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Chapter 1

The *Minion* and Its Travels: Sailing to Guinea in the Sixteenth Century

Bernhard Klein

The *Minion* was a ship of the Royal Navy, originally built in 1522¹ and named after the type of small cannon made of cast-iron or bronze frequently in use on Tudor and Stuart ships. Known as one of Henry VIII's favourites, referred to as 'la Mignone'² by the French, 'Mjinhona'³ by the Portuguese, and 'Miñona'⁴ by the Spanish, the *Minion* was rebuilt twice in the 1530s and included in an illustrated inventory of Henry's navy in 1546. Deployed initially in domestic and cross-Channel service, and involved in several skirmishes in Scottish, Irish, and European waters, it was later chosen as one of a small number of ships leased from the crown by London's overseas merchants in the 1550s and 60s, when it was first used in the trade with Spain and, probably, the Canaries and/or the Azores, and later undertook travel to Africa and the West Indies on at least five separate occasions. Its last known voyage took the ship from the Caribbean to Cornwall, where it landed in Mount's Bay on 25 January 1569. Having already been the subject of complaints about its lack of deep-seaworthiness in 1561,⁵ it was condemned shortly after that final voyage, possibly in 1570,⁶ giving it a total lifespan of just under 50 years.

¹ For the date, see the document in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* [hereafter *L&P*], III: part 2: 1521-23, ed. J.S. Brewer (London: Longmans et al., 1867), p. 1102, item 3591, dated 2 October 1522, containing the first known reference to the ship: 'The King's *Minion* and the four Spaniards are ready for the coast of Ireland'.

² *L&P*, IX, 1535, ed. James Gairdner (London: Longman et al., 1886), 189, item 566 (footnote).

³ António Brásio (ed.), *Monumenta missionária africana. África ocidental (1469-1599)*, vol. 4 (Lisbon: Agência geral do ultramar, 1954), item 69, p. 246.

⁴ *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1558-1567* ed. Martin A.S. Hume (London: HMSO, 1892), p. 447, item 307 [hereafter *CSP Spanish, 1558-1567*].

⁵ See the letter by John Lok to a syndicate of London overseas merchants, dated 11 December 1561, in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 3 vols (London: George Bishop et al., 1598-1600), II, part 2, pp. 53-4 [hereafter *PN2*]. This was the second, much expanded edition of Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*.

⁶ See Tom Glasgow Jr, 'List of Ships in the Royal Navy from 1539 to 1588 - The Navy from Its Infancy to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada', *The Mariner's Mirror* 56, no. 3 (1970), pp. 299-307: 301; J.J. Colledge and Ben Warlow, *Ships of the Royal Navy. The Complete Record of All Fighting Ships of the Royal Navy from the 15th Century to the Present* (London: Chatham Publishing, rev. ed. 2006), p. 227; C.S. Knighton and David M. Loades, *The Navy of Edward VI and Mary I* (Aldershot: Ashgate, for the Navy Records Society, 2011), pp. 497-8 [hereafter *NEM*].

The *Minion* was neither the largest, nor the most widely travelled, nor the most famous ship in Tudor England. Instead it shares the characteristics of a range of other, hardly very remarkable vessels, which together formed the material base for the ‘maritime world of early modern Britain’ that is the subject of this volume. It is precisely its relative ordinariness, however, that makes it a particularly fitting example for the purposes of this essay. Taking my cue from recent explorations of ‘global microhistory’ as a theoretical model that integrates a focus on the local within a macro framework, a close study of the *Minion* opens up a window on the master narrative of Britain’s rise to a major sea power which allows local and individual stories to confirm or contest that explanatory framework.⁷ As we shall see, while the ship’s move from domestic to European to global spheres of action signals a trajectory broadly compatible with the standard account of contemporary English maritime aspirations, the specific details of the *Minion*’s travels reveal instead a series of unexpected historical alignments and social configurations.

The story of the *Minion* has never been told in full. In what follows, I will look at the ship’s history – or perhaps its biography – from three different angles. The first section takes a broad diachronic view of the roughly half century of the ship’s existence, summarizing what can be reliably established in material terms about its movements across European and global seas in that time. The second section focuses on the period after 1558, which is both its best documented and its most ambitious decade, when it voyaged far out of its comfort zone, becoming central to the West African trade pioneered by a syndicate of London-based merchants from 1553 onwards, and later participated in one of the earliest English slave trading voyages. The final section will move from the material and economic to the cultural and social spheres by looking more closely at the *Minion* as a space of encounter and cross-cultural contact in which nobles, mariners, and traders, from different parts of the world, as well as Africans captured as slaves, cohabited in various constellations of power, hierarchy, and subjection.

⁷ The term ‘global microhistory’ was coined by Tonio Andrade in ‘A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory’, *Journal of World History* 21, No. 4 (2010), pp. 573-91 (p. 574). It has been taken up, amongst others, by Francesca Trivellato in ‘Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?’, *California Italian Studies* 2, No. 1 (2011), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq> (6 May 2019); and by John-Paul A. Ghobrial in ‘The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory’, *Past & Present*, No. 222 (2014), pp. 51-93.

A timeline for the *Minion*

The chronology of the *Minion* can be largely pieced together from surviving evidence in the *State Papers*, in naval records, in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*, and in a variety of other sources. Described in its early decades as a modest ship of 150 or 180 tons,⁸ it patrolled the Irish Sea and the Channel in the 1520s, carried wine for the royal household from Bordeaux and La Rochelle, and transported building materials between various English ports. On at least one occasion, it was selected for diplomatic duty. On 1 October 1532, the Spanish ambassador Eustace Chapuys announced to Charles V that Henry will soon 'cross the sea in the *Minion*'⁹ for his state visit to Calais in October and November, where he was to meet the French king, though a published account of the visit later in the same year placed Henry instead on the *Swallow*, a galleon of 240 tons.¹⁰ Whether the *Minion* carried the king or not, the Chapuys letter makes it very likely that the ship was part of the fleet that took the English delegation to France. If the commemorative painting produced in honour of the king's earlier, 1520 visit to Calais, *The Embarkation of Henry VIII at Dover* (c. 1540/41), on which a total of fifteen English warships can be seen, is taken as a guide, the fleet may well have contained a similar number of ships in 1532.¹¹

Some degree of royal affection for the *Minion* certainly appears to have been in evidence, since a French source of 1535 refers to the ship as 'the mistress of England' [la maistresse d'Angleterre]¹² - obviously a play on the French rendering of its name, 'la Mignone'¹³ - which may possibly be taken as further evidence that the *Minion* was indeed in Calais three years earlier, when the unmarried Anne Boleyn, well known by then as Henry's mistress, was a member of the king's entourage. The same source reports that the ship was drawn into a Swedish naval battle in 1535 and 'broken to pieces' [mise en pièces]¹⁴ as a result, which may be one reason why the *Minion* was among those ships 'new made'¹⁵ or rebuilt into a stronger and more heavily armed ship

⁸ See *L&P*, IV, part 1: 1524-26, ed. J.S. Brewer (London: Longman et al., 1870), 761, item 1714 (180 tons); and *L&P*, V, 1531-32, ed. James Gairdner (London: Longman et al., 1880), 591, item 1377 (150 tons).

⁹ *Ibid.*, V, 1531-32, 591, item 1377.

¹⁰ See *The maner of the tryumphe at Caleys and Bulleyn* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1532), sig.A.ij.

¹¹ The painting forms part of the Royal Collection at Hampton Court Palace, inventory no. RCIN 405793.

¹² *L&P*, IX, 189, item 566 + footnote.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *L&P*, X: 1536, ed. James Gairdner (London: HMSO, 1887), 513, item 1231.

in 1536 by the Cromwell administration.¹⁶ It subsequently appears in the records as a ship of around 300 tons.¹⁷ Two years later, it apparently had to undergo reconstruction and/or repairs again, and in January 1539 was reported to be ‘standing in [the] docks’ at Deptford, ‘masts ready but not set up’.¹⁸ In the following decade, the *Minion* played a part in the French and Scottish wars.

The year 1546 yields the most informative details of the ship’s construction. In that year, an image of the ship (the only one known to exist) was included in the set of three rolls of vellum presented to Henry VIII as a pictorial index of the Royal Navy by his clerk of the ordnance, Anthony Anthony (fig. 1). These rolls – now shared between the British Library and the Pepys Library in Cambridge, and known collectively as the Anthony Roll after their creator – contain images of 58 ships and served, in all probability, not so much as a working inventory but as a presentational item intended to impress ambassadors and royal visitors with the firepower of the Royal Navy.¹⁹ The comparison between the only one of these 58 ships that has been partly preserved – the *Mary Rose* – and the image of it contained in the rolls, certainly suggests that the principal aim of the visualization is not the accurate description of the ship but the exaggerated display of England’s military prowess.²⁰

Since few, if any, of the ships in the Anthony Roll appear to have been drawn from life, information about the *Minion* contained in it has to be treated with caution, even though it remains the fullest extant source about the ship. Across the whole of the collection, the written sections, listing crew and ordnance in much detail alongside other equipment, are generally far more reliable than the visual depictions, which rarely match the textual detail.²¹ For the *Minion*, the tonnage is listed at 300, the total number of guns at 86, and the crew at 220 men: 100 soldiers, 100 mariners, 20 gunners.²² These

¹⁶ According to Hakluyt, the *Minion* was part of an expedition to Newfoundland in March 1536 (see *PN2*, III, p. 129), but as E.G.R. Taylor has convincingly demonstrated on the basis of Admiralty records, he must have misheard name of the ship, which was actually the *William*. See E.G.R. Taylor, ‘Master Hore’s Voyage of 1536’, *The Geographical Journal* 77, No. 5 (1931), pp. 469-470 (p. 496).

