Dutch vessels in African waters

Routes, commercial strategies, trading practices and intra-continental trade (c.1590-1674)*

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous pages have been devoted to the study of the intra-continental trade in Western Africa. Scholars such as Brooks, Kea, Curtin and many others have examined in detail the coastal commerce conducted in different areas of the continent by Africans, Europeans and Eurafricans.1 However, most of these works have focused

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on the impact of the opening of the Atlantic trade on specific regions. The coordination between the African hinterland, coastal trade and inter-continental commerce has been disregarded, with few exceptions. The relationship between intra- and inter-continental trades should have been included in the historical debates about the Atlantic Empires, their formation and modus operandi, but here long-distance trade has been the prime focus. Nevertheless, the study of the inter- and intra-continental trade should not be split. In fact, intra-continental trade in Western Africa was crucial for the long-distance trade conducted by the Europeans between this continent, the Americas and Europe. Over time, coastal commerce also became fundamental for the survival of the European posts and settlements in Western Africa.

To partly fill this void in the debate, this article will look in detail at the Dutch intra-continental routes, as well as at the commercial strategies and trading practices adopted by the merchants of the Republic. Our main goals are to show the role of the coastal trade in the success of the long-distance routes and in the survival of the Dutch posts in Western Africa and to emphasize the control of African merchants over the supply markets located either on the coast or the hinterland.

The article is divided in five sections. Section one identifies the coastal circuits and analyses the split between the intra- and inter-continental routes. Furthermore, we examine the strategies and reasons for this division and discuss the functions of the coastal circuits at a local, regional and international level. Section two focuses on the role of inter-racial unions and of the process of settlement on the development of the coastal routes. The role that Eurafricans and Europeans played, as well as, the control they exerted over the coastal circuits and supply markets are also discussed. The third section examines how the trade was conducted both on the coast and the hinterland and discusses the adjustment of the Europeans to African commercial practices. In the last two sections of the article, the Dutch interactions with the Western African supply and consumption markets are briefly analysed and the level of Dutch engagement in this intra-continental trade is debated.

Our conclusions are based on published travelling accounts, the archives of the first Dutch West India Company (West-Indische Compagnie, hereafter WIC) and the collection of Notarial contracts of the Municipal Archive of Amsterdam

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The analysis has been complemented with secondary literature whenever available.

Routes

The Dutch implemented their coastal circuits in three areas of Western Africa, i.e. Cape Verde, Senegambia, the Gulf of Guinea and West-Central Africa, since these areas offered different products and slaves, which were in high demand in Europe and the Americas. However, these intra-continental routes were organized differently and changed in order to better achieve their goals throughout the seventeenth century.

The coastal commercial circuits developed by the merchants from the Republic were not efficiently articulated with the inter-continental routes and completely fixed until the early seventeenth century. The ships freighted in the Dutch ports to conduct trade between the Republic and Western Africa, were the same that carried out the coastal trade in a system of port-to-port commerce. These ships or fleets followed several coastal routes, such as: a) the Cape Verde and Senegambia circuits; b) the Gulf of Guinea circuits; and c) the West-Central Africa circuits. Each of these coastal circuits included several routes.

The Cape Verde and Senegambia circuits comprised the routes between the island of Gorée, the Petite Côte of Senegal and the Cape Verde islands. For example, a vessel operating in the route Republic–Cape Verde (on the continent) would approach the coast at the latitude of Gorée. From there on the ship would proceed further south sailing port-to-port along the Petite Côte and stopping at places such as Portudal (present-day Saly-Portudal, Senegal), Rufisque, and Joal (present-day Joal Fadiouth, Senegal).

4 This study is based on a set of 341 notarial contracts collected from the SAA. This set comprises all notarial acts regarding business activities of merchants of this Dutch port with the Western Coast of Africa. This selection includes various types of notarial acts such as insurance and commercial partnerships as well as commercial agreements, labour contracts and powers of attorney. In geographical terms, this set comprises all contracts for Senegambia, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone, Grain, Ivory, Gold and Slave Coasts, Sao Tome and Principe, Loango, Kongo and Angola. This set of contracts is part of a bigger sample comprising c.17.000 notarial acts covering the Atlantic, the Baltic and the Mediterranean between 1580 and 1750. Work in progress by Catia Antunes and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva.

