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EXCAVATIONS AT MNG'ARU: AN EARLY IRON WORKING PHASE SITE IN THE RUFJI REGION

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on excavations conducted at the Early Iron Working (EIW) site of Mng'aru, near the Rufiji Delta in Tanzania. The work carried out establishes the site of Mng'aru as belonging to the Mwangia phase of the EIW period which dates back to the 6th century A.D (Chami 1998). The pottery from this site has closer affinities with the Kwale EIW phase previously established as the EIW tradition of the coast of East Africa (Soper 1971). The Mwangia phase is also known to have some decorative elements similar to those of the TIW tradition (Chami 1994). Chami (1998) has now divided the EIW tradition into Limbo, Kwale and Mwangia phases. In his 1994 work, he has also discussed the status of the TIW tradition. It is argued here that the pottery under study, represents a transitional phase to the Later Iron Working (LIW) period or an intermediate period between Kwale and TIW.

The site of Mng'aru (39° 00N and 7° 60E) is located on the natural ridge 8km south west of Kibiti town, about 100 km south of Dar es Salaam along the road from Dar es Salaam to Mtwara. The site is in the present Rufiji District of the Pwani Region, in the village of Mng'aru from which it takes its name. The village is surrounded by thickets and patches of cleared land in which the villagers cultivate and grow various food and cash crops such as cassava, rice, maize, bananas, millet, pumpkins, beans, sugar cane, coconut palm, sesame, castor, pineapples and a variety of citrus fruits. Apart from cultivation and growing different crops, the villagers also fish from numerous ponds and streams around the village and from the Rufiji river. Trading is yet another important activity of the inhabitants of the area.

The present work was preceded by the University of Dar es Salaam field school conducted in the Rufiji District in 1996 (Chami and Mapunda 1998). The investigation of the archaeological sites in the Rufiji region (see Chami in this volume) identified a number of EIW sites, some of which were test excavated. One of the sites that was test excavated is called Mwangia, about three kilometers north of Mng'aru village (Fig. 3.1). The excavation of the Mwangia site yielded EIW pottery that has been dated to the 6th century A.D (see Chami and Mapunda 1998). This has been argued to overlap with the early TIW phase also dated to about the same period (Chami 1994). Furthermore, it was recognized to represent the last phase of EIW period on the coast of East Africa (Chami 1998).