

AMSTERDAM MERCHANTS IN THE SLAVE TRADE AND AFRICAN COMMERCE, 1580s-1670s

Abstract

Historians have failed to assess the share of slave trade and African commerce in the portfolio of European merchants during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Was the slave trade a central or peripheral activity for Early Modern European entrepreneurs? What was the role of the slave trade when compared to other businesses carried out by these merchants? These questions are answered by an insight in the business choices of the largest Amsterdam slave traders between the 1580s and 1670s, using as primary sources the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) and the notarial archives of Amsterdam.

In 1944, Eric Williams published *Capitalism and Slavery*. He placed ‘in historical perspective the relationship between early capitalism as exemplified by Great Britain, and the Negro slave trade, Negro slavery and the general colonial trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’.¹ Williams argued for a link between capital accumulation from the slave trade and the British Industrial Revolution and for a connection between the growth of industrial capitalism and abolitionist ideas. For Williams, capital accumulation from the slave trade and the plantation economy had helped finance the Industrial Revolution. When industrial capitalism became the engine of economic growth in Great Britain, he argued, the plantation complex and associated slave trade became secondary in the priorities of entrepreneurs and state officials. For these reasons, the development of an abolitionist movement was deeply ingrained in the rise of industrial capitalism.² The debate around Williams’ proposal ensued in the 1960s and 1970s, but it gained new strength with the new approaches of the

1. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and slavery* (Chapel Hill 1944) ix.

2. Supporters: Richard Sheridan, ‘The plantation revolution and the Industrial Revolution, 1625-1775’, *Caribbean Studies* 9:3 (1969) 5-25; Critics: Roger Anstey, ‘Capitalism and slavery: a critique’, *Economic History Review* 21:2 (1968) 307-320; Stanley Engerman, ‘The slave trade and British capital formation in the eighteenth century: a comment of the Williams Thesis’, *Business Studies Review* 46:4 (1972) 430-443; Howard Temperley, *British anti-slavery, 1833-1870* (London 1972); Keith Aufhauser, ‘Profitability of slavery in the British Caribbean’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5:1 (1974) 45-67; Robert Thomas and Richard

1980s and beyond.³ The results of this debate also reached the Netherlands. In the article ‘The Long Goodbye’, Seymour Drescher deemed Williams’ premises unsuitable to explain the Dutch case. For Drescher, there was no link between the capital accumulation of the Dutch slave trade and the plantation economy and the industrialization process, since the Netherlands was one of the last northwestern European countries to industrialize and one in which the abolition debate arrived at a very late stage. On the other hand, the climax of capital accumulation from manufacturing during the seventeenth century was not followed by an abolitionist movement.⁴

In 2006, Piet Emmer, Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau and Jessica Roitman followed Drescher’s lead by claiming that the British colonial achievements in the Atlantic constitute an exception not the rule, hence looking for the ‘Williams’ connections’ for other European Atlantic empires is erroneous. The profits and spin-off effects of the trade outside of the European routes was negligible and the entrepreneurship associated with the non-European trades was a state-sponsored system, since protectionist laws allowed firms that were not competitive to keep operating well into the end of the eighteenth century.⁵

Emmer *et al.*’s position coincides with the appreciation Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude make of the contribution of the Atlantic system, in particular of the plantation economy, to the growth of the Dutch economy.⁶ However, since the beginning of the twenty first century, Dutch historiography has tried to fight the idea that the output of the Dutch participation in the Atlantic exchanges was negligible.⁷ Only recently, Matthias van Rossum and Karwan

Bean, ‘The fishers of men: Profits of the slave trade’, *The Journal of Economic History* 34:4 (1974) 885-914.

3. Important contributions: Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage. Comparative studies in the Atlantic slave trade* (Princeton 1978); Barbara Solow and Stanley Engerman, *British capitalism and Caribbean society* (Cambridge 1987); Joseph C. Miller, *The way of death: Merchant capitalism and the Angolan slave trade, 1730-1830* (Madison 1996); David Eltis, *The rise of African slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge 2000); Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic trade and the British economy, 1600-1800* (Cambridge 2000); Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the industrial revolution in England: a study in international trade and economic development* (Cambridge 2002); J.A. Rawley and Stephen D. Behrendt, *The transatlantic slave trade. A history* (Lincoln 2005).

4. Seymour Drescher, ‘The long goodbye: Dutch capitalism and antislavery in comparative perspective’, *The American Historical Review* 99:1 (1994) 44-69.

5. Piet Emmer, Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau and Jessica Roitman, *A Deus ex Machina revisited: Atlantic colonial trade and European economic development* (Leiden 2006) introduction.

6. Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The first modern economy. Success, failure, and perseverance of the Dutch economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge 1997) 474.

7. Victor Enthoven, ‘An assessment of Dutch Transatlantic commerce, 1585-1817’, in: Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic commerce. Dutch transatlantic trade and shipping, 1585-1817*, (Leiden 2003) 385-446; R. van Welie, ‘Slave trad-

Fatah-Black revised Emmer *et al*'s position by stating that the impact of the Dutch slave trade on the economy of the Republic was greater than what historians have claimed so far. However, they do not claim that this impact had consequences for the Dutch industrialization, as the Williams's proposition suggests.⁸

In spite of the debate about the profitability of the slave trade for European and Dutch capital accumulation, David Eltis *et al* estimate that the Dutch transported more than half million enslaved Africans from Africa into the Americas, during roughly two hundred years.⁹ Therefore, regardless whether slave trade was a competitive enterprise, merchants operating within the Dutch Republic kept slave trading operations in their business portfolios. This article will assess the Dutch participation in the slave trade during the period between 1580 and 1674, highlighting the relative place this activity took in the portfolio of the Amsterdam business community. We start with a general assessment of the Dutch slave trading activities during the end of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, since this period has been grossly neglected.¹⁰ The historical community has given precedence to the Dutch slave trading practices of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for which sources are more abundant.¹¹

The primary sources supporting the claims in this article will be the TSTD published by David Eltis and his co-authors and a sample of notarial contracts from Amsterdam.¹² Even if these sources present undeniable methodologi-

ing and slavery in the Dutch colonial empire: a global comparison', *Nieuw West-Indische Gids* 82:1-2 (2008) 45-94.

8. Matthias van Rossum and Karwan Fatah-Black, 'Wat is winst? De economisch impact van de Nederlandse trans-Atlantische slavenhandel', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 9-1 (2012) 23.

9. David Eltis *et al*, *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, 1999 (henceforth TSTD). For the most updated version of the dataset, see: <http://www.slavevoyages.org>.

10. Exceptions: Wim Klooster, 'Het begin van de Nederlandse slavenhandel in het Atlantisch gebied', in: Maurits Ebben, Henk den Heijer and J. Schokkenbroek (eds.), *Alle streken van het kompas: Maritieme geschiedenis in Nederland* (Zutphen 2010) 249-262; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in western Africa. Empires, merchants and the Atlantic System, 1580-1674* (Leiden 2011) 271-324.

11. Henk den Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven. Scheepvaart en handel van de Tweede Westindische Compagnie op Afrika, 1674-1740* (Zutphen 1997); Corrie Folmer-van Prooijen, *Van goederen naar slavenhandel. De Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie, 1720-1755* (Leiden, unpublished dissertation, 2000); Ruud Paesie, *Lorrendrayen op Afrika: de illegale goederen- en slavenhandel op West-Afrika tijdens het achttiende-eeuwse handelsmonopolie van de West-Indische Compagnie, 1700-1734* (Amsterdam 2008).

12. This sample comprises 374 commercial and financial contracts subscribed by individuals and firms. These sources have been extracted from a broader sample of 16,000 contracts gathered for the study of economic activities and cross-cultural trade with western Africa and within the Atlantic World between the 1590s and 1780s. For western Africa, we have searched the Notary collection for the activities of more than 200 businessmen in the

cal challenges, they are the only systematic data available, since accounting books or correspondence from private merchants are scarce or difficult to come by. The information provided by the *TSRD* will put into perspective the Dutch participation in the slave trade during the selected chronology, underlining the difference between private and Dutch West India Company (*WIC*) investment as well as the regional distribution of slave trade participation within the Republic. For this analysis, we singled out the *TSRD* thirty most prominent slave trading operators within the Dutch Republic, all of them merchants in Amsterdam. In the next section, we will assess the role African operations played in the overall activities of these selected few, using for this purpose a sample of their notarial contracts.¹³ Following the paper trail left by these men, we are able to reconstruct business strategies, investment preferences, composition of partnerships and the relative significance of the African commodity trade and the slave trade for the Amsterdam business community.

When looking into the business portfolios of the most prominent Amsterdam slave traders, we bring into the historical narrative the role individual merchants played in the traffic of enslaved Africans and show the relative value of this activity in the overall volume of business of this Dutch elite. If there was capital accumulation in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century, the slave trade played but a very small direct role in that accumulation, as Pierre Gervais generally claims that

merchant activity was a central element in the networks and webs of relationships over the Atlantic (...) When closely analyzed, however, daily merchant practice does not fit easily into regional categories, whether Atlantic or Imperial.¹⁴

regions of Senegambia and Cape Verde, the gulf of Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Loango and Angola.

