Between 1940 and 1970 the number of traders and trading stores increased significantly throughout Mwinilunga District, in the North-Western Province of Zambia. Whereas previously trading stores had been limited to the Boma\(^1\) and Ikelenge, and outlying villages had merely been serviced by occasional passing traders, from the 1940s onwards trading enterprises run by European or African traders were set up in all corners of the district.\(^2\) Why did the number of traders increase so rapidly and how did this increase influence the patterns of production and consumption of the local population?

The main aim will be to highlight the pivotal role which traders played in linking production to consumption, thereby influencing both. As levels and patterns of production and consumption underwent major changes during this period, Mwinilunga provides an interesting case study to discern the influence of traders hereupon. Did the presence of traders stimulate the acquisition of consumer goods, and did this acquisition in turn encourage higher levels of agricultural output, for instance? During the colonial period traders not only bartered or sold consumer goods such as salt, cloth and soap, but also bought agricultural produce locally. Production and consumption were physically linked in the trading store, as the selling of cassava directly enabled the buying of cloth in the same store.\(^3\) What happened after independence in 1964 when separate (semi-) government institutions, mainly marketing boards, took over the buying of agricultural produce, whereas trading stores started focusing primarily on the sale of consumer goods?

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\(^1\) The term *Boma* will be used to refer to the district administrative centre, the town of Mwinilunga, in order to differentiate it from the district as a whole.

\(^2\) National archives of Zambia, Lusaka (NAZ) SEC2/131, Kasempa Province annual report 1929–30 and NAZ SEC2/156, Western Province annual report 1949 – a comparison of these documents shows an increase in the numbers of traders.

\(^3\) NAZ SEC2/137, P.L.N. Hannaford, Mwinilunga District annual report 1955.
CARAVANS AND EARLY COLONIAL RULE – PRECEDENTS OF TRADE

The people of Mwinilunga have long been connected to regional trade networks, involving the exchange of iron tools, locally manufactured baskets, salt and other scarce goods. From the eleventh century onwards, items from as far away as the Indian Ocean coast started reaching the area, but it was especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that long-distance trade goods, coming from the Atlantic coast via Angola, became available in large quantities. Products such as beads, cloth, firearms and gunpowder, but also tobacco and liquor, were obtained from Portuguese traders and African intermediaries, the most significant of which were the Ovimbundu. In exchange for these goods the inhabitants of the area offered beeswax, rubber, ivory and slaves, but also cassava. Cassava, a crop introduced to the area by the long-distance trade itself, served to feed the caravans, which could consist of up to 6,000 individuals travelling for months at a time. Cassava production increased during this period, as sale of the crop enabled the obtaining of other highly desired items in return. The link between (agricultural) production and consumption, which would prove so important during the colonial and postcolonial periods, was thus already apparent during this earlier period. Although by the turn of the twentieth century the long-distance caravan trade had virtually collapsed due to a combination of factors including intertribal warfare, slavery, the imposition of colonial rule and the ensuing demarcation of international boundaries, trade had established some

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4 For references to the broader region see: J. Vansina, Paths in the rainforests: Toward a history of political tradition in Equatorial Africa (Madison, 1990), 58–61 and J. Vansina, How societies are born: Governance in West Central Africa before 1600 (Charlottesville and London, 2004), 60–7.


6 E. Bustin, Lunda under Belgian rule: The politics of ethnicity (Cambridge, etc., 1975) 1–40 and A. von Oppen, Terms of trade and terms of trust: The history and contexts of pre-colonial market production around the Upper Zambezi and Kasai (Munster, etc., 1994) 45–99 and 211–35.
