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A Historical Analysis of Dutch-Benin Trade Relations, 1593-1741

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the nature of trade relations between the Benin Kingdom and the Dutch between 1593 and 1741. It documented and analysed the features of Benin-Dutch trade; the major items of trade and means of exchange; as well as the terms of the Dutch-Benin Trade Treaty of 1715. The paper further interrogated the causes of the breakdown of trade relations between the two countries in 1741. Data for the study was obtained extensively through archival materials as primary sources; and books, newspapers, articles, theses, dissertations and journals as secondary sources. The paper found out that trade was the hallmark of Benin-Europeans' relations between the 1440s and 1741. It observed that the trade contact between Benin and the Dutch started around 1593 and declined around 1741. It concluded that the trade relations brought mutual benefits to both parties: great prosperity and fame to the Benin kingdom; and economic buoyancy to the Dutch.

Keywords: Dutch, Benin, Trade Relations, Economy, Diplomacy

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Introduction

The earliest Dutch trading ships were dispatched to the Guinea coast in 1593. A regular trade relations had, however, been established with Benin by the end of the sixteenth century. As a matter of fact, the Dutch were fully in charge of Benin trade having taken over the trade from the British and the Portuguese.

To put the records straight, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish trade contact with Benin with the visit of John Affonso d' Aveiro in 1485 during the reign of Oba Ozolua, the first Oba to receive Europeans at his court. However, it is important to note that John Affonso d'Aveiro was not the first European to visit Benin. The Portuguese sent out explorers in the 1440's in search of a new sea route to the East and it was during one of the voyages of exploration that a Portuguese sailor named Ruy de Sequeira arrived in Benin in 1472. Hence it is said that Ruy de Sequeira was the first Portuguese to visit Benin territory in 1472. He reached the Bight of Benin during the reign of Oba Ewuare¹. On his arrival, he stopped at the coast and began to gather information about the happenings in the Benin kingdom. However, Ewuare, the then reigning Oba of Benin, showed little interest in the visitor. This was largely because he was busy with domestic restructuring of the kingdom to enhance his hegemonic control over the entire territory of Benin.

The situation was not the same when Joan Affonso d'Aveiro came to Benin in 1485. From the account of Philip Koslow, it was established that not until, 1485 did a Portuguese emissary Joao Afonso d' Aveiro made the journey from the coast to Benin City². Like most European visitors or traders to Benin City, Afonso d'

Aveiro made the journey through the sea to Ughoton then overland to Benin City. Unlike Oba Ewuare who was so busy with domestic affairs and did not receive Ruy de Sequeira; Oba Ozolua readily received Afonso d' Aveiro in 1486 and was ready to allow the Portuguese to trade in pepper, slaves and other commodities that may interest them. J. Parry indicated that the decision to send an emissary in search of Benin should be seen against a background of intense African activity inspired by John II who ascended the throne of Portugal in 1481³.

The French also participated in Benin trade before the Dutch. The French were attracted to Benin trade because of the information they heard about the Portuguese profitable trade in Benin. Their presence was first felt when two French ships attacked and plundered two Portuguese ships returning to Sao Tome from the Mahin River in 1533⁴. Thus began the French interloping exercises in Benin. By 1539, French ships were already trading with Benin with pepper as the main item of trade. The Oba and his chiefs were aware that they were dealing with Europeans who were competing with the Portuguese and they adopted a readiness to trade with all nations.

The British joined the league of European nations to establish trade relations with Benin. She was able to displace the Portuguese in many areas and took the lion's share of the African trade. In her first contact with Benin in 1553, Britain sent out two ships, *Primrose* and the *Lion*, to the Benin River under the command of Capt. Thomas Wyndham⁵. The Oba of Benin also agreed to sell pepper to them since he was aware that pepper was their special interest apart from other items.

