

# VU Research Portal

## **Building life histories of Cape Town's enslaved, 1700-1850**

Mbeki, L.

2018

### **document version**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

Mbeki, L. (2018). *Building life histories of Cape Town's enslaved, 1700-1850: an archival and isotopic study*. [PhD-Thesis - Research and graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

### **E-mail address:**

[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)



# *Chapter 8*

The Fort Knokke individuals revisited

## Introduction

From the beginning of 1808 the British parliament passed legislation to put an end to the slave trade “from or into British colonies” (Saunders, 1984:224) including The Cape. What this meant for the Cape colonists was that a new form of cheap labour was required. This presented itself in the form of “prize negroes”, enslaved persons on prize ships captured by the British navy for engaging in the slave trade. In order to avoid British anti-slavery efforts in the Atlantic, Brazilian traders turned their attention away from West and West Central Africa and became more involved in the East African coast slave trade in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries to provide labour for their sugar and coffee plantations (Alpers, 1975). In this period Mozambique was a source of slaves not only for Brazil and The Cape, but also the Swahili Coast, Madagascar, and the Mascarenes. These souls originated from as far inland as Malawi and up the Zambezi river (**Figure 18**).

There are a few studies of Brazilian slave trading in Southeast Africa (e.g. Campbell, 1989; Capela, 2014; Harries, 2016). This research has relied on documents generated during this period. Harries in particular has demonstrated how Cape slave traders were actively involved in the financing and logistics of procuring Mozambican slave labour. More than 400,000 Mozambican slaves were ultimately transported to Brazil such as those on the much-publicised *São José-Paquete de Africa*, which was shipwrecked off the coast of Cape Town in 1794 ([www.slavewreckproject.org](http://www.slavewreckproject.org)). Other physical evidence of past slaving activities on the Mozambique-Cape-Brazil route was discovered in 1950 when human remains were excavated at the former site of Fort Knokke and identified as slaves from the *Pacquet Real*, which was also wrecked off Cape Town in 1818 (Cox, 1995).



**Figure 18** Map of Mozambique

From <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mz.html> with few alterations

## Archaeological setting

Fort Knokke was built between 1743-1744 and demolished in the early 1950s during road and rail construction. It stood at the site of today's Woodstock Station in Cape Town. A collection of 19 mostly adolescent individuals was excavated from a common shallow grave at this site. A further excavation 46m away revealed 7 coffin burials of robust, probably European, males (Rose-Innes, 1992). It was unclear whether the two sets of burials were related.

## Human migration assessment

The strontium ratio of dental enamel is a reflection of the geological source region of the consumed foods at the time of mineralisation (see Bentley (2006) and references within). Migration histories can be reconstructed by adopting a multi-dental elemental sampling strategy in which dental elements with discrete mineralisation times are selected (see Kootker *et al.*, 2016). A migration event can be identified if an individual's strontium isotope ratio deviates from the determined local bioavailable strontium signal. Such data is available for Cape Town and the greater Cape floristic region (Copeland *et al.*, 2016; Kootker *et al.*, 2016), however, no such bioavailable data is available for Mozambique although high strontium isotope ratios are expected in individuals from the Phanerozoic and Precambrian regions (~0.73- Mbeki *et al.*, 2017). Although there is a lack of reference bioavailable data for Mozambique, it is still possible to identify individuals' migration histories and thus glean information about indigenous slave networks in Southeast Africa that fed into both the Indian and Atlantic oceanic slave trades.

## Materials and methods

Enamel samples were taken from individuals excavated at the Fort Knokke site in Cape Town to complement strontium data generated by Cox (1995). Some sampling restrictions applied due to the lack of post cranial material in some cases and limited dental material in others, this resulted in the collection of 47 samples representing 20 recovered individuals (Rose-Innes, 1992; Cox, 1995). In keeping with previous studies, where possible, enamel was collected from first, second and third molars to enable reconstruction of individual migration histories during childhood and adolescence (Kootker *et al.*, 2016; Mbeki *et al.*, 2017). During this fieldwork campaign, permission was not granted for either dentin or bone collection for additional carbon and nitrogen isotope analysis, however some limited data are available from Cox's study (1995).

Unlike the skeletal material encountered in previous chapters, there was some comingling of the individuals from the common shallow grave at Fort Knokke. Some sorting of the skeletal material has been carried out by Rose-Innes (1992). Where cranial material from multiple individuals was stored together and if possible, teeth from the same jaw were sampled. There is, however, a small chance that comingling resulted in inaccurate life history reconstructions.

Bulk enamel powder collection for strontium isotope analysis was performed on site at Iziko Museums Slave Lodge, Cape Town, in pre-acid cleaned Eppendorf vials and subsequently transferred to the class 100 cleanroom facility at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The strontium extraction protocol and analytical details are described elsewhere (Kootker *et al.*, 2016). The measurements were performed on a MAT-Finnigan 262 RPQ-plus

multicollector mass spectrometer (Finnigan Corp., San Jose, CA), and on a ThermoFinnigan Triton at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam using a static routine. All measurements were referenced to the within-run value of the NBS987 standard, which gave a mean  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  value of 0.710262 ( $n = 7$ ) for the 262 mass spectrometer, and 0.710259 ( $n = 7$ ) for the Triton over the period of the study. The samples were run to an internal precision of  $\pm 0.000006$  (1SE) or better. The total procedural blanks ( $n = 4$ ) introduced a negligible contribution.

## Results and discussion

Strontium isotope ratios are reported in **Table 12**. The  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values range from 0.70923 to 0.73094. Of the 16 individuals we presume were enslaved, 7 (44%) were found to have experienced migration events prior to arrival at The Cape. The sample size is however too small for meaningful statistical analysis.

