Africa Enslaved
A Curriculum Unit on Comparative Slave Systems for Grades 9-12

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Compilation date: March 2006

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Cover photo: The slave monument, Stone Town, Zanzibar, Tanzania © 2003, Christopher Rose

Tanzania
- International boundary
- Region boundary
- National capital
- Province capital
- Railroad
- Road
- Track

SLAVERY IN THE SWAHILI EMIRATES OF EAST AFRICA

As the primary port of call on the Swahili Coast, as well as the seat of Omani power in the region, Zanzibar was the primary center for the slave trade in East Africa. Although the number of slaves traded in the Indian Ocean never reached the level of the West African-Atlantic slave trade, European abolitionists focused a substantial portion of their efforts in the 19th century on Zanzibar. It is estimated that 1.5 million slaves were exported from East Africa in the 19th century. Approximately half of them were sent to other destinations in East Africa, while the others were sent to the Indian Ocean Islands, the Middle East, India, and Brazil.

Although the slave trade had existed on the Swahili Coast for centuries, the primary trading power in the region during the 17th century was Oman, which needed very few slaves (about 2,000-3,000 per year) internally. At the end of the 18th century, the French established colonies on Ile-de-France and Bourbon island (now Mauritius and Reunion), which exploited local sugar plantations as a main source of income. In 1776, the French signed an agreement with the sultan of Kilwa to be furnished with a supply of 1,000 slaves per year. By the end of the century, the governor of Kilwa had fallen out of favor with the new leadership in Oman, and Zanzibar became the main center for slave sale and distribution in East Africa.

Zanzibari society was Swahili and Muslim, which provided a rigid social and legal framework for the slave trade and the practice of slavery locally. Slaves have certain legal rights under Islamic law that their counterparts elsewhere did not enjoy. At the same time, however, the constrictions of society and demands of the booming Zanzibari economy in the mid-19th century meant that the laws were neither evenly applied nor always followed.

The slave trade grew largely out of the same networks used for the trade in ivory, another major export from East Africa that also experienced dramatic growth during this period. Between the end of the 15th century and the end of the 19th century, the ivory trade grew by 3,000%. Large raiding parties, such as those led by the notorious trader Hamid ibn Muhammed, known as Tippu Tip, tied into local networks in the hinterlands to acquire slaves and ivory, and marched them to the coast at a considerable profit. The slaves were forcibly marched to Bagamoyo, north of the present site of Dar es Salaam on the mainland, where they were loaded onto dhows and taken to the main slave market at Zanzibar for sale. The journey from the interior to the coast was long and grueling, and it is estimated that only one in five of the captives survived until the journey’s end.

Beginning around 1800, Zanzibar had begun producing cloves on plantations throughout the island. Cloves are a seasonal crop that must be picked, dried, and harvested before the fruit splits open, all of which must be accomplished in a short amount of time after ripening. The climate on Zanzibar allowed for two harvests per year, but this required a massive amount of labor. The demands were easily met with slave labor. By 1828 the income generated from the clove production was such that Sultan Seyyed Said of Oman moved his court from Muscat in Oman to Zanzibar in order to establish a royal monopoly on clove production. The Sultan himself personally owned 45 plantations on the island.

Another avenue for the slave trade was Brazil, whose need for slaves had been frustrated by British efforts to abolish the trade in the South Atlantic in the early 19th century. By mid-century, Brazilian traders began rounding the Cape of Good Hope and sailing to Zanzibar to export slaves to Brazil.

Slaves comprised the largest single subgroup of the population of Zanzibar by the mid-19th century, being larger in number than either the Arabs or the Swahili. Estimates range wildly: one observer puts the number at about 60,000 in 1847 while another estimate is that four-fifths of Zanzibar’s population of 450,000 in 1844 were slaves. Most reliable sources seem to indicate that at mid century the slave population was between 50,000 and 60,000.

Although abolition efforts were concentrated on Zanzibar from the early part of the 20th century, the trade was not abolished until 1890, and the practice was legal in parts of East Africa until 1907. Abolition led to a decline in the region’s prosperity, as much of the economic activity of East Africa was dependent on slave labor. Nor were all slaves able to enjoy freedom unconditionally—in form and under Islamic law the institution of slavery continued in some measure, and among some families, well into the mid-20th century.
Comprehension Exercises:

1. Where is Zanzibar located? What natural advantage does the Swahili coast have in tying into worldwide trade networks?
2. Research commodities traded on the Indian Ocean and create a time line depicting which commodities were important at what era.
3. Look at abolition dates around the world and identify causes and effects in the number of slaves sold in Zanzibar during the 19th century.
LEGAL STATUS

Reading 1: The Prophet Muhammad on the Proper Treatment of Slaves

Fear God in the matter of your slaves. Feed them with what you eat and clothe them with what you wear, and do not give them work beyond their capacity. Those whom you like, retain, and those whom you dislike, sell. Do not cause pain to God’s creation. He caused you to own them and had He so wished He could have caused them to own you.


