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## **Mastering the worst of trades : England's early Africa companies and their traders, 1618-1672**

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Research aim and question

In 2018 it will be 400 years since the English Guinea Company received its patent as the first English joint-stock company aimed at trade with Africa. Despite having a palpable impact not only on the history of England and its empire – but on social and economic developments in and around the Atlantic basin up to today, little is known of the English Africa companies and their trade from this early period. This thesis seeks to remedy that. It aims to nuance and contextualize the role of England's early Africa trade as part of the process of early modern expansion, and by better embedding it in this narrative, emphasize the unique position the traders and their companies held. Few companies enjoyed as much privilege and support, and did as much humanitarian damage, as the Africa companies. Throughout this thesis I aim to present the story of the early English Africa companies, showing how the merchants of the official English Africa trade, the men that were leading its companies, combined the privileges bestowed upon them with their diverse experiences to secure their position, and expand their operation. By combining their private experiences and trade activities with the shelter supplied by an officially supported company, they aimed to protect their established positions and activities from the rapidly increasing competition of the seventeenth century Atlantic, develop new sectors, connect markets and mitigate risk.<sup>1</sup> By considering both the personal experiences of prominent members and the history of the companies they constructed around them from a *longue durée* perspective, I hope to challenge perceived categories, divisions and seemingly inevitable outcomes in the process of developing England's first empire.

This thesis presents the development of the early companies, the Guinea Company (GC) and the Royal Adventurers into Africa (RA) by piecing together the continuous story from the granting of the first official company patent in 1618 up to the emergence of the third and largest corporation involved in the trade, the Royal African Company (RAC) in 1672. Unlike previous work on the Africa trade which has focused mainly on the RAC and its large-scale slave trading operation, this thesis looks to the corporations, traders and events that preceded it. With this comes a reconsideration of several of the topics that has colored the existing historiography surrounding the Africa companies. These include the involvement of the companies

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to my colleague Kaarle Wirta for bringing forth the concept of institutional sheltering which he presents it in further detail in his forthcoming article: Wirta, Kaarle, "If Opportunity doesn't Knock, Build a Door: Entrepreneurial Opportunities on the Gold Coast and Institutional Sheltering in Europe by Mid-Seventeenth Century", and in his forthcoming dissertation titled *Dark Horses of Business, Overseas Entrepreneurship in Seventeenth-Century Nordic Trade in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans*.

in the slave trade; the evaluation of company activity, success and outcome; and the favorable position that secured the RA monopolistic rights to supply slave labour to the growing English colonies. By considering the genealogy of such decisions from a longer perspective they appear, not necessarily as the result of state plans, bad business decisions, ideological changes or as hostile take-overs, but as part and parcel of protecting, maintaining and strengthening the interests of influential company leaders.

Thus, this in-depth look at the early companies allows for a more general reconsideration of the interaction between the corporate and the private as, unlike the traditional perception of private interest as something that should be suppressed by the corporation, the early Africa companies show themselves as both heavily reliant on and the easy victims of private interests within their own upper ranks. As an emerging corporation, the GC, and later the RA, faced a succession of strong London merchants in its leadership who on several occasions throughout the seventeenth century used their private influence to rescue and aid the company, but also did not hesitate to sacrifice it in order to secure their own interests. The GC appears as a highly malleable structure, representing only one piece in the far larger puzzle that is the career of its prominent members. Unlike the more traditional view of an antagonistic relationship between the corporation and private interests, manifested most often in the principal-agent dynamic, this thesis shows the symbiotic relationship of a weaker structure and strong private initiative.

By directing focus towards the early companies that faced the rapid early seventeenth century development of the Atlantic basin paired with much political turmoil and an array of new challenges, I investigate the changes the company underwent as its activities grew from bilateral luxury trade between Africa and England - into a credit-based slave trade that spanned three continents. It is implied in this thesis that the strong focus on the RAC (which appeared only in 1672) and on the transatlantic slave trade, though rightly justified, has resulted in a somewhat anachronistic view of the Africa companies as inherently Atlantic in focus. The early sources reveal not only that this was not the case, suggesting instead that a decision to push the company towards the Atlantic – and into the transatlantic slave trade – was motivated partly by the need for established Atlantic traders turned company members to protect their existing interests. The decision to redirect company focus towards the Atlantic, clearly manifested with the launch of the Royal Adventurers into Africa in 1660, meant heavy involvement in the Atlantic credit exchange cycles which became in the end a major contributor to both the RA's and the RAC's downfall.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>J.W. Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631," in *Essays in British and Irish History: In Honour of James Eadie Todd*, ed. Henry Alfred Cronne, T. W Moody, and D. B Quinn (London: F. Muller, 1949); George Frederick Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa* (Cornell University:

Thus, the thesis emphasizes the relationship between the early companies as structures and their members, a relationship both symbiotic and encumbering depending on context, as well as – to an increasing degree – between company members and representatives of state power. It thus contributes not only to the historiography of the English African companies themselves, but to that of formal and informal empire building, and its relations with the history of merchant networks and agency. It offers examples of developing corporations that rely heavily on the personal connections and abilities of their members for tackling an increasingly competitive and highly challenging environment. By emphasizing the personal effect that a changing Atlantic economy had on individual Atlantic traders turned company members, I aim to show that the individual needs of prolific members both trumped, mixed with, and yielded to the needs of the organization. The successful maintaining of this relationship, though coming to an end with the deregulation of the trade at the turn to the eighteenth century, ensured the survival of the African companies for nearly 80 consecutive years.

## 2. Historiography of the African companies

England's trade with the West Coast of Africa has not gone unnoticed. England's participation in the transatlantic slave trade, first included in royal patent in 1663, gradually increasing towards the end of the seventeenth century, before booming with the deregulation of the trade in 1712, had received – and continued to receive – much attention from scholars. This has resulted in an array of excellent studies, much data collection and open sources databases, all assisting in the efforts to grasp and understand the largest forced migration in human history.<sup>3</sup> The continued interest in

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Lancaster, Pa., Press of the New Era Printing Co., 1919); K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (Cambridge University Press, 1986); Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic Trade and the British Economy, 1660-1800*, New Studies in Economic and Social History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672-1752* (UNC Press Books, 2013); L. H. Roper, *Advancing Empire: English Interests and Overseas Expansion, 1613-1688* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ann M. Carlos and Jamie Brown Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company: Fringe Firms and the Role of the Charter," *The Economic History Review* 49, no. 2 (May 1, 1996): 291-313.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, vol. Vol. I, 1441-1700 (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1930); David Eltis and David Richardson, *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database / Edited by David Eltis and David Richardson*. (New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale University Press, 2008); David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas / David Eltis*. (Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Eltis, ed., *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives* (Stanford University Press, 2002); Eugene D. Genovese and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *Race and slavery in the western hemisphere: quantitative studies. Edited by Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, etc.* (Princeton University Press, 1974).

the slave trade has, however, resulted in an uneven distribution of scholarly attention, as the vast majority of English slave trade took place under the last of the Africa corporations to receive a royal patent, the Royal African Company (1672).<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis on the RAC has resulted in a tendency to see the format of England's *official* Africa trade, understood as trade done under royal charter by the Africa companies, as emerging only at the end of the century, with granting of the RAC's patent in 1672. The same lack of a long *durée* perspective on the trade has resulted in the rather famous demise of the RAC as appearing equally dis-attached from its preceding history. As a quote from J.W. Blake, the producer of one of the few existing studies of the first of the Africa companies, the Guinea Company, so amply put it: "*If it be true that Tudor experience was the basis of later developments in the African trade, it is no less true that the difficulties of transition from the fitful, groping – and all-too-often semi-piratical – ventures of the Elizabethans to the peaceful and regular Guinea trade of the restoration companies were successfully surmounted by the resourceful merchants who carried on the trade between 1600 and 1660*".<sup>5</sup> It is these resourceful merchants and their role in the Africa trade that form the basis of this thesis.

Furthermore, the tendency in past historiography to divide up overseas activities between east and west, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic, in long-distance commodity and luxury exchange and proprietary settlement activities, has meant that the early Africa companies have fallen between different historiographical chairs.<sup>6</sup> Despite the justified focus on the transatlantic slave trade, it is argued here that the decision to connect the Africa company trade to the markets in the Americas was but one out of several possible outcomes. In fact, as the thesis will show, there were both strong arguments and evidence to instead support an eastern connection, between the West African coast and the Indian Ocean trade. This came naturally to a trade that, much like that of the East Indies, was based around bilateral luxury exchange, the basis for the activities of the Guinea Company through most of its existence. The trade of the Guinea Company centered around gold, ivory, redwood, wax, gum and pepper grains, far more in tune with the operations of the EIC than is often presented. The undeniable change in company operations around the middle of the century, which in the thesis is referred to as the "push into the Atlantic", only occurred towards the end of the Guinea Company's near forty years existence and represented a change few other companies of the period experienced.

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<sup>4</sup>See fn 1.