13. Afonso Fidalgo (in partnership with Rodrigo Fidalgo), Aron de Pas, Diogo Dias Querido, Diogo Nunes Belmonte, Dirck Pietersen Wittepaert, Duarte Palacios (in partnership with David Palacio), Francisco Feroni, Hans van Hontom, Heerman Abrahamsz, Henrico Mathias, Isaac Coijmans, Jacob van der Wel, Jacob Venturin, Jan Baptista Lieftrinck, Jan Vlasbloem, Jan Pietersz Baecker, Julian Henriques, L. W. Verpoort, Luis Henriques Reinel, Manuel Dias Henriques, Manuel Lopes Homem, Manuel Rodrigues Cartagena, Manuel Solis Y Ulhoa (in partnership with Diogo Lopes Ulhoa), Marcus Broen, Mathijs ten Broecke, Michiel van Ameland, Miguel de Pas, Nicolaes Vis, Philip van Hulten and Willem van Meeckeren.

14. Pierre Gervais, 'Neither Imperial, nor Atlantic: A merchant perspective on international trade in the Eighteenth Century', *History of European Ideas* 34:4 (2008) 465-473, abstract.

Dutch participation in the slave trade, 1580-1674

The Dutch interest in the Atlantic dates back to the sixteenth century. Dutch men served in the Portuguese and Spanish empires and operated rudimentary commercial partnerships directly from the Republic.¹⁵ Historiography has failed to recognize the importance of this early Dutch commitment to the Atlantic by preferring to address the successes and failures of the WIC and the Middelburg Commercial Company (MCC) during the eighteenth century.¹⁶ For this reason, most of the statements about the Dutch Atlantic activities during the long seventeenth century portrait the experience of the WIC, grossly neglecting the role private merchants played before and alongside the Company.

There is a consensus among historians that the WIC dominated the Dutch Atlantic operations and concomitantly the slave trade between the western coast of Africa and the Americas. Ruud Paesie questions this consensus for the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and the data available on the TSTD contradicts this dominant view for the late sixteenth and seventeenth century as well.¹⁷ According to the TSTD, for the period between 1580 and 1674, forty-five percent of the Dutch slave trade was in the hands of private merchants, while the WIC was left with twelve percent. It is unknown whether the other forty-three percent of entries belong to private entrepreneurs or to the WIC, but if all the unknown instances were voyages organized by the Company, we end up with a Dutch Atlantic where private slave trade reaches almost half of the total of registered slave voyages.¹⁸ It is therefore a serious mistake to ignore the participation of private merchants in the Dutch Atlantic exchanges before and during the monopoly of the first WIC.¹⁹

One other myth that has plagued Dutch Atlantic historiography is the entrenched believe that the merchant communities of the province of Zeeland were major players in the Atlantic trades. Once again, this legend has arisen because of the known disputes between Zeelanders and Amsterdammers

15. José António Gonsalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos. Influência da ocupação holandesa na vida e na cultura do norte do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro 2001) 241; Piet Emmer, 'The First Global War: the Dutch versus Iberia in Asia, Africa and the New World, 1590-1609', *e-Journal of Portuguese History* 1:1 (2003); José Manuel Santos Pérez & George F. Cabral de Souza (eds.), *El Desafío Holandés al Dominio Ibérico en Brasil en el siglo XVII* (Salamanca 2006); Klooster, 'Het begin van de Nederlandse Slavenhandel', 249.

16. Henk den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen 2002); Den Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven*; Folmer-Van Prooijen, *Van goederen naar slavenhandel*.

17. Paesie, *Lorrendrayen op Africa*.

18. <http://www.slavevoyages.org>, 17-02-2012.

19. I. de Groot-Teunissen, 'Herman van Coopstad en Isaac Jacobus Rochussen. Twee Rotterdamse slavenhandelaren in de achttiende eeuw', *Rotterdams Jaarboekje* 3 (2005) 171-200.

within the WIC and from the eighteenth century successes of the MCC.²⁰ Once again, the TSTD contradicts the preponderance of Zeeland as the main instigator of slave trade during the period 1580-1674. During these decades the main ports of departure of slave trading vessels, either ran by private merchants or by the WIC, were Amsterdam (three and half percent) and its fore port – Texel (roughly forty percent). Combined they represent forty-three percent of the ships that departed from the Republic into the Atlantic to participate in the slave trade. The share of the ports of Zeeland and Flushing combined amount to a meager twelve percent of the total.²¹ This means that if Zeeland, and most specifically Middelburg, was an important slave investment outlet, that did not happen before the dawn of the eighteenth century.

Current Dutch historiography has also failed to clarify whether slave trade was a European or an Atlantic driven process.²² The TSTD supports Pierre Gervais's claim that the Atlantic did not generate changing processes, Europe did, since about sixty-eight percent of Dutch slave trade departed from the Republic, followed by twenty-two and half percent of voyages initiated in Brazil (mostly Pernambuco). A negligible part of the voyages departed from elsewhere in Europe and from within the Atlantic.²³

The TSTD also shows that Dutch slave trade was mostly in the hands of metropolitan private investors from Amsterdam, who determined the strategy, volume and destination of the enslaved Africans imported from the western coast of Africa into Dutch Brazil and other European colonies in the Americas, leaving the WIC with a small role to play.

Business portfolios of the Amsterdam merchant elite, 1580-1674

Amsterdam private entrepreneurship was paramount for the Dutch slave trade during the late sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century. But, was slave trade an important activity for the Amsterdam merchant elite as seems to have been the case elsewhere in Europe?²⁴

20. Den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC*, chapter 1; Doeke Roos, *Zeeuwen in de Westindische Compagnie (1621-1674)* (s.p. 1992); P.J. Winter, *De Westindische Compagnie ter kamer, stad en lande* (The Hague 1978) 2.

21. <http://www.slavevoyages.org>, 17-02-2012.

22. Gervais, 'Neither Imperial, nor Atlantic', 1-2.

23. <http://www.slavevoyages.org>, 17-02-2012.

24. J.H. Bebbet, 'Cary Helyar, merchant and planter of seventeenth-century Jamaica', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 21:1 (1964) 53-76; D.D. Thoms, 'The Mills family: London sugar merchants in the eighteenth century', *Business History* 11 (1969) 3-10; John Norman Kennedy, 'Bahian elites, 1750-1822', *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 53:3 (1973) 415-439; T.M. Devine, 'An eighteenth-century business elite: Glasgow-West India merchants, c. 1750-1815', *The Scottish Historical Review* 57:163-1 (1978) 40-67; Rae Flory and David Grant

In the TSTD, there are thirty prominent merchants from the city of Amsterdam that appear to be the largest slave traders in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century.²⁵ This group is composed by men born in Amsterdam and other towns in the Republic, foreigners, Christians and Jews, young and old, operating as individual investors or within partnership, investing in European and overseas routes. According to the sample of notarial contracts, Atlantic investments accounted for about forty-four percent of the business ventures of these gentlemen and within this percentage only about one quarter pertained to direct or indirect investment in African exchanges, whilst the lion share of the investments (fifty-six percent) were directed to European ventures.

The share of the European investments was divided through ventures in the Baltic, Iberian and Mediterranean markets. Dutch and foreigners, Christians and Jews, participated equally in the Baltic trade, considered one of the main sources of capital accumulation of Dutch towns after the Revolt of the Low Countries. Merchants and skippers played a key role as intermediaries in the grain and timber trades in what is commonly known as 'the mother trade'.²⁶ The Baltic trade was directly linked to the Iberian and Mediterranean markets. Amsterdam middlemen shipped timber and grain to Iberian, Italian and Eastern Mediterranean towns and in exchange transported salt, wine, olive oil, cork and fruit (dried and fresh) into the Baltic and the Republic.²⁷ Besides the bulk trade, there was also a significant volume of luxury products from the overseas empires being shipped from Iberia into the Baltic and northwestern Europe.²⁸

Smith, 'Bahian merchants and planters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 58:4 (1978) 571-594; Alex Dupuy, 'French merchant capital and slavery in Saint-Domingue', *Latin American Perspectives* 12:3 (1985) 77-102; Kenneth Morgan, 'Bristol West India merchants in the eighteenth century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 3 (1993) 185-208; H. Nader, 'Desperate men, questionable acts: the moral dilemma of Italian merchants in the Spanish slave trade', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33:2 (2002) 401-422; Simon D. Smith, 'Merchants and planters revisited', *The Economic History Review* 55:3 (2002) 434-465.

25. See footnote 13.

26. Milja van Tielhof, *The 'mother of all trades': the Baltic grain trade in Amsterdam from the late 16th to the early 19th century* (Leiden 2002); Christiaan van Bochove, *The economic consequences of the Dutch: economic integration around the North Sea, 1500-1800* (Amsterdam 2008).

