# Bombay Africans 1850-1910 (Part One)

Royal Geographical Society

with IBG

Advancing geography and geographical learning

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### Introduction

This exhibition reveals the lives of a group of African men known as the 'Bombay Africans': Sidi Mubarak Bombay, Abdullah Susi, James Chuma, Wikitani, Mathew Wellington and Jacob Wainwright. They were all, through their knowledge of languages, landscapes and diplomacy, invaluable members of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century British expeditions into East Africa. Women were also present on these expeditions. However, the record of their contribution has been lost to history.



From left to right: Agnes Livingstone, Thomas Livingstone, daughter and son of David Livingstone, Abdullah Susi, James Chuma and Reverend Horace Waller at Newstead Abbey, Nottingham discussing the journals, maps and plans made by the late David Livingstone.

By R Allen & Sons, 1874

The results of these expeditions were recorded in sketches, photographs, maps and written accounts. These records illustrated Victorian attitudes towards the so called 'dark continent', attitudes that often referred to Africans as either 'uncivilized natives' or 'noble savages'. As a result, the contributions that Africans made to the exploration of East Africa appeared as mere footnotes in the history of exploration. The Bombay Africans also contributed to other aspects of political and economic life. This includes their roles in the antislavery movement and with Christian organisations such as the Church Missionary Society which led to the formation of the first East African settlements for returning 'freed slaves'.

"The vague expression of the 'Expedition'... is very apt to swallow up a subordinate's (guide's) individuality and valuable services, throwing him into the background, where he is more likely to be forgotten. To obviate such a fate for the invaluable headman of the East Central African Expedition...let me bring him especially under the readers notice." Joseph Thomson FRGS, 1881



Joseph Thomson with Chuma (left) and Makatubu Publication: Joseph Thomson African Explorer (London: Low & Co. 1896) by Rev J B Thomson 1896

"I would like these stories to reach many more people – especially the generation of my children and grandchildren. You don't know who you are until you know where you come from." Mwatumu, Tanzanian Women's Association

The exhibition has been created in partnership with RGS-IBG fellow and historian Cliff Pereira and the Tanzanian Women's Association (London), Friends of Maasai People (Harrow), Congolese Community in the UK, Lancaster Youth Group (Ladbroke Grove, London), Ghanaian Elders Group (Black Cultural Archives, London) and O-Bay Community Trust (Edmonton, London). Members of these groups identified and discussed materials from the Society's collection and their responses are included in the following pages.

Please note: Where relevant, the names of places and peoples have been left in their original form. For example, 'Bombay' has been used instead of 'Mumbai'.

## African Diaspora & the Indian Ocean

#### The Indian Ocean Trade in Enslaved Africans

For millennia, Africans have been travelling across the Indian Ocean to the Middle East and Asia. Many travelled freely and settled. They included merchants, sailors, Christian and Muslim pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem and Mecca, soldiers, guards, fishermen, incense collectors, diplomatic envoys, conquerors and adventurers.

However, the majority of Africans endured forced migration to Asia as slaves. Slavery dominated the lives of the Bombay Africans, many of whom were enslaved as young children and transported across the Indian Ocean. Millions of enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic and Indian oceans. However, there were key differences in the experiences of those subjected to these trades:

- Proportionately larger numbers of children were enslaved in the Indian Ocean than in the Atlantic
- Enslavement as part of the Indian Ocean trade took a variety of forms, including plantation labour and within domestic settings
- The scale of trade varied greatly over time and place in the Indian Ocean, small vessels carrying twenty enslaved Africans were common
- Those that were enslaved, and their children could gain their freedom from their masters and within Islamic states did attain high social status



Capture of Madagascar slaves
Publication: Scenes in Africa, for the amusement and instruction of little tarry-at-home travellers by Rev. Isaac Taylor (London: Harris & Son 1820) by J Harrison 1820

Such differences had an impact on how African communities developed outside Africa.

"It appears that those (enslaved) that were moved across the Indian Ocean maintained some of their culture as opposed to the Atlantic side where it is much more difficult to identify their cultures and roots. This also made it easier to stop the Atlantic slave trade using law as it was an economic trade. The Indian Ocean trade seems more ingrained in the societies that supported it and hence more difficult to remove."

Abubakar, Tanzanian Women's Association

#### Slavery in East and Northeast Africa

The use of slaves was common in many African societies. For example, domestic slavery was practiced by traditional societies such as the Buganda, and Bunyoro Kingdoms of Uganda, the Yao and Nyassa of Malawi, and the Merina of Madagascar. A combination of plantation and domestic slavery was practiced among the Christian kingdoms of Ethiopia, and the Islamic societies of the Somali, Swahili and Comoro Islands and Zanzibar.

The coastal cities of Eastern Africa were the end of trade routes that stretched far into the interior. One route ran 2,400 km (1500 miles) through Kitale in Western Kenya into Eastern Uganda and to the Congo Basin. Another, the notorious slave market at Bagamoyo, was fed by a route through Tabora in central Tanzania and Ujiji on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. These trade routes also served as starting and finishing points for the 19th century expeditions into Africa's interior.



Map of Eastern Africa showing old trade routes and ethnic groups by Cliff Pereira, 2007

Red lines depict trade routes and names appearing in orange are ethnic groups.

