Rocha’s *The Ethiopian Redeemed* and the Circulation of Anti-Slavery Ideas

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At the end of the 1820s the Reverend R. Walsh arrived in Brazil as the Chaplain of Viscount Strangford, the British Ambassador Extraordinary to the Court of Brazil. In between his clerical duties, Walsh visited the Imperial Library of Rio de Janeiro to search for a book written by a Portuguese priest 70 years before. He had heard that the book made ‘a considerable sensation’ at the time and was anxious to check the truth that his proposals defined the slave trade as piracy, anticipating the anti-slavery sentiments of the people of England. After reading it, he solemnly stated: ‘If the Portuguese were the first Europeans to make negro slaves, it is but justice to them to say, that they were among the first to exclaim against the traffic.’

My aim in this article is to approach the issue of the circulation of emerging anti-slavery ideas between colonial Brazil, Portugal, Great Britain and France as well as their colonies and also the United States during the first years of independence. I shall analyse the book *Etíope Resgatado, empenhado, sustentado, corrigido, instruído e libertado* [*The Ethiopian Redeemed, pledged, nurtured, corrected, educated, and emancipated*], which was published in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1758. The book was written by the Portuguese priest, Manoel Ribeiro Rocha, during the years he lived in the city of Salvador, Bahia, which was then the capital of the royal Portuguese colony – the so-called state of Brazil. Besides being an important administrative colonial centre, Bahia was known as one of the main ports for slave ships coming from Africa.

There has been much discussion over the role of this book. During the nineteenth century and until recent times the author was seen as an ahead-of-his-time abolitionist and celebrated as such. More recent views insist in denying him such a revolutionary label and consider his views as belonging to the traditional pro-slavery ideology. But both sides reveal two problematic points.

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First, there is seldom any close reading of the text, that is, the author’s proposals on slavery, its main themes and motivations. When one wants to present him as an abolitionist, the last word of the title easily comes to mind. But when one wants to present him as a pro-slavery voice, one quickly forgets the word ‘emancipated’. Yet a close reading of the text allows one to perceive that the six words following ‘The Ethiopian’ in the book’s title form a well-structured plan for attacking slavery without destroying the Portuguese commercial interests at once. This true combination between humanism and interest with a strong trend towards utilitarianism can be better understood in the context of the enlightened ideas circulating on both sides of the Atlantic.

Second, there is seldom any close reading of the context from which the text emerged. Scholars seem more interested in dealing with the issue of the supposed influence of the book over nineteenth-century Brazilian abolitionist writings than in reflecting on the mental connections between this text and other anti-slavery texts that were then being written and circulating in European countries such as Great Britain and France, as well as in their American colonies. One may therefore conjecture that like many men of letters of the mid-eighteenth century, Rocha was acquainted with the ideas coming from French philosophers and liberal British Protestants that, as David Brion Davis suggests, ‘directly challenged the traditional Christian view of slavery’. As we shall see, Rocha’s criticism of slavery as well as his proposals for gradual abolition responded well to the new sensibilities arising from a wide cultural transformation toward sin, human nature and progress. Moreover, he seemed well attuned with the enlightened elites who were then ‘experimenting with internalized moral and cultural controls to establish or preserve their hegemony’.

Having in mind Walsh’s observations on the ‘sensation’ caused by Rocha’s book at the time, it is possible that his proposals circulated among late eighteenth-century British abolitionists, thus helping to give expression to an emerging international anti-slavery sentiment.

The Main Theses of *The Ethiopian Redeemed*

I shall begin by summarizing the main theses of Rocha’s book. From the outset, Rocha is careful to make it plain that his book should not be read as a frontal attack on slavery. In his dedication to the Virgin Mary, he states that he will propose some prudent changes to slavery following the advice of the ‘middle course’, which is the Virgin’s way of intervention, as one learns in the Bible. Defining himself as an ‘unworthy slave’ of the Virgin, he explains that whatever science and charity one may find in his book flows directly from the Virgin’s will. As a slave of the Virgin, he will merely
communicate to the readers the divine truth emanating from her on the holding of ‘the miserable captives’. Interestingly enough, he does not have any dedication to the King of Portugal, which one would expect from someone living under a monarchy where the books were published by permission of a strict censor.

The book is divided into eight parts. The first three parts refer to the first and the second adjectives of the title, ‘redeemed’ and ‘pledged’. The following parts refer to the phases the redeemed and pledged slave should go through until achieving freedom: nurture (part four), correction (part five), education (parts six and seven) and emancipation (part eight). Two clear, interconnected theses run throughout its pages: (1) the African slave-trade is illegitimate and must be acknowledged as pure piracy; and (2) the Africans unjustly enslaved should go through a period of disciplinary preparation for freedom during which they would repay with their services or ‘peculium’ their owners’ expenses in rescuing and maintaining them.

From Piracy to Redemption

A slave merchant would find no way out from mortal sin and burning in hell forever after death in the first 38 pages of this book. The trade in Africans by the Portuguese merchants and the Africans’ subsequent enslavement in Brazil must be considered piracy because they have not been captured and made slaves as a consequence of public, just and true wars. Addressing the merchants directly, Rocha states from the very first line of the first part:

First of all, the merchants should know that such assaults, despite being allowed by the gentile kings (truly such by grace and divine permission …), they are not legitimate war, but invasions whose nature is of robbing, stealing, and pirating negotiation.9

How could the Portuguese consider legitimate the wars being waged by barbarian African chiefs who reduced to captivity thousands of prisoners and even their kinsmen or people who committed only minor offenses? Yet the Portuguese merchants would not inquire into the reasons for the enslavement of the Africans being sold to them.

The ‘right of nature’ was clear on this point: slavery was legitimate only when resulting from ‘just war’; and a just war had to be publicly declared by a prince against other nations.10 Rocha implies that the right to declare war was not for everyone, but only for those state authorities acknowledged by the European nations. Therefore the African wars could not be seen as legitimate, but only as savage events in which free people were captured by thieves and pirates and sold afterwards to European merchants.11 In turn, European merchants behaved just like pirates in buying African slaves without inquiring into the reasons for their enslavement.
enough, a prejudicial argument on the illegitimate character of all African wars could result in a radical indictment against European slave-traders who profited from internal conflicts in Africa.

From this first statement on the illegitimacy of the slave-trade from Africa, Rocha warned the merchants that it was a mortal sin against justice and charity to buy things one presumes to be other people’s property. By the same token, one should be aware that ‘the miserable slaves’ unjustly reduced to captivity did not lose the ‘dominium’ on their liberties. Therefore the merchants who bought such slaves deserved divine condemnation for usurping other people’s property, that is, the slaves’ right to freedom. But if the merchants deserved hell, what to expect from those who had already bought slaves and enjoyed their services? Should the slave owners in Brazil give up their slaves and send them all back to Africa? A reader who followed Rocha’s virulent indictment of the African slave-trade might answer positively to these questions. But one should not forget that from the beginning, he promised to show a ‘middle course’ solution to the problem of the injustice of the African slave-trade.

