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West Africa & the Rise of Asante: Rivers of (Black) Gold and the Proto-globalization of Labor

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WEST AFRICA & THE RISE OF ASANTE: Rivers of (Black) Gold and the Proto-globalization of Labor

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Abstract:

This paper examines the concept of the “external arena” and the role of the “information network” in the expansion of the world-system and absorption of new regions. I reference research on nested networks of interaction, and echo criticisms that the impact of myth and misinformation has been underappreciated as an element of incorporation. Alteration occurs well-prior to the point at which most world-systems literature considers a region incorporated. I develop the concept of “protoglobalization” to characterize this early, overlooked social, economic, and political change.

West Africa offers a rare case of external state creation and resistance to European systemic expansion. Historically, the region was part of the trans-African systems of trade, with linkages across the continent to the Mediterranean and Middle East. The Asante provide an example of initially successful resistance to incorporation and how that process can be understood. As such, it also contributes to the concept of a “contested periphery” involved in the process of creative destruction. The case reaffirms the significant impact external regions can have on the functioning of “internal” system actors – here via commodities like salt, gold, or cheap labor. Finally, the article uses the methodological innovation of historical maps to trace the border of the European “information network”. This allows for a refinement of our understanding of the complex process of incorporation, which parallels contemporary issues with globalization.

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WEST AFRICA & THE RISE OF THE ASANTE: Rivers of (Black) Gold, Bars of Salt, and the Proto-globalization of Labor

To expand upon existing research on ‘incorporation’ into the world-system, I undertake a specific case study of a region external to the expanding European world-system. Accordingly, this is meant to flesh-out the middle ground between Wallerstein’s (1974, 1980, 1989) analysis of incorporation (European-focused, state-centric, ‘inside-out’) and Hall’s (1986, 1987, 1989) research on frontiers and incorporation (external, indigenous-oriented, ‘outside-in’). This case also supports the ‘pulsation’ thesis of world-systems (Hall 1987, 1989, 2005; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Beaujard and Fee 2005), offering insight for future cross-systemic study: are zones along system borders repeatedly incorporated as they fall in and out of neighboring systems, or are they mere geographic socio-cultural bridges between systems? Accordingly, the case of West Africa is also applicable to research on ‘contested peripheries’ (Allen 1992, 1997, 2005; Cline 2000; Hall 2005). Such areas have “geographical, political and economic implications, since the affected region lies between two larger empires, kingdoms or polities established to either side of it” (Cline 2000: 7). Furthermore, the Asante case offers insight into the ability of regions to maintain externality, or ‘negotiate peripherality’ (Kardulias 1999, 2007). West Africa (i.e., Asante Kingdom) maintained independence from colonial subjugation well into the nineteenth century, despite being linked to the trans-Saharan African, European and Atlantic Ocean systems (Beaujard and Fee 2005; Beaujard 2007). Finally, because of the long historical overview of this case, it also lends support to the application of world-system analysis to pre-capitalist settings, as has been argued by Abu-Lughod (1989, 1993), Chase Dunn and Hall (1991), Frank (1990, 1998), Frank and Gills (2005), Gills and Frank (1991), and it echoes concerns with globalization as having a considerable historical legacy (*cf.*, Gills and Thompson 2006). The interaction between systems is also a useful homologue for contemporary discussions about cultural globalization and civilizational ‘clashes’ (Huntington 1993).

I use Chase-Dunn and Hall’s (1991, 1997) and Hall’s (1986, 1989, 1999a, 1999b, 2009) notion of nested networks of interaction combined with Carlson’s (2001, 2002, 2011, 2012) ‘zone of ignorance’. By treating networks as various ‘states of being’ through which a region passes and is briefly temporally fixed, one can operationalize incorporation more specifically. So a region can be in 1) a ‘zone of ignorance’ (ZOI) – where next to nothing is known and myth carries as much weight as fact and beyond which an area exists which is ‘external’; 2) the ‘information network’ (IN) – of regularized information exchange and cultural interaction; 3) the ‘prestige goods network’ (PGN) – of regularized luxury and high value-to-weight goods exchange; 4) the political-military network (PMN) – of regularized military and/or political interactions; 5) a bulk goods network (BGN) – a system of regularized exchange of low value to weight goods. Accordingly, this case study adds to the “variance-maximizing” strategy that Hall (2009:29) calls for regarding the study of frontiers, and which applies to studying cases of incorporation.

The case study focuses on the transition from the zone of ignorance, to information network, to prestige goods network, ending with the political-military network. As historical maps are reflections of a given information network, a ‘freeze-frame snapshot’ of accumulated knowledge, these are used to parse the status of a given region at a particular historic moment. Maps in conjunction with other written sources are used to give a clearer picture of a given region during the period of incorporation (*cf.*, Carlson 2001:253-254), especially the transition from zone of ignorance to information network, as maps often capture the myths, rumors, and biases (geographic and otherwise) of a given historical period or worldview.

I. Introduction

In considering the process of incorporation, West Africa differs from other cases of incorporation in several ways. While external to the system, the region is in closer proximity to the European continent. Thus, it is reasonable to presume a certain amount of information diffusion between the Europe and West Africa via intermediary and tertiary actors. Because it is an adjacent arena, the period of interaction that is involved in the incorporation process is likely to be greater than that of Nootka Sound. However, this is not to say that one is unable to similarly address the process and its dynamics. Indeed, this case may actually offer a greater ability to track the various changes in the political, social, and economic facets of indigenous life *because* the process is spread out over a larger temporal cross-section in historic terms of Afro-European interaction. Additionally, the West African region is part of a larger trans-Saharan system, where the region around Nootka Sound was largely isolated from external contact and more of a mini-system. So, it remains to be seen whether significant differences in incorporation will arise from the difference in systemic setting, or if other protoglobalizational (geographic, economic, social, cultural) factors play a more important or different role.

In West Africa, and with the Asante¹ Kingdom in particular, we step up the ladder of ‘social complexity.’ This provides additional insight into the variations of regions and peoples incorporated into the expanding European system, and allows greater understanding of the vagaries of the process as a whole. This allows us to examine the changes that occur when a region moves from the “zone of ignorance” to “within the system”.

II. The Stage

What exactly is the “Asante Kingdom”? In general when referring to the Asante, scholars tend to mean the grouping of Akan-speaking peoples that rose to power in the 18th and 19th Centuries in the region roughly equivalent to modern Ghana.² Prior to this, Asante was just one of several Akan tribes in West Africa, though it had yet to become one of the most dominant. The real story of Asante ascendancy – and the history of the Gold Coast³ – lies in the intra and inter-tribal consolidation and annexation that occurred during this period, which gave rise to what is referred to the ‘Asanteman’ or as ‘Greater Asante’ (Wilks 1993: 189). The ‘Asanteman’ – the Asante nation – developed characteristics of a modern nation-state. However, we are concerned with not just the time period of the Asanteman, but also the various factors that contributed to its rise and eventual demise, as finalized by British occupation in 1896. For general reference, a map of this period reflects the degree of colonial occupation, and should prove helpful as a contextual reference as the case discussion proceeds:

¹ Variations on the spelling include Ashanti, Ashantee, even Asiantey, but I use Asante throughout.

² This should not be confused with the historic Mande-speaking kingdom of Ghana, which was a major medieval African kingdom in the Western Sudan (about 1,000 miles north of modern Ghana). Historic Ghana rose to power based on tribute and profit from the trans-Saharan gold trade, and was eventually surpassed by the emergence of the Mande-speaking imperial confederation of Mali (*ca.* 1230-1430), which was eventually supplanted by Songhai (1464-1591). See Khapoya (1998: 68-110) for a summary of political development in historic Africa.

³ The Gold Coast may be roughly defined as the Guinea Coast stretching from Cape Appolonia in the west to the mouth of the River Volta in the east, a stretch of approximately 300 miles.



Plate 3.1: Scottish (1896). Scottish Geographical Society (1896). "Map of the Gold Coast Colony and Adjacent Territories" [Map] J.G. Bartholomew engraver, *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Geographical Institute. Electronic image courtesy The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, The University of Texas at Austin http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/gold_coast_1896.jpg.

By 1896, the region had become quite well known, and was plainly "within the system" as a territory

of Britain, the international system's hegemonic power. Similarly, territory around the Asanteman was also incorporated as a 'French Protectorate' to the west and 'German Togoland' to the east, with residual 'Neutral Territory' in the northern hinterlands apparently beyond the grasp of Europe, if only temporarily.

A. Why the Asante Kingdom?

Why look at the rise of the Asante Kingdom? First, while the major West African kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai had considerable contact with the Arab states (primarily because of a trans-Saharan salt-gold exchange network), the minor kingdoms and city-states of the region (*e.g.*, the Yoruba states of Ije, Benim, and Oyo and the Akan states that became the Asante) were more isolated and had little or no direct contact (Walton 1971). The reason for this becomes clear if one examines reports of the region's geography and natural forest boundaries. Where the desert and savanna kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhai lacked natural boundaries and profited greatly from the trans-Saharan gold trade (thus mandating a certain degree of external contact), the thick tropical forests of the Asante region served as a natural barrier to regularized trade. In addition, the presence of tsetse flies in the sub-Saharan tropical zone made the use of freight animals impossible. This mandated that human cargo bearers carry trade goods, or haul these goods in dugout canoes along available waterways. So, the region is somewhat more "pristine" in that it is less-influenced by external factors, the changes that occurred as a result of European contact and the expansion of the system as a whole are more obvious.

This is not to say that the region existed in a static environment prior to European contact. Quite to the contrary. The West African region was dynamic politically and economically long-before the arrival of Portuguese traders on the coast in 1471, and one should take care not to fall into the Eurocentric-diffusionist trap of thinking that the region existed under some sort of never-changing *status quo* prior to the arrival of Europeans (*cf.*, Blaut 1993, Diamond 1997). In fact, it is just the question of *how extensively* the area was linked to external factors that will frame part of this case-discussion. While these early linkages are not necessarily direct (as with the northern kingdoms), there does seem to be some debate as to the relevance indirect linkages have in the consideration of the incorporation process. So, a second reason to look at the Asante in West Africa is to explore the nature of these earlier, often indirect, linkages to the larger world-system.

A third reason to look at the region of the Asante has to do with the development of the relationship with the European powers. Just as the region is isolated from northern contact because of its dense forest, it is similarly isolated from the peoples of the coast. Therefore, one may study the development of European interaction more closely, as there is an intermediary 'middleman' in the broad relationship between the Asante and the traders on the coast. In this instance, the Fante peoples of the coast played the role of middlemen. In thinking of phases of incorporation, this serves to break apart the "contact periphery" from the "zone of ignorance". The particulars of the region serve to spread out the zone of contact, so that the "membrane" at the leading edge of the system is more easily studied; the systemic forces of creation and destruction are more clearly identifiable.⁴

Fourth, the level of documentation and scholarly study relating to the history and administration of the kingdom of Asante is extensive. Since several European powers were active on the coast of Africa during the time period in question (fifteenth through nineteenth centuries), a rich body of documentary evidence (*e.g.*, journals, travel accounts, trade ledgers, inventories, official reports,

⁴ See Hall (2001b) for a discussion of frontiers as loci for social change and the appropriateness in the use of the membrane metaphor.

communiqués) exists which may be used to evaluate the motivations – both personal and public – driving expansion. In turn, one may compare the European documentary evidence to the oral traditions of the Asante that are more recently being recorded and studied alongside Western interpretations of history (e.g., Adjaye 1984; Wilks 1975, 1993). In short, there is a long-lasting and pervasive multi-cultural dialogue with some accompanying textual sources that can be used for detailed analysis. This amount of detail often is missing in other regions, and the corresponding period of incorporation often is more compressed. For example, the systemic pulsation responsible for contact and initial incorporation around Nootka Sound took place in the span of approximately 50 years. In contrast, the interactions in West Africa are spread across several hundred years, which allows a broader window to examine any protoglobalizational impact.

Finally, the very *nature* of the economic exchange – the types of goods being traded and produced – is relevant for the discussion of incorporation, and hence globalization. First, because the region produces gold, one may explore the relationship of bullion as a primary source of incorporation, or as a means of telling when a region is ‘within the system’. At what point does supplying gold to external markets delineate incorporation? What if the supply is via a series of exchanges, do the same social and cultural alterations occur?

Second, since the region also provided a vast number of slaves for the world market, we can investigate the relationship between labor (coerced and free), production, and incorporation. If labor is being provided, transported, *and* consumed as a good or factor of production, is a region part of the system? Intuitively it would seem logical. How does this apply to analyzing linkages in the larger commodity chains of global capitalism? What does this do for our consideration of a region as being incorporated? In fact, it seems that addressing the issue of slavery also has implications for how one addresses current issues surrounding the movement of transnational labor and efforts to control labor flows. Are large transnational flows of labor “new” problems associated with globalization?

Third, we can explore just how these economic exchanges between polities of different systemic status are carried out. Are external actors automatically disadvantaged? In particular, is uneven exchange occurring, or is the external region able to negotiate or dictate terms of exchange? This particular case should provide additional insight into the relationship between actors in the system and those not, particularly in examining the ability of a region’s actors to ‘negotiate externality’.

B. Historic West Africa in the World-System

With these premises laid out, one detail remains. That is to briefly cover how the region has been treated in the world-systems literature to this point, and explore the potential for revising this view. In particular, how does Wallerstein (1974, 1980) view the incorporation of West Africa? Because Wallerstein under-appreciates the role of luxury goods in the incorporation process (Schneider 1977), and because he largely ignores slavery as a crucial part of the commodity chains of production, it is unclear as to when the incorporation process begins. We seek to rectify this.

How *is* West Africa positioned in the world-system? At the end of the Long Sixteenth Century (*ca.* 1640), Wallerstein (1974: 68) observes that “perhaps a few enclaves on the African coast might also be included” in the European world-economy, but the larger part of the region is definitely not. Even though “bullion must be seen as an essential crop for a prospering world-economy” (1974: 46), “Sudanic gold came to Europe via North Africa to the Christian Mediterranean world” in the fifteenth century (1974: 168), and “the gold of West Africa plus the pepper and spices of Asia would in fact make up *more than half* the revenue of the Portuguese state by 1506” (1974: 326, *emphasis added*), the region remains ‘external’ as late as 1689 (1980: 246). Regarding the spice trade, “it was precisely the

malaguette of West Africa, not Asian products, which was the most important in *quantity*, if not price” to Europe (1974: 333, emphasis in original). Furthermore, (Wallerstein quoting Godinho) “The African spice trade represented for Portugal a volume of traffic noticeably higher than any of the Asiatic spices other than pepper and ginger, and often greater than their sum total” (1974: 333, f159). Why is the region still external?

The same argument Wallerstein uses to exclude the Indian Ocean trading system applies here: “The social organization of the economy as well as the political superstructures remained largely untouched” (1974: 331). Instead, for the coasts of Africa and other external regions, “It would not be until the world economic upsurge of the mid-eighteenth century that true peripheralization would begin, and even then it first occurred in the most economically promising areas such as India and Indonesia” (1980: 274). In contrast to India and Indonesia, Wallerstein situates West African peripheralization even later. This is marked by the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the emergence of “legitimate” trade in goods such as palm oil. However, it remains to be seen if the region’s economy, social and political structures were truly “untouched”, and if this timeline is remotely accurate.

This formulization is of concern for three main reasons. First, even though Wallerstein considers bullion as a necessary good, he does not apply this as a measure of a region being incorporated. In turn, this neglects the historic relationship of West Africa to the “outside” world-system, and presents a myopic view of the relationship Africa had with regard to European development and expansion. For example, in terms of bullion Chase-Dunn and Hall (1991: 35) assert that “West Africa has been linked to the Mediterranean and Near East since at least AD 800. The gold coins minted in Byzantium and Egypt ... were predominantly struck from West African gold” (See also Wolf, 1982: 39). In fact, much of sub-Saharan Africa could be recontextualized and considered part of the neighboring Eurasian world-system (Abu-Lughod 1989). In this case, part of the problem with Wallerstein’s notion of incorporation is that it does not adequately address interactions *between* world-systems, which may be why the flow of bullion from Africa to the Mediterranean, thence to the Near East and China, is not more fully realized. After all, one region or system’s luxury good is quite likely another’s bulk good; else trade between the two would not easily emerge!

