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## B The Slave Trade

### I

#### *Slavery in general, kinds of slaves, transmission of diseases by slaves to different parts of the world*

Slavery existed already in remote antiquity, the earliest slaves were prisoners of war. Snefru, the first pharaoh of the IVth dynasty (ca. 2580–2553 B.C.) brought back from Lower Nubia 70,000 prisoners of war who became slaves. A relief in the tomb of Haremheb of the XVIIIth dynasty, about 1346–1321 B.C., shows negroes driven into captivity (see THORWALD, 1962, p. 89). In the time of Ramses II (ca. 1304–1238 B.C.) leprosy was reintroduced into Egypt by negro slaves brought from the Sudan (teste SCOTT, 1943).

There were several other reasons why a person might become a slave. Many were born to captivity, others sold themselves or their children in times of famine, others were enslaved for not paying their debts or as punishment for some crime.

The slave trade developed very early.

Slave markets were established in many places in Europe, Asia and Africa. Slaves of many races were sold and were used for different purposes. In Africa slavery was an old widespread institution.

The rise of Islam greatly stimulated the slave trade (note 1). After the Moslem conquest of large parts of northern Africa, slaves were brought on the old caravan routes (note 2) from the Sudan, Abyssinia and by sea from the Zanzibar coast to northern Africa, Turkey, Arabia, Persia and India (COUPLAND, 1961).

During the Middle Ages slavery continued in Europe, especially in the southern parts and there, just as in Islamic countries, slaves represented an accepted part of society. The Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II (1194) 1202–1250 had at his semi-oriental court in Palermo numerous black slaves (note 3). Lisbon and Sevilla were among the main centers of the slave trade. Negro slaves were transported from North Africa to Portugal, Spain and Sicily.

In consequence of the Moslem conquest in Africa, Arabs became the principal slave dealers who carried African slaves over great

distances within Africa and across the sea (note 4). As long as they controlled the Indian Ocean (up to the first part of the sixteenth century), their ships transported African slaves to the East, especially to India (note 5). Some Arabic vessels sailed even before the rise of Islam to Malaya, Java and China, where there was a large Arab settlement at Canton. The introduction of African slaves into China, however, was comparatively small (note 6).

A new development of the African slave trade followed the discovery of the Western Hemisphere by Columbus; it will be discussed below.

The slave trade was responsible for the spread of diseases to different parts of the world (SCOTT, 1943). Within Africa slaves carried yaws, endemic syphilis and leprosy over the old caravan routes. The existence of the Guinea-worm in very distant regions such as the shores of the Red Sea and the Guinea coast is most likely due to the slave trade. Oriental sore, frequent on the mediterranean shores, was carried by slaves to the interior of Africa. The existence of *Schistosoma haematobium* infection in Gimvi near Bombay is probably due to a similar cause (HACKETT, 1963; KYNSEY, 1881; SPITTEL, 1923).

As the transmission of parasitic diseases from Africa to the New World will be discussed in the main part of this study, it may only be mentioned here that among important *non-parasitic* diseases smallpox was introduced into the American mainland in 1519–20 by a negro slave (note 7). It had been carried already earlier to some islands of the West Indies. It is certain that smallpox, measles and other epidemic diseases which were introduced into the New World during the conquest, when the Indians had no immunity and died in very great numbers, contributed considerably to the success of the Spaniards<sup>1</sup>.

### Notes

1. Neither the Koran nor the Bible asked for abolition of slavery, but whereas the Bible mentions slaves only in a general way – letters by Paulus to Titus and to Philemon – the Koran deals with slaves in a number of Suras (Sura II, IV, V, IX, XXIV, LVIII, IC). It enjoins the Moslem to treat the slaves with kindness and encourages manumission. A believer who has committed a serious

<sup>1</sup> People said about these diseases:

Sarampión toca la puerta,  
viruela dice: quién es?  
Y escarlatina contesta:  
aqui estamos las tres! (LASTRES, 1951, vol. II, p. 75.)

crime can atone for it by giving freedom to a slave (BLACHÈRE, 1957; ARBERRY, 1963; JUYNBOLL, 1910)<sup>2</sup>.

2. Among the old caravan routes leading to the north African coast, three main routes may be mentioned: In the West, one went from the Niger near Timbuktu to present-day Morocco (DAVIDSON, 1959); farther to the East, one led from Lake Chad via the oases of the Fezzan to Tunis, Tripoli and Libya. Between these two routes there was another one leading from the Niger bend to Algeria (HUDSON, 1964).

In the 14th and 15th centuries there existed an important slave trade from Timbuktu to Egypt and Asia Minor (HERRMANN, 1954, p. 421).

3. Frederick II used his negro slaves for very different purposes. Some young ones of the 'servitelli nigri' formed a band of musicians. They played, richly dressed, on silver trumpets during meal hours (KANTOROWICS, 1964, Hauptband pp. 287–288).

