

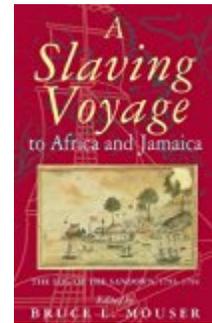
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Bruce L. Mouser, ed.** *A Slaving Voyage to Africa and Jamaica: The Log of the Sandown, 1793-1794*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002. xxii + 156 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34077-1.

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In early April 1793, the experienced British slave ship captain Samuel Gamble took his ship, *Sandown*, owned by an investment syndicate of London brokers and consigned to Joseph and Angus Kennedy, merchants in Kingston, Jamaica, to Upper Guinea in West Africa to buy Africans for transshipment to Jamaica where they would become slaves. He decided to keep a journal, or log, of his activities, from the loading of the ship in late January 1793 in Greenwich until the voyage ended at roughly the same place on 11 October 1794. The log fortuitously has been preserved and is owned by the Caird Library at the National Maritime Museum, London. Bruce Mouser, emeritus professor at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and an expert on the history of Sierra Leone as well as an experienced editor of primary material relating to that area in the period of the Atlantic slave trade, has produced a modern, heavily annotated, version of this log that enables Gamble's observations to become more widely known. I have not examined the original manuscript and thus cannot verify that the edition offered to the public matches the original. But the care with which Mouser has annotated the text invites confidence that this edition meets the highest scholarly standards.

Professor Mouser should be congratulated on his labors in bringing this very impressive text before our notice. The log is of intrinsic interest for several reasons and will be fascinating to several different constituencies. The primary audience is Africanists, especially specialists in West Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gamble describes succinctly but vividly the structure of the Atlantic slave trade in the Rio Nunez region of present day Sierra Leone, outlining the

role that private traders such as Dr. James Walker and David Lawrence played as middlemen, facilitating trade between African sellers and European buyers. Anyone interested in understanding the structure of slave commerce as it was practiced on the windward coast will find this edition, along with its extensive and helpful annotations, extremely useful. Nearly two-thirds of the text deals with Gamble's difficulties in Africa. They demonstrate how complicated and difficult the Atlantic slave trade was in Africa. Gamble was an experienced and seemingly efficient slave captain but he faced enormous difficulties in procuring slaves and in keeping his ship and its crew in proper shape. As Mouser explains, ship captains had to get the timing of both arrival and departure exactly right in order to maximise profits. Gamble was off in both respects. He arrived too early (mid-June) to be able to meet the peak of the slave buying season and his early arrival meant that his crew was exposed to the end of the rainy season and the very real likelihood of catching fever. Mouser details the deaths of numerous seamen, lamenting on September 4 that his crew "are become quite Peevish, fraxious, ill natur'd and Childish [...] am at a loss to know what to do with them." His early arrival did not help him in getting his cargo on board such that he could arrive in Jamaica in good time when the sugar harvest began and when planters were most likely to buy slaves. Ideally, he should have left West Africa in November but the necessity of replacing dead crew with new people, his own illness, and difficulties in dealing with both European traders as well as African intermediaries meant that his many journeys inland and around the coast to facilitate the purchase of slaves had little effect. By mid- to late November, he should have been able

to secure a full complement of slaves. On November 2, 1793, however, the *Sandown* held just five slaves with “No Slaves coming down owing to a dispute in the Interior part of the Country.” By mid-December, Gamble had bought 40 slaves but he was still far short of his full complement of 220 slaves. He only reached that number on March 26, 1794, meaning that he was likely to arrive in the British West Indies far too late for optimum sales. Gamble’s travails shows how precarious was the difference between success and failure in the trade, serving as a useful corrective to simplistic accounts that assume the trade to be a simple and lucrative way of denuding West Africa of people and profits.

