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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE RUFJI REGION SINCE 1987 TO 2000: COASTAL AND INTERIOR DYNAMICS FROM AD 00 - 500

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INTRODUCTION

This paper has a dual purpose: first, it is a summary of archaeological fieldwork conducted in the Rufiji region between 1987 and 2000; and second, it is a discussion of results in view of the problems that led to this research endeavor. All fieldwork conducted in this region before 1999 has already been reported in a series of publications. Therefore, only a summary of these research activities is presented here. The only detailed report is that of the 1999 Field School of the University of Dar es Salaam that was conducted north of the Rufiji delta in the areas of Ranging, Roark, Chewy (Sonja) and Massimo. The aim was to locate more sites of the Late Stone Age (LSA) and Early Iron Working (EIW). These settlements are now thought to be a key to the understanding of the coastal culture of the early centuries AD. The 1999 Rufiji research also aimed at re-excavating the site of Mkukutu-Kibiti to find out further evidence for trade. Before the report of the 1999 work I first present a summary of the previous fieldwork in the Rufiji region.

In the following field report and discussion, several cultural traditions are mentioned which may be difficult for readers to understand. The phases of the EIW tradition, beginning from the earliest, are known as Limbo, Kwale and Mwangia (200 BC-AD 500). Those of the Later Iron Working (LIW) period are known as Triangular Incised Ware (TIW), Plain Ware (PW), and Neck Punctating (NP) or Swahili Ware (SW) (AD 500-1500). For detailed discussion of these concepts and their respective traditions see Chami (1998a). A tradition that emerged on the large part of East Africa from about AD1500 to about 1850 is presented as Post Swahili (PS) tradition.

The terms Azania and Zanj appear in the historical documents of Graeco-Romans (AD 00-500) and Arabs (AD 600 - 1200) respectively. They all referred to the coast of East Africa and probably to its interior. Chami (1994) used "Azanian civilization/culture" to stand for the EIW culture of East Africa and "Zhanjiang" to that of LIW cultures.

RUFJI REGION

The area arbitrarily recognized by this research as Rufiji region can be seen in Fig 2: 1. It has four borders: In the south is the Rufiji River itself and in the north is a latitude