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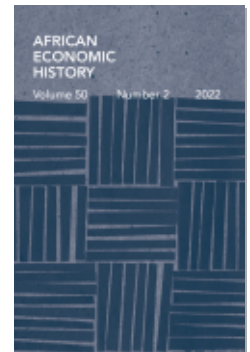
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## A Manden Myth in the Akan Forests of Gold

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# A MANDEN MYTH IN THE AKAN FORESTS OF GOLD

KWASI KONADU

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**ABSTRACT:** Scholars have long assumed merchants from B̄o-Ns̄ko were Islamized Manding speakers, specifically Jula and Wangara. Since the advent of African history in European and North American universities in the 1960s, writers have promoted a Manden cultural diffusion myth that attributed to Jula and Wangara people, and to Islam, a fictitious influential role in commercial and cultural exchanges with Akan societies. This article argues against a Manden cultural diffusion myth related to trade and gold to reveal the earliest forms of Akan gold and monetary practices across varied ecologies in West Africa’s deep history. It shows this Manden myth can finally be laid to rest.

**KEYWORDS:** Manden, Akan, gold trade, Volta basin, Jula-Wangara

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“And that which they vended was always so pure and fine, that to this day the best Gold is called by the Negroes, *Acanni Sica*, or *Acanist’ Gold* [Akan gold]”<sup>1</sup>  
—Willem Bosman, Dutch chief merchant, 1705

## Introduction

The nexus of Akan societies and the communities of the West African savanna and Sahel was the forest-savanna ecotone, or that broad middle Volta basin encompassing the northern portions of the semi-deciduous forest and southern zones of the savanna woodlands. Besides the B̄o,

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an Akan society on the northwestern forest fringe, scholars do not know which savanna merchants visited or settled the major Akan gold-trading terminus of B̃o-Nsok̃ and the surrounding middle Volta basin environs. On the northwestern edge of the forest, B̃o-Nsok̃ is also known in the (early) literature as Begho. Scholars assume those merchants were Islamized Manding speakers, specifically Jula and Wangara.<sup>2</sup> I use Manden/Manding for speakers of Malinké (Maninka), Mandinka, Bamana, and Jula. The names Jula and Wangara both mean “merchant.” The Manding word *julá* shares the same semantic field as the Akan/Twi term *batafo*, long-distance merchants. Writers since al-Bakrī of the eleventh century have chronicled these African traders conducting a “commerce in gold dust,” and ascribed to Jula Malian origins and Wangara Soninke roots. Yet scholars ignore the transformation of these terms from identifiers of a profession (*julá*) to markers of a people and language (Jula), who may or may not have been linked to the Malian empire or imperial Wagadu. This complex transformation is lost in the loose ways the names Jula and Wangara have been deployed, but this elusiveness also explains why scholars assign them an influential role in commercial and cultural exchanges with Akan societies. That role is a widely held but fictitious idea—in a phrase, a Manden cultural diffusion myth.<sup>3</sup>

Exchanging goods is a cultural as much as an economic act, for trade always occurs in a cultural context. Through Jula traders, myth purveyors claim Manding—and by extension, Islam—significantly influenced the language and culture of Akan societies from the fifteenth century onward. In 1961–62, historian Ivor Wilks articulated this claim in two articles, “The Northern Factor in Ashanti History: Begho and the Mande” and, in collaboration with linguist John Stewart, “The Mande Loan Element in Twi.” Distinguished colleagues like Jack Goody and graduate students of his repeated this claim, as did Wilks in a subsequent two-part article, “Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries” (1982). The recurrent “northern factor” claim became widely accepted and, even when revisited recently, linguist Mary Dakubu not only affirmed Wilks’ view but also suggested additions to Wilks’ twenty “Mande loanwords.” However resilient the propositions offered by Wilks, and however stubborn the view that influence flows north to south in African history, there is myth-busting evidence against Manden cultural diffusion through trade and for Akan gold and gold-trading practices reaching and engaging North African societies as innovative partners rather than empty-headed receptacles.

Maurice Delafosse’s *Essai de manuel pratique de la langue mandé ou mandingue* formed the principal source of Wilks’ “Mande” loanwords. Delafosse’s *Haut-Sénégal-Niger* also influenced how historians think about the history of empire in West Africa, anchoring the standard template of

“Ghāna-Māli-Songhay” and the politicization of a past which privileged ancient Mali and its foundational epic as well as constructions of Manden in African historiography. As the famous chronicles (*tawārikh*) sustained this template—themselves political as much as they were intellectual projects—so too did modern historians looking for usable pasts gravitate to Mande(n) as a template and lens for wider West Africa, reminding us that “such narratives were created by historians” with little documentation in the past and the contemporary period.<sup>4</sup> Historians like Wilks then looked to language as a method to recover a past but without requisite training in linguistics and at a time when historical linguistics related to Africa was in its infancy. His and his disciples’ reliance on secondary (colonial) materials, even if filtered by a collaboration with linguist John Stewart, show how a Manden myth linked to the Akan was generated and why it, like the imperial template in West African historiography, became a standard account of cultural and economic exchange.<sup>5</sup>

The (mis)use of “Mande” loanwords is not simply nor only a matter of methods, for Africanist historians have long used multidisciplinary approaches in their innovative use of archaeological, anthropological, oral, and linguistic materials. In this case, the methodological problem of historians relying on linguistic data of the colonial kind was compounded by lack of convincing linguistic and other data, in addition to assumptions about what loanwords signify in human exchanges. Loanwords or lexical borrowings imply language contact, not cultural or historical impact, and the greater the borrowings the longer or more intense the exchange between languages.<sup>6</sup> By this measure, it is strange that only two dozen “Mande” loanwords accrued over centuries stand as evidence of significant impact. Indeed, close examination of Delafosse’s *Essai de manuel* and *La langue mandingue* reveal few if any Manding lexemes found in Bono or Asante variants of Akan/Twi. The Bono possess the largest stock of proto-Akan linguistic features and longer sustained contact with Manden traders than other Akan societies; thus, any effect would likely have been archived in Bono speech. This is not the case. Speculative sources, including Delafosse’s colonial works and one-third of twenty words marked “probable” and “possible,” make the “catalyzing sociolinguistic” impact Manding had on Akan societies doubtful. If through trading gold, Islamized Jula-Wangara had decisive roles in shaping Akan cultural forms, material culture, and language, know that only some Jula-Wangara became religious specialists, while others adopted Jula patronyms without converting to Islam. Indeed, evidence from gold trading and Jula-Wangara settlements do not support their crucial impact.

Reflecting on Islam in the middle Volta basin, renowned scholar Nehemia Levtzion conceded:

The influence of Islam in Ashanti [Asante] remained marginal; Islamic elements have hardly been incorporated into the Ashanti national culture, as happened in Dagomba; Muslims have not been integrated to the stage of being members of the local society rather than foreign residents; and conversion has been very limited . . . A similar process may be traced in the old kingdom of Bono-Mansu, where the presence of Muslims has not left marked traces in the culture. The same is true of the Brong [Bono] kingdom of Gyaman, where the Muslim community of Bonduku was even more influential than that of Kumasi; yet Islamic influence on the Brong has been arrested.

In the main, these Akan responses to Islam seemed “common to all the Akan states, and we are confronted with the problem of resistance to Islam, which,” Levtzion admitted, “is not easy to explain.”<sup>7</sup> But if we route thinking about exchanges between Manden traders and Akan societies not through myths but through Akan forests of gold, monetary systems, and long-standing transregional trade, a globalizing Akan forest region with its own cultural ideas and economic and political priorities emerges. This article, then, argues against a Manden cultural diffusion myth to reveal the earliest forms of Akan monetary practices across varied ecologies in West Africa’s deep history.

