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TRADE PATTERNS IN GHANA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

K. B. DICKSON

THE end of the seventeenth century is especially important in the historical geography of Ghana; for many of the features of the country's present human geography appeared or began to evolve at that time. The fundamental tribal structure had been formed, and the population was engaged in a number of economic activities whose basic organizational characteristics have persisted into the twentieth century. Politically, Ghana was a medley of independent states, and whatever coherence it possessed it owed to the intricate network of major and minor routes along which men from all parts of the country traveled to trade. In the same way Ghana was drawn closer to other West African countries and to Europe through trade. Trading, a major source of income, was a carefully organized economic activity and was conducted at three levels: local, regional, and international.

LOCAL TRADE

Local trade is here defined in the broad sense of trade in the markets within a single state. The markets in Ghana were held daily or at other frequent intervals and were governed by a code of laws drawn up to protect trade and to ensure orderly activity. Any infringement was heavily punished. For example, it was forbidden to carry weapons to a market, and traders from distant parts who necessarily carried weapons to protect themselves along the way normally deposited them in the village nearest the market. Barbot tells of a village chief who derived a regular income by charging one shilling a head for looking after traders' weapons.¹

The daily market was commonly held in the open space, without sheds or stalls, around the village shade tree and was mainly resorted to by women traders. The commodities offered for sale included foodstuffs, which varied with the locality, and craft products; there were also some European and western Sudan goods, the prices of which increased with distance from the coastal ports of the Sudan. Cape Coast market was typical: it began about

¹ John Barbot: *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea . . .* (A Collection of Voyages and Travels [3rd edit.; 6 vols.; "Printed by Assignment from Messrs. Churchill," London, 1744-1746], Vol. 5), p. 275. Barbot wrote in 1682. An earlier edition, printed in Paris in 1732, is the one referred to in footnote 33 below.

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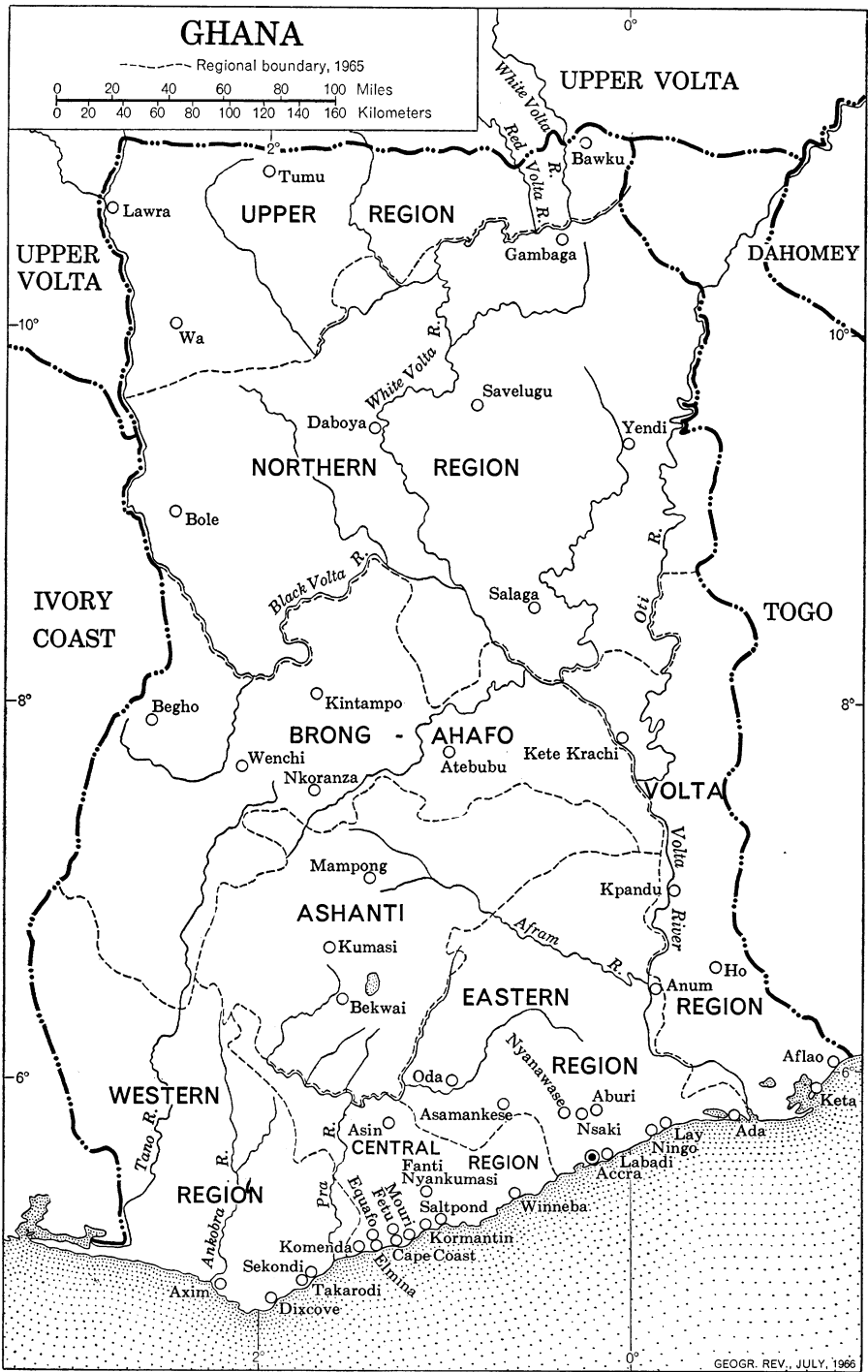


