NYAME AKUMA No. 44 December 1995

TANZANIA

Reconnaissance of Sites Bearing Triangular Incised (Tana Tradition) Ware on Pemba Island, Tanzania

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In the course of three seasons of fieldwork (1989, 1990, 1993) at the Swahili site of Pujini (HnJx) on the offshore island of Pemba, Tanzania, we encountered pottery known in the literature today by two names, Triangular Incised Ware (TIW, Chami 1994) and Tana Tradition Ware (Horton 1984; previously also called Pare Group C. Soper 1967; Early Kitchen Ware, Chittick 1974:320-22 and Wenje Ware, Phillipson 1979). We found it at three locations; once through excavation, at Pujini, and twice by chance during excursions away from the site. Triangular Incised Ware is most closely associated with East African coastal sites dated to the ca. 8th-10th centuries, during the period of rapid Swahili expansion, but it has also been located at interior sites (Soper 1967; Phillipson 1979; Horton 1984; Mapunda 1995). The dating has been extended back to the 7th century and as late as the 13th by some (Chami 1994); Horton (1984) identifies a category of "derived Tana" which extends to ca. the 11th century A.D. TIW finds of any kind have been rare thus far on Pemba. Clark and Horton (1985) found none during their survey of known stonebuilt sites on Pemba, although Horton has found "derived Tana" (Horton 1984) at Ras Mkumbuu in stratigraphy dated to the 9th-10th centuries A.D., and at Mtambwe Mkuu dated to about A.D. 1000 (Horton 1992).

The three sites noted herein are the first to be recorded on the eastern half of the island (see Figure 1). They support Horton's early settlement data from the western Pemba coast; the finds from

Chwaka, especially, may push the earliest recorded habitation of Pemba even earlier, since they occur within an assemblage which has been dated to the 8th to 10th centuries A.D. at related sites elsewhere on the East African coast.

Pujini

The contemporary mosque at Ukutani, the hamlet flanking the ramparted site of Pujini (UTM 589710E/9413820N; Clark and Horton 1985; LaViolette 1989, forthcoming) on its western side, stands atop stone ruins of a larger mosque, and is surrounded by rubble mounds. Local oral traditions name the ruined mosque as that which was built by Mkame Ndume, the historical figure said also to have built the larger stone site; archaeological evidence would support the contemporaneity of the two areas. The mosque lies some 200 m to the west-southwest of the ramparts. In 1989 a shovel test pit (STP 15) placed 10 m west of the standing mosque's southwest corner revealed TIW sherds at 0.9 m depth below surface (Figure 2a, b); Horton, examining the sherds, suggested they may be "derived Tana" (Mark Horton, personal communication, 1989).

In the second, 1990 season, we undertook excavations to the north of the mosque. There, in deposits clearly below those of the ruined stone mosque, we found deposits bearing large TIW sherds (Figure 2c), some decorated and others clearly of the same ware. The sherds were found in several strata, including 0.08 m beneath the stump of a stone pillar at 0.92 m depth below surface. Little domestic debris was found in the area, leading to the tentative conclusion that we were looking at the remains of a large globular water pot, perhaps associated with a non-habitation earthen building, such as a mosque, that predated any stone building in the area. No other direct evidence for an early mosque was found, however, and the sensitivity of our locating an excavation unit abutting the currently-used mosque made further explorations untenable.

There is no doubt that the large TIW sherds were in an intact deposit. What has not been discovered, however, is a domestic site of similar date. Although there are earth-and-thatch domestic strata located beneath the stone buildings at Pujini, no TIW has been found in them to date (LaViolette 1989, forthcoming); a single sherd

No. 44 December 1995

Figure 1: Location of Triangular Incised Ware bearing sites, Pemba Island, Tanzania

