Interwoven

Slaving in the Southern Atlantic under the Union of the Iberian Crowns, 1580–1640

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Abstract

This article explores the linkages between the slave trades to Spanish and Portuguese America during the Iberian Union (1580–1640). Drawing upon legal suits, it argues that Brazilian port cities were both destinations and hubs for the re-exportation of West Central African captives to Spanish colonies. Vessels frequently “stopped over” in Brazilian ports following the Atlantic crossing due to navigational exigencies and to avoid paying the higher duties on captives levied in Spanish American ports. This article demonstrates that the integration of the slave trades to Spanish and Portuguese America facilitated the spread of slavery well beyond sugar-producing regions.

Keywords

Angola – Brazil – Argentina – slave trade – food supply

Introduction

Following a Portuguese military victory against Kasange in 1622, Angola governor João Correia de Sousa sent his field commander to bring all of the “sobas macotas, who are his counselors, tendalas, and maculuntos, ministers of his war,” as well as four “gingos,” or “heirs apparent to Casange,”—26 individuals in all—to the coast to swear vassalage to the Portuguese and choose a new ruler.¹

¹ “Carta de João Correia de Sousa ao Marquês de Frecilha,” 3 June 1622 in António Brásio, comp., Monumenta Missionária Africana: África Ocidental [hereafter, “MMA”], vol. vii (Lis-
The Kasange elites were placed in a well-guarded vessel, and then Sousa sent for the “people of each soba, both warriors as well as women and children.” Over 1,100 individuals marched to the coast, where they were divided among five vessels waiting to carry captives of Portugal’s rudimentary *conquista* in Angola to the New World as slaves. Once embarked, Sousa dispatched the ships to the governor general of Brazil, Diogo Mendonça Furtado, in Bahia, where the Kasange elites would be made to do “what His Majesty wants or what is most useful.” Sousa insisted that the entire community had been enslaved justly and, with the exception of three *sobas* he had ordered beheaded, had not been killed or otherwise harmed. Despite the large numbers of women and children among the captives, Sousa was reluctant to squander such a large quantity of “pesas,” so he suggested that the captives be employed in “the gold mines of São Vicente,” which, owing to a lack of laborers, had not rendered much metal.

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2 Sousa appears to have divided the men and the women among five ships in order to prevent rebellion: among the survivors, women were double the number of men.

3 Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Conselho Ultramarino [hereafter, “AHU, CU”], Angola, cx. 2, doc. 125. “Relação de Manuel Maciel Aranha descriminando o número de escravos que o governador e capitão-general de Angola, João Correia de Sousa, enviou para o governador geral do Brasil, Diogo Mendonça Furtado, distribuídos por cinco navios, contabilizando os que foram entregues em Angola e os que morreram na travessia,” Bahia, circa 1623. The incident is recounted in a number of secondary sources, including José C. Curto, “A restituição de 10.000 súbditos ndongo ‘roubados’ na Angola de meados do século XVII: uma análise preliminar,” in Isabel Castro Henriques and Joana Pereira Leite, eds., *Escravatura e transformações culturais: África—Brasil—Caríbas* (Lisbon: Editora Vulgata, 2002), 185–208; Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas*, 136–137. Heywood and Thornton were unable to locate the original document in the AHU, which appears to have been placed in a box of nineteenth-century Angolan materials until a recent reorganization.
Sousa’s pre-emptive aggression generated a flurry of correspondence in Lisbon. Though the Royal Council ordered the freedom of the sobas and mandated their re-embarkation for Angola at Sousa’s expense, a royal order (carta régia) directed to the governors of Portugal suggested that the rest of the captives might be divided among “Maranhão and other parts” in order to avoid the prospect that “they might attempt some disturbance.” In spite of their young age and ill health, Lisbon officials did not want, like Sousa, to “lose the profits the Royal Treasury could have from these slaves.”

Further information about the fates of the 628 men, women, and children who survived the Atlantic crossing is not known. As the composition of the Kasangewar prisoners impounded in Bahia suggests, the enslavement of entire communities that resulted from Portuguese military campaigns in West Central Africa was one factor among several that resulted in large numbers of children and women ending up as captives for the Atlantic trade. It also challenges assumptions that the captives landed in the sugar-producing captaincy of Bahia (and colonial capital) were overwhelmingly adult males (see Figure 1).

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4 The governor of Brazil re-embarked at least some of the sobas unjustly enslaved for Angola, but it is unknown whether they survived the ocean crossing. “Carta régia aos governadores de Portugal,” 9-12-1622, MMA, vii, pp. 64–65 and “Carta régia ao governador do Brasil,” Lisbon, 17-12-1622 in MMA, vii, p. 66; “Carta régia ao Vice-Rei de Portugal,” 15-12-1622, in MMA vii, p. 204, “Repatriamento dos sobas e pretos enviados para o Brasil,” Lisbon, 17-1-1624 in MMA vii, pp. 197–198, “Carta régia aos governadores de Portugal,” 02-05-1625, in MMA, vii, 332.


