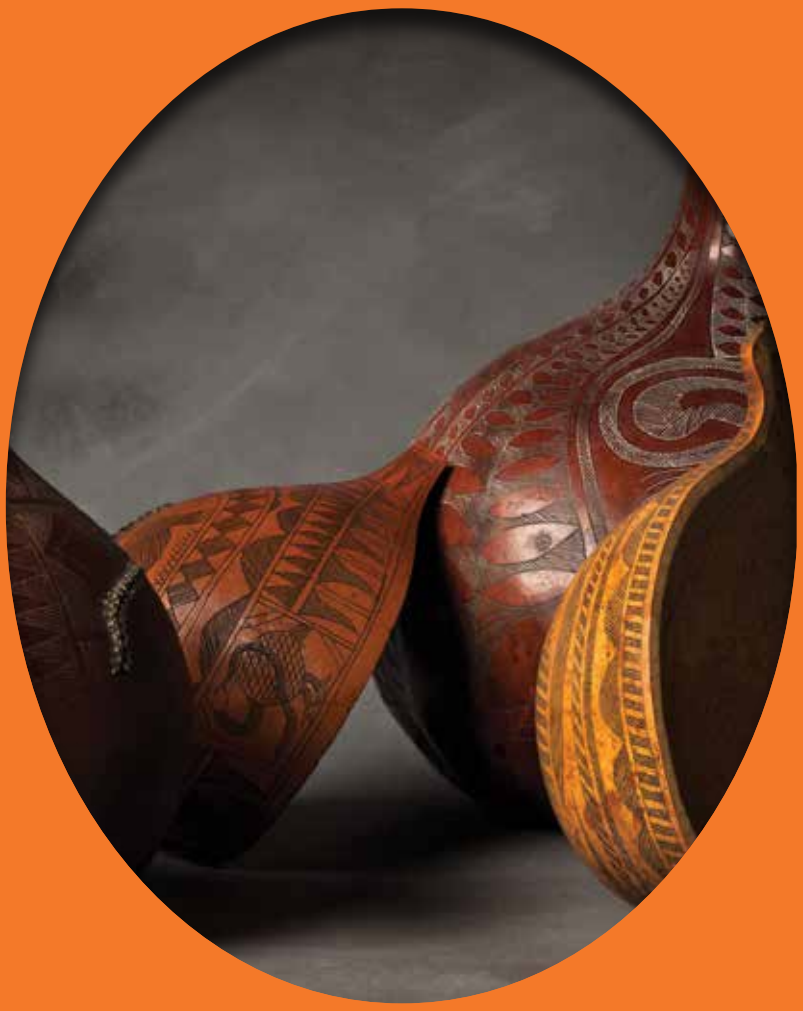
Kenya
Past and Present



Issue 43

Kenya Past and Present

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Kenya Past and Present

Issue 43, 2016

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KENYA MUSEUM SOCIETY

The Kenya Museum Society (KMS) is a nonprofit members' organisation formed in 1971 to support and promote the work of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). You are invited to join the Society and receive Kenya Past and Present. Privileges to members include regular newsletters, free entrance to all national museums, prehistoric sites and monuments under the jurisdiction of the National Museums of Kenya, entry to the Oloolua Nature Trail at half price and 5% discount on books in the KMS shop.

The Society runs the KMS Shop in the Nairobi National Museum and regularly organises events such as an annual art show, weekend and day safaris, children's programmes, lectures, films and other activities to raise funds for NMK projects and development of exhibitions.

NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA

Nairobi National Museum	Nairobi
Karen Blixen House	Nairobi
Nairobi Gallery	Nairobi
Kabarnet Museum✦	Kabarnet
Kisumu Museum✦	Kisumu
Kitale Museum✦	Kitale
Lamu Museum & Lamu Fort	Lamu
Loiyangalani Desert Museum	Loiyangalani
Malindi Museum✦	Malindi
Meru Museum✦	Meru
Narok Museum✦	Narok
Shimoni Slavery Museum	Mombasa
Wajir Museum	Wajir

Sites and monuments:

Fort Jesus	Mombasa
Fort Tenan	Koru
Gede Ruins	Watamu
Hyrax Hill	Nakuru
Kapenguria	Kapenguria
Kariandusi	Gilgil
Kenyatta House	Maralal
Koobi Fora	Lodwar
Olorgesailie	Magadi
Rusinga Island	Mbita
Songhor	Songhor
Thimlich Ohinga	Makalder

✦ Under the new constitution, these museums will be transferred to their respective county control.

KMS highlights 2015

Patricia Jentz, Chairperson, Kenya Museum Society

This past year has been another challenging one for Kenya and the Kenya Museum Society. Travel advisories specifically against travel to the island of Lamu were generalised in the minds of those living abroad to the entire coast and, by extension, to all of Kenya. Combined with Al-Shabaab attacks in the north, many tourists decided to travel elsewhere. As tourism is the second largest generator of foreign currency in Kenya and a major source of employment, the effects were wide reaching. The economy is still growing, but slowly. KMS Museum Shop sales are dependent on tourists and we struggled to cover costs this past year. The lifting of the travel advisories in the second half of the year has sent a ray of hope through the tourism industry but it will take some time before the results become apparent.

The major KMS event of the year was the annual Affordable Art Show, where all art was priced under Ksh100,000 (US$1,000). NMK Director-General Dr Mzalendo Kibunjia opened the show. The work of 194 artists was exhibited in 309 juried pieces selected from approximately 450 submissions. Close to 300 people attended the Friday night opening party and enjoyed wine and hors d'oeuvres while viewing the art, with a lovely chamber ensemble setting

Above:
KMS safaris, led by Narinder Heyer, continue to visit less-frequented parts of Kenya, such as Meru National Park where members enjoyed sundowners while watching for hippos. Photo: Peta Meyer.

Above: KMS members and guests arriving for the Affordable Art Show; the small chamber ensemble that provided the music for the evening. Photos: NMK AV Dept.

the mood. We sold 28% of the show (86 pieces) for Ksh 2,699,000. This is a sign of the maturing art scene and the widening appeal of Kenyan art. The income after expenses and including sponsorship totalled Ksh 1.2 million.

From the proceeds KMS has to date allocated Ksh 400,000 for the installation of a second display of paintings for the Joy Adamson exhibition, and another Ksh 400,000 for the Osteology/Taxidermy Laboratory project.

Many thanks go to the generous sponsors Safaricom Ltd, the Commercial Bank of Africa, Jacaranda Motors and our KMS members.

Children's activities

This year children's activities were revitalised and their appeal expanded, attracting almost 100 children of various age groups and their parents. Activities included kite making, origami, Christmas card designing, embassy tours and a new event held during the Affordable Art Show where one of the exhibiting artists guided the children through the show, describing the various styles represented and then encouraging them to create either a painting or a sculpture of their own.

Lctures and films

Our evening events at the Muthaiga Country Club offered a varied mix starting with Dr Peter Blaze Corcoran speaking about how climate change really does affect us all and what we can do about it.

The ever-popular Dr Munir Virani enthralled a very large audience with his photos and stories of raptors and the serious threats they face from intentional pesticide poisoning and the unintentional poisoning by medications used in the livestock industry.

Judy Rymer's film, *I will not be silenced,* inspired everyone with the tenacity of Charlotte Campbell-Stephen in her seven-year legal battle through the Kenyan judicial system to finally get justice after rape, guided by a courageous Kenyan police officer.

Richard Crompton, a former BBC reporter who now lives in Nairobi, explained how he turned to fiction, inventing a Maasai detective to explore the aftermath of the post-election violence and the new spotlight on corruption. He had his audience looking forward to the third instalment in the Detective Mollel series.

And Akbar Hussein, well known archivist and a member of the Asian African Heritage Trust, took us back to the first 50 years of Nairobi with his wonderful collection of old photographs and the stories that brought them to life.

In the Louis Leakey Auditorium at the Nairobi National Museum, we began the year by collaborating with the South African Embassy to celebrate International Women's Day by screening *Yesterday*, the Oscar-winning South African film about a Zulu farm worker who discovers she is HIV-positive and has to cope with her illness, her little daughter, her dying husband, and the ignorance and misinformation about HIV and AIDS that is still widespread.

Professor Godfrey Muriuki spoke about the cultural characteristics of Kenyans before the colonial period and some of the changes that have occurred from the colonial period to the present, explaining their implications for the future.

Zarina Patel, environmentalist and human rights activist, spoke about the Sidis, following a film about this community of Africans who travelled to India over 500 years ago. Their descendants are now totally integrated Indian citizens, but can be distinguished by their features, their musical drumming and their belief systems.

Dr Jane Goodall lectured to a full house.
Photo: Jane Goodall Institute.

Dr Jane Goodall, UN Messenger of Peace and Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) ambassador, told the story of her lifelong experiences with chimpanzees and expounded on the connections shared among people, wildlife and our environment.

In another diplomatic collaboration, this time with the Polish Embassy, another Academy Award winning film, *Ida,* was screened. Awarded best foreign language film in 2015, *Ida* is a hauntingly beautiful road movie. Evocatively shot in black and white, the story is of a woman's search for her roots against the backdrop of the German occupation of Poland, the Holocaust and communism.

Above:
A new children's activity: An artist at the Affordable Art Show guides youngsters through the show, describing the various styles represented, and then lets them loose to create an artwork of their own. Photos: NMK AV Dept.

Training session for KMS members on how to record species for the Kenya Bird Map project, organised by Nature Kenya. Photo: Washington Wachira.

Day trips

The monthly day outings gained in popularity this past year. Over 130 members and guests toured the Ichthyology (fish) Department, visited Alan Donovan's African Heritage House on the edge of Nairobi National Park and the Owl Sanctuary in Naivasha, learned the ins and outs of beekeeping at the National Beekeeping Institute, experienced organic farming at Mlango Farm and how to make cheese at Brown's Cheese Factory in Tigoni, and improved their birding skills at a free workshop by Kenya Bird Map/ Nature Kenya.

Lunch always tastes better when enjoyed in the great outdoors while on safari. Photo: KMS member.

KMS safaris

KMS weekend outings continued to be very popular, combining history and wildlife with trips to little-visited parts of Kenya. The calendar started with a trip to the secluded Sheldrick Camp in Ithumba, north of the Galana River in Tsavo East, where orphaned elephants are returned to the wild. This self-catering camp run by the Sheldrick Trust is very well appointed and well staffed, and there is always demand to have time with the elephants and learn how they are re-integrated into wild herds.

The next trip was a camping excursion that combined the natural beauty around the foothills of the Aberdares and learning more about the Happy Valley set of colonial settlers. The trip began in Kiambu at the burial site of Lord Erroll and continued with visits to three historic houses. There was much discussion and speculation about who killed Lord Erroll.

Easter saw a trip to Western Kenya, Lake Victoria and Kakamega Forest, again a combination of history and nature. Participants enjoyed the relaxation and beauty of Rondo Retreat's fabulous gardens, a well-guided walk in the forest and some saw the iconic Great Blue Turaco, only found in this part of Kenya. Then on to delightful Kweisos House at Homa Lime, a great base for investigating the history of the railway in the west. Four disused railway stations were visited: Londiani, Kipkelion, Kisumu and Fort Ternan.

The Meru National Park trip was back to self catering, with members enjoying the game from the wide verandah of the warden's charming old house, now the KWS Kinna Guest House. The swimming pool at the neighbouring Kinna bandas was a welcome respite from the heat. Meru is the area where George and Joy Adamson released

The annual safari to the Masai Mara to see the wildebeest returning from the Serengeti. Photo: Prof. Vivien Johnson.

their famous lion Elsa back into the wild. Elsa's grave is inaccessible but the group did visit the grave of Pippa, the cheetah that the Adamsons also raised and released back into the wild.

In May, our group turned their backs on the rains in Nairobi and went exploring sunny, dry Amboseli. The lovely hillside Satao Camp is outside the national park in a private sanctuary on one of the routes elephants use to traverse the area. The group were not disappointed when they had a fantastic view of Mount Kilimanjaro as well as great game watching.

The Kerio Valley was the next destination, staying at the simple but charming Sego Club with its rooftop verandah overlooking the Elgeyo Escarpment. The trip up the valley towards Lake Baringo offered superb scenery with the Tugen Hills to the left, then the Cherengani Hills to the right. The Tugen Hills Museum, a private local museum, offered some interesting insight into local palaeontology research on early hominids. Iten was also on the itinerary, with its reputation for producing world class runners and – unknown to many – a stellar spot for paragliding.

Our annual safari to the Masai Mara for the wildebeest migration did not disappoint, despite one of the group breaking her arm and having to be airlifted out. It definitely added to the excitement. The accommodation was a simple tented camp outside Oloolaimutia Gate.

Enjoying the sun and the wild landscape around Masinga Dam on the Tana River. Photo by Ruth and Donald Thomas.

In September, to escape the cold in Nairobi, we visited a lovely lodge on Samatian Island in Lake Baringo. The island is quite large, about 300 acres, despite the high water of the lake that has all but submerged two of the lodge's cottages. The lodge offers expansive views of Lake Baringo with its hippos, crocodiles and birdlife. And some got rather up close and personal with a scorpion.

Later in September we did a short trip to Masinga Dam on the Tana River, the largest dam in East Africa that provides much of Kenya's electricity. The previously rather exclusive Masinga Dam Resort has been adversely affected by the bad road access. However, the views of this vast inland sea are breathtaking, with Mt Kenya visible on a clear day.

The October trip was a 300 km trek north of Nairobi to scenic Samburu and the Shaba National Reserve where the conservationists Joy and George Adamson established their base and later Joy met her end. It was very interesting to visit Chandler's Falls and the Magado Crater, where donkeys walk down to the crater floor and return loaded with soda, completely unattached and seemingly unattended.

The November trip was another combination of history and wildlife. While staying in Lake Nakuru National Park, a sure bet for excellent game watching, the group visited the Rongai–Elburgan area, where many white settlers had farms 100 years ago. Pioneer aviator Beryl Markham's family and Lord Egerton lived in this area. Lord Egerton started an agricultural school which has become Egerton University and his house, Egerton Castle, is now a school building.

We ended the year back in Tsavo, this extended Christmas trip including both Tsavo East and West. Due to the unpredictability of the rains and having had to change several Christmas trips due to flooding, it was felt that the sandy soils could cope with any weather. The trip combined a walk to the Tsavo bridge and railway (made famous in Col. Patterson's book *The maneaters of Tsavo*), the spectacular wildlife in the two national parks and an excursion outside the parks to the remote Lake Jipe near the border with Tanzania. The year ended around the wonderful water hole watching the hippos at Ziwani.

To conserve

Kenya's natural and cultural heritage

Marla Stone, Kenya Museum Society

In April 2016 the second phase of the Joy Adamson Exhibition opened in the Nairobi National Museum. Again funded by the Kenya Museum Society, this is a continuation of the Society's efforts to make the treasures of Joy Adamson's work archived at the Museum accessible to Kenyans. By presenting different examples of Joy's intriguing paintings, we hope to keep the exhibition fresh and encourage return visits to the Museum.

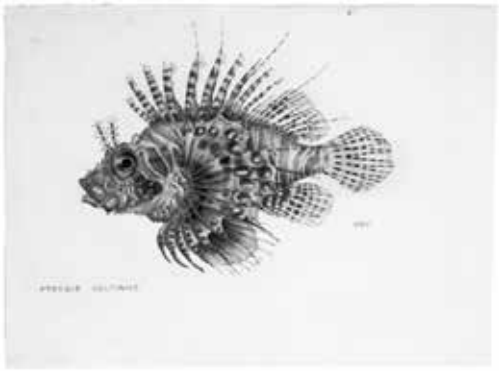
Conservation is the theme of the exhibition, as it was of Joy and George Adamson's lives. They were pioneers of the environmental conservation movement that emerged in the 1970s. Since then, children in schools everywhere learn how they can personally help to protect the environment, and this exhibition is meant to complement and challenge that knowledge in both children and adults.

Joy's portraits of the peoples of Kenya, created between 1944 and 1952 on a commission by the colonial government, captured the tribal dress and ornamentation that was rapidly being replaced by western attire in the colonial era. Painted during a time when colour photography was not common, her work has documented a heritage that might otherwise have been lost. Likewise her illustrations of the plants of Kenya, done between 1938 and 1943, have left a beautiful and detailed record still used by botanists today. Joy's love for animals resulted in her capturing their characteristics in sketches and complete

Above:
Joy Adamson's botanical paintings were so detailed they are still useful to botanists today. Photo: Peta Meyer.

Joy Adamson's portrait of female circumciser Chokanyiga Mwithira, from Imenti in Central Kenya.

Ammocharis tinneana, a plant endemic to sub-Saharan Africa.



One of a series of small watercolours on marine fish, this one the highly venomous scorpion fish.

illustrations, including a large collection of colourful marine paintings.

The first Joy Adamson exhibition, which opened in April 2014, featured 51 botanical illustrations, animal illustrations and portraits of the peoples of Kenya. For this second phase, another 53 paintings have been selected from the Museum's archives.

NMK's Cultural Heritage collection has contributed examples of some of the attire that appear in the portraits, and the Botany Department has provided preserved specimens of the plants in the botanical illustrations. These real-life items complement the two-dimensional paintings. Visitors to the exhibition will also find one panel dedicated to the conservation methods used to preserve items for museum collections.

Joy's account of her travels around the country, the people she met, their ceremonies, foods and day-to-day way of life, came together in the book *The Peoples of Kenya* that she wrote in 1967. The book is still a resource for anthropologists today, especially as the costumes and cultural practices described in it are for most Kenyans a memory of another age. A reprint of the book is for sale in the KMS Bookshop, together with a pack of six greeting cards featuring selected Joy Adamson portraits.

The exhibition has been put together by the Exhibitions Department of the National Museums of Kenya in association with KMS, and is curated by the Head of Archives Immelda Kithuka. Dr Marla Stone of KMS worked alongside the NMK Design Department in design, text creation and editing.

Dr Sonia Harmand and Dr Mzalendo Kibunjia, Director-General of NMK, display the earliest stone tools found in Turkana, during a press conference in May 2015. Photo: NMK AV Dept.

Museum highlights 2015

Juliana Jebet and Hellen Njagi, National Museums of Kenya

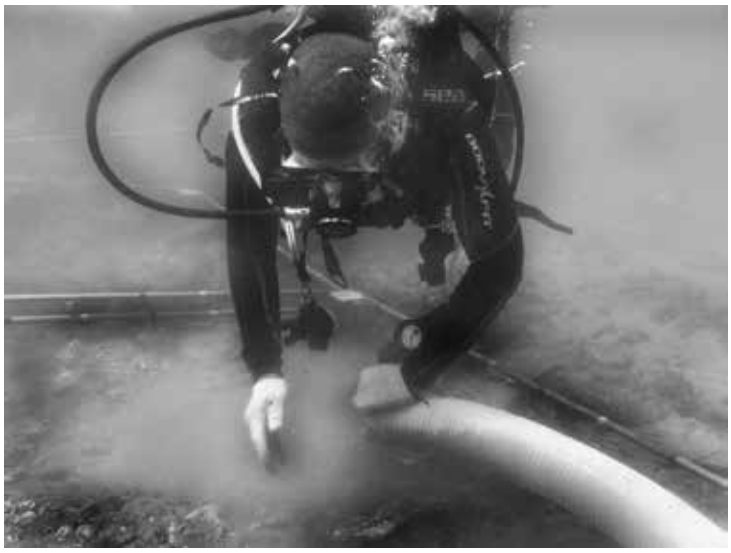
World's oldest stone tools discovered in Turkana

The world's earliest stone artefacts dating back 3.3 million years have been found in Kenya, at a site called Lomekwi 3 on the western shores of Lake Turkana. Announcing the discovery in May 2015, Dr Sonia Harmand, one of the leaders of the West Turkana Archaeological Project, said the find is 700,000 years older than any tools found before, pre-dating the earliest humans in the Homo genus. It is the first direct evidence that a more primitive species may have been capable of planning and making tools.

Dr Harmand is a French archaeologist with the Turkana Basin Institute at Stony Brook University, and a researcher at the Laboratoire de Préhistoire et Technologie of the CNRS in Paris, France. The Turkana Basin Institute is under an agreement with the Government of Kenya, through the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), to serve as a repository for the heritage collections of the Lake Turkana area.

500-year-old Portuguese shipwreck confirmed

The National Museums of Kenya has officially declared that the shipwreck found in 2008 off Kilifi is of Portuguese origin. The wreck was discovered by NMK's marine archaeologist, Caesar Bita, while doing an underwater survey in the area. It lies some two km offshore at a depth of 10 m, off Ras Ngomeni within the borders of Kilifi County.



NMK marine archaeologist Caesar Bita mapping the site of the Ngomeni shipwreck. He later has the opportunity to explain his work to H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta and the First Lady.