A second point of concern has to do with the issue of slavery. One would think that the source of labor in the world-economy would be considered part of the world-economy, but that is not traditionally the case. The emphasis is rather placed on the goods produced, and not necessarily the source of labor. This is puzzling, and reflects a rampant under-appreciation for labor as it relates to global commodity production. While Wallerstein observes that, “One of the *most important* complements in the European diet is sugar, useful both as a calorie source and as a substitute for fats. Furthermore, it can also be used for alcoholic drinks (particularly rum). And later on, it would be used for chocolate, a usage which the Spaniards learned from the Aztecs” (1974: 43, emphasis added). Indeed, “Sugar too was a principal motivation for island expansion. And, because of its mode of production, with sugar went slavery” (1974: 43). So, slavery is at the heart of the European diet; Europeans are ‘consuming’ slaves and the fruits of slave labor in a very literal fashion! Quoting Moreno Fraginals, Wallerstein (1980: 270, f166) acknowledges that sugar is the “primary basic world product, that is, the commodity which occupied top place in terms of the total value of the transactions in international commerce” and it was “the slaves who made the sugar possible” (1980: 270).

Yet the incorporation process of West Africa, and thus the regions of Africa from which the slave labor was drawn, are not deemed “incorporated” until roughly 1750-1880. This is even though Britain dominated world commerce in sugar by 1700, and was only later surpassed by France. Wallerstein (1989: 189) concedes:

Is this the only possible periodization? Obviously not, and the empirical debate is widespread on this issue of dating. Unfortunately, many of the participants do not have a clear model of the process, or at least they have not been using the same model we have been using: external arena—incorporation—peripheral (or semiperipheral) zone. In terms of this model, what we see is that some authors move the dating of incorporation back to the time when a zone becomes part of the external arena. Some authors, on the other hand, will not consider a zone incorporated until it begins functioning as a peripheral zone in the world-economy. Neither of these two sets of authors perceive “incorporation” as a distinctive process in the way we have been arguing.

Actually, I do perceive incorporation as a distinct process, I am using the same – if not better – model, and I still take issue with this periodization. Why? Because it gives too little attention to the external arena and the impact external agents have on internal system dynamics. In turn, this may be traced to the overly state-centric nature the debate. Because we are talking about incorporation into a single capitalist world-system, there are the dual criteria that “to be part of it one has minimally to be integrated into its production networks or commodity chains *and* be located in *states* that participate in the interstate system which forms the political superstructure of this capitalist world-economy” (1989: 189, emphasis added). Thus, entire segments of production processes and commodity chains are neglected because they do not occur in a polity akin to a European-style “state”.

This state-centric formulization can be addressed in at least two ways. First, one can argue that external actors were functioning states. In fact, a significant part of the argument surrounding the Asante in West Africa will be precisely that they *did* manifest characteristics of state-ness prior to the expansion of European control in the region. Secondly and conversely, one may posit that the “state-ness” argument is largely irrelevant because of the probability that the systemic forces creating the state structures in West Africa exerted their influence well before – or at latest concurrently with – the arrival of European actors. Or, by focusing on the ‘state’ aspect of incorporation and expansion, truly dynamic initial causes of change are overlooked. The “state” is an epiphenomenon of social change, or derivative carcass animated because of economic exchange, not a necessary precondition to it. The “state” can be viewed as a golem, and to use that as a definition of when life breathes into the system fundamentally misunderstands the source of the life of the system.

So, as a third point of concern, were the social organization of the economy and the political superstructures in West Africa “largely untouched” by 1750? I think not. Certainly if this IS the case, then one can accept a later dating of incorporation. However, important organizational changes – social, economic, and political – occurred well before 1750. While as of 1750 West Africa had “no world-empire in the area comparable in scope of organization to the Ottoman, Mughal, or Russian Empires. There were instead a number of strong, largely slave-selling states, and a plenitude of small entities which were militarily and politically weak” (Wallerstein 1989: 187). There may have been no ‘empire’ *per se*, but why would these states *not* be considered part of the world-system? How did they even emerge, and what forces led to their emergence? Again, Wallerstein is reifying the European-constructed inside-out model of socio-politico-economic interaction, to the exclusion of systemic networks not yet explicitly subjugated to the European state system.

To address this, Wallerstein introduces the notion that capitalism needs not just “order”, but “favorable order”. The West African states are characterized as providing some order, but creating anarchy elsewhere. Anarchy in this case is actually good for the world-system, because “the promotion of ‘anarchy’ often serves to bring down ‘unfavorable order,’ that is, *order that is capable of resisting incorporation*” (1989: 188, emphasis added). Thus, “one can interpret the British drive against the slave trade as a drive to break down the ‘unfavorable order’ of the smaller units in the

interests of recreation of larger units” (Wallerstein 1989: 189). Of course, the question for whom a given “order” is favorable or unfavorable remains at issue! The notion that a region would be able to resist incorporation is taken as fundamentally “unfavorable”. In many ways, this favorable/unfavorable interpretation of payoff is at the heart of the contemporary globalization debate. Nevertheless, these unquestioned assumptions contribute to a skewed perception of the incorporation process, and become more evident as the case study progresses.

As a final note before discussing of the rise of the Asante state, one should note that there is still considerable debate concerning the foundations of Asante political institutions and practices. Yarak (1990: 17-27) discusses these competing historiographical perspectives in detail, but I shall offer only a brief summary here. One of the earliest attempts to analyze the Asante state was carried out by Rattray (1929), who was the British colonial-government anthropologist. Even though the then-recently defeated Asante state bore little similarity to the precolonial political structures, Rattray’s reliance on a few limited sources produced an image of the Asante political organization that was overly romanticized. Yarak (1990:17) observes that Rattray’s “vision of the precolonial Asante state as an unchanging ‘feudal’ confederation, decentralized, segmented, and ultimately, if contradictorily, ‘democratic’, was one that had widespread appeal, even among the latter-day Asante”. This certainly contributed to an idealized, yet inaccurate, representation of precolonial Asante that has continued to crop up in the literature.

There is a tendency of European historians to equate written documents with history, thus neglecting the African oral traditions. “The absence of documents therefore meant the absence of events worthy of historical study. Thus the history of European traders, missionaries, explorers, conquerors and administrators constituted, in their view, the sum total of African history. The rest is darkness and darkness is not a subject of history” (Fynn 1971: xi). This one-sided view of Asante development is in need of reconciliation with alternative Asante oral traditions. Only more recently have scholars (*e.g.*, Adjaye 1984; Wilks 1966, 1967, 1975, 1993) begun to reconstruct the precolonial Asante oral histories. As a result, a more complete picture of the region’s growth has emerged. Here one is presented with a developing governmental framework characterized in part by feudal structures, but also by considerable bureaucratization and centralized administration. These ongoing historical reforms and political developments are certainly relevant for the discussion of this case, and will be an integral part of the discussion as this tale of interaction unfolds. Why? Because they are undertaken largely in response to linkages to the expanding world-system, and reflect not just important measures of state-building and state capacity, but the degree to which social and political changes may be created in zones (*e.g.*, information networks, luxury trade networks) adjacent to the “systemic-incorporated” zones of interaction (*e.g.*, bulk goods networks, political-military networks).

III. The Players

As mentioned, many Europeans actors were on the coast of West Africa during the 15th-19th Centuries. These include the Portuguese, Dutch, Danes, French, ‘Brandenbergers’ (Prussians), and results in the eventual colonization of the Asante by the British. However, even before the arrival of Europeans on the coast, the region had important links to the broader African system of trade, and through that to the nascent European world-system and the older central Asian system. So, to fully appreciate the ascendance of the Asante Kingdom, one needs to situate it in an appropriate historical context that takes the presence of these larger trade networks into account.

A. Emergence of Akan Society

Because of a lack of written documentation, orally transmitted histories contribute much of what is known about the origins of the peoples of West Africa. This can then be compared to archeological evidence to provide a reasonable picture of the origins of the Asante peoples and their interactions with Europeans (*e.g.*, Davies 1967, DeCorse 2001). Wilks (1993: 64-66) traces the tradition of one branch of the Asante – the Oyoko group⁵ – and finds that it is fairly typical. The tradition consists of three cycles, with the first centering on the founding of a settlement at Asantemanso.⁶ A Hunter in the Forest meets a Ratel,⁷ and is told that people would soon be arriving from the sky at a place called Asiakwa. Once there, a herald appears, followed by a woman bearing a stool. The stool passes to an ancestress of the Oyoko, who then departs for Asantemanso where she makes a settlement. Soon, people come to join her at this new settlement, some from “holes in the ground” at Asantemanso and others from the countries to the south.⁸

The second cycle recounts the dispersal of people from Asantemanso, and recounts the transition from foraging to increased dependence on cultivation. The third cycle relates to the expanding frontier of farming, and bridges the protohistoric period to the historic. Wilks notes that the thrust of the oral tradition is clear and supports arguments from the archaeological record. He concludes that “the period preceding the emergence of the historic kingdom of Asante was one in which intensive exploration of the forest in quest of good cultivatable land was carried out, in which numerous villages were established, and in which clearance of the forest on a hitherto unprecedented scale occurred” (1993: 66). Thus, the oral traditions may be viewed as a relatively accurate depiction – in a broad interpretive sense – of the origins of the Asante.

Fynn (1971) also discusses the traditions of origin of the Akan-speaking peoples. He observes that the Akwamu – a state in the southwest – maintain that their founders migrated from Kong. The Fante say that their ancestors reached the coast after migrating from a region in modern Ghana. Similar tales of migration are found among the Akyem Bosome, the Mamprusi, the Bagomba, and the Ga. The Adangbe and the Ewe claim to have originated to the west in southern Nigeria. Interestingly, all these traditions of origin indicate movements *en masse* and usually include the description of settling in previously uninhabited country.

However, it is reasonable to assume that there were autochthonous people living in the region⁹, as medieval trade with the Sudan included commodities such as kola nuts¹⁰ (a forest product) and salt¹¹ (a coastal product), which would indicate that the region was not totally empty. Rather, the

⁵ Wilks chooses the Oyoko (alternately ‘Ayoko’) because it is the group to which the royal dynasty of Asante belongs and because a “particularly authoritative” recension of it – entitled The History of Ashanti Kings and the whole country itself – was made in 1907 by the Asantehene Nana Agyeman Prempeh I while in exile in the Seychelles.

⁶ This site lies about 20 miles southeast of Kumase.

⁷ In the Twi language it is “sisi”, the ratel or honeybadger (*mellivora capensis*).

⁸ Meyerowitz (1952: 104) relates that this is the ‘official’ tradition of origin approved by the Asantehene, and in the past the death penalty was offered for those passing on unapproved traditions of origin. Information provided to Meyerowitz indicated that the Oyoko originally came from Djana and Bona.

⁹ Daaku (1970: 1) mentions that the Guan, “mostly found around Winneba on the coast, the Akwapin hills, and along the Volta gorge” are considered to be autochthonous.

¹⁰ Kola nuts are bean-like in shape and about the size of a walnut, and are the fruit of the kola tree (*cola nitida*) which is present throughout the forests of West Africa. Its import lies in its two main uses: it may be chewed and eaten as food, and its bittersweet liquid acts as a stimulant (one of the few allowed to Muslims) and also as a remedy against thirst. So, one can see why it would be so invaluable to caravan traders and inhabitants of the Sahara (Boahen 1964: 126-7).

¹¹ Fynn (1971:7) observes that “The peoples of the coastal towns and villages obtained the salt either by boiling sea water in

influx of the Akan peoples likely gained control of a dispersed local population and economic system at a point when it was rapidly expanding. Although, “All that is certain however, is that the Gold Coast forests and coastlands were originally thinly peopled and that, from about the thirteenth century onwards, these areas received a large number of immigrants from other parts of West Africa” (Fynn 1971: 4).

So, why are these mass migrations occurring? Several factors likely contribute to these migrations. One potential explanation lies in the breakdown of the western Sudanic empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai (Fynn 1971: 4). This was certainly the case when the Moroccans – in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century – destroyed the Songhai Empire, yet failed to create any stable political machinery capable of maintaining the Sudanese civilizations based on the trans-Saharan trade. The decline in central authority in Timbuktu and resulting loss of centralized power was not conducive to trade. So, one may reasonably expect population movements as the result of imperial decline, as peoples seek a less chaotic living environment and those already in the imperial hinterland achieve greater autonomy resulting from declining imperial oversight. It is not unreasonable to expect that earlier population movements would result from the decline of Ghana and Mali, much as was the case with the demise of Songhai.

A later, more widespread explanation for the massive population movements is entwined with the arrival of Europeans on the coast. Davies (1967) suggests that very little land was cleared in the forest zone until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when a “population explosion” marked by extensive clearance and settlement occurred. One of the major stimuli for this population increase is the introduction of new food crops by the Portuguese. The Asante themselves attribute their northern thrust to the dual factors of a population explosion that resulted in a shortage of farming and hunting land and disputes over dynastic succession (Rattray 1929: 217, 235). Hymer (1970: 41) also notes that new crops and a subsequent “revolution in land-use” played a part in making possible the denser settlement of forest areas.

Wilks (1993: 41-90; see also 1977) in particular pays considerable detail to the labor requirements of clearing and maintaining farms from natural forest. These labor requirements are quite extensive in the tropical forest, as Wilks suggests that “clearing a one-hectare field in virgin forest would involve the removal of around 1,250 tons of vegetation and require of the order of 500 man-days in labor” (1993: 72). This is hardly a task that a single farmer is likely to undertake alone. In fact, Rattray (1929: 348-9) observed: “The assistance of every able-bodied member of the family or kindred group had to be called in to give a helping hand. The assistance sounded the knell of any possible claim to individual ownership of the usufruct of the land which had been cleared by the collective efforts of the husbandman, his brother, sister, mother, and nephews and nieces.” Wilks takes issue with Rattray, noting that the operation of an *established* farm required assistance during the peak labor period. Furthermore, during a period of extensive land clearance as indicated by traditional testimony, the labor capacity of the existing forest community would appear insufficient given the requirements of the enterprise. So, there is reason to believe that labor – in large part unfree – was already being drawn into the forest region in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

A discussion of the interrelated impacts these new crops and technologies had is carried out in Gemery and Hogendorn’s (1978) discussion of technological change and the slave trade. One of the first innovations in slave gathering relates to the introduction of American crops to Africa, along with

kettles or earthen pots or from natural salt pans which had been dried up by the sun.” In contrast, “Salt was such a luxury commodity in the Sudan that only the rich could buy it, while the poorer people had to extract very small quantities from the ashes of grasses, millet stalks, and certain shrubs, as well as from cattle dung” (Fynn 1971: 6). Bovill (1958) goes so far as to argue that gold was valued in the Sudan almost entirely for its purchasing power in salt.

new methods of crop cultivation. These crops included maize, manioc (cassava), sweet potato, and assorted groundnuts, and appear to have been introduced by Portuguese traders early in the sixteenth century. Kea (1982: 12) offers support for this estimation, noting that maize was an established crop in the coastal zone by 1572, and was grown in the Bono state by 1640. Thus:

There is evidence that the overall costs of growing were reduced, nutritional advances were made (groundnuts soon became a major source of protein, while maize often gives more calories per acre than other cereals), yields were improved (manioc often outperforms other starchy staples), greater resistance to drought and locusts was achieved (especially for manioc), and dependence on any single crop was lessened, thereby reducing the risks of crop failure (Gemery and Hogendorn 1978: 246-7).

These combined impacts resulted in a rise of caloric availability, concomitant decline of death rates, and an overall positive influence on population growth. For those involved in the slave trade, this meant a larger pool of potential captives. For Akan society, it meant increased strain on existing resource levels and the resultant social problems that come with overpopulation. Thus, population expansion or migration is an outgrowth of these social demographic pressures.

Ancillary factors also promoted a drastic increase in population during this era. Gemery and Hogendorn (1978: 247) mention the increased use of hoes and other tools made from imported European iron in the cultivation of crops, and the utilization of firearms as protection against marauding animals. This is not to say that iron was unavailable prior to this. Just the opposite is true, as Doran (1977) observes that iron was processed in West Africa by the Nok Culture more than 1500 years before Portuguese arrival. Yet the volume and accessibility of iron implements undoubtedly increased after Portuguese arrival. Hymer (1970: 41) reports that metal manufactures – pots, kettles, basins, knives, pins, swords, firearms, axe heads, hammers and the like – increased production in agriculture, hunting, and food processing. Kea (1982:12-13) notes that forest agriculture also experienced the consolidation and expansion of two types of farms: the mixed forest farm and the mixed bush farm. Both may be seen as further supporting population expansion into the forest zone. Similarly, Portuguese sources indicated that the rearing of livestock increased considerably from about the mid-sixteenth century on, which would be expected since fodder and grain surpluses from the new crops would make it easier to support livestock.

