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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE RUHUHU RIVER BASIN, EASTERN SHORE OF LAKE NYASA

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INTRODUCTION

While conducting a geological survey in the early 1930s along the Ruhuhu River valley (Fig.9.1), a team of geologists from the Department of Geologic Survey, Dar es Salaam, discovered fossil remains of some terrestrial animals, mostly reptiles, dating between 175-185 million years ago. This discovery was followed by three systematic paleontological investigations conducted in 1936, 1937, and 1963. The aim of these studies was to collect more fossil remains and to determine the spatial distribution of the sites (Hill & Moffett 1955; Moffett 1958; Mturi 1975). The fossil remains were taken to Britain and Germany for further analysis and their whereabouts are not clear (Mturi 1975).

In August 1988, while an undergraduate student at the University of Dar es Salaam, I located two Iron Working sites in Lituhi (Lower Ruhuhu River (Fig. 9.3). The first site was located only 40m from the bank of the Ruhuhu River and the second one was in the plateau area overlooking Lake Nyasa, about 10 km south of the first site. Both sites had scatters of slag, but the latter one also had fragments of tuyere and pottery.

When I began reading about the archaeology of this area (eastern shore of Lake Nyasa) I realized that I was not the only person to recognize the archaeological potential of the area. Several other scholars had identified the eastern Lake Nyasa region's potential for solving critical questions facing archaeologists about the Iron Age in Africa. The following excerpts illustrate my point:

> The Motovillage site on the eastern shore of lake Malawi proves that Nkope Ware is not confined to the western shore .... It seems just as likely that this Early Iron Age culture may extend well east of the Lake. Reconnaissance extending into Mozambique and Tanzania might yield a rich reward. (Robinson, 1969: 7-8).

> Nkope at the southern end of Lake Malawi has startling resemblances to Kwale in certain very specific traits such as fluting and up-turned rim bowls; the spatial gap between them is some 700 km but I have little doubt that southern Tanzania and northern Mozambique will provide evidence of links down the east side of lake Malawi (Soper, 1971: 25).