

Statement of significance and impact /Williams

This study will (1) contribute a better understanding of biological and cultural origins of the ancient urban inhabitants of the east African coast and (2) shed more light on the role of immigration and technology transfers in shaping and restructuring ancient Swahili society. We propose to examine these relationships by focusing on Manda (800-1400 CE), a Swahili archaeological site on Manda Island in the Lamu archipelago on the Kenyan coast. Manda rose to prominence through its role in coordinating trade between the Northern East African interior and the Indian Ocean. A combination of new technologies, careful excavations and detailed ethnographic information will enable us to consider the following hypotheses: 1) *that large scale production and manufacture developed at Manda before 800 CE, prior to the advent of Islam and integration into the larger regional networks;* 2) *that early Swahili populations, while primarily of African origin, were much more diverse in composition than commonly supposed;* 3) *that some non-African migration to the coast did occur prior to the 19th century and* 4) *that Swahili stone towns were ethnically structured which resulted in differences in the genetic composition of the burial populations among the cemeteries located both within the town and outside its perimeter.* We will (1) conduct archaeological excavations in four cemeteries in the ancient port town of Manda; (2) collect genetic data from the skeletal remains of the people buried there (3) collect family genealogies, oral traditions, and ethnohistories and 4) carry out physical and chemical analyses of ceramic, iron, and trade artifacts. The goals of the proposed research are to identify possible source populations, understand the exchange networks that united these communities; and assess the impact of coastal trade on local and regional political economies.

Our proposal is designed to address key questions that have powerful and potentially transformative implications for understanding old world relationships and within Africa. This research will create an awareness of shared genealogy that will have positive implications for national unity in an area often fractured by ethnicity and “tribalism.” We propose to address questions concerning the archaeology of social complexity in East Africa that remain unanswered using conventional archaeological analytical techniques and are convinced that this proposed study is the next logical step in Swahili studies. The rich historic, anthropological, linguistic evidence coupled with ancient and contemporary genetic data to be collected accessed in this project will contribute new knowledge and open up new avenues in interdisciplinary research between archaeologists and geneticists. We will make our research available both to other scholars and to the general public through publications in professional and popular journals; a website to be linked to UIC, the Field Museum and the National Museums of Kenya websites; and an exhibit developed in conjunction with the Field Museum and National Museums of Kenya.