

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-14192-5 - Slavery in Brazil  
Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

---

PART ONE

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SLAVE LABOR

## I

---

## Origins of the African Slavery in Brazil

Slavery was well-known in most complex societies centuries before the establishment of the Brazilian colony by the Portuguese. Slaves were usually a small part of any labor force in most preindustrial societies and were most commonly tied to the household economy. In a few societies, they were used in agriculture, mining, or other productive enterprises beyond the household economy. No ethnic group escaped enslavement, and all societies treated their slaves as outsiders, rootless and ahistorical individuals ultimately held against their will by the threat of force. Because of their legal position, slaves were also the most mobile labor force available in any society.

In the work they performed and in their lack of control over their own lives, slaves were not unique from other subordinate members of their respective societies. Peasants were often in a temporary condition of servitude, some being tied to the land on a permanent basis. Children, women, and prisoners often lived lives indistinguishable from those of slaves in terms of the labor they performed or the rights immediately available to them. But it was the lack of ties to family, kin, and the community that finally distinguished slaves from all other workers. True slaves were persons without the bindings and linkages common to even the lowest free persons and who were thus completely dependent on the will of their masters. Masters could use their slaves at far less cost in reciprocal obligations than any other labor group in their societies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The best model for distinguishing slaves from forced or dependent laborers is provided by Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). A discussion of these same issues for the classical period

Slavery as a system of industrial or market production was a much more limited phenomenon. Most scholars now date its origins for Western society in the centuries immediately prior to the Christian era in the Greek city-states and the emerging Roman Empire of the period. Recent studies have suggested that for slavery as an “industrial” system to exist, there needed to be an important market economy emerging with a limited supply of peasant labor and with abundant sources of slaves – usually via conquest or purchase.

The Roman case is unusual among known preindustrial societies because of the size and importance of both its slave population and their economic role in the economy. It was one of the most urban premodern societies and had important international trade. Slaves were used in food production and other agricultural activities as well as in the urban crafts. It has been estimated that at the height of the Roman Empire, the population of Italy contained some two to three million slaves, who represented a very high 35 to 40 percent of the total population.<sup>2</sup>

Although slaves did not disappear from Europe until well into the modern period, slavery as a major economic institution collapsed with the barbarian invasions of the fifth to the eighth centuries A.D. The decline of urban markets, the breakdown of long-distance trade, and the increasing self-sufficiency of agriculture created a situation in which slave labor was no longer viable, and peasant agricultural labor again predominated. Slavery was reduced to household and domestic tasks, and the early Middle Ages’ stress on defense and security led to the rise of serfs, were peasants who sacrificed part of their freedom in return for protection by the local elite, and serfs and free peasants became the dominant labor force in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

is found in M. I. Finley, “Between Slavery and Freedom,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 6, no. 3 (April 1964).

<sup>2</sup> For the most recent survey of slavery in the classical world with the latest bibliography, see Jean Andreau and Raymond Descat, *Esclave en Grèce et à Rome* (Paris: Hachette, 2006). On slavery in the classical Greek period, see Yvon Garlan, *Slavery in Ancient Greece* (rev. ed.; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982). On Roman slavery, see Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and the excellent recent study of Walter Scheidel, “Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire,” *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 87 (1997) as well as the older collection of essays edited by M. I. Finley, *Classical Slavery* (London: F. Cass, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> On slavery in Europe in the post-Roman times, the classic work based on primary sources is Charles Verlinden, *L’esclavage dans l’Europe médiévale* (2 vols.; Brugge: De Tempel, 1955–1977), and the survey of William D. Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the*

At no time during this period of retrenchment did slavery itself disappear from Europe. Among the Germanic peoples on the northern frontiers, it remained important because of constant warfare, and in the non-Christian world of the Mediterranean, slavery experienced a renaissance from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. The Muslim invasions of the Mediterranean islands and Spain brought the increasing use of slaves in agriculture and industry.

Despite this revival of slavery in the peripheries, slavery in mainland Christian Europe was confined to domestic activities and a few other limited activities. Only in the more advanced Islamic Mediterranean world were slaves used in large numbers. But the subsequent conquest of these states by the northern Iberian Christians resulted more in enslavement than slavery for the captured Muslims. By the end of the Middle Ages, the emerging power of the European economy was fed by an expanding peasant labor force. Although the legal structures originating in Roman law were still intact in Christian Europe, the institution of slavery was not a major force by the time the first Portuguese caravels sighted the Guinean coastline at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Slavery also existed in the African continent from the beginning of recorded times. As in medieval Christian Europe, it was also a relatively minor institution in the period before the opening up of the Atlantic slave trade. Slavery could be found as a domestic institution in most of the region's more complex societies, and a few exceptional states influenced by Islam may have developed more industrial forms of slave production. In these societies, moreover, the status of slaves was not as precisely defined as in regimes in which slaves played a more vital role in production. Children of free fathers and slave mothers would often become free members of the kin group; second-generation acculturated slaves would become less subject to sale and assumed far more rights and privileges.<sup>4</sup>

