

## JAH Forum

# HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN EAST AFRICA: PAST PRACTICE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS\*

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### Abstract

This forum article explores the major intellectual trajectories in the historical archaeology of Eastern Africa over the last sixty years. Two primary perspectives are identified in historical archaeology: one that emphasizes precolonial history and oral traditions with associated archaeology, and another that focuses mostly on the era of European contact with Africa. The latter is followed by most North American practice, to the point of excluding approaches that privilege the internal dynamics of African societies. African practice today has many hybrids using both approaches. Increasingly, precolonial historical archaeology is waning in the face of a dominant focus on the modern era, much like the trend in African history. New approaches that incorporate community participation are gaining favor, with positive examples of collaboration between historical archaeologists and communities members desiring to preserve and revitalize local histories.

### Key Words

East Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, historical archeology, precolonial African history, kingdoms, Haya, collaboration.

Historical Archaeology in East Africa has taken two major pathways. One is a practice that uses written documents, including recorded chronicles, to complement and add to archaeological evidence that pertains to historic life, commonly referred to as ‘filling the gaps’. Usually, historic life in these instances has meant the presence of Europeans in Africa, a lens that is colored with a range of filters including colonial and imperial ideas of racial superiority, missionary commentaries on local beliefs and cultural practices, and theoretical dispositions of the archaeologists. When James Kirkman practised historical archaeology along the East African coast, he did so in a manner that is often identified as text-aided historical archaeology.<sup>1</sup> Kirkman’s interest, like that of H. N. Chittick who followed with similar research, was to affirm foreign connections in the florescence of Swahili cities.<sup>2</sup> One

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1 See, for example, J. Kirkman, ‘Historical archaeology in Kenya 1948–56’, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 37:1–2 (1957), 16–28; J. Kirkman, *Men and Monuments on the East African Coast* (London, 1964).

2 H. N. Chittick, ‘The Shirazi colonization of East Africa’, *The Journal of African History*, 6:3 (1964), 275–94; H. N. Chittick, *Kilwa: An Islamic Trading City on the East African Coast* (Nairobi, 1974); and H. N. Chittick, ‘The East coast, Madagascar and the Indian Ocean’, in R. Oliver (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volume III* (Cambridge, 1977), 183–231.

idiosyncratic characteristic of these early inquiries is that they drew on the Swahili Chronicles, early renderings of oral traditions in Swahili language that represented the interests of different local groups, with foreign identities therein given prominence.

The second trail was blazed by Merrick Posnansky and a number of others who followed his example. Deeply dedicated to servicing the public interest when he was curator at the Uganda Museum in the late 1950s, Posnansky expanded his public philosophy to include oral traditions and other pertinent evidence such as ethnographic information and written records, if available, to inquire into the history of sites in the last millennium in East Africa.<sup>3</sup> Posnansky went on to explore oral traditions at Bweyore, an Ankole royal palace site, where oral traditions helped to explicate a burning event (during which the capital suffered a severe fire) that was archaeologically documented.<sup>4</sup> Inquiries into the history of the Bigo earthworks were also a central part of the thrust to give greater attention to indigenous histories – a major focus of the practitioners of precolonial history in African history during the 1960s and 1970s spearheaded by Roland Oliver and his interests in precolonial Uganda, with archaeological research at the famous Bigo earthworks conducted to affirm a colonial construct pertaining to Bacwezi origins.<sup>5</sup>

Posnansky's experiment at Bigo, important for trying to link oral traditions with archaeological evidence, nonetheless failed to affirm any connection between the two forms of historical information about Bigo as the capital site of the Bacwezi empire.<sup>6</sup> The deeply-flawed source of reported 'oral traditions' on which the Bigo hypothesis was based was a colonial concoction published in the Uganda Gazette in 1909, followed by a series of incorrect historical narratives crafted to fit the 'evidence'.<sup>7</sup> Though this early experiment has serious

3 For a perspective on his days in Uganda, see M. Posnansky, *Africa and Archaeology: Empowering an Expatriate Life* (London, 2009). For a recent history of Ugandan archaeology that explores Posnansky's contributions to public, democratic archaeology in Uganda see A. Mehari, 'Practicing and teaching archaeology in East Africa: Tanzania and Uganda' (PhD thesis, University of Florida, 2015).

4 M. Posnansky, 'The excavation of an Ankole capital site at Bweyore', *Uganda Journal*, 32:2 (1968), 165–82.

5 M. Posnansky, 'Kingship, archaeology, and historical myth', *Uganda Journal*, 30 (1966), 1–12; M. Posnansky, 'Bigo bya Mugenyi', *Uganda Journal*, 33 (1969), 125–50. Peter Shinnie's excavations at Bigo several years earlier proved inconclusive for linking the Bacwezi to Bigo, P. Shinnie, 'Excavations at Bigo, 1957', *Uganda Journal*, 24 (1960), 16–29.

