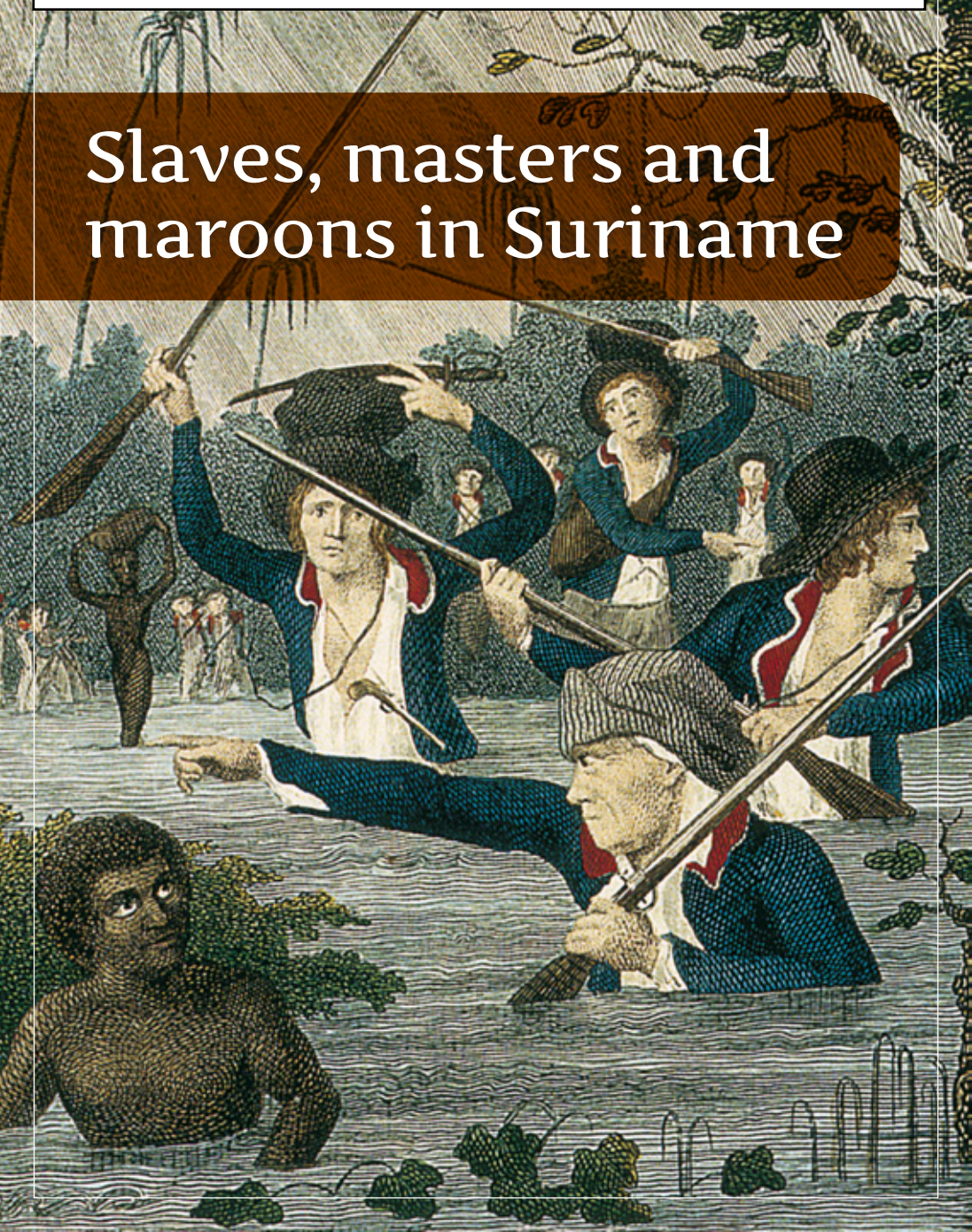


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Slaves, masters and maroons in Suriname



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Introduction

One of the consequences of the voyages of discovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the establishment of large plantations in America. The white planters initially made use of Amerindian labourers. However, the work was too heavy for them. In addition very many Indians died as a result of the diseases brought by the Europeans. The Europeans believed that the importation of slaves from Africa was the solution. The Dutch had a major share in the African slave trade. Many of the slaves who the Dutch transported were destined for Suriname, which was acquired by the West India Company in 1667. How did the slaves live? And how did the Europeans? How did the Europeans and the slaves interact? This booklet is about these and other questions. On this we present a number of unwritten sources: illustrations on slaves, masters and maroons (runaway slaves) in Suriname. Why this subject? Suriname's history is fascinating and should be studied for that reason alone. But there is more to it. About 40% of Suriname's population is descended from the slaves. A large minority of them now live in the Netherlands. Many Dutch people profited from slavery and the slave trade. The Surinamese are much more aware of this than (other) Dutch.

