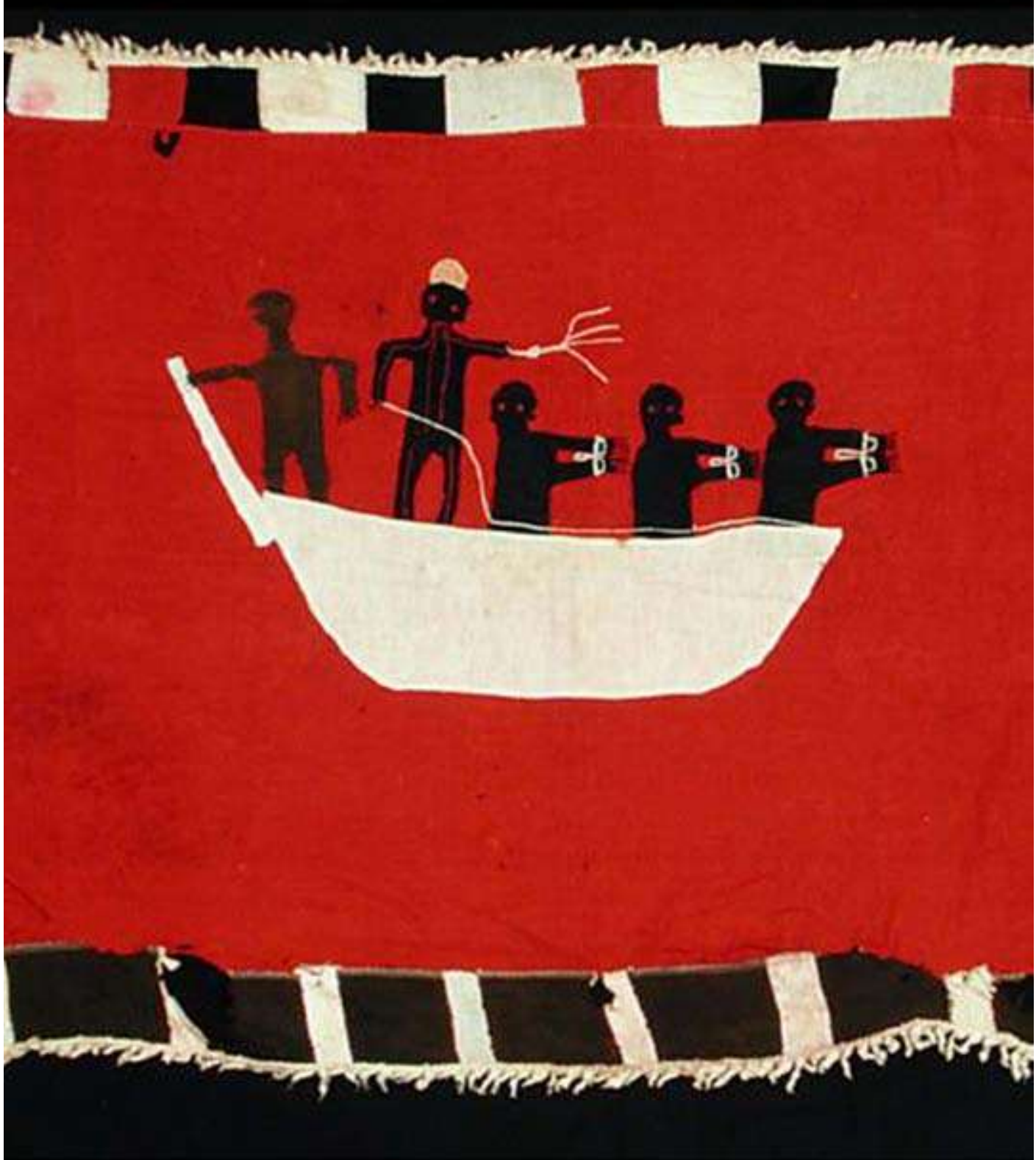
SALTWATER SLAVERY

A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora

STEPHANIE E. SMALLWOOD



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For John W. Blassingame
1940–2000
with gratitude for his great generosity of mind and heart

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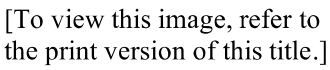
The Political Economy of the Slave Ship

Laden with guns and gunpowder, iron bars, knives, and, most important, a half-dozen varieties of textiles, the *Sarah Bonadventure* was a floating marketplace. Its cargo of trade goods, valued at 2,351 pounds sterling when loaded on board in London in November 1676, had been carefully sorted to draw Gold Coast merchants on deck to negotiate terms of exchange. Trade commenced on 28 February 1677, and thereafter varying quantities and assortments of goods changed hands between the ship's captain, Thomas Woodfine, and his African counterparts. When Woodfine prepared to depart five months later, among the items he had purchased from the African traders were 134 marks, 6 ounces, 15.5 angles of "good Arcaney Gold" (Fig 3.1).[1]

Captive people also had come aboard: like the precious metal, they had been bartered; they had been offered as commodities by African traders who would not, or could not, use gold to buy European goods. One transaction yielded two Perpetuanos (a variety of woolen cloth), three paper Bralls (a variety of Indian cotton), and one sheet in exchange for two persons; another converted seven persons into seven Perpetuanos, six paper Bralls, two sheets, and fourteen knives; a third put four Nittones (Indian cotton), five muskets, and a half a barrel of gunpowder in the possession of a trader who left three persons behind and weighed out three angles to com-



3.1 Account of Slaves aboard the *Sarah Bonadventure,* 1677, T70/1212.

plete the deal. The captives boarded in small groups of only two to eight at a time. But the twenty-two transactions completed over five months of trading there collected one hundred people aboard the *Sarah Bonadventure*—a sizable contribution toward the aggregate known to European slaving captains as a "full complement of Negroes."

The gold taken aboard the *Sarah Bonadventure* was likely to have been contained in a single chest, divided perhaps among seven sacks holding twenty marks each.[2] Given the enormously high value of gold in relation to its volume and weight, the cost for its transport amounted to only a fraction of its purchase price on the African coast. As a result, gold was among the least expensive items to carry in Atlantic shipping lanes in the early modern period.[3]

People stood at the other end of the spectrum, their bulk going a long way toward producing a very different equation. Shipping across the Atlantic "doubled the price of slaves," and this, together with the fact that the same doubling was incurred in the shipment of trade goods from Europe to Africa, meant that overall, "the transportation component of converting goods in Europe into slaves in the Americas comprised approximately three-quarters of the selling price of an African in the Americas."[4] If captive people and gold could be substituted one for the other with relative ease in the African marketplace, they occupied dramatically different positions once ships transported them to markets outside Africa.

As shipping costs were the greatest part of the price of goods transported to overseas markets in the Atlantic world, maritime trade proved commercially viable only to the extent that it was possible to compensate for those costs. Opportunities to buy people cheaply on the African coast contributed one part to the slave trade equation. Achieving unprecedented economies of scale contributed another: crowded ships "translated into large savings based on the number of migrants carried per ton of the vessel." In fact, European migrants would have been less costly to transport than Africans if

ships carrying Europeans had been as crowded as slaving vessels. For this reason, David Eltis has insisted that "from the strictly economic standpoint there were strong arguments in support of using European rather than African slave labor."[5]

Like De Marees's earlier observation that the Gold Coast at the turn of the seventeenth century lacked the "multitude of Captives" necessary "to load ships . . . with blacks," the slave traders' talk of "full complements" or "quantitys of blacks" reflected the imperatives that gave the African side of the Atlantic market for slaves its distinctive character[6]—for these phrases articulated the truism on which transatlantic slave trading turned: namely, that the operative unit of the slave ship was not the individual captive person, but rather the aggregate that formed the "complete" human cargo. The slave ship, then, could not proceed on its way toward American retail markets until its decks were crowded with the requisite number of captives.