4. The conditions of Christian and negro slaves in eighteenth-century North Africa, especially Morocco, are described with a rich bibliography by N. R. BENNETT, 1960. See also A. TOURMAGNE, 1880, G. MACNUNN, 1938, and the ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM, vol. I, 1960, 'abd' (slave) pp. 33–34.

5. In Islamic countries there were slaves of many races, occasionally some of them as freedmen rose to a high rank in the army or became ministers of a ruler.

6. DUYVENDAK, 1949, gives some information on the Arab trade with China and slaves. He quotes (p. 22) from the Ling-wai-tai-ta: "K'un-lun Ts'eng-ch'i is in the south-western sea. – There is an island in the sea on which there are many savages. Their bodies are black as lacquer and they have frizzled hair. They are enticed by (offers of) food and then captured and sold as slaves to the Arabic countries, where they fetch a very high price."

7. The negro who brought smallpox<sup>3</sup> to the American mainland (Mexico) in 1519–20 was Francisco Eguia (BUSTAMANTE, 1958, p. 43), a grumete<sup>4</sup> in the fleet of Pánfilo de Narváez on his expedition against Cortés (HERRERA, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 10, cap. 6; BERNAL DIAZ DEL CASTILLO, Hist. verdadera, cap. XXIV). He suffered from smallpox and went on shore at San Juan de Ulua (Vera-cruz) and transmitted the disease to the Indians with disastrous

<sup>2</sup> The author wishes to thank Mr. Ch. von Oidtmann, Bonn, for the information.

<sup>3</sup> Different from the majority of authors HORACIO FIGUEROA MARROQUIN (1957, pp. 49–67) is of the opinion that the negro of Narváez introduced sarampión (measles) and not viruela (smallpox).

<sup>4</sup> A slave who had to work on ships.

consequences (see also FRANCISCO LÓPEZ DE GÓMARA, JUAN DE TORQUEMADA).

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## II

*The slave trade from Africa to America*

## 1. Development

The beginnings: Prince Henry 'the Navigator' (1394–1460) was the driving force for the various Portuguese enterprises to extend the sea routes southward on the West coast of Africa. Portuguese expansion started after the conquest of Ceuta in 1415 (for details see DUFFY, 1959, 1962). In 1483 Diogo Cão reached the mouth of the Congo (Zaire), and in 1497–99 Vasco da Gama crowned the various explorations by sailing up the East African coast to India and back.

In 1441 Antam Gonçalves exploring the western shore of Africa captured some Moors and carried them as slaves to Lisbon. He was ordered to return them but received instead 10 negroes and some gold dust<sup>1</sup>. *This started the Portuguese slave trade by sea from equatorial Africa to Europe.* Before the discovery of the New World these slaves were shipped chiefly to Lisbon and Spain.

One should keep in mind that for centuries before that time negro slaves were carried by Arab slave dealers from equatorial Africa on the old caravan routes to the mediterranean coast and from there were sent to Portugal, Spain and Sicily.

In order to protect their trade, the Portuguese built a number of forts 'castles' on the Gold coast of the Gulf of Guinea, the strongest was São Jorge da Mina (Elmina, 1482). Among other strongholds of Portuguese power were the island of São Tomé and Luanda in Angola. During the greater part of the sixteenth century Portugal had more or less a trade monopoly on the African West coast.

From 1580–1640 Spain and Portugal were under one sovereign. From the later sixteenth century on, the Portuguese power and trade on the African West coast gradually declined, due to the competition of other nations, especially the Dutch, French, and English.

The French built in 1626 the Fort St. Louis in Senegal and gradually a whole chain of fortified places was built by different

<sup>1</sup> In the 15th century, negro slaves worked already in the sugar plantations of Madeira (VERLINDEN, 1924, 1961).

In all probability Phoenicians already visited the Canary Islands. The Carthaginian admiral Hanno sailed about 460 B.C. on a voyage of exploration beyond Gibraltar and found Phoenician settlements on the west African coast.

nations on the Guinea coast. Some of these 'castles' changed hands several times (LAWRENCE, 1963)<sup>2</sup>.

In the middle of the seventeenth century the Dutch were firmly established on the Guinea coast.

From about 1623–1660 the Dutch also held parts of Brazil which, however, they could not keep. In the second half of the 17th century their influence on the Guinea coast was replaced by that of the English.

Several trading companies were formed by the English, Dutch, and French with national monopoly rights of trade with the Guinea coast. In 1618 James I gave a Charter of Monopoly to the 'Company of Adventurers of London trading into Parts of Africa'. The Dutch formed in 1621 the 'West India Company' combining trade to the West Indies with African trade (VAN ANDEL, 1931; DAVIDSON, 1961, p. 55). There existed besides others the 'English Royal African Company' chartered in 1672 and the French 'Compagnie du Sénégal' of which John (Jean) Barbot, who wrote interesting descriptions, was an agent<sup>3</sup>.

