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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Africans Championed Free Trade: Violence, Sovereignty, and Competition in the Era of Atlantic Slave Trade

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Abstract

This article examines the central role of West Central Africa in the development of a global capitalist economy during the eighteenth century. Using a rich and overlooked set of records in English, Portuguese, and French, the article explains that rulers and brokers on the Loango coast championed ideas and practices of free trade and free markets from the rise of the Atlantic slave trade through at least until the end of the eighteenth century. The article shows that European slave traders opposed a free market by fiercely competing to obtain full control of the trade in African captives along the Atlantic Africa. In contrast, the West Central African states of Ngoyo, Kakongo, and Loango, located north of the Congo River, fully embraced free trade and free markets during the era of the Atlantic slave trade.

Keywords: Central Africa; Angola; Democratic Republic of the Congo; slave trade; diplomatic relations; violence; trade

A recent wave of studies has reemphasized the connections between the Atlantic slave trade, slavery, and capitalism, therefore sparking renewed interest in the works of historians Eric Williams and Walter Rodney.[1] Despite this new attention, as noted by Toby Green, most recent histories of capitalism have ignored the role of the African continent.[2] Aiming to contribute to this debate, this article focuses on how African authorities and traders on the Loango coast in West Central Africa promoted free trade and free market ideas in their interactions with European merchants who sailed to the region to purchase African captives.

This article focuses on the Loango coast, the coastal area of the kingdoms of Loango, Kakongo, and Ngoyo, situated north of the Congo River, a region that has been ignored, understudied, and sometimes conflated with the broader area south of the Congo River, where the Portuguese colony

[1] Among these works are Herman Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); and Jennifer L. Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021). See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944) and Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1981).

[2] See Toby Green, "Africa and Capitalism: Repairing a History of Omission," *Capitalism: A Journal of History and Economics* 3, no. 2 (2022): 301–32. Among the histories of capitalism that overall ignore the African continent are Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012) and Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

of Angola was located.[3] First, I highlight the Loango coast's unique status as a region never fully dominated by the Portuguese, despite their repeated claims. Second, I illuminate the role of Africans in developing a global capitalist economy during the eighteenth century.[4] I argue that any attempts to understand free trade without engaging the central role of African rulers and merchants in shaping its policies and dynamics risk reproducing ideologies that insist on placing African agents as receptacles of Western ideas rather than the ones shaping financial systems and terms of trade.[5] The discussion of this early period of promotion of free trade and free markets also underscores the cruel, contradictory, and unequal dimension of merchant capitalism in which men, women, and children who had lost their freedom were the main commodities sold by African elites to European traffickers.

This article draws on two studies by José Lingna Nafafé and Toby Green, who developed similar arguments for Senegambia where West African brokers challenged the Portuguese monopoly of external trade in the seventeenth century.[6] I show that decades before the publication of *The Wealth of Nations* by Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith, European slave traders not only opposed the monopoly imposed by state companies but also resisted the free market on African shores by fiercely seeking to monopolize the slave trade in Atlantic Africa.[7]

In contrast, as early as in the seventeenth century states located north of the Congo River on the Loango coast promoted free trade with Europeans who visited the region. These West Central African rulers and brokers did not write treatises explaining their views on free trade, but European travel accounts, reports, and correspondence describing their actions provide a detailed picture of how they conceived free trade. First, for these West Central African authorities, free trade meant keeping their seaports open to all European nations trading in the region. Second, for them, free trade also consisted of maintaining control of all stages of commerce in enslaved Africans, and especially of interactions with European slave merchants stationed on the coast. As part of these exchanges, some agents were in charge of external commerce, imposing taxes and tributes on European traders. Third, rulers and brokers of the Loango coast, supported by their subjects, understood that free trade required sovereignty. Therefore, its three kingdoms (Loango, Kakongo, and Ngoyo) kept control over

[3]Over the past fifty years, there were few monographs focusing on the Loango Coast. See Phyllis Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast, 1576–1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Annie Merlet, *Autour du Loango (XIVe–XIXe siècle): Histoire des peuples du sud-ouest du Gabon au temps du royaume de Loango et du «Congo français»* (Libreville: Centre Culturel Français de Libreville, 1991); Arsène Francoeur Nganga, *La traite négrière sur la baie de Loango pour la colonie du Suriname* (Saint-Denis: Edilivre, 2018); and Ana Lucia Araujo, *The Gift: How Objects of Prestige Shaped the Atlantic Slave Trade and Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

[4]Other historians made similar attempts. See Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Madison, 1988); the book's reappraisal by Mariana P. Candido "Capitalism and Africa: Revisiting *Way of Death* Thirty-Five Years After Its Publication," *The American Historical Review* 127, no. 3 (2022), 1439–48; and Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[5]For studies that place free trade policies as exclusively European see James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History,* revised ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009). For a similar criticism see Marie-Hélène Knight, "Gorée au XVIIIe siècle du sol," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 64, no. 234 (1977): 33–54.

[6]José Lingna Nafafé, "Challenges of the African Voice: Autonomy, Commerce, and Resistance in Precolonial Western Africa," in *Brokers of Change: Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Pre-Colonial Western Africa*, ed. Toby Green (London: Oxford University Press, 2012), 70–87, and Green, *A Fistful of Shells*, 105 and 469.

[7]Smith's book was originally published in two volumes as *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: W. Straman and T. Cadell, 1776). I use Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations Books I–III* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), and Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations Books IV–V* (London: Penguin, 1999). On the history of free market before and after Smith, see Jacob Soll, *Free Market: The History of an Idea* (New York: Basic Books, 2022). The opposition of monopolies by state companies was visible in the case of the English Royal African Company, so free trade operated by individual merchants ended up winning. See William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672–1752* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

their territories and never allowed any European power to establish permanent trading posts such as castles, forts, and fortresses in the region during the era of the Atlantic slave trade.

By making these points, this article does not intend to revitalize the now-old debate on the obvious "agency" of African elites in the Atlantic slave trade and consequently in the development of merchant capitalism.[8] I also depart from the argument made by esteemed historian John K. Thornton, who suggested that both Africans and Europeans "sought an 'administered' trade, under state control, that attempted to eliminate or control the effects of market mechanisms like competition in the hope of securing maximum revenue from commerce."[9] I recognize that West African rulers, such as the kings of Dahomey, rhetorically offered the Portuguese Crown the monopoly of the trade in enslaved Africans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[10] Yet, these offers were the exception and not the rule, as they responded to specific needs of periods of war in Western Europe and West Africa, during which there was a steep decrease in the number of European slave merchants stationed in the Bight of Benin and a dramatic decline of African captives available for sale. Thereby, despite these exceptions, rulers in West Africa and the Loango coast promoted and embraced free trade by keeping their ports open to all European nations that wanted to trade in the areas they controlled and, therefore, avoiding European efforts to establish a monopoly on the trade of enslaved Africans.

The article begins by quickly revisiting the development of the Atlantic slave trade in West Central African ports south of the Congo River and in West African major ports such as Anomabu and Ouidah, where local rulers controlled the trade. This context resembles the situation of the West Central African ports of Luanda and Benguela where Portuguese explorers and merchants had established monopolies of the slave trade in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Second, the article explores two conflicts that took place in the seaport of Cabinda in the Kingdom of Ngoyo during the eighteenth century, to demonstrate how the Woyo of Ngoyo and the Kotchi of Kakongo defended free trade, while opposing European slave merchants in their attempts to impose a monopoly over the trade in enslaved Africans. The first conflict in the early 1720s involved British traders of the Royal African Company, Portuguese officials, and the Woyo people of Cabinda. The second and most important clash opposed French traders and navy officers, joined by Woyo and Kotchi rulers, agents, and commoners, against Portuguese officials in 1783–84.

I argue that through their actions the Woyo people of Ngoyo, supported by their Kotchi neighbors from Kakongo, defended free market and free trade agendas in their own terms during the eighteenth century. To make this point, I rely on eighteenth-century British, French, and Portuguese correspondence, journals, and other official reports as well as European travel accounts and maps that shed light on the peculiar position of Ngoyo's slave-trading port of Cabinda. These sources carry European points of view but still provide rich evidence of how Loango coast rulers, brokers, and commoners defended their views of the free market and free trade through tangible actions that countered European attempts to control their external trade.