¹⁷ See *L&P*, XX, part 2: 1545, ed. R.H. Brodie (London: HMSO, 1907), 11, item 27; C.S. Knighton and D.M. Loades (eds), *THE ANTHONY ROLL of Henry VIII’s Navy. Pepys Library 2991 and British Library Additional MS 22047 with related documents*, Occasional Publications of the Navy Records Society, Vol. 2 (Aldershot: Ashgate, for the Navy Record Society, 2000), p. 55.

¹⁸ *L&P*, XIV, part 1: 1539, ed. R.H. Brodie (London: HMSO, 1894), p. 51, item 143.

¹⁹ See C.S. Knighton, ‘The Manuscript and Its Compiler’, Knighton and Loades, *THE ANTHONY ROLL*, pp. 3-11 (p. 4).

²⁰ See Stuart Vine, ‘The Evidence of the *Mary Rose* Excavation’, Knighton and Loades, *THE ANTHONY ROLL*, pp. 15-19.

²¹ See D.M. Loades, ‘The Ordnance’, Knighton and Loades, *THE ANTHONY ROLL*, pp. 12-14.

²² See Knighton and Loades, *THE ANTHONY ROLL*, p. 55.

are probably the figures for maximum capacity. In 1548, the number of guns had dropped to 63 in the royal inventory,²³ and before rebuilding, the crew of the *Minion* comprised only 92 in April 1523 and 122 in September of the same year.²⁴ During the four African voyages between 1558 and 1565, the number of men on board, including merchants, was probably around or below 100 on average;²⁵ in October 1567, when leaving Plymouth for the West Indies via Africa, one eyewitness reported a crew of ‘a hundred persons more or less’.²⁶

The vessel is included in the first of the three rolls depicting four-masted ‘Shyppes’, and the rigging evident in the image is appropriate to the size of the vessel: eight sails (square for the two front masts, lateen for the back two) across all masts and the bowsprit. The passage in William Towerson’s log of 1558, when the loss of ‘maine saile, foresaile, and spreetsaile’²⁷ during the return journey from West Africa forced the *Minion* to drift for two days near Cape Finisterre, Galicia, seems consistent with the image, assuming that Towerson referred to the main bottom sails on the three front masts. The *Minion* often had a pinnace in tow, as shown on the image. On one occasion in April 1558, off the coast of West Africa, a companion ship, the *Tiger*, came so close to the *Minion* during a windless night, that a pinnace was crushed between the two ships, ‘the Master of the Tyger asleepe’.²⁸ The hull shows five gunports along the side, at two different deck levels, and two at the stern, all depicted without lids, which is highly improbable. Higher up the stern, two further guns can be seen, emerging from the back of the ship without any ports at all, which the illustrator may have simply forgotten to add. The two gunports at the stern are placed so near (if not actually below) the waterline that it is highly unlikely they could have been in that position. The top two guns appear to be positioned in such proximity to the nearest guns on the same deck on either side of the sterncastle that they would have probably clashed inside the ship, or at least could not have been operated simultaneously in battle.

The visual detail of the *Minion*’s firepower thus seems exaggerated in the Anthony Roll, and reports of the ship in action do not suggest a particularly high degree

²³ See *The Inventory of King Henry VIII*, ed. David Starkey (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1998), p. 149.

²⁴ See *L&P*, III, part 2, 1242, item 2949 (92 men); item 3358 (122 men).

²⁵ See J.D. Alsop, ‘Tudor Merchant Seafarers in the Early Guinea Trade’, Cheryl Fury (ed.), *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 75-115 (p. 87).

²⁶ Harry Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins: Queen Elizabeth’s Slave Trader* (Princeton, NJ: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 320n11.

²⁷ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

of operational capability. During a 1543 skirmish in the Channel, for example, a small French ship managed to bypass the *Minion* and another ship of the Royal Navy, the *Primrose*, without much resistance, bragging later that ‘as two of the King’s best ships cannot better one of theirs of 180 [tons] burthen, they will go home through the Narrow Seas maugre their enemies.’²⁹ In 1563, while engaged with two Portuguese vessels off the West African coast just east of Mina Castle, a barrel of gunpowder exploded in the steward room which injured most of the gunners and allowed the Portuguese to destroy the *Minion*’s foremast with ease.³⁰ And in the most detailed report of the *Minion* in battle (at San Juan de Ulúa in the Gulf of Mexico, September 1568) the ship’s survival is owed not to its defensive strength but to the timely preparations and clever manoeuvring of its crew, who had made the ship sea-ready even before the Spanish attack got under way.³¹

In what might be a sign of its decreasing relevance for the Royal Navy under Edward, the *Minion* spent the decade after 1548 mainly on loan. In that year, the ship was handed to Thomas Seymour,³² the young king’s maternal uncle and brother of the lord protector, who was executed the following year, and then in 1550 to Sir William Herbert, later the first earl of Pembroke.³³ From that year onwards, the *Minion* was in merchant service for six years,³⁴ constituting one of the larger English trading vessels for the period,³⁵ though not many details about this period have come to light. In 1550 and 1551, a *Minion* that could be the royal ship is twice recorded in the port of Bristol, each time entering with a range of commodities that suggest it was used in the trade with Spain, the Canaries and/or the Azores: on 18 December 1550, the ship carried wine, olive oil, raisins, orchil (red or violet dye), and sugar;³⁶ on 26 June 1551, it arrived with a

²⁹ *L&P*, XVIII, part 1: 1543, ed. James Gairdner and R.H. Brodie (London: HMSO, 1901), p. 506, item 938.

³⁰ See *PN2*, II, part 2, 55.

³¹ For different accounts of the battle, see *PN2*, vol. 3, pp. 472-3, 490, 524. See also the various depositions made as part of Hawkins’ claim against the Spanish government before the High Court of Admiralty in March 1569, especially the account of Thomas Hampton, captain of the *Minion* during the Hawkins voyage (The National Archives, SP 12/53; Hampton deposition on f. 22r-33v).

³² See C.S. Knighton and David Loades (eds), *Elizabethan Naval Administration* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, for the Naval Records Society, 2013), p. 8 [hereafter *ENA*].

³³ See John Roche Dasent, *Acts of the Privy Council of England 1550-52*, new series, III (London: HMSO, 1891), p. 43.

³⁴ See *NEM*, p. 498.

³⁵ For the size of individual vessels in England’s merchant navy in the Tudor period, see the essay by Craig L. Lambert and Gary P. Baker in this volume.

³⁶ See Susan Flavin and Evan T. Jones (eds), *Bristol’s Trade with Ireland and the Continent, 1503-1601. The Evidence of the Exchequer Customs Accounts* (Bristol: Four Courts Press, 2009), pp. 566-7, 581, 603, 608. Thanks to Craig Lambert for pointing me to this source.

cargo of pepper, sugar, and a staggering 210 tons of woad (a blue dye originating from either Toulouse or the Azores), valued at £1,400.³⁷ In 1565, the *Minion* was again carrying ‘woad from the Azores’.³⁸ These details could indicate that the *Minion* was in this period already connected to the same London traders who later funded the voyages to Guinea, several of whom – such as Edward Castelin and Anthony Hickman – entertained business links with Iberian ports.³⁹ By 1557, under Mary I, the *Minion* was back in crown service, carrying William Howard, the Lord Admiral, in the Channel on 20 June.⁴⁰

Its possible use in the trade with the Canaries or the Azores would have made the *Minion* a logical choice for its main extra-European career, which started in the late 1550s, when the ship sailed four times to Guinea (West Africa) and once, via Guinea, to the West Indies, stopping in the Canaries for revictualling on every occasion (save one). These voyages were made possible by a cooperation between the crown under Elizabeth and a syndicate of London merchants, who hired the ship directly from the queen, separately for each new venture, in return for a share of the profits to be made from the voyages. The queen’s cut could be substantial: one of the agreements for a Guinea expedition (in 1564/5) specifies that ‘Her Majesty [is] to receive a third part clear of the gains of their voyage’⁴¹ for the loan of two ships, the *Minion* and the *Primrose*. The exact profits returned on the African voyages through the trade in gold, ivory, and pepper are not known, though they were significant enough to continue attracting promoters throughout the 1550s and 60s, despite a high mortality rate peaking at 60-70% for the first of these ventures, the 1553 voyage to Guinea and Benin under Thomas Windham.⁴²

³⁷ Ibid., p. 603.