Comprehension Exercises:

1. Sum up this passage in a few words. What do you think the Prophet’s message is? How do you think Muslims should treat their slaves, in light of this passage? Keep this in mind as you read the other passages that describe how slaves were actually treated.
2. As a comparison: what does the Bible say about slaves and how they should be treated? (Hint: look at Exodus 20:10 and Exodus 21:1-11.)
Reading 2: Lord Hardinge on Religious Laws Governing Slavery in Zanzibar

The following are the legal disabilities which the [Islamic] religion and law (and the two are in Zanzibar, save for a few exceptions, identical) impose upon the slave:

1. He cannot own, or acquire, or dispose of private property without the permission of his master.
2. He cannot give evidence in a Court of Justice, nor, without his Master’s sanction, take an oath.
3. He cannot, without the sanction of his master, contract a legal marriage, nor, according to most of the doctors, even with the permission of his master, have more than two wives at the same time.
4. He cannot sue his Master before a Court of law unless severely mistreated. In case of ill-treatment the qadi (judge) may and ought to warn the master that if the complaint is repeated, and proved genuine, he will forfeit his slave. Should the slave sue his master a second time, and the charge of cruelty be established, the qadi may order the slave to be sold, and the purchase money paid to the master.
5. He cannot sue any other person without his master’s consent.
6. He cannot, without his master’s permission, engage in trade, undertake a journey, or even make the pilgrimage to Mecca, nor in general claim any legal or civil right, except through and with his master’s sanction.
7. There is no legal limitation to his master’s power of punishing him, and, theoretically, I believe that he might put him to death without himself being held guilty of murder, or of any more serious offense than cruelty.
8. Except for the general prohibition described above of ill-treatment or cruelty, there is no legal limitation to the amount or nature of the work which a master may impose on his slave, whether the latter be a man, woman, or a child.

These rules are contradicted by practice in two categories: by custom, and by power of the Sultan.

In practice slaves do hold property of their own and are allowed by their masters to dispose of it. It is quite a common thing for a slave to have slaves of his own, and to treat the produce of their labor as his own personal property. In practice, moreover, the slave is always allowed to labor two days in the week (Thursday and Friday) or at least one day (Friday) for himself and his family alone, and what he earns on those days is regarded by local custom as exclusively his.

He is also permitted to retain a small portion of what he earns while working for his master, and once every six months he is entitled to new clothing (one shirt or white cotton gown for a man, two pieces of cloth for a woman).

If his master gives him neither board, lodging, nor clothing beyond the regular half-yearly allowance, he is entitled to half his earnings. Should [his master] refuse it to him, he can be summoned on the slave’s complaint by the qadi and ordered to pay, and if he refuses, he can be imprisoned for contempt of the qadi’s order. If the slave gets no pay he is entitled to a portion of a room, a bed, and any food left over from his master’s meal or cooked by the slaves of the house or, in place of food, to 2 annas to provide for him.

Hardinge to Kimberley, Africa No. 6, C-7707, February 26, 1895.

Comprehension Exercises:

1. In general, what is your impression of the legal status of a slave under Islamic law in Zanzibar? How do the rights of a slave in Zanzibar compare with the rights of a slave in the United States? Use examples from the readings to illustrate your point.

2. This passage was written by a European observer in 1895, after the slave trade in East Africa had been banned, but before the institution was abolished. What do you think the author’s intentions might have been in writing this article? How can you tell? Cite examples from the text.
SLAVE LABOR

Reading 1: Princess Salme of Zanzibar Recalls Life in the Palace

Princess Salme Seyyed bint Said was the daughter of Sultan Seyyed Said of Zanzibar. In later life, she eloped with a German merchant and moved to Europe, where she wrote her memoir, a fascinating account of her early life in the palace on Zanzibar. In this passage, she describes life in the palace. Bear in mind that the palace servants are domestic slaves.