Wilks (1993: 71) summarizes the “socioeconomic revolution” that took place: An alternative view now suggests itself, that the emergence of the states – Kumase, Dwaben, Mampon, and so forth – that united to form the Asanteman at the turn of the seventeenth century was indeed preceded by a period in which the forestlands were explored and cleared and new agrarian settlements established; that this represented a major transformation in the productive forces such that an economy with a primary dependence on hunting and gathering gave way to one with a primary dependence upon the cultivation of food crops; that the social relations of production of the forest peoples were accordingly modified by the creation of the great exogamous matrilineal clans and the redistribution of communities between them; that this socioeconomic revolution began, geographically, in the forest heartland of Amansie and Adanse, and chronologically, should probably be regarded as having reached its zenith in what is for the Asante the immediate protohistoric period (*firi tetemu*), the sixteenth century.

Exactly! Indeed, it appears that the ‘long sixteenth century’ is long in geographic reach as well as duration. So, there is widespread and pervasive change occurring largely as a result of European contact (*e.g.*, new foods, new market forces [supply *and* demand]), which in turn results in a population explosion, resultant migration, and ultimately increased state formation in the gold-bearing

forestlands of the interior. All, one might add, occurs well before the dominance of the Asanteman in the 17th and early 18th century, and certainly before the region is commonly considered “linked” or effectively part of the wider European world-system.

What is the relationship between the trade of gold and slaves on the coast and the rise and ultimate incorporation of the Asante? Wilks (1993) nicely explores the labor-gold interchange and its relationship to the development of the interior. When Portuguese traders arrived at Elmina¹² in 1470-71, they found that slaves were among the most popular commodities to exchange for gold. This trade proved to be so profitable that in 1482 the fortress of São Jorge da Mina was constructed. However, competition was felt from suppliers in the north such as the Wangara,¹³ such that in 1513 the Portuguese Governor of Elmina complained that a shortage of slaves and other goods impeded his ability to compete for the purchase of gold (Wilks 1993: 76).

Far from carrying the only supply of unfree labor to the Akan region, the Portuguese served as a mirror image to the established traders on the northern fringes of Asante territory. The principal agents were the Muslim Wangara¹⁴ traders, who had established a number of trading stations – the most important of which was Bighu – along the northern frontier of the forest country. While there is no ready documentary evidence of the source of the slaves sold by the Wangara, Wilks (1993:76) states that it “must be assumed that, as in later periods, they were obtained principally from the (‘acephalous’) societies of the Voltaic basin”. Der (1998: 3-7) echoes this point, and places the earliest linkages of Northern Ghana with the Hausa trade to the northeast in the mid-fifteenth century. Interestingly, the rise of the kingdom of Gonja is tied to this period, as cavalry groups of Malian origin moved into the savanna hinterlands of the forest. To exploit the market in human beings, in collaboration with the Wangara traders, they created the framework of the Gonja state. As Wilks (1993:76) premises, “It seems that new kingdom was organized primarily for trade, that trade consisted largely in the supply of labor to the forest in return for gold, and that the labor was procured by extensive raiding of the rural peoples.”

To recontextualize the way in which the Wangara, Portuguese and Akan became intertwined in a labor-gold interchange, Wilks (1993:77) argues that labor was being drawn into the forest interior during the same time as major forest clearances were underway. There are two main layers to this argument. First, the availability of labor was a necessary precondition for the clearance of the forest and the creation of an agrarian order. However, second and more importantly, the availability of gold was a necessary precondition for the procurement of labor. So, because of the rising demand for gold bullion in the world markets during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – which may be attributed to the minting of new gold currency, the bullion drain accorded the overland trade with India and China, general hoarding, as well as overall market expansion – the Akan were in the position of having both gold and the possibility of expanding production. The entire process is summarized:

Geographically peripheral to the major centers of world commerce, the Akan were nevertheless drawn into the world economy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Gold was increasingly produced for the world bullion market and traded both at northern outlets maintained by the Wangara and at southern outlets maintained by the Portuguese. To sustain the trade, Wangara and Portuguese alike found themselves having to supply labor to the Akan; the former procured slaves from the northern grasslands, the latter from maritime regions as distant as Benin and beyond. The influx of labor into the forest country facilitated the creation of arable, such that a

¹² As a reflection of the volume of gold being acquired, one may note that the literal translation of ‘Elmina’ is “the mine”.

¹³ Der (1998) offers an overview of the northern slave trade in Ghana.

¹⁴ Also referred to as ‘Juula’, originating from the Malian empire of the Western Sudan (Yarak 1990:6), and occasionally referenced as the ‘merchants of Mandingua’.

society in which the dominant mode of production had been hunting and gathering transformed itself into one in which the dominant mode was food crop cultivation (Wilks 1993: 77-8).

All of this social change occurs merely because of indirect bullion linkages to the rapidly expanding world-system that was evolving during the long sixteenth century.

These important initial changes and social alterations may begin even earlier. In fact, the regional economy was linked to the larger international trading networks by at least the early fourteenth century, as gold and kola nuts were exported northward to Jenne, other Niger valley cities, and on to the trading centers of Hausaland and Bornu. From there, the gold was sold to Muslim merchants “in exchange for slaves, Saharan salt, metalware, and various other trade goods” (Kea 1982: 201), and was transported across the Sahara to North Africa and eventually into the economy of the Middle East.

As a result of the linkages between Asante gold production and the larger systemic market demands, considerable social reorganization accompanied the extraction process. Wilks goes so far as to note: “To speak of an ‘agricultural revolution’ in the forest country is appropriate. So, too, one may refer to an ‘industrial revolution,’ if by that no more is meant than the rapid expansion of gold production” (1993: 95). In fact, the expansion of gold production went hand-in-hand with a shift toward increased agriculture. This is made plain in a Portuguese report of 1572 – as cited in Kea (1982: 201-202) – describing how colonists should organize the exploitation of gold as exhibited by local practice:

Once you find mines you should make a fortress (*fortaleza*) there or a house capable of housing whites and for the blacks make a stockade (*cerca*) of large timbers called *rochada* near which and near the house they can put up cottages where the blacks who will work in the mines will live. In addition to the blacks who will dig in the mines you should also have blacks who will clear the land around them, and sow *milhos*, and yams, and draw palm wine, *caroucos*[], and anything else to sustain themselves, and, also, to provide sustenance for the miners. You should also have blacks to rear cattle for the whites.

Several factors make up the gold production process. First, a central political administration represented by *obirempon*¹⁵-dominated polities, who lived in fortified settlements and extracted surplus from free and unfree producers. Second, a localized labor force of unfree gold producers settled in their own stockaded village. Third, an auxiliary labor force of free and/or unfree land-clearers, cultivators, and cattle herdsman with their own settlement. Fourth, a developed mining technology (as exhibited by deep pits and underground excavations) and attendant artisan and craftsman population supplying tools and other necessities through workshops and local market networks (Kea 1982: 202).

Wilks (1993: 78-82) points to another important social characteristic that emerged out of the relationship between gold production and the associated free and unfree labor: the rise of the Asante institution of the matriclan. He suggests that this institution arose in the era of the forest clearances – associated with the growth in agriculture required by increased gold extraction – and was related to the way society was restructured as the overall mode of production changed. Interestingly, the matriclan served as a mechanism other than direct lineal descent by which strangers could be assimilated into a clan, which has the obvious benefit of helping deal with the social integration of the unfree labor that was being drawn into the Akan forest country. For instance, “matrilineal descent goes with a quality

¹⁵ Defined by Yarak (1990: 304) as “literally, ‘big man’, denoting wealth and high status”, plural is *abirimpon*.

of openness in the texture of effective descent groups” such that because of “its bias towards a wide-ranging recruitment of manpower, matriliney is well adapted to any situation in which competing demands for men are higher than demands for material resources” (Douglas in Wilks 1993: 79-80).

Thus, unfree labor was assimilated into the class of free Asante commoners, and they acquired the same legal status.¹⁶ Wilks (1993: 81) explains how the matrilineal assimilation works: “a male slave might often become the third, fourth, or even fifth husband of a (by then elderly) free woman, so that any children she bore by him would be free; and that female slaves were often married by free men and their children immediately adopted into the father’s lineage.” The corollary to the rise of matriliney as an adaptive social institution associated with the labor requirements of a growing agrarian order is that once the agrarian order was firmly established (by the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century), the demand for immigrant labor dropped and the role of the matriclan was de-emphasized and superseded by traditional lineage relations. However, women would continue to play an important role in Asante political and social relations.¹⁷

To summarize the period immediately preceding the emergence of the Asante state, one can see that the transformation of the Akan social order is directly related to the presence of gold in the forestlands and the linkages of the region to the emerging world-economy. In essence, the efficient extraction of gold required the clearance of forestland to support a viable system of agriculture, which in turn supported unfree labor and free artisans and other free labor associated with the extraction and agricultural processes. The demand for labor was such that a larger system of slave acquisition and distribution emerged to meet the requirements of the forestland interior (as characterized by the Wangara activity in the north and Portuguese activity in the south). The importation of slaves and their subsequent assimilation via the matriclan form of social organization, and the emergence of small-scale *obirempon*-dominated polities can reliably be dated to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. All of these processes, instead of being separate occurrences, were sessile products of a single process: the demand for gold in the emerging modern world-economy of the long sixteenth century.

Two other important socio-political developments grew out of the linkages of the region to the larger world-system: the emergence of feudalistic polities that would later form the basis for the Asante kingdom, and a general socio-economic “about face”, or shift in orientation toward the south. First, Yarak (1990) nicely describes the feudal relationship between *obirempon* and the ‘free settlers’ (*adehyee*). The *adehyee* obtained cleared land from and attached themselves to the *obirempon* as subjects on the basis of negotiated relations of obligation. In particular, these obligations “included the provision to the *obirempon* of a token portion of the agricultural production and hunted game; a more-than-token share in the other commodities obtained from the land, such as kola and gold, which had a market exchange value; the obligation to pay special levies or taxes; and, perhaps most importantly, the obligation to take up arms in support of the *obirempon* when required” (Yarak 1990: 7-8). In return, the *obirempon* granted the settlers secure access to the land (since it technically “belonged” to him), provided protection and defense of the land against encroachment, took on responsibility for land allocation and settlement of disputes over land use, and performed periodic and annual religious rites designed to “prosper” the land. This situation closely mirrors the feudal system and responsibilities of the lord and vassal relationship that predated the emergence of “modern” states in Europe.

¹⁶ Wilks (1993: 81). However Yarak (1990: 8) argues that assimilated people and their descendants retained a special status as *gyaasefo* (literally ‘people round the hearth’) and had special obligation to the matrilineal descendants of the *obirempon* who purchased them. These obligations were more onerous than those of the free settlers, but the *gyaasefo* also secured heritable rights to land and to most of the product of their labor.

¹⁷ See Farrar (1997).

As in Europe, feudal small states preceded the formation of larger states among the Akan. For example, small states serve the economic basis of being able to maintain peace and security in a given area, and can provide for the safety of the area's traders and then tax them accordingly. These taxes may be viewed as 'protection rents', which are an indicator of systemic incorporation and a characteristic of the political-military network (PMN) of interaction. The geographic limitations of small states necessarily mean that long-distance trade is in danger of predatory attacks by bandits, or increased costs accrued by dealing with economic middlemen. However, the "more effective the political and military organization is, the wider an area it can encompass, the greater the trade it can stimulate, the greater the taxes it can collect, and hence the greater an area it can pacify" (Hymer 1970: 43).

The rise of the Asante should be viewed in this context. The Asante wanted to promote free trade with the Europeans in the coastal regions, but were stifled by occasional banditry – both traditional and 'state sponsored' – along the trading roads to the coast, and by tolls associated with having to pass through neighboring states on the way to coastal markets. So, four groups of actors are relevant:

1. The Asante, who want to promote unfettered free trade with the coast;
 2. Other African states such as Fante or Denkyira that thrived precisely *because* of their status as profit-taking middlemen;
- And, as the coast was the site of considerable European rivalry:
3. Europeans (and local allies) favorably inclined toward Asante goals (*i.e.*, the Dutch and the Danes, who had concern over increased British monopoly);
 4. Those opposed to increased Asante control over the coastal markets (*i.e.*, the British).

The Asante viewed the trade with European agents on the coast with great importance not just because of the profits made from the trade, but also because it was the source of guns and gunpowder. The possession of firearms allowed for the maintenance of the Asante state against foreign incursion and allowed for additional political and military expansion, especially against neighboring states with a less-ready supply of firearms. The intermediary states, in contrast, wanted to maintain their own status and put an end to increasing Asante political domination. Accordingly, they sought to control trade – especially the northward flow of firearms – with the Asante. Fynn (1971: 25) reports that there were "numerous occasions when soldiers from the Abora state within the Fante federation took positions on the trade routes through their country to ensure that firearms were not sent into the interior." The southward flow of trade was also controlled. The chiefs of the coastal states would refuse northern merchants passage to the coast until they had paid heavy tolls. Eventually, the coastal rulers set up markets at their northern frontiers in order to exchange their own goods for those of the northerners (*e.g.*, the Akanny, the Denkyira, the Akyem, the Akwamu and the Asante) instead of allowing them passage to the coast.

As time went on, the Europeans grew increasingly aware of the presence of the Asante in the hinterlands of the interior, until "[a]ll the European traders on the Gold Coast recognised Asante as the major source of trade in the country and they vied with one another in courting the goodwill and friendship of the Asantehene" (Fynn 1971: 154). Some Europeans with a more tenuous hold on the coast, like the Dutch and the Danes, were not particularly worried about Asante political goals, but were more concerned with maintaining a viable supply of gold. Thus, they were more willing to supply goods the Asante desired (guns, powder, and lead). The British, in contrast, wanted to keep the Asante out of coastal affairs. This was not driven by any altruistic desire to support 'friendly' regimes among the Fante or other coastal states, but rather because of pure self-interest. British policy became

one of maintaining political fragmentation because this enabled the British merchants to have a better bargaining position *vis á vis* indigenous traders, as one political faction or local king could be played against another.

B. The Coming of the Europeans

The European arrival on the West Coast of Africa had considerable impact on the local social, economic and political structures from the very beginning (and even earlier via indirect systemic linkages of supply and demand). Yarak (1990: 7) summarizes the relationship between the rise of the Asante and the expansion of the world-system:

It may be concluded then that the clearance of the forest and the establishment of a viable system of agriculture, the importation of slaves and their assimilation into the matriclan form of social organization, and the emergence of small-scale *obirempon*-dominated polities, were in fact all part of a single process which can be dated to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Further, this process was rooted in the participation of the people of the Akan forestlands in the emerging world-economy.

The intricate relationship between economic forces of transformation and social and political repercussions is clear; one is able to recognize the forces of ‘creative destruction’ at work. In fact, this cycle of transformation continued to the point that West Africa experienced, quite literally, what Fage (1961) called an ‘about face’. The political effects of this shift in orientation to the south were considerable. New flows of goods were coming into and out of the region, which prompted the growth of trading centers in the south, where only small fishing villages previously existed. The European introduction of firearms on a large scale produced a reorganization of political power, especially in the forestland states behind the coastal kingdoms. Wars of consolidation and expansion followed, with rival kingdoms such as Denkyira, Akwamu and Akyem supplanting the older tribal kingdoms like Akanny. It is within this environment of political rivalry and jealousy, and in interest of preserving “its own political and economic independence that Akwamu assisted in the creation of the nascent Asante Union to counterbalance the military might of its traditional enemies” (Fynn 1971: 26). Thus, the processes of expansion and reorganization related to the growing bullion demands and trade contacts established with the expanding world-system during the long 16th century provide the triggering event for the founding of the Asante Kingdom by the late 17th century. The story of initial European contact, and more direct systemic involvement, begins with the Portuguese.

1. The Portuguese Prologue (1471-1642)

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to make their way to West Africa, slowly feeling their way south along the African coast in search of a short ocean route to the fabled riches of Cathay and the Far East. Other motivations include the desire to flank the Arabs and locate the source of gold that flowed across the Sahara to trading centers on the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, as well as a desire to seek an alliance with the mythical Christian kingdom of Prester John.¹⁸ The relative importance of each is open to debate, but for the history of the Gold Coast and the Asante, the Portuguese discovery of an active trade gold at Elmina proved to be the most crucial.

In January of 1471, João de Santarém and Pero de Escobar, operating under the employ of a wealthy Lisbon merchant – Fernão Gomes – who had been granted a royal monopoly¹⁹ for the

¹⁸ In 1424 the Portuguese occupied the Canary Islands and found a people living there who were not Muslims. This strengthened the hope that a Christian kingdom lay beyond Islam’s southern limits.

