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# Dispersion, Procreation and Mission: the Emergence of Protestantism in Early Modern West Africa

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## Abstract

This article explores the emergence of Protestantism in West Africa in the 17th century, using both primary and secondary sources. Its central argument is that the history of Protestantism in early modern Africa has mainly been examined within the paradigm of mission history, thus reducing the history of Protestantism to a history of Protestant missionary endeavors. By intersecting three complementary windows, – a Roman Catholic window, a chartered company window and a Euro-African window –, the article traces the wider history of Protestantism in early modern West Africa. It maps the impact of Protestantism on Roman Catholics in West Africa, sketches the significance of Protestantism for certain Euro-Africans, and shows that through a combination of dispersion, procreation and mission Protestantism became a reality in West Africa as early as the 17th century.

## Keywords

mission – Protestantism – West Africa – chartered companies – Euro-Africans – Roman Catholics – Protestant-Catholic rivalry

## 1 Introduction

In February 1636 the newly established *Propaganda Fide* authorized a French Capuchin mission to the Petite Côte, a coastal area of present-day Senegal. The explicit aim of the mission was to prevent Dutch “heretics” from corrupting

the faith of the local Luso-African Christians. During an exploratory visit to the Petite Côte in 1635 the Capuchins of Normandy had concluded that the Christian community there had been sadly neglected by the Diocese of Santiago de Cape Verde. This, in Capuchin opinion, made them vulnerable to the influence of Dutch Calvinist traders, living in the coastal towns of Rufisque, Joal, and Portudal. *Propaganda Fide* seems to have shared this concern and resolved that the French Capuchins were to maintain a mission on the Petite Côte for as long as the Dutch “heretics” would reside there.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars are generally of the opinion that Protestantism remained a marginal phenomenon in West Africa<sup>2</sup> well into the 19th century. Hence, early modern Protestantism has received little attention in the literature on Christianity in West Africa,<sup>3</sup> except for some studies on missionary initiatives in the mid- and late 18th century in the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. In the 1960s Hans Debrunner, for example, wrote on Danish and Dutch Protestant initiatives along the Gold Coast, one of the main hubs of the transatlantic slave-trade at the time, and in 1992 David Kpobi published a study on Jacobus Elisa Capitein (c.1717–1747), a formerly enslaved African who worked in Elmina as chaplain for the Dutch West India Company (DWIC).<sup>4</sup> More recently, there have been

1 Nize Isabel de Moraes and Guy Thilmans, *A la Découverte de la Petite Côte au xvii<sup>e</sup> Siècle. Sénégal et Gambie* (Dakar: Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar-IFAN, 1993), vol. 2, 290. Note: De Moraes and Thilmans' three volumes are an anthology of primary sources on the Petite Côte.

2 West Africa in this paper denotes the (coastal) area from present-day Senegal up to and including Nigeria.

3 This is both true for the more general works e.g. Elizabeth O. Isichei's *A History of Christianity in Africa. From Antiquity to the Present* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1995); Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) and for the studies focussing on West Africa, see Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity* (London: Arnold, 1986), 23–4; Lamin O. Sanneh, *West African Christianity. The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 112–13. Also books discussing early modern Calvinist missions, such as Danny L. Noorlander, *Heaven's Wrath. The Protestant Reformation and the Dutch West India Company in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2019) and Charles H. Parker, *Global Calvinism. Conversion and Commerce in the Dutch Empire 1600–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022) pay little attention to West Africa.

4 Hans W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Pub. House, 1967), 70–81; Hans W. Debrunner, “Notable Danish Chaplains on the Gold Coast,” *Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society* 2,1 (1956), 12–29; Hans W. Debrunner, *Sieckentroosters, Predikants and Chaplains. A Documentation of the History of Dutch and English Chaplains to Guinea before 1750* (s.l: s.n, 1964); Hans W. Debrunner, *A Church between Colonial Powers. A Study of the Church in Togo* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965); G. Simonsen, “Belonging in Africa. Frederik Svane and Christian Protten on the Gold Coast in the Eighteenth Century,” *Itinerario* 39,1 (2015), 91–115; David N.A. Kpobi, *Mission in Chains. The Life, Theology and Ministry of the Ex-Slave Jacobus E. J. Capitein (1717–1747)*,

several publications on Philip Quaque (1741–1816), an African minister engaged by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), who worked in Cape Coast from 1765 until his death in 1816.<sup>5</sup> Bruce Mouser and Fiona Leach have both published on missionary work among the Sussoo (Edinburgh Missionary Society) and Liberated Africans (Church Missionary Society) in late 18th- and early 19th-century Sierra Leone.<sup>6</sup> These researchers concur in their conclusions: due to the slave-trade, the life-style of the resident Europeans, the lack of continuity, and the language barrier, early modern Protestantism failed to make an impact on the indigenous populations of West Africa. Danny Noorlander in *Heaven's wrath* draws the radical conclusion, that “[n]either the Dutch, the English or the French had any serious missions and ecclesial presence in West Africa in the period.”<sup>7</sup>

What these studies have in common is that they examine the early modern history of Protestantism within the paradigm of mission history, interpreting

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- with a Translation of His Major Publications* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993). The mid-18th century Moravian mission to the Gold Coast has received little scholarly attention. See e.g. Karl Müller, *200 Jahre Brüdermission* (Herrnhut: Verlag der Missionsbuchhandlung, 1931), 163–70; Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival. Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 202–32; Peter Sebal, “Christian Jakob Protten (1715–1769) and Rebecca Protten (1718–1780),” in Ulrich van der Heyden (ed.), *Unbekannte Biographien. Afrikaner im deutschsprachigen Raum vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zum Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (s.l.: Kair Homilius Verlag, 2008), 53–64.
- 5 David Killingray, “The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s–1920s,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33,1 (2003), 3–31; Ty M. Reese, “‘Sheep in the Jaws of so Many Ravenous Wolves’: The Slave Trade and Anglican Missionary Activity at Cape Coast Castle, 1752–1816,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, 3 (2004), 348–72; Ty M. Reese, “The Barriers to Conversion. The Rev. Philip Quaque, Company Pay, and the Economy of Cape Coast, 1766–1816,” *African Economic History* 48 (2020), 1–19; Vincent Carretta and Ty M. Reese, *The Life and Letters of Philip Quaque, the First African Anglican Missionary* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Travis Glasson, “Missionaries, Methodists, and a Ghost. Philip Quaque in London and Cape Coast, 1756–1816,” *Journal of British Studies* 48,1 (2009), 29–50.
- 6 Bruce L. Mouser, “African Academy. Clapham 1799–1806,” *History of Education* 33,1 (2004), 87–103; Bruce L. Mouser, “Origins of Church Missionary Society Accommodation to Imperial Policy. The Sierra Leone Quagmire and the Closing of the Susu Mission, 1804–17,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39, 4 (2009), 375–402; Bruce L. Mouser, “Continuing British Interest in Coastal Guinea-Conakry and Fuuta Jalloo Highlands (1750 to 1850),” *Cahiers D'études Africaines* 43,172 (2003), 761–90; Fiona E. Leach, Sarah Hartwig, Elizabeth Renner, and Susanna Klein, *Reclaiming the Women of Britain's First Mission to West Africa. Three Lives Lost and Found* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
- 7 Danny L. Noorlander, *Heaven's Wrath. The Protestant Reformation and the Dutch West India Company in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2019), 109. Noorlander buttresses his argument by quoting the Dutch Calvinist *ziekentrooster* (a lay pastoral worker) Jacob Steendam who lamented (about the Gold Coast) that “[t]here Christ's true church / has neither place nor bed.”

