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Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Precolonial Western Africa
Dutch Trade with Senegambia, Guinea, and Cape Verde, c.1590–1674

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The Dutch trade in the Atlantic is, traditionally, associated with the monopoly of the Dutch West India Company (West-Indische Compagnie [WIC]) established in 1621. However, private entrepreneurship was vital for the functioning of the Dutch Atlantic economy both before and after 1621. The inter- and intra-continental trade demanded high investments in insurance, freight, purchase of cargos, and payment of seamen and commercial agents. The articulation of the coastal and long-distance circuits required high commercial expertise and wide trading networks covering several geographical areas. The European entrepreneurs and businessmen in the Dutch Republic as well as their agents overseas were on the genesis and at the basis of this complex system of interactions.

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. However, for convenience, we will refer to them as ‘Dutch’ businessmen. The Dutch mercantile community also comprised an active group of Portuguese Sephardic merchants. The group had taken refuge in the Republic after the establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal (1536) and the blockade of Antwerp (1584–85) by the Dutch insurgents as a consequence of the city’s economic decline.

For the past twenty years, several scholars have studied these mercantile groups. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the economic activities

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of these private investors in the early trade with the western coast of Africa. This chapter sheds some light on this subject by analysing the interests of the private businessmen from the Republic in Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde, and their conflicts and forms of cooperation with the WIC. It also looks into the conflicts opposing these entities and their impact on commerce. Transactions involving Dutch, Sephardic, Portuguese, and Euro-African merchants are explored as well.

First, we pay attention to the entrepreneurs based in the Republic financing the insurance of ships and cargos for Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde. To understand the origin of the capital covering the risks of this trade, we also briefly look at their other economic activities. Secondly, we focus on the businessmen operating in the long-distance circuits connecting the regions mentioned above with Europe and the Americas. Here, we aim to identify the most important European merchants investing in this trade and to enumerate their main business interests. To achieve these goals we check areas of investment and commodities traded. In the final section of the chapter, we look at the commercial agents of the European merchants controlling the trade in the Dutch and Portuguese Guinea, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde.


DUTCH TRADE WITH SENEGAMBIA, GUINEA, AND CAPE VERDE

The study of the entrepreneurs, businessmen, and agents operating from the Republic is based on a set of 341 notarial contracts collected from the Municipal Archive of Amsterdam (Gemeente Archief van Amsterdam, Notariale Archieven [GAAA Not Arch]). This set comprises all notarial contracts regarding the business activities of the merchants of this Dutch port with the western coast of Africa for the period 1580 to 1674. This selection includes various types of notarial contracts such as insurance and commercial partnerships as well as commercial agreements, labour contracts, and powers of attorney. In geographical terms, this set includes all contracts for Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone, Grain, Gold, Ivory and Slave Coasts, São Tome and Principe, Loango, Kongo, and Angola. In this chapter we analyse only the contracts for the first three areas mentioned. The analysis of the entrepreneurs, businessmen, and agents is based on case studies of the economic activities of certain individuals. The selection of these merchants has been made with regard to the number and quality of primary sources available.

The chapter covers three different periods: (1) c.1590 1623; (2) 1624 38; and (3) 1639 74. These chronological boundaries are essential because the juridical framework regulating commercial activities in the so-called Dutch Atlantic in general, and the western coast of Africa in particular, changed over time. While the first period corresponded to an era of free trade, after the establishment of the WIC (1621 24), private merchants were prohibited from trading with the western coast of Africa and other areas in the Atlantic, and were forced to remove their assets from the commercial posts within a period of two years (1623). These commercial restrictions were in use until 1635 for Brazil and 1648 for North America and the western coast of Africa. However, from the early 1640s onwards, the signs of economic decline started to emerge and the WIC’s incapacity to conduct trade and guarantee the exchange of goods in the intercontinental routes led to a gradual opening up of the commercial monopolies to private businessmen. Therefore, after the...
1640s, and especially in the 1650s and 1660s, there was a revival of private investment from the Republic into the western coast of Africa.

Thus, in the first period we focus on the economic activities of the private entrepreneurs, businessmen, and agents operating in Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, and Cape Verde, whereas in the second period we examine the commercial organization of the WIC and its activities. In this period, we also look at the activities of the interlopers whenever the primary sources make this possible. In the latter period, we analyze the activities of the WIC and the private insurers, merchants, and agents authorized to operate in the areas controlled by the WIC and within certain branches of the monopoly.

Entrepreneurs

The regions of Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde became part of the financial and commercial activities of the entrepreneurs and businessmen of the Dutch Republic in the late sixteenth century. Since the 1590s, 'Dutch' entrepreneurs had been backing the risks of the ships freighted in the Republic to operate in two main intercontinental circuits connecting the Seven Provinces to Senegambia and the Cape Verde Islands, as well as in the port-to-port navigation in these two regions. However, only a few European entrepreneurs had enough capital to be insurers.

In the economic history of the port-to-port commerce, these ships followed several coastal circuits, for example: (a) the Cape Verde and Senegambia circuits, (b) the Gulf of Guinea circuits, and (c) the West-Central African circuits. Each of these coastal circuits included several routes. The Cape Verde and Senegambia regions under writing here comprised the routes between the island of Gorée, the Petite Côte of Senegal, and the Cape Verde islands: Filipo Ribeiro da Silva, "Dutch Vessels in African Waters: Coastal Routes and Extra-Continental Trade (c.1590–1674)", Zijdschchrift voor Zeegeschiedenis 1 (2010), 19–28. For examples, see GAA Not[arch] Arch[ive] 124/125–126: 16 March 1611, Not Arch 169/28–29v: 4 October 1619.

