

THE ROLE OF “BROKERS” IN THE DUTCH SLAVE TRADE IN MADAGASCAR IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY¹

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The European slave trade in Madagascar in the eighteenth century was the theatre of an important clash of cultures where Malagasy brokers played an important role in overseeing the commercial exchanges between the two parties. In this unpredictable environment, both Dutch merchants and Malagasy sovereigns relied on these intermediaries who not only served as interpreters, but also as mediators in any conflicts that might arise during their stay. Over the years their position, though strongly linked to the political power of the Sakalava sovereign, proved to be one of independence and personal benefit, while trying to satisfy both parties.

keywords: Madagascar, Slave Trade, Dutch East India Company (VOC), intermediaries/brokers, Sakavala

Summer 1694: The Dutch East India Company² ships *Standvastigheid* and *Tamboer* are anchored on the northwest coast of Madagascar, trading slaves. The Dutch merchants are complaining about a certain English-speaking deputy of the Malagasy king named “Lou Lou” who is defined as “the king’s snitch and a rascal [...] he is full of gossip and cunning subterfuges [but] His Majesty had a high esteem for him and for this reason we stayed friends.”³ They meet him again two years later on the ship *Soldaat* and he is qualified as “a small, very agitated little man, not the most ignorant, and very irritable.”⁴ In 1699, on the ship *Peter & Paul*, the Dutch encounter the same intermediary and they fear difficult communications with this “little guy with a big mouth.” However, upon promising him gifts, Lou Lou ensures the friendship of the king’s entourage. At the end of their stay, the VOC merchants qualify him as “a useful trading tool, which we can influence [...], without his aid it would not have been possible to secure this many slaves.”⁵

The previous paragraph illustrates the important role of intermediaries in the slave trade, as both the Malagasy sovereign and the VOC officers tried to overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers that they had to face in trade in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, at a time when they already had to cope with the ever-changing political and economic situation in Madagascar. In this paper, we argue that the Malagasy intermediaries were instrumental in the success of these commercial operations. In addition, although loyal subjects of their king, these intermediaries were far from tools in the hands of the sovereign. Instead, they worked independently of both the Malagasy sovereign and the Dutch merchants, trying to exploit their unique position.

As a framework for this research, we chose the Sakalava⁶ Kingdom of Boina, as it was the most important slave-exporting Malagasy community for most of the period and one for which there is relatively abundant source material, dozens of VOC ship’s logs of slaving expeditions.⁷ Although these mostly cover the period between 1672 and 1779, we have limited ourselves roughly from 1730 to 1770, for practical reasons concerning the availability of sources from different

² Hereafter referred to as VOC (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*). This commercial multinational was founded in 1602 and it held the monopoly on all Dutch trade east of the Cape of Good Hope until its dissolution in 1799.

³ Brons, *Een kort berigt wegens den quaden uijtslag den slavenhandeling aen’t Eijlant Madagascar*, 14 Jan 1695. Nationaal Archief [NA], VOC 1560, without folio.

⁴ Chalumeau, 2004, pp. 8–9.

⁵ Ship’s logbook of the *Peter & Paul*, 1699. NA, VOC 4043, f. 1106.

⁶ At the end of the seventeenth century, the Sakalava community was split into two different branches: The Kingdom of Menabe and the Kingdom of Boina. In this article, the term “Sakalava” always refers to the latter.

⁷ Conserved at the *Nationaal Archief* in The Hague (Netherlands) and the Western Cape Archives in Cape Town (South Africa)

archival institutions, and the opportunity to consider the continuity of the brokers' presence. We have concentrated primarily on Dutch VOC sources, though we have also studied French and English documents, in particular for specific comparisons with other Malagasy slave-exporting regions.

The VOC sources on Madagascar have only been partially exploited, mainly by scholars investigating one specific region (such as the Dutch Cape Colony),⁸ or by researchers studying the Indian Ocean region in a larger context.⁹ Following James C. Armstrong's article about the European slave trade in Madagascar, things came to a standstill and the island has been virtually ignored by VOC historians, as the slave trade within its empire has only recently been reassessed.¹⁰ Furthermore, although some ship's logs have been the subject of detailed publication, they fail to fully explain the difficulties surrounding trade, which really was a clash of different cultures and interests.¹¹ Only Andrew Alexander has studied Dutch-Malagasy trading in greater detail, but his research is limited to one slaving expedition in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹²

Therefore, no previous scientific work on the slave trade in Madagascar has studied the role of Malagasy intermediaries in detail. Despite the fact that we only know as much about these intermediaries as the European traders were willing to write down, Dutch sources are surprisingly detailed, whereas the French and the English often omitted their existence.

Accordingly, the VOC ship's logs are practically the only useful source and one might be sceptical as to whether these documents provide enough detail for us to analyse the role the intermediaries played in the slave trade.¹³ Nonetheless, we think that they offer sufficient information to explain the role of a broker between Dutch traders and the Sakalava sovereign. Further, by studying the sources carefully and cross referencing them, we will not only be able to understand the dynamics of the slave trade, but also the motivations of these intermediaries.

The Dutch ship's logs are reliable contemporary sources of information about trade and have been used by other specialists in eighteenth-century Madagascar, such as Stephen Ellis. For this period, we often possess multiple reports of the same voyage, as it was essential for the VOC to provide the next expedition with

⁸ Worden, 1985; Shell, 1994.

⁹ Barendse, 2002, 2009.

¹⁰ Armstrong, 1983. On the slave trade and slavery in the VOC: Vink, 2003; Van Rossum, 2015.

¹¹ Chamuleau, 2004; Westra & Armstrong, 2006. Sleight and Westra (2013, pp. 30–31) indicate the importance of brokers trade.

¹² Alexander, 2007.

¹³ Using only English and French sources, Jane Hooper (2010, p. 114) confirms in her thesis that we know very little about these intermediaries, especially about their role in coastal communities, and that we only know they worked for the local sovereign.

valuable information about the political and economic situation in Boeny Bay and Bombetoka Bay. This is further emphasized by the fact that we often have different testimonies about the same intermediaries. Of course, by limiting ourselves exclusively to European sources, we will only have one side of the story. We should, however, emphasise the complete absence of Malagasy sources for the early modern age, especially about the intermediaries we want to study, as they are not mentioned in the *sorabes*, or any oral traditions.¹⁴ Therefore, we have no other choice but to rely on VOC sources if we want to learn more about this period.

The use of temporary local intermediaries was relatively rare in the VOC world, and we find only a few comparisons with other parts of its empire, for example with the Chinese, who were brokers in Batavia and large parts of Southeast Asia.¹⁵ At the same time, local “ethnic headmen” served as middlemen and interpreters in the event of the arrival of foreign Dutch dignitaries in the capital of the VOC Empire, when gifts were exchanged and gun and cannon shots were fired as they entered the castle.¹⁶ The Dutch presence in Madagascar, however, bore more resemblance to their first encounters in the Indian Ocean region at the beginning of the seventeenth century. At that time, Blussé notes, the Dutch had to play by the local rules, as they were still “transitory foreign traders” before becoming colonial rulers. On the island of Java for instance, they had to pay regular tributes to the Sultan of Banten for decades, which only ended in the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁷ In this light, the Dutch trading in Madagascar can be seen as unique in VOC history, and can best be compared with the transatlantic slave trade at the independent African ports. We will make frequent use of the West African example in our research, while taking into account some fundamental differences, such as a permanent European presence protected by fortresses and often with interpreters. This was not the case in Madagascar.¹⁸

A final remark has to be made regarding the choice of the words “broker” and “intermediary” in this article. In the original documents, the intermediaries that the Dutch had to deal with were named in different ways: *tolk*, *geleijdsman*,

¹⁴ *Sorabe* are texts of a religious nature from the southwest region written in Arabic script. Oral traditions surrounding the Sakalava of Boina monarchy were collected by Frenchmen Vincent Noël and Charles Guillaïn in the 1840s.

