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Graham Abney

*Candidate*

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History

*Department*

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This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Thesis Committee:*

Dr. Michael A. Ryan, Chairperson

---

Dr. Sarah Davis-Secord

---

Dr. Nahir Otaño Gracia

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**SUNDIATA KEITA'S INVENTION OF LATIN PURGATORY:  
THE WEST AFRICAN GOLD TRADE'S INFLUENCE ON  
WESTERN EUROPEAN SOCIETY (CA. 1050-1350)**

by

**GRAHAM ABNEY**

**B.S., HONORS IN HISTORY, PORTLAND STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
History**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2021**

## **Dedication**

For Cyrus

## Acknowledgments

At its core, the thesis to follow argues that individual actors can influence wide-reaching historical developments which they seemingly appear unconnected to. That is a little reductive, to be sure, but it encapsulates the argument nevertheless. In a similar way, though I ultimately produced it, many individuals have influenced the development of this thesis. To them I offer the following thanks and acknowledgments.

Dr. Michael A. Ryan has shepherded this project from its origins during an informal conversation in November of 2019 to the formal state it now finds itself in. Dr. Ryan has also acted as a dedicated mentor in matters (very) big and (very) small, as well as tireless supporter of the projects I have undertaken while at UNM. If this thesis is a success, Dr. Ryan deserves much credit. Dr. Sarah Davis-Secord helped me realize the potential interpretative value of economic data. Much of part II of this thesis was originally written for Dr. Davis-Secord's Medieval Mediterranean seminar, and its conclusion—which necessitated my scrutinizing of charts and graphs to develop—would have been personally unthinkable before taking the course. Dr. Nahir Otaño Gracia provided very welcome support for this project and its methodologies, especially with an early draft of the introduction and part I. Taking Dr. Otaño Gracia's Medieval Romance and Race seminar also allowed me to explore how sub-Saharan Africa's influence on Latin culture can be identified, which greatly influenced the general direction of this thesis.

In addition to my committee members, I have had the opportunity to study under many extraordinary scholars during my time at the University of New Mexico. Dr. Erica Monahan introduced me to world systems theory and assigned Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* in her Eurasian Borderlands seminar. These were two highly influential

moments during my time at UNM and both helped shape this thesis; The art history summer reading group led by Dr. Justine Andrews helped me begin to think about gold in its materiality and beyond its immediate economic functions; In the early stages of this project, Dr. Judy Bieber offered very forceful support for it and the methodologies utilized within it; Dr. Charlie Steen helped me find my authorial voice as a first-semester student (though I no doubt use more subordinate clauses and em dashes in this thesis than he appreciates!); and Dr. Timothy Graham has been of immense help with the Latin in this thesis. Furthermore, what became part I of this thesis was originally written in a seminar taught by Dr. Graham. Though he is an expert in medieval and early modern England, for my benefit he essentially acted as de facto Africanist during that seminar, a role I am thankful he filled. I must also thank Dr. Jonathan Davis-Secord, Christine Ellis, and Noah Holt for their expert Latin instruction. A thank you is also in order for Dr. Caleb Richardson for his encouragement and support of my research, as well as his flexibility while I acted as his graduate assistant.

I have experienced graduate school under exceedingly difficult personal circumstances, pandemic and otherwise. I owe a stupendous debt to the great friends I have made while attending UNM, for both their emotional and intellectual support. Thank you, sincerely, Casey Brown, Jess Cochran, Joey Wright, and Robert Esquibel for your friendship.

I must of course acknowledge my parents Vici and Dennis Abney for their endless support. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my brother, Cyrus. It is impossible to articulate your influence on this thesis. I'm not sure if you realized it, and I'm not sure if I did either, but I am you in many ways: I only like what I like, and study what I study, because you liked it first. That is not out of shallow imitation, though, but respect and love. I would enjoy nothing more than for you to read, somehow criticize absent any knowledge of the content,

and ultimately come around to the argument in this thesis. I know you are proud. I love you and miss you.

**SUNDIATA KEITA'S INVENTION OF LATIN PURGATORY:  
THE WEST AFRICAN GOLD TRADE'S INFLUENCE ON  
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M.A., HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO**

**ABSTRACT**

Following the advent of the North African Almoravids into West Africa during the late eleventh century, the region experienced a prolonged period of political instability, resolved only after the legendary victory at the battle of Kirina in 1235 by Sundiata Keita (r. 1235-55), ruler of Mali. Despite this turmoil, West Africa—the premodern world's major supplier of gold—is still largely imagined in historiography as producing and exporting gold into the global market during this time at or above pre-conquest levels. Concurrent to these developments, however, Western Europe experienced a prolonged gold famine. By utilizing world systems theory and synthesizing high medieval West African history alongside history of the Latin West, I argue that West African gold exports into Western Europe significantly declined during the eleventh, twelfth, and early thirteenth centuries. Applying actor-network theory, I further argue that the cashless systems of pay that developed in the Latin West as a consequence of the bullion shortage (and the theologies developed to rationalize them) thus had their ultimate origins in the West African historical events that prevented gold from being exported in a reliable manner. Indeed, it was only after the battle of Kirina and the



development of political stability that the Empire of Mali brought to the region that gold reached the Latin West in great quantities, most notably evidenced in Genoa and Florence's ability to begin minting gold currencies in 1252. As I further describe, with their new gold currency, Florence emerged as a core during the fourteenth century in what I refer to as the Western European/Trans-Saharan world system, using the coins to usurp the economic autonomy of their rivals. Still, Florence's power remained relative, something demonstrable through analysis of the Florentine economy after an immense amount of gold was spent in Cairo by the Malian emperor Musa I (r. 1317-32) during his hajj in 1324.

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## Introduction

During the first two decades of the fourteenth century, the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) composed his famous *Divine Comedy*. In the poem, Dante described Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell, the individuals found in those locations, and the earthly actions that led to their varying fates upon death. For example, Dante placed those who committed violent acts in Hell's seventh circle. This includes a group that might not immediately seem associated with violence. Observing this group, Dante described how

Despondency was bursting from their eyes;  
this side, then that, their hands kept fending off,  
at times the flames, at times the burning soil ...  
When I had set my eyes upon the faces  
of some on whom that painful fire falls,  
I recognized no one; but I did notice  
that from the neck of each a purse was hung  
that had a special color and an emblem,  
and their eyes seemed to feast upon these pouches.<sup>1</sup>

These tortured souls were usurers.<sup>2</sup> Though usury had long been reviled throughout the Latin West, Dante's placement of usurers in Hell was an articulation of the contemporaneous hostility that existed towards the practice.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Dante's placing usurers in Hell can be thought of as a natural culmination of "the intensified anti-usury campaign of the thirteenth century" that existed throughout Latin Europe and that preceded the composition of his poem.<sup>4</sup> During the thirteenth century, an immense number of philosophical, spiritual, and less-studied legalistic tracts were composed decrying the practice of money lending at

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<sup>1</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Usury was considered a violent act by medieval theologians because, like robbery, it involved theft of another person's property.

<sup>3</sup> Paolo Cherchi, "Canto XVII: Geryon's Downward Flight; the Usurers," in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 231-33.

<sup>4</sup> John H. Munro, "The Medieval Origins of the Financial Revolution: Usury, *Rentes*, and Negotiability," *International History Review* 23, no. 3 (2003): 522.

usurious rates.<sup>5</sup> But, as is evident by Dante's placement of money lenders in Hell, usury continued to be practiced throughout medieval Europe despite its numerous prohibitions and the antagonism directed towards the practice. Both the act of usury and the cultural trends it inspired were so dispersed that, despite these feelings, they remained a central component of thirteenth-century European society. What directly propelled the widespread practice of usury in thirteenth-century Europe, however, were events that occurred thousands of miles away from the Latin West.

Nearly a century earlier, around the year 1235, the Empire of Mali was formed in West Africa after Sundiata Keita (r. ca. 1235-55) defeated his personal rival and king of the Sosso, Soumaoro Kante (d. 1235), at the battle of Kirina. The events surrounding the founding of the Empire of Mali have subsequently been passed down via oral tradition in the famous epic of *Sundiata*. Sundiata's victory and the trials he faced leading up to that moment are worthy subjects for the genre: after the battle and the establishment of Imperial Mali, nearly two centuries of political instability absent a regional hegemon and characterized by constant conflict between semi-autonomous states following the decline of kingdom of Wagadu in the mid-eleventh century were concluded.<sup>6</sup> As the epic of *Sundiata* details, one of the new emperor's first acts following his victory was to hold a courtly reception attended by representatives of all the peoples recently incorporated into his nascent empire. After this audience assembled, Sundiata's personal *jeli*, a type of poet who wields political power in Mande society, recounted the deeds of his master, describing Sundiata's victory as being of far-reaching importance:

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<sup>5</sup> For discussion about how legal writings influenced public sentiment toward usury, see John F. McGovern, "The Rise of New Economic Attitudes in Canon and Civil Law, A.D. 1200-1550," *Jurist* 32, no. 1 (1972): 46.

<sup>6</sup> For a succinct description of this period, see Robert Cornevin, *Histoire des peuples d'Afrique noire* (Paris: Éditions Berge-Levrault, 1960), 246.

Peoples, here we are, after years of hard trials, gathered around our savior, the restorer of peace and order. From the east to the west, from the north to the south, everywhere his victorious arms have established peace ... In the world man suffers for a season, but never eternally. Here we are at the end of our trials. We are at peace. May God be praised. But we owe this peace to one man.<sup>7</sup>

Though grandiose, these words are not merely embellishments typical to panegyrics feting kings. Rather, the idea that Sundiata established global peace was (and is) meant to be understood literally. Still today, Mande cosmology maintains that the wielding of political power by certain classes like blacksmiths, from which Soumaoro Kante descended, upsets the universal order and throws it into chaos; similarly, it also holds that members of the hunter class, from which Sundiata Keita descended, are best equipped to return the universe to a stable state following its disruption.<sup>8</sup> Sundiata's victory was understood by his subjects, then, as not simply leading to a new secular political order. Instead, Sundiata's ascension to the emperorship of Mali constituted part of a larger cosmological process that witnessed him literally restoring harmony to the entire universe, his influence thus reaching far beyond West Africa.

Though seemingly separated by vast distances of both geography and time, Dante's placement of usurers in Hell was directly connected to Sundiata's victory at Kirina. As the world's major supplier of gold between the tenth and fifteenth centuries—one estimate holding that the region supplied two-thirds of the world's gold—West Africa played a significant role in the premodern world economy.<sup>9</sup> But, outside of studies about material culture, the broader implications of premodern West Africa's place in the global economy

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<sup>7</sup> D. T. Niane, ed., *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, trans. G. D. Pickett (Edinburgh Gate: Pearson, 2006), 74.

<sup>8</sup> John William Johnson, "The Dichotomy of Power and Authority in Mande Society and in the Epic of Sunjata," in *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature and Performance*, ed. Ralph A. Austen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>9</sup> A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman Group, 1973), 82.

and role as primary supplier of the world's gold have not been fully considered.<sup>10</sup>

Discussions of West Africa's role in the premodern global economy largely imagines it as a static place, absent variables like political upheaval, where gold was mined and exported on a consistent basis to sate the bullion needs of the rest of the world.<sup>11</sup> Of course, this is incorrect, as West Africa was a dynamic region during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, and West African historical agents, like Sundiata Keita and Soumaoro Kante, influenced both local and distant societies. Indeed, during this time the region alternated between periods of political stability and instability, which "radically [altered it] as a consequence."<sup>12</sup> This had effects on its ability to supply gold to the world. As these varying levels of gold exports waxed and waned, they also had additional cultural and social reverberations for medieval Europe, like the development of cashless systems of payment and the invention of theologies to allow for their use. When Dante placed usurers in Hell, then, he was reacting to European economic innovations that developed partly due to variations in West Africa's ability to supply gold to the Latin West, processes that were influenced by figures like Sundiata. Though perhaps remarkable when first recognized, this kind of link between Dante and Sundiata was not unusual. During the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, political events in West Africa, driven by numerous African historical

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<sup>10</sup> For an example of the material culture approach, see Kathleen Bickford Berzock, "Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time," in *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange Across Medieval Saharan Africa*, ed. Kathleen Bickford Berzock (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 29.

<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, a significant number of historians have considered alternate potential variables in the gold trade. The economic historian Eliyahu Ashtor asks if "political events such as the establishment of new masters at the outlets of gold in northern Africa" had an effect on the supply of West African gold in the Mediterranean region before concluding they did not. Ashtor, meanwhile, does not afford a similar consideration to West Africa. See Eliyahu Ashtor, *Les métaux précieux et la balance des paiements du Proche-Orient à la basse époque* (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1971), 17. *Événements politiques tels que l'établissement de nouveaux seigneurs aux débouchés de l'or en Afrique septentrionale*.

<sup>12</sup> Michael A. Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 30.



agents, instigated innovative economic thought in the Latin West that fundamentally changed European society and culture.

*World(-)Systems Analysis and the Middle Ages*

The standard regional perspective applied to Europe in the high and late Middle Ages often proves inadequate for understanding the complete array of processes that drove social and cultural trends of the era. Instead, the potential to produce more holistic scholarship exists through the incorporation of methodologies like world systems theory into the cultural and social histories of medieval Europe.

World systems theory is a sociological, anthropological, and historical framework that proposes that global connections, seen and unseen, led (and continue to lead) to the development of social systems in which all human action takes place.<sup>13</sup> As defined by the sociologist Andre Gunder Frank and the political scientist Barry K. Gills, a world system is present if “extensive and persistent trade connections” exist between regions; “persistent or recurrent political relations” occur “with particular regions or peoples”; and if regions share “economic, political, and ... cultural cycles.”<sup>14</sup> Though world systems theory has predominately been applied to global connections during the early modern and modern eras that can be labeled as “capitalistic” without controversy, it is correct to imagine high and late medieval Europe as also existing in a world system.<sup>15</sup> And, while twelfth- and thirteenth-century West Africa is largely discussed as a peripheral region and most analysis does not attempt to understand its broader, more profound, and non-materialistic links with the world,

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<sup>13</sup> Robert A. Denemark, Jonathan Friedman, Barry K. Gills, and George Modelski, “An Introduction to World System History: Toward a Social Science of Long-Term Change,” in *World System History: The Social Science of Long-Term Change*, ed. Robert A. Denemark, Jonathan Friedman, Barry K. Gills, and George Modelski (London: Routledge, 2000), xvii.

<sup>14</sup> Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, “The Five Thousand Year World System in Theory and Praxis,” in *World Systems History*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

it indeed shared a world system with high and late medieval Europe as a consequence of its essential role in the world economy.<sup>16</sup>

Within the last fifteen years, a scholarly trend has developed seeking to decenter the Latin West and analyze the region as but a single part of a much larger Global Middle Ages.<sup>17</sup> The primary aim through such studies is to deconstruct presumed premodern European exceptionalism through comparative analysis, and to investigate long-range interconnectivity both within Europe and between the West and other regions of the globe.<sup>18</sup> World systems theory thus naturally features heavily as a key methodological tool used in these studies. Published in 2020, the sinologist Valerie Hansen's *Year 1000*, for example, takes an amalgamated world system and comparative approach to argue that globalization—generally understood to be a modern phenomenon—began around 1000 CE.<sup>19</sup> Specifically

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<sup>16</sup> Even after the development and popularization of world systems theory, Eurocentric analyses remain the norm, “systematically [ignoring Europe’s] predecessors, their achievements, and the nature of the system that existed before European hegemony.” This thesis offers a corrective to this trend. For Eurocentrism in world systems analyses, see Denmark, Friedman, Gills, and Modelski, “An Introduction to World System History,” xx.

<sup>17</sup> For an introduction to the Global Middle Ages, see Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, “Towards a Global Middle Ages,” *Past and Present* 13 (2018): 1-44.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. For an example of a comparative approach involving analysis of both sub-Saharan Africa and the Latin West, see Anne Hauror, *Rulers, Warriors, Traders, Clerics: The Central Sahel and the North Sea, 800-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). In her study, Hauror considers the meager archeological and textual evidence of the medieval central Sahel region in light of similar but more robust evidence from the medieval North Sea region to highlight “similarities in approaches and interpretations” (2). Hauror uses this approach, for example, to argue that “large-scale territorial control” in the early medieval North Sea region and medieval central Sahel was impractical and that princely power is “more fruitfully considered under the heading of economically driven intervention” (60-61). Ultimately, *Rulers, Warriors, Traders, Clerics* is only comparative in nature, though, with Hauror occasionally hinting at potential economic links between the two regions in the eleventh- and twelfth-century Mediterranean slave trade (84).

For an example of an approach highlighting both the internal and external interconnections of the Latin West, see Nahir Otaño Gracia, “Towards a Decentered Global North Atlantic: Blackness in *Saga of Tristram ok Ísodd*,” *Literature Compass* 16 (2019): 1-16. In her article, Otaño Gracia proposes a new analytical paradigm of the “Global North Atlantic” (2). Otaño Gracia’s motivations for developing this framework are to highlight interconnectivity in the North Atlantic region (like through the dissemination of texts, and the appropriation and adaptation of cultural forms), expand the regions commonly thought of as incorporated in the North Atlantic to include Iberia, the Mediterranean and North Africa, and—most importantly—illuminate ways in which these distant regions influenced North Atlantic culture. For example, Otaño Gracia undertakes a philological analysis to locate potential later medieval Icelandic knowledge of Ethiopia in the fourteenth-century *Saga of Tristram ok Ísodd* (7).

<sup>19</sup> Valerie Hansen, *The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World—and Globalization Began* (New

for Hansen, combined economic and social developments on all continents of the world around 1000 CE, theoretically connected directly through Norse expeditions to North America, allows her to confidently state “it is fact ... that a network of global pathway took shape that year.”<sup>20</sup> Hansen’s argument is, essentially, Global Middle Ages scholarship apotheosized: it develops a global historical narrative in the premodern era, sees Europe as only one coequal member of the global whole, and is highly accessible.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these specific, often explicit goals of Global Middle Ages scholarship, however, sub-Saharan Africa (including gold-rich West Africa) occupies a peripheral space in works in which the region could feature as an essential component. In the case of Hansen, she argues that the West African gold trade reached its apogee in the fourteenth century due to “European demand for gold” without considering West Africa’s ability to supply, or its willingness to trade, the yellow metal.<sup>22</sup> The influence of medieval West Africa on the Latin West thus remains a massive blind spot in the Global Middle Ages corpus. Tracing the development of world systems theory and scholarly focus on the Global Middle Ages offers answers for this analytical lacuna and provides strategies for producing more holistic scholarship.

In its original form and without modification, world systems theory is explicitly inapplicable to the European Middle Ages. Originally proposed in 1974 by the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein in his *Modern World-System*, world system theory in its earliest form was deployed to explain the origins and evolution of the present-day global-capitalist

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York: Scribner, 2020), 1-8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Hansen’s argument maps with what Holmes and Standen believe the benefits of the Global Middle Ages paradigm are. See Holmes and Standen, “Towards a Global Middle Ages,” 8.

<sup>22</sup> Hansen, *The Year 1000*, 138.

economic superstructure.<sup>23</sup> Doing so, Wallerstein believes, also offers the opportunity to locate the origins of Western global economic and political supremacy, and the inequalities they have wrought around the world.<sup>24</sup> As defined by Wallerstein, then, a world system is an interrelated group of separate capitalistic economies; “a world,” he explains by borrowing language from Fernand Braudel, not so much “*the world*.”<sup>25</sup> Each capitalist world-system, as Wallerstein further defines, is limited by rigid boundaries, with “core,” “semi-periphery,” and “periphery” zones occurring within those borders.<sup>26</sup> Though he concludes that Europe possessed neither the capitalistic economic policies nor the interconnectivity necessary to satisfy his definition of a world-system until the 1500s, Wallerstein nevertheless offers the interconnected “city-states of Northern Italy” and “city-states of Flanders and Northern Germany” as examples of proto world-systems in high medieval Europe.<sup>27</sup> According to Wallerstein, however, it was not until 1450 that two key features of the capitalist world-system, a “‘world’-wide division of labor and bureaucratic state machineries,” were widely dispersed enough throughout Europe for his modern world-system to begin to emerge.<sup>28</sup>

Though it offers a new way to understand early modern global interconnectivity and

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<sup>23</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii. Emphasis the author’s.

This is also the cause for the compound adjectival use of “world” in Wallerstein’s concept of the “world-system.” World-system in this sense is closer in meaning to “world-economy,” “*Welttheater*,” and “*Weltwirtschaft*.” When “world system” appears in my analysis without the hyphen, it refers to something different: a transregional network linking two or more areas of spatially distant regions of the globe. As I define “world system,” the entire world or globe does not need to be incorporated into it, only regions traditionally considered distant or unconnected from one another. The world system I analyze in this thesis, for example, incorporates high medieval West Africa, the Mediterranean, and Northwestern Europe. Throughout this thesis, I refer to this as the Western European/Trans-Saharan world system. The Western European/Trans-Saharan world system was absolutely connected to and influenced additional regions of the globe, but those connections and consequences are beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

<sup>27</sup> For discussion of the high medieval economy and city-states in a potential world system, see *ibid.*, 36-37. For further discussion of Wallerstein’s insistence on capitalism being present in his world-system (and, thus, the absence of capitalism in Europe until the 1500s), see *ibid.*, xxvi.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

economic innovations, Wallerstein's world-system is thus nevertheless highly teleological, temporally-limited, and fundamentally Eurocentric.<sup>29</sup>

In 1979, only five years after the publication of *The Modern World-System*, Braudel published his *Perspective of the World* in which he offered his own world systems analysis and helpfully expanded upon, and corrected aspects of, Wallerstein's thesis. Braudel similarly understands world-systems as "fragment[s] of the world ... [with] a certain organic unity," interconnected above all by economic exchange.<sup>30</sup> Like Wallerstein, Braudel's world-system also includes clearly observable boundaries, a well-defined hierarchy, and a city serving as its center which exerts economical- and cultural-gravity.<sup>31</sup> Braudel deviates from Wallerstein in two significant ways, however. First, he proposes that capitalism (and, thus, a modern world-system) was present in Italy by the twelfth century, thereby pushing Wallerstein's model back four hundred years.<sup>32</sup> And, Braudel appreciates more explicitly than Wallerstein that "an economy never exists in isolation," instead additionally being linked with a region's culture and society.<sup>33</sup> As world systems include a push-and-pull dynamic—with "the most advanced [regions of the world system] ... dependent on the most backwards and vice-versa"—Braudel's world system model allows for connections to be made between political events and cultural change in distant societies.<sup>34</sup> Still, Braudel defaults to placing varying European cities at the center of his world system, and argues that

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<sup>29</sup> The Eurocentrism is an intended feature of Wallerstein's analysis. When later arguing against Andre Gunder Frank's theory of a relatively stable 5000-year world system, for example, Wallerstein rejects his analysis by labeling it "Sinocentric." See *ibid.*, xxviix-xxx.

<sup>30</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World: Civilization and Capitalism, 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. According to Braudel's analysis, though, at this moment Italy existed as a sort of core in a semi-formed Western European world-system, and in the periphery of a Mediterranean-centered Byzantine and Muslim world-system. See *ibid.*, 107-10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

the attendant fluctuations in power corresponding to these cities' rising and falling fortunes influenced peripheral regions, not the other way around.<sup>35</sup> Despite the positive improvements to Wallerstein's theory that Braudel provides, like applying world systems analysis to the Middle Ages, the Mediterranean (and, as the early modern era progresses, Western Europe as a whole) remains the gravitational force in its center, exerting considerable power over its peripheral zones. In fact, Braudel explicitly names sub-Saharan Africa as a zone outside of his medieval world-system, writing that "Black Africa [was separated] from White Africa" by the Sahara, which acted like a "hard to penetrate" shell.<sup>36</sup>

The sociologist Janet L. Abu-Lughod, in her *Before European Hegemony*, published in 1989, most thoroughly described the high medieval world system and Europe's position in it. As Abu-Lughod explains, economic and cultural change in the Latin West allowed it to integrate into a preexisting global network of commercial exchange around 1250.<sup>37</sup> For approximately the century following 1250, Abu-Lughod believes that the Latin West was but one of eight regions, interconnected through three larger and coequal trading networks, involved in this pan-Eurasian system linking the Far West with the Far East.<sup>38</sup> Where Wallerstein sees a fragmented world before 1500 later subsumed by European capitalism, Abu-Lughod identifies a connected world in the later Middle Ages. According to Abu-Lughod, Europe only emerged as the world's premier economic and political force around 1350 due to social innovations in the West arising from the Black Death, and a decline in Eastern commerce caused by the deterioration of Silk Road trade routes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>37</sup> Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12, 18.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 18; Janet Abu-Lughod, "Discontinuities and Persistence: One World System or a Succession of Systems?," in *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand*, ed. Barry K. Gills and Andre Gunder

Abu-Lughod's world system rightfully remains highly influential: it demonstrates the wide dispersal and the impressive distances of high medieval global trade connections, in turn deconstructing commonplace teleological narratives by arguing for the existence of a pre-hegemonic Europe. There are significant issues with some arguments posed by Abu-Lughod in *Before European Hegemony*, however, particularly as it relates to West Africa's position in her world system. For example, while acknowledging that gold coins were "the preferred specie for international transactions" during this period in Europe and the Middle East, Abu-Lughod nevertheless explicitly ignores West Africa (and, by extension, West African gold) from her conceptualized world system.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, West Africa's marginalized position in Abu-Lughod's world system is even represented visually, with the author excluding the region on a map demonstrating the circuits of her world system (Fig. 1). Abu-Lughod does attempt to justify this decision, however, arguing it is acceptable to neglect the role of Africa in her analysis because "[its] merchants were largely local and African goods seldom made their way to China or Europe."<sup>41</sup> This is a significant oversight, greatly underestimates the influence of high medieval West Africa on distant regions of the globe, and requires correction.