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Pesas/peças (literally, “pieces” in Portuguese) and the Spanish equivalent, piezas, were a unit used to count slaves. A healthy adult slave was the equivalent of one “peça”; younger, older, or ill slaves were usually valued at less than one peça.

With the exception of Dutch-ruled Pernambuco (1630–1654), a relative paucity of surviving records in Portugal and its former colonies has led scholars to draw upon scant documentation to approximate the volume of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century slave trade to Brazil, including slave licenses, promissory notes, contracts and other notarial records produced in Europe and Brazil, colonial officials’ sweeping contemporary estimates, and comparisons with other sugar-producing regions such as the British Caribbean. These methodologies

An overview of these methods is provided in Domingues and Eltis, 95 and Alexandre Vieira Ribeiro, “The Transatlantic Slave Trade to Bahia, 1582–1851,” in Extending the Frontiers, 130. Equating pre-1650 Brazil to the British Caribbean during the “sugar revolution,” Eltis, Behrendt, and Richardson speculate that 150,000 slaves were disembarked in Brazil between 1601 and 1650. David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, and David Richardson, “A participação dos países da Europa e das Américas no tráfico transatlântico de escravos: novas evidências,” Afro-Ásia 24 (2000): 28; Gustavo Acioli Lopes, “Brazil’s Colonial Economy and the Atlantic Slave Trade: Supply and Demand,” in David Richardson and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, eds., Net-
presume that slave vessels boarded the proportions of men, women, and children planned, followed the itineraries that they declared in ship registries, and that the African presence in seventeenth-century Portuguese America was confined to sugar plantations, assumptions that recent research on slavery in early Spanish colonies has overturned.7

Beyond misrepresenting the characters and significance of Africans to the early South Atlantic, the simplification of Brazil’s colonial history to a succession of economic cycles (sugar, gold, and coffee) has led scholars largely to neglect the possibility of slave traffic to the non-plantation southern captaincies of Rio de Janeiro and São Vicente. Following the initiation of their first military offensive in Angola against Ndongo in 1579, Portuguese waged war and exacted tribute from Mbundu populations they were able to subject throughout the seventeenth century, resulting in the sale of thousands of individuals for export to Atlantic markets. The great majority of the (conservatively estimated) 10–15,000 captives embarked at Luanda each year of the early 1600s went to Spanish American ports, most to the Caribbean but a significant minority to the southern Atlantic.8 If Portugal’s role in supplying these Spanish American markets with enslaved laborers prior to 1640 has been acknowledged, few scholars have considered the slave trades to Brazil and Spanish America as an integrated commerce.9


9 On the classic view of Brazilian and Spanish American trades as “follow[ing] patterns that
This article demonstrates that a single, integrated slave trade to Spanish and Portuguese American colonies moved American-produced food and necessities to Angola in exchange for enslaved laborers. Brazilian port cities were both destinations and hubs for the re-exportation of West Central African slaves to Spanish America. They attracted vessels that left slaves for transshipment to Spanish colonies to the north and south owing to their proximity to Portuguese outposts on the African coast, the lower duties that Brazilian officials collected on captives at the port of disembarkation (and their greater level of salutary neglect), local demands for slave labor, an abundance of raw materials for shipbuilding and repair, and normal exigencies of navigation.

Transshipments through Brazil also challenge the notion that 1640 represented a great rupture for the slave trade to Spanish America, as residents of Spanish colonies often obtained captives via intermediaries in Portuguese America. This trans-imperial reality also complicates conventional complete separation between “intra-American” or “intercolonial” and “transatlantic” voyages. Within the historiography of the slave trade, the scholarly consensus has been that intra-American trading flourished only in markets too small to absorb the captives arriving by the hundreds on vessels arriving directly from the African coast, in periods of restriction on legal trading, or after 1640. Recent studies of the trade to Pernambuco, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro have acknowledged that Brazilian ports served as entrepôts for other slave markets in Brazil, but rarely have scholars addressed the possibility that a subset of these captives were sold outside of Portuguese territory. This article shows that the integra-
tion of the slave trade to Spanish and Portuguese America facilitated the spread of slavery well beyond sugar-producing regions during and after the period of Iberian Union.

Muddling the Middle Passage: Stopovers in Brazil

The intra-American trade in slaves has received less attention than its trans-Atlantic component. In her landmark work on the slave trade to Spanish America during the Portuguese asiento period (1595–1640), Enriqueta Vila Vilar referred to intercolonial trade between Spanish, Dutch, and English-controlled ports as the traffic in “ladino” (acculturated) slaves, implying that captives who arrived from Caribbean entrepôts were less “African” than those who crossed the Atlantic directly for Spanish America.12 In his recent study of the intercolonial slave trade to British America, Gregory O’Malley defined an intra-American voyage as “a shipment between two American locales for which the enslaved people on board changed vessels or owners (usually both) after their arrival in the Americas,” excluding voyages that acquired captives in Africa but which made sales in multiple American ports.13

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12 Vila Vilar, Hispanoamérica, 158–159.
13 O’Malley, Final Passages, 18.
Trade Database used a different rubric for distinguishing transatlantic from intra-American voyages. In the case of ambiguous records of slave voyages from late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Cuba, David Eltis excluded voyages from the database that carried fewer than 140 captives, the average number of slaves transported to Havana from that dataset on vessels known to have crossed the Atlantic, classifying smaller cargoes arriving in Havana as local or intra-American.14 Neither definition takes into account the exigencies of early modern navigation or the realities of transporting a human cargo; separating “transatlantic” from “intra-American” voyages oversimplifies the complex, multi-stage itineraries that sixteenth and seventeenth-century slavers followed. This section explores why a number of slavers made stopovers in Brazil and how these stopovers integrated Iberian trade in the North and South Atlantic.