In the 17th century when Portugal lost its leading position on the Guinea coast, Spain lost its monopoly of the West Indies. The English took the Bermudas in 1609, Barbados in 1625. The French established themselves in Guadeloupe and in Martinique in 1635, while the Dutch took Curaçao in 1634.

By their acquisition of colonies in the West Indies the English became still more interested in the slave trade, as they needed manpower for their sugar plantations. By the treaty of Utrecht, 1713, England, which by now controlled the greater part of the Guinea coast, obtained in place of France from Spain an Asiento which allowed her to supply 4,800 slaves yearly to the Spanish possessions. Gradually more and more slaves were also shipped to North America.

Slave trade on the Bights of Benin<sup>4</sup> and Biafra, where foreigners were not allowed to build fortified places, was carried out in official cooperation between the captains of the slave ships or their middlemen and the local 'kings'. Whydah, Lagos, Benin, Bonny, Old and New Calabar played at different times a prominent rôle as slave markets.

<sup>2</sup> Much of the trade of the Guinea coast was for a considerable time carried on in cowrie shells (money cowrie: *Cypraea moneta*).

<sup>3</sup> He designated himself as 'agent-general of the Royal Company of Africa and Islands of America at Paris'. John Barbot, a Huguenot emigrant in English employ, had a brother James and a nephew likewise called James who also wrote interesting accounts of their voyages to Africa.

<sup>4</sup> The Portuguese Ruy de Siqueira was the first white man who in 1472 landed in the Bight of Benin.

The twenty negroes brought in 1619 by a Dutch warship from the Guinea coast to Jamestown, Virginia<sup>5</sup>, were regarded as the first negro slaves introduced into the English colonies of North America (for the slave trade to North America see E. DONNAN, 1930-35). Actually negro slaves arrived in North America nearly one hundred years earlier. They were introduced in 1526 by Lucas Vásquez de Ayllón, who attempted to found a colony in what later probably became Virginia (or Georgia).

*The twenty slaves which were sold in 1619 in Jamestown, Virginia, marked the beginning of the slave trade in North America.*

It was the last one to develop and began to flourish after the Royal African Company was chartered in 1672. The slaves were mostly imported into the southern colonies. They were partly carried directly from Africa, more from the West Indies.

About 1790 the several European countries engaged in the slave trade exported from Africa: The British 38,000, the French 20,000, the Portuguese 10,000, the Dutch 4,000, the Danes 2,000. Total 74,000 (quoted from Encycl. Britannica, 1964 edition 'slavery'; see also MANNIX & COWLEY, 1962, and POPE-HENNESSY, 1967).

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<sup>5</sup> "About the last of August came in a Dutch man-of-Warre that sold us 20 negars."

John Rolfe's report of the landing of the first negro slaves in the English colonies, 1619. (See letters of John Rolfe in Works of Captain JOHN SMITH, 1910.)

Slavery was introduced into New York in 1625.

## 2. The Spanish possessions and the slave trade

The first negro slaves who were brought to the New World accompanied the conquistadores. They came from Spain and were in part the descendants of the negro slaves carried for centuries from North Africa to southern Europe and since 1441 by the Portuguese from the Guinea coast to Lisbon and Spain before Columbus had discovered America.

In the early period of the slave trade, slaves came to the American mainland, the 'Tierra Firme', either from the West Indies or from Europe, especially from Sevilla (see AGUIRRE BELTRÁN, 1946, cap. I)<sup>1</sup>. The first slaves from Spain were sent in 1502. Only for a short period, slaves came also from Mauretania, the northwest coast of Africa and the Levante. The importation of these slaves was soon prohibited for religious motives in the newly occupied territories.

More and more requests for negro slaves were received in Spain, as manpower was needed and the Indians proved unable to do the hard work. HERRERA wrote that one negro worked as much as four Indians (note 1).

The situation changed when BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS (1474–1566), the 'Apostle of the Indies', realized that within a comparatively short time the Indians would die out, whereas the negro slaves, who so far had been brought already to Espaniola, worked hard and seemed to be healthy. Las Casas had accompanied Ovando to the West Indies and had seen how the Indians were treated under his administration. He returned to Europe and begged Charles V to import more negroes as an act of mercy towards the Indians. Charles granted the request and in 1518 gave one of his favorites, Laurent de Gouvenot, the privilege of 4,000 'licencias' (licences) to import 4,000 negro slaves annually during ten years. Gouvenot sold the 4,000 licencias to three merchants from Genoa residing in Sevilla for 25,000 ducats.

