

Excerpt from: Thomas Phillips, *A Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London*, Ann. 1693, 1694 (published 1732).

Source Introduction and Summary: In this document, Captain Thomas Phillips of the English slave ship, *Hannibal*, describes how he and his English crew interacted and negotiated with an African king, and his emissaries, in order to acquire slaves. Phillips also describes how English traders branded and shackled slaves in the early stages of the Middle Passage, and how Africans resisted their enslavement by mutiny and suicide. Phillips also provides a rare reflection on how Europeans and Africans perceived color difference and created emerging concepts of race and racism.

Phillips, and his ship, were part of the Royal African Company, the English slave trading stock-company which originated in 1660 after the restoration of the monarchy. The Royal African Company dominated the West African slave trade during the late seventeenth century. In 1693, Phillips and the *Hannibal* left England for present day Benin on the West African coast to acquire slaves. After filling his ship with 700 men and women, Phillips and the *Hannibal* sailed for Barbados in the eastern Caribbean where English sugar plantation owners required large amounts of slave labor. Only 372 of the slaves on the *Hannibal* survived the passage from West Africa to Barbados – an unusually high mortality rate. During the seventeenth century, the average mortality rate for any given slave ship making the passage from Africa to the Americas was about twenty percent. (Yazawa, *Documents for America's History*, 59) ⁽¹⁾

Excerpt:

“As soon as the king understood of our landing, he sent two of his cappasheirs [Africans designated by coastal kings to supply European traders with slaves], or noblemen, to compliment us at our factory [slave trading fort on the coast], where we design'd to continue, that night, and pay our devoirs [respects] to his majesty next day, which we signify'd to them, and they, by a foot-express, to their monarch; whereupon he sent out two more of his grandees [noblemen] to invite us there that night, saying he waited for us, and that all former captains used to attend him the first night: whereupon being unwilling to infringe the custom, or give his majesty any offence, we took our hammocks, and Mr. Peirson, myself, Capt. Clay, our surgeons, pursers, and about 12 men, arm'd for our guard, were carry'd to the king's town, which contains about 50 houses . . . (216)

“We returned him thanks by his interpreter, and assur'd him how great affection our masters, the royal African company of England, bore to him, for his civility and fair and just dealings with their captains; and that notwithstanding there were many other Places, more plenty of negro slaves that begg'd their custom, yet they had rejected all the advantageous offers made them out of their good will to him, and therefore had sent us to trade with him, to supply his country with necessaries, and that we hop'd he would endeavor to continue their favour by his kind usage and fair dealing with us in our trade, that we would oblige his cappasheirs to do us justice, and not impose upon use in their prices; all which we should faithfully relate to our

masters, the royal African company, when we came to England. He answer'd that the African company was a very good brave man; that he lov'd him; that we should be fairly dealt with, and not impos'd upon; But he did not prove as good as his word; nor indeed (tho' his cappasheirs shew him so much respect) dare he do anything but what they please . . . so after having examin'd us about our cargoe, what sort of goods we had, and what quantity of slaves we wanted, etc., we took our leaves and return'd to the factory, having promised to come in the morning to make our palavera, or agreement, with him about prices, how much of each of our goods for a slave. (217)

“According to promise we attended his majesty with samples of our goods, and made our agreement about the prices, tho' not without much difficulty; he and his cappasheirs exacted very high, but at length we concluded as per the latter end; then we had warehouses, a kitchen, and lodgings assign'd us, but none of our rooms (217) had doors till we made them, and put on locks and keys; next day we paid our customs to the king and cappasheirs . . . then the bell was order'd to go about to give notice to all people to bring their slaves to the trunk [holding area for slaves to be sold] to sell us . . . This man carry'd about [the bell] and beat with a stick, which made a small dead sound . . . (218)

“We were every morning, during our stay here, invited to breakfast with the king, where we always found the same dish of stew'd fowls and potatoes; he also would send us a hog, goat, sheep, or pot of pitto [a liquor made from corn] every day for our table, and we usually return'd his civility with three or four bottles of brandy, which is his *fumum bonum* [favorite]: We had our cook ashore, and eat as well as we could, provisions being plenty and cheap; but we soon lost our stomachs by sickness, most of my men having fevers, and myself such convulsions and aches in my head, that I could hardly stand or go to the trunk without assistance, and there often fainted with the horrid stink of the negroes, it being an old house where all the slaves are kept together, and evacuate nature where they live, so that no jakes can stink worse: there being forced to sit three or four hours at a time, quite ruin'd my health, but there was no help. (218)

“Capt. *Clay* and I agreed to go to the trunk to buy the slaves by turns, each his day, that we might have no distraction or disagreement in our trade, as often happens when there are here more ships than one, and the commanders can't set their horses together, and go hand in hand in their traffick, whereby they have a check upon the blacks, whereas their disagreements create animosities, underminings, and out-bidding each other, whereby they enhance the prices to their general loss and detriment, the blacks well knowing how to make the best use of such opportunities, and as we found make it their business, and endeavor to create and foment misunderstandings and jealousies between commanders, it turning to their great account in the disposal of their slaves. (218)

