Introduction

The paper examines the organization of commerce and exchange in the 17th century West African Gold Coast region (comprising what is today Ghana and eastern Côte d’Ivoire) between the factors or agents of chartered trading companies, specifically Danish, Dutch, and English, and the principal merchants of the region who were known to the factors as “Akani” (and also as “Acanes,” “Accanisten,” “Akanisten,” “Arcanies,” “Hacanys,” etc.). It was an Atlantic gold trade and not a trans-Atlantic slave trade that was important to the Gold Coast regional economy in the 16th and 17th centuries. How was the gold trade organized? Where did the gold come from? How was it distributed? Who were the Akani? What was the global significance of 17th century Gold Coast gold production and trade? These are some of the questions the paper addresses. Although at
the current stage of knowledge in this field of historiography, it raises more questions than it answers, the paper does suggest new research avenues and perspectives.

In describing the 17th century Akani trading organization, the paper reflects on an earlier age of African-European commercial encounter and the global reality of a specific West African location. Neither local nor global, the Gold Coast region was a network of human interaction and integration. It was a space of interconnections, of political-economic networks, of long-distance trade networks, and caravan routes. The Gold Coast European encounter generated extensive changes in modes of spatialization, ranging from cross-cutting political alliances and overlapping spheres of influence and competing economic networks and rival political networks occupying the “same” territory to geographical and craft specialization. The encounter produced new economies of (market) trade, and new and expanded domains of commerce and accumulation (Chouin 1998; Stahl 1994; Deffontaine 1993; Kea 1982). At the heart of these developments was, as the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot phrased it, “the continuous centrality of the Atlantic as the revolving door of major global flows” (Mitchell 2005, chapter 6; Drayton 2002; DeCorse 2001; also Trouillot 2003). The Gold Coast region and the Akani trading formation were active participants in these global flows and one far-reaching effect was the differentiation of regional historical geography, a differentiation that was evident not only in the relations of production, distribution, and marketing - e.g., zones of subsistence, economic trading zones, and production networks - but also in political, social, and cultural matters (DeCorse 2001a; DeCorse 1992; Stahl 1994; Deffontaine 1993; Kea 1982; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1976; Posnansky 1975; Ozanne 1963).
What sources are available to historical studies of this period? Among the important sources are the extensive archival records, or (preserved) knowledge systems, of the chartered trading companies. The companies’ documentation comprises letters, daybooks, trade journals, debtors’ lists, accounts books, legal cases, inventories, treaties and contracts, reports and registers of different kinds, and a wide range of miscellany such as chronicles, biographical profiles, and an autobiography. Published texts from the period (in Danish, Dutch, German, French, Portuguese, Latin, Swedish, and Italian as well as English) are also major sources of information (Law 2001; Chouin 1998; Fage 1994; Deffontaine 1993; Jones 1985; Jones 1983; Kea 1982; Reindorf 1980; van Dantzig 1980; van Dantzig 1978; Ryder 1965; Carson 1962). Among the leading companies were the Old West Indies Company and New West Indies Company (Dutch), the Guinea Company, East Indies Company, and Royal African Company (English), the African Company and West Indies and Guinea Company (Danish). The Swedish African Company was active in the Gold Coast trade from 1649 until 1663 and the Brandenburg Company from the 1680s until the early 1720s (Nováky 1990; Jones 1985; van Dantzig 1980). Other 17th century companies like the Company of Adventurers of London trading to Gynney and Bynney and the Company of Merchants Trading to Guinea had short commercial life spans in West Africa (Porter 1968). With the exception of the Brandenburg Company whose trading establishments were ill-positioned to benefit from the Akani trade, the other companies spared no effort in attracting Akani captaincies to the ports where they maintained commercial stations.

Mention should also be made of the private or interloper ships from Europe. These vessels, which did not sail under the charter or flag of any company, traded on a
regular and competitive basis at Gold Coast ports in spite of the determined hostility of the agents of the different chartered companies. Dutch interlopers conducted their trade at Danish or English trading stations, while English interlopers traded at Danish and Dutch establishments and Danish interlopers were to be found at English and Dutch stations. Commercial transactions were conducted aboard the interlopers’ ships. The documentation referring to interloper commercial transactions are, for obvious reasons, comparatively scanty. The private traders did not have factories or castles to maintain hence they could sell their merchandise at lower prices than the companies’ agents and at the same time purchase gold and other commodities at higher than company prices. Interlopers also conducted a respectable trade at the factories or lodges of local Gold Coast merchants. They proved to be formidable competitors (Deffontaine 1993; Kea 1982, chapters 6 and 7; van Dantzig 1978).

A second source of information comes from archaeological fieldwork. Data from archaeology are often ignored and not incorporated into historical studies. Archaeology projects, comprising surveys and site excavations, have been carried out in various parts of Ghana on a more or less systematic basis since the early 1960s (Stahl 1994; Anquandah 1982). Archaeological research has transformed our understanding of the region’s political economy, material culture, technologies, long-distance trade connections, and longue durée. Archaeology complements and expands the information derived from written sources and oral histories (Stahl 2004a; Stahl 2004b; Stahl 2001; Stahl 1994; DeCorse 2001a; DeCorse 2001b; DeCorse 1996; DeCorse 1987; McIntosh 1994; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1976’ Posnansky 1975; Posnansky 1973; Posnansky 1972; Posnansky 1971; Ozanne 1963). Given the nature of Ghanaian historiography at
the present time, my presentation is necessarily introductory. For the most part, it is based on research conducted more than two decades ago. Obviously, what I have to say does not represent the last word on the subject. Much more research remains to be done before we can have a richer and deeper knowledge of the regional trading system, the specific role of the Akani organization within it, and the global significance of the region’s gold producing industry.

**Globalization and the African-European encounter**

Seventeenth century African-European commercial contact on the Gold Coast seaboard represented an encounter that belonged to what Felicity Nussbaum calls, in another context, “prehistories of globalization” and what C.A. Bayly refers to as “archaic globalization” (Nussbaum 2003; Bayly 2002; also Trouillot 2003, chapter 2). These early modern globalizations speak to commercially dynamic spaces that had not yet been fragmented by the systemic logic and self-expansion of capital (cf. Trouillot 2003, chapter 3; also Arrighi 2004). On the West African Gold Coast littoral we see an expanding maritime-based capitalist system, operating out of a northwestern European regional world-system, engaging with an expanding land-based Akani trading organization, which operated on the southern frontier of African inter-continental systems of exchange (Arrighi 2004; Stahl 2004a; Ringrose 2001; Austen 1987; Anquandah 1982; Kea 1982). On both sides of the encounter there were mechanisms and infrastructures that facilitated the building and growth of the modern global economy. Trouillot’s perceptive study of “global transformations” provides a framework for my understanding of the encounter. He writes:
“Culturally, the world we inherit today is the product of global flows that started in the late 15\textsuperscript{th} century and continue to affect human populations today. Yet the history of the world is rarely told in those terms. Indeed, the particularity of the dominant narratives of globalization is a massive silencing of the past on a world scale, the systematic erasure of continuous and deep encounters that have marked human history throughout the globe….After all, [facts about global flows] were always part of the available record. That they were rarely accorded the significance they deserve suggests the existence and deployment of mechanisms of silence that make them appear less relevant than they are, even when they are known…. Thus, a theoretical task parallel to the documentation of these flows is to assess the terms of the dominant narratives of world history – the words used, the concepts deployed, the setting of the plots and subplots, the depiction of the characters and the connections made or ignored between all of the above” (Trouillot 2003, pp. 34-35).

Trouillot enjoins us to regard with suspicion and skepticism words such as modernity, globalization, progress, and development because they project the North Atlantic experience on a universal scale that they themselves helped to create (Trouillot 2003, pp. 35-36). The North Atlantic universals do not describe the world; they offer visions of it and in the process silence their own history. Trouillot encourages us to unearth those silences, those conceptual and theoretical missing links that make the universals so attractive (Trouillot 2003, p. 36).