<sup>5</sup>Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade in 1631," 87.

<sup>6</sup>The important work of Robert Brenner is a good example. Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

With the push into the Atlantic came the right to supply labour to the growing English colonies, a task that was – despite its inherent disregard for human life – contemporarily perceived as a privilege. That perception has inherently remained until our own time, where the exclusive rights to the supply of labour is often pushed forward as a paradox when the Africa companies' struggles are discussed.<sup>7</sup> This is, I argue, a view worth nuancing. The shift made official with the patent granted to the Royal Adventurers in 1663, though building up over the preceding decade or so, connected the Africa trade to the Atlantic circle of exchange where the reliance on credit was great and the turn-over slow. It is argued here that the decision to place slave trade under patent was impacted by the opportunity to participate in the supply of the Spanish Americas through the Asiento contract which presented itself at the same time, and when that agreement fell through the company had little hope over surviving. The RA was quickly dissolved and the RAC launched, but despite a gradually more professionalized and structured format to company trade, the inherent grinding of debt and lack of liquidity symptomatic of Atlantic trade could not be escaped and the trade was eventually deregulated. Despite this eventual demise of the Africa companies and of official trade under patent, the thesis aims to underline the adaptability and longevity of organized Africa trade, an adaptability that was largely unmatched by any of the other trading companies of the century.

### 3. African companies in England's seventeenth century expansion

The early modern period brought with it widespread European expansion. Growing transoceanic and cross-cultural trade spurred the development of new products and production processes, increased migration - both forced and voluntary, transfer and disbursal of capital, and increased reliance on colonial imports and exports. Networks of traders developed, crossing vast oceans, aimed at supplying old markets with new products and new markets with established European necessities. As the world grew more connected, chains of commodities encircled the globe in intricate networks resting on complex credit systems and ever developing business techniques. After slowly establishing early trade throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the century that followed saw a sharp increase in goods traded, settlements established, production and migration. These processes, taking place more or less simultaneously among different European states has been described as the establishment of the *first* empire, an empire of commerce, which readied the ground for the largescale imperialism of the nineteenth century – the *second* empire, and the industrial revolution.

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<sup>7</sup>An example is Carlos and Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company."

In this process merchants played an integral part, as suppliers of the new colonial settlements, as settlers themselves, as discoverers, and as participants in the process of developing the imperial economy. Mercantile activity had relied on familial links and networks of trust as tools in the battle against risks and uncertainty, but as Europe's commercial reach increased, so did risks, uncertainty and the number of people involved. The result of this was an increased reliance on credit and reputation when building and maintaining commercial contact.<sup>8</sup> Some of Europe's mercantile communities responded to the challenge of mitigating risks and ensuring trustworthiness in overseas trade by joining together in partnerships. These groups took on various forms, experimented with a variety of formats, and increased in number throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In England, the focal point of this thesis, the seventeenth century came to be known as the incorporated century, and the joint-stock company came to represent one of two company archetypes.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the join-stock structure, there was the regulated trading company which, despite appearing on and off throughout the seventeenth century, had its heyday in the latter part of sixteenth century. The regulated company consisted of traders who together controlled the access to a trade, but who, unlike their join-stock counterparts, traded on separate accounts – meaning they did not pool capital, nor organize their ventures in unison. The format has been likened to the merchant guilds, where only guild members were permitted to conduct a specific trade, and together lower risk, and control market supply as well as prices.<sup>10</sup>

The early Africa companies operated, though at times loosely, along the lines of a joint-stock structure - where members pooled their capital together to further their commercial efforts; and enjoyed limited liability – where each member was only liable for the sum he (or she) invested, keeping their personal finances separate from the outcome of company-organized ventures. The joint-stock companies also observed rules for capital lock-in – where the investments made by individual members of the corporation was out of reach from creditors making claims against the same members privately; and the concept of the corporate body – where a corporate entity was awarded personhood. The latter of these was especially important as it allowed the company perpetual succession, continuing its existence beyond the life or involvement of its initial members, and allowed it to both sue and be sued,

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<sup>8</sup>Peter Mathias, "Risk, Credit and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise," in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15–35.

<sup>9</sup>Aske Laursen Brock, "The Company Director: Commerce, State and Society" (University of Kent, 2017); Joyce Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton ; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1978); Phil Withington, "Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1016–38.

<sup>10</sup>Sheilagh C. Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000-1800*, Cambridge Studies in Economic History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).



own land and hold capital.<sup>11</sup> As the merchants of specific trades banded together in companies, and rulers started to realize the potential and importance of long-distance trade and colonial settlement, international competition was inevitable. A general contemporary understanding of the economy as a zero-sum game, where one nation's growth came at another's cost, meant that each nation saw it as vital to support their respective overseas sectors. Simultaneously, most early modern rulers were in no economic position to organize the expansion process directly.<sup>12</sup> Rulers used their powers to issue patents and privileges in order to assist the companies in their trade, such as letters of privilege, proprietary grants and trade monopolies, extended through letters patent, of which the latter is the most important for the focus of this thesis.

England had three official Africa companies through the seventeenth century. That is companies that held a patent of exclusivity and privilege extended by the English rulers. Smaller companies and patent holding partnerships had traded to Africa in the sixteenth century, a brief account of which will be given below, but only in the second decade of the seventeenth came the first patent that gave the Guinea Company exclusive access to the West African coast on behalf of England. The Guinea Company (GC) traded as a tightly-linked and modestly sized company, with perpetual succession and rolling membership, meaning that regardless of the changes to its membership the company remained intact as a corporate body. The GC focused on trade to the African coast, centered around gold and African commodities, though some slave trading to the Americas took place before the patent rights passed to a new company in 1660. The Guinea Company's successor, the Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa (RA), was the first company to focus their attention on trade to the English colonies. The company was protected and assisted by increased colonial control and the exclusive right to supply the large-scale plantation economies with labour, as well as Acts of Navigation hindering non-English merchants from participating legally in the supply. The RA went further still, securing a sub-contract with the holders of the Spanish Asiento contract, the monopoly on supplying slave labour to the Spanish Empire. This was a highly attractive task as the Spanish markets were both large and fueled by bullion, as opposed to credit – the preferred choice in other colonial exchange. Still, the RA had a tough time, largely explained by the Second Anglo-Dutch war, as well as growing debts and animosity from the English planters.

The letters patents that were granted by the English rulers to the companies of the Africa trade, assured them geographical control over specific regions and their markets on behalf of England. Though changing somewhat in scope and

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<sup>11</sup>Giuseppe Dari-Mattiacci et al., "The Emergence of the Corporate Form," *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 33, no. 2 (January 5, 2017): 193–236; Davies, *The Royal African Company*.

<sup>12</sup>Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 16–18.

reach throughout the century, the main region of company interest remained the west coast of Africa, stretching from the Senegal and Gambia rivers, often referred to as Senegambia, towards the Sierra Leone region and on to the Gold Coast in modern day Ghana. As the century progressed the activity along the coast expanded, reaching southward towards the Bight of Benin and on towards Nigeria, to what was historically referred to as the coast of Calabar, continuing as far south as modern day Kongo. The constitutional and representative rights included in the patent gave the companies the ability to enter into trade agreements with different rulers in the name of the English king; to seize the goods of Englishmen who interloped within the geographical sphere covered by the patent, and the right to stop private trade that breached with it. Whether the company was in a position to command these rights was, however, another matter.

In their discussions regarding the seventeenth-century corporation the contributors to the workshop paper "*The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History*", edited by Dr. William Pettigrew, identify five qualities that help describe a distinctively corporate sociology.<sup>13</sup> Firstly, the corporation appeared as subordinate to state authority both domestically and abroad. In England, the African companies relied on the ruler's support through the extension of patents and privileges, and on the coast of Africa, they were rarely in any position to impose themselves on the local states. Instead, they were equipped with the ability to enter into treaties and trade agreements on behalf of the English rulers in order to facilitate their access to desirable markets. The company thus played an important role by facilitating English subordination to the local authority for the sake of trade on behalf of its own rulers. Secondly, and despite the subordinate character of the corporation domestically, it appeared autonomous from its domicile state in its operations abroad. This is exemplified by the rights the African companies held, through their letters patent, to pursue other Englishmen who challenged their privileges, seizing goods and challenging them in court. The right to seize property was reserved for the ruler in England, yet abroad those rights could be extended to commercial entities such as the Africa companies. It should be said, however, that these rights gradually expanded over the course of the century, and although they may have been included in the letters patent it did not necessarily follow that the companies were in any position to enforce them. Thirdly, a corporation's existence represented a constant process of negotiation, as the company juggled challenging interlopers, foreign traders and rival states. This feature is especially prominent in the GC which did

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<sup>13</sup>William A. Pettigrew, ed., "The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History" (Workshop: Transoceanic Constitutions: The Corporation as Protagonist in Global History, Lincoln College, Oxford, 2017), 5–15; William A. Pettigrew, "Corporate Constitutionalism and the Dialogue between the Global and Local in Seventeenth-Century English History," *Itinerario* 39, no. 3 (December 2015): 487–501.

