

## ■ TANZANIA

### Archaeological Work at Kisiju, Tanzania, 1994

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#### Introduction

In June and July 1994, the University of Dar es Salaam conducted archaeological work in the Kisiju area. This region was chosen for a number of reasons. First, a survey by Harding (1960, 1961) found that the area of Kisiju was occupied from the stone age period onwards. He reported stone age and early trading sites which he could not date. Apart from relative dating of the 5th century A.D. suggested for a "Frankish bead", not much information was revealed about the culture and chronology of the sites. Secondly, University of Dar es Salaam archaeological work begun in 1987 led to the identification of Early Iron Working (EIW) and Triangular Incised Ware (TIW) sites in the hinterland of Kisiju (Schmidt et al. 1992). Further work by Chami (1992, 1994) showed that the general area has been occupied ever since the EIW period (1st century A.D.). Furthermore, it was found that in the 6th-7th century A.D., established littoral communities linked the hinterland sites with overseas states in the Middle East. This vindicates Graeco-Roman sources which state that the central coast of East Africa had settlements connected to the ongoing Indian Ocean trade (Casson 1990).

The 1994 fieldwork was geared towards identifying more settlements of a similar kind on the littoral. The prosperous hinterland sites would definitely have been connected to yet unidentified trading settlements on the Kisiju coast.

#### The area of Kisiju

Kisiju is a small town of about 8 hectares with a large area around it with dispersed huts. It is the largest port between Dar es Salaam (100 km to the north) and Kilwa (150 km to the south). This port is used for fishing and trading purposes. All goods from Kwale and Koma islands pass through this area, as well as a good amount of those for/from Mafia. It is also a calling and stopping station for boats plying between Dar es Salaam and Kilwa. More than 10 sailing boats, six lorries and a bus serve the port at one time. The vehicles link the port with Dar es Salaam.

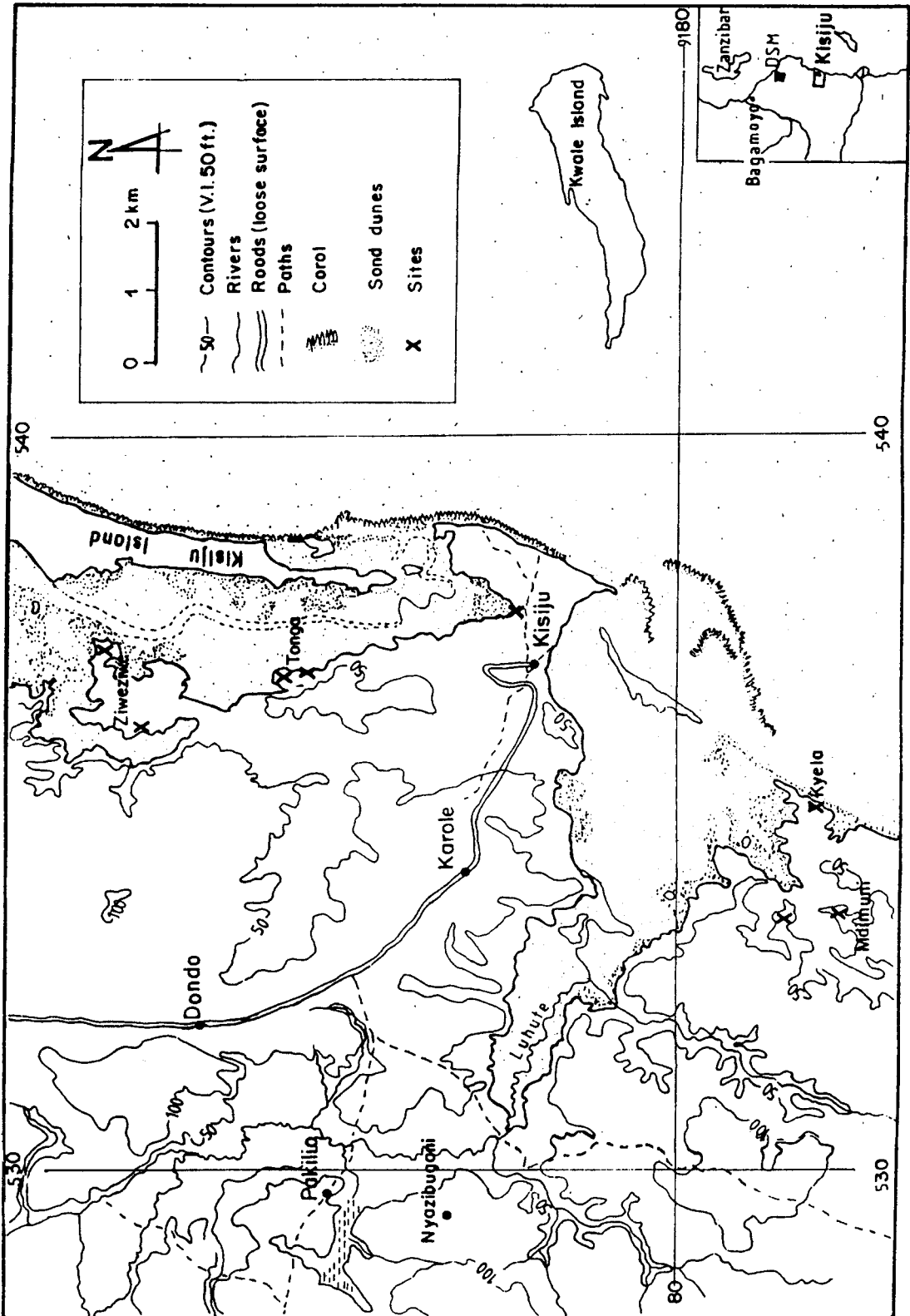
The existing architectural remains suggest that this port played a similar role from the 19th century A.D. onwards. Before this time, the port was located either to the northeast or northwest. Shifts in settlement seem to be due to the continuous process of erosion and sand deposition and growth of mangroves. Some oral records indicate that the islands of Kwale (4 km east) and Koma (30 km southeast) were closer to the mainland than they are today.