FIG. 1.—Location map.

sunrise, when large numbers of women, carrying their trade goods on their heads, arrived from the nearby villages, and it ended about sunset. The daily markets were also patronized by the local European residents, who purchased "negro provisions" for the slave ships bound for the New World.

In addition to the daily markets were the markets held weekly or at eight-day intervals. They were fewer in number but drew traders from greater distances; they were characterized by bulk purchases and exchange of commodities not often sold in the daily markets. Still other markets were held at intervals between daily and weekly. An example was Aburi market, which functioned three times a week and attracted merchants from neighboring Asin, Akwapim, and Akwamu towns; the merchants traded mainly for European goods brought up from Accra. Such periodic markets, unlike the daily markets, were normally held in large open spaces not necessarily in the towns but in a locality central to the surrounding major settlements. The markets often developed into important settlement sites. Ajumako Kwantanum (literally "the meeting point of five roads") in Southern Ghana, and Bole, Wa, and Savelugu in Northern Ghana, are examples of settlements that owed their early importance to their function as focal points of trade for large regions.

Periodic markets included fairs that were held once or twice a year and attracted merchants from still greater distances. The fairs were also important social occasions and were attended by all nonresident members of the state. The large annual eight-day fair at Abrambo, for example, was a major social event for all citizens of the state of Fetu.² Another famous annual fair in Southern Ghana was held at Asin, the capital of the state of that name; to it Asin traders, who before 1698 monopolized the middleman trade between the coast and the interior, brought the precious iron bars obtained from the European warehouses on the coast to sell to merchants from the surrounding states.³ To avoid overlap and competition, fairs and other periodic markets in neighboring regions were held at different times of the year.

REGIONAL TRADE

As applied to Ghana at the beginning of the eighteenth century the term "interstate trade" is perhaps more meaningful than the term "regional trade." First, the boundaries of the numerous states were real enough to make the term "local" inapplicable once they had been crossed. Second, by considering

² Barbot, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

trade between states it is possible to bring out the patterns of commodity movements both within and between the broad regions.

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND LIVESTOCK

The kinds of agricultural products traded and the patterns of their movements depended on the physical environment and on regional specialization, which in turn depended on both physical and economic factors. The movements followed several directions. There were east–west and west–east movements along the coast, which reflected mainly the differences in the physical environment. Rice, for example, moved from west to east because, with the minor exception of the mouth of the Volta, only Axim, with its regularly distributed heavy annual rainfall and its wet soils, produced rice. On the other hand, Axim’s physical environment did not permit the successful cultivation of many other crops, so that corn, sweet potatoes, and yams, for example, moved from east to west to Axim.⁴ Fantiland, centrally situated on the coast, was a major producer of corn, thanks to its suitable physical environment and its long-standing tradition of agriculture, and supplied minor coastal corn-producing areas such as Elmina.

