

## The Copper Cauldrons aboard the *Henrietta Marie*

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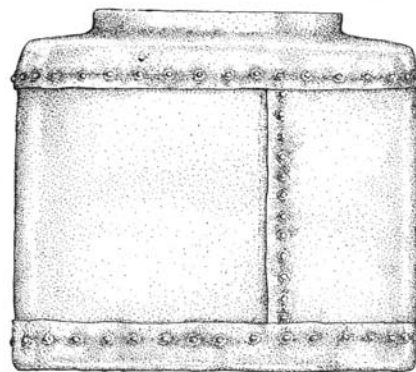
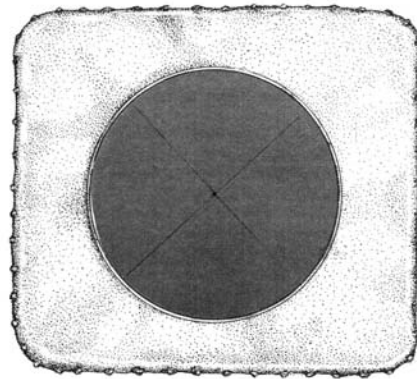
High in the reef, at the northern extreme of the *Henrietta Marie*'s site, two riveted, copper cauldrons were discovered. These two pieces are similar in design, but of strikingly different sizes. With near certainty, these copper cauldrons were used as cooking vessels aboard the ship. The smaller of the two is a rectangular, two chambered one, with two coamed openings at the top. The other is a very large cube with a single opening, also coamed. It is assumed fitted lids covered the openings, though none has been found. When considering the nature of the *Henrietta Marie*'s business, the need for two cauldrons like these becomes evident.

Aboard a slaver sailing from Africa to the Americas, there were two distinct populations - the cargo of slaves, and the crew. Though the Africans outnumbered the European sailors by 10 or 20:1, they shared no comforts. This indignity can be measured through many different ways when looking at a slave ship, including the different foods that were customarily consumed onboard by each of the two groups. Though the actual foodstuffs generally do not preserve on shipwreck sites, the galley items, and tableware do. When one looks at differences between the cauldrons, it becomes clearer each was carried to accommodate the differences in the people on board..

Contemporary accounts from those who sailed on slavers record many of the common foods served to Africans, and how they were prepared. Over and over again, the same items appear - "horse" beans, yams, rice, "Indian" wheat, and "mandioca." In a typical passage, Alexander Falconbridge, a slave-ship surgeon, wrote in 1788,

" The diet of the negroes, while on board, consists chiefly of horse-beans, boiled to the consistence of a pulp; of boiled yams and rice, and sometimes of a small quantity of beef or pork. The latter are frequently taken from the provisions laid in for the sailors. They sometimes make use of a sauce, composed of palm-oil, mixed with

flour, water, and pepper, which the sailors call *slabber-sauce*. Yams are the favorite food of the Eboe, or Bight negroes, and rice or corn, of those from the Gold and Windward Coasts; each preferring the produce of their native soil... The horse beans and rice, with which they are fed aboard ship, are chiefly taken from Europe."



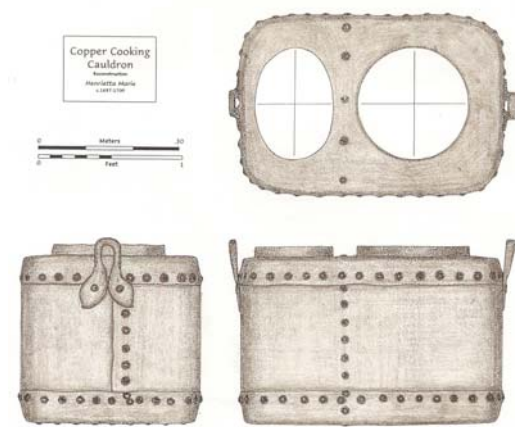
The Large Copper Cauldron from the *Henrietta Marie*.  
Drawing Robert Cummings/MFMHS.

In 1699, James Barbot of the *Albion Frigate* described that the Africans on his ship were fed twice a day in groups of ten from a wooden tub, with each receiving a wooden spoon, and a coconut shell of water. Assuming these diets

were typical, it would appear that nutritional requirements were, at best, being only minimally met, and dehydration must have been a persistent reality.

The crew of the *Henrietta Marie* would have fared better. Typically a merchant ship of the time would have been stocked with salt-meats, cheese, peas, biscuit, beer, brandy, and rum. Additional fresh provisions would have been acquired in Africa, and the sea could always provide plenty of fish and turtles. Two pewter plates found on the site, scarred with utensil marks, remain from their tableware.

from the *Henrietta Marie*, evidence for inequality is almost always found.



The Small *Henrietta Marie* Cauldron.  
Drawing David Moore/MFMHS.

Applying these scenarios to the cauldrons, the larger likely held the voluminous, plain, single-course meals needed to keep the Africans sustained. This vessel, with a capacity of almost exactly one-half of a cubic yard, would have served well to hold the large amounts to be cooked for the 200+ Africans. Its single chamber reflects the monotony of their diet. When this item was discovered, its bottom was filled with chain. At the time, in the third leg of the triangular voyage with the Africans already sold as slaves, it simply made for a nice storage space. The smaller cauldron with two chambers, one of exactly one cubic foot, and the other one and a half cubic feet, could have been used to prepare two hot courses for the crew, which numbered around eighteen.

Oppression was inherent in the trade of Africans to the West Indies, but when going beyond the surface, and examining the meaning and purpose of even apparently benign objects