The Ngomeni wreck has most of its major timbers still intact and was found to contain copper ingots stamped with an emblem similar to those seen from a shipwreck in Oranjemund, Namibia. "The Namibia shipwreck has been fully identified as Portuguese. Provisional dates from analysis of artefacts collected place the site at 15th to 16th century AD when the Portuguese were dominant along this coast, controlling the western Indian Ocean trade," says Mr Bita, who is head of coastal archaeology at NMK. The Ngomeni shipwreck is provisionally the oldest shipwreck site in Kenya.

The site has not been fully excavated yet, but plans are underway to explore its potential, especially for research and tourism. Objects collected in the wreck – which include stone cannon balls, stone anchors, lead plates, copper ingots, Islamic green and black glazed pottery, wooden buckets, and animal horn and ivory – would make good displays as part of an underwater museum. All recovered artefacts found so far are in the Fort Jesus Museum conservation laboratory for further analysis and preservation.

Rock art found in Turkana

The Italian government in conjunction with the National Museums of Kenya has launched a project to document the rock art found in Turkana. "We are excited about the prospects of this project that will see better preservation and a detailed account of the rich rock art culture in the Turkana region," explained the director of the Italian Cultural institute in Nairobi, Francesca Chiesa, at the launch.

Turkana County has a rich rock art heritage dating back over 2,000 years. Most of the rock engravings in the area consist of geometric designs although some animal paintings, such as elephants and giraffes, can also be found. Many believe the rock engravings were made by Twa hunter-gatherers, because similar images have been found from the areas they used to inhabit in East Uganda and around Lake Victoria. Archaeologists believe that large areas of Turkana were covered by forest as recently as a thousand years ago, which explains why the art depicts wild animals that do not live in the habitat any longer.

"There is an extraordinary opportunity to increase our knowledge of the recent archaeology of Lake Turkana and promote its cultural tourist potential," said lead researcher Prof. Lernia, who teaches African archaeology at the University of Rome and doubles as an honorary research fellow at

Rock engravings in Turkana County. Photo: David Coulson, Trust for African Rock Art.

the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. According to his counterpart, Dr Ndiema of NMK, this programme has the potential of making Lake Turkana the epicentre of cultural tourism in Kenya.

Inaugural Ura Gate Tharaka Cultural Festival

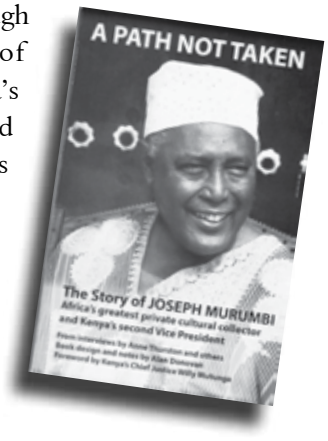
The inaugural Ura Gate Tharaka Cultural Festival took place in August 2015 in Tharaka Nithi County, on the eastern slopes of Mt Kenya, and brought together several different communities, namely the Tharaka, Igembe, Tigania and Borana, to celebrate their unique cultures and promote social cohesion. The theme for the festival was 'Culture and conservation as pillars of county prosperity'.

The county of Tharaka Nithi is endowed with a rich cultural and natural heritage that includes the complex biodiversity of the Mt Kenya forest, 360 sq. km of which lie in the county.

The festival was a celebration of music, song, dance, performance, storytelling, children's games, crafts and demonstrations of the culinary traditions of the communities taking part. Visitors also toured nearby attractions, including the high gradient falls of Tana River and the scenic eastern slopes of Mount Kenya. The festival was sponsored by the National Museums of Kenya in collaboration with Mediamax and the Marimanti Baobab Lodge.

Joseph Murumbi book launch

The National Museums of Kenya in collaboration with the Murumbi Trust launched the Joseph Murumbi book, titled *A Path Not Taken,* in September 2015 at the Nairobi Gallery. The book tells the story, through personal interviews, of Joseph Murumbi, Kenya's second vice president and Africa's most famous cultural collector.



Why did Murumbi decide to walk away from public office at the pinnacle of power?

This has been a subject of intrigue in Kenyan politics for decades. But the assassination of his friend and mentor, Pio Gama Pinto, had shaken him to the core, and he was unhappy with the way things were going, which he thought were not in the interests of the common person.

Murumbi instead chose to serve his country, his continent and the world as a preserver and protector of Africa's heritage. He was arguably the continent's greatest private collector of art, books, postage stamps, artefacts, textiles, jewellery and everything African, including 50,000 documents on Africa, many of which he acquired during the decade that he was in exile in England before Kenyan independence. Some of Murumbi's collection was sold after his death, some now rests in the National Archives and some can be seen in the Nairobi Gallery on Kenyatta Avenue, in the building known as the Old PC's House.

Cultural conversations with Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Prof. Micere Mugo

The National Museums of Kenya hosted a three-way conversation featuring famous Kenyan diaspora authors Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Prof. Micere Mugo in September 2015 at the Hall of Kenya. The cultural conversation, intended to become a regular series, attempts to cast a spotlight on what it means as a nation to identify culture as our foundation, and also what role cultural institutions such as the National Museums of Kenya can and should play in making this more than just words.

Prof. Ngugi wa Thiong'o makes a point during the cultural event, as NMK's Dr Mzalendo Kibunjia looks on. Photo: Ebrahim Mwangi, NMK.

Other issues raised during the discussions were what Kenyans can do to strengthen the role of institutions such as NMK in facilitating them in the work they are mandated to do. What are some of the obstacles we face as cultural workers and institutions and what can be done about them? The discussion was moderated by Njeeri Thiong'o, the wife of Prof. Thiong'o.

Somali Heritage Week

Kenyans of all ages and backgrounds convened at the Nairobi National Museum from 18 to 21 November 2015, for a unique and unprecedented celebration of the country's diversity during the first-ever Somali Heritage Week that showcased the best of Somali culture from Kenya and the region.

The goal of this event was to create a place where Somali people and lovers of culture could come together to celebrate the community, to engage with the challenges facing them, to sustain traditions and to provide a learning opportunity for those outside the culture. Talks, music, dance, storytelling and an exhibition were presented free of charge. This week-long extravaganza also featured heavy hitting panel conversations that revolved around the theme 'Identity: What does it mean to be Somali in Kenya today?'

The event was sponsored by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Awjaama Omar Cultural, Research and Reading Centre in Eastleigh and the National Museums of Kenya, among other partners.

Rites Of Passage exhibition

The 'Rites of Passage' exhibition, which ran in December 2015 at the Nairobi National Museum, presented cultural practices associated with the transition from one stage of life to another, especially from childhood to adulthood. Among various communities in Kenya, circumcision is a ritual of crucial social importance with complex meanings that affect the entire society. The cutting of the foreskin in males symbolises the cutting away of childhood and a person's assumption of adult responsibility, both social and cultural. The circumcised individual is accepted as a full member of the tribe; an uncircumcised person is a child, no matter what their age.

The exhibition presented the traditional rites of passage in four Kenyan communities – the Bukusu of Western Kenya, the Meru of Eastern Kenya, the Maasai of the Rift Valley and the Swahili of the coast. The fifth was the contemporary Rites of Passage Experiences (ROPES) which presents an alternative by offering religious-centred rites with churches, schools and children's homes as a new community.

The exhibition was a joint initiative of the US-Africa Cultural Heritage Strategic Partnership Initiative, the International Council of Museums, the National Museums of Kenya and the Haitian Heritage Museum, among other partners.

NMK in annual Travel Expo

The National Museums of Kenya participated in the fifth edition of the Magical Kenya Travel Expo (MKTE), held in October 2015 at the Leisure Lodge & Golf Resort on Diani beach. The expo is an annual high-profile international tourism event, organised by the Kenya Tourism Board, that attracts participation from local, regional and international trade partners as well as the Kenyan public.

Schoolchildren at the Rites of Passage exhibition learn the cultural traditions of communities other than their own. Photo: Ebrahim Mwangi, NMK.

The hosting of the event on the coast was also identified as significant on three fronts – an opportunity to profile Diani globally as Africa's leading beach destination, reinforcing the safety of Kenya's coastal region, and providing Kwale County an opportunity to showcase other diversified products besides its spectacular beaches. MKTE 2015 hosted 170 buyers from 40 countries around the world.

Annual Curators Meeting in Meru

The National Museums of Kenya held its fourth Annual Curators Meeting (ANCUM) at Alba Hotel, Meru in October 2015 under the theme 'Heritage management and devolving museums'. The chief guest was the Sports, Culture and Arts Cabinet Secretary, Dr Hassan Wario. In his address to curators from all the museums, sites and monuments across the country, Dr Wario said that NMK would soon start training county government workers in management and conservation of tourist attraction sites and monuments, because the counties currently lacked the necessary capacity to manage these important heritage sites on their own.

Dr Hassan Wario, the Cabinet Secretary for Sports, Culture and Arts, seated front row, centre, gave the keynote address at the NMK Annual Curators Meeting.

Dr Wario reiterated that NMK needs to work out a formula to partner in the management of museums and other sites and monuments that are located in far-flung areas of the country.

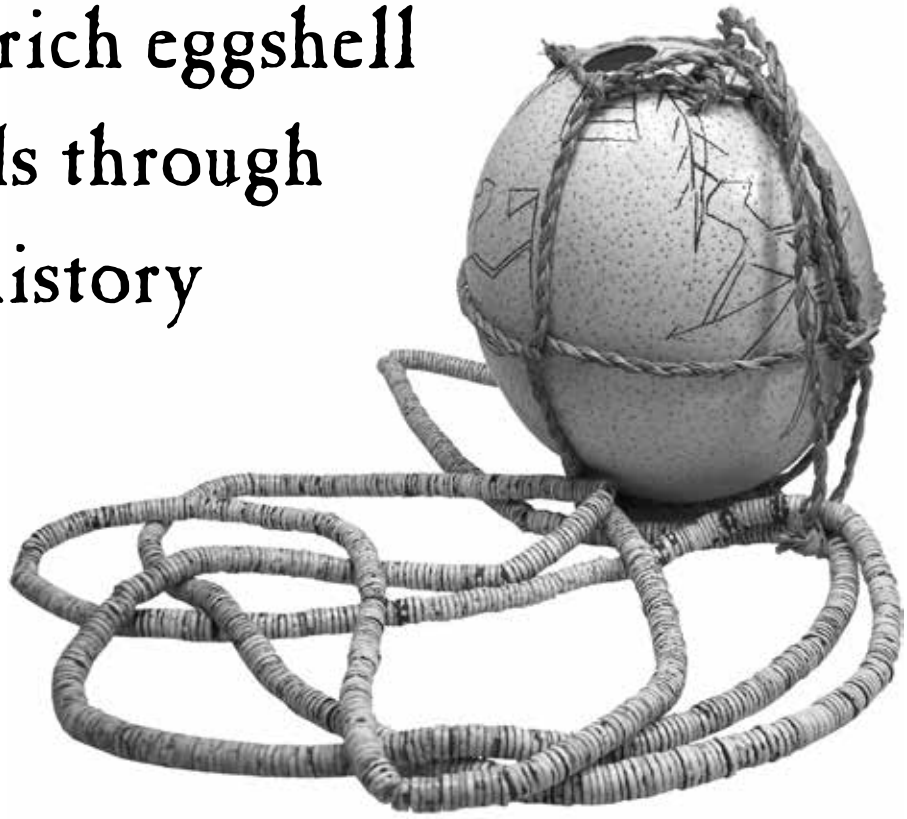
Kenya reclaims slot at 38th session of the UNESCO General Conference

Kenya has been elected to the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), at the 38th session of the UNESCO General Conference held in November 2015 in Paris. Kenya was elected for the period 2015 to 2019, the fifth time the country is being represented on the Board since it joined Unesco in 1964.

The Executive Board is a powerful decision-making organ consisting of 58 member states whose work is to examine the programme and budget of Unesco and provide guidance on implementation. Kenya was elected in a competitive vote involving 11 African countries.

Beauty and the bead:

Ostrich eggshell beads through prehistory



Long before mass-manufactured beads, our ancestors used natural materials to make ornaments, the most common material being ostrich eggshell. Archaeologist Angela Kabiru explains why beads meant more than beauty.

Above: OES beads and water carrier from southern Africa, where ostrich eggshells still find a use in traditional communities. Photo by courtesy of the MoneyMuseum Zurich, www.sunflower.ch.

Angela W. Kabiru

Archaeological sites have uncovered beads and pendants made from a variety of materials that include plant seeds, wood, bone, ivory, clay and stone. Beads made of ostrich eggshell (OES) are the most common beads found in many Kenyan prehistoric sites. Ostrich eggshells were (and continue to be) used as water containers when whole and as raw material for beads when broken into a thousand pieces. The large number of OES beads recovered from archaeological sites has motivated debates about why beads were first made and how their uses may have changed over time.

According to archaeologist Stanley Ambrose,[1] the transition from the Middle Stone Age (MSA) to the Later Stone Age

Ostrich eggshell beads have been found in large numbers at archaeological sites throughout Kenya.

(LSA) stone tool industrial complexes also marked the transition to 'modern human behaviour' when ground stone tools and perforated ornaments such as beads became common. The difference between the MSA and the LSA has been defined as "…a long and monotonous period of flake tools and stagnation [MSA], followed by a rapid revolutionary change to technological sophistication and economic and social complexity [LSA]".[2] Simply put, the presence of blades, prepared cores, and points are the hallmark of the MSA while the absence of these – or the presence of the more advanced microliths, bladelets, microblade cores, and backed geometric forms – signal the transition to the LSA.

The Later Stone Age

Evidence from several archaeological sites in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that the transition from Middle to Later Stone Age occurred first in East Africa. The early MSA in East Africa began somewhere between 300,000 and 200,000 years ago while the record for the LSA began shortly after 50,000 years ago at sites such as Enkapune ya Muto cave in Kenya.

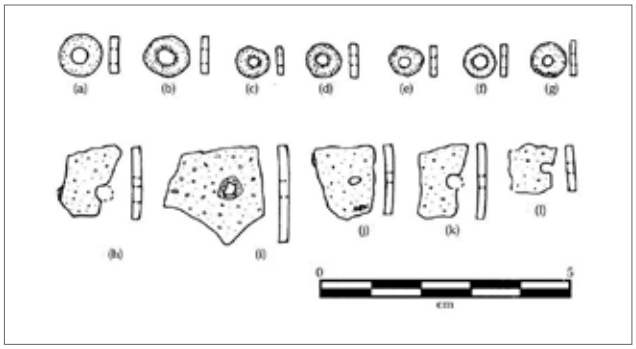
In tandem with more advanced stone tools, other exciting things happened during the LSA such as the development of symbolism, ritual and aesthetics. This is what McBrearty and Brooks[2] refer to as "… the human ability to represent objects, people, and abstract concepts with arbitrary symbols, and the ability to act with reference to abstract concepts".

The development of symbolism, burial of the dead and the making of art and ornamentation are all considered hallmarks of 'modern human behaviour'.[1–3,4,17] This is an important marker in archaeology because it represents behaviour that differentiates intellectually modern humans from our more archaic relatives.

One item that has been linked to symbolism, burial and ornamentation in different contexts is the bead. Perforated beads and pendants are common objects in Kenya's archaeological sites. They were usually made of plant seeds, clay, stone, bone, ivory and, more commonly, ostrich eggshell. The manufacture and use of ostrich eggshell (OES) beads was widespread in the African Later Stone Age,[2] especially during the Holocene (the last 10,000 years).

Beads and modern human behaviour

In the small cave named Enkapune ya Muto (EYM), also known as the Twilight cave or GtJi 12, situated on the Mau Escarpment, west of Lake Naivasha, Stanley Ambrose excavated ostrich eggshell beads that have been radiocarbon dated to 39,900 +/-1600 years BP (before present).[1] This rockshelter contains the oldest known archaeological evidence spanning the MSA-LSA transition. The collection, now stored at the National Museums of Kenya archaeology laboratory, includes complete beads, bead preforms and shell fragments. These are the oldest OES beads in the world found so far.



The excavation site and OES preforms and beads found at Enkapune ya Muto cave, at c. 40,000 years BP the oldest evidence of bead manufacture. Photo by courtesy of S. Ambrose. Illustration: S. Ambrose.[1]

The beads mark the dawn of a new technique of manufacturing personal adornment but, says Ambrose, may also signal a more significant innovation for modern human behaviour. According to Ambrose, early dates for the LSA and beads may have implications for the origin and spread of modern human behaviour and modern humans out of Africa.

Beads as symbols and gifts

Apart from their use as ornaments, beads may have been used as gifts, an indicator for the rise of symbolism and abstract thought. Among the modern !Kung hunter gatherers of the Kalahari, beads (especially OES) continue to be used in a system of gift giving and exchange that is thousands of years old. This system of delayed reciprocity is documented by Wiessner,[5] and locally referred to as *hxaro*. It functions to strengthen networks of social and economic relationships and serves as a social safety net in marginal environments, thereby enhancing survival. It is a complex arrangement. Hxaro partners typically live in areas with complementary resources, which may be as far apart as 100 km. In lean times, this means that families can always get what they lack in their immediate localities due to these permanent associations. According to Wiessner, the word for sewn beadwork is synonymous with hxaro ('gifts'), and beadwork was considered an appropriate gift for all occasions. This means that although beads were made as ornaments, they may have had more symbolic uses and meanings that we can only guess.

As Peter Mitchell[6] observes, the presence of OES beads in southern Africa in areas where ostriches did not live serves to reinforce the idea that a similar hxaro-like delayed reciprocity system was practiced several thousand years ago. This, he suggests, may signify the invention of a 'symbolic marker' for a social security system that permitted humans with modern behaviour to survive in risky environments. The significance of the Kenyan Enkapune ya Muto beads is that they demonstrate that 'modern' human behaviour evolved independently very early in East Africa, since South African OES collections are not as old as this.

A specialised craft

Whatever the original reasons for making ostrich eggshell and other types of beads, bead making and use became an important economic activity. This can be seen in the large numbers of beads produced during the Holocene, some from semi-precious stones that had been transported over long distances. The fact that OES beads were also being produced in very large numbers may be an indication that ostrich eggs were easy to find, and also that this was a specialised craft into which people put a lot of effort and time.

Joy Adamson's painting of an El Barta woman. Her many necklaces of OES beads would have been a symbol of wealth and prestige. Photo: NMK Archives.

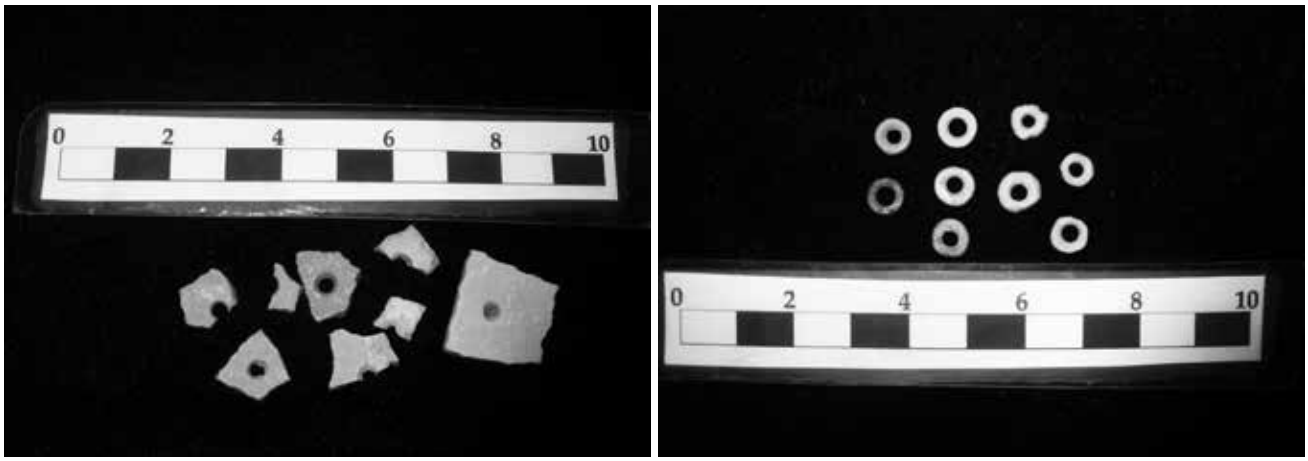
In Kenya, OES beads have been found in many LSA archaeological sites, in numbers ranging from a few to hundreds and even thousands. Burial sites seem to have most of these beads, and it is assumed that they were part of the grave goods that accompanied their owners into the afterlife. Burial and other special treatments of the dead are a consistent feature of the symbolic life of modern human societies.[2] Grave goods were buried with the dead to be used in the afterlife, and included both utilitarian and ceremonial objects. Grave goods may include pottery, stone tools, mace heads and beads. In rare cases, animals such as dogs were buried just as humans were. In Kenya, as in most of Africa, OES beads seem to have been an important component of human burials; many such sites have beads included.

