

GIUSEPPE CAPRIOTTI

COMPARING PERCEPTIONS:  
WESTERNERS AND KENYANS FACING SWAHILI TANGIBLE  
CULTURAL HERITAGE.  
AN INQUIRY ON GEDE, MNARANI,  
AND JUMBA LA MTWANA RUINS\*

INTRODUCTION

The research question that guides this inquiry came about during my first visit to the monumental ruins of Mnarani, in the suburb of Kilifi, on the Kenyan coast.<sup>1</sup> This visit took place during my first secondment to the country, in 2018, and within the TICASS—Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Sciences project, that is the precursor to TPAAE—Transcultural Perspectives in Art and Art Education. As a western scholar interested in cultural heritage, I was excited to visit Mnarani Park and to discover the ruins of a settlement which are chronologically comparable with the European Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. Following this personal interest, I also visited the ruins at Gede and Jumba la Mtwana, both situated on the Kenyan coast. I remained struck by the fact that the archaeological sites in Mnarani and Gede are combined with snake parks. In addition to my (European) fascination, I was struck by what appeared to me as a generally small number of visitors, mostly white tourists. This gave rise to questions

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<sup>1</sup> On this site see the pioneering article by James KIRKMAN, "Mnarani of Kilifi: The Mosques and Tombs," *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 95–112.

about the absence of black Kenyans. Why are white tourists almost exclusively visiting the archaeological parks and not local people? And, more generally, which is the perception of the value of tangible cultural heritage among those living in coastal Kenya?

Even though the tangible cultural heritage of the Kenyan coast between Malindi and Mombasa is also embodied by Portuguese architecture (exemplified by Fort Jesus in Mombasa) and British colonial architecture (mainly in Malindi and Mombasa), this essay will deal specifically with the perception of the value of Swahili cultural heritage, in particular, the role of the ruins in the social, cultural, and economic life of the coast. My aim is to better understand how today's inhabitants approach the Swahili past, with a focus on the relationship between identity and tangible culture.

The tangible cultural heritage of the Kenyan coastal area between Malindi and Mombasa is mainly (but not exclusively) represented by complexes of ruins left of early urban settlements. These date between the 10th and 18th centuries and coincide with the formation of Swahili culture. This cultural formation and these coastal settlements are an interesting, interrelated and complex phenomenon explored extensively in archaeological research.<sup>2</sup> However controversial, recent scientific literature dealing with the search for indigenous origins overturned the old hypothesis of an exclusively Arab origin of the Swahili culture.<sup>3</sup> According to this new theory, the myth of external (Arabic or Persian) origin arises from common words in the vocabulary of both Arabic and Swahili languages. It posits that Swahili culture took shape on the Kenyan coast before the Arab and Portuguese colonization, and that Swahili civilization finds its roots among Bantu tribes, including the Mijikenda, that share a common vocabulary. These groups are found both in coastal and upland regions and include tribes that had no contact with Arab traders. The Swahili language not only borrows from Arabic, but also from

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<sup>2</sup> Felix CHAMI, *Zanzibar and the Swahili Coast from c. 30.000 years ago* (Dar es Salaam: E & D Vision Pub., 2009); Felix CHAMI, *Tanzania Coast in the First Millennium AD. An Archeology of the Iron-Working, Farming Communities*, Studies in African Archeology 7 (Uppsala: Societas Archaeologica Upsaliensis, 1994); Chapurukha Makokha Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of the Swahili States* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1999); Jan HOORWEG, Dick FOEKEN, and Robert A. OBUDHO, eds., *Kenya Coast Handbook: Culture, Resources and Development in the East African Littoral* (Münster: Lit, 2000); Herman O. KIRIAMA, *The Swahili of the Kenya Coast* (London: Eight-Publishers, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Chapurukha M. KUSIMBA, Ryan RAAUM, Sloan WILLIAMS, Janet MONET, Ibrahim BUSOLO, and Mohamed MCHULA, "Decoding the Swahili: An Integrated Archaeological and Genetic Study of the Swahili of East Africa," *Studies in the African Past* 9 (2011): 23.