## Trading Terms and Commercial Terrains

Members of Akan societies enslaved, traded, wedded, fought, and allied with African Muslims, and yet their relationship seems to have been distant. In European records, we find patchy, but important, vocabularies for Akan/Twi since 1480; they have almost no trace of words for Islam or Muslim until the nineteenth century. The earliest Arabic manuscripts found in the Akan forest date to the early nineteenth century, along with the nominal presence of Muslim advisors in the Asantehene’s court, while most Muslims lived in self-segregated quarters. We encounter the term *kramo* in the nineteenth century. It is odd that Akan communities would adopt a term which does not mean Muslim outright, *k(a)ramo* (*kàrà̀mɔ̀ɔ̀*, “teacher”), and bypass the apt Manding terms *silàmɛ* (“Muslim”) and *mori* (“Islamic scholar, marabout”). By using a modified loanword, *kramo*, for a teacher associated with written texts, the reference may not have unequivocally been to a “Muslim” because the Akan possessed a script and graphic signs. Almost always identified with Muslim peoples of the savanna (called *ntafo*, “peoples of uncultivated, flat, open land”) were captives sourced from north of the Akan forest, the likes of which were called *ɔ̀ɔ̀nɔ̀kɔ̀* (pl. *nnɔ̀nɔ̀kɔ̀/fo*). But *ɔ̀ɔ̀nɔ̀kɔ̀* was one of several terms for captives/servants. *ɔ̀ɔ̀nɔ̀kɔ̀* bears no relation to Manding terms for captives—*woloso*, *ɔ̀n*. It was a derogatory term for a child born after

previous infant siblings died—*dɔnkɔ*, “love does not go”—and “uncivilized” northerners.

From North Africa to the forest-savanna ecotone, Akan merchants discovered camels, horses, and lions, and so while *gyata/ɔhyeegya* (lion) flowed from Manding *jata/jara/jada*, it is unclear how *ɔpɔnkɔ* (horse) originated from Manding *so/donfɛn*, and even less *yoma/afupɔnkɔ* (camel; lit., “horse with hump”) from Manding *nɔɔmɛ/naamɛ*. Horses and donkeys were found at Bɔnomanso and Bɛo-Nsokɔ, but tsetse flies eviscerated them in the forest—the ecological source of canoes, tobacco, and paper. Paper (*krataa*) and tobacco (*taa/tabaa*) have little to do with Manding *bātāki* (of Arabic origin) and *sara/sira*, respectively, but more to do with the Portuguese *carta* and *tabaco*, though the Akan also called paper *borɔhoma* (“foreign skin”) or what we call parchment—writing material produced from animal skins. Canoe in Akan/Twi might be *ɔkorɔ*, derived from the Jula *kurun* (stool, small boat), but the Akan call this vessel *obonto*, *batadewa*, and *korɔsten*, a combination of *korɔ* (“a large wooden vessel or bowl”) and *tenten* (“very long”). Also cut from a long single log, a *padua* was used as well, sometimes instead of a canoe. In support of trade and human mobility, these canoes plied the Atlantic littoral and the rivers of the forests of gold.<sup>8</sup>

The Manden myth claims that a principal feature of this trading river basin ecosystem—gold and gold mines, or the language to name them—came into Akan/Twi as *sika* (gold) and *nkoron/nkonon* (gold mine) from Manding traders. *Sika* ultimately, it is, came from the Arabic *‘ar-rizqu* (“wealth”) or *al-‘razqu* (“profit, means”). If the Manding have words for gold, and they do—*sanu/sanin*—why did these not stick? How would people who did not mine or produce gold inspire real gold producers to adopt imported terms for gold and gold mine? As it turns out, the Manding *kɔɔ*, the alleged source of *nkoron*, means “water well,” having nothing to do with mines or shafts, while *nkoron* is precisely “a pit dug on purpose to seek out gold, a shaft, mine.” Although the gold exploited from mines was branded *sika* or *sikafuturu* (“unwrought gold”), gold was also termed *amapa*, “pure gold.” If the Manding words for gold bear no semantic or phonetic resemblance to their Arabic progenitors, how might the Arabic, then, relate to *sika*?

Oddly enough, the Arabic terms *rizp/razaqa* offered as the source of *sika* have nothing to do with gold but rather means “subsistence” and “blessing,” while these and the Arabic term for gold, *zar*, have Persian origins. We may never know the absolute origins of these words, but we know that the Akan concept of gold, *sika*, has endured for half a millennium in the accounts of people who wrote in different languages and represented competing territories. Flemish Eustache de la Fosse wrote *sika* as *chocqua* (i.e., *shecka*) in 1479–80, Portuguese Duarte Pereira wrote it as *sygua* around

1500, Englishman William Towerson as *sheke* in 1555, Dutchman Pieter de Marees as *chika* in 1602, Germans Hieronymus Megiser as *scheke* and Samuel Brun as *sicka* in 1603 and 1617, Dutchman Olfert Dapper as *chika* in 1668, German Wilhelm Müller as *sica* in 1673, Frenchman Jean Barbot as *chika* in 1680, and Dutchman Willem Bosman wrote in 1700: “That which they vended was always so pure and fine, that to this day the best Gold is called by the Negroes, *Acanni Sica*,” or Akan gold.<sup>9</sup>

Into the present, *sika* as gold and perhaps money have indeed remained omnipresent, but the same cannot be said for the monetary system and practices to which it was a part. Pit digging and shaft mining, using wood as support, occurred near hills and mountains. Beyond these mines, where mineworkers plowed the earth for pieces of gold ore (*sikafraebo*), raw gold dust (*sikafuturu*) originated in riverbeds and valleys. From rich alluvial soils exploited by hoes and soil chisels, gold dust and soil particles were washed and filtered through baskets, wooden bowls, and trays. While gold dust was weighed from small amounts to large denominations, gold ore, like iron, was cast into ingots (*ɔkɔwa*) for further processing and the creation of objects, likely through a technique called cold hammering, before other casting methods were developed or acquired. Cold hammering is a striking technique that shapes metals—gold, silver, or alloys—without heating, using self-made hammers and anvils of (bed)rock or chunks of iron. Iron can be made red-hot and copper can be shaped by hammering while cold, then reheated, plunged into cold water, and hammered more.

Since constant cold working of softer metals makes them brittle, smiths or *atomfo* (“one who forges/works iron”) would gently reheat them, allowing for recrystallization and further cold working. Pure gold or *amapa*, however, can be cold hammered indefinitely without reheating. A gold bead excavated from an eighth-century archaeological site on the Akan coast, hollow and spherical in shape, appeared to have been cold-hammered gold, suggesting that “cold hammering, cutting, and bending may have been more characteristic of earlier production.” Though gold—especially its finer particles—was weighed, it was never transformed into weights. Rather, seeds, other metals, stones, and pottery were transformed into weights. The result was a monetary system so complex that scholars turned to not only the Manden myth but also to Arabic and Portuguese to explain its origins.<sup>10</sup>

Though Akan weights were ubiquitous, with several million in use, we know little about their origins. The Akan did not barter because they had currencies, or mediums of exchange, with multiple meanings: seeds, metals, and stones. Their stone-iron monetary system predated or was used in conjunction with gold dust, but the widespread use of gold, as more than symbolic or ornamental, was not uniform across Akan societies. Technologies

and usages associated with gold currency were linked to movement and settlement patterns in the forest and on its fringes, facing both the savanna and the sea. The peoples who coalesced into the Dɛnkyira polity migrated from the Bɔno region and from Adanse, settling near the Ofin river almost parallel to the Akyem east of the Pra river, where “pieces of iron [were] used as money by the Akems [Akyem] in ancient times, before they learned to use gold-dust from the Dankiras [Dɛnkyira].” There is no way to precisely track or chronologize such transitions, but our evidence of weights and gold working in large agrarian settlements before 1000 CE, between the coast and the forest-savanna ecotone, points to gold trading and an evolving Akan monetary system.<sup>11</sup>

In this monetary system, the tools of the trade included scales, scoops, containers for carrying and storing gold, and sacks in which to carry these items, including the weights themselves. Around 1580, André Alvares de Almada wrote about “certain Mandinga merchants” at a trading town up the Gambia River, procuring copper and other imports to be traded for gold and kola from “the people (of the gold region),” called “Cafres (Kaffirs).” Almada was struck by their “accurate scales, the arms of which silver inlay and the cords are of twisted silk,” carrying weights “which are of brass, and are shaped like dice. The scales carry a larger brass weight of one pound, shaped liked the pommel of a sword. The gold they transport in laces, in scraps of cloth, in the quills of large birds, and in the hollow bones of cats, which they hide in their clothing.” Though the Gambian region was more than a thousand miles away from the Akan region, the Manden myth suggests a Manding origin to the Akan counterparts. Writing a few decades later, Dutchman Pieter de Marees described the Akan gold weighing tools:

They make weights of copper, each in proportion. They have small copper scales: The pans are circular, made hollow like an orange-peel, with very long strings and a short bar, without tongs. In between [the strings] is a small equator [needle] or tongue with a little hole in it, through which they pass a little thread. In this way they weigh taking this little thread to their finger with their thumb, they lift the scales up and [put them] down with it.

