

The Wealth of History
of the Small African
Twin-Island State
São Tomé and Príncipe

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By

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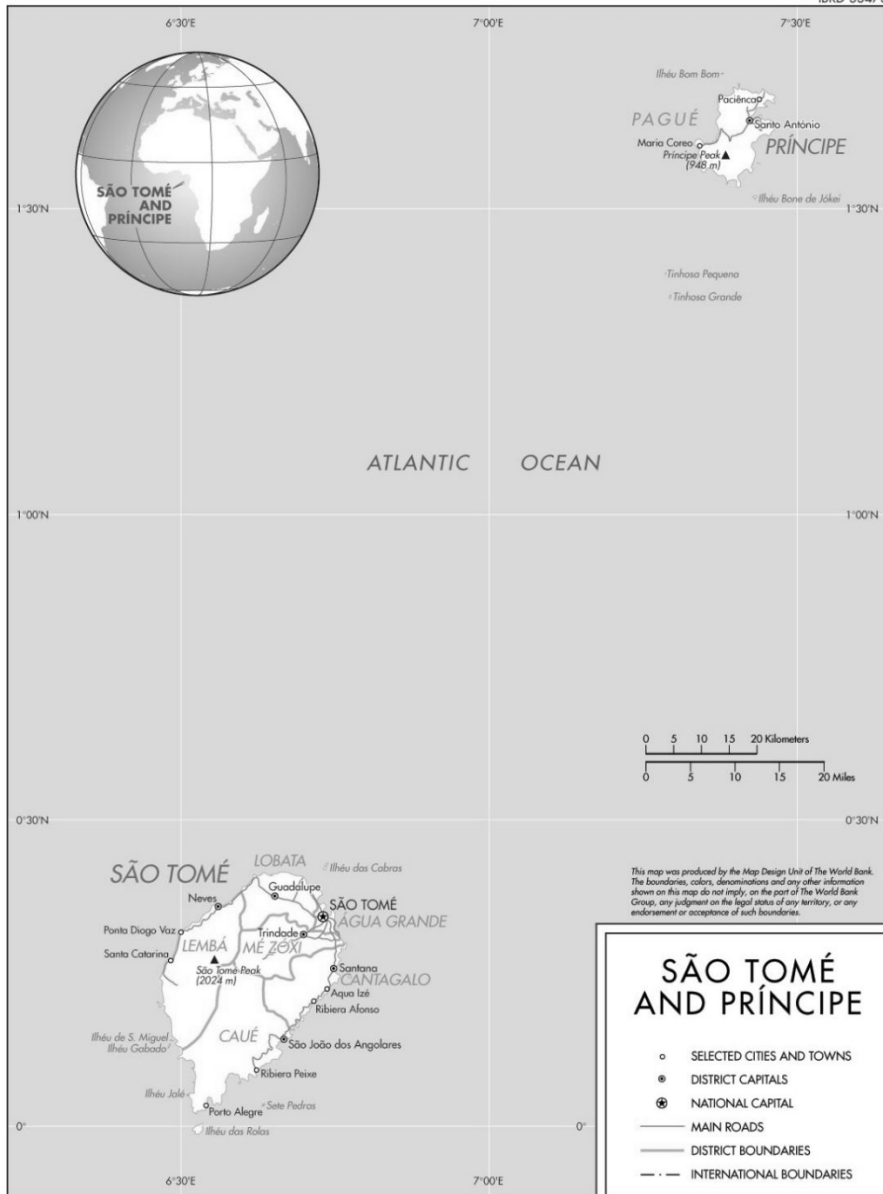
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Map Courtesy of the World Bank

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

As the title *The Wealth of History of the Small African Twin-Island State* suggests, this book is about the early and contemporary history of São Tomé and Príncipe, a small twin-island republic situated approximately 350 km off the coast of Gabon, in the Gulf of Guinea. The islands are volcanic in origin, with mountainous and densely forested tropical landscapes that create striking natural scenery. It is the second smallest African country after the Seychelles, and the smallest of the five Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, with a surface area of 1,001 km² and a total population of approximately 225,000. Around 7,500 people live on the smaller island of Príncipe, approximately 140 km away from São Tomé. Unlike most Sub-Saharan African countries, which are multiethnic societies made up of peoples of different cultures, languages, and religions, São Tomé and Príncipe is a relatively homogeneous Creole society that emerged in the sixteenth century when the hitherto uninhabited islands were settled by Portuguese colonists and enslaved Africans deported from various regions on the mainland. After Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe was the second territory in which Africans and Europeans lived together on a permanent basis. Despite their different geographic locations and natural environments, in cultural and historical terms the two African island nations colonised by Portugal share several characteristics.

One of these features is a period of colonial rule which lasted some 500 years, one of the longest periods of European colonialism and significantly lengthier than in the case of most mainland African territories. However, although São Tomé and Príncipe was always nominally a Portuguese colony, it was not colonised continuously throughout this long period. In fact, the islands were colonised twice by Portugal in significantly different economic and historical contexts, first in the sixteenth century during Portugal's maritime expansion and secondly in the latter half of the nineteenth century, at the beginning of the colonisation of Africa by European powers. In these two periods, the small islands played a pioneering role in the economic history of sugar and cocoa, respectively. However, the short-lived economic successes were based on slavery and the harsh conditions of contract labour. Following independence in 1975, the country's economic development has fallen far short of expectations and consequently its dependence on foreign aid has persisted. This is unlikely

to change in the near future, since the country's oil boom, predicted in the early 2000s, has never materialised. Despite a series of exploratory drillings in its territorial waters by various international oil companies, commercially explorable hydrocarbons have not been discovered yet.

