Sources and Commentary

Inland Connectivity in Ancient Tanzania

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This research note emphasizes human entanglement inland of the East African marine coastal fringe, but tied to it and to the Swahili World, c. AD 750–1550. Social, economic, political, and ritual intersections developed between late pre-urban/urban communities and their countrysides.¹ Stone towns on the Swahili Coast administered countrysides, produced and marketed items for long-distance exchange, and emulated elite Islamic ritual and religious styles and products to build nodes of authority.²

By the 1990s, each of these interpretations of coastal towns created a potential role for non-coastal, African communities and inland goods in coastal livelihoods, whether Islamic Swahili or otherwise. In effect, theoretical advances in archaeology on the coast opened a pathway to challenge previous caricatures of disconnected and static inland people found in early Eurasian travelogues and post-independence colonialist scholarship. This potential has yet to be met.

1 M.L. Smith, “The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 43 (2014), pp. 307–323.

2 M. Horton, & J. Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000; C. Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States*, London, AltaMira, 1999; P. Sinclair, & N.T. Håkansson, “The Swahili City-State Culture”, in *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*, ed. M. Hansen, Copenhagen, Royal Danish Academy of Science and Letters, 2000, pp. 463–482; H. Wright, “Trade and Politics on the Eastern Littoral of Africa, AD 800–1300”, in *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns*, eds. T. Shaw *et al.*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 658–672.

Framing Issues

Researchers still struggle to rethink the “outer landscapes” of the late pre-urban/urban Swahili: inland settlements and people socially entangled with the coastal area. Regional approaches that equitably integrate coastal and inland communities and landscapes have the potential to overcome divisive practices that lack perspective.

Up to today, if read carefully, some of the best appreciated works about the Swahili Coast and western Indian Ocean exhibit worrisome assumptions about inland Africa and Africans presented as fact.³ This tendency is especially crucial now, as the region’s archaeology sees a resurgence in once bygone representations of the Swahili culture as arising predominantly or almost exclusively from maritime influence.⁴ One explanation for this resurgence is an unwillingness by researchers to follow-up on the potential – opened by earlier theorizing (noted above) – to engage, through science and the humanities, the region’s “outer landscapes”. Preferred research topics and practices continue to fulfil, rather than to question, probe, and test the expectation of a dichotomy between the ‘coast’ and ‘interior’.⁵ Just as with earlier scholarship by Neville Chittick during the 1970s and 1980s, it is easy to interpret the Swahili as the result of foreign influence if researchers chose to subvert certain African histories in deep time and to ignore the presence and potential contributions of inland settlements and their communities.

How might archaeologists and other scholars with an interest in the *region’s* history and/ or the history of the Islamic World address hinterland East Africa in an interdisciplinary manner? Moreover, how might they engage such issues with a degree of scope and sophistication equal to those applied to the coast?⁶

- 3 Cf. J. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888*, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 1995; M. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India and Portugal in the Early Modern Era*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998; A. Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Empire into One World Economy, 1771–1873*, London, James Currey, 1987.
- 4 Cf. J. Fleisher, J., et al. “When did the Swahili become Maritime?”, *American Anthropologist*, 117/1 (2015), pp. 100–115; A. LaViolette, “Swahili Cosmopolitanism in Africa and the Indian Ocean World, A.D. 600–1500”, *Archaeologies*, 4 (2008), pp. 24–49; S. Pradines, *Fortifications et Urbanisation en Afrique Orientale*, Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology, 58, 2004.
- 5 J. Walz, “Routes to History”, In *The Death of Prehistory*, eds. P. Schmidt & S. Mrozowski, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 69–91.
- 6 G. Abungu, & H. Mutoro, “Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenyan Coastal Hinterland”, in *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns*, eds. T. Shaw et al., London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 694–704; F. Chami, *The Tanzanian Coast in the First Millennium A.D.: Archaeology of the Iron-working Farming Communities*, Uppsala, Sweden: Societas

Compared to southeastern Africa, few archaeologists work in the coastal hinterland of East Africa to build comparative knowledge bases of the last 1500 years or so, including potential deep time ties that bound African neighbours together.