There are three other smaller settlements situated in the Kisiju peninsula further inland along the road to Mkuranga (60 km on the Kilwa road from Dar). From Kisiju, these are Mavunje (5 km), Kalole (10 km) and Donde (15 km). All these settlements can be used as a base to study the ancient silted bay along the river Dulute or the silted and mangroved shoreline north of Kisiju (Map 1).

#### The survey and finds

The survey was conducted along the beach and followed the Lulute river, south and southwest of Kisiju. On the immediate shore, nothing was found. A few sites were located along the Lulute River. There was a low density of cultural materials; most of these were recent. Where test pits were excavated, materials found came from a depth of less than 40 cm below the surface. Test pits ranged in size from 50 cm<sup>2</sup> to 1 m<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to the survey, local people were interviewed about their knowledge of the antiquity of their area. It was reported that there existed two ports in Zerere: Nyasibugani and Pakilio. According to oral tradition, boats made their way to the ports along the river. A local man in Pakilio



Map 1: The 1994 field school survey around Kisiju

port showed us 19th century English and Indian coins collected from the site. A test pit there revealed many local potsherds of the 18th and 19th centuries A.D. associated with European ware. These materials were obtained at a level of 0.40 cm. Another test pit at Nyasibugani yielded local pottery down to about a meter. The pottery, which awaits further study, was plain with a long neck and a thin rim.

The site of Mdimuni was discovered on an isolated island on a seasonal swamp about 4 km south of Kisiju town, about a kilometer away from the shore. Thick deposits of cultural materials (mainly potsherds) were found. These could belong to a pre-iron working period, although a further study of the site is required before this is confirmed.

Another site was found a kilometer northeast of Kisiju town containing materials dating to the 11th-13th centuries A.D. The site is very extensive, covering an area of about 160,000 m<sup>2</sup>. A small hoe test pit (50 cm<sup>2</sup>) was excavated near a silted inlet. Artifacts identified comprise local potsherds and pieces of crucibles. This find conformed Harding's (1960) report of 15 complete copper crucibles collected from the area. At the center of this site, 200 m from the inlet, houses were built with coral rubble. These are now being dug out for reuse. This confirms Harding's report of similar activity in the past.

A site was found north of Tonga village, four kilometers north of Kisiju. Under a thick brush cover, it seems to have been rich and extensive. Along the old beach, now covered in mangroves, are numerous local and foreign potsherds, glass fragments and beads. All these seem to belong to the 11th-14th centuries. A buried house foundation can be observed right behind the old beach.