Burial and ritual

The Jarigole stone pillar site is located on the east side of Lake Turkana near Alia Bay. It consists of a large oval-shaped platform, about 15 to 20 cm thick, a mound (about one metre high), and at least 28 basalt pillars.[7] It is primarily interpreted by Charles Nelson[8] as a mortuary site since the central area of the site contains several hundred overlapping burial pits, where new pits have been dug into old ones. The pillars are believed to have been erected to commemorate the dead. The site therefore provides evidence of complex mortuary behaviour that included large-scale work effort involved in the movement of large pillars. The initial excavation on the mound and platform produced thousands of Nderit potsherds (the distinctive pottery style typical of the Lake Turkana basin), more than 10,000 ostrich eggshell beads, flaked stone implements, and many other artefacts. Interestingly, beads and pendants made from amazonite and other semiprecious stones were also found in large numbers. The presence of shell beads *(Strigatella paupercula)* derived from the East African coast led Nelson[8] to conclude that there were well-established regional exchange networks that enabled long distance movement of raw materials. This site has been dated to about 4,000 years. Other sites in the Turkana area that have yielded OES beads include Lowasera, Lothagam, North Horr, Dongodien, Kalokol and Ngamoratung'a.[19–23]

Within the central Rift Valley, many burial sites in caves and rock shelters have well preserved OES beads. Apart from Enkapune ya Muto, they include sites such as Lion Hill Cave, Naivasha Railway Rockshelter, and Hyrax Hill. On the Laikipia plateau, Ari Siiriainen[20] excavated some burials under stone cairns, some of which had OES beads in them. Many sites on Lukenya hill near Machakos have OES beads as well.[11, 12]

One advantage of ostrich eggshell is that it preserves well, especially when it is buried in sheltered sites such as caves and rock shelters. But OES beads are not only found in burial sites; some are discarded in the rubbish when they are broken, some are found mixed up with other artefacts



The OES preforms and beads found at Olkena near Lake Magadi have been dated to 10,000 years BP.

in the deposits, while some have been found in contexts that suggest the actual manufacturing site. Production sites are important in that they provide evidence of step-by-step sequences of how the beads were produced.

The main advantage of using OES for bead production is that the shell is of uniform thickness, so prior preparation is not necessary. In addition, the shell has an attractive ivory colour that does not stain easily. However, making beads out of OES is not easy because the shell breaks readily, especially when the central perforation is being drilled.

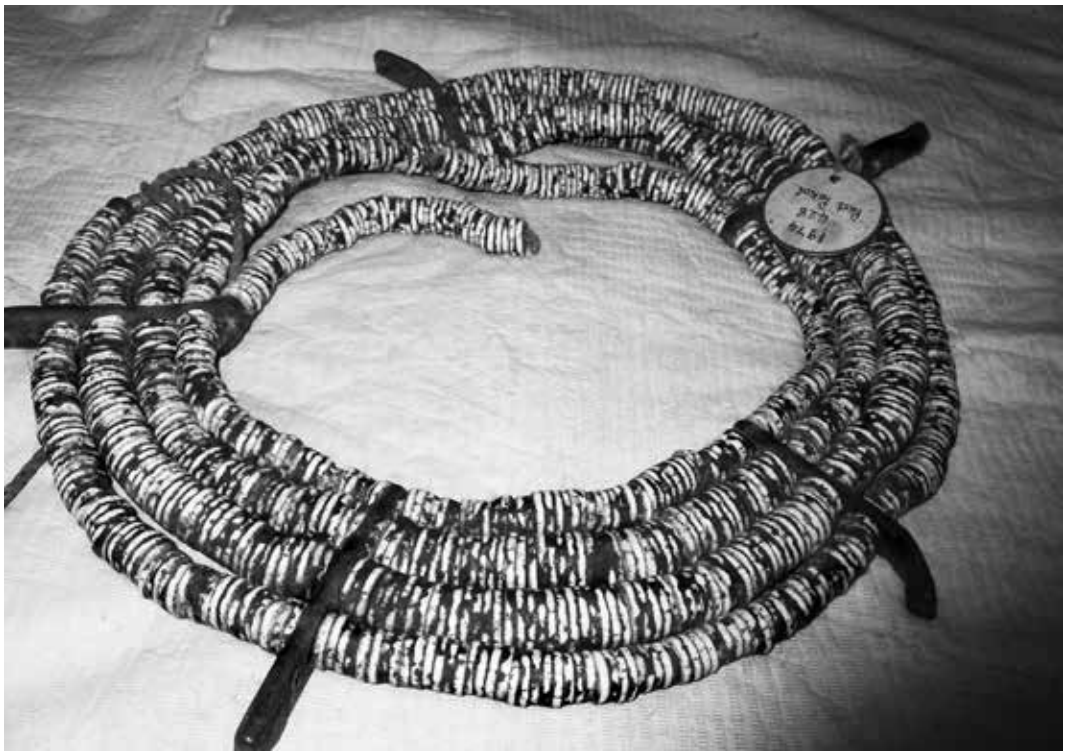
Bead factories

According to studies that have been done on prehistoric OES bead production, these little beads are produced in several stages: 1) bead blank production (preform production), 2) perforation (boring), and 3) surface finishing. [1,9,10]

Preforms (or blanks) are little pieces of polygonal shell that have been broken or snapped off the larger shell in preparation for perforation. These may be shaped to a roughly circular shape before being drilled. Their size depends on the desired final product, as pieces that are too large means the finishing process involves more work and therefore takes more time. Using appropriate tools, these preforms are bored to create the holes where the string goes through. In archaeological collections, boring was done using stone implements, some of which have been found at bead manufacturing sites such as North Horr. The stone borers were made of obsidian, quartz or cryptocrystalline silica. Perforation of beads was carried out in two main ways – from one side through to the other side, or boring through both sides to meet in the middle. We can assume that the method chosen depended on the tool available and the experience of the borer. The central perforation was then rubbed further to make the edges round and smooth.

When a good number of beads had been perforated, they were strung with cord to make a tube of beads. Held firmly this way, they were ground on stone to smoothen and round off the edges. Beads produced in this manner tend to be of equal size and finishing quality. The level of finishing differs from site to site, and it may be assumed to be a function of individual experience or use of the beads.

Sites such as North Horr-1 and Jarigole in northern Kenya, Enkapune ya Muto in the central Rift Valley and Olkena in Magadi have yielded large numbers of preforms. The presence of preforms is evidence



Pokot woman's OES necklace with spacers, coated with fat and a black colouring called *okup*. Such necklaces are now only worn by old women. From NMK's ethnography collection, 1974.

of bead manufacture: an indication that beads were made on-site, rather than being imported whole. The large numbers of unfinished beads in some localities has led to the use of the term 'bead factories', which also implies the existence of specialised craftsmanship by artisans in special use areas.

At the site of Olkena in the Magadi basin, more than 1,105 ostrich eggshell pieces have so far been recovered during ongoing surface collection and excavation exercises by Kenyan and American students. The pieces include 89 unbroken beads, 157 preforms and 859 fragments. Found in association were 51 tiny cryptocrystalline silica borers – all made from local white Magadi chert, although obsidian, lava, quartz and other cryptocrystalline raw materials were available.[10] This shows an ability to discriminate between raw materials depending on physical characteristics. The borers are mostly double ended, have rounded or sub-rounded ends, and show signs of micro-flaking and blunting, likely evidence of ostrich eggshell drilling and perforation. The radiocarbon dating on ostrich eggshell provided an age of 10,450 +/- 75 years BP for the site.

OES beads of similar antiquity have been found elsewhere in Kenya. Site GvJm 22 on Lukenya Hill has beads from a context dating between 15,000 and 17,000 years BP,[11] while GvJm 16 yielded beads from a level containing bone dated at 13,150 years BP.[12] Beads from Gamble's cave were dated to 12,000 -10,500 years ago.[13]

Available archaeological evidence shows that OES bead manufacture was widespread throughout the LSA, through the Iron Age and into historic times.

Current makers and users

As we have seen, beads have been a dominant form of visual expression for thousands of years in East Africa, having been made not only from ostrich eggshell but also plant and tree seeds, seashells, bone and stone. As part of the Indian Ocean trade, long

distance caravans found their way into the interior seeking valuable commodities such as rhino horn and ivory, and bringing with them coloured beads, brass and copper wire, and cloth. From the second half of the 19th century, leather wraps were being oversewn with coloured beads as status indicators[15] and had become a "key visual index of ethnicity in Eastern Africa ... where colour preferences and designs became highly visible resources".[14] The introduction of coloured beads, cloth and aniline dyes may have been the main reason why the production of OES beads was reduced or ceased altogether within some communities.

Members of farming communities such as the Kikuyu and Wakamba no longer wear OES beads, although historical records show that they were part of personal ornamentation until early in the last century. However, OES beads are still being made and used by members of pastoralist communities. These include the Samburu, Turkana, Pokot and Maasai. Among the Turkana, an unmarried girl has ostrich eggshell beads decorating her triangular sheepskin apron *(arash)* along the edge and on the wide belt at the back to distinguish her from a married woman, while the pattern displayed by the beads on the apron identifies her clan and location.[16] A Pokot man who kills another in battle wears a string of OES beads until he has undergone a cleansing ceremony.[18] Okiek initiates wear a headdress decorated with OES beads until they come out of seclusion.

Postscript

My personal research indicates that bead making nowadays is a woman's job. My observation, however, is that the beads being made currently are of much lower quality than those from prehistoric times. Is it because the method of manufacture is different, or that the value – aesthetic or symbolic – has changed, so that the quality no longer matters? The number of wild ostriches has also drastically reduced, so it may be rather difficult collecting eggs for the raw material, and the craft may be dying out altogether. Personal communication with Turkana herdsmen indicates that they have to travel further and further away to collect or buy ostrich feathers for their ceremonial headdresses since the birds no longer inhabit the range they used to.

Turkana unmarried girl's apron trimmed with OES beads, from NMK's ethnography collection, 1969.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANGELA KABIRU UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

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Current research interests include cultural tourism, prehistoric beads, cultural landscapes and GIS (geographic information systems) applications in archaeology.
Her most recent article for KP&P, *A short prehistory of Karura Forest,* appeared in issue 42.

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History in stone

A walking tour of ten historic buildings in Nairobi

Nairobi's growth as a city means that most of its historic buildings are now dwarfed by steel and glass giants. Amateur historian Martin Wahogo takes us on a walking tour of 10 overlooked buildings that played a role in the history of the city.

Martin Wahogo

On a fine sunny day in Nairobi in October 1927, Governor Sir Edward Grigg initiated the preservation of historic buildings, monuments and archaeological finds in the Colony of Kenya by signing the document entitled, *An Ordinance to Provide for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments and Objects of Archaeological, Historical, or Artistic Interest*.

The 1927 Ancient Monuments Act was the first of five successive pieces of preservation legislation. It was followed by the acts of 1934, 1962, 1983 and 2005, each one repealing and replacing its predecessor to give us the current legislation that guides the preservation of historical artefacts in Kenya.

Part of the Act states, "Any man-made object or structure dating from before 1895 and any Swahili door carved before 1946

Above:
City Hall: Still a handsome building, it was the tallest in Nairobi when it opened in 1935.

LEGEND: 1. Old PC's House 2. Kipande House 3. Bank of India (Memorial House) 4. McMillan Library 5. Stanbic House 6. Cameo Cinema 7. Stanley Hotel 8. Westminster House 9. City Hall 10. Nairobi Law Courts

A walking tour of Nairobi's historic buildings would start at "Point Zero" (no. 1) and end at today's Supreme Court (no. 10). Map: Google Maps.

are automatically protected. Only historic objects or places dating after 1895 have required gazetting."

It is with this background that I present a compilation of some of Kenya's best preserved buildings. Most of them are on the presently named Kenyatta Avenue and Wabera Street. These two streets are among the oldest in Nairobi and their architectural landmarks trace the growth of the city. Many significant buildings of the time were concentrated in this area, with the critical ones being around City Square, the open quadrangle between City Hall and the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), dominated by the statue of

The Kenyatta statue opposite City Hall, looking towards the Supreme Court Building. Photo: Peta Meyer.

Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta. In earlier days, it was a relaxation spot for the residents of Nairobi, but today it is part of the KICC courtyard and the public can no longer sit there freely.

Under the colonial master plan of 1948, there was to be a grand square called "Kenya Centre" encompassing the critical public buildings in the city, from the McMillan Library at the north end of Wabera Street to City Hall and the Nairobi Law Courts (now the Supreme Court) at the south end. Like many of Nairobi's master plans, this did not come to pass.

A number of the historic buildings shown here now accommodate branches of Kenya's major banks. It seems that the traditional architecture and solidity of the stone appeal to the financial fraternity. Whatever the reason, the buildings are still in use today, as solid as the day they were built.

1. Old PC'S House on Kenyatta Avenue

The first Provincial Commissioner's house was designed by architect C. Rand Overy.

Built in 1913, the historic Provincial Commissioner's (PC's) House, on the junction of Kenyatta Avenue and Uhuru Highway, is one of the oldest stone buildings in Nairobi. It was fondly nicknamed "Hatches, matches and dispatches" by the settler community because it was where births, marriages and deaths were recorded. The building was in danger of falling into private hands before being gazetted in 1993. It was declared a national monument in 1995, handed over to the National Museums of Kenya in 1997 and finally reopened as the Nairobi Gallery in 2006, hosting art exhibitions that are open to all.

It is within this building, with its lovely domed ceiling, octagonal-shaped hall and natural stone walls, that one finds "Point Zero", the spot from which all distances in Kenya are measured.

2. Kipande House on Kenyatta Avenue

Kipande House was designed by the architects Wevill and Davies in 1913.

Kipande House, originally known as the Nayer building, was built in 1913 by wealthy Indian businessman Gurdit Singh. At that time the Kenya-Uganda railway line passed through today's Loita Street and the building was intended as a warehouse and railway depot. Its most striking feature is a unique clock tower, 165 ft high, which made it Nairobi's tallest building until City Hall was built in 1935.

This iconic building became the Nairobi identity card (*kipande*) registration centre for Africans in the pre- and post-WWII period. Today it houses a branch office of the Kenya Commercial Bank.

3. Bank of India building (old Memorial Hall)

Under the Bank of India façade lies the original stonework of the Memorial Hall building.

The white and blue facade that today identifies the Bank of India is a modern addition covering a stone building originally known as Memorial Hall. Situated next to the Cameo Cinema on Kenyatta Avenue, Memorial Hall was the home of the governing Legislative Council (Legco) between 1924 and 1954, and one of the buildings that housed parliament in the years leading up to independence in 1963.

4. McMillan Library on Wabera Street

The McMillan Library building was privately built and donated to the city of Nairobi.

The McMillan Memorial Library was built by Lady Lucy McMillan in 1931 as a memorial to her husband, the pioneer settler, agriculturalist and explorer Sir William Northrup McMillan. Currently Kenya's biggest library, it was designed by C. Rand Overy, the same architect who designed the Old PC's Office. Located at the north end of Wabera street, it has over 270,000 books, as well as an extensive collection of newspapers, journals and periodicals dating back to 1906.

This building is the only Nairobi landmark protected by its own Act of Parliament (The McMillan Library Act, Cap 217), thus ensuring its preservation.

5. Stanbic House on Kimathi Street

Stanbic House was designed by architects Henderson and Partners, who also built the Muthaiga Club.

At the junction of Kenyatta Avenue and Kimathi Street stands Nairobi's first brick building. Now housing a bank, it was built in 1923 by Colonel Ewart Scott Grogan and named Torr House, for his manager Joseph Torr. The building was modelled after the City Hall in Stockholm, Sweden (though nobody remembers why).

Grogan is famous for being the first man to walk from the Cape in South Africa to Cairo, and he did this to win the hand in marriage of Gertrude Harding (for whom his later project, Gertrude's Garden Children's Hospital, is named). Torr's was part of Grogan's vast business empire and popular as an entertainment spot.

Torr House was later bought by Joe Torr, who named it the Torr Hotel. In 1956, he sold it to the Ottoman Bank. It now houses the Stanbic Bank.

6. Cameo Cinema on Kenyatta Avenue

The Cameo Cinema started life as the Theatre Royal.

Cameo Cinema stands next to the Bank of India building on Kenyatta Avenue. Grandly christened the Theatre Royal when it was opened in 1912, this was the first movie theatre in Kenya. More popularly known as “Nairobi's pit of fleas”, it became a fundraising hall and entertainment centre for British troops during the two world wars. The building today houses a casino and a restaurant.

Among its interesting historical records is the fact that its long-term tenant, the Verandah Bar, was for several decades the only entertainment spot in Nairobi with a snooker table.

7. The Stanley Hotel on Standard Street

The Stanley Hotel has been in its present location since 1913.

The Stanley is the oldest hotel in Nairobi, built in 1902 by English businesswoman Mayence Bent as the Victoria Hotel, made up of four rooms, and later renamed after the explorer Sir Henry Morton Stanley.

The hotel has had numerous mishaps including the original being burnt down in 1905, and then rebuilt in its present location in 1913 as the New Stanley Hotel. Abraham Block bought it from Mayence in 1947 and later sold the hotel to the Sarova Group, who then restored the original name of the Stanley Hotel.

It is at this hotel that the idea of a stock exchange was born in 1922, when stocks were bought and sold at the Long Bar. This became formalised as the Nairobi Stock Exchange in 1954. The writer Ernest Hemingway was one of the Stanley's many famous guests and a number of his stories use the hotel as a backdrop.

Among the hotel’s famous spots is the Thorn Tree Café, where an acacia tree was used as a message depot by travellers passing through Nairobi; it served as the growing town's first post office. The hotel is also famous for being the first place to sell Kenya's Tusker Beer in 1922.

8. Westminster House and Pan Africa House

Westminster House now houses Eco Bank.

Built in 1928, and situated on Kenyatta Avenue next to the equally old and similar-looking Pan Africa House, the graciously proportioned and unique Westminster House served as the lodgings for colonial administrators before Kenya's independence. Now housing yet another bank, it is said that the building has an underground tunnel to City Hall that goes all the way to the Parliament Building as well.

9. City Hall on City Hall Way

City Hall was completed in 1935.

City Hall, on City Hall Way, was originally called Nairobi Town Hall and is one of the buildings surrounding City Square. The first Nairobi Town Hall was a wood and iron one-storey building at the junction of Moi Avenue and Kenyatta Avenue. The second one was an equally modest building near Moi Avenue.

City Hall as we know it today was opened during the silver jubilee celebrations of King George V in May 1935, in the same week as the Nairobi Law Courts on the adjacent side of the square. At the time of its opening, the City Hall clock tower made it the tallest building in Nairobi.

As the demand for services kept growing to meet the needs of the expanding city, the Nairobi City Council added building extensions to create more office and conference space. The most recent addition was the 13-storey City Hall Annexe, completed in 1981.

10. Nairobi Law Courts on Wabera Street

The Nairobi Law Courts building was designed by Sir Herbert Baker.

Currently housing the Supreme Court, the Nairobi Law Courts building was officially opened in 1935, the same year as City Hall. It is one of the buildings surrounding City Square. Sited at the opposite end of Wabera Street from the McMillan Library, it was designed in the Palladian style and considered the finest building architecturally in Nairobi when it was unveiled. Nairobi

Law Courts was a court for Europeans; Natives and Asians were not served here.

At its entrance is a fountain topped by the statue of a naked boy wearing a judge's wig and holding a fish, meant to portray that justice is as hard to grasp as a fish, but is nevertheless a process bare for all to see. The symbolism seems to be lost on the present generation of citizens and recently there have been demands for the statue's removal on the grounds that it is obscene.

The statue in front of the Nairobi Law Courts, now the Supreme Court, dates back to the 1940s.

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Martin Wahogo is an internet systems developer with a keen interest in Kenyan history. He has been travelling around Kenya for more than 20 years and shares his knowledge through his pocket guidebook *Know Kenya*. Martin also leads local walking tours and has worked with the National Museums of Kenya, Kenya Wildlife Service and various tour firms. When not developing systems or travelling to learn more about the country, he runs a popular Facebook page on interesting sights around Kenya, http://www.facebook.com/KnowMyKenya.

Further reading:

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2. http://www.nation.co.ke/News/Named+Kenyas+top+15+buildings+/-/1056/1499686/-/mi7dd2z/-/index.html
3. http://dailykenya.blogspot.co.ke/2012/09/top-20-buildings-in-kenya.html
4. https://natekev.wordpress.com/tag/history-of-nairobi-architecture/

Decorated gourd by Patrick Ngui, Ukambani.