¹ Kit Eliot, *Benin* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 5-8

² Philip Koslow, *The Kingdoms of Africa: Benin Lords of the River* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1995), p. 32

³ J. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance* (London: Oxford, 1963), pp. 133-134

⁴ A. T. Corpo Cronologico II, Maco 185, No. 107

⁵ L. I. Izuakor, "Patterns of Pre-Colonial Exploitation", in ToyinFalola (ed.), *Britain and Nigeria:*

Exploitation or Development (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1987), pp. 34-35

In the same vein, the Dutch were first attracted to Benin by pepper and the trade took place at Ughoton. In the case of the Dutch, unlike the French and British, the Oba of Benin changed the tactics of trade by undertaking to have a given quantity of pepper in readiness for the arrival of the Dutch ships in order to reduce delays and risk of sickness among their crews. This could also be seen against the backdrop of bitter experiences of the Portuguese, the British and French due to bad climatic condition at Ughoton, the seaport of Benin. The climate was very harsh as most of the men sent to Ughoton became sick and died. Hence it was said that the history of the Portuguese trading post at Ughoton is very obscure⁶. D' Aveiro himself died at Ughoton, a place which soon became notorious for the high mortality rate among Europeans serving there. The place was afterwards found to be very unhealthy and not as fruitful as has been expected, hence, the Portuguese stopped their trading activities.

J. F. Landolphe disclosed that he was in Ughoton in February 1778 and rented a house to serve as a temporary warehouse and factory⁷. Unfortunately, the usual problem of bad climatic condition drove him completely from Ughoton, as he lost about one third of his crew of 90 through disease. The normal disease of fever at Ughoton might probably be responsible for that disaster. Similarly, in the first trade trip of the British to Benin in 1553 under the command of Capt. Thomas Wyndham, out of 140 men who set out for Benin via Ughoton, only 40 returned safely to Plymouth, Wyndham, and Pinteado. The remaining 98 died of sickness, probably, malaria⁸.

Meanwhile, the Dutch enterprise in Guinea was controlled by numerous partnerships and companies up till 1620. In 1621, those interests combined to form the Chartered West India

Company with a twenty-four year monopoly of all Dutch trade from the Tropic of Cancer to the Cape of Good Hope⁹.

Features of Dutch -Benin Trade Relations

During the period of Dutch trade relationship with Benin, the procedures changed from the former practice. The first notable change was that new trading centres were established in a number of riverside villages such as Ughoton, Arbo and Boededoe, apart from Benin City¹⁰. P. A. Igbafe notes that this development attracted traders from areas outside the Benin Kingdom, like Ijebus, Ijaws and Itsekiris as they made their way by canoe into the Benin River to sell their slaves, cotton clothes and **coris** to the Dutch¹¹. The implication was that the centre of commercial activities from Ughoton to factories along the main Benin River, especially Arboh. The reason for this action was to reduce the control of the Oba of Benin over the trade. It was also done to lure other non-Benin peoples to participate fully in the trade outside the Oba's sphere of effective power.

The second feature was the development of a group of non-Benin, independent powerful traders from this new system. For instance, the Itsekiris became prominent stakeholders in the trade network. They built large war canoes. This enabled them to establish themselves on the coast and to control the trade routes to Benin. By the middle of the nineteenth century, an Itsekiri was appointed Governor to the Benin River without any reference to Benin. By so doing, the Oba of Benin was deprived of one of his main sources of wealth since the Itsekiri middlemen now had direct trade contact with the Europeans. The relevance of Ughoton as the port of trade also declined drastically because of the shift of trade from the Oba's

⁹ A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, p. 86

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ P.A. Igbafe, "Pre-Colonial Economic Foundation of Benin Kingdom" in I. A. Akinjogbin and Segun Osoba (eds.) *Topics on Nigerian Economic and Social History* (Ife: University of Ife Press, 1980), pp. 31-34

⁶ A.F.C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans: 1485-1897* (London: Longman, 1969), p. 33

⁷ J. F. Landolphe, *Memoirs*, Vol. 1

⁸ L. I. Izuakor, "Patterns of Pre-Colonial Exploitation", p. 36

dominion to centres nearer to the sea or along the main Benin River.

Another feature of this trade was the issue of trust system. In this system, the Dutch gave goods to the Benin traders on credit due for payment at most six months. However, the trust system was later abused by some traders. However, the Benin traders including those of Ughoton could generally be relied on the issue of trust. According to A.F.C. Ryder when :

This commerce, which consist in slaves, ivory and various kind of cotton cloth, is very slow, the cloths are not found readymade, but they take goods on credit and with these goods, they have the cloths made in fire at the most, six months. Then although they are heathens and unknown, they faithfully deliver the cloth to the captain of the ship¹².

