

Oscar Mallitte's Andaman Photographs, 1857-8¹

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At the end of 1857 the French photographer Oscar Jean-Baptiste Mallitte (c. 1829-1905) left Calcutta with a British expeditionary party. Its brief was to survey the Andaman Islands and to decide where best to establish a penal colony. Mallitte took a series of accompanying 'photographic drawings', the first ever photographs of the Islands. On the return of the party to Bengal, several dozen copies of the images were printed and mounted, but subsequently they slipped from archival view and until recently they have been assumed lost. However, copies of most of the photographs have now been found in the Queen's Collection at Windsor Castle. A new curator of photography was working her way through the archives when she came upon them. Though the set as a whole was both unsigned and unattributed, because each photograph had a separate title that correlated with place names and printed textual records, she understood their provenance immediately.² The eleven images comprise: 'Port Cornwallis'; 'Remains of the Old Settlement, Chatham Island, Port Cornwallis'; 'Native Hut, Chatham Island, Port Cornwallis'; 'The Volcano, Barren Island'; 'One of the Labyrinth Islands, Group of Burmese Convicts'; 'Port Blair'; 'Ross Island, Port Blair'; 'Implements and Weapons of the Andaman Islanders'; and, 'Three Views of John Andaman (a native of one of the Islands)'.³ The collection lacks just two of the originals: 'Watering Cove, Blair Island' and 'Blair Harbour, North Shore'.⁴

The Mallitte photographs raise a series of interesting questions, for they produce visually something of the pre-colonial landscape and culture of the

¹ I am grateful to the National Maritime Museum for supporting my research through the award of the Sackler-Caird Fellowship, 2007-9. Thanks also to participants in the British Association of South Asian Studies Annual Conference, University of Leicester, Mar. 2008, and Institute of Advanced Studies 'Connected Histories' workshops, University of Warwick, 2007-8, and to David Arnold, Paul Jenkins, and Daniel Rycroft. This paper could not have been written without the expertise and assistance of photographic curators John Falconer (India Office Records [henceforth IOR]) and Sophie Gordon (Queen's Collection, Windsor Castle).

² I refer here to Indian specialist Sophie Gordon. For the complete list of photographs, see: IOR P.188.52 Home (Judicial) 23 Apr. 1858: Cecil Beadon, Secretary to Government of India, to F.J. Mouat, President Andamans Committee, 17 Apr. 1858

³ Queen's Collection, Windsor Castle: Photographic Drawings of the Andaman Islands (1857-8).

⁴ IOR P.188.52 Home (Judicial) 23 Apr. 1858: Beadon to Mouat, 17 Apr. 1858.

Andamans in the last months before permanent British occupation of the Islands. Most particularly, they represent for the first time photographically an Islander: a man the survey party kidnapped and forcibly removed to Calcutta, with a view to showing him the supposed benefits of ‘civilization’ and learning something of Andamanese culture. When he fell seriously ill, it returned him to the Andamans, its initial concern that he would prove a conduit for knowledge of colonial superiority superseded by the hope that he would survive.⁵ Later on, Mallitte’s photographs of him were copied, and widely published as lithographic engravings. These images are already quite well known, but the insertion of the original photographs into the visual frame now allows us for the first time to interrogate some of the slippages that were implied during the transformation of the limited edition photographs into mass-circulated engravings. This paper will show that the photographs are of significance in this respect in three ways. First, they enable us to examine the underlying violence of colonization. Second, they demonstrate some of the ambiguities around the use of forced convict labour as a means of colonial expansion. Third, they reveal some of the ways in which the pre-colonial Islands and its peoples were constructed and represented both discursively and visually through the trope of colonial ‘tropicality’. As such, the photographs and engravings – together with their associated written texts - constitute a significant part of the imagined geography of the Andamans as a conceptual space, culturally and environmentally distant, different, and distinct from the British metropole, and ready to receive the supposedly civilizing benefits of colonization.⁶

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By the middle of the nineteenth century, having abandoned a disastrous earlier attempt at occupation during the 1790s, the government of India began to develop plans to colonize the Andaman Islands. Dating from Marco Polo’s travel writing in

⁵ Mouat to Beadon, 15 Jan. 1858, cited in ‘The Andaman Islands: with notes on Barren Island’, *Selections from the Records of the Government of India (Home Department)*, no. 25 (Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1859) (henceforth *Selections from the Records*), 28-9. Mouat drew on his experience as Inspector-General of Prisons, comparing ‘Jack’s bronchitis with that afflicting ‘Sonthals and all other wild tribes ... in the Jails of the Lower Provinces’.

