


Slavery and Dominion in the South Sea Armada, 1570s-1680s

Esclavitud y dominio en la Armada del Mar del Sur, 1570s-1680s

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ABSTRACT

A key outcome of Francis Drake’s incursion into the South Sea was the formation of the South Sea Armada, which was based out of the port of Callao in the Viceroyalty of Peru and whose primary purpose was to guard the transport of silver to Panama, where it would be transferred for trans-oceanic shipment. Yet the squadron faced immediate existential threats from within, as evidenced by the pattern of viceregal decrees targeting slaveholders who brought slaves on board for the ostensible purpose of serving as deckhands and pages, only to press them into personal service. This tension, between the demands of the maritime defense industry, on one hand, and slaveholders’ personal prerogatives, on the other, constitutes the primary focus of this article.

Keywords: slavery; slaveholders; deckhands; mariners; mobility.

RESUMEN

La entrada de Francis Drake al Mar del Sur ocasionó el establecimiento de la Armada del Mar del Sur. Con su sede en la ciudad porteña de Callao, en el Virreinato del Perú, la Armada funcionaba primariamente para proteger el transporte de cantidades de plata en su camino a Panamá antes de cruzar el Atlántico. Un reto formidable que acompañó a la formación de la Armada fue la presencia de *grumetes* esclavizados. A pesar de que la función de los *grumetes* era facilitar las operaciones de los barcos, su llegada a la compañía de sus amos puso en marcha un conflicto entre las necesidades de una empresa marítima, por una mano, y las prerrogativas de los amos de esclavos, por la otra.

Palabras clave: esclavitud, amos, grumetes, marineros, movilidad.

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In August 1578, the privateer Francis Drake made a now-legendary passage from the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Magellan and into what was then known as the South Sea, where he led a series of incursions on land and at sea. After attacking Valparaíso (in what is now Chile) and Callao (Peru), Drake learned of a ship that had recently set sail for Panama laden with silver, gold, flour, and other goods. By early March of 1579, Drake had caught up with the target, which initially took his *Golden Hind* for a friendly Spanish vessel and was therefore easily taken. His arrival and successful taking of a prize ship laden with silver and gold provided an object lesson in the need for heightened defenses in this corner of the Spanish empire. While Spain's colonies in the Atlantic and Caribbean had long been vulnerable to foreign attack, the Crown viewed the Pacific coast of South America – which was buffered by the Isthmus of Panama to the north, and the Strait of Magellan to the South – to be at a safe remove. But Drake's passage and the subsequent crossing of other British corsairs, along with those sailing on behalf of the Dutch and French, made clear that safety was in short supply (*The World Encompassed* 34-61).

This was not Drake's first incursion into the New World. As Luis Miguel Córdoba Ochoa has observed, Drake made initial headway into the region in 1567 on slave-trading voyages and returned in 1570 and 1572 (Córdoba Ochoa 82-83). During that latter voyage, in 1572-1573, Drake led a series of raids from Panama's Atlantic coast across much of the Isthmus, during which he relied on local maroon communities for operational bases, manpower, weapons, food, and intelligence (Lane 40-42 and Córdoba Ochoa 83). I shall say more about Drake's exploitation of tensions between enslaved communities and the Spanish Crown later in this essay. Even with this knowledge of Drake's interest in the region, which coincided with mounting tensions between Spain and England, his crossing of the Strait of Magellan seemed to catch local officials unprepared.