³⁸ *CSP Spanish, 1558-1567*, 445, item 305.

³⁹ Castelin and Hickman employed two factors in Gran Canary for the trade in sugar; these are probably the ‘two English Marchants’ (*PN2*, vol. 2, part 2, 45) mentioned by Towerson in the account of the 1558 voyage, when the *Minion* called in the Canaries on 12 February. On Castelin and Hickman, see T.S. Willan, *The Muscovy Merchants of 1555* (Clifton, NJ: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1973), pp. 26-7; and J. McDermott (2008), ‘Castelin, Edward (fl. 1554-1578), merchant’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi-org.chain.kent.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/61534>.

⁴⁰ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Mary I, 1553-1558*, ed. C.S. Knighton (London: Public Record Office, 1998), p. 282, item 621.

⁴¹ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*. ed. Robert Lemon (London: Longman et al., 1856), XXXV, p. 247.

⁴² For a contemporary account of this voyage, see Richard Eden, *The Decades of the newe worlde or west India* (London: William Powell, 1555), 343r-348r; and the reprints in Richard Willes, *The History of Trauayle in the West and East Indies* (London: Richarde Iugge, 1577), 336v-341v; and in *PN2*, vol. 2, part 2, pp. 9-13. The mortality estimate is taken from P.E.H. Hair, ‘The Experience of the Sixteenth-Century English Voyages to Guinea’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 83, 1 (1997), pp. 3-13 (p. 10).

The *Minion*'s four trading missions to Africa each lasted between six and nine months, and are confirmed for the years 1558, 1562, 1563, and 1564/5.⁴³ On each occasion, the fleet's intended departure date was October or November to enable trading during the cooler months at the start of the year, before a return journey during late spring. In the event, the first three voyages did not set out until January or February, with only the last one leaving in October. The return to England is confirmed for all four voyages between July and October, with the voyages arriving late in the year suffering the most from the extreme weather conditions on the West African coast.⁴⁴ One of Hakluyt's editorial comments on the late return of the 1558 voyage, when mortality may have been as high as 50 per cent⁴⁵ and 'not above thirty sound men' were left on a fleet of three ships in August, emphasized '[t]he great inconvenience by late staying upon the coast of Guinie'.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, given its repeated use on these long-distance voyages, the *Minion* appears to have proved a reliable vessel, despite the complaints of John Lok, a veteran of the Guinea trade, who wrote in a letter to the London promoters on 11 December 1561 that the *Minion* was 'spent and rotten', and impossible 'for men to lie drie in'.⁴⁷ The successful voyages that followed appear to have proved him wrong.

On its final voyage solely to Guinea, in 1564/5, the *Minion* made its first contact with the slave trading fleet of John Hawkins, the Plymouth merchant and original 'sea dog', that would be intensified in the ship's final years. The two fleets lay side by side in the port, then met again shortly after leaving Plymouth on 18 October 1564, 'hail[ing] one the other after the custome of the sea'. They parted ways, and met again on 26 October in the port of El Ferrol in Galicia, seeking shelter from a storm. In the days between, the *Minion*'s companion ship *Merlin* had sunk from a gunpowder explosion, 'through the negligence of one of the gunners', losing three lives. Several months later in the West Indies, on 29 April 1565, Hawkins heard from a French captain who had just been 'beaten off [the Mina coast] by the Portugals gallies' that 'the like was hapned unto the Minion', that many seamen had died through the lack of victuals, and that the

⁴³ See the table in Alsop, 'Tudor Merchant Seafarers in the Early Guinea Trade', p. 76. Alsop's essay is an updated version of research findings first presented in P.E.H. Hair and J.D. Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea, 1553-1565: The New Evidence of Their Wills* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), which includes an earlier version of the same table on p. 49.

⁴⁴ Detailed descriptions of the voyages, including departure and arrival dates, are contained in Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, pp. 5-72.

⁴⁵ Hair, 'The Experience of the Sixteenth-Century English Voyages', p. 10.

⁴⁶ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 51.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

captain and merchants on the *Minion* were prisoners of the Portuguese.⁴⁸ Whether these events happened is unclear, but if they did, their consequences must have been less dramatic than the report suggests, since on 5 July 1565, the *Minion* is back in London, via Southampton, according to letters by the Spanish ambassador.⁴⁹

In between its African missions, the *Minion* returned to crown service. In 1560, for example, the ship is confirmed in Scottish waters, helping to fight off the French after the Treaty of Berwick,⁵⁰ and in September and October 1563, it served in the French wars immediately after its return from Guinea, presumably with all of the surviving seamen.⁵¹ The last recorded voyage of the *Minion* was both its longest and its most infamous. Loaned in 1567 to John Hawkins, the ship was part of the fleet of six that set out from Plymouth on 2 October on Hawkins' third (and England's fourth) transatlantic slaving expedition.⁵² Four of these ships were Hawkins' own, but two were on loan from the crown, the *Minion* and the 700-ton flagship, the *Jesus of Lübeck*, originally purchased by Henry VIII in the 1540s from the Baltic port of Lübeck, part of the Hanseatic League. During this voyage, the *Minion* became something of a floating hospital, as sick men were transferred onto the ship to keep the crew of the *Jesus* in health.⁵³ The fleet stopped at Gomera in late October, at Cape Verde in November, and then in Sierra Leone between December and February, capturing nearly 500 Africans,⁵⁴ before crossing the Atlantic to the West Indies, arriving at Domenica in March 1568. After trading and pillaging in the Caribbean for several months, Hawkins ran into a storm near Florida which badly damaged the *Jesus*. Seeking shelter at San Juan de Ulúa in the Gulf of Mexico, Hawkins unexpectedly encountered a Spanish

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁹ *CSP Spanish, 1558-1567*, 445, item 305; 447, item 307.

⁵⁰ See *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603*, 1: 1547-1563, ed. Joseph Bain (Edinburgh: HM General Register House, 1898), p. 365, item 737.

⁵¹ See Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, p. 39.

⁵² Hawkins had undertaken two previous slaving voyages in 1562-3 and 1564-5; his associate (and relative) John Lovell commanded one such voyage in 1566-7. Much has been published on these voyages; see, for instance, James Alexander Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins: The Time and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927); and his *Hawkins of Plymouth* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1949). For the best recent biography of Hawkins, see Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins*.

⁵³ Testimony of William Collins, seaman on the *Jesus*. See Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins*, 68-9. Collins was among the 100 seamen that Hawkins set ashore near Tampico, Mexico, in October 1568, and who were later captured, interrogated, and punished by the Mexican Inquisition. See the note in G.R.G. Conway, *An Englishman and the Mexican Inquisition* (Mexico City: privately printed, 1927), p. 156.

⁵⁴ Hawkins' estimate for the number of slaves captured was 'betweene foure and fiue hundred' (*PN2*, III, p. 522); Miles Philips thought it was 'very neere the number of 500' (ibid., 470); and Job Hortop put the number squarely at '500' (ibid., p. 488).

fleet of 13 ships in September 1568 and was forced to share the small anchorage in the local port.

Negotiations to avoid confrontation between the two fleets failed, and on 23 September 1568, according to one eyewitness, ‘three hundred Spaniards entred the Minion, whereat our General [Hawkins] with a loude and fierce voyce called vnto vs [the mariners on the *Jesus*], saying, God and Saint *George*, vpon those traiterous villaines, and rescue the Minion’.⁵⁵ The patriotic appeal yielded results; the *Minion* withstood the initial onslaught and eventually managed to escape, though only by using the demasted *Jesus of Lübeck* as a shield against the Spanish attack. The ship emerged badly damaged from the fight. Two weeks later, while putting ashore one hundred of his men near Tampico, Mexico, Hawkins described it as ‘sore beaten with shotte from our enemyes’ and ‘in such perill that euery houre we looked for shipwracke’.⁵⁶ The ship had lost two anchors and three cables in the battle, which put ‘the companie of the Mynnyon [...] very manye tymes in greate danger of ther lyves’⁵⁷ during the return journey to England, according to Humphrey Fones, who came back alive. As one of only three surviving ships of the original fleet of six,⁵⁸ the *Minion* eventually limped back into English waters in January 1569.⁵⁹ The ship was dropped from the records in this or the following year.⁶⁰

The career of the *Minion* spanned half a century and the reign of four Tudor monarchs. The ship was part of the growing navy under Henry VIII, which was foundational for the later emergence of English sea power; it was central to the economic collaboration between the crown and private investors under Elizabeth, which became key to the growth of the empire; and it was an early English player in the transatlantic slave trade, in which Britain was to assume a prominent role from the late 1630s onwards.⁶¹ It sailed both east to Africa and west to the Caribbean, replicating in its

⁵⁵ *PN2*, III, p. 490.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 525.

⁵⁷ The National Archives, SP 12/53 f. 51v.

