

THE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MAFIA ARCHIPELAGO

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The Mafia Archipelago, comprising Mafia, Chole, Juani, Jibondo and numerous uninhabited coral atolls (see Caplan this volume, Figure 50.1), has a rich archaeological record pointing to the islands' continuous occupation from the early first millennium AD. There are numerous historical traditions and many practices remain unchanged, providing great opportunity for ethno-archaeological research. Here I summarise archaeological survey and excavation conducted in the archipelago over the last 60 years.

Historical context

The archipelago was subject to several periods of colonial (external) control over the last millennium that have influenced cultural identities, activities and material culture (Walley 2002; Wynne-Jones and Mapunda 2008; Christie 2011: 100–5). Historical sources (Baumann [1895] 1957; Revington 1936; Piggott 1941) refer to the nature and impacts of external contact **from the eleventh century CE onward**, following the inclusion of the islands into the control of the Sultanate of Kilwa (eleventh–fifteenth centuries CE) as well as the effects of later colonisations by the Portuguese (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries CE), Omani (*c.* eighteenth–nineteenth centuries CE), Germans (1890–1915), and most recently British (1915–1922).

The accounts of pre-European contact focus on the acquisition of the archipelago by the Sultanate of Kilwa, which likely resulted in the foundation of the settlement of Kisimani Mafia (Van Spengen 1980: 336). Although the Portuguese had limited impact on the islands (Baumann [1895] 1957: 5; Revington 1936: 34) they produced several accounts that provide insight into contemporary Mafian life. These indicate, for example, that Mafian communities were noted shipbuilders and often provided the Portuguese with shipbuilding materials (Revington 1936: 34; Rezendes in Freeman-Grenville 1975: 183).

In the early eighteenth century, the archipelago was nominally controlled by the Imams of Muscat, who gained increasing influence beginning in 1840, after Sultan Sayyid Said moved to Zanzibar and established a direct presence in Mafia (Baumann 1957 [1895]: 6). At this time Kua was sacked by the Sakalava of Madagascar, and was abandoned in favour of Chole Island (Revington 1936: 34).

The Germans took control in 1890, affecting the socio-political landscape of the archipelago very little (King 1917: 119). Their most significant change was moving the administrative centre

Table 23.1 Summary of surveys conducted in the Mafia Archipelago 1950–2015. (Collated from: Chami 1998; Chami 1999; Chami 2000; Chami 2004; Wynne-Jones 2006; Wynne-Jones and Mapunda 2008; Rhodes 2010; Christie 2011; Christie 2013b; Jeffrey 2012.)

Team/date	Area surveyed	Surveys conducted	Key outcomes
Chami and Msemwa (1995)	• Kisimani Mafia to Kilindoni	• Semi-systematic coastal walkover surveys	• Early Iron Age (EIA) pottery (unspecified)
Chami (1997)	• Mtoni Terrace (South coast); • Juani Island; • Jibondo	• Semi-systematic coastal walkover surveys	• Several sites identified including: • six EIA (c. 1–6th c. AD) sites
Chami (2000)	• Northern coasts: (Bweni, Kanga, Kirongwe, Ras Mbisi and Kipingwi) • Bwejuu Island	• Semi-systematic walkover surveys	• unspecified number of later sites (c. 11th–16th c. AD) • Plain Ware (PW) site (c. 11–13th c. AD) near Kirongwe Port • Swahili Ware (SW) (c. 14–16th c. AD) site near Kanga • Post Swahili (PS) (c. 17–19th c. AD) site Bwejuu west coast • Submerged/semi-submerged pot sherds c. 14th c. AD off Bwejuu
Wynne-Jones and Mapunda (2006)	• Juani Island • Northwest coast (Bweni, Kanga, Kirongwe, Mfurumi) • Utende to Ras Kitoni • Chole Island	• Systematic walkover surveys (coastal and interior)	• Forty sites recorded including: • fifteen potters' workshops • thirteen pottery scatters: various periods (7th–10th c. AD [1]; 11–13th c. AD [2]; 14th–16th c. AD [2]; 18th–19th c. AD [8]) • eight shell middens: unknown date • two maritime activity areas: modern
Rhodes (2006)	• Chole Island	• Building Survey	• Record of colonial waterfront structures (Chole)
Christie (2008–2009)	• Northwest coast (Bweni, Kanga, Kirongwe, Mfurumi) • Utende • Chole Island • Juani	• Systematic walkover surveys (foreshore and inter-tidal) • Re-visitation of previously identified sites	• Sixty one sites recorded: • twenty-three pottery scatters: various periods (6th–8th c. AD; 14th–16th c. AD [6]; 18th–19th c. AD [12]; Unknown [4]; Modern [1]) • fourteen maritime activity areas: modern • twenty shell middens/scatters: various periods (18th–19th c. AD [2]; Modern [13]; Unknown [5]) • four structural remains: 18th–19th c. AD
Christie (2010)	• Kua Ruins, Juani	• Buildings surveys	• Record of settlement
Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (2012)	• Kisimani Mafia	• Systematic walkover surveys (foreshore and inter-tidal); • Sub-surface transect surveys	• Local pottery • Imported ceramics (including <i>Scaffiato</i>) • Foreign coins • Structural remains (additional to those reported by Chittick (1961) • Keel (reportedly left <i>in situ</i> following inundation) • Two large circular stones (function unknown)