The Gold Coast-European encounter is a silenced history and one of the missing links in the dominant narratives of world history. The rationale that there is no
documentation to chronicle the encounter is implausible. The historical record gives us, for example, a mid-17th century letter from a factor of the English Guinea Company. The letter unearths one of world history’s silences, in this instance, commercial relations between Africans and Europeans at Gold Coast ports in the first half of the century. In contrast to the master narratives of world history, the unnamed author of the letter does not reduce the trade connection to an encounter between a modern or civilized subject and a non-modern or uncivilized one. In this respect the letter de-stabilizes stereotypical views of West African historicity.

“[New English] traders have settled at Wyamba [modern: Winneba]. Some say the [people of Guinea] are barbarous, not merchants like those of the East Indies, so are the natives of Guinea merchants and not barbarous nor fools, which we conceive they will find before they get their money in their cargoes again, and all in a merchandizing way, for where we have admittance to trade on shore, we are very safe and well entreated…, but where we trade upon our own defense, we dare not set foot on shore, but these are inconsiderable places…. We say that in Anno 1632 and 1633 we first settled a factory [at Winneba] and that those kings [of Agona] granted that port [and another] port called Barracco [modern: Bereku]. [One of the king’s sons was sent to England] and returned again, and now remains a factor for us at our castle of Kormantse, after that the king of [Agona] sent us another whom he called his son, named Asheney who lived at our castle of Kormantse three or four years and had learned to speak English” (The spelling has been modernized. Anonymous 1650; see also Sainsbury 1880; Sainsbury 1893).
The Agona ruler offered the English traders a secure trading environment and did not arbitrarily confiscate their goods. He allowed his son to travel to London and when the son later returned to the Gold Coast, he worked as a factor in the employ of the Guinea Company. This “subplot” is not found in the dominant narratives of world history.

English merchants first visited and traded with the Agona city-state regime in the mid-16th century. They described the polity’s political capital as a fortified place about the size of the city of London. Archaeological surveys and excavations of the city’s ruins were conducted in the 1960s. They were able to document the growth of the city over a period of two centuries. In the 17th century the city extended over a distance of five miles and on its outskirts were craft villages. Not surprisingly archaeologists have found substantial evidence of imported merchandise. The coastal economy of the Gold Coast was not traditional but dynamic (Stahl 1994; Deffontaine 1993; Anquandah 1982; Kea 1982; Ozanne 1963). In the context of the Guinea Company’s trade at the ports of the Agona capital – Winneba and Bereku - it is worth citing Marshal Hodgson’s comment on the emergence of modernity in Europe. He places this phenomenon in an appropriate context:

“It was also necessary that there exist large areas of relatively dense, urban-dominated populations, tied together in a great interregional commercial network, to form the world market which had gradually come into being in the eastern hemisphere, and in which European fortunes could be made, and European imaginations exercised” (Hodgson).

The Guinea Company’s trade at the Agona ports represents one example of an African-European commercial encounter and a historical condition akin to what Hodgson
describes. The condition was enabled by local and regional inter-linkages in centralized
and de-centralized forms of socio-spatial organization. The Agona ports were centralized
nodes within this organization. Within that network, the Agona sovereign was at the
head of a body of officials in a civil system of a society with nucleations (ports, a
political capital, etc.). The latter performed specialized functions of government, politics,
social organization, and economy (Kea 1982; also Sanjek 1994; Leeds 1994). While a
mid-17th century agent of the Guinea Company could recognize this social reality
without reducing it to the exotic, the same cannot be said for 21st century practitioners of
world history – although one recognizes the exceptions. As Trouillot has noted, world
history narratives and narratives of modernity have eclipsed particular African landscapes
and historical formations.

The Gold Coast region

Since at least the 11th century, and perhaps as early as the 9th, the Gold Coast
region has been a major producer and exporter of gold. (The modern nation-state of
Ghana ranks among the top ten gold producers in the world today.) At the time of the
first European expansion into West African waters – the Portuguese in the 15th century -
the region had a distinct geo-historical identity as an area of economic specialization,
namely gold production. Total Portuguese gold exports between 1471 and 1500
amounted to 17 tons, according to one author (Madisson 2000, p. 59; also Deffontaine
1993, chapter 1; Kea 1982, chapter 5). Archaeological evidence reveals that the region
was in commercial contact with other West African areas of trade and specialization via
“Islamicate” and “non-Islamicate” trading networks (DeCorse 2001; Stahl 2001; Stahl
1994; Wilks 1993, chapter 1; Wilks 1882a; Wilks 1982b; Kea 1982; Anquandah 1982;
Posnansky 1973; Posnansky 1972; Posnansky 1971). These areas were functional sites in a West African world-system, on the one hand, and African trans-continental exchange networks, on the other. The West African world-system was an urbanized space of scale economies and specialized production (Ogundiran 2005; Stahl 2004a; Stahl 2004b; Stahl 1994; Mauny 1967). The pre-14th century Gold Coast region was a periphery and a frontier space, specifically a gold commodity frontier. It exported to the Middle and Upper Niger Valleys, the Hausa Plains, and the Lake Chad basin gold, kola nuts, and ivory in exchange for slaves, manufactures goods, and raw materials such as copper (Stahl 1994; Wilks 1993, chapter 1; Posnansky 1976; Posnansky 1975; Posnansky 1973; Posnansky 1972; Posnansky 1971). The great density of old gold workings in the auriferous districts - pits, mine shafts, and open-cut trenches - is strong testimony to the intense nature of the region’s gold mining activities (Anquandah 1982). The economies of gold production facilitated the elaboration of interaction networks, the founding and growth of towns and cities, the expansion of relations of servitude, the expansion of agricultural and craft production, and the expansion of Muslim and non-Muslim trading diasporas (Stahl 1994; Wilks 1993, chapters 1 and 2; Wilks 1982a; Wilks 1982b; Posnansky 1976; Posnansky 1975; Posnansky 1973; Posnansky 1972; Posnansky 1971). The Gold Coast region was part of a trans-regional and trans-continental urban landscape. Historical change in the region, from periphery to core, must be seen as part of its longue durée and its continuous interactions with the West African world-system, a vast urbanized space of scale economies and specialized production (Ogundiran 2005; Stahl 2004a; Stahl 2004b; McIntosh 1994; Mauny 1967).
Apropos the region’s economy, the 17th century, in contrast to the 18th, was a time of the export gold trade and not the export slave trade. However, there was for much of the 17th century a significant import slave trade (Kea 1982 chapters 5 and 6). A basic difference between the 17th and 18th century export economies can be briefly stated. During the era of the gold trade, processes of wealth accumulation relied heavily on profits from caravan-based trade and exchange networks. During the trans-Atlantic slave trade era, processes of accumulation were tied to expansionist political-military projects and the extraction of tribute and other levies from conquered populations (Kea 1982, chapter 5). A regional urban hierarchy organized around the control of long-distance trade fell into irreversible decline and a regional hierarchy dependent on military conquests rose to replace it. A military revolution (namely, a change from shock to missile warfare and the adoption of mass conscription as a mode of labor mobilization) and large scale imperial state formation were fundamental to these historical developments. Networks of capital accumulation were embedded in and subordinated to networks of power. Thus, in the 17th century the region was dominated by a Muslim entrepot known as Begho/Nsoko, a commercial rather than a military enterprise. In the 18th the entire region was under the political dominion of Kumase, the capital of a conquering Asante Kingdom (Wilks 1989; Wilks 1982a; Wilks 1982b; also Stahls 2001; Stahl 1994; Anquandah 1982; Kea 1982, chapters 3-5). The transformation marked a (violent) shift from a Stadtwirtschaft, a city-centered economy, to a Territorialwirtschaft, a territorial economy, to borrow terminology from Fernand Braudel (Braudel 1984, pp. 294-96). Both economies were attached to a globalizing Atlantic world-economy but in quite different ways (Kea 1982; cf. Drayton 2002; Stahl 1994; Deffontaine 1993). Under
the political rule of commercially minded elite, the Akani trading organization flourished in the Stadtwirtschaft era. The succeeding era was a time of de-urbanization over a wide area and to a certain extent de-monetization of the countryside, or at least a declining use of gold in rural transactions. The distinction between “town” and “country” in the Territorialwirtschaft had two striking features: urban market-political centers, with their hinterlands of farms of indebted peasants and plantations worked by servile labor, on the one hand, and “deep rural” farming communities of free cultivators where indebtedness to urban merchants and moneylenders was relatively limited, on the other. Urban centers included a rural hinterland that was worked by two different agrarian labor forms – indebted peasant households and households of enslaved laborers. “Deep rural-ness” was further defined by the agrarian communities’ relative ideological disengagement and relative economic independence from the centers of commercial and political power (Mabogunje and Richards 1985). Nevertheless, these communities were affected by the region’s global connections through their mobilization for military campaigns, campaigns that produced captive bodies for the Atlantic slave trade (Kea 1982; also Stahl 1994; Deffontaine 1993; Anquandah 1982). The Akani trading organization collapsed under the political and social conditions of the Territorialwirtschaft.