Map of Senegambia, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Author: Armand Haye
The Gulf of Guinea circuits encompassed all the routes in the areas between the Grain Coast and Cape Lopez, i.e. the Ivory, Gold and Slave Coasts. A commercial trip to the Gold Coast would also approach the African continent at the latitude of Cape Verde, and start there its port-to-port navigation, anchoring at Komenda, Cape Coast, Accra, Ardra, Lagos River, Benin, Cameroon, Corisco Bay and Cape Lopez. As the traders from the Republic became more acquainted with the Gulf of Guinea, other places were also visited, like Cape Mount, the Sess River, Axim, Mouri, Kormantin, Rio del Rey, Gabon and Ollibatta.

The West-Central Africa circuits covered the areas between Cape Lopez and the north of present-day Angola. Most of the ships destined to the Loango Coast (present-day Congo - Brazzaville) and the Congo River, only approached the coast at the latitude of Cape Lopez; there they would start to navigate port-to-port southwards.

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7 ‘Samuel Brun’s voyages of 1611-20’ in: Jones (ed.), German Sources 64-78.
calling at Mayoumba (present-day Gabon), Loango, Congo River and Cabinda (present-day Angola).  

The Dutch coastal circuits were not exclusively used by fleets destined for these three areas. For instance, the ships travelling to West-Central Africa could also approach the coast at the latitude of the Cape Verde Archipelago and call at one of the islands (usually the least populated, i.e. Maio, Sal, Santo Antão or São Vicente) to provision the ships with foodstuffs, fresh water and firewood, before they started their coastal circuits from Cape Lopez further south. Moreover, the same voyage could include several coastal circuits. Some commercial trips to Angola included two coastal circuits: a first tour of the Petite Côte of Senegal and a second of the West-Central African region. The trips to the Gold Coast could also approach the continent more than once to conduct port-to-port trade. The first coastal circuit would start at the latitude of Cape Blanco or Cape Verde and call at the ports of the Petite Côte, while a second coastal circuit would begin at Cape Palmas and end at Cape Lopez. On the way, the vessels would stop at places like Cape Appolonia, Cape Three Points, Komenda, and Cape Coast. From Cape Lopez they could start a third coastal circuit anchoring at Loango, the Congo River and other places.

Due to the limited quantity of products traded at each port of call, at the end of the coastal circuits the merchants often ended up with leftover products of the original load brought from Europe. Therefore, sometimes, the fleets circulated more than once on the same route. For example, in the Gulf of Guinea, after conducting trade along the Grain, Ivory, Gold and Slave Coasts and reaching Cape Lopez, the ships would set sail again to Cape Mount and re-start navigating port-to-port at the Grain Coast, stopping for instance at the Sess River, Cape Palmas, and Mouri. This evidence tells us much about the controlling role of the African dealers over the supply markets and coastal transactions.

During the early period of Dutch presence in Western Africa, all these multiple coastal circuits had an exclusive function: to acquire or purchase African products to supply the consumption markets in Northern Europe, mainly hides, gold, and elephants’ tusks. The Dutch participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade remained until the 1630s very limited in number of ships and transported enslaved Africans.

Combining long-distance routes and coastal circuits was a common practice among ‘Dutch’ traders in the Atlantic. They applied the expertise acquired in the

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8 SAA, NA 376/114-115: 1613-03-06; NA 201/137: 1622-07-10; La Fleur (trans. & ed.), Pieter van den Broecke’s 83-102.
10 La Fleur (trans. & ed.), Pieter van den Broecke’s 69-81.
12 ‘Samuel Brun’s voyages of 1611-20’ in: Jones (ed.), German Sources 77-78.
‘mother trade’ (Baltic) and Mediterranean trade to the development of their Western African commerce. However, in Western Africa, timing became of the essence and therefore a major logistic problem. A journey combining long-distance and coastal circuits could last up to 27 months, increasing the costs with wages, victuals and insurance, and reducing or postponing the return-profit (See Table 1).