¹⁹ In November 1469 King Afonso V granted the monopoly for trade beyond the ‘Grain Coast’, so named for trade in ‘grains of paradise’ or Guinea grain (*Afromomium melegueta*) which was a cheap but prized substitute for the more expensive Indian pepper. The monopoly stipulated that Gomes must chart a minimum of 100 leagues of additional coastline annually, thus freeing the crown from having to incur the additional expense of exploration and guaranteeing a modest

exploration of the coast, discovered the traffic of gold on the Costa da Mina. After an initial renewal of the monopoly, the crown reasserted its control in 1474 as the gold trade provided a major source of revenue for the nation. The reassertion of royal monopoly was not merely an economic decision. It was made in part as an effort to regain control over interlopers – Portuguese and foreign – in the lucrative trade. By August 1474 the royal prohibition offered the death penalty for anyone caught sailing to Mina without the necessary licenses. One of the earliest non-Portuguese interloping expeditions to Mina was made in 1475, the ship was Flemish but carried a Spanish pilot. Spain would continue to challenge Portugal's claims on the Guinea coast, sending numerous expeditions in search of profit from the trade in gold, slaves, ivory and malagueta pepper (Vogt 1979).

To counter foreign incursions on the royal Portuguese monopoly, Don João II (John II) decided to establish a permanent base on the Gold Coast. January 1482 saw construction on the fort São Jorge da Mina begin, adjacent to the indigenous town of Elmina (Edena).²⁰ The fortress at Elmina soon would dominate the trade on the coast, and images of the castle appeared frequently in maps of the region as a symbol of the central role it played in trade on the Gold Coast. Not only was this the most distant Portuguese settlement at the time, but also the first true European building in the tropics. The Portuguese soon expanded their base of control with the construction of similar fortified settlements at Axim (1500), Shama (1558), and Accra (1557). The period of trade expansion during the years 1482-1540 saw the Portuguese extend their sphere of control from Cape Three Points in the west – anchored by Axim to the west of the Cape – to the kingdom of Akara in the east, where trade centered on the town of Accra. Once the gold trade came under increasing challenge, the Portuguese sought to extend their influence with permanent bases, which is why the effort to build forts at Shama and Accra lagged behind the Portuguese fortifications at Elmina and Axim. This was also a strategic choice, as any foreign interloper had to first make it past these western fortifications and their patrols before being able to trade with the Africans to the east.

One should also note when reference is made to Portuguese “control”, that this asserted control is only in terms of other European powers, as the Portuguese were never able to extend their overt political influence much beyond the distance of cannon shot from their bases of operation. The balance of power lay with local African political authorities that made the decisions to partake in a beneficial trading relationship with the Portuguese. The relevance of local political agency continued to play a role in the African-European interactions, especially once other European nations penetrated the area and indigenous leaders were able to play representatives of one European nation against those of another in order to seek out the most advantageous trading relationship and trade goods.

The years after 1540 saw a drastic increase in European challenges to the Portuguese *mer clostrum*.

By 1542, a French ship visiting Cape Three Points returned with 1,000 ounces of gold. While domestic political troubles hampered French expansion during the sixteenth century, other nations were not so constrained. Three English ships (the *Primrose*, *Lion*, and *Moon*) were outfitted in 1554, though early English efforts were unorganized until James I formed the Company of Adventurers of

income in the form of a monopoly payment and royal share of any gold [one-fifth] (Vogt 1979: 7-9).

²⁰ Following Decorse (2001) I use the name “Elmina” anachronistically to refer to the settlement south of the Benya Lagoon on the Elmina peninsula. “Elmina” as a place name “emerged in Dutch and German sources only in the mid-seventeenth century, becoming the most commonly used variant by the end of the seventeenth century” and “likely resulted from confusion over references to Mina in Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish sources, the possible sequence being: da Mina, de la Mina, della or dela Mina, del Mina, del Mina (*sic*), d’el Mina, d’Elmina. French and English sources do not use the name “Elmina” until well into the eighteenth century.” While the settlement’s pre-European contact name is uncertain, the “Village of Two Parts” (Aldea das Duas Partes) is mentioned in 1479, with “Elmina” and “Edina” being used locally today (Decorse 2001: 195).

London in 1618 (Daaku 1970: 9-10). The most serious immediate challenge however, came from the Dutch and resulted in Portuguese expulsion from their last permanent base at Axim in 1642.

After the expulsion, the Portuguese did continue to visit the Guinea coast, though contact was rather tenuous. Instead, the bulk of Portuguese activity was concentrated on the slave trading activities in Angola and Upper Guinea. With the discovery of gold in Brazil at Minas Gerais in the last decade of the seventeenth century, the urgency of the slave trade increased. This led to the reopening of the slave trade between the Brazilian ports and Lower Guinea – centered upon the now Dutch controlled Elmina. The Portuguese shifted focus, now importing gold, hides, tobacco and sugar to West Africa in exchange for slaves, ivory and wax. So great was the Portuguese demand for slaves to labor in the mines and plantations of the New World, that by 1724 the “Dutch Company needed more ships to collect slaves from other parts of West Africa for sale to the Portuguese at Elmina. A year later the Portuguese trade was described as the ‘artery and nerves’ of the Gold Coast trade” (Fynn 1971: 16). The importance of the trade led to considerable competition between the Dutch and British to extract profits from the Portuguese in the eighteenth century through tariffs and duties on the trafficking of slaves. By 1727-8, it is estimated that 6,000 slaves were exported to Brazil annually, with estimates of overall slave exports running much higher.²¹

Considerable advances in geographic knowledge marked the Portuguese exploration of the coast of Africa and eventual push into the Indian Ocean. The need to adapt this newfound knowledge with an existing worldview resulted in similar advances in cartography and how Europe dealt with the receding zone of ignorance. While Campbell (1987: 6) notes that the printed maps of the last three decades of the fifteenth century largely ignore the discoveries of their own period, it is likely that this delay occurred while the knowledge percolated through the system’s information network. For instance, Whitfield (1998: 34) observes that “if the Portuguese had been recording their discoveries on sea-charts, they have, through some unknown historical accident, failed to survive.” Instead, the earliest cartographic examples embodying the new information often came from Italian sources. Two important Italian maps illustrate this process of information diffusion, reflecting the Portuguese accomplishments and setting them within a changing view of world geography: the Fra Mauro map of c.1459²² and the Cantino World Map (1502).

²¹ Boxer (1963: 16-17). A considerable body of literature exists surrounding the Atlantic slave trade and the population flows associated with it. For example, (Curtain 1969, 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1991; Curtain and Vansina 1964; and Manning 1969, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1990, 1996) examine census estimates, offer demographic models, and examine various facets of the slave trade, Lovejoy (1986) provides an edited volume on the impact of the trade, Foster (1976) looks at the role of Africans as active participants, and Law (1977, 1986) and Polyani (1966) focus on Dahomey and the slave trade.

²² 1459 is used as a conservative date for the map, as the exact date of composition is uncertain. However, Whitfield (1998: 36) notes that it “was almost certainly drawn between 1448 and 1458”.



Plate 3.2: Fra Mauro (1459) [Detail]. “Fra Mauro’s Map” in Whitfield (1994: 33).
British Library shelfmark: Maps 14.d.16.

Fra Mauro was a monk in the Camaldolese monastery on the Italian island of Murano near Venice. Famous as a mapmaker, he was commissioned by King Alfonso V of Portugal to draw a new world map, and one of the inscriptions on the map indicates that Fra Mauro was supplied with the latest Portuguese sea-charts as source material. So in many regards this is a ‘Portuguese’ map, though produced by an Italian. Since new geographical knowledge made using a Ptolemaic model obsolete, the map “at first sight appears to be in the ecclesiastical tradition of circular medieval world maps, but in fact it embodies navigational information from both Mediterranean and Arab seafarers, and like the Catalan Atlas draws heavily on Marco Polo for its concept of Asia” (Whitfield 1998: 34). Geographic information was a precious resource, and it is one that was flowing into as well as out of Europe. Recognizing that the map is oriented with south at the top, standard among Islamic maps, reinforces the likelihood of Arab influence. The representation of Africa is also new: Portuguese contact with Arab traders strengthened the belief that the route around Africa was navigable and the “Ptolemaic concept of a land-locked ocean is explicitly rejected, not yet on empirical grounds, but more as a statement of faith, aspiration or prophecy” (Whitfield 1994: 32). Myth, hope and hearsay are blended

with limited empiric fact, as illustrated with the representation of the Gulf of Guinea. The eastern end of the Gulf was beyond the furthest extent of actual Portuguese exploration, who had not penetrated beyond Sierra Leone when the map was drawn. On the East African coast, the ports of Zanzibar, Kilwa, Mombasa, and Sofala – all centers of Arab trade – are illustrated, and the Asian region's golden domes and spires reflect the overt influence of Marco Polo. Overall, the map serves to reinforce the Portuguese push around Africa and reflects the importance that cross-cultural information diffusion has for motivating systemic expansion.

The Cantino World Map of 1502 also speaks to the importance of information diffusion. While again no Portuguese charts survive to document the then-recently completed voyages of Bartolomeu Dias around the Cape of Good Hope (1488) and Vasco da Gama's successful return from India (1499), the Cantino Map was drawn from the “most recent” Portuguese sources. The chart was smuggled out of Portugal by an Italian diplomat, Alberto Cantino, and exercised tremendous impact on mapmakers, scholars and navigators in Italy for many decades (Whitfield 1998).



Plate 3.3: Cantino (1502)[Detail]: “Cantino World Map” in Whitfield (1998: 40).

Alternate electronic image at: <http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/Ren/Ren1/306.html>.

The Cantino World Map is “a landmark of geographic knowledge in several respects: the Indian peninsula is now shown unmistakably, Cabral's Brazilian coast dominated the western section; Newfoundland appears in the north Atlantic; above all the coast of Africa is mapped with startling accuracy” (Whitfield 1998: 45). The only major error is that the depth of the Gulf of Guinea is exaggerated by about ten degrees, though this is understandable given the strong winds, countervailing currents, and the fact that longitude could only be estimated by dead reckoning. The map is a “celebration of Portuguese Africa, with the Portuguese flags defending its coast, and the fort of El Mina pictured like a huge Renaissance city dominating Guinea” (1998: 45). The crosses along the coast of Africa mark the placement of stone columns – *padrões* – erected during the voyages of Diego

Cão (1482, 1485-86) to measure Portuguese progress along the coast, some of which survive today.²³ Africans appear to toil around Elmina with indigenous cities in the hinterland, but details about the interior of Africa are not provided. Africa would only briefly remain a Portuguese island, as the publication of smuggled charts and general dissemination of information regarding the gold trade combined to ensure competition from European rivals.

2. The Dutch Challenge and Expansion (1593 – 1642)

The Dutch were comparatively late in their attempts to engage in trade on the Gold Coast, arriving after nearly a century of Portuguese activity and in a strictly mercantile capacity at the end of the sixteenth century, later than even initial English expeditions. Initial Dutch connections to the Gold Coast trace to the 1590s, when Bernard Ericksz initiated trade to Guinea from the United Provinces. His tale is also illustrative of the nature of information diffusion and the importance that the information network holds for the expansion of a trading system. Ericksz learned of the Portuguese trade in gold and ivory while a prisoner on the Portuguese island of São Thomé. When he returned to the United Provinces he not only passed on the news, but also outfitted the first Dutch expeditions to the Guinea Coast (Daaku 1970: 10-11).

Other Dutch entrepreneurs quickly followed Ericksz's lead and were officially encouraged in this pursuit. The states of Holland and Zeeland provided government incentives by exempting ships from certain duties. Interest in the trade grew, as reflected in the formation of trading companies in Middleburg and Amsterdam by 1600. With increased Dutch activity came increased opposition from the Portuguese. During the period of 1568 to 1648, the United Provinces were engaged in a struggle with Spain for their independence, and it was during this period that the crowns of Castile and Portugal were united. This is relevant for two reasons. First, this meant that any attack by Dutch traders on the Portuguese in Guinea was a legitimate extension of the war with Spain. Second, the economic benefits of trade with the Guinea coast served to offset the expenses incurred during the costly war with Spain (Daaku 1970: 11-12).

The economic importance of the Dutch trade with the Gold Coast should not be understated. The primary interest of the Dutch was the purchase of gold mined by the Akan-speaking peoples of the interior, though pepper (malaguette), ivory and salt were also purchased. The volume of trade is indicative of the importance Guinea held for the United Provinces. Within fifteen years of the first Dutch expeditions to the coast – so by 1608 – there was a yearly average of twenty ships engaged in the trade with West Africa, “which carried about 200,000 yards of linen, 40,000 pounds of copper basins, kettles and other hardware, and 100,000 pounds of beads, as well as blankets and other goods. Besides ivory, wax, pepper, and grains, about 2,000 pounds of pure gold reached the United Provinces annually from Guinea” (Daaku 1970: 11). A ton of gold every year was flowing into the United Provinces, so much that until 1630 almost all the gold used for coinage in the United Provinces came from Guinea. Because the Dutch had a superior supply of trade goods sought by the African gold merchants, they were able to secure the majority of the gold exported to Europe. It was a desire to monopolize the gold trade that led to increased efforts to expel the Portuguese (Daaku 1970: 11, Yarak 1990: 94-95, Vogt 1979).

Dutch efforts to form a chartered company to undertake a regulated trade with the Gold Coast

²³ Embodying the hazards associated with maritime exploration, Cão's ultimate fate is a mystery. He never returned from the 1485-86 voyage after reaching Walvis Bay, within 500 miles of the Cape of Good Hope. He may have perished attempting to venture southward or may have returned to the Congo in order to ascend it. 80 miles upstream a stone was found years later with Cão's and others' names, stating that ships sent by the king of Portugal had come to that place (Whitfield 1998: 39).

and thereby increase pressure on Portugal were delayed by a truce with Spain in 1609. Signed on April 9, articles four and five of the twelve-year armistice specified that the Dutch would not traffic in areas of the Spanish empire, but were free to trade in areas not directly subject to Spanish suzerainty. Philip I of Spain's prior ascension to the Portuguese throne in 1581 meant that this included areas held by Portugal. This truce had a dual impact on the Dutch. Domestically, the idea of a chartered company was vetoed for fear it would be seen as an infringement on the truce (arranged by the leader of the States-General assembly, John Oldenbarnevelt). Formation of the West-Indische Compagnie (West India Company) was delayed until 1621, when the truce had expired and by which time Advocate Oldenbarnevelt had been executed (Vogt 1979: 147-148, Daaku 1970: 12).

In Africa, the Dutch-Spanish armistice increased the dangers faced by the Dutch, as the Portuguese had Spanish aid guarding access to Guinea and attempted to crack down on what they viewed as illegal trade. The private Dutch traders largely ignored the treaty, as they claimed that Spanish authority in Mina was limited to the areas in personal control of the Portuguese fortresses. This interpretation meant that any areas outside Elmina and the area directly around Axim were open to Dutch trade. Especially important was the Dutch post at Moure (Mori) in the coastal state of Asebu, about 15 miles east of Elmina. Moure was a particularly favorite site for Dutch-African trade as the king of Asebu did not recognize Portuguese authority and the Dutch had founded an unfortified trading lodge there by 1600. So not only was Moure the focal point of Dutch power on the Gold Coast, but the Dutch could argue that the area was a dependency of theirs, was outside the domain of Spain, and therefore the Dutch had legitimate trading interests on the African coast. To solidify this claim to Moure and thereby continued access to the Gold Coast, fortifications were built adjacent to the town in 1612 (Vogt 1979: 160-1, Yarak 1990: 94, Daaku 1970: 12).

The Portuguese governor, Duarte de Lima, similarly disregarded the treaty of 1609 and made efforts to interdict both supply and demand aspects of what he perceived as 'illegal' Dutch activity. Lima began to wage an aggressive campaign against the Dutch, seizing numerous vessels and even initiating a land attack against Moure in 1610. The renewed Portuguese activity in seizing vessels and crews had repercussions in the Netherlands, where shippers and merchants were increasingly vociferous in their complaints and relief requests to the States-General. In Africa, Lima also attempted to put an end to the source of Dutch gold by preventing the Asebu from trading with the Portuguese. Two representatives of the king of Asebu made the trip to Holland to request Dutch help against Portuguese harassment, which added further incentive for the States-General to fortify Moure and provide a regular garrison for the outpost. Conflict continued on the coast with advantage shifting between Portugal and Holland depending on the flow of troops and supplies from the home countries, but took a decided turn against Portugal by 1621 (Vogt 1979: 161-4).

The treaty between the United Provinces and Spain came to an end in 1621, and the Dutch finally established a chartered company (West-Indische Compagnie, WIC) for the Guinea trade. Even before this, however, the Dutch were outcompeting the Portuguese on the coast. The Dutch were better organized and equipped than their predecessors and were shipping more goods cheaper. The arrival of governor Duarte de Lima's relief expedition in 1608 is illustrative of the problem. For the Portuguese, this one flotilla – consisting of one transport, two caravels, and galleys that followed in 1609 – took thirty-four months to dispatch. Vogt (1979: 159) further relates, "In contrast, during the same period more than three score Dutch ships had sailed to Mina and returned with gold and ivory cargoes!" Portugal relaxed the royal monopolistic contract system regulating trade with Elmina in 1615 in an effort to stimulate additional Portuguese voyages and alleviate the supply problems of the coastal garrisons, but few Portuguese ships took advantage of this decree. The prices of trade goods on the Gold Coast were so depressed by Dutch imports that a reasonable profit was not possible for

Portuguese traders, so the burden of maintaining the stations remained a royal one (Vogt 1979: 168-9).