In his three-volume study of the social and economic forces that shaped the modern world from the 15th century to the eighteenth, Fernand Braudel posits a three-level hierarchy as a defining feature of what he calls “world-economies.” With some modifications, his model is useful for an understanding of the 16th and 17th century Gold Coast region. At its base the region had an all-embracing sea of agricultural communities oriented toward subsistence and market production, household production, periodic rural
markets, and village barter (cf. Stahl 2001; Stahl 1994; Wilks 1993, chapter 2). At level two the region was a world of towns and trade, daily urban markets, fairs, craft villages and workshops engaged in mass production (e.g. pottery and tools), mining, gold and moneta cowrie currencies, merchant caravans, and a credit system. Institutionalized hierarchies, social differentiation and socio-economic specialization were indices of the regional mercantile economy. This space was the terrain of the Akani trading organization (Kea 1982; also Stahl 1994; Deffontaine 1993; Wilks 1993, chapter 1; Wilks 1982a; Wilks 1982b; Anquandah 1982). At the highest level was capitalism. Here there were monopolies and attempts by entrepreneurs/merchants to control complete networks or even entire world-economies). The chartered trading companies functioned at this level (Braudel 1984; also Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993; van Dantzig 1980). So too did the great Muslim trading diasporas which dominated the West Africa world-system and the inter-continental exchanges that were integral to the greater Islamic world. It was a space of caravanserai, trade routes, and world cities (e.g., Timbuktu, Kong, Jenne, Kano, Katsina, and Agades) (Wilks 1982a; Wilks 1982b; Mauny 1967).

A published Dutch source of 1601 provides an informative account of the Stadtwirtschaft of the Gold Coast coastal zone.

“The towns which lie towards the interior of the country [i.e., 5-15 miles from the coast] are richer in goods and gold than the [coastal] towns, and have more houses and are more populous than the seaside towns; they also have wealthier merchants who conduct more trade than those in the coastal towns whose inhabitants are the interpreters, boatmen, pilots, officials, fishermen, and slaves of the inhabitants of the interior towns…. The inland towns are extremely large compared to the
coastal towns…but I have learned from the Blacks that further inland still are larger towns containing multitudes of people (Pieter de Marees (1601) quoted in Kea 1982, p. 23.)

Archaeological surveys and excavations have confirmed this description (Stahl 1994; Ozanne 1963). Some of the biggest inland urban settlements, in the forest districts and in the savanna north of the forest, were built in a linear fashion along a single main road that measured from five miles (e.g., Ahwene Koko) to fifteen miles in length (e.g., Bono Manso). The urban centers were nodes in networks of capital/wealth accumulation and networks of political and symbolic power. Through their castle, forts, and factories, the chartered companies tapped into this regional system (Stahl 2004a; Kea 1982; Anquandah 1982; Ozanne 1963).

Archaeological fieldwork has also produced abundant evidence revealing multifaceted changes in the region from the 15th to the 17th century (DeCorse 2001a; DeCorse 1998; DeCorse 1992; Stahl 1994; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1971; Ozanne 1963). Thus, in the Accra area of the Gold Coast a relatively prosperous agrarian society was transformed by trade with Europe into one of the greatest gold-producing communities in the world, dealing in between one third and on half a ton of gold annually. One result was an extreme change in material culture, for example increasing craft specialization, especially in ceramics and centralized production as pottery became homogeneous over a large area. The pattern of settlement changed, from one of small and medium-sized villages, usually with an irregular layout to one of towns, from one half mile to seven miles long, and very orderly in the placing of house compounds, middens, and streets (Ozanne 1963; Kea 1982; also Stahl 1994; Anquandah 1982; Penfold 1971).
changing political economy developed different yet overlapping modes of spatialization, e.g., (1) expansion of the circuits of trading capital into new areas, as revealed in uniform patterns of material culture over a wide stretches of the region; (2) geographical specialization of production; from mining and pottery-making to agriculture and herding; (3) growth of fairs as consumer markets, particularly in the southern districts of the region. Furthermore, the growth of coastal towns and the founding of new ones were connected to the differentiation of social labor into different categories of dependents such as slaves, day laborers, and pawned debtors. Finally, the setting up of trading stations by local merchant-princes and European chartered companies had a profound effect on coastal settlement geography (Stahl 2004a; Stahl 1994; Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993; Kea 1982; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1976; Posnansky 1975; Ozanne 1963).

The most important commercial center in the whole region was the Bighu/Nsoko complex. Akani caravans were probably trading there in the 15th century, if not earlier. In its description of the city and its inhabitants a 1629 Dutch map has this to say: “There is no gold or trade [to the coast] from there but they have very fine goods, [for example] clothes woven like carpets which are worn amongst the Accanists [i.e., Akani]. [They] also have horses [and] live in fortifications but don’t have firearms” (Deffontaine 1993; Kea 1982). Located on the savanna-forest ecological divide and founded in the 11th century, the city was a thriving center by the 14th century because of its connections to the Middle Niger Valley and trans-Saharan trade routes (Stahl 1994; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1976; Posnansky 1973; Posnansky 1972; Posnansky 1971). Archaeological research indicates that the central core of the city occupied an area of about three miles
by five miles and consisted of several wards or quarters. This section housed Koranic schools, craft industries, a central mosque, merchants’ families, etc. According to investigating archaeologists, it had a resident population of 7,000-10,000. The population size of the outer wards is not known. On the outskirts of the city were numerous villages engaged in various craft activities such as cloth production, metalworking, pottery-making, ivory-carving, and leather-working. According to some estimates, the entire complex comprised an area of 20-30 square miles in the mid-17th century. From about the 1640s or 1650s Bighu/Nsoko began importing large quantities of merchandise from the Atlantic coast thanks to the multiplication of European trading stations and the commercial operations of the Akani trading organization (Stahl 1994; Wilks, 1993, chapter 1; Wilks 1982a; Wilks 1982b; Kea 1982; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1976; Posnansky 1973; Posnansky 1972; Posnansky 1971).

The attributes that marked the rural-urban distinction in the region were clearly visible in the time of the *Stadtwirtschaft*. Sociologist Anthony Leeds identifies in a useful fashion space-extensive activities (e.g., agriculture, herding, fishing, and mining) and space-intensive activities (e.g., commerce, craft industries, administration, education, and religion). The more the activities overlap, the greater is the density of aggregation of activities and hence the larger the scale of population nucleation. Urban settlement nucleation established a centralization of resources – economic, political, religious, and symbolic – and a system of resource allocation (Leeds 1994). In the southern Gold Coast rural farming communities were tied to the towns because they were obliged to pay their taxes in gold and gold could only be obtained through the sale of agricultural produce in the towns and cities (Kea 1982). The 17th century Akani trading organization dominated
the distribution of resources of various kinds from one population nucleation to another, from the ports to the daily urban markets and fairs in the forested interior and thence to Begho/Nsoko and other great market centers and their caravanserai (Bono Manso, Bui, Old Bima, Daboya, Buipe, and Yendi Dabari among others) north of the forest. Throughout the region, in town and country alike, gold was the principal medium of exchange in the b17th century. Akani commercial activity linked the principal centers of space-intensive activities to each other and to the space-extensive mining, fishing, and salt-making centers. It thus contributed not only to the spatial integration of these centers but also to the regionalization of a distinctive urban elite culture, elements of which were appropriated by rural communities (Stahl 1994; Kea 1982; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1973; Posnansky 1971; Bravmann and Mathewson 1970).

