Introduction

In reconstructing African monetary history, Webb has stressed the importance of working in depth with money-objects, non-minted ‘coins’, of sub-Saharan Africa, of placing them in their wider context and thus to clarify what they really represent in terms of monetary systems. We support this goal. Economic anthropologists and historians, however, have mostly concentrated on explaining the true ‘behaviour’ of African money and have tended to put all pre-colonial money-objects into a single framework without taking into consideration the local history specific to each region. For example the functioning of all pre-colonial West African copper-based currencies has been explained solely through an account of the Niger Delta situation, or of the specific manilla story. In the long term, local, precise, historical studies of West African copper currencies still need to be done, such as the one on the cowrie. Such in-depth work can only be carried out by drawing data from different fields of evidence – the archaeological record is one major field to take into account. The work of P. de Maret on data from Central Africa is a good example. Before his work, the evidence for the copper currencies of Central Africa came primarily from chance finds of ingots and ingot moulds, many of them undated, and from travel and ethnographic accounts. Through de Maret’s thorough archaeological study of 300 graves of the Upemba depression covering 1,000 years, drawing upon data that relate to date and sequence, he was able to reconstruct the monetary history of central Shaba, showing how the H-shaped crosses, the croisettes, evolved from items limited in circulation to the prestige sphere (objects of value) to a commercial, all-purpose currency (monnaie polyvalente).

Concerning West Africa at the time of the Muslim trans-Saharan trade and of the great Sahelian empires of ancient Ghana and Mali, E. Herbert recalls Ibn Battuta’s account of the copper currency of Takadda and the confirmed presence in West Africa in the 14th century of copper rods – not just ingots for barter but true means of exchange – true currencies – and in doing so evokes the important work done by R. Mauny in tying Ibn Battuta’s text to actual archaeological data. The analysis does not, however, go far enough: both textual and archaeological evidence should be placed in the wider historical context, following in this manner what had been in general advocated by Webb (as cited above). One has to take into account the influence of the weighing and fiduciary systems of North African Muslim courts (through the merchants) on sub-Saharan imperial polity-ruled entities at the time when trans-Saharan trade brought these worlds into contact. One also has to take into account what went on in sub-Saharan areas not in contact with North African customs and in which barter was the usual form of economic exchange.

Ibn Battuta’s text and another account by an Arabic author of the 14th century explicitly demonstrate that copper-based objects identified as probable currencies occurring at the same time may, however, have been endowed with different qualities in order to serve different monetary purposes. Archaeological records shed light on this debate by revealing tangible money-objects, which, due to their aspect and composition, imply different usages, showing clearly the coexistence in western-most Africa (as early maybe as the 11th century), of money-objects expressing completely different ‘behaviour’ and, thus, involved in separate monetary systems.

A. Money-objects in copper-based material in West Africa: the evidence from 14th-century records

During his visit to Takadda (identified as the site of modern Azelick in Niger) in 1352 Ibn Battuta recorded:

The copper mine is outside Takadda. They excavate the earth for it and bring it to the town and smelt it in their houses…. When they have smelted it into red copper they make bars of it a span and a half long, some thin and some thick, of which the thick are sold at 400 bars per gold mithqal and the thin at 600 or 700 for a mithqal. This is their currency. With the thin ones they buy meat and firewood and with the thick ones male and female slaves, sorghum, butter and wheat.

Herbert drew attention to this ‘standardization of the rods’ and ‘the “minting” of two different sizes’ adapted to cheaper and more expensive purchases, which made these rods ‘true means of exchange, not simply ingots for barter.’ Mauny has already noted that these ‘bars’ (or rods) were an extremely small division of the mithqal, and therefore currencies with a very low purchasing power; in other words, their values were given in terms of the mithqal of gold. In consequence, one should not be opposed to the definition of these ‘bars’ as standard monetary units (based on the mithqal, thus, on the Muslim monetary – or at least weight– system).

In the same text Ibn Battuta tells us that the copper is not only used in the city of Takedda but is also meant to be ‘carried to different lands and among these to the lands of infidels’. Certainly, this would be for the purpose of exchange for other goods, even if this is not precisely indicated in the text. Another text, by the Arabic writer al-‘Umari, may clarify what could have been the purpose of the copper bars. Al-‘Umari, who interviewed many Egyptian officials who had met the Mansa Musa (then the Emperor of Mali) during his visit to Cairo in 1324, reported what the Mansa had said about a copper mine he had within his empire which seemed to have brought him significant revenue.

We send it [the copper] to the land of the pagan Sudan and sell it for two-thirds of its weight in gold, so that we sell 100 mithqals of this copper for 66 2/3 mithqals of gold. The text from al-‘Umari shows that the copper sold to the gold suppliers, the ‘pagans of the forest’, yielded enormous

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benefit from selling at a price of two-thirds of its weight in gold – which has been reviewed at length by Bucaille, as well as by Garenne-Marot and Mille, though not in the context of controlled stratigraphy. On the one hand there is a collection of some 200 wire-like objects, varying in length and weight (most of them 30–40mm in length and 2–8g in weight), unlike ordinary copper wires, have a very characteristic shape. The wire, which is frequently flattened in the middle, has thickened rounded ends (see Fig. 1). Bucaille, who examined some of them in 1976 in their corroded state of conservation, came up with a very vivid description of them: ‘a match burned entirely that would have had two thickened rounded ends’.10

Their ubiquity on the site – in all the soundings and excavations that were conducted – and Ibn Battuta's report led Mauny to characterize these fils à double tête as a currency – a fractional ‘coin’ of low purchasing power based on the mithqal.11 His assumption has been widely accepted in regard to both the very wide distribution and diverse contexts on the Kumbi Saleh site, to the point where Berthier adopted the term fils-monnaies for them.12

As a matter of fact, some fils à double tête of Kumbi Saleh can be dated to the 14th century and were found in what is

![Figure 1](image-url)
thought to have been the quarter of the Muslim merchants of the town (called also the ‘urban tell’ because the accumulation of collapsed stone buildings caused this area of about 4ha to really stand out in the general landscape of the site). The *fils à double tête* seem to have appeared even earlier at Kumbi Saleh but the problem is that most of those recovered before the careful excavation conducted by Berthier in the 1980s of a habitation unit in this quarter were not precisely dated. The chronological sequence established by Berthier shows that although copper remains occur in the earliest levels (9th century), the first *fils à double tête* appear only at the end of the 11th century, thus coinciding with the setting of the urban framework on this area, the stone buildings and the occurrence of artefacts of more distant North African origin such as carnelian beads, glass weights, glassware similar to those from Raqqada. After this period the *fils à double tête* are found in all subsequent levels up to level Vb with a peak in level III (13th century). In summary, thus far the proven use of the *fils à double tête* on the Kumbi Saleh site seems to have lasted for at least three centuries – from the end of the 11th century to the end of the 14th century or beginning of the 15th century.24

Kumbi Saleh is the presumed site of the capital of Ancient Ghana, the first Sahelian Empire recorded in Arabic texts (8th to the mid-13th century). The emergence – or at least the development – of this empire is linked to the trans-Saharan trade and the control of exchanges. North African products, and among those Saharan salt, were exchanged for gold from countries located upstream on the Niger and Senegal rivers, with Ancient Ghana exploiting its position as an intermediary between the suppliers of gold and the trans-Saharan traders (see Fig. 2). The decline of the Empire of Ghana and the later control of this region by a hegemonic power of Malinke origin, leading to the Mali Empire, did not seem to affect the urban development of Kumbi Saleh, as shown by the architectural features of the area excavated by Berthier. Thus, the archaeological data from Kumbi Saleh documents the existence of copper money objects in Sahelian West Africa in the 11th to the 13th century, which, in a sense comparable to

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23 **Figure 2** Map of the western part of Africa, showing: the trans-Saharan routes heading to Awdaghust (Tegdaoust) and Ghana (Kumbi Saleh) as recorded in the writings of al-Bakri (11th century) and al-Idrissi (12th century). All known routes are indicated and mapped without taking into account the fluctuations in the frequency and in the itineraries, which occurred between the 11th (time of al-Bakri) and the 14th century (i.e., the estimated) limits of ancient Ghana (8th–mid-13th century) and Mali (mid-13th–15th centuries); the gold deposits of upper Senegal and Niger rivers; the copper deposits bearing evidence of ancient workings; the location of the sites cited in the text. (Graphic: Geoatlas maps modified by L. Garenne-Marot)
that described by Ibn Battuta at Takkada, certainly correspond to the definition of ‘standard monetary units’. What remains to be documented, however, is the possibility of the coexistence of different copper money-objects meant to embody different monetary or transactional functions. The town of Tegdaoust/Awdaghust and the data from its copper workshops might provide elements of a response to this question.

C. The archaeological evidence: copper-based ingots of the Tegdaoust workshop and the transformation of the trans-Saharan brass rods

Tegdaoust (the modern name of the site of the ancient town of Awdaghust), situated at the end of one of the main westernmost trans-Saharan roads, was a major centre of trans-Saharan trade, a place of unloading and exchange, from its settlement at the end of the 8th century until the mid-11th century. Its relation to the capital of the Empire of Ghana fluctuated during this period but in the 10th–11th centuries at least it was a tributary town of the capital of Ghana. Excavations during a 12-year period in the 1960s–1970s yielded a good overview of the organization of the town with its residential quarters and workshops.26

Important workshops were unearthed in a quarter separate from the residential parts of the town in which artefacts related to copper metallurgy were recovered. Several ingot-molds and 16 ingots or fragments of ingots of copper-based material were found beside three large furnaces.27

In order to understand the importance of the copper workshops of Tegdaoust in this discussion about copper money-objects, some broad overview of the contextual situation is required. Arabic texts from the 9th century onwards mention that along with desert salt the trans-Saharan caravans brought copper, both red copper (non-alloyed) and coloured copper (alloyed copper such as brass, which has a golden tint).28 As tangible proof, 2,085 long bars (around 70cm in length and 500g in weight) of copper-based metal (see photographs of the bars in Fig. 3) were recovered from an abandoned load of a caravan buried in a sand dune in the Majâbat al-Koubrâ, the most arid part of the Mauritanian Sahara.29 This load has been dated to between the 11th and the beginning of the 14th centuries.30 Interestingly, the bars were made, not of unalloyed copper, but of brass with high zinc content (20% of the total weight).31 The difference is significant, because the brass was certainly imported. Brass originated at that time from North Africa, certainly from the mines of the Sus and Dai valleys (in present day Morocco), famous then for the production of ‘coloured’ copper. Unalloyed copper may have been imported but also could have been local to the regions just south of the Sahara. There are the copper deposits in the Air region of modern Niger (where Azellick is situated), as we have seen. Mauritania is also rich in copper, for example there are the well-known deposits around the modern town of Akjoujt and those of Tajalt Omou Kadiar closer to the archaeological site of Tegdaoust. Finally there are deposits in present day Mali, close to the border with Mauritania, around the modern town of Nioro du Sahel.32 Thorough archaeological investigations of the mines around Akjoujt have shown that copper was smelted there as early as the beginning of the 1st millennium BC.33 Direct dated evidence for ‘medieval’ exploitation – especially in the Tajalt Omou Kadiar area – is lacking due to an absence of research but numerous clues (among them geological reports of ancient workings) suggest that local copper smelting was still going on at the time of the Muslim trans-Saharan trade.34 Some of the conditions experienced by Azelick/Takkada on the ground in the 14th century thus existed already in Tegdaoust/Awdaghust in the 11th century, including exploitation of local copper resources and prolonged contact with North African customs.

The ingots recovered next to the three furnaces in the copper workshops of Tegdaoust are of special interest. Of the three complete ingots, two were about 25cm long and the other 14cm long. The analyses show an alloy of leaded brass with very unusual iron content.35 By combining the data from the archaeological remains, the composition of the analyzed ingots and that of the bars from the Ma’den Ijâfen, it was possible to deduce what transformations of the copper material were made in the workshops.36 The ingot-molds showed that the ingots of copper based material were manufactured there. The hypothesis is that the long bars like those from the Ma’den Ijâfen, of an ideal size for camel transportation through the desert, were transformed into shorter rods (25–26cm long). This was a more convenient size for transport by donkeys and for the trade with the South, certainly as far south as the gold mines. Moreover, the composition of the metal was certainly also modified there. Mike Wayman, metallurgist at the university of Alberta, Canada, and the author were able to show through a careful reading of the elemental analysis of the ingots that not only was lead possibly added there, as had been previously thought,37 but that the Moroccan brass was diluted with locally smelted copper in the workshops of Tegdaoust (Fig. 3). Considering the amount of income that the taxes on copper transactions represented for the King of Ghana – more than double those on salt (as mentioned by al-Bakri writing in 1068)38 – it would have been very lucrative to mix northern imported brass with local copper without altering the golden colour of the metal, and thus increase the mass of metal to be traded with the South. The colour was important there and has certainly helped to clearly distinguish imported from local material.

In all probability, the Tegdaoust workshops were destroyed at the time of the Almoravid raid in 1054–1055, according to al-Bakri.39 They were not rebuilt (destroyed furnaces, discarded ingot mould and ingots were left in situ) and so this dramatic event gives a terminus ante quem date of mid-11th century to all the material recovered there.

D. Copper-based ingots and fils à double tète of Tegdaoust: copper-based bars of different shape and metal composition found in the near vicinity

Some fils à double tête were also found at the Tegdaoust site. Still, as they were recovered in disturbed, non-stratigraphic contexts, they were mostly discarded and not archaeologically recorded. Interestingly, the three precisely recorded ones were all situated within the workshops area and close to the discarded ingots and ingot moulds.40 No indication of their local manufacture was evident. They simply lay close to the furnace in the same mid-11th century environment as the previously cited leaded brass ingots.

So, here we have in the same contextual environment two copper-based objects of different shape: on the one side, ingots,
rods, about 25cm long and on the other, some tiny, wire-like objects of a length and weight about 1/60 of that of the ingots. The shape of the ingots meant that they could easily be transformed – either bent with hammering work into ready-made anklets or bracelets or else re-melted and the fused metal cast into a wide range of objects. The *fils à double tête* are, however, completely different, being so tiny that it would have been difficult even to work them into rings.