Europeans in Atlantic Africa

African societies had engaged in trans-Saharan trade for centuries before the Portuguese arrived in Atlantic Africa. In Senegambia, the Portuguese established trade and diplomatic ties with polities

[8]On the debate on African "agency" through the lens of the notion of "extraversion," see Jean-François Bayart, "L'Afrique dans le monde: une histoire d'extraversion," *Critique internationale* 5 (1999): 97–120. For a discussion on extraversion, see Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 80, and Lisa Lindsay, "Extraversion, Creolization, and Dependency in the Atlantic Slave Trade," *The Journal of African History* 55, no. 2 (2014): 135–45. On African "agency," see also Green, *A Fistful of Shells, xvi–xvii*, and Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves*, 24–25.

[9]John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54.

[10]See Ana Lucia Araujo, "Dahomey, Portugal, and Bahia: King Adandozan and the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Slavery and Abolition* 3, no. 1 (2012): 1–19.

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like the Kingdom of Jolof while also using extreme violence, including raids to enslave Africans for transport to Iberia. Therefore, this early Portuguese "cannon diplomacy" complicates applying the concept of "agency" to African rulers and agents. Expanding southward along the Atlantic coast, the Portuguese settled in Upper Guinea, relying on agreements with local rulers and communities shaped by the organization of these coastal societies.[11] In regions with centralized states, local powers exerted greater control on external trade. In areas where decentralized societies predominated, external agents such as the Portuguese, and later other European powers, were in a better position to negotiate and take more control of commercial exchanges with local rulers, sometimes establishing trading posts along the coast.

In the 1460s, Portuguese explorers had reached the Azores, Cape Verde, Madeira, São Tomé, and the Canary Islands, where they developed plantation economies based on the use of enslaved Africans. The Portuguese also settled in the region stretching from the Petite Côte in Senegal to Sierra Leone, including Cape Verde, where they consolidated their presence through trade, which they tried to control.[12] In 1497, a Portuguese decree prohibited the trade of iron to Upper Guinea, which had been used as currency in the region before the rise of the Atlantic trade in enslaved Africans.[13] In 1512, another decree ordered enslaved Africans be transported directly from Upper Guinea to Lisbon, without stopping in Cape Verde. In 1514, an order prohibited Portuguese subjects to "go and live among the Africans in Guinea" and stated "that no iron should be taken from Cabo Verde for trade in Africa."[14]

European powers established permanent trading posts in Atlantic Africa to control trade in people and goods. After building a fort in Arguin (1445), the Portuguese reached the Gold Coast, where they gained permission to construct São Jorge da Mina (Elmina Castle). Completed in 1482, this fortress safeguarded gold and other resources from rival European attacks. The Portuguese were not passive observers in this region. They intervened in regional wars to defend their interests in the gold trade and eliminate European competitors.[15] Additional coastal structures followed. In 1555, the Portuguese erected a trading station in Cape Coast, and in 1589, they built a fort in Cacheu.[16] In the seventeenth century, other European powers started the construction of forts and castles in the area that became known as the Gold Coast. In 1652, the Swedish African Company built the Fort Christiansborg in Osu (today's Accra), later purchased by the Danish. In 1653, the Swedes constructed a fort on Cape Coast, which the English rebuilt in 1663. In the Bight of Benin, Britain, Portugal, and France established forts in Ouidah, which starting in 1727 was controlled by the Kingdom of Dahomey.[17]

In 1483, Diogo Cão arrived at the mouth of the Congo River in West Central Africa, where the Kingdom of Kongo was the largest state. The exchanges with these states and the early conversion of the King of Kongo to Christianity shaped the development of the Atlantic slave trade from West Central Africa. In 1575, the Portuguese founded Luanda, south of the Congo River, which became

[11]Green, *The Rise,* 93.

[12]See Toby Green, "Masters of Difference: Creolization and the Jewish Presence in Cabo Verde, 1497–1672" (PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2007); Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, *The Forgotten Diaspora: Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Green, *The Rise*; and Peter Mark, "The Central Upper Guinea Coast in the Pre-Contact and Early Portuguese Period, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century: The Dynamics of Regional Interaction," *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde,* no. 67 (2021): 113–44.

[13]Green, *The Rise*, 118. See also, Green, *A Fistful of Shells,* 529-530, n58.

[14]Green, *The Rise*, 116.

[15]John K. Thornton, "The Portuguese in Africa," in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800*, eds. Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 144.

[16]Green, *The Rise*, 27, 260.

[17]See Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving "Port" 1727–1892* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).

the largest slave-trading port in Atlantic Africa.[18] In 1617, the Portuguese established the colony of Benguela south of Luanda, which later became the second busiest slave-trading port in West Central Africa.[19]

In West Central Africa, in the middle of the sixteenth century, the kingdoms of Ngoyo, Kakongo, and Loango were the main states of the Loango coast, their respective ports being Cabinda, Malembo, and Loango, north of the Congo River. Following early contacts with Portuguese explorers in 1483, these three states started developing external trade activities with the Dutch, English, and French through their seaports, where their commercial agents were based. As the Atlantic slave trade intensified, the Portuguese watched the Loango coast and continued claiming the region on maps and in official correspondence. Still, faithful to their goal of keeping free their external trade and market, the three states remained sovereign and never allowed European powers to build fortresses on their harbors.

Free Trade and Sovereignty on the Loango Coast

Several scholars have discussed ideas of free market and free trade as opposed to monopolies. Jacob Soll examined the origins of the notion of free market and free trade, tracing them back to Roman antiquity with Cicero, to Italian philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli's notion of self-interest, and to Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius, who insisted on "theories of free seas, free trade, and the economic and political rights of the individual."[20] These early debates around the ideas of free markets and free trade coincided with the rise of merchant capitalism and the Atlantic slave trade. The emergence of ideas of free trade was almost concomitant with the creation of several state companies such as the Dutch East India Company, the Dutch West India Company, the Royal African Company, the South Sea Company, the French East India Company, and the French West India Company, during the seventeenth century. However, here lies an interesting contradiction. These European ventures and other future chartered companies that supported European colonial expansion in the Americas, Africa, and Asia relied not on free trade but intended to secure state monopolies over commerce. Decades later, in his *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith criticized these restrictions. Although neither addressing the trade with Africa, nor the Atlantic slave trade, Smith praised Britain, whose colonies "allowed a more extensive market, than any other European nation," in contrast with Portugal and Spain, as well as France, which harshly enforced the monopoly of trade with their colonies.[21]

European nations and slave traders promoted free trade and free markets to maximize profits and capital by fostering competition among private traders. Meanwhile, in several Atlantic African ports, they sought monopolies on the trade in enslaved peoples. By the seventeenth century, West African rulers began viewing free trade as a way to minimize restrictions on their imports and exports. They also countered the Portuguese agents' monopoly attempts. As José Lingna Nafafé explains, these actions responded to the long-lasting presence of these Portuguese traders in coastal areas and therefore were also shaped by "African understandings of land tenure and associated rights," which

[18]See John K. Thornton, *A History of West Central Africa to 1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). On the Atlantic slave trade in West Central Africa, especially in Luanda, see Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, *The Atlantic Slave Trade from West Central Africa, 1780–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and Vanessa S. Oliveira, *Slave Trade and Abolition: Gender, Commerce, and Economic Transition in Luanda* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2021).

[19]Mariana P. Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 147–49. For more on land clashes between the Portuguese and West Central African rulers see Mariana P. Candido, *Wealth, Land and Property in Angola: A History of Dispossession, Slavery, and Inequality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 46–62.

[20]Soll, *Free Market*, 102.

[21]Smith, *The Wealth of Nations Books IV–V*, 156 and 193.

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European actors dismissed as nonexistent.[22] On the Loango coast, Ngoyo's rulers and agents defended the free market and free trade by preventing European powers such as England, France, and Portugal from building fortresses or other permanent physical structures in their ports.

Despite the pioneering position of West African rulers in promoting free trade, scholars have neglected their role in the rise of ideas of free markets and free trade. Jacob Soll, for example, notes the strong military power that backed European chartered companies and the limits they imposed on the pursuit of free trade.[23] Likewise, Pernille Røge shows how starting in 1750, French economists known as the physiocrats criticized the mercantile system while also attacking the French Crown monopoly of trade, known as the *Exclusif*, embodied in the French chartered colonial companies.[24] Still, neither Soll nor Røge address how West African and West Central African societies resisted European monopolies, nor how they promoted ideas of free trade and markets in response to European colonization.

