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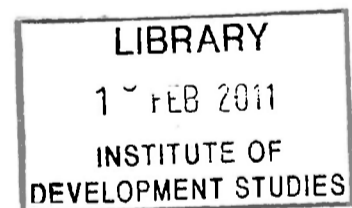
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THE WEST AFRICAN SLAVE INDUSTRY

By

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By

T.C.I. RYAN

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to trace the response of the West African Slave Industry to changing economics and political circumstances during the years 1441 to 1850.

It concludes that the adaptations found in the structure and techniques of the industry depict a strong economic rationale, and that the African merchants on the Coast were able to, and did in fact, exploit their market power over both suppliers from the interior and Trans-Atlantic shippers.

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PREAMBLE

I would like to make my own the following quotation
from a recent Doctoral thesis:^a

"... it seems necessary to point out that this thesis is a study of economic history and not a study of morality. This last point seems of some importance because so many of the present as well as past scholars working in the area of the slave trade have felt compelled to continuously reassert their conviction that the institution of slavery was morally reprehensible. Not infrequently the issue of morality may still be detectable even in the conclusions of modern historical analysts.^b Hopefully, it will be enough for this author to assert once, now, that he believes slavery to be an immoral institution. In the rest of this study we shall try to approach and analyze the Atlantic slave trade in much the same manner and with much the same tools that would have been used in a study of, say, the twentieth century home construction industry."

SCOPE:

In describing the slave producing industry this paper will restrict itself to the West African Coast during the four hundred years 1450-1850. The description of the slave market will be similarly limited. Thus significant exclusions will be East and Central African production and the New World, the Indian Ocean as well as the Trans-Saharan markets.

PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

The earliest records,¹ 1441, show the Portuguese raiding for slaves but by 1446 they were already buying them.² Periodic raiding by European captains—for example Hawkins's much publicised voyages³—seems to have gone on through the remainder of the fifteenth century and up through the next two hundred years. This never seems to have been a successful source of long run supply since coastal resources were soon exhausted and, much more important, it upset the more stable supply lines.⁴ (Interestingly the kidnapping of leaders led to their being ransomed in slaves⁵).

During these years the European nations were struggling for supremacy in many spheres. These conflicts were carried to Africa where the Portuguese, Dutch, British, Danes and French vied for control of sections of the coast, establishing monopoly companies and lending naval support to resist competition.⁶ This period also saw attempts by the Europeans to enter the African interior firstly in quest of gold then later seeking general merchandise: gum, ivory etc., but mainly slaves.⁷

The Portuguese alone made any permanent inroads, first to the North of El Mina (which the Dutch captured in 1641 but they failed to replace the Portuguese in the interior) then later in Congo/Angola. The Portuguese establishments were not mere factories but colonies - initially peopled largely by transported convicts.⁸ Furthermore the Portuguese were the first to obtain significant plantation demands for slaves on the plantations in the island of St. Tome.⁹

The efforts of the other nations to enter the other stages of the slave industry were repulsed by the local rulers by force¹⁰ - even Portuguese endeavours were curtailed - and much more significantly, by disease.¹¹ Europeans seem to have rapidly succumbed to the many new diseases of Africa - particularly malaria (fever). One reason for Portuguese perseverance in Malemba was its relatively more healthy climate.¹²

Over the four hundred years under consideration between eleven and thirteen million slaves were probably shipped from the West African Coast.¹³ As many as 5,000 seem to have been sold annually for fairly long periods from very limited areas, even the same port.¹⁴ (The term "port" is not used with its normal meaning but it rather connotes a coastal town) This indicates some organisation, which, since there is ample evidence of successful opposition to European intrusion, must have been predominantly indigenous.

As with the European kidnapping, there was a period of haphazard production when Africans kidnapping other Africans seems to have been the form of production.¹⁵ This does not appear significant since it was soon realised that ships, with the greatly desired trade goods, would only call on a regular basis if there was some guarantee of a steady supply of slaves from any particular location.¹⁶ Initially the European forts with their stock of trade goods to buy slaves at all times and barracoons for storing slaves made for stability of supply;¹⁷ but the rulers who permitted the construction of these castles made sure they were never so strong as to be independent of their hinterland e.g. they could not enclose a spring.¹⁸ And the sole effective reply that the Europeans had was 'to threaten to close their fort and so withdraw the supply of trade goods.'¹⁹

Since man-stealing was forbidden by most tribes' laws²⁰ some other technique of production soon came to the fore. (An interesting etymological note is that the word "to kidnap" throughout West Africa was "panyar" which came from the Portuguese apanar which meant "to gather along the way").

Towns would raid other towns, petty leaders conduct marauding raids on the neighbouring countryside and, in general, efforts to produce small parcels of slaves by capture became common. Not surprisingly, the consequences of this were wholly undesirable. Local resources were being rapidly depleted, possible death or capture of the raiders added risk and cost to the enterprise and ship-load quantities, say 300 slaves, were very hard to generate at any one location.²¹

Furthermore there were obvious economies of scale. Larger warrior bands were more productive, larger trading units had a larger catchment area - probably the problem of relationship with a neighbouring village somewhat curtailed the "robber-barons", a problem that did not arise when the natural unit of the tribe was considered, moreover the tribal leader was more powerful and therefore more efficient since all followed him - somewhat analagous to the scarce entrepreneurial skills of man management and leadership.

