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Dark horses of business : overseas entrepreneurship in seventeenth-century Nordic trade in the Indian and Atlantic oceans

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5 Gatekeepers of Knowledge from Overseas

5.1 Introduction

During the seventeenth century, all European trading enterprises faced the challenge of how to access and process scarce and irregular flows of information between Europe and overseas. Due to reasons characteristic of transcontinental trade, such as long distances and uncertain sailing conditions, there was a pressing need for the local knowledge of the men stationed overseas. The latter were crucial for the perception and planning of business in Europe, since they had the most up-to-date knowledge of local business rhythms and patterns. Such individuals were also responsible for conducting business in practice, which meant that they needed an understanding of how to trade with both non-European merchants and European competitors, in environments that were remarkably different from those at home.

This chapter will focus on the importance of accumulation of knowledge to overseas business. I understand the latter as the individual's experience of business conducted overseas through his own continuous presence and active participation, as well as his capacity to access and translate business information, both for his own benefit and for that of the trading enterprises for which he worked. This can be summed up as *knowledge of overseas trade*, which, for an individual with an entrepreneurial mindset, was something worth pursuing, particularly in order to demonstrate an aptitude for entrepreneurship to the directors of the companies in Europe.

I have chosen to use the concept *knowledge* rather than that of *know-how*. The reason for this is that although practical skills in conducting trade (*know-how*) are included within the more general term *knowledge*, the latter extends far beyond the merely practical sphere of the former. Thus, business know-how is a subordinate aspect of my larger concept of knowledge.

The concept of experience refers to the accumulated practices of long-term service overseas, as well as the capacity to navigate different zones of social and economic interaction. Information includes two factors. First, access to information refers to the capacity for gathering and accumulating information about trade overseas. Second, based on their previous experience, individuals knew how accumulated information could be used, for example, to exploit rumours and reports in order to influence the overseas trading situation, or to promote their career and social advancement in Europe. Thus, knowledge was an essential means for individuals to demonstrate added value, and to thus justify their relevance for the companies that employed them.

For their part, Leyer and Carloff not only had access to existing information, but also actively produced new information for the companies they served, a service that gave them a competitive advantage as entrepreneurs.⁶⁸⁴ Indeed, Leyer and Carloff went even further: they translated information into knowledge – a skill that not everyone possessed. In this sense, the exclusivity of knowledge, and not just information, constituted an important entrepreneurial asset.

The role of knowledge in long-distance and global trade has been discussed by Karel Davids, who has argued for its importance in the development of infrastructures, trade and institutions.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁴ Della Giusta and Casson corroborate that entrepreneurs differ from others because of the way they can access information, Casson and Della Giusta, "Entrepreneurship and Social Capital", 220–44.

⁶⁸⁵ Karel Davids, "On Machines, Self-Organization, and the Global Traveling of Knowledge, circa 1500–1900," *Isis* 106, no. 4 (2015): 866–74; Karel Davids, "River Control and the Evolution of Knowledge: A Comparison between Regions in China and Europe, 1400–1850," *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 1 (2006): 59–79.

Dauids has demonstrated how centralised institutions, such as states and trading companies, coordinated information from above. However, he has also claimed that this top-down focus has been one-sided, and has tended to obscure the other side of the flow and circulation of knowledge, that is, a bottom-up consideration of the role of individuals and groups in the finding, reproduction and circulation of knowledge. As Davids has made clear, recent studies of self-organised networks have attempted to rectify this imbalance.⁶⁸⁶ Indeed, the accumulation, processing and diffusion of knowledge were vital for the trading companies. While institutions remained responsible for the coordination of these processes, the contribution of experts with knowledge was crucial to their success.⁶⁸⁷

Chartered companies had limited face-to-face contact with their employees and their business counterparts – communication mainly occurred through personal correspondence and official reports.⁶⁸⁸ Direct contact between the governing elites of long-distance corporations and their overseas employees and agents was, by the very nature of the enterprise, less frequent, due in large part to delayed postal cycles. Conversely, chartered companies were organisations that needed regular and reliable intelligence from overseas.⁶⁸⁹

Steven Harris has shown that company employees “were bound by both written and unwritten rules of conduct, and corporate leaders had at their disposal mechanisms for the social and cognitive training and disciplining of members.”⁶⁹⁰ Trading companies needed to recruit reliable employees, and to send them overseas in order to develop business and to provide up-to-date correspondence and intelligence reports. The success of these information circuits varied greatly between the different companies.⁶⁹¹ However, all companies attached great importance to them, which meant that the companies were the preferred employers for men with more or less sophisticated writing and reading skills. Therefore, the contribution of individuals was absolutely essential for the companies, regardless of their organisational structure or economic success.⁶⁹²

The close correlation between experience, access to information and knowledge is important to emphasise. These three elements added value to one’s worth in employment and leadership in a long-distance trading organisation, where many individuals cultivated the image of a knowledgeable man. As such, this chapter will address the importance of the accumulation, use and misuse of knowledge.

⁶⁸⁶ David Hancock, “The Triumphs of Mercury: Connection and Control in the Emerging Atlantic Economy,” in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ.Press, 2009), 112–140; Antunes, “Free Agents”; Polónia And Owen, “Cooperation-Based”.

⁶⁸⁷ Davids, “On Machines, Self-Organization”, 876.

⁶⁸⁸ Steven J. Harris, “Long-Distance Corporations, Big Sciences, and the Geography of Knowledge,” *Configurations* 6, no. 2 (1998): 269–304, 279.

⁶⁸⁹ Harris, “Long-Distance Corporations”, 279.

⁶⁹⁰ Steven J. Harris, “Networks of Travel, Correspondence and Exchange,” in *Networks of Travel, Correspondence and Exchange: Volume 3, Early Modern Science*, ed. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 341–64, 357.

⁶⁹¹ Harris, “Networks of Travel”, 358.

⁶⁹² Regarding the importance of individuals and their knowledge, see Miles Ogborn’s work on English East India Company employees, Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

5.2 *The definition of knowledge overseas*

Of special interest for this chapter is the word “experience”, which played a crucial role in the activities of both Leyel and Carloff. In this regard, Robert Porter has written about the importance of hiring men with extensive experience on the Gold Coast. According to Porter, the English were particularly fortunate in managing to secure the services of Arent de Groot for their first expedition to the Gold Coast. As Porter put it: “De Geer made an even more spectacular catch, for he was able to engage as Director-Commandant of the Swedish company the man who was perhaps the most energetic, enterprising and experienced of all the WIC officials on the Gold Coast – the fiscal, Hendrick Carloff.”⁶⁹³

In this quotation, experience refers to an individual’s continuous presence in a physical space, as well as his capacity to process learning by doing (in this case, business and administration). Simultaneously, experience refers to the understanding of the local context, including its various actors, competitors, political entanglements, and cultural and social constraints. Experience can thus be understood as the understanding of multiple settings, through continuous visits and relational trial and error. In the long run, the successful management of experience resulted in a more effective adaptation of oneself and use of available means, in a process that transformed experience into usable knowledge. Overseas, not everyone was able to translate experience into knowledge, either due to personal limitations, such as a lack of literacy or cultural adaptability, or due to environmental constraints, for instance, difficulties in surviving in inhospitable environments. Entrepreneurial-minded individuals such as Leyel and Carloff were among those who successfully managed to convert experience into knowledge.

Leyel accumulated experience during his earlier years in the service of the VOC. Travelling through multiple ports in the Indian Ocean, developing a command of the major trading languages, practising different customs of trade, and entangling his interests with those of local merchants all resulted in a certain degree of adaptation to the social and cultural world of the Indian Ocean. When Leyel entered DEIC employment, he was thus able to translate the acquired experiences into knowledge, which he attempted, not always successfully, to apply in practice.

Carloff also accumulated experience whilst in the employment of the WIC. His numerous voyages to and in Western Africa illustrate the way in which he acquired experience, with particular emphasis on the geography of local markets, the daily administration of trade and the management of sensitive political conflicts (between Africans, between Africans and Europeans and between competing Europeans). His service in Angola, the island of São Tomé, and the vast Guinea Coast, his skills as a slave trader on the Slave Coast, and his role as an intermediate between the hinterland and the coastal trade in Accra, all contributed to the conversion of accumulated experience into knowledge, which Carloff would later deploy in practice whilst in the service of the WIC, SAC and the Glückstadt Company. However, as with Leyel, the use of knowledge did not always result in the expected outcomes.