Museum pieces: Life once removed

We often use things to say who we are. If that armchair, this or that car, or a favourite teacup says a lot about city folk, isn't it only reasonable that things like a goblet from Marakwet, baskets from Ukambani or an embellished gourd would have a lot to tell us about life in rural Kenya?

Wilhelm Östberg
Translated from Swedish by Charly Hultén

Even if the objects presented in this article (with the exception of one from the colonial era) are still widely used in the places they come from, these particular examples have been retired from actual use. They are museum pieces, whose only contact with human beings is the white cotton gloves of a curator. Once robust utensils in everyday use, they now spend their days under lock and key on a dust-free shelf in a climate-controlled repository. In their former lives they would quickly be replaced when they wore out; now they are preserved for all perpetuity. In the museum they serve a new purpose, namely, to give us insights into the lives of people in the Kerio Valley, Ukambani and other places.

The fact that they were items of everyday life by no means implies that they cannot have a deeper significance. One of the following stories tells of a number of family heirlooms now stored in museum warehouses and the moral dilemma they posed – and continue to pose – to those who acquired them. Was it right to purchase objects that had great meaning to their owners, who were anxious to sell them only because their situation forced them to part with whatever they had that could fetch a price? It was a situation, totally unforeseen, where we were forced to think on our feet and make a decision: to buy or to refrain.

Most acquisitions are uncontroversial. But still, when you enter a storeroom and see necklaces with red, yellow, orange, blue and green beads, each lying in protective tissue paper and stacked one on top of the other in an oxygen-free carton, one of hundreds of such cartons in long rows of cabinets, there's no denying that one feels a little sad. It is dark and quiet in the repository; the humidity of the air is regulated. Each necklace has been numbered, described, photographed and registered in the museum's database. Everything is efficiently managed, well organised. In the museum I see necklaces we acquired in the Kerio Valley. They would be gleaming in the sunshine, worn by eager and enthusiastic women on their way to a market or a ceremonial event. They flashed with colour, pride and wealth. And here they lie, in the silent dusk of the storeroom. Of course, there are plenty of beaded necklaces in the Kerio Valley; the ones we collected are by no means precious rarities. But each necklace was a bearer of dreams, and of tradition. Someone had put aside money (not easy to come by in the Kerio Valley) in order to buy the beads in a *duka* or at a market; had sat hours sewing the beads in place, to make a necklace she was planning to wear at a particular event, or give as a present to a young relative. Can a museum be a keeper of dreams?

In the shadowed alleys between the cabinets I try to summon the vision of cumulus clouds against a clear blue sky, the sounds of cow bells, of water gurgling along an irrigation furrow, the whine of myriad insects and the brilliant metallic colours of small birds. Light, voices, laughter.

The necklaces have become objects of research and display. But when I take them out of the cabinet and hold them in my hands, I sense they long to be out in real life.

Nevertheless museum pieces they are, and all I can do is to try to tell their stories, what they are, and the lives they used to live.

The *soin*: Gathering nature's plenty

One day in the Kerio Valley I was sitting together with a group of men in their thirties, in the shade of an expansive tamarind tree beside a canal. We talked about how the water was distributed, led out in ever smaller trenches to irrigate the fields. There was some talk about the mechanics of it, but above all they discussed the many turns and considerations surrounding how the water is allotted. There were many details, repetitions, revisions, complications. I was taking notes. An older man passed by on the trail alongside us, and one of my group called out: "Hey, Uncle. Where's the fat?"

An odd question, one might think. But the chain of association is this: fat = plenty; plenty = party. The man was on his way to a party. Dressed in a threadbare overcoat, a film noir-style hat, shorts, and sandals made of the treads of recycled tires, he held a slender staff in one hand; in the other, a *soin.* It was the soin that revealed where he was headed.

When a man reaches a certain age, when he has a well-established household and is

eligible to be considered an 'elder', he carves himself a soin. It is often of wood, but may also be made out of woven grass, caulked with cow dung. You start by chopping out a suitable chunk of *mokoiywo* wood, and then carefully form it into a serviceable goblet using a razor-sharp machete. The inside is hollowed out with the help of a curved knife. This particular soin is decorated with bits of aluminium fitted into the wood. Repairs and reinforcements are of aluminium, too. The lug is a metal spiral. The aluminium was formerly a saucepan. If a utensil is cracked or has a hole in it so that it is no longer useful, it is melted down and put to a new use.[1]

A soin is used by men, but only on special occasions. Each man has his own soin and takes it with him to gatherings or ceremonies. It is in the first place used for drinking mead. When I took a soin out of the museum stores to be photographed, I put my nose to it and savoured the lingering aroma: sweet, floral and smoky. Some of the exuberance of the crowds, the sounds and the heat from ceremonies in the Kerio Valley have managed to survive in the climate- and temperature-controlled archive cabinets.

The formal description says a soin is used to drink mead at ceremonial gatherings. But beer brewed using millet and maize, the staple beverage at parties, is also drunk out of the soin, as is water if its owner feels thirsty on the way to or from the festivities. A soin is a subtle label, indicating that its owner is worthy of respect. Using a soin prematurely, before one has come of the proper age and status, is to invite ridicule.

Women drink out of a half gourd or empty cans or mugs of tin or plastic. So do younger men. Mead is served by older men. At ceremonies, mead and beer are distributed among those who are present. The various clans receive their assigned gourdfuls, but it is the older men in each category who administer the mead; it is by their grace that the women and younger men get a taste of it.

A ceremony that is successful has sweetness, the sweetness of honey. In Marakwet it is said that bees collect honey from everything in the surrounding landscape: from flowers, drops of water on a leaf, even from animal carcasses. Out of all this comes honey, sweetness, everything good. All of nature is concentrated in the honey used to brew *kipketin,* mead. In Marakwet ceremonies the power of nature is transferred, via mead, to the people, to the culture. The transfer is literal. Mead is showered over the individuals or objects that are to be blessed. For example: when a woman is expecting her first child, a *barbariso* ceremony is held. It is time for any grudges or disagreements between her clan and that of her husband to be resolved. If they are not put to rest, the lingering discord will keep the baby from coming out, will hinder the birth. In the ceremony all manner of discontent is stirred away (*kebarbar* means to stir). At the end of the ceremony, each of the four elders who organised and hosted the ceremony utters a benediction for the couple, takes a mouthful of mead from his soin and showers kipketin over them.[2]

Now, what have we said about the soin? That it is an emblem for well-established men. It marks distinctions between young and old, between men and women; it tells about how all the wealth of the natural surroundings is brought together to do good in people's lives. A ceremony without mead is in Marakwet unthinkable, and mead is best drunk out of a soin. (For those who have the right to do so.)

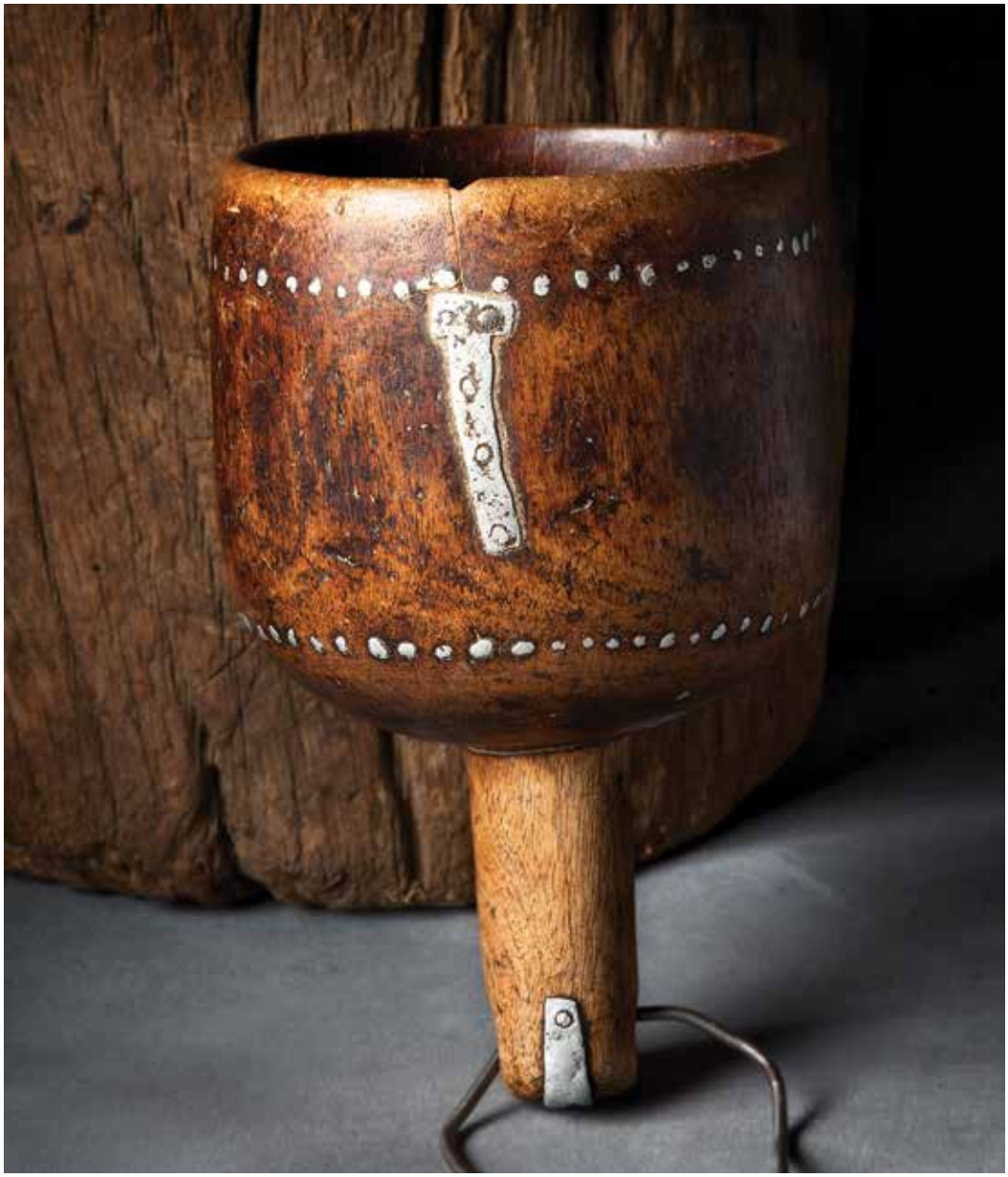
For the people of Marakwet, mead is also a link back to their own history. It embodies

1 I have briefly described this goblet before, in Östberg (2005, pp 54-55).

2 This is an abbreviated version. The ceremony is intricate, and describing all the steps in it and what they symbolize would lead too far afield.

all that their environment offers them, all that they need for their existence, and it is a medium by which they convey blessings. Kipketin links the Marakwet people to their land and to previous generations. It symbolizes an eternal process of re-creation – and it is sweet. *Anyiny,* a ritual creation of 'sweetness', the resolution of anything that might put expectations awry, is to transform something 'bitter' to *sere,* something blessed. The soin is one of the tools for this transformation.

For the visitor to a museum far from Marakwet the goblet offers a sort of darkroom experience, in which some characteristic features of Marakwet society and culture emerge. That idea would not be foreign to people in Marakwet. Losiabuk, who sold this soin to us in the village of Tot in the Kerio Valley, had bought it from someone in Chesongoch because he liked its looks. He was happy that it was going to be shown in a museum far away from his village and agreed that it would be a good ambassador for Marakwet. And soon he planned to carve a soin of his own.



Goblet, *soin,* Marakwet. Height 16 cm.

Kipande, the "native passport"

This is perhaps the most notorious artefact of the colonial era, a *kipande.*

Anyone who wished to leave their home district, for example, to find work on the European-owned farms or in a town, was required to have an official permit to do so. The metal capsule, attached to a thin chain, was worn around the neck. The contents were an ID paper with name, place of birth or residence, fingerprint and information about the person's occupation and place of employment. Officials might at any time ask native Kenyans to show their 'papers'. The official opened the capsule, while its owner stood, hands clasped behind his or her back. The official could see whether the individual had permission to be where he was. It was unlawful for the owner himself to open the capsule. That is what people say today, the people old enough to have experienced those days. And why should we doubt it? Shows of power are, as we know, often more bizarre than rational.

The metal capsule and chain were sold at local general stores. They cost as much as a good, warm blanket.

This kipande belonged to Kiptilak from Sibou village in northern Marakwet. He was born early in the 20th century. When he died, his son, Metoboyon, saved his passport in case the English required it to be returned. Metoboyon had a kipande of his own. The museum acquired Kiptilak's passport from his grandson, Kirotich Kirop, who was born in the 1950s. By now times had changed; Kirotich Kirop has never had to wear a kipande.

Passport, *Nyumba ya kipande* ("house", container for a passport). Length 7.5 cm.

Family heirlooms

For decades now, sisal baskets from Ukambani have been the very best souvenirs visitors to Kenya can buy. Beautiful, durable, fine craftsmanship.

On the road to Ukambani you will always see women walking, weaving baskets as they walk. In their homes they will spend spare moments weaving baskets, between their daily chores. Many women have a basket always in progress. 'Kamba baskets' are a good source of income for many, many households in the region. Of course, they are also put to use – seed is stored in them, textiles, all kinds of things.

The first step in making such a basket is to separate the fibres of the sisal leaf against the slightly dull blade of a machete that has been wedged in the fork of a tree, or the sisal leaf may be pounded on a stump. The woman then rolls the fibres into twine along her thigh.

But this is the time of the terrible drought of 1983/84, and two colleagues from the National Museums of Kenya – Andrew Kite arap Cheptum and Johnstone Kibor Kassagam – and I are visiting the area to purchase sisal baskets for our respective museums' collections. To our surprise, we were also offered antique baskets made of the inner bark of the baobab tree. They are coloured using red ochre and soot. Baskets like these are hardly ever made these days. But many families still have old baskets, and they treat them with reverence. They are more delicate, more elegant than sisal baskets, but perhaps more important they are keepsakes, remembrances of the women who made them.

Now, when there was no longer any food, and when we had bought all the sisal baskets our museums needed, the women brought out some of these old family heirlooms and offered them for sale.

Preparing the fibres from the inner bark of the baobab tree is an intricate process. You start by cutting out a rectangular section of the bark on one side of the tree. (Then you have to wait to let the tree heal before you harvest the section again.) The elephants are competitors in this regard: the bark contains a mineral that they like to eat. Elephants can actually finish so much of a tree's bark that it may be nearly girdled, which can kill the tree.

Once the bark has been 'harvested', the inner bark is stripped away from the outer bark and pounded in a mortar. Small wads of the pounded fibre are then chewed until they are soft enough to be twisted into twine. Preparing the raw material and weaving a basket took one month, provided other chores didn't get in the way. We also saw whole sacks made out of baobab fibre. They were used to store grain.

The fields lay ready for sowing, but week after week had passed without a cloud in the sky. It was the third year running without enough rain. In the family next to the house where we lived, an old woman sat in the shade. She had stopped eating. Whatever little was left in their stores was for the young, those who would sow the new crop, if only the rains would come. This was the predicament the people of the village found themselves in when we were offered baskets made of the inner bark of the baobab tree.[3]

We chose carefully among the baskets put before us. We were looking for baskets that would represent a traditional handicraft from Kitui in our museums for future

3 I have written about this dilemma on a previous occasion, see Östberg (2005), pp 56-58.

generations, and we were anxious to make the right choices. But suddenly one of the women burst out, scolding us: "Now you have chosen three bags from this woman, and none from her neighbour. What sort of people are you? How can you deny her the opportunity to earn a few shillings to buy food for her children? Why do you come here only to treat us like this?"

We were naturally intent on acquiring the best for the museums and, by extension, the taxpayers who ultimately would be paying for the baskets. At the same time, that meant that we were denying people who were hungry a chance to buy food they so badly needed. Should we instead have made our choices so that as many people as possible would at least have been helped a little?

On this particular occasion there were about 15 women present and a good number of children. Most of the baskets were of such quality that they might well be exhibited in a museum. A handful were masterpieces. The money we had was not enough to buy all the baskets. If we chose only the most exquisite, a few families would be able to get through the crisis and have money to spare. If we bought a basket from each of the families, the level of quality in our collections would have suffered, but the women we were bargaining with would have been more satisfied.

The intermezzo cast a sudden shadow over our professional roles. But we assured one another that it was important for a traditional handicraft to be preserved in our museums. Furthermore, droughts are a recurrent phenomenon in Ukambani, and selling one's valuable possessions is a tried and true means people use to get by.[4] That sounds good enough, but the fact remains that our museums came by these heirlooms because people were starving. We hadn't stolen the baskets, but we did take advantage of a desperate situation. The women offering the items for sale had no other choice.

What to do? We were museum people, not aid workers. Should we haggle over prices with people in need, or deny them the chance to solve their problems in the manner they had chosen?

We decided the best solution was this: We bought the best baskets for our museums, while we made sure that everyone sold at least one of the baskets they offered. A pragmatic solution, yet the fact remains that we were able to acquire cultural treasures only made available to us because of the famine. Few of the women we did business with would ever replace the old baskets made of baobab fibre. They would use the coarser but readily available sisal. We appeased our consciences with the thought that perhaps their grandchildren would one day value being able to see these well-preserved old baskets on display in the museum. A rationalisation born of the terrible drought in Ukambani.

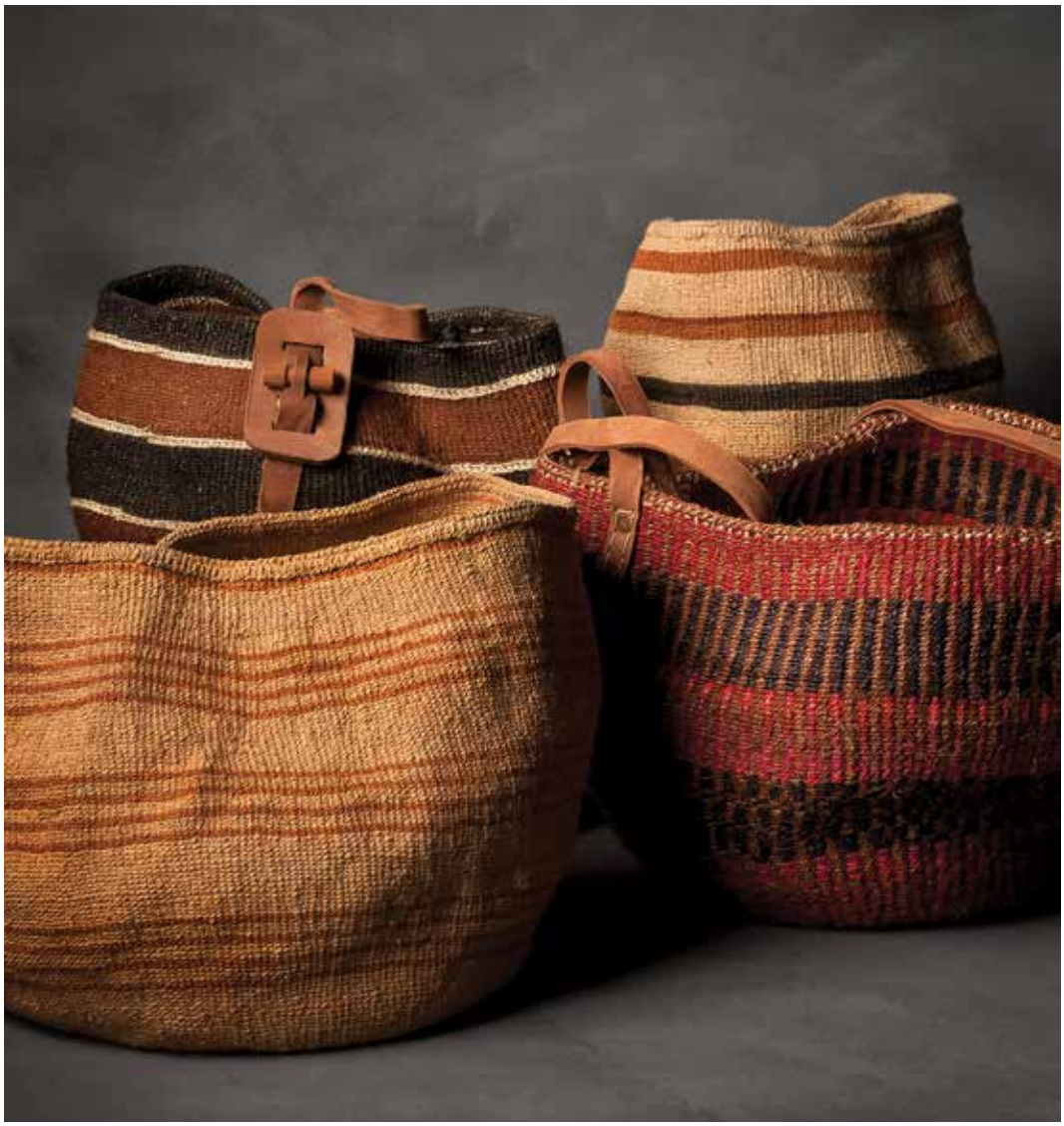
Looking back, I am not at all sure that we even acted in the best interests of our institutions. Displaying the baskets with the text, "Baskets made of the inner bark of baobab. Kamba, Kitui, Kenya. Early to mid-twentieth century" and a little information about how they are made leaves visitors to the museum in the dark about the desperate famine of 1983-84, without which the baskets would never have been on display.