De Marees admitted, “For us it is difficult to weigh with such scales: one has to be very experienced to know how to use them . . . but among themselves they know how to weigh so accurately that there is never a mistake.” De Marees recorded “ensenni” (Akan: *nsania/nsane*) for scales, noting only the use of spoons for scooping (*sawa*), small bags used for transporting gold dust (*bɔtɔwa/obofu*), and the weights themselves, some of which he named. These included the *benda/benna*, *bennafa*, *osuaa*, *suru*, *nsano*, and *agyiratwe*. It is important to note that *bennafa* and *benna* referred to European metal



weights of one and two troy ounces respectively, which explains why neither are proper Akan weight class names; the English troy ounce, a half ounce, and two ounces are not represented in Akan weights and measures.<sup>12</sup>

The weight system evolved into two groups: seed weights and metal weights, anteceded by stone weights of an earlier period. That seeds should feature in a gold monetary system is not a surprise. The *karat* (derived from Greek *keration*, carob seed) was a unit of weight before it was a measure of the fineness of gold, deriving the seed (bean) as a standard weight for measuring small quantities, then adopted by Arabic as *qīrāt*, where it became a formalized part of the Mediterranean system of weights. In the Akan system, five classes belonged to seed weights—*damma*, *taku*, *ntaku mmienu*, *ntaku mmiensa*, *ntaku nnan*, *ntaku nnum*—whose mass ranged from 0.085 to 1.27 nominal grams, the smallest seed weight being the *damma* ( $\frac{1}{3}$  *taku*). The weights used in gold trading were geometric rather than figurative (called “proverb stones”). These geometric weights were cast and chiseled blocks of brass, bronze, or copper, shaped into cubes, square pyramids, rectangular prisms, and polygons. These weight shapes were much more expansive than the Manding weights “shaped like dice” and “the pommel of a sword,” described by Almada. Though some 60 currency values were normally used, 30 classes constituted the geometric metal weights: *soafa*, *fiasofa*, *dommafa*, *broofa*, *agyiratwefa*, *nsoansafa*, *bodomfa*, *soa*, *fiaso*, *domma*, *broofo*, *agyiratwe*, *nsoansa*, *bodommo*, *nnoma nnu*, *nsano*, *dwoasuru*, *namfisuru*, *ananansum*, *suru*, *presuru*, *takyimansuaa*, *asia*, *dwoa*, *onamfi*, *oansuaa*, *osuaa*, *asuanu*, *asuasa*, and *peredwan*. These ranged in mass from 1.40 to 73.2 nominal grams, the smallest metal weight being the *soafa* ( $5\frac{1}{2}$  *taku*). Weight names indicating two or more small units were combined to produce corresponding weights, evinced by composite names for weight classes from *suru* upwards. This system was standardized across Akan societies and transmitted via people who shared linguistic forms.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the precise epoch in which standardization was achieved, weight standards originated with gold producers in the Akan region rather than in markets in Jenné, Timbuktu, or North Africa. But having standards did not mean fixed fees, especially when merchants used larger weights when buying and smaller when selling—reminiscent of today’s foreign exchange and money transfer companies. Market transactions used those standards as bases for negotiation because prices hinged on supply, demand, variety, fluctuating tastes, and the value of corresponding currencies. Myths aside, the evidence reveals that the Akan monetary system is based on the indigenous *taku* seed system and the *mitkal* (Arabic: *mitqāl*, “weight”) system, and not on the Arabian commercial *ratl* standard, English troy ounce, or Portuguese ounce. For the *ratl*, gold was almost never weighed using a commercial

standard whenever a gold standard was used. What existed, then, was an Akan monetary system plugged into North Africa and the Arab-Muslim world, but not in the way Manden myth purveyors have led us to believe.<sup>14</sup>

The geometric weight system included coin-weights, with values inscribed on them, while also functioning as a system of graphic signs—a writing system. Weights with signs possibly worked as coins, in the sense that signs, placed in any position, indicated a weight value. These contained denominations or numeral signs from “1” to “10,” allowing for addition, multiplication, and division but with no evidence of subtraction. This penchant for counting in tens, where the Akan calendar (*adaduanan*) is a multiple of ten and the day (*ɛda*) is divided into ten parts, was observed by de Marees around 1600. De Marees writes, “After reaching the number ten, each number requires them to utter so many words, one on top of the other.” That is to say, counting from one, *baako*, to ten, *ɛdu*, the person continues with 11 (*du-baako*), and after 20, *aduonu*, 21 (*aduonu-baako*). Though the Akan have terms for nothing (zero), the recent concept of zero as a numeral was unnecessary because counting took place by scaffolding, using base numbers from one to ten. Thus, *du-baako* is “ten-and-one” and *aduonu-baako* is “ten-twice-and-one.” De Marees continued, “They have only counted up to ten, then taken one finger in their hand and again counted up to ten, then taken another finger in their hand and so on, till they have both hands full, making a total of a hundred” (*ɔha*). They also “make a notch . . . till they have their full number.” The verb *bu* means to bend or break, but it also means to count “by bending the fingers.” De Marees recorded no numeral inscriptions on the “small square pieces of gold, weighing one *aes* or half an *aes*” that Akan peoples used among themselves. “If the quantity is so small that it cannot be weighed,” there is reason to believe they may have been coin-weights because the *aes* was the smallest unit in the old Dutch system. The nominal mass of the *ntaku mmeinu* and *taku* seed weights were 0.508 and 0.254 grams, matching “one *aes* or half an *aes*,” respectively. Cast or chiseled on these coin-weights’ relief were numerals indicating values, like tenth- to thirteenth-century inscribed coin-weights in Fatimid Egypt. These were not the only important signs inscribed on weights.<sup>15</sup>

Shaped in polyhedrons, polygons, and arcs and spheres, weights of complex design with singular or multiple graphic signs yielded some 254 basic signs in all. They possess signs identical to alphabets found in northern Africa and the Mediterranean, with some specifically Akan. All of the signs in the ancient Libyan and Tifnagh scripts belonging to the Imazighen of North Africa, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso were in the Akan signs, but not all of the Akan signs existed in these scripts. The Tifnagh graphic writing system, dated to the third century CE yet still in use, consists of a

consonantal alphabet of 22 to 24 signs. Vowels were usually unwritten, but when inscribed, they appeared at the end of a word with the signs /a/, /i/, and /u/, and in special cases the ending /-t/, which, in some instances, were part of a compound sign (e.g., *-bt*, *-st*, *-nt*). Its non-cursive letters were made using points, lines, circles, and squares, but these were written and read in spiral and bi-directional forms; that is, horizontal and vertical. The Akan system utilized straight and wavy lines, spirals, circles, squares, and points independently and in combination. When its signs were symmetrical, they were also read bi-directionally; when unsymmetrical, reading proceeded from right to left and from top to bottom. Akan societies shared the same language and graphic signs but writing systems do not require a system of sounds. Digits or symbols used to write do not need a sonic (sound) identity because sonic identity is the translation of a visual brand into audio. Akan travelers, whether merchants or migrants, need not speak Tifinagh and related languages to share in or be inspired by the meaning of their symbols, nor speak Arabic to create a monetary system that accommodated the *mitkal*, adjoined to their own *taku* seed weight system.<sup>16</sup>