**The trading stations**

The chartered companies established competing trading stations in small and large coastal towns during the course of the 17th century. Permission to trade and to build trading stations was granted by the ruling dynasties and dominant families of the interior or sub-coastal towns. Treaties defined the rights and obligations that existed between the contracting parties (Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993; Nováky 1990; Jones 1985; Jones 1983; Kea 1982; van Dantzig 1980; van Dantzig 1978; Porter 1968). With an ever expanding maritime traffic, Atlantic commerce added increasingly to the repertoire of everyday material life in the coastal and sub-coastal towns (DeCorse 2001a; Stahl 1994; Anquandah 1982; Kea 1982; Ozanne 1963). Expanding economies of trade provided a dynamic that strengthened the pre-existing disposition of coastal towns to seek better terms for their dependence on inland political capitals or even to replace them as political
and administrative centers. An aspiring class of port-based merchant-princes was the main social dynamic behind these political maneuvers. The trading companies were not averse to supporting them with merchandise, weapons, and credit (DeCorse 2001a; Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993; Kea 1982; van Dantzig 1978).

The companies’ commercial strategy was based on the construction of castles, forts, and factories in the different coastal towns. Occasionally, a factory was set up in a sub-coastal town and more rarely in the interior up to 30-40 miles from the coast (van Dantzig 1980; also Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993). The strategy proved to be enormously lucrative to both company and private traders. Its success depended on African and European employees of the companies working together. The personnel of a trading station, whether it was a castle of a trading lodge or factory, consisted of three categories of employees: (1) the company’s servants (factors, writers, soldiers, craftsmen, gold-takers, brokers, envoys and interpreters, etc.) included Europeans, Africans, and Euro-Africans or Afro-Europeans, that is, sons of European fathers and African mothers; (2) the company’s “ caboceers,” among whom were political notables from the coastal and sub-coastal towns, provided services of different kinds (economic, political, military, and diplomatic); (3) the company’s slaves (boatmen, artisans, laborers, cooks, shepherds, gardeners, quarrymen, etc.) were either purchased at local markets (e.g., Great Accra or Winneba) or at ports on the Slave Coast (e.g., Little Ardra, Jakin, Great Popo, or Sav-Huedah) or were debtors who had been condemned to servitude in the trading establishments until the debt was paid off. In the larger trading stations, such as the Dutch castle in Elmina, the personnel could number well over 200 (Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993; Nováky 1990; Kea 1982; van Dantzig 1978). In 1663 the English
factory at Cape Coast, which was located in the Afutu polity, had nearly 100 personnel. The factory was originally occupied by the Swedish Company and had been built by the royal treasurer of Afutu. It was described as the “head factory and residence of the company’s chief agent for the whole of Africa.” Under the chief agent’s authority in 1663 were two merchants, a gold-taker, a warehouse-keeper, a chief accountant, a second accountant, and three younger factors; a garrison of 50 English soldiers and 30 black slaves, a captain, and four sergeants or corporals (Sainsbury 1880). The European personnel were usually multi-lingual. They would have had some knowledge of Portuguese Creole, the commercial lingua franca in 17th century western Africa, and differing degrees of fluency in other languages, both European and local. The chief factors of the Danish companies, for example, corresponded in Dutch, German, French, and English (Kea 1982; Reindorf 1980). Due to malaria, dysentery, yellow fever, and other tropical illnesses, mortality rates among the Europeans were high. But if they lived long enough they invariably “married” local women and raised families, usually in their own residences in the ports or they had a mistress/girlfriend with whom they had children. All of the trading stations paid monthly rents to local “ground landlords” and were obliged to pay various taxes (such as customs duties and war taxes) to rulers and various officials in the coastal and sub-coastal towns. In addition they presented gifts of varying value - a form of rent - to local elites on an almost continuous basis, e.g., on the occasion of local (and European) holidays, marriages, funerals, birthdays, succession to political offices, and so on (Law 2001; Deffontaine 1993; Jones 1985; Jones 1983; Kea 1982; van Dantzig 1978; also DeCorse 2001a; Chouin 1998).
Apart from the aforementioned personnel many trading stations included on their payroll resident captains of the Akani merchant-broker community as well as the captains’ assistants or deputies. An account from 1670 describes the relationship between Akani captains and the trading stations.

“In the land of Fetu [i.e., Afutu or Efutu] the Battafuen [modern: batafo: long-distance, wholesale traders], or merchants, from the Kingdom of Accania [i.e., Asen], buy most of the merchandise from the trading Christians. Thus, each nation which trades with the Blacks intentionally strives to have at hand an eminent Accanisten (who is renowned and esteemed in Accania). Such an Accanist [Akani] lives therefore in the town nearest the Christians and receives from the latter not only a fixed monthly allowance but also such goods as says, iron bars, copper, tin, etc., and he is also given cheaper wares. He is called a captain, an honorable title among the Accani traders. So when merchants come [to the coast] from Accania in order trade with the Whites they report to this captain with a request: as they are obliged to lay out a certain sum of gold for merchandise, he should go in their place since he can strike a good bargain and gain the best price” (Müller quoted in Kea 1982, chapter 7; also Deffontaine 1993).

The trading stations and the authorities of the ports where the stations were located were expected to provide a secure trading environment for the captaincies. Both recognized the captaincy as a corporate entity with legal and economic rights and privileges. However, the Akani merchant-brokers did not enjoy monopoly rights over a port’s trade (Kea 1982, chapters 6 and 7; also Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993). Rulers of coastal
polities exempted captaincies from taxation (customs, tolls, war tax, etc.) although the
captaincies were expected to make periodic “donations” to the rulers. However, Akani
caravan-merchants were subject to various levies. The sources do not say whether or not
the captains had to pay taxes to their political superiors in Acanij/Asen. Presumably, they
did.

Given the intense competition among the companies, no effort or expense was
spared by the chief factors or commandants to retain (or obtain) the loyalty of a captain,
who if offered more substantial payments (e.g., a monthly allowance, commissions,
various gifts and fees, etc.) than a rival company’s agents, might move his entire
captaincy to another port. An interesting and atypical case is that of a well known and
particularly wealthy Akani captain named Jan Clasen Cutterique of Cape Coast who was
one of the biggest and most influential merchants on the entire Gold Coast. He was one
of the signatories (designated as “Captain of the Accanies”) of the commercial treaty
concluded between the Afulu Kingdom and the English East Indies Company in January
1660. Some idea of Cutterique’s wealth can be gleaned from large and well furnished
house in Cape Coast and his payment of a fine of nearly 1,000 ounces of gold to Aduaffo,
the ruler of Afulu, in 1667 after he had killed a man in a duel. In the 1660s and 1670s
Cutterique received monthly allowances and other payments - collectively a form of rent
- from both the English factors of Cape Coast and the Danish factors of the nearby port of
Amanfro. He served two different chartered companies at the same time. His position
was certainly unique for there is no evidence that any other captain was ever employed
by more than one company at a time. He also traded with the Dutch at Elmina and
aboard the interloper ships that anchored in the Cape Coast Road. For Cutterique to
freely trade with the Dutch at Elmina and with interloper ships while receiving “rent” from two chartered companies was also highly unusual, even for someone of his status (Kea 1982, chapter 7).

As gold was the principal export, its acquisition was at the heart of the companies’ commercial interests. A late 17th century French estimated that total gold exports from the Gold Coast amounted to 10,000 to 12,000 marks (80,000-96,000 ounces). The Dutch company exported 5,000 marks, the English company, 3,000, the interlopers, three-fourths of whom were Dutch, 1,500 marks, and the Danish, Portuguese, Brandenburgers, and French exported altogether 700 to 800 marks. Earlier in the century, annual gold purchases totaled 14,000 to 15,000 marks (112,000-120,000 ounces) (“Mémoire ou Relation du Sr. Du Casse,” 1687-1688, pp. 7-14; see also Deffontaine 1993; Kea 1982). Through most of the century the Akani captaincies sold yearly two-thirds of the gold that was exported by the companies and no doubt they sold most of the gold purchased by interloper ships. Other exports included ivory, dyewood, gum, pepper, lime juice, hides, wax, and civet (Law 2001; DeCorse 2001a; Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993; Jones 1985; Jones 1983; Kea 1982; van Dantzig 1978). Compared to the 18th century, relatively few slaves were sold into Atlantic slavery in the 17th century. It was not until the 1680s that the annual export of enslaved persons began to increase substantially. Earlier, total annual slave exports from Gold Coast ports were fewer than a thousand a year (Law 2001; Deffontaine 1993; van Dantzig 1978; also “Mémoire ou Relation du Sr. Du Casse,” 1687-1688, p. 7). It should be note, however, that an unknown number of slaves who were sold to the Dutch at Elmina and the Danes at
Amanfro were purchased by Gold Coast merchants at Slave Coast ports (Kea 1982, chapter 6).