Among those who could afford to be insurers in the Dutch Republic were several important merchants of Amsterdam, namely: Jan Jansz Smits, Claes Andriesz, Albert Schuit, Barent Sweets, and Jan de Clerck. Less prominent in the insurance business with Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde, but still fairly active were: Pelgrum van Dronckelaar, Anthoni van Diemen, Hans van Soldt, Hans van Geel, Hendrick Voet, Willem Pauw, Van den Bogaert, Willem van Warwijk, and Solomon Vocknecht. As an example of the insurance activities developed by these businessmen with regard to the regions just mentioned, we will look into the activities of Jan Jansz Smits and his associates.

Jan Jansz Smits, businessman in Amsterdam, started his insurance activities in 1612 with ships destined to the western coast of Africa and other areas in the Atlantic, namely Brazil, the West Indies, Portugal, and Spain. In general, Jan Jansz Smits worked in partnership with Claes Adriaesz, Barent Sweets, and Albert Schuit. Claes Andries and Barent Sweets were two powerful merchants from Amsterdam, especially active in the trade between Portugal, the Republic, and the Baltic. However, they also operated as insurers of vessels sailing from the Republic and Portugal to Cape Verde and Guinea, and the Southern Atlantic waters, to both Angola and Brazil. As for Albert Schuit, he was a trader in Amsterdam, specializing in the insurance business, mainly with the western coast of Africa and Brazil. Schuit started his insurance activities in 1614 and remained active until 1623. In the early years of his business, he mainly insured ships operating the routes connecting Europe, the western coast of Africa, and the Americas. However, later Schuit almost exclusively safeguarded vessels involved in the Brazilian trade. His highest

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Notes:
1. Between 1624 and 1648 the number of notarial contracts concerning the economic activities of private merchants is lower. Nevertheless, there are multiple examples of notarial acts by the WIC and private businessmen, as well as between entrepreneurs, in deliberate attempts to evade the company monopoly. After the mid-1630s, the number of notarial contracts increased again, making it possible to follow in detail the economic activities of the several merchant groups of the Dutch Republic investing in the western coast of Africa.
3. Until the early seventeenth century, the ships freighted in Dutch ports to conduct trade between the Republic and the western coast of Africa were often the same that carried out the coastal trade in Africa.
volume of insurance business was in the routes linking Brazil to Portugal, namely Lisbon, Viana do Castelo, and Porto.11

Like Schuit, Jan Jansz Smits expanded his insurance business to the commercial routes linking Brazil and Europe.12 However, as with the western coast of Africa, in the insurance activities concerning Brazil Jansz Smits operated mainly in partnership with other merchants to lower the risks. Among his partners one should be mentioned in particular, Hans van Soldt de Jonge, who also participated in the insurance business for the western coast of Africa, as well as men such as Bartholomeus and Abraham Biscop, and Wijbrant Warwijk.13

Many of the ships, cargoes, and return goods insured by these merchants were the property of Portuguese Sephardic merchants living either in Portugal or in the Republic. For instance, in 1612, Jan Jansz Smits, in association with Claes Adriaesz, Jan de Clerk, and Jasper Grevenraet, insured several goods for Diogo da Silva, such as hides, elephant tusks, gold, and other merchandise loaded on board the St Jacob, skippered by Harpert Martens from Rotterdam, for a trip from Cape Verde to the Republic.14

The Dutch entrepreneurs insured not only the ships and cargoes of the Dutch merchants and the Portuguese Sephardic Jews established in Amsterdam, but also most of the vessels sailing the long-distance routes of the Portuguese Atlantic. The Portuguese historian Costa has emphasized that the majority of the businessmen operating in the Portuguese Atlantic had their ships and commodities insured in Amsterdam.15 This option could have been a solution for a possible lack of capital in Portugal. However, it is more likely that it was a well-thought-out strategy to spread risk and avoid major losses within the same mercantile group. In fact, the members of the Portuguese Jewish Nation of Amsterdam, some of them renowned as very wealthy businessmen, used a similar commercial strategy.

Usually, the Portuguese contractors in Amsterdam acted as contacts for the mercantile groups in Portugal to purchase commodities from Portugal and the Portuguese Empire. For instance, João Soeiro, contratador of the Cape Verde and the Guinea royal monopoly between 1608 and 1614, made use of his factors' connections with the Sephardic Jews to freight and insure vessels in Amsterdam.16 In addition, by conducting direct trade between the Republic, the Petite Côte of Senegal (also included in the aforementioned monopoly), and the Republic, the ships could avoid calling at the ports of São Tomé and Príncipe (São Tomé and Príncipe), Lagos, and Lisbon, where several taxes had to be paid to the royal treasury. Soeiro’s main contacts in Amsterdam were Gaspar Fernandes, Gaspar Nunes, Duarte Fernandes, Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga, and others. For example, on 5 August 1611, Gaspar Fernandes transported goods for Duarte Fernandes, on board Het Vliegende Hert sailing from Rotterdam to Portugal (present-day Saly-Portugal, Petite Côte, Senegal), under the command of skipper Alewijhn Janssen from Rotterdam. The value of the merchandise transported to Portugal and the insurance premium was "1000 pond. 20 schellingen, 10 groten vel.", while the value of the return goods and the insurance premium for the return voyages amounted to 2,552 Flemish pounds. Duarte Fernandes was probably a holder of a commercial licence issued by João Soeiro to conduct trade within the area of the monopoly.17