from Chole to Kilindoni – a more suitable and centralised anchorage – in 1912. Seized by the British in 1915, Mafia was then used in the war effort against the German battleship *Konigsberg*, which wreaked havoc among the British Fleet in the region (Revington 1936: 35).

Archaeological surveys

The archipelago has gained increasing archaeological recognition, prompting several systematic and semi-systematic, foreshore and inter-tidal, walkover and shovel test pit (STP) surveys, ethno-archaeological research and diver reconnaissance (Table 23.1). Chami's (1999, 2000, 2004) surveys focused on identifying evidence for the archipelago's earliest occupation during the Early Iron Age (EIA). While later sites were observed, they were not reported in detail (Chami 1999: 3–4).

Wynne-Jones (2006) reported sites of wider chronological and typological variety. She placed greater emphasis on understanding the impact of different environments on settlement patterns and activities, with systematic walkover surveys also conducted on the coastal edge and inter-tidal zone (Wynne-Jones 2006: 6). In addition to pottery scatters, modern and historic maritime activity areas (such as fish traps, boat building sites and shell middens) were also recorded, documenting the diversity and importance of maritime interactions and highlighting a key area for further research.

This prompted my research project, which used an inter-disciplinary approach combining archaeological, ethnographic and environmental survey strategies to explore the socio-cultural context of maritime interactions in the archipelago, using an anthropologically informed framework (see Christie 2013b: 32).

In combination, these surveys provide a good overview of settlement history and activities, enabling some general observations. There are fewer sites in the south of Mafia than the north. Yet the earliest sites are located here, on the Mtoni Terrace – a raised coral platform created partially due to changing sea levels (Shaghude 2004: 94). Chami (1999: 3) systematically targeted this environment for his survey, bringing success in locating early sites. Wynne-Jones' (2006) surveys were less selective; her claim that the southern part of the island is relatively free of archaeological sites is based on a different methodology.

Systematic survey recovered a denser pattern of settlement on the northwest coast (Wynne-Jones 2006: 8), a pattern reflected in my own research. These sites are less ephemeral and more temporally diverse, particularly from the eleventh century CE onward. The less accessible northeast coast requires further survey. The maritime sites recorded (Wynne-Jones 2006; Christie 2013b) document the diversity of shell species exploited by Mafian communities. Species selection was influenced by habitats in adjacent marine environments, and the presence of more stratified sites (for example, MAF2008–018), which demonstrate changes in species selection and enable potential assessment of changing marine environments (Christie 2013b).

Archaeological excavations

I carried out substantive excavations at six sites, with STPs opened at a further seven (Table 23.2, Figure 23.1). These excavations address some questions raised by the surveys, while simultaneously highlighting areas for further research.

Sites dating to the Middle Iron Age (c. seventh to tenth centuries CE) have mostly been identified through excavation not survey (for example, MAF2008–004, Kinundu, Ukunju Cave and Juani Primary School) (Map 1, p. XX; Table 23.2). These sites have clear evidence for MIA occupation, indicating continuous habitation of the islands from the early first millennium CE



