Azania is the ancient name for East Africa.

The circular motif on the front cover of this and previous volumes of *Azania* is taken from a carved coral roundel which adorns the Small Domed Mosque at Kilwa Kisiwani, built in the early fifteenth century AD.

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Azania

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Archaeological sites of East Africa: four studies

Special volume by
John E.G. Sutton

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The British Institute in Eastern Africa

Kilwa

A history of the ancient Swahili town

with a guide to the monuments of Kilwa Kisiwani and adjacent islands

A Tanzanian island in world history

Lying on a small island in a sheltered bay of the southern Swahili coast, the harbour of Kilwa was in much of the medieval period as rich and important as any in this quarter of the world. First settled about 800 AD, this Muslim town and sultanate rose to prominence on the coast in the eleventh century and attained impressive wealth and power in the early fourteenth (in particular around 1320, the date of the most splendid and spacious stone buildings). That wealth derived from trade and shipping not only along the coast but also in the wider Indian Ocean network. The Swahili harbours were supplying timber, ivory and other African products to southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf and as far as Gujerat in India, and thus connecting with the routes leading to China in the east and to Egypt and the Mediterranean countries in the west.

Especially important for Kilwa was its control of the coast to the south, in particular the harbour of Sofala (some distance beyond the Zambezi mouth), through which gold mined in Zimbabwe was channelled into the world trading system. Those southerly gold sources were known from at least the end of the eighth century, and at each period when demand in the wider world increased, Kilwa profited further as middleman in supplying the metal — together with ivory and other merchandise of the region — to the international network (fig. 1). Thus, the exceptional boom of the early fourteenth century — which is reflected in the most spectacular architectural feats at Kilwa and at Great Zimbabwe at the same time — corresponds with an unprecedented surge in the world's demand for gold and in its price (resulting especially from the adoption of gold coinages by European city-states and kingdoms between the 1250s and 1330s). This naturally stimulated increased mining in Zimbabwe and traffic along the east coast of Africa to the Red Sea, with Kilwa exploiting its pivotal role to the full.

Such unusually favourable circumstances could not last indefinitely of course, and a marked slump followed in the middle of the fourteenth century. But, as the world economy picked up in the early fifteenth, Kilwa revived, although as a regional harbour for the trade between Africa and the Islamic heartlands, as well as India, it now faced

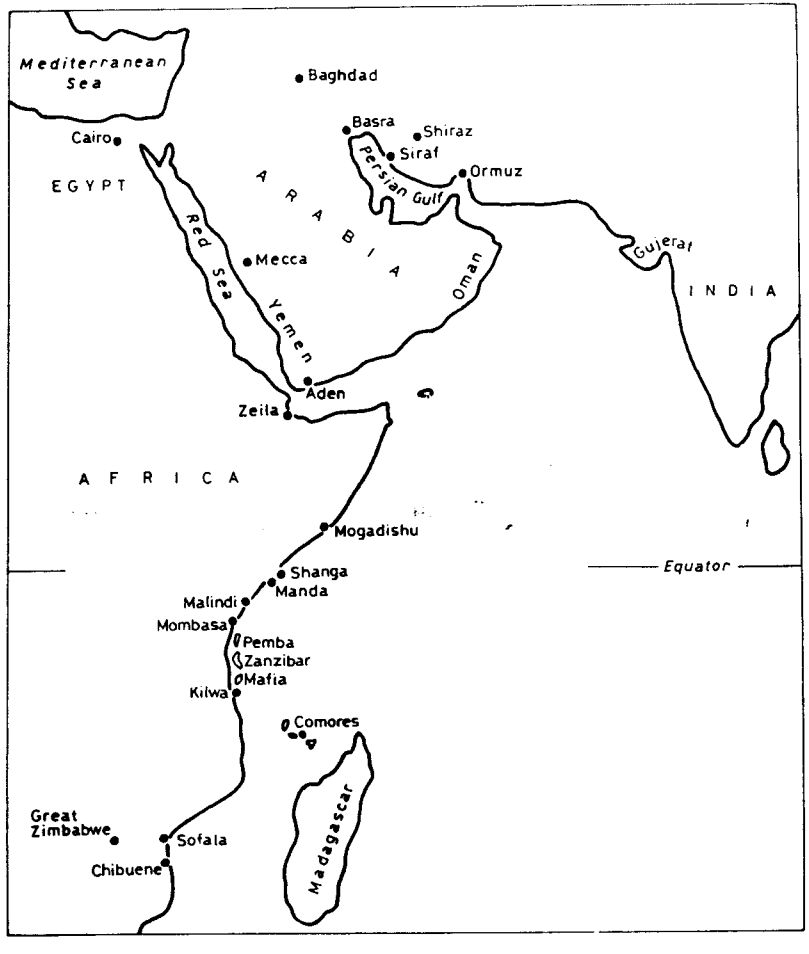


Fig.1. The western Indian Ocean, ninth to fifteenth centuries AD

stronger competition from Mombasa and Malindi to its north on the Swahili coast.

It is then to this late medieval period (as it is known in the world at large) comprising the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries AD that belong most of the stone buildings for whose ruins Kilwa is celebrated. These, like Swahili architecture elsewhere along this coast, were constructed in rectangular style in measured cubits, using locally quarried coral for the masonry. The usual technique for building these walls, both internal and external, was to bond the coral-rag with lime mortar course by course and to carefully

smooth and plaster the surfaces including the floors (the plaster as well as mortar being prepared, as to this day, by burning coral). Roofs were sometimes pitched and thatched, but were frequently flat, consisting of coral-concrete supported on timber rafters or mangrove-poles (or both), these resting on the walls with, where necessary, internal pillars of wood or stone for extra support. The visible medieval stone structures at Kilwa built in these ways include several mosques, some of them ornate and embellished with domed roofs supported on arches, as well as the enormous palace complex of Husuni Kubwa (fig. 2) overlooking the harbour to the east of the town. This last, as well as the domed enlargement of the Great Mosque (fig. 3), was constructed about 1320, just when the world's gold demands reached their peak.

Fig.2. Husuni Kubwa from the air (1961); view from north, with main palace area in foreground. (Compare plan and reconstruction, figs. 27 and 28.)

There were also rich town houses which, though naturally less grand and spacious than the palace and community mosque, were constructed by the same basic techniques and drew on the same range of styles. Although on Kilwa itself the masonry walls of these houses have been mostly robbed for use in subsequent building (especially that which occurred in the late eighteenth century), the form of such fifteenth-century houses, as well as a town plan, are preserved in the deserted site on the adjacent island of Songo Mnara. (This is described below; see figures 34 and 35.) Earlier, most of the

Fig.3. The Great Mosque of Kilwa: the domed extension, originally built in early fourteenth century, and restored (following collapse) in early fifteenth century.

dwellings were built in coastal style of wood and earth with thatch roofs — and indeed numerous houses continued to be built in that way by the ordinary townspeople and farmers, alongside those of stone occupied by the elite.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the old Indian Ocean trading system, and in particular the commerce of Kilwa and the other Swahili harbours, were irreversibly upset by the invasion of the Ocean from the south by Portuguese ships, sailing, as had never happened before, from the Atlantic. A particular concern of the Portuguese was to wrest the trade of Zimbabwean gold from Kilwa's control; they also set about regulating the whole commerce of the coast, using force where necessary to impose their suzerainty over the Swahili towns and their sultans. Kilwa itself was attacked and badly damaged in 1505. The actual Portuguese presence at Kilwa over the next two centuries was slight; but the revolution in the Indian Ocean commercial network — indeed in that of the whole world — meant that the East African coast, and especially Kilwa at its southern end, were reduced to a backwater and declined sharply.

There was a brief revival at Kilwa town late in the eighteenth century in response to international commercial trends, and in particular demands for ivory and slaves obtainable from the African interior. This period is marked by renovation of mosques and the building of a new and fortified palace complex on the west edge of the town (known in its ruined but still imposing state as *Makutani*, 'the big walls'). But this renewed burst of independent prosperity was of short duration, being suppressed at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Omani rulers of Zanzibar, who were then claiming political and economic control of this coast and who were at the same time jealous of Kilwa's

prestige as the ancient centre of East African Islamic culture. Being thus a threat to Zanzibar's growing commercial empire, the sultan of Kilwa suffered the indignity of having a Zanzibari governor imposed on him; for this purpose the rectangular fort (*Gereza*) which dominates the harbour and shore was rebuilt (on the foundations of a Portuguese structure) as a symbol of Zanzibar's control, while the harbour was effectively closed to all but very local traffic. Eventually in the 1840s the last sultan of Kilwa was deported to Oman. By this time the commerce of the southern coast and interior had been diverted to other harbours, notably a new roadstead under Zanzibari control at Kivinje, a few miles to the north of ancient Kilwa on the island.

The above historical sketch is deliberately kept summary. More detail for certain periods, especially as they relate to the archaeology and visible monuments of Kilwa, can be found below in the section on 'Kilwa and the Swahili past'. The prominent individual sites, buildings and ruins are described in turn in the latter part of this study. Before that, some brief points of explanation are offered on the name *Kilwa* and the historical legacy of the ancient town, seeing that both remain subject to varying degrees of popular misconception.

The name *Kilwa*

Kilwa is in the first place the name of this small island and of the town which flourished on it for more than a thousand years.

The 'new' Swahili town which developed in the nineteenth century at Kivinje on the mainland shore to the north is usually known as Kilwa Kivinje, thereby acknowledging its historical connection with the original Kilwa on the nearby island. Although some settlement has continued to this day on the old island site, it has for almost two hundred years been reduced to village status, with thatched houses standing close to the stone ruins of the mosques, cemeteries and houses of the successive periods of the ancient town. The place is now called Kilwa Kisiwani, meaning 'Kilwa on the island', to distinguish it from Kivinje and other places in the district (see fig. 33, below). But before the building of Kivinje it was unnecessary to add 'Kisiwani'; at that time *Kilwa* referred solely to this ancient town — and to the sultanate (or kingdom) which for many centuries had its seat there and whose fame reached distant lands.

The first known mention of *Kilwa* in writing is in the Arabic text of Yakut in the early thirteenth century, but the name must be much older than that. Almost certainly the same name was current when the sultanate was established on the island, probably in the eleventh century, and very likely it applied to the earliest settlement of the harbour front in the late eighth or early ninth century.

The original meaning and etymology of the name 'Kilwa' are uncertain, whether from a Bantu or an Arabic root. After 1498, when the first Portuguese ships under Vasco da Gama sailed past these shores, it was recorded as 'Quiloa', which spelling is found on European maps and documents of the sixteenth and following centuries. Thus the English poet John Milton, scanning the printed atlases available in the seventeenth century, recorded 'Quiloa' among the kingdoms of this region of the world when composing his epic *Paradise Lost*.

Nowadays in Tanzania, 'coming from Kilwa' may refer to anywhere in Kilwa *wilaya* or district, a wide administrative area stretching some distance both along the coast and inland. The district headquarters, established by the German East African administration

at Kivinje in the 1890s, was moved late in the British period to Masoko on the narrow peninsula facing old Kilwa (Kisiwani). This Masoko has developed as a small harbour and commercial settlement, as well as the government base; it has now become the main centre in the district (one with an airfield), so that 'going to Kilwa' commonly means reaching (Kilwa) Masoko in the first place. But everyone is conscious of the older history — to which the ruins on the island bear testimony, these being the relics of the original Kilwa.

Whose ruins? whose history?

