

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there are tall, green, blade-like plants, possibly sugarcane, growing in rows. The middle ground shows a field of similar vegetation under a bright, slightly hazy sky. The overall tone is naturalistic and historical.

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Plantation Slavery in Barbados

*An Archaeological
and
Historical Investigation*

Plantation Slavery in Barbados
An Archeological and Historical Investigation

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For
Holley, Heather, Kathy, Josh, and Lisa
and to the memory of
Robert A. Clarke

the prevalence of west-headed orientations roughly corresponds to the period when the large majority of Barbadian slaves were creoles rather than having come from Africa. By the late 1780s, as was noted in chapter 2, more than 85 percent of the slaves were of Barbadian birth while by 1817, 93 percent were creoles. These population data suggest that creole patterns or European influences were probably reflected in the mortuary complex by this period; this suggestion is supported by the archaeological evidence and information derived from written sources.

6 / The Mortuary Patterns of Plantation Slaves

MATERIALS on the mortuary patterns of Barbadian slaves derive from the archaeological research at Newton cemetery and from manuscript and printed sources; by integrating both sets of data we follow the archaeological approach to ethnohistory outlined by Baerreis (1961). Comparative data on other West Indian slave cultures, particularly Jamaica, and West Africa suggest possible Barbadian patterns when specific information is lacking; these data are also used to help elucidate information in the written sources on Barbados or the archaeological record. Comparative archaeological data from other Caribbean slave cultures are negligible.

In general, the archaeological record from Newton provides some information not available in written sources, but it also defines the inherent limitations of archaeology with respect to reconstruction of ideological and behavioral patterns. Thus, although archaeological data helped us reconstruct this important aspect of slave culture, its limits required greater reliance on written sources.

Despite their importance, however, the written sources do not provide detailed and systematic descriptions of mortuary patterns; also, written information is generally superficial, scattered, and fragmentary; particularly when compared to Jamaica where "the material on the subject is comparatively rich" (Patterson 1967:195).¹ The only relatively detailed source for Barbados describes an urban funeral of a domestic slave in 1796 (Pinckard 1806; 1:270-274).

Although the written sources span the slave period, they do not consistently report on the same topics. We often had to guess dates within broad time periods and also frequently speculate about how common a particular custom or belief was at any given period. Another important limitation of the written sources on mortuary patterns is the Eurocentric bias underlying all observations and descriptions of slave values, ideas, and behavior.

The relatively limited archaeological and written evidence means

that a variety of specific questions and issues related to the mortuary patterns of any society, whether viewed diachronically or synchronically, can only be minimally treated. Other significant features cannot be dealt with at all, or else must remain highly conjectural. Nonetheless, we can delineate a number of the more fundamental and general components of the beliefs and practices surrounding death with a reasonable degree of confidence, even if we cannot recapture many details and variations. Moreover, despite the shortcomings in the archaeological and written record, we are confident that this chapter shows how mortuary patterns formed only one dimension of a total ideological and behavioral system that can be identified as slave culture.

SLAVE DEATHS

Tens of thousands of slaves died on Barbados from the inception of the sugar plantation system to emancipation, but we cannot determine the actual number of deaths. Until the second decade of the nineteenth century, when a slave registry was established, the island's central government kept no records of slave deaths or births because, as the governor reported in 1681, "few of them [are] . . . Christened" (Dutton 1681). By the late eighteenth century, if not earlier, plantations usually kept complete records of slave deaths, but few of these records have survived and they are insufficient to

TABLE 17. Deaths of Barbadian slaves by sex, 1817–1832.

Triennium	Males		Females		Total	Buried by Anglican church during triennium	
	Num-ber	Percent-age	Num-ber	Percent-age		Num-ber	Percent-age of total deaths
1817–1820	3,317	50.2	3,286	49.7	6,603	558	8.4
1820–1823	3,487	51.9	3,228	48.0	6,715	528	7.8
1823–1826	3,409	50.7	3,304	49.2	6,713	739	11.0
1826–1829	3,494	51.2	3,320	48.7	6,814	919	13.4
1829–1832	—	—	—	—	8,587	956	11.1
Total					35,432	3,700	

Sources: 1817–1829, *Parliamentary Papers* (1833a). 1829–1832, *Parliamentary Papers* (1833b). All figures are from the triennial registry returns which ran from July to July. The 1829–1832 figures include the approximately 1,189 slaves who died during the 1831 hurricane. Anglican burials are derived from table 18.

project islandwide statistics effectively for any given year or for the duration of the slave period.

The available islandwide figures, derived from the slave registry, do reflect the number of people who died during some years of the nineteenth century before emancipation. The earliest figures are for the triennium July 1817 to July 1820, and later figures are from subsequent trienniums until 1832. Over this fifteen-year period there were 35,432 deaths, an annual average of 2,362 or about 2.9 to 3.0 percent of the total slave population (table 17). Although this percentage could be projected against available earlier islandwide population statistics to arrive at a crude estimate of the total deaths during the slave period, it is not necessary for present purposes. The point to be stressed is that, taking the island's plantation slave population as a whole, death was not a rare or infrequent phenomenon, and that slaves responded to death, as men and women have done everywhere and at all periods, with a variety of beliefs and socioreligious customs.

GRAVESITES AND CEMETERIES

PLANTATION BURIAL SITES

"The Negroes . . . bury one another in the ground of the plantation where they die," wrote Barbados's governor in 1676, "and not without ceremonies of their own" (Atkins 1676b). A ceremonial context and the slaves' responsibility for burying their own dead on plantations had been established in earlier years (Ligon 1657:50), and these features continued to mark the mortuary complex throughout the slave period.

In 1828, a London-based Anglican missionary society asked the rectors of the island's eleven parishes "in what places are slaves usually interred?"² The ministers variously reported that unbaptized slaves (and some baptized ones) were buried "in their usual burying places on the estates," "on the plantations to which they belong," and "in places set apart for that purpose on each plantation" (Society for the Conversion 1829); in no case, however, did a minister suggest where these "usual burying places" were located or indicate if a common pattern was followed on plantations in situating these "places." In fact, the historical sources are generally silent or vague about where plantation burial grounds or gravesites were located.

No known maps show the locations of plantation burial grounds, although a few sources suggest an area in the vicinity of the mill yard or slave village. For example, 1812 records show that among Edgecombe plantation's 210 acres there were two acres of "a bot-

tom containing a pond, trees, & bamboos which has the common burial place." This delineation may imply an area not far from the mill or Negro yard—where ponds were usually placed—but the record does not specify where the "bottom" was located in relation to the three acres "in Negro houses" (that is, the Negro yard) and the four additional acres which included roads and the mill yard (Society for the Improvement 1811–16:43).

Two written sources, however, provide a relatively specific indication of where the burial grounds or graves were located. In 1788 the governor reported

Negroes are superstitiously attached to the burial places of their ancestors and friends. These are generally as near as can be to the houses in which they live. It is frequent to inter a near relation under the bed-place on which they sleep, an unwholesome and dangerous practice which they would think it the utmost tyranny to alter. These houses are in many estates injudiciously placed in unwholesome situations, where the Negroes are perpetually, in spite of every care, decreasing; and to remove their habitations unto healthier spots, has been found, from that very attachment I have mentioned above, a most dangerous experiment (Parry 1789a:17).³

During the same period, the Council of Barbados also noted that slave mortality could be partially explained by "the injudicious situation of their houses, which it would be dangerous to alter, on account of their superstitious attachment to the burying places of their ancestors" (1789).⁴

The written evidence indicates and the location of Newton cemetery clearly shows that graves were located either within the slave villages or in nearby burial grounds. Historical sources as well as the archaeological investigations at Newton and other plantations suggest that common burial grounds were more frequently used than subfloor house graves for interments; moreover, although the direct evidence is slim, the locations of these burial grounds were probably determined by plantation managements who not only considered the agricultural potential of the plantation's lands but also the positive value that slaves attached to having their burial grounds located close to their villages.⁵

ANGLICAN BURIALS: CHURCH CEMETERIES AND PLANTATION SITES

A few slaves were buried in cemeteries attached to Protestant mission stations or, more frequently, Anglican church and, late in

the slave period, chapel yards. The Anglican church was the island's official church, its ministers derived salaries from public funds, and from early in the seventeenth century its churches were located in each of the island's parishes. In general, the religious influence of the Anglican church overwhelmingly surpassed that of any other European denomination.

During most of the period of slavery relatively few slaves, especially plantation slaves, were baptized in the church⁶; baptism, of course, was a prerequisite for church burial. There were comparatively few church burials during the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth. Anglican slave burials did not significantly increase until the early nineteenth century (table 18). Because Anglican clergymen sometimes did not record slave burials and baptisms in the parish registers, in 1826 a law, popularly known as the "Sunday and marriage act," directed all clergymen "to keep a register of the several baptisms, marriages, and burials of slaves . . . celebrated and performed in their . . . parishes according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England."⁷ This law resulted in more systematic records of slave burials, but as the rector of Saint Thomas reported in 1821 (in a remark that could as easily have been expressed by other parochial ministers in earlier and later years), "there are many deaths of persons unbaptized which the parish register does not notice" (Maynard 1821). During this period, the island's Anglican church, as a result of external pressures, was beginning to convert the slave population. A few ministers had made sporadic efforts in earlier periods, but it was not until the 1820s that these efforts were more or less systematically pursued. Slave conversion was increasingly emphasized for the rest of the preemancipation period (Handler 1974:172–189).

Although the number and proportion of slaves buried by the Church of England was much greater in the later years of the slave period, a sampling of surviving parish registers for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indicates that the church buried relatively few slaves. Most were in Saint Michael (table 18). Probably a majority of the Saint Michael burials were in Bridgetown, where the urban environment provided greater opportunities and incentives for the adoption of European-derived beliefs and practices than existed in the plantation areas of the parish (or the rural areas of the island in general).

The infrequency of Anglican slave burials, especially outside of Saint Michael, is clearest when the number of these burials is compared with the total number of slave deaths. Islandwide statistics on

TABLE 18. Anglican burials of Barbadian slaves by parish.

Year	Saint Michael		Other parishes	All parishes
	Number	Percentage ^a		
1678-1679	2	66.6	1	3
1700	0	—	0	0
1720	0	—	0	0
1740	2	100.0	0	2
1760	0	0.0	3	3
1780	14	82.3	3	17
1800	37	82.2	8	45
1810	117	85.4	20	137
1818	138	79.7	35	173
1819	168	81.9	37	205
1820	147	81.6	33	180
1821	162	77.1	48	210
1822	104	71.7	41	145
1823	132	76.3	41	173
1824	160	75.8	51	211
1825	166	69.4	73	239
1826	206	71.2	83	289
1827	152	62.5	91	243
1828	167	65.7	87	254
1829	281	66.5	141	422
1830	178	65.6	93	271
1831	221	61.0	141	362
1832	200	61.9	123	323
1833	229	49.3	235	464

Sources: 1678-1679, Public Record Office (1679/80). 1700, 1720, 1740, 1760, 1780, 1800, 1810, Barbados Department of Archives (1700-1833). Figures for all years are only available for Saint Michael and Christ Church, the most heavily populated parishes; except for Saint Andrew and Saint James, figures for other parishes are available for various years. The totals for parishes, aside from Saint Michael and Christ Church, have been estimated by applying the average of the known parishes to the unknown ones. 1818-1820, *Parliamentary Papers* (1823), all parishes except Christ Church. Figures for Christ Church are from Barbados Department of Archives (1700-1833). 1821, Barbados Department of Archives (1700-1833). Data are lacking for the parishes of Saint John, Saint Andrew, and Saint James; totals have been estimated by applying the average of the other parishes, exclusive of Saint Michael. 1822, Public Record Office (1823). 1823-1833, Barbados Department of Archives (1700-1833). No data are available for Saint Andrew and Saint James for 1823, 1824, and 1825; average for other parishes, exclusive of Saint Michael, has been applied to estimate total.