Once he got word of Drake's arrival in the South Sea, Peruvian Viceroy Francisco de Toledo had dispatched at least two ships – the *Nuestra Señora de Esperanza* and the *San Francisco* – to block the *Golden Hind*, but they proved unable to do so. Drake continued conducting minor raids on smaller ports throughout the region before departing for China. As Córdoba Ochoa put it, “the events following Drake's incursion at Callao were, to say the least, shameful (Córdoba Ochoa 2017, 83-87 and 87). As a result of this disastrous chain of events, the port of Callao – center of imperial trade and gateway to Lima, Capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru – emerged as the hub of several land- and sea-based defense projects. *La Armada del Mar del Sur*, or the South Sea Armada, stood at its center. The Armada's primary purpose was to guard the transport of silver to Panama, where it would be transferred for trans-oceanic shipment. From the very beginning the Armada encountered its share of threats. First was the fact that Drake's successful incursion into the region, together with the lore that soon came to surround it, only increased the appeal of the South Sea to Spain's European rivals and led to an uptick in corsair activity. But the Armada's vessels and crew were prepared to withstand such attacks. This, after all, was the very logic of the Armada's founding. But perhaps no single threat to the Armada was more menacing – or, perhaps, more surprising – than its own internal workings. Barely a year into the Armada's existence, it was beset by a set of challenges that Peruvian Viceroy Francisco de Toledo sought to eradicate by way of a stern proclamation: “I order and mandate,” it read, “that no lieutenant general, or captain, or grand master, or any other person or official, can board any Armada ship

with any slave, whether his own or one belonging to another person, as a mariner or *grumete* (deckhand) or page.” (López de Caravantes 66-67). The only exception the proclamation would grant was to owners who were bringing enslaved drummers, fifes, and trumpeters on board the vessels.

What necessitated the imposition of such precise restrictions targeting deckhands, pages, and the people who held them in bondage? According to Toledo, there had emerged a burgeoning and nettlesome practice in which slaveholders were assigning their human property to the ostensible task of joining the squadron’s crews – roles for which enslaved men and women were granted “a wage, rations, and passage,” (López de Caravantes 37) just like everyone else on board – only to press them into personal service during their time at sea. In other words, rather than recognizing that the deckhands and pages who were hired to serve on behalf of the Armada therefore owed their time and labor to it, just like any other sailors, slaveholders were insisting on the primacy of their own authority by demanding that deckhand and pages perform acts of personal service as though they were their very own shipboard valets. For slaveholders, their individual priorities mattered more than the security of silver and the work of the maritime enterprise.

So intractable had slaveholders become in this behavior that, despite the targeted and specific language of Toledo’s proclamation, he had to reissue it at several intervals throughout his viceregal term (López de Caravantes 70-71, 79, 89, and 163). So, too, did one successor of his after another – including García Hurtado de Mendoza (the Marqués de Cañete, who was Viceroy from 1590-1596), Luis de Velasco (Marqués de Salinas, 1596-1604), and Juan de Mendoza (Marqués de Montesclaros, 1607-1615). Each time, over the course of four decades, their proclamations referenced additional practices in need of correction, including the fact that enslaved men and women were supplementing their wages by providing personal shipboard services not only to the owners with whom they traveled, but to third-party individuals as well.

To be sure, these proclamations represent a small source base covering a narrow context across a relatively short time span. There is so much that they do not tell us. Perhaps most significantly, they do not tell us about the lived experiences of enslaved deckhands, pages, and musicians on board the Armada vessels apart from their labor, making it impossible to draw upon the materials for any understanding of what kinds of social interactions these individuals had outside of the master-slave dynamic. And yet we know that they must have had those kinds of interactions, thanks to the work of scholars such as Alex Borucki, Marcus Rediker, and Stephanie Smallwood, who have shown in the context of the Middle Passage that even the most difficult and dire onboard circumstances could not stand in the way of relationship building. In fact, the very traumas engendered by those circumstances could produce lasting bonds that not only translated from the slave ship to American shores but also carried many of those who collectively survived their experiences at sea through the rest of their lives. Of course, the slave ship context is just one useful frame of reference for understanding these dynamics. The other is the world of the pirate ship. Marcus Rediker has argued that sailors on board these kinds of vessels “developed a distinctive work culture with its own language, songs, rituals, and sense of brotherhood” (25) thanks to the extended periods of time spent away from loved ones and the rest of society, and to the need for mutual reliance to ensure collective survival.

