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THE RISE OF PORTOBELO AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SPANISH AMERICAN SLAVE TRADE, 1640S–1730S: TRANSIMPERIAL CONNECTIONS AND INTRA-AMERICAN SHIPPING*

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the rise of Portobelo as the most important center of the Spanish American slave trade from the 1660s to the 1730s. Portobelo's emergence was one of the most striking results of the structural transformation that the slave trade to Spanish America underwent between the 1640s and the 1650s. In these years, intra-American transimperial shipping displaced direct slave voyages from Africa to the Spanish Caribbean. By focusing on the elements that underpinned Portobelo's emergence, this essay shows how shifting transimperial connections affected the making and unmaking of the intrainperial circuits that supplied slaves to Spanish America. This approach reveals the inner workings, evolving links, and disputed hierarchies that interlocked port towns with inland cities and also structured the African diaspora in Spanish America and the emergence of a black Pacific.

In March 1660, the ship *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* called at Portobelo, on the Caribbean coast of the Isthmus of Panama, and as was customary, the royal officials inspected the vessel. The ship carried a mixed cargo of cloth and 100 African slaves. The ship's captain, the Sevillian Manuel Grande de los Cobos, showed to the royal officials a license from the House of Trade in Seville that entitled him to trade in slaves. The license justified the presence of the captives in the ship but not the cargo of cloth, which the royal official ultimately seized. Grande de los Cobos, as well as some ship officers and

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mariners, contended that the ship had left Cádiz, in Andalusia, and later had visited the coasts of Guinea and the Gambia River (in Senegambia), where the slaves had been bought. From there, the ship had headed for Cartagena, but bad weather had forced it to divert to Portobelo.¹ New inquiries into the *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* took place in Cartagena and Portobelo one year later. This time, other members of the crew offered a different, detailed account that was probably a truer version of the events. According to them, the ship had sailed directly from Cádiz to the Dutch island of Curaçao, where the slaves and the cloth were purchased, and from there had continued on to Portobelo.²

The accounts of the *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*'s itinerary parallel those of many other slave ships that reached Spanish America during the early modern period. Due to the Spanish empire's lack of slave-provisioning centers along the African coastline, these slave ships operated across imperial lines to introduce captives into Spanish America. Loading ships with more slaves than the trading permits allowed was the norm rather than the exception. Moreover, bad weather conditions were often used to justify a ship's arrival at an unauthorized port.³ What distinguishes this story from others is the fact that the *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* was a pioneering ship in choosing Portobelo as its first destination for unloading a cargo of African slaves in the Spanish Caribbean. In the decades to come, many other ships' captains would follow the example of Manuel Grande de los Cobos, and the Isthmus of Panama would become a major hub for transimperial slavery.

This article analyzes the emergence of Portobelo as the most important center of the Spanish American slave trade between the 1660s and the 1730s. Portobelo's rise was one of the most striking results of the structural transformation in the slave trade to Spanish America between the 1640s and the 1650s, when intra-American transimperial shipping displaced direct slave voyages from Africa to the Spanish Caribbean.⁴ The profile of the slave providers changed too, from the Portuguese merchants who had dominated the slave trade since the late sixteenth century to Dutch and English carriers who supplanted the Portuguese from the mid-seventeenth century onward. All in all, nearly 566,000 African slaves were transported to the Spanish Indies using this new shipping pattern. This shift has been mostly studied with regard to the rise of the British and Dutch transatlantic slave trade and in relation to the emergence of Curaçao, Jamaica, and Barbados as the depots that furnished the Spanish Caribbean with slaves. And yet, while it seems clear that this shift was accompanied by a general decrease in the total

¹ Testimonies on the *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*'s itinerary, Portobelo, 22 Mar. 1660, Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereafter cited as AGI), Escribanía 489B, pieza 87, fols. 99r, 103r–4v, 107–8r, 112r–v, 158v–59r; report on the seizure of the *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*, Portobelo, 30 Apr. 1661, AGI, Panamá 22, ramo 6, no. 104, fols. 3r–v.

² Testimonies on the *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*'s itinerary, Cartagena and Portobelo, 25 Feb.–24 Mar. 1661, AGI, Escribanía 489B, pieza 88, fols. 2v, 4v, 6v, 17v, 26r, 41v.

³ For the characteristics of the slave trade to Spanish America and how traders operationalized it, see Mendes, "Foundations of the System"; Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat, "Atlantic History."

⁴ Welch, "Intra-American and Caribbean Destinations," 46–49, 59–62; O'Malley, *Final Passages*, 139–70, 219–63; Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat, "Atlantic History," 434–40, 443–46, 450–53; O'Malley and Borucki, "Patterns," 322–28, 332–35.

volume of the slave trade to Spanish America, its effects on the direction of trade to Spanish America remain obscure.⁵ This essay takes a first step toward filling that lacuna.

This study of the rise of Portobelo employs a chronological scope that begins in the last decade of the sixteenth century. The period between the 1590s and the 1630s is well known to historians, but details about the 1640s, when the slave trade to Spanish America was almost completely interrupted, are scant. Similarly, little is known about how the slave trade was reformed during the 1650s. And while our knowledge of the trade after 1660 is better, it too can be improved. By studying these periods together instead of as discrete historical units, a general picture of how those changes in the slave trade emerged can be assembled.⁶ By deploying this large chronological scope, we can, first, better highlight how and in what ways the slave trade to Spanish America was transformed during the middle decades of the seventeenth century and, second, situate those changes in their larger historical context.

Like other works, this article examines the evolving patterns of the slave trade to a specific port and a concrete Spanish American region—in this case, Portobelo and Panama, respectively.⁷ However, the analysis deployed here takes a step forward and grasps what effect Portobelo's emergence had on the larger intrainperial slave routes in which it took part. With a fine-grain, detailed portrayal of the 1640s and the 1650s constructed from fragmentary evidence, including 15 previously unknown slave voyages to Portobelo, this article clarifies the Isthmus of Panama's poorly understood role in linking the transatlantic and Caribbean slave trades to Peru.⁸ Until the mid-eighteenth century, when it was replaced by Puerto Rico and Cuba, Peru was one of the largest markets for slaves in Spanish America.⁹ Since the 1590s, transatlantic voyages had disembarked slaves first in Cartagena, from where they were then taken across the Isthmus of Panama. Cartagena was both the main entry point for African slaves to Spanish America and the leading reexport market around which the intrainperial slave routes in the Caribbean pivoted until about 1640. Thereafter, slave traders who were aiming to supply the Peruvian market began sailing past Cartagena to go directly to Portobelo. Portobelo's rise as a center of the transimperial intra-American slave trade thus undermined the mercantile primacy that Cartagena had enjoyed, something the Cartagenans did not surrender without a fight.

Finally, paying close attention to Portobelo allows me to offer a dynamic perspective on the day-to-day construction of the matrix of links that shaped the system

⁵ I have relied on the interpretative framework and data offered in Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat, "Atlantic History," 434–38.

⁶ Only a few works examine these decades together: Borucki, "Trans-imperial History"; Seijas and Sierra Silva, "Persistence"; Sierra Silva, *Urban Slavery*, 107–43.

⁷ For example, the cases of Peru, Mexico, Venezuela, Guatemala, and Buenos Aires are respectively covered in Bowser, *African Slave*, 52–87; Palmer, *Slaves of the White God*, 6–35; Borucki, "Trans-imperial History"; Lokken, "From the 'Kingdoms' "; Schultz, "'Kingdom of Angola.' "

⁸ Although no study has specifically focused on the slave trade to the Isthmus of Panama, excellent contributions can be found in works concentrating on the slave trade to Peru: Bowser, *African Slave*, 52–87; Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 187–234.

⁹ An overview of this process is provided in Eltis and Lachance, "Demographic Decline," 347–48. The rise of routes running through Buenos Aires for furnishing Peru with slaves also undermined Portobelo's centrality. See O'Malley and Borucki, "Patterns," 317, 332–33.

of port cities and inland towns through which about 2,000,000 African slaves entered and were dispersed throughout Spanish America during the early modern period. By reconstructing the changes in the multiple and evolving routes of forced migration to and through Portobelo, this article also contributes to our understanding of the formation of Afro-Latin American communities from the Caribbean to Peru and the emergence and consolidation of a black Pacific.¹⁰

To gauge how slavery was channeled through Portobelo and across the Isthmus of Panama, the following pages draw on sources from the Archivo General de Indias in Spain. These include reports about the seizure of slave ships, customs taxes on the isthmus, and information on the conduct of royal officials, who frequently facilitated smuggling, fraud, and tax evasion. Notarial and fiscal records consulted in Peru's Archivo General de la Nación have been used to illuminate the connections between the ports of Panama City and Lima. As Panamanian notarial records have not been preserved for the period, these sources from the Archivo General de la Nación offer complementary information regarding the slave trade directed to Portobelo, much of which was ultimately destined for Peru. Where necessary, I have also relied on extant literature to provide information on the intra-American voyages that were directed to Portobelo. Finally, in addition to the 15 newly found slave voyages to the Isthmus of Panama, my research has revealed another 14 hitherto undiscovered slave ships arriving to locations other than Portobelo, such as Cartagena and Lima, between 1649 and 1672.

