

# Rocks, Wrecks and Relevance: Values and Benefits in Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage

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## **Abstract**

A small limestone outcrop is located on part of Tanzania's coastline on the island of Kilwa Kisiwani (now a World Heritage Site). Local folklore depicts this as an Arab dhow, turned to rock following prayers offered by the local residents, fearful that the crew of the dhow were coming to harm them. This folklore was recorded during some oral history work in a maritime and underwater cultural heritage (MUCH) project at Kilwa Kisiwani. It was a reminder of what the local people valued and equally, if not more important, to their cultural identity.

This presentation will use three locations, from Chuuk and Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia to Kilwa Kisiwani in Tanzania to explore their tangible and intangible maritime and underwater cultural heritage (UCH) and how they are valued. In all these cases local communities know what are the significant MUCH sites and stories, yet other site types and/or other (non-local) values can dominate management programs. This is compounded by international agreements such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) *2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001 Convention)* giving prominence to more dominant cultural values and in pursuing management processes that marginalize local sites and values. This causes some indifference in developing MUCH programs in some countries which is further influenced by the fact that not all countries can afford or want to implement MUCH programs, particularly if the programs do not provide real benefits to communities and stakeholders.

Within this context, the presentation will explore what forms of empowerment programs have been used or are being considered in realising the MUCH aspects of a community's cultural identity.

## **Chuuk**

Chuuk (formerly Truk) is located in the Western Pacific Ocean 3,700 kilometers (km) south-east of Tokyo and is made up of the central most populated area Chuuk Lagoon, and five coralline atoll groups. Today it forms one of the four States of the independent Nation, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

Chuuk has been inhabited for about 2,000 years and the inhabitants were initially coastal dwellers living in stilt houses who produced a simple undecorated pottery from local clays (Rainbird 1993). As time moved on, Chuukese moved from being coastal dwellers to hill top inhabitants. Edward Hall and Karl Pelzer (1946:22) state that, 'Truk society is divided into three large groups: chiefs, chief's people and common people or low-class people'.

Land ownership has been and continues to be very important to Chuukese. The Chuuk landscape has spiritual associations known through traditional stories. Many landscape features provide spiritual connections to Chuukese history, mythology and settlement of the islands as well as in a metaphorical manner, through the *Itang* language (Figure 1). The sites and stories are still a strong and tangible part of Chuukese society in the same way as land ownership.

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Figure 1. Tonaachaw, viewed as a supernatural octopus, kuus, whose tentacles stretch out across Chuuk Lagoon to the outer islands (King and Parker 1984:55), Photograph by Arimichy Rudolph, 2006.

Chuukese cultural practices, customs and traditions are inherent in every part of daily life. Aspects of these cultural practices can be manifested in what is sometimes called tangible heritage but much is intangible. All constitute an important part of being Chuukese. In contrast to western, scientific construction of heritage, tangible heritage is of less value in relation to Chuukese cultural identity.

### **Colonial history**

Chuuk, as with all of Micronesia, had Spanish (only as a presence from 1565 but formally as a colonial ruler from 1885-1898), German (1899-1914), Japanese (1914-1945) and the United States of America USA (1945-1991) colonial rulers, with the Japanese and Americans having the greatest influence on current lifestyles.

In 1919 under the League of Nations (the forerunner to the United Nations) Micronesia (apart from Guam which remained as an American territory) was entrusted to Japan to administer as a Mandated Territory. Given the vigor and size of the Japanese bureaucracy involved in this administration and the ineffective restrictions placed on it by the international community, Japan was able to, 'Japanize the islanders through education, propaganda, intermarriage, and in general the promotion of cultural changes' (Mirrer 1971:23).