The composition of the metal of the ingots and the *fils à double tête* is also different. The metal of the three Tegdaoust *fils à double tête* was not analyzed, but analyses on examples from Kumbi Saleh show that their composition varied. This is only to be expected when one considers their use over three centuries, but interesting patterns may be seen. Copper – not brass – is always the base metal. This copper base is alloyed with lead, sometimes in very high proportions – up to a quarter of the metal in some cases. In the cases with a high lead content, the alloy is quite standardized in its composition revealing a regular pattern of impurities. Lead copper has none of the aesthetic and workable qualities of brass. Thus both their metal composition and their size mean that the *fils à double tête*, could not be transformed into other consumable objects, unlike the leaded-brass ingots.

**E. Lead-brass ingots and *fils à double tête* of Tegdaoust: monetized goods versus standard monetary units**

Both the shape and the quality of the metal of the leaded-brass ingots of Tegdaoust made them items that could easily be transformed into secondary products. They fit nicely with the definition of goods with a high level of consumption, which, in the process of regularized exchange, acquire the properties of money – that is, to serve as a medium of exchange, store of value, standard of deferred payment and above all standard of measurement, and thus become monetized. They are
exemplary items within any monetary system of barter transactions. However, both the size and the composition of the metal of the fils à double tête give a final product with a low to negligible rate of consumption—favouring the hypothesis of the fils à double tête as standard monetary units.

The political centre of the Empire of Ghana was distant from the gold mining areas. The control of the gold was mostly through the control of transactions. Al-Bakri mentions the taxes that were imposed to insure the state income.‘‘Transactions on the Tegdaoust market were done with gold powder, again according to al-Bakri.‘‘Weights in unalterable glass bearing Fatimid inscriptions of the 10th–early 11th centuries were found, testifying to the use of, if not a fiduciary, at least a weighing system comparable to that of the Egyptian Fatimid court.‘‘If we accept the fils à double tête found in the Tegdaoust workshop as fils-monnaies—standard monetary units—this would mean that already in the mid-11th century, there was some centralized control of money, with the creation of a local standard unit, a division of the mitqual. This would not be inconsistent with the imperial policy of regulating all exchanges.

Lead, a by-product of the extraction of silver from galena ores, was certainly an import from the North. Galena mines are abundant in Morocco and were intensively exploited at that time.‘‘The problem is that, apart from the few that emerge from Berthier’s excavations, the analyzed fils-monnaie cannot be put into a chronological sequence and so it is not possible to determine if there was a fluctuation of the lead content over time. It would have been interesting to see if a fluctuation did exist over time, from a standardized alloy with a high lead content to a mixed composition with lower and lower lead additions. If such a fluctuation did exist, it could reveal an interesting pattern. At the beginning of the period, the fils-monnaie might have been imported as finished products directly from the Maghreb, as standard monetary units at the demand, perhaps, of the local state power—the King of Ghana—in order to facilitate taxation and to reduce flexibility in currency substitution. The ease of manufacturing the fils-monnaie might have led to local production with a lower and lower standard quality of metal. It might be significant to note that, along with the brass bars of the caravan of the Ma’den Ijâfen were heavy bags of cowrie shells. Were those intended to replace the devalued fils à double tête, which no longer fulfilled their role? The cowries also had the same characteristic advantages of smallness in size, durability and ready divisibility together with the added advantage of being impossible to counterfeit.‘‘Ibn Battuta made precise reference to them as standard monetary units in the 14th century: ‘these cowries are also the currency of the Sudan in their countries. I saw them sold at Mali and Jawjaw at the rate of 1,150 to the gold dinar’.

F. Tegdaoust and Kumbi Saleh: same monetary systems?

Why are the fils-monnaie mostly restricted to the Kumbi Saleh site, considering the relations that existed, at least in the 11th century, between Tegdaoust and Kumbi Saleh?

The dramatic events that took place at Tegdaoust with the Almoravid raid and the destruction of the copper workshops were the beginning of a series of changes that occurred in the second half of the 11th century in the westernmost African sector of trans-Saharan and interregional trade. The Tegdaoust copper workshops were not rebuilt and one sees subsequently a major change in the trans-Saharan routes: the road that led to Tegdaoust was abandoned.‘‘Tegdaoust no longer played a major role as an unloading place and a redistribution pole between the North African merchants and the gold traders. From then on, the economic activity of the town declined dramatically. Tegdaoust (Awdaghust) is described in 1154 as a small town in the desert in which there is no large trade.‘‘Changes certainly occurred in the town of Ghana, the capital of the Empire, after the Almoravid episode, but there is little to be gleaned from the Arabic sources. A century later, we learn from al-Iдрissi that the king of Ghana claimed descent from the prophet’s family. So a Muslim king perhaps of Arab descent had succeeded the animist king of Soninke origin described by al-Bakri in the mid-11th century. It is interesting that the period following the end of the Tegdaoust workshops corresponds to the period of development on the site of Kumbi Saleh of the quarter around the mosque to which belongs the habitation unit excavated by Berthier. This habitation unit continued with little disturbance for three centuries (the end of the 11th–14th century) but it did display embellishments.‘‘The city of Ghana seemed to have remained economically and politically active even during the Mali dominance. Al-‘Umari, in a chapter entitled ‘the Kingdom of Mali and what appertains to it’, recalls that even if Ghana is a province of the Kingdom of Mali, ‘In the whole kingdom of his sovereign there is none who is given the title of “King” (malik) except the ruler of Ghana who is like a deputy to him even though he be a king’.‘‘It appears that the decline of Tegdaoust gave new impetus to the economic development of Kumbi Saleh. It is after that time also that the fils-monnaie are found in numbers in the levels of the urban tell of Kumbi Saleh (see Fig. 4). Kumbi Saleh might have taken over the industrial transformation of copper-based metal formerly carried out in the destroyed workshops of Tegdaoust. The copper mines in the vicinity of Nioro du Sahel, already mentioned, are very close to Kumbi Saleh. Geological survey reports have shown the importance of ancient workings in these mines, and many authors, beginning with Mauny, have related this data to the copper mine mentioned by the Mansa Musa which, as we have seen, was very profitable.‘‘It is therefore due to both political and economic circumstances that the fils-monnaie are only rarely found at the Tegdaoust site after mid-11th century. Still, the Tegdaoust evidence may point to the fact that money-objects in copper—not minted coins but with the same properties as minted ones—may have existed already at the beginning of 11th century. This was due to the special circumstances prevailing at the time— Sahelian empires in close contact with monetary and weighing systems indissolubly identified with the nation-state, and with large transactions taking place with a centralized control of money. We could advocate the existence of polities exercising monetary powers as early as this time, although economic historians like Webb only evoke the existence of a true correlation between nation-state and monetary control with the Asante or the Hausa states.‘‘

Conclusion

In tying together the archaeological findings of copper money-objects and the remains of copper metallurgy of the Tegdaoust/Awdaghust workshop destroyed in the mid-1050s, copper money objects of Kumbi Saleh (late 11th to 14th century) and
Arabic accounts of copper products used as ‘monetary items’ in 14th century West Africa, it has been possible to show that money-objects in copper, not minted coins, but with the same properties as minted coins, may have existed already at the beginning of the 11th century. This supports the argument that a true correlation existed between nation-state and monetary control before the Asante or the Hausa states.

Furthermore, the evidence shows that two ‘monetary’ systems in which copper money objects played a major part might have co-existed at that time within the most western part of Africa: first, in towns in close contact with monetary and weighing systems identified with the nation-state, a system with large transactions taking place with a centralized control of money and, second, in regions with no contact with these monetary systems identified with the nation-state, another system in which copper was a medium of exchange within a monetary system of barter transactions (including transactions for gold).

Through the data from Tegdaoust/Awdaghust (backed up by data from Kumbi Saleh) it was possible to show that specific copper-based money objects correspond to each ‘monetary’ system. In the Tegdaoust copper workshop, within the same archaeological unit, both items of standard monetary units – the fils à double tête – and items that could relate to standards of measurement – leaded-brass ingots – were found.

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Money, Cloth-Currency, Monopoly, and Slave Trade in the Rivers of Guiné and the Cape Verde Islands, 1755–1777

Carlos F. Liberato

Introduction

Historical research has yet to do justice to the role of cloth-currency within the mechanisms of the Atlantic slave trade and corresponding power struggles among its principal protagonists, the local and colonial powers of West Africa. This chapter shows that the monopoly exercised by the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company over the production and trade of cloth strips in the Cape Verde Islands was one of the most important factors in preserving Portugal’s position in the region known as the Rivers of Guiné throughout the second half of the 18th century. To do this, it explores commodity-currencies and the company’s activity related to the Atlantic slave trade, the use of slave labor in Cape Verdean plantations, and the relation between cloth-strip production and trade.

In the geography of pre-colonial currencies in West Africa, Senegambia was the heart of a cloth-currency territory. The use of cloth strips as money was well established by the 16th century and the use of cloth as money was still expanding in the 18th century. It is also clear that many other commodity currencies were in use alongside cloth: cattle were a standard of value in the north of this zone; dates were sometimes used in the Sahara; measures of millet were common in the Sahel, and bars of salt were used at certain times in the interior. As discussed in this chapter, much of the cloth currency was made locally in Senegambia, and increasingly also in the Cape Verde Islands. Locally-made cloth used as money was called pagne in Senegalese French, country cloth in Gambian English, soro in Pulaar, tama in Soninke, and panos in Portuguese. This cloth money was the dominant currency along the upper Guinea coast when the Portuguese first arrived, and it had spread eastward along the sahel and throughout much of the region of Mandinka and Fulbe culture. When soro was first used in the Fuuta Jallon highlands is not known, but the Fulbe made it the dominant currency there in the 18th century. Cloth currency had spread to the coastal zone well before the 18th century and was even produced in the Cape Verde Islands by the 16th century.  

Information on cotton cultivation in the Cape Verde Islands demonstrates that the use of cloth strips as money on the upper Guinea coast was well established by the late 15th century. Indeed the growth of a local industry to produce cloth strips in the Cape Verde Islands was closely associated with Portuguese trade on the upper Guinea coast and the Rivers of Guiné, it also competed with locally produced cloth for use as a currency. By the early 18th century, however, French merchants had introduced a standard piece of Indian cloth from Pondichéry, usually referred to by French authors as a pièce de Guinée or simply guinée, which competed with locally produced cloth and cloth strips produced in Cape Verde. The spread of the Pondichéry guinée as a monetary unit actually represented the substitution of an imported cloth for locally produced cloth, although never replacing local production. Hence the wide-spread adoption of Pondichéry cloth strips in the 18th century was an innovation that earlier had been achieved with the introduction of panos from the Cape Verde Islands. As the activities of the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company in the 18th century demonstrate, Cape Verde Islands panos continued to supply strips of cloth for use as money on the mainland well into the late 18th century.

The required skill for textile production was brought to the Cape Verde archipelago by slaves transported from Senegambia to work on the plantations and in port cities. This process is vividly depicted by Christopher Fyfe:

Some of the slaves were weavers by profession, and wove the cotton into country cloths as they had done on the mainland. New elaborate patterns of North African type were introduced, and from the middle of the 16th century Cape Verde panos were regularly exported to Guiné to be exchanged for slaves. As elsewhere in West Africa, European traders were forced to adopt African methods of accounting, and panos became recognized as units of account, just as bars and cowries were in other regions.  

In the Cape Verde Islands and the Rivers of Guiné region four or more cloth strips sewed together were generally called a pano. In Cape Verde a variant of pano, called barafula or barafula, became the standard currency on the islands and in the Portuguese trading zone of the West African coast. From about 1510 to the first half of the 19th century cotton cloth constituted a privileged medium of exchange for the acquisition of slaves by Portuguese and Cape Verdean, as well as other European slave traders, in Guiné. The Portuguese obtained their supplies from two regions, the Cape Verde Islands and some areas of the coast, especially the region known as the Rivers of Guiné, or simply Guiné. For the period of existence of the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company (1755–1777), it is possible to give concrete indications as to amounts and destinations for the panos manufactured in the Cape Verde Islands. Few such statistics exist for the ones produced by local weavers in Guiné, though it is known that they had similar patterns to those from Cape Verde. In both cases the company used cloth-currency to buy slaves and other local goods, to pay taxes to local authorities and to pay its representatives, soldiers, and workers. Nevertheless, amounts and prices of the panos acquired by the company in Guiné are largely unknown. The agents of the company in Cacheu and in Bissau obtained panos in exchange for European money and, more commonly, for imported goods. The panos were then shipped to areas of higher demand and exchanged for slaves and other goods. It is possible to demonstrate this use of panos as money, similar to the use of other commodity-currencies.

Commodities as money during the era of the Atlantic slave trade

Before anything else it would seem to be propitious to present a definition of money and how to interpret the use of different media of exchange, other than metal coins, within the African
context. This study adopts Marion Johnson’s definition, as presented in her examination of various currencies in African history:

Money is essentially what can be used to buy things; unlike payment in kind, payment in money involves the expectation that the recipient will probably use the money for further payments, rather than consuming it himself. So the first requirement of anything to be used as money is general acceptability.⁵

Sometimes this acceptability can come from a convention supported by state authentication (silver, gold, coin, cowries) or by external market demand (gold dust). In other cases, such as cloth, acceptability can derive from the usefulness of the currency itself, so that the recipient knows that someone will always be wanting it.⁶ Other characteristics of money are its capacity of subdivision or to form part of a system of related units. It also may be used to reckon prices and to act as a store of value.⁷

Recent decades have witnessed increasing interest in historical research related to money in Africa.⁸ Correspondingly, historians working specifically with the Atlantic slave trade have examined currency mechanics and terms of purchases, as well as what Africans received in return for slaves and other exports. Stanley B. Alpern has shown that European input is important for the reconstruction of the material culture of Africa during the era of the Atlantic slave trade.⁹ He combats two myths of recent African historiography about the Atlantic slave trade. The first of these myths proclaims that Africa received nothing that had not been produced by well-developed local industries, while the second, nicknamed the ‘new gewgaw myth’ by Philip Curtin, claims that Africa only received from Europe defective arms, cheap trinkets, poor quality alcohol, and useless luxury articles.¹⁰

Alpern’s viewpoint is quite different; for him what dominated the Atlantic slave trade from beginning to end was African importation of ‘practical cloth’ and ‘metal goods’. By working from an impressive number of sources Alpern has compiled a partial list of commodities that were used as money and exchanged for African slaves and products. The list includes cloth (Indian, European, Turkish, other African regions, etc.); clothing (kerchiefs, hats, caps, etc.); other clothing products (bedclothes, table linens, carpets and rugs, etc.); un-worked or semi-processed metal (iron bars, copper or brass bracelets, copper rods, lead, tin, gold, and silver); metal containers (basins, pots, kettles, cauldrons, dishes, plates, tankards, bowls, cups, jugs, buckets); other metal-ware (knives, cutlasses, swords, razors, scissors, pins, needles, thimbles, fishhooks, bells, locks, keys, tools, nails, weights, trumpets, etc.); firearms (guns, muskets, pistols, cannons, gunpowder, lead balls, shots, and gun flints); beads (glass, crystal, pearls, semiprecious stones), coral, and cowries; alcohol (brandy, rum, gin, wine, beer, etc.); tobacco (rolls of Nicotiana tabacum and smoking pipes); glassware (mirrors, drinking glasses, etc.); ceramics (European, Chinese, and American earthenware vessels); paper; seasoning (salt, sugar, garlic); exotic foods (preserves, butter, cheese, candied fruits, salt beef or pork, etc.); drugs (tea, coffee, chocolate, sarsaparilla, etc.); non-metal containers (chests or trunks, goods containers, barrels, bags, sacks, etc.); and pompous trappings (satins robes, silk mantles, gold-trimmed hats, embroidered uniforms, European flags, umbrellas, silver-headed canes, silver tobacco pipes, watches and clocks, music boxes, silverware).¹¹ This long list demonstrates that almost any commodity could be used as money.