*The selling of the 4,000 licencias to Genoese merchants, who in cooperation with the Portuguese shipped the stipulated number of negroes to the Spanish West Indies, represents the beginning of the systematic slave trade from Africa to the New World.*

*Evolution of the 'trata negrera':* In 1513 the Spanish Government issued regulations by which a 'licencia' had to be obtained before the introduction of a negro slave into the Western Hemisphere. At the beginning the price of a licencia was two ducats.

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<sup>1</sup> During the early period negroes took part in the Spanish explorations (BROWNING, 1930; WRIGHT, 1902).

In general the licencias carried no monopoly rights, they were controlled by the Casa de Contratación and the Universidad de Mercaderes in Sevilla.

From 1532–1589 no licencias with monopoly rights were issued (teste MELLAFE, 1964, p. 32).

In the last quarter of the 16th century the Spanish Government changed the situation in a sense that the very many licencias to private persons and the licencias issued as a concesión graciosa were greatly restricted with the intention to abolish them gradually. Instead of licencias 'asientos' with monopoly rights were issued, first to the Portuguese as they were at that time in a position to supply large numbers of slaves and furthermore were united from 1580–1640 with Spain under one monarch.

When Portuguese power declined, the French and later the English obtained asientos.

The Dutch tried to replace the Portuguese in the slave trade and also relied on contraband shipping from their island of Curaçao. They were in their turn driven from the Guinea coast by the English. Then followed a period during which great international trading companies obtained asientos. One of the last ones was the English South Sea Company (flourished about 1719). At about 1789–1793 the slave trade became free (AGUIRRE BELTRÁN, 1944; MELLAFE, 1964, p. 49); see also MUÑOZ, 1793, and SACO, 1938).

It should be kept in mind that from the beginning up to the abolition of the slave trade a very important clandestine trade existed.

The Spanish ports of entry in the Western Hemisphere were gradually increasing in number. There was also in addition an extensive trade between the islands of the West Indies and from them to the mainland.

The possessions on the Pacific coast were supplied with negroes chiefly by the slave trade through Panama. Panama received negroes who had disembarked in Cartagena de Indias and Portobello. They were reshipped by boats which went from Panama southwards to Guayaquil, Callao and Valparaiso. In the course of time slaves were also carried from Africa to Buenos Aires and forwarded by land to the interior of the continent and to the West coast.

Manila gradually became a center for the trade with slaves from various Asiatic countries to the American West coast (note 2).

It was inevitable that with the constant arrival of ships, which brought large numbers of negro slaves from Africa, infectious diseases were introduced. Yaws and dysentery are mentioned in early

reports as very frequent on slave ships; the most dreaded diseases, however, were smallpox, measles and yellow fever. In consequence, the Spanish authorities in various ports of their vast dominions introduced quarantine regulations.

The first quarantine measures were put into effect in Espaniola in 1519–20 following the outbreak of smallpox in Mexico. An alcalde and a notary public had to visit all arriving vessels. The Viceroy of Nueva España (Mexico), Martin de Enríquez, ordered on the 22nd of November 1571 that a physician of the Island San Juan de Ulua (Veracruz) had to examine every slave upon arrival of a slave ship.

In Peru in 1622 the Marqués de Guadalcázar ordered that all newly arrived negro slaves had to be kept in quarantine, two always chained together until they were sold (LASTRES, 1951, vol. II, p. 74). In March 1630 the Viceroy Luis Gerónimo de Cabrera y Bobadilla, fourth Count of Chinchón, ordered that all negroes bozales (negroes shipped directly from Africa) had to stay before entering Lima at a league's distance outside the city and that three physicians had to examine them for the existence of smallpox and measles which the negroes might introduce into the city.

In Martinique quarantine measures were prescribed in 1686 to prevent the introduction of diseases by slave ships. These quarantine measures were reinforced by a royal decree in 1708.

In 1621 the authorities in Buenos Aires ordered that newly arrived negroes should be lodged in the furthest houses of the town or in tents (teste MOLL, 1944).

Physicians were sent from Caracas to La Guaira to inspect slave ships from Trinidad and Margarita.

In São Paulo quarantine inspection of newly arrived negroes was in force since 1733.

In Haiti in 1766 all slave ships were ordered to Port Morel to prevent the importation of Yellow fever from the Guinea coast.

In Surinam, after a smallpox epidemic had occurred in 1763 and 1764, supposedly introduced by imported negro slaves, the Government ordered that all newly arrived slaves had to be carefully examined by a government physician (VAN ANDEL, 1931).

The slaves, before embarking in an African port, were examined by the captain or the physician of the slave ship and the slave dealer regarding their physical condition. As swollen neckglands were well known to the slave dealers as a sign of sleeping sickness, slaves with enlarged neckglands were rejected (see VAN ANDEL, 1931).

