

■ TANZANIA

Narosura pottery from the southern coast of Tanzania: First incontrovertible coastal Later Stone Age pottery

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Introduction

This work reports the discovery of pottery of Narosura or Later Stone Age (LSA), tradition at the Tendaguru dinosaur site near the town of Lindi on the southern coast of Tanzania. The artifacts were found by the second author while accompanying a team of Germany paleontologists in September 2000. In a different area of Tendaguru, Middle Stone Age (MSA) artifacts were also found. Similar artifacts have been reported from the Kilwa-Lindi area (Leakey 1925; Karoma personal communication).

The Tendaguru area

Tendaguru (Figure 1) is a world famous dinosaur site discovered by the Germans in the early years of the 20th century. Germans before the First World War, and British afterwards undertook several expeditions with the aim of recovering dinosaur bones. Many bones of various Jurassic animals were collected including the largest dinosaur ever exhibited in a museum, which is now in Berlin. A comprehensive geomorphology of the area, history of the research and description of animals identified there are found in Zils et al. (1995). The September 2000 Tendaguru expedition reexamined the stratigraphy of the old excavations and quarry areas in order to comprehend the chronology and palaeocology of the dinosaurs.

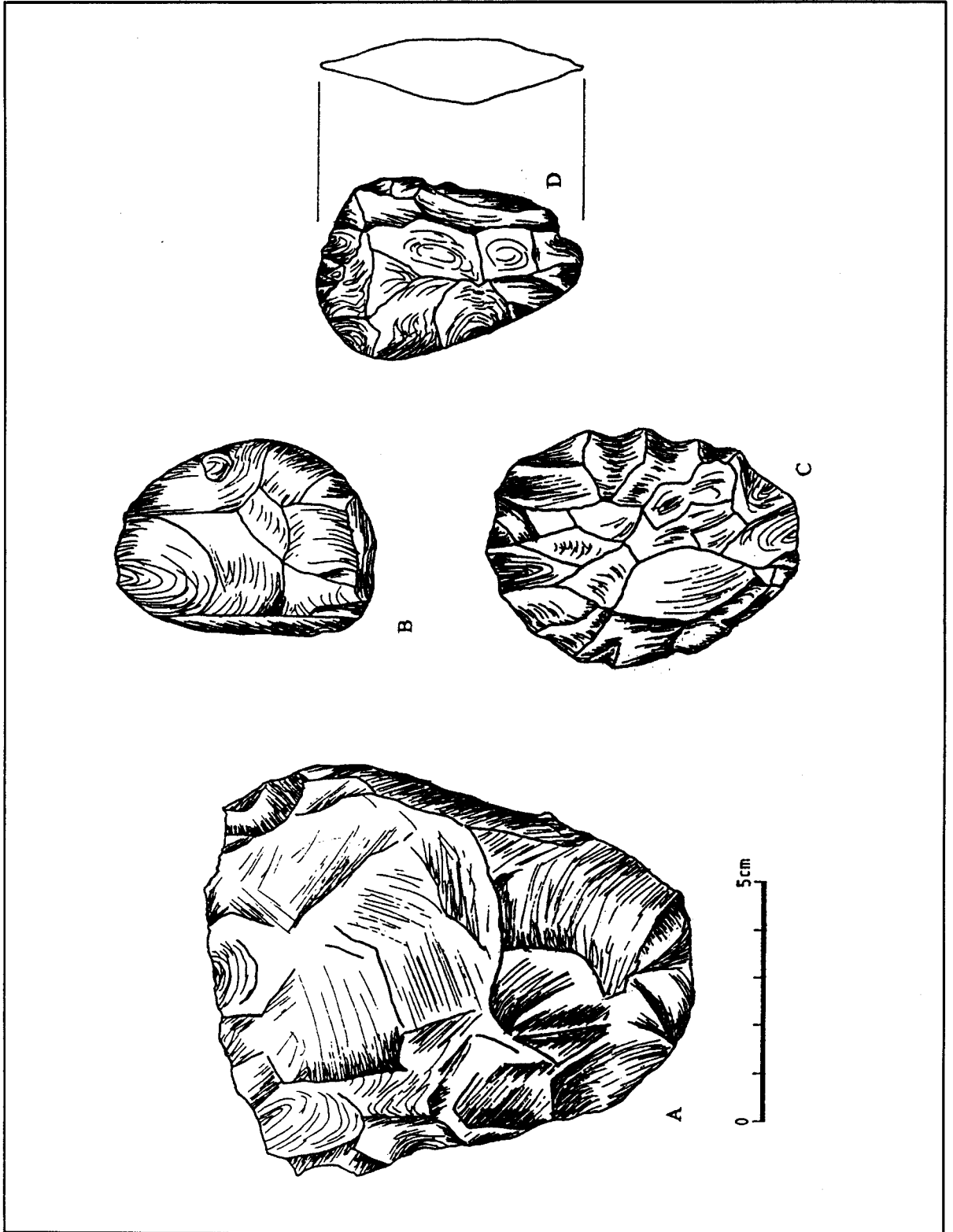
Survey work in the area 2 km southwest of the Tendaguru hill at Tingutinguti, at the former dinosaur site S, yielded MSA tools. These were handaxes (Figure 2a), core scrapers (Figure 2b-d) and flakes. Narosura type potsherds were found scattered over an area 5 km north of Tendaguru on the way to Mtaapaia and Ukulinga (Mnyangara) villages. The find location, which is being eroded by water, could probably yield more Narosura artifacts if properly researched.

