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African Music in Seventeenth-Century Jamaica: Cultural Transit and Transition

Richard Cullen Rath

BEFORE 1688, African slaves on southern Jamaican plantations had never seen anyone from the British Royal Society. That year, Dr. Hans Sloane left his residence at King's Hall, the governor's estate in Spanish Town, to visit a sugar plantation in the interior. Sloane was not only a fellow of the Royal Society but also physician and friend to the governor of the island, Christopher, duke of Albemarle. His purpose was to make field notes for his catalogue of New World plant and animal life.¹ For diversion, the plantation owner invited Sloane and another guest, a French musician named Baptiste, to witness a festival held by the slaves of the estate. To European senses, such music and revelry presented a spectacle not to be missed. Although recent revolts among the slaves of nearby plantations made the owner uneasy, he, his overseer, and his guests left the great house one evening and hiked a short distance down a path into a wooded area.

They entered a clearing picked clean of grass and carefully swept. In the center, two African musicians sat on logs by a small fire of corn stubble, playing homemade string instruments. About a dozen African men and women with "Rattles ty'd to their Legs and Wrists, and in their Hands," were dancing and singing inside a ring of people surrounding the fire. The others clapped or scraped sticks, shook bean pods, or beat on an iron hoe blade. Dancers and percussionists made "a noise, keeping time with one who makes a sound answering it on the mouth of an empty Gourd or Jar with his Hand."² Baptiste took notes on the music and Sloane made rough

Richard C. Rath is Crown Fellow in the American Cultural History Program at Brandeis University. Acknowledgments: I am indebted to John Thornton for reading and commenting on countless revisions of this article and for much more. I also wish to thank Ira Berlin, Kenneth Bilby, Francis Bremer, Michael Craton, Monisha Das Gupta, David Hackett Fischer, and Daniel Heslink for their suggestions. Figures I–III are reproduced with kind permission of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library. Expenses for this project were defrayed in part by a Niehmeyer-Hodgson research grant and the independent study program at Millersville State University.

¹ William Lux, *Historical Dictionary of the British Caribbean* (Metuchen, N. J., 1975), 120, 135, 141, 157, 158. The description that follows is based on Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, St. Christopher and Jamaica . . .*, I (London, 1707), xlvii–lviii.

² Sloane, *Voyage to the Islands*, I, xlviii, xlix, 1. For the significance of sweeping a clearing see Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The BaKongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago, 1986), 51, 54–56, 127–131, and Robert Farris Thomp-

sketches of the instruments. Soon, the revelers realized they had visitors, and the music gradually wound down and stopped.

The overseer shouted at the slaves in a pidgin language, directing them to continue. The musicians resumed with a different song, this one with no words. Its simple repeated melody at first sounded dissonant to Sloane, but after a few minutes he and his companions became entranced by the rolling rhythm of the dancers and clappers, the counterpoint of the gourd beaters, and the repetitious melody, all locked together. Time flew by until this piece came to its end.

Sloane then asked the master whether he could question the slaves about the music. The master, quite uneasy by that time, remarked that it would be fruitless to try to communicate directly with them and called to his overseer, who explained a little about the slaves while a new piece of music began. A man playing an instrument unfamiliar to the Europeans accompanied a single singer in this quieter, more melodic song. While Sloane spoke with the overseer and the master, Baptiste, disregarding the English conversation, applied himself to notating the rhythm and melody of the music as best he could. Later, he filled in the few fragments of lyric he could piece together from memory.

The music ended and the ring of people began to disperse. The overseer called out to one of the musicians and questioned him in pidgin. The language they used was suited to the one-way communication of work commands but was a source of confusion in this context. At length, the overseer turned to Sloane and told him what he believed to be the African origin of each song in turn: Angola, Papa, and Koromanti.

A remarkable scene: several languages—pidgin, English, French, at least two (and probably more) unrelated African tongues; three discrete musical styles recorded by someone versed in a fourth; participants ranging from slaves to gentry, with connections to three continents—all thrown together for a moment in time.

Sloane's travel account, *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, St. Christopher and Jamaica . . .*, provides the primary source material for this study. It contains several pages describing the Jamaican plantation slaves' music Sloane heard that night and includes Baptiste's careful transcriptions of three songs, each labeled by its ostensible African ethnic origin (Figure I), and drawings of the instruments (Figure II). The music that Sloane and Baptiste recorded is fascinating in its own right; it is also important in a larger historical context. This article proposes to use

son, "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture," in Joseph Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Ind., 1990), 164. For the use and significance of rings of people in African-American music see Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York, 1987), 1-90. For the use of an upturned clay pot or hollowed-out gourd as a functional substitute for the skin drum see J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York, 1974), 74.

1

The Introduction.

Upon one of their Festivals when a great many of the Negro Musicians were gathered together, I desired Mr. *Baptiste*, the best Musician there to take the Words they sung and set them to Musick, which follows.

You must clap Hands when the Base is plaid, and cry, *Alla, Alla.*

Angola.

Ho-baognion, Ho-baognion,

The musical notation for 'Angola' consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a bass line on a bass clef staff. The vocal line contains two phrases: 'Ho-baognion,' followed by a rest, and then 'Ho-baognion,' followed by a final note. The bass line provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Ho—ba, Ho—ba Ognion, Ognion.

The second system of notation for 'Angola' continues the vocal and bass lines. The vocal line has two phrases: 'Ho—ba,' followed by a rest, and then 'Ho—ba Ognion, Ognion.' The bass line continues with a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Papa.

The musical notation for 'Papa' is a single system with a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a bass line on a bass clef staff. The vocal line contains a single phrase of notes. The bass line provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

FIGURE I. Three African songs in Jamaica, 1688. The song titles refer to West African and central African ethnicities. From Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, St. Christopher and Jamaica . . .*, vol. I. By courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.

The Introduction.

li

Koromanti.

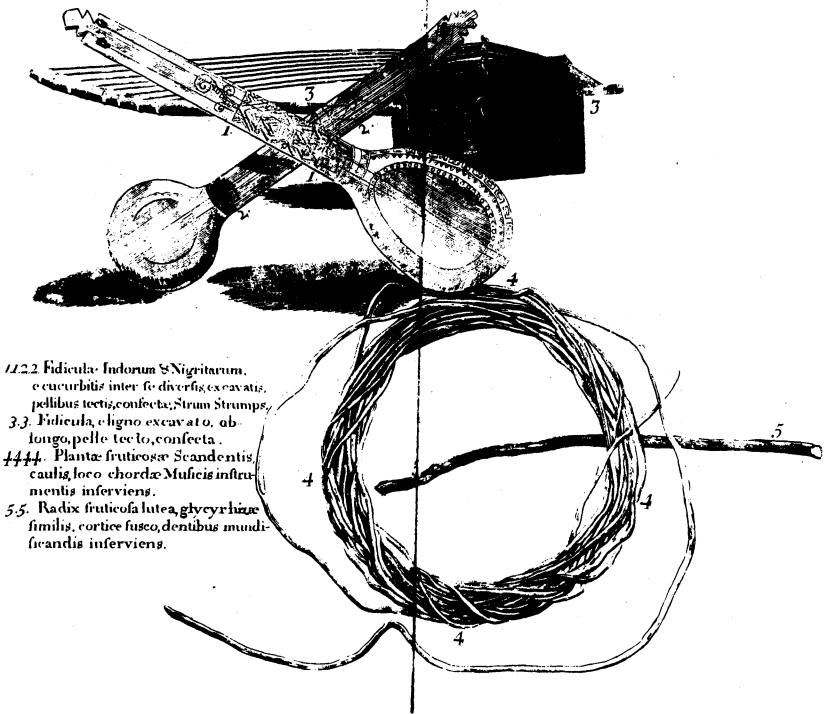
12
8

Loud. Soft.

Meri Bonbo

mich langa meri wa langa.

The musical score consists of ten staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 8/8. A '12' is written above the first measure, and an '8' is written above the second measure. The music is written in a rhythmic style characteristic of African music. The second staff includes the dynamic markings 'Loud.' and 'Soft.' below the notes. The third staff features a change in time signature to 6/8. The fourth staff has a key signature change to one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 6/8. The fifth staff includes the text 'Meri Bonbo' below the notes. The sixth staff includes the text 'mich langa meri wa langa.' below the notes. The seventh staff continues the melody. The eighth staff continues the melody. The ninth staff continues the melody. The tenth staff continues the melody. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.



