

The Materiality of Indian Ocean Slavery and Emancipation

The Challenges of Presence and Absence

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Barely visible in a photograph of the Peace Memorial Museum in Zanzibar in 1926, a year after the museum's opening, are a set of slave stocks, objects which speak tangibly of the punitive experience of slavery. These politically charged objects were displayed in the historical section of the museum at ground level, resting on the bases of the wooden stands displaying photographs of historic sites around Zanzibar. Their exact origin is unknown, although during the institution's creation a colonial official on Pemba island suggested that slave stocks could be acquired there for the museum.¹ The legacy and memory of slavery was a delicate issue in British colonial Zanzibar. The British were proud of the humanitarian mission of abolition, but some members of the Arab community, the ruling elite alongside the British, blamed the end of slavery for a downturn in their economic fortunes. Emancipation gradually transformed Zanzibari society, as the formerly enslaved renegotiated their identities and communities within colonial Zanzibar.² Within this sensitive situation, the curators may have discussed the location of the stocks in the museum display, and significantly they are not mentioned in the various museum guidebooks. Their display at foot level allowed for an ambiguous interpretive path to be trodden. In the absence of documentation, one can only speculate as to the justification for their position. Perhaps the curators decided that the stocks could easily be ignored or highlighted by a museum guide as necessary. Such an uneasy compromise reflected the British approach to dealing with this inflammatory issue.

The question of representing slavery resurfaced in the Museum in 1957, at a time of increasing political tension between representatives of the Arab community, many descended from slave-owners, and of the Afro-Shirazi

Party, which sought to cohere the interests of the African community including the Swahili majority, former slaves and their descendants, and more recent migrants from the mainland.³ C.H. Thompson, then archivist-curator, recorded that “the opinion has been expressed in Arab circles that the Museum, through its exhibits relating to the slave trade, is a subtle political weapon to keep African and Arab apart and so consolidate the position of the European”.⁴ Five years later in August 1962, as the political situation intensified still further, a member of the colonial government requested that “during these days of party tension, no pictures should be on show which might tend to exacerbate racial feelings”.⁵ Some months later, a letter from Thompson’s successor as curator reveals the ultimate fate of the stocks:

Two pieces of wood at Museum about 25 ft. long each, with holes in them. These were used for fastening legs of slaves (slave fork). As they were too big they could not be put in any store; therefore they were kept outside at the entrance of my office rather at a conspicuous position. With your permission I should like to destroy them. The wood is not good and has holes. Therefore they have no cash value; I shall split and dump them into the sea.⁶

The Zanzibar government approved this action the following month. Objects of such potency, which made palpable individual suffering and simultaneously represented the atrocities of the slave trade, were deemed too sensitive for retention in the tense climate of decolonization and ethnic identity politics. The destruction of the stocks, however, is a significant loss to Zanzibar where few genuine remnants of the island’s slave history and heritage remain.⁷

This example highlights numerous issues with recovering the materiality of slavery. It is the story of deliberate destruction of significant objects, but it simultaneously reveals how material things retain their power and significance within the museum setting and can become politicized. The legacy of slavery loomed large over the *Zama za Siasa* (Time of Politics) of 1957–1963 in Zanzibar.⁸ As we have seen, the Zanzibar Museum first chose to manage this contentious issue by placing objects out of easy eye-view, at floor level, then chose the heavy-handed solution of destruction. What is singular about this particular story of loss in the wider picture of the material culture of slavery is that we know the reason for this object’s absence. The decision to acquire the object in the first place is also noteworthy, especially given the challenges it