6 Posnansky, 'Bigo', 28–9.

7 D. L. Baines, 'Ancient forts', *Official Uganda Gazette*, 15 (1909), 137–38. The absence of definitive oral traditions attached to Bigo has been discussed in several exegeses that unveil the fabrication of a pastiche of oral traditions, some Ganda, in the early twentieth century. The Baines construct was passed down through several generations of scholars including, among others, J. Gorju, *Entre le Victoria, l'Albert, et L'Edouard: Ethnographie de la partie anglaise du Vicariat de L'Ouganda: origines, histoire, religion, costumes* (Rennes, 1920); E. J. Wayland, 'Notes on the Bigo bya Mugenyi', *Uganda Journal*, 1 (1934), 21–32; J. Grey, 'The riddle of Bigo', *Uganda Journal*, 2 (1935), 226–33; E. C. Lanning, 'Excavations at Mubende Hill', *Uganda Journal*, 30 (1966), 153–63; and, notably, Roland Oliver, who accepted the earlier representations without critical reflection. See R. Oliver, 'A question about the Bacwezi', *Uganda Journal*, 17 (1953), 135–37; R. Oliver, 'Discernible developments in the interior, 1500–1840', in R. Oliver and G. Matthews (eds.), *History of East Africa* (Oxford, 1959), 169–211. These reifications have become so entrenched in the literature and popular political discourse in Uganda they are now considered beyond question. For critical historical analyses of the myth of the Bacwezi at Bigo, see P. R. Schmidt, 'Oral traditions, archaeology and history: a short reflective history', in P. Robertshaw (ed.), *A History of African Archaeology* (London, 1990), 252–70; P. R. Schmidt, *Historical Archaeology in Africa: Representation, Social Memory, and Oral Traditions* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2006); and P. R. Schmidt, 'Deconstructing

shortcomings, it did stimulate deep interest in the possibilities of marrying oral traditions with archaeology, something that Jan Vansina noted with detailed observations in his 1965 volume.<sup>8</sup>

The spirit of these inquiries at the time also inspired John Sutton, the first Makerere PhD in archaeology, to pursue similar interests with his research into Siriwikwa holes in the highlands of Kenya. Drawing extensively on oral traditions and local ethnography, Sutton was able to arrive at an explanation of these features as domiciles, departing significantly from colonial representations that these features were ‘cattle pens’.<sup>9</sup> As a student at Makerere in the mid-1960s I, too, was drawn to the excitement that surrounded these early experiments and subsequently used indigenous knowledge and oral traditions to explore the deep-time antiquity of a major ritual site in northwestern Tanzania associated with the origins of iron production in Eastern Africa.<sup>10</sup>

This was not an historical archaeology dependent only on written documents, nor was it an academic pursuit that valorized the modern era as the most transformative among all historic eras in world history.<sup>11</sup> While the second pathway initially incorporated a perspective of ‘verification’ of oral traditions, such testimonies were also used to develop more expansive historical interpretations.<sup>12</sup> Freed of the burden to justify its practice with only colonial entanglements, this type of historical archaeology focused instead on historical issues within African societies, concerned with how Africans constructed their histories, changing and transforming them to suit their sociohistorical needs.

A deepening interest in marrying oral traditions and archaeology developed in the 1970s and 1980s, again partly influenced by Posnansky and his later engagement with West

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archaeologies of African colonialism: making and unmaking the subaltern’, in N. Ferris, R. Harrison, and M. Wilcox (eds.), *Rethinking Colonial Pasts Through Archaeology* (Oxford, 2014), 445–65.

8 J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Chicago, 1965).

9 For example, J. E. G. Sutton, ‘The archaeology and early peoples of the highlands of Kenya and northern Tanzania’, *AZANIA: Journal of the British Institute in Eastern Africa*, 1 (1966), 37–57; J. E. G. Sutton, *The Archaeology of the Western Highlands of Kenya, Volume III* (Nairobi, 1973).

10 For instance, P. R. Schmidt, *Historical Archaeology: A Structural Approach in an African Culture* (Westport, CT, 1978); P. R. Schmidt, *Iron Technology in East Africa: Science, Symbolism, and Archaeology* (Bloomington, IN, 1997); and P. R. Schmidt, *Historical Archaeology in Africa*.

