

# The archaeology of Mauritius

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*The archaeology of Atlantic slavery has been widely studied in recent years, but less attention has been paid to the post-slavery system of indenture that transported contract labourers from South Asia, China and Africa to new lands. Colonial Mauritius has left abundant archaeological remains, not least the cemetery for slaves and freed slaves established at Le Morne in the nineteenth century. Analysis of aDNA has demonstrated that individuals buried at Le Morne were of Madagascan and East African (probably Mozambican) origin, testifying to the long-distance movement of slave labour.*

*Keywords:* Indian Ocean, Mauritius, colonial period archaeology, slavery, archaeology of indenture

## Introduction

The contemporary view of Mauritius as an island idyll with high-end tourism belies a turbulent past. Successive imperial administrations controlled the island from the sixteenth century, with periods of Dutch (1598–1710), French (1721–1810) and British (1810–1968) hegemony. This article focuses specifically on the work of the Mauritian Archaeology and Cultural Heritage (MACH) project (Seetah *et al.* 2011), and reports on archaeological explorations concerned with slavery and indenture. By approaching the ‘island as a site’, the MACH project aims to connect disjointed locations to form a cohesive network of nodes that testify to changing cultural and economic drivers, as evidenced in the material record. The main aim is to link local archaeology to international research agendas and identify key areas of the archaeology of the island that may have resonance within the wider discipline. Mauritius offers a unique regional case study, providing nuanced approaches to slavery, diaspora and colonisation that are particularly useful for comparison with Atlantic archaeology.

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## **The development of archaeology, heritage and archaeological heritage**

Archaeology is a relatively new subject in Mauritius, and the preservation of the archaeological record is jeopardised by two local factors. In the first place, the economic success of the island has led to rapid development geared towards providing services and manufacturing. Secondly, although cultural heritage is protected by the directives of the National Heritage Fund, and mandatory environmental assessments before construction are aimed at safeguarding the ecosystem, there is no legislation specifically designed to protect archaeological sites. Despite the absence of legislative protection, or any real pedagogic tradition, the value of archaeology to local communities has been increasingly recognised since 2003 and this has led to internal pressure to develop the discipline.

It is remarkable that despite its significance as a highly complex node within the labour-trading network of the Indian Ocean and beyond (Allen 2008)—a picture corroborated by genetic studies of the modern population (Fregel *et al.* 2014)—the significance of Mauritius was not immediately recognised by the archaeological community in the way it was by historians (e.g. Teelock 1998, 2009; Allen 1999; Vaughan 2005). Mauritius was also used for the ‘Great Experiment’, a trial by the British to replace slavery with ‘free’ labour (Drescher 2002). As a consequence, our understanding of key issues from the colonial period in this region, specifically trade, exchange and labour provision, has been informed from an historical perspective. Despite nuanced and original research by historians of slavery (Teelock 1998; Allen 1999), the perspectives gleaned from records of imperial administration remain biased. Understandably, the historic model was used by early archaeological studies that centred on colonial enclaves, particularly the Dutch presence (Floore 2008), and later imperial infrastructure such as the naval outpost at Île de la Passe (Summers & Summers 2008) and the plantation system (Summers & Summers 2009). The growth of interest in heritage, together with initiatives campaigning for UNESCO inscription, led to archaeological investigations focusing on slavery and indenture—topics of greater relevance to the overwhelming majority of the modern population—and specifically excavations at Apprvasi Ghat (Chowdhury 2003) and Le Morne (Chowdhury 2006; Teelock 2012: 102).

It was not until specific discoveries at Le Morne, Trianon and Bois Marchand, alongside work at Apprvasi Ghat, that the potential of the island to contribute tangible new perspectives on slave and indentured life-ways was fully realised. Mauritian archaeology underwent a transformative process and became a means of understanding populations defined in the historical sources as slaves or labourers; it gave a much-needed voice to otherwise muted communities.

## **From the ground up: the Mauritian Archaeology and Cultural Heritage project**

The development of heritage and the increasing engagement of local communities with their archaeological past have encouraged archaeologists to approach research and excavation in more sensitive ways. There is an awareness of the need to explain the significance of multivocality in a region that has a rich historical archive but a poorly understood

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Figure 1. The island of Mauritius, showing the location of key sites discussed in the text.

archaeological record. Archaeology has had to demonstrate that when researching a nation's past, especially that of newly decolonised states, history is one part of the framework of the past, and not the complete record.

