



Linda A. Newson, Susie Minchin. *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century.* Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007. xiv + 378 pp. \$148.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-15679-1.

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Rethinking the Atlantic Slave Trade from the “Guinea of Cape Verde”

At first sight, the material of this major contribution to the study of the transatlantic slave trade seems as though it should be more familiar than it is. The trade began, after all, through the Iberian Atlantic, and many of the practices which later slavers and plantation owners developed in the Atlantic world derived from these early interactions. One need only look at the history of Barbados and South Carolina for the proof of this. Techniques of sugar cultivation and processing were introduced to Barbados from Brazil in the 1640s, and it was with this input that Barbadian planters switched from indentured British labor to enslaved African labor. Subsequently, many of the first settlers of South Carolina originated from Barbados. One may therefore draw a direct line between production techniques and racial attitudes developed in the Lusophone world to those which subsequently emerged in the low country of the United States.

Such factors make the study of this early Iberian trade fundamental to understanding how the history of slavery in the Atlantic world developed. And yet, as the authors note in their introduction, there have been relatively few studies of the Portuguese slave trade to Spanish America, and in general the transatlantic slave trade of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is notably underrepresented in the literature on Atlantic slavery. Indeed there remains no monograph of the birth of the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century, though this is something that the author of this review will shortly resolve.

The importance of Newson and Minchin's work is twofold. In the first place, they have uncovered precious new documentation in the Archivo General de la Nación in Lima which gives perhaps the most detailed record we have for the entire proceedings of a slave-trading enterprise from the 1610s. The slaver in question, Manuel Bautista Pérez, was much later arrested, tried, and put to death by the Inquisition in Lima, which is why the records were preserved.[1] In the second place, they have pieced together perhaps the most detailed account we have of the lives of slaves in this Iberian trade during every aspect of their transatlantic migration, from capture to sale, as their title suggests.

The focus of the book is particularly on slave health, diet, conditions, and medicinal treatments at every juncture of the voyage. This apparently quite confined narrative focus is in fact a window onto the experience of slaves in the trade, as the emphasis on diet reveals the conditions of slaves during their migration and the type of physical experience they had. Such an emphasis is quite rare in a literature that has been beset by the issue of quantification ever since the *annalists* got their hands on it, and which still struggles to slough off this unhelpful legacy.

Members of this list will find the earlier chapters of most interest to their own research. Here, the authors deal with the ways in which slave voyages were fitted out and develop a detailed picture of how slaves were

procured on the coast of Upper Guinea in the Cacheu region (present-day Guinea-Bissau), the conditions in which slaves were kept on the coast, and the nature of the Middle Passage during the journey to Cartagena in the Nuevo Reino de Granada (present-day Colombia). Although the authors's prime focus in their African chapters is on the Guinea-Bissau region, some useful details emerge in their comparison of the diseases that slaves from Upper Guinea and Angola had on their arrival in the Americas. These details allow them to draw important conclusions relating to agricultural production, diets, and health in these parts of Africa in the early seventeenth century, which is an important contribution to our understanding of precolonial everyday life in these regions of such interest to this list.

The Upper Guinea focus also acts as a useful corrective to some of the recent literature which has suggested that after the late sixteenth century the transatlantic slave trade had an almost exclusively West Central African make-up.[2] Such ideas are certainly incompatible with the findings of this book, which observes the following percentages of slaves from the Upper Guinea region among those sold in Cartagena between 1626 and 1633: 1626–33.3 percent; 1627–70.5 percent; 1628–70.2 percent; 1629–83 percent; 1630–53.3 percent; 1631–31.7 percent; 1632–11.5 percent; and 1633–54.5 percent (p.

153).

This is a book which scholars need to consider with care and detailed attention. One suspects—and indeed the authors themselves admit—that their use of the Lima material is just one aspect of the many new interpretations which the documents may support. And the sign of an original work is one which, like this book, provokes as many questions as it answers.

Notes

[1]. For other detailed studies of Bautista Páez, see in particular Susie Minchin, "May You Always Care for Those of Your Patria": Manuel Bautista Páez and the Portuguese New Christian Community of Viceregal Peru: Slave Trade, Commerce and the Inquisition, 1617-1639 (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1998); Nathan Wachtel, *La Foi du Souvenir: Labyrinthes Marranes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001); and Tobias Green, "Masters of Difference: Creolization and the Jewish Presence in Cabo Verde, 1497-1672" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 2007).

[2]. See Linda Heywood and John Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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