

A preliminary report of an archaeological survey of the Tanga Bay vicinity, including Amboni caves perimeter, and the Kwale Island in the northern coast of Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper is a preliminary report of the archaeological survey conducted in the Tanga Bay and its vicinity in the northern coast of Tanzania. The major objective of this survey was to locate sites which could provide clues to the ancient coastal trade towns, particularly Toniki. The survey led to the discovery of sites having archaeological potentials for excavations. Some materials collected, were of foreign importation, thus offering possible clues to the ancient transoceanic trade between Further exploration of the area would provide better understanding of the archaeological potential of the surveyed area.

Introduction

Between the 11th and the 20th August 2013, an archaeological survey was conducted at the areas of Amboni caves and Kwale Island on the Tanga Bay, on the northern coast of Tanzania. The survey covered the area between geographical coordinates; E 039° S 05° 04' 41.3" and S 04' 11.6" for the southern limit and E 039° 09' 21.5" S 04° 57' 55.7" for the northern limit. This work was a follow-up of previous archaeological studies in the area by this team in 2012, and the ongoing Ph.D. research by Christowaja Ntandu (see in this volume), in the hinterland area about 35 kilometers to the West of Tanga Bay. The main objective of this survey was to find out sites with materials datable to the Early Iron working (EIW) period, which could provide some insights to the ancient trade town of Toniki, mentioned by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, as emporium, and by the Claudius Ptolemy, as a metropolis (Casson, 1989; Chami, 2006). The exact location of this ancient market-town is yet to be known, but *Ptolemy's geography*

placed it at latitude 4°S. The area covered by this survey is within this geographical position. Several sites with rich archaeological materials of the ancient time or of Greco-Roman period were discovered. This is based on the recovery of sites with substantial concentrations of (EIW) period potsherds, some of which are seemingly non-local, thus thought to be of foreign origin.