Agricultural products also moved from the coast to the immediate interior, mainly in response to differences in livelihood. The principal alternatives to agriculture were gold mining and middleman trade, and areas devoted to these depended on their agricultural neighbors for foodstuffs. The Akim, who concentrated on gold mining to the virtual exclusion of farming, purchased food supplies from the agricultural areas between Winneba and Accra. Similarly, the people of Asin, famed throughout the country as traders or middlemen, apparently did not bring their land under adequate cultivation and therefore had to trade with their neighbors to the south, the Asebu, for provisions.

The pattern of agricultural-commodity movements in Ashanti is not clear, but it is unlikely that food crops were transported over long distances in view of the rational organization of economic activities in Ashanti, which provided for the assignment of a number of agricultural villages to each major town in the member states. Ashanti settlements were arranged in a strict hierarchy based on the political status of the chiefs, and each settlement was surrounded by minor settlements tributary to it both politically and economically. At the bottom of the ladder was the purely farming village, inhabited

⁴ William Bosman: *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London, 1705), Letter 1. This work was written as a series of letters between 1700 and 1702.

entirely by slaves in the service of an overlord who resided in the town.

Although food crops may not generally have moved over long distances in Ashanti, agricultural products of restricted distribution, such as kola nuts and palm oil, the former the basis of Ashanti's foreign trade and the latter an indispensable part of the diet, crossed individual state boundaries in Ashanti and traveled long distances. Ashanti as a whole was fairly self-sufficient in food supplies. There is no indication anywhere that Ashanti trading caravans returned with food crops from the coast or from Northern Ghana, with the single exception of shea butter, which, although consumed as food in Northern Ghana, was used in Ashanti as an unguent.

The pattern of movements of agricultural products in Northern Ghana at the beginning of the eighteenth century is obscure, but it may perhaps be surmised from a later known situation within a similar social and economic context. Trade was the basis of wealth in Northern Ghana at that time, and agriculture was merely for subsistence. It is thus unlikely that agricultural products (except perhaps cotton and tobacco, which were confined to certain well-defined areas in the country but were in great demand) traveled long distances to reach their markets.

Northern Ghana also raised cattle, but again the place of livestock in the trade pattern within the region is not easily defined. The situation is much clearer for Southern Ghana, where the animals were traded laterally along the coast. The principal source of cattle in Southern Ghana was the coastal plains of the southeast, especially the extensive stretch of grassland behind and within the states of Labadi and Ningo. Herdsmen from the two states usually bought the animals in the neighboring state of Lay, fattened them in the home pasture grounds, and then transported them to the cattle market at Accra and places farther west.⁵

The prices of agricultural products and livestock in Ghana were determined simply by the law of supply and demand. Bullocks from Ningo and Labadi, which were always in great demand, were normally sold at thirty crowns each.⁶ Similarly, maize, a relatively scarce commodity, commanded a high price in Southern Ghana, the only place where it was cultivated, whereas millet and Guinea corn, produced in much larger quantities and nationwide in distribution, generally fetched a lower price. In wartime the prices of all agricultural commodities rose because of the necessary suspension of farm work; then on the coast a thousand stalks of millet or sorghum, which usually

⁵ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], pp. 185-186.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

sold for as little as about 2/6*d.*, cost an ounce of gold, worth about £4 at the time.⁷ The price of millet also rose, though not as high, in the lean period between harvests, since storage facilities were inadequate.

FISHING AND HUNTING PRODUCTS

The trade pattern for fish was uncomplicated, since the fishing communities on the coast supplied the rest of the country. The predominant pattern of movement was thus from south to north, and it was not greatly disturbed by supplies of fish from the inland rivers. Fishing was not traditionally an important occupation in the inland states, even in Northern Ghana, where splendid opportunities for fishing existed. The fish were transported dried or smoked from the coast to Ashanti, and possibly along the Volta River from Ada on the coast to Northern Ghana. This was certainly the pattern in the second half of the eighteenth century. It is unlikely that Ashanti transmitted any of the fish to Northern Ghana; for its kola-nut trade with Northern Ghana completely overshadowed everything else.