Persons of rank are roused by a slave girl with a gentle and agreeable greeting between half past four and five in the morning.

At four o’clock [in the afternoon] everyone would come together to perform the third prayer. Afterward, everyone would put on splendid dress and the entire family, including Father, would come together for the main meal.

We had no special dining room, but took our meals on the veranda. There the eunuchs spread a long sefra with all the food for the whole repast. A sefra somewhat resembles a billiard table in shape; it is only a few inches high, however, and around the top runs a wide ledge. Although we possessed a lot of European furniture—lounges, tables, chairs, and even a few wardrobes—we nevertheless sat down to eat in true Oriental fashion, upon carpets or mats next to the floor. Precedence by rank was strictly observed, the Sultan taking the head; near him were the senior children, the little ones (those over seven) coming at the end.

Upon its termination, the eunuchs would carry European chairs out upon the broad veranda, but only for the adults; the small people stood up as a mark of respect for age, which is held in greater reverence there than anywhere else. The family gathered about the Sultan, while a row of smart, well-armed eunuchs lined the background.

Half an hour after the [meal] eunuchs handed round genuine Mocha in tiny cups resting on gold or silver saucers … The coffee is poured out immediately prior to consumption, which task requires such skill that only few servants are fitted for it. The coffee-bearer carries the handsome pot, made of tin adorned with brass, in his left hand, while in his right he holds only a single small cup and saucer. Behind or next to him an assistant carries a tray with empty cups and a large reserve pot of coffee. If the company has dispersed, these men have to follow the various members, and insure their partaking of the delicious beverage. How highly coffee is esteemed by the Orientals, everybody knows. The greatest care being bestowed upon its preparation, it is specially roasted, ground, and boiled whenever wanted, and therefore is always taken perfectly fresh. Roasted beans are never kept, nor boiled coffee, either, when in the least degree stale, being then thrown away or given to the lower servants….

Upon retiring for the night we dismissed the male servants, who joined their families, living in separate dwellings apart from the house.


Comprehension Exercises:

1. How skilled were the slaves who worked in the palace? Consider the requirements necessary to be the coffee-bearer, for instance.
2. Would the life of a domestic slave have been easy?
Reading 2: Customs and Duties of Domestic Slaves in Lamu, Kenya

Lamu, like Zanzibar, was an island with one major town that depended largely on trade and plantations for its economic prosperity. Lamu was under the control of the Sultan of Zanzibar for most of the 19th century, and the quality of life for slaves on both islands was very similar.

A household slave had better opportunities than a plantation slave to earn independent income, and a household slave could buy cloth as well as locally made perfumes … A female slave also used make-up, such as kohl for her eyes and henna, with which, in Arab fashion, she painted designs on her feet and hands, as her mistress did…. The wives of wealthy town slaves also dressed several cuts above ordinary domestic slaves and even adopted the free-born manner of going about under a shiraa carried by her own slaves.

Female [household] slaves usually made morning trips to the market and to the fishing boats to purchase the needs for the day. They first had to shop for the mistress, who never went out of the house until later afternoon (and only then to visit family members …). Female slaves tended the children of the household, including their own. They drew water for their mistresses’ baths, tended them when they were ill, served all meals, and performed special dances within the [women’s quarters] to entertain them. They ate the same foods as their owners … but they ate the leftovers—and they ate last…. Since the slaves controlled so much of the kitchen work, they could ensure that enough was left over for themselves.


Comprehension Exercises:

1. What was the life of a domestic slave like (bear in mind that all of the “servants” mentioned in Princess Salme’s passage are slaves)? How do you think these slaves were treated?
2. How similar were the duties of a domestic slave in Zanzibar to the duties of a domestic slave in the United States? Cite evidence from the text that supports your answer.
Reading 3: Customs and Duties of Domestic Slaves in Lamu, Kenya

On the small plantations behind the town, the slaves lived and worked in everyday contact with their masters. Weekend contact with their mistresses and the family children was frequent….

A single upper-class family typically owned two to three plantations, each with its own complement of slaves…. On large plantations, slave families lived in houses at both ends of the plantation, and sometimes there was also a small cluster of houses in the middle; thus, the living arrangements on the plantations permitted a certain degree of privacy and provided space for separate garden plots for slave families. Plantations of five to six acres were worked by two to four slaves and their families, those as large as one hundred acres by about forty slaves. For the highly labor-intensive tasks of planting and harvesting, the labor of town slaves was used to augment that of their farming counterparts; otherwise, the plantation slaves and their families performed all of the farm labor.