The idea of tribal war as a source of slaves seems to dominate other technologies from the closing years of the 1600s to midway through the 1700s.²² These were extremely productive years but the technology was not without serious short-comings. A successful war was likely to flood the market and depress the price.²³ This led to the need for an acceptable storage technique.

On the one hand some slaves were "reinvested" i.e. absorbed by the conquering nation into its army²⁴, while on the other hand there were held as workers on coastal farms where they at least, paid for their own subsistence up-keep.²⁵ The topic of the opportunity cost of slave labour is considered elsewhere.²⁶

As might be expected areas that were subject to occasional inundations with captives produced storage facilities. A "foreign" captive was unlikely to escape because of differences in language, physiognomy etc.²⁷

Those areas would also be expected to take into consideration the seasonal demand for slaves since ships could not load all the year round because of the heavy surf during the stormy season.²⁸

The European factories found off season slaves cheaper to buy but then they had to pay storage until ships came—and then, unless the ships were company vessels, that had to buy from them, they had to sell in competition with the African middlemen.

The forts did have some advantage in that they provided an organisation for speedy delivery of large numbers. All the evidence points to the fact that captains were prepared to pay a premium for rapid delivery,²⁹ since slave and crew mortality seem to have depended (among other things) on the length of time the ships lay at the coast.³⁰ Moreover demurrage rates were high—from £2 10s to £6 per day in late 1600s— which encourage rapid loading.³¹

Obviously the availability of an alternative to selling slaves for the African middlemen made it easier for them to exploit the European captains. There are cases of them luring ship to ports with the offer of cheap slaves and then, having partially filled the ship's complement slowing down delivery till the price rose.³² Other cases record actual withdrawal of slaves from sale,³³ while elsewhere it is recounted that middlemen were able to delay delivery when a ship seemed in a strong bargaining position for lack of competition³⁴ until its stock of trade goods was depleted on wood, food and water which were the normal coastal requirements.

Further advantages which accrued to the slave producing nation were that it obtained guns and powder in amongst the trade goods. With these it was enabled to expand its political activities in the hinterland. It could even chose between continuing as a direct producer or specialise in middleman brokerage activity. The latter alternative came available for several reasons. If the nation became strong so that

it could dominate the inland paths it could affect supplies to its coastal outlets.³⁵ Furthermore if it could throw off the thralldom of some other kingdom as in the case of Dahomey and Ardre.³⁶

There seem to have been well established slave marts in the interior,³⁷ these provided a convenient alternative to war as a source of bulk supply, without the additional cost of storage. It is not clear what the supply to these marks depended upon, but it is recorded that some slaves came to them from small " producers"³⁸. It would appear that there was no general technique for taking slaves down to the Coast. Some caravans-coffles- were privately organised by inland traders,³⁹ while others were financed and run by the coastal brokers.⁴⁰ In either case there were obviously transit costs of food and policing. Although there is a record of a caravan leader saying he fed his slaves little in transit so as to weaken them and lower escape risks⁴¹, there is also evidence that coffles preyed upon each other so there were definite advantages to scale⁴² (till the caravans must have looked-and behaved at times- like small war parties). A further advantage of scale-power-was that a large bellicose coffle was less likely to be bothered by irksome transit taxes, and fines as they came along the forest paths through minor states.⁴³

In general traders from the interior were kept in ignorance of market conditions on the coast.⁴⁴ They were obliged to sell their stock of slaves some miles from the sea.⁴⁵

Yet a further type of slave production seems to have become significant in the latter part of the 1700s and into the 1800s. Rulers were able to generate at will a flow of slaves by passing laws to trap the unwary then inflicting slavery as a penalty on the guilty.⁴⁶ Another common form of this was to send ones wives out into the surrounding villages and when a ship came in to do a circuit of the villages and harvest all those whom the wives accused of molesting them.⁴⁷ These were the so called women palavers (again from the Portuguese palavra, "a word")

Like this use of law, the priests of the fetishes were able to convict visitors from the country for infringing rules, for causing ill etc. and so provide a steady flow of captives without incurring costs.⁴⁸ Since these were local captives they had to be sold off to ships immediately if there were not to be a great risk of escape.

These "legal" techniques provided some three to ten slaves per day which did not represent a great dislocation in society. Yet this was sufficient to attract ships.

Conveniently the season which was unsuitable for ships to come to the coast was also a time when labour was used on the land.⁴⁹ Thus wars could be seasonal, like in Dahomey⁵⁰, other slaves could be used on farms before export, and the likelihood of country folk coming to town when ships were in was larger.

MARKET FORMS:

It is hypothesised that the African slave trade was transacted in an imperfect market where the main market power was in the hands of the middlemen on the African Coast.

There are two stages to this hypothesis that require proof: firstly the imperfection of the market and secondly the location of market power, should the market prove imperfect.

A perfect market is one in which there are large numbers of buyers and sellers each so small that any one, acting independently, is unable to affect the price. There is an homogeneous product and buyers and sellers have equal (and perfect) knowledge. There must be no restriction of entry into the industry.

As a consequence of perfect competition we would expect to observe firms making occasional short run excess profits but for most of the time normal profits would be the return to entrepreneurs in the industry. (This is not a sufficient condition for competition since it also might occur in monopolistic competition). Where techniques were changing we would probably encounter a considerable turn over of firms.