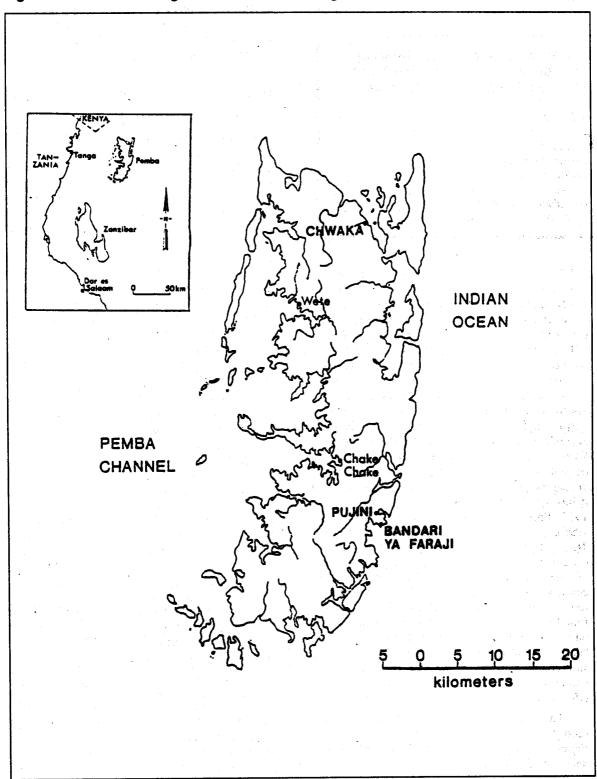
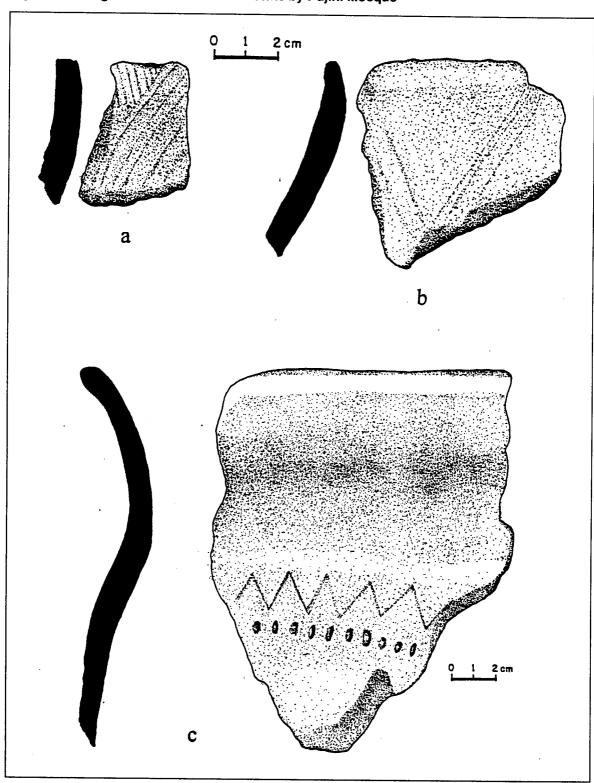


Figure 2: Triangular Incised Ware from units by Pujini Mosque



NYAME AKUMA No. 44 December 1995

was found in fill near the northwest corner of the enclosed area.

Bandari ya Faraji

Early in the 1989 season, on a Sunday walk to a small sandy beach called Bandari ya Faraji 1.5 km south of Pujini, we encountered an ancient baobab with a diameter of some 5 m (UTM 589920E/9411850E). The tree stood 75 m from the beach itself, growing on solid ground abutting mangrove swamp. Baobab trees, native to the savanna and not the littoral, are usually a sign of habitation sites on the coast, and are often associated with Swahili settlements. Indeed, around the base of the tree were sherds, which upon examination proved to be TIW, both body sherds and others bearing incisions and punctates; punctates in particular are typical of what Horton (1992) calls the "Zanzibar facies" of Tana Tradition pottery (see Figure 3a, b).

A more thorough surface examination revealed a few undecorated sherds of different (later) ware, and one piece of ca. 19th-century English whiteware over an area of ca. 70 x 40m. The highest concentration of TIW was found in an area some 30 m to the west of the large baobab, in a scatter of about 10x10 m near a second, smaller baobab tree. We returned to dig three shovel test pits, at 5 m intervals in the densest area of TIW surface scatter, in the hope of finding intact deposits. We found none; the stratigraphy in each comprised sterile, disturbed topsoil overlying other sterile deposits. Coral limestone outcropping is common in this area, making the surface appear to be littered with stone, but there was no evidence of stone building. The juxtaposition of TIW and the baobabs, however, suggests the one-time presence of a small habitation site, or an activity area near sandy beach (the latter not common on the east coast of Pemba), whose deposits have been eroded by the encroachment of dense mangrove, with possible later sites overlapping it.

Chwaka

We discovered the third occurrence in 1993 during an excursion of the Pujini crew to the large ca. 15th-16th century Swahili site of Chwaka (Clark and Horton 1985), located on the Michiweni peninsula in the north of Pemba (see

Figure 1). By our truck, parked at the point where the .5 km foot path to Chwaka left the main road (UTM 68850E/9451250N), Andrew Reid noticed sherds on the ground surface which turned out to be TIW and Sassanian-Islamic Ware. Well outside the range of the Pujini excavation permit, we restricted our activity to a quick reconnaissance of the area.

