

■ MOZAMBIQUE

The Quirimbas Islands Project (Cabo Delgado, Mozambique): Report of the 2015 Campaign

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Introduction

In 2015, a new archaeological project was launched in the Quirimba Islands, an archipelago located in northeastern Mozambique, near the border with Tanzania. The project, financed by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, aims to study the settlement in these islands during the first millennium and the first half of the second millennium AD and its role within the Swahili culture and the East African international trade. This report presents the results of the first fieldwork campaign that took place in June 2015.

The Quirimbas Islands

The Quirimbas archipelago is located in the Cabo Delgado province in northeastern Mozambique, stretching 100km parallel to the coast Qisanga Bay in the south to the Rovuma River in the north (Figure 1). The archipelago consists of approximately 32 islands of which 11 are included in the National Park of the Quirimba Islands. The coast is characterized by coral formations, which provide the geological base for the islands, interrupted by sandy beaches often surrounded by mangroves. The combination of shallow waters, marked tidal fluxes and mangroves makes the coastal navigation difficult for sailors unfamiliar to the area. The islands have a hot and humid climate, but limited rainfall that ranges from 800 to 1000mm per year, making this area the driest part of Mozambique (Duarte 1993: 55). In fact, the lack of fresh water has been traditionally a major problem for the settlement of the islands, with only some of the bigger islands having permanent sources of water.

Portuguese sources provide scant information about the inhabitants of the islands in the earlier period of occupation, but some of the scarce documents point to the existence of relevant Swahili settlements in the region. The most relevant text is dated to 1523 and describes a raid against the island of Quirimba by a Portuguese captain, who reported the existence of an important settlement with a factory house and an abundance of guns, powder and



Figure 1: Location of Cabo Delgado Province (left) and Swahili-related sites in the province (right).

even small cannons (Castro 1969: 175). A second later reference (Santos 1891: 273-279) dated to 1592 mentions another important Swahili settlement on the island of Matemo, destroyed by the Portuguese during the conquest of the islands. The rest of the references also point to well-established, prosperous Swahili communities in most of the main islands, renowned for their textile industry and with close links to the mainland communities (Santos 1891: 278-9).

The previous archaeological works in the area have also confirmed the interest of the Quirimbas Islands for the study of the Swahili culture. The first news about the archaeological remains date to the 1960s (Duarte 1993: 75), and since then different surveys and excavations have taken place in the islands of Ibo, Vamizi, Quisiva, Macaloe Quirimba and Matemo as well in some coastal sites on the Tungi Peninsula, Pangane or Quissanga Beach (Duarte

1993; Madiquida 2007). However, most of this work has been sporadic and based on surveys and test pits rather than systematic excavations, an approach that has provided limited results so far.

The Quirimbas Islands Project: Preliminary Results

The Quirimbas Island project is integrated within a bigger project focussed on both sides, north and south, of the East African coast (the second leg of the project is set in Somaliland and directed by Dr. González-Ruibal). The project tries to correct some of the main problems of the archaeology in the region: the lack of well excavated sites with accurate chronologies and the absence of information related to the economic, social and environmental context of these Swahili sites. The project also aims to under-

stand the type and characteristics of the interactions between the Swahili inhabitants of the Quirimba archipelago and the mainland communities. The first fieldwork campaign was planned as an initial contact with the region, locating sites already known and to evaluate their state of preservation and their archaeological interest, as well as to assess the logistics required for successive campaigns.

Due to the logistical problems of transport between islands, and the lack of time, our work focussed on the island which provided the best logistic base—Ibo—and the nearby islands—Quirimba and Matemo. According to the available data, the three islands housed some of the most important sites in the archipelago: all are cited in early Portuguese documents and previous work documented structures or significant amounts of archaeological materials, either imported or local. In addition to these main islands, a trip was organized to the village of Pangane located in the mainland 37km to the north of Ibo. According to Duarte (1993: 76-77), a significant site was located at this place, but during our short visit no archaeological remains were located.

Ibo Island. Ibo is currently the most important island in the Quirimbas Archipelago, the only one that currently provides accommodation for visitors and regular links with both the mainland and the surrounding islands. It is also the head of the district and the place where archaeological permits have to be checked before the beginning of the archaeological work. All of these facts have made Ibo the most visited and studied island of the archipelago although, as in the rest of the islands, work has been sporadic in the last 40 years.

