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## Colônia do Sacramento - Livro 5º. de Batismos (1763-1777)

Peer-Reviewed Dataset Article

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### Description

The Colônia do Sacramento Batismos dataset details the status and personal relations of 271 individuals baptized in Colônia Do Sacramento, Uruguay in the mid-eighteenth century. The data was garnered from the *Livro 5º de Batismos da Igreja Matriz (5th Book of Baptisms of the Matriz Church)*, an ecclesiastic source that recorded a spectrum of lived experiences and connections, of both free and enslaved, during the last years of Portugal's control over the port city. The ecclesiastic baptismal records from Colônia do Sacramento are currently deposited at the Arquivo da Cúria Metropolitana do Rio de Janeiro. The dataset is in both English and Portuguese, although the orthography present in the sources was preserved, and it includes names in Portuguese and Spanish. The dataset has 271 rows, each with information about different baptized individuals and their connections. It has fifty-one columns, described in detail in the data documentation accompanying the dataset.

Founded in 1680, Colônia do Sacramento was the Portuguese effort to re-establish commercial routes between Brazil and Río de la Plata that once thrived during the Iberian Union (1580-1640). During its ninety-seven years under Portuguese rule, the town was attacked, besieged, and/or conquered by the Spaniards on five occasions (1680, 1705, 1735, 1762, 1777). Despite its contested nature, Colônia do Sacramento experienced population growth and developed a vibrant urban community. Colônia do Sacramento's fast-paced growth was anchored in the expanding commerce and slave trade between Spanish- and Portuguese-America. The city developed into the main entrepôt for European manufactures and Luso-Brazilian products (spirits, sugar, tobacco, sweets) and was also a gateway for a thriving slave trade. After the Portuguese resettlement in 1716, the town quickly developed a population in excess of three thousand inhabitants, of whom forty percent were enslaved in 1760. It also developed urban infrastructure with paved streets, brick houses, and a port with several cranes all inside the city walls. Suburban neighborhoods, located outside the walls, spanned several miles into the countryside, with chapels, general stores, agricultural farms, mills, and a slaughterhouse. Most upper-class and slave-holding residents were of white, European descent and utilized the slave trade and enslaved labor for commercial gain. The enslaved played an important role in providing the day-to-day food supply of the colony, while skilled wage-earning slaves were a source of income for families or widows in the town.

Although Luso-Brazilian merchants had sold slaves via Colônia do Sacramento to Buenos Aires since its re-population in 1716, the number of captives sold through the town grew substantially after the end of the South Sea Company's contract (*asiento*) for the introduction of slaves in the region in 1737. Ten years later, Colônia do Sacramento was the main gateway of slave introductions in the region, with vessels carrying enslaved Africans arriving from Salvador da Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, or directly from West-Central Africa. As a result, the role of Colônia do Sacramento as a slave trade entrepôt in Río de la Plata allowed for the formation of a large population of free and enslaved people of African descent in the urban center. *Pretos forros* (free blacks) and slaves in Sacramento were responsible for limited agricultural production, domestic services, wage-earning skilled and unskilled labor (including by artisan slaves), and stevedores in the port area. By the mid-eighteenth century, the enslaved, free blacks, and *pardos* (persons of mixed race) composed a large percentage of the population and workforce in Colônia do Sacramento.

Due to intermittent military conflicts and since Colônia do Sacramento did not have a *câmara* (town council), administrative and private sources about slave life in the town are scarce. Thus, ecclesiastical records provide an incomparable window into this eighteenth-century Luso-Brazilian port-town in Río de la Plata. The *Livro 5<sup>o</sup>. de Batismos da Igreja Matriz* transcribed here provides a unique view of Sacramento in its latest period. The 5<sup>th</sup> *Book of Baptisms* was used only in extraordinary moments, such as an imminent military threat, when authorities sent all remaining books to Rio de Janeiro (the seat of the Bishopric) as a measure of safety. In the 5<sup>th</sup> *Book of Baptisms*, the religious authorities recorded free and enslaved baptisms alongside each other, which makes this the only ecclesiastical source of Colônia do Sacramento to record free and enslaved people together. The other surviving baptismal books of Colônia do Sacramento, in contrast, only record white and free individuals. The 5<sup>th</sup> *Book* presents two snapshots of the Colônia's society, one from 1763 to 1764, during the Spanish occupation of the town, and from 1774 to mid-1777, the last years of the Colônia under Portuguese rule.