In the Ziweziwe area, 6 km north of Kisiju, an interesting site was found in an isolated sub-island across "jangwa", 2 km north of the village. Cultural materials recovered indicate that the site was occupied from the Stone Age (Figure 1 j-m) period through the EIW period (Figure 1 f-g) to recent times. Several microliths made of quartz and sandstone were seen on the western part of the island and EIW and LIW potsherds were scattered on the northern and eastern part. Several large scatters of shells were observed throughout the island suggesting active marine resource

exploitation. Most of the shells were from underwater coral reefs. Other local potsherd scatters were found a kilometer south of this site, some of which belong to the TIW tradition. Lithic scatters indicate a pre-iron age occupation (Figure 1 j-m).

### One day survey of Kwale

On July 18, 1994, the field crew travelled to Kwale Island, about 4 km east of Kisiju. The island is about 1 km wide and 4 km at the longest point (Map 1). In the western area is Kwale town, located on the beach terrace. The largest portion east of the town is elevated coroline rock. In the survey of the elevated area, a few sherds of 12th-15th century were observed in the middle and southwest. One TIW sherd was also collected on the surface of the elevated area near a well; the well is said to be of great antiquity (Figure 1 e).

Around the town one can see a surface distribution of mixed pottery assemblages, ranging in time from the EIW to recent. One of the EIW sherds was found right at the center of the town was decorated with a fine line of punctation below the bevels (Figure 1 b). Seven others were found at the northeast edge of the town, where subsurface materials are exposed by people digging for coarse quartz pebbles mixed within clay. This is near a boat making site. These sherds seem to have two to three clearly executed bevels/flutes with no other decoration after the bevels (Figure 1 a, c). One sherd was a typical EIW upturned bowl with four bevels (Figure 1 d).

At the eastern tip of the town are tombs of unknown date. These are covered by thick brush and huge baobab trees. Adjacent to them is a primary school. A survey around the town indicated that abundant foreign ware was imported to the island between the 9th and the 15th centuries A.D. These included sgraffiato, lustre ware and Islamic monochrome. This evidence suggests that the town area has been occupied continuously from the 1st century A.D. Future excavations could probably offer a better picture.

### Ziweziwe excavation

The Ziweziwe site was found to have EIW potsherds in the northeast portion. All these were surface finds, in an area being eroded by rain