The accumulation of knowledge was as dependent upon experience as it was upon the capability of acquiring and managing information. The importance of relevant information for the companies has been noted by Mark Casson, who points out that information was not freely accessible to everyone, and, for that reason, individuals holding privileged information had an advantage in intervening either in the company or in the wider marketplace. Indeed, this is the main reason for

⁶⁹³ Porter, *European Activity*, 290.

which Casson considers information, when transformed into knowledge, as an important element in entrepreneurship and an asset for entrepreneurs. This is why, in the seventeenth century, knowledgeable individuals became so crucial for companies and investors. As Casson puts it, experience, information and knowledge are highly localised, and only people on the ground are able to make full sense of them, since they are the only ones who observe the actual events.⁶⁹⁴

Donald Harreld emphasises the companies' need for up-to-date information regarding market conditions. In the case of the early modern period, information flowed slowly due to long distances and infrastructural constraints. As Harreld stresses: "Very large joint-stock companies, like the East India Companies, relied most heavily on their individual functionaries abroad to provide market information."⁶⁹⁵ In a similar fashion, Ann Carlos and Santhi Hejeebu argue that such overseas agents "were the vital generators of information that oiled the wheels of transcontinental commerce."⁶⁹⁶ In practice, agents, who possessed crucial information regarding market conditions, had an extensive knowledge of the availability of products, of foreign competitors, and of suppliers, and thus held a competitive advantage compared to their counterparts.

The importance of accessing and managing flows of information is generally referred to in economics as the "principal-agent theory". The relationship between the principal and the agent might become complicated when the agent makes decisions on behalf of his principal, and the principal does not have access to the same information as the agent. This becomes problematic, especially when the agent is motivated by his own interest and might thus be tempted to harm the interest of the principal. The main reason for such problems is the asymmetric access to information, which means that the agent has more up-to-date knowledge, for instance, of local markets and trading customs.

Carlos and Nicholas propose that during the early modern period, international markets were characterised by uncertainty and asymmetric information. Trading companies did their best to decrease transaction costs by collecting, processing and coordinating information on tastes, commodities and prices.⁶⁹⁷ The source of this information was the employees and local agents. For that reason, companies devised ways to supervise their personnel, in an attempt to reduce risk and to increase the opportunities for profit.⁶⁹⁸ One such mechanism of control was the labour contract. By this means, companies could specify fixed and incentive payments, so as to increase the chance of maintaining a stable and cooperative workforce. A second mechanism was to oblige officials to produce information for the administrative centres of the company. One of the ways in which companies tried to ensure the cooperation and loyalty of their employees was to allow a certain degree of private trading. From the perspective of the company, this incentive ensured that employees would remain vehicles of information circulation, without disturbing the strategic goals of the organisation. Furthermore, this mechanism was also a way of compensating for low and/or unpaid salaries.

⁶⁹⁴ Casson, ed., *Entrepreneurship*, 9.

⁶⁹⁵ Donald Harreld, "An Education in Commerce: Transmitting Business Information in Early Modern Europe," in *Information Flows: New Approaches in the Historical Study of Business Information*, ed. Leos Müller and Jari Ojala (Helsinki: SKS, Finnish Literature Society, 2007), 63–83, 67.

⁶⁹⁶ Ann Carlos and Santhi Hejeebu, "Specific Information and the English Chartered Companies, 1650-1750," in *Information Flows*, eds. Müller and Ojala, 139–69, 140.

⁶⁹⁷ Ann Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Theory and History: Seventeenth-Century Joint-Stock Chartered Trading Companies," *The Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 04 (1996): 916–24, 916.

⁶⁹⁸ Ann Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Agency Problems in Early Chartered Companies: The Case of the Hudson's Bay Company," *The Journal of Economic History* 50, no. 4 (1990): 853–75, 858.

If permitted, private trade was a common practice in the Indian Ocean. To the contrary, it seldom occurred in the Atlantic Ocean. For example, Carlos and Hejeebu argue that the English companies in the Atlantic controlled several exclusive markets, such as the fur trade in North America. If the companies had allowed private trade, they would have had to deal with direct competition from their own employees or agents. As an alternative, companies paid higher salaries, although in the case of the African trade, collaterals or bonds had to be deposited by new employees to guarantee loyalty.⁶⁹⁹ Following on from the arguments of chapters two and four, it should be stated that in the Atlantic Ocean, interloping was easier than in the Indian Ocean. For this reason, the danger was that a company's employees would offer their skills to competitors, whether these were private partnerships or other chartered companies.

The arguments of Carlos, Nicholas and Hejeebu probably hold true for the English context and the English companies. However, this dissertation will take a different approach. I am less concerned with the need of companies to recruit agents with the required knowledge, and more concerned with the agents themselves, the way they acquired and developed knowledge, and how they pitched that knowledge as a personal asset and reason for employment. Thus, I am turning the principal-agent problem the other way around.

From an entrepreneurial point of view, Jari Ojala and Leos Müller have demonstrated that asymmetries in the distribution of information were certainly beneficial for individuals. As they put it, "the bigger the information asymmetry, the greater the advantage and the potential profit for the well-informed actor."⁷⁰⁰ In line with these findings, I hypothesise that individuals with exclusive access to information would be tempted to use their position to strengthen such asymmetries, and to hinder companies from developing new information-gathering strategies. In short, this would ensure that the individuals concerned would remain indispensable. Information asymmetry was a source of profit, at least for some. It allowed individuals to mobilise their experience, to gather information, to translate it into knowledge, and to channel it in the way that most benefitted themselves personally, and eventually also the companies they served.

Leyel had access to information in a way that most employees did not, since unlike those experts on Indian Ocean trade based at the European headquarters of the companies, he had actually participated in the operations concerned. Leyel's privileged access to information, especially about local markets and possible competitors, was partly thanks to his local trading partners. Leyel was thus the repository for different information flows. Intriguingly, only a few letters sent from Europe to Tranquebar, were addressed to Leyel.⁷⁰¹

In the case of Carloff, the fact that he had been employed by the Dutch, the Swedish, the Danish and the French had served to enhance his access to information. When he entered the employment of the SAC, he had already known that the Cape Coast did not currently have any permanent European settlements.⁷⁰² From his service with the WIC, Carloff also knew that the Dutch wanted to attract local trade closer to Elmina castle, particularly by undercutting the role of the Fetu in the hinterland trade, which had kept the latter largely closed to Europeans.⁷⁰³ However, Carloff's

⁶⁹⁹ Carlos and Hejeebu, "Specific Information", 163–164.

⁷⁰⁰ Leos Müller and Jari Ojala, "Information Flows and Economic Performance Over the Long Term: An Introduction," in *Information Flows*, ed. Müller and Ojala, 14–28, 21.

⁷⁰¹ RAC, DK, B 246 A, H. Leyel to W. Leyel, 28.12.1646.

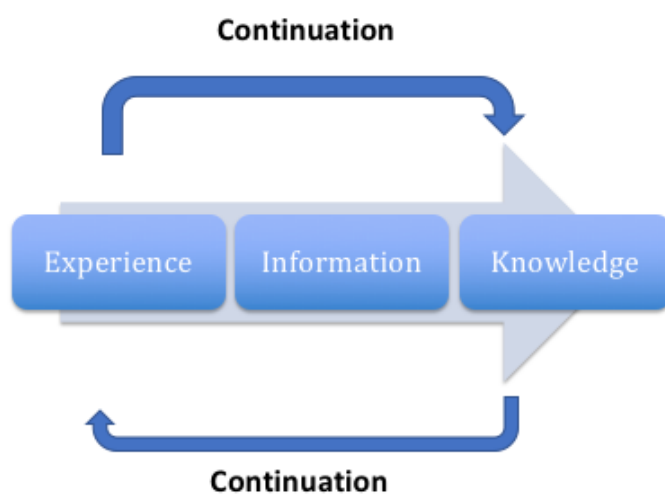
⁷⁰² Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 10; chapter three in this dissertation.

