
‘TO GET A CARGO OF FLESH, BONE, AND BLOOD’: ANIMALS IN THE SLAVE TRADE IN WEST AFRICA

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Abstract

This article examines how English and West African agents involved in the slave trade in Atlantic Africa used animals to establish trust, forge political bonds, connect distant spaces through a shared medium of exchange, and create regular trading networks from the late seventeenth century until the early eighteenth century. Slave traders from the Royal African Company and diverse West African polities offered each other livestock for sacrifice or as diplomatic gifts to formalise political or commercial alliances. Traders used the shells of cowry sea snails as abstract currency to purchase captives. These exchanges gradually produced and constituted an ecocultural network of human and animal social relationships and cross-cultural negotiations that enabled the expansion of England’s involvement in the slave trade from the Gambia River to the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin. However, vermin animals impeded these connections by destroying valuable commodities, including trade goods and human captives. This article aims to deepen our understanding of how animals bound European and African slave traders together into new networks of exchange, and how some animals threatened the stability of their partnerships.

Keywords: Atlantic slave trade, Royal African Company, West Africa, Gold Coast, Bight of Benin, factor, caboceer, curranteer, ecocultural networks, sheep, cowries, guinea worms, rats, cats

Introduction

Animals, living and dead, connected and constricted distant English and West African sites of exchange in the slave trade in Atlantic Africa in the late seventeenth century. This article investigates two key aspects involving English and African agents’ dependence on exchanges of animals to support a broader trade in human captives. It does so by first situating how slave traders used animals, often livestock such as sheep, in ritual sacrifices and as diplomatic gifts to establish political and economic alliances; and second, by examining how a mollusc—the cowry sea snail *Monetaria moneta*—functioned as a widespread form of currency in the slave trade

the English struggled to build in the second half of the seventeenth century. Each of these aspects reflect how English slavers gradually adapted to West African ritual culture, taste and economic protocols involving non-human animals to embed themselves within regional trading systems. These points of intersection in the trade reinforced commercial networks and expanded the traffic in enslaved people. The final section demonstrates how intractable vermin, such as worms and rats, interfered with commercial flows by damaging valuable commodities intended for exchange, including trade goods and the bodies of human captives. What emerges from this investigation of the slave trade is a clear picture of the significant cultural, political and economic roles animals played in linking together and obstructing networks of slavery across Atlantic Africa.

Using letters written by factors, or purchasing agents, of the Royal African Company, and printed accounts of the trade written by other officials, I will show how animals mediated exchanges as the company entered the trade in West Africa around 1672, survived the loss of its monopoly in 1698, through to its reorganisation under James Brydges, first Duke of Chandos, in 1731.¹ After this period, the company turned towards more speculative mercantile projects in Atlantic Africa involving agriculture, medicine and mining. Company agents studied the possibility of raising indigo and cotton plantations in Sierra Leone, developing soap and potash manufactories on Sherbro Island, operating gold mines near Cape Coast, and prospecting for drugs at various locales as the company's profits in the castle trade declined due to competition from separate traders.² In 1752, the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa replaced the Royal African Company altogether. Though these letters were primarily written by white factors, I read this archive for evidence of the actions taken by caboceers—West African headmen, often military or spiritual leaders, who interpreted for and negotiated between factors and local slavers—and curranteers—rulers of towns, city states and larger polities—involved in the trade as well. However, factors often confused the difference between caboceers and curranteers in their letters, making it difficult to precisely identify several African individuals in this archive. This article strives to recover the enslaved as subjects as well in the

1 The letters cited in this article originate from MSS Rawlinson, C. 745, 746 and 747, held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. I am grateful to the dedicated scholarship of Robin Law, who painstakingly transcribed and published these collections in the three volumes cited here: Robin Law, ed., *The English in West Africa: The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681–1699*, vols 1–3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2001–07); William A. Pettigrew, 'Free to Enslave: Politics and the Escalation of Britain's Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1688–1714', *William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2007): 3–38.

2 William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672–1752* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 198; On bioprospecting and extraction projects of the Royal African Company in the early eighteenth century see Matthew David Mitchell, "Legitimate Commerce" in the Eighteenth Century: The Royal African Company of England Under the Duke of Chandos, 1720–1726', *Enterprise & Society* 14, no. 3 (2013): 544–78.

narrative, yet it recognises how the violent commodification and objectification of slaves through the trade led to their fragmentary and mutilated existence in the archive of the company.³

Few historians study animals in the slave trade, with the exception of Marcus Rediker in his article on how the threatening presence of sharks trailing behind slave ships became 'an integral part of a system of terror' created by captains throughout the middle passage.⁴ Moreover, few environmental histories of empire and colonisation involving animals in the early modern British Atlantic world discuss the slave trade, or the factories, outposts and castles the Royal African Company built between the Gambia River and the Bight of Benin.⁵ In broader environmental histories of the British Empire, animals do not appear as significant actors in discussions of the slave trade. William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, for instance, stress that 'plant transfers lay at the heart of imperial expansion and the Atlantic slave trade'.⁶ While valuable plants, especially sugar, tobacco and other botanical commodities, drove the demand from slaveholders in the West Indies for greater trans-shipments of captive labourers over time, this article shows, by contrast, how animals linked together and hindered the economic geography of the slave trade in Atlantic Africa before the peak of the trade in the eighteenth century. I will show how spaces in the trade, such as the Royal African Company's outpost at Dixcove and factory at Ouidah, emerged in part due to humans using non-human animals in a mostly instrumental fashion to support commercial exchanges. Commercial geographies involving animals, such as the one I seek to illuminate, existed alongside what Judith Carney terms the 'more-than-human geography' of fugitive spaces created by Atlantic Africans in the New World, such as Neotropical mangrove swamps in Brazil where maroons sought out plants and animals in a terraqueous ecology for shelter, food and refuge from slavery.⁷

Focusing on the role of animals in the slave trade further develops the cultural history of slavery. Historians of late eighteenth-century humanitarianism and pet-keeping have shown how natural historians and reformers in England and France navigated the discourse of 'animal slavery' to defend the practice of pet-keeping through

3 Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

4 Marcus Rediker, 'History from Below the Water Line: Sharks and the Atlantic Slave Trade', *Atlantic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2008): 285–97.

5 For important discussions of animals in British imperial environmental history see Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); George Colpitts, *Pemmican Empire: Food, Trade, and the Last Bison Hunts in the North American Plains, 1780–1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Andrea Smalley, *Wild By Nature: North American Animals Confront Colonization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

6 William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24.

7 Judith Carney, "'The Mangrove Preserves Life': Habitat of African Survival in the Atlantic World', *Geographical Review* 107, no. 3 (2017): 433–51.

a framework of paternalistic improvement.⁸ These authors defined humanity as an intellectual and ontological category bound up with ideals of authority and care over non-human animals. Animals existed in a dependent and subservient relationship to humans. While late eighteenth-century writers conceived of animals as slaves, and also of enslaved people as being akin to non-human animals in their status as dependent subjects, the mercantile agents of the late seventeenth century examined here did not share precisely similar ideas. Company factors in Atlantic Africa valued animals for their ritual significance and economic utility without drawing overt rhetorical comparisons between enslaved people and animals.

Whereas environmental historians overlook the role of animals in the slave trade, scholarship on the African diaspora, which this article draws from, has demonstrated the economic importance of cowries and other creatures in shaping the trade. Stephanie Smallwood argues that the slave trade on the Gold Coast, and throughout Atlantic Africa, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became a 'stage for a range of activities and practices designed to promote the pretense that human beings could convincingly play the part of their antithesis—bodies animated only by others' calculated investments in their physical capacities'.⁹ The commodification of enslaved captives involved the methodical evaluation of bodies, including estimating their future productive labour against the known value of material objects, such as cowry shells, which factors and their subordinates trafficked at Ouidah and elsewhere in exchange for captives. Such evaluations emerged out of complex calculations, cultural negotiations and the underlying material infrastructure of the trade stretching from England to coastal Atlantic Africa, and across the Atlantic Ocean to island colonies in the West Indies. The slave trade, as Smallwood and others contend, depended upon the quantitative methods of accounting and attendant forms of paperwork to render enslaved people abstract commodities tied to monetary equivalents, whether they were shackled in a coffle, bound at a factory for sale or chained in the dungeons below Cape Coast Castle, the Royal African Company's headquarters on the Gold Coast.¹⁰ Precise quantities of cowries, whether weighed in barrels, counted on strings or measured in particular local enumerations, facilitated slave sales between English and West African traders.¹¹ By writing in account ledgers, inventory lists and letters, factors and other agents did the work of 'turning people into slaves' through numerical paper records, a process that at every

8 Ingrid H. Tague, 'Companions, Servants, or Slaves?: Considering Animals in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 39, no. 1 (2010): 111–30.