After almost fifty years of independence, São Tomé and Príncipe is still one of Africa's least known countries. Hence, very few English-language academic books focussing on the country's history and present have been published. The most recent was Catherine Higgs' *Chocolate Islands: Cocoa, Slavery and Colonial Africa* (2012), which deals with the "slave cocoa" scandal in the early twentieth century. Before this only three other books on the small country had appeared: *São Tomé and Príncipe. From Plantation Colony to Microstate* (1988) by Tony Hodges & Malyn Newitt, *A History of São Tomé Island 1470 -1655. The Key to Guinea* (1992) by Robert Garfield, and my own *Comrades, Clients and Cousins. Colonialism, Socialism and Democratization in São Tomé and Príncipe* (2006). Unfortunately, Pablo Eyzaguirre's excellent PhD thesis *Small Farmers and Estates in São Tomé, West Africa* (1986) has never been published. This book aims to fill the gap in academic books on São Tomé and Príncipe, at least partly. However, the intention is not to provide a complete history of São Tomé and Príncipe from its settlement in the late fifteenth century to the present day, but rather to focus on crucial periods and important events in the country's more than 500 years of varied and eventful history. The book comprises six chapters on topics relating to the country's early and contemporary history. They demonstrate that, regardless of the size and remote location of the archipelago, throughout its history local economic and political developments have frequently been linked to Atlantic or global history. The different chapters are organised in chronological order and can be read either consecutively or separately since each one deals with a specific historical period or episode. With the exception of Chapter 3, which has been written especially for this publication, the other chapters have all been published before in various periodicals and books over a twenty-year period. They have all been thoroughly updated and completely revised for this collection of essays. The various Portuguese-language quotations have been translated into English by the author.

Chapter One, *The first colonisation*, deals with São Tomé's settlement and colonisation in the sixteenth century, which saw the establishment of a plantation economy based on sugar and slave labour, and the emergence of a local Creole society and culture. In this period São Tomé became the first tropical plantation economy driven by the labour of enslaved Africans, subsequently serving as a model for Brazil and elsewhere in the Americas, where it was developed further. The second chapter, *Slave resistance and*

revolt, discusses the historical origin of São Tomé's maroon community, nowadays known as Angolares, established in the first half of the sixteenth century in the inaccessible mountainous interior of the island. The second part of the chapter describes the course and repercussions of Amador's slave revolt in 1595, one of the greatest rebellions of enslaved Africans in Atlantic history. Chapter Three, entitled *Recolonisation in the nineteenth century*, examines the second colonisation of the archipelago by Portugal. This period was marked by the re-establishment of the plantation economy based on coffee and cocoa and, after the abolition of slavery, the introduction of so-called contract labour. Tens of thousands of contract workers were recruited in Angola, Mozambique, and Cabo Verde for the rapidly expanding plantations. The local Creole population was economically and politically marginalised in the process, while the misery and slave-like working conditions of the foreign plantation workers stood in sharp contrast to the wealth generated by the Portuguese owners of the large plantations. The fourth chapter, *The massacre of February 1953*, describes the background and course of the tragic events of that month, when dozens of innocent and defenceless Sãotomeans were killed on the orders of the Portuguese governor. The history of this brutal violence became so embarrassing for Portugal's self-image as a benign colonial power that even after the fall of the Salazar dictatorship in 1974 the country's authorities refused to grant access to an official report on the atrocities for decades. Chapter Five, *Anti-colonial activism and independence*, focusses on the anti-colonial activities of São Tomé and Príncipe's few exiled nationalists during the 1960s and 1970s which, in a context favoured by Portugal's decolonisation during the Cold War period, cumulated in the conquest of national independence in 1975. The sixth chapter, entitled *Politics and Economy since 1975*, examines political and economic developments in the country after independence. The first part highlights the comparatively satisfactory performance under multiparty democracy, which was introduced in 1990 when the socialist one-party state established after independence and based on the Soviet model had proved to be a complete failure. The second part examines the decline of the country's cocoa sector, the oil boom that, at least so far, has not materialised, and the continuing dependence on foreign aid.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADI	Acção Democrática Independente (Independent Democratic Action)
AfDB	African Development Bank
AHD	Arquivo Histórico-Diplomático (Historical-Diplomatic Archive)
ANP	Agência Nacional de Petróleo (National Oil Agency)
ANTT	Arquivo Nacional Torre de Tombo (National Archive Torre de Tombo)
BNU	Banco Nacional Ultramarino (National Overseas Bank)
CLSTP	Comité de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe (Liberation Committee of São Tomé and Príncipe)
CPI	Corpo da Polícia Indígena (Native Police Corps)
DGS	Direção-Geral de Segurança (General Security Directorate)
ENAPORT	Empresa Nacional de Administração de Portos (National Ports Management Company)
ERHC	Environmental Remediation Holding Corporation
FNLA	Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (National Liberation Front of Angola)
FPL	Frente Popular Livre (Free People's Front)
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Liberation Front of Mozambique)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JDA	Joint Development Authority
JDZ	Joint Development Zone
JSN	Junta de Salvação Nacional (National Salvation Board)
MDFM	Movimento Democrático Força de Mudança (Democratic Movement Force of Change)
MFA	Movimento das Forças Armadas (Armed Forces Movement)
MLSTP/PSD	Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe/Partido Social Democrata (Liberation Movement of São Tomé and Príncipe/Social Democratic Party)

MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (People's Liberation Movement of Angola)
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAIGC	Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde)
PALOP	Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (Officially Portuguese-speaking African Countries)
PCD	Partido de Convergência Democrática (Democratic Convergence Party)
PIDE	Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado (International and State Defence Police)
PSC	Production Sharing Contract
UDD	União para a Democracia e Desenvolvimento (Union for Democracy and Development)
WIC	West-Indische Compagnie (Dutch West India Company)
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST COLONISATION*

Introduction

When the first Portuguese navigators arrived in the Gulf of Guinea in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, only the largest island, Bioko (formerly Fernando Po, 2,017 km²), located just 32 km off the coast of Cameroon, had an autochthonous population known as the Bubi. The smaller islands of Príncipe (142 km²), São Tomé (859 km²), and Annobón (17 km²) were all uninhabited and were subsequently settled by Portuguese colonists and enslaved Africans. Portugal claimed the four islands but did not occupy Fernando Po since the island is situated close to the African mainland and its population was hostile towards them. In 1778, Portugal ceded Fernando Po and Annobón together with the mainland territory of Rio Muni to Spain in exchange for Spanish occupied lands in southern Brazil, as part of a land swap agreement known as the Treaty of El Pardo. The territories ceded by Portugal became the colony of Spanish Guinea that in 1968 gained independence as Equatorial Guinea. São Tomé and Príncipe remained a Portuguese colony for almost 500 years until independence in 1975.

