

## CROSSING EMPIRES: *Portuguese, Sephardic, and Dutch Business Networks in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1580–1674*

In the last two decades, private entrepreneurship has emerged as an important research area in the field of Atlantic history.<sup>1</sup> Various studies have clearly shown the role played by private business in the making of the early modern Atlantic economy.<sup>2</sup> Initially, private entrepreneurship was studied separately from imperial entities and did not contemplate activities encompassing several European empires. Recently, however, scholars have started to look into private engagement in various branches of the Atlantic colonial trade, broadening our understanding of when and how private business operated simultaneously in different colonial settings. The works of Schnurmann, Studnicki-Gizbert, Ebert, Trivellato, and Antunes are some of the most important contributions.<sup>3</sup>

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1. This article is an extended version of a paper presented at the 123rd annual meeting of the American Historical Association (New York, January 2–5, 2009) in the panel *Weaving the Webs of Empire: Connections and Confrontations in the Early Modern World*, organized by the Forum on European Expansion and Global Interaction. The materials presented here are also partially integrated into my Ph.D. dissertation, titled “The Dutch and the Portuguese in West Africa: Empire Building and Atlantic System: 1580–1674,” defended at Leiden University in June 2009 (in press with Brill Publishers, Atlantic World Series).

2. See, for example, *The Atlantic Economy During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel*, ed. Peter A. Coclanis (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005); *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy: Essays on Transatlantic Enterprise*, eds. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Commercial Networks in the Early Modern World*, eds. Diogo Ramada Curto and Anthony Molho (Firenze: European University Institute, 2002).

3. Claudia Schnurmann, “Atlantic Trade and Regional Identities: The Creation of Supranational Atlantic Systems in the 17th Century” in *Atlantic History: History of the Atlantic System: 1580–1830*, ed. Horst Pietschmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), pp. 179–198; Schnurmann, “Representative Atlantic Entrepreneur: Jacob Leisler, 1640–1691,” in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817*, eds. Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 259–286; Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, “Interdependence and the Collective Pursuit of Profits: Portuguese Commercial Networks in the Early Modern Atlantic” in *Commercial Networks*, pp. 90–120; Studnicki-Gizbert, “La ‘nation’ portugaise. Réseaux marchands dans l’espace atlantique à la époque moderne,” *Annales HSS* 58:3 (2003), pp. 627–648; Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea. Portugal’s Atlantic Diaspora and the Crises of the Spanish Empire, 1492–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University

In this article, we will look into the involvement of private business in the transatlantic slave trade. Reconstructing the figures of this nefarious commerce and assessing the transport and treatment of enslaved Africans in the Middle Passage and its consequences have been the main priorities for scholars working in the field for the past 60 years.<sup>4</sup> Although European participation and commercial practices have already been examined, little attention has been paid to the European perpetrators themselves, especially to the private businessmen operating inside and outside the sphere of the Iberian royal monopolies and the chartered companies established in the course of the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, the Portuguese and Dutch trades in the Atlantic have been associated with the monopolies of the Portuguese crown and the Dutch West India Company (hereafter, the Company). However, private entrepreneurship was vital for the functioning of these two Atlantic economies, the slave trade being one of its most important components. The traffic in enslaved Africans demanded high investments in insurances, freights, purchase of cargos, and payment of seamen, commercial agents, and others. The articulation of the coastal and long-distance routes required a high degree of commercial expertise and wide trading networks covering several geographical areas. To a great extent, the success of the business depended on complex financial and commercial webs connecting key places. These factors stimulated interactions on an international and local level and the establishment of trans-imperial business networks.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Portuguese, Sephardic, and Dutch, Flemish, and German<sup>6</sup> businessmen based in Portugal, the Dutch

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Press, 2007); Christopher Ebert, "Dutch Trade with Brazil before the Dutch West India Company, 1587–1621" in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, pp. 49–76; Ebert, *Between Empires: Brazilian Sugar in the Early Atlantic Economy, 1550–1630* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Cátia Antunes, "Investimento no Atlântico: redes multiculturais de negócio, 1580–1776," in *XV Congresso Internacional de AHILA, 1808–2008: Crises y problemas en el mundo Atlántico* (Leiden: AHILA, Depto. de Estudios Latinoamericanos, 2010).

4. Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade; A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); David Eltis, "The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58:1 (2001), pp. 17–46; Eltis et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*, CD-ROM (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David Eltis and David Richardson, *Routes to Slavery: Direction, Ethnicity, and Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London: Frank Cass, 1997). Eltis and Richardson, "A New Assessment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade" in *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, eds. David Eltis and David Richardson (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 1–60; Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

5. David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, and David Richardson, "National Participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade: New Evidence" in *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections During the Slave Trade*, eds. José C. Curto and Renée Soulodre-La France (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 2005), pp. 13–42; Jelmer Vos, David Eltis, and David Richardson, "The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the African Origins of the Traffic" in *Extending the Frontiers*, pp. 228–249.

6. The Republic mercantile community included two important groups: Christian merchants of Dutch, Flemish, and German origin and the Portuguese Sephardim established in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. For convenience, the former are designated as "Dutch" throughout this paper and the latter as "Sephardim."

Republic (hereafter, the Republic), and other places in Europe, as well as overseas, were at the heart of this complex system of interactions. They will be the prime focus of this article. For the past 20 years, scholars have studied these mercantile groups. Nevertheless, little attention has been given to the economic activities of private investors in the slave trade.<sup>7</sup> Only in recent years have specialists on the transatlantic slave trade started looking into the activities of private businessmen engaged in this commerce, either single-handedly or in partnership with associates. The works of Vila Vilar, Franco Vega, Miller, Newson, and Minchin are cases in point.<sup>8</sup> This article will partly fill this void in the literature by examining the financial and commercial networks of Portuguese, Sephardic, and Dutch participants in the transatlantic slave trade.

We will focus on the period between 1580 and 1674. The year 1580 corresponds to the beginning of the Habsburg rule over Portugal and its empire, and the year 1674 refers to the bankruptcy of the Dutch Company. During this period, the businesses of the Amsterdam private merchants were deeply affected by the political, military, and diplomatic conjunctures of the time, as well as by changes in the juridical framework regulating commercial activities in the so-called Dutch Atlantic and Iberian Atlantic regions. We will start by looking into these matters and then continue with an analysis of the businessmen based in Portugal and the Republic who operated in the slave circuits connecting western Africa to the Americas. Here, we aim to identify the most important merchants investing in the slave trade and point out their main associates, insurers

7. On the mercantile groups in the Republic, see, for example: Cátia Antunes, *Globalisation in the Early Modern Period: The Economic Relationship Between Amsterdam and Lisbon, 1640–1705* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2004); Oscar Gelderblom, *Zuid-Nederlandse kooplieden en de opkomst van de Amsterdamse stapelmarkt (1578-1630)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000); *Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship in Early Modern Times: Merchants and Industrialists Within the Orbit of the Dutch Staple Market*, eds. C. Lesger and L. Noordegraaf (The Hague: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1995). On the Portuguese Sephardim in the Republic, Western Europe, and the Atlantic in general, see Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750* (London: Clarendon, 1998); Israel, *Diasporas within the Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews, and the World Maritime Empires (1540–1740)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Y. Kaplan, *An Alternative to Modernity. The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Daniel M. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation 2000). On the mercantile group in Portugal and the Portuguese empire, see Leonor Freire Costa, *Impérios e grupos mercantis. entre o Oriente e o Atlântico (século XVII)* (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 2002); Freire Costa, *O transporte no Atlântico e a Companhia Geral do Comércio do Brasil (1580–1663)*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 2002); José Gonçalves Salvador, *Os magnatas do tráfico negreiro (séculos XVI e XVII)* (São Paulo, Brasil: Pioneira Editora, 1981); David Grant Smith, “The Portuguese Mercantile Class of Portugal and Brazil in the 17th Century: A Socioeconomic Study of Merchants of Lisbon and Bahia, 1620–1690” (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Austin, Texas, 1975).

8. Enriqueta Vila Vilar, “La sublevación de Portugal y la trata de negros,” *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv* 2 (1976), pp. 171–192; Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamérica y el comercio de esclavos* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1977); Marisa Vega Franco, *El tráfico de esclavos con América: asientos de Grillo y Lomellini, 1663–1674* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1984), pp. 194–202; Joseph C. Miller, “Capitalism and Slaving: The Financial and Commercial Organization of the Angolan Slave Trade, According to the Accounts of Antonio Coelho Guerreiro (1684–1692),” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17:1 (1984), pp. 1–56; Linda A. Newson and Susie Minchin, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

and agents. Our goal is to reconstruct their commercial webs, and our analysis will be based on several case studies, whose selection is based on the quality and number of relevant primary sources available.

The data here presented have been gathered during 10 years of research in Portuguese and Dutch archives. The study of the insurers, merchants, and agents operating from Portugal is based on the monopoly contracts and the correspondence collected from the Portuguese Overseas Historical Archive (hereafter, AHU), the notarial contracts from the Portuguese National Archive (hereafter, IAN/TT) and the Porto District Archive (hereafter, ADP). For the Dutch and Sephardim based in the Republic, we will use the collection of notarial contracts of the Amsterdam city archive (hereafter, GAA).<sup>9</sup> The analysis is based on a set of 494 notarial contracts comprising insurances, commercial agreements, labor contracts, and powers-of-attorney related to the business of Amsterdam's merchants with the regions of Senegambia, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and Sierra Leone; the Grain, Gold, Ivory, and Slave Coasts; and São Tomé and Príncipe, Loango, Kongo, and Angola. Given the erratic nature of this type of primary source, we have complemented our study with these resources: data in the collection of the first Dutch West India Company deposited at the Netherlands National Archives (hereafter, NA, OWIC), published travel accounts, and secondary literature.