The creation of the West-Indische Compagnie in 1621 is a critical benchmark for the Dutch activity in Africa. First, the WIC acted in many ways like a semi-autonomous 'quasi-state', or individual political entity. It was given a monopoly on trade between the Tropic of Cancer and the Cape of Good Hope and was a semi-independent commercial and naval enterprise. The company was "empowered to make alliances for, and on behalf of, the States-General; to appoint governors, officials, and justices; and to maintain troops and garrisons," though in time of open war "troops and necessary war materials for the defence of the projected colonies were to be supplied by the States-General" (Daaku 1970: 13). Second, the Dutch WIC exemplifies the larger context in which the coast of Africa was seen at the start of the 17th century. The name itself ('West India Company') reveals that a major incentive for the Dutch expansion in Africa was the procurement of slaves for sugar plantations in the New World. This is even though the major Dutch export was gold and "available evidence indicates that as late as the end of the seventeenth century the Gold Coast ports were still *importing* slaves from the areas east of Accra, the aptly named 'Slave Coast', and even from as far south as Angola, as had been the case throughout the Portuguese period at Elmina" (Yarak 1990: 94-5, also Kea 1982: 197-201, Vogt 1979: 57).

The West India Company served as a platform from which the Dutch could expel the Portuguese from the coast. Since the WIC could undercut Portuguese traders, supplies and support for the Portuguese garrisons were infrequent in coming. By 1637 a demoralized garrison at Elmina surrendered to the Dutch, and the last remaining Portuguese outpost on the Gold Coast was captured when Axim fell in 1642. Even the capture of Elmina reflects the larger Atlantic context of the coast, as the Dutch attack was mounted from Brazil via Moure (Yarak 1990: 95). The profits of the WIC also reflect the economic importance of the region for the Dutch, as during "the first thirteen years of the company's existence the United Provinces imported from Guinea about 40,461 marks of gold, estimated to be worth about 17,733,899 florins, and 1,137,430 pounds of ivory worth about 1,178,688 florins" (Daaku 1970: 14).²⁴

Two maps of this period illustrate the still-tenuous but growing awareness of the interior nature of the Guinea Coast's gold trade. The first, Gastaldi's circa 1550 illustration appeared in Ramusio's widely circulated multi-volume travel narrative. A number of illustrations on the landscape and seascape indicate the region's transition into the world-system networks of interaction. The map, like most European activity at this time, centers on the fortress at Elmina ("Castel de lamina"). Elmina is amidst the wilderness of Africa, an outpost of 'civilization' yet a hub of activity. Soldiers are interacting with natives outside the castle and there is an indication of an interior African "estate" in the Elmina hinterland where four men make obeisance to their superior.²⁵

²⁴ A mark is 8 troy ounces. Further, these figures are official company figures for Dutch imports only and do not include any estimates of smuggling, shipments lost at sea or seized, and do not include the value of other goods such as spices that were also exported from West Africa.

²⁵ Wilks (1993: 96) uses this description of an interior estate in his discussion of the transition from "estate to state" during the period. While Wilks ascribes the depiction to an 'unidentified artist', I follow Whitfield's (1998: 164) accreditation to Giacomo Gastaldi as Whitfield is an expert in historical cartography.



Plate 3.4: Gastaldi (c.1550) [Detail]. Gastaldi, Giacomo (c.1550) “West Africa” [Map] in Gian Battista Ramusio (1606) *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, Venice. British Library Shelfmark 566.k.3.

The Europeans are gaining knowledge, albeit fragmentary, of the interior workings of the coastal political economy. The rest of the African interior serves as a counterpoint to this new knowledge, presented as a fantasy of forests and mountains, with rivers in the middle of the Sahara and a reference to “Etiopia” in the heart of West Africa. Two Portuguese ships are heading to Elmina, one from the East and one from the West, indicating the central position of the castle. This importance is further exaggerated by the relative size of the castle’s depiction, which is something that recurs throughout European representations of the Coast. Lest the reader think that the ship from the East is returning to Portugal, the caption “Vado al castel de la mina” is included. Further, the ship is likely carrying slaves from the slave-bearing regions to the East (e.g., the Slave Coast of Benin or further south in Angola) for import to labor in the interior gold fields, in exchange for gold at the coastal trading centers. Along the coast, Gastaldi depicts four canoes all rowing against the prevailing currents from the West. This reflects the very active coastal maritime trading network that was present and remarked upon by the Europeans as a means of local goods exchange and communication. For example, Governor Lima frequently used information from canoe traders as a warning of foreign incursion into the region. In September 1609, lacking Portuguese galleys, he even successfully employed canoes manned by Elminan natives to carry his soldiers out to overwhelm a Dutch sloop, captained by Elias Tripp, sailing from Amsterdam to Moure (Vogt 1979: 61).

A second map produced in 1629 encapsulates an increasing level of awareness of the emerging political system of the coastal interior. It also reflects the shift in power from the Portuguese to the Dutch, as the map is of Dutch manufacture and was originally drafted at the Dutch center of African commerce, Moure.

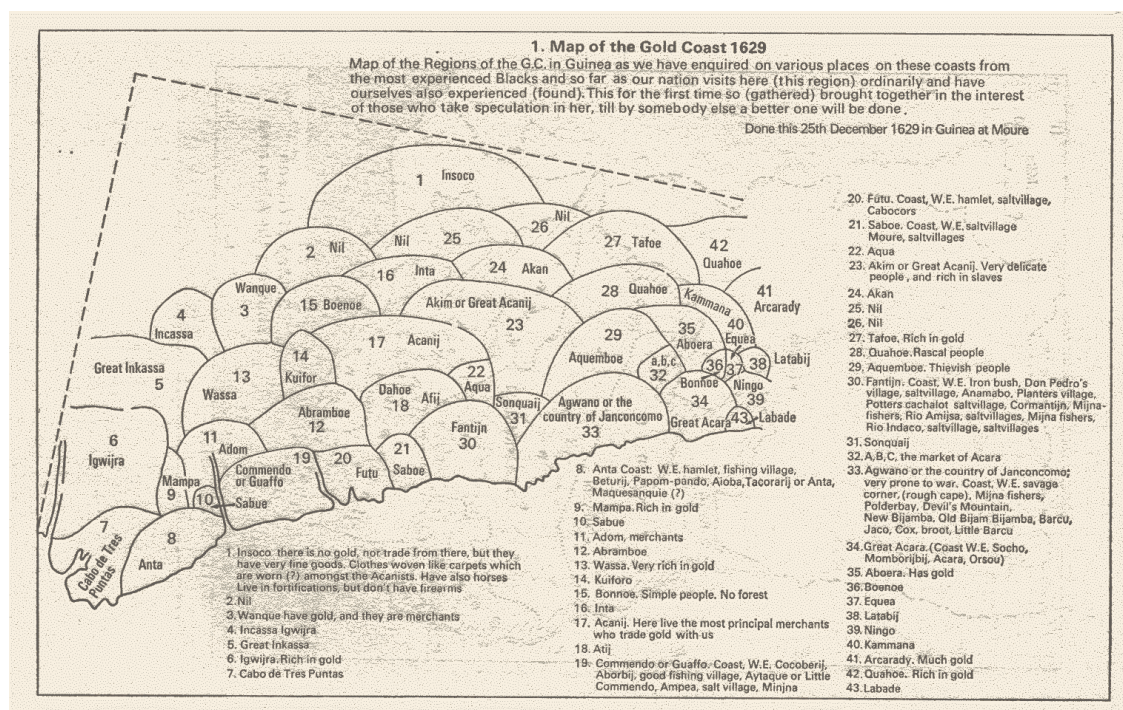


Plate 3.5: Dutch (1629). "Map of the Regions of the Gold Coast in Guinea Coast" in Daaku (1970: 199) translated from West Indische Compagnie Chart 743. A similar translation appears in Fynn (1971: 3).

The caption of the map indicates that this is a compilation of local transmitted knowledge gathered from "the most experienced Blacks" as well as data the Dutch "have ourselves also experienced". The coast is broken into 43 distinct regions with accompanying brief descriptions where there is available information. The descriptions prove insightful as to the nature of economic exchange taking place as well as the characteristic of the inhabitants (from a Dutch standpoint). For example, one of the most familiar would be region 21, "Saboe", which contains the Dutch entrepôt of Moure that is flanked by a "saltvillage" to the west and additional "saltvillages" to the east, producing salt for trade with the interior. Similarly, zone 30 corresponds to the Fante ("Fantijn") and is rather well known by this period with several saltvillages and "Mijna-fishers" designated. Regions 17 ("Acanij"), 23 ("Akim or Great Acanij") and 24 ("Akan") correspond to the Akan-speaking peoples of the hinterlands, with the notation that "the most principle merchants who trade gold with us" come from Acanij (Akani), though the ultimate source of the gold traded by the merchants is not disclosed.

The political reality of the Gold Coast, especially with regard to the inland states, differed from that portrayed by the map of 1629. In particular Akani (Acanij, Accany, Hacany) received the most attention, as its traders had a great reputation for the purity of their gold. For this reason, by the 1520s the Portuguese initiated a policy of sending regular gifts to the inland rulers to facilitate trade, a practice that was imitated by European traders that followed. Certainly Akani traders traveled far and wide, visiting all the important interior trading centers, and was consequently identified as the largest exporter of gold. However, this commercial importance tended to obscure the political reality of the African interior: "The Europeans were apt to designate all inland traders who came to their forts, from Winneba in the east to Shama in the west, as Akani traders, even though they might have come from many different states. They were unable to ascertain what this state really was" (Daaku 1970: 146).

The Akani “state” of the seventeenth century was more likely a loose confederation of states with kinship ties and not the large, dominant interior kingdom envisioned by the Europeans on the coast.

The situation after 1642 (when the Dutch successfully expelled the Portuguese) and through the end of the seventeenth century was a time of considerable activity, both for Europeans on the coast and the various African polities in the region. Between 1642 and 1650 the struggle on the coast was a straight contest between the Dutch and the English, but the sugar revolution in the New World pushed other European nations toward West Africa. It is here that the region’s broader economic linkages were felt once again: “The Gold Coast, which had been a gold mine both literally and figuratively for the Dutch, now became a ‘slave mine’ for virtually the whole of western Europe” (Daaku 1970: 15). For example, a Swedish company appeared in 1650 with rapid success, establishing trading posts at seven locations within a five-year span. By 1664, however, the company had faded away. Similarly, the Danes first established a presence at Cape Coast, but Dutch and English competition soon forced Danish activities to be constrained to the coast east of Accra. The Brandenburgers were also eventually squeezed out, and the French only periodically appeared on the scene. Essentially, the European presence on the coast after 1650 is an extension of the continental European commercial competition between the English and the Dutch, with the development of the African coast occurring in the context of this extended Anglo-Dutch rivalry (Daaku 1970: 15-16).

The Anglo-Dutch rivalry in Africa followed the arc of the rivalry in Europe, though it often occurred in an environment subject to different motivations and expectations. For example, during the first Anglo-Dutch war relations on the Gold Coast were relatively friendly, as a gentlemen’s agreement promising not to attack one another was established. Daaku (1970: 16) relates that the two chief officials “agreed that, in the absence of directives from Europe, they would continue to pursue free trade on the Guinea coast. In case orders came from Europe to attack, each would give the other ten days of grace for preparations”. By the time of the second Anglo-Dutch war of 1664-5 relations had deteriorated, with Britain losing Kormantse but gaining Cape Coast. Afterwards, relations stabilized with periods of intermittent conflict, and the reappearance of France on the Gold Coast even serving as a temporary unifying force at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

This period of imperial rivalry in the late 17th century is captured exquisitely in an English map of unknown authorship, circa 1680.



Plate 3.6: Guinea Factorys. Author Unknown (ca 1680) "A Draught of the Coast of Africa from the Straights Mouth to Cape Bona Esprance" [Map]. Electronic image from Afriterrra.org, catalog number 1212: <http://catalog.afriterrra.org/viewMap.cmd?number=1212>.

The text note on the map verifies that "The Flaggs denote the Factory's, and the Place on the Coast where the Flaggs are Raised from, shews where such Factory stands, and the Names writt against the Flaggs is the Names of those Factory's". Not only are the European footholds deemed "factory's", but there is considerable competition for such factory's. The Gold Coast is clearly the

focus of activity in Africa, so much so that the designation of it on the map is nearly obscured by the sheer number of flags. This is in rather stark contrast to the “Grain” and “Quaqua” (ivory) Coasts, and next to no interior detail is present beyond noting the Gambia and Senegal river drainages (which had been partially explored).

In addition to the Dutch (*i.e.* red-white-blue tricolor flag) and English (*i.e.*, white flag with red St George’s cross), closer examination reveals other European actors and their relative positions. Reflecting the competition for access, three different national flags have the designation for Accra: English, Dutch and what is a Swedish or Danish pennant.²⁶ Elsewhere we see the “Brandenburger” flag (white with black eagle of Prussia)²⁷ on the west coast at Brandenburg (named for the city of the company’s founding, not vice-versa) and on the Gold Coast at “Accquedah” (Akwida), which was founded in 1684 (*cf.* Jones 1985). The Brandenburgers were able to maintain a close alliance with African merchant prince John Konny (who was opposed to the English and Dutch), which helps explain their presence. Gold flags with the shield of Portugal are absent from the Gold Coast by this time, but are represented on the west coast near present day Guinea-Bissau. French holdings at Goree, Senegall, and Whidah are also designated by the pure white flag of the Bourbons (symbolizing purity and royal authority), which served as the *de facto* national flag of the Kingdom of France.



Plate 3.7: Guinea Factorys (*ca.* 1680) [Detail]. Author Unknown (*ca.* 1680) “A Draught of the Coast of Africa from the Streights Mouth to Cape Bona Esprance” [Map]. Electronic image from Afriterrra.org, catalog number 1212: <http://catalog.afriterrra.org/viewMap.cmd?number=1212>

²⁶ Sweden had a brief presence on the Gold Coast, first establishing a royal trading company in 1649, and founding six forts, including Fort Carlsborg (aka. Cape Coast Castle) in 1650 and Fort Christiansborg (aka. Osu Castle) in Accra. After warring with Denmark, Sweden was largely gone from the Gold Coast by 1663. The Danes then controlled Fort Christiansborg at Accra with some brief interruptions until 1850, so it should be a Danish pennant, especially as this was the only Danish holding on the coast between 1685 and 1734. Though the Danish flag is red with a white cross, while the Sweden did use a blue ensign through the mid-1600s.

²⁷ When the Brandenburg African Company was created around 1680 to take advantage of the African trade, their first flag was white with the red eagle of Brandenburg. On January 8, 1701, Frederick III issued a decree requiring Company ships to fly the white flag with the black eagle of Prussia. It is unclear whether this map is then more accurately dated post-1701, or if the unknown author was using the more common Prussian designation for what were, in all reality, Prussian holdings and for which the Prussian flag was more commonly known than the flag of electoral Brandenburg.

The commercial rivalry between the English and the Dutch continued, and often included struggle for political influence over competing kingdoms and proxy coastal powers. However, by the late seventeenth century Dutch hegemony in Europe was increasingly contested and the Dutch position on the Gold Coast was in gradual decline. So, the years between Portuguese expulsion from the coast (1642) and the beginning of Dutch decline (1689) form a brief interlude of additional incorporative activity. This period further stoked the fires of economic competition, from which the Asante would emerge phoenix-like by 1701.

3. Rivalry and Transition (1689 – 1700)

Why is 1689 an important year of division? In large part it is because of events in the core which reflect a changing world economic situation. Wallerstein (1980: 245) uses the year as a delineation point for core rivalries, with Dutch hegemony successfully challenged by British and French interests. 1689 serves as the starting point for a second phase of core rivalry, one characterized by unbroken Anglo-French competition and relative Dutch decline. This new rivalry “seemed a round of almost unending wars over the issues of land, allies and markets in Europe and over supplies (of slaves, of tropical and semitropical products such as sugar, and of furs and naval stores) in the periphery and the external arena (the Americas, West Africa, India)” (Wallerstein 1980: 246). Wallerstein recognizes that this period is one of contention in West Africa, though he considers it to be external to the system. Nevertheless, it is the beginning of what he considers incorporation, with peripheralization occurring after the world economic upsurge of the mid-eighteenth century.