¹⁵ Blussé, 1986, p. 49.

¹⁶ Blussé, 2000, pp. 29–30.

¹⁷ Blussé, 2000, p. 28.

¹⁸ Crété, 1989, p. 90.

makelaar, *strandwachter*, or even *lieveling*.¹⁹ The differences between the meanings of these titles, given by the Dutch, seem to be very subtle, and it is difficult to know their exact place in Malagasy society. The descriptions given by historians such as Kuitenbrouwer, who identifies the presence of middlemen in Dutch Java in the nineteenth century, also do not cover their Malagasy counterparts.²⁰ For the sake of consistency, we do not consider the intermediary or broker as a third party who offers intermediation services between two parties (as he is formally part of one) nor the middleman we encounter in the transatlantic slave trade (as he does not provide slaves).²¹ Although verbal communication is important, they cannot be considered interpreters, but more as mediators in trade as they linked up different worlds and, in the words of Philip Havik and Toby Green, “made connections where there had been none” together with “having a foot in both worlds.”²²

Unfortunately, historians have focused less on brokers in the pre-colonial era, which explains the difficulties surrounding the term, especially regarding the phenomenon in a region where research on the subject is practically nonexistent.²³ Accordingly, this article cannot be placed either in the discovery phase when the first contacts were made or in a colonial context as was the case with most European possessions on the Indian subcontinent, in Insulinidia, and even in West Africa where the need for interpreters also existed. This study must instead be considered a first attempt to unravel the role that these crucial mediators played in the slave trade. Before we discuss their position in greater detail, we will consider the context of our research.

VOC in the Indian Ocean region and the slave trade

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch presence in the Indian Ocean region was mostly concentrated in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian subcontinent. On the route to these commercially important regions, the VOC decided to establish “refreshment stations” for her Indiamen going from and to Europe. In 1639, the company occupied the inhabited island of Mauritius, and Cape Town was founded in 1652. Labour-intensive agriculture was the

¹⁹ In general we can attest that until the 1740s, the Dutch always speak of *tolken* (interpreters), when describing the Malagasy intermediaries. However, from the 1750s onwards, the term *makelaars* (brokers), is more and more used in order to refer to these people, that is to say, the officials that oversee trading activities in the vicinity of the shore. It is not clear what exactly triggered this change, because their role appears unchanged over time.

²⁰ Kuitenbrouwer, 1982, pp. 99–101.

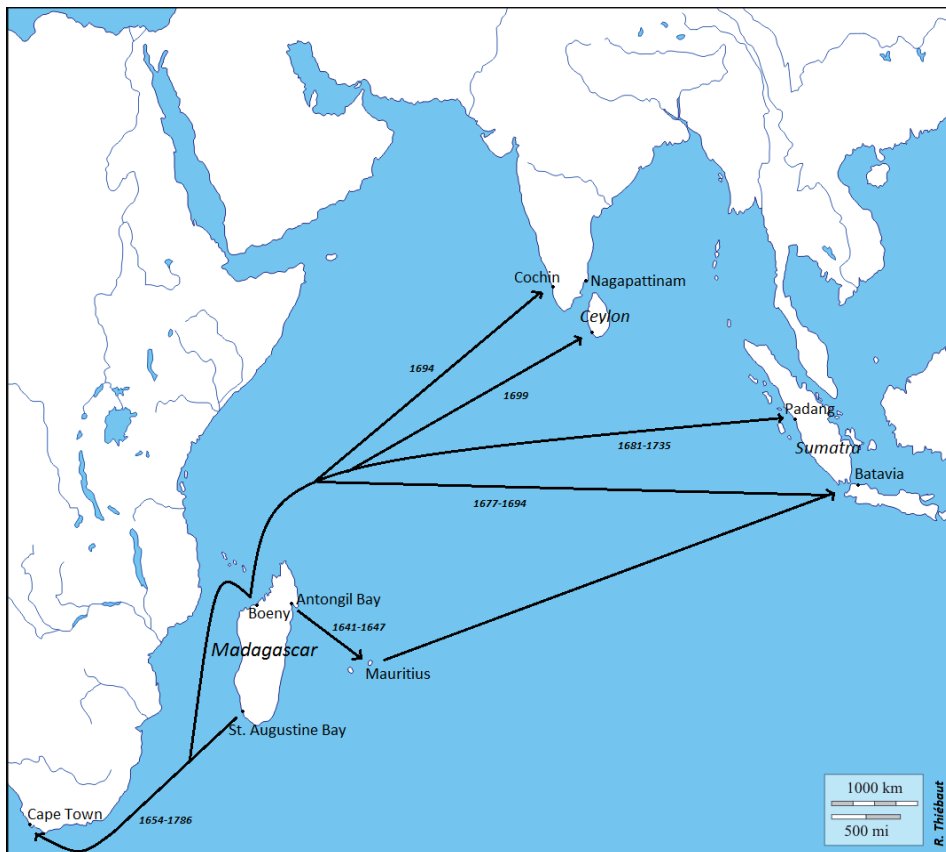
²¹ Klein, 1999, p. 120.

²² Havik & Green, 2012, pp. 2–3, p. 8.

²³ Havik & Green, 2012, pp. 5–6.

most important economic development in these colonies. In order to respond to workforce demands, construct fortresses and undertake other heavy work, the Dutch relied mostly on slave labour.²⁴ This demand, combined with the low birth rate and frequent epidemics, meant that the Dutch were continuously forced to launch new slaving expeditions.²⁵ The proximity of Madagascar, and its reputation of being the “slaving grounds” for Arab and Swahili merchants, meant that it formed the most important slaving reserve for the VOC during this period.²⁶ Between 1642 and 1786, about ninety slaving expeditions were organised to the island of Madagascar, while other European nations, including the English and the French, also traded Malagasy captives to their Indian Ocean possessions and beyond.²⁷

Map of the known VOC Madagascar slaving routes



²⁴ One might even talk about true “slave societies,” Vink, 2003, p. 135.

²⁵ Allen, 2015, pp. 12–13.

²⁶ Vernet, 2009, pp. 39–41.

²⁷ Shell, n.d.; Allen, 2015.

Because of its centuries-old link with the Arab and Swahili worlds, the north-west coast of Madagascar had several commercially active ports.²⁸ From the middle of the seventeenth century, Boeny Bay took prominence over the other bays. When the first Dutch slaving ship arrived there in 1672, they found the slave trade already firmly established by the Antalaotra community.²⁹ Upon arrival, the Dutch made use of existing slave trading networks, as happened on the West African coast.³⁰ This practice continued when a Sakalava community from the south conquered these ports and founded the powerful and centralized kingdom of Boina in the 1680s.³¹ The Dutch trade remained relatively regular until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the presence of pirates halted further expeditions for nearly thirty years. From 1732 to 1779, slaving expeditions resumed, but often with intervals of several years, and almost always concentrated on the northwest coast.³² The fierce competition from other slave traders and the declining political power of the Sakalava in the 1750s resulted in the VOC starting to concentrate on other Malagasy regions in order to get their hands on slaves. Even the East African coast began to attract their attention, with low prices and a great abundance of captives.³³ The last Dutch expedition to the Malagasy coast took place in 1786.

Madagascar with some commercially active ports in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries



²⁸ Campbell, 2005, p. 51.

²⁹ A Swahilised merchant community permanently established in the northwestern ports of Madagascar. They had important trade links with the Comoros, Swahili coast and Arabian Peninsula. Rantoandro, 1983, pp. 199–200.

³⁰ Klein, 1999, pp. 105–106.

³¹ Kneitz, 2014.

