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# To Be the Key for Two Coffers: A West African Embassy to France (1670/1)



Christina BRAUNER\*

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### INTRODUCTION

The embassy of Matteo Lopes, ambassador of the West African 'kingdom' of Allada, to Louis XIV has so far mainly been treated as a curious anecdote or as an entry in the numerous lists documenting the 'African presence' in Europe from the Middle Ages up to the present time.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, Matteo Lopes will be regarded as a guide to global experiences and global interconnectedness and its limits in the early modern world. He can lead us from Africa via America to Europe and—by analogy with an earlier 'embassy'—even further, to the Ottoman Empire. Despite the fact that we do not have any account of the embassy written by Lopes, he provides us with an opportunity to explore African and European strategies to cope with strangers and strangeness.

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\*\* This paper is a revised and more 'globally' oriented version of a longer essay published in German in the journal *Historische Anthropologie* 21 (2013), pp. 199–226.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, HANS WERNER DEBRUNNER, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe. A History of Africans in Europe before 1918*, Basel 1979, pp. 69f., which DAVID NORTHRUP, *Africa's Discovery of Europe, 1450–1850*, New York/Oxford 2009, p. 119 follows. In the context of African history Lopes is dealt with by I[SAAC] A[DEAGBO] AKINJOGBIN, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours, 1708–1818*, Cambridge 1967, pp. 30f. and ROBIN LAW, *The Kingdom of Allada*, Leiden 1997, pp. 2f., ID., *Religion, Trade and Politics on the 'Slave Coast'. Roman Catholic Missions in Allada and Whydah in the Seventeenth Century*, in: *Journal of Religion in Africa* 21,1, 1991, pp. 42–77: pp. 44f. and 49; ID. / KRISTIN MANN, *West Africa in the Atlantic Community: The Case of the Slave Coast*, in: *William & Mary Quarterly* 56,2, 1999, pp. 307–334: pp. 315f.

To facilitate this undertaking, I am going to tackle the question of ‘globality’ in early modern times in two different though intertwined ways in the following, attempting to integrate structural and interactionist aspects. First of all, the embassy of Lopes is used as a case study to trace threads of global connectivity and processes of intercultural communication<sup>2</sup> within the Atlantic world. Secondly, the paper addresses the different ways in which early modern actors experienced global connectivity, the different modes in which they imagined ‘globality’, and the different strategies they used to cope with intercultural encounters. Although it dwells on phenomena quite distinctively ‘pre-modern’, this paper is, following Osterhammel’s definition, possibly rather more an exercise in global history than in the history of globalization.<sup>3</sup>

# 1. FLAGS ON THE AFRICAN SHORE: TRANSFERRING A EUROPEAN CONFLICT TO AFRICA

The first scene of our story, set in May 1670, has its own iconic qualities: a small group of men employed by the Dutch West India Company tore down a French flag at the beach of Allada, on the shores of the West African Slave Coast.<sup>4</sup> It was an initial trigger for a conflict that had long been simmering and ready to erupt openly, a

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<sup>2</sup> In the following, I distinguish between ‘intercultural’ and ‘transcultural’, the first relating to all phenomena or situations where two or more ‘cultures’ are involved whereas the latter is exclusively reserved for practices and objects that are products of intercultural encounters insofar as they cannot readily be identified with one of the cultures of origin but rather represent something ‘new’, something which Homi Bhabha would presumably call ‘hybrid’. That all cultures are hybrid is an important insight but of less heuristic value in assessing different situations of encounter and interaction, but this distinction might help to outline more clearly the processes leading to transculturation and differentiate between various forms culture contact can take.

<sup>3</sup> JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL, Globalizations, in: The Oxford Handbook of World History, ed. JERRY H. BENTLEY, Oxford 2011, pp. 89–104: pp. 93ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Suite du Journal du sieur Delbée; & la cause de l’envoy de l’Ambassadeur du Roy d’Ardres en France, & sa réception en cette Cour*, in: JEAN DE CLODORÉ, *Relation de ce qui s’est passé dans les îles et terre ferme de l’Amérique, pendant la dernière guerre avec l’Angleterre, et depuis, en exécution du traité de Bréda*, tome II, Clouzier: Paris 1671 (second imprint), pp. 495–557 : pp. 495ff. (only the rare second imprint of the *Relation* contains this *Suite du Journal*; I have consulted the copy of Queen’s College Library, Oxford).

conflict that, first of all, concerned local trade and trading privileges but came to involve questions of rank and global visions of power.

The Dutch had been present in the ‘kingdom’<sup>5</sup> of Allada since the 1630s, dealing in clothes and slaves and erecting a trading factory in Offra, the main port of the country.<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, they watched French endeavours to gain a foothold in Allada, initiated by the royally licensed *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* in 1669,<sup>7</sup> with great suspicion. Their efforts to discredit the French ‘newcomers’ at the royal court of Allada, however, were unsuccessful. The French

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<sup>5</sup> The fact that West African polities were mostly styled ‘kingdoms’ in early modern European sources deserves a treatment of its own; it is remarkable, however, that this terminology has made it into present-day research (almost) without any reflection devoted to semantic implications. For the present paper, it might be sufficient to note that the idea of an essential difference between European and African kinds of rule evolved only during the late-eighteenth century. To cut a long story short, I will continue to speak of ‘king’ / ‘kingdom’, as it reflects the European perspective of the sources; but bear in mind that it is, after all, an expression tied to this perspective.

<sup>6</sup> For the following two decades, the Dutch took over the monopoly position formerly held by the Portuguese. From the late 1650s, however, the English and French began to emerge as fierce competitors. —Cf. LAW, Allada, pp. 5ff.; ID., *The Slave Trade in Seventeenth-Century Allada: A Revision*, in: *African Economic History* 22, 1994, pp. 59–64. In 1663, the English Company of Royal Adventurers (founded in 1660 to replace the Guinea Company and, in turn, replaced by the Royal African Company in 1671) began major slave-trading expeditions to Allada and established a factory (*ibid.* pp. 73ff.).

<sup>7</sup> This company is rather understudied; cf., however, the accounts by PIERRE BONNASSIEUX, *Les grandes compagnies de commerce. Etude pour servir à l’histoire de la colonisation*, Paris 1892, pp. 369–377; CHARLES H. COLE, *Colbert and a Century of Mercantilism*, Bd. 2, Morningside Heights 1939, pp. 1–27; Stewart L. MIMS, *Colbert’s West India Policy*, London/New Haven 1912 and KENNETH J. BANKS, *Financiers, Factors and French Proprietary Companies in West Africa, 1664–1713*, in: *Constructing Early Modern Empires. Proprietary Ventures in the Atlantic World, 1500–1750*, ed. LOUIS H. ROPER / BERTRAND VAN RUYMBEKE, Leiden/Boston 2007, pp. 79–116. In the context of French trading companies in general, PIERRE H. BOULLE, *French Mercantilism, Commercial Companies and Colonial Profitability*, in: LEONARD BLUSSÉ/FEMME GAASTRA (eds), *Companies and Trade. Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime*, Leiden 1981, pp. 97–117. There are more intensive studies on the Africa companies of later times: see esp. ABDOULAYE LY, *La Compagnie du Sénégal de 1673 à 1696. L’évolution du commerce français d’Afrique noire dans le dernier quart du XVIIe siècle*, Bordeaux 1955 and ANDRE DELCOURT, *La France et les établissements au Sénégal entre 1710 et 1763*, Dakar 1952.

obtained the royal permission to establish a factory in Offra alongside the Dutch one already in existence.<sup>8</sup>

The French flag that had been hoisted alongside a Dutch banner was intended to serve as a marker to the passing and anchoring ships, signalling the existence of a French establishment. As the action following the Dutch attack on the flag shows, it had further symbolic meaning, representing the French claim to participate in Allada trade and symbolizing France in general. The attack on the flag was thus understood as an attack on French rights and the French position in Allada in general. The major bone of contention, from the Dutch point of view, was probably that the French had planted their flag to the right-hand side of the Dutch banner, in the place perceived as more prominent.<sup>9</sup>

The French *commis*, the Sieur de Mariage, gathered some of his men and was about to proceed with a violent response, when the local governor (known under the Portuguese name of *fidalgo*) intervened on behalf of the king. He rushed in to re-establish the supreme royal authority, which he claimed the two quarrelling parties had disregarded. He then required them to wait upon the king to let him decide on a solution to the conflict.