Still, neither the slave ship nor the pirate ship is a perfectly adequate parallel to Armada vessels and the unique ways they shaped enslaved seafarers’ experiences. These were spaces that offered

comparatively more freedom of mobility than the slave ships that kept captives shackled and largely immobile, but at the same time they also denied the same kind of freedom from authority and social hierarchies that were largely enjoyed by – or at least attributed to – sailors on board pirate vessels. More research is therefore needed to understand how enslaved deckhands and pages (as well as their musically- and performatively-inclined counterparts) navigated the particularities of the Armada vessels, and to trace the kinds of communities, rituals, and conflicts that resulted therein. If we are to understand Armada vessels in relation to other seafaring contexts and to land-based slaveholding societies, these are the things we need to learn, to avoid replicating slaveholders' tendencies to reduce enslaved people to their labor functions, to develop as full an understanding as possible of the nature and features of these societies, and to recognize the sea as not just the beginning of African diaspora history but as constitutive of it as well.

The limitations of these viceregal proclamations notwithstanding, their very existence and repeated issuances reflect an early and enduring tension between the demands of a maritime defense enterprise, on one hand, and slaveholders' own prerogatives and sense of authority, on the other. Out of this tension came a profound sense of desperation, as colonial officials needed to intervene and wield control in the realm of shipboard practices lest those practices endanger the silver wealth that they were sworn by their official duties to protect on behalf of the Spanish Crown. To probe these dynamics, the present article engages with and brings together several areas of inquiry. Most importantly, it forms part of the evolving study of the Pacific World, a region which David Igler has described as "a vast waterscape where imperial and personal contests played out in isolated bays and coastlines, where indigenous communities sought to control the terms of exchange, and where maritime traders plied the waters for profitable commodities" (4). The vastness of the region makes drawing its boundaries rather difficult, since scholars have used the "Pacific World" to alternately refer to Oceania, the Pacific Rim, the Pacific Basin, or the South Sea (among other localities), with each instance capturing a distinct sense of place. Oceania encompasses parts of the tropical Pacific such as Australia, New Zealand, and Polynesia, whereas the Pacific Rim denotes the lands surrounding both sides of the Pacific Ocean. Meanwhile, the Pacific Basin – perhaps the most geographically inclusive label of all – includes both the Pacific Rim as well as the islands of the Pacific Ocean. For its part, the South Sea refers to the coastal regions and waterways connecting East Asia to Central and South America. Further complicating things is that each characterization of the Pacific World also denotes vastly different historical contexts (Korhonen; Flynn; Matsuda; Igler; Armitage and Bashford). But one of the common threads running through these diverse considerations of the Pacific World is a singular elision: Africans. Even though West Africa does not fit within any established geography of the Pacific World, Africans and their descendants certainly figured prominently within it.

Commerce and Conflict in the South Sea

The inauguration of the Manila Galleon trade in 1565 made the South Sea – or the part of the Pacific Ocean that connected East Asia to Central and South America – one of the busiest commercial zones in the world. Spanish ships carrying porcelain, lacquers, silk, spices, and other Asian merchandise crossed from the

Philippines to the Viceroyalty of New Spain and were laden with American bullion for their return. In addition to these trans-oceanic voyages were numerous short-haul transfers that moved Asian imports and American products (including bullion, indigo, sugar, flour, wood, wine, and textiles) between various Pacific-facing Spanish American ports (Lewin; Fish; Bonialian). One consequence of this multi-directional and lucrative traffic was that the South Sea became an appealing target of foreign incursions for which the Crown and its local officials were poorly prepared (Andrews; Bradley 1989 and 1999; Lane; Lincoln; Beattie 2015). Indeed, although Spain's colonies in the Atlantic and Caribbean had long been prepared to face external threats, the Crown viewed the South Sea – which was buffered by the Isthmus of Panama to the north, and the Strait of Magellan to the South – to be at a safe remove. Now, thanks to Francis Drake's arrival, the idea proved to be a fantasy.