Might not a collection of baskets of a range of qualities be more informative? Wouldn't it be interesting to know that the sellers had insisted that the museum purchase baskets from everyone, not just a few? Isn't that important? Isn't the story the items have to tell more important than how well they are made?

4 O'Leary (1984) p 24.

In the confines of the museum a baobab basket will never be used to store or carry things. The memory of the great-grandmother who made it is lost on the visitors to the museum. The basket has lost its purpose and meaning, its life. Removed as it is to an alien world, it needs to be given new tasks: it should afford visitors to the museum a sense, an inkling of the lay of the land, of the climate, of day-to-day life in Ukambani. It should say something about local skills and traditions. But, above all, it should give voice to its former owners. In this case, she says: "We are, and our children's lives are, more important than your museum collections. Do something that makes life easier for your fellow human beings." And she surely has other things to say that I don't know, but that visitors may hear her say, provided they are told more than merely that what they are looking at is a basket from eastern Kenya.

When we were selecting the baskets, we focused on acquiring the finest examples. Instead, I think we should have heeded the woman who demanded that everyone be represented. Had we collected a cross-section of the baskets, sought to portray what *is* rather than show only the most exquisite examples, would we not have made it easier for museum visitors to grasp what life is like in Ukambani?



Baskets, *vyondo,* Kitui. Two baskets made of baobab fibre, two of sisal fibre. Heights: 21–30 cm. Diameters: 21–32 cm.

The many virtues of a half gourd

What is the most common item in settlements in the Kenyan countryside? Making generalisations about a whole country is of course risky business, but still, I would put my money on the half gourd. Wherever you go, you're sure to find them. Leaning against a wall, turned upside down to dry after washing the dishes, or set aside in a quiet corner with tomatoes or something else in them. They are used as bowls at meals; they are used to store flour and to transport grain. A six-year-old may feed their younger sister or brother porridge out of a half gourd. People drink water out of them, or milk, or millet beer.

Before sowing, seed is cleaned and sorted in half gourds. After the harvest, grain is separated from the chaff with the help of two half gourds. Potters keep clay in them.

There are less mundane uses, too. Seers keep birds' bones in a half gourd – or pebbles or cowry shells or whatever else enables them to gaze into the unknown. Healers do the same with the substances they use. And where would one store the chalk powder that figures in so many ceremonies, if not in a half gourd? Another gourd will be used to collect the blood of a ritually sacrificed animal. Food and drink for ancestor spirits are set out in them.

Frequently, decorative patterns are burned into the gourd shell – dashes that look like the tracks of a bird or waves or triangles that represent the three cooking stones, the symbol for woman. The skin of a gourd is easily scored. It invites decorative carving. In 1910/11, Swedish ethnographer Gerhard Lindblom documented bas relief designs on half gourds in Ukambani, in eastern Kenya: Mount Kilimanjaro, crocodile, zebra, arrowhead, rhinoceros, snake, frog, stool, coin. What did the figures symbolise? Lindblom writes that people decorated the gourds for aesthetic reasons, for "the pleasure of the work for its own sake. Possibly some medicine man puts magic signs on his apparatus. But on the whole it is all pure ornament".[5]

In the 1970s, artist Peter Nzuki, born and raised in Ukambani, happened to read Lindblom's monograph and was fascinated. He started carving gourds, which he sold to a couple of galleries in Nairobi and the National Museum shop. When his nephew Patrick Ngui finished school, he moved in with his uncle and started working in the atelier, carving gourds and making drawings, which he sold to a souvenir shop on Mokhtar Dada Street in Nairobi. When his father died, Patrick Ngui moved home to his village, Thaka, in Ukambani, to run the family farm and to marry. He continues to carve gourds for extra income.

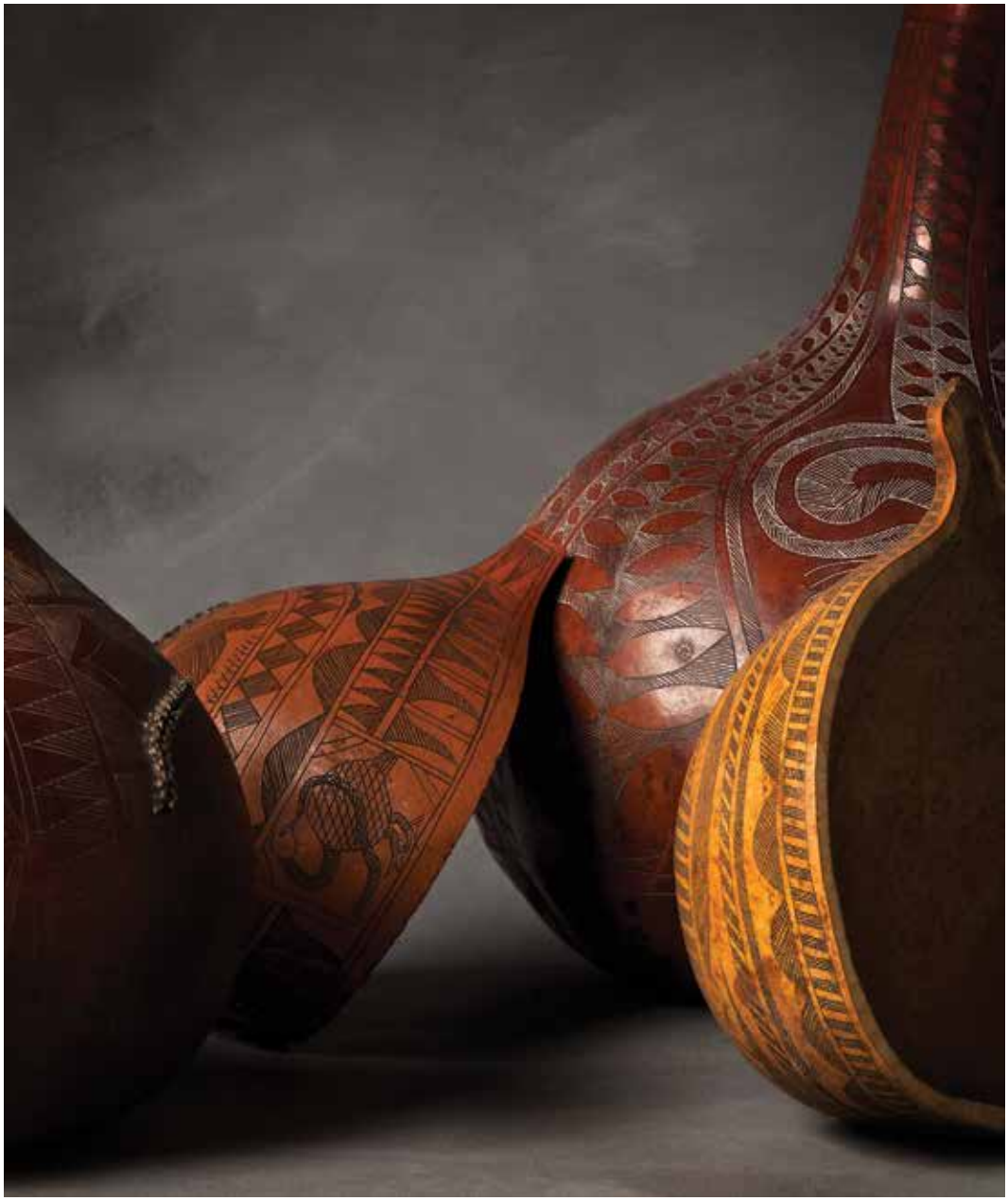
Patrick Ngui produces two to three gourds a day in the periods when he has free time. He works with his knife directly, without preliminary sketches. He generally starts by dividing the gourd into two sections, and then fills the one field with animals, for example, and the other with something else.

He likes to depict scenes of country life: the honeyguide that leads the hunter to bee hives, or herds of cattle, village dances. Patrick Ngui, too, has seen the pictures of the old gourds in Lindblom's monograph. "Those images are hard to do, but they are very beautiful." He enjoys carving gourds and keeps several favourites in his home as decoration. But in contrast to those who carved the gourds seen by Lindblom in Ukambani more than a century ago, he emphasizes meanings in his patterns and images. Is this perhaps an adaptation to the market? Tourists hunger after glimpses of local folklore, and Patrick Ngui's images are

5 Lindblom (1919/20), p 370.

popular. We survey the motifs he is working on at the moment: "The elephant means good luck. If you meet an elephant at the start of the hunt, the hunt will be successful. If you meet him on a journey, you will find what you are looking for. The zebra is beautiful and does no one harm. She is like a woman, they have the same character. We do not eat zebras – they are like donkeys, so you cannot eat them. But the rhinoceros is dangerous, his heart is like ours. His anger is aroused in an instant, then he calms down and lopes off into the forest and has soon forgotten what it was that bothered him. When we humans calm down, we instead ask forgiveness. The ostrich and the snake embrace. The ostrich brings food to the snake; the snake protects the ostrich's nest. That's why they are friends. Or maybe it is only because the shells of ostrich eggs are so thick that the snake can't get into them."

Clearly, the stories are enticing and his gourds do sell.



Gourds carved by Patrick Ngui, Peter Nzuki and a gourd from Ukambani collected by Gerhard Lindblom in 1912. Length: largest 58 cm, smallest 24 cm. Width: largest 35 cm, smallest 22 cm.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY SANDIN

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Dr Wilhelm Östberg is Associate Professor in Social Anthropology, formerly curator of African studies at the Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm, and currently affiliated researcher at the Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University. Together with colleagues in the National Museums of Kenya he has participated in a number of field collections in different parts of Kenya. His recollections of working in the Kerio Valley appeared as "Life among the Marakwet" in issue 42 of *Kenya Past and Present*.

... AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Tony Sandin is a noted Swedish photographer, who is particularly recognised for his photographic field work among Native American tribes in South Dakota, USA. He has had several solo exhibitions and frequently participates in group exhibitions. He is currently affiliated with the Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm.

ZHENG HE IN AFRICA

A coin found on Manda Island near Lamu may provide direct evidence that the early 15th century Chinese treasure ships visited Kenya.

Above:
One of the most famous paintings of the Chinese treasure ships, by celebrated artist-historian Herb Kawainui Kane. Photo by Peter von Buol.
The Yongle coin found on Manda Island. Photo: Chicago Field Museum.

Peter von Buol

An international team of scientists has recently completed its scientific analysis of a small copper and silver coin found during a 2013 archaeological excavation on Manda Island in the archipelago of Lamu, off the Kenyan coast. The researchers, led by Dr Chapurukha Kusimba, have concluded the coin is an authentic early 15th century coin issued by Chinese Emperor Zhu Di, who reigned as Yongle, the third Emperor of China's Ming Dynasty.

Yongle (Chinese for perpetual happiness) reigned from 1402 to 1424 and the coin may provide direct evidence of the early 15th century visits to Africa by the ships of Chinese Admiral Zheng He.

"Zheng He's fleet definitely came to Africa and probably the Kenyan coast, according to the first–hand account written by Ma Huan, [one of the many translators] who sailed with the fleet. Zheng He was, in many ways, the Christopher Columbus of China. It's wonderful to have [found] a coin that may ultimately prove he came to Kenya," said Dr Kusimba, a professor of anthropology at the American University in Washington D.C. and a research associate at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Kusimba is also a senior research associate at the National Museums of Kenya.

The authenticity of the coin was verified by one of Kusimba's collaborators, Dr Tiequan Zhu, associate professor of anthropology at Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou.

"The coin was issued by Emperor Yongle (1402–1424) in the Ming Dynasty. It was cast by one of the imperial mints for use as standard currency, although some may have thought such coins brought good luck as well," said Kusimba.

However, while the dates correspond with the Zheng He voyages, Kusimba believes more work must be done to verify visits by the Chinese treasure ships. "Chinese coins were widely circulated in those days, and old coins continued to be in use for hundreds of years after the relevant emperor's death.[1] Emperor Yongle issued a lot of coins, too, meaning that ours is not rare in itself, although perhaps of great historical importance. So, we should continue to be cautious in what we say while we are going ahead," Kusimba added.

Manda is an obvious location for such a coin to appear in the archaeological record. Throughout the 15th century, the island was an important East African stop for international traders and diplomats. The coin, discovered on the first day of their excavation, provides an intriguing clue for relationships initiated and maintained 500 years ago by imperial China and the peoples of East Africa.

Admiral Zheng He's voyages to East Africa

Throughout his reign, the emperor Yongle pursued diplomatic missions to far-flung lands. In 1403, the emperor initiated construction of a large fleet of ships in the imperial shipyard near Nanjing. Meant to project military power and diplomacy, the ships were designed to carry military personnel and diplomats as well as sailors, soldiers, merchants, doctors, pharmacists, astronomers, court officials, tailors, carpenters, cooks, translators, eunuchs and concubines. Chosen by the emperor to command the fleet was Admiral Zheng He, a trusted court official who happened to be a practicing Muslim, something that gave him an affinity with the peoples he met in the countries of the Indian Ocean rim, including the islands and coastline of East Africa.

Between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He commanded a total of seven voyages to the western Indian Ocean. His ships carried silk, porcelain, ceramics and lacquered goods, and the admiral was sent out by the Chinese emperor to impress all those he visited. He was instructed to "show kind treatment to distant peoples"[2] and to bear gifts of great treasure to foreign rulers, and to return with foreign ambassadors as well as "tribute" in the form of gifts to China.

1 A similar coin was found in 2010 by a joint team of Kenyan and Chinese archaeologists in Mambrui, a village just north of Malindi on Kenya's north coast.

2 From the monument at Ch'ang-lo, in Fukien province, erected by Zheng He in 1432.

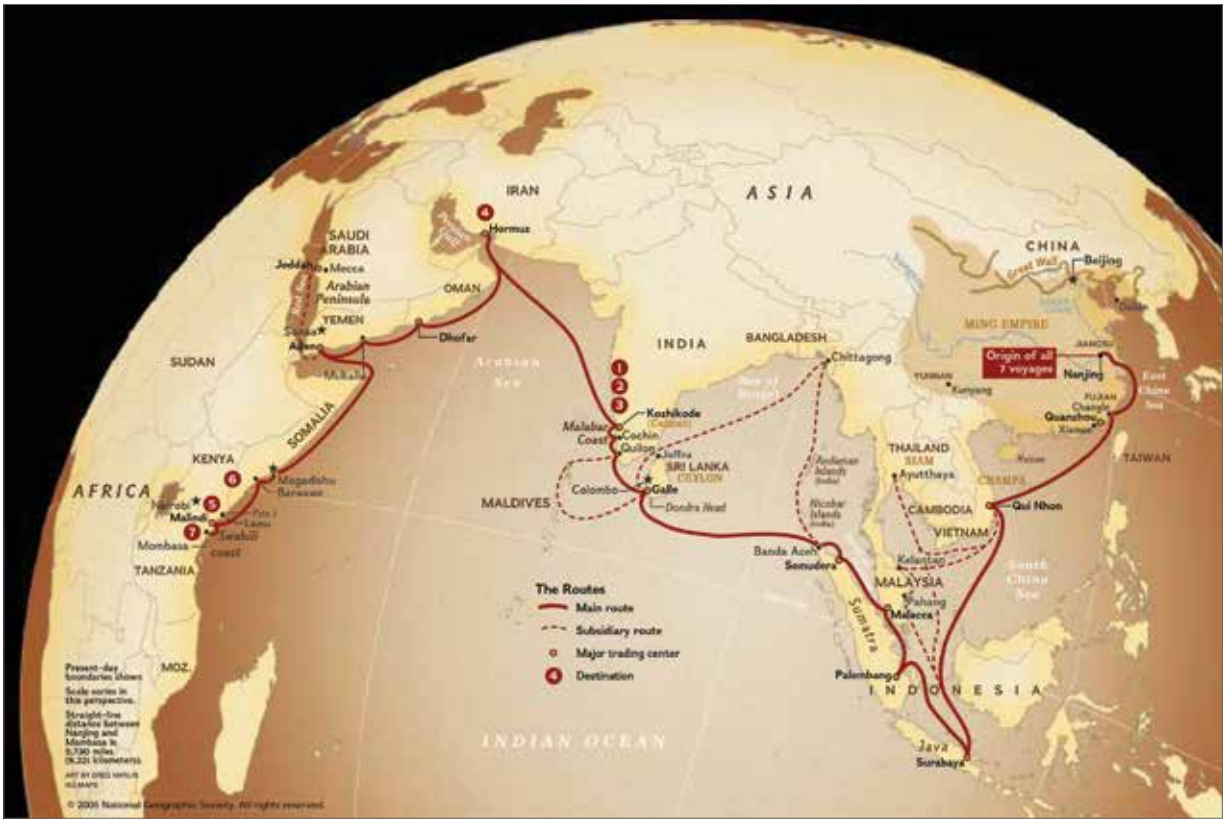
According to the late artist-historian Herb Kawainui Kane, who was an acknowledged expert on the historic voyages of the middle ages, Zheng He's voyages were meant to "speak softly" and "carry a big stick".

"Awed by the artistry of Chinese wares, yet cautioned by the floating display of China's military muscle, 'barbarian' rulers might be brought into a co-prosperity sphere with China as its centre. And safety for Chinese traders was urgently needed. Pirates were [at that time] strangling the sea-routes, and the caravan route to the Middle East had been made hazardous by the bloody rampages of the Mongol leader Tamerlane," wrote Kane in a personal communication with the author.

Prior to his appointment as admiral of the fleet, Zheng He had already impressed his emperor as a capable administrator and military leader. Contemporaries described him as being physically powerful, having great height and girth. His physical attributes, as well as his intelligence, impressed all those with whom he came into contact. He also possessed a unique voice, which his contemporaries said rang like a bell. This is not surprising as he had been castrated as a youth to serve as a eunuch in the imperial court.

By 1405, the admiral commanded a fleet of about 1,180 ships that included battleships, troop ships, supply ships and cavalry ships. The largest, and most impressive, were the emperor's treasure ships.

The wooden ships of Zheng He's fleet were technological marvels of their age and possibly among the largest wooden ships ever built. The size of the ships, however, continues to spark debate. Although historical accounts record their size as having been about 137 metres in length (a measurement corroborated by a 10-m long rudder post discovered at the former imperial shipyard in Nanjing), current research indicates that such as ship would not have been seaworthy.



The routes of Zheng He's seven voyages across the Indian Ocean. Map: National Geographic, 2005.

The monument to Admiral Zheng He that stands in Malacca, on the west coast of Malaysia. Photo by Hassan Saeed, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The largest ship of Zheng He's fleet was probably about 69 m, comparable in length to Lord Nelson's flagship, the HMS Victory, which was not built until some 250 years later.

According to Kane, who researched intensively into shipbuilding methods: "Their size was possible only by the Chinese method of building hulls of successive layers of planking, reinforced with interior bulkheads – a technique that results in hulls equal in strength to steel. Other Chinese innovations included the stern rudder, watertight compartments, leeboards, fully battened sails, gunpowder, cannon and the magnetic compass."

The first voyage into the Indian Ocean (1405-1407) cleared the Malacca Straits of pirates. Zheng He and his men captured their leader and successfully opened a major trade route to the Indian Ocean. By the 1420s, Zheng He's ships had visited Calicut, on India's west coast, Hormuz, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea. Zheng He was from an Islamic family and it is believed he made a personal pilgrimage to Mecca.

"Down the coast of Africa, Zhang He's ships visited the major cities, from Mogadishu to Mombasa, and there is evidence the Chinese knew of Zanzibar and Madagascar. A Chinese map defining the Southern Cape suggests that some of his ships may have rounded it into the Atlantic Ocean," Kane added.

Archaeologists continue to find fragments of Chinese porcelain set in niches or embedded in the masonry of ancient buildings along the African coast, such as at the ruins of Gedi, Pate, Takwa and Jumba la Mtwana,[3] in Kenya.