9 Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 35.

10 Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 71; Trevor Burnard, 'Collecting and Accounting: Representing Slaves as Commodities in Jamaica, 1674–1784', in *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, ed. Daniela Bleichmar and Peter Mancall (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 177–91.

11 Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 115. Jan Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 114–24.

turn depended on knowing the equivalent value of the remains of cowry shells, and other faunal goods such as red coral, and humans in the slave trade.¹² This article seeks to build on the scholarship of Smallwood and others to emphasise how the English adoption and use of cowries as money developed fitfully as the Royal African Company's networks expanded.

Finally, by drawing on the work of imperial environmental historians who question how 'interlinked cultural formations, material exchanges, and ecological processes' shaped the expansion of the British Empire and its far-flung colonies and semi-colonial spaces in the nineteenth century, this article asks how the Atlantic slave trade, which resulted in the unprecedented transfer of approximately 12 million African captives across the Atlantic Ocean from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, involved, to an appreciable extent, the formation of an ecocultural network involving humans and different kinds of animals.¹³ The Royal African Company did not settle colonies in West Africa in the seventeenth century. However, the company performed a significant imperial function in delivering captives to colonies in the West Indies, especially Barbados and Jamaica, and entrepôts in the Viceroyalty of Peru and the Viceroyalty of New Granada under the *asiento*, including Buenos Aires and Cartagena de Indias, until the early eighteenth century.¹⁴ The slave trade that the Royal African Company built up, I argue, produced and depended on particular human–animal networks in which English and West African traders became bound through rituals involving propitiatory animal sacrifices, exchanges of animal gifts and the widespread use of animal currencies. Yet the agency of vermin impeded commercial ambitions as well.

Local relationships between slavers hinged upon knowing the value and uses of non-human animals in Atlantic Africa. Broad and highly contested networks between forts, outposts, ships and the wider colonial world were contingent on micro-level human–animal negotiations and entanglements. Before millions of enslaved men and women climbed out of the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle and passed through the Door of No Return to the shoreline, animals brought slave traders together in Atlantic Africa and shaped the 'inhuman traffick' in significant ways as sacrifices and gifts, media of exchange and obstinate vermin.¹⁵

12 Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 35.

13 James Beattie, Edward Melillo and Emily O'Gorman, eds, *Eco-Cultural Networks and the British Empire: New Views on Environmental History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 3–20; Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12.

14 On the connections between the Royal African Company and the South Sea Company, which delivered captives to port cities in New Spain using African Company ships, see Adrian Finucane, *The Temptations of Trade: Britain, Spain, and the Struggle for Empire* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 53–83; John G. Sperling, *The South Sea Company: An Historical Essay and Bibliographical Finding List* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 13–15.

15 Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (London: James Phillips, 1788), 37.



Figure 1: Royal African Company castles, forts and outposts established in the second half of the seventeenth century discussed in this article.

Source: Map developed by Belinda Paige Blakley for the author.

Sacrifices and gifts

The Royal African Company's material infrastructure, particularly the forts that defended slave trading on the coast, developed gradually out of violent conflicts with their major rival in the late seventeenth century, the Dutch. Both in the form of ritual sacrifices and diplomatic gifts, animals played important roles in securing political and economic alliances between the company and African polities and city states. Chartered in 1672, the Royal African Company coordinated the slave trade in West Africa from its heavily fortified central castle on the Gold Coast, Cape Coast Castle, which had been captured from the Dutch West India Company by an English naval squadron in 1664.¹⁶ While officers at Cape Coast reported to the company's headquarters and court of directors in London at Africa House, clerks at the central fort maintained correspondence with smaller outposts and unfortified outposts to the east and west, spanning over 2,000 miles along the coastline from the Gambia River to the Bight of Benin.

As propitiatory offerings, animals shaped the trading networks the Royal African Company struggled to build at these forts and outposts. In examining the development of the company's base at Dixcove on the Gold Coast, environmental

16 Kenneth Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), 40–1.

historians can appreciate how factors adopted West African cultural values and rites involving sheep as sacrificial offerings to forge bonds of trust, commerce and mutual alliance.¹⁷

On 15 August 1692, Christopher Clarkson, a surveyor for the company, reported to the chief factor at Sekondi that a party consisting of his men and several company slaves had successfully recaptured the site of the company's former outpost at Dixcove. While the company had claimed Dixcove as territory since 1684, it failed to maintain a permanent fort there until Clarkson's mission.¹⁸ Clarkson seized the site at a crucial moment, as the company feared the rising influence and powerful fortresses to the west held by the Brandenburg African Company, based at Groß Friedrichsburg, and the Dutch West India Company to the east, headquartered at Elmina Castle.

Upon landing at Dixcove in the summer of 1692, Clarkson triumphantly hoisted a flag and 'fired 2 guns to keep of our enimies and encouradge our friends' to approach their camp. Clarkson's ritual of possession declared the space the property of the Royal African Company, but did not guarantee their long-term security.¹⁹ Aware of their precarity on the coast, Clarkson quickly dispatched messengers to arrange a palaver (a formal discussion) with an Ahanta headman and the ruler of Dixcove, Captain Dickie, an African ruler, despite his English-sounding name, and at this point an Ahanta headman. Prospects of trade with the company and a military alliance against Adom, a nearby city state, enticed Dickie, who in a gesture signalling his acceptance of the company's terms, sent Clarkson workers to aid a party of company slaves in building the fort at Dixcove.

After raising the limestone walls of the fort, Dickie, Clarkson and a group of 12 caboceers, who translated for the company and negotiated trade agreements, gathered for a celebration. In a ritual to seal the relationship between his people and the Royal African Company, Dickie 'layed some gold under the foundation stone and killed a fatt sheep'.²⁰ Clarkson participated as well, and acknowledged Dickie's sacrificial offering with dashees, or gifts, of brandy and textiles.

17 On animal sacrifice see Kwasi Konadu, *The Akan Diaspora in the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36, 104; Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Religion Defined: A Systematic Study of Ancestor Worship Among the Akan* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 229, 234; Walter Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas: Identity, Culture, Power* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 196; Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 135, 199.

18 Robin Law, ed., *The English in West Africa, 1691–1699. The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681–1699, Part 3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2007), 1–2.

19 Christopher Clarkson, Dickies Cove, 15 August 1692, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 3; Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

20 Christopher Clarkson, Dickies Cove, 15 August 1692, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 3.

In several Fante- and Akan-speaking cultures on the Gold Coast, rituals involving animal sacrifice purified communities and sanctified, created, or restored, social, economic and political bonds of obligation between people.²¹ As Kwasi Konadu explains, sheep existed in proto-Akan and Akan-speaking cultural groups as living instruments for making propitiatory sacrifices, gifts or payments to resolve disputes and repay debts. The diverse meanings of sheep as sacrificial animals are evident in several entries in a Twi dictionary produced for missionaries on the Gold Coast from the late nineteenth century.²² While it is unclear from the records of the company, the animal Dickie slaughtered was likely either a species of sheep indigenous to West Africa, or possibly one of a breed brought earlier to the region in the sixteenth century by Portuguese explorers.²³ While a surveyor for the Royal African Company remarked in the early eighteenth century that the local breed of sheep on the Gold Coast did not resemble the varieties familiar to Europeans, the late seventeenth-century factors discussed here did not describe the animals in detail.²⁴ It is unclear from the letters if the traders feasted on the sheep afterwards. Yet the sheep's ritual death bolstered the stability of the Royal African Company by binding the firm to Captain Dickie and his allies.

Rites involving sheep would not have been entirely alien to the English, as families in England and its North American colonies likewise gifted and bequeathed livestock as a form of intergenerational wealth and property.²⁵ In New England, for instance, livestock was often given as a form of bridewealth. Moreover, in English oral and visual culture and literature, sheep represented social values, including bonds of obedience and trust between servants and masters.²⁶

However, in participating in the ritual with the Ahanta headman, Clarkson recognised Dickie's sacrifice as a crucial step toward creating trading opportunities and security for the Royal African Company at Dixcove. Upon conclusion of the ritual, Clarkson urged Johnson, his superior at Sekondi, to send materials to furnish

21 Konadu, *The Akan Diaspora in the Americas*, 36, 104; Ephirim-Donkor, *African Religion Defined*, 229, 234; Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 196; Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 135, 199. Nineteenth-century British writers familiar with the Gold Coast also observed ritual sacrifices of sheep among Fante, Twi and Ewe speakers. See Brodie Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa: Including an Account of the Native Tribes, and Their Intercourse with Europeans*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853), 217–18, 226; Alfred Burdon Ellis, *The Ewe-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1890), 62, 105; Alfred Burdon Ellis, *The Tshi-Speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1887), 31, 35–6, 39, 43, 72, 85.