Among the slave women’s duties was herding animals on fenceless plantations. The women also helped their husbands gather the harvest, planted and picked the fruit and vegetables for their own families, and gathered firewood to prepare their meals. They ground rice, maize, or millet each morning and daily carried from the well to the house all water used by their families. Because slave families worked hard in intense heat, their clothes had to be washed often. That burden, too, fell to the women. They had sole care of their children, who, when old enough, helped out with family chores.

The master provided clothing for his slaves once each year. Female workday dress was the *kanga*, worn in sets of two. A *kanga* was a piece of cloth, large enough for a woman to wrap herself from the armpit to below the knees; a second piece was used to cover the head and upper body. (Women covered their heads and shoulders when they prayed.) Male slaves were issued two different items of clothing. For work, each male wore a piece of heavy material (*kikoi*) wrapped around the waist and, reaching below the knees, looped through the legs; the garment thus resembled a somewhat loose pair of shorts. For sleep, he wore a *leso*, made of softer material, more like that used in the woman’s *kanga*. Male and female slaves were expected to obey the Muslim standard of modesty, keeping their bodies covered at all times including during sexual intercourse.


Comprehension Exercises:

1. What kinds of duties were assigned to the plantation slaves? What do you think their living conditions were like?
2. How does the life of a plantation slave compare to the life of a domestic slave?
3. What do you think might have been the relationship between plantation slaves and domestic slaves? How might each group have viewed the other?
RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Reading 1: Princess Salme of Zanzibar Remembers Going to School in the Palace

Here, the slaves attend school with the children of the royal family—not as servants, but as fellow pupils.

We girls needed only to learn reading, but the boys had to learn writing as well. For the conduct of instruction there was one female teacher at Bet il Mtoni and one at Bet il Sahel, either having come from Oman upon my father’s behest.

Everyone was permitted to bring a few slaves to school; they took position somewhere in the background, while we children arranged ourselves on the mat as we pleased.

We had no special schoolroom. The lessons took place on an open veranda, to which pigeons, parrots, peacocks, and bobolinks enjoyed unrestricted access. This veranda overlooked a courtyard, so that we could amuse ourselves by watching the lively proceedings down below. Our academical furniture consisted of one enormous mat, and equal simplicity distinguished our apparatus for study: Koran with its stand, a small pot of ink (domestic manufacture), a bamboo pen, and a well-bleached camel’s shoulderblade. Easy to write upon with ink, this last-named serves as a slate; one’s nerves are spared the screeching of the slate pencil. The camel bones were usually cleaned off by slaves. Our first task was to acquire the complicated Arabic alphabet, which done we began to practice reading in the Koran, our only text-book, the boys, as I have already mentioned, receiving tuition in writing as besides.


Reading 2: Celebrations and Free Days among Plantation Slaves in Lamu, Kenya

Idd-al-Fitr is the holiday that follows the Islamic month of Ramadan, during which Muslims are supposed to fast during daylight hours. The name literally means “festival of the breaking of the fast.”

Every [plantation] has its share of poultry, goats, sheep, donkeys, and cows…. Children, even slave children, also rode the donkeys on special occasions…. On Idd-al-Fitr, masters also gave their slaves presents of new clothing or money…. Male slaves worked six days a week. On Friday, men were free to attend mosque. They were also free to carry out jobs for themselves and their families. Friday services at the mosques in town ran from 9:00 am until 2:00 p.m.; there the men recited prayers and passages from the Koran. Probably most slaves had only a nominal acquaintance with the Koran, since mosque schools were few—two or three at most—and, because they were located in town, were inaccessible to [plantation] slaves except on their days off….


Comprehension Exercises:

1. Summarize Reading 1 briefly. What do you think the importance of educating slaves was? Compare the importance of educating slaves with education for the other children in the royal household.

2. What subjects do you think students in this classroom studied? How can you tell? Why would these subjects be important, for free persons as well as slaves?