the emergence of Protestantism in West Africa mainly as a prologue to the 19th-century missionary movement. Debrunner writes: “These chaplains were not missionaries but their work and witness helped to stir up the Christian conscience and to bring about *real* missionary work in Ghana.”<sup>8</sup> And elsewhere he maintains that the work of these chaplains instigated the “beginnings of missionary work.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Travis Glasson considers Philip Quaake to be an example of “an *emerging* evangelical culture that was looking for *new ways* to spread the gospel.”<sup>10</sup>

The preoccupation with mission and indigenous conversion in the literature runs the risk of reducing the history of Protestantism in early modern West Africa to a history of Protestant mission, thus disregarding other aspects of Protestantism’s history. Both David Kpobi and Ty Reese for example mention a local interest in the schools established by Capitein and Quaake.<sup>11</sup> West Africans had been pursuing European (and Islamic) education for centuries, sending children to Cape Verde as well as Europe to acquire knowledge and intercultural skills. Protestant educational initiatives, often commenced to cater for the growing number of Euro-African children, therefore offered Africans new opportunities to access education (locally as well as abroad). While rarely interested in conversion, the quest for education gave Africans a reason to associate with Protestant ministers and school teachers and even entrust their children to them. Roman Catholic sources point to another aspect of Protestant history. The sources indicate that by the 1630s the Protestant (and especially Calvinist) presence on the Petite Côte as well as lower down the Guinea coast had become sufficiently robust to raise concern among Roman Catholics in both Europe and West Africa, causing them to develop strategies to attempt to thwart the spread of Protestantism.

This article explores these and other aspects of the onset of Protestantism in West Africa in the 17th century. Because the sources on the region, though numerous and multifarious, are fragmentary and scattered when it comes to Protestantism and because there are no archival collections that can be

8 Italics mine. Hans W. Debrunner, “Pioneers of Church and Education in the Gold Coast,” *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger* 4,3 (1962), 376.

9 Debrunner, “Notable Danish Chaplains”, 25.

10 Italics mine. Glasson, “Missionaries, Methodists, and a Ghost”, 49. Edward Andrews’s *Native Apostles* seems to work with a similar paradigm, stating that the 17th and 18th centuries are “a decisive period for the development of English and later British missionary missions.” Edward E. Andrews, *Native Apostles. Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4.

11 Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 145–8; Reese, “Sheep in the Jaws of so Many Ravenous Wolves”, 357.

considered the equivalent of “Protestant missionary archives” for the period, I have opted to explore the emergence of Protestantism through three complementary windows. In view of contemporary Protestant-Roman Catholic contestations and *Propaganda Fide’s* explicit aim to retain and “regain the faithful in all those parts of the world where Protestantism had been established”, the first window offers a perspective on how contemporary Roman Catholic missionary sources depict the onset of Protestantism in the region.<sup>12</sup> A second window takes materials from the chartered companies as its starting point and maps the 17th-century intentions and initiatives by the boards and chaplains of these corporations to move beyond the resident European mercantile community and evangelize the indigenous populations.<sup>13</sup> A third and final window opens to the world of Euro-Africans. Peter Mark has argued that Luso-Africans on the Upper Guinea Coast considered their association with Christianity (here: Roman Catholicism) to be part of their Portuguese heritage and an essential aspect of their identity. Though often an “amalgam of Christian, Jewish, and African practices” their adherence to Christianity distinguished them from their surroundings. Mark argues that this Luso-African Christian identity not merely was a religious marker but signaled also their skill as cultural brokers and their access to commodities and trans-local trade networks.<sup>14</sup> Building on the work by Mark, I argue that during the 17th century some Euro-Africans considered Protestantism to be an intrinsic part of their Euro-African identity which underscored their Euro-African descent and connectedness to the European mercantile settlements, signaled their intercultural skills, and implied, indirectly, their access the privileges such as education and trade networks.

My argument in this article is twofold. First and foremost, I argue that the history of Protestantism in early modern West Africa is more encompassing than the history of Protestant missionary initiatives. Archival materials substantiate that the arrival of Protestants influenced and modified the conduct of Roman Catholics in West Africa. The sources also indicate that during the 17th century, due to intermarriages and other long-term interactions between Africans and Europeans, certain Euro-Africans and Africans identified as Protestant (or even Anglican, Lutheran or Reformed) as a sign of their European descent and

12 Festo Mkenda, “Jesuits, Protestants, and Africa Before the Twentieth Century,” in Robert A. Marysk and Festo Mkenda, *Encounters between Jesuits and Protestants in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 20.

13 Paul E.H. Hair, “Protestants as Pirates, Slavers, and Protomissionaries. Sierra Leone 1568 and 1582,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21,3 (1970), 203–24.

14 Peter Mark, “Portuguese” Style and Luso-African Identity. *Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 15–7.

their connectedness to the fort communities and networks. Second, I argue that the sources suggest that Protestants missionary work did not commence only in the 18th century as much of the literature seems to suggest. Rather, the sources evidence that throughout the 17th century there were attempts to evangelize the indigenous populations of West Africa, however modest and ineffective these proved to be. The West Africa materials therefore do not bear out that Protestantism was a relative 'late-comer' to African missionary scene. On a methodological level the contribution exemplifies the productiveness of intersecting and triangulating complementary perspectives when dealing with a scarcity of archival materials.

