

Slave Acquisition and its Appliance in the Philadelphia's 6th Voyage.

A comparative analysis between the Philadelphia's sixth voyage and general theories in slave acquisition as formulated by Hogerzeil and Richardson.

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Introduction

Slave trade is still a very widely discussed topic in the community, after more than 200 years after abolishment. Feelings can still, understandably get very heated in debates on slave trade. It is however noteworthy how many misunderstandings exist around slave trade. Slaves would be traded for simple necklaces, conditions aboard a slave ship would be abysmal and slaves would be regarded as animals.¹ Though the last 2 misconceptions can be debated to be true on some occasions, they are surely not universal (this is in no way intended to be a defence of the events that occurred during the slave trading period). These misconceptions are generally accepted and adopted, however one cannot speak of a generally accepted view on the acquisition of slaves in West-Africa. This paper will endeavour to research the process of slave acquisition/purchasing. The topic of slave acquisition can be regarded as quite important, since it is capable of shedding a new light on common misconceptions of slave trade, and therewith change the view one might have on slave trade. The paper will be structured as follows: firstly, an attempt will be made to find or define a general theory on slave acquisition through research done in several peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Secondly, a short description of the 6th journey of the Philadelphia will be given, a transatlantic slave trade ship sailing under the flag of the Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie². After this the defined general theory will be compared to the events occurring in the 6th journey of the Philadelphia. In this comparison one can establish whether there are differences or similarities between general theories and actual

¹ The means of purchasing will be discussed in relation to general theories of slave purchasing and the actual MCC voyage. The conditions on board and the regarding of slaves as animals will not be further expanded on. In order to provide a short explanation on this: sources indicate that whilst conditions on slave ships can be seen as poor, they were not as poor as many think. For the slave traders it was vital to transport the slaves to the other side of the Atlantic alive, and poor conditions would not help with this. Regarding the slaves as animals would not either. Although when mass slave trading occurred the view of slaves slowly changed into that of a commodity, there were many religious institutions affirming the humanity of slaves, and thus endeavouring to enhance the conditions on board of a slaveship.

² Hereafter referred to as the MCC

practice, thus either refuting or confirming the theories defined by scholars earlier. A conclusion will be drawn following on this comparison.

General Theories in Slave Purchasing

As mentioned earlier, slave trade is a widely discussed subject in society, and therefore, a vast number of scholarly sources can be found on the subject. However, most sources focus on the processes and social implications of slave trade in the West-indies (e.g. Sheridan 1958, Getz 2003). Sources that would focus on West-Africa mostly approach slave trade from an anthropological angle, looking at the implications of slave trade on the African culture (e.g. Lovejoy and Richardson 1995, Fage 1969). Socio-geographical works are also prevalent, with their focus on the demographical effects on the African population (Richardson 1989). It was difficult to find sources that would focus specifically on the strategies and mechanisms that were employed by the slave traders in order to provide and successfully buy slaves in West-Africa. This can be amounted to the lack of track-keeping by primary sources on their slave acquisitions.³ The article by Hogerzeil and Richardson is unique in its approach of slave purchasing, and although it is not an exclusively historical article, its quantitative approach may provide helpful in establishing what slave traders did.

Hogerzeil and Richardson: Slave Purchasing Strategies and Patterns in Slave Acquisition

The article mentioned is a research conducted by Hogerzeil and Richardson published in 2007⁴ in the Journal of Economic History. The research was conducted focusing on slave mortality rates. It is applicable to this research since it partly focuses on slave purchasing strategies. It is especially usable due to the fact that the research is based on MCC records, which directly relates to the analysis of the journey of the MCC frigate Philadelphia that will be the

³ Hogerzeil and Richardson argue that the MCC can be regarded as unique in its tracking of slave acquisition.

⁴ Hogerzeil and Richardson 2007, 160--190

focus of this essay. Hogerzeil and Richardson analyse the daily records of 39 different slave journeys. Of those 39 ships 38 successfully completed their journey (one was deemed unseaworthy and was disbanded). In addition they look at the slave purchase transcripts, which is a method of administrating unique to the MCC. The slave purchase transcripts keep accurate day to day track of the slave purchases captains made. The transcripts are detailed as they keep track of the sex and age of the slaves acquired. Hogerzeil and Richardson are focused on the periods the ships spent in selling and buying slaves in West-Africa and in America. They defined the period an MCC ship takes to buy slaves in West-Africa (referred to as loading phase) to last on average 223 days, approximately 2/3rd of a year. During this period the MCC ships would buy on average 253 slaves per journey.