### **TRANS-IMPERIAL BUSINESS IN POLITICAL AND MILITARY CONTEXT**

The participation of Portuguese, Sephardic, and Dutch businessmen in the transatlantic slave trade had been directly affected by the political, military, and diplomatic situation in Europe and the Atlantic during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Three main events influenced the activities of these merchants: the annexation of Portugal and its overseas possessions to the Habsburg empire in 1580; the opening of formal hostilities between the Republic and the Habsburg empire in 1621 with the end of the Twelve Years' Truce (1609–1621); and the independence of Portugal in 1640 and the subsequent negotiations leading to the ceasefire and the peace treaty of 1662. The annexation of Portugal to the Habsburg Empire in 1580, together with the legal reform of the system whereby slaves were supplied to the Spanish American colonies and new laws regarding the presence of foreigners in those areas, provided the Portuguese merchants with access to the Spanish *asiento* (the royal monopoly for

9. These source materials have been chosen as the main basis of our study because they constitute one of the most representative collections of notarial acts for the study of the European trade in the early modern period.

the supply of slaves to Spain's American colonies)—and therefore with the legal right to supply slave labor to Spanish America.<sup>10</sup>

However, the annexation also dragged Portugal and its empire into the economic and military conflicts between the Habsburg empire and the Republic.<sup>11</sup> In 1598, Philip II imposed a total embargo on all Dutch ships sailing to Iberia. Portuguese and Spanish ships were also prevented from anchoring at Dutch ports by a reciprocal embargo decreed by the States-General (the central government of the Republic, holding the highest legislative and executive power). Soon after, Dutch merchants trading in colonial goods started to organize their own intercontinental routes directly from the Republic to the South Atlantic, sailing to Venezuela, the Caribbean, Brazil, and western Africa.<sup>12</sup> The arrival of the Dutch in the South Atlantic triggered conflicts between Dutch and Portuguese merchant ships, as well as naval attacks by the Portuguese coastal fleet at Mina (present-day Elmina, Ghana) on the Dutch merchants.<sup>13</sup> Between 1598 and 1608, several assaults on the Portuguese possessions in western Africa, namely São Tomé, Príncipe, and the fortresses of the Gold Coast, were organized by the Dutch merchants and sponsored by the States-General.<sup>14</sup> The mutual attacks had a disruptive effect on trade in both the North and South Atlantic.

After two decades of violence and economic loss for Spain, Portugal, and the Republic, the main parties involved in the conflict negotiated a ceasefire—the Twelve Years' Truce—and ended the embargoes, all-in-all positive measures for private merchants. However, the truce was used by the Republic and the Habsburg empire to strengthen their military positions both in Europe and overseas. Not unexpectedly, the end of the truce gave way again to open conflict and new impositions of mutual embargoes. The first move of the States-General was

10. Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea*, pp. 42–66.

11. This conflict resulted from the Dutch revolt (1568) against the taxation and centralization policies implemented by Philip II.

12. Antunes, *Globalisation in the Early Modern period*, chapters 2 and 3; see also Frédéric Mauro, *Portugal, o Brasil e o Atlântico (1570–1670)*, appendixes (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1997).

13. For further details and descriptions of these conflicts, see *Pieter de Marees: Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, eds. Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford: The British Academy, Oxford University Press, 1987); J. de Laet, *De Iaerlyck verhael van de Vernichtinghen der Geotroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie in dertien boeken*, 4 vols. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1931–1937); J. K. J. de Jonge, *De Oorsprong van Nederland's Bezittingen op de Kust van Guinea in herinnering gebracht uit de oorspronkelijke stukken naar aanleiding van een voorgenomen afstand dier bezittingen aan Groot-Brittannië* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1871); For examples from the GAA Notarial Archive (hereafter, *Not. Arch.*), see, for instance, GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 200/306v–307: August 24, 1619.

14. Victor Enthoven, “Early Dutch Expansion in the Atlantic Region, 1585–1621” in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, pp. 17–48; Dantzig and Jones, *Pieter de Marees*, pp. 202–222; “Johann von Lübeliding's Voyage of 1599–1600,” in *German Sources for West African History, 1599–1669*, ed. Adam Jones (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983), pp. 9–17; J. H. De Stoppelaar, *Balthasar de Moucheron: een bladzijde uit de Nederlandsche Handelgeschiedenis tijdens den Tachtigjarige Oorlog* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1901); De Jonge, *De Oorsprong*, pp. 7–13.

chartering a state-sponsored commercial company (1621) and providing it with a monopoly over Dutch trade in both the North and South Atlantic. The Company was to be used as a military weapon against the overseas possessions of the Habsburg emperor in the Atlantic, including both the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas and the western posts and settlements of Africa. The Company began operations in 1624, and the effects of its privateering were felt immediately.<sup>15</sup> During the following two decades, the Company took over considerable colonial areas from the Portuguese crown, Brazil and Angola being the most important economically. During these years, the hostilities between the Company and the Portuguese escalated visibly in the South Atlantic waters and possessions.

Immediately after the Portuguese restoration on December 1, 1640, the newly crowned João IV (r. 1640–1656) tried to re-establish peaceful relations with the Republic.<sup>16</sup> On June 12, 1641, a treaty valid for a period of 10 years was signed in The Hague; it was ratified in Lisbon on November 12, 1641. According to this treaty, the Republic and Portugal would observe a truce, starting in Europe immediately after the document had been ratified, one year afterward in India, and six months after the arrival of the news in Brazil. In Asia and Europe, the Dutch were allowed freedom of navigation and commerce. However, the Portuguese ships did not have access to the Dutch-controlled Brazilian ports.

In spite of the truce, the troops of the Company and the Portuguese crown had more bloody military encounters than ever in Angola and Brazil between 1645 and 1654. These military events had a tremendous impact on trade, since Angola was the major market for slave labor and Brazil was at the time the major producer of sugar for northern European consumer markets. Private merchants felt the effects severely.<sup>17</sup> Only in 1662 did Portugal sign a peace treaty with the Republic.<sup>18</sup> The restoration of Portuguese independence in 1640 also put an end to the easy access of Portuguese and Sephardic merchants to Spain's Amer-

15. For the number of Portuguese ships seized by the Company up to 1636, see De Laet, *De Iaerlyck verhael*, pp. 282–285.

16. Duarte P. de Lima, "A política brasileira de El-Rei D. João IV" in *Congresso do Mundo Português* (Lisbon: Comissão Executiva dos Centenários, 1940), vol. 4, pp. 337–378; Lima, "A colaboração dos governos de Lisboa e de Madrid perante a agressão holandesa no Brasil," in *Congresso do Mundo Português*, vol. 4, pp. 369–399; Virginia Ráu, *A embaixada de Tristão de Mendonça Furtado e os arquivos notariais holandeses* (Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa de História, 1958); and Edgar Prestage, *A embaixada de Tristão de Mendonça Furtado à Holanda em 1641: primeiras embaixadas de el-rei D. João IV com documentos elucidativos* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1920).

17. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 1498/190: August 17, 1639.

18. According to the settlement, the Portuguese crown allowed Dutch ships to buy goods at the Portuguese ports on the west coast of Africa. Dutch businessmen also gained permission to export weapons to Portugal and the Portuguese posts and settlements. Nevertheless, the crown limited the commercial freedom of the Dutch and the Portuguese merchants: these groups were not allowed to trade in products that were part of the monopoly of the Company of Brazil. In addition, they had to pay taxes on all products traded and were forced to sail in convoys organized by the aforementioned Company. Costa, *O Transporte*, vol. 1, pp. 208–236, 537–558.

ican colonies and the Spanish asiento, changing the business opportunities they enjoyed. We will explain these effects in more detail below.

## CRACKS IN THE MONOPOLIES

The political, military, and diplomatic events just described also brought changes to the juridical framework that regulated private business in the Iberian Atlantic and the Dutch Atlantic. Those changes affected, directly and indirectly, the business prospects for private merchants and the level of risk involved in financial and commercial transactions associated with the slave trade. Portuguese trade with western Africa had been a monopoly since the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> To organize trade and prevent the intervention of smugglers, the crown had established several factories in the Guinea-Bissau region, Cape Verde, and São Tomé.<sup>20</sup> However, by the late fifteenth century, the Crown had begun to grant private merchants trading licenses to operate within certain areas and with a specific range of goods<sup>21</sup> and also to lease direct management of the different monopolies to private interests.<sup>22</sup> Between the 1530s and 1640s, this became common practice. The monopolies of Cape Verde and Guinea, São Tomé, and Angola were leased regularly to private businessmen, named as *contratadores*.<sup>23</sup>

The *contratadores* had permission to trade and to place their own factors and assistants in the different regions. They were also allowed to grant *avenças* (trading licenses) to other private merchants. The *avenças* were contracts authorizing the *avençador* (license holder) to export a certain quantity of a given product within a specific geographical area. According to these contracts, the *contratadores* would cover the risks involved in the transport, such as shipwreck, fire, and capture by pirates and corsairs. The other party had permission to load the quantity of goods mentioned in the contract in a specific port. For instance, in Angola

19. Jill Dias, "As primeiras penetrações portuguesas em África" in *Portugal no Mundo*, ed. Luís de Albuquerque (Lisbon: Publicações Alfa, 1989), vol. 1, p. 285; Marília Lopes, "A exploração económica da Guiné e de Cabo Verde," in *Portugal no Mundo*, vol. 1, p. 252.