Frequently one is told that these stone ruins (*magofu*) at Kilwa, as at numerous other sites along the coast of Tanzania and Kenya, are to be credited to Arabs who supposedly settled and ruled this coast and the islands from early in the Islamic era. This 'Arab' attribution is commonly offered both for those structures built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (notably Makutani and the Gereza on the island, as well as Kivinje on the mainland) and for those dating to the medieval period (that is, before Portuguese involvement in the region). Sometimes the term 'Shirazi' is mentioned, on the assumption of an ancient migration from Shiraz in Persia (or the ports of the Persian Gulf more generally). This unlikely version of history is enshrined in the legend of the foundation of Kilwa and of its first sultan. He is remembered as Ali bin al-Hasan and is said to have sailed from Shiraz where his father (al-Hasan) was ruler. This story, composed or concocted for political reasons long after the supposed event (and written into a local Arabic text of the sixteenth century known as *The Kilwa Chronicle*), is of a sort told of many places claiming an ancient tradition, and is patently not an objective historical account. Its purpose, as with any royal or sultanate history, was to provide a noble pedigree and sense of legitimacy. More than that, on the African shores and islands it was necessary, for townspeople as much as their rulers, to invoke an origin in Arabia or the Persian Gulf in order to demonstrate a genuine Muslim ancestry in the heartlands of Islam. And this has meant that the Swahili populations of these coastal settlements and islands have, under such names as 'Shirazi', downplayed the obvious and overwhelming East African element in their ancestry.

The ruins at Kilwa, Songo Mnara and elsewhere on the coast and islands of Tanzania and Kenya, are therefore the relics of earlier Swahili settlements, not those of foreign migrants or invaders ('Arabs', 'Shirazi' or whatever), as is commonly averred. Although the mosques and tombs are by definition Islamic, they are not simple transplants from Arabia or the Persian Gulf. Their architectural style is one which developed locally, being distinctive, in both its forms and its coral masonry techniques, of the Swahili coast. As archaeological remains, they comprise an important body of evidence for the history of the Swahili people over a period of more than a thousand years, and also of the involvement of this Swahili region in the commerce of the Indian Ocean and its place in the Old World economy. Much of this commerce and the shipping extending to the Swahili coast, and to Kilwa lying towards its southern end, was largely in the hands of Arab merchants and captains sailing from Oman, the Persian Gulf and, from the eleventh century on, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. Cultural and Islamic contacts naturally came with this commerce, and some Arab merchants would have settled and married locally, thus encouraging the Islamization process in Swahili society. But insistence by later generations on an Arab family or clan ancestry has usually been more

a cultural statement than a genealogical fact. While Arabic was doubtless used as the *lingua franca* of the international trade of the western Indian Ocean (so that Arab scholars and travellers like Ibn Battuta, visiting Kilwa in 1331, communicated easily in the harbour and court), Swahili would have been since the ninth century the common language of all the coastal towns and islands and of the coasting traffic.

Kilwa and the Swahili past

Swahili, as is well known, literally means 'coastal'. But culturally the term implies more than that since for many centuries Swahili civilization has been Islamic, and it is Muslim practice which has till recently distinguished Swahili from other East Africans. This adherence to Islam has encouraged the popular misperception of the Swahili people as Arab or part-Arab, and has by extension fostered the common assumption (discussed above) that the ruins of previous Islamic settlements and their mosques, and stone buildings generally at Kilwa and elsewhere along the coast, should be attributed to Arab settlers (or immigrants from the Persian Gulf). For a more balanced view, one might look first at the local cultural situation and in particular at the Swahili language spoken along the whole coast of what is now Tanzania and Kenya. Like the languages of the hinterland, (*ki*)Swahili belongs in both structure and basic vocabulary to the north-eastern division of Bantu; its roots are clearly in the African continent, not overseas. The emergence of the Swahili language as such and its spread to the various coastal and island settlements and harbour-towns should stretch back about twelve-hundred years.

It was this rapidly emerging Swahili culture and population — extending as far south as the Comores, the shores of Madagascar and the Sofala coast beyond the Zambezi mouth in Mozambique, and in the northward direction probably as far as Mogadishu — which was able to receive and assimilate Arab merchants and visitors and their Islamic religion from about 800 AD onwards. That was a period of economic expansion and new commercial links in much of the Old World; in the Indian Ocean these were stimulated by the Abbasid caliphate which had taken over the Arab empire from 750 and established its new capital at Baghdad. The developing trade-routes of the Ocean at this period therefore were oriented on Oman and the Gulf beyond, thus to link with the rich provinces of the Caliphate in Persia as well as Iraq.

The products which overseas merchants sought from the land of Zanj — as East Africa was known abroad — included luxury items, notably ivory which was prized in many countries including China, leopard-skins for rugs and covers, rhino-horn and ambergris, the last derived from whales and obtained on the shores, being valued for perfume. These are recorded in early Arabic texts, especially that of al-Masudi, who wrote in the early tenth century. (He claimed to have visited East Africa himself, notably the famous island known as Qanbalu, probably to be identified with Pemba, which had already a Muslim population and ruler.) Equally important, if less emphasised, was the export of timber from the coast, quantities of this being required for building, of houses but also of ships, in treeless parts of southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Zanj slaves, moreover, were carried to the Gulf, in particular for salt-mining and agricultural works, but this constituent of the trade declined very sharply late in the ninth century after the great slave revolts in lower Iraq.

Masudi also mentioned the gold of Sofala, which would have derived from Zimbabwe. This commodity, being required in the Abbasid caliphate and in countries

beyond, for ornaments and jewellery and for currency in particular, gave an additional, and irreversible, impetus to this international commercial contact of the Swahili region as far as Kilwa and well beyond. There are some archaeological hints along the coast that the beginnings of this southerly gold trade preceded the Abbasid period and may have occurred as early as the sixth century, that is the time of Byzantine-Sassanid rivalry in the Near East, Arabia and the Red Sea. Moreover, export of East African ivory to the Red Sea and Egypt was documented as early as the first century AD, alongside the commercial expansion of the Roman Empire.

Be that as it may, it was not until 800 AD (or a very close date) that traffic in these commodities from eastern Africa — and south-east Africa in the case of gold — established itself as part of a regular and sustained trading system in the western Indian Ocean. Once the conditions for that occurred at the end of the eighth century or early in the ninth, a regional infrastructure was called for. This need was answered by the emergence of the Swahili as a people with a distinctive coastal culture and a developing commercial involvement.

In emphasising these cultural and economic changes at this period, and the appearance then of a specifically Swahili system and identity, one must not overlook that the region had been occupied since long before by Bantu-speaking iron-using cultivators. Recent archaeological surveys of the coast, its hinterland and the islands too, have revealed frequent signs of these Early Iron Age farmers and their distinctive pottery, dating approximately 1500 to 2000 years ago. Some pieces have been reported on Kilwa island itself. This clearly was the population from which the Swahili emerged, the latter now developing a maritime orientation with permanent coastal and island settlements.

Early Kilwa and the Swahili expansion: 9th and 10th centuries

The commercial connections with Oman and the Persian Gulf from around 800 AD are attested in the lowest archaeological layers at Kilwa (especially by and below the Great Mosque) and at a number of other sites along the whole Swahili coast (fig. 4) as far north as the Pate-Manda-Lamu archipelago.

At all these seaside and island settlements have been found pieces of pottery imported from the Persian Gulf from about the ninth century onwards, together with much more plentiful pottery of local manufacture. These local unglazed earthenwares were more essential for everyday purposes, including cooking for which the glazed and wheel-made vessels from overseas were quite unsuitable. But the latter have received disproportionate attention from archaeologists since, as widely traded items, they provide the crucial dating evidence for the local wares found with them and for the archaeological levels and features generally.

This abundant local pottery of the primary levels of the Swahili sites is readily distinguishable from the preceding Early Iron Age wares of the broader region; as a style it is commonly, if rather misleadingly, known as 'Tana tradition'. (See fig. 5. Chittick, in his report on the Kilwa excavations, called it 'early kitchen ware'; particularly distinctive is the decoration of the necks and upper bodies of these vessels with patterns of incised diagonal lines and triangles, so that it has also been called 'triangular incised ware'.) While this pottery style is indeed found at the mouth of the Tana in Kenya and along that river's lower course, its distribution is in fact very much wider, extending both

along the whole Swahili coast and to the islands, that is southwards to Kilwa and well beyond it to the Comoros and to sites lying south of the Zambezi mouth. It also occurs some distances inland, especially in Tanzania. While its area of origin may be disputed — whether on the coast itself or in the hinterland, whether towards the southern end of its distribution or the northern — it serves in effect as an archaeological hallmark of the early Swahili, and at the same time corroborates the essentially African composition of that society.

While the details of this 'Tana tradition' pottery need not detain us here — they may be consulted in the archaeological reports — its historical message should not be missed. The exceptionally wide distribution of so recognisable a style implies a popular fashion which was rapidly adopted along the trade-routes and in the market settlements — those reached by ship and also those up to 200 kilometres inland approached on foot — by communities who were eager to connect with the commercial network and to relate to, or even to identify with, the emerging Swahili system. Some of these pottery vessels would have travelled with the trade, especially in ships and smaller boats, serving as containers for foodstuffs and other items of merchandise, or simply for the water and provisions required on board for the voyage. (This will explain the discovery of sherds of vessels of this style as far away as Oman.) It may be that potters also travelled to set up their craft in the various harbours and growing settlements of the Swahili coast and islands; alternatively, local potters, on encountering the new style, may have turned their hands to it, thus helping propagate the fashion as they responded to demand.

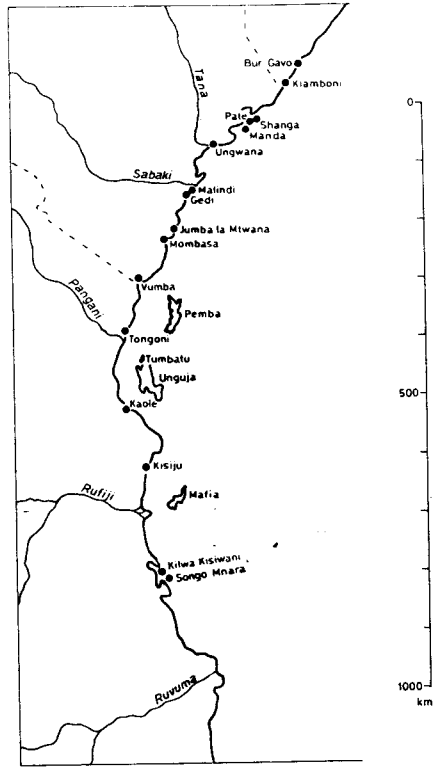


Fig.4. The Swahili coast, showing the principal towns and archaeological sites of the ninth to fifteenth centuries

The coastal and hinterland trade, which was instrumental in this expansion of Swahili identity and fashions, would not have been handling exclusively goods for the overseas market. For one thing, like any trading system it had to be two-way and to cater for local needs in the first place. While the world demand for ivory, and the profits to be made from this, doubtless stimulated activity, that depended on an existing local infrastructure

by which essential commodities were traded. Notable here would have been salt carried inland, iron for which ores are unevenly distributed, and certain foodstuffs depending on season and weather, with surpluses here and shortages there. Iron from mainland smelting would have been especially important in Swahili settlements and on those islands lacking ores. Kilwa is not exactly in that category, for there are remains of old iron-workings to the east of the town site (in the Nguruni area west and south of Husuni Kubwa); these are not adequately dated, but could in part be earlier than the main settlement on the island. In time, however, the developing town of Kilwa almost certainly obtained much of its iron requirements from the wider catchment.

