

# Iles de Los as bulking center in the slave trade 1750-1800

by  
BRUCE L. MOUSER \*

Les îles de Los, situées près de Conakry en République de Guinée, étaient une plaque tournante du commerce des esclaves de la côte Windward à l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Les conditions requises pour qu'un tel endroit soit opérationnel sont un emplacement stratégique par rapport aux sources d'esclaves, des ressources naturelles sur les îles pour leur autosuffisance, un système de commerce bien défini et des arrangements spécifiques avec les propriétaires africains qui protégeaient leurs étrangers et profitaient de leur présence. Cet article décrit comment les négociants des îles se sont lancés dans ce commerce et les caractéristiques qui ont influencé leur succès sur la côte.

*Mots clés* : Traite des esclaves, îles de Los, Guinée, Conakry, commerce côtier, comptoirs de commerce, comptoirs flottants, Forékariah, Compagnie de Liverpool, Compagnie de Sierra Leone, Barber and Bolland, SMX Golberry, Grumettas, Moria, relations propriétaires fonciers/étrangers.

*The Iles de Los, located near Conakry, Republic of Guinea, was a major bulking center in the slave trade from the Windward Coast of West Africa. Those prerequisites for such a center to operate included strategic location relative to sources of slaves, natural resources of the islands which made them self-sufficient, a well-defined system of commerce, and specified arrangements with African landlords who protected their strangers and profited from their presence. This article describes how traders on the islands engaged in commerce and those characteristics which influenced their success on the coast.*

*Key words* : Slave trade, Iles de Los, Guinea, Conakry, coastal trade, trading-factories, floating factories, barracoon, Forékariah, Liverpool Company, Sierra Leone Company, Barber and Bolland, SMX Golberry, Grumettas, Moria, landlord/stranger relationship.

---

\* Department of History, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

In the long history of the slave trade, certain islands located off Africa's shore served as warehousing or bulking centers, providing trade goods to merchants in local markets and in those located as far as a hundred kilometers distant. This paper addresses characteristics which enabled such bulking centers to exist and focuses specifically on conditions that made the Iles de Los an important entrepot of commerce during the last half of the eighteenth century<sup>1</sup>. Among the most important prerequisites for commercial success were natural resources available nearby, a strategic and accessible position vis-a-vis sources of slaves and European buyers, a well-defined system of commerce within the community of traders, and the presence of friendly landlords who might profit from rents and duties and who sometimes participated in commerce as traders themselves. All of these prerequisites were present on the Iles de Los between 1750 and 1800<sup>2</sup>.

Of these characteristics perhaps the most important was position. The Iles de Los were located three kilometers offshore from Cape Sangara and Tumbo Island, near Conakry, the capital of the Republic of Guinea. This portion of the Upper Guinea coast was slightly to the south of the mainstreams of trade in the Gambia and Grande rivers which had developed during the early phases of European contact. The rivers which dotted this southern stretch of coastline, among them the Nunez, Pongo, Dembia, Morebaya, Forékariah, Melakori, and Scarcies, were notorious for fevers and for treacherous bars which blocked their mouths. Bottom-ripping reefs lay scattered along this stretch, and shoals or sand bars extended several kilometers from the shoreline, further challenging even the most experienced captain. Once having safely maneuvered through these obstacles, captains continued to face adversity, however, for mangrove swamps

---

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the African Studies Association Meeting in Bloomington in 1981. I am indebted to Victoria Bamba Coifman of the University of Minnesota and George E. Brooks of Indiana University who carefully read the present paper and made suggestions, some of which I have incorporated.

2. Captains who visited the Iles de Los in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, who left records, and who are cited in this study include: Joseph HAWKINS, *A History of a Voyage to the Coast of Africa*, Troy, 1797; S.M.X. GOLBERRY, *Travels in Africa*, 2 vols., London, 1803; S.M.X. GOLBERRY in Yvan DEBBASCH, « L'Espace du Sierra-Leone et la politique française de traite », *De la traite à l'esclavage*, vol. I, edited by Serge DAGET, Paris, 1988, 209-12; Joseph CORRY, *Observations Upon the Windward Coast of Africa*, London, 1807; F. B. SPILSBURY, *Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa*, London, 1807; P. LABARTHE, *Voyage au Sénégal pendant les années 1784 et 1785*, Paris, 1802; Captain EDDY, in Bruce L. MOUSER, « The Voyage of the Good Sloop *Dolphin* to Africa 1795-1796 », *The American Neptune*, XXXVII (1978), p. 249-261; Samuel GAMBLE, National Maritime Museum-Greenwich, Log/M/21, « Sandown », (hereafter cited as Gamble, « Sandown »); Adam AFZELIUS, *Sierra Leone Journal 1795-1796*, edited by Alexander Peter KUP, Uppsala, 1967. Hawkins may have visited the islands late in the century, but his account of the coast is so unreliable that his comments about the islands should be questioned. He says that traders allowed market-bound slaves to move about freely because the islands served as a natural prison. Other data suggest otherwise.

extended as much as fifty kilometers inland, and many vessels in the area confounded their commerce. Trading vessels often became stuck during a low tide and had to be pulled across muddy bottoms by teamsters from shore as rivers narrowed upstream.