On a theoretical level, this list establishes the relative importance of a variety of commodity-currencies, among which European weapons are cited, in the Atlantic slave trade. For years numerous historians concentrated their efforts on describing the process by which Africans used European arms to procure captives who were traded in order to obtain more European weaponry for further slave raiding or self-protection against slave raiders, calling it the ‘gun-slave cycle’.¹² However, in recent years well-documented studies have demonstrated that guns were indeed important, but not enough to overshadow the impact of other imported goods.¹³ The same seems to apply to the dynamics of the slave trade in the Rivers of Guiné, where the significance of weaponry should also be put into a wider context, as the many firearms received in exchange for slaves were often melted down to make farm implements and tools.

Walter Hawthorne, in his solid analysis of how small-scale and decentralized societies located in Guiné were transformed under the impact of the slave trade, stresses the importance of European guns as a source of iron for both agriculture and warfare:

the need to obtain European weapons for defensive purposes may not have compelled Africans to conduct slave raids, but the need to obtain iron from which to forge practical defensive or offensive weapons – as well as cutting edges for digging tools – did compel ‘coastal’ Africans in Guinea-Bissau to produce and market captives.¹⁴

Thus European guns were imported, in many cases, for their metallic content and used more as a source of iron than as effective weapons in warfare. To a certain degree this situation is similar to the use of other commodity-currencies of the Atlantic slave trade, such as iron bars, copper or brass bracelets, and copper rods. The present study contributes to this debate by reviewing available documentation on the production and commercialization of cloth strips in the Cape Verde Islands, and by presenting panos as one of the most important commodity-currencies utilized by Portuguese and Cape Verdean traders for the obtaining of slaves in the Rivers of Guiné during the second half of the 18th century.

Cloth strips as money in West Africa, Cape Verde, and the Rivers of Guiné

There is no consensus about when cotton, the loom, and the techniques of weaving were introduced into sub-Saharan Africa, although cotton textile production was well established before the trans-Atlantic slave trade.¹⁵ The most commonly accepted idea is that cotton seeds and weaving techniques came from the Mediterranean world. If it occurred through trans-Saharan routes in the times of Carthage or, more recently, through Muslim traders, is a matter of controversy. Yet one point seems to be clear: Muslims spread the use of cotton clothing south of the Sahara.¹⁶ As Charles Monteil demonstrated, cotton textiles were common in sub-Saharan courts of the 11th and 12th centuries.¹⁷ The introduction of the loom in the African sub-continent is still partial and incomplete, but evidence suggests that looms arrived through trans-Saharan routes.¹⁸
In the 1970s Marion Johnson opened a wide spectrum of possibilities for the history of commodity-currency in Africa, especially in her discussion about measures of cotton cloth as money and their competitiveness with respect to imported textiles during the colonial period.\(^2\) In more general terms, Marion Johnson noted that textiles played in this region’s trade.

More recently, Colleen Kriger published a comprehensive study of the changes that occurred in the production of textiles in West Africa, showing that foreign competition occurred much earlier than previously assumed and certainly before the 20th century.\(^3\) By studying particular groups of artisans during the era of Muslim and Atlantic trading, she has shown how the importation of textiles from India and Europe affected craftmanship in West Africa. As Kriger notes, along the way, technologies were transferred to new locales, centers of manufacture arose and declined, specific textile products were imitated or revised, and prices were affected by a variety of production and transport costs.\(^4\)

Her observations may be applied to the Cape Verdean cotton cloth industry during the era of the Atlantic slave trade. Despite these important contributions there are still few references to the use of cloth as money for the Cape Verde Islands and Guiné.\(^5\) The extensive catalogue of the Berlin Museum’s textile collections, edited by Brigitte Menzel, includes some fabrics from Guine Bissau, but there is no mention of textiles used as money.\(^6\) Along the same line Rénée Boser-Sariváxeváns published a classification of West African textiles according to history and techniques, containing examples from Portuguese Guiné; although at times she mentions that cloth was used as money, she does not include an analysis of the fact.\(^7\) Similarly, Venice Lamb surveyed West African weaving processes, paying special attention to their artistic value and offering a particularly interesting historical survey, but she does not study the use of cloth as money.\(^8\)

A noteworthy exception is António Carreira, who has dealt specifically with the panos da terra manufactured in Guiné and Cape Verde.\(^9\) Carreira has stressed the important role these textiles played in this region’s trade.\(^10\) For more than three centuries the panos were the principal medium of exchange for the acquisition of slaves in Guiné and they were an essential part of almost all transactions. This chapter recognizes Carreira as the main expert on this subject and seeks to enhance and further his work, particularly as it relates to the use of cloth strips as money by the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company.

Despite the difference in the nomenclature and past and present variations in the panos, António Carreira has presented a well documented study of cloth production in Cape Verde and Guiné based on surviving data and examples. Carreira describes the panos used by the peoples of Guiné as being composed of strips, cotton bands of woven threads (called bandas) in widths that vary from 7 to 21 cm. The bands are in number of four to thirteen – in some areas even more – sewn together lengthwise, thus forming a whole to be used as a garment, as protection for the body, as a funeral shroud, and to transport small children on one’s back.\(^11\)

Depending on the type of fibre, artistic value and the work needed to weave the bands, a pano could fall into one of two broad categories: panos simples or singelos (that is, ordinary cloth) and panos d’obra (that is, cloth involving much work). The panos simples were considered to be the ones formed by a number of off-white (natural color of the fabric) bands or those simply dyed with a single color, as well as the ones formed by bands woven with limited and simple linear adornments that do not demand much specialized weaving technique.\(^12\)

In the 18th century, this category of panos was called barafula or berefula, cates or escates, bantans, xereos, and sabos, or generically panos da terra (country cloths). On the basis of their artistic and commercial values, these panos were sold at different prices.\(^13\) The panos d’obra had more complex patterns that were defined by Carreira as being the ones formed by bands whose weaving involved complex loom creations (defines vaguely as ornaments in relief, brocade techniques or floating- for lack of a more appropriate or expressive technical term), alternately using black and white cotton threads or multicolored fibers of cotton and silk, forming geometric designs, objects, houses, churches, boats, insects, symbols like Christ’s cross, stars of various points, rose-like ornaments and others.\(^14\)

In this category there were four types: bixo simples; bicho cortado; boca branca; and pano de vestir (cloth for clothing), oxós or oxô.\(^15\)

In a more generic classification, based on complexity and the quality of the yarn, the panos manufactured in the Cape Verde Islands could be divided into three broad categories: grossos (rough), ricos (intricate), and tecido fino (delicate) fabric. The panos made of wider bands (approximately 35cm) belonged to another category because of their practical use. Their main purpose was to protect against the cold, serving as a wrap or bed clothing. This kind of panos can be divided into three types: colcha (bed covering), manta de lã (woollen covering), and manta de retalhos or manta de farrapos (patchwork quilt).\(^16\) While the colcha (bed covering) was entirely made of cotton fibers, the warp of the manta de lã (woollen covering) was made of wool with the weft made of cotton.\(^17\) Used as bedding, the manta de retalhos (patchwork quilt) was made of the remnants of local and imported fabrics.\(^18\)

In the Rivers of Guiné, the value of cloth surpassed the level of practical and immediate consumption, serving as a medium of exchange, as well as a display of wealth and superiority in life and death. The panos served as garments for men as well as women, probably more for the latter than for the former. Panos were also commonly used at funerals, as a shroud for the corpse. Sometimes the deceased went to his or her grave wrapped in panos the number of which could range from 12 to 100. It depended on the wealth of the departed’s family, or better, on social rank. For respected elders, powerful authorities or religious figures, funerals required many more panos than the ones used to wrap other people.\(^19\) The use of panos visually expressed the differences between the members of the various social levels that stratified the African population.\(^20\)

Not only were panos used to buy slaves, but Portuguese
officials also used the cloth to pay soldiers and workers. In Guiné, weavers and their families manufactured fabrics made of local cotton and using local dyes.\(^{39}\) On the cotton plantations of Cape Verde, from the end of the 16th century on, slave weavers worked under the supervision of their masters. The production from both areas was distributed among the Portuguese trading posts on the West African coast. The *panos* were the distinctive commodity used as money by Portuguese and Cape Verdean traders in the slave trade of the region. During the existence of the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company, difficulties related to measurement and the subdivision of pieces of cloth made civil and military authorities working in Portuguese trading posts oppose the official use of cloth as currency.\(^{40}\) However, they were unable to convince the Portuguese government that some other form of colonial money should be introduced for the sake of commercial enterprise and for better control over the payments to troops and workers stationed in Guiné and Cape Verde.\(^{41}\) Despite sporadic attempts to create a Cape Verdean currency, also valid in Guiné, it was only in 1864 that in Portuguese overseas territories a provincial currency was introduced with the creation of the Banco Nacional Ultramarino.\(^{42}\)

### The Cape Verdean *panos*: history, characteristics, and craft

When the first Portuguese arrived on the West African coast, its peoples were already cultivating cotton and using it to weave cloth. The oldest European sources that allude to weaving practices are probably the two narratives of Alvise Cadamosto, who visited the region in 1455 and 1456. He reported the existence of extensive cotton cultivation and weaving among peoples living in the region between the north side of the Senegal River and the Gambia River, notably the Wolof, Serer, and Mandinka.\(^{43}\)

A half century later, Duarte Pacheco Pereira found that most people did not wear cotton clothing. They mostly used animal skins, while the use of cotton was restricted to nobles and wealthy people.\(^{44}\) In his description of the Senegambian coast between 1506 and 1510, Valentim Fernandes noticed that Wolof nobles wore good cotton clothing brought to their country overland by Muslims and by sea by European traders. He also reported the harvesting of cotton on the Cape Verdean island of Santiago, but he did not mention any kind of cotton weaving on the islands.\(^{45}\)

The first Portuguese settlers arrived on the uninhabited Cape Verde archipelago during the 1460s. From then on settlers gradually developed commercial, social, and cultural ties with the *lancados*\(^{46}\) and with the African societies of Senegambia and the upper Guinea coast. Afterwards, European (mainly Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish) and local-born traders based on the archipelago conducted an increasing proportion of the Portuguese commerce with West Africa, from Senegal to the Gulf of Guinea. The islands of Santiago and Fogo seem to have had sufficient rainfall to support plantation agriculture. In consequence, slaves were brought to cultivate cotton, sugar, and indigo. Slaves were also introduced to herd livestock, where rocky terrain or meager rainfall ruled out the cultivation of commercial staples. During the 16th century, Cape Verde-born Portuguese and, increasingly, Cape Verde-born Luso-Africans became more numerous than peninsular Portuguese who were living as *lancados* in Guiné. These individuals acquired immunity or resistance to endemic diseases in West Africa, such as malaria, dysentery, and others. Another advantage was fluency in Kriol, the language of the islands, and which, together with Mandinka, enabled commerce with Senegambia and the upper Guinea coast. During the 16th century the principal commodities exported from the islands included salt, horses, tobacco, alcohol, and other agricultural products. Most of the commerce conducted by these Cape Verdean traders was illegal.\(^{47}\)

Parallel to the increase in the population of the Cape Verde archipelago during the first half of the 16th century, the Portuguese crown issued a series of regulations seeking to boost cultivation of cotton and cereals, breeding cattle, and the colonization of new lands. In this period, production of cotton developed on the islands of Santiago and Fogo, cultivated by slaves and mostly sold for export.\(^{48}\) For the most part, the Cape Verdean cotton production was exported in raw form to Europe and the African coast.\(^{49}\) During the initial years of colonization, it seems that Cape Verdean cotton was exported to Guiné, where it was exchanged for *panos* produced locally by African peoples. Based on Portuguese sailors’ oral narratives, Valentim Fernandes published a description of the Portuguese trade on the West African coast between 1506 and 1508. In this description, it is possible to read that on the West African coast people preferred the ‘red cloth from Alentejo, the cotton that had been transported from the Cape Verde Islands, and horses each one of which could buy seven blacks’.\(^{50}\) Fernandes’s description gives details about transactions on the Cacheu and the Casamance rivers, to which ‘ships came from Cape Verde to trade their cotton for *panos*, as there are Christian dwellers here, like in Casa Mansa’.\(^{51}\)

Although there is no concrete evidence of weaving activity throughout the first half of the 16th century in the two most populated Cape Verdean islands, Santiago and Fogo, the existence of a developed cotton industry in Guiné is well established. Mandinka, Balanta, Brame, Banhun, Felupe, and other peoples produced undyed and dyed cotton fabrics, which were sold in markets throughout the region. On the Cacheu River (then called São Domingos), Portuguese and Cape Verdean traders acquired large quantities of cloth in exchange for European goods and indigo produced along the southern Nuno River. On 26 January 1582, Francisco de Andrade reported that the main production along the Nuno River was of bricks of indigo. These indigo bricks were sold to neighboring peoples, who used them to dye cotton fibers and create elaborate patterns. He is probably one of the first Europeans to report on the monetary importance of *panos* in regional trade:

> nothing is traded [along the Nuno River] other than leaves of dye, like sweet bread, that are then loaded on ships that go to the São Domingos River [Cacheu], to be used by the Negroes to color their cloth black so it [the dyed cloth] can be used as money all along the other Rivers of Guiné.\(^{52}\)

By the end of the 16th century, the island of Santiago was producing cotton cloth fashioned according to African patterns and techniques. The sale of *panos* in Guiné increased as a result of the intensification of European trade. Moreover, the importance of Islam in the hinterland also favored the sale of cloth because of the emphasis on clothing in Muslim society. In the Portuguese ports and trading posts European, Muslim, and Creole populations disseminated the taste for cotton clothing.
among local peoples. Although Portuguese accounts report little about commerce by Cape Verdeans on the West African coast, because of the need to protect trading secrets, it is clear from Dutch accounts around the turn of the 17th century that Portuguese commercial activities in the region relied on Cape Verdean cloth as an important element in their trade. In 1623 the Dutch shipmaster Dierich Ruiters described how Cape Verdeans developed a prosperous business ‘out of nothing’:

The trade we called ‘coastal’ is mostly undertaken in small ships, pinnaces and launches, by Portuguese who live on Santiago Island. First they load these with salt, which they conveniently obtain for nothing on the islands of Maio and Sal (Cape Verde Islands) and they sail to Serra-Lioa with the salt and trade it for gold, ivory and kola. Then from Serra-Lioa they sail again to Joala and Porto d’Ale (in Senegal), where they trade a portion of the kola for cotton cloths. They also sometimes trade ivory obtained in Serra-Lioa for Cape Verde cloths (so called because many are made at Cape Verde). From there they sail again east to Cacheu where they trade the rest of their kola and their remaining goods for slaves. They acquire fifty to sixty slaves in exchange for the goods they have obtained by trade along the coast, and each slave is worth 150 reals to them, or pieces-of-eight. So they make 9,000-10,000 reals out of nothing, in a matter of speaking.23

However, above all other merchandise, the panos were the most important item in the bundle of merchandise used as money by Portuguese and Cape Verdean traders to acquire slaves in West Africa. By putting a cotton industry in place on the archipelago of Cape Verde the Portuguese spurred growth of the local economy and aided the expansion of trade in Guiné, as reflected in the coastal trading activity and particularly in the transport of kola nuts, a local stimulant, from Sierra Leone to Cacheu.24 On occasion, European ship captains who did not have Cape Verdean panos could not buy slaves in Guiné. Cape Verdean predominance in the slave trade reached its apex in the last decades of the 16th century and remained an important factor in coastal trade, being challenged only in the second half of the 17th century.25 The Cape Verdean panos acquired transaction value due to their good quality and innovative patterns that allowed the cloth to be used for purposes other than as money. Portuguese accounts referred constantly to the superiority of Cape Verdean fabrics in relation to other imported goods in the region.26 At various times, once before 1687 and again in 1700, the Portuguese crown issued laws and regulations prohibiting the sale of Cape Verdean panos to foreign ships. The offenders were to suffer capital punishment, though not even that impeded many impoverished islanders from taking the risks and trading extensively with Dutch, British, and French captains.27

John Picton suggests that the most important criteria in evaluating fabric included the type of loom used to produce it, its weave structure, the raw material of the cloth, and the characteristic configurations of its pattern.28 According to Philip Curtin’s description, it seems that looms and individual work processes in Cape Verde were similar to those in the Senegambia region. Within Senegambia, the techniques of weaving differed little and only the horizontal, narrow-band, treadle loom was used. The weaver used to sit ‘under shelter or in the open shade, with one end of the warp fastened to a weight which was gradually pulled closer as the weaving progressed’.29 The difference in Cape Verde was that most of the stages of the weaving were done by slaves that worked side-by-side with other slave weavers.

António Carreira established that cotton in Guiné was commonly grown on small tracts of land by women, children, and slaves of the family.30 Generally the fields were located in the backyards or in the areas next to the family compound, called moranga in Kiriol. Cotton debris and other household scraps were thrown onto these lands to fertilize the soil in order to obtain better production. Women, aided by their children or slaves, were responsible for plowing, sowing, weeding, and harvesting the family’s cotton fields. In much more recent times, in the areas where the cotton was destined for trade, the preparation of the soil, cultivation, and harvesting fell to the men, sometimes aided by their relatives. The activities around ginning, carding, and spinning were also considered women’s obligations. Once the thread was put onto reels, the women delivered them to the weaver. The weaver would then manufacture the cloth strips that were later divided into two equal parts. Half of the bands belonged to the weaver, and the other half to the woman or women that supplied the thread. Weaving appears to have always been done by men in the Rivers of Guiné. With the intensification of the slave trade it gradually became more and more the occupation of slaves, of slaves’ descendants or, more recently, of freedmen.31

In general, it can be said that Carreira’s description of the stages of production of the panos in Guiné is also valid for Cape Verde. However, in the latter case, small domestic production on the plantations was substituted by production on a larger scale, conducted by slaves. And all the output was appropriated by the slave owners.

In the Cape Verde Islands the making of panos was traditionally a domestic activity in almost all the homes of the rural areas and even in the backyards of the elegant residences in the villages and towns. Cloth served as garments for the free and slave populations, and was sold or used as money to buy food and other staples. Some planters possessed dozens of looms and many slave weavers that worked side-by-side under the supervision of their masters. On the larger plantations cloth production assumed a much more entrepreneurial character. There, panos were produced in great quantity for local use and much more so for the slave trade on the West African coast.32 However, this production and relative trading freedom would drastically change after the creation of the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company.

Panos within Portuguese monopolistic trade practices in Cape Verde and Guiné, 1755–77

The Grão Pará and Maranhão Company was founded in June of 1755 with the intention of reorganizing the trade between Portugal, West Africa, and Portuguese Amazonia, then called the State of Grão Pará and Maranhão.33 When the company was created the development of Portuguese Amazonia with slave labour was the ultimate goal of the Portuguese authorities and traders that were involved in its foundation.34 José I, King of Portugal, himself acquired a good amount of the company’s shares. He, along with friends and partners, reaped steady profits for more than 20 years until the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company was dismantled in 1777, after the King’s death. Sponsored by the Marquis of Pombal,35 the enlightened prime minister of Portugal, the company unsuccessfully attempted to impose monopolistic trade practices over an
extensive part of the African coast from Senegal to Angola. In addition, the crown granted to the company fiscal, political, and military powers. The company could then collect taxes and appoint civil servants and military officials to Portuguese trading posts in Guiné and Cape Verde. In exchange for these prerogatives, the company would be responsible for the payment of the personnel and had to fortify Portuguese trading posts. However, in reality, the presence of the company in Africa did not weight heavily except within the Rivers of Guiné, especially in the ports of Bissau and Cacheu.  

In Guiné, with variable grades of success, the company tried to achieve three main goals. First, the company was able to impede the activity of ship owners in the service of Brazilian traders and planters that were directly obtaining slaves from the region, evading legal contracts formerly allocated by the Portuguese crown to metropolitan traders. Second, it tried unsuccessfully to grant its monopoly over the whole trade in the region, where English and French traders disregarded alleged Portuguese rights over its trade. Finally, the company attempted, but was also unable, to impose Portuguese control over international trade practiced by the peoples that lived next to its trading posts in Bissau and Cacheu. The last two goals were interconnected, since neither English nor French ships stopped trading directly with the peoples of Guiné, nor did the latter discontinue trading with foreign vessels. 

Because panos produced in the Cape Verde Islands were highly valued in Guiné when dealing for slaves, the Portuguese crown granted a monopoly over the commercialization of panos in the archipelago. Its agents also imposed financial terms that gave the company a virtual monopoly over the whole cloth in the region, where English and French traders disregarded alleged Portuguese rights over its trade. Finally, the company attempted, but was also unable, to impose Portuguese control over international trade practiced by the peoples that lived next to its trading posts in Bissau and Cacheu. The last two goals were interconnected, since neither English nor French ships stopped trading directly with the peoples of Guiné, nor did the latter discontinue trading with foreign vessels. 

The means that allowed the company to obtain most of the Cape Verdean cloth production included three parallel or concomitant processes. Firstly, the company would make contracts with families that owned looms and slave weavers, the company advancing the cotton thread, the dyestuffs and other necessary implements. Sometimes it even provided foodstuffs to sustain the whole household for a certain time period. The return payment was compulsorily effected in cloth, at the ordinary price or at the price agreed upon at the moment the contract had been negotiated. Secondly, the company would acquire panos from wealthy land owners, who usually possessed a great number of looms and slave weavers. Finally, the company would receive cloth as payment for taxes, rent, tithes and other duties, and sometimes for the repayment of company loans or other debts at fixed prices that were imposed on the general population or on small merchants. These arrangements were already common practices among the population, even before the company adopted them. The cloth was normally bought at a ‘small’ price. Later, the company would profit by re-selling it for a higher price at local or regional markets, especially along the West African coast. 

The low buying price paid by the company in the islands was the result of its own unfair trading policies when dealing with locals and, above all, of its ‘not altering the custom of the country’. 

Thus, buying panos cheaply in Cape Verde and selling them at the market price in Guiné, the company was able to furnish for its representatives in Guiné thousands of low-cost panos. In this way the company succeeded in competing with its English and French rivals that also disputed commercial supremacy in the Rivers of Guiné. Considering that the panos produced in Cape Verde were the highest valued articles for slave trade in the region, and in most cases actually necessary for the closing of any business deal in the slave markets of Guiné, the company held a clear advantage in relation to its foreign competitors. However, it is necessary to say that English and French competition did not disappear before the second half of the 19th century. This study seeks only to suggest that, by virtually monopolizing both production and commercialization of the Cape Verdan panos, the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company assured Portugal’s leading position in trade in the Rivers of Guiné throughout the second half of the 18th century, not being driven out of the region by the more powerful French and English rivals, as had occurred in Senegal, Gambia, and Sierra Leone. 

Throughout the period of its existence (1755–77) the Portuguese Grão Pará and Maranhão Company had to adapt its business to the employment of different kinds of currency and goods used as money for trade transactions already in practice in the Rivers of Guiné and the Cape Verde Islands. In attempting to solidify profits and exercise its monopoly, besides cloth strips the company had to deal with several metropolitan and colonial currencies from a number of European countries, gold and silver colonial coins from the Americas, iron and copper bars, firearms and gunpowder, alcohol, beads, and many other commodities from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, all of which were used to buy slaves in West Africa. 

Nevertheless, most scholars who have studied the economic development of the relations between Portuguese and Africans on the West African coast are unanimous in saying that, in relation to the prices of a number of European goods, there were relatively stable prices in the markets of the region and that there was a nominal value for each item. Their nominal value suffered slow, little or no variation throughout the years. In the case of cloth units in Senegambia, Philip D. Curtin states that wherever these different currencies met, they were usually integrated by a recognized exchange rate or equivalence, but these rates of exchange were not true market prices. They were, rather, part of a more complex set of equivalents that began with the cloth itself, taking fractional parts of the whole cloth as fractional units of currency. 

In a detailed account of Portuguese trade in Guiné during the 1760s and 70s Bernardino António Álvares de Andrade stated that in Bissau a banda, or strip of ordinary cloth, had the nominal value of 100 réis. It was possible to buy a cow weighing approximately 240kg for the nominal price of 4,000 réis, putting together the following goods: a flask of aguardente (alcohol made from sugar cane), a flask of gunpowder and a bundle of beads. Between Bissau and Geba, there was a significant difference in the nominal value of imported goods. This difference becomes even more important if we take into consideration the nominal prices of the same goods in Lisbon. In Geba, in exchange for an iron bar with the nominal value of 6,000 réis, it was possible to buy 24 sheep. More important yet, the nominal price for a slave was established based on the following terms:
Goods and nominal prices of a slave in Geba—hinterland of Bissau, 1770s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Goods</th>
<th>Lisbon (réis)</th>
<th>Bissau (réis)</th>
<th>Geba (réis)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ordinary gun</td>
<td>15200</td>
<td>45000</td>
<td>85000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pieces of ordinary cloth</td>
<td>15000</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>85000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bars of iron</td>
<td>25400</td>
<td>45000</td>
<td>85000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Flasks of aguardente*</td>
<td>35600</td>
<td>125000</td>
<td>245000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Barrel of gunpowder**</td>
<td>55760</td>
<td>155000</td>
<td>305000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bundles of beads</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>25000</td>
<td>45000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Flints</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>15000</td>
<td>15500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Bullets</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>15000</td>
<td>15500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Panos of Cape Verde</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>45000</td>
<td>85000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ordinary hat</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>25000</td>
<td>45000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bottle of aguardente***</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>15000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>185380</td>
<td>485500</td>
<td>985000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Profit (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+305120</td>
<td>163.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+795620</td>
<td>433.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Andrade 1952: 66.

* Alcohol made from sugar cane, commonly known in the Portuguese world as aguardente (Portugal), cachaça (Brazil) or gerebita (Angola).
** In the original, '1 Frasqueira de agua ardente de 12 frascos de 5 quartilhos cada hum'.
*** Probably a bottle of 1 litre.