NUMBER OF BUYERS:

Firstly we might consider the buyers—the shippers. Although nations and companies attempted to obtain monopolies of certain sections of the African coastline the mere fact that there was a stream of legislation against interlopers indicates that competitive behaviour seemed the norm.⁵¹ Furthermore the turnover of personnel among the captains and shipowners⁵² seemed to indicate both profit margins were not excessive⁵³ (although occasional very high returns were recorded⁵⁴) and entry was easy.

Although companies set up factories on the African coast which favoured their own vessels slaves were available, usually cheaper, from other sources which favoured the interloper. The failure of the companies to make long run profits is indicated in the following records:-

Donnan records the failure of both the first and second Companies of Senegal under the French.⁵⁵

Zook chronicals the failure of the English Company of Royal Adventurers trading into Africa.⁵⁶

Davies recounts the rise and fall of the Royal African Company.⁵⁷

Unger records voyage by voyage, the fate of the Middleburgsche Commercie Compagnie.⁵⁸

Westergaard recounts the story of Danish efforts to profit from the trade and their final failure.⁵⁹

The general failure to profit from the Asiento, to supply slaves to the Spanish New World colonies is told in many places, Bandinel might be used as a source.⁶⁰

Besides these there are records of bankruptcies of individuals and occasional efforts at examinations of profits from surviving records.⁶¹

(It should be noted that the cause of losses was not necessarily attributable to competition but often to wars and high risks with low financial reserves.)

Some element of monopoly was granted to the holder of the privilege of supplying the Spanish American dominions the Asiento.⁶² But, since the asiento was a contract to supply a certain number of slaves at a fixed price it was not an exploitable monopoly. Its benefits lay more in the fact it enable its possessor to bring a ship into the Spanish held ports which usually meant an opportunity for smuggling and to obtain gold, which was at a premium in the merchantilist-dominated world.⁶³ Again the evidence indicates the asiento was unremunerative.⁶⁴ No one renewed, even though many contested for each new one, and England thought she had gained a major object when she got her first asiento in the Treaty of Utrecht.⁶⁵

Other slaves were sold at fixed prices or auctions in the sugar islands, arrangements that were unlikely to lead to profit for the shippers. The West Indies lobby in England saw to it that the price was not fixed too high.⁶⁶

On the African coast the common features seems to have been the captains were price-takers. Sometimes they bought from stocks held in a fort's barracomm on other occasions they bought following negotiations with the local ruler on price.

There are many instructions that can be cited on European merchants telling their captains to try and avoid competition with fellow captains on the coast even to setting up a ring.⁶⁷ But as many cases and more can be cited of the failure of these strategies. The middlemen were able to frustrate these efforts by delays (including holding up a ship until competition arrived⁶⁸) and even by force of arms.⁶⁹

Such treaties as granted national monopolies to enslave from some area were weakened by the presence of alternate loading places and by competition amongst the shippers of that nation. It seems that the French alone were able to enforce their monopoly to parts of the windward coast but even so there was competition between the shippers of Nantes, Havre etc.⁷⁰

Once one considers the peak period of the slave trade, the eighteenth century, it is apparent that all captains were completing--there were even efforts to open New World markets to free trade.⁷¹

There were, of course, occasional large profits to be made. Sometimes these arose from an exceptionally fortunate voyage with few deaths, on other occasions from advantageous prices in Africa.

PRICE DETERMINATION.

The slave price in Africa was normally of two stages, firstly a price in terms of the local unit of account was negotiated then the rate of exchange of trade goods into that unit.⁷² The unit of account in most cases was fictitious so there is the appearance of barter but the real profits and losses seem to have arisen on the basis of the assortment--"sorting"--the ship carried.

As captain John Atkins remarked in 1737 "coin is the dearest way of buying, at distance from Europe."⁷³ Or Thomas Clarke to the Royal African Company wrote in 1678 "..... if wee had good goods by us..... wee need nor to Lower the Prices. There was a necessity for it otherwise the Ship must a gon away with halfe her Slaves."⁷⁴

If the European nation were fortunate enough to have a monopoly of some particularly desirable trade good its ship might be able to have some advantage over others. French brandy⁷⁵, Danish guns⁷⁶, Brazilian tobacco⁷⁷ etc. at various times seem to have been significant in this role. Hence the European nations' trade laws affected competition in Africa. The French allowed shippers to buy Dutch goods which otherwise would have been taxed,⁷⁸ the Portuguese were forbidden for many years (till 1760) to trade with guns⁷⁹, the English too traded with their enemies in quest of equalising advantages in Africa.⁸⁰

Naturally enough a market between shippers and forts in trade goods sprung up in the African roads.⁸¹ Several consequences are worth commenting without being directly relevant to the slave trade. Since the African market at any

one location was thin for any particular trade good shippers sailing with similar cargoes raced each other on the voyage to Africa or tried to keep their sailing date a secret so as not to be frustrated by finding a saturated market for their good on arrival.⁸² Surpluses could be sold to or left with forts. Also in the post-abolition years shippers from lands where slavery was illegal came to Africa and bought European goods, giving in exchange goods desired by the participants of the slave trade.⁸³

Since profit was often to be got by exploiting ignorance captains attempted to raise the price of their more tinselled goods far above their prime cost but it would appear from the following quote from Daniel Defoe that the competitive pressure was such that even this advantage was soon lost.

