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THE SLAVE TRADE FROM THE WINDWARD COAST: THE CASE OF THE DUTCH, 1740–1805¹

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In the rapidly advancing scholarship on African coastal societies in the Atlantic slave trade, the Windward Coast remains a much neglected area.² The only study fully devoted to the slave trade from this region is an article published in 1980 by Adam Jones and Marion Johnson, which critiqued the census data produced by Philip Curtin.³ Jones's and Johnson's commentary ended with a warning that, for lack of historical knowledge of the trade from this part of West Africa, it was still far too early for scholars to produce a meaningful census. "What is needed now is not a slanging match over the totals which Curtin proposed, but detailed analysis of individual regions and indeed of individual ships."⁴ Using the ship records of the Middelburgse Commerce Compagnie (MCC), this paper examines regional patterns of trade between Dutch buyers and African suppliers on the Windward Coast in the second half of the eighteenth century. After losing access to West Africa's more productive slaving zones, around 1740 the Dutch found new markets for slaves on the Windward Coast, where conditions for trade were far less favorable. The archives of the MCC, the largest private slave trading firm in the eighteenth-century Netherlands, document unusual methods of trading in this part of Africa. In most African regions slave trading was concentrated in a limited number of ports, but trade on the Windward Coast was spread out over numerous small embarkation points. Through systematic analysis of the MCC records, this paper highlights the most significant features of this trade and doing so addresses a number of enduring misunderstandings about the economic history of the Windward Coast. First, Kru-speakers formed a considerable part of the slaves the Dutch carried from Africa after 1740, despite the absence of major embarkation points on the Kru Coast. Second, among the Kru slaves were disproportionately high numbers of

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women and children, although the overall ratio of children on board Dutch slave ships was drastically reduced by selective purchasing on the Ivory and Gold Coasts. Third, Cape Lahou, on the eastern Ivory Coast, was by far the most important slaving port for Dutch free traders in West Africa and was, in this period, rivaled only by Malembo on the northern Angolan coast.

I

The significance of the Windward Coast for eighteenth-century slavers from the Netherlands was first acknowledged by Johannes Postma in his pioneering work on the Dutch Atlantic slave trade.⁵ Postma calculated that after 1740, when the West India Company (WIC) had lost its monopoly on the African trade and disengaged from Atlantic slaving, Dutch free traders on the coast of West Africa obtained roughly 70 percent of their slave cargoes on the Windward Coast, while the remaining purchases were completed on the Gold Coast. He further estimated that, overall, the Dutch colonies in the Americas drew roughly 40 percent of their slave labor force from the Windward Coast. Recent calculations based on *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (TSTD2) as well as the data presented in this paper indicate that Postma's findings were largely correct.⁶ However few scholars have thus far recognized the implications of these results for the history of slavery in the Atlantic world, in particular the ascendancy of Kru-speaking groups and Cape Lahou among the African suppliers of slaves to the Dutch Americas.

Postma highlighted the prime position of Lahou on the Windward Coast, an issue taken up by Philip Curtin in his 1975 re-assessment of the volume of the Atlantic slave trade. According to Curtin, the pre-eminence of Lahou was due, first, to its location at the mouth of the partly navigable Bandama River, which gave local trade brokers access to Juula merchant networks in the interior; and, second, to the eighteenth century migration of the Baule (an Akan sub-group), towards the lower Bandama, which by provoking warfare with established Senufo and Guro

communities created a supply of captives for export.⁷ In later years, Curtin linked the Akan expansion into modern Ivory Coast to the creation around 1750 of a new trade route connecting Lahou to Jenne in the Sudan.⁸

Adam Jones and Marion Johnson criticized these explanations. Although they primarily questioned the foundations of Curtin's measurements of eighteenth-century slave exports from the region, they also hinted at flaws in Curtin's historical account of the prominent role of Lahou in the Atlantic trade. Jones and Johnson doubted that a trade route connecting the lower Bandama with the Sudan still existed in the middle of the eighteenth century. By contrast, they reasoned that this route had probably been closed due to the disruptive impact of the Akan migrations. More fundamentally, in their view, there was too little evidence available at the time to sustain the theory that increasing slave exports from the Ivory Coast were the result of state expansion and warfare. "The real origins of slaves were far more complex and varied," they suggested, cheekily referring to the slave narratives collected in Curtin's own *Africa Remembered*.⁹

It will be clear from this paper that the growth of Cape Lahou as a major port in the Atlantic slave trade is a subject in need of further study.¹⁰ The origins of the slaves exported from Lahou may as yet be unknown, but very likely local merchants were able to tap into slave supply networks that were non-existent elsewhere on the Windward Coast. Paradoxically, Curtin, as well as Jones and Johnson, borrowed their views on Juula commerce to the lower Bandama River from the seminal work of Yves Person on the southern savanna region of West Africa.¹¹ Supporting the position taken by Jones and Johnson, Person postulated that the Akan migrations cut off Lahou from access to Sudanese markets deeper inland. However, as pointed out in the final section of this paper, other studies suggest that even if the Baule excluded the Juula merchants from their realm, the former continued the north-south trade connecting the Sudan with the Atlantic coast.