With this intricate colonial math goods that in Lisbon had a nominal value of 18550 réis could buy a slave in Geba for the nominal value of 48500 réis, while in Bissau the same slave would have a nominal value of 48550 réis. However, contingencies such as bargaining between the parties, implications of a bad harvest, sickness or defect could change the customary ideal equivalent measures or quantities of goods needed to buy a slave. Andrade is clear when he addresses this subject:

The slaves bought in the dry backlands ordinariy cost this price [48500 réis]; often, however, a slave might have a much lower price, because of the vendor asking for certain goods, in which case the buyer pays less than a half of the above price. If the slave does not measure four hand spans, or if he has the slightest defect, be it from birth or later acquired, he can be bought in the backlands for no more than 20500 réis.76

It is important to recall that all values were only nominal, since transactions conducted in metropolitan currency were rare. In fact, merchandise prices were determined by an amalgam of costs, bargaining, supply and demand. Most African goods held relatively steady prices, but, likewise, the bargaining ability of African, Cape Verdean, and European traders bore heavily on the final composition of prices. Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson state that to produce slave-price data for Africa, historians have generally adopted two methods. Firstly, in order to estimate slave prices at initial cost they used data on slaves shipped from along the coast and the value in Europe of goods bartered for them. Secondly, they relied on contemporary reports to produce price data on slaves in Africa.79

Since information on the prices for slaves in Guiné are rare the information provided by Andrade is particularly important, especially since he spent more than a decade residing and traveling throughout the region. Citing a letter dated 19 May 1766, he declared that the Spanish pataca is all over these islands [Cape Verde and Guiné] with the exchange value of 750 réis.80 In Portuguese the terms pataca, patação, or peso, refer to the Spanish silver coin valued at 8 reals.81 In the English world it was known as the Spanish dollar and came to be called the Spanish-American dollar from the 16th century on, following the establishment of colonial mints in Mexico (1535), Peru (1572), and Bolivia (1575). It was also known as the ‘piece of eight’ and it is a well-studied currency, along with other similar coins, such as the peso, the peso duro, the Mexican dollar, the United States dollar, and the Maria Theresa thaler. Each had a slightly different silver content, but in Africa, generally speaking, all were accepted as equal.82

Based on the exchange rate between the Spanish dollar and the Portuguese réis (1/750), according to information provided by Andrade, it is possible to advance a tentative estimate of the average real price of a regular slave in Guiné. By considering that a regular slave was bought in Bissau for 48500 réis, and by dividing this amount by 750, we reach the amount of 64.6 Spanish dollars. This calculation sounds about right and is consistent with the calculations by Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, for whom the real price for slaves on West African coast was 74.8 silver dollars in the period 1783–1787.83

During the whole period of operation of the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company, the production of cloth in Guiné and Cape Verde was insufficient to meet the demands of the African market. António Carreira presents the following figures:

### Exportation of panos from the Cape Verde Islands to the Rivers of Guiné, 1757–1782

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cacheu</th>
<th>Bissau</th>
<th>Sierra Leone</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1757</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1758</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>2,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1759</td>
<td>1,551</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>5,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>3,029</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>3,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>1,967</td>
<td>2,610</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>4,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1763</td>
<td>2,366</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>3,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>1,599</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>3,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>2,536</td>
<td>1,939</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>4,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1766</td>
<td>4,576</td>
<td>4,311</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>8,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1767</td>
<td>2,160</td>
<td>2,752</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>4,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1768</td>
<td>1,975</td>
<td>8,414</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>10,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>4,107</td>
<td>7,231</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>11,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>2,990</td>
<td>6,888</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>9,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>3,862</td>
<td>1,352</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>5,214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1772</td>
<td>4,859</td>
<td>3,234</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>8,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>4,790</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>8,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>2,606</td>
<td>1,675</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>4,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>6,287</td>
<td>6,472</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>12,759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>4,555</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>10,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>1,889</td>
<td>1,831</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>3,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>1,629</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>3,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 64,948 68,148 169 133,265

Source: António Carreira 1968: 125.
By considering these 26 years, it can be seen that the annual average number of panos exported from the Cape Verde Islands was approximately 5,125. However, if we take into account that the year 1757 is the first effective year of operation of the company on the West African coast, and that 1780–82 were the years of the closing sales of its entire business, then during the 22 years of the company’s full operation (1757–78) the annual average peaks at about 6,000 panos. The high point of exportation was in the years between 1766 and 1776, when about 95,000 panos (70% of the total) were shipped to Guiné, with an annual average of 8,635 pieces. The registers of the company record exports of almost the totality of cloth pieces for Bissau and Cacheu. Only 169 were registered as going to Sierra Leone in 1758. This small amount may be explained by the fact that the company did not have representatives in Sierra Leone. Transactions with this area were registered in the account books of the agency in Bissau, reflecting the supplies taken for trade to Sierra Leone, as well as the goods and slaves that were extracted from there. Afterwards, the headquarters of the company in Lisbon listed everything on the books as being transported by the agents at Bissau. Besides a small number of slaves it seems that the company had brought from Sierra Leone not much more than seahorse ‘teeth’, bricks of glue and indigo, and other such goods, though they represented substantial profits. 45

As a means for achieving its commercial objectives, in particular its trade in slaves, the company had to increase the manufacturing of cloth in the Cape Verde Islands. When the supply of cloth dwindled there were problems with the acquisition of slaves and staples in Guiné. The company used cloth, gunpowder, muskets, swords, pistols, knives, beads, alcohol, 46 and other commodities to purchase slaves, wax, ivory and other goods produced locally in Guiné. In each region the amount of those goods that conventionally would correspond to the price of a slave, a certain amount of wax, so many ivory tips, etc., was previously established by custom and market value. Unfortunately, it is now difficult to find concrete indications of those amounts. 47

In terms of types of cloth and their average prices, Carreira presents the following figures for the shipments from Cape Verde:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type/Denomination</th>
<th>Pieces exported</th>
<th>Average in réis</th>
<th>Total in réis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinário (ordinary)</td>
<td>62,039</td>
<td>115500</td>
<td>330585000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicho and Bicho superior</td>
<td>46,985</td>
<td>85625</td>
<td>4052455625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>8,398</td>
<td>75000</td>
<td>587865000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agulha</td>
<td>6,257</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>187715000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fio de lâ and Vermelho</td>
<td>2,047</td>
<td>65000</td>
<td>122825000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agulha e Vestir</td>
<td>1,719</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>50175000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestir</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>50175000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrado</td>
<td>1,436</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>43085000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrós</td>
<td>1,384</td>
<td>125250</td>
<td>1695450000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obra</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>105600</td>
<td>43675200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preto and Preto superior</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>135500</td>
<td>31235000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordão</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>25000</td>
<td>38450000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galá or Galam</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>35000</td>
<td>56450000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>135500</td>
<td>17825000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boca-branca &amp; Boca-preta</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>65100</td>
<td>54855000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxom &amp; Oxom quadro</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>105000</td>
<td>13050000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: António Carreira 1968: 127

The above types or denominations obey the orthographic forms adopted by the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company. As it can be seen, the enormous volume of remittances was not limited to the lower-cost cloth. As might be expected, the cloth denominated ordinário (or barafula), used by the less-wealthy buyer, was the most popular, representing more than 46% of the total number of pieces exported. However, the more expensive ones, called bicho, bicho superior, retrós, and fio de lâ, were also in great demand, for which reason they appear together, with 50,416 units exported, amounting to more than 33% of the total. These ‘fine’ fabrics were probably destined for the elders, notables, spiritual leaders, and other elements of the wealthy classes, as garments for their daily life and shrouds for burial, as well as for bridal gifts, and for comfortably securing children to women’s backs.

The name of the Cape Verdean island that supplied the cloth did not always appear on the accounting registers of the company. Only occasionally were there clear indications as to the origin of the panos. Of the total of 133,265 panos that were acquired and exported to Guiné, the accounting books recorded the origin of only 64,681 (48.5% of the total): 19,272 from Santiago, 43,696 from Fogo, and 1,713 from Brava. 48 The total that was produced and exported was surely much higher. Despite all legislation to the contrary, an uncertain yet high number of panos was sold by impoverished islanders and smuggled to the African coast by other European ships.

The total value of 630.7558825 réis, although obtained without absolute certainty as to the accuracy of the figures, points to the importance of textile manufacturing for the economy of the Cape Verde Islands. It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that cloth prices in Guiné were at least 100% higher than in Cape Verde, which granted large profits to the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company, even taking into account costs with shipping and storage. In the last years of the 18th century the re-sale price of cloth produced in Guiné was at least twice as high as its original price in Cape Verde. 49

As for numbers of slaves bought by the company in Bissau and Cacheu, António Carreira presents the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Total of slaves purchased</th>
<th>Total original in réis (approx.)</th>
<th>Annual Average of slaves purchased</th>
<th>Average original cost in réis (approx.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1756–60</td>
<td>2.027</td>
<td>120.9615000</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>595675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761–65</td>
<td>4.183</td>
<td>308.9595000</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>735861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1766–70</td>
<td>5.294</td>
<td>371.3365000</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>705143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771–75</td>
<td>4.637</td>
<td>329.4805000</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>715055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776–78</td>
<td>2.485</td>
<td>177.2515000</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>705957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778–89</td>
<td>1.805</td>
<td>119.7155000</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>663324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,444</td>
<td>1,427,7025000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: António Carreira 1988, 112
Of the total number of slaves bought by the company, only 105 were embarked in Cape Verde. At Bissau and Cacheu, 1,920 slaves died before embarkation or escaped from the barracoons; a fact that reduced the shipments from both these ports to 18,419 during the whole period.

These last two tables show that there was an important increase in both figures, for *panos* exported from the Cape Verde Islands and for slaves purchased in Bissau and Cacheu. By taking into consideration that cloth from Cape Verde was an essential part of exchange for slaves and that the average price of a slave in Bissau was 48$500 réis, it is possible to assume that the cloth exported from Cape Verde during the period, valued at 630–758$825 réis, could have bought approximately 13,000 out of the total of 20,444 slaves during the whole period (1757–82). Even taking into account variations in individual slave prices, specific demands for particular fabrics, and the payment of taxes in cloth by the Portuguese to African authorities, the approximation of the number of slaves seems about right. Such credit input should have had a significant impact on the Portuguese slave trade in the Rivers of Guiné, which surely helped Portugal to maintain its position as a colonial power in the region, against English and French interests.

**Conclusion**

This study has explored some aspects of the use of cloth as money on the West African coast especially during the second half of the 18th century. In examining the activities of the Portuguese Grão Pará and Maranhão Company, it can be seen that cloth played a major role in the slave trade practiced by the Portuguese in Guiné. Cape Verdean cloth was important for the slave trade in Guiné and the company secured a virtual monopoly over its production and commercialization. Therefore, this chapter suggested that, largely financed by Cape Verdean cloth together with monopolistic and fiscal privileges, the company allowed Portugal to assume colonial influence in Guiné during a period when its power was decreasing in other regions of West Africa.

Each one of these aspects has countless implications, for fabrics had not only commercial value but also cultural and social significance for West Africans. In Guiné they were prized possessions as a display of wealth and social prominence. Even poor people tried incessantly to acquire as many pieces of cloth as they could during the course of their lives in order to provide for themselves a decorous burial and to arrive with some ‘capital’ at the other side of death.

The intensification of the slave trade during the 18th century occasioned ferocious competition among European traders over the coastal and riverside markets of the region. The Portuguese had to develop a series of measures to reinforce and protect their positions in the commerce of West Africa. This was a costly endeavour and the Portuguese crown placed the responsibility in the hands of the Grão Pará and Maranhão Company. In its turn, the company, seeking to solidify profits, cultivated overseas transactions looking to buy cheap goods at points of origin and sell them at a large profit at their destinations.

Under such circumstances, the monopoly granted to the company over the commercialization of *panos* produced in the Cape Verde Islands also gave it virtual control over the production of cloth on the archipelago. The company, empowered by taxation prerogatives, debt collection, and financial dealings, appropriated almost the entire production by local craftsmanship and large-scale manufacturing. Considering that the demand for cloth was increasing in Guiné, it is probable that the *panos* from Cape Verde should be credited with a role of great importance in the permanence of the Portuguese in the region, despite English and French pressure to expel them.

As far as scholarship can determine at this time, there are no records of how many of these *panos* were used by the company to pay taxes to African authorities, to buy slaves and other goods, and to make payment to soldiers and workers in Bissau.

Definitive research on the role of cloth as money in the region of Guiné is still to be written. This survey only found and knocked on some of the doors that will need a stronger hand to open them up to curious eyes. Among the many questions that deserve further examination are: what are the specifics of the migration of looms, slave weavers, and weaving techniques from the West African coast to the Cape Verde Islands; how a traditional household activity turned into an assembly-line production with European traits in the hands of wealthy planters in the Cape Verde Islands; how many pieces of cloth were actually produced in Guiné, and what were their destinations; what amount of cloth was smuggled from Cape Verde by other Europeans; how many slaves were effectively exchanged for cloth in West Africa; what is the level of personal involvement of soldiers and workers in the slave trade at Bissau, and what happened to them when they turned into Papel relatives? It is probable that many of these questions will remain unanswered for years to come, but the search for responses is still imperative for those who are committed to the unveiling of African history.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, which generously funded my trip to Portugal, where the idea of this chapter was conceived. I would like to thank Paul Lovejoy and José Curto for reading my early drafts. My gratitude also goes to Janis Jordan who assisted me with translation of the most difficult passages. And, as always, I wish to thank Rita and Ravi Liberato for their loving encouragement at all moments.

**Notes**

1. The term Guiné or Guinea depends on time, space, and authors. For some it refers to the Greater Senegambia, the region between the Senegal and the Sierra Leone rivers. In Arabic it means the ‘Land of the Blacks’, while in English documents and texts it is called Gyny and upper Guinea coast, see Hall 2005, 80–82. In this chapter the Portuguese term Guiné was adopted following the example of René Péllissier (1989) in order to avoid confusion with other Guineas (Conakry and Equatorial) and to delimit the region to the area of Portuguese influence, which through renunciations and amputations became today’s Guinea-Bissau. The name Portuguese Guinea is also unacceptable because colonial rule in the region only became reality in the 1930s. Therefore, to maintain closer coherence with the sources, the pre-colonial appellatives Guiné and the Rivers of Guiné seem to be more appropriate for the 18th century.

In this category at least 17 types or 29 Carreira 1968, 83.

Lamb 1975, 73–102.


Vogt 1975 is a brilliant exception, but his analysis is restricted to Kriger 2006, 5.

Kriger 2006. 

Carreira 1968, 98–99. In this category at least 17 types or denominations were produced in Cape Verde: barafula or barafala; cate or ascate; bantan; xerox; sabo; preto; ordindiro; lista de fora; agulha; gallam; galá; or galá; gualuman or gulosam; jugulado; else; sor; dampe; saka; and lambu or bumba.


Carreira 1968, 98–103. The colcha (bed covering) was usually made of white or colored cotton threads. Sometimes, silk and wool threads would be incorporated into the fabric, but the most common type used only cotton. These coverings were typically manufactured with white, black, yellow, green, or blue thread. The dimensions of the coverings were approximately 1.96m by 1.50m and they were composed of six bands, each about 25cm wide, and occasionally a fringe of approximately 4cm sewn all around as embellishment. For an extensive survey on dye stuffs in the 18th century see Fairlie 1965.

