

The Export Trade in Slaves, 1600–1800

By 1600, an important structural change in the political economy of some parts of Africa was well underway. Islam continued to be an agent of change in the northern savanna and along the shores of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. Slaves were exported on a sustained level, and enslavement and slavery were still interpreted largely in terms of Islamic law and tradition. The growth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade had already exposed west-central Africa to a radically new influence. In the next two centuries, this influence was to have an even greater effect on much of the Guinea coast than the earlier trade in slaves had had anywhere in Africa, with the result that the people of the Atlantic basin experienced a major transformation in social organization.¹ The dynamic changes along the Atlantic shores where the export trade became so substantial in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries transformed slavery there in ways quite different from the earlier pattern in the Islamic belt, although structurally the impact was the same: Where slaves had once been an incidental element in society, they now became common. The ability to supply slaves required adjustments in the methods of enslavement and the development of a commercial infrastructure. These changes in turn were accompanied by increased domestic use of slaves.

The Volume of the Export Trade, 1600–1800

Despite the unevenness of the data available for a census of the export trade in slaves, it is possible to make some broad comparisons between its various sectors (see Table 3.1). The trade increased steadily from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. The total number of slaves who left Africa – about 1,088,000 in the sixteenth century – includes 750,000 slaves allocated to the Islamic trade and 338,000 for the trans-Atlantic trade. The estimate for the Islamic traffic could be significantly off the mark but is unlikely to be less than 500,000

TABLE 3.1. *Estimated Slave Departures from Africa, 1500–1800*

Sector	1500–1600	%	1600–1700	%	1700–1800	%	Total	%
Red Sea	100,000	9.2	100,000	3.6	200,000	2.6	400,000	3.4
Sahara	550,000	50.6	700,000	25.2	700,000	9.0	1,950,000	16.7
East Africa	100,000	9.2	100,000	3.6	400,000	5.1	600,000	5.1
Atlantic	338,000	31.1	1,876,000	67.6	6,495,000	83.3	8,709,000	74.7
TOTAL	1,088,000		2,776,000		7,795,000		11,659,000	

Source: Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.2 3.3, 3.7. Also see Ralph Austen, “The 19th century Islamic slave trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea coasts): A tentative census,” *Slavery and Abolition* 9, 3 (1988), 21–44; José C. Curto, “A quantitative reassessment of the legal Portuguese slave trade from Luanda, Angola, 1710–1830,” *African Economic History*, 20 (1992), 1–25; Curto, “The legal Portuguese slave trade from Benguela, Angola, 1730–1828: A quantitative re-appraisal,” *Africa* (São Paulo) 16 (1993), 101–16; and Per O. Hernaes, *Slaves, Danes, and African Coast Society. The Danish Slave Trade from West Africa and Afro-Danish Relations on the Eighteenth-Century Gold Coast* (Trondheim: University of Trondheim Press, 1995). It should be noted that slaves destined for the offshore islands of the western African coast and Europe for the period 1600–1850 are not included. The estimated number of slaves leaving western Africa was correspondingly higher. The figures used here rely on the *Slave Trade Database*, which does not account for slaves sent to the offshore islands or Europe in this period. See David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Manolo Florentino, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (<http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>).

or more than 1,000,000. The estimate for the trans-Atlantic movement is far more accurate. Hence the sixteenth-century migration probably was on the order of 800,000 to 1,300,000 people. The seventeenth-century trade is subject to less error, and the eighteenth-century trade to less still, because the proportion of the trans-Atlantic trade – which can be estimated far more accurately than the Islamic trade – steadily increased, thereby reducing the relative size of the Islamic trade and correspondingly minimizing the error inherent in an assessment of its volume.

In the seventeenth century, the Islamic trade was probably on the same scale as in the sixteenth century – roughly 800,000 people – although again the number was perhaps as low as 500,000 or as high as 1,000,000, but the great increase in the Atlantic traffic meant that the total number of people who left doubled from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century and more than doubled from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century (from 2,766,000 to 7,795,000), even though the Islamic trade expanded in the eighteenth century too (up perhaps 300,000, all in the Indian Ocean). The trans-Atlantic trade rose from about one-fourth of the total trade in slaves in the sixteenth century to more than four-fifths in the eighteenth century. Over the period as a whole, the trans-Atlantic sector accounted for almost three quarters of the enslaved population that left Africa. The total number of slaves sold across the Atlantic between 1600 and 1800 was on the order of 8.4 million.² It is likely that scholars will be able to modify the conclusions reached in the pages that follow as new material is examined that will revise the export figures. The concern here, therefore, is to

TABLE 3.2. *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1601–1700*

Period	Number of Slaves	Annual Average
1601–1625	353,000	14,100
1626–1650	315,000	12,600
1651–1675	488,000	19,500
1676–1700	720,000	28,800
TOTAL	1,876,000	

Source: David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Manolo Florentino, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (<http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>).

understand where *most* of the individuals who were shipped to the Americas came from, that is, the 1,876,000 who were sold from 1600 to 1700 (Table 3.2) and the 6,495,000 who were sold in the eighteenth century (Table 3.3).

The largest exporting region in the early seventeenth century was west-central Africa, which continued sending thousands of slaves a year to the Americas, thus consolidating a pattern that began a century earlier. Senegambia and Benin maintained their relatively modest share of the trade as well, each providing about a thousand slaves a year. Slaves came from elsewhere too. The really dramatic expansion of the Atlantic trade began after 1650, and from then slave exports affected ever larger parts of Africa. In the last 50 years of the seventeenth century, more slaves were sold to Europeans on the Atlantic coast than in the previous 200 years combined. This phenomenal growth was a response to the spread of plantation slavery in the Americas. From the 1640s through the 1660s, sugar spread from Brazil to the Lesser Antilles – Barbados, Martinique, Guadeloupe, St Kitts, and Antigua – and these new colonies acquired tens of thousands of enslaved workers. In the third quarter almost 20,000 people went each year, but in the last quarter of the century, when approximately 720,000 slaves left African shores for America, the annual average approached 30,000 people. By now, sugar plantations were being established on Jamaica and Saint Dominguez, which rapidly became the two largest producers of sugar. As a result, the dramatic surge in slave exports continued into the eighteenth century, reaching figures on the order of 65,000 people per year for the whole century. We must remember that these figures are primarily based on the known volume of slave arrivals in the Americas and not on the actual number of people who left Africa, which undoubtedly was higher because some slaves, perhaps on the order of 15–20 percent, died on the Atlantic crossing. The estimates used here take into allowance this mortality.