Narosura pottery description

Sixteen potsherds were collected from the site for study at the University of Dar es Salaam; seven are illustrated here [Figure 3]. Few sherds seem to have an element of necked-pots, but the neck concave is too casual for necked-vessels (Figures 3a, b and f). They could be of a type of vessel described by Ordner (1972:62) as a bowl with slightly everted rim, with two bands of incised cross-hatching. Our typical illustrated example (Figure 3f) has two bands of comb stamping. Others (Figures 3a and b) have wide bands of comb stamping. The majority of the potsherds seem to have been of vessels which had an angular carve at the major point (Figures 3c, d, and g). Although some of these could be of necked dependent restricted vessel (Chami 1994:78), it is likely that they were of restricted bowls similar to what Ordner (1972:62) describes as a narrow-mouthed bowl. One rim found related to this type of pottery was slightly flattened at the lip with a very slight eversion.

The main decorative element found in this assemblage is oblique comb stamping. In most cases, the instrument used had a blunt rectangular prong (Figures 3a and e). Although Odner (1972) does not offer statistics for his decorative elements, a quick look at his illustrations shows that many sherds were comb stamped and most were probably obliquely stamped with similar blunt rectangular pronged tool (Odner 1972:Figure 24). Another type of comb stamping generated pendant triangles, some being quadrangular (Figure 3c). A variety of comb-stamped pendant triangles is also found in Odner's (1972) Narosura assemblage. One sherd with a cross-hatching motif was also found associated with a zigzag incision (Figure 3d). The latter is similar to a false relief chevron. Cross-hatching is a

Figure 2. Middle Stone Age artifacts. A: Handaxe. B to D: core scrapers.



common decorative element in Odner's (1972: Figure 23) Narosura collection. His figure 23b has a zigzag line bounding the cross-hatching motif just like one of our examples (Figure 3d). In both Tendaguru and Narosura samples, punctations, horizontal and zigzag lines have been used to bound motifs. Graphiting (Fig. 3c) was found on two sherds. The fabric quality of the potsherds suggests that the vessels were strong, and finely made. They were well polished and the color of those collected for analysis is red-brownish.

Discussion

The Narosura pottery tradition has been attributed to a people of LSA culture in the Eastern Rift Valley of Kenya and Tanzania. Sites range from 1000 to 300 BC (Bower and Nelson 1978; Ordner 1972), and are called "Pastoral Neolithic" because their pottery is associated with LSA stone tools and bones of cattle and goat/sheep. Narosura settlements are also thought to have occurred in the eastern branch of the East African Rift Valley between Lakes Nakuru and Eyasi (Ordner 1972). This distribution was slightly modified when Mturi (1986) reported another Narosura type-site in west Kilimanjaro.