Gujarat, Chinese, Indonesian, and Portuguese.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the ruins of stone towns along the east African coast not only are an effect of Arab colonization. Current scholars tend to overcome the problem of the external or indigenous origins with the notion of the formation of Swahili culture in this specific area. Future studies and research will better understand how much this search for indigenous and local origins is motivated by post-colonial and identity claims.

As I have already observed, the archaeological sites of Mnarani, Gede and Jumba la Mtwana are mostly visited by foreign tourists. Therefore, the first step in my research is to analyse how the ruins are presented and promoted in guidebooks for Kenyan and Westerner tourists. This is a limited sample, conducted with guides I was able to find in Kenyan university libraries and in the Euro-American market.

#### 1. THE PERCEPTION OF WESTERNERS: ANALYSIS OF GUIDEBOOKS FOR TOURISTS

How are the ruins presented in international and local guides for tourists?

The *Kenya Guide* was published in 1997 by Elise Vachon, who was born in Kenya to British parents. It is a travel guide for “American and foreign locals”, with the subtitle: “Be a traveller—not a tourist!”<sup>5</sup> So the guide was conceived by a Kenyan, mostly for American and foreign residents. About Jumba la Mutwana National Park we can read:

This fascinating monument is actually excavated ruins of a 14th century Swahili settlement and slave trading center. The name means “house of slaves”. It is located a short distance north along the coast, just after crossing the Mtwapa Creek bridge near Kibambala village. Look for the signpost. Grassy slopes down to the ocean and huge, old baobab trees add interest to the site. The most impressive remains are those of “the mosque by the sea”—a large worship center with many tombs and wall scripts of the Koran. (280)

Concerning the Mnarani ruins, the guidebook says:

A short distance outside the town of Kilifi, on the Mombasa side of Kilifi Creek, are the well-preserved Mnarani Ruins. They sit at the top of a cliff overlooking

<sup>4</sup> See the paper by Ibrahim Busolo in this journal issue (pp. 35–51).

<sup>5</sup> Elise VACHON, *Kenya Guide* (New York: Open Road Publishing, 1997).

Kilifi Creek and the old ferry landing. Fortunately, they have not found their way into the mainstream of tourism, but you still have to pay \$3.90 to get in if there is anyone there to collect. The ruins are not as large as those at Gede, but they are just as impressive. The city was once part of a string of Swahili towns dotting the East African coast. Excavations done in 1954 show the site was occupied from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Remains indicate the town was destroyed by pillaging Galla tribes. Remnants of the town wall with its busy gate and an amazingly deep well offer a look into the past. There is a Great Mosque with its delicately carved inscription around a niche (*mirabh*) pointing the way to Mecca; a smaller mosque, and various tombs. One of the burial chambers is actually a pillar tomb. (289)

On Gede National Park, the author spares more lines:

Located just off the Mombasa-to-Malindi road, about two miles from Watamu, are marvellous, partly excavated Swahili ruins, surrounded by almost impenetrable woods. To get into Gede of Gedi (which means 'Precious'), there is a charge of \$4, which is worth every penny. Buy the detailed map and guide book at the entrance in order to get the full historical effect. Hours are 7:00 am to 6:00 pm daily. An ancient city of Islamic origin, Gede is estimated to be from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For reasons unknown, the mysterious city was abandoned toward the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Archaeologists guess the ocean receded and left them high and dry, or invading tribes ran them off. Thick forest took over the site but it was re-discovered in 1920. The large palace is particularly fascinating with all its rooms, halls, and niches. There is even a 'safe' for valuables and impressive 'bath-rooms'. Some partial restoration work on the Great Mosque and the deep wells is making slow progress. It is possible to wander around the 45-odd acres of ruins, where it's fun to imagine what the town was like so long ago. Monkeys chatter in the treetops, tiny antelopes or, perhaps, an elephant shrew may show themselves. Birds, snakes, millipedes, huge ants, lizards and butterflies bask in the sun, sharing the ruins and encompassing forest with you. The locals stay away at night, claiming ghosts haunt the site. Even the archaeologist James Kirkman, excavating the area, says he felt he was being watched. The entire place is filled with a mysterious and delightfully titillating area. (297)

In this case, the author also mentions the presence of monkeys, snakes, and butterflies, that (as we will see) are very important for the life of the park.