⁶ On tropical visibility, see: David Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: environment, culture and European expansion* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996); David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Travelling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800-1856* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2006); Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, eds, *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005); Nancy Leys Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (London, Reaktion, 2006).

the thirteenth century, there was a widespread belief that the inhabitants of the Andamans were at best savages and at worse cannibals. From the end of the eighteenth century, the significance of eastward sea routes through the Bay of Bengal grew. Correspondingly, so did the frequency of Andamanese attacks on distressed seamen and passengers. In 1855, commissioner of neighbouring Arakan, Henry Hopkinson, wrote of his astonishment that the Islands 'should be left in the possession of a handful of degenerate negroes, degraded in habits and intelligence to a level little above the beasts of the forest with which they dwell.'⁷ Though Governor-General Canning had his doubts about the viability and expense of colonization, the government of India and the East India Company's court of directors were broadly in favour of it.⁸ Their view was strengthened when in 1856 a group of Andamanese killed eight Chinese traders after they went on shore in search of water.⁹ Magistrate of Tenasserim J.C. Haughton wrote: '[I]t appears highly discreditable in a civilised Government to allow such a state of things to exist within a sea, one may say, bounded by its own territories and on the high road to many of its chief emporia.'¹⁰

In this broader Bay of Bengal context, the north Indian mainland erupted in rebellion in 1857. During widespread military and civilian unrest, rebels damaged or destroyed dozens of prisons, and set free thousands of prisoners, leaving a severe shortage of secure jail accommodation. Simultaneously, India's established penal settlements in the Straits (Singapore, Penang, Malacca) and Burma (Arakan and Tenasserim Provinces) refused to receive mutineers and rebels amongst the usual convicts sentenced to transportation, considering them to be treacherous. At the beginning of 1857, despite concerns about sea routes, the government had been somewhat reticent about re-colonizing the Andamans, fearing a long-term drain on finances. But with few options for the imprisonment or transportation of rebels and mutineers, at the end of the year it appointed Indian medical service surgeon and

⁷ Henry Hopkinson, Commissioner of Arakan, to Grey, 8 Feb. 1856, cited in M.V. Portman, *A History of Our Relations with the Andamanese: compiled from histories and travels, and from the records of the Government of India, Volume I* (Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1899), 190-7 (quote 191).

⁸ Grey to Dalrymple, 29 Feb. 1856, cited in Portman, *A History of our Relations, Vol. I*, 189.

⁹ Governor-General Canning to the Court of Directors, 22 Apr. 1856, enc. A. Bogle, Commissioner Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces, to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary to Government of India, cited in Portman, *A History of our Relations, Vol. I*, 197-204.

¹⁰ J.C. Haughton, Magistrate Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces, to Bogle, 3 Mar. 1856, cited in Portman, *A History of our Relations, Vol. I*, 198.

inspector-general of prisons Frederic J. Mouat to head a committee charged with choosing the best location for a penal colony on the Islands.¹¹ Mouat was accompanied to the Andamans by two assistants, Bengal army surgeon G.F. Playfair, and a lieutenant of the Indian navy, J.A. Heathcote. The men returned to India with a favourable report for settlement in the spectacular natural harbour of Port Blair on an island now called South Andaman.

The colonization of the Andaman Islands was effected in the wake of the development of photography on the Indian mainland, a radically new visual form which held out the promise of value-free representation. In *Camera Indica*, visual anthropologist Christopher Pinney describes its development in colonial India in terms of its 'indexicality'. It offered, he claims, superiority over more equivocal signs in a place of apparent visual allusion and wonder.¹² At the time, contemporaries believed that photographs provided objective records free from interpretation. Thus, they were an epistemological medium through which 'visual facts' became scientific knowledge. The famous photographer Henry Fox Talbot entitled his first book on the medium *The Pencil of Nature*, suggesting something of his belief that objects represented *themselves* through photographs.¹³ Mallitte, it seems, agreed, entitling his collection of Andamans images 'photographic drawings'.¹⁴ Photography seemed to create new boundaries of 'visual truth' and to challenge artistic interpretations of objects and subjects, through a process Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have conceptualized as 'mechanical objectivity'.¹⁵

Though photographers like Fox Talbot and his contemporaries made claims about its 'objectivity' and 'scientific neutrality', photography does not transcend the social context in which it is produced, circulated, and read. Cultural, economic, and political forces all determine both the content of photographs and the ways in which

¹¹ Clare Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8: prisons, prisoners and rebellion* (London, Anthem, 2007), 107-15. For a short biography of Mouat, see Ross Lawrenson, 'Frederic John Mouat (1816-97), MD FRCS LLD of the Indian Medical Service', *Journal of Medical Biography*, 15 (2007), 201-5.

¹² Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: the social life of Indian photographs* (London, Reaktion, 1997), 20. For another general account of the development of photography in nineteenth-century India, see also John Falconer, 'Photography in Nineteenth-Century India', in C.A. Bayly (ed.), *The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947* (London, National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1990), 264-77.