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Frank (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 278.

<sup>40</sup> For the role of gold coins in international trade, see Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 13.

Scholars have previously noted the incompleteness of Abu-Lughod's world system. Hauor, for example, endorses Abu-Lughod's general argument while noting that she "unfortunately ... does not extend her analysis to sub-Saharan Africa." Similarly, Glen Dudbridge points out that close connections between China and Japan in the period of Abu-Lughod's world system means the latter should be included in her analysis, but it is not. Despite these criticisms, as late as 2008 Abu-Lughod reaffirmed and restated her envisioned world system, offering no corrective for West Africa's exclusion. For Hauor's comment, see Hauor, *Rulers, Warriors, Traders, Clerics*, 102. For Dudbridge's, see Glen Dudbridge, "Reworking the World System Paradigm," *Past and Present* 13 (2018), 299-301. For Abu-Lughod's reaffirmation of her world system, see Janet Abu-Lughod, "The World System in the Thirteenth Century: Dead-End or Precursor?," in *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Innovations*, ed. Peggy Levitt and Sanjeev Khagram (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 187-90.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

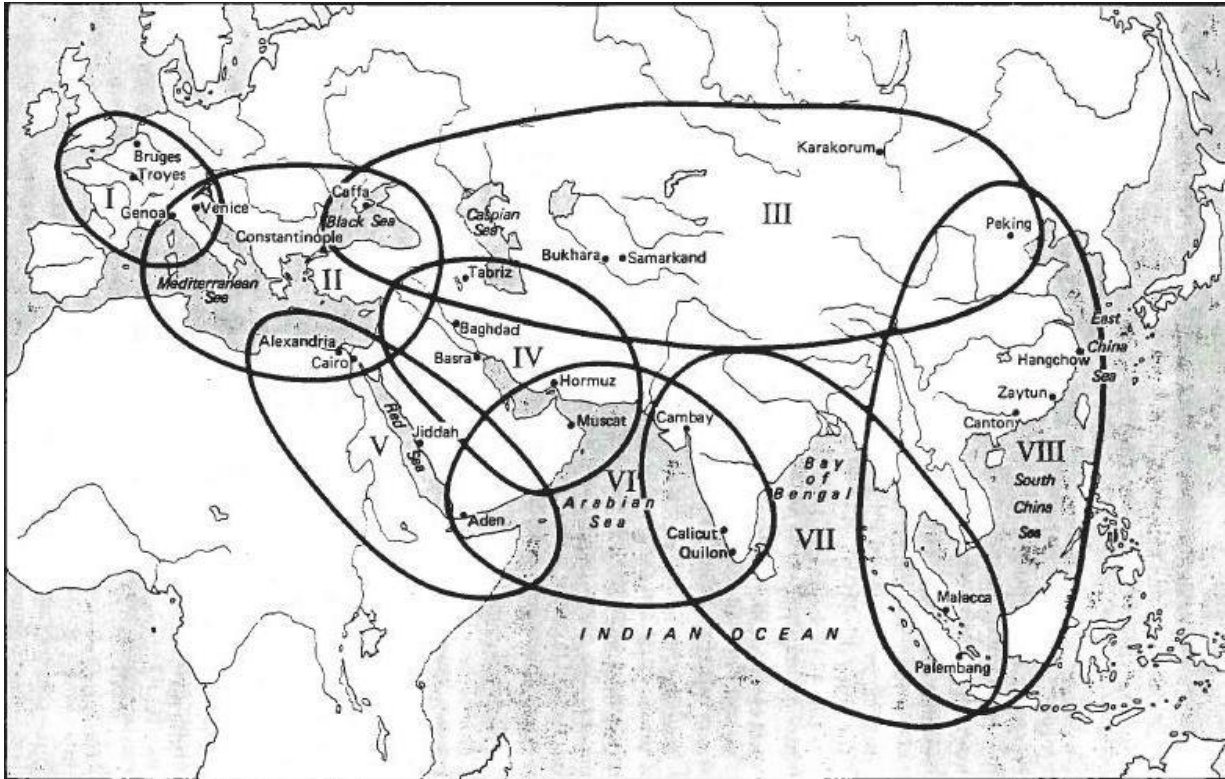


Fig. 1. Janet Abu-Lughod's world system. (Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250-1350* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], 36).

Most Europeanists studying the premodern era have treated the potential economic and cultural force of West African gold similarly. A recurring theme in works relating to gold in the high European Middle Ages are questions posed by scholars that could likely be resolved by investigating West African political history and incorporating it into their analyses. Marc Bloch, for example, identifies two unanswered “problems of gold” in the Middle Ages: minting of gold currencies’ cessation at a large scale in the ninth century, and Genoa and Florence’s resumption of minting gold currencies in the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The role of West Africa does not feature in Bloch’s answer for the second problem, however, as he instead proposes that unreliable silver currencies in the interior of Europe and the

<sup>42</sup> Marc Bloch, “Le problème de l’or au moyen age,” *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale* 5, no. 19 (1933): 8.



necessity of gold for trade with the Near East impelled Italian merchant republics to mint gold coinage without explicitly considering the region in which the metal originated in.<sup>43</sup> Braudel notes that gold in the Mediterranean basin during the high Middle Ages was “an indispensable motor element for its economic life,” “without which Mediterranean activity, and notably the rich and powerful commerce of the Levant, would have stopped or at least been compromised.”<sup>44</sup> Braudel therefore pins the decline of Mediterranean trade in the late Middle Ages on Portugal’s near-monopoly of West African gold beginning in the fifteenth century, though he does not consider if similar processes occurred two centuries earlier.<sup>45</sup> Wallerstein, though in this instance publishing after Braudel, comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that without Portuguese access to West African gold in the fifteenth century “Europe would have lacked the collective confidence to develop a capitalist system.”<sup>46</sup> Wallerstein’s entire argument, then, is contingent on Europe’s access to West African gold yet he follows the lead of other scholars and does not consider the role of African gold in the high medieval Western European economy.

In the authoritative work on gold in high medieval Europe, Robert Sabatino Lopez both discusses European interest in West African gold and attempts to resolve Bloch’s second question. But Lopez’s solution for why Genoa and Florence began minting gold coins in 1252 is not that West Africa increased the amount of gold it exported, but instead that gold flowed westward into Italy from low-yielding Bohemian gold mines opened in the thirteenth

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 23-25.

<sup>44</sup> For the role of gold in the Mediterranean economy, see Fernand Braudel, “Monnaies et civilisations: de l’or du Soudan à l’argent d’Amérique; un drame méditerranéen,” *Annales* 1 (1946): 13. *Un élément moteur indispensable à sa vie économique*. For the potential consequences on the Mediterranean economy of an absence of gold, see ibid., 12. *Sans quoi l’activité méditerranéenne, et notamment le riche et puissant commerce du Levant, serait stoppé ou pour le moins compromise*.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>46</sup> Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I*, 46.

century.<sup>47</sup> Anna Degler and Iris Wenderholm perceptively note that later medieval European usage of West African gold to mint coins added “a political-colonial element” to the preexisting “economic discourse of material,” but in so doing imply an unequal relationship in which the Latin West was better suited to influence West African society.<sup>48</sup> Thomas Walker comes closest of all scholars to recognizing the role of West African political history on the European economy noting that “political fragmentation in both North and West Africa may well have slowed the gold flow north.”<sup>49</sup> Walker stops short, however, observing that a “Braudelian” undertaking would be necessary to both prove this hypothesis and reveal the consequences such a slowed flow of gold would have had for the Latin West.<sup>50</sup>

*European Intellectual Traditions and West Africa’s “Unthinkable” Role as Global Power*

A running theme thus exists in both the historiography concerning gold in the high and later European Middle Ages and world systems analysis: West Africa’s role in the global economy is continually ignored or marginalized, even when its inclusion would enhance scholarship or solve seemingly inscrutable historical questions. Works begun with a desire to decenter Europe and correct traditional teleological narratives of Europe’s rise to economic supremacy, like Abu-Lughod’s and Wallerstein’s, are among those which fall into this trap.<sup>51</sup> Compounding this, valid critiques of this aspect of Abu-Lughod’s world system also frame

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Sabatino Lopez, “Back to Gold, 1252,” *Economic History Review* 9, no. 2 (1956): 233.

<sup>48</sup> Anna Degler and Iris Wenderholm, “Der Wert des Goldes – der Wert der Golde. Eine Einleitung,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 79 (2016): 444. *Eine politisch-koloniale Dimension ... ökonomische Diskurs des Materials.*

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Walker, “The Italian Gold Revolution of 1252: Shifting Currents in the Pan-Mediterranean Flow of Gold,” in *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, ed. John F. Richards (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1983), 37.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Abu-Lughod notes that a lesser utilized method to transform beliefs held as canonical is “by changing the scale of what falls within its purview.” Similarly, Wallerstein cites his experiences witnessing inequalities in late-colonial Africa as the inspiration for his work. For methods of knowledge acquisition, see Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, ix. For Wallerstein’s experiences in Africa, see Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I*, 5.

the issue in a way that marginalizes West Africa's role in the global economy. When Gills, reflecting on Abu-Lughod's legacy, notes her omission of West Africa, he argues it is only an issue because the "exchange nexus [of the Mediterranean] played a key role in [the] formation of West African cities and states of the medieval period."<sup>52</sup> In essence repeating the argument he is critiquing, as well as echoing Hansen and Braudel, Gills sees the Latin West as more capable of influencing sub-Saharan Africa, rather than the two regions acting as coequal members of the same world system. This paradox—the continual appearance of this argument in works explicitly produced to decenter Europe—requires explanation.

No matter what the motivations are behind the production of works that utilize world systems theory, they are part of a European intellectual tradition and dependent upon Eurocentric norms and ideas.<sup>53</sup> As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in his *Provincializing Europe*, the academic tradition of studying history is rooted in progressivist thought begun during the European Enlightenment and further developed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social scientists like Marx and Weber.<sup>54</sup> Chakrabarty notes that continual use of this "historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather something that became global *over time*."<sup>55</sup> So, even highly conscious and self-reflective histories that attempt to decenter Europe, but still rely on European models, concretize Europe's position as "the sovereign of all histories."<sup>56</sup> Wallerstein's search for the origins of a global capitalist economy, Hansen's locating the emergence of globalization with Viking expeditions to North America, and Abu-Lughod's implicit adherence to a teleological

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<sup>52</sup> Barry K. Gills, "Janet Abu-Lughod and the World System: The History of the World System and the Development of World System History," *Journal of World System Research* 20, no. 2 (2015): 178-79.

<sup>53</sup> This includes the present work as well.

<sup>54</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), especially 3-6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. Emphasis the author's.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

narrative of eventual European hegemony are all firmly historicistic in the ways Chakrabarty identifies and against which he warns. Adherence to this tradition at times appears almost inescapable.<sup>57</sup> Following the publication of *Before European Hegemony*, its harshest review offered the fair criticism that Abu-Lughod couched in Eurocentric norms and values her determination of “winners” and losers, “success” and “failures” of the participants in her world system.<sup>58</sup> Still, this same critic, while himself not pointing out Abu-Lughod’s omission of West Africa, saved his most severe and pointed criticisms for differences in interpretation of Weberian concepts, devoting three pages of precious review space to the subject.<sup>59</sup>

The processes described by Chakrabarty would alone be enough to spur the unintentional cloaking of West Africa’s role influencing high medieval European society. European intellectual traditions, however, are also dependent on theories that consciously worked to obscure sub-Saharan Africa’s position in global history, and these trends also continue to influence the production of world system and Global Middle Ages scholarship. As François-Xavier Fauvelle notes in *The Golden Rhinoceros*, a compendium of vignettes demonstrating sub-Saharan Africa’s global dynamism in the Middle Ages, “Africa is a space of knowledge repeatedly invented from the outside.”<sup>60</sup> Writing in his *Invention of Africa*, the philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe describes how “anthropology and philology and all social sciences [we can include history and the other humanities here] can be really understood only

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<sup>57</sup> As Chakrabarty notes, the academic profession of studying history developed concurrently with nineteenth-century European colonization, and the process of colonization included the import of European university systems. Therefore, “the globality of academia is not independent of the globality that the European modern has created.” See *ibid.*, 46.

<sup>58</sup> Donald A. Nielsen, “After World Systems Theory: Concerning Janet Abu-Lughod’s *Before European Hegemony*,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 4, no. 4 (1991): 485.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 493-95. For Abu-Lughod’s reply to Nielsen (including a defense of her understanding of Weber), see Janet Abu-Lughod, “Reply to Donald Nielsen’s ‘After World Systems Theory,’” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 4, no. 4 (1991): 499-500.

<sup>60</sup> François-Xavier Fauvelle, *The Golden Rhinoceros: Histories of the African Middle Ages*, trans. Troy Tice (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2.

in the context of their epistemological region of possibility.”<sup>61</sup> From this perspective, the long genealogy of world systems theory and much Global Middle Ages scholarship, with their inherent focus on the development of capitalism and materialistic connections, begins to come into focus. Hegel’s remark in *The Philosophy of History* that Africa “is no historical part of the World ... it has no movement or development to exhibit,” appears to continue to be highly influential.<sup>62</sup>

This critique, entirely necessary, is not meant to denigrate the personal character of scholars like Abu-Lughod.<sup>63</sup> Instead, it is meant to highlight that works written in the era of Western colonialism or Western economic supremacy subconsciously utilize the normative framework of those systems in their analyses. Scholarship like that of Abu-Lughod do not consciously set out to employ or bolster the worst aspects of these frameworks. Rather, these frameworks and the ideas they facilitate are so central to Western intellectual traditions that they are difficult to avoid. Since, to borrow Mudimbe’s words, “knowledge essentially functions as a form of power,” this is an intentional feature of these systems of thought.<sup>64</sup> Writing about Western anthropological ideas applied to Africa, for example, Mudimbe further notes that “they are constrained [academic] discourses and develop within the general system of knowledge which is an interdependent relationship with systems of power and

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<sup>61</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>62</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 117.

For the legacy of Hegel in the study of premodern African history, also see Toby Green, *A Fistfull of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2020), 8. Green remarks that Hegel’s influence has caused “most historians [to be] painfully slow in pushing back against the stereotypes regarding the ‘Africa’ of the nineteenth century and before.” Green goes further, characterizing this as an “almost total failure of mainstream historians to take African kingdoms and their histories seriously when writing about the birth of the modern world.” As this thesis details, this “almost total failure” extends into the high and later medieval worlds as well.

<sup>63</sup> For similar sentiments, see Simon Yarrow, “Economic Imaginaries of the Global Middle Ages,” *Past and Present* 13 (2018): 217-18.

<sup>64</sup> Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 27.

social control.”<sup>65</sup> Even the best-intentioned scholar can unintentionally produce scholarship that elides with those systems, in turn emboldening and strengthening them.

Hansen’s discussion of sub-Saharan Africans in *The Year 1000* demonstrates this phenomenon. Globalization, the lens through which Hansen analyzes world history, is a Western concept and an inherently passive process for the African subjects she examines. For example, Hansen includes in her discussion of African historical developments a brief section about the famous image of the Malian emperor Musa I (r. 1312-37) grasping a large gold nugget found on the Catalan Atlas, produced in Majorca in 1375.<sup>66</sup> This image should not be taken as an example of African history, however. Rather, it is Latin history relating to how the West perceived, understood, and rationalized knowledge about sub-Saharan Africa in the Middle Ages to fit its worldview. Despite scholars like Fauvelle and Mudimbe urging against it, Hansen nevertheless conflates Western knowledge about Africa with African history itself to locate the development of Western values in the region. In the study of the Global Middle Ages, it is of fundamental importance to continue scrutinizing the ways in which African history is ignored or marginalized in favor of Eurasian history. Hegel’s comments, for example, that “Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained – for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World – shut up; it is the Gold-land

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>66</sup> Hansen, *The Year 1000*, 144. Hansen also makes the peculiar decision to style Musa as “King Mansa Musa.” This essentially equates to referring to him as “King King Musa” or “King Emperor Musa,” a needless redundancy. Considering *The Year 1000* is targeted towards both popular and academic audiences, referring to Musa as a “king” rather than “mansa” is an appropriate choice. If this section of my thesis demonstrates anything, it is that accessibility to works of global history are important to deconstruct pernicious historical narratives, especially those about the Middle Ages. Similarly, I agree with Geraldine Heng that standard stylistic choices in academic works, like non-European names over-encumbered with diacritical marks, can potentially limit a work’s readership. Hansen’s “King Mansa Musa” construction, however, is either a consequence of negligence—which is unfortunate given the subject matter and aim of the book—or an attempt to simultaneously familiarize and exoticize Musa for her audience. For an example of “King Mansa Musa,” see Hansen, *The Year 1000*, 152. For Heng’s commentary, see Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 6.

compressed within itself ... enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” has been (or would be) rejected as ridiculous by any serious contemporary historian.<sup>67</sup> Still, this idea resonates quite clearly with Braudel’s observation that the Sahara acted as an impenetrable shell, Abu-Lughod’s omission of West Africa from her world system because its merchants remained local, and Hansen’s dependence on a Western source when developing her image of the region.

In the same way the intellectual traditions that some global historical frameworks are grounded in implicitly foster the omission or marginalization of premodern West Africa in analysis, the perception of sub-Saharan Africa as a location without history encourages scholars to ignore the region as a potential source of answers to historical questions. As I will demonstrate, Bloch’s ‘problem of gold’ and Lopez’s ‘return to gold’ have their solution and origin in West African political history, a conclusion that neither scholar even begins to consider. This apparent oversight is not the consequence of a personal failing of either scholar, however. As the sociologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds his readers in *Silencing the Past*, “history is always produced in a specific historical context.”<sup>68</sup> When Bloch and Lopez wrote in the middle of the twentieth century, the thought that West Africa and West African actors could independently contribute so significantly to medieval European history was not viable. As Trouillot writes, historical truths—no matter how obvious or logical—can at certain times seem “unthinkable.” Trouillot explains: “The unthinkable [in historiography] is that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, that which perverts all answers because it defies the norms under which the questions were

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<sup>67</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 109.

<sup>68</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 22.

phrased.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the era in which Bloch and Lopez were writing was one where theories about Hamitic conquest, the queen of Sheba building Great Zimbabwe, and people from Atlantis sculpting the famous early modern Benin copper figures were all still in circulation in some circles.<sup>70</sup> The works analyzed thus far that are part of the evolution of world systems theory, as well as those by medievalists that detail the high medieval Latin West’s relationship with gold, are all valuable and significant contributions. Still, the hindering of analysis as comprehensive as possible by the historiographical and intellectual norms of the eras they were produced in need to be confronted and understood. Thankfully, the ability now exists to move past those legacies. Medievalists, whether they work in the Global Middle Ages or not, can begin to offer correctives and produce more accurate scholarship.

#### *Actor-Network Theory, and Other Paths Forward*

Scholars working in the Global Middle Ages possess an earnest interest in developing new methodological and theoretical approaches to better understand medieval societies and culture.<sup>71</sup> Recent initiatives have included an emphasis on better understanding the dissemination of “persons and ideas” in interregional medieval trading networks; producing comparative studies of geographically-distant medieval societies to better understand politics and economics in the Middle Ages; and introspectively considering aspects of the field, like the application of the word “global” itself when describing the medieval past, to determine what are the most suitable words to characterize the era.<sup>72</sup> These approaches are largely

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>70</sup> For an overview of these kinds of theories and their influence on the production of African historiography, see Raymond Mauny, *Les siècles obscurs de l’Afrique noire: histoire et archéologie* (Fayard: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1970), 8-9.

<sup>71</sup> For potential strategies to develop innovative methodologies, see Geraldine Heng, “The Global Middle Ages: An Experiment in Collaborative Humanities, or Imagining the World, 500-1500 C.E.,” *English Language Notes* 47 (2009): 205-16.

<sup>72</sup> For the transmission of people and ideas, see Jonathan Shepard, “Networks,” *Past and Present* 13 (2018): 116-57. For comparative approaches, see Yarrow, “Economic Imaginaries of the Global Middle Ages,” 214-31.



comparative, however, or the moments they analyze involve direct interaction and exchange. Consequently, since direct links between the two regions were limited, no existing work of historiography offers the exact framework or paradigm necessary to better understand the extent of high medieval West Africa's influence on the Latin West.

Terminologically, Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen's suggestion of a "combinative" approach in the study of the Global Middle Ages is a fruitful starting point.<sup>73</sup> As Holmes and Standen describe, such an approach combines "examples that are thematically cognate but which do not necessarily match precisely in terms of time, place or formal characteristics" allowing the "discern[ment of] features of the Global Middle Ages from insider positions."<sup>74</sup> For instance, new interpretations and meanings can appear for both the history of the Latin West and West Africa by combining both. Holmes and Standen's suggestion pairs well with the anthropologist A. L. Kroeber's revival of a concept of a cultural oikumene. Kroeber, fundamentally a structuralist, argues for the oikumene as a "frame within which a particular combination of processes happened to achieve certain unique results" to better facilitate comparative analyses.<sup>75</sup> Though Kroeber's analysis, published in 1945, is at times highly chauvinistic, he does include *all* of sub-Saharan Africa in his oikumene and believes shared processes of culture formation can be located throughout the globe.<sup>76</sup> My thesis modifies these two methodologies slightly: instead of focusing on atemporal, "thematically cognate" examples, it combines apparently unconnected historical developments—West African political history and changes in Latin society—to better

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For use of the word "global," see Caroline Dodds Pennock and Amanda Power, "Globalizing Cosmologies," *Past and Present* 13 (2018): 88-115.

<sup>73</sup> Holmes and Standen, "Towards a Global Middle Ages," 23-24.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> A. L. Kroeber, "The Ancient Oikumene as Historic Culture Aggregate," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 75, no. 1/2 (1945): 9.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

understand the far-flung consequences of both.<sup>77</sup>

Utilizing actor-network theory in analysis of premodern world systems and the role of gold in the Middle Ages helps reveal these connections and further facilitates the refinement of Abu-Lughod's, Bloch's, Braudel's, and Lopez's work. Actor-network theory proposes that the world is composed of a nearly limitless number of networks, with actors serving as nodes of connection.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, it begins to produce an image of the world in which all actors exist within networks, and those actors also serve as nodes of connection with other networks. As described above, modified world systems approaches like Abu-Lughod's imagine regional trade networks as integrated into a larger world trade network. Applying actor-network theory, however, demands appreciation of the additional social and cultural networks, both domestically and internationally, that influenced one another. Or, to put it another way, regional networks themselves were and are composed of an additional series of networks.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, these networks have a similarly reciprocal relationship of influence with actors or actants, which includes all things, both human and non-human, material and immaterial.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> The methodology utilized in this thesis also shares much with the "California school" of economic history—it is partly a synthesis of a variety of secondary sources and recontextualization of the data within them in an attempt to produce a more complete understanding of the relationship between twelfth- and thirteenth-century Western Europe and West Africa. This approach is similar to the one found in Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Pomeranz, in composing a comparative economic study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and Asia, writes that "we cannot understand pre-1800 global conjunctures in terms of a Europe-centered world system; we have [identified], instead, a polycentric world with no dominant center." Though focusing on West Africa's influence on medieval Europe (rather than medieval Europe's influence on contemporaneous West Africa), this thesis presupposes the existence of a more dynamic "polycentric world" during the period under consideration. For "pre-1800 global conjectures," see Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>78</sup> Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications," *Sozial Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 370.

<sup>79</sup> John Law, "After ANT: Complexity, Naming, and Topology," in *Actor Network Theory and After*, ed. John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 7.

<sup>80</sup> Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory," 374. Latour defines an actor as "not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it." See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46.

As the sociologist Bruno Latour, one of actor-network theory's greatest advocates (and critics!), describes, central to actor-network theory is the complete rejection of a "fixed framework."<sup>81</sup> In so doing, observers are no longer restrained by arbitrary boundaries from understanding the many complicated ways actors and actants influence the world around them.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, this restores the agency and potentialities of action to individuals that neat delineations and definitions, like the eight clearly-defined trade circuits of Abu-Lughod's world system, implicitly hinder. Combined, such an approach ultimately allows for the elucidation of "connections among [seemingly] unrelated elements."<sup>83</sup> In the analysis to follow, these "unrelated elements" are medieval Latin culture and West African political events, with West African gold serving as the primary interregional actor. Demonstrating these connections reveals unequivocally the economic and cultural links between West Africa and the Latin West. I imagine these links as comprising its own world system, which I refer to as the Western European/Trans-Saharan world system.

According to Abu-Lughod, West Africa's role in the global economy was limited because it was raw materials, like gold, that the region contributed to the world system she identifies. Though she attempts to decenter Europe, Abu-Lughod nevertheless disregards West Africa's role in the world system and how its gold functioned locally. Gold's value during the global Middle Ages, however, was relative to specific temporal and geographic contexts. To put it another way, Abu-Lughod utilizes a fixed reference for the value of gold that does not work in pan-Afro-Eurasian contexts. For example, locally in West Africa during the period under study gold was not used as currency.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, even in a

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<sup>81</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 24.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>83</sup> Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory," 375.

<sup>84</sup> Philip D. Curtin, "Africa and the Wider Monetary World, 1250-1800," in *Precious Metals in the Later*

specific context like individual high medieval European churches, gold could have varying roles, from a means to buy goods for the poor to luxurious material used in the production of sacral objects.<sup>85</sup> Not only was gold an “indispensable motor” for high medieval Mediterranean trade, then, but it also held central roles for the cultural, social, and economic life of all Western Europe. It follows that if the availability of gold varied in the Latin West during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, aspects of culture and society it was intimately linked to varied as well: Europeans’ relationship with the metal necessarily evolved as its availability rose and declined. To this end, Abu-Lughod notes that without preexisting world economies, when “Europe ‘reached out’ [to them in the thirteenth century], it would have grasped empty space rather than riches.”<sup>86</sup> As I demonstrate, Europe *could not* reach out inter- or intra-regionally in the way it did without access to West African gold and the innovations its absence compelled. Since Europe was part of a broader economic system that depended on West African gold, political events in the region that affected the production and export of that gold had the potential to significantly influence life in Europe. This was so even if contemporaneous Europeans or West Africans could never appreciate that these processes were occurring, or if it can never be directly located in the historical record.