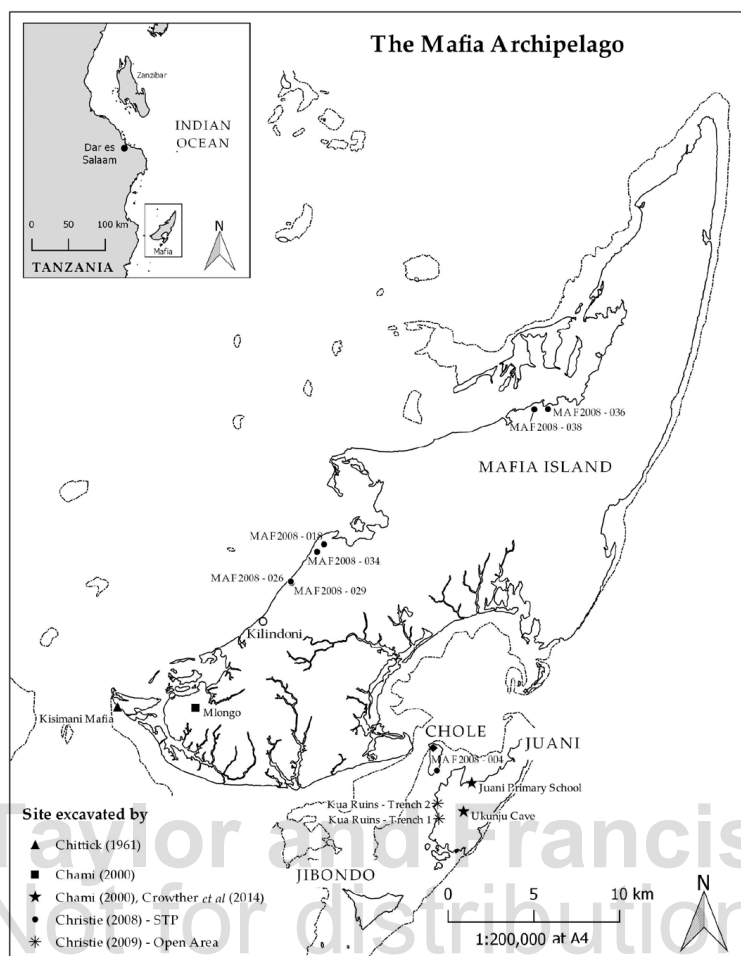


Figure 23.1 Map of Mafia showing sites revealed through survey.

(Crowther *et al.* 2014: 41; *contra* Wynne-Jones 2006: 7). This demonstrates the importance of multi-faceted survey strategies, although identifying excavation areas remains challenging. Imported materials and trade goods were recovered from all substantive excavations, indicating ongoing active engagement with regional and international trade networks from the early first millennium CE (for example, Juani Primary School), through the growth and decline of the Swahili mercantile economy (for example, Kisimani Mafia and Kua), to more recent exchanges (for example, MAF2008–038).

Kisimani Mafia and Kua (Map 1, p. **XX**) are the only stonetown sites in the archipelago. Oral traditions document a complex socio-political relationship between them, and between the occupants of Kua's main complex and the earlier adjacent settlement of Mkokotoni (Freeman-Grenville 1962). While both sites have traded items in their deposits, Kisimani Mafia seemingly played a more active role in international exchange networks, with greater abundance of coins, imported pottery and beads among other items (Chittick 1961; Van Spengen 1980). The absence of a deep-water harbour may have restricted Kua's trade opportunities (Piggott 1941: 5); it is also likely that Kisimani Mafia benefited from an intensification of trade because of its association with Kilwa. Further work is needed at Kisimani Mafia and Kua to clarify their relationship to each other, and their role in the socio-political organisation of the archipelago and wider region.

Table 23.2 Summary of excavations conducted in the Mafia Archipelago 1950–2015. (Collated from Chittick 1961; Chami 1999a; Chami 2000; Chami 2004; Christie 2013a; Christie 2013b; Christie 2013c; Crowther *et al.* 2014).

Team/date	Site excavated	Area excavated	Sites/materials identified	Radiocarbon dates
Chittick (1957/1964)	Kisimani Mafia	Nine areas – six within/around Mosque III; one test pit in each well; 1 isolated test pit into cliff section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local pottery: SW and PS Imported pottery: <i>Sgraffiato</i>, celadon, blue- and green-glazed Islamic ware, white and blue-on-white Chinese porcelain and Eastern Mediterranean pottery Foreign coins Structural remains Local pottery: Kwale ware, Plain Ware (PW) 	Single charcoal radiocarbon date – Radiocarbon Age: 1740 ±60 (3rd c. AD) Two charcoal radiocarbon dates – Radiocarbon ages: 490 ±60 and 1330 ±60 (7th c. AD date indicated)
Chami (1997)	Mlongo, Mafia	Two trenches: 2 m × 3 m and 2 m × 2 m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metallurgical debris Local pottery: Tana Tradition/Triangular Incised Ware (TT/TIW); SW; PS 	
Chami (2000)	Kinundu Cave, Juani*	Two trenches: 1 m × 2 m and 1 m × 1 m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imported pottery: possible Indian EIA period Faunal assemblages Lithic assemblage Local pottery: Kwale and Limbo Ware, SW, PS Shell beads Metallurgical debris Possible structural remains Postholes 	
Chami (2000/2001)	Juani Primary School, Juani	Two seasons: Season 1 – two trenches: both 1 m × 2 m Season 2 – one trench: 5 m × 4 m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local pottery: unspecified EIA forms, SW and PS Imported pottery (various sources including India) Faunal assemblages Glass beads Lithics 	Two marine shell radiocarbon dates – Radiocarbon ages: 2480 ±60 and 2410 ±60 (1421AD and 668AD respectively)**
Chami (2000)	Ukunju Cave, Juani	Two trenches: both 1 m × 2 m		

