

Trust in long-distance relationships

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Long-distance connections loom large in global history. Their study, alongside comparative history and the history of common experiences, can be seen as one of three alternative approaches in this emerging field.¹ The present chapter combines elements of all three approaches; here, we begin to look at connections comparatively, while also isolating elements of common experience. We examine long-distance trade in and between Europe, the Mediterranean, and West Africa, focusing on the period between about AD 1000 and 1600.² Many of the questions we pose could be applied to other regions, but a certain level of detail is needed in order to say anything meaningful about trust.

As the practice of global history matures, acquiring greater time-depth, new ways of looking at connectivity and long-distance relationships are necessary. Economic history has tended to see the problems of information, uncertainty and risk in long-distance trade as logistical and symptomatic of pre-modern conditions. Their solution has been seen to lie in the development of features of the modern firm: institutional and documentary technologies such as banks, accounting, money, commercial associations, insurance loans, underwriting,

¹ James Belich, John Darwin, and Chris Wickham, 'Introduction', in Belich, Darwin, Margaret Frenz, and Wickham (eds.), *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 3-22.

² Because written texts are very rare for the medieval period in West Africa we also draw upon later textual evidence where appropriate, as well as archaeological data.

contracts, and so on.³ This is despite healthy currents in economic anthropology that have pointed out the importance of studying people and their behaviour as well as the rules of the market.⁴

Questions of trust in fact lie at the root of many of the problems faced by long-distance traders across the globe. Should one rely upon the cooperation of partners, agents, or clients whose behaviour cannot be directly monitored – and if so under what conditions? How can the inherent risks to buyers who pay in advance and sellers who offer credit be surmounted?⁵

³ Peter Spufford, *Power and Profit: the Merchant in Medieval Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 30-8; Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 76-9; Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: PUP, 1983), 372-81; John H. Munro, 'The International Law Merchant and the Evolution of Negotiable Credit in Late-Medieval England and the Low Countries', in Munro, *Textiles, Towns and Trade: Essays in the Economic History of Late-Medieval England and the Low Countries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994), X, 49-80; Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 207-11.

⁴ Marie Perinbam, 'The Julas in Western Sudanese History: Long-Distance Traders and Developers of Resources', in B.K. Swartz and R.E. Dumett (eds.), *West African Culture Dynamics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1980), 455-475; Paul Seabright, *The Company of Strangers: a Natural History of Economic Life* (Princeton: PUP, 2004).

⁵ Abner Cohen, 'Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas', in Claude Meillassoux and Daryll Forde (eds.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), 266; T.H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), 289, 295.

In circumstances where commercial transactions rarely involved the simultaneous exchange of goods and payment, trust was clearly fundamental to the creation and maintenance of relationships and networks.⁶ However, general surveys of medieval trade typically do little more than occasionally allude to its significance. For instance, one recent history of business in medieval Europe stresses the importance of trust, but diminishes it as an object of study by equating it with innate honesty or the supposedly-natural fact of kinship.⁷ Some scholars have even gone so far as to deny the importance of trust, arguing instead that uncertainty is dealt with by the calculation of costs and benefits.⁸ But for others, trust is a problem demanding detailed discussion. Niklas Luhmann tackled the issue of calculation head-on, arguing that trust is the means by which people reduce the complexity of calculating risk. Charles Tilly similarly saw trust as an imperative, arising from the frequent and necessary experience of placing valued outcomes at risk from the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of

⁶ Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: the Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009); David Sebouh Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean : the Global Trade Networks of Armenians from New Julfa* (Berkeley: UCO, 2010).

⁷ Edwin S. Hunt and James M. Murray, *A History of Business in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 56-7, 148, 158; also Damien Coulon, *Barcelone et le Grand Commerce d'Orient au Moyen Âge: un Siècle de relations avec 'Égypte et la Syrie-Palestine (ca. 1330 – ca. 1430)* (Madrid-Barcelone: Casa de Velázquez, 2004), 599.

⁸ Richard Sosis, 'Does Religion Promote Trust', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, 1 (2005), 1-30; K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: an Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge : CUP, 1985); Lopez, *Commercial Revolution*, 75.

others.⁹ Luhmann's observation on complexity has been enormously influential, as has his articulation of a distinction between trust in persons and trust in institutions; but in common with much of the discussion of trust by economists, the interpretative utility of this body of work is blunted by a tendency to generalise and simplify, even where some attempt at historical contextualization is made.¹⁰ Instead, we propose a less absolute dichotomy between trust in persons and in institutions, and a more multi-faceted characterization of trust and trustworthiness.

In this we follow, to a certain extent, the growing literature on European credit and contract enforcement that has begun to treat trust as a crucial problem, as well as studies of long-distance trade along 'spindly networks' in Africa, Asia and Europe, examining the means by which trust was fostered in the principal-agent relationship. This is becoming a key question in global economic and social history, and some medieval and early modern historians have begun to view trust as a cultural as well as economic phenomenon.¹¹ We aim

⁹ Niklas Luhmann, *Trust and Power* (Chichester, 1979); Charles Tilly, *Trust and Rule* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).

¹⁰ Dorothea Weltecke, 'Trust: Some Methodological Reflections', in P. Schulte, M. Mostert, I. van Renswoude (eds.), *Strategies of Writing: Studies on Text and Trust in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 379-92.

¹¹ Steven A. Epstein, 'Secrecy and Genoese Commercial Practices', *Journal of Medieval History*, 20 (1994), 313-25; Gabriele Signori, *Schuldenwirtschaft: Konsumenten- und Hypothekarkredite im spätmittelalterlichen Basel* (Munich: UVK, 2015); Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: the Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998); Søren Sindbæk, 'The Small World of the Vikings: Networks in Early Medieval Communication and Exchange', *Norwegian Archaeological*

to open the subject up further still, by showing that whatever institutional arrangements are adopted, trust has always been a human decision and emotion, not something easily legislated for. In taking this approach we do not, however, simply align ourselves with the main alternative interpretation of long-distance relationships: that which holds trust to be underpinned by shared religious, familial, or cultural identity, as we shall see below. Instead we are working with Bernard Williams' critique of the tendency to be content with 'macro-motivations', and Timothy Guinnane's view that social context is everything in attempting to understand trust.¹² We will examine how trust was a set of values, a suite of emotions, a conversation involving speech-acts and physical performance, and a way of negotiating the spaces in which relationships were conducted.