The technical limitations of sailing on the open ocean meant that sixteenth and seventeenth-century vessels avoided spending much more than a month at sea.15 Their needs for any port to reprovision and repair forced crew to work their ways around imperial jealousies—and modern historians’ tendencies to take nominal restrictions at their word. The historiography has tended to separate the various slave trafficking routes of the Atlantic world by nation, but the men who participated in the Angola trade were in fact acquainted with Portuguese and Spanish American ports in the North and South Atlantic. Alonso Gonzalez, the pilot of a vessel that landed captives in Buenos Aires in 1618 and again in 1620, had made a number of voyages between Angola and Rio de Janeiro prior to his first reported arrival in the Río de la Plata.16 Buenos Aires-based slave trader Manuel Rivero made multiple slaving voyages between Angola, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires; in 1643, his wife Domingas Leal told Spanish authorities that he had been absent from Buenos Aires for four years and that she had last heard that he was in the Caribbean, at Cartagena de

14 David Eltis, “Construction of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database: Sources and Methods,” http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/understanding-db/methodology-12 (accessed 26 May 2017). Eltis notes that other contributors to that database may have used different criteria.
Indias, likely organizing another slaving voyage.\textsuperscript{17} Familiarity with multiple Iberian colonies via the slave trade suggests how the African coast integrated the Atlantic world.\textsuperscript{18}

In the first instance, stopovers on the Brazilian coast were predicated by the geography of the South Atlantic. The Brazil Current carried slave ships down the coast to the River Plate year-round, but sandbars, winds, and other natural features impeded navigation during several winter months of the year.\textsuperscript{19} The River Plate was navigable only between the summer months of December to March, and even then not in the large ocean-going vessels favored for the Atlantic crossing. Probably a number of the captives they brought from Africa were reboarded in Brazil onto smaller, shallower craft more suited for charging up the estuary.

Setting navigational considerations aside, few vessels—especially merchant craft—carried sufficient provisions to last many weeks at sea. Rough seas and humidity quickly spoiled foodstuffs. Though early modern navigators had yet to pinpoint the causes of scurvy and dysentery, they knew that making multiple stopovers to refresh, re-provision, and seek treatment for any illnesses correlated to better health of both crew and any captives that they may have been transporting.\textsuperscript{20} Beyond ensuring their safe arrival in Spanish American ports, stopping over in Brazil served a host of surreptitious ends.

Cross-comparisons of port entry records with sources such as royal officials’ correspondence and investigations of illegal slave trading reveal that vessels reported as arriving from a Brazilian port in one source were sometimes transatlantic voyages that stopped over in one or more Brazilian ports prior to their arrivals in Buenos Aires. For instance, the shipmaster of \textit{La María San Juan}, Lorenzo Nicolen, manifested 67 slaves before local officials, claiming that he had come from Rio de Janeiro. But, in a different record, officials noted that Nicolen’s vessel carried departure certificates “from the factors of Juan Rodriguez Coutiño who reside in Angola,” suggesting that it was a transatlantic slaver that sold captives in Rio de Janeiro prior to continuing on to Buenos

\textsuperscript{17} “Registro y desarme de portugueses, 1643,” \textit{Revista del Archivo General de Buenos Aires}, no. 3 (1871): 147.


\textsuperscript{20} Rodrigues, “Um sepulchro grande,” 333–342.
Table 1  Origins of 133 slaving vessels arriving in the port of Buenos Aires whose first known port of origin was on the Brazilian coast, 1586–1680

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First known port of origin</th>
<th>Number of vessels (% of total)</th>
<th>Known captives disembarked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>71 (53%)</td>
<td>4775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahia</td>
<td>28 (21%)</td>
<td>1738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pernambuco</td>
<td>11 (8%)</td>
<td>671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>São Vicente/Santos</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil, port not specified</td>
<td>20 (15%)</td>
<td>968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>133</strong></td>
<td><strong>8283</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Aires.21 La María’s route through the South Atlantic was hardly unique: of twenty-two vessels that originated in Angola and landed slaves in Buenos Aires prior to 1640, nineteen also dropped anchor in Rio de Janeiro. The remaining three vessels stopped over in Bahia, Espírito Santo, and São Vicente, respectively.22 Information about these trajectories is often derived from investigations of illegal slave trading—records that do not exist for all vessels, leaving open the possibility that many others made similar calls en route to wherever they eventually turn up in known records.