### *Thesis Organization*

I organize my thesis in two parts. Part one is a combinative history of eleventh-,

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*Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, 232.

The most widespread currency in use during the West African Middle Ages was cowrie shells. Imported from the Maldives islands in the Indian Ocean, cowrie shells served a similar function in West African societies as billon coins in Western Europe, predominately used for small payments. That cowrie shells found their way from the Indian Ocean into West Africa first arriving at least as late as the eleventh century reemphasizes that the region was a participant in the medieval world system. See J. S. Hogendorn and H. A. Gemery, “Continuity in West African Monetary History? An Outline of Monetary Development,” *African Economic History* 17 (1988): 128-29.

<sup>85</sup> Elisabeth Vavra, “*Ich Goldtschmid mach köstliche Ding*: Organisation—Arbeitsbedingungen—Produkte,” *Das Mittelalter* 21, no. 2 (2016): 276.

<sup>86</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 12.

twelfth-, and thirteenth-century West African political history and concurrent European cultural developments. Through my analysis of the available source material, I argue that the period of political instability in West Africa following the advent of the North African Almoravids in the region during the second half of the eleventh century led to a reduction in the amount of gold exported into foreign markets, including Europe. This reduction in trade, I further argue, lasted until the establishment of the Empire of Mali around 1235 by Sundiata Keita. I confirm my argument by contextualizing my hypothesized decline of gold exports with the long-lasting European bullion famine during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, and a sustained period of peculiar relationships between the Latin West and gold. Finally, I further contextualize the economic and cultural innovations spurred by the bullion famines—like the usury practiced by Dante’s sinners and the purgatory they found themselves in—with West African history. This elaborates on the indirect links the region had with the Latin West, and the role individual African historical agents played in the development of European society.

Part two is a comparative analysis of the uses of gold in the Mediterranean basin by Italian merchant republics and the Empire of Mali in the later Middle Ages. An end to the political instability in West Africa in the thirteenth century and the increasing amount of gold exported from the region impelled drastic changes to Europe’s relationship to the yellow metal. Though most often analyzed by medievalists as instruments for trade and payment, gold and gold coins in the later medieval Mediterranean basin possessed additional potential functions. For the city of Florence, the production of gold florins beginning in 1252 provided opportunities to imperialize their Latin rivals by usurping economic rights and propagandizing their city through international trade networks. And, for Mansa Musa,

distributing gold in Cairo during his famous hajj in 1324 allowed him to demonstrate his global powers to an international rival. Both Musa and Florence's use of gold, I argue, are best understood as intentional acts of imperialism, something that becomes most clear through comparative analysis.

## Part I: The West African Gold Trade and Its Influence on Latin Society

In his *Book of Routes and Realms*, the Muslim Iberian geographer al-Bakri (1040-90) offered to his readers a brief description of the West African Kingdom of Wagadu and the customs of its people. Located in present day Mauritania and Mali, and known in sources as the Kingdom of Ghana due to its ruler's title, al-Bakri's source of information for Wagadu was Muslim merchants involved in the trans-Saharan caravan trade.<sup>87</sup> From the information collected from them, of particular note to al-Bakri was the immense and easily accumulated gold wealth of the king of Wagadu. The anecdotes he provided about West African gold remain as alluring to a modern reader as they surely were to his contemporary audience. In fact, medieval Muslim geographers like al-Bakri generally only offered great amounts of detail when they described locations they considered exotic, peoples who followed unusual customs, or to relay important economic information.<sup>88</sup> With Wagadu, all three applied. He wrote, for example, that "The nuggets found in all the mines of [the king's] country [were] reserved for the king, only [the] gold dust being left for the people," continuing by noting that "The nuggets may weigh from an ounce to a pound. It is related that the king owns a nugget as large as a big stone."<sup>89</sup> As al-Bakri further described, not only did this prerogative enrich the king but there were so many nuggets of this kind available that his claim to them also protected the local economy because "but for this [system] the people would accumulate gold until it lost its value."<sup>90</sup> And with so much gold available, the king of Wagadu used it to scarcely imaginable ends: he wore "a high cap decorated with gold"; he held court "in a

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<sup>87</sup> When possible, throughout this thesis I refer to this kingdom as "Wagadu" rather than "Ghana."

<sup>88</sup> Emmanuelle Tixier du Mesnil, "Panorama de la géographie arabe médiévale," in *Géographes et voyageurs au moyen âge*, ed. Henri Bresc and Emmanuelle Tixier du Mesnil (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2010), 22-23.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Bakri, *Book of Routes and Realms*, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins, in *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2000), 81.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

domed pavilion around which [stood] ten horses covered with gold-embroidered materials”; he was often found surrounded by “pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold”; and he even adorned his dogs in gold, as “round their necks they [wore] collars of gold and silver studded with a number of balls of the same metal.”<sup>91</sup>

Also reported to have taken place in the eleventh century, though occurring over 2500 miles north of Wagadu, the infamous king of England William the Conqueror (r. 1066-87) had a starkly different experience with the yellow metal. In 1071 in the marshy area north of Cambridge known as Ely, which was also the site of a cathedral and monastery, William found himself forced to maintain a siege to subdue a rebellion that had arisen against him. As described in the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, after his opponents surrendered to him, William carried out a violent retribution and “sentenced some to imprisonment, [and] some to a deprivation of the eyes, the hands, or the feet.”<sup>92</sup> Following this, according to the *Liber Eliensis*, William hastened to visit the shrine of St. Etheldreda (636-79) which was located in Ely’s monastery. “At last coming to the monastery,” the chronicler reported, “standing a long way from the holy body of the virgin he threw a marc of gold upon the altar not daring to approach closer, fearing that a judgment from God would be brought upon him for the wicked things which his men carried out in that place.”<sup>93</sup> Where the king of Wagadu possessed so much gold that he could adorn his horses and dogs in the metal, his English counterpart was only able to offer a single gold coin in a sincere attempt to avoid God’s judgment, both in his present and afterlife.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>92</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, ed. D. J. Stewart (London: Impensis Societatis, 1848), 245. *Quosdam carcerali poenae, quosdam oculorum, manuum, vel pedum privation addixit.*

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. *Ad monasterium Denique veniens longe a sancto corpore virginis stans marcum auri super altare proiecit, propius accedere non ausus, verebatur sibi a Deo iudicium inferri pro malis quae sui in loco patrauerant.*



The scarcity of gold implied in the *Liber Eliensis*, contrasted so sharply with the excess gold wealth of the king of Wagadu as described by al-Bakri, serves as an exemplar for the Western European experience with gold between approximately 1050 and 1250. In 1054, the North African Almoravids conquered the Sahelian trading entrepôt of Audoghast, inaugurating a series of events that eventually led “to the ruin of Ghana,” culminating with the Almoravids’ sacking of its most significant city Koumbi Saleh in 1076.<sup>94</sup> For nearly two hundred years to follow, West Africa experienced a significant level of political instability. By synthesizing historiography about gold in high medieval West Africa and the Latin West, it is demonstrated that this period saw a severe reduction in the amount of gold exchanged through trans-Saharan trade and, consequently, a decline in the amount of gold available in Western Europe. Between 1050 and 1235, the sort of political security experienced by the king of Wagadu in al-Bakri’s anecdote and, therefrom, the process of accumulating gold is described in Arabic sources with significantly different terms. Similarly, Latin sources from the same period indicate that William and his single marc of gold, the anecdote about which was conspicuously written in the twelfth century (and during the pinnacle the gold famine that events in West Africa created for the Latin West), was shared by many Western European princes and merchants. It was only around 1250 in the Latin West, when Christian polities began to resume minting gold coinage, that the famine ended.

Importantly, the experiences of the Latin West with gold in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries were the consequence of decisions made by historical actors in sub-Saharan Africa. Underlying the evidence and examples to follow—whether it was a twelfth-century English monk writing of a king’s meager oblation of a single gold coin, early

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<sup>94</sup> Raymond Mauny, “The Question of Ghana,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 24, no. 3 (1954): 208.

thirteenth-century Italian merchants developing cashless systems of pay to make up for the lack of physical bullion, or mid thirteenth-century theologians reimagining purgatory to offer those same merchants a path to salvation—were choices by sub-Saharan Africans.

### *Political Instability in High Medieval West Africa*

Documents pertaining to West African history before the nineteenth century are relatively rare and often epistemologically dubious. When using them in analysis, it is necessary to remain mindful that they were overwhelmingly written by devout Muslims and were thus anchored in a religious ideology.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, they were almost always produced thousands of miles away from the locations they were describing, with the authors relying on information obtained from second- or thirdhand accounts.<sup>96</sup> But, in coordination with archeological and sociological studies, these documents provide a foundation to begin reconstructing the far-reaching consequences of political events that occurred in the region during the high Middle Ages. Patterns emerge in the available Arabic sources describing West Africa that both emphasize its great gold wealth and the precarity of the processes involved with the production and exportation of gold.

Following the Muslim conquests of North Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries, Muslim merchants began crossing the Sahara Desert and into West Africa, primarily exchanging life-sustaining salt for gold.<sup>97</sup> As a result, the Kingdom of Wagadu was recognized as far away as Baghdad as “the land of gold” by the early eighth century.<sup>98</sup> Though gold was and continues to be found throughout much of West Africa in small

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<sup>95</sup> Timothy Insoll, “The External Creation of the Western Sahel’s Past: The Use and Abuse of the Arabic Sources,” *Cambridge Archeological Review* (1994): 41.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Gomez, *African Dominion*, 23. This process also led to the gradual spread of Islam in West Africa and its syncretization with indigenous religions.

<sup>98</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, “The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500,” in *History of West Africa*, vol. 1, ed. J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 120.

deposits, most of Wagadu's gold was obtained from the massive gold fields of Bambuk and Bure located in modern-day Senegal and Guinea respectively.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Wagadu's hegemony in the region stemmed not from direct control over these gold mines, but its ability to control the flow of gold from Bambuk into the trading entrepôts along the Sahel grasslands on the southern edge of the Sahara Desert, like the previously mentioned city of Audoghast.<sup>100</sup> By the end of the tenth century, Wagadu was exporting "considerable quantities" of gold and had emerged as a key member of the premodern world economy.<sup>101</sup> Even if the legends about its wealth like those offered by al-Bakri seem unbelievable, Wagadu was in actuality an exemplar medieval West African state, setting terms of trade with trans-Saharan merchants and controlling the flow of gold northward from its southern hinterlands.<sup>102</sup>

There is, however, very little evidence produced contemporaneously that offers an accurate picture of the West African gold mining process, and much of the information about its undertaking has been reconstructed from later sources and modern artisanal gold mining techniques used in the region.<sup>103</sup> Thus, it is known that gold mining in premodern West Africa was performed by "ordinary local farmers"—both men and women—as a "secondary occupation" when they were not farming.<sup>104</sup> Overwhelmingly, miners collected gold through pit mining, and some shafts were excavated twenty meters deep and included lateral tunnels.<sup>105</sup> Mining was therefore undertaken during the annual dry season in the region, from

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<sup>99</sup> Ralph A. Austin, "The Sources of Gold: Narratives, Technology, and Visual Culture from the Mande and Akun Worlds," in *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time*, 64.

<sup>100</sup> Gomez, *African Dominion*, 32.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Spufford, *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 163.

<sup>102</sup> For this paradigm, see François-Xavier Fauvelle and Caroline Robion-Brunner, "Les routes de l'or africain au moyen âge," in *L'Afrique des routes: histoire de la circulation des hommes, des richesses et des idées à travers le continent africain*, ed. Catherine Coquery-Balandier (Paris: Musée du Quai Branly, 2017), 86.

<sup>103</sup> Austin, "The Sources of Gold," 63.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

late January at the earliest and into May, as the mines would otherwise flood with rain water.<sup>106</sup> The entire difficult process did not provide the farmers with any great wealth, but merely acted as a potential source for supplemental income.<sup>107</sup> Most likely, medieval gold mining could only yield “one gram or less per worker per day.”<sup>108</sup> Though farmers acted as miners, it was still a complicated operation requiring “a considerable degree of specialization and coordination” to undertake.<sup>109</sup> Further, it required annual migrations by farmers into especially gold-rich areas in order for the operation to occur.<sup>110</sup> Gold was also mined through the less onerous process of panning alluvial streams but, nevertheless, mining gold in this manner was a “time-consuming” process.<sup>111</sup> Above all, gold was only mined when “it could be fitted into a more complex pattern of political order,” and it was therefore the sort of operation that worked best when the local political situation was stable.<sup>112</sup> To this end, there is some historiographical acknowledgment that periods of “settled government” in both “North Africa and the Western Sudan” corresponded to a “flourishing” of the gold trade.<sup>113</sup>

The stability provided to the region by the hegemony of Wagadu, however, declined dramatically beginning in the late eleventh century. The conquests beginning in 1054 of northern regions under Wagadu control by the Almoravids sent reverberations throughout West Africa and caused the dramatic “demise ... of a kingdom [once] so powerful.”<sup>114</sup> Almoravid supremacy in the region was itself short-lived, however, as its leader Abu Bakr ibn Umar (r. 1056-87) was killed in a battle in 1087 and its North African and Iberian

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<sup>106</sup> Philip D. Curtin, “The Lure of Bambuk Gold,” *Journal of African History* 14, no. 4 (1973): 629.

<sup>107</sup> Austin, “The Sources of Gold,” 64.

<sup>108</sup> Curtin, “The Lure of Bambuk Gold,” 628.

<sup>109</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 46-47.

<sup>110</sup> Austin, “Sources of Gold,” 65.

<sup>111</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 46.

<sup>112</sup> Curtin, “The Lure of Bambuk Gold,” 629.

<sup>113</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 80.

<sup>114</sup> Gomez, *African Dominion*, 38.

holdings were conquered by the North African Almohad dynasty in 1147.<sup>115</sup> Though rough sketches of the era exist, broadly speaking West African history “is little known after 1076.”<sup>116</sup> What is known is that declining Wagadu power meant that “no single people dominated the western Sudan” in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.<sup>117</sup> This created an unstable political environment in West Africa absent a centralizing authority that allowed peoples in the interior of the region to exert their independence.<sup>118</sup> This general trend is confirmed by archeological analysis which demonstrates that the southern Sahel and Inland Niger Delta region witnessed rapid urban decline during this time.<sup>119</sup>

Of the peoples who developed autonomy absent a centralizing authority, the Sosso, located in modern-day western Mali, were the most notable due to their role in the epic of *Sundiata*. It is supposed that the Sosso themselves completed their own conquest of Wagadu in 1203, enslaving its people in the process.<sup>120</sup> The fourteenth-century Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) offered a brief narrative for this period of West African history and its consequences for the region’s stability. According to Ibn Khaldun, “the authority of Ghana waned and its prestige declined as that of the veiled people [meaning the Almoravids and Almohads] ... grew. These extended their domination over the Sudan ... Then the authority of the rulers of Ghana dwindled away, and they were overcome by the Sosso people ... who subjugated and absorbed them.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Letvzion, “The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500,” 130.

<sup>116</sup> Tadeusz Lewicki, “Un État soudanais médiéval inconnu: le royaume de Zāfūn(u),” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 11 (1971): 503. *Après 1076 est peu connue*.

<sup>117</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe*, 164.

<sup>118</sup> Letvzion, “The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500,” 131.

<sup>119</sup> Roderick J. McIntosh and Susan Keech McIntosh, “From *Siècles Obscurs* to Revolutionary Centuries on the Middle Niger,” *World Archeology* 20 (1988): 145.

<sup>120</sup> Mauny, *Les siècles obscurs de l’Afrique noire*, 146-47.

<sup>121</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Book of Examples*, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins, in *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, 333.

While the Sosso had some lasting power, the instability in the region was so great that small, short-lived kingdoms like that of Zafunu were able to carve out “its independence from the conquest of Ghana by the Almoravids.”<sup>122</sup> Zafunu, a largely pastoral society likely located in the southwestern Sahel and whose main city served as a trading entrepôt, offers an intriguing example for this instability.<sup>123</sup> In his geographical work entitled *The Dictionary of Countries*, the thirteenth-century Arab scholar and traveler Yaqut al-Hamawi (1179-1229) described a near-contemporary meeting between a king of Zafunu and an Almohad prince in Marrakesh. Despite ostensibly being under Almohad suzerainty, Yaqut nevertheless observed that

The king of Zafun(u) is more powerful and more versed in the art of ruling than [other West African princes]. And this is the reason for which the [people of] the Veil Wearers [meaning, the Almohads] recognize his superiority, by demonstrating to him their obedience and turning to him [in order to obtain his aid] in case of important affairs of state. One year, while going on pilgrimage to Mecca, this king arrived to the Maghreb, in the realm of the Veil Wearer al-Lamtuni, ‘prince of the Muslims.’ The latter greeted the king on foot while the king of Zafanu did not dismount from his horse [to greet him].<sup>124</sup>

Despite soon after disappearing from the historical record, Zafunu grew to be powerful and independent enough following the decline of Wagadu that its king refused to show even basic courtesy to an Almohad prince while visiting their capital. Though the anecdote may read as remarkable, these sorts of shifting power dynamics between Northwest and West Africa were in fact quite typical in West Africa during the period under consideration.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Lewicki, “Un État soudanais médiéval inconnu,” 504. *Son indépendance par suite de la conquête du Gāna par les Almoravides.*

<sup>123</sup> For the location of Zafunu, see *ibid.*, 510. For the pastoral characteristics of its society, see *ibid.*, 508-9.

<sup>124</sup> Yaqut al-Hamawi, as printed in Lewicki, “Un État soudanais médiéval inconnu,” 504. *Le roi d’az-Zāfūn(u) est plus puissant que ces derniers et plus versé dans l’art de régner. Et c’est la raison pour laquelle les [peuples de] Porteurs du Voile reconnaissent sa supériorité, en lui témoignant leur obéissance et en recourant à lui [pour obtenir son aide] en cas d’importantes affaires d’État. Une année, en allant en pèlerinage à la Mecque, ce roi arriva au Maghreb, chez le Porteur du Voile al-Lamtūni, ‘prince des Musulmans.’ Celui-ci accueillit le roi à pied tandis que le [roi de] Zāfūn(u) ne descendit pas de son cheval [pour le saluer].*

<sup>125</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, “Berber Nomads and Sudanese States: The Historiography of the Desert-Sahel

### *Arabic Sources and the Decline of the Gold Trade*

At the very least, trade routes across the Sahara often changed during this politically unstable time, making Europe's ability to access gold more difficult and unpredictable.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, even scholars skeptical about the extent of the Almoravid and Almohad conquests in West Africa concede that "dislocation at the center reflected in a reduction of Ghanaian influence on the periphery might actually have reduced the flow of gold" during this period.<sup>127</sup> This process—political instability's negative influence on the ability to move gold—is present in the available sources, as well as allusions as to how it reduced the capacity to mine gold in West Africa.

An oral tradition, for example, holds that the reason Wagadu ultimately declined was that an evil snake cursed the region, causing "the cessation of the gold, which moved [outside of the region under Wagadu control] ... and to Bure on the Upper Niger."<sup>128</sup> More contemporary to these events in the twelfth century, the Sicilian geographer al-Idrisi (1100-65) highlighted in his *Book of Roger* the difficulties involved in producing gold. Every August, al-Idrisi wrote, gold was deposited on the island-country of "Wanqara," often

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Interface," in *Islam in West Africa: Religion, Society, and Politics to 1800*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), 5.

<sup>126</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 168; Ashtor, *Les métaux précieux*, 21-22. Neither Spufford nor Ashtor makes the connection that the shifting trade routes may have been a result of political events in West Africa.

Additionally, as Fauvelle and Robion-Brunner note, the control of trading entrepôts—specifically Sijilmasa—was important for North African dynasties in order "to rule Morocco, its expansions into the Sahara, or the Iberian Peninsula." Consequently, nearly concurrent to the period under consideration in this thesis, Sijilmasa itself experienced significant upheaval, going from an independent city-state, to sequentially controlled by the Fatimids, Almoravids, Almohads, and Marinids. See Fauvelle and Robion-Brunner, "Les routes de l'or africain au moyen âge," 89. *Dominer le Maroc et ses extensions au Sahara ou en péninsule Ibérique*.

Beginning around 1100 CE, the Sahara also underwent "a phase of climatic unpredictability" which forced the eventual universal adoption of the camel by Berber traders when crossing the desert, something that also could have temporarily slowed the flow of gold from West to North Africa. For "climatic unpredictability," see Cynthia Becker, "The Sahara as a Cultural Zone," in *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time*, 94.

<sup>127</sup> David Conrad and Humphrey Fisher, "The Conquest That Never Was: Ghana and the Almoravids, 1076. I. The External Arabic Sources," *History in Africa* 9 (1982): 45.

<sup>128</sup> Letvzion, "The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500," 125.

described in Arabic sources simply as “the Island of Gold” and located an eight-day journey from Wagadu, after the “Nile” River flooded it.<sup>129</sup> When the water receded, the inhabitants of Wanqara “return[ed], flocking to that island in search [of gold].”<sup>130</sup> The archeologist Susan McIntosh argues that the region Muslim geographers designated as Wanqara was not understood literally by them to be a gold-producing island but instead a “place where gold was procured for a wider market.”<sup>131</sup> Specifically as it relates to al-Idrisi, McIntosh believes that the geographer was relaying distorted reports about a seasonal trading entrepôt in the Inland Niger Delta region with his description of Wanqara.<sup>132</sup> This interpretation seems to give a little too much credit to al-Idrisi: his topographical knowledge of areas distant from his home of Sicily, whether it was West Africa or Northern France, was quite garbled.<sup>133</sup> Instead, al-Idrisi, like other high medieval Muslim geographers, is best read as providing generalities about the locations he described in his work.<sup>134</sup> At its most skeletal level, his brief passage about Wanqara detailed certain difficulties in the process of obtaining gold, like the temporal limitations of its procurement. And, even if McIntosh’s interpretation is wholly accurate, such a seasonal market as she identifies in al-Idrisi’s passage, facilitated by a long-distance diasporic trading community of Soninke people, would itself have been precarious and easily disrupted in the challenging twelfth-century political climate.<sup>135</sup>

Al-Idrisi’s assertion that an annual overflowing of the Nile River deposited gold on

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<sup>129</sup> Medieval Arabic authors believed the Niger and Senegal rivers were tributaries of the Nile.

<sup>130</sup> Al-Idrisi, *Book of Roger*, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins, in *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, 111.

<sup>131</sup> Susan Keech McIntosh, “A Reconsideration of Wangara/Palolus, Island of Gold,” *Journal of African History* 22, no. 2 (1981): 147.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>133</sup> Mauny, “The Question of Ghana,” 205.

<sup>134</sup> Tixier du Mesnil, “Panorama de la géographie arabe médiévale,” 22.

<sup>135</sup> For the role of the Soninke in the twelfth-century gold trade, see McIntosh, “A Reconsideration of Wangara/Palolus, Island of Gold,” 154.



Wanqara appears to be an amalgamation of preexisting Muslim knowledge about the river and West Africa. Many ancient western traditions relayed in sources later inherited by Muslims, like the work of the Roman author Pliny the Elder (23-79), believed the Niger and Senegal rivers were tributaries of the Nile because exotic fauna like hippopotamuses could be found in both East and West Africa.<sup>136</sup> Further, before the eleventh century, most Muslim intellectuals that wrote on the topic of the Nile adhered to the theory of the Greek author Ptolemy (100-170) that the Nile had its original source at the Mountains of the Moon in East Africa.

The eleventh-century Persian author al-Biruni (973-1048), for example, described how he believed the Nile supplied gold to West Africa in his *Conglomerate Book on the Knowledge of Gems*. When discussing the Nile's source at the Mountains of the Moon, al-Biruni wrote that "These mountains bear gold and are extremely high, so that the force of the water carries down ... big pieces of gold like ingots that resemble carrots."<sup>137</sup> Comparatively, al-Idrisi did not mention carrot-sized gold, and he wrote at a time when it was common among Muslim geographers to believe that a branch of the Nile originated in West Africa rather than that it flowed in that direction.<sup>138</sup> Still, al-Idrisi's remark that all who collected gold in Wanqara, "whether a large or small quantity," were pleased because "both great and

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<sup>136</sup> Robin Seignobos, "L'origine occidentale du Nil dans la géographie latine et arabe avant le XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Orbis disciplinae: hommages en l'honneur de Patrick Gautier Dalché*, ed. Nathalie Bouloux, Anca Dan, and Georges Tolia (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 374.

<sup>137</sup> Al-Biruni, *Conglomerate Book on the Knowledge of Gems*, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins, in *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, 58.

<sup>138</sup> "Seignobos, "L'origine occidentale du Nil," 391-92.

