CHAPTER SIX

REEXAMINING THE MAJI MAJI WAR IN UNGONI WITH A BLEND OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ORAL HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first attempt to use archaeology in the study of the Maji Maji War. Archaeology can be defined as the study of the past cultures through material remains. As such archaeology and history are very closely related as both are interested in the human past. However, one of their differences is time scope; archaeology is capable of probing far deeper in time to the origins of culture and humanity over two million years ago and tracing human history all the way to the present, whereas history deals with the periods, going no further back than five thousand years ago, for which written documents and oral traditions exist. It is therefore in the later period where history and archaeology complement one another and produce a better understanding of our past.

It is on this viewpoint that this chapter is based. It employs archaeological techniques to verify, clarify, and supplement information used by researchers who have relied on historical methods alone in studying Maji Maji in Ungoni. This is not, however, the first time archaeology and history have been co-applied for a common goal. Historical archaeology is a sub-discipline of archaeology which shares time scope

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and methods with history, particularly the application of archival and oral sources. Peter Schmidt, for example, has successfully combined history and archaeology in studying the socio-technological transformations that took place in northwestern Tanzania in the past three thousand years.\(^2\)

Several reasons make the deployment of archaeology to Maji Maji War imperative. First, historical research has so far been pragmatically compelled to rely significantly on oral histories as a principal source of information. Yet, none of the eyewitnesses of the War survives today. Our informants belong either to the second or third generations after war. But as we all know, the reliability of oral traditions diminishes with time, hence the need for crosschecking between disciplines to increase reliability and credibility.

The second reason is that the tradition surrounding the Maji Maji War abounds with myth and symbolism which obscures reality and confuse truth with fiction. Moreover, information on Maji Maji, like that of any other war, is marked by both embellishment and deliberate omission because both sides created accounts meant to maintain the morale of the fighters and supporters. When rewriting the history of Maji Maji, therefore, one needs to screen off myths and establish what exactly happened and what did not. As a discipline acquainted with the study of material cultural remains, archaeology’s unique service is to trace material evidence which can be compared with both oral traditions and archival sources.

This paper is based on a research conducted from 2002–04 in Ungoni (Map 5), which today constitutes Namtumbo and Songea Districts. Specific locations studied include Kitanda in Namtumbo District and Maposeni, Mang’ua and Kikole in Songea District. The study involved interviewing local people in order to get in-depth information about the relationship between sites and the Maji Maji War. The sites were also physically visited to examine material evidence of events encountered in oral and written accounts. A one square meter test excavation was established at Kikole where surface materials were not informative enough. In the following section we examine these sites and consider how each was related to the Maji Maji War.