22 Johann Gottlieb Christaller, *A Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi ...* (Basel: Evangelical Missionary Society, 1881), 105, 155, 208, 261, 522.

23 Kwamina B. Dickson, *An Historical Geography of Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 36, 47, 209.

24 William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (London: John Nourse, 1744), 147.

25 Allan Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 236; Barbara Jean Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450–1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120, 133.

26 Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 164, 167.

the fort and more gifts to offer to their new allies. Among the supplies Clarkson requested were bricks, boards, company slaves and trade goods to offer to Dickie and his caboceers as dashees. While Clarkson considered the profits of trade in enslaved captives and gold dust between Dickie and the company, and the possibilities of entering into lucrative interior trade relations with nearby polities such as the Akan-speaking kingdom of Denkyira, the future of the fort at Dixcove, like others on the Gold Coast, was built, in part, upon offering up an animal (the sheep), and the social bonds of reciprocity it represented.

Far from being an exception, sheep became important ritual sacrifices and diplomatic gifts that shaped alliances between European factors and African actors involved in the trade. In the mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch dominated the trade on the Gold Coast and frequently frustrated English ambitions to expand the ambit of their activities in the trade.²⁷ From Fort Ruijghaver on the Ankobra River to their outpost at Ouidah, the Dutch had over a dozen forts.²⁸ Since the English first settled their initial fort, Cormantin, on the Gold Coast in 1631, continuous fighting with the Dutch West India Company and their allies over influence in the trade hindered their ambitions.²⁹ Despite the station's precarious situation, Dixcove strengthened the company's territorial and commercial expansion on the coast among their European competitors.³⁰ However, their ultimate success in the region depended on the company's ability to negotiate and secure trading alliances with powerful West African polities and kingdoms, which in part rested on knowing and recognising the value of animals in the region. Several of these negotiations, such as the founding of Dixcove, involved accepting, offering or providing sacrificial sheep.

Six years after Clarkson recaptured Dixcove, William Gabb, a factor at the newly reoccupied fort at Sekondi, wrote to the company's headquarters at Cape Coast on 27 April 1698 to report that tensions between the English and the Dutch nearby at Fort Oranje, and further outposts including Butri and Fort San Sebastian at Shama, threatened to erupt into war. The Dutch, who obstructed the company's hopes of trading with the kingdoms of Wassa and Twifo, continued to frustrate English entrées into trading networks in the region. Gabb's fort, Sekondi, lay between Dixcove to the west and Cape Coast to the east. Like Dixcove, the company claimed to possess an outpost at Sekondi since 1683; however, the English evacuated and abandoned the fort several times in the midst of armed hostilities.³¹ Between 1694

27 Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 247–9, 268–9.

28 Harvey M. Feinberg, 'Africans and Europeans in West Africa: Elminans and Dutchmen on the Gold Coast during the Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 79, no. 7 (1989): 1–186.

29 Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 12–42.

30 At Dixcove, the Royal African Company established a successful trade alliance with the nearby kingdom of Denkyira, trading comparatively little in slaves, yet the fort became valuable as a provisioning station for ships coasting between the company's forts carrying enslaved people and other cargo from the outposts to Cape Coast. On Dixcove see *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 1–2.

31 *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 90–1.

and 1700, disputes over access to markets in the slave trade between the Dutch and the English, West African kingdoms and towns on the Gold Coast, including Eguafu, Adom and Ahanta, and the powerful African merchant prince John Cabess at Komenda, carried on through a series of violent conflicts, later known as the Komenda Wars.³²

As European and African competitors clashed, animal exchanges continued to shape the future of the slave trade at the Gold Coast forts. In a letter from Sekondi to Cape Coast in the spring of 1698, Gabb informed his superiors of the state of affairs at the fort with regard to the kingdom of Adom. The company warred with Adom throughout the 1680s, and found itself at times drawn into conflict between Adom and Ahanta.³³ As a factor, Gabb attempted to reconcile the company and Adom; however, peace between the two proved fragile. Like the foundation of trade at Dixcove, reconciliation hinged upon carefully presenting an animal sacrifice. During a palaver at Sekondi, Gabb reported that ‘The King’ of Adom ‘gave the sheep I brought up to the white men that was killed in the Castle, and his fetish [deity] tells him, if he doe not give one for the Castle, it will not doe well, so he desires one of your Worshipp’s’.³⁴ While the Adom king accepted Gabb’s offering of a sacrificial sheep to bind the company to Adom, he demanded the company offer a second sheep of their own in reciprocity for him to ritually slaughter in the castle to purify their relationship.

The Royal African Company’s assent to providing animals for sacrifice, and the king’s demand for properly consecrating this alliance, demonstrates how necessary sheep became for English attempts to solidify their relationships with Gold Coast polities. Gabb requested Cape Coast send another sheep immediately to assure Adom of their intent for peaceful trading and to ensure their future bonds of mutual support against their Dutch rivals. The company responded promptly to Gabb’s missive and forwarded a sheep to Sekondi. Company officials at Cape Coast likely purchased the animal from herdsmen nearby to the castle.³⁵ Gabb thanked his superiors at Cape Coast the following month for sending the ovine present, which he promptly delivered to the king ‘and told em all you was pleased to order’.³⁶ The gift of the sheep, and other trade goods, including textiles, secured the Royal African Company’s political, economic and military alliance with Adom, and further bolstered their power on the Gold Coast.

32 John Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800* (London: University College London Press, 1999), 127–48; Robin Law, ‘The Komenda Wars, 1694–1700: A Revised Narrative’, *History in Africa* 34, no. 1 (2007): 133–68.

33 *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 1–2, 90–1.

34 William Gabb, Succondee, 27 April 1698, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 127.

35 William St Clair, *The Door of No Return: The History of Cape Coast Castle and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Blue Bridge, 2006), 72–5.

36 William Gabb, Succondee, 10 May 1698, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 130.

Gifts of livestock animals between company factors and African traders, beyond the ritual context of sacrifice, knitted together trading networks between forts, towns and other markets throughout the slave trade. African rulers offered animal gifts to the company to keep open routes of exchange and relays of communication. Writing to Cape Coast from Komenda, the company's factory east of Sekondi, William Cross reported in 1686 that the 'The king [of Eguafu] yesterday sent me a sheep for farther satisfaction about this pallaver, which I have sent your Worship herewith'.³⁷ The king gifted livestock to assure his English partners that Eguafu, and the towns subordinate to Eguafu, intended to maintain trade in enslaved captives and other goods with the company's factors at Komenda. In later years, Eguafu continued to send animal gifts to the English, who recognised the ovines as valuable promises for continued trade, peace and stability.³⁸

Headmen presented gifts of wealth on the hoof to open new lines of trade on the Gold Coast. At Dixcove, Captain Nedd, likely an Ahanta caboceer familiar to the company, wrote to the company's headquarters at Cape Coast informing them of his plans to build a croom, or village, near the castle in 1698. 'May it please your worships', he wrote, 'I have herewith sent you a sheepe, which desire your Worships will be pleased to except off.'³⁹ Nedd built his croom to profitably trade with the fort at Dixcove in provisions and for a possible trade in captives. Regardless of whether or not Nedd expected the English to accept the sheep as a sacrifice, or simply as a gift of meat, he succeeded in using the animal to insert himself, his kin networks and allies into the company's web of trade on the Gold Coast. Fante caboceers and curranteers continued to leverage four-footed gifts into the early eighteenth century. In the memorandum book of Cape Coast, entries from 1703 and 1704 record how a local trader, Quomino Coffee, sent the company regular presents of sheep in order to remain in their good graces and maintain his connection to the company.⁴⁰

Individuals used animal gifts to influence diplomatic channels established in the trade. Traders tendered gifts of livestock, for instance, in exchange for people held in pawn or taken captive during occasional conflict at the outforts. Thomas Willson, a factor stationed at Komenda, reported in the winter of 1694, for instance, that Cabess, a military ally of the English, offered a 'fatt sheep' as a gift to the company in

37 William Cross, Commenda, 8 September 1686, in *The English in West Africa, 1685–1688. The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681–1699, Part 2*, ed. Robin Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2001), 88.