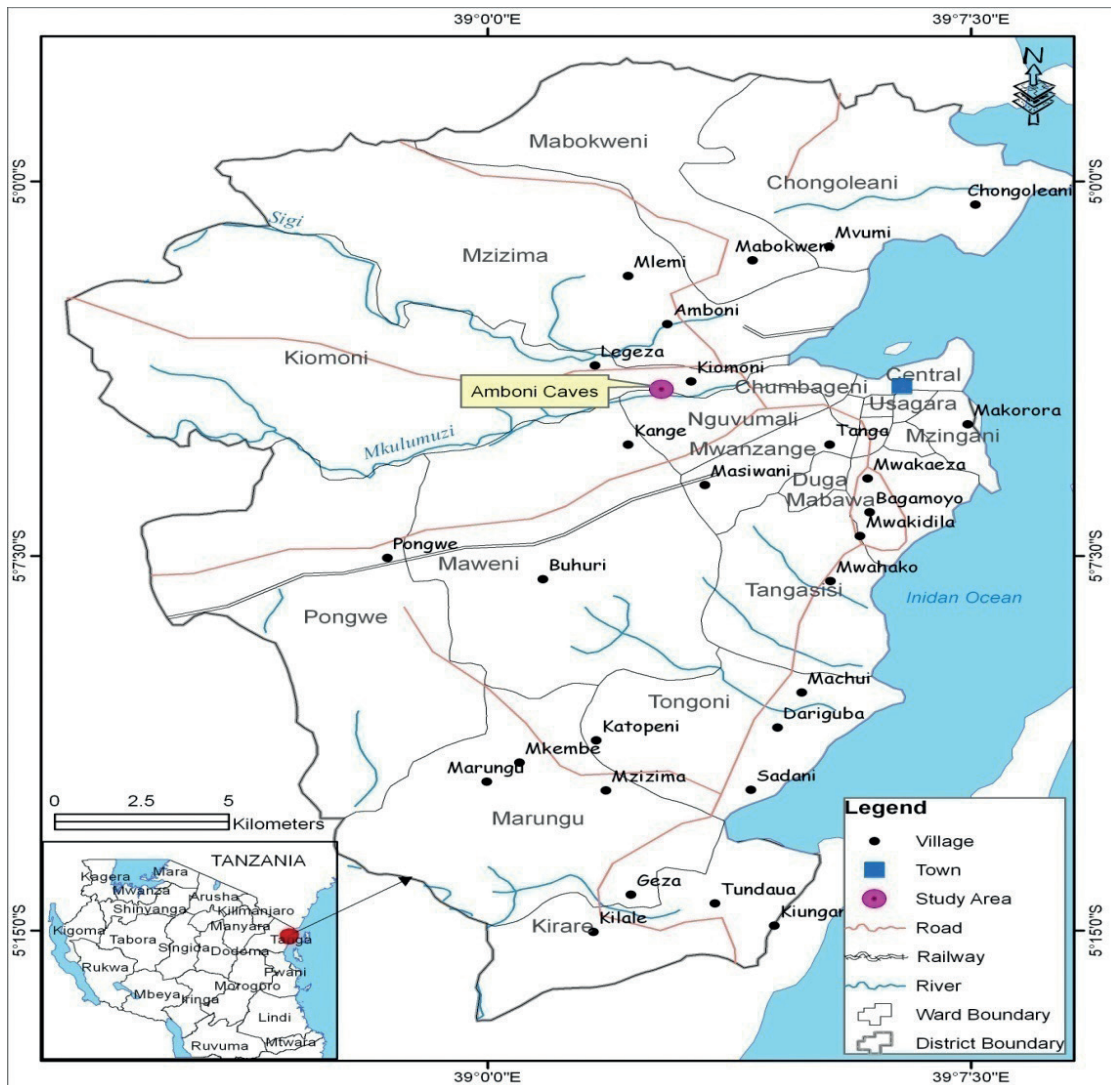


Figure 1: Map of Tanga District showing the Tanga Bay

Fieldwork

The field method employed was pedestrian survey, which began at Chumvini area, where Mkulumuzi (Utofu) River enters the Tanga Bay (Fig. 1). The survey team walked along the road to Gallanos Secondary School, examining disturbed and open landscapes, especially of red soils, considered to be of ancient time (Chami, 1994). The area surveyed was of thick vegetation cover, mainly grass, rendering the archaeological visibility poor in the areas off the road. However, the road cuts and gully erosion provided some indications of archaeological materials. At the first house towards Gallanos Secondary School (E 039° 04' 41.3" S 05° 04' 11.6"), we encountered a few potsherds which we identified to be of EIW period, based on their bevelled thick rims and brick-red fabric. Within the same general area of Gallanos (E 039° 04' 02" S 05° 04' 19"), as it is called, lies another site with a fair concentration of potsherds, the tradition of which could not easily be identified. The site lies on a few hundred metres to the left of the intersection point of the Tanga-Mombasa highway, and the road to Gallanos secondary school in the proximity of the Utofu Bridge. This site is devoid of vegetation cover due to erosion and quarrying activities, but with a big baobab tree, a few trees as well as some light bushes around. The soil sediments are red with high concentration of pottery being either of EIW period or of near modern times.

After the Gallanos work, the survey team moved to the Amboni limestone caves area, about 2km to the West of Gallanos. The purpose was to locate limestone caves with archaeological potentials. Prior to this survey, one of our colleague, Mr Ryno in 2012, had conducted an archaeological excavation at Amboni Main Cave (E 039° 02' 49" S 05° 04' 24") and established a cultural sequence spanning from LSA to the near modern time (see in this volume). He also located a few other caves with archaeological potential, but these are yet to be thoroughly examined.

