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Abstract

*This paper examines the economic relationship between the United States and Zanzibar from the 1830s through the 1860s. Through the use of primary sources found in Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr.'s compiled book *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, this paper explains the complexity of American-Zanzibari trade relationships in the nineteenth century, proves the global trading connections of Zanzibar, and explores the experiences of American consuls in this East African country. With the understanding of Zanzibari trading relations, pre-colonized Africa emerges as a formidable economic force and pivotal trading partner for American interests in the nineteenth century.*

A BOUNTIFUL RELATIONSHIP: AMERICAN TRADE RELATIONS WITH ZANZIBAR IN THE 1800s

By Wendy Myren

Unbeknownst to many Westerners blinded by the “dark continent” theory, East Africa has a rich history of global connections and worldwide trade. In the 1830s, the United States intertwined itself into this trade and gained a prominent presence in Zanzibar that remained strong for decades. During the trading heyday between Zanzibar and the United States from the 1830s through the 1860s, both countries benefitted economically from the exchange of goods. Although American trade with both the western and eastern coasts of Africa never exceeded more than two percent of total American commerce, the subject remains an important and revealing subject of study.¹ An examination of Zanzibari trade exposes the interconnected web of this global trading network. In particular, this paper will explore the trade relationship between the United States and Zanzibar, with specific focus on the role of Salem. Emphasis will be placed on the ivory and slave trade, as well as

¹ Cyrus Townsend Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar* (United States: Essex Institute, 1950), 115-116.

the personal experiences of American consuls and merchants. Through the use of letters from American merchants and consuls in Zanzibar, this paper will prove the complexity of trade between these two countries during the 1800s, describe the importance of this trade, and reveal the trading complexities of this African nation.

Trade with East Africa and the United States began in the early 1800s, with one of the first commercial dealings with Zanzibar beginning in 1826.² The American brig *Ann*, which frequently traded with Sumatra, Manila, and Mocha, first traveled south to Zanzibar for supplies after finding Mocha short of food. The brig acquired ivory from the island and thereby became a continuous trading destination for American ships.³ In 1827, the American vessel *Spy* became the first vessel to return directly from Zanzibar, carrying copious amounts of gum copal.⁴ Americans became frustrated with the formalities, heavy commissions, and anchorage fees in Zanzibar during the beginning of their trade relationship, which eventually led to trading treaties between the Sultan and the United States.⁵ Although American traders set up business houses in Zanzibar beginning in the 1820s, trade did not expand until the 1830s.⁶ By 1837, America opened one of the first consulates in the world in Zanzibar.⁷ With the arrival of the first consulate, Richard P. Waters from Salem, America became the biggest foreign trading partner for Zanzibar, at least until the eve of the American Civil War in 1860.⁸ Zanzibari producers shaped world markets with their large quantities of ivory and cloves. This greatly benefitted and enriched Salem trade, who relied on Zanzibar for its products.⁹

Trade Relations

During the zenith of American and Zanzibari trade, American ships (particularly from Salem) made up a significant proportion of trading vessels in the port at Zanzibar Town. From September 1832 to May 1834 in Zanzibar,

2 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa*, 89.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 S. Hoyle, "Early Port Development in East Africa," *Tijdschrift Voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 58, no. 2 (March 1967): 100.

7 Sanford J. Ungar, "Keep Our Zanzibar Consulate Open," *New York Times*, January 25, 1979, A19.

8 Richard Francis Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872), 408.

9 Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (United States: University of California Press, 2008), 62.

thirty-two of the forty-one vessels that arrived in the port came from America, and twenty-three of them from Salem alone.¹⁰ In a given year, at least half the vessels that arrived in Zanzibar came from America, even as naval traffic toward the island increased to 150 vessels per year.¹¹ These Salem ships sailed under the trading and shipping company established by Captain John Bertram, who had a strong relationship between Zanzibar and his firm.¹²