With respect to imports, the companies supplied their commercial establishments with merchandise brought from Europe, Asia particularly India, and the Americas. The Dutch West Indies Company, for example, “usually had 150 to 200 sorts of articles in stock. In exceptional cases it could offer African traders as many as 350 different commodities (den Heijer 2003a; den Heijer 2003b; see also DeCorse 2001a; Chouin 1998; Deffontaine 1993; Nováky 1990; Kea 1982, chapters 6 and 7; Anquandah 1982). The Akani captaincies purchased the bulk of the imported merchandise (Deffontaine 1993; Kea 1982, chapter 7).

The trading stations were heavily involved in the coasting trade as middlemen. Each station had its own small fleet of vessels devoted to this commerce. On occasion, the factors rented boats from merchant-princes or well-to-do traders in order to engage in this traffic. The coasting trade was conducted at various ports along the western African seaboard from Upper Guinea (Senegambia/Sierra Leone) to the Kingdom of Kongo (modern northern Angola). The Gold Coast was an especially important focal point in because of the range and volume of cabotage goods imported into the region’s ports, especially West African and Central African textiles. Merchant-princes from such ports as Shama, Elmina, Cape Coast, Kormantse, and Accra were active in this trade. Some of them had their own agents living and trading in various towns, for example on the eastern Gold and western Slave Coasts (Kea 1982, chapter 5). They competed rather successfully with the European factors primarily because they tended to trade with interloper ships instead of company ships and in contrast to the factors their boats
provided transport services for paying passengers who desired to travel to one or another port. They also traded in agricultural produce, craft goods and salt were, in addition, the main transporters of cattle between the Slave Coast, where livestock were reared on a large scale for distant markets, and the Gold Coast where the demand for livestock was constant and huge (Kea 1982, chapters 5 and 6; also Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1971). The Akani captaincies had no boats (although there were exceptions). They tended to rely on the trading stations or port-based merchant-princes or merchant-brokers from whom they would rent the use of boats and crews. In their coasting trade operations the merchant-princes dealt in merchandise imported from Europe, agricultural produce, salt, smoked and salted fish, livestock, dogs, a wide variety of luxury and plain cloths, gold (dust, bars, and artifacts), copper, mats, weaponry, ivory and ivory artifacts and jewelry, redwood, luxury beads, pottery, and so on (Kea 1982, chapters 6 and 7).

Slaves were an especially important import into the Gold Coast, at least until the early 18th century. In the 15th and 16th centuries the Portuguese sold slaves at Gold Coast ports. A report from 1479 mentions two Portuguese caravels that sold 400 slaves at the ports of Shama and Elmina and between 1475 and 1540 Portuguese factors sold more than 12,000 slaves to various merchant groups from the interior, including Akani (“Hacanys”) and Muslim (“Mandinguas”) traders. Most of these were sold at Elmina and after 1540 slave imports declined to about 100 a year (Chouin 1993; Kea 1982, chapter 5; Ryder 1965). Slave imports remained significant for a good part of the 17th century. In the early part of the century, for example, English ships were contracted to convey slaves from São Tomé to Elmina where they were sold. These slaves probably originated in the Bight of Benin and the Kingdom of Kongo. In 1621 a Portuguese vessel with 150 slaves
was en route to Elmina, when it was seized by English pirates and in October 1656, to give final example, the Dutch at Elmina agreed to sell 104 slaves purchased in the Bight of Benin and along the Angola coast to Gold Coast merchants. In the 16th and 17th centuries, merchants from eastern Gold Coast ports were active in the slave trade, importing the slaves from the Grain (or Malaguetta), Kwakwa (or Ivory) and Slave Coasts (Kea 1982 chapter 5). Although seldom acknowledged in the historical scholarship, there were several 17th century coastal and sub-coastal towns with slave markets, for example Winneba, the Agona port where the Guinea Company set up its first factory on the Gold Coast. An estimated fifteen to twenty slaves were sold to local traders monthly at the Winneba market in the mid-17th century. The political capital and commercial center known as Great Accra was one of the principal markets in the southern Gold Coast. There, an estimated 300 slaves were sold annually to local buyers in the 1650s and 1660s (Kea 1982, chapter 5). European factors and merchant-princes and other local traders were heavily involved in this trade. The demand for enslaved bodies came from the Akani merchant-brokers, who in the 1680s were paying a little less than two ounces gold for adult male.

The coasting trade supplied the European factories, forts, and castles with a labor force. The company or castle slaves, as the laborers were called, were employed as laborers, boatmen, craftsmen, gardeners, cooks, soldiers, etc. They were indispensable in the maintenance of the trading establishments; indeed, without them there would have been no company trading stations. Even with the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, some inland Gold Coast districts were still importing slaves throughout the first half of the 18th century (Wilks 1982a; Wilks 1982b; Kea 1982, chapters 6 and 7). The
intensification of trade between Gold Coast and Slave Coast ports around the middle of the century, particularly in slaves and textiles, can be partly attributed to the increased activity of the coastal-based Akani captaincies and their close association with local merchant-princes (Kea 1982, chapters 6 and 7).

The Akani trading organization

A 1629 Dutch map shows the location of the political homeland of the Akani merchants. Modern calculations situate it 60 to 80 miles from the Atlantic coast. It is variously referred to in 17th century documents - Acanij, Accania, Arcania, and so on. It is known to modern historians of Ghana as Asen. The map has a succinct reference to “Acanij - Here are the most principal merchants who trade with us.” Later 17th century sources consistently refer to Acanij as a place with important “ancient markets” and as the source of the purest gold that was sold at the Gold Coast ports (Kea 1982, chapter 7). Acanij was not a military power nor did it engage in wars of expansion. Yet it was able to produce all the protection - diplomatic, political, and military - required by the self-expansion of its merchant capital in the region. Until the late 17th century, there were no great territorial state formations in the region from which it could “buy” protection.

“Akani” (“Acanij,” “Akanisten,” etc.) can be defined as an urban, cultural-political identity and not an ethnic or religious one. The term means “first” or “foremost,” and apparently signifies an achieved elite (or noble) status. The ranks of the Akani were, in theory, open to anyone of talent and ambition. The Akani were known throughout the coastal zone as abirempon (singular: obirempon), rich and great (powerful) men. Three different groups of abirempon were important in the Akani trading organization: (1) merchant-investors, who formed a dominant political class; (2)
caravan-merchants, who were responsible for commodity distribution, and (3) merchant-brokers who were organized in captaincies, corporate communities that were guild-like in their organization; they were responsible for imports and exports.

