

The Dimension of the Dutch Slave Trade from Western Africa

Author(s): Johannes Postma

Source: *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1972), pp. 237-248

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/180853>

Accessed: 14/02/2011 10:12

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of African History*.

THE DIMENSION OF THE DUTCH SLAVE TRADE FROM WESTERN AFRICA¹

BY JOHANNES POSTMA

I

SUBSTANTIAL participation in the involuntary migration from Africa by the Dutch merchant marine is generally taken for granted in much of the literature on the slave trade. A few authorities go so far as to claim that periodically the Dutch may have dominated the Atlantic slave trade.² This became a distinct possibility after the second quarter of the seventeenth century when the Dutch, with their large carrying fleet, drove the Portuguese from the coasts of West Africa and Brazil, areas that were essential to the slave trade. The notion that ships from the Netherlands were involved in the traffic even earlier has been given currency by the often quoted report of an English colonist at Jamestown, that in the year 1619 '... a Dutch man-of-warre ... sold us 20 negars'.³ Yet, not until very recently has an attempt been made comprehensively to assess the nature and extent of the Dutch slaving activities.⁴ This article focuses on the volume of the Dutch slave trade and aims to fill a research gap clearly voiced by Philip Curtin in his recent book on the Atlantic slave trade.⁵

The task of unravelling the intricacies of the Dutch involvement in the slave trade was a rewarding one, primarily because the archives in the Netherlands are a delight to the researcher. As early as the seventeenth century, Dutch merchants had developed highly rational and efficient institutions of commerce, which produced and preserved numerous accounts, correspondence, and legal papers. The archival holdings of the Dutch West India Company, the principal agent of the Dutch slave trade under a government monopoly, were crucial in this study.

The Director (*Directeur-Generaal*) of the West India Company (WIC) in

¹ A slightly different version of this article was presented as a paper at the thirteenth annual meeting of the African Studies Association at Boston in October 1970. The African Studies Center of Michigan State University and the Faculty Research Council of Mankato State College contributed financially to the research and writing of this article.

² W. S. Unger, 'Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de Nederlandse slavenhandel (I)', *Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek*, xxvi (1956), 153; S. van Brakel, 'Bescheiden over de slavenhandel der WIC', *Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek*, iv (1918), 53; Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), 73; J. D. Fage, *A History of West Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 66.

³ Lerone Bennett, *Before the Mayflower* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1966—first published in 1962), 29-30; Daniel P. Mannix and Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), 50 and 55.

⁴ This refers to my own dissertation, 'The Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade; Slaving on the Guinea Coast, 1675-1795'. Michigan State University, 1970.

⁵ Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 55, 85 and 117.

Africa, stationed at the company's African headquarters in Elmina, Ghana (then the Gold Coast), sent lengthy periodic reports to his superiors in Holland concerning the WIC's commercial pursuits on the African coast. In addition, a nearly complete set of minutes of the meetings of the Council, the governing board assisting the Director, have been preserved since the end of the seventeenth century.⁶ The company's Bookkeeper in Africa prepared, as a rule, annual, semiannual, and bimonthly commercial accounts. Each item of trade, including the slaves, had to be accounted for. If a slave died, a death warrant (*attestatie*) was drawn up and copies of these were sent to Elmina and to the Dutch United Provinces. Before a slaving vessel left Africa for the new world, the captain of the ship had to sign a cargo report (*cognossement*), listing the total number of slaves, and specifying their sex and approximate age. Each of these documents were copiously duplicated by clerks and sent to Elmina and the Netherlands.⁷

Not all papers were preserved, however. The rate of loss is particularly noticeable for the years prior to 1700. Only a small percentage of the documents of the old or first WIC, which operated during the years 1621-74, have survived. The availability of documents, or the lack of them, have influenced the chronological demarcations in the history of the Dutch slave trade. I shall proceed to deal with the subject in three successive stages, viz. the monopoly of the first WIC (1630-74), the monopoly of the second WIC (1675-1734), and the free trade period (1735-95).