The development of European colonization and a plantation economy in the Americas intensified the trade in enslaved Africans on the Loango coast.[25] During the seventeenth century, Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French traders sailed to the region to acquire enslaved people, leading to increasing rivalries over the eighteenth century.[26] In contrast with local rulers and agents, European crowns, through their companies and traders failed to defend and promote ideas of free trade and the free market. Likewise, European merchants only evoked free trade when the rhetorical commercial freedom provided them with financial advantages. Whereas Loango coast rulers and commercial agents protected their sovereignty and their ability to conduct their external maritime trade that relied on selling enslaved people, Europeans sought to impose monopoly by force.

While eighteenth-century French physiocrats promoted the idea of settling the African continent to develop agricultural production to replace the plantations in American colonies, France, Portugal, and Britain were making efforts to establish permanent trading posts on the Loango coast, a region where European powers had not yet succeeded in constructing forts and castles to develop the trade in enslaved Africans. Following the treaties of Utrecht of 1713, Britain obtained the *asiento* (contract) to transport enslaved Africans to the Spanish colonies in the Americas. To carry out this work, the Royal African Company appointed Captain Nurse Hereford as the governor of a future fort to be constructed in Cabinda. On 4 February 1721, Hereford sailed as the captain of the vessel *Royal Africa* "bound for the Coast of Angola to make a new settlement at Cabinda," transporting a cargo that included goods such as powder, guns, textiles, and stones.[27]

Upon arrival on 29 June 1721, Hereford obtained permission from the *maningoyo* (ruler) of the Kingdom of Ngoyo to erect a fort in Cabinda. In a letter, the governor and captain-general of Angola, Henrique Figueiredo e Alarcão reported the British intention to build a fort in Cabinda, and "to do so, had brought materials in a ship and two sloops and men and women to live near the said fortress." He warned that if the British built the fortress, they would become the "masters of this port" and

[22]Nafafé, "Challenges of the African Voice," 73.

[23]Soll, *Free Market*, 102.

[24]Pernille Røge, *Economistes and the Reinvention of Empire: France in the Americas and Africa, c. 1750–1802* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 82–85.

[25]See Martin, *The External Trade.*

[26]On the Atlantic slave trade on the Loango coast see Martin, *The External Trade*; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and Stacey Sommerdyk, "Reexamining the Geography and Merchants of the West Central African Slave Trade: Looking Behind the Numbers," *African Economic History* 38, no. 1 (2009): 77–105; Stacey Sommerdyk, "Rivalry on the Loango Coast: A Re-Examination of the Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade," in *Trabalho forçado africano. O Caminho de Ida*, ed. Arlindo Manuel Caldeira (Porto: CEAUP, 2009), 105–18; Stacey Jean Muriel Sommerdyk, "Trade and Merchant Community of the Loango Coast in the Eighteenth Century" (PhD dissertation, University of Hull, 2012); Christina Frances Mobley, "The Kongolese Atlantic: Central Africa Slavery and Culture from Mayombe to Haiti" (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2015); and Araujo, *The Gift*.

[27]The National Archives, UK (TNA), London, T 70 1225, *Royal Africa*, Lists of ships and their voyages in the Company's service, fl. 9. On additional goods requested see TNA T 70 23, Document type: extracts, Royal African Company, fl. 35.

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would prevent other vessels from coming ashore in the area.[28] After the arrival of the *Royal Africa,* other British vessels (*Royal African*, the *Accra*, and the *Congo*), also anchored in Cabinda to support the new settlement.[29] It quickly became clear that the British were building a fort not to promote free trade, but to monopolize the slave trade, similar to their actions on the Gold Coast in the seventeenth century. The British soon clashed with a French slave ship captain, destroying his trading post and ordering him to leave Cabinda.

When the fort construction was nearly concluded in 1723, the British refused to pay trading duties to the *maningoyo*'s commercial agents. Responding to the outrageous British behavior challenging Ngoyo's sovereignty, the Woyo allied with the Portuguese who had always hoped to control Cabinda and feared that the fort's construction would give the Royal African Company the monopoly of the trade in the region. Led by José de Semedo, the Portuguese attacked the British fort from the sea, while a group of 200 Woyo men assailed the settlement by land.[30] In October 1723, the Portuguese and the Woyo destroyed the British fort and burned the *Royal Africa*.[31] The *Boston News-Letter* reported on the conflict by stating that on 7 February 1724, "the Natives of the Kingdom of Angola [Ngoyo] upon that Coast, afflicted by a Portuguese Man of War, have burnt their Guardship Called the Royal African, commanded by Capt. Hereford, and entirely destroyed the Compagnies Factory at Cabenda, of which the said Captain was Governour."[32]

In 1756, during the Seven Years' War, the French Navy sent a two-ship squadron to the Loango coast, where they destroyed British trading posts by seizing African captives and commodities. In 1757, the French attempted to monopolize the trade in Cabinda through the signature of a treaty with "Prince Classe," the *mfuka* (the king of Ngoyo's commercial agent). The treaty sealed the "friendship and union" of the French and the Woyo who would "work to establish an equally advantageous, lucrative and secure trade for the two nations," while the French engaged "to help them, protect them, defend them against any power whatsoever that would like to attack or disturb the conditions set out in the treaty."[33] The agreement allowed the French to build a fort in Cabinda and among other points offered Ngoyo's military support to protect the port from internal and external attacks. Although up to then no European power had ever managed to construct a permanent trading structure in Cabinda, the Woyo faced significant threats at the moment in which the treaty was signed. The perennial danger of a European attack grew during this exceptional period of war in Europe, in which the trade in enslaved Africans on the Loango coast was in decline. Neighboring polities also threatened Ngoyo during this period: Soyo, the once province of the Kingdom of Kongo, located south of the Congo River, regularly attacked and carried out raids in Ngoyo.[34] Despite these menaces, neither Soyo nor the Portuguese were successful in dominating Ngoyo, Kakongo, and Loango during the eighteenth century.[35]

[28] Arquivo histórico ultramarino, Portugal (AHU), Lisboa, Conselho ultramarino (CU), 001, cx. 22, doc. 2255, "Carta do [governador e capitão general de Angola], 9 May 1721, fl. 1.

[29] TNA T70 1225, Lists of ships and their voyages in the Company's service, fl. 16–17 and fl. 21–22.

[30] AHU CU 005, cx. 18, doc. 1613, "Carta do vice-rei e capitão-general do Brasil Vasco Fernandes César de Meneses," 30 Sep. 1723, fl. 1–1v. All English translations from Portuguese and French were made by the author.

[31] TNA T70 1225, *Royal Africa*, Lists of ships and their voyages in the Company's service, fl. 9.

[32] *The Boston News-Letter,* 23–30 Apr. 1724.

[33] Archives Nationales, France (ANF), Paris, MAR B4 77, "Copie du traité fait avec le prince Classe Maffouk et les habitants du pays de Cabinde…," 8–8v. On the treaty see also Martin, *The External Trade,* 85; Mobley, "The Kongolese Atlantic," 93. Both Martin and Mobley refer to Mfuka "Klaus" but the exact transcription is "Classe" however that term was pronounced in Kikongo, see Araujo, *The Gift,* 56–57.

[34] For more details, see Mobley, "The Kongolese Atlantic," 92–103.

[35] Referring to the eighteenth century, John K. Thornton states that "Soyo, had been successful in dominating Ngoyo and Kakongo during the earlier part of the century." Later on, apparently based on two accounts separated by more than one century (one mid-eighteenth-century account authored by Proyart and a late nineteenth-century account authored by Bastian), Thornton also reaffirms Soyo's influence in Kakongo. Yet, French primary sources used here and others that are beyond the scope of this article do not corroborate this statement. See Thornton, *A History of West Central Africa,* 304–5 and 344.

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Initially, the Woyo positively received the French offer to protect Cabinda, even though the French never built the fort. In the years following the treaty, the French established themselves as the main European power trading in enslaved Africans in Cabinda. As put by Phyllis Martin, the French preponderance was largely because free trade prevailed on the Loango coast, and if "the French gained predominance, it was because they appeared in the greatest number, paid the highest prices, and supplied the best trade goods," and as a result "[s]uccessful competition was clearly the most effective way to gain control of the Loango coast."[36]

Years later, the Portuguese still aimed to dominate the slave trade along the Loango coast, which they continually watched from Angola without the military and financial power to impose.[37] Eighteenth-century Portuguese maps feature this enduring claim. In 1773, the governor and general captain of Angola, Dom António de Alencastre, commissioned the then sergeant major and engineer Luís Cândido Cordeiro Pinheiro Furtado to create a map of the Loango coast showing the planned future forts of São José de Cabinda, São Sebastião do Mulembo, and São Martinho do Luango (to be built in Cabinda, Malembo, and Loango, respectively).[38] Ten years later, the Portuguese decided to construct a fort in Cabinda, at the same site as the British fortress they had destroyed sixty years earlier.