The MACH project developed from an earlier initiative under the author's direction in 2008, entitled 'Environmental Imperialism: Colonial Archaeology in Mauritius'. The topic and title were heavily influenced by the insightful work of Crosby (2004). The first season of excavation focused on a site (800m<sup>2</sup>) in the north of the island at Mon Choisy (Figure 1). A near-pristine location was identified within a region undergoing extensive development. The site was formerly plantation land and offered a valuable opportunity to record the transition to sugar agriculture. Charcoal samples pinpointed the shift to agrarian soils to

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the first quarter of the nineteenth century (dated by the Poznań Radiocarbon Laboratory using OxCal v3.10 to AD 1680 (27.2%), AD 1740/1800 (68.2%), AD 1940 at 95.4% probability), corroborating historical records for agricultural expansion into this region as sugar production intensified under British rule (Allen 1999: 12). Pollen grains were not recovered from the virgin soils, but those found in the upper layer were indicative of imported species.

This promising initial season catalysed broader surveys in 2009 and 2010, incorporating land-based and coastal reconnaissance to assess the potential for slave, indentured, maritime and environmental archaeologies. For the first time on Mauritius, geophysical surveys (magnetometry, electrical resistivity and ground-penetrating radar) were undertaken, providing a foundation on which to start to build a systematic, global approach to the archaeology of the island, rather than focusing on specific colonial enclaves or time periods. Surveys funded by the Australian National University were undertaken to identify evidence for early non-European settlement. These were conducted as part of reconnaissance work on the sites shown in [Figure 1](#) and also coastal, volcanic (Trou aux Cerf) and lakeshore regions. The broad survey strategy was to identify the presence of ancient technologies (i.e. chipped tools) and evidence for habitation in cave systems such as Trois Cavern. These investigations proved unsuccessful and echoed results from other island enclaves such as the Seychelles, although Diego Garcia does have earlier evidence of charcoal (Atholl Anderson *pers. comm.*). Future plans for the MACH project include establishing baseline data for the island, including artefact catalogues and a dendrochronology profile, as well as an ambitious plan to perform a LiDAR scan of key regions to investigate possible slave-dispersal routes during episodes of *maroonage* (flight from the plantation).

## Viewing slavery through resistance and the body

The Le Morne Cultural Landscape was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, based solely on intangible heritage (Bakker & Odendall 2008). This consists of oral history recounting how slaves threw themselves to their deaths upon seeing soldiers making their way to their refuge. The slaves died needlessly; the soldiers were coming to tell them that they were emancipated. The inscription refers specifically to the plateau, Le Morne Brabant ([Figure 2](#)), as a final sanctuary for marooning slaves. Surveys in 2009 incorporated: the plateau; Îlot Fourneau, a small islet apparently used during the French colonial period for punishing slaves; two abandoned settlements, Trou Chenille and Macaque (*Makak*); and the Le Morne 'Old Cemetery'. The cemetery ([Figure 3](#)) finds no comparanda in the wider region; it therefore offers a unique Indian Ocean reference point for Atlantic sites (e.g. Hansen & McGowan 1998; Pearson *et al.* 2011).

The Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund identified five 'structures' of various dimensions, evidently delineating graves. A concerted programme of field survey incorporating geophysics revealed 21 structures ([Figure 4](#)) and provided the basis for excavation in 2010, 2012 and 2013; the total number of known structures is now 45. We believe that the area of the cemetery could extend well beyond the initial estimate (3600m<sup>2</sup>), and perhaps incorporate different zones of burial clustered on the sandbank. At a conservative estimate, at least 70 individuals were buried in the sector currently under investigation, and probably



Figure 2. *Le Morne Brabant and key sites that have been surveyed or excavated.*

many more in the wider area. The initial season of excavation unearthed 11 entire skeletons, six sub-adults (Appleby *et al.* 2014) and five adults. All the skeletons were aligned south-west to north-east, effectively facing the Brabant (a basaltic monolith dominating the peninsula). The one exception was a neonate placed between its mother's legs, aligned in the opposite orientation (burial 1, Figure 4). Later seasons of work revealed the complexity of this site. Numerous burials did not follow the south-west to north-east alignment and were recovered from deeper interments, some without any evident grave marker. In general, while osteological and isotopic analysis of the remains recovered in 2010 revealed an 'adequate diet' and relatively few indications of disease (although dental disease was prominent; see Appleby in Seetah 2010a), the remains from later seasons, ostensibly from an earlier phase of burial, indicated a much higher incidence of disease, particularly inflammatory conditions (Figure 5).

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Figure 3. Le Morne 'Old Cemetery' (photograph: Yves Pitchen).