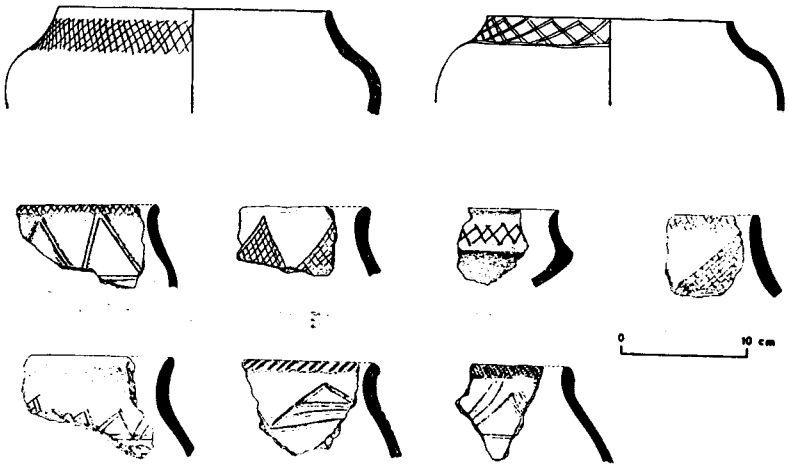


Fig.5. Early Swahili pottery from Kilwa, ninth to eleventh centuries AD (after Chittick)

This geographically extensive Swahili culture, held together by the coasting traffic and the island crossings, and in contact with the wider world of Islam and Indian Ocean trade, was open to innovations in food and cuisine. From early in the Iron Age, that is before this distinctive Swahili culture emerged, the staple of cultivating communities in the coastal and hinterland region would have been sorghum (*mtama*), the most widespread of African millets. Two important crops of south-east Asian origin were introduced probably in the early Swahili period of the ninth century or so. One was the banana, which has been remarkably adapted and variegated both on the coast and in interior regions of eastern and equatorial Africa with adequate rainfall. The other is rice, which, being easily stored and transportable, became important in towns and acquired a prestige in Muslim countries as a cosmopolitan food acceptable to travellers and guests. Coconuts, also of south-eastern Asian origin, would have been introduced at the same period, and have enriched the diet and the cuisine. For protein the Swahili relied naturally on fish, caught not so much from the deep seas as in the estuaries and the inner side of the coral reef. They also had goats and some cattle or could obtain these from the mainland, although the environment of Kilwa is not so

suitable for cattle as is that of the northern coast. As Kilwa town grew on its small island, one would imagine that an increasing proportion of its food requirements relied on cultivation on the nearby mainland; while a special commodity such as rice could have been imported from as far away as Madagascar, where this crop grows well and has a very long history.

Conversely, the soils of the Kilwa region are suitable for cotton, another introduction of this period, being required for sailmaking as well as clothing in this maritime Muslim society. There is copious evidence for cotton-spinning at Kilwa in the form of spindle-whorls which date back at least to the twelfth century. In time some of the cotton produced and woven locally may have been exported. Other special types of cloth were imported, a practice which would go back to the earliest sustained contact with the world of Islam around 800 AD.

At the site of Shanga on Pate island (off the northern Swahili coast) detailed excavations have revealed the presence of Muslims at that earliest period with a small wooden mosque, whose traces were clear (as a succession of structures, in fact) below the stone floor of the later community mosque. It is likely that there were equally early mosques, built for the use of visiting merchants as well as small resident Muslim communities, at other Swahili settlements involved in the overseas commerce. Qanbalu, mentioned by al-Masudi, was one of these. It is tempting therefore to speculate that at Kilwa below the stone remains of the Great or Friday Mosque (the northern part of which was probably constructed in the eleventh century) there would have been a series of older wooden structures dating back to the beginning of the ninth century, that is the period of the Abbasid empire when the Swahili region became integrated in a sustained way into the international commercial system. To describe this early Swahili society as 'cosmopolitan' might be considered an exaggeration, but it was certainly conscious of the existence of a wider world, and of the direction of the Islamic heartlands approached by sea through the Persian Gulf. And Kilwa, in particular, at the southerly end would have appreciated its instrumental position in channelling the gold deriving from Zimbabwe and the Limpopo valley into that system.

The rise of Kilwa and the sultanate of Ali bin al-Hasan

On certain occasions the cultural and mercantile connections with places in southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf were exploited or strengthened by increased settlement or dynastic alliances — as well as commercial adventurism. This may have been the case with Ali bin al-Hasan who established the Kilwa sultanate in the eleventh century, and issued the first copper coins there (and probably at Mafia too, the two islands being normally under one rule). Kilwa was an obvious choice of harbour on the Swahili coast from which to command the trade in gold and ivory from the south; and, in making it and Mafia his bases of operation, Ali bin al-Hasan was outflanking rival adventurers who were then asserting their rule on Pemba and Unguja (Zanzibar island). The 'Shirazi' connection which this Ali and his successors at Kilwa claimed was doubtless part

Fig.6. Copper coins (diameter 20 mm), eleventh century, inscribed with name of Ali bin al-Hasan, traditionally the first sultan of Kilwa

of the propaganda used to promote legitimacy and sovereignty in a competitive situation, as was clearly the coinage inscribed with his name and Islamic mottoes.

These small coins (figs. 6, 7) were not an innovation in the Swahili region. They had already been issued on the northern coast and islands by rulers who established mints using silver, that metal being obtained perhaps by melting imported coins from overseas. What was new at Kilwa and Mafia in the eleventh century was the substitution of copper, which would have been cheaper than silver, deriving most likely from the Zambezi region as a natural concomitant of the gold being traded. While the copper, or a proportion of it, was retained at Kilwa for this coinage — needed doubtless for local market transactions and small change in particular — the gold was sold for profit and transported northwards into the Islamic and Indian orbit.

By this period the old Persian Gulf trade axis was weakening, with the western Indian Ocean routes coming to focus more strongly on the Gulf of Aden, Yemen and the Red Sea. This change reflects the decline of the Abbasid empire centred in Iraq and the corresponding rise of Egypt in the Fatimid period, and the commercial demands of the Mediterranean beyond it from about 1000 AD on. These factors — in particular the effective reopening of the Red Sea as a trade route after four centuries of quiescence — were instrumental in the surge of activity on the Swahili coast and at Kilwa in particular in the eleventh century. Somewhat paradoxically however, on the cultural and sentimental plane the older Persian Gulf and 'Shirazi' connection persisted. This is illustrated in the calligraphy used on the coins of Kilwa, Zanzibar and Pemba, and also in certain stone inscriptions placed in mosques on Zanzibar and Tumbatu. While these were beautifully carved locally from *porites* coral, the style is distinctive of the workshops of Siraf, the port of Shiraz in Persia — where presumably the artist and stonecutter had learned his trade. This persisting cultural orientation to the Gulf may relate to the denominational allegiances of certain Muslim communities and the rulers of Kilwa and other Swahili towns at that period. The insistence on a 'Shirazi' descent, seen as essential to legitimate rule, was doubtless part of the same traditional connection.

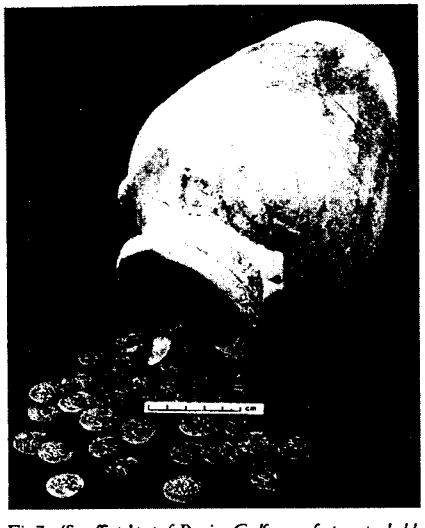


Fig.7. 'Sgraffiato' pot of Persian Gulf manufacture, probably eleventh century, found on Mafia island (Kisimani Mafia site), containing a hoard of over 500 copper coins of the early type of Ali bin al-Hasan

It was arguably in the reign of Ali bin al-Hasan, somewhere around 1050, that the original stone structure of Kilwa's Great Mosque was built. That is the small flat-roofed northern part (without the much later domed extension). The mosque and its sequence of building are described below, where a series of subsequent modifications to the walls and floor of the old part are noted. These are not precisely dated, but some must belong to the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, a period for which it is difficult to

identify specific events of significance at Kilwa from either the *Kilwa Chronicle* or from the archaeological record revealed so far. (But reasonably approximate dating for this period, as for earlier and later ones, is provided by imported ceramics, both Islamic and Chinese, which circulated with the Oceanic trade.) There was certainly continuity of occupation, even if the early bout of activity in the time of Ali bin al-Hasan himself may not have been maintained throughout the next two centuries. It seems too that several of the sultans of this period did not issue coins, those of Ali and his associates and immediate successors being apparently adequate for local use over several generations of variable commercial activity.

The Mahdali revolution and the reign of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman

By 1300 however, Kilwa's strategic position in handling and developing the trade with the south — and especially the gold from Zimbabwe, as world demands soared to unprecedented levels — was becoming widely recognised. About this date the sultanate was taken over by the Mahdali house by means of some sort of *coup d'état* — as told in the *Kilwa Chronicle* — through which a new leader emerged victorious, by name al-Hasan bin Talut. This event was followed in the next thirty years by lavish expenditure and magnificent architectural feats. These include the domed extension to the Great Mosque — indicating not only the new wealth and pride of the town and its ruler, but equally a marked increase in the population or at least in the number of worshippers each Friday — as well as Husuni Kubwa palace, the latter being an enormous and sumptuous building project along the shore to the east of the town. That would have been constructed, from the available dating clues, about the years 1315 to 1325. While the building methods and materials were essentially local — consisting in the main of the usual coral-rag bonded in lime-mortar — some of the new architectural styles and motifs, including domes and arches, would have required the recruitment of masons with experience in other Islamic countries — and perhaps the sending of Kilwan apprentices to observe and study there. Once the new palace was ready, the sultan and his court were able to offer open house not only to the richer traders but also to sheikhs and scholars who were willing to brave so long a southward journey in merchant vessels from Arabian ports.