In contrast to this picture of inconvenience and danger to captains who ventured to this coast were the Iles de Los which offered significant attractions to those who seemed determined to trade among these rivers. Collectively the six largest islands took the shape of the ridges of a cone. The largest island, Tamara or Futabar (also called Grand Island and William Island), was 8.5 kilometers long and 850 to 1500 meters wide and lay in a southwest to northeast arch along the northwestern portion of the island group. The island rose to approximately 160 meters at its highest elevation, and early descriptions portrayed the island as thickly wooded. Its location and shape helped to produce a natural shelter on its leeward side where vessels could anchor safely and weather all but the most severe storms. In the eighteenth century, Tamara was called William Island after its Baga headman and was occupied by three villages of 200 huts each. Two British traders lived at Traytor's (Fôtoba), having built factories and a dock <sup>3</sup>.

Factory Island formed the eastern edge of the group and the island closest to Cape Sangara and the Ile Tumbo. Factory was approximately eight kilometers long and as little as 320 meters across at its narrowest point. Like Tamara, it was thickly wooded in the eighteenth century, except around the major factory town on the island. Unlike Tamara, however, Factory Island (also called Kassa) on its coastward side had beaches where longboats could land cargoes, and consequently it was here that Europeans established the largest number of trading posts, hence the name Factory Island <sup>4</sup>. Completing the circle to the south were Kid (Cabri), Whites (Blanche), and Coral (Corail). These islands were small and of little importance, except as navigation marks to indicate the presence of bars, reefs, and shoals as well as safe passages to the better anchorage area near Tamara. In the center of the circle was Crawford Island, sometimes called Ruma (Roume), an island little more than 1.5 kilometers wide and as narrow as 150 meters. Two factories and a village of turtlers were located

---

3. Admiralty, *The African Pilot, or Sailing Directions for the Western Coast of Africa*, London, 1856, p. 86; CORRY, *Observations*, p. 107; GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 168; LABARTHE, *Voyage*, p. 238; James BOYLE, *A Practical Medico-Historical Account of the Western Coast of Africa*, London, 1831, p. 14-15; M. Alb. ROUSSIN, « Mémoire sur la navigation aux côtes occidentales d'Afrique », *Annales maritimes et coloniales*, par. I, 1821, p. 257, par. II, 1821, p.273-77; [GOLBERRY] in DEBBASCH, « L'espace du Sierra-Leone », p. 209; AFZELIUS, *Sierra Leone Journal*, p. 99-100. Captain BELCHER, « Extracts from Observations on Various Points of the West Coast of Africa », *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, II (1832), p. 278-79, reported the islands to be of volcanic origin.

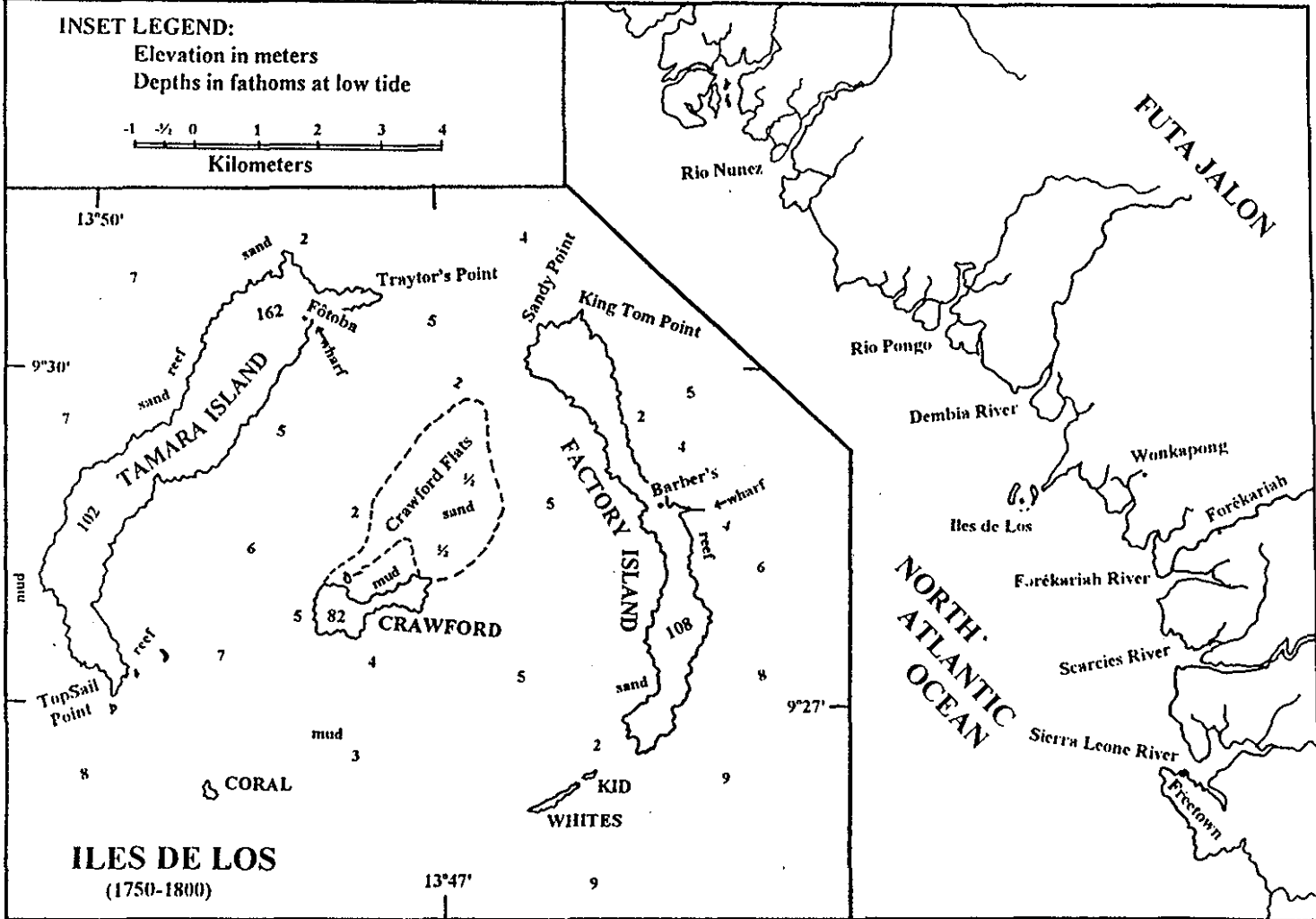
4. *The African Pilot*, p. 86; BOYLE, *Medico-Historical Account*, p. 15-16.

