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Slave Mortality on Board of 'De Eenigheid'

A Comparison between the Third and Fourth Voyage

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Introduction

The Middelburgs Commercie Comapagnie (*Middelburg Commerce Company*, henceforth MCC) was founded in 1720 and until 1889 ships left Middelburg and Vlissingen destined to Europe, Africa, the North and the triangular trade routes under the MCC’s rule. After the WIC lost their monopoly in the 1730s, other companies could also make their triangular trade voyages. The MCC grew significantly during the early 18th century and made 113 triangular trade journeys in total. The company kept extensive records that the Directors and the Captains kept before, during and after the journeys. These records are listed on the UNESCO’s Memory of the World Programme in 2011, because of their completeness and extensiveness (Zeeuws Archief). The logbooks, records of when and for how much slaves were bought and sold, letters of correspondence, statements when something went wrong, and calculations of debit and credit are few of the many items that can be found in the MCC archives. This paper will encompass the records of the Snow “De Eenigheid” from the third and the fourth journey, which sailed from Middelburg to Africa, where they bought slaves, and then to the Caribbean to sell their slaves and went back with letters of exchange, ivory, tobacco, coffee beans and other luxury goods.

The Snow De Eenigheid was built in the years 1755 until 1759 and was directly sent to Curacao when the ship was finished (MCC Slavenreis D’Eenigheid). This Snow was about 22.5 meters long, 7 meters wide and 3.2 meters high and generally had about 35 crewmembers on board and about 250-350 slaves when converted to a slave ship (2.374; 2.388; 2.396; MCC Slavenreis D’Eenigheid)¹. The first two voyages of De Eenigheid were not triangular trade journeys, but the last three journeys all completed the full triangle (Zeeuws Archief). De

¹ All the numbers that are cited refer to the entries of the Zeeuws Archive with the main entry number of 20.

Eenigheid was being sailed between 1759 and 1768 after which it was abandoned by the MCC. Before the ship would sail to the destination, many goods were bought, such as provisions and trading materials, such as cloth, guns, gunpowder and other expensive goods and the crewmembers were selected. After the last check, the ship would sail for the coast of Africa and after about 7 months, it would set out for mainly Surinam, Curacao, Essequibo and Berbice. First the captains went to the mainland of the Americas to sell their slaves, but only in the fourth journey, the captain decided to go to Curacao to buy mainly tobacco to sell in The Netherlands (2.391-4; 2.383).

After my pilot research, which encompassed the fourth journey of De Eenigheid, I discovered that the mortality amongst the slaves was higher than average, about 26% in comparison to a 13% average during that time (2.297.2; 2.391-3; Postma, 252). The reasons for this high mortality rate were not clear: there were no statements about this instance and this made me wonder what the contributing factors were for this high mortality rate. For this research, I would like to compare the fourth voyage to the third voyage because of three reasons. First of all, the third voyage was led by an experienced captain, contrasting the unexperienced captain of the fourth voyage. Jan Menkenveld had already sailed multiple times as a captain for the MCC and Daniël Pruijmelaar was a first time captain. Secondly, the third voyage made a profit, and the fourth voyage did not. The third voyage made a profit of about 2000 Flemish Pounds and the fourth journey lost around 1500 Flemish Pounds (2.374). Thirdly, during the fourth journey there was a slave uprising on the ship whereas the third voyage did not have many problems.

For the research, I have examined most of the entries for the third and the fourth voyage, as well as some of the general entries that were available for the Snow De Eenigheid. The main focus of this research was the relationship between the captain, the duration, the extenuating

circumstances and the diseases and the mortality of the slaves and therefore special attention was paid to the Snow's destinations in Africa, the durations of the stays, the letters of correspondence and the statements made by the crew to the Directors of the MCC. This was compared to the research that was already existing a comparison was made in how exceptional these two journeys were.

This paper will conclude with which factors were most important to the slave mortality rates in these two journeys. An article has already been written on this topic, mainly discussing a statistical analysis (Hogerzeil and Richardson). What will be attempted in this paper is to compare the means that were discovered in this paper with the non-statistical evidence that was found in two exemplary journeys. In this paper I will compare the third and the fourth journey of De Eenigheid and highlight the different factors that might have played a role in the difference in slave mortality. Then I will compare the factors to secondary literature and I will discuss whether and how their findings relate to my findings. Lastly, I will give my conclusions about the factors that could contribute to the high mortality rate and I will give some suggestions for further research.