11 One of the initial claims that historical archaeology is an archaeology of the modern world is found in B. M. Fagan and C. E. Orser, Jr, *Historical Archaeology* (New York, 1995). Subsequently, this perspective has been reified in C. E. Orser, Jr, *A Historical Archaeology of the Modern World* (New York, 1996); and, among others, D. L. Hardesty, ‘Historical archaeology in the next millennium: a forum’, *Historical Archaeology*, 33:2 (1999), 51–8. Africanists have been caught between a legacy of African-based precolonial history and the broader disciplinary stress on modernity, resulting in compromises such as that proposed by Peter Robertshaw – that we extend colonialism in Africa back in time to include Eastern colonialism, P. Robertshaw, ‘African historical archaeolog(ies): past, present, and a possible future’, in A. Reid and P. Lane (eds.), *African Historical Archaeologies* (New York, 2004), 375–91. For critiques of the Eurocentric view of historical archaeology in Africa, see P. R. Schmidt and J. R. Walz, ‘Re-representing African pasts through historical archaeology’, *American Antiquity*, 72:1 (2007), 53–70.

12 See a discussion of these early ‘verification’ experiments with oral traditions in P. R. Schmidt, ‘Remaking African history with archaeology’, in P. R. Schmidt and T. Patterson (eds.), *Making Alternative Histories: The Practice of Archaeology and History in Non-Western Settings* (Santa Fe, NM, 1995), 118–47; this includes a history of the ‘verification approach’ as part of East African archaeological practice, but does not advocate a ‘verification’ approach, contrary to the representation by D. Stump, ‘On applied archaeology, indigenous knowledge, and the usable past’, *Current Anthropology*, 54:3 (2013), 268–98.

African archaeology. Diverse efforts arose in using archaeological evidence to challenge deep-seated historical interpretations, many of which arose under colonialism. These meta-narratives often represented African histories as less developed and resilient than Europe's or diminished local histories by privileging outside influences. The research of Susan and Rod McIntosh in the Niger River Delta, for example, provided an important and early success story in affirming that local deep-time oral traditions about ancient settlements in the Jenne area were accurate – with archaeology attesting to local processes of settlement more than two millennia ago.<sup>13</sup> These findings disproved the literary interpretation that the area did not experience significant development until the coming of Islam.

In retrospect, little attention was accorded to this and other breakthroughs in the general practise of African historical archaeology. Archaeologists were not part of historians' discourse about oral traditions.<sup>14</sup> When edited volumes were published about oral tradition research, archaeologists were not included, even though their research may have been pertinent.<sup>15</sup> Though this was also the era of periodic publications of radiocarbon dates in *The Journal of African History*, rarely did historians respond to such updates, possibly because robust discussion by archaeologists of the historical implications was missing. The two communities coexisted with mutual interests, yet rarely was there a systemic interchange of ideas, possibly because archaeological lingo often mystified historians.

Since Posnansky set the standard for local historical engagements several decades ago, there has been a sea change in historical archaeology at the global level, with many scholars advocating an archaeology of the 'modern' era. This historical archaeology privileges European involvement with the non-European world, which when applied to Africa may overlook the vitality of historical systems within indigenous African societies. This school of thought, promulgated from the perspective of North American based archaeologists, holds that colonial engagements are those that merit inquiry in conjunction with archaeology.<sup>16</sup> Concomitantly, those who practise an historical archaeology that seeks to understand internal dynamics of change and continuity are patronizingly characterized as practicing an 'historical archeology, but not modern-world archeology because it denies the myriad relationships of power, dominance, and oppression forced on indigenous peoples by various nation states since about 1500'.<sup>17</sup>

13 S.K. McIntosh and R.J. McIntosh, *Prehistoric Investigations in the Region of Jenne, Mali*, Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology, 2, British Archaeological Reports (Oxford, 1980).

14 See several notable exceptions, for example, C. Ehret and M. Posnansky, *The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History* (Berkeley, 1982); D. L. Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century* (Oxford, 1998).

15 For example, J. Miller (ed.), *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History* (Hamden, CT, 1980); and, L. White, S.E. Miescher, and D.W. Cohen (eds.), *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington, IN, 2001). On the widening gulf between African history and African archaeology, see A. B. Stahl and A. LaViolette, 'Introduction: current trends in the archaeology of African history', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 42:3 (2009), 374.

16 For instance, C. E. Orser, Jr, 'An archaeology of ethnocentrism', *American Antiquity*, 77:4 (2012), 737–55, is a polemical defense of a Eurocentric perspective of historical archaeology at the global level, including misrepresentations of how historical archaeology is practised in Africa. For an alternative view, see P.R. Schmidt and I. Pikirayi, 'Will historical archaeology escape its Western Prejudices to become relevant to Africa?', *Historical Archaeology* (forthcoming).