As the Portuguese prepared their expedition to Cabinda, the minister for Portugal's colonies, Martinho de Melo e Castro, instructed the governor of Angola José Gonçalo da Câmara to appease the Ngoyo's ruler with the customary presents, especially "sufficient quantities of *cachaça* [Brazilian sugarcane brandy]."[39] A Portuguese official referred to the Woyo as "naturally ambitious and needy" and also easy to corrupt: "it is probable that, treating them well, and making them known by experience, that they can obtain abundance and gifts from our neighborhood, they will prefer us to foreigners, who dislike them, offend them and sometimes steal."[40] He also warned the expedition members to avoid violence, and "severely punish all people who insult the Blacks or do the least violence to them, as this can result in great detriment to the royal service, especially as long as the Portuguese Dominion is not well rooted there."[41]

On 13 July 1783, Antonio Januario do Valle sailed from Luanda to Cabinda as the captain of the frigate *Nossa Senhora da Graça*, which was followed by the frigate *Loanda Nossa Senhora Monte do Carmo* and three corvettes. On board the five vessels were 1,000 crew members, including officers, soldiers, sailors, artisans, and workers, as well as enslaved men and boys owned by the officers. In addition to foodstuffs, the vessels transported a variety of construction instruments, and before arriving in Cabinda the squadron anchored at the mouth of the Dande River to load lime, firewood, timber, and charcoal, which they needed to erect the fort.

Once in Cabinda, the Portuguese officers quickly marked the site where they intended to construct the fort. Fearing resistance to their attempt to control the trade in Cabinda, the fast pace was intended to prevent the Woyo from obstructing or delaying the construction work.[42] Situated in an elevated area nearly 130 feet from the beach, the site allowed for better control of access to the port, by preventing losses and smuggling from European interlopers.[43] In other words, it was important to secure a fortress from French and British attacks, as well as from the Woyo forces. Despite these protective

[36]Martin, *The External Trade*, 86.

[37]ANF Marine B4 267, Campagnes à la côte d'Afrique 1783–1784, "Projet de mémoire pour servir d'instruction aux S. Commandant les forces navales du roi sur les Côtes d'Affrique," fl. 269v–270.

[38]Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Lisboa, Agência Geral do Ultramar, Arquivo Histórico, cx. 42, doc. 9230.

[39]José Curto, *Enslaving Spirits: The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and its Hinterland, c. 1550–1830* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 153.

[40]Letter from José Onorio de Valladares e Aboim, 11 July 1783, in "Angola: O Forte de Cabinda," Ministério das colônias, *Arquivos das colônias* 3 (1918): 196.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., 194.

[43]"Letter from Luiz Cândido Cordeiro Pinheiro Furtado, Forte de Cabinda, November 5, 1783" in "Angola: O Forte de Cabinda," in Ministério das colônias, *Arquivos das colônias* 3, no. 17 (1918): 172.

measures intended to secure the monopoly of the trade in Cabinda, the Portuguese officials sought to convince the Woyo and their agents that their intentions were simply to promote "peaceful ideas of commerce and security."[44]

The War on Free Trade in Cabinda

When the Portuguese started the arrangements to construct the fort in 1783, several French vessels were anchored in Cabinda, including *L'Usbek* (from Nantes) commanded by Jean-Baptiste Candeau, and *L'Affriquain,* whose captain was Louis Lefer de la Motte (referred to as "Noir Lamothe"), both from Nantes. As the Portuguese occupied the port, the French traders kept exchanging with the Woyo man who occupied the office of *mambuku*, a wealthy broker, governor of sorts, and heir to the throne of Ngoyo who resided near Cabinda. Cabinda elites and the French officials had good reasons to work to stymie a Portuguese monopoly. On the one hand, Portuguese control of the port opposed the interests of Woyo rulers, by hurting Ngoyo's sovereignty and compromising the centuries-long history of free trade in Cabinda. On the other hand, a Portuguese monopoly would also disadvantage the French; the Loango coast was the site where they purchased the largest number of enslaved Africans to transport to Saint-Domingue, their richest colony in the Americas during the second half of the eighteenth century.[45] As this alliance consolidated, the Portuguese invasion became a war against the Woyo people of Cabinda and their Kotchi allies in Malembo, supported by the French Crown and slave traders.

In Cabinda, the slave trader Candeau wrote a detailed journal describing his interactions with the Portuguese between 23 July and 23 August 1783.[46] He narrated the arrival of a large Portuguese vessel, topped with 16 to 18 cannons, carrying two other boats, and transporting between 400 and 500 men, and that three other vessels were expected.[47] Luiz Cândido Cordeiro Pinheiro Furtado, who a decade earlier sketched a map envisioning the future Portuguese forts on the Loango coast, was now tasked with building and commanding the fort. In his interactions with the French captains, Furtado denied any Portuguese intention of building a fort. But Candeau doubted it was true, as "there was no need for two engineers or fascines to build a *quibangue* [*quibangua,* temporary structure built a few feet above the ground] like we have one."[48] At this early stage, the Portuguese feared a French intervention that would dissuade the Woyo leaders from accepting the proposal of building a fort in Cabinda. We do not know the response of the Woyo rulers, agents, and commoners to the Portuguese claims over their territory other than through the journals, reports, and correspondence of Portuguese and French officials. Still, because these biased sources contain rich descriptions of a significant number of exchanges, they document the violent actions of the Portuguese against Ngoyo's representatives, and how the Woyo responded to the Portuguese attempt to erect a fort and impose their monopoly in Cabinda.

On 26 July 1783, Furtado informed Candeau that the "people of the country (*gens du pays*)" were willing to welcome them [the Portuguese], so if there were any further changes in their "way of thinking, one could only attribute it to [his] advice." Both the French and the Portuguese emphasized the

[44]Letter from José Onorio de Valladares e Aboim, 11 July 1783, 196.

[45]ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," Mémoire du roi pour servir d'instruction particulière au Sr. Bernard de Marigny Chevalier Commandant de la Frégate La Venus, fl. 283. For estimates, see *SlaveVoyages*, slavevoyages.org. For the whole eighteenth century, the largest number of enslaved Africans carried by the French to the Americas, mainly Saint-Domingue, were boarded in the ports of the Bight of Benin. Yet, this trend changed in the second half of the eighteenth century. Also, several French slave voyages labeled as departing from the generic region West Central Africa and St. Helena originated on the Loango coast.

[46]The slave ship *L'Usbek* appears as *L'Usbeck* in Jean Mettas, Serge Daget, and Michèle Daget, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 1 (Nantes. Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 1978), 625. The captain's last name appears as "Caudeau," but his last name in his journal is clearly written as Candeau.

[47]ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée. Candeau (J.B). Capitaine du navire L'Usbek de Nantes," fl. 206.

[48]Ibid., fl. 206v.

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agency of Woyo authorities in these developments. Candeau's response emphasized that if the Woyo could change their mind in twenty-four hours, they could do that by themselves and according to their own interests.[49] Meanwhile, the Portuguese stated "that the court of France would have nothing to say, since the leaders of this country, free people, made a transfer at their discretion." Pointing to the Portuguese use of coercion, Candeau challenged the legitimacy of permission granted through the use of cannon diplomacy. According to him, Woyo leaders "had made this transfer […] because they were intimidated to find themselves at sea in a warship, given the disposition in which I had seen them yesterday to risking everything to maintain their freedom."[50] In other words, Woyo representatives agreed to the fort's construction only because they had no choice, as surrendering their independence to the Portuguese offered no benefits after maintaining free trade in their port for over two centuries.