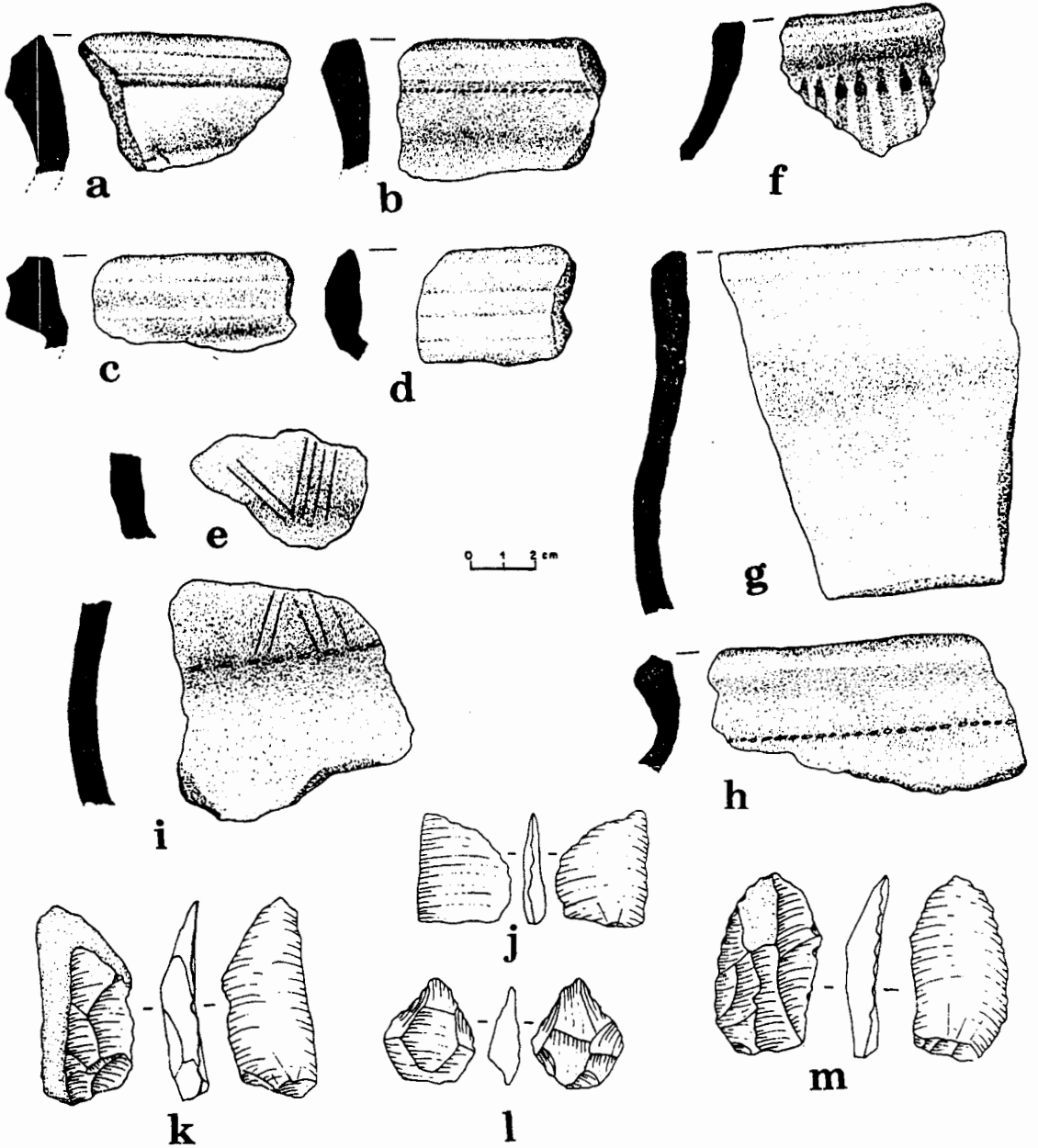
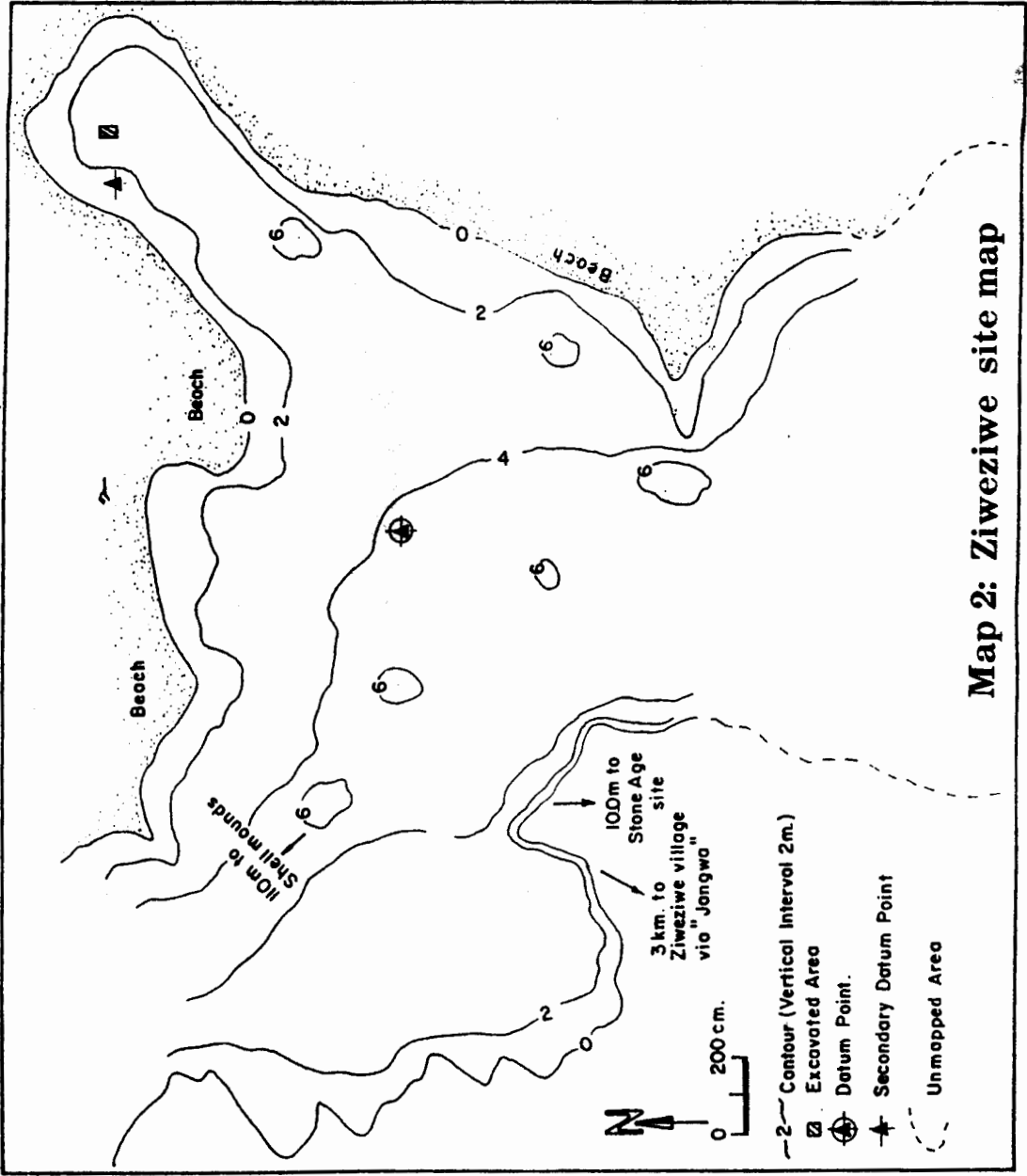