Two other important associates of João Soeiro were Diogo da Silva and Diogo Dias Querido, both merchants in Amsterdam and connected to Soeiro via their common agents in Senegambia and the Guinea Bissau region: Simão Rodrigues Pinel and Estêvão Rodrigues, factors of the contratador on the coast. For example, on 19 January 1611, Diogo da Silva and Diogo Dias Querido sent some goods in the ship Santiago, skippered by Marcelissen from Rotterdam, sailing from Rotterdam to Portudal and Joal (present-day Joal-Fadiouthu, Petite Côte, Senegal). The value of the cargo amounted to 5,120 Flemish pounds. Simão Rodrigues Pinel and Estêvão Rodrigues were responsible for the trade on the coast. Hides, ivory, and other African goods were to be handled for European cargo. They planned to stay six months in the area. Bartolomeu Andriesz, Wijbrant Warwijk, and António van Diemen insured ship and cargo. The ship sailed from Portugal to several places on the coast of Guinea and returned to the Republic. Claes Andriesz, Jasper Grotenraets, Barent Sweets, and Jan Jansz Smits, all merchants in Amsterdam, insured the return cargo.18

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12 GAA Not Arch 376/229: 26 April 1613.

13 GAA Not Arch 377/74: 1 March 1614; Not Arch 377/74: 1 March 1614.

14 GAA Not Arch 129/63: 14 December 1612; Not Arch 130/13-14: 14 December 1612; Not Arch 130/13-14: 14 December 1612; Not Arch 130/13-14: 17 December 1612.

After 1640, the businessmen operating in Portugal continued to freight and insure their ships and cargoes in Amsterdam, especially those used in the European trade. The data available for the trade with the western coast of Africa does not give detailed information regarding the insurance in this chronology.

During the strict monopoly of the WIC over the Atlantic (1621–37) information on the insurance activities of the aforementioned entrepreneurs is very scarce. The limited number and the nature of the primary sources concerning the WIC do not allow an identification of the insurers of the company. Nevertheless, after the WIC started to open up its monopoly to private investment, the insurance activities of the entrepreneurs of the Republic reappear in the notarial contracts.

Businessmen

Whereas the entrepreneurs held the capital required to cover the risks, the businessmen had the commercial knowledge and connections to shipping and trade. Between c.1590 and 1623, there were two different groups of merchants in the Republic with economic interests in the western coast of Africa: the ‘Dutch’ merchants and the Portuguese Sephardic Jews established in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities.

The ‘Dutch’ businessmen started their economic activities in the Atlantic in the late 1580s, often organized in small private commercial companies. They invested mainly in two commercial branches: the sugar and the dyewood trade from Brazil; and the gold, ivory, and leather trade from the western coast of Africa. The slave trade was a minor commercial activity for most of these merchants, at least until the takeover of the Brazilian north-eastern capitanies.

During this early period, the majority of the notarial contracts in our sample concerning the trade with the western coast of Africa, in general, and the commerce with the Senegambia, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, in particular, were signed between ‘Dutch’ private traders. As a representative case study of ‘Dutch' commercial activities in the regions just mentioned, we have selected the businesses of Gerrit van Schoonhoven, merchant of Middleburg.

Van Schoonhoven was one of the most active traders in the western coast of Africa until the establishment of the Dutch West India Company (1621–24). His main area of investment were Guinea and Cape Verde, and his economic activities can be traced between 1604 and 1621.

Gerrit van Schoonhoven apparently started trading in Guinea and Cape Verde as an individual merchant around the year 1604. However, by 1613 Van Schoonhoven declared that he had been doing business on the coast of Guinea in partnership with Cornelis Muninck, also a merchant from Middleburg with commercial interests in Brazil. At the end of the partnership he received from Muninck more than 2,500 Flemish pounds. By 1621, Van Schoonhoven appeared as one of the directors of the Compagnie Guinéenne, together with Jan Gerritsen Meereman and Elias Trip. This company was one of the most active in Western African trade in the period prior to the establishment of the WIC.

Sporadically, Van Schoonhoven also appeared together with other Dutch traders from Amsterdam as insurers of vessels and cargoes of Portuguese Jewish merchants established in the Republic, like Diogo Nunes Belmonte, and Portuguese traders from the Portuguese northern port cities like Viana, such as Francisco Gomes Pinto.

The Portuguese Sephardic Jews established in Amsterdam formed the second group of merchants in the Republic investing in Western Africa. Among them were Gaspar Sanches, Gaspar Nunes, Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga, Duarte Fernandes, Diogo da Silva, the Belmonte family, Diogo Vaz de Sousa, and Estêvão Rodrigues Penso. Based on the notarial contracts, we have selected the economic activities of Gaspar Sanches and his associates as a representative case study.
Gaspar Sanches, a Portuguese merchant resident in Rotterdam, and Gaspar Nunes, a merchant in Amsterdam, were probably the most dynamic Sephardic businessmen in Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde during the first two decades of the seventeenth century. Sanches and Nunes together organized several commercial trips to these areas. Their main areas of business were the ports of Porto de São Martinho and São Filipe (present-day in the Petite Côte, Senegal), and the islands of Cape Verde. For example, on 19 September 1609, the two Portuguese merchants together freighted the St. Iacob, of 80 last, to sail from Rotterdam to Portual, under the command of skipper Govert Jansen from Rotterdam. The cargo cost 7,000 guilders. In 1610, Gaspar Sanches and Gaspar Nunes freighted the same vessel and skipper to sail to the same destination. This may be a sign of specialization. However, the contracts do not give further details on the price of the cargoes.

