Term Paper

Interloping Trade of the MCC

Laura Volkmer

A&H 376 Topics in History

Dr. W. van den Broeke

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A lot of research about the profitability and abolition of slave trade have been done in the recent past. So far, little attention has been paid to the purchasing strategies of the trading companies. In the article Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797, certainly a lot of attention has been paid to the mortality of slaves on board of slaving ships was paid, not so much, however on the purchasing strategies. The way how slaves were bought, in the case of the MCC, on the West Coast of Africa, would help to understand the general condition of the slaves and the system of slave trade in general. This paper aims to investigate the purchasing strategies of the MCC, and its importance for the profitability of the journey to get an idea for the motives behind the employment of certain strategies. Every ship of the MCC got at least two documents with instructions with it on the journey: general and particular instructions. The general instructions were the same for every ship, but for the particular instructions two versions were handed over to the captains. One of them gave the instructions to focus mainly on the purchasing of slaves, and the other was concerned with trade in a more general sense, which means that they were not primarily in Africa to purchase slaves, but to buy ivory, gold, red wood, and ebony. The ships that were sent out with the instruction focusing on trade also had the instructions to sell their slaves to slave ships. The snow Zanggodin will be in the focus of investigation. The Zanggodin was sent out to five journeys during 1764 and 1775 and only three of them where triangle trade journeys. What could be the possible explanations for the

decision of the MCC to not let complete all their ships the triangle journey, like in the case of the Zanggodin, who came back to the Netherlands from the coast of Africa in her first two journeys before having sailed to Suriname? One reason which could serve to explain the cooperation and therefore the return of some ships to the Netherlands instead of going to the Americas could be due to the nature of the contracts the MCC had with the WIC. The WIC formerly held the monopoly for the trade on the West coast of Africa, but this was lost and the MCC could buy the right to trade at the coast (at first the Gold Coast was excluded from that permission). However, one of the conditions to buy the permission was a restriction of the timespan the ships were allowed to trade at the coast. Under this condition to make slave trade and trade in general more profitable it was necessary that ships of the MCC would work together. In that way it was avoided that ships sailed to Suriname before reaching the maximal number of Slaves they could take with them. And vice versa, because the slaves were exchanged with ivory, ebony or gold the ship that supplied the slaves was also able to sail back to their home harbour fully loaded. In this sense the profitability of a journey cannot be analysed in isolation but only in connection with the cooperative ships. This suggestion is supported by the fact that the goods and slaves were exchanged on the basis of purchasing price (and expenses made so far) without the aim of profit by the captains and officials negotiating. In the case of slave shortage, this two fold strategy could hold to prevent economical disasters. The Snow Zanggodin during her carrier in the MCC fulfilled different roles in this two fold strategy: as mentioned before the two first journeys were no triangle trade journeys, as opposed to the last three journeys. Because of the change in trading behaviour the Zanggodin seems to be an appropriate starting point to learn more about slave purchasing strategies in the MCC.

¹ Harold van Damme, *Prosopografische analyse van directeuren-commissarissen en hoofdparticipanten van de Middelburgse Commercie Companie, 1720-1755*, master thesis, University of Ghent, 29.

In the 18th century three major techniques of purchasing slaves existed. These were the factory system, the "legger system," and the trade from ships along the coast, also called the "interloping system." The factory system "implied that a company managing factories would purchase slaves from African merchants at the factory and store the slaves in anticipation of an affiliate ship arriving for a cargo of slaves," whereas the "legger system" is a trading system in which the trade was transacted on permanently stationed ships in lagoons or estuaries. Later those ships were later called "floating barracoons". ² The interloping trade was the system of choice for the MCC. The ships, regardless if they were looking for slaves or African products, did sail up and down the coast and stopped to negotiate wherever it looked promising. Not having a fixed place to go to get products, like in the legger or factory system could mean that trading took a lot longer and this time factor would support the assumption that the ships had to cooperate because of the time constraint. Postma in his book *The Dutch* Participation in the African Slave Trade: Slaving on the Guinea Coast, 1675-1797 mainly refers to the WIC and its way of trading, where the interloping trade only plays a minor role, although this changed towards the end of the century.³ After the WIC had lost its monopoly of trade at the coast of Africa, it had to compete with other companies like the MCC. The other companies, including the MCC, did not have harbours and offices at the coat and needed to interlope. The slaves were bought wherever it seemed promising, which probably had as a result that the WIC factory masters or captains of the floating barracoons could not get sufficient numbers of slaves to continue to depend on the legger and factory system only. Under the pressure of increased competition in slave trade the WIC had to adopt their strategies and increase their interloping activity. Another reason why they had to abandon the legger and factory system could be that it was not economical anymore, after the WIC had lost the monopoly of slave trade, because it required a constant extensive stuff, as Postma laid

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² Johannes Postma, *The Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade: Slaving on the Guinea Coast, 1675-1797* (Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1970), 65.