Slaves became, for the purpose of transatlantic shipment, mere physical units that could be arranged and molded at will—whether folded together spoonlike in rows or flattened side by side in a plane. Because human beings were treated as inanimate objects, the number of bodies stowed aboard a ship was limited only by the physical dimensions and configuration of those bodies. "Transportation history provides no parallel," writes David Eltis, "to the transatlantic slave ship."[7]

"How Many Negroes You Propose to Carry"

For the ship to be capable of accommodating a "full complement," preparations had to begin well before the commencement of a slaving voyage.[8] Responding to an enquiry regarding the use of his ship, the *Barbados Merchant,* for a slaving voyage, the company secretary informed Joseph Bingham on 20 June 1706: "In answer to yo.rs of ye 16th Curr.t I have proposed yo.r ship to ye Roy.ll Afri-

can Comp.a & they have ordered me to write you to make answer to ye p.ticulars herewith sent you & they will entertaine yo.r ship into their service for Guiney & the West Indias." In addition to "How many Negroes you propose to Carry," the company wanted to ascertain what the exact dimensions of the ship's available deck space were: "what heighth between Decks abast ye Main Mast & allso what heighth from mainmast to foremast, from Plank to Planke w.th ye breadth from inside to inside, & length from ye Bulke head of the Gunroome to ye foremast between Decks."[9]

The cargo hold was the area normally used for storage of goods purchased on a trading voyage, but this narrow, irregularly shaped space below the waterline could not be readily adapted to the needs of the slave ship's human cargo. On average some three hundred or more people were intended to occupy the space of a slave ship. Only the long, flat surfaces formed by the decks were suitable for stowage of so many, and those only after the addition of platforms between decks to double the available surface area.[10]

The slave hold was thus a space specially designed for the transport of captive people. In addition to shackles and bolts, material for constructing platforms was among the items the Royal African Company required shipowners to provide before their departure for the African coast. The company's agreement regarding Bingham's ship stipulated, for example: "The owners [are] to provide ye s.d ship w.th a sufficient Quantity of Deals for platforms for ye Negroes, Shackles, bolts, firewood, a bean room large enough to stow such a quantity of beans as is sufficient for provisions for ye Negroes w.ch is ab.t 20 quarter p. 100 Negroes w.th a sword & fire lock, Muskett & amunition for each of ye ships Comp.a &c."[11]

After several months of correspondence regarding the use of Bingham's vessel, the company had offered a proposal in July 1706 to hire the *Barbados Merchant* "to perform a Voyage from Portsm.o to ye South parts of Guinea & thence to Jamaica." The ship's human cargo was to be 350 slaves "or 50 more if can take them in."[12]

One month later Bingham had accepted the offer, and accordingly the company's Governor had "ordered a Copy of a Charterpartye to be gott ready" before the Committee of Shipping's next meeting. In essence a script outlining how the slaving voyage was to proceed, the "charterparty" was a standard contract stipulating such factors as "the size of the crew, the number of passengers, cargo to be carried on each stage of the voyage, places of lading and discharge and the time to be spent at each, and the freight charges."[13]

Apparently, Bingham was not satisfied with the number of slaves his ship was assigned to carry, for his efforts to amend the charterparty prompted two rounds of further negotiation. The company secretary wrote to notify Bingham on 15 August 1706, "[The company officials] have considered your last proposall and are come to a Resolution that your Ship shall take in 450 Negroes and no more by reason she is a Crank [top-heavy] Ship." Having secured license to carry a hundred more slaves than originally agreed, Bingham appears to have tried to raise the number higher still. In September, the company wrote to Bingham again, acknowledging the "alterations" he had made in the charterparty, but stipulating that "for answer, they agree to take your ship at 450 Negroes certain and no more."[14]

As a ship's physical dimensions were fixed, crowding ever more bodies onto its decks was the only means to extend the limits of its carrying capacity. On more than one level, stretching that capacity to the utmost was key to a slave ship's profitability. Maximizing the size of slave cargoes maintained the rate of return that investors demanded. Moreover, it answered the captain's self-interest, as the greater share of his compensation depended on the number of persons delivered alive to the American market, not the price at which they sold on the market. The contract for the *Barbados Merchant* included the standard provision: "The Captain to have four Negroes by lott out of each one hundred & four for a gratuity provided he take particular care of ye Negroes during ye Voyage & ob-

serve the Company's instructions during the Voyage & the Doctor to be allowed by ye Company's agent at Jamaica £12 per head for all Negroes delivered alive at Jamaica upon making account of the Mortallity."[15]

The voyages undertaken on behalf of the Royal African Company before 1714 carried 330 persons on average, or 2.3 slaves per ton. "We calculate he can take 300," Royal African Company officials wrote regarding Robert Groome's impending voyage in command of the 122-ton *Cape Coast Frigate* in May 1701, for instance.[16] The specific equation the company used to make such calculations is not known, but we do know the result. Noting their comparative economic "efficiency," Eltis found that these numbers put English slavers ahead of both Dutch and French competitors in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, for the English ships were carrying "50 percent more slaves per ton and twice as many slaves per crew member" than the others.[17]

Whatever the number of captives a ship was allowed to carry, it was routine to permit and indeed to encourage ship owners and their captains to squeeze more bodies into their human cargoes. Though the *Spanish Merchant* was "freighted" to carry 550, the company agents at Whydah had leave to put ten to twenty more persons aboard if they thought it "convenient" to do so.[18] The company's instructions regarding the *William & Jane* likewise noted that the ship was "contracted to take in 230 slaves and 20 more if you can conveniently put them aboard."[19] And it was with approval that officials in London noted the use of children as filler to top off the cargoes put aboard the company's ships. "We like well yo.r method," the missive to Cape Coast read, "of putting some small boys & girls of 10 years of age and upwards abd. our own ships over & above ye complement we intended them for."[20]

Captives languishing at the Gold Coast littoral in 1702 stood to gain, however, if their departure from the forts landed them aboard the *Royal Africa*. When that ship was dispatched to Cape

Coast Castle in September it carried instructions to pursue an alternate approach to attain the same end that crowding was meant to achieve. The *Royal Africa* was to carry six hundred persons to Barbados. "But if you have near his complement ready," the officials advised, "would not have the ship sent to seek for 50 to 100 Negroes but rather dispatch him directly for Barbados, for more money may be gott tho not so fully slaved by a short voyage then to run the hazard of the inconveniencys of a long one."[21]

When the company sent the frigate *Somers* to Cape Coast for a second slaving voyage in September 1700, it was "judge[d]" that the 240-ton ship would "conveniently take 500 slaves." The vessel had carried an even greater number on its preceding voyage; "but wee fear," the company's London officials explained, "the crouding too many into her might be the occasion of a greater mortality, which wee would study all wayes possible to prevent, and being fewer wee hope you will more readily purchase them and further her dispatch."[22] Only when the human cargo was thought to be large enough to raise the probability of death and the attendant loss of property could the slave ship be deemed "full," its complement of captives "complete."[23]

The vessels used in the English trade before the late eighteenth century were not specifically built to carry slaves. Captains were therefore obliged to design novel ways to organize space aboard their ships to accommodate human cargo. Peter Blake's journal aboard the *James* illustrates how captains transformed the decks of standard merchant ships into quarters meant to stow a "full complement" of captive people.

