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Jacques Adélaïde



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Demography and Names of Slaves of Le Moule, 1845 to May 1848 *

by
Jacques ADELAIDE

INTRODUCTION

The parish of Le Moule is situated in the central part of Grande-Terre and belongs to the sugar-cane zone, which extends over the major part of the island of Grande-Terre. The sugar economy was stimulated in the first half of the nineteenth century by the fact that Le Moule was a sea-port.

I. — DOCUMENTS : THEIR ORIGIN

In the archives to be found in the Town-Hall, there is a certain number of records of births and marriages of slaves. Although censuses of slaves were undertaken a long time ago in the French West Indies, it is a result of legislation passed during the reign of Louis-Philippe in 1833 and 1839 that we have this documentation.

The principal text is a royal decree of June 11, 1839, chapter 3 of which deals with the « registration of births, deaths and marriages of slaves ».

1) Slave owners were obliged to declare « before the

* Communication présentée à la Troisième Conférence annuelle des Historiens antillais (Université de Guyane, Georgetown, 15-17 avril 1971).

mayor of the parish in which their slaves lived », births, deaths and marriages of their slaves.

2) The registration of births and deaths had to be done within three days. In principle, the newborn had to be registered within 40 days ; the mayor had to verify deaths himself or have them verified by his appointed official before burial could take place. Marriages had to be registered within five days.

3) Information had to be given not only about the slaves but also about those who went to register the births, etc. (master, plantation manager or trustee).

From 1845 to May 1848, about 1500 certificates of births, marriages and deaths were made out. February 1848 saw the fall of the July Monarchy and the proclamation of the Second Republic. From April to May, 1848, prospects for the abolition of slavery became more apparent. It is, however, interesting to note that, until abolition, registration of births etc. continued to be done before the Mayor of the parish of Le Moule. The 1848 Register stops at May 26 and the last certificate concerning a slave was a birth certificate.

This legislation enacted during the reign of Louis-Philippe, by giving real civil status to the slaves, can, in my opinion, be seen to reflect the general policy of the July Monarchy in regard to slavery, a policy oriented towards gradual emancipation, in spite of the resistance of the colonists.

II. — FORM OF CERTIFICATES

The certificates indicated whether the person who made the declaration was the proprietor and/or manager, or a trustee, or simply an inhabitant of the estate to which the slave belonged.

As far as the slave was concerned, mention was made of his name, his nick-name [if any], his age, his sex, his marital status, the estate on which he was born, was married, and on which he died. In the case of a birth, similar information was provided on the relatives of the slave.

Observations.

a) Generally, the slave had a registration number. But we were able to discover a case of non-registration in 1847.

The certificate specifies that the slave in question, a certain Marguerite, 75 years old, « formerly belonged to Miss Nicole who allowed her to enjoy de facto liberty ». Non-registration was doubtless the sign of this de facto liberty.

b) A certain number of certificates gave more specific physical descriptions : for example, the slave was described as « red-skinned » — obviously mulatto slaves (today mulattoes are called « red-skinned »).

c) The administrative centre of the « commune » was a little town by Guadeloupean standards. It is therefore not surprising to find that a certain number of slaves were born, married or died at Le Moule.

Out of 98 births that took place between January and June 1847, at least 5 took place at Le Moule, in the house of the master (or the mistress) « situated in this town ».

Out of 128 death certificates made out between January and August 1847, nine of these were concerned with deaths which took place in the town of Le Moule.

d) It does not seem that one can talk about absenteeism on the part of plantation owners. Certain declarations were made by estate managers. But these were special cases, plantations that were generally bequeathed to heirs without being sub-divided. We find, for example, François Desprez, manager of the Boyvin plantation belonging to the Boyvin heirs ; Minpeza, manager of an estate belonging to Lemoine-Maudet Bros.

e) I have already pointed out that registration had to be done within a certain time limit. For births and deaths, this limite was respected. This was not the case for marriages.

In general, marriages were registered on the actual day of the ceremony. In some cases, however, one notices that the marriages were not registered for several months. For example, the marriage of the slaves Simon and Celeste which took place on July 3, 1847, was not registered until November 26, 1847. It appears that the masters and the administrator accorded less importance to these registrations than to others.

f) A significant change took place in the registration of marriages. In 1845 and after 1846, marriage was authorized by the master or his trustee. In 1847 it was simply stated that « slaves X and Y entered a contract of marriage ». It seems, therefore, that there was a certain degree of freedom in regard to matrimonial alliances among slaves.

III. — DEMOGRAPHY OF THE SLAVES OF LE MOULE

Years	Birth certificates	Death certificates	Marriages
1845	202	213	3
1846	194	231	2
1847	209	261	31

Possible conclusions.