^a Percentage of all Anglican slave burials.

slave deaths for fifteen years can be correlated with Anglican burials for the same period. From 1817 to 1832, 35,432 slave deaths were reported to the island's central administration, but only about 3,700 slaves (10.4 percent) received Anglican burials (table 17). Of these 3,700 burials, however, 2,582 (69.7 percent) were in Saint Michael. During this fifteen-year period, the maximum percentage of slave decedents buried by the Anglican church was only 13.4 percent and the percentage was lower in the earlier years.

What, then, was the general practice that determined where Anglican-baptized slaves were interred? In 1817 the rector of Saint Peter reported that baptized slaves in his parish were "interred in the same manner as the whites and free coloured people in the church or chapel yard" (Neblett 1817). The clearest answer to this question, however, derives from information supplied by the eleven parochial rectors in 1828 (Society for the Conversion 1829). They stressed that a crucial determinant of church burial was baptism; baptized slaves were always buried according to Church of England rites, often in the burial grounds of the parish church or chapel where the service was performed by the rector or catechist. However, baptized slaves were also buried in plantation burial grounds. On such occasions, the funeral rites could be performed by the rector, a catechist, or a white member of the plantation staff. Saint Michael was an exception to the general pattern; baptized plantation slaves there were "always interred in places set apart for that purpose on each plantation." Bridgetown's baptized slaves were buried in the yard of Saint Mary's chapel (but not in the cemetery of Saint Michael's Cathedral).⁸ The ministers also implied or directly stated that neither they nor their catechists attended the burials of unbaptized slaves and that these slaves were always buried "in their usual burying places on the estates"—never in church cemeteries.

The ministers' information is from quite late in the slave period and probably does not adequately reflect earlier practices. In fact, we suspect that even baptized plantation slaves tended to be buried on the plantations rather than in church grounds during the seventeenth, and much of the eighteenth centuries (see, for example, Godwyn 1680:136). By the 1820s (if not earlier), according to the parochial ministers, baptized slaves were buried in either location—church grounds, with the exception of Saint Michael, being more common. However, baptized slaves were a minority in the slave population and constituted a small percentage of the total slave deaths. Thus, although the number of plantation burials cannot be quantified, the number of baptized slaves buried on the plantations added to the number of unbaptized slaves also interred on planta-

tions clearly indicates that the overwhelming majority of slaves were buried on plantation lands.

MORAVIAN AND METHODIST BURIALS

Other European denominations—the United Brethren (or Moravians), Methodists, Quakers, Catholics, and Jews—may have had some direct effect on where and how plantation slaves were buried. As a whole, however, they played a minor role in comparison with the Church of England. From the early eighteenth century, a catechist was assigned to work among the slaves of the Codrington plantations (although his “religious work was not permitted to interfere in any significant way with the usual pattern of plantation management”; Bennett 1958:140), but United Brethren missionaries were the first who came to work specifically among the slave population. The earliest missionaries arrived in 1765, but some fifty years later, only 480 slaves had been baptized (United Brethren 1814; 6: 436–437). By contrast the Anglicans had baptized over 2,500 slaves from 1812 to 1817 (Handler 1974:164); this number also far exceeded the additional 1,339 Moravian baptisms from 1818 through 1834 (United Brethren 1834; 13:291–292).

From their two mission stations (the second one was established in 1825), the Moravians confined their efforts to the rural areas and almost exclusively to plantation slaves. Although the missionaries regularly reported on their activities and problems, they rarely mentioned the funerals of slave congregants (United Brethren 1790–1836; 1–13). When these slaves died “most of them were interred” in the cemetery attached to the mission station (United Brethren 1831; 12:42–43); however, some Moravian slaves were buried on plantations, a practice which must have been more common in earlier periods.

The number of Moravian burials, whether on mission grounds or plantations, was relatively small. In 1827, 1829, 1831, and 1832, years when slave membership in the Moravian church was rapidly increasing, missionaries reported the deaths of 120 adult and children congregants (United Brethren 1826; 10:357–358; 1829; 11:269; 1831; 12:134–135, 330). Even if we assume that all 120 received Moravian burials, far more were buried under Anglican auspices. During the same four years, 1,350 slaves were buried according to Anglican ritual and practice (table 18). Thus, the Moravians had a much slighter impact than the Anglicans on plantation slave burials.

The Methodists, who started their missionary activities in 1788, had an even weaker, indeed negligible, influence. They generally had difficulty in receiving permission to preach to plantation slaves;

unlike the Moravians, therefore, their activities were largely confined to Bridgetown. Not until 1821 did Methodist missionaries proclaim some success among plantation slaves: on *one* plantation they “selected” for baptism six adults who they regarded “as the first fruits of this mission amongst the thousands of pagan slaves . . . living on the island” (Shrewsbury and Nelson 1821a); by 1829–30, only thirty-two slaves belonged to the mission and most, if not all, lived in Bridgetown (*Parliamentary Papers* 1831–32b); at the same time, the Moravians had 620 slave members (United Brethren 1831; 12:42–43).

Methodist missionaries believed that one of their problems in proselytization was the lack of a mission burial ground. Efforts to purchase land started in 1804 (Bradnack 1804), but were not realized for a number of years, a source of considerable frustration. As one missionary despairingly wrote in 1814, as an elder congregant (race not specified) was dying, the Anglican “clergy declare they will not bury her because she was not baptized by them. We have not a foot of land in which we can put her and she must either be buried in some private place or thrown into the sea” (Boothby 1814). When their first chapel was constructed in Bridgetown in 1820, the Methodists gained their cemetery, but it is doubtful if more than a handful of any plantation slaves were buried in it.

QUAKER, CATHOLIC, AND JEWISH BURIALS

In the 1670s and 1680s, Quakers composed the second largest Christian denomination in Barbados. By the late seventeenth century, however, death and migration had greatly reduced the Quaker community. In 1743 less than one hundred, including children, were concentrated in Bridgetown and Speightstown (Peckover 1742–43). By 1810, if not earlier, no Quakers were living on the island (Schomburgk 1848:94–95; Sturge 1908).

During George Fox’s visit to Barbados in late 1671 and early 1672, the Quakers became the first group to attempt to Christianize their slaves and to bring them to their meetings. Pressure from the wider white community, including a 1676 law forbidding the practice (Rawlin 1699:120–121), ultimately inhibited proselytization. In general, the influence of Quakers on slaves, beyond a short period during the 1670s, appears to have been slight.

We do not know whether any slaves were permitted to become Quakers, and there is no specific information on the influence that Quakers may have had on slave burials. A 1671 visitor observed that Quakers “in many places . . . bury their own in their gardens” (Hull 1671), or, as the governor reported ten years later, “bury their dead

in fields and hedges" (Dutton 1681).⁹ Although the Quakers developed some community burial grounds, there is no evidence that slaves were buried in them; if, indeed, any plantation slaves were ever buried under Quaker auspices they were probably buried on plantation lands in the same cemeteries as other slaves.

Catholicism was of some importance in Barbados during the seventeenth century, especially among the Irish who were usually indentured servants. But during the eighteenth century and pre-emancipation decades of the nineteenth, there were virtually no European Catholics on the island. Even those in earlier periods appear to have had a negligible religious impact on the slave population. By the middle of the seventeenth century, however, slaves had been imported (presumably by Dutchmen) from Brazil where they had "been bred up amongst the Portugals" (Ligon 1657:52). Some of these slaves were probably Catholics. In 1654 a handful of Catholic slaves was also brought from the English colony in Surinam by a group of Frenchmen.

Commenting on the religion of Barbadian slaves in general, one of these Frenchmen, a priest, observed that "if any of them have any tinge of the Catholic religion, which they received among the Portuguese, they keep it the best they can, doing their prayers and worshipping God in their hearts." When some of the slaves brought by the French party were sold, the priest reported "they were extremely sorrowed to see themselves sold as slaves in an island of heretics" (Handler 1967:61, 67, 71). We have no evidence beyond the mid-seventeenth century for Catholic slaves. If, during that period, any plantation slaves died as Catholics, they were presumably buried on the lands of their owners because Barbados had no Catholic church or cemetery during the slave period.

During the seventeenth century, the island's small Sephardic Jewish community, whose members had largely come from Brazil, was almost entirely confined to Bridgetown, although some lived in Speightstown. Of about 260 Jews of all ages and sexes in 1681, only three or four men owned very small plantations (Dutton 1681; Samuel 1936). The Jewish community steadily decreased and by the preemancipation decades of the nineteenth century, it comprised about 100 persons, all residents of Bridgetown and all white (*Parliamentary Papers* 1814-15; Shilstone 1966:4). Slaveholding was common among Jews although the number they could own was sometimes legally restricted. The total number of slaves owned by Jews, however, was very small; for example, in 1679-80, when the Jewish community was relatively large, Jews owned only 304 slaves, approximately 0.7 percent of the total slave population (Samuel

1936:51, 63, 90, 91; Public Record Office 1679-80). No evidence exists that Jews ever attempted to convert their slaves and there is no clear evidence that the slaves of Jewish owners were ever buried in the Jewish cemeteries (see, for example, Shilstone 1956, 1966:7-8).

In all, during the slave period, the vast majority of Barbadian slaves were buried on plantations; of those buried in nonplantation cemeteries, the largest number (but still a fraction of the total burials) was interred in Anglican church or chapel grounds. The Newton data show that many deceased slaves on that plantation were buried in a cemetery, and written sources indicate that on other plantations specific burial grounds were also set aside for slave interments. However, the population data from Newton suggest that some persons, such as infants and small children, were buried apart from these designated areas, but the written sources are silent as to where these interments took place.¹⁰ Baptized plantation slaves were in a minority, and they also often adhered to the beliefs and practices of their nonbaptized peers. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, for example, baptized "many slaves" during the eighteenth century, but "very few learned anything of Christian doctrines" (Bennett 1958:140).

BELIEFS SURROUNDING DEATH

Barbadian slaves believed that death was usually the result of supernatural causes, particularly witchcraft or sorcery.¹¹ Belief in these causes was apparently more common in the earlier years of the slave period (for example, in the 1730s and 1740s, "but few Negroes . . . believe that they die a natural death"; Hughes 1750:15-16; see also Holt 1729a), but such beliefs were also widespread in later times. "Even the better sort amongst them," reported Governor Parry in the late 1780s, "almost universally believe in witchcraft, and are so firmly persuaded of its effects . . . [that] many of them despond and die when they conceive themselves bewitched" (Parry 1789b; see also J. Brathwaite 1789 and Barbados Council 1789). An 1806 law making Obeah a felony punishable by death stated that "many slaves have lost their lives or have otherwise been materially injured in their health by the wicked acts . . . of Obeahmen and women" (Public Record Office 1806). Another law, passed twelve years later, found the earlier one "ineffectual" and attempted to more rigorously circumscribe those who would "injure and affect the life or health of any other person" (Public Record Office 1818).

The belief in witchcraft or sorcery was, of course, found in

Europe, but the conviction that witchcraft and sorcery not only caused death but also were major causes of death was much more common, indeed ubiquitous, as a cultural rationale among West African populations. The fact that Barbadian slaves subscribed to such a widespread rationale in the belief systems of African peoples clearly suggests African influence.