17 Orser, Jr, 'An archaeology', 742.

This bounded view of the discipline excludes most of African history and arouses objections in the African world because colonial history is once again privileged – an amplification of the colonial experience and a manifestation of the writing of African history from European documents and points of view. A dilemma facing historical archaeologists of Africa today is whether they should choose to satisfy these rigid criteria in order to meet standards set in the West, or whether to connect their archaeology with ways of seeing the contemporary world through its links to the deep past, through oral traditions and other sociohistorical evidence. This is not an either/or condition, as many of us face both conditions in our practice, as discussed in the final section of this article.

## HYBRID APPROACHES

Today, archaeologists continue to practise both types of historical archaeology in East Africa as well as various hybrids. The colonial-oriented approach is steadily growing more popular at the expense of deep-time histories. This trend in African archaeology – an ever-increasing concentration on the historic period (meaning the modern era of literacy), especially with increased interests in the slave trade in both West and East Africa – parallels what Richard Reid has identified as a dominant interest in African history in the modern era.<sup>18</sup> The reasons for this shift are multiple. Among the influences are more accessible information held in colonial archives, a proliferation of published research during the postcolonial era, and growing popularity of ideological perspectives that privilege modern era historical archaeology over precolonial historic archaeology. There are disquieting implications held in the parallel trends in African history and African historical archaeology, foremost of which is a disappearing interest and capacity to research more ancient history in Africa. There are also pragmatic concerns expressed in this changing profile. To add significant inquiries into oral traditions and local ethnography vastly complicates and extends field research, something that few young scholars can afford to engage. It takes much greater effort and financial backing to conduct an historic archaeology that integrates ethnography, archival research, and oral traditions with archaeological evidence, not to mention mastery of an African language.

There are, however, important and positive exceptions to this trend, best illustrated by the research of Jonathan Walz in eastern Tanzania. Working with Zigua healers, Walz brings new insights into the flow of objects along historic trade routes into the interior of Tanzania. Of significant interest to historians is his treatment of objects such as glass beads that today are incorporated into healing practices among the Zigua. Healers traverse past caravan routes and gather such items from dispersed areas – integrating the past into present beliefs and practices.<sup>19</sup> Building on the work of historians such as J. L. Giblin, J. Glassman, S. Feierman, and I. N. Kimambo, Walz shows the advantages of focusing

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18 R. Reid, 'Past and presentism: the "precolonial" and the foreshortening of African history', *The Journal of African History*, 52:2 (2011), 135–55; A. Holl, 'Worldviews, mind-sets, and trajectories in West African archaeology', in P. R. Schmidt (ed.), *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa* (Santa Fe, NM, 2009), 129–48.

19 J. R. Walz, 'Healing space time to medical performance and object itineraries on a Tanzania landscape', in R. A. Joyce and S. D. Gillespie (eds.), *Things in Motion: Object Itineraries in Anthropological Practice* (Santa Fe, NM, 2015), 161–77.

on present healing practices that draw on the power and vitality of the past to mitigate the painful circumstances of colonial and postcolonial histories in the lower Pangani (Ruvu) basin.<sup>20</sup> Walz's perspective cautions that the history of things resides not only in the past but also in the present, arising from historical motivations among the Zigua to include landscapes and things as part of their healing performances.

Walz's contributions include important interpretative positions on the limited and Eurocentric conceptualization of historical archaeology as a European encapsulation, 'whereby historicity derives from entanglement with Europe', a perspective that denies how and why Africans made and thought about their own histories, often outside European influence.<sup>21</sup> Walz expands East African historical horizons in ways reminiscent of Feierman's initial treatments of Shambaa myth, to proffer interpretations about mythological serpents that appear during times of duress and disaster.<sup>22</sup> These stories (and their semantic domains) are tied to prominent places with deep-time histories and their tellings engage the myriad changes that have impacted the Pangani basin over the centuries, ranging from the slave trade to plantation agriculture. Particularly important is the close proximity of such sites to important nodes in the caravan routes, a linking that testifies to change introduced by external and internal trade over the centuries. The eruption of snake myths are an integral part of the landscape history, mostly overlooked by historians as key indices to change.

The most significant contribution Walz makes to Eastern African history is his demonstration of active exchange between Swahili coastal settlements and the interior, particularly manifest at sites such as Kwa Mgogo near Mombo town at the western skirt of the Western Usambara Mountains. Using material culture, such as land snail beads and other commodities manufactured in the interior, ceramic affinities between the so-called hinterland and the coast, and coastal and foreign items that appear at inland sites, Walz collapses the dichotomy between coast and interior and between history and prehistory – a significant contribution to African history that affirms strong affinities between 'Swahili' coastal communities and their contemporary counterparts in the interior.<sup>23</sup> Other research in the same regions, as discussed by Paul Lane, focuses on the presence of trade routes as possible stimulus for change in subsistence practices.<sup>24</sup>

20 J. L. Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania, 1840–1940* (Philadelphia, 1992); J. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion & Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, NH, 1995); S. Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom: A History* (Madison, 1974); and, I. N. Kimambo, 'Environmental control and hunger: in the mountains & plains of nineteenth-century Northeastern Tanzania', in G. Maddox, J. L. Giblin, and I. N. Kimambo (eds.), *Custodians of the Land: Ecology & Culture in the History of Tanzania* (London, 1996), 71–95.

