AN EAST INDIAN LABORERS HOUSEHOLD IN 19TH CENTURY JAMAICA
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Summary
Diversity in the Caribbean is the result of many Diasporas including European, African, East Asian, and East Indian. While much of the research on Diaspora in the Caribbean has focused on the African Diaspora beginning in the sixteenth century and ending in the nineteenth century, an examination of other groups present in the Caribbean can add to our understanding of the true depth of diversity in the emergence of social landscapes. This paper explores an East Indian laborer household excavated in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica. The material residues of the people who lived in this house along with the structure's orientation and layout is distinct from those recorded on households of African Jamaicans who resided in a separate locus at the same site. This data suggests potential avenues for future research.

INTRODUCTION
Archaeological excavations at Seville Plantation in Jamaica resulted in the recovery of a house site associated with 19th century East Indian laborers. While the identification of a household of East Indian context was incidental to the exploration of African and European contexts at the site, its presence is of particular value as it illustrates the complexity of social interactions in the region and highlights the importance of examining cultural transformations within a setting influenced by multiple diasporas. This study takes a close look at the house structure and associated material remains. It explores the specific economic and social implications of an East Indian presence and highlights distinctions in the residual material culture representing ethnically derived differences among African and East Indian laborers on a single plantation. The study also shows parallels in certain economic aspects of material use between African and East Indian laborers in contrast with those associated with plantation management.

The identification of an East Indian household in a setting where it was not documented illustrates the importance of understanding that the history of the Caribbean involves multiple diasporas. Seville was known to have been a setting in which groups from many backgrounds interacted. The area that comprises Seville Estate was the site of the pre-and proto-historic indigenous village of Maima. Columbus spent a year on its shoreline interacting with this and other native groups while marooned in Jamaica in the 15th century. The Spanish established both the settlement of Sevilla la Nueva and sugar plantations there in the 16th century, and while the focus of Spanish settlement moved to St. Jago de la Vega (Spanish Town) in the second quarter of the 16th century, the sugar estate continued operation until the Spanish were displaced by the British in 1655. Under both the Spanish and British, enslaved African laborers made up the majority population of the estate in the 16th–19th centuries.

The joint Syracuse University / Jamaica National Heritage Trust, Seville African Jamaican Archaeological Project was designed to explore continuity and change in the archaeological record.
associated with the African laborers during the period of slavery and after emancipation. It also aimed at contrasting these findings with data from the planter and managerial contexts. The surprise recovery of a distinct and spatially discrete mid-19th century East Indian household provided an extra and enriching level of contrast that allowed us to do more than simply contrast the relative economic and social conditions of African laborers and European managers. It allowed us to look within 19th century laborer contexts and see culturally defined differences that relate to ethnic preferences that are all too often masked by gross economic divisions.

To date, archaeological studies of plantations have focused on economic dominance and subjugation between Europeans and Africans. Archaeology has been used as a valuable tool in highlighting the emergence of the internal dynamics of enslaved African laborers and processes of cultural transformation (Armstrong 1990, 1998), examination of maroonage and resistance (Agorsah 1994; 1999) spatial analysis to define social relations (Delle 1998; Armstrong and Kelly 2000), reconstruction of family and kin based social structure (Higman 1999), and refined analysis of market relations and material distribution systems (Hauser 2001). Considerably less attention has been paid to the lives and material record of other groups in Jamaica, and in the Caribbean. Beginning in the 19th century, after the cessation of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery, planters sought new sources of labor. In Jamaica these efforts took the form of recruiting “voluntary” labor from African (1840-1865; Thomas 1974), indentured servants from India (1844-1917; Shepherd 1988), and China (1852-1859; Black 1972).

This study presents a reinterpretation of a mid-19th century house site located at Seville Plantation in Jamaica. In the early 1990s, this house was correctly attributed as a post-emancipation free laborers living quarters (Kelly 1989, Kelly and Armstrong 1991). At the time of initial analysis this house was noted as projecting material, structural, and spatial patterns that were distinct from the ten other post-emancipation houses explored at Seville. A reanalysis precipitated by the need to further explain the widely divergent data from this house site, combined with an attribution of the site as the location of a “coolie house” by a local informant, set in motion a rethinking of the ethnic identity of the occupants.