The first archaeological research in Ibo took place in 1978, when Tereza Cruz and Paul Sinclair surveyed the island and excavated at three different sites, documenting two different occupation periods that could be parallel to Kilwa II and IIIb/IV phases according to the archaeological materials (Sinclair 1987: 24). All of the sites were documented in the central area of the village of Ibo, the only place that has been traditionally inhabited in the island and where the best harbour is located (Figure 2, right).

Although the archaeological results were promising, the next archaeological fieldwork took place three decades later when a project aimed to promote and protect the cultural heritage of Ibo, Matemo and Quirimba included the archaeological survey and excavation of several places (Stephens 2006). The excavations in Ibo took place during 2006 and 2007 in two of the three Portuguese forts, near the church and inside the house of one of the most important merchants in Ibo and provided a significant amount of pottery dated to the early 18th century AD and onwards, although an early Swahili occupation could be detected near the San José fort. Unfortunately, after two field seasons the project was stopped and the results were never published with the exception of a brief report of the 2006 campaign. The death of the field director in 2007 prevented a full publication of the results of the 2007 campaign and the study of the archaeological materials recovered, which are currently stored in the San João Baptista fort.

Our work in Ibo had three main objectives. Firstly, it was directed to locate the sites described in Sinclair's and Stephens' publications to evaluate their archaeological interest for our project. Most of the sites were easily located, although the position of the test pits was only approximately established. In all of them archaeological materials with a modern chronology (18th to 19th centuries AD) were collected, yet they weren't considered significant enough to plan an excavation. The exception (Figure 3) was the area occupied by the village major square, an extensive open area near the shoreline with the old Portuguese church, where materials were found by Sinclair (1987: 24) and Stephens (2006:16) and were also documented by our team. The most interesting findings came from the hole left by the removal of a tree in the center of the square, which brought the archaeological strata to the surface. Around this hole a high number of pottery—both local and imported wares—and glass fragments and beads were collected, with some examples with decorations similar to those of the so-called Lumbo (*ca.* 13th to 15th centuries AD) and Sancul (*ca.* 17th to 19th centuries AD) traditions, which represent the Swahili culture in the region (Madiquida 2007: 63). The imported wares include some examples from China, dated to



Figure 2: Places surveyed during the campaign (left) and test pits carried out on Ibo by Sinclair and Stephens (right).



Figure 3: Archaeological site at the main square of Ibo (left) and some of the materials collected there (right).

the Ming dynasty (15th to 17th centuries AD). The presence of materials coming from a confirmed (if disturbed) archaeological context, with older chronologies than those located at other sites during our survey; and the excellent location of the site (near the shore line, inside the village but in an area without buildings) make Ibo's major square a key site for the research of the Swahili culture in the island.

As already noted, all previous work in the area has focussed on the village of Ibo. Our project extended the area of research to the whole island, surveying the areas most likely to have been occupied in earlier periods. Although many areas of Ibo present serious disadvantages for human occupation (due to the presence of mangroves, poor beaches or coral reef outcrops that are visible on the surface and hamper cultivation), the survey located two other possible sites in the interior and to the south of the island. Both were identified by the presence of imported wares (mostly dated to the 19th century AD) and local pottery of the Sancul tradition, with a proposed chronology of the 17th to 19th century AD (Duarte 1993: 61).

Finally, during this campaign a preliminary study of the 2006-2007 materials collected by Stephens and stored at the San João Baptista fort was undertaken in order to evaluate their interest and their links with the materials documented in our project. Unfortunately, these materials have been severely affected by humidity, with some of the tags and bags rotting and allowing the materials to mix together; such samples were of little use. However, some bags were recovered intact, and they have provided interesting information about the type of materials documented in excavations.

Matemo Island. The island of Matemo, located 8km to the north of Ibo, has been far less studied than Ibo, with the first archaeological information gathered in 1997 by Hilario Madiquida (2007: 62). This archaeologist documented the remains of a cemetery and several buildings, including a mosque, and collected a sample of local and imported pottery, beads and faunal remains. The local pottery was hand-made and showed a great variety in deco-

rations, including stamped shells, painting and incisions associated to the Sancul tradition. Imported wares included blue painted Chinese porcelain. In 2006, and as a part of the archaeological project that excavated in several places in Ibo, some archaeological works were carried out in Matemo. Due to the special circumstances in which this project ended, no written information of the intervention was produced and the only evidence remaining are some materials stored in the fort of San João Baptista.