Review, 40 (2007), 59–74; Anne Haour, 'What made Islamic Trade Distinctive - As Compared to Pre-Islamic Trade?' ,in David Mattingly, Victoria Leitch, Chloë Duckworth, Aurélie Cuenod, Martin Sterry and Franca Cole (eds.), *Trade in the Ancient Sahara and Beyond*, *Trans-Saharan Archaeology*, 1 (Cambridge: CUP and The Society for Libyan Studies, 2017), 80-100; Jessica Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean: the Geniza Merchants and their Business World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012); Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*; Aslanian, *Indian Ocean to Mediterranean*; Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009); Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi and Cátia Antunes (eds.), *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

¹² Bernard Williams, 'Formal Structures and Social Reality', in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford, 1988), 3-13, at 11; Timothy W. Guinnane, 'Trust: a Concept Too Many', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (2005), 77-92.

In many discussions trust is *only* treated as a problem in long-distance relationships. Local relationships are classically imagined within a face-to-face society, where everyone knows everyone else and economic interaction is embedded in a host of other familial and social relationships. This has been described as ‘thick trust’ or ‘mechanical solidarity’.¹³ The antithesis of the imagined village is the transaction conducted over long distances, which is assumed to involve ‘thin trust’ based on limited knowledge and purely economic relationships. Although this dichotomy usefully introduces questions of scale, it supports a seductive yet false distinction between an unconnected pre-modern world in which life was lived locally, and a connected modern world in which life is lived globally. It also promotes the idea that trust operates on either the local or the global scale; that it is thick or thin, easy or difficult. The medieval evidence however indicates a complex continuum of trust practices in every setting where life is lived beyond the immediate; from journeys of a few miles to long voyages across oceans or deserts.

The need for a historically-situated examination of trust does not suggest itself merely because of the inadequacies of the ‘macro-motivations’, such as religion or economic rationality. The medieval and later texts describing trans-Saharan, Mediterranean and northern European trade themselves employ a variety of discourses in which trust is explicitly and implicitly evoked. These written sources include travel literature and geographies,

¹³ ‘Mechanical solidarity’ derives from Emile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Paris, 1930), contrasted with the organic solidarity of modernity; the multi-stranded character of pre-modern relationships is classically expressed in Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrer and Rinehart, 1944); ‘thick trust’ is Bernard Williams’ phrase in ‘Formal Structures’. For an unreasonably stark division between modernity and pre-modernity see Adam B. Seligman, *The Problem of Trust* (Princeton: PUP, 1997).

business letters and contracts, and the judicial records of commercial disputes. As such they privilege certain overarching frameworks like law, the state, literacy, and masculinity, but they also frequently speak of other relevant concepts like friendship, family, belief, and emotion. Where possible we have also drawn on archaeological data and concepts in order to explore trust cultures, but here too there is a bias towards social forms leaving more tangible traces, privileging permanent over temporary settlements for example.

Although we do not believe that institutions can wholly account for the extension of trust across long distances, it is difficult to imagine any trading situation where law and government did not at least figure in the imaginations of the parties. The maximal case can be illustrated from those instances where a high degree of confidence was sustained at least in part because the trading partners knew that default was punishable by a legal authority. For example, the thirteenth-century wool trade between English farmers and French and Italian merchants involved many contracts to buy wool wholesale in advance of the sheep-shearing season (Map 1). This gave the dealer a preferential price and the producer a guaranteed sale. In October 1259, Stephen de Chaendut recognized that he owed six sacks of good wool to the ‘Cahorsin’ merchant society represented by Arnaud Griffun, Imbert Rok and William Fresepayn. He was to deliver the wool at Boston fair in July 1260. As security his lands and chattels were forfeit to the value of the sale, and could be confiscated by the ‘barons of the Exchequer’.¹⁴ These ominous agents of royal power loom over all such records of debt and advance sale. They were the ultimate enforcers of contracts and guarantors of trust in medieval England, and their principal sanction involved knowing the location of people’s

¹⁴ *Advance Contracts for the Sale of Wool c. 1200 – c. 1327*, ed. Adrian Bell, Chris Brooks, and Paul Dryburgh, List and Index Society, 315 (Kew: The National Archives, 2006), items 3, 81.

lands and goods and being able to confiscate or occupy them to extract payment. This was also attractive to merchants from outside that jurisdiction.

The weight of institutions is demonstrably true in many regions where direct evidence of contracts and enforcement survives.¹⁵ Even where no such evidence exists we can nonetheless see authority-seeking behaviour amongst merchants. Islamic writing dealing with the meeting of North African and Middle Eastern travellers with the people of the Sahara and its southern edge indicates that order and security were paramount concerns (Map 7).¹⁶ Ibn Hawqal, writing in the tenth century, is explicit, drawing attention to places where it was thought that ‘the orderly government of kingdoms is based upon religious beliefs, good manners, law and order, and the organization of settled life directed by sound policy’, while observing that those who lack these qualities ‘do not deserve to be dealt with separately.’ For Mediterranean Muslim writers such as al-Bakrī (eleventh century), Ibn Saïd (thirteenth century), and Ibn Battuta (fourteenth century), eating wheat, wearing particular clothes or

¹⁵ Besides parchment and paper records, some of the materially most ephemeral evidence is the corpus of birch bark agreements from twelfth-century Novgorod: T.S. Noonan and R.K. Kovalev, ‘What Can Archaeology Tell Us About How Debts Were Documented and Collected in Kievan Rus’?’, *Russian History*, 27 (2000), 119-54.

¹⁶ Nehema Levtzion and John F. P. Hopkins, *Corpus of early Arabic Sources for West African history* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2000). See also Tim Insoll, ‘The External Creation of the Western Sahel’s Past: The Use and Abuse of the Arabic Sources’, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, 13 (1994), 39-49 for a discussion of the prejudices and ideas underpinning this encounter.

using certain types of architecture were markers of familiarity, and perhaps trustworthiness,¹⁷ but their insistence on the importance of law and order trumps any concerns over way of life. A geographical treatise written for the Norman king of Sicily by the Moroccan-born al-Idrīsī in 1154 draws the reader's attention to the presence of legal authorities in the Senegal valley:

Sila, on the northern bank of the river ... is a metropolis, a meeting place ... and a good market ... Sila belongs to the domains of the Takruri, who is a powerful ruler. He has slaves and soldiers, strength and firmness as well as widely-known justice. His country is safe and calm. Tiraqqa is one of the towns of the Wanqara. It is a large town, inhabited by many people, but it has no surrounding wall nor enclosure. Tiraqqa is subject to the ruler of Ghana, in whose name the *khutba* [sermon] is delivered, and to whom the people go in litigation.¹⁸

However, there is no clear evidence that West African rulers provided justice in disputes between local and foreign merchants, while in European monarchies, it is clear that local and informal means of guaranteeing trust were also crucial elements as well as more formal mechanisms. For instance, in the English wool transaction described above, alongside the distant threat of royal coercion two men are named as 'mainpernors' (sureties) for the

¹⁷ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 68, 85, 188, 301, 303; see especially 185, also 401, n. 15 for a comment on indications of changes in the material culture as a result of contact with foreign merchants and the spread of Islam.