Finds from the Le Morne 'Old Cemetery' reveal nuanced details about the life-ways of the interred. Although the material culture is European in origin, it has been used in a manner reminiscent of African traditions, or, more accurately, Afro-Malagasy (see below). In this sense the objects are not European, African or Madagascan, they are *Mauritian* (Seetah 2015a).

Given the immense local significance of the Brabant, which is a particular focal point for Mauritians of African descent, two issues were identified by the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund as critical: the ethnic origin of those interred in the cemetery and its period of use. Coins recovered from burial 7 (Figure 4) suggested a period of active use around AD 1835–1850. Subsequent radiocarbon analysis (Table 1) gave dates that were approximately 100 years earlier than anticipated. It is possible that the results were offset due to depleted carbon in the diet of those buried, offering an explanation for the earlier dates (Thomas Higham *pers. comm.*).

The more significant issue of ethnicity was of national importance. This had the potential of securely linking the cemetery to the period of slavery or emancipation, thereby providing the tangible evidence to support UNESCO inscription. The Minister of Arts and Culture personally announced the results to news crews and journalists (Seetah 2015b). In the first use of the technique on human remains, mitochondrial aDNA—the maternal lineage—was successfully extracted from 11 individuals; of these, nine were identified as being of East African, probably Mozambican, origin, and two were Madagascan (Table 2). These results

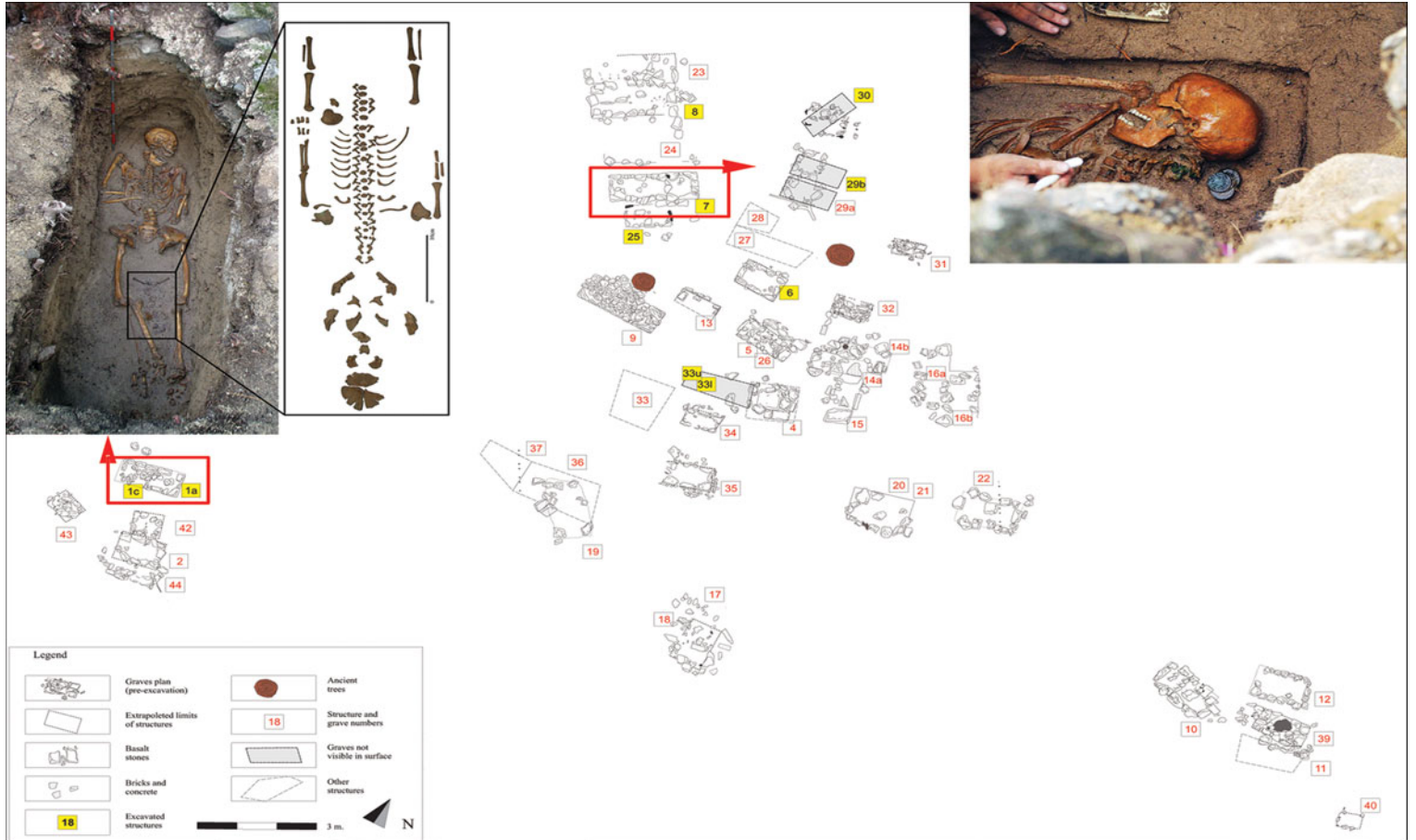


Figure 4. Plan of graves at Le Morne 'Old Cemetery'; burials 1 & 7 highlighted.