**INSET LEGEND:**

Elevation in meters  
Depths in fathoms at low tide



Kilometers



**ILES DE LOS**  
(1750-1800)

13°47'

9°27'

FUTA JALON

NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

constructed states of Sumbuya and Moria<sup>18</sup>. Continuing wars on the coast and slave rebellions in the Futa Jalon highlands and along the Futa/ Scarcies corridor also generated large numbers of market-bound slaves, with victors selling vanquished at coastal factories. Imperial growth on the coast and in the interior also produced an expanding market for gunpowder and firearms, both readily available to Liverpool traders from manufacturers in Birmingham and the West Midlands<sup>19</sup>. One firm which maintained a factory on the Iles de Los at this time was the Barber and Bolland Company of Liverpool, also called the Liverpool Company, the Liverpool Society, and the Sierra Leone Company. The company had facilities to make and repair boats and used its factory on the Iles de Los as a staging area from which agents engaged in trade in coastal rivers. English and American factors established residences in many of these rivers and left their marks with names such as Ormond, Heard, Faber, Wilkinson, Harrison, Pearce, Richardson, and Holeman, to name but a few. Some of these became wealthy, with John Ormond, Sr., the most cited example of one who had accumulated a considerable fortune by the time of his death in 1791<sup>20</sup>.

---

18. Great Britain, Privy Council. Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council... relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations, 1789. See Roger BOTTE, « Les Rapports du Nord-Sud, la traite négrière et le Futa Jalo à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle », *Annales Économique, Société, Civilisations*, n° 6 (1991), p. 1416-1424, and Winston MCGOWAN, « The Establishment of Long-Distance Trade between Sierra Leone and its Hinterland, 1787-1821 », *Journal of African History*, 31 (1990), *passim*, for the impact of imperial wars on trade and specifically on the supply of slaves to coastal markets. The author is preparing a biography of Alimani Amarah (1769/70-1826), ruler of Moria from 1802 to 1826, in which the rivalry between coastal towns which characterized the period of his father, Alimani Sitafa, and the appearance of a « Mahdi » on the coast will be covered in detail.

19. Paul E. LOVEJOY and Jan S. HOGENDORN, « Slave Marketing in West Africa », in *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, edited by Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, New York, 1979, p. 231. See Gomer WILLIAMS, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque, With an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (reprint, New York, 1966), p. 621, 674, for Liverpool traders active on this coast. Perhaps the best description of commercial and political arrangements on the windward coast is found in Marion JOHNSON, « The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Economy of West Africa », in *Liverpool, The African Slave Trade and Abolition*, edited by Roger ANSTEY and P.E.H. HAIR, Bristol, 1976, p. 15-27. See Francis Edwin HYDE, *Liverpool and the Mersey: An Economic History of a Port, 1700-1970*, Newton Abbot, 1971, p. 26-36, for an excellent description of forces which drove Liverpool based traders during the eighteenth century. For more information about the sources of manufactured goods, see François VIGIER, *Change and Apathy. Liverpool and Manchester During the Industrial Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass., c1970, p. 64; David RICHARDSON, « West African Consumption Patterns and Their Influence on the Eighteenth-Century Slave Trade », in *The Uncommon Market*, edited by Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, New York, 1979, p. 308-10; James A. RAWLEY, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, New York, 1981, p. 193-218. John MATTHEW, *A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone*, London, 1799, p. 89, 154, visited the islands and coast in the mid-1780s and reported that slave rebellions had occurred here in 1785. GAMBLE, « Sandown », ms. 73r-73v, wrote that the principal coastal markets for the Fula in 1793 were the Gambia and Nunez rivers and the Morebaya and Forékariah rivers through Sumbuya and Moria countries in the Futa/Scarcies corridor.

20. GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 169-171, 191-194. Golberry also noted that the Liverpool Company had established trading arrangements with the Société du Havre and several firms in Nantes. See also Claude RIVIÈRE, « Le long des côtes de Guinée avant la phase coloniale », *Bulletin de l'Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire, série B*, XXX (1968), p. 743-44.