In the earliest years of the slave period, the magicoreligious beliefs of Barbadian slaves were fundamentally African. Even though these beliefs were modified over the years, slaves (whether ultimately influenced by African or European religious thought) also retained a profound adherence to the notion of an afterlife and "the survivance of departed souls" (Steele 1787-88).¹²

The written sources provide few details on how the nature of this afterlife was defined or perceived, but it is apparent that African-born slaves (and perhaps creoles as well) believed in a return to Africa. "They imagine that if they die they will go to another land where riches, honor, and splendor will not be lacking, but where there will be an abundance of everything," observed a visitor in 1661 (Gunkel and Handler 1969:7). And Ligon, who lived in Barbados from 1647 to 1650, noted that non-Christian slaves "believe a resurrection, and that they shall go into their own country again, and have their youth renewed" (1657:51). "When these Negroes die a natural death, or especially when they destroy themselves," observed Hughes during the 1730s and 1740s, "they believe that they shall return to their own country . . . and what they mean by their own country is that they shall, after this life, enjoy the company of their friends and relations in another world" (1750:16). Pinckard, commenting on an African-born domestic slave's funeral in Bridgetown in 1796, also stressed how the participants "had full faith in Jenny's transmigration to meet her friends, at her place of nativity; and their persuasion that death was only a removal from their present to their former home—a mere change from a state of slavery to a state of freedom . . . They confidently expected to hear from poor Jenny, or to know her influence . . . before morning." The women who helped inter "poor Jenny" bade her good-bye while asking her to "remember me to all friends t'other side of the sea" (1806; 1:273-274).¹³

By Pinckard's time most slaves in Barbados were creole and at least some of the participants in the funeral he described were probably Barbadian-born. The sources, however, generally do not clearly distinguish between the beliefs held by creole and African-born slaves or provide information that can be interpreted as specifically creole.

In the early eighteenth century, John Oldmixon (who never visited Barbados but had received his information from planters and merchants familiar with the island) wrote: "The foreign slaves believe they return to their own country, which belief they brought from thence with them"; he did not specifically mention the conception of the afterlife held by creole slaves although he implied that most slaves were creoles at the time of his writing (1741;2:12, 135). Similarly, in 1788, when a knowledgeable planter reported "many Negroes . . . believe in a supreme being, in the survivance of their spiritual part, and in the expectation of future rewards and punishments," he was referring to non-Christian slaves (by this time creoles were in a majority). He pointed to the "universality" of a conception of life after death as one of "these three points of faith" among the slave population (Steele 1789:28). This belief, whether or not tempered by the influence of European thought, was shared by baptized and nonbaptized slaves (for the latter, in particular, it meant they did not have to relinquish a fundamental belief when they became Christians¹⁴). Even though their interpretations of slave beliefs and behavior are Eurocentric, the sources agree that an important component of slave religion was a conceptualization of a soul that survived after death and was able to move through space.¹⁵ (Indeed, although not specifically reported in the sources, slaves may have adhered to the notion of multiple souls, a common notion in West African religious thought.) The archaeological evidence, in the form of grave goods with at least some of the burials, seems to support this interpretation.

Jamaican slaves' belief in a return to Africa was "clearly the retention and slight reinterpretation of the common African belief that on death one rejoins one's ancestors. Indeed, the very notion of 'returning home' after death was held by many of the tribes in Africa from which the slaves came" (Patterson 1967:198); Patterson's observations can be extended to Barbados as well. And, in general, beliefs which were fundamental and widespread in West African indigenous religious systems—such as the survival of souls, a journey to the spirit world where the dead reside, and an afterlife (and even reincarnation)—could have been easily adhered to by both African-born slaves in Barbados and creoles.

Regardless of whether possible variations in belief were, for example, a result of different African ethnic backgrounds, cultural exchange among slaves in Barbados, or differential acculturation to European thought, all Barbadian slaves—Christian and non-Christian, creole and African-born—placed great emphasis on the funeral. The funeral had a number of functions in slave life, but its impor-

tance was clearly related to a "strongly marked . . . characteristic," a visitor in 1833 ethnocentrically reported, which is "their superstitious veneration for the dead"; "it is impossible to pay them a higher compliment or please them more than by attending the funeral of any of their deceased relatives or friends" (Rolph 1836:38). And when, in the late 1790s, the manager of Newton wrote about the death of one of his favorite slaves, a Christian, he expressed his intention to provide "a handsome burial—what . . . [the slaves] esteem the best reward of services after death" (Newton Papers 523/352-1); the slave received his "handsome funeral . . . as a small tribute to faithful services" and "as an encouragement to others" (523/381-1).

THE FUNERAL

"The funeral is the true climax of life," wrote Melville Herskovits, the pioneer in anthropological studies of Afro-American cultures, "and no belief drives deeper into the traditions of West African thought . . . The elaborateness of funeral rites in the area is cast in terms of the role of the ancestors in the lives of their descendants, and because it is important to have the assurance of the ancestral good will, the dead are honored with extended and costly rituals . . . whatever else has been lost of [African] . . . custom, the attitudes toward the dead as manifested in meticulous rituals cast in the mold of West African patterns have survived" in the New World (1958:63).

For several reasons, including removal from their natal social groupings, the fracturing of their kinship and community ties, the heterogeneity of their ethnic backgrounds, and the plantation regimen and its behavioral restrictions, African slaves could not reconstitute the rituals and funeral patterns of their homelands. The concept of a funeral, however, and the importance attached to the disposition of the dead and the veneration of ancestors continued into the New World setting and provided the foundation for the mortuary patterns that evolved in slave cultures.

Slaves on Barbadian plantations, like those elsewhere, developed a ritualistic complex from an early period in the history of slavery on the island. Judging by the way in which Europeans commented on, or alluded to, this complex it was clearly alien to them in many respects. For example, the island's governor stressed that slaves buried their dead with "ceremonies of their own" (Atkins 1676b). Ligon also suggested the patterned nature of such "ceremonies" when he reported that "when any [plantation slaves] . . . dye, they dig a grave, and at evening they bury him, clapping

and wringing their hands, and making a doleful sound with their voices" (1657:50).¹⁶

To describe the mortuary complex and to suggest the changes it underwent over time, we outline the sequence of activities from the time of death through the funeral, interment or burial, and postinterment period.

PREPARATION OF THE CORPSE

Various West African cultures prescribed definite lengths of time to elapse between death and burial, and some societies employed diviners to ascertain the most propitious time for interment. We do not know to what extent, if any, such norms were operative among Barbadian slaves. Following either their own beliefs or, more likely, the exigencies of plantation demands, slaves were usually buried on the day of their death or within a day afterward (Ligon 1657:50; Madin 1779; Newton Papers 523/110, 111). Burials took place in the evenings and associated activities lasted late, according to a clause in the major and comprehensive "slave consolidation act" of 1826 which forbade plantation managements from permitting "the funeral of any slave . . . after the hour of seven o'clock at night" (*Parliamentary Papers* 1826-27a:210).

The historical sources do not mention if slaves were buried in shrouds or clothing, but the archaeological evidence suggests the latter (and also makes it plain that people were occasionally buried with jewelry as well). As noted in chapter 5, excavated artifacts included buttons and a metal belt buckle; also textile fragments had adhered to the coils of one of the bracelets excavated with Burial 72.

Although the direct historical and archaeological evidence is weak, it seems reasonable to assume that slaves were usually, if not always, buried in clothing. There is no record that plantations provided shrouding materials, and the material poverty of the slaves makes the use of shrouds unlikely. The European practice involved clothing or shrouding. Although West African practices varied, most bodies were clothed or wrapped in some manner. In West Africa, both clothing as well as some type of wrapping could occur simultaneously, and occasionally only genital coverings were used. European and African practices and the social conventions of Barbados make it doubtful that slaves were buried naked; although nude burials are occasionally reported for West Africa, they were unusual and apparently occurred only in special cases in cultures where clothing or wrapping was the more customary practice (see, for example, Cardinall 1920:109; cf. Ffoulkes 1909:155, 158). Also,

if nude burials had occurred in Barbados, they probably would have been reported because of their alien nature to European practice.

Corpses were probably prepared for burial in their houses or in the homes of close kinsmen or friends. The historical sources do not indicate if corpses were placed on formal display or treated in any ritualistic manner before being transported to the burial ground; however, because such practices are not mentioned may mean very little. In Jamaica in the late eighteenth century, if not earlier, the decedent was laid out and "an assemblage of slaves from the neighborhood appears; the body is ornamented with linen and other apparel, which has been previously purchased, as is often the custom . . . and all the trinkets of the defunct are exposed in the coffin" (Beckford 1790; 2:388, quoted in Brathwaite 1971:216).¹⁷

Only one Barbadian source records that bodies were kept for any length of time after death. In 1806, Major Richard Wyvill, a British Army officer stationed in Barbados, wrote in his diary: "A funeral of black people passed our windows, the attendants all in black. The corpse was excessively offensive in its effluvia, as we are informed that those Negroes who wish to have a handsome funeral for their dead friends keep the body as long as possible, and until they can raise a sufficient sum of money to pay the expense of hiring clothes, etc" (Handler 1975:23). Wyvill's observations referred to townsmen who probably included freedmen (some of whom at one time may have been slaves) as well as slaves. Although the plantation regimen would probably have inhibited delaying the funeral, Wyvill did point to the importance attached to the funeral and also to the emphasis placed on special attire for the occasion.

MOURNERS AND THE FUNERAL PROCESSION

In the late eighteenth century, a Barbadian creole reported that slaves attempted to wear more elaborate attire on "occasion of their meeting together, for festive or solemn purposes" (Holder 1788: 23). This practice was already apparent earlier and persisted in later times. Only by the late eighteenth century, however, do the sources indicate that those who were "decently and respectably clad" (Rolph 1836:38) at funerals wore attire that was marked by a standardization in color. Without mentioning how men were dressed, Pinckard noted that at the funeral he viewed in 1796, the women were "neatly clad . . . and mostly in white" (1806;1: 271). Wyvill, also reporting on two funerals he witnessed in Bridgetown some ten years later, observed, without specifying sex, that the "attendants" wore black (Handler 1975:23, 26). In 1833

another observer stressed that black was worn by mourners at slave funerals (Rolph 1836:24, 38), while a Moravian missionary in 1830 reported that the women were dressed in white, without mentioning the color worn by men (United Brethren 1829;11:407-408). The sparsity of references and their lack of generalization make it difficult to establish a clear pattern, yet it is apparent that by the later days of the slave period the color of attire had significance within the context of the funeral. Today in Barbados in the funerals of the rural working class, white is the standard color for females while men wear black (or dark) suits.¹⁸

There are strict standards of dress at contemporary funerals and people only wear their finest clothes. Plantation workers who ordinarily go barefoot and wear tattered, worn clothing would not conceive of attending a funeral without wearing shoes. Men wear their only suits and women white dresses. This dress, usually an altered version of the dress in which she was married, is a married woman's finest piece of clothing. Men, women, and children are as well groomed as possible. Their appearance (and often their demeanor) dramatically contrasts to that of everyday life.

A Barbadian informant described funerals in the days of his youth—at around the time of World War I—before the advent of automobiles in the rural areas. On the day of the burial, the procession left the house of the deceased for the parish church. First came the horse-drawn hearse with the coffin; the immediate family walked behind and was followed by the other mourners. The mourners walked in pairs; the women, dressed in white, preceded the men, dressed in dark, preferably serge, suits. The ambience of the procession was solemn—no noise, no music. Today, however, the automobile plays a key role in the funerals of rural Barbados. Mourners are transported from the house of the deceased where they congregate to the churchyard for interment. Preceded by the hearse carrying the corpse and the car carrying the immediate family, the remaining autos are strung out into a procession that winds over country roads until it reaches the church. Barbadians place great value on riding to church in a car and often gauge the elaborateness of funerals by the number of automobiles in the procession.

