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).

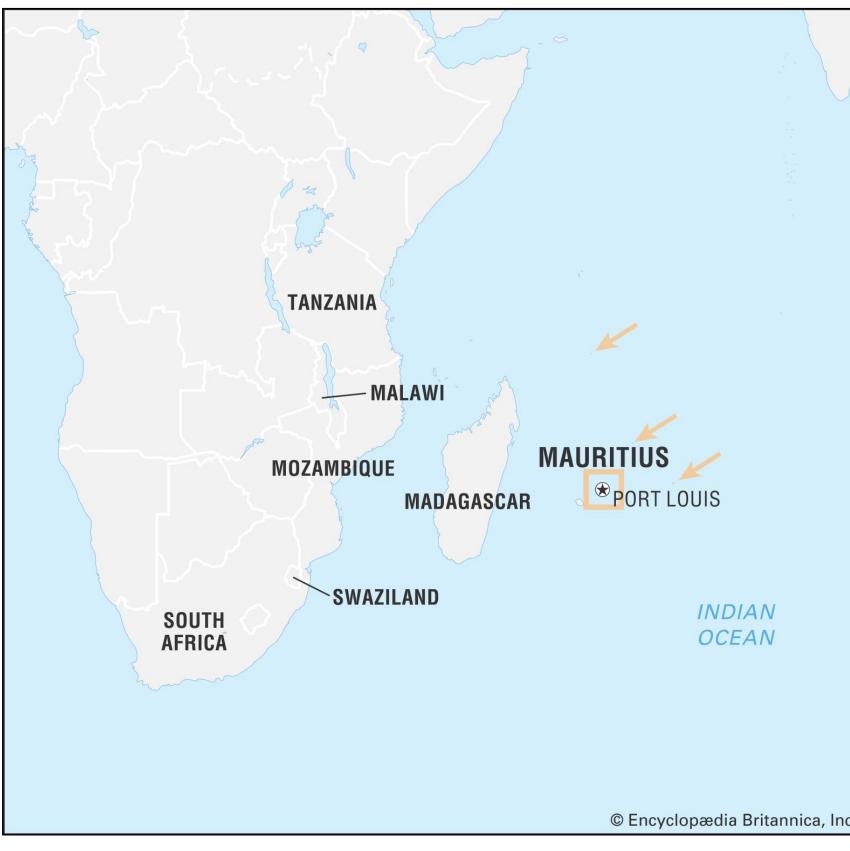


Figure 1. Traffickers brought slaves from East Africa Central Africa to Mauritius

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 perso	ns,	Natives of Africa	a fo	und	on l	board the	Brig Su	uccès [and?] s	eized by Hi	s Majes	ty's :	Ship	Mer	nai, F	airfa	ax M	ores	by Esquire G.[?] B. Captain
	National Archives of t	he U	Inited Kingdom	(NA	UK)	CO 2	167/92												
	Citation: "Schedule (324) persons, natives of Africa, that were found								rd the brig Succe	es," 21 Ap	ril 1821	(NA	UK C	2016	57/92).			
	Sex Height									Marks (T=Tatoo, S= Scar, M = Other Mark)							scar, M = Other Mark)		
No.	Names	Age	Cast	м	F	Feet	Inches	INCHES	SYMBOLS	Strokes	Stomach or Belly	Left Arm	Right Arm	Forehead	Temples	Cheeks	Back	Breasts	Other
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	Kowonera	24	Mozambique	1		5	3	63.00	ХХ	10	М		Т		Т	Т			
	Makapanga	28	Mozambique	1		5	2 1/4	62.25	1	5	TM			Т	Т				
	Mazikanda	26	Mozambique	1		5	1	61.00	X	5	М	Т	Т		Т	Т	Т		

Figure 3. Transcribed "Schedule"

RESEARCH QUESTION

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

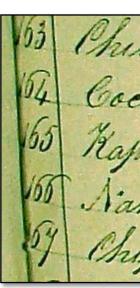
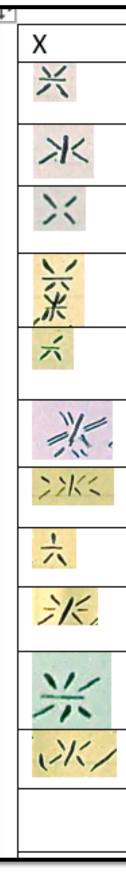


Figure 2. Detail from the "Schedule" (National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 167/92)



CODING

- \bullet



RESULTS

- •The symbol code X is more prevalent than any other code, appearing 121 times on 77 captives
- •Symbol code O appears on 29 captives
- •l appears on 26 captives
- •Compound (IX) appears on 18 captives
- •E appears on 14 captives
- •V appears on 13 captives
- •C appears on 6 captives

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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.