"The trade carried on here, (the West Coast of Africa), whether by the English, or other European nations, consists in but three capital Articles, viz., Slaves, Teeth, and Gold; a very gainful and advantageous Commerce, especially as it was once carried on, when these were all purchas'd at low Rates from the Savages; and even those low Rates paid in Trifles and Toys, such as Knives and Sissars (sic), Kettles and Clouts, Glass Beads, and Cowries, Things of the smallest Value, and as we may say next to nothing; but even this Part of the Trade is abated in its Goodness, since by the Strife and Envy among the traders, we have had the Folly to instruct the Savages in the Value of their own Goods, and inform them of the Cheapness of our own; endeavouring to supplant one another, by underselling and over bidding, by which we have taught the Negroes to supplant both, by holding up the Prices of their own Productions, and running down the Rates of what we carry them for Sale"⁸⁴

Describing the situation in Tres Puntas, John Atkins wrote in 1737 about John Conny, the cabocero.

" He has engrossed by his riches and power, the Trade of the place, and by that means has reduced the Traders profits to 20 per cent. A disadvantage they themselves have contributed to in some measure by under-selling one another".⁸⁵

In reviewing the lists of trade goods sent and recommended, there is little evidence of the geegaws, beads, and trinkets beloved of the critics of European trade with " primitive" (their word) peoples. One finds instead : cloth, iron bars, bowls, guns, powder, rum and a multitude of manufactured goods.⁸⁶ There were of course some braided coats and brilliant items to flatter the vanity of rulers, usually as gifts (dashes).⁸⁷

Besides trade goods, particularly in the latter periods of the trade, captains were in many cases obliged to pay some portion in "cash" i.e. gold⁸⁸ or cowries⁸⁹ according to location. These items were expensive, and in the case of gold-since it was a necessary item-it gave an advantage to nations or traders with a source of gold. Particularly of note is the claim that the governors of forts got gold in the daily retail trade so they were:-

" enabled to provide this part of the assorted required in the purchase of a slave or an easier rate, and to dispatch their ships off the coasts with full cargoes much more expeditiously than the private merchant can".⁹⁰

Although, earlier it has been stated that prices were negotiated, they were in the end analysis, set and promulgated by the local ruler. The captain was unable to buy any slaves at all without permission of the ruler nor was the published price open to further debate with slave selling citizens.⁹¹ And as Priestley notes:-

The Anti couldimpose severe limitation on freedom of action and trading manoeuverability of a private settler as well as on the Governor of a fort".⁹²

So it seems the factories fared no better than the captains. Sometimes in the later years captains on reaching their African destination found no slaves available so they would advance trade goods on credit to African middlemen who would then set off to the interior and buy them.⁹³ Sometimes the captain would continue down the coast in quest of other supplies, there is a case, one cannot tell how general a situation it described, when the captain returned he found the middleman had sold the slaves to another ship (getting, presumably, a premium for rapid loading) and repaid his financier in trade goods.⁹⁴ Captains who hoped to get an advantage from binding a supplier by keeping him in debt found that they were more likely to lose their loan and their supplier since he would be reluctant to have dealings with his creditor.⁹⁵ Truly a case of "neither a borrow nor a lender be for loan oft loses both itself and friend..."⁹⁶

NUMBER OF SELLERS:

This paper has argued supplies might come from stocks, from personal production or from purchases from others—coffles and marts. Stocks required storage facilities either as barracoons, slave villages or farms, all of which must have been expensive. (This is not to suggest that there was a free market for land but it was a form of holding wealth).

Personal production required a warrior band or army, control of a fetish, a number of wives or political power. Again the scale of operation debarred all but a few wealthy, powerful leaders in any area.

To run ones own collecting organisation required maybe canoes, guards, porters to take trade goods into the interior and weapons. To rely on purchases from coffles from the interior one needed to be able both to stop them from going elsewhere along the coast⁹⁷ and also to stop them from getting into direct contact with the final buyer, the sea-captain.⁹⁸ Once more one must conclude that the middlemen required capital and power (maybe better stated as "economic and political power") to take advantages of the trade opportunities of the later years.

It is therefore unlikely that the "many sellers" requirement of perfect competition held.

If the middlemen made excess profits there must have been some way of curtailing entry. An interesting suggestion is that their profits were the sum of slave profits and tax revenues. By keeping slave prices down they made it unprofitable for new entrants who could not get tax revenues.⁹⁹ It would then be a matter of competition among the few where taxes and compulsory gifts-bribes, dashes or what you will-made the profit.

" Serin Donso, the most famous broker on the river (GAMBIA), lived at Cower. An old man, he exercised so much authority over the merchants trading at Cower that it was useless for a separate trader to expect a cargo of slaves until he had been squared. In 1734 he became so exacting that the separate traders withdrew in protest to Yanimarew (Niani Maru) up the river and persuaded the merchants to bring their slaves to them there-a manoeuvre that was almost the cause of a war between the King of Yani and the King of Barsally, who naturally resented the loss of trade".¹⁰⁰

The same story can be told of the legitimate trade, in a letter in 1809 a New England captain, Samuel Swan complained:-

" The rivalship of Traders has raised raised (sic) the prices of of (sic) produce and lessened the value of Goods so much it is now better to buy of the factors (European 'Factories'). The delay of a large vessell trading with the Natives is of more value than the difference of expence in purchasing of the whites, nor is the first cost ultimately much cheaper from the Dashes, or presents, made to the Kings and trade men being so much increased by competitors".¹⁰¹