But it was Miles Barber and those agents of his commercial empire who had made the Iles de Los something special. The French captain Golberry visited the islands in the 1780s and provided the best description of the commercial network then operating from the islands. He noted that it was here that a shipper could acquire a knowledgeable pilot to lead him to the coast, as well as carpenters, sail makers, rope makers, joiners, smiths and even bricklayers. To protect Company interest here and at Sierra Leone, Barber kept a vessel with 24 guns stationed off the coast<sup>21</sup>. According to Golberry, Barber started building his network of trade after making an agreement with King Tom in 1754 for a factory on the islands. By the 1770s, between nine and ten rivers were linked to the Barber enterprise. When Golberry visited Barber's town on Factory Island in the 1780s, the center of the Barber empire was perhaps at its greatest extent: two barracoons for marketable slaves; a wharf to facilitate loading and unloading ships; a house for his agents (either shippers or his own factors); a shop-house for merchandise/commodities; a warehouse for wines; a magazine for gunpowder; a shop-house for making and storing rope/rigging; a shop-house for ship repair and storing shipwright supplies; a blacksmith shop where workers also made harnesses for horses and cattle; a large trading vessel permanently anchored at the wharf; and a brigantine and a large number of long boats for trading in the neighboring rivers<sup>22</sup>.

Barber's enterprise extended coastward as well. Perhaps his largest zone of coastal operations was in the Sierra Leone River where he maintained factories at Port Loko, Rokel, and Tassin Island. He also had several floating factories in this river. In the Sherbro River, he operated a floating factory, as well as a number of longboats. In the Galinas area was a land-based factory, but in the « country manner ». Floating factories characterized his operations at Cape Mount, Mesurado, Bassa, and Cape Palmas. His operations extended as far as Cape Coast. According to Golberry, between 450 and 500 Grumettas were associated with Barber's enterprise, representing nothing less than a commercial empire of significant proportions. Golberry noted that Barber had built this empire in less than thirty years, partly because he was extended to all parts of the coast, had obtained a monopoly as a supplier of trade goods, was a hard worker, and had carefully nurtured arrangements with local rulers<sup>23</sup>.

---

21. GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 170, 193.

22. [GOLBERRY] in DEBBASCH, « L'Espace du Sierra-Leone », p. 209, 211. GOLBERRY, p. 211, noted that Barber had shipwright merchandise as varied as in any European port, but fewer in numbers. George E. BROOKS, « Bolama as a prospective site for american colonization in the 1820's and 1830's », *Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa*, n° 109 (1973), p. 9n, noted that Barber's factory was destroyed by American privateers in 1788. The contradiction between this information and Golberry's account cannot be reconciled.

23. [GOLBERRY] in DEBBASCH, « L'Espace du Sierra-Leone », p. 209-11. See Walter RODNEY, *West Africa and the Atlantic Slave-Trade* (Historical Association of Tanzania Paper n° 2, 1967), p. 8-10, for a critical class-analysis of European attempts to engage coastal rulers in the slave trade and to divide rulers from subjects.

The relationship of Barber to traders in the Nunez/Pongo/Dembia complex and rivers in Sumbuya and Moria to the south of Cape Sangara is less clear in the sources. In all of these rivers, land-based factories had existed since the early 1700s. A large number of European, EurAfrican, and African traders had established functional factories along these rivers after mid-century, perhaps taking advantage of large numbers of market-bound slaves and continuing demands for firearms and gunpowder from the interior, both a consequence of Fula expansion and warfare in the Futa Jallon. In any case, Barber certainly reached an accommodation with these traders, supplying their needs in coastal trade, as well as an area for recuperation and retreat from demands of life on the coast <sup>24</sup>.

The company also sought to perpetuate its influence by sending the sons and daughters of traders, agents, and headmen from this section of coast to or near Liverpool where they were « to learn Sense and get a good Head ». Here they acquired skills in reading, writing and mathematics and returned to the African trade presumably as supporters of the company and Liverpool trade and with knowledge of trade goods produced in the Liverpool/Manchester/Birmingham region of England. Among those who were in England in 1788 from the Iles de Los were John Holeman, James Payne and Thomas Williams, the latter the son of the ruler of the Iles de Los who would be himself headman by 1793 <sup>25</sup>.

Others who visited the islands before 1800 supported Golberry's observations. Captain Samuel Gamble of the *Sandown* in 1793-94 described a vibrant commercial network linking traders in the coastal rivers with those on the islands. Ocean-worthy vessels often anchored between Crawford and Tamara islands or on the lee side of Factory Island while longboats scouted the coast for slaves and commodities. It was common for coastal traders to come to the Iles de Los where they took orders from visiting shippers. Local traders occasionally paid the cost of pilots who guided captains into their rivers. Gamble observed that traders in the rivers also engaged in « coasting », collecting slaves from distant places along the coast and bringing them to captains anchored at the Iles de Los. This practice relieved ship captains of having to search each river for available slaves. Gamble also noted that the islands were a convenient place to leave and pick up mail or to learn the latest news from England or America <sup>26</sup>. Zachary Macaulay (Governor of Sierra Leone, 1796-99) visited the islands in 1798 and specifically credited them as a good place to obtain repairs and medical treatment and to secure passage to England or America <sup>27</sup>.

---

24. See Bruce L. MOUSER, « Trade, Coasters, and Conflict in the Rio Pongo from 1790 to 1808 », *Journal of African History*, XIV, 1 (1973), 45-64.