Figure 1: Artifacts collected from Kwale and Ziweziwe. a-e: Kwale EIW and TIW traditions, f-i: Ziweziwe EIW and TIW traditions, and j-m: lithics from Ziweziwe.



Map 2: Ziweziwe site map

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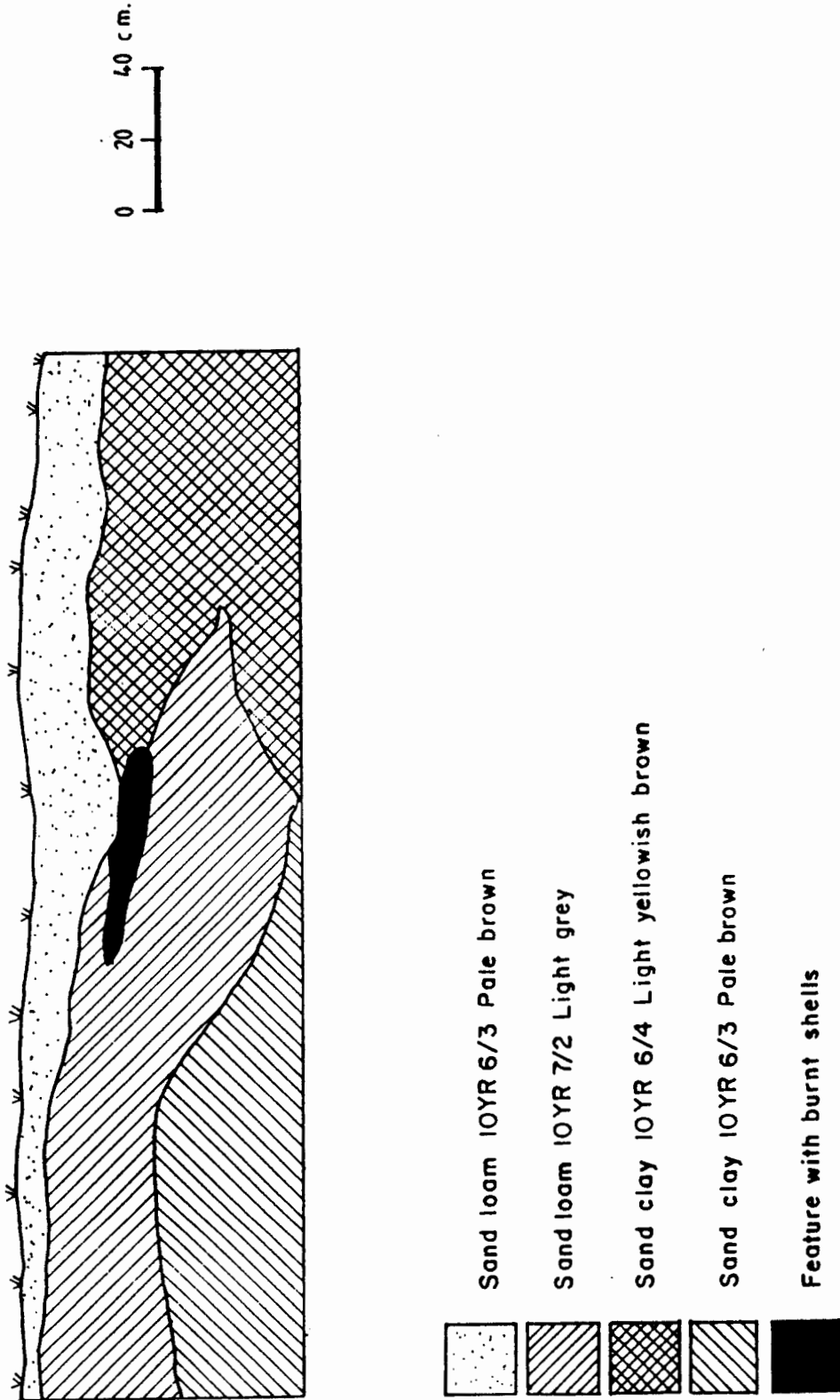