Adding to the mounting sense of danger were circumstances unfolding on the other side of the world, as the near-constant reality of conflict between England and Spain provided additional reason to plunder. In fact, the business of privateering in the South Sea was borne of tensions between the two nations. When, in 1585, Spanish officials arrested crewmembers onboard several English ships in the Bay of Biscay (off the northern coast of Spain) and confiscated their cargoes, England responded by issuing letters of marque, or reprisal, to the offended parties. The letters granted their holders permission to launch attacks against Spanish ships which, once captured, would need to be condemned by England's Admiralty Court as legitimate prizes, after which point their spoils would then be divided among several stakeholders. First and foremost were the Crown and Lord Admiral, who would take one fifth and one tenth, respectively. The remaining shares would be distributed to the privateering ship's owners and then to the seamen according to rank.

The port city of Callao figured prominently in both the commerce that made South Sea such an attractive target of incursions as well as in the defense industry that emerged as a response. And the enslaved and free people of African descent who lived there were at the center of the labor pool that staffed these operations. Since the city's founding in 1537, African-descent men and women had worked as shipbuilders and stevedores and provided myriad services in the taverns and brothels that formed part of the extended maritime economy (Bowser 96-97). Moreover, because, like other *chalacos* (as the inhabitants of Callao were known), they had a reputation for being "*gente del mar*," or people of the sea, they were also directly involved in various maritime endeavors (Lewin 64). They served on private merchant vessels, in everything from small boats "manned only by a Spaniard assisted by a Negro and a couple of Indians" (Bowser 96-97) to larger vessels with larger crews.

The port of Callao was not alone in supplying African-descent sailors to merchant vessels, which frequently picked up new crew members as they stopped at various ports. Such was the case with the *Nuestra Señora de la Alegria*, which made a run from Callao to Panama and back between 1608-1610, with "a shipmaster, a notary, four Spanish sailors, and four black sailors, plus a female slave who probably did the cooking" for the outbound trip, and returned from Panama with two more black sailors and three more Spaniards (Bowser 97). But when it came to supplying labor to the Armada, Callao was crucial: between 1584 and 1641, according to one estimate, the Spanish Crown employed at least 926 sailors of African

descent, all of whom were classified as *grumetes* (Bowser 97). By definition, *grumetes* were apprentice sailors who labored on behalf of the entire ship by preparing food, providing cleaning services, and generally following sailors' orders; in exchange for this work, they earned minor wages and rations (Tempère 2002). And while this category of sailor was not inherently racialized, in the case of the Armada it was a category to which African-descent sailors almost exclusively belonged. With that *de facto* racial designation came a host of attendant complications.

Slavery and Freedom on the High Seas

In broad terms, the African-descent deckhands counted both the free and enslaved among their ranks. The latter group consisted of two types. First were those who were sent on board Armada ships at the behest of owners such as lawyers, doctors, and widows who remained at home to await their slaves' return. In this way, the presence of enslaved deckhands on Armada ships functioned as a kind of extension of the institution of slavery in Callao, throughout the Viceroyalty of Peru, and elsewhere in Spanish America, where the practice of owners hiring out slaves to live on the resulting income was deeply entrenched. This arrangement put slaveholding within reach of men and women of various classes, regardless of household size and labor needs, since owners could rely on their slaves to generate income on their behalf. In Lima and Callao, owners hired out slaves to work across the urban landscape, while male slaves worked in a variety of skilled and manual capacities, as carpenters, tailors, blacksmiths, cobblers, tanners, candle makers, masons, bricklayers, builders, carriage drivers, and water carriers, among other jobs. For their part, female slaves worked as cooks and servants in taverns and restaurants, and were also counted among the city's street vendors, selling items such as flowers, incense, produce from nearby farms, and the popular fermented-corn beverage known as *chicha*. Under these circumstances, slaves often lived apart from their owners, which meant that the idea of sending their human property out to sea fit within established patterns. The second type of enslaved deckhand boarded in the company of owners serving on Armada ships as sailors themselves. This second category was precisely the group that was targeted by the viceregal proclamations that opened this essay, in large part because of how much their presence strained against the more familiar practice in which hired-out slaves worked outside of their owners' immediate purview and created an immediate conflict of interest.