Before examining the history of Protestantism via these three windows, I first briefly sketch the religious landscape of early modern West Africa in order to situate the emergence of Protestantism in its wider religious setting. From the mid-16th century onwards, small Christian communities began to emerge on the West African mainland, initially located mainly along the coast and main rivers of present-day Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and the Gold Coast, but later extending to other navigable places along the West African coast.<sup>15</sup> Comprising chiefly of Luso-Africans (the offspring of Portuguese settlers and African women) who identified with Roman Catholicism as part of their cultural and religious heritage, these small Christian hubs were visited intermittently by clergy of the Diocese of Santiago, Cape Verde and by European missionary priests (e.g. Jesuits, Capuchins, and Franciscans).<sup>16</sup>

These Christian communities developed in what was already a religiously diverse scenery. West Africa south of the Sahara was a patchwork of expressions of traditional religiosity, though north of the tropical rainforests Islam had begun to spread. Some ethnic groups had increasingly begun to identify themselves as Muslim, while itinerant preachers and Muslim traders actively propagated Islam among traditional believers as far south as present-day Sierra

15 Examples include Joal, Portudal, Rufisque, Bintang, Geregia, Juffureh, Cacheu, Guinala, Farim and Bena.

16 For a discussion of the different categories of Luso-Africans, see José da Silva Horta, "Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in 'Portuguese' Accounts on 'Guinea of Cape Verde' (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)," *History in Africa* 27 (2000), 103. For a discussion of Luso-African Christian communities on the Upper Guinea Coast see Peter Mark, "The Evolution of 'Portuguese' Identity. Luso-Africans on the Upper Guinea Coast from the Sixteenth Century." *Journal of African History* 40, 2 (1999), 174–6; Martha T. Frederiks, *We Have Toiled All Night. Christianity in The Gambia 1454–2000* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 166–78; Toby Green, Philip J. Havik, and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva (eds.), *African Voices from the Inquisition*. Vol. 1, the Trial of Crispina Peres of Cacheu, Guinea-Bissau (1646–1668) (Oxford: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2021), xxxix–lvii.

Leone. Migratory waves and *jihadist* movements also enhanced the spread of Islam in West Africa.<sup>17</sup> Portuguese settlers and their Luso-African descendants added two more religious persuasions to this mix, because some of these Iberian settlers were *conversos* who seized the opportunity of the relative freedom from religious control on the Upper Guinea coast to reembrace Judaism.<sup>18</sup> Most however identified as Roman Catholic and their descendants considered their Christian faith an important identity marker of their European heritage, which distinguished them from the surrounding populations.<sup>19</sup>

## 2 The Roman Catholic Window

Roman Catholic sources document that the steady increase of Protestants on coast of West Africa from the last quarter of the sixteenth century onwards was a source of deep concern for the Portuguese Crown as well as for Christians in West Africa. Though there is little evidence in these sources that Protestants engaged in proselytism in West Africa during the 17th century, their arrival and presence was considered a threat, both economically and religiously.

From the colonization of the Cape Verde Islands in the 1460s onwards, Portugal had claimed the right to control the trade on the Guinea Coast. It considered all parties, that violated this monopoly, interlopers.<sup>20</sup> That many of these interlopers were Protestants, added insult to injury. Those who were caught were often charged with heresy as well as piracy.<sup>21</sup>

The concern over the arrival of Protestants in West Africa was also religiously motivated. Already during the 16th century the animosity between Protestants

17 Philip D. Curtin, "Jihad in West Africa. Early Phases and Inter-Relations in Mauritania and Senegal," *The Journal of African History* 12,1 (1971), 11–24; Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Islam. A Study of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century* (London: E. Arnold, 1982), 77–110; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Jihād in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2016).

18 Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, *The Forgotten Diaspora. Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Mark and Da Silva Horta argue that over the course of the 17th century, the Inquisition increased its hold over the Guinea coast, making life more difficult for Jewish merchants, resulting in the gradual migration of the Jewish community, away from Africa, to the Americas or northern Europe.

19 Jean Boulègue and Xavier Guillard, *Les Luso-Africains De Sénégal, XVI<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècles* (Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, 1989); Mark, "Portuguese" Style and Luso-African Identity.

20 Walter Rodney, "Portuguese Attempts at Monopoly on the Upper Guinea Coast, 1580–1650," *The Journal of African History* 6,3 (1965), 307–22.

21 Hair, "Protestants as Pirates, Slavers, and Protomissionaries," 203–24.

and Roman Catholics in Europe had spilled over to West Africa, often with detrimental effect on the Luso-African Christian communities there. In 1568, for example, a British mercantile fleet under the command of John Hawkins (1532–1595) conducted an iconoclastic raid in the port of Cacheu. Located in present-day Guinea Bissau, Cacheu had by the mid-16th century developed into one of the main centers of Luso-African Christianity, serving as the seat of the archdeaconry of the Diocese of Santiago.<sup>22</sup> According to a member of Hawkins' crew, the English "took all the crosses and images they could find and threw them into the sea."<sup>23</sup> About 10 years later, Sir Francis Drake conducted a similar iconoclastic attack on Santiago Island, Cape Verde.<sup>24</sup> Also the Dutch targeted Roman Catholic buildings and objects during their conquests in West Africa, as is evidenced by their recurrent destruction of São Tomé's cathedral and its church ornaments (1562, 1599).<sup>25</sup>

Established in the aftermath of the schisms in Europe, *Propaganda Fide* cautioned missionaries to West Africa to be vigilant about Protestants and their heretical ideas. When the French Capuchins of Brittany in 1634 intimated their intention to start a mission in Assini and Axim (present-day Ivory Coast and Ghana), *Propaganda Fide* urged them "to be beware of all heretical, schismatic and pagan rites and ceremonies."<sup>26</sup> And according to the earlier cited report of the French Capuchins of Normandy from 1636, the Capuchins to the Petite Côte received explicit instructions to prevent the spread of Calvinist ideas.

Considering the limited number of Protestants living along the Guinea Coast in the first decades of the 17th century, the Roman Catholic fixation on Protestantism seems somewhat exaggerated, possibly reflecting European rather than West African realities. The fact is, however, that by the 1630s, Protestantism on the Petite Côte *had* multiplied and diversified. In 1635 Fr. Alexis de Saint Lô encountered not only Roman Catholics and Dutch Calvinists in the coastal village of Rufisque, but also Puritans, "Arminians" (followers of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius), and Lutherans, as well as Jews, Turks and local Muslims. Yet despite their religious differences,

22 Da Silva Horta, "Evidence for a Luso-African Identity," 100.

23 Hair, "Protestants as Pirates, Slavers, and Protomissionaries," 212.

24 Francis Drake and Francis Fletcher, *The World Encompassed by Sir Francis Drake. Being His Next Voyage to That to Nombre De Dios* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1854), 21.

25 Alan F.C. Ryder, *Guides to West African Materials in European Archives*, vol. 2 (London: London Athlone Press, University of London, 1965), 40. Dutch sources indicate similar iconoclastic actions during the conquest of Brazil, such as the destruction and sacrilege of sacred spaces. Noorlander, *Heaven's Wrath*, 76–7.