The *Kenya Tourism Guide 2009/2010* (5th ed.) is published by the Postal Directories of Nairobi<sup>6</sup> for a local and international tourists. In it, Gede and the Mnarani ruins are cited in a combined entry:

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<sup>6</sup> *Kenya Tourism Guide 2009/2010*, 5th ed. (Nairobi: Postal Directories of Nairobi, 2009).

Gede Museum is an important archaeological site. It was founded in the 12th century and grew until the 17th century, when it was abandoned mainly due to hostile neighbouring communities. Excavations in the 1940s revealed abundant remains of religious, cultural, domestic, and commercial structures, including imported Chinese and Islamic porcelain, glass, shell beads, gold and silver jewellery, coins, and local pottery. Gede also has a surrounding indigenous forest that is home to a variety of flora and fauna. Mnarani Ruins in Kilifi are the remains of a 14th century Swahili occupation and settlement, and consist mainly of two mosques and some tombs. The mosque and tombs were built between 1475 and 1500. (217)

Gede is illustrated with seven pictures, but Mnarani is not depicted. The guide doesn't mention the presence of the snake parks at the archaeological sites. Regarding Jumba la Mtwana, the guide says:

Jumba la Mtwana (mansion of the slave), located in Kilifi, offers the tourist an informative and interesting attraction. However, no evidence has been found so far to suggest that this 13th century Swahili settlement was a slave trade centre. Jumba la Mtwana are the remains of a 13th century Swahili settlement, and consist of well preserved mosques, tombs, and domestic houses. Among the exhibits are artefacts of imported Chinese and Islamic pottery, local pottery, and glass and shell beads. Every year, the Rabai people of Jumba hold a cultural festival to celebrate their culture. A small museum commemorating the life of Ludwig Krapf and the Rabai culture can also be found here. (219)

To these guides, produced in Kenya, we can add two more, written in Italian. For the purposes of our research, these are very important as the Kenyan coast is visited in great number by Italians, many of whom reside there.

A guidebook published in 2005 by the Florentine publisher Polaris and written by four Italian authors offers an itinerary from Mombasa and Malindi for coastal visitors. In this itinerary, Mnarani is not mentioned, Jumba la Mtwana is only quoted with an explanation of three lines, whereas Gede enjoys mention in a special box as an unmissable attraction:

Mysterious and exciting appear to the scholar the ruins of Gedi, the Arab city suddenly abandoned by its inhabitants in the 16th century, perhaps due to the unexpected arrival of Galla nomads from neighbouring Ogaden and Somalia. This archaeological complex remained completely hidden by the jungle for three centuries until it was found at the end of the 19th century and, subsequently, restored in the decade between 1948 and 1958 by the team led by Dr. James Kirkman.

This city, declared a National Monument in 1927, is nestled in a dense forest inhabited by monkeys and forest duikers (*Cephalophus adersi*), a species of antelope that lives in coastal woods. The salient features of this animal are the crest of long hair between the horns, the short rounded ears and the soft red coat with a white area in the rear. Gedi is one of the most important historical sites in Kenya: it is in fact the most interesting testimony of an urban centre built during the Arab colonization. The most significant constructions are the Juma'a, or great mosque, the complex of raised tombs built according to the characteristic Swahili architecture and dominated by a hexagonal monolith that rises to the side of the entrance, the public building where the sultan directed the economy and presided over the administration of justice, and some stately homes still well preserved. This stone city was protected from the outside by a double wall of which only a few majestic entrance portals have survived. The discovery of valuable furnishings, such as blue and white Chinese porcelain, carnelian and coral beads, coins, glass, and terracotta lamps, led scholars to believe that the 2,500 inhabitants enjoyed a high standard of living. So, why did the name 'Gedi' not appear in the documents and maps of the time? Why was it abandoned for no plausible reason? The uniqueness of Gedi, its fascinating links with the Arab world and the stories that can be read from its walls suggest any conclusion.<sup>7</sup>

Without any mention to the snake park, the guide furnishes a captivating description of a site rich with secrets and unsolved mysteries.