Neither tradition nor contemporary literature has much to say on the distributive trade in products of the chase, but it may be assumed that since hunting was a countrywide occupation, its products did not generally travel over long distances to markets. On the other hand, in those areas in Northern Ghana where cultivation seems to have been unimportant as compared with hunting, as in the poor lands of central Gonja or in the Desert of Ghofan, food supplies may have been assured by the selling of game to neighboring agricultural areas. One of the earliest and most definite references to game as an important article in interstate trade was made by the Danish botanist Isert, who wrote in 1786 that hunting, a major occupation in Akwapim, furnished the only products that the Akwapim could sell at Accra.⁸

SALT

The two main salt-producing areas of Ghana, the coast and Daboya in Northern Ghana, had fairly well defined spheres of influence. The primary movement of sea salt was south-north in response to the insatiable demand from upcountry, and so important was the trade that a large body of middlemen functioned almost solely in connection with it. Ashanti, perhaps the largest inland consumer of salt from the coast, received its supplies mostly through Asin and Fanti middlemen. Salt from Ada may have reached

⁷ Bosman, *op. cit.* [see footnote 4 above], Letter 16, p. 298.

⁸ Paul Erdman Isert: *Voyages en Guinée* (Paris, 1793), pp. 259-260.

Northern Ghana by the Volta, for such was the case in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Daboya, whose salt was extracted from the numerous saline "soaks" in the area, supplied the whole of Northern Ghana and also areas outside it. Caravans from Grunsi, Dagomba, Konkomba, Kabre in Togo, and elsewhere came to Daboya to trade for salt, but the Ashanti, preferring the variety from the coast, allowed none of the salt from Daboya to enter their territory.⁹

The salt trade was one of the major components of regional trade in the country and was highly profitable. "It is not to be imagined," wrote Bosman,¹⁰

what vast Riches the *Negroes* get by boiling of Salt; and if they were always, or for the most part in Peace, those who follow that Employment would in a short time amass unweildy Sums; for all the Inland *Negroes* are obliged to fetch their Salt from the Shore, from whence it is easy to infer that it must cost them very dear: Wherefore the meaner Sort are obliged to make use of a certain saltish Herb instead of Salt, which their Purses will not reach.

In the inland areas of western Dahomey, Bosman added, and doubtless also of Togo and the Volta Region, a handful of salt was exchanged for one or two slaves.

GOLD AND SLAVES

Like that of salt, the pattern of gold movements was straightforward. The major producers in Ashanti and Southern Ghana sent their gold down to the coastal ports; the smaller quantities from alluvial sources around Bole in Northern Ghana were transmitted to the western Sudan by Mande middlemen. Within Ghana gold probably circulated in regional (as well as in local) trade in the form of trinkets, but usually as gold dust where it was used as currency. On the whole, gold featured more prominently in the country's external trade.

Slaves were also more important for export than for internal trade. Two kinds of slaves must be distinguished: the *donko* and the domestic slave. The latter, who as his name implies was engaged in household service within the country, was generally someone given away by the family in payment for a debt or as security for a loan; the *donko*, a prisoner of war or a panyarred victim, was exported. Slave marts for *ndonko* existed throughout the country; among the more famous were those at Salaga, at Mansu in Asin, and at Aflao.

⁹ Mahmoud El-Wakkad, transl.: *Qissatu Salga Tarikhu Gonja, Ghana Notes and Queries*, No. 3, 1961, p. 18.

¹⁰ Bosman, *op. cit.* [see footnote 4 above], Letter 16, p. 308.

EUROPEAN AND CRAFT INDUSTRIAL GOODS

European goods moved primarily from the coast inland, but not all of them reached their destinations after passing through a number of regional or local markets. For strategic and political reasons, guns and ammunition, for example, were transported directly from the coastal ports to inland states by official trading caravans, and the Ashanti did not permit them to be transported through their territory to Northern Ghana. The Ashanti, indeed, maintained the embargo on the sale of guns to Northern Ghana until the late nineteenth century.