Small numbers of Africans already had come aboard the *James* when Blake began preparations to put his vessel into full-time service as a slave ship in November 1675. The first step was to divide the space of the vessel's lower gun deck.[24] While anchored off

Anomabu and Agga in late November, Blake sent some crewmen ashore in the ship's boat to cut long wooden poles for "stanchions to make up my bulk head upon ye Gunn Deck." Once in place, this partition would serve as a barrier to "keep our Negroes apart from our white men."[25] Conventions of social hierarchy ordered English life aboard ship no less than they did on land. This space below the main deck was the domain of the crewmen, while their superior officers resided in the more comfortable quarters up above.[26] For the duration of the Atlantic crossing, crewmen and the Africans they held captive would be neighbors in this space belowdecks.

Once the stowage of captives belowdecks commenced, officers required that the hatchways remain covered at all times for the safety of the ship. Yet these three openings cut into the mid-, aft-, and forepart of the main deck, together perhaps with a few smaller openings or "scuttles," were the only means by which air reached the close quarters below. In outfitting a vessel to transport human cargo, it was necessary to keep the hatch openings covered, so as not to thwart security, while still allowing air to flow through to the Africans incarcerated below.

In the seventeenth-century, ship captains engineered a makeshift solution to the problem by making use of the narrow beams that formed the under-support of the decks. Ledges installed across the hatchways formed a makeshift grate that kept the openings secured without impeding the supply of air to the quarters below, while so-called carlings were used to build up "raised borders about the edges of the hatches and scuttles," to prevent water from running down below.[27] Blake undertook this task while anchored off "Amissa" (Amersa), a few miles east of Kormantin, after going ashore accompanied by his carpenter "to cutt wood to make head ledges and Comings" for a grating to "let down the aire among the Slaves."[28]

At this time Blake also commenced the most labor-intensive of the alterations to the ship: construction of platforms to add surface

area that would be needed to stow his human cargo. While ashore at Amersa, Blake enlisted the assistance of the local captain, or "Meerine," whose party of workers "cutt me 100 great poles to make stanchions for my platforms."[29] With the ship's lower deck suitably partitioned to separate white from black, its ventilation system in place, and platforms under construction, the *James* was prepared for its role as slave ship.

On 9 January 1676, Blake received orders "to sail for Wyemba [Winneba] and there take in what slaves" the company agent had acquired.[30] The orders disappointed Blake, for having viewed the captives held at both Winneba and Accra already, he hoped to win permission to "goe for Accra and take in those good slaves, because I was afraid," he explained, "of having a parcell of thin slaves from Wyemba."[31] The castle's orders stood, however, and Blake made his way to Winneba.

Once he was there, it would be necessary to feed the African captives that began to board in large numbers, and in this regard Blake's efforts to make his ship ready to receive its human cargo had fallen short. The "furnace," or cooking apparatus, that would be used to boil food for the slaves was damaged, having "burnt out and a great hole in ye bottome," though Blake had repeatedly requested permission to go to Cape Coast Castle "to have my Slaves Furnace sett up" and unload the trade goods that continued to occupy much-needed space in the ship. The requests had been denied, however, and the agent at the castle had sent Blake "from place to place with all ye goods in ye ship." As a result, Blake complained, "I am forced to carry a great part of my water upon my upper deck." As the ship's store of fresh water was consumed, he was hard pressed to find a place to store the empty casks and was resolved, therefore, "to hang them alongst [his] quarters" on both sides of the ship.[32]

Given that a large contingent of African captives was due to come aboard, a solution had to be found immediately. While Blake

remained on shore to confer with the company agent at Winneba, his crewmen were busy assembling a makeshift apparatus for preparing the slaves' food. At daybreak on the morning of 11 January, a party of seamen went ashore in the ship's longboat to collect sand "to fill a great square hearth, to make fyer on to boile ye Neagg.rs Furnace," and returned to the ship later that morning with both sand and "40 men slaves." Meanwhile, Blake ordered the other of the ship's two small boats, the pinnace, to bring aboard "as many slaves as she would conveniently carry." Later that afternoon Blake returned to the ship himself, "to see if ye great Furnace would boyle," and on the following morning, "finding our Furnace to boyle very well," Blake went back on shore and ordered the remainder of the slaves to be sent aboard the ship, confident that his jury-rigged setup would enable him to feed the 167 men, women, and children from Winneba in his charge.[33]

The condition of these captives was no better than that of the people Blake had seen several months before. This group being "for ye most part very thin slaves," their emaciated frames told of severe deprivation in the two months or more they had spent incarcerated there. What was more, among those sold as adult males were "severall boys for men," whom the local king had insisted the company take toward payment of a debt.[34] Blake remained for one day after getting this group aboard, "in expectation of more slaves" the king had promised to deliver the following morning, "which he said would be Choice slaves." But the additional captives were not forthcoming, and so before daylight on 14 January, when a favorable land breeze began to blow, Blake unfurled his sails and raised anchor.[35] For some ten days he was forced to rely on the makeshift furnace, not finding opportunity to set up the "Slaves Furnace" until 21 January, when he was able finally to put ashore all of the trade goods from the ship at Cape Coast Castle.[36]

Even with the nearly doubled surface area created by platforms, the lower deck alone could not accommodate a "full complement"

of captives. It would be necessary also to make use of the upper deck. With at least 167 slaves aboard already and many more still to come, Blake once again sent ashore for stanchions "to make an end of setting up my platforms upon the Gunn Deck," and also to complete platforms "in the Forecastle."[37] With the forepart of the ship's upper deck occupied by African captives, only the quarterdeck and captain's cabin remained available for Blake and his officers' exclusive use.

Once captives went aboard the slave ship, their management continued to be governed by the alienating agenda of commodification. Captives were segregated by sex in the quarters belowdecks when they came aboard, and it was common to erect barricades to separate men and women during time spent abovedeck as well—a strictly observed policy that reflected the captain's concern to disable normal social relations among the human cargo. Bosman reported that "their Lodging-place is divided into two parts; one of which is appointed for the Men the other for the Women; each Sex being kept a-part."[38] Likewise, according to Barbot, "the men and women are usually separated, the men being placed in the forepart beyond the main mast, and the women towards the stern, with a stout barrier between them, otherwise," he explained, "there would be dreadful confusion."[39] Thomas Phillips acknowledged the difficulty with which captains enforced such efforts at social control. "Tho' we separate the men and women aboard by partitions and bulk-heads, to prevent quarrels and wranglings among them, yet do what we can," he wrote, "they will come together."[40]

"By Degrees and Good Industry"

Captains' aim to increase the volume and hence the profitability of slave cargoes entailed considerable time and a complex coordination of efforts. Of the numerous variables sea captains tried to control, none was more important than time, as the men who suc-

ceeded in the business of human trafficking well knew. Both their safe return to European home ports and their proceeds depended on the speed with which they could conclude their business on the African coast. Their task was to obtain the best collection of people the market could offer in a limited window of time. Because this was a market, the contest was competitive between European buyers engaged in an anxious race against time and African sellers, who exploited this and other European dependencies with great finesse.

