

Edited by · Editores

José da Silva Horta · Carlos Almeida · Peter Mark

# AFRICAN IVORIES IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD, 1400-1900

*MARFINS AFRICANOS NO MUNDO ATLÂNTICO, 1400-1900*



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CENTRO DE  
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UNIVERSIDADE  
DE LISBOA

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## **Back to the Ivory Coast:**

Dutch commodity trading in West Africa, 1740-1809

### *De volta à Costa do Marfim:*

*Comércio de mercadorias holandesas na África ocidental, 1740-1809*

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Scholars and activists interested in measuring the impact the global ivory trade has had on African elephant populations have used different methods to connect trade patterns to provenance zones. In recent years, archaeologists have advanced the search for origins by applying multi-isotope analysis on material obtained from historical elephant tusks and ivory objects. Based on this technique, Ashley Coutu and others have, for example, been able to construct a historical dataset of elephants from different habitats in East Africa, which has allowed them to identify a “moving frontier” of ivory extraction during the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> But the multi-isotope approach is limited by the availability of samples and, as a method to determine origins, works best when applied on a small geographical scale. Archaeologists therefore rely on historical context to identify broad impact zones and select appropriate collections or ma-

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1 Coutu et al., 2016. The notion of a “moving frontier” comes from Sheriff 1987.

terials for sampling. In other words, document-based research techniques still have an important role to play in the reconstruction of historical commodity chains that linked extraction frontiers to global centres of ivory consumption.<sup>2</sup>

Using trade records of the Middelburg Commerce Company, this brief essay aims to identify the foci of Dutch ivory trading in West Africa in the eighteenth century. It will pinpoint the precise locations of trade of twenty-three vessels sailing from Middelburg after 1740 and, on that basis, conclude that the Ivory Coast, especially Cape Lahou, was a central node in the ivory commodity chain to the Netherlands. The essay proposes that to reconstruct the African segment of the chain and assess the impact of the export trade on local elephant populations and their habitats, future archaeological research, both in the field and in laboratories, should consider this region as an impact zone of major importance.

The principal aim of the essay is, therefore, to demonstrate how records of ivory transactions on the African coast can contribute to the identification of historically significant provenance zones. By examining patterns of ivory trading in West Africa, however, the essay inevitably touches upon a maligned analytical entanglement of the latter with the transatlantic slave trade. In 1982, Harvey Feinberg and Marion Johnson argued that decent quantitative assessments of the ivory trade had been lacking because historians tended to “treat ivory purchases as an appendage” of the slave trade and thus failed to recognise their significance.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Martha Chaiklin has suggested that “to clarify networks of interaction and exchange” and “show the environmental and cultural impact of ivory as a commodity”, historians should “decouple ivory from its more sinister traveling companions”.<sup>4</sup> But can we really do this? As this essay will point out, on both the European and the African side, the two trades were not only intertwined but also supported one another. Because many European merchants who bought ivory were also in the business of purchasing enslaved people, like the Middelburg Company for example, scholars

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2 Chaiklin 2010, 532. The study of commodity chains focuses on the way primary goods were transformed into finished products through the involvement of a series of interlocking actors and institutions. See Topik et Wells 2012, 598-599.

3 Feinberg et Johnson 1982, 435.

4 Chaiklin 2010, 530.

often rely on the same archives for documenting these different trades. Moreover, historians of the ivory trade generally approach these sources with the same questions about volume, composition, direction, origins and impact that others have long asked about the Atlantic slave trade. Given the size of the ivory trade and its importance to the African suppliers involved, a comparison with the slave trade in terms of geographies, supply chains and societal costs might be a more productive research strategy than an unwarranted decoupling.

## Historiographical bias

Histories of Dutch economic activity in western Africa indicate that until the middle of the eighteenth century, maritime traders invested as much in the purchase of goods on the African coast as in the riskier business of transatlantic slaving. The West India Company (WIC), for instance, organised almost as many so-called “return voyages” to Africa – which carried African goods directly back to the Netherlands – as triangular slaving voyages.<sup>5</sup> Of the several hundred trade expeditions to Africa conducted by Dutch interlopers while the WIC held a monopoly on the African trade (1674-1730), most focussed on procuring products like gold, pepper, gum and ivory.<sup>6</sup> Compared to the British, the share of commodity ships in the Dutch African trade during this period was exceptionally high.<sup>7</sup> After the WIC’s monopoly on Atlantic slaving ended, in 1740, the interests of private merchants gradually tilted towards the slave trade, but commodity trading remained an important part of their business. For example, of the 151 voyages that the largest of these private firms, the Middelburg Commerce Company (MCC), fitted out to Africa after 1730, thirty-nine were return voyages.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, many of the company’s slaving voy-

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5 Den Heijer 1997.