Engagements with contemporary people and a consciousness to recent patterns of connectivity across the region offer heuristic devices to reconsider periods outside the reach of documents.⁷ If researchers were to identify evidence of continuous entanglement into antiquity, then it would inspire new interpretations of long-term regional relations, the influences of inland Africans on the late pre-urban/urban Swahili World, and the potential impacts of oceanic and Islamic networks on the African interior before the last few centuries.

It is these framing issues that inspired the 1999 launch of an interdisciplinary and multi-source project in northeastern Tanzania. In 2006, the project's archaeological survey and excavation components, as well as the ethnographic, oral tradition, and other research facets, were completed. However, given the volume of retrieved data, analysis is still on-going, which is not uncommon with large scale regional projects focused on archaeology.⁸ This note provides information important to the research area's background and project methodology, but also shares select material finds, including items unearthed in hinterland vicinities that confront established thought about regional connectivity.

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- Archaeologica Upsaliensis, 1994; R. Haaland, & C. Msuya, "Pottery Production, Iron Working, and Trade in the EIA: The Case of Dakawa, East Central Tanzania", *Azania*, 35, 2000, pp. 75–106; R. Helm, *Conflicting Histories: The Archaeology of Iron-working, Farming Communities in the Central and Southern Coast of Kenya*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Dept. of Archaeology, University of Bristol, 2000; C. Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States: Walnut Creek, AltaMira*, 1999; B. Mapunda, "The Indian Ocean and its Hinterland during the Iron Age: Evidence for Socio-Cultural Interactions from Southern Tanzania", *Journal of Indian Ocean Archaeology*, 5 (2008), pp. 85–96; M. Pawlowicz, "Modelling the Swahili Past: The Archaeology of Mkindani in Southern Coastal Tanzania", *Azania* 47/4 (2012), pp. 486–506; P. Schmidt *et al.*, *Archaeological Investigations in the Vicinity of Mkiu, Kisarawe District, Tanzania*, Archaeological Contributions of the University of Dar es Salaam, Occasional Paper No. 1, Archaeology Unit, University of Dar es Salaam, 1992; C. Shipton *et al.*, "Intersections, Networks and the Genesis of Social Complexity on the Nyali Coast of East Africa", *African Archaeological Review* 30/4 (2013), pp. 427–453; J. Walz, "Routes to History."
- 7 P. Mitchell, *African Connections: An Archaeological Perspective on Africa and the Wider World*, Walnut Creek, California, AltaMira, 2005; J. Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization*, University of California Press, 2008; J. Walz, "Mombo and the Mkomazi Corridor", in *Salvaging Tanzania's Cultural Heritage*, eds. B. Mapunda and P. Msemwa, Dar es Salaam University Press, 2005, pp. 198–213.
- 8 Cf. M. Horton, *Shanga: The Archaeology of a Muslim Trading Community on the Coast of East Africa*, London, British Institute in Eastern Africa, 1996.

Project Context and Methodology

The Zanzibari-Inhambane environment of coastal East Africa incorporates near shore islands and a mosaic (or mixed) environment on the continent's mainland. The seascape and littoral spaces of the western Indian Ocean eventually grade into estuarine, riparian, and highland ecologies. In some areas this inland gradient is little interrupted. From central Kenya to central Tanzania, the unique Eastern Arc Range of mountains approaches the coast to within twenty kilometers. In northeastern Tanzania, the mountains are visible from the coast and out at sea, serving as topographical markers and resource magnets. Such environments, which encapsulate an array of niches in a compact area, tend to motivate intense interactions among human communities. In these spaces, it is difficult to differentiate among maritime, riverine, and terrestrial identities and practices. Not all people living on the "coast" are "maritime" and not all people "inland" are delinked from the "the aquatic". Moreover, communities' orientations can shift through time.