This lack of interest on Matemo contrasts with the information provided by the Portuguese written sources. Although those are scarce for the Quirimba Islands, one of the most explicit references to the previous Swahili settlement comes from Matemo. Although briefly, in his description of Mozambique written in 1592, Joao dos Santos makes reference to a large Swahili settlement in the island, with many houses with their windows and doors decorated with columns (Santos 1891: 274), that was destroyed by the Portuguese during the conquest of the archipelago. The mosque documented by Hilario Madiquida in 1997 undoubtedly corresponds to this important site.

During our fieldwork campaign two trips were made to Matemo. The first one identified the site described by Madiquida and located the mosque, the cemetery and several other buildings. These archaeological remains were documented and georeferenced, and a sample of surface archaeological materials was gathered throughout the site. The state of the site—covered with vegetation—made necessary a second visit three days later, after the area around the mosque was cleared and this important building could be properly documented. The mosque (Figure 4, top left and right) has dimensions of 13x9.5m with the walls measuring 0.35m and is poorly preserved with approximately 1m of height still standing in the northwest area, which is the best preserved. The exception is the mihrab, which is complete and asymmetrically located in the qibla, and has a minbar with seven stairs attached. The building was made with irregular coral stones and mortar, with the walls and the floor plastered. The layout of the mosque can be easily reconstructed through the remaining walls,