Hogerzeil and Richardson argue that the loading phase for MCC ships was significantly longer than those of other slave carriers sailing under different flags. They base this argument on the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, a corpus of almost all different slave voyages undertaken from West Africa to America⁵, which shows that the average time of other slave ships spent in West-Africa was 138 days, about 80 days shorter than the MCC ships. The duration of the slave acquisition phase can be attributed to the variety of locations the MCC captains had to sail to in order to buy slaves. This will be touched upon later. Slave traders from large slave trading nations such as Great-Britain or France bought slaves in big parties at local merchants with which they had a lot of contact.⁶ Understandably, this would take up a lot less time than sailing along the coast of Africa.

Hogerzeil and Richardson note the general trend in the geographical origins of the slaves MCC ships bought. Almost all slave ships researched (38 out of 39) started their journey along

⁵ Transatlantic Slave Trade Database

⁶ Sheridan 1958, 249--263

the coast of West-Africa in upper Guinea. Upper Guinea was defined broadly by Hogerzeil and Richardson and covers the area from Senegambia until the Windward Coast (located west of the Gold Coast). The favourite destination in this area was the Windward coast, where the MCC purchased 68% of their slaves. Another popular destination was the Gold Coast, where 22,5% percent of all slaves was purchased. In this respect the MCC was different from other slave carriers, as most others would buy full ships of slaves at the Windward coast or markets further south, like the English or the French, where the MCC still had to buy slaves *troque au vol*.⁷ This can be an explanation for the aforementioned extended duration of their stay compared to other carriers, according to Hogerzeil and Richardson. The main place of Dutch slave traders to purchase slaves was Elmina, at the Gold Coast. It was the most important source of slaves for the West-India Company (hereafter known as the WIC⁸). However, the MCC acquired 68% of their slaves at the Windward Coast, as earlier mentioned. The MCC deliberately chose to go to a different location than their competitor. In this respect, the MCC was an innovative company. In order to compete with the established power of the WIC, which held a monopoly on Dutch slave trade for a long while, the MCC engaged in collaboration with British captains and traders in the Windward Coast according to Hogerzeil and Richardson. This is a noteworthy feature in international trade that one will not see occurring often in slave trade history.⁹ This collaboration between the MCC and the British would ideally lead to a faster and thus more profitable acquisition of slaves. One could however argue that the MCC was not very successful in doing

⁷ Troque au vol is a term used by Hogerzeil and Richardson to define the buying of slaves based on chance. In this case, scouring the coasts of Africa and hoping to pick up slaves by chance rather than actual planning for locations or merchants for their purchase.

⁸ The West India Company was a Dutch trading company focusing on trading with America. Until 1730, 10 years after the foundation of the Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie, they held the monopoly on slave trade for the Netherlands.

⁹ The collaboration was made possible by the fact that the Dutch trading companies like the VOC, WIC and MCC were largely independent from the Netherlands (or the Dutch Republic) as a country, so nationalism would not form a barrier in the collaboration between two nations.

so as the stay in West Africa was considerably longer than that of other carriers as mentioned earlier.

MCC ships generally acquired slaves at the aforementioned locations at a rate of 1.19 slaves per day. Hogerzeil and Richardson argue that the rate of loading is increased close to departure. This can be seen as obvious, since geographically speaking, Elmina is one of the last places along the West-coast of Africa before leaving towards America. Being an influential port for Dutch slave acquisition, it is not more than logical that the number of slaves acquired would rise upon reaching this port.