- 1122 Fiducula Indorum & Nigritarum.
 e cucurbitis inter se diversis excavatis,
 pellibus tectis, confecta; Strum Strumpis.
33. Fiducula, e ligno excavata, ob-
 longo, pelle tecto, confecta.
444. Plantae fruticosae Scandentis,
 caulibus chordae Muscis instru-
 mentis interserviens.
55. Radix fruticosa lutea, glycyrrhizae
 similis, cortice fusco, dentibus mundi-
 ficandis interserviens.

FIGURE II. Musical instruments of Africans in seventeenth-century Jamaica. The lute in the front (1) is an Indian *tanpura* shown for comparison. The middle instrument (2) is a central African lute. The instrument behind the lutes (3) is an eight-stringed West African harp. The instruments were strung with wound fiber (4). Sticks like those in (5) were used by enslaved Africans to clean their teeth. From Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, St. Christopher and Jamaica . . .*, vol. 2, plate 232. By courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.

that record to fashion a model of transit and transition of the music as it was played in Africa and as it came to be played in Jamaica in the seventeenth century. From this model, clues can be obtained to more general aspects of cultural transmission in the setting of slavery.

The music and descriptions in *Voyage to the Islands* yield insights into the debates about African cultures in the Americas, centering for United States scholars on the "Herskovits-Frazier problem." In 1939, the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier maintained that the ordeal of slavery in the United States had been so traumatic that it completely destroyed African cultural heritages in North America and that any distinctive culture African Americans developed was of necessity acquired after their arrival

and derived from European and American components. Two years later, the anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits contended that direct continuities existed between African cultural regions and the Americas as survivals traceable to specific areas of West and central Africa.³

Herskovits and Frazier defined the terms and issues that have guided debates on African-American cultural origins to this day. Within this discourse two major contributors, sociologist Orlando Patterson and historian Edward Brathwaite, have focused their work on Jamaica. Patterson published *The Sociology of Slavery* in 1967, and Brathwaite responded in 1971 with *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*.

Working with the social structures of slavery, Patterson, agreeing with Frazier, maintained that slaves were formed of and made by the world in which they resided—a world of bondage and oppression bent on obliterating their personal histories. Masters were granted absolute legal power over slaves as early as 1674. The rise of a profit-driven sugar monoculture in the closing decades of the seventeenth century destroyed any semblance of social rights for the increasing numbers of slaves brought from Africa. These women and men, Patterson asserted, experienced “a complete breakdown of all major institutions—the family, marriage, religion, organized morality.” The resulting human being took shape as a “Quashee” character (similar to Stanley Elkins’s “Sambo”) who had “all the symptoms of a broken trauma-ridden personality.” The totality of masters’ domination of slaves precluded the persistence of African-based society or culture.⁴

Brathwaite countered that Patterson’s institutional analysis captured only planter-dictated aspects of Jamaican slavery. African-based local cultures thrived, he claimed, but were ignored or invisible to planter society. He described cultural creolization that resulted in slaves’ identification with both the local African-derived community and the authority of the planters. Master and slave, he contended, were not “in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole.” Brathwaite concluded that in the later years of Jamaican slavery, “the African influence remained, even if increasingly submerged, as an important element in the process of creolization [of the enslaved]. European adaptations could never be whole-hearted or complete. There might be apparent European forms, but the content would be different.”⁵

The anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, also working in the West Indies, sketched out a compelling synthesis of these positions in 1976. They called for “careful and specific historical research on

³ Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, rev. ed. (Chicago, 1948), 1-69; Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston, 1941).

⁴ Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (Cranbury, N. J., 1969), 10, 74, 80-86, 284, quotations on 151, 178; Elkins, *Slavery*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1968), 81-87, 97-98, 130-133.

⁵ Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford, 1971), 96-101, 212-239, 298, 306-311, quotations on 307, 231.

particular cases in particular periods," with the goal of uncovering values and beliefs that survived the middle passage as material culture and institutions could not. Mintz and Price, among others, have combined linguistic conceptions of creolization with the cultural ones that Brathwaite portrayed.⁶

One consequence of Mintz's and Price's work was a re-centering of attention on the role of African ethnicity in the Americas. Barbara Kopytoff, also writing in 1976, focused on the function of ethnic identity among Jamaican Maroons as a rallying point for African alliances rather than as a fixed attribute, one that was gradually subsumed into a more generalized African identity. During the 1980s, several authors, particularly Winifred Vass, Patricia Jones-Jackson, and Robert Farris Thompson, documented the dispersal of traits from specific African cultural systems to various American locations. John Thornton, utilizing evidence from their major places of origin, has examined how enslaved Africans transferred their ethnic affiliations to the Americas and transformed them into something new.⁷

During the past decade, other scholars have tracked the distribution of African nationalities through regional and local studies. Investigating slavery and ethnicity in the South Carolina coastal districts, Daniel C. Littlefield found that planters depended on a small core of Windward Coast slaves knowledgeable in rice culture who were augmented by a larger work force of Angolan field laborers. Charles Joyner combined and applied specifically linguistic creole approaches with those of Mintz and Price and Brathwaite to highlight the West African foundations of one slave community in the rice districts. In 1990, Joseph Holloway edited a volume of essays that includes studies of the ethnic origins of Africans in the Sea Islands, Florida, New Orleans, and Mississippi, among other places. Most recently, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall has argued for a strong Bambara influence in Creole Louisiana.⁸

⁶ Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1992; originally published as *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective*, ISHI Occasional Papers in Social Change, No. 2 [Philadelphia, 1976]), vii-ix, 9-10, 20-21, 52-53, passim, quotation on 92.

⁷ Mintz and Price's new preface registers their somewhat ambivalent recognition of this development; *ibid.*, vii-x. Kopytoff, "The Development of Jamaican Maroon Ethnicity," *Caribbean Quarterly*, XXII (1976), 33-50; Vass, *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States* (Los Angeles, 1979); Jones-Jackson, *When Roots Die: Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands* (Athens, Ga., 1987); Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge, 1992), 183-234; Thompson, "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture," in Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture*, 148-184.

⁸ Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, La., 1981); Joyner, *Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, Ill., 1984); Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture*, particularly the essays by Holloway, Robert L. Hall, Jason Gaston Mulira, Thompson, and Margaret Washington Creel; Hall, *Africans in*

One problem in all such work is that early American evidence of African culture formation is fragmentary at best. Kenneth Bilby, an anthropologist who has studied the cultural origins of the Jamaican Maroons, maintains that the "sketchy" nature of the historical literature generally precludes the recovery of the earliest workings of creolization among enslaved Africans, especially "at the individual level, where conscious creative decisions (as well as unconscious adjustments) were made." Even so, although the beginnings of the process are obscure, "the concrete results are nonetheless visible everywhere, both in the documented music and dance of the past and in the many continuities of context, style and form displayed by their present-day musical descendants."⁹

The musical descriptions in Sloane's *Voyage to the Islands* provide a unique glimpse into the process of creolization among enslaved Africans of known ethnicity. Baptiste unintentionally rendered a number of distinctly African features (defined and discussed in detail below) that were not yet recognized or employed in the seventeenth-century European music with which he would have been familiar.¹⁰ Sloane supplies an impression of diverse first-generation expressions and of the ways in which they were selected, combined, and changed to produce something new.

The linguistic paradigm of pidginization provides a way of drawing out the musical evidence in Sloane and connecting it to more general models of cultural transmission. Some pidgins serve as temporary contact languages that meet narrow and specific communication needs—often concerning trade or labor—between two unrelated cultures. The situation in slaveholding societies was more complex. A common language was needed for communication not only between slaves and their English-speaking masters but across intra-African barriers as well. From the perspective of the first generations of enslaved Africans in the Americas, pidginization was a process of experimenting, tentative and provisional, by which people of different cultures adapted as best they could to each other and to new environments.¹¹

Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century (Baton Rouge, La., 1992).

⁹ Bilby, "The Caribbean as a Musical Region," in Mintz and Sally Price, eds., *Caribbean Contours* (Baltimore, 1985), 186.

¹⁰ I claim no special objectivity on Baptiste's part, nor do I contend that his transcriptions are more accurate (or even nearly as accurate) as those of modern ethnomusicologists. Western musical notation is unable to capture many features of non-European musics, and I have no evidence that Baptiste's recording transcended any of these limits. However, the interpretation below accounts for the many non-European features that are present in his transcriptions, features also found in modern ethnomusicological studies of West Africa, central Africa, and Jamaica.