Table 1  **Length of the voyages of Dutch ships operating in the Western African trading routes: some examples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Departure</th>
<th>Date of Arrival</th>
<th>Number of months</th>
<th>Ship’s Name</th>
<th>Route</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-1600</td>
<td>03-1602</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Cape Verde* – Guinea**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-1605</td>
<td>10-1606</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Roode Hart</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Cape Verde*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-1607</td>
<td>06-1609</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Neptunnis</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Cape Verde* – Guinea** – Angola***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09-1609</td>
<td>07-1611</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Mauritius Nassau</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Angola***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-1611</td>
<td>10-1612</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Angola***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-1611</td>
<td>09-1613</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Meermann</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Angola***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03-1614</td>
<td>05-1616</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Weisse Hund</td>
<td>Amsterdam – Guinea**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Albert van Dantzig & Adam Jones (trans. & Eds.), *Pieter de Marees: Description and historical account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)* (Oxford 1987); J. D. La Fleur (trans. & Ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke’s journal; ‘Samuel Brun’s voyages of 1611-20’* in: Adam Jones (ed.), *German sources for Western African history*, pp. 44-96.

Observations: * Cape Verde = Petite Côte of Senegal; ** Guinea = Grain, Ivory, and Gold Coasts; *** Angola = Loango Coast, Congo River and Soyo (present-day Angola, near the effluent of the Zaire River).


14 Since the 1590s, the Dutch Republic was home to a wide mercantile community including not only Dutchmen, but also foreigners, such as Flemish and German merchants. The community also comprised an active group of Portuguese Sephardic merchants. However, for convenience, we will refer to them as ‘Dutch’ businessmen.

To overcome the problem posed by the timeframes, the ‘Dutch’ trading companies needed to artificially split the inter- and intra-continental routes. To achieve this they used different strategies. The companies recruited factors or merchants to be their permanent representatives in different coastal areas of Western Africa for terms of one to three years. This practice was implemented in the Petite Côte of Senegal, Cape Mount, Loango and Soyo. Here, several factors of the trading companies had small lodges or cottages where they lived and traded. Usualy they were also equipped with a small sloop of 12 last to sail along the rivers and collect products from the surrounding villages.

In addition, the companies also kept floating trading posts on the coast, so-called leggers, where the factors and assistants lived and traded with the Africans. These small yachts or barges with a capacity of 20 last would stay anchored on the coast for a certain period of time, which could last from a few weeks to a year or longer. This practice gave the commercial firms the chance to stockpile African products to load the main ships operating in the inter-continental circuits.

Furthermore, the companies tried to optimize the stay of their main fleets on the coast and improve the coordination between the intra- and the inter-continental routes. To accomplish this, the companies used two main strategies. The ships departing from the Republic carried on board one or two prefabricated sloops that would be assembled and equipped with muskets and heavy guns at Cape Verde or Cape Lopez. These small vessels were used to trade in the shallow waters along the coast and the estuaries of the rivers as well as to go ashore to get fresh provisions for the heavier ships.

The trade conducted by these sloops was coordinated with the main vessels. In fact, the articulation between the heavier and the lighter ships was essential for the success of the commercial trips. In general, the heavier vessels would stay anchored trading at the most important ports, while the junior factors would be sent on board the sloops further along the coast to conduct trade and collect merchandise. These sloops would conduct trade until the arrival of the heavier ships or before they finished the load of bartered goods. For instance, in the Gold Coast, the main vessel