PORTOBELO AND THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA: A TRANSIT POINT WITHIN THE SPANISH EMPIRE, 1590S–1630S

From the 1590s to the 1630s, before the rise of Portobelo, the slave trade to the Isthmus of Panama took place as a form of regional intraimperial commerce. This trade was hierarchically organized and pivoted around Cartagena. By then Cartagena hosted the leading Spanish American slave port, where more than 50 percent of the registered slaves in the Spanish Caribbean disembarked (156,790).¹¹ Those slaves were transported via at least 412 voyages, mainly originating from Upper Guinea and Angola and to a lesser extent from Lower Guinea.¹² The ship's arrivals turned Cartagena into the continent's main wholesale market for African slaves, from where local merchants or other traders reexported the captives throughout the Caribbean Basin and beyond.

Cartagena's primacy over the Isthmus of Panama as a terminal for the transatlantic slave trade was based on its geographical location, its urban dynamism, and its well-fortified port. This also explains Cartagena's centrality in the articulation of the slave trade to and within Spanish America up until the 1630s. Transatlantic traders aimed at delivering their human cargo as quickly as possible to ensure that their ventures remained profitable and to reduce the costs and the risks of prolonged voyages. The ships' captains

¹⁰ Bryant, Vinson, and O'Toole, "Introduction," 3.

¹¹ Veracruz was the second most important slave port and received around 20 percent of the slaves (60,964). *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, accessed 10 Dec. 2018 (hereafter cited as *Voyages Database*), <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/FzOj2HX8>.

¹² Wheat, "First Great Waves," 22.

sought out protected ports close to the major transatlantic routes, where they knew that their cargoes would be sold easily. In order to ensure that, there needed to be a stable community of traders to engage with in midterm and long-term operations.¹³ Cartagena offered all those advantages, making it a coveted destination for legitimate slave merchants and smugglers alike. By the 1590s Cartagena was one of the Spanish fleet's official ports, connecting Iberian and Spanish American trade. Accordingly, a growing mercantile community developed under the umbrella of the port's robust stronghold and constant military presence.¹⁴

Portuguese merchants spurred the rise of Cartagena as a slave port and knitted Cartagena's connections with the Isthmus of Panama. However, the importance of Portuguese merchants was not restricted to the Cartagena-Panama axis. In 1607, the president of the Audiencia of Panama insisted that the Portuguese influence extended throughout the Atlantic.¹⁵ During the union of the Spanish and Portuguese empires (1580–1640), Portuguese traders dominated all stages of the slave trade to Spanish America, including the capitalization and organization of the voyages from Lisbon and Seville to Africa, the acquisition of the slaves, their transportation across the Atlantic Ocean, and the distribution of the captives throughout the Spanish Americas. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the Portuguese were the most prominent foreign community in Cartagena—around 80 percent in 1630—and in Panama City—60 percent in 1607.¹⁶

Within this Portuguese-led intrainperial regional market that revolved around Cartagena, the Isthmus of Panama became the final destination for many slaves. Ships used to cover the distance from Cartagena to the isthmus in nine to ten days. Cartagena's proximity to Nombre de Dios—plundered by Francis Drake in 1596 and subsequently abandoned—and Portobelo—founded in 1597—granted Panamanian buyers cheap and easy access to Spanish America's largest wholesale slave market.

The Panamanian demand for African slaves began with the colonization of the isthmus. The population in the hinterland, composed mostly of free and enslaved black people, had a central role in this colonization. As “surrogate colonizers,” Africans worked as farmers and ranchers, gold miners and pearl fishers, or operators of the mule trains supporting the transisthmian trades.¹⁷ The presence of African communities in Panamanian towns and villages was equally important. For example, by 1607 Panama City hosted about 1,322 inhabitants of European descent, while the African population included 3,721 enslaved individuals in addition to another 742 free black people. In Portobelo, 316 African slaves lived with 450 free people of mostly European descent.¹⁸

¹³ O'Malley and Borucki, “Patterns,” 319.

¹⁴ Vidal Ortega, *Cartagena de Indias*, 69–115; Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 136–40.

¹⁵ “Presidente de Panamá a la Junta de Guerra,” Panama City, 25 June 1607, AGI, Panamá 15, ramo 8, no. 79.

¹⁶ The main foreign communities in Cartagena were the Portuguese (154 people), the Italians (13), and the French (7). See Vila Vilar, “Extranjeros en Cartagena.” In the case of Panama City the main foreign communities were the Portuguese (31) and the Italians (18). See “Descripción de las Indias,” Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (hereafter cited as BNE), MSS 3064, fol. 63r.

¹⁷ Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*, 6, 168–69, 197–99.

¹⁸ “Descripción de las Indias,” BNE, MSS 3064, fols. 63r–64r, 136r–37v. These figures include the male and female population of all ages.

While enslaved Africans were employed as domestic servants, free black people acquired prominent roles as notaries, leaders of royal militias, or specialized workers.¹⁹ Large maroon communities also grew on the Isthmus of Panama and became central actors in the everyday life of the territory, both defying and negotiating terms of Spanish rule.²⁰

The Isthmus of Panama worked as a linchpin in the intrainperial slave trade, as the isthmus connected Cartagena and the Caribbean with Lima and Peru. Approximately 1,000–1,500 slaves a year were dispatched from Cartagena to Portobelo and from there to Panama City and then on to Peru.²¹ The paucity of Panamanian sources makes it difficult to conduct a robust quantitative analysis of this slave trade. Still, extant sources provide precious data about how the slave trade took place across the isthmus. For example, between 1632 and 1638, 4,214 slaves entered Panama City in 70 lots, each containing an average of 60 slaves although in reality ranging from 2 to 240 captives.²² From Panama City's port, Perico, a myriad of small boats and light vessels departed to provide the expanding economy of Pacific South America with African slaves.²³ The maritime slave trade that originated from Panama City affected the demographics of leading coastal cities like Guayaquil, Trujillo, and Lima, to the extent that already by the 1600s African slaves represented approximately one-third to half of their populations.²⁴

Due to the traders' operational limitations, most of them used Portobelo and Panama City as sites for initiating slave trade exchanges. Cartagenans, whether commissioned by other investors or acting as individual traders, traveled to Portobelo to sell slaves directly. Conversely, Panamanian traders sailed to Cartagena to purchase slaves directly and sell them back home.²⁵ The Panamanian slave market also attracted Peruvian buyers, who often preferred to acquire slaves on the isthmus in person rather than relying on retailers.²⁶ Only in a few cases were the slaves not sold in Panama. A few powerful trading houses, such as the one owned by the Portuguese Lima-based trader Manuel Bautista Pérez, were able to finance, coordinate, and manage the complex, expensive, and drawn-out process of moving enslaved people from Cartagena to Peru across the Isthmus of Panama.²⁷

¹⁹ Mena García, *La sociedad*, 371–72, 384–89; Espelt Bombín, “Notaries,” 48–56; Ireton, “‘They Are Blacks,’” 596–97, 600–604.

²⁰ Pike, “Black Rebels”; Tardieu, *Cimarrones*, 71–105, 183–250; Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*, 53–66.

²¹ Bowser, *African Slave*, 78.

²² Records on the *sisá* tax are the most consistently available sources. They refer to the 1632–38 period. However, this data only reflects the taxes that were paid. It omits payments that were delayed, not to mention the contraband trade. See tax collection data for 1 Jan. 1632–24 Sept. 1634, and 11 Jan. 1634–25 May 1636, Portobelo, 21 July 1636, AGI, Panamá 35, no. 23; tax collection data for 7 Jan. 1637–22 Oct. 1637, AGI, Contaduría 1476, fols. 272r–76v; tax collection data for 7 Jan. 1638–7 Jan. 1639, AGI, Contaduría 1477, fols. 140r–45v. These sources are also discussed in Castellero Calvo, *Sociedad*, 579–88.

²³ For an overview of the maritime trade in this area, see Clayton, “Trade and Navigation.”

²⁴ Tardieu, *El negro*, 244; Bowser, *African Slave*, 92, 339–40.

²⁵ “Los oficiales reales de Tierra Firme en conformidad de una cédula de Vuestra Magestad envían relación de lo que ha montado el derecho de la *sisá*,” Portobelo, 21 July 1636, AGI, Panamá 35, no. 23. See also Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamérica y el comercio*, 120; Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*, 134.

²⁶ “Autos seguidos por Esteban Martel de Montemayor,” Lima, 1632, Archivo General de la Nación, Lima (hereafter cited as AGN), Dirección de Archivo Colonial (hereafter cited as DAC), Tribunal del Consulado, Judicial, Pleitos, leg. 147, exp. 17.

²⁷ Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 187–206.

