

Abstract

A sacred site is a place which is considered holy, and is partially or wholly reserved for magico-religious or ceremonial functions. Because of this it is venerated and revered and is kept free from contamination by sin and evil. Sacred sites vary in size from very small places covering a few square metres to large areas covering several hectares of land. They are usually characterized by the presence of artefacts, ecofacts and features that are unique to them; they may be in the open air, or in rockshelters, caves and forests. In many cases, sacred sites have frightening tales told about them, in order to scare off those who would want to destroy or defile them. In the archaeological record, sacred sites may initially be identifiable as burial sites, ceremonial sites or butchery sites. It is on the basis of such clues that other attributes that are typical of sacred sites can be identified, isolated and studied. It is against this background that this chapter discusses the Mijikenda kaya (pi. makaya) as a sacred site.