¹³ Fox Talbot, quoted in Don Slater, 'Photography and Modern Vision: the spectacle of 'natural magic'', in Chris Jenks (ed.), *Visual Culture* (London, Routledge, 1995), 223.

¹⁴ Queen's Collection, Windsor Castle: Photographic Drawings of the Andaman Islands (1857-8).

¹⁵ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, 'The Image of Objectivity', *Representations*, 40 (1992), 81-128.

they are interpreted and reproduced.¹⁶ Despite what Daston and Galison term the ‘dream of perfect transparency’, photography requires human agency and thus enters rather than ends the debate over neutrality.¹⁷ Moreover, as a visual medium it has a history of coexistence with textual representation. Such texts include the descriptions associated with individual images, as well as photographic labels, titles, inventories, and albums. Photography also existed alongside other visual forms, most notably engraved images. Skilled craftspeople copied photographs by making detailed incisions on metal or more usually on cheap wooden plates, thus intervening in the content or representation of photographic objects or subjects. Their engravings were then printed on paper, and used in newspapers, books, and periodicals. The interplay between photograph, text, and engraving is especially important vis-à-vis the reproduction of mid nineteenth-century photographs, in the years before the development of technologies of mass circulation.

The head of the Andamans Committee, F.J. Mouat, had served previously as first president of the Photographic Society of Bengal (1856-7).¹⁸ It seems that he knew Oscar Rejlander, who like Mouat was a surgeon, perhaps from an earlier meeting in Paris. Though Rejlander had only recently arrived in Calcutta, Mouat personally invited him to accompany the expedition as a volunteer, thus reflecting his own interest in photography rather than any official desire to record the trip visually. That said, on the party’s return to Calcutta, the government of India was keen to acquire Rejlander’s photographs.¹⁹ In his subsequent written account of the survey, *Adventures and Researches Among the Andaman Islanders* (1863), Mouat presented a remarkably detailed account of Rejlander’s work. He described Rejlander as a photographer of ‘considerable experience’. ‘We considered ourselves truly fortunate,’ he wrote, ‘in having secured the services of one who was not only an artist of undoubted ability, but whom, during the long hours at sea that might have passed tediously without his society, we found to be at all times a most pleasant and entertaining companion.’ He went on to note how during a stop in the Burmese port of Moulmein the survey party

¹⁶ Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford, Berg, 2001); David Green, ‘Veins of Resemblance: Photography and Eugenics’, *Oxford Art Journal*, 7, 2 (1985), 15; James Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London, Reaktion, 1997), 19-20.

¹⁷ Daston and Galison, ‘The Image’, 111-12, 120 (quote 111).

¹⁸ See: *Journal of the Photographic Society of Bengal*, 2 (21 Jan. 1857).

¹⁹ IOR P.188.52 Home (Judicial) 23 Apr. 1858: Beadon to Mouat, 17 Apr. 1858.

took the opportunity to test its photographic equipment and materials. Mouat wrote that he was reassured that images could be ‘reproduced with the nicest fidelity and accuracy.’ The committee reached the Andamans on 11 December 1857 and, according to Mouat, Mallitte proved a ‘trusty and faithful comrade’, applying himself ‘diligently’ to his photographic work. Mouat noted: ‘through his unwearied application we were enabled to carry back an invaluable collection of photographic pictures of the country and people – the rich and varied scenes of nature, and’ – he added somewhat exaggeratedly for he was referring to just five images – ‘striking groups illustrative of the life and customs of the natives of the Andaman Islands.’²⁰ In 1858, the Andaman Committee was asked to print 50 sets of Mallitte’s images, to mount ten of them, and after reserving five sets ‘for its own use’, to submit the remainder to the government of India. Mouat and Mallitte co-ordinated the printing, running into difficulties with just one of the images, ‘John Andaman (dressed)’, for its negative plate sustained damage to the collodion (wet plate).²¹

One of the photographs Mouat first described, Mallitte’s image of Saddle Hill on North Andaman, did not survive the transition from camera to paper, for there is no record of it in the archives, despite the ‘favourable’ atmosphere in which it was produced.²² But other pictures were more successful. Of the photographing of Barren Island, Mouat noted: ‘We had no sooner landed, than Monsieur Mallitte, struck by the remarkable appearance of the great smoking cone in the centre, made preparations to take a photograph of it; and the skill and correctness with which the appearance of that wonderful natural object was rendered, showing exactly the fine dark silvery surface, was rewarded with the warmest appreciation by all who witnessed the perfect picture his superior photographic manipulation produced.’²³

²⁰ Frederic J. Mouat, *Adventures and Researches Among the Andaman Islands* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1863), 68-9.