The first major source of slaves for the Americas, the area of Angola and Kongo, remained a substantial exporter far into the nineteenth century. The second region to become a big supplier was the Slave Coast (Bight of Benin), which entered a period of particularly rapid expansion in the late seventeenth

TABLE 3.3. *Atlantic Slave Trade by National Carrier, 1701–1800*

National Carrier	Number of Slaves	Percent
English	2,545,000	39.2
Portuguese	2,213,000	34.1
French	1,139,000	17.5
Dutch	330,000	5.1
North American	189,000	2.9
Danish	67,000	1.0
Spanish	11,000	0.2
TOTAL	6,494,000	

Source: Eltis, et al., *Slave Trade Database*. The national trades have been studied in considerable detail; see Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 151, 207, 211; Roger Anstey, "The volume of the North American slave-carrying trade from Africa, 1761–1810," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 42:12 (1975b), 201; Roger Anstey, "The volume and profitability of the British slave trade, 1761–1807," in S. L. Engerman and E. D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975c), 13; Roger Anstey, "The British slave trade, 1751–1807," *Journal of African History* 17:4 (1976), 261, 267, 607; Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 28; Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 27; Robert Stein, "Measuring the French slave trade, 1713–1792/3," *Journal of African History* 19:4 (1978), 519; Johannes Postma, "The origin of African slaves: the Dutch activities on the Guinea coast, 1675–1795," in S. L. Engerman and E. D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975b), 201; Svend Erik Green-Pederson, "The History of the Danish Negro slave trade, 1733–1807," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 42 (1957), 201; José C. Curto, "A quantitative reassessment of the legal Portuguese slave trade from Luanda, Angola, 1710–1830," *African Economic History*, 20 (1992), 1–25; Curto, "The legal Portuguese slave trade from Benguela, Angola, 1730–1828: A quantitative re-appraisal," *Africa* (São Paulo) 16 (1993), 101–16; and Joseph C. Miller, "The political economy of the Angolan slave trade in the eighteenth century," *The Indian Historical Review* 15:1/2 (1988/89), 152–87.

century, continuing into the eighteenth century until the end of the trade in the nineteenth. The third area to experience a profound rise in slave departures was the Gold Coast, whose exports rose sharply in the early eighteenth century but fell off by 1800. The fourth area was the Bight of Biafra, centered on the Niger delta and the Cross River, which suddenly became a major exporter in the 1740s and continued to be so for a century. Other parts of West Africa had temporary spurts in their export figures. Thus the Bandama River was important before 1750, the coast near the Futa Jallon highlands was busy in the 1750s

and 1760s, and ports near where Monrovia and Freetown now stand handled some traffic at different times. Finally, the Senegambia, with its connections to the Muslim interior, always supplied some slaves, although never on the scale of the four major exporting regions.

These regions are discussed in terms of the estimated number of slave departures by quarter in the seventeenth century and by decade in the eighteenth century. These figures are presented in several forms. First, the source of the enslaved population shifted to the region of the Kingdom of Kongo in the first two-thirds of the sixteenth century. (Table 3.2). Kongo and neighboring Angola remained by far the most important source of slaves well into the seventeenth century. Secondly, the Bight of Benin became a major source of slaves in the 1670s, and within a couple of decades surpassed west-central Africa in terms of the numbers of slaves being sold across the Atlantic. The Gold Coast also became an important source of slaves, for the first time, in this period. The far-western coast (Senegambia and upper Guinea) continued to supply some slaves, roughly on the same level as in the sixteenth century, whereas the Bight of Biafra was relatively unimportant. Kongo continued to be a major source of slaves as a result of civil wars that erupted after 1665, which partially accounts for the sustained level of exports from west-central Africa. Thirdly, an examination of the regional composition of the trade for each decade in the eighteenth century suggests that the trade expanded rapidly in three phases (Table 3.4). In the first third of the century, the Bight of Benin led all regions in numbers of slaves being dispatched. The Gold Coast continued at previous levels, whereas the number of slaves leaving west-central Africa increased to levels that were unprecedented, increased steadily until the 1730s. Both Senegambia and the Bight of Biafra, although representing a small portion of the total trade, also accounted for increasing numbers of slaves.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, west-central Africa resumed its position as the largest source of slaves for the Americas. The Bight of Benin declined by almost half, whereas Senegambia, the upper Guinea coast, and the Bight of Biafra expanded rapidly. In the last third of the century, the numbers of slaves leaving west-central Africa increased to levels that were unprecedented, exceeding the level of departures for all of Africa in the first decade of the century. In this period, the number of people leaving every region increased. The Gold Coast and the Bights of Benin and Biafra together exported almost as many slaves as west-central Africa.

For the eighteenth century as a whole, the trade was heavily concentrated on the Gold Coast, in the Bights of Benin and Biafra and above all in west-central Africa. Taken together, these areas accounted for almost 88 percent of the trade. The 2,365,000 who came from west-central Africa represented more than 36.4 percent of the trade, whereas another 1,223,000 slaves (18.8 percent) came from the Bight of Benin, 1,014,000 slaves (15.6 percent) came from the Gold Coast, and 904,000 slaves (13.9 percent) came from the Bight of Biafra. By contrast, the Senegambia region (363,000), the upper Guinea coast

TABLE 3.4. *Regional Origins of Slaves in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Trade*