Zanzibar became an ideal place to trade starting in 1832, when Sultan Seyyid Said transferred his capital and court from Muscat to Zanzibar. Here, he created a new trading post and town to siphon East African trade to one area. Trade in Zanzibar became highly successful due to the enhanced commercial benefits of the new location. Zanzibar, situated significantly further south than Muscat, experienced proximity to the fertile coastal belt on the mainland — with close availability to the easiest routes to the interior. As a result of this move, Sultan Said controlled the trading routes into the mainland and became a powerful leader in East African trade.¹³ Said also created a system of variable tax rates that encouraged merchants to pass through Zanzibar, thereby undermining and surpassing other East African ports such as Kilwa.¹⁴ Furthermore, Americans preferred trade with Zanzibar because the population mostly consisted of Arabs, with only some Africans, and 60,000 slaves.¹⁵ Because of their inherent racist perspectives, American merchants seemed to detest trade with those of African descent, who they saw as “queer,” bothersome, and annoying people¹⁶ who did not understand currency.¹⁷ Frequently in the letters, American merchants talked down to the Africans on the East Coast but spoke highly of the Sultan and Master of Customs, both of Arab descent.

10 Gaurav Desai, “Oceans Connect: The Indian Ocean and African Identities,” *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (May 2010): 714.

11 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 116.

12 *Ibid.*, 98.

13 Hoyle, “Early Port Development in East Africa,” 99.

14 Erik Gilbert, “Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean: Long Distance Trade, Empire, Migration, and Regional Unity, 1750-1970,” *The History Teacher* 36, no. 1 (November 2002): 24.

15 “A Visit to Zanzibar, 1847. Horace B. Putnam’s Notes of a Cruise to the Indies or a Life in the Forecastle,” in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 400.

16 “The Log of the Bark Palestine, 1839-1840,” in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 187.

17 “The Log of the Bark Reaper, 1838-1839,” in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 186.

The United States and Zanzibar traded a variety of products during the 1800s, and both sides benefitted greatly from the trade exchange. Exports from Africa included gum copal, aloes, gum arabic, columbo root, tortoise-shell, rhino horn, beeswax, cocoa-nut oil, millet, and especially cloves, ivory, and animal hides.¹⁸ During the beginning of its trade with Zanzibar, the United States also received supplies for whaling voyages in East African waters.¹⁹ However, before the Civil War and the restriction of the slave trade, the United States took slaves from East Africa. A strange irony existed that “slave labor brought from Africa to the United States helped produce cotton that was manufactured into so-called *amerikani* cloth, which was shipped by Salem merchants to Zanzibar for trade.”²⁰ Therefore, the trade with Zanzibar came full circle with the African slaves picking the raw cotton in the American South, only to have it woven into cloth for the Zanzibari people. Occasionally, the Sultan sent his own ships to Salem to conduct trade, but this occurred less frequently than the United States sending its own ships to Zanzibar.²¹

Imports to Africa from the United States remained highly important to the African people, especially in regards to fashion. Zanzibar demanded American cotton cloth from the Northern factories “of unbleached calico, 30 to 32 yards long, a yard wide, and weighing about 10 pounds, stamped in blue ‘Massachusetts sheeting.’” This type of cloth gained the name *amerikani* or *merikani*.²² *Amerikani* cloth became the superior cotton cloth, and East Africans desired this specific brand.²³ In fact, some Zanzibari people left the “Massachusetts sheeting” label on display while wearing the cloth.²⁴ East African consumers shaped American companies in the North, who strove to meet African demands by creating fashions to satisfy African tastes, since fashion remained an important part of the life to the Zanzibari people.²⁵ The cheapness of the raw materials in America allowed the creation of a very du-

18 Edmund Roberts to Louis McLane, Washington, 14 May 1834, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 157.

19 George Shepperson, “The United States and East Africa,” *Phylon* 13, no. 1 (1952):28.

20 Desai, “Oceans Connect: The Indian Ocean and African Identities,” 715.

21 *Ibid.*, 713.

22 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 118.

23 Shepperson, “The United States and East Africa,” 28.

24 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 118.

25 Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization*, 64.

rable fabric that sold for a low price.²⁶ Other countries, such as India, could not compete in this trade until the American Civil War interrupted the Zanzibari-American trade. During its scarcity, the American cloth from Massachusetts still remained the most desired fabric. As a result, Arabs on Zanzibar called themselves “cotton-beggars” for American cloth during the war.²⁷