²¹ Mouat noted: ‘when the [film] of Collodion once breaks, it is very difficult to prevent its becoming hopelessly destroyed in the process of printing’. The photographs were mounted by Calcutta publisher Messrs LePage and Co. IOR P.188.55 Home (Judicial) 23 July 1858: Mouat to Beadon, 19 Apr. 1858.

²² Mouat, *Adventures*, 141. The image is not listed as part of the complete set in IOR P.188.52 Home (Judicial) 23 Apr. 1858: Beadon to Mouat, 17 Apr. 1858. Saddle Hill is an impressive 2400 feet (745 metres) high.

²³ Mouat, *Adventures*, 155. An engraving taken from this photograph appeared (untitled) in *Selections from the Records*, facing p. 9.

Evidently keen to record picturesque and wondrous natural scenes, and no doubt to demonstrate his technical ability and skill, Mallitte also made direct interventions into the Andamans landscape. In 1793, the East India Company had made an ill-fated attempt to settle the Islands as a penal colony. Just three years later, after disease decimated the convicts and their associated administration, the Company abandoned it. At the turn of 1857-8, Mallitte oversaw the careful rearrangement of the ruins of the former penal site to produce an aesthetically pleasing image, albeit one that revealed also the limitations of his *appareil*. Mouat wrote:

The preparations for this took up a great deal of time, the masses of old masonry being held so tenaciously in the grasp of the strong creepers, and so profusely covered with vegetation, that before we could expose to view these interesting ruins – for so they appeared to us – the labour and delay were such as to call into requisition all the patience we possessed ... Monsieur Mallitte included as much in his picture as the aperture of his lens permitted.²⁴

(NB remains of old settlement image – posed figures).

‘Remains of the Old Settlement, Port Cornwallis’.

Mouat, *Adventures and Researches*, facing p. 100.

I want to focus on Mallitte’s three photographs of an Andamanese man. We do not know his name, though he was photographed as ‘Andamans John’, and Mouat described him as ‘Andamans Jack’.²⁵ ‘Jack’s story is quite remarkable, for the surveyors kidnapped him and took him back to Calcutta where they introduced him to Governor-General (later Viceroy) and Lady Canning. In a letter to Queen Victoria, Lady Canning wrote that he was ‘gentle and tractable and imitates everything and is amused at everything from a glass of water upwards’.²⁶ When he fell ill, he was returned to the Andamans to an uncertain fate.²⁷

‘Jack’ was not the first Andamanese to be removed from the Islands, for during the first half of the nineteenth century a few Islanders were picked up adrift at sea and taken to mainland Southeast Asia where they were employed as servants.

²⁴ Mouat, *Adventures*, 111; *Selections from the Records* (engraving facing p. 6).

²⁵ Note that ‘Jack’ is a common derivative of ‘John’.

²⁶ Queen’s Collection, Windsor Castle RA VIC/Z 502/30: letter from Lady Canning, 9 Jan. 1858.

²⁷ *Selections from the Records*, 28-9.

Apparently, one man even ended up working as a tobacconist in London.²⁸ However, he is by far the best known, and post-colonial historians and anthropologists have discussed his kidnap in some depth. Their interest in him rather than earlier abductees can be explained in part by Mouat's detailed and lengthy description of the event, which as was common at the time was either summarized or reviewed in a range of other publications.²⁹ However, also significant was the circulation of a series of engravings of 'Jack', which brought a certain representational immediacy to the story. Perhaps the best modern account of the kidnap is by David Tomas, who discusses his experiences through a cultural frame. 'Jack' was, Tomas concludes, 'raw cultural material to be translated into more easily accessible visual and verbal forms.' There were six sites used to produce this transformation, including: dressing 'Jack' in European clothing; allowing him to look at himself in a mirror; fabricating a ventriloquist's dummy to render 'Jack' fearsome and so disperse a gathering Bengali crowd; and, taking his anthropometric measurements.³⁰ I want to unpick further Tomas' sixth site of cultural transformation: photography.

Mouat described the photographing of 'Jack' twice. In *Adventures and Researches*, he wrote that he had wanted to photograph him naked in order to represent him as he had been at the moment of his capture (as 'a *fac simile*'), but after his exposure to the modernity of the survey party this was an impossibility and 'Jack' had refused: '[S]o great was the change already produced in him by his new ideas and associations,' Mouat wrote, 'that he seemed utterly shocked at the very thought of appearing naked, even before individuals of his own sex.' Mouat recalled how he had eventually persuaded him to comply, but it was no 'easy matter', and 'not without many earnest remonstrances [sic] against such a display of himself in his natural state.' The apparent transformation of 'Jack' from savagery to civilization through the process of photography was also represented through Mouat's description of his

²⁸ IOR P.188.67 India (Public) 18 May 1863, no. 25: Mouat to A. Eden, secretary to government Bengal, 10 Apr. 1863. See also *Selections from the Records, Appendix I*; Portman, *A History of Our Relations, Vol. I*, 111, 116, 117, 445-7.