Though believing the Niger and Senegal Rivers were eastward flowing tributaries of the Nile, al-Idrisi's work, including his map of the Nile River, was most often copied by scribes in Alexandria and Cairo. Further, Egyptian intellectuals cited (or cribbed) al-Idrisi's work in their own well into the sixteenth century. See Jean-Charles Ducène, "Les Œuvres géographiques d'al-Idrīsī et leur diffusion," *Journal Asiatique* 305 (2017): 35-36.

small [relied]” on it resonates with al-Biruni’s belief in a gold-soaked Nile.<sup>139</sup> The manner in which gold found its way to West and Northeast Africa, much like the presence of hippopotamuses in both regions, provided a kind of confirmation that the Nile extended laterally across Africa. While this passage appears to hint at knowledge of the alluvial gold mining process, more significant is al-Idrisi’s implicit acknowledgment that gold production in the region was precarious and dependent on numerous external factors. Even though al-Idrisi described the flooding as regularly occurring every year, he still maintained that the amount of gold collected by those who lived in Wanqara ultimately depended on “what God ... [allowed].”<sup>140</sup>

In Muslim sources, West African political turmoil is in fact sometimes described as stemming from a combination of meteorological issues and divine caprice. Writing around 1252, the little-known North African author al-Dardjini reported that in 1179 “a polytheist [king of Mali] ... ruled over a vast realm ... [and] possessed twelve mines, from where they extracted raw gold.”<sup>141</sup> In that year, al-Dardjini continued, a “great famine” occurred, and “the people complained about this tribulation with the king, who ordered that prayers be made for rain ... [but] the rain did not fall!”<sup>142</sup> Finding the power of his gods inadequate, the king requested assistance and instruction on Islam from a Muslim merchant. After “both spent the night making prayers and invocations,” a large cloud of rain appeared and “lasted seven days and seven nights without stopping,” ending the famine, assisting the king, and

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<sup>139</sup> Al-Idrisi, *Book of Roger*, 111.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Al-Dardjini, “La conversion d’un roi de Mālī,” trans. Joseph Cuoq, *Recueil des sources arabs concernant l’Afrique occidentale du VIIIe au XVIe siècle*, ed. and trans. Joseph Cuoq (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975) 471. *Un [roi] polythéiste [de Mali] ... régnait sur un vaste royaume ... [et] possédait 12 mines, d’où on extrayait de l’or brut.*

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. *Grande disette ... Le peuple se plaignait de cette épreuve auprès du roi, qui ordonna de faire des prières pour la pluie ... [mais] la pluie ne tombait pas!*

leading to his and his subjects' conversions to Islam.<sup>143</sup> The details in al-Dardjini's anecdote are quite different from al-Idrisi's, particularly al-Dardjini's explicit reference to a political leader, but an overarching theme emerges in both: the flowing of water or its interruption is directly related to gold wealth. According to al-Idrisi, gold could not be collected in West Africa without a regularly anticipated deluge. Conversely, though as al-Dardjini wrote gold was procured through more standard methods like "mining," an absence of water led to a miniature rebellion, threatening the political order and the king's right to rule over his gold mines. Ironically, if al-Dardjini's anecdote is true, rain falling to such a degree might have made gold mining impossible for that year. But, at its most skeletal level, the passage describes the many different factors that played a role in the procurement of West African gold.

Connections between economic prosperity, conversion to Islam, and the right to rule in medieval West Africa also appears in the seventeenth-century *Tarik al-Sudan*, which records some early oral traditions from the region in the process of describing the ascent of the Songhay Empire. Though the anecdote under consideration concerns actions by a sultan of the gold-trading entrepôt of Djenne at the end of the thirteenth century, the same general concepts appear as in the earlier sources, hinting at broader themes in medieval West African history and helping to solidify interpretations of al-Idrisi's and al-Dardjini's writings. According to the *Tarik's* author Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di (d. after 1655), the sultan of Djenne decided to convert to Islam around 1300. As described in the *Tarik*, "When [the sultan] made up his mind to embrace Islam he ordered that all the Muslim scholars within the city should be assembled ... [then] he made a profession of Islam before them, and told them to call

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid. *Tous les deux passèrent la nuit à faire des prières et des invocations ... Le pluie dura sept jours et sept nuits sans discontinuité.*

upon God Most High to grant the city three things.”<sup>144</sup> After requesting that the scholars ask God to protect foreigners in his city and to encourage immigration into it, the sultan’s final request turned more explicitly economic: the sultan asked “that those who came to trade there should lose patience and grow weary over selling their goods, and so dispose of them cheaply, allowing the people of Djenne to make a profit.”<sup>145</sup> Al-Sa’di concluded the anecdote by noting that the requests “were accepted by God,” and that “their efficacy [could] be observed and witnessed” in his present day.<sup>146</sup>

Though ostensibly a story about the divine rewards conversion to Islam could bring, al-Dardjini’s and al-Sa’di’s anecdotes also utilized tropes found in the al-Idrisi passage about Wanqara: all three emphasize that the health of West African polities with easy access to gold, or at least the vigor of West African economies, was delicate and dependent on a number of external and internal factors. For example, although the area around Djenne itself did not produce gold, its trade did occur in the city. Al-Sa’di’s report that the sultan’s request to God that foreign merchants get the worse end of commercial deals which occurred in Djenne was similar in essence to al-Dardjini’s king praying for rain to fall to end a famine or al-Idrisi’s remark that those who collected gold in Wanqara thanked God for what they procured.<sup>147</sup> In fact, the consistent allusions to religion in the reports of al-Idrisi, al-Dardjini, and al-Sa’di appear to function more as a statement about the precarious nature of rule in the eras they were describing than potential benefits for those who converted to Islam. Generally speaking, medieval Muslim authors who used secondhand sources were hyper conscious

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<sup>144</sup> Al-Sa’di, *Tarik al-Sudan*, trans. John O. Hunwick, in *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sa’di’s Tarik al-Sudan Down to 1613 and Other Contemporary Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 18-19.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Djenne is generally understood now to have experienced significant decline around 1300.

about the deficiencies of those reports.<sup>148</sup> They were also suspicious about the piety of recently converted Muslims in foreign lands, fearful that indigenous religions or non-Islamic customs still present in syncretized religions (like those of West Africa) could lead to recent converts apostatizing.<sup>149</sup> Rather than examples for the faithful to follow, religion is used by the authors in the three reports to show how insecure and tenuous their subjects' successes were: though the West Africans who became Muslims were given divine rewards for doing so, abandoning their faiths would be the end of those rewards. For an author like al-Idrisi or al-Dardjini, this was a conservative message to develop when writing about events they were unable to verify.

It was not until 1235 and the victory by the legendary founder of Mali, Sundiata Kieta (c. 1217-1255), in the battle of Kirina over his personal rival and king of the Sosso, Sumaoro Kante (d. 1235), that the political situation in West Africa began to settle. Indeed, the combined oral and written sources celebrate Sundiata's victory as the end of "a high level of disorder, of chaos" in the region.<sup>150</sup> Much like Zafunu, "the origins of [Mali] were very humble: truly a small chiefdom," and Mali is nearly absent from the available sources prior to the reign of Sundiata.<sup>151</sup> But, because of the lack of a unifying state in the region, Mali developed into an empire and grew to be larger and more centralized than the kingdoms that preceded it. The major innovation that empire brought to the region was direct control of the two major mining grounds of Bambuk and Bure, the discovery of new mines, and control of

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<sup>148</sup> Michaël Cousin, "La perception des minorités religieuses dans la récits des voyageurs musulmans à l'époque médiévale," in *Identité religieuse et minorités: De l'Antiquité au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. François Brizay (Rennes: Presses Universitaires Rennes, 2018), 145.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-51.

<sup>150</sup> Gomez, *African Dominion*, 68.

<sup>151</sup> Mauny, *Les Siècles Obscurs de l'Afrique Noire*, 154. *Les origines de [Mali] furent très humbles: vraisemblablement une petite chefferie.*

the trading entrepôts on the southern Sahel like Timbuktu and Gao.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, the period in which the Empire of Mali was supreme in the region corresponded with “a flourishing time for trade on the Saharan routes.”<sup>153</sup> Archeological data offers confirmation for these developments as it demonstrates that Malian sultans used permanent capitals during their reigns—generally understood as evidence indicating a consistent flow of commercial goods through a region—becoming the first polity to do so since the decline of Wagadu in the mid-eleventh century.<sup>154</sup>

All these developments were at times also reflected less ambiguously in the sources. The fourteenth-century Egyptian historian Shihab al-Umari (1300-84) drew direct links between political upheaval in the region and a decline in the gold trade when describing imperial Mali. “The kings of [this region] have learned by experience,” al-Umari wrote, “that as soon as one of them conquers the gold towns ... the gold there begins to decrease and then disappears while it increases in the neighboring heathen countries.”<sup>155</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, the pinnacle of the West African gold trade was reached explicitly during a time of low conflict.

### *The Gold Famine in the High Medieval Latin West*

West Africa was thus politically unstable between the late eleventh and mid-thirteenth centuries. The available near-contemporaneous written sources and oral traditions indicate that the era’s political instability led to a decline in the production and export of

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<sup>152</sup> Letvzion, “The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500,” 133. For Mali’s control of Goa, see Mamadou Cissé, “Goa, a Middle Niger City in Medieval Trade,” in *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time*, 141.

<sup>153</sup> Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 80.

<sup>154</sup> David C. Conrad, “A Town Called Dakajan: The Sunjata Tradition and the Question of Ancient Mali’s Capital,” *Journal of African History* 35, no. 4 (1994): 360.

<sup>155</sup> Shihab al-Umari, *Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises*, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins, in *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, 262. Though al-Umari was describing West Africa during a period in the fourteenth century in which the Empire of Mali was continuing its program of solidifying control of the region, the anecdote nevertheless describes how gold production could be influenced by political events.

gold. Additionally, sub-Saharan trade routes were also disturbed during this time. These processes appear to be confirmed by the results of metallurgic analyses on Egyptian Fatimid dinars which indicate an over 100% decline in the use of West African gold in the minting of gold coins between the periods of 909-1047 and 1048-1171.<sup>156</sup> This was followed by a further severe debasement of Egyptian dinars during the reign of Saladin (r. 1174-1193) after his capture of Cairo and his establishment of the Ayyubid dynasty.<sup>157</sup> Essentially, polities nearer to West Africa witnessed a decline in their ability to access the region's gold. But, much of the world was dependent on West African gold; the same decline in its trade that effected North Africa and Egypt also had effects on medieval Europe's economy.

As it was, the sustained period of political instability in West Africa corresponded with a period of drastic shortage of precious metals throughout Europe which featured a number of "bullion famines."<sup>158</sup> Precious metals were so relatively scarce during the thirteenth century that some principalities attempted to institute "bullionist" economic policies that legally prohibited the export of precious metals outside of their states' borders.<sup>159</sup> Beginning around 1222 in England, for example, Henry III (r. 1216-72) made the trade and exchange of bullion a royal monopoly, though it most likely was not as successful in practice as he desired.<sup>160</sup> Still, without the importation of precious metals through international trade "not many countries in Europe would have possessed a coinage" at all due

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<sup>156</sup> Ronald A. Messier, "Almoravids: West African Gold and the Gold Currency of the Mediterranean Basin," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17 (1974): 39.

<sup>157</sup> Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz, "The Crisis of Dinar in the Egypt of Saladin," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76, no. 3 (1956): 180-82.

<sup>158</sup> Markus A. Denzel, "The Role of Institutions in Financial Crises: Fairs, Public Banks, Stock Exchanges (13th to 18th Century)," in *The Financial Crises: Their Management, Their Social Implications, and Their Consequences in Pre-Industrial Times*, ed. Giampiero Nigro (Florence: Florence University Press, 2016), 429.

<sup>159</sup> Munro, "The Medieval Origins of the Financial Revolution," 543-44.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 548.

to an absence of domestic mints and mines.<sup>161</sup>

The bullion available in Europe until the mid-thirteenth century was overwhelmingly silver. Though silver had been the standard currency throughout Europe since the reign of Charlemagne (r. 768-814), the “real start of a money economy in western Europe” began in the late tenth century following the exploitation of silver mines in the Harz mountains in Northern Germany.<sup>162</sup> But by the thirteenth century, European silver currencies had greatly deteriorated in purity and weight and were no longer a viable form of payment for large transactions.<sup>163</sup> Instead, what was necessary for international trade was gold currency. As Braudel writes, trade in the Mediterranean would not be possible for Latins without access to “the providential gold of the [Western] Sudan.”<sup>164</sup> This was especially true for trade with the entire Muslim world, in which gold was “the basis of all currency systems” by 1164.<sup>165</sup> Trade between Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean basin during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries followed a general pattern: Christians would transport silver and goods to North Africa and exchange them for gold; Christians would then transport that gold to the Near East and exchange it for luxury wares like spices, silk, and dyes.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Pamela Nightingale, *Trade, Money, and Power in Medieval England* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2007), 370.

<sup>162</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 98.

<sup>163</sup> Lopez, “Back to Gold, 1252,” 219.

<sup>164</sup> Braudel, “Monnaies et civilisations,” 11. *L’Or providential du Soudan*.

Writing about the mid to late fifteenth century, Jacques Heers similarly notes that “One is able to say that, from the point of view of monetary exchanges, the global economy was dominated by the gold of Africa.” See Jacques Heers, “Le Sahara et le commerce méditerranéen à la fin du moyen-âge,” *Annales de l’Institut d’études orientales* 16 (1958): 248. *On peut dire que, du point de vue des échanges monétaires, l’économie mondiale est dominée par l’or d’Afrique*.

<sup>165</sup> Andrew M. Watson, “Back to Gold – and Silver,” *Economic History Review* 20, no. 1 (1967): 4. Numismatic data indicates that Almoravid dinars were the primary gold currency used in the Levant by the Genoese, for example. See Messier, “Almoravids: West African Gold and the Gold Currency of the Mediterranean Basin,” 33.

<sup>166</sup> For trade with North Africa, see Watson, “Back to Gold – and Silver,” 14. For trade with the Near East, see David Abulafia, “Trade and Crusade, 1050-1250” in *Mediterranean Encounters: Economic, Religious, Political, 1100-1550*, ed. David Abulafia (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 15.



For these reasons, beginning with the First Crusade in 1098 crusaders also likely took as much gold with them as possible to the Near East, utilizing treasure hoards and repurposing precious objects crafted with gold, further draining Europe's supply of the metal.<sup>167</sup> Indeed, Latins in the Levant clearly had access to gold, but were forced to use it locally rather than export it to Europe. Many expensive Latin projects in the Near East were paid for with gold. This included both Latin purchases of Cyprus, each costing 100,000 Byzantine bezants, and the ransoming of the army of Louis IX (r. 1226-70) for 800,000 Muslim dinars.<sup>168</sup> Still, a 1962 survey of twelfth- and thirteenth-century crusader coin hoards found only one gold coin compared to over 2000 silver coins, demonstrating the imbalance in available metals to Latins.<sup>169</sup>

Domestically in Europe between 1150 and 1250 gold held a similar monetary value, priced approximately nine or ten times its weight in silver.<sup>170</sup> However, the very few gold coins minted in Christian Europe during the first half of the thirteenth century—as well the relatively few gold coins that reached Europe from the Byzantine Empire—were of poor quality or reputation.<sup>171</sup> For example, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily Frederick II (r. 1198-1250) had enough gold to begin minting augustals—coins imitating imperial Roman issues—in 1231. The coins were nevertheless considered to be of low quality

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<sup>167</sup> Watson, "Back to Gold – and Silver," 7. Though not considering the concurrent political situation in West Africa, Watson locates this process as the cause of the high medieval gold famine. But his own analysis seems to serve as further evidence of a reduced amount of West African gold during this period, as he concedes that "a greater part of the gold used by the crusaders [meaning, those already established in the Near East] ... seems to have been of eastern origin." See *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>170</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 178.

<sup>171</sup> Lopez, "Back to Gold," 219. New bezants stopped being minted following the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, only to be resumed (in much lower quality form) in the 1220s. See B. J. Cook, "The Bezant in Angevin England," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 159 (1999): 273.

throughout Europe.<sup>172</sup> Even in Sicily there appears to have been hesitancy to use augustals, necessitating Frederick's deployment of strong-arm tactics on his subjects to enforce his monetary policy. The thirteenth-century chronicler Richard of San Germano (1165-1244) recorded how this process worked in his city. Richard noted that in 1232 "one Thomas from Pando, citizen of Scala, brought to San Germano the new gold coin, called the augustal, to be distributed through out the entire abbey and San Germano, so that men may use this coin in their buying and selling, according to the value for it by imperial foresight."<sup>173</sup> As the chronicler noted, that "imperial foresight" also included forethought about the coin's potential unpopularity, because failure to use coins would bring persons "under the penalty to persons and goods recorded in" a letter from the emperor "that the said Thomas brought" at the same time he distributed the augustals.<sup>174</sup> Though freshly minted, the reputation and quality of augustals were such that Frederick had to impel his subjects to use them under threat of law. It is no surprise then that to facilitate large-scale and international trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Latin Europe depended on, and preferred, gold currencies minted beyond its borders.

Of the gold currencies in circulation in Europe between the twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries, the preferred denominations were minted with West African gold.<sup>175</sup> Gold coins minted with West African gold took circuitous routes to the Latin West,

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<sup>172</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 176.

<sup>173</sup> Richard of San Germano, *Chronicle*, in *Quellenbuch zur Münz- und Geldgeschichte des Mittelalters*, ed. Wilhelm Jesse (Lubeck: Scienta Verlag Aalen, 1983), 84. *Quidam Thomas de Pando civis Scalensis novam monetam auri que augustalis dicitur ad Sanctum Germanum detulit distribuendam per totam abbatiam et per Sanctum Germanum, ut ipsa moneta utantur homines in emptionibus et venditionibus suis, iuxta valorem ei ab imperiali providentia constitutum.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* *Sub pena personarum et rerum in imperialibus litteris quas idem Thomas detulit annotate.*

<sup>175</sup> Messier, "Almoravids: West African Gold and the Gold Currency of the Mediterranean Basin," 33. As Messier notes, this reputation about West African gold—specifically that which was minted into Almoravid dinars—even existed in twelfth-century China, where mercantile documents noted their high quality. See *ibid.*, 34.

predominately through trade with Christian and Islamic states in Iberia, and Islamic states in North Africa and the Levant. Genoese mercantile history in the high Middle Ages demonstrates this preference for African gold. Beginning in the twelfth century, Genoese ships explored the western Moroccan coast searching for direct access to West African gold.<sup>176</sup> In the beginning of the thirteenth century, supposedly pure West African *pailoa* gold was mentioned with increasing frequency in Genoese notarial documents.<sup>177</sup> Other Genoese documents began to distinguish between debased Sicilian gold coins and gold coins minted with *pailoa*.<sup>178</sup> And, specifically to have direct access to West African gold, in the first half of the thirteenth century the Fieschi banking family of Genoa began investing in trade with the port city of Safi on the western Moroccan coast, which at the time served as the southern terminus for Saharan trade caravans.<sup>179</sup> This Latin preference for African gold is also reflected in the popular literature of the era. In a thirteenth-century Sicilian poem, a young man desperately in love brags to his desired about his vast treasure of lower quality augustals. He is rebuked, however, by the woman he is pursuing who tells him that she is worthy only of Almohad gold, meaning that she considers herself as high quality as a foreign gold coin, not the ersatz ones minted by Frederick II.<sup>180</sup> Within the boundaries of Latin Europe, however, the bullion shortages of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—

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<sup>176</sup> Robert Sabatino Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 112.

<sup>177</sup> Ashtor, *Les métaux précieux*, 24.

<sup>178</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 170.

<sup>179</sup> Lopez, “Back to Gold,” 231.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

There is some irony that Muslim coins minted with West African gold had such a high reputation: they were often of lower quality than Muslim coins minted with Asiatic or East African gold. West African gold truly was and is of a higher natural purity, approximately 92% pure even when raw. Comparatively, East African or Asiatic gold is naturally 80% pure. This high purity of West African gold, therefore, allowed minters confidence to produce coins without first refining the metal, leading to coins that were often only 92% fine, while minters who used East African or Asiatic gold would often refine it first, producing coins with higher gold content. For discussion about this process, see Messier, “Almoravids: West African Gold,” 37.

corresponding with periods of political instability in West Africa—appear to have included foreign gold coins as well, making gold “no more than a rare and particularly highly-valued and desirable commodity.”<sup>181</sup>

### *The Example of England*

The lack of a presence of gold coins during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in England offers a helpful paradigm to demonstrate the scarcity of gold throughout Europe. Gold coins were occasionally minted upon request in early medieval England, like when a king or bishop wanted to reward their followers with special gifts, but the practice ended in the mid-eleventh century during the reign of Edward the Confessor (r. 1042-66).<sup>182</sup> Some chronicles also indicates that there was gold available in the country during the reign of Henry I (r. 1100-35), but more generally speaking “the amount of gold entering England ... declined in the second half [of the twelfth century] and still further by its end and into the thirteenth century.”<sup>183</sup> In governmental documents, references to Almoravid or Almohad dinars—known as “obli de Musc” in English records—only appear three times between 1190 and 1238.<sup>184</sup> As of 2014, only eight Muslim or imitation Muslim gold coins minted in Iberia and dating to between the twelfth and mid-thirteenth centuries have been discovered in

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<sup>181</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 176.

<sup>182</sup> Mark Blackburn, “Gold in England During the ‘Age of Silver’ (Eighth to Eleventh Centuries),” in *Silver Economy in the Viking Age*, ed. James Graham-Campbell and Gareth Williams (New York: Routledge, 2007), 61-65.

<sup>183</sup> For the presence of gold in England during the reign of Henry I, see Marion M. Archibald, “Islamic and Christian Gold Coins from Spanish Mints Found in England, Mid-Eleventh to Mid-Thirteenth Centuries,” in *Early Medieval Monetary History: Studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn*, ed. Rory Naismith, Martin Allen, and Elina Screen (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 388. For its absence in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, see *ibid.*, 394.

<sup>184</sup> Philip Grierson, “Obli de Musc,” *The English Historical Review* 66 (1951): 75-76. Containing approximately 2.3 grams of gold per coin, obli de Musc were “relatively small gold coins.” See Philip Grierson, “Muslim Coins in Thirteenth-Century England,” in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy, and History: Studies in Honor of George Miles*, ed. George Carpenter Miles and Dickran Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), 387.

archaeological sites in England.<sup>185</sup> Additionally, no gold hoards dating to this period have been located in England.<sup>186</sup> This lack of dinars and imitation dinars in England puzzles numismatists and economic historians alike, with one remarking that “an explanation is still required to account for [their] absence.”<sup>187</sup> As a consequence, the monetary history of England during these centuries is easily reconstructed, and “it is usually accepted that there was relatively little money apart from that represented by the English silver coinage.”<sup>188</sup>

Due to their scarcity because of West African political events, if gold coins served any sort of social and cultural role in England before the mid-thirteenth century, it was largely performative. Though debts were often recorded in the Pipe Rolls as being owed to the government in Byzantine gold bezants, from the mid-twelfth century forward those debts were recorded as being paid with silver instead.<sup>189</sup> Only Jewish money lenders and merchants were expected to pay their debts and fees in gold, likely because they had greater access to gold coins.<sup>190</sup> A single bezant also had ceremonial roles in high medieval England, exchanged to conclude assorted contracts.<sup>191</sup> A register from Old St. Paul’s Cathedral dating to 1295 describes a similar ceremonial role for foreign gold coins as gifts to churches, one that resonates with William the Conqueror’s use of a marc of gold at the shrine of

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<sup>185</sup> Archibald, “Islamic and Christian Gold Coins from Spanish Mints,” 379.

<sup>186</sup> Martin Allen, “Coin Finds and the English Money Supply, c. 973-1544,” in *Money, Prices, and Wages: Essays in Honor of Professor Nicholas Mayhew*, ed. Martin Allen and D’Maris Coffman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 15-19.

<sup>187</sup> Archibald, “Islamic and Christian Gold Coins from Spanish Mints Found in England,” 394.

<sup>188</sup> Paul Latimer, “Money and the English Economy in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” *History Compass* 9, no. 4 (2011): 248.

<sup>189</sup> Cook, “The Bezant in Angevin England,” 258-59. Cook interprets the available evidence to mean that physical bezants were used when they are recorded in English documents. Contextualized within the evidence offered in this thesis, however, the use of “bezant” in high medieval English documents was almost certainly as a kind of money of account. As Cook concedes, “bezant” could also serve as shorthand for two shillings. Ultimately, he further concedes that his broader argument “is impossible to prove.” For the bezant’s equivalent in shillings, see *ibid.*, 262. For Cook’s concession about his argument, see *ibid.*, 264.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

Etheldreda. At the time of the register's production, St. Paul's feretory of St. Lawrence was "with four golden rings attached, and with one maravedí [a Spanish dinar or imitation dinar], and two gold obli de Musc, similarly attached."<sup>192</sup> The register also records that this practice was done to the church's feretory of St. Ethelbert, as "on one side, ten obli de Musc, and two rings of gold are attached."<sup>193</sup> Comparable charitable uses of gold coins existed among the aristocracy as well, and it was a common practice of Henry III to distribute Muslim gold coins in displays of public almsgiving.<sup>194</sup> Among the general population, brass replicas of dinars were worn as talismanic brooches.<sup>195</sup>

*The Latin West's Relationship with Gold After Sundiata's Victory at Kirina*

This relationship to gold in Western Europe changed dramatically in the mid-thirteenth century, corresponding with the emergence of the Empire of Mali in 1235 and the increase in gold exported from the region that logically followed. For example, the Kingdom of Castile—perhaps owing to established links to West Africa via Iberian Muslim states—began minting a gold coin in 1240, though they failed to take hold in Europe.<sup>196</sup> More significantly, the Italian merchant republics of Genoa and Florence had enough gold (and access to gold) by 1252 for both to mint their own pure gold currencies that year, the genovino and florin respectively.<sup>197</sup> In 1284, Venice followed the lead of Genoa and Florence and also began minting gold ducats, and "one state after another [in Europe] followed suit in introducing new gold coins."<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> "1295 Register of St. Paul's," in William Dugdale, *History of Saint Paul's Cathedral* (London, 1818), 313-14. *Cum quatuor annulis aureis affixis, et uno marbodino, et duobus obolis de Marchia aureis, similiter affixis.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 314. *Affiguntur in una parte x. oboli de Marchia, et duo annuli aurei.*

<sup>194</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 183-84

<sup>195</sup> Allen, "Coin Finds and the English Money Supply," 386.

<sup>196</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe*, 169.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 176. The processes attendant with this resumption of minting gold coins are described in detail in part II of this thesis.