This kind of crosschecking of documentation is necessary because tax records and other centralized accounts produced in Spanish American ports reveal few details about slave ship itineraries. Royal officials usually recorded only a vessel’s last known port of departure (if they recorded one at all) rather than other ports where the vessel sold or acquired captives. More than one-third of the 333 vessels that landed captives in Buenos Aires between 1587 and 1680 were reported to have originated in Brazilian ports (Table 1). In the absence

21 AGI Charcas 123, s/n, “Certificazion de los negros que han entrando en Bs Ayres desde el año de 97 hasta el de 637= de permizion conzedida a los asentistas Pedro Gom= Reynel y Gonzalo Baez Cotiño,” Buenos Aires, 1637; AGI Charcas 38, “Testimonios de todos los negros q an entrado por este puerto de Buenos Ayres desde el año de 1597 hasta el presente de 1606 y veynte y uno de marzo,” Buenos Aires, 1606.

of information about an African port of departure, such vessels would generally be categorized as “intra-American” or “inter-colonial” slavers unless set in the inter-imperial framing developed in this article.

Traders who plied Caribbean-African circuits also made stopovers in Brazilian ports, evincing the ubiquity of “stopping over” in Portuguese America following the ocean crossing. In 1611, a Luanda-based merchant named Francisco de Marques advised his correspondent in Lisbon that in light of the large number of legal suits levied against traders charged with contraband, it was better to sail for the Spanish Caribbean “via Pernambuco,” rather than directly from the African coast. Marques confided that one of his vessels that was scheduled to depart Luanda would be following the Pernambuco route and that the shipmaster had received orders to divide the captives among four separate vessels upon their arrivals in Brazil—presumably, to mask the transatlantic slaver as smaller, regional transshipments.23

Due to the proximity of Pernambuco and Maranhão to the course from central Africa to Cartagena and other authorized Caribbean ports, traders favored these Brazilian captaincies as transshipment points, but ports even further south supplied the Spanish Main as well. In a letter to one of his business associates in Buenos Aires, slave trader Manuel Rivero reported that a shipmaster ostensibly planning to sail for Cartagena de Indias landed a “quantity of piezas” at Ilha Grande, an island off the coast of the present-day state of Rio de Janeiro, to avoid paying the higher duties on captives that were owed in Spanish American ports.24 Such findings illustrate the extent to which the Iberian slave trade to Spanish and Portuguese America operated as a single commerce rather than the separate, unconnected branches featured in the historiography.

Though duplicity certainly supplemented necessity in the decisions of ship captains of hundreds of unregistered slave voyages to drop anchor in Brazilian ports, licit slave traffic, following the usual course from Spain to southern Africa, which first ran west to the coast of Brazil before following the prevailing southern hemisphere anti-cyclone east to Angola, also contributed to voyages using both Portuguese and Spanish ports. Following its September 1635 departure from Sanlúcar de Barrameda, a Spanish Atlantic port serving Seville and

23 AHU, CU, Angola, Cx. 1, Doc. 18, “Carta de Francisco de Marques a Joan de Argomedo,” Luanda, 22 April 1611.
the Indies trade, the *urca San Miguel* was battered by stormy weather and made an emergency landing in Rio de Janeiro so that crew could careen the vessel. After many months in Rio de Janeiro, *San Miguel* proceeded to Luanda, calling en route at Buenos Aires in March of 1637.25

Beyond navigational considerations or needs for provisions and repairs, the lower duties collected on captives landed in Brazilian ports offered an additional incentive for vessels bound for Spanish colonies to make these stopovers. In the first Brazilian port of disembarkation, shipmasters owed between 3,000 and 4,000 *reis* in duties for each *pieza*; in motivating contrast, shipmasters disembarking slaves paid royal officials 7,000 *reis* per *pieza* in Spanish colonies. In theory, vessels sailing between Brazilian ports were exempt from duties. In 1620, the shipmaster of *Nuestra Señora de Naçaret*, Lorenço Gomes, turned over “45 *piezas*” to the *Alfândega* (customs house) of Espírito Santo (the present-day city of Vitória) as payment for 946,800 *reis* in duties owed on the captives he had embarked in Luanda (the equivalent of nearly 300 enslaved persons) and sold an additional “5 *piezas*” to cover departure taxes as well as the costs of foodstuffs for crew and captives and repairs to his ship. Despite acquiring official authorization to sail for Rio de Janeiro, Gomes proceeded to Buenos Aires, where he disembarked another 220 captives.26 Entry and exit tariffs fluctuated from one Brazilian port to another, cost-saving differences that Gomes may have considered when deciding to disembark captives in the less-trafficked port of Espírito Santo, where entry duties were 640 *reis*, as opposed to Rio de Janeiro, where entry duties were 1,600 *reis*, more than twice as much.27 Initially claiming that he was an intra-American slaver blown off course by bad weather, as did many slaving voyages proceeding under the cover of dubious documentation, an investigation conducted in the port of Buenos Aires revealed Gomes’ actual transatlantic itinerary.28 “Stopovers” on the southern

25 James Ford Bell Library, Archive of the Jesuits in Mexico and South America, Box 3, Folder 44, “Visita of the slave ship San Miguel,” Buenos Aires, 1637. My thanks to David Freeman for sharing this source with me.

