

NEW DETERMINATIONS OF ABSOLUTE DATES FROM COMOREAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

H.T. WRIGHT, Museum of anthropology, University Museum Building,
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Mi. 48109, ETATS UNIS.

Most of our understanding of the archaeological chronology of the Comoro Islands is based upon the occurrence of Near Eastern and Chinese ceramics of known age in stratigraphic layers in Comorean archaeological sites. This kind of dating requires checking by other methods for two reasons.

1. These imported types were often made and exported for long periods of time, so that their occurrence provides an imprecise indication of date at best.

2. Being rare and valuable, imported pottery was often preserved for a long time before it was broken and discarded in an archaeological deposit.

Fortunately, we have a number of Carbon - 14 age determinations from the Comoros, and they have enabled us to confirm the absolute age of the settlements of the IXth and Xth centuries A.D. This note presents both recent Carbon - 14 analyses and the results of a newer analytical technique, thermo-luminescence dating, for sites of the XIth century and later. These results are important for understanding the advent of Islam on the Comoros.

Carbon-14 Age Determination from Domoni and Sima, Ndzuwani

Charcoal samples excavated in 1984 by the joint team of the Centre de documentations et Recherche and the University of Michigan (sponsored by the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Geographic Society) were submitted to the Radiocarbon Laboratory of Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, under the direction of Dr. Herbert Haas. The results are preliminary pending final corrections for counter calibrations, but changes in the age estimate will be minor. The results given below include both the standard date using the conventional half life in radiocarbon years before A.D. 1950 and a correction for calendrical age given quantities of carbon-13 and variations in atmospheric Carbon-14 based on studies of ancient tree-ring growth.

SMU 1521

Domoni, Ndzuwani, Shirazi Mosque
Unit I:15 (South Excavation, Layer 16)

A Thermoluminescence Age Determination from Sima on Ndzuwani

A sherd from the same layer as SMU 1521 was submitted to the T-L Laboratory at the University of Durham, Durham, England. The sample was recovered in 1984 under the program noted above. The results, based upon the pre-dose technique, have been communicated to us by Dr. Ian Bailiff and Dr. Ian Watson.

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Domoni, Ndzuwani : Shirazi Mosque
Unit I:15 (South Excavation, Layer 6)

Like SMU 1521, this sample should immediately predate the construction of the second mosque. Likewise, it is associated with "late scraffiato" sherds of the late XIIth of XIIIth centuries.

Age Estimate	A.D. 1210 ± 155
95% Confidence Limits	A.D. 900 - 1520

Comment : Perfectly concordant with the evidence of the imported ceramics

General Comment

These few dates confirm the evidence of the imported ceramics that the earliest mosques on Ndzuwani were built in the XIth or XII centuries A.D. and that the mosques with elaborate carved coral mihrabs were built during the XIVth or XVth centuries A.D. Certainly, however, more dates are desirable given the rather broad confidence limits provided by single analyses.