³ Postma, *Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade*, 164.

out in his book *Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade.* Interloping ships would sail and trade along the coast independently from company offices at the coast. The main area where the WIC followed the interloping strategy was at Angola,⁵ later in the century the interloping trade increased as a result of the weakened monopoly of the WIC on trade at the coast of Africa. The Dutch interlopers were mainly equipped by Dutch merchants and companies from the province of Zeeland, in fact they were frequently called Zeeland (Zeeuwse) interlopers. Ships trading according to the interloping system were, in general, smaller than the ships that traded according to the legger or factory system. 8 In the case of the WIC, according to Postma there are "none or few records by which the nature and volume of their [interlope] trade can be assessed." The Middelburgse Commercie Companie (MCC) was the most important private trading company that penetrated the monopoly of the WIC at the coast of Africa, and is an exception to the rule in the sense that the captain and the first mate were obliged to take records meticulously, which can be studied in the Zeeuwse Archief in Middelburg. The WIC divided its trading activities into tree separated categories: the Gold coast trade, the slave trade and the costal trade. The term slave trade in regard to the WIC preliminary focuses on the trade on the Slave Coast and Angola whereas the Gold coast trade focused on the Gold Coast, both trading categories are part of the legger or factory system. Costal trade, however, is the interloping trade and is not restricted to a geographical area. ¹⁰ In a more flexible manner the division into slave trade and costal trade can also be seen in the MCC organisation. Every MCC captain was equipped with a folder of documents that included letters of authorization and instructions. The instructions consisted on at least two documents: the general instructions, which were the same for every ship, and the particular

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⁴ Postma, *Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade*, 71.

⁵ Postma, Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade, 68.

⁶ Postma, Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade, 69.

⁷ Postma, *Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade*, 71.

⁸ Postma, Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade, 63.

⁹ Postma, Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade, 74.

¹⁰ Postma, Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade, 68.

instructions, of which two versions existed. The first one, called particular instructions A, have trade in general as aim with particular focus on ivory and gold, and other African products. Although the captain should also buy slaves if there was the opportunity, this was not the priority of the journey. The ships with this set of instructions would sail along the coast and purchase African goods and slaves. The instructions also stated that they should not leave out any chance to sell their purchased slaves to other ships, even to ships of other nations. The second set of particular instructions (B) clearly has slave trade as a priority. The ship should sail to the coast of Guinea as fast as possible, where slaves should be bought and brought to Suriname (as in the fifth journey of the Zanggodin to St. Eustatius). ¹¹ To achieve this they would also sail along the coast, but it seems like that at certain places like the Cape la Hoe the legger system would be employed and they would buy slaves from other ships. The MCC, therefore one could say reinterpreted the two strategies from the WIC, which brought greater flexibility and required a greater cooperation between the ships. WIC captains only occasionally were asked to hand over their slaves to another ship of the same company at the coast of Africa, so that the latter could begin its Atlantic crossing earlier, ¹² and only on rare occasions WIC sold slaves to French and English ships, but this never became rule in the WIC. 13 To sum it up the suggestion is that the cooperation between the ships followed roughly the two strategies of legger and interloping trade and the two categories of costal and slave trade of the WIC, and that this is reflected in the two sets of instructions. In the following the case study of the Snow Zanggodin will be used test and exemplify this assumption. The snow Zanggodin sailed five times under the flag of the MCC to the coast of West Africa during 1764 and 1775, but only set sail to the Americas the last three times. The method employed to analyse the purchasing strategies of the Zanggodin was to first look at the set of instructions they carried for every single journey, then to see how this might have

 $^{^{11}}$ Instructies, Inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende dit schip, 1764-1776, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1366.1 + 20.1366.2 + 20.1366.3 + 20.1367.1

¹² Postma, Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade, 67.

¹³ Postma. Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade, 92.

influenced their trading strategies on the west coast of Africa with the help of the book of trade (negotieboek) and the letters of the captain written to the MCC officials in Middelburg. According to this pattern the time at the coast of Africa of every journey will be discussed.