This survey examined a number of caves and rock shelters, from the main Amboni Caves, moving westwards up the Mkulumuzi River. It should be noted that most of the caves, either did not have enough space to harbor human settlements, or their floors render the shelters unsuitable for human settlements. The only promising cave site in this area was located at E 039° 02' 46.7" S 05° 04' 26.4" South of the Main Amboni Caves. The cave has a substantial floor surface (4x2m), ideal for

human settlement. Outside the cave, there is a good shelter, which ensures that the cave is under the shade from direct sun and rain. There is also adequate light in the cave rendering it suitable for human habitation and activities. Although cultural materials such as pottery were not observed on the surface, the cave promises to be archaeologically potential, hence attracting future excavations.

Another site with a high concentration of pottery remains was discovered in the Tanga Bay, East of Amboni village. The local name of the site is Kiongwe-Masagara, or Ras Kazone B, located at E 039° 05' 08.9" S 05° 02' 35". The site is a peninsular-like near the shore line of the Indian Ocean on the Tanga Bay. There is a considerable concentration of pottery remains, possibly ranging from EIA to the near modern. Although the majority of sherds are of Swahili tradition. Typical Swahili stylistic features were however, not pronounced. Many sherds had characteristics of EIW tradition such as thick fluted rims, which we also opined that they were imports. The excavation of this site is vital for the verification of our opinions and would be a step towards the discovery of the long lost *Ptolemaic Toniki* metropolis. Laboratory analysis of Kiongwe-Masagara potsherds only reaffirmed our opinion that they are imported materials, probably originating from the Indo-Roman world (Henry Wright and Sunil Gupta pers.commu.).

Another interesting site was discovered on Kwale Island, North-West of the port of Tanga. It is located at E 039° 09' 21.5" S 04° 57' 55.7". The name refers to both the modern settlement on the shore line, and the coral island, about 1km off-shore, with no settlement today. The island is today fully covered by a heavy vegetation of trees, including big baobabs, and thick thorn bushes. We were informed by local men, Mzee Kihela and Jamhuri Rashid, who guided us into the area, that some cultivation activities took place in the past in areas with soils. Today, people are cutting down trees in the island for firewood and construction purposes. On the surface, where there was fair surface visibility, we observed a tantalizing amount of potsherds scattered over the brick-red soil surface. Some potsherds are observably comparable to those of Kiongwe-Masagara, which we attributed to foreign origin. Swahili Ware potsherds were abundant, suggesting that the site could have been occupied or utilized continuously by humans as early as the EIW period. We collected few fragments of EIW pottery with one

rim shed clearly identifiable by being thick and bevelled rim (ST5-1). Dozens of potsherds which we suspected as EIW imported sherds were collected. This site bears great archaeological potentials, and its location at latitude 4°S would really tempt one to think of a possible *Ptolemaic Toniki*.

Material Analysis

Cultural materials collected from fieldwork are only potsherds. Cleaning and preliminary inventory was done in the last day of the field and a total of 96 potsherds were brought to the laboratory for analysis. Laboratory analysis was conducted, preliminarily focusing on identifying the pottery traditions, especially EIA and imported wares. Identification was followed by proper bagging of the findings.

Laboratory analysis revealed that 34 potsherds are characterized by thick and fluted rims with orange surfaces and reddish grey cores, and we suggested that they are non-local. Samples of these sherds were photographed and images sent to Professor Sunil Gupta, an expert in Indo-Roman pottery, for verification. His observations confirmed that the sherds fall within the Indian repertoire, or could as well be of Aksumite origin. In any case, he made it clear to us that the materials are of foreign origin, hence imported goods. During the days of Toniki, In the ancient time the East African or the Azanian coast had trade links with Mediterranean and the rest of the Indian Ocean (Tomber, 2008, Smith and Wright 1988, Chami, 2006). The results of this analysis therefore, call for further archaeological investigation of the site to unravel the cultural sequence.

Conclusion

The archaeological fieldwork reported here established that the areas of the Tanga bay and the Amboni caves have sites worthy finding funds for excavations. It is possible that the ancient trade town of *Toniki*, reported by the *Ptolemy* to be located at latitude 4 South, could have been located in this research area. This survey work has provided some insights to that problem.

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