**Table 12:** Strontium isotope data for a selection of individuals from the Fort Knokke site

ID	Biological sex	Age	Dental element	$^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$	$\pm 2\text{SE}$
4763A*	Male	-	26	0.70974	0.00001
			28	0.70942	0.00001
			47	0.70967	0.00001
4764*	Female?	<21	46	0.71589	0.00001
			47	0.71934	0.00001
			48	0.72005	0.00001
4765	Female	15-21	28	0.71118	0.00001
			36	0.71174	0.00001
			37	0.71051	0.00001
4767	Female	15-21	18	0.71633	0.00001
			36	0.71786	0.00001
			37	0.71803	0.00001
4770	Female	-	26	0.72086	0.00001
			27	0.71727	0.00001
4772.1	-	-	26	0.72231	0.00001
4772.2	-	-	26	0.71171	0.00001
4773A	-	Juvenile	17	0.71198	0.00001
			18	0.71273	0.00001
4773B	-	Juvenile	17	0.71202	0.00001
			18	0.73093	0.00001
4775	Robust Male	Adult	46	0.70999	0.00001

Table 12: Continued

ID	Biological sex	Age	Dental element	$^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$	$\pm 2\text{SE}$
			47	0.70937	0.00001
4778	Robust Male	Adult	16	0.70971	0.00001
			18	0.70972	0.00001
4779	Female	-	36	0.72204	0.00001
			37	0.72194	0.00001
			48	0.71268	0.00001
4780	Robust Male	Adult	17	0.70923	0.00001
4782	Robust Male	Adult	47	0.70941	0.00001
4783	-	-	48	0.70959	0.00001
4789B	-	-	36	0.71519	0.00001
			38	0.70958	0.00001
4870	Male	Indeterminate	16	0.70981	0.00001
			18	0.70972	0.00001
4871	Female	15-21	28	0.71382	0.00001
			36	0.71419	0.00001
			37	0.71386	0.00001
4872*	Male	Adult	26	0.70995	0.00001
			27	0.70994	0.00001
			28	0.70965	0.00001
4873	-	-	26	0.71185	0.00001
			27	0.71217	0.00001

Key: Isotopic (this study) and osteological (Rose-Innes, 1992) data.

Dental element notation conforms to Fédération Dentaire *Internationale*.

\*Presence of dental modifications

The robust males in the Fort Knokke sample display  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values that cluster around 0.709 and they all experienced residential stability in early life. Their migration occurred after the formation of their M3 (16 years of age). This profile is consistent with European sailors. The rest of the Fort Knokke individuals display a wide range of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  M1 values, suggesting diverse origins, in keeping with the different regions supplying the slave trade at the Mozambican coast.

A difference of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{enamel}}$  ( $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ )  $> 0.001$  between dental elements is taken to indicate a migration event. Several migration events were identified for some Fort Knokke individuals. These migration events may be the result of being traded in indigenous slave networks in Southeast Africa before falling into the hands of Brazilian traders and being wrecked at The Cape. The assumption is that migration events were a result of enslavement or change of hands.



As explained in chapter 4 the resolution of the sampling strategy employed here may not be high enough to detect all migration events experienced by an individual. Moreover, migrations between isotopically identical locations are also not detectable, thus the extent of migration will be underestimated.

Nevertheless, individual 4764 experienced a migration event to a more radiogenic region between the ages of 3 and 8 as is evidenced by  $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{M1-M2}}=0.003$ . She experienced residential stability between ages 8 and 16. Individual 4765 in contrast, experienced multiple migration events in early life. Between ages 3 and 8 years she migrated to a less radiogenic region,  $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{M1-M2}}=0.001$ , she subsequently migrated to a significantly more radiogenic region between the ages of 8 and 16,  $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{M2-M3}}=0.004$ .

Individual 4767 experienced residential stability until the age of 8. Between the ages of 8 and 16, however, she migrated to a less radiogenic area,  $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{M2-M3}}=0.002$ . A migration event is also evident for individual 4770, a female aged 15-21 at death. Between the ages of 3 and 8 she changed residence to a less radiogenic region,  $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{M1-M2}}=0.01$ . No further migration could be discerned as no M3 was available for analysis.

Individual 4779 migrated to considerably less radiogenic realms during adolescence,  $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{M2-M3}}=0.009$ . Individual 4773B also experienced a migration event in adolescence to a more radiogenic area,  $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{M2-M3}}=0.02$ . Finally, individual 4789B moved to less radiogenic realms between the ages of 3 and 8,  $\Delta^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{M1-M2}}=0.006$ . No further migration was detected for this individual.

Migration events could thus be identified in 7 of 16 enslaved individuals. In the cases of individuals 4772.1, 4772.2 and 4783 only one dental element was available for analysis. It was therefore not possible to discern whether they had experienced migration. Their significantly different strontium isotope ratios (0.72231, 0.71171, 0.70959), however, do indicate diverse geological origins.

The ages of these young enslaved persons contrast sharply with the range of ages, 16-40, of slaves from South and Southeast Asia destined for sale at The Cape (Chapter 3). The older age of Asian slaves would make it possible for them to be immediately put to work after arrival at The Cape. The shortage of labour at The Cape may have made these Asian slaves attractive to buyers despite the relatively high prices they fetched. Perhaps in the Atlantic world the lower price of young slaves made them attractive to buyers.

## Conclusions

The migration histories of the young individuals on the *Pacquet Real* suggest that they had experienced enslavement and migration in indigenous Mozambican slave networks prior to their transportation by Brazilian slave traders. The ages of these individuals hint at a significant difference in the nature of Cape slavery and its analogue in Brazil.