The Akani trading organization was centrally and politically controlled by a state council. For example, the head of every coastal captaincy was appointed by the state council of office-holders. These officials were the trading system’s merchant-investors. Not much is known about the functions of the state council and its membership. There is some information on the caravan-merchants but not enough to answer all questions. The caravan-merchants were responsible for moving commodities from the ports to the principal Akani markets which were the main centers of distribution to other parts of the region. From these markets, caravans moved into the grasslands north of the forest to more than a dozen Muslim and non-Muslim trading centers (Stahl 2001; Wilks 1993; Wilks 1982a; Wilks 1982b; Kea 1982; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1973; Posnansky 1971; Bravmann and Mathewson 1970). The caravan-merchants were possibly active even further north. The documentary evidence is thin but a mid-17th century report suggestive. The report, which dates from about 1649, expounds on the “trade of Afríca” in the 1630s from a Gold Coast-based perspective.: “The Blackmoores bring their gold from Tombatu [Timbuktu] and Gago [Gao], to the south of Guinnia [Guinea], that is to Castel de Mina, where the Portugals resided, and to Moure where the Dutch have a factory, and to Cormantine frequented by the English” (Anonymous ca. 1649). The “Blackmoores” were presumably Akani caravan-merchants and not Muslim Wangara (or Juula), who dominated much of the interior trade of West Africa. Located in the Middle Niger Valley, Timbuktu and Gao imported gold from the south, that is the Gold Coast
(and the Upper Niger and Senegal Valleys). Akani caravans would have carried gold to these places to sell and not the reverse and they would, as the report relates, carried gold to the coastal factories and castles. If (non-Muslim) Akani caravans ventured as far as north as Timbuktu and Gao, caravan-merchants would have found it necessary for purposes of trade to conclude contracted partnerships with their Muslim counterparts. But this is an issue that requires further research. A starting point would be oral histories relating to former centers of commercial and political importance. One set of oral histories refers to trade oriented elites from Bono Manso (60-65 miles east of Begho/Nsoko), traveling to Timbuktu and/or Jenne and across the Sahara (to North Africa) in the 14th century in order to gain knowledge of the gold trade (i.e., markets, weights, available trade goods, routes, etc.). Archeological fieldwork on the ruined Bono Manso site supports this tradition to some extent. In 13th century strata archaeologists have found gold and silver weights based on the Islamic standards of Jenne and Timbuktu, evidence of craft specialization (textiles, ivory carving, copper and copper alloy production, and so on (Stahl 1994; Anquandah 1982; Posnansky 1976; Posnansky 1975). Whether Akani caravan-merchants traded in the cities of Hausaland (e.g., Katsina and Kano) and in the Lake Chad basin (e.g., Birni Ngazargamu) is also an open question, which only future research can resolve. In my opinion, the likelihood is that they were conducting trade to these cities in the 17th century. In the north-eastern parts of the Gold Coast region, on the routes to Hausaland and the Lake Chad basin, were important trading and political centers, great caravanserai, major iron ore mining and smelting sites, and numerous specialized craft villages. This area was a big and growing market for
many of the commodities that the Akani sold - gold, kola nuts, craft goods, and ivory (Stahl 1994; Anquandah 1982).

The captaincy, the third sector in the Akani trading organization, was a corporate community. There is more information about the captaincy institution, especially the captaincies on the coast. It can be usefully described as a merchants’ guild, comparable to other occupational guilds such as the guild of goldsmiths and the military guild, which was, in effect, a town militia (e.g., in the ports). Hardly anything is known about inland captaincies, although captaincies that were established in Muslim towns might have been referred to in Arabic language sources (chronicles, legal cases, *fatwas*, commercial contracts, etc.). This is another area for future research.

The captaincies functioned as social networks that generated social capital by sustaining shared norms and values, transmitting information, punishing malefactors, and successfully undertaking and organizing collective action when necessary. To what extent the social capital of the captaincy facilitated commercial growth has yet to be determined. But since by the 1650s the captaincy institution was established throughout the greater part of the region, one cannot underestimate its economic and social impact in those places where it functioned.

As a guild head, a captain can be characterized as a master merchant–broker who supervised senior and junior merchant-brokers and apprentice merchant-brokers. He had an assistant who is always designated “lieutenant” in the companies’ records. The apprentices included the sons and younger brothers of the captain and the merchant-brokers. The captains functioned as chief merchant-brokers, spokesmen, and representatives of their community. All named captains were men. As far as is known no
woman ever headed a captaincy. However, in the middle of the century there are a few Dutch Company references to Akani women who merchant-brokers in ports where the Dutch had trading posts. The women are described as the widows, wives, and sisters of captains and/or senior merchant-brokers. There are no references to women merchant-brokers among captaincies that traded at Danish and English forts and factories (Kea 1982, chapter 7). It would be no exaggeration to say that the captaincy institution was so successful that it catapulted Akani to regional commercial leadership in the 16th and 17th centuries (Kea 1982, chapter 7).

Captaincies were to be found at inland gold producing sites and at the various markets where gold was exchanged. Information about these captaincies is sparse but it is likely that they functioned very much like the coastal captaincies about which there is a substantial body of information. The coastal captaincies operated a near monopoly of the 17th century gold export trade. In 1601 there was, as far as is known, only one Akani captaincy on the coast, at the port of Elmina. At the time the port was the site of the principal Portuguese trading establishment (São Jorge da Mina) in West Africa. The Dutch seized control of it in 1637. The Elmina captaincy was probably established in the first half of the 16th century and it continued to exist until the first decade of the 18th. In the 16th century the captaincies would have been located in the sub-coastal towns, five to fifteen miles from the littoral. In the 1610s there are specific references to captaincies in four (unnamed) sub-coastal towns. The latter probably included Asebu, Afutu, and Great Komenda, all of which were political capitals with important markets. At this time, there were three known coastal captaincies; whether other existed is unclear. By the 1660s the sub-coastal towns no longer had resident captaincies because the captaincies were all
based in the principal ports, although there were captaincies in southern forest towns, some 5 to 20 miles north of the sub-coastal towns.

Wherever the captaincies were established, local rulers and authorities in the ports and sub-coastal towns welcomed them, principally because of the wealth they could bring and the political and diplomatic support they could provide. Hence, the captains and their deputies regularly received gifts in gold artifacts, merchandise, livestock, salt, and produce from rulers who competed with each other for Akani trade and captaincies. The move to the coast reflected the growing wealth and power of the ports, the continued growth of the Atlantic trade, and the proliferation of local and European commercial establishments. In the 1620s and 1630s there is evidence that captaincies were being set up in several ports but there is no precise information about their names. While only a few ports had European commercial stations from the 1610s to the 1640s, they are likely to have had trading posts set up by local traders and brokers. There is no unambiguous information about the presence or absence of Akani captaincies at these places. By 1650, however, there were six coastal captaincies and by the 1660s there were between nine and fifteen. Captaincies were put in place in the 1640s and 1650s at places where the English and Swedish trading companies were operating. From the 1670s to 1700 there were definitely ten permanent coastal captaincies and another five to ten temporary ones, that is, captaincies that were in place for only one to five years (Kea 1982, chapter 7).

The number of merchant-brokers attached to a captaincy ranged from fewer than ten at a small port to more than fifty at a large one. The members of a captaincy either lived in their own quarter in a town or in a separate community on the outskirts of a town. Merchant-brokers (and their families) were mobile. It was not unusual for a merchant–
broker to be assigned to several different ports over a period of several years. The
captaincies and their captaincies were highly regarded not only because of their dominant
role in trade but also because they were social exemplars of what it meant to be wealthy.
On public and festive occasions the captains and their subordinates displayed in the
words of a Danish chaplain “their splendor and magnificence.” Their lifestyle of
conspicuous consumption was a standard many notables in the coastal and sub-coastal
towns sought to emulate. The dissemination of the captaincy lifestyle had a big impact
on the material culture and the cultural life of the coastal and sub-coastal towns (Kea
1982, chapters 7 and 8).

The merchant-brokers conducted their trade aboard company ships and at the
castles, forts, and factories. The quantities and kinds of merchandise purchased were
largely determined by commercial and political conditions in the interior and the security
of the trade routes. A wide range of goods were bought: cloths of different kinds, iron
and lead bars, brass- and copperware, tobacco pipes, firearms, gunpowder, spirits, tallow,
beads, pewter ware, knives, and a great many other items. When there were military
conflicts or political disputes in the interior, the captaincies suspended their trade at the
trading stations until peace was restored. At times, the merchant-brokers’ purchases were
restricted to a limited range of merchandise because of inland market demands or because
of slow sales at inland markets. Thus, In November 1645 the Elmina captaincy was
interested only in iron bars, neptunes (i.e., large brass basins) and two kinds of cloth. On
other occasions, the merchant-brokers would be interested in only one commodity, e.g.,
gunpowder, sheets, or neptunes. At other times, they would buy up an entire ship’s
cargo: lead bars, iron bars, carbines, cloths (including Guinea cloths, says, paper brawls,
sheets, coarse and fine sletias, perpetuanas, tapseals, narrow tapseals, narrow nicanes, etc.), rum, and pewter of all sorts. The captaincies also conducted a big trade in salt and smoked fish. They were a source of credit and had a favorable reputation as moneylenders. Not only coastal elites but also European factors borrowed gold from the captains and their assistants. A Danish Company accounts book (covering the years 1667-1674) furnishes plenty of details about such transactions (Kea 1982, chapter 7).