However, the same could not be said of Arbo that was a new settlement on the main Benin River and apparently populated mainly by Ijaws. This was a place where the Dutch opened a factory as an alternative to Ughoton in 1644. The dispute over the trust compelled the Dutch to burn down Arbo completely in 1644 and a total stoppage of trade in the Benin River which also affected Ughoton. However, with the prospect of red wood and gum trade and the new prosperity of Ivory trade, the Dutch resumed their Benin voyages in 1713 by sending a ship to Ughoton to trade in ivory and to get more information of how redwood and gum could be traded in¹³.

Meanwhile, it is instructive to note that all European trade was conducted at the port of Ughoton before the building of factories on the main Benin River in the mid-seventeenth century. On the arrival of a ship, the chief of

¹² A.F.C. Ryder, "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" in Obaro Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), p. 238.

¹³ Biblioteca, Ajuda, Codice 51, VIII 25 (Lisbon:1620), p.115 as cited in A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, p. 86

Ughoton informed the Oba through a messenger. Captains of such vessels and the foreign traders would thereafter proceed to visit the Oba in Benin to pay their respects and custom duties which the foreigners called gifts. The Oba then sent down the royal officials and a few traders to meet the Europeans on the ships to inspect the wares, bargain and fix prices for the goods before formally opening the market to the traders. It is necessary to add that this was the normal procedure with the entire European traders before Dutch intervention¹⁴.

During the period of the Dutch, it was still necessary for the chief of Ughoton to inform the Oba of the arrival of a new ship. The difference was that instead of the Dutch being taken to Benin City, two or three *Iwebo* officials, usually the *Uwangue* and *Eribo*, with some local traders were sent to deal with the European merchants at Ughoton¹⁵. If the trade was to be conducted outside Ughoton to areas in the main Benin River, the Oba's officials and traders made adequate arrangements to move to where the European ship lay¹⁶. The *Uwangue* and *Eribo* placed in charge of the waterside trade ensured that the sale of certain commodities like palm products were royal monopoly.

Manila was the staple trading currency of Benin, although the Dutch complained of a shortage of them in 1646¹⁷. Apart from Manillas, Cowries also continued to serve as the common currency within Benin and were needed by Europeans resident there for minor purchases of food stuffs. The only challenge

¹⁴ M. Ediagbonya, *The Socio-Political and Economic Transformation of Ughoton (Benin Kingdom, 1440-1897)*, (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Department of History, University of Benin, 2015), pp.158-160.

¹⁵ A.F.C. Ryder, "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" in Obaro Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), p. 238.

¹⁶ A. F.C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, p. 89

¹⁷ Ibid

was that they were not imported in quantity because of their high cost price¹⁸.

Articles of Trade in Benin-Dutch Trade Relations

There were a good number of articles of trade in Benin-Dutch trade relations. First the Dutch were attracted to Benin trade because of its pepper. Other Benin items included slaves, cotton cloths, coris, gum, beads and redwood. According to a Portuguese source, by 1620, the Dutch were already buying these articles and took them to Costa da Mina trade¹⁹. Benin gum in particular was reported to be very profitable to the extent that the Dutch were very anxious to buy it in large quantities.²⁰

Some of the major articles brought in by the Dutch to Benin were brass, manilas, cowries and flint-locks. Indeed, cowries were shipped by the Dutch into Benin in large quantities as they were widely used as common currency. Similarly, firearms like flint-locks which the Portuguese were hesitant to export to Benin were brought in by the Dutch towards the end of the seventeenth century. Considering that Benin was constantly at war with her neighbours and needed firearms for conquests as a guarantee for political and economic powers; the importance of this item can hardly be over-estimated. Some other items brought by the Dutch included, beads Silesian cloth, red, yellow and blue kerseys, brandy and wine²¹. The Dutch also introduced tobacco to Benin and most of the people cultivated the habit of smoking.

It should also be added that though Iron, in a manufactured form, had been carried to Benin by Europeans at least since the English voyages of the 1580s, it should be noted that it

was the Dutch who introduced the standard iron bar, probably in the 1630s²². By 1644, it had won a permanent and prominent place in the Benin trade²³.