⁷⁰³ Daaku, *Trade and Politics*, 107.

best source of knowledge was his duty as WIC prosecutor to inspect all incoming ships suspected of smuggling. During these inspections, he met men like Arent Gabbesen, and learned not only about European affairs, but also about methods of commercial interloping. It is thus not surprising that even men such as Jan Valckenburgh were willing to take the position of prosecutor, a post that has attracted less interest than that of governor in the historiography, despite its crucial importance for business.⁷⁰⁴

The central argument of this chapter is that information and experience should not be treated as separate things, but rather as overlapping characteristics, which combined to constitute knowledge of overseas trade. Over time, once knowledge was acquired, one could adapt and develop new and more profitable experiences. Therefore, continuity over time was essential for the knowledge accumulation process, as illustrated in figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1 Process of knowledge accumulation



5.3 *Leyel and knowledge in the Indian Ocean*

Leyel was required to report to the directors of the company in Copenhagen, and was accountable for DEIC business in Asia. His reports were supposed to provide the directors and the king with sufficient information about the state of the company in India.⁷⁰⁵ In the DEIC, the person responsible for reporting to Europe was the commander, so the directors in Copenhagen had high expectations of this person.

From early on, Leyel sought to create the impression of being the right man for the position. One of his strategies was to exploit the information he was able to gather for his own benefit. He often began reports by underlining the bad conduct of fellow employees, especially Pessart, thus making his own actions appear in a good light. In other words, he presented himself as the man who was in the right place at the right time to save the company. To emphasise his importance, after the siege and subsequent inspection of Fort Dansborg, he reported that all matters regarding the company were in a desperate state, that the whole affair was embarrassing and that it endangered Danish respectability in the eyes of other Europeans.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰⁴ About the role of the prosecutor, see chapter two; Valckenburgh as prosecutor, see chapter three.

⁷⁰⁵ RAC, DK, Diverse kongelige ekspeditioner det Ostindiske Kompagni vedkommende, Instructions to the commander, undated, but related to the First DEIC.

⁷⁰⁶ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 22.11.1644.

Another recurring theme in Leyel's reports was his complaints regarding his colleagues' heavy alcohol consumption. "Here more than anywhere else in the world, opportunities for drinking and loose behaviour abound."⁷⁰⁷ To reinforce his role as saviour of the company Leyel drew an association between the immoral behaviour of other employees and administrative difficulties. This became a convenient way for Leyel to send signals about who was to blame for the bad management of the company in Asia. The fault lay with his nemesis Pessart and his companions, whom Leyel referred to as rebels, rhetorically placing them outside of the orderly and morally superior space of the company.⁷⁰⁸

Leyel continued to cultivate his image as the only person capable of securing the best interests of the company. For example, he informed Copenhagen that trade in Makassar was about to collapse, largely because of Pessart's unpaid debts. Had Leyel not made the journey there, the entire factory would have been lost to other Europeans, and the DEIC would have faced great losses, since Makassar was the place in which it made most profit. He promised the directors that within one year, he would repay the outstanding debts and continue to expand trade.⁷⁰⁹

Furthermore, Leyel portrayed himself as the only trustworthy employee in the East. He complained that he had no one else he could trust, and, for that reason, he had been forced to appoint Anders Nielsen as the acting governor at fort Dansborg, so that he could travel in order to sort out the problems that had been caused by his predecessor.⁷¹⁰ However, what he failed to report was that this travelling often involved trading for his own benefit.

Leyel also insisted on demonstrating his knowledge of local customs to the directors in Europe, particularly by explaining how gift-giving was an essential part of his duties, and how well he performed it, particularly in relation to the Nayak. He also compared his own skill in these matters to that of his predecessor Crappe, a man who was much admired by the company directors in Denmark.⁷¹¹

From Leyel's reports, a director in Copenhagen, without access to any other information, could easily believe that the company was in trouble, and that forceful measures were needed. By blaming his co-commander for everything that had gone wrong with the company, Leyel justified his decision to take charge of the DEIC in Asia.⁷¹² For Leyel, it was important to protect the image of his own superior judgement. Indeed, this was probably why Leyel's communiques were so personal, disclosing only the vaguest information about the details of business.⁷¹³

In a separate report addressed to the King of Denmark, Leyel described what had happened in India since he had arrived. In general, the information was the same as that which he gave to the directors. However, in the letter to the king, one gets the impression that Leyel emphasised his own importance even more strongly. He stated to the king that he had done his utmost to improve trade in India, and that he would demonstrate his success in his subsequent reports.⁷¹⁴ Leyel perhaps saw an opportunity to send divergent information to the directors and to the king, and to thus manipulate the

⁷⁰⁷ "eptersom her giffis meehre leyliched till druekenskab og losagtighed end paa nogen stadre i warden.", RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 22.11.1644.

⁷⁰⁸ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 22.11.1644.

⁷⁰⁹ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 12.12.1645.

⁷¹⁰ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 22.11.1644.

⁷¹¹ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 12.12.1645.

⁷¹² RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 22.11.1644.

⁷¹³ Similar argument by Casson. See Casson, *The Entrepreneur*, 42.

⁷¹⁴ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the king, 12.12.1645.

situation to his own advantage.⁷¹⁵ Indeed, this would have been quite feasible, given the monopoly that Leyel held over information.

Among the things that Leyel omitted from his reports to the directors and the king, was the fact that he was allowing the Dutch and the English to trade at Tranquebar, provided they kept their flags hidden.⁷¹⁶ Similarly, he made no mention of the fact that he was providing employment to local merchants, or that he was extending credit to other DEIC employees. In his reports, Leyel gave the impression that he was operating alone in India, whereas in reality he depended upon a multiplicity of different networks (as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter).

One way in which Leyel conveyed his own importance was to give detailed explanations of how he had improved trade. In particular, Leyel wanted to give the impression that he had made Tranquebar a more attractive venue for trade by stabilising exchange rates. In addition, Leyel was keen to emphasize that security had improved since the construction of the fort, and that new houses had been built using materials from Emeldy, Japara and Makassar.⁷¹⁷ Leyel went to great lengths to demonstrate how he had saved the position of the Danish in Asia. His reports especially underlined the role of knowledge: Leyel understood what was needed, and demonstrated his knowledge regarding competitors, the challenges of business and, most importantly, the measures required to improve trade. After all, he was on a royal mission. “I would prefer to leave India, but I would be ashamed of doing so before I have, with the help of God, developed trade for the better, and before the king has sent someone else to relieve me.”⁷¹⁸ Leyel felt that he was a valuable asset for the company, and stressed his importance by accentuating the burden of serving in Tranquebar.

As discussed in chapter two and four, the company relied on only a few men in India. Therefore, an experienced overseas employee like Leyel was invaluable. Nothing in his appointment suggests that the other directors doubted his capabilities. However, despite the lack of critical voices, the other directors might not have been pleased with Leyel’s personal appointment by the king. It was, after all, against the original charter of the company, and it was difficult to know who Leyel was really representing: the king or the company. His appointment in India was perhaps a relief for the other directors, since it seemed that he was representing the king’s interests foremost.

In his reports, Leyel also gave the impression of being knowledgeable. He took the liberty to present his vision of how trade should be conducted in practice. As an example, Leyel claimed that it was absolutely necessary that the directors send additional ships to India, preferably large ships, along with one hundred and eighty newly recruited men. If this could not be done, Leyel suggested hiring people from other companies, especially officers, carpenters and smiths. Alternatively, he suggested that seasoned India trade veterans could be hired in Europe, and sent out to serve under the DEIC.⁷¹⁹ He often returned to his request for ships, of between 120 and 150 lasts, which would be deployed in the intra-Asian trade. With these ships, it would be possible to sail continuously from the Coromandel Coast to Ceylon, Sumatra and Java.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁵ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors and the king, 12.12.1645.

⁷¹⁶ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to P. Nielsen, 20.09.1645.

⁷¹⁷ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 12.12.1645.