26 Ralph M. Wiltgen, *Gold Coast Mission History, 1471–1880* (Techny, Ill: Divine Word Publications, 1956), 37.



Fr. de St Lô observed, the inhabitants of Rufisque interacted amicably with each other, and received him and his compatriot Renouard cordially and with respect.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps these convivial interactions in Rufisque and elsewhere on the Upper Guinea Coast were the main source of apprehension.<sup>28</sup> For the Capuchin records suggest not so much concern over potential Protestant missionary activities among traditional believers or Muslims, but rather over proselytism among the Luso-African Christians.<sup>29</sup> A report by the Provincial of the Normandy Capuchins to *Propaganda Fide*, written in 1640, fulminated, that because the bishop of Cape Verde neglected the Christians on the Petite Côte, “he leaves his flock exposed to plundering by an invasion of wolfs” (presumably referencing Protestants).<sup>30</sup>

Subsequent missionary reports echo this sentiment. In a letter dated 1655, a Lazarist missionary observed with alarm that the town of Rufisque on Petite Côte had now already “fifteen or sixteen persons of the Reformed religion”, who corrupted the local Roman Catholics with their swearing, foul language

27 Alexis de Saint-Lô, *Relation Du Voyage Du Cap-Vert* (Paris: Hachette, 1972), 90–1. Also further down the Petite Côte, in Portudal, Catholics and Protestants seem to have been on friendly terms, with Dutch traders extending hospitality to itinerant priests. Spanish Capuchins, who visited the Luso-African community in Portudal in 1646 mention that they were welcomed by three ‘whites’, one of whom was a Dutch Calvinist who “persisted in his heresy” but who nevertheless emptied his storage space for it to be transformed into a make-shift Catholic chapel and another Dutch trader offered the priests hospitality by inviting them to stay with him. J.-R. de Benoist, *Histoire de l’Église Catholique au Sénégal. Du Milieu du xv<sup>e</sup> Siècle à l’Aube du Troisième Millénaire* (Paris: Karthala, 2008), 49. A contemporary, non-missionary source, *Le Routier de la Côte de Guinée de Francisco Pirez de Carvalho* written in 1635, identifies similar religious diversity in Joal, Portudal and along the Gambia river. See De Moraes and Thilmans. *A la Découverte de la Petite Côte au xvii<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. vol. 2, 316, 318.

28 Lemos Coelho and De La Courbe, both writing in the late 17th century, comment on the cordial relations between the adherents of various faith traditions in Vintang Creek and Geregia (the border area of southern Gambia and Casamance). Francisco de Lemos Coelho, *Description of the Coast of Guinea, 1684*. Translated by Paul E.H. Hair (Liverpool: A. Heuwerjans, 2007), 47; Michel Jajolet de La Courbe and Prosper Cultru, *Premier Voyage du Sieur de la Courbe Fait à la Coste d’Afrique en 1685* (Paris: E. Champion, 1913), 201–4. And the Belgium Capuchin Célestin de Bruxelles who worked in Quidah in the 1680s had cordial relations with the resident Dutch and English merchants, who supplied him with wine for the Mass and furniture for the chapel. Letter by Fr. Celestinus Bruxellensis to the Provincial of the Province of Flanders-Belgium, Guinea 2 November 1682, *Analecta Ordinis Minorum Cappucinatorum* 31 (1915), 358.

29 De Moraes and Thilmans. *A la Découverte de la Petite Côte au xvii<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, vol. 2, 290; Benoist, *Histoire de L’Eglise Catholique au Sénégal*, 46.

30 De Moraes and Thilmans. *A la Découverte de la Petite Côte au Xvii<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, vol. 2, 297.

and infamous songs.<sup>31</sup> Even as late as March 1686, more than 10 years after the Dutch had lost their control over Gorée Island and the Petite Côte, a group of French Franciscans set out to the Upper Guinea coast with the dual aim “to preach religion in Nigritie” and to “combat the heresy of Calvinism.”<sup>32</sup>

There is little evidence in the Roman Catholic sources that Protestants in West Africa actively attempted to proselytize Roman Catholics during this period. However, the sources do indicate that Protestants often practiced their devotions in public; these devotional regimes could be witnessed by third parties, forming a potential source of influence or corruption. This is, for example, corroborated by a record of the Portuguese slaver Miguel Ribeiro, who worked on the Mytombo river in Sierra Leone in 1568. In his statement to the Inquisition, Ribeiro indicated that he had observed the devotional regime aboard the afore-mentioned fleet under the command of John Hawkins during the six weeks that the ships were docked in the Sierra Leone estuary to restock. According to his testimony, the crew gathered on deck for devotions on a daily basis. There, in plain sight for all to see and hear, they sang Psalms for half an hour each single day.<sup>33</sup> Communal devotion was not unique to British ships. As Noorlander has demonstrated, there were similar devotional regimes aboard the Dutch fleet. Songs or prayers marked the changing of the watch, while each morning and evening (and whenever the circumstances called for it), clergy or lay preachers led short devotions comprised of prayers and/or Psalm singing. On Sundays the devotions also included scripture readings and a sermon.<sup>34</sup>

31 Nize Izabel de Moraes, “Relations de Lazaristes Français Concernant la Petite Côte (Sénégal),” *Présence Africaine* 89,1 (1974), 167.

32 Jean-Baptiste Gaby, *Relation de la Nigritie, Contenant une Exacte Description des Royaumes et de Leur Gouvernements, la Religion, les Moeurs, Coustumes, et Raretez de cet País, avec la Découverte de la Rivière du Senega, Dont on a Fait une Carte Particuliere* (Paris, n.p., 1689), 7.

33 Through a twist of fate, the stop-over in West Africa of the British fleet commanded by John Hawkins in March 1568 is richly documented. After its sojourn in the Sierra Leone estuary, Hawkins’ fleet encountered the Spanish navy en route to America. In the battle which ensued Hawkins lost seven of his ships and most of his staff. Those unfortunate enough to be captured were charged with both piracy and heresy. The records of the local episcopal inquisition in Mexico in 1570 as well as reports in London, Lisbon and Seville of the journey as well as the incident still exist. If the account of an English sailor aboard Hawkins’ fleet is representative, not everyone participated in the daily devotions with the conviction. According to his testimony “half the men on the flagship say when called to prayers – Body of God, what an amount of singing, praying and preaching; may the Devil fly away with the preacher”. Paul Hair, “Protestants as Pirates, Slavers, and Protomissionaries: Sierra Leone 1568 and 1582,” 203–4, 211. For a full discussion see Paul E.H. Hair, *Hawkins in Guinea, 1567–1568* (Leipzig: Inst. für Afrikanistik, 2000).

34 Noorlander, *Heaven’s Wrath*, 59–85; see also Jac. Hage, *Gereformeerden aan de Goudkust. Predikanten, Ziekentroosters, Goud en Slaven (1598–1873)*, unpublished PhD thesis, VU University Amsterdam 2011, 215.