### **World War II (WWII)**

The Japanese Navy wanted to expand further south to the resource-rich lands of Indonesia, Malaysia and Borneo so Micronesia was seen as stepping stones to this region. In 1939, the Japanese Navy established the Fourth Fleet to guard Micronesia establishing Chuuk as one of four Micronesian headquarters (Peattie 1988:251). Japan considered that Chuuk Lagoon's natural fortifications made it one of the best anchorages in the world and a 'formidable naval base' (U.S.SBS 1947:2).

The later development of the military base in Chuuk Lagoon meant great changes to the islands, particularly around the coastline. Three airstrips were built on the islands of Weno, Etten and Param (for fighter and bomber aircraft) and two seaplane bases located on Tonoas and Weno. Major facilities were constructed to cater for the various naval fleets. The main island of Tonoas had over 1,200 buildings erected on it in addition to Dublon Town for civilians and many coastal defence guns were established on the majority of the islands (JICPOA 1994:10).

In February and May 1944 a total of 3,450 aircraft bombing flights from an American Carrier Task Force of over 50 ships sunk more than 60 Japanese navy and merchant ships located within Chuuk Lagoon, and destroyed over 300 aircraft, and the airstrips and many of the buildings on the islands in Chuuk Lagoon.

Chuukese suffered the greatest loss of life in all the Caroline Islands from the almost daily bombing (Poyer, *et al.* 2001:147). Initial USA plans for Chuuk were for a USA fleet anchorage and recreation centre (Blake 1945). Within a short time, and a change of plans not to proceed with the recreation facilities, USA impacts and aims became similar to earlier Japanese time—imposition of another official language, alienation of land, manipulation of the traditional political and social structures, and acquisition of the territory through a United Nation system leading to independence with strings attached. “Japanizing” Micronesia was replaced with “Americanizing” Micronesia.

## **Yap**

Yap (Waab, the traditional name) is located 840 km south west of Guam.. Yap is one of the four States of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and like Chuuk it contains a more populated region of high volcanic islands (Yap proper) and some outer coralline atoll groups. The population today is about 11,700.

Traditions, customs and cultural practices remain a core of Yapese society. The outer islanders are famous for their canoe building, sailing, navigation and related customs and practices (Jeffery and Pitmag 2010). In Yap proper, stone money still plays an important role in Yapese cultural practices and traditional dances are performed to honour the spirits and ancestors, and tell of the suffering during World War II, amongst other things (Jeffery and Pitmag 2010).

German administrators had a significant impact on Yapese society although it was Japanese emigrants who arrived in great numbers that dominated Yapese. The biggest impact during the Japanese times was in the decline of the number of Yapese; the population dropped to 2,400 from an estimated 27,000 pre western contact, and about 7,800 in 1899 (Adams 1997:16; Hunter-Anderson 1983; Useem cited in Takeda 1999:4).

## **Kilwa Kisiwani**

Kilwa Kisiwani is a small island located on the southern coast of Tanzania, East Africa, about 270 km from the capital city of Dar es Salaam.

Kilwa Kisiwani was a prominent, perhaps a pre-eminent Swahili port and city during much of its time but primarily during the 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Sutton 1998). The Swahili Coast of East Africa covers 3000 km of Kenya and Tanzania and was linked to Persian traders seeking gold, ivory and slaves in Africa and bringing back to Africa cloth, silver, perfumes and jewelry from India, and ceramics from China (see Bitu this volume). As a result the Kiswahili language developed from the mix of the African Bantu language and Arabic and Persian words, and other key aspects of the Swahili culture greatly developed, including Islam, Arabic art and architecture. The Portuguese attacked Kilwa in 1505, bringing decline along with loss of control of the gold trade (Pollard 2009).

Kilwa Kisiwani had periods of decline after the Portuguese, then great activity mainly through the slave trade operated by the Omanis from Zanzibar up until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sutton 1998). A reminder of Kilwa Kisiwani's importance, prosperity and culture can be seen in the ruins of palaces, residences, a fort, about 80 small and large mosques, and a number of cemeteries (Figure 2).