On 27 July 1783, the Portuguese met several Woyo representatives at the *mambuku*'s residence. At this occasion, both the king and the *mambuku* signaled their opposition to the construction of the Portuguese fort, telling them to trade with two ships in Cabinda, two ships in Malembo, and one in Loango, and "if they absolutely wanted to have a more solid and comfortable house than those we usually have, they could build it in the depths of the Bay, near his home." Moreover, the *mambuku* confirmed that his previous promise to the Portuguese "on board the frigate could not be held against him, as he had only expressed this consent forcefully" and to allow him off board, as "the Portuguese told him they wanted to keep one of [the king's] officers as hostage."[51] This incident seems to be related to pawnship, the practice of taking hostages or "pawns" as collateral during slave trade transactions between Europeans and Africans.[52] Here, however, the Portuguese took as hostage an agent occupying one of the highest Ngoyo's offices. Still, the use of violence was not surprising, as since the rise of the Atlantic slave trade, the Portuguese used coercion in their interactions with West Africans and West Central Africans. In fact, before their departure to Cabinda, the members of the Portuguese expedition were told to expect Woyo's resistance.

According to Candeau, soon after these events, the Cabinda's *mambuku* reported having requested the commander of the Portuguese frigate to send an ambassador to the king of Ngoyo (*maningoyo*). But the Portuguese refused the request "without first having a hostage in land for their guarantee," and instead requested the French ship captains respond to the *mambuku*. As the captains refused to do so "as contrary to the interests of our King, and for the good of commerce in this country" the Portuguese "seemed to take great offense" and told them "to be ready to leave tomorrow morning."[53]

As the days passed, the Portuguese became increasingly aggressive, by controlling the movements of the French captains, preventing them from leaving their vessels even to get water. At one instance, a Portuguese officer fired cannon shots to allegedly salute the *mambuku*, almost hitting French crew members when they were loading and unloading their trade goods from their ships to their *quibangua.* The Portuguese likely feared that by delivering rifles and gunpowder to the Woyo agents, the French were arming them for a future resistance operation.[54] Thus the Portuguese proposed to the French "to continue their trade under the condition of not giving rifles"—justifying this prohibition as a matter of trade competition, as the Portuguese captains lacked rifles to trade

[49]Ibid., fl. 206v–207.

[50]Ibid., fl. 207.

[51]Ibid.

[52]See Paul E. Lovejoy, "Pawnship, Debt, and 'Freedom' in Atlantic Africa during the Era of the Slave Trade: A Reassessment," *The Journal of African History* 55 (2014): 59; Randy J. Sparks, *"Where the Negroes Are Masters": An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 28 and 37; Green, *Fistful of Shells*, 277; Mariana P. Candido and Vanessa Oliveira, "Slavery in Luanda and Benguela," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia in African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); and Ana Lucia Araujo, *Humans in Shackles: An Atlantic History of Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024), 60–62.

[53]ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," fl. 208v.

[54]Ibid., fl. 209–11.

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with the Woyo.[55] Eventually, the Portuguese commander allowed the French to daily unload fifteen trading rifles and thirty barrels of gunpowder. After the French challenged this order, the Portuguese ordered them to finish their trade in ten days, perhaps hoping they would leave the port to never come back.[56]

Meanwhile, as Candeau prepared to sail to Malembo to get news from newly arrived French traders, two Woyo "princes" joined him on board. But a Portuguese envoy told him to not allow any *Noir* leave on board his boat, suspecting the French and the Woyo were plotting to get support from Kotchi agents in Malembo.[57] These exchanges ended up very badly when on 23 August 1783, the *mambuku* came to Candeau's vessel "for lunch and to take some goods and presents to send to a Prince in the land who had stopped the trade of this country because of some dispute." Because the *mambuku* feared being arrested by Portuguese officers on his way home, Candeau followed him ashore on board another boat. But his presence was useless. The Portuguese canoes approached the two vessels "with sabers, rifles and pistols and seized this Prince putting a cocked pistol under his throat to take him and his aides on board a Portuguese boat."[58]

After leaving Cabinda, *L'Usbeck* went to trade in Malembo, from where it sailed to Saint-Domingue on 23 October 1783, carrying 600 enslaved Africans.[59] Upon arriving in Cap-Français, the French captains of *L'Usbeck* and *L'Affriquain* deposed a complaint against the Portuguese vessels. They denounced the Portuguese for kidnapping the *mambuku* and his retinue "at gunpoint when he was on board the ship *Lusbec* [sic] with the captain of the said ship having the French flag at its stern." Describing the episode as being of "unheard-of violence and against international law" they demanded satisfaction for this insult and also requested the release of the *mambuku* and his entourage detained on board the Portuguese vessel *Invencível* on 23 August 1783.[60] Of course, surviving Portuguese documents portrayed Portuguese invaders as helpless victims of the villain Woyo of Cabinda and their Kotchi allies in Malembo—with the justifications that restrictions imposed on other slave merchants were only intended to prevent the French from inciting the "Negroes' rebellion" and that efforts to block communication aimed "to force the same Negroes to stay quiet and in peace."[61]

Despite the Portuguese aggression, the French were obviously not generously acting to promote free trade or to protect Woyo interests but were simply reacting against the Portuguese initiative to prevent them from freely trading in enslaved Africans in Cabinda. Following the documented kidnapping of Ngoyo's *mambuku* on board a French vessel, the captains got evidence that the Portuguese would prevent other European nations from trading in Cabinda. It also became clear that the *mambuku* was forced to allow the construction of the Portuguese fort after being kidnapped.[62]

After these incidents, the French Crown issued a preliminary report in 1784. The document ordered Bernard de Marigny—a seasoned French Navy officer who served in the American

[55]Ibid., fl. 211.

[56]Ibid., fl. 212.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Ibid., fl. 212v.

[59]Mettas, Daget, and Daget, *Répertoire des expéditions* 1, 625. The spelling varies in the manuscript sources. Daget spells *L'Usbeck* and Jean-Baptiste Caudeau, instead of Candeau (see n46, above). On the database *SlaveVoyages,* however, *L'Usbeck* appears as having traded in "West Central Africa and St. Helena, port unspecified," Voyage ID 31096.

[60]ANTT, Ministério dos negócios estrangeiros, cx. 952, Negociação de Cabinda com a França, c. 1783-1786, "Extrait des minutes déposées au Greffe de l'Amirauté du Cap, 25 Sep. 1783, and Déposition d'arrivée du navire L'Affricain de Nantes cap. Louis Lefer de la Motte, Extrait des registres du greffe de l'Amirauté du Cap, unnumbered folios.

[61]ANTT, Ministério dos negócios estrangeiros, cx. 952, Negociação de Cabinda com a França, c. 1783–1786, "Cópia, Os negros sujeitos da Coroa de Portugal…," unnumbered folio.

[62]Martin, *The External Trade*, 87–88, Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, "The Transatlantic Slave Trade from Angola: A Port-by-Port Estimate of Slaves Embarked, 1701–1867," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2013): 117.

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Revolutionary War—to lead an expedition to Cabinda to restore trade freedom and destroy the fort if the Portuguese refused to comply. Upon arriving in Cabinda, Marigny was to declare the goal of the expedition was "not to harm competition… but to maintain perfect equality."[63] On 29 February 1784, Marigny's squadron sailed from Brest to Cabinda. Despite being a French expedition, he stated that his mission was aimed at "making the commerce and the entry of the Bay of Cabinda free to the French, British, and Dutch trade ships."[64]

As Marigny was heading to the Loango coast, French missives continued asserting that the coast of Cabinda was a free trade zone.[65] Curiously, the French considered that if they were not able to stop the fort's construction, they could also erect a fortress in Cabinda. In the end, the French alleged defense of free trade was intended to protect their own commercial interests. In fact, if offered the opportunity, they would also attempt to impose the monopoly of the trade in enslaved Africans in the region. Despite these discussions, the cautious French position clearly changed after Marigny and his squadron anchored in Cabinda on 17 June 1784.

Upon arrival, the French officers went ashore to observe the Portuguese fort's construction, and reported the presence of nearly 600 men, among whom were Portuguese subjects, including free and enslaved Black Africans.[66] To support their operation, the French Navy officer and captain of the barge *La Lamproie*, Hippolyte Louis Antoine drew a series of maps depicting the fort (Fig. 1, below).[67]

One plan (Fig. 2, below) shows the entire fort compound, including the governor's house and several structures such as a hospital, an iron foundry, a chapel, and a prison. The French concluded through these observations that the fort was not intended to protect the Portuguese from the Woyo because "the fortified sides facing both the sea and the harbor cannot in any way be intended at the locals since they have no force or maritime trade."[68] Thus, Marigny requested Furtado to "kindly let me know what your intentions are and the orders you have from your court so that I can definitively regulate the conduct that I will have to follow so that the intentions of the King my master are fulfilled."[69] Repeating to Marigny that the fort's "purpose was only [for defense] against the Negroes" Furtado explained that the orders to construct the fort came not from his queen, but from "the governors of the Kingdom of Angola and its dependencies" who oversaw this delicate matter related to the "private exclusion and the rights that different nations of Europe may have on the trade of Africa and particularly on this coast."[70] The governor of Angola's role as having ordered

[63] ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," Mémoire du roi pour servir d'instruction particulière au Sr. Bernard de Marigny Chevalier Commandant de la Frégate La Venus, fl. 285v.