The project emphasized one such area of environmental and human diversity, namely the lower Pangani (Ruvu) Basin of northeastern Tanzania. There, a natural east–west corridor – the Mkomazi Corridor – runs inland along the southern edge of the Usambara Mountains, a component of the Eastern Arc Range.⁹ The corridor limits the lowland area to be probed for archaeological evidence of human entanglement. Such evidence is fragmentary and can be concealed by surface vegetation. A focused and systematic methodology is necessary to thoroughly but efficiently assess landscapes. The practices of the people – agriculturalists, agro-pastoralists, and foraging communities – who live within the corridor present clues that can also be used to guide research strategy. They continue to participate at rotating markets that correspond to nodes of nineteenth-century caravan routes.¹⁰ Previous informal research identified early ceramics and later glass beads in such vicinities.¹¹ The unique character of the regional environment, present human practices, and scattered traces anticipate the potential for systematic archaeological investigations.

9 J. Walz, "Mombo and the Mkomazi Corridor".

10 O. Baumann, *Usambara und seine Nachbargebiete*, Berlin, Dietrich Reimer, 1891; J. Farler, "Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country and the Victoria Nyanza", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* (New Series), 4 (1882), pp. 730–746; R. Burton, & J. Speke, "A Coasting Voyage from Mombasa to the Pangani River; Visit to Sultan Kimwere; and Progress of the Expedition into the Interior", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 28 (1858), pp. 188–226.

11 R. Soper, "Iron Age Sites in North-Eastern Tanzania", *Azania*, 2 (1967), pp. 19–38.

Thus, the project employed a regional approach that incorporated the coast and hinterland. A systematic archaeological surface survey of five areas in the natural corridor proceeded inland from Pangani Bay. The five areas of intensive assessment were selected to overlap known market nodes and vicinities the corresponded to nineteenth-century caravan traffic and trade. The overall survey and excavation project intensively assessed 44 km² (as its sample), the largest survey of its type in East Africa.¹²

More recent work by Biginagwa¹³ at Korogwe (see Figure 1) further validates this project's findings from 1999 to 2006 and the interpretation that the corridor shows long-term human settlement and evidence of coastal exchange inland.¹⁴

The geographically and historically informed regional approach and its systematic methodology identified and unearthed materials that previous informal methods ignored, missed, glossed, or under-recovered. The methodology

FIGURE 1 Map of the lower Pangani (Ruvu) Basin in Northeast Tanzania, survey areas 1–5 and site of Kwa Mgogo marked

- 12 J. Walz, "Mombo and the Mkomazi Corridor"; J. Walz, *Route to a Regional Past: An Archaeology of the Lower Pangani (Ruvu) Basin, Tanzania, 500–1900 c.E.*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Florida, 2010; J. Walz, "Routes to History".
- 13 T. Biginagwa, "Excavations of 19th Century Caravan Trade Halts in North-eastern Tanzania: A Preliminary Report", *Nyame Akuma*, 72 (2009), pp. 52–60.
- 14 J. Walz, "Mombo and the Mkomazi Corridor"; J. Walz, *Route to a Regional Past*.

enables challenges to historical assumptions and makes a new past. It tested the hypothesis of regional connectivity during the last 1500 years. Evidence makes apparent that the same vicinities served as more recent and ancient nodes of exchange within the corridor. Investigations in two of the five survey areas, near the contemporary towns of Mombo and Gonja, both equal to or greater than 100 km inland, together yielded more than one hundred archaeological localities of different periods, a selection of which were excavated.