¹¹ For recent systematic reviews of the literature and definitions of pidginization see John A. Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles* (Cambridge, 1988), I, 3–70; Derek Bickerton, *Language and Species* (Chicago, 1990), 105–129 and passim, "Creole Languages," *Scientific American*, CCXLIX (1983), 116–121, and *Roots of Language* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981), 1–42, esp. 1–8; and Ronald Wardaugh, *An Introduction*

Planters had the power to create groups of dislocated peoples. Although they controlled the structures of these groups, they were unable and unwilling to control the cultural contents of the local communities that such groups built within the structures. Planters distanced themselves from the everyday activities of the enslaved, leaving each group in relative cultural isolation. Even though the planter goal of mixing diverse ethnicities was not met to the degree it was prescribed, enslaved Africans found themselves in groups that had no culture or language native to all. By pidginization of both languages and cultures they negotiated viable communities in the first generation.¹²

Children born into slavery combined, stabilized, and expanded the pidginized, African, and English constituents of their cultural environment to produce a creole language and culture. They actively, if unconsciously, made sense of a fragmented world. This is the process of creolization proper. When used outside the field of linguistics, the term "creolization" refers to both pidgin and creole phases of the process. It is one contention

to *Sociolinguistics* (Oxford, 1986), 70–76. For the distinctions between pidginization or creolization and pidgin or creole languages see Jeff Siegel, *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment: A Sociolinguistic History of Fiji* (Cambridge, 1987), 16–17. "Tertiary hybridization" is the technical term for the particular type of pidginization process that takes place within linguistically mixed, dislocated communities such as those comprising enslaved Africans. For the introduction of this term see Keith Whinnom, "Linguistic Hybridization and the 'Special Case' of Pidgins and Creoles," in Dell Hymes, ed., *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages* (Cambridge, 1971), 91–115. Wherever possible, I have adopted definitions that do not impinge on the vitriolic debates among creolists regarding universals and substrates. My own position, formed by the evidence in Sloane, follows Bickerton in defining pidgins as provisional, changing, and ad hoc systems (*Roots of Language*, 5) rather than as more formalized, rule-based systems, as others argue (Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, I, 5). Summaries of Bickerton's work are usually unreliable, attributing to him a monocausal "extremist" approach explicitly rejected (and predicted) by him (for example, compare *Roots of Language*, v, 300–302, 303–304, with Holm's summary of it in *Pidgins and Creoles*, I, 60–68, esp. 61, 66). A mediating position appears to be emerging in recent works on Caribbean creoles; for examples see Barbara Lalla and Jean D'Costa, *Language in Exile: Three Hundred Years of Jamaican Creole* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., and London, 1990), 1–6, and David Sutcliffe with John Figueroa, *System in Black Language* (Philadelphia, 1992), xvii, 11–12, 127.

¹² For planters' structural power see Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 80, 86, 178. For structure/content division and cultural isolation of both planters and enslaved see Brathwaite, *Development of Creole Society*, 96–101, 212–239, 306–309. For the concept of ethnic mixing as a strategy adopted by planters see Mintz and Price, *Birth of African-American Culture*, 2–3, 8, 15, 34, 87 n.2. Initial heterogeneity of slave populations is crucial to their concept of "crowds" rather than "cultures," a distinction on which the balance of their model hinges; *ibid.*, 18f. Some planters preferred particular ethnicities, especially Akans in Jamaica, a factor that tempers the Mintz and Price hypothesis. Evidence from shipping lists further qualifies the mixing hypothesis, because even if planters adopted that strategy, supplies of ethnically homogeneous slave cargoes often precluded meeting such demands; Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 192–205.

of this article that the two processes need to be treated separately in extralingual applications as well.

Music bears more than a surface relationship to language. A culture's music has a phonology of aesthetically permissible notes, a vocabulary of acceptable scales and rhythms, and a syntax of customs and rules that govern the largely unconscious ways people represent themselves through these notes, scales, and rhythms to produce what they recognize as music. These ways are conditioned by the cultural community—in the case of settled cultures, by means of tradition and adaptation; in the case of displaced African ethnic cultures meeting in the bonds of slavery, by means of negotiation.¹³

In heading his three musical transcriptions "Angola," "Papa," and "Koromanti," Sloane thought the labels named the origin of each piece. In order to establish the ethnicities of the musicians who performed them, the regions these headings denoted will be discussed briefly in the context of the seventeenth-century slave trade to Jamaica.

Between 1655 and 1680, one-fourth to one-third of Jamaican slave imports came from other islands in the West Indies; many were Africans who had been seasoned in Barbados. The remainder came directly from Africa, mostly in ships of the Royal African Company that obtained their human cargoes at ports between the Senegal and Niger rivers in West Africa. In addition, Jamaican planters illegally purchased a small number of central Africans from free-lance and Portuguese slavers.¹⁴

Jamaica planters used the name "Koromanti" to refer to slaves purchased from the Akan region of the West African Gold Coast (modern Ghana).¹⁵ Koromantis spoke languages of the Western Kwa family, a

¹³ Nketia, "The Musical Languages of Subsaharan Africa," *African Music: Proceedings From a Meeting in Yaoundé, Cameroon, 23-27 February 1970* (Yaoundé, 1972), 7-42. For transformational models of linguistic change see Robert D. King, *Historical Linguistics and Generative Grammar* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1969), 65-85; T. G. Bever and D. T. Langendoen, "The Interaction of Speech Perception and Grammatical Structure in the Evolution of Language," in Robert T. Stockwell and Ronald K. S. Macaulay, eds., *Linguistic Change and Generative Theory: Essays from the UCLA Conference on Historical Linguistics in the Perspective of Transformational Theory, 1969* (Bloomington, Ind., 1972), 38; and Robert J. Jeffers and Ilse Lehiste, *Principles and Methods for Historical Linguistics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 109. For an interesting application of a Chomskian grammar to music theory see Ray Jackendoff and Fred Lerdahl, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

¹⁴ Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 134-136; Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, Wis., 1969), 56-62, 138, 150, 158-162.

¹⁵ The ethnonyms "Coromantee" (see Maria Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica . . .* [Kingston, Jam., 1966]), "Koromanti" (see Sloane, *Voyage to the Islands*, I, li), "Kormantse" and "Coromantine" (see Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* [Baltimore, 1982], 38, 29, and passim), "Koromantyn" (see Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies . . .*, [London, 1793-1801]), and the modern "Kromanti" (see Bilby, "The Kromanti Dance of the Windward

subdivision of the more ancient and loosely related Kwa language family that extended from what is now the Ivory Coast to Cameroon. Koromantis were the most prized slaves in Jamaica during the earliest years of British settlement. They were also the most intractable. Many had strong military backgrounds, having fought in local wars among the littoral and forest states of the Gold Coast.¹⁶ The Jamaican landscape offered an ideal arena for their style of open-formation fighting, as demonstrated by the rebellions they mounted between 1673 and 1686. Rebels who were not caught, mostly Koromantis, retreated to the mountains in the parishes of St. Ann, St. Elizabeth, and Clarendon to constitute the core of the Maroon communities, one of which, in St. Elizabeth Parish, persists to this day.¹⁷

Perhaps as a result of these revolts, planters purchased a greater number of "Angolan" slaves in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. In European parlance, Angola referred to a vast area of central Africa embracing Kongo, Angola, Loango, and a number of smaller states. All of these peoples spoke Bantu languages and shared many cultural traits, easing transitions from one central African culture to another. From about 1680 to 1700, Angolans constituted some 40 percent of all slaves brought into Jamaica. In practice, planters found them hard to control also. They showed a decided tendency to run away, compounded by their belief that "on their deaths they are going home again" to central Africa, which Sloane concluded was "no lucriferous Experiment, for on hard usage they kill themselves." These factors led planters to return to Koromantis and related Gold Coast ethnicities by the end of the century.¹⁸

Maroons of Jamaica," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, LV [1981], 71-76), among others, derive from the Gold Coast port Coromantin.

¹⁶ For information on manpower, tactics, and battles in this region of Africa see Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast*, 130-168, esp. 142 for a sampling of battles and their casualties, and 159 for the role of the English, who had a fort at Kormantse.

¹⁷ Patterson, "Slavery and Slave Revolts: A Sociohistorical Analysis of the First Maroon War, 1665-1740," in Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Garden City, N.Y., 1973), 256, 283. Modern Jamaican Maroon communities also exist in St. Mary, Portland, and St. Thomas parishes but not in St. Ann or Clarendon (Bilby to author, Jan. 1992).