Staff in the forts and factories along the coast were expected to observe similar devotional regimes.<sup>35</sup> The earlier-mentioned letter dated 1655, in which a Lazarist missionary complained about the “infamous songs” of the Dutch traders in Rufisque, corroborates that the resident Calvinists on the Petite Côte did indeed observe their devotional routine of singing Psalms.<sup>36</sup>

Religious discord among the adherents of different religious persuasions in the trading communities seems to have been rare; the sources indicate a sort of ‘live and let live’ atmosphere, though occasionally itinerant priests seem to have been object of Calvinist polemics.<sup>37</sup> During his pastoral tour among the Luso-African communities on the Petite Côte (Senegal), the Jesuit Baltasar Barreira for example encountered a Dutch Calvinist trader, resident in Ale (Portugal), who sought to provoke him into a polemical discussions. According to Barreira, the man feigned an interest in conversion to Roman Catholicism in order “argue” with the Jesuit.<sup>38</sup> A few years later, around 1612, Barreira’s co-worker Manuel Alvarez reported encountering “heretics” further down the coast, in Sierra Leone, where a “schismatic lion” (an English Anglican trader), Alvarez complained, “wounded me with the sword of his tongue, saying heretical and discourteous words.”<sup>39</sup>

There is evidence that by the late 16th century not only European Roman Catholics missionaries, but also some of the Luso-African Christians, cognizant of the religious landslides that had occurred in Europe, had become wary of Protestants and were devising ways and means to ward off the proliferation of Protestantism in West Africa. In 1594, in what is probably one of the oldest West African-authored works to mention Protestantism, the Cape Verdean trader André Alvares de Almada expressed his concern over the growing

35 Noorlander, *Heaven’s Wrath*, 103.

36 De Moraes, “Relations de Lazaristes Français Concernant la Petite Côte (Sénégalie),” 167.

37 Peter Mark writes: “Religion was a prominent aspect of mixed cultures at trading centers from The Gambia to Bissau. European merchants in the Vintang region included Portuguese and French Catholics and English Protestants. Indeed, there were representatives of all the religions that existed on the Upper Guinea Coast: Islam, Judaism, Catholic and Protestant Christianity, and African religions (Jola, Bagnun, Soninké). Significant however, 17th century sources mention neither strife nor active proselytizing or competition between followers of the various sects. Peaceful coexistence seems to have characterized the extraordinary religious diversity of these trading communities in the Lower Gambia region. There is a certain irony to the Portuguese name ‘Geregia’, which may derive from ‘Heregia’ [heretics]; one might say that the town’s population was so diverse that no matter what one’s religious orientation, it was full of heretics.” Mark, *Portuguese Style and Luso-African Identity*, 86.

38 Avelino Teixeira de Mota and Paul E.H. Hair (eds.), *Jesuit Documents* (s.l: Andreas Heuwerkerjans, 2007), 240–1.

39 Mota and Hair, *Jesuit Documents*, 333, 339–40.

number of Dutch, British and French interlopers and passionately appealed to the Portuguese crown to increase its hold over West Africa. To clinch his argument De Almada contended that the Portuguese colonization of parts of the West African coast could serve the dual purpose of compensating for the Catholic setbacks in Europe and of spreading Christianity among Africans. De Almada writes:

Now that we see almost the greater part of Europe poisoned by a variety of Lutherite sects, it may be that by settling some part of Black Africa, God's Holy Faith will be extended there. That would be a great service to Him, and many souls might be saved among the heathen ...<sup>40</sup>

De Almada's entreaty, though echoed by others in the decades that followed, proved fruitless; rather, the 17th century saw the gradual decline of the Portuguese sway in West Africa.

The sources also hint that not only Luso-Africans, but also other West African Christians were gradually drawn into these Protestant-Roman Catholic contestations. According to a report written by the Jesuit missionary Baltasar Barreira around 1608, an overzealous West African convert by name of Don Filipe de Liao, who ruled a polity on the Sierra Leone river, "was not content to employ his zeal in the conversion of his brothers, (...) but he directed it also to the harassment of the heretics and pirates who came to his kingdom." Earlier that year, it seems, Don Filipe's men had attacked two ships in the Sierra Leone river and killed the crew, solely because they were "heretics."<sup>41</sup> And an oral tradition recorded by Debrunner relates that African Roman Catholics in Edina hid their crosses, chalices, and missals when the Dutch captured the Portuguese castle St George de Mina in 1637, for fear of desecration or confiscation by the Dutch, an indication that also the Edina Christians had become entangled in the controversies between Protestants and Roman Catholics.<sup>42</sup>

The Roman Catholic window thus documents not merely the proliferation and diversification of Protestant groups in West Africa during the 17th century but also evinces that the rise of Protestantism in West Africa impacted the perceptions, attitudes and actions of Roman Catholics on the Guinea coast.

40 André Alvares de Almada, Avelino Teixeira da Mota, and Paul E.H. Hair, *Brief Treatise on the Rivers of Guinea*, 2nd ed. (s.l.: Andreas Heuwerjans, 2010), 136.

41 Mota and Hair, *Jesuit Documents*, 230–1; Paul E.H. "Heretics, Slaves and Witches. As Seen by Guinea Jesuits c. 1610," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28,2 (1998), 131–44.

42 A few years later, in 1642, the Dutch confiscated chalices, crosses and missals during their capture of the Portuguese fort at Axim. Debrunner, *History of Christianity in Ghana*, 33.

### 3 The Window of the Chartered Companies

The second window offers a perspective on Protestantism in West Africa through the lens of the archival materials of the chartered companies. With trade being the primary objective, the bulk of the materials focusses on economic and political issues. Occasionally, however, the documents touch on matters involving religion and, for example, offer glimpses into the private or communal devotional life of the employees of the chartered companies. The materials confirm that during the 17th century most chartered companies to West Africa made provisions for the spiritual needs of their employees living abroad by engaging chaplains or lay-readers. These men, who were responsible for the church services, pastoral care, and catechism classes, were customarily stationed only at the larger settlements. Despite Capuchin preoccupation with the Calvinist influence on the Petite Côte, there are, for example, no indications that the DWIC ever stationed a minister or *ziekentrooster* (lay pastoral worker) there, though a thorough scrutiny of the DWIC records or Roman Catholic archives might yield different insights.<sup>43</sup> But since the DWIC was, as Noorlander has convincingly argued, a “Calvinist institution”, the mere presence of its representatives may have been sufficient reason for concern, with the resident Dutch exercising their own interpretations of the ‘priesthood of all believers’.<sup>44</sup>

There are regular indications in the archival materials that the various chartered companies envisaged their chaplains to care for the expatriate community as well as plant the gospel. In reality however, most of the chaplains’ time was taken up by the expatriate community, in particular with counselling the sick and conducting services and funerals. Hal Parker’s assessment that during the 17th century the Dutch efforts in the Atlantic world “rarely ranged into the area of direct efforts at converting people to Calvinism”, is to some extent true

43 The Dutch have often been accused of prioritizing trade over religion, though Danny Noorlander has argued that Calvinism shaped both the aims and the activities of West Indian Company. Noorlander, *Heaven’s Wrath*, 1; Danny L. Noorlander, “For the Maintenance of the True Religion’. Calvinism and the Directors of the Dutch West India Company,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 44,1 (2013), 73–95. See also Parker, *Global Calvinism*.