II

The initial stage of the Dutch participation in the slave trade is difficult to evaluate due to a dearth of documentary evidence. Since few of the papers of the first WIC have been preserved, it is not to be expected that a comprehensive picture of that early period will ever be unveiled. It is clear, however, that the sale of those twenty slaves at Jamestown in 1619 was incidental rather than designedly a commercial transaction; the slaves in question had undoubtedly been captured from a Portuguese or Spanish slaving vessel.⁸

The Dutch did not start slaving on a regular basis for another decade, when the WIC captured portions of the Portuguese colony of Brazil (1630) and thereby created a market for slaves. A few incidental Dutch slaving ships have been reported crossing the Atlantic during the first three

⁶ The bulk of these minutes were preserved in Elmina until 1872, when the Dutch surrendered their West African trading posts to the English. The documents that had been kept in Africa were then taken to the Netherlands, where they are currently kept in the collection 'Archief van de Nederlandse Bezittingen ter Kuste van Guinea' in the Rijksarchief at The Hague.

⁷ More detailed descriptions of documentary evidence can be located in Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .' 95 ff., and translated copies of some of the crucial documents are included in its appendices.

⁸ Unger, 'Bijdragen', 137; Bennett, *Before the Mayflower*, 29-30.

decades of the seventeenth century,⁹ but it was not until 1629 that the WIC officially accepted the responsibility of supplying Dutch planters in the Americas with African slaves.¹⁰

With the development of sugar plantations in Brazil and the West Indian islands during the 1630s and 1640s, European planters increased their demands for slave labour. In 1641, the Governor of the Dutch colony of Brazil, Johan Maurits, requested the importation of 15,000 black slaves annually. But the WIC was not able to comply with these demands, as the Dutch were still lacking experience in the slave trade.¹¹ (For that matter, the Dutch slave trade never reached such proportions.) During the years 1636–45, one of the most active decades of slaving in the early period, the total number of slaves taken to Brazil by the WIC was 23,163, or less than 3,000 per year.¹² After this decade, a period of decline in the Dutch slave trade followed. This was due to a variety of factors, including financial difficulties of the WIC,¹³ resilience of the Portuguese, and the entrance of other European powers into the Atlantic slave trade. In 1655 the WIC sent a new director to the African coast with the specific instructions to revive the trade in slaves from its recent decline.¹⁴

The Portuguese gradually reconquered their Brazilian colonies, until in 1645 the Dutch lost their last stronghold there. This deprived the WIC of its principal slave market, but it did not preclude Dutch participation in the slave trade as new markets were found in the Spanish colonies and the Guianas.¹⁵ The Spanish trade was carried out illicitly at first, but in 1662 the WIC agreed to the first of the so-called *asiento* contracts. By this agreement the company committed itself to deliver 2,000 black slaves annually to the *asiento* agents in the Western hemisphere. Periodically these contracts lapsed and were renewed, and eventually the volume of slaves rose to a maximum of 4,000 per year, as was the case in 1675.¹⁶

For the remainder of the century, the *asiento* trade constituted the bulk of the Dutch slave trade, although contract figures cannot be relied upon to determine the volume of the trade; frequent breaches of contract and strained international relations periodically forced the trade to a complete halt. This was the case in 1674, when, as a result of the Dutch war against

⁹ W. R. Menkman, *De West-Indische Compagnie* (Amsterdam: P. N. van Kampen, 1947), 26–27. According to Menkman, Dutch merchants started the triangular slave trade before 1700, indeed as early as 1582, but more recent scholarship does not support these allegations; see Unger, 137.

¹⁰ Unger, 'Bijdragen', 138.

¹¹ See Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .', 16, for a more extensive treatment of this subject.

¹² Unger, 'Bijdragen', 138–40 and 142.

¹³ Menkman, *West-Indische Compagnie*, 125; F. Snapper, *Oorlogsinvloeden op de overzeese handel van Holland* (Amsterdam: Published Ph.D. dissertation, 1959), 77.

¹⁴ K. Ratelband, ed., *Vijf Dagregisters van het kasteel Sao Jorga Da Mina aan de Goudkust* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1953), 1.

¹⁵ Unger, 'Bijdragen', 143–4.