European buyers came into direct contact with the slave supply system at the Atlantic littoral, where African sellers accumulated captives and determined who would be sold, and when, to nourish the growth of European slave cargoes. Always watching the market carefully, the African owners exploited captives' labor until such time as a visit from a dealer trading directly with European buyers, or from a European factor himself, signaled that the time was right to consign some of the captives at their disposal to the commercial channels leading toward the water's edge. Or perhaps word reached the sellers' ears that a newly arrived slave ship was anchored offshore. In regions that lacked European settlements, African brokers held slaves until European ship captains were ready to begin receiving them aboard their vessels. Even in regions that did host European settlements where captives could be held while awaiting debarkation, African brokers preferred to hold captives until the arrival of European slave ships, in hopes of commanding higher prices.[41]

In the closing decades of the seventeenth century, the victims of Akwamu's expansion in the eastern Gold Coast were the human face of the slave economy. The correspondence of the Royal African Company factors allows us to trace the flow of people, as those reduced to captivity by Akwamu's wars were funneled to the major eastern Gold Coast ports in the closing decades of the seventeenth century; and subject polities were called upon to release people whenever demand was high, such as when several ships were trad-

ing in the vicinity of a port at the same time, all anxiously seeking captives to fill their decks.

The Atlantic market's pull on the eastern Gold Coast becomes evident in the disposition of people seized in Akwamu's campaigns against Agona, for instance. The Agona kingdom was a regular target of Akwamu aggression during an eight-month period from January through August 1686—the prelude to Akwamu's defeat of the kingdom in 1688–1689.[42] Though the gold trade was severely damaged by the fighting throughout the period, opportunities to buy captives generally were plentiful. Whereas captives had been "very scarce" in January, by 2 March there was a "good quantity of very good slaves" in the fort at Accra, and the factor was able to put twenty-five men and twenty-one women aboard the slave ship *George* two weeks later.[43]

Captives continued in good supply in the following months. Though "very little gold" had been purchased "because of the war between the Arguines [Agona] and Ahenesa [Akwamuhene Ansa Sasraku]," the factor reported in June, "I have now by me 30 very good slaves," and he was rejecting opportunities to buy more because he did not have sufficient provisions to feed them.[44] On 18 July, twenty-five captives were sent up to Cape Coast Castle, and almost four weeks later another forty-seven were dispatched to the castle. Meanwhile, the Dutch also were buying "great quantities of slaves," and the factor at Accra had been "informed [that] slaves are plenty which cannot be brought here by reason Ahenesa [is] having war with Arguina [Agona]."[45] Captives continued to flow in for the following six weeks, the factor at Accra purchasing at least eighty-six from mid-August to the end of September.[46]

By the end of September 1686, a new round of fighting was under way in the Akwapim hills northeast of Accra. Akwamu had made tributaries of the small polities nestled behind the escarpment and drew heavily on the hill communities to supply the Atlantic market for captive people.[47] "Trade is gone very low again by reason

Ahenesa warring Occrepon [Akropong]," reported the factor at Accra at the end of September, further noting, "Slaves also are gone very scarce."[48] On 21 October Ahenesa reportedly was ready to head into battle. Only ten days later, the news of his victory aroused anticipation regarding the human traffic that was likely to follow. "Ahenesa having beaten Ocrepon will not be long ere slaves and gold will be more plenty, being now very scarce," read the report from Accra.[49]

Sixteen captives were in the fort when the factor at Accra penned his report on 31 October. When he requested additional provisions "for slaves use" one week later, their number had grown to twenty-five. "I know not how suddenly may come a great quantity," he wrote, "they coming daily more and more very good Gold Coast slaves from Ahenesa."[50] Another week passed, and the factor reported, "I have now by me 40 slaves, most men."[51] One week later there was talk that Ansa Sasraku was finally preparing to bring his troops, together with the spoils of their warmongering, back home to the Akwamu capital at Nyanaoase. "Trade is now very dull for gold and little better for slaves," the factor at Accra reported, "which must be expected until the return of the said Ahenesa from the field which I hope will not be long he is daily expected." By the first week of December, more than 105 enslaved men and women had been brought down to the Royal African Company fort at Accra, while others went to the neighboring Dutch fort.[52] In contrast to the steady stream of war captives, very little gold came down from Akwamu. "I suppose," concluded the factor, "[it] cannot be expected before they have discharged themselves of their slaves."[53]

At the end of December there were enough captives in the fort for forty-six men and twenty-one women to be put aboard the slave ship *Dragon*.[54] The surplus of Akwamu captives appears to have been expended at last by the early months of the new year. Having guessed in December that he might be able to purchase "in a

month's time maybe 100 or 150" slaves, the English factor offered a different assessment on 1 February. "I cannot tell you how many slaves I could procure in a month's time," he wrote, "in these parts the trade is very dull at present for that commodity and cannot give you the least encouragement."[55]

When there was no specific need to off-load large numbers of war captives, it was the arrival of ships that triggered the flow of people toward the water's edge. In January 1680, the arrival of the hundred-ton *John Bonadventure* at Cape Coast Castle set the machinery in motion. A vessel employed by the castle, the *Isabella,* was already out buying slaves at Allampo and put a parcel of fifty-two captives onshore at the company's fort at Accra. In the meantime, the *John Bonadventure* sailed to windward (west) of the castle in search of a supply of corn.[56] The following month the *Isabella* ferried another fifty-eight captives from Allampo to Accra, and another sloop was dispatched from the castle to buy slaves at Winneba.

The activity continued in March, the *Isabella,* the castle's sloop, and the *John Bonadventure* all being sent out to collect slaves at Winneba and Allampo.[57] Also in March, the company agents at the castle offered "a dashey" of "4 yards scarlett broad cloth and 5 ½ gallons brandy" to one "Attabarba," in the hope that he would "open the trade with Angina [Agona] to bring downe slaves to give Capt. Woodfine the speedier dispatch."[58] The gesture appears to have had the desired effect: seventy-one captives were bartered for goods at the castle in the following month.[59] "Aboard Capt. Woodfine wee have put his full complement of Slaves according to his owne Liking," read the report from agents at the castle dated 20 April 1680.[60] When the ship departed at the end of the month, its human cargo consisted of 560 captives "taken in on the Gold Coast & Alampo."[61]

Details regarding the market for captives at the time the *John Bonadventure* was seeking its cargo on the Gold Coast suggest that

Woodfine's "liking" fell considerably short of ideal expectations. The standard instructions to ship captains called for twice as many men to be put aboard as women and further stipulated that none in obviously poor health or outside the prescribed age limits—"from the age of 15 years not exceeding 40"—were to be accepted.[62] Over against this abstraction of the ideal slave cargo, however, stood the material realities of acquiring sufficient captives to assemble a ship's complement on the African coast. More than half of the adults purchased for the *John Bonadventure* on the castle's account were women, and nearly a quarter of these removed themselves, by death or escape, before the group boarded the ship. The *John Bonadventure*'s cargo was known to fall below prescribed standards on at least two counts: the high proportion of women, and indications of epidemic disease among the captives put aboard.

