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Suriname and the Atlantic World, 1650-1800

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Part II: Connections

Paramaribo's place in the connections between the plantations and the rest of the Atlantic world was not solely that of gatekeeper. Over time it developed many other functions in the colony, not in the least because of the geography of town, located close where Suriname's main rivers merge and flow to sea. The plantations used the waterways to connect to other plantations, with enslaved Africans bringing supplies, tools or news back and forth. Paths between plantations existed, but real roads were only found along a few canals in the northern part of the colony in the late eighteenth century. All those who arrived in Suriname travelled on the rivers. Recently arrived captives from Africa were transported to their prospective plantations, and captains and brokers went upstream to barter for the price of return shipments. During the era of slave-based plantation production the rivers, creeks and the occasional canal formed Suriname's vascular system which was not only transporting transatlantic commodities, but was just as important for the local circulation of goods. The rivers also provided space for illicit exchanges, and people traded or smuggled goods and exchanged news.

Part II deals primarily with Paramaribo and its development as a local centre with its markets and services. The chapter shows not only how the city functioned as a place from where local distribution was organised, but also what the limits were when it came to the development of local docking and distilling industry. The Atlantic world not only connected cities, but as the chapter on migration will show it also included connections deep into the European hinterland. Lastly the slave trade is examined, with an emphasis on the changes in the slave trade in terms of overseas representation and the organisation of debt and payment between the plantation owners and the slave traders.