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**THE SHORE AND THE MARKETPLACE:
MICROSPACE IN THE EUROPEAN-AFRICAN
TRADE ON THE WEST AFRICAN COAST
IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES
(Descriptions and Iconographic Sources)***

I

During the second half of the fifteenth century, the rudiments of all the future organisational forms that were to constitute trade between Europeans and Africans were to be laid out in West Africa. These included trade on the caravels; trade on the shore, in places where Europeans came on land; trade at local markets; and trade at trading posts guarded by forts (Arguim, São Jorge da Mina).

The economic aspects of the beginnings of trade between the Portuguese and the Africans have been well researched and described. In addition, Philip Curtin and George E. Brooks examine the macrospace of trade at the level of the entire West Coast region and its hinterland as well as on an inter-regional scale.¹ The present article, however, will focus on the microspace of trade – its scenery – an aspect which

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¹ Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *L'économie de l'empire portugais aux XVe et XVIe siècles* (Paris, 1969); Marian Małowist, *Europa a Afryka Zachodnia w dobie wczesnej ekspansji kolonialnej* (Warsaw, 1969); Wilfrid Brulez, 'Les voyages de Cadamosto et le commerce guinéen au XVe siècle', *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome*, xxxix (1968), 311–26; Jean Boulègue, 'L'impact économique et politique des navigations portugaises sur les peuples côtiers. Les cas de la Guinée du Cap-Vert (XVe-XVIe siècles)', *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, xxxiv (1988), 431–8; Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, 1975), 59–100, 271ff.; George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa 1000–1630* (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford, 1993), 49–57.

has drawn less interest to date. As far as the microspace is concerned, we know most about the forts and trade posts. Both of the above mentioned trading posts have been the subject of monographs.² I wish to analyse the spatial organisation of two types of trade: the one on the shore, in locations where the Portuguese landed, and the second at local markets. My intention is to complement the descriptive data with iconographic material.

The first form (trade on the shore) was when a European ship sailed along the coast in stages and dropped anchor at convenient locations; the merchants came ashore by boat and established contact with the coastal population. In 1480 the Flemish merchant Eustache Delafosse wrote that ‘sailing up and down this Pepper Coast, which extends for thirty miles, we spent our time on procuring pepper grains and slaves’.³ The effectiveness of this type of trade depended on the choice of stop. Various factors affected such a choice: geographical conditions and information obtained earlier about potential African trade partners and about their desire to trade or refusal to establish contacts, as well as information about the goods they had.

The Venetian merchant Alvise Cadamosto established in 1455 contacts with the ruler of Kaior, Budomel (da Mosto met him on the shore and even travelled inland to his seat). Cadamosto wrote about Budomel that a ‘certain Portuguese who had had dealings with him had informed me that he was a notable and an upright ruler in whom one could trust and who paid royally for what was brought to him’.⁴

² Théodore Monod, *L'île d'Arguin (Mauritanie), essai historique* (Lisbon, 1983); Paul E.H. Hair, *The Founding of the Castelo de São Jorge da Mina: An Analysis of the Sources* (Madison, 1994); Joseph Bato'ora Ballong-Wen-Mewuda, *São Jorge da Mina, 1482–1637. La vie d'un comptoir portugais en Afrique occidentale* (Lisbon, 1993); see also Arnold Walter Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* (London, 1963); Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra, 1980).

³ *Voyage d'Eustache Delafosse sur la côte de Guinée, au Portugal et en Espagne (1479–1481)*, ed. and trans. Denis Escudier (Paris, 1992) (hereafter: Delafosse/Escudier), 34: ‘en allant et venant parmy celle coste de la Graine, quy dure 30 lieues, nous passames le tempz en recoeillant de ladite graine et des esclaves’. About the author and his work, see *ibidem*, 83–147 and Paul E.H. Hair, ‘The Early Sources on Guinea’, *History in Africa*, 21 (1994), 101. On places on the shore referred to by the Portuguese as *resgates*, see Malowist, *Europa*, and Brooks, *Landlords*, 197ff.

⁴ *Le navigazioni atlantiche del Veneziano Alvise Da Mosto*, ed. Tullia Gasparini Leporace (Il Nuovo Ramusio, v, Rome, 1966), 49 (hereafter: Cadamosto/Leporace): ‘io havea habuto information da altri Portogalesi, che con lui havea habuto a far, che liera persona da bene e signor de chi se podea fidar, apagava realmente quello

Experiences concerning appropriate locations and partners were gathered and written down. The work of Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (written in ca. 1506–8) is a sort of set of instructions – equally of a geographical and sailing nature – for persons travelling to West Africa.⁵

As he sailed for the Gold Coast, Delafosse knew one could acquire gold there and that it was not only worthwhile to take European goods, but also slaves bought on other parts of the African coast.⁶ His account makes use of well-established names for parts of this coast: the Pepper and Gold coasts. The latter appeared in the form of *Minne d'Or*.⁷ In this second location, Delafosse exchanged a part of his merchandise with the inhabitants of *Aldeia das Duas Partes*. But he did the larger part of his trade with African merchants coming from the hinterland. He had to wait until news of his arrival had reached them and until they arrived on the relevant shores. This lasted several days.⁸ The expedition of a European merchant inland was out of the question considering the resistance of the locals and the costs of such an undertaking. Waiting on the shore was cheaper and safer. Exceptions included an invitation from a local ruler, as happened in the case of Cadamosto, or the possibility of sailing inland along the navigable sections of rivers. In the latter case, the situation was similar to a caravel dropping anchor at shore.