The proclamations offer tantalizing evidence of the complicated shipboard dynamics in which slaveholders participated that in turn ensnared enslaved Africans. To begin, the sources provide a window onto the labor enslaved people performed on behalf of the Armada itself. As deckhands (and even pages and musicians, about which there is minimal data beyond the viceregal proclamations that mentioned them), enslaved men and women formed an integral part of the Armada's workforce from its earliest beginnings that took place outside of the master-slave dynamic. So, too, was the provision of personal service to third parties while onboard the ship – which primarily (but not exclusively) consisted of doing laundry – in exchange for payment. Despite the particulars of the setting in which these dynamics took place, they also fit within the logic of slavery as it had operated on land in Spanish America, where hired-out slaves

worked for third parties and earned wages in return. Likewise, these sea-based activities formed an important part of enslaved peoples' ability to reap benefits from their own labor and sweat, allowing them to set aside funds to purchase their freedom or to improve their and their families' conditions. These activities were also jointly in conflict with the expectations of slaveholders who presumed that their access to the labor of their human property would remain unfettered.

Beyond providing access to money, these activities served enslaved people's own interests by expanding their sense of status and possibility. Even though they boarded with their owners, enslaved deckhands were quickly thrust into a labor landscape that saw them toil alongside unaccompanied slaves and free people of African descent with whom they shared similar roles and responsibilities. This was a direct result of the racist logic of the seafaring enterprise (itself a product of the larger colonial society of which it was an offshoot), which placed Spaniards (defined here as Iberian-born *peninsulares* and American-born *criollos*) in positions of authority and eminence and largely relegated people of African descent – no matter their legal status – to servile positions (Bowser 97). Again, the source base for understanding this context is thin, making it difficult to detail the interpersonal dynamics on board. But the fact that enslaved people served alongside free people, and that they all engaged in the same types of work, invites us to contemplate what this would have meant for enslaved peoples' self-conception. Despite the slaveholding regime that compelled them to serve on board Armada fleets against their will, and the racial hierarchy that followed them from land onto the sea, enslaved people were nonetheless doing the same kind of work as free men and women. And that work was of tremendous importance to the Crown and its interests. Of this, they were keenly aware.

It is therefore worth considering the extent to which this kind of work instilled in enslaved people not just a sense of freedom and mobility that they would not easily shed once back on land, but also a sense of pride in the broad significance of their time at sea. At the same time, as Rachel O'Toole notes in her discussion of the African-descent mariners, oarsmen, and muleteers, and vendors whose labor was crucial to the functioning of trade networks that spanned from the Isthmus of Panama to the northern coast of Peru, these individuals were rarely discussed in records from the era, much less credited for their skills and contributions (O'Toole, "Securing Subjecthood" 151-3). African descent people were also aware of these sentiments since the dismissiveness of those records was merely a reflection of the attitudes and treatment they encountered in their daily lives.

Indeed, because slaveholders who joined the human beings, they held in bondage on board Armada ships were immediately aware of the extent to which their dominion as owners would necessarily be undermined as enslaved people assumed new and transformative duties, they sought as quickly as possible to ensure their continued claims to the labor of their human property. Evidence of these myriad issues can be found in the legislation passed by a succession of Viceroy's in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, who all took turns directing slaveholders boarding Armada ships with their human property to pay for their passage if they were going to use them as *criados*, or personal servants. If, on the other hand, slaves were boarding Armada ships to work (and be paid) as deckhands, their owners needed to allow them to perform the duties required of them (López de Caravantes 66-67, 79, 101, and 162-163). Yet, despite the

specificity of these laws, the fact of their repeated issuances signaled a persistent pattern of abuse. It also highlighted a fundamental truth that lay at this intersection of slavery and seafaring: in bringing slaves on board Armada ships, slaveholders also brought with them long-established expectations about the master-slave dynamic.