The Elmina captaincy was one of the most important on the coast and is well documented. A few examples will provide an idea of the kind of information that can be found in the Dutch Company’s day books. In October 1645 a new captain was appointed to head the captaincy at Elmina, the biggest town on the Gold Coast (resident population: 10-15,000) and the Dutch Company’s chief commercial base in West Africa. A daybook register from St. George Castle describes the arrival of the captain.

“A servant of the king of Fetuij [Afutu] arrived saying that the expected Accanist [Akani], known to us as Speck and to the Blacks as Quauw [Kwawu], will be here tomorrow or the day after with many Accanists from Futuij and a great number from Mouree. He is coming here to be captain over the Accanists….”

The next day Kwawu arrived with 100 of his own servants and 100 Akani merchant-brokers who were based in the sub-coastal town of Afutu and the port of Moure. On the morning of November 2nd the new captain met with Dutch officials in the Castle.

“This morning, after the gate was raised, appeared the newly arrived captain, Quau, together…the captain of the Accanists at Moure, besides other merchants. Quau informed us that he had been appointed by the caboseros [principal men] of Accanij. Whereupon we replied that neither side should suffer any problems but
each should do its duty and that we shall treat him like all the former captains were treated” (Kea 1982, chapter 7)

Kwawu assumed authority over a captaincy with more than 30 merchant-brokers and perhaps as many as 50. His monthly allowance from the Dutch Company was one *benda*, or two 2 ounces gold. It was paid in gold and merchandise and sometimes in livestock (mainly cattle). His assistant received a monthly allowance of one ounce gold in addition to “customary presentations.” Kwawu received customs duties on each Dutch ship that traded at Elmina, apparently at the rate of two ounces gold per ship. He regularly received gifts of different kinds, usually luxury items (including cloths, beads, and weapons) and various payments in merchandise, gold, and livestock. The captain and all of the other merchant-brokers received fixed commissions on all commercial transactions. The relationship was reciprocal as the captain presented the Dutch factors with produce, livestock, and gold ornaments and jewelry. As a corporate body, the Elmina captaincy, which had its own quarter in the port ("Abcou") received regular gifts from the Dutch factors (Kea 1982, chapter 7).

In June 1645 a Dutch report from Elmina Castle noted that the general practice of the Akani merchant-brokers was to buy a great quantity of imported merchandise at low prices and to sell them for gold at very high prices. One of Kwawu’s very important duties was to come to a mutual agreement with the Dutch factors on the prices of the trade goods. It was a practice of the factors to draw up at regular intervals a *markt-brief* or *prijscourant*, or a price list of all the goods to be sold at the Dutch Company’s establishments. The goods included not only merchandise brought from Europe but also commodities purchased from the coasting trade. After the *markt-brief* was made up, it...
was presented to the captain and the senior merchant-brokers. Discussions concerning
the price list could last for several days and sometimes for weeks. Failure to agree on
price adjustments could provoke the captain to suspend all commercial transactions at the
Dutch Castle and possibly all other Dutch trading stations and to direct the trade to the
stations of other European companies (Kea 1982, chapter 7).

Elmina was not Kwawu’s first appointment as captain. His earlier captaincy or
captaincies are not known but it is likely that in the 1630s he resided in one of the sub-
coastal towns. He served as the Elmina captain until 1652 at which time he was
appointed by the Akani state council to head the Cape Coast captaincy. He held this post
for three years at which time his superiors abruptly removed him from office. The
documents do not explain why he was replaced (Kea 1982, chapter 7). It is worth noting
that Cape Coast, like Elmina, was a major West African port. A 1663 Guinea Company
report described it as the “head factory” and residence of the Company’s chief agent for
the whole of Africa. The Cape Coast captaincy was understand the circumstances a
prestigious one and as its captain Kwawu enjoyed much influence among all of the
coastal Akani captaincies. After 1655 there are no further references to him in the
companies’ records. It is likely he was appointed to an inland captaincy and never again
served on the coast (Kea 1982, chapter 7).

As captain, Kwawu’s training and skills had to be considerable for his duties were
manifold. He had to know Portuguese Creole, the commercial lingua franca of 17th
century western Africa, as well as local languages (e.g., Fante, Guan, and possible Gã).
He had to have knowledge of gold weights and measures, both European and local. The
local gold weights were based on the Islamic gold and silver weight standards of
Timbuktu and Jenne and some of these weights derived from weights used in the ancient Roman Empire (Garrard 1980). He had to know what goods were available at the trading stations and at what prices, when ships and inland caravans would arrive. He also had to know what goods were in demand in the inland markets and at what prices and he had to know about the military and political situation in the interior of the region since the security of the caravans depended on a peaceful and stable environment. Kwawu would have “hosted” all Akani caravans arriving in Elmina. He adjudicated all disputes that affected his captaincy, especially in cases concerning credit and debt. He ensured that individual members of the captaincy did not deviate from the group norms established to promote their collective interests, for example, by trading gold below a fixed value. He served as a mediator in disputes between different captaincies, between European trading stations, the Dutch and English, for example, and between European trading stations and local rulers. At times, he settled disputes and conflicts between one coastal town and another or between a sub-coastal town and its dependent ports. He concluded commercial agreements with local rulers and the European factors, thereby ensuring rights and privileges for himself and his captaincy. These agreements covered a range of subjects, such as tolls, custom duties, commissions, preferential access to local markets and trading stations, security of merchant-brokers’ property, liabilities, and so on. The captain could forbid members of his captaincy from trading with a European fort or factory and he could prohibit Akani caravans from traveling to a particular port or a sub-coastal political capital to trade. He was responsible for warehousing goods purchased from ships and the port’s trading establishment and organizing the caravans that
transported the goods from the port to towns and markets in the interior (Kea 1982, chapter 7).

One captain who enjoyed a long and distinguished career on the coast was a man named Korankyi. In the 1630s and 1640s he was captain of the Akani merchant-brokers at Mankessim, a large sub-coastal political capital, and, at the same time he headed the captaincy at the port of Kormantse. In 1655 he was appointed to the captaincy of Cape Coast, succeeding Kwawu. He remained in charge of this captaincy until late 1658 or early 1659, at which time he became the captain of the merchant-brokers at Elmina. His successor at Cape Coast was the wealthy Jan Clasen Cutterique who remained captain there until 1696. For the period between 1632 and 1704 the trading company records refer to more than twenty captains and deputy captains and more than fifty senior and junior merchant-brokers. These persons represent only a small percentage of the Akani merchant-brokers who resided in the ports and sub-coastal towns in the 17th century. Nonetheless, they offer some idea of the organizational scale of Akani trading operations during the period under review (Kea 1982, Chapter 7).

My account of the Akani trading organization omits important topics. I have in mind topics like the following: the organization of caravans, trade goods, the captaincies’ social structure, the credit system, the system of gold and silver weights, the principal, price structures, trade routes, daily life in the coastal captaincies, family and kin networks within the captaincy system, and patron-client relations, to mention a few. A major source which requires a detailed analysis of its own is an accounts book of the Danish African Company (*Regnskab fort på Guineakysten af det dansk-africanske Kompagnis direktør*). It was referred to above. The transactions cover the years 1667 to 1674 and
include the accounts of several Akani merchant-brokers. The details are fascinating and throw light on a considerable range of commercial transactions – on the Gold and Slave Coasts and particular trading/financial centers in western and northern Europe (Kea 1982, chapter 7). The document is written in Dutch and has never been published or translated into English. A future publication is not immediate.

**The bullion trade**

The gold economy of the Gold Coast had its role in the global flows of bullion. In his magisterial study of 17th century Indian Ocean commerce R.J. Barendse makes an interesting comment in his conclusion. “The major product traded within Eurasia,” he writes, “was American silver and African gold, mined and/or traded by Europeans (Barendse 2002, p. 491). Barendse’s “African gold” refers to gold from southeast Africa, northeast Africa, and West Africa. Barendse’s point is that American silver and African gold were fundamental in the early modern global economy. The Atlantic economy and the Indian Ocean economy were tied together through global flows of bullion (Barendses 2002).