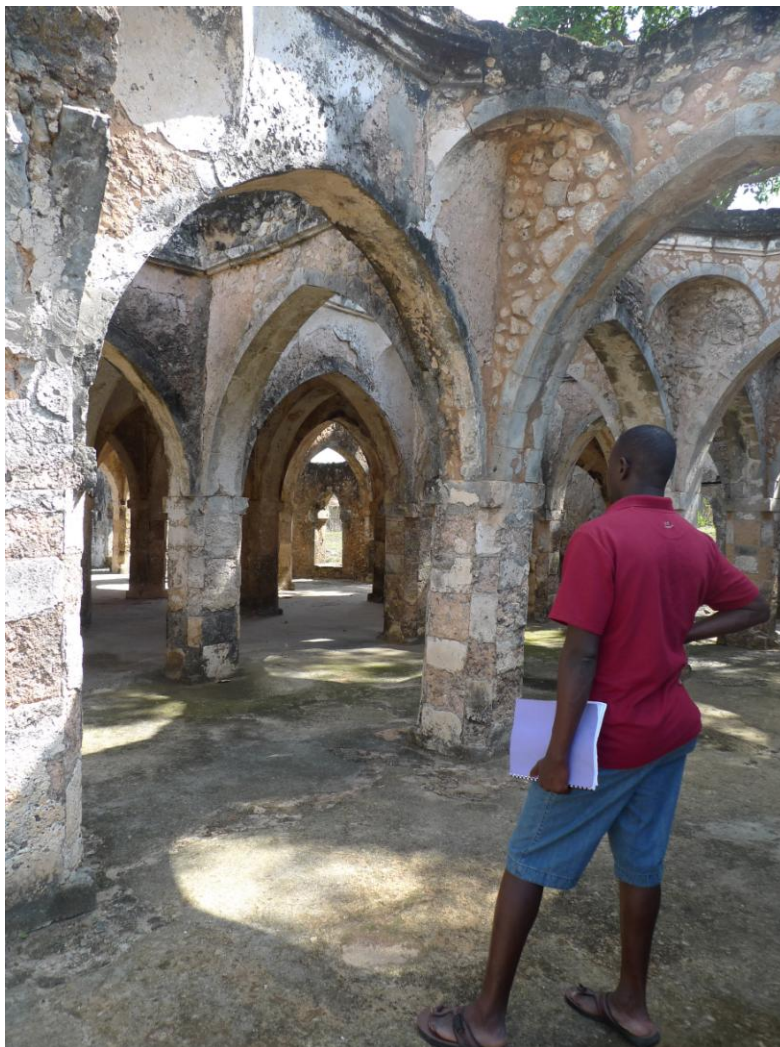


Figure 2. The great mosque on Kilwa Kisiwani, Photograph by Bill Jeffery 2010.

## **2001 Convention**

The 2001 Convention contains a number of general articles on the best practice of underwater cultural heritage management. It applies to 'heritage sites' not just 'shipwrecks and artefacts' which means it should be the catalyst for many broader based programs that have relevance to and benefit many people.

The 2001 Convention should therefore, as a priority, actively promote these broader based programs especially where traditional sites and traditional cultural practices are strongly developed and maintained in a country or region and they contribute to a local cultural identity.

## **Project implementation**

### **Kilwa Kisiwani**

Since 2009, a four-phased capacity building program developed by Centre for International Heritage Activities CIE has been implemented in Tanzania. A phased program implemented over a period of time was considered appropriate for a number of reasons. It provided the necessary time for teams to build the skills (in many cases this needed to start with swimming and diving training) and it gave the trainers time to build a relevant and beneficial local program (Parthesius and Jeffery 2009).

The program has involved many theoretical and practical sessions, from learning to dive through to the implementation of a non-disturbance survey of a shipwreck off Zanzibar, and reporting on their activities (see Mahudi this volume).