26 AGI, Esc 880C, Pieza 10, “Nuestra Senora de Nacaret maestre Lorenco Gomez bino de Angola,” Buenos Aires, 1621; AGI Esc 868A, Pieza 1, fol. 61v–84r, “Certificacion de Antonio de Linares depositario General de la Ciudad de la Trinidad en que zertifica los navios q an entrado desde el ano 1612 asta este de 1639 asi de arrivado como de aviso lo que trujeron y se remato en almoned a por su magd y entero en el 81 Caxa de este puerto,” Buenos Aires, 1639; AGI Charcas 123, s/n, “Expedientes de revocacion por el Tribunal del Consulado de Lima de las licencias concedidas por Buenos Aires a navios de registros [1661–1693].”


28 On transatlantic voyages masquerading as intra-American voyages, see O’Malley, 132–133.
Brazilian coast, whether premeditated or necessary, facilitated the spread of slavery well beyond the sugar-producing regions of the northeast. These surreptitious strategies, in effect, allowed players on the peripheries of sugar in Brazil to acquire enslaved Africans whom they could not otherwise have afforded.

Though time spent in Brazil presented opportunities for voyage investors to increase their profits, it also offered the potential for slave flight. After purchasing some 69 captives at West Central African markets in Lastra, Motemo, and Luanda, Lorenzo García sailed for South America. Though he hoped to sell the bulk of his captives in Buenos Aires, he arrived too late in the year to navigate the Río de la Plata and made a stopover in São Vicente. Six of his captives attempted flight while in the port and were apprehended by Amerindian slave catchers. García had to pay for the medical care of one man who had “a wound from an arrow.” Another captive killed a slave owned by one “X. Estrada,” who had presumably been appointed to guard the new arrivals. García was forced to sell yet another captive to “Manuel Vaz Mulato” to cover the cost of foodstuffs and the dispatch of his vessel to Buenos Aires. He made two unsuccessful attempts to reach the estuarine port before he finally arrived in the city in early 1597 with just 13 captives.29

As the numeric discrepancies between the human cargoes disembarked in Buenos Aires by Lorenzo García and Lorenzo Gomes illustrate, vessels departing from West Central Africa transported variable cargoes of captives during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whether due to slave flight, mortality, fraud, poor business decisions, or bad luck. Neither tribute collection, nor warfare, nor trade fairs guaranteed slave merchants that consistently large numbers of captives would be on the market at any given time.30 It is therefore not feasible to determine whether an early modern Iberian voyage was transatlantic or intra-American based solely on the number of slaves that a vessel disembarked.31


Provisioning the South Atlantic

Far from a lucrative commerce that provided a ready supply of laborers for cash-crop plantations in the Americas and lined traders’ pockets with specie, the early slave trade from Angola and Brazil was often a means through which to obtain foodstuffs, military rations, and other provisions to shore up the tentative Portuguese military presence on the African coast, fund mineral exploration in the Americas, and fend off hunger around the Atlantic. A booming Atlantic trade in grain, hides, tallow, and other locally produced commodities facilitated access to enslaved labor for a broader swath of the Brazilian and Spanish American populations than is commonly believed.

Acquiring captives by purchasing them at slave fairs in the West Central African interior required access to a costly, ever-changing assortment of merchandise in order to satisfy both the tastes of the local political authorities who presided over the markets and the middlemen who conveyed goods and slaves between coast and hinterland. At the newly-established fair of Masanga Caiita in 1629, acceptable wares to barter for slaves included various silk and cotton fabrics from India, England, France, and the Low Countries; domestic scabbards (bainhas) produced in Guimarães, Portugal; hats; and mirrors; all costing precious hard currencies. Indeed, expenditures on Asian and European manufactured goods often surpassed other financial outlays of early modern slave voyages, including the salaries of crew and customs duties. Portuguese military officers soon figured out that warfare, kidnapping, and the seizures of entire communities were much more cost-effective, if violent, means to obtain captives. As Antônio Dinis, an early seventeenth-century observer, explained, each “pessa de Indias” purchased “terra dentro” (in the interior) cost 10,000 reis and was sold to merchants for double that price, but noted discreetly, “that is only when one buys them.” More commonly, officials in Luanda employed private slave soldiers, known as “negros de guerra,” to “fight on our behalf, and everything that they take their owner has a part in, and these [captives] do

32 “Preços e medidas para o trato dos escravos na feira de Masanga Acaita,” Embaqua [Ambaca], 15 October 1629, in Beatrix Heintze, with Maria Adélia de Carvalho Mendes, Fontes para a história de Angola de século XVII, 11, Cartas e documentos oficiais da colectânea documental de Fernão de Sousa, 1624–1635 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1988), 311–312.
not cost them any money.”34 The low costs in imported merchandise for which traders acquired captives for sale on Atlantic markets gave them more capital to acquire foodstuffs rather than expend goods for some of their captives.