38 In July 1698, for instance, Gerrard Gore, a factor at Komenda, reported that representatives from Eguafu arrived with a gift of a sheep: Gerrard Gore, Commenda, 1 July 1698, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 229–30.

39 Captain Nedd, Dicks Cove, 28 June 1698, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 81.

40 Entries from 22 March 1703 and 10 May 1703, Memorandum Book, Kept at Cape Coast Castle from 13 January 1703 to 2 January 1704. T70/11 Papers of the Royal African Company. The National Archives (TNA), London.

exchange for freeing ‘one Peter, a Black, owt of irons’.⁴¹ The circumstances of Peter’s incarceration are opaque, yet Willson accepted the gift and visited Cabess’ croom a few days later, bringing presents of his own, including casks of beef.⁴² Factors at Cape Coast occasionally found themselves entangled in similar situations. An entry in the memorandum book at Cape Coast from 1704 records how the company redeemed a canoe pilot named Cawera held as a pawn by the king of a Fante-speaking polity, Asebu, for the price of a fat sheep and three ounces of gold.⁴³ Entries from the fort diary at Komenda from 1714 document how presents of ‘fatted Sheep’ continued to bind the company to Cabess, and to the burgeoning state of Asante to the north.⁴⁴

Caboceers used animal gifts to ingratiate themselves with curranteers, who negotiated with Europeans throughout the slave trade. Caboceers, such as those living around Sekondi, paid customary gifts of sheep to the factories to maintain relationships with the English.⁴⁵ In addition, caboceers used other animals as gifts. Writing from the company’s fort at Anomabu to Cape Coast, the factor Gerrard Gore reported in 1698 that in the midst of negotiating trade in enslaved captives and other goods, and diplomatic relations with Eguafu, ‘One of our Cabbosheers named Towne Auqua has killed an elephant’ and presented the creature as a gift for the Eguafu curranteers assembled at the castle.⁴⁶ Perhaps Auqua fêted the men at the fort with the animal’s meat, or offered the ivory removed from its corpse as a gift. Gore notified Cape Coast that the bounty of Auqua’s hunt swayed the curranteers to remain and ‘further occasions their longer stay’.

The Royal African Company’s Dutch and Danish rivals in the slave trade likewise commented on the role of sacrificial offerings and livestock gifts in shaping their networks on the Gold Coast. Willem Bosman, a merchant for the Dutch West India Company in the late seventeenth century, for instance, recorded how Dutch factors gave and received sheep as sacrificial offerings and payments at Elmina Castle to curranteers and other headmen in nearby crooms.⁴⁷ Johannes Rask, a chaplain at the Danish factory Christiansborg Castle, near Accra, took note of how caboceers and curranteers ritually slaughtered sheep and other livestock at the castle during his tenure there between 1708 and 1713.⁴⁸

41 Thomas Willson, Commenda, 10 December, 1694, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 142. On Cabess see David Henige, ‘John Kabes of Komenda: An Early African Entrepreneur and State Builder’, *Journal of African History* 18, no. 1 (1977): 1–19.

42 Thomas Willson, Commenda, 16 December 1694, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 142.

43 19 June 1704, Memorandum Book, Kept at Cape Coast Castle from 13 January 1703 to 2 January 1704. T70/11, Papers of the Royal African Company. TNA.

44 Entries dated 20 November 1714 and 23 February 1714/15, in the Commenda Fort Diary. T70/1464, Papers of the Royal African Company. TNA.

45 James Walker, Succondee, 27 October 1687, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 59–60.

46 Gerrard Gore, Annamaboe, 21 January 1698, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 376.

47 Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea: Divided Into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts* (London: J. Knapton et al., 1705), 30, 106, 124, 127.

48 Johannes Rask, *Two Views from Christiansborg Castle*, vol. I: *A Brief and Truthful Description of a Journey to and from Guinea*, trans. and ed. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2009), 134, 181.

Though gifts of megafauna rarely occurred on the Gold Coast or the Bight of Benin, impressive and unusual animal presents appeared at the company's factories in Upper Guinea. Francis Moore, a clerk at the Royal African Company's fort on James Island in the Gambia River, for instance, noted in his journal in 1730 that a Wolof-speaking trader had taken 'a young Elephant brought alive as a Present to the Governor' of the fort.⁴⁹ While the clerk offered no comment on this animal, or the governor's reaction, perhaps this captive present became a curiosity held at the fort for the amusement of the factors. On other occasions at James Island, Wolof- and Mande-speaking traders presented the governor with 'two Porcupines' and an ostrich. Since slave traders often purchased animals, such as parrots and monkeys, as pets to sell to elites in England who kept fashionable private menageries, it is possible that these gifts reflected African astuteness in supplying exotic fauna for the English in this period.⁵⁰ In addition, African merchants in Upper Guinea continued to offer gifts of megafauna to separate traders unaffiliated with the Royal African Company well after the loss of its monopoly and the decline of the castle trade. One slave ship captain anchored at Sierra Leone in 1805, for instance, received presents of 'a young alligator, two porcupines, and a crown-bird'. In addition, the slaver liked to show off another gift to travellers he met with in Upper Guinea: a young enslaved boy named John Favorite.⁵¹

Offerings of animals as propitiatory sacrifices, diplomatic gifts or curiosities for menageries bound English and West African actors together in the late seventeenth century, and over time forged powerful political and economic networks in the slave trade in Atlantic Africa that bolstered the Royal African Company's power in the region. Trade in human captives was bound up with exchanges in animal flesh that bridged cultural divides between Europeans and Africans and sustained the networks through which captives moved between the spaces of the trade.

Media of exchange

Cowries are small marine gastropods found in the Indian Ocean, but the animals can be located in global history due to their use as money in antiquity in India and much of continental Africa, China and Europe.⁵² Like other snails, cowries use their muscular propodium for locomotion and to attach their bodies to surfaces. Cowry snails use their tentacles, siphon and radula to locate and feed on algae, polyps, coral

49 Francis Moore, *Travels Into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London: D. Henry and R. Cave, 1738), 40, 45, 62.

50 Caroline Grigson, *Menagerie: The History of Exotic Animals in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 47, 53, 72; Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 22.

51 Francis Spilbury, *Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa: Performed by His Majesty's Sloop Favourite, in the Year 1805* (London: Printed for Richard Phillips, 1807), 26.

52 Hogendorn and Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, 7, 13, 15.

and floating detritus.⁵³ As they develop, their mantle secretes calcium carbonate crystals to produce the enamel of their dorsal shell. In the Maldive Islands, fishers, often women or girls, collected the animals from tide pools along the shore at low tide either by hand or using nets.⁵⁴ After gathering the animals from the shoreline, fishers either piled the animals in the sun to die and rot, and then they could easily remove the snail carcasses from their shells using branches; or buried caches of cowries in sand pits to quicken their decay and removal.⁵⁵ Next, fishers washed the shells with fresh water to clean away sand and dirt and any remaining animal matter from the shells.⁵⁶

Cowry shells connected the slave trade as a form of currency at the forts and markets where African Company traders and West African traders convened. English traders used the words bouges, from the Portuguese *búzio*, and cowries, from the Hindi and Urdu *kauri*, interchangeably.⁵⁷ Among the dead animals slavers exchanged for enslaved captives were red corals culled from the Mediterranean Sea and the bone-white shells of the cowry snails transported from the Indian Ocean. *Monetaria moneta*, a cowry species endemic to the Maldives, was most commonly found in the castle trade on the Gold Coast and Bight of Benin in the late seventeenth century, while to a lesser extent the ringed *Monetaria annulus* species, found in coastal East Africa, the Zanzibar Archipelago and the Red Sea, circulated as well.⁵⁸ Forms of shell money existed in West–Central Africa as well, such as the zimbo shell currency prevalent in the Congo.⁵⁹

In the first decade of the sixteenth century, Portuguese traders, such as Duarte Pacheco Pereira, noticed how merchants in Benin used ‘money shells’, and began using the Maldive *moneta* as a media of exchange in the region.⁶⁰ Forms of bone and shell money, like the shells Pereira noticed around 1508, including Atlantic species of molluscs, had circulated as currency in West African polities since at least the ninth century.⁶¹ Cowries from the Maldives found their way into West African states, such as the Ghana, Mali and Songhai Empires, in the medieval era via maritime and overland routes as Arab traders from Yemen and Oman sailed between ports across the Indian Ocean and shipped cowries through the Red Sea to Cairo and other port

53 *ibid.*, 5.

