
CONCEPTUALIZING AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND BIOCULTURAL HERITAGE PARK IN CHONGOENE, GAZA PROVINCE, MOZAMBIQUE: COMMUNITY BENEFITS CONNECTED TO COASTAL SHELL MIDDENS AND ECOSYSTEMS.

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Résumé

Chongoene District in Gaza province, Mozambique, hosts a number of important archaeological shell middens which are also of significant heritage value to local communities and for the country as a whole. These shell middens form the focus of this paper which aims to explore what is currently known about their origins and archaeological associations and current threats to their preservation and management. This paper will outline a possible way forward that includes the establishment of an innovative Archaeological and Biocultural Heritage Park, that places community stewardship and educational engagement at the centre of efforts to protect these sites and disseminate information about this rich heritage through informed, collaborative management.

The Chongoene shell middens provide essential cultural ecosystem services for local coastal communities and warrant protection as part of district-level cultural landscape preservation activities. They also provide testimony, beginning in the early first millennium CE around the transition from Late Stone Age hunting and gathering to early farming Iron Age modes of subsistence, to the changing interaction between humans and nature through the exploitation of the marine molluscs and other coastal resources over the *longue durée*.

We argue in this paper that despite having been known for many years and recognized

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as archaeologically important the preservation and conservation of these coastal middens in the dunes at Chongoene still present an overwhelming challenge to the Provincial Government authorities owing to the absence of any integrated coastal management plans for this section of Mozambique's coastline. Moreover, we contend that, if properly preserved and valued, these shell middens and their associated coastal ecosystem can contribute to fostering a deeper sense of environmental responsibilities and positive evaluation of maritime cultural heritage while also strengthening cultural attachments to place and generating economic opportunities through related investment in establishing biocultural heritage tourism. Their location close to the Indian Ocean with beautifully beaches can obviously attract visitors, while their scenic qualities and deep human history offer ideal qualities for promoting philosophies of local cultural stewardship and environmental conservation. Essentially, local people recognize themselves as part of this landscape that they have created over time, through shellfish collection, fishing and cultural engagement with the sea and its resources.

Mots-Clés: Shell middens, Chongoene, Ecosystems, Preservation, Biocultural Heritage, Local coastal communities