As can be seen from the above quotations taxes could be raised to marginal levels. In fact it seems that various areas lost their customers by excessive taxation¹⁰³. Ships were able to shop along the coast and it is significant that the main centre for loading slaves along the Slave Coast gradually shifted over the years Eastwards.¹⁰⁴

It would also appear that rulers used tax changes to attract customers in lean years.¹⁰²

HOMOGENEITY

Elsewhere I have discussed the significance of the mortality-proneness of slaves from different areas¹⁰⁵. This characteristic which shall be termed "fragility", would seem to have made slaves non-homogeneous goods. It is certain that they were recognised by ships'-captains and plantation owners alike as having very different qualities. These ranged from docility, to stubbornness from fragility to healthiness, even beauty was considered. Relative prices in the New World and in Africa embodied these prejudices. But the very fact that relative prices did take cognisance of these facts can be interpreted that some abstract slave equivalent were really being considered. Palanyi's comments about barter in Dahomey would be explained in this light¹⁰⁶, of course, the whole system of classing slaves in the New World as pieces d'Indes¹⁰⁷ would strengthen this argument.

MARKET FOR INPUTS.

Earlier it was argued that coffles from the interior needed to be a certain size to be viable. Little evidence remains on who were the caravan captains but they must have represented a threat to the profits of the coastal middleman¹⁰⁸ if they could ever gain access to the coast. Apart from anything else the coastal rulers wished to control the movement of guns and powder into the interior where they might represent a threat.¹⁰⁹ The middlemen tried to keep the operators inland in ignorance of coastal conditions just as they deceived the Europeans with tales of dangers inland.¹¹⁰ As Falconbridge notes,

"extreme care taken by the black traders to prevent the European from gaining any intelligence of their modes of proceeding."¹¹¹

In cases where the hinterland was not under the control of the port ruler or his allies caravans were flexible in route. Thus coffles went North of the Portuguese at Luanda to the French and English traders at Loango;¹¹² caravans too, were diverted in their trek to the Gold Coast ports by potential gains elsewhere.¹¹³

Interesting this mobility was even exploited by the coastal entrepreneurs who were known to have brought in lower quality (cheaper) slaves from some poorer area to sell as premium slaves through their outlet which had a reputation for dealing in slaves of a certain calibre.

The follow from the examination of Mr. Coghlan, merchant of London before the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations in 1777 might be cited in evidence.

" Do you know whether at any time since 1758, slaves bought from other parts of the Coast of Africa to the Gold Coast have been sold there as GoldCoast slaves?.

Yes, it was a fraud to which inexperienced people were liable, and within the period of enquiry 42 Gaboon slaves were sold to one of my captains in that trade as Gold Coast slaves, out of which number the captain buried 40 before his arrival in the West Indies".¹¹⁴

The direction of caravans seems to have been influenced by market prices because there is evidence that other markets suffered shortages while the Trans-Atlantic trade flourished,¹¹⁵ The fact that lower price markets were satisfied after the New World markets were closed cannot be taken as necessary evidence that coastal prices represented high caravan profits. Rather it seems higher costs required higher prices and European goods were more attractive (guns were available) than trade items of equal value in traditional markets.¹¹⁶

PROFIT LEVELS:

One might have expected from an established industry which had endured so long some evidence of wealth accretion by those whom, this paper has argued, profited by the traffic.

Obviously wars which overthrew regimes would account for some absence of evidence.¹¹⁷ But we might also cite the system of matrilineal inheritance as not being conducive to cumulating economic power from one generation to the next.¹¹⁸

Besides as Daaku has remarked:-

" Given the Akan conception that a man's true greatness has not in the acquisition but the disbursement of wealth....." ¹¹⁹

It is not surprising that family fortunes did not necessarily accumulate.

There is the case of the very powerful mulatto families which might lend support to this hypothesis. Being mulattos they could not inherit under tribal law but nor were they obliged to obey it in their bequests and succession. Since they were often the children of European traders and ruler's daughters they had the dual advantage in trade of acceptable contacts with the indigeneous population and the language and cultural veneer required by the shippers.¹²⁰

Another mode of circumventing tribal law which has been mentioned in the literature is for the African middleman to marry a slave, and children by her did not come into the traditional scheme of inheritance.¹²¹

Koranic inheritance too did not lead to the same disintegration of property.¹²² Islam had another role to play in this traffic. Muslims would not enslave other Muslims which curtailed proselytism since a too effective apostolate would lead to a depletion of potential slave supplies.¹²⁴ Furthermore in the Catholic colonies of South America Muslim slaves were not acceptable since the infidels might spread heresy to the Indians.¹²⁵

ENTERPRENEURIAL DIFFERENCES

The actual characters of the middlemen emerge from the literature as powerful men.¹²⁶ The rulers and the caboceer were able to take independent stands and play one nation off against another. The "jealously" guarded their privilege and seem to have effectively worked for their classes perpetuation. Their sons were educated in Europ,¹²⁷ their daughters made alliances with traders.¹²⁸ They had the highly desirable skill of literacy - the Islamic scholars are noted as having got posts because of this.¹²⁹

While all that has been described must lead to a picture of market power in the hands of the middlemen, there seems to have been some conflicts which must account for a significant competition.