6 Paesie 2008.

7 Smith et Woltjer 2016, 17.

8 Unger 1951.

ages to the West Indies carried African commodities to reduce the economic risks involved with carrying human cargo.<sup>9</sup>

Much of what we know about the size of the Dutch ivory trade relates to the period of the WIC monopoly, as studied for instance by Feinberg and Johnson and, in greater detail, Henk den Heijer.<sup>10</sup> Based on extensive research in the company archives, den Heijer estimates that from 1674 to 1740 the WIC purchased almost three million pounds of ivory on the Gold Coast. This number does not include tusks the company imported by coastal trade from other African regions, the provenance of which cannot be accurately determined.<sup>11</sup> While the ivory trade was notably smaller than the gold trade in this period, the trend after 1700 was, in the words of Feinberg and Johnson, “toward the export of greater quantities” as demand in northern Europe for finished consumer goods, including ivory knife handles and combs, was growing.<sup>12</sup>

The quality of the research notwithstanding, the reliance on the WIC records has created a temporal and geographical bias in the study of Dutch trade in precolonial Africa. Thus far, historians have mainly focussed on the period before 1740 and privileged negotiations on the Gold Coast at the expense of other regions. In relation to ivory, there are several problems with this bias. First, while gold predominated early exchanges between Dutch and African traders, ivory became the most important commodity export from the African coast in the 1740s.<sup>13</sup> By this time, moreover, ivory exports from the Gold Coast were in decline as the many free traders who entered the business after 1730, like the numerous interlopers before them, tended to draw on ivory supplies from other regions, especially the Ivory Coast. According to den Heijer, the WIC did not rely much on the Ivory Coast for ivory supplies, despite the region’s historical association with this commodity.<sup>14</sup> If so, this might have been a reason for interlopers to go there, which is indeed what they did.

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9 Eltis et al, 2010; Behrendt et al., 2010, 87; Smith et Woltjer 2016, 20-27.

10 Feinberg et Johnson 1982; den Heijer 1997.

11 According to den Heijer, detailed trade books of only twenty-six WIC voyages to the coast of West Africa have survived. He also points out that the WIC only dispatched four commodity ships directly to Angola.

12 Feinberg et Johnson 1982, 439; Smith et Woltjer 2016, 19.

13 Prooijen 2000.

14 Den Heijer 1997, 137; Marees 1605, 5.

## Ivory Coast

While it is difficult to pinpoint locations of trade in the period of the WIC monopoly, private company records from the period after 1730 make it possible to determine where exactly Dutch traders purchased ivory. This chapter uses data from twenty-two MCC slaving voyages collected for a previous study on the Dutch slave trade in West Africa.<sup>15</sup> These slave-ships, which sailed between 1741 and 1794, all took on board significant amounts of ivory in West Africa along with African captives. The patterns observed in this slave-and-commodity trade will be compared with that of a return voyage of the MCC vessel *Vliegende Faam* in 1753-1755, one of the thirty-nine commodity ships the MCC sent out to West Africa.<sup>16</sup> The crew of this vessel mainly purchased ivory, but they also bought small amounts of beeswax, redwood, ebony and gold and a small number of enslaved people, whom they subsequently exchanged with Dutch slavers for merchandise. Based on observations in MCC ship journals and related archival evidence, it can be reasonably assumed that the way other Dutch traders conducted their business on the African coast in this period resembled the patterns observed in the MCC records. It must be noted, though, that this essay only offers a preliminary sketch of trading patterns, which must be complemented by further research in WIC and MCC records and a complete inventory of Dutch commodity ships to draw a more accurate picture of the Dutch ivory trade in the eighteenth century.