Carreira 1968, 98–99. In terms of dimensions, a woolen covering could vary from 1.90m to 2.25m in length and from 1.50m to 1.75m in width. It might be composed of three to five bands, each with a width ranging from 35cm to 50cm. In natural color, the woolen coverings presented a rough appearance. The wool was not previously softened by any means. The final product depended entirely upon the quality of the fibers provided by the archipelago’s sheep herds.

Carreira 1968, 99–101. On the Cape Verdean island of Santo Antão, this kind of quilt received the name clabedatche. Its dimensions varied from 1.74m to 2.10m in length, and 1.50m in width, being composed of four to five bands, each with a width of 35cm to 50cm.

Carreira 1983, 208.

For a detailed account on cloth as a basic resource in another context see Martin 1986.

For an extensive survey on dye stuffs in the 18th century see Fairlie 1965.

Ferreira 1961, 12.

The term lançados refers to Portuguese individuals that, from the 16th century on, established themselves among African communities along the West African coast, adopting African spouses and customs; all despite constant regulations issued by the Portuguese crown against European settlement on the West African coast. The word comes from the Portuguese ‘lançar-se,’ which in the West African context may be translated as ‘casting one’s lot’ among African societies. See Brooks 1980a.

Brooks 1993a and 1993b.

Barcelos 1905, III, 122.

Pereira 1954, 56.

Fernandes 1975, 42. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Portuguese were made by the author with the assistance of Janis Jordan.

Fernandes 1951, 42.

Brásio 1963, II, 10.

Translated from Dutch by Hair 1974, 51–52.

At this point it is important to make particular reference to the kola nut, for it also was a traditional African commodity that was largely used as money for many centuries and, like the panos, is still today highly prized in West Africa. Although other varieties were commercialized, Cola nitida nuts were the most appreciated. Red, white, or shades in between, the nuts were chewed and were credited with numerous properties such as medicinal, mouth asepsis and source of energy. Chewing kola nuts was a luxury, but it was also used at naming ceremonies, weddings and other occasions. Wealthy people offered kola to visitors as a sign of hospitality and affluence. Kola was grown only in the Equatorial forest, but it was traded almost everywhere in West Africa. At least from the end of the 16th century on Portuguese and Cape Verdean traders started to ship kola from the Scarcies River (Sierra Leone) north to the Gambia and the Rivers of Guiné, competing with kola brought overland to the coast and obtaining excellent profits. For a detailed account on the kola trade of the upper Guinea coast see Lovejoy 1980, 97–98 and 117–118; and Brooks 1980b.

Carreira 1983b, 68.

Carreira 1968, 128.

Brooks 1993a.

Andrade 1952, 122.


Lovejoy and Richardson 1995.

Andrade 1980.

Andrade 1983a, 209.

Pellissier 1889.

Andrade 1983a.

Andrade 1983a, 209.

Pellissier 1889.

Curtin 1975, 238.

Réis is a common deformation of the plural of ‘real’, an old Portuguese monetary unit. At least since 1602, the value of a thousand réis was represented as 1.000. The symbol U, known as ‘delta’, was still being used in Brazil during the 19th century. In Brazil and in Portugal, however, from 1747 on, the ($ (money sign) began to be used in the same way as the delta. The conto de réis (a million réis) was represented by two points, as in 1.000$000. See Fernandes 1876.

See Pallaver’s chapter in this volume for more on glass beads as currency in East Africa.


For a complete series of prices in Portugal throughout the period see Godinho 1955.


Andrade 1952.

Andrade 1952, 120.

Fernandes 1856, 12.

Gervais 1982; Pond 1941a, 1941b; Curtin 1975, 266, n. 5 and 267, n. 7.

Lovejoy and Richardson 1995.

Carreira 1983, 212.

See Heap’s chapter in this volume for more on gin as currency in Southern Nigeria.

Brooks 1993a and 1993b.

Carreira 1968, 128.

Carreira 1983b, 68.
'A recognized currency in beads'. Glass Beads as Money in 19th-Century East Africa: the Central Caravan Road

Karin Pallaver

During the 19th century, glass beads were still seen in Europe as mere imitations of true pearls and gemstones and produced, as it was said, ‘pour les Sauvages et les Nègres’. However, in other parts of the world, glass beads had a great value and were widely used as currency, as it was the case of the interior of present-day Tanzania. Starting from the beginning of the 19th century, this region became systematically involved in the commercial world of the western Indian Ocean. New trade patterns spread over the interior, which led to important social, political and economic changes. As in other parts of Africa, one of these changes was the development of a complex monetary system based on the use of different types of currencies. Glass beads of Venetian origin, among others, became one of the main means of payment and exchange along the central caravan road that connected Bagamoyo on the coast, to Tabora, in the Western region of Unyamwezi, to Ujiji, on the Eastern shores of Lake Tanganyika.

As many observers of the time lamented, the types of glass beads requested by the populations living along the caravan roads were subject to frequent fluctuations. As glass beads were widely used as ornaments in the interior of 19th-century Tanzania, European travelers commonly attributed the changes in the glass bead demand to the ‘capricious’ fashion of the African populations. This explanation, however, reflected their prejudice against the African use of money, which they often considered as primitive and backward. The monetary system of East African caravan trade was, instead, very complex. As we are going to see, the frequent changes in the demand were not only the result of fashion, but rather a response to the needs of the local economy and trade.

The aim of this article is to explore the different currencies in use along the caravan roads in 19th-century East Africa. The main focus will be the role of glass beads, which, I will argue, performed a critical function in the entire monetary system, being the link between long-distance trade and African interregional trade. The first part of this article gives a brief overview of the historical context in which glass beads were used as money. The second part will deal in more detail with the different currencies used along the central caravan road and in the surrounding regions. A third part will then investigate the economic functions of glass beads along the caravan roads and show how they performed the role of a recognized currency in the main markets of the interior. A final brief part will then provide some notes on the glass bead production in Venice during the 19th century.

1. The historical background: long-distance trade and Nyamwezi interregional trade

The Indian Ocean is one of the oldest economic and cultural world-systems: thanks to the presence of the monsoon winds, the driving force of the Indian Ocean commerce, India and the Arabian peninsula established close commercial relationships with East Africa. Until the beginning of the 19th century, however, the East African coast remained almost completely separated from its interior and was more part of the commercial world of the western Indian Ocean than of East Africa. The goods requested by Indian and Arab traders could be obtained in the immediate coastal hinterland and therefore there was no need to organize expensive commercial expeditions into the interior. At the same time, the regions of the interior were characterized by the presence of a widespread network of African local and interregional trades, mostly in salt, iron, copper, foodstuffs and forest products. It was only from the first decades of the 19th century that these two separate worlds began to establish a strong connection as a consequence of the huge increase in the international demand for ivory and slaves. East African ivory was very valuable since it was particularly suitable for being carved, being softer than West African and Indian ivory. In the 19th century, East African ivory began to be widely requested in Europe and America to produce luxury goods such as carved figures, parts of instruments, combs, billiard balls, and so on. It was also requested by the Indian market, where it was used to produce jewellery. The increased demand for slaves was due to the establishment of clove plantations in Zanzibar and Pemba and to the sugar-cane production of the Mascarene Islands. There were other East African goods requested by the international markets like gum copal, which was used to produce varnishes for the American furniture industry and hides, which were used in American and European tanneries.

All of these products had growing prices on the international markets during the 19th century and this gave African producers and traders favorable terms of trade. Between 1826 and 1857, for example, the price of ivory in Zanzibar doubled and it doubled again in the next 30 years. The international demand for these products became a great stimulus for Indian, Swahili and Arab traders operating on the coast to expand their commercial activities into the East African interior. At the same time African traders already operating in the interior organized their own caravans to the coast. Nyamwezi traders, in particular, pioneered the commercial routes to the coast and with the development of the long-distance trade they began to enlist as porters in the Arab-Swahili caravans and organized at the same time their own caravans to the coast. The active response of the Nyamwezi came from their long tradition in the interregional trade networks that connected Unyamwezi, their place of origin,
with Lake Tanganyika on the west, Lake Victoria on the north and the southern regions of Ulipa and Ruemba. Nyamwezi interregional trade included many types of goods, but was centered around four major products: copper, tobacco, iron and salt. Copper was produced for the most part in the region of Katanga and was used to make jewellery. In around 1860 Nyamwezi traders established themselves in Katanga to deal in copper, and, according to the explorer Thomson, in 1880 they dominated the biggest part of its trade towards the coast. Tobacco was taken by Nyamwezi traders in Usukuma and then sold in Ugogo where it was in great demand. Iron was highly requested in Unyamwezi, as iron forging was one of the main activities of the Nyamwezi, besides portage and agriculture. It was used to produce tools of everyday use, such as hoes, knives, axes, arrows and spears. Nyamwezi traders also went regularly to Uvina to buy high quality salt. This long tradition in commercial exchanges allowed the Nyamwezi traders to take part in the coastal trade and to rapidly adapt to the new patterns of trade. They extended their interregional trade networks and put in contact two commercial worlds that until that moment had been almost completely separated.

The monetary system of these trade networks was very complex and involved the use of different types of currencies. On the coast, the most widely accepted currency was the Maria Theresa (MT) thaler or dollar, also known as the ‘black dollar’, which was used as the main means of payment and as a unit of account in Zanzibar and along the coast. The other currency used on the coast was the Indian rupee and its fractional coins, the anna and the pice. In the coastal markets the Indian rupee and the MT thaler often coexisted; even if accounts were usually kept in dollars and cents, in market transactions the fractional coins for the dollar were annas and pice rather than cents. For this reason, in 1845 the British authorities introduced large quantities of pice from India in order to mitigate the shortage of small change in Zanzibar. Together with the MT thaler and the Indian Rupee, another coin that was in use on the coast was the Spanish dollar or piastre. In 1857, when Richard Burton was on the coast organizing his caravan the Spanish dollar did not have a fixed rate, as it was not a legal tender, contrary to the MT thaler, which was the main unit of account. It seems, however, that towards the end of the 1870s, the Spanish dollar begun to be more popular than before, at least as a unit of account. In fact, the White Fathers, who in that period began to regularly organize their caravans to go into the interior, kept their accounts in Spanish piastres and barely mentioned the MT thalers. These currencies were in use on the coast and in Zanzibar, but were not accepted in the interior. The caravans travelling inland had to supply themselves with commodities, which were used as a means of payment and exchange.

2. The monetary system of the caravan roads
The use of commodity currencies in Africa was very widespread during the pre-colonial period. Many scholars have worked on the definition of pre-colonial African money, investigating its main functions in the African economic context. According to Karl Polanyi, an object is called money when used in any one of the following ways: for payment, as a means of indirect exchange, or as a standard. Money can be all-purpose money, answering to all of these uses, and special-purpose money, when the different uses of it are separated from one another. With reference to the case of pre-colonial Senegambia, Philip Curtin has underlined, however, that no currency is all-purpose in any society because no society makes payments for all the purposes that payments can be made for. According to him, a more fruitful approach in the analysis of pre-colonial African currencies is ‘to recognize that anything can be money as long as the people who use it accept it as a recognized medium of exchange and standard of value.’

Of the same opinion is Paul Lovejoy, who, dealing with the case of Central Sudan, underlines the need to focus on market integration and economic growth and to understand pre-colonial monetary systems in order to evaluate the extent to which a capital market developed. According to him, the question is not if these currencies were all-purpose money, but the extent to which each currency met these requirements: medium of exchange, common measures of value, stores of value, standards of deferred payment. In the framework of 19th-century East African trade, there were different currencies which met these requirements.

The biggest part of the provisions of a caravan starting from the East African coast for the interior was made up of cloth, glass beads, metal wires; then came other items of trade which could vary from arms to musical boxes, from hats to sugar and so on. Some of these goods were used to make gifts for local chiefs residing along the caravan roads. Other goods, particularly cloth, glass beads and brass wire, were used as a means of exchange and payment during the caravan journeys and in the market centers of the interior and were commonly described by European observers of the time as the ‘African money’ or ‘the African coins’.

Cloth, ‘the gold and silver of Equatorial Africa’ as a missionary defined it, was highly valued in acquiring the goods of long-distance trade and was also widely requested to pay hongo, the tributes imposed by local chiefs on passing caravans. There were three main varieties of common cloth requested along the caravan roads, together with many different types of coloured cloth used for higher unit of exchange. Until the 1860s, the most requested cloth in the interior was a kind of unbleached cotton produced in America, particularly in Salem, Massachusetts, which in East Africa was called merikani or merekani. A second type was an indigo-dyed cotton from India, called kaniki, which was generally acquired at a lesser price than the American one; it was, in fact, totally rejected from some populations of the interior and therefore as currency it was not used as much as the merikani. After the 1860s, a thin grey shirting produced in England, called satini, also entered the market. In the 1880s it was much in vogue along the caravan roads and because of its lesser quality it was cheaper than the merikani and the kaniki. American textiles dominated the East African market until the US Civil War when the cotton supplies of Salem were cut off. From this point onwards, the East African market began to be flooded with Indian made cloth produced in Bombay, which from the 1860s onwards took the place of American produced cloth in the East African trade networks.