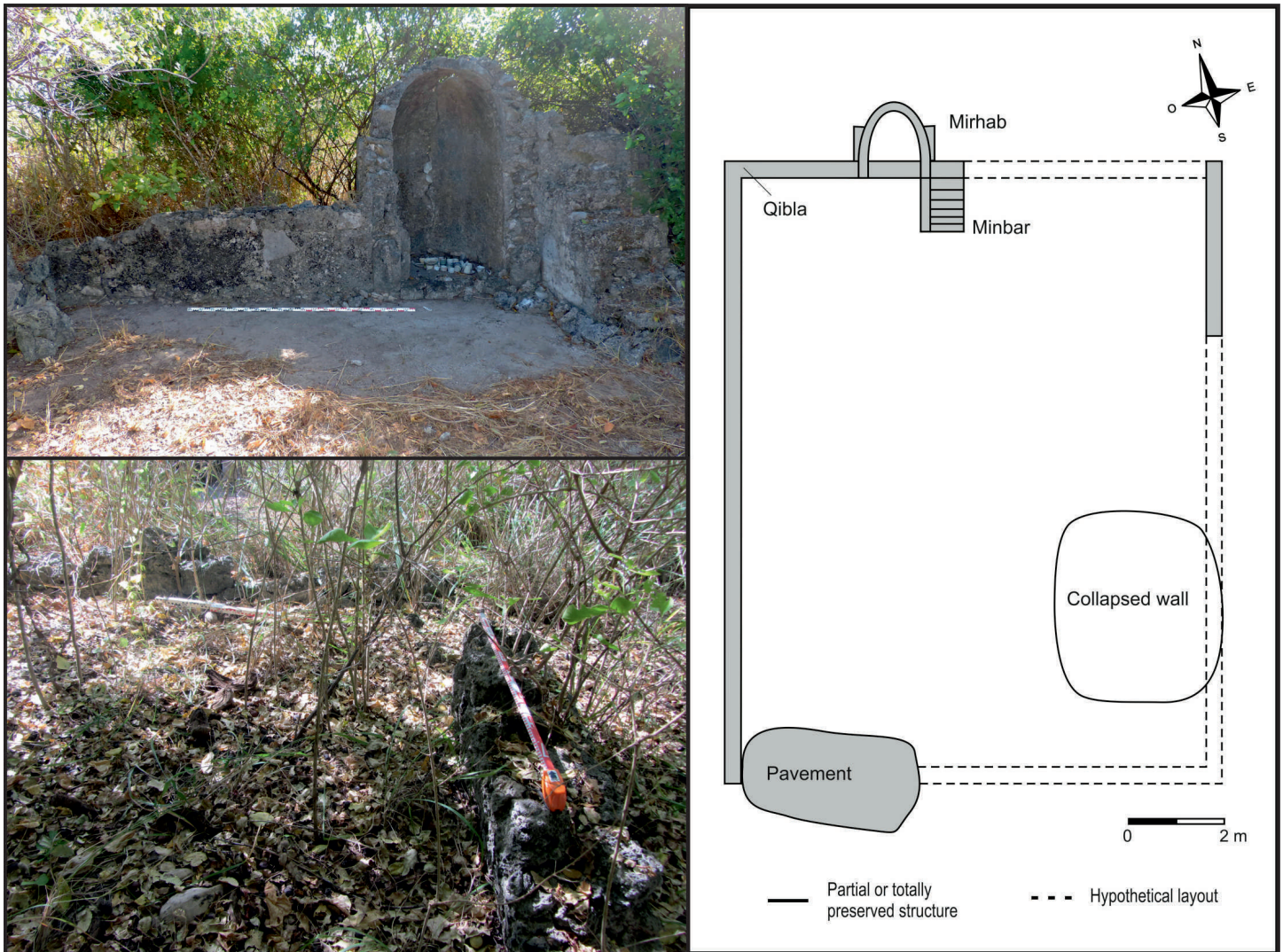


Figure 4: View of the mihrab and minbar (top left) and layout (right) of the Matemo mosque, and squared structure at Matemo site (bottom left).

although some architectural features—e.g., a stone pavement documented in the southwestern corner—require an excavation to be properly interpreted. Although its religious function has completely ceased, the place has still some symbolic meaning for the local community of Matemo which still places offerings at the floor of the mihrab.

Leaving aside the mosque, only two other buildings were documented, one of them a squared structure of 2.30x2.40m, walls 0.34m wide, and a second one of unknown dimensions that is almost completely destroyed and covered by vegetation (Figure 4, bottom left). These buildings and the mosque are scattered, in some cases with distances

of several hundred meters between them, and given the dense vegetation it is likely that other structures will be found in the area. Regarding the cemetery (Figure 5), the tracing of tombs was extremely difficult due to the vegetation, but at least ten were located, in some cases organized into rows. Most of the tombs are delimited by one or two plain stones at both sides, but other are more complex, with carved stelae and in one case delimited by a walled structure with crenellation-like adornments at the corners.

Regarding the archaeological materials collected during the two visits, they show clear similarities to those described by Madiquida and collected by Stephens: crisscrossed incisions, shell stamps and

paintings are predominant in local pottery decorations of Sancul types, while Chinese white and blue porcelain is the most common imported ware. Some Chinese sherds are dated to the 18th to 19th centuries AD, suggesting that the island was populated after the destruction by the Portuguese in the 16th century AD.

Quirimba. The third of the islands visited during this first campaign is located just 5km to the south of Ibo, and until a recent period was the most important island in the archipelago and one of the few with sources of fresh water available all year round and therefore could support agriculture. This importance is reflected in one of the earliest documents of the Portuguese that referred to the archipelago, a punishment expedition which was carried out in 1523 against this Swahili settlement (Castro 1969: 175). This document describes a big village with hundreds of inhabitants and a factory house where there were kept several small cannons, gunpowder

and many muskets, as well as ivory and other goods. Since the conquest the island was the main Portuguese settlement in the Quirimbas islands until 1761, when Ibo was chosen as the first capital of the Cabo Delgado province.

As in the case of Matemo, research in Quirimba has been very scarce, limited to a brief visit by Liesegang in the 1980s (Madiquida 2007: 62). Several test pits were excavated and a Swahili site was located on the southwest part of the island where pottery of the Sancul tradition was found (Madiquida 2007: 63). Although the dense vegetation prevented a systematic survey of the area, at least one squared building was documented (Figure 6, centre) with dimensions of 5.40x8.50m, walls 0.65m wide and of a similar building technique as those of Matemo. Near this building two other stone structures were located: a small (1.10m in diameter), circular structure that is difficult to interpret (Figure 6, left) and a rectangular tomb (1.92x0.52m) covered with



Figure 5: Different stelae and tombs of Matemo graveyard.