25. Great Britain, Privy Council, Letter from John Matthews..., 16 April 1788; AFZELIUS, *Sierra Leone Journal*, p. 100.

26. GAMBLE, « Sandown », passim; SPILSBURY, *Account*, p. 25.

27. Journal of Zachary Macaulay, Huntington Library, entries dated 14 January 1798, and 3 March 1798.

Whatever the advantages linked to trade from the Iles de Los, there also could be disadvantages. The fact that the islands were in the major shipping lanes meant that many captains stopped there on their way to Africa or from Africa, bringing with them whatever disease was prevalent at their last ports-of-call. Diseases seemed to spread rapidly, especially during peak periods of trade<sup>28</sup>. Another disadvantage, especially to the novice ship captain, was the unscrupulous nature of some traders who took advantage of shippers' ignorance about local rules of trade. Such was the case when Captain Eddy of the sloop *Dolphin*, a Rhode Island vessel, made his maiden voyage to the Iles de Los in 1795. Eddy advanced trade goods to William Cleveland from the Sherbro River near Sierra Leone who contracted to provide a cargo of slaves within a specified time. Meanwhile, Eddy remained anchored at the Iles de Los. One deadline passed, and then another. Probably not in good shape to begin with, the *Dolphin* began to deteriorate. After nearly a year of waiting, a jury declared the *Dolphin* unseaworthy, and the owners never did collect their cargo of slaves<sup>29</sup>.

Another incentive for a successful bulking center on these islands was the presence of a friendly landlord who sometimes engaged in trade as well. There is no known recorded agreement between the company and a landlord, but patterns prevailing along the coast and later on the islands suggest that such a relationship was indeed in place. The local headmen were King Tom in 1754, George Williams in 1788, and Thomas Williams by 1793. The particular arrangement between landlords and outsiders/strangers most certainly specified a rent to be paid for land use and a specified duty paid on goods imported and exported through the factories. The rights and privileges of traders, including a list of villages open to his enterprise, were clearly designated. The landlord would generally promise to protect his stranger from attack, secure merchandise for heirs in case of untimely death, and guarantee debts accumulated by those under the landlord's protection. In return, the stranger agreed to provide arms to his landlord in time of war and refrain from engaging in local politics. Central to this relationship was the understanding that strangers would not accumulate indigenous rights or challenge the existing system. Such a system must have been in place by 1794, for Gamble complained of the anchorage duty charged him off Tamara. Such a payment, on the other hand, resolved the question of status for outsiders who, once having paid the duty, acquired a landlord's protection<sup>30</sup>.

---

28. ELLIS, *West African Islands*, p. 88-91.

29. MOUSER, « Voyage », passim.

30. GAMBLE, « Sandown », ms. 38r-39r; « Journal of a Voyage from Sierra Leone to the River Kisi Kisi in the Schooner Experiment of Sierra Leone, February 1805, perform'd by Alex.r Smith; by Order of Governor Day », Sierra Leone Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago, University Library (hereafter cited as Smith 1805), entry dated 5 April 1805. See Bruce L. MOUSER, « Accommodation and Assimilation in the Landlord-Stranger Relationship », in *West African Culture Dynamics*, ed. by B. K. Schwartz, Jr., and Raymond E. Dumett, The Hague, 1980, p. 495-

The particular relationship of landlords to strangers, however finitely drawn on paper or orally stated, could always be in doubt because of frequently ambiguous definitions of ownership: Who was the rightful owner of the land? Traders on the Iles de Los found themselves in such a dispute in 1805. Although Thomas Williams, a Baga, exercised nominal authority over the islands, his landlord was Boye Demba who ruled all Baga along this coast and « towards » the islands. Boye Demba traced his claim to the Baga ruler Tomboli of Kaporo who had married a daughter to Sumba Tumani Dumbuya, who was not Baga but Susu. To this union were born three sons, Boye Demba, Kanta, and Sangara. Each was given a section of the coast, but the eldest, Boye Demba, held ultimate jurisdiction over the others, including their lands<sup>31</sup>. As a result of the wars of Morian expansion which James Penny described from the Forékariah area in the 1770s and 1780s, at least three groups claimed the islands at the turn of the century. Boye Demba claimed the islands as traditionally Baga territory. Mori Kanu of Tenéné, a Mandingo, asserted that during the wars of expansion he had acquired title to all coastal and salt producing area between the Iles de Los and the Sierra Leone River, an area of nearly a hundred fifty kilometers<sup>32</sup>. Fendan Modu Dumbuya (of the same family which married the earlier Baga ruler of Kaporo) maintained that he had purchased the lands between Matacong Island and the Iles de Los from Mori Kanu. As the dispute over ownership of the islands and inevitably control of commerce along this coast escalated, the position of traders on the islands and their arrangements with landlords became increasingly tenuous. A significant blow to the Liverpool group (Barber had left the trade by the early 1790s, and H. Jackson and Richard Horrock had obtained his property) may have been a raid which Mori Kanu launched against the islands during the 1804-05 trading season during which he « seized and sold a number of free people, destroyed their towns, &c. and after extorting money

---

514. In the case where Barber outlived two rulers, a separate landlord/stranger agreement would have required with each ruler. Normally agreements continued only as long as both parties lived. AFZELIUS, in *Sierra Leone Journal*, p. 137-38, mentioned a King Kanta (Contar) who received payment of 100 bars each from resident traders and one bar for each ship anchored at Factory Island. Kanta may have been Fendan Modu's representative on the island, for Contaar was both a subsection of the Dumbuya family and a section of Bereira town on the coast. GAMBLE, « Sandown », ms. 43r, also noted with increasing frequency in 1793-1794, that there was a burial charge of 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> bars for each whiteperson who died in the Rio Nunez. Twenty years later, Melchoir Renner, a missionary, reported (CA1/E4/127, Renner to Pratt, Bashia. [20 June 1815], Church Missionary Society Archives) that annual rent on the Iles de Los was 100 bars, exclusive of the cost of building and maintaining of structures. For a good description of arrangements between landlords and strangers in 1806, see CA1/E1/116c, Hartwig Journal [Susu Country], entry dated 14 April 1806, Church Missionary Society Archives.