Even during the slave period a procession of some kind was an important element in the complex surrounding the disposition of the dead. By the end of the slave period, this procession already had many of the overtones or features that endure in rural Barbados today. In 1833, Thomas Rolph observed "the funeral of a Negro woman," probably in the area of Vacluse plantation in the parish

of Saint Thomas, where he had spent some time during his three-month visit: "The long procession winding along the mountain's brow had a solemn, yet picturesque effect. The mourners were all very decently attired in black" (1836:24). Later Rolph provided a more detailed description of another "spectacle of a Negro funeral":

On reaching the house, I observed several long forms covered with mourners, all most decently and respectably clad in black. Many females were also assembled in black crape dresses, with black bonnets and veils. Groups of Negroes continued arriving for an hour; at length a large party having congregated, they formed themselves into a procession. They had an abundance of fruit, cake, wine and refreshments. The hearse, a sort of funeral car, drawn by a black horse, containing the coffin, which was covered with small ornaments, and surmounted by a large pall, went first; then the mourners followed, forming a parade, two by two, carrying umbrellas, and extending a long distance. The procession was closed by two mourners on horseback. The whole appearance was decent and respectable, and resembled more the funeral of a wealthy tradesman, than a slave (1836:38).

This was probably not the funeral of an ordinary field worker, and the description clearly implies the funeral of a baptized slave destined for burial in a churchyard. The processions in most slave funerals were undoubtedly more spartan. Funerals were probably also much less elaborate in earlier times than toward the close of the slave period.

The Reverend Griffith Hughes, a careful observer of slave customs from the mid-1730s through the 1740s, reported a procession while alluding to beliefs and practices clearly of African origin: "There are but few Negroes who believe that they die a natural death, but rather that they are fascinated, or bewitched. The bearers, in carrying the corpse of such a one to the grave, when they come opposite to, or in sight of, the house of the person who is supposed to have bewitched the deceased, pretend to stagger and say that the corpse is unwilling, and will not permit them to carry it to the grave until it is suffered to stop near, or opposite to, that house. After this is complied with for a few minutes, the corpse is, as they think, appeased, and then the bearers, without difficulty, carry it to the grave" (1750:15).

An identical custom was described for Jamaica around the same period and persisted, in one form or another, into the nineteenth century (Patterson 1967:196-197; Lewis 1834:98). Rattray described "carrying the corpse" among the Ashanti as a "ceremony

by means of which it was hoped to discover the person who by witchcraft had caused the death of the deceased" (1927:166, 167-170; cf. Danquah 1928:238). The custom was also found among, at least, other peoples of the Gold Coast and in Dahomey (Field 1961:200; Parrinder 1961:152); a similar custom also existed on the Niger delta (Talbot 1932:243). The practice reported for Jamaica and Barbados—and other areas of the Caribbean (Mintz and Price 1976:28)—is so similar to the West African one that its origin in the West Indies can clearly be attributed to a West African source. Because Hughes was the only one to report "carrying the corpse" in Barbados, it is difficult to establish to what extent the custom continued as part of the slaves' mortuary complex. Apparently nothing similar has survived into modern times.

The procession itself became more elaborate in later years and may have been modeled along European lines. Information on processions is largely confined to the preemancipation decades of the nineteenth century and, to some extent, the late eighteenth. In general, descriptions of or allusions to these processions refer to townsmen or those buried in church or chapel grounds. Later, however, as more slaves were buried in church grounds, the procession took on more elaboration and importance probably because church cemeteries were distant from the plantations. Without information, we cannot describe plantation burials (especially those of nonbaptized slaves) or determine if a formal procession accompanied the corpse to the plantation burial ground.

Although slaves, through compulsion or otherwise, sometimes attended the funerals of their owners (Hutchins 1817; Handler 1975:26; Orderson 1842:209-210), the sources convey the impression that whites rarely attended the funerals of nonbaptized slaves. We doubt that whites participated in the processions preceding interment even for baptized slaves. For all intents and purposes, then, the participants in slave funerals were "fellow slaves only" (Madin 1779:22).

The funerals could be limited to a handful of people or could include a good portion of the slaves on a plantation. On the Codrington plantations from 1819, "on the death of any one [slave], the relatives have the intermediate time between the decease and interment, and all on the estate leave their work one hour earlier than usual to attend the funeral," according to *The Christian Remembrancer* (1823:408). We do not know if the Codrington practice was followed on other plantations during the nineteenth century or whether, in earlier periods, plantation managements permitted all their slaves to attend a funeral. A suggestion

... of the deceased sometimes had special privileges is found in the work log of Seawell plantation for 1796–97. In one case, five slaves were given the day off from work “because of death in family,” and in another “children of a Negro woman” were given “two days off from their work in the 1st and 2nd gang” (Newton Papers 523/111). Although the Newton log for the same year does not specify this practice, it probably occurred at Newton and on other plantations. Throughout slavery, however, the permission of plantation managers or owners was required to attend funerals (permission was apparently not usually denied in the case of close kinsmen), especially if interment were in a churchyard or cemetery.

Sometimes a special group was permitted to attend a funeral. In 1741, for example, a Christian slave died on the Codrington plantations and “all the Christians [slaves] ... attend[ed] his funeral” (A. Alleyne 1741). And, when a slave member of the Moravian church died, the missionary wrote that the plantation manager “gave a holiday to the people who belonged to our church, for attendance at the funeral.” She was interred at the churchyard, “the distance being nearly five miles” from the plantation where she died (United Brethren 1829; 11:407–408).

The Moravian missionary also found “the appearance of the funeral procession ... very striking. The women dressed in white, walking in pairs after the corpse, followed by the men.” Pinckard, on the other hand, observed that males preceded females: after the hearse came “six boys, twelve men, and forty-eight women [who] walked behind, in pairs, as followers” (1806;1:271). Pinckard accounted for the large number of females in terms of their being the “sud-associates” of the deceased who was a “washerwoman.” A few other sources that mention processions suggest that formation in pairs was a feature of at least some processions in the later years of the slave period. Moreover, by the late eighteenth century, in the funerals of freedmen (some of whom at one time may have been slaves), “the kindred of the deceased” followed the corpse “as chief mourners, and after these all that were their friends and acquaintances” (Steele 1789:35); a similar pattern may have been followed by slaves at this period or in later years. The general order of these funerals and specifically the procession of mourners walking in pairs behind the corpse, seems to have been of European derivation (see, for example, Ashton 1883:44; Sidney 1891;1:71; Grant 1961:369; Besant 1925:270).

The degree to which funeral processions were formally organized in the earlier years of the slave period is not known. However, by the late eighteenth century funerals appear to have had a number

of culturally prescribed organizational aspects, such as the precedence of the corpse, the mourners walking in pairs, and the color and nature of attire. The evidence also suggests that the organization and content of the processional became more formalized and elaborate as the years progressed.

Hearses and Coffins. The hearse was one manifestation of the more elaborate funeral content. Evidence for hearses, however, is meager. Pinckard in 1796 and Rolph in 1833 both witnessed small horse-drawn hearses in slave funerals. In 1807 Newton plantation expended over three pounds for “hearse hire & church fees for [the] funeral of Old Mary Ann,” a favored domestic (Newton Plantation 1805–1841), the only case in the plantation’s records on slave expenditures that a hearse is mentioned.

On Barbadian plantations in general, hearses may have been occasionally used in the funerals of baptized slaves whose bodies were transported to a church burial ground and more frequently in the towns (even for nonbaptized slaves—as suggested by Pinckard), but the cost of renting them inhibited their use. In any event, the evidence implicitly suggests that hearses were not common in the funerals of plantation slaves and were not employed in these funerals until fairly late in the slave period.¹⁹

Although each source that mentions a hearse also mentions a coffin, coffins were more widely used; not all slaves, however, were buried in coffins. At Newton cemetery, for example, twenty-nine burials definitely had coffins (additional coffins could not be associated with particular individuals because of postburial disturbance). In some cases these coffin burials dated from the early eighteenth century. The earliest explicit historical references to coffins for slaves, however, are in Pinckard’s 1796 description of a Bridgetown funeral, and the 1796–97 work logs of Newton and Seawell plantations; the latter record that plantation carpenters and coopers constructed coffins for some of the slaves who died (Newton Papers 523/110, 111).

The limited documentary evidence that permits correlating the deaths of individual slaves with the construction of coffins supports the archaeological observations that not all slaves were buried in coffins. On Seawell plantation from April 28, 1796, to April 25, 1797, six slaves died, but coffins were only made for three; at Newton, from May 5, 1796, to April 26, 1797, four slaves died, but coffins were made for two (table 19). The plantation’s carpenters or coopers made each coffin on the day of death, and apparently were only called on to construct coffins as they were needed and on an individual basis.

The sample of deaths shown in table 19 is too small to establish

TABLE 19. Coffin construction and slave deaths: Newton and Seawell plantations, 1796–1797.

Plantation	Date of death	Date of coffin construction	Decedent				
			Sex	Age	Place of birth	Occupation	Cause of death
Seawell	Sept. 7	none	M	"old"	—	retired	old age
Seawell	Oct. 6	none	F	50+	Africa	field	—
Seawell	Nov. 17	Nov. 17	F	50+	Seawell	sick nurse	old age?
Seawell	Nov. 21	Nov. 21	F	30+	Seawell	unemployed	leprosy
Seawell	Jan. 1	none	M	40	Seawell	field	—
Seawell	Jan. 11	Jan. 11	F	30	Seawell	field	childbirth
Newton	Oct. 18	none	M	60+	Newton	retired	old age
Newton	Nov. 21	Nov. 21	F	50+	Newton	livestock	dysentery
Newton	Nov. 27	none	F	21	Newton	field	dysentery
Newton	March 9	March 9	M	60+	Newton	basketmaker	old age

Sources: Seawell, Newton Papers (523/111, 316). Newton, Newton Papers (523/110, 315). Deaths and coffin-building could only be correlated for Newton from May 5, 1796, to April 26, 1797, and for Seawell from April 28, 1796, to April 25, 1797. All the decedents were phenotypically black; no data show whether any were baptized.

a pattern of what categories of slaves received coffins or what criteria were significant in determining who would be buried in a coffin. Baptism, which may have been an important variable in coffin use, is not recorded for the plantations' slaves. In any event, we suspect that the most important factor was the personal value that the plantation manager placed on a slave; the coffin was, in effect, a plantation reward and one of the items that, for example, the manager of Seawell and Newton had in mind when he emphasized that slaves attached great weight to having a "handsome burial" (Newton Papers 523/352–1). In general, coffins were probably more regularly used on Newton, Seawell, and other Barbadian plantations as the slave period drew to a close.

Only one source mentions that the coffin in a slave funeral was "covered with small ornaments" (Rolph 1836:38), but the failure of other historical sources to mention ornamentation or, indeed, the early use of coffins means very little. The archaeological evidence shows that some coffins had ornaments or furniture—at least in the form of metal handles and plates—and date from the early

eighteenth century. There is no reason to suppose that coffin use at Newton deviated from the pattern that existed on other Barbadian plantations.²⁰

In general, coffin use among Barbadian slaves appears to have been the result of European influence. Although we do not know the shape or design of the coffins, the historical sources implicitly suggest (by not commenting that there was anything exceptional about them) that they were probably of "a conventional Old World form"—that is, octagonal—a coffin type that was also widespread in Colonial America (Habenstein and Lamers 1962:256).