¹⁸ Sloane, *Voyage to the Islands*, lii. For the intellectual origins of central African attitudes about being slaves of Europeans see MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, 62. For ethnic patterns of slave imports see Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 134-136, and Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 56-62, 138, 150, 158-162. Curtin arrives at a "speculative" 6.3% Gold Coast share of total slave imports to Jamaica during the period 1685-1692 by subdividing the undifferentiated "Guinea" region (considered to comprise Sierra Leone, the Windward Coast, and the Gold Coast) of his source for Jamaica by the differentiated ethnic distribution for the English slave trade as a whole during this time. He qualifies his findings by noting, first, that in contemporary accounts planters expressed a preference for Gold Coast slaves despite their bellicosity, and second, that Jamaica planters purchased about 80% of all Gold Coast slaves sold in the colonies until about 1790. Even after assuming that, as a result of Koromanti-led revolts, Gold Coast imports to Jamaica were at their lowest precisely at the time documented by

After the Koromanti-led revolts of the 1670s and 1680s, planters also began to purchase greater numbers of slaves from the Bight of Benin. These slaves accounted for about 30 percent of the Africans imported into Jamaica during the last two decades of the century. The Popo were from this region, where they occupied the area extending from the mouth of the Volta River east to the Kingdom of Allada, straddling the present-day border between Togo and Benin. They were closely related to the Whydaw peoples, who dominated the supply side of the late seventeenth-century European slave trade along the Bight of Benin. The short piece labeled "Papa" in Sloane's record probably represented music from this region. Shifting political boundaries and competition from several other European nations made the supply of human chattels from the Bight of Benin, then becoming known as the "Slave Coast," too unreliable to meet Jamaica's increasing demand for long.¹⁹

Sloane preserved what appears to be a cultural record of first-generation transatlantic slaves from several distinct African regions. By comparing the music with traditional African regional styles and placing it in the context of late seventeenth-century Jamaican slavery, we can forge a crucial link in the acculturation debates. Sloane recorded neither African-American culture nor African culture in the Americas. Instead, his evidence tells of Koromantis, Papas, and Angolans creating identities as Africans under the bonds of slavery in a new world.

Early American accounts of African music are rare. Drouin De Bercy recorded one snippet played by soon-to-be-freed slaves in late eighteenth-century Santo Domingo, but his transcription was not as meticulous as Baptiste's. Verbal descriptions are more common but less illuminating. In about 1640, Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre (probably not the same Baptiste as Sloane's acquaintance) depicted a scene similar to that in Sloane for the French West Indies, except that skin-covered drums were used. A few years later, Richard Ligon described, in addition to drumming and dancing, the construction of an African-designed marimba. In his late eighteenth-century narrative of the Surinam slave revolts, John Gabriel Stedman provided one of the best depictions of creolized African music in the American colonies, but even that is minimal and biased concerning the music itself. Stedman was more painstaking in sketching "their instruments of Sound," which were "not a Little in Genius," being "All made by themselves."²⁰

Curtin's source, Patterson's higher Gold Coast figures, which also account for the influx of Angolans, make better sense for the late 17th century.

¹⁹ For locations of and information on the 17th-century slave trade in the Bight of Benin, particularly Popo, see Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford, 1991), 5, 9, 14-19, 129-135, and Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, xii, xxiv.

²⁰ De Bercy, *De Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 1814), cited in Pierre Pluchon, *Vaudou, Sorciers, Empoisonneurs de Saint-Domingue à Haiti* (Paris, 1987), 113; Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale des Antilles Habitées par les François* (Paris, 1667), II, 526-527;

In addition to Baptiste's transcriptions, Sloane wrote one of the most thorough descriptions of music and dance in the seventeenth-century Americas:

The *Negros* are much given to Venery, and also hard-wrought, will at nights, or on Feast days Dance and Sing; their Songs are all bawdy, and leading that way. They have several sorts of instruments in imitation of Lutes, made of small Gourds fitted with Necks, strung with Horse hairs or the peeled stalks of climbing Plants or Withs. Their Instruments are sometimes made of hollow'd Timber covered with Parchment or other Skin wetted, having a Bow for its Neck, the Strings ty'd longer or shorter, as they would alter their sounds. . . . They have likewise in their Dances Rattles ty'd to their Legs and Wrists, and in their Hands, with which they make a noise, keeping time with one who makes a sound answering it on the mouth of an empty Gourd or Jar with his Hand. Their Dances consist in great activity and strength of body, and keeping time, if it can be. . . . They formerly on their Festivals were allowed the use of Trumpets after their Fashion, and Drums made of a piece of a hollow Tree, covered on one end with any green Skin, and stretched with Thouls or Pins. But making use of these in their Wars at home in *Africa*, it was thought too much inciting them to Rebellion, and so they were prohibited by the Customs of the Island.²¹

How do Sloane's description and Baptiste's transcription relate to African music of the same period? These records mark both a destination for region-specific African music and a point of departure for New World music. "Angola" and "Koromanti" held different meanings for the musicians in Jamaica than they would have had in Africa. Ethnic identity remained meaningful, but at the same time there was a good deal of syncretism among the musical cultures present. These two pieces of music are long enough to be analyzed in terms of language and musical style. "Papa" is too short to appraise in the same depth as the others.

The relationship between the Sloane records and concurrent music in West and central Africa can be explored in three ways. The music may be analyzed for similarities to the scales and rhythms of the traditional music of the area in Africa from which it is purported to have come. The instruments may be compared in a similar fashion. The language of the lyrics may give clues to the origins of the music.

Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657), 46–49, 50, 52, 107; Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* . . . (1790), ed. Richard Price and Sally Price (Baltimore, 1988), 516, 538–541. The most complete collection of early American African-derived musical sources is Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Chicago, 1977), 1–46 and passim. Epstein points out that mainland North American sources are unknown until the 18th century (p. xvi).

²¹ Sloane, *Voyage to the Islands*, xlvi–xlix, lii.

TABLE I
INCIDENCE OF THIRDS IN "KOROMANTI" AND "ANGOLA"

Register →	Koromanti	Angola		
		Upper	Lower	Both
Thirds (N)	33	14	9	23
Intervals (N)	316	26	45	71
Thirds/Intervals	0.10	0.54	0.20	0.32

Melody. The first piece of music, "Angola," shows several traits more prevalent in the Akan region of modern Ghana (the Koromanti region) than to Angola. First, the intervals of the upper register of the piece are 54 percent thirds (Table I). The pattern of thirds is common in the Akan region today, whereas neighboring areas use octaves or unison extensively. Intervals of a fourth, which are more indicative of Angolan origin, are completely absent from the upper register. Second, the upper register comprises eight different pitches spanning more than one and one-half octaves. They are (beginning above middle C): D-C#-D-E-F-G-A-B^b, constituting a heptatonic, or seven-tone, scale resembling a European D harmonic minor scale. This type of scale is common among the Akan. Finally, the piece is structured with a section of two-part polyphony, with its emphasis on the horizontal interplay between the two melodies rather than vertical "block-chording" prevalent in Western popular music. This horizontal presentation of harmony is another distinguishing characteristic of Akan music.²²

The bass register of "Angola" is marked by features more Angolan than Akan. The most common notes are A (twenty-two occurrences) and D (fifteen occurrences). E and F appear twice, and C is indicated three times. This five-tone scale is substantially different from its seven-tone counterpart in the upper register and is rarely found in Akan music. The predominance of A and D notes, which are a fourth apart, also corroborates the presence of a culture other than Akan. Pentatonic scales and intervals of a fourth are typical of—though not limited to—central African music.²³

The melodic figure of "Koromanti" bears only limited comparison to traditional Ghanaian music. Akan music is noted for the predominance of intervals of a third, which, while not totally absent from this piece, are much less frequent than in "Angola," especially in the latter's upper register.²⁴ "Koromanti" also makes extensive use of runs of consecutive

²² Nketia, in "Musical Languages," 19-31, and *African Music in Ghana* ([Evanston, Ill.], 1963), 34-61, discusses the use of thirds and heptatonic scales by the Akan, and in the latter also discusses harmonies. I use "block-chording" in place of the more accurate musical term "homophony" to avoid confusion with its linguistic homophone, which has a different meaning, as this sentence illustrates.

²³ A. M. Jones, *Studies in African Music* (London, 1959), I, 224-231, and Rose Brandel, *The Music of Central Africa* (The Hague, Neth., 1962), 60-62.