The *fidalgo*'s action was quite consistent with Allada politics towards Europeans in general: the royal monopoly on trade was as strictly maintained as the royal authority, especially in matters of jurisdiction, over all people living in the king's country. Allada, in its

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<sup>8</sup> They succeeded despite the king's objections to the quality of French commodities and complaints about former instances of French 'unfaithfulness'. According to the Journal of D'Elbée, it was the reputation of the French king that finally convinced the King of Allada. Presumably, this argument should be read with caution as it seems to be directed at impressing a European audience; Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbée [...] aux Isles dans la coste de Guynée, pour l'établissement du commerce en ces pays, in: JEAN DE CLODORÉ, Relation de ce qui s'est passé dans les îles et terre ferme de l'Amérique, pendant la dernière guerre avec l'Angleterre, et depuis, en exécution du traité de Bréda, tome II, Clouzier: Paris 1671 (first imprint), pp. 347–494: pp. 406ff.

<sup>9</sup> Récit de la Réception faite à Dom Mathieu Lopes Ambassadeur du Roi d'Ardres à son arrivée aux Isles françoises de l'Amérique s'en allant en France vers S.M., joint à la lettre de M. de Baas du 24.09.1670, Archives d'Outre-Mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence, F 3/26, fol. 86r–89r: fol. 86r. The report of the *Suite du Journal* mentions only that the French flag was planted on the right-hand side but does not mention specific Dutch objections thereto; *Suite du Journal*, p. 497.

time the most powerful ‘kingdom’ on the Slave Coast and the most important source of slaves in the region before the rise of Ouidah, pursued a ‘foreign policy’ different from the one the nearby Gold Coast polities clung to: its rulers granted no exclusive rights or monopolies to any European nation whatsoever and prohibited the erection of fortified trade forts.<sup>10</sup> The plea of the *fidalgo* and his strict insistence on the supreme authority of the king match this policy. Furthermore, the fact that the quarrelling parties instantly submitted to the plea and prepared to make their way to court shows that royal authority did indeed hold sway with the Europeans (and, possibly, the *fidalgo*’s threat to chase them out of the country also carried some weight).

But on the way to the audience with the king, the conflict flared again and gained an even more general dimension, evoking the ‘global’ background of the initial rivalry: the Dutch *commis* boasted of the “*ancienneté*” of his nation in the country and denounced the French as “*nouveau venu*” who had no naval power at all, thus cleverly expanding on the *local* point of view. The French *commis*, in contrast, sought to bring the *overall* French position to bear, pointing to the “*qualité du Roy son Maistre, la puissance de son Estat, l’ancienneté de Sa Monarchie*”.<sup>11</sup> Within the European theatre of

<sup>10</sup> LAW, Allada, pp. 70ff. and pp. 94ff.; a more general evaluation of power relations on the Slave Coast by ID., ‘Here is No Resisting the Country’: The Realities of Power in Afro-European Relations on the West African ‘Slave Coast’, in: Itinerario 18,2, 1994, pp. 50–64; for the Gold Coast cf. KWAME YEBOA DAAKU, Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720. A Study of the African Reaction to European Trade, Oxford 1970.

<sup>11</sup> *Suite du Journal*, S. 500f. The events are described in a quite similar way in the *Récit de Reception*, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 86r–86v, which is independent of the *Suite du Journal*. The latter, however, was used as a source by JEAN-BAPTISTE LABAT, *Voyage du Chevalier des Marchais*, vol. 2, Saugrain: Paris 1730, pp. 334–337, who embellishes it in parts. —Later on, the French tried to counter the Dutch argument of “*ancienneté*” in Guinea by creating the myth of the “*navigations dieppoises*”, which allegedly had led to the first ‘discovery’ of Guinea already in the 14th century; cf., for example, *Mémoire sur le Sénégal et L’île de Gorée* [n.d., after 1720], Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Paris, Fonds Français (Ancien) 12079, pièce 1 : “... *Si l’ancienneté et la stabilité des Possessions sont des titres réels que toutes les Nations reconnoissent comme le premier droits?] on ne contester pas à la France la légitimité du sien sur les établissemens de la Côte Occidentale d’Afrique dans l’étendue qu’on vient de tracer. Dès le 14ème siècle les villes de Rouen et de Diepe avoient une association pour le Commerce du Sénégal*

politics it was the Dutch who had to bear the stamp of utter newcomers. The Sieur de Mariage thus imagined French status and the rank of the French king to be of ‘global’ prevalence, even surpassing the Dutch dominance in local *realpolitik*. This prevalence, of course, gave him the right to precede the Dutch *commis* in their passage to the king. The Dutch, just as naturally, objected, and threatened to run a spear through the Sieur de Mariage. Bloodshed was prevented only by the stout-hearted action of the prince of Allada taking the combatants by the hand and leading them to his father the king.

The conflict over the contested flag on the African shore thus turned out to be deeply rooted in inner-European struggles. Two points are important in a ‘global’ perspective:

Firstly, the conflict in Allada is but one example of a typical side-effect of the European expansion: the export of European conflicts into other world regions. This side-effect had first appeared in West Africa when the region was drawn into the global struggle between the Dutch and the Iberian powers, especially in the first half of the seventeenth century, and had had its impact during the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1664–1665). These few hints have to suffice about questions of historical priority here, as the title ‘first global war’ has already been awarded to many different armed conflicts.<sup>12</sup> Here, they

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[...]”. A similar wording can be found in the *Observations sur le commerce de la Traite des Nègres*, [n.d., after 1763], ANOM, C 6/27. This myth has long been disproved (cf. RAYMOND MAUNY, *Les prétendues navigations dieppoises à la Côte occidentale d’Afrique au XVe siècle*, in: *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Afrique Noire* (BIFAN) 12B, 1950, pp. 122–134 and THÉODORE MONOD, *Un vieux problème: Les navigations dieppoises sur la côte occidentale d’Afrique au XIXe siècle*, in: BIFAN 25B, 1963, pp. 427–434). In popular accounts, however, it still lingers on: e.g. in JEAN DE LA GUÉRIVIÈRE, *Die Entdeckung Afrikas. Erforschung und Eroberung des schwarzen Kontinents*, München 2004 [original ed. Paris 2002], p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> A very early date is suggested by PIETER C. EMMER, *The First Global War: The Dutch versus Iberia in Asia, Africa and the New World, 1590–1609*, in: *e-Journal of Portuguese History* 1,1, 2003, URL: [www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese\\_Brazilian\\_Studies/ejph/html/issue1/pdf/emmer.pdf](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue1/pdf/emmer.pdf). Roosen quotes an assessment of the War of the League of Augsburg (1688–97) as “first world war”; cf. WILLIAM ROOSEN, *The Age of Louis XIV. The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, Cambridge, Mass. 1976, p. 9. Finally, the Seven Years’ War (1756–63) is styled as the “first global war”, e.g. by WILLIAM R.

can roughly illuminate the structural phenomenon without our engaging in a debate about the definition of fully-fledged warfare. Exported conflicts like the one just discussed sometimes proved to be catalysts for intercultural alliances or processes of transculturation. This could even result in the ‘entanglement’ of conflicts in which extra-European and European constellations overlapped and formed indissoluble intertwinings.<sup>13</sup>

The (fortunately bloodless) conflict in Allada in 1670 was not unique in the relations between the French and the Dutch outside Europe. On the eve of the Dutch War (1672–1674), the struggle between the two countries expanded to places outside Europe, where it mostly took the form of trade competition and diplomatic quarrelling. Rather surprising, at least at first glance, is that the local constellation overseas more often favoured the Dutch over the French—which the latter thought highly damaging to French prestige.<sup>14</sup> With regard to West Africa, Colbert even planned a major attack on the Dutch forts at the Gold Coast<sup>15</sup> and sent out a reconnaissance mission to the Guinea coast under the command of the *Sieur de Hally and Gémozac*.<sup>16</sup> For some reason, however, the

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NESTER, *The First Global War. Britain, France, and the Fate of North America, 1756–1775*, Westport 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the intriguing essays in *Empires and Indigenes. Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion and Warfare in the Early Modern World*, ed. WAYNE E. LEE, New York/London 2011 and MARK MEUWESE, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade. Dutch-Indigenous alliances in the Atlantic world, 1595–1674*, Leiden/Boston 2012 (contains a chapter on Dutch–Portuguese conflicts on the Gold Coast).

