

## **The History of Slaves in Salaga (The great Slave-Market)**

Written by Osman Zulaiya, Abdul-Wahab-Suwad, Al-Hassan Assana and more students of Form1 and Form2 of St. Peter's International School, Salaga/Ghana

This is a very cruel and sad story about the history of slavery around the "Salaga Slave-Market". This is all about how the slave buyers treated our beloved people. This history is very sad and I think everyone who hears of it will feel a sign of sympathy for them.

Salaga is a town, located in East Gonja District in the northern half of Ghana. Salaga served as a key market for Moshi and Hausa people, coming from the north and Ashantis, the dominant ethnic group in Ghana, mainly for the busy regional trade of slaves and kola (-nuts) in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The control of Salaga gave the Ashantis an upper hand in slave trade to the north and south.

Located in the south Sahel, Salaga, also known as "Timbuktu of the South" for its cosmopolitan population, had different types of trades.

Back in former days, slavery was a business venture. Slavery started at Salaga in 1732 and ended 1892. During this time Salaga was the largest Slave Market in Afrika. Perpetuation on this uncivilized activity included Moshi and Hausa tribes, coupled with the chiefs and other key individuals within the town.

When the slaves were brought from different parts of Africa to Salaga, the chiefs and other key individuals took their share and later sold them to buyers. If you weren't a "prey", of course you gained. You were left in the care of landlords who decided on, what to do with you. Sometimes even the people themselves became victims.

Because it was so barbaric, there was no sympathy even between the indigenous people. The rule was, that once you were sold to a slave buyer or master, you were subjected to his or her control. Some slaves were bought to serve as laborers, wives, husbands and children.

There were no places to store these slaves, so most of the time they were in fact tied around the Baobab tree in the market. This cause of injustice was okayed by almost everybody in the community.

Today the exchange of goods and services between customers and buyers is done with money. Formerly business deals were done with gun powder, guns, salt, sugar and sometimes foodstuffs in exchange for human beings. In Salaga the Ashantis dealt with cowries in buying slaves. About 500 000 slaves were

taken to the coast by them and sold to Europeans, who shipped them to America.

The town Salaga and the Slave-Market have some unique features.

Slaves who died in the course of the trade were dumped under the Baobab tree. In effect, the Baobab tree served as a cemetery for slaves. Their bodies were fed on by vultures which gave the site the name “RAFIA ANGULU”, meaning literally “River of the Vultures”, because close to the site was a small stream.

Another feature is the “OUAKAM BAYOU” which literally means “Bathing slaves”. This is the place, where all the slaves were bathed and rubbed with sheabutter to make them shine. They gave them food to eat to make them look attractive enough, to find buyers for good sales.

You will have the occasion to see some relicts such as shackles, chains, spears and guns in the Slave-Museum of Salaga, which were used by the slave masters to carry out their activities.

In the southern part of Ghana slaves had to wait in dungeons before leaving with ships for America through the “Door of no Return”. Such dungeons did not exist in Salaga. The Baobab tree within the Market was a helping hand for keeping slaves. All, the slave masters needed to do, was to tie or chain the slaves against the tree subjecting them to impending dangers. The original Baobab tree fell on June 24<sup>th</sup> 1970. A new baobab tree was planted to replace the old one in February 1989. Under this tree you can find big stones, most likely to be igneous rocks, on which the masters sat while the transaction was going on.

The slaves were fed with Gari (made from cassava/Manioc) and other food stuffs. Gari was predominant because it was economical to come by. The slaves had their baths and drank water from the wells, which they dug themselves. Some of these wells are still in use today.

In Salaga slavery has abolished itself by marriage. Till date sacrifices and libations which entails the use of cow milk and “Maasa” (made from maize) is offered at the slave cemetery inside Salaga every Friday and Monday in remembrance of the ancestral souls of the departed slaves.