<sup>198</sup> For Venice's minting of gold coins, see *ibid.*, 178. For the minting of gold coins by other states, see Lopez,

These trends are clear in England. Where earlier in the century gold had been exceedingly rare, the greatest amount of obli de Musc coins appear in Henry III's wardrobe records for 1244.<sup>199</sup> In fact, beginning in the 1240s, enough gold was in circulation that Henry began accumulating it with increasing intensity to fund various proposed international projects, like a crusade in the Near East and an invasion of Sicily.<sup>200</sup> Rather than accept silver as the payment for fees as had been custom earlier in his reign, in the late 1240s Henry began insisting on gold as payment.<sup>201</sup> In the years of 1251 and 1252, in fact, the total percentage of fees paid in gold were 83% and 98% respectively, where even in 1250 the percentage was a meager 8.3%.<sup>202</sup> And, Henry had so much gold available to him by 1257 that he began minting his own gold coins.<sup>203</sup> This project was, however, a disaster, and Henry's flooding his country with gold severely devalued the metal.

The thirteenth-century *Chronicle of Mayors and Sheriffs of London* offers an humorous anecdote demonstrating how rapidly the circumstances surrounding gold changed in England. As the *Chronicle* noted, Henry summoned the mayor and citizens of London to his court in 1257 to ask, "whether or not, according to their conscience ... [his] coin would be useful and for the common benefit of his kingdom."<sup>204</sup> The citizens, "having taken counsel and consulted among themselves, came before the king saying that great financial harm could

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"Back to Gold," 223. Perhaps also indicating a greater availability of gold in Europe, the late-thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed innovations in Latin goldsmithing, like the application of translucent enamel and the use of water-powered polishing mills. See Vavra, "*Ich Goldtschmid mach köstliche Ding*," 280-81.

<sup>199</sup> Grierson, "Obli de Musc," 77. Grierson, who earlier in his article states that "in 1238 Henry III seems to have become suddenly aware of the existence of obli de Musc," hypothesizes these coins were meant to be melted down and used in the creation of a new shrine for the relics of Edward the Confessor. For Grierson's comments about Henry's potential ignorance about gold coinage, see *ibid.*, 76.

<sup>200</sup> D. A. Carpenter, "The Gold Treasure of King Henry III," *Thirteenth-Century England* 1 (1985): 61.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>202</sup> These figures are adapted from data provided in Carpenter, "The Gold Treasure of Henry III," 67.

<sup>203</sup> Lopez, "Back to Gold," 252.

<sup>204</sup> *Chronicle of Mayors and Sheriffs of London*, in *Quellenbuch zur Münz- und Geldgeschichte des Mittelalters*, 86. *Secundum conscientiam eorum si ... [sua] moneta foret utilis at commune commodum regni sui an non.*

come to his kingdom by this coin, and chiefly to the poor of his kingdom,” particularly because many of their “chattels are not worth a single gold coin.”<sup>205</sup> And, due to the greater quantities of gold available, the citizens complained that “gold leaf, which always used to be worth ten marks, is now worth only nine or eight marks.”<sup>206</sup>

Comparing West African political history with European economic history makes it clear that the cause for the emergence of gold currencies in Latin Europe was the stabilization that the founding of the Empire of Mali brought to West Africa. This link, however, has not yet been made in the historiography of either subject. There is acknowledgement that during the fifteenth century and on the eve of the Columbian exchange, Genoa, Florence, and Venice received the majority of their gold through trade with North Africa.<sup>207</sup> Additionally, there is an acknowledgment in historiography concerning money in medieval Europe that “monetary history must always have a place in explanations of economic and social change,” but the broad view necessary to draw these connections between West Africa and Europe in the high Middle Ages has not been applied.<sup>208</sup> This includes the foundational work of historiography on the transition to gold currencies in 1252 by Lopez. In the work, Lopez remarks that “the economic and political circumstances that brought one European mint after another back to gold have not yet been fully determined.”<sup>209</sup> As a solution, Lopez proposes that Florence and Genoa began to import gold from newly opened mines in Central Europe.<sup>210</sup> But Lopez also notes that the total annual amount of gold

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid. *Habito consilio et colloquio inter se venerunt coram rege dicentes quod per illam monetam posset magnum dampnum pervenire regno suo et maxime pauperibus regni sui, quorum plurimorum catalla non valent unum aureum.*

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. *Aurum de folio, quod semper solebat valere decem marcas, nunc non valet nisi novem marcas vel octo.*

<sup>207</sup> Marian Malowist, “Quelques observations sur le commerce de l’or dans le Soudan occidental au moyen âge,” *Annales* 25, no. 6 (1970): 1630.

<sup>208</sup> Nightingale, *Trade, Money, and Power in Medieval England*, 389.

<sup>209</sup> Lopez, “Back to Gold,” 220.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 233.



collected from those mines circa 1252 was approximately 200 pounds.<sup>211</sup> By applying world systems theory—and fully appreciating Latin Europe’s place in the thirteenth-century global economy—an explanation begins to appear. It is estimated, for example, that gold production in West Africa reached unprecedented levels beginning in the mid-thirteenth century; compared to a paltry 200 pounds being mined in Central Europe, West African mines were exporting northward as much as 3300 pounds annually.<sup>212</sup>

*Sundiata Keita’s Invention of Latin Purgatory*

Periods of political instability and stability in West Africa during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, then, directly correspond to periods of bullion scarcity and plenitude in Latin Europe. This comparative approach confirms that the period of West African history between the decline of Wagadu and the rise of Mali saw a reduction in the export of gold into international markets. Furthermore, these shared fates of two distant regions incontrovertibly demonstrate that West Africa was a member of the high medieval world system. More importantly, it was choices made by West African historical actors that upset both the world system and material conditions in the Latin West. But, as application of actor-network theory forces one to appreciate, there were many more consequences beyond the immediate availability of gold.

There exists an understanding that the bullion shortage shaped contemporaneous European economic developments because “long-term fluctuations in the supply of coin influenced the broad, expansionary, and deflationary phases in the economy of medieval Europe and contributed to the structural change that accompanied them.”<sup>213</sup> Thus, to fully

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Curtin, “Africa and the Wider Monetary World,” 240.

<sup>213</sup> Nightingale, *Trade, Money, and Power in Medieval England*, 387.

situate West Africa and Europe within the same networks of connections, the way in which these developments in the region influenced the Latin West's culture and society must also be considered. As described above, the lack of West African gold in Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did have some obvious cultural effects, from similes employed in Sicilian love poems to brass brooches worn in England. But the shortage was so severe—and West Africa's role in medieval Europe's world system so great—that more profound consequences for European cultural and social life can be deduced. Indeed, because of its effect on the European economy, the political instability in West Africa from the twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century can also be attributed as a direct cause of economic innovations concerning credit in Europe and the widespread antagonism against usury that new forms of credit inspired.

The history of money lending in Europe predates the twelfth century, but merchants were given new impetuses to develop innovative sources of capital and cashless payment systems beginning in that century because of the bullion shortage.<sup>214</sup> As the historian Jacques Heers notes, these developments specifically “allowed” merchants and bankers “to economize metal pieces.”<sup>215</sup> To this end, “settlement and payment techniques that did not require the use of currency” were present at “all” high medieval trade fairs.<sup>216</sup> Credit was necessary at these fairs to facilitate the exchange of goods for most individuals, who did not have immediate access to cash.<sup>217</sup> Further, to protect their limited bullion, Italian merchants developed the concept of a “bill of exchange” in the latter half of the twelfth century,

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<sup>214</sup> Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages*, 72.

<sup>215</sup> Heers, “Le Sahara et le commerce méditerranéen à la fin du moyen-âge,” 249. *Qui permettaient d'économiser les pièces métalliques*.

<sup>216</sup> Denzel, “The Role of Institutions in Financial Crises,” 430.

<sup>217</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 53.

allowing the transfer of funds from one party to another without the use of cash.<sup>218</sup> Large Italian merchant companies could not reasonably operate (and thus act as trade intermediaries between the Mediterranean and northwestern Europe) without “a continuous flow of payments back and forth” in the form of bills of exchange.<sup>219</sup> This dramatically increased the amount of capital available for interregional commerce in Europe.<sup>220</sup> By the beginning of the thirteenth century, “the letter of exchange became the most widely used instrument of credit” in part because “its advantages to hide interest charges became more obvious.”<sup>221</sup> Additionally, continuous public debt emerged in Italy during the mid-twelfth century and became widespread by the thirteenth century.<sup>222</sup> These novel systems of exchange that emerged around the beginning of the thirteenth century were so dispersed and innovative that they are considered fundamental to the ‘commercial revolution’ that occurred during the European Middle Ages.<sup>223</sup> These developments were so sophisticated and innovative, arising in reaction to the lack of gold exported from West Africa, that they are also in part credited with spurring a golden age of scientific learning in the fourteenth century as natural philosophers were often required to interact with them in their daily lives.<sup>224</sup>

Though operating in the same world system as Mediterranean Muslim and Jewish merchants, these were uniquely Latin innovations reacting to the specific circumstances of the European bullion famines. Twelfth-century Cairo genizah documents, for example, produced in a location that received gold from both West and East, record the practice of

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<sup>218</sup> Munro, “The Medieval Origins of the Financial Revolution,” 543.

<sup>219</sup> Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages*, 104.

<sup>220</sup> Peter Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1986), xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>221</sup> Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages*, 104.

<sup>222</sup> Munro, “The Medieval Origins of the Financial Revolution,” 514.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>224</sup> Joel Kaye, “The Impact of Money on the Development of Fourteenth-Century Scientific Thought,” *Journal of Medieval History* 14, no. 3 (1988): 254.

traveling with bags of cash to pay for goods.<sup>225</sup> In North Africa, where the amount of available gold would also have been reduced but still much greater than that available in Western Europe, Malakite juridical proscriptions completely prohibited the use of non-usurious forms of cashless pay.<sup>226</sup>

These Latin innovations were also developed during a sustained period of intense and sophisticated anti-usury campaigns conducted by clerical figures in Latin Europe.<sup>227</sup> In earlier centuries money was attacked on moral grounds with “notably irrational” language, like the trope of money being akin to excrement.<sup>228</sup> But, these arguments were much more nuanced by the end of the twelfth century as scholastics and theologians became hyper-focused on the subject of money.<sup>229</sup> Writing in the 1190s, for example, the Parisian canon lawyer and future cardinal Robert Courçon (c. 1160-1219) declared that “usury is to be permitted under no circumstance and laws which allow it have not been canonized.”<sup>230</sup> Despite this sweeping declaration, Courçon still found certain applications of usury acceptable, like when it was done to perform a good deed. To this end, Courçon noted that “[Saint] Jerome said, ‘It is better that your treasure be exposed to interest on a loan than a poor person to a storm,’” and that “blessed Paula accepted interest so that she might feed the poor.”<sup>231</sup> But, Courçon still believed that usury was dangerous, and described this danger in

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<sup>225</sup> Eliahu Ashtor, “Banking Instruments Between the Muslim East and the Christian West,” *Journal of European Economic History* 3, no. 1 (1973): 566.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

<sup>227</sup> Munro, “The Medieval Origins of the Financial Revolution,” 507.

<sup>228</sup> Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 178.

<sup>229</sup> Gérard Sivéry, “La notion économique de l’usure selon saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue du Nord* 86 (2004): 700.

<sup>230</sup> Robert Courçon, *De Usura*, in *Le traité “De Usura” de Robert de Courçon*, ed. and trans. Georges Lefèvre (Lille: l’Université de Lille, 1902), 11. Lefèvre’s edition has both a Latin and French version of *De Usura*. The English translations in this paper are my own using the Latin version. *In nullo casu permittenda est usura et leges qui eam permittunt non sunt canonizatae*.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. *Ait Hieronymus, ‘Melius est ut thesaurus tuus exponatur ad usuram quam pauper ad imbrem ... beata Paula accepit usuram ut pasceret pauperes.*

metaphorical terms. “Just as, when a very beautiful girl passes through the village and you are drawn into sin,” he wrote, “this is not to be charged to her passing by but to you.”<sup>232</sup>

Compared to earlier centuries, there is much nuance here: it was the conscious decision to be greedy through usury, according to Courçon, that was sinful.

The writings of Courçon and other scholastics, however, did not deter moneylenders. In fact, the relationship between new types of money lending and cultural hostility towards usury was reciprocal; increased money lending meant increased hostility and new regulations against usury, which itself spurred the development of new forms of technically non-usurious credit.<sup>233</sup> Thus, part of the reason bills of exchange were invented was to facilitate “legal usury” by disguising interest rates in exchange rates.<sup>234</sup> Concurrently in Northern Europe, *rente* contracts, which were a kind of mortgage, began to be employed to similar ends and for similar reasons.<sup>235</sup> And, even though princes enacted laws against usury, loans were necessary for most thirteenth-century governments to remain solvent.<sup>236</sup> Though the papacy issued new decrees against usury at the Third Lateran Council in 1179, the practice remained so widespread—in part thanks to emerging forms of innovative money lending—that in 1208 Innocent III (r. 1198-1216) requested in correspondence to the Bishop of Arras that he not enforce rules against usurers because there were so many of them that it would cause

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 19, 21. *Sicut si pulcherrima virgine transeunte per vicum, scandalizaris in ejus formam, hoc non ei transeunti sed tibi imputandum est.*

<sup>233</sup> Munro, “The Medieval Origins of the Financial Revolution,” 506. As Hans-Jörg Gilomen notes, even in the present-day businesspeople are quite apt at finding legal solutions for seemingly “*verbotene*” economic goals. See Hans-Jörg Gilomen, “Christlicher Glaube und Ökonomie des Kredits im Spätmittelalter,” in *Ökonomische Glaubensfragen: Strukturen und Praktiken jüdischen und christlichen Kleinkredits im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Gerhard Fouquet and Sven Rabeler (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018), 122.

<sup>234</sup> Munro, “The Medieval Origins of the Financial Revolution,” 545.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 518. In 1251, most *rente* contracts were declared non-usurious by Innocent IV (r. 1243-54). See *ibid.*, 523.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 514.

churches to shut down for a lack of parishioners.<sup>237</sup> Courçon even anticipated such potential issues. Rhetorically, Courçon wrote that

when moneylenders everywhere offer to build churches entirely or in part from usury, such as windows, or dormitories, or hermitages, or hospitals, or leper houses, one must ask what the bishop who has the ability to demolish these is to do, when it has been established unto him that all such are from usury. Does he not understand that temples of this sort are just like temples of Baal? Therefore, how can those who live there have a pure conscience knowing that these are tabernacles of sinners and have been built from sins, and that in them they scarcely eat anything except from robbery?<sup>238</sup>

The solution Courçon offered was a little more extreme than Innocent's to the Bishop of Arras:

It does not seem to us that such great destruction can be purged completely except by the convocation of a general council of all bishops and princes under the lord pope, where the Church and princes together might proclaim to all under the pain of excommunication and condemnation that anyone might labor either spiritually or physically and that each one might eat his own bread, that is, [the fruit] of his labor. So that, just as the Apostle commanded, there might be no meddling or lazy ones among us. And in this way all usurers and rebels and thieves might be removed, and alms could be given and the fabric of churches built, and all things would thus be brought back to a pristine condition.<sup>239</sup>

These concerns were necessarily central for theologians like Courçon. In fact, no institution depended quite as much on usury as the papacy which utilized Italian merchants, bankers, and their innovative systems of pay to transfer funds "from and to the remotest corners of

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<sup>237</sup> Francesco L. Galassi, "Buying a Passport to Heaven: Usury, Restitution, and the Merchants of Medieval Genoa," *Religion* 22 (1992): 314.

<sup>238</sup> Courçon, *De Usura*, 35. *Cum foeneratores passim offerant ecclesiis, construendo eas totas vel in parte de foenore, ut vitreas vel dormitoria, vel eremitoria vel hospitalia aut domos leprosorum, quaeritur quid faciat praelatus qui habet potestatem diruendi haec, cum constiterit ei quod talia sunt ex foenore. Nonne intelligit quod hujus modi templa sunt tanquam templa Baal? Quomodo ergo possunt ibi viventes habere mundam conscientiam scientes quod haec sunt tabernacula peccatorum et ex peccatis constructa, et quod in illis vix aliqua comedunt nisi ex rapina.*

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.* *Non videtur nobis quod tanta perniciēs plene possit purgari nisi convocato generali concilio omnium episcoporum et principum sub domino papa, ubi Ecclesia simul et Principes indicerent omnibus sub poena excommunicationis et condemnationis ut quilibet laboraret aut spiritualiter aut corporaliter, et ut unusquisque panem suum, id est sui laboris manducaret [sicut praecepit Apostolus] et ne aliqui essent curiosi aut otiosi inter nos. Et sic tollerentur omnes foeneratores et seditiosi et raptores, et sic possent fieri eleemosynae et fabrica ecclesiarum, et omnia sic reducerentur ad pristinum statum.*

Europe.”<sup>240</sup>

By the thirteenth century the situation became untenable for the Church. New theologies about confession were developed in reaction to merchants’ use of new financial instruments, especially usury.<sup>241</sup> Highly specific definitions for what type of quasi-usurious economic actions were not *actually* usury, like those developed by Raymond of Pennaforte (ca. 1175-1275), began to be theorized.<sup>242</sup> Though their methods involved the exploitation of others, canonists began to discuss merchants as being central to the functioning of society and casuist theological positions were developed for their trade.<sup>243</sup> Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) developed a similar argument, writing that merchants could make profit through various means if they were not exploitative and if it served a communal good.<sup>244</sup> And, at the council of Lyon in 1274, purgatory was officially defined in part to offer money lenders a way to continue practicing their socially necessary sin without fearing eternal damnation.<sup>245</sup> Though, as demonstrated above, there was more physical money in circulation in medieval Europe by the time the council of Lyon took place, medieval creditors felt more confident lending money with the additional physical money available because it meant a greater likelihood that they would receive a return on their loan.<sup>246</sup> So, while the bullion shortage necessitated both the broader use of money lending and the development of innovative methods to loan money in Latin Europe during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the influx of African

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<sup>240</sup> Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages*, 104.

<sup>241</sup> Jacques Le Goff, “Au moyen age: temps de l’Eglise et temps du marchand,” *Annales* 15, no. 3 (1960): 429, 431.

<sup>242</sup> Gilomen, “Christlicher Glaube und Ökonomie des Kredits im Spätmittelalter,” 133-34.

<sup>243</sup> Hans-Georg Hermann, “Eigennutz und Übervorteilung: kanonistische Sichtweisen auf eine prekäre Optimierungsstrategie im Vertrag,” in *Der Einfluss der Kanonistik auf die europäische Rechtskultur*, ed. Orazio Condorelli, Franck Roumy, Mathias Schmoeckel (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 210.

<sup>244</sup> Sivéry, “La notion économique de l’usure selon saint Thomas d’Aquin,” 701.

<sup>245</sup> Galassi, “Buying a Passport to Heaven,” 313.

<sup>246</sup> Nicholas Mayhew, “Modelling Medieval Monetisation,” in *A Commercialising Economy: England 1086 to c. 1300*, ed. Richard Hugh Britnell and Bruce M. S. Campbell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 67.

gold into Europe after the founding of the Empire of Mali helped give creditors confidence when loaning money, which itself propelled further usury.

### *Conclusion*

A recapitulation of the arguments presented thus far is necessary: West Africa was politically unstable between the late eleventh and early thirteenth centuries; the available sources indicate this period of instability had a negative effect on the West African gold trade; this led to an era of extreme gold shortage in the Latin West; the lack of bullion necessitated the widespread use of credit in Europe, which had long-term cultural consequences like the Church officially defining Purgatory in 1274 to allow money lenders a way into heaven, and—even if obliquely—Dante’s eventual placement of usurers in his seventh circle of hell. Additionally, the establishment of the Empire of Mali in the mid-thirteenth century brought stability to West Africa and led to an increase in the amount of gold reaching Europe. This both brought about the minting of gold coins in the Latin West and gave money lenders the confidence to offer more credit, spurring further anti-usury sentiments.

The relative lack of available sources concerning West Africa from the late eleventh to mid-thirteenth centuries presents difficulties when attempting to reconstruct political events from the era and their consequences on the gold trade. Similarly, as the corpus of historiography on the use of gold in Latin Europe emphasizes time and again, there are apparent difficulties explaining the causes of Western Europe’s gold shortage during the same period of time and the Latin West’s decision to return to gold currencies around 1250. But, imagining the Latin West and West Africa as participants in a Western European/Trans-Saharan world system offers explanations for both phenomena: the lack of gold in Europe



during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries indicates a concurrent decline in gold production in West Africa; additionally, Europe's minting of gold currencies demonstrates an increase in the production of West African gold. This also confirms that high medieval Latin Europe shared a world system with West Africa because "if distant parts of Afro-Eurasia experience economic expansions and contractions nearly simultaneously, that would be evidence that they participate in the same world system."<sup>247</sup>

With this understood, the further application of actor-network theory reveals the ways in which these interconnectivities between West Africa and Western Europe had larger consequences. High medieval merchants, the members of the Church that helped define purgatory in 1274, and Dante writing in Florence in the early fourteenth-century shared multiple, non-temporally-limited networks and nodes of contact with Sundiata, and the latter's victory at Kirina sent massive reverberations through them.

Poetically, this idea is expressed in one version of the epic of *Sundiata*. As this version relays, Sundiata Keita was weak as a child and could not stand or walk. However, when he was seven years old, he was given a kingly scepter made of thin reed and gained the ability to walk, foreshadowing his right to rule. After Sundiata gained the ability to walk, his personal *jeli* celebrated by playing his balafon and singing the following prophetic verse: "You have come bringing joy to the world. Sundiata has come to make the world happy. You have come bringing joy to the world."<sup>248</sup> This is remarkably close to the truth. Thousands of miles away, through Sundiata's founding of the Empire of Mali in 1235, he significantly influenced European culture and society. But he was not unique in this regard and was only one of many West Africans during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries that had a

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<sup>247</sup> Frank and Gills, "The Five Thousand Year World System in Theory and Praxis," 5.

<sup>248</sup> Ed., Roland Bertol, *Sundiata: The Epic of the Lion King* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1970), 51.

similar effect on the Latin West. The decisions by polities like that of the Sosso or Zafanu to exert independence, or peasants refusing to participate in seasonal gold mining like those mentioned in al-Umari's anecdote, all played crucial roles in these historical processes.

## Part II: Gold and Economic Imperialism in the Mediterranean Basin

Mansa Musa (r. 1312-37), emperor of gold-rich Mali and purported wealthiest man to ever live, undertook his famous hajj to Mecca in 1324. Included in his journey were two months-long stays in Cairo, and his time spent in the city is legendary: “The man flooded Cairo with his benefactions [of gold],” al-Umari reported an eyewitness to the event telling him in his *Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises*.<sup>249</sup> Though al-Umari’s source described his gifts as benefactions, given the centrality of gold to the medieval Near Eastern economy, Musa’s largesse eventually proved to be unwanted.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, as a consequence of his dispersion of most of the estimated eighteen tons of gold which he took with him on his journey from West Africa to Cairo, Musa’s presence led to the ruin of the city’s economy.<sup>251</sup> As the eyewitness explained to al-Umari, Musa brought a veritable goldrush with him to Egypt, with its attendant highs and lows: “The Cairenes made incalculable profits out of him and his suite in buying and selling and giving and taking,” though their fortunes quickly changed as they “exchanged gold until they depressed its value in Egypt and caused its price to fall.”<sup>252</sup> The native Cairene al-Umari was himself able to confirm the aftermath of Musa’s visit, writing that “Gold was at a high price in Egypt until [Musa and his retinue] came in that year ... from that time its value fell and it cheapened in price and has remained cheap till now ... [and] this has been the state of affairs for about twelve years until this day.”<sup>253</sup>

Musa’s apparently uncritical use of gold—“his crazy generosity”—is characterized in

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<sup>249</sup> Al-Umari, *Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises*, 270.

<sup>250</sup> For the role of gold in the medieval Near East, see Ashtor, *Les métaux précieux et la balance des paiements du Proche-Orient*, 13.

<sup>251</sup> For an estimation about the amount of gold Musa took on his hajj, see Gomez, *African Dominion*, 106.

<sup>252</sup> Al-Umari, *Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises*, 270-71.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

both contemporaneous Arabic sources and some modern historiographical works as a symptom of sub-Saharan African naivete when interacting with the broader world.<sup>254</sup> Musa's activities in Cairo, however, are better thought of as conscious acts of imperialism. By flooding Cairo with gold, a decision made after a humiliating experience during an audience with the Egyptian sultan al-Nasir (d. 1341), Musa demonstrated his ability to negatively influence the region's economy—the very fulcrum of Abu-Lughod's hypothesized world system—whenever he so wished.<sup>255</sup> Musa's gifts of gold, then, were not so much benefices as they were weapons. Though this interpretation deviates from standard historiography, it nevertheless fits better with broader trends relating to the use of the metal in the late medieval Mediterranean basin.

Two years before Musa flexed his economic might and threw the sultan's economy into disarray, a similar process occurred at the papal court in Avignon. As discussed in part I of this thesis, in 1252 Genoa and Florence became the first Western European states to mint gold coins with any sustained success since the decline of the Roman Empire.<sup>256</sup> These gold coins, especially the Florentine florin and later the Venetian ducat, developed into a standardized currency for the late medieval Mediterranean economy and were necessary for Latin participation in international trade and other large payments in the region. Thus, in 1322 Pope John XXII (r. 1316-44) found himself in a position akin to al-Nasir in 1324 and many other Western princes in the later Middle Ages, with the health of his treasury indirectly beholden to a foreign power. The Avignon papacy, which still looked eastward towards Italy as its primary theater of political action, required access to a currency accepted

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<sup>254</sup> For an example, see Mauny, *Les siècles obscurs de l'Afrique noire*, 157. "Sa folle générosité."