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16 SAA, NA 151/207v: 1618-04-04; NA 215/107: 1620-02-18; NA 836/17e reg.: 1632-10-08.; La Fleur (trans. & ed.), _Pieter van den Broecke’s 47 & 74._
17 Sloop: translation from the Dutch _sloep_. In this context it refers to barges: ships especially designed to navigate in rivers, canals and shallow waters.
18 _Last_ = 2,000 kilograms.
19 La Fleur (trans. & ed.), _Pieter van den Broecke’s 79 & 88-89._
would anchor at Cape Coast or Mouri, while the sloops would be sent further east to places like Accra and Benin. On completion of these journeys the small vessels would return to Mouri, to load the products onto the larger ship. When these vessels were ready to set sail to the Republic, the sloops would be dismantled and reloaded on the heavier ships. Only if a factor or junior-merchant was left on the coast to conduct trade, these small vessels would be kept there for their service.

In the Loango Coast and the Congo River, the scheme was even more complex. Once the main vessel had reached Cape Lopez, a smaller yacht included in the fleet or a sloop would be sent immediately to Loango to conduct trade there until the arrival of the main ship. Meanwhile, the heavier vessel would travel to Loango; there the goods purchased by the lighter vessels would be loaded. The main ship would anchor there for a few weeks trading, while the yachts and the sloops would be once again sent further south to the Congo River. The goods purchased would be collected later by the main ship. Pieter van den Broecke gives us a glimpse of this complex scheme to coordinate the coastal trade carried out along the coast by the bigger and the smaller ships on the service of the same trading company in some passages of his journal.\(^{21}\)

In addition, the merchants in the Republic instructed their chief factors to place the factors and junior factors on shore with merchandise to conduct trade for a certain number of weeks or months. To stay on shore, the traders rented a house from an African, where the factor or junior factor and his helper could live and store the merchandise to barter for African goods as well as the products bought until the arrival of the sloops and the yachts employed in the coastal trade or the main fleet.\(^{22}\)

Moreover, the ‘Dutch’ trading companies tried to control the departures of the fleets from the Republic and Western Africa in order to ensure a permanent presence of their representatives on the coast and to guarantee a regular supply of African goods to the consumption markets in Northern Europe.\(^{23}\)

These strategies implemented by the ‘Dutch’ merchants were quite successful in the areas where the Portuguese did not have a military presence, such as the Petite Côte of Senegal, Cape Mount, Loango and Soyo. However, on the Grain, Ivory, Gold and Slave Coasts, they had to face the military attacks of the Portuguese fortress-factories and to cope with the commercial competition of the traders and colonists.

\(^{21}\) La Fleur (trans. & ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke’s 87-91.*

\(^{22}\) La Fleur (trans. & ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke’s 28 & 88.*

\(^{23}\) La Fleur (trans. & ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke’s 53, 76, 79 & 91.*
from São Tomé. Even after building Fort Nassau at Mouri, ‘Dutch’ merchants had to fight the opposition of the Portuguese. Therefore, the commercial companies operating in the Gulf of Guinea advocated the takeover of the Portuguese strategic places in the Gold Coast and the Gulf of Guinea, i.e. Mina (present-day Elmina, Ghana), Axim, Shama, São Tomé and Príncipe, and supported the chartering of a monopolistic company for the Atlantic trade. Some of the ‘Dutch’ traders in the early seventeenth century argued that if they had permanent trading posts, lodges and forts along the coast of Western Africa to organize the coastal trade they could generate higher profits, by organizing the coastal trade separately from the long-distance routes, and thus reducing the time consumed in voyages. This idea is quite clear, for instance, in Pieter de Marees.  

In fact, this was also one of the arguments used to support the establishment of the WIC in 1621-1624.

However, the establishment of the WIC did not bring major changes to the organization of the Dutch coastal circuits in Western Africa. In the areas where the previous trading companies had permanent trading posts, such as the Petite Côte of Senegal, Cape Mount, Loango and Soyo, the WIC adopted the commercial organization already in place, keeping the posts and factories used by the aforementioned companies. The same happened in regard to the coastal circuits; the ones that were already in the process of becoming autonomous from the long-distance routes became split, other coastal routes would become autonomous at a later period. In the Gulf of Guinea, the Company only managed to split the coastal and the long-distance circuits after the takeover of the Portuguese possessions in the Gold Coast in the late 1630s and early 1640s. Here, the WIC also implemented a system identical to the one described earlier for the private trading companies. The goods purchased at the several forts, lodges, warehouses and floating trading posts were to be sent regularly to Elmina.