	Sene-Gambia	Upper Guinea	Wind ward	Gold Coast	Bight of Benin	Bight of Biafra	West-Central	SE Africa	Total Africa
1701-1710	16,300	1,200	3,100	81,100	136,900	22,000	133,400	100	394,200
1711-1720	22,700	3,100	4,400	97,300	173,400	34,600	131,900	10,000	453,400
1721-1730	34,900	9,400	4,500	113,900	178,300	41,800	145,400	3,900	548,400
1731-1740	44,800	1,500	9,400	106,700	111,100	56,600	232,000	1,200	598,000
1741-1750	24,200	8,000	25,200	61,600	93,400	93,900	245,400	0	586,600
1751-1760	50,600	17,400	44,100	88,200	89,200	93,300	223,800	3,000	643,000
1761-1770	52,400	42,300	76,500	108,700	101,600	146,500	280,200	1,900	819,000
1771-1780	51,300	36,600	65,200	112,600	113,200	109,900	267,300	2,900	755,700
1781-1790	37,900	31,400	36,100	135,000	110,200	151,200	333,900	28,700	868,000
1791-1800	28,000	51,100	21,200	109,400	100,800	154,600	371,800	19,000	848,400
TOTAL	363,200	202,000	289,600	1,014,500	1,223,200	904,600	2,365,200	70,600	6,494,600

Source: Eltis et al., *Slave Voyage Database*.

TABLE 3.5. *West African Slave Prices: Semidecadal Averages, 1663–1775*

Year	Price in £ Sterling of 1601	Number of Observations
1663–1667	3.29	1
1668–1672	3.00	2
1673–1677	1.76	3
1678–1682	3.67	12
1683–1687	3.74	9
1688–1692	3.22	3
1693–1697	4.24	4
1698–1702	5.43	12
1703–1707	10.24	10
1708–1712	11.21	9
1713–1717	11.75	13
1718–1722	12.77	13
1723–1727	11.89	13
1728–1732	13.37	9
1733–1737	17.65	9
1738–1742	18.92	5
1743–1747	11.13	6
1748–1752	14.26	19
1753–1757	12.52	16
1758–1762	14.07	9
1763–1767	16.54	15
1768–1772	17.76	15
1773–1775	15.96	9

Source: Richard Bean, *The British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1975), 72. Bean's prices are calculated as the prime cost in Britain of goods used to purchase slaves rather than the actual price of slaves on the African coast.

(202,000), and the windward coast of modern Liberia and western Ivory Coast (290,000) accounted for slightly more than 13 percent of total exports.

Furthermore, the price structure of the Atlantic slave market over these two centuries suggests that prices rose fourfold or fivefold, whereas supply increased on the order of two-and-one-half times. The data on slave prices are most complete for the last third of the seventeenth century and for the eighteenth century (see Table 3.5). Although iron bars, cowrie shells, lengths of cloth, and other items were actually the currencies used by African merchants in calculating the price of slaves, the pound sterling value of goods exported to Africa can be used as a guide to the price structure of the slave trade. The cost of goods purchased in Europe that were used to buy slaves remained fairly steady at £3 to £4 sterling between the 1660s and the early 1690s, whereupon the price doubled within a few years. The prime cost of goods in Britain leveled off at £10 to £13 from the middle of the first decade of the eighteenth century until the early 1730s, when it rose again to about £18 to £19, before falling back to a lower

level during the 1740s. For the rest of the century, the prime cost of goods gradually rose again, ranging from £13 to £18. During this period, supply rose from 30,000 slaves per year in the last quarter of the seventeenth century to 85,000–87,000 people per year in the last two decades of the eighteenth century; hence it is clear that prices increased with the supply of slaves (see Table 3.4). Various scholars have measured the elasticity of the supply of slaves with respect to price changes: Bean has calculated a figure of 0.75 and 0.83 for two different periods within a century; Manning has reached a figure of 1.5 for the Slave Coast alone; LeVeen has estimated a figure of 0.81.³ LeVeen's calculation, for example, means that a 10 percent increase in prices corresponded to an 8.1 percent increase in exports. While these calculations do not deny that noneconomic motives were important in the rising supply of slaves, these comparisons of volume and price do indicate that economic factors were major determinants of the response of African suppliers to rising demand.

The question of price is important in determining the extent to which African suppliers responded to market forces in catering to the export trade. This issue has concerned historians who are interested in establishing the cause of the expansion in slave departures. Was the increased scale related to the conscious decisions of slavers who were responding to higher prices, or was the increase in supply a relatively incidental feature of the extension of enslavement that resulted from the spread of warfare and other politically motivated actions?⁴ LeVeen's analysis of prices clearly demonstrates that market factors did influence the supply mechanism; at least he has been able to show a correlation between rising prices and expanding supply.⁵ Market forces alone, however, are not the only influence on the supply of slaves. A response to changing economic conditions reflects the attitudes of the enslavers and their acceptance of the slave trade as a legitimate activity. Further, the costs of investment in equipment and the organization of slave gathering and marketing became an influence on the available supply of victims. The sale of war prisoners, even if prices were low, was desirable to those government officials wanting to rid themselves of enemies; if some compensation could be gained through their disposal, so much the better. In short, market conditions aside, the maintenance of a steady demand for slaves influenced attitudes; when combined with rising demand, the supply of slaves could and did increase dramatically.

The Dominance of West-Central Africa

West-central Africa, including the coast from Cabinda and Loango to Angola, accounted for the majority of slaves exported to the Americas until the last quarter of the seventeenth century and a major share of the total thereafter.⁶ From 1600 to 1800, more than 3.5 million slaves were shipped from this region alone, which represented about a third of all slaves exported from Africa in these two centuries, including the trans-Atlantic trade and the established Islamic trade. The portion of the Atlantic trade that can be attributed to west-central Africa

is correspondingly larger than a third. At the height of the trade in the eighteenth century, this region was the largest single exporter, except for the first three decades, when it was the second largest source. In the last several decades of the century, the peak years of the trans-Atlantic trade, west-central Africa accounted for more than 40 percent of the migration of slaves.

The Kingdom of Kongo continued to be a major source of slaves, and other states on the periphery of Kongo assumed an increasingly important role in transferring slaves to the Europeans on the coast. These included the Vili to the north of the Congo River and several Mbundu states to the south and east. European rivalries on the coast resulted in direct intervention in local politics, especially in Angola, where the Portuguese maintained bases for raiding and trading. The extent of European involvement on the mainland was more pronounced here than anywhere else on the Guinea coast. The Portuguese used Luanda as a base for raids into the interior, except for a few years in the 1640s when the Dutch expelled the Portuguese. Otherwise, the Portuguese dominated Angola, and the Dutch and English traded at Cabinda and Loango, north of the Congo River, or at the mouth of the Bengo River, north of Luanda.