Odner (1972:71-73) has discussed several known pottery traditions, which he regards as variants of Narosura. These include Sutton's (1973:146-54) Class A (Elmentitan) and Class B (Gumban A) pottery from central Kenya and Odner's own Narosura type from the Kenya/Tanzania border south to Lake Eyasi. This is just one of the "Pastoral Neolithic" traditions of the Rift Valley (see Robertshaw 1990 for a discussion of terminology). Ordner (1972:72) argues "that Narosura ware and classes A and B ware are partly contemporary; the similarities are looked upon as representing cultural elements which have been diffused between the two areas."

This discovery has a number of implications for our understanding of LSA and Early Iron Age (EIA) cultures in East Africa. The presence of a Narosura site on west Kilimanjaro suggested that the "Pastoral Neolithic" people had spread out of the Rift Valley to the adjacent hinterlands. The discovery of this tradition on the southern coast of Tanzania, in the Rufiji region (Chami 2001a), and an unconfirmed report from Zanzibar (Chami

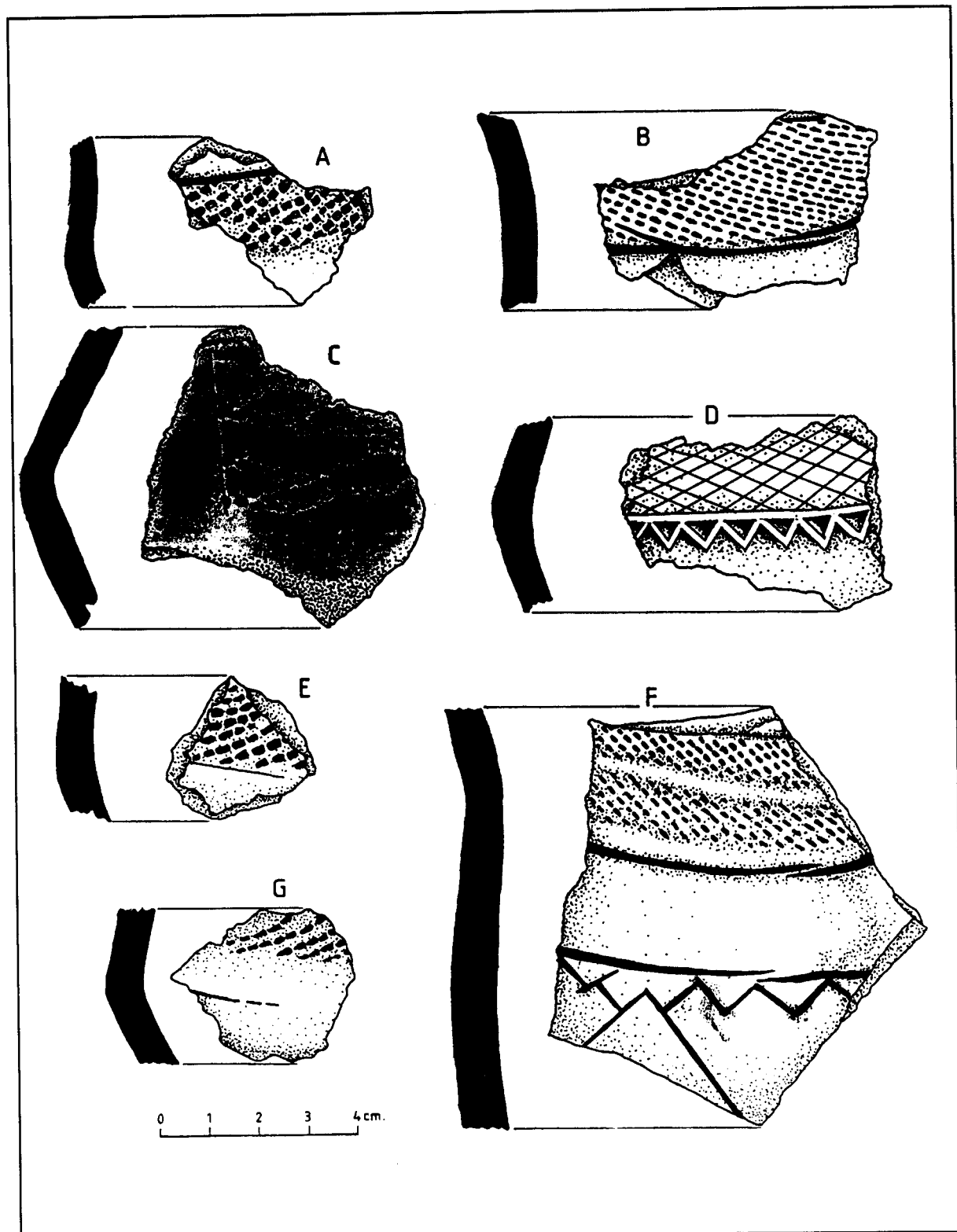
2001b) and Mafia would support the idea that Narosura tradition was widespread on the coast and islands of East Africa.