II

The Windward Coast stretched from Cape Mount in the northern corner of modern-day Liberia to Assinie on the eastern border of modern Côte d'Ivoire. This definition of the Windward Coast is the one used in TSTD2 and was first employed by Curtin in his 1969 *Census*.¹² The name refers to the coast's location west, or windward, of the Gold Coast and thus originated from a European outlook on the African coast; for the British and the Dutch on the Gold Coast, windward started where the coastal forts ended.¹³ Paul Lovejoy has recently argued that such a definition has little meaning from an African perspective – and there is no point in denying that – although the Atlantic slave trade was of course created by Europeans and Africans alike.¹⁴ From the perspective of both African and European merchants it would make sense to consider the area around Cape Lahou, the so-called Quaqua Coast, as part of the Gold Coast. The MCC records and other primary sources indicate that, besides slaving, Lahou also participated in the gold trade and Lahou was probably connected to the same commercial networks that supplied the Gold Coast with commodities for export.¹⁵ As this paper will point out, however, trade on the coast west of Lahou was in a number of ways significantly different from other slaving areas in Africa. To facilitate comparison with *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, the regional demarcations originally used by Philip Curtin are maintained.

Much like Sierra Leone to the north, the Windward Coast was an area for which slave traders showed little interest before the eighteenth century. European visitors to West Africa around 1700 observed that exports from the region centered on ivory and did not include slaves. Along the coast from Cape Mount to Cape Palmas, Kru-speaking communities also still exported pepper grains (*Aframomum melegueta*). This region, hence known to Europeans as the Malaguetta or Grain Coast, was furthermore frequented by Atlantic traders in transit to lower Guinea to buy provisions, notably rice, water and firewood. Avoiding the controlled monopoly zones of Britain and the Netherlands on the Gold Coast, interlopers of different nationalities targeted the coast between

Cape Lahou and Assinie to purchase ivory and small amounts of gold dust.¹⁶ These interlopers may have purchased small numbers of slaves as well.¹⁷

Throughout the history of the Atlantic slave trade, no region in Africa supplied fewer slaves to the Americas than the Windward Coast. According to the TSTD2, an estimated total of 337,000 slaves were carried from the Windward Coast, of which 290,000 embarked in the eighteenth century alone. These estimates are much lower than those previously calculated by Curtin, whose latest figure was 530,000 for the period 1711-1800,¹⁸ but much higher than the 143,000 suggested for the eighteenth century by the 1999 slave trade database on CD-ROM.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Windward Coast was the last region in Africa which European merchants opened for transatlantic slaving, although it already had exported pepper to European markets since the late fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century, a small number of slaves were sold to the Portuguese, who also used to carry slaves from the Windward Coast to Elmina.²⁰ During the seventeenth century, just a few European ships appear to have loaded slaves there.²¹ The Windward Coast only started to supply slaves on a significant scale for the Atlantic market after 1700. Slave exports increased in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, while a peak was attained in the third quarter, which was largely due to British activities. Liverpool merchants in particular traded heavily on the northern part of the coast (especially at Cape Mount), often to complement a trade that started in Sierra Leone. As the British withdrew from the trade after 1807, the Windward Coast's function in Atlantic slavery was severely cut. Adding to declining British demand for slaves, another nation with a major stake in the region, the Netherlands, also abandoned the slave trade shortly after 1800.

The Netherlands were, after Britain, the second largest national carrier of slaves from the Windward Coast. In the eighteenth century, Dutch vessels shipped roughly 90,000 slaves from the region, almost all of them destined for the Guyanas. But it is remarkable that the Dutch only began trading slaves on the Windward Coast after 1740, that is, after the WIC had largely withdrawn from the Atlantic trade.²² Whereas

the WIC never had a strong commercial interest in the region, interlopers from Zeeland frequented the Windward Coast when the WIC held a monopoly over the West African trade (which effectively ended in 1734), thereby setting a pattern for the later free traders.²³ The directors of the Zeeland-based MCC were well informed about the interloping activities of the Middelburg and Vlissingen merchants and the African markets in which they operated; in the 1720s they even participated in an illegal trade expedition to the Loango Coast.²⁴

Although Dutch purchases fell far behind those of Britain in terms of volume, no other slave trading nation relied more on the Windward Coast than the Netherlands. Whereas British vessels loaded 6 percent of all slaves they carried across the Atlantic on the Windward Coast, Dutch traders obtained 16 percent of their slave cargoes from this region. In the eighteenth century alone, the Windward Coast accounted for nearly a quarter of all Dutch slave exports from Africa. For Dutch free traders the Windward Coast gained particular importance as by the middle of the eighteenth century British, Portuguese and French merchants had squeezed the Dutch out of the Bight of Biafra and then the Bight of Benin, where some of Africa's most productive slaving ports were located. In places like Old Calabar and Ouidah, large numbers of slaves could be obtained in short spans of time. As business in these regions proved more cost-effective for European traders, it also became competitive, and the Dutch were eventually boxed out.²⁵ Dutch exports from the Bight of Biafra dropped from six thousand slaves in the decade prior to 1670 to two thousand slaves in the decade after; in subsequent years these numbers dwindled even further. For some time the Dutch still maintained a foothold in the Bight of Benin, but after 1740 their slave purchases in this region also collapsed. Seeking new alternatives for the growing plantation colonies in the Guyanas, Dutch traders migrated to the Windward Coast while they also increased their dependence on the Loango Coast and the Gold Coast.