Figure 6: Archaeological structures at Quirimba Island.

a structure resembling a gable roof (Figure 6, right). As happened with the Matemo mosque, the tomb has been a receptacle for offerings in recent times. Regarding the archaeological materials, the sample was limited to several sherds of hand-made, undecorated pottery, but the excavations by Liesegang carried out in 1988 recovered white and blue Chinese porcelain, as well as some more modern types of porcelains and several beads.

The Material Culture

The archaeological materials studied during this campaign have three different origins. A set of materials corresponding to several of the already published surveys and excavations was studied at the Department of Archaeology of the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo. A second, larger set of materials came from the excavations of Christopher Stephens in 2006 and 2007. Finally, our own materials gathered during the surveys complete the sample. In addition, a number of materials have already been published (Duarte 1993; Madiquida 2007; Sinclair 1987) and some preliminary classifications have been made, based on pottery found in the 1980s (Duarte 1993: 61). According to these studies, pottery in the coastal areas of northern Mozambique would correspond to two main stages: the so called Lumbo tradition, dated to the 13th to 15th centuries AD and characterized by “impressed areal decoration, in bands or geometric irregular surfaces, immediately below the rim” (Duarte 1993: 60). The second tradi-

tion named Sancul is characterized by “ochre decoration, crisscrossed and crosshatching fine line incisions and applied motifs. The occurrence of wheeled ware appliqué is worth noting” (Duarte 1993: 61). Regarding its chronology, it could be dated in the 17th to 19th centuries AD.

Although this general framework is useful to get a general idea of the relative antiquity of the materials found on surveys, some problems arise when a more specific contextualization is required. Most of the excavations on which this classification is based are test pits or survey collections, with only two radiocarbon dates for the Lumbo pottery (Duarte 1993: 67), while the chronology for the Sancul pottery is mainly based on parallels with the sherds found in the San Antonio de Tana shipwreck of 1697 (Duarte 1993: 61). The chronological range of both types of traditions is therefore yet to be properly determined, and our surveys and the study of previous materials have shown a number of decorations not included in the previous descriptions, including excised potteries and many examples of roulette decoration previously identified simply as impressed ware (Haour *et al.* 2010). The materials found in Ibo and Matemo (Figure 7) seem to correspond to both traditions, showing an occupation that could be as old as the 12th century AD if the radiocarbon dates from other coastal sites can be extrapolated to the islands. In the case of Quirimba, the materials collected do not provide clues about the chronology of the site.

Regarding the imported wares (Figure 8),

they still require an intensive study but most of the found sherds correspond to well-known European series, including examples of Sponge decorated, Blue transfer or Shell-edged wares with a chronology of the first half of the 19th century AD (Samford 2014). Some of the Chinese wares, on the contrary, seem older, with some examples of blue and white porcelains which could date back to the 17th century (Klose 2007: 98, fig. 91b). A single piece of dark brown glazed pottery found in Matemo could have a Portuguese origin and a chronology around the 16th to 17th century AD (Figure 4, 8). The modern chro-

nology of most of the sherds is not surprising considering most of them were found on surveys in places like Ibo, where the village has been permanently occupied.

Conclusions and Future Work

The brief campaign carried out during 2015 has achieved three main objectives. Firstly, it has confirmed the entity of the archaeological remains in three of the Quirimba islands and their interest for