Merchants operating in and from the Isthmus of Panama engaged in the slave trade to varying degrees, in roles ranging from specialized dealers to occasional buyers, but all of them complemented their portfolios with other trades.²⁸ For traders, the isthmus was an excellent place to diversify their investments due to the annual (subsequently biannual) fair that it hosted. At this fair, celebrated in Nombre de Dios from 1544 to 1597 and then in Portobelo from 1598 to 1739, Spanish and Peruvian merchants met to exchange large sums of goods, merchandise, and silver.²⁹ Moreover, the slave ships arriving at Portobelo transported other goods in addition to human merchandise, which gave rise to profitable side trades.³⁰

In sum, the slave trade had a paramount importance for the Panamanian business sector. Indeed, contemporaries, as did the president of the Audiencia of Panama in 1607, defined the slave trade as the region's leading commerce.³¹ The slave traders were the main, but certainly not the only, beneficiaries of this infamous trade. Their transportation of enslaved people across the isthmus encouraged the development of a service sector along the terrestrial and fluvial stages of the transisthmian routes. The constant movement of enslaved people generated profits for local muleteers and boat captains, inn and barrack owners, and food providers.³² However, by the late 1630s and the early 1640s, a dramatic series of international and domestic transformations brought this buoyant slaving economy to a sudden halt.

THE FALL AND REVIVAL OF THE SLAVE TRADE TO PORTOBELO, 1640S–1650S

Why did this robust and thriving Portuguese-led slave trade collapse? How did the Panamanians react to this change, and what shape did the subsequent slave trade to Portobelo adopt? In the 1630s, the Inquisition launched a series of campaigns against Portuguese subjects accused of practicing Judaism in Cartagena (1636–38), Lima (1635–41), and Mexico City (1642–49), which affected Panama as well.³³ Portuguese traders were arrested, deprived of their assets, and eventually executed. In this way, the Inquisition dismantled the networks that controlled the provision of African captives to Spanish America, which had taken decades to form. To complicate things further, Portugal rebelled for independence from Spain in December 1640. Official communications between both empires were thus cut off, and as early as January 1641

²⁸ Vila Vilar and Lohmann Villena, *Familia*, 43, 46, 49, 64–65; Castellero Calvo, *Sociedad*, 613, 621–22.

²⁹ Ward, *Imperial Panama*, 67–98.

³⁰ For a good example of these strategies, see Newson, “Piety.”

³¹ “Presidente de Panamá a la Junta de Guerra,” Panama City, 25 June 1607, AGI, Panamá 15, ramo 8, no. 79.

³² Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 187–206.

³³ Quiroz, “Expropriation of Portuguese New Christians.” Concrete examples regarding the Isthmus of Panama can be found in Quiroz, 416, 439–40, 445, 450, 454, 456–58.

the Spanish American governors were instructed to repel any Portuguese ships that reached their coasts.³⁴

With the collapse of the Portuguese connection, the Council of the Indies in Madrid sought merchants who could restart the slave trade between Africa and Spanish America. Some of the Portuguese merchants who remained loyal to Spain and claimed to have contacts in Africa were willing to act as slave carriers. Also, merchants from the Spanish peninsula, as well as Spanish American, Flemish, English, and Genoese traders, asked for licenses to operate the slave trade. Yet the council suspected that these agents would partner with the Portuguese or Dutch rebels in Africa and thus preferred not to issue any licenses during the 1640s. This decision meant a de facto suspension of the official African slave trade to Spanish America that was only lifted in 1651.³⁵

The role that smugglers played in filling the gap caused by the official transatlantic slave trade's closure has not yet been clarified in detail. Some Spanish American regions on the Atlantic coast benefited from their proximity to Africa and continued to receive some slaves. For instance, Portuguese merchants retained an important role as slave smugglers within the Río de la Plata region, which was also close to the Portuguese colonies in Brazil. Nevertheless, the Portuguese and the Dutch, who fought against each other to gain control of the leading African slaving centers of São Tomé and Angola between 1641 and 1647, were more interested in orienting their slave exports to their respective Brazilian colonies than to Spanish America.³⁶

Unlike Cartagena, where some slave ships still arrived, the Isthmus of Panama does not seem to have benefited from contraband in slaves during the 1640s.³⁷ In May 1649, the royal officials in Portobelo reported to the Council of the Indies that no slave ships had reached the isthmus in recent years.³⁸ This assertion is in line with the archival evidence. To date, for the 1640s only the arrival of two slave ships at Portobelo, in 1641, is documented.³⁹

³⁴ Instructions to the audiencias' governors in the Viceroyalty of Peru, Madrid, 7 Jan. 1641, AGI, Indiferente 429, libro 38, fols. 180v–81v. The position adopted by the local Spanish American governments regarding the Portuguese rebellion is studied in Schwartz, "Panic in the Indies."

³⁵ The suspension of the slave trade during this decade and its effects are depicted in Vila Vilar, "La sublevación."

³⁶ Moutoukias, *Contrabando*, 62, 64, 128, 170; Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese*, 247–54; Caldeira, "Angola," 112–13.

³⁷ In July 1647, a Spanish ship paid taxes for unloading 67 slaves at Cartagena. See letter by the royal officials, Cartagena, 24 Feb. 1649, AGI, Santa Fe 75, no. 18. In June 1649, a Spanish frigate called at Cartagena transporting 48 adult slaves and 2 children. See letter by the royal officials, Cartagena, 11 June 1649, AGI, Santa Fe 75, no. 23. On July 14, 1650, another Spanish ship arriving at Cartagena from the Gambia River brought 60 slaves, mostly children. See "Sobre arribada del filibote *Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza*, maestre Cristóbal Rodríguez," Cartagena, 1650, AGI, Contratación 5755, no. 3.

³⁸ Letter by the royal officials, Portobelo, 18 May 1649, AGI, Panamá 36, no. 17.

³⁹ One came from Santa Catalina (Old Providence Island). The royal officials sold the captives brought by the ship at the price of 300 pesos per head. In total, they collected 13,250 pesos. Thus, we can estimate that the ship carried around 44 slaves. See letter by the royal officials, Portobelo, 28 Aug. 1641, AGI, Panamá 35, no. 52. Most probably, the slaves were taken from the English, as the Spanish had just captured the island from them in 1641. There is also the possibility that these slaves were maroons. See Games, "'Sanctuary,'" 16–17. The details about the other ship are unknown. See "Los oficiales de la Real Hacienda de Panamá dicen en carta," Madrid, 5 July 1642, AGI, Panamá 229, libro 3, fol. 181r. Nor have customs taxes revealed complementary information about the arrival of African slaves to the isthmus. For the 1640s, the customs tax registry only records lump sums of money derived from tax

Undoubtedly, the extant sources may conceal some of the commerce involving newly arrived Africans to the isthmus. Yet the lack of sources condemning contraband in slaves and the fact that no royal official was charged with underregistering slaves' arrivals or covering up their trade during the 1640s corroborates the impression that there was a profound disruption in the slave trade to the Isthmus of Panama.⁴⁰ At the same time, the disruption of the Panamanian slave trade is evident on the Peruvian coasts, too. In fact, from 1640 to 1655, the Trujillo landowners paid to their indigenous workers much higher salaries, reflecting the absence of new African slaves.⁴¹

The lack of new forced African labor and the effects of this on Spanish American economies can be seen in the numerous complaints that reached Spain from 1644 to 1650. Cartagena, Panama City, and Lima all complained about different aspects of the interruption of a system of slavery that had connected them to each other. Observers in Cartagena approached the scarcity of African slaves as a commercial and labor crisis.⁴² Panamanians, ranging from Jesuit and Franciscan friars to local political leaders, also missed the slaves who used to come from "Angola and the Rivers region."⁴³ They lamented the effects that this shortage had on the productive sectors of the isthmus, including sawmilling, pearl fishing, mining, ranching, agriculture, and transisthmian transportation. Lima merchants, for their part, claimed that the cessation of "the usual trade in slaves through Cartagena and Portobelo" caused the regional economy to lose 8,000,000 pesos over five years.⁴⁴

With the dearth of newly arrived African captives —called *bozales*— in Portobelo, the Panamanian slave markets increasingly drew on locally born (*criollo*) and culturally assimilated (*ladino*) slaves, as well as others of Indian descent. A low-scale but verifiable trade in criollo slaves and African captives who had probably reached the isthmus before 1641–42 can be found in records for isolated transactions. For instance, in 1645, Captain Santiago de Anseta sold five black slaves to the Audiencia of Panama to engage them in public works.⁴⁵ Between 1647 and 1649, Juan Vázquez de Añasco sold one black slave of unknown origin and another slave whom he labeled a "zambo" —of African and indigenous descent.⁴⁶ Something similar occurred on a greater scale elsewhere in Spanish America. For example, the slave markets in Mexico City and Puebla were furnished with

collection and also omits the transactions that yielded the income. See tax collection data for 1642–51, Panama City, AGI, Contaduría 1478. Other, more detailed sources for this period do not add information on the slave trade. See tax collection data for 1640–41, Panama City, AGI, Contaduría 1481, no. 1, ramos 8–9.