presented in display and interpretation. As this chapter will demonstrate, the material record of the experience of being a slave in the Indian Ocean region is subject to the forces of colonial collecting practice. The few possessions of enslaved people were rarely deemed worthy of acquisition by Europeans whose priority in these regions was an ethnographically-driven project to collect material from indigenous populations. These lacunae reflect Wayne Modest's observations about Caribbean collections – these island cultures were “not ancient enough yet not modern enough” for collectors.⁹ Enslaved peoples and their societies before and after emancipation defy simple categorization and hybridity is often present through their material culture. As Sujit Sivasundaram has identified in relation to Sri Lanka, Europeans overlooked the “creole and hybrid” in preference to the “indigenous”.¹⁰ This paucity of material evidence then influences how Indian Ocean slavery and its legacies are presented in museums. As Jones has noted in this volume in relation to the Netherlands, histories of slavery are now permanent features in several museums in Britain and are the subject of temporary exhibitions. However, the Atlantic story tends to dominate. John McAleer has highlighted how public histories of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean “have been mediated by the collecting and representation of objects and attendant knowledge relating to them”.¹¹

The limits of British collecting practice forge particular views of Indian Ocean societies and seriously constrain our ability to recover their material worlds. Archival studies of the Atlantic world reveal that the enslaved themselves owned and consumed a variety of material goods.¹² Higman lauds these efforts but highlights that “we lack a general model to guide our understanding of the relative presence and absence of evidence”.¹³ Yet, as is widely acknowledged, patterns of slave trading and slave cultures differed greatly between the two oceans. Archaeology offers another possibility for recovering items or objects not collected at the time, although this is a challenging task. As Wynne Jones reminds us, “slavery tends to leave little archaeological trace”.¹⁴ Concerted efforts are being made to reveal these traces in the Indian Ocean world.¹⁵ Donley-Reid, for example, identified the areas in which enslaved people lived and the role played by enslaved women in households in Lamu.¹⁶ Kusimba has examined rockshelters in south-east Kenya to explore the impact of the slave trade on migration patterns and the economic and political upheaval wrought by slave and cattle raiding.¹⁷ Croucher's excavations of clove plantations in East Africa offer evidence from buildings and objects to complicate our understanding of gender and slave identities.¹⁸ Research has also been conducted in the island destinations of many East

African slaves, the histories of which are discussed by Christiansē in this volume. Excavations have taken place in the Le Morne Cultural Landscape, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Mauritius. In the Le Morne “Old Cemetery”, the burial site of a community of maroons and later freed slaves, Seetah has established the ethnicity of these individuals and material culture which was, though European in origin, used in an African or Afro-Malagasy manner in the burial site.¹⁹ In combination these sites speak of resistance of the enslaved and the development of their own cultural practices. These various projects continue to provide new interpretations of sites, material evidence and data that fill some gaps in the material record, offering new possibilities for museums and heritage sites.

This chapter explores evidence of the Indian Ocean slave trade in museums in Britain and how we might interpret them to reinsert the story of the enslaved into these objects’ histories. Françoise Vergès has demonstrated that there are alternative ways of presenting histories of complex island societies and memories in the absence of objects in a post-colonial museum.²⁰ My intention in this chapter is not to propose that objects should hold a privileged position in museological interpretations of the Indian Ocean experience of enslavement, but I seek to investigate the few material remnants to expose slave narratives and understand the logics of collecting that have led to their preservation. As with archives, the perspectives of the enslaved are often silenced in museum collections. Edward Alpers’s 2007 study of the “other middle passage” based on British records shows how we can expose elements of the Indian Ocean slave experience using these British sources.²¹ Similarly, Christiansē in this volume shows how we can tease out the narratives of the enslaved through an imaginative close study of archives. This chapter will first examine objects associated with the explorer David Livingstone and collected to promote the cause of abolition. It will also examine objects and images of the Bombay Africans, emancipated men who supported British exploration in East Africa.²² Finally, it will look at objects amassed by colonial officers in post-abolition Zanzibar. These objects are currently housed in the David Livingstone Centre, the British Museum and the Royal Geographical Society. This limited selection of objects exposes the self-interest of British collectors and their priorities, but I seek to demonstrate that further study of their histories and the archival record can highlight the agency of the enslaved and their experiences. By looking at objects and *seeing* the slave in museum collections, museums can find alternative ways to interpret their collections and defy the colonial intentions of collectors.