²⁴ An octave has 7 intervals, so there is a 14.3% chance that an interval occurs

TABLE II
PARAMETERS OF "KOROMANTI"

Section	Range		Final Note	Notes Used (N)	Pitches Used (N)	Key	Mode
	Lowest Note	Highest Note					
I	Middle C	A = 440	C	7	11	C	I
II	G	G	G	7	8	G minor	I
III	G	G	G	8	9	D	IV
Totals	Middle C	A = 440	G	12	16		

seconds over a span of more than an octave. This has *never* been observed to happen among the Akan by the ethnomusicologist J. H. Kwabena Nketia, who notes that chains of seconds, whether ascending or descending, are usually "broken up after three, four or five or occasionally six steps by a pause or a change in direction."²⁵

"Koromanti" can be divided into three sections, each marked by a double bar line—||—and each in a different tonality or key (Figure I, Table II). The scales used in all three sections are heptatonic. These European scales and keys, which Baptiste used as a mental template to record the music he heard, have been tempered for a few centuries—notes of one octave are divided into twelve roughly equal units, referred to as half-steps or semitones. A semitone is represented on the piano by the difference in pitch between one key and its immediate neighbor (regardless of whether that key is white or black).²⁶ This system is the only one that European notation can represent accurately.

The first two sections of "Koromanti" use seven notes, the third, eight. The extra note in the third section was probably the result of an attempt by Baptiste to record microtones, which cannot be represented by standard European notation. Many African (as well as other) musical traditions make use of microtones in their tunings. These are notes somewhere between the European semitones; on a piano, they would fall between the keys. An example familiar to Western audiences (albeit one of African ancestry) would be the bending of a string by a blues or rock guitar player to accent a note. Microtones are perceived by the Western ear, acculturated to tempered tuning, as being out of tune.

The microtonal section of "Koromanti" has both G and G \sharp , which is highly unlikely because the section uses G as its root note (the fourth

at random. The 10% ratio of thirds in the piece demonstrates that they are not a distinguishing characteristic (Tab. I).

²⁵ Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*, 44.

²⁶ Examples of semitones or half-steps would be E-F (white key to white key), F-F \sharp (white key to black key), or F \sharp -G (black key to white key). On the guitar, a semitone is represented by a movement of the fingers up or down the length of the neck a distance of one fret.

mode of the tonality of D major, which the third section is in, begins on G). More likely, the fourth is raised, so that it lies somewhere between a European G and G#. Baptiste probably did not know how to deal with this and rendered some of the notes as G and others as G#. Correction would give a third heptatonic scale for the piece, as the eight notes would then become seven, with the third and seventh notes partially flatted (Table II).

The use of microtones is not common among the Akan, who show a preference for a heptatonic scale based on the natural overtone series that is equivalent to a nontempered version of a European major scale, where the seventh interval is flatted slightly. This type of scale would not have caused Baptiste any confusion. The Angola region, which is known for its employment of microtones, is not known for its use of heptatonic scales. Although "Koromanti" contains several traditional Akan melodic structures, the musician used these features in unconventional ways.

Rhythm. Sloane mentions the percussion: dancers with rattles set the beat over which a drummer improvised on a gourd or jar. Both Angolan and West African drummers use this configuration, and it is still found in Tambo and Kromanti drumming traditions in Jamaica, the former claiming Bantu descent, the latter West African. The only distinguishing rhythmic evidence in the transcriptions is again anomalous. Nketia marks variety in durational values as a distinguishing characteristic of traditional Akan music, but "Koromanti" uses long runs of same-length notes, as does the bass register of "Angola."²⁷ This contrasts with the variety and relative nonrepetitiveness of note lengths employed in the upper register of "Angola."

Baptiste did not record the drum patterns, though he did capture the syncopation and polymeter in all three pieces—no mean feat for an amateur European musician untrained in African musical styles. It is a credit to his skill that he was able to record polymeter without altering it to force a fit with European expectations of meter. Sub-Saharan African drumming patterns have been extensively analyzed and classified by region.²⁸ It is unfortunate that those heard by Sloane and Baptiste were not recorded, for they were probably the same ones used when the musicians were in Africa.

Much African music is nondirectional in its use of time: melodic and rhythmic modules are begun and repeated; variation is supplied from

²⁷ Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*, 64.

²⁸ For central African drumming patterns see Nketia, *The Music of Africa*; for West African patterns, see Jones, *Studies in African Music*; for Tambo drumming, Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds*, 20–23; for Kromanti drumming, Bilby, "Kromanti Dance of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica." Syncopation, the accenting of a beat other than strong one, was used in European music at this time. Polymeter refers to changes in the metric grouping of the notes throughout the passage—for example, 3 groups of 2 followed by 2 groups of 3 followed by 2 groups of 2. Polymeter can occur with only one part, although more are possible. Under this general term is subsumed "polyrhythm," which requires more than one part. The only example of the latter in Sloane is in the last measure of "Angola," where the meter of the upper part is different from that of the lower part. Neither polymeter nor polyrhythm was used in 17th-century European written music.

combining, superimposing, and mutating basic modules into countless alterations. A piece may be very short or may last for hours. Musicians end a piece when they are finished rather than when it is finished. In European cultures, by contrast, time is traditionally understood to be moving in a linear fashion toward a goal: music typically has a climax and an end. There are overlaps between, and exceptions to, these two perspectives on time, but in general the African view is more cyclical, the European more linear. The "Angola" and "Papa" transcriptions probably each represent an "African"-type module that was repeated and elaborated.²⁹

Instrumentation. West and central African horn and drum music often expressed state and institutional power. In a 1684 letter written from the Gold Coast town of Gross Friedrichsberg, Johan Nieman described the singing, drumming, and horn playing that he heard there as "the most frightening and strange tones and dancing with the oddest movements in the world." Otto Friedrich von der Groeben, visiting the same area in 1694, heard horn music "like the shepherds in the villages in our country blowing the Christmas mass," although he does not make clear whether this assessment was critical or complimentary.³⁰ These seventeenth- and eighteenth-century horn and drum ensembles functioned as an elite within Gold Coast societies, allowed by law (in Africa but not in Jamaica) to play only for major political leaders. When captured in wartime, court musicians became royal slaves and as such could not be sold or traded by their new owners. To capture another state's court orchestra was considered a great accomplishment.³¹ Probably very few court musicians were sold into Jamaican slavery; they would have been rescued or ransomed by their own people or kept as a prize by their captors.

Although captured royalty or their musicians were not likely to be sold to Europeans, ambitious Koromantis in a new world constructed instruments and ensembles like those in their home country as a display of power both to their peers and to the planters. Michael Craton documents

²⁹ For time perceptions see Alan P. Merriam, "African Musical Rhythm and Concepts of Time Reckoning," in Merriam, *African Music in Perspective* (New York, 1982), 443-461, Ruth M. Stone, "In Search of Time in African Music," *Music Theory Spectrum*, VII (1985), 139-148, and David Reck, *Music of the Whole Earth* (New York, 1977), 164-165, 180. Daniel Heslink, professor of music at Millersville State University, a percussionist interested in African and other non-Western forms of music, suggests that Reck's term "motive" connotes a musical gesture of thematic significance developed and explored through purely musical means present in European art music but not in folk styles. His suggestion to use the more accurate term "modules" is followed here (Heslink to author, May 1991).

³⁰ Nieman's letter is in Adam Jones, *German Sources for West African History, 1599-1699* (Wiesbaden, Ger., 1983), 88. For von der Groeben's portrayal of the Gold Coast see p. 52. Another description of Akan state instruments and ensembles appears in Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea* (1602), trans. Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford, 1987), 93, 171-72.

³¹ Nketia, "History and Organization of Music in West Africa," in K. P. Wachsmann, ed., *Essays on Music and History in Africa* (Evanston, Ill., 1971), 17-22.

an occurrence of this sort in Barbados in 1675. Caffee, a rebel leader, had set up a court modeled on Akan precepts and was to be crowned in a ceremony that would have included Akan horn music, when the planned revolt was discovered and forestalled.³² Half a century after Sloane's voyage, a similar uprising led by "Coromantee" slaves in Antigua was averted by merest chance. The Coromantee "king" announced his intention to lead an uprising "in open Day-light, by a Military Dance and Show, of which the Whites and even the Slaves (who were not Coromantees nor let into the Secret) might be Spectators, and yet ignorant of the Meaning." The meaning was delivered by "Drums beating the *Ikem Beat*." The revolt was to take place during a "Great Ball" that the governor was supposed to attend. As it happened, the ball was postponed and the plan found out, with many deaths resulting.³³

Drum and horn music displayed a real and immediate slave power—"too much inciting them to Rebellion," in the words of Sloane—so frightening to Jamaica planters that it was "prohibited by the Customs of the Island," and with good reason, considering the record of rebellion there in the late seventeenth century. Although most regions of Africa from which captives were taken had drumming traditions connected in some way to state displays of power, the practice was strongest and most developed in the Gold Coast—a situation of which planters, missionaries, and traders seemed well apprised.³⁴

Travel accounts from the Gold Coast also mention stringed instruments. These were folk, rather than royal, instruments. After a visit to the region in 1602, Peter de Marees wrote of "small Lutes, made out of a block, with a neck, like a harp with 6 strings made of rush, on which they [the Akan] play with both hands," keeping "in good tune." Nieman reported that the Akan had "a sort of guitar, which they can play fairly well and sing pleasantly to."³⁵

In Jamaica, slaves countered planters' suppression of African court music not only by direct resistance but also with the type of folk music recorded by Sloane. Lutes and harps could be made easily; eyewitnesses

³² Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), 107.

