

João

João was enslaved in West Africa. Portuguese enslavers imposed the name João Mina on him in reference to Fort Elmina, where he was sold. João ended up on a Portuguese sugar plantation in Brazil. When he fled to Dutch Brazil in 1646, he was interrogated upon arrival by the Dutch West India Company (WIC). His knowledge was important in the war against Portugal.

The struggle between Portugal and the Dutch Republic played out in Europe and elsewhere in the world. The Dutch West India Company conquered parts of Brazil from Portugal with an eye to the lucrative sugar production. The sugar was cultivated by enslaved indigenous people and Africans like João.

African monarchs were also drawn into this European conflict. Johan Maurits, Governor of Dutch Brazil, and Garcia II, King of Congo, became allies in their mutual struggle against the Portuguese. This cooperation marked the beginning of the Dutch transatlantic slave trade, of which João became a victim.

The slave market in Recife, Brazil, Zacharias Wagener, c. 1637-1641

Foot stocks designed for the constraint of multiple enslaved people, c. 1600-1800.

Enslaved people, constrained in foot stocks, Jean-Baptiste Debret, c.1830.

Ox-Driven Sugar Mill in Dutch-Brazil, Frans Post, 1640.

Dirk Wilre, Director-General of the Gold Coast in Fort Elmina, Pieter de Wit, 1669.

Gilt silver basin, gift from Garcia II to Johan Maurits, 1586.