Material Finds

The project documented 337 archaeological localities, numerous Indian Ocean and Swahili coastal items at ancient inland sites (including those positioned at or beyond 100 kilometres inland), aligned fluctuations in production and consumption between the emergent and established Swahili and their outer landscapes, broadly correspondent shifts in settlement patterns, and indications of route infrastructures (paths preceding the nineteenth-century) that penetrate inland.¹⁵ Moreover, finds from systematic excavations suggest the continued use of specific vicinities, like Mombo, as central nodes of connectivity through time and up to the present era. People in this corridor secured and remade their livelihoods by producing, exchanging, and consuming goods and by debating the flows of power on a shared landscape. The project shows that inland communities were more integral to pasts of scale than once thought.

The area around Mombo now has the largest known concentration of TIW (Triangular Incised Ware)/Tana Tradition sites in inland Tanzania and, perhaps, anywhere. A large cluster of these types of sites, including Kobe, covers 1.3 km² in the Mkomazi Corridor near Mombo, with its greatest florescence achieved in the late first millennium AD. Not coincidentally, this period corresponds to the earliest Swahili-related settlements in Kenya and, later, Tanzania, and to coastal sites that bear artifacts demonstrated to have inland origins.¹⁶

15 P. Schmidt, & J. Walz, "Re-representing African Pasts through Historical Archaeology", *American Antiquity* 72 (2007), pp. 53–70; J. Walz, "Mombo and the Mkomazi Corridor"; J. Walz, *Route to a Regional Past*; J. Walz, "Routes to History"; J. Walz, "Zigua Medicine, between Mountains and Ocean: People, Performances, and Objects in Healing Motion", in *Histories of Medicine and Healing in the Indian Ocean World*, eds. A. Winter & F. Tesfaye, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, Volume 2, 2015, pp. 197–218; J. Walz, & L. Dussubieux, "Zhizo Series Glass Beads at Kwa Mgogo, Inland NE Tanzania", *Journal of African Archaeology* 14/1 (2016), pp. 99–101.

16 F. Chami, *The Tanzanian Coast*; M. Horton, *Shanga*.

Positioned near Mombo, the archaeological site of Kwa Mgogo is particularly important. It is an open-air site perched along a low ridge south of the dramatic West Usambara Mountains. On its surface, Kwa Mgogo exhibits a dense scatter of early ceramics and beads made from landsnail shell. The site extends across the landscape for more than one hectare. Based on its artifacts and tests run on multiple radiocarbon samples from intact strata, in absolute terms Kwa Mgogo dates from the late first millennium and the early second millennium AD.

Excavations at Kwa Mgogo yielded copious artifacts (see Figures 2 and 3), including more than 500 kg of early TIW/Tana Tradition ceramics (at Kwa Mgogo, AD 650–900) and Group B pottery (at Kwa Mgogo, AD 900–1350). In northeastern Tanzania, these ceramics appear across the coast and interior. Other finds include, but are not limited to, hammer stones, quern fragments, ornaments, iron smelting debris, and faunal and botanical remains, among ash features and gneiss-lined burials. Excavations recovered more than 600 objects of personal adornment. Beads include those made on site and fashioned from the shell of *Achatina* sp., or the Giant African Landsnail. Trenches yielded all stages of bead production. Shell beads found in burials and other indications of regional connectivity indicate bead production for veneration and exchange.

These are shared across the coast and interior in northeastern Tanzania. Other finds include, but are not limited to, hammer stones, quern fragments, ornaments, iron smelting debris, and faunal and botanical remains, among ash features and gneiss-lined burials. Excavations recovered more than 600 objects of personal adornment. Beads include those made on site and fashioned from the shell of *Achatina* sp., or the Giant African Landsnail. Trenches yielded all stages of bead production. The use of shell beads in excavated burials and other indications of wider regional exchange imply bead production for exchange and veneration.