Many researchers believe that Narosura people were pastoralists (Bower and Nelson 1978; Robertshaw 1990). Narosura is grouped in the "Pastoral Neolithic" mode of production because its people "relied substantially on domestic stock for their livelihood" (Bower and Nelson 1978:562). While this could be true for the Rift Valley and nearby grassland areas, it is questionable whether coastal Narosura people were pastoralists. Excavations in a LSA level at a Zanzibar cave, dated to the last millennium BC or the Narosura period, has yielded varieties of bones of wild and domesticated (chicken and cat) animals (Chami 2001a). This suggests that although domestication was practiced, cattle and goat/sheep were not present in the Zanzibar Neolithic community. Other modes of production, including hunting, fishing, farming and trade, could have been relied upon. As for hunting, the LSA stone horizon in the Zanzibar cave yielded many bones of wild animals, including all types of antelopes. Many other small animals including digdig and rats were hunted for food. Fish bones, harpoons and shells were also found, suggesting fishing.

Researchers have agreed for a long time now that farming was introduced into eastern and southern Africa by the Early Iron Age (EIA) people in the early centuries AD (Soper 1971; Collett 1982; Huffman and Hebert 1994-95). But there is evidence of new kinds of practices reflected in LSA burial mounds, as well as cave and open air "Pastoral Neolithic" sites: grinding stones, pestles and stone bowls. All these have been received with mixed feelings; one suggestion is that these implements could have been used to process wild crops (Sassoon 1968:23; Sutton 1973:148; Odner 1972:78).

There is also believed to be little evidence of involvement in trade networks before the turn of the first century AD at the time of *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* (Casson 1989; Sutton 1994-95). The people inhabiting the coast of East Africa earlier are believed to be unable to sail (Sheriff 1981). However, trade objects like pottery and beads associated with LSA and EIA materials have also been found on both Zanzibar and Mafia and in the Rufiji

Figure 3. Narosura pottery from Tendaguru.



region of mainland Tanzania (Chami 1999a, 2001b). This is an indication that trade activities could have begun in the LSA and that Narosura people could have initiated them. Trade goods have already been reported from the LSA, Ngorongoro crater burial mound sites and Kenya's Njoro cave dating to the last millennium BC (M. Leakey 1966; Leakey 1972). Significant are the marine shells (cowries) found in the Ngorongoro burial mounds suggesting contact between the coast and the Rift Valley area. The presence of LSA and EIA sites in Mafia and Zanzibar also suggest that sailing by the coastal people had begun from the last millennium BC if not earlier (Chami 1999b). Many researchers also believe that the earliest pottery technology, just like agriculture, was introduced by immigrant iron working Bantu-language speakers (Soper 1971; Phillipson 1993; Huffman 1970). This theory has been questioned by several researchers who that the EIA cultural package was received and adopted by resident Neolithic Bantu-speakers (Gramly 1978; Mazel 1992; Chami 1999a). The find of the Narosura LSA pottery on the southern coast of Tanzania now provides first incontrovertible evidence that pottery was made and used by LSA people south of the Tanzania/Kenya Rift valley. In other words, it is not the advent of EIA culture that was responsible with pottery making in the larger part of east, central and southern Africa. LSA people had made pottery and as it is shown for Zanzibar (Chami 2001b) and southern Africa (Mazel 1992) they also had domesticated some animals although not all areas had cattle and goat/sheep.

Conclusion

Research from the coast of East Africa suggests that Narosura people settled there as early as the beginning of the last millennium BC. More work is needed to find out more about their mode of production. The coming of the EIA cultural package was received and adopted by LSA people of Narosura tradition. Their settlement on the southern coast of Tanzania can now be used as an indicator to how pre-EIA domesticating and farming elements spread to southern Africa.

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