## Monetary Systems and Graphic Signs in Transregional Perspective

Mastering foreign monetary and graphic systems and making them work with existing, localized ones, could not have happened on its own in the forest. While they possessed mobility, the Manden myth traps the Akan in the forest. But if Akan societies were embedded in transregional commerce—and they were—then movement across ecologies was indispensable. Their understandings of these ecologies were coded in language. These forest peoples saw deserts as sandy, dry, and barren. Yet they used one term, *sare/sere*, that combined conceptualizations often kept separate—grassy savanna plains (*serem*) and arid and barren tracts of desert land (*sareso*). This concept ignored a buffer zone called the Sahel (Arabic: *sāhil*, “shore”). Further, the cowrie currency that reached the Sahelian empires from North Africa, and ultimately from the Indian Ocean, was called *sereε* (“savanna-desert thing”). Even the African lion, known for traversing the savanna and desert ecologies, was called *saremmuseε*, “king of the savanna-desert.” These understandings reveal that the various Akan clans (*mmusua*) forming settled communities within and on the vertical edges of the forest were mobile, integrative, and adaptive.<sup>17</sup>

Through travel and grasping worlds wider than their own, Akan merchants extended their markets, seizing upon transregional opportunities for two commodities demanded by the savanna-desert empires and peoples

beyond: kola nuts and gold. Kola (*Cola nitida*) is a stimulant that contains caffeine equal to two or three cups of coffee, increasing energy and reducing hunger. Almada noted, “Of all the imported goods the most esteemed is cola” among Manding and Muslim merchants. “They would give anything in exchange for it, foodstuffs, cloth, slaves, or gold.” But trans-savanna and trans-Saharan trade was not built on kola, but gold. Between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when internal conflict and climate change affected Wagadu and Islam led to Jenné-jeno’s decline, Akan-supplied gold traveled to these lands and beyond.<sup>18</sup>

When Akan elders recalled the trek from Asen in the Pra-Ofin basin to Jenné in the upper inland Niger delta, where gold and kola were traded, they reckoned their ancestors traveled some 42 days, using the Akan *adaduanan* as a matrix for mapping out space, time, and distance. Traders may have used this calendrical understanding for measuring time and distance and, if so, their approximations were remarkably close. Asen to Jenné is some 756 miles walking if one walks an average of 18 miles per day on a 42-day trip. If travelers averaged ten to fifteen miles per day in the forest, those miles would increase to some twenty per day in the savanna. They used a combination of walking and canoeing in the forest, for several rivers were navigable to a point, and although the Tanɔ, Manso, and Pra rivers flow in southerly directions, the Pra has numerous cataracts and was barely navigable. We can imagine merchants and their parties traveling from the coast or forest interior along the Tanɔ in the west, or as Menda Mota did with his sixteenth century Akan guides up the Manso or following other rivers or extant paths from the confluence of the Ofin-Pra rivers, through Adanse, or doing the same for the Volta River and one of its tributaries (Afram, Sene, Oti) in the east. Following or using (where possible) a river, the headwaters of the Tanɔ placed travelers in Takyiman and a few miles from Bɔnomanso; the headwaters of the Afram did likewise fifteen miles from Mampɔn or Akumadan en route to Takyiman, and the mouth of Ofin at Ofinso positioned travelers on paths to Takyiman, then onto Bɔnomanso or Wankye and Bɛo-Nsokɔ. From Mampɔn, travelers could head northeast, taking routes to Atebubu, Salaga, Yendi, and Hausaland, or reach the same from the Volta, through Kete Krakye, traveling northward. Along a northwest trajectory, traders and travelers moved from Bɛo-Nsokɔ to Sampa then Bonduku.

European sources are silent on early transregional trade, for their creators were uncomprehending latecomers and knew little about intra-African histories. The absence of Arabic or Ajami manuscripts further complicates matters. However, once the Portuguese monopolization of the region on the Akan-populated coast was broken in the early seventeenth century, the upstart Dutch and their sources hint at what were chronologically earlier

trade patterns. These were recorded in local idioms and, therefore, reveal something about indigenous understandings. Andres Josua Ulsheimer arrived a year after de Marees and witnessed the “best gold” at Accra and a “great trade” in metals and woolen cloth at Komenda, amazed “they too use weights and measures.” Not long after, the Dutch were informed that Wankye possessed gold and merchants and Bɛo-Nsokɔ had “very fine goods,” “clothes woven like carpets which are worn amongst the Acanists,” or the Akan gold merchants. Whether those woven clothes were from *kente* cloth or not, it is known that international trade at Bɛo-Nsokɔ was evidenced by Turkish rugs and textile fabrics known locally as Nsokɔ *daso* (*ɔdaso*, “quilt, blanket”). If we thought trade moved only north-south, Akan commerce in cotton cloth in western Ivory Coast, woolen cloth called Allada *nkyeremu* (“red and black cotton cloth”), and Benin cloths called *mpa so* (“bed cover”) add an east-west axis that predated Europeans on the coast. Less than a decade after the Portuguese reached the Akan coast, they encountered these preexisting circuits of intra-African commerce, eventually plugging themselves into these exchanges before fighting over control of them. For trans-savanna commerce, they were effectively invisible and powerless, hoping their coastal stronghold would divert commerce. These hopes were dashed. Coastal commerce continued after the Dutch ousted the Portuguese, and trans-savanna trade likewise pushed past Bɛo-Nsokɔ to Bonduku, Kong, Buna, Bobo-Julasso, Jenné, and further on.<sup>19</sup>

Bonduku was the principal town of Gyaman, a Bɛno polity settled before the sixteenth century that became proficient in trading gold, salt, iron, kola, cloth, and other goods. It was bordered by the Komoé river in the west, the so-called Lobi and Black Volta mines to the north, and Sampa to the east, near the Bɛo-Nsokɔ complex. On the northern path merchants arrived at Buna, then passed the fortified ruins that date the former market town of Loropéni to the eleventh century, before reaching Bobo-Julasso. A northwest path from Bonduku led to Kong, then on to Bobo-Julasso. Founded in the thirteenth century when gold mines proximate to Bɛo-Nsokɔ flourished, the trading town of Buna had its own gold deposits. Kong thrived as a trading center for forest and northern African goods in a tropical savanna stretch of grasslands, settled by Jula migrants around the twelfth century. Both traded in North African and Mediterranean goods like Turkish carpets and cloths, called in Buna *daso*. Bobo-Julasso traded in cotton, other textiles, ivory, and metals, but it remained in frequent conflict with Kong, which eventually occupied the town. The village of Sikasso, too, was associated with cotton textiles—as producers. From Sikasso or Bobo-Julasso, the northward path to Jenné ran some 230 miles, or 13 days of savanna walking. Though gold and kola reigned supreme as forest exports, the currency

used for exchange was not cowries but cloth, which explains why cloth and textiles were so ubiquitous in the trading towns. As early as the eleventh century, al-Bakrī mentioned cowries in the savanna-Sahel region but not exactly as currency—only as part of “goods imported,” such as salt and copper. The earliest remarks about cowries as currency in the region come from the fourteenth century, when al-'Umarī refers to Kanem's use of cowries, beads, round pieces of copper, and coined silver as currency. However, importantly, cowrie, bead, copper, and silver currencies were “all valued in terms of [a] cloth” that Kanem produced. Jenné, on the other hand, was a major trade terminus, but it had a divergent earlier history. Its commercial reach extended to the northern bend of the Black Volta river, bordering B̄eo-Nsok̄ and Bonduku.<sup>20</sup>