²⁹ A small selection includes: Edward Belcher, 'Notes on the Andaman Islands', *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, 5 (1867), 40-9; F.J. Mouat, 'Brief Narrative of an Expedition to the Andaman Islands, in 1857', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 6, 2 (1861-2), 41-3; review of *Adventures in Colburn's United Services Magazine, and Naval and Military Journal, Vol. III* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1863), 433-40.

³⁰ David Tomas, *Transcultural Space and Transcultural Beings* (Oxford, Westview Press, 1996), 75-93 (quote 76).

childlike relationship to the camera: ‘if he had not been restrained, he would have broken it in pieces, in order, like a child with a drum, to see what was in it.’ Mouat was not pleased with the photograph. ‘From the powerful effects of the sun’s rays at the time the photograph was taken,’ he wrote, ‘it had a very hard and unpleasing expression.’ Nevertheless, an engraving of this image appeared as the frontispiece to the government of India’s *Selections from the Records*.³¹ Mouat preferred a second image taken by another photographer, Mr Pilleau, although he noted that Jack was ‘in a state of sickness at the time’.³²

(photograph, standing, near-naked, with implements)

‘John Andaman’.

The Royal Collection © 2005, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

I am intrigued also by a third photograph of ‘Jack’, dressed in naval uniform. And it is the absences of this representation that make it compelling, for as far as I am aware it was never copied as an engraving, and this is the first time that it has been published - some 150 years on. This is probably because as a result of the broken negative described by Mouat it was produced in only limited numbers and so never circulated widely. But the image is also quite different to the others; for in aligning ‘Jack’ with – literally dressing him in - ‘civilization’ it situates him directly beyond Andamans landscape and culture, and so perhaps opens up fewer representational possibilities.

(NB: One photograph, standing, dressed).

‘John Andaman’.

The Royal Collection © 2005, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Apart from his somewhat vague allusion to ‘Jack’s compliance with and restraint during the photographic process, what is absent from Mouat’s written account is a sense of the underlying violence of the encounter. This emerged more clearly when Mouat addressed a meeting of the Ethnological Society of London after his return to Britain, four years later in January 1862. His presentation followed a

³¹ *Selections from the Records*, frontispiece and xi.

³² Mouat, *Adventures*, 284.

discussion of the skeleton of an Andamanese man killed by the survey party, and presented by Mouat to the British Museum.³³ Mouat talked against the background of a table top display of stolen objects, in all probability the same set of ‘implements’ and ‘weapons’ photographed by Mallitte and incorporated into contemporary engravings. The Andamans Committee’s destruction of life and appropriation of both human remains and community property reveal something of the ambiguity of the supposed distinction between ‘savagery’ and ‘civilization’. Moreover, in his verbal account of the survey Mouat transformed his earlier textual representation of ‘Jack’s ‘shock’ at being stripped of clothing for the photograph (as also his ‘restlessness’)³⁴ into the language of ‘distress’ and ‘disruption’. ‘Jack’s relationship to both the camera and to his captors also emerged as deeply coercive. Mouat spoke of how he had interrupted the sitting by running behind the camera ‘to see what was going on’. ‘[W]e had to keep him at his post by the menace of a stick,’ he said, ‘he understood that’.³⁵ Mouat alluded also to ‘Jack’s relationship to his own image, noting that while Indians unfamiliar with the medium tried to read photographs by turning them upside down, ‘Jack’ flipped his picture over to see if his image was also on the back.³⁶ So described, the photographing of ‘Jack’ might be understood as part of what Felix Driver and Luciana Martins have described as the ‘living space of encounter and exchange’ – and contestation - that characterised the production of visual knowledge.³⁷

Mallitte’s ‘capture’ of ‘Jack’s photographic likeness represented visually his literal confinement as an interstitial cultural site. The survey party contained him as a means both of gathering information about the Andamans and of spreading the supposed benefits of civilization to other Islanders. His physical (and photographic) capture began a pattern of kidnapping (and photographing) Andaman Islanders that

³³ Professor Owen, ‘On the Osteology and Dentition of the Aborigines of the Andaman Islands, and the Relations thereby indicated to other Races of Mankind’, *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, 2 (1863), 34-43. In supporting the idea of monogenesis, the Ethnological Society was sympathetic to evolution.

³⁴ *Selections from the Records*, xi.

³⁵ Mouat’s (untitled) talk, cited in Owen, ‘On the Osteology’, 43-9 (quote 46).