1689 is also a convenient date of division for events on the coast of Africa, as the happenings in Europe had parallels on the African coast. Dutch hegemony here, too, was under assault. Most of the conflict centered on the coastal kingdom of Komenda, which lay just to the west of Elmina. Daaku (1970: 78) clarifies why Komenda became the focus of contention:

Komenda, the ‘vegetable garden’ of the coast, was the healthiest spot for Europeans; it also had the advantage of being within easy reach of such commercially important local states as Wassa, Twifo and Assin, Adansi and Asante.²⁸ The place therefore, not unnaturally, became a prize for European companies, all of which endeavoured to keep out rivals. This involved both Africans and Europeans in frequent quarrels and even in wars.

Ongoing tensions under the Dutch surfaced practically wherever the Dutch tried to establish control, partially fueled by Dutch claims to tolls on fish. This practice actually resulted in Fetu and Elminan forces laying siege to the castle at Elmina in 1682 as a protest. In this way, problems with the Dutch and Komenda overshadowed other events on the coast, though other European forces fueled the discontent. By the 1670s, the British and French had turned their eyes to gaining access to Komenda and the French sent an expedition in 1688 to establish a fort. Civil war broke out as the king of Komenda favored French intervention, but the Dutch and their local allies put down the civil war, killed the king and drove his supporters into exile. The French apparently had enough, for when they returned at the beginning of the eighteenth century their activity was concentrated to the extreme West at Assini (Daaku 1970: 78-81).

By 1694 the situation in Komenda had deteriorated and war between the Dutch and Komenda was imminent. The Dutch, possibly from ignorance or possibly motivated by a desire to precipitate war, sent an expedition to prospect for gold in Komenda without the consent of the king. When the expedition was attacked and some miners seized and imprisoned, the Dutch responded by attacking a

²⁸ Of course, Asante did not become relevant to coastal politics until after conquering Denkira in 1701, only they truly register on European awareness. Nevertheless, Komenda was a hub of commercial activity for the surrounding states.

local merchant prince, John Kabes. For all practical purposes the Dutch-Komenda war – which was the longest drawn-out struggle between a local African state and a European company – had begun. So what of the English? In addition to providing substantial help to the Komenda people, the English had been busy with the Fante and Asebu states. Through reliance on traditional alliances, as well as considerable bribery, by 1695 “the English reported that they had raised a powerful army at the request of Komenda, which had driven away the Twifo and Kabestera soldiers who had been hired by the Dutch” (Daaku 1970: 83). The war would end in 1699, but the struggles between the Dutch and British over the dynastic succession within Komenda continued throughout the first two decades of the eighteenth century. This is not to say that relations between the English and the Dutch were without periods of peace and temporary reconciliation. This atmosphere of cooperation was generally facilitated by the appearance of a third-party competitor. The appearance of the French on the coast during the war of the Spanish Succession offered one such instance. Similarly, to counter the growing power of the Fante, in 1710 the rival companies of Holland and England entered into the Fetu River Convention. In 1711, both companies joined forces (unsuccessfully) to attack John Konny, a merchant prince of Pokoso, who the Europeans felt had been responsible for Fante belligerence and seizures. By 1711 Konny had become the *de facto* ruler over the three Brandenburg castles, and he would continue to hold them until 1724 when he finally lost them by force (Daaku 1970: 17, 115-143). But by the 1720s, another major African state, the Asante, had made its way into the European sphere of awareness and would prove to be a less tractable trading partner for the Europeans.

Indeed, what was the European ‘sphere of awareness’ in regards to the Asante by the opening of the eighteenth century? On one hand, very little substantive geographical information had changed over the preceding hundred years. For example, Willem Blaeu’s representation of Africa endured essentially unchanged.



Plate 3.8: Blaeu (1667). Blaeu, Willem Janzoon (1667) “Africae Nova Descriptio” [Map], Amsterdam: Joan Blaeu. Electronic image courtesy James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota
<http://bell.lib.umn.edu/hist/im/Blaeu.jpg> .

Of Dutch origin and originally prepared in 1617 for Willem Blaeu’s series of maps on the continents, the plate was reused in his own *Atlantic Appendix* in 1630 and later in his son Joan’s series, *Atlas Maior*. As such, it was published in different editions and languages through 1672. The map includes ethnographic representations of various African peoples in native dress (and conveniently arranged in a hierarchy of skin-tone) on the left and right margins, but also includes representations of ports, forts, and trading centers across the top. Less accurate information is relegated to the interior of Africa; specifically note the westward direction of the river Niger in west Africa.

An almost identical representation was still in use by 1707, well after the Asante had become better known. Johann Homann’s map of the African continent is strikingly familiar. While the ethnographic detail and the forts are absent, the outline of Africa is almost identical to that provided by Blaeu 90 years earlier. The Niger still runs westward, though shadings and some interior detail have been subtly altered. The cartouche reflects the economic focus of the African trade, as the African figure on the left sits next to a pile of ivory while the main figure to the right wears what appear to be anklets and a headband of gold.²⁹

²⁹ Daaku (1970: 21) relates the cargo carried by the Dutch ship *Opmeer* in 1705 upon its return to Accra after a voyage to Benin: “17,924 pounds of ivory, 4,000 pounds of wax, and 15,015 pounds of rice, and only 4 marks 6 ounces 72 ackies of gold.” This is relevant not only because it gives a glimpse of the sheer volume of goods being transported, but also because – as Daaku points out – the bulk of gold came from the aptly named Gold Coast and was available in very limited amounts elsewhere.



Plate 3.9: Homann (1707). Homann, Johann Baptist (1707). “Totius Africae nova repraesentatio...” [Map], Nurnberg. Electronic image courtesy the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota, <http://bell.lib.umn.edu/historical/Hafrica.html>.

The source of these riches still seems to be in doubt, or at least beyond detailed, first-hand European knowledge. Looking closer at the representation of the Gold Coast (below), some interior detail emerges and there is reference to the Asante via Greater Akan (‘Acanes Maior’) and Lesser Akan (‘Acanes Pequenos’). But the focus is still primarily on the coast and the various European settlements, with little detailed knowledge of the interior despite the strong trade linkages.

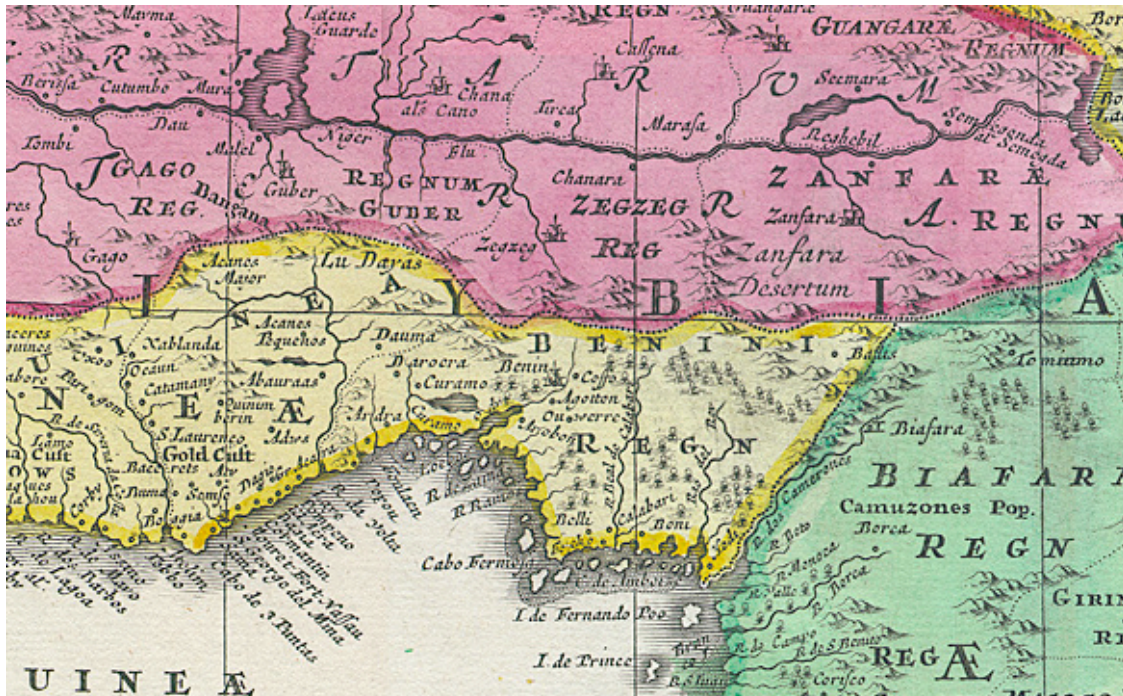


Plate 3.10: Homann (1707)[Detail]. Homann, Johann Baptist (1707). "Totius Africae nova repraesentatio..." [Map], Nurnberg. Electronic image courtesy the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota, <http://bell.lib.umn.edu/historical/Hafrica.html>.

Why is this the case? The answer speaks to the larger conditions of the trading system on the Gold Coast and western Africa. First, the conditions – environmental as well as political – on the coast confined Europeans to the area immediately adjacent to their forts. In order to secure trade, they depended on African traders, servants, and middlemen. Some Africans were directly employed by the European companies; others established their own businesses as middlemen, who conducted traders from the inland to the European forts. The European everyday experience, and thus their firsthand knowledge, was likewise limited to the coast. Furthermore, there was really no need for Europeans to initially venture inland. New towns, classes of wage-earners, and local artisans emerged, directly created by Afro-European contact with the purpose of meeting European demand (Daaku 1970: 19-20). Commenting on the situation around Moure in 1629, the Dutch acknowledge this relationship and its impacts: "Many work in order to serve as brokers for those who come to buy some goods from us, with which they make good profits, there is now because of our trade much intercourse of foreign people, from inland along the coast, so that apparently (provided the trade continues here) this place will much increase its population" (cited in Daaku 1970: 184). It was only *after* interior actors began to threaten the profitability of the coastal enterprises that the systemic push inland gained momentum (Reynolds 1975, Warner 1999), though the process was initiated by earlier increased European competition on the coast.

The European information network actually seems to lag behind the expansion of the trade-goods and political-military networks in this instance. This is reflected in the maps of the time. Homann (1707) has considerable detail and knowledge of coastal settlements, yet only rather vague impressions of the interior polities Greater Akan ('Acanes Maior') and Lesser Akan ('Acanes Pequenos'), which by the turn of the eighteenth century had already coalesced into an ascendant Asante. So one is presented with a fuzzy middle ground on the map where detail must be reconciled

with fact, but uncertainty is still present. Beyond this middle ground are regions that still exist on the very fringes of the information network and are therefore more influenced by myth and misinformation, without the dialectic need to be influenced by detail and fact. So one sees the representation of the Niger flowing west, through a large lake with an island, and the bold naming of alleged interior kingdoms (e.g., “Regnum Guber”, “Zegzeg Reg.”, “Zanfaræ Regnum”). Homann reinforces this division between ‘known and almost known’ and ‘mythic-dominant and unknown’ quite nicely with his use of color: yellow for the coastal region and purple for the interior. Whether conscious or not, the ‘membrane’ at the front edge of the information network is apparent.

Other contemporary representations reinforce the economic nature of the fixation with West Africa as well as the European focus on the coast. Bosman (1705) reflects the European practice of adopting names for coastal regions determined by their commercial interest (e.g., Grain Coast, Ivory/Tooth Coast, Gold Coast, Slave Coast) which had become common by the end of the seventeenth century. While the regions had some overlap in availability of commodities, Dutch sources confirm that “the Gold Coast was the principle if not the only source of the gold trade” (Daaku 1970: 21). Evidencing the growing international and public awareness of the coastal trade of West Africa, Bosman’s (1705) book was immediately published in French and English within a year of its initial Dutch publication, and included the addition of an “exact map of the whole coast of Guinea, that was not in the original”. The focus of the map is almost exclusively on European coastal holdings, with only the vaguest references ascribed to regions of the interior, though the economic appellations still appear.

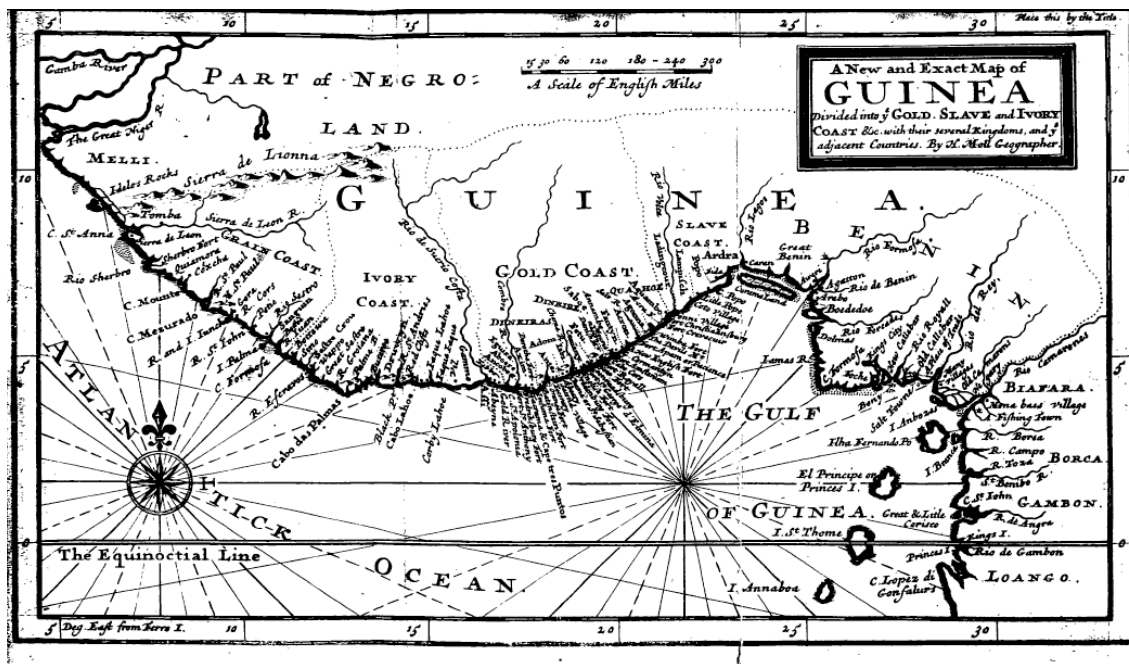


Plate 3.11: Moll (1705). Moll, Herman (1705) “A New and Exact Map of Guinea” [Map], in Willem Bosman (1712), *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts*. 2nd ed. London: J. Knapton. Electronic image courtesy Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries, <http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/sccoll/africa/bosman.jpg>.

The limitation of direct European influence to the coastal area is crucial. This limitation had a double

impact on the development of the Asante, that of 'engaged ignorance' or benign neglect. From the European perspective, the interior effectively functioned in the zone of ignorance as far as informational awareness was concerned. Why? Partly due to the environment, partly due to local politics, but also because the profits being extracted on the coast were sufficient to mitigate against the additional expenditures of interior expansion. For example, Daaku (1970: 19) examines Dutch sources and provides some insight into the volume and value of the trading:

In 1710, it was estimated that goods costing 7,200 florins in Holland could be sold for 20,000 florins on the Gold Coast. On the Guinea coast the Dutch bought slaves for 45 florins per head, and sold them in the New World at 210 florins per head. The 6,000 slaves that the Dutch exported annually from the Guinea coast after 1700 fetched them as much as 1,260,000 florins in the New World. After allowing for all expenses and losses due to deaths in the Middle Passage estimated at 390,000 florins the net gain of the Dutch was about 670,000 florins."

The volume of the trade is indicated by the balance sheets of some the least profitable Dutch posts, which "for the twelve years from 1705 to 1716, showed that a net profit of about 239,742 florins had been made on goods valued at 7,755,965 florins that had been sent. Commodities such as 67,299 pounds of ivory, 1,025 slaves, and 1,983 marks 5 ounces of gold had been purchased.

This does not take into account the more profitable Dutch stations, nor the activities of the English, the Danes, Prussians, independent traders ("Ten Per Cent Men"), and other unsanctioned trade. So the European powers were happy to remain limited to the coast and the Asante developed outside the political-military sphere of systemic interaction (and largely outside the information network), while gaining the economic benefits of being integrated into the trading networks of the expanding world-system. By 1700, if not earlier, the flows of bullion, goods and people in and out of the Gold Coast indicate that it was an integral part of the larger world economy, even from a European perspective.