In each of these areas, the Dutch slave trade always centered on a single port. Thus, as the eighteenth century progressed, on the Loango Coast Dutch slavers increasingly concentrated in Malembo. On the Gold

Coast, Elmina emerged as the major center of trade, while on the Windward Coast Cape Lahou was the only major supplier of slaves to the Dutch. Together these three ports accounted for roughly two-thirds of the Dutch slave trade out of Africa between 1730 and 1800.²⁶ It should be emphasized, however, that Lahou and the Gold Coast were part of the same trade route, commonly described as the Dutch “Guinea trade.” On this route, ship captains (or their supercargoes) typically started purchasing slaves on the upper Windward Coast, most often near Cape Mesurado. Then they sailed down along the coast, all the while trading slaves, until they reached Lahou on the Ivory Coast, where most of the purchases were done. Ultimately, the ship’s hold was “filled up” in one or more of the Gold Coast ports. In the 1740s, Axim was often the final port of slave embarkation, followed in the 1750s by Anamabo and Apam, and by Elmina from the 1760s onward. By contrast, Malembo was part of the so-called “Angola trade,” which also included Loango and Cabinda, although in the latter ports the Dutch had far less purchasing power as the century wore on.

III

This study is based on a database of 72 slaving voyages undertaken by the MCC between 1740 and 1802. For each voyage, the database provides the number of slaves purchased at every single embarkation point, with breakdowns for the age and gender characteristics of the slaves. The database also indicates the time vessels spent on the African coast purchasing slaves, as well as slave mortality rates on the coast, during the Middle Passage and after arrival in the Americas. As the largest private slave trading firm in the Netherlands, the MCC organized a total of 114 slaving voyages between 1732 and 1802, all but two of which were carried out between 1740 and 1794.²⁷ Eighty voyages were destined to the Guinea Coast, three to Gabon, and thirty-one to the Loango Coast. The database builds on information taken from the surviving log and/or trade books of 69 Guinea voyages and the three

voyages to Gabon, all located in the provincial archives of Zeeland in Middelburg.²⁸

The database lists 88 different places on the West African coast where MCC vessels purchased slaves. For the purpose of analysis, these ports have been divided into five groups.

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Slave Purchases in the MCC Guinea Trade, 1740–1803 (72 voyages)

Region	Ports	Slaves	Percent	Total Dutch Guinea trade, 1741–1803	TSTD2 estimates
Senegambia & off-shore Atlantic	–	–	–	–	426
Sierra Leone	5	97	0.5	679	829
Windward Coast west of Lahou (Kru Coast)	44	4,520	23.9	31,638	77,867
Cape Lahou	1	7,179	38.0	50,249	
Windward Coast east of Lahou (Quaqua Coast)	9	1,039	5.5	7,272	
Gold Coast	21	5,339	28.2	37,370	48,942
East of Gold Coast	8	735	3.9	5,145	4,715
All regions	88	18,909	100	132,353	132,353

Source: MCC database and David Eltis, David Richardson, Manolo Florentino, and Stephen D. Behrendt, *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (www.slavevoyages.org).

The first group includes five ports in the Sierra Leone region, north of Cape Mount, which accounted for less than one percent of the MCC's

slave trade in West Africa. The second group comprises 44 ports on the Windward Coast from Cape Mount to Little Lahou, a long stretch of coast inhabited by Kru-speaking groups and also known as the Kru coast. Cape Lahou (aka Grand Lahou), which alone accounted for nearly 40 percent of the MCC's slave trade in West Africa, constitutes the third group. The fourth group includes nine ports on the Windward Coast east of Lahou. European merchants named this region the Quaqua coast, which also included Lahou and was famed for its exports of striped cloth.²⁹ The Gold Coast, with 21 ports from Newton to Accra, makes up the fifth group, while eight ports located east of the Volta River form the final group (better known among historians as the Bight of Benin and the Bight of Biafra). None of the MCC vessels in the database purchased slaves in Senegambia.

Table 1 shows the regional distribution of the total number of slaves purchased by the MCC in West Africa. As is clear from this table, the Windward Coast accounted for two-thirds of the MCC's slave exports from Guinea. This figure is representative of the total Dutch slave trade in the free trade era. Extensive consultation of MCC ship journals proves that vessels from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Vlissingen followed the same trading pattern as the MCC ships. We can, therefore, confidently project the regional percentages calculated from the MCC database onto the TSTD2 estimate for the total Dutch slave trade in West Africa between 1741 and 1805. The result, as shown in Table 1, is that the Windward Coast supplied approximately 89,000 slaves to the Dutch in this period, which means 11,000 more slaves than the *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* suggests.

The difference between the MCC database and TSTD2 stems from the fact that the former has not yet been fully integrated in the latter. The *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* consequently underrates the size of the slave trade from Cape Lahou, for which it suggests an estimated total of nearly 15,000 slaves embarked by all national carriers between 1709 and 1820. At the same time, TSTD2 is biased towards Elmina, which in the absence of contrary evidence has been viewed as the main location of slave embarkation in case it was the last port of call on the African coast,

which it often was for Dutch vessels. As a result, the *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* inflates the number of slaves carried from the Gold Coast at the cost of the Windward Coast, where in most cases the majority of slaves was really purchased.