21 See J. R. Walz, 'Archaeologies of disenchantment', in P. R. Schmidt (ed.), *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa* (Santa Fe, NM, 2009), 21–38; and J. R. Walz, 'Mombo and the Mkomazi Corridor', in B. Mapunda and P. Msemwa (eds.), *Salvaging Tanzania's Cultural Heritage* (Dar es Salaam, 2005), 198–213.

22 Feierman, 'The Shambaa', 40–69.

23 Also see J. R. Walz, 'Routes to history: archaeology and being articulate in Eastern Africa', in P. R. Schmidt and S. Mrozowski (eds.), *The Death of Prehistory* (Oxford, 2013), 69–91.

24 P. Lane, 'New directions for historical archaeology in Eastern Africa?', *The Journal of African History*, 57:2 (2016); T. J. Biginagwa, 'Historical archaeology of the nineteenth-century caravan trade in North-Eastern Tanzania: a zooarchaeological perspective' (PhD thesis, University of York, 2012).

One of the trends away from deep-time African histories is the significant growth of Diaspora archaeology, the study of the slave trade, its impact on African societies within Africa and on the Africans and their descendants who were enslaved in the Americas. There is now a well-established practice in Diaspora archaeology and African American archaeology, especially in North America, that is growing steadily and that may contribute to a diminished interest in ancient African history.<sup>25</sup> Study of European and Asian engagement with African societies through the medium of slavery has extended to East Africa, with the caveat that the slavers were mostly Omani Arabs, who provided slaves to Western as well as Eastern ports. The Indian Ocean Diaspora is evoking more interest from archaeologists, ranging from maroon communities in Kenya, where Lydia Marshall has effectively used oral accounts of Watoro trading of food commodities,<sup>26</sup> to other studies noted by Paul Lane.<sup>27</sup> Some studies avoid an exclusive reliance on documentary evidence, integrating local histories and emphasizing African viewpoints and quotidian material life, variously represented by the ambiguous archaeological catchphrase ‘African agency’, a kind of archaeological power-blessing sometimes meant to humanize the archaeological record.

Noteworthy from the perspective of integration of African-made histories is the research of Chaparukha Kusimba in eastern Kenya.<sup>28</sup> Eschewing a strictly site-based archaeology, Kusimba has meticulously collected and analyzed oral traditions about Nyika communities’ interactions with slaving – how they adapted to the depredations of slaving, erecting special refuges, and scheduling their lives to include seclusion and surveillance. This attention to local histories sets this historical archaeology apart from those who seek to investigate slavery from the perspective of foreign engagements with Africa. Another new perspective emerging from historical archaeology on the coastal littoral is a new way of using the Swahili Chronicles.

Matthew Pawlowicz and Adria LaViolette examine late nineteenth-century Swahili Chronicles for Lindi, Sudi, and Mikindani, three towns along the southern Tanzania coast, finding these histories to be significantly different in their emphasis on the dominance of African groups in the narratives.<sup>29</sup> The contributions of African groups appear explicitly in the texts and their presence is linked to deep-time histories of material culture in

25 See N. Hunt, ‘Whether African history’, *History Workshop Journal*, 36:1 (2008), 259–65; Hunt argues that ‘African history has never been more at risk to disappearing into diaspora studies of North America as diversity agendas there prescribe histories that view Africa only through the lens of Atlantic mobility and slavery’, 259. This view applies equally as well to African historical archaeology, for example, A. Holl, ‘Worldview’, 148.

26 For example, L. Marshall, ‘Fugitive slaves and community creation in nineteenth-century Kenya: an archaeological and historical investigation of Watoro villages’ (PhD thesis, University of Virginia, 2011); and L. Marshall, ‘Spatiality and the interpretation of identity formation: fugitive slave community creation in nineteenth-century Kenya’, *African Archaeological Review*, 29 (2012), 355–81.

27 Lane, ‘New directions’.

28 C. Kusimba, ‘Archaeology of slavery in East Africa’, *African Archaeological Review*, 21:2 (2004), 59–88; C. Kusimba, ‘Practicing postcolonial archaeology in Africa from the United States’, in P. R. Schmidt (ed.), *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa* (Santa Fe, NM, 2009), 57–76.