Glass beads were generally second only to cloth among the most requested goods of 19th-century East African trade and were largely in demand along the main caravan roads and around Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika. Traders who wanted
to go from the coast into the interior had to buy beads from Banyan traders who had the monopoly of the bead trade in Zanzibar, where, according to Burton, glass beads were imported yearly ‘by the ton’.\footnote{43} In some parts of the interior glass beads were accepted as a means of exchange for ivory and slaves and as a means of payment for tributes. During the 19th century, there were many different types of beads in use; among the most requested there were the same same, or sami-sami, beads, made of red coral, the white beads, popularly known as merikani,\footnote{21} the gulabi beads made of pink porcelian, the black beads called bubu, the sungomaji, white and blue beads produced in Nurnberg, and a variety called sofì, Venetian cylindrical beads available in different colours.\footnote{22}

Brass and copper wires, finally, were other important articles in the East African trade and were considered by 19th-century observers as troublesome items as their value was influenced by many factors, such as their weight, the length of the coil and their packaging.\footnote{26} Along the central caravan road, brass wire was particularly valued in Unyamwezi. There it was used to produce coil-bracelets, which were also in demand in the market of Ujiji, where they were used to buy slaves and ivory.\footnote{27} In Ugogo, brass and copper wires were widely requested as hongo and then used to make ornaments.\footnote{37}

Imported goods were used by the caravans traveling inland from the coast, but not by those going in the opposite direction. Once a commercial caravan had reached the interior and had acquired the ivory, slaves and other goods to be carried to the coastal markets, it was necessary to reorganize a new caravan to travel back to the coast. New porters had to be engaged and new goods had to be acquired in order to pay the caravan personnel, to buy food and to pay taxes along the road. Buying cloth and beads in the interior would not have been economic, as the prices of these commodities increased substantially from the coast towards the interior. The prices between Zanzibar and Tabora could increase from two to five times and from Tabora to the coast, serving as “lubricant” of the long-distance trade.\footnote{36}

The availability of small change was essential for these small transactions and since beads could be split up in smaller units, the need for small change. Cloth was generally the most important medium of exchange for the purchase of high-valued goods like ivory and slaves, whereas glass beads and metal wires were used for smaller transactions. Glass beads, for instance, were particularly requested in exchange for food. Foodstuffs were generally carried to the caravanserais by local women who sold them directly to porters and other caravan personnel during caravan stops. Cloth could be used to buy food, but glass beads were often the more convenient currency. The availability of small change was essential for these small transactions and since beads could be split up in smaller units, they became the most widespread means to buy food during caravan journeys.\footnote{44} This does not mean, however, that glass beads were not used to buy ivory and slaves or that cloth was not accepted in exchange for food. Along the caravan roads of 19th-century Tanzania there was not a clear distinction between mono-function money and full-function-money. What is important for our analysis is that these currencies circulated side by side and that they were not substitutive but complementary, in the sense that plural monies could do what a single money could not.\footnote{50} The presence of plural currencies in the interior was the result of the existence of a multi-layered market, composed by local, interregional and long-distance trade networks. And, as we are going to see, glass beads played the role of an intermediary currency among these different spheres of trade.

3. Glass beads as money along the central caravan road

The history of glass beads in East Africa is a very ancient one, as they had been imported for centuries on the East African coast from South-East Asia. When the first Portuguese arrived on the East African coast, glass beads of European origin were not yet...
accepted by the local traders, but in the following centuries, beads of Venetian origin became more and more valuable in purchasing the East African goods requested by the international markets. During the 19th century, with the development of strong commercial relationships between the interior and the coast, glass beads became one of the main components of the complex monetary system of the East African caravan trade. We can observe a major difference in the value and the functions of glass beads when they were used along the caravan roads or in the main market centers of the interior. Along the caravan roads, glass beads were not always in demand and the types requested were subject to frequent fluctuations. Instead, in the main towns of the interior glass beads were accepted as a recognized currency in the framework of a composite monetary system generally based on cloth. During caravan journeys glass beads were used to discharge different types of obligations: to pay taxes along the roads, to pay the caravan personnel and to buy different types of goods, such as foodstuffs and, in some regions, the goods of the long-distance trade.

Beads were commonly used for the payment of hongo, which were the taxes imposed by local chiefs on passing caravans. Hongo were particularly costly in the region of Ugogo, situated between Tabora and the coast, and glass beads together with cloth, were highly requested to settle their payment. The Belgian explorer Jerome Becker, who traveled in the interior during the 1880s, considered it fundamental for an expedition to have a supply of different kinds of beads in order to pay hongo. During his expedition, brass wire was requested as hongo in Ugogo and Unyamwezi, and glass beads from Unyamwezi onwards. The types of glass beads requested to settle the hongo varied significantly over time and glass beads were in some cases even refused by local chiefs, who preferred cloth to beads. During Burton’s times, for instance, black beads called babu were highly requested as hongo in Ugogo, whereas 20 years later, the White Fathers used only merikani white beads and cloth to pay hongo there. In 1871 the American explorer Henry Morton Stanley found that beads were of almost no use to pay hongo in Ugogo, even if his beads were widely accepted as hongo on Lake Tanganjika. In Ugogo, glass beads had also the extremely important function of being a privileged means of payment for water. According to Becker, local people dug a hole in the ground where they put water and sold it to passing caravans. He paid with beads, tobacco, hemp and gunpowder.

Besides being used to pay taxes, glass beads were used to compensate the caravan personnel. In the interior of 19th-century Tanzania the only means of transport were human porters, who carried on their shoulders the goods requested by the international markets from the interior to the coast. Caravans were also always accompanied by armed guards, called askaris, who had the task to maintain the order in the caravan ranks and to defend them from the attacks of thieves. Porters and askaris were hired by caravan organizers and traders and they received a wage in exchange for their work. The amount was decided before the caravan departure from the coast or from the caravan places in the interior, and the payment was generally settled in cloth or in beads. Cloth and glass beads were often alternated to pay porters and askaris. The White Fathers, for example, during their first travel into the interior in 1878–1879, paid their porters with cloth from the coast until Unyamwezi, and then with beads from Unyamwezi to Lake Victoria. Glass beads were also exchanged for food along the road. They were used in the payment of posho, the food rations due to porters and askaris. The amount of posho was decided when the caravans were organized and was given to porters and askaris on a regular basis by the caravan master or guide. It could be directly given in grains, generally millet or sorghum, or in glass beads and cloth. In this case, glass beads and cloth were then exchanged for food along the road and particularly in the caravanserais where the caravans stopped to rest and to replenish their supplies. As glass beads could be split up in small units, they were generally the preferred currency for the purchase of food. We can observe that the cheapest quality of beads could generally buy the cheapest kind of foodstuffs; for example, according to Burton, the cheaper varieties of beads could be exchanged for grain and vegetables, but they could not buy fowl, milk and eggs. Glass beads were also extensively used in larger commercial exchanges and contemporary reports are full of details concerning the use of glass beads in acquiring ivory and slaves. However, the general trend was to use cloth, guns and piastres to purchase slaves and ivory and to use glass beads in smaller transactions such as the purchase of food. This system of exchange was in use both in Ujiji and Tabora and also in the Congo region.

Contrary to what happened along the caravan roads, where the types of commodities requested for payment could vary in a significant way, in the main commercial centers of the interior, like Tabora and Ujiji, beads were used as a recognized currency. The existence of a currency in beads was determined by the need to have a recognized exchange rate in the main markets of the interior, where the different types of currencies used along the caravan roads were put in relation to one another. We find a lot of references to the use of a bead currency in the market of Ujiji. The German explorer Hermann von Wissmann reports that in the Ujiji market the smallest coins were represented by red and blue glass beads. Cotton cloth and copper crosses represented silver money, whereas slaves, cattle and ivory represented ‘European’ gold. The explorer Joseph Thomson tells us that in the market of Ujiji they have made the first advance towards the use of money in the adoption of a bead currency, which performs all the functions of our coppers, cloth being the medium for the larger purchases.

According to Beverly Brown, in 1874 at the latest, glass beads were the accepted currency in the market of Ujiji. Being part of a monetary system composed by different types of currencies, the value of glass beads was directly related to that of cloth; the rates of exchange were based on a cloth standard and were set each morning. It was not a true market price, but rather part of a complex set of equivalents. After reaching Ujiji, the missionary Edward C. Hore, reported that:

Here for the first time we find a regular currency or money in use by the natives; it consists of strings of blue and white cylindrical beads, each string containing 20 beads. Bundles of 10 strings are called ‘fundo’. From 9 to 11 fundi are given in exchange for 4 yards of good heavy American calico; the value varying daily, according to the quantity of cloth in the market.

Owing to the presence of different types of currencies, money-changers operated in the market of Ujiji, who exchanged cloth for beads or a particular type of beads for
another one, in this way facilitating market transactions. This offered to them a profitable daily business, as market prices were supplemented with service charges to any buyer not dealing in sofì, the white and blue cylindrical beads accepted as currency. According to Brown, glass beads were primarily market currency and their value fluctuated considerably in response to market exchanges. The arrival of a caravan with hundreds of porters and ample stocks of cloth and beads, for example, always generated numerous exchange adjustments.

In the region of Unyamwezi, glass beads were reported to be used as currency. Captain Stairs, stopping at the market of Tabora, found that food was set out in small quantities equivalent to the value of a string of beads. During his stay in Tabora, Stairs noticed that it was possible to buy foodstuffs with one string of beads and with 30 strings a dozen eggs. Beads could then be exchanged for cloth as soon as a seller had collected enough of them and the cloth so obtained was then used to buy goods of higher value than foodstuffs. Also the missionary Dodgshun reports that in the market of Tabora there was a recognized currency in beads. According to Burton, in the market of Msene, in Western Unyamwezi, there was a recognized currency in beads, which were the white and blue glass beads called sofì. During the 19th century, glass beads were therefore used not only along the main caravan roads to buy food and to pay taxes, but were also used as currency in the main market towns of the interior. There glass beads could buy different types of market goods, like foodstuffs, tobacco or iron hoes, and could be exchanged for cloth, which was then used to acquire valuable goods.

Tabora and Ujiji were not only the most important inland markets along the caravan road connecting the interior to the coast, they were also the places in which the African interregional caravan trails, coming from neighbouring regions, intersected. In the market of Ujiji traders arrived from Uvinza and Ukha in order to sell salt, from Uruni with palm oil and cattle, from Ukanga and Kaoele with fish, from Uvira and Usowa with ivory, and so on. Also in the market of Tabora a great variety of products of the African interregional trade was available; dried fish coming from Lake Tanganyika, salt coming from Uvinza, iron hoes from Ukerewe, cattle from Usukuma, copper from Katanga, etc. The markets of the commercial towns of the interior were therefore also the place where coastal and African traders could acquire the goods of African interregional trade, which were used, as previously noted, as a means of payment during the caravan journeys towards the coast. In the towns of the interior, glass beads, being the recognized currency, played a critical role, as they represented the main medium of exchange to purchase the goods of African interregional trade. In the market of Tabora, for example, tobacco was pressed and then cut in small cubes weighing about 15–20 grams, each one equivalent to one kete of glass beads. After being purchased with beads, tobacco was then used to buy foodstuffs and water and to pay hongo in Ugogo. Iron hoes, which played a key role as a means of exchange during travels from the interior to the coast, could also be bought in the market of Tabora with glass beads: when William Stairs was there, in 1887, 30 strings could be exchanged for an iron hoe. Since glass beads, as we have noted above, were particularly suitable for small transactions, it is very likely that they were preferred by African traders in exchange for their salt, iron and tobacco, which were then used as a means of payment during long-distance travels towards the coast. This is confirmed by Stanley, who states that in the market of Ujiji glass beads were the most popular currency among local traders. According to him, cloth, like merikani and kaniki, could be accepted as a means of payment, but white and black beads, called sofì, were ‘the only current money accepted by all the natives attending the market.’

Even if cloth has generally been considered as the main medium of exchange in the market economy of the interior of 19th-century Tanzania, we can observe how glass beads, though less requested than cloth as hongo and in exchange for ivory and slaves, were actually the most important means of payment in the inland markets. Beads, in fact, contrary to cloth, could be split up in smaller units, therefore becoming more suitable in acquiring the goods of African interregional trade. As glass beads were widely accepted by African traders in the interior, this commodity facilitated the exchanges among the different spheres of trade and played the role of the intermediary currency that the market needed as a medium of exchange between the currency circuit of the interregional trade network and that of the long-distance trade. Considering the functions of glass beads as money can also help us to better understand why the demand for glass beads along the caravan roads was subject to so many fluctuations, which were not only due to local fashion, as contemporary observers deemed, but depended on the complexity of the East African market.

4. Fashion and inflation: the fluctuations in the demand for glass beads

In Europe, at least until the first half of the 20th century, glass beads were considered as ‘minor’ trade objects, being used in distant parts of the world to buy far more valuable goods, such as ivory, gold and slaves. Asymmetry of exchanges is, of course, a recurrent theme in the reports of European travelers and missionaries in Africa, but it was not applicable to the case of 19th-century East Africa, where glass beads were used as currency in the long-distance trade with the coast and in local commercial transactions. European travelers of the time were very well acquainted with the fact that East African populations did not accept cheap knickknacks in exchange for their goods. The request for foreign commodities was in fact very detailed and European, Arab and Swahili traders could not easily circumvent the local demand.

As an observer of the time wrote,

> In Europe it is generally thought that the savages of Inner Africa accept a string of beads or a yard of cloth as a sufficient recompense for dozens of elephants’ teeth, and that the nourishment of a caravan is repaid by the honour of the visit. These happy days are long since passed.

What struck European travelers, and irritated them even more, were the rapid changes that characterized the demand for glass beads in the regions of the interior. As noted by many travelers, each population had its particular preference as to tint, colour and size. In Burton’s times, for example, as much as 400 different types of beads were in demand. Later, in 1871, when Stanley was organizing his caravan on the coast to go into the interior in search for Livingstone, it took him a long time to decide which kind of glass beads to bring with him. He
decided, at the end, to buy 11 different types of beads among the great number in use. According to contemporary observers, the types of beads requested could, in fact, change every year or every month. Burton, while describing the bead currency of Msene, explained that the information he was giving could be considered valid only for that year, 1858, because currency was liable to perpetual and sudden change, often causing severe losses to merchants, ‘who after laying in a large outfit of certain beads, find them suddenly unfashionable and therefore useless’. The demand was therefore not easy to predict, and traders and explorers going into the interior had to pay particular attention to buy the right types of beads to avoid severe losses. Speke and Burton, for instance, were obliged to throw away many beads considered worthless; they had bought the wrong types of glass beads, which had no value and were not accepted even as gifts. Generally they consulted the recently returned caravan leaders, traders or porters about the prevailing kinds of beads requested among the populations living in the interior. In Burton’s times, for instance, black glass beads (called bubu) were the recognized currency in Uzaramo, but during Stanley’s journey into the interior in 1871 the same beads, though currency in Ugogo, were ‘worthless with all other tribes’. At the beginning of the 1870s, merikani beads were accepted only in Ufipa and some parts of Usagara and Ugogo, but at the end of the decade they were accepted only from Unyamwezi onwards. A particular kind of beads could also remain in demand for a long period: again, during Burton’s travels in the 1850s, the most requested beads in Unyamwezi were the red ones, called sami-sami, which were still in demand during Stanley’s first travel in 1871. In 1878, the White Fathers found that the same beads were still in demand along the central caravan road from Unyamwezi onwards.

Fashion and tastes were depicted by European observers of the time as the main reason for the rapid changes in the demand. Stanley complained that

The various kind of beads [to be carried into the interior] required great time to learn, for the women of Africa are as fastidious in their tastes for beads as the women of New York are for jewelry.