27. Marie-Christien Engels, *Merchants, interlopers, seamen and corsairs: the 'Flemish' community in Livorno and Genoa (1615-1635)* (Hilversum 1997); De Vries and Van der Woude, *The first modern economy*, 669; Catia Antunes, *Globalisation in the early modern period: The economic relationship between Amsterdam and Lisbon, 1640-1705* (Amsterdam 2004); Maartje van Gelder, *Trading places: the Netherlandish merchants in early modern Venice* (Leiden 2009);

28. Hans Pohl, *Die Portugiesen in Antwerpen (1567-1648): zur Geschichte einer Minderheit* (Wiesbaden 1977); Jonathan Israel, *Conflicts of empires: Spain, the Low Countries, and the*

For the Amsterdam slave traders, the Baltic represented only nine percent of the business portfolio, being the only exception to this rule Louis de Geer, known for his upstanding role as representative of the king of Sweden, holder of monopolies within the Swedish export of metals and later on even named the 'father of Swedish Early Modern industry'.²⁹ The low participation in the Baltic trade was compensated by a vast participation in the Mediterranean and Iberian trades, for twenty-eight and sixty-three percent, respectively. The overwhelming participation in the Iberian markets and low engagement in the Baltic indicates that these merchants did not thrive on the bulk trade by exchanging grain and timber for Mediterranean and Iberian agricultural products, but they rather excelled in the luxury trades, being the middlemen of the Iberian colonial output within the northern European markets.

It should come as no surprise that the re-export of colonial/luxury products from Iberian ports into Amsterdam was actually the main activity of the Amsterdam businessmen involved in the slave trade. It is difficult to determine whether there was a transfer of knowledge from the Iberian experience into the exchanges with western Africa, although we assume that to be a probability. We think that part of the success of the Amsterdam business community in the African dealings derived from their acquired knowledge about the functioning of the Iberian markets and institutions while participating in the European Iberian exchanges. They gathered the necessary information and know-how to work within the loop holes of the Spanish and Portuguese monopolies in the Atlantic and in so doing became extremely successful in their African and transatlantic adventures. Consequently, the experience and learning process of the Iberian re-export dynamics helped forging the Amsterdam participation in the Atlantic trade and appears inexorably intertwined with the slave trade in the business portfolios of these Amsterdam merchants.

Within the contracts that formed the European portfolio of the Amsterdam slave traders, the majority of businessmen preferred mixed ventures, where commercial and financial activities could be combined, more often than not within partnerships, rather than on solo ventures. The typology of the contracts show that the first investment choice was primarily trade, while financial investments were only complementary to the commercial activities. Perhaps the best example is the direct relationship between freight contracts and different forms of maritime insurance for cargos, crews and ships, in an

struggle for world supremacy, 1585-1713 (London 1997); Antunes, *Globalisation in the early modern period*.

29. J. Thomas Lindblad, 'Rehabilitatie van Louis de Geer (1587-1652) als vader van de Zweedse industrie: reactie op een artikel in een vorig nummer', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 105:1 (1992) 51-7.

attempt to protect one's investment against natural disasters, warfare, embargoes, piracy and privateering.³⁰

Summarizing, the most prominent slave traders in the Republic resided in Amsterdam and held a diverse business portfolio that included investments in Europe and the Atlantic. Within the European continent, the Baltic, Iberian and Mediterranean markets seem to have been the business targets of the group, although Iberian interests supplanted business ventures elsewhere. Even though, and by and large engaged in commercial transactions, Amsterdam slave traders reserved a part of their capital to invest in financial products, most frequently in maritime insurances and personal credit schemes.

The African trades in the Amsterdam portfolios, 1580-1674

The Amsterdam slave traders invested forty-four percent of their capital in the Atlantic in general. The African share of that investment accounted for only twenty-one percent, whereas the slave trade represented about ten percent. But, were the main slave traders in the Republic equally engaged in the slave trade, regardless of their place of birth or religious congregation?

The correlation between slave trade and religious affiliation of slave traders has been an issue of contention among historians. Arguments have been made for the over representation of certain religious groups in slave trading activities. In this context, although shocking, the public statements by Leonard Jeffries in 1991 about Jewish overwhelming prevalence in the slave trade were neither new, nor unexpected.³¹ Specialists on Atlantic exchanges and the slave trade, most prominently David Davis, Seymour Drescher, Eli Faber and Saul Friedman were forced to issue a strong response to this unfounded allegations, so they claimed.³²

30. Sabine Go, *Marine insurance in the Netherlands 1600-1870: a comparative institutional approach* (Leiden 2009); Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in western Africa*, 271-279; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, 'Crossing empires: Portuguese, Sephardic, and Dutch business networks in the Atlantic slave trade, 1580-1674', *The Americas* 68:1 (2011) 22-25.

31. Public address July 20, 1991, Albany, New York. Nation of Islam Historical Research Department, *The secret relationship between Blacks and Jews* (Chicago 1991).

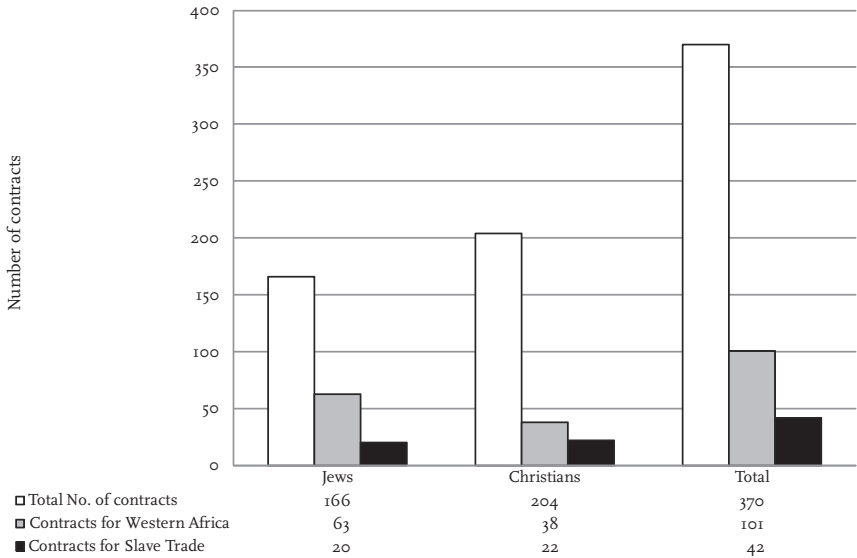
32. Seymour Drescher, 'The role of Jews in the Transatlantic slave trade', *Immigrants and Minorities* 12 (1993) 113-125; David B. Davis, 'Jews in the slave trade', in: Jack Salzman and Cornel West (eds.), *Struggles in the promised land: Towards a history of Black-Jewish relations in the United States* (New York 1997) 65-72; Eli Faber, *Jews, slaves and the slave trade. Setting the record straight* (New York 1998); Saul S. Friedman, *Jews and the American slave trade* (New Brunswick 1998); 'AHA Council Issues Policy Resolution about Jews and the slave trade', *AHA Perspectives* (Mar. 1995).

For Robert Stein, Jewish participation in the slave trade was ‘on a small scale and had slight impact’.³³ Eli Faber concurs by explaining that

... interest regarding the extent to which Jews participated in the institution of slavery in the Americas has stemmed from allegations that they predominated in the slave trade and that they owned slaves well in excess of their proportion among the white population (...) they did neither. (...) their participation (...) was quite small’.³⁴

But was the Amsterdam Jewish community less involved in the slave trade than its Christian counterpart?

FIGURE 1 Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade, 1596-1675



Sources: Sample constructed based on 374 contracts from the Notarial Archives of Amsterdam (GAA, NA). For details on sampling method, please see note 12.

Amsterdam merchants participated equally in the western African trades, regardless of their religious background (see Figure 1), this if we consider that all the members of the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam within our sample were actually Jews.³⁵ Between the 1580s and 1620s, Amsterdam Christian

33. Robert Stein, *The French slave trade in the Eighteenth Century: an old regime business* (Madison 1979) 159-160.

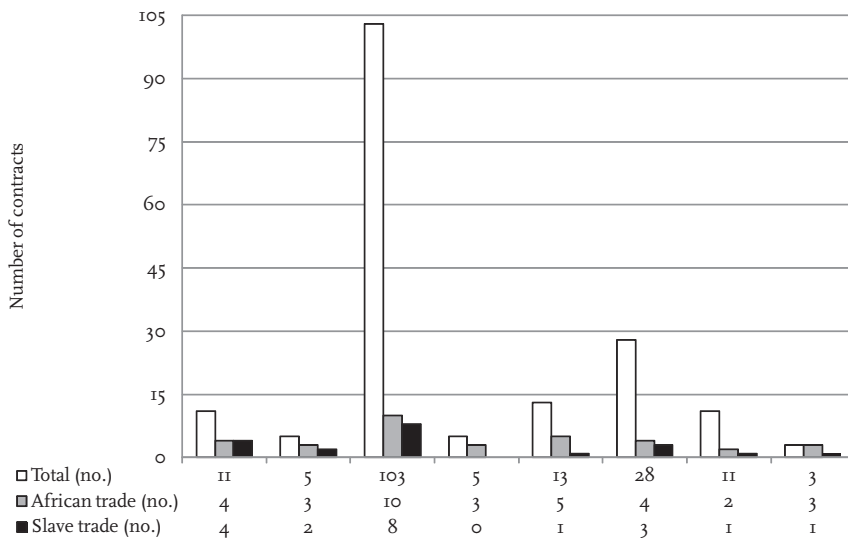
34. Faber, *Jews, slaves and the slave trade*, 1.