While Zheng He's voyages were meant to project China's prestige throughout the Indian Ocean, they were also meant to demonstrate the glory of Yongle's reign to his own subjects. One of the most prestigious gifts to arrive in China was a giraffe, reputedly from Malindi, sent via the ruler of Bengal. The giraffe seemed to the Chinese to be a real-life version of a legendary animal, the *Qilin* (Chee-Lin), a mythical hoofed creature whose appearance marked the arrival of an illustrious ruler.

The voyages continued throughout the reign of Yongle but remaining evidence suggests that some resented the high costs associated with them. Many officials in the Ming Court failed to grasp the advantages of sea power. Faced with the Mongol threat on the northern frontier, the advisors to Yongle's successor persuaded him to abandon voyaging altogether. After the return of the last voyage in 1433, the many ships of Zheng He's fleet were either converted to serve as grain barges on China's inland canals and rivers or left to rot in harbours.

To discourage future overseas ventures, court officials destroyed most of the records associated with Zheng He's fleet. Even images of the great fleet were burned.

Among the only remaining records in China is a monument built by Zheng He himself in 1432. Erected at Ch'ang-lo, on the coast of Fukien province, and dedicated to Mazu,

3 These sites of ancient settlements along the Kenyan coast are gazetted national monuments under the protection of the National Museums of Kenya.

Painted silk scroll depicting the African giraffe that arrived in the court of the Yongle emperor in 1414.The scroll is now displayed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

the goddess of sailors, the inscription on its stone surface reads, in part:

> The Emperor, approving our loyalty and sincerity, has ordered us [Zheng He] and others at the head of several tens of thousands of officers and troops to embark more than a hundred large ships to go and […] make manifest the transforming power of the imperial virtue, and to show kind treatment to distant peoples. From [1405] until now, we have seven times received the commission of ambassadors to the countries of the Western Ocean. The barbarian countries we have visited are: by way of Champa [now Vietnam], among others, Java, Palembang, Siam, Ceylon, Calicut, Cochin (in India), Aden on the Red Sea, and Mogadishu in East Africa. All together we have sailed to more than thirty countries, large and small.[4]

Zheng He's voyages had occurred long before the Europeans came to dominate the Indian Ocean trade routes. The voyages were already a distant memory in 1498 when the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama first reached the shores of East Africa. Da Gama and his men were astonished when their African hosts spoke of previous light-skinned visitors from a distant land whose ships, much larger than those the Portuguese travelled in, had been full of highly desirable trade goods, the remains of which continue to turn up in archaeological sites today.

The excavation on Manda Island

According to Kusimba, the archaeological excavations on Manda have yielded clues about the extent of the trading relationships between the local peoples and the outside world, not just China.

"It is obvious, based on the relatively higher than usual proportion (8–10%) of non-local archaeological artefacts, that trade played a crucial role in the development of Manda. Trade linked diverse peoples and communities in a network of interactions that had a huge impact in the advancement of daily life," Kusimba said.

"The island of Manda was home to an advanced civilization from about 600 AD to 1430 AD. The island was briefly reoccupied from about 1500 to 1750 AD, when the last residents left because the well water had become salty. Trade played an important role in the development of Manda, and [the Yongle] coin may show trade's importance on the island dating back much earlier than previously thought."

"We know Africa has always been connected to the rest of the world, but the coin we found opens a discussion about a direct relationship between China and the western Indian Ocean nations."

4 Translation by Joseph Needham in the series *Science and Civilisation in China*, published between 1954 and 2008 by the Cambridge University Press.

The ruined walls of Takwa, on Manda Island, where Chinese as well as Islamic pottery fragments have been found, showing a long history of trade. Photo by Kevin Borland, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Kusimba stresses it is important for archaeological work to continue on Manda and believes additional evidence of the Chinese presence will be uncovered. He adds that continued investigation of sites on Manda and Mtwapa have provided details about the region's economic development throughout the 14th and 15th centuries that have challenged and overturned previously held beliefs about eastern Africans' abilities to innovate and build their own economic infrastructure, finding ways of engagement that made the region attractive to foreign merchants and investors.

"Our ongoing research at Manda (and Mtwapa) has irreversibly revised early models that proposed migration as the primary catalyst for regional cultural transformations. It now appears that adoption of agriculture, market-based exchange and urban-centred state structures were the main catalyst for building communal and personal wealth. [There was] a steady transformation of the villages and hamlets into small towns, cities and, ultimately, to city states that hosted large and diverse citizenry. This is evident not only at our sites but also other regions of eastern and southern Africa, including southern Zambezia [now Zimbabwe]," Kusimba said.

For trade to have prospered, relationships and socio-political stability were crucial. Kusimba believes that research at Manda will play a crucial role as a model in discovering how market-based exchange and urban-centred political economies arose.

"The people of Manda understood the importance of building networks of alliances. Through these connections, they successfully created a little paradise that was the envy of their neighbours. In the end, they really couldn't hang on to what they had created. The pendulum swung elsewhere. Perhaps there was a power shift to nearby Shanga on Pate Island. Be that as it may, the wealth that had been experienced by Manda in its heyday was not to be recreated anywhere [else nearby], at least until much later on Zanzibar," said Kusimba in conclusion.

The expedition was jointly led by Kusimba and Dr Sloan R. Williams, associate professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Dr Janet Monge, associate professor of anthropology at University of Pennsylvania and curator of biological anthropology at Penn Museum, and Mohammed Mchulla, staff scientist at the Fort Jesus Museum of Mombasa. The researchers also found human remains and other artefacts that predate the coin.

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Pygmy tales:
Tall stories about short people in East Africa

Anthropologist Martin Walsh recalls his encounter with a former arrow poison trader who told of his capture and imprisonment underground by a group of *Wabilikimo*, the fabled Pygmies of the East African interior.

Ever since ancient times, marvellous yarns have been told about the existence of diminutive peoples in faraway lands. Despite their modern identification with short statured hunter-gatherers in the rainforests of Africa, the telling of similar tales has not entirely abated. Was this just another tall story about short people, or a mangled memory of real events?

Martin Walsh

Above:
Missionary Johannes Rebmann's 1848 sketch map of East Africa, where the *Wabilikimo*, "people of low stature", are shown in the vicinity of Kikuyu country (top left). Map by courtesy of the Johannes Rebmann Foundation and Gerlingen City Archive.

The dry landscape between Tsavo West and Tsavo East, with Mt Kasigau in the background, where Mwaro Marai recounted his tale of being captured by Pygmies.

16 November 1987. It was a hot afternoon in the dry landscape between Tsavo West and Tsavo East national parks that is dominated by Mount Kasigau. I was nearing the end of more than a month's stay in the village of Kisimeni, and in a hurry to complete my survey of the scattered households of the members of Mwangaza women's group. One of my last interviewees was Mwaro Marai, a man in his 50s whose second wife (of three) was also a member of the group. Mwaro was a Giriama, originally from Mariakani, who had moved to this mixed community of Taita, Duruma and Kamba in 1972. After we had talked at length about his family's farming and other enterprises, conversation turned to Mwaro's past employment. For many years he had been a railroad worker, and was still chasing after his retirement cheque from the Kenya Railways Corporation. When he was a younger man, though, in the last decade of British rule, he had travelled far and wide selling arrow poison.

When I heard this, my ears pricked up. *Utsungu*, literally 'bitterness', is the deadly *Acokanthera*-based poison made by different peoples in the hinterland of the Kenya coast. It was used most notoriously by Waata hunters to kill elephants and other large game in Tsavo before they were stopped from doing so after the creation of the national parks in 1948.[1] I had been tracking down information on a related but little-known group of former hunter-gatherers called the Degere, who live on both sides of the Kenya-Tanzania border near the coast, and was delighted when Mwaro told me that he had sold arrow poison to them in the far northeast of what was then Tanganyika, and indeed had stayed with them there for six months in 1959.[2] Conscious that I had three more homesteads to visit before nightfall, I scribbled down as much as he could tell me about their livelihoods, language and history in response to my eager questioning.

But Mwaro wasn't done there. He followed this with a sketch of his further adventures in late colonial Tanganyika: the good life in the high Pare Mountains, where his hosts generously offered him their daughters; his encounter with people who twittered like birds when they were speaking; and last but not least, his capture by the fabled *Wabilikimo*.

I was amazed and incredulous. The diminutive Wabilikimo, whom he described

as having comparatively large heads and short torsos, had held him captive in one of their underground dwellings. From a distance these looked just like anthills, but in fact were subterranean houses, covered in earth. Unlike the Degere at that time, they were a sedentary people, and were properly dressed. Mwaro located them a mere twelve kilometres or so from Dodoma in central Tanzania, but later in our conversation said that they neighboured both the Sandawe – north of Dodoma – and the Sukuma, whose traditional territory is much further to the northwest. I asked about their language, and Mwaro told me that they had their own. Their morning greeting exchanges began with the senior of two saying "Hu hu!", to which the appropriate reply from a junior was "Ho hu" – at least that's what I recorded in my notebook, even though it sounded as though it might have come out of a fairy tale.[3]

I didn't have time to quiz Mwaro about the circumstances of his alleged capture and subsequent release by the Wabilikimo, or to press him on other details and ask for more. As it happens this was my last chance: we didn't speak again at length before I left Kisimeni and returned to Mombasa two days later.

The name 'Pygmy' derives from the ancient Greek word that meant 'fist' and, by extension, a measure of length from the elbow to the knuckles, the short forearm cubit. For lack of an agreed alternative, it is still used to describe the short statured peoples of Central Africa, though many would prefer to use the names of the different ethnic groups that this sometimes pejoratively used term encompasses. Some researchers refer to the Pygmies collectively as rainforest hunter-gatherers, but they are neither restricted to the rainforest nor exclusively reliant on hunting and foraging for their subsistence.

Pygmies, ancient and modern

Listening to Mwaro's tale, I imagined that I had been carried back into a faraway time when Pygmies were the subject of both geographical speculation and myth. The ancient Egyptians were familiar not only with physical dwarfs but also aware that there were populations of short statured peoples living to their south, and were entertained at court by both. The Greeks and Romans of classical antiquity likewise located the Pygmies on the edges of the known world, placing them in either India or Ethiopia.[4] Writing in the 5th century BC, Herodotus famously recounted the story of five chief's sons of the Nasamones (a Libyan tribe) who ventured across the waterless desert until "they at last, after many days, saw trees growing on a plain":

> "They approached the trees and tried to pick the fruit that was growing on them, but as they were doing so were set upon by small men of less than normal human stature, who captured them and took them

A Greek *chous* wine vessel, 430–420 BC, shows a Pygmy fighting a crane, National Archaeological Museum of Spain. Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen, CC BY 2.5.

> away. The two groups—the Nasamones and their guides—could not understand each other's language at all. They were taken through vast swamps and on the other side of these swamps they came to a town where everyone was the same size as their guides and had black skin. The town was on a sizeable river, which was flowing from west to east, and in it they could see crocodiles."[5]

Herodotus thought that this river was the Nile; others have suggested the Niger or one of its tributaries. In another tale told in *The Histories*, the Persian navigator Sataspes was said to have sailed for some months down the Atlantic coast of Africa as far as "a country inhabited by small people who wore clothes made out of palm leaves". In this case it was the Pygmies who fled to the hills when the foreign sailors landed and took their livestock.[6]

European knowledge of African Pygmies and their whereabouts advanced very little over the next two millennia. In his *Anatomy of a Pygmie*, published in 1699, Edward Tyson described the dissection of a chimpanzee from Angola and sought to prove that "the *Pygmies* of the Ancients were a Sort of *Apes*, and not of *Humane Race*".[7] It took a few decades for this terminological confusion to be cleared up, following which it wasn't until the 20th century that the fully human status of African Pygmies was recognised and the distribution of different ethnic groups in and around the equatorial rainforest began to be accurately mapped.

Anthropologists and linguists are still describing these diverse peoples and their complex social, economic, and cultural relationships with their taller neighbours. Recent research, meanwhile, has suggested that the various groups of Pygmies share a common genetic origin, and diverged from the ancestors of other African populations around 70,000 years ago. The details of this history, however, remain to be elucidated, and some groups of Pygmies evidently have a much more recent shared ancestry.[8]

The two-cubit Wabilikimo

I later realised that there were much closer models for Mwaro's tale. Rumours of the presence of Pygmies in the East African interior were first recorded by European visitors to the coast, and were clearly derived from local sources. Lieutenant Thomas Boteler of the Royal Navy, who visited Mombasa on a number of occasions in the period between 1823 and 1825, was the first to write of the short statured people whom Mwaro called Wabilikimo:

> "Immediately inland of the Wanne-kahs reside the Meric Mungoans, who likewise speak a different language. [...] These people state that in one district between their country and that of the Wannekahs there is a pigmy race of people who scarcely attain the height of three feet: they call them Mberikimo, and affirm the fact of their existence with many protestations of veracity. They assert that the journey from Mombas to that country would take six weeks."[9]

Boteler's 'Wanne-kahs' are the *Wanyika*, an old name for the Mijikenda peoples of the coastal hinterland, whose subgroups include Mwaro's Giriama. The 'Meric Mungoans' are the *Marimangao*, an archaic nickname for the Kamba, whose homeland (Ukambani) is to the west of the semi-arid Tsavo but who traded regularly with the Mijikenda and Swahili of the coast. 'Mberikimo' is *Mbirikimo* or *Mbilikimo*, the singular of the ethnonym, the most common Swahili form of which is Wabilikimo, sometimes *Wambilikimo*, or *Wabirikimo*.

We next hear of the diminutive Wabilikimo in the journals of the Church Missionary Society's Reverend Johann Ludwig Krapf.

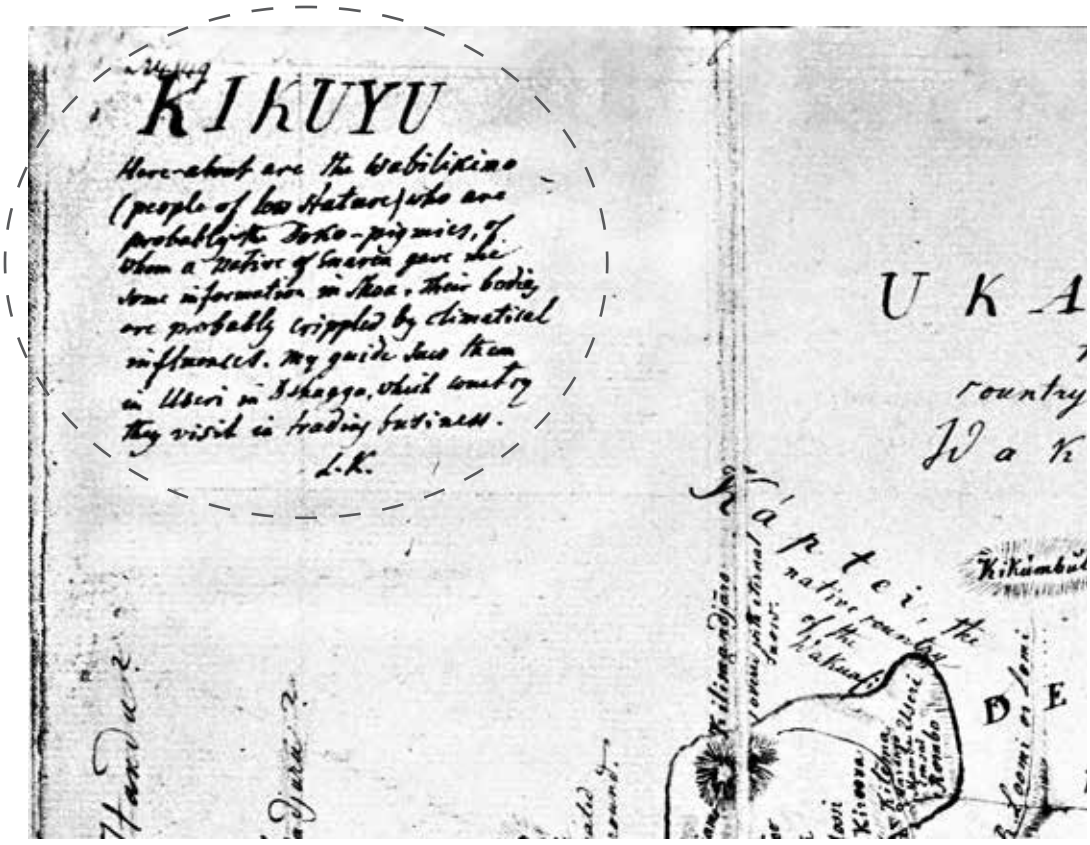
The following entry was written at Rabai on 13 May 1847:

> "Our servant Amri told us some fabulous tales of the Wabilikimo, that is, of the pigmies, and cannibals in the interior. There is said to be a tribe in the interior by whom human beings are fattened for slaughter. A Mnika, it appears, once escaped from a house, where he was to have been slaughtered for dinner. The Wabilikimo in the interior, it would seem, place low seats for their stranger-guests, which by the pressure fix themselves to the seat of honour, and hinder them from rising. I conjecture that these stories have been invented by the Wakamba and the caravan leaders, in order to deter the inhabitants of the coast from journeying into the interior, so that their monopoly of the trade with the interior may not be interfered with. In Abessinia, too, I used to hear similar stories of cannibals, invented by the slave dealers, to terrify the slaves with the fear of being eaten up if they were to loiter on the road or run away."[10]

Mwaro, it seems, was not the first coastal trader to claim that he had been captured by the Wabilikimo.

In September 1848 Krapf marked the Wabilikimo, "people of low stature", on a sketch map drawn by his fellow missionary Johannes Rebmann, placing them in the vicinity of "Kikuyu", to the west of Ukambani. He suggested that they might be the same as a group of Pygmies called the Doko that he had heard about during his earlier travels in Abyssinia, and added: "Their bodies are probably crippled by climatical influences. My guide saw them in Useri in Dshagga, which country they visit in trading business", the latter being a reference to Usseri in Uchaga, on the eastern slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro.[11] On a later map, dated 4 April 1850, Rebmann located the Wabilikimo to the west of Kilimanjaro and south of Kikuyu country. He wrote:

> "Wabilikimo ... literally the two-measuring, i.e. twice the measure from



Detail of Johannes Rebmann's 1848 map. The note about the Wabilikimo (circled) is signed "L.K.", i.e. Ludwig Krapf. Map by courtesy of the Johannes Rebmann Foundation and Gerlingen City Archive.

> the middle finger to the elbow, which of course is an exaggeration, but they are no doubt a diminutive race of men. They come to Jagga, to trade, where they are called Wakoningo."[12]

By this time Rebmann had been on three journeys to Uchaga ('Jagga'), and made notes on the Wabilikimo during at least the second of these, when he placed them to the northwest of Mount Kilimanjaro.[13] The 'Wakoningo' (also *Wakonyingo*, *Wakonongo*) were still remembered in 20th century Chaga traditions as the aboriginal inhabitants of Kilimanjaro, though little more was known about their identity.[14] It is quite possible that they were already a mythical people when Rebmann heard about them.

In July 1850, at the start of his second journey to Ukambani, Krapf gathered more information about the Wabilikimo from some Kamba traders:

> "On the 15th we were met by a caravan of Wakamba coming from the interior with ivory to the coast, and to some of them, who seated themselves on the ground beside me, I explained the object of my journey; after which, a Mkamba told me that in his youth he had travelled to Mbellete, and had then proceeded into the country of the Wabilikimo, or "little people" (pigmies). The distance between Ukambani and Ubilikimoni was greater than that between the former and Mombaz; the Wabilikimo had long feet, but short bodies, and on their backs a kind of hump; and nobody understood their language. The Wakamba made friends with them by offering copper rings, for which honey was presented in return; they were good, harmless people, and there were many elephants in their country."[15]

The entry in Krapf's unfinished Swahili dictionary, which was published in 1882, summarised what the CMS missionaries had learned, adding a few new details and a good dose of scepticism:

> "MBILIKÍMO [...] *lit., one who is of two measures or yards* ([...] *pl*. wabilikimo), *a kind of pigmy; the pigmies are said to reside four days' journey west of Jagga;* [...] *they are of a small stature, twice the measure from the middle finger to the elbow.* [...] *The Suahili pretend to get all their knowledge of physic from these pigmies, who have a large beard, and who carry a little chair on their seat, which never falls off, wherever they go. There may, indeed, be a set of diminutive people in the Interior but no man in his right senses will ever believe the fables which the credulous and designing Suahili have invented regarding these pigmies. Beyond the* wabilikimo *are the* juju wa majúju*, at the world's end* [...]*, as the fable states.*"[16]

Later Swahili dictionaries added little to this definition.[17] Krapf and Rebmann's incomplete Mijikenda dictionary also recorded *mbilikimo* as a term used in the Rabai dialect, but with an invariant plural, implying that it was a borrowing from Swahili. The Reverend W. E. Taylor, however, later gave the form *mbirikimo*, with the plural *abirikimo*, in his Giriama dictionary. He defined it as 'dwarf', adding "especially a member of the rumoured race of Pygmies".[18]

Despite various proposals, the most convincing etymology is that first suggested by Krapf and Rebmann, which derives *mbilikimo* from Swahili *mbili*, 'two', and *kimo*, 'measure, height', the latter in turn being a loanword from Arabic. If this derivation is correct then we can surmise that *mbilikimo* is a relatively recent term of Swahili origin. This is also suggested by the modern form in Zanzibar, which is *mbirikimo* in both the singular and plural. The lack of a regular or agreed plural form in Swahili is a sure sign that the name is a relatively new one. In everyday usage in Zanzibar and elsewhere on the East African coast, it is applied

Batwa Pygmy women in Burundi, where many of them specialise in making and selling clay pots. Photo: Doublearc [public domain].

primarily to people with dwarfism, and this may well have been the term's original referent. Its use as an ethnonym to describe short statured peoples of the interior might have been a secondary development, an extension of the original meaning that has since become an archaism.