The Third Journey of the Snow "De Eenigheid":

The stay on the coast of Africa and the Middle Passage

On the first of October 1761 the Snow "De Eenigheid" left for Africa, where they arrived at Caap Monte on the 7th of December (2.383). The captain of the ship was Jan Menkenveld, who already had some experience with the triangle trade before (2.383, Zeeuws Archief). They sailed through the Canal, without any breaks, to Africa where they would trade their products for slaves. After having bought all their slaves, they sailed to the Americas on the 8th of May 1762. He did not go to Surinam, because the slaves on board were too weak. Instead, he went to

Berbice, Demerary and Essequibo to sell his slaves on auctions and individually. Menkenveld sold all his slaves in a short amount of time, but he stayed a bit longer to trade his money for coffee beans and other goods from the Americas that were on demand in The Netherlands. On the 16th of December he sailed back to the Netherlands, but on the way back he was caught up by a storm and De Eenigheid could not return to the Netherlands. Therefore, they went to Plymouth in England, where they arrived on the 15th of February. After about two weeks, the weather allowed De Eenigheid to sail home where they arrived on the 26th of March 1763.

The captain was instructed to buy as many slaves in Cape Monte as possible, but Menkenveld only bought one slave there (2.375.3; 3.383). During the next five months, De Eenigheid sailed from modern day Liberia to Ghana in search for slaves. Mezurado, Baza, Cape das Palmas, Lahoe, Axim and Elmina were a few of the places they went to. Often small canoes came up to the ship to offer products, such as palm oil, ivory or slaves, but the captain also let canoes deliver goods they bought before. They met with some other captains as well to exchange the latest news and to sometimes trade one or two slaves. The trading products they took were mainly guns, jewelry, cloth and liqueur and those were exchanged not only for slaves, but also for ivory (*Tanden*) which were sold in either the Americas or taken back to The Netherlands (2.384-6).

Jan Menkenveld did not manage to get most of his slaves from the Upper Coast, where slaves are generally cheaper than on the Grain and the Gold Coast (2.384-6; 2.392-4). After trying to get slaves on the western side of the Grain Coast, he went to Cape Lahoe, which is on the eastern side of the Grain Coast. Around that area he bought about 150 of his 326 slaves. The rest of the slaves he bought in smaller groups at the time. Usually no more than 5 slaves were bought a day rather than buying them in vaster amounts. From the end of February until the 21 of

March, Jan Menkenveld took care of his provisions. This month the ship sailed between Great Bazan to Axim and canoes with water, rice, lime juice and palm oil arrived at the ship. Doing so, he slowly sailed into the Gold Coast area, where he went to Elmina in quite a short amount of time. In Elmina, the last tons of water and food were acquired and with eleven more male slaves on board, the ship were ready to leave for the Americas. The slaves 326 cost 32624,-, 11 guilders in total, which is an average of about 100 guilders per slave (2.384-6). This last number fluctuated, because every deal was made separately and secondly, males were more expensive than females and children were less expensive than grown-ups.

However, there was a problem when the ship made it out of the harbour of Elmina: it got stuck in the shallow waters in front of the coast and could not leave for another week because some repairs had to be made and they had to leave behind the anchor of the ship (2.375.3). An account of what happened can be found in the “*Stukken betreffende diverse reizen van dit schip*”; the commanders of the ship were obliged to write a testimony when an outstanding event occurred in order to notify the Directors of the MCC about extra costs that had to be made due to these instances. Another testimony describes how free Africans got onto the ship and started trading and talking with the slaves (2.375.3). This got out of hand, because the sailors could not speak any African languages and before they knew, some of the slaves jumped into the canoe the free Africans brought with them. After some pulling and pushing, one of the free Africans fell into the water and was devoured by sharks.

The mortality of the slaves was average during the journey; thirty three slaves lost their lives whilst being transported to the Americas (2.374, 2.390). Twenty-two of them were male and seven female, the rest of them were children, mostly girls. Near the coast of Africa, seven slaves died, but during the middle passage only three slaves died. The majority of the deaths

happened near the coast of America, in Berbice and Essequibo. The captain writes in his testimony of why De Eenigheid did not go to Surinam that the slaves were exhausted and in order to prevent more slaves from dying, he would sail to Berbice instead to provide them with fresh food and water (2.375.3). There was a surgeon, Petrus Couperus, who wrote a journal that was kept and he stated that most of the slaves died from bowel related problems: diarrhea, scurvy, not willing to eat and emaciation, but amongst the living slaves: ringworm, burns, and many other diseases were determined (2.390). The living conditions on the ship proved to be very hard, tightly packed for months on end. There were signs of depression and suicide: some slaves stopped eating and others either attempted or committed suicide by jumping overboard and died whilst drowning.