The slave-ships in the sample traded ivory in twenty-seven different locations, from Cape Mount on the upper Guinea coast to Gabon in the south. In total, they purchased 6,767 elephant tusks, including large teeth and scivellos (small-sized tusks), together weighing 110,384 Dutch pounds (one Dutch pound equalled 494 grams). Thus, on average each one of these vessels carried 5,000 pounds or about 300 pieces of ivory from the coast along with their more valuable human cargos. The *Voyages* database indicates that between 1740,

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15 Vos 2010. Details on the twenty-two voyages can be found in The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, voyage ID: 10447, 10463, 10542, 10543, 10592, 10625, 10627, 10666, 10784, 10786, 10788, 10871, 10905, 10910, 10913, 11007, 11056, 11058, 11085, 11086, 11127, 11210.

16 Zeeuws Archief (ZA), 20 Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie (MCC), 1148-1149.

when the WIC monopoly on slaving ended, and 1809, when the last slave ship from the Netherlands crossed the Atlantic, 712 Dutch vessels were engaged in the transatlantic slave trade (including fourteen owned by the WIC), of which about 400 traded in West Africa, as opposed to the Loango Coast north of the Congo River.<sup>17</sup> If each vessel carried on average 5,000 pounds of ivory, then roughly 2m pounds of West African ivory were imported to the Netherlands in this period by way of the slave trade alone.

To what extent did the patterns of ivory trading overlap with the slaving activities these vessels conducted simultaneously? The first point to emphasise is that, in the half-century covered by this sample, African brokers in Cape Lahou on the eastern Ivory Coast supplied 54 percent of all ivory purchases. A previous study established that the share of Cape Lahou in the MCC's slave trade in West Africa was 38 percent, underlining the port's preeminent position in the Dutch slave trade after 1740.<sup>18</sup> It appears, then, that slave-ship captains depended on Cape Lahou even more for loading ivory than they did for the embarkation of captives. For the latter they still relied to a significant degree on the warehousing facilities provided by the West India Company forts on the Gold Coast.

Contemporary sources confirm the centrality of Cape Lahou in the West African commodity trade. In the mid-seventeenth century, for example, Olfert Dapper recognised Lahou as the main port for trading ivory on the West African coast.<sup>19</sup> Around 1700, Dutch and British interlopers concentrated here to avoid the monopoly control that the WIC and the Royal African Company of England exerted from their forts on the nearby Gold Coast.<sup>20</sup> Toward the end of the century, The British captain John Adams observed that “[t]he Dutch, at a former period, carried on here [in Cape Lahou] a considerable trade in slaves and ivory, particularly in the latter, in which the Lahoo people have always dealt largely.”<sup>21</sup> Since ivory trading was established at Lahou long before slave ships

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17 *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/ZyHAFSe6> (accessed 17 June 2020).

18 Vos 2010.

19 Dapper 1668, 432.

20 Bosman 1967, 490; Nationaal Archief, West-Indische Compagnie (1.05.01.02), no. 102, p. 166-166v, 168-169v.

21 Adams 1822, 2.

started calling there in the eighteenth century, it is likely that the availability of ivory supplies gave local brokers the economic leverage to break into the more competitive transatlantic slave trade.<sup>22</sup>

One of the twenty-two slave-ships in the sample, the *Jonge Willem*, sailing in 1772-73, carried a major load of ivory from Gabon: 250 large teeth and 422 scrivellos (of which sixty-two were hippopotamus teeth), constituting 14 percent of the total amount of ivory traded in the sample. Given that the sample included just a single voyage to Gabon, it is difficult to draw general conclusions from these numbers, though at the minimum, they demonstrate that merchants in the Komo River estuary had access to significant ivory supplies. The Dutch had started trading ivory on the Gabon coast in the seventeenth century, for which they sometimes paid with enslaved people imported from other African regions.<sup>23</sup> The Dutch ivory trade in Gabon seems to have increased in the 1730s, with Liverpool traders following in the 1750s, although they drew more heavily on supplies from Calabar, Cameroon and Bonny.<sup>24</sup> On the back of this commodity trade, local merchants became involved in the transatlantic slave trade in the 1760s.<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that, while Dutch slavers remained minor players in this region, the *Jonge Willem* was one of a handful of Dutch vessels that began frequenting Gabon for captives at the time.<sup>26</sup>

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Ivory Coast gained renewed importance for Dutch slavers, who found it increasingly hard to compete with traders from Britain, France and Brazil in other parts of western Africa.<sup>27</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that most of their ivory purchases also occurred along this coast. The three other major places of trade in the sample were all in the western part of the Ivory Coast: Sassandra (8.0 percent), Rio Cavali (4.7 percent) and Tabou (3.4 percent). Most trading communities on the Ivory Coast were deeply embedded in local forest economies, with few

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22 Eltis 2013, 31.