A series of commercial corridors tapped the interior, so that the supply area was gradually pushed further inland as slave demand increased. These routes included overland trails and rivers that channeled slaves toward two points, Malebo Pool (Stanley Pool) on the Congo River in the north and Luanda in the south. Rapids on the river prevented boats passing between Malebo Pool and the coast, and hence slaves were marched overland to one of several ports on the Loango coast and at Cabinda. In the south, river transport was not used, for the tributaries of the Congo flowed northward while slaves had to march westward to reach the coast. Fourthly, during the eighteenth century, several inland states became principal suppliers, the most important of which were Lunda and Kazembe, whose provinces paid tribute in slaves who could then be exported. The population of the region lived in widely scattered kinship groups that provided the slaves, either through direct taxation or raids, or both.

Already by 1600, several thousand slaves per year were being exported from this stretch of coast, with a particularly dramatic expansion taking place in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. In the first half of the seventeenth century, departures reached 668,000 slaves, or more than 13,000 slaves per year, much of this volume a result of the trade along the coast south of the equator. After 1650, annual departures from west-central Africa averaged more than 11,000 people. Portuguese expeditions into Kongo and other parts of the interior continued to supply slaves, but many slaves were a by-product of civil wars that ravaged Kongo. Moreover, areas deeper in the interior became more important. Two Mbundu states, Kasanje and Matamba, dominated the trade routes in the interior of Luanda.

The traffic was on a level of 13,000 per year in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, rising to 14,500 embarkations per year in the following decade. The scale of the movement from west-central Africa continued

to increase dramatically, averaging over 23,000 people per year in the years 1731–1760, whereupon the figures again reached a new plateau, exceeding 27,500 slaves annually in 1761–1680 and rising still further to 35,000 per year in the last two decades of the century. In the course of a century, the scale of the migration had increased almost fourfold, and this increase was from a base that was already considerable. The structural changes that accompanied this growth were extremely important to the local political economy. The scale of the trade required major adjustments in the ability to enslave people and to ship them to points of export (see Chapter 4). These changes in turn affected a larger and larger geographical area, beginning with Kongo and the Portuguese stronghold at Luanda but ultimately reaching the far interior of the Congo River basin.

The Bight of Benin, 1640–1800

The Bight of Benin, or the “Slave Coast,” as the Europeans knew it, was the only exporting region that temporarily displaced west-central Africa as the largest single supplier.⁷ The modest trade of early Portuguese contact continued into the early seventeenth century. Estimates from the 1640s suggest trade on the order of 1,200 slaves per year, primarily from Benin and its neighbors. Restrictions on the trade there prevented the steady growth in slave volume, and it was not until new states and different routes were developed in the second half of the seventeenth century that the trade entered a period of expansion that was to justify the European epithet. The trade rose from the modest levels of the early seventeenth century, when only a few hundred people left each year. After c. 1655, the trade rose dramatically, from at least 2,000 people per year and rising to almost 4,000 per year in 1676–1680, doubling to 8,000 departures annually in 1681–1685, and reaching 12,000 per year by 1700. The rise continued into the first decades of the eighteenth century, reaching 14,600 slaves per year and eventually accounting for more 20,000 people per year in 1726–1730 at the time of Dahomey’s conquest of Ouidah (Table 3.6). For the fifty years from 1681 to 1730, approximately 670,000 people left the Bight of Benin, one-third of the estimated number of slaves in this period. The Bight was the largest source of slaves, even exceeding the number of people obtained in west-central Africa. Thereafter, the scale of slave exports declined to about 11,000 per year, rising again briefly to 14,600 per year in the early 1750s but otherwise continuing to decline to about 9,000 people in the late 1790s. After the 1730s, west-central Africa always exported more slaves than the Bight of Benin, and by a considerable margin, usually twice or three times as many. For the eighteenth century as a whole, 1,284,000 slaves (almost 20 percent of total exports) left from the Bight of Benin, 1,492,000 in the century and a quarter when slave exports were substantial.

The surge in exports from the Slave Coast had no connection with the Kingdom of Benin, which had once supplied a thousand or more slaves to European merchants. In fact, the export of slaves from the Kingdom of Benin

TABLE 3.6. *Bight of Benin Slave Trade, 1601–1730*

Period	Number of Slaves	Annual Average
1601–1650	9,600	192
1651–1655	1,800	360
1656–1660	10,300	2,060
1661–1665	12,800	2,560
1666–1670	17,200	3,440
1671–1675	10,700	2,140
1676–1680	19,100	3,820
1681–1685	40,700	8,140
1686–1690	39,200	7,840
1691–1695	47,900	9,580
1696–1700	60,500	12,100
1701–1705	73,000	14,600
1706–1710	63,900	12,780
1711–1715	72,000	14,400
1716–1720	77,500	15,500
1721–1725	91,700	18,340
1726–1730	102,700	20,540
TOTAL	750,600	

Source: Eltis et al., *Slave Voyage Database*. For an earlier estimate of the trade, see Patrick Manning, “The slave trade in the Bight of Benin, 1640–1890,” in H. A. Gemery and J. S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 117.

actually declined as a result of government restrictions on the sale of male slaves. Instead, three new factors account for the astronomical expansion in exports. First, the prospects for commercial profit seem to have been a strong motive in the struggle for power along the lagoons behind the Bight of Benin. A series of lagoon-side ports tried to dominate trade, from Grand and Little Popo in the west through Ouidah (Whydah), Offra, Jakin, Epe, Apa, Porto Novo, Badagry, and Lagos in the east. Allada, centered inland from the lagoons, successfully imposed some dominance on the lagoon, and its ports at Offra and Jakin, and then its subjugation of Ouidah, assured mastery of the export trade at the end of the seventeenth century, when exports became important. Secondly, the Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo initiated a series of wars in the interior that resulted in the enslavement of many people. Oyo was a savanna state; its capital was located only 50 km from the Niger and 300 km inland from the coast. Its strength lay in its cavalry, based on horses imported from farther north, which enabled the state to dominate trade to the coast. Thirdly, Dahomey, centered 100 km inland, intervened in coastal politics and raided its northern neighbors from the 1720s, thereby adding to the export volume. Dahomey used Ouidah as its principal port, as did Oyo until after the middle of the eighteenth century.