In fact, the dire condition of some of the captives assembled for the *John Bonadventure*'s cargo was plainly apparent, so much so that agents at the castle removed from the group "noe less then Forty" whose illness was too evident to be ignored. According to Nathaniel Bradley, chief merchant at the castle at the time, it was his policy to take such precautions on the company's behalf. "At their going away if they had Poor & sickly slaves which wee thought would not stand wee have changed them thinking it more for Your Interest that they dye on shoare then that they go away sick & infect the good slaves."[63] When the appearance of ill health was serious enough to suggest the probability of imminent death, captives might thus avoid the slave ship. But it was the fate of many captives, having passed inspection by European eyes trained on the need for a full complement of captive people, to face death amid the terrors of the slave ship.

The qualities that mattered most in the African markets were different from those of greatest concern to buyers in the Americas. The ship captain's most pressing concern was not his captives' qualifications for plantation labor; rather, what mattered most to the ship

captain was whether captives would survive their passage aboard the slave ship. The business of the Atlantic market in Africa, in other words, was production not of bonded laborers but of human commodities—units of merchandise that became an acceptable cargo by attaining the desired number and rough demographic specifications.

Given the imperative to acquire an aggregate of bodies in a timely fashion, it was often necessary to approach the assembly of the slave cargo with considerable flexibility. The "lusty" man cost more in the African market for slave exports than his ordinary counterpart, the woman with blemish-free skin drew a higher price than one whose body was marked by smallpox scars, and the "man slave who wanted the first joint of his thumb" could be purchased for three ounces of gold instead of the four ounces paid "per head" for a captive in possession of all ten fingers.[64] On the slave ship's invoice or in the castle's "account" of "shipping slaves," however, all these became commensurate units in the same commercial categories—"men" or "women." Here on the African side of the Atlantic market, the value of the "chain slave" resided in her contribution to the volume of the aggregate. Quality was necessarily subordinate to quantity, which was required for the slave ship's speedy departure.

The imperative for European captains to acquire large numbers of captives in a short period of time put African sellers in a position of considerable advantage. Although European buyers preferred for their cargoes more males than females, the stronger over those weakened by illness and deprivation, those in the prime of adulthood over the very young and elderly, African sellers recognized and exploited the market reality that pressured European buyers to accept whatever was made available to them. Forced to concede to African commercial interests if they wished to "complete" a cargo at all, European buyers accepted women as substitutes for men, the very young and old as substitutes for adults in their prime. In all these ways, the political economy of the slave ship produced a mar-

ket for captives on the African coast that was markedly indiscriminate.

Company officials in London regularly wrote to their factors on the African coast to complain that the quality of the slaves purchased did not meet the company's standards: the cargoes included too many women, too many "superannuated" or very young people, and worst of all, cargoes where the death rate exceeded the "common mortality" or whose survivors were in a state so pitiful on reaching American markets that agents there suspected the captives must have been noticeably ill when put aboard on the African coast.[65] Likewise, officials at Cape Coast Castle might chide subordinates at the trading factories for buying captives who did not fit the profile agents were charged to produce. The agent at Anomabu, for instance, acknowledged the complaint from the castle that of the thirty persons he sent up to Cape Coast, "4 are mentioned as old" and promised that "for the future shall take great care to buy none but what I shall be well satisfied will answer your expectations."[66] If the recurrent themes in the dialogue between London, Cape Coast Castle, and the factories on the Gold Coast are any indication, though there was consistent pressure to mold slave cargoes in the image metropolitan investors and American buyers considered ideal, the cargoes assembled on the African coast regularly fell short of that standard.

A particular source of dissatisfaction was the appearance of women in numbers greater than the company desired.[67] Women were more valuable than men on the African market for slaves, but women were also easier both to obtain and to dispose of. The productive and reproductive capital they represented was the primary concern of kinship institutions, and women circulated with relative frequency and ease in the exchange networks that framed kinship relations. Moreover, women did not present the threat to security that male captives posed, and as easily as they could be incorporated into urban domestic households or village compounds as

wives and agricultural laborers, they could be released at a moment's notice when lucrative opportunity arose. Describing the production of cargoes at the neighboring Bight of Benin, for example, English slaving captain Thomas Phillips reported, "The present king often, when ships are in a great strait for slaves, and cannot be supply'd otherwise, will sell 3 or 400 of his wives to compleat their number."[68]

Bringing men to the coast in large numbers, by contrast, entailed planning and organization. In the aftermath of war, traders regularly marched groups of male captives to the coastal forts; or if ships were on the coast seeking human cargoes, traders happily negotiated directly with European captains. Whereas men appeared in irregular bursts, women were easily corralled for sale to European buyers anxious to "complete" a ship's human cargo.

"Here is no trade come from Quomboe [Akwamu] as yet," the factor at Accra reported in July 1683. "His son and the man which always was our messenger is up in the Country but when it doth come it is all at once." The factor had purchased seven captives "and could have had more," he wrote, "but we stand for one man and one woman, men slaves being very scarce here."[69] Writing to update agents at Cape Coast Castle on his progress buying slaves at Allampo in September 1683, John Groome reported that he had twenty-eight aboard his ketch the *Merchants Adventure:* twelve men, thirteen women, two boys, one girl, "and may purchase more women but I do not forbear because I would have them bring one man with one woman." He would begin the return voyage to the castle when wind and current conditions turned favorable, and he hoped by that time to have "50 or 60 slaves in or more." The local broker from whom he had purchased his first group of captives at Allampo had "sent his men with ye goods up in ye Country for ye purchasing of more slaves, & are not come downe as yett, but I am in hopes," Groome continued, "that this weeke may proove better than ye Rest of the time has." But he closed his missive with a pro-

viso: the African traders here were asking "very high rates" for the captives they offered for sale, "and specially them that are good."[70] Ten days later, the result of his negotiations reflected his earlier warning. The number of captives aboard the *Merchants Adventure* had grown, there now being forty-five aboard the vessel, but, Groome confessed, they were "not according to your desire, for men are verry scarce & especially those that are good."[71] One month later, Hugh Shears offered a similar report of his progress procuring a cargo for the *Cape Coast Brigantine*. At anchor a few miles east of Accra, Shears had purchased eighty-seven captives, of whom there were more women (forty-four) than men (thirty-eight) among the adults.[72]

A large part of the challenge European buyers faced on the Gold Coast in the seventeenth century had to do with prices. Captives could be obtained at lower prices in the neighboring Bight of Benin and in the Bight of Biafra, and European traders' command of maritime technology enabled ships to approach Atlantic Africa as an integrated commercial zone. European investors in slave cargoes relied on the ability to gather information on prices everywhere in Atlantic Africa and to direct their slaving vessels accordingly. African investors did not share that advantage: they could not know the price of human commodities in markets elsewhere on the coast. Eltis has pointed out that "if Africans had sold their slaves on the coast for twice their actual price in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, say, £8 instead of £4, then quite possibly little slave trading would have occurred."[73]

In the Gold Coast in the seventeenth century, however, bullion was available in sufficient quantities to merchants engaged in Atlantic commerce to mitigate European demand for human commodities. The evidence suggests that African merchants were expert at making European buyers pay for the human specimens they most valued and pushing European buyers to take lesser captives in order to realize an affordable cargo. In the absence of data on local prices

for slaves, it is not possible to pursue comparative analysis of the domestic and Atlantic export markets. But the advantage African sellers enjoyed in a market shaped by stringent time constraints and fierce competition between and among national groups of European buyers is clear. It appears likely that the astute African broker of human commodities had the potential to sell people in the Atlantic market for a price in excess of the captives' value on the domestic market for slaves.