#### Liberation

Although the Transatlantic slave trade was abolished in 1807, the trade in enslaved Africans in the Indian Ocean continued for several decades after. The British Royal Navy had a strong presence in the Indian Ocean and played an important role in liberating many enslaved Africans. Their ships often employed Arabs, Asians and Africans, many of whom were liberated from slavery themselves. The Navy policed maritime trade routes and also initiated agreements to stop the slave trade. The sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf, Persia, the Yemen, Muscat and Somali chiefs all signed treaties to restrict the slave trade between 1800 and 1822.

Bombay was the eastern headquarters for the British Royal Navy and it became the hub for British antislavery activities. Many of those freed in the Indian Ocean were taken to India instead of being returned to Africa. This was done to protect liberated individuals from possible recapture by traders in East Africa. The British Indian administration was also viewed as being better placed to support the newly freed men, women and children and placed them with local families or helped them find jobs.

During the mid-1800s the Church Missionary Society began establishing orphanages for these liberated individuals in India. These missionary shelters played a crucial part in the development of the Bombay Africans as a community, the name coined to describe these displaced Africans, and also their later contribution to the anti-slavery movement in East Africa.

In India, the Abolition Act of 1811 and the Indian Government Act of 1843 reduced the slave trade within areas under British administration. Pressure was also placed on the independent 'Princely' Indian states to reduce the trade in their areas. However, it was only in 1873 that the trade of East Africans across the Indian Ocean was effectively ended through a treaty signed with the Sultan of Zanzibar. Trade continued across the Red Sea from Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt.



Liberation by the Royal Navy - main deck of HMS Lynx with slaves taken from Arab dhow by T Baines, 1859

## British Exploration of Africa

#### **British expeditions to Africa**

There was intense European interest in Africa during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Royal Geographical Society supported many of the expeditions during this period.

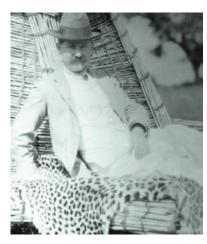
1848	Kilimanjaro Expedition, J Rebman
1849	Mt. Kenya Expedition, J Krapf
1855	Somaliland, R Burton/ J Speke (RGS expedition)
1857-1858	Source of the Nile, R Burton/J Speke (RGS expedition)
1860-1863	Great Lakes, J Speke/J A Grant (RGS expedition)
1864-1865	Zambezi Expedition, D Livingstone
1866-1867	Tanganyika, D Livingstone
1867-1873	Last Journey, D Livingstone
1871-1872	North Tanganyika, H M Stanley
1873-1875	Livingstone Relief Expedition, V L Cameron (RGS expedition)
1874-1877	Congo Expedition, H M Stanley
1879-1880	Central Lakes, J Thomson/H Johnston (RGS expedition)
1881	Rovuma, J Thomson
1879-1882	Congo, H M Stanley
1883-1884	Masailand, J Thomson (RGS expedition)
c1886	Kilimanjaro, H Johnston

Exploration took place for many reasons; the 'discovery' and identification of key geographical features, to increase trade, consolidate territories and spread Christianity.

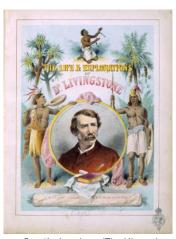
David Livingstone is the best known explorer from this period. He combined a zeal for geographical discovery, Christian missionary work and a strong opposition to slavery. Other explorers of the time included Harry Johnston, Joseph Thomson, Captain V L Cameron, James Grant, Henry Morton Stanley and John H Speke. All of these explorers employed Bombay Africans on their expeditions.



Captain V Cameron by Maull & Co, Date unknown



Sir Harry Johnston, May, 1900



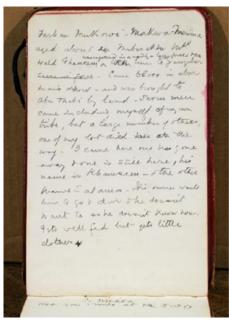
Frontispiece from 'The Life and Explorations of Dr Livingstone' by John S. Roberts (Adam & Co., London/Newcastle on Tyne, 1878).

#### **Records of exploration**

The Society's collection of maps, photographs, illustrations and documents reveal much about the work of the British explorers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These records often document condescending and derogatory comments about African peoples, as well as inaccurate scientific work which categorized people into racial hierarchies.

However, when pieced together such records also offer substantial clues and evidence for historical events and figures, and they also reveal stories that would otherwise be left untold.

For example, Sir Percy Z Cox's journal entry shown here alongside J A Grant's photograph provide important records of the Indian Ocean slave trade.



Page from Journal by Sir Percy Z Cox, 1902

#### Notes read:

Left: Faruk an Mukowi – Makwa-Merima aged about 24 Mubarak...Wald Ghaneem was captured in a raid by a large force then taken... to Zanzibar. Came in force - Came to Soor in above man's dhow - and was brought to Abu Thabi by land. Several men came including myself of my own tribe, but a large number of others, one of my lot died along the way - 3 came here one has gone away & one is still here, his name is Khamseen - the other name is Salama. His owner wants him to go & dive & he doesn't want to as he doesn't know how. Gets well fed but gets little clothes.

Below: "Slave market-place, Zanzibar - very difficult to take - slaves and Arabs kept running away leaving only a line of women slaves whose legs and a face or two may be observed - the women's entire dress is a blue cotton sheet or cloth tied tight under arms and extending as far as the knee - their heads are cropped as short as scissors can crop them - very often they have for ornament a hole through the upper lip - at the market they come out very clean - houses are blocks of coralline partly plastered - an individual wily Arab squats to the right eyeing the women".