Père Livinhac of the White Fathers noticed that, as barter goods, glass beads were second in importance only to cloth, but were far more subject to the ‘caprice’ of the people he met along the road. These references to fashion and even caprice are a clear indication of a European prejudice against the African use of money, which was considered as backward, particularly when the use of glass beads was involved. According to this interpretation, the frequent changes in the types of glass beads requested were related to the vanity of African women, who could abruptly change their tastes according to current fashion.

Fashion undoubtedly influenced the demand, as glass beads were widely used as ornaments among many African societies. As Lidia D. Sciama rightly points out, ‘beads, in their different colours, arrangements and styles, are important symbols of collective, as well as individual identity for many social groups’. In the interior of 19th-century Tanzania glass beads were used to decorate beads and hair, to embroider cloths, masks and dolls, and to make jewellery, like necklaces, bracelets, and so on. As they were worn by chiefs, they were also considered important as a sign of aristocratic status. In Unyamwezi, glass beads, together with cloth and iron hoes, were also an important part of the bride price. Glass beads also had ritual values. Both Cameron and Stanley speak about propitiatory sacrifices in beads made to gods on Lake Tanganyika. Stanley was told by his guide that there was a custom, both among the Arabs and the local people, to throw merikani beads into the water to appease the god of the lake, Kabogo. Stanley’s guide warned him that, those who throw the beads generally get past without trouble, but those who do not throw beads into the lake get lost and are drowned.

Lieutenant Cameron confirms this version, when he reports that at a certain point of his exploration of Lake Tanganyika, near the Machahezi river, two Jiji guides put three jundo of beads into the water to appease the god of the lake, Kabogo.

For some travelers, the fluctuations in the demand for beads were not only due to fashion, but also to the inflation that took place when too many beads of the same type were in circulation in a particular region. For example, after discovering that coloured beads were preferred to the white beads he had brought with him, Speke reached the conclusion that

It is always foolish to travel without an assortment of beads, in consequence of the tastes of the different tribes varying so much; and it is more economical in the long-run to purchase high-priced than low-priced beads when making up the caravan at Zanzibar, for every little trader buys the cheaper sorts, stocks the country with them, and thus makes them common.

Fashion and inflation were obviously important factors in determining the changes in the demand, but that is not the entire story. A more comprehensive explanation of the continuous fluctuations in the bead demand could come from the analysis of the role of glass beads as money. We have noted in the previous section that the circulation of different types of glass beads was strictly related to the presence of a multi-layered market in the interior, in which glass beads played the role of an intermediary currency among different networks of trade. Cloth was also accepted as currency in these trade networks, but glass beads, with their range of colours and their assortment, were more suitable to respond to the variety of the local demands. In the different regions of the interior many types of glass beads were therefore in circulation and were accepted as a means of payment. In the most important markets of the interior not only the diverse trade networks intersected, but also the different types of glass beads used in these networks were put in relation to one another. The presence of a recognized currency in the main markets, like the soft beads used in Ujiji, was exactly determined by the need to have a currency that could mediate among the varieties of beads in use in the interior. This is why money-changers operated in the main markets of the interior, dealing daily with hundreds of varieties of beads.

Even if we do not know exactly which currencies were used outside long-distance and interregional trade circuits, we could infer that in local commercial exchanges, glass beads were accepted as a means of payment. There was therefore a relationship between the changes in the demand for glass beads and the kind of goods put up for sale in the markets or in the caravanserais. African traders who carried their iron hoes, tobacco, salt and agricultural products to the markets or to the caravanserais, obviously exchanged their goods for a commodity that could be used as a means of payment in their
place of origin. Since the goods available in the towns of the interior and along the caravan roads came from different areas of production, in which different kinds of glass beads were in demand not only for actual wear, but also used as a means of payment, European travelers found that a particular product could be purchased only with a certain kind of beads. This was due to the kind of beads used as a means of payment in the region where these goods came from. The changes in the bead demand could, for example, be related to the seasonality of the agricultural production or to the temporary availability of certain types of goods. European explorers and missionaries did not have a comprehensive picture of the whole trade network and in a simplistic way attributed the rapid changes to the ‘fastidious tastes of African women’, as Stanley put it, rather than to the complexity of the East African monetary system.

European travelers were not the only ones convinced that the request for glass beads was subject to local fashion. In Venice, the glass bead producers also believed that the frequent fluctuations in the demand coming from abroad were due to the changeable fashion of the populations living in distant parts of the world. Jeremy Prestholdt has demonstrated how the cloth production of Salem and Bombay was strictly dependent on the demand coming from East Africa. The 19th-century Venetian glass production was also largely dependent on the foreign demand for glass beads, like that coming from the East African market.

5. Some notes on the glass bead production in Venice and its connection to East Africa

The glass bead production in Venice can be traced back to the Middle Ages. From the beginning of the 15th century onwards, Venice obtained its supremacy in world glass-bead production, when Venetian glass beadmakers filled the void left by the decline of western Asian industries. To maintain its supremacy, the government of the Venetian Republic established in 1490 restrictive laws that obliged glass beadmakers, upon penalty of death, not to divulge glass beadmaking secrets and not to export their know-how abroad. Even if in Europe glass beads continued to be largely disregarded until at least the 20th century, Venetian glass bead production and export had a continuous increase from the 15th century until the end of the 19th century. Thanks to their vivid colours and their durability, Venetian glass beads were extensively used in many parts of the world as ornaments and to decorate different kinds of objects.

During the period under examination, the glass production of Venice was hit by a severe crisis, which affected both artistic and ordinary glass production. The glass bead production, however, was not involved and during the 19th century glass beads were the most important article of Venetian export and the only one to survive the general crisis. From 1848 glass bead manufacturing in Venice had been subject to an extensive mechanization, which led to an output growth and definitely contributed to the success of Venetian glass beads. The power of the glass bead industry of Venice and the ability to face foreign competition were also largely due to a peculiarity of its productive system; the work of stringing beads was, in fact, assigned to Venetian women at home. This gave great flexibility to the production, which could be easily increased or diminished according to the fluctuations of the demand.

Glass bead production remained, therefore, during the 19th century, the most trade-oriented of all Venetian glass manufactures, and, as Francesca Trivellato points out, ‘during the alternate vicissitudes of the Venetian economy, glass-bead manufacturing represented a major source of work and profit; and seed-beads in particular, became the backbone of industrial development’. The biggest part of the production was exported to satisfy the foreign demand, which, in a period of crisis, largely sustained the Venetian economy.

An important part of the glass bead production of Venice was undoubtedly directed to East Africa, as it is confirmed by many sources and by the glass beads found there. In 1874, for example, the Venetian Chamber of Commerce commissioned statistics on the export of glass beads: India was the main destination, with ITL 1,860,000, followed by England with ITL 1,470,000 and then Zanzibar and East Africa, with ITL 650,000. There were two types of Venetian glass beads which were in high demand in the interior of East Africa during the 19th century: the black ones and the cylindrical beads called sofì. Among the beads produced in Venice, black beads were one of the most requested, as it is evident from the many shapes and sizes of black beads available in the sample books of Venetian glass bead firms. These kinds of beads were particularly requested in France, where they were used in clothing and in making funeral wreaths. In East Africa babu, as black beads were called, existed in many different sizes, the small being the most valued, and were much in demand in the interior, particularly in Uzaramo. Sofì beads could be of different colours: red and blue, white and blue or white and black. These beads were in great demand in 19th-century East Africa, and, as we have seen, they were used as currency in the market of Ujiji. In the 1850s they were used as currency in Usagara, Unyamwezi and the Western regions. The East African Expedition arrived in the interior lacking this kind of bead and its members were obliged to sell their cloth in exchange for sofì.

Being largely dependent on the export to foreign markets, the glass bead production of Venice had to adapt itself to the fluctuations of foreign demand. The frequent and sudden changes in the bead demand, in fact, were not only a problem for the traders, missionaries and explorers operating in East Africa; they were also a problem for the centres of production, situated in distant parts of the world, like Venice. If we take, for example, a survey on the Venetian production ordered by the prefect of Venice in 1879, we find that the author lamented the continuous variations in the Venetian production of glass beads. According to him, the production changed greatly from year to year and even from month to month, in response to the fluctuations of the foreign fashion. This was, indeed, a frequent complaint among the producers of the time.

Much of the research on the specific connection between Venice and the East African market is still to be done, but what is clear is that during the 19th century a strong link was established between these two parts of the world. The huge demand for glass beads coming from the East African market definitely sustained the production in Venice, whereas Venetian glass beads performed the function of a recognized currency in the economy of the regions of the interior.
Conclusions

In 19th-century East Africa different types of trade co-existed together with the use of different types of currencies. Along the many caravan roads that intersected in the interior, goods coming from African interregional trade and those of foreign origin carried from the coast were exchanged in the framework of a complex monetary system, where different types of currencies responded to the needs of trade and where the bargaining was based on the assortment of different types of goods. Multiple monies, in fact, were used as a means of payment and performed different functions, responding to the need of a market-economy mainly based on the export of ivory, slaves and gum copal. In the main markets of the interior these different types of currencies were put in relation to one another and this led to the need of a recognized exchange rate. The most important role in connecting the different currencies used along the caravan roads was played by glass beads. Throughout the 19th century this commodity was highly requested along the caravan roads as a means of payment and exchange, but also in the main markets of the interior, where glass beads were the recognized currency. Even if cloth has generally been considered as the main medium of exchange in the market economy of the interior of 19th-century East Africa, we can observe how glass beads, though less requested than cloth as hongo along the caravan roads and as a means of payment to acquire ivory and slaves, were the most important means of payment in the inland markets. The huge request for glass beads coming from the East African market definitely linked this area to the main centres of production of glass beads in Europe, like Venice. There, the production had to adapt itself to the fluctuations of the demand coming from abroad and had to take into account the rapid changes in the demand coming from all over the world. Tracing the paths followed by Venetian glass beads in the 19th century, allow us to link the history of Africa to the history of Europe in a revealing way, studying not only the consequences of European economic expansion and production on marginal economies, but traveling, ‘that same road in the opposite direction, to see what light Africa’s experience can cast on European history’.

Notes

1 Dodgshun 1879.
2 Montesquieu, as cited in Trivellato 2000, 239.
4 Sheriff 1987, 57; the central caravan road was the main commercial road along which ivory was exported from the regions of the interior to the coast.
6 Unomah and Webster 1977, 270.
7 Roberts 1970.
8 Sheriff 1987, 156.
9 Beachey 1967.
10 Sunseri 2007.
11 Nolan 1977, 43.
12 Holmes 1971.
13 See Roberts 1970, for a detailed account of Nyamwezi interregional trade and its connection to long-distance trade.
14 Thomson 1968, 46.
15 Menard 1880–1881.
16 Roberts 1970, 45.
17 Sutton and Roberts 1968.
18 Following Kuroda 2007, 89, the Maria Theresa thaler was first minted in Vienna in 1751 and continued to be minted after the death of the Empress in 1780; in the Red Sea region it was still popular during WW II.
19 According to Sheriff 1987, XIX, the universal rupee was established in 1836, but its value fluctuated until 1899.
20 Sisson.
21 Burton 1859, 422–423. Sisson 1984, 36–37, states that during the period 1860–1890 the Spanish dollar was approximately equal in value to the Maria Theresa thaler, whereas the relation between the Spanish piastre and the rupee was 2.10 Spanish piastre for 2.18 rupees.
22 See White Fathers Archive, Rome C11 Caravanes and C20 Provicariat de l’Unyanyembe
23 Polanyi in Dalton 1971.
24 Curtin 1975, 235.
25 Lovejoy 1974, 564.
26 Burton 1859, 425, for example, said that ‘…beads in East Africa represent the copper and smaller silver coins of European countries’; J.M. Hildebrandt in Rigby 1877–1878, 422, defines cloth, glass beads, iron, and brass wire as the ‘African money’; H.M. Stanley in Bennett 1970, 5–6, says: ‘…and [I] entrusted to them my balas of cloth, bags of beads and coils of wire, which you must recollect are as gold, silver and copper money in Africa’.
27 Guillet 1881.
28 Sissons 1984, 47.
29 Burdo 1891, vol. I, 170; Schynse, 1891, 29, called satini ‘bad cloth’.
30 Prestholdt 2004, 773–776; Sheriff 1987, 135, points out how the decline of American textile production, together with a refusal of the African market to fully accept English textiles, led to a great increase of the request for glass beads and brass wire.
31 For a general history of glass beads in East Africa, see Vierke 2006, chapter 12, 263–342.
32 Burton 1859, 454.
33 Even if merikani was the name usually given in East Africa to unbleached American cotton, the same name was used to refer to white glass beads, probably because they had a colour resembling that of the American cloth.
34 Burton 1859, 426–427; Deniaud 1878–1879.
36 Burton 1859, 428.
38 According to Burton 1859, 185, between Zanzibar and Tabora the prices increased five times; according to Jerome Becker,1887, vol. I, 466, the prices between Zanzibar and Tabora only doubled.
40 P. Blanc 1881.
42 Deniaud 1878–1879
43 Deniaud 1878–1879; according to Sigl 1892, 164–166, still during the first part of the German colonial period iron hoes remained one of the main items of trade in Unyamwezi. In a report of 1892 he states that 150,000 iron hoes had reached Tabora and were then used as currency from Ugogo to the coast, particularly to buy foodstuffs.
44 Coulbois, 1883.
49 Hobley 1929, 246.
51 Van der Sleen 1958, 211–212.
52 From the 1860s onwards, arms and gun powder began to be more and more requested as hongo in the interior; for an account of the arms trade in 19th-century East Africa, see Beachey 1962 and Iliffe 1979, 51.
54 Livinhac 1878–1879.
55 Stanely 2006.
57 The literature on porters is rather rich; for a recent work see Rockel 2006.
58 For an account of monthly wage rates for caravan porters, see Rockel 2006, 7, 2, 226.
59 Livinhac 1879.
60 Burton 1859, 190.
61 B. Brown 1971, 622.
62 von Wissmann 1890, 235.


van der Sleen, W.G.N 1958, ‘Ancient Glass Beads with Special Reference to the glass guilds, which were replaced by a free labour market.


Blanc, P., 1881, White Fathers Archive, Rome, C20–217 [I].
Schnyse, A. 1891, Con Stanley ed Emin Pascià attraverso l’Africa Orientale, Milan (orig. edn Cologne 1890).