This, at least, was how European factors viewed the African sellers' power to unload all manner of captives at a profit. A woman "not thought Merchantable" was removed from the *Dorothy & Anna* and "put a Shore" at Cape Coast Castle in September 1715, and subsequently returned to the factor who had purchased her at Anomabu. "I asked advice of severall what I should doe with her and what was Customaraly done with Slaves returned not fitt for the Company's Service," he wrote. "Every one I demanded advice on told me," he continued, "they Sold them where they Could, and that the Gentlemen at Cape Coast did the same, with Sick & bad Slaves they had often at Cape Coast." Accordingly, "the Woman I sold to one Capt. John Green for 48 Gallons Rum," he reported.[74] Likewise, he "sold severall of the sickly Slaves to Capt. Morgan of the *Tunbridge Gally,*" according to his report regarding a group of captives too ill to pass muster aboard a Royal African Company ship in January 1721.[75] Only by death, escape, or redemption did captives—even those deemed not "merchantable"—evade the market's grasp.

Although it was possible to fill slave ships at the Gold Coast, the demand for slave exports far outpaced the supply of captive people made available by the local merchant class in the second half of the seventeenth century. Though ships usually could obtain at least some portion of their human freight on the Gold Coast, often

months of coasting back and forth among the leeward ports were required to accumulate enough captives to "complete" a cargo. By the 1680s, the Royal African Company, realizing the efficiency of treating the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin as a single region for slaving, ordered ship captains to obtain what they could at Gold Coast markets and then sail eastward past the Volta River to the ports serving Whydah and Allada in the Bight of Benin, where a seemingly limitless supply of slaves was available.[76] Though some number of vessels departed every year with a cargo procured primarily between Cape Three Points and Allampo, it became increasingly common to "complete" cargoes by pooling captives from the Akan- and Ga-speaking communities of the Gold Coast together with large contingents of Ewe-speaking people obtained from communities that funneled slaves toward the Bight of Benin ports.[77] As a market for people, the Gold Coast came to be a constituent part of a larger integrated whole, comprising the continuous four-hundred-mile stretch of coast from Axim to Whydah.

When the *Edgar* arrived there in January 1681, outfitted to take on a cargo of 320 captives, 32 people were counted among the "Inventory of goods in Cape Coast Castle," including 18 "poore old refuse" men and women, a woman employed in the garden who was "sick of the smallpox," and 10 "very sicke and weake" men and women who had been brought up to Cape Coast from Allampo the previous month.[78] Four "Arda" men (castle slaves) together with 9 women and 2 boys were at the factory at Agga, and no human commodities had been housed at Anomabu and Anishan. Finally, though there were 37 people at Accra, only 8 were men, and 3 of these were "Arda bumboys."[79] Already on the coast when the *Edgar* arrived was Captain Henry Clark in the *Prosperous,* en route to procure his cargo of slaves at Angola, and also the *Mary,* under the command of Captain Robert Smith. Having arrived in November 1680, the *Mary* was to receive its full cargo as well, and she was still taking in slaves when the *Edgar* arrived. When the

Mary finally departed, probably sometime the following month or early in March, more than five hundred persons had compressed themselves between the ship's decks.[80] Following so close on her heels, the *Edgar*'s captain Charles Bowler would find his task procuring a cargo on the coast that much more difficult.

One month after the ship's arrival, thirty captives (ten men, nineteen women, and one boy) were aboard the *Edgar.* The group included the three men, eight women, and one boy put aboard while the ship was sent to gather shells at Amersa, along with perhaps the two men and eight women who had been purchased at the castle during the month of February, and probably also a man who, having run away from one of the company settlements, had recently been taken again.[81] Now Bowler made his way out of the roadstead at Cape Coast Castle, en route to "purchase his complement of slaves at Winneba and along the coast to Allampo."[82]

By 9 March the *Edgar* had reached Winneba, the primary Atlantic outlet for the Agona kingdom.[83] Here, thirteen boarded the vessel, apparently all that remained of the captives available for export at the time, as "all the slaves that was at the waterside" there already had gone aboard the "two English interlopers" also trading in the area. Well aware of the advantage that fell to African sellers when slaving captains were trying to fill their ships, the queen of Agona, sending word that she would come down to the waterside herself, with a parcel of captives to sell, now held the *Edgar* at anchor several days more. But the "great trade for slaves" that was promised never materialized. When the ship departed a few days later, none but those first thirteen had joined the cargo.[84]

As the forty-three captives now aboard the *Edgar* felt the ship under way once more, Captain Bowler set his course for Accra. There, the company agent presented the group of captives he had accumulated, giving the ship's factor "the Choyce of Nineteene Negroe Slaves." Most of these having made a poor visual impression, only a handful boarded the ship, and the factor reported that among this

group he "could hardly find Seaven fitt to be putt aboard Shipp." These seven having brought the number of captives aboard to fifty, the *Edgar* put back to sea, now headed for Allampo.[85]

As had been the case at Winneba, there were no onshore settlements, so the ship's factor, James Nightingale, negotiated directly with the local African traders and an official appointed by the king "to fix the price of slaves going on board, one by one, according to sex and age . . . as they are delivered from the mountains."[86] While Nightingale remained onshore, trying to secure agreements with the African merchants against competition from English interlopers as well as Portuguese and Dutch traders (all of whom offered higher prices than he), an assistant, Robert Hollings, stayed aboard the vessel, sending ashore whatever trade goods Nightingale requested.[87]

On 25 March, there were "but one hundred & one negroe Slaves" aboard the ship, which number made up "not one third part of our complement," Bowler complained. Having sent up into the hills to acquire more captives, the Allampo merchants had "promised the rest in five weeks time." There was good cause for concern, however, for when Nightingale had gone ashore to trade, he had discovered that many of his goods were "not vendible." If the officials at the castle did not respond to the current list by sending trade goods he requested, whatever captives might appear would be sold to other ships.[88]

The passage of time was yet another challenge they faced, for in seven days the *Edgar* would enter into a twenty-day "demurrage" period, beyond which time additional freight charges would be levied against the Royal African Company by the vessel's owners if the ship had not yet left the African coast.[89] Nightingale did his best on shore to purchase what he could over the following several weeks, but by 6 April, only thirty additional captives had been added to the group; the *Edgar* now had "not above 135 Negroes aboard." Nonetheless, he remained hopeful. "The people of the Countrey

which are gone for Slaves are not come downe . . . Wee doe expect them dayly with a good quantity, and then will doe my indeavour," he wrote optimistically.[90]

Now almost a full week into the ship's demurrage period, it was necessary to decide whether to dispatch the *Edgar* or to keep the vessel beyond the twenty-day window, to try to complete its cargo. Nightingale offered his "small opinion" that if the proper trade goods were sent up from the castle and the vessel was permitted to remain, "[I] do believe by degrees and good industry we may get your ship's complement of slaves or thereabout in six weeks time." Meanwhile, he had sent a parcel of goods not selling well at Allampo back up to Winneba, in hopes that they might procure some slaves there. "I doe assure your Honour and Councills," he wrote, "that I study every way to gitt Slaves for ye Ship."[91]