The second microspace of trade was the marketplace. The majority of the markets which the Europeans reached had existed before their arrival in West Africa.⁹ The activities of the Portuguese consisted in

che l'tolea'. For an English translation, see *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. and trans. Gerald R. Crone (London, 1937), 35 (hereafter: Cadamosto/Crone). See also Humberto Leitão, 'As duas viagens de Cadamosto à África Ocidental 1455–1456', in *O Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos e as Comemorações Henriquinas* (Lisbon, 1961), 1–20; Hair, 'The Early Sources', 98–100.

⁵ Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis. Côte occidentale d'Afrique du Sud Marocain au Gabon*, ed. Raymond Mauny (Bissau, 1956) (hereafter: Pacheco/Mauny). English trans.: *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis by Duarte Pacheco Pereira*, trans. and ed. George H.T. Kimble (London, 1937).

⁶ Delafosse/Escudier, 32.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 22, 32, 34 (Pepper Coast), 22, 26 (Mine and Minne d'Or).

⁸ *Ibidem*, 26.

⁹ Rafał Karpiński, 'Considérations sur les échanges de caractère locale et extérieur de la Sénégambie dans la deuxième moitié du XVe et au début du XVIe

joining the local trade and in adapting themselves to the local conditions. The first European description of a West African marketplace that we know of comes from the account of Cadamosto. Having completed his trade with Budomel, he set off out of curiosity to the local market which was held relatively often, on Mondays and Fridays, and attracted people from the entire area:

Men and women came to it from the neighbouring countryside within a distance of four or five miles, for those who dwelt farther off attended other markets. ... In this market I perceived quite clearly that these people are exceedingly poor, judging from the wares they brought for sale. ...¹⁰

Cadamosto went on to enumerate the goods on sale: cotton (cloth and yarns), vegetables, oil, millet, wooden vessels, palm mats, other objects of daily use, as well as weapons and small quantities of gold. The trade was based on barter as money was unknown. Of all those goods, the Venetian was only interested in gold (he must have had victuals in abundance as Budomel's guest). It turned out that Budomel, who offered slaves and was most certainly able to obtain greater quantities of gold than the traders at the marketplace, was a better trade partner for the Venetian merchant. For the same reason, trade with local rulers and merchants coming from inland prevailed over trade at local markets during the first period of contacts. But the market could not be omitted when the goods to be bought were food. It was also possible to change meeting places with merchants living further inland from incidental locations on the coast to local markets.

siècle', *Africana Bulletin*, 8 (1968), 65–83; Małowist, *Europa*, 272f., 350f.; Claude Meillassoux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Tenth International African Seminar at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, December 1969* (Oxford, 1971); Anthony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London, 1973); Ralph A. Austen, *African Economic History: Internal Development and External Dependency* (London and Portsmouth, 1987); Marian Małowist, 'Märkte und Städte im Westlichen Sudan von 14. bis 16. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1967), no. 2, pp. 281–305; Brooks, *Landlords*, 49–96.

¹⁰ Cadamosto/Leporace, 67: 'merchado ... che se fasia in suso una prataria ... el qual se fasea un luni o veneri ... a questo marchado venia homine e femine del paexe circostatne a quatro over cinque mille, che quelli stavano piu lonzi andavano ad altri merchadi. ... E in questi merchadi compresi molto ben che costoro sono zente poverissima a respecto a le cose che portavano suso quel merchado a vender'; Cadamosto/Crone, 48.

A fragment describing the West African coast in the account of Valentim Fernandes (from 1506–10) seems to relate to this latter phenomenon. The author writes that caravels could sail inland along the São Domingos River (presently the Cacheu River in Guinea Bissau) and there trade with the local ruler took place.¹¹ This was not the only trade partner of the Portuguese in the region. Along a tributary of the Cacheu, the Portuguese reached the *Banhiins* people (presently the Bagnoun or Banyun) who, according to Fernandes, showed particular predispositions for trading at markets where one could obtain ‘all things originating from the above-mentioned countries’, i.e., cotton, millet, rice, palm wine, chickens, cattle, goats and other goods mentioned earlier by Cadamosto, as well as civets (animals and a scent of animal origin).¹²