Africanists will be interested in other features of the text besides its elucidation of business success and failure in the slave trade. The remarks that Gamble made concerning the coast of Africa and the appearance of the interior are valuable first-hand testimony about an area of the world little commented upon in this period. More significant, perhaps, is Gamble’s occasional commentary upon the people that he meets. He thought little of Africa—a “country at variance with Mankind” and full of disagreeable wild beasts, enormous snakes, and an abundance of annoying insects. The animals of Africa indeed made such a racket that “there’s little if any sleep to be got so that a European richly deserves what he gains.” He was even less impressed with Africans, whom he describes at first encounter in the Cape Verde islands as “rogueishly inclin’d from their Infancy.” Africans in the Sierra Leone interior were even worse: “filthy and beastly as ugly” with “Miserable” houses; moreover, they were jealous, indolent, and “capable of depraved barbarity.” “A Philosopher,” he concludes “would here find an ample field to display his genius which may justly be term’d a Natural History of the Human Species in their Savage state.” Gamble’s distaste for Africans and easy capacity for comparing them to animals reflect standard European thinking but his expressions of distaste are sufficiently detailed and forceful as to make his words arresting. His words are given more force when counter-posed with his equally contemptuous attitude to the Irish peasants that he encountered in Cork. He asserted that the Irish live worse than Africans did in Africa, especially Irish women who were “us’d to a degree of barbarity carrying the manure on their backs to the land, while as off[ten] great idle fellows are looking on at their ease.” Teachers will find it useful to expose students to Gamble’s prejudices to both Africans and the Irish, in order to show that it was not only Africans that Englishmen compared to animals: Gamble noted that in Cork “Peo-

ple[,] Hogs[,] and Dogs all live in the same place” and were probably fed “out of the same vessels.”

Scholars interested in the organisation of the slave trade, particularly as regards the crossing itself and the sale of Africans in the New World, will also find Gamble’s log interesting, although the information about these activities is less full than that on slavery and society in Sierra Leone. Gamble had no more luck transporting Africans to sell in the Caribbean than he did in procuring slaves. Soon after his ship left he faced a slave insurrection where ten slaves died. Sadly, he tells us little about how the insurrection developed and how it was put down. But the fact that it did occur illustrates the danger of trading in slaves and why slave captains heavily armed their ships. Insurrection was less detrimental to the success of the mission than disease and crossing the Atlantic. Gamble barely did either. He lost thirty-four slaves to disease, as well as several crewmen. His water kegs leaked, forcing him to put his crew on three-quarters rations. Not surprisingly, when he put into Barbados to get fresh supplies, sixteen of his crew absconded, losing all their pay in the process. Gamble’s log gives evidence of just how appalling conditions were on slave ships and why only the most desperate men signed up to serve as seamen on slavers. By the time he limped into Kingston on May 13, he had only 6 crew and fewer than 200 slaves.

Gamble’s travails were not over on arrival, as his delay in leaving Africa had cost him dearly. He arrived in Britain’s premier slave-buying colony when planters were busily restocking their plantations after the reduction in the supplies of slaves during the 1780s. But the supply of slaves in Kingston in May 1794 was too great even for Jamaican planters. Gamble noted that the island was overrun with French emigrants, was subject to an epidemic of yellow fever and had “very scarce and dear” provisions. Planters could not buy slaves because they lacked adequate foodstuffs. Moreover, the harbor was clogged with ships—Gamble noted seventeen slave ships in Kingston, carrying 5,432 Africans. Not surprisingly, he found the “Sale of Negroes here very indifferent at present.” It took him nearly two months to sell all his slaves (save for four sickly ones he could not sell). Gamble does not mention the prices he received for slaves and says little about the process of selling slaves in Kingston. This absence of detail is a great shame, but one suspects that Gamble’s profits from the eighteen-month expedition were very slim. The slave trade was not an easy business, even if overall profits in the trade were healthy.

Africanists will find this work more useful than will Caribbeanists. But scholars in general will enjoy Mouser's careful annotations of Gamble's interesting text and will appreciate his careful index and full bibliography. The only regret is that Mouser could include only a few of Gamble's many illustrations in his edition. That cannot be helped. We should be grateful for what we have and be pleased that this important text has been given the sort of care and attention that mark good scholarship.

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