The Dutch – Benin Trade Treaty of 1715

The Dutch – Benin Trade Treaty was signed on 26 August, 1715. It was the first formal treaty between Benin and the Europeans. The treaty became necessary particularly after the discovery of gum in Benin. The genesis of the treaty was the disagreement over the price of gum and the conflicting economic interests of the Dutch. While the Dutch were highly interested in transacting trade in gum because of the high profits it commanded in Europe; Oba Akenzua I of Benin's main interest was the establishment of a factory in his territory, particularly Ughoton. All these and many other matters were put on the table for discussion. At the close of negotiation, the following terms were agreed upon:

- i. The Oba must give a solemn promise to be recorded in writing that he would not harbour any runaway slaves belonging to the company.
- ii. The Oba was to build two houses at his cost, one at Ughoton and another at Arbo to serve as factories. They must be so constructed as to safeguard the merchandize from fire, thieves and white ants. They must be repaired as often as is necessary.
- iii. The Oba was also to assume responsibility for the swift arrest and punishment of any subject who stole the company's property.
- iv. In the likely event of failure to abolish the credit system altogether, Van Naerssen was to reach some form of

¹⁸ A. R. Qude W.I.C. 11, No. 107

¹⁹ Biblioteca da Ajuda, Codice 51, viii. 25

²⁰ Cited in A.F.C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, p. 89

²¹ D. Ruiters, *Toortse de Zee-Vaert* (Flushing, 1623)

²² A.F.C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, p. 98

²³ Ibid

agreement that would make the Oba and the headmen of trading village sureties for trust given to traders living under their jurisdiction²⁴.

The ruler of Benin and his chiefs must permit the Dutch to trade in whatever commodities. They thought fit and not insist on the current practice of taking, the best merchandise in exchange for cloths which were losing their market along the coast. Finally, Van Naerssen was to do his best to persuade the Oba to exclude all other Europeans from the Benin trade²⁵.

Revixit Van Naerssen, an official of West India Company was mandated to enter into negotiations with Oba Akenzua I (C. 1713) to streamline trading activities so as to avoid conflict between the two sides.

After much debate, which took much time and a lot of expense, an agreement was reached on 26 August, 1715. The agreement was the first formal treaty between Benin and the Europeans. The major highlights of the agreement include the following:

The Oba of Benin approved the trade in gum and redwood, promising to ensure that so constant a quantity of these products shall be worthwhile.

It was agreed that the Oba would build and maintain a factory at Ughoton. Article 5 of the Treaty of "agreement reached between the Honourable General Chartered Dutch West India Company... and the King of Great Benin, Akenzua" in 17/15 states:

For the accommodation of the company's servants, the storage of its effects and the fostering of trade, the king promises that on the departure of me the under mentioned from this place for Aggreton, he will immediately give orders for the construction of a factory at his

own expense in the above-mentioned place named Aggreton. The said building to be so constructed as to serve for the shelter of the goods of the company's chief official have; undertakes to have any necessary repairs done at his own expense as often as these shall be required²⁶.

The Oba refused to change from the practice of dealing with all nations, since the king being master of his land wishes to extend to them, as to all other nations, free access to trade. This can be seen from Article 10 of the Treaty which states that:

Also it is hereby agreed and established that no Portuguese who may at anytime be found in the king's territory shall be attacked by the company's ships or servants, since the king, being master of his land, wishes to extend to them as to all nations free access to trade²⁷.

A closer look at the treaty shows that it brought success to both sides. For the Dutch, they succeeded in negotiating the gum trade which was very profitable to them. From the side of Oba Akenzua I, a factory would be built at Ughoton. His long time request for the erection of a factory in his territory by the Dutch had been achieved. The factory which was built at Ughoton by the Dutch opened up the historical town to international limelight. This brought much wealth to the kingdom as a commercial town. It promoted trade and other maritime activities in Ughoton. Another huge success recorded by the Oba of Benin was his refusal to allow for Dutch monopoly over Benin trade. This meant that Benin trade was opened to all traders from all the countries who were interested in maritime trade with Benin. Unfortunately, however, all the factories have closed down by the early eighteenth century.