Both the archaeological and historical evidence also indicate that normally only one corpse was placed in a coffin. However, when great numbers of people died at one time during epidemics or as a result of hurricanes, practical expediency dictated that a coffin contained more than one corpse. An eyewitness account of the massive hurricane of 1831 mentioned that "wherever one turns, there are coffins to be met with, in each of which two poor creatures are in many instances conveyed to the grave" (quoted in Schomburgk 1848:59–60). Although not specifically mentioned, we assume that in some cases the comment applied to slaves because they accounted for about 75 percent of the deaths caused by this hurricane.

Under normal circumstances, multiple interments (with or without coffins) were not a characteristic feature of the slave mortuary complex. The historical sources imply that single interments were the rule, and, aside from the hurricane-related deaths there is no other direct evidence of multiple interments in historical sources. Among the ninety-two burials we identified at Newton cemetery, only two pairs, in both cases a probable man and a small child (but not a newborn infant), could be positively identified as multiple interments. We find it difficult to explain these cases, although the persons involved in each case probably died at the same time.²¹ In any event, except for reasons of epidemics or natural disasters, the number of people who died annually on Newton plantation (and, presumably, on other plantations), including women in childbirth, would have generally mitigated against the possibility of multiple interments (see Appendix D).

Whether buried in a coffin or whether a hearse was used, the corpse was "conveyed to the grave" by bearers, but the historical sources do not specify if any norms governed their selection and number. The two sources that mention bearers imply that they were men (Hughes 1750:19; Pinckard 1806; 1:271–272). The coffin bearers themselves were participants in the funeral procession.

Ambience. In 1796, Pinckard described a Bridgetown funeral of an African-born "washerwoman" slave. The participants followed the coffin, "but I cannot say as deeply afflicted mourners... Grief and lamentations were not among them; nor was even the semblance thereof assumed. No solemn dirge was heard... no fearful silence held. It seemed a period of mirth and joy. Instead of weeping and bewailing, the followers jumped and sported as they passed along, and talked and laughed with each other, in high festivity. The procession was closed by five robust negro fishermen, who followed behind playing antic gambols, and dancing all the way to the grave." While the coffin was lowered into the grave, "many [of the participants at the funeral] were laughing and sporting the whole time" (1806; 1:271-272).

The white Barbadian author of the novel *Creoleana* alluded to a similar atmosphere. The novel was written in the late 1830s but its setting was Barbados in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Slave funerals were marked with "hilarity which... amounted to little less than revelry and debauch, created by the profuse introduction of 'burnt wine' and 'sangaree'" (Orderson 1842:117). The novel, however, described the death of a "mulatto" domestic slave whose "remains... were attended to the grave by a solemn procession of all the most respectable negroes and mulattoes of Staffords and the neighboring estates," and the novelist expressed, "with Christian satisfaction," that, at the time of his writing, "the solemnity of these occasions" was more widespread.²²

Other references to slave funerals in the 1830s (United Brethren 1829;11:407; Rolph 1836:24, 38) also convey a picture of more "solemn" processions than those of earlier times. Neither reference alludes to an air of "high festivity" or "hilarity" nor an ambience of "mirth and joy." However these later references, including the slave funeral mentioned in *Creoleana*, refer to the funerals of baptized plantation slaves who were destined for churchyard burials. Similarly, a comment on the funerals held by "Free Negroes" in Bridgetown during the late 1780s, when one of their number had been "wantonly shot by some angry white man," described the atmosphere as "solemn... quite peaceable, silent, and inoffensive" (Steele 1789:35). Although the atmosphere at these funerals may have been tempered by the protest freedmen were expressing, at this period "the greater part" of "Free Negroes" were baptized (Parry 1789a:18), and many subscribed to the values and shared the cultural practices of the white population (Handler 1974:208-217). Slaves probably also attended the funerals of freedmen (freedmen often had slave kinsmen and mates), and by the nineteenth century,

if not earlier, the funeral processions of Christian slaves probably had the character and general atmosphere found, or expected, in the processions of Europeans or white creoles. To what extent this atmosphere existed in the funerals of unbaptized plantation slaves, even during the late period of slavery, is difficult to say. Whatever this ambience, however, the important role of music, including singing, dancing, and instrumentation was one of the major differences between European and slave funerals.

In Barbados in general, musical forms and expression were one of the more prominent complexes in slave culture. From an early period of slavery, music was "an integral part of the slaves' system of religious beliefs and practices," manifesting itself in mortuary patterns and strongly reflecting the West African influence (Handler and Frisbie 1972:6, 14, 33-34).²³ For example, Ligon reported that while burying their dead, slaves were "clapping and wringing their hands, and making a doleful sound with their voices" (1657:50). Hughes, describing slave funerals in the 1730s and 1740s, reported that "most young people sing and dance, and make a loud noise with rattles, as they attend the corpse to its interment" (1750:15). In the late eighteenth century Pinckard (1806;1:270-274) and Orderson (1842:37) also stressed or alluded to the importance of various forms of musical expression in the mortuary complex. One of the clauses in the "slave consolidation act" of 1826 prohibited "any heathenish or idoltarous music, singing, or ceremonies" at slave funerals (*Parliamentary Papers* 1826-27a:210) although it is not known what specific effects this clause had on individual plantations.

In a unique reference, Pinckard wrote that on reaching the burial ground "the corpse was taken from the hearse, and borne by eight Negroes, not upon their shoulders, but upon four clean white napkins placed under the coffin. The body was committed to the grave, immediately on reaching it" (1806;1:271-272).

INTERMENT

Under normal circumstances, plantation managements apparently did not interfere with interment and postinterment behavior. It was not until the 1820s, as noted above, that legislative action simultaneously tried to encourage the Christianization of slaves and to eliminate "heathenish" practices.

The historical sources and the archaeological evidence agree that slaves were buried in freshly excavated graves—the universal practice among West African peoples—and not, for example, in surface or above-surface sites. We do not know how it was de-

cided who would be buried under a house and how specific locations in plantation communal burial grounds were selected. Only Hughes reported a particular custom surrounding the excavation of a grave: "If... in digging a grave, they find a stone which they cannot easily get out, they immediately conclude that the deceased is unwilling to be buried there; therefore they dig elsewhere, until they find a place more propitious to the supposed inclination of the dead" (1750:15).²⁴ We do not know if this custom also applied to slaves buried under house floors. Similarly, the historical sources provide no information on the rules, if any, governing who was charged with digging the grave. In graves excavated under houses, perhaps the gravediggers stood in a special relationship, kinship or otherwise, to the deceased, and there may have been a similar norm with respect to gravesites in plantation communal burial grounds. Among West African peoples, the gravediggers were often kinsmen, of one kind or another, of the deceased.

Pinckard observed that "the body was committed to the grave, immediately on reaching it, without either prayer or ceremony; and the coffin, directly, covered with earth" (1806:1:272). However, some "ceremony" may have taken place during interment, especially of the more Africanized plantation slaves during earlier periods. In Jamaica, in the early eighteenth century at least, gravesite rituals were performed at interment and if the decedent "be one whose circumstances could allow it, or if he be generally beloved, the Negroes sacrifice a hog in honour of him; which they contribute to the expenses of among themselves... the nearest relation kills it, the entrails are buried, the four quarters are divided, and a kind of soup made, which is brought in a calabash or gourd, and, after waving it three times, it is set down; then the body is put in the ground" (Leslie 1740:307-310, quoted in Patterson 1967:196-197).²⁵

ORIENTATION AND POSITION OF THE CORPSE

The historical sources for Barbados yield a little information on the selection and preparation of gravesites, but they do not mention the specific manner in which the corpse was interred in the ground. The archaeological record from Newton cemetery provides the only information on such practices. Our data show that consideration was given to the positioning and directional orientation of the body. Of the ninety-two burials, body orientation could be ascertained in fifty-eight cases. Fifty-five (95 percent of the sample) were buried along an east-west axis (in seventeen cases the head

was to the east, and in thirty-eight cases it was to the west). Only three were laid out in a north-south position with the head to the north, but we have not been able to ascertain if this orientation had any cultural significance.²⁶

The reasons for the east-west pattern are not clear. East-headed burials may suggest some emphasis on orientation toward Africa, which lies east of Barbados. Because east-headed burials (without coffins) were generally earlier than those headed west they were more likely to have been of African-born individuals (or first-generation creoles), and, as discussed earlier, a widespread belief was that through death one returned to Africa. However, there were some relatively early coffinless burials headed west, and west-headed burials were the most common type. Unless we can assume that these burials reflected emphasis on the eyes' facing east, the significance of orientation in relation to the direction of Africa must remain entirely conjectural.

If value was attached to the direction in which the eyes faced, the slaves may have adopted the European practice, but, perhaps, with a different underlying rationale since most slaves were not Christians. The nineteenth-century English anthropologist Edward Tylor reported that the standard "Christian usage of digging graves east and west, which prevailed through mediaeval times, is not yet forgotten. The rule of laying the head to the west, and its meaning that the dead shall rise looking toward the east... still remain established in modern European religion" (1958:509-512; cf. Ariès 1974:8). H. J. Rose also noted "the usual practice throughout Christendom" of placing the body with the head to the west so that the deceased would "rise facing the Lord," to the east, "on the Second Coming" (Rose 1922:127; cf. Genovese 1974:198). This orientation pattern, which was followed in Anglican practice, may be reflected in the west-headed burials at Newton that tend to be later than the east-headed ones. At any rate, West African data indicate a variety of orientation practices (and explanations), including east-west positioning, and the possibility of West African influence cannot be discounted.²⁷

African sources also suggest that sometimes the direction of the feet was emphasized in body orientation practices. For example, among some peoples of Sierra Leone, "the body is buried... with the feet facing eastward, so that the thunderstorms which blow from the east may 'blow the spirit back to its former home'" (McCulloch 1950:84). Among the Edo of the Benin kingdom in Nigeria "the corpse is laid in the grave with the feet pointing to the

west, that is towards...the old port of Benin, where the dead are believed to embark in canoes and cross the sea to the spirit world which lies beyond the dome of the sky" (Bradbury 1965:104).

In general, we assume that Newton slaves, especially in the earlier periods, subscribed to beliefs that were fundamentally African. Because of the variety of African practices in orientation, however, it is probably better to view orientation patterns (and, for that matter, many other features of the mortuary complex) as generalized features related to ideas concerning the passage of the soul, rather than to interpret them rigidly as representing any single set of beliefs or reflecting a particular African cultural tradition.

With two exceptions, Newton burials were found in extended, supine positions. Although extended-supine interments were apparently highly characteristic of Christian and Northern European burial practices (see, for example, Hazlitt 1965:285; Boase 1972:112; Hartley and Elliot 1926, plate 17; Rose 1922:127), they were also found in West Africa where flexed and lateral burials were also common.²⁸ In such West African burials, hands were commonly placed near the head or under the cheeks, most often in the "sleeping" position. The African data on hand positioning are generally very sparse, but we can assume that when burials were extended and supine the hands were placed along the sides or over the pelvic or chest area, as in European practice. In no case were the hands placed under the head or cheeks at Newton cemetery; this is undoubtedly related to the fact that we found no flexed burials (aside from one that was partially flexed), a feature that might have been expected given the African influences on the mortuary complex in general. At Newton cemetery we observed a variety of hand positions: in some burials hands were at the sides or folded over the chest or pelvic area; in others each hand was in a different position. We could not find, however, any statistically significant patterning among the various hand positions.

Explaining the single prone burial in Newton cemetery also raises a problem. Burial 9 was not only interred in a prone position, but also was the solitary interment in Mound 1; these unique features suggest that the woman possessed some unusual but unknown characteristics. We were unable to find any indication of prone burial positions in Europe or in the West Indian historical literature. Our survey of the West African ethnographic literature yielded only one specific reference to prone burials, and this reference suggests a broad explanation, involving a negatively viewed death, for the prone burial in Newton cemetery.