³² Sanchez, 2013, p. 172, 178.

³³ Ross, 1986.

The first contacts and Dutch interpreters

During trade between the Europeans and the Malagasy, there was a practical need to overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers in the months they had to interact with each other. When the first Dutch arrived in Madagascar in 1596, they landed at Antongil Bay and St. Augustine Bay. In these commercially peripheral regions, the peaceful exchange of hostages was a careful precaution to ensure the safety of Dutch and Malagasy alike, a practice that continued until the end of the seventeenth century.³⁴ In their communications with local inhabitants, they were primarily dependent on sign language.³⁵ After kidnapping two boys on the west coast, the Dutch were able to communicate with the local inhabitants when they arrived at the other side of the island.³⁶ It is unclear if these Malagasy served as interpreters on subsequent voyages. On their second expedition in 1598, the Dutch were accompanied by a certain Abdul “who understands something of this [Malagasy] language.”³⁷

As Madagascar only played a secondary role in the VOC commercial network, there was little incentive to overcome the existing language barrier.³⁸ As early as 1603, Frederik de Houtman had created a Malagasy-Dutch dictionary,³⁹ although no trace of its use by the VOC can be found. In fact, ship’s captains considered themselves lucky when they encountered shipwrecked Europeans such as Dutchman Peter in 1618, who lived among the Malagasy and could act as an interpreter during their sporadic contacts.⁴⁰ These accidental castaways were the first intermediaries. It was only with the establishment of regular trading contacts in the middle of the seventeenth century that translation became an issue that the Cape authorities wanted to overcome, as they saw that all the slaving expeditions in the 1660s ended in failure.⁴¹ It was therefore decided to take an interpreter, a female slave called Anna, on the first Dutch slaving voyage to the northwest coast in 1672.⁴²

³⁴ Ship’s journal of the *Voorhout*, 1677. NA, VOC 4013, f. 974. In certain regions, this continued well into the eighteenth century: Ship’s journal of the *Elisabeth*, 1742. AN, 4JJ/74, p. 9.

³⁵ Mollema, 1935, p. 137, 191.

³⁶ Mollema, 1935, pp. 173–174.

³⁷ Keuning, 1942, pp. 28–31. Abdul seems to have been a slave from Banten who was taken from the first voyage back to Holland. He served as a translator who “speaks good Portuguese, good Javanese and good Malay.” Bertrand, 2011, pp. 226–227.

³⁸ They “borrowed” the slave trade regulations from the WIC (Dutch West India Company) active in West Africa in the same period, as this trade resembled the transatlantic slave trade: Van Dam, 1930, 1.2, pp. 668–670.

³⁹ *Spraecck ende woordboek inde Maleysche ende Madagaskarsche talen, met vele Arabische ende Turcsche woorden*.

⁴⁰ Flacourt, 2007 [1661], pp. 149–150.

⁴¹ Five ships were sent to Madagascar in the 1660s, to return with only about a dozen captives.

⁴² Instructions [of the *Pijl*], 7 Oct 1672. NA, VOC 4008, f. 667–668. Anna was most probably a Malagasy taken on a previous slaving expedition. Her role was to act as a translator and to help Dutch merchants with local customs.

One year later, the Dutch captured the English slave vessel *Joanna Catherina*, which came from Madagascar with a certain Simon d’Arabier on board, who served as a translator for the Arab and Malagasy languages.⁴³ He was subsequently employed on the *Voorhout* in 1676, during which Simon was “very apt to treat with the local inhabitants.”⁴⁴ The commercial success of the expedition, and the positive feedback he received from the ship’s officers, encouraged the Cape authorities to employ Simon as an interpreter on three subsequent voyages before his death in 1683.⁴⁵ By then, the important influx of Malagasy slaves at Cape Colony from previous expeditions meant that “the loss of the deceased interpreter Simon the Arab could be adequately compensated with the Malagasy slaves present here, who speak our Dutch language fairly well.”⁴⁶ As a consequence, on most slaving expeditions, a Malagasy slave from the Cape served as an interpreter.⁴⁷

As the Dutch merchants mourned the loss of their precious interpreter, a revolution swept through the northwest coast of Madagascar, shifting political power from the Antalaotra community into the hands of the Sakalava sovereign Andriamandisoarivo (c. 1660–1702). He took control of the foreign slave trade at a time when a regular network with the Cape Colony was firmly in place. From this time onward, intermediaries assisting European traders became a normal presence, at least in Boeny Bay. This development was essential to the VOC’s ability to trade as “dealing with the indigenous population [of Madagascar] required some experience and a sophisticated bargaining strategy.”⁴⁸

The political situation on the northwest coast

The status of the intermediary was strongly dependent on – and cannot be dissociated from – the political situation and the economic role of the slave trade within its system. Andriamandisoarivo had witnessed the victorious campaigns of his father Andriandahifotsy (c. 1620–1683) in securing direct access to a maritime port, and understood the role of the slave trade in the political power of the

⁴³ Instructions of the *Elisabeth*, 14 Nov 1678. WCA, C2338, f. 36 and C1344, f. 108–109.

⁴⁴ Instructions of the *Voorhout*, 1676. WCA, C 2337, f. 69. See also: Armstrong, 1983, pp. 232–233; Westra & Sleight, 2013, pp. 31–32.

⁴⁵ Letter from Batavia to the Cape, 14 Oct 1684. WCA, C333.

⁴⁶ Letter from the Cape to Batavia, 12 Feb 1684. WCA, C1374. Although we know nothing about the criteria that were used to choose interpreters, it is certain that proficiency in both the Dutch and Malagasy languages was an essential prerequisite as well as overall good behaviour.

⁴⁷ On the rare occasions that expeditions were organised in Batavia, it proved difficult to find a Malagasy interpreter: Instructions of the *Binnenwijzend*, 23 Apr 1732. NA, VOC 985.

⁴⁸ Bialuschewski, 2005, p. 405. Andrew Alexander (2007, p. 15) speaks of an “unpredictable trading environment.”

Sakalava of Menabe. Deprived of succession, this prince made a daring move to take control of the most active slave exporting region of the island.⁴⁹ Between 1683 and 1686, he conquered the entire northwest coast of Madagascar, including Boeny Bay and Bombetoka Bay. Instead of excluding the Antalaotra community, he left them in place and took control of their commercial networks.⁵⁰ The trade in captives was essential to the monarchist system, which was dependent on the influx of firearms, ammunition, gunpowder and silver coin.⁵¹ Accordingly, a kind of mercantilist system was put in place, because no European could trade without the formal agreement of the king.⁵²

How did the slave trade in the Sakalava kingdom of Boina differ from that in other Malagasy coastal regions? This trade formed the foundations for the creation of Sakalava, as was the case with the Betsimisaraka community in the northeast coast in the 1720s.⁵³ However, it was the continuous presence of different foreign traders, not only European, but also Arab and Swahili, that confirmed the northwest coast as the foremost slave exporting region of the island. This made the Sakalava kingdom the political and economic superpower of Madagascar in the first half of the eighteenth century, while also receiving tribute from surrounding regions.⁵⁴ For other regions, the slave trade remained somewhat irregular and of secondary importance to the local sovereigns.

This difference is also reflected in the prestige of the king of Boina, who was “feared like a god” by his subjects. From 1730s onward he forced foreign merchants to come to his inland capital to obtain a license to start trading.⁵⁵ Although the sovereigns of other regions such as St. Augustine Bay and Fort Dauphin also had inland capitals, they would always move their court to the shoreline in order to trade with the Europeans. Ratsimilaho of Betsimisaraka was the only king who lived directly on the coast, in the town of Foulpointe.⁵⁶ Because trade took place on the beach, the Sakalava sovereign needed to have some trusted intermediaries on the coast to ensure the slave trade was properly executed in accordance with his rules.