The market described by Fernandes, one of several in the area, was held every eight days. It lay at a distance of 7 miles from the sea shore, and reaching it was made possible by the navigable river. The market functioned under the authority of the local ruler (*el rey da terra*). Fernandes gave his name as *Jagara*. This word, however, is not a name but a term referring to a group of people enjoying high social status. In other texts, *Jagara* has been translated as *fidalgos*.¹³ Therefore, this term does not refer to a king-ruler but to a local chief. On his orders, it was forbidden to come to the marketplace with weapons and to disrupt the peace. Two supervisors ensured order in the market. A separate place was assigned for each type of good. Only fruit wine was sold everywhere, in contrast to honey and other types of wine which had their permanent place. According to Fernandes, the marketplace brought together 7,000 to 8,000 people (which seems an exaggerated number). Yet this was a unique market in that it attracted village dwellers even from distant locations. The supervisors took particular care that no harm came to these foreign arrivals. The author added that the market was also a place of entertainment. Thanks to

¹¹ Valentim Fernandes, *Description de la Côte Occidentale d’Afrique (Sénégal au Cap de Monte, Archipels)*, ed. and trans. Théodore Monod, Avelino Teixeira da Mota, and Raymond Mauny (Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa, 11, Bissau, 1951), 68 (hereafter: Fernandes). According to Brooks, *Landlords*, 227, it was ‘a group of villages the Portuguese collectively termed São Domingos’.

¹² Fernandes, 68–70: ‘Ha nesta terra todallas cousas das terras sobredita’. Malowist, *Europa*, 351–3.

¹³ Fernandes, 70 and fn. 133 on p. 164.

the order and safety that reigned there ‘numerous highly born men and women who had nothing to sell’ came there without fear ‘in order to drink wine, as this was one of the principal goods there’.¹⁴ The Portuguese showed an unusual interest in this market. It was large; it was visited by foreigners who were accepted and looked after; numerous goods were sold there in large quantities; and access was assured by the navigable river. The Portuguese bought mainly cotton cloth and civets. Their trade there became so intense that some European merchants settled near the marketplace permanently.¹⁵ Fernandes’ account is borne out by a source from 1526, the ledger book of the ship ‘Santiago’. The ledger includes not only the voyage’s itinerary, but also the type of goods bought and a list of presents (*dadivas*) given to the chiefs of São Domingos, Buguendo and other districts and villages, the *jagarafes* and the port manager. There is also information about the *lançados*, who were already quite active traders.¹⁶

Thus, Cadamosto and Fernandes have left us with exceptionally detailed descriptions of West African markets. They pointed to various aspects of the markets’ functioning such as their catchment area, size, the goods that could be exchanged there, the ways they were managed, and even their non-economic functions. In addition, Fernandes made a few observations about the spatial arrangement of the marketplace. Their accounts and the ‘Santiago’ ship ledger refer to the states of the Wolof, areas settled by the Serer and areas lying by the river Cacheu (São Domingos). Eustache Delafosse’s account in turn concerns trade on the Pepper and the Mina (i.e., the Gold) coasts. These regions are distant from one another and are inhabited by very numerous and varied peoples. This raises the problem of the comparability of the methods and organisation of European-African trade in those regions. The available source material indicates that on the specific sections of the West African coast that I am interested in, the spatial organisation of African-European trade was similar. It is

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 70: ‘vem a esta feyra muytos fidalgos homês e molheres sem terê q venderê saluo pera beberê porq hûas das principaes mercadorias q nella se guesta he o vinho’.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 68: ‘e aqui estam christaõs mercadores estantes’.

¹⁶ Avelino Teixeira da Mota, ‘A Viagem do navio “Santiago” à Serra Leoa e Rio de S. Domingos em 1526, Livro de Armação’, *Boletim Cultural de Guiné Portuguesa*, xxiv, 95 (1969), 529–79; about the region and markets under discussion, see 542, 546–8, and 572–5. See also Brooks, *Landlords*, 15, 227–9.

possible to indicate several reasons for such similarities. In Africa, this was due to continuous surpluses in agricultural production that could be directed to local trade; to the existence of long-distance trade of valuable and expensive goods; to the existence of markets before the arrival of the Europeans; and to the similarity between various African structures of social and political organisation, such as the segmentary systems of villages, chiefdoms and, on some parts of the coast, early states.¹⁷

Because of those similarities, African societies reacted to the Europeans' offer of trade in a comparable fashion. It is possible, however, that such similarities were influenced by the transmission of information and behavioural patterns between various areas of Africa that were quite distant from one another. This included the circulation of information about the arrival of the European newcomers (confirmed already in the middle of the fifteenth century), and also the appearance of the Mande merchants in different parts of the Upper Guinea coast and the Gold Coast.¹⁸ The Portuguese and Italians in their trading in the fifteenth century and in the early sixteenth century, also active in various regions of the coast, followed a similar pattern. The prudence in contacts shown by both sides led to the emergence of areas of coastal trade, which was treated as neutral space. The inclusion of the Europeans in the various trade forms already existing on local African markets comes later.