³³ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Mar. 10-17, 17-24, 1737.

³⁴ For central African state drumming traditions that resembled Gold Coast practices in many surface features see Michael Angelo and Denis de Carli, *A Curious and Exact Account of a Voyage to Congo in the Years 1666 and 1667*, trans. A. and J. Churchill, in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1704), I, 622, and Jos Gansemans and Barbara Schmidt-Wenger, *Musikgeschichte in Bildern: Zentralafrika* (Leipzig, Ger., 1986), 15-27. For discussion of how these different traditions impinged on slave-planter relations see Richard Rath, "Drums and Power: A Generative Approach to Slave Culture in Coastal Georgia and South Carolina, 1730-1790," paper presented at the Southern Historical Association annual meeting, Atlanta, Ga., Nov. 6, 1992.

³⁵ De Marees, *Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom*, 93, 171-172. Nieman's account is in Jones, ed., *German Sources for West African History*, 88.

remember these instruments being played as recently as the 1920s.³⁶ An eight-stringed harp as Sloane depicted (Figure II) was probably the instrument used to play the upper register of "Angola." Since this instrument could not be fingered, it could produce only eight pitches—the exact number required by that register.

The lower register of "Angola" was probably played on one of the fretted lutes in shown in Figure II, which has Angolan attributes. The cross-hatching engraved on the neck of the middle instrument illustrated by Sloane (the other lute is of Asian Indian design) is strong evidence of Angolan origin.³⁷ The order and range of the notes is such that they could have been easily fretted on this lute. The D two octaves below middle C could have been played on the open low-pitched string, and the A above it could have been fretted. The remaining notes—C-D-E-F-A—would have then been played on the higher-pitched string. The notes are clustered together in a way that strongly suggests this tuning.

The vocal is in a declamatory call-and-response style, falling within the preferred Akan framework of a short vocal solo followed by a choral response or instrumental passage or both. This is an especially popular structure in traditional Akan lute music, although it is not particularly distinguishing, as many other types of African music also display antiphonal features.³⁸ In sum, the bass register of "Angola" is identifiably central African, and its upper register and vocal are most likely Akan.

The instrumentation in "Koromanti" is not as clear as in "Angola," but the layout of the notes is more compatible with a keyed instrument such as a sansa (Figure III) or marimba than a fretted one like the two-stringed lutes (Figure II). The use of an eight-stringed harp is precluded because such an instrument was capable of producing only eight pitches, and "Koromanti" requires sixteen pitches (Table II). Lecturing in 1913 on Jamaican musical instruments, Astley Clerk spoke of a "Coromantee flute" about a yard in length, with three holes in it, as the instrument used for "Koromanti." Although an overblown flute could conceivably produce the requisite sixteen notes with many chromatic runs, it would require more than three holes as well as extreme virtuosity on the part of the musician.³⁹

The marimba and the sansa were strange to European sensibilities. The Capuchin missionary Denis de Carli considered the marimba, though he

³⁶ Helen H. Roberts, "Possible Survivals of African Song in Jamaica," *Musical Quarterly*, XII (1926), 346.

³⁷ Thornton to author, Mar. 1990. For modern illustrations see MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, 125.

³⁸ Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*, 28–30.

³⁹ See Clerk, "Extract from the Music and Instruments of Jamaica," *Jamaica Journal*, IX (1975), 64–67, for a discussion of instruments. This article is extracted from lectures Clerk gave in Kingston in 1913. He mistakenly associates the tambo with the Maroons. It is more accurately derived from the central African traditions of the later wave of immigrant workers. He also defines the "rhumba box" as a drum, although it is a bass sansa. Perhaps this is the same mistake that Sloane made. Sansa is the generic term for instruments with wood or metal keys attached to a sounding board at one end and are plucked or struck with the fingers at the other.

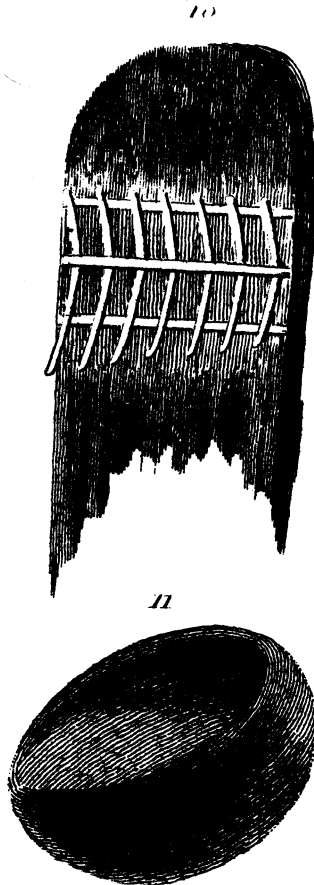


FIGURE III. A wooden *sansa* with an unattached calabash resonator, as seen by John Gabriel Stedman in Surinam in the 1770s. The engraving by William Blake is in Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796), vol. II, plate 69 (detail). By courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.

gave it no name, to be the “most ingenious and agreeable” of all Kongolesse instruments. To build it, the Kongolesse made a wooden bow and bound to it “fifteen long, dry, empty Gourds, or *Calabashes* of several sizes, to sound several Notes, with a hole at top, and a lesser hole four fingers lower, and stop it up half way, covering also that at the top [of the gourds] with a little thin bit of Board.” These thin boards were the keys the player struck with “two Sticks, the ends whereof are cover’d with a bit of Rag.” The marimba had a timbre that Carli thought “resembles the sound of an Organ, and makes a pretty agreeable Harmony.” Ligon also remarked on

a mid-seventeenth century Barbadian slave's construction of a marimba, wrongly assuming it to be a new invention.⁴⁰ In Surinam, Stedman characterized the sansa, to which he gave the central African moniker *Loango bania*, as

Exceedingly Curious being a Dry board on which are Laced, and kept Closs by a Transverse Bar, different Sized Elastick Splinters of the Palm Tree, in Such a manner that both ends are elevated by other Transverse Bars that are Fix'd under them and the Above Apparatis being placed on . . . a Large *Empty Gourd* to promote the sound/ the extremities of the Splinters are Snapt by the fingers, Something in the manner of a piano Forto & have the same Effect.⁴¹

Sansas, which are found throughout the Caribbean today, usually have the notes laid out in alternate steps, one for the right hand and the next for the left, whereas the notes on marimbas more often run consecutively from low to high. These designs, particularly the former, facilitate the playing of long descending or ascending passages of seconds. Two-stringed lutes are ill suited to this task, which was one of the main characteristics of "Koromanti." An additional reason to suppose a keyed instrument is that the durations of the notes are fairly regular and short, evincing plucked or struck notes with little or no sustain. This is also in keeping with the nature of either the sansa or the marimba.

Although common in the Angola area, these keyed instruments were seldom used in the Akan region.⁴² Sloane alludes to neither marimba nor sansa directly, although his mention of striking the mouths of gourds could refer to the resonators of a sansa, as he states that the gourds were struck with the hands, not sticks. Perhaps Sloane missed the sansa in the Jamaican situation and saw only the more familiar-looking calabash resonator.

Language. The lyrics to "Angola" and "Koromanti" are not readily translatable into their modern geographic correlates, Kikongo and Akan. The languages spoken today have changed considerably in the three centuries since Baptiste wrote. Furthermore, he employed French orthographic conventions that could only approximate the Bantu and Kwa phonologies of the lyrics.⁴³ Nonetheless, the language of the songs con-

⁴⁰ Angelo and Carli, *Voyage to Congo*, I, 622; Ligon, *True History*, 48–49. Another Capuchin missionary, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi, also left accounts and pictures of central African instruments in *Istorica Descrizione de' tre Regni, Congo, Matamba, et Angola* (Bologna, It., 1687), 157, 211, 216. For reproductions of privately held oil paintings by Cavazzi see Ezio Bassani, "Un Cappuccino nell'Africa nera del Seicento," *Quaderni Poro*, IV (1987), and Gansemans and Schmidt-Wenger, *Musikgeschichte in Bildern*, 15–27. The latter also reproduces sketches by Merolla and others.

