

## ■ TANZANIA

### The central caravan route of Tanzania: a preliminary archaeological reconnaissance

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This paper gives an overview of a reconnaissance survey in western Tanzania, around Tabora and on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. The reconnaissance was carried out by the authors over two weeks during July 2006. It had two discrete aims, which combine to produce an archaeology of a caravan route across central Tanzania.

The central route was the principal route by which inland goods reached the ports of the coast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: by this road, which was later also the route of the German railway, vast quantities of commodities, in particular ivory, slaves and weapons, were transported to and from the coast. This commerce has frequently been the subject of historical attention (for example, Alpers 1975; Koponen 1988; Roberts 1970; Rockel 2000; Sheriff 1987) and the escalation of trade along it during the nineteenth century has been seen as causing major social, economic and political changes in the societies through which it passed.

Reconnaissance at some key points on this route was aimed at assessing archaeological potential for two main studies. Firstly, we were looking for any pre-eighteenth century activity in the areas that later became centers of trade; ideally sites with a continuity into the later period were sought, as these would show the impact of changing economic circumstances on

the archaeological record of the area. Secondly, we were looking for settlement sites of the nineteenth century that might offer the potential for a social archaeology of the later trading communities. On both counts we were successful, and we each hope to return to pursue these research interests in 2007.

### Methodology and geographical scope

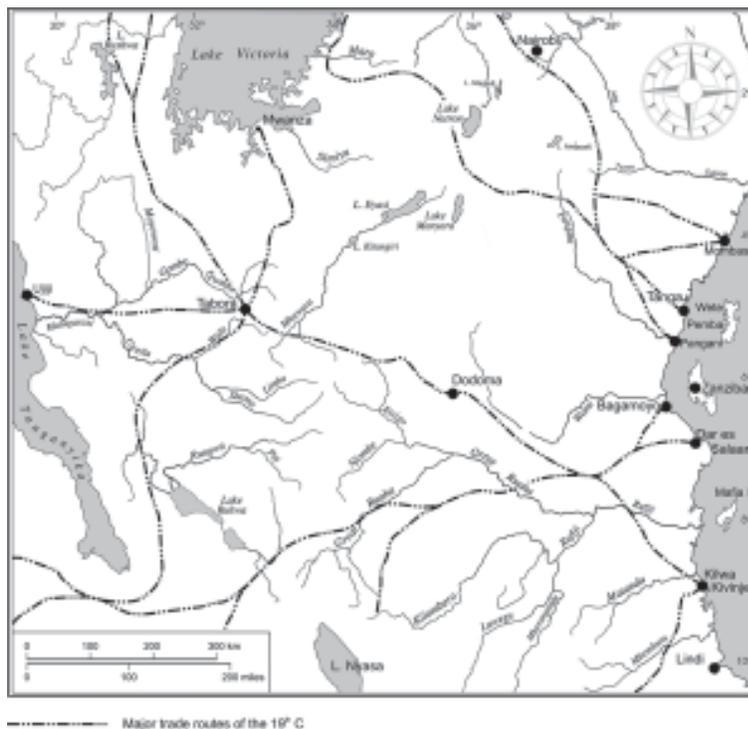
Although the central caravan route is well-known from historical sources, there has been only minimal archaeological investigation of its material remains. This presented an exciting archaeological opportunity, but also something of a challenge, as the caravan route extended for hundreds of kilometers from Lake Tanganyika to the Indian Ocean (Figure 1). We decided for this first season to begin with two of the main centers on the later trade route: Tabora (Kwihara) and Ujiji; we also included a visit to Uvinza, a salt-working site close to Ujiji along the Malagarasi river (Sutton and Roberts 1968). At each location we carried out some limited archaeological survey, exploring the potential of the surrounding landscape and concentrating on covering a cross-section of the landscape features. The survey was unsystematic, but afforded us a brief glimpse into the possibilities for further work.

In each location we also spent time conducting interviews with the local elders, getting their views on the history of the area and finding out about the locations of sites of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and the stories attached to them.

### Tabora

As expected, the Tabora area was rich in remains of the nineteenth century. These proved particularly easy to locate. Many were known to local residents, and could often be named as the residence of a particular historical figure, such as Fundikara. In addition, there was a definite correlation between patches of coconut palms and areas of nineteenth century remains: since the palms (introduced to the region in the nineteenth century) were often quite anomalous in their surroundings it was easy to follow these clues on the horizon and to be led to artifact scatters and building remains of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Figure 1.** Trade routes through Tanzania during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



Twenty sites were recorded in total; it would have been possible to continue collecting more in some areas, but we stopped when we had recovered a sample of what was to be found in a certain place. In particular, there was a large cluster of discrete artefact scatters, all adding up to imply the presence of a large site, in the vicinity of the ‘Livingstone Tembe’ at Kwihara. This house was occupied by Livingstone in the mid-nineteenth century, when the focus of settlement was here, at Kwihara, rather than at present-day Tabora, some 16km to the north. Much of that settlement is still visible in the form of artefact scatters and palm clusters today.

