

4

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF POTTERY PRODUCTION FROM THE RUFJI REGION, TANZANIA

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INTRODUCTION

Archaeological research in the last ten years on the central coast of Tanzania has revealed many archaeological sites dating to periods ranging from the Late Stone Age through the Early and Later Iron Working to the advent of the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century. These sites include Limbo, Mkukuru, Mwangia and Misasa (Chami 1998, this volume). These sites have revealed abundant archaeological remains among which pottery features prominently. Of importance to this study is that the ancient pottery industry survives in this region to this day. There are potters in the region who still practice pottery production using traditional methods inherited from their ancestors. In spite of the impact of modern metal and plastic wares, there are many households still using pottery vessels produced locally. Nevertheless, despite the presence of a surviving traditional potting industry in the region, ethnographic and ethno-archaeological studies have not been undertaken to understand the ancient potting industry.

Although this chapter is about the ethnographic work done in the Rufiji region, its purpose is to compare with archaeological data from the same region. My work is therefore ethno-archaeological in the long run. Ethno-archaeology is an approach of study that utilizes ethno-graphic observations of present societies to cultural remains in the archaeological record (Hodder, 1986). Schiffer (1972, 1976) emphasizes that ethno-archaeologists study artifacts participating in ongoing behavioral systems.

The material artifact class under this particular ethno-archaeological study is pottery. The study focused on pottery for the following reasons: firstly, pottery is among the few remaining traditional crafts that are still surviving in the region, and secondly, pottery has the capacity to provide us with information on many aspects of human behavior (Rice 1987:25). Pottery has been described as being an additive process in which the success steps are recorded in the final product (Wandibba, 1999: 14). Thirdly, pottery is the materialization of a collective tradition, including the tools, actions and the rules that are traits that are transmitted from one generation to another (Misago, 1996: 104). According