35. The Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam is often synonym for the Sephardic Jewish community of Amsterdam. Even though not all members of the Portuguese Nation of Amster-

merchants, Protestants and Catholics alike, born in- or outside of the Republic were engaged in the African commodity trade and gradually also drawn into the slave trade by providing insurances for ships and cargos contracted by members of the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam for their slave voyages. Amsterdam Christian direct participation in the slave trade only became significant after the 1650s, when the wic relaxed its monopoly. In the sample of contracts under scrutiny in this study Henrico Matias, Louis de Geer, Francisco Ferroni, Marcus Broen and Isaac Coijmans were the most active Christian participants in the African commodity trade and the slave trade between the 1650s and 1670s (see Figure 2).

Contrary to the Amsterdam Christian group, the Portuguese Sephardim were active in African commodity and slave trades since the 1580s. Diogo Nunes Belmonte, Miguel de Pas, Duarte and David de Palacios and Manuel Dias Henriques were the most important merchants during the period prior to the 1640s (see Figure 3).³⁶

FIGURE 2 *Largest Amsterdam Christian participants in the overall African trade and slave trade, 1580-1674*

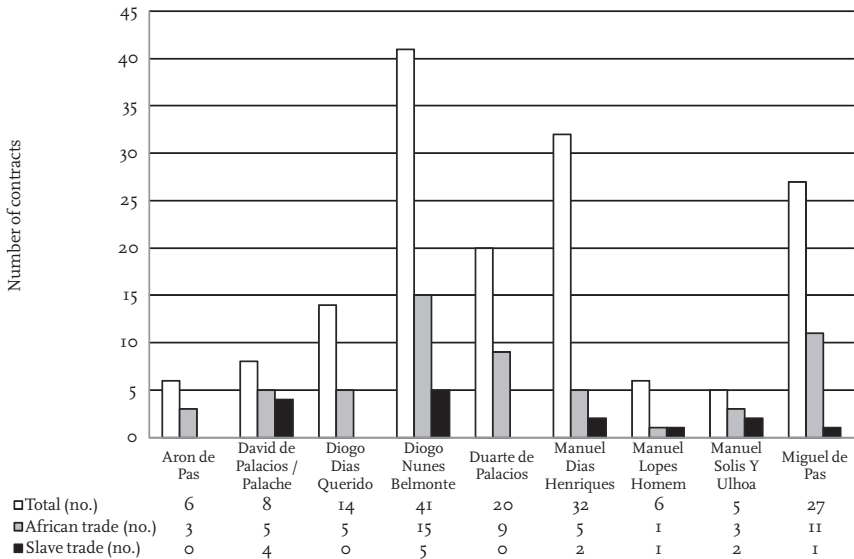


Sources: Ibid.

Note: The data pertain to individuals with five or more Notarial Contracts related to the African commerce and the Slave Trade.

dam were Jewish, it is safe to assume that most were. Yosef Kaplan, 'Wayward new Christians and stubborn new Jews: the shaping of a Jewish identity', *Jewish History* 8:1-2 (1994): 27-41.

36. Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in western Africa*, 278, 282-283, 286-287, 307, 312-314, 317; Ribeiro da Silva, 'Crossing empires', 22, 30, 17.

FIGURE 3 *Largest Amsterdam Jewish participants in the overall African trade and the slave trade, 1580-1674*

Sources: Ibid.

Note: The data pertain to individuals with five or more Notarial Contracts related to the African commerce and the Slave Trade.

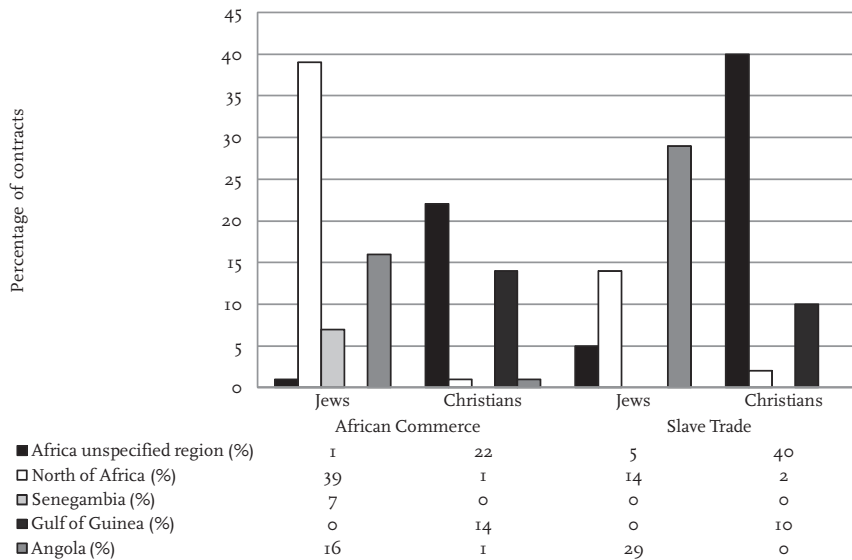
The analysis of the period 1580-1674 shows that the commercial participation of Christian and Jewish merchants in the overall western African commerce was similar, contradicting Jeffries' claims that the Jews were overwhelmingly involved in the slave trade, but also clearly nuancing Stein's and Faber's statements that Jewish participation was small. The knowledge Sephardic merchants had about the Iberian colonial markets and their networks in the major European and Atlantic colonial port cities was crucial for their early commitment to the western African and the slave trades. In the long run, their participation in these commercial branches contributed substantially for the growth of the Republic's trade with western Africa and its increasing input in the slave trade in the course of the seventeenth century. A good example of this learning process is Diogo Nunes Belmonte, member of the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam, who in 1612 participated in the trade with Senegambia with two Portuguese Sephardic merchants from Venice. Together, they entrusted a cargo of exchange goods to Jacob Pelegrino, also a member of the Nation, to be traded at the Petite Côte of Senegal. The cargo was transported on board of the *Jonas*, under skipper Douwe Annes, from Enkhuizen. The return cargo was to be delivered at Livorno.³⁷ Less than five years later

37. GAA, NA 258/83; 1614-01-28; NA 645/887; 1620-01-22.

the same Diogo Nunes Belmonte appears as main investor in several slaving voyages in association with skippers and merchants with connections in Amsterdam, Lisbon, Seville and the Spanish West Indies.³⁸

The geographical distribution of Amsterdam merchants' participation in the western African trade shows that the main areas of commercial interest were the north of Africa, Angola and the gulf of Guinea. Amsterdam Christian merchants concentrated their activities in the gulf of Guinea, whereas Sephardic Jews operated mainly in the north of Africa, Angola and Senegambia (see Figure 4). Nevertheless, the African products traded by the two groups show little difference. In the gulf of Guinea, Christian merchants traded mainly in gold, ivory and wax, although identical goods were purchased by the Jewish merchants.³⁹

FIGURE 4 *Participation of Amsterdam merchants in the African commerce and the slave trade: Zoning, 1580-1674*



Sources: Ibid.

In the north of Africa, the Sephardim traded mostly in gold, silver and precious stones, while in Senegambia gold, ivory and hides were at the core of their commercial activities.⁴⁰ As for the slave trade, the Angolan coast, the

38. GAA, NA 254/188-188v: 1614-05-22; NA 164/162: 1620-11-11. For further details on Belmonte's business connections, see: Ribeiro da Silva, 'Crossing Empires' 307, 312-313, 317. Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in western Africa*, chapter 7.

39. GAA, NA 2227/271-276: 1668-06-02.

40. GAA, NA 638/210-211: 1630-06-28.

north of Africa and the gulf of Guinea took up twenty-nine, sixteenth and ten percent, respectively, of the group's total investment in slaving activities (see Figure 4).⁴¹

The comparative analysis of the Christian and Jewish investment preferences reveals distinctive features. The Christians concentrated their slaving activities in the gulf of Guinea, whereas the Sephardim operated mainly in the north of Africa, Angola and Senegambia (see Figure 4). The former concentrated their activities in supplying areas where the Portuguese were less active, such as the Grain, Ivory and Slave coasts, while the latter preferred areas under Portuguese commercial influence in order to be able to capitalise on their merchant network connections acquired while engaging in the Iberian and Mediterranean markets. In both cases, there was a clear attempt to avoid the areas closely controlled and policed by Portuguese officials, private merchants in the royal service, leaseholders of royal monopolies or tax farmers.