The method of slave procurement proves as important as the numbers. Compared to other regions in Africa, trade on the Windward Coast was following an unusual pattern. Ship captains generally called at different places along the coast (of the 54 identified places of purchase on the Windward Coast, some were almost standard ports of call, whereas others were visited on a less frequent basis) but at most they purchased only small numbers of slaves. Table 2 shows that, except for Cape Lahou, not a single place on the Windward Coast supplied more than seven slaves per voyage. One reason for this seemingly haphazard nature of the trade can be found in the region's geography. This part of the West African coast is characterized by steep beaches, heavy surf, few decent river inlets and a shortage of good anchorages throughout. "For lack of natural harbors," Curtin explains, "trade along this coast was fragmented, divided among many small ports or shipping points."³⁰ Due to the absence of good landing spots, maritime trade had to be ship-based.

The MCC logbooks describe in detail how captains used to stop at several points along the coast, often sailing back and forth, waiting for African traders to come out by canoe or for a smoke signal from land telling there was an opportunity to barter. Alternatively, captains sent boats ashore to collect information about the possibilities of trade. In this "troque au vol" style of trade, Dutch captains sometimes bought a handful of slaves at a single place, but quite often they bought no slaves at all. In exploiting practically all the markets for slaves that existed on the Windward Coast, the Dutch distinguished themselves from British and French buyers, who generally focused on the northern part of the coast (especially Cape Mount and Bassa). The fact that, according to TSTD2, only twenty-four British and eighteen French vessels traded slaves at Cape Lahou throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries is astounding, especially since this port had the capacity to supply the Dutch with an average of 800 slaves per year.

Table 2: Ten Most Important Places of Purchase in the MCC Guinea Trade, 1740–1803 (72 voyages)

Place	Region	Slaves	Slaves/voyage	% of total trade
Cape Lahou	Quaqua coast	7,179	100	38.0
Elmina	Gold Coast	1,996	28	10.6
Axim	Gold Coast	1,111	15	5.9
Anamabo	Gold Coast	554	8	2.9
Kru Settra	Kru coast	501	7	2.6
Apam	Gold Coast	458	6	2.4
Sassandra	Kru coast	451	6	2.4
Cape Mount	Kru coast	416	6	2.2
Grand Bassam	Quaqua coast	408	6	2.2
Rio Cavaly	Kru coast	360	5	1.9
Total		13,434		71.0

Source: MCC database

Equally striking are the irregular age and gender distributions in the different port groups. As Table 3 demonstrates, the share of males among the slaves purchased on the coast west of Lahou was a mere 52 percent; meanwhile children formed an extraordinarily large fraction of the slaves taken from the Kru coast (42 percent). Cape Lahou exported relatively few children, but the female share was still exceptionally high (45 percent). East of Lahou, slave purchases focused increasingly on males and included very few children. Compared to the Atlantic slave trade in general, females were overrepresented in the Guinea trade and children underrepresented, despite the large numerical presence of the latter among the slaves carried from the coast west of Lahou.

On average, the MCC vessels spent 222 days on the African coast buying slaves. The average number of slaves carried per voyage was

269, which translates to a purchase rate of 1.2 slaves per day (which was similar to daily loading rates of Liverpool ships trading on the Windward Coast). One would expect that the long trading time in Africa raised not only the costs of outfitting a slaving voyage, but also the mortality rates among crew and slaves.³¹ The MCC data on slave mortality, however, run contrary to expectations. First, the overall death rate of 12.9 percent was low by Dutch standards. TSTD2 indicates that of all slaves shipped by the WIC from West Africa, 16.8 percent had died before sale in the Americas. Furthermore, mortality rates were higher during the Middle Passage, which on average lasted about seventy days, than during the seven or eight months that MCC vessels spent loading slaves on the coast. The number of slaves who died on board ship in Africa was 4.3 percent of the total purchased, while the death rate during the Atlantic crossing amounted to 7.7 percent. The reason for this comes from the fact that the vast majority of slaves embarked during the latter part of the loading period, whereas the impact of disease factors rose as the voyage progressed.

Table 3: Age and Gender Distribution of Slaves in the MCC Guinea Trade, 1740–1803 (72 voyages)

Region	Percent male	Percent children
Windward Coast west of Lahou	51.9	42.1
Cape Lahou	54.4	11.3
Windward Coast east of Lahou	58.2	7.4
Gold Coast	65.8	8.7
Total Guinea Coast	57.1	18.5
Total Africa (TSTD2)	64.6	20.9

Source: MCC database and TSTD2

Although the study of slave mortality falls largely outside the boundaries of this paper, it touches directly upon questions about regional differences in slave supplies. Using a sample of 39 MCC slaving voyages, Simon Hogerzeil and David Richardson have recently linked

shipboard mortality data to differing “purchasing strategies” in the Dutch Guinea trade.³² They demonstrate that the number of slaves obtained per week by the MCC vessels rose as time progressed. “During most of the purchase period, [the] pattern of acquisitions was fairly homogeneous or constant... with slaves being acquired at the rate of up to five a week up to 20 weeks before departure from Africa, and rising to about eight a week... between 20 and six weeks before departure.”³³ During the last month acquisition patterns changed radically, as the vessels used to complete their purchases at one of the Gold Coast forts, often by placing an order in advance. Indeed, 22 percent of the slaves were bought in the last of the seven or eight months spent on the African coast, and 15 percent during the final week before sailing. Unfortunately, Hogerzeil and Richardson fail to recognize the importance of Lahou as a supplier to the MCC vessels. “Slaves were acquired at the Windward Coast at various places, with no single location predominating,” they state.³⁴ However, the small increment in the purchase rate between twenty and six weeks before departure came from the vessels’ stay at Lahou in this period.