³⁶ Mouat, *Adventures and Researches*, xii. On Indian attempts to read photographs, see Clare Anderson, *Legible Bodies: race, criminality and colonialism in South Asia*, (Oxford, Berg, 2004), 148.

³⁷ Driver and Martins, ‘Views and Visions of the Tropical World’, in Driver and Martins, eds, *Tropical Visions*, p. 5.

lasted into the 1860s and beyond.³⁸ As such, the photographs of ‘Jack’ are not value free (or to use Pinney’s term ‘indexical’), but embody more complex colonial functions. Perhaps the first thing to note with respect to the visual representation of ‘Jack’ is the shifting background to two of the photographs. In the first, near-naked ‘Jack’ stands in front of Andamanese cultural objects. In the second, he is dressed in a naval brigade uniform, and leans against what looks like the side of a house: presumably Mouat’s Calcutta residence, where we know he stayed.³⁹ This tied his body to the ‘natural’ and ‘urban’ environments respectively in particular ways that implied the mutual incompatibility of both his pre-colonial subjectivity and his entry into colonial modernity. Or as *Chamber’s Journal* noted when Jack’s clothes were removed and he was returned to the Islands after his forced detention in Calcutta: ‘Barbarism and civilization seemed *alike* to have deserted him.’⁴⁰

But the reproduction and circulation of engravings of ‘Jack’ are also hugely significant in drawing out the significance of early representations of the Andamans as what Driver and Martins have called an extended transaction rather than a linear visual projection.⁴¹ At the time of Mouat’s survey, though it was possible to make copies of photographs, it was expensive to mass reproduce them in books, newspapers or magazines. A few engravings copied from selected photographs were, however, printed shortly after the committee returned to Calcutta. Four images appeared in each of the government of India’s printed account of the expedition, *Selections from the Records* (1859),⁴² and Mouat’s *Adventures and Researches* (1863).⁴³ If the photographing of ‘Jack’ was deeply coercive, underlying the process that transformed the photographs into a range of engravings was an associated visual intervention that was open to colonial discipline of another kind, for engravings were ‘quasi-photographic’ sources through which craftsmen intervened in the interpretation and

³⁸ Clare Anderson, ‘Early Colonial Contact in the Andaman Islands, 1858-64’, paper presented at *Crime, Governance and the Colonial: forces, continuities and contemporary strategies* conference, University of London, 4 July 2008.

³⁹ Mouat, *Adventures*, 284-6.

⁴⁰ ‘A Savage Archipelago’, 290 (my emphasis).

⁴¹ Driver and Martins, ‘Views and Visions’.

⁴² *Selections from the Records*: frontispiece, no title (‘John Andaman’); facing p. 6, ‘Remains of the Old Settlement Chatham Island’; facing p. 9, no title (Barren Island); facing p. 22, ‘Andaman Islanders and Implements’. They are all brown tinted, and engraved by Calcutta lithographers T. Black of 4 Waterloo Street.

⁴³ Mouat, *Adventures and Researches*, frontispiece, ‘A Group of Andaman Islanders’; facing p. 100, ‘Remains of the Old Settlement, Port Cornwallis’; facing p. 147, ‘Burmese Pioneers’; facing p. 315, ‘Andaman Islanders and Implements’. These images are black and white.

thus transformation of ‘mechanical’ photographic images into line-drawn ones.⁴⁴ Moreover, the viewers of both photographs and engravings relied on written narratives and textual pointers in order to read and interpret their content and meaning. Within this triage of photograph, engraving, and description lay the possibility of visual and textual disruption of various kinds, rendering each potentially unstable in content and meaning both as individual images and in relation to each other.

Mallitte’s photograph of the Labyrinth Islands and its associated engraving presents a fascinating slippage in these respects. When the Andamans Committee stopped in Moulmein, the local authorities assigned twelve convicts to their charge; as Mouat put it ‘men who, from their previous habits, were accustomed to find their way in the dense and tangled forests of these regions’.⁴⁵ In most of Mallitte’s photographs, the accompanying text is a simple description of the English name given to particular geographical spaces – ‘Port Blair’, ‘Barren Island’, ‘Port Cornwallis’, and so on - and his image of the convicts – ‘One of the Labyrinth Islands, Burmese Convicts’ - is no exception. In the engraving of the photograph, however, the convicts underwent a textual transformation, becoming a party of Burmese *pioneers*. This transformation did not go unnoticed in contemporary reports of the survey. As *Chamber’s Journal* reported, the ‘convicts’ were placed in Mouat’s service as ‘pioneers’.⁴⁶

(NB Photograph: Burmese convicts)

‘One of the Labyrinth Islands, Burmese Convicts’.