Table 1. AMS radiocarbon dates (all dated materials derived from human remains, excavated from within grave contexts and analysed by Rosa Fregel).

Lab number	Burial	Age (BP)	$\delta^{13}C$ (‰)	Age range (BP)
OxA-V-2496-57	STR1a	292±26	-13.87	1632-1684
OxA-V-2496-55	STR6-7	262±24	-14.18	1164-1712
OxA-V-2496-56	STR6-8	232±26	-14.23	1694-1742
OxA-V-2503-13	STR7	208±25	-14.70	1717-1767
OxA-V-2503-14	STR8	156±25	-14.49	1769-1819
OxA-V-2496-50	STR25	199±27	-12.08	1724-1778
OxA-V-2503-15	STR29	182±24	-14.18	1744-1792
OxA-V-2507-10	STR30	225±27	-14.69	1698-1752
OxA-V-2496-53	STR33U	290±26	-11.51	1634-1686
OxA-V-2496-54	STR33L	334±26	-14.70	1590-1642

Table 2. Results of aDNA analysis (by Rosa Fregel).

Burial	mtDNA (mols./ml)	Haplogroup	Origin
STR1a	3.38E+03	L0a	Comoros/Madagascar/Eastern Africa
STR1c	4.42E+03	L0a	Comoros/Madagascar/Eastern Africa
STR6-7	1.84E+03	L3d	East Africa (Mozambique?)
STR6-8	1.11E+03	L3d	East Africa (Mozambique?)
STR7	4.41E+03	L1c*	East Africa
STR08	1.54E+03	B4**	Polynesia and ISEA, via Madagascar
STR25	2.77E+03	L3d	East Africa (Mozambique?)
STR29	1.49E+04	L3d	East Africa (Mozambique?)
STR30	8.24E+03	L3d	East Africa (Mozambique?)
STR33U	1.71E+03	M7c**	Polynesia and ISEA, via Madagascar
STR33L	1.71E+03	L3d	East Africa (Mozambique?)

\*The L1c haplogroup has not been observed in the published data; the motif without 16147T mutation (haplotypes not shown) has, however, been observed in Eastern Africa.

\*\*B4 and M7c lineages probably reached Mauritius via the Malagasy slave trade.

lead us tentatively to conclude that the cemetery contains the remains of the very first emancipated, freeborn, Mauritians; that is, inherently free, as enshrined in law, and distinct from those granted freedom (*gens de couleur libre*).



Figure 5. Osteomyelitic femur from structure 24 at Le Morne ‘Old Cemetery’, 2012 season (photograph: Jonathan Santana).

The excavation is at an early stage with much work remaining, but the site has considerable potential both in terms of local heritage and wider research. The local response to inscription has been positive but also revealing; dedication of the site as a World Heritage Site paved the way for the first extensive osteological, aDNA and

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dating analysis of a cemetery. It has also provided a focal point from which archaeological heritage and its interpretation can flourish in the wider region (Chowdhury 2006; Colwell-Chanthaphonh *et al.* 2014). Although the plateau has been designated as a World Heritage Site, the remaining land, i.e. the Brabant itself and a portion of the buffer zone, is under the ownership of one individual. At the time of writing, he remains reluctant to allow continued research, despite pressure from the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund, and indeed from the Prime Minister and other members of the government. In itself, this speaks volumes about the potential that heritage has within this setting, relevant to the nation as a whole, and played out at the uppermost level of political life.