When the system of *licencias* was replaced by that of *asientos*, an official physical examination, the 'palmo', of each slave was

required to ascertain that a slave could be officially regarded as a 'pieza de Indias' for which the asientos were issued. A 'pieza de Indias' had to be a person of a certain age (15–36 years), about 1.70 m high and in good health. When the slave had successfully passed the palmeo, he was subjected to the 'carimba', the making of a small mark with a letter of the respective asiento by burning the skin with a red-hot iron.

At the place of destination a further rather careful examination in the slave market by a slave dealer and the prospective buyer was carried out before the sale<sup>2</sup>. The documents often mention specifically that the slave who was sold had not the habit of eating earth. Although the cause of this habit (hook-worm-infection) was not known, experience had shown that slaves who were eating earth became anaemic, hydropic and weak and ultimately died, not from earth-eating but from their hookworm-infection (see besides those mentioned in the text, the following authors: VAN ANDEL, 1931; BARRERA Y DOMINGO, 1798; HUBER, 1966; ORTIZ, 1916; SACO, 1938; SCHELLE, 1906; VERLINDEN, 1958).

### Notes

1. HERRERA states: "Porque como iban faltando los indios, y se conocía que un negro trabajaba más que cuatro, por lo cual había gran demanda de ellos."

HERRERA. Decada II, libr. II, cap. 8.

(Quoted from MELLAFE, 1959, p. 15).

2. The 'Manila Galleons' provided a communication between Manila and Acapulco for 250 years, from 1565–1815. Notwithstanding numerous restrictions by the Spanish Crown, the Manila Galleons carried on a considerable transshipment of Asiatic slaves from Manila to Mexico (see W. L. SCHURZ, 1939, *The Manila Galleon*).

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<sup>2</sup> Before the sale, the slaves were often treated by the slave dealers in various ways, in order to make them appear younger and free from diseases (see VAN ANDEL, 1931).

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### 3. Origin of African slaves carried to the New World

The slaves carried to the Western Hemisphere belonged to many different tribes, the majority came from the coastal areas of West Africa. An exact determination of their origin is difficult, as slaves were often called after their port of embarkation and as furthermore the names of some tribes were changed in the slave trade<sup>1</sup>. In addition many documents which could have proved the origin of slaves were lost or, as in the case of Brazil, were intentionally burned (in 1890) to remove all traces of the stigma of the slave trade.

Following AGUIRRE BELTRÁN, 1945, 1946; HERSKOVITS, 1958; MANNIX & COWLEY, 1962; RAMOS, 1946, a few tribes and the

<sup>1</sup> B. DAVIDSON, 1961, p. 103, gives some examples: The Nupe who were sold by the Yoruba in western Nigeria were delivered as Tapas to the markets of the New World. If Yoruba people themselves were enslaved by the Fon of Dahomey, they were known as Nagos. The Susu were registered in the Mexican records as Xoxo. Tribal names which were not changed are the Kissi and Senufo.

regions where they lived are briefly mentioned: Senegambia furnished the Fulah or Fulani (Peuhls), the Wolof, the Serer in the north and the Felup south of the Gambia.

The Fulah had a comparatively light complexion, they were strict Moslems and the sons of many families of the higher class could read and write Arabic. The Wolof were very black, powerfully built with long slender legs. The Mandingo lived in wide parts of the interior of Senegambia and on the coast of Upper Guinea; they were farmers and traders.

From the territories which became later Portuguese and French Guinea came the Baga and Susu; Sierra Leone furnished the Chamba.

The inhabitants of the Gold Coast were in the slave trade called Coromantees after the port of Cormantine. They may have belonged to different tribes but were in their majority Fanti and Ashanti; the latter lived at some distance from the coast.

From Dahomey came the Ewe, from the Bight of Benin the Yoruba, from the Bight of Biafra the Ibo<sup>2</sup>, Ibibio and Efik. The territories further south, the Congo and Angola, furnished Bantu with many tribes; Caffirs<sup>3</sup> came from Mozambique.

DAPPER in the 17th century had already stated that slaves of Mozambique were sold in the Congo. There are indications that slaves were sometimes brought from the African East coast across the continent to the West coast. This, however, happened not often and occurred especially in the nineteenth century during the Arab slave trade from Zanzibar (DAVIDSON, 1961, pp. 105-106).

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<sup>2</sup> The Ibo had the reputation of being inclined to suicide; they believed that after death they would return to their homeland.

<sup>3</sup> Slaves carried from the Mozambique coast were called Kaffrarians after the Arabic word *kāfir*, meaning 'pagan' (teste DAVIDSON, 1961, p. 104).