most of its negotiating within its own ranks, as merchants who entered merged their own agendas with that of the company. These three features all applied to the GC and the RA to varying degrees. The RA, as a larger structure with a stricter format of corporate management, shareholding and operation, fits more easily than the Guinea Company with the fourth feature, it was more integrative. As the trading companies grew in importance and expended their scale of operation abroad, they became integrative points of connection between their domestic societies and global realities. The RA, and its successor even more so, featured in the public discussions regarding colonial management, issues of labour supply and the role of monopolies. The same cannot be said for the GC, which appears as a smaller and more closed structure, concerning itself mainly with bilateral trade in luxuries, less in the supply of colonial labour – a key element in the productivity of England's Atlantic colonies. The last feature identified by the contributors to *"The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History"* as descriptive of the seventeenth-century corporation relates to the corporation's constitutional nature. The letters patent as early examples of constitutions allowed for the "mobilization of capital at home and facilitated commercial relations overseas."<sup>14</sup> In addition to settling on constitutional practices for their operation at home, such as the rights and expectations of members, they adapted and experimented with alternative constitutional techniques abroad. Though this description fits well with the larger trading companies such as the East India and Levant Companies, it is difficult to identify clear tendencies for integrating constitutional practice in the case of the early Africa companies. Where the EIC held control over "corporate spaces" that included a multitude of nationalities and traditions which continuously impacted each other, the GC only controlled a few small footholds dotted along the African coast, and though there undoubtedly was mutual impact, the sources reveal frustratingly little about transnational interactions between local structures and the GC at this early stage. As for the RA, although its operations were larger, their control on the African coast was never strong and though the English colonial sphere was undergoing much change during its existence it remained inherently English in its constitutional practice. The early companies fit well into the description of a typical seventeenth century corporation in most ways, fulfilling the obligations of their patent and treaties of trade with varying but overall success, though they do not share the size or impact of the larger Levant and East India Companies neither domestically, nor in their meeting with the local states on the African coast.

The Africa companies never enjoyed strong market control. They operated in three distinctly different economic landscapes which were all more or less volatile,

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<sup>14</sup>Pettigrew, "The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History," 11.

a challenge few other trading companies had to tackle. Companies such as the East India or Levant Company did deal with variety of different markets within the eastern or Mediterranean sphere but was spared the three-way juggling act across the Atlantic facing the Africa companies. The same was true for their proprietary counterparts, such as the Bermuda and Virginia Companies, aimed at facilitating colonial settlement. The GC and RA, as well as the RAC, held little to no control over the African markets from the start, living on the terms of the local African societies, where demand changed rapidly, and trade was easily spoilt by rivals glutting the markets.

Illustration 1:  
The Coast of West Africa



Source: ClipArt, 2018

Across the Atlantic the African companies increased their presence and involvement in the slave trade as the labour demands of the newly established colonial societies in the English Caribbean grew. By 1663 the English slave trade was placed in the hands of the RA. In order to secure the necessary labour the colonial planters had to work either from a long-term perspective, gradually increasing the number

of workers by painstakingly saving all surplus funds, or hope for the extension of credit from their labour suppliers.<sup>15</sup> By making use of credit, usually extended – in the case of England - by established merchants in London, it became possible to acquire the necessary labour immediately and thus speed up both the repayment process and the generating of profit. Credit brought the necessary dynamism needed for the difficult process of establishing colonial production and reaping its reward. The increasing reliance of credit exchange came to color the Atlantic throughout the early modern period. In order to understand the full meaning and effect of this, Jacob Price recommended we “*Let go of the idea that credit and debt is something associated with the less fortunate*”.<sup>16</sup> Credit in the Atlantic context, rather than giving small-scale colonial producers a chance to establish themselves, was most readily extended to the most successful planters who managed to reach economies of scale in colonial production. From the perspective of a creditor these were the candidates with the highest likelihood to repay their debts. The importance of credit thus further favored the large-scale planters and the larger production units and contributed to the phasing out of the reliance on English indentured servants, as it sped up the gathering of land on fewer hands in larger plantations. The result was an increasing reliance on the trafficking of laborers from Africa's western coast. Though slavery, as a new form of labour organization, gradually took over from the reliance on European indentured servants, the mode of financing the labor supply changed little.

Richard Sheridan referred to colonial financing in the seventeenth century as a “*merchant-system of finance*” where metropolitan merchants, and later the company, traded on their personal accounts, either through travelling the Atlantic themselves, or by making use of a network of factors and supercargoes.<sup>17</sup> This meant most of the risk for both extending capital and trading in colonial goods fell on the merchants, and later the company. The lack of liquidity that plagued the English colonial markets, meant that a reliance on the future sale of colonial commodities drove all exchange. However, any return on colonial products took a long time to materialize and fluctuated greatly as markets for different commodities reached saturation. Therefore, the extension of credit to planters often involved waiting on repayment for long periods of time. In the case of the Africa companies this transferred the problem of liquidity onto the company, and quickly resulted in the need for the companies to seek credit of their own.

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<sup>15</sup>Joseph C. Miller, “Credit, Captives, Collateral and Currencies: Debt, Slavery and the Financing of the Atlantic World,” in *Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Alessandro Stanziani (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 105–22.

<sup>16</sup>Jacob M. Price, “Credit in the Slave Trade and Plantation Economies,” in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 293–94.

<sup>17</sup>Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Canoe Press, 1974), 262.

From 1663 the Royal Adventurers held the monopoly on labor supply in the West Indies but could not hinder competition from private trade and experienced severe difficulties with getting planters to repay their ever-increasing debts. In London they supposedly held the sole right to distribute African products, but also here the integrity of their monopoly was hard pressed. Managing this balancing act was difficult and relied on experienced and established merchants that could step-in with their personal credit when the company could hope for no more. The necessity of private, personal credit remained until the very end of the RA's existence, and underlined the companies continued dependency on their members private personas and reputations as trustworthy lenders.

#### **4. Connecting histories**

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to our existing knowledge of the Africa companies as institutions, as well as their trade and returns as manifestations of their changing success, by placing a continuing line of influential company members center stage. This thesis therefore compliment works that emphasize the importance of informal networks at the base of all major institutions. In order to counterbalance a strong focus on the institution as an integral part of the move towards modernity and increasingly intricate economic methods of organization, which inherently results in a ranking of an institution's output, I try to connect the personal experiences of historical actors to the development of the institution. As the majority of this thesis focuses on the first of the English Africa companies, the Guinea Company, where limited sources remain, a holistic approach which includes individual actors and their endeavors both before and during their time as company members, can throw new light on company and trade development.

A sharp divide between the corporate and the private world has developed, and the two are often seen as distinct and on collision course with each other. In the case of the Africa companies the tendency to focus on the animosity and conflict that existed between corporate and private interest has been exacerbated by the overweight of judicial and political sources surrounding the meeting of patent, privilege and exclusion, and private, inherently illegal activity. However, little attention has been given to the potential of such sources for telling us about the company itself and its members. I therefore turn my attention both to the internal history of the company itself, as simultaneously a unit and a group of individuals. The individuals in question formed part of a rather small and tightly-linked group of company men with diverse experience from long-distance trade in the Atlantic, as well as the Indian Ocean. I suggest an approach that aims at connecting the two, the private and the company, as it manifests itself in the *longue durée* of the seventeenth century. I argue

that the private interests of company members not only preceded the company, but continuously impacted its development in both positive and negative ways. At times it assisted, at other times hindered or took precedence over the company as a greater structure. By investigating the private interests of central company members, I argue that they were integral to the company, intimately connected to its history and to its fate. I attempt to connect, rather than juxtapose and compare private activities as separate and parallel to company life, disconnected from and inherently damaging to the company structure.

The emergence of the concept of entangled history was a response to the limitation presented by the widespread application of the comparative approach especially to the history of empire and expansion that followed the global turn. Where comparative history juxtaposed historical trends, national histories, cultures and periods, and perhaps especially geographical regions, the devotees of entangled history as a concept looked for ways of acknowledging two distinct historical entities that were simultaneously intermixed and mutually impacting each other.<sup>18</sup> A conceptual framework that acknowledged two entities as both separate and conjoined, with both distinct and shared histories. The traditional purpose of both comparative and entangled historical studies have been to help in the traversing of real and imagined borders of nationality, time and culture, emphasizing noteworthy commonalities or differences and understanding interdependence, rather than dividing history into monolithic and disconnected pieces of an overarching narrative. This thesis does not cross national or temporal borders. It does not speak of distinctly different groups. Instead, it takes a long *durée* perspective on the entangled histories of two subsequent corporations and the private individuals that built and engaged with them. In a response to the tendency of emphasizing the monolithic, monopolistic, patent-holding companies as countering private and dynamic mercantile initiative, I seek to show that the spheres of private and company activity, in the case of the early Africa companies, were created, maintained, and sustained in unison, through a dialectic relationship that mutually depended on and amplified by each other.