The Decline of Dutch Trade in Benin

²⁴ A.R.N.W.I.C. Vol. 122: Contracten Wet Naturellen, ff. 74-76

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

As hinted above, the Dutch trade in Benin suffered serious setbacks and continued to witness sudden decline in the eighteenth century. The profit generated by the trade in gum was no longer sustained. Her efforts to diversify the Benin trade by discovering other products of commercial value and probably extend the area of their operations failed. Europe had apparently forgotten about Benin pepper and needed a report from Dutch officials to awaken the company to the fact that a tolerable quantity of pepper was grown in Benin before setting in motion further enquiries to discover whether it resembled malagetta or East Indian pepper²⁸. Its interest in Benin trade suffered greatly thereafter.

The West Indian company had little interest in malagetta but was ready to buy a good quantity of pepper which resembled the East Indian pepper. Heyman, a Dutch official, was convinced that the Benin pepper resembled the oriental kind. Subsequently, the Benin people experimented with the planting of tail pepper under Dutch supervision at Ughoton, Arbo and Boededeo; but none of the pepper seeds germinated²⁹. Attempt was made to negotiate with the Oba about the prospect of pepper trade. However, the negotiation did not succeed either because of the high price of pepper in Benin. Hence, the Dutch reached a decision not to buy Benin pepper.

By 1719, the Dutch had shifted attention to promote ivory trade in Benin. That year, 25,000 pounds of ivory were collected at Ughoton and Arbo. Henceforth, the Dutch company relied more on ivory as its strength of its Benin establishment. In order to promote ivory trade in Benin, the Dutch appealed to the Oba of Benin to reserve the ivory trade exclusively for the Dutch company only. This effort at monopolising the ivory trade was rejected

because the Oba was not ready to change from the old practice of its strong desire to trade with all nations of the world. It should be recalled that Benin had benefitted much from its open door policy of trading with the Portuguese, the French, the British since the 16th century, and was not ready for the Dutch to deprive the people of this golden opportunity. Hence, the Dutch company met with the usual reply that the Oba was ready to trade with all nations. So their last hope appeared to be dashed.

For gum, although it had so falling in value on the European market, by 1717, the Dutch officials, Van Naerssen and de Reyke, were instructed to gather gum from as wide an area as possible and drive away all foreign ships and Dutch interlopers³⁰. Ryder posits that the instruction of Van Naerssen was a gum's price of 4½ pound³¹. The effort to promote gum trade ended up as a failure. This was because with time, the profit generated by the trade in gum continued to witness gradual decline.

Later, serious efforts were made to focus on gold trade because it was rumored that gold was available in Benin. Upon investigation by the Dutch West Indian Company, however, it was discovered that the information was not correct because only a minute or small amount gold dust could be found in Benin territory.

Benin cloth was the next area of interest in the Dutch attempt to diversify their Benin trade. The company made serious efforts to find a profitable outlet for Benin cloth in the European market. The strategy employed by the Dutch officials was to promote the production of Benin cloths in large strands and send samples to Europe together with 6,000 pounds of local cotton *yaria*³². Unfortunately again, this experiment on Benin cloth did not succeed

²⁸ A.R. Bezittingen, Vol. 82; F. de Reyke to H. Haring, 19 March, 1716

²⁹ A.R.B., Vol. 86; J. de Reyke to W. Butler, 16 June, 1719.

³⁰ A.R.B., Vol. 84, *Instructions*, 3 October, 1719.

³¹ A.F.C. Ryder, *Benin and The Europeans*, p. 160

³² A.R. N.W.I.C. Vol. 55, Council of Ten to W. Butler and Council, 30 November, 1717.

because the looms on which Benin cloths were woven could not produce the broad long cloth suitable for the European market. Another problem was that Benin cloth was to be avoided because unsalable stocks were piling up at Elmina.

Another problem that led to the decline of Dutch trade in Benin was the bad shape of the factory at Ughoton. Initial arrangement made with the Oba Akenzua I of Benin for the maintenance of the factory had broken down. In September 1725 a Dutch official, Arnauld Bambergh at Ughoton discovered that the store house roofless and full of holes and cracks, some of them big enough for a man to walk through³³. It was said that by April 1734, the company's trade and building was in a state of dissolution and the two surviving Dutchmen were critically ill³⁴. Again the company official, Van Naerssen arrived at Ughoton, the seaport of Benin on 25 November, 1717 and found trade and the factory in a sorry state. He also found that the factory was not the kind required for the proper protection and housing of the company's property and servants or as had been shown to them previously by the under-Clerkide Reyke and myself³⁵.