The difference between Christian and Jewish investment strategies went beyond the geographical selection for the slave imports. Another divergent strategy consisted of the choice of trading routes within which to operate. Christian slave routes linked ports and regions under wic jurisdiction or commercial influence as was the case of the Gold Coast and Curaçao, the major Dutch slave entrepot in the Caribbean catering to the Dutch, French, English and Spanish colonies in the region (see Figure 6).⁴² The Jewish slave ships, on the other hand, connected the Portuguese and Spanish colonies and trading posts in western Africa and the Americas (see Figure 4).⁴³ This difference in strategy should be seen as a cunning institutional safeguard. By remaining within the regions under Portuguese and wic influence, both merchant communities attempted to function within the premises allowed within the legal systems that protected the contracts they signed in Amsterdam. In case of accident or conflict, the Christian merchants could take their cases to the town, provincial and supreme courts in the Republic, while the Por-

41. In the north of Africa, slave trade is directly associated with ransoming of captives, since certain types of slaves were welcome in the Barbary States, Spanish and Portuguese fortress towns and free cities in the north of Africa. José Alberto Tavim, 'Abraão Benza-merro, 'judeu de sinal', sem sinal, entre o Norte de África e o reino de Portugal', *Mare Liberum* 6 (1993) 115-141; Tavim, "'Subir a Fez' durante o século xvi. Contribuição para o estudo de um mellah', in: Carmen Ballesteros and Mery Ruah (eds.), *Os Judeus Sefarditas entre Portugal, Espanha e Marrocos* (Lisbon 1999) 87-117.

42. GAA, NA 2231/82-89; 1669-09-09; Marisa Vega Franco, *El trafico de esclavos con America; asientos de Grillo Y Lomelín, 1663-1674* (Seville 1984) 194-202; Enriqueta Vila Vilar, 'La sublevación de Portugal y la trata de negros', *Ibero-Americankisches Archiv* 2 (1976) 171-92; Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic*, 33-38, 349-353.

43. GAA, NA 258/81v; 1613-03-19; NA 254/188-188v; 1614-05-22.



Ill. 1 'View of the island of Goree near the Cape Verde Peninsula, ca. 1665'.

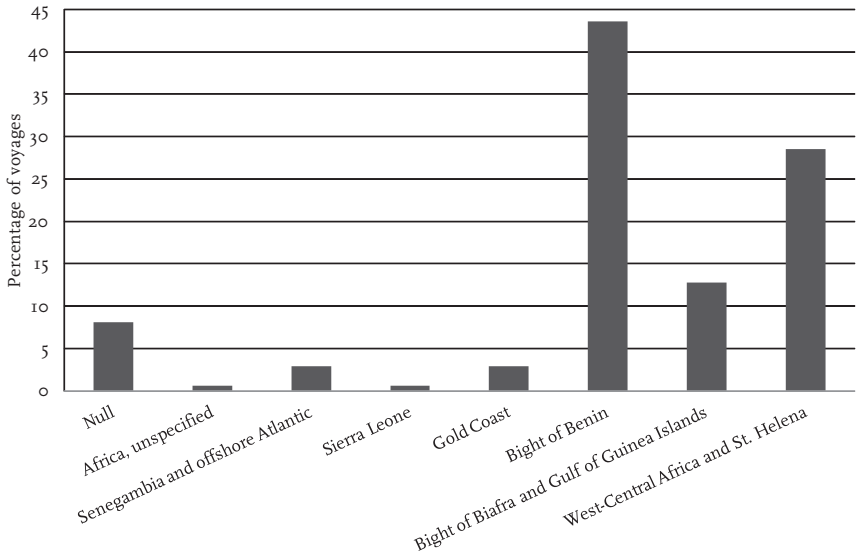
Source: NL-HaNa - 4.VELH 619.55.

tuguese Jews could take their cases to the Portuguese courts and the Dutch courts simultaneously. This meddling between two legal systems put a high premium on cross-cultural partnerships, since they were the best equipped to fully access both legal systems were the original contractual agreements to fail.⁴⁴

The data provided by the TSTD underlines the role of Amsterdam Christian businessmen in the various western African regions. During the 1650s and through the 1670s, forty-four percent of the merchants concentrated their portfolios in the bight of Benin, twenty-eight percent in west central Africa, and thirteen percent in the bight of Biafra and the gulf of Guinea Islands. If we add up their total participation in all the coastal regions around the gulf of Guinea, we come up with an astonishing sixty percent, against twenty-eight percent of participation in west central Africa (see Figure 5).

44. Cátia Antunes, 'Prosecuting the Persecutor: Contracts, Sugar, Jews, and Inquisitors, 1580-1640', *Mediaevalia* 32:1 (2012) 219-236.

FIGURE 5 *Amsterdam Christian slave ships' owners: Major regions of slave purchase, 1650s-1670s*



Sources: <http://www.slavevoyages.com>, 17-02-2012.

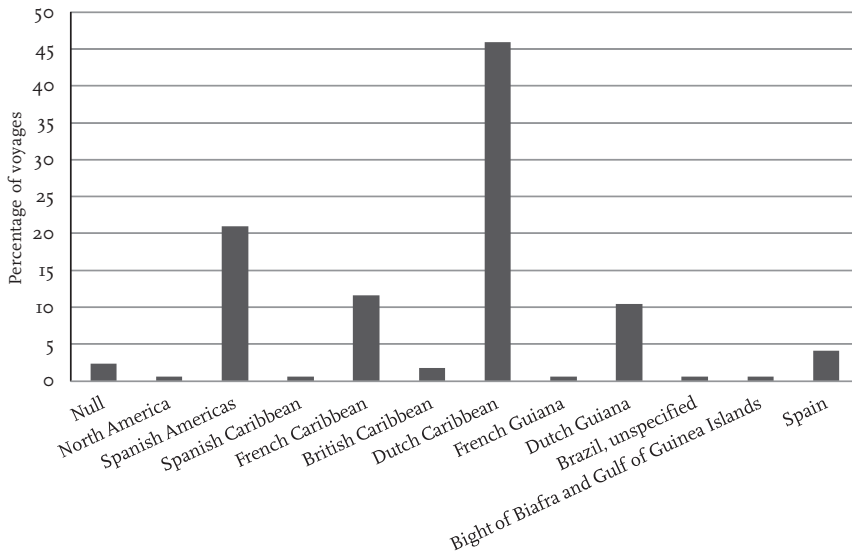
Note : These names have been identified based on the information available for the owners of vessels involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade for the period of 1650-1675. For details on these men and their slave ventures, see: <http://www.slavevoyages.org>, 17-02-2012.

The discrepancy between the notarial data and the *TSVD* can be ascribed to the fact that the latter only has data on shipowners for the period of 1650s-1670s, while the contracts we have examined have information for the early voyages, as well. These different results are also related to the political and military context of these decades. During the 1650s-1670s, private merchants participated in the *wic* slave trade and at that point the Company had already consolidated its position in the Gold Coast and the bights of Benin and Biafra. It is therefore not surprising that private merchants would take a preference to these areas. This situation contrasted sharply with the period prior to the chartering of the *wic*, when Amsterdam merchants could trade almost anywhere along the western coast of Africa, as long as they avoided the Portuguese royal fleets stationed at- or patrolling the Gold Coast.

In terms of slave landings, Amsterdam Christian merchants catered mainly to the Dutch and French Caribbean, and the Spanish Americas for forty-six, twelve and twenty-one percent, respectively. Yet, if we account for the slave landings in all the Caribbean islands and the Guianas we come to an amazing sixty percent. The emergence of the Caribbean in general, and Curaçao in particular as a platform for re-distribution of slaves was only possible because the *wic* sponsored a colony of settlement in Curaçao and

the Dutch Guiana, the rise of a plantation economy in the British, French and Danish Caribbean colonies, and the end of the Portuguese control over the Spanish *asiento* – source of the supply of slave labour into the Spanish American colonies (see Figure 6).⁴⁵ Similar insights into the Amsterdam Portuguese Sephardic operations are impossible to make because the *TRTD* only identifies ship owners rather than freighters, which was the role most Sephardim played in the slave trade.⁴⁶ To reconstruct the activities of the latter group, notarial sources have been paramount.

FIGURE 6 *Amsterdam Christian slave ships' owners: Major regions of slave landing, 1650s-1670s*



Sources: <http://www.slavevoyages.com>, 17-02-2012.

Note: Slave landing regions include North America (New York), Spanish Americas (Spanish Americas, Spanish Central America, Rio de La Plata) Spanish Caribbean (Spanish West Indies), French Caribbean (Guadalupe, Martinique, Other French Caribbean) British Caribbean (Jamaica, Barbados).