• 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).

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Figure 4. Coding System

By Symbol (Figure 5)

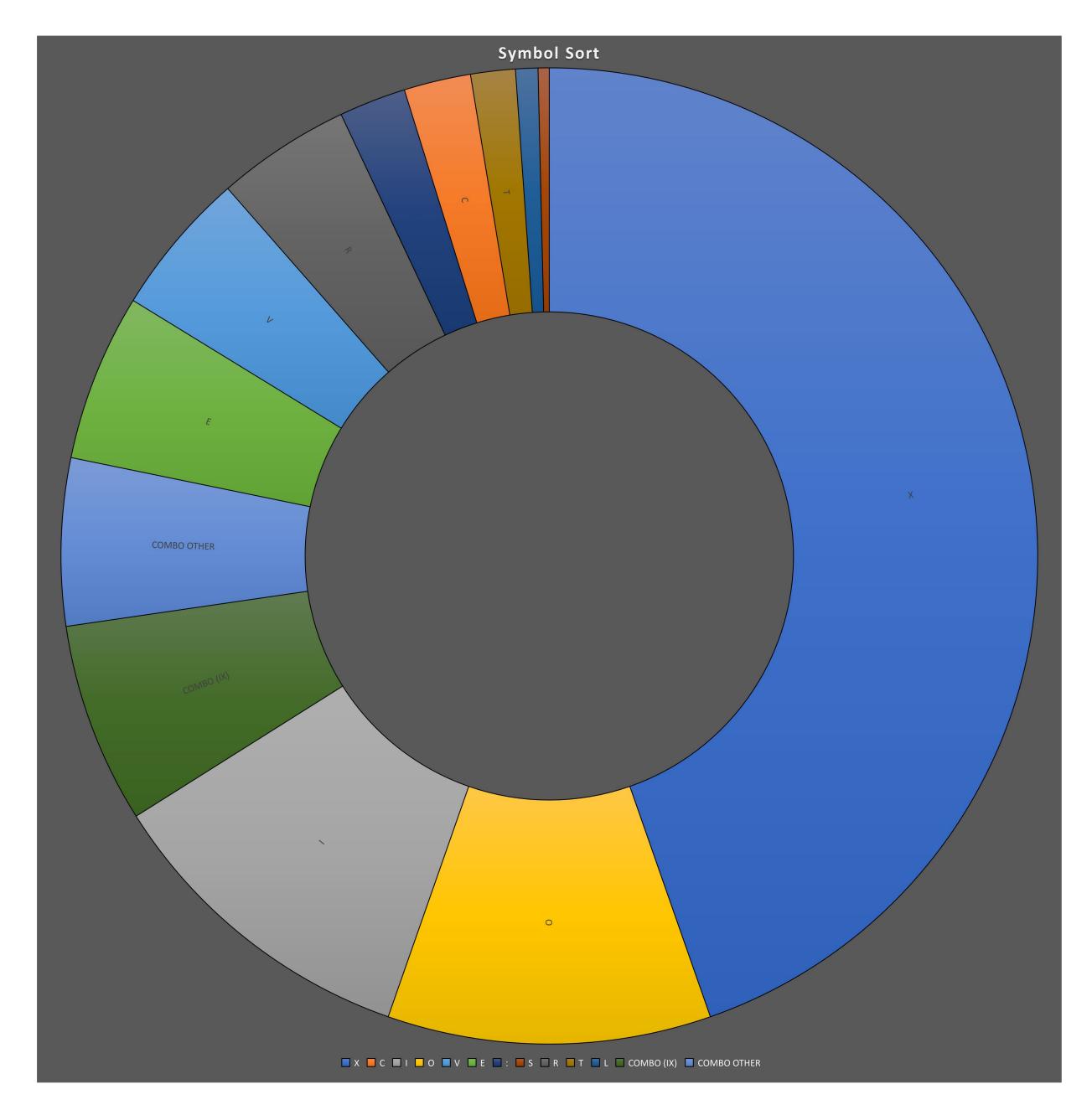


Figure 5. Results of the Symbol Sort

temples & forehead - Do, tatoed on both cheeks, temples & belly. tatoed on forehead, cheeks & temples. I on both temples & belly. " on both cheeks.

Les Monjavas sont l'espèce de noirs la plus commune à Mozambique. On les reconnoît à l'aide des étoiles qu'ils se font sur le corps et sur les joues, ainsi qu'à deux ou trois barres horizontales au-dessous des tempes. Leur humeur est douce et chagrine; ils s'attachent beaucoup à leur maître, pourvu qu'ils n'en soient pas maltraités; ils sont mieux faits, en général, que les Macquois, mais bien moins robustes. Il faut observer que lorsqu'ils arrivent à Mozambique, ils ont fait un voyage de 250 lieues, et sont exténués de fatigues; c'est sans doute la cause qui en fait périr une si grande quantité à la mer. Ce peuple aime la musique à l'excès; ses airs sont courts, et on les répète plusieurs fois. On y distingue un chant'plein de douceur, et des accords qui plaisent même à des oreilles exercées.