31. Mahawa BANGURA, « Contribution à l'histoire des Sosoe du xv<sup>e</sup> siècle », *Mémoire de diplôme de fin d'études supérieures*, 1971-72 (Institut polytechnique Gamal Abdel Nasser, Conakry), p. 161-165.

32. SMITH, 1805. 27 March 1805; AFZELIUS, *Sierra Leone Journal*, p. 138.

from all the white traders carried his arms » against Fendan Modu Dumbuya of Wonkapong<sup>33</sup>.

While this ownership problem may have sealed the fate of Liverpool activities on the island, other factors had been building which contributed to their demise. A French retreat from the West Indies during the years of the Revolution and of European wars which followed it meant that the comparative risks to Liverpool merchants of trading in West Africa or in the Americas changed substantially. Profits from the African trade could be as high as five hundred percent, but seizure during warfare could mean complete losses. Comparable risks did not exist in the America trade. The 1793 Financial crisis and the Commodities crisis of 1797, moreover, weakened long-term attachments to the African trade. But perhaps of even greater importance to Liverpool outfitters was increasing sentiment in England to end slave trading. All of these factors changed the mood of Liverpool merchants who now shifted to less risk prone trades in the Americas<sup>34</sup>.

Those characteristics which made the Iles de Los so well suited for a bulking center in the slave trade were precisely those, however, which brought the end of the islands' use for continued slaving in the nineteenth century. In the decade after 1808, when slave trading became illegal for American and British subjects, slavers tried unsuccessfully to rebuild the islands to their former position in the coastal slave trade. But that which appealed to slavers also attracted the attention of those who opposed it, especially British governors who watched intently from Freetown, located at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River. Fresh and good water at Tamara, Factory, and Crawford islands continued to attract ships captains, especially officers of naval men-of-war of Britain, France, and the United States and made the islands a necessary port-of-call. Moreover, safe anchorages were still scarce commodities along this coast. As more and more shippers arrived in search of African commodities, the islands continued to serve as an important staging area, following many commercial patterns established in earlier times, but transformed by the new character of goods sought on the coast and by the presence of aggressive British power at Sierra Leone<sup>35</sup>. It was, after all, still a good place to obtain a pilot and avoid the unhealthy climate of coastal rivers.

Bruce L. MOUSER

---

33. SMITH, 1805, 1 April 1805. See also Bruce L. MOUSER, ed., *Journal of James Watt: Expedition to Timbo, Capital of the Fula Empire in 1794*, Madison, African Studies Program paper, 1994, p. XIII, for a discussion of Jackson and Horrock.

34. HYDE, *Liverpool and the Mersey*, p. 33-36; B. K. DRAKE, « The Liverpool-African Voyage c. 1790-1807: Commercial Problems », in *Liverpool, The African Slave Trade and Abolition*, edited by Roger Anstey and P.E.H. Hair, Bristol, 1976; James WALVIN, « The Public Campaign in England Against Slavery, 1787-1834 », in *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, edited by David Eltis and James Walvin, Madison, 1981, p. 67.

35. Odile GOERG, « Deux modalités d'adaptation à l'abolition de la traite atlantique : le Rio Nunez et le Rio Pongo (actuelle Guinée) » in *De la traite à l'esclavage*, edited by Serge Daget, Paris, 1988, p. 558.

Le professeur Jean DEVISSE, président d'honneur de la Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, nous a quittés au mois d'août 1996. Jean Devisse a joué un rôle capital dans l'essor des études d'archéologie et d'histoire africaine ainsi que dans le renouveau de la Société et de la *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*.

En décembre 1995, il adressait une lettre au comité de rédaction de notre revue qui prouvait que, dans sa retraite, il suivait avec beaucoup d'attention notre publication.

Dans un prochain numéro, la *Revue* publiera un hommage à Jean Devisse.



here at the turn of the century. Stretching northeastward from Crawford for three kilometers was a shoal or mud flat, called Crawford Flats by early sailors. Because the flats made the channel between Crawford and Factory islands dangerous even during a high tide, factories tended to be located on the western side of Crawford Island and the leeward side of Factory Island <sup>6</sup>.

Alfred Ellis visited the Iles de Los in the 1880s and left a romanticized description of Factory Island, perhaps little different from how it appeared to others in the heyday of the slave trade:

Leaving the factory [Barber's, Kassa] to the left, you proceed by a narrow path, much encumbered with rocks, up the hill, where you find another track following the high ground which forms, as it were, the backbone of the island. On either side is a grove of palms, the feathered fronds of which, arching over towards each other, form an umbrageous roof, while rare ferns spring out from the interstices of the trunks. A shrub, with a flower something like verbena, fringes the path with a thick border; and, beyond the palm groves, a dense growth of tall underwood, sparsely studded with scarlet and white flowers, shuts in the view. A few steps to the brow of the hill, and you look down upon the calm waters of the inner basin, barely rippling against the dull red rocks, with the wooded knoll of Crawford Island in the center. A number of white cranes are standing at the water's edge steadfastly regarding their feet, each with the air of an old gentleman, with his hands folded under his coat-tails, looking down in a fit of deep mental abstraction; and a couple of fish-hawks are circling overhead, on the look-out to rob some successful gull or pelican of his finny prey <sup>7</sup>.

