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Maranhão Inventories Slave Database, 1767-1831

Peer-Reviewed Dataset Article

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Description

The Maranhão Inventories Slave Database (MISD) contains extracted information about the lives of 8,188 enslaved Africans and their descendants in Maranhão, Brazil from the mid-eighteenth century through the early nineteenth century. The primary source material from which I collected data for the MISD was produced during a period of the rapid expansion of African slavery in Maranhão. From Portugal's founding of the territory in the early seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century, there were very few enslaved people of African descent (*negros*) in the territory. Native peoples (*indios*) were forced by white settlers (*brancos*) to perform the lion's share of labor in fields and in towns. However, by the late eighteenth century Africans and their descendants had become the primary labor source in Maranhão. This was due to the founding in 1755 of a Portuguese company, the *Companhia Geral do Grão Pará e Maranhão*, which in 1757 was given monopoly rights to the trade in enslaved people from Africa into Maranhão and its neighbor, Pará. A census of the population of Maranhão in 1787 recorded

the total population of the captaincy at about 99,000, of which about 10% were *indio*, 30% *branco*, and 59% *negro*. The census did not distinguish free from enslaved, but the overwhelming majority of registered *negros* were slaves. By 1800, about a third of the enslaved *negro* population was *crioulo,* or Brazilian born. Descriptions of the local population frequently include other categories as well: *cafuzo* (descendant of *indio* and *negro* parents), *mameluco* (descendant of *branco* and *indio* parents), and *mulato* (descendant of *branco* and *negro* parents).

Data contained in the MISD were produced between 1767 and 1831 and have been extracted from inventories of property owners' possessions that are housed today in the Arquivo Judiciário do Estado do Maranhão in São Luís, Brazil. When a property owner in the territory died, a representative of the state tallied the deceased's possessions—including slave property. Inventory takers wrote down extensive information about the enslaved, such as given names, approximate ages, marriage partners, children, profession or skills, monetary values, and "defects" such as injuries and illnesses. Enslaved people's original (African) names were not recorded, since the enslaved in Brazil were baptized and given new names. Inventory takers also asked the enslaved from what "nation" (*nação*) they hailed.

To the question "What is your nation?" enslaved people registered in the post-mortem inventories gave a range of answers. Those who hailed from Africa often responded with the name of an ethnoliguistic group. Sometimes they stated a place name—a port or city in Africa. And sometimes they gave the name of a broad region of Africa—such as Guiné (Guinea), Mina, Angola, and Moçambique (Mozambique). Such responses tell us much about who slaves thought they were and what identities they chose to emphasize. Records of professions of ethnolinguistic, place, and regional identities can be used by historians to trace individuals to specific places or broad regions in Africa; that is, recordings of enslaved people's identities often reveal where they originated from on the continent. But enslaved people who had been born in Brazil thought about "nation" differently. They were most often *crioulo*, which means "Brazilian born," though sometimes a racial category defined "nation"—*cafuzo*, *mameluco*, and *mulato*. All of this makes clear that enslaved people in Maranhão had multiple and often overlapping identities, some of which associated them with places in Africa and some of which were created in the New World.

By compiling data about nation, sex, age, value, and more into the MISD, a great many conclusions can be drawn. First, data indicate that a majority of Africans who were imported into Maranhão after 1755 came from an area stretching only tens of miles inland from the West African ports Bissau and Cacheu, which are in present day Guinea-Bissau and were, at the time, in the region Portuguese called Guiné. People residing close to the coast in Guiné spoke, among other languages, Balanta, Papel, Bijago, Floup, and Biafada. Most lived in politically decentralized societies and applied highly refined techniques to the production of paddy rice. Most professed localized spiritual beliefs that we might call animism; they believed that certain material objects contained supernatural powers and that spirits inhabited the earth, interacting

with humans and affecting them for better and worse. Further inland were people who spoke, among other languages, Mandinga and Fula. They lived in more politically hierarchical societies, farmed upland rice, and herded cattle. Many were Muslim. Enslaved Africans who survived the arduous journey across the ocean from the ports of Bissau and Cacheu to Maranhão shared many of the same cultural assumptions. They applied the same techniques to farming rice, had similar food preferences, and embraced many of the same spiritual beliefs. In towns and on plantations in Maranhão, they took on a new identity, one white colonists called Guiné, the characteristics of which were the product of the mixing of cultural elements from across the West African region.