<sup>14</sup> This opinion, for example, was held by Colbert; cf. THOMAS J. SCHAEFER, *The Economic History of the Reign*, in: *The Reign of Louis XIV*, ed. PAUL SONNINO, New Jersey/London 1990, pp. 27–43: pp. 37f. and cf. DAVID ONNEKINK, *The Ideological Context of the Dutch War (1672)*, in: *Ideology and Foreign Policy in Early Modern Europe (1650–1750)*, ed. ID. / GIJS ROMMELSE, Farnham/Burlington 2011, pp. 131–144: pp. 133ff.

<sup>15</sup> Such plans were considered, for example, in Colbert’s correspondence with the Marquis de Seignelay in mid- 1670; letters by Seignelay to Colbert, dd. La Rochelle, 07.08. and 11.08.1670, BnF, *Mélanges Colbert* 84, fol. 25r-26v and 31r-33v. Seignelay suggested that it would take 1,200 infantry, six war ships, and three barges

(*flûtes*) to attack Elmina and Chama (26r).

<sup>16</sup> The main sources for this expedition have recently been edited by Gérard Chouin; cf. *Colbert et la Guinée. Le voyage en Guinée de Louis de Hally et de Louis Ancelin de Gémozac (1670–1671)*, ed. GÉRARD CHOUIN, Saint-Maur 2011.

planned attack was not realized. When the Dutch War finally broke out, West Africa as well as the Caribbean indeed became theatres of war (with the naval campaigns led by de Ruyter and d'Estrées).<sup>17</sup>

But secondly, the events in Allada are also relevant for the question of the imagination of 'globality': in this conflict, it was the French *commis* who pursued a 'global' way of thinking. He denied—and, from a strategic point of view, had to deny—local circumstances and specificities in favour of a generalized view of rank and a global vision of French power. This vision, as well as the behaviour of his Dutch counterpart, goes hand in hand with a conceptualization of rank and ceremony that ascribes a universal validity to the European order of rank and assumes a universal language of ceremonial signs. Only against the background of these assumptions can the importance attributed to questions of precedence and 'ceremonial' treatment at courts beyond Europe be understood. French precedence (or rather, the precedence of the French monarch) was imagined on a global scale. In this perspective, it even had to be realized in the remotest corners of the globe and could not tolerate any infringements, even at the court of a 'black barbarian'. This, in turn, implied that ceremonial acts outside Europe could influence and contribute to 'symbolic capital' back in Europe, if set in the right context. That the Dutch and the French representatives thought it necessary to quarrel about precedence at the court of Allada necessarily implied an acknowledgement of Allada's ruler.<sup>18</sup>

The view on ceremonial and rank is, of course, a very Eurocentric world view that lacks reflexivity. But it is an inclusive Eurocentrism, not an exclusive one, which came to dominate in the

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<sup>17</sup> Cf., for example, the overview of the events by MIMS, Colbert's West India Policy, pp. 195–224.

<sup>18</sup> This was also implicit in the French assumption that their highest-ranking representative, the Sieur du Bourg, was received as an 'ambassador' in Allada; cf. *Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbée*, pp. 404f. That du Bourg was allowed to sit next to the king is interpreted to be a special mark of this rank. As the ability to send as well as to receive ambassadors was the most distinguished mark of sovereignty, the reception of du Bourg presupposes that the king was, to some degree, acknowledged as a sovereign and legitimate subject of international law in the European sense; see below, n. 52.

late eighteenth and nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> And even if it is not a ‘real’ global world view, it is, at the least, a pre-condition for the globalization of diplomatic practice and the integration of knowledge about polities and ‘states’ worldwide.

## 2. AFRICAN JUDGMENT ON EUROPEAN QUARRELS: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

Enter Tezifon,<sup>20</sup> King of Allada. Tezifon was no passive figure in an expanded theatre of European quarrels. He actively sought to reassert his control and authority over the situation and to set an end to ‘foreign quarrels’. He first of all forbade all further flag hoisting on his shores and thus suspended the conflict of rank that had arisen. Secondly, he referred the global conflict of rank to the judgment of the two rulers in Europe but decisively maintained his right to judge questions of precedence within his realm on his own. To be able to come to an informed judgment, he decided to send out an ambassador who should travel to Europe in order to evaluate the respective power of the Netherlands and France.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the quarrel on the Allada shore led to one of the best documented Sub-Saharan embassies to Europe in early modern times. The fact that the King of Allada decided to send an ambassador was not that unusual in its own right; quite a few envoys of Guinean rulers travelled in the Atlantic world between the fourteenth and the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> What was indeed unusual was the role the King

<sup>19</sup> This wording follows Osterhammel’s assessment of European perceptions of Asia; cf. JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, München 2010 (first ed. 1998), pp. 380ff.

<sup>20</sup> “Tezifon” is the name given in the *Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbée*, p. 422 and in Barbot’s account of Guinea; Barbot on Guinea. The writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678–1712, ed. PAUL E.H. HAIR / ADAM JONES / ROBIN LAW, vol. II, London 1992, p. 658; cf. LAW, Allada, p. 49, who suggests a possible identification of “Tezifon” with the ruler named “Zekpon” known in the local oral tradition (51).

<sup>21</sup> *Suite du Journal*, pp. 506ff.; *Récit de la Réception*, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 86 r/v.

<sup>22</sup> The most substantial research so far has been done on the early African embassies to Portugal and Rome; cf., for example, KATE LOWE, ‘Representing Africa’: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402–1602, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17, 2007, S. 101–128, PETER E. RUSSELL, *White Kings on Black Kings: Rui da Pina and the Problem of Black Sovereignty*, in: *Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Honour of Robert Brian*

of Allada assumed by sending this embassy: he took the position of an observer of Europe, even of a judge of European power relations, all the while firmly maintaining his right to decide on questions of precedence within his own realm. Although this countered the universalist vision of the French to a certain degree, they nevertheless appreciated the royal decisions: “*Cette procédure tenue par un Roi Barbare qui ne connoit ni la religion ni l’écriture ni l’histoire et qui [...] ne peut avoir que des connoissances obscures des affaires du monde paroît néanmoins asses judicieuse, mais son bon sens se manifeste davantage au dessein que la difficulté des nations lui a fait concevoir et exécuter en même tems d’envoïer un Ambassadeur à S.M. pour complimenter Sa Sacrée Personne et pour observer la grandeur et la magnificence de la France afin que par le témoignage de son Ministre il puisse ordonner avec justice les préséances des étrangers qui traiteront avec ses sujets.*”<sup>23</sup> Owing to the lack of Dutch sources,<sup>24</sup> a certain obscurity remains whether the mission was intended from the beginning to visit only France, or whether Tezifon originally wanted it to journey both to France and the Netherlands. All we know is that French sources present it as a mission only to Louis XIV, and this was what it indeed came to be.<sup>25</sup>

Whom did Tezifon of Allada choose to be his ambassador to France? It was a man named Matteo Lopes, who was of Afro-

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Tate, ed. IAN MICHAEL / RICHARD A. CARDWELL, Oxford 1986, S. 151–163 and PIERRE VERGER, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le Golfe de Bénin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du xvii<sup>e</sup> au xix<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1968, Kap. 7, pp. 251–286. Cf. also the overview by DEBRUNNER, *Africans*, pp. 65–73. Portugal and the Vatican received, supposedly, by far the majority of early modern Sub-Saharan embassies (esp. from Ethiopia and Congo). But there were also quite a number of envoys to France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, although their ‘official’ status and acknowledgement varied. Unfortunately, in most cases there is only scarce documentation at hand.