¹⁶ *Archief van de Tweede West-Indische Compagnie*, vol. 831. This volume contains several *asiento* slave contracts. Hereafter cited as WIC. See also I. A. Wright, 'The Coymans Assiento', *Bijdragen voor Vaderlandse geschiedenis en oudheidkunde*, VI (1924), 24; and Van Brakel, 'Bescheiden over de slavenhandel', 53.

both France and England (1672-4), the slave trade was interrupted for at least one year.¹⁷ These developments caused the bankruptcy of the old WIC and the creation of a new company under the same name.

The quantitative aspects of the initial period of Dutch involvement in the slave trade will undoubtedly always remain a matter of conjecture.¹⁸ At this point it seems clear that for two separate decades, 1635-45 and 1662-72, the dimension of the slave trade was substantial, exceeding an average of 2,000 slaves per year. But for the remainder of the period the annual average was far below this mark, and perhaps well below 1,000 slaves per year, as during certain years no slaving occurred whatsoever. A global estimate of 70,000 slaves exported from Africa by the Dutch during this forty-five year period seems to be reasonable.

III

Due to the preservation of much larger quantities of documentary evidence, the remaining 120 years of Dutch participation in the slave trade can be analysed with much greater precision. Like its predecessor, the second WIC enjoyed a monopoly of the Dutch slave trade that lasted until 1734.¹⁹ For this reason, the logical source for information is the archives of the WIC. A variety of documents had to be scrutinized in the endeavour to disclose the dimensions of the slave trade. Unfortunately, the main ledger of the company is no longer in existence, otherwise the quantitative problem would have been far simpler. A valuable substitute for the main ledger is a tabulation of the merchandise purchased by the WIC on the African coast during the period of 1675-1731. These 'return goods' (*retourwaren*),²⁰ as the Dutch styled them, listed African products such as gold, ivory, slaves, etc., information that must have been drawn from the main ledger. Surviving bimonthly accounts confirm the reliability of the list of 'return goods'.²¹

The information contained in the list of 'return goods' was tested and supplemented by two other sets of data collected from a variety of other WIC documents. The first of these consists of pertinent information on 241 separate WIC slaving voyages, painstakingly collected from letters, reports, accounts, and other company papers.²² Not every WIC slaving

¹⁷ WIC, vol. 831, pp. 47 and 401. For more details on the Dutch *asiento* trade see Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .', 116-18.

¹⁸ The frequently cited work of Unger (see notes 2 and 25) has thus far been the most authoritative on the slaving activities of the old WIC, whose documents he consulted, although his articles focus on the eighteenth century free trade of Middelburg. Unfortunately, Unger's writings have only been published in Dutch.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the WIC monopoly see Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .', 57-64, and also the sections on the free trade period below.

²⁰ 'Archief der Verspreide West-Indische Stukken', Folder 928, Rijksarchief, The Hague.

²¹ See bimonthly accounts in WIC, vol. 108, pp. 32, 41, 46 and 53.

²² The information is compiled in Appendix A, 229-40, of Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .'.

mission was detected by this method, particularly not for the late seventeenth century, but for the last two decades of WIC participation in the trade the information appears to be quite complete.

A significant flaw in the collection of data just mentioned, and also in the list of 'return goods', is the nearly complete absence of information on the WIC trade with the Loango-Angola coastal region. This trade was not under the supervision of the WIC Director at Elmina, and was therefore not recorded there. Fortunately, a third compilation of data aids in alleviating this problem; this is a collection of assignments (*tourbeurten*) of slaving voyages by the Directors of the WIC in Holland.²³ The information was gleaned primarily from the minutes of Directors' meetings and from correspondence between Africa and the Netherlands. And while the list of assignments is far from complete—it comprises roughly half of the total number of slaving missions undertaken by the WIC—the sample is sufficient to allow comparisons between the African export regions.