54 *ibid.*, 81, 157.

55 *ibid.*, 23, 29.

56 *ibid.*, 82, 83.

57 *ibid.*, 5.

58 Akinwumi Ogundiran, ‘Of Small Things Remembered: Beads, Cowries, and Cultural Translations of the Atlantic Experience in Yorubaland’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, no. 2/3 (2002): 427–57; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 103–5; Marion Johnson, ‘The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa. Part I’, *Journal of African History* 11, no. 1 (1970): 17–49.

59 Hogendorn and Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, 166.

60 *ibid.*, 19, 106.

61 Ogundiran, ‘Of Small Things Remembered’, 432, 442, 447.

cities in North Africa.⁶² Trans-Saharan trade networks involving the sale of slaves and other commodities well before the arrival of the Portuguese involved *moneta* cowries from the Maldives.⁶³

Cowries' value as a form of currency in multiple cultures in North and West Africa derived from the virtual impossibility of counterfeiting the animal's shell.⁶⁴ In multiple polities, including those made up of Fante, Akan, Fon, Aja, Ewe and Yoruba speakers, people valued the snail shells before the arrival of Europeans for their political, economic and religious value as instruments of divination, as magical charms and as ornamentation worn by the elite.⁶⁵ As Akinwumi Ogundiran argues, the monetisation of these animals did not take place until the proliferation of stable markets involving standards based on cowry shells in the slave trade in the early modern period. Over time the shells, particularly the smaller species slavers in the Bight of Benin preferred, gradually became symbolically associated with wealth, fertility and individual status.⁶⁶

Around 1515, European merchants, led by Portuguese traders like Pereira, began transporting to the Bight of Benin (later known to Europeans as the Slave Coast due to its principal commodity) massive shipments of *Monetaria moneta* purchased either directly from the Maldivian Islands or indirectly at markets on the Indian subcontinent. The Dutch and the English followed the Portuguese precedent in the seventeenth century. In the Indian Ocean, Dutch East India Company ships often blocked their English East India Company (EIC) rivals from purchasing cowries directly from the Maldivian archipelago. Without regular access to the Maldives, English EIC factors resorted to acquiring cowries at markets in India, especially Balasore in Orissa, Bombay and Calcutta, and at Aceh in Sumatra, where the animals were commonly used as money.⁶⁷ In the late seventeenth century, English EIC officials purchased substantial quantities of cowry shells at Balasore, which were then used as ballast for ships returning from their stronghold at Fort St George in Madras to England, and later sold at auction to the Royal African Company in London.⁶⁸

62 Hogendorn and Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, 16; James Walvin, *Slavery in Small Things: Slavery and Modern Cultural Habits* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 40.

63 Hogendorn and Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, 22.

64 *ibid.*, 6.

65 Ogundiran, 'Of Small Things Remembered', 432, 442; Hogendorn and Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, 101.

66 Ogundiran, 'Of Small Things Remembered', 439, 447.

67 Hogendorn and Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, 37, 41, 42, 81, 157.

68 Hogendorn and Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, 37–47. For an example of an advertisement from the EIC in London, see East India Company, Court of Managers, *London: The Court of Managers for the United-Trade to the East Indies will put up to sale at the East-India-House in Leaden-Hall-Street, on the 19th of March, 1705/6, the following goods ...* (London, 1706), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale.

Cowries became valuable and vital to the slave trade as an abstract, fungible currency form in West African kingdoms and city states that were traded for gold dust, provisions, ivory and slaves.⁶⁹ While slave traders did occasionally exchange cowries in Upper Guinea and on the Gold Coast, the animals were most valuable in the Bight of Benin. Between the decades of the early sixteenth century and the early nineteenth century, European merchants shipped approximately 30 billion cowries to the bight.⁷⁰ While it is difficult to precisely quantify the overall value of cowries for the slave trade, their ubiquity in late seventeenth-century letters, inventories and other documents from the Royal African Company suggests their enduring value as currency for enslavers.

Ships sailing for the Royal African Company from England to Cape Coast deposited their cowry cargo at the central castle, where agents then dispersed the shells further east and west via smaller coasting vessels such as the *African Merchant* sloop, captained by George Nanter.⁷¹ In West Africa, company factors used the animal shells, along with trade goods including textiles and metal wares, as money to buy captives from local traders. As coastal trade networks involving slaves and cowries expanded further inland from the Bight of Benin, the ubiquity of the Indian Ocean money cowries more fully connected trade networks between coastal West African and North African slavers via trans-Saharan trade routes that predated the arrival of Europeans by several centuries.⁷²

Cowries, along with goods such as kettles and fabrics, facilitated transactions of captives between English and African slave traders. Coasting vessels that sailed between the Gold and Slave coasts supplied the company's forts and outposts with stocks of cowries and transported enslaved captives to Cape Coast Castle. In a letter from James Fort at Accra, sited east of Cape Coast, Arthur Wendover, a factor, notified his superiors in 1680, for instance, that the captain of the coasting vessel *Bonadventure* requested a typical supply '33 3/4 cask of coureyes' to exchange for enslaved captives at Arda, later known as Allada, on the Slave Coast.⁷³ 'A proper cargo', for purchasing slaves in Arda, wrote another factor, contained first and foremost a necessary quantity of valuable 'bougees'.⁷⁴ Wendover complained to

69 Johnson, 'The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa. Part I', 18; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 45.

70 Ogundiran, 'Of Small Things Remembered', 429.

71 George Nanter, Whiddah, 5 January 1687, *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 389–90.

72 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 79. Lovejoy observes, for example, that Oyo traders at coastal ports exchanged cowries for slaves, and later used the cowries to purchase horses at northern markets from North African traders crossing the Sahara. See also Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 74–6, 252–4.

73 Arthur Wendover, James Fort, Accra, 10 February 1680, in *The English in West Africa, 1681–1683. The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681–1699, Part 1*, ed. Robin Law, (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1998), 154.

74 John Carter, Whiddah, 22 November 1686, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 333–4.

Cape Coast that some of the cowry shipments arriving at Accra lately appeared broken or otherwise damaged, which, along with being too large or discoloured, decreased their value on the coast.⁷⁵

Factors and ships' captains routinely requested that Cape Coast supply them with cowries to successfully carry out the business of the slave trade. Writing at Offra, the company's factory near Arda, and due east of Ouidah, Cross told Cape Coast in 1681 that the trade in enslaved people continued to accelerate in the region, pointing out that 'tis very inconvenient for a ship to come here without booges, and if you send none by the next ship, you must hardly expect any slaves'. However, he continued, 'if you purchase any att the Mina Castle (where I heare there is plenty) you may be sure of slaves in a very short time'. Cross' letter suggests how diminished or delayed supplies of cowries from England could push the company to turn to its Dutch rivals for assistance, and so moved the company temporarily into a subordinate position.⁷⁶

One ship's captain, Charles Towgood, complained that without cowries he could not purchase captives while anchored at Adangme, near the Volta River. Towgood lamented how a French slave ship loaded with 'nothing but bouges' arrived before his vessel, and succeeded in buying slaves.⁷⁷ James Thorne, a factor at Offra, wrote the same year to Cape Coast while in negotiations with the king of Arda to send 'booges by the next shipping ... without them you must expect little to be done, for tis all one their money here, as silver and gold is with us'.⁷⁸ In 1681, Petley Wyborne, an independent trader who at times collaborated with the company, reported to Cape Coast from a town near Ouidah that enslaved captives 'are to be had here if they that wants brings goods fitt for the place, as booges', brass utensils or linen.⁷⁹ Cape Coast responded to such demands, yet factors continued to emphasise time and again the necessity of a regular flow of the small, polished cowry shells for opening or sustaining economic networks around the bight.

In efforts to track the value of cowries, factors taking stock of the company's warehouses at the forts listed their supply of animal shells by weight and in their ledgers included the current rates of exchange for cowries and slaves. In an inventory of the warehouse at Offra from 1681, Thorne noted that, among textiles, metal goods, guns and other trade items, the fort stocked '961 pound of booges att 78 lb per slave'.⁸⁰ Thorne recorded in the inventory how the fort paid its caboceers in

75 Arthur Wendover, James Fort, Accra, 20 February 1680, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 154–5.

76 William Cross, Ophra in Arda, 18 August 1681, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 219–21.

77 Charles Towgood, Aboard the Cape Coast Briganteen, Allampo Road, 5 March 1682, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 270–1.