⁴⁹ Kneitz, 2014, pp. 97–98.

⁵⁰ According to Rantoandro, they took on the role of intermediaries, but it is difficult to know the exact origin of the Malagasy intermediaries. Rantoandro, 1983, pp. 207–209.

⁵¹ The same thing was witnessed on the West African coast: Strickrodt, 2015, p. 134.

⁵² Randrianja & Ellis, 2009, p. 67; Ellis & Randrianja, 2000, p. 49.

⁵³ Ellis, 2007, pp. 448–450; Cabanes, 1982, pp. 170–171.

⁵⁴ Ratsivalaka, 1995, I, pp. 109–112.

⁵⁵ Armstrong & Westra, 2006, p. 128. See for example: Ship’s logbook of the *Binnenwijzend*, 1732. NA, VOC 11257, without folio.

⁵⁶ Filliot, 1973, pp. 132–133.

The Dutch, being aware of the fierce competition between foreign merchants in Bombetoka Bay, started to visit other Malagasy regions from the 1740s onward. After the death of King Andriamahatindriarivo around 1755, the Sakalava kingdom was divided and subsequently weakened by external and internal pressures, and the sovereigns had more and more difficulties in assuring a regular flow of slaves to the coast.⁵⁷ We have reason to believe that this strengthened the power of the Antalaotra merchants, who regained much of their power in the 1770s, especially under the rule of Queen Ravahiny. We will see how this changing political and economic situation was reflected in the status of the intermediary.

The first intermediaries of the Sakalava (before 1730)

Although the first intermediaries were the result of fortuitous encounters with shipwrecked sailors, between roughly 1685 and 1730, the existence of Europeans as intermediaries can best be explained in the context of piracy, as the island became an important refuge for buccaneers. At several points along the east coast, pirates and their offspring even established themselves as political powers amidst the coastal communities and they might have helped Andriamandisoarivo to conquer the Antalaotra strongholds in the 1680s.⁵⁸

Consequently, an important number of retired pirates became intermediaries in the European slave trade in Madagascar.⁵⁹ Other Europeans came ashore as deserters or victims of pirate attacks or shipwrecks. In 1705, the crew of the *Ter Aa* found that a dozen Englishmen had taken up residence in Boeny Bay and ten years later, those on the *Leidsman* found around thirty Dutchmen at Bombetoka Bay, after being put ashore by a French privateer.⁶⁰ With the end of pirating, the number of Europeans in Madagascar diminished, although the island continued to attract fortune seekers.

Real intermediaries seem to have been absent under Antalaotra rule in the 1670s. This community generally spoke good Portuguese and their role as a merchant society with a century-long experience in maritime trade may have eliminated the need for an intermediary.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the Dutch make mention of

⁵⁷ Evidence is found in the log of the *Schuilenburg* in 1755, which mentions the disorderly and pitiful state of the Kingdom of Boina, due to a civil war between the brothers of the deceased king. WCA, C2250, f. 51.

⁵⁸ Ratsivalaka, 1995, I, pp. 100–101.

⁵⁹ Larson, 2000, p. 65; Bialuschewski, 2005, p. 420.

⁶⁰ Ship's logbook of the *Ter Aa*, 1705. NA, VOC 10812, without folio; Westra & Armstrong, 2006, pp. 88–89.

⁶¹ Ship's logbook of the *Voorhout*, 1676. NA, VOC 4012. This also underlines regular maritime contacts between the Antalaotra community and the east coast of Africa. Rantoandro, 1983, pp. 206–207.

the presence of certain “courtiers” of the king in trade transactions – such as Faki and Boeba who assisted them with some favours – but without going into much detail.⁶² This changed with the creation of the Sakalava Kingdom of Boina, when trade was directly overseen by the sovereign, probably wanting to control commerce in the freshly conquered Antaloatra community and possibly influenced by a lack of experience of direct trade with European merchants.⁶³

Although *commis* Jeremias Brons of the *Standvastigheid* indicated in 1694 that these Sakalava spoke some English, we see that the first intermediaries who made their appearance were Europeans, including Lou Lou, who was identified as a *Noorman* or Norwegian.⁶⁴ The reasons for this can be linked to their commercial know-how and multilingualism, and their military support for the Sakalava king. This resembled common practice in Guinea, where William Snelgrave informs us of the case of Bullfinch Lambe, an English intermediary in the 1720s.⁶⁵ Lou Lou gave advice to the Dutch on what gifts to give the king and acted as a spokesman between the two parties. He also acted as an intermediary in the case of any complaints. This allowed the Dutch to get things done on a day-to-day basis, especially when the Sakalava king was in his capital. In the end, they gave him a present for his loyal service.

For the services he provided, Lou Lou can accordingly be identified as the first real intermediary in the Dutch slave trade, at least about whom we possess detailed information. Under Andiantoakafo (reign c. 1710–c. 1732), only one Dutch vessel, the *Leidsman*, traded in Boeny Bay.⁶⁶ No real intermediary can be identified, although the Dutch praise the help of a certain Andian Simonalij, who was “the second person of the kingdom” and “had a great influence on the king.”⁶⁷ In return for his help in persuading the sovereign to accept the proposed price, Simonalij was given a musket. He also sold some of his slaves to the Dutch, as well as slaves of other Malagasy, encouraging them to accept the muskets offered.⁶⁸ However, can he be qualified as a broker?

In order to fully comprehend the status of the intermediary within the dynamics of the slave trade, we need to take into consideration certain specific criteria that can be found in the ship’s logs. In this article we see an intermediary as

⁶² Ship’s logbook of the *Voorhout*, 1677. NA, VOC 4013.

⁶³ Ship’s logbook of the *Tamboer*, 1694. NA, VOC 1544, f. 1050-1051.

⁶⁴ A *commis* is a VOC merchant. Brons, *Een kort berigt wegens den quaden uijtslag den slavenhandelinge aen ’t Eijlant Madagascar*, 14.01.1695. NA, VOC 1560, without folio.

⁶⁵ Snelgrave, 2008 [1735], pp. 61–62.

⁶⁶ This period represents a slump in Malagasy trade: Worden, 1997, p. 54.

⁶⁷ Westra & Armstrong, 2006, p. 95. He is identified by Stephen Ellis as sovereign Ratsimilaho of the Betsimisaraka community: Ellis, 2007, p. 452.

⁶⁸ Westra & Armstrong, 2006, p. 101.

being a courtier close to the king, but without being a member of his family or a high ranking official. However, they were most likely to have had an elevated status and a favourable position without holding any real political power, as we might see with some *rijksbestierders* who are identified from the 1740s onward.⁶⁹ Andrew Alexander, talking about St. Augustine Bay in the 1770s, states that the *Rijksbestierder's* role was that of the primary negotiator with the king, whereas the *makelaars* negotiated with the local Malagasy community.

However, it is difficult to compare different Malagasy regions, and a *Rijksbestierder* can be best identified as the right hand man of the Sakalava sovereign, or the official with whom West African sovereigns on the Slave Coast shared their control over the slave trade.⁷⁰ Accordingly, he was given some gifts, as he might influence the king favourably, but he always remained close to the court and therefore cannot be seen as a trade intermediary, but instead as yet another person whose favours had to be "obtained."⁷¹ In this light, Andian Simonaliij was a "hybrid broker", as he took on this role, without being continuously employed in it.