Among some Coastal Bantu peoples of the Cameroons, as among

other West African peoples, "abnormal" burial rites were performed for albinos, twins, firstborn children dying as infants, and "for persons with supernatural powers." In particular, there was a belief, apparently shared by neighboring peoples, in "a special form of witchcraft" called *Nyongo*. The "people believed to have *Nyongo*... [were] buried face downward so that if they attempt to come out of their graves they will move in the wrong direction" (Ardener 1956:90, 105-106). We are not maintaining that Burial 9 can be specifically explained in terms of *Nyongo*, but a special feature such as this is suggestive, especially when combined with broader evidence from West Africa that people with unusual characteristics or negatively viewed traits were buried differently from others. Burial 9 may have been viewed as a special type of witch or Obeah woman and her interment probably reflected an African cultural influence. The late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century date of the burial coincides with a period when most Barbadian slaves were either African-born or first-generation creoles.

GRAVE GOODS

The historical sources on Barbados do not mention if slaves were buried with nonorganic materials, such as tobacco pipes, pottery, jewelry, or other objects, or organic goods, such as food or drink. In 1687-88, however, Hans Sloane observed that when Jamaican slaves died "their country people make great lamentations, mournings, and howlings about them expiring, and at their funeral throw in rum and victuals into their graves, to serve them in the other world. Sometimes they bury it in gourds, at other times spill it on the graves" (1707;1:xlviii). John Taylor, whose account of Jamaican slave life was also based on a residence during 1687 and 1688, reported: "When those slaves die they make a great adoe at their burials for having caryed them to the grave in a very mournfule manner... both men & women which accompany the corpse sing and howle in a sorrowfull manner in their own language till being com to the grave, into which the[y] gently put the corpse, and with it casadar bread, rosted fowles, sugar, rum, tobacco, & pipes with fier to light his pipe withall,²⁹ and this they doe... in order to sustain him in his journey beyond those pleasant hills in their own country [Africa] whither they say he is now goeing to live at rest" (1688;2:544). By 1687-88, many Jamaican slaves had come from Barbados or had been transported from the West African Gold Coast (Patterson 1967:134-135), and the placement of grave goods may have been an aspect of the interment "ceremonies"

alluded to by seventeenth-century commentators on Barbadian slave life.

In the early 1720s, while at a slave trading post on the Gold Coast, John Atkins learned from an African trader who spoke some English that "the putting up of a few necessities with the corps [*sic*], such as they loved, is our way of respecting the deceased"; the "necessaries" included "pipes, tobacco, brandy, or whatever else the deceased loved or wanted" (1735:80, 85–86). We gathered information on burial practices from some sixty to seventy West African cultures, but the literature mentioned only one broad group, the Ashanti and related Gold Coast peoples, that used tobacco pipes as grave goods. Ellis reported that goods interred with the wealthy included "gold ornamented pipes" (1887:240) while Ffoulkes noted that in the burial of a chief, "inside the coffin, and near the head, are placed a pipe (if the chief was a smoker), or snuff, etc., and all his best jewels" (1909:158, 155–156).

West African peoples commonly placed goods inside the grave with the corpse. These goods could variously include food and drink, pottery containers, fine cloths and clothing, mats, kola nuts, tobacco, money, beads, cowry shells, jewelry (such as copper rings and bracelets), gold dust, soap, and other personal articles or possessions such as knives. They were viewed as presents or gifts to the ancestors the deceased was about to meet, as necessities to assist on his journey and residence in the spirit world, to keep him from being ashamed at having insufficient possessions in his new home, or to help him maintain the same position in the afterlife that he enjoyed before death.³⁰ The quality and quantity of these goods, of course, often varied according to the wealth and status of the deceased. Placing offerings or goods inside the graves can be distinguished from placing food and goods on top of the filled-in grave during interment rites. Both practices, however, could exist in the same society and occur during the same burial.

Although the literary sources on Barbados fail to report if organic and nonorganic materials were interred with burials, the archaeological evidence clearly indicates the practice. The amount of artifactual material associated with individual burials, however, was quite limited. We found the largest percentage of grave goods with the earlier burials—that is, those burials that occurred when there were a greater number of African-born slaves or first-generation creoles. The function of burial artifacts may have related to African or African-type beliefs, but we cannot archaeologically demonstrate if grave goods reflected the slaves' religious beliefs in an afterlife.

Furthermore, there was no overall correlation between the presence or absence of grave goods and particular age or sex groups. In general, we do not know to what extent, if any, interment and postinterment procedures and ritual for adults varied with the sex and status of the slave in his or her community. As we discussed in chapter 2, Obeah practitioners had great influence and probably prestige in their communities in Barbados (as in Jamaica; see Brathwaite 1971:162–163, 219; Patterson 1967:182–190). The uniquely large quantity of materials associated with Burial 72 (see chapter 5) suggests that he was some type of an Obeah man or at least someone who enjoyed a special status within the Newton slave community. However, Burial 9, which was interred by itself in Mound 1 and was roughly contemporaneous with Burial 72, may have been a witch or negatively viewed Obeah woman, and completely lacked artifactual material.

No other sociologically defined status or wealth distinctions among the slaves can be suggested by the archaeological evidence. Indeed, if we rely only on this evidence, any distinctions among slaves, as indicated by the historical record and described in chapter 4, would be overlooked. On the other hand, the archaeological evidence showing the existence of grave goods (and patterning in body orientation) provides a good illustration of the limitations of the historical sources.

The archaeology also allowed us to examine the possibility that slaves placed coins over the eyes of the dead at the time of burial. A Barbadian writer reported in 1942 that particular types of copper coins "were often used by the people to close the eyes of their dead and they still occasionally come to light when old burial grounds are disturbed for building or other purposes" (Aspinall 1942:113). The coins were minted in 1788 and 1792, apparently for use as tokens on some Barbadian plantations; referred to as the "Pineapple" and "Neptune" pennies, respectively, the coins are collectively known as the "Barbados Pennies" (Pridmore 1965:77, 82–84; 1962). Primary historical sources do not mention this use of coins in slave burials, and excavations at Newton and elsewhere in Barbados did not yield any type of coinage. Thus, the origin of the custom during the slave period is not supported by written or archaeological evidence.³¹

GRAVESITE RITUALS

Documentary data about the treatment of the grave after the body had been interred are limited. In the 1796 urban funeral of a slave washerwoman, Pinckard observed that after placement in

the grave, the coffin was immediately "covered with earth. In doing this, much decent attention was observed. The mould was not shovelled in roughly with the spade...but was first put into a basket, and then carefully emptied into the grave; an observance which might be adopted in England"—thus suggesting the non-European nature of this practice (1806;1:272; cf. Genovese 1974:200). While the grave was being filled "an old negro woman chanted an African air, and the multitude joined her in the chorus. It was not in the strain of a hymn...but was loud and lively, in unison with the other gaieties of the occasion." Pinckard went on:

From the moment the coffin was committed to the earth, nothing of order was maintained by the [funeral] party. The attendants dispersed in various directions, retiring, or remaining, during the filling up of the grave, as inclination seemed to lead. When the whole of the earth was replaced several of the women, who had staid to chant, in merry song, over poor Jenny's clay, took up a handful of the mould, and threw it down again upon the grave of their departed friend, as the finishing of the ceremony, crying aloud "*God bless you, Jenny! good-by! remember me to all friends t'other side of the sea, Jenny! Tell 'em me come soon! Good-by, Jenny, good-by! See for send me good — to-night, Jenny! Good-by, good night, Jenny, good-by!*" All this was uttered in mirth and laughter, and accompanied with attitudes and gesticulations expressive of any thing but sorrow or sadness (1806;1:273).³²

Pinckard's description points to the importance attached to grave dirt, an importance confirmed by other observers in different contexts. Pinckard, however, was the only one to provide any information on what transpired during and after the grave was filled; thus the extent to which his description can be extended to the funerals of plantation slaves in the same period (as well as earlier and later ones) is a matter of speculation. However, the significance of grave dirt and postinterment rites honoring the dead make it likely that similar activities took place at plantation burial grounds.³³

Indeed, Barbadian slave customs, at least in earlier periods, were probably similar to Jamaican practices. In 1687–88, John Taylor observed that after offerings had been placed in the grave, Jamaican slaves "fill up the grave, and eat and drink thereon, singing in their own language [and] verely dolefully desirring the dead corpse (by kissing the grave) to acquaint their father, mother, husband, & other relations of their present condition & slavery as he passes thru their countrey towards the plesant mountains, which

message they bellow out to the dead corpse in a dolefull sound, and goe kiss the grave & depart (1688;2:544). Another Jamaican source, dating from the early eighteenth century, described how while the body was covered "with earth, the attendants scream out in a terrible manner, which is not the effect of grief, but of joy." Sometimes a hog had been sacrificed and a "soup" prepared; "after the grave is filled up, they place the soup...at the head, and a bottle of rum at the feet. In the meantime cool drink...is distributed amongst those who are present; one half of the hog is burned while they are drinking, and the other is left to any person who pleases to take it...and so the ceremony ends" (Leslie 1740:307–310, quoted in Patterson 1967:196–197; as previously suggested, these practices were West African in character).

GRAVE MARKERS AND MOUNDS

Our archaeological investigations at Newton and elsewhere on the island suggest that grave markers or gravestones were not erected or placed over gravesites in plantation burial grounds. Moreover, only one written source mentions grave markers of any kind for plantation slaves. Although the absence of such references is not conclusive, the fact that grave markers are not mentioned supports the interpretation suggested by the archaeological record.

The manager of Newton requested of the plantation's owner to send from England "if there be not much expense in it...a small plain stone for the head of...[the] grave" of George Saer (Newton Papers 523/381–1), although the records do not reveal whether the stone was actually sent. Saer was a Christian and a much-valued slave, and chances are that the "handsome funeral" given him by the plantation manager in 1798 included a churchyard burial. Because gravestones involved expenditures, it is very unlikely that plantation managements regularly provided them. They probably were given only to highly valued Christian slaves destined for churchyard burial.³⁴

Although graves do not appear to have been marked in any particular way, the archaeological investigations indicate that in some cases earth was added to the grave after interment. The written record for Barbados provides no information, but an authoritative Jamaican source during the last half of the eighteenth century reported that after "the space of a month" another ceremony took place that involved, among other elements, laying "a considerable heap of dirt over the grave, which is called covering it" (Long 1774;2:421–422, quoted in Patterson 1967:197. See also sources cited in Brathwaite 1971:217–218, and details on the

"tombing ceremony" in early twentieth-century Jamaica; Beckwith 1969:84).

This activity apparently had socioreligious significance, but it could also have been performed to compensate for the settling-in of the grave, a common phenomenon. In either event, the amounts of earth involved in the construction of the large, permanent mounds at Newton (see chapter 5) imply more labor than simply filling a settled-in grave would have required. Whatever the significance of these mounds, the archaeological evidence indicates that the practice of mound building in Barbados was relatively uncommon.³⁵

POSTINTERMENT

The documentary evidence strongly suggests that behavior following interment was as or even more important as interment itself. In Barbados, as in Jamaica, postinterment rites were not only widespread but also a vital aspect of the whole mortuary complex.