The last guidebook I will look at was written by Briton Richard Trillo for Rough Guides and published in Italian in 2013 by Feltrinelli. It is not feasible to quote its detailed descriptions due to length. Mnarani ruins are described as a very interesting site, not only for its architecture, but also for the great number of Arab inscriptions on its buildings, for the landscape and its position on Kilifi Creek. Two pages are dedicated to Jumba la Mtwana, recommended not only for the rich history of the site, but also as an enchanting beach. Three pages are dedicated to the history, description, and explanation of Gede's ruins, which the author considers "astonishingly beautiful": "don't miss it, even if you are not interested" in the archaeological sites of the coast. The guide contains detailed descriptions of Gede's palace, great mosque, and tombs. It does not omit the peculiar Kipepeo, the "house of butterflies", which, as we will see, is very important for the local economy;<sup>8</sup> even if the snake parks go unmentioned.

<sup>7</sup> My translation, see Massimo BOCALE, Gianni MAITAN, Piera BORGHETTI, and Marialuisa TRAMONTAN, *Kenya. Un infinito safari tra culture ancestrali e i Big Five d'Africa* (Florence: Polaris, 2005), 311–12.

<sup>8</sup> Richard TRILLO, *Kenya* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2013), 416–18, 448, 452–54.

In these guides, aimed mainly at international tourists and with different degrees of detail, the ruins are considered very important sites; strongly recommend in some and explicitly considered unmissable in others. In my opinion, this is an important reason why the ruins are visited mostly by international tourists.

## 2. THE PERCEPTION OF THE ARTISTS CASTRO AND PETER NGUGI

During this research, I also involved artists living in Kilifi and Mnarani to provide points of view on their relationship with Swahili architecture and culture that could be significant for my investigation. The art of Moha (Mohammed), a Swahili painter living in Mnarani, doesn't have a connection with the ruins, even though he is a Muslim and has visited the site. On the contrary, the Kilifi-based painter Castro (Castro Osore), a member of the Luhya tribe, makes Swahili-themed paintings for a local and international clientele. On the coast, tourists love buying paintings with exotic settings.<sup>9</sup> In discussing with Castro his artistic production, I was impressed by a painting (now in the collection of a Kilifi resident, Leslie Rampinelli) of a flautist interacting with many turtles, set against a background of Islamic architecture similar to the ruins in Mnarani. That visitors to the archaeological site must pass by the reptile park, with many snakes and extraordinarily large tortoises, made me think that the artist's visit there might have inspired the painting. However, Castro said that my guess was wrong and that the painting had no relation to Mnarani ruins. Rather, the work is a copy of piece made in 1906 by Turkish orientalist painter Osman Hamdi Bey entitled *The Tortoise Trainer*. I think that even a report of an erroneous research trail has a value. In this case it is indicative of how misleading the scholar's expectation can be.

Something very different happens in the art of Peter Ngugi, an artist from the Kikuyu tribe, who resided on the island of Lamu on Kenya's north coast in 2017, where Swahili culture is alive in the urban structure of a vivid

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<sup>9</sup> On the art of Mohammed and Castro see Giuseppe CAPRIOTTI, "In a Savannah of Images. Artistic Production and Public Spaces along the Kenyan Coast," in *Urban Visibility, Mobility, Information and Technology of Images*, ed. Aleksandra Lukaszewicz Alcaraz and Flavia Stara (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Akademii Sztuki w Szczecinie, 2020), 70–92.

city.<sup>10</sup> Now based in Thika, an inland city not far from Nairobi, the painter exhibited a series entitled *Walls Have Ears*<sup>11</sup> at the Lamu Art Festival that organisers selected for their catalogue cover.<sup>12</sup> Swahili architecture serves as a backdrop for paintings in the series, sometimes asserted in the foreground, as well. The series represents Muslim men talking to each other, often depicted from behind. We don't know the content of their conversation, but the paintings evoke the feeling that the figures are revealing secrets. They think they cannot be heard as they speak in secret. But *walls have ears* in Swahili houses, which feature perforated facades that let voices pass through. This theme is explicit only in the last paintings in the series, which feature Tannoy speakers through which muezzin calls the faithful to prayer, further illustrating the accommodations made for sound in Swahili architecture.