The turning point of Rocha’s argument begins by distinguishing the ones who behaved in good faith from the ones behaving in bad faith. The ignorant buyers are the ones who act in good faith. They do not suspect that the Africans have been unjustly enslaved. Therefore they buy the slaves from merchants who often act in bad faith, that is, as people who buy goods knowing they were stolen. For the ones who act in bad faith there should be no middle course: merchants are obliged to restore to the slaves immediately the total value of the damage caused to them. But what to say about the ones who act in good faith, that is, those who act in ignorance or perhaps are beginning to have some doubts about the justice of African slavery? From the mid-sixteenth century, theologians and jurists called attention to the risk of buying unjustly enslaved people. Their advice to the slave owners was that they should inquire about the justice or injustice of their enslavement. In case they did not find out the right answer to their inquiries, they could continue detaining the slaves with no obligation of indemnifying them. The slave owners would continue acting in good faith since they had tried to clarify their doubts without success.

Yet Rocha contradicts the traditional solution by raising another question: what if, after patiently inquiring of the slave ships’ captains and the merchants, the slave owner concludes that there is a larger propensity toward the injustice of the enslavement of their black servants? To Rocha this conclusion would imply a more positive than negative answer to the original doubts. In this case, the same rule traditionally applied to the cases of acquisition in good faith of other people’s property should be followed here. The owner of a ‘doubtful slave’, that is, not legitimately enslaved,
must give him back his total liberty. Yet the owner should be responsible for
the restitution of only one part of his liberty, the part that is owed ‘pro
quantitate dubii’ (given the quantity of doubt) or ‘pro ratione maioris
propensionis’ (given the reason of a larger propensity).17

At this point, Rocha pictures the fiction of a partnership between the
slave holder and the slave. It would be a new time of good faith, when
ignorance would be replaced by a mutual disposition for justice. Slave
holder and slave would be partners in holding one common property, the
slave’s liberty. Liberty, which is an ‘indivisible thing’, belongs by natural
right to the one unjustly enslaved. But the one who bought the slave acting
in good faith, having been ignorant, has a legal right to one part of his
liberty. In this case the indivisible liberty must be divided as a common
good belonging to two partners, as one may visualize in the following
example: a slave who is worth 100,000 ‘réis’ (Portuguese currency at the
time) should receive half liberty as restitution and, simultaneously, buy the
other half by paying 50,000 ‘réis’ to the slave holder. Whenever the slave
did not have the money to buy half of his liberty, he would serve his master
until fulfilling his debt.18

The fiction of the partnership between slave holder and slave
commanded two other imperatives: (1) the children of female slaves born
during the time of ignorance or good faith would achieve their liberty by the
same rule of dividing it in two, one half for restitution and the other for
acquisition; but the children born after the inauguration of the partnership
would be entitled to a bigger part of restitution for their liberties; and (2) the
slave holder would neither sell his slaves and children, nor buy other slaves
lest more sins should weigh on his already troubled conscience.19

Of course, Rocha knew that his proposal of a partnership between slave
holder and slave did not have any chance of being accepted. From the
perspective of the slave holder the implications of such a partnership would
surely be quite difficult: the slave would pay just half of his price in buying
his liberty; the slave’s children would be manumitted by the same rule; and
last but not least, the entire slave-trade from Africa, and within Brazil,
would cease at one stroke. Probably the slave himself would not welcome
such an unequal partnership; but it should be stressed here that the slave’s
point of view was not under consideration by Rocha. His aim was to reach
the slave holder’s consciousness by persuading him of his mortal sin against
human justice.

In following Rocha throughout the intricacy of his juridical-theological
arguments, one may perceive a method of rational persuasion being
carefully developed. First he states in a radical tone that the slave-trade from
Africa is piracy deserving divine condemnation. Second, he shows a way
out which was drastic from the slave holder’s point of view, the idea of a
partnership. It is true, as he briefly reminds by way of an aside, there should be an even more drastic and moral way of ceasing the sin of illegitimate slavery: after baptizing the heathen, let them go as free as they were born.\textsuperscript{20} But his readers, the slave holders, and perhaps some merchants, should not be so ‘afflicted’ at the perspective of ‘the horrible duties’ involving his proposal of partnership.\textsuperscript{21} Despite their mortal sin against human justice, one should acknowledge the contribution of the African slave-trade, and slave work, to the wealth of the kingdom of Portugal. Therefore he offered his troubled readers a ‘soft’ and ‘middle course’ proposal: to change the business of buying and selling slaves into a ‘contract of redemption’.\textsuperscript{22} The fiction of redeeming Africa from barbarism and heathenism by simultaneously enslaving and baptizing its inhabitants permeated the history of Portugal’s participation in the African slave-trade from its beginnings in the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{23} Counting on the support of a number of Papal bulls, the Portuguese rulers and the slave-traders claimed that by transporting the baptized Africans to the Christian lands they were allowing their deliverance from the demon’s slavery.

Rocha incorporated the same Catholic fiction of Africa’s redemption by the Portuguese slave-trade, yet with a significant change. In the original fiction, baptized Africans – already free from serving the demon – would be perpetually enslaved to the men who had redeemed (that is, bought) them. Slavery in life was the price they had to pay for their redemption from the original sin. They would be completely free only after death, and in case they had behaved well as Christian slaves during their lifetime. Yet in Rocha’s renewed fiction the Christian slaves would achieve their freedom while still living by paying back to the slave holder the price of their redemption by means of their services or money. His inspiration here was the Roman Imperial Law – the Roman \textit{Digest} – that could be applied in Portugal in cases not defined by the Kingdom’s Ordinations of 1603.\textsuperscript{24}

By signing up to a ‘contract of redemption’, the sinful and illegitimate African slave-trade would become a blameless and licit trade. From then on slavery would be only temporary. Slave-traders and slave holders on the one side, and slaves on the other side, would enjoy mutual rights: the first would have the right of pawn and retention of the slaves, but not their ‘dominion’; the second would have the right of manumission, that is, they were obliged to serve their masters until paying the debt of their ransom. As for slave women, their children would be born free once there was no ransom debt weighing on them.\textsuperscript{25}

The next step in picturing the renewed fiction of Africa’s redemption was to define the amount of the pawn, the duration of temporary slavery, and the destiny of the slave women’s free children, the ‘ingênuos’.\textsuperscript{26} The price of the slave’s ransom, the pawn, should not be the value of the rolls of
tobacco which were usually given by the Portuguese traders in exchange for slaves at the coast of Africa. The value of the pawn should be set by the price of the first sale, including here the merchant’s profit. Given the high ransom prices slaves would have to pay for their liberation, one should expect a temporary slavery which was very far from brief.

But there was one more reason to define a long period of servitude for the ‘redeemed’ slave. In contradistinction to the Roman Law, which defined a five-year period of servitude before manumission, Rocha proposed a maximum term of 20-year compulsory services. As he explained, the Roman slaves were able to pay more quickly for their ransom as they were white and ingenious. It is interesting to notice here how far the racialization of African slavery had already been rooted in the Portuguese mind. Leaving aside his usual prolixity, Rocha was able to communicate with his readers by appealing in a few lines to the prevalent sentiment of prejudice against the African worker.

As for the destiny of the slave women’s free children, it would not be less harsh. Although born in freedom, Rocha suggested that they should serve their mothers’ masters for 14 or 15 years in compensating for the costs of their rearing and education. But the skilled children should serve a longer term of 25 years.