⁴¹ Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition*, 438–440. For a historical discussion of central African musical styles that includes both sansas and marimbas see Gansemans and Schmidt-Wenger, *Musikgeschichte in Bildern*, 17–27.

⁴² Gerhard Kubik, *Westafrika: Musikgeschichte in Bildern* (Leipzig, 1989), 140–180.

⁴³ Bantu languages include Kikongo, Kituba, and Kimbundu in the Angolan

tains clues to understanding the processes by which Africans reconstructed their various ethnic identities under the constraints of slavery in the Americas.

The lyrics to "Koromanti" have been identified as belonging to an Akan language, either Fanti or Twi, though it is agreed that the form is non-standard. Barbara Lalla and Jean D'Costa, relying on the insights of a Ghanaian informant, Vincent Odamtten, identify "Koromanti" as "a children's play song in archaic Twi." A version of the song is sung by Ghanaian children: "*Michi langa / Kofi so langa*" means "I am coming / Kofi is coming," according to Odamtten. Lalla and D'Costa maintain that in "Sloane's version, most of the elements are repetitions of nonsense words typical of play songs."⁴⁴ Eva Tagoe, a native speaker of Fanti, characterized the lyrics as resembling a Fanti game song. In this type of song, *langa* holds no lexical meaning but is used to make the text rhyme and denotes that the singers are swaying. The meaning Tagoe gives the rest of the lyrics to "Koromanti" is "I will cradle you, comfort you." *Meri* marks an action in the process of being done, and *bonbo* is a verb indicating the action of holding someone while lightly patting her or him on the shoulders or back.⁴⁵

Several clues point toward creolization in the lyrics of "Koromanti." The song employs a speech element that resembles the Kikongo noun-class marker *wa*, which appears in a number of roles in Caribbean creoles. In Jamaican Creole, *wa* usually functions as an indefinite article that is glossed as an approximation of the English one. However, it may also perform other noun-modifying functions that are foreign to English articles but common to Bantu-language noun-class markers. This process of having African usage patterns manifested in compatible English surface forms is known as "masking" or "camouflaging" and is a common feature of creole languages.⁴⁶ *Langa*, the lexically empty element in modern Ghanaian versions of the song, is widely found in older sources of creolized speech in the Americas. It often meant "tall," "long" (duration), or "far" but could also refer to the instrumental preposition "with." Variants of the word can be found in West and central African languages

region. Kwa languages divide into two groups, Western Kwa and Eastern Kwa. Western Kwa languages include Akan, Ashanti, Twi, Fanti, Ewe, and Ga. The Eastern group includes Yoruba and the many Ibo languages of Nigeria.

⁴⁴ Lalla and D'Costa, *Language in Exile*, 128.

⁴⁵ Eva Tagoe, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology, Brown University, to author, Feb. 1993.

⁴⁶ Jay Edwards, "African Influences on the English of San Andrés Island, Colombia," in David DeCamp and Ian F. Hancock, eds., *Pidgins and Creoles: Current Trends and Prospects* (Washington, D. C., 1974), 1-26; Richard Allsop, "How Does the Creole Lexicon Expand?" in Albert Valdman and Arnold Highfield, eds., *Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies* (New York: 1980), 90-95; Sutcliffe, *System in Black Language*, viii, 5, 33-35, 56, 126; Frederic G. Cassidy, "Multiple Etymologies in Jamaican Creole," *American Speech*, XLI (1966), 211-215.

today, often with similar meanings.⁴⁷ *Langa* and its homophones may have entered Kwa and Bantu languages from English at an early date, explaining their presence in both African and Creole languages. Alternatively, and perhaps more plausibly, words that had wide linguistic distributions and vaguely compatible meanings may have converged into creole forms.

Rather than showing creole features, the upper register of "Angola" displays evidence of mislabeling. Several traits of the lyrics suggest of Kwa rather than Bantu languages. First, the words were sung to the melody in the upper register, which fits West African better than central African models. Second, Akan uses three relative pitches: high, low, and middle, with the middle tone occurring only after a high tone. Nketia states that this quality is confirmed in Akan melody lines.⁴⁸ Of the two pieces under study, the upper register of "Angola" better complies with this stricture. Neither "Koromanti" nor the bass register of "Angola" maintains the pattern.⁴⁹

The phonetic approximations of Baptiste's French orthography also manifest Kwa features not usually present in Bantu languages. The *h* in "Hoba Ognion" was most likely not sounded, and "Ognion" was probably pronounced with a nasalized *o* in both syllables (as in the French *bon*) with a *y*-glide (as in the third syllable of *picayune*) preceding the second *o*. These nasalized vowels are a distinct feature of Maroon "deep" possession language today, which Bilby has shown to have distinct Akan elements. Western Bantu languages use nasalized vowels much less often than Kwa languages.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Brusciotto Giacinto, *Grammar of the Congo Language as Spoken 260 Years Ago*, ed. with a preface by H[enry] Gratta Guinness (London, n. d. [1882]), calls *wa* a marker of "principiations" of nouns. Hazel Carter and João Makoondekwa, *Kongo Language Course: Naloongi Makikongo* (Madison, Wis., 1988), call *wa* a "class marker" or "linking participle." Thanks to Thornton for help with these sources. For *one* see F. G. Cassidy and R. B. Le Page, eds., *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1980), 331-332. For *langa* see *ibid.*, 270, and Jan Voorhoeve and Ursy M. Lichtveld, eds., *Creole Drum: An Anthology of Creole Literature in Surinam* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1975), 120, 273, 280-281. Hundreds of planters, taking with them close to two thousand slaves, left Surinam between 1668 and 1680; many of them relocated in Jamaica.

⁴⁸ For music and pitch patterns of language see Nketia, *African Music in Ghana*, 47-48, and "Musical Languages," 17-26. For distribution of tonal languages see William E. Welmers, *African Language Structures* (Los Angeles, 1973). Carter advises checking Welmers's work on central African tone with speakers of the particular languages before drawing conclusions (Carter to author, Mar. 1993).

⁴⁹ Marilyn Ketterman, Department of Anthropology at Brown University, suggests that "Angola" in this instance may be a common mistransliteration of "Anloga," a modern ethnonym for an Ewe group with a history of extensive contact with the Akan (Ketterman to author, Feb. 1993). I have been unable to document "Anloga" in either the 17th or 18th century. For Ewe-Akan contacts see Kwamina B. Dickson, *A Historical Geography of Ghana* (Cambridge, 1971), 27-30.

⁵⁰ For nasalization features among the Maroons see Bilby, "How the 'Older Heads' Talk: A Jamaican Maroon Spirit Possession Language and Its Relationship to the Creoles of Suriname and Sierra Leone," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, LVII (1983), 46. Carter notes the differences between Kwa and Bantu nasalization features (Carter to author, Feb. 1993).

The possibility of Angolan origins for the words cannot be entirely discounted. Thornton notes that *ognion* may be a phonetic variant of the Kikongo *yonga*, meaning "to copulate," marked with a third-person singular nominative prefix and a third-person singular accusative infix. Although this supports Sloane's remark that "their Songs were all bawdy, and leading that way," the form Thornton proposes, *onyonga*, would be ungrammatical in modern Kikongo and is unattested in the seventeenth century. Hazel Carter proposes that constantly shifting processes of euphemism and *blonipha* (a taboo against pronouncing the name of a deceased elder in any word) would have been in effect, further obscuring the meaning from anyone not privy to the particular system. She concludes that although the lyrics could have been in Kikongo, they are not recognizably so.⁵¹

The lyrics may have had multiple meanings, with an overtly bawdy sense masking a more esoteric interpretation.⁵² In the modern Jamaican Maroon community of Charles Town, *oba* means "man" or "child." The root for this word is from the Western Kwa language family—namely the Ashanti-Akan term *o-ba*, meaning "person."⁵³ Throughout most of the Americas, the African term *obeah* commonly refers to someone thought to possess otherworldly skills and contacts. The Fante, who speak a Western Kwa language closely related to Ashanti, have two terms that resemble the lyrics of "Angola," *obosom*, any secondary deity, and *anyen*, a type of witchcraft that calls on ancestor spirits or foreign deities. The Anang of Nigeria, who speak an Eastern Kwa language in the Ibo group, also have three terms that warrant comment: *obio*, the local community with which one identifies; *onyon*, "to wander"; and *ekpo*, an individual's "soul," which becomes an ancestral spirit after death. In modern Anang religions, *obio ekpo* refers to the community of souls of the properly dead, and *ekpo onyon* means a homeless, wandering soul, or ghost.⁵⁴ By inference, *obio onyon*

⁵¹ Sloane, *Voyage to the Islands*, xlvi; Thornton to author, Mar. 1, 1993; Carter to author, Mar. 19, 1993; for *blonipha* see *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed. Carter states that the form posited by Thornton requires the infix *-ku-* before the object concord *-n-* and a lengthening (gemination) of the first consonant of the stem *-y-* in modern Kikongo, yielding *o-ku-ny-yonga*.