*Early Transatlantic Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). The basic relations between serfdom and slavery are examined in Marc Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages, Selected Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) and discussed in Pierre Dockès, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation* (London: Methuen, 1982). Recent discussions on medieval slavery and its decline are found in Pierre Bonnaissie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Susan M. Stuard, "Ancillary Evidence for the Decline of Medieval Slavery," *Past & Present* 149 (November 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Slavery in Africa has been the subject of wide interest and controversy in recent years. A good introduction to this debate can be found in Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972). The most recent and the best attempt at classification and historical analysis is Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in*

African slaves were also to be found outside the continent as well. With no all-embracing religious or political unity, the numerous states of Africa were free to buy and sell slaves or even to export them to non-African areas. Caravan routes across the Sahara predated the opening up of the African Atlantic coast, and slaves formed a part of Africa's export trade to the Mediterranean from pre-Roman to modern times. Given the widespread use of slaves within Africa, there was also an internal slave trade well before the opening of the West African-Atlantic routes.

Africans were being shipped outside the continent in steady numbers for at least some six centuries prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, with an estimated 3.5 to 10 million Africans being sent to Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. These forced African migrations contained more women and children than would the emigrants later participating in the Atlantic slave trade, and they also came from regions that would be only moderately affected by the Atlantic movements. The internal slave trade also was biased toward women. To supply these two slave markets, the whole complex of enslavement practices from full-scale warfare and raiding of enemies to judicial enslavement and taxation of dependent peoples had come into use and would also be the source of slaves for the Atlantic slave trade when this came into existence in the early fifteenth century. These pre-Atlantic slave trades were less intense and had less of an impact on local conditions than the Atlantic trade. Their annual volume was lower and was spread over more years than the Atlantic trade.<sup>5</sup>

The arrival of the Portuguese explorers on the sub-Saharan African coast in the early 1400s represents a major new development in the history

*Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For detailed case studies, see the essays in Jean Claude Meillassoux, *L'Esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975); Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977); James Watson, ed., *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); and finally Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> On the North African and East African trades, see Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); François Renault and Serge Daget, *Les traites négrières en Afrique* (Paris: Karthala, 1985); and the essays of Ralph A. Austen, "The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census," in Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); "The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea Coasts): A Tentative Census," *Slavery & Abolition*, IX (1988), and "The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade Out of Africa: A Tentative Census," *Slavery & Abolition*, XIII (1992).

of the slave trade from Africa in terms of its intensity, the sources of its slaves, and the usage made of these slaves in America. Initially, however, there was little to distinguish the Portuguese from the Muslim traders of North Africa. The Portuguese aimed at bypassing North African Saharan routes via a route from the sea. Their prime interest was gold, with slaves, pepper, ivory, and other products as secondary concerns. They purchased slaves as early as 1444, but sent them primarily to Europe to serve as domestic servants. Thus, the new sea trade started as an extension of the older overland trades. The Portuguese even carried out extensive slave trading along the African coast to supply the internal African slave market in exchange for gold, which they then exported to Europe. Their concentration on gold as opposed to slaves was based on the growing scarcity of precious metals in Europe. An expanding European economy was running an increasingly negative balance of trade with Asia, and the direct European access to the sub-Saharan gold fields helped pay for that trade.<sup>6</sup>

It was only with the introduction of sugar production to the eastern Atlantic islands and the opening up of the Western Hemisphere to European conquest at the end of the fifteenth century that a new and important use was found for these slaves. As slaves once again became a major factor in agricultural production within the European context, Portuguese interest in its African trade slowly shifted from a concern with gold and ivory to one primarily stressing slaves.

The first of the Crusades marked the revival of international markets for Christian Europeans and brought them actively into the slave trade. From the tenth to the thirteenth century, Genoese and Venetians expanded into Palestine, Syria, the Black Sea, and the Balkans, adding to their possessions in the eastern Mediterranean islands of Crete and Cyprus. These colonies created a new impetus to slavery. A market in Slavic peoples developed in this period, which gave rise to the use of the