A total of 140 slaving assignments can be documented for a fifty-year period. Forty-two of these ships were dispatched to Angola (the name used by the Dutch in reference to the region north of the River Congo, now often called the Loango Coast), eighty-five were sent to either the Slave Coast or the Gold Coast, and the remaining thirteen had optional or mixed destinations. It appears then that the Loango-Angola slave trade of the WIC

Table 1. *The W.I.C. Slave Trade, 1675-1735*

Slaves purchased and listed as 'Return Goods', 1675-1731	88,456
Seven and one-half per cent adjustment for discrepancy in accounting (<i>piezas</i> vs. heads)	6,644
Slaves transported in WIC ships, 1732-5	12,844
	<hr/>
Total number of slaves from the Guinea Coast	107,944
	<hr/> <hr/>
Estimated purchases on the Loango-Angola Coast (50 per cent of the Guinea trade)	54,072
	<hr/>
Guinea and Loango-Angola trade combined	162,016
	<hr/> <hr/>
Transports on hired free traders	3,000
Confiscated slaves	5,000
	<hr/>
Grand total estimates of the WIC trade	170,016
	<hr/> <hr/>
Annual average	2,790

Source: Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .', pp. 102, 103, 107 and Appendices A and C.

²³ Listed as Appendix C, 258-63, of Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .'.

constituted nearly one-third of the total, and related to the Guinea trade in a one to two ratio.

Table 1 illustrates the process employed to arrive at a global estimate of the dimension of the Dutch slave trade during the monopoly period of the second WIC. The list of 'return goods' is used as a basis, and this is supplemented by data drawn from the tabulation of individual ships. This was necessary for the years following 1731, when the list of 'return goods' was concluded. An average of 525 slaves per cargo was inserted when the record of the exact number was not available. This average was calculated on the basis of 159 cargoes of which the exact number of slaves had been recorded.²⁴

The resulting totals had to be augmented by three different factors: first, by a number of free trade slavers that were permitted to buy slaves in Africa by the WIC; secondly, by several thousand slaves that were taken from confiscated Brazilian slaving vessels; thirdly, by a discrepancy in accounting. The latter was due to the fact that the company counted slaves not in terms of individual human beings, but in commercial units of *piezas de India*, a 'piece' being a healthy male or female slave between the ages 15 and 35; children below the age of 15 were valued as fractions of a *pieza de India*. On the basis of a sample of fifty-six WIC slave cargoes of which the figures of both persons and *piezas de India* were recorded, it appears that a discrepancy of approximately seven and one-half per cent should be taken into consideration.²⁵

The list of 'return goods' did not include the slaves acquired through confiscation. At least 4,250 such slaves can be accounted for,²⁶ but this may not include all confiscations. I have therefore ventured to give the slightly higher estimate of 5,000.

Finally, it appears that during the decade of the 1720s, the WIC allowed a few free trade ships to purchase slaves in Africa. A total of ten such ships have been documented, but more vessels may have been involved.²⁷ Since free trade ships were in general considerably smaller than WIC slavers, the total number of slaves involved in these transactions has been estimated at 3,000.²⁸

²⁴ See the table of calculations in *ibid.*, 99.

²⁵ It appears that the WIC rarely purchased child slaves during the seventeenth century, but that this category of slaves rose to nearly ten per cent during the first half of the eighteenth century. In subsequent years, according to Unger, Dutch free traders averaged as many as 21.5 per cent non-adult slaves in their cargoes. See Unger, 'Bijdragen, II', *Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek*, xxviii (1958-60), 49. See also 104-10 in Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .', where I made the unfortunate error of giving 5 instead of 7½ per cent as an accounting discrepancy.

²⁶ These are tabulated in Postma, 107.

²⁷ This information was drawn from insurance policies preserved in the 'Archief der Maatschappij van Assurantie', vols. 215-17, Gemeente Archief, Rotterdam. See also Appendix A-4 in Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .'.

²⁸ An average free trade cargo has been estimated at 288 slaves per ship. See the calculation on p. 151 of Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .'.

IV

The year 1735 has been selected as a demarcation line between the period of the WIC monopoly and the period of free trade, but in actuality the shift took place in two stages. In 1730 the company surrendered its slave trade monopoly everywhere except for the crucially important region of the Gold Coast, but four years later this area was also opened to the Dutch free traders. The years between 1730 and 1735 should be seen as a transition period during which both WIC slavers and free traders were actively engaged in the traffic. Only fifteen WIC slavers were found recorded after 1735.²⁹

The WIC continued to be involved in the slave trade on a different level, however, by managing the Dutch trading stations on the Gold Coast. Free traders were allowed to use the services of these stations, but in return they were obligated to pay the company a fee (*lastgeld*) entitling them to a slaving permit. The records of these fee payments constitute a large amount of valuable data concerning the volume of the Dutch slave trade during the free trade period.