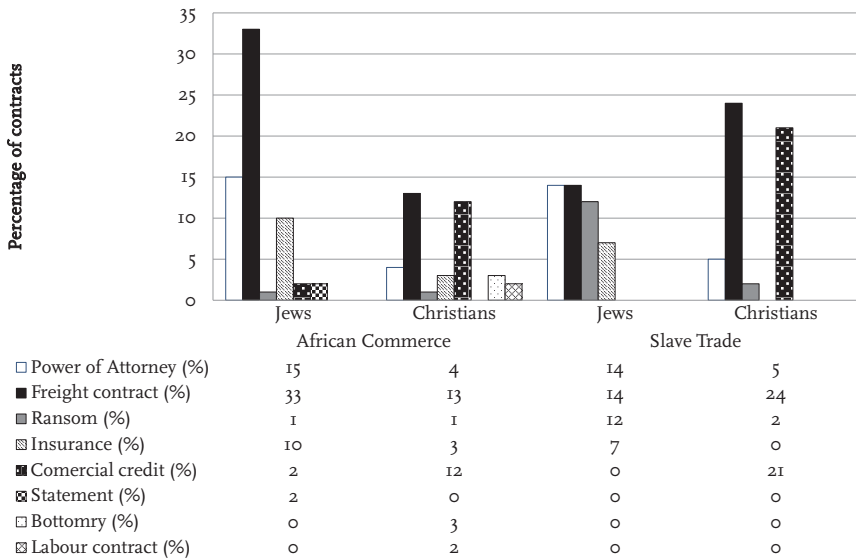
45. Stuart B. Schwartz, *Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill 2004); David Eltis, *The rise of African slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge 2000); Postma and Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic*, various chapters; Wim Klooster, *Illicit riches*; Henriqueta Vila Vilar, 'Los asientos portugueses y el contrabando de negros', *Anuário de Estudos Americanos* 30 (1973) 557-99; Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamerica y el comercio de esclavos* (Sevilla 1977); Vila Vilar, *Aspectos sociales en América colonial. De extranjeros, contrabando y esclavos* (Bogotá 2001).

46. Stacey Sommerdyck and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, 'Reexamining the geography and merchants of the West Central African slave trade: Looking behind the numbers', *African Economic History* 38 (2010) 77-105.

Commercial partnerships and investments for western Africa, 1580-1674

One other way of looking at Amsterdam's participation in the slave trade is by studying the typology of notarial contracts used for the western African commerce. For the commodity trade, most contracts were freight contracts, powers of attorney, commercial credits and insurances, amounting to forty-six, nineteen, fourteen and thirteen percent, respectively (see Figure 7), whilst for the slave trade freight contracts, commercial credit, powers of attorney and ransoms represented thirty-eight, twenty-one, nineteen and fourteen percent of the contracts (see Figure 7). These results reflect a preoccupation on the part of the merchants to gather the required capital for their commercial operations and to recruit the most suitable agents.⁴⁷

FIGURE 7 Participation of Amsterdam merchants in the African commerce and the slave trade, 1580-1674: typology of contracts



Sources: Sample constructed based on 374 contracts from the Notarial Archives of Amsterdam (GAA, NA). For further details on sampling method, please see note 12.

47. David Ross, 'The career of Domingo Martinez in the Bight of Benin, 1833-64', *Journal of African History* 6:1 (1965) 79-90; Daniel L. Schafer, 'Family ties that bind: Anglo-African slave traders in Africa and Florida, John Fraser and his descendants', *Slavery and Abolition* 20:3 (1999) 1-21; Stephen D. Behrendt, 'African merchants, notables and the slave trade at Old Calabar, 1720: Evidence from the National Archives of Scotland', *History in Africa* 30 (2003) 37-61; Mariana P. Candido, 'Merchants and the business of the slave trade at Benguela, 1750-1850', *African Economic History* 35 (2007) 1-30; Tobias Green, *The rise of the trans-atlantic slave trade in western Africa, 1300-1589* (Cambridge 2011).

The analysis of content of the freight contracts for Christian and Jewish merchants demonstrates that the members of the Portuguese Nation were more interested in the commodity trade with western Africa than the Christian traders, with thirty-three and thirteen percent respectively. The inverse was the case in the freight contracts for the slave trade, where Christian freight contracts accounted for about twenty-four percent while Jewish freight contracts represented only fourteen percent (see Figure 7). The chronological analysis of the freight contracts, on the other hand, shows that Jewish merchants were engaged in the overall commerce with western Africa and the slave trade mainly in the period prior to the 1640s, whereas Christian merchants increased substantially their share during the 1650s and 1660s.⁴⁸ A similar trend can be found in the analysis of the insurances. Before the 1640s, Christians acted as insurers, whereas the Sephardim appeared mainly as purchasers of insurances.⁴⁹ What this information underlines is the shift from a western African commodity and slave commercial portfolio held by Jews and financed by Christians towards a world in which both groups acted out as commercial and financial principals. Towards the 1670s, Amsterdam's Christian and Jewish communities were trading and financing their own western African exchanges.

Freight contracts and insurances stress the importance of private merchants in the western African commodity and slave trades, regardless of the Portuguese and Dutch imposed commercial monopolies. But what kind of economic relationship was there between these private merchants and the monopoly holders, especially the wic?

Members of the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam like Manuel, Luís and Duarte Dias de Pas and André and Miguel de los Rios emerge in the sources as buyers and holders of wic shares, usually from the Chamber of Amsterdam. These shares were often bought from Dutch brokers for large sums of money. Hence, over time, and especially after the 1640s, the participation of the Sephardim of Amsterdam in the western African commerce and the slave trade became indirect through shareholding in the wic.⁵⁰ Christian merchants like Henrico Mathias, in contrast, increased their direct commercial engagement in the overall western African commodity and the slave trade, and in the insurance market.⁵¹

48. Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in western Africa*, chap. 7.

49. GAA, NA 254/188-188v: 1614-05-22.

50. GAA, NA 2188A/134: 1649-02-23; NA 876/24v-25: 1650-02-11; NA 2189A/364: 1650-05-11; NA 2189B/662: 1650-08-26; NA 2189B/688: 1650-08-27; NA 2189B/706: 1650-08-31; NA 2189B/709: 1650-08-31; NA 2189B/940: 1650-10-21; NA 2189B/954: 1650-10-27.

51. GAA, NA 322/675-699: 1675-04-27; NA 3221/695: 1675-04-27.



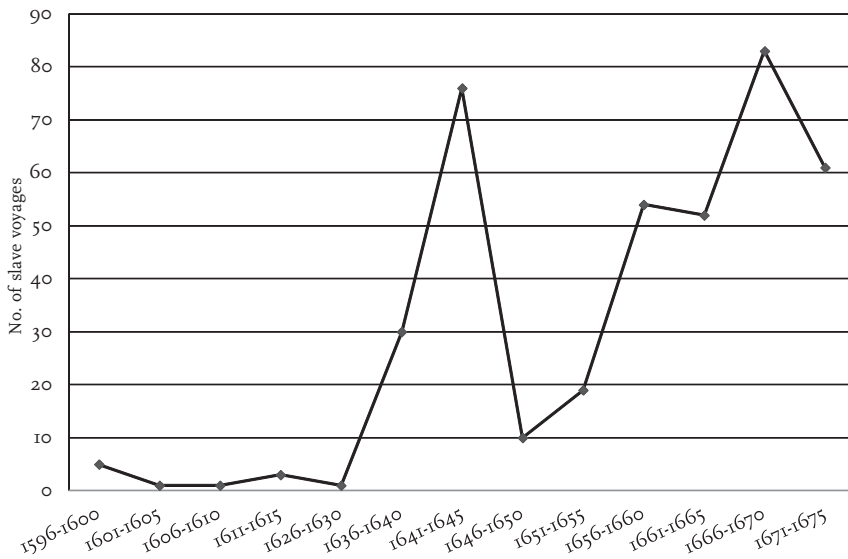
Ill. 2 'Drawing of the city of Luanda, c. 1665'. Source: NL-HaNa 4.VELH 619.63.

The growing participation of Amsterdam's merchants in the slave trade from within the WIC was related to changes in the juridical framework regulating the commercial activities in the Dutch Atlantic. From 1580 until 1621 we may speak of an era of free trade. After the establishment of the Dutch WIC (1621-1624), private merchants were prohibited from trading with western Africa and other areas in the Atlantic, and were forced to remove their assets and personnel from the commercial posts within a period of two years (1623).⁵² These commercial restrictions were in effect until 1638 for Brazil and the Caribbean, 1647 for Angola, and 1648 for north America. However, from the early 1640s onwards, signs of economic decline emerged and the WIC's incapacity to conduct trade and guarantee shipping of commodities and slaves in the intercontinental routes led to a gradual opening up of the monopoly to

52. J.A. Schiltkamp, 'Legislation, jurisprudence, and law in the Dutch West Indian colonies: The Order of Government of 1629', *Pro Memoriae* 5:2 (2003) 320-321; Henk den Heijer, 'Directores, Stadhouderes e Conselhos de Administração', in: M. Wiesebron (ed.), *O Brasil em Arquivos Neerlandeses (1624-1654). Brazilië in de Nederlandse Archieven (1624-1654)* (Leiden, 2005) 17-43..

private entrepreneurs.⁵³ In order to gain access to the wic monopoly areas, private merchants were to pay commercial fees of two and half percent over the value of the imports and exports.⁵⁴ The shift in policy on the part of the Company stresses the ever increasing weight of private entrepreneurship in the western African commerce and the slave trade, on the one hand, and the inability of the Company to function as a commercial enterprise, as the data in the TSTD clearly shows (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8 Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade, 1596-1675



Sources: Jelmer Vos, David Eltis and David Richardson, 'The Dutch in the Atlantic world: New perspective from the slave trade with particular reference to the African origins of the traffic', in: David Eltis and David Richardson (eds.), *Extending the frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (New Haven 2008) 249.