The matrix at Kwa Mgogo also yielded more than 75 marine and estuarine shells with coastal origins, including examples of aragonite (fossilized giant clam shell) beads as well as 16 small tubes of marine shell. The production and timed transition from shell discs to the presence of shell tubes parallels a contemporaneous trend at coastal Swahili sites further north, like Shanga.¹⁷ Some ceramics bear marine shell impressions. In addition, a few ceramics from the Middle East (e.g., hatched sgraffiato) and the Swahili Coast (red burnished and graphited feasting bowls) occur at Kwa Mgogo in the uppermost site strata. Few if any of these non-local items exist at other hinterland sites in East Africa, and

¹⁷ M. Horton, *Shanga*.

FIGURE 2 *Unit 1 excavation at Kwa Mgogo (strata and feature labeled; up to -190 cm below ground surface)*
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certainly not in these quantities, which suggests that evidence of interaction in the corridor may have resulted from more than down-the-line exchange.

Excavations to a depth of 190 cm below the ground surface also produced 34 glass beads and beads of carnelian, agate, rock crystal, ostrich eggshell, and copper. At Kwa Mgogo, the earliest glass beads (pre-mid tenth century AD) – all of Indian Ocean origin – occur alongside TIW / Tana Tradition ceramics. These glass beads are drawn, cobalt blue in color, and exhibit bubble trails parallel to their perforations. Such ornaments are Zhizo Series glass beads that date from the mid-eighth to the mid-tenth century AD, a conclusion based on chemical tests and analyses in addition to comparisons with the elemental signatures of

FIGURE 3 *Ceramics and beads indicative of coast-interior continuities and/or links excavated in interior Northeast Tanzania: (A) early TIW/Tana Tradition ceramics (pre-900 AD); (B) beads of drawn glass (including Zhizo Series, c. eighth- to tenth-century AD), carnelian, and copper (copper cone 3.8 cm in length); (C) hatched Sgraffiato (c. twelfth-century AD); (D) sherds of ritual serving vessels associated with Swahili Ware (top two) (c. thirteenth-century AD); (E) beads of wound glass (c. thirteenth- to fourteenth-century AD) (cm scales)*
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known glass beads from the western Indian Ocean.¹⁸ Zhizo Series beads employ glass from the Middle East (Iraq and Iran) after the fall of the Sassanian Empire (Henderson et al. 2004). Some scholars argue that such glass may then have been formed into beads in South Asia and/or Thailand.

At Gonja (see Figure 1), in an additional survey area located more than 150 km from the coastal fringe, the South Pare Mountains meet the arid lowland steppe. Well outside the Zanzibari-Inhambane Coastal Mozaic, research in this area generated clusters of first millennium and early second millennium AD ceramics, including small sites with TIW / Tana Tradition ceramics located away from the mountains. Maore Ware and Group B ceramics predominate at more than 20 open-air sites in the surveyed zone. Sites associated with Group B ceramics, in particular, extend in a clustered distribution along the skirt of the mountains. Surface and excavated finds from these archaeological localities show a spike in the production of iron (evidenced by slag heaps, tuyeres, and furnace bases) and disc beads made from landsnail shell. One conclusion is that some of these items met extra-local, putatively coastal, needs. Such

18 M. Wood, et al., "Zanzibar and Indian Ocean Trade in the First Millennium CE: The Glass Bead Evidence", *Anthropological and Archaeological Sciences*, 2016. <http://link.springer.com/journal/12520/onlineFirst/page/2>.

productive activities align chronologically with the rise of urbanism and a florescence in Swahili coastal communities.

Residents at the ancient site of Gonja Maore kept domestic stock, cultivated crops, and consumed beer. Landsnail debris and beads are profuse in excavations. Finds show the entire production sequence for shell disc beads, from blanks to finished ornaments. Pieces of rock crystal and a small number of Indo-Pacific glass beads and shards of glass typical of Swahili urban sites indicate more far-flung ties to the coast at the height of urbanism in the middle second millennium AD (for the further implications of such beads in eastern Africa, see Moffett and Chirikure 2016). The ornaments recovered near Gonja and Mombo constitute a portion of the 195 bead types generated from the overall project: 149 of imported glass and 46 of other materials.