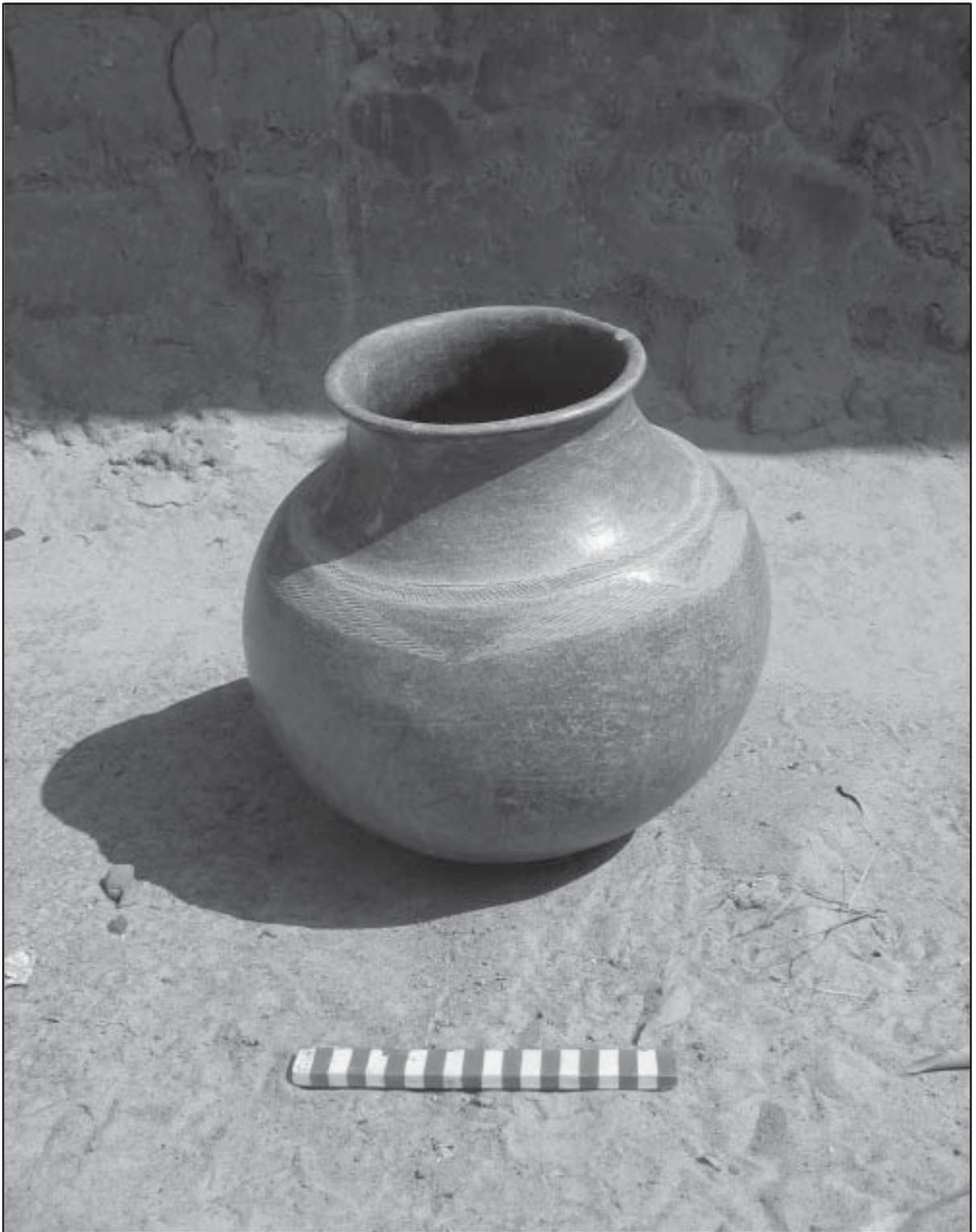
The majority of artifacts at all sites recorded here were local ceramics, although European imported spongewares, dating to the late 19th century, were not uncommon. Large grinding stones were also found at several sites, and these, along with palm trees, seemed to serve as the most obvious indicators of human habitation. The most common local ceramic decoration seemed to be variations of incised triangles, similar to that observed on contemporary ceramics (Figure 2). Such decoration is in

marked contrast to that found on the East African coast in the 19th century (Croucher and Wynne-Jones 2006). At present, however, our artifact analysis is in its very early stages, and it is not possible to speculate about the possible social meanings of these ceramics.