Gaspar Sanches and Gaspar Nunes also participated in the trade in hides with Cape Verde. On 14 January 1611, Paulus Claesz declared that a cargo of hides from the Cape Verde producers had arrived in Rotterdam on board the vessel of Govert Jansen with Gaspar Fernandes, probably the supercargo put on board the vessel to conduct the business in Cape Verde. Paul Claesz, in fact, bought part of the cargo—500 pieces at a price of 50 stuivers per piece. On 31 January of the following year, the same duo of traders hired the skipper Govert Jansen to travel again to Cape Verde.

Sanches and Nunes were also associates of other Portuguese Sephardic merchants of Amsterdam doing business in the same areas of Western Africa. Gaspar Sanches had occasional partnerships in his commercial enterprises to Portual and Cape Verde with Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga and Duarte Fernandes. For instance, on 24 December 1610, Gaspar Sanches and Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga freighted the ship Het Vliegende Hert, skippered by Heuyn Claessen, to sail from Amsterdam to Portual.

Gaspar Nunes joined in business with João Lopes da Costa and Antonio Nobre, as well as with Pierre Thonen and Pierre Bacquelarot, merchants in Amsterdam. The trade with Guinea conducted by Gaspar Nunes in partnership with the above-mentioned merchants connected the Republic to the Petite Côte of Senegal and the port of Dieppe (Normandy, France), where Luis Fernandes, the son-in-law of Gaspar Nunes, was the main contact person. On 20 September 1612, Gaspar Nunes had a total debt of 2,622 guilders and 33 stuivers in three bills of exchange issued by Pierre Thonen and Pierre Bacquelarot. These commercial partnerships tell us much about the wide network of the Sephardic merchants throughout Europe and the European Atlantic possessions.

After the establishment of the WIC (1621–24), the private traders in the Netherlands officially had to suspend their activities in Western Africa. However, many continued to freight ships to these areas. Therefore, private businessmen kept devising strategies to purchase forbidden commodities and evade taxation by avoiding paying the company for commercial licenses.

Their presence in the areas under the jurisdiction of the WIC increased even more after the company decided to open up the commercial monopolies regarding the trade to Brazil and the New Netherlands (present-day New York), in 1638 and 1648, respectively. Both Dutch and Sephardic merchants decided to establish partnerships and cooperative relations with the WIC. For example, in the 1660s, Joost van Wickeloort, Pieter van Uffelen, Adriaen Brugman, and Joost Glimmer, merchants in Amsterdam, appear to have been associated with the WIC, more precisely with the Chamber of 'City and Surrounding Land', that is, Groningen, for the Gambia River trade. In fact, the directors of the WIC Chamber of Groningen granted them permission to equip ships and supply cargoes to the Gambia River.
after 12 August 1657. In order to gather all the required ships they gave power of attorney to Pieter van Wickevoort to freight the ship De Winde, skippered by Frans Jansz Backer from Burgerdam, and load the required cargo in Zealand on 3 March 1660. The following month, these merchants freighted the ship De Gouden Burgh, under the command of skipper Jacob Cley from Middleburg, to sail with goods and provisions for eight to nine months from Amsterdam to the Gambia River and back to Amsterdam or elsewhere in the Republic. The freight would amount to 1,400 guilders per month. However, Johan van Wickevoort and Joost Glimmer claimed that persons of the Chamber of Amsterdam considered them to be lacking in experience, and had treated them as enemies and inexperienced merchants. This accusation was probably true for Joost Glimmer, but not for the other businessmen. Pieter van Uffelen, a member of the Van Uffelen family, started his economic activities in Western Africa, more precisely Cape Verde, Gambia, and Sierra Leone, as early as 1614 in partnership with Michiel Block. Johan van Wickevoort had business connections with the Spanish-American colonies, the West Indies, and the Caribbean Islands, especially Jamaica. His main partner in this business was Henrico Matias, an influential German merchant based in Amsterdam with wide commercial interests in the western coast of Africa, the Spanish-American colonies, Brazil, Spain, and Portugal. These disputes may also have been due to the commercial jurisdictions of the chambers over the different regions of the western coast of Africa.

Commercial agents

To conduct trade in the western coast of Africa, the 'Dutch' and the Sephardic businessmen needed either to live at the posts, take part in the commercial journeys, or place their economic agents at key points in the commercial circuits. These men needed to establish cooperative relations with other economic agents already settled on the Western African coast, namely Portuguese, other Europeans, Euro-Africans, and Africans.

