

Hidden Histories – Tanga – Teacher notes – Geography and Climate focus

Hidden Histories is an oral history project in the coastal areas of Tanga, Tanzania. Developed over 11 years, the aim of the Hidden Histories team was to co-create a project with the villagers, who are mostly living with no legal tenancies, or first-generation residents from the Zigua, Bondei, Shambaa, Digo and Mbugu peoples, who work mostly as fishermen and on small farms. They documented their lives, thoughts, knowledge and skills.

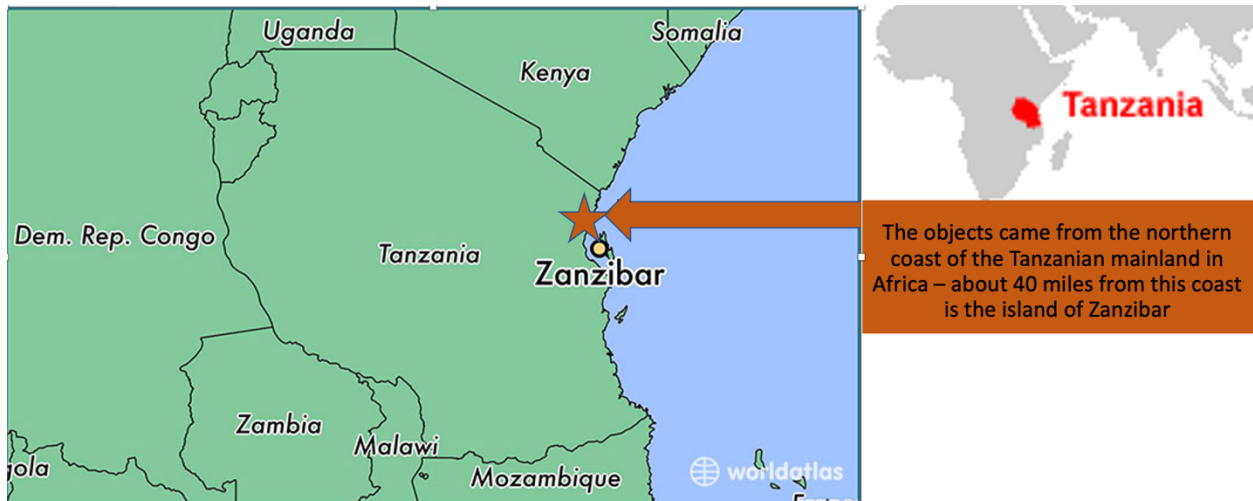
In the Pitt Rivers Museum there is a collection of 550 figures that originated from the area, about 15 miles from where the team worked.



The objects in the museum are called mkaramo and are only about 12 cms high (less than half a ruler). They are made of a mixture of sand and unfired clay.

They were collected near Tanga in (now) Tanzania. It used to be called Tanganyika and then after independence from British colonial rule it joined with Zanzibar island to become Tanzania ("Tan" comes from Tanganyika and "Zan" from Zanzibar).





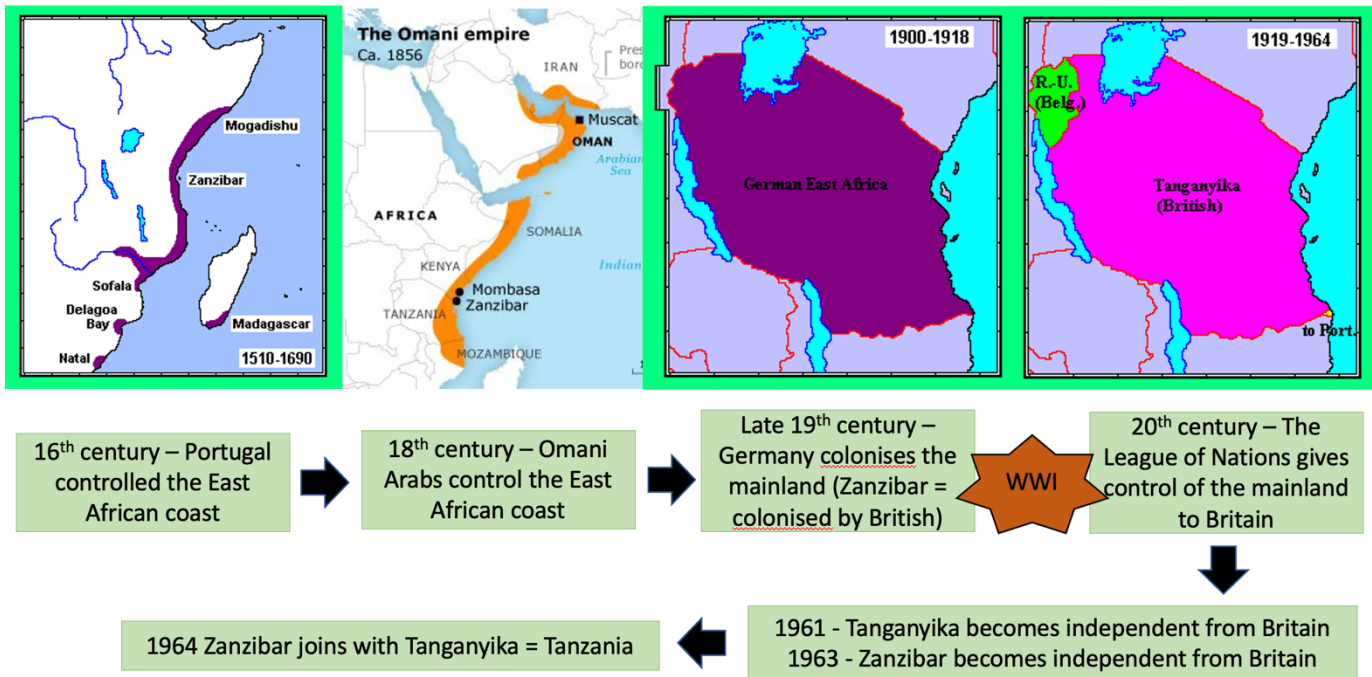
The location of Tanzania on the coast of East Africa.