In industries dominated by a few large firms it is common to find efforts at collusion and non-price competition. In the slave producing industry cases of collusion have not been recorded on the African part¹³⁰ although the European factors appear to have sought some détente despite hostilities abroad.¹³¹

More common for the African states was war and efforts to forcefully curtail activities in competitors.¹³² There were many gains besides more market power from a successful campaign, these may even have been the primary object of the war. More slaves were obtained, maybe more land and even a possible subject state which would pay an annual levy of slaves.

The city states too fought each other and woo-ed European favour with promises of concessions.¹³³

The persistence of this type of competition together with the earlier mentioned fact that loading locations shifted over the years leads to a conclusion that the states may have had market power in the sense that they could charge a price greater than their marginal revenue, but that they probably were producing on the downward sloping section

of their average costs and their profits were constantly threatened by lower taxing neighbours and rising collection costs.

A further significant conflict which is recorded on a few occasions is the clash between the objectives of the African entrepreneurs and the rulers (where these were not the same people). The traders we may assume aimed at some sort of profit maximisation but the rulers' motivations seem to have varied from profit, to power, from slaves for sacrifice to slaves for work on internal operations.¹³⁴ Where the ruler and trader were in conflict, it is certain that the ruler could so affect slave prices as to drive custom away. Interestingly, in Calibar where this seems to have happened, the state was noted to become the centre of the palm oil industry.¹³⁵ It is possible that rulers who did not rely on the trade but nevertheless desired European trade goods might have had greater returns from reinvesting slaves internally than from tax revenue from slave ships.¹³⁶

SUPPRESSION

Little of this paper has been devoted to the post-abolition period i.e. after 1807. This is as much a matter of lack of information as anything. Nevertheless certain lines can be drawn.

Profit margins to shippers appear to have risen spectacularly, but it is felt that the figure of the trade being profitable if two ships in five got through is an exaggerated one¹³⁷ since elsewhere it is recorded that ships which were employed smuggling slaves were often burned on arrival in the West Indies.¹³⁸ This cost would not be in the calculations employed by officials. Even allowing the profit margin the immense risks might account for that as being the minimum required profit.

Among the adaptations were the use of very fast ships¹³⁹- Baltimore clippers-and extremely rapid loading¹⁴⁰-several hundred in a day!-by removing the deck. This meant that barracoon storage¹⁴¹ and minimal haggling on price were necessary. This minimised the risks in blockade running.

Contemporary correspondence also shows that ships seeking legitimate cargoes had to wait when a slaver came into the roadstead,¹⁴² which clearly shows ruler profits were larger from slaves. Furthermore the British had to undertake forceful action to suppress the traffic, which included interestingly, taking Lagos which led to establishing the colony of Nigeria.¹⁴³

CONCLUSION

It has been argued that, although the West African slave industry gained a major impetus from the opening up of New World markets, the European traders came in such numbers and contested for slaves with such great rivalry that although at best, they made huge profits, more typically, their profits were merely adequate.

The slave producing nations strove to attract European ships and adapted their production techniques so as to maximise their gain. In pursuit of this both political and economic strategies were observed.

The middlemen, rulers and merchants, appear to have fixed prices effectively. They were not always able to control the primary production of slaves but seem to have been able to manipulate the supply to the shippers.

Although there were in, all likelihood, a multitude of small slave sellers they were unable to trade without the approval of their ruler and on-at least-the terms he laid down.

The possibility that coastal profits might have been absorbed by primary producers in the interior was considered. Such evidence on interior marts and slave caravans as was examined leads to the conclusion that this was not the case.

We conclude therefore that the West African slave industry changed and grew over the years under review. The adaptations were those that would have been expected in an oligopolistic industry, such as efforts to control supplies, to undermine opponents, and to dictate terms to buyers. We found a development from petty, haphazard raiding up to careful

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harvesting (one is tempted to think of wife-palavers as analagous to cultivation!) We found specialisation developing and efforts at exclusion of competition. And in the end it is probable that the middlemen and rulers whose interests were vested in the slave trade became a wealthy class interested in the continuation of the traffic.

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"The natives (from Accra on the coast) carry those commodities (from ships) to Abonoe market which is four leagues beyond Great Acra northward, for the Accanez people, who resort thither three times a week; as do the Blacks from the country of Abonee, Aquanboe and Aquimera, who all buy those goods of the Acra men, at such rates as they think fit to put on them, the king refusing to permit those strangers to go down themselves to the European warehouses on the coast; for which reason those Blacks pay often double the value for what they buy. The king has there an overseer, who has the power to set the prices on all goods, between buyer and seller".

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in the Americas informed of what ships were on the African coast and when they could be expected.