Of course, there were differences between these regions. They mainly concerned the type of African products that dominated trade with the Europeans. This was reflected in the name of various parts

¹⁷ On cultural similarities, see Raymond Mauny, *Tableau géographique de l'Ouest africain au Moyen Âge d'après les sources écrites, la tradition et l'archéologie* (Dakar, 1961). On the types of political organisations, see Michał Tymowski, *The Origins and Structures of Political Institutions in Pre-Colonial Black Africa: Dynastic Monarchy, Taxes and Tributes, War and Slavery, Kinship and Territory* (Lampeter and New York, 2009).

¹⁸ On the 15th-century transmission of information about Europeans, see Cadamosto/Leporace, 85 and Cadamosto/Crone, 60. On the role of the Mande merchants, see Ivor Wilks, 'A Medieval Trade-Route from the Niger to the Gulf of Guinea', *Journal of African History*, iii, 2 (1962), 337–41; *idem*, 'Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', i: 'The Matter of Bitu', *Journal of African History*, 23, 3 (1982), 333–49 and ii: 'The Struggle for Trade', *ibidem*, 23, 4 (1982), 463–72; Andreas W. Massing, 'The Wangara, an Old Soninke Diaspora in West Africa?', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 158, 2 (2000), 281–308.

of the coast – Pepper, Gold, *etc.* There were also differences in what Africans wished to acquire – for example, in the fifteenth century, Europeans brought to the Gold Coast slaves acquired in other parts of the West Coast – and differences in the reactions of Africans and the actions of Europeans depending on the Africans' type of social organisation. There were more similarities than differences, however.

Given the above-mentioned similarities in the forms and organisation of trade, we can compare not only the material contained in the accounts from the fifteenth and early sixteenth century but also that presented by iconographic material.

II

Iconography is an important source complementing those accounts, for trade on the shore and at the marketplace alike. Two excellent drawings in terms of the information they provide are the drawing from the work of Pieter de Marees (1602) and that from the work of Olfert Dapper (1668). Even though they are sources from a later period than the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, one can make use of them to obtain additional information by comparison and through the method of retrogression. Dapper gave us an illustration depicting trade on the shore, while de Marees, a picture of a marketplace. We will examine them in this order, not the chronological one.

The work of Olfert Dapper was published for the first time in Amsterdam in 1668.¹⁹ This was a scientific description of Africa, for which the author had used the available geographic, natural, travel and historical literature. He worked for profit, which he had to share, however, with his publisher and engraver Jacob van Meurs. Dapper's work was published many times – one more time in Dutch in 1676 and in German, Latin, English, and French.²⁰ The drawing which

¹⁹ Olfert Dapper, *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten, van Egypten, Barbaryen, Libyen, Biledulgerid, Negroslant, Guinea, Etiopiën, Abyssinie ...* (Amsterdam, Jacob Van Meurs, 1668).

²⁰ About O. Dapper, recently: Paul E.H. Hair, 'Barbot, Dapper, Davity: A Critique of Sources on Sierra Leone and Cape Mount', *History in Africa*, 1 (1974), 25–54. A very good work with abundant cited literature: Adam Jones, 'Olfert Dapper et sa *Description de l'Afrique*', in Christiane Falgayrettes *et al.* (eds.), *Objets interdits* (Paris, 1989), 73–84. In the same work see the reproduction of the original 1686 French edition, 93–368.

I am analysing here comes from the latter French edition of 1686. The French translation, like some other foreign language editions, contains a number of errors and changes in relation to the original. The illustrations, however, are an exact reproduction of the original. In some foreign language editions, including the French one, the publishers used the copperplate dies acquired from Jacob van Meurs' heirs.²¹

The drawing in question (ill.1), placed in the said print beside a description of the land of the Wolof,²² i.e., where 200 years earlier, Cadamosto had traded with Budomel, illustrates trade between the Europeans and the Africans on the shore of West Africa. It is often reproduced, but usually serves only as an illustration rather than source material worthy of analysis, although the value of iconography as a distinct source carrying additional and often unique information has gained increasing recognition in the last few decades, especially in medieval studies.²³ The drawing is made up of several scenes taking place on the shore. In the foreground a European pours alcohol, most probably a form of vodka, for an African, who is holding a glass. Considering the African's modest attire, he is probably a merchant.²⁴ He would have set off for the shore having heard about the arrival of ships. This scene presents the beginnings of trade negotiations; an offering of drink is a form of preliminary gift and, at the same time, a sampling of the merchandise's quality. To the side are two large barrels, which most probably contain alcohol and one of which serves as a makeshift table. Aside, on the ground, lie bowls and other copper vessels, some cloth and a bundle with goods. We can identify them thanks to the enumeration on the adjacent page of the typical goods which were brought to the country of the Wolof.