This Mahdali family which wrested control of Kilwa about 1300 (or slightly before) may have been already established at Tumbatu, off the north end of Zanzibar island. It also maintained connections with the Red Sea, being perhaps related to the Rasulid rulers of Yemen; and members of the Kilwa house visited Yemen, performed the *hajj* to Mecca and studied in those lands. Its successful bid for Kilwa at that very time was doubtless stimulated by the rapidly rising price of gold in the world and the opportunity for exploiting the sources in south-eastern Africa through control of Sofala. The increased demand for gold in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries — adding to the standing requirements in the Islamic countries and further east — is largely attributable to developments in the European economy and currencies, as city-states and rival kingdoms (with their developing banking houses and royal mints) began one after another issuing gold coinages alongside the normal silver. In the gold-producing regions of Africa, therefore, in the west as well as the south-east of the continent, old mines and panning areas were exploited more intensively and new ones prospected. Production levels surpassed those of previous centuries and continued to rise further

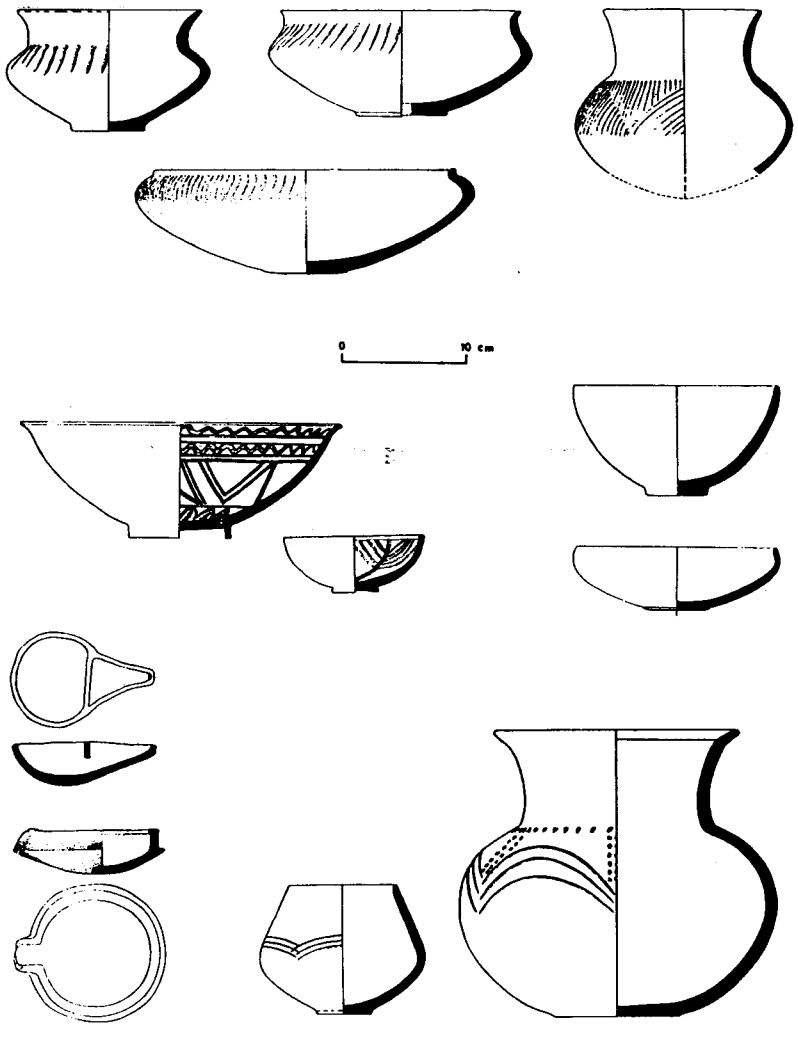


Fig.8. Locally manufactured pottery, thirteenth to fifteenth centuries (from Chittick 1974): wealed/modelled ware (top), painted ware (mid left), burnished ware (mid right), cooking pot, jar and lamps (bottom).

until at least 1330. Kilwa accordingly tightened its control of Sofala, the port for the gold mined in Zimbabwe. For a generation it made a mark in the world at large.

This particularly rich age at Kilwa reached its apogee in the 1320s, during the reign of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, remembered as Abu al-Mawahib, 'the Father of Gifts', a praise-name he assumed during his lifetime. About 1310-15 he had succeeded his grandfather, al-Hasan bin Talut, who had earlier seized the sultanate for the Mahdali line. Al-Hasan bin Sulaiman is the only ruler of Kilwa who is known to have minted gold dinars — these being inscribed 'struck at Kilwa' and dated in Islamic years (720s = 1320s AD) — as if trying to put himself and his southerly sultanate on the map of the great powers of the Islamic world (fig. 9). At the same time the production of copper coins was vastly intensified, presumably because of the demands of the local market serving a swollen population in a boom-town situation. This sultan further bestowed on himself grandiloquent titles — including 'Commander of the Faithful' and 'the Victorious King' — as read on these dinars and on an inscription in Husuni Kubwa palace (fig. 10).

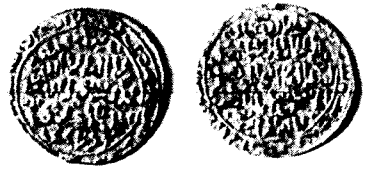
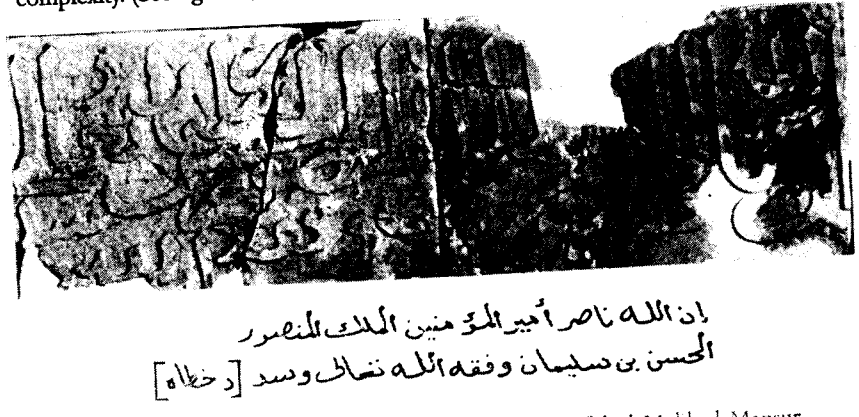


Fig.9. Gold dinar (diameter 28 mm) of sultan al-Hasan bin Sulaiman of Kilwa, found at Tumbatu. The date on the reverse (right) reads 72? (H), placing it in the 1320s AD (photo: Helen Brown).

This gigantic and ornate edifice above a breezy cliff to the east of the town — which may have been built entirely in the same sultan's reign, but could have been planned and begun in that of his grandfather — has no parallel on the Swahili coast. Although other towns were graced with palaces (or grand houses which might qualify for that term) or with other sorts of monumental buildings — notable examples being at early Shanga and at Tumbatu closer in time to the building of Husuni Kubwa — there is nothing to compare with Husuni Kubwa for size and architectural complexity. (See figure 2, and the description, plan and reconstruction below; figs. 26-



Verily God is the helper of the Commander of the Faithful, al-Malik al-Mansur [the conquering king] al-Hasan ibn Sulaiman, may Almighty God grant him success.

Fig.10. Inscription of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman found in Husuni Kubwa (in the rubble at the north end of the palace court). Height 33 cm; a third block is missing.

30.) Together with the yard and store-rooms at the back of the palace and the adjacent enclosure called Husuni Ndogo, this complex may have combined a royal trading emporium and warehouse system with the palace itself. Most likely the royal mint was contained in the same complex, both for the rare gold coins and for the vast production of new copper coins required in this reign by the local market and the town. (Crucibles for copper smelting are frequent in the rubbish deposits and rubble of Husuni Kubwa.)

Nevertheless, Husuni Kubwa was certainly intended as a palace to be lived in, not just a closely controlled commercial and financial centre. The main accommodation areas, together with the courtyards for assembly and reception purposes — as well as the ornamental octagonal bathing-pool which is unique in this part of the world — demonstrate a palatial purpose to serve the sultan, his family, court and guests, thus to achieve a balance of domestic and political functions. However, that purpose was fulfilled for a brief period only, for soon after al-Hasan's death, probably no later than 1335, his successors seem to have abandoned the palace. In fact, certain parts appear not to have been properly completed. For normal times it doubtless proved too costly to maintain and maybe too inconvenient for the everyday use of the succeeding sultan and his family, if not pretentious in the eyes of his subjects.

So, the young traveller of Moroccan origin, Ibn Battuta, who was at Kilwa in (or about) 1331 and spoke warmly of al-Hasan's hospitality and other virtues, may — or perhaps may not — have been offered quarters in Husuni Kubwa. In his short and anecdotal account of Kilwa there is no obvious allusion to this palace. But it is clear from Ibn Battuta's testimony — and from his decision to voyage here — that Kilwa had in this reign a widespread reputation as a place which welcomed Muslim visitors, and he mentioned other, more senior, scholars sojourning that year. Likewise, in the *Kilwa Chronicle*, this reign is remembered as the age of Kilwa's greatest power. With the world's demand for gold soaring relentlessly, this merchant-prince of the Mahdali house was clearly exploiting to the full the opportunity for profit by controlling the Sofala-Kilwa-Tumbatu-Yemen route which fed the onward transmission through the Red Sea to Egypt and the Mediterranean.

Significantly too, in the southern African interior, this was the period of the greatest building activity and signs of wealth at Great Zimbabwe, the capital of the Shona state or confederation which controlled the larger part of the gold mining between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers. Zimbabwe was in no way part of Kilwa's political empire; and the monumental buildings and great stone enclosures there derive from a local tradition which bears no architectural relationship to that of the Swahili. But the international economic factors on which much of the wealth, power and labour resources of Zimbabwe ultimately depended are obvious, as is equally the commercial interdependence of Great Zimbabwe and Kilwa at this very period. The point is nicely illustrated by the finding a few years ago at Great Zimbabwe of a single copper coin of the Kilwa mint, one inscribed with al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's name (fig. 11).

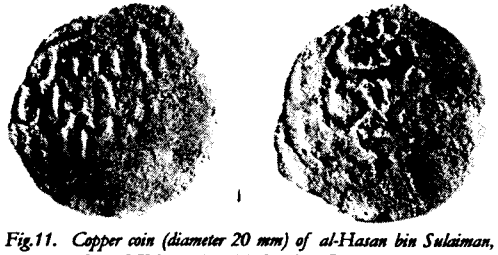


Fig.11. Copper coin (diameter 20 mm) of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, sultan of Kilwa c1315-35, found at Great Zimbabwe (photo: Tom Huffman)

The Mahdali house, with its international connections and concern that Kilwa be seen as a full member of the Islamic world, ensured moreover once for all conformity with the mainstream Sunni persuasion of Islam following the Shaf'i school, such as has persisted along the Swahili coast since that period. Ibn Battuta noted this adherence, and one of the aspirations behind the building of the Great Mosque extension with its arches and domes — as well as the purpose of welcoming sheikhs of international standing at the same time — may have been to underline conformity with cosmopolitan Islam, and to erase any older image of the Swahili as peripheral and of their Islamic practice and their mosques as provincial. In preceding centuries, both at Kilwa at the time of the early 'Shirazi' rulers and at other Swahili settlements to the north, there are strong indications of adherence, by influential families if not by whole communities and their rulers on occasions, to Shi'i and Ibadhi sects, these resulting presumably from connections with Oman and the shores of the Persian Gulf. But since the fourteenth century Swahili Islam appears to have been virtually exclusively Sunni (the exceptions being later visitors and immigrant communities from Oman and India which have maintained their Ibadhi and Shi'i allegiances and built their own mosques).

Changing fortunes: 1340 to 1505

Kilwa's wealth was thus dependent on trade and special commodities, notably the gold of Zimbabwe and, its price on the world market. But the fluctuating demands and prices were of course entirely beyond Kilwa's control, and when they slumped for some reason, Kilwa's economy slumped too. This seems to have happened quite markedly in the middle of the fourteenth century, only shortly after the reign of the magnificent sultan al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, the Father of Gifts. There are several signs of this slump: the palace of Husuni Kubwa was abandoned and left to decay, being presumably too costly to maintain; the domed extension to the Great Mosque collapsed and was not repaired for some decades, a situation indicating a reduced town population; the minting of coins ceased or was heavily curtailed, suggesting a less vibrant local market; and for the next fifty years or more (that is till 1400 or so) the wider world seems to have forgotten about Kilwa. Fewer ships had reason to sail there, and the place could not maintain its reputation for hospitality to wandering scholars and students — as it did when Ibn Battuta had visited on the crest of the boom.