It was also discovered that the store house was almost entirely bare of merchandise and the books full of unpaid debts and there were no trader at the factory or anywhere near, nor had any been here for several months³⁶. It may thus be said that the dilapidated state of the Dutch factory at Ughoton also accounted for the decline of Dutch trade in Benin.

It would be recalled that in the Treaty reached between the Dutch and Benin on 26 August, 1715, it was agreed that the Oba of Benin

would build and maintain a factory at Ughoton. Article 5 of the Treaty states that:

“the said building to be so constructed has to serve for the shelter of the goods of the company's chief official here; undertakes to have any necessary repairs done at his own expense as often as these shall be required³⁷.”

Unfortunately this agreement was not honoured by the Oba of Benin, to the extent that by 1725, the storehouse was roofless and full of holes, cracks and some of them large enough for a man to walk through.

Another factor responsible for the decline of the trade was that some of the terms of agreement reached between the Dutch and Benin in the Treaty of 26 August, 1715 were not adhered to by the Dutch official. An agent of the Dutch West Indian Company, Van Naerssen, was instructed that, in the likely event of failure to abolish the credit system altogether, he should reach some form of agreement that would make the Oba and the headmen of trading villages sureties for trust given to traders living under their jurisdiction. This issue of trust or credit system continues to be a serious obstacle towards promoting trade. Some of the traders misused the trust system as they often fail to keep to the terms of agreement. It was so bad that the dispute over the trust compelled the Dutch to burn down Arbo leading to a total stoppage of trade in the Benin River. As most of the quarrels had arisen over debts incurred by Benin traders, the company's officials believed that a fundamental cause of conflict might be removed by ending the system of credit trading and an agreement to this effect formed one of the principal points of a new treaty signed in Benin City in June, 1735³⁸.

³³ A.R.B., Vol. 93. A Bambergh to Valckenier, II, December 1725.

³⁴ A.F.C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, p. 181.

³⁵ A. R. B., Vol. 85. R. Van Naerssen to W. Butler, 31 December, 1717

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Article 5 of the Treaty between the Dutch and Benin on 26 August, 1715

³⁸ A.R.N.W.I.C., Vol. 488, ff 157-158.

To authenticate this misuse of credit system, the company's official, Van Naerssen observed with dismay that the account books were full of unpaid debts. He told the Oba of Benin that the payment of debt will be the major condition of re-opening trade with his kingdom. The Oba of Benin reacted violently and decided to cut off food supplies to the factory. Van Naerssen responded by turning to chief Anthony of Boededoe for provision in order to survive.

Another area of contention was the refusal of Benin trader to pay higher prices for Dutch goods. The desire of any trader is to make profit. Therefore, when the price is high, more goods will be supplied. But when the price is low, the producers are discouraged since the profit margin would have reduced substantially. The Dutch became frustrated.

This frustration was clearly explained in the letter written by G. Ockers to P. Valckenier in November, 1724. It reads:

The native here so carefully regulated trade at the time the factory was established that it is how impossible to move them to pay more for the merchandise. For I tell them that the merchandise now costs more, they answer me that it does not concern them, that they agreed to trade on those terms at the time and that they will now continue to trade in the same manner. They say too that they would rather do no trade than be forced to abandon their old rights and customs³⁹.

In such conditions trade cannot flow as the Dutch were producing at a big loss. In such an atmosphere of an unprofitable trade, the Dutch have no option than to stop the trade. The last attempt was made in 1737 by the Dutch and the new Oba of Benin, Oba Eresoyen. The new Oba of Benin was hopeful that the Dutch would return to Ughoton to re-occupy their factory. The interest of the Oba and the people was not only based on trade, the people of Benin were

anxious to have the services of the factory physicians who had saved several lives by their medicines and other medical facilities. The Dutch official who wanted to facilitate this new deal was H. Hertog and his men. He entered into a new treaty with the Oba of Benin in December, 1737 designed mainly toward re-occupying the factory at Ughoton and ensured the Director-General of the Dutch West Indian Company to defend the post. H. Hertog however gave a condition for his intended plan of action to succeed which was the provision of sufficient and suitable ships to maintain contact with the outpost⁴⁰.