23 Patterson 1975, 13-14.

24 Behrendt et al. 2010, 83-5, 93-5. For the Dutch data, they refer to Austen et Jacob 1974.

25 *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/UX3AAkob> (consulted 12 June 2020).

26 *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, voyage ID, 10786; ZA, MCC, 674.

27 This paragraph builds on Vos 2016.

hinterland linkages. This part of the West African coast was known for its dense, seemingly impenetrable forest, a scene captured in Barbot's observation that "all views seem the same, everywhere forest and hardly anywhere distinguishable, this being the case from Cape Mount to Cape Lahou!"<sup>28</sup> The Bandama River at Lahou provided an artery through the forest, by which local merchants were connected to the commercial hubs of the Baule, Akan and Mande worlds, allowing them to turn Lahou into an important centre for the regional ivory and slave trades. Sassandra was possibly linked into the same long-distance trade networks, given that in the seventeenth century local merchants exported the same blue-and-white banded cottons that Jula traders also brought from inland markets to Lahou.<sup>29</sup> Because hinterland connections were available, the ivory traded at Lahou and Sassandra could have come from both forest and savannah elephants. However, none of the other coastal outlets west of Lahou, perhaps with the exception of Rio Cavali, was linked to the savannah region beyond the forest, meaning that the ivory traded in these places was very likely extracted from forest elephants.

Another important point on overlap between the slave and ivory trades concerns the merchandise sold to African brokers. The purchase books of the MCC vessels indicate that captains or their supercargoes used the same trade goods for buying ivory (or gold, for that matter) as for buying captives, at least when they purchased both in the same African region.<sup>30</sup> These goods included expensive varieties of textiles, guns, gunpowder, and liquor, as well as less expensive assortments of copper, glass and earthenware, tobacco, knives, beads, and iron bars. This finding discredits the idea that the African demand for guns was a specific feature of the slave trade or, more generally, that the slave trade required merchandise that was substantially different or more expensive than that used in other European trades with Africa.<sup>31</sup> Instead, it suggests that for African brokers, at least in the eighteenth century, ivory and captives were alternative means to obtain imported manufactured goods.

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28 Hair et al., 1992, 240; Person 1970, 292; Person 1987, 257.

29 Bellefond 1669, 181-183.

30 For instance, see ZA, MCC, 681 (*Jonge Willem*, 1778); 848, 863 (*Nieuwe Hoop*, 1772, 1783); 1093 (*Vergenoegen*, 1786); 1136 (*Vis*, 1774); 1293 (*Watergens*, 1778).

31 Inikori 1977.



In 1753, the MCC vessel *Vliegende Faam* set out on a return voyage to West Africa, captained by the experienced slaver Pieter de Moor and carrying merchandise worth 30,000 Dutch florins. The ship started trading at the river Sangwin on the Malagueta Coast, then made its way down to Gabon and São Tomé, before it sailed back up to the Ivory and Gold Coasts to complete its purchases. Over a period of sixteen months, from February 1754 to May 1755, the crew procured ivory in thirteen different places, consuming four fifths of the ship's trade cargo. In total they purchased 610 large teeth and 740 scrivellos, together weighing 26,914 Dutch pounds. If all thirty-nine commodity ships of the MCC purchased roughly equal amounts of ivory, then the Middelburg Company alone would have imported more than 1m pounds of African ivory to the Netherlands.

Unsurprisingly, given the trading pattern of Dutch slavers in this period, Cape Lahou figured prominently in this voyage's itinerary. De Moor anchored his ship twice in Lahou, in April 1754 and February the following year, to purchase 174 teeth and 176 scrivellos, whose combined weight constituted 39 percent of the ivory loaded on the *Vliegende Faam*. Based on the MCC data, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that in the period under study Lahou merchants accounted for roughly 40 percent of the ivory procured by Dutch slave and commodity traders. Unfortunately, precise information on the number of Dutch commodity ships in this period (as exists for slave-ships) is not yet available. But if the above computations are correct, then in seventy years Lahou supplied ivory to the amount of 400,000 pounds to MCC commodity ships and 800,000 pounds to Dutch slave-ships. That is 1.2m Dutch pounds or 592.9 metric tons in total, excluding non-MCC produce traders. By comparison, between 1750 and 1808, British ships carried 196.7 tons of ivory from Old Calabar, which was their main place of trade in the Bight of Biafra.<sup>32</sup>

After Lahou, the most important trade locations were the Cameroons (12.9 percent), Anomabu on the Gold Coast (10.4 percent), Sassandra (9.7 percent), Little Popo in the Bight of Benin (7.5 percent) and Jack-Jack on the Ivory

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32 Behrendt et al. 2010, 94.