In the 1630s and 1640s, the increasing participation of the Republic in the slave trade was stimulated by the takeover of the northeastern Brazilian captancies and Angola by the wic, whereas the boost in the next twenty years was motivated by the transfer of the plantation economy to Suriname, the transformation of Curaçao in a major entrepot for the supply of slave

53. GAA 54: Reglement [...] over the openstellen van de handel op S. Paulo de Loanda. The Hague, 1648; Klaas Ratelband, *Os Holandeses no Brasil e na Costa Africana. Angola, Kongo e São Tomé (1600-1650)* (Lisbon 2003) 310-315.

54. Ernest van den Boogaart and Pieter C. Emmer, 'The Dutch participation in the Atlantic slave trade, 1596-1650', in: Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogenborn (eds.), *The uncommon market: Essays in the economic history of the Atlantic slave trade* (New York 1979) 353-375.

labour to the Caribbean markets and the Spanish Americas. The growth of the 1650s and 1660s was also facilitated by the increasing presence of the WIC employees in the Gold Coast, and the bights of Benin and Biafra. This growth was further extended when the Company granted permission for private merchants to trade in enslaved Africans and multiple commodities in western Africa. Thus, the direct access of private merchants to the western African coastal supply markets and the American consumption markets for slave labour made the difference for the participation of private capital in the slave trade. Despite never becoming major slave traders when compared to the English or the Portuguese, the merchants of the Republic acquired a stable quota in the slave trade as well as the ability to supply multiple European colonies in the Caribbean and in the Americas, catering to the demands of Danish, French, English and Spanish, at least until the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714).⁵⁵

If freight contracts and insurances reflect the commercial and financial interest of Amsterdam merchants in the western African trades, powers of attorney and commercial credit provide an insight into the social composition of the partnerships behind the western African business. The two key elements in these partnerships were their cross-cultural nature (they bound men from different origins, places of birth and religious backgrounds) and their subversive nature (they systematically ignored the constraints imposed by the rules of commercial monopoly imposed by different states). For example, in 1664, Francisco Ferroni granted a power of attorney to Martin Noell so that he might sign an agreement with the agents of Domingo Grillo and Ambrósio Lomelini in Barbados for the supply of 600 to 1000 'Black Indians or Moors' to the Spanish West Indies. Martin Noel was a merchant in London and an investor in the Royal Company of the Merchants Adventurers' of England, whereas Grillo and Lomelini were merchants of Italian descent and leaseholders of the Spanish *asiento*. A few years later, Ferroni was himself promoted to the role of representative for Grillo and Lomelini in Amsterdam. During the year of 1675, and on behalf of the latter, he signed a contract with the directors of the WIC, Chamber of Amsterdam, to supply slaves to the Spanish West Indies via Curaçao. The agreement was worth 100,000 guilders. Given the restrictions on the transport of bullion between Curaçao and Cartagena de las Indias by Dutch owned ships, arrangements were made for payment to Grillo's and Lomelini's factor in the island. Joseph de Castillo,

55. Johannes M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic slave trade*, 33-38; Han Jordaan, 'The Curaçao slave market: From *Asiento* trade to free trade, 1700-1730', in: Postma and Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic commerce*, 219-258.

merchant in Brussels, was also involved in the business, providing part of the initial capital for the venture.⁵⁶

Powers of attorney were also used to sort out problems brought about by the need of ransoming. Sephardic merchants signed multiple contracts regarding ransoming, while the Christian involvement in this type of exchanges was insignificant. This difference may be explained by the levels of engagement of the Amsterdam Sephardim in the north African trade. The ships that operated in the trading circuits linking the north of Africa and the Republic were often targeted by pirates of the Barbary States and the Ottoman empire sailing via Gibraltar, along the Moroccan coast into the open Atlantic. These attacks often led to the capture of ships and cargoes and to the enslavement of crews and passengers, forcing merchants and their agents to negotiate the ransom of ships, cargoes and crews.⁵⁷ On October 1637, the *Santa Maria* was freighted by David de Palacios to sail from Hamburg to the north of Africa calling at Lisbon. While sailing towards its destination, the ship was attacked by Ottoman pirates. Ship and cargo were taken to Sale and the crew enslaved and sold at the local slave market. George Bijsterveld, Dutch consul in Marocco made an attempt at ransoming the crew, but negotiations concerning the liberation of non-Dutch sailors were made difficult by the state of war between Marocco and the Habsburg Empire.⁵⁸ Similar mechanisms of capture and enslavement were used by European merchants against Moorish ships and crews. For instance, in 1634, some English, Dutch and French merchants with economic interests in Sale and Madeira reported that 22 Moors had been enslaved and bought by the governor of Madeira.⁵⁹ In both cases, as in many others, the Portuguese Nation of Amsterdam intervened as intermediary to settle the ransoming demands, which often included the exchange of prisoners for slaves, products or species.⁶⁰

56. GAA, NA 1148/205; 1664-03-12; NA 3221/395; 1675-04-27; NA 3678B/919; 1669-07-01; NA 2231/82-89; 1669-09-09.

57. Jonathan Israel, *The Jews of Spanish North Africa, 1600-1669* (London 1979); Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (eds.), *Ransom slavery along the Ottoman borders (early fifteenth – early eighteenth centuries)* (Leiden 2007); Janice E. Thompson, *Mercenaries, pirates and sovereigns. State-building and extraterritorial violence in early modern Europe* (Princeton 1994).

58. GAA, NA 1420/188; 1637-04-23.

59. GAA, NA 948/236-238; 1635-03-02.

60. Moulay Belhamissi, *Les captifs algériens et l'Europe chrétienne (1518-1839)* (Algiers 1988); Philippe Contamine, 'Un contrôle étatique croissant. Les usages de la guerre du xive au xviii^e siècle: rançons et butins', in: Philippe Contamine and Nicole Genet (eds.), *Guerre et concurrence entre les Etats européens du xive au xviii^e siècle* (Paris 1998) 199-236; Alexis Bernard, 'Le logiche del profitto. Schiavi e società a Siviglia nel Seicento', *Quaderni Storici* 107:2 (2001) 379-389; Francisco Vidal Castro, 'Le rachat de captifs en al-Andalus (viii^e-xve s.). Théorie et pratique du droit et des institutions islamiques', *Hypothèses* (2006) 313-327; Michel Fontenay, *La Méditerranée entre la Croix et le Croissant. Navigation, commerce, course et piraterie (xvii^e-xix^e siècle)* (Paris 2010); Maura Fortunati, 'Captivi, riscatti ed assicu-

Between commercial and financial investment, the Amsterdam slave traders only tighed up ten percent of their total portfolio to the slave trade and about one fifth to the western African commodity exchanges. Why such a modest commitment?

The low participation of the Amsterdam merchants in the commerce with western Africa and the slave trade is directly related to the patterns of consumption in Europe and the Americas, to the legal and fiscal frameworks regulating these commercial branches, and the specific risks and specificities inherent to these multiple activities. From the fifteenth century onwards, the northern European and Baltic towns were the major consumption markets for the Portuguese and Spanish colonial products, since Iberian consumption markets failed to respond to the new imports.⁶¹ African ivory, gold, pepper, wax and ambergris as well as Brazilian sugar and dyewood, and Spanish American silver and gold made their way from Iberian ports to the north.

Until 1585 Antwerp was the main redistribution centre for Iberian colonial goods in northern Europe (including the Baltic and Scandinavia), a position taken by Amsterdam in the 1590s.⁶² However, since the third quarter of the sixteenth century, African products had to compete fiercely to guarantee their place in the consumption markets. African sugar from São Tomé faced competition from the Brazilian sugar, known for its higher quality.⁶³ African gold struggled against the Spanish American gold, whereas African pepper battled against Asian pepper. Only African ivory had a guaranteed consumption outlet, though the demand remained limited, since ivory catered to a niche market of high valued manufactured pieces of personalised design for an elite of wealthy consumers.

The competition African products had to face to succeed in the European markets, on the one hand, and the small niche markets they were catering to, on the other hand, made profits look potentially high but at the same time uncertain, increasing the risks of investment in general. The growth of the overall transaction costs might have put some of the Amsterdam commercial elite off from engaging extensively in the western African commodity trade.