But there was more than good anchorages or a pleasant view to attract ship captains and resident traders to these islands. Early travelers noted that abundant food supplies were available on the islands. Fish and turtle catches were good, and wild pigs apparently were plentiful still in the eighteenth century. The soil was rich and fertile, with rice, cassava, pumpkin (squash), and groundnuts as principal crops of the indigenous Baga or as goods easily obtained on the island. The island peoples also raised milk cows, beef cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry which they sold to visiting shippers. The islands were also known as a source for bananas, oranges and lemons, and for sea onions which possessed special medicinal properties <sup>8</sup>. Another advantage was the presence of building stone for

---

5. CORRY, *Observations*, p. 107; BOYLE, *Medico-Historical Account*, p. 13; *Description nautique de la Côte d'Afrique depuis le Cap Blanc jusqu'au Cap Formose*, Paris, 1814, p. 25-27. ROUSSIN, « *Mémoire sur la navigation* », par. I, p. 274, noted that the correct name for Factory was « l'île de Loss » and Crawford also was called « l'île Française ». The African Pilot, p. 87, noted that beef, fowl, and plantain could easily be purchased at the factories on Crawford. AFZELIUS, *Sierra Leone Journal*, p. 115, 134-35, noted that in 1796, traders on Crawford raised cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs.

6. The African Pilot, p. 86.

7. Alfred Burdon ELLIS, *West African Islands*, London, 1885, p. 92-93.

8. GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 170; [GOLBERRY] in DEBBASCH, « *L'espace du Sierra-Leone* », p. 209-10, reported « morphil »; BOYLE, *Medico-Historical Account*, p. 14; ROUSSIN, « *Mémoire sur la navigation* », par. I, p. 2768. The African Pilot, p. 87, reported that « Mr. Campbell, an English

constructing factory buildings strong enough to withstand fire, storm and perhaps raids. Available timber also made the islands an ideal place to obtain repairs for wooden-bottomed vessels which, in addition to regular maintenance, occasionally needed to have planks replaced. The gentle shoreline of Factory Island was particularly well-suited for careening vessels on shore so that such repairs could be made<sup>9</sup>. Fresh water could be obtained on Factory, Tamara, and Crawford islands. *The African Pilot*, issued by the Admiralty in 1856 as a handbook for sailors, advised that safe water could be obtained from Tamara. Commander Thomas Miller of HM Sloop *Ranger* praised the islands in 1850: « I found on Factory Island the best water on the whole of the West Coast of Africa »<sup>10</sup>. Another natural advantage was an absence of swamps and mosquito breeding areas. Although the islands were but a few kilometers from coastal mangrove areas, resident traders had cleared a large section of central Factory Island for agriculture, and with the trees removed, steady sea breezes reduced the number of mosquitos and helped to insure a healthier climate. Indeed, traders and others from the adjoining coast frequently came to the islands to recuperate from illnesses<sup>11</sup>. In an area which, as Hutchinson noted in 1858, always possessed « two [Sierra Leone] governors —one going out living and the other coming home dying », the Iles de Los were a welcome exception to that rule<sup>12</sup>.

---

merchant, cleared 100 acres of Factory Island for cultivation of the ground-nut, in 1847, and that the natives from the adjacent shore flocked to him for employment ». George BROOKS, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630*, Boulder, 1993, p. 278-79, briefly mentioned that Baga had grown rice on the islands in the fifteenth century and that a permanent settlement was located here.

9. GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 171; BOYLE, *Medico-Historical Account*, p. 13. See Tommy T. HAMM, « The American Slave Trade With Africa, 1620-1807 » (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1975), p. 63, 143, and MOUSER, « The Voyage of the Good Sloop Dolphin », p. 258-59, for frequency of such repairs.

10. *The African Pilot*, p. 87; BOYLE, *Medico-Historical Account*, p. 13-17; GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 170.

11. BOYLE, *Medico-Historical Account*, p. 16; GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 170; Substance of the Report of the Directors of the Sierra Leone Company to the General Court... 1795, London, 1795, p. 137; George BROOKS, *Yankee Traders, Old Coasters and African Middlemen*, Boston, 1971, p. 61; J.P.L. DURAND, *A Voyage to Senegal*, London, 1806, p. 82; AFZELIUS, *Sierra Leone Journal*, p. 100. BELCHER, « Extracts », p. 278, advised captains that the islands would be a good place to go for « vessels with much sickness » but warned that the islands also were known to be where « cataracts in the eye » were prevalent among the « natives ». See Dr. SIMON, « L'Étude médicale des rivières du sud du Sénégal : Notes médicales sur le poste de Benty [Melakori] », *Archives de médecine et de pharmacie navales*, III, 1887, p. 81-98, and Paul VIGNÉ, « Quelques mots sur la climatologie des rivières du Sud, au point de vue pratique », *Revue de géographie commerciale*, Société de géographie commerciale de Bordeaux, 1888, p. 377-380, for diseases prevalent among the coastal rivers. The absence of mosquitos and diseases which flourished on the coast also made the islands an ideal place for slaver captains to anchor and receive consignments of slaves from the neighbouring rivers. Slaves, in the hold of a ship, were likely to survive longer at the Iles de Los than at any place along this coast. GAMBLE, « Sandown », ms. 40v, noted that it was common practice in 1793 to smoke the inside of houses in order to dry timbers and remove sickness and to clear bushes away from houses as a way to increase air circulation and improve health.