Nevertheless, the implication of these findings for the analysis of shipboard mortality is that, although MCC vessels spent an exceptionally long time on the African coast, the time during which slaves were exposed to risk factors on board ship was on average significantly shorter. Hogerzeil and Richardson also underline that “the last minute surge in purchases... centered disproportionately on adults, especially men.”³⁵ Mortality normally increased for all slaves throughout the loading phase, as well the Middle Passage, but death rates of children and women usually remained lower than those of men. The fact that most men embarked during the last part of the loading phase helped to keep mortality rates down.

Examining the peculiar age and gender ratios of the MCC slave acquisitions, Hogerzeil and Richardson introduce the concept of “purchasing strategies.” In their view, the disproportionately high number of women and children loaded on the Windward Coast was the result of a deliberate choice of the MCC captains. “As time spent on

board ship was widely considered a health hazard for slaves, a deferral in purchasing high-value adult males was perhaps to be expected. In other words, it reflected a policy adjustment by MCC shippers to coastal price differentials among categories of slaves largely dictated, it seems, by planter preferences for adult males in the Americas.³⁶ In addition, the comparatively high propensity of slaves from the Windward Coast to rebel on board ship might also have influenced regional patterns of slave exports.³⁷ “The relative lateness in finalizing the loading of adult males may... have been just as much an adjustment to fears of slave rebellion as to the price premium on adult male slaves.”³⁸

This study argues for a more Afrocentric explanation of the regional differences in the MCC’s Guinea trade. Hogerzeil and Richardson do not exclude the possibility that African factors influenced Dutch “purchasing strategies” on the Windward Coast. The rising demand for African workers in Dutch Guyana after 1750, combined with a strong competition for slaves in other regions of Atlantic Africa, “brought MCC shippers... into contact with emergent slave supply systems that were perhaps less efficient than the well-established systems of the Gold Coast in satisfying shippers’ preferences for slaves.”³⁹ Indeed, the picture that emerges from the MCC ship journals is that, on the Windward Coast west of Lahou, Dutch captains had little choice in their purchases. The slaves offered for sale were small in number and were mainly women and children.

IV

We now return to the origins of the slaves exported from the Windward Coast, analytically divided in three port groups. Cape Lahou was by far the largest slaving port on the Windward Coast, and it was predominantly trading with vessels coming from the Netherlands. Between 1740 and 1805, when Lahou exported an estimated 50,000 slaves via Dutch vessels (Table 1), it stood out as the most important supplier of African labor to the Dutch Americas after Malembo, the center of the Dutch slave trade on the Loango Coast. Local brokers and

small independent traders sold on average 100 slaves per voyage to the MCC (Table 3). Although prices were much higher here than on the coast further windward, Lahou was attractive because it was able to supply slaves in much larger numbers and more swiftly. With average annual sales of more than 800 slaves after 1740, there can be little doubt that Lahou merchants tapped into hinterland markets that were unavailable to most other ports on the Windward Coast. The historical literature provides a few, though contradictory, clues about the commercial networks that connected Lahou with the interior and, therefore, about the possible origins of the exported slaves. The work of Yves Person suggests that by the time the Dutch intensified their commercial relations with Lahou, the latter was already cut off from a direct north-south connection with the Sudan. This route, which linked the lower Bandama River via Kong and Old Boron to the Sudanese centre of Jenne, had been established by Malinke and Juula groups in the early 1600s. When the Baule migrated into the Bandama region in the early eighteenth century, however, the Juula trade networks were dismantled. Long-distance trade was replaced by a “system of relays carrying goods from place to place under the control of local chiefs. Thus from the first quarter of the eighteenth century the Bandama route was closed to Sudanese trade... On the coast, Lahou fell into a decline and ships stopped calling there.”⁴⁰ Excluded from the trade networks in the Baule savanna, Juula merchants concentrated on alternative channels to the Atlantic coast, notably Kumase in the Asante kingdom, but also the Comoe River that gave access to outlets at Bassam and Assinie.⁴¹

The evidence presented in this paper indicates, however, that Lahou did not fall into decline after 1700 but instead flourished through its commercial relations with the Dutch. In a number of publications on the pre-colonial history of the Baule and the hinterland of the Quaqua Coast, Timothy Weiskel has also failed to recognize the economic vitality of Lahou in the eighteenth century. “During most of the eighteenth century,” Weiskel has argued, “the trade arriving at Grand Lahou, the natural outlet for the Baule southern trade, was never significant enough to attract sustained European interest.”⁴² In his view the commercial

networks of the Baule that replaced the long-distance trade routes of the Juula were, because of the former's Akan connection, directed more towards the east than to the south. It is worth pointing out, in this regard, that except for three voyages to Gabon, every single MCC vessel in our database purchased slaves at Lahou, which was moreover the principal port of embarkation in 48 out of a total of 69 cases.

