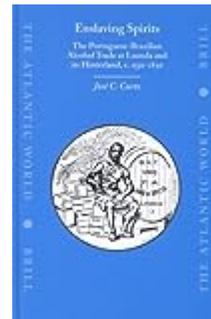




José C. Curto. *Enslaving Spirits: The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and its Hinterland, c. 1550-1830*. Leiden: Brill, 2004. xi + 252 pp. \$107.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-13175-0.



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Published on H-Atlantic (July, 2006)

Bacchus's Atlantic Friends

Readers will welcome this new addition to the literature on the Atlantic slave trade for the insights it offers on the (all but ignored) importance of Portuguese wines and Brazilian sugar cane brandy in the south Atlantic slave trade connecting Angola and Brazil. José C. Curto of York University (Canada) has offered an important contribution to our understanding of the scope and depth of this new aspect of the slave trade. By extension, this work would be of great interest to historians of nineteenth-century Angola and the Atlantic, as well as those concerned with the growing interest in the history of food.

As Curto states several times in this work, others have mentioned wine and brandy as being omnipresent in Angola and some have included a small discussion of the role these beverages played as trading commodities. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first in-depth study of this aspect of the Angolan slave trade. It is certainly the only such work in English. After a brief introduction outlining the longevity and widespread use of indigenous wines in Africa (before and during contact with Europeans), in his second chapter Curto explores the in-

roduction of Portuguese wines into a variety of coastal Africa societies. The next three chapters form the heart of the work, each concentrating on alcohol in Luanda (and the interior) and the slave trade. Chapter 6 discusses the high rates of profit made in the trade, while chapter seven highlights the importance of the non-potable uses of these spirits. The author then ends the work with a brief conclusion.

The consumption of wines and stronger alcohols was not new to these African societies, as Curto so carefully points out in his first two chapters. What was new was the quantity of wines and brandies that came to flow into coastal Africa as well as their relative strength vis-à-vis locally made brews. These larger quantities, in turn, influenced the long-term drinking habits of many African peoples. Curto does not say this in so many words, but his examples and the wealth of data he has uncovered led me to that conclusion (he includes twenty-five graphs that summarize much of the economic data presented in the text). His materials on the importance of these spirits in the slave trade are very convincing. He skillfully uses (mostly) primary materials from Lisbon, Luanda, and Rio

de Janeiro, as well as printed sources, to discuss wines and brandies in this trade and to extract the overall numerical totals that he needed.

In addition, this work sheds light on two aspects that were of particular interest to this reviewer, both beyond the focus of Curto's work. First, Curto begins to provide a coherent explanation of one of the great mysteries of early modern Portuguese agriculture: the deliberate over-production of wine at the expense of other crops that had to be imported. Why, for example, would the Portuguese produce wine on Madeira when there was already a surplus in Europe? Curto's work shows that these wines, both from Portugal as well as from Madeira, were critical items of trade, very much demanded by suppliers in Luanda and the Angolan interior. Madeira wine in particular was a wine made for long-distance trade and this was one of its many uses. According to Curto, roughly one-third of the slaves obtained in the trade in Luanda were obtained using Brazilian brandy and Portuguese wines (p. 184). Clearly, these were important commodities. Curto also outlines how the taxes from these spirits were an important source of revenue for the

Luanda city council, as well as those from licenses from the taverns that served these drinks to the public (pp. 162-174). This brings me to my second point of interest: the widespread perception of Luanda as a nest of Europeans whose best friend was alcohol. As Curto points out, many visitors and officials commented on the large-scale consumption of alcohol in Luanda. This, along with the increasing use of the Angolan colony as a place to send convicts (especially after 1880), cemented a very negative image of the colony in Portuguese popular perception. This would delay voluntary European colonization of the colony for some time. Thus wine and brandy and their popularity in Angola would have an impact well beyond the slave trade, the agents who functioned in it, and the general population of Luanda.

This is an important work for all these reasons and one that merits the attention of scholars working in this arena. It is also a clearly written work that is easy to follow. All in all, Curto has taken a very slippery subject and crafted a detailed study of the importance of spirits in the Angolan slave trade.

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Citation: Timothy Coates. Review of Curto, Jos   C., *Enslaving Spirits: The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and its Hinterland, c. 1550-1830*. H-Atlantic, H-Net Reviews. July, 2006.

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