1) Death certificates outnumbered birth certificates. It even seems that the disproportion increased between 1845 and 1847 :

+	11	in	1845
+	37	in	1846
+	52	in	1847

One can conclude that the number of deaths has been underestimated. Nonetheless : 1) The outnumbering of births by deaths reflected a general tendency in the demography of slaves. (Cf. Debien : *Destinées d'esclaves à la Martinique.*)

2) Statistics on population, commerce and navigation, for Guadeloupe show for the years 1845-46-47 that deaths outnumbered births :

Year	Births	Deaths
1845	3934	4104
1846	3604	3922
1847	3758	4395

These figures are all the more significant because they are the statistics for the entire population (free and non-free).

One can say that the decrease in number noticed with regard to the slaves of Le Moule indicated a general tendency throughout the colony.

3) The number of birth certificates hardly increased. On the other hand, increase in deaths (according to the certificates) was more marked. It seems that the decrease in the slave population was influenced mainly by deaths.

There were few marriages in 1845 and 1846. The liberalisation of the slave system subsequent to the Mackau Act

(July 1845) explains the increase in the number of marriages in 1847 and at the beginning of 1848.

Observations on births and deaths.

a) Births : 1) Information on the age of the mother is not very precise. One notices, however, that it was especially between the ages of 21 to 22 years and 32 to 34 years that women bore children. Few births before the age of 20 are noticed.

2) Of 98 births certificates issued in 1847, 4 cases of children being born of marriages between slaves are recorded. In the eyes of the law and of the Church, there was a predominance of illegitimate children. The fact that the father was not mentioned does not mean, however, that he was not known.

Death certificates.

1) One is struck by the incidence of mortality among adults. Few slaves seemed to have reached old age, i.e. to have exceeded 60 years.

2) One single case of a married slave is recorded among the 130 deaths certificates made out between January and August 1847.

Marriages seemed to have taken place late in life, about 60 % of the marriages recorded between 1845 and 1840 took place among people over 29 years of age. In a certain number of cases, the husband was registered dead either the day of the marriage or the day after. Registration of the marriage took place even after the death of the husband. Examples :

a) Antoine who married Eulalie December 22, 1847, died December 23 (certificate N° 507). Antoine's age is given as 32.

b) Etienne called Saint Prix who married Constance on March 24 1847 died two days later on, March 26, aged 30 (certificate N° 427).

What conclusions can be drawn from these facts? It seems as if marriage was intended to regularise a relationship. It took place at the end of one's life, or when one of the partners was almost at death's door. Marriage was the final goal of family life, rather than the beginning.

Of 54 marriages recorded between 1845 and May 1848,

only 2 took place among slaves who did not belong to the same owner. One is led to believe that the life of the slave was restricted by the system of slavery, that the plantation remained the framework in which they existed.

IV. — NAMES AND NICKNAMES OF SLAVES

Besides their registration number, the slaves were designated by a name which was in reality a nickname. These surnames/given names are in many instances of Christian origin. One finds no trace of surnames/given names inspired by antiquity or by literary works. The choice of surname/given name was less varied than in the 18th century.

Complicated cases.

1) *The slave borne to married parents* : According to the certificate, the child received a nickname and not a name. The child born to Ursula and Michael received a Christian name Saint-Joseph.

2) *Other factors that cause complication* : Use of the nickname that was formally and legally recognised. On the average, it seems as if 10 to 15 % of the slaves received a nickname, sometimes from birth.

Form that the nickname assumed.

1) The nickname was a Christian name or a diminutive of a nickname — e.g. : Louise was called Françoise. Celeste was called Suzon.

2) The nickname refers to a rank in the family. Thus one finds Petite Maman, or Florine called Première Fille (First Daughter).

3) The nickname might refer to a physical quality. Petit, petite, grand, petite mauvais. It might also refer to a classification in the hierarchy of colour (Capresse, Petit Nègre, Nègresse).

4) The nicknames might refer to the ethnic or geographic origin of the slave. Thus in 1846, we find a reference to Adelaide called Ibo, Isaac called Congo. In June 1847, the Clarisse was called Martinique.

A particular case : « Nègresse » was sometimes used

as a nickname. From constant usage, the nickname doubtless became a family name or a given name.

The result was a simple system of assigning names which did not exclude a certain degree of flexibility.

CONCLUSION

The demography of slaves of Le Moule from 1845 to May 1848 does not contradict what we know of the demographic pattern of the slaves in the colony — mortality exceeding birth rate — unions outside of marriage. The choice of names and nicknames was less varied than in the 18th century. It was more closely inspired by the French way of giving names.

JACQUES ADELAIDE,

*Centre Universitaire des Antilles
et de la Guyane, Pointe-à-Pitre.*