¹⁸ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 107, 111. The *khutba* was the Friday prayer, which could include a sermon signalling political allegiances; for parallels see Elizabeth Lambourn, 'India from Aden – Khutba and Muslim Urban Networks in Late Thirteenth-Century India', in Kenneth R. Hall (ed.), *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm, c. 1000-1800*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 55-97.

debtor. They would supply the wool or its cash value if the principal could not. Despite the presence of royal authority, informal and personal means of buttressing trust were, in this and similar ways, frequently sought out.¹⁹ We should not be led by the creation and survival of impressive judicial archives into thinking that political authority was always, or ever, the main means by which trust was maintained. Indeed, as Steven Epstein points out, judicial enforcement was the sign of a failed relationship, something to be avoided, and David Aslanian has argued that trust was *in itself* beneficial, reducing ‘transaction costs.’²⁰ And trust could flourish in situations where the role of institutions was much more ambiguous. An increasingly well-studied example of this emerges from the contents of the Cairo ‘Geniza’, a repository of discarded letters and documents from Fustat, the commercial centre of the Fatimid caliphate. Arabic-speaking Jewish merchants, now often known as the Maghribi traders, spanned the Mediterranean and the Near East, appearing in Baghdad, Persia, India, Syria, Egypt, the Levant, Byzantium, North Africa, Sicily, and Iberia. The Geniza material is extraordinarily rich, but historians disagree on its interpretation. How far did the merchants rely upon judicial authorities in maintaining the bonds of trust necessary to ship goods and procure services across long distances? The merchants’ letters make much of informal and familial connections, as in this example of a draft note, prepared in 1036 by an older merchant in Tunisia for his younger associate in Egypt:

So-and-so sent me a letter suggesting - which I intended to do anyhow - that you two should cooperate. When you travel to Busir you take the trouble to purchase for him what he needs, while he will take care of oil and soap. When you tarry here you will look here after his affairs, while he will travel to Egypt and make purchases for you

¹⁹ *Advance Contracts*, items, 3, 81.

²⁰ Epstein, ‘Secrecy’, 325; Aslanian, *Indian Ocean to Mediterranean*, 170-1.

and for himself, for he is an expert in flax and other goods. I shall be very pleased with this friendship between the two of you. For he will take Abu Sa'id's [the writer's cousin's] place with you. I need not stress this matter any further, for your success depends on it.²¹

Here there is no mention of contractual arrangements such as those seen in the English advance sale of wool. No external authorities are mentioned, and yet instructions are given and relationships of dependency hinted at. This evidence is, however, ambiguous. Avner Greif has postulated that the Maghribi traders inhabited a private-order enforcement network, in which the fear of losing one's reputation as an honest dealer and trustworthy agent, as well as the ability of the network to communicate honesty or default, were enough to make it possible to trust an agent without a formal contract. But others have ruled this out. Sheilagh Ogilvie and Jonathan Edwards have claimed that the traders *did* in fact use courts to settle disputes, while Jessica Goldberg has argued that in most cases the fear of legal action proved sufficiently effective.²²

In West Africa too, historians disagree. Lucie Colvin, in her study of late-eighteenth century Hausaland, argues for the tight governmental control of trade, suggesting that rulers regulated how and where markets could be established, what merchandise could be sold, and

²¹ S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley: UCPress, 1967-93), i. 165.

²² Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 58-90; Jonathan Edwards and Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'Contract Enforcement, Institutions, and Social Capital: the Maghribi Traders Reappraised', *Economic History Review*, 65 (2012); Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions*.

what price asked; similarly Lars Sundstrom states that on the Kano market prices were regulated by the ruler.²³ However, both appear to base their interpretations on an ambiguous passage written by the British traveller Hugh Clapperton in the 1820s, who declared that rates at the Kano market were set by the 'market chief'.²⁴ Clapperton's testimony gives no indication that this market chief was acting on behalf of the political authorities; it is equally possible that she or he was chosen by the merchants to maintain order. Certainly, as Clapperton himself tells us, the revenues from the market formed part of the ruler's income, and these revenues presumably derived from the commissions on sales and the rental fee for stalls which the market chief collected. But the chief may not have been the sole market authority, and others may have claimed the right of taxation.²⁵

Besides the view that trust was primarily created by the presence of political and legal authority, the major alternative explanation has been the existence of a shared culture among traders. Abner Cohen and Philip Curtin have popularized the model of trade diasporas,

²³ Lucie Colvin, 'The Commerce of Hausaland, 1780-1833', in D. McCall and N. Bennett (eds.), *Aspects of West African Islam* (Boston: African Studies Centre, 1971), 101-135; Lars Sundström, *The Exchange Economy of Pre-Colonial Tropical Africa* (Guildford: Billing and Sons, 1974).

²⁴ Colvin, 'Commerce', 108; Sundström, *Exchange Economy*, 62; Hugh Clapperton, Dixon Denham and Walter Oudney, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823 and 1824*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1828), ii. 253

²⁵ Polly Hill, 'Notes on Traditional Market Authority and Market Periodicity in West Africa', *Journal of African History* 7:2 (1966), 295-311. The attractiveness of trade to rulers as a source of revenue is a reminder that it was not always wise for merchants to rely utterly on political favour for the conduct of trade.

bound together by identity and dispersed across the region of trade.²⁶ For instance, across much of the ‘old world’ the economic networks formed by Jews have often been cited as classic trading diasporas. Joshua Holo makes an uncontroversial point when he writes that the Jews of the Byzantine Empire in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were linked by shared languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek) and ‘the trust engendered by familiarity.’²⁷ Many historians have made similar arguments, some showing how multiple cultural traits were sometimes shared by itinerant or diaspora minority groups. Muslim merchants involved in both trans-Saharan and Mediterranean trade were often religious scholars as well, while Jewish brokers of trade in West Africa were often also blacksmiths, living on the edge of settlements in spatial as well as cultural terms.²⁸ Shared beliefs and practices may well have contributed to close affinity and the trust necessary for trade, while other historians have noted a more defensive ‘togetherness ... strengthened by the special dangers of minority status.’²⁹ Marie Perinbam, who has considered the role of diaspora trade networks in West African history, has discussed how Hausa and Jula (also known as Dyoula) merchants negotiated relationships with their host communities; she concludes that ‘[m]aintaining

²⁶ Cohen, ‘Cultural strategies’; Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 1-14.

²⁷ Joshua Holo, *Byzantine Jewry in the Mediterranean Economy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 63.