The means the MCC used to purchase slaves varied (one of the stereotypes touched upon in the introduction). Where many believe that slaves were purchased by simple means such as glass, mirrors and cheap necklaces, sources indicate that proponents of this view largely underestimate how expensive slaves were. Before embarking on a transatlantic slave ships slave traders would stack the hulls of their boat with cargo intended for barter trade in exchange for slaves in West Africa. Records show that in contrast to the earlier mentioned popular belief those hulls were usually filled with guns, tools, utilities, cloth, clothes and alcohol.¹⁰ The slave merchants in West Africa were very aware of the actual prices of slaves in barter trade. Looking in the transatlantic slave trade database, one can find that merchants kept track of the average price per slave¹¹, depending on their age, gender and origin.¹²

In terms of division in sex or age, the MCC was on par with the rest of the slave carriers, Hogerzeil and Richardson establish after looking into other quantitative analyses of slave trade in West Africa. On average, 81% of the slaves bought by the MCC was identified as an adult. The ratio between sexes was somewhere around 45% female versus 55% male. There is however a

¹⁰ Sheridan 1958, 249--263

¹¹ Transatlantic Slave Trade Database

¹² Hogerzeil and Richardson

slight discrepancy between the rates in which adult slaves and child slaves were bought.¹³ An MCC slave ship would ordinarily purchase less child slaves toward the end of their stay in Africa, according to Hogerzeil and Richardson. This would lead to an increased duration of stay of the slave children on board of a slave ship. This is one of the reasons Hogerzeil and Richardson define as to why this discrepancy exists. A prolonged stay on a slave ship would form a larger risk towards the more expensive adult male slaves, whose mark-up price was relatively larger than that of kids according to MCC records. Another reason that Hogerzeil and Richardson formulate is that instructions reveal that captains had to be selective in their buying process at the start of a loading phase in Africa. The cheaper child slaves would fit better into this picture than the more expensive adult male slaves, which they were forced to buy hastily at the end of their stay in West Africa. On the other hand, the rise in the amount of adult slaves loaded can also be attributed to the fear of rebellion. When picking up the most likely group (adult men) to rebel later on in the journey as to minimise the risk of rebellion.

All in all, Hogerzeil and Richardson's research is a statistical, quantitative description of historical data taken from the MCC and several other databases. This is not surprising, since Hogerzeil has a strong social science foundation as a psychologist. Richardson is a professor of Economic history and thus also has a strong background in statistics and data-processing. It will be interesting to see if the Philadelphia's 6th voyage can be seen as a statistical anomaly looking at the data published Hogerzeil and Richardson.

¹³ Hogerzeil and Richardson assume that the division between being an adult and being a child for MCC slave traders would have layed somewhere around the age of 14. There is however no evidence for this in primary literature.

A Description of the 6th Voyage of MCC Ship Philadelphia

Leaving Middelburg at the 22nd of February, it was not until the 6th of March that Menkenveld actually set off for the coast of West Africa¹⁴. Jan Menkenveld was an experienced captain who undertook 7 slave voyages on 3 different ships. He was sanctioned and fired in his last voyage with frigate Haast U Langzaam for misbehaving and neglecting his duties as a captain. The Philadelphia counted 38 crewmembers when they set off for Africa. On their journey, the Philadelphia unfortunately lost 3 crewmembers. 2 fell overboard, one died of disease. Rankings varied of course, with the lowest ranked crewmembers being ‘jongens’ and the highest ranked member being Jan Menkenveld ranked as captain. Menkenveld earned 10 times as much as the ‘jongens’.

The cargo of the Philadelphia consisted of a wide variety of products, many of those similar to the ones discussed earlier. Guns were very prevalent among the cargo, but also were alcohol, iron tools and utilities. Alcohol was traded in the barter exchange, as were textiles and decorated robes. Noteworthy was the fact that the MCC ship also traded copper kettles (referred to as koperen cymbalen) for slaves.^{15 16} In addition to this the ship sold knives to the local tribes and also notable, olive oil and tobacco. Olive oil and tobacco are not products available from Dutch soil, so those must have been imported as well. This means that most certainly the tobacco sold in this journey almost made a circle, as it came from Suriname and was sold in Africa, but it had to go via Middelburg.¹⁷

¹⁴ This was caused by some technical difficulty: Zeeuws Archief, 20 Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie (MCC) 889.1

¹⁵ Zeeuws Archief, 20 Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie (MCC) 926

¹⁶ This can be seen as noteworthy since cymbals are a musical instrument rather than the utility, so language played a part in deciphering what was going on. Secondly kettles are not at all space-friendly or travel friendly, so it does not seem to be an efficient product to bring on a journey that would last for approximately 3 months.