During the early period of Dutch presence in the western coast of Africa, the merchants of the Republic did not have any formal commercial organization. Therefore, the different private companies had businessmen and agents travelling on board the ships or placed on shore and on board freighting trading posts—leggers. These commercial personnel were organized hierarchically, the leader being a chief merchant or chief factor, with several junior merchants, sub-factors, accountants, and bookkeepers working under his leadership (see Figure 5.1). The Van Uffelen family under Matheus and Hans van Uffelen had commercial activities in Madeira, Bahia, and Guinea from 1600. GAA Not Arch 1133/133v–134v: 29 April 1660; Not Arch 1131/67–68: 21 October 1659, Not Arch 97/76: 5 August 1604; Not Arch 102/212: 9 March 1606; Not Arch 138/7: 4 September 1614–09–04.

Figure 5.1 Commercial organization of private commercial companies (1590–1623).

The supercargoconditions sent to Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde on board the ships to conduct trade on the coast could either be one of the businessmen investing in the commercial venture or commercial staff hired by the merchant freighting the ship and investing in the trip. Both the Dutch and the Portuguese Sephardic merchants did this. For example, on 24 December 1619, Gaspar Sanches and Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga freighted the ship Het Vliegende Heer, skippered by Heyns Claessen, to sail from Amsterdam to Portuadul. Pedro da Veiga and his brother Gaspar Fernandes travelled on board the ship to trade the merchandise on the coast. In most cases, the main investors in these commercial journeys stayed at home and hired other supercargoconditions to go on board the vessels and trade the commodities on the coast. Both the Dutch and the Portuguese Sephardic hired watercargoconditions to do business on their behalf in Senegambia, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde. For instance, on 19 September 1609, Gaspar Nunes and Gaspar Sanches hired Luís Fernandes and Gaspar Fernandes, respectively. These two supercargoconditions went on board the St Jacob, with all costs and voyage paid for. In the Petite Côte of Senegal, they conducted trade at Portualdo, Joal, and Kaffa. Another good example was the team of supercargoconditions of Diogo

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9 GAA Not Arch 1132/21–22: 10 January 1660; Not Arch 1132/229: 3 March 1660; Not Arch 1540/138: 7 April 1660.
10 The Van Uffelen family under Matheus and Hans van Uffelen had commercial activities in Madeira, Bahia, and Guinea from 1600. GAA Not Arch 1133/133v–134v: 29 April 1660; Not Arch 1131/67–68: 21 October 1659, Not Arch 97/76: 5 August 1604; Not Arch 102/212: 9 March 1606; Not Arch 138/7: 4 September 1614–09–04.
da Silva; Simão Rodrigues Pinel and Estêvão Rodrigues were among them. They had to travel several times on board vessels freighted by Diogo da Silva and his partners for these commercial ventures to conduct trade on the Petite Côte of Senegal on their behalf. 38

The different commercial firms operating in the Senegambian, Guinean and Cape Verdean trade also contracted factors to be their permanent agents on the coast. For instance, Gerrit van Schoonhoven, partner in the Compagnie van Guinea, together with Elias Trips and Jan Gerritsen Meerman, hired several men. In 1613, Van Schoonhoven and his partner Cornelis Munnick already had factors in Guinea. Later, Van Schoonhoven hired other men, namely Rombout Pils, Hendrick van Domselaer, Carel Tresel, and Gerrit Laurens Rijser. The former two were in his service in Guinea in 1617. Carel Tresel was hired a second time in 1618 to be the senior factor—oudere commis—to conduct trade in the same area for a period of two years, receiving a monthly wage of thirty-six guilders. The latter, Gerrit Laurens Rijser, was hired in the same year to travel on board the ship Jupiter, also trading in Guinea for a similar period of time, with a monthly salary of thirty guilders. 39 Van Schoonhoven’s factors conducted trade mainly in gold and elephant tusks; such products were bartered for oil, alcoholic beverages, and beans. 40

The Sephardic merchants also signed labour contracts with several traders to be their factors in Senegambia, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. For instance, Diogo da Silva and partners kept factors permanently on the Petite Côte of Senegal. Simão Rodrigues de Noe and Diogo Vaz (de Sousa) were two of those men. Another good example is Diogo Dias Querido, also a Portuguese Sephardic Jew in Amsterdam. In 1612, he freighted the ship Jonas under the command of skipper Douwe Annes of Enkhuizen, for a trip from Amsterdam to Senegambia stopping at Cape Verde (on the continent), Portuálo, Joal, and Rufisque. The skipper and crew were supposed to receive an open letter from his factor on the coast, Jacob Peregrino or Pelegrino, stating that he had fulfilled his obligations. 41

The businessmen operating in the Petite Côte of Senegal as factors of the Sephardic businessmen in Amsterdam, as well as those on board their vessels, were classified by the Portuguese Crown as lançados. In fact, some of these men even had institutional ties with the contratadores of the royal monopolies of the economic areas of Senegambia and Guinea Bissau under the jurisdiction of the Portuguese Crown. For example, Luis Fernandes, supercargo of Gaspar Nunes, and Simão Rodrigues Pinel and Estêvão Rodrigues (Penso), supercargoes of Diogo da Silva, as well as Jacob Peregrino, factor of Diogo Dias Querido, were also factors of the Portuguese contratador of the monopoly of Cape Verde and Guinea between 1608 and 1614, João Soeiro. Pedro Rodrigues da Veiga, partner and supercargo of Gaspar Sanches, was also among Soeiro’s factors. 42 Jacob Peregrino, factor of Diogo Dias Querido, had business connections with Duarte Fernandes, a Jewish merchant in Amsterdam, and Duarte Dias Henriques, the contratador of Angola in the period 1607–14. 43 Moreover, other Portuguese Jewish merchants in Amsterdam operating in the commercial circuits linking the Republic to Senegambia, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde as well as other regions of the western coast of Africa, were also included in the list, namely Diogo Vaz (de Sousa) and Gaspar Nunes. 44