This bright idea could not work because the ships demanded were not available and unfortunately, H. Hertog was murdered at Badagry. On part of the Oba Benin, his commitment toward this project was shown in his several messages he sent to Badagry asking the Dutch to re-occupying their factory at Ughoton. The Oba of Benin hinted that their factory at Ughoton had fallen down three times and that he had rebuilt it at his own expense and also took care of all the company's property. This information was placed at the disposal of the Director-General thus:

That same king very humbly begs your Honour to re-open trade and he undertakes to keep all Englishmen out of Benin, but so long as there are no Dutchmen there he must willy-nilly be friends with the English. Enclosed herewith is a bead or conte de terre which the king sends to your Honour as a sample; he says he has many like it and is ready to trade them⁴¹.

The level of the decline of Dutch trade in Benin kingdom can be seen in the letter written by J. Bronssama to Director-General of Dutch West Indian Company where he observed that by 1740, there were no Dutchmen in Benin to transact trade. The reply of Barovius F. the

³⁹ A.R.B. Vol. 103. H. Hertog, to M. F. de Bordes, 20 April, 1738.

⁴¹ A.R.B. Vol. 105. J. Bronssama to F. Barovius, 7 May, 1740.

³⁹ A.R.B. Vol. 92: G Ockers to P. Valckenier, November, 1724.

Director-General to J. Bronssama one of the officials in charge at Badagry finally confirmed the end of Dutch trade relations with Benin. In the said letter, he wrote:

We should be willing to arrange with the king of Benin for the re-opening of trade there, if not for our complete lack of ships and the sorry state in which the late Director-General has left the company's affairs. But as it is to be hoped that things will not always be like this, you should not turn down the king's proposals but rather keep on friendly terms with him and in the meantime find out whether the company's factory there is really in the condition he pretends⁴².

Ryder remarked that for many years, the factory at Ughoton had been an idle luxury, sustained not by trade but by the inertia of an outworn organization⁴³. Also at that time, the West India Company lacked the resources to maintain the Dutch factory at Ughoton and thereby sustain the trade. The Dutch trade in Benin finally broke off abruptly in 1741.

Conclusion

In this paper, it was affirmed that the Dutch had established a regular trade with Benin by the end of the sixteenth century, through its agent, the Chartered West India Company that was granted a twenty-four year monopoly of all Dutch trade from the Tropic of Cancer to the Cape of Good Hope.

During the period of study, the trade relation between the Dutch and Benin experienced a great transformation as the center of trade was moved from Benin City to a number of riverside villages including Ughoton, Arbo and Boededoe, among others. This was done to attract traders from areas outside the Benin Kingdom like Ijebu, Ijaws and Itsekiris. This encouraged them to participate in the maritime trade as they made their way by canoes into the Benin River, to sell their goods to the Dutch.

It was also done to reduce the control of the Oba of Benin over the trade.

Other features of the trade were the introduction of the trust system; Manillas as the staple trading currency of Benin and cowries served as common currency also within Benin. There were common articles of trade. First the Dutch were attracted to Benin trade because of its pepper. Other Benin items included slaves, cotton cloths, coris, gum and redwood. Of all these items of trade gum was the most profitable from the assessment of the Dutch. The Dutch brought into Benin brass manillas, cowries, flint-locks, beads, Silesian cloth, brandy wine, tobacco, iron bar etc.

In order to promote trade between the two countries, certain agreements were reached in a treaty which took place on 26 August, 1715 which was described as the first formal treaty between Benin and the Europeans. While Oba Akenzua I represented Benin in the negotiation, Revixit van Naessen represented Dutch West India Company.

Some of the vital decisions reached include: the Oba of Benin approved the trade in gum and redwood promising to ensure that so constant a quantity to these products shall be worthwhile. It was agreed that the Oba would build and maintain a factory at Ughoton. The Oba refused the Dutch monopoly of Benin trade instead maintained the practice of dealing with all nations.

The Dutch trade in Benin suffered sudden decline from the eighteenth century. The Dutch reliance on gum and trade became counter-productive, as the profit generated from the trade in gum was longer sustained because the value of gum had fallen in the European market. In order to address these setbacks, attempts were made to diversify their Benin trade which proved abortive. Hence, that enthusiasm about the Benin trade suffered greatly. So the Dutch trade in Benin by 1741 had broken off abruptly.

⁴² A.R.B. Vol. 105. F. Barovius to J. Bronssama, 28 February, 1714.

⁴³ A.F.C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, p. 195.