3. Compare what Princess Salme says in Reading 1 with what Patricia Romero Curtin says in Reading 2. Are there similarities between the lives of domestic slaves and plantation slaves? What are the main differences? How applicable is what Princess Salme describes in Reading 1 to the slaves described in Reading 2?
REBELLION, RUNAWAYS & EMANCIPATION

Reading 1: Description of the Zanzibar Rebellion of 1840

One rising took place … in about 1840…. A large part of the conspirators assembled one moonlit night on one of the plantations. They made their way … to the seashore to the north of Zanzibar [town.] In the early hours of the morning, they boarded a number of the Arab dhows, surprised and killed or overpowered the members of the crew, raised anchor, made sail and crossed over to the mainland. The whole plan was so rapidly executed that there was no time to organize any effective resistance. Those of the revolted slaves who were not able to obtain passages in the dhows took refuge in the interior of the island, where they were joined by a number of malefactors and other malcontents. Such troops as were in the island proved quite incapable of dealing with the situation. The outbreak appears to have begun in the middle of the year, when the possibility of reinforcements arriving from Arabia or the Persian Gulf was completely out of the question. The rebellion lasted for six months. It was finally suppressed by Seyyid Said’s maternal uncle, Ahmed bin Seif, who arrived with a body of mercenaries from Hadhramaut.


Reading 2: European View of the African’s Reaction to Slavery and Freedom

Pay particular attention to the tone of this passage. It reveals quite a bit about the attitude of many Europeans toward Africans—even those Europeans working for abolition.

A Slave in a moment of pique, or yielding to the sudden impulses to which the African, like a child, is very prone, will frequently run away from his old surroundings and afterwards repent at leisure—and thus suddenly severing his old ties with his old home toils along on the Uganda road with a weight of 60 lbs on his head, under the strict discipline of a European caravan leader, impatient of malingering or idleness, will doubt perhaps whether he was not better off in his own holding on the Zanzibar plantation and, amidst the dreary steppes of Masailand, sigh regretfully, as does every true Swahili, for the scene of the cocoa-nuts and the spice trees.

Hardinge to Salisbury, FOCP 7077/103, April 23, 1898.

Reading 3: Pursuing Runaways in Lamu, Kenya

At least once in the 1870s, Lamu men took their slave armies to the mainland to recapture a village of runaways. The runaways, joined by local allies, defeated the Lamu force with a “rain of arrows,” forcing it to beat a hasty retreat to Lamu.… Slaves were [generally] unreliable for recapturing other slaves.


Comprehension Exercises:

1. Based on the three readings above, what were the chances that a slave could run away successfully? Why?
2. What do you think Curtin means when she says “slaves were generally unreliable for recapturing other slaves?”
3. All three of the readings seem to indicate that running away or rebellion were fairly rare. Why do you think this might be? Cite evidence from these readings, and from what you have read about the condition of slaves in East Africa.
Reading 4: Lord Hardinge on the Religious Laws Governing Emancipation

According to [Islamic] law, no authority whatever, except his Master, can free a slave. There are, so far as I know, only three exceptions to this rule:

1. After the death of a master, two witnesses declare before a qadi that they heard the deceased verbally pronounce the slave to be free.
2. A concubine who bears her master a child, if not actually freed by him on its birth, becomes a free woman at his death, and cannot even during his lifetime be sold. This form of emancipation is, of course, dependent on the master recognizing the child as his own, which in most [Muslim] countries he is not strictly bound to do; in Zanzibar he usually recognizes it, but the mother is not usually freed until his death.
3. A person committing certain specified sins, such as breaking the Ramadan fast, killing another [Muslim] accidentally, or other crimes, may be ordered to free a certain number of slaves as punishment.

There are three ways that a master can manumit a slave:

1. “Atak” – the verbal grant of immediate and unconditional freedom
2. “Tadbir” – a promise which confers immediate freedom upon the master’s death; this applies not only to the slave but to any children born after the promise is made
3. “Kitabah” – a written agreement to free the slave on certain conditions, such as the payment on installments of a ransom, pending completion of which the slave, under the title of “mukatib” enjoys a certain amount of personal freedom, but cannot perform any valid legal or civil act by himself.

Of the three modes, I believe “tadbir” to be the commonest in Zanzibar at present; “kitabah” is, I am told, a good deal rarer.

It should be remembered that the emancipation of slaves is a very meritorious act in the eyes of the [Muslim] religion and that it has always been common for devout [Muslims] to purchase them with this specific object, a bequest of money for this purpose by will (called “curbah” or a pious gift) being considered peculiarly commendable.

It is tradition that the Prophet Muhammad once said “Whosoever shall free a [Muslim] slave God will free every member of his body, limb by limb, from the first of hell.”

