

KENYA

Kenya is rich in its antiquities, monuments and cultural and natural sites which are spread all over the country. The National Museums of Kenya is the custodian of the country's cultural heritage, its principal mission being to collect, document, preserve and enhance knowledge, appreciation, management and the use of these resources for the benefit of Kenya and the world. Through the National Museums of Kenya many of these sites are protected by law by having them gazetted under the *Antiquities and Monuments Act* Cap. 215. One of the sites under such protection is the Mtwapa Heritage site.

Case Study One – Mtwapa Heritage Site

Mtwapa Heritage Site (MHS) is an archaeological site that was a town during the 14th century AD as were other East African sites on the coast. The site is situated on a piece of land that is owned both privately and publicly (National Museums of Kenya). Mtwapa is located on the north-east of the Kenyan coast 15 km north of Mombasa, one of Kenya's major cities.

The history of Mtwapa as a settlement dates back to the 12th century AD. Archaeological evidence from the site indicates that the site developed prior to contact with the Middle and Far East. This must have been facilitated by the location of the site on the mainland on a relatively navigable creek, a situation which encouraged direct communication with the hinterland on the one hand and contact between coastal societies themselves on the other. Archaeological evidence gathered on Mtwapa indicates that the site was important both for its position facing the sea and as an exit point to the Middle East.

The structures at Mtwapa can be described as falling into the general coastal Swahili architecture – an original, creative synthesis of opportunities of the African climate and the resources and methods developed in the Arabian homelands. Remains at the site consist of the ruins of a town wall which once surrounded the site. The wall may be seen today as a mound of earth extending across roads and through the bush (cross-country). The architectural remains consist of 64 houses, one mosque and a tomb. There are five categories of houses: the single unit, double unit, triple unit and compound house complexes. According to oral tradition the site had three mosques being the Sheik Muhdar, Sheik Zamani, and Sheik Salim (still existing), the presence of which is corroborated by archaeological evidence.

The surviving ruins are built of coral rag and blocks dressed in lime mortar and lime plaster. Coral was mined locally and was used with mud mortar for house construction. The mangrove forests provided timber for building. Whilst there are no surviving structures outside the town wall, evidence of mounds (one of which was identified as a mosque) clearly indicate that some people must have lived outside it. This is further confirmed by the presence of pieces of pottery also found scattered outside the stone wall as far as the beach. This is where large quantities of local pottery, cowrie shells, imported ceramics and human skeletal remains can be seen on an eroded section of modern steps.

It is estimated that two thirds of the site lies outside the town wall. Other structures still surviving include several wells, pit latrines, a tomb, mosque cistern and lower portions of the mosque mihrab.

Mtwapa with all its complex structures and archaeological remains is also renowned for its forest, wildlife sanctuary, beach and its use for religious purposes and remains one of the most significant sites on the Kenyan coast. It is also protected by law as it is gazetted under the *Antiquities and Monuments Act* Cap 215. This act protects those sites that are considered of palaeontological, archaeological and historical interest. Its importance rests on a combination of these factors.

Despite seven centuries of natural degradation, weathering and occasional deliberate destruction of the remains, the structures are still relatively well preserved and continue to provide both aesthetic and romantic values. The location of the site and its outstanding architecture gives the place technical engineering and survey mastery value rendering it an invaluable educational resource. Also, its setting in a natural forest gives it important ecological, recreational and use values. On the eastern front, fishermen continue to use the site as a thoroughfare to the sea which is an important economic resource. The dual ownership of the land and ruins respectively makes the site a test ground for participatory management.

Threats to Mtwapa Heritage Site

The threats to the Mtwapa Heritage Site are natural and man-made. The natural risk factors include rain, erosion, vegetation, micro-organisms and natural aging of the ruins. The man-made risk factors include pollution, population and or development pressure, vandalism and looting, lack of financial resources leading to inadequate maintenance and neglect.

Currently the entire site is an open area as it does not have a protective perimeter fence around the site, making it difficult to control entry and movement within the site. The people living in the neighbourhood are themselves a threat as they vandalise the ruins, collect easily available coral rubble and also destroy the local vegetation for domestic use. Infrastructure such as high-tension electrical power lines diagonally traverse the site. This situation predisposes the monument to imminent future development that may take the form of roads, housing construction etc.

Mtwapa Heritage site, part of the ruins (Photo: National Museums of Kenya)



Emerging solutions to threats

Several issues need to be addressed with regard to a thorough preservation and protection of the Mtwapa Heritage Site. The main concern is the development of a thorough and comprehensive management plan that is proposed to adopt a multidisciplinary approach and involve all the relevant stakeholders. A thorough implementation of this management plan is necessary to realise this positive move towards this site's conservation.

It is then planned to educate the local inhabitants regarding this heritage site being an essential component of their heritage and that of the nation and the world at large. However, the National Museums of Kenya has found it increasingly difficult to implement most of its preservation and conservation programs. This is due to a minimal budgetary allocation from the main government.

However, the intervention of the international community and the inclusion of the site as Heritage at Risk will help in the continued maintenance required for the conservation of the site. The government of Kenya will be encouraged to enforce laws and carry out the implementation of policies that are conservation driven.



Case Study Two – Qorahey Wells

These wells are located in Wajir District in the North Eastern part of Kenya. The word *qorahey* means a place with a lot of sand. The area is generally quite dry. The wells cover a vast area of about one square kilometre which is marked by concrete pillars every two hundred metres. There are eight wells belonging to different clans within the pastoral community. They are round, of different sizes and cemented. They were cemented in the 1940s. These watering wells which have been in existence for the last one hundred years are the lifeline for the livestock which is the backbone for the livelihood of the community. The water level in this area is only about 10 m below ground level.

Threats to Qorahey Wells

The wells are not protected by law. The people using the wells are also a threat to the wells as they pollute them by littering. They are also threatened by encroachment, both developmental and urbanisation. Vegetation growing near the wells is also a threat.

Emerging solutions to the threats

The wells need to be protected by law by having them gazetted under the *Antiquities and Monuments Act* Cap 215. There is also need to educate the local inhabitants of the importance of protecting the wells as an essential component of their heritage.

Report compiled by staff at the National Museums of Kenya

One of the Qorahey wells (Photo: National Museums of Kenya)