12. T.J. HUTCHINSON, *Impressions of Western Africa*, London, 1858, p. 36.

the physical attractions and advantages of the islands were made even more appealing by the patterns of factory-oriented commerce which had developed all along the coast and in particular between traders on the islands and those carrying trade to the neighboring rivers. In the late eighteenth century, a typical factory was not a place where goods were manufactured but was where a factor, or agent of another, carried out his business. The size of a factory varied greatly depending upon the wealth of the trader, his volume of business, the peculiarities of his relationship with his landlord, and nature of his business as retailer, wholesaler, or perhaps both. Over time, factories along this coast took basically two standard forms: land-based and floating. In land-based factories, the walls of the main shop-house were generally made of sundried-mud blocks or stone, and the building was capped with a wooden gabled frame covered by grasses laid up similar to thatch. The walls were often one and a half stories high, with the loft serving as residence for the trader and storage for trade goods. The ground floor served as a store where the trader kept African products and imported goods. Such a structure (fig. 1) was clearly evident in a 1793-94 line-drawing of the principal town on Factory Island. That drawing, however, included a traditional European-styled two-storied building (fig. 2) which had the appearance of a warehouse or residence and a large two-plus-storied building (with Crownsnest) (fig. 3), the likely headquarters of the factory itself<sup>13</sup>. A factory customarily had a large enclosed courtyard where African traders might rest, display products, and conduct bargaining sessions. During the heyday of the slave trade, a barracoon where slaves destined to be sold were held would be located nearby. Other buildings in the 1793-94 drawing included open-sided structures which offered protection from the elements, but little security for trade goods. These may have been part of the factory's barracoon. In addition to these requirements, there also would have been housing for the factory's laborers, storage sheds to hold goods anticipating African, European, or American buyers, and houses for wives and children. Traders on occasion owned docks, wharfs, or covered loading areas, again depending on wealth, volume of trade, and agreements with landlords<sup>14</sup>.

Floating factories were far different. Such factories were composed of ships (perhaps no longer seaworthy) anchored at ports of friendly landlords along the coast. Such factories generally did not stock large quantities of trade goods and served instead as outposts of larger factories located elsewhere along the coast. Certainly, large numbers of market-bound slaves could not be secured at a floating factory. Such factories, however, provided merchants with the advantages of convenience, security for merchandise, mobility to markets that developed or

---

13. GAMBLE, « Sandown », ms. 118.

14. GAMBLE, « Sandown », ms. 118; Eugene STOCK, *History of the Church Missionary Society*, London, 1899, I, p. 134; GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 170, reported residences on the Iles de Los as « commodious and wholesome ». See also Bruce MOUSER, « Landlords-Strangers: A Process of Accommodation and Assimilation », *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8, 1975, p. 425-440.

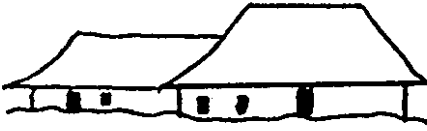


Fig. 1

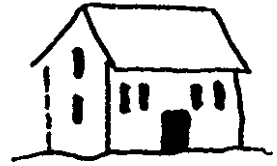


Fig. 2

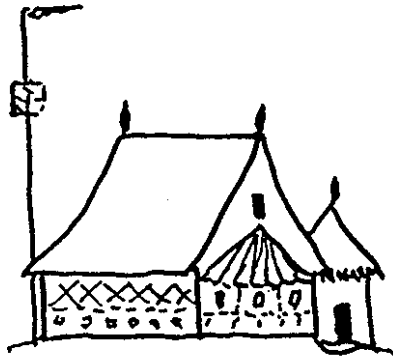


Fig. 3

changed, and mobility away from contentious areas where circumstances might render a stationary factory a casualty or booty of war <sup>15</sup>.

The most complete description of the slave trading system on the *Iles de Los* dates from the 1770-1790 period, a time when Liverpool traders dominated commerce <sup>16</sup>. What had drawn Liverpool merchants to these islands in the first place were ready supplies of ivory, hides, beeswax, ebony, palm oil, malaguetta peppers, camwood (for cloth dyeing), gum resin, gold dust, and especially slaves, all of which were brought from coastal rivers <sup>17</sup>. James Penny of Liverpool lived in the Forékariah area from 1768 to 1770, and he described the turmoil and commercial opportunities there which accompanied religious and commercial rivalry among African elites along this coast and wars fought to establish a hierarchy of trading and politically important towns, all linked to the newly

15. The only description of floating factories along this coast is in [GOLBERRY] in DEBBASCH, «L'Espace du Sierra-Leone», p. 209-12.

16. British Museum, Mss. Eg. 1162 a, «Papers on African Trade by J[ohn] Roberts, 1779», p. 258, reported 1640 slaves shipped from the *Iles de Los* on board Liverpool vessels in 1754 alone.

17. J. A. CARNES, *Journal of a Voyage From Boston to the West Coast of Africa*, Boston, 1852, p. 63; GOLBERRY, *Travels*, p. 163; [GOLBERRY] in DEBBASCH, «L'Espace du Sierra-Leone», p. 210.