(continued)

Table 23.2 (continued)

Team/date	Site excavated	Area excavated	Sites/materials identified	Radiocarbon dates
Christie (2009)	Various sites: Mfurumi [4]; Kirongwé [2]; Chole Island [1]; Kua Ruins, Juani	Nine test pits at each of seven sites: 0.5 m × 0.5 m Three trenches: two 2 m × 3 m and one 1 m × 1 m trench;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local pottery: various traditions and dates Imported pottery: porcelain ceramics Faunal remains Glass Local pottery: SW and PS Imported pottery: European, Middle Eastern and Chinese ceramics Faunal assemblages Shell, bone and glass beads Metallurgical debris (iron slag) Structural remains Local pottery including TT/TIW (MIA) sherds Imported pottery including Chinese and Sasanian Islamic pottery Faunal assemblages Shell, stone and glass beads Archaeo-botanical remains: sorghum, millet, cowpea, baobab and cotton Lithic materials associated with MIA deposits Local pottery: EIA and TT/TIW (MIA) sherds Imported pottery: Middle Eastern Ceramics Faunal assemblages Archaeo-botanical remains: sorghum and cowpea Shell and glass beads Mofa cooking ovens 	Three charcoal radiocarbon dates – Radiocarbon ages: 531 ±25; 470 ±25 and 263 ±30 (AD1325–AD1346 or AD1393–AD1327, AD1415–AD1451 and AD1619–AD1669 respectively)*** Pending
Sealinks (2012)	Ukunju Cave, Juani	Nine STPs: 0.5 m × 0.5 m each One trench: 2.3 m × 2 m (narrowing to 2.3 m × 1.2 m)		
Sealinks (2012)	Juani Primary School, Juani	One sondage 90 cm × 60 cm Four trenches all 2 m × 2 m STP transects		Pending

* In Chami (2000) the dates for Kinundu Cave are the same as those for Juani Primary School.

** There is some discussion as to the validity of these dates as the Marine Reservoir effect (ΔR) for this region has not been determined and is highly variable (see Crowther et al. 2014: 27).

*** The calibration curve for this period oscillates. Consequently, more date ranges are proposed. These are refined based on archaeological, architectural and historical dataset (see Christie 2013b).

More recent excavations (Christie 2013a; Crowther *et al.* 2014) have begun to elucidate past subsistence strategies using faunal and archaeo-botanical assemblages. These indicate that Mafian communities practiced a mixed economy of marine and terrestrial resource use and agriculture. Excavations at Kua highlight intra-settlement variations in subsistence strategies, possibly reflecting differential access to resources influenced by socio-economic status (Christie 2013c: 116). As faunal datasets from more sites in the archipelago become available, it would be interesting to evaluate whether or how subsistence practices change over time. Regional trends point to changing marine exploitation strategies facilitating more intensive exploitation of offshore fish species in the early second millennium AD, in line with an increasing engagement with the sea (Fleisher *et al.* 2015: 110). Are these trends reflected in the wider archaeology of the archipelago? Though not recorded by Chittick (1961), there are substantial midden deposits at Kisimani Mafia that could help address this, research that should be prioritised as the site is subject to severe erosion.

Surveys at Kua (Christie 2013a, b, c) also demonstrate that later-period Swahili settlements (often overlooked regionally) have an interesting story to tell, adopting features from earlier settlements and introducing new styles present in even later settlements, but differing from both. Further work examining the development and organisation of Kua could inform our understanding of Swahili settlement development more generally.

Summary

In summary, the archipelago's archaeological potential has been increasingly recognised. Recent surveys and excavations provide conclusive evidence for continuous occupation from the early first millennium CE. They demonstrate that, far from being insular, Mafian communities played an active part in the Swahili world. This is only the beginning; further research can inform regional research agendas. These would include providing opportunities to document early evidence for maritime adaptation and engagement; to elucidate the archipelago's place in Indian Ocean trade networks during the florescence of the Swahili mercantile economy; to explore the development, organisation and activities of later Swahili settlements; and, finally, to address the influences of historic periods of external contact on present day populations, practices and material culture.

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