There must be a combination of causes, local and international, for this depression. Some of the local and regional factors can only be guessed, and may include the personality of the rulers who succeeded after the death of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman about 1335. (For instance, his brother and immediate successor, Daud bin Sulaiman, adopted a more parsimonious policy which quickly turned away the superfluous visitors — so Ibn Battuta learned through the travellers' grapevine.) It is possible that one or more of the other Swahili city-states further north along the coast managed to challenge Kilwa's control of Sofala and the monopoly of the gold being traded from Zimbabwe, but there is no clear evidence for that at this point. Doubtless more influential would have been the international economic trend, the European gold market reaching saturation in the 1340s and the price beginning to fall. Then between 1346 and 1349 so much of the Old World, and especially its trade routes and harbours, were afflicted by the international plague, commonly remembered in Europe as the 'Black Death'. This had an immediately disruptive effect on commerce, and in the longer term depressed demand

because of general population loss. It is not known whether the plague itself reached Kilwa; but, in view of its being carried by trading vessels in the Mediterranean and other seas, it would be most surprising if the busy harbours of the Swahili region escaped the scourge. And, as noted, there are definite hints of a reduced population at Kilwa in the late fourteenth century.

It was not until 1400 or a little later that Kilwa shows signs of revival, just as the world economy and the demand for gold were beginning to pick up. This period was remembered appropriately as the 'new rain' — and this title or nickname was given to an energetic sultan ruling Kilwa at the time. It reasserted its control over Sofala, the gold-trade harbour to the south, and the Mahdali ruling house renewed its Red Sea connections, with visits to Yemen and performance of the *hajj* to Mecca.

The most obvious — and symbolically important — of these signs of economic revival at Kilwa was the restoration of the Great Mosque. Its domed and vaulted extension was reconstructed, following the original architectural plan of the time of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman. The difference on this occasion was in the masonry, in particular the technique employed for constructing the pillars to support the arches, domes and vaults. Instead of the monolithic columns of the early fourteenth century which had proved too weak for the purpose, thus contributing to the collapse, composite stone pillars were now constructed — and have ensured the survival of most of the roof to this day. (See the description of the Great Mosque and its stages below.)

Alongside or following this restoration of the Great Mosque, there occurred a bout of stone building in the town, reflecting this renewed prosperity at Kilwa and its exploitation of the Sofala and Zimbabwe trade. Other mosques were built, including the small domed example on the west edge of the town, this being virtually a miniature replica of the Great Mosque extension. Houses began to be built of stone, on the south side of the mosque and elsewhere in the town, presumably by richer citizens and merchants. Most of these are discernible now simply as mounds, the houses having fallen into decay during the depressed period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and then much of the stone having been robbed for new buildings during the brief revival of the late eighteenth century. A better view of remains of such fifteenth-century stone houses and an appreciation of a town plan of that period may be gained at Songo Mnara, the island to the south of Kilwa — and presumably under its control — which has been less subject to later construction and damage (see figs. 33 and 34). (Other good examples survive on the Kenyan section of the Swahili coast, at Jumba la Mtwana, Gedi and Shanga. In the last-named town many of these stone houses probably date before 1400, Kilwa being apparently rather late in taking up this fashion.)

The largest of the building complexes at Songo Mnara has been called the 'palace' by archaeologists, but it may have been no more than the house of a particularly rich or eminent family (fig. 35). On Kilwa island itself there was no attempt at this period to restore Husuni Kubwa, the palace built by al-Hasan bin Sulaiman a century before. It is likely that the impressive fifteenth-century building complex on the west side of the town, in the area now called Makutani lying between the shore and the Jangwani creek, represents the new and rather more modest palace of the sultans from this period.

Portuguese, Omanis and the new world order: Kilwa from the 16th to 19th centuries

Although Kilwa maintained possession of Sofala till the end of the fifteenth century, its position on the Swahili coast during that century was not as preeminent as it had been in the early fourteenth. Among the rival Swahili towns and their sultanates, Mombasa and Malindi in particular prospered and grew during this period, especially in response to the increasing trade with Gujerat in India. Pate off the northern coast and new Unguja (Zanzibar town) also thrived. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, moreover, with the region coming under Portuguese control, these northerly Swahili towns fared better than Kilwa, either by allying with the Portuguese at times (or serving as the latters' base on the Swahili coast, as was Mombasa during the seventeenth century) or by taking a relatively independent line. But Kilwa, being at the southerly end of the main Swahili extent and having been so dependent for its prosperity on the trade from the Zambezi region, was more permanently impoverished by the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean and the consequent reorientation of world trade routes — and in particular by its loss of Sofala and the gold of southern Africa.

It was a loss of sovereignty too. Since Kilwa resisted, the town was attacked by Almeida's force in 1505 and, according to the accounts, it was 'sacked' and considerably damaged. While the sultanate was not abolished — for the Portuguese were in no position to attempt any form of direct rule in the region — the sultan himself fled and was replaced by a candidate acceptable to the Portuguese. Henceforth the sultan's power, both political and economic, was permanently clipped, being subject to the agents and governors of the Portuguese crown based at Mozambique and Goa. A fort was built at Kilwa immediately after its capture in 1505 — on the site where the *Gereza* was reconstructed almost three centuries later. It was garrisoned for only a few years since, with a separate Portuguese fort at Sofala itself, and another on Mozambique island halfway between the two, the source of Kilwa's former wealth was effectively intercepted, so that a permanent Portuguese governor and military presence here were hardly necessary.

The loss of wealth and importance is reflected by the generally negative evidence of the next two-and-a-half centuries. There were no new buildings of any substance or duration, and documentary records relating to Kilwa are few and brief, occasionally noting its former greatness in contrast to its current insignificance. About 1588, moreover, the island is said to have suffered an attack of a different sort, this time from the mainland at the hands of a mobile horde called Zimba, which had originated in the lower Zambezi region and acquired a reputation, in Portuguese accounts, for armed plunder, destruction and even cannibalism. The real details and impact of that event at Kilwa cannot be assessed independently. However, the town survived, or revived soon after, albeit in a modest way, and some trade was conducted, whether regularly or irregularly, with Portuguese traders and officials in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, because of its fabled wealth and history and its importance at the time of the Portuguese arrival on these shores, Kilwa's fame persisted in Europe so that it appeared on the world maps of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ironically the very time when it had declined sharply as a town and as a place of economic significance.

The brief revival of fortunes which the town and sultanate of Kilwa experienced in the latter part of the eighteenth century owed little to the ending of Portuguese rule of the coast north of Mozambique (following their defeat by the Omani Arabs in the

long siege of Fort Jesus of Mombasa of 1696-98). It resulted more from new opportunities in a fluid situation during a period of international commercial expansion which stimulated increased activity in the Indian Ocean. This is reflected by rising demands in the world for ivory and also for slaves in the more immediate region, both of which encouraged penetration of the African interior, by latching onto local trade networks, from suitable harbours such as Kilwa. More specifically there was a need for slave labour to work the French sugar plantations which were being developed on the Mascarene islands, that is Isle de France (Mauritius) and Bourbon (Réunion), in the south-western part of the Ocean. This occasioned a burst of prosperity and independence at Kilwa, between the 1770s — when a French merchant and shipowner, named Morice, made elaborate arrangements with the sultan of the day for regular supplies of slaves — and the 1790s. On the ground this period of renewed activity is marked by a fortified palace, built within a broad walled enclosure for further protection, at Makutani on the western edge of the town (this new construction largely destroying and obscuring the fifteenth-century remains there). There were also repairs and alterations to the Great Mosque, indicating a busier town and its new source of wealth — as well as a persisting sense of Kilwa's history.

This combination of prosperity, with a consciousness of an historical tradition and grandeur, expressed in the maintenance of the largest ancient mosque on the coast, one with exquisite arches, domes and vaults, presented a threat to Oman's claim to suzerainty of the whole coast (following its ousting of the Portuguese) through its base at Zanzibar. Accordingly, the Omani forces moved in the years around 1800 to impose their own governor on Kilwa and to build a fort, the *Gereza*, for the latter and his garrison. At the same time they developed the new harbour of Kivinje on the mainland shore twenty kilometres northward; this effectively superseded the harbour on the island as the main commercial link with Zanzibar and elsewhere and as the coastal terminal for the ivory, slaves and other commerce from the Lake Nyasa region and beyond. As a British naval officer observed in 1812, the role of the sultan on Kilwa Kisiwani was already reduced to an honorific one, just as the ancient town was downgraded to village status. The eventual deportation of the sultan to Oman in the 1840s merely confirmed this situation.

No less symbolic of Kilwa's loss of independent status and economic role was the abandonment of the Great Mosque some time in the nineteenth century. In its rather ruined state it is still revered (and may be occasionally cleaned and used for a special purpose), but essentially it survives as an historic monument. For regular worship the existing community of Kisiwani (or its devout core) finds it more convenient to use a smaller mosque on the east side of the village. This is itself quite an elegant building (now with a corrugated *mabati* roof), very likely dating to the brief period of revived prosperity in the late eighteenth century.

The town and its main monuments

The site of the ancient town of Kilwa remains largely that of the present village, Kilwa Kisiwani. Its limits — which would have varied at different periods in its history — are not well defined and appear never to have been walled. But the town can be roughly mapped (fig. 12) by the extent of old building remains, which leave an uneven surface after collapse or stone-robbing, and by other signs of former occupation, notably pottery

and other domestic rubbish on the ground. Together these indicate an area measuring up to a kilometre along the sea front and half that distance back from it.

As a slightly raised and naturally drained area occupying the north-west end of the island, between the harbour front and the sandy creek called Jangwani, it would have recommended itself for settlement and security for two obvious reasons. In the first place it was separated from the mainland by a channel one to two kilometres wide — which would have reassured strangers coming by ship to this region. Secondly, the situation well within the bay afforded protection from the ocean storms, not only for the town itself but equally for the harbour, since the narrow bay entrance and the coral reef outside it combine to stem the swell and to render Kilwa as safe a haven as any on this stretch of the coast. Though shallow at its western end (that part beyond the Gereza), the main harbour has sufficient depth for the mooring of sailing vessels, including ocean-going dhows.

These advantages of situation would of course have been useless without the availability of fresh water close to the surface. Not every island is so blessed as is this north-western end of Kilwa where the first settlers would have prepared rudimentary wells. In time, as happens elsewhere, exploitation of the natural resources, through cultivation and building as much as through simply taking the groundwater, led to a progressive drop in the water-table, this requiring that wells be formalised, often with built tops, and frequently deepened. This process can seen at *kisima kikuu*, the 'old' or 'main well', and at others in the town, including some abandoned examples attached to ruined mosques.

It was not simply a matter of a fall in the water-table but equally one of a gradual raising of the land. The elevation of the town surface above the level of the shore is largely artificial, the debris from settlement and building on the site century by century having raised the surface appreciably. The excavations undertaken below the Great Mosque revealed three or four metres of accumulation there beginning 1200 years ago. A similar depth of deposits is visible in the cliff at the harbour front (to the east of the Gereza and the Malindi mosque) where foundations of buildings as well as eroding potsherds and other debris are revealed. (To stem this erosion, substantial retaining walls had to be built here against the shore in the late medieval period. Some observers have regarded these, mistakenly it seems, as 'defensive' town walls.) The original sandy surface would have been barely above the high-tide level, and occupation of what is now the shoreline may have become possible only with time as settlement and successive building, using earth as well as stone, gradually raised the town's surface and pushed towards the harbour.