²¹ Olfert Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique* (Amsterdam, W. Waesberge, Boom et Van Someren, 1686); Jones, 'Olfert Dapper', 75–6 and fn. 20.

²² Dapper, *Description*, 237.

²³ Jacques Le Goff, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1964); Henryk Samsonowicz, 'Malarska wizja zjednoczonej Europy w średniowieczu', in Henryk Gapski (ed.), *Christianitas et Cultura Europae. Księga jubileuszowa Profesora Jerzego Kłoczowskiego* (Lublin, 1998), i, 378–85.

²⁴ This we can deduce on the basis of the typical attire of an African merchant depicted in table 2, point B, in the work of Pieter de Marees, *Beschryvinge ende historische verhael vant Gout koninckrijk van Gunea, anders de Gout-custe de Mina genaemt ...* (Amsterdam, Cornelis Claesz, 1602). See also the French edition of the same work, *Description et récit historial du riche Royaume d'Or de Guinea* (Amsterdam, Comille Claesson, 1605).



1. Olfert Dapper, *The trade between the Europeans and the Africans on the shore of West Africa*

Behind the first scene a European merchant with his head uncovered kneels before the local ruler, most probably that of one of the states of the Wolof people. The merchant is holding a bottle in one hand and is making a gesture of greeting and honour with the other. Most probably he is also offering a drink as a gift to begin trade negotiations. The ruler is recognisable by the attire covering his entire body,²⁵ as well as by the parasol held above his head by his suite made up of two persons. The latter are only wearing sashes on their hips but are armed with spears.

The third scene – one which additionally suggests that the first two illustrate the beginnings of trade negotiations – shows the unloading of barrels from a boat that has come to the shore. The merchandise is

²⁵ On the significance of dress and nakedness, see Anna Chabrowska, 'Afrykanie w oczach Europejczyków w dobie wczesnej ekspansji kolonialnej. Afryka zachodnia do końca XV wieku', MA thesis presented in 2008 at the Institute of History, University of Warsaw.

being unloaded by crew members of the ships anchored at a distance from the shore.

The fourth scene seems unconnected with the first three. On it we can see herders driving a herd of cattle. This is not cattle meant to be sold. Ship crews did purchase victuals but not in such quantities. The purchase of one or two animals was possible, but not that of a herd. The same holds true for the other side – African herders never sold an entire herd but one or a few animals. The scene with the herders thus has a different significance and is not directly connected with trade. Perhaps it signals that the local population also engages in other important occupations. Perhaps the author wished to show this scene in opposition to the others as an illustration of a disconnection between the trading space and the adjacent yet distinct space of customary life; or as a means to evoke a pastoral atmosphere and to reach out beyond the main theme of the illustration? The thick vegetation in the background could play such a function as it relates to the Europeans' first impressions as they came to the land of the Wolof. The very first discoverers had already written of its beautiful vegetation and natural beauty.²⁶ These impressions are reflected in the name *Cabo Verde* given to the neighbouring cape in the fifteenth century and used till our day.

The drawing under discussion shows people of various social functions and roles and of various social statuses. On the African side, we can see the ruler, his suite and a merchant. On the European side, we can see the merchants and the boat crew acting as porters. Each of the European merchants acts differently and has a different partner. The one who is to trade with the ruler is kneeling and, with an uncovered head, pays homage to him. The one who is to trade

²⁶ Gomes Eanes de Zurara, *Crónica dos Feitos notáveis que se passaram na conquista da Guiné por mandado do Infante D. Henrique*, ed. Torquato de Sousa Soares, ii (Lisbon, 1981) (hereafter: Zurara/Soares), 172. The most often cited French translation is Gomes Eanes de Zurara, *Chronique de Guinée*, intr. and trans. Léon Bourdon (Dakar, 1960) (hereafter: Zurara/Bourdon), 121. For an English trans., see *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea written by Gomes Eanes de Azurara*, ed. and trans. Charles R. Beazley, 2 vols. (New York, 1896) (hereafter: Zurara/Beazley), i, 96. Cadamosto/Leporace, 74–5; Cadamosto/Crone, 53; Fernandes, 22; Pacheco/Mauny, 46, 60; Diogo Gomes, *De la première découverte de la Guinée*, ed. Théodore Monod, Raymond Mauny and G. Duval (Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa, 21, Bissau, 1959) (hereafter: D. Gomes), 27.

with an African merchant is pouring him alcohol in a friendly gesture, but keeps his hat in place so as not to show social distance. Both Europeans are offering their partner a gift and both are in the position of petitioners asking for trade.²⁷

The gestures of the Africans, in turn, bear witness to their self-assurance. The ruler, under his parasol, adopting a position imbued with pride, accepts the homage of the kneeling merchant. The African merchant's hands are resting on his hips and he holds his head high without bowing. The gestures of the people surrounding the ruler are directed at their superior and lord. The armed escort has no contact with the European merchants. Similarly, the European boat crew is busy with its unloading tasks and has no contacts with the Africans.