⁵⁸ The other two were the 50-ton *Judith*, commanded by Francis Drake, which arrived back in Plymouth a day before Hawkins, and the 150-ton *William and John*, which left San Juan de Ulúa before the battle and returned to Ireland under Thomas Bolton (see Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins*, 104).

⁵⁹ For an account of the voyage published under Hawkins’ name (though possibly not written by him), see *PN2*, III, pp. 521-5. For a more recent historical assessment, see Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins*, pp. 52-115.

⁶⁰ I follow Glasgow and others in assuming that the *Minion* originally built in 1522 was condemned in 1570 or before, and that the ship referred to by Hakluyt as the *Minion of London* in several accounts dealing with events after 1580 is therefore a different ship. See Glasgow, ‘List of Ships’, p. 301; Colledge and Warlow, *Ships of the Royal Navy*, p. 227; *NEM*, pp. 497-8.

⁶¹ On the Tudor navy and sea power, see David Loades, *The Tudor Navy: An Administrative, Political, and Military History* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1992), and his *England’s Maritime Empire: Seapower,*

overseas travels the macro division of global space that increasingly governed the European perception of world geography, and which shaped, for example, the sequential arrangement of travel accounts in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*, as well as the collection of voyages published by the de Brys on the continent, which are divided into an eastern and a western series. Yet the *Minion's* individual travels rarely reflect that geopolitical framework, nor do the published accounts advertise the imperial mission to which they arguably made an early contribution. On its extra-European journeys, the ship sailed principally as a trading vessel, and its five forays into the Atlantic world were characterized not by a sense of English destiny but by local European rivalries, the relative ignorance about the non-European world, and the pressing need to catch up with the achievements of other seafaring nations, in particular Portugal and Spain.

The *Minion* in Guinea

Apart from Hawkins's third slaving expedition, the international dimension of which attracted substantial commentary across a range of contemporary sources,⁶² the Guinea voyages are the best known of all the travels undertaken by the *Minion*, mainly because accounts of several of them were included in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*, first in 1589, and then again, with some changes, in the substantially larger, three-volume edition of 1598-1600. The trade enabled by these voyages was an early English overseas commercial operation which is still a neglected area of the Tudor maritime experience, despite constituting, at the time, 'the largest concentration of England tonnage in any extra-European commerce'.⁶³ During the *Minion's* lifetime, nine trading voyages solely

Commerce and Policy, 1490-1690 (Harlow: Longman, 2000); on the links between the crown, privateering, and empire, see Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and Nicholas Canny (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 1: The Origins of Empire. British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); on Britain's early involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, the scholarship is too numerous to be listed here, but a good introduction is provided by Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶² Kelsey's 2003 biography of Hawkins (*Sir John Hawkins*) makes more extensive use of Spanish sources than most other English-language accounts of Hawkins' voyages. P.E.H. Hair, *Hawkins in Guinea, 1567-68*, University of Leipzig Papers on Africa, History and Culture, No. 5 (Leipzig: Institut für Afrikanistik, 2000), deals only with the Guinea sections of Hawkins' third voyage but also uses some Spanish material.

⁶³ Also, 'Tudor Merchant Seafarers in the Early Guinea Trade', p. 76. For the wider connections between West Africa and Europeans in the period, see David Northrup, 'Africans, Early European

to Guinea are known to have been funded by English merchants, between 1553 and 1565, in four of which the ship participated.⁶⁴ Across the two editions of Hakluyt's collection, seven items – ranging from short letters and meeting notes to long prose accounts – deal with these four voyages, and a further three accounts relate to the *Minion*'s final voyage to the West Indies.⁶⁵ Together, these ten accounts, supplemented by archival sources from England, Spain, and Portugal, give an insight into the material, economic, and political frameworks in which the ship operated on its Atlantic journeys.

The trips solely to Guinea followed recognizable protocols of preparing for the voyage, setting out and arriving in Guinea, gathering local information to scope out the best places for trade, making contact with the locals, and maximizing profits ahead of the return leg to England.⁶⁶ The *Minion* never sailed on its own but always in a convoy of two, three, or four ships, sometimes together with smaller, often unnamed pinnaces. On the first voyage, in 1558, the *Minion* is singled out as the 'Admirall'⁶⁷ of the fleet (ie, the flagship) in the long account of that journey penned by the commander, William Towerson, and included by Hakluyt in both editions of *The Principal Navigations*. Towerson was the son of a yeoman from Cumberland, apprenticed to a London skinner since 1551, who had also commanded the previous two English Guinea voyages in 1555/6 and 1557.⁶⁸ Given that the *Minion* was a substantially larger vessel than the two ships Towerson had sailed in before,⁶⁹ and indeed one of the largest of the English ships sailing to Africa at the time (together with the *Primrose*), its selection appears to reflect the growing ambition of the London merchants for the Guinea trade.

Contacts, and the Emergent Diaspora', Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 38-54.

⁶⁴ See the table in Alsop, *ibid.* Hair's earlier estimate of the number of English voyages to Guinea in the same time frame was 'under a dozen' (Hair, 'The Experience of the Sixteenth-Century English Voyages to Guinea', p. 3). Other English voyages, notably by Hawkins, also stopped at Guinea in this time span but went on to other destinations. They are not included in the count of nine.

⁶⁵ These ten items are: *PN2*, II, part 2, 44-52 (Towerson account of 1558 voyage); 51-2 (letter by promoters to Lok 1561); 52-3 (Lok letter to promoters 1561); 54-5 (Rutter account of 1562 voyage); 55 (notes of promoters' meeting 1564); 56 (extract from Hawkins voyage 1564); III, 469-87 (Miles Philips on third Hawkins voyage, 1567-9); 487-95 (Job Hortop on third Hawkins voyage); 521-5 (Hawkins account of third voyage). The tenth item, not included in *PN2*, is found only in the first edition of Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*: Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English nation* (London: George Bishop et al., 1589), pp. 130-35 (Baker account of 1563 voyage) [hereafter *PN1*].

⁶⁶ For an overview of the typical voyage logistics and conditions, see Hair, 'The Experience of the Sixteenth-Century English Voyages to Guinea'.

⁶⁷ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 44.

⁶⁸ On Towerson, see J.D. Alsop, 'The Career of William Towerson, Guinea Trader', *International Journal of Maritime History* 4 (1992), pp. 45-82.

⁶⁹ Towerson's two previous ships were the *Harte* of 60 tons (1555-6), and the *Tiger* of 120 tons (1557). See *ibid.*, p. 60.

Six years and four voyages later, business prospects were still seen as favourable enough for a contract to be signed on 11 July 1564 ‘betwixt the Queen, and Sir William Garrard and other Merchants, for hiring the Queen’s ship Mynyon, for Africa’.⁷⁰ On this occasion, the vessel was newly rigged ‘upon the Queenes majesties charges’,⁷¹ with the help of master shipwright Peter Pett of Deptford, founder of a famous shipbuilding dynasty in England, whose son Phineas Pett went on to design the gigantic, 1500-ton warship *Sovereign of the Seas* for Charles I in 1637.⁷² The Admiralty agreed ‘to have the *Minion* ready’ by 15 August 1564, with the promoters responsible for all wages and charges after that date.⁷³ Peter Pett’s help had been requested by the *Minion* on at least one earlier occasion, after a series of mishaps delayed its second voyage to Guinea by several months. In September 1561, the ship collided with the *Primrose* in the Thames, was quickly repaired, only to collide again with the same ship in a storm in the Straits of Dover in November.⁷⁴ The second collision required more expensive repairs and necessitated the help of Pett as well as that of another shipwright, Butolph Moungey of Kent.⁷⁵ John Lok, commander of England’s second voyage to West Africa in 1554-55, was scathing of their efforts and subsequently withdrew from the voyage on 11 December, citing the *Minion*’s lack of seaworthiness and the dangers of the late departure date.⁷⁶ The ship eventually sailed in January 1562 under a new commander, George Ireland.

During its journeys to West Africa, the *Minion* passed Cape Palmas and Cape Three Points many times, stopped at coastal villages and rivers in modern-day Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, and various other locations, including River Sess, the Sassandra and San Pédro rivers, and settlements such as Takoradi, Shama, Moree, and Accra. Place-names are frequently mentioned in the accounts but knowledge of local geography on the part of *Minion*’s mariners was understandably shaky; deictic references such as: ‘[i]n this place, and three or foure leagues to the Westward of it, al along the shoare, there grow many Palme trees’,⁷⁷ are not untypical. Mariners often also

⁷⁰ *A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts in the British Museum: With Indexes of Persons, Places and Matters* (London: House of Commons, 1816), 217, item 113.

⁷¹ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 55.

⁷² On the *Sovereign of the Seas*, see the chapters by Alan James and Rebecca Bailey in this volume.

⁷³ Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, p. 69n77.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31; *ENA*, 213n1

⁷⁵ See *The Navy Treasurer’s Quarter Book, 1562-3* quoted after *ENA*, 213. The repairs were carried out in Bristol where the *Minion* was taken and from where Lok wrote his letter to the promoters.