Second, data from the MISD indicate that in Maranhão a minority of enslaved Africans came from other regions of the continent—Mina, Angola, and Moçambique. These enslaved people brought with them a great range of skills, food preferences, and spiritual beliefs. Some maintained identities linked to languages that they spoke—Hausa, Ibo, and Angico, among many others. But many took on identities rooted in the broader regions from which they were derived. As they did with enslaved people from Guiné, Portuguese often referred to enslaved people from other regions as being from particular nations, determined by the language they spoke or region they had come from.

Finally, data from the MISD indicate much about choices enslaved people made in Maranhão. For example, information about slave marital status indicates that after puberty, about a third of enslaved African married in the territory and that an impressive percentage chose to marry others from the same region of continent. So enslaved people who professed Guiné as an identity most often married others who professed the same, re-creating endogamous marriage patterns they had known across the ocean. They made choices about whom to marry and their selections were informed by the cultures from which they had come. However, the nature of the group in which the enslaved from Guiné married endogamously was different in Amazonia from what it had been in their native land. In Guiné, Africans married most often within ethnic groups. In Amazonia, they married most often within a regionally defined group.

I elaborate on these and other conclusions drawn from the dataset in *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511779176; and in "From 'Black Rice' to 'Brown': Rethinking the History of Risiculture in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Atlantic," *American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (February 2010): 151–163, https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.115.1.151, among other articles.

> this description section is longer than most to serve as a comprehensive example; do not worry if yours is shorter

Dates of Data Collection

2004-2005

Dataset Languages

Portuguese, English

Geographic Coverage

Brazil, Maranhão, São Luís, Africa, Guiné, Guinea-Bissau, Bissau, Cacheu, Mina, Nigeria, Angola, Congo, Moçambique.

Temporal Coverage

1767-1831

Documents Type

Census or Register

many datasets are built using sources from various archives or collections; your list here might be much longer

Sources

Inventories of Slaveholders' Possessions. Un-catalogued Boxes. Arquivo Judiciário do Estado do Maranhão. São Luís, Brazil.

Methodology

Data for the MISD was derived from post-mortem inventories of slaveholders' possessions that can be found in un-catalogued boxes in the Arquivo Judiciário do Estado do Maranhão in São Luís, Brazil. The manuscript documents are in Portuguese. In each inventory, there is a section that describes the enslaved people who property owners claimed as possessions. Across inventories, more or less the same information can be found about enslaved people. In each inventory, there is a single-paragraph description of each enslaved person and the information contained in each paragraph is most often listed in the same order. That is, inventory takers pursued a standardized record-making process.

Rather than transcribe each paragraph word for word, I extracted key data in an Excel spreadsheet on a laptop computer. I structured the spreadsheet in the same order as data contained in each paragraph description of an enslaved individual in the inventory. My spreadsheet contains column (or field) headings in English and contains nineteen fields. I did not create the database with publication in mind, so I did not always follow best practices. For example, I standardized the spelling of nations (ethnoliguistic groups), which sometimes showed variations from inventory to inventory. Had I been thinking about publication of the database at the time, I would have had one column for nation as recorded in the document and another for the standardized version, what I impute that ethnonym to be. For other entries in my spreadsheet, I translated some terms into English. For example, inventory takers used the

Portuguese words for man and woman, whereas I record these as "M" (male) and "F" (female). Moreover, I sometimes imputed sex when it was not noted based on the baptismal name or other gendered words in the primary source. For example, in Portuguese *uma escrava* means a female slave and *um escravo* means a male slave. For my research, I was interested in the registered slaves' origins, so I created fields denoting region and grouped enslaved people into regions based upon the nations inventory takers recorded. My groupings were Guiné coast and Guiné interior, Mina, Angola, and Moçambique. These regional designations do not appear in documents, though Guiné, Mina, Angola, and Moçambique sometimes appear as nations or ethnonyms.

The database is in both English and Portuguese, and the Portuguese has been modernized. The database has 8,188 rows, each with information about a different enslaved individual. It has nineteen columns, that are as follows:

Year Transcribed from primary source. Year of the recording of the inventory; boxes in the Arquivo Judiciário do Estado do Maranhão in São Luís, Brazil, are arranged in shelves by date, so this information will also help researchers locate materials.

Owner Transcribed from primary source. Last name of person who owned the enslaved person; boxes in the archive often list on the outside the last names of property owners for whom information is recorded in inventories, so this information will also help research locate material.

Page Page in the inventory that the information was derived from.

Name Transcribed from primary source. Name of an enslaved individual as recorded in the inventory; these are always names given at baptism.