There were also practical considerations that motivated them. As Frederick Bowser notes, the Spanish Crown made it a practice to only release deckhands' wages at the end of their period of service. In some cases, those payments were subjected to long delays (Bowser 98). This would have proved frustrating to absentee slaveholders and those on board the ships, but while the former group had no choice but to wait, the latter group could have used this knowledge as a means of justifying making demanding claims to their slaves' labor. After all, if they were not going to be paid for their service, or at least not until well after the conclusion of the journey, who did the slaves really work for? For slaveholders, the answer was simple.

Whatever its precise features, their logic created further problems for the Armada, in that slave owners were also taking the money their slaves earned as deckhands and keeping it entirely for themselves, thereby increasing their own pay and benefits (Lane 40-42). Not only that, but in enlisting their slaves to wash their uniforms (among other forms of personal service), slaveholders were contributing to a drain on resources. Given that water was generally a scarce on-board commodity, fulfilling these demands threatened to deny the rest of the ship a vital resource. In short, the struggle between master and slave in the context of the Armada proved to have more far-reaching implications. At stake was not just how enslaved men and women spent their time, but the very functioning of the South Sea Armada.

Given all these struggles, it is worth asking why officials did not ban enslaved deckhands outright. Simply put, their skilled labor was far too valuable, and there was no alternate supply. And so, slaveholders and officials remained locked in a struggle over the boundaries of dominion over the labor of slaves. Slaveholders' claims to ultimate authority over their human property blurred the distinction between *criados* and deckhands, a fact which ran up against the exigencies of shipboard life in ways that threatened both the working and social order of the ship. And while colonial officials saw a clear need to restrict the boundaries of slaveholders' authority in this context to ensure that deckhands were providing necessary ship-wide service, they were not interested in completely undermining that authority either, which is why they did not seek to ban the practice of bringing slaves on board Armada ships for personal service outright. Thus, in conceding slaveholders' property rights, officials left the door open for continued abuse, since regardless of whether owners brought their slaves on board as deckhands or paid for their passage as *criados*, both masters and slaves ultimately treated the needs of the ship as secondary. Further, slaves continued to reap myriad benefits from their time on board Armada vessels, from the economic to the less tangible though equally meaningful. It is this position of possibility that opens up a window onto the set of calculations that enslaved men and women made regarding where else to direct their skilled labor during a period of tremendous upheaval.

The World of the South Sea

Enslaved and free blacks also found themselves being conscripted by foreign invaders to help plunder the wealth that circulated in the region. Here, again, Francis Drake's legacy offered lessons to Spain and its American colonies about the extent of their vulnerabilities. As mentioned previously, during an earlier voyage, in 1572-1573, Drake led a series of raids on Panama that were immeasurably facilitated by local maroon communities (Lane 40-42). Indeed, that Spain's imperial rivals could also find collaborators among local enslaved populations was a source of regular worry to officials in the South Sea. Shortly after Drake's incursion into the region, for instance, officials wrote to the Spanish Crown to warn of the alliances British corsairs could form with maroon communities in Panama (AGI, Patronato Real, 234, R.1, 1575, "Carta de los oficiales reales de Panamá," 1r.-6r.). The subsequent years saw the Peruvian coast and South Sea Armada come under increased attack, first by the Dutch, who, as Peter Bradley notes, "embrac[ed] the hope of enlisting the aid of Indians, and perhaps negroes, for anti-Spanish action" (Bradley 23), and later by the British, who were likewise inclined to conscript runaways and free blacks to join their ranks as they made their way into the region later in the century (Lincoln 9). And, as Kris Lane and others have shown, the mere presence of foreigners "did much to stir the political waters of the region" (Lane 142), creating opportunities for local caudillos, indigenous groups, and runaway slaves to secure local power.