⁷⁶ *PN2*, II, part 2, pp. 53-4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

depended on information passed down by previous English voyagers; indeed, the transmission of travel intelligence was one reason for setting down accounts of these voyages in the first place. Towerson, for example, describing some strong currents off the coast of Sierra Leone in 1557, emphasized that these details are to be noted by ‘all they that saile this way [...] or els they may be much deceived’,⁷⁸ clearly assuming that his warning would reach later travellers.

Sea charts, possibly rudimentary in content, helped the mariners on the *Minion* find their way, and the information gathered on their own journeys also in turn informed later travellers. On his first voyage to Guinea, in 1555, Towerson already had a ‘Carde’ available on board, which he refers to several times in his account,⁷⁹ though he does not explain how detailed it was or where he obtained it. In the account he wrote on the *Minion* in 1558, he mentions no maps or charts, though they appear in other sources. The will of boatswain’s mate Thomas Shawe, for example, who also sailed on the *Minion* in 1558, mentions an astrolabe and a map in his possession;⁸⁰ that of John Grebby on the *Primrose*, sailing alongside the *Minion* in 1562, ‘one Carde with compasses’.⁸¹ William Rutter, a factor who wrote an account of the 1563 voyage and who died in Guinea on either the *Minion* or the *John Baptist* in January 1565, also owned his own chart which he left for the master’s mate, Henry Seymor. Seymor, who died only a few months later in May, then passed on ‘the Card that was William Ruters’⁸² to yet another mariner. In their instructions for the 1562 voyage, the promoters asked their then commander, Lok, to improve on available charts by making ‘a plat’ of the coastline he was passing, ‘setting those places which you shall thinke materiall in your sayd plat, with their true elevations’.⁸³ Whether Lok’s replacement, George Ireland, followed these instructions is not known, but no map or chart that would fit this description has so far been discovered.

Navigational instruments were part of the official equipment, alongside timekeeping devices, flags, and spare items of rigging. On 20 December 1562, in preparation of the 1563 voyage, Thomas Spencer of London was paid for the delivery of a ‘great chest filled with provisions for the *Minion* and *Primrose*, viz. flags of St.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 25, 28, 29.

⁸⁰ See Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, p. 272.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 283.

⁸² Ibid., p. 332.

⁸³ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 52.

George, great compasses and great running glasses, and shivers and cocks of brass, with divers other kinds of things for the furnishing of the same ships for Ethiopia'.⁸⁴ One of those flags mentioned here later facilitated peaceful negotiations with a French ship near River Sess in April 1563. The French captain, who had initially taken flight at the sight of the *Minion*, later returned when 'he had espied our flag, perceiuing vs to be Englishmen'.⁸⁵ They then agreed terms, which did not please the French. The number of St George's flags visible on of the Anthony Roll image of the *Minion* is clearly an exaggeration, but the one that was in use on the *Minion* during an incident in Gran Canary in February 1558 was enough to enrage a Spanish admiral, who asked Towerson 'to furl [his] flagge'.⁸⁶ (Towerson refused to comply.)

The Guinea run was known for a quick arrival and a long return. In 1558, the *Minion* took only five and a half weeks to reach Cape Mount (in modern-day Liberia), including a stopover in the Canaries; in 1563, the ship reached River Sess in about the same time, this time breaking the journey in Cape Verde. The return journeys to England, when ships needed to reach the west-flowing equatorial currents further south, were much longer: four and a half months in 1558 and two months in 1563.⁸⁷ While the exact travelling times for the other voyages cannot be established, these do not appear to be unusual figures.⁸⁸ Once in Guinea, the ships traded for several months (three and a half months in 1558; two in 1563) by calling at various points along the coast, and using their pinnaces and longboats to make contact with the shore. Strong coastal currents made this approach dangerous, and on the 1563/4 voyage (which did not include the *Minion*), one boat with nine merchants on board was separated from the main ship during a storm and never made contact again, though three of the merchants survived.⁸⁹ While trading, the ships were often separated for parts of the time, either through adverse weather conditions, Portuguese attacks, or – when trading imperatives made it expedient – by design. Dangers increased for unaccompanied ships. In April 1563, for example, off Cape Palmas, the *Minion* ran into two Portuguese vessels bound for Mina Castle and only narrowly escaped, while its consort, the *Primrose*, had forged ahead further east. 'God be praised the Minion had no hurt for that time',⁹⁰ Rutter

⁸⁴ *The Navy Treasurer's Quarter Book, 1562-3*, quoted after *ENA*, pp. 224-5.

⁸⁵ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 54.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸⁷ For the dates of the 1558 voyage, see *ibid.*, pp. 44-52; for the 1563 voyage, see *ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

⁸⁸ See Hair, 'The Experience of the Sixteenth-Century English Voyages', p 7.

⁸⁹ See the account of Robert Baker's second voyage, written in verse, in *PN1*, pp. 135-42.

⁹⁰ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 54.

noted, mindful of the gunpowder explosion (cited above) that was to be the outcome of the next Portuguese attack.

The three main commodities that made Guinea attractive for English traders were gold, elephant's teeth, and Malagueta pepper. On the *Minion's* voyages, all three commodities were obtained from local African traders, not always on the best terms, and sometimes, by force, from French ships. The account of the 1558 voyage mentions the acquisition of 31 elephant's teeth, an unspecified amount of pepper, and 117 pounds of gold (roughly 43 kilos), 50 pounds of which came from a French ship taken as a prize on 5 April 1558 near Mina Castle. The 1563 voyage returned with hardly any gold but 'Elephants teeth 166. weighing 1758 pounds' and 'Graines [= pepper] 22 buts full'.⁹¹ In 1565 the *Minion* left Guinea with perhaps as much as 150 pounds of gold (or 56 kilos), as well as sizeable amounts of ivory and pepper, according to the Spanish ambassador.⁹² In return, the English sold different types of cloth, products made of heavy metals (brass, iron, lead, etc), and possibly an assortment of trifles such as beads, bells, and pearls, summarized broadly as 'marchandise'⁹³ in the account of the 1563 voyage by Robert Baker. In 1558, cloth was in such high demand on the Guinea coast that on 3 May, the *Minion* ran out of the stock it had brought from England and started selling cloth seized from a French ship instead. On 31 March 1558, Towerson mentions the sale of 'Manillios',⁹⁴ or metal bracelets, to the Africans of Takoradi ('Hanta'). More trade of this nature must have taken place than is mentioned in the accounts. A list inserted by Hakluyt after Towerson's account in the *Principal Navigations*, probably compiled by Towerson himself, which spells out in detail the 'commodities and wares [...] most desired in *Guinie*',⁹⁵ describes metal-based products in ten out of 21 entries. Interestingly, the two entries in the Bristol port book for 1550 and 1551, mentioned above, list the *Minion's* cargo on exit as cloth, calf skin, and lead, which might suggest a link to the Guinea trade, perhaps via Iberian intermediaries, even before the start of the English voyages.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁹² *CSP Spanish, 1558-1567*, 447, item 307. The estimate of 150 pounds of gold is Hair's, the source refers instead to '20,000 crowns in gold'. See A. Teixeira da Mota and P.E.H. Hair, *East of Mina. Afro-European Relations on the Gold Coast in the 1550s and 1560s. An essay with supporting documents*, Studies in African Sources 3 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988), 30-31.

⁹³ *PNI*, p. 132.

⁹⁴ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 47.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Building materials were apparently carried by the *Minion* on the 1562 voyage, and again in 1564/5. On both occasions, these must have been intended for an English trading fort or factory to be erected on the Guinea coast. The attempt to establish a permanent foothold in West Africa speaks to the close link between trade and empire (even if the latter idea had not yet received much coherent treatment in English political thought) but also to the practical limitations the English faced in the period, who did not succeed in following the Portuguese example of the existing forts at Mina and Axim until several decades into the seventeenth century. The possibility of an English fort or ‘castle’ was first raised in 1555 in a note sent by the English merchants to the crown in defence of their right to free trade with Guinea against the claims of the Portuguese ambassador.⁹⁶ The ‘inhabitants of that country [ie, Guineal]’, the note reads, ‘offered us and our factors ground to build uppon, if they want to make any fortresses in their countrey’,⁹⁷ which may be a reference to the same offer noted by Towerson on 13 January 1556, when he claimed that on the previous English voyage a local African ruler ‘came aboard the shippe ... and offered them [the English factors in 1554/5] ground to build a Castle in’ (optimistically glossed by Hakluyt in the margin as the offer ‘to build a towne in Guine’).⁹⁸

On 23 February 1557, Towerson again reports that the ‘king of Abaan’⁹⁹ (possibly the ruler of Beraku, modern-day Ghana¹⁰⁰) encouraged the English ‘to send men and provision into his countrey, to build a castle’,¹⁰¹ and in 1561 the London promoters followed up on this scheme by instructing Lok to find the best location for ‘a fort upon the coast of Mina in the king of Habaans country’.¹⁰² A letter from the Spanish ambassador dated 27 November 1561 confirms that the fleet that sailed in 1562, which included the *Minion*, carried ‘cut-timber, artillery, munitions, arms, and victuals, for a year in greater quantity than is required for their own use’,¹⁰³ and although the fort was not built on this voyage, nor on any of the previous ones, the plans seem to

⁹⁶ On the English plans to build a fort in Guinea, see also Teixeira da Mota and Hair, *East of Mina*, pp. 21-6.