20. Maria Teresa da Silva Diaz de Scabra, "Análise organizacional de S. Jorge da Mina: perspectivas da colonização Portuguesa na Costa Ocidental Africana" (Unpublished M.A. diss., University of Lisbon, 2000), pp. 80–92; J. Bato' Ora Ballong-Wen-Mewuda, *São Jorge da Mina, 1482–1637: la vie d'un comptoir portugais en Afrique occidentale* (Lisbon/Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1993), vol. 1, chapters 2 and 3; Maria Manuel Torrão, "Rotas comerciais, agentes económicos, meios de pagamento" in *História geral de Cabo Verde*, ed. Maria Emília Madeira Santos (Lisbon/Praia: Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, Instituto Nacional da Cultura de Cabo Verde, 1995), vol. 2, pp. 17–123; Zelinda Cohen, "Administração das ilhas de Cabo Verde," in *História geral de Cabo Verde*, vol. 2, pp. 189–224.

21. Dias, "As primeiras penetrações," p. 285; Lopes, "A exploração económica," p. 252.

22. The practice of leasing out the commercial monopolies over the several areas of the west coast of Africa started as early as the 1450s. J. Bato' Ora Ballong-Wen-Mewuda, "A instalação de fortalezas na costa Africana: os casos de Arguim e da Mina: comércio e contactos culturais" in *Portugal no Mundo*, vol. 2, pp. 137–149.

23. Mauro, *Portugal*, vol. 1, pp. 217–218; Torrão, "Rotas," p. 29; Zelinda Cohen, "Subsídios para a história geral de Cabo Verde: os contratos de arrendamento para a cobrança das rendas e direitos reais das ilhas de Cabo Verde (1500/1560)," *Studia* 53 (1994), pp. 336–338.

the ships of the *avençadores* were to be loaded only at Luanda, and the loading was to be inspected by both the agent of the *contratador* and the royal factor. Together, they would issue a *certidão de despacho* (embarkation certificate) to be presented to the authorities at the port of destination.<sup>24</sup> The *contratador* or his agents could sell these trading licenses, in either Portugal or the Atlantic possessions. To avoid losses, the *contratadores* could demand a *fiança* (pledge of goods) from the *avençadores*. For the *avenças* sold within the overseas possessions, *fianças* were usually given in the form of gold, silver, or precious stones.

During the fifteenth century, at the time of establishment of the *donatarias* of Cape Verde and São Tomé (royal donation of land, and administrative and judicial power, to noblemen), the crown also granted commercial advantages to their privileged owners (the so-called *donatários* and *capitães-donatários*), as well as to the settlers.<sup>25</sup> These measures, aiming at promoting population settlement and economic developments, gave permanent inhabitants and citizens permission to trade with the nearest areas of the African continent, opening the door for another stream of private participation in the slave trade, as well as in other businesses.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the monopoly of the Portuguese crown was not completely closed to private entrepreneurship. From the early sixteenth century, private merchants controlled the crown monopolies in western Africa, including the slave trade.<sup>27</sup> In the late seventeenth century, the role played by the *contratadores* was

24. Eunice R. J. P. L. Jorge da Silva, "A administração de Angola: século XVII" (Unpublished M.A. diss., University of Lisbon, 1996), vol. 1, pp. 221–253.

25. The *donataria* was a royal donation of the ownership of land to a nobleman as a reward for serving the crown. In most cases, it could be inherited by the descendants of the landowner, after royal confirmation. The *donatário* had the power to administer the land and to exploit it economically. In order to do so, he often divided the land into several *capitanias-donatarias*, territorial administrative divisions. In general, these noblemen did not settle in their *donatarias* and *capitanias-donatarias*. The rule of each of these areas was given to a *capitão-donatário*, who was in general a member of the *donatário* noble house. The captain had administrative, judicial, economic, and military power to organize the territory in the name of the real owner. Both the *capitanias-donatarias* and the function of *capitão-donatário* were donated in the form of inheritance right to the descendants of the beneficiary. A similar administrative system had already been used in Portugal during the Middle Ages; the success of this solution led the crown to use it in the new overseas areas in the Atlantic. First, it was tried with success in Madeira and Azores and from there was transplanted to Cape Verde, São Tomé, Angola, and Brazil. Given this fact, the early Portuguese administration of the Atlantic had a medieval character. For a general overview, see Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 197–254; António de Vasconcelos de Saldanha, *As capitánias e o regime senhorial na expansão ultramarina portuguesa* (Funchal: Secretaria Regional do Turismo, Centro de Estudos de História do Atlântico, 1992).

26. Cristina Maria Seuanes Serafim, *As ilhas de São Tomé no século XVII* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos de Além-Mar da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2000), pp. 11–13; Isabel Castro Henriques, "O ciclo do açúcar em São Tomé nos séculos XV e XVI" in *Portugal no Mundo*, vol. 1, p. 269; Luís de Albuquerque, "A colonização de São Tomé" in *Portugal no Mundo*, vol. 2, p. 174; Torrão, "Colonização de Cabo Verde: meios e objectivos" in *Portugal no Mundo*, vol. 2, pp. 165–166.

27. In the late seventeenth century, the role played by the *contratadores* was replaced by several commercial companies chartered by the Portuguese crown with monopoly rights over the trade along the west coast of Africa. Daniel Pereira, "A fundação da Companhia de Cacheu, 1671–1676" in *Mansas, escravos, grumetes e gentio: Cacheu na encruzilhada de civilizações*, ed. Carlos Lopes (Guinea-Bissau/Lisbon: Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa, Imprensa Nacional da Casa da Moeda, 1993), pp. 207, 215.



taken over by several commercial companies chartered by the crown and given monopoly rights over the trade with Brazil and western Africa.<sup>28</sup>

In the Republic, trade with western Africa, including the slave trade, was controlled by private businessmen until 1621. In the main Dutch port cities, there were a handful of private companies and several independent businessmen involved in the commercial branches.<sup>29</sup> These private firms had no formal commercial organization, having only hired merchants and accountants aboard ships, onshore, or aboard *leggers* (floating trading posts) for conducting trade in western Africa.<sup>30</sup> The establishment of the Company by the States-General in 1621 brought to an end this initial period of free trade. The Company was granted a monopoly over all Atlantic commerce.<sup>31</sup>

Doing business and overseeing the monopoly required a formal commercial and bureaucratic framework. As a result, the west coast of Africa was divided into different commercial regions: Gambia, Cape Verde, Arguin, Sierra Leone, the Grain Coast, and the Gold Coast. The trading activities in each of these areas were granted to one of five chambers of the Company: Amsterdam, Zeeland, Maas, Northern Quarter, and Groningen,<sup>32</sup> whereas the most profitable commercial areas of western Africa—the Gold and Slave Coasts and the Loango—came under the direct administration of the Company’s board of directors.<sup>33</sup> Later, the regions of Angola and São Tomé were also put under the direct rule of the “Gentlemen Nineteen.”<sup>34</sup> It is likely that this division of the west coast of Africa had

28. The first was granted to Lourenço Pestana and Manuel da Costa Martins, who were given power to trade in the port of Palmida, south of Arguin. The second Company, led by António de Barros Bezerra and Manuel Preto Valdez, was in 1675 granted permission to control trade only in the areas of Cacheu. Daniel Pereira, “A fundação da Companhia de Cacheu, 1671–1676” in *Mansas*, pp. 207 and 215; see also Costa, *O Transporte*, vol. 1, chapters 1 and 2.

29. W. S. Unger, “Nieuwe gegevens betreffend het begin der vaart op Guinea, 1561–1601,” *Economisch-historisch Jaarboek* 21 (1940), pp. 194–217; Enthoven, “Early Dutch Expansion,” pp. 17–48.

30. “Andreas Josua Ulsheimer’s voyage of 1603–4,” in *German Sources*, pp. 21–29. “Samuel Brun’s voyages of 1611–1620,” *ibid.*, pp. 45–96; *Pieter van den Broecke’s Journal of Voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea, and Angola (1605–1612)*, ed. J. D. La Fleur (London: Hakluyt Society, 2000), pp. 28, 47, and 83–103; see also Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, “Dutch Vessels in African Waters: Routes, Commercial Strategies, Trading practices and Intra-continental Trade (ca.1590–1674),” *Tijdschrift voor Zeegechiedenis* 1 (2010), pp. 19–38.

31. P. C. Emmer, “The West India Company, 1621–1791: Dutch or Atlantic?” in *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies During the Ancien Régime*, eds. Leonard Blussé and Femme Gaastra (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1981), pp. 71–95; Henk den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1994), chapters 1, 2, and 3; see also Ernest van den Boogaart and P. C. Emmer, “The Dutch Participation in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1596–1650” in *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, eds. Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogenborn (New York: Academic Press, 1979), pp. 353–375.

32. H. den Heijer, “Directores, Stadhouderes e conselhos de administração,” in *O Brasil em arquivos neerlandeses (1624–1654)*, ed. M. Wiesebron (Leiden: CNWS, 2005), pp. 17–43; Den Heijer, *Goud, ivoor en slaven: scheepvaart en handel van de Tweede Westindische Compagnie op Afrika, 1674–1740* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1997).