From the Asante perspective, there is little question that by 1700 the interior region was effectively linked to the world-system. In fact, the very emergence of Asante as a functioning polity in the mid-seventeenth century is a direct result of this linkage and it provides striking evidence regarding the import trade linkages have for political development. The Asante emerged *because* the region was part of the growing world-economy. To briefly restate the situation up to 1700 as summarized by Wilks (1993), in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a foraging mode of production in the forest country changed to an agricultural mode. This 'agricultural revolution' parallels the emergence of a matrilineal social organization that allowed Akan society to absorb the influx of new labor associated with gold extraction and its concomitant agricultural labor requirements. Third, this transformation engendered new political organization not based exclusively on kinship ties. All of these changes are directly due to being linked to the bullion demands initially of the Mediterranean economy via trans-Saharan trade routes, then the Atlantic economy via the coastal maritime trade and produced the fully functioning absolutist Asante state of the mid-nineteenth century.

By 1700 state formation was well underway and the region was undergoing nominal incorporation. Yet the Asante were able to state-build initially without coming into conflict with the European powers *because* they existed on the fringe of the zone of ignorance; it was also a zone of safety. So, there are two main reasons state-building occurred inland instead of on the coast. First, the inland states were able to benefit from European trade by using firearms as a key factor in military expansion;³⁰ territorial rewards were most easily reaped by inland states with a supply of arms against

³⁰ Prior to 1650 firearms were available on the coast but in a limited supply. Daaku (1970: 149) remarks: "On the whole the

those without such a supply, which reinforced the advantageous position of having networks of trade with the coast. Guns and powder became the lifeblood of empire: guns flowed in, gold flowed out, and territory was conquered. Second, coastal European interference and competition actively prevented the formation of larger political units (*e.g.*, Komenda) in areas in closer proximity to the European forts. Away from the machinations of competing coastal interests, African states were able to embark on empire-building without overt external interference and therefore able to present a new political order as a *fait accompli* (Daaku 1970: 152-3).

4. Asante State Building and Expansion (1701 – 1750)

The Europeans first became aware of Asante as a political power in 1701, when Asante conquered Denkyira. Yet the emergence of the Asante was merely the product of an ongoing political upheaval in the hinterland of the Gold Coast facilitated by the large scale introduction of firearms after the overthrow of the Portuguese trading monopoly. By 1650, Akyem, Denkyira and Akwamu were the most important states in the immediate hinterland of the Gold Coast, and it is Akyem that was part of the old Akanny kingdom known as ‘Great Akanny’ which included southeast Asante (Fynn 1971: 19-20). These inland states rose to power on the basis of controlling the gold, slave, ivory and kola nut resources of the interior (as well as literal control over the trading paths to the coast), but were in a state of constant rivalry and hostility. It is out of this environment that the Asante Union emerged.

Credit for the emergence of the Asante as a unified polity is ascribed to Osei Tutu, a son of a royal family of the Asante. Tradition dictated that princes of tributary states (which Asante was) traveled to the capital of Denkyira to serve an apprenticeship in government and learn the ways of the royal court. Thus, Osei Tutu is reported to have spent his early life in the powerful southern states of Denkyira and then Akwamu³¹ where he “not only learnt the art of politics but also discovered that the rise of those states had been made possible by the introduction of firearms in appreciable quantities” (Fynn 1971: 55). It is also during the 1670s whilst in Akwamu that Osei Tutu is said to have met Okomfo Anokye, who would become the right-hand man of Asante nation building. A celebrated priest, it is Anokye who is credited by the Asante with creating the Golden Stool,³² which provided the religious basis of the Asante Union and would become the symbol of Asante nationalism by “enshrining the soul of the nation” (Fynn 1971: 55, Daaku 1970: 157).

However fuzzy the origins of the Golden Stool, its historical implications are clear. By the 1690s Akan tributary states of the Denkyira that had been associated primarily because of their

political stability of the African states was due to the comparative scarcity of firearms. This was because Portugal was forbidden by the Pope to sell guns to heathens and Muslims. The Dutch West India Company was also officially not allowed to sell guns. In spite of the sale of firearms by interlopers, their distribution was mainly confined to a few coastal states. From the 1650s, however, the arrival of many different trading nations on the Gold Coast made any restrictions on firearms difficult to enforce.” By 1658 the Dutch Director-General requested that the restriction be removed, and soon thousands of firearms were flowing into the coast annually. The Dutch guns were so in demand by 1680 that even the English were importing firearms from Holland -- much to the dismay of English ‘shotgun makers’ -- and by the turn of the seventeenth century the Dutch were selling about 20,000 tons of gunpowder on an annual basis (Daaku 1970: 149-151).

³¹ Osei Tutu is said to have been forced to leave Denkyira after having an affair with the niece of the king (Daaku 1970: 162).

³² The Golden Stool, according to tradition, was first presented by Anokye at a meeting of the Asante chiefs where he caused the Stool to descend from the heavens. Every one of the assembled rulers provided cuttings from their nails to be concocted into a ‘medicine’, which was then used to consecrate the stool, which was then entrusted to the king of Kumasi (Osei Tutu). Thus, “In addition to his duties as the Kumasihene he became, by virtue of the Golden Stool, the head of the new nation whose external manifestation of unity was symbolized by the Golden Stool” Daaku 1970:163, Rattray 1929: 290).

common ancestry were united into one nation. Under the excessive tributary demands of the Denkyira, the Asante Union was able to capitalize on the ill-will held by other tributary states like the Twifo, Assin, Adom and Wassa. It is because these states blockaded the trade routes into Denkyira and assisted the Asante king, that the Asante were able to get powder and firearms despite being inland. Further, Denkyira was left in short supply because of the defection of its tributary states and their refusal to let supplies pass. Thus, the war was carried by the Asante, who literally burst on to the scene as far as the Europeans on the coast were concerned (Daaku 1970: 164).

The merchants on the coast were able to infer that change was in the offing, and were indirectly aware of the Asante. Dutch reports in 1699 indicated that war was coming because little gold was reaching the coast, and reports in 1700 mentioned the strong demand for muskets among the “inland Negroes”. The Dutch Director-general also expressed concern once the war was underway, because he feared that a lengthy war would be detrimental to trade. It was with obvious relief that in November of 1701 the Asante were reported as having achieved a complete victory over the Denkyira (Wilks 1993: 111).

The political and economic effects of the 1701 war were far-reaching. Asante superseded Denkyira as *the* dominant political power of the Gold Coast hinterland, though they did not immediately gain complete control over the former tributary states of the Denkyira. For the Asante, this was seen as a liberation struggle out of which a new nation – the Asanteman – was created. The aftermath of the war saw the transition of the military coalition into a political union (Wilks 1993: 112). The war also resulted in the revival of old alliances and the creation of new ones, largely a direct result of the fear of the powerful new Asante nation. Nevertheless, the next half a century would see the evolution of a system of administrative control that grew to suit the expanding frontiers of the Asante Empire. Furthermore, as a result of Asante victory, the European powers on the coast were presented with a new political player and lost little time sending official envoys to regularize relations and negotiate trade status. The Dutch, anxious to ensure that there were no ill-feelings because of their prior relationship with Denkyira, were the first nation to send an accredited European representative to an inland African state when David van Nyendaal visited Kumasi “to congratulate Zaay, the king of Asijante” (Daaku 1970: 144).

By the early 1700s Asante continued to solidify and expand its control over the interior of the Gold Coast. This gave the Asante control of the gold, slave and ivory resources of the area, which would ultimately prove a double motivation for greater expansion. On one hand, the Asante kingdom was able to extract greater surplus from its tributary states which could then be used to support territorial expansion. This was supplemented by spoils from the campaigns of suppression the growing empire was forced to carry out, as Asante traders were habitually molested on various routes to coastal markets. This was a primary factor leading to war with Akyem in 1717, in which Osei Tutu was reportedly killed. Nevertheless, the Asante continued their expansion under Asantehene Opuku Ware and the first half of the eighteenth century was largely a period of war. Meyerowitz (1952: 111) summarizes the expansion succinctly:

[B]y 1730 the Doma states of Abamperedase, Suman and Gyaman, were in the hands of Asante. Under Osei Tutu’s successor, Opuku Ware, the Bono Kingdom was destroyed and incorporated into Asante, together with all its tributary states from Banda to Krakye on the Volta. Then Nta (Gonja) and Dagomba in the north were subjugated, as were the three Akyem states in the south-east, and Sehwi in the west. In less than fifty years the Asante reigned supreme over most of the Gold Coast and parts of the French Ivory Coast.

It was precisely the drastic extent of Asante dominance that would lead them into conflict with the

European powers during the latter half of the eighteenth century.

By 1729, the Asante had extended their control over a considerable amount of territory in the interior of the Gold Coast and even expanded out to the coast at Cape Apollonia after waging a war of conquest against the Aowin in 1715. But European cartographic sources fail to reflect this changing reality in the interior, and now exterior, portion of the Gold Coast. For example, d’Anville’s 1720 depiction of the Gold Coast – which would be used as a ‘gold standard’ of maps for the next 50 years – reflects information that is quite outdated by the time of its publication. Furthermore, as d’Anville was renowned for his belief that one should not fill a map with fictitious or superfluous material to make up for lack of geographical knowledge, it is likely that he is basing much of his information on the earlier ‘accurate’ Dutch map of 1629.

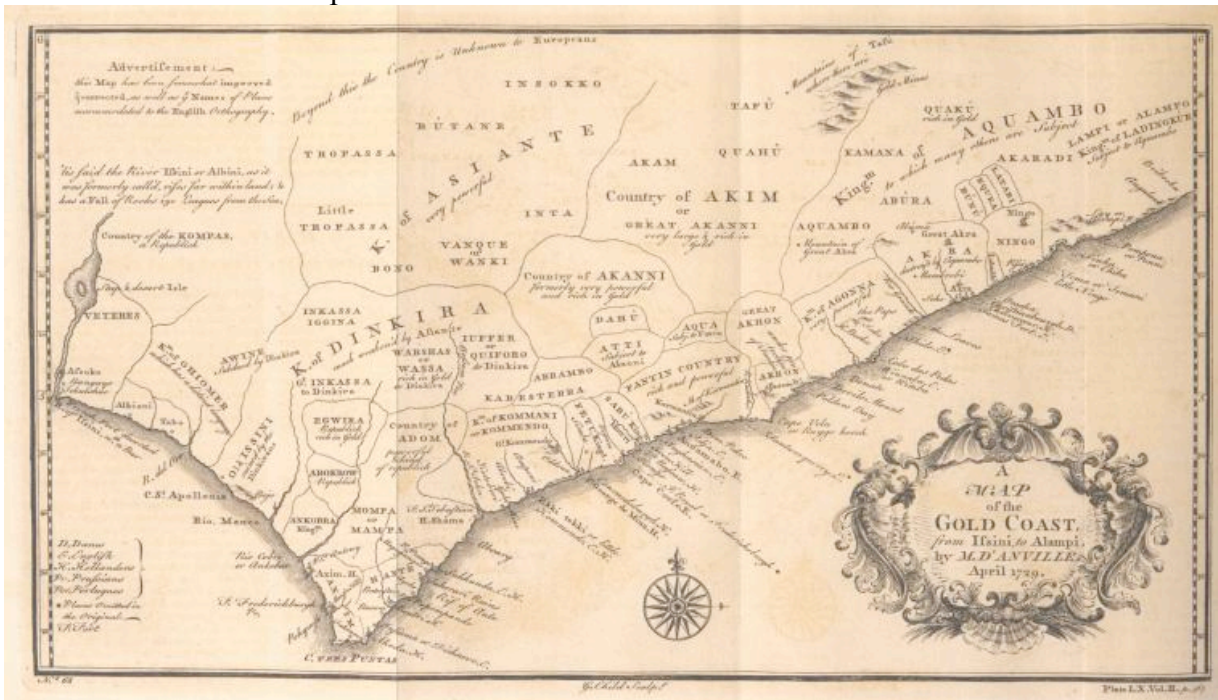


Plate 3.12: D’Anville (1729). d’Anville, Jean Baptiste Bourguignon (1729) “A Map of the Gold Coast”, Paris. Image courtesy New York Public Library, Image number 1261651.

Comparisons between the 1629 Dutch map and the 1729 d’Anville maps do present striking similarities. They also conveniently illustrate just how little geographic knowledge of the African interior had changed over the preceding century. A closer examination reflects the increasing status of Asante.



Plate 3.13: D'Anville (1729) [detail]. d'Anville, Jean Baptiste Bourguignon (1729) "A Map of the Gold Coast", Paris. Image courtesy Northwestern University Library
<http://hdl.library.northwestern.edu/2166.DL/inu-afrmap-4333843-recto-ah> .

The Asante are finally represented as a distinct political entity on European maps, having entered the European information network, but the full extent of Asante rule is still unknown. While the 'Kingdom of Asiante' is noted as being "very powerful" the 'Kingdom of Dinkira' is only "much weakened by Asiante", despite actually having fallen to them by this time. Similarly, the Country of Akanni is noted as "formerly very powerful". Knowledge of the far reaches of the interior is also cloudy as d'Anville notes that "Beyond this the Country is unknown to Europeans", once again confirming the edge of the European zone of ignorance. While the reality was that most of the territory depicted was in actuality "unknown to Europeans", there is a bit of reassuring honesty in the notation. The Asante had extended their reach to the western coast by 1715, though some confusion over the actual extent of their control is warranted. Daaku (1970:178) reminds that "the Asante drive to the coast in the eighteenth century was for commercial rather than political reasons; they made no efforts to incorporate such regions into their empire either as provinces or as mere tribute-paying outposts. If anything, all they wanted was direct trade with the Europeans." This is understandable, as the Asante required a ready flow of European goods – especially powder and firearms – to expand

their sphere of influence and were still a newly-emergent political power on the interior. The period up to the middle of the eighteenth century is one of Asante state-building concerned with securing its trade network; it is only in the latter half of the eighteenth century that empire-building and full 'peripheralization' begins.

Other cartographers are not as circumspect as d'Anville and readily continue the tradition of filling in 'unknown' regions with the products of guesswork, rumor and myth. Undoubtedly part of this has to do with the differential rate of information diffusion throughout the European system, but it occurs even in countries that arguable have the best access to information. For example, the d'Anville (1729) map of the Gold Coast – of French origin and published in Paris before being translated and published for English consumption – may be compared to the Moll (1729) map of Guinea, which was of British origin (Plate 3.14).



Plate 3.14: Moll (1729). Moll, Herman (1729). "Negroland and Guinea. with the European Settlements, Explaining what belongs to England, Holland, Denmark Etc." [Map]. Electronic image courtesy University of Florida : Map and Imagery Library: <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/maps/ALW1663L.JPG>.

Despite being a contemporary and publishing a map in the same year as d'Anville, Moll also uses a fairly standard European representation of the region. This is evident in several aspects of his map. First and most obviously, the focus of the map, "Negroland", exists primarily as a European construct and figment of the imagination; a region literally belonging to the Black African and beyond the realm of White European influence. Geographically, the east-west representation of the Niger makes an appearance, as does the large lake of the interior. Both would later be proven quite inaccurate. Farther south in Guinea, the overt European emphasis is again evident. Despite the emergence of the Asante as a "very powerful" inland kingdom controlling the very resource for which

the Gold Coast was named, Moll places no emphasis on the coastal or inland polities. Instead, the focus is on English, Dutch, and Danish coastal holdings, all of which depend on the inland African polities for their profitability. Additionally, the potential identity of any inland actors is subsumed in importance by the goods exported from the region; Moll repeats the earlier practice of naming the ‘Coasts’, though he now neglects the Ivory (or ‘Tooth’) Coast as a primary economic inspiration.

Yet the focus on the coast and the extraction of goods is actually good for the emerging Asante – the region existed in a state of relative political insulation.³³ This insulation allowed the Asante to develop unhindered by adverse European influence; in fact the coastal governors were anxious to cultivate Asante goodwill in order to maintain an uninterrupted flow of gold and slaves. This is reflected in the haste with which both the Dutch and English tried to normalize relations with the Asante king after the defeat of Denkyira in 1701. But this favorable view of Asante relations also facilitated the rapid political and economic expansion experienced under Osei Tutu’s successor, Opoku Ware. Regarded as one of the greatest eighteenth century Asante kings, Opoku Ware reigned over Asante during its period of military expansion and consolidation. Ware ruled for thirty years, during which time “Denkyira, Sefwi, Twifo, Aowin, Wassa Akuapem and Ga-Adangbe became tribute paying vassals of Asante. Akwamu, though not a conquered state, was expected to provide the Asante court with troops when required” (Fynn 1971: 81). So by the time of his death in 1750,³⁴ the Asante controlled the gold, slave and ivory resources of the Gold Coast interior. This date serves as a delineating point between the processes of ‘incorporation’ and peripheralization’ not just because of the death of Opoku Ware, but also because of other events in the larger world-system. Events after 1750 take place in the context of the region shifting from a state of ‘effective incorporation’ to being solidly in the periphery. Thus, the later Anglo-Asante Wars are accurately viewed as wars of peripheralization in which European imperialism comes into direct conflict with the Asante Empire.