Comparing works made by the two artists—a comparison of centre and periphery—it is important to note Castro's use of tangible Swahili cultural heritage in response to what he perceives as demand from international tourists. We might term what is a very interesting phenomenon as “Orientalism in reverse”. Instead of European artists travelling abroad to paint exotic settings, Castro is a local artist who decided to produce images of Swahili everyday life for appreciation by Westerners. In contrast to such romantic portrayals of “paradise lost” and aimed at the tourist market, Ngugi employs elements of this same tangible heritage as a symbol of identity in progressive works that are immediately recognizable as Kenyan—created by a Kenyan artist who knows well such complexities. In a sense, these elements are exaltation and ennoblement of genuine and original Swahili culture.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. LOCAL PERCEPTION: THE QUESTIONNAIRE AS A TOOL

To gain an understanding of the perception among residents of the value of tangible Swahili cultural heritage, I carried out a survey as a supplement

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<sup>10</sup> George ABUNGU and Lorna ABUNGU, *Lamu. Kenya's Enchanted Island* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009); Kalandar KAMALKHAN, *The Swahili Architecture of Lamu, Kenya. Oral Tradition and Space* (London: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the presentation at <http://www.lamupaintersfestival.org/art-lamu-2017/artists-2017/ngugi/peter-ngugi.php>.

<sup>12</sup> *Art Lamu 2017* (Lamu: Lamupaintersfestival, 2017), 94–103.

<sup>13</sup> Giuseppe CAPRIOTTI, *Looking for Market or Identity? The Materiality of Swahili Everyday Life in Kenyan Contemporary Artistic Production between Centre and Periphery*, in press.

tary tool in the form of a questionnaire distributed in local communities near the archaeological parks between 2018 and 2019.

Along with demographic details of those sampled, the questionnaire sought information and opinions of cultural sites that respondents visited. It elicited from them answers about their relationship with the cultural heritage of the Kenyan coast, and what they know about the region's Arabic and Swahili history, as well as descriptors that could be linked to the sites they visited.

A 26-year-old teacher who visited Mnarani and Gede ruins responded: "I have no relationship with the coastal area because I am not from the coastal region of Kenya. I'm just here because of education." It is so because the Kenyan coast today is populated not only by Swahili people, such as members from the Mijikenda tribes of Bantu-speaking origin, but also by inhabitants coming from other parts (and tribes) of Kenya. This observation made me slightly modify the questionnaire, asking the respondents' tribal and/or cultural affiliation. While the perception of the value of cultural heritage varied depending on these affiliations,<sup>14</sup> relative homogeneity in the answers appeared in the collected responses. Contrary to what might have been expected, responses varied more according to the level of education and gender than to tribal affiliation.

The results show that few local inhabitants visit the ruins, and those who did go as part of school trips. In addition, the ruins appear to be an important feature of coastal identity only in specific circumstances. The primary recollections of these visits are the snake parks and the presence among the ruins of monkeys, butterflies, and large trees. The situation changes when the answers come from teachers or students, who associate their visits with the slave trade that took place on the coast, Arab life in the period, and antiquity associated with of tombs and mosques. Many cite recent scholarly literature showing that Swahili culture predates the arrival of the Arabs and their intermarriage with Bantu-speaking tribes, and arising with contributions from an array of cultures. This data testifies to education's important role in cultivating recognition of the value of tangible cultural heritage, which is not strictly linked to tribal affiliations. Western tourism is influencing a new perception of the value of tangible cultural heritage among residents, as well. In particular in Gede, where souvenir sellers have long exploited the business opportunity the ruins provide.

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<sup>14</sup> I thank Ibrahim Busolo for having discussed with me this problem, which I didn't consider first.

This changing of awareness also results from combined effort by government agencies responsible for conserving cultural heritage and promoting domestic tourism, the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) and the Kenya Tourist Board, respectively.

#### 4. THE ROLE OF CURATORSHIP

Recently, teams led by NMK curators are engaged in a focused efforts that aim to involve local communities in managing the parks and to boost educational activities in cooperation with schools. I met the curators of the three parks in March and April 2021.