33. The direction of the Company was given to an assembly, a board of 19 directors—the Gentlemen Nineteen—from the different chambers. *Ibid.*

34. NA, *Staten Generaale*, no. 5773: 1642-02-06 in *L’Ancien Congo et l’Angola, 1639–1655: d’après les archives romaines, portugaises, néerlandaises et espagnoles*, ed. Louis Jadin (Brussels/Rome: Institut Historique Belge de Rome,

to do with the political and military interests of the Company and the States-General in these regions. This division also seems to have been the best solution found by the Company to satisfy the interests of the private businessmen who had invested in these regions before the establishment of the Company.<sup>35</sup>

From its outset, the chartering of the Company was met with great opposition from the merchants of Amsterdam and the northern port cities of the Republic, who had important investments in the North Atlantic fisheries, Brazilian sugar and dyewood, the salt trade with South America, and the African gold, ivory, and slave trades. Some commercial branches were therefore detached from the Company monopoly soon after its establishment. The Brazilian and African trades, however, remained under the Company control, but not without hammering profits for both the Company and the private merchants.

The military character of the Company caused the disruption of many activities in these areas. For several years after the takeover of the captaincies in north-eastern Brazil, sugar production decreased, causing major losses for the sugar refiners in the Republic.<sup>36</sup> In the years immediately after the occupation of Luanda, Company officials also failed to secure a regular supply of slave labor to Dutch Brazil.<sup>37</sup> During the same period, the burden of paying for the huge military campaigns against the Portuguese possessions in the Atlantic began to be felt.<sup>38</sup> The Company lacked cash flow to operate its businesses in Brazil, western Africa, the Caribbean, and North America and struggled to ensure the transport of commodities, personnel, and weaponry between its posts and settlements. To mitigate its losses, the Company granted the shareholders permission to participate in the trade with Brazil and the Caribbean in 1638. In 1647, the Company also agreed to open the slave trade from Angola to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Spanish Americas to private businessmen. Finally, in 1648, the trade with North America, including the slave trade, was opened to private businessmen from the Republic.<sup>39</sup> The only commercial branch that remained

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1975), doc. 76, vol. 1, pp. 200–202; Gemeente Archief Rotterdam (hereafter, GAR), *Handel*, no. 83; S. van Brakel: “Enne Memorie over den handel der WIC, 1670” in *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast, 1674–1742. A Collection of Documents from the General State Archive at The Hague*, ed. Albert van Dantzig (Accra: GAAS, 1978), doc. 1, pp. 10–12.

35. For further details, see Ribeiro da Silva, “The Dutch and the Portuguese in West Africa,” chapter 1.

36. Ebert, “Dutch Trade with Brazil,” pp. 49–76; Ebert, *Between Empires*, chapters 3, 5, and 6.

37. Klaas Ratelband, *Nederlanders in West-Afrika (1600–1650): Angola, Kongo en São Tomé* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2000) [Portuguese trans. *Os Holandeses no Brasil e na Costa Africana. Angola, Kongo e São Tomé (1600–1650)* (Lisbon: Vega, 2003)].

38. Michiel A. G. de Jong, *‘Staat van oorlog’: wapenbedrijf en militaire hervorming in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden, 1585–1621* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005).

39. Emmer, “The West India Company,” pp. 79–81; *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast, 1580–1680* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990), p. 110; J. G. van Dillen, *Van rijkdom en regenten, handboek tot de economische en sociale geschiedenis van Nederland tijdens de Republiek*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p. 169.

as a Company monopoly was the trade in gold. This shift in the Company policies opened broad opportunities for business in the Republic, and it meant that for substantial periods of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, private merchants in Portugal and the Republic controlled most of the Atlantic commerce, including the slave trade.

## THE PORTUGUESE MERCANTILE COMMUNITY AND THE SLAVE TRADE

In Portugal, both Portuguese and foreign merchants had commercial interests in the slave trade. Most foreigners were from the Italian cities and Flanders, while the Portuguese merchants were divided between Old Christians and New Christians. These businessmen had begun their economic activities in the South Atlantic in the fifteenth century. Western Africa was their first economic target, followed by the Spanish Americas and Brazil in the early sixteenth century. The sugar, dyewood, and slave trades were their main interests. Lisbon and Seville were the organizational centers of the Old World slave trade (see figure 1), and their role continued when the transatlantic traffic began.

As already stated, private merchants wanting to participate in these businesses needed to lease a monopoly or obtain a commercial license from the crown and/or the *contratadores*. According to Freire Costa, the Dias Henriques, the Vaz de Évora, the Rodrigues de Elvas, and the Fernandes de Elvas were some of the most prominent families holding the management of the *contratos régios* (royal monopolies).<sup>40</sup> The Lamego, the Ximenes, the Coutinho, and the Gomes da Costa families were also prominent. Until the mid-1620s, these families appeared regularly as holders of the monopoly contracts of the Portuguese crown, not only for western Africa, but also for other commercial areas. During this period, there was also foreign investment in the royal contracts for the African trade, including the slave trade. For instance, between ca. 1583–1600, Giovanni Batista Rovelasca, a Milanese merchant based in Lisbon, and his associates Pedro de Sevilha and António Mendes Lamego rented the royal monopoly of São Tomé. During the same period, Rovelasca's partners also held the monopoly rights of the contract of Angola.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the Union of the Iberian Crowns (1580–1640), the Portuguese commercial and financial community also had the chance to hold contracts from the Spanish royal monopolies.<sup>42</sup> The Spanish *asiento*—Spain's monopoly over

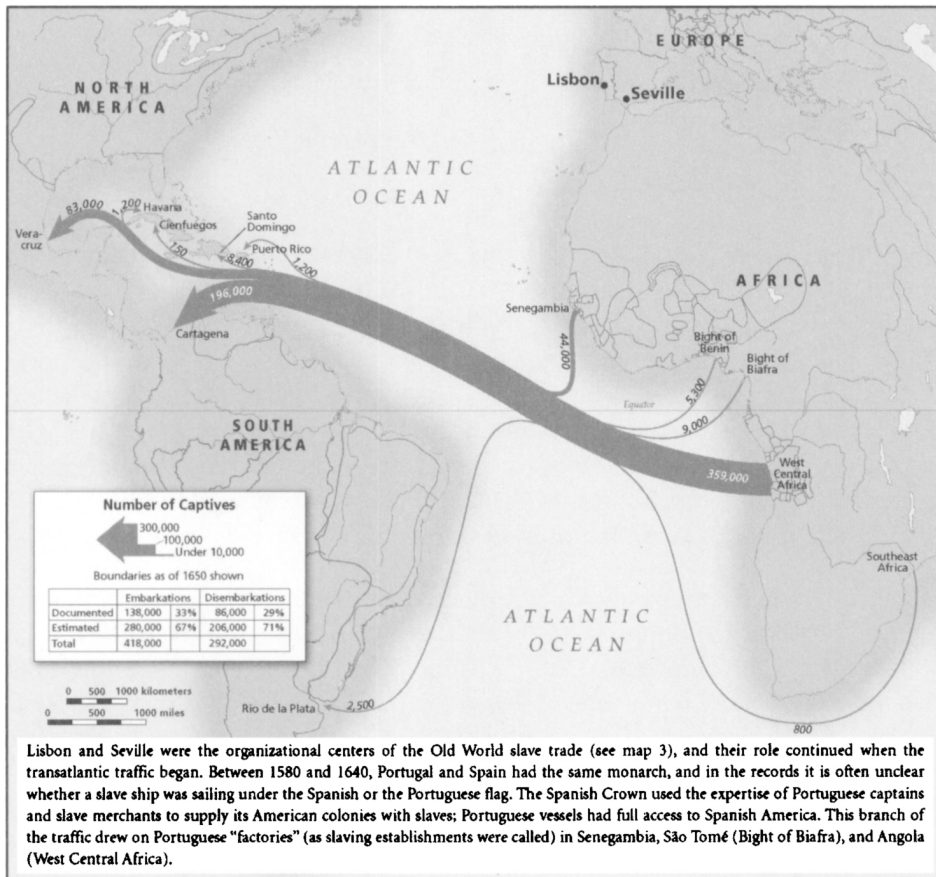
40. Costa, *Impérios*.

41. Mauro, *Portugal*, vol. 1, pp. 215–218; Salvador, *Os magnatas*, pp. 15, 19–29, 32–35, and 39–48.

42. Leslie Brennan Rout Jr., *The African Experience in Spanish America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 37–61; Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamerica*, pp. 23–59 and others.

FIGURE 1.