[64] AN, Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," M. Bernard de Marigny, 2 Jul. 1784, Extrait de mon journal de Navigation, fl. 290.

[65] Archives Nationales d'outre-mer, Aix en Provence (FR ANOM), 16 DFC MEM 137, XIII, carton 75, 2 Apr. 1784, fl. 1–2.

[66] FR ANOM 16 DFC MEM 132, XIII, carton 75, "Journal et détail de tout ce qui s'est passé depuis le 17 juin…" fl. 5v.

[67] ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," M. Bernard de Marigny, 2 Jul. 1784, Extrait de mon journal de Navigation, fl. 290. For more on these maps, see ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," fl. 303–5. See also, François Gaulme, "Un document sur le Ngoyo et ses voisins en 1784: l'observation sur la navigation et le commerce de la côte d'Angole,' du comte de Capellis," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 64, no. 236 (1977): 350–75.

[68] FR ANOM 16 DFC MEM 124, XIII, carton 75, "Relation de l'expédition de Cabende," fl. 3; ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," Correspondance de Mr. de Marigny dans son expédition à Cabinde sur la Côte d'Afrique en 1784, 1ère lettre de M. de Marigny à M. le commandant du fort portant pavillon portugais à Cabinde, 20 June 1784, fl. 314. On the Portuguese false claim that they built the fort to protect themselves from the Woyo, see ANTT, Ministério dos negócios estrangeiros, cx. 952, Negociação de Cabinda com a França, c. 1783–1786, "Cópia, Os negros sujeitos da Coroa de Portugal…," unnumbered folio.

[69] ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," Correspondance de Mr. de Marigny dans son expédition à Cabinde sur la Côte d'Afrique en 1784, No. 4 1ere lettre de M. de Marigny à M. Le Commandant, fl. 315.

[70] FR ANOM 16 DFC MEM 124, XIII, carton 75, "Relation de l'expédition de Cabende," fl. 1v; ANF Marine B 267, fl. 294v; and ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," Correspondance de Mr. de Marigny dans son expédition à Cabinde sur la Côte d'Afrique en 1784, Réponse de M. le commandant du fort portugais à la 1ère lettre de M. de Marigny.no. 4, traduite d'après lui-même, fl. 318. For the original letter in Portuguese see, ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes

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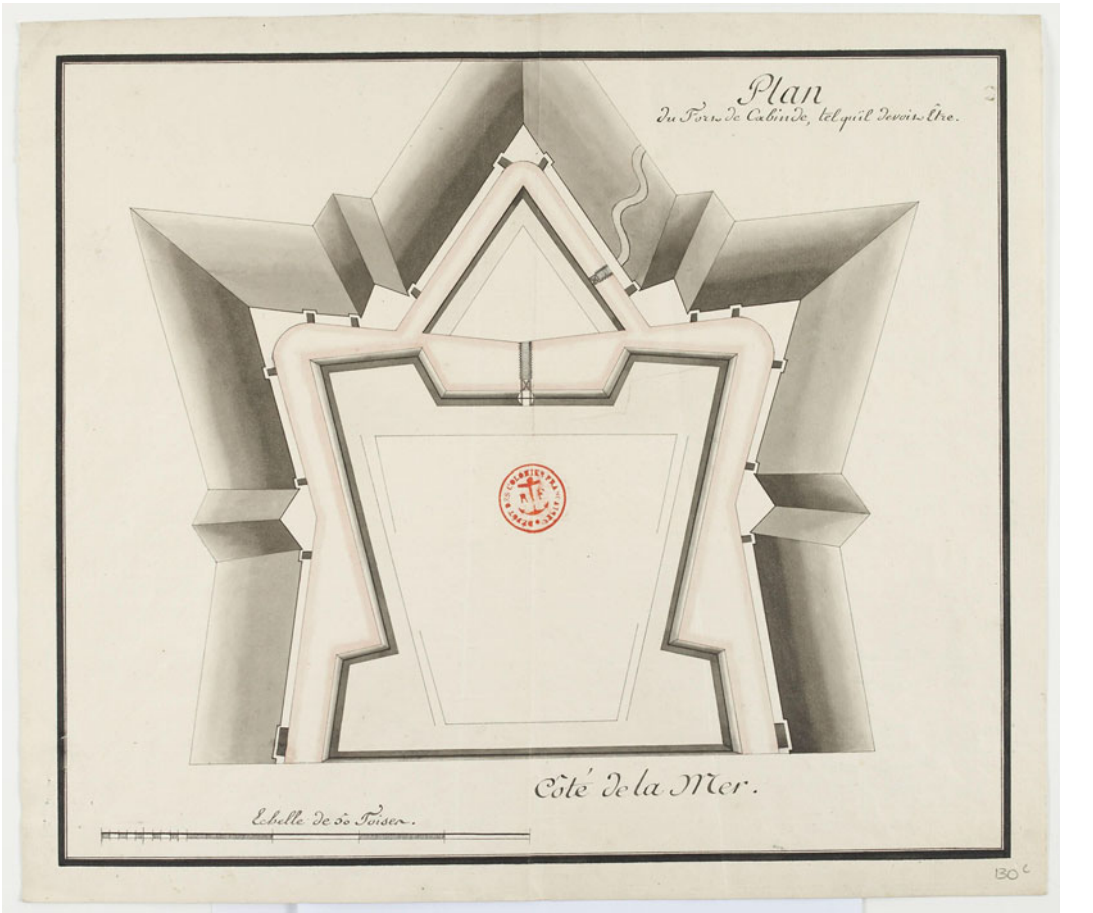

Figure 1. Plan of the fort of Cabinda as it should be, 1784.
Source: FR ANOM 16 DFC C 130, portefeuille 24.

the fort's construction underscores the relative autonomy of the West Central African Portuguese colony and the underlying plan to extend the territory controlled by Portugal to the Loango coast.

The French expedition consolidated their alliance with the Woyo, as only the latter could defeat the Portuguese. In another letter to Furtado, Marigny stated that under his protection the Woyo could vanquish the Portuguese: "I hope that you will not attribute it to a misplaced desire to want to intimidate a respectable soldier like you and… I would be in despair of being suspected of being able to participate in any way in the animosity of the people of the country against your nation, but I am afraid in advance of what they could commit sheltered from my attack."[71] Meanwhile, consistent with Ngoyo's long tradition of free trade in Cabinda, the *mambuku* promised to support the French operation against the Portuguese fort.[72]

de Guinée," Correspondance de Mr. de Marigny dans son expédition à Cabinde sur la Côte d'Afrique en 1784, 20 June 1784, fl. 389.

[71]ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," Correspondance de Mr. de Marigny dans son expédition à Cabinde sur la Côte d'Afrique en 1784, 2eme lettre de M. de Marigny à M. le commandant portugais qui répond à celle cy-dessus, fl. 319v.

[72]FR ANOM 16 DFC MEM 124, XIII, carton 75, "Relation de l'expédition de Cabende," fl. 2–2v.