The question can be asked whether this picture, drawn in Europe by someone who had no firsthand knowledge of Africa is not an idealised product of his imagination. The answer lies in recalling the purpose for which the description and the illustration were produced and in confronting the picture with the written sources that I have analysed earlier. Dapper's aim and that of the illustration placed in his work was a scholarly description and iconographic presentation of Africa in keeping with the knowledge of the time. The engraver had to operate within the bounds defined by this aim without giving free reign to fantasy. The scene under discussion is a reproduction of the situations found in the descriptions, including Cadamosto's account, of which Drapper made use (he even quoted the name of Budomel). However, a picture needs to present things that a written text may leave out. Omissions in a text are considered a drawback, if not a disqualifying one. Unfilled spaces in a picture can't be left blank and need to be filled with substance. In order to be faithful to reality one can make use of many different accounts and verbal descriptions. It is highly probable that such were the sources for this and other similar illustrations in Dapper's work.

Some elements of the illustration quite obviously do not apply to the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries but are part of seventeenth-century reality. Above all, this applies to the seventeenth-century attire of the European merchant. In addition, the import of alcohol from Europe and the importance of this merchandise in the trade with

²⁷ The giving of presents (*dadivas*) to local chiefs as early as 1526 is testified to by the list of gifts from the ship 'Santiago', see da Mota, 'A Viagem', 547, 572.

Africa also belong to the seventeenth century.²⁸ Earlier, the Africans drank African alcoholic beverages – trade in palm and fruit wines as well as in honey-based beverages was well-established as is shown by Fernandes' account. It is only the spread of distillation and the production of strong alcoholic beverages in Europe (something that took place during the sixteenth century) that changed the situation and led to the massive export of this merchandise to Africa in the following centuries.

The remaining elements of the illustration we can relate to the situation from the second half of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth through retrogression. The elements include the figures of trade partners (the African ruler and merchant, and the merchants from Europe), the figures of people assisting in the trade contacts but not participating in it (the ruler's armed escort and the European porters). The gestures and the symbols of social position of individual figures taking part in the trade are consistent with the account of Cadamosto who wrote with great respect of Budomel's dignity and of the manner in which he carried himself.

The illustration also provides information that widens our knowledge based on the description of the area in which trade took place. This area is – as we can see – quite small. It is located on the shore, beyond the African settlement and far from the European ships. It can be viewed as an intermediary area accessible to both sides but which is not fully controlled by either of them. There are no structures whatsoever and no attempts have been made to define the boundaries of the grounds. Such a space allows for unconventional behaviour aimed at producing contacts with the outer world. By the seventeenth century, the occupation of this space by the traders had become an automatic and many times repeated instinct. But in the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the methods and spatial framework of trade on the coast of West Africa were only beginning to take shape, the choice of this space arose from the needs and calculations of both sides. At that time, the risk to the Europeans was greater than it was to the Africans. It is for this reason that during the first contacts of this type the sides

²⁸ On the import of alcohol to Africa in the 17th century see Dapper, *Description*, 235–6. But de Marees, in *Beschryvinge*, chpt. 11, fails to mention alcohol among the most important goods imported to Africa in the early 17th century. See also Hopkins, *An Economic History*, 111, 129–30.

exchanged hostages.²⁹ When the trade turned out to be advantageous to both sides and both sides wanted to maintain it, such security methods disappeared. Presumably the presence of guards near the African ruler reflects his prestige and is not an expression of fear or prudence on his part. The grounds on the shore, the area which was common and did not fully belong to either party proved to be a convenient and lasting meeting place.

The second of the drawings which I wish to analyse (ill. 2) illustrates a market on the Gold Coast and comes from the work of the Dutchman Pieter de Marees published in Amsterdam in 1602.³⁰ The drawing is thus related to a different part of the coast than Upper Guinea. It can, however, in conjunction with the accounts of Cadamosto and Fernandes, be used as comparative material. De Marees' work – which had numerous editions in various European languages in addition to the Dutch one – is one of the best descriptions of the Gold Coast in modern times. The French edition of 1605, published in Amsterdam under the supervision of the author himself, was particularly faithful to the original. The original copperplate tables from the Dutch edition were used for this one as well. The illustration of the market is the fourth of eighteen tables. The entire series of tables was the object of research summed up in an article by Regula Iselin concerning their ethno-historical value as sources.³¹ The publisher and printer of de Marees' work was Cornelis Claesz. The copperplates were ordered from an unidentified specialised engraving atelier. Perhaps they were engraved on the basis of drawings made, quite possibly, by de Marees himself.³²

The tables show various aspects of life on the Gold Coast: the appearance and attire of people of various social positions; the occupation and work of local inhabitants; and the local flora and fauna. Their aim is both didactical and informative. Each of the tables was provided

²⁹ Zurara/Soares, 195; Zurara/Bourdon, 132; Zurara/Beazley, 110.