<sup>23</sup> *Récit de la Réception*, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 86v.

<sup>24</sup> The correspondence from Allada, conserved in the Dutch Nationaal Archief, unfortunately encompasses only the period from late 1686 up to the conquest of Allada by Dahomey in 1724; cf., above all, the letters contained in Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, TWIC 180.

<sup>25</sup> A letter of a French official at Martinique, however, refers to jealous reactions of the Dutch and the English about the embassy; letter of du Lion to [Colbert?], dd. Martinique, 30.09.1670, ANOM, C 7a/1: “...les Anglois et les Hollandois, ont tesmoigné en Guynée, une grande fascherie de cette ambassade, delaquelle ils n’attendent rien de bon pour leurs affaires”.

Portuguese descent and, in all likelihood, born on the isle of São Tomé. He was, thus, predestined to act as an intermediary in an intercultural context. Many brokers prominent in Afro-European commerce in Guinea were of Eurafrikan descent as this often implied skills in both African and European languages and a certain knowledge of both cultures.<sup>26</sup> Lopes himself could speak Portuguese (probably the creole Portuguese known as '*lingua da costa*')<sup>27</sup> and was able to understand Spanish in later conversations at the French court. He also had some knowledge of Christianity and Christian beliefs but was neither baptized nor converted, as far as we know. His biography, nevertheless, demonstrates that, in the mid-seventeenth century, the Slave Coast was not a place of first encounter any more but a place of "second contacts".<sup>28</sup> It was a region where cultural contacts and even processes of transculturation had already had their impact.

As different sources show, Lopes held quite an important position at the court of Allada and was often described as the king's "interpreter".<sup>29</sup> During his mission to France he was thought to be

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. GEORGE E. BROOKS, *Eurafrikaners in Western Africa. Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the 16th to the 18th Century*, Athens/Oxford 2003. That actors of mixed descent served prominently as intermediaries is not a phenomenon limited to West Africa; for examples from the Euro- Amerindian context, cf., for instance, TIMOTHY SHANNON, *Iroquois Diplomacy on the Early American Frontier*, London i.a. 2009.

<sup>27</sup> The enduring importance of Portuguese-based creole, even after the Portuguese presence on the Gold (and Slave) Coast, is emphasized by MAGNUS HUBER, *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context. A Sociohistorical and Structural Analysis*, Amsterdam/Regensburg 1999, pp. 27–33.

<sup>28</sup> To borrow Brook's phrase: TIMOTHY BROOK, *Vermeer's Hat. The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, London 2009 (first ed. 2007), pp. 19ff.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbée*, p. 405 and 508. Earlier sources from the mid-seventeenth century onwards also mentioned Matteo (or Matheus) Lopes as interpreter to the King of Allada; cf. *Relação do Reino de Arda* (17.07.1662), in: *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, ed. ANTONIO BRÁSIO, vol. 12, Lisboa 1981, no. 154, pp. 378–388: pp. 379f. (the only source stating that Lopes was a Christian and a Portuguese); *Memorie, in wat maniere men gewoon is tot Ardra op de kust van Guinea te handelen* (ca. 1657), in: PIETER VAN DAM, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, 's-Gravenhage 1939, vol. 2,3, Bijlage Iib, pp. 538ff.: p. 540; *West Africa in the Mid-Seventeenth Century. An Anonymous Dutch Manuscript*, ed. ADAM JONES, [Atlanta] 1995, pp. 305 and 198 (where a

“*un des principaux seigneurs [du] Roïaume*”, which, however, might be a slightly interested over-interpretation to make him meet the European expectations of ambassadors’ distinguished social background.<sup>30</sup> As an “interpreter”, Lopes also undertook diplomatic missions to important neighbouring countries like Oyo and Benin on behalf of the king.<sup>31</sup> Thus, it was self-evident that he was the man who could be entrusted with such a novel mission. Lopes was equipped as usual: he carried the usual gifts (of which more further on), had a garderobe of distinguished clothing, and was followed by a suite composed of three of his wives and three of his sons, as well as six slaves.

The choice and equipment of the ambassador by the king as well as his description by the French show that both sides had at least one thing in common: they understood diplomacy as universal practice and expected their own standards and norms to be of global validity.<sup>32</sup>

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“Man[u]el Lopes” is mentioned besides Matteo, possibly his brother). In 1670, Lopes himself was already of considerable age (the *Suite du Journal* attributes him “*grand aage*” [sic], pp. 511f.); besides, he is called a “*vieillard*” there as well as in the *Récit de la Réception*, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 87v.

<sup>30</sup> *Récit de la Réception*, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 86v; du Lion styles Lopes as “*confident à son prince*”; letter of du Lion, ANOM, C 7a/1. —In early modern Europe, ambassadors were usually of noble rank. Nobility would, so the contemporary assumption goes, encompass a certain dignity that was necessary to represent the sovereign; cf. ROOSEN, *The Age*, pp. 66f. and ANDRÉ KRISCHER, *Souveränität als sozialer Status: Zur Funktion des diplomatischen Zeremoniells in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im Mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. RALPH KAUF / GIORGIO ROTA / JAN PAUL NIEDERKORN, Wien 2009, pp. 1–32; pp. 25f.

<sup>31</sup> In West Africa, ‘spokespersons’ or ‘interpreters’ often fulfilled diplomatic functions as well, as is most extensively documented for the Akan *okyeame*; cf. KWESI YANKAH, *Speaking for the Chief. Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory (African Systems of Thought)*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1995. More general accounts of the (pre-colonial) history of diplomacy in West Africa are provided, for example, by the following: ROBERT S. SMITH, *Warfare & Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa*, London 1989; JOSEPH K. ADJAYE, *Diplomacy and Diplomats in Nineteenth Century Asante*, Lanham/New York/London 1984 (for *akyeame* as diplomats in Asante cf. pp. 13f. and 35–39); and KENNETH INGHAM (ed.), *Foreign Relations of African States*, London 1974.

<sup>32</sup> This also involves a certain universalizing conception of ‘kingship’ or rule. This universalizing tendency was shared by the Africans and Europeans involved. While the French clung to their standards for judging royal power in Allada by alluding to the size of the king’s army and city of residence, rumoured to be larger and more

This assumption, however, was possibly not the best starting point for intercultural communication outside a “contact zone”<sup>33</sup> with its transcultural setting, as was the Slave Coast in those days.

### 3. MIDDLE PASSAGE AND NEW CONTEXTS; OR, NO EXCHANGE OFFICE ON MARTINIQUE

Matteo Lopes began his voyage to Paris on the next available ship of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales. This happened to be *La Concorde*, which had been engaged in slave trading at the port of Offra and set sail with a human ‘cargo’ of 443 slaves in June 1670.<sup>34</sup> Thereby, Lopes’ itinerary was determined—he had to go to Martinique first to then cross the Atlantic a second time to reach Europe. Lopes thus followed the ‘classical’ trans-Atlantic triangle of the slave trade; in fact, the slaves and the ambassador journeyed side by side. This coincidence paradigmatically demonstrates the broad divergence of the ‘Black Atlantic’: Africans could be partners in trade (not least in slave trade) and diplomatic agents, but they were, at the same time, subjected to the largest coerced migration in world history.<sup>35</sup>

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populated than Paris (*cf.* Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbée, p. 381), or to his palace alone being as large as the Dutch town of Monnickendam (OLFERT DAPPER, Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche Gewesten, Jacob van Meurs: Amsterdam 1668, p. 489), the Alladas showed a similar disposition to transfer their own standards in the choice of gifts for the French king and the expectations towards the ceremonies at the French court.

<sup>33</sup> Wording coined by MARY LOUISE PRATT, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London 1992, pp. 6ff. For the West African contact zone, *cf.* TOBY GREEN, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589*, Cambridge 2012; GEORGE E. BROOKS, *Eurafricans in Western Africa. Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Athens, OH/Oxford 2003.