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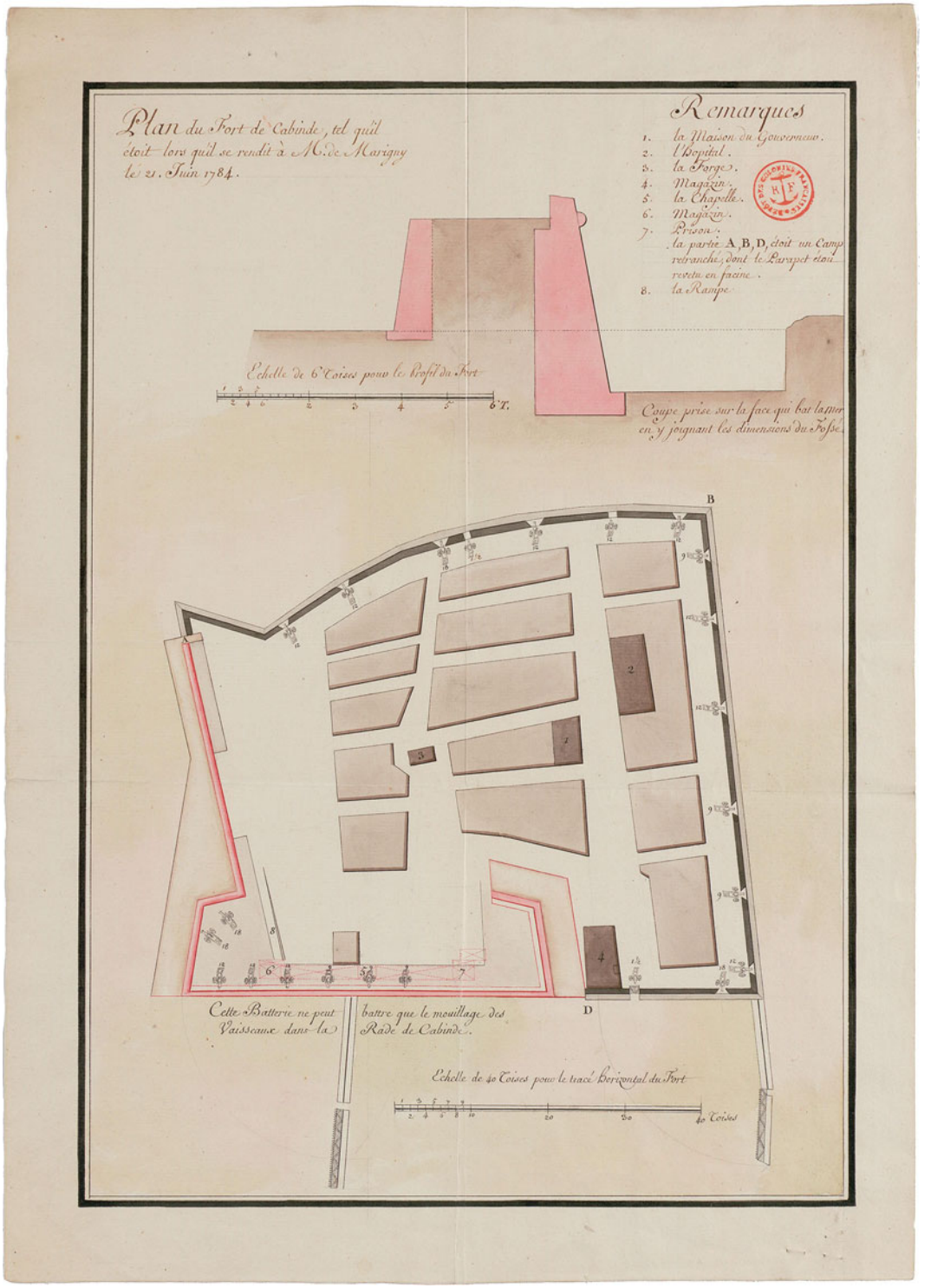

Figure 2. Note on the layout of the Cabinda fort as it was when it surrendered to Mr. de Marigny on 21 June 1784.
Source: FR ANOM 16 DFC B 133, XIII, portefeuille 24.

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Marigny also informed French captains anchored in Malembo of his arrival and his mission to "support and protect Europeans' freedom of commerce on the coast of Angola."[73] In their support of Marigny, French traders were joined by Dutch and British traders, including the famous Archibald Dalzel, the former governor of the British fort in Ouidah and future governor of the Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast, who signed "for the English Captains."[74] In their letter, they explained that Portuguese hostilities forced them to leave Cabinda and sail to Malembo, a crowded harbor where nearly eighteen vessels were anchored. Asking for French protection, they complained that this new competition increased the prices of African captives for sale, forcing them to extend their stay on the coast, which led them to incur higher expenses.[75]

In a few days, the preparation to destroy the Portuguese fort started. Whereas Marigny evaluated he could only put 200 men ashore, the *mambuku* promised him "800 armed Blacks," though he also wanted to count on the "people of the country… to drag the pieces of cannon."[76] Hence, the operation's success largely relied on the support of the Woyo leaders and their men. To this end, language played a central role as well. Although some Woyo agents spoke French, Marigny counted on a man named Mercier, an auxiliary officer of *La Lamproie*, who understood and spoke the Woyo's language so as to explain them their role in the operation.[77] In addition to gathering 31 grenadiers and 300 riflemen, Marigny relied on 1,200 armed Woyo men (and probably Kotchi as well), who according to a French plan (Fig. 3, below) were divided into 3 groups of 400 men each.

With the operation prepared, Marigny ordered Furtado to destroy the Portuguese fort and "open the port of Cabinda to all nations, otherwise he would attack it."[78] Outnumbered and without sufficient military power, the Portuguese were left with no other choice than to surrender and accept the conditions imposed by the French, including demolishing the fort, leaving Cabinda, and taking their men and effects back to Luanda.[79] Meanwhile, the French sent to Malembo the Portuguese subjects who could not board the available vessels. As these individuals waited for transportation to Luanda, they were kept on board French slave ships.[80] Surviving correspondence shows that despite losing the war on the ground, the Portuguese intended to win the war of disinformation. The Portuguese did not reproach the French but rather blamed the Woyo and the Kotchi for their defeat. According to the Portuguese, their captains found several of their "Black mariners and workers, either slaves

[73]Ibid., fl. 1v.

[74]ANF Marine B 267: "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," M. Bernard de Marigny, 2 July 1784, Extrait de mon journal de Navigation, fl. 290 and fl. 294; Marigny, Correspondance de Mr. de Marigny dans son expédition à Cabinde sur la Côte d'Afrique en 1784. Lettre de M. de Marigny à son arrivée sur la côte à MM les capitaines marchands français à Malimbe. A bord de La Venus Côte d'Angole, 16 June 1784, fl. 308–309v; "Réponse de MM. les capitaines marchands français anglois et hollandais à Malimbe le 17 juin 1784," fl. 308v–309v. Dalzel was the captain of the slave ship *Saint Ann* that sailed from London to West Central Africa on 9 Sep. 1783, and disembarked 330 enslaved Africans in Jamaica on 22 Sep. 1784. The voyage appears in the *SlaveVoyages* database, voyage ID 83454, but the port where the *Saint Ann* traded is not indicated. On Dalzel, see also I. A. Akinjogbin, "Archibald Dalzel: Slave Trader and Historian of Dahomey," *The Journal of African History* 7, no. 1 (1966): 67–78.

[75]Musée d'histoire de Nantes, Correspondance de Mr de Marigny dans son expédition de Cabinde sur la Côte d'Affrique en 1784, 17 June 1784, 2001.9.1, fl. 2. See also ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," "Réponse de MM. les capitaines marchands français anglois et hollandais à Malimbe le 17 juin 1784," fl. 308v–309v.

[76]ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," M. Bernard de Marigny, 2 July 1784, Extrait de mon journal de Navigation, fl. 295.

[77]ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," Correspondance de Mr. de Marigny dans son expédition à Cabinde sur la Côte d'Afrique en 1784, "Ordre donné au S. Mercier officier auxiliaire un peu connu des nègres dont il parle la langue," fl. 317.

[78]FR ANOM 16 DFC MEM 124, XIII, carton 75, "Relation de l'expédition de Cabende." fl. 3.

[79]FR ANOM 16 DFC 132, "Journal et détail de tout ce qui s'est passé depuis le 17 juin," fl. 8v–9. See also Silva, "The Transatlantic Slave Trade from Angola," 117. The report and journal first refer to the Portuguese agreeing to raze the fort to the ground ("*raser*") but as the Portuguese surrendered, they referred to the French demolishing the fort.

[80]FR ANOM 16 DFC 132, "Journal et détail de tout ce qui s'est passé depuis le 17 juin," fl. 9–9v.