Buildings of stone were more permanent than those of earth, wood and thatch; and the labour expended on stone houses — as well as the prestige that attached — usually ensured that their owners undertook periodic repairs and sometimes reconstruction on old foundations. However, within the main town area it appears that there was little building in bonded stone until the early fifteenth century — with the one important exception of the Great Mosque. The dating of buildings established by Chittick's excavations vindicates the testimony of Ibn Battuta who visited in 1331, during the reign of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman when the Great Mosque's extension was probably just completed; he recorded that the domestic buildings then were of wood and thatch. The 'great house' (or house complex) built of stone immediately to the south of the mosque — which has been left open since excavation — dates mostly to the beginning of the fifteenth century, being probably contemporary with the

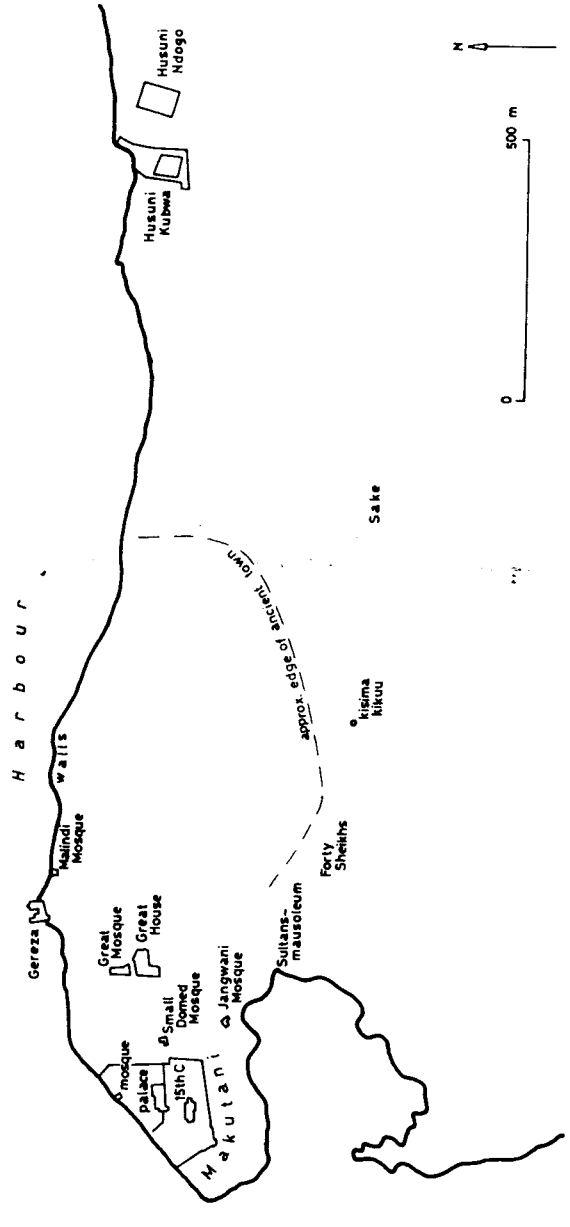


Fig.12. The ancient town, principal ruins and harbour front of Kilwa Kisiwani

reconstruction of the mosque's extension (described in the section below). Other stone house sites, probably of the fifteenth century in the main, are clear as mounds, these resulting not simply from their collapse when abandoned in later centuries, but more particularly from the deliberate breaking up of walls and roof collapse as a convenient source of stone for later construction. Most of that robbing activity would have occurred in the late eighteenth century, the brief period of Kilwa's revival, much of the reused stone being doubtless accounted by the building of Makutani on the west side and finally the reconstruction of the fort or *Gereza*.

The Great Mosque

Situated back from the shore in the western part of the old town area, the Great Mosque of Kilwa is larger and more architecturally complex than any other ancient mosque in East Africa. Like any communal religious building with a long history, it has experienced modifications, enlargements and repairs. Basically, and as can be quickly appreciated on inspection (see plan, fig.13), it consists of two stone mosques — or rather an original flat-roofed structure of fairly standard design, probably first built in the eleventh century, to which about three centuries later was attached the famous arched and domed extension (fig. 14). This increased the size of the mosque more than fourfold; at the same time the extension, with its domes and barrel-vaults, introduced several novel elements into the repertoire of forms and styles employed in Swahili Islamic architecture.

The early mosque, 11th century

The original stone mosque (figs. 13 and 15) measured approximately 12 by 8 metres. Its plan is clear enough, all of the walls surviving in part, although the roof collapsed long back (and the rubble has been cleared). That roof consisted of coral blocks and concrete laid above timber beams (the slots for which are visible in the east wall), these supported by polygonal wooden pillars (which were fitted into stone sockets in the floor) in three rows of three. The prayer-hall was entered through arched doorways on either side, and perhaps at the south end too. The style is broadly similar to that of other medieval mosques of the East African coast, although the more frequent design on this southern stretch has only two rows of pillars.

Close examination of the surviving ruin shows that the building was modified on several occasions, one notable feature being the doubling of the wall thicknesses. That exercise would doubtless have been accompanied by reroofing — maintenance of such flat concrete roofs being a constant cause of concern, as the support timbers, whether cut rafters or mangrove-poles or both, cracked or rotted with age. These indications of a long history with modifications are corroborated by excavations (undertaken by Neville Chittick in the early 1960s) below the floor and against the wall foundations; these have revealed three earlier floors, of which the lowest is over one metre down.

The mihrab — the apse-like feature in the *qibla* wall, that is the north one facing Mecca towards which prayers are directed — was also reconstructed on at least one occasion, its side-pillars being made more prominent. To the right of the mihrab it appears that a stone kerb was installed for a minbar — from which the imam or sheikh addressed the congregation. (Certain of these changes may be later still, of the fourteenth

or fifteenth century, following the opening of the south wall to join with the great domed extension.) Outside the west wall most of the tank and ablution buildings, as well as the ante-room (perhaps for the sheikh or imam), were added or modified in one or more stages.

Although the most likely date for the first building of this flat-roofed stone mosque would be some time in the eleventh century AD — the time of Ali bin al-Hasan, who is recorded as the first sultan of Kilwa and who left his mark by the vast numbers of copper coins which were issued in his name — the evidence, both stylistic and archaeological, is not perfectly precise. The attribution of the mosque to Ali bin al-Hasan seems reasonable therefore but is not conclusively proven. The order of architectural modifications is nevertheless clear, most of those noted being completed between the eleventh century and the beginning of the fourteenth, but within this range one cannot place a more exact date on each addition or repair.

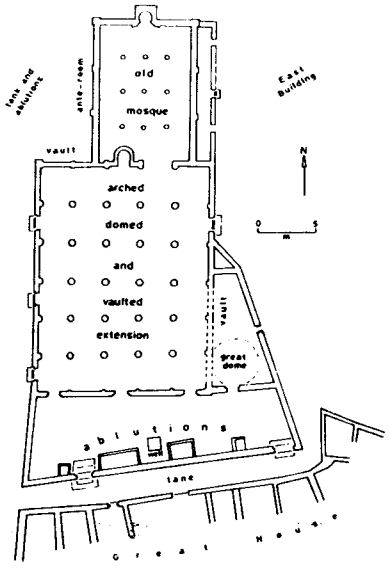


Fig.13. The Great Mosque: simplified ground plan (based on Garlake and Chittick)

Looking further back, moreover, it may be wrong to assume that the earliest stone structure represents the first mosque on the site or the beginning of a Muslim presence at Kilwa. As speculated above, there is a strong likelihood of wooden mosque structures having preceded it. At the least, people were settled here and were in commercial connection with the Islamic world from the late eighth or early ninth century; and the example of the northern Swahili town of Shanga (on Pate island), where a series of small wooden mosques was built from that very date (on the exact site of the later stone community mosque), encourages one to think again about the early social and religious situation at Kilwa.

The 14th-century domed extension — and its collapse

By contrast with the early history of the Great Mosque, the construction of the arched and domed extension, the collapse of the same and its subsequent rebuilding, can be more confidently dated by reference to known events at Kilwa. The basic plan of this ambitious and spacious enlargement belongs to the early fourteenth century, following the seizure of the sultanate by the Mahdali house. Its building may have occurred alongside that of Husuni Kubwa, the palace outside the town, in the years about 1320 during the reign of the celebrated sultan, al-Hasan bin Sulaiman; very possibly the work was directed by the same architect or corps of master-masons. The mosque extension (figs. 3, 13, 16) was borne on a grid of stone pillars, in seven rows by six (the outer rows embedded in the walls) to make thirty bays, these pillars branching into arches to support

Fig.14. The Great Mosque from the air (1961); view from north-north-west. Old mosque in foreground; domed extension in centre; Great House being excavated behind.

Fig.15. The Great Mosque: the early flat-roofed prayer-hall at north, as excavated, showing mihrab and sockets for pillars

the series of domes and — in two of the rows (less the end bays) — barrel-vaults (semi-cylinders). Around the edge of the roof was a parapet of castellated design; this is now mostly lost, but fragments have been recovered from excavations in the rubble outside the walls.

This extension was built to join with the old mosque in such a way to allow direct access — and a view to the north (*qibla*) wall and mihrab — between pillars and arches on the line of the original south wall. But this was not done symmetrically, and the overall result looks clumsy — and irks architectural purists. The chosen arrangement left, moreover, a narrow area along the east side of the old mosque which was filled as a walled corridor and roofed, at first with vaults and afterwards with flat masonry. On the west side of the old mosque similarly, there were modifications around the existing ablutions, and the space between these and the angle of the old and new prayer-halls was covered by a barrel-vault, which survives in part.

An extra and larger dome was added — perhaps after the main work — at the south-eastern corner, together with a narrow vaulted room with its own door which was later blocked. This great dome must be that under which — so it is recorded in the *Kilwa Chronicle* — the famous sultan, al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, 'was wont to pray'. It is now fallen with the rest of the south end of the mosque. Ironically this was the one feature of the mosque which was said (by the chronicler in his pious way) to have survived the collapse of the mosque in the fourteenth century. That event is stated as occurring in the same reign (i.e. before *c.* 1335), but if it really was as sudden and comprehensive as is chronicled, it more plausibly occurred somewhat later in the same century.

Whatever really happened, it is clear from the plan of the extension, and from the discarded monolithic pillars and fragments lying outside (visible in fig. 3), that the whole structure as originally — and perhaps hurriedly — built was chronically unsound. It was a case of the architect's vision running beyond his (or the masons') technical expertise. The octagonal pillars for supporting the arches and the whole weight of the domed roof were fashioned as single pieces from *porites* coral. This material had been favoured by Swahili masons in the preceding centuries, but not for such an ambitious and load-bearing purpose as was now being demanded. Being too weak (or the manner of setting them inadequate), these pillars and their foundations could not take the strain, and cracks if not serious breakages must have occurred in the domed roof and supporting arches until much of the extension became unusable.

For a period following the collapse — if we are to accept the explanation offered in the *Kilwa Chronicle* — competent masons could not be found to effect the necessary repairs, so that 'the people were obliged to pray under shelters and tents'. That may not be the whole story; as noted in the historical survey above, Kilwa's wealth, and population too, having soared in the time of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, the 'father of gifts', slumped during the following half-century. There may have been neither the resources nor the need to repair and maintain so large a mosque.

The reconstruction of the domed extension, early 15th century

At the beginning of the next century however, the urge to restore and the spirit of revival were felt at Kilwa alongside the town's economic and population recovery. This was the time of the sultan remembered aptly as the 'new rain'. He or his predecessor is

recorded travelling to Aden, Yemen and Mecca in 1410/11, one purpose of which journey may have been to enlist craftsmen for the mosque's renovation and other building works. That may not have been so necessary, however, for the restoration of the mosque extension followed faithfully the architectural plan of the previous century. What was different was the design of pillars, and these, one would imagine, would have been fashioned by local craftsmen who knew the materials. The new pillars, again octagonal, were composite constructions of coral blocks and concrete (fig. 16). On these the arches, domes and vaults were successfully refashioned. What one sees now therefore is this early fifteenth-century rebuilding of the original mosque extension of a hundred

Fig. 16. The Great Mosque: the arched and domed extension, interior

years before. Most of it stands to this day, but not the southern part or the great dome to the side. Interestingly, it was in the southern and eastern walls which have now largely fallen that the original and unsatisfactory monolithic pillars were retained in the reconstruction. (Some repairs to the walls, with the addition of external buttresses where necessary, and reerection of fallen pillars at the south end, were undertaken by the Tanganyika Antiquities Department in the late 1950s and early 1960s alongside Chittick's excavations.)

