

Kola in the History of West Africa.

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Résumé

P. E. Lovejoy —La kola dans l'histoire de l'Afrique occidentale.

Le commerce de la kola, spécialement l'espèce *Cola nitida*, a joué un rôle considérable dans l'histoire économique de l'Afrique occidentale. La zone principale de production se situe dans la bande forestière, sur le territoire actuel du Ghana, de la Côte d'Ivoire, de la Sierra Leone, du Libéria et de la Guinée. La culture du kola-tier est probable dès le xive siècle, certaine au XIXe, associée à la collecte dans les peuplements spontanés. L'analyse linguistique (diffusion de la racine *guro) en situe l'origine dans la région frontalière actuelle Libéria/Guinée/Sierra Leone, où son commerce était déjà développé lors de l'immigration mande (xve-xvie siècles), probablement depuis le xiiie siècle, sinon plus tôt. Les premiers cultivateurs étaient sans doute de langue ouest-atlantique ou mel, ultérieurement (xve siècle) supplantés par des Mande venus de la savane. La principale marchandise importée de la savane en retour paraît avoir été le fer ouvré. Plus à l'est, en pays Akan, le trafic de la kola aurait été associé à celui de l'or à partir des xive-xve siècles. C'est la seule zone où, pour des motifs liés à l'écologie, se développe un État centralisé lié à ce commerce. La révolution économique du xixe siècle entraîne une augmentation massive du trafic et de la production (i 000 % entre 1910 et 1960) liée aux nouvelles facilités de transport maritime et terrestre.

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Introduction

The kola nut, particularly the variety *Cola nitida*, has been a major commodity in West African trade for many centuries, long before its distinct taste provided the inspiration for numerous cola drinks. Such wondrous potions as kola-wine, kola-cocoa, and kola-chocolate were first experimented with in Great Britain in the 1890's, although Burroughs & Wellcome's 'Forced March Tabloid' was the only preparation which retained the original taste of the bitter nut.¹ Later drinks, including Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola, now the most popular, bear little resemblance in taste to the chestnut-size nut traditionally chewed in West Africa. Red, white, or of shades in between, the *C. nitida* nuts were valued because they cleansed the mouth, provided a spurt of energy, and were credited with numerous medicinal and other properties. They were also mildly addictive, which was an important, if unknown, reason why thousands of common folk chewed it, at naming ceremonies, weddings and other occasions, although it constituted a luxury. For the wealthy, they were a necessary sign of their hospitality and affluence. Other varieties of kola, less widely distributed and less prestigious, had similar physiological effects.²

Grown only in the forest, kola found a ready market almost everywhere in West Africa, including the savanna and southern Sahara, many hundreds of kilometres north of its production zone. Despite the great care needed to preserve the nuts—which are vulnerable to a variety of pests and must be kept moist—, kola was central to north-south exchange between forest and savanna. This article will concentrate on it, although one must keep in mind that other commodities, especially gold, salt, livestock, slaves, textiles, leather goods, and iron hoes, were also impor-

* I wish to thank Philip D. Curtin, Jean-Loup Amselle and Richard Roberts for their comments.

1. ROBINSON 1900: 153. Also see CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 433-435; FREEMAN 1893: 144. In early experiments, kola was prepared with sugar and vanilla to form 'kola chocolate'. It was used in the manufacture of cocoa and chocolate to improve the quality of inferior cocoa; and also medicinally as a source of caffeine.

2. For a discussion of the uses of kola, see LOVEJOY 1980; SUNDSTRÖM 1966: 135-146; CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 448-462; RUSSELL 1955.

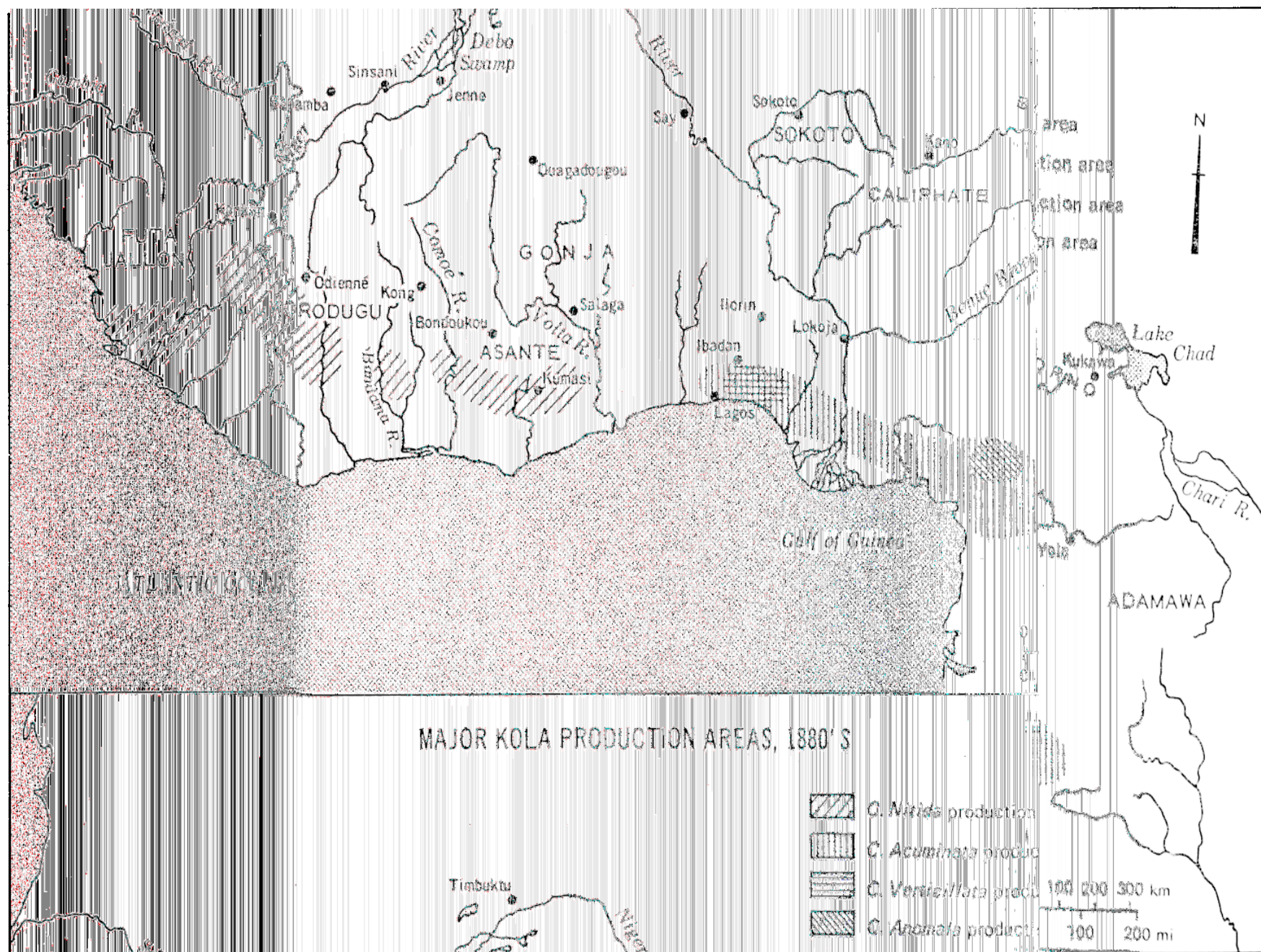
tant, and that the commercial patterns here described also relate to a wide range of commodities. Kola is isolated for analysis in order to determine the origins of *C. nitida* production, to establish the probable routes of distribution in the savanna, and to contribute to the construction of a chronological framework for further analysis of trade in West Africa.

Varieties of Kola

Kola is indigenous to the West African forest, but is found as far east as Gabon and the Congo river basin. Of its more than forty varieties, four—*C. nitida*, *C. acuminata*, *C. verticillata*, and *C. anomala*—, which are the most common of the edible species,³ have been important in the commerce of West Africa. These four types are similar in their chemical composition and use. They contain, together with other compounds, large amounts of caffeine, and smaller quantities of theobromine, kolatin, and glucose. All these are stimulants: caffeine affects the central nervous system, theobromine activates the skeletal muscles, kolatin acts on the heart, and glucose provides energy to the body as a whole. When chewed, and it appears that kola was not cooked or made into drinks anywhere in Africa, the nuts have an effect similar to that of coffee, tea or cocoa, and consequently kola, being an excellent refreshment, can be used to relieve hunger, thirst, and fatigue, lending itself well to social situations. It had a ready market almost everywhere in West Africa: in the savanna, where demand was high in the absence of tea, coffee or other preparations filling such roles, and tended to increase with the spread of Islam and its prohibitions on alcoholic beverages; but also in the forest areas, although alcohol was drunk, where kola was often associated with rituals and ceremonies.

The kola-producing zone can be divided into two parts, one for *C. nitida* and the other for *C. acuminata*, *C. verticillata* and *C. anomala* (see Map). This division is significant because *C. nitida* was by far the most important variety in terms of trade between forest and savanna, and because its zone of cultivation was geographically separated from

3. RUSSELL 1955: 211; but also see DALZIEL 1948: 100-107. The scientific classification of the varieties of kola was virtually completed with the publication of CHEVALIER & PERROT in 1911. Chevalier was able to establish that a number of different specimens which had previously been classified separately were the same, and he identified all the major varieties. His classification of sub-varieties of *C. nitida* (a species red or white and with two cotyledons), however, has been challenged by Russell and others. Nonetheless, Chevalier's work was a major breakthrough. It built on the earlier work of numerous German, French, and English botanists, much of which was confusing. For examples of earlier work, see ECKHARDT 1887; HERTZ 1880-1881; 'Cola' 1890 and 1906. For a survey of the botanical history, see RUSSELL 1955: 210-228. Also see MISCHLICH 1930. Another variety of kola, *C. ballayi*, was found in Gabon and areas further east. It was exported to the savanna north of this region, but was not transported to West Africa and hence is not dealt with here. See CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 21-22, 139-142, 196-198; VANSINA 1973: 112, 117.



that of the other varieties. There does not appear to be any difference in the techniques of cultivation that would account for this. The explanation as to why one variety assumed such importance commercially while the others did not also remains unclear; one can only note that a market had to be developed, since taste for the nuts is acquired, and that, whatever the reasons, demand for the other varieties has always remained small by comparison.