<sup>34</sup> There is no precise date given for the beginning of her voyage. *La Concorde* arrived in Martinique on 13 September 1670. As the average middle passage from the Bight of Benin to Martinique in the late-seventeenth century took about 78 days (*cf.* [slavevoyages.org](http://slavevoyages.org)), we can assume that *La Concorde* began her voyage in mid-June or at the end of June; *cf.* the entry in the Slave Voyages database (voyage ID 21559).

<sup>35</sup> From the voluminous literature, *cf.*, for example, HERBERT S. KLEIN, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Cambridge 2010; DAVID ELTIS, *Free and Coerced Migrations: The Atlantic in Global Perspective*, in: *Making Sense of Global History. The 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences Oslo 2000*.

Lopes' reception at Martinique was a decisive step for the mission. The French colonial officials in Martinique were the first outside Africa to make decisions about the treatment of Lopes. Their assessment of the embassy as "*considérable*" and their decision to receive Lopes as "*une Personne qui est envoyé par un roi*" was clearly guided by interest. The embassy, wrote Governor Jean-Charles de Baas-Castelmore, was not only advantageous for the glory of the French king "*dont les grandes vertus atteint la vénération des Rois les plus éloignés*", but it was also of use for the French subjects if it provided them with a good reputation in Allada.<sup>36</sup> This thinking was not only directed to secure the French trading interests on the Slave Coast and thereby to satisfy the demands of the French planters in the West Indies but also right in line with the universalist vision of royal power Louis XIV indulged in.

Martinique was also a turning point for the mission in another way as it was the first place where Lopes had to interact within a setting that was not a site of second encounters for him in the way the Slave Coast was. In fact, the first limits to the universalist notion of diplomacy both parties shared and the first fissures in intercultural communication already appeared on Martinique. The first assessment of Lopes himself seemed to be rather positive:<sup>37</sup> Governor de Baas praised Lopes' "*esprit*", even his "*génie*" and the ingenious witticisms he used to cope with new situations or things to which he was not accustomed. De Baas could thus recommend Lopes according to the rules of courtly taste. The ambassador also had a certain knowledge of Christianity and was inclined to invite French missionaries to Allada. He even planned to leave one or two sons in France for education. In short, he demonstrated just the right mixture of self-assurance and insight into the superiority of the host culture as

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Commemorative Volume, ed. SØLVI SOGNER, Oslo 2001, pp. 189–203. Concerning the divergent roles Africans played in the Atlantic world, with a strong emphasis on African agency, cf. JOHN THORNTON, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, Cambridge i.a. 2008.

<sup>36</sup> *Récit de la Réception*, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 86v.

<sup>37</sup> It was even more positive in the account of Père Labat, who obviously draws on the *Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbée* and the *Suite du Journal* but differs from these sources in certain details. Labat's account is written in such a way as to remove obscurities and give an even more official touch to the affair; cf. LABAT, *Voyage*, p. 354 and 343 (i.a.).

appeared suitable in a well-behaved foreigner. Besides, Lopes obviously succeeded in presenting himself as a valuable and influential intermediary for the French with the King of Allada. He illustrated his important role by the comparison the title of this paper quotes: “*Le Roi de France est un coffre, Le Roi d’Ardre un autre coffre et je suis la clef de tous les deux.*”<sup>38</sup> This was clearly a *bon mot* worthy of remembrance and an early modern diplomat trying to make himself indispensable.

There were, however, some things which startled the French officials in Martinique even though they had provoked no such amazement with Europeans in Africa. To begin with, Lopes and his entourage had set out on their journey in a fashion the officials regarded as ‘nakedness’, having brought no adequate clothing for European winters. The entourage itself gave cause for astonishment as Lopes had brought three of his wives<sup>39</sup> and a “*trompette*”. This instrument was made in an extraordinary and ridiculous fashion, wrote de Baas, but Lopes insisted on having it always marched in front of him and sounded as a mark of honour.

A similar difference of valuation arose when de Baas was allowed to view the royal gifts Lopes brought with him for Louis XIV: different weapons, above all two “*zagayes*” (a local kind of spear), and a gown and a mat or cloth (both made of bark). To be sure, these items were common gifts for distinguished recipients in West Africa. Especially the spears that belonged to Tezifon himself and the bark clothes that could be endowed with specific sacral meaning<sup>40</sup> had to count as extraordinary and special objects. On the

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<sup>38</sup> Récit de la Réception, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 89r. —Some hints on the symbolic meaning of keys in West Africa can be found in TIMOTHY F. GARRARD / PIERRE-ALAIN FERRAZZINI, African Gold. Jewellery and Ornaments from Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal in the Collection of the Gold of Africa Barbier-Mueller Museum in Cape Town, München 2011, No. 113, S. 229 and LUDEWIG FERDINAND RØMER, A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760), ed. and transl. by SELINA AXELROD WINSNES, Oxford 2000, S. 99.

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed analysis of European discourses on polygyny, cf. CHRISTINA BRAUNER, Unkeuschheit oder wirtschaftliche Notwendigkeit? Diskursive Spielräume im Umgang mit Polygamie zwischen Naturrecht, Taufern und Westafrika, in: Saeculum 61,1, 2011, pp. 99–139.

<sup>40</sup> See ANDREA REIKAT, Handelsstoffe. Grundzüge des europäisch-westafrikanischen Handels vor der industriellen Revolution am Beispiel der Textilien, Köln 1997, pp. 38f., who alludes to the use of bark cloth in ritual contexts.

Guinea coast, European officials were used to receiving such gifts as marks of esteem and distinction. Unfortunately, the French outside Africa saw them differently. They judged the gifts as being of little value and curious rather than worthy items.<sup>41</sup> The report on the audience in Paris simply dismissed the gifts as “*quelques raritéz*”.<sup>42</sup>

Probably the difference of valuation most strongly influencing Lopes' embassy concerned money. Of course, Lopes had been furnished with money to finance his mission—but unfortunately, on Martinique this money was not accepted. Lopes possessed great quantities of what was the prevalent currency on the Slave Coast, i.e. small cowrie shells. These shells, themselves a ‘transcultural’ product, were regularly used in regional Afro-European trade, and the trading companies operating in Guinea imported them for this special purpose via their Eastern counterparts from the Indian Ocean.<sup>43</sup> In Allada, for example, the customs duties and gifts which were required before any trade was permitted were partly paid in cowries.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, the French governor of Martinique was ignorant of all this and complained that Lopes had come “*dans un extrême confiance de la liberalité des François. Je ne sais sur quoi il*

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Kruger suggests that bark or raphia clothes were used for “special ceremonial occasions”; COLLEEN E. KRIGER, *Cloth in West African History*, Lanham i.a. 2006, pp. 24f. —Certain mats made of bark or raphia were, contrary to the judgments quoted above, an export article much sought after in Europe; see THORNTON, *Africa and Africans*, pp. 53. The so-called “Allada clothes” were bought by European traders not only for re-sale on the Gold Coast but also in the Caribbean (*ibid.*).

<sup>41</sup> *Suite du Journal*, p. 509, *Récit de la Réception*, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 88v.

<sup>42</sup> *Traitement fait en France à [Don] Mathès Lopéz Amb[assadeur] du Roy d'Arda sur la Côte de Guinée en 1670*, dd. [1670], Archives Affaires Étrangères (AAE), La Courneuve, Mémoires et Documents, Afrique 12, fol. 4r-6v: fol. 5v.

<sup>43</sup> See JAN HOGENDORN / MARION JOHNSON, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, Cambridge i.a. 1986, who point out that, in fact, the shells were accepted as currency in more places in the world than any coins so far. Cowries were used in Africa, Asia, and parts of the American continents (pp. 12ff.). For a critical discussion of assessments of early West African currencies in economic theory, cf. ANTHONY G. HOPKINS, *An Economic History of West Africa*, Harlow 1973 (new imprint 2009), pp. 67–71.

<sup>44</sup> *West Africa in Mid-Seventeenth Century*, ed. JONES, pp. 278f. and 37f., pp. 305f. and 198f. 12,000 lb of cowries were said to fetch a cargo of 120 slaves (47). In 1639, the Dutch company specifically bought cowrie shells in order to trade in Allada; cf. the letter by [Heeren XIX] to [Adriaen Jacobsz. van Amersfort], dd. 28.11.1639, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, OWIC 8.