In this coastal trade the Company used canoes, sloops and small yachts. The transport of products, mail and passengers between the different settlements was rendered by a few small yachts. In the 1640s, the WIC had four yachts permanently stationed at Elmina for this purpose. The three heavier yachts were used for the transport of products between Elmina and the different posts as well as to conduct trade in the mouth of the rivers on the Slave Coast, whereas the smaller yacht was mainly used to carry firewood and water. A journey through the Company forts and lodges in the Gulf of Guinea would take between two and three months. Usually, these voyages took place during the dry season.

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26 Ibidem.
During Dutch rule over Angola and São Tomé (1641-1648), the Company took over the commercial routes that had been in use by the Portuguese since the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively. In São Tomé, the Company employees partly gained control of the circuits linking the island with the Slave Coast and the bights of Benin and Biafra. In Angola, the WIC got partial access to the coastal circuits linking Luanda with Loango and Mpinda in the north and the port of Benguela in the south. However, the Company was never able to control the waterways and land routes connecting the coast to the hinterland, where the most important fairs took place.27

Thus, we would argue that the major change brought about by the WIC concerned the functions of the coastal circuits. Although their main function was still the stockpiling of products for the European markets, they also started to cater the demands of the American colonies and meet the needs of the WIC posts and settlements in Western Africa.

As we have seen earlier, after the 1590s the ‘Dutch’ merchants (and later the WIC) made multiple efforts to separate the intra- and inter-continental routes in

order to optimize the long-distance circuits in terms of improvement of transportation costs and therefore of transactions costs. However, the Dutch coastal routes only became totally autonomous from the long-distance routes by the mid-seventeenth century. This autonomization was reached during the rule of the WIC by appropriation of the coastal circuits used by the Dutch private trading companies along the Petite Côte of Senegal, the Grain, Ivory, Gold and Slave Coasts, Loango and Soyo. The same happened when the Company took control of the Portuguese coastal routes in the Gulf of Guinea linking the São Tomé islands to the Slave and Gold Coasts and along the Angolan Coast connecting Luanda to Loango, Soyo, Kongo and Benguela. Only over time would the coastal trade be regarded by the WIC as profitable per se and as a way to fulfil the needs of the Company posts and settlements in West-Africa.

**Commercial strategies**

The coastal circuits were supplied by land and river routes linking the hinterland to the coast. The level of access of the European traders engaged in the coastal trade to the hinterland played a key role on the success of the coastal and long-distance circuits. The ‘Dutch’ merchants were not interested in controlling the trading circuits in these hinterland areas. Their main goal was just to gain permission from local rulers to trade on the coast and to buy products for the long-distance routes. Therefore, their contact with the African hinterland in Senegambia, the Gulf of Guinea and West-Central Africa was mainly limited to sporadic visits to the African authorities.  

Consequently, the ‘Dutch’ merchants relied exclusively on middlemen of African, Eurafrican or Portuguese descent to obtain their African products as well as African slave labour force.

In order to overcome their almost complete absence from the hinterland, the Dutch private companies gave instructions to their chief and junior factors about how to behave towards potential competitors on the coast. In general, they met their rivals on board their ships or trading lodges in an attempt to arrange a common price for the products, and to define the type and quantity of goods to barter for African supplies in order ‘not to spoil the market’.  

28 Examples of such diplomatic embassies/courtesy visits may be found in several journals of voyages to the Western Coast of Africa. Pieter van den Broecke, for instance, reports two visits to local rulers: the former to the ‘count of Sonyo’ – the ruler of Soyo – in 1608 and the later to the ruler of Mbanza Ngoyo in 1612. La Fleur (trans. & ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke’s* 58 & 89.