THE SETTING

Seville Plantation is located on Jamaican’s north coast, just west of St. Ann’s Bay (Figure 1). The property is owned and operated by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust and is a National Landmark. The lands which make up Seville Plantation have been in constant occupation since pre-historic times and include the indigenous village of Maima, the yet to be identified site of Columbus maroonage during his second voyage in 1494, the 16th century Spanish settlement of Sevilla La Nueva and a later Spanish period sugar plantation, and a post 1655 British period sugar plantation established by the Hemings family (Armstrong 1998; Armstrong and Kelly 2000).

The archaeological study of the laborer communities associated with the British Colonial plantation in Jamaica was carried out by Armstrong as a cooperative project of Syracuse University and the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. Surveys and excavations were initiated in 1987 and completed in 1993. The goals of the project were to illustrate cultural transformations with in the African Jamaican community at Seville. Two discrete occupation areas were found at the site. The temporal
and spatial separation between these two loci allowed detailed examination of contrasts over time. One area was occupied from the third quarter of the 17th century to the end of the third quarter of the 18th century. The settlement then moved to its second locus where occupation continued through the end of the 19th century. The discrete separation of laborer contexts was blurred only by the presence of a single mid-19th century household built at the far end of what had been the earlier slave community (Figure 2).

In searching for answers as to the context of this distinctive house site we initially attributed its differential location, size, orientation, materials, and structural attributes to emerging differentiation within the post-emancipation African Jamaican community at Seville. A second look however, points decisively to the fact that the differences seen relate to ethnic and social distinctions that relate to the presence of East Indians.

THE EAST INDIAN DIASPORA

Between 1844 and 1917 thirty six thousand four hundred Indians immigrated to Jamaica from East India Company holdings in Bengal and Madras (Roberts 1956:128). The population that immigrated to Jamaica represented 8.4% of the nearly five hundred thousand East Indian immigrants to the Caribbean. While the East Indian population represents a small minority within the total population of Jamaica, in the parishes of St Elizabeth and Clarendon they are a significant minority. Culturally, ubiquitous foods like curry goat and roti highlight the subtle but lasting influence of the East Indian community on Jamaica.

Jamaica's diversity is the result of many Diasporas including European, African, East Asian, and East Indian. Historical archaeology has focused on cultural permutations of the demographically dominant European and African groups. The archaeological record of groups, like those from India, can add to our understanding of the true depth of diversity in the emergence of social landscapes. While the Indian Diaspora has been relatively underrepresented by academics, there is growing scholarship among Anthropologists (Williams 1996), Historians (Shepherd 1988) and Geographers (Prorok and Hemmasi 1993). For the most part this research has focused on the positioning of Indians vis-a-vis the larger African communities and highlight the rise and occurrence of interracial conflict (Shepherd 1988).

In Jamaica, Verene Shepherd has examined the origins of racial conflict. She argues that much of this conflict, while predicated on constructs of ethnicity and race, is based on class differences that arose in the post-emancipation period. In this period, planters employed indentured labor as a means to supplement their dwindling labor supply and to keep wages low for former slaves. The planters took advantage of the ensuing antagonism between laborers from India and African to retain control over labor (Shepherd 1988: 90). Within this context, East Indian manners of speech were chided by Africans, while Indians espoused racial superiority over Africans. It wasn't, however, until the post war depression that this antagonism broke out in violent conflict. This eventually fed into nationalist concerns in the 1940s and 50s when the task of defining a Jamaican was undertaken (Shepherd 1988:109). Indians, in the end were considered aliens.
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF AN EAST INDIAN HOUSEHOLD

When House Area 14 (Locus 4) was initially excavated there was a consensus that the structure was quite unique. Three things made this structure stand apart from the other house areas: the materials represented in the consumption patterns, the method of construction and the layout of the house. Initially these differences were interpreted as reflecting economic differences within the African free labor community.