In the nineteenth century, East Africa ranked as the principal source of ivory for the world and enticed foreign traders to make the long journey to Zanzibar. Europe and America showed particular interest in this ivory trade, and became high demanders for this product.²⁸ Zanzibar constituted the main ivory market in East Africa, supplying seventy-five percent of the world’s total until the late 1800s.²⁹ They controlled the trade routes on the mainland and brought the ivory from the interior to the coast, where it was then shipped to Zanzibar Town and sold at a high price to Western merchants.³⁰ America alone compromised eighty percent of the soft ivory market in Zanzibar.³¹ Soft ivory, which elephants in East Africa generally possess, became a more desirable product for Europeans and Americans. Americans brought in close to half a million dollars per year for Zanzibar, just for the purchase of this ivory.³² This type of ivory is less brittle, cracks less often, and is easy to shape. Americans enjoyed this soft ivory for its malleable qualities, which provided the raw material for billiard balls and piano keys for American consumers.³³

Ivory adequate for Europeans and Americans, called “Bab Olihah” by the Zanzibaris, sold formally and for high prices. Each piece sold according to weight and quality, and Zanzibaris separately weighed each piece and logged it into a book to ensure consistency and quality.³⁴ According to accounts from the American merchants in Zanzibar during the trading zenith, ivory

26 Charles Ward to George Abbot, Kennebunkport, 13 March 1851, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 479.

27 Shepperson “The United States and East Africa,” 28.

28 R.W. Beachey, “The East African Ivory Trade in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 269.

29 Ibid.

30 Gilbert, “Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean: Long Distance Trade, Empire, Migration, and Regional Unity, 1750-1970,” 26.

31 Beachey, “The East African Ivory Trade in the Nineteenth Century,” 288.

32 Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast*, 409.

33 Beachey, “The East African Ivory Trade in the Nineteenth Century,” 275.

34 William Hines, “William E. Hines to William H. Seward, Zanzibar, 25 October 1864,” In *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, edited by Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 529.

tended to be around \$32-\$35 per arrobe.³⁵ With foreign competition prevalent in Zanzibar, arrobe prices did not lower to accommodate American buyers who either waited for the prices to drop or succumbed to the high ivory price. Ivory demand remained high among Europeans, so Americans frequently settled for ivory of low quality — meaning tusks of less than fifty pounds and bags of ivory pieces.³⁶ Since the ivory trade led to the death of thousands of elephants per year, some populations could not recover fast enough for hunters arriving the next year. As a result, “dull seasons” became detrimental for those Americans and East Africans dependent on the ivory trade for economic income.³⁷ Despite this pitfall, the United States remained a dedicated ivory purchaser for decades in the nineteenth century — until the depression of trade in the 1860s.

The American Civil War devastated trade between the North United States and Zanzibar. The figures from 1830 to 1860 do not compare with numbers during and after the Civil War. The trade between these two countries never bounced back to the flourishing relationship it once was during the mid-1800s. Before the Civil War, Zanzibar enjoyed America as its biggest and most prevalent foreign trading partner. The yearly value of American outward cargo (mostly cotton cloth and sheeting from the Lowell factory) averaged around one million dollars.³⁸ Between 1852-1857, Americans averaged about thirty-one ships sailing to Zanzibar annually, with an average of 8,593 tons of cargo being sent to the island.³⁹ Furthermore, the United States procured two to three million pounds of cloves per year from Zanzibar.⁴⁰ In 1859 alone, clove exports totaled 4,860,100 pounds to the United States. Ivory and copal remained important products for American purchase, with 488,600 pounds of ivory and 875,875 pounds of copal purchased by American merchants in one year alone.⁴¹ Western merchants also bought other products such as kopra (dried meat of the nut), orchilla, hippo teeth, amber-

35 “A Visit to Eastern Africa, 1848. Ephraim A. Emmerton’s Journal,” in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 407.

36 Charles Ward to Michael Shepard, Zanzibar, 10 May 1849, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 441.

37 William H. Jelly to George West Jr., Zanzibar, 26 September 1849, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 450.

38 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 116.

39 Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast*, 408.

40 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 116.

41 Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast*, 409.

gris, cowris, goat-skins, and some valuable woods.⁴² This trading relationship proved fruitful, with £118,688 worth of goods exported to the United States from Zanzibar in 1859 — the year before the onset of the bloody American Civil War.