Before the last decade of the 19th century, the production of *C. nitida* was confined to the forests west of the Volta river, except for a very limited output in Nupe, near the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers; this variety of kola was in particular demand among Muslims, and since areas of production were far away, it had to be transported considerable distances in order to reach the most eastern markets in the Central Sudan. *C. acuminata* was the primary variety grown in Yorubaland, the Igbo country, and areas further east; some was sold outside the forest zone, but it figured more prominently in local trade.⁴ *C. verticillata* also was grown in the forests of Yorubaland, and perhaps further east too; some was exported north into the Central Sudan, where it was known to Hausa consumers as *hannunruwa*; it was also used in Borno, although demand there appears to have been far less than for *C. nitida*; *C. verticillata* was considered slimy, and women used it as much for cosmetic purposes as for its caffeine.⁵ *C. anomala* was grown only in Bamenda and was exported north, at least by the middle of the 19th century; unlike *C. verticillata*, it was an acceptable substitute for *C. nitida* in the markets of the Central Sudan; the production area was limited, however, and possibly little *C. anomala* was cultivated before the expansion of Hausa trade into southern Fombina (Adamawa) in the 19th century.⁶

The Development of the 'C. Nitida' Trade: Methodological Considerations

Although kola was indigenous to the whole forest area of West Africa, only certain parts have been important historically in the production of *C. nitida*. Kola trees can grow in the forest-savanna fringe south of approximately 10° N latitude, but the main area for *C. nitida*, which is the variety discussed in the rest of this article unless otherwise indicated, has been between 6° and 8° N, from the Volta to the rivers of the Upper Guinea coast. Proximity to the savanna was significant in determining potential output, the most productive region beginning from 125 to

4. AGIRI 1972: 48-63; 1975; RUSSELL 1955: 215-216. *C. acuminata* has from three to five cotyledons; it is called *abata* in Yoruba. For a discussion of *C. acuminata*, see CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 3-6, 12-13, 294-295.

5. LOVEJOY 1980, ch. VII; RUSSELL 1955: 220-221. AGIRI (1972: 52, n.) identifies *C. verticillata* as monkey kola. *C. verticillata* has two to five cotyledons.

6. RUSSELL 1955: 221-223; LOVEJOY 1980, ch. VII; CHILVER 1961: 253-254. *C. anomala* has from three to six cotyledons. For a discussion of merchant activity, see DUFFILL 1976; WIRZ 1972: 157-158; CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 397, 403.

150 kilometres inland and ending approximately 300 kilometres from the coast. This belt was subdivided into four parts. In the east, the Akan forests were the principal source: in the 19th century kola was found in Asante, from Mampong in the east through Tekyiman and the Tano river valley, and it also grew in the Ano region along the Comoé river, 200 to 300 kilometres from the coast. The second area, straddling the Bandama river, especially comprised Guro country, but also included the Bete area to a lesser extent. The third area was further west astride the present Sierra Leone-Liberia-Guinea boundary near the source of the Niger river: a variety of people exported kola from this zone, including, from east to west, the Dan, Gerze (Kpelle), Toma, Kisi, and Kono. The fourth area was the coast between the Scarcies and Nunez rivers in Sierra Leone and Guinea, where the Temne and Bullom collected kola for export along the coast and through the Futa Jallon highland. Kola was also cultivated north of this broad belt, but then only in small groves near villages where conditions were favourable; usually the nuts were smaller, and were consumed locally. Trees had to be tended carefully, and their presence in Futa Jallon, Kuranko country, and even near Kankan indicates their commercial importance (Chevalier & Perrot 1911: 150-152).

In the first decade of the 20th century, *C. nitida* trees were usually planted in the most important producing areas, as this has probably been for many centuries. Cultivation was common among the Temne, Baga, Kisi, Toma, Gerze, Dan, Mano, Ge, Guro, Gan and perhaps the Asante.⁷ Groves of thirty to sixty trees were common near Ge villages, while the Kisi planted trees in pockets of forest by theirs. Among the Gerze and Toma, groves were found along the Diani river, in Kabaradougou, and in Simandougou. In the Ano region which supplied Kong, kola was planted in groves of 250 to 300 trees. Trees were elsewhere planted in smaller numbers. The Guro planted individual trees when girls were aged six or seven in preparation for puberty rites, but there were no plantations. The Mano planted a tree or two on grave sites, this sometimes forming the basis of a small grove.⁸

Even when trees were wild, they were often claimed and marked. The Toma, Gerze and their neighbours, after clearing the land around

7. Much of the information on kola production is based on the informations of Chevalier, who toured the principal kola regions in 1899 and between 1905 and 1910. Since Chevalier's specific intention was to study kola and since he was a botanist with access to official reports, his findings are particularly important. He not only examined areas of intense cultivation, but he visited areas where kola only grew wild or did not grow at all. He also visited the English and German colonies. Another advantage of his study is that he quotes at length from the reports of other observers and compares these with his own findings. Also see LOVEJOY 1980, ch. II; SCHWAB 1947: 64; MEILLASSOUX 1964: 119; BERBERICH 1974: 142.

8. SCHWAB 1947: 64; CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 145-191, 289-296, 313-319, 324; LELONG 1948-49: 36-38; MEILLASSOUX 1964: 119. Also see TERRAY 1974: 329-330; McCULLOCH 1950: 67.

newly discovered trees, used bundles of straw, old matchet handles with small stones tied to them, pieces of calabash stuffed with bombax 'cotton', and other devices to establish a claim. In Gerze country, the sites of abandoned villages were visible because of the number of kola trees there. The Guro acted differently: except for a few trees, most nuts were gathered in forests, where access was a lineage right. In the area between Kumasi and Nkoranza in Asante, kola trees were so thick in the 1890's that they formed a gigantic kola forest. Some of the trees there may even have been planted, and certainly underbrush was cleared away to protect seedlings, which must have been a regular practice for a long time. As with the Guro, however, the gathering of kola seems to have been possible for any member of a lineage which maintained collective rights to the trees.⁹

It is crucial to the argument presented here that the trade in kola depended, at least in part, on its cultivation. Evidence of this cultivation is conclusive for the late 19th century, and one can assume that customs associated with planting trees on grave sites and as a preliminary stage in puberty rites are very old. The question is how old, and how significant such practices have been in spreading *C. nitida*: one text from the 16th century indeed states (Ibn al-Mukhtār, in Mahmud Kāfi 1964: 67) that 'plantations of kola' existed then, but this being the only reference, it remains theoretically possible that, as the market for kola developed, commercialization at first only involved nuts tapped from trees in their natural state; and that *C. nitida* has spread by itself throughout the area from the Scarcies and Nunez rivers eastward to the Volta, with cultivation developing only later. My assumption here, however, is that the very spread of kola trees from some areas to others was a result of cultivation: the movement of villages, the opening of new lands, and local trade probably resulted in the planting of trees, as well as it allowed natural germination and the spread of wild stands of kola. This argument is supported by linguistic data and by the traditions which chronicle the movement of people in the area of kola production.

The evidence is discussed in five parts: linguistic and ethnographic data are examined in the first two parts; accounts and evidence of trade —with the savanna, from the Akan forests, along the Guinea coast—in the following three. The reconstruction of the chronology of the kola trade before 1600 is based on this discussion. Although the data are incomplete and often confusing, the following propositions can be advanced, each of which is discussed at length in the appropriate section: (1) Linguistic data indicate that the likely origin of cultivation for *C. nitida* was in the

9. SCHWAB 1947: 64, 418; LELONG 1948-49: 36-38; FREEMAN 1898: 353; ARHIN 1965: 143; BERBERICH 1974: 142, citing MOHR 1882: 16; WONDJI 1972. Wondji, who bases his information on oral accounts, argues that the Bete did not plant kola trees, although colonial observers in the first decade of the 20th century report otherwise. Again it seems likely that the Bete traditionally protected kola seedlings, even if they did not actually plant trees.

Guinea-Liberia-Sierra Leone border area, but do not provide evidence for ascertaining a date of initial development. (2) Ethnographic data, primarily collected by Person, suggest that kola already was a commercial crop when Mande-speaking groups settled in the forest where it was cultivated. The first Mande group probably moved into the forest in the mid-15th century, with the major movements dating to the 16th century. Ethnic boundaries were relatively stable by the early 17th century. Hence the ethnographic data give some reliable basis for the reconstruction of a chronology. The trade had developed before the 15th or 16th centuries, but a major transformation occurred then. (3) The market for kola in the savanna probably existed by the 13th century, and possibly much earlier. Furthermore, this market was large enough to have by then come to the attention of observers in North Africa. This supports a chronology in which kola commercialization antedates the Mande migrations into the forest in the 15th and 16th centuries. (4) Kola production in the Akan forests, which developed later than in areas to the west, was important by the 15th and perhaps the 14th century. This corroborates the thesis that kola cultivation was initiated well before this time in the original area of production. Furthermore, the evidence of kola imports in the Central Sudan demonstrates that demand was quite large in the savanna by the 15th century, since the Central Sudan was at a considerable distance from areas of production. (5) Finally, information on trade along the Upper Guinea coast gives some indication of the scale of production at the time when the movement of Mande groups into the forest initiated major changes in the original production zone. The coastal trade must have represented only a fraction of the interior trade, but it was, nonetheless, on the order of several hundred tons per year for a relatively restricted geographical area of the savanna. It seems likely that other parts of West Africa of comparable population density imported at least as much by the same time. The total trade, therefore, probably involved thousands of tons of kola by the late 16th century, although there is no way of verifying this hypothesis.