⁹⁷ John William Blake, *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560*, 2 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1942), II, pp. 356-7.

⁹⁸ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 34.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁰ See J.D. Fage, ‘A Commentary on Duarte Pacheco Pereira’s Account of the Lower Guinea Coastlands in His *Emeraldo de situ orbis*, and on Some Other Early Accounts’, *History in Africa* 7 (1980), pp. 47-80 (pp. 61-3).

¹⁰¹ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 42.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁰³ *CSP Spanish, 1558-1567*, 219, item 144.

have persisted at least until 1564, when Portuguese spies reported that the *Minion* or one of the other two English ships bound for Guinea on the 1564/5 voyage carried ‘moveable planks’ of wood [taboas movediças] to be ‘unloaded on the Mina coast’ [tiraré na costa da Mjna],¹⁰⁴ clearly with the intention to ‘build on land’ [para edefficar em terra].¹⁰⁵ The references suggest that the *Minion* was centrally involved in early, if abortive attempts to give the English traders a more permanent presence in the region, which was not finally achieved until the building of Fort Cormantine in Moree, Ghana, erected at the beginning of the English slave trading period between 1638 and 1645.

While that phase in Anglo-African relations was still some decades in the future during the *Minion*’s four trading ventures to Guinea, its final voyage was already unequivocally engaged in the transatlantic slave trade. Leaving Plymouth in October 1567, Hawkins’ fleet had loaded the full range of trade goods supplied by the London syndicate under William Garrard, consisting of ‘brode clothe, carges [kersey], cottens, linnen clothe, silks, pintados [painted cotton cloth], margaritas [pearls], pewter, and haberdashe ware, and other marchandize to the value of aboute 16500 pounds sterling’, according to William Clarke, one of the four merchants on the voyage, sailing in the *William and John*.¹⁰⁶ But in addition, the fleet left Plymouth with African slaves in the hold, brought to England from the West Indies by John Lovell in the previous month, and took on many more in Sierra Leone, several of whom were still on board the *Minion* when the battered ship reached England for the last time in January 1569. The treatment of Africans as mere ‘cargo’ during the Hawkins voyage offers a depressing contrast to the *Minion*’s earlier visits to Guinea, when – as the following section will show – African traders had set foot on its planks and interacted with the English visitors on equal, often respectful terms.

The People of the *Minion*

Few specifics are known about the *Minion*’s crewmen before the 1550s. Occasional references in the *State Papers* mention some officers by name and refer to casualties at sea but rarely take account of ordinary seamen. The situation is different for the Guinea

¹⁰⁴ Brásio, *Monumenta missionária africana*, vol. 4, item 69, p. 246.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., item 70, p. 249.

¹⁰⁶ The National Archives, SP 12/53 f. 14v, deposition of William Clarke.

voyages. Through the pioneering work of Paul Hair and James Alsop, who have traced over 90 wills of seamen involved in the nine English Guinea voyages between 1553 and 1565,¹⁰⁷ the names of about 350 individuals who sailed on the *Minion* and other ships involved in the trade have now been retrieved, not only of those who died but also of surviving shipmates named in the wills.¹⁰⁸ The local men who sailed to West Africa came from all over the British Isles, including Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, not just from the port cities of England. Some seamen may have come from Portugal,¹⁰⁹ and we know from the accounts in Hakluyt that French mariners frequently joined the crew. Hawkins' men in 1568 certainly included some French and Dutch sailors on the *Minion*.¹¹⁰

Seamen knew that the Guinea voyages were risky ventures. 'I am appoynted to goo into the lande of Geney, being a longe and dangerouse Journey, having no certentie of my lif nor sure coming home',¹¹¹ noted George Warde (who did not return home) in his will on 12 October 1557. Many of the common seamen owned more useful, even valuable possessions than is often assumed, especially varied items of clothing. Some were clearly literate, some had proper beds, and many ate food that was neither rotten nor stale. The wage rates on the voyages were high by contemporary standards, and several mariners made additional profits from private trading, which was permitted on some of the ships, including the *Minion*.¹¹² In their wills, often made on board within a day or a week of death, personal items and shares of their wages were passed on to shipmates, to family members, or to other figures in the seamen's local parish, as well as to the poor. One mariner on the *Minion*, Anthony Ditton, even left 5 shillings of his wages to the University of Oxford in 1562, 'to be giuen to some poore scoller that hath nede'.¹¹³ His fellow mariner John Mores also left 13 shillings 4 d to 'the Colledge of Oxford'.¹¹⁴

Ships were hierarchical spaces, but in line with established maritime tradition, mariners on the *Minion* also participated in onboard decision-making and in the

¹⁰⁷ See Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders*. This study, published in 1992, printed 89 wills of Guinea seamen. A further four wills, all by seamen on the *Minion*, have since been discovered. See Alsop, 'Tudor Merchant Seafarers in the Early Guinea Trade', p. 77n4.

¹⁰⁸ See Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ See *ibid.*, 243 ('Francisco George'), *et passim*.

¹¹⁰ See Conway, *An Englishman and the Mexican Inquisition*, pp. 155-62.

¹¹¹ Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders*, p. 281.

¹¹² See *ibid.*, pp. 105-57.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

distribution of profits. For example, when Towerson stopped two vessels *en route* from Bordeaux to Gdańsk ['Dantzic'] on 31 January 1558, suspecting them of carrying French goods that could be seized as a prize of war (which had been declared by Mary on 7 June 1557), it was 'determined ... that euery man should take out of the hulks so much as he could well bestow for necessaries'.¹¹⁵ This meant equal shares for all. On 5 April on the same voyage, the goods and valuables taken from a French ship at Accra ['Egrand'] were also shared out among all crewmen, since all the extant wills from the voyage made after that date mention some variant of '[m]y share of the prize taken at Egraunde'.¹¹⁶ On 15 April, Towerson dropped his plans to '[move] our company for the voyage to Benin' - that is, sail further east into a much hotter climate - after consulting with the rest of the ship, since 'the most part of them all refused it'.¹¹⁷ Whether 'company' here refers to the entire crew or perhaps only to officers and possibly merchants, is not entirely certain, though the principle of sharing and seeking consent rather than imposing decisions from above is clearly established.

Once on the Guinea coast, the English built up business relationships with African traders in a number of ways, largely by respecting time-honoured protocols of 'commercial diplomacy'.¹¹⁸ As the accounts in Hakluyt make clear, English traders generally made an attempt to observe appropriate forms of conduct, and to respect local ritual and existing hierarchies, as far as they understood these. But things did not always go to plan. One relationship Towerson tried but failed to continue in 1558 was with Don John, a local Fetu ruler and business partner of some standing, 'a graue man',¹¹⁹ who first appears in the English sources in the account of the 1554/5 voyage,¹²⁰ and whom Towerson had earlier met in January 1556 near Cape Three Points.¹²¹ When Towerson decided in May 1558, after some days of slow trading at Accra, to sail west in the *Minion* and see 'what was to be done at the towne of Don Iohn',¹²² no meeting with the local 'captain' could be arranged. Instead, the Africans refused to engage in any meaningful trade, which Towerson blamed (rightly, perhaps) on Portuguese

¹¹⁵ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 44.

¹¹⁶ Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders*, 249. For commentary, see *ibid.*, p. 26.

¹¹⁷ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 48.

¹¹⁸ P.E.H. Hair, 'Attitudes to Africans in English Primary Sources on Guinea up to 1650', *History in Africa*, 26 (1999), pp. 43-68 (p.54). See also April Lee Hatfield, 'A "very wary people in their bargaining" or "very good merchandise": English Traders' Views of Free and Enslaved Africans, 1550-1650', *Slavery & Abolition* 25, 3 (2004), pp. 1-17.

¹¹⁹ *PN2*, II, 2, part 2, p. 30.

¹²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

interference. He even went on land personally and approached local villages waving a white flag, but found none of the locals prepared to speak to him.¹²³ In retaliation, his company attacked the locals, killing and hurting many, then ‘burned their towne, and brake all their boats’.¹²⁴ Such a hostile act is not typical of the English behaviour in Guinea more broadly, but demonstrates that, for Towerson at least, respect for the locals was conditional on securing profit.