*a fondé de pouvoir circu[ler] la moitié du monde avec des espèces de si peu de valeur [...]*". In his opinion, such things could only be valued by barbarians—and had the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales not undertaken to pay for their provisions, the ambassador and his entourage would have starved right there on Martinique.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, beyond the West African "contact zone", limitations to intercultural communication appeared, owing to ignorance and universalistic beliefs both sides held. This shows that despite globalized visions of power and values, practices of interaction and standards of communication were still strongly bound to specific regions and groups. There was no exchange office for shells on Martinique. The question of currency severely limited the embassy's 'independency' as envisioned by the king. Nevertheless, Lopes and his entourage boarded the vessel *La Bergère* bound for Dieppe on 27 September 1670 at the expense of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales<sup>46</sup> and crossed the Atlantic a second time.

#### 4. GLOIRE ET MALICE. MATTEO LOPES IN FRANCE

After a rather long voyage, due to contrary winds and bad weather, *La Bergère* arrived in Dieppe on 3 December 1670 and Lopes made his entry into the town, preceded by his "*trompette*" announcing him and followed by his suite. In Dieppe, they were lodged and accommodated by one of the directors of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales, the Sieur Jacques, who then received an order to lead the group to Paris.<sup>47</sup> One of the "*Gentilhommes Ordinaires de la Maison du Roi*" arrived in Dieppe to accompany them to the capital.<sup>48</sup> On the way to Paris, Lopes enjoyed the honours that were conceded to the Ottoman 'ambassador' Aga Soliman in 1669. This Aga Soliman had pretended to have the rank of ambassador and had been treated as such throughout his voyage to Paris, although with the

<sup>45</sup> Récit de la Réception, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 88v and 89r.

<sup>46</sup> The point in question here is that the ambassador (or his master) did not pay for his voyage. Usually, the court (or hosts) bore only the expenses of the ambassador's sojourn in the capital (though not completely, of course).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. the letter of Jacques to Colbert, dd. Dieppe, 04.12.1670, BnF, Mélanges Colbert 155, fol. 452r–453r; Suite du Journal, p. 513.

<sup>48</sup> Suite du Journal, pp. 513f.; MICHEL CLAUDE GUIBERT, Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Ville de Dieppe, vol. 1, Dieppe 1878, p. 341.

presentation of his credentials upon his arrival in the capital the French discovered that he was a mere envoy.<sup>49</sup> That the *traitement* Lopes should receive was conceived by the analogy with Aga Soliman surely had nothing to do with this complicated background. The analogy is due rather to a common practice of assessing ‘strangers’ in early modern times: if one encountered strange persons or objects unknown so far, it was a widespread custom to attempt to understand by comparing them to ‘known strangers’. Throughout the descriptions of African courts, for example, many comparisons with Ottoman or Asian courts are to be found, whereas African religious practices gave cause for comparisons with Jewish, Muslim, or Ancient customs.<sup>50</sup> When French officials ascribed to the ‘unknown stranger’ Matteo Lopes a ceremonial status equivalent to that of a ‘known stranger’ (the Ottoman Empire, despite the long established relations, still somehow lingered on the edge of the European diplomatic stage), this was therefore no unusual procedure. The ceremonial receptions both Aga Soliman and Lopes enjoyed during their journeys to Paris were unusual for the embassies from within Europe, which normally made their way to Paris “*sans aucune cérémonie*”, the major event being the “*Entrée publique*” later on.<sup>51</sup>

These ceremonial acts, however, indicated that Lopes was indeed acknowledged as an ambassador. As only sovereign princes

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<sup>49</sup> Mémoire pour servir à régler le cérémonial pour la réception de l’Ambassad[eur] envoyé au Roy par le [Grand] Seigneur, AEE, MD Turquie 10, fol. 39r-82v: fol. 39r-40v. Soliman was received, as was Lopes, by a “*Gentilhomme ordinaire de la Maison du Roi*” to greet him on behalf of the king, accompany him on his way to Paris, and pay for his sustenance. In the towns he passed through there were guards of honour formed and salutes fired. The local mayors or consuls were required to compliment the ambassador and offer “*presens ordinaires*” (fol. 39r/v).

<sup>50</sup> The Dutch author Pieter de Marees, for example, compared the burial rites he encountered in Guinea to those of the Jews; PIETER DE MAREES, *Beschryvinghe ende historische Verhael van het Gout Koninckrijck van Gunea* (1602), ed. S.P. L’HONORÉ NABER, ’s-Gravenhage 1912, pp. 185f. In the *Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbée*, the courtly clothing is compared to Persian apparel (421f.). Ancient history, too, was frequently used as a point of comparison, for example by the Danish–German chaplain Johann Wilhelm Müller with regard to jurisdiction at the Gold Coast, which he likened to Roman practice; WILHELM JOHANN MÜLLER, *Die Africanische Auf Der Guineischen Gold-Cust gelegene Landschafft FETU* (1673/6), facsimile ed. Graz 1968, pp. 114f.

<sup>51</sup> JEAN DE DUMONT, *Le Cérémonial Diplomatique des Cours de l’Europe*, vol. 1, Amsterdam 1739, p. 36.

could send envoys of ambassadorial rank, this also implied that Tezifon of Allada was acknowledged as a sovereign prince—the rank of the ambassador and the status of his master were closely intertwined.<sup>52</sup> Lopes made his entry to Paris on 13 December, riding in a six-horse carriage as was due to an ambassador.<sup>53</sup> In Paris, he was accommodated in the Hôtel de Luynes (also known as Hôtel des Ambassadeurs or Hôtel du Nivernais), which often served as lodgings for ambassadors from outside Europe. It is situated at 10 Rue de Tournon, between the Palais du Luxembourg and the Pont Saint-Michel.<sup>54</sup> The secretary of the English Embassy reported that “all the world” went there to see the “extraordinary” ambassador.<sup>55</sup> Louis XIV was in Versailles when Lopes arrived but sent one of the gentlemen of his chamber (*gentilshommes de la chambre*) to accompany the ambassador and accorded him an audience for 19 December. Whilst waiting for the royal audience, Lopes refused to indulge in any more sightseeing and entertainment but explained that he first had to see the king, this being the aim of his desires (“*le but de mes souhaits*”). The French understood this behaviour as “a mark of sound wit” (“*une marque d’un esprit solide*”) and good reflection.

On 17 December, however, the directors of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales “*en corps*” paid Lopes a visit. In a way, his embassy illustrates also the specific role of privileged trading companies in early modern Europe. The financing of Lopes’ stay as well as the course of events and the negotiations during his visit to France indicate a certain division of labour between court officials and company officials that appears quite characteristic of the practice

<sup>52</sup> ABRAHAM DE WICQUEFORT, *L’Ambassadeur et ses fonctions*, vol. 1, Jean & Daniel Steucker: Den Haag 1681, p. 5 and pp. 17ff. with the famous phrase: “...[I]l n’y a point de plus illustre marque de la Souveraineté que le Droit d’envoyer & de recevoir des Ambassadeurs” (17); cf. WILLIAM ROOSEN, Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach, in: *Journal of Modern History* 52,3, 1980, pp. 452–476 : p. 474f.

<sup>53</sup> *Suite du Journal*, p. 514.

<sup>54</sup> *Suite du Journal*, p. 514; *Traitement fait en France*, AAE, MD Afrique 12, fol. 4r/v. —For the Hôtel itself and its guests, cf. CAMILLE-GEORGES PICAVET, *La diplomatie française au temps de Louis XIV (1661–1715)*. Institutions, Mœurs et Coutumes, Paris 1930, pp. 131f.

