

AFRICAN TATTOOS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN SLAVE TRADE

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INTRODUCTION

In 1810, the British government, followed by the French, banned the Indian Ocean slave trade. Ten years later, 324 men, women, and children were seized by Captain Fairfax Moresby off the French brig *Le Succès*. Taken as slaves from Africa by French smugglers, the captives' fates were recorded in the "Schedule" by the government in the island of Mauritius (Figure 1) during prosecution. The "Schedule" (Figure 2) records the names, genders, ages, heights, and a detailed account of any markings or tattoos, including the body parts where the markings are located (e.g. temple, cheek, belly).

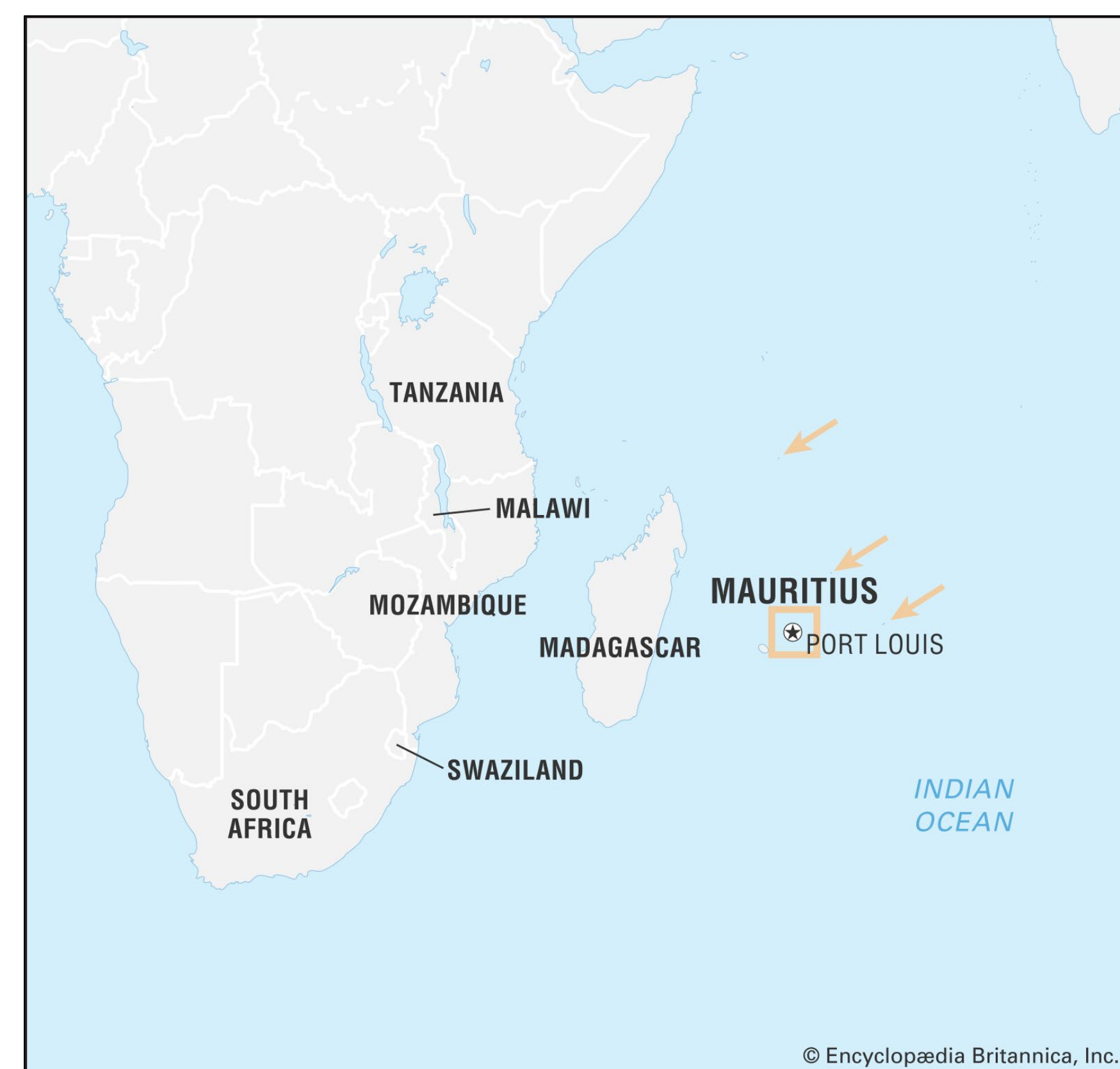


Figure 1. Traffickers brought slaves from East Africa Central Africa to Mauritius

METHODOLOGY

This case study transcribes the archival records of captives taken from the *Succès* into an Excel Spreadsheet (Figure 3). I have sorted columns of similar data in order to find correlations between tattoos, ages, names, and heights. Correlations could lead to group identity and the captives' origins.

Schedule of 324 persons, Natives of Africa found on board the Brig Succès [and?] seized by His Majesty's Ship Menai, Fairfax Moresby Esquire G.[?] B. Captain National Archives of the United Kingdom (NAUK) CO 167/92																						
Citation: "Schedule (324) ... persons, natives of Africa, that were found on board the brig Succès...." 21 April 1821 (NAUK CO 167/92).																						
No.	Names	Age	Cast	Sex			Height			SYMBOLS	Strokes	Marks (T=Tattoo, S= Scar, M = Other Mark)										
				M	F		Feet	Inches	INCHES			Stomach or Belly	Left Arm	Right Arm	Forehead	Temples	Cheeks	Back	Breasts	Other		
1	Moresalos	18	Mozambique	1	4		11	1/4	59.25		0	T	T	T	T	T						
2	Fambarika	21	Mozambique	1	5		13	3/4	61.75	R X X	13	M			T	T	T					
3	Kowonera	24	Mozambique	1	5		3		63.00	X X	10	M		T	T	T						
4	Makapanga	28	Mozambique	1	5		2	1/4	62.25	I	5	TM			T	T						
5	Mazikanda	26	Mozambique	1	5		1		61.00	X	5	M	T	T	T	T	T					

Figure 3. Transcribed "Schedule"

RESEARCH QUESTION

Can the tattoos on captives in Mauritius help identify their ethno-cultural and geographical roots in East Central Africa?

53	Phikasho	15	d:	d:	4	5 3/4	Tattooed on both temples & forehead - O
54	Coco	17	d:	d:	4	7	on forehead, tattooed on both cheeks, temples & belly.
55	Kapandira	17	d:	d:	4	7 1/2	* * * on belly, tattooed on forehead, cheeks & temples.
56	Kamaly	16	d:	d:	4	2	on forehead, tattooed on both temples & belly.
57	Chipalasa	17	d:	d:	4	4 3/4	Tattooed on forehead & on both cheeks.

Figure 2. Detail from the "Schedule" (National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 167/92)

SIGNIFICANCE

Little is known about the captives' origins in East Central Africa, or their lives prior to seizure. Understanding the meanings and experiences behind the tattoos of the captives may provide deeper insight into why certain slaves were selected over others and provide context into the slave trade.

CODING

- Transcribed the complete list into an Excel Spreadsheet
- Added two additional columns, inserting a picture of the tattoo into and the number of strokes in the other
- Assigned a letter code (C, X, etc.) to each family of similar symbols, which yielded eleven categories (see Figure 4).
- Entered the code into a third new column in the Excel Spreadsheet (Figure 3).

X	C	I	O	V	E	:	S	R	T	L	COMBO (IX)	COMBO (OTHER)
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