The taste for European goods was well established in Southern Ghana by the beginning of the eighteenth century, and Fanti middlemen made huge profits out of distributing commodities such as linen, knives, hats, bugles, and mirrors. The goods were expensive because of their scarcity in relation to demand, so that a regular practice among the middlemen was to stock them against the rainy season, when few ships were in the roads and prices rose even more steeply.¹¹

Much less expensive were the products of craft industries—metal goods (gold, silver, iron, and brass), carved wooden articles, cloth, leather goods, and earthenware vessels. Metalworking and pottery were countrywide in distribution, but although most settlements had their metalworkers and potters, certain areas specialized in manufacturing particular products and distributed them over wide areas. The Shai, for example, were famous for their earthenware vessels, which they sold in neighboring areas, including Accra.¹² Leatherworking was confined to Northern Ghana, and the products of woodworking were exchanged mainly in Ashanti-Brong Ahafo and Southern Ghana. One product of the woodworking industry whose trade pattern was exceptionally uncomplicated was the dugout canoe. The distribution of canoe manufacture depended mainly on the distribution of the fishing industry: it was most important on the coast, where fishing was a major occupation. On the coast itself the distribution was uneven, depending on the availability of suitable trees, including the silk cotton, and the presence or absence of more remunerative craft industries. Takoradi and Axim apparently specialized in the making of large transport canoes; Butri, Ekon, Komenda, Kormantin, and Winneba produced large numbers of smaller craft.¹³ The canoes were also purchased on the coast by European merchants,

¹¹ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], p. 259.

¹² S. W. Saxton: Historical Survey of the Shai People, *Gold Coast Rev.*, Vol. 1, 1925, pp. 127-145.

¹³ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], p. 266.

who used them with hired Ghanaian oarsmen to transfer goods to and from their ships when trading on the difficult surf-bound coast of the Volta Region and beyond.¹⁴ The cost of a large transport canoe was between £40 and £50.¹⁵

The cloth industry had two branches, the older of which produced bark cloth from the tree *Antiaris toxicaria*. A long, narrow strip of bark softened in water and beaten with wooden mallets became a single piece of cloth, supple and several times the original width of the bark. This branch of the industry was found mainly in the forest areas of Southern Ghana and Ashanti–Brong Ahafo, since the tree supplying the raw material is a forest species. Northern Ghana, covered with wooded savanna, has never been known to produce bark cloth.

The younger branch of the cloth industry was weaving on a simple loom worked with both hands and feet, and it apparently began to spread, in Ashanti at any rate, in the late seventeenth century, as tradition affirms.¹⁶ Weaving may also have been known in Northern Ghana at the beginning of the eighteenth century, since the region was in uninterrupted contact with the culturally advanced centers of ancient civilization in the western Sudan, but no evidence exists. Nevertheless, woven cloth, called *kente* by the Akan, was in short supply and expensive as compared with imported cloth; this situation also held true a century later, when weaving was certainly a countrywide occupation.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ghana's external trade at the beginning of the eighteenth century followed three directions: toward the sea and across to Europe and the New World; overland toward the Sahara; and overland or by sea along the coast as far as Nigeria and possibly beyond. Barbot even went so far as to declare that the people of Elmina were particularly skilled in canoe navigation and often sailed in large canoes as far as Angola.¹⁷ The observant Bosman, who knew the coast well and was aware of the relatively short coastwise canoe voyages, does not mention the more ambitious trips to Angola. It will be recalled that European merchant ships regularly took on board canoemen from Elmina and other coastal settlements when trading on or beyond the coast of the Volta Region, and that these canoemen crossed the surf in their smaller craft to load or unload the ships. Some of the canoemen may have returned home

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁶ R. S. Rattray: *Religion & Art in Ashanti* (Oxford, 1927), p. 220.

¹⁷ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], p. 266.

with easily misinterpreted stories of how they had rowed their canoes to distant foreign shores. This probably explains Barbot's statement.

EXPORT TRADE

The principal overseas exports were gold, slaves, and ivory; the numerous minor exports included "negro provisions," guinea grains (*Aframomum* sp.), wax, and lime juice produced on the Dutch lime plantation at Mouri near Cape Coast.¹⁸ Another major export was the kola nut, which went overland to the western Sudan and eventually across the Sahara to North Africa. The exact quantities exported are not ascertainable, but all the evidence—especially the fact that Ashanti's immense commercial power rested mainly on its possession of the kola tree—points to the conclusion that exports must have been very large.