This chapter focuses on the first colonisation of the hitherto uninhabited tropical islands by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and seeks to put the rise and fall of São Tomé's early plantation economy into a wider social and political context. As far as the sources are concerned, the chapter draws on the American Ph.D. theses of the historian Robert Garfield on São Tomé's early history (1972; published in 1992) and of the anthropologist Pablo Eyzaguirre on the island's plantation economy (1986).¹ In addition to earlier Portuguese scholars of São Tomé and Príncipe, contemporary Portuguese historians have provided important new insights into the archipelago's past in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Among the latter are the historians Arlindo Caldeira, particularly on the slave trade, and slavery,² Luís Pinheiro on economy and politics,³ Pedro Cunha on the local

economy,⁴ and Cristina Serafim on the economic decline in the seventeenth century.⁵

In their analyses, the different scholars who largely draw from the same primary sources do not differ as far as the key issues of the archipelago's early history are concerned. Differences are predominantly restricted to details, such as the number of mills in operation and the quantities of sugar produced. Sugar cultivation was based on a system of slave labour on large estates that served as a prototype for later plantation complexes in the Americas. From the beginning, most of the local population consisted of enslaved Africans from the mainland, since few whites were willing to settle voluntarily in the distant unhealthy tropical islands. São Tomé and Príncipe was already a slave society before the transatlantic slave trade began and similar slave societies appeared on the other side of the Atlantic.

The first section of this chapter describes São Tomé's settlement and colonisation and the emergence of the Creole society and analyses the social-political environment of the local economy which was dominated by the slave trade and the sugar industry. The second section deals with slavery in São Tomé and the development of its slave trade. This was the mainstay of the local economy until sugar production began around the 1520s, and thereafter always remained an equally important economic activity. The last section depicts the rise of São Tomé's sugar industry and examines the various reasons for its gradual decline, beginning at the end of the sixteenth century. Thanks to the tropical climate, fertile soils, and abundant rainfall the islands offered favourable conditions for the cultivation of sugar cane.

However, this was not the case for sugar production, since, due to the high humidity of the tropical climate, the quality of São Tomé's sugar was inferior to that of Madeira and Brazil. Therefore, the principal factor in São Tomé's economic decline was the emergence of the sugar industry in Brazil, where both the production conditions and the quality of sugar were significantly better than in the archipelago. Attracted by the promising economic prospects, the São Tomé planters left for Brazil which had become a large-scale sugar producer in the 1580s. Other internal and external factors including political instability, maroon assaults, slave revolts and sea-borne attacks by the Dutch contributed to and hastened São Tomé and Príncipe's economic decline. By the end of the seventeenth century, the plantation economy in the archipelago had virtually ceased to exist and was replaced by cultivation of foodstuffs both for subsistence and for the supply of passing slave ships, while the slave trade proceeded on a smaller scale until its abolition in the mid-nineteenth century.

Settlement and society

Exactly when the Portuguese arrived in the Gulf of Guinea islands is not known, although most authors believe that the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe were first sighted by the navigators João de Santarém and Pedro Escobar on December 21, 1471, and January 17, 1472, respectively. Both pilots were sailing in the service of the Lisbon merchant Fernando Gomes, who in 1469 had been granted a five-year trade monopoly in the Gulf of Guinea by the king, on the condition that he explore 100 *léguas* (about 500 km) annually along the West African coast. The first attempt to establish a settler colony in São Tomé, which was densely covered by tropical forests, was only made a few years after the arrival of the two navigators, during the reign of King João II (1481-95), following the establishment of the fort São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) on the Gold Coast in 1482 and the Portuguese arrival in Kongo the following year. The fort at Elmina was designed to support existing regional trade networks.⁶

Although the islands were small, they seemed well-suited for colonisation, since they were uninhabited and out of reach of potentially hostile African settlements on the mainland. The Portuguese crown expected São Tomé to become a settler colony, sugar producer, food supplier for Elmina and a safe haven for ships returning to Europe from Elmina and those sailing to and from India. However, the Portuguese later realised that the latter objective was not viable, since the most favourable sea routes did not pass by São Tomé.⁷ The colonisation of the archipelago followed a pattern already used in the previously settled archipelagos of Madeira, the Azores and Cabo Verde. The Portuguese king appointed noblemen as captains of the islands, granting them extensive privileges in exchange for the colonisation of the territory. Privileges and tax exemptions for settlers were a favourite strategy for attracting them to the new territories.

However, the settlement of the Gulf of Guinea islands proved to be difficult due a lack of food and the insalubrious tropical climate. Despite the fertility of the volcanic soil, there was a scarcity of food because Mediterranean crops like wheat, rye, barley, grapes, and olive trees would not grow in the inappropriate tropical climate.⁸ Initially there were almost no local tropical food crops in the archipelago either. Therefore, to start with, food had to be imported along with the enslaved Africans from the Niger Delta.⁹ While the settlers gradually adapted to a different diet, tropical diseases, particularly malaria, made São Tomé and Príncipe a dangerous environment for Europeans for centuries. Consequently, in Portugal the island quickly gained a reputation as the “white man’s grave” and few settlers went there voluntarily. Many appointed officeholders delayed their

departure or tried to limit their stay to a minimum once they had arrived on the island.¹⁰ Due to a lack of voluntary colonists, deported convicts constituted a significant proportion of the Portuguese settlers from the beginning. Even during the height of the economic boom, around 1570, the entire European population possibly did not exceed 500.¹¹

In December 1485, the Portuguese king appointed São Tomé's first captain (*donatário*) João de Paiva (1485-90), to set up the essential public offices, and granted the white colonists certain privileges to attract settlers to populate the island, including free trade in enslaved Africans and other goods on the coast between the Rio Real (New Calabar river) and the Kongo kingdom. The letter of appointment mentioned sugar production as an integral part of São Tomé's colonisation project.¹² At the time, the Portuguese already had experience in both the African slave trade and in sugar production using slave labour.¹³ However, the first settlement attempt made in the northwest of the island between 1486 and 1490 apparently failed due to tropical diseases and a shortage of food.