The findings from this project challenge the notion of the hinterland as a trope for the sparseness of human history.¹⁹ Its initial results spur a reconsideration of Africa-Africa and Africa-Indian Ocean entanglements. Such patterned ties are apparent in the outer landscape, which contributed people, ideas, raw materials, and goods to the core of the Swahili World, at sites like Mtwapa and Tongoni.²⁰ Coastal settlements may have administered select villages in their umlands, but also consumed goods from afar and may have managed networks further afield as power and territory were maintained or elaborated.

Discussion and Conclusions

There are dangers when research and history are solely document driven. Classic works on East Africa, now somewhat outdated, view Indian Ocean networks and Islam as sources of influence at the coast, but fail to consider entanglements between coastal and hinterland communities seen as separate. Systematic research can address this lacunae across time, in this case by critically proceeding inland from the better known coast to the less well known, or historically unknown, interior.²¹

Questions persist. What was the reach and what were the influences of interior communities at the coast through exchange, ideas, and movement? Similarly, what was the reach and influence of oceanic and Islamic networks in the Mkomazi Corridor? What are the details associated with pulses of

19 P. Schmidt, & J. Walz, "Re-representing African Pasts".

20 C. Kusimba, & S. Kusimba, "Hinterlands and Cities: Archaeological Investigations of Economy and Trade in Tsavo, Southeastern Kenya", *Nyame Akuma*, 54 (2000), pp. 13–24.

21 J. Walz, "Mombo and the Mkomazi Corridor".

connectivity during different periods and at specific vicinities? Do material traces from the coastal fringe and ocean located at Mombo support previous suggestions that the Usambara Mountains served as a source of enslaved Africans in ancient networks of Islamic trade?²² Such questions find preliminary answers in cases gleaned from other areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, but would require testing in East African settings.²³ Researchers posing and addressing such queries should account for inland exigencies and the pasts and practices of non-Islamic African communities,²⁴ which opens real and more judicious possibilities to evaluate the region's human interactions, incorporations, tensions, and contests.

Twenty years ago it was observed that insufficient evidence existed to detail coast-interior linkages and their consequences for East Africa.²⁵ Now the situation has begun to shift through scientific practice coupled with a humanistic outlook. Although many current archaeologists and historians may be sympathetic to the role of hinterland communities in the social and commercial developments of the wider region that extends to the Indian Ocean, indifference with the interior and perceived hinterland inaction continue to subvert expanded and improved studies.

In East Africa, umlands and hinterlands should be approached as central to comprehending regional connectivity. Material indications of linkages in the Mkomazi Corridor demonstrate interdependence across the coast and interior, including well before and subsequent to the tumult of the sixteenth-century. Countrysides in East Africa are fruitful venues for future research. They bear still obscured remnants of nodes and networks in which power, territory, and identity were made and negotiated.

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- 22 M. Horton, *Shanga*; J. Walz, "Mombo and the Mkomazi Corridor"; J. Walz, & S. Brandt, "Toward an Archaeology of the Other African Diaspora: The Slave Trade and Dispersed Africans in the Western Indian Ocean." In *African Re-geneses*, eds. J. Haviser and K. MacDonald, University College London Press, 2006.
 - 23 T. Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2003; N. Levitzon, "Slavery and Islamization in Africa: A Comparative Study", in *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, ed. J. Willis. London, Frank Cass, 1985, pp. 182–198.
 - 24 See f.ex. S. MacEachern, "Selling Iron for Their Shackles: Wandala-Montagnard Interactions in Northern Cameroon", *Journal of African History* 33/2 (1993), pp. 247–270.
 - 25 A. LaViolette, *et al.*, "The Coast and the Hinterland: University of Dar es Salaam Archaeological Field Schools, 1987–88", *Nyame Akuma* 32 (1989), pp. 38–46; J. Sutton, "East Africa: Interior and Coast." *Azania* 29–30 (1994–95), pp. 227–231.