<sup>255</sup> For Cairo's role as a fulcrum in the high medieval world system, see Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 149.

<sup>256</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 176-77.

everywhere in southern Europe like the florin to pay for expenses and function.<sup>257</sup> In 1322, then, John took the dramatic step of ceding the papacy's monetary policy to the Florentines in order to keep the papacy solvent. In a letter, John ordered his mint masters at the castle of Pont-de-Sorges to follow the instruction and guidance of three Florentine merchants to begin production of the papacy's own florins with the same weight and purity as the real coin.<sup>258</sup> Essentially, the papacy's thirst for gold florins was such that it began to manufacture its own imitations of the coin. Where Musa could ruin an economy by flooding it with gold, the reputation of the florin had developed to such heights, and its centrality to the southern European economy had become so great that papal projects were in danger of ceasing for mere want of the currency.

As detailed in the introduction and first part of this thesis, gold currencies in the later Middle Ages had clear practical applications, and most relevant historiography approaches the subject from that perspective. To help understand the full panoply of effects that the large-scale resumption of minting gold coinage carried for the Latin West, however, gold in the fourteenth-century Mediterranean basin can be analyzed beyond its instrumental economic functions. Though distinct in important ways, both Musa's use of raw gold in Cairo and the Florentines cultivation of international dependence on their florin were acts of imperialism.<sup>259</sup> Gold provided the few polities that could marshal large quantities of it with

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>258</sup> August Coulon, ed., *Lettres secrètes et curiales du Pape Jean XXII (1316-1334) relatives à la France, extraites des registres du Vatican* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1906), 177-78.

<sup>259</sup> I understand "imperialism" to be the action by which one polity usurps the governmental and/or economic sovereignty of another. Though imperialism often includes the development of geographic empires, that is not an aspect of the processes I identify in this part of my thesis. For a survey of the many historical definitions of "imperialism" which helped shape my own, see Ray Kiely, *Rethinking Imperialism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2-3. For the necessity of using words like "imperialism" and "colonialism" when discussing political developments in the Middle Ages, see Merril Jensen and Robert L. Reynolds, "European Colonial Experience: A Plea for Comparative Studies," in *The Medieval Frontiers of Latin Christendom: Expansion*,

the ability to both usurp the economic sovereignty of rivals and increase their own prestige through propagandistic techniques specifically relating to uses of the metal.

That these actions are clearly identifiable as imperialistic is a critical step in understanding West Africa's role in the later medieval Western European/Trans-Saharan world system. As Braudel describes in *Perspectives of the World*, the center of a world system

always ... [features] an exceptional state, strong, aggressive and principled, dynamic, simultaneously feared and admired ... [They are strong governments] capable too of asserting themselves abroad: it is to these governments, who never hesitated to employ violence, that we can readily apply, at a very early date and without fear of anachronism, the words colonialism and imperialism.<sup>260</sup>

West Africa's position in the high medieval world system should be incontrovertible at this point. But that Musa could both travel to foreign lands and, in the process, imperialize rival states demonstrates that the region assumed a new, more powerful position in the world system following Sundiata's victory at Kirina in 1235 and in the years that followed. This development occurring concurrent with the simultaneous rise of Florence as an economic superpower is also to be expected according to Abu-Lughod's model. As she explains, "when there was a period of congruence among upward cycles of related regions, these cycles moved synergistically. Upturns were the result ... of the linkages each region managed to forge with other parts of the world system."<sup>261</sup> In this instance, the strength of Abu-Lughod's theory demonstrates areas where her model could be improved. Both the longer-term example of the development of Florence and the shorter-term example of Musa dumping gold into Cairo evidence that new cores of the Western European/Trans-Saharan world

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*Contradiction, Continuity*, ed. James Muldoon and Felipe Fernández-Armesto (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 39-40.

<sup>260</sup> Braudel, *Perspectives of the World*, 51.

<sup>261</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 358-59.

system evolved as a consequence of West Africa's ability to export more gold beginning in the mid-thirteenth century. World systems "restructure," Abu-Lughod writes, when "players who were formerly peripheral begin to occupy more powerful positions in the system and when geographic zones formerly marginal to intense interactions become foci and even control centers of such interchanges."<sup>262</sup> The previous section elaborated upon the dramatic consequences that could follow after access to one of the Western European/Trans-Saharan world system's cores was limited; the analysis that proceeds from this point concerns the cultural and social consequences of the flourishing of that same core.

To this end, it is necessary to resituate the argument in actor-network theory and appreciate that the Florentines were only able to develop their many uses of the florin following an increase to the amount of gold exported from West Africa in the mid-thirteenth century. Elaboration on these processes further illuminates the obscured links between West Africa and the Latin West described in the previous section, and how individual actors in the two regions shared networks and could influence each other's societies. More directly, medieval West African history played a significant role in the development of medieval Western European history; without the successes of Sundiata and the political stability maintained by his successors, there would have been no gold florin to cause John XXII anxiety or serve as a model for nearly all other gold coins minted in Europe beginning in the late thirteenth century.

#### *Modern Perceptions of Medieval Gold and the Gold Trade*

The possibility for gold coins to act as an instrument of imperialism has not been directly addressed in historiography about money or gold in the Middle Ages. At the least,

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 367.

early theories as to the West's return to gold like that of Lopez propose that a "desire to uphold and enhance the prestige of the state" may have been a reason Italian merchant republics (and the principalities that followed them) decided to start minting gold currencies beginning in the thirteenth century.<sup>263</sup> Further, more contemporary scholars like Degler and Wenderholm accurately note that, whether or not its stated as such in the sources, later medieval European usage of West African gold to mint coins added "a political-colonial dimension" to a preexisting "economic discourse of materials."<sup>264</sup> And, though preceding the work of these scholars, Bloch comes close to syncretizing the two lines of thought by proposing that an innate cultural desire begun in the Middle Ages to accumulate "this 'fabulous' metal" is "one of the reasons that [Europeans] have subjected or exploited the world" into the present day.<sup>265</sup>

These hypotheses can be built upon. Degler and Wenderholm's idea, for example, implies as a central component to the medieval gold trade an unequal relationship between North and South wherein Mediterranean states levied their will on West Africa.<sup>266</sup> Instead, as François-Xavier Fauvelle notes, it was "African political and economic elites who, controlling gold fluctuations, succeeded in imposing themselves on foreign markets as powerful and reliable economic partners."<sup>267</sup> Reapplying Fauvelle's argument to Western Europe, it was because Florence had access to gold markets that thus allowed the city to also

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<sup>263</sup> Lopez, "Back to Gold, 1252," 236-37.

<sup>264</sup> Degler and Wenderholm, "Der Wert des Goldes – der Wert der Golde," 444. *Eine politisch-koloniale Dimension ... ökonomische Diskurs des Materials*.

<sup>265</sup> Bloch, "Le problème de l'or au moyen age," 8. *Ce 'fabuleux' métal ... une des raisons qui [Européens] ont fait soumettre ou exploiter le monde*.

<sup>266</sup> This is a fairly typical view from Europeanists. See Robert S. Lopez, "Trade of Medieval Europe: The South," in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 2, ed. Michael Postan and Edwin Ernest Rich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 289.

<sup>267</sup> François-Xavier Fauvelle, "Trade and Travel in Africa's Global Golden Age (AD 700-1500)," in *Global Africa: Into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Dorothy L. Hodgson and Judith A. Byfield (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 18.



impose themselves economically on their near neighbors. Indeed, where Bloch locates modern European colonial impulses in later medieval appetite for gold, the paradigm can also be flipped and gold understood as a tool which, when deployed strategically, European states could use to “subject and exploit” other Europeans. In fact, merely minting gold coins did not guarantee that they would be successful for high medieval polities, and the list of states that attempted but failed to introduce their own gold coins in the second half of the thirteenth century, like France and England, is notable.<sup>268</sup> As it pertains to Florence, prestige was only gained from minting gold coins thanks to a combined program of shrewd economic policy, the development of propaganda that glorified their new gold coin, and conscious mythmaking surrounding the origin of the florin.

Gold’s success as a tool for imperialism in the fourteenth-century Mediterranean basin was as much a consequence of its intrinsic value as it was conscious actions by those who wielded it for those ends. The era in which the use of all types of coinage became widespread throughout Western Europe coincided with the end to the era of internal Latin expansion through conquest and colonialism, and which thus necessitated new methods to develop hegemony. This era also overlapped with the second stage of the medieval commercial revolution, with exchanges of money taking the place of traditional feudal services and dues.<sup>269</sup> These concurrent trends presented new possibilities for the states that identified them. Due to their small size, for example, Italian merchant communes could not wield the same sort of tools for expansion as large kingdoms. Instead, Lopez writes, “their weapons of strength included embargoes, piracy, ... discriminatory tariffs, and the

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<sup>268</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 182, 185.

<sup>269</sup> Lopez, “Trade of Medieval Europe,” 291.

construction of new routes.”<sup>270</sup> Coins, specifically gold coins, were an additional “weapon of strength” that should be included on Lopez’s list.

Beginning in the high Middle Ages, Italian merchant republics had to be highly conscious of the monetary policy of their rivals, and the introduction of particularly successful coins could impel rival states to follow their lead. For example, due to an influx of silver from Fourth Crusaders paying for passage to the Levant, Venice began minting very large and pure silver grossi coins in 1201, which forced Genoa to follow suit and mint similar coins because the purity and weight of the grossi were popular throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>271</sup> In 1254, a group of seven smaller north Italian cities, including Parma and Pavia, agreed to mint a sort of international currency in limited quantities to develop a certain level of economic independence in the face of encroaching cities in the region like Milan and Florence.<sup>272</sup> And when Venice began minting gold ducats in 1284 they did so at the same weight and fineness as gold florins.<sup>273</sup> Importantly, though, Venice also granted rights to merchants that would use ducats internationally as they feared that introducing the coin locally would upset the systems of exchange used in the Adriatic region.<sup>274</sup> Markets were precarious, and tastes as to preferred coinages used in trade could quickly change—or be manipulated—through economic policies.

Coins, however, could represent more for medieval states than merely a tool to facilitate trade. Relating them to the complete array of techniques used by the high medieval Latin West to expand territorially and politically, Robert Bartlett notes that the “power” of

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>271</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 226-27.

<sup>272</sup> Lucia Travaini, “Mint Organization in Italy between the Twelfth and Fourteenth Centuries: a Survey,” in *Later Medieval Mints: Organization, Administration and Techniques*, ed. by Nicholas Mayhew and Peter Spufford (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports Publishing, 1988), 44.

<sup>273</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 178.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

coins, like charters, “[did] not reside in a purely material efficacy.”<sup>275</sup> Instead, Bartlett argues, “Their power [lay] ... in the way they [objectified] human relationships.”<sup>276</sup>

Florence’s ability in the beginning of the mid-thirteenth century to mint gold coins with city-specific insignia, disseminate them through recently developed merchant networks, and encourage their use in international trade was a preeminent tool for the commune to exert levels of economic control over rival states.<sup>277</sup> Where kings of France, England, and Castile depended on military conquest and direct rule to expand their power, Florence could mint gold coins and promote their use.

*Gold Money, Medieval Political Theory, and Their Applications by Florence*

Italian merchant republics did not enact these kinds of economic policies in a vacuum, however, and contemporaneous works of political theory articulated and encouraged similar ideas about the use of coins. Writing in his *De regimine principum*, for example, Ptolemy of Lucca (1236-1327), a Dominican and contemporary of Thomas Aquinas, located two primary benefits in coinage produced by the state: a standardized coin increased revenues and could act as propaganda.<sup>278</sup> “[A prince’s] own coinage or money,” Ptolemy wrote, “is an ornament for a king and kingdom, and for anyone’s rule, because the image of the king is depicted on it, like Caesar’s.”<sup>279</sup> As a consequence, he believed that “so distinct a memorialization of him [and, therefore, a city or state] can exist in nothing so much as in coinage, because nothing pertaining to a king or lord is used so frequently by men’s

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<sup>275</sup> Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 286.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> For the role of merchant networks in the early dissemination of the florin in Europe, see Peter Spufford, “The First Century of the Florentine Florin,” *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini* 107 (2006): 426.

<sup>278</sup> *De regimine principum* is sometimes attributed to Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>279</sup> Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, in *Opuscula Omnia Thomae Aquinatis* (Venice: 1587), 304. *Nummismata, siue moneta propria, ornamentum est regis, et regni, et cuiuslibet regiminis, quia in ea repraesentatur imago regis, ut Caesaris.*

hands.”<sup>280</sup> The propagandistic utility of coins was so great, Ptolemy continued, that it even explained the etymology of *nummisma*, the Latin word for coin: “Truly it is called *nummisma* because ... it is stamped with the names [*nominibus*] of princes and [their] likeness, whereby it is manifestly apparent that the majesty of lords shines from coinage and therefore cities, or princes, or prelates all procure this for their glory.”<sup>281</sup> Paired with this propagandistic value, Ptolemy also saw a state’s ability to mint its own money as a means to exert economic control on the local population and increase revenues: “his own coinage turns to the benefit of a prince,” he wrote, “because by it are measured the tributes and whatever taxes that are imposed on the people.”<sup>282</sup> For medieval princes and states, then, Ptolemy encouraged the minting of coins to reinforce their power locally through semiotics on widely distributed coins and to increase revenues by requiring their use in payments to the state. Whether intentionally or not, beginning in the second half of the thirteenth century Florence followed the steps laid out in *De regimine principum* with two major exceptions: the city applied these principles not just domestically but internationally, and it outsourced much of the work involved to other states.

As the availability of gold increased for Italian merchant republics in the second half of the thirteenth century, Italian merchants and bankers possessed a remarkable ability to find value in gold coinage beyond its means to facilitate trade. Certainly, gold coins were initially minted for use in international trade. Before 1252, Latin merchants depended on gold, almost exclusively in the form of coins minted by Muslim states, to purchase goods in the Near East.

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid. *In nulla re tanta potest esse claritas memoriae eius, eo quod nihil sic per manus hominum frequentatur quod ad regem, vel quemcunque dominum pertineat, quantum nummisma.*

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. *Nummisma vero dicitur, quia nominibus principum effigieque designatur ... per quod manifeste apparet, quod ex nummismate maiestas dominorum lucet: et ideo ciuitates, siue principes, siue prelati hoc pro sua gloria singulariter ab Imperatoribus impetrant.*

<sup>282</sup> Ibid. *Nummisma proprium cedit in commodum principis ... quia per ipsum mensurantur tributa, et quaecunque exactiones quae fiunt in populo.*

With the advent of new, locally manufactured gold coins, Italian states were less-dependent on foreign gold currencies and trade balances began to become more positive for Latin merchants.<sup>283</sup> Coin hoards found in Aleppo and Acre, for example, indicate that by the 1270s the florin was a commonly used coin in that part of Near East, and its significantly higher purity compared to locally manufactured bezants, dinars, and imitation dinars created a preference for them.<sup>284</sup> But in Italy, Florentines put their new gold money to use not just in trade, but also as a cudgel to usurp economic rights of their rivals and provide security for their city. A relationship developed between Florence and the Angevin monarchs of Naples in which, in exchange for loans of gold florins, Florentine merchants assumed control of important southern Italian industries and were granted lands. To help pay for his wars of conquest in southern Italy—a theater in which gold was necessary for large payments—Charles of Anjou (r. 1266-85) began taking on massive loans of florins from Florentine bankers in 1265.<sup>285</sup> Generally speaking, kings and churchmen were not expert in economics like merchants, making them easy targets for exploitation.<sup>286</sup> Indeed, though the loans seem straightforward, Florentine bankers offered them to Neapolitan monarchs with the expectation that they would never repay them in full. In lieu of gold, the loans were often paid back through indirect means. This included the assumption of money-generating titles

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<sup>283</sup> Henry L. Misbach, “Genoese Commerce and the Alleged Flow of Gold to the East, 1154-1253,” *Revue internationale d’histoire de la banque* 3 (1970): 84.

<sup>284</sup> For discussion of coin hoards, see Robert Kool, “A Thirteenth Century Hoard of Gold Florins from the Medieval Harbour of Acre,” *Numismatic Chronicle* 166 (2006): 316. For the varying fineness of gold coins minted in Syria during the thirteenth century, see Misbach, “Genoese Commerce and the Alleged Flow of Gold to the East,” 76. Florins, famous for their 24-karat purity, far outpaced contemporaneous coins produced locally in the Levant and their 14- to 18-karat purities.

<sup>285</sup> David Abulafia, “Southern Italy and the Florentine Economy, 1265-1370,” in *Italy, Sicily, and the Mediterranean, 1100-1400*, ed. David Abulafia (London: Variorum, 1987), 379.

<sup>286</sup> Edward Miller, “The Economic Policies of Governments: Introduction,” in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 3, ed. Mark Potosan, Edwin E. Rich, and Edward Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 281.

like tax and tariff collecting positions in Neapolitan ports on the Adriatic coast and exclusive export rights of southern Italian goods, the most important of all being Sicilian and Apulian grain.<sup>287</sup>

Through loans of florins to kings of Naples, Florentine merchants and bankers essentially displaced southern Italian merchants from their native theaters of operation.<sup>288</sup> In an era in which the biggest economic concerns for Mediterranean governments were self-sufficiency and having enough food for their citizens, these were remarkable gains by the Florentines.<sup>289</sup> Located in a region of poor grain production, yet still needing to find a way to feed their nearly 330,000 subjects—100,000 of which lived in the city proper—Florence parlayed “regular loans” to kings of Naples in exchange for access to grain.<sup>290</sup> As good of a deal as this was for Florence, it was similarly disastrous for its rivals. Florentine control over Adriatic grain exports was a continual source of frustration to the Venetians.<sup>291</sup> This control of grain exports was even maintained during the famines that afflicted Europe in the early fourteenth century, sapping precious southern Italian grain northward into Tuscany.<sup>292</sup> These processes, so beneficial to the city and so harmful to its rivals, began because of loans of florins. Rather than seek repayment of the loans with gold, Florentine merchants and bankers were content with gaining control over the trade of humbler (though essential) goods like wheat, industries that had previously belonged to rival merchants.

This process—the complete infiltration of gold florins and Florentine machinations

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<sup>287</sup> Abulafia, “Southern Italy and the Florentine Economy,” 380.

<sup>288</sup> Lopez, “Trade of Medieval Europe,” 301.

<sup>289</sup> Carlo M. Cipolla, “The Economic Policies of Governments: The Italian and Iberian Peninsulas,” in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 3, 400-401.

<sup>290</sup> For demographics of Florence and areas under its control, see Lopez, “Trade of Medieval Europe,” 303. For the scheme of exchanging loans for grain rights, see David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 356-57.

<sup>291</sup> Abulafia, “Southern Italy and the Florentine Economy,” 381.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

into the economic policies of foreign countries—is evident in documents relating to the reign of Charles II of Naples (r. 1285-1309). Documents collected by the nineteenth-century historian of Florence Robert Davidsohn and pertaining to the single year of 1303 present a brief illustration of Charles’s constant dealings with (and indebtedness to) the Florentines. On May 13 of that year, for example, Charles was recorded discussing with Apulian officials how to settle a debt of 2000 ounces of gold to the famous Bardi banking family of Florence.<sup>293</sup> To resolve this debt, on May 28 Charles resolved to pay to the Bardi family his half of the revenues he received from an export tax on food goods leaving Apulia for an undetermined amount of time.<sup>294</sup> This was a significant concession, as already on June 16 a tax of 213 ounces of gold was leveled on a single shipment out of Apulia containing 711 salme of grain, at a rate of thirty ounces of gold per every 100 salme (approximately 4,500 tons).<sup>295</sup> On July 1, Charles further ordered officials of Apulia to begin paying 1000 ounces of gold from the money they collected to the Peruzzi banking family from Florence in order to resolve a previous loan.<sup>296</sup> Then, on July 8, Charles named Catellinus Aldebrandini from Florence as the master of the mint in Naples.<sup>297</sup> To help pay for the military activities of count Charles of Valois (r. 1284-1325) in Sicily, Charles received another loan of 4200 florins (approximately 530 ounces of gold) from the Bardi family on July 15.<sup>298</sup> On August 23, two Florentines representing separate banks appeared at the king’s court in Naples to do an accounting of his debts which he had owed to their companies beginning in the year

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<sup>293</sup> Robert Davidsohn, *Forshungen zur Geschichte von Florenz*, vol. 3, *Regesten unedirter Urkunden zur Geschichte von Handel, Gewerbe und Zunfswesen* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler and Son, 1901), no. 439.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 443.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 444.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 445.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 446.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 449.

1301.<sup>299</sup> And, on December 28, Charles ordered the lord of Bari to pay 2000 ounces of gold from collected revenues to the Peruzzi bank.<sup>300</sup>

Like his father before him and Pope John XXII, Charles II was, simply, wholly dependent on the Florentines. Without their cash his war in Sicily would have difficulty continuing; without their technical expertise, his mint would have been without a master; and without their presence, he would have been unable to constantly redirect revenue streams to pay off past loans. Following increases in the amount of gold exported from West Africa, a new core—Florence—thus developed in the Western European/Trans-Saharan World system, imperializing its neighbors, its power radiating west- and southward.

#### *How Florentines Understood the Florin*

The shrewd use of loans of florins to imperialize the export of southern Italian commodities like grain, while different from the use of gold currency in international trade, still involved a direct economic use of the new gold coins. But, concurrent to these developments in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Florentines involved in the production of the florin seemed to sense non-economic, less tangible benefits to gold florins. At the least, adhering to Ptolemy of Lucca's ideas about the semiotic functions of coins, use of the florin throughout the Mediterranean basin meant that the iconography on the coin that represented Florence, the fleur-de-lis and the image of John the Baptist, also spread. According to Caroline Leroy, use of these standardized symbols inaugurated in 1252 might have been a conscious decision by the commune to raise the profile of the city. Specifically, Leroy argues that these "iconographic representations ... reflect [a] wish of universalism

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., no. 452.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., no. 455.



claimed by the city of Florence for its circulating currency.”<sup>301</sup> To Leroy, Florence even “seems to have anticipated the popularity of its money through its typological choices.”<sup>302</sup> Whether Florence possessed the sort of prescience Leroy ascribes to it, every exchange involving florins throughout the Mediterranean basin—every time a coin passed through the hands of men, to borrow Ptolemy’s language—knowledge about the city increased and its standing was elevated.<sup>303</sup>

The florin also carried benefits for those Florentines that were able to cultivate a personal association with it. In 1317 the *Libro della zecca* began to be compiled. In the *Libro*, masters and workmen of the Florentine gold mint, as well as the unique mintmarks which those masters applied to gold florins during their tenures, were registered for posterity. The book begins with a prologue that explains its purpose which, when analyzed in full, demonstrates a function beyond just being an introduction to an informational work.<sup>304</sup> This is not wholly unexpected since “economic expansion [in the later Middle Ages] created new social instruments,” but the *Libro della zecca* accomplishes this in interesting ways.<sup>305</sup> The prologue reads:

At the time when ... the distinguished and wise men Giovanni Villani and Gherardo Gentile, citizens and merchants of Florence were, on behalf of the commune and people of Florence, masters and officials of the mint of gold and silver, and of the places at which coins are minted for the aforesaid commune; and the distinguished men Bartolo Fey and Gano, son of Dietaiuto, were, for the said commune, smelters of the aforesaid gold coin; and Morello Tommasini and Rosone, son of Juncta, were

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<sup>301</sup> Caroline Leroy, “Le trésor de Bruges (1877) et la circulation des florins d’or de Florence au nord des Alpes de 1250 à 1350,” *Revue belge de numismatique et de sigillographie* 153 (2007): 94. *Les représentations iconographiques ... reflètent [une] volonté d’universalisme revendiqué par la cité florentine pour ses émissions monétaires.*

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. *Semble avoir anticipé par ses choix typologiques la popularité de son monnayage.*

<sup>303</sup> For discussion about how the image of John the Baptist elevated Florence’s standing, see Jean-Baptiste Giard, “Le florin d’or au baptiste et ses imitations en France au xiv<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes* 125 (1967): 101.

<sup>304</sup> The prologue is composed in notoriously clunky Latin. See A. Carson Simpson, “Mint Officials of the Florentine Florin,” *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 5 (1952): 118.

<sup>305</sup> Miller, “The Economic Policies of Governments,” 287.

inspectors of the said gold coin; and Lopus ser Phillipi was, for the said commune, assayer and approver of the silver coin or places: When the aforesaid Gherardo and Giovanni, masters of the aforesaid mint, considered the honorable gold coin that is minted and made in the city of Florence ... and also considered the common circulation that the said coin has throughout the entire world; and also when they considered that there were many princes in the world in past times who desired to remove the abovesaid gold coin from circulation, and the coin's circulation always increased; and when they attended and truly saw and heard from the querulous complaints of many honest and expert men of the city of Florence that no memorial that is clear for those individuals wishing to see it can be found in the aforesaid commune of Florence concerning the masters and officials and stamps of the said mint that existed and were appointed from the day of the coin's origin, fabrication, and regulation up to the present; and when the aforesaid masters saw that it would be useful for a certain register to be made for the aforesaid commune, of the aforesaid former masters, officials, and stamps and also of those who will be at any given time; and when the aforesaid Gherardo and Giovanni, masters and officials of the aforesaid mint, by the authority of their aforesaid office of the said mint, imposed upon and commanded me Salvi Dini of Florence, notary and for the time being scribe for the aforesaid commune, that the memorial below be made of the same masters, officials, and stamps of the said mint.