Even then Ouidah remained the leading port and may have accounted for the departure of almost a million people from the late seventeenth through the early nineteenth century. Although Oyo forced Dahomey to pay tribute, this was not sufficient to guarantee access to Ouidah, and therefore, Oyo developed alternate ports at Porto Novo and Badagry further east.⁸

There were a number of important differences in the development of the export trade on the “Slave Coast” from the pattern that prevailed in west-central Africa. First, there was no European military presence like that of the Portuguese at Luanda and in Kongo, and Europeans did not raid for slaves. Instead Portuguese, French, British, and other traders were confined to coastal ports where they were compelled to trade on terms established by port officials. Secondly, Muslim traders provided links between slave-exporting states and the far interior, so that some slaves and other goods were acquired through a network of interregional trade. The export trade in slaves was only one sector in a complex internal African trade. Thirdly, the growth of the slave trade was closely associated with political developments, as was the case in west-central Africa, too, but in the interior of the Bight of Benin the emerging states were more centralized, in part because of the commercial links with other states to their north and in part because of the profits gained from the European trade. The difference was one of degree, but the presence of an Islamic factor, the confinement of Europeans to mercantile activities, and the more developed commercial sector contributed to a setting that was distinct.

The Gold Coast

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the West African slave trade expanded westward from the Bight of Benin to neighboring parts of the coast. Given that European merchants were already stationed on the Gold Coast, it is perhaps logical that the quest for slaves spilled over to this area and indeed to places further west, including the Comoe and Bandama River valleys in eastern Ivory Coast. The Gold Coast – a term used here to include eastern Ivory Coast too – was closer to the Americas; ships could stop at the various European establishments on their way to the better-stocked markets of the “Slave Coast” and return via the Gold Coast if their holds were not filled. All that was necessary was a sufficient supply of slaves. By the early seventeenth century, the Gold Coast was no longer a net importer of slaves; occasionally a few slaves were exported. Nonetheless, slave sales did not become significant until the last three decades of the century. Even then supplies fluctuated wildly, from 2,000 or more slaves in some years during the 1670s to 408 slaves exported between June 1687 and November 1688, a seventeen-month period.⁹

These variations hardly made the Gold Coast a reliable source, but the market for gold sustained European interest and kept ships available for any increase in slave supply. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, moreover, political rivalries on the Gold Coast had provoked a number of wars,

and the resulting turbulence accomplished what market demand had failed to achieve: a steady stream of slaves ready for export. Between 1701 and 1710, more than 80,000 slaves were bought, an average of 8,000 per year, compared with annual departures of more than 13,000 per year from west-central Africa and almost 14,000 per year from neighboring ports on the Bight of Benin. Departures from the Gold Coast reached 11,000 per year from 1721 to 1740, before declining 6,000 per year in the 1740s. Thereafter, the number of departures increased to almost 9,000 per year in the 1750s and reaching a height of 13,500 annually in the 1780s. Most of the people leaving the Gold Coast in the eighteenth century left via Elmina, Cape Coast, or Anomabu, the most important trading fortresses on the Gold Coast, although for a brief period there was no castle at Anomabu, only a ship stationed permanently off the coast. Many of the other castles along the Gold Coast supplied slaves to these principal ports.

The political situation responsible for slave exports was the struggle among the Akan for mastery of the interior, including a region from the Bandama River and its port at Grand Lahou, through the Comoe River and its port at Grand Bassam, as well as the Gold Coast itself. The victor was Asante, which ultimately conquered much of the forest area and several states in the savanna as well.¹⁰ Something on the order of 150,000 slaves came from Grand Lahou and Grand Bassam in the last half of the eighteenth century as the Baule – Akan refugees fleeing the successful Asante armies – displaced the Guro and Senufo who had been living there.¹¹ The trade route north from Grand Lahou to the savanna towns of Boron and Kong, a route that had been opened by Muslim merchants in the seventeenth century but was now cut temporarily by the Baule, may have supplied some slaves from the Muslim traders of the savanna, but most slaves were probably a product of the Baule wars. When the Akan region is treated as a unit, more than a million people were deported in the eighteenth century, and whereas some of these slaves came from the far interior, the great majority appear to have been Akan. Thus we see the slave trade expand westward from the Bight of Benin to the Gold Coast, where a relatively few ports dominated trade at any point in time, and a string of less important trading castles and lagoon-side ports supplied slaves to the leading ports where European ships did most of their business.

The similarities between the Gold Coast interior and the Bight of Benin are readily apparent. Slave exports were closely associated with the emergence of centralized states in both regions. Europeans were confined to coastal establishments and had little direct involvement in the enslavement of people. The Muslim factor was strong, providing commercial connections with the far interior, so that the Akan states were involved in continental trade on a scale that was at least equal to Oyo, Dahomey, and the Kingdom of Benin and was perhaps even greater. Nonetheless, there were important differences that set the Gold Coast apart. First, Akan society was matrilineal, whereas the people of the Slave Coast recognized patrilineal principles of social organization. This difference

affected both the political structure of the state and the institution of slavery. Secondly, the Akan region had major sources of gold – hence the name for the coast – that were absent further east, and the forest area here also had extensive groves of kola-nut trees that produced an essential item of trade with the north. A similar industry did not exist in the interior of the Bight of Benin, although in both regions textile production was an important economic activity.