Reports from Dutch factors in the middle of the century indicate that the Akani captaincies sold two-thirds of the gold purchased by the European trading stations (Kea 1982, chapters 6 and 7). What happened to the gold? Thomas Crisp, a founder and factor of at least two short-lived English companies and the Guinea Company, claimed to have exported half a million pounds sterling from the Gold Coast between 1636 and 1644, or between three and four tons of gold (Porter 1968). Most of this gold would have been brought to the coast by Akani caravan-merchants.
From the 1640s to the 1660s the commercial strategy of the English East India Company was to acquire “rich Guinea gold” and ivory at the Gold Coast and to sell them in India. The Company’s court of minutes contains numerous references to the Gold Coast-India trade. First enunciated in the late 1649s, the strategy was to join the trade of Guinea, that is, the Gold Coast, to the trade in India because gold was “so much in demand in the East.” Another report relates that “it is agreed that the trade of Guinea for gold and teeth [ivory] shall be united with the East India trade in one body and regulation by the authority of the state.” The East India Company had to contend with the rival Guinea Company but in 1657 the East India Company took over the Guinea Company’s Gold Coast trade. In 1660 Officers of the East India Company sent a petition to the Duke of York with the following declaration:

“The trade they enjoy on the Gold Coast serves their East India trade by supplying it with gold, which is carried thence direct to India…. As the Gold Coast trade cannot be made advantageous without the East India trade and the latter needs the supply of gold, it would be of service to all concerned if the two trades were united”

In 1669 the East India Company signed a warrant “to permit Edward Blackweell to export £40,000 to £50,000 of Guinea gold, custom free, to improve the trade in the East Indies” (Sainsbury 1912; Sainsbury 1913; Sainsbury 1916, Sainsbury 1922; Sainsbury 1925; Sainsbury 1927; Sainsbury 1929; also Barendse 2002). Between 1658 and 1663 seventeen of East India ships transported a total of 43,736 ounces gold from the Gold Coast to India or between a quarter and a half a ton. This amounted to an annual average of 7,289 ounces (Griffith 1972). Once again, most of this gold would have passed
through the hands of the Akani captains. Between 1600 and 1700 811 ships sailed from England to Asia and exports of silver and gold amounted to 1,300 tons (Madisson 2001, pp. 63, 65)

According to one of its officials, the Dutch West Indies Company purchased 40,400 marks gold between 1623 and 1636, and, according to another report, between 1635 and 1674 57,532 marks gold (over half a million ounces) was bought by the company (den Heijer 2003b). In 1661 the Company exported a total of somewhat more than 1758 marks gold (14,064 ounces), in 1662, slightly more than 2039 marks (16,012 ounces), and in 1673, a little over 902 marks (7,206 ounces). From 1668 to 1676 the Dutch Company exported a total of 25,000 ounces (or 3,125 mark) gold, or 3, 125 ounces a year (Anonymous 1652-74). From 1674 to 1696 the new West Indies Company exported an annual average of 1,700 marks of gold, or 13,600 ounces. An unspecified portion of this gold was sold to the Dutch East Indies Company, which shipped it to Asia. Between 1600 and 1700 1,770 ships sailed from The Netherlands to Asia and after the West Indies Company establishment itself on the Gold Coast in the 1720s many of these ships would have carried West African gold. Of all the Company’s exports from Africa gold accounted for approximately 80 percent of the total value (den Heijer 2003b; Maddison 2001, pp. 63, 65).

The Danish companies exported much less gold than the Dutch and English companies but they also provide interesting details about the trade. In January 1674 an inventory was taken of the gold in stock in the African Company’s main trading station, Fort Fredriksberg. The inventory listed the following items: ten sacks of gold dust, each with 20 mark gold; gold dust in miscellaneous bags; debased gold in miscellaneous bags;
three gold neck rings; gold wire; gold amulets and debased gold; gold artifacts (hatbands, buttons, knobs, amulets, etc. The total value of the gold was 237 mark 5 ounces and 13 angles. The sacks of gold dust would have been sold by the merchant-brokers of the Amanfro captaincy. The debased gold and gold objects would have come from residents in the coastal and sub-coastal towns, such as traders, brokers, interpreters, boatmen, militia officers, and political officials. Danish gold exports were consumed in Denmark, although some gold was probably shipped to the East Indies (Kea 1982, chapters 6 and 7).

In his detailed description of the African gold cycle between 1300 and 1800 economic historian Ian Blanchard contends that during the years 1670-1760 African gold producers played a significant role on international specie markets, following a period when this role was marginal due to the dominant position of American production on world gold markets. He connects the African cycles to “the rhythm of a series of environmental-economic cycles.” He elaborates on the nature of African gold in the global economy.

“During these years from 1660-1710 exports of mercury to markets other than those supplying the Spanish American silver mines continued at a slightly higher level of about 1,500 quintals a year. Of this about half was dispatched to [West] African producers, working beyond the Niger Bend where output of gold increased from about 1.5 tons a year in c. 1660 to 4.875 tons on average in 1690-1710. By far the largest part of this output (3.245 tons) passed to Europe by way of the trans-Saharan routes, controlled from Morocco, the terminal points of these routes – Tangier and Ceuta – attracting the covetous attention of the
European nations. Only a diminutive flow passed to the West African coast. Here the trade grew from about 1.3 tons a year in c. 1660 to 1.628 tons in 1690/1710, attracting a host of Dutch, English, Brandenburg, Danish, Portuguese, and French traders to pick up the crumbs from the Moroccan Emperor’s table.”

(Blanchard, n.d.)

Blanchard probably underestimates gold exports from Gold Coast ports. He certainly does not include the East India Company’s transport of “rich Guinea gold” to India. Still, his wider argument is that intercontinental exchange systems were more significant for West African social formations than Atlantic exchanges along the coast. The coastal trade in gold was never a substitute for the dense and long-established continental trade (Meillassoux 1971, pp. 49-86). Contrary to popular and scholarly illusions, the Atlantic trade did not bring about the collapse of the West African-Saharan trade, at least not until the end of the 19th century.

Conclusion

The possibility and actuality of the chartered companies’ trade on the 17th century Gold Coast depended on pre-existing socio-economic structures and interacting exchange networks. Without these there would have been no company commerce or company trading stations. The Akani trading organization provides a telling example of the scale of commercial activity at the Gold Coast ports. The organization was responsible for the export of tens of thousands of ounces of gold and for the import of a huge volume of merchandise. But the overseas Atlantic trade did not operate unto itself. It was connected to the coasting trade of western Africa and to the trans-continental (Islamic) trade of the African interior. There are implications here for understanding global flows.
That is, the Gold Coast/West African context cannot be neglected in the formulation of theoretical perspectives on the formation of the early modern world.

Future research on the topics raised in this paper would require more intensive archaeological fieldwork throughout the region, particularly in the old gold mining districts and at ruined urban sites that were once market centers and political capitals. Fieldwork should also include surveys and excavations of ancient rural settlements as well. Also of great importance is the methodical collection of oral histories from various strategic points in the region, for example the cultural and political heartland of the Akani trading organization could be a source of valuable information. Most important of all is the need to conduct systematic investigations of Muslim sources in Arabic and Ajami (i.e., non-Arabic) languages. This field of research is completely neglected. Muslim sources are fairly voluminous and are to be found in private, public, and mosque libraries. Unfortunately, they have, with a few exceptions, been ignored in historical scholarship (Kea 2003; Muhammad 2000; also Bennison 2002). The European archival sources have not yet been exhausted and no doubt have much new information to yield.

On a concluding note, it is of more than historiographical interest that economic and general histories of Africa and histories of West Africa carry hardly any references - barely a sentence or two - to Akani captaincies as trading organization and the exchange networks in which the captaincies functioned, and the world historical implications of the Akani phenomenon. There are, of course, the standard narratives about the activities of chartered trading companies in West African waters (e.g., Gilbert and Reynolds 2004; Austen 1987). However, the Gold Coast region and the Akani trading organization can
be contexts where other narratives about the early modern world and “archaic
globalizations” can be debated and constructed.

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