As has been alluded to above, in English historiography a separation has developed between the private and the corporate in overseas trade, especially with the important and influential work of Robert Brenner in the 1990s.<sup>19</sup> His arguments have had its equivalent in other historiographies as well, most notably through the focus on private and illegal trade, and the undermining of company privilege by private individuals in Europe and throughout empire. Partly a response to Immanuel

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<sup>18</sup>Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1997): 735–62; Jürgen Kocka, "Comparison and Beyond," *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 39–44.

<sup>19</sup>Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*.



Wallerstein's world system with its presentation of a core-periphery relationship that favored the metropole, this approach instead emphasized the lack of metropolitan control (often represented by the "weak" overseas company), a micro-approach that captured the reality "on-the-spot", and the reliance on illegal activity among the developing territories - especially in the Americas.<sup>20</sup> Brenner does not claim that the relationship between company and private was necessarily hostile, but that the two spheres appealed to different social groups, and thus enforced a division between wealthy, well-established company merchants who preferred monopolistic domestic market dominance and bilateral luxury exchange in the Indian Ocean, in juxtaposition to an entrepreneurially free Atlantic where myriad trades and diverse commercial activities enticed small-scale merchants and shipowners who were willing to accept the insecurity, and long-term investment that the settlement societies in the Americas offered and demanded. However, as will be shown, this divide leaves little room for the African companies which fit neither here nor there, crossing, as the century progresses, from one oceanic sphere to the next, from luxury trade to plantation supply, and from gold trade to planter debt.

This parallel is part and parcel of a recent turn away from the strong focus on the role of institutions in generating economic growth, and a top-down approach to the process of empire, in which the commercial companies were accredited much importance as an extension of government control. Instead several historians' interests turned towards the impact of the individual, of individual agency, and of dynamic entrepreneurship in spite of rigid regulation and control from above.<sup>21</sup> Important historical works, such as Sheilagh Ogilvie's *Institutions and European Trade* and Francesca Trivellato's, *The Familiarity of Strangers* represented a growing trend that both questioned the efficiency of institutions and offered alternative ways

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<sup>20</sup>Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System.*, Studies in Social Discontinuity (Academic, 1974). Karwan Fatah-Black, *White Lies and Black Markets: Evading Metropolitan Authority in Colonial Suriname, 1650-1800* (BRILL, 2015); Fatah-Black; Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt*; Bram Hoonhout, "Smuggling for Survival: Self-Organized, Cross-Imperial Colony Building in Essequibo and Demerara, 1746-1796," in *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800* (2016, n.d.); Bram Hoonhout, "The West Indian Web : Improvising Colonial Survival in Essequibo and Demerara, 1750-1800" (Thesis, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2870/329011>; Carlos and Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company."

<sup>21</sup>Douglass C. North and Barry R. Weingast, "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England," *The Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 4 (December 1989): 803-32; Stephen H. Haber, Douglass Cecil North, and Barry R. Weingast, *Political Institutions and Financial Development* (Stanford University Press, 2008); Douglas W. Allen, *The Institutional Revolution: Measurement and the Economic Emergence of the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 2011); Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Avner Greif, "Contract Enforceability and Economic Institutions in Early Trade: The Maghribi Traders' Coalition," *The American Economic Review* 83, no. 3 (1993): 525-48; Avner Greif, "Cultural Beliefs and the Organization of Society: A Historical and Theoretical Reflection on Collectivist and Individualist Societies," *Journal of Political Economy* 102, no. 5 (October 1, 1994): 912-50.



of explaining the organization and profits of empire.<sup>22</sup>

The historiographical presentation above is admittedly somewhat simplified, as works that underline the interdependence of the two has appeared in increasing degree in recent decades. These works argue for the importance of the individual as intrinsic to the success of official institutions such as the trading companies, and show us how reality often differs greatly from the theoretical, also in the daily running of even the most rigid institutions.<sup>23</sup> The principal-agent dynamic has been both the scourge and the savior of institutions, by drawing in incapable and qualified personnel in equal measure, both enticed by the opportunities of enrichment from supplementary private activities. In the case of the companies presented here, they form part of a tradition where much blame has been placed on the principal-agent issue as part of the explanation of their perceived failures. In this the main attention has again been directed towards the latter decades of the seventeenth century Africa companies, the RAC.<sup>24</sup> However, the problem of dishonest agents, though it does appear sporadically in early records pertaining to the company, did not preoccupy the leaders of the earlier companies to nearly the same degree as it did the management of the RAC. Unlike the sizable format of the RAC, and to some degree the RA, several of the prominent GC members had a past in overseas trade and had been present on the African coast, either in a private capacity or as company representatives. They were therefore less removed from its reality, less likely to fall victims to biased representations of the reality on the coast by cheating agents on the spot, and as a result the principal-agent issues are not the focus of this work. Instead of looking at the company employees on the West African coast, it focusses on the changing core of company management and leadership in the metropole as it developed through the century.

<sup>22</sup>Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*; Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (Yale University Press, 2014); Cátia Antunes and Filipa Ribeiro Da Silva, "Cross-Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Atlantic: Africans, Dutch and Sephardic Jews in Western Africa, 1580-1674," *Itinerario* 35, no. 1 (April 2011): 49–76; Xabier Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and Their Overseas Networks* (Boydell Press, 2013).

<sup>23</sup>Søren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work: Madras and the City of London 1660-1740* / Søren Mentz. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2005); Chris Nierstrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company: The Dutch East India Company and Its Servants in the Period of Its Decline (1740-1796)* (BRILL, 2012); Regina Grafe, "On the Spatial Nature of Institutions and the Institutional Nature of Personal Networks in the Spanish Atlantic," *Culture & History Digital Journal* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2014); Ann M. Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Managing the Manager: An Application of the Principal Agent Model to the Hudson's Bay Company," *Oxford Economic Papers* 45, no. 2 (1993): 243–56.

<sup>24</sup>Ann M. Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Theory and History: Seventeenth-Century Joint-Stock Chartered Trading Companies," *The Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (1996): 916–24; S. R. H. Jones and Simon P. Ville, "Efficient Transactors or Rent-Seeking Monopolists? The Rationale for Early Chartered Trading Companies," *The Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (1996): 898–915; S. R. H. Jones and Simon P. Ville, "Theory and Evidence: Understanding Chartered Trading Companies," *The Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (December 1996): 925–26.

The scholarly focus has not only been attentive of the challenges but also the importance and benefit of private activity by company employees for the large-scale trading companies. Examples of great recent studies that acknowledge the companies' dependency on private entrepreneurial activity are the works by Søren Mentz, Chris Niestrasz and Emily Ericsson who acknowledges how the dynamism of private activity, conducted overseas, benefitted the company structure.<sup>25</sup> Though this thesis also focusses on the importance of the private individual in the process of developing the Anglo-Africa trade, it sees the company, less as an obstacle to overcome for private traders, instead underlining the appeal of company trade to those outside of the company structure. Instead of considering the entry into a company structure a dismissal or a suppression of the newly joined members' private activity, the Guinea Company with its patent, offered the chance to amplify activity that had before been private. The members of the small, though shifting leadership, of the Guinea Company decided at different times to place their established commercial operations within a company format that adopted and assisted its continual growth, strengthened by the, at least nominal, protection from competition that the company patent provided.

Thus, instead of focusing on the animosity between a dynamic but suppressed private sphere and the inefficient, privileged and undermined company, I aim to show the entanglement of the two as they appear in the relationship between the Guinea Company, the Royal Adventurers, and its leaders.

## 5. Focus and factors of analysis

I argue that in the protection of private interests the company played an instrumental part. Instead of seeing the companies as structures that diverse actors moved in and out of, we should instead see the early companies as being built around private practices. This was of course how companies emerged, but more importantly it was also how they endured. Indeed, as the century progresses, the image of a company with more or less anonymous shareholders emerge, but for the majority of the period covered in this thesis we must speak of a very tight-knit, exclusive group of traders, that replaced each other gradually with age, and who introduced their own solutions and goals into the company sphere. This was a necessity for the company to survive in markets that were extremely volatile, easily overcrowded, and under continuous pressure from geopolitical changes. These are not, in first instance,

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<sup>25</sup>Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600–1757* (Princeton University Press, 2014); Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at Work*; Niestrasz, *In the Shadow of the Company*.

men who joined the companies because it was their only option for legal trade, for that the companies were too feeble and their geographical scope too wide. Instead they all operated privately and in breach of the company charter, until they deemed it the right time from the perspective of their personal careers to opt for company membership. By including the perspective of the members as private merchants with experience, and who's goal it was to maintain the income their trade generated, it becomes possible to see the developments of the company and the official trade in a new light, better embedded into contemporary realities.