<sup>55</sup> Letter by Francis Vernon, dd. Paris, 17.12.1670, National Archives, Kew, SP 78/130: “The Guinée embassad[or] is lodged at l’hostel de Luynes all the world goe to see him...”

in general. The fact that the carriage Lopes held his entry in was owned by the Compagnie (not by the king and queen as usual) illustrates this very specific relation that allowed for greater flexibility in diplomatic practice.<sup>56</sup> The companies were not ‘private enterprises’ in the modern sense of the term. Although being profit-oriented ventures with private shares, they often took the role of a ‘quasi’-representative of the sovereign and were an active participant in foreign politics.<sup>57</sup> The royal dominance and interest was particularly pronounced in France, where the mighty minister of Louis XIV, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, since the 1660s had been a strong driving force for the foundation of various overseas trading companies.<sup>58</sup>

On 19 December, at nine in the morning the Sieur de Berlize, the *introduceur des Ambassadeurs*, came for Lopes with the carriages of the king and queen to guide him to the Palais des Tuileries. The ambassador was accompanied by his three sons. His wives had apparently been left at home; they were, however, present at Lopes’ audience with Queen Marie-Thérèse the next day.<sup>59</sup> On Lopes’ arrival at the Palais, the Swiss and French regiments formed a guard of honour. As with all the guards in the palace, they were under arms.<sup>60</sup> The Marechal de Rochefort, captain of the royal bodyguards, received Lopes in the hall of the guards; he then proceeded to the

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<sup>56</sup> Suite du Journal, 514; LABAT, Voyage, 342. Interestingly, the protocol does not mention the entry at all—in contrast to other ceremonies on the way to Paris. This might strengthen the hypothesis of purposeful informality. The usual procedure of ambassadorial entries is illustrated by the numerous examples in THÉODORE GODEFROY, *Le Cérémonial françois*, vol. 2, Paris 1649, pp. 771–794.

<sup>57</sup> So far, this has been demonstrated extensively only for the East India companies; cf. i.a. JAN A. SOMERS, *De VOC als volkenrechtelijke actor*, [Deventer] 2001, pp. 66ff.; JURRIAAN VAN GOOR, *De koopman als diplomaat. Hofreizen als spiegel van Europees-Aziatische verhoudingen*, in: *Orbis in Orbem. Liber amicorum John Everaert*, Gent 2001, S. 513–538; *Hof en handel. Aziatische vorsten en de VOC 1620–1720*, ed. ELSBETH LOCHER-SCHOLTEN/PETER RIETBERGEN, Leiden 2004; and PHILIP STERN, *The Company-State. Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*, Oxford 2011.

<sup>58</sup> SCHAEFER, *The Economic History*, pp. 37f. and MIMS, *Colbert’s West India Policy*.

<sup>59</sup> *Traitements fait en France*, AAE, MD Afrique 12, fol. and 6r; Suite du Journal, pp. 531ff.

<sup>60</sup> This seemingly matches the usual procedure as outlined in DUMONT, *Le Cérémonial*, pp. 38f. A difference, however, is to be found in the absence of a “Prince” to conduct Lopes to his audience (*ibid.* p. 39).

Galerie where the king was seated in an armchair (*fauteuil*) placed on a throne. Lopes greeted the king in a fashion, however, that was typical of his own country and was a source of some confusion and ambiguity in Paris. From a ‘European’ point of view, the ambassador seems to have exaggerated the usual bows and courtesies by prostrating himself before the king. One source even reports that he fell face-down to earth whilst clapping his hands (which would have required quite some acrobatic talent).<sup>61</sup> In this position he remained even during his address to Louis, with his eyes covered and not looking at the king. When Louis asked him to rise up at a certain point, Lopes is said to have shown some surprise.<sup>62</sup>

This behaviour seemed strange to European observers, although it could have been expected if they had read the report of de Baas about his interview with Lopes in Martinique carefully. De Baas had indeed questioned Lopes about the usual procedure for a royal audience in Allada and asked him what he expected for the audience in Paris. Unsurprisingly, Lopes expected the French audience to be just like those at home. The description of the latter, as de Baas noted it, matches the behaviour Lopes showed in Paris: the King of Allada sat on a chair with his crown on his head<sup>63</sup> while the ambassador “à la tête nue” lay on a mat on the floor, prostrate before the king, as no other position might be taken in the face of royalty. This corresponds to other seventeenth century sources on court ceremonial in Allada,

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<sup>61</sup> Letter by William Perwich, dd. Paris, 20.12.1670, National Archives (NA), Kew, SP 78/130, fol. 263. The protocol and the *Suite du Journal* mention clapping of hands only with regard to the audience with Queen Marie-Thérèse and place it after the prostration which indeed makes more sense; *Traitement fait en France*, AAE, MD Afrique 12, fol. 5v and 6r and *Suite du Journal*, p. 532.

<sup>62</sup> LABAT, Des Marchais, p. 347.

<sup>63</sup> This is a rather problematic detail as it is the only occasion where a crown is mentioned. In West Africa, crowns are (beyond the Yoruba-influenced region with its bead crowns) quite uncommon. When in 1664 the English Company of Royal Adventurers attempted to present the King of Allada with a crown, they felt obliged to explain what meaning this object had, thus apparently assuming that such items were unknown in the region. The vessel carrying the crown in addition to other gifts and a letter by James Duke of York (the later James II), however, was captured by the Dutch during the Second Anglo-Dutch War; R. VAN LUTTERVELT, *Herinneringen aan Michiel Adriaanszoon de Ruyter in het Rijksmuseum*, in: *The Rijksmuseum bulletin* 5,2, 1957, pp. 28–71.

where even the detail of covering one's eyes can be found.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, Lopes' 'strange' behaviour, which failed to match European expectations, can be explained with regard to the ceremonial norms he expected back home. This explanation was already suggested by Abraham de Wicquefort, who dropped a short hint on the episode in his 1677 work *Mémoires touchant les Ambassadeurs, et les Ministres Publics*. He notes that Lopes had made his "révérence à la mode de son pays".<sup>65</sup> Wicquefort thus shows a certain insight into the cultural relativity of ceremonial.

French officials, above all Colbert himself,<sup>66</sup> could certainly have known about the expectations of Lopes. But they did not inform him about French standards of ceremonial behaviour. On the contrary, they obviously took his 'strange' behaviour in their stride. Why? To my mind, they consciously used the ambiguity inherent in Lopes' behaviour. As the informed would know, it was perfectly 'normal' within Allada ceremonial standards to prostrate oneself before the king and implied no specific subordination of any kind. Within European ceremonial semantics, however, the gestures Lopes made took on a completely different meaning, being unusual for an ambassador and signalling submission and humiliation. This very ambiguity could be used to stage the royal glory (*gloire*) of Louis XIV, not only for Lopes but for the European *société des princes* (or the "höfische Öffentlichkeit"<sup>67</sup>).<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Journal du voyage du Sieur Delbée, pp. 427 and 447; cf. also *Memorie, in wat maniere*, pp. 538f.; cf. LAW, Allada, pp. 68ff., who compares the accounts of Allada with those of its neighbours Hueda and Dahomey.

<sup>65</sup> [ABRAHAM] DE WICQUEFORT, *Mémoires touchant les Ambassadeurs, et les Ministres Publics*, Jean & Daniel Steucker: Den Haag 1677, S. 463.

<sup>66</sup> That Colbert, who was in all likelihood the recipient of de Baas' report, closely watched the proceedings might be deduced from the short report he gives of the entry and audiences in his letter to de Baas in Martinique; Colbert to De Baas (copy), dd. 21.12.1670, ANOM, B 2/141, fol. 139r.

<sup>67</sup> This term, which approximately translates as "courtly public", is based loosely on Habermas' conception in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) and is used to describe the public sphere constituted by the closely connected courts in early modern Europe; cf. BARBARA STOLLBERG-RILINGER, *Höfische Öffentlichkeit. Zur zeremoniellen Selbstdarstellung des brandenburgischen Hofes vor dem europäischen Publikum*, in: *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Geschichte*, N.F., 7, 1997, pp. 145-176.