The identification of a brokers' status within the Sakalava community is problematic. They had to live close to the shore in order to welcome foreign traders, and needed some commercial experience in the slave trade in order to know its dynamics. The fact that they were paid for their services, at least by the Dutch, is also essential. Although Alexander believes they were not language proficient, we consider that fluency in a European language would have been a fundamental prerequisite for obtaining their status, together with being accustomed to European culture.⁷² West African courtiers, for example, always spoke a European language and they offered their services to the Europeans.⁷³

These brokers should not, however, be confused with the king's close courtiers identified as ministers and emissaries sent to oversee trade and assure that the rules of the Sakalava sovereign were respected and the negotiated price was paid.⁷⁴ These deputies of the king could even decide on the prices of minor merchandise, clearly indicating their subordinate role and illustrating an important

⁶⁹ For example: Ship's logbook of the *Meermin*, 1762, NA, VOC 4229, f. 379. His role seemed to have been that of a "primary mediator" according to Andrew Alexander (2005). However, there is no evidence of this in the Boina Kingdom.

⁷⁰ Law, 1991, pp. 206–207.

⁷¹ Ship's logbook of the *Neptunus*, 1761, WCA, C2250, f. 116–117. In 1741, the Brak had to use gifts for a number of people: "2^e stem Andian Woana", "gunsteling Joema", "1e minister Andian Manoedoe", "two courtiers Andian Inatoew and Mangsaka".

⁷² Alexander, 2007, pp. 42–43.

⁷³ Cr    , 1989, pp. 120–121.

⁷⁴ Ellis, 2007, p. 452.

difference from the brokers.⁷⁵ Lastly, Jane Hooper identifies an “interpreter or an ambassador” in the English slave trade on Madagascar. It is not quite clear who she is referring to, but the role of an intermediary should be defined somewhere in the middle.⁷⁶ We should also emphasise that during the absence of slave ships, which could have lasted months or even years, brokers must have held a high social status in the Sakalava society.

The golden age of brokers (1730–1770)

Our best information about Malagasy intermediaries in the Sakalava Kingdom of Boina is for the period between 1730 and 1770. These years seem to correspond to the institutionalization of their role. Smooth communication with European foreigners was of great importance and it is during this time that we see the assignment of brokers to Dutch slave traders by the sovereign.⁷⁷ Something very similar can be identified in Ouidah, on the West African coast, where the king appointed several brokers who served as agents as well as interpreters.⁷⁸ At the same time, the number of Europeans in Madagascar diminished, thereby leaving the job of intermediary to other subjects of the king. In the following part, we introduce the different intermediaries that were encountered in chronological order and discuss their status, personality and background as perceived by the Dutch.

In 1732, the VOC ship *Binnenwijzend* encountered three different interpreters: Don Jan Sandpinder, Crismis, and Anthonij. Don Jan, who spoke “good Portuguese”, seems to have been the principal intermediary, and he was the one favoured by the *commis* who indicated that he was the most “political” one.⁷⁹ Crismis⁸⁰ was identified as a broker who spoke “crooked” English and subsequently assisted the ships *Huis ten Donk* in 1733, and *De Brak* in 1741 and in 1743, when he was the third *makelaar*.⁸¹ In 1752, the Dutch encountered him again. This time he was identified as a septuagenarian, but his role as an official intermediary seems to have been over, as the king assigned three different brokers: Jan, Rhemeinte, and Jek.⁸² The next year, however, we find Crismis as a broker,

⁷⁵ Ship’s logbook of the *Schuijlenburg* 1752. NA, VOC 18015, without folio.

⁷⁶ Hooper, 2010, pp. 114–115.

⁷⁷ For example: Ship’s logbook of *De Brak*, 1743. NA, VOC 4157.

⁷⁸ Law, 2004, p. 132; Klein, 1999, p. 104.

⁷⁹ Ship’s logbook of the *Binnenwijzend*, 1732. NA, VOC 11257, without folio.

⁸⁰ Other spellings include Krismus, Krismis, and Crusmusse.

⁸¹ Ship’s logbook of *De Brak*, 1743. NA, VOC 4157, f. 156–157.

⁸² Ship’s logbook of the *Schuijlenburg* 1752. NA, VOC 18015, without folio.

together with Lourens and Rhemeinte.⁸³ After this, he was never mentioned again, although he might have died considering his age.

Antony Cheraha (or Seraha, or simply Anthonij) was the third interpreter for the *Binnenwijzend*, He spoke “good” Portuguese” and was described by the Dutch as of “Jesuit physiognomy and extremely cunning.”⁸⁴ In 1741, Anthony was labelled as being the “King’s favourite broker.”⁸⁵ He would meet a tragic end in 1752, when the *Schuilenburg* was trading at Bombetoka Bay. “Recently, broker Antony was attacked, and killed in an unfortunate manner, after which the assassins took with them his wife, children, slaves, goods and other inhabitants, and we have been unable to retrieve them.”⁸⁶

Table I: Malagasy intermediaries in the Kingdom of Boina (1694–1770)

ACTIVE YEARS	NAME(S)	NUMBER OF VOC SHIPS
1694–1700	Lou Lou ⁸⁷	5
1732	Don Jan	1
1732–1753	Crismis	7
1732–1743	Anthonij	5
1752–1753	Remeinte	2
1753–1760	Laurens	2
1760	Remeinharo	1
1762	Reijgoege	1
1769–1770	Noeme	2

This table was compiled by studying dozens of ship’s logs found in the Nationaal Archief in The Hague and in the Western Cape archives in Cape Town.

Political instability after the death of Andriamahatindriarivo, and the subsequent decline in Sakalava power, initially had no effect on the role of the brokers. In 1760, we find the usual broker, Laurens (together with Remeinharo), which

⁸³ Ship’s logbook of *Drie Heuvelen*, 1753. NA, VOC 18014, without folio.

⁸⁴ Ship’s logbook of the *Binnenwijzend*, 1732. NA, VOC 11257, without folio.

⁸⁵ Ship’s logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 186–187.

⁸⁶ Ship’s logbook of the *Schuijlenburg*, 1752. NA, VOC 18015, without folio.

⁸⁷ He might have been there until 1705.

emphasizes the continuity of their status.⁸⁸ Two years later, the log of the *Meermin* recorded that Laurens had died and his brother Jacob had taken his place, assisted by Reijgoege and Jan Beene.⁸⁹ By 1770, the king had appointed no fewer than four brokers for the Dutch, among whom we find Noeme and Mahasinoe, together with multiple deputies, which might attest to the monarch's weakening power.⁹⁰ Things seem to have changed fundamentally in the mid-1770s, when the Dutch dealt exclusively with the Antaloatra as intermediaries.⁹¹ The importance of the Malagasy interpreters in the Dutch slave trade is reflected in the continued use of the same people as brokers in the eighteenth century, as illustrated in Table I.

How does this compare to similar trade in the Western Indian Ocean region? The Comoro Islands were an important refreshment station for any European ship passing the Mozambique Channel. Being close to Madagascar, its political situation was similar to that of the Antaloatra community and their king, Saïd-Mahmet, primarily sold livestock and vegetables to the Europeans. In the 1730s and 1740s, French ships were mostly assisted by a certain "Abdala," who was seen as an interpreter and the "*courtier des étrangers, connu de tous nos Français qui fréquentent cette Isle* [Anjouan]."⁹² Although concrete details needed to make a thorough comparison are missing, we are inclined to believe that Abdala occupied virtually the same role as the Malagasy interpreters in Boeny Bay and Bombetoka Bay. In their voyages to the east coast of Africa in the 1770s, the Dutch did not encounter any intermediaries.⁹³ Other Malagasy regions also had their intermediaries as early as 1672, when the crew of the Dutch ship *Pijl* discovered an English-speaking Malagasy at St. Augustine Bay.⁹⁴ This continued in the 1740s, when the French found a certain James Martin, who spoke and even wrote English and Portuguese, although his role is difficult to distinguish in terms of political status, as he is labeled *Rijksbestierder*.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, the ship's logbooks are silent about the origins of the intermediaries. Their names are Europeanised in most cases, with Don Jan Sandpinder being the most notable case: He was a Portuguese nobleman.⁹⁶ Antony Seraha

⁸⁸ Ship's logbook of the *Neptunus*, 1761. WCA, C2250, f. 109.