44 Noorlander, *Heaven’s Wrath*, 5–10, 103. In their introduction to Hoornbeeck’s *On the Conversion of the Heathen and Indians* Jo Spaans and Ineke Loots suggest that relying on the effectiveness of lay ministry may even have been company policy. See *Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617–1666), on the Conversion of Indians and Heathens. An Annotated Translation of De Conversione Indorum Et Gentilium (1669)*. Edited by Ineke Loots and Joke Spaans (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 12. It is important to stress that not all DWIC employees were Calvinists (or Dutch), let alone zealous Calvinists.

for all missionary efforts initiated by employees of the chartered companies in West Africa, with the critical word being “rarely”.

On the Upper Guinea Coast, there seems to have been only one 17th-century attempt at Protestant mission, being the short-lived Couronian colonial venture on the Gambia river in the 1650s. Between 1649 and 1661 Jacob Kettler, Duke of Courland and Semigallia (1610–1682) established a colony on St Andrew’s island in the Gambia river, comprising of Couronian and Dutch traders, Latvian families, and some Luso-Africans. According to the records, three Lutheran ministers served the community at St Andrew’s: Gottschalk Eberling (1652–1654), Joachim Dannenfeldt (1654–1658), and Wilhelm Zacharias Müller (†1661).<sup>45</sup> In line with the liberal religious politics of the Dutchy of Courland and Semigallia, Duke Jacob also engaged a Catholic priest to provide for the religious needs of the Luso-African community, called Padre Godofredo in the sources.<sup>46</sup> No details of the activities of these clergy seem to have survived, but the appointment letter of Lutheran clergy explicitly states that they were to be more than chaplains to the expatriate community. Rather, their primary task was to bring indigenous people to the “correct and true knowledge of God”. According to the instructions given to pastor Joachim Dannenfeldt, the Lutheran clergy were to learn the local vernaculars and refrain from making sneering and demeaning comments from the pulpit, employing only “Sanftmut und Gelindigkeit” (meekness and gentleness) in their missionary work, so that the local people would be won for Christianity.<sup>47</sup>

Further down the coast, along the shores of present-day Ghana and Togo (the Guinea coast proper), there is more evidence of Protestant missionary work. The German goldsmith Michael Hemmersam, who worked for the DWIC between 1639 and 1645, mentions that the Dutch, French, and English all had made attempts to convert Africans but failed. According to Hemmersam, a Dutch governor in Elmina even had a school built for missionary purposes, aiming to enhance literacy among young people and teach them to live a God-fearing life. But because it proved too difficult for the children to learn

45 Eberling died in the Gambia, Dannenfeldt had returned to Courland by early 1658, while his colleague Müller is said to have served in Guinea for eight years, though the colony experiment collapsed in 1661. Heinrich Diederichs, *Herzog Jacobs von Kurland Kolonien an der Westküste von Afrika*, (s.l.: n.p., 1890), 24; Ernst Dammann, “Die ersten Lutherischen Geistlichen in Africa (Gambia),” in Gerhard Müller and Winfried Zeller (eds.), *Glaube, Geist, Geschichte. Festschrift für Ernst Benz* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 525–31; Frederiks, *We Have Toiled All Night*, 179–80; Kord Henning Uber, “Die Religionspolitik Herzog Jakobs von Kurland unter Besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer Bedeutung für die Herzoglichen Kolonialunternehmungen,” *Studia Maritima* 25 (2012), 181–92.

46 O.H. Mattiesen, *Die Kolonial- und Ueberseepolitik der Kurlaendischen Herzoege im 17. u. 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1940), 182.

47 Mattiesen, *Die Kolonial- und Ueberseepolitik der Kurlaendischen Herzoege*, 286.

Dutch and for the teacher to learn the vernacular, the experiment failed.<sup>48</sup> Hemmersam most likely refers to the Dutch director-general Jacob Ruychaver, who supported the initiative of the Reformed minister Meynhardt Hendricxsz to start a school in Elmina in 1641.<sup>49</sup> Letters by Dutch ministers working at Elmina later in the 17th century show skepticism with regard to missionary work; they considered the behavior of the DWIC castle staff to be so depraved that it debunked any form of credible Christian witness.<sup>50</sup>

The archives of the Brandenburg African Company also hint at missionary intentions, though whether these were ever realized, remains unclear. In 1684 the director general of Groß Friedrichsburg Johan Brouw received instructions from the board to ensure the pious and exemplary behavior of the staff by gathering the castle staff every evening before the evening meal to pray and to sing Psalms and to oversee that every Sunday a sermon was read from one of the devotional books the company had provided. He was also instructed to promote the spread of Christianity among the indigenous population.<sup>51</sup> Whether or not there is a relation between these instructions and the arrival of the Reformed minister Johannes Eskuche in 1694, is uncertain, as there are no details about Eskuche's work in Ghana, apart from the fact that he served for four years before returning to Emden, only to die a few months later from health impairments.<sup>52</sup> An initiative of the Royal African Company to start a school in Cape Coast in 1693 "to instruct the children of such of the natives as live near our castle" fell through when the intended schoolteacher John Chiltman died shortly after arrival.<sup>53</sup> Only with the arrival of Thomas Thompson and later Philip Quaake did the educational work recommence.

Perhaps the best documented and most comprehensive attempt at Protestant mission in West Africa during the 17th century was that of the Wilhelm Johann Müller, chaplain of the Danish West India and Guinea Company. Müller served at Christiansborg castle between 1661 and 1669 and recounts his experiences in his book *Die Africanische auf der Guineischen Gold-Cust Gelegene Landschafft Fetu* (1676). Debrunner considers him a rare

48 Michael Hemmersam, and Christoph Ludwig Dietherr von Anwanden, *West-Indianische Reissbeschreibung, De anno 1639 biss 1645. Von Amsterdam nach St. Jorius De Mina, Ein Castel, in Africa, von Michael Hemmersam* (Nürnberg: Verlag Paul Fürstens, 1663), 70.

49 Hage, "Gereformeerden aan de Goudkust," 197.

50 Noorlander, *Heaven's Wrath*, 103; Hage, "Gereformeerden aan de Goudkust," 215.

51 Adam Jones, *Brandenburg Sources for West African History 1680–1700* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985), 95; Richard Schück, *Brandenburg-Preußens Kolonial-Politik unter dem Großen Kurfürsten und Seinen Nachfolgern: 1647–1721* (Leipzig: Grunow, 1889), vol. 1, 336.

52 Christian Gottlieb Jöcher, *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon* (Leipzig: J.F. Gleditsch, 1750), vol. 2, 400.

