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Slave Routes in Western Tanzania: A Preliminary Report on Survey in Tabora and Ujiji.

By Sarah Croucher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones[1]

The following report is a brief introduction to reconnaissance survey work carried out in Western Tanzania in July 2006 to investigate caravan routes that ran from the East African coast inland as far as the Congo during the 18th and 19th centuries. These routes were tied to the trading of captive Africans from inland areas to the Indian Ocean coast. When they reached the coast, enslaved individuals were either kept to work on local Arab-run plantations, or traded out into the Indian Ocean. Although it has proved difficult to quantify the number of slaves being traded from this region during the 18th and 19th centuries, the African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean region has been described as "one of the most neglected aspects of the global diaspora of African peoples" (Alpers, 2000: 84). The reconnaissance survey in the areas of Ujiji and Tabora (see Figure 1 for a map of the trade routes in the area) had the aim of locating sites related to the caravan trade along which these slaves were traded. In addition it aimed to locate earlier sites of settlement in the region, and thus contextualising later colonial changes within the longer time scale of history.

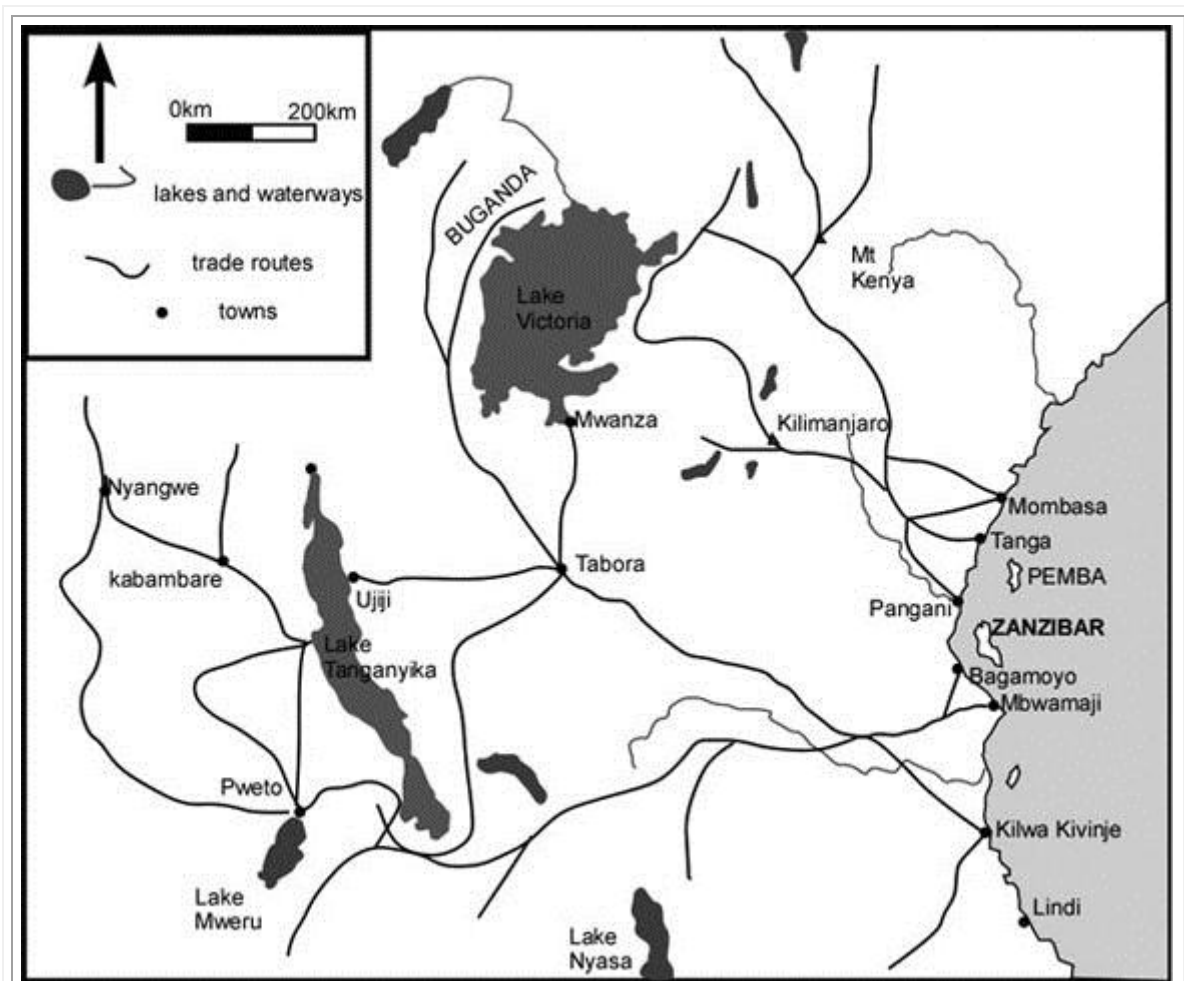


Figure 1: Map showing major caravan routes in 19th century East Africa after Sheriff (1987: 191).

The East African caravan trade of the 18th and 19th centuries linked the coast of present-day Kenya and Tanzania as far as 1,500 miles inland to the Congo. It has been argued to have caused major changes in the economies, politics and societies and cultures of the communities through which it passed (Rockel, 2000a: 769). In the area around the modern town of Ujiji, on the shore of lake Tanganyika, these changes were experienced by the local Watongwe population as well as migrants who arrived in the area to trade, drawn from Arabia, the East African coast, and from central Tanzania. In Tabora, another urban centre that developed as a result of trade routes, the local population consisted of Nyamwezi groups, who similarly found their lives intertwined with migrants