Portuguese officials grumbled that, in contrast to vessels from Portugal, which brought only “trade goods,” vessels from Spanish territories in the Americas arrived in Luanda “loaded with wines, provisions, and other things,” to “embark slaves for the Indies.”35 Some portion of these commodities may have been entrusted to *pumbeiros* for *resgate* at trade fairs. Writing in 1655, Bartolomeu Paes Bulhão asserted that wine facilitated trade with local residents; by this point, *aguardientes* produced from sugarcane grown in Brazil were also in circulation.36 Outside of Crown-sanctioned trade fairs, however, Angolan colonists were willing to part with captives in exchange for products from Spanish America. In 1618, military commander Manuel Cerveira Pereira sent an infantry captain, Lourenço Dias Ferreira, from the new outpost he had established in Benguela to Luanda with a quantity of slaves to purchase “some things for the service of this conquest,” including food and “things for the soldiers to wear.” In Luanda, Ferreira negotiated for these necessities for his troops with a ship owner named Cosme Carvalho. Though Ferreira’s certificate does not indicate the ultimate destination of the captives who were sold for foodstuffs, Carvalho is known to have made at least one slaving voyage from Angola to Buenos Aires three years earlier. Illustrating Carvalho’s role as a supplier of government necessities on the Angola side, during an inspection of his vessel, *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, upon his departure from the South American port, local officials impounded three horses and 355 *fanegas* (bushels) of flour.37

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37 AGI Esc 892A, Pieza 5, fol. 3v–4r. Permanent residents of the Rio de la Plata were permitted
Other merchants similarly took advantage of the integration of the Spanish and Portuguese South Atlantic to move humble commodities to the most advantageous market in order to acquire slaves. Around 1615, Martín Ochoa de Arancivía, a vecino of Buenos Aires, embarked wheat flour on behalf of several residents of Buenos Aires to sell in Pernambuco. Upon arriving in Pernambuco, Arancivía had trouble unloading the flour because another large quantity of the grain had recently arrived from Portugal, so Arancivía re-exported the flour on to Angola. Buying slaves, at the time, Arancivía claimed that flour’s valuation in Luanda at 25 pesos per fanega allowed him to barter for a number of slaves, whom he then sold in Pernambuco.38

Private initiative (via the trade in slaves and contraband merchandise), rather than crown sponsorship, funded the colonization of Brazil and the conquest of Angola.39 In 1602, Governor of Brazil Francisco de Sousa entrusted slaves and other goods captured from a Dutch vessel to Pedro Mendez de Sosa for sale in Buenos Aires. Remittances from his sale of the captives and goods were to be employed in “the mines and fortifications ... of the village of São...”

to exchange limited quantities of grain, tallow, and hides with Brazilian and Angolan traders for “necessities” but were prohibited from using these so-called “fruits of the earth” to acquire slaves. In 1613, the Council of the Indies rejected the request of the appointee (and holder of the Angolan contract) Gonçalo Vaz Coutinho to import horses from the Río de la Plata to be used in the conquest of Angola on the grounds that vessels large enough to transport livestock to the African coast would introduce contraband “blacks and merchandise” to South America. AGI Charcas 1, r. 12, n. 296, “Consulta del Consejo de Indias sobre los grandes yinconvenientes q se Representan en lo que Pide el Governor de Angola cerca de que se le permita sacar cavallos del Río de la Plata de que se trata en la cons38 y inclusa del Cons40 de Portugal,” Madrid, 17 November 1613.

38 AGI Esc880A, Pieza 1, fol. 24v–26v, “Confesión Martín de Arancivía,” Buenos Aires, 3 April 1617.

Vicente” on the southern Brazilian coast and to pay soldiers. Several years later, the same Governor Sousa petitioned the Spanish Council of the Indies for 1,000 “escravos de Guiné” (Guinea slaves) on behalf of the residents of São Vicente to be forwarded on credit of the Royal Treasury, payable within three years, or to give licenses to individuals who could bring the slaves exempt from duties. Likely suspecting that the slaves would be resold by their recipients for a profit, and doubting the prospects for mineral exploration in São Vicente, the Council of the Indies assented to importing only “up to 20 slaves from Guinea” from Bahia as well as the implements necessary for mineral exploration.

Brazilian captaincies with relatively small populations of enslaved Africans in the seventeenth century were nonetheless important spaces for organizing, outfitting, and redistributing slave voyages between Angola and Spanish America, including those viewed as minor within the larger historiography of the early slave trade to Brazil, such as São Vicente. At least thirteen of the 333 vessels that landed in Buenos Aires carrying enslaved Africans claimed they were sailing for São Vicente, the southernmost Brazilian captaincy. São Vicente traders also trafficked captives to the Río de la Plata via land and riverine routes, as they had prior to the establishment of Buenos Aires, which traversed Paraguay well into the seventeenth century. São Vicente was negligible in terms of sugar production, but its presence in the Iberian imagination suggests the need to look beyond sugar in order to understand more fully the African slave trade to early Brazil. Affonso Sardinha, the owner of a sugar trapiche (animal-powered mill) in the captaincy of São Vicente, loaned ships to traders to buy captives in Angola, bought indigenous as well as African slaves, and had business partners

40 AGI Esc 846A, Pieza 7, fol. 1r–1v, “Declaracion de Pedro Mendez de Sosa,” Buenos Aires, 7 June 1600; and fol. 2v–3r, “Treslado de la carta del governador del Brasil,” São Paulo, 14 January 1600.