³⁰ See fn. 24; the last English language edition, along with a very good critical treatment and numerous footnotes: Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (eds.), *Pieter de Marees: Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)* (Oxford, 1987) (hereafter: de Marees/Dantzig&Jones).

³¹ Regula Iselin, 'Reading Pictures: On the Value of the Copperplates in the *Beschryvinghe* of Pieter de Marees (1602) as Source Material for Ethnohistorical Research', *History in Africa*, 21 (1994), 147–70.

³² *Ibidem*, 153.

with exhaustive commentaries – letters on the table refer the viewer to relevant clarifications. Given the great accuracy in the presentation of objects, costumes, and scenes of human activity depicted on the table, the absence of racial traits for the persons shown is surprising. Differences in the persons' material culture can be seen, but not their physical attributes. The figures on the tables were depicted in an antique style. They are shown without individual traits, as specific human types, people representing various social roles, but not as specific persons. The drawing which depicts the market and which drew my attention is devoid of such shortcomings.³³ It depicts the functioning of an institution and of its spatial form, and not human figures, which are few and imbedded in the space.

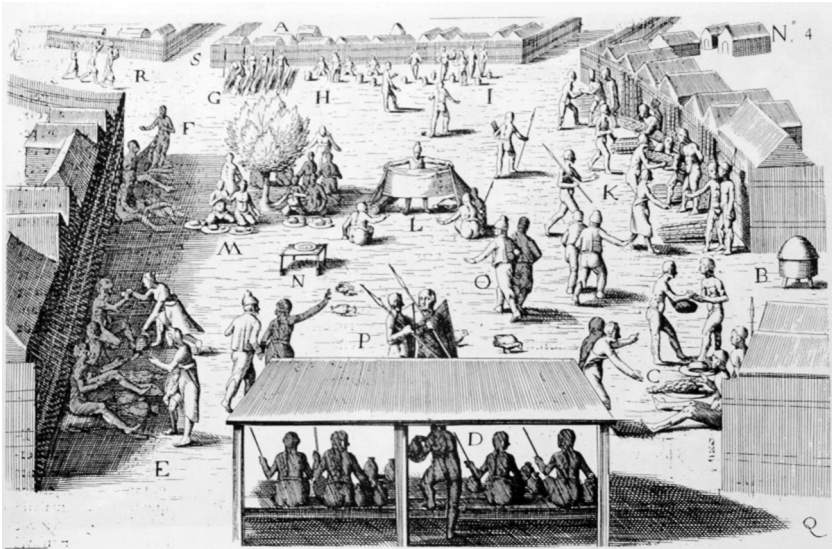
The market from table 4 in de Marees' work took up a sizeable area surrounded by light structures (Cadamosto wrote of a similar field). It was located a Dutch mile (about 7 km) to the east of Mina. Its characteristic trait was – similarly to the market described by Fernandes – the setting aside of places in which specific goods were bought and sold: millet, bananas and other fruit, meat, poultry, palm wine, fish, wood, rice, fresh water, sugar cane, Dutch cloth and a type of bread called *kanquies*. There was no separate place for trading in gold (more about this below).

The space of the marketplace was distinctly set aside by structures and canopies. The reference elements that organise and divide this space are roads outside the market leading onto the shore and to Mina, to Fetu and other towns further inland; the seat of the area's chief and authority of the market; a little granary belonging to the chief; a tree with, underneath it, women selling *kanquies*, and which de Marees does not mention in the description – even though it is shown on the drawing; a second tree beyond a palisade marking the road to Mina. According to Adam Jones and Albert van Dantzig, those trees were venerated as remainders of places of worship.³⁴ The marketplace also included a place of fetich worship – 'their God'.

The people shown on the drawing are above all local sellers and buyers, both men and women. There are also two armed guards

³³ Table no. 4 in the work of de Marees opens chpt. 15, entitled 'About their Markets, how they hold them and what kind of trading is done there', de Marees/Dantzig&Jones, 62–5.

³⁴ de Marees/Dantzig&Jones, 62, fn. a.



La description de la figure No 4.