Survey in the Tabora region also led us to explore along the route of the Igombe River, north of the modern town. This area was almost entirely devoid of remains, apart from the scattered daub of a mid-twentieth century village which we were led to by local inhabitants.

Thus, the visible archaeology of the Tabora region confirmed much of what we already knew: there was a nineteenth century focus of settlement around Kwihara and that any earlier caravan trade was not concentrated in this region. Although we did find a number of sites of the nineteenth century, when compared with sites recorded in the Ujiji area (see below) we felt that these Tabora region sites were unlikely to fulfill our overall project aims.

Figure 2. Contemporary pot from Tabora.



## Ujiji/Lake Tanganyika

The area around Lake Tanganyika, near Ujiji, was much more promising. Again, we found a lot of nineteenth century material, as was to be expected in an area that had been so prominent in trade at that time. Ujiji has now been eclipsed by Kigoma, but was the major caravan terminus on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in the nineteenth century, for traders coming both from the coast and from destinations across the lake in Congo. This was the major 'Arab' immigrant settlement in the region, and oral histories recorded in July 2006 recounted that the area had been inhabited by some of the local, indigenous population (mostly converting to Islam) and Arab, Indian and other traders who migrated from the coast; all of these town residents were said to have lived in square houses and made extensive use of imported material culture, as well as dressing in coastal styles.

Within the town, Livingstone's house again served as a focus of nineteenth century settlement, and a large artifact scatter in this area gave a good cross-section of ceramics from this period. Again, these were mostly locally-produced, although a few imports were found, which were probably from Livingstone's own collections as they were immediately adjacent to his house. Elsewhere in the region, although comparable local ceramics were found, imports did not accompany them.

The area around Ujiji was also interesting in terms of nineteenth century occupation, as there are several different wards of the town, of varying age, many of them associated by the locals with particular groups or periods. The area of Kasimbu, for example, is immediately south of Ujiji proper, along the lake shore. It is associated with 'Arabs' in with the nineteenth century and is said to be where they first settled when they came to Ujiji. The area is still partly inhabited, but visible on the surface are abundant artefact scatters and many coconut and date palms attest to intensive former occupation here.

An interesting contrast to these 'Arab' sites is the site of 'Maswas Fort', south of Ujiji near the point where the Malagarasi River meets the lake. This site, which is marked on early twentieth-century maps, is now marked by the remains of some mud-brick architecture and an artefact scatter of locally-produced nineteenth-century ceramics. The histories relating to Maswas fort claim that he was a local king/ruler

who set himself up in opposition to the Arabs. It is claimed that in particular he was opposed to the slave trade.

Both of these sites – Kasimbu and Maswa's fort – offer great potential for a social archaeology of the nineteenth century and Dr Croucher hopes to return to excavate there during 2007.

In addition, the area around Lake Tanganyika seems to offer great potential for revealing earlier settlements and for examining the material culture of earlier societies on the lakeshore. In particular, sites were located along the valleys of the Malagarasi and Luiche rivers. Artifact collections were made at these sites, but it is difficult to establish any chronology for them yet, as a typology for the region is still in its very early stages. It does seem that many of the sites may be of considerable antiquity, as microliths were also abundant at many of the locations.

We hope that the information for constructing this typology may come from the site of Uvinza, which is approximately 60 km from Ujiji to the east along the Malagarasi river. This was an important salt-processing site (Sutton and Roberts 1968), containing brine springs that have been exploited over hundreds of years. Excavations at Uvinza conducted in the 1960s recovered a stratigraphy dating back 1500 years, with associated pottery. Based on our reconnaissance, we believe that other brine springs may also yield interesting stratigraphies: in one location disturbance from industrial activity had revealed a metre of stratigraphy with clear layers. From the lowest layer many lithics were collected, and every layer had a lot of ceramic and burnt material in it.

Dr Wynne-Jones hopes to return to Uvinza to excavate at the brine springs there. It is hoped this will create a typology for the region, as well as giving us information about early industry and the production of salt for trade. She also hopes to conduct further survey in the river valleys around Ujiji, building up a picture of local settlement and material culture before the nineteenth century expansion.

## Conclusions

Rather than reach any over-hasty conclusions about the settlement history and social archaeology of these regions we are here instead reporting on a reconnaissance which we feel has demonstrated the

potential for a long-term archaeology of the caravan route between Lake Tanganyika and the coast. This potential seems most obvious in the trading settlements of the Ujiji area (including Uvinza). We hope to continue our fieldwork in 2007, in two separate but complementary projects. It is our shared hope that in this dual approach we can eventually create a nuanced long-term history of the region, which would add considerably to our existing historical knowledge.

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