⁴⁰ "Visita de Jerónimo de Mansilla, oidor de la Audiencia de Lima," Panama City, 1649–52, AGI, Escribanía 484A; "Visita de Jerónimo de Mansilla, oidor de la Audiencia de Lima," Panama City, 1649–52, AGI, Escribanía 484B; "Cartas y expedientes sobre las visitas a la Audiencia," Panama City and Portobelo, 1645–55, AGI, Panamá 70.

⁴¹ O'Toole, *Bound Lives*, 25–26, 88–96.

⁴² Letter by the royal officials, Cartagena, 10 Oct. 1645, AGI, Indiferente 2796; letter by Clemente Soriano, Cartagena, 19 Dec. 1646, AGI, Indiferente 2796.

⁴³ Petition by Panama's city council, Panama City, 8 Aug. 1646, AGI, Panamá 31, no. 46.

⁴⁴ Letter by Lima's attorney Joseph de los Ríos, Madrid, 30 Aug. 1645, AGI, Indiferente 2796.

⁴⁵ Papers related to Jerónimo de Mansilla's visita, Panama City, 1650, AGI, Escribanía 484B, pieza 17, fol. 54r.

⁴⁶ Tax collection data for 1651–52, Panama City, AGI, Contaduría 1479, fol. 186v.

criollo slaves from Central America and the Spanish circum-Caribbean, while Lima was supplied with black ladino slaves from Nicaragua and Chile.⁴⁷

Due to the lack of new African slaves and foreigners' occasional attacks in search of captives, Panamanian authorities sought local ways to enlarge the pool of coerced workers.⁴⁸ In 1645 these authorities recommended subduing Spaniards, mulattoes, and maroons who "roam like barbarians" over the isthmus by settling them near Panama City and forcing them to work.⁴⁹ Panama's political leaders also targeted the indigenous tribes who resisted imperial rule and probably subjected them to slavery through the renewed warfare during these years. For instance, in September 1651, the president of the audiencia encouraged retaliation against the Indians of Darién who had raided the areas surrounding Portobelo and Pequení.⁵⁰ As volunteers were needed to launch the campaign, the president encouraged Spaniards, mulattoes, and free black people to join the venture by offering them fixed salaries, the right to booty, and license to enslave any opponent under 18 years of age.⁵¹

The revival of the slave trade in the Spanish Caribbean during the 1650s brought an increase in the number of ships that transported African slaves to Portobelo. Over the course of 14 years, from 1648 to 1662, almost 16,000 African slaves were disembarked in the region. The recovery of the slave trade in this period may seem modest when compared with the 78,000 or so slaves that Portuguese traders had brought to the Spanish Caribbean during the 14 years before 1640.⁵² However, the entry of those 16,000 slaves indicates the important role played by new transimperial and intra-American shipping networks in the trade's revival. The establishment of those networks in the years around 1650 reshaped the traditional distribution channels of slaves to and within the Spanish Caribbean. This change is especially evident in the case of the Isthmus of Panama, which began to operate not only as a transit point within the intrainperial slave trade but also, for the first time, as a gateway to the transimperial slave trade to Spanish America.

The Dutch were the most important traders for establishing these new channels of slavery to Spanish America. Although the Dutch presence in the Caribbean previously had been modest, things started to change after 1638, when the Dutch West India Company opened its trading monopoly to private merchants in Brazil, the Caribbean, Angola, and North America. The Dutch presence was further reinforced when Dutch Brazil surrendered to the Portuguese after the 1645–54 campaigns and many Dutch colonists and slave traders migrated to Curaçao, which had been conquered in 1634. This movement of people was facilitated by the rapprochement between Spain and the United

⁴⁷ Bowser, *African Slave*, 77; Seijas and Sierra Silva, "Persistence," 316, 324–25.

⁴⁸ For instance, in April 1650, four vessels raided Portobelo and the Chagres River, seizing slaves from the locals. Junta de la Real Hacienda, Panama City, 5 Apr. 1650, AGI, Contaduría 1480, no. 1, fols. 27r–28v.

⁴⁹ "La ciudad de Panamá dice que demás de las necesidades que tiene representadas," Panama City, 8 Aug. 1646, AGI, Panamá 31, no. 46.

⁵⁰ The context of the events of 1651 is covered in Gallup-Diaz, *Door*, 47–52.

⁵¹ Junta de la Real Hacienda, Panama City, 18 Sept. 1651, AGI, Contaduría 1480, no. 1, fols. 41r–43v.

⁵² For the 1626–40 period, see *Voyages Database*, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/ffCyWuJJ>. For the 1648–62 period, see *Voyages Database*, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/oIlgGUc>.

Provinces after the signing in 1648 of the Peace of Münster, in which the Spanish empire officially recognized the Dutch presence in the Caribbean. Two years later, Dutch ships were permitted to call at Spanish American ports in case of emergency, which became an excellent pretext for trade. Although Curacao's soil was not suitable for plantation agriculture, its location was ideal for trade with the Spanish colonies, and it quickly became a commercial hub. All these factors, combined with the readjustment of the Dutch presence in Africa after the loss of Angola and São Tomé in 1648, turned Curaçao into the leading slave depot for the Caribbean during the 1650s.⁵³

Although the English transatlantic trade was also developing in these years, its role in furnishing the Spanish Caribbean with slaves was not comparable to that of the Dutch trade. Intermittent hostilities with Spain between 1655 and the 1670s prevented the English from establishing a regular trading relationship. Under these circumstances, the English traders based on the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone developed their slaving ventures to provide the expanding Barbadian sugar industry with forced workers and to bolster the colonization of Jamaica, after it was conquered from the Spanish in 1655.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, some English merchants were attracted by the high prices paid for slaves in the Spanish American markets and took human cargo to their ports.⁵⁵ Similarly, Spanish American ships visited Barbados and Jamaica to acquire slaves from English hands.⁵⁶

In addition to the arrival of new groups of slave-trading merchants, which made up for the loss of the Portuguese, the revival of the African slave trade to Spanish America benefited, though in unexpected ways, from the reopening of its official markets in April 1651.⁵⁷ Although the crown and the House of Trade in Seville granted merchants licenses to participate in regular trade, the demand for them was low, and smuggling predominated.⁵⁸ However, the fact that licenses were circulating again ultimately meant that the de facto prohibition on trading slaves had been lifted. Thus the restoration of the slave trade as an official activity enabled smugglers and royal officials to use a wider set of legal subterfuges to regularize illegitimate arrivals in Spanish American ports.⁵⁹

According to contemporary observers, while some direct voyages from Africa to the Spanish Caribbean took place during the 1650s, the demand for slaves was increasingly supplied by a new pattern of regional trade across imperial divides.⁶⁰ From the perspective of the Spanish American buyers, trading regionally allowed them to avoid the costs involved in organizing transatlantic expeditions. Even licensed Spanish peninsular merchants relied on foreign slave providers in the Caribbean and contravened trading permits that only authorized them to purchase captives on the African coast.

⁵³ This paragraph builds on Klooster, "Slavenvaart," 122, 124–25; Klooster, *Illicit Riches*, 41–43, 59–61, 65–67, 73–74, 105–9; Antunes and Silva, "Amsterdam Merchants," 22–24.

⁵⁴ Gragg, "To Procure Negroes."

⁵⁵ Thornton, "Spanish Slave-Ships," 377–79.

⁵⁶ Zahedieh, "Merchants," 575.

⁵⁷ Instructions to the Marquis of Liseda (head of the House of Trade), Madrid, 18 Apr. 1651, AGI, Indiferente 2767, libro 1, fols. 319r–20v.

⁵⁸ Vila Vilar, "La sublevación," 179–80, 188–89; García-Montón, "Cost," 18–21.

⁵⁹ On the importance of regularizing irregular trades and how this was done, see Moutoukias, *Contrabando*, 105–11.

⁶⁰ "Copia de un papel en que se proponen diferentes condiciones para hacer conforme a ellas la provisión de negros," Madrid, 31 Mar. 1662, AGI, Indiferente 2834.

Nonetheless, the flow of slaves that reached the Spanish Caribbean during this period was far from steady, and the geographical distribution of slaves probably depended on the competitiveness of the local Spanish American markets, their proximity to the provisioning centers, and the ability of suppliers and purchasers to build cooperative relationships.

The patterns outlined above are well reflected in the slave trade to the Isthmus of Panama. Already during the 1640s, some slave traders focused on Portobelo. In 1645, the Spanish Isidro Benitez requested permission to off-load 50 African slaves in Portobelo, Cartagena, or New Spain from the Sevillian House of Trade.⁶¹ In 1648, the Irishman David Hammond also included Portobelo alongside Cartagena and Havana as his three options for trading slaves. That year Hammond requested the Council of the Indies' permission to sell in those ports 250 slaves that he owned in the Virgin Islands and claimed to have purchased from a plundered Portuguese ship.⁶² Although these traders never obtained permission for their slaving ventures, their intentions demonstrate Portobelo's appeal to slave merchants.