Both the archives of the WIC and the MCC (*Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie*), the most prominent private slaving company in Holland during the free trade period, have preserved extensive records of slaving permits. This primarily made it possible to document as many as 530 separate free trade slaving voyages, which constitute approximately sixty per cent of the total number during the 1730-95 period.³⁰

One of the most valuable collections of data concerning the free trade period were the triennial accounts covering the years 1729 to 1791.³¹ They list the receipts for slaving permits in triennial periods. After an average cargo capacity, an average slave cargo, and the fees per unit were determined, the approximate fee spent for each slave could be calculated. The resulting figure made it possible to determine how many slaves could have been transported for the fees paid to the WIC. Table 2 illustrates the process used and shows the result of the calculation.

However, a number of confusing variables enter into this calculation. First of all, the fees recorded included fines levied against slaving vessels that took longer than the allotted time for the triangular voyage; the time allowed for the voyage was eighteen months. Overdue fines amounting to 119 months can actually be documented, but only one-fourth of the sources available recorded these fines. From the evidence, I have deduced that approximately 100,000 guilders, or about 3 per cent of the total amount of fee payments, constitutes fines and thus did not contribute to the number of slaves.³²

²⁹ They are tabulated in Appendix A-3 in *ibid.*, 239.

³⁰ The information is listed in *ibid.*, Appendix B, 241-57.

³¹ WIC, vol. 269.

³² See Postma, 149, for a detailed calculation.

Table 2. *Free Trade Slaving, 1730-91*

	1730-61	1762-91	1730-91
Fees of slaving permits	fl. 1,732,131	fl. 1,541,058	fl. 3,273,189
Fines incurred, 3 per cent	51,964	46,232	98,196
Net fees	fl. 1,680,167	fl. 1,494,826	fl. 3,174,993
Fees per <i>last</i> ^a	fl. 60	fl. 42½	
Average size of ships (<i>last</i>)	61.6 (237) ^b	88.2 (153)	
Average slave cargo	317.2 (40)	270.7 (61)	288 (117)
Slaves per <i>last</i>	5.15	3.07	
Estimated fee per slave	fl. 11.65½	fl. 13.84½	
Estimated number of slaves	144,159	107,992	252,151
Estimated number of ships	455 ^c	399 ^c	874

^a The *last* is the Dutch measure of a ship's capacity, about twice an English ton.

^b The figures in parentheses indicate the sample employed to determine the average.

^c The cumulative number of ships of the two separate periods show a disparity of 21 vessels compared to the total number of ships calculated on the basis of an average cargo of 288 slaves. This may well have resulted from the relatively small samples used for the two separate periods. An error of 15 slaves per average cargo of the two periods combined would harmonize the end result.

One further complication enters into the picture, viz. that in the year 1760 the WIC changed its standards of measuring slaving vessels when assessing fees for slaving permits. Ship measurements were expressed in terms of *lasts*, which are equivalent to about two maritime tons. In order to avoid an uproar from the private slaving companies, the WIC adjusted its slaving permit fees commensurately from sixty to forty-two and one half guilders per *last*. Due to these changes, separate calculations for the periods before and after 1760 became necessary for this study.

Based on the data and the calculations described above, an estimated 250,000 slaves were taken across the Atlantic by Dutch free traders during the period of 1730-91. Figures for the final years of the Dutch trade are drawn from records of individual slaving voyages.³³ The cumulative estimate for the 1730-95 period is listed in Table 3.

The reader may wonder why the activities of the Dutch interloper ships prior to the 1730s have not been taken into account, particularly since the celebrated Dutch factor Willem Bosman reported at the beginning of the eighteenth century that the volume of gold exported from Africa by interlopers was equal to that of the WIC.³⁴ Bosman's account, however, does not confirm interloper participation in the Dutch trade in *slaves*. It appears

³³ See citation 28 above.

³⁴ Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967—first published in 1704), 89.