¹⁷ For further research it could be interesting to see if there were direct trade routes between South America and West Africa. This seems to be a more efficient route.

Upon arrival in Cape Mesurado on May 1, after a journey of 2 months the crew of the MCC started trading the so-called ‘cargazoen’ they brought with them from Middelburg for slaves. However, contrary to popular belief, the ship did not only buy slaves but also picked up goods indigenous to Africa such as ivory, hides and gold, to bring with them to America and eventually to the Netherlands. It is remarkable that the MCC ships, in addition to cargo for the slave trade, also brought with them goods as personal favours for the slave traders and MCC board members. A slave trader by the name of Pieter Theodonis Huijdekooper makes a mention of a kind of citrus oil he gave to Menkenveld as a personal favour to a MCC board members.¹⁸ This is interesting since it indicates that not only a close kind of communication was kept between the captains and MCC in Middelburg, but that African slave traders also maintained tight contact with the MCC.¹⁹

In the letters sent by Menkenveld and local traders mention was made of the contact Menkenveld maintained with other MCC captains that happened to be in West Africa at that time. Menkenveld notes his joy about his meeting in Elmina with captains Zandleven and Claas Pietersz²⁰. The captains would share knowledge on where slaves were to be found and where areas were that were to be avoided. A comparable amount of contact was apparently maintained with foreign captains, as conversations with 2 British ships and 1 Portugese ship were also noted, though these conversation were not always friendly. They would mostly revolve on where not to go since their fellow countrymen were already there.²¹

Menkenveld and the Philadelphia sailed from Cape Mesurado to Elmina in 5 months. This is noteworthy in 2 ways. Firstly Mesurado was noted by Menkenveld as the first location

¹⁸ This interesting feature can also be an interesting topic for future research.

¹⁹ Zeeuws Archief, Middelburgsche COmmercie Compagnie (MCC), 890

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

they visited in Africa. Cape Mesurado can be found in today's Liberia. Liberia was located in the Windward coast. This means that Menkenveld skipped over known slave markets in Senegal, the Gambia and Sierra Leone. He does not make mention of the reason why he did this.²² Secondly, compared to other MCC ships this can be seen as a rather short voyage. However, it is to be noted that the journey from Cape Mesurado in the Windward Coast to Elmina in the Gold Coast can be driven today in 18 hours and 25 minutes. Aside from this, Menkenveld seems to have gone for a short route along the African coasts, as sources report that ships have gone long beyond Elmina in the direction of Biafra in search for slaves.

In the 5 months along the coast of West Africa, the Philadelphia managed to pick up 312 slaves. Primary places of picking up slaves were Cape Lahou (located in the Windward Coast) and Elmina. The division of the slaves was as follows: 43.2% men, 40.1% women, 8% boys, 8.7% girls.²³ Looking at the Gender/Age division of the slaves at the start of the journey, it was quite different. Of the first 107 slaves Menkenveld picked up, 27 were male, and a stunning 52 were female. Additionally 15 boys were acquired and 13 girls. This division is a lot different from the final one, meaning that Menkenveld towards the end of his journey managed to pick up a lot of adult men. Upon reaching Elmina the 6th of October, the rate of slave purchasing was increased picking up 22 slaves at the very last day. This can be expected, since before Menkenveld was roaming the coasts of Ghana, without visiting major slave selling places.

Of the 312 slaves the Philadelphia purchased, 301 slaves left for the middle passage, indicating that 11 slaves had already died in the 5 months that the Philadelphia spent in West Africa. This number of course affirms why a speedy acquisition of slaves can be deemed important. Distributed over the amount of crewmembers, there was a rate of about 9 slaves per 1

²² Zeeuws Archief, Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie (MCC), 925

²³ Transatlantic Slave Trade Database

crewmember. Menkenveld kept careful track of the slaves he purchased. Daily records of slave purchases were made, in which the slaves were mentioned by sex and age (category). The process of slave purchase administration could be interesting for further research as it still raises some unanswered questions.²⁴ It does become clear from the records that slave purchasing was an economically meticulous process. Menkenveld managed to buy slaves (and the other goods mentioned above) for exactly as much money as he earned by selling the cargo he brought from Middelburg.