78 James Thorne, Ophra in Arda, 19 August 1681, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 221–3.

79 Petley Wyborne, Judeah alias Whidda, 8 January 1681, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 228.

80 James Thorne, Ophra in Arda, 18 December 1681, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 221–3.

cowries and paid for repairs to the factory walls and buildings completed by local artisans in cowries, and how he paid the ransom of a messenger who had been panyarred, or kidnapped, at Ouidah ‘in booges’. ‘I would desire your worship to send booges’, Thorne requested in his letter accompanying the updated inventory to Cape Coast, ‘for I have none for my present use but am forct to borrow of the blacks’. Thorne’s petition reveals how crucial the market in cowries, and regular access to supplies of the animals were to reckoning the value of the enslaved and keeping the trade flowing in the bight.

Factors such as John Carter at Ouidah wrote repeatedly in frustration to Cape Coast requesting information on the flow of cowries to the outforts, and reckoned with the shifting value of cowries at different forts between the major regions of the slave trade. During 1686–87, Carter wrote to Cape Coast on several occasions to request supplies of smaller cowries, as his clients at Ouidah valued the small shells rather than the larger kinds the company shipped to the Ouidah factory.⁸¹ Around the same time, Mark Bedford Whiting, a factor at Accra, sent to Cape Coast ‘an enquirey for bouges for slaves’, asking to know how much the price of cowries for captives differed between sites on the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin.⁸² Writing aboard the ship *Adventure*, in 1687, James Bayly reported that he purchased ‘six slaves with such goods as I have’ at Ningo, ‘but theirs twenty gon away for want of goods’, especially cowries, which his Dutch competitors possessed in much greater quantities.⁸³

African labourers hired by the company at its factories posed challenges to the Royal African Company’s distribution and supply of cowries. In 1693 and 1694, Thomas Phillips commanded the slave ship *Hannibal*, which sailed from England to Cape Mesurado, the Gold Coast, Ouidah and São Tomé before crossing the ocean to Barbados. While anchored at the factory at Ouidah, Phillips learned firsthand how difficult it could be to maintain supplies of cowry shells on the ground. In the warehouse at Ouidah, barrels of cowries delivered from coasting vessels were frequently ‘pilfer’d by the negro porters’ who stole them using ‘instruments like wedges’ to pry loose barrel staves and then pocket handfuls of shells.⁸⁴ Phillips and his crew failed to prevent such incidents at the warehouse, and failed to catch any of the porters in the act of stealing the shells.

81 John Carter, Whidah, 1 March 1686, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 327–31; John Carter, Whidah, 11 November 1686, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, , 332; John Carter, Whiddah, 6 January 1686/7, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 337.

82 Mark Bedford Whiting, James Forte, Accra, 27 May 1686, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 273–4.

83 James Bayly, from on board the *Adventure*, at Mingo [Ningo], 26 September 1687, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 364.

84 Thomas Phillips, *A Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London, Ann. 1693, 1694 ...* (London: John Walthoe, 1732), 216.

Captains of coasting vessels wrote directly to Cape Coast to request supplies of cowries for slaving voyages. William Piles, the commander of the sloop *Sally Rose*, wrote in 1697 to Cape Coast from off the coast of Teshi, a town east of Accra, a short letter 'concerning my bouges'.⁸⁵ Piles had requested the factor at Accra send him the current rates of exchange for cowries and enslaved men and women, and complained that local merchants refused previous prices for slaves in cowries and were now demanding more. After Piles offered 70 pounds of cowries 'for a man, they immediately fell a telling them, and return'd back again. I have offered them eighty pound for a man, and they will not take them'. 'I desire your answer,' he demanded, 'how many pound of bouges you will allow me for a man, and likewise for a woman'. Despite regular calculations and record-keeping by factors, the value of cowries fluctuated between places and across time due to their variable sizes, shapes and relative scarcity. On occasion, the value of cowries could drop precipitously as demand changed. Later that month at Kpone, also east of Accra, Piles lamented that local traders did 'not now ask for any' cowries.⁸⁶

Cowries attracted the attention of not only merchants in West Africa, but also naturalists interested in improving the company's prospects for accruing wealth in the form of enslaved captives in Atlantic Africa. James Houstoun, Chief Surgeon at Cape Coast Castle, sought valuable specimens—especially plants, animals and minerals—for the 'improvement' of the slave trade and the Royal African Company on a bioprospecting expedition from 1722 to 1724.⁸⁷ The Duke of Chandos, a major investor in the Royal African Company who aimed to diversify the company's commercial activities, appointed Houstoun to the position.⁸⁸ In his attempts to improve the company's economic prospects, which declined in this period due to the rise of 'interloper' independent traders, Houstoun collected medicinal plants, which he hoped to transplant to gardens in either England or English Caribbean colonies, and suggested the company establish experimental indigo and cotton plantations on islands in the Sierra Leone River.⁸⁹ Houstoun's itinerary from Sierra Leone to Ouidah fits with other speculative missions the company launched in the

85 William Piles, Tersee, 22 June 1697, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 600–1.

86 William Piles, Pono, 30 June 1697, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 601.

87 James Houstoun, *Some New and Accurate Observations Geographical, Natural and Historical. Containing a True and Impartial Account of the Situation, Product, and Natural History of the Coast of Guinea, so far As Relates to the Improvement of that Trade, for the Advantage of Great Britain in General, and the Royal African Company in Particular* (London: J. Peele, 1725), 2.

88 James Houstoun, *Memoirs of the life and travels of James Houstoun, M.D. (formerly Physician and Surgeon-General to the Royal African Company's Settlements in Africa, and late Surgeon to the Royal Assiento Company's Factories in America)* (London: The author, 1747), 127.

89 Houstoun, *Some New and Accurate Observations*, 5–7, 12–15. Richard Drayton argues that cultural ideas about the improvement of natural resources through agriculture and botany inflected English political economy, trade and imperialism in the seventeenth century: *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

early eighteenth century designed to adapt expertise in natural history and natural philosophy to projects in agricultural improvements, chemistry, medicine and mining in the region.⁹⁰

In 1722, while scouting a ‘most fertile Island’ in the Sierra Leone River, the doctor collected ‘Cockle-Shells, which very much resemble our Cowries’.⁹¹ The animals, Houstoun projected, ‘might have been of considerable Use to me afterwards, as current Money on the Slave Coast. How far these Collections might have contributed to the Rise of *African* Stock, I shall not pretend to determine’. In his natural history of West Africa, published after his travels, Houstoun complained that factors on the Gold Coast, including, he alleged, the governor of the company’s settlement at Ouidah, undermined the company by illicitly selling cowries to European competitors, in particular the Portuguese, and hoped his discovery in Sierra Leone would ameliorate the losses caused by disloyalty to the company.⁹² While Houstoun dreamt of translating his knowledge in natural history and medicine into projects for improving the company’s position in the slave trade, such as the substitute cowries from Sierra Leone, his shell scheme never materialised.⁹³

Exchanges of cowry shells for enslaved captives continued beyond the period of the Royal African Company’s monopoly and waning power in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the account book of the Liverpool slave trader William Davenport, for instance, there are records of the use of cowries as either currency or as dashees into the late eighteenth century. In an inventory of ‘sundry Merchandise shipped by Thomas Will, Ship *Ann* for the River Camaroons on the Coast of Africa’ from 1782, the captain listed the ship’s supplies of cowries, among other goods, used to trade for captives in West Central Africa, south of the Bight of Benin.⁹⁴

As traders for the Royal African Company reckoned with the value of cowries as currency on the coast to purchase captives, enslaved people understood cowries in an altogether different light. Saidiya Hartman explains that as the slave trade expanded across West Africa, people living in regions impacted by the trade that slavers frequently raided for captives, such as towns further inland from the coastline in present-day northern Ghana, circulated their own stories of how predatory ‘cowrie

90 Mitchell, “‘Legitimate Commerce’ in the Eighteenth Century”. Among the projects Mitchell points out that Chandos commissioned in this period were the missions led by Captain Trengove, Robert Plunkett, Samuel Heartsease, and a ‘mineralist’ accompanied by Nicholas Baynton, who sought to locate gold mines, identify new agricultural commodities for acclimatisation and cultivation, and to establish a company garden at Cape Coast Castle.

91 Houstoun, *Some New and Accurate Observations*, 4.

92 *ibid.*, 32–3.