“When we were at the trunk, the king's slaves, if he had any, were the first offer'd to sale, which the cappasheirs would be very urgent with us to buy, and would in a manner force us to it ere they would shew us any other, saying they were the *Reys Cosa* [the king's slaves], and we must not refuse them, tho' as I observ'd they were generally the worst slaves in the trunk, and we paid more for them than any others, which we could not remedy, it being one of his majesty's prerogatives; then the cappasheirs each brought out his slaves according to his degree and

quality, the greatest first, &c. and our surgeon examin'd them well in all kinds, to see that they were sound wind and limb, making them jump, stretch out their arms swiftly, looking in their mouths to judge their age; for the cappasheirs are so cunning, that they shave them all close before we see them, so that let them never be so old we see no grey hairs in their heads or beards; and then having liquor'd them well and sleek with palm oil, 'tis no easy matter to know an old one from a middle-age one, but by the teeth decay; but our greatest care of all is to buy none that are pox'd, lest they should infect the rest aboard; for tho' we separate the men and women aboard by partitions and bulk-heads, to prevent quarrels and wranglings among them, yet do what we can they will come together, and that distemper which they call the yaws, is very common here, and discovers itself by almost the same symptoms as the . . . clap does with us; therefore our surgeon is forc'd to examine the privities of both men and women, with the nicest scrutiny . . . When we had selected from the rest such as we liked, we agreed in what goods to pay them, the prices being already state before the king, how much of each sort of merchandize we were to give for a man, woman, and child, which gave us much ease, and saved abundance of disputes and wranglings, and gave the owner a note, signifying our agreement of the sorts of goods; upon delivery of which the next day he receiv'd them; then we mark'd the slaves we had bought in the breast, or shoulder, with a hot iron, having the letter of the ship's name on it, the place being before anointed with a little palm oil, which caus'd but little pain, the mark being usually well in four or five days, appearing very plain and white after. (218)

“When we had purchas'd to the number of 50 or 60 we would send them aboard, there being a cappasheir, intituled the captain of the slaves, whose care it was to secure them to the water-side, and see them all off; and if in carrying to the marine any were lost, he was bound to make them good, to us, the captain of the trunk being oblig'd to do the like, if any run away while under his care, for after we buy them we give him charge of them till the captain of the slaves comes to carry them away: These are two officers appointed by the king for this purpose, to each of which every ship pays the value of a slave in what goods they like best for their trouble (218), when they have done trading; and indeed they discharg'd their duty to us very faithfully, we not having lost one slave thro' their neglect in 1300 we bought here. (219)

“There is likewise a captain of the sand, who is appointed to take care of the merchandize we have come ashore to trade with, that the negroes do not plunder them, we being often forced to leave goods a whole night on the sea shore, for want of porters to bring them up; but notwithstanding his care and authority, we often came by the loss, and could have no redress.

“When our slaves were come to the seaside, our canoes were ready to carry them off to the longboat, if the sea permitted, and she convey'd them aboard ship, where the men were all put in irons, two and two shackled together, to prevent their mutiny, or swimming ashore. (219)

“The negroes are so willful and loth to leave their own country, that they have often leap'd out of the canoes, boat and ship, into the sea, and kept under water till they were drowned, to avoid being taken up and saved by our boats, which pursued them; they having a more dreadful apprehension of *Barbadoes* [the island of Barbados in the eastern Caribbean] than we can have of hell, tho' in reality they live much better there than in their own country; but home is home, &c: we have likewise seen divers of them eaten by the sharks, of which a prodigious

number kept about the ships of this place, and I have been told will follow her hence to *Barbadoes*, for the dead negroes that are thrown over-board in the passage. I am certain in our voyage there we did not want the sight of some every day, but that they were the same I can't affirm. (219)

“We had about 12 negroes did willfully drown themselves, and others starv'd themselves to death; for 'tis their belief that when they die they return home to their own country and friends again. (219)

“I have been inform'd that some commanders have cut off the legs or arms of the most willful, to terrify the rest, for they believe if they lose a member, they cannot return home again: I was advis'd by some of my officers to do the same, but I could not be persuaded to entertain the least thoughts of it, much less to put in practice such barbarity and cruelty to poor creatures, who, excepting their want of Christianity and true religion, (their misfortune more than fault) are as much the works of God's hands, and no doubt as dear to him as ourselves; nor can I imagine why they should be despis'd for their colour, being what they cannot help, and the effect of the climate it has pleas'd God to appoint them. I can't think there is any instrinsick value in one colour more than another, nor that white is better than black, only we think it so because we are so, and are prone to judge favorably in our own case, as well as the blacks, who in odium of the colour, say, the devil is white, and so paint him.” (219) ⁽⁷⁾

Attributions

(1) Content by Florida State College at Jacksonville is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

(7) [*A Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London*](#) by Thomas Phillips is in the [Public Domain](#).