Origins of the Kola Trade: The Linguistic Evidence

Linguistic evidence (see Tables I and II) shows that the terms for kola in the area from the Bandama river westward to Sierra Leone and Guinea are related, and suggests that it was in this area that *C. nitida* was first developed as a commercial crop. The common root of the various words for kola in this region can be here reconstructed as *goro. The similarity in terms is all the more striking because the languages spoken in this region belong to two distinct linguistic subfamilies within Niger-Kordofanian (see Table I): in Greenberg's classification (1966: 8), the languages in the far West are grouped under West Atlantic, while those in the interior as far as the Bandama river are included in Mande.

TABLE I. — WORDS FOR KOLA IN THE LANGUAGES
OF THE WEST AFRICAN FOREST

<i>Language</i>	<i>Language Subfamily</i>	<i>Words for Kola</i>
Kisi*	West Atlantic	<i>kolo, ko-tundo</i> (tree)
Temne*		<i>kola, tola</i>
Gula		<i>gola</i>
Limba		<i>tutugi, tugwi</i>
Mano	Mande	<i>go</i>
Dan (Dyola)*		<i>go, godi</i> (tree)
Gerze (Kpelle)*		<i>torofo, tugula, tugure</i>
Foma*		<i>furo</i>
Guro*		<i>guro</i>
Mende		<i>ku, kari, toto, tolo, toli</i>
Kono*		<i>konno</i>
Abbey	Kwa	<i>na</i>
Abidji		<i>lo</i>
Abure		<i>bese-va</i>
Avikam		<i>elwa</i>
Attie		<i>lò</i>
Anyi*		<i>wese, wose</i>
Bete*		<i>guresu</i>
Ebrie		<i>apho, apo, hapo</i>
Mbatto		<i>opo</i>
Neyo		<i>gre</i>
Twí (Asante)*		<i>bese</i>
Krobo		<i>tsle</i>
Ga		<i>chele</i>
Yoruba		<i>o-bi</i>
Igbo		<i>oji</i>
Bassa		<i>we-eh</i>
Edo		<i>eve, ewe, eube</i>
Ijaw		<i>daba</i>
Fang	Benue-Congo (Bantu)	<i>bilu</i>
Tio		<i>ibilu</i>
Kongo		<i>biru</i>

* Major 19th-century kola producers.

Sources: CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 159, 168, 176, 370; HAIR 1967: 42; DELAFOSSE 1955: 823; UCHENDU 1965: 74; SCHWAB 1947: 498; and personal communications from Alphonse Tekpetey, University of Wisconsin (16.4.1971), and from G. Canu, directeur de l'Institut de linguistique appliquée, Université d'Abidjan (8.11.1971).

TABLE II. — WORDS FOR KOLA IN THE LANGUAGES
OF THE WEST AFRICAN SAVANNA

<i>Language</i>	<i>Language Subfamily</i>	<i>Words for Kola</i>
Wolof	West Atlantic	<i>guro</i>
Fula		<i>woro, goro</i>
Diola of Fogny		<i>guru</i>
Soninke (Serakhulle)	Mande	<i>goro</i>
Bambara		<i>goro, woro</i>
Malinke		<i>woro</i>
Jula		<i>wuro</i>
Samo		<i>gure</i>
Koranko		<i>oro, woro</i>
Susu		<i>kolai, kolaxame</i>
Dagbane	Voltaic	<i>gule</i>
Senufo		<i>woro</i>
More (Mossi)		<i>gure</i>
Dyan		<i>wura</i>
Lobi		<i>wura</i>
Dagara/Dagari		<i>gur</i>
Kirma		<i>woro</i>
Tyurama		<i>woro</i>
Mambar		<i>woro</i>
Senar of Kankalaba		<i>woru</i>
Tenyer		<i>wuro</i>
Tusian		<i>wer-ne</i>
Seme (Siamu)		<i>gbel</i>
Ele		<i>guru</i>
Fulse		<i>gure</i>
Gurmanche		<i>guoli</i>
Songhay	Songhay	<i>goro</i>
Kanuri	Saharan	<i>goro</i>
Hausa	Chadic	<i>goro</i>
Gbari	Kwa	<i>gwolo</i>
Guan		<i>kapuse</i>

Sources : DELAFOSSE 1955: 823; WEISS 1940: 102; PROST 1965: 373; 1964: 410; LABOURET 1958: 227; BENTON 1968, II: 62; BIRD 1964. Besides Guan, the only known exceptions are languages spoken north of Igbo country, an area which was not within the major savanna trade patterns of the far West (personal communication from R. J. Gavin; I wish to thank Phyllis Ferguson for information on Guan).

By contrast, the words for kola in virtually all the languages in the Kwa subfamily are clearly unrelated, there being less similarity within the Kwa group than between West Atlantic and Mande. Among the former group, the people who speak the Anyi, Twi, and Bete languages have been important producers of kola for export, but only the Bete term for kola (*guresu*) bears a resemblance to those used further west. The Bete lived adjacent to the Mande and West Atlantic area and further west than other Kwa-speakers. Their neighbours to the north, the Guro, were major producers of kola, and the Bete country was not far from other centres of cultivation. This is perhaps a significant indication that *C. nitida* was first gathered for commercial purposes in the far west where the Mande and West Atlantic languages are spoken. It should also be noted that the Baule area between the Bandama and Comoé rivers, previously inhabited by the Senufo, Dida and Guro, has not been important in the production of kola. The Baule are an Akan group which moved west from central Asante, where kola was grown, in the 18th century. Only the extreme northeast of their country is within the kola zone, contiguous to that of Asante. Otherwise the area they now inhabit occupies a crucial position which divides the kola belt into an eastern and a western segment (Chauveau 1977: 579, 591-594). To the west, the **goro* root is universal; to the east, *bese* or *wese* was the most common term among those who collected and sold kola.

Equally significant in the identification of the West Atlantic and Mande area as the initial region of kola production is the linguistic relationship between the **goro* of the forest and the word for kola virtually everywhere in the West African savanna (see Table II). From the Senegambia to lake Chad, *goro*, *woro* or some other variation is used. The change from 'g' to 'w' is a normal sound shift in the Mande languages, while vowel differences and the 'r' and 'l' alternatives are easily understood linguistically.¹⁰ This similarity suggests that kola spread throughout the savanna from the area west of the Bandama river, and probably from that straddling the Guinea-Sierra Leone border, since the most logical explanation for the diffusion of the **goro* root is that the savanna languages borrowed the term from one of the forest people who grew kola. It must also have been the case that the kola merchants used only one or two commercial languages in their business activities. The linguistic evidence suggests that the initial diffusion of kola occurred relatively quickly, which would indicate, as Person has argued (1968: 102), the existence of an established, interlocking commercial network capable of providing the security and organization necessary to the relatively quick distribution of the perishable nuts from forest to savanna.¹¹

Three linguistic data point to this conclusion. First, some non-

10. Personal communication from Professor Charles Bird, Department of Linguistics, Indiana University. I wish to thank Professor Bird for his assistance, although I am fully responsible for all interpretations.

11. For a general discussion, see PERSON 1968: 89-129.

Mande people such as the Fulbe and the Senufo use the word *woro* instead of *goro*. This indicates that they first obtained kola only after the sound change in the Mande languages had occurred. It is however likely that both groups have been consumers for many centuries, for they lived relatively close to the kola-producing region and to the north-south routes followed by kola merchants.

Second, the Songhay, Hausa and Kanuri use *goro*, which indicates that they had borrowed the term before the phonological change from 'g' to 'w' had taken place. One can at least say that the Songhay, and through them the people of the Central Sudan, must have been in contact with merchants who used the *goro* form at the time they came to know kola. Since Songhay and the Central Sudan are particularly far from the western producing region, this also suggests that the introduction of kola was very ancient.

Finally, the diffusion of kola consumption must have taken place before kola was exported from the Akan region: if people speaking an Akan or another Kwa language had developed their kola resources before the forest people to the west of the Akan, then some savanna languages would have borrowed a Kwa term. In fact only Guan, the Kwa language spoken in Gonja, immediately north of the Akan area, has a word similar to *bese*, the Akan and Twi term. Two languages, Guro and Gola, indicate a possible connection between kola production and the western forest region. The word for kola in Guro, a Mande language, is *guro*, while in Gola, a West Atlantic language, it is *gola*. The fact that the terms for the languages and for kola are identical is either an amazing coincidence or an indication that these people tended to identify themselves through their participation in the kola trade. The Gola have probably lived in the forests of Sierra Leone since at least the 13th century. Their ancestral home, east of the St. Paul river, in today's Liberia, has long been the centre of kola production, so that they may have been major producers in the past. When, in the mid-16th century, they were forced to move, their lands were occupied by Mande-speakers, probably the Toma, Gbunde, and related groups (Person 1971: 678; also see 1961: 12, 47).

The connection between the Guro and kola production is also ancient, although traditions of origin are too confused to provide a chronological framework. Some Guro claim a relationship with the Bete in the south; others remember a migration from the east, probably when the Baule moved into the region in the 18th century; while still other Guro claim an association with the Malinke in the savanna. Some traditions mention a search for kola trees as a reason for migration, but they are too vague to suggest anything more than a long tradition of kola production (Meillassoux 1964: 33-37). Nonetheless, the relationship between the ethnic name and the word for kola also occurs in the savanna, where the region adjacent to Guro country is called 'the land of kola', *Worodugu*, which is derived from *woro*, 'kola nut', and *dugu*, 'land'. The Mande

sound shift from 'g' to 'w' seems to have operated here: the geographic term, *Worodugu*, 'the land of kola', designating the markets for Guro kola, is literally the northern extension of 'Guro land', which would be **gurodugu*, without the sound shift. This hypothetical reconstruction may or may not be accurate historically, but the connection between the Guro and kola is. But one must also take into account that a general movement of Mande-speaking groups into the forest area has taken place about the same time, i.e. in the 15th and 16th centuries, and that the traditions of the Toma and Gerze, who were also major kola producers, are more assertive in their claims of savanna origins than those of the Guro; what then seems likely is that the settlement of all these people was related to the development of kola as an export crop (Person 1968: 74; 1970b: 284-285; 1964: 327).