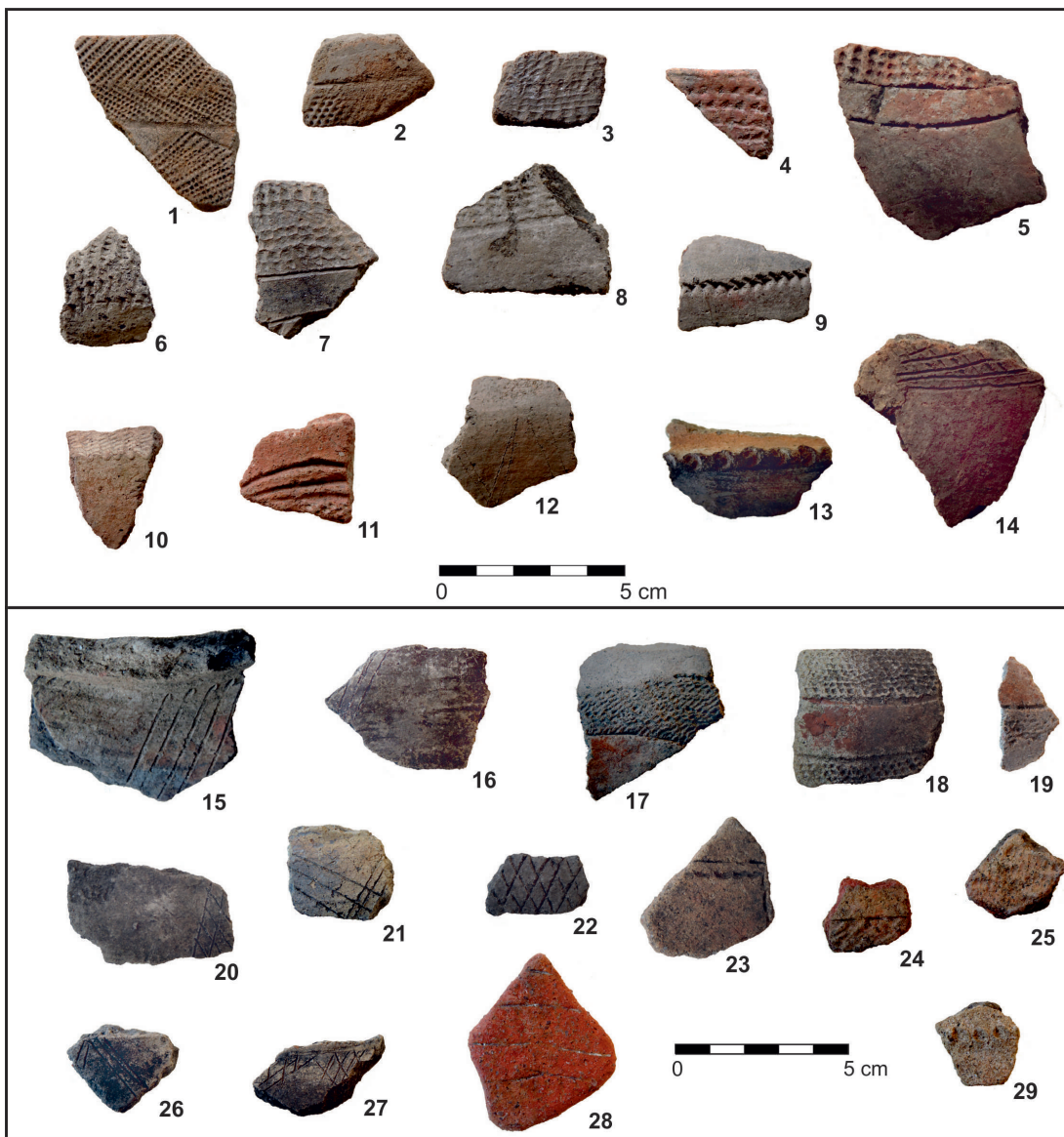


Figure 7: Local pottery at Ibo (top) and Matemo (below).