29 M. Pawlowicz and A. LaViolette, ‘Swahili historical chronicles from an archaeological perspective: bridging history, archaeology, coast, and hinterland in Southern Tanzania’, in P. R. Schmidt and S. Mrozowski (eds.), *The Death of Prehistory* (Oxford, 2013), 117–40.

the region. The material culture and the African-oriented narratives both mark off this sub-region from the northern coast, challenging dominant interpretations about the Swahili world and extending an historical narrative beyond the Swahili elite to include a majority Swahili population residing in villages and towns.

As the investigations of Walz, Marshall, Kusimba, and Pawlowicz and LaViolette illustrate, the divisions that inform global historical archaeology today do not influence most practices in East Africa. Meanwhile, a new frontier in historical archaeology in East Africa is slowly emerging, with initiatives taken by local groups and communities to capture and revitalize their histories as well as contest conventional interpretations. Among the most vital of these community projects is that involving diverse ethnic groups at the Shimoni Caves of southeastern Kenya. One group in the larger community has challenged the given historical narratives about the caves as slaveholding pens, with their points of view now incorporated into public representations.<sup>30</sup> Income from the Shimoni Caves heritage site supports schools, teacher salaries, and a host of other projects that contribute to local wellbeing. Such initiatives, because they inevitably involve colonial entanglements and postcolonial cultural transformations, involve archaeologists in assessments of materiality, benefits that accrue to communities, and reconciliation of interpretative debates.<sup>31</sup>

## FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

At a time when oral traditions have become deeply compromised by the death of so many history-keepers after the HIV/AIDS pandemic,<sup>32</sup> there is growing concern that research into the intersections of oral testimonies with archaeological evidence will fade proportionately. But this fear is ill-founded, for the disappearance of specific genres of oral tradition testimony has been accompanied by the emergence of alternative, subaltern histories.<sup>33</sup> In settings where earlier research tended to focus on oral testimonies held by elites and recognized male storytellers, new opportunities have emerged to investigate subaltern accounts, often histories held by women.<sup>34</sup> The absence of colonial records for much of daily life in

30 P. Abungu, 'Heritage, memories, and community development: the case of Shimoni Slave Caves Heritage Site, Kenya', in P. R. Schmidt and I. Pikirayi (eds.), *Community Archaeology and Heritage in Africa: Decolonizing Practice* (London and New York, 2016, in press).

31 D. Stump, 'On applied archeology'. Stump is wary of applied approaches to history and their conflation with integrative archaeologies (what he calls hybrid archaeologies). He objects strongly to the loss of power by historians over historical analyses, yet he also says that he 'would cling like a drowning sailor to any approach that offered the faintest possibility of demonstrating a direct benefit of archaeological research to any community at any scale', 293. Far from any drowning events, community archaeologies have been accruing local benefits for some years.

32 P. R. Schmidt, 'Social memory and trauma in northwestern Tanzania: organic, spontaneous community collaboration', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 10:2 (2010), 255–79.

33 For instance, P. R. Schmidt, 'Hardcore ethnography: interrogating the intersection of disease, human rights and heritage', *Heritage and Society*, 7:2 (2014), 152–70; P. R. Schmidt, 'Rediscovering community archaeology in Africa and reframing its practice', *Journal of Community Archaeology and Heritage*, 1:1 (2014), 38–56; and, P. R. Schmidt, E. Bamba, and Z. Mohamed, 'Emerging female subaltern histories in Tanzania: unforeseen consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic', in S. Kus and K. Kasper (eds.), *Materiality of Gendered Practices: Archaeological Perspectives Across Historical Landscapes* (Boulder, CO, 2016, in press).



colonial times marks important opportunities for a new period of inquiry into oral traditions and oral histories linked to landscape history, architecture, and ritual places.

This new historical archaeology incorporates a community approach when community members see it in their interests to investigate their histories to ensure their preservation under conditions of rapid change. Over the last six years, several local groups in northwest Tanzania have worked to rescue and revitalize their histories. The first case pertains to the palace of King Kahigi II (1890–1916) of Kihanja Kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Kihanja Kingdom was marked by a prominent and very large royal compound built by the German colonial government at Kanazi in a German colonial style. The record about Kanazi is sparse but oral histories are foremost among the limited sources that provide a sense of what life was like in this extraordinary but very rural royal compound.

By 2008, the main residence and the court building were both seriously degraded, leading to efforts to restore and stabilize Kanazi Palace.<sup>36</sup> As participants and archaeologists, we saw that oral traditions and oral histories, along with archaeology, provided the only significant evidence for understanding elite colonial entanglements in northwest Tanzania. The goal was to conduct an historical archaeology of daily life at Kanazi, adding historical dimensions to a museum within the restored structures. The royal family and clan saw this to their benefit after years of lost prestige and degradation to the royal compound.