Neither the historical sources nor the archaeological record suggest that slaves practiced exhumation and secondary burials, a custom found in Europe from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ariès 1974:18–22), but which seems to have been uncommon in West Africa. But a fundamental element in the Barbadian mortuary complex, which Europeans invariably found to be the most exotic and alien, was the "barbarous ceremony of strewing the grave of a friend with provisions to help the dear defunct on his journey to his native lands" (Colthurst 1835–38:48). "I... never suffer a Christian [slave] to be buried any other way than as he ought to be," wrote the Anglican catechist to the Codrington slaves in 1789, "on which occasions I strictly prohibit any of their rude customs to be afterwards practised over the corpse" (quoted in Bennett 1958:97). Although there are implications that these "idolatrous ceremonies and customs" were occurring in the seventeenth century (Gunkel and Handler 1969:7; see also Atkins 1676b), the earliest specific references to them occur in the 1720s. In a 1729 letter, an Anglican minister complained that insufficient care was "taken to restrain the Negroes... from what they call their plays (frequently performed on the Lords days) in which with their various instruments of horrid music howling and dancing about the graves of the dead, they [give] victuals and strong liquor to the souls of the deceased to keep them (as they pretend) from appearing to hurt them" (Holt 1729a; see also Bennett 1958:80–81). The letter writer did not imply that these "plays" were of recent vintage nor confined to certain plantations

(although he was especially concerned with the Codrington plantations); moreover, neither implication is given by Griffith Hughes when he generalized on similar ceremonies from the mid-1730s through the 1740s: "Some days after [interment], especially on their feasts, they strew at night some of the dressed victuals upon the graves of their deceased parents, relations, or friends" (1750:15).

Although some offerings of food and drink may have been made at the time of interment (as occurred in a number of West African cultures), the major rites occurred sometime after the day of the burial, according to Hughes and other sources. In fact, Philip Madin, who observed the funeral of a Barbadian plantation slave in 1779, specifically noted that on "the day after his interment a number of... [the slaves] went to stroke up his grave, as they call'd it." We are not sure what this expression meant (although it might have alluded to, in part, the construction of some type of mound). About nine or ten days later "they went again to carry some victuals and drink to the grave, pretending that the deceased expects it from them, and that if they don't do so they will dream of him and he will come and trouble them" (1779:22).

Viewing dreams as omens was an important aspect of Barbadian slave culture (as it was in African cultures and in parts of the British isles—see, for example, Campbell 1900:268–276; Dyer 1878:206–233). However, Madin's observation alludes to a West African belief that delaying postinterment ceremonies might bring about deleterious social or personal consequences for those who were obliged to perform the ceremonies (see, for example, Busia 1954:201; Little 1954:115; Rattray 1927:166; Forde and Jones 1950:27). Madin also learned from the owner of the slave who died about another incident in which a slave woman "who had buried her husband, and after some time having neglected this ceremony she took it into her mind that her husband was displeased with her, for neglecting him, and used to dream that he came and told her she did not love him" (1779:22–23). Madin implied that offerings were also made on occasions subsequent to the immediate post-interment period. The novel *Creoleana*, perhaps in exaggerated form, also mentions such practices: "It was no unusual thing to see, as each Sunday returned, hundreds—nay, thousands of these poor deluded creatures 'throwing victuals' and with drumming, dancing and riot practising frenzied incantations over the graves of their deceased relatives and friends" (Orderson 1842:37–38). Similarly, periodic offerings were also suggested in 1788 by a planter who mentioned that the "faith" of the slaves was "demonstrated by their funeral rites and their anniversary celebrations of

them to departed friends" (Steele 1789:28). During the eighteenth century, at least, these "anniversary celebrations," or "heathen sacrifices at the graves of the dead" (Holt 1729b), appear to have been more or less regularly performed on Sundays, when slaves were freed from work demands on plantations. Offerings of food and drink on top of the graves were intrinsic features of these rites. Robert Nicholls, a Barbadian-born Anglican minister (who left Barbados as a young man and returned in 1768 for a two-year residence), also specifically reported that "the principal feasts... [the slaves] ever give... are after the funerals of their friends, when they scatter some provisions on the grave and eat the rest themselves with a view, as I understand, of holding communion with the dead" (1790:332).

The historical sources provide no information on what norms governed the termination of the mourning period, or at what point and under what circumstances postinterment rites ceased, if they did, for a particular decedent. Nor do they indicate if the mourning period required other practices, such as special ritual taboos or body decoration. In West Africa, a wide variety and diversity of special customs were associated with the mourning period. The people most intimately involved in these practices were kinsmen and affines, such as wives. The historical sources for Barbados suggest that persons who stood in a special relationship to the deceased were primarily responsible for performing the postinterment rites; however, the participants were also drawn from the wider slave community and bore no special relationship to the deceased other than the fact that they were his or her friends and peers.

By the late 1820s, under legal and acculturative pressures, open performance of gravesite rites appear to have waned (see Colthurst 1835-38:48; Society for the Conversion 1829). In 1832 the Archdeacon of Barbados may have suggested their virtual disappearance, at least in their more dramatic form: "I have reason to think that the indecent revellings and the disorderly and demoralizing dances on the Lord's day, formerly so common in this colony, are at present of comparatively rare occurrence" (Eliot 1833:84-87).

Whatever the specific ethnographic details at any given period, and whenever gravesite rites ceased to be a characteristic feature of plantation slave culture, these rites were clearly widespread and of fundamental significance to plantation slaves for much of the period of slavery; furthermore, this ritual complex, involving at its core the propitiation and veneration of the spirits of the dead, must be viewed in light of the influence of the West African heritage on the culture of Barbadian slaves—a heritage that universally

stressed, albeit with varying emphasis and elaboration, the vital role of the ancestors in socioreligious thought and practice.³⁶

GRAVE DIRT AND OATHS

The influence of the African heritage and the sacred value attached to gravesites is also suggested by the importance of grave dirt and its role in the ordeal used in establishing innocence. Griffith Hughes first documented and most elaborately described the vital role of grave dirt in ordeals:

[In] their method of clearing themselves from imputed crimes... the Negroes take a piece of earth from the grave of their nearest relations, or parents, if it can be had; if not, from any other grave. This being mingled with water, they drink it, imprecating the divine vengeance to inflict an immediate punishment upon them; but in particular, that the water and mingled grave-dust which they have drank (if they are guilty of the crime) may cause them to swell, and burst their bellies. Most of them are so firmly persuaded that it will have this effect upon the guilty, that few, if any (provided they are conscious of the imputed crime), will put the proof of their innocence upon the experiment (1750:15-16).³⁷

The seriousness with which slaves regarded the ordeal when grave dirt was employed was capitalized on by whites when they required slaves to testify in legal proceedings. The ordeal became, in effect, a means of swearing an oath in the European sense of the term.

Although slaves were legally prevented from testifying against whites until 1831, they were sometimes called on to give evidence in cases involving themselves or freedmen. If required to testify at a "slave court," where capital and minor offenses were tried in front of white judicial officials (there was no jury at a slave court), baptized slaves testified under oath in the same manner as whites. However, as a British parliamentary commission was told in 1823, nonbaptized slaves were "sometimes sworn on grave dirt according to a superstition" (Dwarris 1827:86). This practice had been going on for many years. In 1783, for example, a Barbadian newspaper reported a case (cited in K. Watson 1975:173) in which two plantation slaves were accused of having stolen a heifer from a neighboring plantation. The crime was a felony punishable by death. The testimony of Cromwell, a slave on one of the plantations, established the guilt of one of the accused and the innocence of the other. The wife of the guilty man, however, challenged Cromwell's testimony and urged the justices of the peace trying the case to "swear Cromwell on a Negro grave." Cromwell was made to stand on a grave and the woman "mixed some of the dirt in a glass of

spirit and prostrating herself upon the grave...crying and kissing it, invoked the dead within, saying 'Oh Molly, if Cromwell swears true, well, bless and prosper him so long as he lives; but if he swears falsely...I beg you all to follow him close, and never let him rest, night or day, till he goes to hell, where he will belong to.'"

Cromwell reluctantly drank the mixture. When reexamined he changed his testimony "and implicated the individual whose innocence he had previously established. His testimony was then corroborated by the real culprit."

Some whites questioned whether an oath taken by a non-Christian was as efficacious as one sworn on the Bible. One writer strongly believed in the power of such an oath and explained: "their grave dirt is the same as the dust of the tabernacle, for their burial place is called the Negroes church. They mix both [water and grave dirt] together, and set the deponent on the grave, putting the mixture in his hand, which he drinks, and then he is charged by an oath of cursing, to which he replies, amen. And they think...that the perjured person will swell and rot, and become a curse among them" (*Barbados Mercury*, February 7, 1784). And arguing in 1787-88 that slaves should be permitted to give evidence in all courts, a planter was confident that "the solemnity of that oath ["by grave dirt"] appears to be connected with their ideas of the survivance of departed souls, and of future rewards and punishments under the decrees of the Divine Power" (Steele 1787-88, in Dickson 1814:83).

AFRICAN INFLUENCES AND CHANGES IN MORTUARY PATTERNS

We have suggested the influence of the West African cultural heritage on the mortuary patterns of plantation slaves throughout this chapter. Aside from specific practices and beliefs that the historical sources mention and the archaeological evidence suggests, whites who reported on the mortuary complex in general terms stated or implied that what they observed or heard about was essentially non-European. In 1779, for example, a visiting Englishman observed that the slaves participating in a plantation funeral had "some singularities peculiar to themselves" (Madin 1779:22). Over a century earlier the island's governor reported that slaves buried their dead "and not without ceremonies of their own" (Atkins 1676b). In general, the evidence indicates that in Barbados, as in other areas of the British Caribbean, the most fundamental elements in the mortuary complex throughout most of the slave period were African in form and origin; moreover, although these

elements were most pronounced in the beliefs and behavior of African-born or nonbaptized slaves or both, they were also found among other plantation slaves.

The strength of African traditions in slave life was directly or indirectly emphasized by writers who reported, however briefly and ethnocentrically, on slave culture. In the early eighteenth century, for example, John Oldmixon wrote that "few" slaves "shew any disposition to hearken to the doctrine of Christians. They are so fond of their own idolatry" (Oldmixon 1741;2:130; cf. Frere 1768:125). Hughes succinctly stated the influence of African traditions during the 1730s and 1740s: "Our slaves, in their mirth and diversions, differ according to the several customs of so many nations intermixed...The Negroes in general are very tenaciously addicted to the rites, ceremonies, and superstitions of their own countries, particularly in their plays, dances, music, marriages, and *burials*. *And even such as are born and bred up here, cannot be intirely weaned from these customs*" (1750:15-16; italics supplied).

African traditions must have been as strongly pronounced in earlier periods. As the years progressed, however, more slaves were creoles and they were increasingly "weaned from these customs." But even by 1788, when most slaves were Barbadian-born, the governor, in reporting how "Negroes are superstitiously attached to the burial places of their ancestors and friends," noted: "for tho' they seem to have no system of religion, nothing like the worship of any diety, in some instances their superstition is inconceivable" (Parry 1789a:17). "So superstitious are some of them," Madin reported (1779:22), referring to beliefs surrounding death. In 1812 a group of planters observed how Christian "moral and religious instruction" would act as "a means of counteracting the baneful effects of superstition" (Society for the Improvement 1811-16:123). "There is no characteristic more strongly marked in the Negro," Rolph emphatically observed in 1833, "than their superstitious veneration for the dead" (1836:38). The "superstitious" beliefs and "heathenish ways" (Porteus 1807:174³⁸), as ethnocentrically perceived by whites, implied a magicoreligious complex that was fundamentally non-European—that is, Afro-creole or African.