⁸⁹ Ship's logbook of the *Meermin*, 1762. NA, VOC 4229, f. 378.

⁹⁰ Ship's logbook of the *Zon*, 1769. NA, VOC 4257, f. 183.

⁹¹ The Antaloatra are identified as "moors." Ship's logbook of the *Zon*, 1775. NA, VOC 4279, f. 931.

⁹² Ship's logbook of the *Penthièvre*, 1743. AN, MAR, 4JJ/116, p. 60.

⁹³ Ross, 1986.

⁹⁴ Hubert Hugo, *Cort extract*, 24 June 1672. NA, VOC 4009, f. 261.

⁹⁵ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1743. NA, VOC 4157, f. 156–157; Monet to the Archbishop of Paris, Bourbon Island, 13 Apr 1742. Archives de la Congrégation de la Mission, Manuscript 1504, piece 25.

⁹⁶ This might have been a name given by Portuguese to identify him easily. The English gave titles such as "Duke of York" to certain Malagasy interpreters in St. Augustine Bay: Hooper, 2010, pp. 122–123.

was said to have spent ten years in Lisbon, which is an extremely interesting reference as it is the only one indicating a prolonged stay in Europe, a phenomenon which seems to have been more widespread in West Africa. Plasse explains that in the 1760s, there were multiple *courtiers nègres* who had been in Europe, such as the nephew of the viceroy who had resided in Amsterdam for a long time.⁹⁷ These brokers were probably not Europeans, as they are usually named explicitly, as in 1733 when the VOC ship *Huis ten Donk* traded with "Louw [...] a Swiss [...] taken by the French in 1708 on [the] Companies' ship *Overwinnaer* and sent here. He now acts as beach guard on Fomatoeke [Bombetoka Bay] on the orders of King Baba [Andriamahatindriarivo]."⁹⁸ In most of the African coastal regions, brokers were the offspring of European fathers and Malagasy mothers, as was quite common among the Betsimisaraka on the northeast coast of the island.⁹⁹ This is underlined by broker Crismis, who might have been close with the English pirates who stayed on the northwest coast in the 1690s.¹⁰⁰ However, from the end of the 1760s, these brokers seem to have lost every European aspect, as they no longer spoke any European language and ceased to have European names.¹⁰¹

Nathalie Everts states that in West Africa brokers did not always have a high status, though their importance and high status in Madagascar were attested to on different occasions.¹⁰² In 1743, when two intermediaries were drunk and forgot to bring the Dutch traders to an audience with the king, they were immediately pardoned by the sovereign and their lives were spared.¹⁰³ The fact that broker Anthonij possessed slaves is also proof of his high social status. This is further emphasized by the fact that, when he murdered his wife in 1732, he was only punished by having his livestock confiscated, which was a typical punishment for Malagasy nobles.¹⁰⁴ Some brokers even became viceroy or *rijksbestierder*. Yet another example shows a certain freedom of movement, as in 1742, broker Jan fled from St. Augustine Bay to the Sakalava Kingdom of Boina after a failed military expedition to obtain slaves.¹⁰⁵ Subsequently, in 1753, a certain Jan (the

⁹⁷ Plasse, 2005, pp. 41–42, 54.

⁹⁸ Louw should not be confused with Lou Lou from the 1690s. This is probably sailor Lourens Lossinge from Basel, who embarked on this ship in 1707. Ship's journal of the *Huis ten Donk*. 1733. NA, VOC 2266, f. 5186.

⁹⁹ Thiébaud, "La creation d'une élite franco-malgache à Madagascar au XVIIIe siècle," forthcoming.

¹⁰⁰ His name also closely resembles the word for "Christmas" in both Malagasy and Swahili.

¹⁰¹ Ship's logbook of the *Zon*, 1769. NA, VOC 4257, f. 183

¹⁰² Everts, 2012, pp. 61–63.

¹⁰³ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1743. NA, VOC 2585, f. 210–211.

¹⁰⁴ Ship's logbook of the *Binnenwijzend* 1732. NA, VOC 11257, without folio.

¹⁰⁵ Boucher, 1979, p. 55.

same person?) was again found in St. Augustine Bay and claimed to have been a broker for VOC commis Daniel Rousselet in Bombetoka Bay ten years earlier.¹⁰⁶

The role of intermediaries in the slave trade

By this time, the VOC was well accustomed to the conventions of trade. However, the trading environment remained somewhat unpredictable, which is reflected by the varying success of the different expeditions.¹⁰⁷ We should note that interactions between the Malagasy sovereign and the VOC merchants were conducted on the basis of equality, as was the case in West Africa.¹⁰⁸ To illustrate the different phases of the slave trade, upon arrival foreign ships were greeted by some canoes, normally bringing a Malagasy broker – sometimes called a *strandwachter* – on board, who offered his services in assisting the merchants during their entire stay.¹⁰⁹ Most of the time, two or three individuals were continuously employed on different tasks. Again, we can see an important resemblance with the West African slave trade, where William Snelgrave was always accompanied by interpreters during his stay.¹¹⁰

The first task of these brokers was to inform the Sakalava king of the arrival of the Dutch traders and to help them assemble a reasonable gift. This is what the French called a *coutume*, some kind of trading rights, officially to honour the king, but in fact to “open” the negotiations on slave prices. Unlike some west African kingdoms, there was no real export tax per slave ship.¹¹¹ In 1741, broker Crismis gave advice on the sort of gifts that would please the king in order to be able to conduct trade in slaves.¹¹² For this, the European merchants had to visit Marovoay,¹¹³ where they were again assisted by a broker, who they called *geleidsman*.¹¹⁴ At the king’s residence, a “counter gift” was given by the Sakalava sovereign, often consisting of one or more oxen. This was followed by long, wearying price negotiations, which were carried out entirely by the king himself and we do not find evidence of intermediaries interfering in these discussions. Until

¹⁰⁶ Ship’s logbook of *Drie Heuveln*, 1753. NA, VOC 18014, without folio.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander, 2005, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ Klein, 1999, p. 111.

¹⁰⁹ Ship’s logbook of *Drie Heuveln*, 1753. NA, VOC 18014, without folio. According to Jane Hooper, interpreters remained on the European ship throughout their stay, but we found no evidence of this on the northwest coast. Hooper, 2010, pp. 113–114

¹¹⁰ Snelgrave, 2008 [1735], p. 119.

¹¹¹ Klein, 1999, p. 104.

¹¹² Ship’s logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 187–188.

¹¹³ The Sakalava capital is situated several days’ walk from Bombetoka Bay.

¹¹⁴ Ship’s logbook of the *Schuilenburg*, 1752. NA, VOC 18015, without folio. In 1743, as many as three brokers accompanied the Dutch to the Sakalava capital: Ship’s logbook of *De Brak*, 1743, NA, VOC 4157, f. 138–139.

the prices were fixed and freedom of commerce declared, which could take several weeks, nothing could be traded except for minor provisions such as poultry, eggs, and vegetables.¹¹⁵

It is not always clear how translating was carried out during these negotiations, as the Sakalava king and other chiefs did not speak any European language, or only knew a few words at best.¹¹⁶ This contrasts with their counterparts on the northeast coast, who often spoke good French. The sovereign of Anjouan, Saïd-Mahmet, spoke very good Portuguese and acceptable French, and some West African sovereigns, such as Opubo Fubara Pepple, the king of Bonny, could speak sufficient English to make themselves understood by European traders.¹¹⁷ In the case of Sakalava, the assistance of the Dutch interpreter is often explicitly mentioned, and in 1741, *De Brak* encountered the French interpreter "Pool" and two years later a French deserter "Raaijfiel," acting as a close counsellor and personal translator to the Sakalava king.¹¹⁸ After successful negotiations, the Dutch would return to the beach and construct a temporary stronghold, called a *factorij*, where they received the slave sellers.