Written below is the register and book containing the [record of the] masters and officials of the said mint, who could be found, and the stamps that they made or caused to be made on the aforesaid coin of gold or silver, and also of the stamps found on the gold florins coined in the said mint at times for which no record can well be found, nor the names of the masters and officials in whose time they were made. And it was written by me the aforesaid Salvi, notary of the said mint, at the command of the said masters, in the 1317<sup>th</sup> year of the Lord's incarnation, in the fifteenth indiction, in the month of March.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> *Il libro della zecca*, in *Le monete della Repubblica Fiorentina*, vol. 1, ed. Mario Bernocchi (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Publishers, 1974), 1-2. *Tempore quo ... discreti et sapientes viri Iohannes Villani et Gherardus Gentilis, cives et mercatores Florentini, erant, pro comuni et populo Florentino, domini et officiales monete auri, argenti et legarum, ad quas pro ditto comuni cuduntur monete; et discreti viri Bartolus Fey et Ganus filius Dietaiuti erant, pro dicto comuni, rimettitores ditte monete auri; et Morellus Tommasini et Rosone filius Iuncte erant sententiares ditte monete auri; et Lopus ser Philippi erat, pro ditto comuni, sagiator et approbator monete argenti seu legarum. Considerantibus predittis Gherardo et Iohanne, dominis monete preditte, honorabilem monetam auri que cusa est et fatta in civitate Florentie ... considerantibus etiam comunem cursum, quem habet ditte moneta auri per universum orbem terrarum; considerantibus etiam quod plures fuerunt in orbe principes, temporibus retroactis, qui cursum auferre voluerunt monete aure supraditte, et eidem monete semper cursus adcrevit; et attendentibus et vere ex lamentosis querelis quamplurimum proborum et expertorum virorum de civitate Florentie videntibus et audientibus quod, de dominis et officialibus et signis ditte monete, qui a die ipsius initiate, fatte et ordinate monete usque in diem presentem fuerunt et fatti sunt, nulla in comuni Florentie supraditto reperitur memoria, que singulis ipsos videre volentibus pateat; videntibus etiam dominis supradittis quod utile fore, de predittis dominis, officialibus et signis preteritis ac etiam de illis qui erunt pro tempore, fieri, pro comuni preditto, quoddam registrum; prenominitis Gherardo et Iohanne, dominis et officialibus monete preditte, vigore eorum officii supraditti, imponentibus et mandantibus michi Salvi Dini de Florentia, notario et presentialiter scribe, pro comuni preditto, ditte monete, de ipsis dominis, officialibus et signis memoriam fieri infrascriptam.*

*Infrascriptum est registrum et liber continens dominos et officiales ditte monete, qui reperiri potuerunt, et signa que fecerunt seu fieri fecerunt in moneta auri vel argenti preditta, ac etiam signa reperta in*

This introductory passage—in form and content—is essentially a founding charter typical of the high medieval era. Written sixty-five years after the inauguration of the minting of gold florins, the prologue first offers cachet to the current mint officials at the time of the book’s production, who in the prologue act as quasi-signatories or witnesses for the creation of the *Libro della zecca*. After the prologue, the book then lists the first sixty-five years’ worth of previous mint masters, which, much like “ancient rights” won through medieval charters or land grants, carried benefits for their descendants. Many of the early mint masters, for example, came from upper-class families that would later develop into important noble families in the city.<sup>307</sup> Indeed, mint masters with surnames like Medici, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, and Vespucci make appearances in the full *Libro della zecca*.<sup>308</sup> Describing high medieval origin stories that involved conquest, Bartlett notes that “those who were present at these new beginnings were rapidly mythologized and given special standing in the collective memory,” which led to benefits for their descendants.<sup>309</sup> Early association with the florin, used in a specific sort of economic conquest, carried similar advantages. And individual florins, of course, could not carry the image of mint masters in the same way they could a king, but the *Libro della Zecca* offered an alternative way for them to gain the kind of prestige Ptolemy of Lucca said could be won through coins. As the prologue notes, after all, it was two mint masters—Giovanni Villani and Gherardo Gentili—who took it upon themselves to order the production of the *Libro* for the benefit of their commune.

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*florenis auri coniatas in ditto moneta, de quorum tempore et dominis et officialibus, quorum tempore facti sunt, non bene potest reperiri memoria, et scriptus per me iamdictum Salvi, notarium monete predictae, de mandato dominorum predictorum, sub anno dominice incarnationis millesimo trecentesimo septimo decimo, indictione quinta decima, de mense martii.*

<sup>307</sup> Simpson, “Mint Officials of the Florentine Florin,” 115.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>309</sup> Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 93.

When describing the process of its own creation, the prologue further functions like a charter by conferring benefits. As the author of the prologue wrote, it was because of “the common circulation that” the florin had “throughout the entire world” and because of the “querulous complaints of many honest and expert men” in Florence that the *Libro della zecca* was produced. Since the prologue mentioned that many princes used and desired the florin, a document like the *Libro* was necessary to assure any prestige gained from the spread of the coin was ultimately returned to the commune. The *Libro*, then, conferred intangible securities for the city through the process of also conferring knowledge about the history of the mint. And, like many charters, the prologue’s author also discusses it as being essentially the first written record of preexisting knowledge. To this end, although the author of the prologue describes some of the evidence for the earliest mint masters as incomplete, he nevertheless recorded what was available. A prologue qua charter of this nature was unnecessary when gold florins were first minted; after their use and reputation became widespread in the Mediterranean basin, however, there were benefits to be had through association with its origin for both the commune and mint officials.

Mythmaking and origin stories surrounding the creation of the florin appear in Florentine sources beyond the prologue to the *Libro della zecca*. The same Giovanni Villani (1280-1348) who ordered the creation of the *Libro* also produced a chronicle of Florentine history in which he included accounts describing the beginning of the minting of gold florins in 1252. While sometimes analyzed as being a mostly true story, Villani’s version of events, written nearly seventy years after they were said to occur, is highly dubious. Villani began his anecdote by describing how with the

new florins having begun to circulate through the world, they were carried to Tunis ... and being brought before the king of Tunis, who was a worthy and wise lord, they

pleased him much ... and finding them to be of fine gold, he much commended them, and having caused his interpreters to interpret the imprint and legend on the florin, he found that it said: St. John the Baptist, and on the side of the lily, Florence. Perceiving it to be Christian money, he sent to the Pisan merchants who were then free of the city and were much with the king ... and asked them what manner of city among Christians was this Florence which made the said florins. The Pisans answered spitefully through envy, saying: 'They are our inland Arabs,' which is to say, 'our mountain rustics.'<sup>310</sup>

The king of Tunis, however, not believing the Pisan merchants, sent for a Florentine merchant instead to provide him with more information about his city. This merchant explained "how Pisa in comparison was neither in power nor in inhabitants the half of Florence, and that they had no golden money, and that the florin was the fruit of many victories gained by the Florentines over them."<sup>311</sup> Pleased by both the information he had learned from the merchant and the quality of the florin, the king of Tunis "made the Florentines free of the city, and allowed them a place of habitation and a church in Tunis, and he gave them the same privileges as the Pisans."<sup>312</sup>

Villani's story offers more information for how Florentines in the fourteenth century thought about and understood the florin than how the florin was actually received outside of Florence in 1252. Approximately twenty years before Villani, for example, the Florentine chronicler Paolino Pieri (d. 1340) offered information contrary to Villani's, writing that the florin was little used in the early years of its minting.<sup>313</sup> Pieri's description does indeed fit better than Villani's with broader trends relating to Mediterranean gold coins. For example, the entry for 1252 in the *Annales Ianuenses*, the chronicle of Genoa, described its own city's

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<sup>310</sup> Giovanni Villani, *Croniche Fiorentine of Giovanni Villani*, trans. Rose E. Selfe, ed. Philip H. Wicksteed (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1906), 161-62.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> William R. Day, Jr., "Early Imitations of the Gold Florin of Florence and the Imitation Florin of Chivasso in the Name of Theodore I Paleologus, Marquis of Montferrat (1306-1338)," *Numismatic Chronicle* 164 (2004): 188.

minting of gold coins in quite different terms. Rather than a celebration of the gold coins like that found in Villani's *Croniche* or the *Libro della zecca*, the chronicler only provided a laconic passage spanning six Latin words: "in this same year the gold coinage of Genoa was minted."<sup>314</sup> Indeed, given the failures of many other gold currencies begun in the thirteenth century, the approach of the Genoese chronicler was the logical and cautious one. To this end, records also indicate Venetian counsellors were not hopeful about the future of the gold ducat when they first began minting them in 1284.<sup>315</sup>

Both the Florentine merchant in Tunis and the king of Tunis's purported reaction to the currency seem at odds, then, with general trends relating to the advent of gold currencies. But, more telling to Villani's purpose in relaying the story, it does not elide with the circumstances of trade between the Latin West and North Africa in the mid-thirteenth century. Crucially, gold currency was not used for trade by Latin merchants in Tunis when Villani's story is said to have taken place. Instead, Europe shipped massive amounts of silver into Tunis and North Africa, where it was then exchanged for gold, itself later transported to the Near East and used to purchase luxury products.<sup>316</sup> North African merchants were so particular about the precious metals they accepted as currency that enterprising Christians minted imitation Muslim silver dirhams specifically to expediate trade in the region.<sup>317</sup> This included the Genoese in 1253, one year after they began minting their gold genovinos.<sup>318</sup> Further, this practice persisted until the 1270s despite papal attempts to shut down Christian mints that produced these coins imprinted with Islamic sayings and despite the great

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<sup>314</sup> *Annali Genovesi di Caffaro de' suoi continuatori* (Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1926), 10. *Eodem anno nummus aureus Ianue fabricatus.*

<sup>315</sup> Day, Jr., "Early Imitations of the Gold Florin of Florence," 188.

<sup>316</sup> Ashtor, *Les métaux précieux et la balance des paiements du Proche-Orient*, 23.

<sup>317</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 175.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

inconvenience that transporting thousands of silver coins to North Africa—rather than ingots—would have entailed.<sup>319</sup> By the time Villani was writing, however, the gold florin was indeed a popular coin used internationally and, as discussed above, a means through which Florence usurped the economic rights of their rivals. Many nationalistic origin stories produced in the high medieval era relied on the motif of a legendary conqueror to explain their present-day successes and national character.<sup>320</sup> Villani’s story shares similar qualities, making Florentine economic successes through the use of the florin in his contemporary times appear inevitable. Much like the prologue to the *Libro della zecca*, then, Villani’s anecdote is a product of its time, not so much intended to convey factual information about the past but to offer an origin story for the florin that mapped onto his present reality.

To maintain these various intangible benefits, the mint in Florence needed to produce florins of a consistently high quality. Part of the reason, for example, the florin or genovino became a standard currency in distant regions like the Near East was because of the continual debasement of coins produced locally in those regions. To safeguard against the devaluing of their money and other potential negative incidents, the Florentine mint drafted a constitution with rules attempting to limit the possibility for these things to occur. Produced around 1310 and known as the *Constitutum artis monetariorum civitatis Florentiae*, the document stipulates by what practices the mint’s workers were meant to abide and the punishments they could face should they violate them. As described throughout the document, a constant concern for its framers was guaranteeing that the currency the mint produced reliably remained at an exceptionally high quality. In fact, after an opening preamble, rules for electing new mint officials, and a statute banning all workers from blaspheming “God and his

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>320</sup> Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 85.

mother, the blessed Virgin Mary, or any male or female saints of God, or the heavenly court” in the mint, the very first regulation concerns the potential debasing of money.<sup>321</sup> According to this statute, if any minter should diminish the value gold or silver coin,” he was to be “expelled from the mint, and condemned to the loss of forty silver denarii in his wages.”<sup>322</sup> This punishment, the most expensive of its kind in the *Constitutum*, was significant as mint workers generally did not earn high wages.<sup>323</sup> The *Constitutum* also contains an ordinance banning “theft or fraud” [*furtum vel falsitatem*] in the mint: “It established and ordained that if any minter should commit theft or fraud in matters pertaining to the mint, or existing in the mint, he is to be charged therewith by the bailiff or the minters before the lords and masters of the mint and expelled from the mint.”<sup>324</sup> The florin, central to familial and personal prestige as described in the *Libro della zecca*, as well as communal prestige as described in Villani’s anecdote, required certain protections that the *Constitutum* sought to provide. In essence, in order to imperialize their neighbors, the florin had to remain of a high, reliable quality. As I discuss later, however, it was only the florin and their imitations which the Florentines sought to protect. Indeed, Florentines who worked in foreign mints did not always adhere to similar rules as outlined in the *Constitutum*—for their commune’s benefit, they were selective regarding which coins they protected from debasement.

### *The Example of the Avignon Papacy and Western Europe*

Use of the florin was so widespread in Europe by the 1320s, and its non-economic

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<sup>321</sup> *Constitutum artis monetariorum civitatis Florentiae*, ed. Piero Ginori Conti (Florence: Olshki, 1939), 3.

*Deum et beatam Virginem Mariam matrem eius, vel aliquem sanctum, aut sanctam Dei, vel curiam celestialem.*

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.* *Statutum et ordinatum est quod si aliquis moneterius diminueret monetagium monete auri, vel argenti, sit expulsus de moneta, et condempnetur in soldis quadraginta florenorum parvorum.*

<sup>323</sup> Travaini, “Mint Organization in Italy,” 47.

<sup>324</sup> *Constitutum artis monetariorum civitatis Florentiae*, 5. *Statutum et ordinatum est quod si aliquis moneterius faceret furtum vel falsitatem de rebus pertinentibus ad monetam, vel in moneta existentibus, sit inde per prepositum vel moneterios accusatus coram dominis et magistris monete et de moneta expulsus.*



functions so ingrained in the coin, that the processes described above became self-driving and perpetuating, with foreign governments inadvertently assisting in this process of Florentine economic imperialism. A closer examination of John XXII's order to mint imitation florins demonstrates the role foreign states played in this process. Consider, not only did John put Florentine merchants in charge of developing the program for minting imitation florins, but he also explicitly depended on the commune, requesting help and access to necessary technology like weights and measures to produce imitation coins as true as possible to those already in circulation.<sup>325</sup> Comparatively, numerous princes before John, though not following the lead of Genoa and Florence, spectacularly failed in their attempts to mint gold coins of their own.<sup>326</sup> As Bloch notes when discussing failed gold coinages of the thirteenth century, since "all money is founded on confidence ... and in a large measure on habit," "plagiarism was" a monetary program like the papacy's "only resource."<sup>327</sup> Confidence and habit were, indeed, the main reasons that the papacy minted imitation florins rather than striking their own gold coinage, especially in the years following 1322 when John needed dependable and widely accepted currency to finance his wars in Italy.<sup>328</sup> Additionally, there were relatively limited risks and non-material costs transporting florins and imitation florins compared to silver currencies. With florins, taxes or dues owed to the papal camera by individual monasteries or churches could be discreetly transported by a single traveler—1000 florins, for example, only weighed approximately 5.5 pounds.<sup>329</sup> Due to the extent of the

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<sup>325</sup> William R. Day, Jr., "Antiquity, Rome, and Florence: Coinage and Transmissions Across Time and Space," in *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and Exchange of Ideas, c. 500-1400*, ed. Claudia Bolgia, Rosamond McKitterick, and John Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 246.

<sup>326</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 168-69; Lopez, "Back to Gold, 1252," 238-39.

<sup>327</sup> Bloch, "Le problème de l'or au moyen âge," 24. *Toute monnaie est fondée sur la confiance ... [et] dans une large mesure, sur l'habitude ... plagiat était ... seule ressource.*

<sup>328</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 183.

<sup>329</sup> Marc Bompaire, "Voyageurs, convoyeurs, et réseaux financiers à la fin du moyen âge: quelques exemples Français," *Revue Belge de numismatique et de sigillographie* 152 (2006): 70.

Avignon papacy's bureaucracy, and the regions it primarily focused on politically, widespread adoption of the florin offered a number of solutions to its economic problems.

These papal motivations carried clear benefits for Florence and its merchants. Assisting with the production of the papal imitation florins (and other imitation florins to follow) further caused the currency to be standard throughout Western Europe and reduced the opportunity for counterfeit currencies to succeed.<sup>330</sup> Additionally, success of John's imitation florin led to similar programs being successfully adopted by other Latin princes, further expanding the prestige of the currency and strengthening its reputation.<sup>331</sup> To this end, during the reign of Clement VI (r. 1342-52) the association between the papacy and the florin was so thorough that the curia distributed over three and half million florins to the French king Philip VI (r. 1328-50) to help pay for his expenses during the early stages of the Hundred Years War.<sup>332</sup> This use of florins as a form of payment during the Hundred Years War led to the even further development of mints that produced imitation florins in France and the Low Countries to expediate payment for supplies and to soldiers.<sup>333</sup> Much like the mint of John and Charles II, these mints also required experts to produce acceptable imitations, and Florentine mint workers were sought to run them.<sup>334</sup> In order to ensure these florins were of high quality, rights were often granted to attract Florentines to serve as mint masters. At the papal mint in Avignon during the reign of Clement, for example, Florentine mint workers were granted legal privileges, like exemptions from papal taxes and some

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<sup>330</sup> Day, Jr., "Antiquity, Rome, and Florence," 248.

<sup>331</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 185.

<sup>332</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 278n2. Simultaneous to this, Florentine bankers also provided the English king Edward III (r. 1327-77) with loans of 1.5 million florins for his own preparation for war with France. See *ibid.*, 277.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>334</sup> Travaini, "Mint Organization in Italy," 49.

ability to choose which judge would serve in court cases they were involved in.<sup>335</sup>

This development of new mints and the disbursement of these Florentine mint masters throughout Europe naturally coincided with an explosion in the number of florins produced on the continent: in 1338, in addition to 350,000 florins minted in Florence, another 100,000 imitation florins were minted in Ghent under the auspices of a Florentine mint master, and an additional 35,000 florins were minted as far afield as Lübeck.<sup>336</sup> And, of course, many of these imitation florins bore the images of the lily and John the Baptist ubiquitous to the coin, including those papal coins that ordinarily would have included an image of Peter or Paul.<sup>337</sup>

Of all developments of this kind, the most spectacular was John XXII's decision—now having a personal stake in the reputation of the florin—to issue a bull in 1324 banning the counterfeiting of the currency by Florentine rivals.<sup>338</sup> In a similar manner to how Florence parlayed loans of florins to kings of Naples into trade rights and privileges, the numismatist Ulrich Klein believes that Florence's decision to send assistance to John's mint was part of a transaction that concluded with his issuing of the bull.<sup>339</sup> This sort of direct exchange is difficult to divine from the sources, but, at the least, the bull known as *In delictorum diversorum* was a major victory for the Florentines: it cast their economic rivals as greedy, threatened them with anathematization if they did not cease the production of imitation florins, and essentially endorsed the florin as the standardized currency in the Latin

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<sup>335</sup> Guillaume Mollat, "Les papes d'Avignon et leur hotel des monnaies a Sourgues," *Revue numismatique* 12, no. 4 (1908): 255-56.

<sup>336</sup> Leroy, "Le trésor de Bruges," 114.

<sup>337</sup> For a description of one of John XXII's florins, see Giard, "Le florin d'or au baptiste et ses imitations," 99.

<sup>338</sup> Day, Jr., "Early Imitations of the Gold Florin of Florence," 198.

<sup>339</sup> Ulrich Klein, "Der Florentiner Goldgulden und seine Imitationen," in *Faux-contrefaçons-imitations: Actes du quatrième colloque international du Groupe Suisse pour l'étude des trouvailles monétaires*, ed. Anne-Francine Auberson, Harald R. Derschka, Suzanne Frey-Kupper (Belfort: Éditions du Zèbre, 2004), 137.

West. Indeed, the bull begins not by discussing negative consequences of counterfeit money on economies, but by using florid language to cast those involved in the production of illicit florins as money-obsessed sinners, similar in nature to Dante’s usurers, placing profit before both divine and secular law. “There are ... some who,” the bull begins,

forgetful of their own salvation, not content with common and ordinary transgressions, bursting towards improprieties and forbidden things, are sunk down by damnable desire for profits and the inexhaustible pit of profits in such a way that while they satisfy their gluttonies, toward which they gape, rashly plunging themselves into illicit gains, or rather spiritual losses, they prefer wicked takings and illicit profits to the honor of God and the salvation of souls, and to both imperious edicts of sacred canons, to and common laws.<sup>340</sup>

The bull continued by becoming specific—alluding to the rivals of Florence that “prefer wicked takings and illicit profits to the honor of God and the salvation of souls”—and noting the tradition that is violated by the production of imitation florins:

Public report has been made ... that there are some in parts of upper Lombardy and of the Genoese march, who with the reins of rash permissiveness slackened, presuming that crimes are allowed to them, they strike and mint, or they cause to be struck or minted florins of gold, following the form and mark and dye and the lettered borders of those which have been accustomed to be struck and minted in the city of Florence, from a time beyond memory, and also at present are struck and minted.<sup>341</sup>

Though the bull ostensibly sought to rectify personal failings and prevent others from committing sin, its aims eventually turned economic:

And although the said florins have been minted similar to the true florin from Florence, they are deficient in the true and typical value of the florin; those florins however (in a copied imitation of true florins) deceive common people ... and also at

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<sup>340</sup> John XXII, *In delictorum diversorum*, in *Die Ausgaben der apostolischen Kammer unter Johann XXII*, ed. Schäfer, K. H. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöning, 1911), 138-39. *Sunt ... nonnulli, qui propriae salutis immemores, delictis communibus et vulgaribus non contenti, ad profana et vetita prorumpentes, sic damnata cupiditate lucrorum ac inexhausta eorum voragine devoluuntur, quod dummodo suas ingluvies ad quas inhiant, expleant se lucris illicitis, immo iacturis spiritualibus temere immergentes, honori Dei et animarum salutis, ac sacrorum canonum et imperialibus edictis et iuribus communibus, capturas nefarias et lucra illicita anteponunt.*

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid. Relatio ... publica ... effecit ... nonnullos esse in Lombardia superioris et Marchiae Ianuensis partibus, qui licentiae temerariae laxatis habenis licere sibi praesumentes illicita cudunt et fabricant, seu cudi et fabricari faciunt florenos auri, secundum formam et signum et coinum ac circumferentias litterarum, qui in civitate Florentiae (a tempore cuius non extat memoria) cudi et fabricari sunt soliti, et cuduntur et fabricantur etiam in praesenti.*

the same time experts in matters of this kind, and they expose themselves to financial losses and to the ruin of people, when they accept them as true florins.<sup>342</sup>

The production of counterfeit florins needed to cease, *In delictorum diversorum* ultimately argued, because of the confusion it was causing in economic exchanges—Florence’s domain—and in princely treasuries—John’s primary concern.

What the bull emphasizes and highlights elides with both Florentine economic policies and resonates with the political philosophy of Ptolemy of Lucca. The counterfeit florins, the bull related, were deceitful and could cause damages when they were used in buying and selling. Similarly, they looked exactly like the real deal, to the point that, as the bull describes, “most did not have the skill to discern between florins and false florins of such similarity.”<sup>343</sup> If money, as Ptolemy wrote, was the means through which people most often came into contact with their lord and how those lords consequently gained prestige, unreliable money could also derail those processes. Indeed, these concerns are also partly why the *Constitutum* specifically banned the debasement of the florin. Though perhaps not intentional, Florentine efforts to make princes in the Latin West reliant on their currency clearly paid major dividends when they cultivated this reliance at the court of John XXII. No matter how effective *In delictorum diversorum* was in preventing the counterfeiting of florins, it still represents one of the highest authorities in all of Christendom intervening on behalf of Florence and the city’s money for its benefit.

### *The Example of Central Europe*

Imitation florins spread throughout central Europe in the first half of the fourteenth

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid. *Et quamvis dicti floreni ad veram florenorum de Florentia similitudinem fabricati, in vero et solito florenorum valore deficient; ipsi tamen (simulata eorum effigie) personas ... et quandoque etiam in huiusmodi rebus expertas decipiunt, ipsasque rerum et periculis personarum exponunt, dum pro veris florenis ipsos recipient.*

<sup>343</sup> Ibid. *Plurimi non habeant inter florenos et florenos tantae similitudinis peritiam discernendi.*

century at a similarly frenetic pace, and in a similarly cascading manner, as they did in Western Europe. John the Blind (r. 1313-46), king of Bohemia, was the first prince outside of France during this period to mint a gold currency, ordering the production of imitation florins in 1325.<sup>344</sup> Partly due to the yields from recently opened native gold mines, Charles I of Hungary (r. 1301-42) began minting his own gold currency in 1328, using the florin as a paradigm for his coin's weight, fineness, and type.<sup>345</sup> In fact, the production of these imitation florins was even preceded by a meeting between Charles and John in which the two kings agreed to a shared system of currency in their neighboring principalities, with florins, produced locally or otherwise, designated as the standard gold piece.<sup>346</sup> The use of the florin in central Europe was so dispersed that by 1340 Louis IV of the Holy Roman Empire (r. 1328-47) began to grant specific rights and privileges pertaining to their minting, including to the city of Lübeck.<sup>347</sup> Not long after in 1354, the elector-princes in the Rhineland also decided to use florins as a standard currency and mint their own imitations. This decision possessed massive ramifications for money in central Europe and led to the production of even further imitations, "because all other German, Netherlandish, and Lothringian gold money oriented itself to the coinage of the elector-princes."<sup>348</sup> These trends pertaining to both the spread of florins and the varying polities that began to mint them are also reflected in data from rediscovered coin hoards in central Europe. Among the coins found in a treasure from

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<sup>344</sup> Johannes Abdullahi, "Die erste Goldmünze Böhmens: Die Münzpolitik Johans des Blinden zwischen Kapitalbedarf und repräsentativem Herrschaftsstil," in *Heilige, Helden, Wüteriche: Herrschaftsstile der Luxemburger (1308-1437)*, ed. Martin Bauch, Julia Burkhardt, Tomáš Gaudek, and Václav Žůrek (Cologne: Wien Böhlau Verlag, 2017), 150.

<sup>345</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 268.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>347</sup> Klein, "Der Florentiner Goldgulden und seine Imitationen," 137.