Collecting in the name of abolition: David Livingstone

By the mid-nineteenth century, Britons were principally interested in the Indian Ocean slave trade in pursuit of the cause of abolition. Christiansë gives detailed accounts of this process in her chapter in this volume. The expeditions and publications of David Livingstone were the most influential of these endeavours and exposed the British public to the continued presence of slavery in the region. Supported by the abolitionist lobby in Britain, Livingstone brought eastern Africa to the attention of politicians and the public. The Slavery Abolition Act came into force in the British Empire only in 1834, and abolitionists, hitherto focused upon the Atlantic, then turned their attention to eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean. Livingstone was critical in propagating first-hand accounts of the East African slave trade, describing its horrors in detail, which the newly self-righteous British public lapped up. He campaigned for intervention in the region with his powerful rhetoric proposing “Christianity, civilisation and commerce” as the keys for eradicating the slave trade in the interior of eastern Africa. Livingstone, however, was not an enthusiastic collector or particularly drawn to material culture.²³ Of the objects amassed on these expeditions remarkably few relate directly to slavery.²⁴ This scarcity contrasts with how loudly this narrative speaks within Livingstone’s writings and in his self-identification as an anti-slavery campaigner.

One of the few objects attesting to Livingstone’s anti-slavery mission is a yoke or goree, now in the David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre in Scotland. These wooden forks, placed around the neck of slaves to restrain them, graphically illustrate the plight of enslaved people as they were forced to make arduous treks from the inland to the coast of East Africa. A small illustration of a goree features in the first part of Livingstone’s *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambezi and Its Tributaries: And of the Discovery of the Lakes Shirwa and Nyassa* when he briefly mentions an encounter with a slave party which they did not free as they did not know what to do with them afterwards.²⁵ It is possible that this object was collected during an episode described later in this book when Livingstone and his party met another slave coffle. Livingstone was incensed by what he saw, particularly noting the drivers who, “bedecked in various articles of finery, marched jauntily ... They seemed to feel that they were doing a very noble thing, and might proudly march with an air of triumph”.²⁶ At the sight of the white men, the slave drivers fled and their leader, before himself bolting from the scene, admitted that these slaves had

not been bought but captured in war. Livingstone's party then set about freeing the captives who "in their way of expressing thanks, clapped their hands with great energy".²⁷ The women and children were easier to free as they were bound by rope, but releasing the men was more challenging "as each has his neck in the fork of a stout stick, six or seven feet long, and kept in by an iron rod which was riveted at both ends across the throat".²⁸ A saw carried by Bishop Mackenzie was used to cut through the yokes. Livingstone was told by the slaves of earlier attempts by two women in the party to untie the ropes which bound them, but they were shot to deter others, an important reminder of the regular attempts by enslaved people to resist.

Livingstone retained a goree, which became part of his personal collection, much of which was transferred to the David Livingstone Centre. We later learn in the *Narrative*, however, one reason why few such remnants survive. After being released from their bonds, the women of the party were told to cook the food they had been carrying. At first they took some coaxing – they "seemed to consider the news too good to be true" – but then they "went at it with alacrity, and made a capital fire by which to boil their pots, with the slave sticks and bonds, their old acquaintances through many a sad night and weary day".²⁹ The enslaved women immediately took this opportunity to burn the objects of their confinement. Livingstone interpreted this deliberate destruction as a symbolic celebration of the women's freedom.