Nation Transcribed from primary source but spellings standardized by database author. For Africa-born enslaved individuals, the African ethnolinguistic (e.g., Balanta, Mandinga, Papel), place (e.g. Cacheu, Bissau, Luanda), or regional identity (e.g. Guiné, Mina, Angola, Moçambique) that the enslaved individual was associated with. In some entries, enslaved Africans were simply recorded as Africa, meaning an origin somewhere on the continent. For Brazil-born enslaved individuals, the Brazilian identify that the enslaved individual was associated with (e.g., *crioulo*, *cafuzo*, *mameluco*, and *mulato*.) These are all Portuguese descriptors used in Maranhão in the period. *Crioulo* indicated a Brazilian-born, *cafuzo* the descendant of *indio* (Indian) and *negro* (black) parents, *mameluco* descendant of *branco* (white) and *indio* parents, and *mulato* descendant of *branco* and *negro* parents. Occasionally primary sources describe an enslaved individual as *negro*, which does not reveal the origin of

you are not required to include your category definitions in your data article, especially if the categories are rather self-explanatory; you are required, however, to submit this "data documentation" list with your dataset for preservation in the Harvard Dataverse (see below)

the individual. However, sometimes "nation" is designated as *negro* from a particular place (e.g. *negro de Cabo Verde*), which does indicate a place of origin.

Region	Imputed by the database author. The broad region of Africa or the Americas from which the nation indicates an origin in (e.g. Guiné, Mina, Brazil).
Sex	Imputed from the name and gendered words used to describe the enslaved individual. Recorded in the database in English. Male and Female.
Age	Transcribed from the primary source. Numerical age including fractions.
Value	Transcribed from the primary source. In *réis*, the Portuguese currency of the period.
Mar	Married. Indicated in the primary sources. Recorded in MISD as Y for "yes. N for no.
Partner	Indicated in the primary source. Marital partner's nation.
Children	Indicated in the primary source. Recorded in MISD as Y for yes. N for no.
No. Children	Number of children. Indicated in the primary source. Recorded in MISD as a number.
Chofslave	Child of slave. Indicated in the primary source. Recorded in MISD as Y for yes if the enslaved individual is the child of a slave.
No. Gran	Number of grandchildren. Indicated in the primary source. Recorded in MISD as a number.
Occupation	Transcribed from the primary source.
Notes	Things indicated in primary source that do not fit into any of the above headings.
Slavno	Unique identifier assigned by project for the enslaved individual.
Plant	A unique identifier that allows me to distinguish between inventories taken in the same year of different planter/slave owner holdings since boxes in the archive are not catalogued.

Date of Publication

June 2020

Use Permissions

Data Links

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/6JIZCE
Linked Data Representation: *Enslaved.org* Summary Visualization

Acknowledgments

Cite this Article

Hawthorne, Walter. "Maranhão Inventories Slave Database, 1767-1831." *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* 1, no. 1 (2020). https://doi.org/10.25335/wph8-v295.

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Data Documentation for Walter Hawthorne's "Maranhão Inventories Slave Database, 1767-1831."