<sup>348</sup> Konrad Schneider, "Prägung und Umlauf von Dukaten im Rheinland: Erste hochfeine Florene und Dukaten und ihre Verdrängung durch die rheinischen Goldgulden" *Jahrbuch für westdeutsche Landesgeschichte* 32 (2006): 94. *Denn nach den Gulden der Kurfürsten richteten sich alle anderen deutschen, niederländischen und lothringischen Guldenprägungen aus.*

Limburg and dating to no earlier than 1342, for example, are 136 total gold coins, including 120 florins, of which 84 were minted in Florence. Comparatively, a coin hoard from Mainz and dating to approximately fifty years later and around 1390 contained 450 total florins, including 185 minted in Hungary, sixty in Bohemia, and fifty-nine in Austria.<sup>349</sup>

The role of the florin in John the Blind's economic policies helps to further emphasize the remarkable ways in which florins filtered into foreign economies and how their associated prestige led to more benefits for the city. Much like John XXII and the Angevin kings of Naples, John the Blind's economic policy was essentially outsourced to Florence and beholden to the city's wishes and economic goals. Though a gold currency could help finance John's international wars, coined gold was not used locally in Bohemia as a currency.<sup>350</sup> Like many other parts of Europe, silver was the standard metal of currency in the kingdom. John was, however, innovative in his use of silver as a currency, minting pennies with the metal that featured an exceptionally unique design showing his face in three-quarters profile.<sup>351</sup> Given the preexisting prestige and international value of the florin, however, John was unable to act in a similarly innovative way when minting his imitations, which remained faithful to the original in design, purity, and weight.<sup>352</sup> Still, while noting that John likely lost money by minting the coins, the numismatist Emanuela Nohejlová-Pratová concludes his decision to mint florins was "an act of political representation, because John needed the luster of gold in the luster of his own person."<sup>353</sup> The economic historian

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>350</sup> For John's need to pay for wars, see Abdullahi, "Die erste Goldmünze Böhmens," 149-50. For the lack of local applications of gold currency in Bohemia, see *ibid.*, 161.

<sup>351</sup> For the design of John's silver penny, see *ibid.*, 158-59.

<sup>352</sup> For the quality of John's imitations, see *ibid.*, 160.

<sup>353</sup> Emanuela Nohejlová-Pratová, as quoted in Abdullahi, "Die erste Goldmünze Böhmens," 151. *Ein Akt politischer Repräsentation, denn Johann benötigte zum Glanz seiner Person auch den Glanz des Goldes.*

Peter Spufford comes to a similar conclusion.<sup>354</sup> And, the historian Johannes Abdullahi positions John's decision to begin minting florins as a broader part of a propagandistic program, akin to holding tournaments or patronizing poets and heralds.<sup>355</sup>

Missing in these interpretations, however, is that this was prestige gained specifically through association with Florence and their florin. Simply, John could not have been able to participate in such an act of political representation without the years of work by Florentines to imperialize Latin Christendom with their coins, nor would he have gone to the extents he did without the direct encouragement of Florentines. The Bohemian chronicler Peter von Zittau (1275-1339) offered a notable example of how this process worked. As the chronicler reports, at a moment when "this king now [had] an intense desire to amass a heap of treasure," he "summoned from Florence certain Lombards highly skilled in the science of turning money to profit."<sup>356</sup> As previously described, the international reputation of the florin caused Florentines to be sought out for technical advice for the production of coins and general advice on economic policy. Indeed, John employed a Florentine as his own mint master.<sup>357</sup> Though his imitation florins were detrimental to his finances and offered few benefits outside of intangible prestige, these Florentine advisors nevertheless offered a solution that would allow the florins to continue being produced: John should debase the money used locally, they suggested, in a sense thus implying that the purity of his imitation florins should not be tinkered with. As Peter von Zittau related, this suggestion proved to be amenable to the king, and "on their advice he allowed cheap silver pennies to be minted in

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<sup>354</sup> Spufford, *Money and Its Use*, 269.

<sup>355</sup> Abdullahi, "Die erste Goldmünze Böhmens," 151.

<sup>356</sup> Peter von Zittau, *Chronicon Aulae Regiae*, in *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum*, ed. Josef Emler (Prague, 1884), 284. *Habet rex iste nunc intentum studium, ut aggreget cumulum thesaurorum ... advocavit rex quosdam de Florentia Lombardos in sciencia lucrandi pecunias valde gnaros.*

<sup>357</sup> Abdullahi, "Die erste Goldmünze Böhmens," 152.



the public mint.”<sup>358</sup> This had a disastrous effect on the local economy, however, and “because of this, a sizable protest began to be raised among the people, since their copper material and corrupted form hindered the trade of all sellable goods.”<sup>359</sup>

This advice by the Florentines in John’s employ is most remarkable when contextualized in the evidence discussed above. First, debasing his silver coinage was an unusual tack to take. In the first half of the fourteenth century, Bohemian silver mines produced more bullion than any others in Europe, to the extent that under John’s predecessor Wenceslaus II (r. 1278-1305) sent approximately 6.8 tons of silver annually to his mints.<sup>360</sup> Essentially, the decision was not made due to a want of silver. Furthermore, if the minters who made the suggestion were located in Florence, the mere act of debasing the silver currency would have resulted in the punishments spelled out in the *Constitutum artis monetariorum civitatis Florentiae*. As also described in the *Constitutum*, Florentines with knowledge of minting had to receive permission from the provost of the mint before working outside of the commune.<sup>361</sup> And, the decision violated Ptolemy of Lucca’s advice to princes about money, with coins featuring the name and image of John now debased and unreliable—exactly what *In delictorum diversorum* sought to prevent for Florence. Essentially, what the Florentines in John’s employ—who had to be deputized by their native mint master to work in Bohemia—suggested to the king was the complete opposite of the monetary policies of their city. In so doing, they both protected the value of an imitation florin (in turn protecting the value of the true florin) and obliquely weakened the silver

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<sup>358</sup> Peter von Zittau, *Chronicon Aulae Ragiae*, 284. *Ad horum consilium parvos denarios rex permisit in moneta publica monetari.*

<sup>359</sup> Ibid. *Cepit ex hoc clamor in vulgo non modicus elevari, quoniam cuprea materia et corrupta eorum forma impediunt omnium venalium rerum fora.*

<sup>360</sup> Michael North, *Das Geld und seine Geschichte: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994), 18.

<sup>361</sup> Travaini, “Mint Organization in Italy,” 46.

currency of a rival state.

By the 1330s, then, Florence had imposed its economic might on the rest of the Latin West and the gold florin reigned as the premier currency in Europe. Networks of Florentine merchants and bankers encouraged its use, and its uniformity and purity of gold was highly valued for large payments and international trade in the West. The specific value of gold in southern Europe allowed Florentine merchants to forge exploitative contracts with Neapolitan monarchs, displacing foreign merchants and usurping rights over essential goods like grain. As Villani's improbable anecdote reveals, this accomplishment was recognized by the Florentines themselves. Additionally, as demonstrated by the prologue to the *Libro della zecca*, prestige and honor could be won for Florentines through association with the coin and the mint that produced them. There was an added benefit for Florence with regards to this prestige as much of it was earned at the expense of, or with the help of, rival states. The gold florin was so central to European economic life that the papacy anathematized any who would dare to counterfeit it, increasing confidence in both the currency and the city whose name it bore. Imitations were, however, still allowed, though this also benefited the Florentines, with foreign governments spreading the city's fame through the use of their city-specific insignia on their imitations and employing Florentine experts to run their mints.

*The Later Medieval World System, Global Mali, and Economic Imperialism*

Though Florence's monetary policy outpaced that of its European competitors, the city too was at risk of being imperialized and its economic policy was at risk of becoming beholden to a foreign power. Indeed, Florence was not the only later medieval polity that could wield gold as a tool for imperialism. As demonstrated in part one of this thesis, variations in the amount of gold available to Western Europe had the potential to profoundly

influence Latin society and culture. Therefore, despite its firm position as a core in the Western European/Trans-Saharan world system, Florence was still dependent on other actors in said system to maintain its power.

To this end, the documents and scholarship pertaining to Florence analyzed thus far allow for a clear picture to emerge about the ways in which gold could be used as a tool for imperialism in the later Middle Ages. With this paradigm established, a comparative analysis with Mansa Musa's own similar use of gold while in Cairo can be undertaken, in turn allowing these uses of the metal in the later medieval Mediterranean basin to come into a sharper focus. Conscious decisions from Musa, which elided with broader goals of imperial Mali, sent reverberations throughout the Mediterranean basin and influenced European economies that had previously developed a dependency on gold as a currency.

By going on hajj, Musa naturally accrued spiritual benefits and political capital which he could utilize locally in West Africa. Beyond this, however, Michael Gomez argues that Musa possessed two economic and imperial motivations for his pilgrimage: to extend his hegemony over territories within his immediate sphere of influence in order "to access and control a larger share of commercial markets" so that he could "maintain imperium through means other than military force," and to establish Mali as a "transregional, if not global power."<sup>362</sup> Similarly, Nehemia Levtzion argues that Musa's hajj was ultimately successful because it encouraged Egyptian merchants to invest in direct trade with West Africa.<sup>363</sup>

According to the available written sources—including the purported words of Musa himself—these hypothesized goals do indeed fit with broader political trends and policies of the Empire of Mali. As previously referenced in part one of this thesis, al-Umari, for

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<sup>362</sup> Gomez, *African Dominion*, 109.

<sup>363</sup> Levtzion, "The Early States of the Western Sudan," 152.

example, described how unrestrained conquest in West Africa led to a decline in the amount of gold produced in the region. “If the sultan wished he could extend his authority over [pagan gold-producing regions],” al-Umari wrote, “but the kings of this kingdom have learnt by experience that as soon as one of them conquers one of the gold towns ... the gold there begins to decrease and then disappears, while it increases in the neighboring heathen countries.”<sup>364</sup> In other words, emperors of Mali understood the dramatic risks to their treasury that existed should they pursue imperium through military conquest. Consequently, they developed non-militaristic methods to imperialize their neighbors. In Musa’s case, al-Umari explains that he opted to cultivate a trading relationship with the gold-producing pagan lands to his south, exchanging “crude copper” for gold at a rate of 100 to 66.6 units.<sup>365</sup> This was, in essence, the same strategy as the Florentines in southern Italy and Naples; but where the city and its bankers traded florins for the right to control the southern Italian grain market, Musa traded copper for gold. In Mali’s program of establishing and maintaining imperium, shrewd economic policy and market manipulation were common and viable methods to employ.

The sources similarly indicate that emperors of Mali envisioned their domain as possessing a global-political role. Such ideas even appear fundamental to the self-conception of emperors of Mali and were part of broader programs developed to demonstrate their right to rule to both domestic and international audiences. As al-Umari described, for example, while in Cairo Musa reported to one of the author’s sources that his predecessor outfitted and personally led a fleet of 2,000 ships to “discover the furthest limit of the Atlantic Ocean.”<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Al-Umari, *Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises*, 262.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

Despite the voyage's presumed failure, both the story itself and Musa's decision to relay it to an international audience indicates Mali thought of itself as a global power, a self-conception which Musa also felt the need to announce during his stay in Cairo.

Similarly, Ibn Khaldun reported that one of Musa's later successors Mari Jata (r. 1360-74) completed a series of diplomatic exchanges with a sultan of Morocco by sending him "a giraffe, a strangely-shaped and large-framed creature resembling various other animals."<sup>367</sup> As Ibn Khaldun further related, the arrival of the animal caused a great spectacle, with a crowd gathering "until the space was too small for them and they climbed upon each other in the press round the giraffe in amazement at its form."<sup>368</sup> Though a distant potentate, Mari Jata's actions thus impelled a brief mania among inhabitants of Fez, in turn demonstrating the various forms of non-military power he (and emperors of Mali more generally speaking) wielded.

Gold, however, was the primary tool for emperors of Mali to use when developing their global prestige. As discussed in the first part of this thesis, the Ghana's abundance of gold—possessing so much that he could purportedly adorn his dogs in the metal—caused an international stir and was reported in al-Bakri's geographical work. Similarly, Fauvelle proposes that the golden orb held by the image of Musa on the famed Catalan Atlas of 1375 is perhaps an indication of European knowledge of a famous, massive gold nugget used to articulate kingship in West Africa beginning with kings of Wagadu and appropriated by emperors of Mali.<sup>369</sup> At the least, Ibn Khaldun considered shrewd use of gold by emperors of Mali to be central to their ability as rulers. As he reported, Mari Jata was "a most wicked

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<sup>367</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Book of Examples*, 342.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Fauvelle, *The Golden Rhinoceros*, 197.

ruler,” an appraisal partly confirmed by his decision to sell a “boulder of gold which was a prized possession” of emperors of Mali.<sup>370</sup> As one of Khaldun’s informative sources described, the boulder weighed “twenty *qintars*” and was “regarded as the rarest and most precious of treasures because its like [was] so scarce.”<sup>371</sup> Stewardship over gold, and politic uses of the metal, were thus central to how West African rulers were perceived internationally.

Reading the available sources about Musa’s hajj in Cairo absent this context and the paradigm established through the study of Florence, it would seem he failed to either expand Mali’s imperium or announce his empire as a global power. As described by one of al-Umari’s sources, when Musa arrived in Cairo he was hesitant to visit al-Nasir in person ““because he would be obliged to kiss the ground and the sultan’s hand.”<sup>372</sup> Viewing himself at least as an equal to the sultan, the idea of following the protocol expected of a supplicant was insulting to Musa. Nevertheless, he was forced to visit the sultan’s court and kiss the ground in front of him, justifying it by claiming he was “mak[ing] obeisance to God who created [him]!”<sup>373</sup> On the one hand, the available sources say that, despite Musa’s initial unwillingness to follow protocol, there was no further conflict between the two rulers. On the other hand, Gomez writes that “the whole of the evidence [about the audience] suggests the meeting was a major disappointment for Musa.”<sup>374</sup> Indeed, this moment leads Gomez to conclude that Musa failed in his broader goals of demonstrating the global power of Mali.<sup>375</sup> After traveling thousands of miles only to be treated by al-Nasir as a subordinate, Musa

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<sup>370</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Book of Examples*, 335-36.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>372</sup> Al-Umari, *Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises*, 270.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>374</sup> Gomez, *African Dominion*, 117.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

apparently did not obtain his desired geo-political outcomes from his hajj.

Musa's disappointment, however, should be understood as motivation for his actions which followed the audience. In fact, such an interpretation fits with general patterns of Musa's rulership style. For example, the famous Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta (1304-68), whose journeys took him to West Africa during the reign of Mari Jata, relayed an anecdote about the largess Musa demonstrated when returning favors. According to Battuta, when Musa was just a boy and it was uncertain if he would become emperor, a local man gave him a gift of seven gold mithqals (akin to seven dinars).<sup>376</sup> Years later and after becoming emperor, the man returned to court to request Musa's help concerning a dispute. As Battuta described,

Musa recognized [the man] and brought him so close to himself that he sat with him ... Then he made him admit the kindness which he had done to him and said to the emirs: "What should be the reward of one who has done the good deed that he has done?" They said: "For a kindness ten times the like thereof, so give him 70 mithqals." Thereupon he gave him 700 mithqals.<sup>377</sup>

Similarly, Ibn Khaldun reported that Musa sent al-Nasir a gift of 50,000 dinars in advance of their meeting.<sup>378</sup> Of course, what al-Nasir offered Musa in return was not interpreted as a gracious gesture, requiring from Musa a reaction in kind.

As already detailed, Musa followed his meeting with the sultan by flooding Cairo with gold—discussed by his contemporaries and, perhaps, intentionally disguised by the emperor as being benefactions—which led to severe, long-lasting consequences for the Cairene economy. Though he was forced to follow protocol and genuflect in the presence of the sultan, through his actions that followed Musa nevertheless exhibited his ability to exert

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<sup>376</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Rihla*, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins, in *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources*, 295.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>378</sup> Ibn Khaldun, 323.

his power globally. In fact, by flooding all of Cairo with gold, Musa essentially made his gift to the sultan worthless. Neither the local economy nor al-Nasir appear to have benefited financially from Musa's visit. Still, Musa's reputation appears to have remained positive in the Near East following his hajj. Al-Umari wrote, for example, that when the author first arrived in Cairo he found its citizens "eager to recount what they had seen of the Africans' prodigal spending."<sup>379</sup> When al-Umari wrote about Musa's visit ten years later, he was not merely reflecting on the opulence involved in Musa's visit, but also the very real economic consequences with which Cairo continued to contend.

Importantly, the Egyptians who witnessed the event believed, based on Musa's own words, that his spending did not have major consequences for his own treasury. While in Cairo, Musa was asked by at least one Egyptian about a legendary gold-producing plant that, among learned Muslims, was believed to be the source West Africa's gold. In this conversation, Musa did not deny or clarify the legend, but leaned into it, describing two separate plants whose roots were made of gold. As al-Umari wrote, "Musa ... [explained] that gold was his prerogative and he collected the crop as a tribute."<sup>380</sup> According to Musa himself, acquiring gold was as easy as pulling it out of the ground or exchanging it for crude copper; his supplies of the yellow metal were, from the perspective of the Egyptians, limitless. Of course, this was false and Musa likely delayed going on his hajj in order to accumulate enough gold for his trip. Furthermore, the sources do not indicate that his original plan was to ruin Cairo's economy. But when traditional diplomacy failed to produce the results Musa desired, he turned to more aggressive, imperialistic methods to demonstrate his personal influence and Mali's position as a global power.

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<sup>379</sup> Al-Umari, *Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises*, 269.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.



This decision by Musa had further reaching consequences than even he likely appreciated: when Musa dumped tons and tons of gold into the Cairene gold market, he not only upset the local economy but, as data indicates, crashed the western Mediterranean gold trade, which naturally carried negative results for Florence's gold-based economy. At the exact moment Musa visited Cairo in 1324, for example, the gold florin was at its highest ever value, with every florin of gold worth approximately a combined sixty-six silver Florentine soldi and nine silver denarii.<sup>381</sup> Ten years later in 1334—contemporaneous to when al-Umari reported that the value of gold was still depreciated in Cairo—the florin reached its lowest value level since 1316, worth only fifty-nine silver soldi. This trend is locatable in the exchange rates of gold to silver throughout Europe.<sup>382</sup> Further, in the decade following Musa's hajj, the Florentine mint produced the most gold florins it ever had or would produce, manufacturing approximately 1315 kilograms worth annually, or over 360,000 individual coins.<sup>383</sup> The ratio of gold to silver coins produced by the Florentine mint in that decade was also dramatically high, with 16% more gold minted into coins compared to silver. Comparatively, the 1340s saw 235% more silver minted into coins than gold.<sup>384</sup> So, Musa's visit to Cairo appears to have both devalued gold in Florence and increased the city's overall supply in the years that followed. As a consequence, the value of gold relative to silver plunged even further in Italy during the 1340s; where in 1324 one gram of gold was worth fourteen grams of silver on the peninsula, by 1349 one gram of gold was worth barely over nine grams of silver.<sup>385</sup> The drop in the value of the florin was disastrous for the city,

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<sup>381</sup> Peter Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange*, 3.

<sup>382</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 272.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>385</sup> Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange*, lxi.

coinciding with a period of famine, plague, and the eventual bankruptcy of the commune, problems which the city attempted to buy its way out of by minting so many gold florins.<sup>386</sup>

The economic historian Peter Spufford argues in the concluding chapter of his *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe* that, while impressive, large payments in the Latin West “paled into insignificance against the tide of commerce.”<sup>387</sup> Whether they were for the ransom of a king or to buy titles and lands, Spufford argues, payments of these sort “seen in the perspective of decades ... makes them seem small and ephemeral.”<sup>388</sup> Perspectives like those of Spufford, however, conceal important functions of gold and gold currencies in the later medieval Mediterranean basin. Through highly specific—even non-commercial—usages of their gold currency, Florence was able to imperialize their rivals, opening up new markets and increasing their prestige in the process. Similarly, Musa ruined both the gold markets of Cairo and Florence after a hostile reception with the al-Nasir, the West African emperor in the process announcing his status as a global monarch.

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<sup>386</sup> Leroy, “Le trésor de Bruges,” 102.

<sup>387</sup> Spufford, *Money and its Use*, 392.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

Fernand Braudel's evaluation of gold's role in the high and later medieval Mediterranean, referenced at numerous points throughout this thesis, is noticeably laudatory compared to other works of historiography. From characterizing gold as the "essential motor element" for trade in the region, to portraying West African gold as "providential" for Mediterranean economic life, Braudel's comments are also quite expected given the source. The role of trade connections is central to Braudel's broader interpretations of historical processes, perhaps second in importance only to geography; that he focuses on gold's significance is no surprise and allows him to appear quite prescient in his comments published in 1949. Indeed, he comes closer than nearly every other scholar that preceded or followed him—be it Marc Bloch, Janet Abu-Lughod (who explicitly devalues the role of gold in her world system), or Michael Gomez—at revealing the profound links between the histories of West Africa and the Latin West.

But even Braudel, seminal historian that he is, comes up significantly short. Like many other historians who study the subject, Braudel identifies the advent of the Portuguese in West Africa in the late fifteenth century as the primary cause for a precipitous decline in the trans-Saharan gold trade. More unfortunately for his beloved sea, however, he also identifies the same event as the cause for significant economic decline in the Mediterranean basin. When he reaches this moment in his analysis, his tone even seems to become one of anger at historians who have failed to recognize the significance of these developments. He rhetorically asks, "What happened [with the arrival of the Portuguese in West Africa]? Nothing. Nothing but a tiny insignificant fact, of which people have not wanted to see, until now, repercussions on the profound life of the Mediterranean—and, therefore, on the entire

economy, on the entire history of Europe.”<sup>389</sup>

Braudel’s anger is misplaced, however, and his analysis suffers from it. Much like the processes in the earlier era analyzed in this thesis, West Africans needed to possess a desire to trade with the Portuguese before they redirected the northwards flow of gold towards the western coast. Indeed, that is what the inauguration of direct intervention by European merchants brought to the gold trade—redirected trade routes—as gold outputs did not increase from their premodern levels until the advent of industrial mining in the region in the early twentieth century.<sup>390</sup> Though gold was an actant of fundamental importance in the Western European/Trans-Saharan world system, then, it was not gold itself that was the “essential motor element” in the high or later medieval Mediterranean basin. Application of actor-network theory—that is, heeding Abu-Lughod’s advice and examining premodern trade from the broadest possible perspective—instead necessitates the acknowledgment that the fundamental cog in Mediterranean trade was the African historical agents that facilitated or hindered the exportation of gold.

Before gold could act as the Mediterranean’s “essential motor element” in the high and later Middle Ages, caravan traders needed to traverse the Sahara, transporting the yellow metal to North Africa where it could be purchased by Christian merchants in exchange for silver; before it could be transported to North Africa, it had to be transported northwards from the southern gold fields to trading entrepôts on the southern Sahel, requiring strong, centralized governments and political figures to encourage regular trade into these locations; and before it was shipped to the southern Sahel, West African peasants had to undertake an

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<sup>389</sup> Braudel, “Monnaies et civilisations,” 13. *Ce qui s’est passé? Rien. Rien qu’un tout petit fait insignifiant, dont personne n’a voulu voir, jusqu’à présent, les répercussions sur la vie profonde de la Méditerranée – et, donc, sur toute l’économie, sur toute l’histoire de l’Europe.*

<sup>390</sup> Curtin, “The Lure of Bambuk Gold,” 630-31.

annual migration to the gold fields, their ability to mine it dependent on a stable political (and meteorological) order.

Whether it was William the Conqueror's single marc of gold tossed at the shrine of St. Etheldreda, cashless systems of payment developed by Italian merchants in reaction to the high medieval bullion famine, the resumption of minting gold coins by Genoa and Florence in 1252, or Dante's placement of usurers in hell in the fourteenth century, medieval sub-Saharan Africans continually made decisions that shaped Latin society and culture. It is not hyperbolic or rhetorical to refer to Sundiata Keita as inventing Latin Purgatory: his victory at the battle of Kirina in 1235 and the increase in gold exports from the region and into Europe that followed further spurred the economic and theological innovations initially begun when West African peoples like the Sosso decided to exert their independence following the decline of Wagadu in the mid-eleventh century. Though the links are obscured and require novel methodologies to reveal, the lives of Sundiata and Dante were intimately connected.

After 1235, gold entered Western Europe in greater amounts and truly did become the "essential motor element" for the city of Florence to expand its own hegemony and imperialize its rivals. Kings of France, Naples, and Hungary were dependent on the technical expertise of the Florentines, as well as the reputation of their money, for their own economic policies. The florin was so crucial to Western European economies that John XXII even used his papal powers to anathematize any who would dare to counterfeit them. Through the shrewd use of West African gold, Florentines thus usurped the economic rights of neighboring Christian states and developed into a core of the fourteenth-century world system. Still, when viewed from a broad perspective, it is clear the city's power was relative—the entire system depended on access to West African gold to mint coins of a high

fineness and international reputation. In fact, for one brief moment in 1324 during Musa's hajj, the Western European/Trans-Saharan world system was suddenly condensed, West African gold flooded the Mediterranean basin in levels previously unseen, and Florence's economy suffered for it. Musa's use of gold in Cairo shared some motivations with Florence's use of their gold coins, but his ability to upset the northern Italian city's economy in the process—something medieval Florence could never do to West Africa's economy—demonstrates where the true gravitational center lay in the early fourteenth-century Western European/Trans-Saharan world system.

The overarching argument in this thesis significantly deviates from the very historiography drawn upon to make it. From Georg Hegel in the nineteenth century to Valerie Hansen in the twenty-first, deliberately or not scholars have continually marginalized sub-Saharan Africa's and Africans' role in the development of global history. As demonstrated in this thesis, the truth is far more interesting. The developments of usury, purgatory, and universal currencies, all considered fundamental aspects of the high and later medieval Latin West, were all dependent on historical processes that occurred thousands of miles away in West Africa.

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