There is ample indication in these early years of the trade, that company struggle did not represent private struggle. Two clear cases appear right out of the gate, in chapter one, where private traders John Davies and Humphrey Slaney utilized their superior experience and connections to hollow out the company patent, so as to secure themselves the fruits of the trade, at the cost of the company's other, more aristocratic – but less experienced, members. As the company returns dropped, the two merchants secured themselves the trade and large profits. As the company argues over the payment of a debt under £1000, Slaney privately sent out ships worth £20,000 or more. It is important to note that the weight of the patent, and the privileges it offered, was not inherently connected to the numbers on the company's bottom line, and the numbers are therefore not enough to go by when we attempt to assess the success of company's trade and activity, or the appeal of company membership. The patent secured the same nominal rights for its members, regardless of whether the company was wealthy or poor.

Different merchants display what appears as differing motives for joining the companies when they do. No records exist that can tell us with certainty in what way organized trade appealed to each individual, but their actions allow some hypotheses to form. For some, such as long-term, and well established private trader, Samuel Vassall, it may have been as simple as considerate private losses over a short period of time. In addition, his attempts at getting the state apparatus involved in removing the company or alternatively to extend the patent to himself also fell within that same year. Company membership may therefore, in his instance, have appealed in a “conventional” fashion, by offering lowered risk, limited liability, pooled capital and better access to credit. For another, Maurice Thomson, the idea of combining eastern and western trade activity, where the hope was for English activity on the West African coast to play an integral part in a globally connected trade, appears as the main motivation. As he attempted to persuade the East India Company to include West African trade in their activities, he desired a collaboration between the Guinea Company and the East India Company. In order to achieve this he desired the latter took over the former's patent, and he deemed membership in the Guinea Company as necessary to achieve his goal. As his private discussions with the East India Company turned towards the introduction of African trade to eastern commerce, Thomson

leaves his practice of interloping in areas covered by the Guinea Company patent – where he had been active for nearly twenty years up to that point. By considering the past and private dealings of company members it becomes clear how the world of private and corporate were closely enmeshed. If one acknowledges that company experiences had its impact on the reality of individual members, it is not unreasonable to assumed that such an impact flowed both ways.

Private experience and interests often benefitted the company, as was the case with Thomson, but private interests also came at a cost. The interests of company members were widespread, and as the sphere of overseas trade grew, the merchants in question used the company structure to shelter their activity from competition. But in their attempts to shield their interests, they pushed the company to the forefront of their endeavors to continue to exert pressure on their competitors. I identify the protection from competition was one of the greatest motives for company membership. But, as will be seen, towards the middle of the century this resulted in the company being pulled, along with the African coast, increasingly into the Atlantic. With the introduction of the slave trade into official company trade the company entangled itself into an impossible web of responsibilities and debt. The securing of a patent of excessive privilege, the patent presented to the Royal Adventurers in 1663 which included the sole right to import enslaved labour into the growing Atlantic colonies, appeared to secure the company's future. However, the entry of the company into the transatlantic slave trade was instead the beginning of the end of regulated English Africa trade. The task proved too great, and the Atlantic economy of debt meant the expectations of profit failed. The monopoly was unpopular and drove a wedge between the company and its customer base, the Atlantic planters.

The men that will be presented in more detail here all were company members at various points. They all traded privately in the Atlantic, several of them also in the Indian ocean. They were all English, and in focusing attention on their impact on the company, as its leaders, this study remains adherently English, European, and metropolitan in its nature. The main focus is therefore not on the company's employees on the spot, or of cross-cultural meetings in Africa or the Caribbean. Detailed and enlightened work continues to be produced on these subjects however and have been drawn on throughout the research.<sup>26</sup> This is also not a thesis that seeks to assess the transatlantic slave trade. The trade featured as an integral part of both the companies' and the actors' private activity, and is presented as such, but the focus remains on the company leadership. This choice of focus is not meant to

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<sup>26</sup>Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720: Study of the African Reaction to European Trade*. (London: Clarendon Press, 1970); Robert Porter, "European Activity on the Gold Coast, 1620-1667" (University of South Africa, 1974); Colleen E. Kriger, *Making Money: Life, Death, and Early Modern Trade on Africa's Guinea Coast* (Ohio University Press, 2017).

denigrate or undermine the inherent inhumanity and immorality of one of history's darkest chapters. The slave trade and its relation to England and its companies has produced, and continues to produce, great scholarly research, which again has been drawn upon in the writing of this thesis. However, the understandably strong parallel that has been drawn between the companies and their slave trade, in the attempts at understanding and remembering the importance and impact of that period in human history, has partly clouded the fact that the African companies' trade in enslaved humans only commenced after several decades of company activity, gradually, and in combination with bilateral commodity exchange. I attempt to approach the trade in slaves both from the company and the private trader perspective, and thus question the effects it had on the company and the future of official Africa trade under patent.

The historical actors given attention here share other common features. They were all private traders, based in London, who opted for company membership. Once members of the company they took on leading roles as managers of the Guinea Company, or took central roles in its successor, the Royal Adventurers into Africa, which saw the membership expand. They all operated in a wider set of trades than that to Africa alone, and their interests in the company trade complimented their other activities. They had interests in the Atlantic provisioning trades, as labour or credit providers, or in offering European necessities to the growing Atlantic settlements and commenced their activities early in the century when the Atlantic was comparably calm. Their involvement in overseas activity, as well as their involvement in supporting trades, such as ship ownership and plantation development, meant that they possessed extensive private experience from the African coast or the overseas territories. Several of them included trade to the east as part of their commercial portfolios, in the form of involvement with the EIC. This was especially prevalent when the EIC leased the Guinea Company charter near the middle of the century. Several of them also drew on connections to political elites, and at various times involved themselves in the management of the Atlantic colonies.

Following chronological lines this thesis commences with the actors who first requested and operated under the company patent, John Davies and Humphrey Slaney. Davies was instrumental in acquiring the patent in 1618, while Slaney, joining the company shortly after, introducing both his trade and his associates to the company over the course of the 1620s. By the end of the decade Slaney, accompanied by his partners Nicholas Crispe, William Cloberry and John Wood, requested a new patent better suited to their interests and mode of trade. These four ran the company much like a partnership until they were gradually replaced either through old age, or problematic political associations by the early 1640s. The only remaining partner was John Wood, who was joined by Samuel Crispe (Nicholas Crispe's brother), Rowland Wilson, and soon after Maurice Thomson and Samuel Vassall. The latter two had, at the point of acquiring their membership, operated for many years as interlopers

in areas covered by the company patent. The introduction of the EIC to the African coast brought with it the increased interest of merchants-politicians Martin Noell and Thomas Povey, but eventually put an end to the Guinea Company with the return of the Stuart monarchy. Noell and Povey together used their experience, reputation and political connections to influence the ongoing development of colonial management in ways that favored both their private trade the company. After contributing to secure the Royal Adventurers a favorable patent in 1663, which for the first time included the sole right to provide enslaved labour to English colonial markets, they drew on private connections and their capacity as private traders to secure the company a sub-contract to the Spanish Asiento. However, the slave trade monopoly and its accompanying debts, combined with the second Anglo-Dutch war and the growing unpopularity of the company among its main customer (and debtor) base, eventually left it with no other option but to declare bankruptcy and hand their patent over to the Royal African Company in 1672.

Defining aspects of company activity was introduced from, or relied upon, the private sphere, where it had first been tested and tried. That included some of the most defining features, such as the slave trade format, the modes of trade on the African coast, the Asiento, and the colonial control that brought both benefits and damage. The development of the company was a direct result of the attempts by established traders to protect the position of privilege that they enjoyed as a result of being among the early Atlantic traders.

## 6. Sources

The sources for the early African companies are almost all institutional in nature. For the first of the companies, the Guinea Company, no company sources remain. Unlike the later companies, the RAC and to some degree the RA, the GC has left no minute books, no overview of shareholders and little company correspondence remains. It does, however, appear frequently in the sources of the High Court of Admiralty in connection to interloping and disputes over losses and debt responsibilities. The same is the case for Court of Chancery, which records give us insight into the company structure as a result of several internal conflicts between members that ended in litigation. The most enlightening in this regard are the records produced in an internal debt dispute at the end of the 1620s, in an inheritance dispute involving the company from the late 1630s and an investigation by a committee of the Customs Office from the mid-1640s. Together they paint a picture of a company structure that is changing and developing as a result of growing experience, but frustratingly little light is thrown on the size of the investor groups, the size of its membership or the full extent of its profits. What the cases do tell us, however, is that the returns on

successful company voyages were often large – upwards of £20-30,000 in some cases, and because successful voyages that were wound up without conflict did not appear in the courtroom, we must entertain the possibility that the returns went beyond what can be gleaned from the records that have remained.