It is gold, the most precious object of European trade, for which most information is available. It was estimated that as much as seven thousand marks' worth of gold was exported annually, but only if the country was at peace and all the trade routes open.¹⁹ The export figure referred only to gold sent overseas through the coastal ports. A breakdown showed how much was exported by each of the major European trading companies and others:²⁰ Dutch West India Company, 1500 marks; English African Company, 1200; Dutch interlopers, 1500; English interlopers, 1000; Brandenburgers and Danes, 1000; Portuguese and French, 800.

The gold trade was plagued with numerous problems, one of which was the increasingly large quantities of adulterated gold offered to the European merchants. Unwary merchants were liable to transport whole cargoes of false gold to Europe. Consequently, the Dutch in 1702 offered to pay the chiefs of seven major coastal states one benda, or an ounce, of gold for each local offender brought to their headquarters at Elmina dead or alive.²¹ The growth of the practice of falsifying gold was due in no small measure to the encouragement given Ghanaians by European merchants to sell adulterated gold to trade rivals, and it was not long before the instigators themselves began to suffer by it. Denkera merchants, when they controlled much of the gold trade at the Western Region ports, were particularly notorious for the

¹⁸ Bosman, *op. cit.* [see footnote 4 above], Letter 16, pp. 289–290.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Letter 7, p. 89.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ W.I.C. 98: West India Company letter dated September 25, 1702, from Elmina to Amsterdam. The company's records on Ghana form part of the Furley Collection in the Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon.

large quantities of adulterated gold they blackmailed the European merchants into accepting. Bosman remarked that the Dutch fort at Butri, christened Batenstein because of the brisk gold trade there, should be rechristened Schadenstein, since European merchants there were more likely to lose than to gain on the gold transactions.²² Nevertheless, not all the local merchants were that notorious; the Asin, for example, brought so much pure gold to the Central Region ports that the best gold from Southern Ghana came to be referred to as “Accany sica” or Asin gold.

The export trade in slaves was uncomplicated. The main problem was the ensuring of regular supplies, but this depended at any given moment on the country's political climate: supplies were plentiful in times of intertribal war and meager when there was peace. For example, sometime in 1682 a slave ship remained for days at the port of Lay without obtaining a single slave, yet only two months earlier, when there had been a serious war between the Akwamu and the Gã, a French man-of-war had collected three hundred slaves at the same port within a matter of days.²³ However, the interludes of peace were not long enough or frequent enough to discourage the flow of slaves to the coastal ports. The period about the beginning of the eighteenth century was one of numerous wars; besides, a regular occupation among the inhabitants of some parts of Southern Ghana—for example, of Ada and Keta Districts (referred to by Bosman as Coto)—was to travel inland and abduct men for sale at the ports.

Information about the third major article of export, ivory, is not as detailed as that for gold or slaves. The supply of ivory was plentiful because of the proliferation of elephants not only in the forest of Ashanti-Brong Ahafo but also in Southern Ghana, including the coast. About the beginning of the eighteenth century elephants were not an uncommon sight at Elmina.²⁴ It is likely that the quantity of ivory exported was much smaller than the quantity produced, since ivory was in great demand locally for the manufacture of ornaments and musical instruments (trumpets). This was true also of the minor export commodity of wax, which was used in the country for lighting.²⁵

IMPORT TRADE

Imports consisted of a wide range of goods of European manufacture,

²² Bosman, *op. cit.* [see footnote 4 above], Letter 2, p. 15.

²³ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], p. 186.

²⁴ Bosman, *op. cit.* [see footnote 4 above], Letter 14, p. 242.

²⁵ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], p. 261.

which typically included linens, silks, brocades, guns and ammunition, iron and silver bars, copperware and brassware, and alcoholic drinks. The Dutch also imported large quantities of cowries, which were used locally as currency. From the western Sudan came a wide variety of goods, including fabrics of all kinds, brassware, leather goods, and books. All these articles except firearms were distributed through the local or regional markets. The nature and origin of one import are surrounded by a thick fog of mystery. This was the "aggry bead." The beads were apparently imported from Benin in Nigeria until roughly the end of the seventeenth century, when importation practically ceased, partly as a result of competition in the markets in Ghana with cheap glass substitutes.²⁶