Fourth Journey of the Snow “De Eenigheid”:

The stay on the coast of Africa and the Middle Passage

The fourth journey of “De Eenigheid” left in the same year the third journey returned (Zeeuws Archief). This time the first mate was the captain: Daniël Pruijmelaar (2.391). He had never been a captain before, but had climbed his way up due to his 8 earlier travels (Zeeuws Archief). On the 17th of August 1763 De Eenigheid left for the coast of Africa and arrived on the 18th of November in Mezurado. Sailing parallel to the coast for almost a year, they left Africa with 256 slaves in total on the 29th of October 1764 to go to Surinam. De Eenigheid arrived in Paramaribo on the 24th of December where they sold all there slaves within a month. On the 20th of February they set sail to Curacao where they bought tobacco and other expensive trading items to take back to the Netherlands (2.392-4). They left Curacao in the end of May and arrived in the Netherlands, in Middelburg, on the 8th of August 1765. The total journey did not make any profits: the MCC lost 1506,10,3 to this journey (2.374).

The captain was instructed to set sail to Africa, buy slaves there and then go to Surinam to sell them (2.375.4). When Daniël Pruijmelaar arrived in Cape Mezurado, he bought some provisions after which they sailed towards the Gold Coast. During the first half of the Snow's stay in Africa, the ship was rebuilt to fit more and more slaves (2.391). In the beginning, some adaptations were made, but the closer they came to the eastern part of the Gold Coast, the more the ship was transformed into a slave ship. They sailed to Pikenine Sester, but then they turned around, went back to Mezurado and started sailing towards Elmina again. The first time they went down the coast took them little over a month, but the second time took them over half a year to complete. In most of the harbours they bought 1-5 slaves, ivory or water, but when they arrived in Croezette, or Rio Saint Andries they bought up to 15 slaves (2.392-4). They would first buy predominantly women and children, but towards the end of their stay, mostly men were bought. After their purchases in Rio Saint Andries, they went to Cape Lahoe where they arrived on the 22nd of March 1764. They would stay there until August and bought over half of the total number of slaves there. Then they sailed towards Elmina, before making their way across the Atlantic Ocean. All the slaves were bought in small groups, but half of the slaves were bought in Cape Lahoe and the other half was purchased in other harbours. The slaves cost 29716,,6,,14 in total for 256 slaves which comes down to 116 per slave (2.392-4). Male slaves were again more expensive than female slaves and children were cheaper than grown-ups. However, also in this journey, the slaves on the upper coast were cheaper than the slaves in Cape Lahoe and beyond on the Gold Coast, but the captain or the circumstances decided that many of the slaves had to be bought in the more expensive area (2.392-4).

During the stay in Africa and the middle passage 67 of the 256 slaves died from, what was mentioned in the journal, diarrhoea (2.391). There is not journal of the surgeon, Henkel,

available anymore, or it was not written, but there are some entries in the journal of August and September 1764 that mention that the slaves were dying from what is called *loop*, the Dutch word for diarrhoea (2.391; Hogerzeil and Richardson, 187). The number of slaves that died during the stay in front of the coast of Africa was 55, contrasting with only 12 deaths during the middle passage and the stay in Surinam. There was also a significant amount of the crew that died, 7 of the 35 members lost their lives and the peak of their deaths lies slightly after the point in which most of the slaves died, namely during the middle passage and the return (2.391; 2.395-6). The causes of their deaths are less clear, because there is no mention other than the date and the name of the crewmember in both the journal and the records of the crew.

During their stay in Africa, the crew was surprised by a slave uprising on the 13th of May 1764 close to Cape Lahoe (2.375.4; 2.376; 2.391). The slaves blocked the door that led to the rest of the ship and tried to climb in a canoe that would bring them back to the shores of Africa. The crew tried to stop this, but could not help some slaves from jumping overboard and eight slaves losing their lives during the fight. In the end of the day, the order was restored on the ship. Some slaves had to be taken out of the sea and others were punished for their deeds with incarceration. The captain had to hand in written statements about this incident, which can be found in *Stukken betreffende diverse reizen van dit schip, 1759-1767* (2.375.4). There was one other instance which was important regarding the conditions of the slaves: the resignation of the first mate, Jacob Caniseris. He was fired on Curacao, because he was often drunk, he swore and he threatened the captain (2.375.4; 2.376; 2.395; 2.396). He must have been a terrible figure to meet if being slave, because a first mate does not get dismissed for small incidents only. During their journey, the slaves had to deal with rough seamen, drunkenness and beatings. The first mate probably being such a man would not have made surviving easier for the slaves.