Jenné lies at the southeastern end of the inland Niger delta, the largest wetland in West Africa, near the river Bani. After dispersing with the rise of imperial Mali, some Jula settled in Jenné and, from this base, worked trade routes to B̄eo-Nsok̄. They pushed into late-fifteenth-century Hausaland via routes from the Volta basin, trafficking in forest-supplied gold dust and kola nut. The mid-seventeenth century *Ta'rikh al-Sūdān* described the town of “Jenne [as] one of the great markets of the Muslims,” but its precursor was the ancient, non-Muslim settlement of Jenné-jeno, which reached its apogee in 750–1100 as a settlement of 82 acres engaged in interregional trade, including the import of captives, iron, and copper. As early as 450 CE, the settlement had expanded and, with the importation of gold and blacksmiths working imported copper, brass, and iron, the town of Jenné was established around 800. The first evidence of a North African or Islamic impact, archived in the form of brass, spindle whorls, and rectangular houses, coincides with the period of Jenné-jeno's decline, 1200–1400. The *Ta'rikh al-Sūdān* tells us its ruler (*koi*) Kunburu converted to Islam around 1180. The former does not deny that “Jenne was founded as a pagan town,” acquiescing that it became more Islamic around the thirteenth century when Jenné-jeno was abandoned. Writing at the start of the sixteenth century, Duarte Pereira said Jenné was “inhabited by negroes,” surrounded by “great wealth of gold,” where yearly “a million gold ducats go from this country to Tunis, Tripoli of [Syria] and Tripoli of Barbary and to the kingdom of Bugia [Algeria] and Fez [Morocco] and other parts.” João de Barros, a contemporary of Pereira's, wrote in the 1520s that Jenné was more famous than Timbuktu in former times and that various African merchants brought gold from there to the Portuguese via their fort at Arguim and along the northwestern African coast. Writing in 1526, Al-Ḥasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzān al-Fāsi described the great trade in cotton cloth at Jenné, a widely exchanged item utilized as currency, but he observed that their coinage was “unstamped gold” and

pieces of iron used for low-value items. Traders, according to al-Fāsī, flocked to Jenné when it was flooded as an island; indeed, the town remains situated between two rivers.<sup>21</sup>

Between the savanna and desert, Akan gold and kola desired by long-distance merchants would leave Jenné, cross the desert via Walala, Timbuktu, or Tadmekka, reaching a region stretching from Marrakesh to Algiers to Tunis and Tripoli or to Cairo and Alexandria via Zawila and Siwa. Since a range of hazards awaited all trans-Saharan travelers, Akan merchants criss-crossed the desert in caravans escorted by professional guides. Caravans were often lost to sandstorms or banditry, towns along common trade routes could be covered by sand, and wells dried up. Desert guides such as the *Ṣanhāja* also provided protection, assisted with food and water, and functioned as interpreters and trade intermediaries. Leaders of communities along these routes deployed gifts as payment for security against attacks from desert dwellers. Caravans typically departed at the end of the rainy season, when sandstorms were minimal, following desert routes made around sand dunes and mountains. But some alternate routes would cut through the dunes. Climate change prompted alternate routes, halting and sometimes shifting the volume of trade across the Sahara and between savanna and forest environments.<sup>22</sup>

If there was one significant period of climate change that affected routes and trade in the wider region, it was the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Those who lived in the forest-savanna-Sahel zone experienced drier conditions and a retreat of forested areas around 1200, increasing conflicts between desert dwellers, nomads, and Sahelian and savanna communities over water and grazing grounds, and greater commerce between savanna and forest peoples. The empire of Wagadu and the sizable settlement of Jenné-jeno felt the pain of climate change and the arrival of Islam, signaling their decline around 1200. The large, agrarian settlements in the forest and on its edges by 1000, working in iron and gold and utilizing a stone-iron-metals monetary system of local origin yet adapted to transregional trade, were connected to a series of trading towns and settled exchange rates that poised the Akan for the increase in world trade and demand for West African gold.

## Conclusion

Between 1125 and 1250, West African gold “reigned supreme” and a “distinctive Afro-European market structure had emerged” in the bimetallic exchange of African gold for European silver. Medieval European gold mining only reached maturity with the first major gold mine in Serbia around 1250. By that time, coins of pure West African gold were already being minted in

Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt and flowing through northwest Africa to the Iberian and Italian peninsulas. Traders from the Italian peninsula exchanged goods for gold. For instance, Florentines established banking operations in Tunis in 1250, trading wool and woven fabrics with Tunisia through Genoa and Genoese traders. Genoese and Florentine merchant-bankers, who even had ties with the pope's family, invested in mining and minting and traded with West Africa for its gold. Why West African gold? Europeans sought this gold because of its purity, for high-quality coins or objects could be produced without needing to refine it first. West African gold dust, flakes, and lumps were transported across North Africa, reaching the Italian peninsula by end of the twelfth century—and Genoa in 1229. Late medieval Europe had virtually a universal interest in the purity of gold, reinforcing its origins outside of Europe.<sup>23</sup>

This elongated moment, chronologized as the twelfth to mid-thirteenth centuries, was a major inflection point in human history as one of the most decisive periods in shaping an evolving, interconnected commercial world. Out of this period came an Akan region of no great commercial importance, obscured by the dense tropical forest and in the shadow of imperial Wagadu, Mali, and Songhay. From the economic backwater of extreme southwestern Europe, Portugal would come out of nowhere with Europe's first global maritime empire. Their paths met on the Akan-populated coast, but the foreigner's desire targeted the forests of gold. Amid the great bullion famine in fifteenth-century Europe, Portugal reached the Akan coast, naming it *a mina* ("the mine"), a chance encounter set up by a series of connected mid-century events.<sup>24</sup>

In 1453, the mortal enemy of Christendom and the target of its fury were the Ottoman Turks, who had just captured Constantinople. Portugal viewed itself as the crusading defender of Christendom. Two years later, the Portuguese created a trading post on Arguim to procure West African gold that would fund the fight against the Turks and Islam. That year, Portugal and Sicily minted coins from the same gold. The Portuguese used it to purchase maritime expertise to compete with the Genoese. Genoese merchant Antonius Malfante had established overland connections with the West African gold trade, reaching Tuwât in 1447, gathering vital data, and forging contacts with trans-Saharan merchants in Timbuktu. Infante D. Henrique then hired Venetian merchant Alvise da Cadamosto in 1455–56 to undertake voyages to West Africa. Malfante had witnessed the Portuguese success in diverting trade from Morocco to Arguim, though Arguim failed to become a center of gold trafficking or to divert the gold traffic between Jula trading diasporas, Akan gold producers, and North Africa. Prior to Fernão Gomes' expeditions to the Akan coast in 1471, there were few options for getting



around Portuguese backwardness, around the gold famine in Europe, or to fabled sources of gold other than through the sea past Sierra Leone. The limits of Portuguese knowledge had been reached until Gomes came along. Akan gold made Gomes a wealthy man. Soon, the outlook for the monarchy and for Portugal changed, opening the way for a global empire. En route to this crowning achievement, Gomes was knighted and appointed to the Royal Council, receiving a new coat of arms and a new name: Fernão Gomes da Mina.<sup>25</sup> Mina, or “mine,” marked Akan people’s forests of gold, monetary systems, and long-standing transregional trade. It was that golden trade, rather than a myth, for which all major European empires competed over the next five centuries.

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## Notes

1. Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London: J. Knapton, 1705), 77; Albert Van Dantzig, “English Bosman and Dutch Bosman: A Comparison of Texts, II,” *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 99.

