

# How to find sources about slavery

**Until the abolition of slavery in the Danish West Indies in 1848, enslaved individuals and slavery were a fundamental part of life on the islands. Therefore, there is information about enslaved individuals and slavery in almost all records from that time.**

This makes it difficult to select the most important groups of sources because it depends on the aspect of slavery one is interested in. The groups of sources in these guidelines have been selected to demonstrate the breadth of slavery-related topics in documents in the Danish National Archives. Thus, the calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas show how they were sold at public auctions, while the reports on the work of company slaves provide an insight into the different kinds of work the enslaved had to perform. Reports from the plantations and the statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804 illustrate conditions on the plantations, e.g. the number of enslaved individuals, housing conditions, health conditions and work tasks. Finally, the records of the court martial in Frederik's Fort 1848 demonstrate how the Danish colonial power reacted to slave rebellions, while the certificates of freedom document which enslaved laborers achieved or bought their freedom.

An example of how to use archives containing information about slavery could be in relation to [the health of the enslaved](#). The monthly hospital reports from the royal plantations on St. Croix show which enslaved laborers were ill, when, for how long and the illness they had.

## The most important groups of sources

- Calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas 1724-1739
  - *You will find the following in Calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas*  
The calculations consist of forms written during the slave auctions. They contain information about, *inter alia*, the buyers' names, how many enslaved persons they bought, the enslaved persons' gender, age (adults or children), physical condition (healthy or sick), and price. The reports can provide you with an insight into the slave trade that took place when the ships of the Danish West India and Guinea Company arrived at St. Thomas from Africa.
  - *This is how the calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas are structured and organized*  
The calculations are organized chronologically, but have not been preserved for all years between 1724 and 1739. Nor can it be assumed that the registered enslaved individuals include all enslaved that arrived at the islands in the years in question. Even though the Danish West India and Guinea Company had a monopoly on importing enslaved laborers, some were also imported illegally. These enslaved laborers are not registered here. The accounts are written in Danish (Gothic).

- *What you should know when using the calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas*
  - **The slave-owners' names:** As the names of the enslaved are not stated, it is not possible to find a specific enslaved person in this way. However, if you know the owner's name, you can investigate whether he or she bought enslaved laborers from the company on St. Thomas between 1724 and 1739.
- *Calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas are archived here*

The West India and Guinea Company, Board of Directors (archive no. 446), Calculations of slaves sold at St. Thomas 1724-1739 (no. 118).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)
- Reports on the work of field and skilled Company slaves 1751-1754
  - *You will find the following in reports on the work of the company slaves*

The reports can help you to gain an insight into everyday working life for the field slaves and artisan slaves who were owned by the Danish West India and Guinea Company. The reports, in the shape of forms, provide information about the work of enslaved laborers in the field, day by day, on the company's plantations on St. Thomas and St. Croix, and about the work of the enslaved working as artisans in the company's buildings on St. Thomas. They state, *inter alia*, how many enslaved laborers performed what work and for how long, what the enslaved were called, and absence due to illness or running away (marronage). The work of the artisan slaves in particular is very precisely described. For example, that two carpenter slaves spent Thursday March 9, 1752 planing boards for the floor of the magazine at Fort Christian in Charlotte Amalie.
  - *This is how reports on the work of the company slaves are structured and organized*

The reports are divided into two: field slaves and artisan slaves. Each report is written chronologically in Danish (Gothic).
  - *What you should know when using reports on the work of the company slaves*
    - **Work function:** You should decide whether you are interested in field slaves or artisan slaves.
  - *Reports on the work of the company slaves are archived here*

The West India and Guinea Company, Board of Directors (archive no. 446), Reports on the work of field and skilled Company slaves 1751-1754 (no. 119).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)

- Reports from the plantations 1787-1847

- *You will find the following in reports from the plantations*

The reports from the plantations can help you to gain an insight into the living conditions of the enslaved laborers on a number of plantations on St. Croix in particular between 1787 and 1847. There are three types of reports that provide different types of information:

- **Weekly reports:** Weekly reports on the labor force of enslaved laborers that worked, which enslaved were ill with what, which enslaved had been punished and for what, and the supplies of food etc. on each plantation.
- **Police reports:** Monthly reports on which enslaved laborers had been punished for what and what the punishment was.
- **Hospital reports:** Monthly reports on which enslaved laborers were ill, when, for how long and with what.

Reports from the plantations come from estates that owed money to the Danish state, and the purpose was to provide the state with ongoing information on operations. The reason that so many plantations owed money is that in 1786 the Danish state took over a number of big loans that plantation owners had taken out in the Netherlands.

- *This is how reports from the plantations are structured and organized*

The collection of plantation reports is organized geographically by island. However, the great majority of reports are from St. Croix. The reports are then organized alphabetically according to the name of the plantation, and finally chronologically. Each report usually consists of a pre-printed form that is filled in in Danish (Gothic), but some forms are filled in in handwriting only. The series of forms for each individual plantation does not cover the whole of the period 1787-1847, but shorter periods. The period that is best covered is the 1830s-40s.

- *What you should know when using reports from the plantations*

- **The name of the plantation:** You should know the name of the plantation you want to investigate.

- *Reports from the plantations are archived here*

Reports from the plantations are archived under the West Indian Debt Liquidation Commission on St. Croix and Thomas/St. John, respectively:

- **St. Croix**
  - The West India Debt Liquidation Directorate, West Indian Debt Liquidation Commission on St. Croix (archive no. 681), Files and

reports concerning individual plantations on St. Croix 1787-1847 (nos. 46.17.1 - 76).