The fragmentary evidence about the arrival of new African slaves to the Isthmus of Panama during the early 1650s reveals a renewed slave trade in the Spanish Caribbean and confirms the interest that slave merchants had in Portobelo. In November 1650, Juan Gómez de Castrillo commissioned Cristóbal Tomás Espínola to travel from Panama City to Lima in charge of merchandise worth 28,000 pesos as well as six slaves whom he had bought at the Portobelo fair.⁶³ The following year, the ship *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad y San Antonio* disembarked 66 slaves in Portobelo under the pretext, real or not, of having captured them from an enemy ship.⁶⁴ The sporadic sale of slaves in Panama City in 1651 may have involved these captives.⁶⁵ However, were the royal officials registering all the newly arrived African slaves to the isthmus?

In contrast to the 1640s, there is evidence for the 1650s of royal officials concealing contraband in slaves, which is further evidence that the slave trade was being restored after a period in which few African slaves, if any, had reached Portobelo. For example, don Gonzalo de Muñoz Calzada, the lieutenant factor of the royal treasury from 1654 to 1657, was charged with omitting the arrival of slave ships from Cartagena in the Portobelo customhouse's ledger books.⁶⁶ Moreover, while royal officials did not record a single

⁶¹ Casa de la Contratación, Seville, 14 Feb. 1645, AGI, Indiferente 2796.

⁶² Petition by David Hammond, n.p., 1648, AGI, Indiferente 2796. On the Irish presence in the Spanish Caribbean during this decade, see Pérez Tostado, "La llegada de irlandeses," 306–12; Block and Shaw, "Subjects without an Empire," 37–49.

⁶³ "Recibió Cristóbal Tomás de Espínola en favor del capitán Gómez Castrillo," Panama City, 2 Nov. 1650, AGI, Escribanía 488B, pieza 67, fols. 124r–25v.

⁶⁴ Tax collection data for 1651–52, AGI, Contaduría 1479, fols. 192r–v.

⁶⁵ In February 1651, don Juan de Peñalosa sold a male slave for 380 pesos. In October, Captain Marcos Gallardo sold an enslaved woman for 525 pesos. AGI, Contaduría 1485A, no. 8, ramo 3, fols. 708v, 714r.

⁶⁶ "Cargos a don Gonzalo de Muñoz de Calzada, teniente de factor oficial de la Real Hacienda," Panama City, 14 Feb. 1661, AGI, Escribanía 487A, pieza 17, fol. 14v. These kinds of practices were systematic. In 1660, the *visitador* noted that there was no ledger book to record the legitimate arrival of slaves. According to him, this was not especially bad. However, he cared more about smuggling and contraband and decided to keep a ledger book exclusively for this kind of trade. "Autos sobre los libros

slave ship arriving to Portobelo in 1656, the notary Alonso Sánchez de Figueroa registered in Panama City the sale of 23 newly arrived slaves for 12,043 pesos in one month.⁶⁷ Royal officials not only facilitated the fraudulent introduction of slaves to the isthmus but also were involved in their distribution to other regions. For example, in 1656 the Audiencia of Panama's fiscal was charged with financing the transshipment of smuggled slaves to Peru.⁶⁸

Slave ships, mostly of Dutch origin, began arriving regularly along Portobelo's coast from late 1657 onward. From then until 1662, sources preserved in the AGI reveal that 12 slave ships off-loaded 1,221 African slaves in Portobelo. As table 1 shows, another five slave ships were officially barred from harboring and unloading their cargoes there, although they probably did so somewhere else in the isthmus. These sources confirm the rise of Curaçao as a slave depot starting in 1657, but to a large extent they are also the result of the implementation of a less tolerant policy toward smuggling.⁶⁹ The man behind this new policy was Fernando de la Riva Agüero, who was appointed president of the Audiencia of Panama in 1658. In contrast to the preceding years, the arrival of slave ships and their seizure by the authorities were better documented. Yet, despite Riva Agüero's apparent zeal for persecuting smugglers and their associates, the Spanish intelligence network in Amsterdam reported that he adopted an ambivalent position toward the Dutch merchants.⁷⁰ Therefore, one suspects that the number of African slaves disembarked in Portobelo was much higher than the AGI sources suggest.

In contrast to the years before 1640, the slave ships after 1640 operated along routes that connected Portobelo with locations across the imperial divide. For example, two Dutch vessels sailed directly to Portobelo from Africa, while another two called at Tobago and Curaçao respectively before bringing slaves to the isthmus.⁷¹ In the case of the *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*, with which this essay opened, the ship departed from Spain, and the slaves were loaded at Curaçao before continuing on to Portobelo in March 1660.⁷² In 1661, two English vessels that had departed from Jamaica unsuccessfully tried to

que manda SM tengan los oficiales reales de Tierra Firme," Panama City, 1660, AGI, Escribanía 486C, pieza 11, fols. 99r, 100r, 110v.

⁶⁷ Investigation by the licenciado don Miguel Francisco de Marichalar into Francisco Terán de los Ríos, Panama City, 20 May 1672, AGI, Escribanía 490B, pieza 7, fols. 28r–30r. The slaves' origin was omitted in the transactions, but the high prices paid for them suggest that they were bozales. On average, the buyers paid 523 pesos per captive.

⁶⁸ Consejo de Indias, Madrid, 13 Nov. 1656, AGI, Panamá 71.

⁶⁹ Dutch slave traders also started to operate in Venezuela in 1657. Borucki, "Transimperial History," 35.

⁷⁰ "Relación de fraudes que se cometen en el comercio de las Indias," AGI, Indiferente 1668, fol. 583r; "Avisos de contravención en el comercio de Indias," AGI, Indiferente 1668, fol. 679r.

⁷¹ The ships were *Zwarte Dubbele Arend* (which arrived in 1657), *Zwarte Leeuw* (1657), *Liefde* (1659), and *Zwarte Arend* (1659). See, respectively, *VoyagesDatabase* (voyage identification numbers 11381, 11366, 98800, 11391), <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/search>. According to *Voyages Database*, the *Zwarte Arend* shipwrecked, and the 259 slaves it transported perished with the ship. However, complementary information has revealed that some mariners survived the accident, which happened between the islands of Santa Catalina and San Andrés. The mariners reached Portobelo in a boat and carried with them 28 African slaves. See "Sobre la entrada y descamino del navío nombrado *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*," Portobelo, 16 Mar. 1659, AGI, Escribanía 486C, pieza 67, fol. 36r.

⁷² Testimonies on the *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*'s itinerary, Cartagena and Portobelo, 25 Feb.–24 Mar. 1661, AGI, Escribanía 489B, pieza 88, fols. 2v, 4v, 6v, 17v, 26r, 41v.

Table 1. Slave ships reaching the Isthmus of Panama, 1641–1662

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ship name</i>	<i>Flag</i>	<i>Place of slave purchase</i>	<i>Previous place of call</i>	<i>Number of slaves</i>	<i>Were the slaves landed?</i>
1641	Unknown	Spain	Santa Catalina	Santa Catalina	44	Yes
1641	Unknown	Spain	Unknown	Unknown	Unkwown	Yes
1651	<i>Nuestra Señora de la Soledad y San Antonio</i>	Spain	Captured from another ship	Unknown	66	Yes
1657	<i>Zwarte Dubbele Arend</i>	Netherlands	Ardra	Ardra	213	Yes
1657	<i>Zwarte Leeuw</i>	Netherlands	Ardra	Tobago	290	Yes
7 Dec. 1657	<i>Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu</i>	Spain	La Guaira	La Guaira	20	Yes
16 Mar. 1659	<i>Zwarte Arend</i>	Netherlands	Río del Rey	Río del Rey	28	Yes
1659	<i>Liefde</i>	Netherlands	Ardra	Curaçao	220	Yes
17 July 1659	<i>San Francisco y las Ánimas</i>	Spain	Guinea	Guinea	38	Yes
Mar. 1660	<i>Nuestra Señora de la Soledad</i>	Spain	Curaçao	Curaçao	100	Yes
May 1660	<i>La Caridad</i>	Netherlands	Unknown	Unknown	168	Yes
5 Jan. 1661	<i>Natividad Grande</i>	Netherlands	Ardra	Ardra	150	No
5 Jan. 1661	<i>San Juan</i>	Netherlands	Ardra	Ardra	150	No
July 1661	Two unknown ships	England	Jamaica	Jamaica	Unknown	No
20 July 1661	<i>La Media Luna</i>	Netherlands	Calabar	Calabar	200	No
11 Nov. 1661	<i>San Joaquín</i>	Spain	Cartagena	Cartagena	11	Yes
11 Nov. 1661	<i>San Juan Bautista</i>	Spain	Cartagena	Cartagena	11	Yes
Mar. 1662	<i>Nuestra Señora del Rosario y San Vicente</i>	Spain	Mina	Mina	52	Yes
Apr. 1662	<i>Jesús, María y José</i>	Spain	Gambia	Gambia	70	Yes

Source: See notes 1, 39, 64, 71, 73–77.