An episode from 1624 offers a glimpse of the ways in which foreign corsairs depended on enslaved and free people of African-descent in the South Sea. In May, just a few days after a silver-laden ship had departed Callao for Panama, officials in Callao received word that Dutch corsair Jacques l'Hermite had been sighted with a fleet of fourteen ships near the port and seemed on the verge of spotting and pursuing the departed ship. Officials in turn dispatched two smaller ships known as *chinchorros*, to determine the extent of the threat against the prize ship and distract attention away from it. Among the envoys on board the *chinchorros* were several *negros*, who the Dutch promptly took captive and interrogated about when the prize ship had left Callao (Montesinos 250-251). While it is not clear why the Dutch separated the *negros* from the rest of the group, their actions resulted in information that enabled l'Hermite and his crew to locate and board the prize ships. It is not clear whether the Dutch extracted this information under duress or even torture, or that they offered promises of freedom or other opportunities should they provide useful information. But officials in Peru were well aware of the potential for enslaved and free blacks to be lured on the side of Spain's enemies.

This is not to suggest that enslaved and free blacks were always or uniformly willing accomplices to Spain's imperial rivals. As the l'Hermite episode makes clear, these groups were vulnerable to capture and interrogation, and whatever advantages they found by cooperating under these circumstances does not erase the fact of their vulnerability. Indeed, during the 1680s to the 1720s, which marked an especially active period of corsair activity in the South Sea thanks to the heightened circulation of people and goods here as well as events in Europe that emboldened Spain's rivals to attack its overseas interests, enslaved and free blacks would find themselves thrust into increasingly perilous and life-altering circumstances (Bradley 466).

Conclusions

Slaveholders' claims to ultimate authority over their human property blurred the distinction between deckhands and personal servants, which ran up against the exigencies of shipboard life in ways that threatened both the working and social order of the ship and the imperial purpose it was meant to serve. In their attempts to shore up these distinctions, officials in the sixteenth and seventeenth century passed legislation requiring slaveholders boarding Armada ships with their human property to pay for their passage if they were going to use them as personal servants. Yet despite the specificity and flexibility of these laws (which did not outright ban the practice of bringing slaves on board for personal service), the fact of their repetition signaled a persistent pattern of abuse. Both slaveholders and slaves – by force as well as in attempts to negotiate improved status and conditions through their own labor and sweat - continued to treat the needs of the ship as secondary.

The behavior of slaveholders on Armada vessels raises an important question: if they were not invested in the premise of the Armada itself, or in the work of guarding the transport of silver against foreign attacks, what were they doing on the vessels in the first place? In one sense it is hardly surprising that slaveholders expected enslaved men and women to fit more work than there were hours in the day, which is to say to carry out their duties as *grumetes* and pages and perform other shipboard services while also attending to slaveholders' individual needs. But there may have been another set of motivations at work as well. For example, in her work on the Luso-Atlantic slave trade from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, Mary E. Hicks has noted that sailors who worked on vessels along the slave-trading route between mainland Guinea and Cape Verde took advantage of receiving compensation in the form of the so-called *caixa de liberdade*, or liberty chest. This was, in essence, cargo space that they filled with goods such as textiles and spices that allowed them to participate in private slave-trading (Hicks 285-286). Perhaps a similar scenario unfolded in the context of the South Sea: a prospective slaveholder might board an Armada vessel alone in Callao and earn his keep as a sailor during the passage to Panama, whereupon he could disembark, purchase from a selection of newly-arrived Africans, and take his human property on board an Armada vessel as a *grumete* or page. In that capacity, the latter would have free passage, earn an income, and receive a ration of meals, all of which benefitted the new slaveholder. Most of all, both masters and slaves would be able to travel along the Pacific coast with minimal risk of being overtaken by corsairs.