²⁸ Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: the Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900-1500* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 55-6; Levtzion, ‘Merchants vs. Scholars and Clerics in West Africa’, in Levtzion and Fisher, *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa* (1986); Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*, 65-70.

²⁹ Lopez, *Commercial Revolution*, 73.

social, cultural, and political distance from their host communities made possible the jula imprint on West Africa cultural pluralities’, noting that ‘the politics of jula culture revolved around shared ethnic and religious affinities, common patronyms, language, myths of a homeland, contracts and social connections, the seeking and granting of favors, honesty, trust, and a host of intangibles which bound rooted hierarchical societies, on the one hand, to an extremely mobile trading group, on the other’.³⁰

Trading groups might also cultivate a collective reputation for trustworthiness. We may see the effects of this in Ibn Hawqal’s tenth-century description of the inhabitants of Sijilmāsa (modern Morocco) as

well-bred in their actions and perfect in morals and deeds. In their manners they do not share the pettiness of the other people of the Maghrib in their dealings and customs, but act with great frankness. They are known for their ready charity and show a manly concern for one another. Though there are among them some old feuds and quarrels they put them aside in time of need and cast them away out of the nobility, forgiveness, and natural generosity which are peculiar to them, and the good manners which they have acquired in their numerous travels, long periods of absence from home, and separation from their country.³¹

Ibn Hawqal is explicit about the link between minority status, trade specialization, and the experience of being a resident alien minority. Immediately after this paragraph he recounts the story of a debt of 42,000 dinars owed to someone from Sijilmāsa by another Sijilmāsa resident currently in Awdaghust, two months’ travel away – a story which impressed him greatly. “I have never seen or heard anything comparable to this story in the

³⁰ Perinbam, ‘The Julas’, 472, 463-4.

³¹ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 47.

east. I told it in al-‘Iraq, in Fars, and in Khurasan, and everywhere it was regarded as a novelty”.³² The implication here is that extraordinary levels of trust existed over vast distances and were constructed around shared affiliation. Despite Ibn Hawqal’s astonishment, however, such practices must have been rather common.

In African history the assumption has often been that Islam provided a network to believers, facilitating trade between people even though not personally acquainted. The names of sub-Saharan West African towns and kingdoms first reached outside ears through Muslim traders, and the cosmopolitanism of a place like Zawila (now in Libya), where in the late ninth century traders from Khurasan (modern Iran), Basra, and Kufa (both in modern Iraq) were operating, hung on its belonging to the *dar al Islam* – perhaps even more specifically, to the minority Ibadi network³³. Titles indicating religious or legal Islamic expertise – already mentioned by al-Bakrī, who states that Ghana had salaried imams and muezzins, as well as jurists and scholars³⁴ – suggest established frameworks, as does the almost casual assumption of long-distance communications, visible in Ibn Battuta’s evidence three centuries later: ‘Anyone who has no associate [at Walata, modern Mauritania] writes to one of the merchants known for his honesty and he acts as his partner in the matter...’³⁵

In the most recent research on the activities of the eleventh-century Jewish merchants whose letters survived in the Cairo Geniza, a self-conscious cultivation of exclusive religious identity has likewise been emphasized as the basis for long-distance trust. Phillip Ackerman-

³² Nehemia Levtzion, ‘Ibn-Hawqal, the Cheque, and Awdaghost’, *The Journal of African History*, 9 (1968), 223-233. Page 225

³³ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 22 and 378, YbB note 1.

³⁴ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 79.

³⁵ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 283

Lieberman argues that while earlier historians such as Shelomo Dov Goitein and Abraham Udovitch understood these merchants to have operated in accordance with an Islamic ‘law merchant’, many of their business practices were in fact modelled on distinctively Jewish customs that occurred at a range of moments in life when a heightened formality was called for. Commercial partnerships were initiated by ‘qinyan’, a rite also used in property purchases and marriages to create obligations between parties.³⁶ In several areas of commercial practice, Ackerman-Lieberman shows how despite certain parallels between Jewish and Islamic law and business practice that might have enabled the Geniza merchants to use the courts of the majority Muslim culture, they chose instead to cleave to legal procedures and discourses that were distinctively Jewish and, moreover, absent from classical Islamic legal texts. Ackerman-Lieberman’s analysis departs from the rather bland assumption that shared culture underpinned merchant trust, arguing for the importance of the details of culture, and putting the argument in reverse: the way that these people did business was constitutive of their shared culture. Shared culture may be the effect of long-distance trade, rather than simply the cause. Indeed this same argument appears in Paul Lovejoy’s discussion of Wangara trade diasporas in West Africa. Drawing on Cohen’s framework, Lovejoy gave it greater historical time depth through a consideration of the role of these traders in the development of long-distance commerce in the Hausa area.³⁷ He suggests that from the sixteenth century onwards a well-established Wangara trading diaspora operated between Songhay and the Hausa cities: Wangara merchants travelled to Hausaland on

³⁶ Phillip I. Ackerman-Lieberman, *The Business of Identity: Jews, Muslims, and Economic Life in Medieval Egypt* (Stanford: SUP, 2014), 85-6, 99-103.

³⁷ Paul Lovejoy, ‘The Role of the Wangara in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the 15th and 16th Centuries’, *Journal of African History*, 19 (1978), 173-193.

commercial expeditions, importing gold and kola and buying textiles and leather goods for shipment to Songhay. Lovejoy believes that the traders promoted a common identity through religion, dress, language, intermarriage and similar social values, and suggests that it was through the Wangara that the trading diaspora system, based on a sense of cultural exclusiveness, was introduced to Hausaland. He also suggests that once the Hausa diaspora had started functioning, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many of the individuals born in and living in its dispersed settlements considered themselves to be foreigners with few connections to local societies.³⁸

Whatever the strengths of the diaspora model, however, the relationship between ‘culture’ (defined at the macro level of religion, kin or shared language) and trade is not nearly as simple as has been suggested. The simple assumption that people of shared identity are inclined to trust one another has lately been criticized by, among others, Francesca Trivellato, who casts doubt on the ‘romanticized view of merchant communities as harmonious, cohesive, and full of pride’, while David Aslanian regrets that trust has been posited as a given attribute of communities, not a factor requiring historical explanation.³⁹ This affects the analysis of the examples we considered above. The idea that commerce and Islam go hand in hand in West Africa is firmly entrenched in scholarship, but archaeological work continues to push back the date of trade contacts across the Sahara. In recent years, increasing numbers of imports, especially copper and glass, have been recovered in sites just south of the Sahara from deposits dating to AD 400–800, that is to say, in periods at least

³⁸ Paul Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola: the Hausa Kola Trade 1700-1900* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1980), 32.