William Mouta, a curator of Mnarani ruins, works with five full-time guides (in partnership with the nearby Mnarani Club resort) and an educational assistant. He says he is aware of the criticalities regarding the involvement of local communities in park management. He concedes that: (1) the 100 shilling ticket price for entry is too high for local visitors; (2) the culture of tourism is lacking as most of the tourism on the coast is not linked to other forms of recreation other than culture; (3) it is difficult to involve the local community in preservation of tangible cultural heritage, because members see no benefit; (4) there is a lack of educational programming focused on tangible cultural heritage, as well as a lack of space near the ruins where educational activities might be carried out; (5) the entrance to the park should undergo modernization to make the park more attractive.

A curator of Jumba la Mtwana ruins, Ashim Hinzano, works with eight guides; none of whom has studied archaeology. Mostly self-taught, they receive a week of NMK training upon being hired. According to the curator, most inhabitants of nearby Mtwapa come from upcountry and thus do not feel connection with the history of the place, while the indigenous Mijikenda connect the ruins to the slavery that took place in the period of Arab domination. He notes that visitors often skip the entry fee by saying they want to access an Italian-run restaurant, Monsoons, at the opposite end of the park. According to the curator, only a serious programme to involve the community and schools can increase the awareness about the need to preserve and enhance this cultural site.

By contrast, Gede offers the best example of involvement of the local community in the life and the management of the archaeological site. Working

under the direction of curator Mbarak Abdulquadir Abdallah,<sup>15</sup> guides are trained by the park's dedicated Department of Education. They can furnish explanations in English, Italian, German, and French; some know more than one European language. While Kenyan tourists come mostly from up-country, Italian holiday makers reaching the ruins from the coastal towns of Malindi and Watamu also are significant in number. Many are attracted by monkeys living in the park, which are hand-trained to accept bananas and nuts in interactions that make for tourist photos. Swahili and Mijikenda peoples consider the park cursed and its grounds a place for pagan sacrifice, beliefs that have partly preserved the site by deterring acts of vandalism. According to local legend, the spirits that inhabit the park punish those who steal stones or cut down trees. In 2020, the curator started a programme to involve local stakeholders in enhancing the perception of the ruins value, including the many ancient trees on the site.

Two projects involving the local population are particularly interesting. The first concerns snakes, some poisonous, that act to control rodents in the park and forest. Snakes are killed as a matter of course in Kenya. So the park educates the population and from an early age to respect the reptiles, which, once sighted, can be captured by professionals. Some are released into the wild in safe places, while others are kept on display inside the park. The second project concerns the butterflies that the park has bred since 1993. They are sold in markets in Mombasa, Istanbul and London. The hatchery serves as an additional attraction for tourists, as well as a vehicle for wealth-creation in the community. In this way, members participate in the life of the park, understanding it as an integrated system in which snakes, butterflies, and humans co-exist in harmony among the ruins.

Likely unconsciously, directors at the Gede park are following guidelines set by the Faro Convention, a treaty signed by the members of the Council of Europe in the Portuguese city in 2005.<sup>16</sup> In it, European states formally recognize the role cultural heritage plays in building a democratic society, and as a vehicle for promoting cultural diversity and sustainable development.

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<sup>15</sup> The historical value of the site is enhanced also by this amazing website: [https://zamani.project.org/exhibition\\_bmm/site-kenya-gede-ruins.html](https://zamani.project.org/exhibition_bmm/site-kenya-gede-ruins.html).

<sup>16</sup> See Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>. On the Faro Convention see Lauso ZAGATO, "The Notion of 'Heritage Community' in the Council of Europe's Faro Convention. Its Impact on the European Legal Framework," in *Between Imagined Communities of Practice. Participation, Territory and the Making of Heritage*, ed. Nicolas Adell, Regina F. Bendix, Chiara Bortolotto, and Markus Tauschek (Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 2015), 141–68.

Focusing on the utility of cultural heritage, the convention establishes citizens as stakeholders in the processes of identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation of cultural heritage, as well as in reflection and public debate on the opportunities and challenges that cultural heritage represents. Since this already happens brilliantly in Gede, the principles of Faro Convention could be fruitfully applied at other archaeological sites on the Kenyan coast, starting with a direct involvement of communities in cultural heritage management practices. As has happened in Gede, this strategy could be a successful way to increase the perception of the value of tangible cultural heritage among the local population.