<sup>68</sup> In 1685, the audience of the Siamese embassy with Louis XIV was similarly 'staged' by making use of the Asiatic court ceremonial, allowing for an even greater

Such an interpretation is reinforced by a portrait that was made of the ambassador in Paris. It was designed by the engraver Nicholas de Larmessin, supposedly on official behalf, and bears the inscription: “*DOM MATHEO LOPES, Ambassadeur du Roy d’Arda, l’Un de Ceux de la Guinée, Au Roy très Chrestien, Louys 14, En l’Année 1670, Auquel Il a fait Offre de la part de Son Maistre, de toutes ses Terres, Ports, Et Generalement tout ce qu’y despendoit de luy.*”<sup>69</sup> The latter phrase was, to be sure, a standard wording in courteous conversation. It was, for example, used by the Dutch governor of Elmina in addressing the French captain de Hally in 1671.<sup>70</sup> The Dutch governor surely had no further intentions of peaceably delivering his forts to the French (though the latter would have certainly appreciated such benevolence). Cut from his context, however, as in the portrait of Lopes, the wording rings differently.

The interpretation of the ambassador’s actions as a submission was strengthened, again, by the tendency to attribute universal validity to one’s own ceremonial standards. Thus, even Wicquefort abandoned his explanation of 1677 when he returned to the episode in his *L’Ambassadeur et ses Fonctions* four years later.<sup>71</sup> In that work, he took a more universalistic stance and assembled different stories of ambassadors offending the honour of their masters by ceremonial misbehaviour. Interestingly, all these stories are set in intercultural contexts, be it Moghul India, Persia, or the Ottoman Empire. Lopes’

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elevation of the monarch; cf. Ronald S. LOVE, *Rituals of Majesty: France, Siam, and Court Spectacle in Royal Image-Building at Versailles 1685 and 1686*, in: *Canadian Journal of History* 31, 1996, pp. 171–198. —The importance of *gloire* as a central concern in Louis’ foreign policy is emphasized, for example, by JOHN T. O’CONNOR, *Diplomatic History of the Reign*, in: *The Reign*, ed. SONNINO, pp. 143–158; pp. 145f.

<sup>69</sup> NICHOLAS (I<sup>er</sup>) DE LARMESSIN, *DOM MATHEO LOPES, Ambassadeur du Roy d’Arda*, engraving; also issued as part of the series *Les augustes représentations de tous les Rois de France depuis Pharamond jusqu’à Louis XIV*, Nicholas de Larmessin: Paris 1690 [first ed. 1679], p. 161. Cf. ROGER-ARMAND WEIGERT, *Inventaire du Fonds Français: Graveurs du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle* (BnF: *Inventaire du Fonds Français du Cabinet des Estampes*), vol. 6, Paris 1973, p. 489 [Larmessin I, No. 267]; a short biography of Larmessin is given pp. 434ff. —The phrase of the inscription is also noted in the protocol; cf. *Traitement fait en France*, AEE, MD Afrique 12, fol. 5r/v.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. the report of de Hally to Colbert in *Colbert et la Guinée*, ed. CHOUIN, p. 67 (“*Il m’offrit tout ce qui dépendoit de luy den cette coste...*”).

<sup>71</sup> WICQUEFORT, *L’Ambassadeur*, vol. 1, pp. 535ff.

audience of 1670 is the concluding episode in this assembly. Although most of the wording is similar or even identical with that of the 1677 work, the change of context and addition of a final commentary made the episode appear in a completely different light. Wicquefort explains that Lopes' (assumed) submission had made the French believe themselves to be in possession of Allada's ivory and gold (which the country, in fact, scarcely offered), but it had come to nothing—further evidence, said Wicquefort, of the malice and infidelity of the African “apes”.<sup>72</sup>

Wicquefort's two different accounts of Lopes' audience with Louis XIV, as well as the apparently calculated ambiguity of the ceremonial interaction, throw an interesting light on the issue of intercultural misunderstandings. It is a global assumption, brought forth over and over again, that misunderstandings in intercultural contexts are generally due to culturally different norms, concepts, world views and standards of behaviour. This might be true for a number of cases, but it implies a rather static conceptualization of culture that denies actors' abilities to gain insight into the norms and concepts of others (which, of course, the modern scholar seems to be perfectly able to achieve). I do not share this conceptualization, although this is not the main point of discussion here. I would rather point out that, above all, the change of opinion Wicquefort underwent shows that there is also a phenomenon one could call 'intentional' or 'strategic misunderstanding'.

With regard to Lopes himself, the main aim of the mission had obviously been fulfilled as the ambassador was duly impressed by French grandeur and glory and convinced of French superiority to the Netherlands. This, at least, is what the French sources tell us. There were also negotiations about the French position and trading privileges in Allada. Despite French doubts about the possibility of making agreements with illiterates,<sup>73</sup> a treaty was even concluded, although it has not been found so far. But all these arrangements came to nothing—because on Lopes' return to Allada in 1671, a civil war

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 537: “*Les Singes de ces pais-là passent en malice & en infidélité ceux des Indes, & de tous les autres quartiers du monde.*”

<sup>73</sup> Severe doubts in this regard were expressed by de Baas, who obviously regarded literate culture as a precondition for fidelity and reliability. He does not seem to include the rate of illiteracy *within* Europe in his considerations; *Récit de la Réception*, ANOM, F 3/26, fol. 88r/v.

had broken out.<sup>74</sup> In defiance of the diplomatic efforts made, the French and Dutch companies both decided to transfer their posts from Offra to the nearby town of Ouidah (also known as Whydah), which would achieve lasting fame as an important port of the Atlantic slave-trade.<sup>75</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The embassy of Matteo Lopes was a global venture in several respects. Firstly and most obviously, Lopes did circle half if not the whole world. His journey took him to three continents, from the African shores to the New World, from the Caribbean to Europe, and finally back to Africa. His story can thus be read as a story of African mobility, if not of global then at least of transcontinental dimension. Secondly, the very origins of the embassy point to global interconnectivity, as it was the European conflict exported to African shores that led Tezifon to send the embassy. It was not only a conflict fought on a global scale but also a conflict fought with global visions. Thirdly, the embassy from a place that the Europeans considered the very periphery of the early modern world shows that early modern diplomacy and international law were at least conceptualized to hold validity for the whole world. The analogy between the Ottoman and the African ambassador drawn to integrate the latter in diplomatic ceremonial further demonstrates the global consciousness which Europeans showed in approaching such issues.

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. the report of de Hally in Colbert et la Guinée, ed. CHOUIN, p. 74 and JOHN BARBOT, A Description of the Coasts of North- and South-Guinea, in: JOHN and AWNSHAM CHURCHILL, A Collection of Voyages and Travels, vol. 5, London 1732, p. 325; see also LAW, Allada, p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> SIMONE BERBAIN, Le comptoir français de Juda (Ouidah) au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Etudes sur la traite des noirs au golfe de Guinée, Paris 1942; a more general history of Ouidah is presented by ROBIN LAW, Ouidah. The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port', 1727–1892, Athens/Oxford 2004. —Only the Dutch would reopen their factory in Offra later on. Du Casse notes, in 1687/8, that the trade of Allada was in the hands of the Dutch and the English; Relation du Sieur du Casse, in: L'Etablissement d'Issiny, 1687–1702, ed. PAUL ROUSSIER, Paris 1935, pp. 1–47: p. 14 (and 15). In 1693, the King of Allada approached d'Amon during his stay in Ouidah to persuade him to re-establish a French post in his country. A treaty was even concluded, but it remained inconclusive; Relation du Chevalier Damon (1693), in: *ibid.* pp. 71–89: pp. 83f.

On the other hand, Lopes' story also tells us much about the limits of global connections and intercultural communication. Firstly, the issue of shell money shows not only that there was no integrated monetary market but also that contemporaries often lacked insight into the relativity of value attributed to objects. Together with the disregard which French officials showed to the allegedly worthless gifts, this indicates that certain processes of transculturation took place in "contact zones", but remained at the same time limited to these specific spaces of interaction. Secondly, Lopes' story points to the problems of intercultural communication. Sometimes, it may be lack of knowledge that causes misunderstandings and other difficulties. Sometimes, however, misinterpretation can also serve strategic ends as in the different interpretations of Lopes' behaviour at his audience in Paris.