Note: It is unknown what stop *La Caridad* made before reaching Portobelo. Here I assume it followed a transimperial journey. The two English ships referred to traveled together. Two slaves were off-loaded from them, but the majority of the human cargo remained on board. Finally, the *San Joaquín* and the *San Juan Bautista* traveled together. In total, they brought 22 slaves, but the exact number of slaves that each ship transported remains unknown. Thus, 11 slaves have been assigned to each ship.

disembark slaves in Portobelo.⁷³ In the same year, three Dutch ships loaded with slaves and claiming to have sailed directly from Africa were also prevented from off-loading their cargo.⁷⁴

Dutch and English ship captains were not alone in claiming to have taken transimperial routes before reaching Portobelo. At least three Spanish American ship captains contended that they had also sailed from Africa.⁷⁵ As it has not been possible to compare their testimonies against other sources, there are at least two possible ways of interpreting them. If these ships had conducted transatlantic voyages from Spanish America to African coasts and back to Spanish America, then the widespread belief that Spanish American slave traders depended on international providers would have to be reconsidered. If, in contrast, the ships had not undertaken transatlantic voyages, it would make sense that the slaves were purchased in the non-Spanish Caribbean. In either case, the evidence suggests that these ships' captains operated transimperial routes and preferred Portobelo over other locations for selling their human cargo.

In sum, at least nine transimperial voyages brought a minimum of 1,179 slaves to the Isthmus of Panama from 1657 to 1662. Their human shipments ranged from 28 to 300 captives, while on average they transported nearly 153 slaves each. The high number of slaves suggests that these expeditions were commanded by specialized slave traders. Additionally, if the 5 ships that did not unload their cargo had in fact done so, the number of transimperial ships would have reached 14. In total, these four ships were thought to have carried at least 500 slaves.

In contrast to the transimperial journeys, between 1657 and 1662 only three captains affirmed that they had stopped at a Spanish American port prior to calling at Portobelo. These intrainperial voyages brought at least 42 slaves to the isthmus and were operated by Spanish merchants.⁷⁶ Distinct from the specialized transimperial slave ventures, these ships illustrate the complementary role that trading in slaves played in Spanish America's

⁷³ These English ships called at the Chagres River in July 1661. Four members of the crew landed with two slaves in an attempt to persuade the local authorities to allow them to disembark the ships' load. "Al presidente de la Audiencia de Panamá," Madrid, 25 Aug. 1661, AGI, Panamá 230, libro 5, fols. 340v–42v.

⁷⁴ On January 5, 1661, two Dutch ships recorded as *Natividad Grande* and *San Juan* called at the Chagres River claiming that they were together transporting 300 slaves, which they had previously bought in Ardra (in the Bight of Benin). Letter by Fernando de la Riva Agüero, Portobelo, 24 Apr. 1661, AGI, Panamá 22, ramo 6, no. 97. On July 20, another Dutch ship, recorded as *La Media Luna*, called at the same location claiming to be carrying 200 slaves acquired in Calabar (in the Bight of Biafra). "Sobre la arribada del navío la Media Luna," Portobelo, 23 Sept. 1661, AGI, Panamá 22, ramo 6, no. 124B, fols. 3r–7v.

⁷⁵ On June 7, 1659, the captain of the *San Francisco y las Ánimas* claimed to have departed from Guinea. "Autos hechos por los oficiales reales de Panamá sobre la arribada de la fragata nombrada *San Francisco y las Ánimas*," Panama City, 1659, AGI, Escribanía 453B, fol. 775r. In 1662, the master of the *Nuestra Señora del Rosario y San Vicente* declared that he had made no stops between Mina (on the Gold Coast) and Portobelo. "El señor fiscal con Diego de la Torre sobre haber arribado con el navío *Nuestra Señora del Rosario y San Vicente*," Panama City, 1662, AGI, Escribanía 454B, fol. 485v. In the same year the captain of the *Jesús, María y José* claimed to have sailed directly from the Gambia River. "Autos hechos sobre la entrada del navío nombrado *Jesús, María y José*," Panama City, 1662, AGI, Escribanía 454B, fols. 537r–40v.

⁷⁶ One of those ships was the *Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu*. It reached Portobelo on December 7, 1657, from La Guaira, Caracas. This ship carried 20 slaves, although it did not have permission to do so. Inquiries into the *Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu*, Portobelo, 1657–58, AGI, Panamá 24, ramo 2, no. 54I.

ordinary commercial ventures. The case of the *San Joaquín* and the *San Juan Bautista* is particularly illuminating in this regard. These two ships commissioned by Pascual de Atocha, a Basque contractor who agreed to provision Cartagena and Panama with guns and muskets, left the northern coasts of Spain in 1659. When they reached Portobelo in 1661, the ships were carrying 22 slaves. The captains probably bought the slaves in Cartagena as a form of private investment from which they expected to benefit once they reached the isthmus.⁷⁷

As African slaves were once again being off-loaded in Portobelo, the slave trade from Panama City to Peru was likewise revived. Several contracts and partnerships between Panamanian and Peruvian merchants relating to this trade have survived. For instance, in October 1656, 41 slaves between 16 and 26 years old, mostly women, plus a cargo of expensive goods including gold, pearls, amber, and civet, were shipped to Peru by Juan Gómez de Castrillo, a householder in Panama City. The consignees were Francisco de Jaúregui and don Pedro de Gárate, two dealers who oversaw the sale of the whole cargo and sent the profits to Panama City.⁷⁸ Peruvian merchants also sought to benefit from the renewed availability of slaves on the Isthmus of Panama. For instance, in February 1658, a certain Marcos Miguel tried his chances at a public auction in which 17 slaves seized from the *Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu* in Portobelo were being sold. In spite of Miguel's offer, another bidder obtained the group for the price of 100 pesos per slave.⁷⁹ If he had been successful, Miguel could have profited from the extremely low prices paid at the auction—mainly due to the slaves' poor health—as those who survived the journey from Panama City to Lima would fetch a far higher price in the Lima or Potosí market.

The arrival of new African slaves on the Peruvian coast shows the revival of the slave trade with Portobelo from a different angle. In cities like Guayaquil and Quito, the presence of African slaves traded in Panama began to be common again.⁸⁰ The same can be said about Lima.⁸¹ The renewed dynamism of the transisthmian slave trade is reflected in the ledger books of the guild of Lima's merchants, who farmed the city's customs duties at the time. In late 1661, the guild's clerks started to record the introduction of new captives in Lima. Most likely, this was a way for the clerks to keep track of the increasing and steady arrival of African slaves from other trades. From December 1661 to September

⁷⁷ Letter by Fernando de la Riva Agüero, Panama City, 20 Apr. 1662, AGI, Panamá 23, ramo 1, no. 10.

⁷⁸ "Recibió el Capitán Andrés de Madariaga maestro del Navío *San Francisco de Asís* en favor del capitán Juan Gómez de Castrillo," Panama City, 11 Oct. 1656, AGI, Escribanía 488B, pieza 67, fols. 127r–29r. They were shipped in the vessel *San Francisco de Asís*, whose captain was Andrés de Madariaga.

⁷⁹ Inquiries into the *Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu*, Portobelo, 1657–58, AGI, Panamá 24, ramo 2, no. 541, fols. 32v–35v.

⁸⁰ O'Toole, *Bound Lives*, 43; Tardieu, *El negro*, 237.

⁸¹ For instance, on February 3, 1660, Roque de Ormaechea sold a 26-year-old slave called Antonio Carabalí, whom he had previously acquired in Panama, to the tailor master Salvador López del Valle for 850 pesos. See AGN, DAC, Protocolos Notariales (hereafter cited as PN) 1099 Medina, 1660, fols. 55r–v. Similarly, on November 26, 1661, Manuel Grande de los Cobos sold Diego Rico de Guinea a 20-year-old bozal slave called Juan Arara, whom he had brought from Panama, for 950 pesos. AGN, DAC, PN 1100 Medina, 1661, fols. 453r–v.

1662, these books registered the arrival of nine ships from Panama City that altogether declared the transportation of 214 African slaves.⁸²

PORTOBELLO: A GATEWAY FOR THE TRANSIMPERIAL SLAVE TRADE, 1660S–1730S

By the beginning of the 1660s, the slave trade to the Spanish Caribbean was back on track, and Portobello's dependence on Cartagena as a slave-provisioning center had weakened considerably—but certainly not its dependence on slavery as an economic resource. During the 1650s, Cartagena seemingly continued to receive more slaves than Portobello, but this trend soon changed.⁸³ In the decades to come, the slave trade across the Isthmus of Panama prospered, and increasing numbers of slaves entering Spanish America were directly offloaded in Portobello. Not only was Portobello's function as a hub for the transimperial intra-American slave trade enhanced, but also Portobello absorbed the largest share of the known slave trade to Spanish America during this time, at least until the 1730s.