The preservation of such material within British collections proclaims the role of Livingstone and his party in the abolition of slavery. As with many such narratives, the abolitionists, their sacrifice and their cause sit at the heart of the story. This focus is evident in the caption in the catalogue for the Livingstone exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in 1996 in which the yoke was displayed: "[w]ooden yoke removed by Livingstone from the neck of the slave".³⁰ This brief description clearly marks out Livingstone's benign action as the central point of interest of the object rather than the experience of the enslaved wearer confined and punished by it. This was, naturally, an exhibition about Livingstone, yet the enslaved person exists only as an object of the explorer's action. Livingstone himself noted the punitive nature of the goree later in his text. On an encounter with 30 young men and boys in slave-sticks he noted that:

The weight of the goree seemed very annoying when they tried to sleep. This taming instrument is kept on until the party has crossed several rivers, and all hope of escape has vanished from the captive's mind.³¹

Although Livingstone observed and recorded the cruelty of such devices, in the exhibition devoted to the man himself the cult of Livingstone, which began during his lifetime and endures to this day, dominates the interpretation of such objects. However, as we have seen, a closer examination of the circumstances around its acquisition offers an alternative narrative which highlights the agency of enslaved women in the destruction of these objects. As Morgan Meyer has observed, absences can have their own materiality.³² The absent gorees and bonds here convey a potent message about resistance and the response of the enslaved to their condition.

An image of slaves wearing gorees in a slave coffle was the only plate included in the published *Narrative* depicting the slave trade in action. This is somewhat surprising, given that the horrors of the slave trade and the need for legitimate commerce were central themes of the book. To overcome the lack of representation of the slave trade, Livingstone asked Horace Waller – a fellow abolitionist who arranged for publication of Livingstone's works with publisher John Murray – to emboss a gold emblem on the cover of the volume. He suggested, “I think a man in a slave stick with his hands tied behind and the slaver with a hold of the other end of the goree [slave stick] & a musket in his right hand will be best”.³³ The exposure of the iniquity of the slave trade, a message threaded throughout the *Narrative*, was thus given visual prominence lacking within the plates in the book. The image was drawn by J.B. Zwecker and engraved by J.W. Whympers based, according to Tim Barringer, on a verbal description by Livingstone. He may also have shown Zwecker the object.³⁴ The goree in these images acts as a potent symbol of the cruelty of the trade, with the object itself a material counterpart to the abolitionist narrative. Handler and Steiner have revealed that this image was reproduced in a variety of publications in the UK and the US, rarely with any specific reference to Livingstone and sometimes erroneously captioned as relating to Mungo Park and the Atlantic slave trade.³⁵ So well did the goree and the column of enslaved people capture the essential image of African slavery that its key reference points to the Indian Ocean, Livingstone, and his proud moment of freeing of slaves, faded through its reproduction.

Exploration, geography and the material culture of slavery

Livingstone's explorations were in part sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), and his explorations are closely tied in with the growing stature of this institution, founded in 1830 to promote the expansion of geographical knowledge. Livingstone's fame in the mid-nineteenth century played a major role in bringing prominence to exploration and the RGS in the public and imperial eye, a phenomenon Felix Driver describes as "geography militant".³⁶ The RGS also became a repository for objects, images and texts related to exploration and currently houses numerous items associated with Livingstone. Most of these can be regarded as Livingstone relics, including his watch, his collar, his pocket-knife, copies of his signature, or sections of the tree under which he was buried.³⁷ In addition, the RGS holds a set of slave chains and leg irons from East Africa, attached by a padlock which has been torn apart. The RGS online catalogue speculates that they could have been acquired during the occasion described in the previous section when Livingstone and his party physically assisted with the removal of such bonds.³⁸ This online entry also states that Livingstone used these chains and irons as props for his lectures in London during which he railed against the slave trade. Such powerful, heavy and noisy objects tangibly brought the punishing conditions endured by enslaved people home to his British audiences and assisted Livingstone in bringing this story of inhumanity to life. These objects of punishment represent Livingstone's attempt to bring the experience of "being a slave" vividly to his audiences in Britain, while also enhancing the authenticity and drama of his performance.