24

Cette pourtraicture demonstre le marche de Cabo Cortio situe vne grosse lieue a Est du Chasteau de Mina vng lieu de commerce, fort bon. & a cause que cest le plus beau marche de tous les autres endroitz, si auens nous misticy. A Est la maison ou residence du Capitaine de ceste place B. Est la logette ou grange ou que le Capitaine tient son millet. C Est le marche aux Bannanas ou fruitz avecq la place ou quon vend la chair. D. Est vne loge ou que les villageois avecq leurs pots a vin de Palma viennent affoir desoubz. E. Est le marche a poillailles F. Est le marche a poisson G. Est la marche du Bois. H. Est le marche ou quon trouue a vendre le Riz & Millet I. Est lendroit ou que leau fresche est a vendre K. Est le marche ou quon vend les Cannes a Sucre L. Icy mesure on la toile de Hollande a brasses, ainsi que les villageois lont achaptie es nauires & apporté en terre & la vendent icy M. Est lendroit ou que les femmes du Chasteau de Mina ont achaptie avecq leurs kankies a vendre N. Est la table de sacrifice de leur dieu Fetisfos. O Sont les Hollandois traversans le marche pour y acheter quelque chose P. Est la garde du Capitaine qui va avecq ses armes Q. Est le chemin vers le riuage de la mer R. Est le chemin vers fectu & autres villes du pass.

2. Pieter de Marees, *The marketplace on the Gold Coast*

keeping order in the name of the chief. Perhaps the other persons walking alone and armed with spears are also guards. All other participants in the market had to leave their weapons (machetes and spears) upon entering the market grounds.³⁵ We can also see two strolling Dutchmen. This is the only copperplate showing Europeans of all the copperplates from the work of de Marees. The cultural identity of the person measuring out cloth is debatable. On the one

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 64.

hand, his head covering could be indicative of a Dutchman, on the other hand in the description of the illustration and in the text of the previous chapter there is mention of the great ability shown by Africans in measuring cloth and in converting European measures of length into local African ones.³⁶

As was the case with the illustration analysed above, some of the information, objects and persons that are typical of the beginning of the seventeenth century cannot be applied to the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth. There were only Portuguese on the Gold Coast at the time, no Dutchmen. There was also no cultivation of sugar cane, which was introduced in the sixteenth century.³⁷ For this market, Mina became the main outside economic point of reference only when it was built (1482) and expanded. But a lot of other information can be applied back in time through retrogression. This concerns primarily the spatial formation, the ordering of trade by types of merchandise, and the organisation and maintenance of order.

The market space differed in a fundamental way from the space of the locations chosen for trade purposes on the West African coast. The marketplace was a precisely defined area that was used in a permanent manner. The grounds were marked out through structures but were also delimited organisationally and legally. Order was kept there and weapons were not admitted. Besides the places set out for specific types of goods, the market also included places of worship. In contrast to the trading area on the shore, this area belonged to the Africans and was organised in keeping with their culture and their economic and social system. The Europeans were guests in this area. If they participated in trade in the market it was only after they had accepted its spatial and customary framework, the frequency with which people met there and other local principles.

The list of European goods that were traded in the drawing under discussion include cloth, for which demand from the local African market was apparently strong and constant but does not include several other goods that were important for European-African trade. There are no metal articles, copper vessels, or iron tools. Perhaps trade in such items took place outside the marketplace, as they were

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 61, 62.

³⁷ Raymond Mauny, 'Notes historiques autour des principales plantes cultivées d'Afrique occidentale', *Bulletin IFAN*, xv, s. B, 2 (1953), 684–730.

sold rather to the chiefs and other affluent persons. Perhaps, as goods from abroad, they had no permanent trading place on the market. The absence of gold is explained in a fragment of the chapter adjacent to the illustration. Under the influence of the Portuguese, during the sixteenth century, gold ceased to be traded on the market near Mina. As it was in constant demand, it became a measure of worth, a form of non-monetary currency. Barter trade continued to function, but it also became possible to pay by small lumps of gold called *kacraws*, from the word *kakra*, which means 'little' in the Akan language.³⁸

De Marees did not inform his readers of the entertainment function of the market – a function about which Fernandes had written earlier in connection with another market – but he mentioned palm wine as one of the main goods traded there. It was more important in the local economy than the European alcohol which was still absent at the market. De Marees' market also had religious functions. One could ask why such information is missing in the earlier accounts. Cadamosto may not have noticed these functions, but Fernandes was particularly interested in local cults and beliefs. He described them immediately after describing the market, but did not place them in the market.³⁹ This may be due to the fact that he depended on informants, who obviously had not provided him with any information in this case.

The information drawn out of both analysed iconographic sources allows for a better understanding of descriptions from fifteenth and early sixteenth century sources. Given their nature, most of the information they bring is related to the question of the spatial organisation of trade and of relations between spatial control and types of African-European trade. Existing literature often assimilates the two organisational forms of trade mentioned here – coastal trade was identified or shown as being very similar to trade in the marketplace. This may have been the case from the economic viewpoint, something which has dominated research until recently. But in terms of social psychology and the organisational bases for the trade contacts between Europeans and Africans, these were two different areas. Each of them was created and used differently, and was differently perceived by the two sides.

³⁸ de Marees/Dantzig&Jones, 65 and fn. 5.

³⁹ Fernandes, 60, 70, 74.