Although the words for kola in these languages are related to the **goro* root, other data suggest that it was probably people who spoke a West Atlantic language who were initially associated with kola and that the Mande-speakers borrowed the term and probably began collecting the nuts later. Among the Temne, for example, who had moved from the Futa Jallon highlands to coastal Sierra Leone by the 14th or 15th century, the vocabulary related to kola production suggests that a West Atlantic language probably was the original source of the **goro* root. The Temne word for kola is *kola* or *tola*, while kola trees are called *nola* or *yola*. The variation in these forms would indicate that the word was indigenous to the language or to proto-West Atlantic, particularly to the Mel languages of coastal Sierra Leone. According to Hair (1967: 55, n.), 'the term *cola* [. . .] is probably of Mel origin but it is not unlikely that it had been borrowed by Mande languages long before Europeans arrived [in the 15th century].' This conclusion must be considered tentative, however, since other linguistic data are lacking.

The Origins of the Kola Trade: The Ethnographic Evidence

Most of the people west of the Bandama river who have been major kola producers claim a savanna origin. They include the Kisi, who speak a West Atlantic language, as well as all the Mande groups who now live in the forests of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast. The fact that the Gerze, Toma, and others who speak Mande languages were not indigenous to the forest helps confirm the hypothesis that kola cultivation has a West Atlantic (Mel) source, but that immigrants from the savanna expelled or assimilated those people initially involved in the kola trade. Traditions collected by Person establish that ethnic boundaries became relatively stable only in the early 17th century. Even then the Gola and others who had previously been displaced continued to expand southward.¹² The early history is sketchy because tra-

12. PERSON 1968: 101-108. Also see PERSON 1971: 673-686; 1963: 143-145; 1964: 327; 1970b: 283-285; 1961: 27, 47-50; HAIR 1967: 42, 55-56.

ditions referring to that far ago obviously cannot be regarded as reliable. Person has however been able to suggest several conclusions which bear on our effort to reconstruct the development of kola production.

First, the Kisi, a Mel group, lived approximately 150 kilometres north of their present boundary in the region of the Niger headwaters and not within the kola zone. By the early 17th century, they had occupied the kola forests, probably because other Mel groups were forced out of this area by one of several Mande invasions (Person 1968: 74, 202; 1971: 673; 1961: 27, 47-50). The fact that the Kisi are the only Mel group to survive as a major kola producer south of the Malinke heartland is significant because it indicates that by the 16th century the production zone was completely transformed. Those Mel groups probably responsible for the original production of kola had by then been destroyed, forced to evacuate the main kola area, or absorbed into other ethnic configurations. Indeed the Kisi themselves have cultural traits similar to those of people of the savanna, where they once lived and which also reflect Mande influence.

The second conclusion which can be drawn from Person's material relates to the movement of Mande-speaking groups into the forest. The earliest remembered Mande incursion was that of the Vai, which probably took place in the mid-15th century and affected the original home of the Gola. Person (1971: 676) speculates that 'the Vai eruption must have been aimed at the kola and sea salt trade.' (Also see 1968: 74.) The Kono may have been involved in a related or similar movement. During this period, the Kamara, a Malinke clan, controlled Konyan, the area to the immediate north of the kola zone astride the routes probably followed by the Vai and Kono. The political consolidation of the Kamara and the Vai-Kono movement may have been related, and suggest that commercial relations similar to those of a later date were probably already established (Person 1971: 675; and 1968: 74).

The most famous Mande invasion, the one which also appears to have been associated with the introduction of the *poro* secret society into the forest, was that of the Mane, which dates to c. 1545. The occupation of the kola zone by the Toma, who moved south from the Milo valley, and the Gerze (Kpelle), moving from Konyan, probably led to the final expulsion of the Gola from the kola forests. The Mane ended up further south, where they introduced dramatic changes among the Mel groups. Foremost among these was the spread of *poro*, a secret society which became the central institution in social affairs and which was equally important in the economy. The decrees of the *poro* society helped mobilize agricultural labour, protected private property, and regulated commerce. *Poro* became particularly strong among the Toma, Gerze, and neighbouring people in the kola forests. Its injunctions appear to have been used to protect claims to kola trees, at least this was the established custom by the end of the 19th century.¹³

13. PERSON 1968: 74; 1971: 675-678, 686. Person's analysis revises the earlier work by RODNEY (1967).

With the exception of the Kisi, therefore, Mande groups successfully seized the kola forests; and even the exception is instructive, since the Kisi also came from the savanna. This major realignment in the kola trade stabilized by the early 17th century, when the area then included, from the Kisi in the west to the Bandama valley in the east: Gbande, Gbunde, Toma, Gerze, Mano, Ge, Dan, and Guro, all of which are Mande groups. To the south were non-Mande, including the Bete south of the Guro, the Gola, Temne, Bassa, and Bulom south of the Kisi. Despite this cultural and linguistic transformation, it is likely that many of the indigenous inhabitants were assimilated and hence the demographic change appears more drastic in tradition than it probably was in reality.

Commercial arrangements also changed. Person's assessment is that 'the seventeenth century saw a massive descent of Sudanese down the rivers [of the forest zone], where they were linguistically assimilated but did introduce Islam.' (Person 1971: 688; also 1968: 73-75, 526-527.) It was in this period that Juula towns were founded to the north of the forest, immigrants maintaining connections essential in the development of trade. This later commercial development has somewhat obscured earlier patterns of trade, just as the movement of the Kisi, Gerze, Toma and others into the kola forests makes it difficult to uncover earlier patterns of production. Nonetheless, scattered information suggests that there was a kola trade well before the 16th century.

The Trade with the Savanna

The kola trade with the savanna is at least seven centuries old, and probably much older.¹⁴ The first reference to a nut which almost certainly was kola indicates that it was known as far north as the Mediterranean coast by the 13th century. Ibn Fadl Allāh al-'Umārī (d. 1349) referred to nuts which were 'âcres, désagréables au goût et les Noirs seuls les mangent.' (In Mauny 1961: 249.) They came from Mali, and were probably of the species which the al-Maqqarī brothers reported being exported from Walata to Tlemcen in the 13th century (*ibid*). Ibn al-Mukhtār, writing in the 17th century, also identifies kola with the Mali Empire; he records a prosperous trade during the reign of Kankan Musa, from c. 1307 to 1332.

'Ses [Mali's] habitants sont riches et vivent largement; il suffit, pour se rendre compte, de citer les mines d'or et les plantations de gouro [kola] qu'on y trouve et dont les pareilles ne se rencontrent pas dans tout Tekrou, sauf au pays de Bergo. . .' (in Mahmud Kāti 1964: 67).

The centre of the Mali Empire was just north of Worodugu, the land of kola, while the gold deposits were located at Buré, to the west. This

14. For a discussion of early references to kola, see MAUNY 1961: 249; LEVTZION 1973: 181-182; RENAUD 1928; HAIR 1967: 42; CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 2-11.

reference makes it clear that kola was collected on a large scale in either the Kisi-Gerze-Toma region or the Guro area, or in both. The comparison with Bergo (Borgu) is confusing, for that name can refer to two areas. The first and most commonly referred to is the Bariba States in the northern part of the Republic of Benin; the second is the area around Jenne.¹⁵ For Songhay in the 16th century, there were two principal kola routes: one went west; the other passed south from Jenne to the Akan forests between the Volta and Comoé rivers. It seems that Ibn al-Mukhtār was contrasting the gold and kola resources of the west, which were channelled through Mali, and those which passed through Jenne from the Akan forests. It is possible, nonetheless, that he was referring to trade through the Bariba States, although other evidence, which will be discussed below, suggests that the 14th century is too early for trade across this region.

Many of the merchants associated with Mali, collectively known as Juula (Dyula), trace their origins back to before the 13th century, when the first references to kola appear. As early as the 11th century, commercial networks did connect the Empire of Ghana with other parts of West Africa and maybe imported kola from the forest.¹⁶ In the 12th or 13th century, Soninke (Sarakole or Serakhulle) merchants and clerics founded the Niger river town of Dia, which formed the nucleus of a commercial and religious diaspora which identified as Jahaanke. Dia was destroyed, but the Jahaanke moved outward to new settlements in the Senegambia, from where by the late 15th century they had established ties with places as far away as the Central Sudan (Sanneh 1976; Curtin 1971). New towns were founded in the vicinity of Dia and became associated with the Maraka who also claim a Soninke origin and a connection with Ghana. Such towns as Sinsani (Sansanding), Nyamina, and others continued in the commercial tradition which maintained extensive links throughout West Africa. Their merchants secured kola from the original production areas, perhaps as early as the 14th century (Roberts 1978). Jenne, which was founded in the 14th century (see Person 1968: 96) probably looked in this direction, too, as Ibn al-Mukhtār's reference to trade through 'Bergo' seems to indicate.