⁷¹⁸ “jeg will hemskt gerne begire at forlodus naff India. Mens jeg skammer mig at giörre det. Indtill jeg med guds hjelp haffuer braegt alting ude een god status og nogen merelhlig thienste for hands majestet og faderlander aff mig skiber her.”, RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 22.11.1644.

⁷¹⁹ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors 12.12.1645; RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the king 12.12.1645.

⁷²⁰ Ibidem.

In addition to his request for equipment and ships, Leyel also demanded men and women. The men should be trained up to become employees of the company, while the women would serve to sustain the continuity of the settlement. This suggests that Leyel planned to embed the company in the intra-Asian trade by fostering a more permanent DEIC settlement. Also, in his report to the king, Leyel demanded further reinforcements. He stated that he hoped to send the *Christianshavn* back to Copenhagen with a handsome profit, but that he currently could not spare the ship and its crew without risking the Danish position in the intra-Asian trade. He suggested imitating the strategy of the Portuguese in Goa, who carried their goods under the flags of other companies, but maintained forts and settlements as property of the king.⁷²¹

Leyel had yet more suggestions. Since reinforcements from Europe had failed to arrive, he proposed allowing other Europeans to handle the shipping between Europe and Tranquebar. He envisaged a non-Danish country or institution assuming the costs and the risks of transport, paying a recognition fee to the DEIC, but retaining the profits from the sale of the goods in Europe. This controversial proposal illustrates the dire straits that the DEIC was in. However, at the same time, it shows Leyel's ability to adapt to a difficult situation.⁷²²

Leyel's suggestions extended into the diplomatic realm as well. He was in favour of a diplomatic treaty with Portugal, as a means of reciprocating the royal decree that had granted the Danish access to Macao, as well as to all the other places within the Portuguese sphere of influence. He concluded that ultimately, the Portuguese had been friendlier and more accommodating than the English or the Dutch. Leyel's enthusiasm for entering Macao was driven by his desire to connect the Spanish American-Manila trade with Macao, and consequently with China. He had a vested interest in the transport of goods from Dansborg to Manila in exchange for silver, which he wanted to trade in Macao for Chinese products, which would in turn bring a high profit upon their sale in Europe. If the deal was timed well, Leyel argued, significant profits could be obtained within ten months. However, in order to fulfil his plan, Leyel needed the Danish crown to finalise yet another diplomatic treaty, this time with the Dutch, so as to secure passage through the Straits of Malacca (the only route to Manila).⁷²³ To facilitate DEIC access to the markets in Manila, Leyel also insisted on a treaty with Madrid. In sum, such references to European diplomacy was yet another way for Leyel to demonstrate his own knowledge and expertise to the king. At the same time, these efforts reveal Leyel's vision of the world, in which trade in Asia was deeply intertwined with politics in Europe and vice-versa.

Given the lack of contact with Copenhagen, there was another problem that Leyel needed to face, namely the proliferation of unreliable information through rumours and gossip. Leyel had no choice but to depend upon such sources to obtain information from Europe. For example, in his first report, Leyel noted that he had heard rumours from Dutch merchants regarding the arrival of a ship from Glückstadt at Cutiara, in Ceylon.⁷²⁴ However, in a letter to Nielsen dated 1644, Leyel admitted that he possessed no detailed information about that ship, and ordered Nielsen to investigate and report the crew and the merchant responsible as soon as possible.⁷²⁵

Second-hand information also played another role. News from Europe was often received through rumours. In a letter to Poul Hansen dated 1646, Leyel wrote that in Bantam, he had heard

⁷²¹ Ibidem.

⁷²² Ibidem.

⁷²³ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors, 15.11.1646.

⁷²⁴ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to the directors 22.11.1644.

⁷²⁵ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to A. Nielsen, 06.11.1644.

from the Dutch that Denmark had concluded peace with Sweden. In the same letter, he also repeated the rumour that the VOC would send 6,000 men to Batavia that year, a measure that had become necessary since the Dutch company had lost 500 men in Ceylon, whilst fighting against the King of Candy.⁷²⁶

Leyel also gathered information from newspapers. For example, on one occasion, he reported that seven ships had arrived from Portugal in Goa, carrying newspapers. Through the latter, he had learned that in 1646, the Dutch had sent 70 ships to the West Indies in order to fight the Spanish Atlantic fleet.⁷²⁷ The arrival of newspapers from Portugal in Goa, and from England in Madras, was again mentioned in letters to Poul Nielsen and Jørgen Hansen dated December 1646. Through these newspapers, Leyel had been able to reconstruct political developments back in Europe. He was keen to stress the growing tensions between the Dutch Republic and England, and between the former and the Portuguese.⁷²⁸ He was also astonished by the fact that the King of England had been defeated by the Parliamentarians in the Civil War, and had fled to a castle in Scotland. He was afraid of what would happen in England in the future, and mourned the fact that he had received “no news from home or from Holland.”⁷²⁹

News finally arrived from home in a letter from Leyel’s son, Hans, and his wife Ellenor Leyel, dated 28 December 1646. After several incidents in the service of the DEIC, Hans had ended up in England. He explained to his father that the Danish King was planning to create a new company, as soon as the court official Corfiz Ulfeldt returned to Copenhagen. Meanwhile, some non-company Danish ships were being prepared to set sail to India.⁷³⁰ In a subsequent letter, Hans informed his father that Johan Braem, Jacob Mickelsen and Roeland Crape, the veteran directors of the DEIC, had all died.⁷³¹

Rumours, gossip, personal correspondence and newspapers were thus the sources of information at Leyel’s disposal. These different sources varied as to their reliability. In practice, Leyel had to decide how to deal with the existing information, which news to trust, which to disseminate, which to withhold, and which to “adapt” in order to advance the interests of the DEIC, to secure the loyalty of its employees, or to further Leyel’s own personal ambitions.

5.4 *Carloff and the accumulation of knowledge in the Atlantic*

For Heinrich Carloff, his accumulated knowledge was the starting-point for his employment with the SAC. Carloff’s 1646 mission to São Tomé, while in the employ of the WIC, had enabled him to become acquainted with the island, its population and its mode of sugar production. This was essential knowledge for the SAC, since Louis de Geer’s argument for founding a company in Sweden had been precisely in order to tap into the sugar trade with São Tomé. According to Louis de Geer, this had the potential to become as lucrative as the Asian trade.⁷³² Although sugar was an important motive, the SAC would eventually focus on the gold trade on the Gold Coast. For Queen Christina, hiring Carloff

⁷²⁶ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to P. Hansen, 08.08.1646.

⁷²⁷ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to P. Hansen and J. Hansen, 16.11.1646.

⁷²⁸ RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to P. Hansen and J. Hansen, 15.12.1646.

⁷²⁹ “jeg haffue indted nyt udaff wore land eller udaf Holland”, RAC, DK, B 246 A, Leyel to J. Hansen, 24.05.1647.

⁷³⁰ RAC, DK, B 246 A, H. Leyel to W. Leyel, 28.12.1646.

⁷³¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷³² Nováky, *Handelskompanier*, 91; Dahlgren, *Louis de Geer*, 336; Granlund, *En svensk koloni i Afrika*, 7; RP, 06.12.1649.

was a means to reach the King of Fetu, with whom she wished to establish good relations.⁷³³ After all, it was through the Fetu that Europeans could buy gold from the hinterland. From an entrepreneurial point of view, these two events demonstrate how Carloff's overseas knowledge was the reason for his hiring and the consequent establishment of the SAC. De Geer and the queen believed that employing Carloff would improve the prospects for Swedish trade in Africa. However, when de Geer presented his plans for a Swedish Africa Company, he met with a cold response from the Royal Council, something which can be explained by reference to internal power struggles rather than by any specific opposition to the plan. Indeed, this was one of the reasons for which de Geer approached the queen in person. Unlike the council, she agreed to his proposal.