Livingstone's explorations were not undertaken simply in the service of expanding geographical knowledge and the Christian mission. The Zambesi expedition of 1858–1863 was specifically charged with bringing back examples of raw materials, commercial products and botanical specimens that might be cultivated there to encourage "legitimate commerce" to combat the slave trade.³⁹ John Kirk, the expedition doctor, collected a large number of objects and specimens including samples of cotton and basketwork, while Thomas Baines, the expedition artist, recorded local manufacturing methods.⁴⁰ The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, which in part sponsored the Zambesi expedition, received the specimens and objects amassed during the expedition. At this time, Kew was home to the Museum of Economic Botany, an institution showcasing the economic potential of the expanding British Empire.⁴¹ Kirk documented these items carefully, including the community

and place from which they were collected, as well as botanical information including the type of plant from which they were made. While the specimens remain in Kew, several of the examples of material culture collected by Kirk were moved from Kew to the British Museum in the 1960s as curators deemed them of more anthropological than botanical interest.

These collections link to the history of slavery in two ways. First, they provide evidence of material cultures of various African peoples from which people were enslaved. Whilst necessarily collected with Kirk's particular mission in mind, their condition and documentation provide important examples of pre-colonial African cultures, technologies, communities and traditions which were ruptured by the slave trade. They are a material memory of pre-enslavement lives. Secondly, such objects illustrate the British mission to expand commerce as a viable strategy to counter the slave trade. Livingstone's mission was not officially one of colonization. Nonetheless, British exploration and the production of knowledge about the region ultimately paved the way for the later annexation of swathes of territory in East and Central Africa. In this respect, these objects and their detailed labels describing the economic potential of plants and people are an ominous sign of future exploitation. Kirk's personal involvement in abolition did not end at this point. As Consul-General at Zanzibar in the 1870s and early 1880s, he was instrumental in negotiating the treaty to abolish the slave trade with Sultan Barghash at Zanzibar in 1873. His diaries record his meticulous observation of the numbers of slaves traded and he shows genuine concern for their plight.⁴² Kirk became a significant collector of antiquities while stationed at Zanzibar although he seems to have amassed no objects which testify to his central role in abolition.⁴³ This is a telling silence, given the fervour with which he pursued the cause of abolition and his interest in African cultures.

Exploration and emancipation: the role of the Bombay Africans

It is clear that through men such as Livingstone, British ambitions to explore the African interior and to abolish slavery were intimately connected. While the celebrated stories of explorers focused upon the individual as a hero taking on the wilds of the unknown, these men were entirely dependent upon local actors. Exploration was far from being a European project. No expedition could take place without a team of hundreds of men and women to act as porters, translators and guides. As Driver and Jones note, "Many of these

intermediaries, for their part, acquired far more knowledge of exploration than most European explorers could ever hope to attain.”⁴⁴ Critical to several expeditions were the group now known as the Bombay Africans – enslaved boys from East Africa later liberated by the British Navy. They were then taken to western India and educated in mission stations along the coast. When David Livingstone was planning his explorations in India, these men were ideal guides and assistants with their knowledge of various East African languages and regions, as well as English. Sidi Mubarak Bombay, James Chuma, Abdullah Susi, Matthew Wellington and Jacob Wainwright are just some of those whose names and histories have been recorded and researched.⁴⁵ The exhibition entitled *Bombay Africans, 1850–1910*, curated by Clifford J. Pereira, at the RGS in 2007 and part of the commemoration of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade, was devoted to these men; it then toured the UK, ensuring that their story was brought to a wider audience. It was one of the few events in that year to focus upon the story of the Indian Ocean.