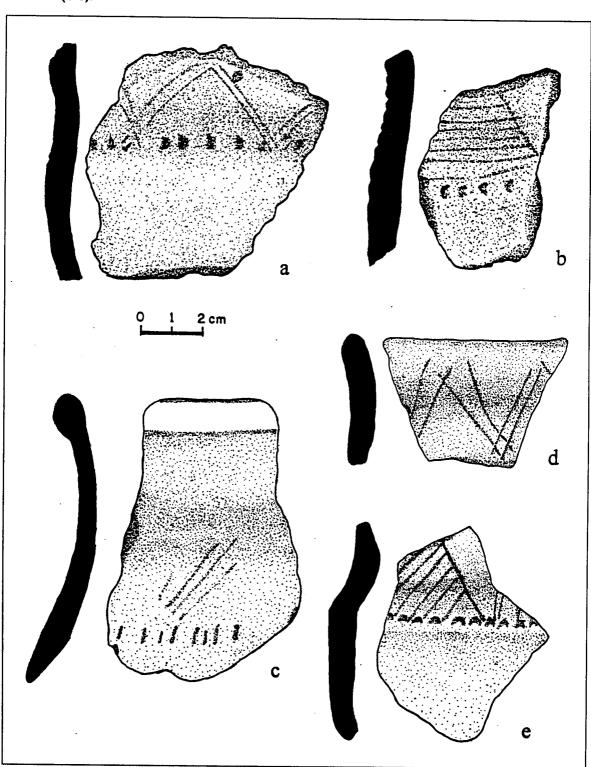
The surface finds alone, however, were compelling: within a radius of approximately 10 meters from the roadside, we found scores of sherds, many bearing the incised triangles and punctates of TIW or the Zanzibar facies of Tana Tradition Ware (see Figure 3c-e), more Sassanian-Islamic (bright blue, gritty glaze over buff paste, with molded surface design, Tampoe 1989:31-3), and a number of "bead grinders", two of which were of stone: one black-and-white basalt (undoubtedly from the mainland), and one of fine brown sandstone. Sherds right by the roadside may have been brought up from below ground by recent road work, but survey of the embankments flanking the road and the area behind each showed sherds in the root balls of up-ended palm trees. This suggests the presence of deposits with some integrity. The visible site was bounded on the south by a stream running under the roadway, and then a low area of rice paddies. Palm and cassava grew in and around the site.

Although it would be hasty to call this an important site before knowing if there is significant intact stratigraphy, the constellation of surface artifacts, including Sassanian Islamic Ware and "bead grinders" in addition to TIW, was consistent with sites on the nearby mainland dated to the 8th-10th centuries (e.g., Horton 1984; Fawcett et al. 1989; LaViolette et al. 1989; Fawcett and LaViolette 1990; Chami and Kessy 1990).

Discussion

Finding TIW in stratified contexts at major stone-built sites on Pemba (Pujini, Ras Mkumbuu and Mtambwe Mkuu) is perhaps not surprising, because so many coastal sites first known to us due to their later, stone-building phases have eventually revealed much earlier founding dates. The TIW at Pujini is most suggestive in its location in an area which had been known to be associated with two successive mosques since the 15th century. It is rewarding to be able to place Swahili set-

Figure 3: Triangular Incised Ware from surface collections at Bandari ya Faraji (a, b) and near Chwaka (c-e).



NYAME AKUMA No. 44 December 1995

tlers there prior to the elaborate fortified site. It is of course significant to piecing together Pemba's early occupational history to place TIW there—whether "derived Tana" or not, and therefore presumably Swahili-speaking settlers—to the 11th century A.D. or even earlier. Considering we now have early first millennium settlement at Unguja Ukuu on Zanzibar Island (AbduRahman Juma, personal communication), however, it is not surprising to have increasing evidence for early occupation of nearby, verdant Pemba.

Perhaps most exciting, however, is the reconnaissance of two TIW-bearing sites in the absence of a systematic survey. We certainly have not found the only other non-stone TIW sites on the island near Chwaka and at Bandari ya Faraji. Systematic survey of Pemba, which we are planning for the next several years, will no doubt reveal other early sites, some, as in the case of Chwaka, near later, major sites, but others nestled unobtrusively along the coast and possibly in the island's interior. Extensive areas of the East African coast cry out for survey, and undoubtedly will reveal early isolated non-stone sites, and those near and contemporary to major stone-built settlements.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the British Institute in Eastern Africa, the Foundation for African Prehistory and Archaeology, the University of Dar es Salaam Archaeology Unit, and the Anthropology Departments of Rice University and the University of Virginia, all of whom supported various aspects of the field work discussed herein. We would also like to thank the Tanzanian, British, and American crew members from the 1989, 1990, and 1993 seasons at Pujini. Warm thanks also go to June Webb of the University of Virginia Anthropology Department for contributing her time and technical expertise. Lastly, we thank the Antiquities Unit of the Zanzibar Museums, Office of the President, for its ongoing enthusiasm and multifaceted support.

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