The merchants of the Mali Empire founded similar settlements, and it is likely that the traders from the northern savanna travelled south too, perhaps directly to the forest and the kola zone. As Ibn al-Mukhtār noted, a major attraction for these merchants was the gold fields of Buré, located along the headwaters of the Niger river, north of the kola forests, and west of Mali. It was a relatively short distance beyond this major commercial axis to the kola-production zone, but there is no evidence for

15. For the identification of Borgu with the Jenne area, see the map in KODJO 1976: 791.

16. For a general study of commercial activity in the Upper Niger and adjacent areas, see PERSON 1968: 89-129. Also see PERINBAM 1974; GALLAIS 1967: 469-488; CURTIN 1975: 66-91.

commercial settlements south of Buré in this period; and, on the basis of genealogical material, Person argues that the earliest Juula settlements in the area between the Buré gold fields and the forest, where Kankan and Konyan are located, were established only in the 15th century,¹⁷ that is well after the first references to kola. The discrepancy between the genealogical data and the Arabic sources may indicate that traditions about earlier savanna networks have been forgotten or absorbed into later traditions, or it may suggest that forest people transported kola north into the savanna before the Juula systems developed. As recently as the 19th century, Guro women carried kola to Boron and other towns north of the forest, and a similar pattern may have existed for centuries (Person 1964: 325-328; 1970b: 283-286).

The nature of commodity exchange between the kola zone and the area to the immediate north of the forest suggests how commercial patterns probably functioned in the period before the foundation of separate Juula towns. The forest region lacked sources of iron, and consequently an essential item of trade with the savanna was small iron implements, shaped somewhat like hoes, which were refashioned into agricultural tools and which also served as currency in the area of kola production. To the west of the Sassandra river, these small hoes were referred to as *gèzè*, while in the Bandama valley they were called *sōmpè*. Iron was worked at relatively few centres in the southern savanna; north of Guro country the important places were at Touba, between Odienné and Man, and Sakhala, north of Mankono.¹⁸ These were also major markets for kola. Livestock, textiles, and salt also figured in the exchange, but these items were only important in that they linked the iron-working centres with the north. The crucial exchange, as regards our effort to reconstruct the development of the kola trade, was in iron hoes. The location of the iron deposits required that either kola producers travelled north to visit the blacksmiths of the savanna or intermediaries serviced this branch of the trade. By the 17th century the latter prevailed. Although there is no evidence for the earlier period, it seems certain that from ancient times kola was being relayed through the iron-working centres.

Amselle's work (1977) on the Kooroko merchants of Wasulu, who were involved in the kola trade long before they became the commercial agents of the Samorian State in the 19th century, suggests another connection between the iron resources of the savanna and the kola of the forest, although Amselle does not specifically associate these merchants with the exporting of iron implements southward to the kola forests where iron money was current. The Kooroko who were originally blacksmiths became important kola traders in part because Wasulu was astride several important trade routes to the south. It seems possible

17. PERSON 1968: 103, 241; also 1963: 143-145; 1964: 327; 1970b: 283-285.

18. PORTÈRES 1960. Also see MEILLASSOUX 1964: 268-273; PERSON 1968: 94, 104, 106, 107; CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 364-366; WONDJI 1972: 38-39, 42-43, 50.

that an exchange of iron products for kola nuts was once important, and, if so, it would have involved the Kooroko blacksmiths. They could have smelted iron in Wasulu and taken their wares to the kola markets, which were in the area of Odienné and further south, a distance of 100 to 200 kilometres. It is also possible that Kooroko smiths went south to smelt ore in the region where iron money was made and there purchased kola for transport north. Although unfortunately Amselle (1977: 37-98) does not provide information which would help clarify these speculations, it seems more than a coincidence that the Kooroko blacksmiths became kola traders, when a principal item of exchange for kola was iron implements used as money in a wide region south of Wasulu.

As was the case with other Juula, the Kooroko were organized into *jamu* which had strong links with the medieval empires of the savanna. The Sumanoro, for example, trace their ancestry back to the 11th century and the Empire of Ghana. The Jabate, Kamara, and Dumbiya claim a link with the Mali Empire and its founder, Sunjata, which dates to the 13th century. The Kulibali were later, and their connection was with Segu and its founder. The Bagayogo, on the other hand, claim to have come from Timbuktu. All these traditions suggest ancient and continued links with the northern savanna and the Sahel, as well as the forest to the south. While all these groups may not have been merchants initially, it seems likely that their movements were related to trade or at least to the establishment of communities able to exploit commercial opportunities. Whether people first moved for political or other reasons, the effect of these migrations was to produce distinct waves of commercial development which were associated with the political ascendancy of specific States and created corridors of trade which, changing over time, yet generally followed a north-south axis. Corporate groups of merchants organized into commercial diasporas dominated trade. New groups could and did emerge, but the tendency was for established merchant associations to maintain kinship, religious, and business relationships which excluded outsiders. New merchants could always be incorporated, but new corporate groups were few. The emergence of another group usually included the establishment of close ties with existing merchants, so that commerce remained a monopoly of the

Legals, some of the identities of merchants in the Juula diaspora changed

But are we really safe in concluding that kola was being produced then? I think so, but the proof, circumstantial again, rests on the hypothesis of a division in kola production, between the area where the *goro root is common and the Akan forests to the east.

Kola Production in the Akan Forests

The Akan forests became a centre of kola production later than the area west of the Bandama river. The natural break in the kola production zone between the Bandama river and the Comoé river, where the Baule live, isolated the Akan forests of the east from developments in the west. This break provides a clue in the chronological reconstruction of the early kola trade. It suggests that the commercialization of kola occurred later than in the Bandama valley and areas further west, an hypothesis which concurs with the linguistic data. It is likely that merchants either introduced seed into the Akan forest, or that they encouraged people to collect nuts for a market which had not previously existed. It is necessary, therefore, to examine available material on commercial networks and kola consumption in an effort to determine when kola production is likely to have begun in the Volta-Comoé region. Since it is probable that the production of *C. nitida* spread from the west, this would establish an approximate point from which to date the full development of the kola trade in the region west of the Bandama river.

Ibn al-Mukhtār's reference to the kola trade through 'Bergo' establishes that kola was found in the Akan forests long before the 17th century, and probably by the early 14th. This information is confirmed in a *materia medica* written in 1586, in which al-Wazīr al-Gassānī, a doctor to Sultan Aḥmad al-Manṣūr of Morocco, described kola, which 'on l'appelle dans le peuple *gūru*,' as coming from 'un endroit appelé Bīṭū, [Bighu] où il y a des mines d'or et de la poudre d'or *tibr*' (cited in Renaud 1928: 51-52). Bighu is the oldest known commercial town in the Volta basin and was located near the present town of Nsawkaw, 150 kilometres northwest of Kumasi. The centre was near the heart of Bono-Mansu, the Akan State which originated in the mid-15th century (Levtzion 1968: 194-195; Arhin 1965: 143).

The origin of the kola trade from the Volta-Comoé region was related to the expansion of the Juula southward from Jenne in the 15th century or earlier. The Volta-Comoé basins were the location of major gold deposits, and over a period of several centuries, traders established a network of commercial centres south of the Niger from Jenne to Bobo-Dioulasso, Kong, and Wa, which focussed on Bighu. As Wilks has shown, this commercial system was well established by 1471, when the Portuguese began trading at Elmina. By the close of the 15th century, the Portuguese were able to take advantage of the existing trade so that over a half ton of gold was purchased on the Gold Coast (Wilks 1969; and 1971a: 354-363). The peak of this trade was between the 1470's and

1520. Person's analysis of this Juula diaspora clearly demonstrates a significant difference from the western Juula (Person 1968: 95-98). In the Volta-Comoé region and the commercial centres between the forest and savanna, the Juula formed distinct communities among people who did not speak a Mande language. 'Juula' effectively became an ethnic name, as well as an occupational designation. This difference between the Juula in the two regions confirms the later development of the Volta-Comoé trading system. Juula became a term comparable to Maraka, Jahaanke, or Kooroko; that is, it designated a specific group of merchants who tended to dominate one region and a related set of commercial routes. In the Volta basin, the Yarse were another such group (Izard 1971: 214-220). Also of Soninke origin, they dominated the trade of the Mossi States in the Upper Volta basin and traded south into the forest zone for kola, although they did not arrive in the kola forests until after the Juula.

It is possible, moreover, that in their quest for gold, these Juula of the Jenne-Bighu axis were responsible for the spread of kola into the Akan forests. To purchase gold, traders took such commodities as salt and textiles to the forest. These goods were much bulkier than the gold which they bought; so that, consequently, far more personnel and livestock were needed on the southbound expedition than on the trip back north. Kola, therefore, became an important supplement to the gold trade. Merchants used surplus livestock and porters to carry kola, and they were able to make additional profits from the sale of the nuts, which were already in great demand in the savanna, as the Songhay *tarikḥ* show.

The Bighu-Jenne trade route and Juula commercial activities tied the Volta-Comoé kola-producing region into the heart of the Songhay Empire. Around 1510, when he was in Songhay, Leo Africanus came in contact with kola, which he described as

'produit par un très grand arbre, fruit qui ressemble à la châtaigne, mais dont la saveur tire sur l'amer. Ces arbres sont à quelque distance du fleuve, sur la terre ferme. Le fruit dont je parle est appelé *goro* dans la langue du pays. . .' (1956: 54).

The region to the south probably refers to trade via Jenne and to the cultivating areas near Bighu, although possibly also to the Worodugu region in the west. In 16th-century Songhay, kola was a luxury, as it was later still. When the grand mosque in Timbuktu was being built in 1581-82, for example, Askia al-Hājj al-Amin sent a gift of sixty-seven mithqals of gold, one thousand cowries, and one hundred kola; the actual amount was possibly one hundred loads of kola. Later in the 1590's, Askia Maḥmūd distributed kola among his troops, and he used the nuts as gifts on a number of occasions.¹⁹ The Moroccan invasion of Songhay in the 1590's may have disrupted the trade temporarily, but merchants soon again responded to the demand for kola.²⁰

19. Askia Daoud (1549-1583) also used kola as a gift; see al-Mukhtār in MAHMUD KĀTĪ 1964: 180, 233, 288, 293; AL-SA'DI 1964: 152.