#### 4. Number of slaves carried from Africa and loss of lives

The inhuman treatment, the suffering and the death of very many slaves who died on the 'path', the march from the interior to the coast have been described by a number of authors, some of whom like Mungo Park had personally travelled with a slave coffle (PARK, 1799, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, 2nd edit., London). The subsequent stay in the barracoons near the coast and waiting for sailing caused many more deaths on account of dysentery and other diseases. On the ships the overcrowding was incredible. Only some larger slave ships carried a physician whose work was hampered by the general conditions on board (see M. A. VAN ANDEL, 1931; G. J. DOW, 1927; D. H. GALLANDAT, 1769; D. P. MANNIX & M. COWLEY, 1962). MELLAFE (1959, p. 177) lists the medicines carried on a slave ship between Peru and Panama; the supply was apparently rather good and probably much better than on many other slave ships.

David Livingstone estimated that at least 10 lives were lost for each slave who reached the coast. One has to add the numbers of slaves sent from the North African ports and those used for the internal African markets. The 1964 edition of the ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA and numerous publications by different authors state that on the average 12½ per cent of the slaves died during the 'middle passage'.

The loss of 12½ per cent during the middle passage represents an average figure. In case of epidemic diseases such as smallpox and dysentery the loss might be 50 or 80 per cent, and when the slave trade was officially prohibited, the captain of a slave ship which was chased by a British cruiser might order all slaves to be thrown into the sea to prevent seizure of his ship, if slaves would be found on board. There are also cases on record that drinking water gave out and the captain ordered a number of slaves to be thrown overboard to have sufficient water left for the crew and the remaining slaves (for details see MANNIX and COWLEY, 1962, and for the 18th century slavery 'MINUTES OF THE EVIDENCE', 1791).

According to the estimate of many modern authors between 12–15 million slaves were carried from Africa during the three and half centuries of the slave trade <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Some writers regard this estimate as too conservative.

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### 5. Circumstances which favoured the African slave trade to America

In the foregoing we have shown that slavery and slave trade existed since antiquity. There can be no doubt that Egypt in pharaonic times, Carthage, imperial Rome, Persia, India, the different Islamic countries, Europe of the Middle Ages and many parts of Africa carried on a flourishing slave trade. The number of slaves taken during these long periods must have been extremely high, especially when in some wars large parts of the defeated armies were sent into slavery (note). Even considering this, the observer is impressed by the number of Africans who after the discovery of the New World were carried during the comparatively short period of about 350 years to the West Indies and the American continent.

DAVIDSON, 1961, has rightly pointed out that the period of about 350 years during which Europeans carried out the slave trade from Africa and treated negroes as low grade human beings, was preceded, at least in some parts of equatorial Africa, by a brief period in which Europeans and Africans regarded and treated each other with mutual respect as equals. He gives as example the Congo and the relations of King Manuel of Portugal and the Mani-Congo Nzinga Mbemba, who after baptism was known as Dom Affonso. In their correspondence these rulers addressed each other as 'Royal Brother'<sup>1</sup>. This feeling of equality soon disappeared, the power of the Congo rulers declined, and after the Portuguese had become the masters of the country, the slave trade in its usual way developed.

<sup>1</sup> There are some twenty-two letters by Dom Affonso to King Manuel for the years 1512-1540 preserved in the Archives of Portugal (DAVIDSON, 1961, p. 122).

There were several circumstances which favoured the African slave trade:

Regarding the African background, a circumstance of great importance was the successive decline and the breaking up of the once powerful negro-empires, Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Bambara followed by the establishment of a number of smaller states which were at constant war with each other. This state of affairs made an effective resistance against foreign aggression impossible and, on the other hand, provided an opportunity of purchasing prisoners of the tribal wars as slaves.

For foreigners one of the most important reasons of the slave trade was the need of manpower in the newly conquered territories of the West Indies and the American mainland with their gold- and silver-mines and their sugar-, tobacco-, coffee- and later cotton-plantations.

A further very important reason which stimulated the slave trade and kept it alive for years in numerous countries after it had been officially abolished, was the very great financial profit gained by those who backed the trade. The profit was so great that even very highly placed persons participated. Examples are Queen Elizabeth I and King Charles II of England (MANNIX & COWLEY).

A circumstance which greatly intensified the slave trade was the introduction of fire-arms by foreigners which they exchanged for slaves. This introduction had disastrous results. The African tribes and nations soon realized that they needed fire-arms for protection against slave raids and on the other hand were able to attack their neighbours and obtain prisoners whom they could sell as slaves for arms and spirits.

#### *Note*

After the victory of Lucius Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus in 168 B.C. 150,000 captives were sold.

Caesar sold on a single occasion in Gaul 63,000 captives (quoted from Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1964 edit., p. 775 'slavery').

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## 6. Revolts of negro slaves

There have been numerous slave uprisings in different parts of the world since antiquity. Among revolts of negro slaves the following may be mentioned:

In Iraq in A.D. 850, the negro slaves rose in revolt led by a negro called 'Lord of the Blacks'. In 869 a rebel Persian adventurer caused thousands of black slaves to revolt and in 871 he captured and sacked Basra (MASUDI, 1897, pp. 471-472).