53 Hage, *Gereformeerden aan de Goudkust*, 335.

example of a mission-minded chaplain.<sup>54</sup> In his book Müller describes his views on mission in Africa and, even more interestingly, shares his personal experiences of evangelizing Africans. Müller's views on mission sound uncommonly modern. He stresses that successful mission requires focus, dedication, and exemplary behavior, and underscores the need for vernacular translation, attention for the receiving culture and the crucial role of indigenous Christians in evangelization. Müller envisaged "erudite, brave, dedicated, god-fearing and exemplary Christians, who would be willing to risk their lives for the sake of Christ" and would focus solely on the conversion of the heathen. According to Müller these missionaries were to prioritize the translation of the New Testament into the vernacular and convert around one hundred Africans who could then serve as missionaries to their brethren.<sup>55</sup>

Müller himself made a start with this project. He compiled a vocabulary of some four hundred Twi words and documented some of the responses to his attempts at preaching to Africans. His book offers a fascinating window into the skepticism that the Christian message evoked among 17th-century Africans, living on the Gold Coast, which could serve to buttress critical interrogations of the theory that Africans are 'incurably religious'.<sup>56</sup>

Then they asked, because Jan Commé or Jan Compo, according to our claim, was a very important Lord and therefore without doubt had very many wives, whether he really did not have more than a single son? (...) About the conception and birth of our Savior Jesus Christ they made physical objections, similar to the Turks, because they considered it to be impossible for a woman to become pregnant without a man or to give birth without losing her virginity. (...) And when one tells them about the suffering and death of Christ, they ask: "What evil did he do. He must, they say, have done something wrong, otherwise his father, Jan Comme, would not have allowed his son to be treated in such a gruesome manner. This question was posed to me by the Fetu *Day*<sup>57</sup> through an interpreter, when he saw a crucifix at Friederichsberg. To which I replied: God's Son

54 Debrunner, "Notable Danish Chaplains", 14–6.

55 Wilhelm Johann Müller, *Die Africanische Auf Der Guineischen Gold-Cust Gelegene Landschafft Fetu* (Hamburg: n.p., 1676), 89.

56 I owe the observation of skepticism to my colleague Birgit Meyer, who in a conversation we had on African responses to Müller, used the word *skepsis*. She observed that such historical materials should be used to interrogate the theory of Africans being "incurably religious". For a discussion of this theory see for example Jan Platvoet, Jan and Henk van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious?", *Exchange* 32, 2 (2003): 123–53.

57 An elder who interacted with Europeans on behalf of the king: Debrunner, "Notable Danish Chaplains", 17.



did not do anything wrong, but his father nevertheless allowed that he was tortured in such a gruesome manner – and even killed; this, he did solely out of love, not only for white people but also for black people, so that we would not forever end up in the fire of hell. Thereupon this pagan man remained silent and shook his head ...<sup>58</sup>

Despite Müller's cogent views on mission and interest in the local context and the Twi language, there is no indication that his missionary endeavors – or other Protestant missionary initiatives – produced any converts. Yet these sparse cases document that Protestants (Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans) made recurrent attempts, however modest and unproductive, at evangelizing Africans. These missionary endeavors took a variety of forms, such as preaching, education, the study of the vernaculars, attention for indigenous ministry and an emphasis on an exemplary lifestyle, all of which would become crucial facets of Protestant mission in the centuries to come.

#### 4 The Window of Protestant Euro-Africans

Ironically, despite the persistent condemnation of the so-called country marriages or *cassare* (or *callisare*) marriages by successive generations of Dutch, Danish, and English chaplains, the Euro-African offspring of these unions of European Protestant men and African and Euro-African women often accepted Protestantism as their religious conviction. More so, in many instances, they formed the nucleus of the emerging Protestant communities in West Africa, and in due time served as a vital underpinning for 19th-century mission. Because of their connection to the castle communities, many of these Euro-Africans had received some form of education and religious formation in West Africa or abroad.<sup>59</sup> Because of their literacy, their intercultural versatility, their networks, and their identification with Protestantism these men and women were considered to be the obvious contact points for the Protestant missionaries; many served as translators, teachers, and evangelists.

The significance of Euro-Africans for Protestantism in West Africa has been well-documented for the 18th and early 19th centuries. Pernille Ipsen in her book *Daughters of Trade* observes that by the mid-18th century the descendants of Danish-Ga relations had begun “marking their differences with

58 Müller *Die Africanische Auf Der Guineischen Gold-Cust Gelegene Landschafft Fetu*, 91–3 (the translation is mine).

59 Hage, *Gereformeerden aan de Goudkust*, 96.

European material culture, and, also quite importantly, with Christianity ...”<sup>60</sup> And SPG missionary Thomas Thompson found a “good number” of baptized Euro-African Anglicans in Cape Coast in 1752, who “having some notion of a privilege by it, and valuing themselves upon their Christian name, accounting it an honourable distinction.”<sup>61</sup> Also Dutch sources substantiate that Euro-Africans were baptized and educated in the Dutch Reformed tradition.<sup>62</sup>

As evidenced by the work of scholars like Michel Doortmont, Natalie Everts, Jac Hage and Colleen Kriger, a close reading of a variety of archival materials suggests that already during the 17th century, some African women with Protestant partners and their Euro-African offspring as well as some Africans who, as slaves or free persons, had been socialized in both African and Protestant worldviews, identified with Protestantism. Jac Hage relates that as early as the 1620s a Dutch minister at fort Nassau Jonas Michaëlis was approached by two African women, requesting baptism for their Euro-African children. Though Michaëlis suspected that the women’s request was more inspired by material gain than by Protestant convictions, he consented in baptizing the children, not in the least because the resident DWIC Director Adriaen Jacobz van Amersfoort promised to serve as their godfather and oversee their Christian education.<sup>63</sup>

In a fascinating article spotlighting Hope Heath aka Madam Esperance (c.1675–1707), Colleen Kriger sketches the life-story of the child slave Esperança (Hope), who became successful business woman. Using legal and ecclesial documents as well as the archives of the Royal African Company, Kriger traces Hope’s life between West Africa and England. First emerging in the archives in the 1680s as a child-slave at James Island (Gambia), Hope was sent to London for education by her owner John Booker. After her return to James Island, and the death of her owner in 1693, Hope received her freedom as well as an annuity and some property (including slaves) from Booker’s estate. Her subsequently marriage to RAC employee William Heath and premature widowhood after a marriage of one and a half year made Hope a free woman of color with independent means. Kriger not only portrays how Hope traveled to England for the birth of her daughter Elizabeth and successfully fended off claims to her inheritance by a relative of Health but also details how she arranged for

60 Pernille Ipsen, *Daughters of Trade. Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriage on the Gold Coast* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 115. It would be worthwhile to conduct a comparative study between the role of Catholicism for Luso-Africans on the Upper Guinea Coast in the 16th and 17th centuries and Protestantism for Euro-Africans on the Guinea Coast in the 17th and 18th centuries.