In 1860, during the American Civil War, other countries entered the Zanzibari market. With the American powerhouse out of the way, foreign merchants found a foothold on the island and sold products with relative ease, thereby destroying America's practically untouchable influence in Zanzibar. During the war, imports from the United States totaled less than £30,000 annually, a significant drop from the pre-Civil War years of well over £100,000.⁴³ Despite the fact that the North could not send as many ships to Zanzibar because their men became involved with the war, the raw cotton for the Northern cloth factories also abruptly ended with the South's secession. This hurt Zanzibari economy, since a significant amount of income came to a screeching halt in 1860.⁴⁴ Specifically, the average annual amount of cotton bales to Zanzibar went from 6,000 bales before the Civil War to a mere 50 bales of cotton during the war.⁴⁵ The ships that managed to sail to Zanzibar during the war carried more diversified goods than previous years. Furniture, flour, and other miscellaneous goods became the norm for American exporting cargo to Zanzibar.⁴⁶ However, the few ships that arrived during the war did not carry an ample amount of cotton cloth, the product most Zanzibari consumers desired.

Perspectives on the Zanzibari Slave Trade

The slave trade and the suppression of it by the British created moral and trading dilemmas for Americans, who became torn between their moral duty to attack slavery and their commitment to their trading business. American merchants became intertwined with the slave trade in Zanzibar because of the slaves' direct involvement with trade relations. Arab middlemen in Zanzibar found slavery unprofitable by itself, but slavery coupled with the ivory,

42 Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast*, 411.

43 Ibid., 414.

44 Hines to Seward, 532-533.

45 Edward D. Ropes to William H. Seward, Zanzibar, 1 July 1865, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 536.

46 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 117.

clove, and beeswax trade became an important part of the successful trade on the island.⁴⁷ As a result, the proficiency of the ivory trade became dependent on slave labor. Most slave traders captured slaves from the interior of the mainland and walked them to the coast to be sold. However, with Zanzibar controlling the trade routes from the interior to the coast, slaves became an asset. Ivory collected from the elephants from the middle of the continent began to be transported by slave caravans. The slaves carried the massive tusks to the coast, where they would be shipped to Zanzibari markets.⁴⁸ Furthermore, slaves had other odd jobs in regards to trade, such as loading and unloading the cargo from the trading vessels.⁴⁹ As a result, slavery went hand in hand with the efficiency of Zanzibari trade, making the British attempt to end the slave trade a particularly troubling issue for Zanzibari and American merchants.

United States consuls carried a dual allegiance to both their country and their specific trading house.⁵⁰ Most American merchants, sailors, and consuls in Zanzibar hailed from the Northern United States, and therefore many considered themselves Yankees with a moral duty to detest the slave trade.⁵¹ Michael W. Shepard's 1844 account of his visit to Zanzibar expresses the despicable conditions of slaves, especially the slave ship conditions.⁵² Shepard describes the cramped conditions of the slave ships and the lack of food and care given to the slaves. Slave traders threw their dead cargo overboard "like sheep" once the ship anchored.⁵³ During the American and Zanzibari trading heyday, it was not uncommon to see animal or human corpses washed up onshore, which filled the trading cities with stench.⁵⁴

Slave labor on Zanzibar created a moral dilemma for American consuls, especially after the Civil War. William Hathorne, United States consul from 1876 to 1880, experienced the personal conflict between the duty to his

47 Shepperson, "The United States and East Africa," 27.

48 Gerald J. Pierson, "U.S. Consuls in Zanzibar and the Slave Trade, 1870-1890," *The Historian* 55, no. 1 (September 1992): 56.

49 *Ibid.*, 60.

50 *Ibid.*, 55.

51 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 122.

52 "A Visit to Zanzibar, 1844. Michael W. Shepard's Account," in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 261-262.

53 *Ibid.*

54 Donald Petterson, *Revolution in Zanzibar: An American's Cold War Tale* (United States: Westview Press, 2002), 7.

country and trading company. He felt the dilemma between morality and good business when it came to thoughts on the Zanzibari slave trade. In 1878, Hathorne signed a note to the Sultan urging him to remove restrictions on “hamali gangs” (groups of slave laborers skilled in loading and unloading cargo). Although Hathorne signed this for the interest of Bertram’s firm back in Salem, he felt that he misrepresented the United States government, since he personally saw slavery as “morally repugnant.”⁵⁵ He eventually withdrew his signature to the Sultan, but despite his own personal beliefs, Hathorne still believed slavery to be necessary for the existence of trade in Zanzibar. Also, a consul’s loyalty to his trading firm proved to be more important than representing the United States as a whole because slavery became “less of a concern than business.”⁵⁶ Other American merchants revealed their primary duty as representing their respective trading companies, with moral issues on slavery coming in second.