Maps showing where the project took place.

The figures were 'acquired' in 1958 by the British colonial official Ralph E. S. Tanner.

What is now Tanzania (especially the coast) was part of many empires over time:



Tanga Port

For at least 13 centuries Tanga was a trading port of enslaved people, ambergris, ivory, gold, fish, and goods up and down the East African coast. Mangrove poles, coral rag, porcelain, precious stones, cotton and sisal were all traded out of this port; oil and liquid natural gas are the latest commodities that connect to the port of Tanga.

East Africa Crude Oil pipeline

This pipeline has been in planning since 2013, it is intended to transport crude oil from Tilenga and Kingfisher oil fields in Uganda to the Port of Tanga in Tanzania. It runs 1,443 km from start to finish. Most of the pipeline, 80%, is in Tanzania. The shareholders are Total Energies (a French supermajor oil company), CNOOC, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (a national company owned by the People's Republic of China), UNOC, Uganda National Oil Company and TPDC Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation.



Tanzania, coast

Climate Change and its effects on life in Tanga

The Hidden Histories team interviewed a number of people about the effects of Climate change.

Sophia Kinogo stated that rainfall had reduced and affected crop yield and that there was a need to plant more weather resistant crops. This meant that there wasn't enough rain to cultivate the variety of seasonal food people were used to growing, such as banana, orange and lime trees.

Rajab Abdallah talked about the destruction of coral, the effect climate change had on sea environments and declining fish stocks. He noted a disappearance in the variety of fish.

Peris noted that the increasing sea temperatures mean that the seaweed was dying off and the sea contained more salt, so there were fewer fish.

If you look at the recorded water temperature on the East Africa coast, can you see changes over time? Has the rainfall decreased?

Who knows how the mkaramo are used?

The makaramo figures were photographed in UK and the images then used to spark conversations in Tanga. It was hard finding people who knew anything about them: eventually three sisters and a daughter (who was a trained and reputable mganga- or healer) gave the team the most information.

There's a big difference between mganga (healer, or waganga- plural, healers) and uchawi (sorcery) in Tanzania, although they often tend to be muddled when they are discussed in the Global North.

Mganga are kind, using their power and training for positive ends to heal and cure.

Uchawi is sorcery and does not require training. It is used for harm and destruction, sometimes even killing people. Margareth Esther John and her aunts believe the makaramo are cursed Uchawi objects, and are objects used by witches to cause harm.



“They are clay figurines shaped however you want to form them,...then you send them with a specific purpose to the recipient, the enemy...If you send them to your enemy, you’ll scare them...it can literally scare you to death.” Hester Salehe

Hester Salehe looking at images of makaramo



“In this area, and internationally, I became famous for mafingo, which is where you remove unpleasant things from people’s bodies.

Mafingo enters your body at night, possesses you, and then causes aches and pains. I set my traps and I capture the mafingo, like a skilled fisherman with a net. I have the ability and skills, learned since I was a child, over many years. This makaramo figure is used to trap the mafingo and to get rid of them.” Margareth Esther John

Margareth Esther John

“I’m not afraid of the pictures of makaramo, they are just papers, decoration, not the real thing. If you showed me the real thing, yes, I would definitely be afraid.

If you encounter these makaramo in person, face-to-face I would be terrified that they have been invested with curses...once the designated person who has been cursed finds it (and they will find it, because that is part of the curse)...They can either become crazy or even in some cases die.”



Mwanamvua Salehe



The Future:

Should these objects be in a British museum?

Today many communities around the world are questioning whether their objects should be in UK museums. The Pitt Rivers welcomes discussions with communities around the future of the collections they hold. The interviewers asked people what they thought about the makaramo figures being in a UK museum and whether they should stay here. We're thinking about the future by looking at the past.

For the residents of Tanga, there are a range of opinions, no single story:

“These clay figures have great importance to the people of Tanga and Tanzania in general. When we look at them, that’s when we start a conversation. That’s how culture grows, as both sides, the Tanzanian and the visitor communicate and explain. I think this desire to learn, and to grow, helps both English and Tanzanian culture to grow.”

Mywini Kombo

“All these things which have been made here, these are natural cultural things. And preserving one’s natural culture and the concepts behind them is a good thing. It’s also about acknowledging the talent and skills that went into making these things. So, if someone in the UK has decided to put this in a museum, they’ve recognised these handmade works are important...We Tanzanians need to be better at preserving the culture for our young people,

who perhaps do not understand, or grasp their importance. This is vital. It is vital for us to learn and know about our culture and talents.”

Mwinyi Kombo (a student saving to go to university)

“This one, someone would say I am seeing something with a big nose and big teeth, and it’s frightening, ugly, horrible. It can literally scare you to death. It’s called Saliti, it doesn’t have arms or legs, and it’s a form. When it enters your body, it can suck the blood out of you”.

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