If slave holders adopted this ‘contract of redemption’, they should expect to enjoy two advantages. First, the perspective of emancipation would encourage the slaves’ good feelings toward their masters, reducing the ever-present risk of rebellions. In consequence, the former slaves who would learn both to be grateful and to love their masters would probably remain at their service. ‘They [might] serve us better in liberty than they used to do in slavery.’ Second, Divine Providence would allow the increase of their prosperity since the sin of illegitimate slavery would have ceased. As he suggested, the divine retributive justice might explain the many calamities that had afflicted the coastal cities – the great centres of slave market. By way of an aside, one may recall the huge earthquake which devastated Lisbon in 1755, three years before the publication of Rocha’s book. But a calamity could also be felt in the gradual decadence of coastal cities. And here Rocha might be thinking of the decay of the once thriving export sugar economy of Salvador, the capital of Brazil and the city where he lived while writing this book.

Redemption with Gratitude

Yet it was not enough to build the fiction of redemption in the eyes of the master if the slave failed to internalize it. Much more was needed besides informing the slave that enslavement was to be provisional until repaying the master for the pawn’s cost. Rocha’s second thesis stressed the need of
preparing the slave for freedom through a long period of disciplinary rearing. Disciplinary rearing meant above all producing gratitude. The slave to be emancipated should internalize a proper meaning of freedom, which would not bring any disruption to the master’s interests and to the kingdom’s wealth.

Gratitude associated with fear of the former master would permeate the behaviour of the former slaves only if receiving proper sustenance, correction and instruction in good manners as well as in the Christian doctrine during the term of enslavement. Although the content of Rocha’s suggestions resembled the Jesuits’ past proposals of moralizing, that is, Christianizing the master–slave relationship, it is interesting to note his concern in setting the smallest details of a new kind of correction – the ‘economic punishment’.

In criticizing punishment as revenge of the master toward the slave, Rocha made clear that it was neither a simple matter of advising Christian charity toward the inferior servants, nor of reforming slavery from within in order to reduce the risks of slave flights or rebellions. For him, punishment should aim to build a responsive and docile body changing the present-day compulsory worker into a future disciplined voluntary worker. His method of disciplining for freedom may be summarized as follows. To begin with, the master should verify if the guilty slave had a good or bad temper. In the first case, a verbal admonition would be enough. But in the second case, there should be a well-ordained disciplinary plan according to the time, cause, quality, quantity and manner of punishing. Here is some of his advice:

- **Time**: one must not punish ‘in continenti’ as soon as the slave committed the fault. It is necessary to wait until the master’s anger has calmed down for otherwise it would also raise the fury of the punished slave.
- **Cause**: one must punish only if there is a reason for this. The master’s caprice should not stand for a cause.
- **Quality**: punishment must have limits not going beyond a few blows on the hands or on the body with a thin rod, and jail. Blows with heavy sticks, tortures and cruel punishment should cease altogether.
- **Quantity**: the number of lashes must be proportional to the guilt; if the slave deserves to be whipped with three dozen lashes, the master should reduce it to only two dozen; and in case the slave deserves one dozen, the master should change it for blows on the hands. The habit of whipping slaves with 300 or 400 lashes should cease, having in mind that the Old Testament allowed a maximum of 40 lashes. But since the New Testament has increased our love toward our fellows, a maximum of 30 lashes would be enough.
In following these precepts for punishment, the master should also inform the slave about the cause, the extent and the manner of punishment. In this manner the slave would be conscious of his guilt and feel respect for a master whose severity could also be magnanimous.  

In sum, if everything worked out according to Rocha’s plan of gradual emancipation, the grateful emancipated worker would remain in the master’s service. Gratitude, a sentiment made of a well-balanced mixture of fear and respect, would replace naked violence in the daily relationship between master and slave.  

Once having paid the pawn debt to the master, the slave should be set free. The master would follow the divine demands of the ‘contract of redemption’ in restoring the primitive and natural freedom, which belonged to the slave by birth as much as to any other human being. The slave had four ways to achieve freedom: first, by paying with money the cost of his or her pawn; second, by serving the master during a number of years; third, when the dying master left a will determining the slave’s emancipation; and fourth, when death liberated the slave.  

But freedom in a world of slavery should not come without proper documents identifying the former slave as well as the amount paid in money or years of service to the master in exchange for emancipation. By stressing the need for issuing liberty charters to the freedmen, Rocha implied that a black man or woman would run the risk of being enslaved once more in case they could not prove their free status in a society ruled by white people.  

By the same token freedom should not come without proper acknowledgements from the master toward the slave. Like the journeyman who is paid once the work is done, the slave should be paid in gifts or money at the moment of his emancipation. That would be the right time for the master to show gratitude, for in the eyes of God being ungrateful to loyal servants was a very serious sin. And in the case of sick or old slaves, the master should keep them under his protection, having in mind the biblical narrative of King David’s wrath against the master who had abandoned his wounded servant. As for the master who died without having remembered to include a liberty clause in his will, he sinned against charity. But his sin would double in case he died without remembering to set free a faithful slave. Then he would have committed a sin against charity and justice. A most grave sin was also that of burying slaves in the fields as if they were beasts. The slave who achieved freedom by death deserved a sacred funeral
and Masses in honour of the dead soul. One should not forget that slaves and masters are equal in the eyes of God. Ungrateful masters would suffer a long time in purgatory before meeting faithful slaves in paradise.\footnote{See the text.}

**Sources and Ideology**

One particular point relating to the sources of *The Ethiopian Redeemed* must be highlighted: the author’s ability in drawing his main arguments on the piratical nature of the African trade and the need to prepare the slave for freedom from a mixture of traditional and modern sources. Four main traditional sources are profusely quoted: Roman Law, as well as the classical authors of ancient Greece and Rome; the first theologians and saints of Christianity; the clerical authorities writing since the fifteenth century; and the Bible.\footnote{See the text.} More modern sources also came to the author’s help: the Philippine Code or Ordination and Laws of the Kingdom of Portugal (1603), which still ruled Portuguese society and the overseas colonies in Rocha’s time; the First Constitutions of the Archbishopric of Bahia (1707); and wonder tales related to the Providence of God. Last but not least, one may also find one rather ambiguous source briefly emerging as the critical views against the African trade and slavery by ‘learned and conscientious people’.

Yet traditional and modern sources are unevenly distributed throughout the book. Rocha relies mainly on the clerical authorities writing since the fifteenth century and on Roman Law, in denouncing the African slave-trade as piracy and proposing remedies to this most mortal sin. But none of the other traditional sources, the Bible or the first Christian saints, seemed of much help here. They find their way, along with more modern sources, when it comes to the preparation of the slave for freedom.

But what to say about the source that Rocha ambiguously brought to light as the voice of ‘learned and conscientious people?’ They appear twice right from the start and sound quite radical. The very first paragraph reads as following:

> Many times the merchants and other inhabitants of Brazil have heard that learned and conscientious people reprove the selling, buying, and possession of black African captives by reason that they are not legitimately enslaved in public, just and true wars, but in abrupt and furtive assaults which those barbarians practice and allow their vassals to do.\footnote{See the text.}

And, once again, the radical voice warns the reader on the injustice of the African trade and slavery:
However, the Merchants sailing to their harbours buy the said furtive slaves in exchange for tobacco and other goods carried by them; it is for this reason that learned and conscientious people justly reprove this sort of trade, mainly because they engage in it without previous examination, and investigation on the justice or injustice of the enslavement of each of the said captives …

Obviously this is also the priest’s voice, a way of making a radical statement while conveniently hiding behind non-nominated honourable sources. But would he use this subterfuge if there were not such radical honourable voices making themselves heard in Portugal and its overseas colonies, despite censorship and the ever-terrifying presence of the Inquisition?