It was not until 1493 that the third captain, Álvaro de Caminha (1493-99), succeeded in establishing the first settlement at a bay in the northeast of the island, which later became São Tomé town. The king granted Caminha civil and criminal jurisdiction over the island and the power to appoint treasury and justice officials. He also awarded the settlers additional incentives including trade in all goods – except for gold – from the island and the mainland from the Rio Real and Fernando Po to the entire territory of the Manicongo. The settlers had to pay a quarter of this trade to the crown, which in turn tithed to the Catholic Church. In 1500, the king appointed António Carneiro (1459-1545), a royal knight, as captain of Príncipe (1500-45), where white settlers benefitted from the same privileges as those in São Tomé. The Carneiro family owned the captaincy of Príncipe until 1753 when the island returned to the crown, while São Tomé had already reverted to the crown in 1522, after the fifth captain, João de Mello (1512-22), had been removed from office due to allegations of corruption. Thereafter, São Tomé was ruled by a governor appointed by the crown.¹⁴

In addition to many convicts, the colonists who arrived with Caminha in São Tomé in 1493 included dozens of young Jewish children who had been separated from their parents by force.¹⁵ Every five Jewish children were allotted a couple of enslaved Africans to help look after them, while every settler received a female and male enslaved person to work for him.¹⁶ After Cabo Verde, São Tomé was the second Atlantic territory where Africans and Europeans lived together permanently. The crown deliberately encouraged mixed-race unions between white settlers and African slaves to safeguard the settlement of the island. Genetic, linguistic, and cultural miscegenation

between Europeans and Africans initiated a process of creolisation that resulted in the emergence of a Creole society with its own culture and languages in the archipelago. The proto-Creole language that developed in São Tomé in the sixteenth century is considered the common origin of the four Afro-Portuguese Creoles spoken in the Gulf of Guinea islands.¹⁷ While miscegenation was widespread in São Tomé and Príncipe and Cabo Verde, this was not a common Portuguese practice in Africa at that time. In sixteenth century Arguim (in present-day Mauretania) and Elmina, the crown prohibited unions between Portuguese men and African women.¹⁸ Furthermore, in São Tomé miscegenation was more widespread among convicts and decreased the higher the person's status in the social hierarchy of the settler community.¹⁹ Convicts enjoyed the same privileges as the other settlers and could participate freely in all economic activities. In the early period, settlers acquired enslaved persons in the Niger Delta and in Kongo. Supposedly the early population also included a few free Africans from the mainland who served as brokers in the slave trade.²⁰

Slavery in São Tomé was not necessarily a permanent condition since enslaved persons were manumitted from the outset. The first recorded individual letters of manumission for enslaved Africans in São Tomé are mentioned in Caminha's will in 1499. As early as 1515, at the request of the Portuguese settlers, a royal decree granted collective manumission to their African wives and their common mixed-race offspring. Legally the mixed-race children of the white settlers were their rightful heirs. As a result of the high mortality rate among whites, a significant number of mestizos would soon inherit plantations from their fathers and became part of the local landowning elite. Another royal decree, in 1517, freed the male slaves who had arrived with the first colonists. These royal decrees constituted the beginning of a free African population in São Tomé called Forros.²¹ Later, freed slaves assimilated into the free African sector. In 1520 a royal charter allowed free mixed-race persons to hold public offices in the local council if they had property and were married. In 1528 this royal decree was confirmed.²² In 1546 another royal decree equated them with white settlers, allowing them to vote and hold office on the city council.²³ Consequently, from the outset, free mixed-race persons and blacks were able to climb up the social ladder. They played a significant role in shaping the emerging Creole society and participated actively in local politics and the economy. Although women within the free population were subject to similar restrictions as their contemporaries in Portugal, under certain circumstances a few women within the landowning elite were able to gain a significant degree of autonomy. Due to the shortage of voluntary settlers, deported convicts were often also appointed to public positions. The crown frequently

pardoned these convicts in exchange for services rendered. According to contemporary chronicles, the early settlement, known as *povoação*, grew from 250 households in 1510 to between 600 and 700 households in the mid-sixteenth century.²⁴ The 1510 chronicle compiled by the Lisbon-based German book printer Valentim Fernandes (c.1450-c.1518) mentions another fifteen settled places and six plantations belonging to the captain of São Tomé. Except for one plantation, the entire south of São Tomé was unoccupied.²⁵

In April 1535, a royal charter granted the settlement city rights. São Tomé's town council was dominated by wealthy sugar-plantation owners. The town council was frequently engaged in power struggles with the governor or the bishop who, in turn, were also regularly in conflict with each other. The frequent disputes between the three parties resulted in considerable political instability in São Tomé. In addition, there were frequent quarrels within the institutions, often between white Portuguese from the mother country and local Creole officials. The high mortality rate among Portuguese officials also contributed to political instability, as it often created a power vacuum. In the period from 1548 to 1770, the city council was entitled to rule in the event of the governor's absence or death. In the twenty-seven-year period from 1586 to 1613, São Tomé was ruled by eighteen governors, including both those appointed by the crown and interim rulers elected by the town council.²⁶

One of the captain's powers was to distribute lands to the settlers under the *sesmaria* system. Under this land-grant system, after five years the grantees became owners of the land, provided that it was cultivated successfully.²⁷ Otherwise, the land could be withdrawn and granted to somebody else on the same conditions. Besides these private lands, there were also crown-owned plantations, at first to cultivate food crops to feed the enslaved population and subsequently to produce sugar for export.²⁸ In 1528, a total of 1,440 enslaved workers produced food crops on three crown-owned plantations.²⁹ During the first years of Caminha's rule, settlers and enslaved Africans alike starved, the former since they depended on food supplies from Portugal and the nearby mainland, the latter because there was a scarcity of local food crops. The settlement imported flour, wine, olive oil and cheese from Portugal for the white inhabitants. Food shortages continued at least until 1499 when starving settlers were sent to Príncipe.³⁰ Only the oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) and one yam species (*Dioscorea cayenensis*) already existed in São Tomé when the first settlers arrived.³¹ In the first years the Portuguese introduced domestic animals like cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, donkeys, ducks and chickens, as well as sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*), maize (*Zea mays*), yams (*Dioscorea minutiflora* & *dioscorea*

alata), figs (*Ficus carica*), orange and lemon trees (*Citrus spp.*) and plantain (*Musa paradisiaca*).³² One banana species possibly already existed in São Tomé, while other varieties (*Musa sapientum*) were later introduced from Brazil. Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), manioc (*Manihot esculenta*) and sweet potatoes (*Ipomea batatas*) were also successfully introduced from the Americas in the sixteenth century.³³ It was only in the 1510s that São Tomé was able to provide São Jorge da Mina fort with food supplies.³⁴ Irrespective of the availability of food in the archipelago, the mortality rate among white settlers due to tropical diseases always remained high and, demographically, whites constituted a very small minority of the population.