The first journey of the Snow Zanggodin took place between May 12, 1764 and April 15, 1766. The captain, Dirk Bonrhegh, embarked on the journey with set A of the particular instructions, which meant that the priority of this journey was trade in general. The particular instructions were complemented with a handwritten document (the instructions, general and particular, generally were printed). The handwritten addition to the instructions ordered captain Bonrhegh to sell his slaves to captain Brouwens of the MCC. The transaction was to take place at the Cape La Hoe. ¹⁴ And in fact Bonrhegh sold 29 slaves between the 20th and 24th of August 1764 to captain Molder at the Cape La Hoe. These 29 slaves however were only first slaves of in total 143 slaves that Bonrhegh managed to buy and then sell again at the coast of West Africa. Interesting is that Bonrhegh did not only sell slaves to his fellow captains of the MCC, he also at two occasions sold slaves to an English and a French captain. However the majority of the slaves were sold to captain Brouwers, as it was intended by the MCC officials. ¹⁵ To manage the trade at the coast of West Africa a close contact and communication between the ships at the coast was required. That Dirk Bonrhegh, indeed stood in contact with the other captains of the ships is confirmed by the letter he wrote to the MCC office in Middelburg. Bonrhegh gives extensive accounts of the ships he saw and the captain he met including very exact numbers about the cargo (and slaves) the ships carried. ¹⁶ After all the purchased slaves were sold to other ships, the Zanggodin set off home loaded with African goods, like ivory, ebony, gold and wax. In the end the journey of the Zanggodin made a loss. 17 On the second of August in 1766 the Zanggodin started her second journey to

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¹⁴ Instructies, Inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende dit schip, 1764-1776, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1366.1

¹⁵ Negotieboek, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1373

¹⁶ Brieven van gezagvoeders aan Directeuren, 1764-1776, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1368

¹⁷ Scheepsboek, 1764-1778, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1365

the coast of Africa, this time under Captain Daniel Pruijmelaar (Pruijmelaar was succeeded by Jan van Sprang after his death. 18 The second journey of the Zanggodin was like the first journey not a triangle trade journey, after having spent 20 month at the coast of Africa the Zanggodin returned to Zeeland the 16th of June in 1768. ¹⁹ Like on the first journey the instructions for the captain were three fold: general instructions, particular instructions A and a handwritten additional document with instructions specifying the particular instructions. The additional instructions, again, did ask the captain of the Zanggodin to sell his slaves to a specific fellow captain/ship of the MCC, in this case David Mulder and his frigate Vrouw Johanna Cores.²⁰ These handwritten documents suggest that part of the purchasing strategies of slaves at the coast of Africa was the cooperation between ships of the MCC with different priorities of trade. The place of choice for the exchange of slaves and good in both cases is Cape La Hoe.²¹ The book of trade for the second journey of the Zanggodin is lost but from letters written by Jan van Sprang to the MCC it is known that on the third April if 1767 115 slaves were given to captain Jacobus Bouqué (snow Nieuwe Hoop) of the MCC.²² However, it is likely that slaves were sold afterwards to other ships as well due to the total length of the journey. The total length of the journey of almost two years might be one of the reasons why the second journey of the Zanggodin made a loss of 1748,3,5 Flemish Pounds. The first and the second journeys of the Zanggodin were the only ones which did not complete the triangle. On her third journey, still under Jan van Sprang, the Zanggodin sailed from Zeeland to Guinea, from Guinea to Surinam, and to Zeeland from Suriname, between September 28, 1768 and June 12, 1770. Astonishingly the instructions for the third journey do not only consist on the general instructions and the particular instructions B, as might be expected for a

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¹⁸ Kopieboek van verzonden brieven, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1383

¹⁹ Journal, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1376

²⁰ Instructies, Inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende dit schip, 1764-1776, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1366.2

²¹ Instructies, Inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende dit schip, 1764-1776, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1366.1 + 20.1366.2

²² Kopieboek van verzonden brieven, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1383 + Journal 20.1376

slave journey. The instructions, in fact encompass particular instructions A and B. There is no evidence that captain Jan van Sprang did sale slaves to other ships, however there was still a lot of contact between with other ships especially the Snow Nieuwe Hoop and it's captain Jacobus Bouqué and occasionally also with foreign ships. That Jan van Sprang did not sell slaves to other ships, does not mean that there was no trade going on between the ships. Van Sprang did purchase slaves from other slavers to a great extent. The term slaver instead of ships is used intentionally. Jan van Sprang noted down very exactly from whom he purchased the slaves. On several occasions he wrote that he bought the slaves from an English man, at other times he said that he bought the slaves from an English captain. ²³ From that could be concluded that there was a network of independent (European) slavers on land, which were selling slaves to ships. Jan van Sprang, however, not only bought from those slavers, the main proportion of his slaves he bought from other captains of the MCC.²⁴ Thus, even though, the Zanggodin did not sell slaves to other ships during her third journey a continuation of the cooperation between ships of the MCC and international parties can be seen. This continuation of the cooperation with other ships is also visible in during the fourth journey of the Zanggodin, again under Jan van Sprang, between 21st of October in 1770 and the 13th of April in 1772. The instructions were essentially the same as for the third journey: general instructions, and particular instruction A and B. This time, however 64 slaves were sold at the coast of Guinea in 1771. 25 It can be assumed that during that year the supply of slaves was rather good, if one considers the fact that the Zanggodin left to Suriname to sell slaves not much later. 26 From the journal and the book of trade one learns that this time the majority of slaves were bought from local people who came to the Zanggodin with small canoes,²⁷