³⁹ Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*, 12; Aslanian, *Indian Ocean to Mediterranean*, 167; see also Chaudhuri. *Trade and Civilization*, 224-6.

partly prior to the development of the Muslim faith. The striking case here are the finds from the burial ground of Kissi, Burkina Faso, with graves of the fifth to seventh centuries containing goods such as glass beads, copper alloys, carnelian and other stone beads, cowries, textiles, and swords with trans-Saharan origins⁴⁰. Then we have some evidence of cooperation between merchants of different religions in formal associations, such as the League of Hunayn, which was based on the island of Mallorca and attempted to monopolize the wool trade between North Africa and southern Europe in the fourteenth century. Up until 1351 Jews and Christians were league members side by side, and Jews were only expelled in the wake of the well-poisoning accusations of the Black Death era which breached what trust had been established.⁴¹ In addition, ventures formally limited to co-religionists might often be made up of merchants from different polities or language communities. For example the trade out of Southampton saw English, Dutch and Italian merchants happy to sail in ships captained by foreigners.⁴²

Clearly cultural ‘macro-motivations’ cannot explain everything. Some elements of the diaspora model are very real – the sense of shared identity, the dispersal, the minority status and trade specialization – but none of this leads simply and directly to trust. To say so is to

⁴⁰ Sonja Magnavita, *1500 Jahre am Mare de Kissi* (Frankfurt: JAAMS, 2015).

⁴¹ María Dolores López Pérez & José Ignacio Padilla Lapuente, ‘Mallorcan Merchants in the Medieval Maghrib: Mercantile Strategies in the Port of Hunayn in the Mid-Fourteenth Century’, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 28 (2013), 141-65.

⁴² Vanessa Harding, ‘Cross-Channel Trade and Cultural Contacts: London and the Low Countries in the Later Fourteenth Century’, in Caroline Barron and Nigel Saul (eds.), *England and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995), 153-68, at 162-3; for comparison see Constable, *Trade and Traders*, 68-9.

defer rather than to answer the question.⁴³ A number of historians have lately dealt with this by locating the problem of trust in the day-to-day practices and experiences of trade, suggesting the need to examine the specific acts that constitute ‘culture’ (*pace* Ackerman-Lieberman above). This could be taken further by focussing on the issue of skills. Kathryn Reyerson, in research on late-medieval Marseille, argues that ‘how merchants coped abroad was a harbinger of their business success or failure’, and pays attention to their ability to learn new behaviours and meet cultural expectations. They joined local guilds and married local women in order to acquire ‘sufficient cultural baggage and language skills to gain the subtlety of approach necessary to do business.’⁴⁴ As Laurence Fontaine has said, traders ‘had to know how to inspire trust to penetrate markets’, which is in agreement with Francesca Trivellato’s comment that visiting merchants had to improvise to find ways of ‘bartering, securing credit, and establishing durable commercial relations with persons who did not speak their language, wore different garb, and worshipped other gods.’⁴⁵ Fontaine has shown how early modern traders invested in their appearance in order to build upon their social credit.

Some micro-cultural competencies needed by participants in long-distance trade could be more specific to business: how to strike a bargain, knowing when a deal had been

⁴³ Here we follow Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*, 11.

⁴⁴ Kathryn L. Reyerson, ‘The Merchants of the Mediterranean: Merchants as Strangers’, in F.R.P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D’Elden (eds.), *The Stranger in Medieval Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1-13, quotations at 1, 5.

⁴⁵ Laurence Fontaine, *The Moral Economy: Poverty, Credit, and Trust in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 272; Trivellato, ‘Historical and Comparative Study of Cross-Cultural Trade’, 1-2.

concluded and when it had not. Within certain cultural zones there was probably enough surface similarity in these practices for proficiency to be easily acquired. For instance twelfth-century Europe witnessed a general shift from seeing sales purely as transfers of property to viewing them also as contracts imposing future obligations (to pay, to deliver goods and so on). Merchants trading on credit or making advance payments relied on commonly-understood signs that a contract had been formed. These tended to transcend linguistic frontiers, and prominent among them were hand clasps or slaps whose local variants could be learnt by observation. Single coins of nominal value were also given and received in many places as symbolic ‘earnest money’ (England) or the ‘señal’ (Spain) to signal good faith, while the widespread notion of ‘God’s penny’ was intended as a charitable donation. Drinking together (‘sale wine’) was a common European sign of a binding transaction, but understandably not so amongst Islamic traders (though there are hints that wine may have featured in Christian-Muslim transactions in some places).⁴⁶ A Nuremberg ‘conversation manual’ (*Sprachlehrbuch*) of 1424 provided German-speaking travelling merchants with role-play scenarios and useful phrases to enable them to make small-talk about the risks of travel and the price of goods with an Italian interlocutor, before concluding a deal over a shared drink.⁴⁷ Guides such as this remind us that the creation of trust occurred

⁴⁶ David Ibbetson, ‘From Property to Contract: the Transformation of sale in the Middle Ages’, *Journal of Legal History*, 13 (1992); Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 278.

⁴⁷ Folker Reichart and Margit Stolberg-Vowinckel (eds.), *Quellen zur Geschichte des Reisens im Spätmittelalter* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2009), 99-109. Thanks to Tanja Skambraks for this reference.

in specific moments, rather than simply arising naturally and ready-made from ‘culture’. We might say that the work of creating trust *was* the work of creating culture. It was a matter of skills, knowledge, practices and learning, rather than possession of some essential similarity.

The judicial records of some European polities provide opportunities to see this daily work of building trust and establishing reputation at moments when it was unravelling; these can be extremely revealing. For instance, in a 1375 case against the merchant Joan Ribalta in the Aragonese royal court, all the witnesses who spoke on his behalf were involved in the long-distance trade between Iberia and the eastern Mediterranean, and had known one another for many years. They were defending Ribalta’s reputation for honesty against accusations made by another merchant, Francesc Sa Plana, and they did so by launching a retaliatory attack against Sa Plana’s reputation, accusing him of excessive drinking and debauchery with prostitutes and female slaves. Sa Plana’s original accusation against Ribalta, supported by the testimony of just one witness, had been that he had denied his Christian faith in order to live safely in the Mamluk sultanate. In travelling, trading and living together, Damien Coulon argues, reputation and trust were essential to these merchants.⁴⁸ The case reveals that adherence to one’s faith and control of personal appetites were significant components of reputation, and we might infer that continuous efforts to advertise constancy in religion and respectable living were pre-requisites for being considered trustworthy. That reputations were built on perceptions of behaviour should demonstrate how meaningless ‘macro-motivations’ are as explanations for trust in long-distance relationships. Establishing a reputation for trustworthiness did not flow automatically from categories such as religious belonging, language community, or family membership.

⁴⁸ Coulon, *Barcelone et le Grand Commerce d’Orient*, 599-602.