The new intra-American transimperial routes to Portobello, established by smugglers in the 1650s, were from 1663 onward also exploited by monopolistic companies running the official slave trade. The crown granted *asientos* for monopolistic charters to introduce slaves to Spanish America from 1663 to 1713, with the last contract expiring in 1750. The inception of monopolistic contracts from which only a single company could benefit put an end to the traditional licensing system allowing multiple merchants to participate in the official slave trade. While the reduced number of actors allowed to engage in the slave trade was a real novelty, in many respects the new monopolistic system of commerce merely formalized (and attempted to profit from) how the slave trade was already operating during the 1650s. Most significantly, the new system also entailed royal approval of transimperial voyages within the Caribbean.⁸⁴

The company of the Genoese Domenico Grillo and Ambrosio Lomellino pioneered the official intra-American transimperial slave trade. The company obtained its contract in 1662 under the agreement to pay 300,000 pesos per year to the Spanish royal treasury for the right to import 3,000 slaves annually from 1663 to 1674. By relying on transimperial shipping in the Caribbean, these traders ultimately landed approximately 21,232 slaves in Spanish America. Most of these slaves were furnished to Grillo and Lomellino by the Dutch, whose position as the leading slave providers in the Caribbean

⁸² “Libro y razón de los pesos que cobran pertenecientes a Su Majestad,” Lima, 1661–64, AGN, Dirección de Archivo Republicano, Ministerio de Hacienda, Libros y Manuscritos Coloniales, libro 162, fols. 13r–14r.

⁸³ There were 3,211 slaves brought to Cartagena by 11 ships. See *Voyages Database* (voyage identification numbers 41464, 44202, 44153, 44288, 44289, 11678, 44200, 11386, 44221, 98804, 11388), <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/search>.

⁸⁴ It is common to find references to the Portuguese *asientos* (1595–1640) in the literature. It is important to note that those contracts granted monopolistic control over the marketing of the licenses to participate in the slave trade but not over the introduction of the slaves to Spanish America. García-Montón, “Cost,” 14–18.

during the 1650s was not only confirmed but fostered. The Dutch furnished almost 93 percent of the slaves to the Genoese organization, while the English provided the rest.⁸⁵

Portobelo immediately benefited from Grillo and Lomellino's control of the official flow of slaves to Spanish America. Initially, their company was entitled to unload slaves in Cartagena, Portobelo, and Veracruz. Although these three ports absorbed 86.2 percent of the known trade, the distribution of slaves among them was distinctly unequal. Around 11,403 captives were disembarked in Portobelo, which counted for 53.7 percent of all the off-loaded slaves. In contrast, Cartagena received only 22.6 percent of the trade —4,811 slaves— and Veracruz a mere 9.9 percent —2,100 slaves. The other 13.7 percent of the trade was directed to ports that from 1664 onward qualified to receive fixed quotas of slaves, including Havana, Santiago de Cuba, San Juan de Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Caracas, Cumaná, and La Guaira.⁸⁶

The evidence shows a rise in direct trade with the Dutch and English Caribbean as well as continued trade through Cartagena to Portobelo. Grillo and Lomellino organized ten expeditions carrying around 4,937 slaves from Curaçao directly to Portobelo and another two voyages with 747 slaves from Jamaica to Portobelo. Slaves from Curaçao also reached Portobelo on 13 indirect voyages that stopped in Cartagena, where around one-third of the slaves (2,528) were sold before the rest (4,961) were forced to continue to the Isthmus of Panama.⁸⁷

The *Santa Cruz* offers a good example of these indirect voyages from Curaçao to Portobelo via Cartagena and of how Cartagena was used as a stopover for the refreshment of the slaves rather than as a market, as it had served before 1640. The *Santa Cruz* called at Cartagena in January 1664. Grillo and Lomellino's agents disembarked 200 slaves who were in need of medical attention and then loaded another 226 slaves who had disembarked in September 1663 from another of the company's ships. By the time the *Santa Cruz* reached Portobelo at the end of January 1664, its human cargo consisted of 561 captives who had been transported by different means and routes before being transhipped again to Peru.⁸⁸

Portobelo's importance, which emerges clearly in Grillo and Lomellino's strategies, extended to future monopolistic companies. The ability of the French Guinea Company, from 1703 to 1714, and the English South Sea Company, from 1714 to 1739, to manage their respective *asientos* is known, which makes it possible to assess their general preferences for channeling the flow of slaves. Over 11 years, the French Guinea Company imported at least 19,269 slaves to Spanish America, who were then off-loaded in nine ports. Most of the trade was channeled to Portobelo and Panama, where 5,845 slaves disembarked. Another 4,251 slaves were unloaded in Cartagena, making it the second

⁸⁵ Vega Franco, *El tráfico de esclavos*, 194–202.

⁸⁶ Vega Franco, 186–87, 194–202.

⁸⁷ Vega Franco, 198–201.

⁸⁸ “Cuaderno de algunos contratos ajustados con las naciones,” AGI, Contaduría 262, fols. 45r–61v; “Testimonio de los autos de las diligencias hechas en razón de la entrada del navío nombrado *Santa Cruz*,” Cartagena, 1664, AGI, Contaduría 262, fols. 61r–94r.

most important destination during this period.⁸⁹ The South Sea Company's slave trade was suspended due to hostilities between the English and Spanish empires in 1719–21, around 1728, and from 1739 onward. However, in a total of over 20 years, this company off-loaded around 64,017 slaves in 13 Spanish American ports. Their leading destination was again Portobelo, which received 19,662 slaves from 1715 to 1738. The second and third most coveted ports were Buenos Aires and Cartagena, which received, respectively, 16,222 slaves (from 1715 to 1738) and 10,549 slaves (from 1714 to 1736).⁹⁰ Both the French Guinea Company and the South Sea Company were permitted to operate in more ports than were Grillo and Lomellino; however, they both also privileged Portobelo as Grillo and Lomellino did before. In sum, the choices made by these monopolistic companies confirm Portobelo's centrality within the renewed slave routes to Spanish America. Smugglers too might well have preferred Portobelo.⁹¹

When the companies who operated the official transimperial intra-American slave trade began to favor Portobelo over Cartagena, Cartagena's inhabitants attempted to protect their local slaving economy. As soon as Grillo and Lomellino's agents reached Cartagena, they tried to enforce privileges that exempted them from paying any local tax on the slave trade. Meanwhile, the city's governor tried to reassert the old system of local taxes and customs for the slave trade, like *aduanilla* and *agua de Tubarco*, which had been crucial for financing the city before 1640.⁹² Harsh disputes between both parties over the payment of taxes and the profit from seized illegal slave cargoes erupted.⁹³ The merchants of Cartagena also retaliated and developed their own illicit commerce by establishing reliable transimperial relationships with Caribbean slave traders. For instance, a sloop that had departed from Jamaica brought 69 slaves to Cartagena in May 1672, where the captives had a recipient waiting for them, a certain Pedro Barbanzo.⁹⁴

Thus although Cartagena lost its role as the leading wholesale market for slaves to which other ports like Portobelo had been subordinated, it remained a transimperial terminal for the new intra-American slave trade. From the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, Cartagena's slave market became oriented toward providing African forced

⁸⁹ The rest of the slaves were disembarked in Buenos Aires (3,475), Caracas (2,349), Havana (1,642), Santa Marta (434), Santiago de Cuba (404), Santo Domingo (435), and Veracruz (434). Palmer, "Company Trade," 37.

⁹⁰ The rest of the slaves were off-loaded in Campeche (805), Caracas (5,240), Guatemala (162), Havana (6,387), Maracaibo (563), Puerto Rico (115), Santa Marta (222), Santiago de Cuba (976), Santo Domingo (103), and Veracruz (3,011). Palmer, "Company Trade," 41.

⁹¹ The reports of South Sea Company agents in Portobelo and Panama City about smugglers' activities suggest this. Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 84–85, 87–94.

⁹² Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamérica y el comercio*, 13–14, 205; Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 71, 144.

⁹³ For instance, "Domingo Grillo y Ambrosio Lomellin factores del asiento de esclavos y el señor fiscal, sobre el comiso del navio nombrado el *Santo Rey Fernando*," Cartagena, 1663, AGI, Escribanía 575A; letter by the governor don Diego de Portugal, Cartagena, 13 Mar. 1664, AGI, Indiferente 2834; petition by Domenico Grillo and Ambrosio Lomellino, Madrid, 11 July 1663, AGI, Indiferente 2834; "Sobre la cobranza que intentaron hacer de los factores del asiento de negros perteneciente a los derechos de almojarifazgo y alcabala antigua y nueva," Cartagena, 15 Nov. 1672, AGI, Santa Fe 76, no. 25.