2. Manding should be understood as a language continuum spoken from present-day Senegal to Burkina Faso and from northern Mali to Liberia and Ivory Coast. Three of the major four variants are mutually intelligible—Bamana, Maninka, and Jula. I have adapted this linguistic understanding of Manding from Valentin Vydrine, *Manding-English Dictionary: Maninka, Bamana*, Vol. 1 (Quebec: MeaBooks Inc., 2015), 4–8; and Coleman Donaldson and Antoine Fenayon, “Manding (Bambara/Jula) - English - French Dictionary,” *An ka taa*, 2019, <https://dictionary.ankataa.com/about.php>.

3. For an argument against this myth, see Kwasi Konadu, *The Akan Diaspora in the Americas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28–53. See also Vydrine, *Manding-English Dictionary*, 6–7; Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu, “The ‘Mande Loan Element in Twi’ Revisited,” *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* 16–17 (2001): 274–75, 286; Maria Grosz-Ngaté, “Power and Knowledge. The Representation of the Mande World in the Works of Park, Caillié, Monteil, and Delafosse,” *Cahiers d’études Africaines* 28, no. 111–12 (1988): 501–7; David C. Conrad, “Maurice Delafosse and the pre-Sunjata Trône du Mandé,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 46, no. 2 (1983): 335–37; Ivor Wilks, “Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. II. The Struggle for Trade,” *The Journal of African History* 23, no. 4 (1982): 463–72; Ivor Wilks, “Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. 1. The Matter of Bitu,” *The Journal of African History* 23, no. 3 (1982): 333–49; K. O. Odoom, “A Note on the History of Islam in Brong Ahafo,” in Kwame Arhin, ed., *Profile of Brong Kyempim* (Accra: Afram and the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana, 1979), 39; Ivor Wilks and

John Stewart, "The Mande Loan Element in Twi," *Ghana Notes and Queries* 4, (1962): 26–28; Ivor Wilks, "The Northern Factor in Ashanti History: Begho and the Mande," *The Journal of African History* 2, no. 1 (1961): 25–34; Maurice Delafosse, *La langue mandingue et ses dialectes (malinké, bambara, dioula)*, Vol. 1, *Grammaire, lexique français-mandingue* (Paris: Geuthner, 1929); and Maurice Delafosse, *Dictionnaire mandingue-français*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Geuthner, 1955).

4. Hadrien Collet, "Landmark Empires: Searching for Medieval Empires and Imperial Tradition in Historiographies of West Africa," *The Journal of African History* 61, no. 3 (2020): 343 (quotation), 346–7, 351–54; Mauro Nobili, "Reinterpreting the Role of Muslims in the West African Middle Ages," *The Journal of African History* 61, no. 3 (2020): 327–40. Michal Tymowski, "Use of the Term 'Empire' in Historical Research on Africa: A Comparative Approach," *Afrika Zamani* 11–12 (2003–4): 19–20; Maurice Delafosse, *Haut-Sénégal-Niger* (Paris: E. Larose, G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1912).

5. John Stewart worked principally on the Akan/Twi language, not Manden/Manding. On his life and work, see Maarten Mous, "John M. Stewart, 1926–2006," *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* 28, no. 1 (2007): 71–4; André Wilson, "John Massie Stewart (1926–2006)," *Studies in African Linguistics* 36, no. 1 (2007): 121–23.

6. The scholarship on loanwords is large. See, for instance, Yaron Matras, *Language Contact* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Martin Haspelmath, "Lexical Borrowing: Concepts and Issues," in *Loanwords in the World's Languages: A Comparative Handbook*, M. Haspelmath and U. Tadmor, eds. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 35–54; Donald Winford, *An Introduction to Contact Linguistics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003); Sarah G. Thomason, *Language Contact: An introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).

7. John O. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sa'di's Ta'rikh Al-Sūdān Down to 1613, and Other Contemporary Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), xxviii; Ivor Wilks, "The Juula and the Expansion of Islam into the Forest," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, Nehemia Levtzion and Randell L. Pouwels, eds. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), 93–115; Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Role of the Wangara in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *The Journal of African History* 19, no. 2 (1978): 173–93; Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: A study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-colonial Period* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 187. For more on adopting Jula patronyms that did not necessarily mean conversion to Islam in the gold mining Muhun (Black Volta) region, see Katja Werthmann, "Gold Mining and Jula Influence in Precolonial Southern Burkina Faso," *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 3 (2007): 401.

8. Kwasi Konadu, *Our Own Way in This Part of the World: Biography of an African Community, Culture, and Nation* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2019), 63, 81. Compare Manding *silāmè/silāma* ("Muslim") with *silāmèya*, "Islam." Wilhelm Müller, in 1673, recorded the term *tutu* for lion. I have been unable to verify this. The lion, in Akan/Twi, is nicknamed *suabi* and is also called *sarèmusse*,

“ruler of the savanna/desert” (sarɛmu, “inside the grassy savanna plains/desert” + ɔsɛɛ, “father [of someone else], ruler,” [syn. ɔhene]). In contrast, the forest-dwelling Akan called the leopard ɔsɛbɔ (“ruler that strikes”), gyahene (“lion king?”), ɔdɛha (“one who possesses the forest”), and kurotwiamansa (“great slayer of nations?”), an appellation of rulers. For the alleged Manding sources of Akan/Twi terms in this passage, see Dakubu, “Loan Element,” 274–286; Wilks and Stewart, “Mande Loan Element,” 26–28. For Manding, I have relied on a rereading of Maurice Delafosse’s work, numerous contemporary Manding dictionaries (Bamana, Jula), including Vydrine, *Manding-English Dictionary*, 4–17. See Vydrine’s source on pages 26–32.

9. Dakubu, “Loan Element,” 280; Dakubu, *Korle Meets the Sea: A Sociolinguistic History of Accra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 141; Johann Gottlieb Christaller, *A Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Chwee, Twi): With a Grammatical Introduction and Appendices on the Geography of the Gold Coast and Other Subjects* (Basel, Switzerland: Evangelical Missionary Society, 1881, rev. 1933), rev. ed., 257. I will also use the revised 1933 edition of Christaller’s dictionary. The Arabic *razaqa* could mean “he sent down” or to “present a person with something”—that is, subsistence, daily bread, a ration. See Meikal Mumin and Kees Versteegh, eds., *The Arabic Script in Africa: Studies in the Use of a Writing System* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 128. RZQ is the Semitic root of the Arabic *rizq* (“sustenance”) and its derivatives *razaqa/razzaq* originating from the Persian *rōzīk*. *Zar* means “gold, money, riches, and wealth.” It is strange that scholars look to Arab peoples with no monetary traditions of their own, having adopted from those they conquered, as the source of African ideas related to monetary history. We might look to the Arabic word *s-k-k/sikka* (pl. *sikak*), meaning minted and coined money, but it also means die, mold, hoe, and railroad track, ultimately deriving from Aramaic and perhaps Akkadian. See Beverly E. Clarity, Ronald G. Wolfe, D. R. Woodhead, and Wayne Been, *A Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic: English-Arabic, Arabic-English* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 221; F. Steingass, *Arabic-English Dictionary* (London: Crosby, Lockwood, and Son, 1884), 499; Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), 1387. There are no Arabic or Ajami manuscripts before the nineteenth century available as a counterpoint to European-supplied documentary sources. Ironically, in the places where many scholars believe we should find such manuscripts—Bɔnomanso, Bɛo-Nsoko, Bonduku, Kong, Buna—none have appeared. I have also consulted the collection of Arabic manuscripts at the University of Ghana, Balme Library and the Institute of African Studies, and these are predominantly religious tracts. None contain content from before the nineteenth century. In French, de la Fosse wrote *che* for *ce* and *seqcue* for *sec*; the French *ch /s/ = sh* and *qu /k/ = k* (as in *ski*). His term for gold, *chocqua*, should be rendered *shecka* (cf. his *enchou*: *en/ch/ou = n/s/ou* [nsuo, water]), where I think the *o* between *h* and *c* was an *e* easily mistaken by the copyist who used an original manuscript to produce the form in the 1548 Valenciennes MS. Also, the young Flemish, perhaps in his late teens on the coast, “lacked the technical ability to hear and record African vocabulary exactly.” See Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea* (1602), Albert