There must have been cultural frontiers that merchants crossed, where learning how to trust and be seen as trustworthy became more arduous and precarious, but the possibility of acquiring such knowledge and skills contributed to the veneer of similarity or translatability that Patricia Crone suggests made pre-industrial culture ‘trans-local.’⁴⁹ Some awareness of crossing frontiers of trust seems to lie behind many of the Islamic geographers’ writings about sub-Saharan Africa. Theirs was an exercise in making the unknown less daunting, and instilling confidence in travellers. Both Ibn Battuta and Ibn Khaldun⁵⁰ often named informants, a practice which lent credence to their accounts while also reassuring the reader that there were outposts of familiar culture in distant lands. Even when the informant is not stated, the language of trust comes in: ‘A trustworthy person informed me’, ‘This fact is well known to them; none of them deny it and it has been related by many trustworthy Muslims’, ‘The trustworthy qadi of Sijilmāsa who had been employed as qadi in the land of Kawkaw and whom I met at Hunayn [formerly the port of Tlemcen] in 1374-5.’⁵¹ Similar literary

⁴⁹ Patricia Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World* (Oxford, 1989), 89.

⁵⁰ Ibn Khaldun, born in Tunis AD 1332, †Cairo 1406, was unique because he consulted Malian informants and checked his data. See Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*.

⁵¹ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 82, 84 [al-Bakrī], 336 [Ibn Khaldun]. ‘How far apart they are!’ exclaims Ibn Battuta when, arriving at Sijilmāsa, he stays with a Moroccan jurist whose brother he had met in China and Delhi: Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 282. We observe that much of the work of the medieval authors seems to be about mapping connections and naming informants; the same individuals seem to keep encountering each other even over immense distances. For similar comments on the existence of a series of familiar points travelled by a small group of individuals, in this case within Asia and Arabia, see Gagan

strategies of recording links, spinning a web of the known around the unknown, and building expectations can be seen in Christian works, such as the notebook of Francesco Pegolotti of the fourteenth-century Bardi company. Pegolotti shared his extensive personal knowledge of English sheep farming, and ports from Morocco to Egypt, the Crimea, and Persia, as well as drawing on other sources to write about the road to Cathay, which lay beyond his sphere of operations.⁵² In short, much of the work of the medieval authors seems to be about making the unknown known. When al Bakri gives details of the road from Tamdult to Awdaghust, or Ibn Battuta describes daily life on the caravan, there is the sense they want to make the road familiar, known, to their readers.

The personal letters and legal documents that survive from Mediterranean and northern European lands permit us to see the ways in which the articulation of trust was part of the maintenance of trusting relationships. The English wool trade once again provides a richly evidenced set of examples. In 1276, Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire sold 62 sacks of wool to Dunelinus Jonte and Bernard Thecbaldi (who were acting on behalf of a group of Florentine merchants), saying ‘we promise’ to supply the wool in four annual instalments. The monks undertook to return the payment along with any expenses, damages and interest, if they defaulted. They made a big show of trust, saying that they would believe whatever the merchants said about such additional charges ‘by their simple word ... without oath or any other proof’: a performance of trust intended to generate trust. For their part the monks did

Sood, ‘Circulation and Exchange in Islamicate Eurasia: A Regional Approach to the Early Modern World, *Past and Present* 212 (2011), 113-162. On connections, see also Shepard, this volume.

⁵² Francesco di Balducci Pegolotti, *La pratica della mercatura*, ed. Allen Evans (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1936).

not ask to be trusted unconditionally in return, swearing to ‘firmly and faithfully’ honour the deal, mortgaging all their goods and property to the merchants until the completion of the sale, and renouncing any future use of the courts to wriggle out of the arrangements.⁵³ We can see that the monks were consciously performing trust in order to be trusted in return.

Remarkably similar practices existed in the Jewish merchant networks evidenced by the Geniza documents.⁵⁴ In a partnership agreement made at Fustat in 1131 between Abu Zikri Judah b. Joseph ha-Kohen and Hananel b. Nissim the former noted that having placed a purse of money with the latter, he regarded him as ‘trustworthy as two proper and trustworthy witnesses’ and asserted himself to be ‘trustworthy concerning all the profit’ of their venture.⁵⁵ The phrase ‘trustworthy as two proper witnesses’ was in common usage, and there are also examples of declining to insist on oaths.⁵⁶ Both Christian and Jewish partnership agreements rested on words and practices of trust (*emunah, fides*) that recalled the relationship between humans and the divine, and were also used in other social situations such as marriage ceremonies.⁵⁷ Long-distance trust thus appears to have been constructed as an extension of

⁵³ *Advance Contracts for the Sale of Wool*, item 19; for other examples of ‘faithful’ language see items 23, 78.

⁵⁴ Thanks to Ben Outhwaite and Juni Hoppe for illuminating discussions of this material.

⁵⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Heb b II.2, translated in Ackerman-Lieberman, *Business of Identity*, 268.

⁵⁶ Ackerman-Lieberman, *Business of Identity*, 244-5, 286.

⁵⁷ Ian Forrest, ‘Trust and Doubt: the Late Medieval Bishop and Local Knowledge’, in Frances Andrews (ed.), *The Church and Doubt*, *Studies in Church History*, 52 (Cambridge: CUP, 2016); Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early*

personal relationships with other people and God. Of course we should not assume that talk about trust securely guaranteed another person's behaviour, but nor can words and the feelings they engendered be excluded from consideration. There were no absolute guarantees in any of the long-distance relationships studied here, and merchants had to build trust by a combination of careful behaviour, self-representation, effort at engendering feelings of obligation, reliance upon aspects of shared identity, and awareness of the potential for institutional support.

All these elements of building trust were situated in time, that is, within relationships that changed over their duration, and which influenced and were influenced by other dynamic relationships. As such trust must be seen as contingent, and as demanding constant effort. Historical contingency, and the physical interaction of the parties involved, can also be analysed in spatial terms, since trade was conducted at particular locations. It is reasonable to hypothesise that the relationships of trade drew meaning from spaces and contributed to the meanings that those spaces embodied, at a range of scales.

The most intimate level at which we can 'see' the conduct of trade is in various buildings and complexes specifically designated for the purpose. Across all of northern Europe inns not only provided accommodation, food, and drink but also constituted spaces for the exchange of news and gossip and the establishment of commercial reputations. Furthermore many trade relationships involved the intercession of an intermediary, often in such spaces. Inn keepers were important vectors of local knowledge about trade, about other nodes in communications networks, and about the population of the surrounding area. For example in 1474 the pilgrim-author Hans von Waldheim relied upon inn keepers to provide

Roman Empire and Early Churches (Oxford; OUP, 2015), 8-9. 209-10. See also Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*, 178-84.

him with information about the areas of the Swiss Confederation through which he was travelling, as well as a personal introduction (through a further intermediary) to a hermit near Bern, and loans of horses.⁵⁸ In his experiences we see not only the traveller's trusting reliance upon his host, but also the host's business need to be trusted by his guests.