Coast (6.7 percent). The appearance of the Cameroons is significant, because since the 1650s Dutch slavers had not shown any interest in this river. In fact, there is little evidence of slaving activities in the Cameroons until Liverpool ships began visiting the river in the 1750s as their business in nearby Calabar was expanding.<sup>33</sup> African merchants in the Cameroons, like those in Gabon, were more engaged in supplying commodities like ivory, wax and redwood to Dutch and British traders. Future research in the Middelburg archives can shed light on size of the Dutch ivory trade in this river estuary. If the records of the *Vliegende Faam* are any indication, however, it should be clear that neither the Cameroons, nor any other port in West Africa, came close to rivalling Cape Lahou in supplying ivory to the Dutch.

### Implications for the archaeological study of Dutch ivory

This preliminary study of the MCC records has significant implications for recent archaeological research on the Dutch ivory trade. Excavations in Amsterdam of objects made of hard animal tissue have shown that manufacturers most frequently used elephant ivory in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is no coincidence that this is exactly the period when Dutch merchants were involved in slave and commodity trading in western Africa. According to Marloes Rijkelijhuizen, one of the investigators, after 1800 “the finds of ivory objects decreased rapidly.”<sup>34</sup> Based on these excavations, archaeologists have thus been able to establish a close link between historical ivory consumption in the Netherlands and the height of Dutch trading activities in West Africa. In a subsequent study, Rijkelijhuizen combined archaeological evidence taken from worked objects and waste fragments with historical records of the Dutch ivory trade and manufacturing to estimate the size of tusks used by Amsterdam craftsmen in the early eighteenth century. She concluded

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33 *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/de5J9T1K> (accessed 17 June 2020).

34 Rijkelijhuizen 2009, 420.

that there was a preponderance of smaller tusks, which might correspond with the category of *scrivellos* in the African trade records. Ivory craftsmen preferred small tusks for making knife handles, although for comb-making they needed larger tusks. Some of the larger tusks imported from West Africa to the Netherlands were re-exported to Asia. The small tusks favoured by Dutch artisans might have been taken from African forest elephants, whose tusks tend to be smaller and produce ivory that is “darker, harder, and denser than savannah elephant ivory.”<sup>35</sup>

More recently, Rijkelijkhuisen and other researchers have tried to establish “whether the ivory the Dutch purchased at the various coastal trading centres originated from the same coastal areas or if it was obtained much further into the interior and brought to the coast along existing trade networks.”<sup>36</sup> A multi-isotope analysis of a sample of twenty-two ivory pieces taken from the earlier excavations allowed them to determine from which geological zone in Africa the elephant ivory originated. While the method seemed promising, the analysis of this one sample provided little conclusive evidence about the exact provenance of the ivory used in the manufacture of the excavated objects. The ivory “originated from elephants that inhabited different geological areas in Africa,” the researchers summed up their research. “The results nonetheless indicate that the ivory of forest elephants inhabiting the West and Central African coast was an important product for import.”<sup>37</sup> Despite uncertainty about geographical origins, there appeared to be a predominance of forest elephant tusks in the ivory supplies to Dutch manufacturers.

This kind of laboratory analysis of ivory manufactures and waste material in the Netherlands must be complemented by archaeological fieldwork of the kind conducted in Ghana by Ann and Peter Stahl.<sup>38</sup> Their research provides useful guidance to future work by archaeologists aiming to recover historical ivory supply chains in West Africa. Based on excavations at multiple sites, Stahl and Stahl tentatively concluded that during the 1700s regional centres of ivo-

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35 Rijkelijkhuisen 2011, 231.