A popular and instructive story about Kanazi Palace focuses on King Alfred Kalemwa (1916–43), Kahigi's successor, who had a taste for fancy cars. He owned and operated the first motorcycle with a sidecar.<sup>37</sup> When British judicial policy freed the royal court for other uses, the Kings of Kanazi are said to have converted it to a garage. Excavations at the entry to the court revealed a number of used car parts, confirming that the court was indeed later used for car repairs. As excavations continued within the court building, we came to understand how important car ownership was to the former kings at Kanazi. Exploring a storeroom once used for tribute, there was no evidence for mundane food stuffs; rather, we documented numerous car parts, including parts to a Willys Jeep, a Peugeot 404, and a Landrover – a small sampling of a once prosperous life (Figs. 1a and b).<sup>38</sup>

This conjunction between oral traditions and archaeological evidence illustrates the importance of an integrative approach to historical archaeology in Africa during more recent times. Inquiries spread to elderly shopkeepers in Bukoba town, where men now in their

34 Within historical archaeology these are recent developments, but they fit within a larger genre of historical writing best illustrated by I. Berger, 'Rebels or status seekers? Women as spirit mediums in East Africa', in A. Cornwall (ed.), *Readings in Gender in Africa* (Bloomington, IN, 2005), 148–56; C. Robertson and I. Berger (eds.), *Women and Class in Africa* (New York, 1986); and L. White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990), which also focuses on Haya women.

35 H. Cory, *History of the Bukoba District* (Mwanza, 1959); K. Curtis, 'Capitalism, fettered: state, merchant, and peasant in northwestern Tanzania, 1917–1968' (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1989); and P. R. Schmidt, *Kanazi Palace Restoration: A Foundation for Sustainable Heritage Tourism in Kagera Region* (Dar es Salaam, 2011).

36 Schmidt, 'Kanazi palace', 16–39.

37 Cory, 'History', 161.

38 For more details see P. R. Schmidt, 'Collaborative archaeology and heritage in Africa: views from the Trench and beyond', in P. R. Schmidt and I. Pikirayi (eds.), *Community Archaeology and Heritage in Africa: Decolonizing Practice* (London and New York, 2016, in press). The excavated items are on display at the Kanazi Palace museum.



**Fig. 1.** (a) left: Royal court at Kanazi undergoing restoration. The throne platform is on the left and the tribute room in the background, where excavations documented many used auto parts. (b) right: Excavation inside court tribute room, with a large variety of used auto parts discarded within the court, later used as a garage: Unit I, level 5.

seventies remembered their fathers' stories or held direct oral histories about their interactions with the former kings. The King of Kihanja continued to receive local tribute from his subjects as well as a handsome government stipend higher than other leaders and as much as a highly placed civil servant in British service.<sup>39</sup> King Kalemra's conspicuous consumption was treated as a mark of wealth and standing, with credit lines allowing him greater privilege and access to the physical signatures of material wellbeing.

Archaeological inquiries at Kanazi have helped to illuminate the history of elite consumption in rural Tanganyika, showing it to be far more expansive than a just-so story about a motorcycle side-car. Over the last 45 years and many excavations in the back and front yards of rural residences ranging from chiefs to common folk, we have documented nothing that could be considered consumption of luxury commodities. At Kanazi the record was significantly different: fancy painted ceramics dating to the twentieth century, gin bottles, medicine bottles of various sizes, and a large variety of used auto parts.<sup>40</sup> When other families, including chiefs and important functionaries, were eating from banana leaves, the royal family used fine china purchased from merchants in Bukoba, further negotiating an enhanced standing in their otherwise politically diminished lives.

The second case arises out of a strong community initiative in Katuruka village to preserve and restore sacred sites and to research and preserve extant oral testimonies in a village archive. My role was first as an invited participant and eventually as a co-producer of historical knowledge, especially as subaltern histories came to light and compelled wider dissemination and acknowledgement. The upshot of village inquiries was the emergence of the history of a once powerful female ritual figure who, during a period of German

39 E. K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate: British District Officer in Tanganyika* (London, 1976).

40 Schmidt, 'Collaborative archaeology'.

colonial manipulations of the geopolitics of Bukara Kingdom, arose as an influential and powerful political figure. Njeru, the white sheep, at age 12 in 1900, married King Rugomora Mahe (c. 1650–75).<sup>41</sup> Thereafter she was invested with conducting the new moon ceremonies, rituals of renewal at the ancient Kaiija shrine tree. As caretaker of the royal burial estate, she received tribute from her subjects and was treated like, as well as called, a *Mukama* or King. The most influential ritual/political figure in the northern section of Bukara kingdom, her history remained submerged until women recently came to be acknowledged as the keepers of oral history in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.<sup>42</sup>