For West Africa, the landlord and the broker are the obvious archetypes of the cross-cultural middleman⁵⁹. They have the same function: to welcome and accommodate the trader in foreign lands, to make business across cultural boundaries. These roles of landlord and broker often merged; as Polly Hill⁶⁰ puts it simply, a landlord operating on the market was necessarily also a broker, and in the case of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Hausaland discussed by Paul Lovejoy⁶¹, accommodation was only an added attraction to the far more crucial brokerage activities of the landlord. One of the most remarkable archaeological recoveries of a potential landlord's house was Peter Shinnie and Paul Ozanne's excavation at 'Ruined Yendi' in Ghana.⁶² Excavation of several large trenches uncovered a large, rectangular, possibly two-storey building with narrow rectangular rooms, and a walled and floored enclosure. Both the building and the enclosure are 'quite alien in style to anything

⁵⁸ Beat Kümin, *Drinking Matters: Public Houses and Social Exchange in Early Modern Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 121.

⁵⁹ Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola*; Phillip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the era of the slave trade*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975).

⁶⁰ Polly Hill, 'Notes'.

⁶¹ Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola*.

⁶² Peter Shinnie and Paul Ozanne, 'Excavations at Yendi Dabari', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 6 (1962), 87–118.

known in the area today.’⁶³ The complex is tentatively identified as ‘a strangers’ and merchants’ quarter’: the building potentially a storehouse, the enclosure a courtyard in which the caravans were unloaded. Tobacco pipes recovered suggest a date in the late seventeenth century and surface indications suggested there existed more structures such as these in the immediate area.

The landlord-broker properties of West Africa bear some similarities with the Mediterranean institution known variously as the *funduk* or *fondaco*. Each were meeting places for the conduct of trade, marked out by a distinct minority identity and the balance between a small permanent group of inhabitants and a larger number of temporary visitors who were often strangers. Christian and Muslim foundations of this type in the Mediterranean were sometimes maintained by distant rulers and overseen by diplomatic officials, such as the Catalan *fondacos* in Beirut and Alexandria in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but they were more commonly set up as charitable foundations with a duty to provide lodging for travellers, whether pilgrims or merchants. There is evidence for a *madrasa* in Fustat, and possibly also a hostel for pilgrims, founded in the thirteenth century by the ruler of Kanem near Lake Chad. Although it was common for merchants from different polities to use the establishments of co-religionists, many cities also contained multiple *fondacos*: for example Alexandria played host to separate houses for merchants from Florence, Ancona, Venice, Genoa, Ragusa, Palermo and Naples.⁶⁴ Because these institutions created a degree of spatial separation between visiting merchants and the host community

⁶³ Shinnie and Ozanne, ‘Yendi Dabari’, 118.

⁶⁴ Coulon, *Barcelone et le Grand Commerce d’Orient*, 85-7; Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 353; Constable, *Housing the Stranger*.

they have been seen as a barrier between cultures,⁶⁵ but separation could equally facilitate trust by making outsiders knowable and locatable, and by associating them with the community in which their reputation mattered.⁶⁶ Individual reputations could be made and lost within the foreign merchant quarters where many a *funduq* was situated, a likelihood suggested by the commercial agreements, wills, and other acts recorded in Pietro Battifoglio's 1289 'minute book' of business deals amongst Christians in Tunis.

Transactions were often notarized in one of the merchant *fondaco* establishments of the city, and it seems as though the Christian merchants were frequent visitors to each other's hostels for these purposes.⁶⁷ They may also have played host to some of the actual transactions between the minority and majority merchants, although this is hard to verify.⁶⁸

However, most transactions took place in more open and public settings. Two major questions might guide future research into the relationship between merchant trust and space: first, what was the balance between transactions conducted in 'private' locations such as inns, landlord-broker properties and *funduqs* on the one hand, and public spaces such as markets on the other? And second, what was the balance between collective will and external authority in providing oversight of these spaces and the activities within them? Here we merely suggest some possible parameters. In England markets were usually established by the authority of a lord, but were often, especially in towns, allowed a high degree of self-

⁶⁵ David Abulafia, 'The Role of Trade in Muslim-Christian Contact', in idem, *Mediterranean Encounters, Economic, Religious, Political, 1100-1550* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 18-19.

⁶⁶ Reyerson, 'The Merchants of the Mediterranean', 8.

⁶⁷ *Notai genovesi in Oltremare. Atti rogati a Tunisi da Pietro Battifoglio (1288-1289)*, ed. Geo Pistarino, *Collana storica di Fonti e Studi*, 47 (Genoa, 1986).

⁶⁸ Constable, *Housing the Stranger*.

regulation by the community of residents classified as citizens or ‘burgesses’. The market place might contain a market hall, perhaps associated with the town government or a leading guild, where market officials, weights and measures, and market courts might be located. The market place was subject to some political authority but its court typically operated only with the participation and consent of the leading merchants. Selling imported goods outside the market place and hours was a crime, but a great deal of informal deal-making short of the final sale took place in private houses and on the road. The market place was also a space consciously conceived of as ‘public’, where trust arguably depended on the concentration of sellers, buyers and witnesses in an open space with good visibility.⁶⁹ The spaces of the English long-distance wool trade were also important, and when deliveries took place at the major regional fairs it was not just convenient, but also gave merchants confidence that the producers would want to be seen to be honest so as not to prejudice future deals. This spatial constituent of long-distance trust was just a grander version of the way that marketplaces conditioned behaviour and expectations. In some major European cities such as Bruges and Antwerp by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, purpose-built exchanges (*bursa* or *bourses*) created a more regulated space that was far less open, and less multi-purpose, than the typical market place.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ James Masschaele, ‘The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England’, *Speculum*, 77 (2002), 383-421; James Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁷⁰ Spufford, *Power and Profit*, 50-2.