The Enlightenment and the Circulation of Ideas

Among the learned and conscientious anti-slavery voices one may find the Jesuit priests whose denunciations against the Portuguese merchants in Africa were being made since the sixteenth century. Rocha extensively quoted two of these Jesuits: the Spanish Luis Molina (1535–1600) and the Portuguese Fernando Rebello (1546–1608). Both accused Portuguese merchants of purchasing slaves who had been unjustly enslaved by African rulers, and therefore of disrespecting liberty as a natural right of all people. Human beings could be legitimately enslaved only by right of conquest in a publicly declared just war.

But as we saw above, Rocha criticized the traditional solution these authors presented: that the enslavement of Africans should be accepted as a matter of fact whenever the slave owners bought them in good faith, not being able to find out the true reasons for their original captivity in Africa. He seemed ready for something more. One wonders whether he had found new inspiration from more recent sources inviting him to rethink the issue of legitimate slavery and the so-called just war. Would the ‘successive rumours’ about anti-slavery critics that were circulating among contemporary slave merchants point to the rise of a new climate of opinion?

As is well known, from the beginning of the eighteenth century ‘a loose, informal, wholly unorganized coalition of cultural critics, religious skeptics and political reformers’ began to constitute what became known as the Enlightenment. As Peter Gay suggests, there was only one Enlightenment deriving from this loose coalition in many cities throughout the world. But unity does not mean unanimity. ‘Thus the variety of political experience produced an Enlightenment with distinct branches’, as Gay emphasizes.

Yet the eighteenth-century Enlightenment has usually been associated with the countries that eventually became the dominant powers in the fast
changing political and economic world of the nineteenth century such as France, Great Britain, Germany and the United States. One may concede that the Enlightenment also made its presence in less developed countries, or more precisely in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, ‘the losers’ of capitalism. But the Enlightenment here is usually seen as a mere movement of importation of ideas, as if the losers acted as passive recipients of progressive ideas being produced by the winners.

My point here is to call attention to the need to approach the Enlightenment from the perspective of the circulation of ideas. And circulation of ideas should not mean exportation or importation, as if ideas could be reduced to things being sold at the marketplace. As Gay suggests, the variety of political experience in many different countries contributed to the rise of many distinct shapes in the Enlightenment.

From the first decades of the eighteenth century, Portuguese men of letters began to take part in that loose coalition of critics and enlightened reformers. Ideas and debates on the need to bring incentives to the natural sciences and introduce a number of reforms in education, government, the economy and diplomacy revealed the many connections between Portuguese intellectuals and their foreign counterparts living in other European countries. But as Kenneth Maxwell shows, in contradistinction to northern Europe, where the proponents of a rationalist philosophy and a modern experimental science were ferocious critics of religion and the Church, in Portugal many of the most radical supporters of an educational reform with emphasis on rational methods of learning and natural sciences were priests.

Living in the capital of the distant state of Brazil, Rocha seemed to be well connected to the rising European movement of enlightened men of letters. By introducing the critical voices of the ‘learned and conscientious people’ in the opening paragraph of part one of his book, Rocha made clear that his arguments on the piratical nature of the African slave-trade and the need to emancipate the slaves gradually counted on many strong supporters. The fear of having his book banned by censorship may probably have prevented him from giving the names of those present-day men of letters. But one may capture a sense of comradeship in the warm and emphatic tone he uses in mentioning their anti-slavery opinions.

Like a number of other eighteenth-century Portuguese priests, Rocha may be understood as a man of the early Enlightenment, when new, secular transforming ideas fought their way betwixt religious and political traditions. His text reveals many signs of the presence of a new pattern of thinking, beginning with freely mixing pagan and sacred sources. The Greeks Plato and Aristotle, and the Romans Séneca, Pliny and Justinian, the so-called ‘gentile’ authors of ancient times, appear harmoniously in The
Ethiopian Redeemed with the first saints of the Christian Church, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Paul and Saint Gregory the Pope, as well as with the books of the Bible, both Old and New Testament. As the British Dr Johnson acknowledged, classical quotation was ‘the parole of literary men all over the world’.\textsuperscript{57}

Although classical quotation had been in use from the first days of the Renaissance, enlightened authors used their classical learning to free themselves from their Christian heritage and turn their eyes toward a more modern worldview.\textsuperscript{58} Yet to say that one strives to leave aside the Christian heritage does not mean one necessarily strives to forget it all. In the case of Rocha, a deeply religious author, classical learning combined with Christian reasoning to overcome the traditional Christian conception of slavery as a fatal station in life for some sinners especially punished by God.\textsuperscript{59}

As often occurred among the first-generation authors of the Enlightenment, Rocha was able to picture ‘a neutral zone’ between the pagan and the Christian worlds where teachings coming from both intertwined in peaceful terms.\textsuperscript{60} Another sign of Enlightenment inspiration may be found in picturing Rome as a mode of civic virtue and non-violence. In Rome, Rocha says, slaves who were loyal to the Republic received their liberty as a prize.\textsuperscript{61} Indeed, Rome ‘belonged to every educated man’, as Gay suggests.\textsuperscript{62}

One more sign of Enlightenment inspiration may be captured in the stoic ideals of tranquility and moderation combined with the ideal of duty.\textsuperscript{63} The ‘middle course’ Rocha so emphatically affirmed while designing his proposal of gradual emancipation found inspiration in Seneca as well as in Saint Thomas Aquinas, and in the Proverb 8:20 – ‘I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the path of judgment.’\textsuperscript{64} As for the ideal of duty, one poet in the opening pages reminds us that Rocha had written this book dictated by God although suffering from a painful disease for more than 20 years. Thus, it was a divine duty to write a book in defence of spiritual and social reform, or in the poet’s words, in aiming to liberate whites from sin and blacks from slavery.\textsuperscript{65}

New Criticism of Slavery

Although it is not possible to know who the contemporary ‘learned and conscientious people’ were that presumably helped to shape Rocha’s anti-slavery arguments, one may think of Montesquieu in \textit{Lettres Persanes} (1721) or John Locke in his \textit{Two Treatises of Government} (1690). Montesquieu called attention to the fact that the Christian princes of Europe had been buying slaves from the African small kings (‘petits rois’) or local chiefs, and transporting them to the American colonies for the last 200 years. Their only aim in trading slaves from one continent to the other was
to make profits. The fact that slaves working under inhuman conditions in a hostile climate died by the thousands would not hurt the Christian sensibility of such greedy princes. Locke opened his *First Treatise* by calling attention to slavery as the most vile and miserable estate to which men could be reduced. Although in the *Second Treatise* he conceded that slavery was ‘the state of War continued, between a lawful Conqueror, and a Captive’, it is interesting that his chapter on slavery was mostly dedicated to emphasizing the natural liberty of Man and therefore to denying him any right to enslave himself to anyone. ‘For a Man, not having the Power of his own Life, cannot, by Compact, or his own Consent, enslave himself to any one …’. Only by an act that deserves death could a man forfeit his own life to another who would make use of him to his own service.