*Regions of Trade for Slave Voyages Outfitted in Lisbon and Seville, 1501–1641*



Source: David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), map 23, p. 43. Reprinted by permission.

the trading licenses for the regular supply of African slaves to the Spanish American colonies—was among those contracts.<sup>43</sup> Between 1586 and 1640, Portuguese businessmen monopolized the system of *asientos*.<sup>44</sup> By holding simultaneously the Spanish *asiento* and the Portuguese royal monopolies on the African trade, these merchants managed to control both the major supply and the consumer markets for slave labor (see Figure 1). For instance, João Rodrigues Coutinho, governor of Angola and son of Lopo de Sousa Coutinho, ex-governor of São Jorge da Mina, held the monopoly rights to the trade with

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

Angola between 1593 and 1606.<sup>45</sup> Between 1595 and 1600, his partner, Pedro Gomes Reinel, was the main holder of the Spanish *asiento*.<sup>46</sup> In the following period (1601–1609), João and his brother Gonçalo Vaz Coutinho managed to obtain the Spanish *asiento* through their connections in the court of Philip II.<sup>47</sup> Gonçalo Vaz Coutinho was also the son-in-law of Diogo da Veiga, a merchant engaged in the slave trade with Brazil and the Río de la Plata.<sup>48</sup>

After the Portuguese Restoration in 1640, the Portuguese merchants who held the *asiento* at the time abandoned Seville, and the links of the Portuguese mercantile elite based in Lisbon to the transatlantic slave trade appeared to weaken.<sup>49</sup> Between the 1640s and 1670s, most *contratadores* of the Angolan royal monopoly were citizens and merchants based in Luanda.<sup>50</sup> This was the case of Lopo da Fonseca Henriques, Tomás Figueira Bultão, Diogo Sanches Caraça, and Jerónimo de Teixeira Henriques. Most of these businessmen were New Christians linked with families that were already major investors in the African trade. For instance, Lopo da Fonseca Henriques rented the contract of Angola between 1645 and 1651. Together with his brother Jerónimo Teixeira da Fonseca, captain of Massangano in Angola, he took over the same contract for two other terms, between 1663 and 1664 and again between 1669 and 1676. The brothers had family ties with Duarte Dias Henriques, holder of the contract of Angola in the period 1607–1614 and the Spanish *asiento* from 1627–1647, who had wide connections in Brazil and the Spanish American colonies as well. Aside the slave trade, the Fonseca brothers also held bonds of the Portuguese public debt and were investors in the Company of Brazil, chartered by the crown in 1649.<sup>51</sup>

After the Portuguese takeover of Luanda from the Dutch in 1648, auctions for contracts of the Angola monopoly took place in that city, not in Lisbon. This was meant to be an exceptional measure, given the financial difficulties of the Portuguese crown in the late 1640s. However, this location was used until the mid-1650s and when the crown tried to hold the auctions in Lisbon again, the merchants of Luanda protested. On April 29, 1659, the municipal council of

45. Mauro, *Portugal*, vol. 1, pp. 215–217; Salvador, *Os magnatas*.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

48. Costa, *Impérios*, pp. 74–76; Salvador, *Os magnatas*, p. 45.

49. Vila Vilar, *Aspectos sociales en América colonial. De extranjeros, contrabando y esclavos* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, 2001), pp. 119–130.

50. During this period, only once did two Portuguese merchants of Lisbon—the brothers António da Gama Nunes and Jorge Lopes Gomes—take over the contract for Angola. They held the contract between 1654 and 1660. Their economic activities included the slave and sugar trades between Portugal, Angola, and Brazil. AHU, *Angola*, box 4 (1654 and 1656), box 5 (1660, 1663, and 1667); Salvador, *Os magnatas*, pp. 52–54.

51. AHU, *Angola*, Papeis Avulsos, 1645. box 3 (1650), box 5 (1660 and 1663); Salvador, *Os magnatas*, pp. 52–53.

the city presented a petition asking the king to suspend the transfer. In the petition, the council argued that contracting the Angola monopoly to the wealthiest businessmen of Lisbon caused great damages to the businessmen of Luanda and many other merchants operating in the South Atlantic slave circuits. According to them, whenever a wealthy merchant from Portugal got the contract, he and his associates would operate the business with their own ships and overload Luanda with exchange goods through their agents there. As a consequence of this overabundance, merchants of Luanda and other traders visiting the port, mainly Luso-Brazilians, experienced great losses in their businesses. This type of complaint, which continued throughout the seventeenth century,<sup>52</sup> does suggest that there was a clear conflict of interests between these two mercantile groups and an ongoing dispute for control of the most profitable monopoly of the Portuguese crown in the Atlantic.<sup>53</sup> By renting the contract of Angola, the merchants of Luanda were not only defending their own commercial interests but also the economic goals of the Luso-Brazilian merchants operating in the slave circuits of the Portuguese Southern Atlantic.

The strong ties between the Angolan and Luso-Brazilian merchants and their distance from the mercantile groups based in Lisbon also tell us much about the changes in the commercial dynamics of the Portuguese South Atlantic during the second half of the seventeenth century. This period witnessed the formation of what was called the “Brazil-Angola complex” and the division of the Atlantic slave trade into two systems. This division was unknown to the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, given the dynamic commercial exchange between Europe, west-central Africa, Brazil, Spanish America, and the Caribbean, as the commercial webs under scrutiny in the final section of this article will show.<sup>54</sup>

Like the *contratadores*, the *avençadores* could be either Portuguese or foreigners. In many cases, they were of Spanish origin and holders of commercial licenses granted by the Habsburg Emperor to introduce slaves in the Spanish

52. “Carta da Câmara de Luanda a El-Rei D. Afonso VI”: 1659-04-29 in *Monumenta missionária africana*, ed. António Brásio C.S.Sp., 1st series (Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1952), vol. 12, pp. 231–233. AHU, códice 16, folio 135v: “Consulta do Conselho Ultramarino sobre queixas dos moradores de Luanda: 1664-11-19; Silva, “A administração de Angola,” pp. 233–237.

53. Similar disputes between the businessmen in Portugal, Angola, and Brazil also occurred in regard to the trade in alcoholic beverages (wine versus cachaça). José C. Curto, *Enslaving Spirits. The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and Its Hinterland, ca. 1550–1830* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

54. Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 307; Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, “The Economic Network of Portugal’s Atlantic World,” in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800*, eds. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 118–119; Daniel B. Domingues, “The Atlantic Slave Trade to Maranhão, 1680–1846: Volume, Routes and Organisation,” *Slavery & Abolition* 29:4 (2008), pp. 477–501; see also António Almeida Mendes, “The Foundations of the System: A Reassessment of the Slave Trade to the Spanish Americas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” in *Extending the Frontiers*, pp. 63–94.

American colonies. To operate as *avençadores*, they had either to purchase an *avença* from the *contratadores* of Portuguese monopolies in the African trade or to associate themselves with other merchants who held those permissions. These practices came to be common during the entire period under study. For instance, António Nunes do Algarve and Francisco Nunes de Beja, *contratadores* of the Cape Verde and Guinea royal monopoly between 1574 and 1580, signed a contract with João de Gusmão on behalf of several citizens of Mexico, granting them permission to purchase 500 slaves in the Guinea-Bissau region and transport them to Mexico. João de Gusmão was holder of a royal commercial license from the Spanish king to introduce slaves in Spanish America. The business in the Guinea-Bissau region would be supervised by the factors of the *contratadores* serving in that region, whereas the payment for the royal taxes on slaves would be made directly to the proxies of the Portuguese *contratadores* at the port of San Juan de Ulúa (Mexico), within a period of two months. The payments were to be shipped to Seville with the Spanish royal fleet and made in either bullion or merchandise (silver, gold, or pearls).<sup>55</sup>

To gain access to the royal monopoly areas in western Africa, many merchants from Portugal and other areas also established commercial partnerships with citizens of Cape Verde and São Tomé, since the latter had privileged access to coastal trades. For example, Diogo Ximenes Vargas, a powerful merchant, ship captain, and landlord in the island of Santiago in Cape Verde, was associated with merchants in Lisbon, Seville, and the Spanish Americas. Ximenes Vargas operated in both the Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau coastal circuits and the intercontinental routes linking the islands to Spanish America. The slaves, bartered in the Guinea-Bissau region, were shipped to Cartagena. The payment rendered in bullion, silver, gold or pearls was sent to Seville with the Spanish royal fleet and afterward transferred to Lisbon using bills of exchange.<sup>56</sup> After the 1560s, however, association between merchants based in Iberia, Cape Verde, or São Tomé, and the Spanish became less common. This change came about mainly because the king granted the *contratadores* permission to access the coastal areas directly, without the participation of the Cape Verde and São Tomé merchants and settlers.

## **THE MERCHANTS OF THE REPUBLIC AND THE SLAVE TRADE**

Like Portugal, between ca. 1590 and 1623, the Republic was home to merchants with economic interests in the slave trade: a group of Christian merchants of Dutch, Flemish, and German origin (hereafter referred to as Dutch)

55. Torrão, "Rotas," p. 24.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 92.

and the Portuguese Sephardim established in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. The Dutch businessmen started their economic activities in the South Atlantic in the late 1580s, investing mainly in the Brazilian sugar and dyewood trades and the African commerce in gold, ivory, and leather.<sup>57</sup> In these early times, Dutch participation in the slave trade was minimal, as studies by Postma, Eltis, and Vos et al. have demonstrated.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the notarial contracts of the Amsterdam city archive give us several examples of ships connecting the Republic to western Africa and traveling back to Europe via Brazil, the Spanish West Indies, Jamaica and Martinique, and the Guianas, transporting slaves (see Figure 2). Many of these voyages were organized by members of the Portuguese Sephardic community based in Amsterdam and other Dutch ports. Diogo Nunes Belmonte, Miguel de Espinosa, and Pedro Gomes de Lisboa are cases in point. During the 1610s and 1620s, they organized several commercial voyages either single-handedly or in partnership, and their commercial webs encompassed Iberia, Upper and Lower Guinea, Angola, Brazil, and the Spanish West Indies.<sup>59</sup> In these operations, Dutch merchants appeared mainly as insurers of the Sephardim.

In the slave voyages organized by the Belmonte family and its associates, the cargos on board the ships were insured by Anthoine van Dimen, Albert Schuijt, Wijbrant Warwijck, Hans van Soldt de Jonge, Pelgrom van Dronckelaer, and Samuel Voerknecht, among many others. For example, in 1614, they insured for Diogo Nunes Belmonte the slaves transported on board the ship *De Engel Michiel*, as well as the return cargo of gold, silver, and other commodities. Captain Sebastião Ribeiro was hired to sail the Luanda–West Indies–Seville route.<sup>60</sup>

Dutch entrepreneurs also backed the risks of many slave vessels sailing under the Portuguese flag in the Atlantic. Freire Costa has emphasized that the majority of the businessmen operating in the Portuguese Atlantic had their ships and commodities insured in Amsterdam.<sup>61</sup> While this option may have been the solution for a possible lack of capital in Portugal, it is more likely to have been a well-thought-out strategy to spread risk and avoid major losses within the same mercantile group. In fact, the members of the Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam, the so-called *Portugees Natie*, some of them known as very wealthy businessmen, used a similar commercial strategy.