61 Thomas Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages* (London: SPG, 1937), 54.

62 Hage, *Gereformeerden aan de Goudkust*, 96.

63 Hage, *Gereformeerden aan de Goudkust*, 187–8.

her baptism and remarriage in the Anglican Church. Widowed once more, Hope returned to Africa with her daughter. Kriger argues that the influential and well-connected Juffure merchant Madam Esperance, who recurrently features in the early 18th-century archival materials on the Gambia trade, was no other than Hope Heath.<sup>64</sup> In her book *Making money*, Kriger argues that Anglo-African marriages such as those of Hope Heath, may have been more common during the 17th century than previously thought, therewith suggesting that there were more women (and men) such as Hope Heath.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, Natalie Everts uncovers the life of Helena Adama-Van der Burgh, an Euro-African woman who spent her life going back and forth between Elmina and Amsterdam and who according to the DWIC records formed the backbone of Elmina's Reformed church for several decades in the early 18th century.<sup>66</sup> Everts describes that Helena, daughter of senior merchant Martijn van der Burgh and Acre Sonqua was born around 1678 and taken to Amsterdam by her father as a toddler, together with four of her siblings. Soon orphaned, the DWIC board saw to the children's well-being; the children were raised in the Dutch Reformed Church. Records bear out that the lives of these children remained interwoven with the Afro-Dutch community on the coast. One of Helena's brothers visited his mother in Elmina in 1694 while a few years later, two of her brothers returned to the Gold Coast as DWIC employees. About a decade later, Helena – by then widow Dedeijn – also returned to Africa to visit her mother. Back on the Gold Coast, she married the DWIC chaplain Ludovicus Adama in 1715, remaining in Elmina until his death in 1719. After a short interval in Amsterdam, she once more returned to her native land in 1726 and continues to occur in the DWIC records with some frequency, detailing her participation in Elmina church life, until her death in 1750.<sup>67</sup>

It is of course debatable whether women like Hope Heath and Helena Adama, with their cosmopolitan life-style and social mobility, are representative for the larger Euro-African community. Their appearance in records that are overwhelmingly western and male-dominated already infers their elite position. The social prospects of Euro-Africans were likely to reflect of the social status

64 Coleen E. Kriger, "From Child Slave to Madam Esperance. One Woman's career in the Anglo-African World, c. 1675–1707," in Mariana P. Candido and Adam Jones (eds), *African Women in the Atlantic World. Property, Vulnerability & Mobility, 1660–1880* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2019), 171–90.

65 Coleen E. Kriger, *Making Money. Life, Death, and Early Modern Trade on Africa's Guinea Coast* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017), 187.

66 Hage, *Gereformeerden aan de Goudkust*, 227.

67 Natalie Everts, "Brought up well according to European Standards. Helena van der Burgh and Wilhelmina van Naarsen, Two Christian Women from Elmina," in Ineke van Kessel (ed.), *Merchants, Missionaries & Migrants. 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2002), 101–10.

of their parents. Children born to enslaved women and low-ranking company employees had fewer prospects than the offspring of high-ranking officers and influential (Euro)-African families. Yet as the case of Michaëlis shows, Hope and Helena were not isolated cases. Also other women sought to be associated with Protestantism.

Also Danish records suggest that Protestant affiliation was not limited to the elite.<sup>68</sup> In 1708 the Danish governor Erik Olsen Lygaard wrote a letter to the Board of the Danish West Indian Company inquiring whether it was permissible to grant the request for baptism of a Euro-African drummer named Jan de Wit. He had been born of an enslaved African woman, who had been raised as a Christian and who had repeatedly applied for baptism. In discussing De Wit's case, Lygaard also refers to a past precedent, where a Euro-African born from an enslaved woman had been baptized by a British chaplain.<sup>69</sup>

The archival materials only offer brief glimpses into an evolving 17th-century Euro-African Protestant world. But the few cases that surface from the documents seem to corroborate Ipsen's argument that these men and women considered their religious affiliation to be an important part of their Euro-African identity, one which tied them more firmly into the fort communities and aided them in accessing certain privileges, such as education or trans-local networks. Thus, a Protestant identity underscored their distinct social status and enhanced their social prospects.<sup>70</sup>

Based on the available sources, it seems that the world of Protestant Euro-Africans was still in an embryonic stage during the 17th century but it was a world that would burgeon as the 18th century unfolded, one that would come to play a central role in the missionary ventures of that century.

## 5 Conclusion

This article has explored the emergence of Protestantism in 17th century West Africa via three complementary windows. This kaleidoscopic examination

68 For a male parallel see Michel R. Doortmont, "Arij De Graaff (ca 1729/30–1788). Weeskind, wic-Dienaar en Gronings Borgheer, zijn Voor- en Nageslacht," *De Nederlandsche Leeuw. Maandblad Van Het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Genootschap voor Geslacht- en Wapenkunde* 114 (1997), 197–218.

69 v.15, 23rd February 1708: Govenor Lygaard, Christiansborg, to the Directors of The West India and Guinea Company, Copenhagen. In Ole Justesen, *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana 1657–1754*, Vol. 1, 1657–1735 (Copenhagen: Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2005), 213.

70 Ipsen, *Daughters of Trade*, 122.

has made clear that Protestant ministers and other personnel employed by the chartered companies developed several missionary initiatives during the 17th century. However, these efforts proved largely unproductive due to lack of dedicated personnel, knowledge of the vernacular and cultural competency as well as due to the life-style of Europeans along the coast. The sources also hint that Africans may have had reasons to be amenable to Protestant missionary initiatives, such as their interest in education, but if Müller's experiences are an indication, they were rather skeptical about the content of the message preached by missionaries and disinclined to convert.

The exercise of using three complementary windows has also shown that the 17th-century story of Protestantism in West Africa is more encompassing than the mere narrative of these missionary efforts. Protestantism's main channels for expansion during the 17th century seem to have been dispersion and procreation of Protestants rather than mission. The Roman Catholic window disclosed that already by the mid-16th century West African Christians were involuntary drawn into the contestations between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Europe. When Protestants began to settle on the West African mainland from the late 16th century onwards, this evoked concern and defensive reactions among Roman Catholics in West Africa as well as in Europe. In response, *Propaganda Fide* stimulated religious congregations such as the Capuchins to invest in the pastorate of (spiritually often neglected) Luso-African Christians as part of their missionary work in West Africa, to ensure that local Christians would not succumb to Protestant proselytism. Though successive generations of Roman Catholic missionaries in Guinea remained preoccupied with this potential threat to the Luso-African Christian community, there is little evidence that large-scale proselytism occurred on the ground.

The people most likely to embrace Protestantism during the 17th century, were Euro-Africans, spotlighted in the third window. For these women and men Christian affiliation entailed more than a 'mere' religious conviction; it was one of the identity markers of their distinct Euro-African identity. It signaled their ancestry or Euro-African socialization and their connections with the European trade settlements along the coast and West African rivers. Their Euro-African identity gave these men and women to access privileges such as education and firmly tied them into the networks of the Dutch, Danish, British, and Brandenburg chartered companies. It was this gradually expanding group, who in the 18th century would become the main focus of and springboard for Protestant missionary initiatives in West Africa.