A second occasion on which Carloff's knowledge was specifically mentioned as a motive for hiring him was his entrance into the French West India Company (FWIC) (1664–1674).⁷³⁴ The company operated on the Slave Coast in Western Africa, and hired Carloff on 8 February 1665.⁷³⁵ Even if a contract was signed between the FWIC and Carloff, it was his brother-in-law, Jean Andre Wolzogen, who represented him in the negotiations in Paris.⁷³⁶ Wolzogen became his representative in France partly because of their family connection, but first and foremost because he belonged to an Austrian noble family, spoke French, and was acquainted with French court culture. He facilitated Carloff's access to the French overseas networks, and helped him during the process of naturalisation in France.⁷³⁷ Wolzogen's role was thus surely important for Carloff's entrance into the French company. However, more decisive was Carloff's knowledge of African trade. He was hired to take command of all the outposts and factories that would be established in the Kingdoms of Luanda, Congo, and Angola, and any other region between the Equator and the Cape of Good Hope, for a period of six years. His contract also bound him to carry slaves to the French West Indies.⁷³⁸ In Carloff's contract, Angola likely referred to the whole Central West African coast, specifically the Luango Coast, and possibly Benguela.⁷³⁹

⁷³³ RAS, LA, 82, The power of attorney by the queen, undated; Granlund has transcribed and translated the letter. Granlund, *En svensk koloni i Afrika*, Appendix 2.

⁷³⁴ Compagnie Française des Indes occidentales.

⁷³⁵ Regular trade on the Slave Coast was established in the seventeenth century, but the Portuguese had begun to trade slaves in the region already around 1550. See Law, *Slave Coast*, 117–121; A Ly, *La Compagnie du Sénégal de 1675 à 1696*, PhD-dissertation (Bordeaux: Université de Bordeaux, 1955), 94–95; Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 117.

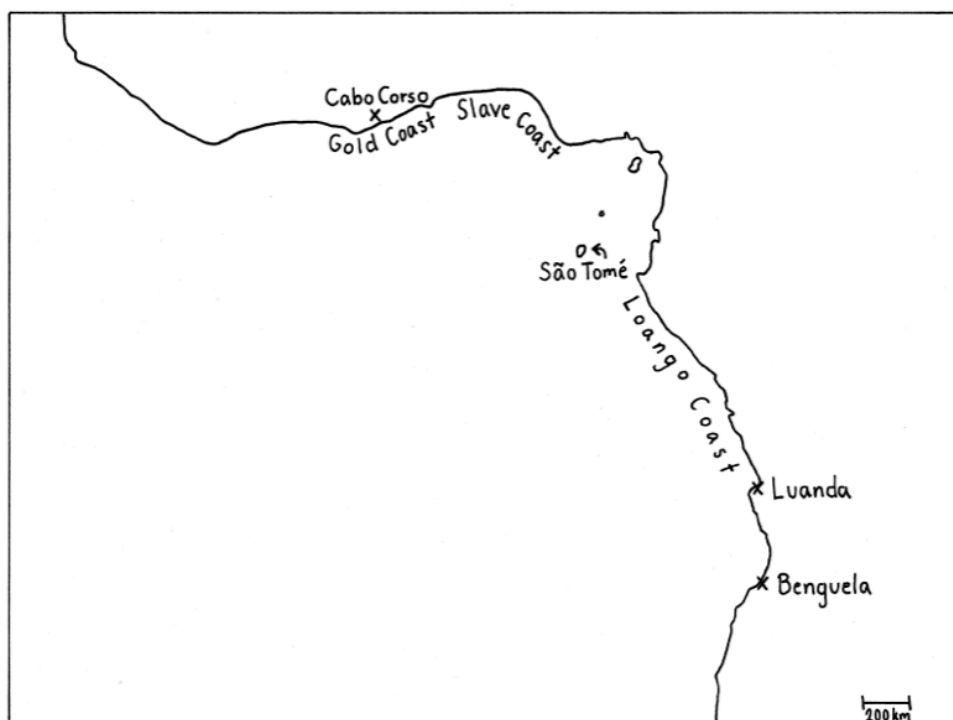
⁷³⁶ Archives Nationales (AN), Minutier central des notaires de Paris (MN), AN/MC/ET/VI/527, Commercial treaty, 28.08.1665; Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 117.

⁷³⁷ Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 117.

⁷³⁸ However, there are problems with the place names in the contract. Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and Stacey Sommerdyk have stated with reference to the slave trade in Central Western Africa that “the definition of Angola's location and size differs from one group of European traders to the next, and shifts significantly over time.” Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and Stacey Sommerdyk, “Reexamining the Geography and Merchants of the West Central African Trade: Looking behind Numbers,” *African Economic History* 28 (2010): 77–105, 78.

⁷³⁹ Ribeiro da Silva and Sommerdyk, “Reexamining the Geography”, 77–82.

Figure 5-2 Map of the region of Western Africa in which Carloff was active



Map created by Henrik Pulli

Even if many of the places mentioned in Carloff's French contract related to areas controlled by Portugal, the geographical terminology implied that the French company were using Carloff to forge a link with the Portuguese in the South Atlantic.⁷⁴⁰ The Portuguese already controlled the Luanda trade, and, for this reason, Northern European slave traders tended to resort to other regions of Central Western Africa. However, even in the Luango, Northern Europeans could easily buy slaves from African traders without Portuguese intervention. In other regions, such as in Benguela, it was not uncommon for Northern Europeans to interlope Portuguese slaving fleets, with the active support of Luso-African merchants on the coast.⁷⁴¹ These activities were not unknown to Carloff. He had an extensive knowledge of the Portuguese sphere of influence, by virtue of having acted as a mediator in São Tomé between the local Portuguese administration and the WIC, and through his service in Dutch Brazil. His contract also specified that he was to be allowed to buy or capture slaves to supply the Caribbean market. This is remarkable, since capturing slaves was not a common European

⁷⁴⁰ During the period 1660–1675, there was a significant increase in the Dutch slave trade in Western Africa. At the same time, there was a decline in the Portuguese slave trade. See Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese*, 250–254.

⁷⁴¹ Concerning the structure of Central Western African trade and the decline of Luanda trade, see Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese*, 200; Roquinaldo Ferreira, "Transforming Atlantic Slaving: Trade, Warfare and Territorial Control in Angola, 1650-1800" PhD-dissertation, (Los Angeles: University of California, 2003), chapter 1; On the importance of Luango and Benguela, see Mariana Candido, "The Formation of a Colonial Society in the African Coast: Benguela and the Atlantic World, 1600-1780," in *Seaports in the First Global Age Portuguese Agents, Networks and Interactions (1500-1800)*, ed. Cátia Antunes and Amelia Polónia (Porto: Uporto Edições, 2016), 197–219, 209-210; Arlindo Caldeira, "Angola and 17th Century. South Atlantic Slave Trade," in *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange: Slave Trading in the South Atlantic, 1590-1867*, ed. Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and David Richardson (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2014), 101–42, 113.

practice on the Gold Coast. However, the Portuguese had been doing it for decades in Central Western Africa.⁷⁴²

The contract between the French company and Carloff was atypical, since he was not officially put on the company's payroll. Carloff was free to sell slaves on the Caribbean islands, on the condition that the French company had first pick of seven percent of the slaves. The return cargoes of sugar that Carloff would receive in the West Indies should then preferably be transported to La Rochelle or Dunkirk. If that was impossible, he should make use of other French ports. The company would pay all import duties and expenses incurred in the unloading of the cargo. Any exports from Guinea to France would earn Carloff a recognition fee of seven percent. Finally, Carloff was allowed to fly the company's flags on all his ships.⁷⁴³ With this contract, Carloff thus moved from being an entrepreneur in Africa to being an entrepreneur in the Atlantic, and shifted his focus from trading in Africa (as had been the case during his time with the SAC and the Glückstadt company) to trading with Africa.

During a time of increased interest in the slave trade, Carloff was by no means the only one to sign a contract with the French company. A similar contract was drawn up and signed by a man called Jacquet, who became director of commerce in Senegal, in an outpost that he had himself established.⁷⁴⁴ Carloff was in a position where he knew that his experience and knowledge was valued in France. The contract with the French company shows that he did not only offer companies knowledge of how to operate in Western Africa, but also used that knowledge to convince rulers in Europe to grant him the opportunity to personally profit from Africa through trade.

