
Santos e Silva, Ana Joaquina dos

(1800?-1859),

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wealthy Luso-African merchant, moneylender, entrepreneur, and slave trader in Angola, was born early in the nineteenth century, the daughter of a Portuguese father and a mestiza or mulatta mother. Ana Joaquina dos Santos e Silva, a mulatta or mestiza, became the wealthiest woman merchant and possibly the wealthiest of all merchants in her day in Angola, a colony of Portugal. Little is known of her early years, except that she married in succession two successful Portuguese merchants, both slave traders. When they died, their widow, Ana Joaquina, inherited their properties and became a wealthy entrepreneur on her own.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Angola's largely coastal colonial society composed of two nuclei at Luanda and Benguela featured an Atlantic slave-trading economy. This traffic was dominated by merchants of Portugal, Brazil, and Angola, although the wealthiest merchants were Brazilian. Luanda's population consisted of a majority of Africans, perhaps a thousand or so white Portuguese, and three thousand Luso-Africans of mixed race, described as mestiza, mulatto, pardo, or *filhos do pais* ("sons of the country"). The elite consisted of army and navy officers from Portugal and the merchant class, whereas most of the white Portuguese in Angola were *degredados*, or exiled or transported convicts sentenced in Portugal for a variety of crime, including political dissent or rebellion.

Although Portugal's oldest ally, Britain, had applied great pressure on Portugal to follow Britain's example and abolish the slave trade, Portugal was slow to comply. Finally in 1836 Portugal passed legislation to abolish the slave trade in her dominions, but this had only a marginal impact in Angola from 1836 to 1849. The Portuguese, Brazilian, and Angolan slave traders resisted pressures to end this tragic yet lucrative business, and their resistance was assisted by widespread corruption and mismanagement in Portugal's governance of Angola. Virtually all officials sent from Portugal received salaries that, to quote a noted foreign historian, were "bad, late or never," and the entire economy of the slavocratic society in Angola still depended on the Atlantic slave trade. Another reason why abolition of slave trade lagged was that traditional African authorities who profited from that trade also resisted this change.

In 1850 Brazil abolished slave trade in Brazil. This belated measure doomed the slave trade in Angola since most of the slaves taken in Angola had been sold in Brazil. By this time Ana Joaquina had diversified her investments in legitimate commerce and agriculture and may have depended less on slave-trading profits.

The last decades of Angola's slave trade era, the 1830s and 1840s, witnessed a spurt in that trade, the failure of governors from Portugal to enforce abolition, and a revival of merchant prosperity. This was the time when Ana Joaquina dos Santos e Silva came into her own as a powerful, wealthy widow. Her property included a large number of African slaves, some of whom were domestic servants who labored on Ana Joaquina's various estates, including a large plantation of sugar at Icollo e Bengo, in the Bengo River valley north of Luanda. Besides the mansion on this plantation, she owned another mansion, of three stories, a rare feature in her day, in the Bungo neighborhood of Luanda. This stately home survived to become a nationally protected historic site. Her property also included plantations in the interior district of Golungo Alto and farms in the newly colonized south coast of Angola, at Mocamedes, modern Namibe.

Besides being an owner of slaves and of plantations that produced sugar, millet, and coffee, "Dona Ana Mulata," the widow, owned a fleet of ships engaged in the slave trade. Her ships traded between Angola and the Brazilian ports of Baia, Recife, Pernambuco, and Rio de Janeiro as well as carried on a trade between Lisbon and Angola and Angola and Montevideo, Uruguay. Her lifestyle as a wealthy merchant featured using the labor of many slaves not only on her plantations and on her ships, but also in her houses where slaves were domestic servants. When Ana Joaquina traveled, she was followed by an entourage of slaves. Since travel was arduous and even dangerous, and since Angola's hot and humid climate nurtured many tropical diseases that killed animals as well as people, travel on horse or mule back remained rare until decades later. By tradition and custom in Angola as well as in Brazil and Portugal, the elite rarely walked any distance but moved in covered *machillas* or protected litters carried by slaves.

One effective measure of the relative size of this wealthy merchant's fortune was that her treasure was spent not only on investments but also in lending money. She lent money not only to other Angolan merchants and traders but also, notably, to the treasury of Portugal's strapped colonial government. In another initiative she assisted the colonial government in the transport of horses and mules used by the colonial military forces in Angola. Ships from her personal fleet were used in 1839 to transport shipments of such animals from South America to Angola.

Another of her ventures in southern Angola is documented in a petition to the government in 1843 in which six other merchants with business in Luanda and Ana Joaquina dos Santos e Silva proposed to establish a regular shipping service that would link Luanda with the new southern coastal settlement of Mocamedes (today Namibe). For whatever reason, including perhaps the official suspicion in Lisbon or Luanda that such a shipping service was merely a front for the African slave trade between those two settlements, the Luanda-Mocamedes shipping link was not instituted at that time. Instead, a fishing business also based in the new southern town to be settled by Portuguese fishermen from Algarve, Portugal, and from Brazil was established after 1850.

Ana Joaquina's merchant investments were not limited to the Atlantic slave trade traffic, to coastal fishing and shipping, or to sugar plantations outside Luanda. She invested also in long-distance trade between the coast of Angola and the central African states of the interior. She lent money in trading schemes to Portuguese traders of the interior, *sertanejos*, and to African and mestizo traders, or *pombeiros*, whose trading expeditions linked the Portuguese-dominated coast with the African-kingdom dominated far interior. One of her more prominent trade partners in such schemes was the Portuguese trader-explorer Joaquim Rodrigues Graca, who was commissioned by Portugal in 1843 to explore and to establish trade links with the central African kingdom of Luanda that included territory

in what became Angola and Congo (Zaire). Although the Portuguese scheme to suborn the king of Luanda into a dependent political relationship with Portugal's Angolan colony and to link Portuguese settlements in Angola with those of Mozambique to the east failed, trade between Luanda and Angola continued.

Ana Joaquina dos Santos e Silva died in Lisbon in 1859.

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