Table 3. *Global Estimates of the Dutch Slave Trade, 1730-95*

	Slaves	Ships
Free traders, 1730-91	252,151	874
WIC trade, 1730-35	16,641	32
WIC trade after 1735	6,772	13
Free traders, 1792-95	1,350	5
Total	<u>276,914</u>	<u>924</u>

that the illicit activities of the small interloper ships capitalized on the direct trade between West Africa and Holland, rather than on the more complicated and dangerous triangular slave trade, so long as the WIC monopoly remained in effect. This is confirmed by the small number—or the absence—of slaves found among the cargoes of captured and confiscated interloper ships. For this reason, my tentative conclusion is that the interlopers did not contribute substantially to the overall Dutch trade in *slaves*.³⁵

V

Global estimates of the Dutch slave trade are listed in Table 4, and fluctuations of the trade are charted in Fig. 1. The estimates of the early years remain highly speculative; an average of 1,500 slaves per year seems to be a reasonable estimate for the 1630-74 period. The annual volume may have fluctuated from none at all to 3,000 per year. Dutch slaving before 1630 must be regarded as minimal, and can hardly be entered into the overall estimate.

The credibility of the estimates after 1675 greatly improve, and the fluctuations of the trade are clearly discernible. The slave trade was continually subject to enormous fluctuations, the result being that certain years the trade came to a temporary halt while during the following year it flourished again.³⁶ In the long run, however, the level of Dutch involvement remained about the same from 1662 until the 1720s, with an average of about 3,000 slaves per year. During the same period the slaving activities of other European nations increased considerably.³⁷ This meant that the relative participation of the Dutch dropped during the monopoly period of the second WIC.

During the decade of the 1720s, the Dutch clearly increased the volume

³⁵ See 71-4 and Appendix H in Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .'. The appendix documents 51 captured interlopers during the last thirty years of the WIC monopoly.

³⁶ The details of these fluctuations and the reasons for them are beyond the scope of this article. They are discussed in considerable detail in my dissertation, chapters v and vi.

³⁷ Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 266.

Table 4. *Global Estimates for the Dutch Slave Trade, 1630/75-1794*

Years	WIC trade	Rented ships	Free trade	Total	Annual average
1630-74	70,000			70,000	1,500
1675-80	18,302			18,302	3,050
1681-90	15,437			15,437	1,544
1691-00	23,155			23,155	2,382
1701-10	23,822			23,822	2,382
1711-20	23,624			23,624	2,362
1721-30	25,424	3,000	4,215	32,639	3,264
1731-40	17,374		30,420	47,794	4,779
1741-50	2,259		52,984	55,243	5,524
1751-60	356		50,994	51,350	5,135
1761-70			62,921	62,921	6,292
1771-80			40,300	40,300	4,030
1781-90			9,695	9,695	970
1791-94			3,500	3,500	880
Totals					
1675-1794	149,753	3,000	255,029	407,782	3,398
Overall (i.e. 1630- 1794)	219,753	3,000	255,029	477,782	

Sources: Tables 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 in Postma, 'The Dutch participation . . .'.

of their slave trade, and this trend was further amplified when the traffic was opened to free traders. With the exception of periodic slumps, the Dutch expanded the volume of their trade gradually until the peak of their involvement was reached just prior to the American Revolutionary War. An average of more than 6,000 slaves annually were taken across the Atlantic by Dutch ships during the decade of the 1760s. The turmoil resulting from the American war caused a sharp drop in the Atlantic slave trade, and the Anglo-Dutch war of 1781 precipitated the virtual demise of the Dutch participation in the traffic. Dutch efforts to revive the trade, after the conflict was settled, were doomed as a result of the turbulence in Europe following the revolution in France. With the expiration of the charter of the WIC in 1791, and the concomitant abolition of slaving fees, the Dutch slave trade briefly revived. But when in 1795 the pro-French Batavian Republic was created in the Netherlands, it was no longer safe for Dutch ships to venture on the oceans.