In Bengal (India) still worse atrocities were committed in the 15th century by negro slaves (for details see COUPLAND, 1961, pp. 32-33).

The negro slaves shipped to the New World showed from the beginning a strong determination to regain their liberty. Already in the first years of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, many who had escaped, lived with the Zapotecas. On the islands of the West Indies there were slave revolts since the early days of the occupation. Probably the first large one was the revolt in Espaniola in 1522, followed by an uprising in 1546. The city of Mexico likewise had slave uprisings, one occurred as early as 1537. Between 1555-1556 there was a great revolt in Panama. In San Pedro, Honduras, a revolt occurred in 1548 (MELLAFE, 1964; WIENER, 1920). For additional information about slave insurrections, see SACO, 1938; HERSKOVITS, 1958; MELLAFE, 1964, p. 82; DAVIDSON, 1961, p. 47; and regarding Brazil, CARNEIRO, 1946.

The Spanish Government realized the great danger of these revolts and issued 'ordenanzas para los negros huidos'. They changed regarding punishment in the course of time, but were always of extreme severity (MELLAFE, 1959, 1964).

In order to capture fugitive slaves the Spaniards used especially trained dogs. With their help they were often successful. Nevertheless, quite a number of slaves reached the forests in the mountains, where they lived with local Indians or in negro communities. They were the 'cimarrones' of the Spanish colonies who, whenever possible, helped other negro slaves to escape.

When the English took Jamaica in 1655, many former slaves of the Spaniards escaped to the hills. They were known as 'Maroons'.

In Haiti (Espaniola) there were slave uprisings in 1679, 1691 and 1704 before the outbreak of the great, extremely cruel revolt toward the end of the eighteenth century after the French Government in Paris on 16 Pluviose II (4th February, 1794) had proclaimed the abolition of slavery.

In Surinam, Dutch Guiana, numerous revolts broke out during

the first part and the middle of the eighteenth century. The escaped slaves, called 'bush negroes' or 'Djukas' have remained independent until to-day.

Brazil had many revolts. Slaves revolted in Bahia at intervals from 1807 to 1830 and caused a very great insurrection in 1835.

For slave revolts in North America see APTHEKER, 1943.

The fact that in some countries negro communities formed by escaped slaves succeeded in keeping their independence and existed without contact, separated from the white population, is of considerable medical and cultural interest; as in these communities there occurred or even still occur diseases which the negroes had brought from Africa and which they had transmitted to the Indians with whom they came in contact.

The often horrible, inhuman treatment of the slaves by their masters obviously stimulated the revolts. It can be explained but not excused by the constant fear from the part of the foreign population which was in many places numerically much inferior to the slaves and for the sake of security felt that they had to keep the negro slaves in permanent terror (note). For examples of the atrocities committed by the slave-owners, see MANNIX & COWLEY, 1962, and JAMES POPE-HENNESSY, 1967.

The argument which was occasionally advanced that slavery had always existed among Africans and that therefore the enslavement of negroes by the Spaniards and Portuguese represented merely the continuation of an old custom, is not justified.

Slavery as practised among African tribes was very different from slavery as practised by the Spaniards in the Western Hemisphere. In many African tribes as in Islamic countries, slaves were regarded as a part of society, many were also born as slaves and therefore slaves, as far as they were not prisoners of war, were in general not treated too badly<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, even the latter ones, although taken from their homes, remained in Africa in a familiar environment (see also RODNEY, 1966). On the other hand, slaves carried to the Spanish possessions in America and to Brazil were completely uprooted and had to work excessively, often under most degrading unhygienic living conditions.

#### *Note*

In Barbados there were in 1684 46,000 negro slaves and only 20,000 whites (MANNIX & COWLEY, 1962, p. 51). In 1798 much

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<sup>1</sup> One has, however, to keep in mind that in numerous African territories slaves often became victims of religious ideas, requiring human sacrifices or were killed when a powerful chief died whom they were supposed to accompany and to serve in another world.

more than half of the Brazilian population were negroes (RAMOS, 1946).

The vast majority of the population in Haiti were negroes (RAMOS, 1946).

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### 7. Abolition of the slave trade

“...and it will still continue true, that never can so much misery be found condensed into so small a space as in a slave ship during the middle passage.”  
Wilberforce, Letter, 1807<sup>1</sup>.

The rôle of slavery during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Western Hemisphere showed dissimilarities in different countries. In some of them, for example Mexico, the ever-increasing mulatto and mestizo population, being free labourers but poor and willing to work at a very low pay, replaced the slaves.

AGUIRRE BELTRÁN (1944) states that during the entire eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth century until Mexico obtained independence, not more than 20,000 slaves entered New Spain.