At a regional level, given the antiquity and complexity of slavery in the Indian Ocean (Campbell & Alpers 2006) and the role played by Mauritius, Réunion, the Andaman and other islands, the Le Morne cemetery offers an important comparison for Atlantic African burial sites. The wealth of evidence regarding historic period African burial, with exceptions in South Africa (see for example Cox & Sealy 1997; Cox *et al.* 2001; Finnegan *et al.* 2011), has been studied overwhelmingly from North and Latin American contexts. Potential points of comparison lie in understanding: how slave communities procured and developed their own material culture (White 2011); how they used burial as a mechanism to maintain cultural connections to ancestral communities (Jamieson 1995; Kusimba 2004); comparison between sites, for example, within the context of osteological assessment (Corruccini *et al.* 1982); the objects used as part of the burial process (Pearson *et al.* 2011: 99–141); and the positioning of burial grounds within a landscape context (Hansen & McGowan 1998; Pearson *et al.* 2011; see also sites listed in Jamieson 1995). In addition, there is potential for studying the early development of syncretism. In Mauritian tradition this is termed *longanis*, and copious evidence for this practice was noted at the cemetery (Seetah 2015a). It is ubiquitous around the island. Historical records suggest that the development of *longanis* stretched back into the colonial period (Allen 2016) and is linked closely with the continuation and development of African healing or harming rites. *Longanis* is an important Indian Ocean and—as there was a large influx of East Africans into Mauritius—potentially East African example of syncretism that contrasts with the West African form seen in the Atlantic, for example, in Haiti, at New Orleans (Fandrich 2007), in Brazil (Engler 2012) and in the West Indies (Bilby & Handler 2004). Thus, Le Morne offers a number of ways to add critical depth to our understanding of the African diaspora, slave life-ways and underlying details of cultural development during slavery and since abolition. In turn, this serves to connect the various phases of labour provision during the period of slavery, as well as global phenomena related to migration in the Indian Ocean.

## A first view of the archaeology of indenture

While Le Morne has potential for the study of slavery, another facet of Mauritian archaeology could have an impact on the development of global archaeological practice more generally: the archaeology of indenture. Considered by one historian as ‘a new system of slavery’ (Tinker 1974), others have emphasised the considerable and nuanced differences between slavery and indenture (Allen 1999: 57–58). In AD 1834, soon after the abolition of slavery,

Britain turned to South Asia and India, in particular, to find workers to fill the labour void. The evident success of this system catalysed the displacement of over two million people from Asia, Africa and Melanesia (Carter *et al.* 2003) to the Indian Ocean and islands in the Pacific and Caribbean. Given the wide geographic impact, it is surprising that this episode has remained virtually unexplored by archaeologists. To the author's knowledge, no dedicated programme of excavation currently exists that focuses on this globally significant diaspora (as distinct from convict labour or movements of indentured Europeans). One important site, the Seville plantation in Jamaica, serves as a potential starting point within an Atlantic context (Armstrong & Hauser 2004). In essence, indentured archaeology reflects on social differences between slaves and labourers. Architectural features in the form of sacred structures are evident throughout the landscape, clearly illustrating that the labourers kept their religion. As is the case in the archaeology of slavery, however, there are few material signatures, even from sites that are tied closely to the indentured system (Calaon 2011).

The role played by Mauritius in the indentured diaspora gained international recognition in 2006 with the inscription of Aapravasi Ghat as an UNESCO World Heritage Site. As the site where the system of indenture was initially implemented, few places are more appropriate for commencing an archaeological interrogation of this subject.

Within the indentured paradigm, viewing the 'island as a site' is proving particularly relevant. This specific approach was developed and implemented to study a range of sites concurrently. It describes a survey strategy that is underpinned by historical research, and integrates desk-based spatial data with non-destructive, on-site reconnaissance. These data are woven into an interpretative framework describing patterns of connectivity between points in the landscape: in effect, attempting to understand the nexus between ideologies (Western or imperial) and archaeological outcomes. Work on Flat Island, a quarantine base complete with hospital and cemetery (Figure 7), is therefore viewed as an essential complement to Aapravasi Ghat, the physical landing point of immigrants (Figure 8) on the island proper, again complete with hospital block but with the addition of a dedicated administrative centre. Trianon, a set of barracks situated on a plantation and probably the dwelling of *sirdars* (established labourers who served as intermediaries between the plantation owners and the contract workers) (Figure 9) (Calaon *et al.* 2012), provides an insight into the living conditions of (elite?) labourers, although it does not represent the actual habitation of the plantation workers themselves. The physical response to absenteeism/vagrancy (absconding workers) is witnessed in the construction of the Vagrant Depot, a prison for labourers. Finally, there is Bois Marchand (Figures 6 & 10), a formal and functioning cemetery with sections dedicated for indentured workers. Since 2011, excavations at Bois Marchand have unearthed a unique snapshot of the island's population at that time. In addition to an estimated 500 interred individuals, Bois Marchand cemetery has extensive burial records that date back to its inception, detailing demography and cause of death.

