

### Background information

Very few people were kidnapped from the coast of West Africa by European traders. Most were purchased for high price with various objects being bartered in exchange. Research shows that the list of merchandise includes goods that were high in quality. These goods can be broken down into several categories: money and currency (coin, cowries, wire etc. which accounted for one-third of all imports by value); military wares (guns and gunpowder); and, luxury items (textiles, mirrors, needles, liquor etc.).

The variety of items traded by British vessels, such as Swedish and Russian iron, Asian textiles, German linen, Italian beads, Brazilian tobacco, etc. were not indigenous to Britain, ie. 50% of all the items traded were not local goods and thus the British slave trade was very much a global economic model.

#### ➤ **European Trade Beads**

Generally European glass-making centres, such as Bohemia or Venice.

##### Information:

Small beads were acceptable at Whydah and the Niger delta while amber beads were preferred at the Gambia. The diverging demands were obviously a function of the different uses and applications to which the beads would be put – as currency, to be incorporated into decoration.

#### ➤ **Cowrie shells**

Originating in the Maldives Islands in the Indian Ocean, these were transported in barrels by European vessels and traded as currency on West coast of Africa.

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Used as currency on the 'Slave Coast' (the coastal region of Western Africa along the Bight of Benin, encompassing the present Togo, Benin (formerly Dahomey) and western Nigeria). Also used as prestige objects to decorate important and expensive items.

#### ➤ **Iron bars**

##### Source:

Russia and Sweden provided a large proportion for the British slave trade

##### Information:

Some area used the bars as currency. However, in other areas these were used as raw materials to be melted down and turned into

Skilled metalworkers would melt them down and convert them into hoes, knives and other implements seen in the 'Ways of Everyday Life' section.

#### ➤ **Cloth**

##### Source

British cloth used, as well as other varieties imported from China, India etc.

##### Information:

Much of the cloth imported from Europe was unravelled and re-spun using African methods and according to African textile patterns. It was used for a variety of object such clothing, bedding and baby-wrappers.

Textile drapes; kente cloth.

#### ➤ **Brass rods and bowls; Manillas**

Bristol was a large source of brass objects. Manillas were crescent-shaped objects.

##### Information:

The brassware vessels were used for domestic purposes such as cooking and salt-boiling.

However, along with the manillas, they were also melted down and turned into objects of high status.

figure; Benin hornblower

➤ **Guns and gunpowder**

Britain exported huge quantities of low quality guns. It is estimated that Birmingham alone exported 150,000 per annum in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

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