This reconstruction in the early fifteenth century was accompanied by extensive stone building in the town, not only of smaller mosques, including the nearby Small Domed Mosque which combines similar features, but also of houses for the well-to-do, some of them forming impressive complexes. That in Makutani at the west end — possibly the new palace site — is described below. Equally extensive is that immediately to the south of the Great Mosque extension, which Chittick, when excavating in the

1960s, labelled for convenience 'the great house' (figs. 14 and 17). This was separated from the mosque extension — and its complex ablution area adjoining the latter's south wall — by a narrow lane (which seems to have cut arbitrarily across the tanks, washrooms and latrines). This so-called 'great house' clearly consists of at least three dwellings; quite plausibly one of these could have served the sheikh. Although most of the stonework has fallen or been robbed in later centuries, the foundations are traceable (the excavations having been left open for view; there is a detailed plan in Chittick's *Kilwa*). Part of this complex may date to the fourteenth century, but the bulk of the building seems to belong to the fifteenth.

Fig.17. The Great House, during excavation in 1962; south end of Great Mosque in right background

The Great Mosque in later centuries

As far as is known, the mosque as rebuilt in the early fifteenth century remained in use until the nineteenth. After 1500, however, with the general decline of Kilwa in the period of Portuguese ascendancy, its upkeep must have presented an increasing strain on the community and parts of it may have fallen into disrepair and disuse. The economic revival of the late eighteenth century, however, would have seen some restoration. That included one striking alteration, namely the construction of a new but plain mihrab for the domed extension, this being simply inserted into one of the arches which had connected with the old mosque. Presumably the latter was no longer being used, its flat roof having collapsed some time previously.

Then, some time in the nineteenth century, with the subordination of Kilwa to Zanzibar and the eventual deportation of the sultan, the Great Mosque was effectively abandoned as a place of communal worship. Nevertheless, it is still respected as a

mosque, and the masonry, albeit in decay, is not robbed for new building in the village. (The actual protection and maintenance of this historic monument of both local and international importance — and implementation of suitable conservation measures — are, as with the rest of the antiquities and ruins, the responsibility of the Tanzania Antiquities Department and its staff resident at Kilwa.)

In Swahili towns, as elsewhere in Islamic lands, the great mosque has been focal, and its history of foundation, enlargement, repairs and alterations encapsulates in a sense the history of the town. In the case of Kilwa, the size and architectural splendour of the mosque, with the arched and domed extension of the early fourteenth century, gave the town and sultanate a notable prestige on this coast, all the more remarkable since Kilwa was the most southerly of the Swahili sultanates, the most distant from the hub of the Islamic world. Some scholars and aesthetes have commented on the 'provincial' look of Swahili Islamic architecture, and on the artistic opportunities missed by builders who, however technically and structurally competent, worked often with a restricted appreciation of the spatial and proportional requirements of the forms and features which they produced in the available coral. Peter Garlake, for instance, in his study of East African coastal architecture, felt the urge to respace the pillars of the mosque extension and, more than that, to adjust the elevation of the pillars and arches so that the vaults and domes which they supported could achieve their full visual potential and architectural satisfaction. Others may regard this as a reflection of individual taste and experience; visitors to Kilwa are free to judge.

Smaller mosques

Apart from the *Gereza* (the fort) by the shore and the equally late buildings of Makutani on the peninsula at the west, the visible standing stone ruins of Kilwa consist of mosques and tombs, the latter commonly associated with the mosques, but sometimes forming separate cemeteries. Both graves and mosques, even in disuse, are hallowed, and therefore, unlike domestic buildings, immune from wilful desecration and stone-robbing by later generations. After the Great or Friday Mosque, certain of the smaller mosques within the town and around its edge deserve notice. These probably belonged to particular communities or families within the town and would have served for private worship or possibly individual sects at certain periods. But, except for the Malindi mosque, there is no direct information on the history of ownership and allegiance.

Malindi mosque

This, with a cemetery of stone tombs, survives in ruined state above the shore a short distance east of the Gereza. Because of its position, it was protected by a sea-wall just behind the mihrab (fig. 18).

The mosque is believed to date from the fifteenth century, but with extensive rebuilding in the eighteenth, including a new style of mihrab with a pointed apex. The prayer-hall had a flat roof supported by a central row of pillars, but the positions of other pillars against the side-walls suggest that the original design was wider with three free-standing rows.

This mosque is reputedly associated with a family which originated in the town of Malindi on the northern Swahili coast and which rose to prominence in the court and

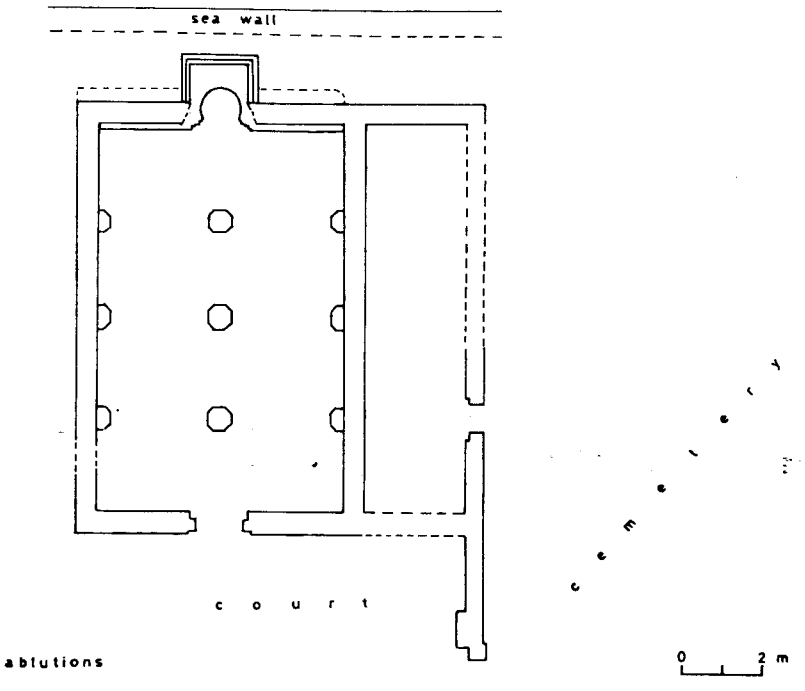


Fig.18. The Malindi Mosque: ground plan (after Garlake).

administration of Kilwa in the fifteenth century. This association can be demonstrated only for the eighteenth century however, the dated inscription from one of the tombs outside the mosque commemorating a member of the Malindi family. (The inscription was removed early in the twentieth century and is kept in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin.) This is an unusual tomb with two domes and a pillar, perhaps inspired by the Small Domed Mosque.

The Small Domed Mosque

This architectural gem — in effect a miniature of the domed and vaulted extension to the Great Mosque and possibly contemporary with the latter's reconstruction — is one of the best preserved of the relics of the fifteenth century. It was nicely designed with a sense of symmetry in three aisles each of three bays, these roofed by domes, plain at

the corners and decorated in the centre, alternating with fluted domes to either side and barrel-vaults fore and aft of centre (figs. 19 and 20). Despite the collapse of the east aisle (with a fallen and upturned dome dominating the approach), the four internal pillars forming a square to support the arches, survive, as therefore does more than half of the roof as well as the mihrab, so that one can still gain a sense of the prayer-hall. The octagonal pillar which surmounts the central dome is unique; as can be seen, part of it has broken off. This mosque's fifteenth-century date is indicated not only by the building style, paralleling that of the restored Great Mosque extension, but also by bowls which were set into the plasterwork. (Most of these have, sadly, been removed or damaged during the twentieth century by unethical visitors.)

There was a sideroom along the east side, which may have served for koranic teaching. The ablutions are at the south-west corner, served by a well outside via a conduit which is preserved.

The body of this mosque was built on earlier foundations, possibly those of a former and doubtless plainer mosque. The new structure of the fifteenth century would have stood proud above the surrounding surface (that now being raised above the old street level by the collapse of houses, in particular a large and ornate example — as revealed by excavation — immediately to the east).

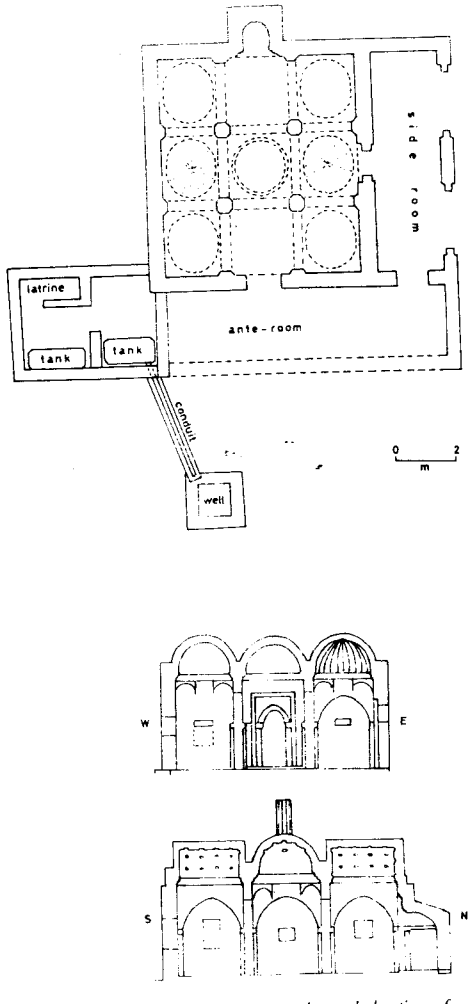


Fig.19. The Small Domed Mosque: plan and elevations of prayer-hall (after Garlake)

Jangwani mosque

Though now very collapsed, this mosque on the edge of the creek was apparently very similar in design to the Small Domed Mosque, having had a comparable pattern of pillars and arches supporting nine small domes. It had similar long rooms adjoining the prayer-hall along both the east and south sides. The

ablutions with, in this case, a round well, were to the south-east. Together with the substantial house which stood on its eastern side, this mosque is also of fifteenth-century date.

Fig.20. The Small Domed Mosque: view from east

Ruins of other small mosques in the Makutani area are noted below, both the late one facing the shore and that incorporated in the earlier complex, believed to be the site of the fifteenth-century palace.

The ruins of other mosques, perhaps of the same period, are traceable well outside the town towards the north-east corner of the island. That known as Mvinje faced the ocean from a slight headland on the broad coral shoal, where it would not have been safely approachable by boat but may have served as a landmark. Two others, now very collapsed, stood close to the shore in the area known as Kipakoni. This is just inside the break in the shoal which serves as the harbour entrance; the siting could be significant in providing a place for prayer before setting out to sea, or conversely for offering thanks on safe completion of a voyage.

