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Department of Archaeology

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Deep History and Archaeology of Africa

Our Ref: Baumanova 29-1-24

Promotions Committee
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Attention: **Mgr. Roman Zat'ko, Ph.D.**
Coordinator, Research Office
Charles University, Faculty of Arts
nám. Jana Palacha 1/2, 116 38 Praha 1

Dear Colleagues,

Dr. Monika Baumanová - Habilitation Assessment

Please find below my assessment of Dr Baumanová's habilitation thesis *Archaeology of the built environment and urban space on the East African coast (11th-19th century CE)*.

For transparency, I should declare that I have known Dr Baumanová for several years, initially as a student interested in the archaeology of Africa, and subsequently as a colleague who undertakes archaeological research in East Africa (among other parts of the continent). I was her mentor for three years while she held a Marie Curie Global Individual Fellow at the University of Basel, Switzerland, and the University of Uppsala, Sweden, during which time she undertook some of the research reported in her habilitation thesis.

Her habilitation thesis comprises nine papers, of which three are co-authored, that have been published in international, peer-reviewed journals, and an introductory overview that helps contextualize her research. The majority of publication outlets are either specialist, regional journals or one's with a more global scope and orientation. All are appropriate publication outputs for work of this nature. The individual articles are all based on original, primary field-based research with solid theoretical foundations aimed at advancing substantive knowledge of the social dynamics and spatial organization of ancient Swahili urban settings on the East African coast, and their comparison with other African urban contexts. All are innovative in approach and both individually and collectively explore previously unexamined or under-researched aspects of the urban social dynamics of precolonial Swahili towns.

The topics examined are quite diverse. In her earlier work, Dr Baumanová (publications #3, 4) explored the utility of using the analytical frameworks of access analysis and spatial syntax modelling, originally developed within architectural studies, for revealing aspects of the social

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significance of different spaces within large, elite structures, such as the palace complex at Gede, Kenya. Excavations at this site in the 1950s demonstrated the elite nature of the complex, but focused primarily on the recovery of materials suitable for demonstrating the geographical scope and temporal shifts in international, trans-oceanic trading networks during Gede's occupancy rather than on determining room functions and spatial organization. The application of a spatial syntax methodology, not previously undertaken on Swahili era sites on the East African coast, revealed several gradations to social space in the complex based on degrees of access and intervisibility, thereby generating more sophisticated understanding of how the palace complex may have operated and how persons of different status may have interacted with one another and the built architecture, and of the different social relations these enabled and reinforced.

Dr Baumanová has continued to build on this pioneering work, expanding her analyses to include social network analysis of Swahili and other predominantly Islamic urban spaces elsewhere in Africa, and introducing more phenomenological, kinaesthetic, and sensorial approaches to understanding the lived experiences of the inhabitants of these towns (publications # 4, 6, 7, 8 & 9). Dr. Baumanová has pioneered the application of these approaches in the study region highlighting their value and potential for advancing understanding of precolonial Swahili societies in ways that other scholars have overlooked. A particularly novel aspect of Dr. Baumanová's research has been her focus on the sensory dimensions of urban space, examining how the visual and aural experiences of inhabitants would have changed as they moved through towns and from room to room. These interpretations have further enabled reconsideration of earlier explanatory models of the social structure of early Swahili towns, while also laying the groundwork for possible 3D-reconstructions of settlement space as part of new approaches to heritage presentation of these sites to members of the public.

In this, she has also drawn on the potential of new technologies, especially laser scanning, working closely with one of the pioneers of this kind of architectural site documentation on the continent. Her most recent work has thus aimed at developing her research findings and approaches to benefit heritage management practices in the study area (publications #1, 6, 9). A key element of this new phase of her work has been demonstration that while previous conventional theodolite-based surveys of these sites have sought to be comprehensive, they have often missed smaller structural elements and the omission of these from site plans can have consequences for interpretation of the use of space and chronological phasing of building activities. Hence, aside from enhancing heritage management at these sites (the 3D laser scans can be used for monitoring structural conditions, for example), application of these technologies also has important roles to play in enhancing research and may even highlight previously unsuspected dimensions to the social and spatial organization of these settlements.

Alongside these theoretically and methodologically driven advances in approaches to understanding the spatial dynamics of Swahili towns and demonstrating the value of digital technologies for enhancing management strategies and improving presentation of the sites to the visiting public, Dr Baumanová has undertaken a major review of the dating and social symbolism of pillar tombs which



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are a key component of the funerary archaeology associated with these ancient settlements (publication #5). While these have long been recognized as a distinctive architectural feature of Swahili stone-towns, these have not received much in the way of scholarly attention for several decades. Building on earlier research results and integrating these with data extracted from a comprehensive literature review and targeted site assessments, Dr Baumanová has produced a new classification of the different forms and offered revised interpretations of the observed formal and stylistic variations. This research will be of considerable value to future scholars interested in understanding burial traditions and the role in marking social distinction in precolonial Swahili societies. This work also extends her broader efforts (see publications # 1, 3, & 4 especially) to develop a usable classificatory scheme for recording and differentiating standing remains of precolonial stone houses, palace complexes and other standing remains for the East African coast. Despite decades of research on these sites, no such classificatory scheme was available previously and the work she and her collaborators have undertaken to develop this has provided a powerful new tool for intra- and inter-site comparisons, and is also has utility for drawing comparisons with other urban settings elsewhere in the Islamic world (see publication # 7).

A further, final dimension to Dr Baumanová's research has been her attention to systems of natural resources extraction and management, and most specifically on water management systems and their material manifestations (see publication # 3). Like so many other elements of Dr Baumanová's research, this has been an under-explored topic in previous scholarship, with only a single study having been undertaken before she started to examine the issue. Yet, it has also long been recognized that the supply of good quality drinking water was a major constraint for many of these towns, especially as they grew in size. Dr Baumanová's assessment of the evidence greatly extends current knowledge of how water was managed in these towns and also provides valuable comparative insights that can feed into debates around how to secure sustainable water supplies in urban settings in contemporary coastal East Africa.

In summary, both individually and collectively, her research has been to a very high academic standard, advanced knowledge in her field, and is innovative theoretically and methodologically sound. Taken together, this corpus of work is distinct from her doctoral research and demonstrates a familiarity and engagement with a very different body of data and a wider range of scholarship. Accordingly, I strongly and enthusiastically give my unreserved support for Dr. Baumanová's application for promotion to the rank of Associate Professor in the Department of Archaeology.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Paul Lane, FSA
Mandela Magdalene Memorial Fellow