Upon arrival in Paramaribo, Suriname after a middle passage journey of 99 days, the selling of slaves began in South Africa. Menkenveld primarily visited auctions where he would sell the slaves, but also sold some slaves *troque au vol*. The process of selling the slaves can also be interesting for further research in the light of the statements made by Hogerzeil and Richardson earlier.²⁵ About 80% of the slaves who survived the middle passage were sold in auctions. In total, some 285 slaves were sold in Paramaribo. Menkenveld visited 5 auctions, in which he sold on average about 40-50 slaves.²⁶ After a stay of three months in Paramaribo, in which the ship was loaded with sugar, coffee beans and tobacco to sell in Middelburg (or perhaps for trade in Africa as was noted earlier), the Philadelphia made a swift voyage homeward in some 3 months. Menkenveld makes no notes about the process of selling the goods brought from Africa in Middelburg.

²⁴ Menkenveld gave each slave an individual number. Those numbers were also apparent in the selling process of slaves in South America. It is unclear from the literature how the slaves were identified. Did Menkenveld give them a burn mark, or a different means of identification? This is interesting for future research, although it is very MCC specific since many other carriers did not maintain an administrative system this detailed.

²⁵ Where the buying process of the MCC was rather chance reliant and chaotic according to Hogerzeil and Richardson, the selling process seemed to happen with a lot more structure in the context of auctions where about 80% of the slaves that survived the middle passage were sold. Why was this process so much more structured?

²⁶ Zeeuws Archive,

A Comparison of Slave Purchasing Strategies

How does the general theory and statistics of Hogerzeil and Richardson on slave purchasing strategies, based on MCC records, compare to the happenings in the 6th voyage of the Philadelphia? This comparison will note the points that Hogerzeil and Richardson made and will then compare those to the facts of the Philadelphia's sixth journey.

1. Stay in Africa in terms of time.

The average MCC ship stayed in Africa for 223 days. Menkenveld and the Philadelphia managed to stay in Africa for some 5 months, which equals about 150 days. This is considerably shorter than the average. As a whole, the average MCC slaving journey lasted about 570 days, 19 months. The Philadelphia, in her 6th voyage, managed to make the triangle voyage in 326 days, almost 150 days shorter than the mean. One of the reasons for this can be the favourable wind Menkenveld mentions frequently in his journal. Additionally the effective, short loading phase in West Africa also played its part. Reasons for the successful loading phase can be the successful communication that Menkenveld had with fellow captains, both from the Netherlands and abroad. This communication allowed him to pick up slaves more efficiently than the average MCC ship. Although it is true that Hogerzeil and Richardson argue that the MCC maintained British contacts, it is most likely not in the degree that Menkenveld was able to achieve. Menkenveld, with 150 days was a lot closer to the mean time spent in West Africa by foreign slave carriers, which was 138 days. This may indicate that Menkenveld's approach of slave purchasing was more similar to that of foreign carriers than the approach of the MCC. More evidence for this statement is needed.

2. *The Amount of purchased Slaves and Gender/Age Division.*

The average MCC ship would typically purchase some 253 slaves. Menkenveld and the Philadelphia managed to purchase 312 slaves, significantly more than the average MCC ship. This too can be attributed to effective communication and an overall effective slave loading phase. In terms of gender and age division, the Philadelphia was on par with the MCC averages. Where average the division of MCC slave ships was usually 45/55 (women/men), the Philadelphia had 49/51. MCC ships typically held about 81% adults versus 19% children, whereas the Philadelphia held 83% versus 17%. However, as mentioned earlier Hogerzeil and Richardson argued the vagueness of the line between adults and children (around age 14), so the numbers may be completely different each way. The Philadelphia's 6th journey does provide proof for the theory by Hogerzeil and Richardson that slave ships tend to pick up less male slaves at the start of their journey, as of the first 100 slaves 52 were female adults and only 27 male.