moving along these caravan networks. Societies living along the 19th century caravan routes are recognised as having gone through massive upheavals and changes at this time, with the world in which they were living becoming "immensely larger" (Iliffe, 1979: 1), as a commercial economy developed through large swathes of Tanzania. A partially monetized economy, merchant capital and wage labour became increasingly a part of the lives of local groups along these routes (Rockel, 2000a: 769) as trade grew in ivory, slaves and weapons

(Rockell, 2000b: 173) and other trade goods such as cloth and ceramics (Gray, 1962: 108; Iliffe, 1979: 19).



Figure 2: Papier maché statue showing journalist Henry Morton Stanley meeting missionary Dr David Livingstone at Ujiji, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in 1871. This was the moment at which the famous words "Dr Livingstone, I presume" are thought to have been uttered by Stanley. Today, these statues and some paintings of this period, form the only museum objects in the Ujiji museum.

Despite the fact that only a small amount of historical work, and virtually no archaeology, has been done in this region, what is clear is that thousands of slaves were forcefully migrated from these areas as part of the increasing capitalist trade of Omani colonialism in East Africa during the 18th and 19th centuries. This means that the African Diaspora formed part of the daily social reality for residents in these areas at this time. Patchy historical records for the period, mostly recorded through the descriptions of the first European missionaries and explorers to travel to the area. Both Tabora and Ujiji have famous Stanley and Livingstone connections. A hangover of the British colonial era in Tanganyika is the memorialisation of these sites, to the exclusion of any form of local African heritage. The Livingstone tembe (the house where he lived in the 19th century) is open for visitors in Tabora, and a memorial to the meeting of Livingstone and Stanley has existed in Ujiji in some form since 1916 (Grant, 1932: 318). However, these sites simply memorialise an Anglo-American version of history, whereby Livingstone was instrumental in the ending of slavery in the area (see Figure 2).

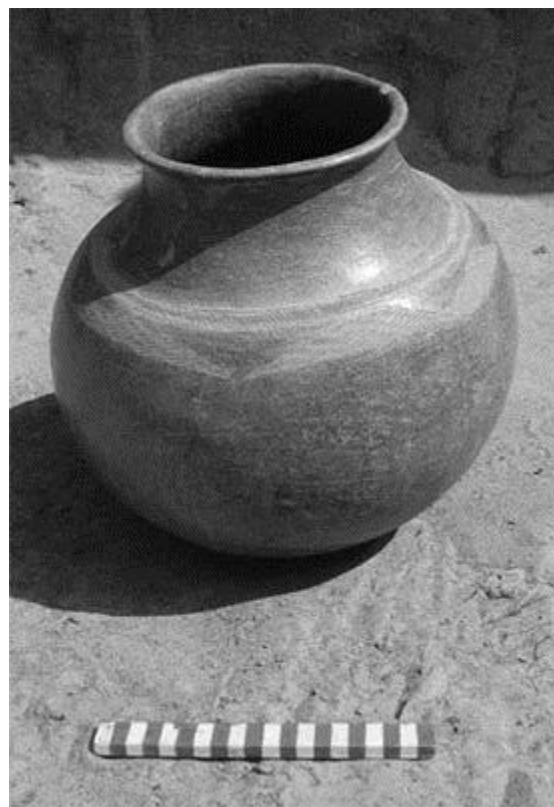


Figure 3: Contemporary pot, Tabora.