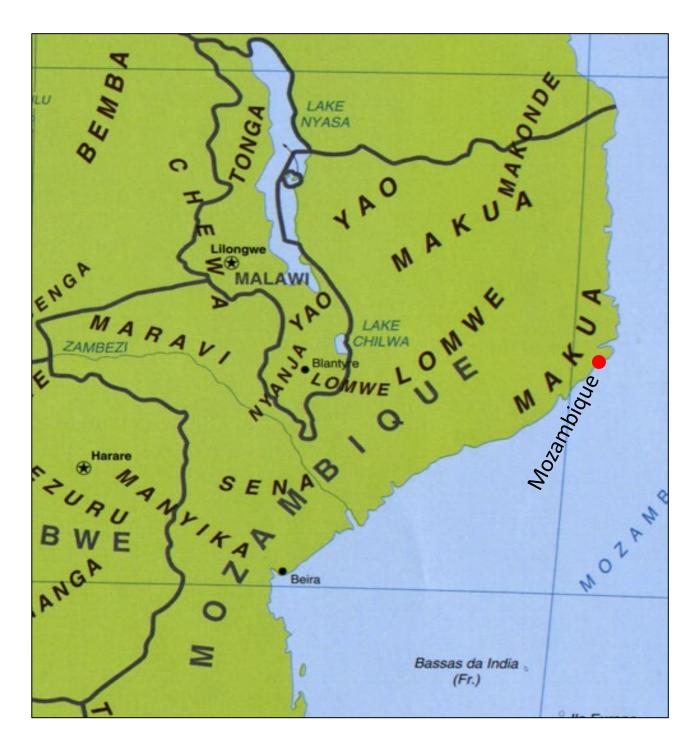
Figure 6. E. Colin, "Notice du Mozambique," 1809, excerpt

TRANSLATION

(Figure 6) "The Monjavas are the most common type of blacks in Mozambique. One recognizes them by the stars that they make on their bodies and their cheeks, as well as two or three horizontal bars under the temples.... [W]hen they arrive at Mozambique [Island] they have voyaged more than 250 leagues, and are exhausted from fatigue."

CONCLUSION

I hypothesize that symbol code X is the same tattoo Colin identified on the Monjavas of Mozambique. Seventy-seven of the captives off the French Brig Le *Succès* were tattooed with the symbol code X and 10% of those also had tattoo code E, the two or three horizontal bars. Colin states that the Monjavas lived 250 leagues inland, approximately 750 miles off the eastern coast of Mozambique. This would situate the Monjavas in the modern Malawi region, near Lake Nyasa (Figure 7).



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Figure 7. Map of East Central Africa