

Urban Origins in Eastern and Southern Africa

A project summary

This project, concluded in 1993, was a regional, archaeological co-operation between institutions in Botswana, the Comoro islands, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Somalia, Sweden, Tanzania/Zanzibar and Zimbabwe.

'... the Urban Origins in Eastern Africa project emerges as one of the leading archaeological projects in developing nations. In addition to its avowed dedication to develop and strengthen research capacity in eight countries, it has also succeeded in developing a truly cooperative project in which African scholars participate in the planning, data collecting, analysis, and publication of results. The project succeeded in meeting its own goals and its record has set a platform for archaeological research in Africa.' (Professor Fekri Hassan, Washington State University, *SAREC Documentation, Urban origins in Eastern Africa: an evaluation of a SAREC project*, 1993, p. 36).

The 5 year programme was initiated in 1987 with a total budget of SEK 18 million. About 70 persons from eastern Africa and the offshore islands participated in the project with an additional 35 participants from the Swedish Central Board of National Antiquities, the Archaeological Department in Uppsala and other institutions in Sweden were involved in fieldwork, laboratory work and as administrative personnel.

The project Urban Origins in Eastern Africa aimed at showing the indigenous origins and development of urban centres in Africa in order to correct the theories then prevalent which viewed African heritage as derivative and impoverished. To facilitate the implementation of these aims a framework was established between the concerned institutions in the region and a strategy to improve the lack of trained personnel and resources in eastern Africa was drawn up. The aims were:

1. to stimulate the creation of a network of scientific contacts between colleagues in eastern Africa and in Sweden, employing advanced communication and information techniques
2. to assist in the training of a new generation of archaeological researchers in eastern Africa
3. to strengthen technical facilities for research and dissemination of information on archaeological heritage.



Exhibition compiled by students on intensive postgraduate course in Uppsala, 1992. Photo: Gustaf Rönnbäck.

The most important contributions of the project were the creation of a network and interdisciplinary, scientific contacts by three general project workshops (Antanarivo, Harare and Zanzibar) and four specialist meetings (Mombasa, Antanarivo, Maputo and Harare). a cooperation between Swedish and African institutions in field excavations; academic and technical training (working on topics within the priorities of the African countries, following the sandwich model with three/four months away from home at any one time for studies and intensive postgraduate training courses) in Sweden, but also in Africa, France, Great Britain, and the USA which resulted in Ph.D, Fil.lic and M.A. degrees (22) with the publication of the academic theses and over two hundred papers. a strengthening of the technical facilities by support consisting of libraries, field and laboratory equipment, computers, transport and logistics, communication facilities, curation/conservation facilities, duplication and publication.

The evaluation report summarises the result of the project (pp. 7-8):

"the strongest results of the Urban Origins in Eastern Africa project consist of the training of an academic staff, the development of an infrastructure, the creation of a network

among African scholars and institutions, and strengthening links between Swedish scholars and experts in African archaeology as well as creating international links between African and Swedish scholars and experts in African archaeology abroad. Application of advance computer technology to archaeology, as well as the innovative use of drilling, phosphate analysis, geophysical methods, and the Geographic Information System in African archaeology. The project reformulated the concept of urbanisation in establishing the contributions of indigenous peoples and in illustrating the role of transregional processes in the growth and survival of urban centres".

© - 2003. UPPSALA UNIVERSITET | Arkeologi och antik historia, Afrikansk och jämförande arkeologi | Box 626, 751 26 Uppsala | [webmaster](#) | Senast uppdaterad 2004-04-13