²³ Meemoria van de dagelijkse negotie etc., Zeeuws Archief, 20.1387

²⁴ Meemoria van de dagelijkse negotie etc., Zeeuws Archief, 20.1387

²⁵ Meemoria van de dagelijkse negotie etc., Zeeuws Archief, 20.1393

²⁶ Journal, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1391

²⁷ Journal, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1391 + Meemoria van de dagelijkse negotie etc., Zeeuws Archief, 20.1393

whereas before it often looked like crew member did by the slaves at land. ²⁸ In the books of trade of the previous journeys Jan van Sprang often notes down that the slaves were purchased by the first mate, whereas during the fourth journey he writes about canoes coming to the Zanggodin. The fifth journey (April 6, 1773 – April 22, 1775) was the last journey of the Snow Zanggodin. The captains were Ibbe Henrich Hoff, who died during the journey, and Gargon his successor. This time the instructions only consisted of the general instructions and the particular instructions B. The B instructions have a handwritten 8th paragraph which says that they should by as much ivory and wax, ebony and red wood as they could, but if not enough ivory and wax should be available they should instead buy as much slaves as possible. The minimum number of 100 slaves was needed to cover the cost to sail to Suriname.²⁹ Different to the former journeys was as well that it was especially forbidden to sell the slaves on the coast of Guinea, reason for this might be the high losses of the first and the second journey, which might be due to the fact that the slaves were sold at purchase price to the other MCC ships. 30 Eventually the Zanggodin left Africa with just 111 slaves, and set sail to Saint Maarten and Saint Eustatius. During the journey to Saint Maarten the Zanggodin began to leak so badly that the crew had to take shifts to pump the water out, and at Saint Eustatius is became clear that it would be too expensive to repair the Zanggodin and the snow was sold there.³¹

How do the five journeys of the Zanggodin support the assumptions made before? In the first and second journey of the Snow Zanggodin, the Zanggodin played the role of the "floating barracoon" at the Cape la Hoe. In both cases the instructions were supplemented by a handwritten document, ordering the captain to wait at the Cape la Hoe to hand over his purchased slaves to other captains (Captain Brouwers and Captain Mulder) of the MCC. The

²⁸ Meemoria van de dagelijkse negotie etc., Zeeuws Archief, 20.1387

²⁹ Instructies, Inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende dit schip, 1764-1776, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1367.2

³⁰ Instructies, Inventarissen, facturen en overige stukken betreffende dit schip, 1764-1776, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1366.1 + 20.1366.2 + 1367.2

³¹ Brieven van gezagvoeders aan Directeuren, 1764-1776, Zeeuws Archief, 20.1368

first time the majority of the slaves was indeed sold to Captain Browers, whereas the second time the slaves were sold to another captain, Jacobus Bouqué, because Captain Mulder had been successful in buying all the slaves without help and had already set sails for Suriname. The third journey can be seen as a kind of transitional journey. Jan van Sprang was not only equipped with one particular instruction, but with both A and B. The reason behind could be to give the captain more flexibility to react to the situation at the coast of Africa in regard to availability of slaves or and African products. The same applies to the fourth journey of the Zanggodin. The fifth journey only had the particular instructions B with them. Possible reasons for this shift in strategies could be the big losses the Zanggodin made in the first two voyages or/and the greater supply of slaves at the coast of Africa, so that it was not necessary anymore to have ships stationed at the coast to hand over their slaves to other ships. The addition in the particular instructions B of the fifth journey do also hint to either a bigger profit margin in slave trade opposed to the trade with other African goods or the possibility to purchase greater amounts of slaves in a shorter amount of time.