The contract with the French company was important in other ways. The moment that Carloff signed this new agreement was prior to the second Anglo-Dutch war, in which France also played an important role. Carloff, who had ceased to trade on the Gold Coast after the skirmish of 1659, was looking for a new outlet. The first step was to become naturalised as French, since the French company did not officially allow the participation of foreigners. In this sense, Carloff's naturalisation as French was similar to his ennoblement in Sweden in 1654.⁷⁴⁵

James Pritchard has stated that the biggest obstacle for French overseas commerce was the limited demand for colonial goods, a situation that also existed in the Nordic kingdoms, where Carloff had served previously. The French chartered companies, such as the West India Company (1664), the Senegal Company (1674), the Guinea Company (1685) and the Saint-Domingue Company (1698) provided services to the state rather than being commercial enterprises. By 1668, foreign trade was forbidden in French colonies and all trade officially monopolised by the companies.⁷⁴⁶ For Pritchard, these companies were not economic success stories. However, this conclusion is only partly correct: certain individuals were profiting from the overseas trade, but these were not necessarily the investors of the companies. As Mims has demonstrated, private merchants were able to challenge the monopoly

⁷⁴² Candido, "The Formation of a Colonial Society", 206–207.

⁷⁴³ The contract has been transcribed by Ly and translated by Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 118. However, he does not reveal the source of the information, and therefore it is impossible to know what the original sources stated.

⁷⁴⁴ Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 117.

⁷⁴⁵ See chapters three and four.

⁷⁴⁶ James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670-1730* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 191.

of the company, among them Dutch smugglers, who profited greatly from the French plantations.⁷⁴⁷ Like the Dutch, Carloff benefitted by establishing a private enterprise, while continuing to assist in the development of company trade. This is why his contract cannot be considered either a typical labour contract, or a proof of property (in shares or bonds) in the FWIC. The following section will focus on the impact that Carloff and his knowledge had within the French company.

The *Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbee* provides a unique contemporary account of the accumulation of knowledge, and particularly Carloff's knowledge of Western Africa.⁷⁴⁸ According to Stewart Mims, the French Navy Captain, François Delbée, wrote about Carloff with great respect, stating that he had considerable experience in the African trade and an impressive knowledge of local practices.⁷⁴⁹ "Mister Carolof, who has traded for a long time in this country, has retained great knowledge of it... [thus] it would not be right if what he has done were to be forgotten, since it has the potential to help those who will conduct similar enterprises in the future. Moreover, his knowledge will be useful and agreeable to the public."⁷⁵⁰ Unlike Leyel, Carloff thus had someone else to sing his praises, a fact that served only to increase his reputation in the eyes of others.

Carloff arrived at Offra in the Kingdom of Ardres (a coastal area in present-day Benin) on 4 January 1670 aboard the *La Justice*.⁷⁵¹ His task was to negotiate a favourable trading location for the French company. To this end, Carloff had a first meeting with the *Fidalgo* (the chief or governor), who was responsible for the commercial affairs of the kingdom. Carloff made an official request to meet the king, and, at the same time, sent a personal envoy to the king on his own initiative. Carloff hoped for a quick reply, but none came for four days. In his message to the king, Carloff had reminded him of the fact that they had previously drunk the *Bocca á Bocca* together.⁷⁵² Finally, a messenger arrived on 16 January, bearing the reply that the king had not forgotten his long relationship with Carloff. Considering this relationship, he did not require the French company to present him with gifts in advance of an audience, as was customary when receiving Europeans. In addition, the king promised the French the same trading rights as other Europeans in the region. The favour the king showed towards the French thus arose from his personal relationship with Carloff.⁷⁵³ As a result, the company obtained unconditional access to the local market and permission to establish a permanent factory. For a recently established company, Carloff's knowledge of the market and negotiating practices were indeed a valuable asset.

However, the historian Eberhart Schmitt has claimed that Carloff could not have been the person who had previously drunk *Bocca á Bocca* with the king. According to Schmitt, Carloff had

⁷⁴⁷ Wim Klooster has also studied such cross-imperial actions, Wim Klooster, "Curaçao as a Transit Center to the Spanish Main and the French West Indies," in *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders*, ed. Gert Oostindie and Jessica Vance Roitman (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2014), 25–51.

⁷⁴⁸ François Delbée, *Journal du Voyage du Sieur Delbee, Commissaire General de la Marine aux Isles, dans la Coste de Guinee pour l'establissement du Commerce en ces Pays en l'annee 1669* (Paris, 1671).

⁷⁴⁹ Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 165.

⁷⁵⁰ "Sier Carolof, qui ayant long-temps trafiqué en ce pais, y avoit conserve beaucoup de connoissance & d'habitude: cette pensée me paroissant d'autant plus raisonnable, qu'il ne seroit pas juste que ce qu'il a fait demeure comme ensevely dan l'oubly, puis qu'il peut servir de regle á ceux qui formeron á l'avenir de pareilles entreprises & sa connoissance est aussi utile qu'agreeable au public.", Delbée, *Journal du Voyage du Sieur Delbee*, 387–388.

⁷⁵¹ The kingdom has various spellings: Ardrah, Ardres, Adra and Arrada. The present-day name is Allada. Offra was a sea port region controlled by the inland Kingdom of Ardres. The region was famous for its slave trade; present-day name: Benin.

⁷⁵² A cultural ritual, to show respect towards each other.

⁷⁵³ Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy*, 168–169.

previously worked on the Gold Coast, and not in Offra.⁷⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Carloff did have access to information regarding local customs, and thus had the knowledge required for this type of operation. Having only the account of Delbée to go by, it is not possible to establish whether or how Carloff exploited the information that Delbée had reported. It is known, however, that the latter – who was greatly respected in France – had decided to report on the establishment of trade connections in Western Africa based on the knowledge of Carloff. I would thus nuance Schmitt’s claim. Carloff’s knowledge of the Slave Coast was based on his previous experience, prior to joining the French company. In 1662, Carloff had sailed with a Dutch licence to Angola, in order to buy slaves from the Portuguese.⁷⁵⁵ It is entirely possible that Carloff visited the King of Ardes during this trip, since many ships stopped there while heading to Angola. At the same time, during Carloff’s employment with the WIC, the company made several exploratory voyages to the Kingdom of Ardes, and, according to Robin Law, the SAC and the Glückstadt Company also traded there during the 1650s, at a time when Carloff was on their payroll.⁷⁵⁶

However, not all of Carloff’s knowledge was used for the benefit of the trading companies. He also used his knowledge of the Western African trade, and in particular the slave trade. According to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD), in 1662, Carloff owned the *St Joris*, which completed a successful Atlantic voyage around that time.⁷⁵⁷ The ship departed from Texel (in the Dutch Republic) for Luanda, where 373 slaves were purchased. It then sailed for Cayenne and Guadeloupe, where the slaves were sold. In January 1665, the ship returned to La Rochelle, with captain Volkert Claas Roem. Den Heijer has mentioned this voyage, and has stated that Carloff was the captain of the ship. However, he was not an experienced sailor, and had thus hired Volkert Claas Roem to pilot the vessel.⁷⁵⁸ There are methodological problems with the names used in the TSTD and their function within a ship, as has been pointed out by Silva and Sommerdyk: “often captains, pilots, freighters and ship owners performed various tasks and roles related not only with sailing but also to business. Their tasks often included operating as accountants in charge of commercial transactions on board the ships and on the coast, where they would conduct trade with local traders whether they were African, Euro-African or European.”⁷⁵⁹ Whatever the position attributed to him in the TSTD, Carloff’s participation in yet another business in Africa demonstrates his flexibility and wide-ranging knowledge.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁴ Eberhard Schmitt, “Die Französische Westindienkompanie Verhandlet mit dem König von Ardrah wegen einer Befestigten Handelsstation und Der Guinea-Küste 1670,” in *Der Aufbau Der Kolonialreiche* (München: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1987), 193–203, 197.

⁷⁵⁵ Heijer, “Een dienaar”, 171.

⁷⁵⁶ Law, *The Slave Coast*, 124.