Two new ideas of freedom relating to anti-slavery criticism emerge from both Montesquieu and Locke’s writings. First, the idea that Africans were being enslaved by European rulers for the last two centuries for the sole reason of commercial rapacity. Second, that Man has a natural right to freedom and may only in very special cases of criminal offences become a slave of another. The traditional Christian argument springing from Saint Augustine that slavery was legitimate in the eyes of God as an outcome of public and just wars loses considerable ground here.

As we have already seen, Rocha began by criticizing the slave merchants for trading Africans without verifying the true reasons for their original enslavement. The traditional Catholic excuse that slavery combined with baptism promoted the redemption of heathens was conspicuously absent from his pages. He then suggested that there was always a larger propensity for unjust enslavement in Africa and that therefore African slavery was illegitimate in the eyes of God. As he emphasized, slavery contradicted the human condition since Man was a rational creature born in freedom. If there was still any value in the idea of slavery as redemption, it had to be combined with a plan of gradual emancipation.

But how to put into practice such a plan of gradual emancipation? Interestingly enough, Rocha never appeals to the Portuguese rulers or suggests a general law of gradual emancipation. One wonders if he ever found inspiration in the Lockean contractualism in which individuals adhere to social pacts by their free will. As Davis explains, to Locke ‘society is composed of discrete, self-governing individuals, whose true humanity lies in their proprietorship of their own persons’. As seen above, in proposing a ‘contract of redemption’ he implies that the slave merchants and slave owners should engage in it by individual conversion from the sin of illegitimate African enslavement.

Thus, in an evangelical mood similar to the one exhibited by the American abolitionist, Samuel Hopkins, in 1776, Rocha expects that
individual conversion would bring collective redemption to the Portuguese kingdom saving it from the many recent ‘calamities’ associated to the divine retributive justice.  

Anti-Slavery and Utilitarianism

Unlike Montesquieu, Rocha was not a detached observer of slavery in distant lands. He lived in a city full of slaves and surrounded by many slave sugar plantations; he probably himself had a couple of domestic slaves. If he ever read the anti-slavery pages of Lettres Persanes he retained its general indictment against slavery, but conveniently left aside the denunciation that commercial rapacity was all that guided European Christian princes in Africa. The very first line of his book seems to have been written in a Lockean mood – ‘Slavery is the greatest unhappiness that may happen to a rational creature in this world …’. But he soon moderated his tone in acknowledging that both the slave-trade and the slave work were ‘useful and necessary’ for the Portuguese kingdom’s ‘subsistence’. Thus his proposal of changing the slave-trade and slavery into a ‘contract of redemption’, that is, a plan for the ‘Ethiopian’ gradual emancipation, aspired to accommodate both principle and expediency.

It is interesting to notice here the intertwining of natural law and utilitarian arguments. Natural law was the divine principle underpinning the indictment against slavery. But since one acknowledged that slavery was useful in material terms for the superior classes of the kingdom, it was convenient to find more down-to-earth arguments in order to begin attacking slavery.

According to Gay, the utilitarian anti-slavery argument gained prominence in the second half of the eighteenth century in tune with the Enlightenment’s general shift of temper from natural law to utility. Montesquieu was particularly able to find a compromise between the higher law and the human law. As Davis suggests, Montesquieu acknowledged the existence of a Higher Law, which he defined as an eternal, uniform and rational system of law limiting even the will of God. However, far from being abstract, this Higher Law could be grasped only in concrete situations, that is, only by rational inquiry into the different institutions of a country. Within this kind of reasoning, where God could be depicted as responding to different historical situations, human law acquired precedence over divine maxims as well as enough legitimacy to be immune to criticism and transformation other than through the gradual devices of reason.

Rocha’s book may be understood as an attempt to delineate a plan of gradual emancipation adapted to the economic needs of the specific historical situation of Portugal and its overseas colonies. Human law was not to be disrupted overnight by abolishing the slave-trade and setting free
the baptized slaves. But human law should be changed in order to respond more consistently to the Higher Law that assured the natural right of freedom to every human being.

The Bible, the Wonder Tales and the Issue of Gratitude

Interestingly enough, the Bible seemed of little help to Rocha when dealing with the injustice of slavery. In his text both Old and New Testament contribute only to persuade the reader of the need to moderate the use of violence in the day-to-day treatment of slaves. His approach is clear, and the Bible would be of little use here: rational methods of teaching combined with little but firm and rational punishment should prepare the slave for freedom and, most importantly, for playing the role of a voluntary responsible worker. A whole array of sources – Seneca, Justinian, the first saints of the Christian Church, the Roman laws and the laws of Portugal – contribute as well to instruct the reader on the art of forming disciplined free workers for the future.

A last source – the wonder tales – was especially used in seeking to create a harmonious hierarchical society in which superior and inferior people were tied up to reciprocal links of gratitude. Rocha tells a few wonder tales taken from modern sources in persuading the slave owners to show their gratitude toward their slaves at the moment of their emancipation. It is interesting to note here how similar the Catholic and Protestant views of human society and divine intervention could be. Rocha’s wonder tales, as well as their instructive life meanings, were much like the ones circulating among learned and unlearned people of seventeenth-century New England, England, France and other European countries.76

Two such tales aim to show that even irrational animals were able to exhibit signs of love and gratitude. One Portuguese nobleman received a precious stone from the mouth of a weasel after saving it from a snake’s attack. And an eagle saved a peasant when he was about to drink from a water vessel poisoned by a snake. The eagle flew fast against the vessel dropping it from his hands. It was a sign of gratitude for the peasant having saved it from another snake a little while ago. Other peasants who drank the same water died soon after.77 Thus, a slave owner incapable of gratitude toward his former slaves should be ashamed of behaving worse than the brute. And he should know that divine retribution would fall on him either in life or after death, for in God’s eyes nobles and peasants, slave owners and slaves, were equal.

Ham’s Curse and the Issue of Racial Inferiority

It is also revealing of Rocha’s interest in a harmonious hierarchical society of free human beings that, in defining the African, he never alludes to the
so-called curse of Noah over Ham, the second of his three sons. The biblical
tale of Ham, who saw his father naked in his tent and whose son Canaan was
cursed by the offended grandfather to be ‘a slave of slaves … to his
brothers’, had been circulating in the Old World since ancient times. As the
institution of slavery became predominantly black slavery in the early
Modern Age, the diverse peoples from Africa began to be depicted by many
writers as the visible Canaanites, the archetypal offspring of Ham.78

By the seventeenth century the story of Ham along with another biblical
tale – the curse of God over Cain’s rebellion – were firmly rooted in both
the old and the new worlds. They provided a rationale for stereotyping black
people as well as pious justifications for the enslavement of Africans and,
ocasionally, of native Americans. In 1693, the Portuguese priest João de
Souza Ferreira described the black and the native inhabitants of the
American continent as the descendants of Cain and Ham and the inheritors
of their curses. For this reason, he argues, they were in this world to serve
their brothers as slaves; moreover it was God’s will to bring to life superior
and inferior people, free people and slaves.79