<sup>6</sup> The standard analysis of Portuguese world trade in the first three centuries of exploration is Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial* (2nd ed. rev.; 4 vols.; Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1981–1983). The best single interpretation of the early Portuguese slave trade is found in Ivana Elbl, “Volume of the Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450–1521,” *Journal of African History*, XXXVIII (1997). Elbl (p. 75) estimates that “Europeans exported approximately 156,000 slaves from Atlantic Africa between 1450 and 1521.” In turn, Godinho estimated a total of 140,000 to 150,000 slaves were taken from Africa by 1505. Godinho, *Os descobrimentos*, IV, p. 161. These figures are higher than the current estimate for Europe found in the new Atlantic slave trade database. Also see Luis Felipe de Alencastro, *O trato dos viventes: Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul, séculos XVI e XVII* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000).

term *slave* to define this status. Slavs, of course, were not the only peoples to be enslaved. On the islands of the eastern Mediterranean, for example, Africans could be found in the early fourteenth century, along with Muslims from North Africa and Asia Minor and Christians from Greece, the Balkans, and northern Europe.

Sugar was introduced from Asia to Europe during the Islamic invasions, but it was the First Crusade at the end of the eleventh century that gave the Christians a chance to become sugar producers in their own right. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian estates in Palestine produced sugar with a mixed labor force made up of slaves, *villeins*, and free workers. After the fall of these lands to the Turks at the end of the thirteenth century, the center of sugar production moved to Cyprus. Here Italian merchants and local rulers used slave and free labor to produce sugar. Cyprus in turn was soon replaced by the Venetian colony of Crete and then by Sicily, which had been producing sugar for the European market since the late eleventh century. With the fall of Palestine and Syrian centers to the Turks, Sicilian production temporarily became preeminent. The Mediterranean coast of Islamic Spain in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries became another important production center for Northern and Western Europe. The westernmost advance of European sugar production reached the southern Portuguese province of the Algarve at the beginning of the fifteenth century. In not all of these cases was sugar produced by slaves, nor were they the exclusive labor force in any particular area. But the identification of slavery with sugar was well established long before the conquest of America. The techniques of sugar production and slave plantation agriculture that developed on the eastern Atlantic islands and later in the New World had their origins in the eastern Mediterranean in the early Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup>

As long as the Portuguese concentrated their efforts in the regions of Senegambia and the Gold Coast, they integrated themselves into the existing network of Muslim traders. The Muslims had brought these coasts into their own trade networks, and the Portuguese tapped into them through navigable Senegal and Gambia rivers. Even their establishment of São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) on the Gold Coast fit into these developments. But the settlement of the island depot and plantation center of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea and the beginning of trade relations with the

<sup>7</sup> The history of sugar production in Mediterranean Europe is discussed in J. H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from Its Origins to 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), chapter 3; and Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (2 vols.; London: Chapman and Hall, 1949–1950).

Kingdom of the Kongo after 1500 substantially changed the nature of the Atlantic slave trade.

The Kongolese were located by the Zaire River (also known as the Congo River) and were unconnected to the Muslim trade before the arrival of the Portuguese. The Portuguese sent priests and advisers to the court of the Kongolese king, and the Kongolese king's representatives were placed on São Tomé. These changes occurred just as the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean islands and the Portuguese settlement of the Brazilian subcontinent were beginning and thus opened the new American market for African slaves. The decimation of the native Arawak and Carib peoples in the Caribbean islands and of the Tupi-Guarani speakers along the Brazilian coast encouraged the early experimentation with African slave labor.

The opening up of the Iberian American colonies initially involved the reexport of acculturated and Christianized blacks from the Iberian Peninsula who were brought in the households of the conquistadores. But after the opening up of Brazil on the one hand and Congo and São Tomé regions to Portuguese trade, a direct Africa-to-America movement began to Spanish America as well. After 1500, the volume of this Atlantic trade slowly rose from an annual few hundred slaves in the first half of the century to more than a thousand per annum by the 1550s and to more than three thousand per annum by the 1580s.<sup>8</sup> Non-Christian and non-Romance-language speakers taken directly from Africa, whom the Portuguese called *boçais*, now made up the overwhelming majority of slaves coming to America.

Another major change came about in the 1560s as a result of internal African developments. Hostile African invasions of the Kingdom of the Kongo led to direct Portuguese military support for the regime and finally,

<sup>8</sup> This and all subsequent estimated numbers on the Atlantic slave trade come from the latest version of the project on the trade that is under the direction of David Eltis. This project began with David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: 1562–1867: A Database* (New York, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); was revised by David Eltis, “The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment,” *The William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 58, no. 1 (January 2001), which supplements the original estimates given by Philip Curtin in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969) with the new Cambridge data set, plus further additions. For the most recent revisions and additions to the old Cambridge slave voyage data set of 2000, see The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, Voyages (Emory University) available at <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>. The “estimates” are under a separate heading and are the numbers used throughout this volume. These can be found at <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces>. I have accessed the material as of August 2008 when this website was finally open to the public.