The Royal Collection © 2005, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

(NB facing p. 147, ‘Burmese Pioneers’.)

‘Burmese Pioneers’.

Mouat, *Adventures and Researches*, facing p. 147.

⁴⁴ Paul Jenkins, ‘The Earliest Generation of Missionary Photographers in West Africa: The Portrayal of Indigenous People and Culture’, *Visual Anthropology*, 7 (1984), 120.

⁴⁵ Mouat, *Adventures*, 70.

⁴⁶ ‘A Savage Archipelago’, *The Eclectic Magazine* (Nov. 1862), 286 (reproduced from *Chamber’s Journal*).

I find this textual shift immensely significant in drawing out some of the ambivalences of the relationship between penal transportation and colonization, and in turn and in a broader sense in bringing out some of the recurrent tensions within the colonial association between the spatial dynamics of confinement and expansion. As such, this semiotic occlusion is an interesting expression of colonial uncertainties around *convicts* as *colonizers*, and is part of a broader argument about the contemporary silences that surround the use of convicts in processes of colonization around the Bay of Bengal during the first half of the nineteenth century. In turn, this silence expresses the recurrent tension between visibility and invisibility that in the widespread use of both high-walled prisons *and* outdoor labour to incarcerate prisoners and to put them to work gave specificity to colonial penal regimes.⁴⁷ It speaks perhaps to a certain colonial discomfort about its reliance on forced penal labour, with convict workers rendered invisible within what we might term the liberal colonial fantasy of the ‘abolition’ of ‘slavery’ and its replacement with other forms of labour, whether apprenticed, indentured or ‘free’.⁴⁸

And what of the engraved images of ‘Jack’ that were copied from Mallitte’s photographs? It is clear that he underwent further representational shifts during the process of transformation from photograph to engraving. As a ‘specimen’ of an entire community, photographed in Calcutta ‘Jack’ stands before a spread of social anchors, including bows, nets, and other ‘implements and weapons’ stolen by the survey party. When this print was line-drawn – it was the frontispiece to the government of India’s *Selections from the Records* - these cultural artefacts were replaced with a more naturalistic backdrop of palm trees and ‘exotic’ foliage. Of interest in this respect too is the frontispiece to Mouat’s *Adventures and Researches* – ‘A Group of Andaman Islanders’ - in which a man clearly drawn from photographs of ‘Jack’ appears in front of other Islanders, a campfire, a man firing a bow, and a canoe out at sea in the distance. Another such incorporative engraving by the well known contemporary artist Colesworthy Grant portrays two men drawing arrows in a canoe surrounded by

⁴⁷ Clare Anderson and David Arnold, ‘Envisioning the Colonial Prison’ in Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown, eds, *Cultures of Confinement: a history of the prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (London, Christopher Hurst, 2007), 304-31.

⁴⁸ Cf Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton, eds, *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006).

nets and spears.⁴⁹ Though it bore no resemblance to any of Mallitte's photographs, like the group picture, it used elements of them.

(NB 2 engravings - frontispiece, 'A Group of Andaman Islanders'; facing p. 315, 'Andaman Islanders and Implements'.)

'A Group of Andaman Islanders'.

'Andaman Islanders and Implements'.

Mouat, *Adventures and Researches*, frontispiece, facing p. 315.

By far the most widely and contemporarily reproduced of all 'Jack's images is an engraving of him looking nothing like the other pictures - photographs or copies - again wearing a naval brigade uniform, but seated in a chair. I assume that this is the portrait Mouat claimed been drawn by Colesworthy Grant, who had drawn the incorporative image of 'Islanders and implements'. Mouat claimed Grant's portrait of 'Jack' as a faithful and accurate rendering of his 'mild, gentle, and benevolent' expression, and chose it to illustrate the title page of his *Adventures and Researches*.⁵⁰ It also appeared in popular periodicals like *Harper's Weekly* and the *Illustrated London News* during 1858.⁵¹ Perhaps the appeal of Grant's portrait lay in its expression of a passivity that contrasted with the common trope of cannibal savagery, but it also revealed a three-fold juxtaposition disavowed by each of Mallitte's photographs: of pre-modernity ('Jack'), civilization (his naval uniform), and colonialism (the large and high-backed wicker chair found commonly in the 'tropics'). Thus the image constituted visually a tropicality that positioned 'Jack' - and by implication all Andamanese - as children of nature anticipating colonization.

(NB Book's Title page).

'*Adventures and Researches Among the Andaman Islanders*'.

Mouat, *Adventures and Researches*.

Only one of the photographic images of 'Jack' has no backdrop, and this was the case for its copy too. Although in the associated engraving the original was

⁴⁹ 'Andaman Islanders and Implements', *Selections from the Records*, facing p. 22.