The emancipation by a stranger, such as a British Consul or other authority, of slaves purchased with this religious intention, is therefore strongly resented by their owners, as depriving them of the merits of their contemplated act, and defrauding them, so to speak, of an investment in the world to come.

To sum up, while [Islamic] law generally encourages emancipation, it requires, with a very few exceptions, that it should be the master’s own free and spontaneous act.

Hardinge to Kimberley, Africa No. 6, C-7707, February 26, 1895.

Comprehension Exercises:

1. Summarize the ways in which a slave in Zanzibar could gain his or her freedom.
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages to each method of emancipation for the slaves? For the slave owners?
3. How do these methods compare with the ways slaves in the United States could gain freedom? What about slaves in Brazil?
4. Based on what Lord Hardinge says in the last two paragraphs, how do you think the European abolition movement was perceived in Zanzibar? Why?
TRANSITION TO FREEDOM

Reading 1: Status of Owning a Slave

[Slaves are essential] as a sign of wealth and respectability, a freed [Muslim] never dreams of doing any sort of labor, but lives off his slaves.

Hamerton to Bombay, Zanzibar Archives, 2 February 1842.

Reading 2: Pemba after Abolition

*Pemba, the sister island of Zanzibar, served as a secondary plot for plantations.*

Since the restraints imposed by the Arab masters have been removed, Pemba has become one huge brothel, the women being worse than the men. They seem to have but half-human souls, and with the subtlety of savages, the passions and physical strength of adults, they have only the intelligence of a child to restrain them.

J.P. Farler, Commissioner for Pemba. Zanzibar Archives, n.d.

Reading 3: Lamu after Abolition

Most slaves on the mainland quickly deserted their owners’ plantations. Those who stayed farmed the land as squatters, refusing to labor for their former owners. But on the island of Lamu, and in particular Lamu town emancipation changed little in the lives of the slaves…. In the eyes of the Lamu faithful, only masters had the right to free their slaves; here the secular proclamation issued by the sultan and brought to the island by British agents had little effect.

There is no way of knowing how many Lamu slaves chose freedom, when British commissioners arrived to compensate their owners and to inform the slaves of their rights under the law.... Perhaps half of the slave population—including whole families—remained under a system of *de facto*, if not *de jure* slavery....

When masters died, ex-slave men (and a few women) started a new life—concentrating on their own limited kin and frequently expressing hostility toward the upper-class. Those who had the opportunity to make money and enjoy a better lifestyle were especially hostile....

Former masters, too, had their hostilities toward the ex-slaves who stayed on. Some found them wanting in religious beliefs—religious instruction of a sort having been provided by owners. Ex-slaves did not ‘belong’ because they failed to accept the teachings of Islam and continued with pagan practices....

Afro-Arab men at times taunted former slaves, reminding them of their former status—making fun of them as ‘freedmen.’ They joked at the way former slaves took new names. Often slaves did not know who their father were; more often, they were referred to by names of former owners (example: Ali, owned by Ahmed, became Ali mtumwa (slave of) Ahmed).


Comprehension Exercises:

1. What were the challenges for slaves after gaining their freedom? Why do you think they might have existed?
2. How easy would it have been for a domestic slave to transition to a free life? What about a plantation slave? Cite evidence from the passages that supports your answer.
3. Based on what Curtin says in reading 3, how similar is the fate of former slaves in Lamu to the former slaves of the Confederacy after the Civil War?
ABOLITION

Reading 1: Princess Salme Defends the Institution of Slavery on Economic Grounds

One must be careful not to judge slavery in the Orient by what one has heard about it in North America or Brazil. The slave of a [Muslim] is in a quite different and comparatively much better position. Slavery is an ancient institution of Oriental people, and I doubt whether it can ever be abolished completely.

I was still a child when the treaty between my father and Great Britain expired. After that date, the slaves of all British subjects in Zanzibar were to be set free. These were hard times for the owners concerned. Their crying and complaining would not end. Some had a hundred or more slaves for the cultivation of their estate. All these were set free on one date, and their masters were ruined.

Should the real possibility exist of slavery’s abrogation, one would have to proceed with the utmost slowness and care. The Negroes must be trained to think and to work, and their masters persuaded how the employment of improved agricultural machinery would enable them to do without hundreds of labourers now needed to cultivate their fields. The proprietor must be made to recognise that no one intends his ruin, and that justice is for him as well as for the serf. This would surely be more humane, more Christian, than ostentatiously building a church in the slave market, which was superfluous, by the way, because the two churches already standing, one Catholic, the other Protestant, had small congregations.