This construction was the responsibility of the brokers and when it was finished, the actual trading could finally begin.¹¹⁹ Although the Sakalava sovereign could offer many dozens of slaves for sale to foreign traders, private merchants – mostly Antalaoatra – accounted for the majority of the slaves traded. In general, no captive could be sold under the fixed price, unless their age differed or if they had physical defects. It was the duty of the intermediaries to direct the sellers, who might be deputies of the king as well as private merchants, to the Dutch *factorij*.¹²⁰ This took place on a daily basis, where slaves were often offered one by one.¹²¹ In contrast with interpreters on the western coast of Africa, who had some involvement in the selling of slaves, there is no evidence of brokers selling their own slaves in Madagascar.¹²²

¹¹⁵ The penalty for trading slaves without royal permission was death: Ship's logbook of the *Huis ten Donk*, 1733. NA, VOC 2266, f. 5182.

¹¹⁶ Andriamandisoarivo, who greeted the merchants of the ship *Soldaat* with "*Goedendag*," explained to them that the deserter Andries had taught him some Dutch words. Chamuleau, 2004, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ The king of Anjouan exclaimed: "*Piti-prince, Piti-païs, Piti-Roy, mais bon-gens, bon cœur, bon foy, et toujours bon service pour le François*." Ship's logbook of the *Penthièvre*, 1743. Service historique de la Défense at Toulon, Ms. 10; Snelgrave, 2008 [1735], pp. 71–72; Saugera, 2012, pp. 83–84.

¹¹⁸ Chamuleau, 2004, pp. 19–20; ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741, NA, VOC 2585, f. 213; Idem of *De Brak*, 1743. NA, VOC 4157, f. 142. Rafiki is the Swahili word for "friend." I thank James C. Armstrong for this observation.

¹¹⁹ Alexander, 2007, p. 50.

¹²⁰ In West Africa the local sovereign as well as private merchants also traded their captives to the same Europeans: Law, 1989, p. 47.

¹²¹ Alexander, 2005, p. 45; 2007, p. 54

¹²² Ship's logbook of the *Meermin*, 1762. NA, VOC 4229, f. 346; Law, 1991, p. 211.

The role of the brokers was nevertheless more complicated than that of simple intermediaries as they were the only liaison the slavers had with the Malagasy world and brokers intervened if there were complaints about the sale, locals' behaviour or anything else. They mediated disagreements with the local population, as happened in 1732, when broker Don Jan received complaints from the Dutch concerning firearms that were initially accepted by the Malagasy but afterwards returned. This broker ensured that trading items were more readily accepted by the Malagasy and not given back.¹²³ The same thing happened with the *Schuilenburg*, when the intermediaries forced private sellers of slaves to accept muskets of lesser value.¹²⁴

When trade progressed too slowly, the broker tried to calm the Dutch, visiting the king on multiple occasions to resolve disagreements such as the low number of slaves offered for sale, while the sovereign tried to obtain some gifts from the Dutch to encourage him to trade more quickly.¹²⁵ In 1760, the *commis* complained to the brokers that work on the *factorij* was advancing too slowly.¹²⁶ On the other hand, complaints could also come from the Malagasy, such as in 1741, when Dutch sailors who had bought *toak* (an alcoholic beverage) from the local population, refused to pay them. The Malagasy in question complained via the brokers to the *commis*, who replied that they should not sell alcohol to his crew.¹²⁷ In the end, the VOC merchant agreed to pay for the drink to calm the situation. Their presence seemed to inspire confidence, for both Malagasy sellers and Dutch buyers, and the trade might even be interrupted when the *makelaars* were absent.¹²⁸

The brokers frequently had to follow orders from the king, such as in 1761 when they had to make sure that the Dutch did not trade with the Antalaotra.¹²⁹ In 1732, Don Jan promulgated the order of the king that obliged every subject to sell their slaves to the Dutch. According to Crismis, it was a very strict order, because someone had already been beheaded for not offering slaves for trade.¹³⁰ Their role was also to assure the sale of the king's slaves, encouraging the Dutch to buy old and less valuable slaves, because these belonged to the sovereign.¹³¹

¹²³ Ship's logbook of the *Binnenwijzend*, 1732. NA, VOC 11257, without folio.

¹²⁴ Ship's logbook of the *Schuilenburg*, 1752. NA, VOC 18015, without folio.

¹²⁵ Sleight & Westra, 2013, pp. 29–32.

¹²⁶ For example: Ship's logbook of the *Neptunus*, 1760. WCA, C2250, f. 111.

¹²⁷ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 287. At the same time, these brokers made daily demands for portions of strong arak from Batavia.

¹²⁸ Ship's logbook of the *Meermin*, 1763. NA, VOC 4229, f. 367.

¹²⁹ Ship's logbook of the *Neptunus*, 1761. WCA, C2250, f. 118–119.

¹³⁰ Ship's logbook of the *Binnenwijzend*, 1732. NA, VOC 11257, without folio.

¹³¹ Ship's logbook of the *Meermin*, 1762. NA, VOC 4229, f. 350, f. 353.

On one occasion, the brokers claimed that trade was slow because the sovereign was not as powerful as his deceased brother, and that the young slaves had all run off when the ship arrived.¹³² Accordingly, the brokers might have been in a dependent situation vis-à-vis the Sakalava sovereign.

Relations between the Sakalava king and the VOC merchants

The role of the brokers can be better understood if we focus on the dynamics of the slave trade. One of the main tasks of the brokers was to secure communications between the Sakalava kings, residing at their inland capital, and the Dutch, staying at the shore. Although trade benefitted both parties, their respective goals were different: The VOC merchants sought to buy as many young male slaves as possible for a fair price in a short space of time, whereas the Sakalava sovereign tried to get rid of all his captives, while trying to stall trade in order to receive more gifts.¹³³ Somewhere in the middle we might find the broker, who had to find a compromise that would satisfy both parties. In this, the king had the home advantage. Most of the time, the Dutch merchants did not have any experience in the Malagasy slave trade, and had to find practical solutions in a sometimes hostile environment. Alexander explains that the Dutch were engaged in a heavily dependent relationship with the Malagasy.¹³⁴

This can best be seen in the light of competition, when the intermediary might send slave sellers to the European trading party offering the highest price.¹³⁵ In 1741, the brokers explained to the Dutch:

If you don't buy everything that we bring to you, young or old, man or woman, then we shall not bring any more slaves for sale and we will send them all to the French. It is a favour that we send slaves first to you and afterwards to the French.¹³⁶

When they kept on refusing old or unfit slaves, the brokers came to them saying, "you liars, don't we offer you any slaves? And is our king not a mighty one and is he not fair?"¹³⁷ The Dutch finally gave in and bought some old and partially

¹³² Ship's logbook of the *Neptunus*, 1761. WCA, C2250, f. 122–123; Ship's logbook of the *Meermin*, 1763. NA, VOC 4229, f. 377.

¹³³ In addition to the *coutume*, which was necessary to start trading, the Dutch would occasionally give more gifts to the Sakalava sovereign in order to speed up trade.

¹³⁴ Alexander, 2005, p. 29.

¹³⁵ However, some brokers could show loyalty, such as Don Jan who refused to trade with the French, unlike his colleague Crismis. Ship's logbook of the *Binnenwijzend*, 1732. NA, VOC 11257, without folio.

¹³⁶ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 243.