The Atlantic World context opens possibilities not only for thinking about the ideas, attitudes, and experiences of European mariners but those of African-descent ones as well. As scholars such as W. Jeffrey Bolster and Mary E. Hicks and have shown, enslaved mariners in the Atlantic found in life at sea an experience of mobility and opportunities for trade and other commercial activities that could supply them with the resources needed to purchase their own freedom (Bolster; Hicks 301). This work provides models for drawing additional meaning from the legislation that opened this article, particularly the hints it offers as to the extent to which enslaved deckhands used their time on board Armada ships to earn money for tasks that fell outside of their proscribed duties. For instance, when they washed their owners' uniforms, enslaved deckhands also did the same for other sailors who paid them. These practices not only used up

reserves of water – a precious resource under any circumstance, but certainly for long voyages – they further upset the larger order and operations of the ship. At the same time, these practices provide us with crucial insight into how slaves experienced and navigated their time at sea. While they certainly understood the larger imperial purpose of their service on board Armada ships, their actions invite us to consider the relevance of this service to their lives back on shore. For them, the money earned at sea could be used toward purchasing their freedom or improving their material conditions, while the fact of having worked to protect Spanish empire could boost their social status (along with that of free deckhands as well). While some of this is speculative thinking, evidence from official chronicles and correspondence shows that the Spanish Crown showed regular appreciation to those who aided in its defense. Thus, beyond tracing how ideas about slavery, race, and empire shaped and were shaped by the space of the Armada ship, this article shows how, for enslaved and free people of African descent, the world of seafaring was ripe with both risks and rewards.

During a period when Spain and its overseas empire were under sustained attack from the British, Dutch, and French, slave labor was instrumental to keeping the region safe. Officials therefore needed slaveholders to adjust their land-based logic about the master-slave relationship in order to meet larger, imperial needs. And while it is clear that slaveholders pushed back against this expectation, we know less about how slaves negotiated it. How, for example, did slaves understand their place within this new context? Further, were there any conflicts or perceived hierarchical distinctions between those engaged in personal service, and those working as deckhands? We know that deckhands were paid the lowest of all mariners and received the smallest food rations, a fact which hints at ship-wide hierarchies across different ranks of service, but this tells us nothing about inter-rank dynamics (López de Caravantes 89). Again, further research is necessary to answer these questions, but asking them means giving careful attention to how the seafaring enterprise shaped slaves' lived experiences at sea.

We must also ask how the shipboard experience in turn shaped land-based dynamics. Whatever challenges or dangers they suffered at sea, enslaved mariners returning to shore would have done so with a strong sense of purpose, given that they served important roles in protecting the South Sea from foreign attack. And while the question of how their time at sea would later improve their status back home – such as by providing the slaves among them with enough money to purchase their freedom, or by conferring a general sense of service-based honor and prestige – remains to be studied.

In discussing enslaved and free blacks' myriad experiences in the South Sea Armada, what becomes clear is the extent to which their experiences intersect with the wider world of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. In addition to these men and women were the enslaved and free people already living in Spanish American port cities and coastal enclaves, who were forced and sometimes even voluntarily flung themselves into the world of seafaring by way of pirates and privateers in the region. Some even remained with those interlopers even as their journeys took them further afield to Asia and Europe. Together, their experiences point to the need for new ways of framing the history of slavery and freedom in Latin America. Widening the lens to focus on the place that Africans occupied in landscape has implications for two broad historiographic areas beyond slavery studies. First, it makes room for the study of the institution of slavery

as an integral part of the history of the South Sea and Pacific World. A second and related historiographic implication pertains to the Atlantic World, whose geographic boundaries overlapped with those of the Pacific far more than scholars acknowledge. Seafarers regularly crossed the Isthmus of Panama or traversed the Strait of Magellan (both of which connected the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, one from the north, the other from the south) and wrote about such crossings in the narratives of their seafaring journeys, yet there remains a relatively firm scholarly boundary between the South Sea and the Pacific World, on one hand, and the Atlantic World on the other.

This is not simply advocating comparison for the sake of it, but rather a call for the development of approaches that center on and trace the movements, experiences, and identity formation of people of African descent rather than hewing to imperial boundaries. At the same time, we can and must still do so in ways that attend to questions of how the diverse imperial actors operating in the Pacific and Atlantic contexts – from the Spanish to the British, Dutch, and French – variously engaged with the African-descent populations they encountered, as well as the reasons for those differences. By centering people of African descent, we can more fully probe how the maritime context not only complicated but destabilized ideas about labor and dominion.

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