During the Napoleonic era, concrete evidence of only one Dutch slaving

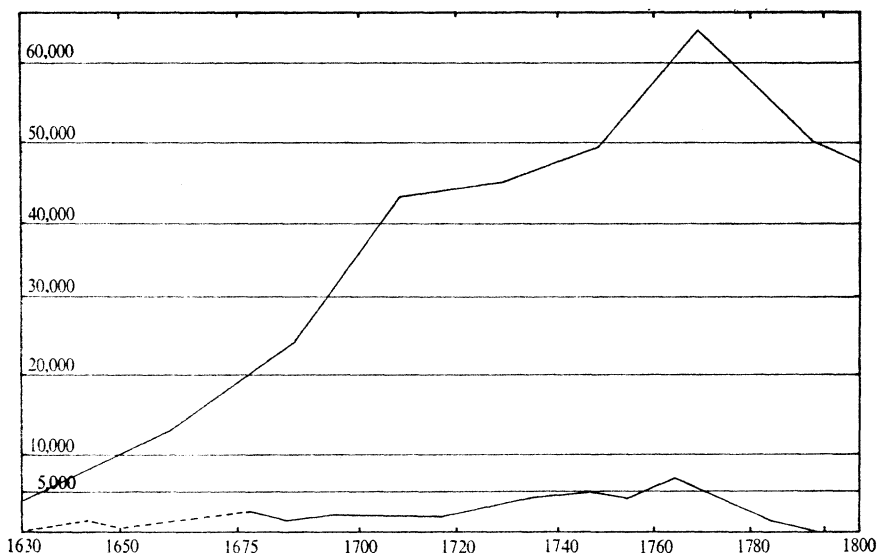


Fig. 1. The Dutch Slave Trade in relation to the overall Atlantic Trade.

voyage,³⁸ during the years 1802-5, has been unearthed. In 1814, the slave trade was declared illegal for subjects of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands, and while a few slavers may have violated this law,³⁹ they certainly did not contribute substantially to the Atlantic slave trade. For this reason, the year 1795 has been selected as the conclusion of the Dutch participation in the slave trade.

Of the estimated 10 million⁴⁰ persons forcefully removed from Africa to the western hemisphere, the Dutch transported nearly 500,000, or about 5 per cent of the total number of slaves. During the 175 years that they were involved on a significant scale, the Dutch share of the slave trade generally approached 10 per cent of the total traffic. Holland was never the 'leading' slaving nation in the sense of sustained quantitative superiority, although during the seventeenth century there may have been short periods in the 1630s and 1640s during which the Dutch dominated the slave trade.

SUMMARY

The Dutch share in the Atlantic slave trade has been assessed largely by means of speculation. This article relies extensively on documents of the Dutch West Indian Companies (WIC), which maintained a dozen or more trading stations on

³⁸ A detailed study of this last slaver has been made by P. C. Emmer, 'De Tweede Reis van het Fregatship "De Standvastigheid"' (Unpublished thesis, University of Leiden, 1968).

³⁹ Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 248, cites statistics indicating that three illicit Dutch slavers had been apprehended by the British, but these ships may well have belonged to planters in the Dutch colonies.

⁴⁰ Curtin's estimates (p. 268) have been accepted as the most reliable to date.

the Guinea Coast, and became the principal agents of the Dutch slaving activities. For approximately 165 years (1630-1795), the Dutch played a substantial role in the Atlantic slave trade. Based on the combined criteria of available documentary evidence and fluctuating techniques of the trade, the Dutch slave trade has been outlined in three successive stages, viz. the monopoly of the first WIC (1630-74), the monopoly of the second WIC (1675-1734), and the free trade period (1735-95). Information on the first period is scarce, leaving much to speculation, but for the years after 1675 a reliable assessment is possible.

On the whole, the Dutch share constituted about 10 per cent of the overall Atlantic slave trade. Annual averages (calculated by decades) ranged from less than a thousand to over 6,000 slaves. During selected years in the 1630s and 1640s, the Dutch may have become the single most active slave trading nation, but toward the end of the seventeenth century the Dutch trade stagnated while other nations drastically increased their volume. When the WIC began to relinquish its monopoly of the slave trade (1730), the volume of the Dutch trade increased until it reached its peak during the 1760s and early 1770s. As a result of the American Revolutionary War and the ensuing Anglo-Dutch war, Holland's participation in the slave trade virtually came to a halt. Feeble efforts to revive the trade in subsequent decades failed as a result of the unstable political situation in Europe following the revolution in France and also due to the movement to suppress the slave trade.