Despite tensions from military occupation and threats of invasion, the baptisms recorded in the book were consecrated in the Matriz Church (the main church in town) or, on rare occasions, at home in cases of the infant's poor health. When a household welcomed a newborn or acquired an unconverted adult slave, families arranged baptisms with godparents, witnesses, and parents present (if possible). As part of these ceremonies, religious authorities recorded the personal information and familial or enslaved connections of baptized individuals. The *5th Book of Baptisms* provides the following information about Colônia's baptized individuals: name of the child or unconverted person, date of birth, date of baptism, legal status (free or enslaved), race, and legitimacy status. Furthermore, the records provide the baptized individual's mother's name, mother's legal status, mother's origin, and mother's race, as well as the father's name, race, origin, legal status, and occupation (although such information was recorded mostly for free individuals), and godparents' names. The records of free whites typically included additional information on grandparents. In the records in which enslaved persons appear, the name of their enslavers is invariably recorded.

Comparing information on fathers highlights the racial disparities concerning legal status, occupation, and paternal legitimacy. The records reveal that, out of the 271 individuals receiving the sacrament of baptism, 125 did not have the name of the father listed. Among the 146 fathers for which we have information, free white men made up 89% (130), most of whom were from Colônia do Sacramento (24%, or 31) and from Portugal (42%, or 55). In contrast, native, black, and mixed-race fathers made up only 11% (16), most of whom were legally free and originated from throughout South America. We find only one *pardo* in the records listed as employed. The lack of data concerning *pardo*, black, and native fathers is a point of interest, specifically regarding social conceptions of legitimacy for the enslaved. Black and native male representation is very low and often absent in these sources, especially when contrasted with the considerable number of baptized black children, enslaved and free. A possible explanation for this absence is that most of the enslaved black fathers were simply not recorded as the legal father or were absent, or the father was a white person or slave owner who did not recognize the offspring. This would coincide with the high number of children without a named father born to enslaved women.

As the documentation on mothers includes more information about black, *pardas*, and white women, compiling data about mothers' race, nation, and legal status can reveal a variety of characteristics of this colonial society. Of the 265 recorded mothers, there is almost an equal rate of black (*preta*) and mixed-race (*parda* or *cabra*) mothers (52%) to white mothers (48%). Although almost all white (free) mothers (96%) were born in South America, 48% of freed mothers were *pardas* born in Sacramento, and 72% of enslaved mothers were *pretas* from either West Central Africa or West Africa. Here, associations can be drawn between the degree of blackness, enslavement, and their birthplace. A possible explanation is that since *parda* mothers did not originate from Africa, it was likely easier for mixed mothers to be born free or freed or to buy their freedom. The separation of *parda* and *preta* mothers by legal status, by which most black mothers were enslaved, and the majority of mixed-race mothers were free, is an indicator of racial dynamics and racial privilege in Colônia do Sacramento.

Lastly, an analysis of baptized individuals' godparents unveils the intricate connections between elite white and enslaved non-white communities. Within this Catholic colonial society, baptisms served to strengthen communal ties by integrating important individuals into families or linking families together through fictive kinship. Although many of these religious networks remained

divided along racial lines, others featured both white slave owners and black or mixed slaves. For example, an influential white merchant, Antonio de Freitas, served as godfather for two enslaved black children. One child belonged to a white affluent widow and slaveholder, Matilde Lopes, while the other belonged to Freitas's uncle, Alexandre Batista, a prominent trader and slaver. In both instances, white community members were using the occasion of an enslaved child's baptism to strengthen community ties. Religious authorities and enslaved individuals also participated actively in these connections. For many enslaved children, the local priest served as both their baptizer and godfather. In these cases, the godmother was often a slave owned by another affluent community member with familial or communal ties to the child's owner. Thus, networks among the enslaved and networks between enslaved and free white people were routine in this colonial society at the fringes of the empire.