An Action Plan subsequently developed by the Tanzanian Stakeholders called for more advanced training in association with the implementation of a project to survey the MUCH sites at Kilwa Kisiwani. It was considered that the project would raise the awareness of the value of MUCH sites and the need for ratification of the 2001 Convention, in addition to helping to sustain the MUCH Unit as the Competent Authority. The Kilwa Kisiwani project was also recommended due to the need to assist in the *Integrated Approach to the Protection and Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage of the Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara, Endangered World Heritage sites* which had as a major aim, 'to improve living standards and ensure long-term sustainability of the site' (UNESCO Tanzania 2008)<sup>2</sup>

The project was implemented in November 2011 with the major activities being site investigations, building a relationship with the local community, collecting oral histories. The team also gained experience in the use of a magnetometer and searching for some ship remains, and an anchor possibly from one of the three 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese ships wrecked in the area was located during the project (Theal 1898:40; Theal 1901:390-391, 476-477)

Of great interest with many of the residents of Kilwa Kisiwani was a site called *Jiwe la Jahazi* (English translation is 'stone dhow'). Local folklore depicts the site as an Arab dhow turned to stone following prayers offered by the local residents, fearful that

the crew of the dhow were coming to harm them. The dhow and the crew changed form and were therefore unable to harm the residents of Kilwa Kisiwani and it is now a significant site in the maritime cultural landscape of Kilwa Kisiwani (Figure 3).



Figure 3. *Jiwe la Jahazi* 'stone dhow' on Kilwa Kisiwani,  
Photograph by Bill Jeffery 2010.

In a meeting with Kilwa Kisiwani's elders, they expressed interest and some reservations about the MUCH project. They were very keen to obtain some lasting tangible benefits in collaborating with researchers at the World Heritage Site and from their experience with previous researchers, ongoing benefits were rare. In the MUCH program, community engagement priorities from the elders were training in new skills, ongoing employment and economic benefits.

### **Chuuk**

A comprehensive survey was used in identifying the sites and in gaining an understanding of their nature, integrity, condition and value (Jeffery 2007).

This work included a range of methods in order to gain an appreciation of who maintains a 'sense of belonging' to the submerged WWII sites. This included many participant observations in Chuuk and the collection of oral histories from Chuukese which provided broad socio-historic and socio-political views of Chuuk (Jeffery 2007). The type of underwater surveys employed combined with an emic approach

made it possible to interpret information about different societies and their relationships without employing any destructive site analysis<sup>3</sup>.

It was revealed that the submerged WWII sites contain both tangible and intangible heritage aspects but the management focuses on the tangible aspects according to a dominant Euro-American perspective. This is related to the iconic pedestal that the tourism industry has placed the sites on which is widely promoted through websites, and primarily American publications.

To Chuukese, the tourism industry centred on the submerged WWII sites brings considerable economic benefit to the government and tourist operators, as does dynamite fishing and artefact recovery to many Chuukese families. Although these activities do conflict in relation to the management and longevity of the sites, the government appears powerless to stop it. Although the submerged WWII sites are used as mnemonic devices by some Chuukese to remember when the war started, it is the terrestrial WWII sites that have family and suffering connections and reflect elements of a Chuukese identity (Jeffery 2007). It is contended however, that the submerged WWII sites do not provide Chuukese with a sense of place, meaning there is no sense of belonging (Jeffery 2007).

The investigation of the Chuuk Lagoon submerged WWII sites has shown that the value and use of the sites from a Chuukese perspective, and from a Japanese and American perspective as well as how they imposed their values on the Chuukese, has provided an understanding of Chuukese identity, and the impacts of colonialism in Chuuk. It provides concepts of empowerment for the Chuukese in constructing local identities using foreign material culture, as well as empowering them to manage these sites but not with a marginalized voice.