Objects related to these remarkable men are scarce. Several were awarded special medals by the RGS for participating in expeditions. In 1873, a set of medals was struck for those who had been with Livingstone on his final expedition and took his body back to Zanzibar and on to England. These so-called “faithful followers” were given medals of which two examples exist, one in the RGS (given to Richard Rutton) and the other in the British Museum, awarded to “Thomas (Khamees)”. Thomas was probably the English name given to this man – whether he was a liberated slave we do not know, although the taking of Christian names was common for the emancipated who were educated in missions. John Kirk in fact donated this medal to the British Museum in 1886 shortly before he returned to Britain from acting as Consul General in Zanzibar. It is possible that Thomas/Khamees died either before he was given the medal or after, and his family presented it to Kirk. While Livingstone’s face prominently features on the obverse and the name of the follower was merely inscribed on the edge, it is nonetheless significant material evidence of the collaborative nature of exploration and in some cases the close relations explorers developed with their assistants.

Photographs and paintings bring the histories of the Bombay Africans to the fore. Tembo, an assistant to James Grant and John Hanning Speke, appears in a painting by Henry Wyndham Phillips, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1864. Driver argues that in this image Tembo represents the importance of local knowledge as evidence for exploration, along with maps, sketches and specimens. Grant and Speke valued local knowledge, but were

criticized by men such as Richard Burton who frowned upon the reliability of using local informants.⁴⁶ Driver has pieced together Tembo's history, noting that he was a formerly enslaved boy, possibly from present-day Tanzania, adopted by General Rigby, Consul at Zanzibar from 1858 to 1861, who brought him to London in 1863. Tembo and another formerly enslaved boy were presented at the RGS and other meetings by Grant and Speke; as Driver explains, "their presence presumably intended to confirm the possibility that black Africans could provide useful evidence for geographical research".⁴⁷ Furthermore, Tembo and his companion represented the success of the British abolition movement and missionary education across the Indian Ocean, as well as celebrating their pivotal role in British exploration.

The Bombay Africans were also captured in photographs. As seen in Christiansē's chapter, photography emerged as a vital technology of empire in the mid-nineteenth century and served multiple purposes, including as a tool of surveillance, but also, as in this case, to celebrate and commemorate imperial achievement. What is remarkable here is that two East African boys feature as part of this celebration. A series of images and *cartes de visite* made in 1874 after Livingstone's death are the most famous images of the Bombay Africans. Abdullah Susi and James Chuma posed for various photographs in the grounds of Newstead Abbey, home of William Frederick Webb, a former explorer and friend of Livingstone. They had accompanied Livingstone's body back to Britain, thanks to the financial aid of Dr James Young, a Scottish chemist and friend of Livingstone.⁴⁸ The series shows different figures surrounding a table of objects and papers related to Livingstone, upon a lion-skin rug. Chuma and Susi are dressed in sober Victorian suits.⁴⁹ In one image, Chuma and Susi kneel and sit either side of the table, with rifles placed in front of the table alongside Livingstone's hat, and a Union flag prominently covering the table. In another version, Livingstone's children and Horace Waller, editor of Livingstone's journals, pose on each side, with Chuma and Susi at the centre of the composition. Waller looks up at the two men, indicating the importance he placed upon their knowledge and understanding, and their loyalty to Livingstone. They spent many hours with Waller decoding Livingstone's last journals. When they were presented with their RGS medals in 1874, Waller stated, "The faithful companions of Livingstone were able to give an intelligible account of every river and mountain and village in the regions they had passed through; and such aid as they could give was of the first importance to Mr Livingstone in preparing the work on which he was engaged."⁵⁰

