

DATA PAPER

Dataset to accompany the excavation report for a 'liberated African' graveyard in Rupert's Valley, St Helena, South Atlantic

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The dataset derives from the excavation and post-excavation of a freed slave ('liberated African') graveyard on the South Atlantic island of St Helena. The report for this site has been produced in two parts: a printed volume published by the Council for British Archaeology (Pearson et al. 2011); and a digital volume deposited with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS). Also held by ADS are supporting data: the primary site record and miscellaneous documents generated during the excavation and post-excavation stages of the project. Substantial further research will be undertaken on this project over the next three to five years. The intention is to expand the dataset as new information is generated.

Keywords: archaeometallurgy, chemical analysis, Colombia, gold, Muisca, tumbaga, tunjo

Funding statement

The excavation, analysis and publication of this site was funded by the UK Department for International Development. Elements of the historical research were made possible by a grant from the Leverhulme Trust.

Context

The project relates to archaeological investigations of the 'liberated African' graveyards in Rupert's Valley, on the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic. These works arose from wider environmental studies initiated in response to proposals to build an airport on the island, which is presently only accessible by sea.

The graveyards belong to the middle decades of the 19th century, and relate to Britain's attempts to abolish the transatlantic slave trade. Between 1840 and 1872 a Vice-Admiralty court operated on St Helena, adjudicating cases of slave ships captured by the Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron. As a part of this process, the human cargo of these vessels, nearly all of whom had been transported in appalling conditions, were brought ashore on St Helena. Historical records indicate that over 26,000 'liberated' or 'recaptive' Africans were received by the island during this period. 'Depots' were set up in two valleys, acting as receiving centres, hospitals and quarantine zones. The first of these, Lemon Valley, was abandoned after 1843, but Rupert's Valley continued to receive and treat slaves into the late 1860s. About one-third of captives did not survive, and were buried in large institutional graveyards: approximately 5000 are thought to lie in Rupert's Valley.

Burials in Rupert's Valley have been encountered in the past, but the present project is concerned with discoveries

made in the mid 2000s. These began when geotechnical trial pitting in 2006 encountered a small number of burials, work which was followed by more formal archaeological investigations in 2007. Full open-area excavation of a part of the upper graveyard was undertaken during a four-month period in 2008.

The 2008 excavation recovered 325 articulated skeletons in a combination of single, multiple and mass graves. A considerable volume of disarticulated human bone from a series of discrete pits was also present. Over 100 registered individual or group small finds were recovered, including coins, iron and copper alloy objects, glass ampoules and bottles, clay pipes, beads, buttons and textile fragments. Most of this assemblage has a European origin. Whilst a few of these items (notably jewellery) may have been owned by the Africans prior to their enslavement, the majority probably relate to the period spent in captivity or within Rupert's Valley.

Spatial Coverage

Rupert's Valley, Island of St Helena, South Atlantic. Excavation centrepoint: 209500, 8237900 (system: DOS 71/4 Astro; projection: Transverse Mercator).

Temporal Coverage

19th century (1840-1872). The excavated part of the graveyard is thought to have been created during the late 1840s.

Methods

Steps

Single context recording was employed. Each individual set of human remains was given a single 'Skeleton' number with the complete grave being numbered as a group context. Cuts and fills making up the grave were given separate context numbers, with coffins also recorded as discrete contexts. Small finds were numbered sequentially.

A photographic record was maintained throughout the excavation, including the photography of all contexts, small finds and burials, in plan, before and after excavation. All photography was undertaken using both 35mm black and white negative and high-resolution digital colour.

A site archive based on standards from MAP2 (English Heritage 1991) and the Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and guidance for the compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives (2009) has been compiled. The physical archive has been deposited with the St Helena Government Archives in Jamestown, whilst an electronic archive containing the core material has been deposited with the Archaeology Data Service.

Quality Control

The excavation was undertaken to the Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and Guidance for archaeological excavation (2008) and Management of Archaeological Projects Second Edition (MAP 2; English Heritage 1991). Site methodology followed Northamptonshire Archaeology's Fieldwork Manual and the Museum of London's Archaeological Site Manual.

All metric survey was undertaken to Metric Survey Specifications for Cultural Heritage (English Heritage 2009).

Dataset Description

Object Name

Dataset to accompany the excavation report for a 'liberated African' graveyard in Rupert's Valley, St Helena, South Atlantic.

Data Type

Primary data, processed data. The dataset comprises two parts:

1. 'Digital volume'. This is a companion to the published monograph¹. It contains: the archaeological structural account; finds catalogue; glass bead catalogue; osteological catalogue; data on the disarticulated human remains; supplementary photographs
2. Archive. Primary site record and miscellaneous documents generated during the excavation and post-excavation stages of the project.

Format Names and Versions

All files are in pdf format (created in Adobe Acrobat 9 PRO and Adobe InDesign CS5).

Creation Dates

Excavation data collection was carried out between May and September 2008. Post-excavation data was generated up to December 2010. The data documents deposited with ADS were generated in July 2011.

Dataset Creators, Roles and Affiliations

Please see the published monograph for project acknowledgements and a complete list of contributors.

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- Helen MacQuarrie. Finds coordinator. Project Officer, AOC Archaeology Group, London. Formerly AHRC funded postgraduate researcher, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Bristol.

Repository Location

UK Archaeology Data Service Collection 1092 (doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5284/1011174>)

Publication Date

December 2011

Language

English

License

CC-BY

Reuse Potential

The archaeological discoveries in Rupert's Valley are of very great importance to studies of the slave trade and its abolition. The objective of the published monograph is to present the baseline information, presenting a structural account of the excavation, setting out the analysis of the human remains and the associated material culture, and placing these findings within an historical and archaeological context. The digital dataset is essential to this objective.

The digital volume presents the detail of the excavated site: its structural account; the finds catalogue; and the osteological analysis. All of these data have the potential to be set within wider comparative frameworks, from osteological analyses of contemporary African and New World populations, to studies of the artefacts of the enslaved. The digital archive enables all aspects of the primary excavation record to be examined. This enables the reader to access a level of detail beyond the synthesis presented within the published monograph.

References

1. **Pearson, A F, Jeffs, B, Witkin, A V and MacQuarrie, H C** 2011 *Infernal Traffic. Excavation of a Liberated African Graveyard in Rupert's Valley, St Helena*. CBA Research Report 169. York: Council for British Archaeology.

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