

African rivers played a crucial role once the Atlantic slave trade began. A large number of slaves came from decentralized societies far in the interior. These stateless, or *acephalous*, societies formed small rural communities located in the region between the forest states and large savanna states and middle-Niger cities such as Jenne and the Hausa city-states. With less organization and fewer resources, the acephalous societies were weak, which made their people more vulnerable to be captured and carried via the waterways that had long brought commerce from the interior to the coast. Indeed, European traders would call the water routes the Slave Rivers.