In discussing the African or African-like components of the mortuary complex of plantation slaves, we relied to a considerable degree on the published literature relating to the cultures of West Africa—the region that was the ancestral home of most Afro-American populations in the West Indies—although we do not claim that our coverage was exhaustive. The information in this

literature is largely based on ethnographic studies conducted during the twentieth century, "thus the data from contemporary Africa are projected back in time and are assumed to be relevant to Africa (and Barbados) of another epoch" (Handler and Frisbie 1972:35). This assumption presupposes a cultural conservatism in West Africa—a conservatism especially evident in, for example, music and motor behaviors associated with musical expression (Merriam 1967:107–108; Mintz 1970:5). Although cultural patterns in traditional, nonliterate, or nonindustrialized societies undergo a less rapid rate of change than under modern conditions and in industrialized societies,³⁹ "even in phases of extensive technical and social change such as the peoples of Africa... have experienced over the past century, traditional beliefs and standards continue to exert a powerful influence" (Forde 1954: vii–viii; cf. Busia 1954: 191). West African cultures, like many others—including those of Western Europe—were conservative with respect to the ideological and behavioral system surrounding death, but aspects of mortuary complexes changed,⁴⁰ not only as a result of European contacts and influences, but also as a result of the influences that African cultures had on one another over the past few centuries.⁴¹

We believe it remains legitimate to question the extent and ways in which the specific cultural patterns in twentieth- or late nineteenth-century Africa can be used to indicate what existed on the continent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the slave trade to the British West Indies was the most intensive. It is not possible to deal with this question here. Although we do not maintain that ethnographic data from modern or relatively modern Africa are conclusive evidence, we believed these data are useful (at least on a general and nonspecific ethnic group level) in suggesting the cultural patterns of African origin that were found among Barbadian slaves. More conclusive proof, of course, could only be arrived at by a comprehensive and systematic reconstruction of the mortuary patterns that existed in West Africa (especially among the peoples chiefly involved in the slave trade) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Some of the more distinctive general and specific features of African influence on the Barbadian slave mortuary complex included the emphasis that slaves placed on the funeral and the central role of the funeral in socioreligious life; the importance attached to ancestors, and the manifestation of this importance in interment and postinterment rites; sacrifices or offerings of food and drink at gravesites during these rites; goods interred with the corpse; the sacred nature of gravesites and the expression of this in ordeals

and oaths; the apparent norm that interment and, especially, post-interment rites be performed, at the minimum, by close kin or affines; the value attached to locating burial sites close to the houses of the living and interment under the houses; the prominent role of various forms of musical expression; the custom of "carrying the corpse"; and such beliefs as the emphasis on witchcraft or sorcery as causes of death, the survival of the soul, and its migration to a spirit world where the dead reside and the ancestors are rejoined.

Many African peoples believed that the afterworld was similar to the temporal one and that the social status held while alive was perpetuated after death. The evidence suggests that Barbadian (and West Indian) slaves added a new dimension to this belief that was, in effect, a function of their status in the New World. Not only did they subscribe to the notion of a return to the "other side of the sea" (Africa), but they also felt that death (including suicide) was a release from slavery which elevated them to a state of freedom in the afterlife. Other values, beliefs, and practices related to their status as plantation slaves were influenced by the European and Euro-creole environment—for example, the value that some slaves attached to burial in Christian churchyards, and the conception of baptism as a device to achieve such burials. Plantation managements could make a "handsome burial" an element in the plantation reward system by merely capitalizing on a fundamental strain in the African or African-type component of the slaves' cultural system. Plantation communal burial grounds were a concomitant of the plantation system itself (some African societies had communal burial grounds but only for particular kin groups). The timing of burials in the evenings and nights, as well as the performance of postinterment rites on Sundays, were responses to the demands of plantation labor schedules.

Other features of European origin entered the mortuary complex, especially in the later years of the slave period and particularly, but not uniquely, with baptized slaves. For example, palls, coffins with metal furniture (including handles), horse-drawn hearses, gravestones (at least for those interred in church burial grounds), and certain characteristics of the funeral procession, including, in some cases, its ambience, walking in pairs, types of attire for mourners, and, of course, the Christian rituals for baptized slaves. Aside from Christian slaves, European influences were, perhaps, to some extent manifest in other areas of the mortuary complex, such as the way in which the corpse was oriented and positioned in the grave (we expected more flexed burials from an African-type population than we found in Newton cemetery).

Some items of European origin were incorporated but in a non-European pattern; for example, various artifacts, such as clay tobacco pipes, were of European manufacture, but using them as grave goods was characteristically African.

We generally lack detailed comparative information on the mortuary customs of white creoles and those of European birth in Barbados. From the information that is available, however, including numerous wills not cited here, it appears safe to assume that the mortuary complex of the island's white population did not significantly deviate from European practices in basic features. A number of these features also appeared in the slave mortuary complex. We are aware, of course, that on a general level a number of mortuary features were shared by both European and African populations in the Old and New Worlds, and that various elements of the Barbadian slave complex were no more unique to West Africa than they were to the British Isles.

In West Africa and the British Isles, funerals and the disposition of the dead were important socioreligious and cultural features. Characteristic features and phases of the funeral and burial varied with, among other factors, the status and wealth of the deceased (and even the manner of death, such as suicide). In both areas the corpse was formally prepared for interment by being washed, dressed in clothes or shrouding, or was covered in some manner. The body was watched over in a wake or wakelike atmosphere. Other rules stipulated where and how the dead should be buried, processions of one kind or another accompanied the corpse to the burial place, and excavated graves were widely used. In both areas, the corpse was oriented in an east-west direction (although in Africa, there was apparently greater variation in orientation patterns) and was rarely buried in a prone position. White or dark colors signified death or mourning, prescribed mourning practices were followed, persons in close relationships to the deceased were expected to behave in particular ways, and food and drink were consumed by mourners. West Africans and Europeans also shared a variety of broadly defined beliefs such as witchcraft, sorcery, and notions of a soul, afterlife, and spirit world.⁴²

In sum, in a wider context, as Melville Herskovits suggested many years ago, "given traits of New World Negro . . . behavior, are ascribable equally to European and African origin. This may well be viewed as but a reflection of the fact that deep beneath the differences between these varied civilizations of the Old World lie common aspects which, in generalized form, might be expected to emerge in situations of close contact between peoples, such as

Europeans and Africans, whose specialized cultural endowments are comprehended within the larger unity" (1958:18). In illustrating the "Old World cultural province" Herskovits noted, among other features, shared elements of folklore, and "certain aspects" of magic, ordeals, the role and forms of divination, and conceptions of the universe. Various dimensions of the mortuary complex can also be included.

These shared broad cultural features and patterns facilitated the acculturative process between African and European populations. However, in stressing the African-like nature of the Barbadian slave mortuary complex, we are not only emphasizing that specific features were distinctively African (for example, burials under houses, the role of the ancestors, and postinterment rites at gravesites), but also that the qualitative nature of the mortuary complex and the distinctive patterning of its constituent elements gave it an African appearance. This appearance is attested to by viewing particular elements and the way in which they were combined and in the reactions of whites to slave funerary and religious practices. Whites' reactions, which often stressed or alluded to the exotic or alien qualities of significant mortuary features, underscored the African nature of these features.

The African influence on the mortuary complex was especially pronounced in the earlier periods of slavery. By the late eighteenth century, when most of Barbados's slaves had been born on the island, European elements were more visible,⁴³ and the complex itself was creole. Although some of its elements resembled or replicated Old World antecedents, the complex had its own contours and patterning and included elements that were distinctively a function of the New World environment and the plantation slave system. As much as European traditions may have influenced the mortuary complex (especially among baptized slaves and in the later periods of slavery), during the entire slave period and for most of the island's slaves, the mortuary complex "strongly reflected the African traditions from which it ultimately derived" (Handler and Frisbie 1972:40).

It is difficult and, perhaps, unnecessary, to "locate the particular areas in West Africa from which the different [mortuary elements and] rites . . . came," Patterson concluded from his study of Jamaican slave life. We generally concur with respect to Barbados and, like Patterson, also stress that "it is more fruitful to regard the rites described in Jamaica as syncretisms of what existed all over West Africa. In the light of the known uniformity of these rites in this area of Africa such syncretisms would certainly not be un-

likely" (1967:198). Patterson may exaggerate the "uniformity" of West African mortuary patterns, and more interethnic or tribal group diversity existed than his statement implies; nonetheless, in mortuary patterns, as well as more generally in religious belief and behavior, a number of broad cultural features, including "basic assumptions about social relations" and "basic assumptions and expectations about the way the world functions phenomenologically" (Mintz and Price 1976:5), were widespread and found in most, if not all, of the societies of the region.

These cultural features included, for example, the concept of the great gods, including a creator god; nature deities; the general responsiveness of deities to human actions; propitiation and veneration of the ancestors, the ancestral cult, and the active role of the dead in the lives of the living; oaths and ordeals involving ancestors or other deities; food and small animal (particularly chicken) ritual sacrifice; the concept of the afterlife or spirit world and souls (including multiple souls); basic shared premises about causality and the efficacy of magical and divinatory techniques; religious ritual associated with medical practices; the profound belief in witchcraft and sorcery; and the central role and significance of the funeral and rites attending the disposition of the dead (Herskovits 1962:101-103, 110-111; Bohannon and Curtin 1971:173-185; Parrinder 1961; Mintz and Price 1976:23. One authority has also noted the "remarkable similarities among symbols used in ritual throughout sub-Saharan Africa"; Turner 1973:1105).

We believe that the specific differences in mortuary practices and other cultural features among West African ethnic groups are, as Hammond has written, "less significant for an understanding of Afro-American cultural history than are the underlying similarities which unite them" (1970:196). Our archaeological data on interment practices also supports this view. We did not find evidence for the range of behavior that could have been expected if the slaves were maintaining broadly different mortuary patterns, rather than synthesizing fundamentally common West African features.⁴⁴

"In terms of our current knowledge," Mintz and Price have recently written, "it seems reasonable to expect that almost any sub-system of an Afro-American culture... would be highly syncretistic in terms of its diverse African origins, as well as in terms of inputs from European... sources; and we must expect it to possess a built-in internal dynamism and a marked adaptiveness to changing social conditions as well" (1976:32). As the "common [cultural] aspects in generalized form" (Herskovits 1958:18) shared by Africans and Europeans facilitated the process of acculturation

between these groups, at least in mortuary patterns, so the "underlying similarities" in West African socioreligious and mortuary belief and behavior provided the foundation on which African slaves from varying traditions constructed a mortuary complex in the New World setting.

"However one may choose to define a generalized West African 'heritage' shared by the slaves transported to any New World colony," and whether or not this heritage "will have to be defined... by focusing more on values, and... 'cognitive orientations'... and less on... the more formal elements stressed by Herskovits" (Mintz and Price 1976:5-7), the West African homelands clearly influenced the mortuary patterns of Barbadian slaves to a considerable degree. Despite the lack of many details on these patterns, the mortuary complex also formed an important and patterned component of slave culture. Only the most superficial historical research could maintain otherwise, and argue in more general terms, as a modern anthropological study of Barbados has done, that "under the conditions of the slave plantation [the slaves]... were able neither to re-establish African culture nor to develop new independent patterns. With emancipation, they could have had no choice but to accept the [English] culture that already existed in the island" (Greenfield 1966:171). Slaves, of course, could not reestablish a specific African culture, but "Africans did not arrive on the shores of the New World with blank minds onto which were impressed... English culture patterns in the 1830s. Although the social system of the slave society was harsh and highly restrictive, slaves developed a complex of behavioral patterns that by any anthropological characterization was cultural" (Handler 1969b: 337).

Clearly in Barbados, as in Jamaica and the Leeward Islands, "the majority of the slaves... retained a very strong African element in their culture" (Goveia 1965:248). In general features, however, by the late eighteenth century, this culture was not "wholly African," but was creolized.⁴⁵ Barbadian slave culture had developed from the interaction between Africans and their descendants (wherein the plantation community was of crucial importance), and from the absorption of European or Euro-creole culture elements in the process of adapting to the conditions of the plantation system and wider features in the island's sociocultural and physical environments.