After the establishment of the WIC (1621), the private merchants were forced to remove their economic agents from these areas within a period of two years (by 1623). The WIC commercial agents replaced them. The establishment of a commercial monopoly with the WIC required a formal commercial and bureaucratic framework to organize and control trade. For those reasons, the western coast of Africa was divided into different commercial regions, namely: Gambia, Cape Verde, Arguin, Sierra Leone, Grain Coast, and the Gold Coast. The trading activities in each area were granted to specific chambers of the company. 45 The Chamber of Groningen was responsible for the trade in the Gambia, while the commerce in the Cape Verde region, comprising the island of Gorée and several trading posts in the Petite Côte of Senegal, was under the control of the Chamber of Amsterdam. The Chamber of Zealand was in charge of the trade in Arguin and the surrounding area of Cape Blanco, whilst trade in Sierra Leone was organized by the Chamber of the Maas (i.e. Rotterdam).

39 GAA Not Arch 645/29–30v: 28 July 1617; Not Arch 151/207v: 4 April 1618; Not Arch 151/208: 4 April 1618.
40 GAA Not Arch 645/29–30v: 28 July 1617.
43 GAA Not Arch 62/415v: 3 November 1617; Not Arch 61A/421: 20 June 1618; Not Arch 34/115: 16; 8 December 1618.
45 See note 30.
and the commerce in the Grain Coast by the Chamber of the Northern Quarter (see Figure 5.2).46

The most profitable commercial areas of the western coast of Africa—the Gold and Slave Coasts, and the Loango Coast—were under the direct administration of the Board of Directors of the WIC, also known as Gentlemen Nineteen.47 Later, the regions of Angola and São Tomé also came under the direct rule of the Board (see Figure 5.3).

These areas were put under the direct administration of the Gentlemen Nineteen not only because they were the wealthiest, but also because they were the places in the western coast of Africa where the company and the States General had political and military interests to defend against the Portuguese. On the other hand, it is likely that the division of the western coast of Africa into different commercial areas was the best option found by the company in order to satisfy the interests of the private businessmen investing in these regions before the establishment of the WIC.

In the areas under the direct commercial administration of the chambers, these were responsible for the commercial personnel and the transport of goods, provisions, and ammunition. In the areas controlled by the Gentlemen Nineteen, the transport of employees, goods, victuals, and weaponry was provided by all the chambers proportionally to the capital invested in the company.48 In return, the chambers would have part of the profits obtained by the WIC in these areas.

47 The direction of the WIC was given to an assembly—the Board of Directors—formed by nineteen directors—Gentlemen Nineteen—from the different chambers. Once again, the number of directors per chamber depended on the capital and the political and economic powers of the provinces and cities, Amsterdam and Zealand each had four directors on the Board, while the other three chambers had two each. Also, a member of the States General had a chair in this assembly. The Board was chaired by either Amsterdam or Zealand. Amsterdam held the presidency during six consecutive years and Zealand for two. H. de Heijer, 'Directoren, Stadhouderen en Conselheis de Administratie,' 17–43; idem, Goud, Ivoor en Slaven, chapters 1, 2, and 3; idem, De Geschiedenis van de WIC, chapters 1 and 2; Pieter Emmer, 'The West India Company, 1621–1791: Dutch or Atlantic,' 71–95.
48 For instance, in a report of the commission formed by the Gentlemen Nineteen to study the separation of the government of Angola from Brazil, dated 6 February 1642, the members of the commission explain clearly how the chambers should supply the establishment. Each chamber should send a vessel of 120 to 140 lasts (1 last = 2 tonos) every six weeks. Each ship should be equipped with 30 to 36 men, 16 to 18 pieces of light and heavy artillery, victuals for an entire year, and a cargo of merchandise worth up to 50,000 florins/guilders. The merchandise to be sent was listed in an enrolment provided to the chambers by the Board of Directors. N[ational] Arch[ своей], State General no. 5773: 6 February 1642: Rapport de la commission formé par les XIX pour étudier de pro et le contre de la separatión de Loanda avec le Brésil. This document is published in Louis Jadin (ed.), L'Ancien Congo et l'Angola.

DUTCH TRADE WITH SENEGAMBIA, GUINEA, AND CAPE VERDE

The commercial staff of the WIC followed a hierarchical order similar to the one described earlier for the commercial agents serving the private companies. In the Cape Verde region, the Chamber of Amsterdam kept one chief merchant, two to three sub-factors, and three to four assistants. For instance, in 1669, Jan van Dilsen and Carel le Coote were assistants at the Petite Côte of Senegal.49 Therefore, it is likely that the chambers used the informal structures put in place by the private companies in the early years, since they had proved to be well organized and worked efficiently for the success of trade.