Sidi Mubarak Bombay features in two portraits in the RGS collections. His name itself explicitly speaks of Indian Ocean mobility – “sidi” being the name in India for migrants and their descendants from Africa, while Bombay indicates that he was educated in the Bombay Presidency after his emancipation. The provenance of one photograph, taken later in his life, is unknown.⁵¹ The other is a stereoscopic portrait taken by James Grant in 1860, and acquired by the RGS on 17 January 1861. Grant’s photographs include some of the earliest images of Zanzibar.⁵² Inscribed beneath the image on the album page is the title “‘Moobarik Bombay’ who has accompanied Cap^t. Speke during 2 expeditions in Central Africa”. Mubarak wears a white robe and cap, carrying a rifle across his body. His white-robed figure stands out prominently in front of a large dark carved wooden door, probably locating the image to Zanzibar. He looks away from the camera and has evidently held this pose still for some time for his figure to be captured sharply during this early phase in the development of photographic technology. While the caption ties his significance to Speke, echoing the constant placement of the Bombay Africans as subsidiary to the European explorer, he was deemed significant enough to be portrayed individually and, as his career demonstrates, his knowledge and experience were critical to numerous explorers, including Burton, Speke, Grant, Stanley and Cameron. Painstaking research has pieced together Sidi Mubarak’s life story, giving this portrait, unlike so many photographs of the enslaved, a biography to accompany it. One final portrait of Bombay no longer exists. Sir John Kirk donated five lantern slides of “East Africa and a portrait of ‘Bombay’” to the RGS in 1894, but this collection was “destroyed on 9th February 1951 as it had faded”.⁵³ The fate of this photograph underlines the fragility of the fragmentary records of those people enslaved and emancipated in the Indian Ocean world.

Colonial collectors in post-slavery East Africa

While explorers largely represented the prelude to colonialism in East Africa, the mission to abolish slavery continued to concern British colonial officials after the establishment of British rule. Many donors to the British Museum were involved in the anti-slavery campaigns, yet few acquired objects which relate to this story. Sir John Kirk, for example as mentioned earlier, donated important objects from his personal collection to the British Museum on his return from Africa, including the earliest examples of Swahili material

culture acquired by the Museum. Yet objects relating to the slave trade are notable by their absence from his collections. Two of Kirk's successors in the colonial service at Zanzibar, however, did acquire and donate sets of slave stocks. The first was Claud Hollis who, while serving in Mombasa in the early 1900s, collected a set of two-metre-long slave stocks and donated these to the museum in 1909 along with other important Swahili collections. These are the oldest examples so far located in British museum collections and their acquisition soon after the abolition of slavery in East Africa makes them particularly significant.

The second set of stocks were collected by William Harold Ingrams, who served in Zanzibar in the 1920s and was a significant collector and writer, publishing the first anthropological study of the island.⁵⁴ He curated the historical section of the Zanzibar Museum with which this chapter began. His written work does not discuss the slave history of the islands in great detail and his studies of the peoples of the island do not examine the former slave communities – an omission which scholars since have been trying to remedy.⁵⁵ In 2014 his collection was donated to the British Museum by his daughter and included a set of slave stocks with five apertures. In recent discussion with the curator it appears that there is no physical evidence upon them to suggest that they were ever used and they are much smaller (at 50 cm long) than other examples. Ingrams, after all, collected them more than twenty years after the treaty abolishing slavery in Zanzibar in 1897. One of the apertures is distinct with an additional concentric carved circle, and these small, possibly unused, stocks are an anomaly within his collection which concentrates largely on the material culture of the Swahili. He may have had them commissioned to document former practices on the islands, although we can only speculate as he does not record these objects in his writings. As with many objects associated with enslavement, while their form speaks vividly of their intended use, records to bring the human element and suffering to light remain scarce.

Conclusion

The story of the Atlantic slave trade dominates the representation of slavery in British museums. The Indian Ocean rarely features and, if it does, is commonly part of the story of abolition or exploration. Museums often try to engage the public with personal narratives and, as this chapter has