Even those who criticized the excess of violence in the treatment of
black slaves nonetheless pointed them out as being the worst sinners among
human beings. In a book published in 1700, Jorge Benci, a Jesuit priest,
considered ‘the blacks’ more capable of practising all kinds of wickedness
than ‘the whites’. He also suggested to the slave owners that the remedy
against the vicious ‘Ethiopians’ was to prevent them from being idle.80

The curses of Ham and Cain were still circulating in Europe by the
second half of the eighteenth century. In Great Britain, one finds an anxious
Granville Sharp struggling between his anti-slavery commitments and his
unresolved doubts over the issue of the descent of the ‘Ethiopians’. In a
letter dated 19 October 1772, Sharp explained to the author of ‘a learned
account’ of Egypt: ‘I had always supposed that black men in general were
descended from Cush, because a distinction in colour from the rest of
mankind, seems to have been particularly attributed to his descendants, the
Cushim … (commonly rendered Ethiopian) …’. Although he was ‘far from
having any particular esteem for the Negroes’, he thought it important to
find out exactly about their descent in order to engage better in their defence
as human beings.81

It is not possible to know if Rocha had similar doubts about the descent
of his character, the ‘Ethiopian’. The fact is that he chose not to mention any
biblical curses weighing on the destiny of the enslaved Africans. Like Sharp
he did not seem to have any particular esteem for them. As seen above, in
emulating a Roman manumission law, he did not hesitate in increasing from
five to 20 years the term the black slaves should serve before achieving the
right to emancipation. As he explained, they were not white and ingenious
like the Roman slaves. But in contrast to Sharp, Rocha seemed ready to leave the Bible and the derived biblical tales aside in order to present the ‘Ethiopians’ as rational human beings endowed with the same natural rights as people of European descent.

The Just Society
It is interesting to emphasize that Rocha accepted the mental inferiority of black people, whom he saw as less ingenious and more vicious than white people. But despite reproducing such racial stereotypes, he would not conclude that their destiny was perpetual slavery as other Portuguese priests writing a half-century before him had done.

In trying to understand the ideological developments that allowed Rocha to visualize a future world of free human beings, no matter the colour of their skin, one should take into account the way he deals with the idea of natural rights. The Catholic priest seems ideologically close to the seventeenth-century Protestant radical writers who found inspiration in Roman Law in picturing civil liberty while giving rise to assumptions wholly foreign to the Roman laws. As Quentin Skinner shows, one of these assumptions emerging from the ‘neo-Romans’, among them John Milton, is that the primitive liberties must be recognized as a God-given birthright, and hence as a set of natural rights to be enjoyed by everyone.

In a less radical mood, Rocha states that the unjustly enslaved Africans did not ever lose ‘dominion’ over their original liberties. After compensating their masters for redeeming them from illegitimate slavery, the slaves should be ‘completely restored to the primitive and natural liberty enjoyed at their birth’. Therefore, once the ‘contract of redemption’ was over, they deserved to be freed.

As seen above, Rocha’s utilitarian approach undercut any immediate solution consistently dictated by a natural right rationale. Besides, he does not go as far as to imagine a society entirely devoid of the institution of slavery; according to his proposal, the slave-trade continues while slaves are to be gradually freed. But I would like to suggest that he implicitly pictures a time when a considerable number of former slaves and their children would be working as voluntary workers on the plantations. At this moment, one may imagine that the slave-trade from Africa would have ceased altogether, for no planter would buy slaves any more while being able to hire disciplined free workers.

All in all, Rocha’s view of a just society seems quite close to that assumed by a number of Americans on the eve of their Revolution. In the words of Bernard Bailyn, a healthy society was seen as that ‘in which it was natural for some to be rich and some poor, some honored and some obscure, some powerful and some weak’. And since wealth, wisdom and power were
seen as having a natural affinity to each other, one might conclude that political leadership would rest in the hands of the same social leaders.  

For Rocha, the healthy or just society of his dreams would not only be hierarchical, in which everyone knows his or her place. It would also be patriarchal, that is, one in which people of different social positions – planters, merchants, free journeymen – live entangled in daily relations of mutual duties, favours and, above all, gratitude.

**Contexts of Reception**

In 1758, the year *The Ethiopian Redeemed* was published in Portugal, American Quaker official committees visited individual slave owners in order to persuade them of the sin of slavery. As Davis shows, during the Seven Years’ War, Philadelphia’s Quaker Yearly Meeting moved from the ideal of Christianizing the master–slave relationship to the ideal of preparing slaves for freedom. It is surely striking to notice the similarity in the anti-slavery approaches emerging on both sides of the Atlantic world. As seen above, for Rocha the ideal of Christianizing the master–slave relationship was but a necessary step toward the ideal of preparing slaves for freedom.

By the mid-1770s three anti-slavery proposals which were very similar to Rocha’s ‘contract of redemption’ were circulating in France, Great Britain and revolutionary America. In 1774 the French Barón de Bessner (1731–85) presented a plan for the gradual emancipation of the slaves. In response to the alarmed French colonists of Guiana, who feared the eruption of slave revolts and the expansion of fugitive communities in the forests, Bessner argued for the need for preparing the slaves for freedom through a 20-year term of compulsory work on their masters’ plantations. He expected that in nurturing the slaves’ hopes toward freedom and life security, they could be gradually transformed into peaceful free workers. As he explained, there should be a ‘new relation between the owners of the land and the men who are destined to cultivate them’, that is, a daily relation based on morality instead of physical compulsion.

In 1775, the English abolitionist Granville Sharp wrote a letter ‘to a Gentleman at Philadelphia’ in order to persuade him to go beyond the measure of forbidding ‘the iniquitous importation of more slaves’, which had been recently taken by the Continental Congress. As he argued, ‘the business is but half done ‘till they have agreed upon some equitable and fate means of gradually enfranchising those which remain’. Thus, in reminding that private interest should give place to justice and right, he offered ‘a few hints’ to ‘those who are best able to judge of the matter’, that is, the leaders of the colony.
As with Rocha’s ‘contract of redemption’, Sharp’s hints combined principle and expediency in emancipating the slaves. First of all, there should be an estimation of the value of every slave by juries appointed for that purpose. This value was to be entered ‘as a pecuniary debt due from each negroe to his master’ in a public register for each district. Second, slave holders who do not occupy all their grounds should be advised to divide their lands into ‘compact little farms’ to be worked by the ‘Negroes’. Besides paying an ‘equitable rent’ in portions of their produce, they would also be able to pay back their debt to the slave holders while holding ‘a moderate gain’ for themselves. Third, the slaves who were not able to manage themselves should be delivered over to the protection of a county committee and employed as ‘hired servants’. Part of their gain was to pay their debts to the original slave holders. As he emphasizes, the slave owners should not be afraid of any material loss for ‘instead of wretched slaves, a new and useful order of men … would be established amongst you; I mean a hardy body of free peasants, serving either as truly tenants or farmers, to improve the estates of landed gentlemen, or else as laborious cottagers …’. 91

It is interesting to notice the similarities between Rocha’s and Sharp’s plans: the need for gradual emancipation, the transformation of the slave into a disciplined free worker, the estimation of a debt related to the slave’s value to be paid to the slave owner. But whereas in Rocha’s ‘contract of redemption’ there was no secular authority interfering with the slave owner’s conscience (and will), Sharp provides one more significant step in inventing a public sphere to administer his plan of emancipation – the official committees, the special juries and the public register. Also differently from Rocha and Bessner, Sharp does not fix a term in years for emancipation; it would all depend on the ability of the slave to pay for his debt with the produce accumulated by his own work.