Comparison

The next part of this paper will compare the two journeys regarding the stay in Africa and the middle passage. The questions that were mentioned in the introduction will be discussed and further examined. This section will lead to the final part of my paper, the further examination of this comparison with the help of secondary sources. First the durations will be compared, secondly the captains will be mentioned briefly and the amount and the conditions of the slaves will be discussed. Lastly, the circumstances during the loading and crossing phase will be contrasted.

The main differences between the third and the fourth voyage were the duration of the journey and the slave mortality. The third voyage lasted one and a half year, whereas the fourth voyage lasted almost two years. The loading phase lasted for 5 months on the third journey and for 11 months on fourth journey: a difference of half a year. Daniël Pruijmelaar made the decision to go back to the starting point halfway through their way to Elmina. This detour was one of the main reasons as well as the little availability of slaves and the many competitors that were mentioned in the letters of correspondence (2.376). The longer stay during the loading phase meant that the slaves which were bought first had a longer exposure to the conditions on board. The third journey went relatively quickly; Jan Menkenveld steered along the coast of Africa quite quickly, bought his slaves and went to Elmina to get some last provisions. He also mentions that the prizes and the number of competitors had risen, but he did not seem to be affected by this (2.376). The crossing phases had similar durations, but different destinations. Pruijmelaar sailed directly to Surinam, whereas Menkenveld sailed parallel to the coast of the Americas heading for Berbice.

Jan Menkenveld had already sailed as a captain for the MCC a few times before and was an experienced head of the ship (*Zeeuws Archief*). He spoke to a numerous amount of other captains during his stay in Africa and seemed to have a lot of contacts from which he could make his decisions to go to a certain place and buy slaves or not. Daniël Pruijmelaar was a first time captain and although he started his career as a 'boy' and served as a first mate on the third journey, he had never been in charge of a ship. Secondly, it states in a letter from the third journey of *De Eenigheid* that he could not speak any African Languages and he could therefore perhaps not trade very well with the free Africans (2.375.3). This meant that many of the aspects of being a captain must have been new to him and that in contrast to the many trading contacts Menkenveld had, he had to build up his contacts. His experience might have shown in the slave revolt that took place whilst he was captain (2.391). The uprising occurred when the captain had only bought half of the total amount of slaves. This shows that the captain might not have been able to control the slaves well, because the slave ship was not completely filled and the slaves started to rebel. The total amount of slaves that was carried was also different; Menkenveld purchased 326 slaves, whereas Pruijmelaar only bought 256 slaves. This major difference is either due to the lack of availability or due to the competence of the captain Daniël Pruijmelaar to buy slaves.

The loading and the crossing phase, as can be read above, had different durations. However, there were other factors that contributed to the conditions of the slaves. On the fourth journey, slaves had a little more space than on the third journey. The *Snow* was not a very large ship and the cramped conditions often meant that the tempers of both the crew and the slaves rose resulting in beatings and other forms of abuse. The difference of sixty slaves on board must have had a great impact, but the contrary is the case. The journey with the most casualties was

the journey with the smallest number of slaves on board. The reason for this might have been the duration, but also the transmittable diseases. The records of the third journey included a logbook of the surgeon: Pieter Couperus. He describes how the thirty-three slaves on the third ship died. Many cases of bowel problems were noticed as well as emaciation, suicide and not willing to eat. Couperus treated all the ill slaves and throughout his logbook it states that he checked the slaves on a daily basis. The fourth journey did not have a logbook of a surgeon in the archive, but there was a surgeon on board. The captain does make some references to the kinds of diseases that were present during his voyage: as written above, diarrhoea was probably the main cause of death on the ship. The conclusion that can be drawn about the difference in casualties is that disease played an important role when examining the slave mortality. Comparing these two journeys, it seems to be the case that disease, more than the amount of slaves on the ship is an important factor.

Lastly, there were some instances on the ship that had an influence on the conditions of the slaves. The rebellion that during the fourth journey has been mentioned above probably is an indication of the hostility of the slaves towards the crew members and this must have had influence on the relationship between the crew members and the slaves and therefore, the living conditions of the slaves. Secondly, there was an instance that happened on the third journey that involved the death of a free African who had come to De Eenigheid to trade with the slaves (2.375.3). Apparently, this happened more often: free Africans traded food for tobacco with the slaves. This was a dangerous business, because most of the crew members could not speak any African languages and they could therefore not understand what they were talking about. This instance shows how direct contact between slaves and free Africans went wrong, probably because of a misunderstanding between the crew and the free Africans.