41 “Consulta do Conselho da India sobre a petição de Diogo de Quadros, referente ao benefício das minas de ouro de Sao Vicente,” Lisbon, 5 June 1636 in Roseli Santaella Stella, Sobre a Capitania de São Vicente, séculos XVI e XVII (São Paulo: Academia Lusíada de Ciências, Letras e Artes, 1999), 117–126; “Traslado da petição de Diogo de Quadros referente ao benefício das minas de São Vicente, com o parecer de Francisco de Sousa” in Ibid., 135–145.

42 See, for example, AGI Esc 880A, “Treslado de algunas causas hechas contra culpados en la comisión de arrivadas por el lizado Mathias Delgado Florez Juez de su magd Andre Dorno de Fuentes ...” fol. 6v–7r, “Declarassion Pedro Alonssso,” Buenos Aires, 10 February 1621.

in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, and Bahia.44 Buenos Aires and environs, the treeless *pampas*, lacked the timbers necessary for ship construction, but, as a Spanish report noted, Brazilian captaincies had abundant wood of all kinds.45 Private shipyards in Brazil, particularly in the captaincies of Rio de Janeiro and São Vicente, were repairing vessels like the *San Miguel* and even building merchant vessels for the Angola trade by the early seventeenth century. Writing from Rio de Janeiro to his Buenos Aires correspondent in 1620, slave trader Manuel Rivero indicated that he planned to travel to São Vicente to oversee the construction of a new vessel to sail for Angola.46

While available evidence indicates that the overwhelming majority of captives sold in the South Atlantic during the seventeenth century were embarked in West Central Africa, Brazilian stopovers added to the diversity of enslaved cargoes yielding a substantial variety of ethnonyms and racial descriptors of captives sold in Buenos Aires. These Brazilian stopovers underscore the extent to which transatlantic and intra-American trades blended together.47 In 1624, shipmaster Gonçalo Mateos embarked captives from West Central Africa on the vessel *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* and sailed from Luanda to Rio de Janeiro. In the Brazilian port, Mateos sold an unknown number of these people and embarked at least 66 others, whom he described as “piezas de Guinea,” before proceeding to the Río de la Plata. Among the 133 captives he finally disembarked in Buenos Aires was a 23-year-old woman known as “Andrea Fula,” indicating Fulani/Peul origins in West Africa; another young man inventoried was “Andres negro ladino,” (Latinized black) indicating that he had spent some time in Iberia or elsewhere in the Americas and acquired linguistic and cultural proficiency in Spanish or Portuguese.48 A captive on a separate vessel supposedly originating in “Angola,” also named *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, included

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47 On how the intercolonial trade nuances linkages between American and African port cities, see O’Malley, 13–15.
48 AGI Esc 849a, fol. 133r, “Exsibission de siete pieças,” Buenos Aires, 18 June 1624; fol. 137r–138r, “Declaracion de Andres negro ladino que es de la partida de los negros que binieron en el nabio el Rosario maestre Gonçalo Mateos,” Buenos Aires, 21 June 1624.
a woman named Angela identified as a “creole mulata from Brazil,” indicating that she had been born into American slavery of mixed European and African ancestry. Angela may have been embarked in a Brazilian port for sale in Buenos Aires; alternatively, she could have accompanied Nuestra Señora del Rosario to Angola to translate or provide other services for her master.49

Beyond mixing individuals from different African provenance zones, vessels that departed Brazil for the Río de la Plata also transshipped Amerindian slaves. A vessel owned by Captain Lope Vazquez Pestaña that departed from one port on the coast of Brazil in 1593 transported 44 unregistered “Guinea blacks” and “one Indian slave woman from Brazil,” one of 47 indigenous Brazilian captives known to have been sold in the Río de la Plata.50

The 1640 Moment

Following the restoration of the Portuguese crown in 1640 and the Dutch capture of Luanda in 1641, the vibrant South Atlantic slave trade temporarily dwindled. The resumption of slave traffic to Buenos Aires from Angola by 1649, less than one year after Luanda’s return to the Portuguese, corroborates other recent scholarship which suggests that 1640 may not have represented such a rupture after all.51 As during the Portuguese asiento period, intra-American and transatlantic slave trades to Spanish America remained interwoven via Brazil. The continued importance of Bahia in the slave trade to the Río de la Plata, and the diversity of slaves who were transshipped from Bahia and Rio de Janeiro to Buenos Aires during this period, reminds us that later patterns—

such as the direct, exclusive traffic between Bahia and West Africa, or Rio de Janeiro and West Central Africa—were not in place during the seventeenth century. In 1671, the governor of Bahia, Don Alonso Furtado de Castro, wrote the governor of the Río de la Plata hoping to acquire horses, emphasizing that the two regions had a “long friendship.” Between 1670 and 1672 alone, at least seven vessels hailing from Bahia, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro, and Santos, all en route to Angola, landed in Buenos Aires on the outbound southerly voyage with trade goods, suggesting the continued relevance of Spanish American products in facilitating African commerce.