In addition to the court records, all the relevant patents have been preserved and consulted, either in published form through the use of C.T. Carr's influential publications for the Selden Society, or in patent rolls and state papers held by the national archive. Carr's publication, *Select Charters of Trading Companies, AD 1530-1707*, includes the 1618 patents of the Guinea Company, the two patents granted to the RA in 1660 and 1663, and the RAC patent of 1672. For the second Guinea Company patent, granted in 1631, and the outcome of a charter renegotiation in 1651, I have relied on the state papers, including the patent rolls, kept at the National Archives.<sup>27</sup>

The collection of state papers also provides valuable insight through the many petitions that have remained from the company members. The continuing pressure from interlopers, as well as certain substantial losses, has produced much material regarding the company's experience. These records are spread among different departments, such as the Privy Council, the Council of State (the equivalent of the former during the Commonwealth period), the colonial and the domestic state papers. Among the state papers can be found the aforementioned investigation by the Committee of Customs from 1643-1644 which includes much information regarding the company shipping, assets, employees and debts, giving a rare snapshot of the state of company affairs in a turbulent time. The papers report of growing activities in the West Indies, as well as growing planter debt, and shows that the company had already started its turn toward the Atlantic. The state papers have been supplemented by relevant reports from the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

Before the Guinea Company lost its patent for good, with the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, the patent was leased out to the East India Company. Therefore, both secondary scholarly works and EIC records have been consulted. The period of RA activity left more company material which was amply researched by G.F. Zook already at the start of the former century, and has been included here. However, the focus on the Asiento trade, of which the company sources say little, I have supplemented the chapter of RA activity with company petitions and discussions in the state papers, and quantitative trading estimates.

As for the merchants themselves, they have left little. Their ledgers and

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<sup>27</sup>Carr's publication includes the 1618 patents of the Guinea Company, the two patents granted to the RA in 1660 and 1663, and the RAC patent of 1672. For the second Guinea Company patent, granted in 1631, and the outcome of a charter renegotiation in 1651, I have relied on the state papers. TNA: C 66/2573, SP 25/65. C.T. Carr, *Select Charters of Trading Companies, AD 1530-1707*, vol. XXVIII (London: Selden Society, 1913), 99–106, 172–77, 177–82.

business correspondence were likely a well-kept secret when they were alive, and little has surfaced since. The court records and petitions assist in forming an image and are when possible supplemented by other sources related to their other activity, such as records from the early Virginia settlement, and relevant secondary works. The only exception is the papers of Thomas Povey, who's private and public role became blurred enough for his records to be saved for posterity, and later included in the collections of the British Library, filed under the title Egerton MS 1295 and Add MS 11411. These records detail the plans and suggestions of Povey and his close collaborative partner Martin Noell - from the Commonwealth and Restoration period - for better metropolitan control over the colonies, a control that also benefitted the company.

The Guinea Company produced contemporary published sources as well, such as Richard Jobson's *The Golden Trade*, written when he, as Guinea Company representative, travelled up the Gambia river in 1621. Along with other travel writings gathered by Hakluyt and Purchas, the diaries of shipwright Peter Pett, from the 1610-1620s; Pieter van den Broecke - a Dutch Africa trader active in the first decades of the century; and the publication of an anonymous Dutch manuscript from the middle of the century instructing the reader of the workings of Africa trade, has been consulted. The published diaries of Samuel Pepys and statesman Bulstrode Whitelock have also been consulted for their anecdotal evidence on the activities of merchants and company.

To compliment the qualitative sources, I have at times consulted the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database in an attempt to gauge trade levels and directions, but the focus on such an early period of the trade results in scarce sources also here.

## 7. Chapter plan

Running along chronological lines, this thesis, after giving some preparatory context, commences with the launch of the Guinea Company in 1618. It represented the first joint-stock company granted exclusive access to the coast of Africa on behalf of England and consisted of men from diverse elites. Both courtiers and naval men featured prominently, but they quickly fell victim to overseas traders with experience and connections far superior. This resulted in several court cases and internal struggles, where the merchants continuously appear at the center of events. The lack of profit, and the constant infighting saw the vast majority of the members leave the company. This gave more space to the merchants to pursue their trade and prepare for a relaunching of the company along lines better suited to their need.

Chapter two investigates what that meant, by using court records to understand how the company was organized under the new charter it received in



1631. A small group of merchants remain as the core of the company and shared the trade and the organization among themselves through high levels of mutual trust and dynamism. The structure undergoes change however, as personal problems spill into the company in the early 1640s. Private obligations become company problems as an in-depth investigation is launched to determine whether the state is entitled to part of the company's holdings. This put pressure on remaining traders, who rely on personal credit, but resolves itself as the investigation reveals that the company is not financially responsible for the missing funds. The investigation offers a snapshot into the condition of the company and reveals its gradual involvement in plantation production and slave trade.

Chapter three considers the Guinea Company in the 1650 with increasing pressure from interlopers and non-company traders, resulting in a patent renegotiation in 1651. The result of the patent negotiation are limitations and divisions to the company's trade, and partly increased the desire to lease out their charter to the East India Company from 1657. By considering overlapping membership and multipronged trading interests the chapter shows the private initiative behind the ground-breaking decision.

Chapter four considers the mid-century changes to colonial management and its impact on trade in the Atlantic, by putting them in a longer context that considers the changes the period brought to the merchants in question. By comparing past practices to the development of new modes of trade, the chapter aims to show a continuity that crosses some of the most turbulent decades of English history.

Lastly, chapter five considers the fate of the RA as a sub-contractor to the Spanish Asiento. It considers to what extent the prospect of participation in the Spanish slave trade, drove certain merchants to join the company, and how they played a vital role in securing the deal. However, war and planter frustration grew to unsurmountable obstacles and the company was left unable to pay its creditors. The Royal Adventurers was therefore dissolved, and quickly replaced by the RAC. The willingness by the new company to accept the debts of its predecessor, suggests however, an overlap in membership, as most of the debts owed by the RA was to its own members.

## 8. Englishmen and Africa before the company

When considering the early English activity on the West African coast, it must be acknowledged that the Guinea Company was not the first manifestation of trade activity between England and the African states on the western coast of the continent, although the patentees claimed so during the negotiations over the patent in 1618. The contestations caused by this claim of first discovery would follow the company for decades as frustrated private traders argued that this initial lie undermined the

foundations of the patent from the very start.<sup>28</sup> Some of the members of the company certainly had traded to Africa individually before 1618. One influential company member, John Davies, had already attempted to obtain a personal patent in 1614, and the claim of being the first Englishmen to trade to the coast was indeed false, a fact the company was aware of when they made the it. Statements given later in the century, suggests that a trading factory was erected in the Gambia River by later Guinea Company governor William St. John and associates already in 1615, but the validity of the claim is hard to determine with certainty.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of a potential early factory, it does not alter the fact that early English activity in Africa, in the employment of the Portuguese and increasingly also among the Dutch, went as far back as the fifteenth century.<sup>30</sup> In England, like in in France and the Low Countries, the second half of the sixteenth century saw several voyages of exploration and trade to the African coast, with some being organized by smaller, looser partnerships, others through more organized activity.<sup>31</sup> For England, the most notable among them were the voyages by William Towerson, John Lok, and Sir John and Sir William Hawkins - father and uncle of Richard Hawkins, a later member of the Guinea Company.<sup>32</sup> These early voyages based themselves on coastal trade with African settlements in the region stretching from Cape Verde down to the River Sestos in modern day Liberia, although at times reaching as far as Castelo da Mina, the center for Portuguese – and later Dutch – activity, on the Ghana coast. Much like the Portuguese and the Dutch, the English would soon also be drawn to the Gold Coast, where European competition quickly became rampant.

In Richard Hakluyt's publication of William Towerson's third voyage to Guinea, in 1577, we get an insight into what the early English traders brought to the

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<sup>28</sup>The National Archives (TNA): CO 1/11, no.29. SP Dom., James I, Acts of the Privy Council of England, Vol. 38, 30 April 1623, p.681-682

<sup>29</sup>TNA: CO 1/11, no.15

<sup>30</sup>Heather Dalton, "Into Spey to Selle for Slavys': English, Spanish, and Genoese Merchant Networks and Their Involvement with the 'Cost of Gwynea' Trade before 1550," in *Brokers of Change: Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Pre-Colonial Western Africa*, ed. Toby Green (Oxford University Press, 2012). Larry Gragg, "'To Procure Negroes': The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627–60," *Slavery & Abolition* 16, no. 1 (April 1, 1995): 65–84.