In most Dutch history school books as yet little or no attention has been paid to the Dutch slave trade and slavery. In school books, as well as for instance in television and films slavery in the United States has received much more attention. Ignoring this black page in our national history is not good. The relations between blacks and whites in Suriname's past still affect the relations between blacks and whites today. Both among blacks and whites the legacy of the slave period is still visible. And it is not so long ago.

As an introduction to the subject this booklet begins with an eighteenth century play situated on a Surinamese coffee plantation. Then there is a chapter explaining how the whites and the blacks got to Suriname, and what happened to the original Amerindian population.

It is intended that a picture story of fifteen illustrations be constructed from the illustrations on slavery in this booklet. In Chapter 4 is explained how this can be done. In Chapter 5, there follow the illustrations themselves with information which can be used in their explication.

I Director and his slaves on a Surinamese coffee plantation - A play

Introduction

At the end of the eighteenth century Pieter van Dijk published a short manual of advice in Surinamese creole and two pieces on Surinamese creole and Dutch which were intended, i.a. to give an impression of the way in which Surinamese plantation directors worked. The author wrote this work for two reasons; he wanted to teach the slave language and to show how slaves should be treated. He himself had lived in Suriname; he had probably been a slave supervisor.

In this work *The life and business of a Surinamese director with the slaves on a coffee plantation*, the evil manager is contrasted with the good. On the one hand is the manager who doles out the most vicious punishments for the least error or mistake; on the other is the owner himself, who finally takes over the running of the plantation, after it has been ruined by the cruelties of the director.

The author does not protest against the system of slavery. He rather objects to random and cruel actions because they are bad for the operations of the business. The play seems implausible because the manager makes so many major mistakes in such a short time. However, the author could not make the piece too long and he wanted to include everything he had experienced.

As you are reading, remember that the play was written by a white, who was not an opponent of slavery.

Words marked with a * are explained at the end of the chapter.

3 Artists illustrate the life of slaves, masters and maroons

Suriname has a fascinating history, on which many sources have been preserved. In addition to many written sources there are illustrations made by artists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What information is provided by their work, and by a few drawings from a later period, about the life of the slaves, masters and maroons? This is the question behind this pictorial research. Before you begin with this, we would like to introduce the artists.

1 The artists

John Gabriël Stedman

John Gabriël Stedman served in Suriname for many years as a Scottish officer in Dutch service. He was born in 1744. His father was an officer of the Scottish Brigade, a unit of the Republic's army recruited from Scots. John also enlisted in this Brigade. He was highly intelligent, but a number of other characteristics prevented a successful career: he was very quick with his words, irascible, quickly angered and a considerable fighter. In order to gain promotion, in 1772 he volunteered for an expeditionary force being formed in the Republic to attack the maroons in Suriname.

Maroons were runaway slaves living in freedom in Suriname, and their descendants. Stedman wrote several

books about his experiences in Suriname. He also drew what he saw. His books contain many of his drawings. In the twentieth century his book was republished, on the right you see the title page.



5 The lives of slaves, masters and maroons, illustrated

1

The arrival of slaves in Paramaribo
(Stedman, c.1775)

These slaves had just been imported from Guinea. The artist is disgusted by their physical condition. He writes: 'You might say that they had just risen from the grave, or from under the surgeon's knife: in short they were walking skeletons.' Nevertheless, he notes that none of the slaves appeared dispirited and that the sailor who was guarding them did not have to use his stick very often.



2

Coffee Plantation Nijd (t)en Spijt
(Winkels, 1846)

In the foreground a river with a canoeist. In the background seven plantation buildings with a boathouse. Near the jetty is a covered boat with two blacks.





3

Director of a plantation with his white officer (Winkels 1840)

The white officer (a white slave supervisor) makes his report on the illnesses on the plantation. The slave boy carries a tray with a bottle of drink and a glass. This is evidently meant only for the director. The director (in the center) has the white officer's report in his hand. The white officer stands humbly and modestly in the background.

4

The room of a white officer (Winkels 1840)

The subtitle of this drawing is: 'The room of a white officer'.

Winkels adds: 'N.B. one of the best sort. This is a white officer's room, the residence of the white gentlemen who are learning the business of the planter in Suriname. There is little furniture, to make the young men used to simplicity and want, there is much air, so that they do not become soft: because, if it is cold, as occasionally happens at night, then such a man experiences it at first hand.'



5

A homesick white officer (Winkels 1840)

White officer in his room has a vision of three figures (his parents and a girl). Subtitle to this drawing is: 'Alone in the world. Yes, you know what that means? God's forgiveness, grace for so much suffering. Why did I leave you, fatherland, parents and you my dear Mat... No I will not say your name, for I have been unworthy to you.'