The story of an African woman who appeared in the records as “Ysabel” or “Margarita” serves to illustrate how tracking the movements of Africans (rather than vessels) might better approximate the demographic realities of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Americas. Spanish authorities apprehended Margarita in the interior city of Córdoba, in present-day Argentina, in 1621 when she was en route to an unknown destination (perhaps Potosí) and in the company of a slave trader named Juan de la Sierra. Margarita roused the suspicion of Spanish authorities because the name that she reported as her own, Ysabel, did not match the name on her license, issued in Buenos Aires, which authorized her duty-free transport further inland, thus indicating that it was falsified. Margarita/Ysabel stated that she was “from a land that is called Lanpa in the kingdom of Angola” (likely Lemba or Malembo, north of the Congo River), and that she was transported from there to Bahia at an unknown time in the company of her master, a Spaniard. Some time later, Margarita was embarked on another vessel, this time for Buenos Aires. Ten or twelve days after her arrival in that port, Margarita was in the service of a cleric (clérigo). Soon after, Margarita was returned to her first master, the Spaniard, and began her journey inland. Unsure of which ship had transported her to Buenos Aires, Margarita could recall only that she had arrived with “the black men and black women who came this year.” She further explained to officials that Africans like her “counted years by the planting seasons of each one, and that she had not been in Buenos Aires one

54 On “Lanpa” as a transliteration of “Lemba,” see Wheat, Atlantic Africa, fn. 49, 136–137.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Vessel name</th>
<th>Captain/maestre</th>
<th>Port of departure</th>
<th>Stated destination</th>
<th>Merchandise traded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1671</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Santiago</td>
<td>Francisco de Lima</td>
<td>Brazil, port unknown</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Manioc flour and “various merchandise”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1671</td>
<td>2 Jan</td>
<td>ns del Amparo</td>
<td>Juan Thomas</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Sugar, conserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1671</td>
<td>25 Jan</td>
<td>San Joseph</td>
<td>Manuel Gonçales</td>
<td>Bahia</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Wood, letters from Bahia governor warning of the presence of French vessels in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1671</td>
<td>29 Jan</td>
<td>San Antonio y ns de la Conzezión [sic]</td>
<td>Antonio de Amaya</td>
<td>Bahia</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Salt, china, slaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1671</td>
<td>25 Feb</td>
<td>San Antonio y Almas</td>
<td>Antonio Fernandes Silva</td>
<td>Pernambuco</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1671</td>
<td>15 Apr</td>
<td>ns de la Concepción y Almas</td>
<td>Captain Antonio Guerrero, maestre Manuel Diaz</td>
<td>Santos</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Wood, aguardiente, sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1672</td>
<td>16 Jan</td>
<td>La Concepción y Almas</td>
<td>Phelipe Rodriguez Tello/Juan Mousiño</td>
<td>Bahia</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Planting time.” Twelve vessels arrived in Buenos Aires that we know of in 1621; one, a navio named Nuestra Señora del Rosario, which anchored in late February and was reported to have originated in Bahia, carried a cargo of 180 male and female captives, of whom at least 27 were crías, children under the age of seven. The shipmaster, Francisco Ambrossio, claimed that the vessel was intended for São Vicente and had arrived in Buenos Aires accidentally.
The *armador* (ship owner), Antonio Lopez, averred that *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* had arrived in Buenos Aires following a failed attempt to make landfall in Bahia on account of poor weather and pursuit by corsairs. Some of the *piezas*, reported Lopez, were embarked on his account “and the account of people in Bahia in the state of Brazil and in Angola.” Might this elaborate tale have been a situation of dividing up captives between several vessels in order to escape notice by Spanish authorities? Regardless of how long she had spent in Brazil or in the Iberian world, Margarita was unable to provide testimony in Spanish or Portuguese. Rather than focusing on the ultimate origin of vessels, scholars must examine the movements of enslaved persons like Margarita among several American ports. A lack of evidence specifying that vessels arrived directly from Africa does not necessarily indicate that few Africans landed there. Rather, this evidence illustrates that every port in Brazil facilitated the early slave trade from Africa.

The early slave trade from Africa to Brazil—like that to Spanish America—was not necessarily a specialized and lucrative commerce designed to furnish laborers for large plantation economies. Rather, in many parts of Brazil, enslaved Africans provided the basic labor needed to sustain a modicum of a colonial presence. Data on these early slave trades suggest that African ports such as Luanda linked Portuguese and Spanish America more than did the formal union of the two Iberian crowns or imperial powers. We might view Brazilian ports as dynamic factories on the American side of the slave trade—places where vessels were constructed and ships provisioned—rather than as successful or failed plantation zones. If the Atlantic slave trade to Brazil for the first four decades of the seventeenth century was, ostensibly, secondary to that of Spanish America in terms of the numbers of Africans ultimately disembarked, Spanish sources reveal the extent to which the operations of carrying large numbers of people across an entire ocean were vital to Brazilian port cities far south of Bahia and Recife.

55 AGI Esc 880A, pieza 2, fol. 71r–73r, “Declaracion del armador [Antonio Lopez],” 1 April 1621.
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