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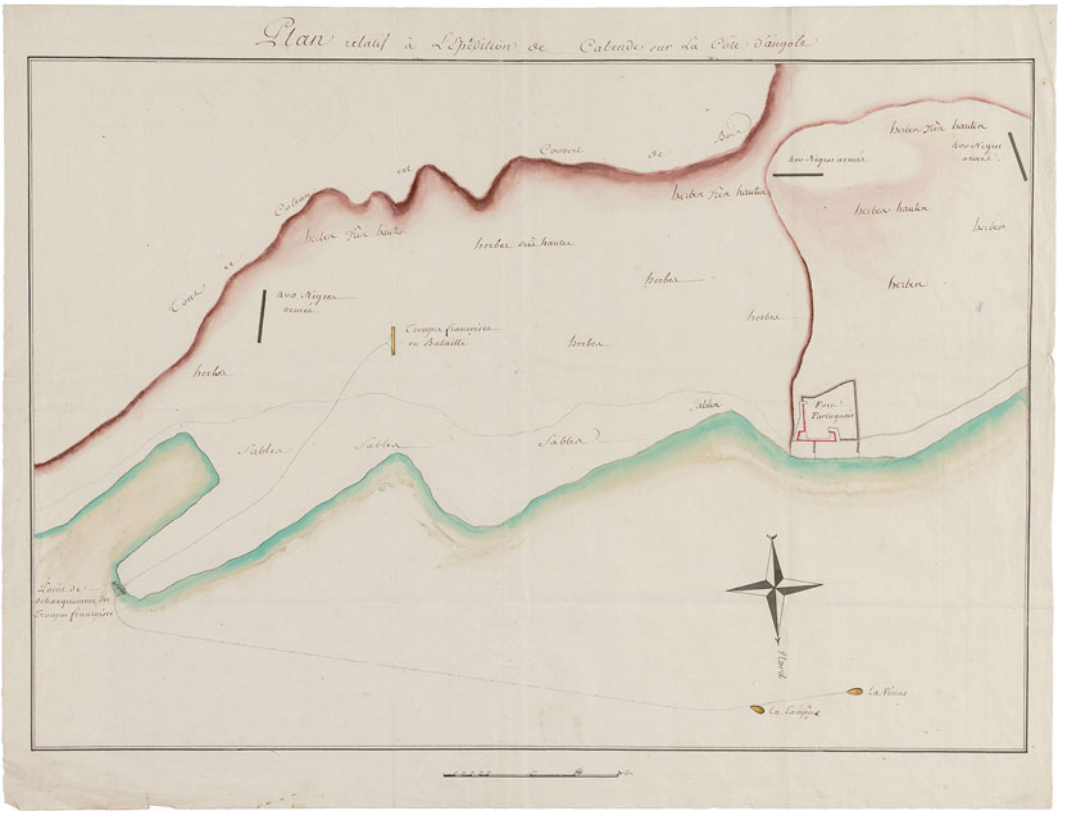

Figure 3. Plan related to the Cabinda expedition, 21 June 1784.
Source: FR ANOM 16 DFC B 125 XIII portefeuille 24.

or free" sold into slavery on board the French slave vessels anchored in Malembo.[81] More likely, after lodging and feeding these prisoners for several weeks, the French slave traders refused to release them without payment.

Free Trade as Resistance Against European Control

Two years after the Woyo-Kotchi-French coalition's victory against the Portuguese, France and Portugal signed a treaty of peace.[82] Whereas the Portuguese used old territorial claims to support their attempt to monopolize the trade in enslaved Africans in Cabinda, the French fight for free trade was designed to protect their own commercial interests. This war over free trade reveals the importance of Cabinda and Malembo during the busiest century of the Atlantic slave trade. The conflict

[81] AHU Governo Geral de Angola, Correspondência confidencial, códice 1642, Carta do governo interino escrita para Cabinda ao capitão-de-ar-e-terra António Januário do Valle," fl. 2. When Marigny's expedition arrived in Cabinda in June 1784, *La Rosalie* from Le Havre was anchored in Malembo. The vessel was commanded by Michel Duval, one of the ship captains who wrote to Marigny denouncing the Portuguese hostilities when he attempted to anchor in Cabinda in May 1784. Musée d'histoire de Nantes, Correspondance de Mr de Marigny dans son expédition de Cabinde sur la Côte d'Affrique en 1784, 17 June 1784, 2001.9.1, fl. 2v.

[82] ANTT Ratificação por Luís XVI, Rei de França, da Convenção com D. Maria I, Rainha de Portugal e mediação de D. Carlos III, Rei de Espanha, acerca das dúvidas sobre o forte de Cabinda e limites do comércio dos franceses na costa ocidental de África, Tratados, França, cx.1, doc. 5.

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also sheds light on how the Woyo and the Kotchi championed free trade and the free market, while resisting Portuguese control.

For the Woyo and the Kotchi, free trade meant keeping Cabinda and Malembo accessible to all European nations. Likewise, to them free trade also meant controlling all phases of the trade in enslaved Africans, particularly the dealings with European slave merchants stationed in Cabinda and Malembo. Most importantly, the Woyo and their Kotchi allies understood that free trade required sovereignty. Consequently, despite English, Portuguese, and French attempts to construct forts and monopolize the trade in enslaved Africans in Cabinda, the Kingdom of Ngoyo, as well as their neighbors in Kakongo and Loango, maintained control over their territories and never permitted Europeans to establish permanent fortresses on their shores during the busiest period of the Atlantic slave trade in the region.

Ultimately, Marigny's operation only succeeded because of the assistance provided by hundreds of Woyo and Kotchi men. Supported by vessels and ammunition, the Woyo-Kotchi-French coalition outnumbered the 1,000 Portuguese subjects. Yet, disease also contributed to the Portuguese defeat. In an official statement sent to Marigny the day before his departure, Furtado explained that when the French squadron arrived in Cabinda there was an epidemic of scurvy that made ill "all officers and soldiers were convalescent, ill or dead…and the only who survived were the Blacks [and] the garrison's workers of color," who were in an entrenchment intended to protect them against attacks from the "*negros do país* (negroes of the country)."[83] Because they were in no position to resist, the fort was abandoned and demolished.

The examination of the roles and actions of Woyo and Kotchi rulers, brokers, and commoners during the episodes that led to the destruction of the British and Portuguese forts in Cabinda allows us to better understand how West Central Africans shaped merchant capitalism in the eighteenth century, the most intense period of the Atlantic slave trade. Ultimately, this profitable trade led to the massive accumulation of wealth in the hands of elites in Europe and the Americas and to a much lesser extent a few members of Ngoyo's and Kakongo's ruling class of nobles and merchants. Understanding this period in which these two societies were able to resist European intervention by setting free markets and free trade in enslaved persons in their own terms also allows us to better grasp how the economy of Loango, Kakongo, and Ngoyo contributed to the development of industrial capitalism and imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when European, and especially Portuguese, intervention in the region eventually put an end to a long era of African sovereignty in the coastal societies north of the Congo River.

Still, despite the role of the Loango coast's three kingdoms in conceiving and influencing notions of free trade and the free market, the crucial role of the African continent, and especially of West Central Africans, in the development of merchant, industrial, and financial capitalism remains largely ignored by works which continue to privilege the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[84] Therefore, this article is an attempt to continue engaging the work of historians such as Walter Rodney, who illuminated the economic history of early modern West Africa and underscored how the Atlantic slave trade drained African human and material resources to enrich the West.[85] The article seeks

[83] ANF Marine B 267, "1783. Campagne aux côtes de Guinée," Correspondance de Mr. de Marigny dans son expédition à Cabinde sur la Côte d'Afrique en 1784, Copie d'une lettre de Monsieur le gouverneur portugais de Cabinda, envoyée à Monsieur Bernard de Marigny, la veille de son départ, 7 July 1784, fl. 359.

[84] See Morten Jerven, *Economic Growth and Measurement Reconsidered in Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia, 1965–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Morten Jerven, *The Wealth and Poverty of African States: Economic Growth, Living Standards and Taxation since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), and A. G. Hopkins, *Capitalism in the Colonies: African Merchants in Lagos, 1851–1931* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024).

[85] See Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast: 1545–1800* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), and Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

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to join recent efforts by historians such as Toby Green and Mariana P. Candido, who have showed that African societies have relied on monetized economies, have cherished landed property, and were part of a global economy earlier, before the rise of the Atlantic slave trade and European colonization.[86]

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[86]See Green, *A Fistful of Shells*, and Candido, *Wealth, Land and Property in Angola*. For previous economic histories focusing on West Africa see: Karl Polanyi, *Dahomey and the Slave Trade: An Analysis of an Archaic Economy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966); A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973); Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); and Ralph Austen, *African Economic History: Internal Development and External Dependency* (London: James Currey, 1987). One exception is Miller, *Way of Death*, that has been reappraised by Candido, "Capitalism and Africa."

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