3. *Purchasing Locations and Methods of Acquisition*

The average MCC ship would buy its slaves in the Windward coast area for 68%, and in the Goldcoast area for 22,5% (mostly in Elmina, earlier defined as an important location of Dutch slave trade). The Philadelphia went to both of these places. Of all places they purchased slaves, Cape Lahoe can be noted as the principal one. Cape Lahoe (nowadays named Grand Lahou in Ivory Coast) was located in the then (defined) Windward Coast.²⁷ This is in agreement with the theories of Hogerzeil and Richardson. Menkenveld's last location before setting sail to

²⁷ A very comprehensive map that defines the different coastal areas can be found under the following link: http://www.google.nl/imgres?imgurl=http://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/images/WindwardCoast.gif&imgrefurl=http://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/lowCountryA.htm&h=162&w=250&sz=15&tbnid=UrS0jpPpKGZctM:&tbnh=90&tbnw=139&zoom=1&usq=_cG-lzN5yK2NaV4ZgZjvm3surOEo=&docid=uOohfzy128F_4M&sa=X&ei=V-SpUtnBsjE4gS9moGoBw&ved=0CD0Q9QEwAg

Paramaribo was Elmina (still named similarly today in Ghana) located on the Goldcoast. According to theories of Hogerzeil and Richardson, one would expect to see an increase in the number of slave purchased per week upon reaching the final stages of the stay in West-Africa. In the Philadelphia's sixth journey, this also happens, although in lesser degree than projected by Hogerzeil and Richardson. Menkenveld picked up 22 slaves in his last week in Elmina, which is less than the 40 that Hogerzeil and Richardson expect.

Also in choice of locations, Menkenveld's approach to the slave trade was comparable with that of foreign slave traders, rather than the Dutch WIC or MCC merchants. Some of this can be attributed to the MCC and its bonds with the British and as such the Windward Coast, but Menkenveld's efficiency in communication also contributed to this. Menkenveld's choice to stay in certain locations for a longer time in order to acquire more slaves at the same location is different from the approach many MCC ships take according to Hogerzeil and Richardson.

The means of purchasing the slaves as defined by Sheridan in 1958 and also by Hogerzeil and Richardson, being the earlier mentioned utilities, guns, cloth et cetera were similar in the 6th voyage of Menkenveld and the Philadelphia. This is to be expected. There are only so many products available in Middelburg, so that is a finite combination of things. In addition, instruction documents published by the MCC mention the acquisition of certain goods for trade. Menkenveld is to oblige these guidelines, and as such a similarity in the kind of goods can be found. Anyhow, the means that the captains utilised in purchasing slaves are almost universal in international slave trade, so there are no unique factors about the Philadelphia's 6th voyage to be seen here.

**Conclusion: was the 6th Philadelphia compliant with the theories formulated by
Hogerzeil and Richardson?**

The 6th voyage of the Philadelphia has overall been fairly similar to the average MCC voyage. The biggest difference it held was the amount of slaves and the overall journey time. This can be attributed to the effective communication that Menkenveld had with his fellow captains. However, one factor was also thus far overlooked in the difference of the Philadelphia's 6th voyage and the general norm and that is chance. In a time as unsure as the 18th century, in a business as changeable as slave trade, one cannot just claim that Menkenveld was successful as a captain. Perhaps, arguably, he was just lucky in finding the right places and meeting the right people. This is however impossible to calculate. One thing this essay does however establish is the importance of communication in slave trade. An effective communication may lead to more slaves in less time, as visible in Menkenveld's voyage. This is maybe also wisdom applicable into economies and companies today. Effective communication will lead to more productiveness. It is exciting to see this factor of everyday life already being recognised 2 1/2 centuries ago.

Further Research

Across this paper, footnotes have indicated possible fields of research for the future. One addition can be made, and this is on the earlier mentioned factor of chance. It would be interesting to analyse multiple voyages of Jan Menkenveld and see if he was able to achieve similar results in his other voyages. When doing so, and comparing those voyages to the statistics provided by Hogerzeil and Richardson, one can establish whether Menkenveld's qualities as a captain were really as good as this research may display them to be. If this is indeed the case, it would be noteworthy to see, since Jan Menkenveld was fired in his seventh voyage

for neglecting his tasks as captain. Anyhow, there are plenty of research opportunities available for future research in this field.

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