Several factors determined the prices of overseas imports. European goods were never available in large enough quantities to satisfy the avid demand for them, particularly in Southern Ghana; they therefore, other things being equal, commanded high prices. This imbalance between supply and demand was reinforced in certain localities on the coast where the European merchants, supported by superior firing power from their forts, prevented the neighboring Africans from trading with rival European trading companies. The Dutch were especially brutal to Africans living close to their forts who were caught trading with other European nationals, and in all the coastal areas controlled by the Dutch their merchants sold imported goods at prices fixed by the director-general.²⁷ Where the Dutch were not in control, they and other Europeans deliberately undercut trade rivals by selling almost at cost. Also adding to the complexity of price determinants was the activity of interlopers, who undercut everyone and disturbed the established patterns of trade. Ships of the interlopers, which were seized by the established European merchants whenever possible, were referred to as "ten per cent ships," since they disposed of their goods at heavy discounts and purchased slaves at inflated prices at those ports which were not efficiently patrolled by ships of the Dutch West India Company or the English African Company.

ORGANIZATION OF TRADE

The regulations governing trade in the local markets have already been referred to; and indeed they applied to the running of regional markets as well. But more important to trade at all levels, particularly the regional and the international, were the activities of middlemen. In Southern Ghana and

²⁶ J. D. Fage: Some Remarks on Beads and Trade in Lower Guinea in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, *Journ. of African History*, Vol. 3, 1962, pp. 343-347.

²⁷ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], p. 274.

Ashanti–Brong Ahafo, and possibly in Northern Ghana too, much of the middleman trade was in the hands of royalty, nobles, and rich citizens. The reason was probably purely economic: trading in distant markets in those times of general insecurity of life required a great deal of organization, which in turn demanded a heavy outlay that only wealthy citizens could afford. Numerous porters had to be employed to headload the goods, and armed men hired to protect them; taxes for right of passage had to be paid to the many chiefs through whose territories the trading caravans passed. The poorer sections of the population were thus effectively barred from participating to any extent in the middleman trade. Nevertheless, it was possible for common people and even slaves to acquire wealth through trading, and this possibility society fully recognized and consequently prescribed (in Southern Ghana) elaborate ceremonies to be performed as a means of notifying the public of the change of status.²⁸

States also engaged in middleman trade. The main source of their importance in this function lay in their location with respect to the European trading posts on the coast, to which the complicated crosscurrents of trade in Southern Ghana and Ashanti–Brong Ahafo eventually drained. Many of the expansionist policies adopted by states in Southern Ghana or Ashanti about the beginning of the eighteenth century or before can be understood in terms of jockeying for the position with the greatest advantage for middleman trade.

The states conducted their long-distance trade through trading caravans that were generally longer than those employed by individual merchants (the carriers forming the caravan marched in Indian file because of the narrowness of the trade routes). They were also better protected and were led by a court official carrying an emblem of state—a “linguist’s staff.” The Ashanti were known to send runners or messengers ahead to announce the arrival of their caravans in the settlements through which the trade route passed. State caravans, like the private ones, payed taxes to chiefs on their routes, and although the payment of these taxes was supposed to ensure them free passage everywhere, the caravans were sometimes plundered. The Twifo in the Western Region were notorious for plundering state trading caravans, and one of the objects of the Dutch diplomatic mission to Kumasi, capital of Ashanti, in 1701 was to assure Osei Tutu, king of Ashanti, that the Dutch would stop the Twifo from interfering with his trading caravans.²⁹

Trading states and middlemen possessed an additional source of income

²⁸ Bosman, *op. cit.* [see footnote 4 above], Letter 9, p. 136.

²⁹ W.I.C. 97 (Guinea 1), 1702: Minutes of Council at Elmina, 5th June, 1702.

in the duties the European merchants had to pay them on imports and exports. All exports were dutiable except slaves, though it was not unusual for powerful brokers to demand duty on them as well. There was yet another convention, according to which European merchants were expected to give presents, called "dassy" (Akan word for thanks), to brokers who undertook to sell their goods. This convention, which the European merchants found irksome but had to follow for fear of losing their trade, was originally instituted by the Dutch in the seventeenth century when they were trying to undermine Portuguese supremacy in the coastal trade.³⁰