Tall stories about short people?

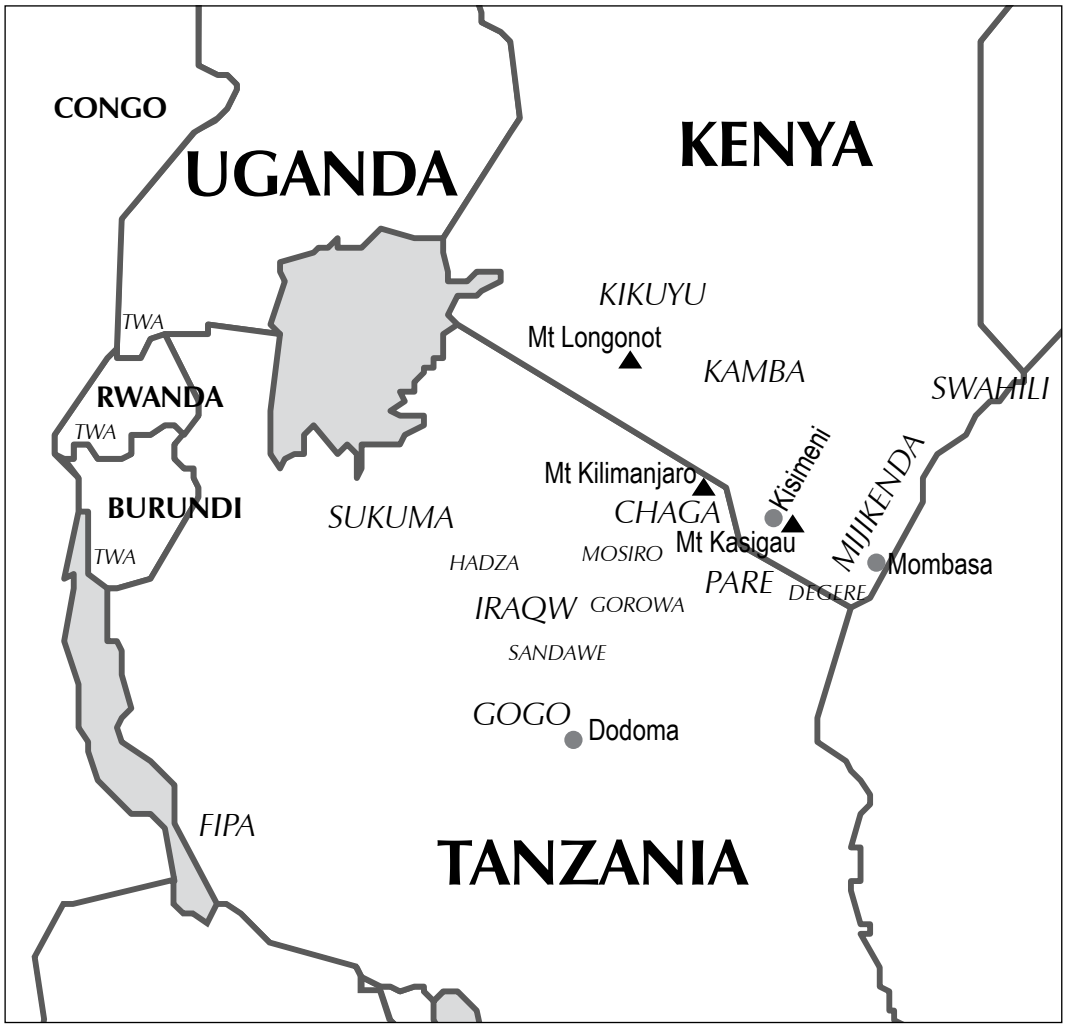
What then should we make of Mwaro's story? There seems little doubt that he was drawing on earlier coastal traditions about the small statured Wabilikimo of the remote interior, enigmatic and powerful as befitted folk living close to the edge of the known world. But who and what did Mwaro encounter during his arrow trading expeditions to Tanganyika in the late colonial period?

None of the locations given in the 19th century literature seems to fit. As we have seen, the Wabilikimo were variously placed either to the east or west of Ukambani, or to the west or northwest of Mount Kilimanjaro. The latter might be considered equivalent to the west of Ukambani, depending on the distances and exact directions involved, though not all of these rather imprecise descriptions can be reconciled. This variation most likely reflects more than just a general uncertainty, but the fact that early European travellers were drawing their information from very different sources and traditions – Swahili, Mijikenda, Kamba, and Chaga – no doubt filtered at times through Swahili-speaking and other interpreters. Rebmann's explicit reference to Chaga tradition is particularly telling in this regard, because it suggests that the Wakonyingo of local legend only became identified with the Wabilikimo of coastal fable in translation. It is possible that Kamba tales about quite different indigenous groups in eastern and central Kenya were at times being similarly reinterpreted.[19]

There are, of course, no Pygmies, as this term is currently understood, in this part of East Africa; nor is there good evidence that there ever have been. The nearest Pygmy populations are in the Great Lakes region, where scattered groups known collectively as Twa (*Batwa*) are found in Rwanda and

Burundi, as well as in neighbouring areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the southwest corner of Uganda, and the far west of Tanzania.[20] Although we cannot rule out the possibility that Krapf's Kamba informants had heard about real Pygmy groups in the Impenetrable Bwindi Forest or elsewhere in this region, there is no evidence to suggest that they were ever present to the east of Lake Victoria. This is not, however, what historians have always believed. The idea that Pygmies were once found throughout East Africa was widely disseminated through the school text *Zamani Mpaka Siku Hizi* ('From the days of long ago until now'). This book, which was first published in Tanganyika in 1930, cites the short statured people of Chaga and Kikuyu tradition among its examples. It has been reprinted many times, and has undoubtedly influenced perceptions of to whom the Swahili ethnonym Wabilikimo might be applied.[21]

Taking all this into account, it could be that Mwaro was recalling a visit to any one of a number of communities in the general area of north-central Tanganyika. This area is home to ethnic groups speaking a variety of Bantu and non-Bantu languages whose culture might well have seemed strange to an inexperienced trader from the coast. The sedentary Sandawe (mentioned by Mwaro) and the hunter-gathering Hadza both speak languages with click phonemes that might be likened to the twittering of birds, as Mwaro described the speech of one group he encountered. Although none of the peoples in this area are known to be particularly short in stature, there is no shortage of local



Places and ethnic groups in East Africa referred to in this article.

traditions about aboriginal inhabitants who were, including the Nkulimba who are said to have preceded the Gogo in Dodoma Rural District, and the diminutive N/íni of Sandawe legend.[22] Semi-subterranean earth-covered houses were once a relatively common sight in some parts of the Rift Valley, for example among the Cushitic-speaking Gorowa and Iraqw, while some hunter-gatherers of Southern Nilotic origin, the Mosiro (Akiek) of Arusha Region, are reported to have scooped out underground living spaces below the roots of baobabs and other trees.[23]

Mwaro's description of the underground dwelling Wabilikimo is therefore not entirely far-fetched, though it may well have been influenced by local tradition and translation as well as his own understandings and expectations drawn from Swahili and other discourses about little folk in the East African interior. The story of his capture could have been based on real events – it's not unknown for foreigners to be detained against their will for one reason or another – though it might equally have been an exaggeration for narrative effect. Again, Mwaro could have been drawing on earlier traditions of capture by the Wabilikimo, as first recorded by Krapf. This is a common trope worldwide in stories about human encounters with wildmen and other subhumans, though more often than not we are the captors and they are the captives.[24]

And finally

Of course, it may be that Mwaro was just pulling my leg. It wouldn't be the first time that a gullible anthropologist has been spun a yarn by an accomplished storyteller; indeed, academic monographs about tribal lore have been written on the basis of not much more than this. But I prefer to think that Mwaro didn't merely make up his tale about the Wabilikimo: the stories he told about his other adventures as an arrow poison trader were fairly credible, and some of the ethnographic and linguistic information he provided can be corroborated from other sources. He may have embellished his anecdotes, but then we all do that. The dividing line between fact and fiction is rarely as solid as we like to believe, and the Wabilikimo will always be suitable subjects for an expanded Borgesian *Book of Imaginary Beings*.[25] And it is unlikely that I will ever really know what Mwaro experienced, or even where it occurred.

The author at the end of his stay in Kisimeni.

The moral of my own tale, though, is much simpler than this. Next time you hear a story like Mwaro's, make sure that you go back and ask for more. Ever since leaving Kisimeni I've regretted not doing this, and am afraid that it's now too late.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND MAPS PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

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POSTSCRIPT

In recent decades Pygmies have suffered from extreme discrimination and violence in a number of African states. Many local and international NGOs are now working to counter this marginalisation and secure their rights, and in the process have reclaimed the use of the name 'Pygmies' as a positive designation. For an example of a prominent organisation campaigning on their behalf, see Survival International's webpage http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/Pygmies.

Baka Pygmy women using smartphones to map community forests in Ingende, DRC. Photo: Gill Conquest/Moabi, from www.newschallenge.org

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It goes without saying that I could not have written this article without Mwaro Marai, and I will be forever in his debt. I remain grateful to all the members of Mwangaza women's group, especially Ndumbu Mkala and Mkala Chipuli, who housed and fed me for the duration of my stay in Kisimeni. Josephat Tayari and colleagues at Tototo Home Industries in Mombasa were particularly helpful in facilitating this. My research in October-November 1987 was funded by the Ford Foundation through World Education Inc. in Boston as part of a long-term study of Tototo's women's group programme, the results of which have found their way into print elsewhere. Tobias Schölkopf of the Johannes Rebmann Foundation kindly assisted in securing permission to reproduce parts of Rebmann's 1848 sketch map. Last but not least, I would also like to thank Asha Fakhi Khamis, for discussing contemporary linguistic usage in Zanzibar, as well as supporting my research in many other ways.

Notes and references

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DEFENDING MOMBASA

While working with the National Museums' Department of Coastal Archaeology, marine archaeologist Hans-Martin Sommer made the first inventory of Mombasa's archaeological sites and historic structures, which included the fortifications and defensive buildings of World War II.

Hans-Martin Sommer

Above: The first modern gun to defend Mombasa was stationed at the site of today's Florida Club on Mama Ngina Drive. Photo by courtesy of Peter Rodwell, Mombasa.

Below: Mombasa Island showing Mama Ngina Drive area (circled), where the research took place.

Map: Google Maps

The project began with the mapping of all heritage buildings on Mombasa's Mama Ngina Drive, as part of the (then) plan to turn the scenic coastal area into a tourist attraction. Research began in late 2006 and led to the first complete inventory of Portuguese defensive buildings stretching from Ras Serani in the east to the Likoni ferry crossing in the west.

On the first day of fieldwork, at the site of the old Portuguese Kaberas Fort on the golf course, several concrete structures of unknown use were discovered. An internet search brought little but there was interesting information on an Australian website about the World War II defences in British and allied harbours.[1] When contacted, the website owner, Dr Richard Walding of Brisbane, ventured the opinion that the building ruins we had found were part of a submarine barrier system, an element of the extensive defence system put in place during World War II by Britain's Royal Artillery, Royal Navy and partly by the Royal Air Force.

1. See http://indicatorloops.com

Enquiries at various British institutions did not yield any results. And the Museum's management were not enthusiastic about adding 'modern' objects to their inventory. Nevertheless, as these were military buildings, they were added to the list of Mombasa's historic monuments. During more than 15 months of field work, which started on October 2006 and ended in March 2008, the whole of Mama Ngina Drive was mapped, and over 40 historical constructions from WWII were discovered and recorded. Upon completion of this part of the project we found several references to buildings within Kilindini Harbour and the Kipevu area on the mainland. This increased the number of military objects to 54. The history and function of the military installations reflect the strategic importance of Kilindini Harbour and of the whole East African coast.

Fighting over Mombasa

Home to the only natural deep water harbour on the East African coast, the island of Mombasa has been fought over since mediaeval times. The evidence can be seen in the many defensive structures left behind by the Portuguese, among them the old Fort St Joseph at Ras Serani (built on the site of a pre-existing Arab fortification), the now-dilapidated Makupa Fort near the causeway to the mainland,[2] and the famous Fort Jesus, Mombasa's biggest tourist attraction and one of the best surviving examples of 16th century Portuguese military architecture.

Three centuries later, with the Portuguese long gone, the Anglo-German agreement divided East Africa into British and German spheres of influence. In 1886 British East Africa (now Kenya), with its capital in Mombasa, came under the control of the British, while immediately to the south lay German East Africa (now Tanzania).

The Japanese embassy in Berlin, Sept. 1940, clad in the flags of Germany, Japan and Italy. The Tripartite Pact between the three countries led to intensified defence activity in Mombasa. Photo: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-L09218.

During WWI the importance of defending Mombasa's coastline and the entrance to Mombasa ports again came to the forefront. Six naval guns from the British cruiser HMS Pegasus, which had sunk off Zanzibar in a German attack, were salvaged and restored, and one of these became the first gun position on Azania Drive (as Mama Ngina Drive was then called), at the site of today's Florida Club.

The defeat of Germany in WWI brought German East Africa under British control. The former colony was renamed Tanganyika, and many of the old German farmers and owners of sisal and coffee plantations returned to work their land. With the rise of National Socialism in Germany during the early 1930s, the ideology quite naturally spread among the German residents of Tanganyika, causing some concern to the British administration.

Meanwhile, to the north of Kenya, the Abyssinian war began in October 1935

2 See "The rediscovery of Makupa Fort", *Kenya Past and Present,* issue 41.

with the invasion of Italian troops and ended in May 1936 with the annexation of Abyssinia by fascist Italy. On 1 June 1936 Italy officially merged Ethiopia with Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, calling the new state *Africa Orientale Italiana* (Italian East Africa). With the knowledge of the good relations between Italy and Germany, fear grew in Kenya in anticipation of a coming war. The decision was made to fortify the entrance to Mombasa's harbour area.

In September 1940, the probability of aggression increased with the signing of the Tripartite Pact in Berlin between Germany, Italy and Japan. By this time most of Mombasa's defence installations were ready for action. Between 1936 and 1939 a huge part of the military buildings were established.

The Public Works Department (PWD) had in early 1936 already started on the installation of an examination battery of two 6-inch guns, with associated searchlights and other equipment, to make Mombasa a defended port. (The two guns installed were probably ship's guns, elderly pieces from the turn of the century that gave good range offshore.)

The site chosen for the new battery was Ras Serani, on the easternmost point of the island, where the main lighthouse stands, and where the Portuguese had earlier built a fort, St Joseph.

The installation had been approved by the Overseas Defence Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the recommendation of the Barry-Beach Report, written by Lieutenant-Colonel Barry, Royal Artillery, and Captain Beach, Royal Engineers, who had visited Mombasa the previous year. This site was militarily ideal, as it directly covered not only the main channel leading into Kilindini Harbour, but also the channel into the old port.[3]

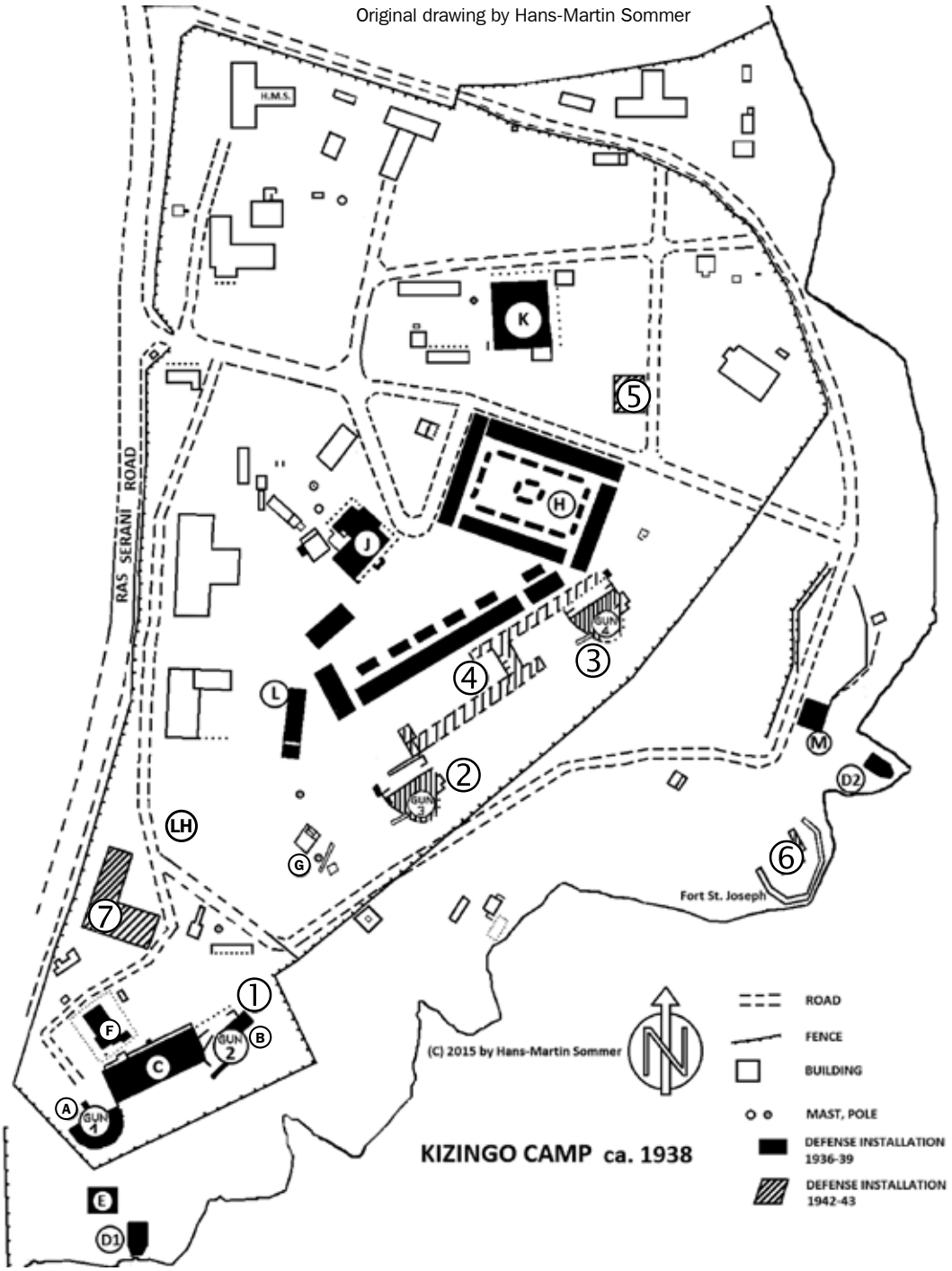
The defence installations 1936 –1938

On 28 June 1936 the Commanding Royal Engineer, Michael Biggs, took over the responsibility for the construction work of Kizingo Camp (see site plan opposite). This included the construction of:

- two 6-inch guns in open concrete emplacements, with ammunition embrasures (**A+B**)
- an underground magazine between the guns, together with ammunition stores and accommodation for duty gun detachments (**C**)
- two 36-inch high current density searchlights, in concrete emplacements (**D1 + D2**)
- an engine room, with three petrol-driven Crossley engines/generators to provide electric power for the searchlights and for the guns and their equipment (**E**)
- a three-storey reinforced concrete building (**F**) to contain
  - a Battery Observation Post, with a depression rangefinder for the guns, and
  - a directing station for control of the searchlights
- a Port Signal Station for communicating with ships entering or leaving the harbour (**G**), with a 9-ft Barr and Stroud rangefinder on the flat roof (**G**)
- on the domestic side, barracks, initially for 75 African *askaris,* and for the families of half of them **(H)**
- Officer's Mess **(K)**, Sergeant's Mess **(J)**, staff quarters **(L)**, stores and other administrative buildings, as well as a sewage treatment plant **(M)**.[4]

3 Briggs, 1994, p.202

4 *Ibid,* p.203



Plan of the Ras Serani military site

LEGEND

1, 2 & 3: 6-inch guns

4: Underground shell & powder room

5: Fortified underground HQ

6: Generator room (built inside the old Portuguese Fort St Joseph)*

7: Women's Royal Naval Service codebreakers

LH: Old rear lighthouse

* Part of the outside wall of the Fort St Joseph was demolished to allow free sight for gun emplacements built behind it

Most of the construction work was carried out by direct employment; the skilled work by Indian artisans (*fundis*). The hard manual labour, for example the digging of trenches and chambers in the coral rock, was done by prisoners from the jail in the old Portuguese Fort Jesus.