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#### Summary

The tangible heritage of the Kenyan coastal area between Malindi and Mombasa is mainly represented by ruins of urban settlements that date between the 10th and 18th centuries and are central to the formation of the Swahili culture. Very often, these archaeological sites feature contemporary snake parks, with reptiles displayed in Perspex boxes. As a result of suggestions in European and American guidebooks that strongly recommend visits as unforgettable, these sites are mostly visited by foreign tourists.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the perception of value of these coastal ruins, to understand how the current inhabitants approach the Swahili past, and with a focus on the relationship between identity and tangible culture. The first sources for this research are tourist guidebooks: how are the ruins presented in the international guides for tourists and in local guides for Kenyan citizens? What differences can we notice? In addition, during a long stay on the coast, we carried out a survey using a questionnaire as a supplementary tool to better understand the perception of the value of ruins among the local communities. The provisional outcomes show that only a small number of local inhabitants have visited the ruins and that, in general, they are not perceived as a fundamental trait of coastal identity. Why do the Mijikenda, the traditional inhabitants of this area, weakly identify themselves with the cultural/historical heritage of the stone towns? Are local societies fostering new connections with ruins and monuments that are present in the territories they inhabit? Is tangible cultural heritage used to support new interpretations of the past?

**Keywords:** cultural heritage; Swahili ruins; value; perception; guidebooks; curatorship

PORÓWNANIE SPOSOBÓW PERCEPCJI:  
MIESZKAŃCY ZACHODU I KENIJCZYCY W OBLICZU MATERIALNEGO  
DZIEDZICTWA KULTUROWEGO SUAHILI.  
BADANIE DOTYCZĄCE RUIN GEDE, MNARANI I JUMBA LA MTWANA

Streszczenie

Materialne dziedzictwo kulturowe na wybrzeżu kenijskim pomiędzy Malindi a Mombasą jest reprezentowane głównie przez ruiny osad miejskich z okresu od X do XVIII wieku, które miały kluczowe znaczenie dla kształtowania się kultury Suahili. Bardzo często w obrębie tych stanowisk archeologicznych tworzone są parki węży, a gady wystawione są w skrzynkach z pleksi-glasu. Dzięki sugestiom zawartych w europejskich i amerykańskich przewodnikach, które gorąco polecają zwiedzanie tych ruin jako niezapomniane przeżycie, miejsca te są najczęściej odwiedzane przez turystów zagranicznych.

Celem artykułu jest analiza postrzegania wartości tych przybrzeżnych ruin, zrozumienie, w jaki sposób obecni mieszkańcy podchodzą do przeszłości Suahili, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem relacji między tożsamością a kulturą materialną. Pierwszym źródłem tych analiz są przewodniki turystyczne, w których autor tego artykułu poszukiwał odpowiedzi na pytania: w jaki sposób ruiny przedstawiane są w międzynarodowych przewodnikach turystycznych oraz w lokalnych przewodnikach dla obywateli Kenii? Jakie różnice możemy zauważyć pomiędzy tymi przewodnikami? Ponadto podczas dłuższego pobytu na wybrzeżu kenijskim autor artykułu przeprowadził ankietę traktując ją jako narzędzie uzupełniające jego badania, aby lepiej zrozumieć postrzeganie wartości ruin wśród lokalnych społeczności. Wyniki tych ankiet pokazują, że tylko niewielka liczba lokalnych mieszkańców odwiedziła ruiny znajdujące się nieopodal ich miejsc zamieszkania oraz że nie są one postrzegane jako podstawowa cecha tożsamości ludzi wybrzeża, należących do ludu Mijikenda. Z tego względu pojawiają się kolejne interesujące pytania, które zostaną podjęte w artykule: dlaczego tradycyjni mieszkańcy wybrzeża Kenii słabo identyfikują się z kulturowym/historycznym dziedzictwem kamiennych miast? Czy lokalne społeczności promują nowe rodzaje więzi z ruinami i zabytkami obecnymi na terenach, które zamieszkują? Czy materialne dziedzictwo kulturowe jest wykorzystywane do wspierania nowych sposobów interpretacji przeszłości?

**Słowa kluczowe:** dziedzictwo kulturowe; ruiny Suahili; wartość; percepcja; przewodniki; opieka nad zabytkami