29 La Fleur (trans. & ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke’s* 29.
selves to fix the prices of the goods, they tried to control the prices of the products in the supply markets, keeping them as low as possible to increase their profit margins.

This may sound like the formation of cartel behaviour or the building of monopolies, but it was never imposed systematically or regularly enough to become either. Over time, this practice was abandoned. In the last decade of the sixteenth century, when traders from various Dutch ports started to trade in Western Africa, and especially on the Gold Coast, they competed with each other to get the highest number of customers and sell as much merchandise as possible in the shortest period of time. In order to achieve this aim they gave gifts to the interpreters to bring the African traders on board their vessels, informed them that they were willing to trade small quantities of goods and in some cases to ‘advance’ products on credit. These were clear strategies to attract the African traders, gain their trust and create a commercial bond between them and the ‘Dutch’ traders. Often, however, these practices ended in losses for the ‘Dutch’ merchants, since the African traders took the products but did not return with the corresponding quantity of African goods.

The ‘Dutch’ merchants, therefore, did not have the control over the African markets and supply markets to form cartels or build monopolies. In fact, these were strategies to defend their commercial interests in new markets where the African traders dictated the trading rules and held complete control of the quantities of products available, prices, types of exchange goods accepted, and ultimately the access to the African supply markets.

Apparently, these practices had a significant impact on trade. Pieter de Marees, travelling along the Western Coast of Africa in the early seventeenth century (1600-1602) gives us a clear picture of such a situation.30

During the first half of the seventeenth century, price agreements among merchants of the Republic also became common.31 After 1624, the system of price agreements was replaced by the WIC monopoly, which tried to control prices at supply markets and consumption markets. However, given the control of the African traders over the supply markets and the patterns of local demand and consumption, this remained a difficult task for the Company employees to achieve.

31 La Fleur (trans. & ed.), Pieter van den Broecke’s 50 & 76.
**Trading practices**

In order to trade in the Western African coastal markets and hinterland, the ‘Dutch’ merchants had to adjust their business to the African trading practices. Commerce was conducted differently in the various regions along the coast, according to the local traditions and the interests of the rulers.

Off the island of Gorée and the Petite Côte the ships could anchor and the merchants could go ashore and trade. A fiscal agent of the local African ruler would come on board to collect duties. After the payment, the chief and junior factors could go ashore and dispatch the lighter ships to Portudal, Rufisque and Joal. However, at each new port they had to pay local duties. These custom duties were paid in kind, using products such as iron bars, alcoholic beverages, glass beads, and so on. These practices were imposed on the ‘Dutch’ and other European traders without exception.

In the area between the Sierra Leone and the Grain Coast the Africans would bring the goods in their canoes and most of the transactions would take place on board of the ships. The only place where the ‘Dutch’ traders were sometimes allowed to go ashore was Cape Mount, where in certain periods some chief factors were able to maintain good relations with the local ruler. However, in all the other places along this coast, such as the Sess River and Cape Palmas, the Europeans were not allowed to go ashore. This situation was similar to that of the Portuguese and Eurafican traders.

On the Gold Coast, in the early period of the Dutch presence it was possible to anchor the ships in the vicinity of some coastal villages such as Komenda, Mouri, Cape Coast and Kormantin. Here, the ships could lie at anchor for several weeks or months while trade was conducted with the Africans. Later, after the establish-
ment of forts and trading posts along the coast, trade was conducted ashore in the fortresses and factories.