93 Johnson, ‘The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa’, 17–49. The creatures Houstoun found most likely did not resemble the species of cowries taken from the Indian Ocean, *Monetaria moneta*.

94 Account book relating to ship voyages, 1777–84. William Davenport and Co. mssHM 82854. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

shells feasted on the bodies of captives'.⁹⁵ Oral traditions posited that Europeans threw captives overboard from their ships in the Atlantic to feed hungry cowries underwater and multiply their money, as human blood supposedly nourished the creatures in the ocean. Into the nineteenth century, popular vernacular knowledge in West Africa held that 'the best places to harvest cowries were along the coast where slaves had been murdered or drowned' and that fishermen could become wealthy by salvaging hybrid 'human-mollusk' bodies of the trade's numerous victims.⁹⁶ The proliferation and durability of beliefs about the vampiric powers of cowries attests to the fact that the enslaved themselves recognised how the trade constituted a deadly entanglement and equation of human and animal life as captives became commodities.

Exchanges of the bony shells of cowries for enslaved captives transformed West Africa, especially the Bight of Benin, from the late seventeenth century onward. Factors purchased slaves, in part, using cowries at outposts in the Gold Coast and at bases along the Slave Coast east of the Volta River. English traders capitalised on the Portuguese precedent of using the animals in the Bight of Benin, and Europeans further transformed the cultural significance of the animals from instruments of divination to stockpiles of wealth as the animal currency became loaded with new symbolic meaning by the early eighteenth century. However, the English frequently failed to keep up supplies of cowries, and lost captives to their Dutch, French and Portuguese competitors. The English further proved slow to adapt to Atlantic African tastes, as is evident in the Royal African Company's distribution of oversized cowries to Ouidah and elsewhere. While the use of sheep and cowry shells expanded networks of trade, the final section of this article turns to vermin animals that restrained commercial connections between English and West African slavers.

Intractable vermin

Relationships of commerce and trust that English and West African traders struggled to build across space and over time were stifled by animals they understood as vermin that destroyed valuable goods and debilitated human captives across Atlantic Africa. Pests exposed the vulnerabilities of the slaving networks the Royal African Company endeavoured to build. Mary Fissell defines vermin in early modern England as animals that 'poached human food' and exhibited unusual cunning in eluding humans and avoiding extermination.⁹⁷ Vermin in West Africa, in particular worms and rats, exploited and hindered the slave trade in multiple ways by infesting supplies of food and goods, by evading plans for their elimination and by endangering the

95 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 209.

96 *ibid.*, 209–10.

97 Mary Fissell, 'Imagining Vermin in Early Modern England', *History Workshop Journal* 47 (1999): 1–29.

health of the enslaved. At every turn, vermin damaged and imperilled the value of human and non-human commodities, and in very material ways limited the expansion and flow of the trade.

Guinea worms, parasitic nematodes that found their way into the bodies of traders and slaves through dirty drinking water, frequently frustrated the company by compromising the health of both groups.⁹⁸ The worms infected factors and enslaved people from their habitats in polluted water cisterns at the forts, in barracoons, or makeshift holding cells, and in the dungeons below Cape Coast Castle where captives lingered before being sent on transatlantic voyages. In the bodies of their hosts, the worms bred and developed within the intestines and, as they grew, moved outward through the skin by forming blisters, which caused their hosts to suffer debilitating pain.⁹⁹ Richard Thelwall, a factor at Anomabu, for instance, apologised in a letter to his superiors at Cape Coast in 1681 for not writing and reporting on the status of the trade at the fort for some time. Guinea worms had festered in Thelwall's body, rendering him 'very lame, having three wormes in one legg, being in a great paine'. As such, the factor regularly failed to write and perform his duties at the fort, including supervising the purchase of captives.¹⁰⁰

While guinea worms infested the bodies of English factors like Thelwall, incarcerated captives suffered debilitating infections of the worms at a much higher rate due to their exposure to the dangerous, unhealthy environments of barracoons on the coast.¹⁰¹ Worms infected the bodies of both enslaved people who traders sold across the Atlantic Ocean and castle slaves held in permanent bondage at the forts. Reporting from Dixcove in 1692, Francis Smith complained that a company slave, a carpenter named Quashe, whose skills in repairing fort walls the factor desperately required to fortify the base, became 'lame with the wormes'. Smith requested Cape Coast send another enslaved artisan, Bastian, who was known among the company for his skill in carpentry, to replace him.¹⁰²

Pain caused by guinea worms affected the lives of enslaved people before enduring the middle passage, as the worms often broke out through the skin of the enslaved while they were incarcerated in barracoons. For company factors whose interests lay in profiting from the commodification of enslaved people and dispossessing them of their bodily labour, worms threatened to undercut company profits. Upon receiving notice from Cape Coast in 1693 that an enslaved man sent to the castle appeared sickly and 'bursten' with an uncertain disease, Edward Searle at Charles Fort, Anomabu, replied that he 'thought soe myselfe at first, but the Negroes told me it

98 Guinea worms' binomial name is *Dracunculus medinensis*.

99 Kenneth Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 71–4.

100 Richard Thelwall, Anamaboe, 1 February 1681, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 107–8.

101 Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 141, 144, 194.

102 Francis Smith, Dickis Cove Fort, 20 January 1692, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 12.

was a worme'. Searle agreed to take the man back from Cape Coast as a company slave at Charles Fort if 'hee bee not passible' for sale.¹⁰³ In 1694, Searle continued to write to Cape Coast on the problems worms posed at Anomabu by rendering captives held there entirely unfit for sale, which would lead to a significant loss for the company. Searle warned that the worms also weakened the ability of company slaves to function as labourers in fortifying and manning Charles Fort: 'The slaves wee have here are not sufficient to finde the Fort in wood and water, they are soe disabled with wormes.'¹⁰⁴

While guinea worms infested the bodies of factors, captives waiting to be taken aboard ships and castle slaves held at the forts, other worms chewed through valuable provisions and trade goods and frequently ruined factors responsible for purchasing and overseeing enslaved people on the coast. In their letters and inventories, factors for the company did not attempt to differentiate between the kinds of worms, or perhaps other insects such as weevils, that damaged trade goods in West Africa. It is possible that their uncertainty was due to the fact that factors most often saw the effects of the animals on their goods rather than the creatures themselves.

In an inventory of the warehouse of James Fort, Accra, from 1681, Ralph Hassell recorded that among the provisions he received from a coasting vessel that month were 56 pounds of 'wormeaten stockfish' that were useless as a foodstuff.¹⁰⁵ Later that year at Accra, Hassell complained that the barrels of corn delivered by a coasting vessel were 'soe bad' from worms and rot 'that the slaves will not eate it nor scarce the hoggs'.¹⁰⁶ In 1682, worms forced Thelwall to sell 'broken and wormeaten' textiles at deep discounts to Akani traders at Anomabu.¹⁰⁷ Worms interrupted the progress of coasting vessels as well. William Piles, commander of the *Sally Rose*, reported in 1697 how worms ate through his stock of yams intended for captives, necessitating the ship's return to the coast to resupply before sailing to Cape Coast.¹⁰⁸

Worms also interrupted the slave trade in the Bight of Benin in the early eighteenth century. Writing from Ouidah in 1728, a factor reported that 'we have a worm here that will Eat through the Bottom' of barrels filled with textiles for trade in less than a day.¹⁰⁹ The factor continued that the worms themselves 'ought to be

103 Edward Searle, Charles Fort, Annimaboe, 11 December 1693, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 311.

104 Edward Searle, Charles Fort, Annimaboe, 21 February 1694, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 313.

105 Ralph Hassell, James Fort, Accra, 11 October 1681, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 175.

106 Ralph Hassell, James Fort, Accra, 18 October 1681, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 177.

107 Richard Thelwall, Annamaboe, 28 September 1682, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 119–20.

108 William Piles, St Thomas, 30 December 1697, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 623–4.

109 Thomas Wilson, William's Fort, Ouidah, 12 July 1728, in *Correspondence of the Royal African Company's Chief Merchants at Cabo Corso with William's Fort, Whydah and the Little Popo Factory, 1727–1728 ...*, ed. Robin Law (Madison, WI: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, 1991), 32–40.

Considered the trouble we have in purchasing Slaves'. Worm-damaged supplies of cloth for barter diminished the factory's overall capacity to acquire enslaved captives at Ouidah.