57. See, for example, GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 376/114–115: March 6, 1613; *Not. Arch.*, 376/114–115: March 6, 1613.

58. Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chapter 1; Postma, “A Reassessment of the Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade,” in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, pp. 139–169; Vos, Eltis, and Richardson, “The Dutch in the Atlantic World,” pp. 228–249.

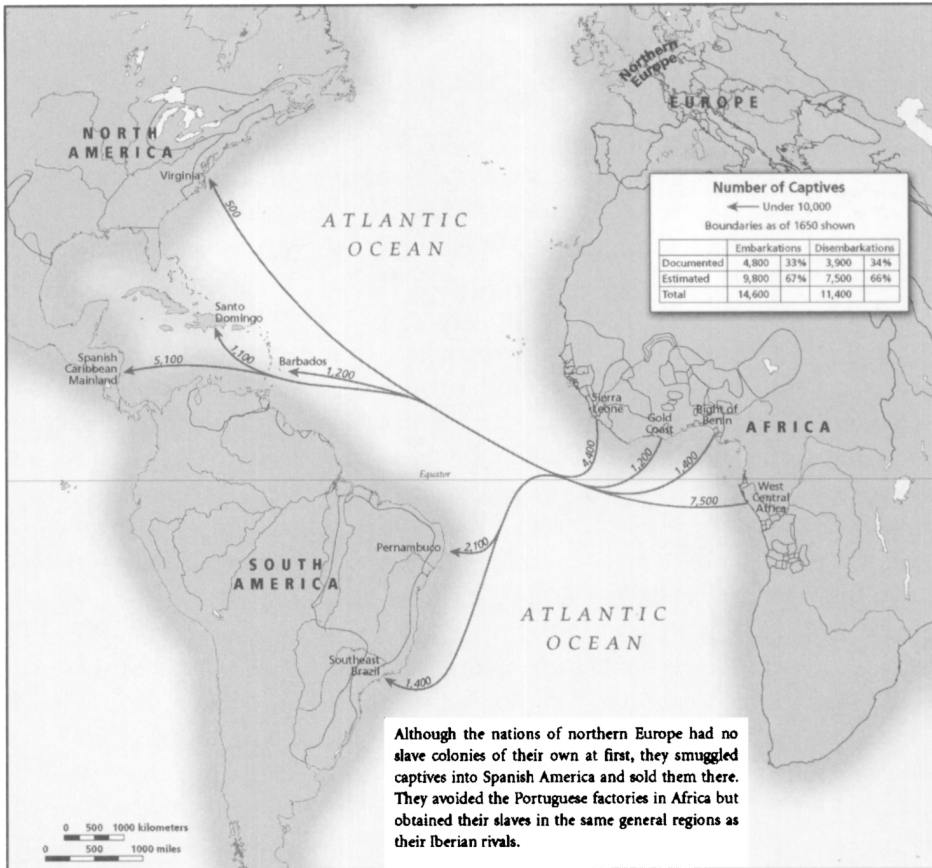
59. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 254/188–188v: May 22, 1614; *Not. Arch.*, 164/162: November 11, 1620.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Costa, *Impérios*, p. 79.



FIGURE 2.  
*Regions of Trade for Slave Voyages Outfitted in Northern Europe before 1642*



Source: David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), map 24, p. 45. Reprinted by permission.

Usually, the Portuguese Sephardim in Amsterdam were the connection whereby Portuguese obtained the insurance they bought in the Republic. Often, they were commercial partners of businessmen operating from Portugal and other posts and settlements within the Portuguese empire. For instance, João Soeiro, *contratador* of the Cape Verde and Guinea royal monopoly between 1608 and 1614, used the connections of his factors with the Sephardim to freight and insure vessels in Amsterdam. Soeiro’s main connections in Amsterdam were Gaspar Fernandes, Gaspar Nunes, Duarte Fernandes, and Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga. Two other important associates of João Soeiro were Diogo da Silva and Diogo Dias Querido, both merchants in Amsterdam and connected to Soeiro through their common agents in Guinea, Simão

Rodrigues Pinel and Estêvão Rodrigues, who were factors of the contractor for the coast. Barent Adriaen Andriesz, Wijbrant Warwijck, Anthoni van Diemen, Claes Andriesz, Jaspas Grevenraet, Barent Sweerts, and Jan Jansz Smits, all merchants in Amsterdam, appeared as insurers of Soeiro's associates.<sup>62</sup>

After 1640, businessmen based in Portugal continued to freight and insure their ships and cargos in Amsterdam, especially those operating in the European trade.<sup>63</sup> The data available for the slave trade does not give detailed information regarding the insurances in this time period. However, it is known that the Company of Brazil freighted English and other foreign ships to convoy the fleets of the merchants operating in the routes connecting Lisbon to western Africa and Brazil. Therefore, it is likely that the insurances for these ships were also obtained at the port of first departure, somewhere in Northern Europe or England.<sup>64</sup> The vessels operating exclusively in the South Atlantic between Brazil and Angola and the Gulf of Guinea fell outside this scheme, being possibly insured in Brazil. In brief, during this early period, Dutch insurers were not only backing the risks of Atlantic ships and their cargos transported under the Dutch flag, but also Iberian ships in the same waters. Most of these businessmen kept an indirect connection with the slave trade by insuring ships and cargos of other traders operating in the slave circuits linking Europe to Africa and the Americas.

On June 3, 1621, the establishment of the Company by the States-General would change this scenario, at least for the following two decades. By 1623, all private businessmen in the Republic with trade interests in the Atlantic had been forced to put an end to their activities. Many protested, and others devised strategies to continue operations in these areas. Their main strategies were to use passports from non-Dutch cities, force ship captains to depart from ports outside of the Republic, and instruct supercargos to trade in slaves, ivory, and copper in areas outside the jurisdiction of the Company, due to the threat of confiscation of the vessel and cargo by the Company.<sup>65</sup> Both the Portuguese Sephardim and the Dutch made use of these strategies.<sup>66</sup>

However, as explained earlier, the strict monopoly of the Company did not last long. After the 1640s, an increasing number of Dutch merchants associated with the Company to guarantee to the Americas a supply of enslaved Africans as well as commodities, foodstuff, ammunition and medicines.<sup>67</sup> For instance,

62. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 125/27v–28v: April 27, 1611; *Not. Arch.*, 124/131–131v: August 5, 1611.

63. Antunes, *Globalisation*, pp. 91–140.

64. Costa, *O transporte*, pp. 537–559.

65. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 2757A/153: April 9, 1661; *Not. Arch.*, 2757A/149: April 9, 1661.

66. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 420/536: December 20, 1639; *Not. Arch.*, 1690/599: April 16, 1648.

67. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 2757A/153: April 9, 1661; *Not. Arch.*, 2757A/149: April 9, 1661.

on August 1, 1657, Henrico Mathias signed a contract with the directors of the Company to deliver slaves to Curaçao on the ship *De Coninck Salomon*.<sup>68</sup> Like Mathias, Heerman Abrahamsen, and their associates, as well as Balthasar and Joseph Coymans—all merchants in Amsterdam—also signed agreements with the Company for the supply of slaves to the Dutch Caribbean and the Spanish Americas, in 1662 and 1675, respectively.<sup>69</sup> During this period, Jan de Velde and his associates would emerge as the main insurers for the slave trade. De Velde was the insurer of the ships freighted by Henrico Mathias. In 1657, for the goods transported on board the *St. Pieter*, traveling from the Coast of Guinea to Río de la Plata and back to Amsterdam, Henrico Mathias and partners paid to Jan de Velde an insurance premium of 6 percent for the first part of the circuit and 14 to 15 percent for the second and third parts.<sup>70</sup>

However, the Portuguese Sephardim in Amsterdam no longer appeared to be directly engaged in the slave trade. They are referred to in the primary sources mainly as buyers and holders of Company shares, usually for the Chamber of Amsterdam. These shares were often bought from Dutch brokers and not directly from the stock exchange. The closest relationship of the Portuguese Sephardim in the Republic to the slave trade was probably through their connections with the Sephardic Jews and Dutch planters based in the Dutch Caribbean and Dutch Guiana. Hence, over time, the participation of the Sephardim in the slave trade came to be indirect and in the form of financial instruments, whereas Dutch private merchants were at the forefront of the business. However, following the footsteps of their Sephardic predecessors, their participation in the slave trade also encompassed regions under the control of various European states, such as the Gold Coast, Angola, Río de la Plata, Brazil, Curaçao, Suriname, and the Spanish Americas.

## ROLE OF THE COMMERCIAL AGENTS

To conduct trade in all these areas, Portuguese, Sephardic and Dutch businessmen had several choices: to live in the settlements and colonies, to travel on the commercial journeys, or to send their agents on board the vessels or at least place them at key geographical points. Often, these agents needed to establish cooperative relations with other commercial brokers already settled in western Africa and the Americas, whether they were Portuguese, Spanish, Eurafricans, Africans, or Native Americans.

68. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 2118: August 1, 1657.

69. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 1996A/113: April 28, 1663; *Not. Arch.*, 322/675–699: April 27, 1675; *Not. Arch.*, 3221/695: April 27, 1675.

70. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 1115/17v: October 5, 1655.

In the Portuguese settlements of western Africa, there were several groups of commercial agents operating in different trading circuits: the commercial officials of the Portuguese crown,<sup>71</sup> the agents of the *contratadores* of the royal monopolies, and the agents of the *avençadores*. However, in Cape Verde, São Tomé, and Angola, the *contratadores* often chose holders of posts in the royal administration to be their representatives. In fact, from the 1610s onward, it was common that royal officers appointed by the King also be the representatives of the *contratadores* in the different monopoly areas.<sup>72</sup> In posts like Cacheu in Guinea-Bissau, the captains of the fortresses were both factors of the *contratador* and overseers and tax collectors on behalf of the king.<sup>73</sup> By employing royal officers with posts in the most important commercial and fiscal agencies of the crown the *contratadores* made their lives easier, in the sense that these men already knew the area and the trading practices. The same connections could be used to smuggle goods and avoid the payment of taxes. As for the military officers, the businessmen probably considered their employment as a way to guarantee security for ships and cargos during loading and unloading.

The *contratadores* and *avençadores* also appointed settlers as their representatives in the monopoly areas. Since Cape Verde and São Tomé settlers had privileged access to the coastal areas, it was to the advantage of *contratadores* and *avençadores* to have them at their service. However, in this selection, they gave preference to those already engaged in the coastal and intercontinental trade.<sup>74</sup> The cooperation between the *contratadores* and these local traders could assume two distinct forms: a simple labor contract through which the settler would be hired as commercial agent or a commercial partnership. Both practices were very common in Cape Verde, São Tomé, and Angola.<sup>75</sup> To solve judicial matters related to the execution of commercial contracts and bills of exchange, these merchants also took on judicial officers of the Portuguese crown in Cape Verde, São Tomé, and Angola as their representatives.<sup>76</sup> In hiring these officers as agents, businessmen hoped to increase their chances of success in their African transactions.

71. Even though it rented the monopoly areas of western Africa to private traders, the crown kept its own commercial agents in several of them. Where the monopolies were rented, the agents of the crown had only an inspection and oversight role in regard to the activities of the private merchants. Torrão, "Actividade externa de Cabo Verde: organização, funcionamento, evolução" in *História geral de Cabo Verde*, eds. Luís de Albuquerque and Maria Emília Madeira Santos (Lisboa/Praia: Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, Instituto Nacional da Cultura de Cabo Verde, 1991), [vol. 1, pp. 249–255; Torrão, "Rotas," pp. 17–123; Cohen, "Administração," pp. 189–224.

72. Iva Cabral, "Vizinhos da cidade da Ribeira Grande de 1560 a 1648" in *História geral de Cabo Verde*, vol. 2, pp. 515–547; Torrão, "Capitães de Cacheu: 1615–1647" in *História geral de Cabo Verde*, vol. 2, p. 514.

73. Cabral, "Vizinhos," pp. 515–547; Torrão, "Capitães," p. 514; Mauro, *Portugal*, vol. 1, pp. 217–218; Salvador, *Os magnatas*.

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*

76. Cabral, "Vizinhos," pp. 515–547.

In the Republic, most private merchants made use of two types of commercial agents: supercargos sent on board the ships and factors placed on shore or on board floating trading posts. Both Sephardic and Dutch merchants employed their services. The Sephardic merchants signed labor contracts with several traders to be their factors in western Africa. Some of these men even had institutional ties with the *contratadores* of the royal monopolies. Luís Fernandes, supercargos of Gaspar Nunes, as well as Simão Rodrigues Pinel, and Estêvão Rodrigues Penso, supercargos of Diogo da Silva, are cases in point. Fernandes, Pinel, and Rodrigues Penso were also factors for the Portuguese contractor of the monopoly of Cape Verde and Guinea between 1608 and 1614, João Soeiro. Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga, partner and supercargos of Gaspar Sanches, was also among Soeiro's factors.<sup>77</sup> Jacob Peregrino, factor of Diogo Dias Querido, is another great example. Peregrino had business connections with Duarte Fernandes, a Jewish merchant in Amsterdam, and Duarte Dias Henriques, the contractor of Angola between 1607 and 1614.<sup>78</sup> Given their connections with Dutch merchants, as evidenced in official documents issued by the Portuguese crown and royal officers, these men were often named as *lançados* (interlopers) within the royal monopolies.

After the establishment of the Dutch Company, all private merchants had to remove their economic agents from these trade areas within a period of two years, to be replaced by Company commercial agents. Based in various Company headquarters in western Africa, including Elmina, São Tomé, and Luanda, they were responsible for organizing the Company trade and keeping the monopoly free from interlopers. Nonetheless, as a consequence of the opening of the commercial monopolies to Brazil, the Caribbean, and New Netherlands, agents of private businessmen reappeared in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Company after in 1638 and 1648. During these years, the practice of sending supercargos on board vessels to conduct trade in different ports of call continued.<sup>79</sup> In Angola, the Company even authorized the settlement of *vrijmannen* (independent colonists) and *vrije kooplieden* (private merchants). The abandonment of Luanda by the Portuguese after the Company takeover, and its subsequent commercial decay, left the Company with no other option but to revitalize commerce. Some of the agents ended up staying after the Portuguese takeover in 1648. Jan Pietersz Harder was one of them. In 1649, he was still living in Angola and doing business with Henrick Cuman and Jacob van der Mart, merchants from the Republic.<sup>80</sup>

77. Torrão, "Rotas," p. 44.

78. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 624/155v: November 3, 1617; *Not. Arch.*, 611A/421: June 20, 1618; *Not. Arch.*, 34/115–116: December 8, 1601.

79. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 2757A/165: April 9, 1661.

80. Klaas Ratelband, *Os Holandeses no Brasil e na Costa Africana. Angola, Kongo e São Tomé (1600–1650)* (Lisbon: Vega, 2003), p. 286; GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 1092/90: December 31, 1649; *Not. Arch.*, 1097/20v: May 4, 1651.

Behind these commercial agents, there was another layer of economic actors: those who linked the African coastal areas to the supply markets of African goods located deeper into the continent. Numbers of free Africans, Eurafricans, and more rarely Europeans, usually called *tangomaos* by the Portuguese authorities, were the connections between these two worlds.<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, given the circumstances of their settlement and the shortage of primary sources, it is extremely difficult to identify these men.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, in most cases, they appear to have been involved in commercial transactions with mostly Europeans.

Portuguese, Sephardic, and Dutch merchants did business with these middlemen in several regions along the West African coast, namely at the ports of Rufisque, Portudal, and Joal on the Petite Côte of Senegambia, as well as in the regions of Loango and Kongo. Pieter van den Broecke, for instance, established contacts with several Portuguese and Eurafricans at different points on the coast during his second voyage to western Africa.<sup>83</sup> These commercial transactions continued under the rule of the Company; in fact, in none of the possessions taken over by the Company did Company employees dare to penetrate much into the interior. In the Gold Coast, São Tomé, and Angola, the employees responsible for the trade relied on middlemen who would bring the African merchandise and foodstuffs from the remote areas in the interior to the coast. The various groups of commercial agents were connected with each other. Together they formed commercial webs covering key points of the commercial circuits, and their efficiency was crucial for the operation of the vast slave routes linking Europe, western Africa, and the Americas.

## TRANS-IMPERIAL COMMERCIAL NETWORKS

The Portuguese, the Sephardim, and the Dutch merchants involved in the slave trade placed their agents in strategic ports that made the operation of the business possible. Analysis of these commercial and financial networks shows their trans-imperial character. Operating the Portuguese monopolies in the slave trade required a wide commercial web covering not only western Africa but also the Portuguese and Spanish American colonies and Europe. Therefore, the *contratadores* and *avençadores* had to place their agents in strategic ports of call to maintain all of these circuits. For example, Simão Ferreira Malaca and his part-

81. André Álvares de Almada, *Tratado breve dos rios de Guiné do Cabo Verde* (Lisbon: Editorial L. I. A. M., 1964), pp. 24–25; Isabel Castro Henriques, *Os pilares da diferença: relações Portugal-África: séculos XV-XX* (Lisbon: Calendoscópio, 2004), 352–353; Philip J. Havik, “Missionários e moradores na Costa da Guiné: os padres da Companhia de Jesus e os tangomãos no princípio do século XVII,” *Studia* nos. 56 and 57 (2000), pp. 225, 228, 230–232, and 249.