The Bight of Biafra

A similar process of commercial expansion happened to the east of the Bight of Benin, where the Niger delta and the Cross River valley – often referred to as the Bight of Biafra – also experienced a surge in slave sales.¹² Some slaves were purchased in the Niger delta in the early sixteenth century, but most of these came from the western delta and more properly belong to a discussion of the Bight of Benin. Slaves apparently came from “Gaboe,” which may refer to Aboh on the Niger River. By the late 1670s and 1680s, Elem Kalabari (New Calabar) was supplying “a vast number of slaves, of all sexes and ages.”¹³ Calabar (known at the time as Old Calabar), on the Cross River, was also supplying slaves in the last decades of the seventeenth century.

The expansion of the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra occurred in two phases; in the period from the 1640s through the first decade of the eighteenth century, departures ranged from about 3,000 to 3,500 per year. Thereafter, the number of departures increased rapidly, reaching a peak of 15,000 people per year in the 1780s and 1790s. This rapid increase in the number of slaves almost entirely supplied British ships, which accounted for 85 percent of slave shipments in the Bight of Biafra before abolition in 1807. Ships from Bristol initially accounted for this expansion, but from the 1740s, Liverpool merchants became dominant. The concentration of trade resulted in the movement of Igbo and Ibibio populations to both British colonies in the Americas and to those places to which British trade catered. Initially, Elem Kalabari appears to have been the principal port, but in the period of rapid expansion in the early eighteenth century, Old Calabar became more important and remained a major port until the nineteenth century. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Bonny emerged as the leading port, eclipsing both rivals. The three ports together accounted for considerably more than 90 percent of people leaving the Bight of Biafra.

Slaves were brought to the coast through the maze of creeks and lagoons that formed the delta of the Niger River and included the mouth of the Cross River. Much of the coastal area was mangrove swamp, very different from other stretches of coast that we have already examined. Large riverboats were used here to transport both slaves and food from the interior, which included some of the most densely populated parts of Africa. Because of the swamps and their unhealthy environment, Europeans did not maintain coastal depots, as was the case on the Gold Coast, in the Bight of Benin, and

in west-central Africa, nor was there direct military intervention comparable to Portuguese adventures in Angola and Kongo. The political structure in the heavily populated forests behind the mangrove swamps was segmented. There were no centralized states on the scale of the other regions, although a loose confederation based on commercial and religious ties and reinforced through the use of mercenaries provided some unity. The political element in enslavement, including wars, tribute payments, and punitive raids, was relatively less significant here, in contrast to the other areas. Instead, slaves were obtained in small-scale raids by one village on another, through extensive kidnapping, and as a result of legal proceedings and religious rites. The degree of decentralization, the relatively late entry into the export trade on a large scale, and the lack of European residence on the coast mark this area off from the rest. Finally, the Islamic factor was also minimal here, although it was not completely absent as it was in west-central Africa. People along the Niger River traded north, thereby having some links, at least through intermediaries, with Muslim merchants, but this trade did not become a factor in the region itself, as it did in the interior of the Slave and Gold Coasts, at least not before the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Upper Guinea Coast and Senegambia

The routes that supplied slaves to far western coasts of the Gulf of Guinea, including the area of modern Sierra Leone, Guinea, and the Senegambia basin, were linked with the trade of the interior where Muslims were the main traders. Nonetheless, the coastal people along much of this coast were not Muslims, and many slave exports were unconnected with developments in the interior. The Senegambian basin, where the Islamic factor was strongest, accounted for 1,300 to 2,200 departures per year from the 1670s through the 1720s, reaching highs of 4,400 departures in the 1730s and more than 5,000 annually from the 1750s through the 1780s.¹⁴ Trade from the Futa Jallon highlands where Islam was equally pervasive fluctuated depending on political developments there, and some slaves reached the coast via routes from the interior of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ivory Coast, where Islamic influence was found.¹⁵ The supply areas for the western coast were the Senegal and Gambia valleys, the Futa Jallon highlands, the kola forests, and the savanna country beyond. One factor in the export figures here was a series of Muslim holy wars that began in the late seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth, which are discussed later.

The upper Guinea coast supplied very few slaves in the seventeenth century and in the first half of the eighteenth century – only a few hundred departures per year in most years. The number of slaves increased substantially in the 1760s, rising to almost 4,200 per year and peaking at 5,000 annually in the 1790s.

Although the trans-Atlantic trade of Senegambia and the upper Guinea coast was relatively small by comparison with the slave trade of the Gold Coast, the

Bights, and west-central Africa, the Atlantic trade still affected the far interior of West Africa more than ever before. Now the pull of the trans-Saharan trade and the Atlantic trade overlapped to a considerable extent. Only in the valleys of the Senegal and Gambia Rivers had the savanna regions supplied both parts of the external trade before the eighteenth century. With the increased demand of the Atlantic trade, people came not only from the interior of Senegambia but also from areas to the north of the Bights of Benin and Biafra. These slaves are often identifiable in modern research because they were Muslims. Some went through Oyo and Asante, and still others traveled along the routes through the kola forests to ports on the western, “windward” coast. Muslims and other slaves from the interior became particularly noticeable on the trade registers of the late eighteenth century, although they appear to account for only a relatively small proportion of the total number of departures from Africa for the Americas.¹⁶

The Volume of the Trade across the Sahara, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean

Approximately 1.3 million slaves were sent across the Sahara, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁷ The trans-Saharan traffic was about 700,000 people per century, which suggests that about 7,000 per year, which may well be too high. A figure of 100,000 for the Red Sea, reflecting an annual average of 1,000 people per year, is allowed for the seventeenth century, and 200,000 departures are assessed for the eighteenth century (Table 3.7). The figures are based on very limited data, but trade across the Red Sea did seem to increase in the eighteenth century. Data are most complete for Egypt in the last decades of the eighteenth century, when an estimated 3,000 to 6,000 slaves arrived each year, but other markets in North Africa also consumed slaves – when the Moroccan sultans wanted slave soldiers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, they looked to sub-Saharan Africa as one source of recruits.¹⁸ Furthermore, the demand for children, young females, and eunuchs appears to have been steady throughout the two centuries.