Most American merchants and consuls did nothing to stop the slave trade in Zanzibar. Tampering with slavery jeopardized America’s trading position and profitability of the trading houses.⁵⁷ Since Zanzibar’s economy depended on slave labor, the United States believed ending the slave trade posed a risk to American trading interests. However, with American slaves newly liberated after the Civil War, the British expected the United States to be supportive of British interests to end the slave trade in East Africa. Despite the pressure to support the British, American consuls valued Zanzibari trade more than ending slavery in East Africa.

United States consuls became suspicious of British motives to end the slave trade, believing it a direct and deliberate attack on American trading interests.⁵⁸ The British attempt to end the slave trade in Zanzibar frequently disrupted American commercial interests with the country. In search of slaves, the British destroyed property on American ships, which halted trade completely. At times, the British searched these ships knowing full well that many Americans openly detested the slave trade.⁵⁹ Their actions disrupted American trade and lost them profit. Some British seized American ships, claiming the slaves to be disguised as black sailors, only to have the United

55 Pierson, “U.S. Consuls in Zanzibar and the Slave Trade, 1870-1890,” 60.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 54.

58 Ibid.

59 “Charles Ward to Michael Shepard, Zanzibar, 16 July 1850,” in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 465.

States struggle diplomatically to prove them as freedmen. Some American merchants believed the British intentionally sabotaged American trading interests with Zanzibar. However, when Zanzibar asked for American aid from trade and slave restrictions imposed by the British, American consuls became more confused on their position.⁶⁰ As a result, American consuls and merchants remained indifferent toward the situation — neither directly supporting the British or Zanzibar. Although the British intervened with trade between America and Zanzibar, the effect of this interference generally did not influence overall trading profits and relations with the country, explaining the United States’ refusal to aid Zanzibar directly with the British problem.

Life for the American Consuls on Zanzibar

The letters and documents compiled and edited by Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks in the book *New England Merchants in Africa* provide clues as to how merchants of both the United States and Zanzibar conducted business and reveals a fuller picture of the trading process and relations between merchants themselves, the Sultan, and other countries. With the American consuls staying on the island for long periods of time, their letters express various experiences of this unique trading relationship. Generally, the American consuls experienced an excellent relationship with the Sultan of Zanzibar, who they called “Highness.” During the Civil War, the Sultan sympathized with the North, therefore earning the American consuls’ favor, since almost all of them hailed from Salem.⁶¹ With this choice, the Sultan garnered Yankee approval since much of his business came straight from Salem trading firms.⁶² Furthermore, American consuls lived comfortably in Zanzibar under the Sultan’s rich accommodations, which included exceptional housing for the trading consuls.⁶³ (The United States consulate had prime location at the apex of the peninsula of Zanzibar.)⁶⁴ Frequently, the Sultan invited American consuls and other trade leaders to all dine together, as a way to encourage healthy and thriving relationships between him

60 Ward to Abbot, 481

61 Ropes to Seward, 536.

62 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 100.

63 “The Journals of Richard P. Waters, 1836-1844,” in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 209.

64 Petterson, *Revolution in Zanzibar: An American’s Cold War Tale*, 20.

and other traders.⁶⁵ He delighted the foreign ladies, who sailed to Zanzibar with their merchant husbands, by giving them gift of cashmere shawls as a courteous gesture.⁶⁶

The Sultan also attempted to accommodate and nurture his trade relationships with other countries. When he believed United States merchants violated the Customs Law, the Sultan did not respond with anger or enforcement. Rather, he wrote a “request” letter to the American president asking him to enforce this law among his merchants.⁶⁷ In his letter, the Sultan politely asked the president to deal with this issue instead of demanding him to, which could have damaged the trade relationship between Zanzibar and America. However, the Sultan’s attempt to appease every country sometimes backfired, especially when animosity between America and Britain emerged. Out of respect for his trading partners, the Sultan saluted each country and hoisted their flag during that country’s respective holiday.⁶⁸ Problematically, the Sultan did not honor America’s Independence Day on July 4, 1850, out of respect for Britain, which infuriated Charles Ward, the American consul. When confronted about the matter, the Sultan apologized and responded that Britain would feel disrespected through the resurfacing of its bitter loss during the Revolutionary War. Ward, further offended since he believed America to be more important than Britain in Zanzibar’s trade relationships, threatened to withdraw United States interests from Zanzibar completely.⁶⁹ The situation ends here in Ward’s letter, with no further mention of the subject. Indeed, American interests continued in Zanzibar, but it became clear that the Sultan could not appease every country present without upsetting another.