82. Cabral, “Vizinhos,” pp. 515–547.

83. La Fleur, *Pieter van den Broecke*, pp. 71, 73, 76, and 87.

ners, *contratadores* of Cape Verde and Guinea between 1590 and 1595, had factors in multiple places across the Atlantic. Jorge Fernandes Gramaxo and Fernão Sanches were their representatives in Santiago (Cape Verde), Manuel Lopes Cardoso was their factor in the São Domingos River (Cacheu, Guinea-Bissau), Jorge Fernandes Gramaxo and Brás Ferreira protected their commercial interests in Cartagena (Spanish America), and Leonel de Quadros was their representative in Seville (Spain).<sup>84</sup>

Like the *contratadores*, the *avençadores* also needed commercial networks. For instance, Luís Fernandes Gramaxo, merchant in Lisbon and *avençador* of the Cape Verde and Guinea monopoly from the 1590s to the 1610s, had two representatives at Ribeira Grande, a factor at the Rio Grande (Guinea-Bissau), and two agents each in Cartagena and Lisbon. His agents in Ribeira Grande were Jorge Gramaxo and Francisco da Cunha; the latter was also factor for the contractor of Cape Verde and Guinea. António Nunes Gramaxo was the *avençador's* connection in the Upper Guinea, and Jorge Fernandes Gramaxo was his contact person in Cartagena. The latter was also the factor for Simão Ferreira Malaca and his partners, who were *contratadores* of Cape Verde in 1590–1595, in Cartagena. Luís Fernandes, a cousin of Fernandes Gramaxo, was his representative in Lisbon. Fernandes Gramaxo's main commercial investments rested in the trading circuit comprising Lisbon, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Spanish America, Seville, and Lisbon.<sup>85</sup>

In the 1630s and 1640s, the businessmen operating in the African trade lost their Spanish American connections due to several events: the religious persecutions conducted against the Portuguese New Christians in the Spanish American colonies, the advent of Portuguese independence, and the post-independence economic embargo and war against Spain.<sup>86</sup> In the 1650s and 1660s, very few *contratadores* and *avençadores* of the Portuguese monopolies in the slave trade remained in Lisbon and kept regular connections between Portugal, Angola, Brazil, and the Spanish Americas. They were no longer major players in this business. From then on, Angolan and Luso-Brazilian merchants would be at the forefront of the Portuguese South Atlantic slave trade.

Like the Portuguese slave traders based in Portugal, the commercial networks established by the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam covered both the Portuguese and the Spanish Empires. Their intercontinental routes encompassed various European states—the Republic, Portugal, Spain, and at times Flanders, France,

84. Torrão, "Rotas," pp. 82–83 and 91; Maria da Graça A. M. Ventura, *Portugueses no Peru ao tempo da União Ibérica: mobilidade, cumplicidades e vivências* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional da Casa da Moeda, 2005), 3 vols.

85. Torrão, "Rotas," pp. 90–91.

86. Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation*, pp. 151–174.

and several Italian cities—as well as western Africa and the Americas. Diogo Nunes Belmonte is a case in point. To manage his involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, Belmonte had connections in Europe, western Africa, and the American colonies. In Europe, Belmonte was associated with Sebastião Ribeiro and Manuel Carvalho, both Portuguese Sephardim based in Amsterdam. Belmonte and Ribeiro also had connections in Lisbon with Custódio Lobo da Costa, whereas in the West Indies their main contact person seems to have been Francisco Ribeiro. Sebastião Ribeiro was not only an investor in the slave voyages organized by Belmonte but he also served as captain on several occasions. For example, in 1613 the *De Engel Michiel* was freighted by Belmonte and Ribeiro, with Ribeiro signing on as captain and carrying instructions to purchase slaves in Angola and sell them in the West Indies. Jamaica, Martinique, and the coast of Honduras were some of the ports recommended for disembarkation. The vessel was to return to Seville with bullion, gold, silver, and other commodities.<sup>87</sup>

Custódio Lobo da Costa, Ribeiro's brother, was also a merchant, but based in Lisbon. On several occasions, he was recruited to captain a ship and to serve as a representative of Belmonte and Ribeiro. The *Espírito Santo da Nazaré*, freighted by the latter two in 1623, was captained by Da Costa. The vessel was to sail from Lisbon to Seville. Da Costa was in charge of taking care of all the paperwork at La Casa de Contratación and obtaining the required permissions to sail to the Spanish West Indies, the vessel's main destination.<sup>88</sup> From Seville, the ship was to head south to Angola, where Da Costa was to acquire slaves.<sup>89</sup> Thus, both Ribeiro and his brother were responsible for the transport of exchange commodities from the Republic to Africa, often via Lisbon and Seville. In these two ports, they were in charge of purchasing an *avença* from the Portuguese *contratador* of the Angolan trade, as well as trade licenses from the holders of the Spanish *asiento*. They were also expected to solve unexpected problems, such as delays in port or lack of commodities and enslaved Africans at the ports of embarkation and issues related to disembarkation, the sale of commodities, and purchase of return cargos.

In this business, Manuel de Carvalho, also a Portuguese based in Amsterdam, acted as credit provider. For instance, in 1617, Carvalho had granted commercial credit to Belmonte for the venture of the *St. Michiel*. The ship had been freighted by Belmonte and was to be captained by Sebastião Ribeiro; it would transport slaves from Angola to the Spanish West Indies. Here, Francisco Ribeiro was Belmonte's contact person. In 1617, Francisco sent to Seville a

87. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 258/81: March 19, 1613; *Not. Arch.*, 254/188–188v: May 22, 1614.

88. For further details on these bureaucratic procedures, see Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, chapter 1.

89. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 646A/394: March 28, 1623.



return cargo on board the *De Capitaine Francisco Ferreira*.<sup>90</sup> Hence, the commercial interests of the Portuguese Sephardim of Amsterdam and their agents overlapped the geographical boundaries of several Atlantic empires, encompassing not only the Iberian Atlantic, but also areas like Jamaica and Martinique, which were under increasing influence of the English and French. During the same period, parallel trans-imperial trade connections were adopted by Dutch Christian merchants for the sugar, dyewood, and tobacco trades. Even, after the establishment of the Company, both Dutch and Sephardic merchants continued to operate in the Atlantic colonies ruled by several European sea powers.

Francisco Ferroni, merchant from Brussels but based in Amsterdam, was a case in point. Ferroni had connections in England, the English West Indies, Spain, and the Spanish West Indies, as well as in the Republic, the southern Netherlands, and the Dutch Caribbean. In London, Ferroni's contact person was Martin Noel, a merchant and investor in the Royal Company of the Adventurers of England. In 1664, Ferroni had granted Noel power of attorney to sign a contract with the agents of Domenico Grillo and Ambrósio Lomellini in Barbados for the supply of 600 to 1,000 "black Indians or Moors" to the Spanish West Indies.<sup>91</sup> At the time, Grillo and Lomellini were the holders of the Spanish *asiento* (1662–1669), in Madrid. Given the connections of Noel with the Royal Company and the involvement of Grillo and Lomellini's agents in Barbados, it is most likely that the slaves referred to in the contract had been transported under the English flag, from an English slave post in western Africa to Barbados and then re-exported to the Spanish West Indies.

By the late 1660s, Ferroni had made another agreement to supply slaves to Cartagena, this time via Curaçao. This contract was signed directly with Grillo and Lomellini. In 1669, to fulfill his obligations in the deal, Ferroni freighted the *Sta. Catarina*. Captained by Anthony Collombij, the vessel was to sail between the Republic, Ardra (present-day Allada, in the Gulf of Benin), and Curaçao. Some 420 slaves arrived in Curaçao, where they were resold to a merchant from Cartagena, certainly the agent of Grillo and Lomellini.<sup>92</sup> To run this venture, Ferroni relied on commercial credit provided by several businessmen, among them Joseph de Castillo, a Brussels merchant. In 1669, De Castillo had provided Ferroni with 10,000 ducats on behalf of Grillo and Lomellini.<sup>93</sup>

A few years later, Ferroni would himself become a representative of Grillo and Lomellini in the Republic, together with Estevan d'Andrea. In this capacity, he

90. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 146/199v–200v: February 23, 1617.

91. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 1148/205: March 12, 1664.

92. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 2231/82–89: September 9, 1669.

93. GAA, *Not. Arch.*, 3678B/919: July 1, 1669.

negotiated an agreement between the *asentistas* and the directors of the Company for the Chamber of Amsterdam to supply slaves to the Spanish West Indies and mainland, using Curaçao as a transfer point. The deal was signed in 1675.<sup>94</sup>

## CONCLUSION

A complex scheme of connections demonstrates clearly that the commercial interests of private businessmen living in the various Atlantic colonial areas transcended the political and geographical borders of the Atlantic possessions of the various early modern European states. Portuguese, Sephardic and Dutch merchants operating from the Republic, Portugal, and other Atlantic areas commonly established commercial webs encompassing several Atlantic Empires—Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and even English.

This evidence throws into question the effective power of the various European states over their Atlantic empires and the importance of imperial borders. The data presented here make evident that the borders of the Atlantic “clusters”—the so-called Dutch, Portuguese, and Iberian Atlantic centers of power established by the European states and state-sponsored companies to support their monopoly interests—were loose and often circumvented by private businessmen to meet their own goals for the Atlantic trade.

The businessmen under analysis in this article invested simultaneously in multiple areas of the Atlantic, each of which has been classified traditionally as a separate Atlantic subsystem, for example, Brazil, the Spanish American colonies, the Caribbean Islands, and North America and Senegambia, West Africa, and west-central Africa.<sup>95</sup> The evidence gathered here disputes the division of the Atlantic slave trade circuits and networks into discrete subsystems for the period prior to the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>96</sup>

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94. For further details on the Grillo and Lomellini asiento, see Vega Franco, *El tráfico*, pp. 194–202; Vila Vilar, “La sublevación,” pp. 171–192; Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 33–38, and appendix 3, pp. 349–353.

95. Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), chapter 1; Emmer, “The Dutch and the Making of the Second Atlantic System” in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, ed. Barbara L. Solow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 75–96; Emmer, “In Search of a System: The Atlantic Economy, 1500–1800” in *Atlantic History: History of the Atlantic System*, pp. 169–178; Schnurmann, “Atlantic Trade and Regional Identities: The Creation of Supranational Atlantic Systems in the 17th Century” in *Atlantic History: History of the Atlantic System*, pp. 179–198.

96. Domingues, “The Atlantic Slave Trade to Maranhão,” pp. 477–501; Eltis, *The Rise of Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 307; Luiz Felipe Alencastro, *O trato dos viventes* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000), p. 62.