

## CHAPTER 3

# Pre-early Iron Working Sedentary Communities on the Southern Coast of Tanzania

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The limited extent of archaeological research in southern Tanzania has led to a poor understanding and misinterpretation of the general prehistory of this part of the country. Not much has been known about the early development of settlements in the area, including the transition from hunting and gathering to settled food-producing economies. Recent surveys and excavations in this region have recovered evidence suggesting the presence of settled pre-early iron working cultures that made and used pottery. Concentrations of both sites and cultural material suggest flourishing communities that were interacting with other people along and beyond the Indian Ocean long before the beginning of the Christian era.

### Introduction

This chapter reports on the on-going archaeological research on the southern coast and hinterland of Tanzania (Fig.1). For a long time, Tanzania south of the Serengeti and its neighborhoods has lacked well-integrated and sustained research. The region was considered to have been inhabited by Khoisan-speaking communities during the Late Stone Age (Ambrose, 1982), a tradition alleged to have survived well into the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium AD (Seddon, 1968).

The archaeological evidence presented in this chapter gives an insight into conceptual problems pertaining to the prehistory of the region. Agriculture, pottery technology and settled village life in the larger part of eastern and southern Africa are still thought to have been brought about by the spread of Bantu-speakers during the early part of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD. The Bantu are also thought to have spread iron working knowledge over the region (Huffman and Herbert 1994-95; Phillipson, 1993; Soper, 1982), and pottery technology to the south of central Tanzania (Phillipson, 1993; 2005).

Although research in the 1990s tried to break away from this interpretive framework (Chami, 1994, 1994-95, 1998, 1999a & b; Chami and Mapunda, 1998; Chami and Msemwa, 1997), nothing was done beyond the Rufiji delta. However, this research was quite prolific. The new finds, including those from more recent surface observations on southern coast of the country (Chami and Kwekason, 2003) suggest that even if not as yet fully demonstrated, continuous occupation and some form of settled life had been established before the Early Iron Working communities (EIW). Based on these finds, a research agenda leading to Ph.D. program was organized under the support of the African Archaeology Network project funded by Sida-SAREC. The area under discussion lies between 40° 05'–40° 10' E and 10° 14'–10° 20' S, an area of about 85 km<sup>2</sup> engulfing the Mikindani peninsular in southern Tanzania.