Further east, in places such as Accra, Cameroon, Corisco Bay and Rio del Rey, trade was conducted on board the ships.\textsuperscript{38} At Ollibata near the Corisco Bay and the Gabon River, the vessels would enter the bay or the mouth of the rivers and fire a gun as a signal to the African traders to come on board. In general, ‘Dutch’ merchants did not go ashore.\textsuperscript{39} Over time, the WIC employees were authorized by the African rulers to have trading posts. The Company personnel were then forced to pay duties and to follow local rules regarding trade, such as royal monopolies over certain goods and primacy of important African middlemen.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibidem 65-69.
\item \textsuperscript{39} ‘Andreas Josua Ulsheimer’s voyage of 1603-4’ in: Jones (ed.), German Sources 29-28; ‘Samuel Brun’s voyages of 1611-20’ in: ibidem 71-72.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Adam Jones (trans. & ed.), Western Africa in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: An anonymous Dutch manuscript (Atlanta, CA. 1995) 197-200.
\end{itemize}

On the Loango Coast and the Congo River, before trading, merchants were escorted by locals to the court of the ruler to ask permission to engage in commerce and bring ashore crew members. In order to obtain these favours, the merchants would greet the ruler with gifts. A similar practice was followed on the Congo River by the Dutch, the Portuguese and Eurafrikan merchants.  

In the areas where traders were allowed to go ashore, commerce could be conducted in two different ways, either on board lighter vessels able to navigate the shallow waters and estuaries of the rivers, or ashore in a house or a small lodge.

In Angola, the trade was usually conducted at fairs located in the hinterland. These fairs already existed prior to the arrival of the Europeans. Here, African traders sold different kinds of products and slaves. Usually, slaves and merchandise were carried from fair to fair, until they were loaded onto the ships destined for Luanda using the water and land ways connecting the hinterland and the estuaries of the rivers to the coast. 

Hence, the ‘Dutch’ merchants engaged in the coastal circuits were forced to adjust to the trading practices followed by the African traders and to comply with the demands imposed by the local rulers.

Western African supply markets

The reasons behind the establishment of the coastal routes and their changes over time partly determined the supply markets they visited and the type of products acquired. The areas of Western Africa where the Dutch established their intra-continental circuits supplied different products. In the early seventeenth century, ‘Dutch’ traders visited these supply markets only to buy African products to meet the needs of the European consumption markets. At the Petite Côte of Senegal, the ‘Dutch’ merchants and the WIC traded especially in hides, elephant tusks, wax, and ambergris. On the Grain and the Ivory Coasts, the Dutch purchased pepper and some elephant tusks. On the Gold and Slave Coasts, they bought mainly gold, ivory and pepper. Trade was also conducted at Allada and on the Slave Coast, but on a small scale, since the main ‘product’ available was slaves and the ‘Dutch’ traders were not much involved in this business before the 1630s.

41 ‘Samuel Brun’s voyages of 1611-20’ in: Jones (ed.), German Sources 4-59.
43 La Fleur (trans. & ed.), Pieter van den Broecke’s 23-42.
44 Ibidem 23-42.
Only in the first decades of the seventeenth century did ‘Dutch’ merchants start to trade in African goods to supply the local coastal markets. At Benin, they purchased blue striped cloth and elephant tails. They also got involved in the trade of *akori*, purchased at Ambrosy, Cameroon, Corisco Bay and Rio del Rey and re-sold on the Gold Coast. In Mayoumba, Loango, and Congo, the Dutch traded mainly in elephant tusks. However, by the 1610s the Dutch private commercial companies were already trading in redwood bought at Mayoumba.

After the establishment of the WIC, the list of goods and the outlets did not change much. In Elmina, Mouri, Axim, Shama, Cape Coast and Komenda, gold was the main product purchased by the Company employees. On the Grain and Ivory Coasts, ivory, wax, slaves and different types of cloth were the chief acquisitions. In Allada, Benin and the Gabon Rivers they obtained slaves, ivory and African cloth. In Angola, Loango and the Congo River, the Company employees purchased similar products at the coastal markets. Slaves, ivory and wax were the main acquisitions. However, the WIC also bought foodstuffs to meet the daily needs of the Company personnel, especially when their ships in charge of logistics did not reach the settlements.

To recapitulate, over time the ‘Dutch’ private traders and the WIC employees became more involved in the intra-continental trade of African goods to supply several coastal areas. However, their engagement in this commerce was mainly due to the merchants and the Company, needing to supply the long-distance circuits with enslaved Africans, ivory and gold, which were in high demand in the European and the American markets. The coastal trade in African goods was also useful to supply the Company garrisons and trading posts with some provisions whenever European shipments failed.