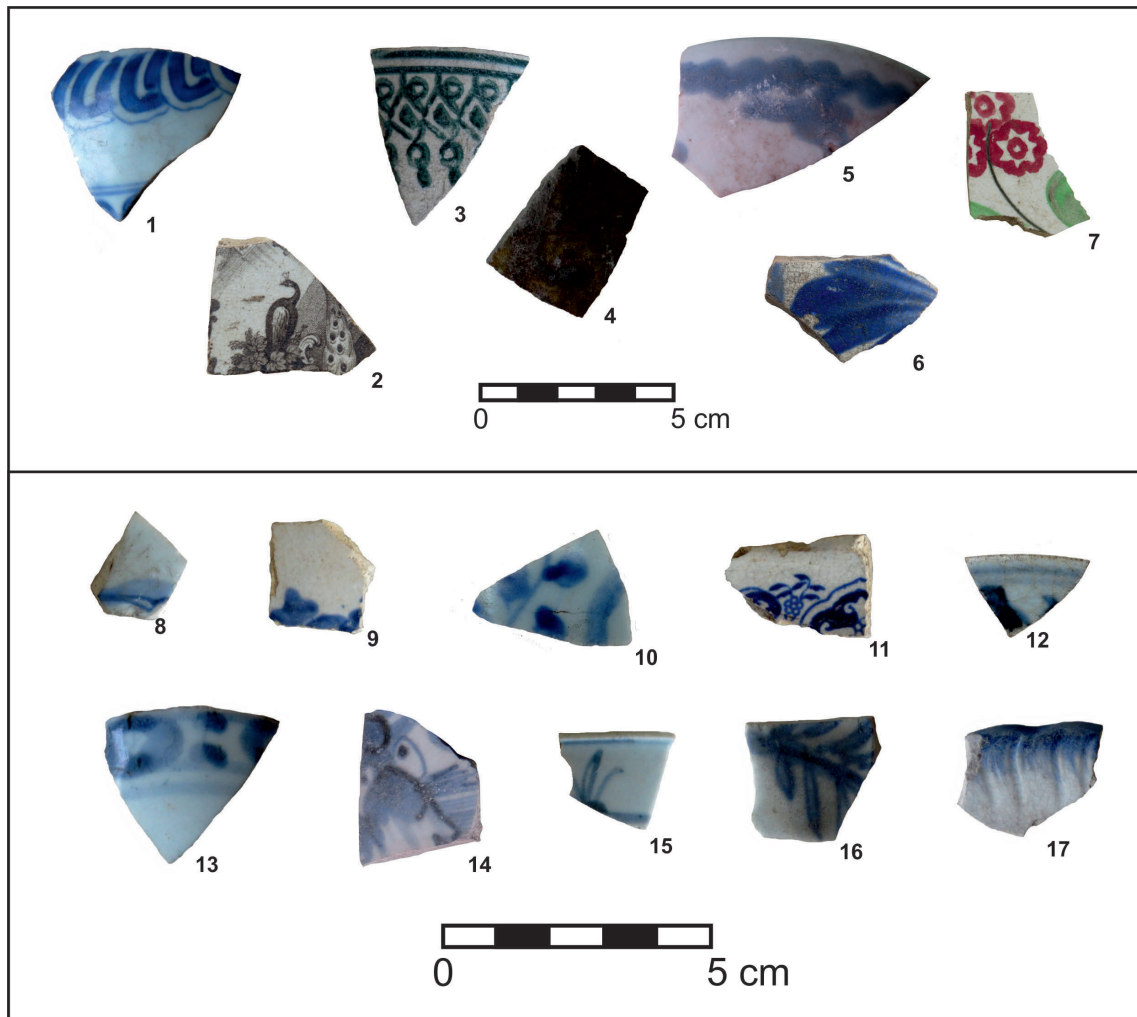


Figure 8: Imported pottery and porcelain from Ibo and Matemo islands. 2 Black transfer ware. ‘Ceylonese’, by G. Phillips, ca. 1835. 3, 7 Sponge decorated ware. 4 Possible Portuguese pottery. 11 Blue transfer ware. 17 Shell-edged ware. Rest of pieces: Chinese porcelain of different chronologies. Sherds number 3, 5 and 14 come from Stephens’ excavations.

the study of the Swahili culture in Mozambique. The sites documented in Ibo, Matemo or Quirimba have provided evidences of a well-established Swahili occupation parallel to that of the better known Tanzanian and Kenyan regions. Although chronologies lack accuracy, from the collected materials and the written sources this occupation was already on its course some time prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century AD. However, the characteristics of these settlements are still very poorly known: there have been no long term excavations to provide accurate chronologies, nor plans of the sites or proper analysis of the environmental conditions in which these sites grew.

The next fieldwork campaign, which is going to take place in June 2016, will aim to confront some of these challenges. A long term excavation is going to be made in Ibo main square, where the most interesting materials have been found, and will try to provide a sequence for the occupation in the island, relating archaeological materials to radiocarbon dates and collecting faunal and pollen samples to understand the economic context of this settlement. Additionally, trips are planned to the islands of Matemo and Quirimba to reconstruct the layout of both sites and to make test pits to analyse their archaeological potential. Finally, a systematic effort is going to be made to describe and study the existing collections

of pottery to integrate them with those coming from the 2016 excavations, in order to propose the first comprehensive corpus of pottery for the Swahili culture north of Mozambique.

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