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Cieszyn, 2.11.2023

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„Archaeology of the built environment and urban space on the East African coast (11th – 19th century CE)”

At the very beginning, as both archaeologist and anthropologist working in North-East Africa, I would like to point out that this is an exciting and generally successful research project which makes a significant contribution to the archaeology of East Africa and, more specifically, to the archaeology of the urban centres of the Swahili coast. The project presents much new evidence relating to the architectural remains: spatial organization, water infrastructure, houses and palace-complexes, tombs and mosques, presented and discussed in the main text in the form of articles or reports published in remote archaeological journals (Archeological Research in Africa, Azania, African Archeological Review and others). Significant relations between the different urban spaces and materials and sensory perceptions, identity and local urban traditions/ local building reminiscences are detected and explored, some successfully confirming prior assumptions relating to the coastal towns of East Africa as a whole and its spatial organization. Presented materials refer to a research field (Swahili archaeology) still in its infancy in African contexts. For me, the relations between the spatial organisation of Swahili towns and urban centres in the Middle Nile valley are fascinating. It is Soba on the Blue Nile I have in mind. I have been engaged in researching this





Medieval city for a couple of years. Consequently, such results will make a valuable contribution to the future development of such studies in this region, primarily if they are based on reliable field research (surveys combined with mapping, 3D scanning, aerial photography and photogrammetry). The author has specialized in non-destructive methods. The Czech Science Foundation financed the field works; the author conducted a study in collaboration with the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and the National Museums of Kenya. The survey works were undertaken at Jumba la Mtwana and Mnarani, both in Kenya.

Introduction (pp 1-15) outlines, in quite general terms, the ‘state of research’ concerning the Swahili coast past, if restricted mainly to urban studies. Provides a brief introduction to what was done in the field of the Swahili archaeology, expressly conferring to standing monumental urban remains. Some reflections on some aspects of urban development and genetics in the late pre colonial era, mainly based on archaeological sources, were made. This section presents some assumptions about the characteristics of the Swahili coast phenomenon regarding transcontinental trade and the use of coral as a building material – one of the critical features of the local architecture. The author suggests reconceptualization of the research paradigm, excluding archaeology from investigating what is in-between the precolonial and colonial times (XV - XIX c.). This highly fascinating process can also be explored archaeologically. It is also noted here that the overwhelming majority of studies were focused on monumental and standing architecture, skipping other spatial elements of the urban landscape (that is also a point in other African countries, for instance, Sudan). The author also rightly notes that Swahili architectural knowledge and achievements were said to be imported from Arabia. This assumption is only partially valid, and the present project is an excellent example of this fact. A general framework for this particular study is also presented here, and some potential new approaches and interpretations of urban Swahili architecture are indicated (space syntax, sensory archaeology, kinesthetic urban heritage studies).





These reflections provide some essential fundamental reasons for uniqueness in contrast to the Middle Eastern traditions (the use of coral for building, household organization and types, and mortuary architecture), which are also explained in more detail here (article 3). Finally, we might find general implications for future research and African archaeology.

Article 1 (pp.26-45) presents a report from a survey (including 3D scanning and drone photography) undertaken in 2021 in two archaeological sites from the 14th-16th centuries CE, Kenya. The section also provides an introduction to the development of urban centres of the Swahili coast, its building traditions and spatial organization, as well as some information and reflections on the life-cycles of mosque architecture, a discussion on specific architectural features concerning studied ruins of towns.

Article 2 (pp. 45-58) insights into the distribution and constructed features associated with water, focusing on their design, density and spatial context in the ruins of Jumba la Mtwana. The article concludes with a series of ‘hypotheses’ relating to social and sensory connotations.

Article 3 (pp. 59-88) presents descriptive primary information concerning the ‘Palace complex’ at the Swahili stone coastal town site of Gede that flourished from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries AD. This article considers the communication networks within the city and their social potential dynamics using the syntax theory of analyses of the structure of the built environment.

Article 4 (pp. 89-100) reverts to consider more general background issues concerning how and in what ways precolonial Swahili settlements were organised. An understanding of how different structures were designed affected the negotiation of multiple social interests, power, and trade relations among members of an urban society. Case studies took stone ruins compared to Swahili stone houses on Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts.





Article 5 (pp. 101-136) introduces what is known of Swahili burial structures in late medieval times. In this piece, the variability of grave monuments in forms and scale and potential indicators of variable status and identity are discussed, as well as comparative case studies from Africa and the Indian Ocean world; the paper reconsiders how pillar tombs might have functioned as a type of material infrastructure for creating social ties and notions of shared identity in a society that has never formally united.