<sup>31</sup>Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. Edmund Goldsmid, vol. XI. Africa (Edinburgh : E. & G. Goldsmid, 1889), 73–189. Most references to voyages list the names of merchants involved, with some exceptions such as John Lok's letters to the Merchants Adventurers to Guinie(sic.) (1561), see *Ibid*, p.164-165. W.R. Scott gives a more detailed presentation of the Merchant Adventurers to Guinie in his William Robert Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720: Companies for Foreign Trade, Colonization, Fishing and Mining*, vol. 2 (Cambridge : The University Press, 1910), 3–10.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid*. William Towerson: p.102-146; John Lok: p.84-102, 164-165; Sir John Hawkins: p.171-173; William Rutter: p.167; George Fenner: p.173-195.

coast.<sup>33</sup> A list, written by Towerson, of desired goods on the coast “*betwixt Sierra Leone and the furthest place of the Mine[Elmina]*” included metal – especially iron bars and “*manils*”<sup>34</sup> of brass and lead, used as currency on large parts of the coast, as well as knives, axe heads, swords, daggers, and basins in brass, tin, and pewter. Kettles, chests, and packing sheets were also desirable. As for specific fabrics, linen was the principal merchandize, but also “*kersie*”<sup>35</sup> is mentioned. So is “*red cloth of low price*”, as well as gowns, cloaks, hats, red caps, Spanish blankets, leather bags, blue corral, and horse tails. The fashion tastes of the African markets were famously volatile and especially the cargoes of cloth proved difficult as an increasing number of fabrics, colors and patterns became available. Still, the trade from Europe largely remained in commodities such as cloth, metal ware, tools, and weapons throughout the seventeenth century, though accompanied by an increasing trade in firearms, as well as alcohol, which formed a vital part of ceremonious gift-giving on the coast.<sup>36</sup> In exchange for their goods the English acquired gold dust, ivory, and malaguetta pepper grains, as well as redwood – known locally as *tacola/takula/taccolla*, used in the dying of cloth and for cosmetic and ceremonial use among several of the Africa societies along the littoral as far south as modern-day Kongo and Gabon.<sup>37</sup> These commodities, along with wax and gum would remain the most important African commodities for the *direct* exchange between West Africa and Europe throughout the century and the next. However, as the seventeenth century progressed a parallel trade in slaves to the Spanish Americas, as well as to the growing European settlements in the Americas, increased in importance.

According to calculations made by W.R. Scott, the early trade in gold, exchanged for brass, copper and tin, generated profits, so much so that merchants could hope for returns ten times the size of the capital risked.<sup>38</sup> This ensured a continued interest, often in combination with other trades; such as that to Spain, the

<sup>33</sup>Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation : Made by Sea or over-Land to the Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at Any Time within the Compasse of These 1600 Yeeres*, vol. VI (Glasgow : James MacLehose and Sons, 1903), 252. Discussed also in Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 105–6.

<sup>34</sup>Bracelets made from different metals. Reference to Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 105.

<sup>35</sup>Kersey, a coarse, woven woolen cloth.

<sup>36</sup>Christina Brauner, “Connecting Things: Trading Companies and Diplomatic Gift-Giving on the Gold and Slave Coasts in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 4 (July 5, 2016): 422.

<sup>37</sup>Pieter van den Broecke and J. D. La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke’s Journal of Voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea and Angola (1605-1612)*, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society, no. 5 (London: Hakluyt Society, 2000), 73, 79–80, 87–88, 97, 102. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 105. Pieter De Marees, A. Van Dantzig, and Adam Jones, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)* (British Academy, 1987), 239.

<sup>38</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:p.4-5.

Mediterranean, or to Morocco – known contemporaneously as the Barbary coast. However, the volatility that gold brought into the exchange was likely prevalent from the very early days of contact. Thus, despite Scott's promising calculations, it was notoriously difficult to predict returns and outcomes. This remained an unpleasant fact also in the century to come. The trade was far from risk-free, and in addition to typical force majeure risks such as accidents at sea and death from disease, the early English traders were constantly on the alert for hostilities from the Portuguese attempting to maintain their exclusive position in the trade, or from the African states who had established trade relations with them. Often, in contemporaneous renditions of their experiences, merchants spoke of trade that was broken off by the sudden arrival of Portuguese armed forces or their allies, forcing the English to flee back to their ships for a hasty departure.<sup>39</sup> At other times the English traders were met with hostility as a result of the actions of Englishmen who came before them. An example of which can be seen in the accounts of William Towerson from his first voyage to the coast of Guinea in 1555, where he endeavored to convince the African traders of the town of Don John near Elmina, that he, unlike some of his countrymen who had visited the coast before him, had no intentions of running away with people against their will or forcing anyone into slavery.<sup>40</sup>

The thoughtless actions of some of the English traders contributed to a gradual push towards structuring the trade more firmly. It was not beneficial that ventures representing the same state followed such "*inconsistent methods*", to use the words of Scott.<sup>41</sup> While Lok and Towerson largely focused on pursuing trade relations and establishing trust between them and the African states, the Hawkins brothers, John and William, instead opted for capturing Africans along the coast. They were enslaved, brought across the Atlantic, and offered up for sale to the Spanish in the West Indies and on the American mainland.<sup>42</sup> The voyages by the Hawkins brothers in the early 1560s were perhaps the best-known example of this practice, but the topic is referred to by both African and English traders throughout the second half of the sixteenth- and the first decades of the seventeenth century in ways that suggests they were not the only, nor the first, to have made use of such methods. Their son and nephew Richard Hawkins, a member of the GC for some years before his death in 1622, also made a note of promises of the slave trade during a voyage to the Americas in 1593: '*It is a trade of great profit, and much used, for that the Negroes*

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<sup>39</sup>Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, XI. Africa:123–24.

<sup>40</sup>Hakluyt, XI. Africa:121.

<sup>41</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:9.

<sup>42</sup>Scott, 2:8–9. Ronald Pollitt, "John Hawkins's Troublesome Voyages: Merchants, Bureaucrats, and the Origin of the Slave Trade," *Journal of British Studies* 12, no. 2 (May 1973): 26–40.

*are carried at the head of the River Plate, to Potosi, to labour in the Mines.*<sup>43</sup>

But the abduction of Africans into slavery while sailing under English flag was naturally not combinable with efforts to establish trust and trade connections with African towns and communities. Intra-European rivalry made the situation more challenging still, as many of the potential regions of trade were already under threat and pressure from the Portuguese. Therefore, in addition to the need for a shared approach that encouraged trust and stability, it was vital to present the English presence on the coast as a viable alternative that of the Portuguese. The same challenge was faced by the Dutch, who in 1593 permanently settled on the coast as a serious contender to the Portuguese hegemony. It was clear, the key was a permanent presence. Without any permanent presence on the coast, the English could not offer the stability necessary for large-scale exchange, nor the potentially vital protection of those who ran the risk of stirring Portuguese anger by trading with a rival state. As mentioned, the Dutch achieved this with their settlement first of Fort Nassau (1612) and in later decades the taking over of former Portuguese stronghold Fort Elmina (1637), a process the Portuguese were unable to halt.<sup>44</sup> The emphasis on permanent settlement on the African coast by the various European states came to define the Africa trade for two centuries to come. In the case of England, even when the trade was deemed unprofitable and the monopoly and the company gone, the small fortified settlements were still considered of such strategic importance that the English state for a long time covered their upkeep.

It was not an option for neither the European or the African states of the sixteenth and seventeenth century to attempt to conduct overseas trade without the assistance of private initiative. The vast distances, the high-risk levels and a lack of in-depth knowledge and experience made such an endeavor too expensive and troublesome. The volatility of the geo-political situation in the early modern world, paired with a lack of regulated currency and an international system of banking made the process of empire building vastly different to the situation of international trade today. Instead states hoped at best to control markets and siphon off some of the revenue they generated. This was true both in Europe and in Africa, certainly as the grip of the Portuguese loosened in the early Seventeenth century. Most African heads of state dealt with by English traders maintained their right to govern the trade that took place within their spheres of control and used European competition to maximize the outcome. European trade in Africa was carefully controlled through the granting of trading rights, usually commencing with the European merchants paying various

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<sup>43</sup>Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes : Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others.* (1625), vol. 17 (Glasgow: J. MacLehose and sons, 1906), 99.

<sup>44</sup>A. van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Sedco Publishing, 1980).

forms of customs and taxes; granting gift on behalf of themselves, their rulers and the companies they represented; and requesting favorable trading rights. Promises given by the English traders in such instances were, as we shall see, not always possible to uphold, and in those instances African rulers would look elsewhere. The intense, and growing, European competition on the coast meant that African rulers were in a position to choose, and often preferred allowing rival states shared access to their markets for the benefit of lowering prices. Such control of European presence helped generate revenue. The practicalities of trade on a day-to-day basis took place between European and African merchants, and as relations of trust were built and partnerships established it was no easy thing for the European companies to simply rid themselves of their factors at will. To replace a trading partner over many years with a new factor appointed by the company in Europe was not guaranteed to be accepted. Knowledge, expertise and networks on the coast was therefore of vital importance.<sup>45</sup>

The final decades of the sixteenth century saw increased crown interest in the budding Anglo-Africa trade in the form of investments in voyages and lending of ships. Such shared ventures, in the shape of charter-parties ratified under the Great Seal of England, often relied on Queen Elizabeth to supply the necessary crew, masters, and gunners, as well as providing ships and necessary provisions, while London merchants provided the tradeable goods. Scott provides us with an example from 1561, where the queen lent ships to the value of £500 in return for one third of any profits. The £5000 in tradable-goods were provided by London merchants.<sup>46</sup> Budding crown interest in such ventures remained ad-hoc and exploratory, without the structure and the merging of official state and commercial objectives that would come to characterize the company patents of the following century. But the patent of a more extensive partnership formed in 1588, known as the Senegal Adventurers, included features similar to those granted to incorporated joint-stock companies in the next century. As the name suggests they focused exclusively on the region including and between the Senegal- and the Gambia rivers, and their patent assured them exclusive access. In addition, the patent secured the adventurers the right to enjoy this exclusivity for 10 years, differing from the previous grants which were given for individual voyages. The venture consisted of eight merchants from Devon and London, and the company was based in Exeter. The initiative came however, according to Hakluyt's transcripts of the patent text, from a group of Portuguese nationals based in England.<sup>47</sup> Too little is known about the Senegal Adventurers to say for certain how important the

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<sup>46</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:p.5-6.