The intention of the paper was to show that the cooperation between the ships of the MCC (and occasionally between MCC and foreign ships) at the coast of Africa was a crucial factor in the slave purchasing strategy of the MCC. The strategies employed by the MCC were further developed trading strategies employed by the WIC, namely the legger and the interloping system with the strategies of slave and costal trade. The terms slave trade and costal trade are mainly descriptions of the geographical environment where the purchasing of slaves took place. The slave trade, for the WIC, was used to signify that the ships went to the Slave Coast and Angola to purchase slaves either with the legger system or factory system, whereas the costal trade was a sort of interloping trade along the coast without having specific harbours or ships where they needed to go. The MCC adapted this system, in so far that they instructed ships to cooperate with one supplying the slaves for another which were bought along the coast before. The place of choice for the exchange of slaves at the coast between the

MCC ships was often the Cape la Hoe. The ships that purchased slaves in the costal trade manner became floating barracoon at the Cape la Hoe and part of the legger system. The function and role of the ship within this could change in the course of their journeys, which was illustrated by the Snow Zanggodin. In the first two journeys the Zanggodin's main purpose was to function as a floating barracoon and did not complete the triangle trade, whereas in the later three journeys she took advantage by other ships supplying them with slaves. In article Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797, which was mentioned in the introduction, Hogerzeil and Richardson wrote about the Zanggodin: "Even the one ship that failed to complete its triangular voyage-the Zang Godin, which sailed in 1773- delivered slaves to America before being abandoned as unseaworthy."32 With no word did they mention the first two journeys of the Zanggodin, which also did not "complete" the triangle voyage, but were, as demonstrated in this paper, involved in the slave trade and part of the slave purchase strategies. The quotation above, translated into positive terms says that ships involved in slave trade always worked with within the triangle trade system. For their study with the purpose to analyse the purchasing strategies they only used the 39 voyages with sailing to Guinea, which completed the triangle voyage.³³ Following this methodology they failed to see that also ships that did not complete the triangle voyage did contribute to the slave trade and therefore are important if talking about the experiences and conditions of the slaves. The outcome of the research of Hogerzeil and Richardson, which focuses on the time span for which the slaves were on board, ³⁴ especially in regard to mortality, is therefore not as accurate as it could be otherwise. The estimation of the time spend by the slaves on the ships in front of the coast of Africa could therefore exceed the estimated time in the mentioned article.³⁵

³² Simon J. Hogerzeil and David Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality: Day-to-Day Evidence from the DutchAfrican Trade, 1751-1797," The Journal of Economic History 67, no. 1 (2007), 162.

Hogerzeil, and Richardson, "Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality," 162.
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Journal. 1391.

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Meemoria van de dagelijkse negotie etc.. 1393.

Meemorial van ingehandelde slaven. 1380.

Negotieboek. 1372.

Negotieboek. 1373.

Scheepsboek, 1764-1778. 1365.

APPENDIX

Particular Instructions A (Article 3)

III.

Vermits by nader Accoord met, d'Ed. Heeren Bewindhebberen van de West-Indische Compagnie, door hun Hoog Mog: is geaccordeerd, om alle plaatzen op de Kust te mogen aan doen, en aldaar vry te Negotieren: Zoo zult gy op alle plaatzen, van Caap Tres punctes af tot aan Fida toe, indien het de nood vereischt, moeten Negotieren; want daar overal, Tanden en Goud, intehandelen is, en ook U Cargazoen daar toe is gedestineert; gy zult ook aldaar, zoo lang moeten blyyen, als 'er eenige Negotie te verwagten is XGy moet ook geen occasie laten passeren, om de Slaaven, die gy mogte aan Boord hebben, om te minder daar mede belast te zyn, af te zetten, 't zy aan Portugezen, Engelschen of Franse Natie (Welke Schepen meest van Quita tot Apéliggen.) En indien gy dan nog veel Kust Goederen overig hebt en het zelve, aan Engeliche of andere Natien, kunt affetten, tot redelyk Avance, zoo zal zulx (als gy de Kust verlaat) geraaden zyn, daar van gebruik te maken, om des te minder genoodzaakt te zyn om doortesteken, waar door de Reis veel zoude verlengt worden, daar wy eenigzints aan de tyd bepaald zyn; of anders moet gy aan St. Tomé, zien, U Restanten te verkoopen; Voorts moet gy in de Bogt, de Cameroenes, de Gabon en Nazareth; zoo veel Tanden, Wasch en Roodhout in handelen als gy bekomen kunt; als mede fwart Ebbenhout (mits dat het zyn lange en groote stukken, en van de swaarste die te bekomen zyn.) En voorts in alles Zoldaar, Coopman en Zeemanschap gebruiken.

Additions to the general and particular instructions of the second journey of the Zanggodin (Excerpt)

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Particular instructions A with addition third journey of the Zanggodin (Excerpt)

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Particular instructions B, additional paragraph