shown, the self-interest of colonial collectors has erased many of these individual stories and material legacies. Projects such as the exhibition about the Bombay Africans have attempted to redress this imbalance and bring these histories and rarely heard voices to a wider public. As we have seen, objects in permanent collections which relate most directly to the Indian Ocean slave experience are those of punishment and confinement. While they were collected to demonstrate the iniquity of the trade and celebrate British humanitarian endeavours towards its abolition, they also make tangible the harsh reality and punitive regimes of slavery. There are other methods of recovering the material worlds of slavery. Close study of photographs and texts reveals clothing, beads and other articles worn by enslaved people. These objects were, in general, not collected but there is potential to find comparable objects in ethnographic museum collections. This chapter has focused upon objects acquired during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to make clear how the forces of colonialism and priorities of European collectors in East Africa and the Indian Ocean world impinge upon the material record of enslavement. The focus by the many colonial collectors upon the “indigenous” leaves cultures emerging from former slave societies unrecorded in museums. The material that we do have makes plain the violence inflicted upon enslaved peoples. Simultaneously, the seizure and removal of such objects from the region indicates the British role in abolition of the slave trade and celebrates the British humanitarian mission. The disavowal of British involvement in the earlier Atlantic trade and a focus upon positive British endeavours in bringing about abolition reflect criticisms levelled at some British museums’ representations of slavery more widely.⁵⁶

Museums are attempting to fill the lacunae in collections. With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the National Maritime Museum (NMM) in 2002 acquired the Michael Graham-Stewart collection, which comprised over 450 items, many of which related to Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades and abolition. The creation of the permanent Atlantic gallery in the NMM, opened to coincide with the bicentenary of abolition in 2007, means that much of this material is on display while the numerous photographs of Atlantic and Indian Ocean slavery from the Michael Graham-Stewart collection are now easily available online.⁵⁷ This example is typical of how special exhibitions and celebrations offer museums the opportunity, and in many cases the budget, to enhance their collections in these areas. Nonetheless, McAleer notes that even after the acquisition of this collection, the NMM “remained very weak in objects that could illustrate the lives and cultures

of the enslaved, and convey their agency and resilience”.⁵⁸ Considering the growing concentration of archaeologists on the issue of slavery, discussed at the start of this chapter, the material record and our understanding of the sites of slavery and the experience of the enslaved in the Indian Ocean through material culture will continue to grow.

Close examination of objects, museum archives, photographs and associated texts can reveal hidden stories to fill the gap in the material record and offer opportunities to highlight the agency and cultures of enslaved people. Collections associated with explorers have the potential too to reveal the critical role of the emancipated as mediators and enablers of British exploration of Africa. Recent exhibitions have brought these “hidden histories” to light. While such displays have focused on their role as explorers, in this context I propose that they can also be considered as part of the material record of abolition and emancipation. I have also highlighted occasions where we know why objects are now absent. Such stories of the deliberate destruction of objects of punishment by enslaved people demonstrate how absent objects can speak as powerfully as those that are present.

Notes

1. Zanzibar National Archives (ZNA hereafter): DF 7/1, History General file, Letter from Theodore Burt, 17 June 1925.
2. See Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890 – 1945*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2001.
3. Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar*, 63. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2011.
4. ZNA: DF 9/5 Museum Policy 1956 – 1963, Curator to Chief Secretary, 27 July 1957.
5. ZNA: DF 9/5 Museum Policy, 1956 – 1963, Permanent Secretary (Education and Welfare) to Archivist/Curator, 31 August 1962.
6. ZNA: DF 9/5 Museum Policy, 1956 – 1963, Archivist/Curator to Permanent Secretary (Education and Welfare), 8 February 1963.
7. Stephanie Wynne-Jones, “Recovering and Remembering a Slave Route in Central Tanzania,” in *Slavery in Africa: Archaeology and Memory*, edited by Paul Lane and Kevin C. MacDonald, Proceedings of the British Academy 168, 327. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

8. See Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*.
9. Wayne Modest, "We Have Always Been Modern: Museums, Collections, and Modernity in the Caribbean," *Museum Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (April 2012): 85.
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27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, 378.
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32. Morgan Meyer, "Placing and Tracing Absence: A Material Culture of the Immaterial," *Journal of Material Culture* 17, no. 1 (March 2012): 103–110.
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50. Quoted in John Hannavy (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, 1217. New York and London: Routledge, 2008.
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