Elusive nests of rats further troubled English slave traders at the forts on the Gold Coast. Rats gnawed trade goods stored in warehouses, rendering valuable textiles for barter worthless. In Hassell's above-mentioned inventory of James Fort, Accra, he reported that of the 20 say textiles, a fine worsted cloth, delivered by Captain Samuel Rickard of the coasting sloop *Blessing*, every bolt was 'ratt eaten' and useless for trade.¹¹⁰ At Charles Fort, Anomabu, Cross complained that casks of valuable tallow for use at the fort and for trade were 'eaten quite up by the rates' after being neglected by company officials and castle slaves tasked with supervising the warehouse.¹¹¹ Three years later, another factor at Anomabu, John Rootsey, continued to complain to Cape Coast that trade goods not properly maintained at the fort and nearby at Anashan appeared 'much eaten by the ratts' temporarily halting exchanges in captives between both forts and their partners.¹¹²

Unable to endure the plunder caused by rats, some factors attempted to eradicate the pests by introducing predators—namely cats—into company warehouses. In 1686 Thomas Bucknell wrote to Cape Coast that the fort at Sekondi was 'most intollerably trobled with rats in the warehouse. They now begin to damnifie the goods, I haveing found severall things knawed per them'.¹¹³ 'If any man in the Castle', he pleaded to Cape Coast, 'can advise me how to distroy them, to advise me of the means; niether can I gett a catt any where'. Bucknell and his subordinates desperately sought after a cat at Sekondi without success.

The following month, Bucknell wrote again to Cape Coast that the warehouse, especially its stores of cloth textiles, continued to suffer from vermin: 'I know not what to doe with the rats, they damage so much good that would make one mad to se, especially the woolen good' traders used to acquire captives.¹¹⁴ The rats ate 'wholes in the boysadoes, Welch plains and blankets' so large that the factor could 'run my fist in them'.¹¹⁵ Bucknell attached an inventory of the goods 'damagd per the rats' to his letter, and wrote despondently that 'how to remidy it I cannot tell'. He tried raising the textiles above the warehouse floor on scaffolding, and in the process moved a nine-hand canoe that had sheltered 'eight ratts of a great biggness',

110 Ralph Hassell, James Fort, Accra, 11 October 1681, in *The English in West Africa ... 1681–1683*, ed. Law, 414.

111 William Cross, Charles Fort, Annimaboe, 3 July 1692, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 294.

112 John Rootsey, Annimaboe, 27 May 1695, in *The English in West Africa ... 1691–1699*, ed. Law, 338.

113 Thomas Bucknell, Succondee, 23 August 1686, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 28–9.

114 Thomas Bucknell, Succondee, 21 September 1686, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 29–30.

115 In his glossary of trade goods, Robin Law explains that boysadoes were woolen cloths produced in England and the Netherlands, and Welch plains were a coarser woolen cloth.

which he and his men killed, along with 'two nests of six young ones apeice, but some escap'd our hands doe what we could'. Bucknell then 'spoild their harbors and made all passages free that they cannot secure themselves from a good cat'.

Bucknell eventually did find a cat for the warehouse, yet he found his proposed predator 'to little, soe I humbly desire your Worship to send me a bigger if it can be procurd. Here be rats almost able to deal with catts'. Bucknell's encounters with rats were not exceptional. The company warehouse at Anomabu faced a similar problem in 1687. Hassell wrote apologetically to Cape Coast that 'I am sorry to write of dammage done by ratts, which is verry much, especially in the allejarrs: we are so pester'd with them that they are not easely destroyd, although [we] keep three catts in the warehouse'.¹¹⁶

Rats continued to pester slave traders and endanger the health of enslaved people in Cape Coast Castle and later on transatlantic voyages. Houstoun described the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle, where enslaved people languished before being taken on ships, as 'swarming with Vermine', including rats, cockroaches and other insects.¹¹⁷ One trader recalled aboard a slave ship, in addition to the 'hot and corrupted air', that the crew and their 'cargo' suffered from rats that 'have done a great deal of damage, we being quite over-run with them'.¹¹⁸ The rats attacked the crew and the enslaved below decks, and devoured the ship's meagre stores of provisions.

Worms and rats put limits on opportunities for English factors to purchase captives from their West African counterparts by damaging trade goods, including the bodies of enslaved people. As vermin, these animals could significantly impinge upon the ecocultural network that slave traders fitfully produced through animal sacrifices, gifts and systems of currency. The power of predatory vermin to curtail trading networks and exploit the vulnerabilities of factory warehouses indicates how the production and maintenance of an ecocultural network was never all-encompassing or permanent, but rather limited, assailable and fragile.

Conclusion

This article has shown how the slave trade in Atlantic Africa depended upon English and West African slave traders producing and maintaining an ecocultural network involving non-human animals as political, cultural and economic instruments. This network was frequently disrupted by non-humans beyond the control of slavers.

116 Ralph Hassell, Annamabo, 1 April 1687, in *The English in West Africa ... 1685–1688*, ed. Law, 201. Allejars, as explained by Robin Law, were a kind of Indian cloth made from cotton or mixed cotton and silk.

117 Houstoun, *Some New and Accurate Observations*, 30.

118 John Newton, *The Journal of a Slave Trader 1750–1754. With Newton's Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, ed. Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell (London: Epworth, 1962), 32.

This article further suggests that applying the ecocultural network concept can bring about a deeper understanding of the environmental and cultural foundations of commercial spaces in the early modern world. It has done so by first demonstrating how trading relations between European and African enslavers, as is evident in the founding of Dixcove, often involved ritual propitiatory sacrifices of sheep. They and other animals, such as elephants or ostriches, became valuable as diplomatic gifts to open new trading connections, as offerings to mediate political alliances, as payment for the redemption of pawns or as curious faunal specimens for collecting. Second, this article has illustrated how the cowry sea snail, *Monetaria moneta*, became a valuable form of currency that facilitated transactions in captives between the Royal African Company and their West African partners. Moreover, this article indicates how tenuous the relations people created with cowries could be over long distances, and how the monetisation of the cowry depended on connecting overseas trading networks spanning the Indian Ocean, Europe and West Africa. The Royal African Company often failed to appreciate and adapt themselves to Atlantic African aesthetics and tastes involving cowries, which hindered the development of their slave-trading activities. Using these kinds of creatures, traders built an ecocultural network with animals that enabled the gradual expansion of the slave trade. Yet, in doing so, traders also created the conditions for vermin to thrive, and these animals unmade such networks by damaging valuable commodities, disrupting supplies of provisions, and infesting the bodies of enslaved people either held permanently at castles or bound for middle passage voyages.

By focusing on the commodification and value of captives and animals, and the evaluation of animals as either commercial instruments or risks, this article suggests further opportunities for scholarly exchange between the history of slavery and environmental history. The co-constitutive commodification of human captives and cowries enabled the trade to flourish on the coast, and their combined evaluation is evident in the ledgers and inventories that listed their equivalent value. Turning people into slaves depended on turning animals into money. Factors performed skilled labour to keep cowries—evaluated by weight and shape—useful for the trade. On the other hand, factors learned and appreciated the value of other animals, as is evident in their prompt responses to the demands of their Atlantic African counterparts for offerings of animals for sacrifice. While this article has mostly focused on English factors, the fragmentary archival existence of the enslaved poses significant interpretive limits on a fuller understanding of how captives themselves perceived different kinds of animals in the trade. Indeed, the archive of the Royal African Company itself produced the commodification of people as abstract figures existing only in the pages of a ledger book.¹¹⁹

119 Stephanie E. Smallwood, 'The Politics of the Archive and History's Accountability to the Enslaved', *History of the Present* 6, no. 2 (2016): 117–32.

This article further demonstrates the promise of the ecocultural network concept for gaining a deeper understanding of the environmental and cultural foundations of relations between imperial metropolises, colonies and semi-colonial trading sites created by the agents of joint-stock companies, local rulers and merchants in the early modern world. The Atlantic slave trade taking place at the outposts and castles of the Royal African Company involved rapidly increasing transfers of human captives, exchanges of sheep, deliveries of cowries and other interactions between people and fauna across considerable distances. 'To get a cargo of flesh, bone, and blood' in Atlantic Africa, as one nineteenth-century writer put it, English traders needed to know and act on the value of animals.¹²⁰ Yet, as animals in the slave trade enabled human agency, others circumscribed such plans. Non-human animals shaped slavery's networks.

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120 Daniel Kumler Flickinger, *Ethiopia: Or, Twenty Years of Missionary Life in Western Africa* (Dayton, OH: United Brethren Printing House, 1873), 112.

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