The colonisation of São Tomé also marked the beginning of missionary activity in the region since the expansion of Catholicism had been an integral part of the project from the outset. The Catholic Church participated actively in the local economy, both in the slave trade and the sugar industry. The first Catholic priests arrived with Caminha in 1493. The island's first two churches, São Francisco, which was part of the monastery with the same name, and Santa Maria, were both constructed with stones and bricks brought from Portugal during Caminha's captaincy.³⁵ Possibly even before 1500, the mother church *Nossa Senhora da Graça* was erected near the foundations of the Santa Maria church.³⁶ The first Augustinian missionaries arrived as early as 1499.³⁷ By 1504 the Catholic Church had also established the charitable institution *Santa Casa de Misericórdia* and its hospital, in response to the high morbidity rate. In 1514 the Portuguese king obliged the masters to baptise newly arrived slaves within six months of their purchase.³⁸ By 1519, there were already three Catholic brotherhoods in São Tomé, which along with kinship was the dominant form of collective solidarity at the time.³⁹ At the request of the Forros, in 1526, the king allowed free blacks to establish the Catholic Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary, which was given the right to engage in trade in enslaved persons, spices and gold with Kongo and Elmina. Later, King João III (1521-57) granted the brotherhood the right to demand and obtain the freedom of their enslaved members.⁴⁰ These concessions reflected the growing importance of the Forros in local society and the economy.

In 1534, Pope Paul III (1534-49) established a diocese in São Tomé, the second in Africa, after Ribeira Grande in Santiago, Cabo Verde, in 1533. The new diocese was subordinated to the diocese of Funchal (Madeira) until 1597, thereafter to Lisbon. Its jurisdiction went from the River Santo André (Sassandra) near Cape Palmas (present-day Liberia) to the Cape of Good Hope, including Elmina and the Kongo. São Tomé's second bishop's local representative was the vicar general João Baptista (1542-52), son of King Afonso I of Kongo (1509-43) who had sent him for education to Rome.

Having been involved in continuous conflicts with the local clergy, who feared that the vicar general would succeed in controlling the See, he finally left the island for Kongo.⁴¹ Following the creation of the diocese of São Salvador in Kongo in 1596, the geographical jurisdiction of São Tomé was reduced until Mount Cameroon, including the Gulf of Guinea islands. In 1677, the diocese of São Tomé was separated from Lisbon and became part of the archdiocese of São Salvador da Bahia, a measure that testified to São Tomé's stronger ties with Brazil during that period. As already pointed out, on several occasions the bishops and other members of the Catholic Church were involved in political and financial conflicts with the secular authorities.

The prosperity of the islands attracted the interest of other European powers, which had ended the Portuguese monopoly along the African coast. Following the attack on São Tomé by French corsairs in 1567, the Portuguese decided to defend the town with a fort. The construction of the São Sebastião fort close to the eastern side of the city was completed in 1575. The Spanish domination of Portugal and its colonies from 1580 to 1640 increased attacks by foreign pirates and corsairs. The Dutch occupied Príncipe in August 1598 with the aim of establishing a naval supply base on the way to and from Asia, but after being decimated from the initial 500 men to fewer than a hundred by disease and fighting, they abandoned the island after only four months. On October 19, 1599, during the unhealthy rainy season, another Dutch fleet comprising thirty-six ships commanded by Admiral Pieter van der Does (1562-99) landed in São Tomé.⁴² Despite warnings about the possible Dutch attack, Governor Fernando de Menezes (1593-1599) had not taken any precautions.⁴³

The intention of the Dutch whose attack was part of the war of the United Netherlands against Spain (1568-1648) was to establish a fortified station in Africa.⁴⁴ When the Dutch entered the town the inhabitants had already fled into the mountains. The next day, the garrison of São Sebastião fort negotiated a cease-fire with the Dutch and handed it over, while Governor Menezes was taken prisoner by the occupants. After one week, the inhabitants returned to the town at night to burn their own houses to drive away the occupants, but they failed. Meanwhile, within a few days Van der Does and most of his officials had died of an infectious disease. After more than 1,200 men had succumbed to the disease in about two weeks and a few ships had lost their entire crew, the Dutch decided to leave the unhealthy island. As the Dutch were unsatisfied by the ransom of 10,000 ducats offered by the settlers they burnt and looted the town and the fort before they departed on November 5.⁴⁵ The Dutch force's booty included a hundred cannons, 19,000 boxes of sugar, 1,400 elephant tusks, lots of cotton, linen and other goods, as well as a large amount of money.⁴⁶ The

Dutch took Governor Menezes, whom they considered to be a Spaniard, to Middelburg in the Netherlands, from where he returned to Lisbon, where he died shortly afterwards. When the ships returned to the Netherlands in early 1600, the total number of dead had increased to 1,800.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding, the Dutch did not abandon their intention of seizing the tropical island. In October 1641, a Dutch fleet of thirteen ships with 1,060 sailors and soldiers commanded by admiral Cornelis Jol (1597-1641) conquered São Tomé. The main reasons for the occupation were to cut off the English from the island's sugar trade and take it over to use it as a supply station for the slave trade with Dutch Brazil (1630-54). This time the mortality rate among the Dutch was also high. Within a few weeks, Jol and all his officers except one, along with hundreds of sailors and soldiers, died of tropical diseases. Notwithstanding, until its departure in January 1649 the Dutch West India Company (WIC) occupied São Tomé's fort and the harbour, from where they maintained control of the local sugar and slave trade. During the occupation the Dutch benefitted from cleavages within the Portuguese colony, which was divided into three competing interest groups. The Dutch occupation even resulted in a short revival of the declining sugar industry.⁴⁸ In 1702, the French attacked Príncipe and seven years later they occupied São Tomé town for one month, demanding a huge ransom.⁴⁹ Thereafter external attacks ceased because of the archipelago's economic decline.