The official abolition of the slave trade in Mexico took place on December 19, 1817, but in reality it had been already suspended for years. Toward the end of Spanish rule there existed according

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (p. 122). London, 1840.

to Baron Alexander von Humboldt (teste AGUIRRE BELTRÁN) in Mexico only 10,000 slaves, 6,000 of which were negroes and 4,000 mulattoes. These were the remnants of the slaves who had been introduced into the country during about 300 years. By unions with Whites and Indians they had been absorbed and contributed to form the new Mexican nation (AGUIRRE BELTRÁN, 1944).

Not only in Mexico but in various South American countries slave labour was gradually replaced to a large extent by the work of a free, very poorly paid mestizo and mulatto population.

In Brazil already in the first period of the slave trade, the famous Jesuit Manuel da Nóbrega (1517–1570) had the courage of speaking strongly against slavery and the slave trade. His efforts, however, were unsuccessful (RAMOS, 1946).

Conditions were different in the southern states of North America where such a large mulatto population did not exist. There the number of cotton plantations increased and in order to get manpower, slaves were needed (note).

When Spanish possessions in the Western Hemisphere obtained their independence, nearly all of them officially proclaimed the abolition of slavery and forbade the slave trade. Nevertheless, it continued often for years in a clandestine way. In England slave trade was made illegal by Act of Parliament in 1807, in the English colonies it became illegal in 1833. English public opinion was widely aroused by the reports of physicians, travellers and explorers who had penetrated into parts of the interior of Africa and described the way how slaves were obtained and the cruelties connected with the slave trade.

Already in the second half of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century many people in England, and also in America, criticized the slave trade and pointed out the evils of slavery; among them was THOS. M. WINTERBOTTOM. Two outstanding figures of the abolitionists in England were THOMAS CLARKSON and William Wilberforce, 1759–1833 (for details see DAVIDSON, 1961; MANNIX and COWLEY, 1962). The 'Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade' was founded in 1787 and after years of bitter struggle the abolitionists succeeded.

In France 'LA SOCIÉTÉ DES AMIS DES NOIRS' addressed the National Assembly in 1790 to have slavery abolished. In the last quarter of the 19th century when the slave trade, although officially long abolished, still existed in many places, the cardinal Charles Lavigérie (1825–1892) organized antislavery societies to protect the natives of Central Africa; the creation of the 'White Fathers' is also due to him.

In North America, Harriet Beecher Stowe's well-known novel

Uncle Tom's Cabin, first published in 1851, highly praised and bitterly criticized, helped abolition by drawing attention to the living conditions of the slaves in the southern American States.

England, which before had been a most active and important representative of the slave trade, became in the nineteenth century the champion in the fight for suppression of the trade.

Partly by substantial bribes, partly by diplomatic pressure and also by her then great naval power England gradually, but with great difficulty, succeeded. In 1849 a British squadron destroyed every slave ship which it found on the Brazilian coast. In this way the slave trade to Brazil was essentially destroyed, although it had in later years a small temporary revival.

An effective English method to curb the slave trade was the search of non-English suspected ships for slaves. This, however, could not be done without special permission of the respective government, which was not always easy to obtain.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the slave trade shifted more and more to the African east coast, especially to Zanzibar and Mozambique, as the British cruisers which were used against the slave ships operated for a number of years only on the African west coast. At about 1840 Zanzibar had become the world's greatest slave market; the population, which in 1807 had been about 5,000, rose to 60,000 in 1856. From Mozambique slaves were carried across the continent and were smuggled to Brazil and the Spanish possessions in South America, especially Cuba. The majority of the slaves shipped from Zanzibar were carried to the Persian gulf. American ships sailing under Portuguese or South American flags and Arabian dhows played an important rôle in the slave trade from the African east coast.

The Zanzibar slave trade was suppressed in several steps, and in about 1873 the trade came to an end.

The danger for the slaves on ships was greatest when the trade was officially prohibited, as especially the Arabs were very ruthless and killed them without mercy if there was any risk that the dhow with slaves be caught by a British cruiser.

A considerable difficulty arose from the question about what to do with the liberated slaves. England created several depots of liberated slaves, some were in Sierra Leone, the Cape Colony, the Seychelles and St. Helena.

The fight for the abolition of the slave trade was very long and complicated, especially as some South American countries which at the time of their liberation had officially condemned the slave trade were for various reasons (financial gains and need of manpower) not so eager to put the law into effect, so that in some

countries the slave trade somehow continued for many years up to the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The United States abolished slavery and the slave trade in 1865. Spain was reluctant in prohibiting the trade, even after the Spanish Cortes had made a law of suppression in 1871. At last in 1880 the Spanish slave trade came to an end. Cuba abolished the trade in 1880, Brazil in 1888.

### *Note*

In the late period of the slave trade, when Canada had only few slaves left, as by law of 1793 all children of slaves became free at the age of 25 years, many slaves of the American States fled to Canada and helped other slaves to escape to the country where they were free.

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