Any such methods can only affront the Arab, who, like most other Orientals, is extremely conservative, and clings with the greatest tenacity to ancient traditions. He ought therefore not to have new ideas violently forced upon him which he finds incomprehensible and outrageous. Disagreement with European views brings upon him the immediate accusation of [Islamic] fanaticism, a thing vastly exaggerated, as was proved when I returned to Zanzibar after an absence of nineteen years. I had in the meantime turned Christian, so that, being a renegade, I deserved my countrymen’s hatred worse than if I had been born one, but they all welcomed me, with frank cordiality commending me to God’s protection. It is not fanaticism but the instinct of self-preservation that animates them when their cherished institutions are assailed by ignorant or unworthy representatives of Christianity.


Reading 2: Sir Lloyd Mathews, Former Commander of the Sultan’s Army, Zanzibar

From my own observation as regards charity, the [Muslims], in their quiet unostentatious manner of giving relief, practically not letting their left hand know what the right hand has done, teach us Christians and our professional philanthropists a good lesson. An earthly recompense is not looked for by them. The poorest man can enter a [Muslim] house and ask for a meal; he will not be sent away fasting, and will generally receive something for the following day. This is absolutely true, and shows that [Muslims] are not the monsters of cruelty they are painted by those who aim at publicity by preaching a ‘jehad’ against the Arabs from their comfortable armchairs in England. There are, of course, exceptions: I do not say all are good, but even the worst treat their slaves far better than many householders at home treat their so-called ‘Slaveys,’ or husbands their wives in the East End of London.

To my mind, the above shows that the gradual freeing of slaves by the Decree abolishing the legal status of slavery is a very wise method. There is no fear of slaves being ill-treated now they have the same rights in Courts of law as their masters; they are paid for the labour, and can obtain their freedom when they please. A gradual emancipation teaches them their position by giving them time to judge for themselves, to think of their future, and act when it pleases them, instead of leaving their masters without thought, becoming vagrants, and pauperized.

Mathews to Hardinge. FOCP 7401/41. 17 March 1899.
Reading 3: Sultan Ali bin-Said’s Decree Abolishing Slavery on Zanzibar, 1890

This edict was issued at the request of the British. Pay careful attention to what it says—and to what it doesn’t say.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the following Decree is published by us, Seyyid Ali bin Said, Sultan of Zanzibar, and is to be made known to, and obeyed by, all our subjects within our dominions from this date.

1. We hereby confirm all former Decrees and Ordinances made by our predecessors against slavery and the Slave Trade, and declare that, whether such Decrees have hitherto been put in force or not, they shall for the future be binding on ourselves and our subjects.
2. We declare that, subject to the conditions stated below, all slaves lawfully possessed on this date by our subjects shall remain with their owners as at present. Their status shall be unchanged.
3. We absolutely prohibit from this date all exchange, sale, or purchase of slaves, domestic or otherwise. There shall be no more traffic whatever in slaves of any description. Any houses heretofore kept for traffic in domestic slaves by slave-brokers shall be forever closed, and any person found acting as a broker for the exchange or sale of slaves shall be liable under our orders to severe punishment, and to be deported from our dominions. Any Arab or other of our subjects hereafter found exchanging, purchasing, obtaining, or selling domestic or other slaves shall be liable under our orders to severe punishment, to deportation, and the forfeiture of all his slaves. Any house in which traffic of any kind of description of slave may take place shall be forfeited.
4. Slaves may be inherited at the death of their owner only by the lawful children of the deceased. If the owner leaves no such children, his slaves shall … become free on the death of their owner.
5. Any Arab or other of our subjects who shall habitually ill-treat his slave, or shall be found in the possession of new slaves, shall be liable under our orders to severe punishment, and in flagrant cases of cruelty to the forfeiture of all his slaves.
6. Such of our subjects as may marry persons subject to British jurisdiction, as well as the issue of all such marriages, are hereby disabled from holding slaves, and all slaves of such of our subjects as are already so married are now declared to be free.
7. All of our subjects who, once slaves, have been freed by British authority, or who have long since been freed by person subject to British jurisdiction, are hereby disabled from owning slaves, and all slaves of such person are now declared to be free. All slaves who, after the date of this Decree, may lawfully obtain their freedom are forever disqualified from holding slaves, under pain of severe punishment.
8. Every slave shall be entitled as a right at any time henceforth to purchase his freedom at a just and reasonable tariff, to be fixed by ourselves and our Arab subjects. The purchase-money, on our order, shall be paid by the slave to his owner before a kadi [judge], who shall at once furnish the slave with a paper of freedom, and such freed slaves shall receive our special protection against ill-treatment. This protection shall also be specially extended to all slaves who may gain their freedom under any of the provisions of this Decree.
9. From the date of this Decree every slave shall have the same right as any of our other subjects who are not slaves to bring and prosecute any complaints or claims before our Kadis.