20. With his several references to kola, al-Mukhtār (in MAHMUD KĀTĪ 1964: 67) implies that the trade continued.

Further east, in the Hausa States, kola was also common by the 15th century, and again its source was the Akan forests. Since this market was distant from the Lower Volta basin, references to kola there indicate a well-developed commercial system, which has been identified with a Songhay-centred diaspora locally known as *Wangara* (Lovejoy 1978a: 175-185). The first mention of this trade is in the *Kano Chronicle*, a document from the 19th century which compiles oral traditions from an earlier era. The *Chronicle* records that, during the time of Queen Amina of Zazzau, 'Sarkin Nupe sent forty eunuchs and ten thousand kolas to her. In her time the whole of the products of the west were [sic] brought to Hausaland. . .' (in Palmer 1928: 109).

It dates her activities to the reign of Sarkin Kano Dauda Bakon Damisa (A.H. 824-841; 1421-1438 A.D.), but more probably Amina ruled in the third quarter of the 16th century. Although the kola imported from Nupe may have been locally grown nuts, it is more likely to have been imported from the Middle Volta basin through Borgu. It does appear, however, that kola was common in Nupe before it was in the Hausa centres, which suggests that Nupe was in commercial contact with the Akan production zone earlier than the Hausa cities. Even if the reference is to Nupe-grown *C. nitida*, earlier contacts would have been necessary, since the original seeds for Nupe production must have been imported from the west.²¹

Other events attributed to the 15th century also indicate that kola was probably first imported from the Akan forests at that time. The *Kano Chronicle* (in Palmer 1928: 109, 111) says that Sarkin Kano Abdullahi Burja, who ruled between c. 1438 and c. 1452 (A.H. 841-856), 'opened the roads from Bornu to Gwanja [Gonja]', and that, during the time of Yakubu (A.H. 856-867; c. 1452-1463 A.D.), 'merchants from Gwanja began coming to Katsina.' In the 19th century when the *Chronicle* was compiled, the 'Gonja trade' was synonymous with the Asante kola trade. Although the Gonja State was not founded until the 16th century—one century after the references to the origins of the trade—it seems likely that tradition accurately relates that kola imports began in the 15th century, when trade with the west appears to have expanded (Lovejoy 1978a: 173-193). The *Wangarawa Chronicle*, written in 1650-51, indeed suggests that direct trade with the Akan forests may have existed by the end of the 15th century. In the list of original Wangara settlements, Bussa, 'Borgu' (Nikki?), and Gonja are included, although trade with these places is not discussed.²²

The information on kola in the Central Sudan helps establish a chronological framework for the early development of the kola trade in West

21. For the dates of Amina's reign, see HOGBEN & KIRK-GREENE 1966: 217; HASSAN & NA'IBI 1962: 3, 37. For kola in Nupe, see NADEL 1942: 90, 231-232. Nupe kola was called *laboshi*, after the district in which it was grown.

22. For the *Wangarawa Chronicle*, *Waraka maktuba fiha asl al-Wangariyin al-muntasibin lil-shaikh*, see AL-HAJJ 1968: 9; LOVEJOY 1978b.

Africa. Since kola, which appears to have come from the Akan forests between the Volta and Comoé rivers, was imported there by the 15th century, it is possible to conclude that the cultivation of kola had spread from the Kisi-Toma-Gerze area through the Bandama river valley by that time, even before the Kisi, Toma, and Gerze were kola producers. This suggests that kola cultivation was part of the Akan economy from the time gold production became important. Working backwards chronologically, the Central Sudan evidence confirms the linguistic data and other Arabic sources. The kola trade appears to have been well established in the Volta-Comoé region by the 15th, and perhaps the 14th century; it had developed centuries earlier in areas to the west.

The Trade of the Upper Guinea Coast

The next major development in the history of the kola trade was the growth of the coastal trade north of the Scarcies river in the 16th and 17th centuries. Trade in the immediate interior of the coast may have been as old as that further inland, at least as it passed through the Futa Jallon highlands. Jahaanke were trading in the Futa Jallon area by the 17th century. Salt was an important item of exchange, and some kola could have been transported as well. The arrival of the Portuguese marked a significant departure, however. Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese merchants began shipping kola from the Scarcies river north to the Gambia, where it was sold in competition with kola brought overland.²³ Alvares d'Almada (1946: 31, cited in Hair 1967: 42) mentioned the coastal trade in kola in 1594, by which time it was a regular feature of Portuguese commerce. In 1606 Bartolomeu André issued a glowing report of the commercial prospects of the Sierra Leone coast, which included gold, ivory, gum, and kola as particularly attractive products. André did not know about the kola trade in the interior, but he did learn that: 'The trees from which is gathered all the cola the Portuguese carry northwards grow only in this Serra and in the neighbouring lands, and not in any other part of Guinea. Each year seven or more ships come here because of the excellent profits in this trade, since the fruit is very highly prized by the Mandingas and other nations.' (Hair 1976: 51.) Seven ships could then carry as much as 100 tons of kola.

The overland trade which ran parallel to the coastal traffic probably was much older, but the first reference to it dates only from 1620-21. Richard Jobson, who followed the Gambia river into the interior, learned that 'gola' nuts were more expensive near the mouth of the Gambia than upstream. Indeed, 'at the highest part of the river, the people brought them abundantly unto us, and did wonder much, we made no esteem or care to buy them.' Perhaps because of the price differential, the Portuguese continued to trade kola on the Gambia, importing the

23. CURTIN 1975: 228-229; RODNEY 1970: 206; PERSON 1971: 675; HOWARD 1979.

nuts into the more expensive lower stretch of the river, as Jobson learned, from 'a great baye, beyond *Cacho* [Cacheo river], where they meete with a people, that brings them gold, and many of these nuts.'²⁴

By the mid-17th century, the coastal trade amounted to at least 225 metric tons per year, a figure calculated from the estimated 10,000 loads of kola, of 3,000 nuts per load, which contemporary accounts record.²⁵ This trade was probably not as large as that of the interior. Indeed it is likely to have been much smaller. Scattered reports in the 17th and 18th centuries indicate that sea-borne kola was more expensive, even at the mouth of the Gambia river, than kola brought overland.²⁶ The market, therefore, was much more restricted than for the Juula trade, and it is likely that the Scarcies-Nunez region produced less kola than Worodugu. Nonetheless, the coastal data provide some indication of the size of the kola trade. If 10,000 loads were shipped along the coast and additional amounts were exported from the Scarcies-Nunez region onto the Futa Jallon highlands, then the interior trade must have been very large indeed.

The Interior Trade in the 17th and 18th Centuries

Subsequent developments in the kola trade of the interior can only be summarized here. In the 17th and 18th centuries, patterns of commerce were consolidated which were to remain largely unchanged until the second half of the 19th century. The centres of production appear to have remained the same, with no major shifts in population. Kankan, Odienné, Boron, Beyla and other towns dominated the trade between savanna and forest. The most important modifications in trade routes resulted from the development of direct links with the coast in the areas where Freetown and Monrovia were later founded. These routes allowed Juula to trade directly with European slavers.²⁷

Politically, the most important changes occurred in the East. The rise of Kong in the 17th and early 18th centuries created a strong State in the border area between forest and northern savanna which controlled the north-south trade from the Akan forest to Jenne, just as Mali had earlier dominated trade between Worodugu and the savanna (Person

24. JOBSON 1968: 134-135. Jobson's account was first published in 1623. HAIR (1967: 42), citing COELHO (1953: 38), notes that the Mandingo at Farim on the Cacheo river were familiar with kola before 1669.

25. CURTIN (1975: 228-229), and RODNEY (1970: 206), both of whom cite COELHO 1953. There is a discrepancy in these secondary accounts, but Coelho's information is correct as cited by Curtin.

26. CURTIN (1975: 228) argues that the frontier between kola brought by sea and that brought overland shifted gradually but did not move decisively in favour of the sea route until the 19th century.

27. For an excellent analysis of the kola trade between the 17th and early 19th centuries, see PERSON 1968: 105-29. Also see GALLAIS 1967: 476-478; AMSELLE 1977: 101-129. Two of the best 19th century accounts are BINGER 1892, I: 141-143, 311-313; CAILLIÉ 1968: 316-386.

1968: 110; also 1970b: 302). Gonja and Dagomba, in the Volta basin east of Kong, completed the encirclement of the Akan forests, until the emergence of Asante challenged the hegemony of the savanna. Asante conquered most of the kola production zone around 1700 and by the middle of the 18th century controlled Gonja and Dagomba, too.²⁸ The political foundation was laid for the tighter administration of the kola trade, and when, by the early 19th century, Asante began to restrict trade, the commercial patterns of the Middle Volta basin began to diverge sharply from those further west. Merchants were increasingly confined to markets outside the production zone, so that kola prices could be protected. Salaga became the official centre for the trade with the Mossi States, Borgu, and the Central Sudan,²⁹ but some kola also passed through Bondoukou, which became important after the destruction of Bighu in the early 18th century.³⁰ Salaga was a new town, founded in the first few years of the 19th century near a provincial capital of Gonja, and it rapidly developed into the largest urban centre in Asante. The principal foreign merchants were Hausa from the Sokoto caliphate, Yarse from the Mossi States, and Wangara from Borgu. The Hausa were the most important, particularly three new groups of merchants who came to dominate the Hausa trade in the 19th century. These were the Agalawa and Tokarawa, who lived particularly in Kano but also in Katsina, and the Kambarin Beriberi, who spread from their initial town of Gummi, south of Sokoto, to other parts of the caliphate.³¹ The development of these commercial groups was comparable to the spread of the Juula. They identified as Muslims, used a corporate structure grounded in common origins to promote business, and were based in the savanna. Alongside the Agalawa, Tokarawa and Kambarin Beriberi, earlier groups of Hausa merchants who had imported kola continued to trade. The Hausa had a somewhat different relationship with the production zone than other merchants, however. Whereas the Juula catered for markets directly north of the forest and had alternate sources of supply, the Hausa merchants generally travelled greater distances and only had one source. Their caravans had to move as far east-west as north-south, and this reduced their bargaining position accordingly. Therefore, once the Hausa carrying trade was fully developed in the 19th century, and Asante had the opportunity to impose restrictions which favoured the producers, the Hausa traders had no recourse but to accept.