Heading	Column	Definition: augmented	Definition: original
slaveno	A	Unique identifier assigned by project for the enslaved individual.	unique id assigned by project
plant	B	A unique identifier that allows me to distinguish between inventories taken in the same year of different planter/slave owner holdings since boxes in archive are not catalogued.	unique id assigned by project
owner	C	Transcribed from primary source. Last name of person who owned the enslaved person; boxes in the archive often list on the outside the last names of property owners for whom information is recorded in inventories, so this information will also help research locate material.	last name of slave owner
year	D	Transcribed from primary source. Year of the recording of the inventory; boxes in the Arquivo Judiciário do Estado do Maranhão in São Luís, Brazil, are arranged in shelves by date, so this information will also help researchers locate materials.	year inventory was recorded
fl	E	Page in the inventory that the information was derived from.	page numnber
name	F	Transcribed from primary source. Name of an enslaved individual as recorded in the inventory; these are always names given at baptism.	name of slave as it appears in inventory
region	G	Imputed by the database author. The broad region of Africa or the Americas from which the nation indicates an origin in (e.g. Guine, Mina, Brazil).	regional designation for slave's origin; inferred; B=Brazil; U=Upper Guinea; Min=Mina; Moz=Mozambique; A=Angola
nation	H	Transcribed from primary source but spellings standardized by database author. For Africa-born enslaved individuals, the African ethnolinguistic (e.g., Balanta, Mandinga, Papel), place (e.g. Cacheu, Bissau, Luanda), or regional identity (e.g. Guine, Mina, Angola, Mozambique) that the enslaved individual was associated with. In some entries, enslaved Africans were simply recorded as Africa, meaning an origin somewhere on the continent. For Brazil-born enslaved individuals, the Brazilian identify that the enslaved individual was associated with (e.g., crioulo, cafuzo, mameluco, and mulato.) These are all Portuguese descriptors used in Maranhão in the period. Crioulo indicated a Brazilian-born, cafuzo the descendant of indio (Indian) and negro (black) parents, mameluco descendant of branco (white) and indio parents, and mulato descendant of branco and negro parents. Occasionally primary sources describe an enslaved individual as negro, which does not reveal the origin of the individual. However, sometimes "nation" is designated as negro from a particular place (e.g. negro de Cabo Verde), which does indicate a place of origin.	ethnic identity
gender	I	Imputed from the name and gendered words used to describe the enslaved individual. Recorded in the database in English. Male and Female.	gender; M=male; F=Female
age	J	Transcribed from the primary source. Numerical age including fractions.	age of slave at time of inventory
value	K	Transcribed from the primary source. In réis, the Portuguese currency of the period.	estimated monetary value of slave
mar	L	Married. Indicated in the primary sources. Recorded in MISD as Y for "yes. N for no.	Y indicates the slave is married; if marriage partners are recorded in the inventory, they are listed on the following line
partner	M	Indicated in the primary source. Marital partner's nation.	ethnic identity of marriage partner
partage	N	Marital partner's age	age of marriage partner
children	O	Indicated in the primary source. Recorded in MISD as Y for yes. N for no.	Y indicates the slave has children; children of slaves are listed on the lines following the parent
nochild	P	Number of children. Indicated in the primary source. Recorded in MISD as a number.	indicates number of children the inventory records the slave as having
nogran	Q	Number of grandchildren. Indicated in the primary source. Recorded in MISD as a number.	indicates number of grandchidren the inventory records the slave as having
chofslav	R	Child of slave. Indicated in the primary source. Recorded in MISD as Y for yes if the enslaved individual is the child of a slave.	indicates the slave is a child of a slave in recorded in inventory
occupation	S	Transcribed from the primary source.	indicates the occupation or skills of the slave
notes	T	Things indicated in primary source that do not fit into any of the above headings	

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Dataverse

Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation Dataverse (Michigan State University)

Maranhão Inventories Slave Database

Version 1.0

Hawthorne, Walter, 2020, "Maranhão Inventories Slave Database", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/6JIZCE, Harvard Dataverse, V1, UNF:6:1q1nHWP9gTjHoG4UnG6OpA== [fileUNF]

Dataset Metrics

27 Downloads

Description

The Maranhão Inventories Slave Database (MISD) contains extracted information about the lives of 8,188 enslaved Africans and their descendants in Maranhão, Brazil from the mid-eighteenth century through the early nineteenth century. The dataset contains 21 variables. MISD data were produced between 1767 and 1831 and have been extracted from inventories of property owners' possessions that are housed today in the Arquivo Judiciário do Estado do Maranhão in São Luís, Brazil. When a property owner in the territory died, a representative of the state tallied the deceased's possessions—including slave property. Inventory takers wrote down extensive information about the enslaved, such as given names, approximate age, marriage partner, children, profession or skills, monetary values, and "defects" such as injuries and illnesses. Enslaved people's original (African) names were not recorded, since the enslaved in Brazil were baptized and given new names. Inventory takers also asked the enslaved from what "nation" (nação) they hailed.

Subject

Arts and Humanities

Keyword

Slavery, Maranhão, Brazil

Related Publications

This data has been described in the following data article: Hawthorne, Walter. "Maranhão Inventories Slave Database, 1767-1831." Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation 1, no. 1 (2020). https://doi.org/10.25335/wph8-v295.

2 Files

MISD-Data-Final20201121.tab
Tabular Data - 1.6 MB - Nov 29, 2020 - 15 Downloads
40 Variables, 8193 Observations - UNF:6:lJb6rKk3YQu/2ZaESbxEkA==
Dataset file for Maranhão Inventories Slave Database
https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml?fileId=4193772&version=1.0

MISD-Documentation-Final20201121.tab
Tabular Data - 15.9 KB - Nov 29, 2020 - 12 Downloads
4 Variables, 999 Observations - UNF:6:DK3d8pAg7zlMwLGKEHz+ew==
Documentation file for Maranhão Inventories Slave Database
https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml?fileId=4193777&version=1.0