Besides the company employees responsible for the organization of trade, the WIC also appointed officials to supervise the commercial monopoly. These officials, called fiscals, were placed in the most profitable areas—the Gold Coast, Angola, and São Tomé—as well as on board the vessels conducting trade in the coastal areas. The fiscals were judicial officials who worked under the command and in straight collaboration with the director or director-general. They had the power to inspect the cargoes on arrival at and departure from the WIC posts and settlements. They also had the right to make inventories and tax the cargoes of any smuggler ship caught by the WIC cruisers patrolling the coast. These officials also had permission to confiscate smuggled goods and to arrest, try, and punish smuggling crews. In order to fulfil all their duties, the fiscals were always supported by sub fiscals.

Between 1624 and 1642, the WIC had only one fiscal in Elmina, with jurisdiction over all ships anchored at this port, as well as at the other company forts, entrepôts, and lodges on the Gold and Slave Coasts. The establishment of WIC governments in Angola and São Tomé (1641) increased the number of fiscals in the western coast of Africa three. The geographical areas under their jurisdiction became defined with the division of the western coast of Africa into three regions. After the loss of Angola and São Tomé (1648), the fiscal of Elmina remained as the single company fiscal for the whole coast until 1674. As for the regions of Senegambia, Guineas Bissau and Cape Verde we could not find references in the primary sources to any fiscals or sub fiscals operating in the region. These functions were most certainly assumed by the highest officer of the company in the region.

49 GAR Handel no. 83. Also in A. van Dantzig (ed.), The Dutch and the Guinea Coast, doc. 1, 10–12. GAA Not Arch 2791/549: 11 October 1669, Not Arch 2791/709: 24 October 1669.
Figure 5.2 Jurisdiction of the chambers of the WIC over the different areas of the western coast of Africa

Figure 5.3 Jurisdiction of the Board of Directors and the Central Government of the Dutch West Indies over the different areas of the western coast of Africa (1624-74).
Sources: NA Oude West Indische Compagnie (OWIC), GAR Handel no. 83; A. van Danzig (ed.), The Dutch and the Guinea Coast, 1674-1742: A Collection of Documents from the General State Archive at the Hague (Accra: GAAS, 1978), doc 1, 10-12; doc 3, 13-20; NA, Rademaker Archief no. 5/2. Heerman Abramsz and the Central Government.
Notes: Fort Nassau: Morit; Fort Crevecoeur: Accra; Fort Batavasteyn: Boxtry; Fort Amsterdam: Kormontin; Fort at Igura: Dwira. Other lodges comprised: Comsuey, Anomaboe (1638-39), Arada, city of Benin, Cape Coast (1638-48), Littl Corrowey (from 1638), Sekondi, Tuccorary, Suconce.
Due to financial problems and limited shipping capacity, the WIC opened up its monopoly to private traders from the Republic. In 1638 the company allowed the participation of private businessmen in the Brazilian and Caribbean trades, and in 1648 granted them access to North America. This relaxing of its monopoly did not change the functions of company employees in charge of the trade organization, since they continued to conduct commerce with the African middlemen. The opening of some branches of the company monopoly to private merchants from the Dutch Republic, however, changed the functions of the fiscal and the auditor. Private traders were to pay commercial fees of 2.5 per cent over the value of the imports and exports—handelsrecognition.59 The fiscal and the auditor were in charge of the collection of this fee. In the Senegambia region this fee was probably paid to the highest WIC official based at Gorée. This practice fuelled multiple conflicts between the WIC and private merchants. A good example of these clashes can be found in the 1660s. Isaac Hoechepied Senior and Gillis van Hoornbeeck, merchants in Amsterdam, had an established trading network with the island of Goeree (Gorée). In order to keep a register of the goods traded there they hired Lammert Claesz as their junior clerk. He was supposed to work under the authority of Pieter van Asperen, the highest representative of the WIC in the region in 1666. Lammert Claesz served these merchants in this post from 28 March 1666 until September 1667. During his stay, he traded the commodities of these private businessmen at the fort. However, the coexistence of this agent and the WIC high officers seems to have been quite difficult. Lammert Claesz, Isaac Hoechepied Senior, and Gillis van Hoornbeeck were accused of smuggling goods at the fort.52

As a consequence of the opening of the WIC monopoly over Brazil and New Netherland, in 1638 and 1648, respectively, an increasing number of ships freighted by private investors were to be found operating the intercontinental

circuits to and from the western coast of Africa. Therefore, supercargoes continued to be put on board vessels to conduct trade at the various ports of call. These supercargoes were not only in charge of selling the products sent from the Republic, and of purchasing new goods and putting them up for sale elsewhere, but they also had the autonomy to buy ships and engage in coastal trade in the various areas they were supposed to visit on behalf of their European employers.53

All the economic agents under analysis so far made the connection between the African ports and the international trading circuits linking these ports with the Americas and Europe. Behind these commercial agents was another layer of economic actors: those establishing a connection between the African coastal areas and the supply markets of African goods located deeper in the continent. Free Africans, Euro-Africans, and more rarely Europeans, the latter usually named zangomaaas by the Portuguese authorities, were the connections between these two worlds. These zangomaaas lived not only in the ports, but also in the interior under the authority of the local African rulers, and, in some cases, they even had family ties with these authorities.54

Given the circumstances of their settlement and the shortage of primary sources, it is extremely difficult to identify who these men were.55 Nevertheless, in most cases they were traders and their main concern was to do business and make as much profit as possible in order to guarantee their own survival. Therefore they would trade with all European merchants settled on the coastal areas, be they Portuguese, Dutch, French, or English.