This dataset has been previously made available in the Slave Societies Digital Archive, but due to the wealth of information the *5th Book of Baptisms* offers about the enslaved population of Colônia do Sacramento, we expect to reach broader audiences by publishing this dataset with the JSDP as well.<sup>1</sup> We hope scholars can further develop our knowledge about the experiences of the enslaved members of colonial societies at the fringes of empires.

## **Dates of Data Collection**

2006-2018

## **Dataset Languages**

English, Portuguese

## **Geographic Coverage**

Colonia del Sacramento, Uruguay

## **Temporal Coverage**

1763-1777

## **Document Types**

Sacramental or Religious Registry

## **Sources**

*Livro 5º de Batismos da Colônia do Sacramento*. Arquivo Histórico da Cúria Metropolitana do Rio de Janeiro. Microfilm No. 439, Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.slavesocieties.info/uruguay>.

## Methodology

The data presented in this data set was compiled by Fabrício Prado from a microfilmed copy of the *Livro 5º de Batismos da Colônia do Sacramento*. The microfilm copy was made in 1979, and it is certified by Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa under Microfilm Document Copy Certificate No. 439. Subsequently, Prado and Christen Macias checked all entries against a transcribed version published by Dalmiro da Mota Buys de Barros in *Colônia do Sacramento: Batizado, Casamentos, e Óbitos, 1690-1777* (Rio de Janeiro: Vermelho Marinho, 2012), vol.1.

The data collection followed the structure of the ecclesiastical source as it was recorded by the priests who entered the information in the original manuscript book of baptisms. As a result, most of the entries include all the variables and information available in the original manuscript, as well as a number of variables with additional information that our team derived from the existing data in the sources. For instance, information on the sex of the individuals was derived from the Portuguese or Spanish name of the individual, which normally carries gender markers, i.e. Joseph (male) or Josepha (female), Manuel (male) or Manuela (female). Similarly, the variable denoting legal status and race of free whites was imputed based on the absence of information indicating the individual was enslaved. In the absence of a skin color description and legal status, we assumed the individual was considered to be white and free. Such a deduction followed the pattern of the period of only recording racial categories for non-whites. Additionally, free whites normally had additional information on the occupation of parents, the identity of grandparents, and lack of information on the person's legal owner/enslaver; all these characteristics were taken into consideration when inputting the legal status of free whites. Information on the origin of enslaved individuals (mostly mothers) was imputed based on the ethnic descriptors utilized in the sources, normally represented as African nations (*nação Angola, nação Mina, Congo, etc.*).

On occasion, we imputed the individual's origin as being from Portuguese America when descriptors such as *crioulo* (Brazilian-born enslaved individual) and *cabra* (person of mixed Indigenous and African descent) appeared in the sources. We also imputed variables to consolidate information on broad regions of parental origins. Because of the discrepancies in the level of detail recorded for free and enslaved individuals—origin was detailed to the level of city and town for free individuals, while for the enslaved only broad regions in Africa or the Americas were noted—we created “Consolidated Origin” data for parents and grandparents. In these “Consolidated” columns, we transformed all origin data into broad regions to facilitate quantification and comparisons across the data set. Some data was only recorded for individuals of a certain legal status, such as parental occupation for free individuals or nation and legal owner's name for enslaved individuals, so we kept these variables as they appeared in the source.

We have included a ‘General Notes’ field to enter miscellaneous information present in the source that did not fit any other variable, including the personal relationships of parents, conditions in which the baby was born, or connections between the child's parents and other individuals in the community. Although such a variable is an addition to the source, the data entered under such variable was entered verbatim.

## Date of Publication

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## Data Links

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse [<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/TSDYA7>]

Linked Data Representation: Enslaved.org [[Summary Visualization](#)]

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