Chuukese and other Pacific Islanders have expressed an indifference to, or a reaction against the global hegemonic view of what constitutes underwater cultural heritage as highlighted in a comment made at a *UNESCO World Heritage Convention 1972* meeting of Pacific Island Nations in Vanuatu in 1999:

“Protection of Underwater Heritage”, within the Pacific, at the moment seems to refer more often to underwater wrecks from World War II, despite the existence of other underwater sites such as sacred cultural sites existing in many areas of the Pacific. The meeting urged the protection of these sites as well as those on land that may be protected by the World Heritage Convention. (WHC 1999)

## Yap

Traditional sites are a primary focus for heritage management in Yap.

The Yap Historic Preservation Office (HPO) is very interested in their fish weirs (*aech*). During the last few years, funding had been provided to some *aech* owners for *aech* restoration. It was considered that a comprehensive survey of the *aech*, many of which are unknown to Yap HPO, was warranted to assist in prioritising further restoration work and revitalising what Yapese saw as a sustainable fishing practice. An estimated 700-800 *aech* are thought to be located on the reef flat.

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<sup>3</sup> Knowledge about cultures can be gained through an emic approach; a subjective, insider's perspective about what things mean to members of a society, and/or an etic approach which is an objective, analytical interpretation of the same customs.

In 2008-2009, the author in collaboration with Yap HPO, with US National Park Historic Preservation funding commenced a survey of the *aech* in association with the *aech* owners, village chiefs and Yap HPO staff. The project was completed in August 2009 and the location of 432 *aech*, together with detailed surveys of 46 *aech* were implemented (Figure 4) (Jeffery and Pitmag 2010).

This work demonstrates that maritime archaeology, if implemented in a broad and contemporary manner can help in some important social, cultural and environmental issues.