**Western African consumption markets**

To purchase African goods at the several supply markets examined earlier, the Dutch had to meet the demands of the different Western African consumption markets. In order to do so, the ‘Dutch’ merchants not only brought European, American and Asian commodities to Western Africa, but also engaged in the coastal trade of African products.

In Senegambia and Cape Verde, both the ‘Dutch’ private traders and later the Company employees used European textiles, metalware and Venetian beads as well as ‘unusual’ objects to purchase the African goods. Only part of African products was used as bartering goods in these coastal markets.

The Gulf of Guinea markets were the ones where the Dutch were forced to supply African goods. The African cotton cloths purchased at the Grain and Ivory Coasts,
Allada and Benin were supplied to the African traders on the Gold and the Slave Coasts as well as Corisco Bay, the Gabon River, Cape Lopez and to the Portuguese colonists of São Tomé. The slaves obtained at Allada, Rio Real, Rio Del Rey and the Cameroon River (present-day Bight of Biafra) were sold to the indigenous traders on the Gold Coast, Corisco Bay, the Gabon River, Cape Lopez and to the Portuguese settlers of São Tomé. The akori acquired at Allada, Cameroon River, Corisco Bay and Rio del Rey was re-sold on the Gold Coast. 46 All these African products were bartered for gold, ivory, and later for slaves.

Most of the African commodities acquired by the ‘Dutch’ private traders and later by the Company employees at Cape Lopez, Mayoumba, the Congo River, the Loango Coast and Angola were bartered for European goods: mainly textiles, muskets and gunpowder. 47 However, from the early seventeenth century onwards, the Dutch private merchants operating in these regions also supplied the African traders on the Congo River with redwood imported from Mayoumba.

The ‘Dutch’ merchants only started to trade in African goods to supply the local consumption markets in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Before that, they only purchased African goods to meet the needs of the European consumption markets. Nevertheless, the volume of the intra-continental trade in African goods was always low, both before and after the establishment of the WIC. However, under the rule of the Company, the number of references concerning the intra-continental trade increased. It seems that after a few years of settlement on the Coast, the Company realised how much it could profit from the regional trade of local products and, therefore, tried to gain from it.

**Conclusion**

In brief, the Dutch coastal circuits in Western Africa changed over the years in order to reduce time and costs of the long-distance routes and consequently make them more efficient and competitive. During the early period of Dutch presence in Western Africa, these coastal routes were mainly regarded as a way to obtain African goods for the international markets. Only after the establishment of the WIC was the coastal trade also conducted to guarantee the supply of the posts. Another important aspect was the complexity of the routes and the level of access of the ‘Dutch’

46 Jones (transl. & ed.), *West Africa* 72, 77-127, 158-165, 176 & 233; Ratelband (ed.), *Vijf dagregisters* lxiii-cx; Dantzig and Jones (trans. & ed.), *Pieter de Marees* 51-53; La Fleur (trans. & ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke’s* 42-102; ‘Samuel Brun’s voyages of 1611-20’ in: Jones (ed.), *German Sources* 45-96.

merchants in the Western African hinterland markets. As we have shown the Dutch coastal circuits were limited to the coastal areas. The Dutch trade, being exclusively based on the coast, relied on the supplies of products brought from the hinterland by the middlemen.

The relationship between Dutch, Portuguese, Eurafricans and Africans in the hinterland areas played a key role in the coastal trade. The Dutch only interacted with the hinterland and their inhabitants sporadically for diplomatic and commercial purposes, depending on the Portuguese, Eurafricans and the Africans to access the supply markets in the interior of the Western African Coast.

Furthermore, the ‘Dutch’ traders purchased the aforementioned African products mainly to be re-exported to Europe and the Americas. Therefore, the Dutch did not seem to have been deeply engaged in the intra-Western African trade per se.