



## CHICKEN BONES FROM A NEOLITHIC LIMESTONE CAVE SITE, ZANZIBAR: CONTACT BETWEEN EAST AFRICA AND ASIA

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### INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses ancient cultural and trade connections between East Africa and Asia in the light of some new archaeological evidence collected from the Tanzanian coast. Of significance is the find of chicken bones in a Late Stone Age (LSA) archaeological context from a limestone cave in Zanzibar. The LSA archaeological context has dates falling in the last three millennia BC.

The bones of Zanzibar domesticated chicken probably become the earliest known in Africa. Hitherto, Egypt provided the earliest date of the second part of the last millennium BC. Chicken was thought to have spread from Egypt to the rest of Africa after AD 800. MacDonald (1992, 1993) has discussed evidence for chicken domestication in Africa. Simoons (1961) has discussed its spread from Southeast Asia.

The fact that Zanzibar had chicken at least by the last millennia BC brings to question the idea that Egypt could have been a secondary dispersal area providing chicken to the rest of Africa. As it will be recapitulated below, evidence is now accumulating showing that East Africa was in direct connection with Asia before the BC/AD changeover. Before immersing into this problem, the archaeology of Zanzibar chicken, the associated materials and carbon fourteen dates is first presented.

### THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ZANZIBAR CHICKEN

The limestone cave of Zanzibar, from where the chicken and related materials were recovered, is called Machaga. It is located at Pete (39°25'E; 6° 15 '20"S) about 25 km southeast of Zanzibar town (Fig.8.1). It is about 5 km northeast of the site of Unguja Ukuu. The cave, which is underground, is a product of sub-terranean streams that cut their way through the limestone. In this way they dissolve the carbonate of lime leaving behind large chambers that become caves when their roofs collapse (Stockley 1928:90). The cave of Machaga has two large chambers. The entrance to the cave is through the outer chamber of which the roof collapsed. The surface floor of the inner chamber is 10 m from the ground surface. The chamber has the dimensions of 6 x 6 m. This is a large room