67. Verger, P., op.cit., p 362.
Postma, J. "Slaving Techniques and Treatment of Slaves. The Dutch Activities on the Guinea Coast" (mimeographed) p.6 From the instruction to captain Ambrose Lace in 1762, sailing from Liverpool (Williams, G., op.cit. p 486). ".....on your arrival at Old Calabar if one or more ships be there you will observe to make an agreement with the Master or Masters so as not to advance the Price on each other....."
68. Martin, P., op.cit., p 93.; Polanyi, K., op.cit., p91;
As Barbot remarks (Donnan, E., Documents I, p 456)
"The rate of slaves is uncertain, as depending on the scarcity or plenty of them, and the number of foreign ships trading there together".
69. From Donnan's excerpt from Phillips's account of the voyage of the "Hannibal" in 1693-4 (p 401):
We find that captains agreed to buy on alternate days to try and keep prices down "the blacks well knowing how to make best use of such opportunities, and as we found make it their business, and endeavour to create and foment misunderstandings and jealousies between commanders, it turning to their great account in the disposal of their slaves." Williams, G. op.cit., p. 481; and Priestley, M., op.cit., p76 record other attempts and failures.
70. Pares, R., op.cit., p 370; Dardel, P., op.cit.; Rinchon, P.D., Le Trafic Négrier, Les Editions Atlas, Bruxelles, 1938, p 25.
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72. Polanyi, K. op.cit., p 49; Saugnier & Brisson, op., cit., pp 213-5.
73. Atkins, J., op.cit., p 112.
74. Donnan, E., Documents I, p 238; See also Rodney, W., History, pp 186-9.
75. Johnson, M., op.cit., p 214.
76. Daaku, K.Y. op.cit., p 149.
77. Birmingham, D., T. & C, p 139, Verger, P., op.cit., p 352.
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of the British West Indies 1700-1763, Archon Books, 1967, p 75 (1st published 1917). The English, too bought goods from the Dutch. Comm. T. & P. 1777 fo. 295.

79. Birmingham, D., T. & C. pp 132, 147.
80. Mayer, B., op. cit., p 135, Bennett N.R., and Brooks G.E., op.cit., p 129. Even the Dutch and Portuguese traded: Birmingham D., T & C., p 107.
81. Priestley, M., op.cit., pp 74-5; Donnan, E., Documents II, pp 520-1, III, pp 194, 224-5, 232-3.
82. Bennett/and Brooks, /op.cit., pp 27, 278, Rodney.W., History, p 135; Donnan, E, Documents III, p 206.
83. Bennett, N.R. and Brooks, G.E., op. cit, p 27
84. Defoe, D., A Plan of the English Commerce, Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1967, p 329 (From 2nd edition 1730) See also Grant, D, op.cit., p 67 and Rodney, W. History, p 148.
85. Atkin, J, op.cit., pp 87-8.
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87. Grant, D. op. cit., pp 167-8.
88. Johnson, M., op.cit., pp 203-4; Falconbridge.A, op.cit., p 54.
89. Donnan, E., Documents I, p 405; Postma, -J., Thesis Appendix D.
90. "Returns from the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations 1777" Accounts and Papers 1777, No. 9 See also Priestley, M. op.cit., p 79.
91. Polanyi, K., op.cit., p 49; Saignier & Brisson, op.cit., p 43. Donnan.E., Documents I, pp 226, 297 and noted as an exception is the daily bargaining in Cabinda p 455. Ryder, A., Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897, Humanity Press, 1969, pp 170-1.
To get some flavour of the feeling of English factors living on the coast in the early 1700s, the following excerpt from a letter from Robert Bleau, agent for the Royal African Company at Cape Coast Castle in 1713 will help:

"..... thus the Fantyns are taught to trade, and by Experience are Expert Merchants, if such a Term may be given to Cunning Tricking Villains, who now give the Law to their Instructors, and make them meanly and basely truckle to them for every Thing, which neither can nor will be desired by the ingenious Part of the Masters, who, I believe, will also own, that the Trade is ruined, and only by themselves, without a Possibility in them to retrieve it, being obliged to submit to the Price put upon both Goods and Slaves by the Natives, who enjoy the Profit of this Trade at the Expence of our Nation..... This letter is preserved in the Kress Library, Harvard, Massachusetts.

92. Priestley, M. op.cit., p 71.
93. Bennett, N.R. and Brooks, G.E., op.cit., p 277; Benezet, A. op. cit., p 95; Dike, K.O. op.cit., p 102, Donnan, E., Documents I, pp 294, 441.
94. Daaku, K.Y. op.cit. p121. Newbury, C.W. "Prices and Profitability in Early Nineteenth Century West African Trade", in C. Meillassoux (ed) The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa, International African Institute, O.U.P., London, 1971, p 99.
95. Daaku, K.Y., op.cit., p 70; Dike, K.O. op.cit., p 89.
96. Shakespear, W., Hamlet-Prince of Denmark, Act I, iii, 75-6
97. Mayer, B, op.cit., p 332; see f.n. 35 above also.
98. See f.n. 45 above.
99. I am indebted to Dr. John Cross for this suggestion.
100. Grant, D., op.cit., p 62 quoting from Francis Moore pp 102-111.
101. Quoted from Bennett, N.R., and Brooks G.E., op.cit., p 50. See also Polanyi, K., op. cit., p 115; Grant, D., op.cit., p 62; Dike, K.O., op.cit., p 67.
102. Donnan, E., Documents I, p 364., Rinchon, P.D., Pierre-Ignace-Lievin van Alstein Capitaine Negrier, Gand 1733-Nantes 1793, IFAN, Dakar, 1964. p 256.
103. Adams, J., op.cit., p 143.
104. Verger, P., op.cit., p 364; Adams, J, op.cit., pp 216-222. Atkins, J., op.cit., p 111 (in 1737), Falconbridge, A., op.cit., p 52 (in 1788).
105. On the whole question of mortality see Ryan, T.C.I., Thesis.

