This thesis examines the archaeological evidence on the Swahili people dietary practices between Ca. 8th and 17th centuries A.D. The study analyzes the extent to which the environment influenced the procurement of food on the north Kenyan Swahili coast. The study adopts a model which relates the Swahili dietary system and economic strategies to the local environment based on culture history.

Evidence for this study draws from the 1987-88 excavations carried out at Ungwana by George Abungu as well as the 1980-84 excavations at Shanga by Mark Horton. Data from ethnographic observations and documentary accounts were also examined. An in-depth study of the ecofact from Ungwana and Shanga was carried out. Further, faunal analysis of the excavated materials from the aforementioned sites was undertaken.

Evidence adduced from the research carried out indicate that there was lack of direct floral remains. However, ceramic and non-ceramic finds offered "indirect" yet worth evidence of the use of crop foods in the Swahili dietary system. In most cases, the inferences made from the floral evidence about the existence of certain food stuff among the Swahili concurs with similar assertions of the early historical accounts and ethnographic observations. There are however, discrepancies in some of the type, quantity and place where the foods are reported. The study further asserts that, the Swahili dietary was a blend of agricultural, pastoral, marine and game resources. Therefore, the Swahili can no longer be seen narrowly as being either of agricultural or pastoral origin only. Evidence yielding from this study indicate that proteinous foods like fish which were hitherto considered an insignificant component of the Swahili diet were indeed popular among the community. The presence of certain types of foods probably not eaten by the Swahili communities but within Swahili settlement confirm the coast-interior interaction thesis in terms of economic symbiosis and social intercourse.