Article 6 (pp. 137-145) deals with the socio-spatial structure and relationships of the living historical urban centres (Old Town of Mombasa, Kenya and Mozambique Island, Mozambique), using analyses of configurations of urban layouts, street networks and sensory environments. It shows, among others, that in the urban centres of the late precolonial period, equality in access to communication and trade was maintained, which was reflected in multiple urban quarters based on a relatively egalitarian lineage system.

Article 7 (pp. 146-163) continues to analyze the modern historical African cities, taking as case studies Timbuktu and Djenne in Mali. Relationships between trade and space organisation are being investigated in some reflections on the East African context.

Article 8 (pp. 164-181) presents several case studies from West and East Africa to illustrate how space syntax can be adapted to provide a multisensory “synaesthetic” perspective on African urban environments while also addressing their cultural contexts.

Article 9 (pp. 182-200) is again a multidisciplinary approach to the studies of precolonial East Africa. The article evokes the thesis of anthropology of the senses about the close relationship between the symbolic order of culture and the impression and sensory structures typical of a specific ethnic or social group. The author explores here the role of the senses in maintaining a sense of local belonging and community.





This thesis is indeed a fascinating, complete and successful research project with significant results. It makes a substantial contribution to the archaeology of the Swahili coast, as well as to the history of the African precolonial urban centres. It addresses what can currently be done in archeology with remote sensing data. The work is an overview of such methods, and this diversity is fascinating. This is a strength of this study, although all analyses are based on similar remote sensing data sets and, apart from the example of the Palace of Gede, more detailed comments do not accompany them on the dynamics of changes in the analyzed urban assumptions and the chronology of these changes). A specialist archeologist may be better qualified than myself to comment further on this. This is also a truly multidisciplinary study, demonstrating quite wide-ranging skills in conducting independent scientific research. Fieldwork focused on stone buildings. As a result, the work briefly raises the topic of architecture made of materials other than stone (wood, mud, etc.), which, due to being less durable, are currently not visible on the surface and did not make it into the 3D documentation prepared by the Zamani project team, of which the author in most cases use it.

The use of the literature on the subject leaves a certain lack of satisfaction. When analyzing West African cities, there are, for example, no references to the literature by Susan and Roderick J. McIntosh and their considerations on clustered cities (The Early City in West Africa: Towards an Understanding, S. K. McIntosh, R. J. McIntosh, The African Archaeological Review, Vol. .2 (1984), pp. 73-98).





In turn, in the matter of sensory contexts, I lacked references to "the anthropology of the senses" and such classic works as *The Taste of Ethnographic Things* by Paul Stoller (1989), *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Source-book in the Anthropology of the Senses* (1991) edited by David Howes, as well as Nadia Serementakis' work *The Senses Still. Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (1994). The achievements of this established anthropological subdiscipline are considerable and should attract greater attention from archaeologists devoted to sensorial studies. This would be highly inspiring and would also allow them to notice some limitations of this approach (see: Tim Ingold 2000). At this point, need to add that the author does refer to the achievements of anthropology in her writing. Her articles also include pertinent references to such scholars as S. Low (spatialization of culture), T. Ingold (materiality), D. Howes and C. Classen (anthropology of senses).

Recommendation: this is a useful and generally successful research project, analysing substantial bodies of data in a number of exciting ways. The candidate seems to have a good general understanding of the research field. The reviewed work summarises the current field experience and methodological reflections, in which the author's primary goal is to present the possibilities of non-invasive research techniques concerning the cities of the Swahili coast. The submitted material proves Doctor Monika Baumanová is a mature and authoritative researcher. This project represents a significant addition to the archaeology of the Swahili coast, with important additional original elements, particularly in archaeological but also anthropological sciences. In places, innovative methods are used, often with success and certainly interesting results. The multi-disciplinary approach adopted perhaps poses additional challenges for the researcher, and at times, the integration of diverse strands is perhaps not fully convincing. A specialist archeological reviewer may have further comments on some technical aspects of that research.





A number of issues and potentially less convincing elements have been noted which, in Poland practice, would nevertheless definitely allow a **Positive outcome**. To sum up – in my opinion, the work of Doctor Monika Baumanová meets the criteria of a habilitation dissertation. It authorizes me to apply to admit the candidate to the following stages of the habilitation process.