Slavery in São Tomé

As already mentioned, right from the outset the settlers owned enslaved Africans to work for them. Enslaved people in São Tomé were employed either as household or plantation slaves.⁵⁰ Newly arrived enslaved persons were called *boçais* (ignorants), while those born in the archipelago were termed *crioulos* (Creoles). In 1510, Fernandes estimated the total number of resident slaves at 2,000. Many settlers owned more than fourteen enslaved persons who cultivated food crops. Apart from household and plantation slaves, enslaved Africans held temporarily in São Tomé for re-export constituted a third category, representing a significant proportion of the local population, but due to their limited length of stay, they did not play an active role in the formation of the local Creole society. According to an account by an anonymous Portuguese pilot published in the mid-sixteenth century, enslaved Africans were employed as couples. They built their own wooden houses and were allowed to work one day per week (Saturday) on their own provision plots to cultivate yams and other food crops for their personal needs.⁵¹ Some authors have interpreted this to mean that there was

only one single category of enslaved Africans in São Tomé.⁵² In 1961 Tenreiro, an author influenced by the lusotropicalist ideology of his time, even claimed that the labour regime in São Tomé was not real slavery, but more akin to serfdom.⁵³ Setting the source in a historical context, however, Henriques argues more convincingly that the mild slave regime only existed in the early stage of the local plantation economy.⁵⁴ Following the extension of the sugar plantations, the labour regime became more oppressive for captives employed on the privately and crown-owned estates where the slaves lived in slave quarters called *sanzalas*.

In the mid-sixteenth century, planters owned some 150, 200, 300 and up to 400 slaves.⁵⁵ This would have been fewer than the average of 480 slaves on the earlier royal plantations producing the food crops mentioned above. Garfield estimates there to have been a total of 9,000 to 12,000 enslaved people in São Tomé during the height of the sugar industry, based on an estimate of between sixty and eighty sugar mills with an average of 150 slaves each.⁵⁶ In the plantations often only the owner, and in his absence the foreman, were white or mixed-race. The caretaker (*caseiro*), in charge of managing the workforce, could be white or mixed-race, but frequently was also a Forro. In addition to the difference between domestic and plantation slaves, there was a hierarchy according to the tasks they carried out on the sugar estates. The trained slaves exercised various crafts, being employed as carpenters, blacksmiths, boilermakers, sugar masters, refiners, and packers.⁵⁷

The slave trade

The Portuguese began to trade enslaved persons from the kingdom of Benin to Elmina around 1480, before the colonisation of São Tomé.⁵⁸ Due to an increase in this regional slave trade, in 1486 they established a trading factory at the port of Ughoton (Gwato) in Benin. The trading post was closed in 1506 when the Oba of Benin imposed an embargo on the slave trade.⁵⁹ The average duration of the slaving voyage to Benin and back to Elmina was two to three months.⁶⁰ The direct coastal slave trade between Elmina and Benin continued until about 1515. In the beginning of São Tomé's colonisation, the main commercial activity of the settlers was the slave trade, which was also necessary to recruit labour for the local economy. The first enslaved Africans were traded on the Slave Coast, the Niger Delta, and the island of Fernando Po. Subsequently, the São Tomé settlers bought enslaved Africans in Kongo (Soyo) and Angola. According to an inventory of two estates in 1533, the origins of the enslaved people within the different regions was very diversified.⁶¹ The enslaved Africans

were sold in São Tomé or were re-exported from there to Portugal and to Elmina. The enslaved persons belonging to the Portuguese king were marked with a cross on their right arms.⁶²

According to Fernandes' manuscript, in around 1510 some 5,000 enslaved Africans were kept for re-export in São Tomé. In that period, Portugal reportedly imported between 10,000 and 12,000 slaves. In 1551, 9,950 out of Lisbon's total population of about 100,000 were enslaved Africans.⁶³ In the period from 1578 to 1583 slaves represented one fifth of the city's population.⁶⁴ In 1516 over eleven months, the royal factory (*casa da feitoria*) in São Tomé received a total of 4,072 slaves in fifteen shiploads from the mainland for re-export. In the same period, Fernão de Melo, the captain, had purchased another 234 slaves.⁶⁵ The first slave ship from São Tomé to Elmina was reported in July 1499.⁶⁶ From 1514 to 1518 António Carneiro of Príncipe had the monopoly of the trade with Benin and the supply of slaves to Elmina, at the time a centre of the gold trade. In the last two years of his contract, Carneiro shipped 300-400 slaves to Elmina.⁶⁷ Between 1518 and 1520 on multiple voyages ships owned by Duarte Belo, a Lisbon-based absentee plantation owner and slave trader, brought seventy to eighty enslaved Africans per voyage from Benin to Elmina.⁶⁸ In 1519 São Tomé became the centre of the slave trade from the Niger Delta to Elmina where the slaves were employed as porters along the trade routes into the interior.⁶⁹ At that time, São Tomé had a subordinate position in relation to Elmina and served as a support post for the fort as a food and slave supplier.⁷⁰ Elmina's factor was allowed to return slaves who did not arrive in good physical condition.

The regional slave trade between São Tomé and Elmina lasted until 1540, by which time the Spanish Caribbean (Cartagena and Vera Cruz) had already become a lucrative slave market and the Portuguese gold trade in Elmina had diminished considerably. During the height of the trade, between the late 1520s and early 1530s, some 500 slaves a year were shipped to Elmina.⁷¹ In 1533, eighty enslaved Africans on the royal ship *Misericórdia* revolted between São Tomé and Elmina, killing almost the entire crew. Later, a few of the rebellious slaves recaptured at the Forcados River (Niger Delta) were recognised due to the royal brand-mark.⁷² The mortality rate of the enslaved people shipped to Elmina was considerably lower than that of those sent to Portugal. On twenty-two ships from São Tomé to Portugal out of a total of 2,202 slaves, 806 died during the voyage, while during the short voyage to Elmina 360 out of 383 slaves arrived alive.⁷³

São Tomé's slave trade with the kingdom of Kongo began in the early sixteenth century, and subsequently that with Angola. In 1532, however, the