First a point of commonality among laborers; all of the laborer contexts at Seville (before and after emancipation) shared a pattern of material use that was dominated by basic subsistence, as indicted by a very high percentage of food related items in comparison to all with managerial contexts (planter, overseer, mid-level manager) (Figure 3). However, when one looks more closely at the material record one can find very distinct patterns of material use that reflect differences between the East Indians, and their fellow laborers (from Africa) or managers (from Europe). For example; when looking at personal items, such as those linked clothing, adornment, and health and hygiene, the relative proportions of items found are distinctly different. These differences reflect ethnic preferences based on heritage rather than simply economic or class conditions (Figure 4). The East Indians at Seville had a broader array of items used to fasten and enhance their clothing, including brass tassels and adornments like beads. While beads were also found in the African contexts, items of personal adornment were nearly absent in the European, managerial, contexts. Finally, while the Europeans and Africans had similar proportions of health and hygiene items (pharmaceutical bottles, combs, tooth brushes), very few recognizable items from this category were found for the East Indian context. This suggests a greater reliance on ayurvedic and homeopathic practices.

The second set of distinguishing characteristics relates to the layout and construction of the house. One cannot ignore the fact that the East Indian house was built in isolation from the African laborers. This is indicative of a recognized difference between laboring groups. In terms of house construction the East Indian house was quite distinctive in layout and design and in construction. The basic orientation of the house was 90 degrees different from the houses that had previously been constructed as part of the African village. The East Indian house was nearly twice the size of the average African house and had defined internal divisions. While the African houses had flooring of marl or wood, the East Indians used pink colored mortar in the main living areas and used brick in their cooking area. The cooking area was a formal room attached to the house, while those of the Africans were detached yard hearths. The brick floor allowed for cleaning that is consistent with conceptions of hygiene in South Asia.

The layout of the East Indian house loosely conforms to practices of architecture of India. While the East Indians that came to Jamaica originated from widely divergent areas of South Asia, there are some potential religious themes that cross-cut these populations. One of which is the way in which space is organized and employed in the construction of residences. This system, known as Vaastuu, arises from cosmology derived from Sanskrit texts employed in Hinduism. Vaastuu employs a mandalla (Ananth 1998: 82) or a geometric representation of the cosmos (Figure 5), in which a god is superimposed over a geometric surface. Through this mandalla certain orientations of the house are preferred as well as proportions (e.g.: 1:1 1/4; 1:1 1/2; 1:1 3/4; 1: 2) (Annant 1998: 130-131). The
ground plan of the East Indian house is in the proportion 1 to 1. Second, we can locate the kitchen in the northwest corner. This location is thought to dissipate the power of the wind (Figure 6). The northwest corner is also the home of the gods and in some populations the kitchen is the home of the household deity. The location of the spring which supplied the water to the house was northeast of the structure. This again is consistent with Vaastu where Isana is located in the Northeast corner of the Mandalla.

CONCLUSIONS
In reassessing this distinctive laborer house site at Seville, this study brings to light the presence of East Indians within the Jamaican plantation context. The data show that while as laborers the East Indians shared certain commonalities of economic condition and class structure with their African counterparts. However, these data also indicate very distinct, ethnically derived preferences and practices that were expressed in this particular household. Clearly, there were divisions among laborers in the post-emancipation era in Jamaica. The East Indians household was constructed separately from their African counterparts and reflects very distinct patterns of material use and construction. These differences can be tied to preferences related to South Asian and African cultural practices. Given these differences and the reasons for the arrivals of the South Asians within the post-emancipation setting, it is not surprising that these new arrivals were viewed with suspicion and even contempt by their African laborer counterparts.

The importance of the study is three fold. First, it presents a definitive case study focusing on a site occupied by indentured East Indian laborers. Second, it provides a clear example of diversity among Jamaican laborers. Finally, it establishes a basis to begin comparative studies of the ethnic identities and cultural preferences among laboring populations and within the Jamaican population as a whole (Indian, South Asian, East Asian, African, and European).

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Figure 1. Seville Plantation, Locator Map
Figure 2. Excavations: The Early African Jamaican Settlement and the East Indian House site
(house-area 1.14)
Figure 3. Assemblage Based Artifact Use: Comparison of broad categories of artifacts by locus (1. Early African Jamaican, 2. Late African Jamaican; 4. East Indian; 5. Planter; 6. Overseer; 7. Mid-Level Manager)
Figure 4: Artifacts associated with personal use. Comparison of proportion of clothing, adornment, and health and hygiene items by locus (1. Early African Jamaican; 2. Late African Jamaican; 4. East Indian; 5. Planter; 6. Overseer; 7. Mid-Level Manager).
Figure 5. Vaastu Purusha Mandala and Cosmology of Vaastu (adapted from Ananth 1998:82-92).
Figure 6. East Indian house orientation in relation to Vaastu representation.