These sites effectively encapsulate the entire trajectory of the indentured diaspora within a geographically contained and highly relevant test case. Importantly, the 'island as site' model aligns with the plans of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund to develop specific cultural routes that illustrate aspects of the indentured diaspora community. The labourers were very

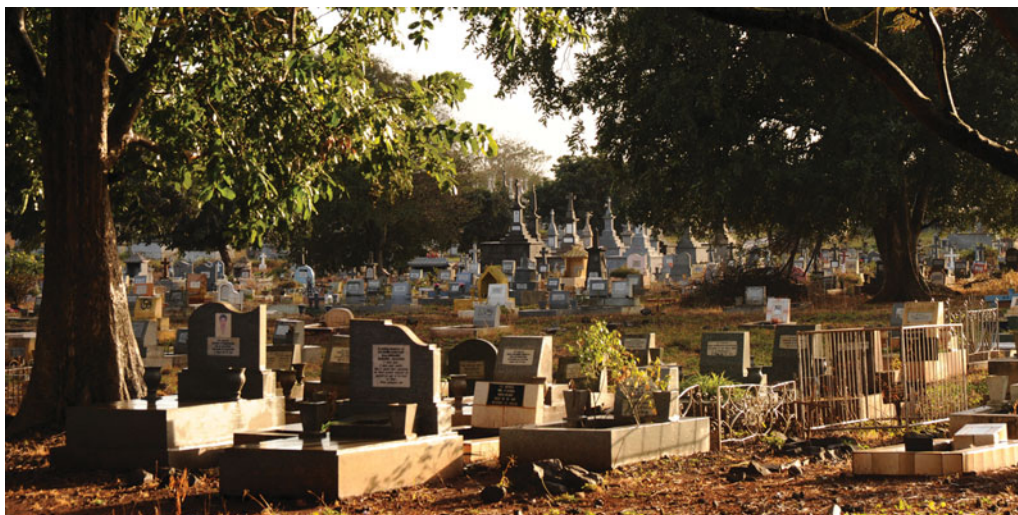


Figure 6. Bois Marchand Cemetery (photograph: Yves Pitchen).

much tied, contractually and physically, to individual plantations, and we can still recognise aspects of the administrative process: for example, dependence on quarantine and expansion of burial grounds to deal with disease, and the reaction to absenteeism. Archaeology also offers the potential to assess the colonial mind-set as it related to specific issues, such as how the process of accepting labour onto the island changed from one imperial administration to the next (Calaon 2011). To this we can add high-resolution details of life-ways that connect directly to the labourers themselves in terms of health, diet (Figure 11) and social practice.

Focusing on one particular issue: what other drivers, besides abolition, influenced the transition to indentured labour? Investigating this question could reveal motivations that archaeology is well equipped to address. Alongside the abolition of slavery, the removal of preferential tariffs for West Indian sugar intensified sugar production in Mauritius, thereby requiring more labour. Although these were undoubtedly the main catalysts for the labour migrations of this period, a number of factors complicate the simplicity of this reasoning. The illegal slave trade was rife and continued up to 1827 (Allen 2010). Coupled with the apprenticeship system, mandating six years' service by emancipated slaves, these two factors should have provided a buffer for the plantation owners during the period directly after emancipation. Nevertheless, history records the appeals of the landowners for additional labour (Allen 2010). There is at least one factor that may have had implications that are at present poorly understood and to which Le Morne may serve as a signpost. The earlier phases of interment at Le Morne, speculatively assigned to the period directly after emancipation, show extensive incidence of disease and possible malnutrition. Bois Marchand cemetery covered some 400 acres when established in 1867 (Pike 1873: 401). Although later in date, it was created to accommodate the massive death toll resulting from epidemics of malaria and cholera. In 1867, 41 000 people, 10% of the entire population, died from these conditions (Pike 1873: 110). The administrative response was to expand quarantine