The blueprints for all the buildings on the operational side had been sent out from the War Office. For the most part they were produced on the recommendations of the Barry-Beach report from the year before.

View from the Battery Observation Post (BOP) of the construction of the underground magazine and 6-inch gun emplacement (Gun No. 2). In the background can be seen the remains of the Portuguese Fort St Joseph. Photo: The National Archives, Kew.

In the months that followed, the gun and searchlight positions were completed. On 21 December 1936, a successful gun test took place with a full load. The completion of the magazine took longer. The last structure, completed in February 1937, was the command post with its two main interconnected compartments for control of the guns and searchlights, and the big 9-inch Barr & Stroud rangefinder on the roof.[5]

Training of gunners on the No. 2 battery in 1936/37. In the background can be seen the Battery Observation Post with the umbrella-protected rangefinder on top. Photo: The National Archives, Kew.

5 Briggs, 1994, p.204

In June 1937 the offices, stores and the remaining *askari* lines were handed over by the contractor. The African soldiers in the camp were housed in single-storied constructions, made of coral blocks on concrete foundations, with lines of rooms 12-ft (3.6m) square[6] and facilities that included running water, showers, open shelters for cooking, and central concrete slabs with taps for washing clothes. Latrine blocks with piped sanitation were located a short distance outside the lines and electricity was provided in each room. In this relatively peaceful time, military training began at the guns and equipment in preparation for the war that everyone hoped would not come.

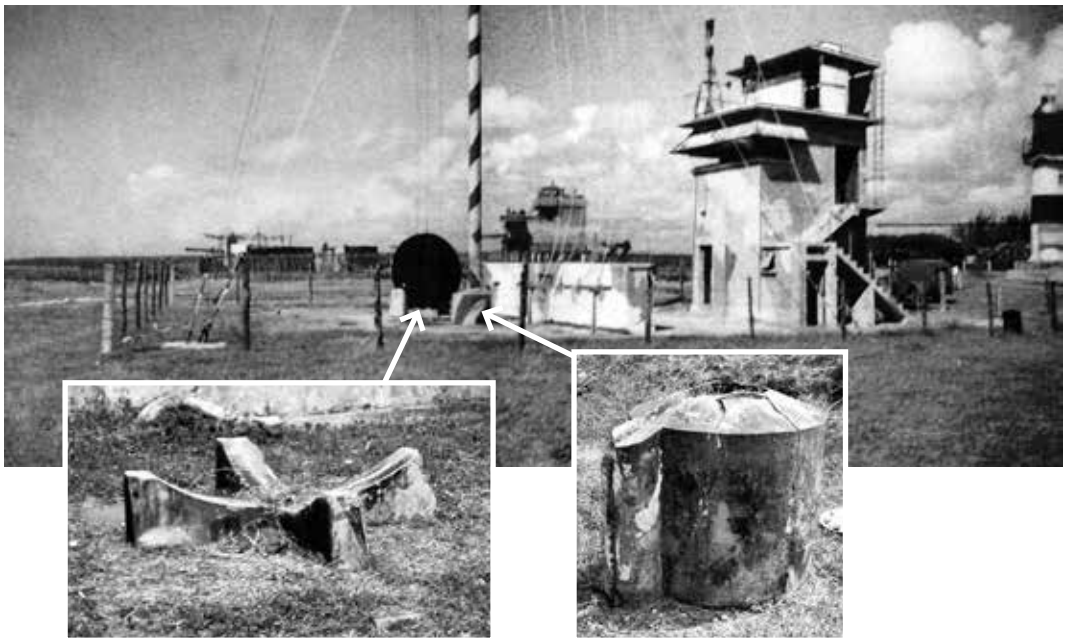
Protecting the harbour entrance

The entrance to Kilindini Harbour and the old port, between the Leven and Andromache reefs, was protected by a remotely controlled minefield. Controlled mines, also known as command-detonation mines and often used in combination with coastal artillery and hydrophones that pick up sound underwater, can be laid in peacetime, because there is no danger of accidental detonation. The mines can be turned into "normal" mines through a switch (which prevents the enemy from simply capturing the controlling station and deactivating the mines), detonated on a signal, or be allowed to detonate on their own. The mines were moored on the seabed at a depth of about 9 metres.

Incoming or outgoing ships reported their request to the Port Signal Station.[7] In front of the signal station stood a mast approximately 24 m high. A huge black ball (nearly 2 m in diameter) lay in a custom mount in front of them. If the minefield on the edges of the reefs was switched "off" the black ball was hoisted to the top of the mast and the

6 Briggs, 1994, p. 203

7 See https://en.wiki2.org/wiki/Naval_mine



Panorama of the Port Signal Station at Kizingo Camp. Inset photos show the signal-ball mount and mast base found by the author. In the background from left to right: Gun No. 2, Battery Observation Post (BOP) and the old lighthouse. Photos: The National Archives, Kew, and Hans-Martin Sommer.

Signal-ball mount (2009).

Base of mast (2009)

vessels could pass the minefield without danger. Immediately after the ship passed, the minefield was switched to "sharp".

The mines in the minefield were so-called "anchor mines". Each mine was connected to its 360-kg anchor by a mooring cable stored on a reel. The depth of the mine below the water surface was controlled by allowing the steel mooring cable to unwind from its reel as the mine was dropped from the minelayer, until a sensor suspended beneath the anchor reached the bottom.[8] Due to strong waves or current, sometimes a mine became detached from its anchor and drifted away. One incident took place on 30 August 1944 at Waa Beach, about 16 km south of Mombasa. The unexploded mine was washed ashore and found by walkers. The mine could not be defused and was blown up on-site the following day.

The anchor mine that washed ashore in August 1944 at the northern end of Waa Beach. Photo by courtesy of the Foster brothers, Tiwi.

War is declared

In September 1939 war was declared and around Mombasa new activities began in order to protect the harbour and the city. The Japanese entered the war in December 1941, and fears of an attack grew steadily after Burma and Singapore were lost and Ceylon became the next target for the enemy. From there the East African coast was not far.

The main strategic concept was to defeat any Japanese fleet advancing against the East African coast through sea and air attacks initiated by the Royal Navy fleet based in Mombasa. The Navy had heavy demand for buildings, to be used as shore headquarters, signal stations, temporary accommodation for staff, and storage for ammunition and equipment of all kinds.[9] Much of this was met

8 Belknap, 1920

9 Briggs, 1994, p.205

Surveyor T. Yokogawa inside one of the three underground operation rooms found in the cliffs below Bandari College, overlooking Kilindini Harbour, before they were sealed off in 2008. Photo: Hans-Martin Sommer.

by requisitioning public buildings and hotels such as the Manor and today's Castle Royal. The Royal Engineers again took the main responsibility for most of the renovation work and they were supported by groups of Air Force (the Air Branch of the Royal Navy, South African Air Force) who were developing a big new airfield on the mainland near Port Reitz, today's Moi International Airport. The two guns near the lighthouse, installed in 1937, were replaced by three modern 6-inch guns in power-operated turrets and with much greater range.

Overlooking the harbour area, the construction of an underground combined operations room and battle headquarters took place and the construction of trenches, pillboxes, covered machine gun posts and other field defences were realised. In case the water pipe from the mainland was cut by enemy action, emergency water supplies and storage facilities were put in place.

Along Azania Drive a huge amount of defence work was installed. Various harbour defences of smaller guns and searchlights covered both Kilindini Harbour and Mombasa's old port, and were linked to underwater submarine detection loops installed and operated by the Royal Navy. This defence complex consisted of two 6-pounder guns, an anti-aircraft light machine gun emplacement (AALMG), a pillbox (concrete shelter), a coastal artillery search light (CASL) and two generator bunkers.

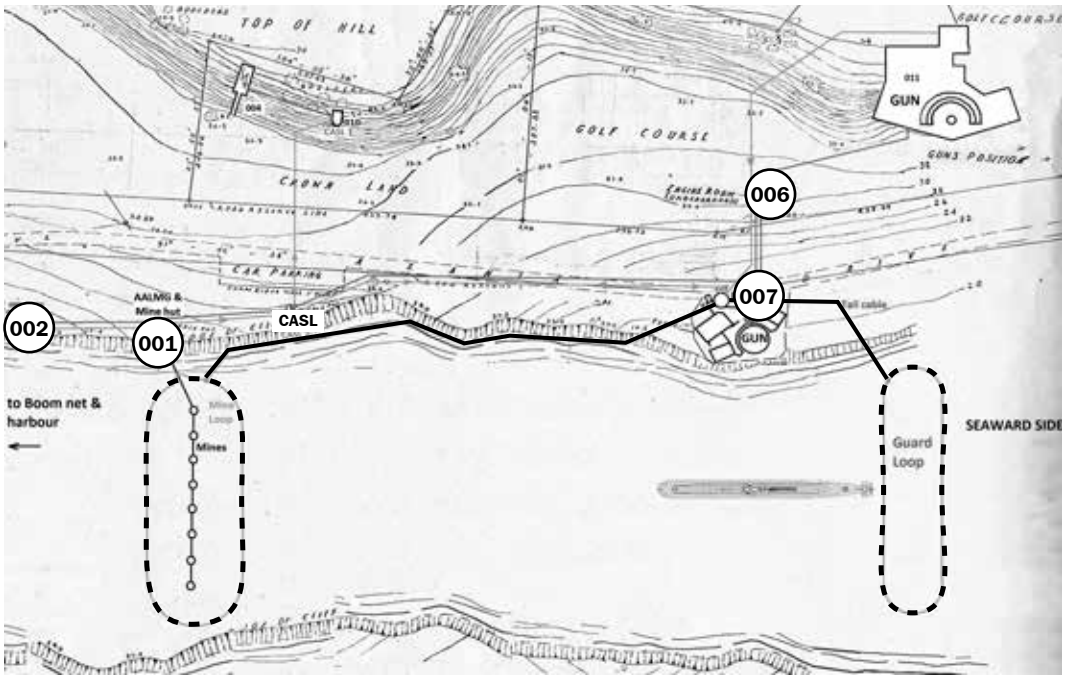
The South African Army despatched about 500 men from an Anti-Aircraft Brigade to Mombasa in May 1940. This 1st Unit was deployed in and around Mombasa at Nyali Bridge, Makupa Causeway, Port Reitz Aerodrome and the golf course. Each of these sections had two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns. The rest of the brigade arrived in June and by the end of the month, no less than 27 posts in and around Mombasa were manned.[10]

Nyali Bridge in Mombasa; note the gun emplacement (arrowed). Photo from author's private collection.

Detecting submarines

Various methods had been developed prior to World War II to alert harbour defenders to the presence of enemy submarines and it was magnetic sensing that was selected for anti-submarine detection. This method relied on electricity passing through a stationary loop of wire placed on the seabed that triggered a signal when a ship or a submarine passed over it. The loops were each about 46 m wide with a central cable running the length of the loop (to Likoni

10 Jacobs, 1977, p.14



Azania Drive, showing position of submarine indicator loops (the dotted lines), gun emplacements and searchlights. Numbers correlate to photos of the found objects below. Map and photos by Hans-Martin Sommer.

about 365 m) and joined at both ends by a waterproof junction box. From the junction box at one end, a tail travelled the seabed to the shore and an indicator loop hut. The Royal Navy fixed harbour defences consisted here of an indicator loop and two boom nets. Remains of one of the boom nets was found in 10 m of water in front of the Yacht Club[11] in the 1980s. There appears to have been a second boom net about 1500 m further on.[12]

The rediscovered anti-aircraft light machine gun emplacement (AALMG) position and indicator loop hut.

Remains of a concealed pillbox in a cliff.

Entrance to the underground generator bunker.

Battery Observation Post, now an advertising billboard.

11 Information from Dr Richard Walding, Brisbane

12 www.indicatorloops.com

Boom ships guarded booms stretched across the Mombasa harbour mouth.[13] In case of a signal from the indicator loop the boom net could be closed in a few minutes and the Battery Observation Post (marked 007 on the map on the previous page) informed to activate the guns and lights.

What remains of the housing for the coastal artillery searchlight (CASL), marked on the map on the previous page. Photo: Hans-Martin Sommer.

Mombasa codebreakers

After the Royal Navy codebreakers at Bletchley Park in Britain cracked the German Enigma Code, more efforts were made to decipher the Japanese codes. In April 1942, following a Japanese attack on Colombo, most of the Royal Navy codebreakers in Ceylon moved to Mombasa. The Indian Allidina Visram Boys School overlooking the Nyali Bridge and Indian Ocean was requisitioned as their base.[14]

Allidina Visram School. Photo: Author's private collection.

Mrs B-, an RN codebreaker from April to August 1943, in front of her work place at Kizingo Camp (object 7 in Kizingo Camp site plan on page 65). Photo by courtesy of Rosemary Brierley, London.

The radio reception at the school was bad and so the codebreaker team was relocated to Kizingo Camp at Ras Serani. The British War Office soon improved communications provided through the Royal Air Force in East Africa, who also supplied the Typex cipher/decoding machines and offered more trained personnel. Soon afterwards the Mombasa codebreakers enjoyed their first major success by helping to interpret the all-important Japanese JN4O code. This and subsequent breakthroughs led to the Japanese merchant marine suffering 90% losses by August 1945, victim to Allied submarines and bombers alerted to their presence.[15]

Despite the many efforts to keep the Japanese fleet away from the East African coast, Japanese submarines and aircraft targeted Kilindini several times. A series of spy flights began on 19 May 1942 over Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, using a seaplane launched from the submarine I-30. Just the next day, 20 May, and again on 25 May, the I-30 carried out periscopic observation and reconnaissance flights of the port at Kilindini.[16] At this time the soldiers at Mombasa were not ready for action and the plane flew away unscathed.[17] The

13 Nicholls, 2005, p.222

14 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Far_East_Combined_Bureau

15 http://www.coastweek.com/codes.htm

16 Morikawa,1997, p. 48

17 Briggs, 1994, p. 206

next incident took place in August 1942, when the submarine I-29 on her second war patrol reconnoitred the Seychelles, Zanzibar and Mombasa.[18] In the following year, in October and November 1943, the I-37 conducted two reconnaissance flights over Mombasa and Kilindini Harbour with a Glen seaplane. The Japanese submarines and aircraft never attacked Kilindini. Likewise, no shot was fired on the Japanese from the innumerable weapons along Azania Drive.

The end of war

In May 1945 the war in Europe was over and in September 1945 the Japanese officially surrendered. The defence of the East African coast was not solely in Mombasa's hands. Military installations had also been built in Tanganyika at Manza, Tanga and Dar es Salaam, and on the island of Zanzibar.[19] There were also many observation points ('coast watchers') along the coast. All guns were fired after fitting for testing purposes only. It is reported that after the announcement of the armistice the joy of the gun crews was so great that they loaded all the guns and fired. After that they were silent forever.

A member of the KAR guarding the 6-inch-gun (Gun 3 in the Kizingo Camp site plan on page 65), watching the passing ship SS Uganda, circa 1948. Photo by courtesy of J. Willson, Diani.

Until about 1950, the cannons were still guarded by the King's African Rifles (KAR) and probably scrapped shortly afterwards.[20]

The ammunition was dumped just 1.6 km off Mombasa in the Indian Ocean. In 1960 professional divers recovered a portion of the explosives from the seaway and disposed of them.

The *Mombasa Times* of 19 November 1960 reported on the salvage and demolition of ammunition off Mombasa.

Despite the archaeological survey and comprehensive list of all military structures found, nearly all the defence buildings are today in a pitiful state. Only one structure in Mombasa is still in use – and that as a public toilet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hans-Martin Sommer has an MA in marine archaeology and worked with the National Museums of Kenya in Mombasa from 2005 to 2008 to set up a department of underwater archaeology. More details of some of his WWII research can be found at http://indicatorloops.com/mombasa.htm

This is the third article that *Kenya Past and Present* is publishing based on Hans-Martin's original research from his time in Mombasa – "The rediscovery of Makupa Fort" appeared in issue 41, and "The lost padrão of Mombasa" appeared in the last issue. Hans-Martin is now based on Germany's Baltic Sea coast.

18 http://www.combinedfleet.com/I-29.htm

19 Zanzibar merged with mainland Tanganyika to form the independent Republic of Tanzania in 1964.

20 Telephone conversation, Kevin Patience, 20 April 2008.

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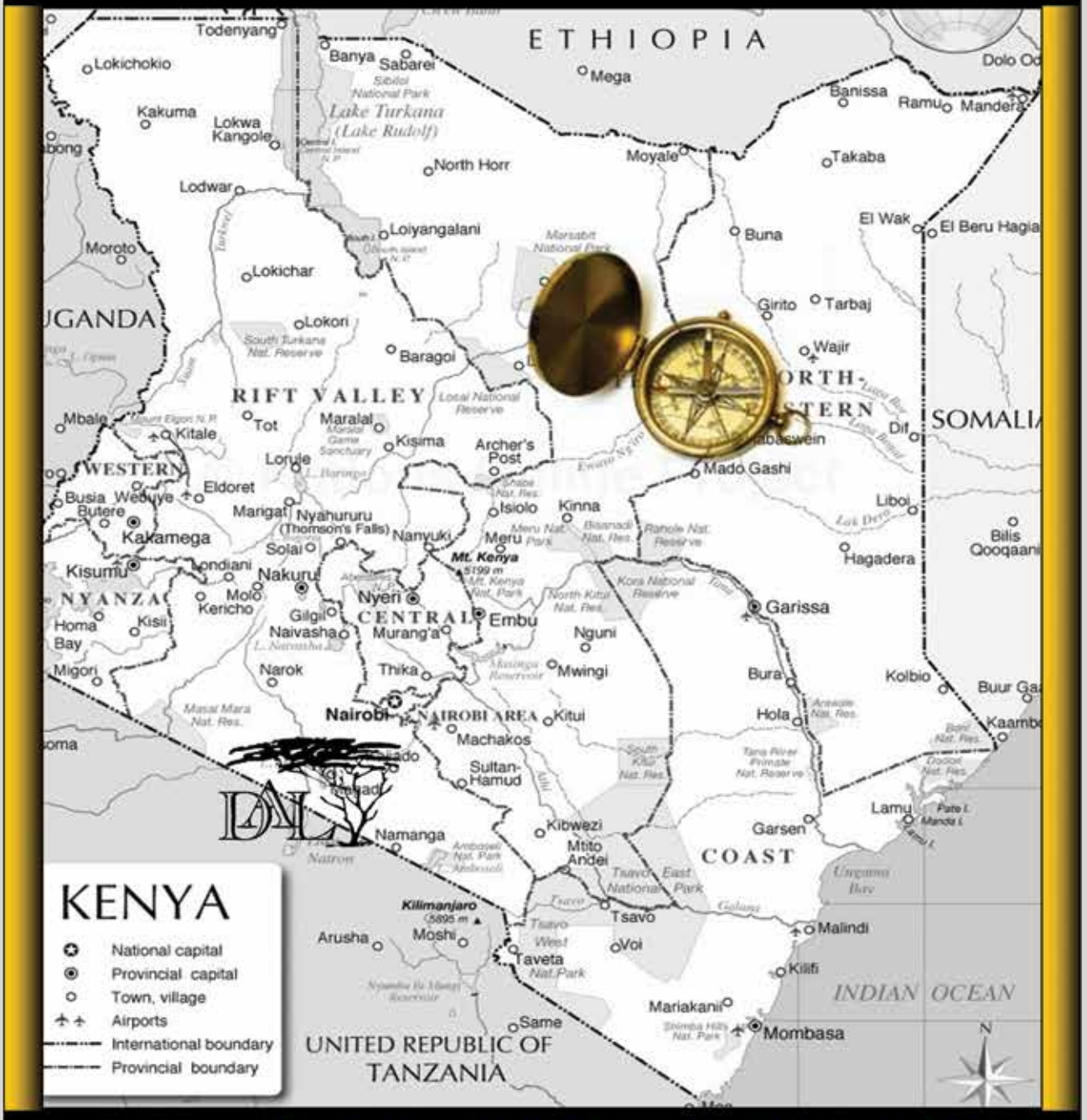

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