¹³⁷ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 278.

disabled captives in order to smooth the trade. This was a well-known tactic often encouraged by the VOC in order to please the king and encourage trade.¹³⁸ The Dutch could also be firm, as shown in 1761 when the *commis* refused to take the old captives of the king, although the *makelaars* insisted strongly.¹³⁹ Several years later, the Dutch even pretended to sail away from the bay, after the new king demanded no less than 150 Spanish piasters¹⁴⁰ for a slave. This threat made the sovereign quickly agree to the initial price of 20 piasters.¹⁴¹

Independence of the intermediary

The actions of the brokers, who seem to have been relatively independent, were mostly dictated by the prospect of economic gain. There is evidence that on every slaving expedition the Dutch gave gifts to the brokers and although no salary was negotiated, they knew that they would receive these offerings. This was mostly in order to encourage them, for example in 1752, when the Dutch gave a musket to every intermediary, “in order to bind them to us and make them favourable to our cause,” promising them a more important gift if the slave trade was successful.¹⁴² On other occasions, gifts were given to thank them for their completed services. As illustrated in Table II, this compensation fluctuated and changed per expedition, but appears to have been approximately equivalent to the price of an adult male slave. Although sometimes, as was the case in 1743, even the wives of the brokers were given a present, compensation could also be “less than usual,” such as in 1761, when poor trade was “reflected in the [poor] gifts.”¹⁴³

In addition to the normal compensation, the Dutch traders were sometimes inclined to give more presents to encourage the intermediaries, as indicated in the journal of *De Brak*.¹⁴⁴ This was as well as the continuous pouring of arak, a very popular strong spirit, which seemed to have been the perfect way to smooth relations and get the brokers on their side.¹⁴⁵ These advantages contrast with their West African counterparts, who received a sales commission.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately,

¹³⁸ See for example: Instructions of the *Westerwijk*, 3 Nov 1685. NA, VOC 4022, f. 183–185.

¹³⁹ Ship's logbook of the *Neptunus*, 1761, WCA, C2250, f. 113.

¹⁴⁰ Silver coin.

¹⁴¹ Ship's logbook of the *Zon*, 1769. NA, VOC 4257, f. 384–385.

¹⁴² Ship's logbook of the *Schuilenburg*, 1752. VOC 10815, without folio.

¹⁴³ Ship's logbook of the *Neptunus*, 1761. WCA, C2251, f. 2; Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1743, NA, VOC 4157, f. 150–151.

¹⁴⁴ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1743. NA, VOC 4157, f. 156–157.

¹⁴⁵ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 318–319; Armstrong & Worden, 1989, p. 110.

¹⁴⁶ Klein, 1999, p. 104; Crété, 1989, p. 128.

we do not know if the brokers also received anything from the Sakalava king for their part in the slave trade, but they could be relieved from their duty.¹⁴⁷

Table II: Compensation received by broker Crismis on three different voyages (compared with the price of a male slave).

YEARS	GIFT	PRICE OF A MALE SLAVE
1732	1 firearm, 1 silk	2 firearms and 5 ounces of gunpowder
1741	2 firearms, 6 ounces of gunpowder, 10 ounces of bullets, 30 flints, 4 simple rough	2 firearms, 2 ounces of gunpowder, 14 ounces of bullets, and 10 flints.
1752	1 piece of simple rough	2 firearms, 8 ounces of gunpowder, 4 ounces of bullets, and 25 flints.

Sources: Ship's log of the *Binnewijssent*, 1732. NA, VOC 11257, without folio; Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 321;

Ship's logbook of the *Schuijlenburg*, 1752. NA, VOC 18015, without folio.

Although these gifts seem to have been sufficient incentive for brokers to go back and forth between the two parties in order to get the most benefit possible, they remained relatively independent in their actions; from the Dutch merchants as well as from the Sakalava king. For example, the Dutch were not able to build their factorij without the presence of the brokers.¹⁴⁸ In 1741, broker Crismis tricked the Dutch into buying the same slave three times, as he had been able to escape twice.¹⁴⁹ Another trick used on multiple occasions was that of the brokers trying to stall the Dutch departure by promising more slaves in a few days.¹⁵⁰ On another occasion, Crismis cursed and insulted a Dutch merchant who deceived

¹⁴⁷ Ship's logbook of the *Neptunus*, 1761, WCA, C2250, f. 123–124.

¹⁴⁸ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 287.

¹⁴⁹ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 287.

¹⁵⁰ The Dutch preferred a quick trade with mostly male adults for a reasonable price. Ship's logbook of the *Schuijlenburg*, 1752. NA, VOC 18015, without folio.

him.¹⁵¹ The ship's logbook of the *De Brak*, 1741, shows a perfect example of their strategy:

[...] now we [the Dutch] want to leave, but they [the brokers] try to stall us because our 'counter gifts' haven't been satisfactory enough for the natives, because they do not honour their words as we have often encountered that they try to persuade us in the beginning and even forced our hand to accept from their wives or relatives as well as some native officer or friend a bowl of milk or a fowl, though after which they bother us directly or the other day to pay a gift and by this end we try to swindle them with a bottle of arak, but they wouldn't be satisfied until we added some piece of cloth.¹⁵²

Both parties tried to get the better of the situation, as was the case in West Africa or indeed in any commercial exchange.¹⁵³

Although a useful trading tool, the intermediaries could sometimes be a real obstacle to trade. Again on the expedition of *De Brak* in 1741, problems persisted when the brokers offered livestock in return for some help from the Dutch who note "this appeared [to] us too dangerous, because from all circumstances, it is clear that they have nothing good for us, and they will give nothing away, or they want to have a cow in return for an egg."¹⁵⁴ Europeans also risked treachery in West Africa, where Marie Grand, a courtier of the French "*est un nègre moins menteur que les autres*."¹⁵⁵ The image given by Jean-Pierre Plasse of the West African brokers fits perfectly with the Malagasy ones:

*Il faut avoir toujours un nègre courtier par rapport à la langue du pays, lequel entend les langues d'Europe comme le Français, l'Anglais et le Hollandais et auquel on donne une bagatelle pour sa peine. Tous ses semblables sont pour l'ordinaire un peu fripons [sic]. C'est pourquoi il faut prendre garde dans les marchés. Ailleurs, ils sont assez bons gens.*¹⁵⁶

Conclusion

Because linguistic and cultural differences existed in the commercial interactions between the Malagasy and the Dutch, both parties tried to overcome these barriers. The Dutch did this by employing their own translators, the Malagasy by

¹⁵¹ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 325.

¹⁵² Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 297.

¹⁵³ Crété, 1989, p. 121.

¹⁵⁴ Ship's logbook of *De Brak*, 1741. NA, VOC 2585, f. 298.

¹⁵⁵ Plasse, 2005, p. 57.

¹⁵⁶ Plasse, 2005, pp. 40–41.

using intermediaries. The political and economic situation in the region reflected the evolution of the intermediaries, from accidental European castaways and former pirates, to multilingual Antalaotra. From the eighteenth century, as the role of the broker became institutionalised we commonly see the same intermediaries assisting the VOC merchants in their relationship with the Sakalava and their sovereign. They became indispensable trading tools for the VOC in order to get their share of captives from the Sakalava sovereign, and for the latter, were essential in regulating the slave trade that was primordial to their survival. In this, we see many similarities with other slave trading regions, especially West Africa.

The role of the brokers consisted of guiding the Dutch merchants during their entire stay in Madagascar. However, because they were dependent on the king for their position, we argue that these intermediaries were able to exploit their position within the possibilities that lay in their reach. In particular, they were driven by the economic profit that would result from helping the VOC merchants in carrying out their orders, and they might also have received advantages from helping the sovereign and private Malagasy traders sell their captives. Therefore, we argue that their role was much more ambiguous, somewhere between carrying out the king's orders and meeting Dutch demands, while trying to get the best out of their situation. They were of fundamental importance to both parties in securing a profitable deal.

Sources

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