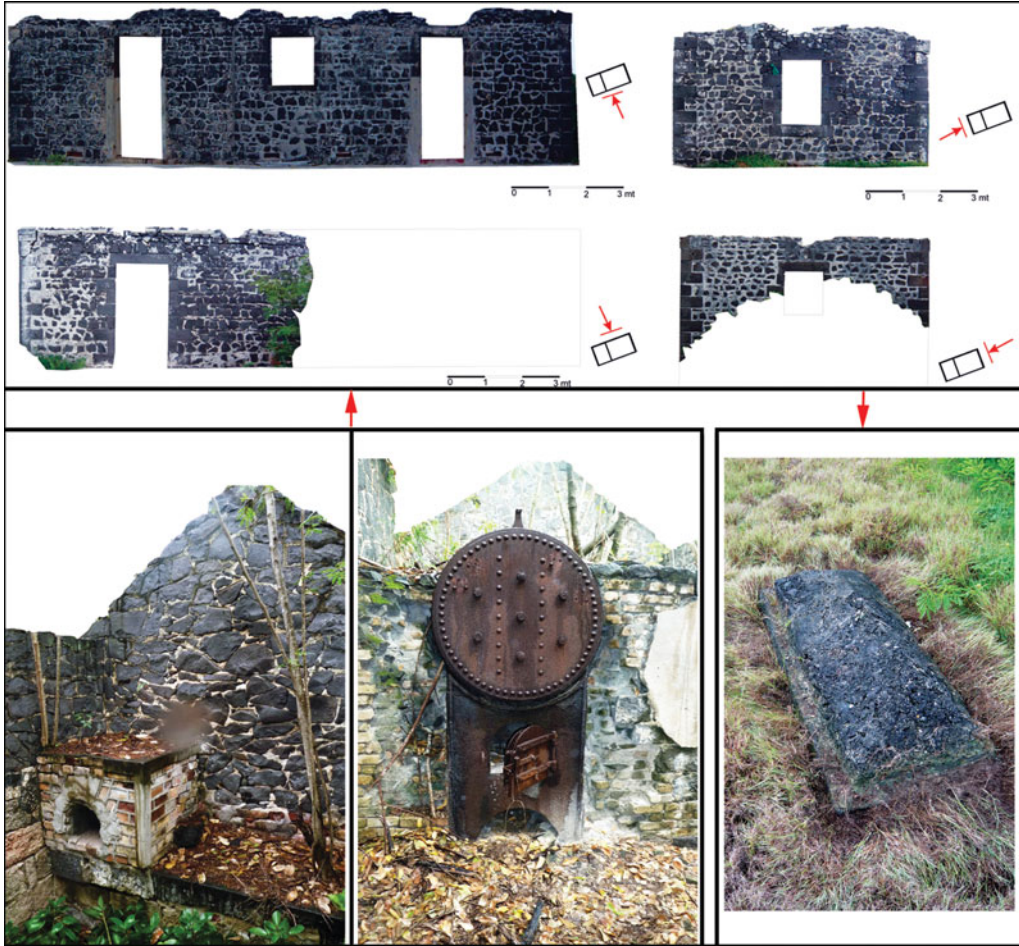


Figure 7. Flat Island; top: details of the hospital block; bottom right: kitchen; bottom centre: possible desalination paraphernalia; bottom left: tomb from cemetery.

(highlighting the purpose of Flat Island) and cemetery infrastructure. The British could not have then known that mosquitoes were responsible for the spread of malaria as that was first discovered by Sir Ronald Ross some 30 years later. The role of disease, while featuring strongly in Atlantic research on labour provision (Pearson *et al.* 2011: 155), has remained largely unstudied within an Indian Ocean context, certainly in terms of archaeology (see Arnold 1991, for a detailed historical overview of the Indian Ocean; and Boodhoo 2010, for Mauritius specifically), and could prove highly relevant to our understanding of labour diasporas in this basin.

### Conclusions: small islands as a microcosm of world archaeology

Mauritius has sites that could provide a completely novel view of archaeology in the region. The archaeology is distinctly colonial and post-colonial, and in many ways 'modern

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Figure 8. *The Steps of the Aapravasi Ghat, UNESCO World Heritage Site (image used with permission of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund).*

2001) for Mauritius and the region more widely, and indirect relationships that connected administrations across this zone, but were strictly beyond the Indian Ocean, with Suakin (Rhodes 2011), for instance. Future work will emphasise how ideas of identity construction (Wynne-Jones 2007) can be useful for the local context (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & de Salle-Esso 2014). Furthermore, mechanisms proposed for continental Africa might have potential for understanding labour and environmental histories (Lane 2010, 2014), as well as more specific issues relating to administrative policy; for example, the ecological consequences of introducing draft animals (Bernard & Parker 2006).

On a more theoretical level, Le Morne contributes to a wider discussion on why archaeologists need to pay careful attention to the role of oral history (Schmidt & Walz 2007). The differential sex ratios of incoming workers to Mauritius, both slave and labourer, underline the significant context of gender relationships (Allen 1999: 43, 58; Croucher 2007). Finally, the UNESCO World Heritage Site inscription of Le Morne and the influence of Madagascan and African peoples on local cultural heritage establishes another example that highlights the role of Africa in the wider world (Police 2001: 81–110; MacEachern 2007; Seetah 2015a). Although comparisons with East Africa are the most immediately relevant, these should ultimately serve as points of departure for wider, global-level comparative studies that take in differences between landscapes, administrative policy and transitions from slavery, as noted in the Atlantic (Armstrong 2009). Farther afield, demographic and social differences could be compared: such as diasporas involving predominantly South Asians in the Indian Ocean *vs* East Asian in the Pacific, at Hawaii for example (Lui 1984).

