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EXCAVATIONS AT KUUMBI CAVE ON ZANZIBAR IN 2005

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Preliminary excavations at Kuumbi Cave in south-eastern Zanzibar are reported. Occupation of the site at greater than c. 22 000 BP is associated with heavy-duty stone tools and an array of large fauna. An hiatus in human occupation represented by animal remains of bats and leopards is followed by a series of occupations dated between ca. 1 800 and 5 300 BP, associated with wild and domestic animal remains. Recent occupation of the site is represented by ceramics and glass beads.

C'est un reportage des excavations préliminaires à la Cave Kuumbi dans le sud-est du Zanzibar. L'occupation du site vers 22 000 ans avant notre ère est associée avec des outils des pierres à usage industriel et avec une panoplie d'une large faune. Un hiatus est suivi d'une série des occupations qui datent d'entre plus ou moins 1 800 ans et 5 300 ans avant notre ère, qu'on associe à des vestiges des animaux sauvage et domestiques. On associe l'occupation récente du site avec des céramiques et des perles en verre.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological investigations along the coast of east Africa and more specifically the islands of the Zanzibar archipelago have focused mainly on the extensive open sites containing architectural remains of the Swahili civilization as well as material and documentary evidence for trade from the early first millennium AD onwards. A series of studies have elucidated farming community ceramic production and spread, metal working and to a lesser extent subsistence activities. Recent years have seen an increase in interest in the transition to food production (see Lane 2004 for a recent overview) and the date at which this is represented on the coast. Relatively little effort has been made to investigate other archives with potential for evidence of, for instance, hunter gatherer activities (Sinclair 2006).

CONTEXT

Kuumbi Cave (S 6° 21' 40", E 39° 32' 33") first reported by Felix Chami is located in south eastern Zanzibar, about 3 km from the coast near Jambiani village (Figs 1 and 2). The cave is on an elevated area ca 26m above sea level overlooking the surrounding coral limestone landscape presently used for rain fed agriculture (Fig. 3) and is an important source of fresh water. The cave is an important shrine where ancestral spirits are venerated and consulted, attracting visitors from all over Unguja, the main island of the Zanzibar archipelago. There are no obvious rock paintings or engravings and this is not surprising given the