Manicongo prohibited the direct slave trade between Angola and São Tomé because it affected the number of slavers bound for Kongo, and thereafter the kingdom became an intermediary between Angola and the São Tomé traders.⁷⁴ The São Tomé traders acquired 1,449 enslaved persons in the three-year period from 1525 to 1528. Between 1532 and 1537 the number of enslaved people had increased to 15,844, most of them from Kongo.⁷⁵ São Tomé's women were also engaged in this slave trade, such as Cecília de Chaves and Grácia Fernandes, who in 1535 were among the charterers of the slave ship *Urbano*, which sailed to the Congo River to buy slaves.⁷⁶ In 1553, King João III reconfirmed the prohibition of the trade with Angola, and Soyo, at the mouth of the Zaire River, became the port of export for Portuguese vessels. In the mid-sixteenth century, over a period of fourteen months between twelve and fifteen slave ships left Kongo for São Tomé, the smaller ones carrying 400 enslaved Africans and the larger ones 700 slaves each.⁷⁷

The transatlantic slave trade from São Tomé to the Spanish Americas began in 1525.⁷⁸ Subsequently, most slaves re-exported from São Tomé went to the Caribbean and Brazil. Between 1532 and 1536, São Tomé re-exported an average of 342 slaves to the Antilles every year.⁷⁹ Caldeira estimates the number of enslaved Africans re-exported in the first half of the sixteenth century to be between 5,000 and 10,000 a year.⁸⁰ Before 1580, São Tomé accounted for 75 percent of Brazil's imports, predominantly consisting of enslaved Africans.⁸¹ At the beginning of the seventeenth century, São Tomé ceased to be an important slave trade entrepôt. In 1614, the São Tomé settlers lost access to the slave markets in Kongo, because they had become a threat to other Portuguese commercial interests and their operations remained restricted to the Gulf of Guinea, from Allada (in present-day Benin) to the Cape of Lopo Gonçalves (present-day Cabo Lopez in Gabon) as the southern limit.

With the appearance of the French, English and Dutch, and the occupation of Elmina by the Dutch in 1637, the island's traders were cut off from their previous supply markets.⁸² During the Dutch occupation of Luanda and São Tomé (1641-48) the WIC directly controlled the trade in the region. Furthermore, from the mid-seventeenth century Angolan slaves were shipped directly to Brazil and the Spanish Americas and São Tomé's access to the market in Luanda was disrupted.⁸³ Subsequently, traders from São Tomé traded enslaved Africans predominantly at nearby markets in Gabon and Calabar. The re-export of enslaved Africans continued, but on a much smaller scale than in the sixteenth century. Between 1710 and 1808, the slave ships going from Bahia to the Mina coast and back were obliged to call at São Tomé where they purchased food supplies and had to pay

taxes. In the eighteenth century, British and Dutch slavers preferred to call at São Tomé to take on water and purchase provisions, while the French and Brazilians went predominantly to Príncipe to buy livestock, fruit and yams.⁸⁴ The commodities received in exchange from the ships were resold on the nearby mainland, particularly the Gabonese coast, Benin, Warri and Calabar.⁸⁵ From the mid-eighteenth century São Tomé's direct maritime connection with Lisbon largely disappeared and communication was made through Angola or Bahia.⁸⁶

Sugar cultivation

Between 1520 and 1530, the sugar exporting business became as equally lucrative as the slave trade. Sugar cane and the people skilled in its cultivation and processing came to São Tomé from Madeira, where, in addition to the Portuguese, the Genoese and Sicilians were also engaged in the sugar industry. The cultivation of sugarcane concentrated in the island's northern flatlands started immediately after Caminha's arrival. When the German physician and geographer Hieronymus Münzer (1447-1508) was received by João II in Évora in 1494, the Portuguese king told him that sugar planted in São Tomé would grow three times faster than that in Madeira.⁸⁷ The production of molasses is mentioned in Caminha's will of 1499. Sugar cane was planted and harvested year-round, and it took five months to grow. The original forest was gradually cut back to make room for the expanding sugar plantations in the island's northern third between Ponta Figo and Santana, while the other two thirds remained covered by tropical primary forest that was largely inaccessible to the settlers. The cultivation of sugarcane in São Tomé proved successful thanks to fertile volcanic soils, the tropical climate, sufficient rainfall and, most importantly, the availability of cheap slave labour from the neighbouring African mainland. The sugar plantations were grouped around the sugar mills, called *engenhos*, which were built next to local streams to power them, a technique already used in Madeira. The island was highly suitable for this technique, since it had a total of twenty-seven streams and seven small rivers.⁸⁸ Generally, the streams also marked the boundaries between the different plantations.⁸⁹ Besides having enough streams to power the mills, the island also provided sufficient firewood to dry the sugar for export.

Most plantations were privately owned by royal officials and settlers, and several belonged to the crown and the Catholic charity Misericórdia. In 1535, the crown owned six large plantations that were run by the royal factor.⁹⁰ A few estates were the property of absentee landlords resident in Portugal. Wealthy plantation owners erected wooden fortresses on their

estates and maintained private armies of armed slaves. On their plantations, the owners exercised great power, while the local authorities were unable to enforce their authority there.⁹¹ Armed conflicts and power struggles between rival plantation-owners occurred frequently, contributing to the conflict-prone political climate.⁹² Due to their wealth, the plantation-owners constituted the most important socio-economic group in the islands. Heywood & Thornton claim that “Some Kongolese nobles also settled on the island and owned estates where they used slave labour.”⁹³ However, the original source of this claim, a description of the island by an anonymous Portuguese pilot in the mid-sixteenth century, does not mention “Kongolese nobles” at all. In the document, the pilot reports that the five times he visited São Tomé between 1520 and 1550 he spoke with

a negro called João Menino, a very old man, who said that he had been taken there with the first [negroes] who went from the African coast to this island when it was populated by order of our King; and this negro was very rich and had children and grandchildren and married grand grandchildren, who already had children.⁹⁴

