

Africa and the transatlantic slave trade



Arm ring trade token,
*The Manchester Museum,
The University of Manchester*



Barbados penny,
Gallery Oldham



Blackamoor,
*Bolton Museum and
Archive Service*



The Slave,
People's History Museum



Manilla, 1700s
© The Manchester Museum,
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Manilla, 1700s

The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester

Manillas were traditional African horseshoe shaped bracelets made of metals such as iron, bronze, copper and very rarely gold. Decorative manillas were worn to show wealth and status in Africa.

Europeans used them as a form of **currency** in west Africa to buy and enslave African people. They **manufactured** them in Britain, especially around Bristol and Birmingham, based on African designs. Different styles and metals had different values. One source stated that in 1505 one manilla was worth a big elephant tooth and eight to ten manillas would buy an African person to enslave.

The trade was described as triangular: ships sailed full of 'exchange' goods such as manillas, metals, clothing, guns and alcohol from Britain to Africa. Enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic to the Americas. The raw materials enslaved Africans grew on **plantations** such as sugar, tobacco and cotton were brought back to Britain where they were processed.

Historians estimate that at least 12 million Africans were removed by force during the transatlantic slave trade. Many millions died when they were captured and transported. Europeans **dominated** the trade in enslaved Africans using the power of guns. They justified enslaving Africans claiming that they were 'uncivilised'.



Slave Trade, 1791
© The Whitworth Art Gallery,
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Slave Trade, 1791

The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

George Morland was an English artist who did two paintings known as 'Slave Trade' and 'African Hospitality'. He was inspired by a friend's poem to paint images of slavery. The movement to end slavery started in Britain in the 1790s.

This print was a **reproduction** of Morland's painting made to help raise awareness of slavery and the need for **abolition**. It was published in Paris in 1794, at the height of the **French Revolution**. The French abolished slavery in 1794 as part of the fight for **equality**, but Napoleon reintroduced slavery in 1802 and it was not abolished in French **colonies** until 1848.

This painting was made as a piece of **propaganda**. It is not based on actual events, but represents a dramatisation of selling enslaved Africans. European slave traders capture an African man, and a woman is led to a boat where there is a person weeping. The African trader under the tree, negotiating with the slave ship's captain, looks on.

The dog used to keep enslaved Africans under control is in contrast to the chained people. The animal has more freedom than the African men, women and children who were traded as goods.



West African drum, 1898
© The Manchester Museum,
The University of Manchester

West African drum, 1898

The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester

This drum was collected in 1898 in Ilorin, Nigeria. It was given to Salford Museum and was described as 'both rare and special and very difficult to get hold of'.

Drums were a very important part of musical traditions in Africa and continued to be used by enslaved Africans on **plantations** in the Caribbean and the Americas. They were used in music, dance and religious ceremonies as well as to send messages.

Enslaved Africans used drum beats to signal the start of **revolts**, including the revolution in Haiti which led to its independence. For this reason drums were banned in some Caribbean islands.

The drum is made with a piece of **manufactured** cotton fabric, probably made in Britain, and possibly in Manchester.

The fact that British goods became **integral** parts of African objects shows how complex the transatlantic slave trade was between Britain and west Africa.

Cotton goods produced in Manchester were in demand in west Africa during the 1700s and 1800s where they were traded for people through African **middlemen**.

Questions

- 1 Why did Europeans enslave Africans to work on **plantations**?
- 2 How did they **justify** this?
- 3 What was life like in Africa?
- 4 What effect would losing so many people have on Africa?
- 5 Why was the transatlantic slave trade so profitable for Britain?
- 6 How did Africans help to enslave their own people?