van Dantzig and Adam Jones, eds. and trans. (London: British Academy, 1987), 190, 249; P. E. H. Hair, "An Ethnolinguistic Inventory of the Lower Guinea Coast before 1700, part 2," *African Language Review* 8 (1969): 231–32; P. E. H. Hair and David Dalby, "A Further Note on the Mina Vocabulary of 1479–1480," *Journal of West African Languages* 5 (1968): 130–31; P. E. H. Hair, "A Note on de la Fosse's 'Mina' Vocabulary of 1479–1480," *Journal of West African Languages* 3 (1966): 56; and Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London: J. Knapton, 1705), 77. In his corrections to Bosman's 1705 English translation, Albert van Dantzig wrote, as a note to Bosman's description of Acanni Sica, "Sika 'gold' is an Akan word of Mandé origin. Acanni Sica is not necessarily derived from 'Akan' but may be an independent expression derived directly from Mandé meaning 'good gold.'" Dantzig offered no explanation; apparently, there was no need to do so when under the spell of a myth. See Dantzig, "English Bosman and Dutch Bosman: A Comparison of Texts, II," *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 112–13.

10. Gérard Chouin, "The 'Big Bang' Theory Reconsidered: Framing Early Ghanaian History," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series*, no. 14 (2012): 19; Christopher R. DeCorse, "Coastal Ghana in the First and Second Millennia AD," *Journal des Africanistes* 75, no. 2 (2005): 13. In Akan/Twi, the anvil is called  $\text{ɔtommo}$ —that is,  $\text{tono}$  ("to forge/beat/work iron") +  $\text{ɔbɔmmɔ}$  ("stone[s]"). In the term  $\text{ɔtomfo}$ , the root  $\text{tom}$  is  $\text{ton(o)}$ , as it is the name of the workshop of the smith— $\text{tonasum}$ ,  $\text{ɔtonsu}$ . Lastly,  $\text{bɔdade}$  (lit. "to strike iron by beating") means to hammer or forge something.

11. Christaller, *Dictionary*, ed. 1933, 326. On the myth of barter, see David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011).

12. An interim edition of André Alvares de Almada's "Tratado breve dos Rios de Guiné," c. 1594, eds. and trans. Avelino Teixeira da Mota, P. E. H. Hair, and Jean Boulègue (Liverpool: Dept. of History, University of Liverpool, 1984), 1: 47–48; André Alvares d'Almada, *Tratado breve dos rios de Guiné do Cabo-Verde*, ed. Luís Silveira (Lisboa: Oficina Gráfica, 1946), 31–32; André Alvares d'Almada, *Tratado breve dos rios de Guiné do Cabo Verde* (Lisboa: Typographia Commercial Portuense, 1841), 31–32. In Manding, weights are called  $\text{girinya}$ ; the Jula variant is  $\text{guliya}$ . See also de Marees, *Description*, 60–61; Hartmut Mollat, "A New Look at the Akan Gold Weights of West Africa," *Anthropos* 98, no. 1 (2003): 38. Mollat writes, "the European weight equivalents could certainly be weighed exactly by means of Akan metal and seed weights, but they were not integrated into the Akan system. Therefore they do not have proper Akan names" (*ibid.*). Georges Niangoran-Bouah argues a *benna* measured the weight of a *benna* pebble used to divide quantities of gold dust of the same name and mass and used to designate money. See Georges Niangoran-Bouah, *The Akan World of Gold Weights* (Abidjan: Nouvelles Éditions Africains, 1984), 1: 45. One elder historian named Kwame Nyame in Takyiman informed a researcher in the 1970s that there was method of using the palm of the hand to weigh gold. Though this has not been corroborated, de Marees remarked, if the merchants did not "have a spoon with them, and when they open their purses in order to weigh the gold, lacking a spoon to scoop it up, they instead make use of their long nails,

with which they scoop the gold into the scales or balance.” See Deborah R Fink, “Time and Space Measurement of the Bono of Ghana” (Master’s thesis, Iowa State University, 1974), 42; de Marees, Description, 29, 247. Atere were spoons, but sawa were the ones used specifically for scooping gold dust onto the scales. Though sack and pouch are used interchangeably, the sack is *koɔ* and *obofu*, tree bark used as cloth and sack. The pouch, *boɔwa*, is believed to derive from Manding *boɔ*/*boɔ*, but I have found neither in Manding for pouch, though *boɔ*/*boɔ* (“sack, bag”) might be candidates for Akan *koɔ*. The box where assorted items, including gold dust, were stored is generally called *adaka*, which supposedly originated from Manding *laka* or Portuguese *arca*. The Portuguese *arca* refers to a chest or trunk, whereas *caixa* is for box. Manding word for box is *buwati* and chest *diso*/*koɔ*. De Marees recorded the term *adaka* but also *o.tom* for box/chest, the latter perhaps a version of *toa(a)*, a small calabash/gourd, box, or case. The small and round wooden box to keep gold dust was called *adom puruwa*. See de Marees, Description, 248, 250, but compare Christaller, Dictionary, ed. 1933.

13. For the most recent perspectives on the Akan weight system, and the serious flaws undermining Garrard’s *Akan Weights and the Gold Trade*, see Mollat, “A New Look,” 32–33, 37; Hartmut Mollat, “Die Akan-Goldgewichte Westafrikas: Neue Aspekte zum Gewichtssystem und zur Funktion geometrischer und figürlicher Formen,” *Baessler-Archiv* 47 (1999): 259–75; Niangoran-Bouah, *The Akan World*, 3 vols. Niangoran-Bouah argues that the basic system had no more than “33 units (stones),” with weights ranked from the smallest unit (*taku*; *ba*, at 0.148 g, in Ivory Coast) to the largest (*peredwan*; *predjuan* in Ivory Coast), divided into three categories. The first ten units were for small transactions; the second consisted of 33 units that, with few exceptions, constituted the system in present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast, reckoned in singles and doubles; and the third had three units. See Niangoran-Bouah, *The Akan World*, 1: 264–69.

14. Mollat, “A New Look”; idem, “Die Akan-Goldgewicht.” For Mollat, lead filings used to adjust the brass/copper weights indicate usage, but plotting between either 8, 12, or 16 *mitkal*, corresponding exactly to Akan weight classes from *asuanu* to *peredwan*, indicate the *mitkal* was a based standard. The weight unit called *ratl* is often reckoned as equal to 12 ounces, a troy ounce equivalent to 31.31 grams, and Portuguese once (*onça*) is 28.68 grams. A regular ounce is 28.35 grams. All of these shifted over time. See Luís Seabra Lopes, “The Distribution of Weight Standards to Portuguese Cities and Towns in the Early 16th Century: Administrative, Demographic and Economic Factors,” *Finisterra* 54, no. 112 (2019): 49–54; Antonio Henrique R. de Oliveira Marques, *Daily life in Portugal in the late Middle Ages*, trans. S. S. Wyatt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 202.

15. Niangoran-Bouah, *The Akan World*, 1: 168, 257–59; Brigitte Menzel, *Goldgewichte aus Ghana* (Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin, 1968); François H. Abel, “Déchiffrement des Poids à peser l’Or en Côte d’Ivoire,” *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 22, no. 1–2 (1952): 95–114; de Marees, Description, 61, 65; and Christaller, Dictionary, ed. 1933, 48–49. Niangoran suggests that counting on the weights went beyond ten, but this was the base system. According to Christaller,

the verb *bu nsa* meant “to bend the fingers in counting the (six) days during which a menstruous woman is not allowed to enter or sleep in her regular dwelling.”