It seems unlikely that João Menino was a Kongolese either, given that the Africans of the first settlement established between 1486 and 1490 came from the Niger Delta, while the Kongo was first mentioned as a slave supplier to São Tomé in 1502.⁹⁵ Caldeira believes that João Menino had arrived as enslaved person with the first settlers around 1485 and belonged to the male slaves manumitted in 1517.⁹⁶ Other authors suggest that the old man was one of the free Africans who had settled on the island; however, they do not give his origin.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, at least one Kongolese may have arrived in São Tomé prior to 1499. In his will, Caminha referred to a Pêro de Manicongo who had worked as a sailor for a settler called Dom Francisco.⁹⁸ In the 1550s, there was undoubtedly a Kongolese nobleman, Rodrigo de Santa Maria, who lived in São Tomé, from where he travelled frequently to Lisbon. In 1550, King Diogo I of Kongo (1545-61) accused him of having been involved in a conspiracy against him.⁹⁹ In 1561, a few Kongolese noblemen who had supported King Afonso II (1561), the successor of King Diogo I, who had been killed by his brother, Bernardo I (1561-66) after only a few days in power, sought refuge in São Tomé.¹⁰⁰ While the existence of Kongolese planters is not documented, the first mestizo plantation owners born in the island are recorded as early as 1521. In addition, in the sixteenth century wealthy local planters included mixed-race women like Ana de Chaves, Catarina Alves and Simoa Godinho. The latter, who died in Lisbon in 1594, owned three plantations, Rio de Ouro, São Bento, and Laranjeira

which she bequeathed to the Misericórdia, which in turn leased them to another planter.¹⁰¹

Sugar production in São Tomé had started by 1517, as the first two sugar mills appear in a document of that year.¹⁰² According to the anonymous pilot, in the mid-sixteenth century there were some sixty sugar mills in operation.¹⁰³ As noted above, Garfield estimates that in the mid-sixteenth century there were sixty to eighty estates in São Tomé with an average of 150 enslaved workers each.¹⁰⁴ Eyzaguirre believes that during the height of the sugar boom the number of mills may have reached 200, with an estimated average number of fifty enslaved workers for each mill.¹⁰⁵ In 1529, João Lobata, a rich local planter, operated twelve mills on his two estates. According to Garfield, each mill had an annual production capacity of up to 5,000 arrobas of sugar.¹⁰⁶ This estimated average, equivalent to 73.5 tons, is considerably higher than the approximately 15-25 tons per mill given by Schwartz.¹⁰⁷ Due to the extension of sugar cultivation, less land was dedicated to food crops which in turn resulted in a shortage of food and caused famine among the enslaved people. The mortality rate among slaves was also high, but it was easier to replace them than the white settlers.¹⁰⁸

Table 1-1 Existing sugar mills, 1517-1736.

Year	1517	c. 1550	1595	c.1600	1610	1645	c.1672	c.1710	1736
Number	2 ¹⁰⁹	ca. 60 ¹¹⁰	ca. 85 ¹¹¹	ca. 120	45	54	31	18-19	7 ¹¹²

Sources: unless otherwise indicated, see Cristina Maria Seuanes Serafim, *As Ilhas de São Tomé no século XVII* (Lisbon: Centro de História de Além-Mar, 2000), 258.

The fully grown canes were cut into smaller pieces that were crushed in a water-driven three-roller mill to extract the juice. The sugar cane waste was used to feed pigs. The juice was boiled three to four times to dry it and then, still semi-moist, put into semi-conical containers to further dry and harden. However, due to São Tomé's high air humidity, this process needed to be assisted by means of wood fires, but even this failed to dry the sugar completely. About 1,175 kg of sugar cane were necessary to produce one arroba (14.7 kg) of sugar.¹¹³ The sugar dried in semi-conical containers called sugar loaves (*pães de açúcar*) weighing 15-20 *arráteis* each (1 *arrátel* = 459 gr).¹¹⁴ For export, the finished sugar loaves were packed into boxes that weighed about 86 kg each. The Portuguese king received one tenth of the sales as taxes. In the 1510s, São Tomé produced an estimated 100,000 arrobas a year. In 1527, sugar producers in Madeira were concerned about the possible negative consequences caused by the competition from

São Tomé's sugar.¹¹⁵ By that time, Madeira's sugar production had decreased from some 300,000 arrobas in around 1450 to about 40,000.¹¹⁶

In the mid-sixteenth century, thirty to forty Portuguese ships arrived annually at the port of São Tomé, where they remained for six or seven months to load sugar.¹¹⁷ The voyage from São Tomé to Lisbon took about fifty days, with another five to ten days for the voyage to Antwerp, a significant port for the importation of sugar into Europe.¹¹⁸ Between July 1535 and November 1548, 112 Portuguese ships, almost exclusively transporting sugar from São Tomé, arrived at the port of Antwerp, which is an average of almost nine ships annually.¹¹⁹ Between 1535 and 1551, a total of 483,652 arrobas of sugar arrived in Antwerp from São Tomé. In 1552 and 1553, sugar imports from São Tomé to Antwerp totalled 85,244 arrobas, while from 1563 to 1572 they totalled 260,000.¹²⁰ In the debt books of the Augsburg-based trading company Christoph Welser and Brothers for the period from 1554 to 1560, sugar from São Tomé was the only registered commodity that was imported through the port of Lisbon.¹²¹ The sugar boom also attracted Spanish, Italian and French merchants to São Tomé. However, the demand for the island's sugar in Europe was due to its abundance and cheapness, rather than quality since it was fairly dark and not very solid. Indeed, in Antwerp São Tomé's sugar was considered the "worst in the world," since the loaves were moist and full of tiny black ants.¹²²

Estimates of sugar production by different authors shown in Table 2 differ and are sometimes inconsistent, since they are calculated with figures derived from information on tax revenue, ship loads or the number of sugar mills. The highest figure is 800,000 arrobas for the years before 1578, given by Lains e Silva, who based his calculation on an estimate of forty ship loads a year of 20,000 arrobas each, seems rather unlikely.¹²³ However, there is no doubt that sugar production reached its height in the third quarter of the sixteenth century and a gradual decline began after that, due to various internal and external causes. As far as the position of the sugar industry in the local economy is concerned, there is no consensus on whether it really replaced the slave trade as the principal source of income. Cunha states that even during the sugar boom, the crown's tax income from sugar did not exceed the revenue earned from the slave trade.¹²⁴ Other authors believe that sugar became the mainstay of the local economy from the 1520s onwards.¹²⁵