⁷⁵⁷ Slave trade database, search profile: captain, name: Carloff, [http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/search,\(TSTD\)](http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/search,(TSTD)) Voyage number: 11389; Issues considering the usage of the slave trade database, Julie Svalastog M., *The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: Qualitative Possibilities and Quantitative Limitations*, M.A. dissertation King’s College London, 2012.

⁷⁵⁸ Heijer, “Een dienaar”, 171.

⁷⁵⁹ Ribeiro da Silva and Sommerdyk, “Reexamining the Geography”, 96.

⁷⁶⁰ On the different roles onboard these ships, see Ibid.

Figure 5-3 Slave trade voyages involving Carloff

COMMISSION/ COMPANY	TIME PERIOD	ROUTE	SHIP	CARGO	CAPTAIN
Amsterdam	1662-1665	Texel/Luanda/Cayenne/Guadeloupe	<i>St Joris</i>	373 slaves	Roem Volkert, Carloff: owner
French West India Company	1666-1668	Texel/Congo North/French Caribbean	<i>Tijdsverdrif</i>	316 slaves	Carloff
French West India Company	1669-1670	Le Havre/Offra/Martinique	<i>La Justice</i>	750 slaves	D'Elbée
French West India Company	1671-1672	Le Havre/Offra/ Guadeloupe	<i>Unknown</i>	450 slaves	Carloff

Source: <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/>.⁷⁶¹

Quirijn Spranger, the director of the colony at Guyana, reported that on 9 April 1664, Carloff had arrived aboard the *St Joris*. The papers of the ship confirmed that Carloff was sailing under a commission from Amsterdam.⁷⁶² He had received this commission, it would seem, on the condition that he would not approach the Gold Coast.⁷⁶³ However, Carloff was not the only Amsterdam resident involved in such slave trade voyages; men such as Henrique Mathias, Jan Foullon, Isaac Coymans, Cornelis Hendricksen, and Dirck Gerloffsen were also involved in similar enterprises, and some of them, like Carloff, were also previous WIC employees.⁷⁶⁴ The slave trade that emanated out from Amsterdam was not a new business.⁷⁶⁵ While Carloff had been prosecutor on the Gold Coast, a Portuguese merchant residing in Amsterdam, Samuel Lumbroso, declared that in 1646, he had been aboard the *De Eendracht* as a passenger, and had sailed to Guinea, where the ship had purchased 200 slaves.⁷⁶⁶ The previous skipper of de Geer, Arent Gabbesen, had also traded slaves in Western Africa towards the end of the 1650s.⁷⁶⁷ In 1671, Thielman Wilkens declared that he and Claes Janssen had been employed by the WIC as merchants on the Gold Coast and the Slave Coast in 1659, 1660, and in 1663. There, they had traded in gold, ivory and above all slaves.⁷⁶⁸ In other words, many previous WIC, SAC and Glückstadt Company employees had been involved in the slave trade. This involvement marked a transition away from trading primarily in gold, and underscores the importance of entrepreneurial adaptation and versatility.

When a new voyage began in 1666, Carloff was captain of the *Tijdsverdrif*. He departed from Texel and sailed to Western Africa, where he purchased 316 slaves, who were then sold at an

⁷⁶¹ TSTD, Voyage nr: 11389, 21561, 44266 and 21560.

⁷⁶² SAA NA: 3188, fol.386, 25.12.1665.

⁷⁶³ Heijer, "Een dienaar", 171.

⁷⁶⁴ Several notary entries show this: SAA NA: 1117, fol.191, 16.06.1656, SAA NA: 604, fol. 193, 12.12.1651; SAA NA: 2118, fol. -, 01.08.1657.

⁷⁶⁵ On the role of Amsterdam merchants in the Africa trade, see the works by Antunes and Ribeiro Da Silva, "Cross-Cultural Entrepreneurship," *Itinerario* 35, no. 1 (April 2011): 49–76; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, "Crossing Empires: Portuguese, Sephardic, and Dutch Business Networks in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1580–1674," *The Americas* 68, no. 1 (2011): 7–32.

⁷⁶⁶ SAA NA: 1690, fol. A/1009, 09.06.1648.

⁷⁶⁷ SAA NA: 1899, fol. 173, 03.10.1657.

⁷⁶⁸ SAA NA: 3589, fol. 258, 15.09.1671.

unspecified French Caribbean port. Carloff eventually returned to Zealand in 1668. Upon his return, the *Tijdsverdrif* was sailing under the French flag and was owned by the FWIC.⁷⁶⁹

Among Carloff's slave trading voyages, I have also included the voyage he made under the French flag with captain Delbée in 1669. During this voyage, Carloff transported 750 slaves to Martinique.⁷⁷⁰ Two years later, in 1671, he set sail from Le Havre, heading for Whydah,⁷⁷¹ where he bought 450 slaves, who were then transported across the Atlantic to Guadeloupe. He lost about 100 of them in the middle passage; a great loss of life, and earnings.⁷⁷² Indeed, the number of casualties during this voyage demonstrates the sheer cruelty of this type of trade. Thus, Carloff accumulated experience in the slave trade during his employment with the WIC, the SAC and the Glückstadt Company, as well as with the French. The experience that he and others gained during such company service could then be transferred into new forms of business.

Knowledge was accumulated through experience, but also through the ability to access information about how trade was being developed and conducted between Europe, Africa and the Americas. Indeed, Carloff had both. For the SAC, the Glückstadt Company and the FWIC, having someone capable of making the connection between various networks and markets was a valuable asset.

Carloff's knowledge was of obvious value to his contemporaries. The governor of Guadeloupe, Du Lion, wrote to Colbert on 18 July 1670 that Carloff had completed a successful slave voyage, and had received payment for his human cargo.⁷⁷³ He also praised Carloff for his excellent knowledge of trade in gold, ivory and slaves.⁷⁷⁴ Indeed, his appreciation of Carloff's know-how was such that Du Lion agreed to grant Carloff land close to Grand Cul-de-sac, for the purpose of building a plantation. Together, he reported, they had plans for building a church, a sugar mill and a warehouse. In the letter that followed, Du Lion, continued to praise Carloff for his knowledge of Africa, and requested Colbert's approval for their joint plans. He also mentioned that Carloff had been offered jobs by the English and the Dutch, but that he had declined.⁷⁷⁵ Later, Du Lion reported that Carloff had returned to the island with yet another 350 slaves.⁷⁷⁶

Du Lion was not alone in praising Carloff's knowledge. In October 1670, the governor of the island Marie-Galante, Jacques De Boisseret, reported that he had been selling slaves on Carloff's account.⁷⁷⁷ In these reports, Carloff was represented as a trustworthy source of information, a regular supply of slaves, and knowledge. The letters by Du Lion and De Boisseret were appreciative of Carloff's knowledge of the Africa trade, meaning primarily the slave trade. However, they also reflected Carloff's transformation into an Atlantic businessman, with access to plantations and the associated trade in cash crops.

The importance of the circulation of overseas knowledge was also apparent in Carloff's communiques to the French Company regarding the slave trade, and especially local trading practices.

⁷⁶⁹ TSTD, Voyage number: 44266.

⁷⁷⁰ Schmitt, "Die Französische Westindienkompanie", 195.

⁷⁷¹ It is possible that Whydah here refers to Offra.

⁷⁷² Schmitt, "Die Französische Westindienkompanie", 194; TSTD, Voyage number: 21561.

⁷⁷³ France (FR), Archives nationales d'Outre-mer (ANOM), Secrétariat d'État à la Marine - Correspondance à l'arrivée en provenance de la Guadeloupe, C7A1 F 253; 18.07.1670. Du Lion to Secretaria d'Etat a la Marine.

⁷⁷⁴ FR ANOM C7A1 F° 275, 25.07.1670. Du Lion to Secretaria d'Etat a la Marine.

⁷⁷⁵ FR ANOM C7A1 F° 279, 28.07.1670. Du Lion to Secretaria d'Etat a la Marine.

⁷⁷⁶ FR ANOM C7A1 F°46, 07.03.1672. Du Lion to Secretaria d'Etat a la Marine.

⁷⁷⁷ FR ANOM C7A1 F°371, 03.10.1670. Jacques de Boisseret to Secretaria d'Etat a la Marine.