16. Niangoran-Bouah, *The Akan World*, 1: 219, 222, 227, 277; Niangoran-Bouah, *The Akan World*, 2: 279, 293; Jean-Loïc le Quellec, “Rock art, Scripts and Proto-Scripts in Africa: The Libyco-Berber Example,” in *Written Culture in a Colonial Context*, Adrien Delmas and Nigel Penn, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 8, 12–13. On African scripts more generally, see Saki Mafundikwa, *Afrikan Alphabets: The Story of Writing in Afrika* (Brooklyn: Mark Batty, 2004).

17. See Christaller, *Dictionary*, ed. 1933, 198, 295, 420, and 445. The first vowel in *sare/sere* alternates without a change in meaning; shifts in tone would change meaning. The suffixes, added to the root, are *-mu* (“inside”) and *-so* (“on”). I suspect *sereɛ* is the compound of *sere* + *deɛ* (“thing”), and using vowel harmony rules, the literal result was “savanna-desert thing.” Up until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, cowries were called *sereɛ* or *serewa*. A definite point of change was the introduction of orthographical and spelling conventions, beginning with the spelling rules published in C. A. Akrofi and E. L. Rapp, *Twi Nsɛm Nkorenkore Kyerɛwbea* (Accra: Government Printing Office, 1939). For changes to *sare/sere* and *sereɛ*, see the enlarged edition: C. A. Akrofi and E. L. Rapp’s *Twi Nsɛm nkorenkore kyerɛwbea: Twi spelling book* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1971), 111–12.

18. An interim edition of André Alvares de Almada, 1: 47. Though focusing on a later period, see Edmund Abaka, “Kola is God’s Gift”: Agricultural Production, Export Initiatives and the Kola Industry of Asante and the Gold Coast, c. 1820–1950 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005). See also Paul E. Lovejoy, “Kola in the History of West Africa,” *Cahiers D’Études Africaines* 20, no. 77–78 (1980): 97–134.

19. Adam Jones, *German Sources for West African History, 1599–1669* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983), 23, 29, 34, 301–2; Adam Jones, ed. and trans., *West Africa in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: An Anonymous Dutch Manuscript* (Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, Emory University, 1995), 229; de Marees, *Description*, 16; Christaller, *Dictionary*, ed. 1933, 66; Kwasi Konadu, “Euro-African Commerce and Social Chaos: Akan Societies in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *History in Africa* 36 (2009): 273; Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, *Collectie Leupe* 743, dated Mouri, 25 December 1629. This anonymous map is often attributed to Dutch cartographer Hans Propheet. The map had two sections: geographical features on the right, descriptive text on the left. The title on the map read: “Map of the country of the Gold Coast in Guinea such that in various places [on this coast] I have questioned the most expert blacks and as far as our nation frequenting the coast has found compliant. It is collected for the first time for the use of those who include it in their speculation, until someone else updates it better. Done on December 25, anno 1629. In Guinea before Moure.” For analysis, see K. Y. Daaku and A. van Dantzig, “Map of the Regions of Gold Coast in Guinea,” *Ghana Notes and Queries* 9 (1966): 14–15.

20. On Lorepeni, see Lassina Kote, “Fouilles Archeologiques dans le Compartiment Sud du Site des Ruines de Lorepeni,” *Revue Africaine d’Anthropologie* 15 (2013): 83–129; and George Savonnet, “Le Paysan gan et l’Archéologue ou l’Inventaire partiel

des Ruines de Pierres du pays Lobi-gan (Burkina Faso—Côte d’Ivoire),” *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines* 22, no. 1 (1986): 57–82. See also Jones, *An Anonymous Dutch Manuscript*, 229; Jones, *German Sources*, 301. Readers curious about the suffix -(s) so in Bobo-Julasso and Sikasso may be interested to know that this suffix in Bamana and Jula means home(land) or state, as in fa-so, “father/mother-land” or so, which means “home/house.” The Bobo and Jula are cultural groups whom French colonizers fused together in naming the area. Al-’Umari also says the ancient kingdom of Takrūr in the middle Senegal River valley used currency that “consists of cowries” imported by merchants who make large profits. Two decades later, Ibn Baṭṭuta observed at Gao, “Its people conduct their buying and selling with cowries, like the people of Mali.” See J. E. P. Hopkins and N. Levtzion, eds., *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 83, 260, 269, 300; Oliver Houdas, trans., *Tarikh es-Soudan* (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1981), 2: 10–20, 20n7, 25n1; and Umar al-Naqar, “Takrūr, the History of a Name,” *Journal of African History* 10 (1969): 365–74.

21. Some scholars have associated the toponyms Bighu and Bitu with B̄o-Nsok̄, but Bighu had nothing to do with B̄o-Nsok̄ or Bitu. There were several Bitu, including one near the middle Niger and Jenné, making the identification of Bighu/Bitu with B̄o-Nsok̄ problematic. Indeed, while the *Ta’riḫ al-Sūdān* tells us, “Those who deal in salt from Taghāza meet there [i.e. Jenne] with those who deal in gold from the mine of Bitu,” no mine ever existed at B̄o-Nsok̄. Likewise, the (false) association of gold production with the village of Adena and the adjacent Portuguese fortress of São Jorge da Mina (“Elmina”) was interrogated by an anonymous Spaniard writing the 1590s, who remarked, “Things work in the same way at Elmina of the Portuguese, for although it bears the name of mine, no gold is gathered there, but is it brought from the interior, from many leagues distant, to be exchanged against the articles they bring.” See Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, 17–18, 23–24, 277–78, 327. See also Ralph A. Austen, ed., *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature and Performance* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 103. On Jenné-Jeno, see Roderick J. McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger: Urbanism and the Self-organizing Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Kevin MacDonald, “Before the Empire of Ghana: Pastoralism and the Origins of Cultural Complexity in the Sahel,” in *Transformations in Africa*, Graham Connah, ed. (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1998), 71–103; Susan Keech McIntosh, ed., *Excavations at Jenné-Jeno, Hambarketolo, and Kaniana (Inland Niger Delta, Mali), the 1981 Season* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995); and Roderick J. McIntosh and Susan Keech McIntosh, “The Inland Niger Delta before the Empire of Mali: Evidence from Jenne-Jeno,” *Journal of African History* 22, no. 1 (1981): 1–22. See also Houdas, *Tarikh es-Soudan*, 2: 22–24; Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1892), 46–47; George H. T. Kimble, ed., *Esmeraldo de situ orbis* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937), 81; G. R. Crone, ed. and trans., *The Voyages of Cadamosto and other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1937), 140; and Al-Ḥasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzān al-Fāsī (Leo Africanus), *The History*

and Description of Africa: And of the Notable Things Therein Contained, trans. John Pory (London: Hakluyt Society, 1896), 3: 823–27, 829–30.

22. On trans-Saharan travels, see Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

23. Ian Blanchard, *Mining, Metallurgy, and Minting in the Middle Ages: Afro-European Supremacy, 1125–1225* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001), 2: 738, 740–41, 747; Lauren Jacobi, “Reconsidering the World-System: The Agency and Material Geography of Gold,” in *The Globalization of Renaissance Art*, Daniel Savoy, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 144, 146, 151; and Sam Nixon, “Trans-Saharan Gold Trade in Pre-Modern Times: Available Evidence and Research Agendas,” in *Trade in the Ancient Sahara and Beyond: Trans-Saharan Archaeology*, D. J. Mattingly, V. Leitch, C. N. Duckworth, A. Cuénod, M. Sterry, and F. Cole, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 171.

24. See John Day, “The Great Bullion Famine of the Fifteenth Century,” *Past & Present* 79 (1978): 3–54.

25. Crone, *Voyages*, 86–9. On the Wangara trading diaspora, see Andreas W. Massing, “The Wangara, an Old Soninke Diaspora in West Africa?” *Cahiers d’études Africaines* 158 (2000): 281–308; Robin Law, “Central and Eastern Wangara,” *History in Africa* 22 (1995): 281–305; Ivor Wilks, “Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. I.”; idem, “Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. II.”; and Lovejoy, “The Role of the Wangara.”