Figure 2: Ziweziwwe trench 1, southern wall profile

water. The surface of the whole sub-island is covered with potsherds of different traditions. It was decided that excavation should be conducted in the northeast where a dense potsherd scatter had been found. Small hoe test pits showed no area of major sub-surface concentration. Before excavation began, the main northern part of the site was mapped (Map 2).

The excavated trench was 3 by 5 m. It was placed on the north-eastern slope, right where several EIW potsherds were eroding from the sub-surface layers. It was discovered that the stratigraphic layers were aligned parallel to the modern hill slope, and that clay patches had been formed between silt and sandy soils. The bottom layer was of calcareous gravels. The southern portion reached a sterile layer at 30 cm, the middle portion at 50 cm and the northern one at 70 cm below the datum point of the trench (Figure 2). Arbitrary 10 cm levels were used for excavation. The first two levels (0-20 cm) covered the elevated south-

ern portion only. Shells and three sherds were recovered, one of which was a rim of EIW style. The second level yielded several more sherds and a piece of bone. At the middle southernmost area, a darkish feature started appearing, which was later determined to be a collection of burnt shells mixed with pieces of coralline sandstone. Two charcoal samples were collected for dating.

The third layer extended to cover three-quarters of the trench. Apart from three potsherds recovered, one a EIW rim sherd, the charcoal concentration was carefully excavated as a feature. A small portion seemed to continue to the southern wall. In the pile were many fragments of charcoal and shells. Two charcoal samples were collected from this area. The remaining layers, four to six, had little to offer, being the eroded lower northern portion. Few sherds were recovered from levels four and five. The number of artifacts collected from the surface and excavated units can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Artifacts collected from the Kisiju survey

PLACE	LEVEL	DEPTH IN CMS	POTSHERDS			SHELL	BONE	LITHICS
			RIM	NECK	BODY			
ZIWEZIWE TRENCH		0	4		2			
	1	0-10	1		2			
	2	10-20			12		2	1
	3	20-30	1		22	385		1
	4	30-40	1		10	1		3
	5	40-50	1	1	13		2	
	6	50-60			1	5		
	7	60-70			10	6		
ZIWEZIWE	surface collection		7		3	1		10
ZIWEZIWE	surface beach collection		6		1			
KISIJU	surface collection		2		4			
KWALE ISLAND	surface collection		11		1			

**Preliminary conclusions**

The 1994 fieldwork around Kisiju has shown that the region was occupied continuously from the Later Stone Age to present. The excavation of Ziweziwe did not yield much information about the Stone Age period, although lithic materials were recovered on the eroded surface west of the sub-island. However, the excavation shed more light on what is already known about EIW settlements on the littoral of the East African coast. If the dates obtained from the site fall into the early centuries A.D., it will add more evidence that this area was occupied by EIW people during the time the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* was written (Chami 1994). Further clarification will be obtained when the Kwale site containing Kwale ware is excavated. It is felt that this site will likely offer a complete chronology starting from the early centuries A.D. to the present day.

Lastly, it is worthy of note that the site reported by Harding (1960) to contain copper crucibles probably dates to the 11th to 15th centuries A.D. It is not yet clear where the alleged Frankish bead of the 5th century was found. It is not, however, surprising for such beads to be found in the area, since as has been shown above, the area has been occupied from the EIW period, and trade goods are found in hinterland sites dating to the 5th-6th centuries A.D. (Chami 1994).

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to acknowledge the work of all the first year archaeology students of 1993-1994. They include Timoth Fasha, Wilhemina Saria, Fortunatus Michael, Felix Ndunguru and Godfrey Matayi. Also many thanks to the authorities of Kisiju for helping us throughout the research period. Thanks to NORAD and Professor Randi Haaland for financial assistance.

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