His understanding of daily practices, the need for gift-giving and tributes, and personal connections, which he had acquired whilst in WIC employment, culminated in the writing of a manual for French captains of slave ships.⁷⁷⁸ The manual was included as an appendix to the journal of Delbée. In the manual, Carloff transferred his knowledge to the French company, providing privileged and detailed information about the slave trade. For instance, he recommended hiring canoers from the Gold Coast to navigate the waters of the Slave Coast for the benefit of European slave traders.⁷⁷⁹ Indeed, the lack of natural harbours on the Slave Coast hindered the landing of European ships, and forced entire fleets into dangerous bays on the Guinea Coast. The use of canoers was thus a practical solution to a long-standing challenge.

Carloff's manual offers a unique opportunity to understand the importance of his access to information combined with his previous service. The first part of the instructions dealt with the voyage prior to arrival on the Slave Coast. Captains should be careful after having passed the latitude of Cape Verde, because of the currents surrounding the islands. Indeed, it was not uncommon for ships to be seized by these currents and swept onto sandbanks. After reaching the Western African coastline, Carloff recommended sailing close to the land, since local merchants would probably have their canoes loaded and ready to come on board. He further suggested that Gran Sestre would be a good place to trade iron for malagette (pepper).⁷⁸⁰ The next stop should be at the river of Saint Andre, to pick up water and firewood. However, he warned that the locals there were hostile and might try to attack the ships. After taking in provisions, captains should then advance towards the shoreline. Locals would probably try to sell ivory, but prices would be prohibitive. After the cape of Three Points, the voyage should continue with smaller sails, and captains should be aware of the rocks at Takorari. At Ante, captains should anchor the ship and buy a canoe, since these were absolutely necessary in Ardres. A canoe should have between sixteen and twenty rowers, and should be paid for with muskets, the only object of barter accepted in the area. According to Carloff, captains would need approximately 50 muskets for each canoe. Once aboard the canoes, captains should continue the four-day journey to Ardres. They were also advised to ask the carpenter on board to acquire wood to strengthen the canoe.⁷⁸¹ The Gold Coast canoes were usually dug out from a single tree trunk, and were thus unsuitable for the Slave Coast, and required modification.⁷⁸² Upon arrival in Ardres, captains should delegate the canoes to the *Commis General*. The General was then responsible for the loading of the merchandise brought from Europe into a boat, which should cross the water where the dangerous currents began. The goods should then be returned to the canoes, which should then be entrusted to the local agent, who would know how to navigate the waters. When enough slaves had been purchased, the expedition should depart.⁷⁸³

The final part of the manual was devoted to the crossing of the Atlantic. From Fernand Po, where the wind was usually very strong, skilled captains should reach Cabo Lopo. Once there, captains should provision their ships with plenty of water and wood, because these could be easily obtained there. After setting out from Cabo Lopo, captains would face the challenge of manoeuvring into the open Atlantic, or risk being thrown back to where they had departed from, where they would

⁷⁷⁸ Manual by Henrich Carloff to the French Ship Captains printed in, Delbée, *Journal du Voyage du Sieur Delbee*, 475–494.

⁷⁷⁹ Law, *The Slave Coast*, 126 and 149.

⁷⁸⁰ Delbée, *Journal du Voyage du Sieur Delbee*, 478.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid*, 483.

⁷⁸² Law, “Between the Sea and the Lagoons.”, 226.

⁷⁸³ Delbée, *Journal du Voyage du Sieur Delbee*, 484.

then have to wait for another month or so. If this happened twice, provisions would be exhausted, and the ship would be forced to anchor at *São Tomé*.⁷⁸⁴ If the right course were taken, ships should then head to Annabon Island, where provisions for the sailors and slaves could be obtained cheaply. Once the ships were provisioned, captains should head for the southeast, or risk being delayed for months. This leg of the journey would be the greatest test for any captain.⁷⁸⁵ The southeast winds would be favourable to the crossing of the Atlantic, reaching in the first instance Penedo São Paulo, and from there the Caribbean.⁷⁸⁶ At this point, Carloff ended his instructions, stating that the remaining voyage was already well known. This last part of the instructions reveals Carloff's knowledge of navigation in Western Africa and the Atlantic, particularly through the vivid and detailed descriptions.

Carloff's manual was a rich source of information for French captains unfamiliar with the African waters and with the slave trade. The fact that he provided detailed and accurate information implies that this was by no means a new subject for him. He was able to give advice on how to sail, how to purchase goods and provisions, and how to avoid the pitfalls of the journey. His information also provided a good overview of the challenges, risks and uncertainties associated with this type of trade. However, although Robin Law has noted that Carloff was the first to recommend the use of canoers from the Gold Coast for slave purchases on the Slave Coast, it seems likely that this was already an established practice.⁷⁸⁷ Nevertheless, from an entrepreneurial point of view, Carloff disseminated a great deal of important knowledge to the French and others.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that experience and access to information were entrepreneurial assets that resulted in knowledge. They were utilised by Leyel and Carloff to enhance their importance to the companies they served. The starting-point for this chapter was an analysis of the principal-agent problem from the point of view of the agent rather than the principal. Instead of looking at how companies tried to control their employees, I demonstrated how employees used informational asymmetries within the companies to their own advantage.

Studying the principal-agent problem from a reversed perspective shows that information became an important asset for individuals, and thus created competition for those positions that involved channelling information to Europe. Aiming to accumulate as much knowledge as possible, individuals often overstated their own importance, which further complicated the channelling of information. In this sense, it cannot be argued that individuals solved principal-agency problems, but rather changed their form. The cases of Leyel and Carloff also show that they wanted to keep the knowledge they had accumulated as their own exclusive property. This individualistic attitude was at times a cause of tension. In particular, rivals within the companies sometimes saw Leyel and Carloff as threats.

This chapter has highlighted the fact that as long as information was circulated unevenly, the need for individuals with up-to-date knowledge remained essential for the companies. Individuals played an indispensable role in the transformation of experience and information into usable and competitive knowledge.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 487–488.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 490.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 491.

⁷⁸⁷ Law, "Between the Sea and the Lagoons.", 225.

Knowledge was demonstrated through the written word. Reports, correspondence, instructions, manuals and narratives remained central to the production of knowledge. Leye and Carloff both sought to control the distribution of information, and this suggests that they were aware of the value of the knowledge they possessed. Nonetheless, for this knowledge, Leye and Carloff depended on their own physical presence in trading zones, their access to local information and practices, their capacity for mobility and travel, their acquaintance with local trading cultures, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, simply knowing the right people.

Effectively safeguarding their own individual knowledge required a balancing act, and was full of potential conflicts of interests. Leye and Carloff made sure that they provided their employers with information that was beneficial for the companies. The information provided was, however, carefully selected. For this reason, even if company administrators tried to control employees by forcing them to regularly report on the state of affairs, employees could subvert this demand by selectively editing the contents of their reports.

Knowledge could also be translated into entrepreneurial opportunities. Leye and Carloff possessed knowledge that was indubitably essential for the companies they served, but they tended to exaggerate this yet further for purposes of self-promotion. At the headquarters of the companies, the directors hoped for the best outcome for overseas trade. As the case of Leye demonstrates, monarchs also had high expectations for the success of trade, but they were also motivated by rivalries with other European powers.

During the seventeenth century, individuals who possessed the right type of knowledge were valuable assets. However, they were also a threat. Directors in Europe simply did not have the information that these men had. Companies could never be sure about the information their agents transmitted. Leye did send extensive reports back to Europe, and represented himself as the saviour of the company. However, whether his plans were actually implemented at the meetings of the directors is unclear. Around the time of the mutiny, the Danish King Christian IV had died (1648), and what would happen to the company remained unknown. Eventually, the company was restructured, and continued to operate, with various additional restructurings, well into the mid-nineteenth century. Carloff provided the French company with useful knowledge about how to engage with the local rulers on the Slave Coast, and also about how to participate in the slave trade. Even if the results of their reports are not entirely clear, they do at least demonstrate the importance of the knowledge they had accumulated. In practice, such individuals were indeed gatekeepers of overseas knowledge, a fact that gave them a considerable competitive advantage.