Through the study of exchanged letters between American merchants, the logistics of 1800s trade in Zanzibar are fully understood. In fact, trade complexities in Zanzibar suggest an effective organization of the trading process in general. The Master of Customs in Zanzibar Town dealt with any and all trading relations between Zanzibar and other countries.⁷⁰ Jeram bin Seva, the

65 “Journals of Waters,” 209.

66 Ibid., 211.

67 Said Bin Sultan to the State Department, undated, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 238-239.

68 Charles Ward to John M. Clayton, Zanzibar, 13 July 1850, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 459.

69 Ward to Clayton, 460-462.

70 Richard Waters to P. Starr Parker, Zanzibar, 1 January 1840, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 225.

Master of Customs during the trading heyday between the United States and Zanzibar, became a frequent subject of discussion in the letters from American merchants. To test for quality, Jeram demanded to see samples of the products brought in by ships before allowing trade to occur.⁷¹ Furthermore, only fair trade occurred between Zanzibar and America, meaning American cotton could not be exchanged for a luxury such as ivory. Each country in business with Zanzibar needed a written contract to anchor and trade with the island at all.⁷² Foreign countries needed to attain permission to trade, putting them at the mercy of Zanzibar's discretion.⁷³ Although most of the merchants and consuls expressed a deep liking for Jeram, Richard P. Waters did not take an instant fondness to him when he first arrived as American consul in the 1830s. In his letter, Waters expresses distaste towards Jeram, who he caught purposely breaking the American-Zanzibari trading treaty.⁷⁴ Waters asserted that the Department would be notified of illegal customs occurring in the Zanzibar port, specifically naming Jeram as falsely charging a five percent export tax on American goods. This expense of removal, which the treaty banned, gave Jeram a certain amount of profit.⁷⁵ Ironically, years later, Waters grew close with Jeram, with whom he had a special business relationship.⁷⁶ Although Waters initially reported Jeram to the Sultan for lewd behavior, it was he who, three years later, performed the questionable behavior. Other American merchants reported Waters as purposely destroying documents intended for President Van Buren and gaining a high amount of profit by performing disingenuous consulate duties.⁷⁷ Despite this corruption, Waters remained as the American consul until 1845, when he was replaced with Charles Ward.⁷⁸ Other American consuls conducted business with Jeram and enjoyed the trading relationship they experienced with this Master of Customs.

The port in Zanzibar became highly desirable for the American merchants and consuls, who expressed their preference for trade with Zanzibar over

71 Richard Waters to P. Starr Parker, Zanzibar, 1 January 1840.

72 Ibid.

73 "Emmertons Journal," 410.

74 Richard P. Waters to John Forsyth, Zanzibar, 6 May 1837, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 216.

75 Ibid., 216-217.

76 Waters to Parker, 225.

77 Edward Brown to William B. Smith, Zanzibar, 9 February 1841, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 229.

78 Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade in Zanzibar*, 113.

other East African ports. Some American traders found other East African ports to be “oppressive” and insulting with “unlawful impositions.”⁷⁹ As a result, Waters pushed for a discontinuance of trade with these ports, and a sharper focus and increased trade with Zanzibar, on account of the fact that Americans still desired East African goods.⁸⁰ Civility between the United States and Zanzibar existed, unlike other ports, according to Waters, who in 1839 strongly pushed for a continuance of trade with Zanzibar.⁸¹ Furthermore, if business lacked elsewhere in East Africa, Zanzibar became a key port to conduct trade, in order for merchants to achieve their full profit from cargo.⁸² The congenial relationship between Zanzibari and American traders and the popularity of the port’s products made Zanzibar the most desirable East African port for American ships.

American merchants also pushed for increased trade with the port in Zanzibar since foreign trading vessels from America needed to stay in the country for months at a time. A one-way trip from Salem to East Africa took around 112 days, or an average of three months.⁸³ With such a long journey to even arrive in Zanzibar, many sailors (and the ship itself) needed ample time to recover from their travels. Also, merchants desired to sell all of their products within these months in order to fully load Zanzibari imports for their home-ward-bound journey.⁸⁴ The entire voyage for an American vessel to return to the United States generally took around a year.⁸⁵ Although the East African trade only constituted a small percentage of America’s total commercial interests, it is clear that the products from this small island became valuable enough for a yearlong voyage to retrieve them.