One week passed, and Nightingale had heard nothing from the castle, but the number of captives in the slave hold had grown slightly, to 140 persons, and Nightingale promised, "We do what we can to procure more with those goods which are vendible."[92] Another two weeks elapsed with no assistance from the castle, and Bowler finally elected to weigh anchor and return to Winneba, where he intended to procure his store of water and leave the coast. Despite the unsatisfactory cargo of trade goods, 140 captives had boarded the *Edgar* during these four to five weeks at Allampo. As the ship set sail, now tacking against the current and prevailing winds, some 200 captive people filled her decks.[93]

On 25 April, the *Edgar* stood off Accra, where word came that a fifteen-man canoe that had set forth from the castle with trade goods and captives to assist the vessel had been lost near Amersa, and nearly all of its passengers, both black and white, drowned. News also arrived that, additional charges to the company notwithstanding, Bowler was ordered to remain on the coast to complete his intended cargo of 320 slaves. As a result, he sailed westward, back to Winneba, where his crew would obtain fresh water to fill

the vessel's casks and the officers hoped to find a more favorable market for slaves.[94]

Again, they were disappointed in their efforts. The queen of Agona came down to the coast and promised to pay part of a debt she owed to the Royal African Company, supply pawns for the establishment of an English factory there, and even give "the best of her endeavours" to procure captives for the *Edgar.* But despite her promises, all available slaves went aboard interlopers that lay waiting a few miles offshore on either side of the town.[95] Like most of the local rulers with whom the company traded, the queen had received goods without providing either gold or slaves to pay for them. The company absorbed such debts as a matter of course, as it was necessary to placate local rulers, to ensure the free passage of upland merchants, from whom the bulk of the large quantities of gold came. After nearly three weeks, "no more than 6 slaves" had joined the others in the *Edgar*'s hold.[96] In the meantime, thirty-nine were sent up by canoe from the castle and the factory at Anomabu, of whom two were rejected by Bowler. These brought the number of captives aboard to 243.[97]

The situation aboard ship turned critical at this juncture. Those in the group who had boarded the vessel at Cape Coast Castle had spent more than two months on the ship. The inevitable motion sickness that came with windy weather or riding at anchor in the ocean swells perhaps would have subsided, as the constant rolling and creaking of the vessel became familiar.[98] Now, however, the smallpox virus was spreading in the hold, and already seven had died.[99]

Meanwhile, the captain had "not above 4 months provisions left" for his crewmen, and concern regarding the ship's store of provisions for the slaves was mounting, as well.[100] A hogshead of "negro brandy" had been lost, and Bowler had been forced to throw a large portion of the "negro bread" overboard, "it being old bread when bought in England . . . and not fit for use." The loss of

the brandy particularly distressed the captain, who anticipated the great need that would arise during the long Atlantic passage, for it was necessary to dull the slaves' senses against their pain and anguish, and to foster an illusory sensation of warmth against the damp and chill of the sea. "There is an absolute necessity for a recruite of Brandy for the Negroes," Nightingale wrote on the captain's behalf, "without which if wee depart the Coast it may be the loss of many of our Negroes in the voyage."[101]

Having weighed all these factors, Bowler announced that unless the company could assist him in procuring the rest of his cargo, he was determined to quit the African coast with those already aboard. The two canoes sent to assist the *Edgar* had depleted the store of captives at the castle, and only four men and nine women remained in chains at Cape Coast at the end of May.[102] Nor were the trading factories able to supply him. On 25 April, the factor at Accra had reported that no new slaves had been purchased there, "but what you left are still remaining."[103] The factor at Anomabu, following orders to send what captives he held to Winneba, had already supplied seven of the slaves sent up by canoe in May.[104]

Some captives were available at Winneba and Allampo, but the *Edgar* lacked the proper assortment of goods to trade successfully at either market. The *Edgar* was laden with a supply of "sayes," but the textiles required to do business at Winneba were "broad Tapseeles," "Brawles," and "Sheets," while at Allampo the "Tapseeles" together with "long clothes" were popular. Neither did the vessel have the "bright Musquetts" that also were in demand at Winneba, or the cowrie shells needed to advance trade at Allampo.[105]

Though a speedy departure might preserve lives (including those of the ship's captain and crew), leaving the coast altogether was not a viable option, for it would indicate failure to comply with one of the most important provisions in the contract that bound the ship's captain, its owners, and the Royal African Company in a relation-

ship of mutual obligation. Departure at this juncture would mean the captain had not managed to procure a "complete" cargo. His protests silenced, Bowler agreed to pursue the alternative and prepared to proceed two hundred miles farther east to the company's factory at the Bight of Benin.[106] On 20 May, Bowler left Winneba and headed back down to Accra to deposit the remains of his Gold Coast trading cargo and take aboard whatever captives might appear in the three days he expected to be there.[107] By this point, eight men and eleven women had died among the 252 persons taken aboard. When the *Edgar* set sail again, it carried 233 captives who had been turned into commodities in the Gold Coast market.[108]

The first small contingent had boarded the *Edgar* in February, at the beginning of the Harmattan season, when winds blowing down from the Sahara Desert produced particularly hot, dry conditions on the coast. Even during this time of year, however, the night always brought cool air. A century later, an eighteenth-century slave ship captain, Robert Norris, would obliquely acknowledge the extremes of temperature—whether cold at that point or the excessive heat characteristic of a crowded hold—in observing that "when a Ship had only Half its Complement of Cargo on Board, those Negroes then there lay as close to each other, by Choice, as afterwards in a Case of Necessity." Those confined aboard the *Edgar* during the weeks before the vessel was crowded with captives, therefore, may have found it useful at times to huddle close, even next to a stranger, in search of warmth against the damp, drafty chill of the slave hold.[109]

As their number had increased during these three months, however, the heat generated by the growing number of bodies, together with the dry heat of the Harmattan season, made conditions in the hold increasingly difficult. Every new delivery of captives added to the effluvia of sweat, vomit, urine, and excrement that painted the decks where the captives lay; each new body required space where now none was to be had. Overwhelmed already by their collective

number, the slaves strained to receive what breeze was produced by the vessel's forward motion, as Bowler proceeded along the coast toward Allada, "wanting 87 slaves" to complete the population of that stifling world.[110]

Aided by the eastward flow of the current and prevailing winds, a ship could reach the Bight of Benin from Accra in three to four days.[111] When the *Edgar* arrived, rebuilding of the company's factory at Offra (adjacent to Jakin) was almost complete, after a fire in March had destroyed much of this waterside town where the company conducted the majority of its trade with the Allada kingdom.[112] The new factory, one of the factors boasted, included a "very secure Trunck" in which to store goods and collect captives for export.[113] Twenty-two captives were sent from the nearby factory at Whydah on 7 July. Assuming that this shipment was sent to help bring the process to a close, the *Edgar* probably was ready to depart no later than the end of the month. The company's factor at Offra reported in his August accounts that he had "dispatched Capt. Bowler from here with 87 slaves according to your order." At last the *Edgar* held a quantity of people deemed sufficient for it to begin the ocean crossing to an American destination.[114]

The annual loss of 1,500–2,000 persons to the slave trade in the last decades of the seventeenth century could hardly have seemed demographically significant in a Gold Coast population estimated to have numbered over a million.[115] But those who inhabited the waterside towns where the business of slave trading was conducted must have looked on warily, wondering what might develop out of this change in direction of slave traffic across the littoral. The demands of the slave ship's political economy established the rhythm of incarceration at the littoral, and that relationship was not lost on the captives themselves. They observed the regular arrival of new prisoners in the coastal factories, the disappearance of those who died or escaped, and periodically, the departure of those who were led out by the castle slaves and never returned again—the last being those selected to board one or another slave ship waiting offshore.