archaeology' (Orser 2008). It is supported by an abundant textual record and offers us a deeply relevant view of what has taken place (and is still taking place) more generally in the world. The island is an exemplar of the globally connected post-medieval world, underpinned by relationships far more complex than slave or labourer *vs* master or European *vs* non-European. At a regional level, it is well situated to contribute to the recent and rapidly expanding interest in the Indian Ocean. Major research projects span the period from protohistory (Fuller *et al.* 2011) to the historic period, with work in an East African context (Biginagwa 2009) of particular interest. Regional studies offer critical areas for more immediate comparison; for example, slave communities in Kenya, Zanzibar and Pemba (Lodhi 1973; Marshall 2012), the important influence of Madagascan communities (Crossland



Figure 9. Trianon Barracks; above: the row of dwellings; below: ground-penetrating radar results (lower left, undertaken by Branko Mušič) and plan of the foundation of a structure (main), possibly used for housing livestock (credit: Diego Calaon), as seen in subsequent excavations (lower centre and right).

Mauritius serves as an essential connection between African, Asian, European and Atlantic research agendas in a way no other location does. It is a critical node both in the (predominantly African) slave diaspora, and the later (predominantly Asian) indentured diaspora, opening up intra- and inter-comparative dimensions. Developments on Mauritius enable us to consider how research in such locations can contribute to debates regarding what archaeology is and what it will become. Small colonial enclaves provide a contained set of motifs that mirror transitions taking place on a larger scale elsewhere in the world. Scale and complexity, however, are different entities; small scale does not equate to muted complexity. In much the same way, small islands serve as a lens through which to view dynamic interactions between groups after colonialism, i.e. between former



Figure 10. Excavation at Bois Marchand (photograph: Yves Pitche).

imperial Europe, modern-day dependencies and newly formed republics (Seetah 2010b). In future we may see archaeological theory and practice applied as the ‘direct offspring of European colonial archaeology’ (Willems 2009), returning as essentially different entities that have absorbed the ideals and requirements of the local community in new settings: accents of a language that has changed in its native land and that serves to promote novel conversation across pedagogic levels.

Mauritian archaeology demonstrates how the discipline may evolve as the ideas of the *global* archaeological community are expressed, requiring a reflexive assessment of our genuinely universal subject. Why it has taken us so long to foster an ‘archaeology of indenture’ is a question that needs to be considered at a disciplinary level, particularly given the global impact of this diaspora, and the fact that historical, community and heritage archaeologies have become increasingly active fields of engagement for the international archaeological community.

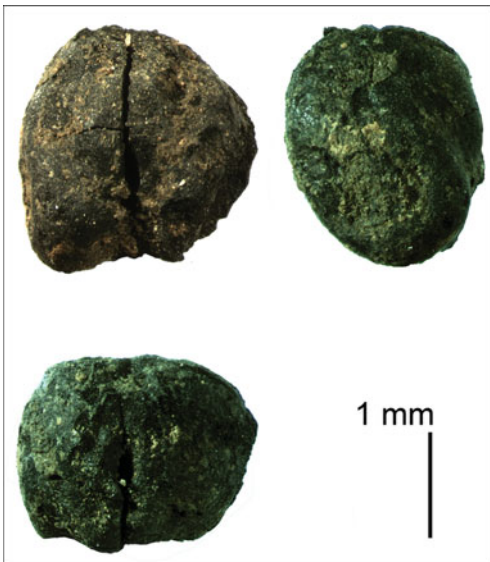


Figure 11. Chickpea, *Cicer arietinum*, from Trianon Barracks (photograph: Jacob Morales-Matoes).

Mauritius offers one view of what historical archaeology looks like on the ground, and could look like in the future more widely in the Indian Ocean. For Mauritius, archaeology has furnished a physical focal point for the island's early development, removed from colonial bastions, as well as a material contextualisation for its historiography based on more than just architectural features in the landscape. For the discipline, the island offers insight into the complexity of slave life-ways more broadly, and a unique point of comparison with the Atlantic; the elements of burial practice as transposed, recreated and re-enacted by groups under similar conditions in vastly different locations. It showcases the first steps towards a wholly new investigative agenda: indenture. Ultimately, Mauritian archaeology offers a view of how the subject can develop and contribute at all levels, from our knowledge of the Indian Ocean to understanding the globalised, pluralistic and deeply connected modern world.

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