36 Rijkelijkhuisen et al., 2015, 504-505.

37 Rijkelijkhuisen et al., 2015, 518.

38 Stahl et Stahl 2004, 86-101.

ry production and trade shifted southward from locations near the Ghanaian forest edge, such as Begho, to centres in the Akan states, like Kumasi. The expansion of Dutch and British ivory trading in the eighteenth century probably contributed to this movement by causing a reconfiguration of regional trade networks toward the Atlantic. Stahl and Stahl say little about provenance zones and whether the ivory came from forest or savannah elephants, but their case-study shows how archaeological fieldwork can uncover changes in the dynamics of the West African ivory trade and, specifically, the networks supplying the Atlantic trade.

## Conclusion

This essay has raised a few methodological, empirical and theoretical points. First, the reconstruction of historical ivory commodity chains between Africa and Europe requires a combination of historical and archaeological research. A systematic study of trade records is required to pinpoint locations of trade on the African coast, which were not only nodal points in Atlantic trade networks linking African suppliers to global ivory markets, but also outlets for moving frontiers of ivory extraction. Archaeological research in the lab and in the field can subsequently help identify the links in the chain from the coast inland and determine the movement, nature and ecological impact of the ivory frontier.

It is suggested here that, as far as the Dutch ivory trade is concerned, both historians and archaeologists need to seriously reconsider the role of the Ivory Coast, especially the merchants at Cape Lahou, in this business. These merchants were among the largest ivory suppliers in Africa in the era of the transatlantic slave trade. Their port, rather than the better studied forts on the Gold Coast, provided Dutch traders in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with most of their West African ivory supplies. Since Lahou merchants had access to a vast commercial hinterland, the ivory they traded could have come from the same provenance zones that supported the trade on the Gold

Coast, but this is difficult to tell in the absence of archaeological research in Côte d'Ivoire and on ivories from the region.

But the significance of this essay's findings goes beyond identifying the West African sources of Dutch ivory imports in the eighteenth century. As the example of the *Vliegende Faam* indicates, African communities like Cape Lahou absorbed massive amounts of European capital by exchanging commodities like ivory for imported merchandise. To understand how Africans viewed their economic relationship with the Atlantic world, it is therefore essential to expand existing research on the precolonial commodity trade. Put differently, by erasing one out of two European ships from the picture of precolonial trade on the African coast, we risk reducing the complex African experience with Atlantic commerce to a singular event, the export slave trade.<sup>39</sup> In some regions, however, commodity trading was equally or more important than slave trading.<sup>40</sup> Especially in areas that played a marginal role in supplying Europeans with captive labour, high-value goods like ivory were an alternative currency to purchase European imports. In some places, like Cape Lahou, ivory also gave merchants the economic leverage to compete in the Atlantic slave trade with firmly established and more productive slave-supply zones.<sup>41</sup>

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39 A point well made by Northrup 2013.

40 For example, see Eltis 1994; Webb 1995; Girshick et Thornton 2001, 353-376.

41 Eltis 2013, 31.

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674; 681 (*Jonge Willem*, 1778); 848, 863 (*Nieuwe Hoop*, 1772, 1783); 1093 (*Vergenoegen*, 1786); 1136 (*Vis*, 1774); 1148-1149; 1293 (*Watergens*, 1778).

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Carved ivory was one of the first commodities exported from Africa to Europe. Ivory artifacts from Atlantic Africa figured in cabinets of curiosities and were used in everyday life. The hybridism of some of this *corpus* has sparked lively debate among researchers and collectors about provenance, dating, and meaning. *African ivories in the Atlantic World, 1400-1900* addresses the subject in its different dimensions. Priority is given to the African contexts of production and use. Circulation is approached in the scope of trade in raw ivory, a topic usually subsumed by the historiography of the Atlantic slave trade. Finally, some of the paths taken by carved and raw African ivory to Europe and South America are identified and the current legal status of this commerce is discussed.

O marfim lavrado foi um dos primeiros produtos exportados de África para a Europa. Artefactos ebúrneos da África atlântica figuraram nos gabinetes de curiosidades e foram usados no quotidiano. O hibridismo de uma parte desse *corpus* tem suscitado vivo debate entre investigadores e colecionadores sobre proveniências, datações e significados. *Marfins Africanos no Mundo Atlântico, 1400-1900* aborda o tema nas suas diferentes dimensões. Privilegiam-se os contextos africanos de produção e uso. A circulação é tratada no âmbito do comércio do marfim em bruto, habitualmente subsumido pela historiografia no comércio de escravizados. Identificam-se, por fim, alguns dos caminhos percorridos pelo marfim africano lavrado e em bruto na Europa e na América do Sul e o seu enquadramento jurídico actual.