In contrast to Person and Weiskel, Jean-Piere Chauveau has argued that the historical north-south trade between Lahou and the Sudan was not interrupted by the Baule migrations. In his analysis, the Baule monopolized the transportation of goods within their country while they traded with foreign merchants at so-called "transit markets" at the frontiers of their territory. Thus they maintained commercial relations with the Juula in the north, with the Guro in the west (via Toumodi and Kokumbo), and with merchants from Lahou in the southern town of Tiassalé, located at the banks of the lower Bandama (only from here to the coast was the river navigable). In this the Baule largely followed the old north-south axis of trade, through which Atlantic imports were exchanged for products like ivory, gold and slaves.⁴³ As for the origins of the slaves traded by the Baule, Chauveau suggests that the majority was purchased from Guro and Juula merchants and probably came from the north.⁴⁴ The strong ties between the Baule and the Guro have been confirmed by the oral traditions Claude Meillassoux collected in Guro country. According to his informants, European imports reached the Guro via the port of Bassam and the Baule town of Toumodi. In return, the Guro supplied the Baule with ivory, war captives as well as slaves purchased from the northern Malinke.⁴⁵ Although Lahou is not mentioned in this context, it seems clear that a substantial part of the slave imports of the Baule, on whom Lahou merchants relied for their supplies, stemmed from Sudanese sources.

Exports through ports on the Quaqua Coast east of Lahou, accounting for a mere 5 percent of the Dutch slave trade in West Africa, seem to have relied on a north-south trade with the Sudan as well. The work of Claude H el ene Perrot shows that the two most important ports on this part of the coast, Grand Bassam (or Bassam) and Assinie, were

outlets for the Mbrasue market in the land of the Anyi of Ndenye. Founded in the late eighteenth century on the banks of the Comoe River, Mbrasue obtained its slaves predominantly from Baule suppliers in the northwest, Kumasi in the east, and Bonduku in the north; from Bonduku there were connections through Kong and Buna with the Sudanese commercial hub of Jenne.⁴⁶ In short, all ports on the Quaqua Coast, including Lahou, were dependent on Sudanese slave supplies. Even slaves imported through the Guro and the Asante probably originated in large part from the northern savannas. Warfare in the Baule and Guro regions, or at the fringes of the Asante kingdom, might also have produced captives for the Atlantic trade.

A current trend in the scholarship on African slavery and the slave trade is to emphasize the production of slaves by means more subtle than inter-societal warfare or the tapping into far away markets by long-distance trade caravans.⁴⁷ It seems that Africans sold into the Atlantic slave trade from the coast west of Lahou were mostly victims of such local or internal means of enslavement. Again geography was one of the underlying factors. The long stretch of coast between Sierra Leone and the Bandama River was covered by dense, often impenetrable forests. Overall the region was sparsely populated; although rivers crossed it, waterside settlements were usually found only at the navigable sections near the river mouths. According to Person, “this coast, hedged in by the great forest, made commerce unattractive up to the colonial era.”⁴⁸ The expansion of Malinke, or Juula, trade networks that connected the Atlantic coast of nearby regions with the Sudanese interior, in this region halted at the forest edges. Thus “the impenetrable wall of the great forests” cut off local Kru and Mande populations from commercial connections with the coastal hinterland.⁴⁹ In the absence of professional long-distance traders, commodities were carried from place to place through networks of local big men.

The lack of extensive trade connections with the interior has, in the historical literature on the Windward Coast, supported the idea that Kru-speakers were insignificant participants in the Atlantic slave trade. “These coastal peoples engaged in a good deal of fishing and trading,”

Person argued, “but the slave trade itself often bypassed these desolate areas, which rarely saw slaves from the interior.”⁵⁰ Another scholar observed that “A few isolated reports of slaving can be found for the eighteenth century, but by 1750 or so it appears that the Malaguetta Coast no longer competed seriously with other areas as a source of slaves.”⁵¹ This paper argues the opposite: in the latter half of the eighteenth century Kru-speaking groups became important suppliers of slaves especially to traders from Liverpool and the Netherlands. Indeed, as Table 1 shows, in this period they accounted for nearly a quarter of all slaves the Dutch carried from West Africa.⁵²

The main features of this trade may be summed up as follows. First, numerous communities on the coast between Cape Mount and Lahou consistently provided slaves to Dutch vessels, but they all did so on a very small scale. Second, more adult women than men were sold into the Atlantic slave trade, while children formed an exceptionally high portion of the exported slaves (among the children boys predominated, which accounts for the overall male-to-female ratio of 52:48). Curtin suggested that “most of these ports drew on their immediate hinterland within the forest.”⁵³ The coastal geography prohibited the development of large-scale embarkation points and of connections with potential supply networks in the interior. But Kru-speaking groups disposed of criminals in society by selling them in exchange for European imports, while other slaves were the victims of violent conflicts between communities.⁵⁴ Kru villages also raided their neighbors for slaves. According to the supercargo of a Dutch slaving vessel, near the Cestos River night-time marauding was a common means of obtaining slaves.⁵⁵ Women and children were of course more vulnerable to village raids than adult males. The fact that these two groups made up a large portion of the slaves exported from the region, might indicate that kidnapping was a prime method of slave production on the Windward Coast.

