

The Archaeology of Mbuamaji: An Early Iron Working Site in Dar es Salaam City, Tanzania.

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Abstract

The history of Mbuamaji site has traditionally been dominated by literary accounts because of lack of archaeological investigations (Chittick, 1969; Rockel, 2006). Notwithstanding, the site's proximity to the Indian Ocean, no significant progress could be achieved in understanding the contribution of this site to the socio-economic and political developments of ancient East African coast. The archaeology of this site was totally disregarded by coastal archaeology scholars probably because it is neither mentioned nor discussed in the old historical documents such as Diodorus de Siculus, Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, and Ptolemy's Geographia (Casson, 1989; Lacroix, 1998). Furthermore, it was also thought that, the site was firstly occupied in the 15th century A.D and later flourished up to 19th century A.D. (Chittick, 1969; Rockel, 2006; Chami pers. com, 2012). Against this background this first archaeological investigation of Mbuamaji site was undertaken for six weeks from January to mid-February 2012. Archaeological surface survey, shovel test pits and excavations recovered a range of data including lithics, pottery, shells, beads, daubs, bones and metal objects. Also, the study documented a range of built heritage assets of Swahili architecture built by coral stone, rag and lime. These include an ancient mosque that is still used as a Friday Mosque, ruined houses, tombs and wells. On the basis of the recovered cultural materials, Mbuamaji site was occupied from Early Iron Working (EIW) of B.C./A.D. changeover, through Triangular Incised Ware (TWI), Plain Ware (PW) to Swahili (SW) times (Ombori, 2012). The recovered evidence shows that the Mbuamaji site contributed much to the developments of ancient East African coast through trade and contacts. This paper therefore, discusses the cultural sequence of Mbuamaji and its implications on our understanding of ancient East African coast.

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