⁵⁰ Mouat, *Adventures*, 284-5 (quote 284).

⁵¹ *Harper's Weekly*, 24 Apr. 1858; *Illustrated London News*, 27 Mar. 1858.

reversed, in all other regards it was identical, and it probably came to serve a more ‘scientific’ purpose.⁵² In contrast to the other prints, in this picture ‘Jack’ was photographed / drawn seated from the waist up, with a loosely clothed lap. His head is turned slightly to one side to reveal the shape of his nose and head, as also an expression of discomfort if not deep unease. With no cultural anchors or other visual interventions of any kind, this image rendered ‘Jack’ a specimen whose cranial and upper bodily form could be generalized to the social and cultural classification of the diverse populations of the archipelago. As such, this image might be seen as a precursor to the later anthropometric work of colonial officers E.H. Man and M.V. Portman. These were investigations of the ‘racial’ origins of an isolated community that were of enormous interest to a range of scientists later on during the nineteenth century.⁵³ Indeed, Mouat sent the photographs of ‘John Andaman’ to German scientist Baron Alexander von Humboldt together with his anthropometric measurements.⁵⁴ Mouat reported that Humboldt had used the images to confirm his ‘racial type’.⁵⁵

(one photograph, sitting, torso/ head shot, wearing trousers).

‘John Andaman’.

The Royal Collection © 2005, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

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⁵² I bought the engraving drawn from this photograph - ‘A native of the Andaman Islands’ - on e-Bay in 2007. Though it is clearly taken from a newspaper or periodical and is a direct copy from Mallitte’s photograph of ‘Jack’s head and torso, I am unsure of its provenance and I have been unable to trace its publication.

⁵³ Most famous during the early years of settlement is Owen, ‘On the Osteology and Dentition of the Aborigines’. A small selection of later nineteenth-century literature includes: G.E. Dobson, ‘On the Andamans and Andamanese’, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 4 (1875), 457-67; W.H. Flower, ‘On the Osteology and Affinities of the Andaman Islands’, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 9 (1880), 108-33; E.H. Man, ‘On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands’, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 12 (1883), 69-175, 327-434. For critical readings of the relationship between photography and anthropometry, see: Elizabeth Edwards, ‘Science Visualized: E.H. Man in the Andaman Islands’, in Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (London, Yale University Press, 1992), 108-21; John Falconer, ‘Ethnographical Photography in India 1850-1900’, *Photographic Collector*, 5, 1 (1984), 16-46.

⁵⁴ Measurements of his head, arms, limbs and so on – including ‘breadth of nose’ - were taken on the *Pluto*. ‘Jack’s age was said to be 25, and he was 4 ft 9 ½ tall. *Selections from the Records*, xi.

⁵⁵ *Selections from the Records*, xii.

I would like to close this article with a brief note on the visual associations between ‘Jack’s confinement and the mass transportation of Indian convicts that followed his release from captivity in 1858. After his trip to the Andamans, Mallitte found employment as photographer to Viceroy Lord Canning’s official tour of the Northwest Provinces during 1859. Later, he taught at the School of Industrial Arts in Calcutta, setting up his own studio in the city. During the 1870s, Mallitte’s attention turned back to the Andamans, and he became involved in the experimental photography of convicts transported from the Bengal Presidency to the Islands in 1874. The photographs were supposed to be read alongside descriptive records to facilitate identification in case of escape. The photographic trial failed, however, for it did not prove possible to individuate convicts from communities that were most usually regarded through the collective lens of ‘caste’.⁵⁶ But Mallitte’s images of ‘Jack’ proved successful for the same reason his convict images did not: their presentation of an individual as a collective representation of an imagined community.

Mallitte’s images of the Andaman Islands failed to produce what Joseph Mullins referred to at the Photographic Society of Bengal as ‘stern fidelity’,⁵⁷ but they did offer the possibility of significant innovations with respect to associated forms of visual and textual representation. In the years before the mass production of photographs, engravings copied from Mallitte’s prints made sense of unsettling aspects of colonial settlement and expansion as also the social and cultural meaning of indigeneity. In association with a range of descriptive text, the images produced meaning around the violence of colonization, the ambiguities of civilization through the savagery of forced labour, and the management of the natural and cultural environment with the construction of what we might term ‘the tropical gaze’. Mallitte’s photographs and their visual and textual associations thus reveal colonization as a sphere of coercion enveloping multiple representational overlaps.

⁵⁶ National Archives of India Home (Port Blair) A proceedings, Feb. 1876, 5-13: Photographing Convicts. See also Anderson, *Legible Bodies*, 145-59.

⁵⁷ Reverend Joseph Mullins, cited in Pinney, *Camera Indica*, 20.