The demand for slave labour, in contrast, was concentrated mainly in Iberia, the Mediterranean bassin and in the Portuguese and Spanish Ameri-

razione alla vigilia dei Codici', in: Vito Piergiovanni (ed.), *Corsari e riscatto dei captivi* (Milan 2010) 113-134.

61. Cátia Antunes, 'Sea and land: the integration of the Dutch and the Portuguese urban Hinterland in the European maritime system during the seventeenth century', in: Simonetta Cavacchi (org.), *Ricchezza del mare. Ricchezza dal mare. Secc. XIII-XVIII* (Florence 2006) 115-146.

62. Cátia Antunes, *Globalisation in the early modern period*.

63. For sugar prices in Amsterdam: N.W. Posthumus, *Nederlandse prijsgeschiedenis* (Leiden 1943).

can colonies.⁶⁴ Until the 1580s, Lisbon and the Iberian southern ports were important redistribution centres for the transport of enslaved Africans (from both north and sub-Saharan Africa) into Europe. These ports catered to the Atlantic Islands of Madeira and the Canaries as well as to Brazil and the Spanish West Indies and America mainland. Later, during the sixteenth century, these commercial circuits were readjusted and the Iberian American colonies started to be supplied directly from western Africa. Therefore, the merchants investing in this business had a guaranteed market for the enslaved Africans imported into Europe and the Americas. Nevertheless, Amsterdam based merchants had a very limited involvement in this commercial branch. We hypothesize that participating in slave circuits posed various challenges to most private businessmen.⁶⁵ Firstly, between the 1580s and the 1670s the Portuguese and Spanish slave trades were held as monopolies by the Iberian Crowns. Private merchants could only acquire permission to operate within these trades by purchasing commercial licenses from the Iberian monarchs or their monopoly holders, the so-called *contratadores* and *assentistas*.⁶⁶ Secondly, the high taxes imposed by the Portuguese and the Spanish Crowns over the slave trade constituted another challenge that cannot be ignored.⁶⁷ Finally, all the aforementioned overseas areas were under the control of the Habsburgs, sworn enemies of the Republic. The conflict involving the Republic, Spain, Portugal and their overseas Empires had a major impact on the Atlantic trade in general and on the African and slave trades in particular,

64. Linda A. Newson and Susie Minchin, *From capture to sale: the Portuguese slave trade to Spanish South America in the early seventeenth century* (Leiden 2007); Maria Manuel Torrão, 'Formas de participação dos portugueses no comércio de escravos com as Índias de Castela: abastecimento e transporte', in: *11 Reunião Internacional de História de África: A dimensão atlântica da África: Rio de Janeiro, 30 de Outubro a 1 de Novembro de 1996* (São Paulo 1997) 203-222; Torrão, 'Rotas comerciais, agentes económicos e meios de pagamento', in: Maria Emília Madeira Santos (org.), *História geral de Cabo Verde*, 11: 17-123 (Lisbon/Praia 1995); Maria da Graça A.M. Ventura, *Portugueses no Peru ao tempo da União Ibérica: mobilidade, cumplicidades e vivências*, 3 vols. (Lisbon 2005); J.L. Vogt, 'The early São Tomé-Príncipe slave trade with Mina, 1500-1540', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6:3 (1973) 453-467; Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les traites négrières: Essai d'histoire globale* (Paris 2004); Herbert S. Klein, 'The Atlantic slave trade to 1650', in: Stuart B. Schwartz (ed.), *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill 2004) 201-236; Avelino Teixeira da Mota, 'Entrée d'esclaves noirs a Valence (1445-1482): le remplacement de la voie Saharienne par la voie Atlantique', in: *Sol, le parole et l'écrit: 2000 ans d'histoire africaine: Mélanges en hommage a Raymond Mauny*, 2 (Paris 1981) 579-594.

65. Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les traites négrières*; Klein, 'The Atlantic slave trade to 1650', 201-236; Mota, 'Entrée d'esclaves noirs a Valence', 579-594.

66. Newson & Minchin, *From capture to sale*, chap. 1; Ribeiro da Silva, 'Transferring European fiscal systems overseas: The Portuguese home and colonial fiscal systems: a comparison', in: Simonetta Cavaciocchi (org.), *Fiscal systems in the European economy from the 13th to the 18th centuries* (Florence 2008) 1: 553-556, 558-560.

67. *Ibid.*, 1: 552-553, 567.

by affecting shipping, routes, supplying areas and consumption markets.⁶⁸ Together, these circumstances drove many merchants away from investing in the slave trade.

In order to trade in western African commodities and slaves, merchants in Amsterdam needed to acquire extensive know-how about the supply areas and the consumption markets. These men and their supercargoes were required to have a fair knowledge of the coastal markets in western Africa and in the Americas, the demand and consumption patterns, trading practices, possible competitors and partners, prices, and exchange rates in the different American markets.⁶⁹ The western African commerce and the slave trade also required extensive commercial expertise and wide trading networks covering several geographical areas. To guarantee a certain level of agency, the businessmen in the Republic needed either to live in the posts on the western coast of Africa, take part in commercial ventures, hire supercargoes or place their employees and/or representatives in key points in the commercial circuits either on the shore or on board of floating trading posts. Supercargoes, chief- and junior-factors were instructed on how to behave towards potential competitors on the coast as well as on how to negotiate with African and Eurafrikan traders. Knowledgeable supercargoes and factors were also needed in the American ports of disembarkation, in order to guarantee the success of business.⁷⁰

Trade with western Africa also posed a whole set of logistical problems. A journey between the Republic, western Africa and the Americas combining long-distance and coastal circuits could last from seventeen up to twenty-seven months.⁷¹ This timeline increased the costs with wages, victuals, and insurance and, consequently, reduced the amount or postponed the moment to collect the profits, driving many merchants away from investing in the slave trade and other branches of the African commerce. European routes

68. Antunes, *Globalisation in the early modern period*; Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in western Africa*, chap. 7.

69. Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, 'Dutch vessels in African waters. Routes, commercial strategies, trading practices and intra-continental trade (c. 1590s-1674)', *Tijdschrift voor Zeegechiedenis* 1 (2010) 19-38; J.D. La Fleur (trans. & ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke's journal of voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea and Angola (1605-1612)* (London 2000) 26-29; 'Andreas Josua Ulsheimer's voyage of 1603-4', in: Adam Jones (ed.), *German sources for West African history 1559-1669* (Wiesbaden 1985) 21-23, 64-65; 'Samuel Bruni's voyages of 1611-20', in: *ibid.*, 4-59, 71-78. Adam Jones (trans. & ed.), *Western Africa in the mid-seventeenth century: An anonymous Dutch manuscript* (Atlanta 1995) 197-200.

70. Ribeiro da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese in western Africa*, chap. 6, 7; Cátia Antunes & Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, 'Cross-cultural entrepreneurship in the Atlantic: Africans, Dutch and Sephardic Jews in western Africa, 1580-1674', *Itinerario: International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction* 35:1 (2011) 49-76.

71. Ribeiro da Silva, 'Dutch vessels in African waters', 26; Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic*, 152, Table 7.1: Time dimension of triangular slaving missions.

were less risky and therefore cheaper, providing the expectation of perhaps not higher, but certainly safer returns.

Conclusion

This article has questioned four main beliefs about the Dutch Republic's involvement in the western African exchanges during the early modern period and their applicability to the first decades of Dutch participation in those commercial branches. In the first place, private entrepreneurs were responsible for a bit less than half of the total investment against a smaller share held by the WIC. In the second place, ports in Zeeland seem to have been supplanted by Amsterdam concerning slaving enterprises up to roughly forty-three percent of the total. In the third place, western Africa represented about one fifth of the total Amsterdam investment, while slave trading activities took up a meager ten percent. Finally, merchants in Amsterdam, regardless of their religious background invested in equal shares in the African trades. In short, the largest slave traders in the Dutch Republic before 1674 were private merchants, from multiple origins and diverse religious backgrounds, residing in Amsterdam and for whom slave trading was but a minor business.

These statements contradict Emmer *et al's* statement that the Atlantic was not important for European businessmen. For the Dutch case before 1674, the Atlantic in general was important, the western African exchanges as well, it was the slave trade that was minor when compared to other investments in the slave traders' portfolios. So perhaps, instead of returning to the discussion initiated by Williams in 1944 about the profitability of slave trade, historians might be better off understanding the profitability of the Atlantic in general. However, that is not an easy task. Since it is almost impossible to discern what was European and what was Atlantic in these exchanges, as proposed by Gervais, we think that the future research agenda for the Atlantic should consider the gains and losses of the Atlantic exchanges within the Atlantic itself (being the Europeans simple participants in a complex nexus of networks) and the spin-offs of the Atlantic output within Europe (with emphasis to the share of this output that was actually retained by Africans and 'Americans'). It is our view that only when we understand this intrinsic dialogue of exchanges between the European and Atlantic spaces will we be able to assess the pivotal role the Atlantic played in the economic growth of Europe before the Industrial Revolution.

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