[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)

- **St. Thomas and St. John**

- The West India Debt Liquidation Directorate, West Indian Debt Liquidation Commission on St. Thomas and St. John (archive no. 534).

- Files concerning estate Flamingo Pannen and the widow van der Pool 1780-1787 (no. 20.6.1).

[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)

- Files concerning estates Adrian and Herman Farm 1828-1847 (no. 20.7.1).

[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)

- The statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804

- *You will find the following in the statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804*

The statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804 can help you to gain an overview of the composition of the enslaved population in 1804. The statistics contain information about gender, age, civil status, place of birth, occupation, religion and how many enslaved persons lived on each plantation, how many slave houses there were and how much land was laid out for the cultivation of food for the enslaved. However, the statistics only cover 1804 and the plantations on the three islands. The towns are not included.

When the ten-year grace period up to the abolition of the Danish trans-Atlantic slave trade had expired (1793-1803), many plantation owners still thought that it was impossible to maintain the number of enslaved laborers without importing new ones. Therefore a questionnaire was launched in 1804 to clarify whether it was necessary to prolong the transition period. The statistics are based on data from this questionnaire. The result was that it was decided not to prolong the period.

- *This is how the statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804 are structured and organized*

The statistics consist of forms that are filed together with other documents from the "Commission for Improvement of the Slave Trade". The collection of forms is organized geographically by island and then by quarter. Likewise, each form is organized geographically by quarter, and each plantation is listed by land registry number. There are also special forms that sum up all data from each island and the entire colony. The forms are written in Danish (Gothic).

- *What you should know when using the statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804*
  - **The location and name of the plantation:** In order to find data from a specific plantation, you should know the island and the quarter it was in and what it was called.
- *The statistics of enslaved laborers from 1804 are archived here*

Chamber of Customs, West India and Guinea Office (archive no. 365), Documents concerning the Commission for Improvement of the Slave Trade (no. 424).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)
- Certificates of freedom c. 1757-1832
  - *You will find the following in the certificates of freedom*

Certificates of freedom can help you to find out if an enslaved laborer succeeded in gaining his or her freedom during the course of the person's life and when this took place. The certificate of freedom is either a page with pre-printed text with the name and the date of issue filled in, or the whole text is handwritten. The certificate always contains the name of the freed person and usually the former owner's name. In addition, there can be information such as the value of the freed person and who paid for the person to be freed if it was not the owner.

The certificate of freedom was issued by the government and was to be carried by the freed person at all times as proof of his or her free status. Some of the certificates of freedom only exist in copy form as the original was issued to the freed person. The series of certificates of freedom is not complete and one cannot be sure of finding the names of all freed persons.
  - *This is how the certificates of freedom are structured and organized*

The collection of certificates of freedom is organized geographically by island and then chronologically. The certificates of freedom are often not in an organized order in the individual box, but in some cases they are ordered alphabetically or chronologically. The certificates of freedom are written in Danish (Gothic) and English (Latin).
  - *What you should know when using the certificates of freedom*
    - **Where:** You should know on which island the enslaved person/freed person you want to investigate lived.
    - **When:** You should know the period you are interested in.

- **The name of the enslaved person/freed person:** You should know the name of the person you are looking for.
- *The certificates of freedom are archived here*  
The certificates of freedom are archived in the archives of the West Indian Government and the St. Thomas and St. John Government, respectively:
  - **St. Croix**
    - The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Subject files: Social and cultural matters
      - Certificates of freedom for enslaved laborers on St. Croix 1769-1807 (no. 3.81.577).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)
      - Certificates of freedom for enslaved laborers on St. Croix 1808-1832 (no. 3.81.578).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)
      - Certificates of freedom for enslaved laborers on St. Croix, A-Ø 1800-1810 (no. 3.81.579).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)
  - **St. Thomas and St. John**
    - The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Register of certificates of freedom for St. Thomas 1816-1830 (no. 3.81.576).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)
    - St. Thomas and St. John Government (archive no. 693), Subject files: Social and cultural matters, Copies of certificates of freedom issued etc. 1757-1800 (no. 11.53.180).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)
- Records of the court martial in Frederik's Fort 1848
  - *You will find the following in the records of the court martial*  
The records are from the court martial that was established after the slave rebellion in 1848, which led to the abolition of slavery in the Danish West Indies. The court was set up to judge persons who had broken the law and caused damage to persons and property during the rebellion. It was primarily former enslaved laborers who were convicted.

The court records can provide you with insight into what took place during the crucial rebellion up to the abolition of slavery and what the Danish colonial power

subsequently did to restore law and order. It contains information about the interrogations, the proceedings and the sentences that were pronounced.

- *This is how the records of the court martial are structured and organized*  
The records are organized chronologically after the date of the interrogations, and the proceedings in court and are concluded with the pronouncement of sentence. The records are written in Danish (Gothic).
- *What you should know when using the records of the court martial*
  - **Name:** Knowing the name of the accused can make it easier to find your way around the material. The records do not have an index, but the names are underlined and thus easier to find by skimming the text.
- *The records of the records of the court martial are archived here*  
The West Indian Government (archive no. 678), Military Court in Fort Frederik 1848, Court records (no. 3.81.223).  
[Link to Arkivalieronline](#)