"6000 Slaves Yearly, If They Can Be Gott"

Events in England, America, and the Gold Coast contributed toward a notable shift in the rhythm and the geography of the market for captives at the turn of the eighteenth century. In England, advocates of free trade began to gain ground in their efforts to dismantle the Royal African Company's monopoly on trade with Africa. After 1698, any and all English traders were free to mount voyages to the African coast, provided they paid a 10 percent duty on the value of their outgoing cargo of trade goods.

Noncompany vessels trading in violation of the monopoly—interlopers—had long been a regular presence on the African coast; with this first step toward formal erosion of the company's privileges, "10 percent men" began to appear on the African coast in large number. Joining the fast-growing number of English ships seeking human cargoes was an increasing array of Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Brazilian merchants, all responding to the burgeoning demand for labor in the American colonies. New gold mines in the Minas Gerais region of Brazil, cane fields spreading to all corners of the Caribbean basin, tobacco fields in Virginia, and rice swamps in the Carolina low country contributed to an overall trend of ever-expanding colonial production and the attendant demand for steady supplies of cheap, servile labor.

No African region was more firmly tied to the Atlantic market at the turn of the eighteenth century than the Gold Coast. Though societies in no fewer than eight distinct regions of coastal Africa regularly received merchandise from European ships, analysis of the cargoes assembled for export to African markets paints a strikingly skewed picture of the distribution of European goods. According to Eltis, "at least two-thirds of all merchandise arriving and leaving sub-Saharan Africa in the second half of the seventeenth century passed through the Gold Coast."[116] When gold deposits that had for centuries supplied the world market for bullion along trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic routes began to dwindle by the turn of

the eighteenth century, the incentive to respond to the fast-growing demand for captive people was powerful.

The Gold Coast was chief among Atlantic African regions that responded to the slave ships plying the coast in ever-larger numbers. Whereas the company agents had struggled to maintain a steady flow of captives in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, officials in London were writing to agents at Cape Coast in May 1699 with these instructions: Be prepared to provide for "our ships, and ships we take to freight, which we compute may be for 5 to 6000 Slaves yearly, if they can be gott."[117] Similarly, the chief factor at Cape Coast reported in February 1706 "that 10,198 Slaves have been purchased in 2 years & 6 Months."[118] Stiff competition from "10 percent ships" occasionally prompted the Royal African Company to pursue its former practice of sending ships to the Bight of Benin to round out cargoes that agents had begun to assemble on the Gold Coast.[119] But the enormous rise in the volume of captive people departing from the region after 1700 suggests that it was possible to fill many, many, ships with human cargoes there in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.[120]

The concentration of political and military power in Asante brought the threat of saltwater slavery to new communities in the central and western hinterlands of the Gold Coast. The changing political geography was reflected in the patterns of Atlantic captivity. At that point people began to appear for sale in those same central and western Gold Coast outlets that had put the greater part of the region's gold exports into Atlantic circulation in the preceding century. The flood of traffic in human commodities now shifted to such outlets as Anomabu and Dixcove—ports that had never been a site of mass slave departures in the preceding century. "We are informed that the chief trade of the 10% men for rum is at Annamabo and that from thence they slave most of their vessels," read a missive from company officials in London that concluded with this directive: "We would have you take that place into consid-

eration that it be supplied with proper persons and plenty of rum to gain that trade and to purchase for our acc.ts all the negroes that is there to be had."[121] By this time the sellers were largely traders from Asante, and among the captives were people from Denkyira and other polities that had come under Asante's dominion.[122]

Drawing from a store of tobacco to purchase two men on 29 January 1712, an agent at Cape Coast Castle put the facility's account for "shipping slaves" in debt to the account for "Port[uguese] Tobaccoe" in the amount of six ounces of gold. On 26 April, gunpowder exchanged for one boy made the account for "shipping slaves" beholden to the account for "powder" in the amount of one ounce, fourteen ackies of gold. Four days later the "shipping slaves" account became indebted directly to the account for gold by the one mark and four ounces given in exchange for four men added to the castle's stock of slaves "in chains." Such were the transactions documented on the left-hand, or debit, side of the "shipping slaves" ledger for the year 1712, where factors recorded the exchanges that brought people into the castle's prison. For every captive acquired, one or more "accounts" lost value, by giving up something against which people were exchanged. People, tobacco, gold, and gunpowder, all mutually exchangeable against one another, were able to pass smoothly across the transactional lines that separated one account from another. Having begun with a balance of 1 man, 6 women, 1 boy, and 1 girl, in the "shipping slaves" account on 1 January, the account shows that seven months of transactions brought the number to 443 captives as of 1 September: 226 men, 111 women, 78 boys, and 28 girls (Fig. 3.2).[123]

As the "debt" owed by the "account of chain slaves" grew, the human collective swelled, one body at a time, until its size reached the requisite number—250, 400, 650—to fill the space of a slave ship. Only once that aggregate of captive people became a "full

complement of Negroes" did it enter the right-facing, or credit, side of the ledger. Now moving out of the castle as a group, shipping slaves paid off their "debt" to the various accounts that had been drained by their purchase. Accordingly, when a large contingent left Cape Coast Castle on 30 June 1712, its departure caused the "shipping slaves" column to be credited by the company's general account, for 300 persons "Shipt on board *Pindar* Gally."[124]

Lifted from the ledger's pages and entered into the company's profit and loss books in London, the numeric values in the ledger were the raw data that supplied the official account of the slave trade. From the ledger's figures metropolitan investors evaluated the company's success and the Board of Trade compiled its reports. The numbers did more than record quantitative values, however. As important as their empirical content is the form and structure of the ledgers, invoices, and other instruments of accounting that documented the traffic in human commodities.[125]

The ledger's double-entry pages and the neat grid of the invoice gave purposeful shape to the story they told. Through their graphic simplicity and economy, invoices and ledgers effaced the personal histories that fueled the slaving economy. Containing only what could fit within the clean lines of their columns and rows, they reduced an enormous system of traffic in human commodities to a concise chronicle of quantitative "facts." Thus, Mary Poovey writes, "like the closet, the conventions of double-entry bookkeeping were intended to manage or contain excess."[126] Instruments such as these did their work, then, while concealing the messiness of history, erasing from view the politics that underlay the neat account keeping.

The slave traders (and much of the modern economic literature on the slave trade) regarded the slave ship's need for volume as a self-evident "fact" of economic rationalization: the Board of Trade's reports, the balance pursued in the Royal African Company's double-entry ledgers, the calculations that determined how

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

3.2 Account of "Shipping Slaves," Cape Coast Castle, 1712, T70/664.

many captive bodies a ship could "conveniently stow," the simple equation by which an agent at the company's factory at Whydah promised "to Complie with delivering in every ten days 100 Negroes."[127] But the perceptions of the African captives themselves differed from the slave trader's economies of scale and rationalized efficiency of production. What appears in the European quantitative account as a seamless expansion in the volume of slave exports—evidence of the natural workings of the market—took the form of violent rifts in the political geography of the Gold Coast. People for whom the Atlantic market had been a distant and hazy presence with little direct consequence for their lives now found themselves swept up in wars and siphoned into a type of captivity without precedent.