Don John – or ‘Dom João’ in the Portuguese sources – may have been the Portuguese trade name given to successive Fetu rulers, since the Portuguese first refer to a local king of that name as being baptised in 1503.¹²⁵ The ‘Don John’ that Towerson failed to meet in 1558 was described by Martin Frobisher in a 1562 deposition to the Privy Council as

a capten, called Don Joan, dwelling in Futta [Fetu], within iij myles of the Castell of Myne [Mina Castle], [who] was required and promised great rewardes and stipendes by the King of Portingall’s agient to bicomme under the obedience of the said king, and to ayde him agenst other that would trate [trade] into those parties; who not onely refused to graunt any parte therof, but also made aunswer that he accomptid [accounted] hymself to be his fellowe. And therefore by no meanes he would be restrayned of his libertie.¹²⁶

Frobisher had been sailing on the 1554/5 voyage to Guinea, commanded by John Lok, and was left behind as a hostage during trading near Mina Castle when the English ships were surprised by the Portuguese and forced into a hasty retreat, leaving no time for Frobisher to return on board. He subsequently spent several years in Portuguese captivity, first at Mina, later in Lisbon.¹²⁷ His deposition notes the considerable degree of autonomy and independence some local African rulers claimed for themselves, and the anxieties about European competition felt by the Portuguese.¹²⁸ That anxiety was

¹²³ See *ibid.*, p. 49.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ See Blake, *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560*, I, p. 96.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 359. See also *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1562*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (London: Longman et al., 1867), 53, item 102, ‘Declaration of Martin Frobisher’.

¹²⁷ On Frobisher, see James McDermott, ‘Frobisher, Sir Martin (1535?-1594)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10191>.

¹²⁸ The case for African trading autonomy has been confirmed by recent historians, for example by John Thornton in *Africans and Africa in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400 to 1800* (Cambridge:

confirmed by the Portuguese ambassador in a letter to Elizabeth on 7 June 1562, in which he complained that '[t]he profits of the fort at the Mina have in the years 1557 and 1558 been altogether decayed by reason of the English and French'.¹²⁹

When the English sought to make contact again with Don John on the 1563 voyage, they were told that he had died but that his replacement, Don Luis, had a son, Anthonio, who was ready 'to traffike with us', together with another business partner, Pacheco. Anthonio and Pacheco met with the English on 23 April, and the next day were still 'aboord the *Minion*'. On 25 April, the *Minion* was attacked by two Portuguese gallies while still at sea, narrowly escaped, and then did not make contact again with the coast until they arrived at 'Rio de Barbos' (an Ivory Coast river) on 14 May. There the company stayed for a week, then sailed further west to River Sess, from where they set sail for England on 4 June, arriving in Dartmouth on 6 August 1563.¹³⁰ The timeline is relevant because a Portuguese source dated 8 August 1564, that appears to refer to these events, states that

certain Englishmen have sometimes said that the last time they came from Mina, I mean that they were on the Mina coast, two English speaking blacks [2 negros que fallão egres] came aboard the English carracks, that told them that the principal black of the land, who calls himself Don John, ordered them to tell them and promise that if the English came with a fleet by sea, that they would help by land, for what I know not, only that the said English trust this promise. And at this time they took with them two blacks, that were aboard when our galleys chased them away. And they could not take them to land again. And one of them died in Portsmouth, at the carracks' arrival. And the other returns in the ones that are now sailing to Guinea.¹³¹

If this source refers to the events on the *Minion* in April/May 1563, as is likely, then Anthonio and Pacheco were taken to England even though they could have left the ship

Cambridge University Press, sec. ed. 1998), pp. 13-71; or by David Northrup in *Africa's Discovery of Europe, 1450-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, third ed. 2014), pp. 55-61.

¹²⁹ *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1562*, p. 76, item 158.

¹³⁰ *PN2*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 55.

¹³¹ Brásio, *Monumenta missionária africana*, vol. 4, item 69, p. 247. Thanks to Tiago Sousa Garcia for providing the translation from the Portuguese.

at either Rio de Barbos or River Sess, suggesting that their subsequent trip to England may not have been an entirely involuntary one. If the survivor of the pair then returned to Guinea on the 1564/5 voyage, he would have spent over a year in England, from August 1563 (return of the 1563 voyage) to mid-October 1564 (departure of the 1564/5 voyage).

If it is also true that both Anthonio and Pacheco spoke English, then it is reasonable to assume that they spent time in England before. The accounts in Hakluyt mention several Guinea Africans travelling back and forth on English ships in the 1550s and 60s, including an individual called ‘Anthonie’, who was sorely missed by the inhabitants of Hanta in January 1557, and about whom Towerson made a promise to the locals that he ‘had bene at London in England, and should bee brought home the next voyage’.¹³² If Anthonie and Anthonio are the same person, then he visited England at least twice, once in the 1550s, once in 1563/4, possibly suggesting a two-way traffic between England and Guinea: not only English merchants travelling to Africa, but also African merchants travelling to England. It is tempting to speculate that Anthonie may have even settled in England and ended his life there, such as the individual who appears in a 1630 burial record of the parish register of St Augustine’s Church, Hackney: ‘Anthony a poore ould Negro aged 105’.¹³³ But there is no means of knowing.

Less speculative is the suggestion that Anthonio and Pacheco may have been referred to in a letter by a Portuguese agent dated 5 September 1562, which states that the English ships that arrived back in Portsmouth from Guinea with gold that year had returned two Africans from London to the Mina Coast on the outbound journey.¹³⁴ This was the voyage which started with a collision in the Thames between the *Minion* and the *Primrose*, was later abandoned by Lok, and finally sailed in January 1562 with building materials on board. The apparently good relations that were developing between English merchants and the Africans of the Mina coast cannot have done

¹³² *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 38.

¹³³ See the facsimile reproduction of the record in Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors. The Untold Story* (London: Oneworld, 2017), p. 5.

¹³⁴ Arquivo Nacional, Torre do Tombo, PT/TT/CC/1/106/11. The source reads: ‘dous negros que elles [h]avião trazido da Mina que amdavão em Lomdres’ [they have brought two blacks to Mina who were in London]. The document is briefly discussed by Teixeira da Mota and Hair (*East of Mina*, 48), and again by Hair and Alsop (*English Seamen and Traders*, 67n65), but is misread in both instances as stating that the two Africans were in London during one of King Philip’s visits to England. Actually, the letter refers to King Sebastian of Portugal, not King Philip of Spain, and only notes that its author, Ruy Mendes, was in London while in the service of his king when the two Africans were there (‘quando eu ali fuy em serviço d’el rey’). Many thanks to Maria João de Oliveira e Silva for providing a transcription of this source.

anything but increase Portuguese anxieties. The agent notes that the two returning Africans were treated well in England, and that they had carried a letter to Elizabeth from their local king with an invitation to send further ships at any time. Assuming that the two Africans sailing back in January 1562 arrived on a previous English fleet returning from Guinea, they cannot have reached England any later than 20 October 1558 (or possibly earlier, since that voyage ‘had not about sixe Mariners and sixe Marchants in health’¹³⁵ with the English shore in sight), meaning they must have lived in the country for three years or longer.

The first reference to Africans being brought to England on trading vessels from Guinea occurs in the account of Lok’s first voyage in 1555, which notes that the English ‘brought with them certaine blacke slaues, whereof some were tall and strong men, and could wel agree with our meates and drinckes. The colde and moyst aire doth somewhat offend them.’¹³⁶ It is very unlikely that these Africans were actually slaves. They were probably either traders, such as Anthonio and Pacheco, or locals kidnapped by the English to serve as cultural intermediaries on future voyages. In a later account Towerson explains to a local man in Don John’s town that these men ‘were in England well vsed, and were there kept till they could speake the language, and then they should be brought againe to be a helpe to Englishmen in this Countrey’.¹³⁷

When the *Minion* first sailed to Guinea in 1558, Towerson states that on a visit to the shore on 4 April, he ‘tooke our Negro with vs’.¹³⁸ This unnamed individual, ‘our Negro’, had clearly been travelling on the ship for some time, perhaps all the way from England, and was here acting in the role of a local guide. Then on 8 June, Towerson notes that ‘George and Binny came to vs, and brought with them about two pound of golde’.¹³⁹ Both these local traders had travelled on English ships before. Binny was named by Towerson in January 1557 alongside Anthonie as one of the Africans who was then still in London. He must have made his way back either on this voyage (he may have been the individual referred to as ‘our negro’) or on another ship. George is frequently referred to as ‘George our negro’ in the account of Towerson’s second voyage in 1555/6 and must have been among the group of men who arrived back in Shama on 17 January 1557: ‘the people were very glad of our Negros, specially one of

¹³⁵ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 51.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3 (page 23 numbered ‘335’).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

their brothers wives, and one of their aunts, which received them with much joy, and so did all the rest of the people, as if they had bene their naturall brethren'.¹⁴⁰

It is unclear how many Africans were brought to England on these voyages.¹⁴¹ Lok's account, cited above, mentions 'certain black slaues', which is glossed by Hakluyt in the margins as 'Fiue blacke Moores brought into England'.¹⁴² The figure of five is therefore an editorial insertion and may not be the number that Robert Gainsh had in mind, who sailed alongside Lok as master of the *John Evangelist* and is the likely author of the report in Hakluyt. In the account of the next voyage, written by Towerson, there is one reference to 'fiue [Africans] taken away by Englishmen' in the previous year, and then another two references, the first noting that 'foure men were taken perforce the last yeere', the second specifying that 'last yeere M. Gainsh did take away the Captaines sonne and three others from this place with their golde'.¹⁴³ These are all either references to the same group of people or to two different groups, making it possible that as many as nine Guinea Africans sailed to England in 1555. The practice of taking locals away – presumably against their will – to teach them English and train them as interpreters clearly continued on later expeditions, without always receiving explicit commentary.