Given under our hand this 15th day El Haj, 1307 [August 1, 1890], at Zanzibar.

[signed] ALI-BIN-SAID, Sultan of Zanzibar.

Comprehension Exercises:

1. Quickly read the Sultan’s decree. What is the main purpose of the decree?
2. Why do you think that the Sultan issued this decree? How do you think the Sultan felt that people might react to it? Why?
3. Summarize the main arguments of Princess Salme’s argument (Reading 1). What is her main argument against abolition? How accurate do you think her arguments might be? Cite evidence from these readings, as well as readings from the “Transition to Freedom” section that supports your arguments.
4. What do you make of the second paragraph of Reading 2? What might the author’s intention be in writing this? Do you agree with his opinion? Why, or why not?
5. What do you think the economic impact of the end of slavery might have been? Consider the kinds of work that slaves did. Cite evidence from any of the readings to support your argument.
Swahili Coast

Glossary

Cloves are the aromatic dried buds of a tree (Eugenia caryophyllata also sometimes Syzygium aromaticum, Myrtaceae) native to Indonesia, used as a spice in virtually all the world’s cuisine.

A dhow is a traditional boat design with one or more triangular sails, called lateens. It is indigenous to the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, India, and East Africa. A larger dhow may have a crew of approximately thirty while smaller dhows have crews more typically ranging around twelve. The dhow above is pictured on a stamp issued by the emirate of Aden (now part of Yemen) in 1937.

A eunuch is a castrated human male. Eunuchs were often used as servants in the royal palace or in the women’s quarters because of their physical strength and sexual incapacity. Eunuchs were the most valuable of all slaves, and were often a sign of prestige and power for their owners. In the Ottoman Empire, considerable political power was held by the eunuchs as they had access to inner workings of the palace.

Oman: The Sultanate of Oman is a country in the southwestern part of Asia, on the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders the United Arab Emirates in the northwest, Saudi Arabia in the west, and Yemen in the southwest. The coast is formed by the Arabian Sea in the south and east, and the Gulf of Oman in the northeast. Oman has been a center for traders for centuries. In 1508, the main port, Muscat, was captured by the Portuguese, who held it until it was taken by the Ottomans in 1659. These were driven out in 1741, when the present line of sultans was formed by Ahmed ibn Said. In the early 19th century, Oman grew to a major power, having possessions in Baluchistan and Zanzibar, but these were gradually all lost. In 1891, Oman became a British protectorate, which lasted until 1971.

Qadi (in Arabic; spelled kadi in Swahili): A judge; specifically one acquainted with Islamic law.

Swahili (also called Kiswahili) is a Bantu language widely spoken in East Africa. Swahili is the mother tongue of the Swahili people who inhabit a 1500 km stretch of the East African coast from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique. There are approximately five million first-language speakers and fifty million second-language speakers. Swahili has become a lingua franca for East Africa and surrounding areas.
About Hemispheres

Created in 1996, Hemispheres is the international area studies outreach consortium at the University of Texas at Austin. Hemispheres utilizes University resources to promote and assist with world studies education for K-12 and postsecondary schools, businesses, civic and non-profit organizations, the media, governmental agencies, and the general public.

Comprised of UT's four federally funded National Resource Centers (NRCs) dedicated to the study and teaching of Latin America; the Middle East; Russia, East Europe & Eurasia; and South Asia, Hemispheres offers a variety of free and low-cost services to these groups and more. Each center coordinates its own outreach programming, including management of its lending library, speakers bureau, public lectures, and conferences, all of which are reinforced by collaborative promotion of our resources to an ever-widening audience in the educational community and beyond.

Hemispheres fulfills its mission through: coordination of pre-service and in-service training and resource workshops for educators; promotion of outreach resources and activities via exhibits at appropriate state- and nation-wide educator conferences; participation in public outreach events as organized by the consortium as well as by other organizations; and consultation on appropriate methods for implementing world studies content in school, business, and community initiatives.