⁵² For evidence of this practice in the antebellum South see Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs of the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1953). For qualification and extension of Fisher's work, also for the 19th century, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974), 248–249, 631, 724, 793–794. For earlier evidence of multiple meanings and some of the uses for them see Rath, "Drums and Power."

⁵³ David Dalby, "Ashanti Survivals in the Language and Traditions of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica," *African Language Studies*, XII (1971), 41.

⁵⁴ James Boyd Christensen, "The Adaptive Functions of Fanti Priesthood," in William R. Bascom and Herskovits, eds., *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago, 1959), 274–276, and John C. Messenger, "Religious Acculturation among the Anang Ibibio," *ibid.*, 281–282. According to Segun Falana, a native speaker of Yoruba (the westernmost Eastern Kwa language), *oba* means "king" and *ognion* (with both *ns* completely assimilated by the nasalized vowels) could refer to the Oyo, the largest Yoruba ethnic group, yielding "king of the Oyo—Allah"; Falana to author, Apr. 1993.

would be a homeless wandering community—living ghosts—a compelling, if speculative, subject for slave song.

Perhaps the only deities left to be invoked by Jamaican slaves were foreign gods and wandering ancestral spirits. *Ognion* may have made a reference to the rootlessness of the new community (*onyon*), but it may also have been a conjuration of spirits who wandered as far as had these Africans (*anyen*). “*Alla, Alla*” may have been an entreaty to the Muslim god. Islam had drawn converts in West Africa before the seventeenth century, but central Africa was as yet beyond its reach. A number of Arabic/Muslim words remain in Jamaican Maroon vocabulary today. David Dalby considers the presence of these speechways among the early settlers to be an established fact signifying West African origins.⁵⁵ Although the evidence is spectral, it seems to point more toward Kwa than toward Bantu origins for “Angola.”

The composite of these terms echoes both the situation of the Africans in Jamaica and the various cultures from which they came. *Hobaognion* may have evoked the ancestral, communal, spirit-identified self—“we,” not “I”—as well as a sense of homelessness, a loss of location and community. The refrain may have been an invocation of a foreign god, who was nonetheless not the god of the slaveowner.

When the evidence—musical, linguistic, and instrumental—is woven together with regional African features as the organizing principle, two patterns of African ethnicity in the Americas emerge. In “Angola,” two distinct ethnicities were combined but cultural boundaries were maintained in each. In contrast, “Koromanti” presents an idealized conception of African ethnicity, one that has been re-made in the Americas.

“Angola” and the corresponding illustrations imply a mixture of two discrete styles, with a Kwa—probably an Akan—musician playing the harp and singing in the upper register while an Angolan played the lute in the lower register. The intervals, scales, harmonies, instrumentation, and language of the upper register all imply Akan origins, not the Bantu cultures indicated by the title. The lower register, however, matches the Angolan title, as evidenced by its scales, intervals, and instrumentation. The two primary musicians—one playing an eight-stringed harp and singing the lead, the other playing the bass on a two-stringed lute—positioned their identities in a way that allowed them to negotiate a whole that was new from parts that were not. This was the process of pidginization in action.

The most striking feature of “Koromanti” is its lyrics, which are identifiably Western Kwa, in agreement with the title. The words, however, cannot be translated fully or situated confidently in a particular Kwa language. Although languages may change somewhat over three centuries, earlier and later versions usually stay mutually intelligible.⁵⁶ Once an

⁵⁵ Dalby, “Ashanti Survivals in the Language of the Maroons,” 45–46.

⁵⁶ See Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 207–208, for the relative ease with which

analysis of the music is introduced, the Western Kwa identification becomes less certain. The ways in which scales and intervals are combined in a repetitive, consecutive manner, both melodically and rhythmically, not only point away from an Akan origin but imply the use of instruments that were not common to the region.

Mimetic explanations of African ethnicity break down in "Koromanti." Traits from unrelated cultures cross categorical boundaries, blending in ways that the music in "Angola" does not. Ethnic identity in the Americas had become idealized in the former but not in the latter.⁵⁷ The external cross-cultural mixing taking place in "Angola" had become internalized in "Koromanti." The result was a creolized ethnic identity. "Koromanti" was probably the expression of a seasoned slave whose African ethnic identity had been constructed wholly or mostly in the Americas. To such a person, Koromanti ethnic identification would no longer signify a subregion of Western Kwa culture but a loosely bundled set of associations centered on West Africa that helped one operate in the context of a new world.

Sloane's musical description is a pivotal document for addressing issues raised in the acculturation debates. Historians have usually drawn their conclusions from the more numerous records of fully developed slave populations or, in many cases, from postemancipation documents. The importance of Sloane's account is its early date and specificity. A glance at no more than the titles of each piece of music calls into question any contention that all was lost in the process of enslavement. Yet Angolans and Koromantis did not simply retain their African cultures intact; a process of interchange and experimentation was taking place in the music. Mintz and Price's hypothesis, that purposefully randomized slave crowds resulted in a cultural leveling process, is not borne out either. The ways in which these negotiations were carried out were ethnically identifiable in 1688.

If African cultures were not destroyed, replicated, or leveled by transit to the Americas, how can description of what happened, as exemplified by the music, be approached? Pidginization provides an answer. When people acquire a second language, they never learn it as well as a native speaker. No matter how long they speak it, they will always be recognizable as non-native speakers, given away by some slight pronunciation difference or misplaced stress. Pidginization is the same process, with the condition that the language must be invented from what is available; there are no native speakers. As a result, the first generation cannot ever be quite at ease with its tentative music, language, or culture. This is seen in "Angola's" uneasy blending of two different musical styles, each part retaining its individual distinctiveness. Each musician was using her or his

17th-century varieties of Kikongo, Kimbundu, and Fon (an Eastern Kwa language) have been translated to their modern equivalents.

⁵⁷ For idealization of African ethnic identities see Kopytoff, "Maroon Ethnicity," and Thornton, "African Nations in the New World Experience," ms., Millersville, Pa., 1992, and *Africa and Africans*, 220.

particular cultural knowledge to produce a suitable musical expression. In all likelihood, neither the musicians nor their companions found the results fully satisfactory.

The first, or pidgin, generation had to negotiate and compromise ad hoc to reach any shared cultural understanding or sense of community. Later, creolized generations acquired this makeshift culture as native, expanded and formalized it, and made it fully their own, as embodied in "Koromanti." They molded the creole cultural language that subsequent unseasoned Africans would have to learn as a second language. The need for pidginization would gradually be eliminated as a new syncretic native identity took shape. The resulting creole form exhibits the lack of explanatory power of most retentions: they were not sacrosanct traditions handed down reverently through the ages but provisional solutions that only became native when a new generation acquired them as part of a cultural first language.

The African diaspora to the Americas may be thought of as the unraveling of a number of individual twines from different ropes and their recombination into new ropes. Thus, pidginization (both broadly and narrowly defined) occurred. As time passed, new groups of twines, some with new kinds of strands in them, coalesced out of the relatively chaotic pidgin stage to weave new ropes with new and discrete cultural definitions. This was the creole stage. Today, African-Jamaican music and language exist in a mature creole culture. Only its history distinguishes it from a noncreole culture. Most historical research into African-American cultures has focused on creole generations. Descriptions such as those in Hans Sloane's account give historians a glimpse into the earliest workings of African cultural transmission (to repeat Bilby's words) "in action at the individual level, where conscious creative decisions (as well as unconscious adjustments) were made." This was a world ordered by decisions and processes much more individualistic and unpredictable than those of later, more stable communities, but the latter owe their existence and contents largely to the results of the former.