Njeru's history was clearly articulated by women in Katuruka, collapsing the androcentric circumscriptions that once obscured her ritual and political roles and opening new historical understandings of ritual and political life in the Great Lakes. Njeru's history is now part of a heritage trail that villagers have created to earn income from heritage tourism (also aimed at teaching local history in schools) to create job opportunities for unemployed school-leavers and others in the village. The ritual regalia house, *Buchwankwanzi*, has been rebuilt where it used to sit, in the midst of a major archaeological site associated with the origins of iron working and the capital of the later Hinda dynasty (Fig. 2).<sup>43</sup> Deeply involved in those investigations nearly fifty years ago, villagers now incorporate archaeological evidence into their heritage discourse.

Additional archaeological inquiries, at the request of the community and with their participation, have documented Early Iron Age smelting furnaces now on display, have enhanced the value of the heritage experience at Katuruka, and have reinforced historical identity. Ancillary research reveals that little is known about the once scores of female ritual officials who once curated the royal regalia of many Haya kings and conducted their rituals of renewal.<sup>44</sup> These histories, resulting from community initiatives, do not undermine the historical canon with their different ontologies – such as the fact that Njeru was visited monthly during the new moon ceremonies by her husband, King Rugomora, in the form of a snake [who] curled upon her naked lap.<sup>45</sup> Nor is there a threat to epistemological authority of our historical discipline through the enriched views they confer to Haya history.<sup>46</sup>

There is an opportunity to see into the future of African historical archaeology through the lens of community initiatives and participatory research. This change has been coming

41 Schmidt, 'Hardcore ethnography', 182.

42 Schmidt, 'Rediscovering', 50.

43 Schmidt, 'Historical archaeology', 152–161, 200, 208–12; 'Historical archaeology in Africa', 74–7; and 'Hardcore ethnography', 182–83.

44 F. X. Lwamgira, a Haya historian of some note, mentions this ritual office in his history of Kiziba, but gives no further information in *Amakuru ga Kiziba na Abakama Bamu* (Bukoba, 1949). These ritual female officials were seen by early Catholic nuns as neglected and some were given refuge and converted during rapid religious changes of the early twentieth century, an observation arising out of the Kanazi mission records as reported by B. Larrison, *Haya Christians Conversion to Greater Freedom? Women, Church and Social Change in Northwestern Tanzania Under Colonial Rule* (Uppsala, 1987).

45 Schmidt *et al.*, 'Emerging female'.

46 Contrary to Stump, 'On applied archaeology', who warns that 'to call for the incorporation of local conceptions within western historical interpretations is to risk undermining one's authority as a historian, because the historical method requires the rejection of any conception of reality that conflicts with one's own', 276. To present alternative ontologies is not incorporation. It is our responsibility as historians and archaeologists to present local narratives as part of the evidentiary corpus, whatever their ontological profiles.



**Fig. 2.** Reconstruction of *Buchwankwanzi* ritual house by Katuruka villagers in the burial estate of King Rugomora Mahe.

since Posnansky risked incorporating local participation and was also recognized as a potential development more than a decade ago by Robertshaw, who presciently observed that debates arising in communities between archaeologists and local views ‘have the potential to subvert the usual relationship of power between the exotic Western archaeologist or African scholar and his or her local informants. However, this power relationship can only be subverted if the archaeologist sheds the mantle of expertise and engages his or her audience as equals’.<sup>47</sup> This moment has arrived.

A clear vista is opening, informed by what people in villages and urban neighborhoods find to be most important for their own historical identities. No longer is African archaeology the provenance of educated Westerners, let alone educated African archaeologists with their agendas to investigate the dynamics, say, of the slave trade and the role of other commodities such as spices in that complex trade. While such topics may elicit the interest of historians and ‘global’ historical archaeologists, they may mean little to the historical sensibilities of the communities that are the foci of such studies. The gap between modernity and precolonial history does not go unnoticed locally. People listen to their sons and daughters when they return from their daily lessons, never hearing a word uttered in support or in sympathy with their ancient local history. This elicits deep disquiet about the direction of culture change, a condition captured by Reid’s observation that: ‘The deep past remains critically important; the longer it is marginalized, the less healthy the body politic will become, and the more troubled the society in denial.’<sup>48</sup> Local reflections on these conditions set in motion attempts to reclaim histories, leading to collaborations with archaeologists practicing a new archaeology by working with communities to learn what issues have historical importance, to help set research goals, and to participate in archaeological investigations.

<sup>47</sup> Robertshaw, ‘African historical archaeolog(ies)’, 385.

<sup>48</sup> Reid, ‘Past and presentism’, 155.