106. Polanyi, K., "Sortings and Ounce Trade in The West Africa Slave Trade", Journal of African History, V, 3(1964) pp 384-5. Polanyi claims trade was on a 1:1 basis and that the seller would compensate the buyer if the slave was inferior, the sorting would remain intact. Profit came though the sorting (the assortment of trade goods exchanged).
107. Boxer, C.R., Port.Soc., p 193, Sperling, J.G. op.cit., p 22.
108. Falconbridge, A., op.cit., p 17; Donnan, E., Documents I, p 433; Polanyi, K., Dahomey and the Slave Trade, p 150. (hereafter D.S.T.).
109. Polanyi, K., D.S.T., p 26; Goody, J., op.cit., p 55. Daaku, K.Y., op.cit., p 164; Rotberg, R.I., op.cit., p 119. Tenkorang, S., "The Importance of Firearms in the Struggle/Ashanti and the Coastal States", Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, IX, 1968, p 3.
- between
110. See f.n. 44 above.
111. Falconbridge, A., op.cit., p 12., see also Dike, K.O. op.cit., p 7.
112. Bennett N.R. and Brooks, G.E. op.cit., p 50; Martin, P., op.cit., p 154. Daaku, K.Y., op.cit., p 136; Birmingham, D. Early African Trade, p 173.
113. Donnan, E., Documents I, pp 294, 440; Comm. T.& P. 1749-50, fo.37-39.
114. Comm. T-& P. 1777, fo.317-8.
115. Miller, J.C., op.cit., pp.181-4; Meillassoux, C., op.cit; p 56. Bovill, E.W. The Golden Trade of the Moors, O.U.P. London, 1968, (2nd edition), p 248.
116. Tenkorang, S., op.cit., p 3.
117. Donnan, E., Documents I, p 287; Accounts & Papers 1777, No. 9 , p 15.
118. Meillassoux, C; op.cit., p 61, Polanyi, K., D.S.T., p 48 comments on taxing inheritance; Vansina, J. Kingdoms of the Savanna, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1966, passim, discusses civil wars for succession. Lloyd, P.C. "Conflict Theory and Yoruba Kingdoms" in I.M., Lewis (ed) History and Social Anthropology, Tavistock Publishers, London, 1968, p 47.,
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120. Rodney, W., History, p 211; Priestley, M., op.cit., p 20, Grant, D., op.cit., p 4.

121. Goody, J., "Succession in Contemporary Africa", Archives Europeenes de Sociologie, X, 1 (1969), p 35. Klein A.N., "West African Unfree Labor Before and After the Rise of the Atlantic Slave Trade", in L. Foner and E.D. Genovese (eds) Slavery in the New World, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1969, p 92.
122. Rodney, W., History, pp 203, 211, 222, 227; Dike, K.O., op.cit., p 36.
124. Meillassoux, C., op.cit., pp 56-7., Mayer, B., op.cit., p 92., Rodney, W. History, p 236.
125. Donnan, E., Documents 1, p 358.
126. Benezet, A., op.cit., p 89 footnotes: "Bardot says the trade of slaves is in more peculiar manner the business of Kings, richmen, and prime merchants exclusive of the inferior sort of black". For examples see: Daaku, K.Y., op.cit., pp 107, 120., Atkins, J., op.cit., p 75; Priestley, M., op.cit., p 13. Adams J; op.cit., p 83.
127. Grant, D; op.cit., p 142., Priestley, M., op.cit., p 20;.
128. Rodney, W., History, p 211., Ward, W.E.P., The Royal Navy and the Slavers, Pantheon Books, New York, 1969, p 70.
129. Donnan, E., Documents 1, p 456; Adams J, op.cit., p 83, Meillassoux, C., op.cit., pp 55 ff., Bennett N.R., and Brooks G.B., op.cit., p 66.
130. There is a suggestion that neighbouring rulers may have agreed to prey upon each other. Rodney, W., History, pp 36, 116.
131. Priestley, M., op.cit., p 76.
132. Postma, J., Thesis, Chapters 5, 6; Rotberg, R.I., op.cit; pp 110 ff.
133. Mackenzie-Grieve, A., op.cit., p 58.
134. Ryder, A., op.cit., p 201; Martin, P., op.cit., pp 156, 159, Ronen, D; op.cit., pp 8 -10.
135. Dike, K.O., op.cit., p 67; Adams, J. op. cit., p 143.
136. Meillassoux, C., op.cit., pp 53-4, 59.
137. Quoted from U.S. Dispatches Xl11 Dec., 14, 1844 and May, 1 1845 in Hill L.F. "Abolition of the African Slave Trade to Brazil", Hispanic American Historical Review, 1931.
138. Mayer, B, op.cit., pp 107, 259. Cairness, J.E., The Slave Power. A.M., Kelley, New York, 1968, p 390. (1st published 1863).

130. Hill, L.F., op.cit. p 192; Mayer, B, op.cit., p.106. Extracts from the Evidence taken before Committees of the two Houses of Parliament relative to the Slave Trade, Negro University Press, New York, 1969, p 92. (1st published 1851). (Hereafter "Extracts"). Chapell, H.I., The Search for Speed under Sail 1700-1855, Norton, 1967., p 297.
140. Chapell, H.I., op.cit., p 301, records 800 loaded in seven hours in 1835. Canot recounts 217 in a day and 1000 in four hours from Gallinas in Mayer, B., op.cit., and - 345 respectively.
141. Mayer, B., op.cit., p 332, Ward, W.E.F., op.cit., p 133.
142. Bennett N.R. and Brooks, G.E., o.cit., pp 106-7; Extracts, p 40.
143. Ward, W.E.F.; op.cit., pp 205 ff., Dike K.O., op.cit., p 85.