5. Britain, Sugar and the Slave Trade (ca. 1750)

Why is 1750 a crucial, if even legitimate, dividing point for the Asante and the Gold Coast? On one hand, local political conditions indicate that this a clear point of division. The Asante Empire under Opoku Ware expanded militarily to its widest extent and began the process of consolidation. Wilks (1993: 119) observes that it is after this point through the nineteenth century it becomes possible to speak of Asante as a fully functioning absolutist state, replete with an “extensive reorganization of the military and civilian agencies of government and the creation of new fiscal, diplomatic, and mercantile structures [that] all worked to enlarge state power and to concentrate it in the monarchy”. Arguably, the Asante political processes after 1750 are those of a state dealing with the forces of peripheralization.

Another reason to choose 1750 as a year of demarcation is because Wallerstein already identifies 1750 as the point at which England had essentially succeeded Dutch hegemony. It is also the world economic upsurge of the mid-eighteenth century that Wallerstein identifies as beginning the true peripheralization of the external arena, though initially limited to the most “economically promising”

³³ Wallerstein (1974: 256-7) discusses how relative insulation can provide an optimal environment for development. Wallerstein, however, is discussing the rise of England’s position in the world-economy during the long sixteenth century, yet appears not to extend the same consideration to non-European states later. The parallel with Asante is manifest: “The English state machinery was just strong enough to fend off baneful outside influences, but still weak enough not to give too great an edge either to ‘traditionalist’ elements or to the new parasites of the state bureaucracy, so that neither the one nor the other were able to eat up totally the surplus of the most productive forces. In short, it was a question of optimal position: relative political insulation while having the economic advantages of the world economy, a relative balance of forces internally which maximized internal peace, but minimized the errors of an overbearing state machinery” (257).

³⁴ See Fynn (1971: 57-83) for a more complete recitation of events under Opoku Ware (1720-1750).

areas such as India and Indonesia. By emphasizing the European half of the economic equation, Wallerstein neglects other areas that are conclusively part of the world-economy by this time, in particular West Africa. The truth of this is evident if one examines a third factor that contributes to linking West Africa to the larger world economy: sugar and slaves.

Wallerstein is perfectly clear in recognizing the importance sugar has for the global economy in the first half of the eighteenth century, but he fails to make the logical development of extending this relationship to include Africa. Labor is simply left out of the equation. The relationship between sugar, slavery and African commerce is sufficiently intertwined that to speak of a Caribbean economy or an Atlantic economy is to speak of Asante-British involvement on the coast of Africa. Wallerstein notes that “Britain clearly dominated world commerce in sugar as of 1700, but by 1750 primacy had passed to France”, though “[w]hat Britain lost on the sugar trade, she made up elsewhere – and first of all, on the slave trade” (Wallerstein 1980:270). To this end, no achievement was as important as the British assumption of the Spanish *Asiento* in 1713. Gained in the negotiations of the Treaty of Utrecht, this gave the British South Sea Company exclusive rights to import 4800 slaves annually to Spanish America for 30 years (1980: 255). This is in addition to the flow of slaves draining into British, French and Dutch sugar plantations, all of which produced “the commodity which occupied top place in terms of the total value of the transactions in international commerce” (Wallerstein 1980: 270 f166 citing Friginals).

On the coast of Africa this meant that European traders were perfectly willing to support Asante military expansion, as they had long relied on inland conflict as a source of slaves for coastal markets. In return, this provided a market for Europe’s ‘finished goods’, particularly firearms. Foster (1976: 431, parenthetical in original) notes that “at the height of the eighteenth-century slave trade, Birmingham (England) gunsmiths alone were exporting muskets to Africa at the rate of between 100,000 and 150,000 a year”. In the end, Asante military activity occasionally interrupted the flow of gold to the coastal markets, but this was made up for by a flow of captives for sale as slaves. Daaku (1970: 19) concurs, noting:

The greatest single disintegrating force in politics was the importation of firearms. These weapons were used to pursue policies of territorial aggrandizement, which in turn fed the slave marts with the victims of wars and raids. Whether there were wars or peace, the end-product was commercially profitable, as wars produced slaves, while gold could be worked in peacetime. But although all the trading companies desired gold, the emphasis gradually came to be placed on slaves.

Either way, the region was part of the larger world-economy by the 1750s, though the important economic, social and political changes that made this possible occurred over the preceding hundreds of years.

IV. Incorporation & Protoglobalization

What can we say about the overall process of incorporation and the experience of the Asante in West Africa? First, it is clear that the process is longer and more involved than initially thought. But using the typography of incorporation previously discussed, incorporation can be broken apart in order to gain a bit more intellectual leverage on the process as a whole. Recall, incorporation is actually a series of processes that overlay changes in temporal states of being, all of which can be tentatively situated by using key signaling events that occur in the processes of interaction. Taken as a whole, the modified typography follows.

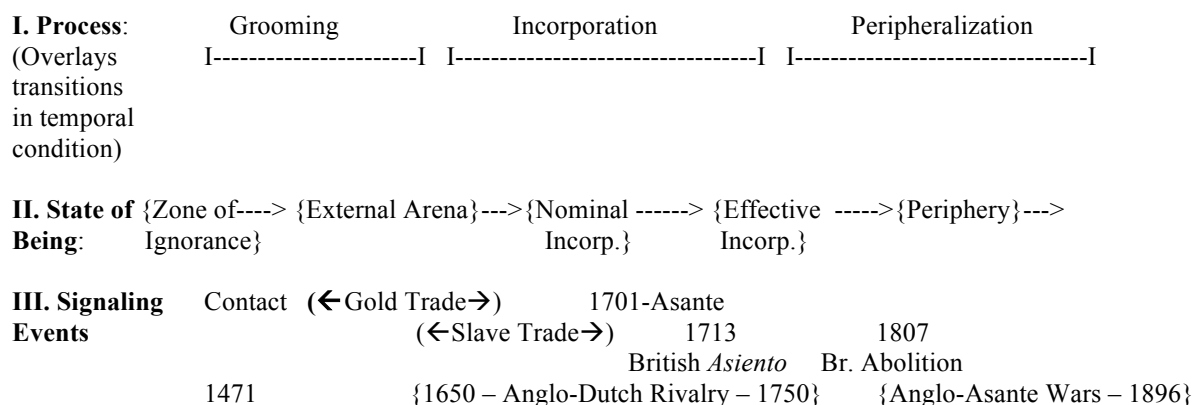


Plate 3.15: Asante Incorporation. Typography of Incorporation, adapted from Carlson (1999:30; 2001: 249).

The ‘grooming process’ is initiated with Portuguese contact on the coast of Africa, though the region was certainly linked to the Mediterranean economy prior to this via the trans-Saharan trade networks. Nevertheless, more direct trade is initiated by Portuguese expansion and can be used as a hard date of systemic involvement, not only because of the tremendous impact the discovery had on the European system but because of the societal ‘about face’ experienced by the Africans. The ‘incorporation process’ begins considerably later but well before what Wallerstein would give credit, and is best characterized by the century of Anglo-Dutch rivalry on the Gold Coast; this is the period in which the region was opened up to greater European competition and influence. Accordingly, the actual peripheralization process – the process that corresponds to Wallerstein’s more limited conception of incorporation – occurs after 1750. The period from 1750 until the assimilation of the Asante by the British in 1896 is one of peripheralization and imperial competition (though between a European and African empire), and is beyond the immediate scope of this study.

In considering the early impacts of incorporation, the process is driven initially by bullion linkages. But the relevance of these linkages proves to be far-reaching. In the case of the European powers, the very volume of gold flowing into royal coffers provides evidence that the region was inexorably linked to the expanding world-economy. But for the Africans, this relationship is far more transformative in a literal sense. As previously discussed, the region experienced a population explosion as a result of the agricultural revolution going on in the forestland interior (Wilks 1993), in turn a response to the demands for gold production (Kea 1982). This inland revolution in social and productive processes also results in a literal ‘about face’ for Akan society; no longer is the emphasis on the land-based trans-Saharan trade, but the focus shifts to the coastal-based maritime trade with the Europeans. As Europe transitioned from a Mediterranean focused economy to an Atlantic economy, this transition is mirrored by the Akan peoples of the African interior. Wilks (1993: 119-120) summarizes the chain of causality:

Akan political institutions in their historic form did not evolve gradually out of earlier (familial) forms of authority but were a functional feature of the revolutionary changes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that brought into being the agrarian order. They were as integral a factor in those immense changes as were the matriclans. The latter redistributed people socially, the former redistributed them politically.

Furthermore, the forms of political authority that emerged was “derived from entrepreneurship: from proprietorship over land based on the manipulation of the demands for gold and supplies of labor” (1993: 120).

The African emphasis on entrepreneurship carried on throughout the incorporation process and provides a context in which to understand the gold and slave trade. As an economic element of social change associated with incorporation, Daaku (1970: 20) argues that “the growth of new towns along the coast and the emergence of the new class of wage earners was one of the most significant developments resulting from the change of the direction of the flow of trade from the north to the south.” The ultimate embodiment of this process is the rise of coastal merchant princes such as John Konny and John Kabes. In addition to the merchant princes, the combination of traders, servants, brokers, tradesmen and skilled workers of white, black or mulatto extraction made for a unique entrepreneurial society that was exclusively the consequence of the incorporation process. The rise of the Asante as a nation-state is perhaps the most relevant manifestation of incorporation and the linkages of the Gold Coast to the broader world-system. In fact, I argue that the Asante emergence as a nation and subsequent consolidation runs coincident with the process of incorporation; they are one and the same. The growth of Asante nationalism, whether measured by the establishment of the Golden Stool or the binding phenomenon of the Great Oath, is inexorably reflective of the position of the Gold Coast in the world economy. This is further reflected in the repeated Asante concern with securing trade routes to the coast, which was the primary motivation behind the majority of the Asante wars of expansion and consolidation.³⁵

While the incorporation of West Africa is initiated because of bullion, it is further promoted by the slave trade and the resulting labor linkage of slavery to sugar production. On the Gold Coast, this coincides with the period of Anglo-Dutch rivalry (1650-1750), and is marked by the assumption of the *Asiento* by the British in 1713. Because Britain had an advantageous position in Africa, aided by Dutch hegemonic decline after 1689, England was well situated to take advantage in the explosive growth in the slave trade. Thus, the slave trade serves a dual role; it is both an indicator and mechanism of productive processes being linked to West Africa. Slavery is the third leg to the triangle trade of the Atlantic: slave labor flows to the colonies in the Americas, sugar and rum flows to Europe, and firearms and lesser goods flow to Africa. So the ‘sugar revolution’ after 1650 serves as yet another tipping point for the incorporation of the Asante and the Gold Coast, which further promoted incorporation by 1750. But what of the so-called ‘legitimate trade’ in kola nuts and palm-oil (used as an industrial lubricant) that came after the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807? Again, this is an indication of peripheralization, not incorporation, and is part of a different stage of systemic behavior.

Finally, what of the various ‘networks of interaction’ that allegedly indicate the states of being during the incorporation process? Indeed, the case of the Gold Coast proves intriguing, if only because the information network – as exhibited by cartographic detail and additional source material – barely expanded beyond the coastal region. A combination of factors makes this possible. First, the physical environment was prohibitive of European expansion inland. Second, the political environment was similarly prohibitive; local authorities preciously guarded their status as middlemen

³⁵ The issue of secure trade routes comes up repeatedly in communications relating to European motivations as well as the context of Asante concerns. For example, Yarak (1990: 99) finds that the Dutch, in the immediate aftermath of the Asante-Denkyira War of 1701, “sought the assistance of the Asante king in re-establishing peaceful trade conditions in the forest interior of the Gold Coast; specifically, the Dutch governor asked that the Asantehene ‘bridle’ the southern Akan kingdoms of Twifo and Adom, which had a history of hindering traders who wished to pass through their lands from the interior to the coastal forts.”

and economic powerbrokers. Third, the profits were sufficient to mitigate the need to expand. The trading companies made enough profit, or lost insufficient amounts to the middlemen, to make financing a military conquest unattractive. It is only when faced with declining profits, increased local competition, and the potential of dealing with a monopolistic Asante Empire in the nineteenth century that Britain engages in overt state destruction and interior expansion (*cf.*, Warner 1998, 1999). Though there is some diplomatic exchange and Asante actually begins to appear on contemporary maps, it remains on the fringe of the information network.

This is not to say that the other networks of interaction were similarly limited. Indeed, they could not be if the argument for incorporation is to be sustained. Because of the ‘beneficial isolation’ of the Asante, the Gold Coast provides an interesting case of the information network actually lagging behind the prestige goods network of exchange as well as the bulk goods network. This is complicated by the nature of the primary goods being exchanged: gold and slaves. Both hold a rather unique place for our consideration. Bullion is considered an important indicator of systemic integration, so the region is almost immediately involved with prestige goods exchange from the moment of contact forward. Then with the exportation of hundreds of thousands of people as part of the productive process associated with sugar manufacture, the argument certainly stands that the region is linked to the bulk goods network of production as a source of the supply of labor. Even if not, it should be considered linked as a source of consumption because of the tremendous flow of finished goods (*e.g.*, firearms) flowing into the Gold Coast.

To summarize, the Akan of the forestland interior are immediately part of the PGN at the point of Portuguese contact in 1471, and are arguably part of this network much earlier due to the linkages of the region to the trans-Saharan trading system. Similarly, they are passing from the zone of ignorance to existing on the edge of the external arena. During the period of Anglo-Dutch rivalry (1650-1750), which also corresponds to the ‘sugar revolution’, the region becomes nominally incorporated and is brought into the BGN of production. By the time of Asante consolidation in 1750, the Asante are arguably becoming effectively incorporated in the larger world-system and are beginning to regularly interact in the political-military network. This interaction increases and is manifest in the seven Anglo-Asante Wars of the nineteenth century fought for peripheral dominance, and indicative of the region being in the periphery and associated with the larger process of systemic peripheralization. All in all, the entire incorporation process is much more complex and begins much earlier than originally conceptualized.

Elements of protoglobalization are readily apparent, and the process of incorporation is more appropriately seen as part and parcel of “globalization”. The process of the systemic incorporation of the Asante in West Africa includes all the elements of protoglobalization: economic, socio-cultural, political, and environmental. Economically, the region was linked through finance (bullion) and labor (slaves) of the world system. Development of supply routes and control over those routes gave rise to the Great Road system of the Asante, and provided the impetus for the rise of the state itself. Small fishing villages become robust trade hubs. The presence of international trading companies acting as ‘quasi-states’ beyond the limits of state control readily mirrors critiques of modern multinational corporations. The West India Company had a monopoly on official trade, was able to raise a private army, engage in treaty making, and basically act as an independent government.

The interaction between economic activity and state building is particularly evident in the creation of the Asante Kingdom. The introduction of firearms and trade wealth alters alliance structures and patterns of power, gives rise to coastal trading kingdoms, and ultimately results in the wars of consolidation and expansion of the Asante. Even before this there is social and cultural upheaval, as the African interior undergoes the ‘socioeconomic revolution’ and ‘about face’ associated with gold

extraction. The shift to organized agriculture led to a demographic explosion, which coupled with the flow of slaves into the region, led to the innovation of matrilineal decent patterns as a means of absorbing newcomers into Akan society.

Environmentally, disease vectors favored the Africans and play a key role in why the Asante were able to develop without ready intervention by the European powers. The tse-tse fly similarly helped keep large animals from being effective, forcing an emphasis on human labor, both slave and free. This valuable resource – human labor – is depleted just as we have seen with other resources, as later reports of slavers indicate that stretches of the African coastline in the prime slave-catching areas were entirely depopulated. Part from ‘over use’ and partly because it became a survival strategy for Africans to move away from the coast, either way indicates a depletion of the resource.

Agriculturally, we see the introduction of new food crops as being beneficial to the subsequent population explosion, and the indigenous peoples altered patterns to utilize mixed forest-farm production, engaging in considerable forest clearing.

While the story of the Asante Kingdom is one of considerable change, it is also an interesting case because we are presented with an indigenous polity that is able to resist the encroachment of European authority and deal with European agents as political equals. The story of the Asante is a good case of ‘negotiated peripherality’, since Asante sovereignty over much of the Gold Coast was firmly recognized by 1817. It would take almost a hundred years until the Asante territories would become part of the British Gold Coast colony. So the story of Asante rise and rule, which can be roughly dated from 1701, is a story of systemic engagement, negotiation, and resistance. It is also a story that bears many similarities to the modern debates on globalization, but it is not the only African case that we will peruse. Nor is it the only case where a strong external state was able to exert its own preferences, if only for a while. Additional cases, on Ethiopia and Japan, offer additional insight into the processes of systemic expansion, incorporation, and the nascent forces of protoglobalization.

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