The great trading nations or states that functioned as middlemen at one time or another in the closing decades of the seventeenth century were Asin, Denkera, Fanti, Akwamu, and Ashanti. The Asin, who for most of the seventeenth century were renowned as a nation of traders, had achieved that distinction early in the sixteenth century after subjugating the Etsi,³¹ who until then had traded extensively with the Europeans. By the early years of the seventeenth century colonies of Asin traders, ruled by governors appointed by the paramount chief of Asin, were established in the major trading centers on the coast, and the Asin soon came to monopolize the middleman trade between Ashanti and all the European trading stations between about Elmina and Winneba.³² Asin merchants traded as far as the Mande trading settlement of Begho in Brong Ahafo,³³ but it is not certain whether they went as far as Northern Ghana.

In 1698 the Denkera crushed the power of the Asin in a major engagement and forever destroyed their preeminence in the country's trade. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Fanti, who also had centuries of trading experience behind them, had effectively succeeded the Asin, and when Bosman wrote about them in 1701, they were powerful enough to close the trade routes to the Central Region ports and to suspend trade if they so wished. The Fanti had been able to climb to that eminence because of their position between the Central Region ports and Ashanti. They were to remain on that eminence for another century or so and to bring the fierce wrath of the Ashanti on themselves by unscrupulously exploiting their position.

Meanwhile the Denkera, who had defeated the Asin, controlled the

³⁰ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], p. 260.

³¹ The *Ati* of Pacheco Pereira (Duarte Pacheco Pereira: *Esmeraldo de situ orbis* [translated and edited by George H. T. Kimble], *Hakluyt Soc. [Publs.]*, Ser. 2, No. 79, London, 1937, p. 120).

³² W.I.C. oc. 11: Letter dated June 12, 1645, from Elmina to Amsterdam. See also Bosman, *op. cit.* [see footnote 4 above], Letter 6, p. 77.

³³ Barbot, *op. cit.* [see footnote 1 above], pp. 190–191.

middleman trade between the coast and the interior of the Western Region. They acquired vast riches, as all accounts of them attest, and were strong enough to intimidate European merchants into tolerating their sharp trading practices, such as falsification of gold.

The most powerful trading nation in the Eastern Region at the beginning of the eighteenth century was Akwamu, which controlled the long stretch of coastline from about Apam in the Central Region to Ouidah in Dahomey, together with a large expanse of inland territory. Merchants from inland states were not allowed to trade directly with the European trading posts at and near Accra but were directed to the thrice-weekly market at Aburi in Akwapim, where Akwamu merchants sold European goods at more than 100 percent profit. The market was presided over by an overseer appointed by the king of Akwamu and empowered to fix the prices of goods.³⁴

Ashanti, the most illustrious empire of all time in the country, took the first long step toward gaining absolute control of the country's external trade when it inflicted a crushing defeat on Denkera in 1701. Ashanti, between Northern Ghana and the western Sudan on the one hand and the rest of Ghana on the other, was admirably situated for large-scale middleman or entrepôt trade, and it became a vast clearinghouse for European, western Sudan, and Northern Ghanaian goods. The importance of this middleman trade to the Ashanti was reflected in the care with which they drew up regulations to ensure its preservation and maximum success.³⁵

The economic geography of Ghana took a new turn with the rise of Ashanti after 1701. The Ashanti brought their organizing genius to bear on trade, and throughout the eighteenth century and up to the last two or three decades of the nineteenth, Ashanti was the nerve center and focal point of the country's trade and trade-route network. In spite of deliberate efforts by the British in the 1880's and 1890's to realign the major trade routes linking Northern and Southern Ghana in such a way as to isolate Kumasi,³⁶ the present-day network of major roads in the country is still basically the same as in the period of Ashanti political and economic supremacy.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

³⁵ R. S. Rattray: *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford, 1929), p. 111.

³⁶ "Further Correspondence Regarding Affairs of the Gold Coast," *Africa No. 268*, Colonial Office, London, 1884. This is a series of official letters, referred to as "Papers," from and to Ghana. Enclosure in Paper No. 2, dated March 29, 1883, Christiansborg Castle, refers to Ashanti's grip on the country's trade. The policy of economic strangulation of Kumasi is stated in "Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of the Gold Coast," [*British Command Paper*] C. 4477, Colonial Office, London, 1885, Paper No. 37.