The trade further west was characterized by more flexible commercial patterns, reflecting the existence of alternate supplies of kola. Juula could travel to virtually any of the three major production regions: the

28. For a survey, see WILKS 1971a.

29. The classic study of Asante policy is by WILKS (1971b). Also see LOVEJOY 1980: 11-27.

30. TERRAY 1974: 320; 1975: 102; FREEMAN 1893: 135-136. Also see BINGER 1892, I: 311-312.

31. LOVEJOY 1980: 75-93; 1973: 633-651; LOVEJOY & BAIER 1975: 551-581.

Kisi-Toma-Gerze region, the Guro area, or the Comoé-Volta region. Major towns were located to the north of each of these areas, including Kankan, Balo, and Beyla in the far west, Boron and Tengrela for the Guro area, and Kong and Groumania for the Comoé valley.³² While merchants from Jenne usually went south through Kong, they also imported some kola from areas further west. The Maraka tended to deal with Kankan, but again alternate supplies were available.³³ This flexibility was, nonetheless, influenced by differing market conditions for nuts of various size and colour. Asante nuts were only red, while those of Ano in the Comoé basin included white nuts, too. Kisi nuts were quite small but high in quality. Large nuts were often from trees in the Gerze and Toma areas. In the far west, both red and white nuts were common. These and other differences affected price, but supply was its most important determinant. When they could, but sometimes only one type of kola was on sale, consumers made choices: generally, red nuts were in greatest demand northeast of Segou and Bobo-Dioulasso, while white kola was more common southwest and west of Bobo-Dioulasso and Segou. This difference reflected in part the availability of red kola in Asante, which serviced the Upper Volta basin, Jenne, and areas further east, and the supply of both red and white nuts further west.³⁴

West of Asante, these supply patterns reinforced a political situation in which producers were unable to develop State structures to protect their interests. Nor were any of the savanna States able to incorporate the production zone within their boundaries (Person 1968: 41, 575). Other than Asante, the only exception was along the Upper Guinea coast and the area astride the Nunez river. There, Futa Jallon was able to exert political control over the area of production, at least by the early 19th century (Caillié 1968: 153), but this exception appears to be related more to the unique geography of the region than to anything else. The savanna country of the Futa Jallon highlands is very close to the production zone. Even so, the coastal area continued to export kola north by sea, as well as selling kola to Futa Jallon.

32. Samori's early career as a merchant demonstrates this pattern. Between c. 1848-1853 he dealt principally with the Toma, whose language he spoke, but also traded with the Kisi, Gerze, and Guro. His hometown was on an important route between Kankan and Toma country, and he continued his father's business of taking cattle and salt south for kola. By c. 1853 Samori was buying kola and slaves in the forest, gold in Buré, and firearms and textiles in eastern Futa Jallon, which had been brought from Freetown (PERSON 1968: 247-248).

33. Caillié, for example, travelled with merchants who purchased kola in Guro country, some of whom took it to Jenne and others to Sinsani; see CAILLIÉ 1968: 316-317, 323-324, 331-332, 339, 345, 372, 379, 386.

34. PERSON 1968: 103; and MALI 1903. (I wish to thank Richard Roberts for this reference.)

The Ecological Basis of the Kola Trade

The unique position of Asante as the only centralized State to emerge from an area of kola production highlights an important dimension of kola production and trade, the close correlation between ecological specialization and cultural boundaries. The sharp division separating producers from merchants and consumers coincided with the ecological divide between forest and savanna. Noting this forest-savanna distinction, Person (1968: 105) distinguishes four zones:

'La première, la zone productive, se trouve au cœur de la Forêt, sous le contrôle d'ethnies que leur civilisation oppose radicalement aux Soudanais. Il en résultait la nécessité d'une zone courtière pour assurer la transition entre les deux types de sociétés. Plus au nord s'étendent les savanes méridionales dont on connaît la pauvreté et qui n'absorbent des kolas qu'en assez faible quantité. Il faut donc la traverser en hâte pour gagner les régions de grande consommation, et c'est pourquoi nous la qualifierons de zone intermédiaire ou zone de transit. Nous trouvons enfin la zone consommatrice où aboutit le gros de ce commerce. C'est essentiellement l'axe nigérien et, plus à l'ouest, celui du Sénégal, tandis que les Pays Senufo et Mosi forment de gros îlots plus à l'est. . .'

A further distinction prevailed between the oldest areas of kola production and the more recent area of the Akan forests. Only in the latter were States to be founded, first Bonu-Mansu as early as the 15th century and, from the late 17th century, Asante. This exception is almost certainly related to the fact that, together with kola, gold was also produced there. This combination of gold and kola enabled sufficient accumulation for a centralized State to emerge. When these resources were supplemented by the possibility of further accumulation through the export of slaves to the Americas, as again was the unique experience of Asante, then the State could become quite strong indeed.³⁵

The kola trade, as an ecologically-based trade, was characteristic of much exchange in West Africa. As can be seen with kola, merchants tended to follow north-south corridors which ultimately stretched from desert to sea coast. In the north, these corridors coincided with transhumant patterns of livestock management, while the coast trade followed rivers into the interior. In both cases, external trade was grafted onto the existing pattern, connecting it with markets either across the Sahara or across the Atlantic to export slaves and, later, vegetable products. Corridors of trade overlapped, and the means of transport shifted between camels, donkeys, head portage, and river boats. Furthermore, there tended to be competition between different corridors, often reflected in the corporate identification of merchants. Traders from the northern savanna operated through satellite communities in the south which were connected by a common acceptance of Islam, were international in orientation, and pursued neutrality in political affairs.

One feature of this ecologically based trade was the sharp cultural

35. WILKS 1975: 29, 65, 179, 418-445, 688; ARHIN 1967; LOVEJOY 1980: 11-27.

contrast between merchants and producers: whereas the merchants were Muslims, the producers were not. But not only was there a distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims: producers themselves maintained separate identities. Just as the savanna commercial corridors tended to be dominated by specific groups, the production zone was similarly subdivided. Although a full exploration of these differences is beyond the scope of this study, certain broad patterns are revealing. The distinction between merchants and producers was perhaps the sharpest cultural boundary, as Person (1968: 105) has argued in some detail for the region west of the Bandama river, and as was also true in the Akan region. Unlike the savanna where States, sometimes quite large, were predominant, forest society was stateless and organized on the basis of lineages. The important exception to this was, of course, Asante, but Asante society was also lineage-based. Setting the forests off against the savanna to its north, the *poro* secret society was the principal agency of social control in the forests of the far west (Schwab 1947: 65; Person 1971: 686), just as the States of Bono-Mansu and Asante were the means by which the Akan protected their interests. These differences were even reflected in monetary structures. In the savanna cowries and gold were the currency, except in the Senegambia region. This marked the area of consumption off from the area of production, where two patterns prevailed: in the western kola zone beyond the Bandama river, iron money was used; in the Akan area, gold, which was produced locally, was the standard; throughout its production zone cowries were not recognized as money. It is striking, moreover, that the three main divisions in the production zone corresponded to differences in currency, with the smallest variation being between the Guro and the people to their west, and the greatest between the area where the **goro* root was found and the Akan forests.

Other traits also distinguished the producers from each of the three principal inland regions of production, the Kisi-Toma-Gerze area, the Guro-Bete zone, and the Akan forests. *Poro* was dominant in the first region; the Guro had no such secret society; while the Akan formed States. Furthermore, lineage structures were different: among the Guro and people further west, society was patrilineal; the Akan were matrilineal. The organization of production was also different: in the region where *poro* dominated, trees tended to be owned; wild trees were claimed by clearing the bush away. The Guro, on the other hand, tended to collect nuts in the forest, although they planted some trees. In both regions, women and children collected the nuts, and women often transported them as well. Among the Akan, particularly within the Asante State, slaves and pawns were used to collect nuts, and while women and children gathered them, too, this was not exclusively a female occupation, as it was further west. Indeed men and their slaves took a major share of the harvest (Lovejoy 1980, ch. 11; Arhin 1965: 143-145; Terray 1974: 328-330).

In all the production areas, the lineages were important. This could be seen in Guro country when women gave some nuts to the elders, a practice which was characteristic of hunting expeditions and agriculture as well. Elders in effect received benefits from kola collection which were theoretically designed to protect the lineage (Meillassoux 1964: 119, 188, 189 n.). Among the Asante, slaves who were used in collecting and transporting kola were often owned by the lineage. Lineage members banded together in order to purchase slaves for this purpose. Pawns were also used in the collection of kola in Asante. Indeed, as Terray (1974: 329) has noted, labour was the crucial variable in the kola trade, and in all cases mechanisms of labour mobilization were developed which were tied closely to lineage structures and which varied little from one production unit to another.