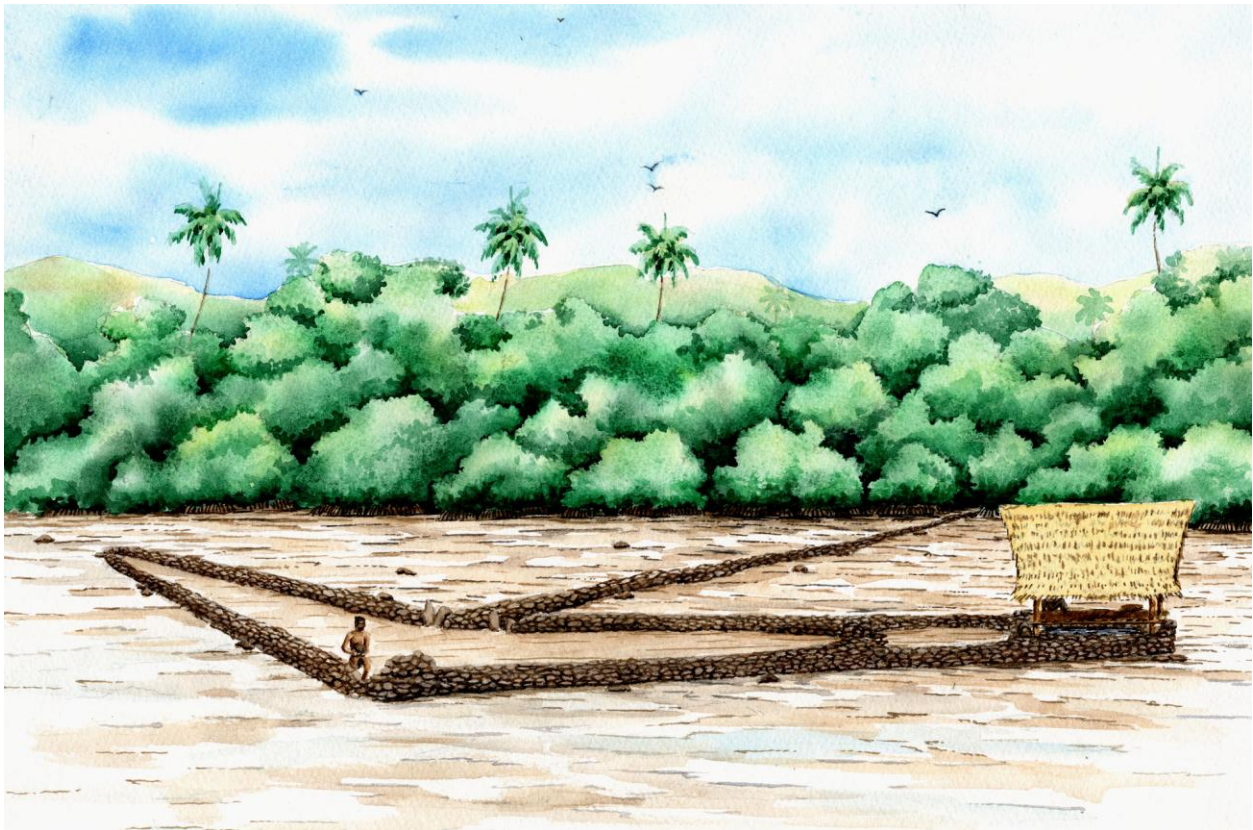


Figure 4. Yapese artist Luke Holoï's impression of an *aech*, based on site and oral information

## **Conclusions**

The 2001 Convention is a significant step forward in the management of underwater cultural heritage sites around the world. The impetus came from effective systematic and scientific archaeological work, as well as from the conflicting and detrimental commercial salvage work on shipwrecks, which were pursued by affluent western nations and nationals. This 2001 Convention and its best practices are now being promoted for implementation around the world including countries that have no background in implementing maritime archaeology, although they have a significant maritime cultural heritage and identity.



The types of heritage sites that some developing countries are more concerned with are their traditional cultural sites. There are also local values in many foreign sites as has been highlighted in this paper. However, many provisions of the 2001 Convention focus on sites that are not a priority from a local perspective or are valued from a dominantly foreign cultural perspective. For example, a number of countries can have an interest in a shipwreck, e.g. the owner of the ship, where it was built, where cargo was collected, where it was destined for, and the nationality of the crew are just a few examples of the different nationals that can be involved in shipwrecks. It may or may not have value to the local community but there are a number of provisions in the 2001 Convention that encourage and support these many national interests and the funding that could possibly flow. Traditional cultural sites however do not have other interests and therefore the 2001 Convention does not as comprehensively support the management of these sites as there is not the potential funding benefit that could come through international collaboration. And in developing countries that need money for the basics; health, food, housing, education, this means money for MUCH is a low priority. It is gratifying to see an account or 'fund' has been established to support the 2001 Convention and for supporting developing nations manage their traditional cultural sites although how much and when money will be available is still not clear<sup>4</sup>.

In regard to some specific issues that come out of this paper, in Yap, the broad community (politicians, government agencies, citizens) led/directed what they wanted in regard to maritime archaeological investigations rather than outside researchers directing what type of investigations should be implemented. In Kilwa Kisiwani there is great potential for maritime archaeology with little having been done which, with the same approach as in Yap, could lead to relevant projects being implemented that achieve realistic benefits for the community.

I attempted to go into greater detail about Chuuk to highlight the complexities that can be inherent in a region's history and what this greater level of understanding can lead to. Amongst other things, it helps to understand the relevant sites to a community. Sites that need protection and intangible heritage are part of the cultural heritage and identity of all stakeholders. It also illustrated how foreign heritage sites could be used to reveal information about local cultural identities. It is my view that researchers in the field of maritime archaeology need to have an emic approach—to spend time with communities in understanding the many, perhaps complex social issues—as well as having an etic approach. Even more appropriate would be to have local citizens implement projects and ongoing programs. Hence the need to develop programs in building capacity for the many different stakeholders who could pursue local approaches and reveal information about relevant sites and their histories, and provide tangible benefits for their citizens.

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