



## Introduction lesson

### Lesson 4.2: The Middle Passage

#### **Middle Passage**

The Middle Passage is the voyage from Africa to America. This was the most infamous part of the triangle voyage. Sailing for weeks on end without land in sight must have been horrendous: The Unity was only 22.50 meters long and had approximately 350 people on board. When The Unity departed from the West African coast, the ship was full: there were 319 enslaved Africans, 33 crewmembers, 42 barrels of drinking water, unsold cargo, provisions, fire wood, gold, nearly 4000 'Middelburg' pounds of ivory.

#### **Prisoners**

Prior to The Unity's departure from Africa most Africans had already been held captive on board for months. The last African was brought on board the week prior to departure, while the first was purchased and brought on board on December 9, 1761. He had already been held captive on board for 151 days before The Unity finally departed. Seven Africans died during their stay along the coast of Africa, 6 men and one girl. The remaining 319 men, women, boys, girls and 7 small children saw the African coast for the last time on May 8, 1762.

#### **Transport and care**

The men and boys were transported separately from the women and girls. The males were locked in on the 'tween deck in the fore body in the evening and at night. During the day they were allowed to go outside, on the waist deck. The females were locked on the quarterdeck in the stern in the evenings and at night. During the day they were allowed to go to 'the tent', a wooden hut built for them on the aft deck. The slaves were given a meal twice a day. If they were sick, the surgeon took care of them and they would receive medicine. The slave quarters were cleaned about once every two weeks and smoked with juniper berries and incense to mask the odor. In between the quarters were sprinkled with lemon juice. Notwithstanding this, life aboard for the African prisoners must have been a hell: closely packed, hardly any room to move, little food, illness, death, fear and insecurity about their future.

#### **Life and death**

The journey across the Atlantic lasted approximately two months. From the top of the mast a sailor first spotted land on June 25, 1762: the coast of the America's was reached. It was a safe voyage for the vessel, but not for the people aboard. During the passage 13 men, 4 women and 3 girls passed away. One of the women had just given birth to a baby. The bodies of the Africans were most likely tossed overboard unceremoniously. The two crewmembers who died during the passage, were given a short ceremony and a seaman's grave.

#### **More information**

De oversteek: <http://eenigheid.slavenhandelmcc.nl/trajecten-van-de-reis-en/oversteek-en/?lang=en>

Slaven aan boord: <http://eenigheid.slavenhandelmcc.nl/trajecten-van-de-reis-en/oversteek-en/oversteek-slaven/?lang=en>

Bemanning aan boord: <http://eenigheid.slavenhandelmcc.nl/trajecten-van-de-reis-en/oversteek-en/bemanning-oversteek/?lang=en>

Op de Atlantische Oceaan: <http://eenigheid.slavenhandelmcc.nl/trajecten-van-de-reis-en/oversteek-en/reilen-en-zeilen/?lang=en>