Both ships had some circumstances that were not fortunate, but there are two main differences that can be concluded from this comparison: the duration of the travel and the difference in captain that could have influenced the mortality rate of the slaves. In the next section, this comparison will be contrasted with secondary sources and it will be concluded whether these journeys were an exception or a standard journey.

The Third and the Fourth Journey and Secondary Sources

Two secondary sources will be used to contrast the primary research with the secondary research. First, the research of Baeyens in the “*De gouden driehoek?: de Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie als 'Slavencompagnie'*” will be discussed and secondly the work of Hogerzeil and Richardson in “*Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797*” will be examined.

Caroline Baeyens describes how the slaves are bought according to her research. She states that most of the slaves die during the middle passage, but in these two cases most of the casualties lost their lives either during the loading phase or during the selling phase (Baeyens, 92). She does mention that there are three major factors that contributed to a successful journey: duration, regional differences and luck (Baeyens, 95). The duration was a factor that played a role in these journeys as well: the third journey was rather fast and had a low mortality rate and the fourth journey had a long duration and a high mortality rate. Luck always plays a role when dealing with different weather conditions and competition of other ships and nations. The regional differences could not be part of this research, because the records did not permit such investigation. Lastly, Baeyens made some clarifying comments about the water in Africa (96). The water that was bought there was not as clean as the water from The Netherlands and therefore, many of the slaves and crewmembers got diseases. The second statement she made

was that the slaves received a ration of a litre of water a day and this is not enough to reach the Americas safely when dealing with bowel problems, especially diarrhoea and dysentery. This water is a major factor in the rate of success of the two journeys. Both journeys had cases of sick slaves, but the quality of the water, as well as the food, probably played a major role in the slave mortality, especially because dysentery and diarrhoea are very contagious. The sanitary conditions on board of a slave ship were playing their part and dirty water and no standards of hygiene had a high chance of cross-contamination and casualties.

Secondly, the research of Hogerzeil and Richardson has a direct link with the themes discussed in this paper. Their research might have the title "*Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797*", but their main research was in the field of slave mortality. Their main outcome was that the amount of days on the ship was crucial and this is one of the conclusions this research will have as well (Hogerzeil and Richardson, 183). They also state that children were purchased earlier than grown-ups and that most of the slaves were bought on the Windward Coast, which is the small strip of land between Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast (Hogerzeil and Richardson, 166 and 170). This is true for both the journeys discussed in this paper as well. The duration of the journeys can be compared to the mean duration Hogerzeil and Richardson calculated as well. The fourth voyage took about 11 months to complete the loading phase, against 5 months of the third journey. The mean that was calculated in their research was 7 months for the loading phase. About 70 days was calculated for the crossing phase and compared to this number of days, the fourth journey was quite average with little under two months and the third journey was fast, completing the middle passage in about 6 weeks. Comparing the durations of the journeys to the average duration, the third journey was fast in comparison to both the research of Hogerzeil and

Richardson and the fourth journey, which took longer on average. This implies that it was only natural that more slaves died on the fourth journey.

Conclusions

The duration of the journeys was a major factor that influenced the slave mortality on both the third and the fourth voyage of De Eenigheid. The duration can be influenced by many circumstances: the weather, competition, the availability of slaves, the competence of the captain and luck. Therefore, there is not one factor that can be concluded to contribute solely to the high slave mortality of the fourth journey in comparison to the third journey. There was an unexperienced captain on board and a slave rebellion, which could have been an influence. However, the third journey also had some hardships due to the trading incidents with the free Africans, the high prizes and the abundance of competition. Comparing the primary research to the secondary research, it seems that they do not discuss the influence of the captain extensively. This might be the case because the captain is either of no importance, or because it is a difficult topic to do research on. There are some indications in the primary sources that the captain is of importance to the duration as well as the profitability of the journey, but further research is needed in order to conclude that the captain was of actual importance.

Suggestions for further research would be to investigate into the fact that on average more male slaves die than females and children, but that they were bought later in the loading process. Another factor that could have contributed to slave mortality is the amount of food per slave that they bought. This was done by the captain and differences in provisions could have been a factor in the well-being of the slaves on board. The regional differences could not be research, due to a lack of bookkeeping in that area, but it would be interesting to see whether this statement stands against the primary sources that might be found on this topic.

The slave mortality on the fourth journey was high, due to illness, a long duration, an unexperienced captain and a lack of luck. This resulted in a loss, contrasting the profitable third journey by Menkenveld who managed to sail quickly and in doing so, keeping more slaves alive. The topic of slave mortality has been a heated debate recently, and this research might contribute a little, including most of the major factors that could have contributed to the well-being of the people that unwillingly set sail to a land that they did not know.

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