<sup>47</sup>Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, XI. Africa:306–12.

Portuguese faction was, but it is likely that the group drew on their experiences and connections in the region when setting up their trade. From the contemporaneous publications of Dutch trader Pieter van den Broecke, it is evident that the bonds made between European and African merchants and their rulers were both personal and long-lasting, and to include established traders therefore contributed greatly to the commencement of trade for a new venture.<sup>48</sup> The process was made easier with a ten year long patent that allowed for the development of a trade strategy, and ensured the ability to plan further into the future than had hitherto been possible.

The Senegal Adventurers were not incorporated however, and likely based themselves on a practice established by the 1560s of having a small group of traders nominally in charge of the business while each represented larger clusters of investors.<sup>49</sup> As highlighted in the work of Scott, this helped solve issues of liability caused when shares were sold from one person to another, and when entering into contracts – as without incorporation each merchant had to put his name on any and every contract connected to the venture. Instead, the representatives of each cluster of investors managed the group's affairs internally and represented its interest when the company directors made necessary decisions. Thus, although only a small number of names appeared on company contracts - a potentially far bigger group internally shared costs, liability, and profits. Trade was organized on a voyage-by-voyage basis, a method that was applied in numerous overseas trading companies and continued well into the seventeenth century. This method of organization had the added bonus of bringing in capital without causing too much confusion when winding up a venture, and the final settlements were organized among each cluster of investors. Although this may have made life easier for the Senegal Adventurers, it does make it difficult to know, based on their meagre records, who- and how many- were behind any given investment, as the numbers may have been far greater than they appear. With the patent granted to the Guinea Company a clearer strategy for tackling the question of liability and incorporation emerged though, as will be seen below, even then these matters were far from straightforward. Serious issues regarding liability, capital lock-in and commitment haunted the company well into the middle of the century. The challenge of unravelling this form of representative investment continues, in some cases, through the duration of the seventeenth century. In instances with little or lacking source material it proves challenging to fully map and understand the nature of such investments through representatives.

Thus, as the sixteenth century drew to a close, the slave trade increasingly appeared as an antithesis to the more peaceful, stable, and lucrative commodity trade. The comparatively late development of plantation production demanding slave

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<sup>48</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke's Journal of Voyages*.

<sup>49</sup>Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2:p.7.



labour in both the Dutch and English expansion processes also meant a delayed rise in the demand for human cargo. As seen in the case of Towerson above, attacks did great damage to the chances of establishing relations, and the effects were often long lasting. When considering the contemporaneous official view on slave trade it is worth noting that no patent seems to have been extended for slave trading specifically in the way some traders requested for redwood, though discovery, exploration, and privateering patents may have opened for such activities. Nor were there any official debates about the slave trade's possible potential through involvement with Spanish silver extraction in the Americas. Contemporaneous publications such as those of Hakluyt, Samuel Purchas or Richard Jobson, or in the Dutch Republic by Pieter de Marees or Pieter van den Broecke, suggests that the more peaceful commodity trade was the preferred practice and far more common throughout the sixteenth century, and understandably so, considering the potential it held for trade in gold.<sup>50</sup> In addition to the perspective of the African states on the coast, any official sanctioning of English slave trade with the Spanish territories would be perceived as an affront to the Spanish authorities attempting to enforce protectionist policies within its territories. As a result, there was a gradual increase in the granting of more detailed and restrictive patents causing a de-facto, if not openly intentional, separation between the English official trade in commodities, including gold, and the taking of slaves to trade for profit. The two appeared mutually exclusive and the transition favored the former. The best way to achieve necessary stability and security around the trade was a discontinuation of abductions along the coast in combination with the establishment of trading centers on plots granted by interested African states along the coast. This became the method favored by all the European actors present, most notably Portugal and the Dutch Republic, but later also by the traders of Sweden, France, Denmark-Norway and Brandenburg. Gradually the coastal trade was replaced by permanent trading factories and in some select places, forts. In their wake came the establishment of long-term, stable, contact.

Despite this general trend towards an established commodity trade via permanent or semi-permanent settlements under African control, this did not mean that the interest in slaves disappeared completely among European traders, as is well-known. Despite a lack of English records from this early establishment process, there exists evidence of activity elsewhere. The German supercargo Pieter van den Broecke chronicled his voyages to the West African coast, in Dutch service, in travel journals.<sup>51</sup> Van den Broecke made three voyages, stretching from 1605 to 1612, first to Cape Verde and the Senegambia region, and later to the kingdom of Loango, on to the coast of modern day Gabon and Kongo. He later went on to serve the Dutch

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<sup>50</sup>Marees, Dantzig, and Jones, *The Gold Kingdom of Guinea* (1602).

<sup>51</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke's Journal of Voyages*.



East India Company (VOC) in the East Indies. On the first of his African journeys, he tells of French ships threatening his expedition while he was trading at Portudal, on the coast of Senegal. On May 1, 1606, van den Broecke writes, “A French ship arrived (...) and they let it be known that they wanted to seize all of the English and Dutch ships that were on the coast.”<sup>52</sup> The situation remained tense for nearly a week while van den Broecke waited for his ship, sent elsewhere to trade, to return to Portudal. On May 5 Broecke noted in his journal, “Our ship came, (...), and so as to not be taken immediately by the Frenchmen by surprise, it [their ship] was joined by four English ships, which offered us total support.”<sup>53</sup> Together the Dutch and English ships proved too great a challenge for the French, who escaped from a near-altercation. The English ships, mastered by a Johan Hillis<sup>54</sup>, sailed together with van den Broecke to Goreé, northwest of Portudal. There they were met by yet another English ship, who reported seeing a Lübeck vessel loaded with sugar at the nearby port of Joal, south of Portudal. Together the Dutch and English agreed to attempt to seize it. The Lübeck ship surrendered on June 27, 1606 and turned out to be chartered by Portuguese traders in Lisbon. As had been reported by the arriving English ship at Goreé, the cargo of the prize consisted of slaves and sugar, as well as cotton and ivory. Van den Broecke noted “They had been underway for five months and had suffered much hunger and distress.”<sup>55</sup> Included in the cargo for the Dutch and English to divide among them were “at least ninety slave men and women, who were so skinny that it was astonishing”.<sup>56</sup> A few days after the seizure, on June 8, he wrote “Our chief factor rewarded the Englishmen, who had alerted us, with all of the black men and women...”<sup>57</sup>

A similar indication of continued English interest in slave trade can be found among the papers left by Sir Robert Cecil, the Lord Privy Seal of England and the queen’s close confidant. The papers of Cecil reveal evidence of English involvement in the trade in the first decades of the seventeenth century, around the same time as the journal entries of van den Broecke, and they usually appear when trade became as source of conflict. Cecil’s papers underline the continued connection between the Spanish- and early Africa trades among English merchants. In 1608 England’s ambassador to Spain wrote to Cecil of English slave traders frustrating the Spanish authorities: “Of late they have imprisoned in Malaga the factor of Mr Kellett of his Majesty’s Wardrobe<sup>58</sup>, whither he came laden with negroes and hides from the river

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<sup>52</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, 30.

<sup>53</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, 30–31.

<sup>54</sup>Possibly a Dutch spelling of the name John Hills/Hill.

<sup>55</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, *Pieter van Den Broecke’s Journal of Voyages*, 33.

<sup>56</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, 33.

<sup>57</sup>Broecke and La Fleur, 34.

<sup>58</sup>Likely William Kellett, working for the Master of the Wardrobe who managed the king’s household.

*of Senega [Senegal] and Puerto Dalia [Portugal] not far from Capo Verde,..”*<sup>59</sup>

These incidents, in addition to showing us that several Englishmen were in operation on the Senegambian coast, as well as possibly elsewhere, give us an indication that the English traders, like other Europeans present, were both willing and able to profit from slave trade also in the decades separating the period of kidnappings by the Hawkins’ brothers and the industry scale transatlantic trade that would start to develop a few decades later.

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<sup>59</sup>“Cecil Papers: April 1607, 16-30,” in *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House: Volume 19, 1607*, ed. M S Giuseppi and D McN. Lockie (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1965), 96-114. *British History Online*, accessed October 24, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-cecil-papers/vol19/pp96-114>.