

The transatlantic trade began as the first global age that started a period of global unification and urbanization. Trade was organized between people of Europe, Africa, Asia, and North and South America. The most obvious issue an audience will consider when thinking of the transatlantic trade, is slavery. Its repercussions after all, are still a dwindling matter in our society today; however, the purpose of this paper is to assert how the evolution of firearms became a primary component in West Africa's ability to prosper in the trading market on the Gold Coast while modernizing their culture.

Prior to the arrival of firearms in West Africa, their ways of warfare and weaponry were much like what people stereotype them as today, homemade bows and arrows along with spears, were a popular choice for the villagers to protect, hunt, and survive in the 15th and early 16th centuries. In a description of the Kingdom of Makoko, written by two individuals interested in Africa of whom traveled with merchants to different locations, the authors portray their weaponry as different from that of their neighbors: They fight on foot. Their bows are small and the wood is covered with snake skin of different colors. The bow strings were made up of a kind of reed that are strong, flexible, and slender. These warriors also carried knives and axes, and were extremely quick and nimble to account for the oppositions arrows. The belts warriors wear is made of elephant skin and are three inches wide and two inches thick. The authors comment on their character, depicting the Makoko people as quick to take up arms, daring, fearless, simple, upright, and sincere.¹ Time evolved in West Africa as did the weaponry,

¹Filippo Pigaffetta, Duarte Lopes, *The Kingdom of Makoko* (1591), ed. Louvain-Paris (1965), Bk. 1, chap.4, pg. 42-43. <https://www.courses.wisconsin.edu/d2l/le/content/3818006/viewContent/23168162/View>

enabling nations to compete with infiltrating tribes and countries to secure their place in history as crafty tradesman.

A Dutch report signifies the year 1658 as the turning point for the Gold Coast of Africa when the large-scale import of guns began. Dutch Director General Valckenburg reported that in 1658 African armies were going to war with thousands of guns and that only muskets were thriving on the Gold Coast. Around 1700, the Dutch alone were selling an estimated 20,000 tons of gunpowder annually. Firearms held a substantial position on slave ships in the late 17th century, and the increasing flow of guns in to the Gold Coast was a major cause of its transition from a Gold Coast to another slave coast between 1658 and 1700.² The demand for guns on Africa's west coast became so great that it was hard for opposing European traders to manufacture guns, gun powder, and ammunition to compete with the prospering market. It was this dilemma that eventually pushed the English as the front-runners for manufacturing cheap guns for the African market.

Why was the demand so high on the Gold Coast? The ways in which guns were used began to vary throughout the continent. Many emerging and expanding states that were well connected to the slave trade wanted to equip at least some part of their armies with the latest weapons. Firearms also facilitated the hunting of large animals and provided a sense of security from attacks which were common at this point in history. For example, the long-barreled musket was more accurate than a short-barreled gun.³ The Asante people were one of the first

² Richards, W. A. "The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century." *The Journal of African History* 21, no. 1 (1980): pp 46-47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/181483>.

³ David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp. 98-100.

West African states to reap the benefits of the long Dutch Muskets when they earned victory along the Gold and Slave Coasts against the Akyem army in 1742. The Akyem were supplied with the Danish muskets three and four feet in length while many Asante used the longer five and six-foot barrels.⁴ Although this victory has been more so contributed to the strategic events done by the Asante in months leading up to this battle, it cannot be denied that accuracy and precision were not advantageous.

The flood of guns into Africa's west coast between 1658 and 1730 made possible the earliest and most influential changes to inter-state warfare, economic life, and political organization of the West African states. The reduction in the price of guns imported between 1680 and 1702 in relation to the increase in slave prices made it possible for some West African communities to develop armies ranging in the thousands by the early 18th century.⁵ For that reason, firearms were a key factor in societal development throughout Africa.

⁴ Richards, W. A. "The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century." *The Journal of African History* 21, no. 1 (1980): p. 48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/181483>.

⁵ Richards, W. A. "The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century." *The Journal of African History* 21, no. 1 (1980): p. 57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/181483>.