The reconnaissance survey project undertaken in July 2006 however, had very different aims. Rather than simply recording the physical remains of sites known by European travellers, we wanted to understand how this trade route of the African Diaspora had effected local populations, and how we might see changing identities in everyday domestic contexts along these routes. This was very much intended as a preliminary season of fieldwork, before targeting areas for closer, more systematic investigations in 2007. Nineteenth century sites, which would have been contemporaneous with the caravan trade, proved easy to locate in both the Tabora and Ujiji areas, with 20 sites recorded in total.



Figure 4: Remains of mud-brick wall, Maswas Fort.

In the Tabora area, sites located close to the contemporary urban centre of Tabora proved easy to locate. These included a wide scatter of artefacts around the area of the Livingstone tembe, including European ceramics. The majority of artefacts 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 (which were introduced in the 19th century to this area), seemed to serve as the most obvious indicators of past human habitation. The most common local ceramic decoration appeared to be variations of incised triangles (similar to that observed on contemporary ceramics, as in Figure 3). Such decoration is in marked contrast to that found on the East African coast in the 19th century, and appears to reflect a separate local trajectory of inland forms and decorations on local ceramics. At present however, our artefact analysis is only at a preliminary stage, and it is not possible to speculate about the possible social meanings of these ceramics.

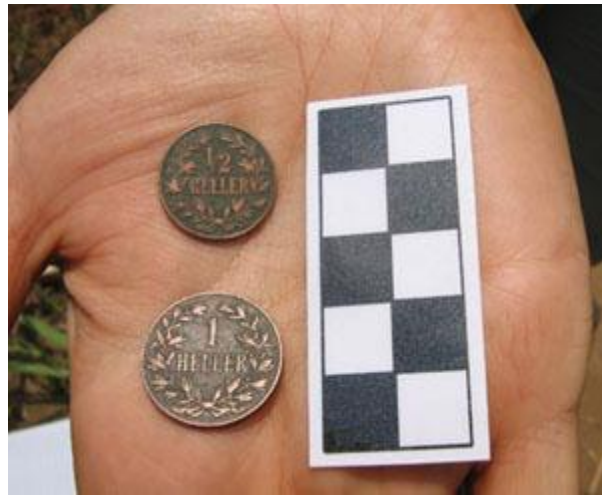


Figure 5: Coins from the German colonial period (dated 1906 on reverse).

Sites in various locales near the present towns of Ujiji and Kigoma were similarly easy to locate. Of particular importance were contrasting sites around the village of Ujiji, and a site which appears to relate to an indigenous trading settlement, south of Ujiji along the lakeshore. Excavations are planned for both of these areas in 2007. Ujiji is now eclipsed by the nearby port of Kigoma, but was the major caravan terminus on the shores of Lake Tanganyika during the 19th century, for traders coming both from the coast and destinations across the lake in the Congo. This was the major 'Arab' immigrant settlement in the region, and the results from excavations here will be representative of daily life in a 19th century inland urban settlement, nominally ruled by Omani colonial elites in Zanzibar. Oral histories recorded in July 2006 recounted that the area had been inhabited by some of the local indigenous population who had settled in the town (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 to have made extensive use of imported material culture, as well as dressing in coastal styles. Contrasting with this is the site of Maswas' Fort (see Figures 4 and 5), today marked only by a series of degrading mud-brick walls. Oral histories testify that this was the settlement of an indigenous Watongwe leader (Maswas), who established a stronghold here with both round and square houses, did not convert to Islam or Christianity, but who also engaged in trading activities with Arab caravan leaders. The site appears to have been continuously occupied into the early 20th century, and finds included coins from the German colonial period.

Notes.

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