In 1780, another aspect of Rocha’s ‘contract of redemption’ came to life in a law enacted under pressure from the Pennsylvania Quakers. Members of the Philadelphia legislature voted for an abolition bill that was very similar to Rocha’s original proposal of emancipating the slave women’s newborn. The difference between Rocha’s proposal and the Pennsylvania Emancipation Bill was that the first wanted the children to serve their mother’s masters until 14 or 15 years old, or 25 years old in the case of skilled youth, whereas the second decreed that children born emancipated by the bill were to serve until they were 28 years old. Similar bills were enacted four years later by Rhode Island and Connecticut. 92

In calling attention to the similarities between Rocha’s emancipation plan and the subsequent ones discussed above, it is worth asking how his ideas might have circulated among different countries on both sides of the
Atlantic. It is not my intention to define who was the first person to make
the claim, lest I commit the historian’s sin of obsession with origins, against
which Marc Bloch warned. But these similarities also suggest that one
should put aside the narrow boundaries of national histories and approach
the history of societies in a given period as a number of intertwined
channels of influence, notwithstanding the contextual diversities.

Conclusions

My primary conclusion is that the book by Manoel Ribeiro Rocha should be
understood as an important contribution to the anti-slavery rationale, which
began spreading its roots on both sides and hemispheres of the Atlantic from
the second half of the eighteenth century.

Rocha contributed to the formation of an anti-slavery ideology by
raising three points of view. First, there is the theme of the illegitimacy of
the African slave-trade. By stating his theme of the injustice of African
slavery, he contributed to the undermining of the traditional thesis that
slavery was a divine outcome of a ‘just war’. As Walsh emphasized, Rocha
began delineating a new theme to be grasped soon by the British
abolitionists: the piratical nature of the African slave-trade.

Second, he developed a plan for a ‘contract of redemption’ in which the
traditional ideal of Christianizing the master–slave relationship was
combined with a new ideal of preparing the slave for freedom. As seen
above this new ideal aimed to convert slaves into sober, self-disciplined
workers.

Third, there is his proposal to emancipate the children born of slave
women while retaining them in the service of their mothers’ masters for a
term of disciplinary instruction. The slaves’ children were to become
disciplined free workers in the future. Would the Quakers of Philadelphia,
Rhode Island and Connecticut have heard of such proposals coming from a
Portuguese priest living in Brazil? Of course, the answer to this question
still needs considerable research.

The irony of this history of circulation of anti-slavery ideas is that
Rocha’s proposal for emancipating the slave womb had to wait 113 years to
be adopted in Brazil. But this time the circulation of ideas moved the other
way around: by 1871 members of the Brazilian Parliament recalled the free
womb law of Pennsylvania as a lesson of moderation and foresight in
contradistinction to the recent example of lack of ‘providentia’ coming from
the bloody US Civil War. As for the ideal of the slave preparation for
freedom, it had become a meaningless old ideal by 1888 when the massive
slave flights from the plantations made it clear that there should be no more
slavery in Brazil.
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2. Padre Manoel Ribeiro Rocha, Etiópe Resgatado, Empenhado, Sustentado, Corrigido, Instruído, e Libertado. Discurso Theologico-Juridico, em que se propoem o modo de comerciar, haver, e possuir validamente, quanto a hum, e outro foro, os Pretos cativos Africanos, e as principaes obrigações, que correm a quem delles se servir. Consagrado á Santissima Virgem Maria Nossa Senhora, pelo ... (Lisboa: Officina Patriarcal de Francisco Luiz Ameno, 1758). I rely here on a facsimile of the 1758 edition, see Manoel Ribeiro Rocha, Etiópe Resgatado, Empenhado, Sustentado, Corrigido, Instruído e Libertado, ed. and intro. Paulo Suess (Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 1992). Suess’s edition also includes footnotes with the translation of the many Latin quotations. The biography of Rocha is little known as Suess shows in his Introduction. Much research is still needed in order to find out the dates of his birth and death and whether he was a Jesuit.


5. Ibid., p.363.


7. Rocha, Etiópe Resgatado, p.3. Proverbs 8:20 reads as following: ‘I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the path of judgement.’ On his proposal of a middle course as well as the theological sources underpinning this political posture, see Suess, ibid., p.xxix. Although Rocha does not quote the French theologian Jean Gerson (1363–1429), it is interesting to note here his conception of a ‘middle course’ approach in discussing the Papal authority. According to him, it was necessary to steer a middle course between two opposing errors for the truth must be sought between the two extremes. In echoing this concept,

10. Ibid., p.27.
11. Ibid., p.28.
12. Ibid., p.31.
13. Ibid., pp.34–6.
15. Ibid., p.37.
17. Ibid., p.42.
18. Ibid., pp.42–3; a similar rule applies to the slave holder who bought slaves in ‘bad faith’: they should return to the slave two-thirds of their liberty, and one-third should be sold ‘for its just price’, ibid., pp.46, 48.
20. Ibid., p.49. Rocha’s source for the proposal of freeing the slaves after baptizing them was the Portuguese Jesuit Fernando Rebello (1546–1608).
22. Ibid., p.67.
23. On slavery and the theological debate on the effects of baptism, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, pp.98–106. In 1808 the fiction of the slave trade for the ‘barbarian’ Africans’ redemption was celebrated by Bishop José Joaquim da Cunha de Azeredo Coutinho, *Concordancia das Leis de Portugal e das Bullas Pontificias, das quaes humas permitem a escravidão dos pretos d’Africa, e outras prohibem a escravidão dos indios do Brazil* (Lisboa: Nova Officina de João Rodrigues Neves, 1808). Coutinho quotes a number of Papal bulls allowing Portugal to trade slaves from Africa while introducing Catholicism ‘in those heathen nations’. They are the ones by Nicolau V, 6 Jan. 1454, Calisto III, 3 March 1455, and Leon X, 3 Nov. 1514. In April 1680 a Portuguese bill allowed ‘the trade of redemption of slaves from the Coast of Africa’; the ‘indians’ slavery was forbidden in the Brazilian lands by a Portuguese bill dated 6 June 1775; Ibid., pp.7–9.
25. Rocha, *Etiópe Resgatado*, pp.50–3. Slave holders would be allowed to buy and sell slaves having in mind that they were exchanging the same right of ransom and retention, ibid., p.53.
26. Ibid., p.54.
27. Ibid., p.55.
28. Ibid., p.55.
29. Ibid., pp.55, 61.
30. Ibid., pp.64–5.
31. Ibid., p.65.
32. Stuart B. Schwartz calls attention to the declining prices for the sugar staple in Bahia and the general inflationary trend along with the sharply rising price of slaves from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. In the mid-eighteenth century the Seven Years’ War (1756–63) brought new opportunities for the Bahian sugar economy. ‘Annual Bahian earnings from sugar were 46 percent higher in the period 1763–1766 than they had been in 1753–1757’, the period Rocha was probably finishing his book. See Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society Bahia, 1550–1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.190–3.