in 1576, to their establishment of a full-time settlement at the southern edge of the kingdom at the port of Luanda. With the development of Luanda came a decline in São Tomé as an entrepôt, for now slaves were shipped directly to America from the mainland coast and from a region that was to provide America with the most slaves of any area of Africa during the next three centuries. By 1600, the Atlantic slave trade was to pass the north and east African export trades in total volume, although it was not until after 1700 that slaves finally surpassed all other exports from Africa in value.<sup>9</sup>

Just as the beginnings of the Portuguese slave trade had complemented a traditional trading system, the first use of Atlantic slave-trade Africans by Europeans was in traditional activities. For the first half-century, the European slave ships that cruised the Atlantic shoreline of Africa carried their slaves to the Iberian Peninsula. The ports of Lisbon and Seville were the centers for a thriving trade in African slaves, and from these centers slaves were distributed rather widely through the western Mediterranean. Although Africans quickly became a significant group within the polyglot slave communities in the major cities of the region, they never became the dominant labor force in the local economies. Even in the southern coastal cities of Portugal, where they were most numerous, they never represented more than 15 percent of the population whereas in other Portuguese and Castilian port cities they usually numbered less than 10 percent. Africans were used no differently than the Moorish slaves who preceded and coexisted with them. African slaves and freedmen were to be found primarily in urban centers and worked mostly in domestic service. The city with the largest number of these African slaves was probably Lisbon, which by the 1550s already had some ten thousand slaves, which rose to some fifteen thousand by the 1630s. In other areas of the Iberian Peninsular, the impact of this first generation of Africans was also significant. About two-thirds of the slaves imported from 1489 to 1516 were African, and an average of about 250 Africans were imported annually.<sup>10</sup> By the sixteenth century, such central areas as Portugal and Andalusia already had large slave populations. By 1573, the whole of

<sup>9</sup> David Eltis, "The Relative Importance of Slaves and Commodities in the Atlantic Trade of Seventeenth-Century Africa," *The Journal of African History*, 35, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>10</sup> Vicenta Cortes Alonso, *La esclavitud en Valencia durante el reinado de los reyes católicos (1479–1516)* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento, 1964), pp. 57–60; and Alfonso Franco Silva, *La esclavitud en Sevilla y su tierra a fines de la edad media* (Sevilla: Diputación Provincial de Sevilla, 1979). For the latest survey of the different groups enslaved in the Iberian

Portugal was said to contain more than 40,000 slaves, a large number of whom were sub-Saharan Africans.<sup>11</sup> But in general, African slaves even in Mediterranean Europe were few in numbers and mostly to be found in urban households. Even the wealthiest European masters owned only a few slaves, and an owner who held fifteen African slaves in sixteenth-century Portugal was considered very unusual. Although slave owners were wealthy aristocrats, institutions, and professionals – many of whom were also major landowners – they infrequently used their slaves in agriculture. Slaves were sometimes to be found in rural occupations but never as a significant element in the local agricultural labor force because of their high costs and the availability of cheap peasant labor.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the important role these acculturated European-African slaves initially played in establishing the legal, social, and cultural norms in Europe and then again in America for the Africans who followed them, the Christian and Portuguese-speaking African slaves were not the basis for the new European slave labor system being established by the Portuguese in the Atlantic World. It was the Africans brought directly to the previously unpopulated eastern Atlantic islands beginning in the first half of the fifteenth century who were to define the new plantation model of Afro-American slave labor. The use by Europeans of African slaves in plantations evolved not in continental Europe with its acculturated slaves but in these Atlantic islands.

Just as Portugal was opening up the African coast to European penetration, its explorers and sailors were competing with the Spaniards in colonizing the eastern Atlantic islands. By the 1450s, the Portuguese were developing the unpopulated Azores, Madeira, the Cape Verde Islands, and São Tomé while the Spaniards were conquering the inhabited Canary Islands by the last decade of the century. Some of these islands proved ideal for sugar cultivation, so Italian merchants were not slow in introducing the latest in Mediterranean sugar-production techniques. After much experimentation, the most important sugar-producing islands turned out

Peninsular, see Alessandro Stella, *Historie d'esclaves dans la péninsule Ibérique* (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Frédéric Mauro, *Le Portugal et l'Atlantique au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1570–1670; étude économique* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1960), p. 147; Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale* I, p. 837.

<sup>12</sup> A. C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441–1555* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) provides the most complete study of Africans in Portugal, with chapter 3 covering their demography and chapter 4 their occupations. The Lisbon population estimates are given in *ibid.*, pp. 54–5. Also see the recent survey by Stella, *Historie d'esclaves dans la péninsule Ibérique*.