⁹⁴ Autos on the sloop *Principe de Beston*, Cartagena, 1672, AGI, Santa Fe 76, no. 23A (the reference to Pedro Barbanzo appears on 8v).

workers for the Colombian hinterland and, specifically, for the expanding mining industry in the regions of Antioquia, Chocó, and Popayán.⁹⁵

Unlike Cartagena, the Panamanian markets at this time became more important as a crossroads for different merchants interested in the slave trade. Transimperial slave providers of diverse nationalities, local middlemen, and wealthy Peruvian buyers went to the isthmus to profit from the slave trade led by Portobelo. Credit played a key role in facilitating sales and acquisitions. In October 1669, for instance, the retailer Antonio de Lara purchased 300 slaves from Grillo and Lomellino's agents in Portobelo. The payment was made in hard cash after Antonio acquired a debt of 134,000 pesos from don Francisco Espinosa de los Monteros, a Lima trader who traveled to the isthmus to acquire merchandise. On September 6, 1670, Antonio's brother, Juan, honored 79,125 pesos of the debt in Lima, where he was marketing the slaves and where the creditor resided.⁹⁶ That installment was probably partially paid from the 16,078 pesos that Juan de Lara had obtained from the sale of 21 slaves in Lima the previous month. While Lima buyers paid Juan de Lara an average of 765.6 pesos per slave, his brother Antonio had spent 446.6 pesos for each of them in Portobelo.⁹⁷

Likewise, smaller investors were attracted by the profitability of trading slaves from Panama to the Chicama Valley (in Trujillo), Lima, or even Cuzco.⁹⁸ Slaves who had been brought from Africa via the Dutch and the English Caribbean were shipped to the Isthmus of Panama and from there dispersed to places as varied as Guayaquil, Quito, and Trujillo. In these locations, they were forced to sustain the cotton, soap, and sugarcane industries that rose during the early eighteenth century.⁹⁹

To summarize, since the 1660s onward transimperial slave traders operating intra-American voyages increasingly visited Portobelo as it was the gateway for the Peruvian markets and their riches—most notably, silver. For instance, Grillo and Lomellino's agents occasionally cooperated with local shipowners to engage in the South Pacific's intraimperial routes in order to market slaves and buy merchandise in Lima. By early 1671 Agostino Grillo, a relative of Domenico Grillo who had served in Panama City since 1663, sold 119 slaves for 88,793 pesos in Lima.¹⁰⁰ From there, he tried to ship 1,179 barrels of wine and a cargo of fine Peruvian hats to Panama City in June 1672.¹⁰¹ During

⁹⁵ Palacios Preciado, *La trata*, 51, 141, 199, 202; Bryant, *Rivers of Gold*, 109–19.

⁹⁶ Payment made by Juan de Lara to Francisco de Espinosa de los Monteros, Lima, 6 Sept. 1670, AGN, DAC, PN 1302 Oliveros, 1669–1671, fols. 129r–v.

⁹⁷ Slaves sold by Juan de Lara and his associate Simón de Orcasitas, Lima, Aug. 1670, AGN, DAC, PN 1302 Oliveros, 1669–1671, fols. 85r–91r, 92r–94v, 105r–7v, 110r–v, 113r–15v.

⁹⁸ For instance, a certain Agustín Arce de la Concha sold a 20-year-old slave, whom he had previously bought in Panama City, for 808 pesos in Lima. See AGN, DAC, PN 1302 Oliveros, 1669–1671, fols. 40r–41r (22 Sept. 1669). For the other locations, see Tardieu, *El negro*, 238; Tardieu, “El comercio,” 407, 409; O’Toole, *Bound Lives*, 94.

⁹⁹ Gutiérrez Rivas, “Esclavitud y mano,” 328, 332–35, 340–47.

¹⁰⁰ Slaves sold by Agostino Grillo, Lima, Apr.–May, July–Aug., Oct. 1671, AGN, DAC, PN 1302 Oliveros, 1669–1671, fols. 415r–16r, 500r–v, 519r–20r, 573r–v; slaves sold by Agostino Grillo, Lima, Feb.–June 1672, AGN, DAC, PN 1303 Oliveros, 1672–1674, fols. 3r–5r, 8v–10r, 19r–v, 27r–v, 34r–v, 50r–52v, 60v–61r, 66v–67r, 73r–74v, 77v–78r, 79r–v, 80v–81r, 90r–93v, 97r–98r, 100r, 101r–v, 103r–5r, 108v–10r, 111v–12r, 118r–19v, 126r–v, 130r–32v, 134v–35r, 136v–37r, 142r–46v, 147v–48r.

¹⁰¹ “Auto de vista del pleito de Domingo Grillo sobre 1,179 botijas de vino y 3 canastos de sombreros,” Madrid, 27 July 1675, AGI, Escribanía 959.

the *asiento* of the Dutch Balthasar Coymans, his organization anchored five slave ships in Portobelo in February 1686, ahead of the upcoming fair.¹⁰² And as soon as the South Sea Company started to operate the *asiento* contract in 1714, it placed its main factory in the Isthmus of Panama. While the South Sea Company's agents engaged in the period's booming contraband trade, they continued fostering Portobelo's role as the leading Spanish American center of the African slave trade.¹⁰³

CONCLUSIONS

This article has demonstrated the rise of Portobelo as the main Spanish American entry point for African slaves from the 1660s to the 1730s, a fact that had not been firmly established in the literature until now. The focus on Portobelo has also provided a better understanding of the larger transformation of the slave trade to Spanish America during the seventeenth century: the shift from direct transatlantic voyages from Africa to transimperial and intra-American shipping during the 1640s and 1650s.

This commerce almost collapsed in the 1640s, after almost 50 years in which the Portuguese channeled a thriving African slave trade to Spanish America. Even if a variety of international and domestic forces worked to the detriment of the slave trade, it was revived in the 1650s largely thanks to the Spanish peninsular and Spanish American traders and international (mostly Dutch, but also English) merchants. As the newly found slave voyages to Portobelo show, these actors rebuilt the slave trade on emerging transimperial and intra-American routes during the 1650s. By the 1660s, this trade was already strong enough to become the source of a pricey monopolistic *asiento* contract. Later, the companies running the official slave trade also predominately used Portobelo-bound routes. The Isthmus of Panama's strategic location, which allowed it to act as a gateway for Peruvian markets, made Portobelo an attractive destination for the monopolistic *asiento* companies and smugglers alike.

My analysis shows that Portobelo's newfound primacy was hardly based on an increase in the trade that it channeled. In fact, the slave trade to Spanish America declined in overall terms during the decades when Portobelo acquired its centrality. Portobelo's prevalence was instead related to its evolving role in the larger slave circuits linking the Caribbean to Peru, which were reconfigured due to the impact of new shipping patterns. Indeed, Portobelo was already an important node for slavery by 1595 yet until 1640 depended on Cartagena, which was furnished with slaves by transatlantic voyages. From 1595 through 1640, around 1,000–1,500 slaves were disembarked in Portobelo annually. Starting in the 1650s, Portobelo became a privileged port for slave ships operating intra-American routes, which pivoted around the Dutch and the English Caribbean. Portobelo's importance increased until the 1730s. Portobelo became the most important hub for

¹⁰² Klooster, "Slavenvaart," 129.

¹⁰³ For the activities of the South Sea Company's agents in Portobelo and Panama City, and the role of these trading posts in the company's business, see Palmer, *Human Cargoes*, 84–85, 87–91, 102–3, 105, 149–51, 156, 166–68, 178. For an overview of the trading dynamics in the Isthmus of Panama during the same period, see Espelt Bombín, "Trade Control," 130–36. The slave trade from Panama to northern Peru during the South Sea Company's *asiento* is covered in Gutierrez Rivas, "El ingreso."

slavery and triggered Cartagena's relative decline as a slave port. However, during this time Portobelo's trade was much smaller in volume than the trade it channeled before 1640: from the 1650s to the 1730s, the slave trade to Portobelo brought on average 768 slaves annually.¹⁰⁴

While further research will sharpen the data presented in this article, the characteristics of Portobelo's emergence as a center of the slave trade shed light on the profound changes that the slave trade to Spanish America underwent. By looking at the case of Portobelo, my analysis also offers a vivid portrait of the shift in slave routes during the middle decades of the seventeenth century, a period about which historians had lacked detailed accounts to date. These shifts not only had implications for cities and merchants but also directly affected the lives of slaves. By examining these transformations, this article also provides a glimpse into the broader context that shaped the Afro-Latin American diaspora and its varied itineraries from the Caribbean Basin to Peru.

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¹⁰⁴ These calculations summarize the data mobilized throughout the article, which referred to the known trade carried out during the 1650s (1,487 captives) and by the monopolistic asiento companies of Grillo and Lomellino (11,403 captives), the French Guinea Company (5,845 captives), and the South Sea Company (19,662 captives).

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