34. It is interesting to recall here Michel Foucault’s writings on the eighteenth-century ‘projects of docility’, or the ‘disciplines’ applied to the individual body; see Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp.180–1.


36. Ibid., pp.91–3.

37. Ibid., pp.93–6.

38. Ibid., pp.97–8.


40. Ibid., pp.101–2.

41. Ibid., p.106. As for the slave’s learning of the Christian doctrine, Rocha advised the slave holder to apply a well-balanced system of punishment and incentives, like a few blows on the slave’s hands and small gifts, ibid., pp.112–13. He also warns that the slaves would internalize good behaviour only if the example coming from the slave holders was consistent with such Christian teachings, ibid., pp.123–5.

42. Ibid., p.131.

43. Ibid., pp.134, 137. Even the freedman who wished to remain at his master’s house should receive a charter of liberty as a way of protection against the vicissitudes of life, ibid., p.137.

44. Ibid., pp.138–9.

45. Ibid., p.146.

46. Most of the classical sources are directly quoted. From ancient Greece, he quotes Plato and Aristotle; from ancient Rome, Pliny, Seneca, Ulpian and Justinian. Among the first theologians and saints of Christianity, he quotes Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Dionsius Areopagita. Among the clerical authorities writing since the fifteenth century, he quotes Antonino, Pedro Ledesma, Navarro, Fernando Rebello, Thômas Sanchez and Luis Molina. From the Bible, he quotes the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Matthew, Luke and John. According to Suess, more than 80 per cent of the biblical quotations appear in the three last parts of the book (correction, instruction and emancipation), ibid., p.xxviii.

47. Ibid., p.25.

48. Ibid., p.28.

49. Suess gives a brief biography for Molina and Rebello, as well as the other priests quoted by Rocha, ibid., pp.xxviii–xxix.

50. Ibid., pp.27–30.

51. Ibid., p.37.

52. Ibid., p.25. Rocha uses the present tense in mentioning the successive rumours coming from learned people.


56. Ibid., pp.17, 99–102. The Catholic Inquisition ruled the censoring of books until 1768 when Minister Marquis of Pombal created the Royal Censor Board (Real Mesa Censória). By the time Rocha published his book, Locke, Montesquieu and Voltaire were authors forbidden by the Inquisition. From 1750 to 1759, 1,107 people were condemned by the Inquisition in Portugal; 18 perished at the stake, ibid., p.99. Rocha had to wait more than a year to have his book freed for publication, that is, from 2 March 1757, when he presented his book to the Inquisitors, to 21 June 1758. The licences from the Saint Office (Santo Ofício) are included in the first pages of his book, *Etíope Resgatado*, pp.18–23. Despite censorship, books circulated underground both in Portugal and in the colonies. There is an interesting list of books belonging to a priest condemned in 1792 in Brazil by the Inquisition: among
the books amassed by the Priest Luis Vieira da Silva (1735–1801), one finds John Milton, 
Le Paradis Perdue, as well as books by Voltaire and Montesquieu. The Inquisition officer 
also declared 24 books in English without copying their titles. See Eduardo Frieiro, O Diabo 
na Livraria do Cônego, 2nd edn. (São Paulo: Ed. Itatiaia; Ed. Universidade de São Paulo, 

57. Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge and 


59. On the Christian views of slavery, see Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of 

60. The observation on the first generation of enlightened philosophers as well as the expression 
generation those philosophers who did most of their great work before 1750, like 
Montesquieu and Voltaire.

61. Rocha, Etiope Resgatado, p.140.


63. See the combination of these ideals in Montesquieu in ibid., pp.50–1.

64. Rocha, Etiope Resgatado, pp.3, 96, 98, 104.

65. Ibid., p.16.


67. John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge 

68. Saint Augustine, The City of God, intro. Thomas Merton (New York: The Modern Library, 

69. According to Rocha, legitimate slavery would occur in three cases: a grave criminal offence, 
the selling of a son by a starving father, and in public and just wars. But in his view none of 
them applied to African slavery. See Etiope Resgatado, pp.4–5.

70. Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, p.412.

71. On Samuel Hopkins and the issue of collective redemption, see ibid., pp.293–5.


73. See the emphatic passage on the needs of the kingdom of Portugal, Rocha, Etiope 
Resgatado, p.76.

74. Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, p.405.

75. The theme of the unprofitability of slavery does not appear in Rocha’s book. Nineteenth-
century Brazilian abolitionists would dwell on this theme, taking the utilitarian trend to its 
last step. See Celia M. Azevedo, Abolitionism in the United States and Brazil: A 

76. On this topic, see David D. Hall, Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious 

77. Rocha, Etiope Resgatado, p.133. See examples of wonder tales in which snakes are the 
usual evil characters in Hall, Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment, p.92.

78. On this topic, see Benjamin Braude, ‘The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic 
and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods’, William and Mary 
Quarterly, Third Series, 54, 1 (Jan. 1997), pp.119–27; William McKee Evans, ‘From the 
Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odissey of the “Sons of Ham”’, 
American Historical Review, 85, 1 (Feb. 1980), pp.15–17, 26; and also Davis, The Problem 
of Slavery in Western Culture, pp.63–4.

79. Padre Joao de Souza Ferreira, America Abreviada: Suas noticias e de seus naturaes, e em 
particular do Maranhão, titulos, contendas e instrucções a sua conservação e augmento 
mai utiis, repr. in Revista Trimestral do Instituto Historico e Geografico Brasileiro (Rio de 
Janeiro: Cia. Typographica do Brazil, 1894), pp.101–2. This book was dedicated to Frei 
Joseph de Lancaster, Bishop of Leiria and General-Inquisitor of Portugal. For similar views 
circulating in the seventeenth-century Anglo-American worlds, see Davis, The Problem of 
Slavery in Western Culture, pp.451–3.

81. Granville Sharp, *An Essay on Slavery. Proving from Scripture its Inconsistency with Humanity and Religion*, repr. in *Tracts on Slavery and Liberty* (Westport: Negro Universities Press, 1969), Appdx 3, pp.43–6. For a debate with similar aims in a pamphlet of 1764, see C.R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415–1825* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp.104–10. On the issue of Cain and his descent being discussed by the Quakers, see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, p.326. Cush, or Kush, was the oldest of Ham’s sons. He is apparently free from the curse thrown over his brother Canaan, probably the reason why it was so important for Sharp to define the Africans as descending from Cush. Besides, Cush begat Nimrod who ‘began to be a mighty one in the earth’; see Genesis 10:6, 7, 8.


83. Ibid., pp.88, 96, 104, 112, 122, 131. It is interesting to note that Thomas Jefferson exhibited a similar posture toward black people and their destiny.


86. According to Davis, a closer look at the sources reveals a frequent blurring of the distinction between slavery and the slave-trade. Only in the 1780s did the British abolitionists make their ‘most important tactical decision: the choice of the slave trade as an exclusive target’. He also shows that the Quakers established the precedent of disengaging from the slave-trade as a prelude to gradual and peaceful manumission; see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, pp.405–7.


91. Ibid., pp.57–60.