V

Around 1740, because of a pressing demand for slaves in the Americas and sturdy competition in the dominant supply regions of West Africa, Dutch slave traders had a strong incentive to explore new markets on the Windward Coast. The African response was affirmative, sending many thousands into slavery, but with the exception of Cape Lahou, local supply systems were rather inefficient. The time slave ships spent on this part of the coast was exceptionally long as purchases were spread over numerous small embarkation points, each of which produced slaves in only very small numbers. Among the enslaved, moreover, the share of women and children, who were probably obtained from villages in the immediate hinterland, was disproportionately large. But as long as prices and mortality rates in Africa were kept low, while prices in the Americas remained high—and the composition of the slave cargoes could be adjusted in Lahou and on the Gold Coast—Dutch slave trading firms saw the Windward Coast as a creditable market. This paper has shown that, as a result of these market decisions, in the second half of the eighteenth century the plantation colonies of Surinam, Demerara and Essequibo began to receive a fair number of Kru-speaking slaves and an even larger group of slaves hailing from the hinterland of Cape Lahou.

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Social Science History Association Conference in Chicago (2007), the European Social Science History Conference in Lisbon (2008), the Atlantic History seminar at the University of Turku (2008), the African Economic History Workshop at the London School of Economics (2008), and the Centre International de Recherches Esclavages in Paris (2009). I thank Ann Carlos, Frank Lewis and my colleagues from the history department at Old Dominion University for their useful comments on the paper. Of course I assume all responsibility for its contents.

² Recent monographs include George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa. Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003); Walter Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil. Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Robin Law, *Ouidah*.

The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port', 1727-1892 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004); Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City. Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra. An African Society in the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Mariana Candido, *An African Slaving Port on the Atlantic World. Benguela and its Hinterland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Atlantic Microhistory. Slaving, Transatlantic Networks and Cultural Exchange in Angola* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

³ Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade. A Census* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); "Measuring the Atlantic Slave Trade," in Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere. Quantitative Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

⁴ Adam Jones and Marion Johnson, "Slaves from the Windward Coast," *Journal of African History* 21 (1980), 34.

⁵ Johannes Menne Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 122-23.

⁶ Jelmer Vos, David Eltis, and David Richardson, "The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the Origins of the Traffic," in David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers. Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), Table 8.2.

⁷ Curtin, "Measuring the Atlantic Slave Trade," 120-21. Curtin used Postma's 1970 Ph.D. thesis, which was published as a book in 1990.

⁸ Phillip D. Curtin et al., *African History. From Earliest Times to Independence. Second Edition* (London: Longman, 1995), 199.

⁹ Jones and Johnson, "Slaves from the Windward Coast," 30-31. Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered. Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 145-69, documents two cases of individuals of Sudanese origin who were sold into slavery and shipped from ports on the Gold Coast.

¹⁰ One recent study of slavery in the forest societies of Côte d'Ivoire ignores Cape Lahou as a slaving port and instead focuses on places that probably only became important export outlets in the produce trade of the nineteenth century. Harris Memel-Fotê, *L'esclavage dans les sociétés lignagères de la forêt ivoirienne, XVII^e-XX^e siècle* (Paris: les éditions CERAP, IRD, 2007).

¹¹ Yves Person, "Le Soudan nigérien et la Guinée occidentale," in Hubert Deschamps, ed., *Histoire générale de l'Afrique noire, de Madagascar, et des archipels*, vol. 1 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970); "The Atlantic Coast and the Southern Savannas, 1800-1880," in J. F. H. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa. Volume 2, Second Edition* (London: Longman, 1987).

¹² Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 128.

¹³ Only the French attempted settlement on the Windward Coast. They constructed a fort at Assinie in 1698, which they abandoned in 1704. See Jean-Michel Deveau, *L'Or et les esclaves. Histoire des forts du Ghana du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: UNESCO, 2005), 301.

¹⁴ Paul Lovejoy, "Extending the Frontiers of Transatlantic Slavery, Partially," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, 1 (2009), 63.

¹⁵ In 1762, the supercargo of a Dutch merchant ship pointed out that the ounce was the standard unit of exchange from Lahou eastward, as it was on the Gold Coast. See Jean Pierre Plasse, *Journal de bord d'un négrier* (Marseille: Éditions le mot et le reste, 2005), 79. See also Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea. Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), 492; P.E.H. Hair et al., eds., *Barbot on Guinea. The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678-1712*, 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1992), 300-301.

¹⁶ Hair, *Barbot on Guinea*, 234-316, 331-37; Bosman, *New and Accurate Description*, 469-93.

¹⁷ For instance, a Vlissingen interloper carried slaves from Lahou in 1709 (TSTD2, voyage id 33652).

¹⁸ Curtin, "Measuring the Atlantic Slave Trade," 112.

¹⁹ David Eltis et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁰ George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers. Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), 283.

²¹ The *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* contains only three records of vessels carrying slaves from the Windward Coast before 1700 (voyage ids 24358, 33752, and 33831).

²² The WIC never withdrew completely from the Atlantic slave trade. According to the *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, at least fourteen WIC vessels carried African slaves to the Americas between 1741 and 1793.

²³ On the Dutch interloper trade, see Ruud Paesie, *Lorrendrayen op Africa. De illegal goederen- en slavenhandel op West-Afrika tijdens het achttiende-eeuwse handelsmonopolie van de West-Indische Compagnie, 1700-1734* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 2008).