The private traders from the Republic did business with Portuguese and Euro-Africans in several points along the coast of Senegambia, namely at the ports of Rufisque, Portudal, and Joal on the Petite Côte of Senegal.56 These

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59 In the Dutch plantations colonies in Brazil, the Wild Coast, and the Caribbean Islands the fiscal also collected land taxes (abbergeld), as well as a head tax per colonist and per slave (hoofdgeld).
52 Between the 1590s and 1612, the traders of the Dutch Republic operating in the western coast of Africa had to pay taxes only in the Republic. Upon arrival the loads were paid the tariffs levied on the foreign trade—the so-called Convooien en Licenten. These were collected by the admiralties of each province on behalf of the States General. The Convooien were a tax imposed by the States General upon the circulation of goods, on the sale of salt, stamp duties, and some temporary taxes on beer and soap. The revenues from these taxes were to be spent on war fleets to protect the international trade and to support expenses of military conflicts. The main purpose of this tax imposition was in fact what gave it the name—Convooien or Convoyen. The license—Licenten—on the other hand, were duties imposed on trade with the enemy, i.e., Spain and Portugal.
53 GAA Not Arch 2757/133: 8 April 1661; Not Arch 2757/153: 9 April 1661; Not Arch 2757/149: April 1661; Not Arch 2757/163: 7 April 1661, Not Arch 3586/235: 21 March 1670. For other examples: GAA Not Arch 1555B/1453: 8 October 1661; Not Arch 1611/22-53: 23 July 1673; Not Arch 420/556: 20 December 1669.
55 Among the merchants and citizens of Ribeira Grande (Santiago, Cape Verde) between 1650 and 1648, we could only identify two men who had lived for many years in the Guinea Bissau region: Vicente Ribeiro and Luis Lopes Rabelo. The latter was engaged on the coastal trading circuits between the islands and the negro and Guinea rivers, together with other two merchants, skipper, and citizens of Ribeira Grande: Francisco Ricalde or Francisco Ricalde and Doego Ximenes Vargues: Iva Cabral, 'Vizinhanos da Cidade de Ribeira Grande de 1560 a 1648', in Maria Emilia Madeira Santos (ed.), História Geral de Cabo Verde, 515-47.
56 J. D. La Fleur (ed.), Pieter van den Broecke's Journal 28, 87-91.
commercial transactions continued under the rule of the WIC in this region. In fact, in none of the territories taken over by the WIC did the company employees dare to penetrate much into the interior.

Taking these aspects into account makes it easier to understand and explain how these commercial agents served the interests of the WIC and the private merchants of the Republic simultaneously, while still pursuing their own ambitions. It also becomes easier to clarify how these economic agents trading within the commercial areas under Portuguese rule (at least nominally) could and did have commercial partnerships with merchants from an ‘enemy state’ of the Portuguese and Spanish kingdoms—such as the Dutch Republic. Finally, it becomes possible to explain how the Portuguese or people of mixed descent could supply African products to merchants from an ‘enemy state’, especially in the coastal areas.

Conclusion

In brief, during the period under review, the Dutch entrepreneurs were not just insurers of ships and cargoes transported by the ‘Dutch’, Sephardic, and Portuguese merchants in the Atlantic world. Most of these entrepreneurs retained an indirect connection with the trade with the western coast of Africa by insuring ships and commodities for other traders operating the commercial circuits linking Europe to Africa and the Americas.

The case studies presented here also show that the ‘Dutch’ and the Portuguese Sephardic merchants of the Republic operated in areas of the western coast of Africa that were situated on the margins of the Portuguese presence in Africa, such as the Petite Côte of Senegal and the less-populated islands of Cape Verde. Whereas for the ‘Dutch’ this was a strategy to avoid naval and military conflicts with the representatives of the Portuguese Crown, which always increased costs and reduced profits, for the Sephardim this was also a strategy to avoid the payment of taxes to the fiscal officers of the Portuguese Crown in Ribeira Grande, São Tomé, and Luanda. In this way, they were able to operate their business without the control of the commercial agents of the Portuguese Crown, who supervised the transactions and made sure that the Crown did not lose money.

To complement their business in the western coast of Africa, Dutch private merchants also engaged in the Brazilian sugar and dyewood trade. These facts may help us to understand the reasons why the private merchants of Amsterdam were so reluctant to invest in the WIC and to support the attacks against the Portuguese Atlantic territories. For them the trade with the western coast of Africa and Brazil were profitable enough without a commercial monopoly, territorial possessions, and a formal military apparatus. In fact during the WIC monopoly over trade with the western coast of Africa, the two groups used various strategies to overcome the commercial restrictions imposed on the Atlantic trade.

To operate their business, both the Dutch and the Sephardic merchants made use of similar agents on the western coast of Africa and recruited them in the same ways. Interestingly, the agents hired to be the supercargoes and factors of the Portuguese Jews had connections with Portuguese merchants conducting trade in the Portuguese settlements of Senegambia and Guinea Bissau on their behalf or on behalf of the contratadores of the royal monopolies.

Hence, this complex scheme of interconnections between the various economic actors demonstrates clearly that the commercial interests of the businessmen living in Europe and in the various Atlantic colonial areas, whether under Portuguese or Dutch rule, transcended the political and geographical borders of the European Atlantic empires and the monopolistic ambitions of these early modern European states and their state-sponsored commercial companies.