The East African trade was somewhat more complex. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, slave departures were essentially an extension of the trade across the Red Sea and Sahara. Slaves were destined for harems, domestic service, and government employment. They were dispatched in small numbers, perhaps on the order of 1,000 per year for the whole coast, or 100,000 people from 1600 to 1700. In the eighteenth century, however, new currents affected this maritime trade. Slaves were taken to the Dutch settlement at Cape Town, and the French established plantations in the Mascarene islands in the Indian Ocean. Dwarfed by trans-Atlantic traffic of the time, this trade was related to developments in the Americas, given that some slaves were taken to Brazil, and that Europeans were trying to establish a plantation economy on

TABLE 3.7. *Slave Departures across the Sahara, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean, 1600–1800*

	1600–1700	1700–1800
Saharan trade	700,000	700,000
Red Sea	100,000	200,000
East Africa	100,000	400,000
TOTALS	900,000	1,300,000

Sources: Ralph A. Austen, “The trans-Saharan slave trade: a tentative census,” in H. A. Gemery and J. S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Academic Press, 1979a), 68; J. M. Filliot, *La Traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: ORSTOM, 1974), 54, 69; Edmond B. Martin and T. C. I. Ryan, “A quantitative assessment of the Arab slave trade of East Africa,” *Kenya Historical Review* 5 (1977), 82; E. A. Alpers, “The French slave trade in East Africa (1721–1810),” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 10:1 (1970), 80–124. It should be noted that the more conservative estimates of Austen’s various calculations have been used here.

the American model in the Indian Ocean. About 115,000 slaves went to the Mascarene islands to grow coffee, indigo, and sugarcane. More than half of these came from Madagascar, with the rest coming from the mainland. The trade reached its height in the last three decades of the century. At this time, the volume of the Islamic sector was on the order of 4,000 to 5,000 people per year, whereas the trade from Kilwa to the Mascarenes moved an average of 2,500 per year between 1786 and 1794. Finally, Mozambique increased its share of the traffic to the Americas; departures rose from almost nothing in the 1770s to an average of 5,400 per year between 1786 and 1794.¹⁹ The East African trade as a whole accounted for the movement of about 400,000 slaves in the eighteenth century. About two-thirds of this total went to traditional markets in the Muslim world, and the remaining third went to the Mascarenes or the Americas.

Demographic Implications of the Export Trade

The export figures can be used as one indication of the scale of slavery within Africa. More than 8.4 million people were exported across the Atlantic from 1600 to 1800, and another 2.3 million were probably exported to the Muslim world across the Sahara, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean in the same period – a total figure that well exceeds 10 million people. Perhaps as many more did not leave, because many slaves died in Africa and others were incorporated into local societies.

Losses from deaths in Africa can be estimated at 6–10 percent at the port of departure and 10–14 percent or more en route to the coast in the last

decades of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, when most slaves were sent to the Americas. These estimates suggest that the scale of the migration was about 20 percent higher than the figures for arrivals in the Americas would suggest. It is likely the loss of life in the trade to the Muslim world was roughly comparable. There were many people who were not enslaved in raids and wars but were nonetheless casualties of slaving wars, although they cannot be classified as slaves. Deaths at the point of enslavement had a significant impact on the demography of the trade, but there is little information on the scale of such deaths.

Estimates of losses are based on admittedly scattered and incomplete material. Losses at port of departure, for example, can be derived from reports on the Gold Coast in 1678 and the first decade of the eighteenth century, as well as from census data from Angola in the late eighteenth century. Other places and other periods may have been significantly different. The Gold Coast data suggest, nonetheless, that approximately 6–7 percent of slaves brought to the Dutch castle at Cape Coast died or escaped. Between April and December 1678, 1,854 individuals were brought to account at Cape Castle; 1,146 were sold to slave ships; 587 were not sold; and 121 died or escaped. Losses amounted to 6.5 percent of the population. In a 32-month period from September 1701 to April 1704, almost 3,000 people were brought to account: 2,320 were shipped off or employed as castle slaves, whereas 217 slaves died or escaped.²⁰ The remainder awaited shipment. In this case, losses were 7.2 percent of the sample. It is not possible to estimate the relative importance of losses from death and escape, although deaths were probably greater. For Angola, losses were as high as 10–12 percent of those brought to the coast.²¹

Deaths were also common on the march to the embarkation points. Given that journeys varied considerably and the number of deaths increased with distance, an allowance of 10 percent is entirely a guess, although the study of losses at sea lends support to this guess. Miller has shown that many of the slave deaths on the Atlantic crossing occurred during the first part of the ocean journey, which indicates that nutritional factors and diseases contracted on land were probably a more significant cause of shipboard deaths than conditions on the ships themselves.²² This hypothesis accords well with epidemiological studies that show that the incidence of death increases dramatically when people move from one disease environment to another. Those slaves transferred to the coast for export had already experienced this movement between disease environments, and the weakened condition of slaves after long marches – and probably inadequate nourishment in many cases – only intensified the health hazards. European merchants took care to purchase the healthiest and strongest slaves; rejects were presumably sold off in local markets at reduced prices, so that deaths among this segment of the slave-trade population are lost to the record. Even though the strongest individuals were purchased, shipboard deaths that can be attributed to diseases acquired on land still account for a significant proportion of total deaths – perhaps an overwhelming proportion.

TABLE 3.8. *Weighted Mean Ratios of Males and Children Carried in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1663–1809*

	Upper Guinea	Gold Coast	Bight of Benin	Bight of Biafra	West-Central Africa	All Regions	Number of Slaves
Male Ratios							
1663–1700	0.760	0.581	0.599	0.493	0.609	0.603	49,925
1701–1809	0.661	0.695	0.611	0.570	0.689	0.650	348,055
Child Ratios							
1663–1700	0.054	0.109	0.128	0.110	0.217	0.122	47,378
1701–1809	0.252	0.116	0.169	0.210	0.281	0.227	298,681

Source: David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, “Fluctuations in sex and age ratios in the transatlantic slave trade, 1663–1864,” *Economic History Review* 46 (1993), 310.