²⁴ C. Reinders Folmer-van Prooijen, *Van goederenhandel naar slavenhandel. De Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie, 1720-1755* (Middelburg: Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, 2000), 76, 89. See also Postma, *Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 123.

²⁵ David Eltis and David Richardson, "Productivity in the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Explorations in Economic History* 32 (1995), 465-84; Vos et al., "Dutch in the Atlantic World," 239.

²⁶ Vos et al., "Dutch in the Atlantic World," 240-242.

²⁷ For the early MCC slave trade, see Reinders Folmer-van Prooijen, *Van goederenhandel naar slavenhandel*.

²⁸ I thank Simon Hogerzeil for sharing his dataset of 39 MCC voyages with me.

²⁹ Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 300, 302; Colleen Kriger, "'Guinea Cloth'. Production and Consumption of Cotton Textiles in West Africa before and during the Atlantic Slave Trade," in Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi, eds., *The Spinning World. A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 114, and the literature there cited.

³⁰ Curtin, *African History*, 198-99; also "Measuring the Atlantic Slave Trade," 118.

³¹ For a comparison of crew wages between the commodity trades of the WIC and the MCC in West Africa, see Henk den Heijer, "The West African Trade of the Dutch West India Company, 1674-1740," in Victor Enthoven and Johannes Postma, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce. Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 163.

³² Simon Hogerzeil and David Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797," *Journal of Economic History* 67 (2007), 166-67.

³³ Hogerzeil and Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies," 168.

³⁴ Hogerzeil and Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies," 167.

³⁵ Hogerzeil and Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies," 170.

³⁶ Hogerzeil and Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies," 172.

³⁷ David Richardson, "Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave Trade," *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001), 69-92.

³⁸ Hogerzeil and Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies," 173.

³⁹ Hogerzeil and Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies," 172. Note that, because of low productivity, prices for all slave categories were much lower on the Kru Coast than in Lahou or on the Gold Coast. From this angle, it would have made sense to buy as many slaves as possible on this part of the coast, whoever they were.

⁴⁰ Person, "Atlantic Coast and Southern Savannas," 265.

⁴¹ Person, "Soudan nigérien," 284-5, 301.

⁴² Timothy Weiskel, "The Precolonial Baule: A Reconstruction," *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 18 (1978), 511-12; also Weiskel, *French Colonial Rule and the Baule Peoples. Resistance and Collaboration, 1889-1911* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 8; Weiskel, "L'histoire socio-économique des peuples baule: problèmes et perspectives de recherche," *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 16 (1976), 380. Weiskel recognized the special relationship Lahou maintained with the Dutch, describing it nonetheless as a "feeble participation in the slave trade."

⁴³ Jean-Pierre Chauveau, "Notes sur les échanges dans le Baule précolonial," *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 16 (1976), 578-84.

⁴⁴ In the nineteenth century, especially under the rule of Samory, the Baule also imported large numbers of slaves from the Anyi and Asante in the east; see Chauveau, "Échanges dans le Baule précolonial," 578, 591, 596. A fundamental problem in the reconstruction of Baule trade networks, and hence the origins of the slaves exported from Lahou, is that the most informative data on trade routes stems from European sources from the late nineteenth-century.

⁴⁵ Claude Meillassoux, *Anthropologie économique des Gouro de Côte d'Ivoire. De l'économie de subsistance à l'agriculture commerciale* (Paris: Mouton, 1964), 265, 270-71, 274.

⁴⁶ Claude Hélène Perrot, *Les Anyi-Ndenye et le pouvoir aux 18^e et 19^e siècles* (Paris: Publications CEDA, 1982).

⁴⁷ See especially the set of articles on the slave trade in decentralized societies in the *Journal of African History* 42 (2001).

⁴⁸ Person, "Soudan nigérien," 292.

⁴⁹ Person, "Atlantic Coast and Southern Savannas," 257. For more details and a slightly different view, see Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 72-73, 96, 282-319.

⁵⁰ Person, "Atlantic Coast and Southern Savannas," 258.

⁵¹ Ronald W. Davis, *Ethnohistorical Studies of the Kru Coast* (Newark: Liberian Studies, 1976), 32.

⁵² Based on Postma's figures of slave exports from the African coast, Alex van Stipriaan has postulated that Mandingos made up about a third of all slaves arriving in Surinam after 1730, with Kormantins (from the Gold Coast) and Loangos forming roughly equal shares. His assumption was that all slaves traded on the Windward Coast were Mandingo, hence of Sudanese origin, and thus ignored the possibility that many hailed from Kru communities along the coast itself. See "'Een verre verwijderd trommelen..." Ontwikkeling van Afro-Surinaamse muziek en dans in de slavernij," in Ton Bevers et al, eds. *De Kunstwereld. Productie, distributie en receptie in de wereld van kunst en cultuur* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), 144-45.

⁵³ Curtin, *African History*, 199.

⁵⁴ Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyage du chevalier Des Marchais en Guinée, isles voisines, et à Cayenne, fait en 1725, 1726 & 1727* (Paris: Saugrain, 1730), 118-19.

⁵⁵ Plasse, *Journal de bord*, 47. See also Bosman, *New and Accurate Description*, 480-81.