The capture, 'perforce', of a 'Captaines sonne' alongside three others did not help Towerson in 1556, since it set the Africans 'bent against us' and was 'the cause that they became friends with the Portugales, whom before they hated'.¹⁴⁴ The reference to the gold that was in their possession suggests that they were either wealthy, or local traders, or both. Their journey to England in 1555 was involuntary, but shipboard meetings between English and African traders cannot have been anything out of the ordinary, even if they are rarely documented. When Anthonio and Pacheco are recorded aboard the *Minion* in 1563, many others must have been there before and after, confirming that the deck of the ship had de facto become an international marketplace. Some modicum of social recognition clearly sprang from these interactions. On 3 February 1557, the master gunner Thomas Rippen, who probably died a year later on the *Minion*,¹⁴⁵ was recognized on land by an African captain and

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁴¹ On these references, see also Kaufmann, *Black Tudors*, pp. 169-95.

¹⁴² *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 22.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 32, 34.

¹⁴⁴ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 34.

¹⁴⁵ See Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders*, p. 25.

asked about other members of the English crew that had visited the previous year.¹⁴⁶ The English in turn showed some limited interest in African social organization, in their practical skills, and even their language, which Towerson made an effort to learn in 1555: ‘Here [...] I learned some of their language’.¹⁴⁷ One English seaman appreciated local craftsmanship so much that he thought it worth bequeathing ‘a cape that I had at Shamia [Shama]’¹⁴⁸ to his captain.

Guinea traders were not the only black Africans to have sailed on the *Minion*. In October 1567, several eyewitnesses saw African slaves being loaded onto Hawkins’ fleet, including the *Minion*, at the Plymouth docks. Estimates of the numbers vary between 40 and 60 slaves,¹⁴⁹ and the most likely explanation for the presence of these Africans in Plymouth is that they were captured in Guinea earlier that year by John Lovell, who then failed to sell them in the West Indies and brought them home with him when he returned to England in September 1567.¹⁵⁰ Many more must have joined these Africans on the *Minion* between November 1567 and February 1568, when Hawkins captured further slaves in Cape Verde and Sierra Leone, the majority of whom were sold in the West Indies.

Some, however, stayed on board. On 1 January 1569, on the return voyage from Mexico, a Spanish fisherman came on board the *Minion* near Pontevedra, Galicia, and ‘saw some fifty people, black and white, sick and well’.¹⁵¹ Later that year, Thomas Hampton, captain of the *Minion*, testified before the High Court of Admiralty in London that during the battle in San Juan de Ulúa, 45 slaves kept in the English ships taken by the Spaniards were either captured or killed, but that ‘xii other Negros in the Mynnyon’¹⁵² went on the journey back to England. Hawkins and Fones confirmed the numbers at the same hearing, and Hawkins’ servant John Tommes added that of the ‘x or xii negros [..] in the foresaide Mynnyon [...] she brought seuen from the saide port of la Vera Crux [= San Juan de Ulúa] into Englande and the rest died by the way homewarde’.¹⁵³ What happened to the surviving seven Africans in England is not known. While still on board, they might have been simply treated as slaves but the

¹⁴⁶ *PN2*, II, part 2, p. 42.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders*, p. 250.

¹⁴⁹ See Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins*, p. 320n11.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁵² The National Archives, SP 12/53, f. 29v.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, f. 39v (Hawkins), 46r (Tommes), 52r (Fones).

descriptions could also suggest that the master / slave hierarchy had perhaps ceased to apply on the *Minion* in 1569, when all hands would have been needed on deck to ensure everyone's survival.

The accounts of the Guinea voyages undertaken by the *Minion* rarely include reflections on the rationale and justification of these journeys. The assumption must be that the expectation of high profits and little else motivated contemporaries, and there is one account of a *Minion* voyage to Guinea which confirms this more clearly than any other source. The 1563 voyage, which left on 25 February and returned in August, is described in the account by William Rutter but also, in all likelihood, in the first of the two poems by Robert Baker, who sailed as a factor on either the *Minion* or the *Prinrose*.¹⁵⁴ Hakluyt included both poems in the first edition of the *Principal Navigations* but dropped them for the second, much expanded version. In the first of his poems, Baker states that he went to Guinea for no other reason than 'to seeke for golde', that he only narrowly escaped Guinea alive after a conflict with local Africans which ended in a bloody fight, and that once back in England he made a vow never to return, 'Forswearing cleane the Ginnie land'.¹⁵⁵

The narrative of Baker's adventures is contrasted with the dealings of a small cast of Roman gods that include an acrimonious exchange between the blacksmith Vulcan, god of fire and champion of 'blacke people', 'king of most / of all the Ginnie land', and his enemy Mars, god of war and defender of 'white men'. Vulcan rails in front of Jove that '[a] people lo is on my coast / [...] They do my people strike / they do this day them kill' - clearly having in mind the vessels from England - and he asks for permission to retaliate in kind by defending his people and a coast that, in his view, 'sure was his'. Mars protests, explaining that the white people called on him for support because Vulcan's 'brutish blacke people' had started the fight in the first place. Jove, overruling the objections from Mars, agrees with Vulcan in principle, but instructs him to let the visitors go unscathed on this occasion, promising him a free hand should they ever return. To clarify his decision, Jove adds that 'these men [the English visitors] need

¹⁵⁴ The attribution is not certain. Hakluyt states in the headnote to the Rutter account that the 'voyage is also written in verse by Robert Baker' (*PN2*, II, part 2, p. 54), but he does not specify which of the two Baker voyages he had in mind. The dates recorded by Baker and the details included in either of his poems also do not fully match the account by Rutter. For further commentary, see Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders*, pp. 35-41.

¹⁵⁵ *PNI*, pp. 132, 135. On Baker, see my "'To pot straight way we goe": Robert Baker in Guinea, 1563-4', Daniel Carey and Claire Jowitt (eds), *Richard Hakluyt and Collected Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, for The Hakluyt Society, 2012), pp. 243-55.

not to seeke, / They haue so fruitfull a countrey / that there is none the like.¹⁵⁶ This is a rare contemporary acknowledgment of the greed that fuelled these early voyages, and an equally rare understanding that global justice may not be well served if a region blessed with abundant natural wealth takes away the scarce resources of another.¹⁵⁷

The Guinea voyages offered occasions for the most sustained, certainly some of the earliest, contact between Englishmen and non-European peoples in the sixteenth century. This contact led to hostilities and eventually to slavery, but also to increased knowledge about each other, and in some cases to veiled expressions of respect. Whatever caricatures of bloodthirsty and sabre-rattling ‘blackamoors’ the English stage would later generate, these cannot have been rooted in the experience of the English seamen who sailed on the *Minion* and who had actually met and interacted with Guinea Africans at first hand.¹⁵⁸ The range of influence widens if we consider the ship’s entire lifespan in the light of the of the many people that walked its planks: ‘George our negro’ and other Guinea traders, such as Anthonio and Pacheco, who spoke English; the English slave trader, John Hawkins, who used interpreters when dealing with the Spanish; probably a European king, Henry VIII; several African dignitaries; hundreds, perhaps thousands of officers, midshipmen, and common seamen from the British Isles and from across Europe; merchants and factors from London and other cities; many unnamed men, women, and children from Guinea taken as slaves against their will. So far, no records of any individual women on board have come to light, apart from, possibly, Anne Boleyn in 1532, who would have travelled with a large female entourage.

But from shores around the globe, many more people set eyes on the *Minion* than stepped on its deck, and their lives too were affected by the goods, technologies, and the ideas it spread. Across five decades, the ship combined the functions of warship, merchantman, executive carrier, supply ship, and slaver; it made some people rich and others poorer, it brought humans into contact, but also tore them apart,

¹⁵⁶ *PNI*, pp. 134-5.

¹⁵⁷ I argue this case at more length in “‘To pot straight way we goe’”.

¹⁵⁸ For discussions of African characters in early modern English drama, see Eldred Jones, *Othello's Countrymen. Africans in English Renaissance Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Eliot Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550-1688* (Boston: Hall, 1982); Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representations of Blacks in English Renaissance Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Jack D'Amico, *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991); and Emily C. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor. From Alcazar to Othello* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

enslaved them, killed them. If the focus on the material and social circumstances of a single ship, rather than the quantitative fortunes of fleets and navies, brings into view the seamless connections across time between trade, diplomacy, warfare, slavery, and wealth, it also foregrounds the inordinate human cost of early modern Britain's maritime expansion.



Fig. 1: The *Minion*, Anthony Roll (1546). British Library Additional MS 22047. After *The Anthony Roll of Henry VIII's Navy*, ed. C.S. Knighton and D.M. Loades (Alershot: Ashgate, for the Navy Records Society, 2000), 54.