Kola in the Commercial Revolution of the 19th Century

After the middle of the 19th century, changes occurred which affected the established patterns and which presaged a new era in the kola trade. These changes were related to the shift from the Atlantic slave trade to 'legitimate' trade in vegetable products. Kola became, in effect, one of these 'new' products, and as for such other commodities as peanuts, palm oil, gum, beeswax, gold, hides and skins, which became important in the commercial revolution of the 19th century, its history was already an old one. Kola nuts, as has been shown, were traded along the Upper Guinea coast as early as the 16th century. Nonetheless, the trade of the last half of the 19th century was fundamentally different. It was part of the new departure in the economic history of Africa, as A.G. Hopkins (1973: 124-166) has characterized the 19th-century revolution to 'legitimate' trade.³⁶

By mid-century some kola was shipped to Europe, the United States and England, primarily for pharmaceutical purposes but also for the soon-to-be famous drinks. About fifty-six tons were imported into England in 1860. This volume rose to 145 tons in 1870, 378 tons in 1879, and by 1910 Chevalier estimated that total African exports reached almost 1,000 tons. Not all of this was *C. nitida* (Chevalier & Perrot 1911: 274-283, 433-435). Agiri's data show that *C. acuminata* was exported from Lagos to Brazil as early as 1851.³⁷ In addition, kola introduced into the West Indies competed with African output.³⁸

The new kola trade resembled other branches of the commercial

36. For HOPKINS' discussion (1973) of the place of kola in the commercial expansion, see pp. 246-248.

37. By 1851 exports were in small quantities. They totalled 397 packages in 1869, 539 packages in 1878, averaging 245 packages in the 1880's. In the 1890's, exports ranged from about 9 to 18 tons per year (AGIRI 1972: 58-62; also see 1975: 55-68).

38. CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 200. In addition, European plantations in the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and Togo produced some kola by 1910 (*ibid.*: 296-302).

revolution in that improved transportation, particularly sea-borne traffic in the early stages, and later rail and road transport, created a vent-for-surplus. As Hogendorn (1976) has demonstrated, this situation prevails when a technological breakthrough allows the marketing of crops on a scale which greatly surpasses earlier output. It depends upon favourable market conditions and the existence of a group of risk-takers, both producers and merchants, who are willing to experiment. Yet the new kola trade differed from other sectors of the 'legitimate' trade revolution in that European and European capital were only marginally involved

kola were probably being produced in the last decades of the 19th century, unless there had been a drop in the inland caravan trade from previous times.

Chevalier's figure of 15,000 tons of *C. nitida* for c. 1910 can be compared with data from the 1960's. Estimates of world production of kola in 1966 suggest a total of 175,000 tons, of which approximately 120,000 tons were produced in Nigeria (Onakomaiya 1970, citing an estimate of the Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria). This figure would include varieties of kola other than *C. nitida*, the other varieties being though only a small proportion of total output. Of the most important markets in the savanna, Bamako imported 16,500 tons in 1955, out of a total production figure for the Ivory Coast of 20,000 tons (Amselle 1977: 230). Kano, the largest market in northern Nigeria, imported from 28,000 to 38,000 tons annually between 1966 and 1969 (Lovejoy 1970: 136).⁴¹ The increase from c. 1910 to the middle 1960's appears to have been on the order of tenfold.

The first instance of the new trade was the coastal trade to Lagos, and ultimately the reshipment of kola overland or up the Niger river to the Central Sudan. Kola came first from Sierra Leone, then from areas along the Liberian and Ivory coasts, and finally, from Asante. The first kola was imported into Lagos from Sierra Leone on European ships as early as 1863, and perhaps in the 1850's (Agiri 1972: 64). This new demand led to increased production in areas near the coast and promoted the business of the Saro and other coastal merchants identified with the British colony. The Saro, who were liberated Yoruba slaves, many of whom were Christian, sent the kola to Lagos for trans-shipment up the Niger river to Lokoja and then overland to the centres of the Sokoto caliphate (*ibid.*: 64, 66-67, citing Hopkins 1964: 41-42). By the 1870's kola also came from the Ivory Coast, with imports reaching 277 packages in 1879, compared with 86 packages from the Sierra Leone. These modest quantities were soon dwarfed by exports from the Gold Coast, starting with 110 packages in 1879. By 1885 Gold Coast sources totalled 85 per cent of kola imports at Lagos, a proportion which was to remain largely unchanged, despite greatly increased quantities, until the late 1920's (Agiri 1972: 65). The steady climb in imports reached 140 tons in 1888, 698 in 1899, and a high of 9,699 tons in 1924, before the amount began to drop off. By the mid 1930's no kola was imported from these sources (*ibid.*: 69; Lovejoy 1970: 141).

The Gold Coast kola came mainly from Akim, the eastern Asante province in the interior of Accra which had not been an important producing area before. Kola output in Akim appears to have expanded under the impetus of Hausa and other merchants who began travelling from Salaga and other northern market towns to the coast after the

41. Other estimates for the export of kola to northern Nigeria are much higher, for they include the whole region. ONAKOMAIYA (1970: 87-88) records estimates ranging from 51,000 to 70,000 tons per year between 1952 and 1965.

British defeated Asante in 1874 (Lovejoy 1970: 130). Initially, the main producing areas in Asante continued to export kola overland to the Sokoto caliphate and other savanna markets, and this appears to have resulted in a net increase in kola production. The Akim kola added a new dimension in the trade, in that steamships facilitated the development of new commercial patterns. By 1910, however, the sea route was able to undermine the old caravan trade across Borgu, and the proportion of kola transported by the old route rapidly decreased from a couple of thousand tons to nothing. The long-term effects of this shift on Asante production were however minimal. Significant amounts of Asante kola were diverted into the sea-borne trade: by 1923-24, over 4,800 tons, out of a total of 7,657 tons for Gold Coast exports. Still, over 2,000 tons were sent north from Asante in 1924, the principal markets being the northern territories and Upper Volta. This northern market was able to absorb an increasing quantity of kola, reaching 4,650 tons in 1930, at a time when the Nigerian market began to decline (Miles 1931).

By far the most significant development after 1890 was the growth of *C. nitida* cultivation in the interior of Lagos where this variety of kola had not previously been grown. Sierra Leone imports and sea-borne shipments from Akim served as an example to the Yoruba farmers of Egba-Owode, Ijebu-Remo, Iwo, and Ota. They began to plant *C. nitida* in the last years of the 19th century, a development which led to the rapid increase in cultivation after 1910.⁴² Thereafter, Yoruba production of *C. nitida* expanded to a level which surpassed the total production of the older areas of cultivation further west. By the 1930's, the markets of the Central Sudan were no longer supplied from the west, despite a great increase in consumption. Instead the kola trade became a domestic industry within Nigeria, with commercial patterns therefore significantly altered over previous centuries. Although Yoruba cultivation now supplied the large market of northern Nigeria, this did not curtail production further west. There, similarly, distributional patterns expanded, and the wholesale kola trade became centred at Bamako and other colonial towns. Improved transportation in the 20th century resulted in a relative price drop for kola nuts, so that kola consumption increased remarkably almost everywhere: once a luxury, kola now became an item of mass consumption (Amselle 1977: 189-276).

C. Nitida Production East of the Volta River

One dimension of the kola trade which is revealed from this study is the fact that the production of *C. nitida* did not spread to the forests east of the Volta river before the very end of the 19th century. This is a curious fact which requires some analysis.⁴³ Merchants traversed

42. For a full discussion, see AGIRI 1972: 71-128.

43. This problem is also raised in LOVEJOY 1980: 24-25.

northern Oyo in the 17th and 18th centuries on their way to and from the Akan forests. They carried kola which they sold in Oyo, at least in the 1820's. It is strange that none of these nuts found their way south into the forest where they could have been planted, as they were in Nupe, in the Niger valley west of the confluence with the Benue river (Nadel 1942: 90, 231-232). That the area is excellent for kola cultivation has been amply demonstrated in the 20th century. The historical situation, therefore, has been one in which kola nuts could have been grown in an area adjacent to a major avenue of the kola trade but no industry developed until the 20th century, despite extensive commercial interaction between the area of potential cultivation and the trade routes of the savanna. This anomaly raises some important historical questions which cannot at present be answered. For instance, did Oyo consciously prevent the movement of *C. nitida* into the forests to its south where *C. acuminata* and *C. verticillata* were cultivated, in an effort to prevent areas outside its imperial system from benefitting from the production of *C. nitida*?⁴⁴ How was Dahomey, where *C. acuminata* was also cultivated and which shared a border with kola-rich Asante, effectively isolated as well? The answer may simply be that no one experimented with the *C. nitida* variety. Certainly the technical skills for the cultivation of the trees were present; there is no significant difference between the cultivation of *C. nitida* and *C. acuminata*. It is also possible that Asante placed some restrictions on kola production, especially in its eastern provinces. Akim, which could have sent kola north, appears to have been a minor source for the Salaga market, until after 1874, when Asante could control neither its former provinces nor trade through them.

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The 19th- and 20th-century kola trade has been examined in broad outline only in order to place the history of kola production in perspective. Numerous studies now exist which deal in greater detail with various aspects of this more recent history. Person, for example (1968: 105-122), provides extensive data on commercial organization of the western trade, including caravan structure, brokerage services, and trade routes. His exhaustive study of Samori examines the impact of the Juula political revolution on the kola trade. Amselle's study of the Kooroko adds further information on the Samorian era, and he also explores (1977: 217-235) the colonial and post-colonial kola trade centred on Bamako (also see Tricart 1956: 211-217; Wondji 1972). Similarly, Cohen (1971: 288-291; 1969; 1966), Agiri (1972; 1977) and Lovejoy (1980; also 1970; 1971; 1973) have treated the eastern trade, both its precolonial patterns involving caravans between Asante and the Central Sudan and its 20th-century

44. CHEVALIER & PERROT 1911: 294; AGIRI 1972: 49-58; 1975: 56-68. Also see LAW 1977: 132, 208.

manifestations when Yoruba production supplanted the traditional commerce.⁴⁵ In these studies, too, commercial organization and diaspora culture are covered in considerable detail, although of all the modern studies only Agiri's concentrates on production rather than trade. Except for the Yoruba area, Chevalier's study of 1911 remains the most thorough treatment of kola production, and certainly much has changed since then (Agiri 1977; Howard 1979).

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⁴⁵ LOVEJOY 1980; 1973; 1971; 1970. For an early discussion, see KRIEGER 1954.

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