Since these rates varied from 9 to 15 percent, it seems reasonable to assign a comparable figure for deaths on land that occurred as a result of similar causes. It should be noted, however, that Miller estimates that 40 percent of those purchased in the interior of Angola died before reaching the coast in the six months between initial sale and delivery.²³

The age and sex ratios of the deported slave population were also variables in the population displacement, and these ratios were different for the Islamic and trans-Atlantic sectors.²⁴ In the trade across the Sahara, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean, there was a much higher proportion of females and children, whereas in the trans-Atlantic trade many more slaves were male than female (Table 3.8). Very few individuals in either trade appear to have been older than thirty. These demographic patterns affected the supply areas profoundly. In the areas catering to the Islamic trade, where there was also a strong domestic preference for women and children, the structure of the market consistently reflected a price deferential based on age and sex. Males, unless they were castrated, were usually cheaper. The competition between domestic and foreign markets for females and children raised their prices to levels that were often twice that of males. This market situation had two profound effects on the development of slavery in the domestic economy. First, the lower prices for males made slave labor an attractive investment for slave owners, and consequently male slaves were used extensively in production. Secondly, the drain on the population hit frontier areas most severely. The withdrawal of women and children had a disproportionate impact on small-scale societies, for it limited the ability to achieve demographic stability. The threat of enslavement kept politically weak people in a difficult position, always in danger of extinction. Those with political power mobilized male slaves in production and often military service, too, thereby achieving demographic growth through the incorporation of new slaves.

TABLE 3.9. *Estimated Population of Trade Slaves, 1600–1800*

Category	Exported	Retained or Killed	Total
Females (14–30)	2,130,000	2,700,000	4,830,000
Males (14–30)	3,830,000	1,000,000*	4,830,000
Children (under 14)	1,600,000	4,200,000	5,800,000
Mature adults (over 30)	0	3,860,000	3,860,000
TOTAL	7,560,000	11,760,000	19,320,000

Sources: Table 3.1 for estimated exports across the Atlantic. Ralph A. Austen, “The 19th century Islamic slave trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea coasts): A tentative census,” *Slavery and Abolition* 9:3 (1988), 21–44; Austen, “The Mediterranean Islamic slave trade out of Africa: a tentative census,” in Elizabeth Savage, eds., *The Human Commodity: Perspectives on the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 214–48; José C. Curto, “A quantitative reassessment of the legal Portuguese slave trade from Luanda, Angola, 1710–1830,” *African Economic History* 20 (1992), 1–25; Curto, “The legal Portuguese slave trade from Benguela, Angola, 1730–1828: A quantitative re-appraisal,” *Africa* (São Paulo) 16 (1993), 101–16; Per. O Hernaes, *Slaves, Danes, and African Coast Society. The Danish Slave Trade from West Africa and Afro-Danish Relations on the Eighteenth-Century Gold Coast* (Trondheim: University of Trondheim Press, 1995). The estimated sex ratio of the total population is calculated at 1:1, including 30% children, 20% adults over age 30, and 50% teenagers and adults under 30, in the total population exposed to enslavement. It is assumed that some men were retained as slaves in Africa and that some were able to achieve their freedom through ransoming or other means. It is arbitrarily assumed that one million men who were enslaved did not leave Africa. Of those who did not leave Africa, a significant number were retained in slavery, while many people died during wars and raids associated with enslavement.

The age and sex distribution of the exported population is useful in calculating who the slaves were that remained in Africa.²⁵ The major exporting regions – west-central Africa and the area of the Gold Coast and the Bights of Benin and Biafra – had the highest concentrations of slaves outside Muslim Africa, and a disproportionate number of slaves retained in these areas were women and children. This dimension of the slave trade contributed to the type of slavery prevalent in west-central Africa and along the West African coast, and helps account for some differences between slavery there and slavery in Muslim areas.

The percentage of newly enslaved people who were not exported but retained in Africa can be assessed by reversing the age and sex ratios of exported slaves, although this is attempted here only for the trans-Atlantic sector. Manning has estimated that equal numbers of males and females were enslaved and that the percentage of children (aged thirteen and under), young adults (aged fourteen to thirty) and older people (over thirty) in the enslaved population was 30 percent, 50 percent, and 20 percent respectively.²⁶ If Manning’s assumptions are accepted as a likely indication of the enslaved population, then the export figures only account for a portion, however significant, of the total enslaved population. As demonstrated in Table 3.9, at least as many, if not significantly

more, people stayed in Africa, many of whom were retained as slaves but some of whom died during enslavement or from disease-related causes similar to the deaths of those exported. Nonetheless, Manning's model suggests that approximately almost 12 million people were retained within Africa as slaves or were killed or otherwise died in the process of enslavement and trade. It is obvious that this model is inaccurate in determining the size of the slave population in Africa, for not all males were exported and some slaves over thirty were exported. Despite these reservations, calculations on the size of the female, child, and elderly categories demonstrate that a significant number of slaves must have been kept in Africa and to some extent approximates the total slave population.

If Manning's model is applied to the export trade data, then almost 20 million people, with a normal age and sex distribution, would have had to have been enslaved to enable the departure of 75 million people from 1660 to 1800, with the age and sex distribution of the export sector (see Table 3.9). It assumes that no captives over age thirty were exported and that not all adult and teenage males were exported. The population that stayed in Africa or was killed would have approached 12 million. If proportionately more males were retained or killed, the numbers of young women, children, and mature adults would be proportionally greater. To the extent that males were enslaved in greater numbers because of warfare, or that people were deliberately killed as undesirable captives, these estimates would vary. There were also regional differences; data from the Biafra area show a more balanced age and sex distribution, which suggests that relatively fewer women and children were retained and that a greater percentage of all captives were exported. For other regions, however, this model appears to accord well with local demographic evidence.

Thornton's analysis of the census data from Angola in the 1770s reveals a high proportion of women in the local slave population. The censuses of 1777 and 1778 show that the female population of Angola at least, and possibly the neighboring states of Matamba and Kasanje as well – which were heavily involved in the slave trade – outnumbered the male population by two to one. Because females tended to be undercounted, the ratio may have been even higher. Not only does Thornton's material confirm the data on the sex ratio of the export trade, but it indicates that the societies of west-central Africa were affected significantly. Polygyny was certainly more prevalent than it could have been in earlier periods, before the scale of the export trade was as large as in the second half of the eighteenth century.