As a result of their desire to acquire the best products (such as high quality ivory) from Zanzibar, American trading companies believed that other

79 Richard P. Waters to John Forsyth, Zanzibar, 1 November 1838, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 220.

80 Ibid.

81 Richard Waters to William Waters, Zanzibar, 17 December 1839, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 224.

82 Michael Shepard to Charles Ward, Salem, 21 May 1850, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 454.

83 “A Visit to Eastern Africa, 1849: Ms. Putnam’s Journal,” in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 416.

84 David Pingree et al. to John Waters, Salem, 10 September 1840, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 227.

85 John F. Webb et al. to John Aulick, Zanzibar, 5 December 1851, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 489.

foreign competition for these products posed a direct threat. American merchants felt pressured to send their cargo to African markets first, so their products could quickly sell before foreign competitors arrived.⁸⁶ The traders from the United States did not prefer to engage in competitive trade because it frequently drove up prices on products such as ivory.⁸⁷ As a result, Americans aimed to arrive in Zanzibar before other ships in order to bargain the prices down. (Ivory prices did not budge with other foreign buyers in town who might be willing to pay full price.) Evidently, the United States remained reluctant to share Zanzibari goods with the rest of the world.

Salem trading companies in particular desired to be Zanzibar's only trading partner. With most consuls representing John Bertram's firm in Salem, and later its successor Ropes, Emmerton, and Company, other firms from ports out of New York and Boston threatened Salem's profits.⁸⁸ Richard Waters, in his letter to his brother in 1844, asserted that Salem traders must "keep all new comers at a distance and so try to make one voyage sufficient to disgust and sicken them of Zanzibar and its trade."⁸⁹ Waters ordered his brother to prevent the Boston vessel *Mohawk* from acquiring a trading contract with Zanzibar and expressed his willingness to pay thousands of dollars to "keep the trade in the hands of those who now hold it."⁹⁰ As a result, Salem interests remained high in Zanzibar, at least until the end of the trading peak later in the 1800s.

Conclusion

As German and British interests toward Zanzibar expanded in the 1880s, the American commercial foothold deteriorated.⁹¹ Although the American Civil War in the 1860s ended the peak of United States trade with Zanzibar, it did not fully conclude until decades later. When British interests firmly rooted

86 David Pingree and George West Jr. to Richard Waters, Salem, 30 December 1841, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 235.

87 "Richard P. Waters, Notes 1842, 1843, and 1844," in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 255.

88 Pierson, "U.S. Consuls in Zanzibar and the Slave Trade, 1870-1890," 55.

89 Richard P. Waters to William C. Waters, Bombay, 13 November 1844, in *New England Merchants in Zanzibar*, ed. Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 252.

90 *Ibid.*, 251.

91 Pierson, "U.S. Consuls in Zanzibar and the Slave Trade, 1870-1890," 54.

in Zanzibar during the late 1800s, the country became a protectorate of the British in 1890, which then flooded the market with cheap British goods.⁹² Therefore, America's presence and trading relationship with this East African country practically ended, as they could not compete with the British goods in the local market. In 1895, Salem's main trading company, Ropes, Emmer-ton, and Company left Zanzibar.⁹³ Trade with Zanzibar dried up completely in the 1900s, and the United States closed their consulate in 1915.

Despite the death of United States and Zanzibari trade relations by the turn of the century, the study of the trade zenith between these two countries remains important for historians. Zanzibar trade provided the United States with its source of ivory, copal, and cloves; in return, the United States provided Zanzibar with cotton and cotton cloth, which greatly influenced demand and fashion in this area. For a few decades, the United States remained the foremost foreign trading partner of Zanzibar, and therefore greatly influenced their economy. Trade relationships between the American merchants, the Master of Customs, the Sultan, and other foreign countries remained intertwined and complex and Zanzibar became a piece of the global network. Zanzibar felt the effects of having an economy reliant on the global network of trade and demonstrated its capacity to keep up with the world's standards.

92 Pierson, "U.S. Consuls in Zanzibar and the Slave Trade, 1870-1890," 67.

93 Ibid.

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