The marketplace has also been the focus of much research into the economic history of West Africa.⁷¹ However, despite the important social and daily role of the marketplace, it appears that it may not have been the main locus of activity in long-distance trade. Instead the private house was an important place of exchange, and this may be partly a result of the landlord system already mentioned. Polly Hill pointed out that the landlord system diverts much of the trade away from the market-place.⁷² Hugh Clapperton, in Kano in the 1820s, wrote

The market is regulated with the greatest fairness and the regulations are strictly and impartially enforced. If a tobe [gown] or turkadee [woman's cloth], purchased here, is carried to Bornou or any other distant place without being opened, and is there discovered to be of inferior quality, it is immediately sent back, as a matter of course, - the name of the dylala, or broker, being written inside every parcel. In this case the dylala must find out the seller, who, by the laws of Kano, is forthwith obliged to refund the purchase money.⁷³

Historians of trade might also profitably question the effects of the spatial patterning of trade on a larger scale. For West Africa much has been made of the twin cities concept, relating to the idea that distinct groups occupied separate quarters. The late tenth-century Egyptian author al-Muhallabī describes the town of Gao at the Niger Bend as a twin settlement: one where there were markets and trading houses and to which there was

⁷¹ See e.g. Bohannan & Dalton, eds. *Markets in Africa* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962).

⁷² Polly Hill, 'Two Types of West African House Trade', in Meillassoux and Forde (eds.), *Development of Indigenous Trade*, 303-318.

⁷³ Hugh Clapperton, *Narrative*, vol 2, 287

continuous traffic from all parts, and the other where the king and his men and those who have his confidence lived.⁷⁴ Other medieval writers report the same situation, most famously al-Bakrī, who indeed also speaks of twin settlements for Ghana city (in present-day Mauritania): one large town possessing twelve mosques, inhabited by Muslims, then the kings' town, six miles distant but with continuous habitations between them.⁷⁵

While it is hard to identify the origins (let alone intentions) behind the division of commercial and political functions between neighbouring settlements, the phenomenon is sufficiently widespread to justify reflection. European parallels include the 'twin capital' condition of London (commerce) and Westminster (government) in late-medieval England, the separation of trade emporia from centres of political power across early-medieval northern Europe, and the isolation of trade, production, and status between neighbouring settlements within a network in Anglo-Saxon England.⁷⁶ It is possible that these and similar configurations had the effect of stimulating long-distance trade by communicating local geographies of commerce to outsiders, and by striking a balance between distance and proximity in the relationship of rulers to traders.

The geography of long-distance trade was, however, just as much about routes as about hubs. Brokerage was not confined to fixed locations, taking place on board ships, at

⁷⁴ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 174.

⁷⁵ Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 79-80.

⁷⁶ Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 680-8; John Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming), Chapter 6: 'The organisation and economy of the Mercian age were based not on complex centres, but on central clusters comprising specialised and defined mono-functional points linked in complimentary groups.'

quaysides, and on caravan routes, while the organisation of the Venetian shipping convoy or the trans-Saharan caravan must have shaped the formation of trust between merchants sharing the hardships of travel. The spatial patterning of trust at mid-points on journeys is obviously harder to study because the archaeology is more ephemeral, and the journey typically produces less litigation and letter-writing than the market place. But archaeologists are increasingly turning their attention to such questions; archaeological investigations have for example been carried out at several sites critical to the history of trade routes into the Ghanaian forest.⁷⁷ These must surely have left an archaeological signature, just going by a nineteenth-century description:

When the caravan arrives at the village... it makes its way to a spot known in advance where the unloading of men and animals is done, and immediately the configuration which the camp must have - it is always the same - is marked by the loads placed on the ground. In the next moment, while the slaves take the animals to water then to grazing, and the women visit the market and prepare the meal, all the men who are not watching over the loads go into the bush or forest to cut branches and fronds with which huts are immediately constructed; then... the camp is surrounded by a continuous barrier of the same materials.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ See Joanna Casey, 'Between the Forest and the Sudan: The Dynamics of Trade in Northern Ghana', in Philip Allsworth-Jones (ed.), *West African Archaeology: New Developments, New Perspectives* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 87 for a brief overview.

⁷⁸ Parfait-Louis Monteil, *De Saint-Louis à Tripoli par le lac Tchad: voyage au travers du Soudan et du Sahara accompli pendant les années 1890, 1891 et 1892*. (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1895); our translation.

Crucially this signature is not most evident through trade goods – which pass through without being deposited in the archaeological record⁷⁹ – but rather through the actual processes of trading.

The difficulty in recovering even the physical spaces in which trade was conducted only serves to emphasize how provisional must be any attempt to capture trust between people. But the attempt is crucial to any understanding of how long-distance relationships were possible in the global Middle Ages. All cultures have ways of talking about trust, and while this indicates the presence of some universal elements that transcend cultural frontiers, the distinctive resonances of trusting and talking about trust in different times and places also matter. However, this does not mean that shared culture on its own explains how trust is stretched across long distances. Rather this involves the performance and active use of trust, in more or less conscious ways, within the framework of a particular relationship; such action is, moreover, not simply a mechanical reproduction of the social environment or a pre-existing culture, but rather it is constitutive of whatever shared culture may exist. Another way of putting this is that people draw upon the cultural resources available to them in pursuit of personal and shared goals, and in turn their successes and failures contribute to the store of ideas, images, behaviours and words available to others navigating similar situations.

As an object of study the medieval globe comprises many comparable examples of the performance and use of trust in long-distance relationships. The present study has shown that in quite disparate cultural circumstances trust was created out of the way traders negotiated the presence of institutional authorities, advertised personal probity, signalled membership of identifiable groups, used intermediaries, articulated their trust for one another, and made use of certain spaces in order to trust and be trusted. Trust cannot be the result of some once-and-

⁷⁹ Casey, 'Between the Forest and the Sudan'.

for-all cause or condition, be it economic rationality, shared identity, or a contract. Here we have merely indicated the possibility and, we hope, the interest in comparing the creation of trust in a global medieval context. Much more work remains to be done in comparing how different aspects of trust interacted in different circumstances, and what effects this had on patterns of trade and the relation of trade to social power and political structures. The framework within which such comparisons are undertaken must reflect similarity as well as difference: much of what we have found here demonstrates the inadequacy of simple accounts of a transition from an unconnected pre-modern to a connected modern world. For example, the way that European merchant companies are firmly entrenched in the institutional ‘History of the Firm’ while Jewish, Hausa, and Wangara merchants are somewhat disparagingly left in the historical cul-de-sac of ‘diaspora trade’, is arguably a phantom of western exceptionalism, which a global medieval approach can helpfully disrupt.⁸⁰ Our emphasis on the ‘work’ of trust has also suggested that there was no separate repertoire of trust practices in short- and long-distance relationships. Both demanded effort, skill and an ability to learn.

⁸⁰ Jane Guyer and Endre Stiansen, *Credit, Currencies and Culture: African Financial Institutions in Historical Perspective* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999) highlights the isolation of African economic history from that of Europe. Quentin van Doosselaere, *Commercial Agreements and Social Dynamics in Medieval Genoa* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 6-8, criticises approaches to the Italian merchant company based too-much on economic rationality and institutional form, introducing elements of social history, but leaves a good deal of scope for economic historians to further integrate cultural work and the performance of trust into their work.