Tombs and cemeteries

Stone tombs, some quite simple and plain, others decorated in various ways or arranged in enclosures, are frequently associated with mosques, sometimes being built right against their outer walls. Some of these tombs at Kilwa date to the fifteenth and earlier centuries, but most which survive, including those in the cemetery by the Malindi mosque, are of the eighteenth century. The approximate date of individual examples is often indicated

by architectural style or by inset China bowls; more occasionally the tomb may bear an inscription in Arabic mentioning the name and family of the deceased and sometimes the day, month and year of death. Reading of such carved-stone inscriptions, which are sometimes worn or damaged and were frequently executed in archaic or decorative scripts, can be difficult however; in particular, the reading of Islamic dates is commonly disputed.

Whether or not the identity of the deceased is recorded, these stone tombs, especially the more elaborate, decorated or inscribed ones, are doubtless those of eminent individuals or wealthy families. Most ordinary members of Kilwa's Muslim society would have been buried in more simple graves, with perhaps a headstone or just a wooden marker, sometimes but not necessarily close to a mosque. Of these one sees only the more recent examples.

Moreover, not all the prominent tombs at Kilwa were built around mosques. Some are separate, being outside the main town area, especially in three cemetery areas to the south and south-east. One of these has been called since the German period the *Sultansmausoleum* or 'cemetery of the Kilwa sultans'. This name may not be strictly correct, but it seems that some of the tombs here are those of members of the sultans' family.

Originally this cemetery consisted of two rectangular enclosures, containing graves of the sixteenth century and perhaps earlier. One of these has an inscription — or rather *had* an inscription which was detached in the 1890s and is now in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin; fig. 21 — commemorating a sultan Sulaiman's grand-daughter, the lady A'isha, who died in either 1360 or 1554 (depending on whether the Islamic year is to be read as 761 or 961). Another had a decorated marble frieze of Indian origin, part of which was found by Chittick's team when excavating — the piece having broken off long back and been buried; it is now kept in the Museum in Dar es Salaam — and another piece of which is in the Museum für Völkerkunde (fig. 22). The style of this carving and koranic inscription is fourteenth century, but it may have been reused on a later tomb. A number of tombs were added to this cemetery in the eighteenth century.

Fig.21. Tombstone with Arabic inscription (height, including border, 50 cm) from the cemetery called the Sultansmausoleum. It commemorates the lady A'isha and records the date of her death — Saturday morning, the 15th day of the month of Dhu al-Qa'da, in the year either 761 or 961 H (1360 or 1554 AD), the correct reading of the century being uncertain. (Photo: Museum für Völkerkunde.)

This stone was probably removed from the eastern end of the smaller grave enclosure in this cemetery; a recess for it is visible.

In the thicket, some two-hundred metres east of this so-called *Sultansmausoleum*, is another cemetery known implausibly as 'the graves of the forty sheikhs' (*masheikhe arobaini*), a story being told that they died all on the same day when a protracted scholarly argument turned violent. These graves belong on the whole to the late eighteenth century. Most are marked by sandstone slabs and are enclosed within a low rectangular wall. This is stepped in part and was surmounted at one end by a pillar, which has fallen.

Some distance to the east, in the area known as Sake, are tombs and grave enclosures which Chittick considered to be of considerably earlier date, thirteenth century or older,

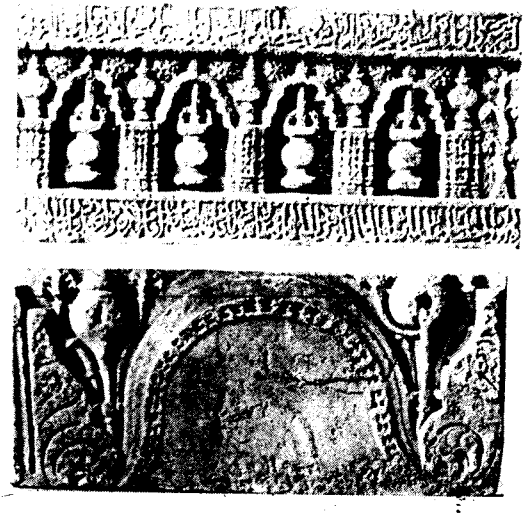


Fig.22. Piece of marble frieze (back and front, length almost one metre) from a tomb in the Sultansmausoleum. On grounds of style and material, it would have been manufactured in India, probably Gujerat, in or about the fourteenth century. The central features and decoration are Hindu, suggesting that it originally belonged to a temple. However, the borders, inscribed with verses of the Koran (XXXVI, 68-69 above, 75-76 below), show that it was reworked for an Islamic monument. Its attachment to a tomb at Kilwa would therefore have been its second or possibly third use. (Photos: Museum für Völkerkunde.)

A smaller fragment of this frieze, found during excavations in the larger enclosure of the Sultansmausoleum, is in the Dar es Salaam Museum.

on grounds of style and of pottery and coins found there. This proposed early dating may not be conclusive. These tombs at Sake are of rather solid form and stepped. Like most of the tombs and burial areas at Kilwa, they will be of less interest to the visitor than the other monuments.

Makutani

To the west of the main town area, in the peninsula between the shore and the sandy creek or Jangwani, is the enclosed area nowadays known appropriately as Makutani, 'the place of big walls' (fig. 23). This is dominated by the remains of the fortified eighteenth-century palace, a heavily built two-storied building with cannon-ports on the upper level and a massive bastion at the south-west corner (fig. 24). The eastern half of this structure comprises a court with a well and long flanking rooms which may have served as barracks and magazine. This late palace was further defended by enclosure walls, running outwards from the bastions and down to and along the shore; at a second stage the area was extended very considerably to the south and west by a further wall with towers and corner houses. Most of the visible stone features in Makutani, including the mosque by the shore which survives in part, belong with this eighteenth-century palace complex.

However, within the same area (to the south of the fortified palace) there had been a complex of fifteenth-century buildings which was later abandoned and mostly robbed to foundation level when Makutani was replanned. This was excavated by Chittick in the early 1960s and has for the larger part been left open. It had comprised a rich and large compound which combined courtyards, with certain of the rooms being domed and vaulted. It also includes a mosque of unusually narrow design, with three bays

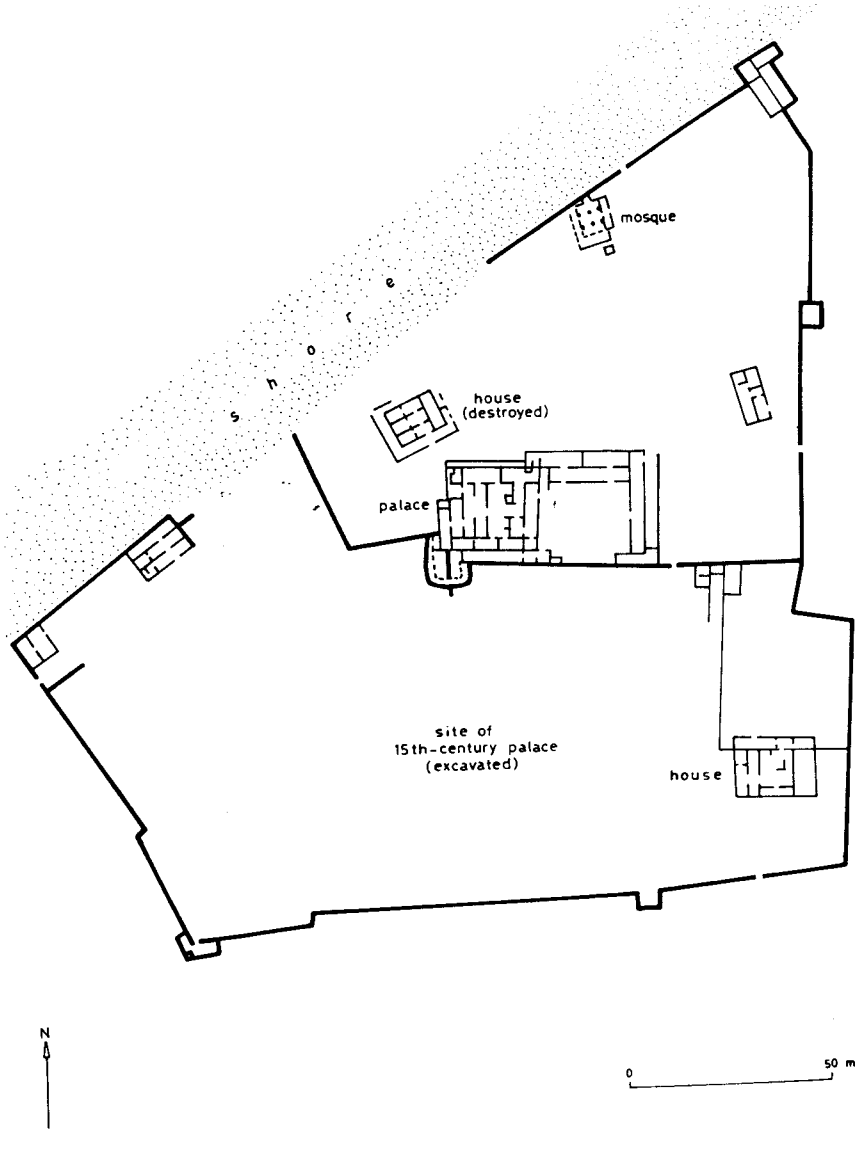


Fig.23. Makutani: plan of the principal features

Fig.24. Makutani: the eighteenth-century fortified palace (view from north).

roofed transversely by barrel-vaults; this was presumably for family use. Plausibly, this complex represents the palace of the sultans of the fifteenth century (after their abandoning Husuni Kubwa); and it may be that this Makutani enclave area remained that of the sultan's residence and court through the following four centuries.

The Gereza

While the Great Mosque, Makutani and Husuni Kubwa are all spectacular monuments in their different ways, it is the rectangular fort called the *Gereza*, dominating the harbour-front (and visible from the mainland at Masoko), which first impresses itself upon visitors and proclaims a place of historical significance (fig. 25). But ironically, the building of the first fort on this site, that is the Portuguese one in 1505 — following Almeida's devastating assault on the town — marks the effective ending of Kilwa's independent sultanate and of the importance of this town and harbour in the Indian Ocean trade and in the world at large. Similarly, the rebuilding of the fort in a different style with more massive dimensions about 1800, by the Omani rulers based in Zanzibar, signalled the final political and economic subordination of Kilwa. The need to do this with such an emphatic and symbolic act of military construction was of course a way of acknowledging the place's historical reputation.

The name *gereza* — by which this fort (like that in Zanzibar town also) is known — derives from a Portuguese word, *ingreja* for 'church'; that indicates a confusion of meaning, but may reflect the memory of Portuguese activity on this site. There is no sign that there was ever a church in or by the short-lived Portuguese fort here at Kilwa

(although at Zanzibar the eighteenth-century Omani fort was built over the site of a small church).

Some traces of the Portuguese construction are visible, notably the rectangular tower on the beach at the north-east corner (see fig. 25). In the later (Omani) period this was incorporated into a round tower, only to be exposed again when most of the latter collapsed together with the whole seaward face of the fort. Some of the original windows in this tower and between it and the entrance — which were blocked in the Omani reconstruction — have lintels fashioned from Mediterranean wood, which was presumably carried by the Portuguese fleet, if not cut from their ships. The erection of this first fort is reported as having required the incorporation or destruction of some existing buildings — as is only to be expected on the harbour-front of a busy town. The foundations of such earlier buildings were revealed in Chittick's excavations around the well in the fort's courtyard. An existing well would have been an obvious consideration in the choice of site.

The new and imposing fort of around 1800 had two round towers at diagonally opposed corners serving as platforms for cannons. These and the castellated parapet and spyholes are fairly typical of Omani fortifications in East Africa and beyond. Although the entrance (in the east wall) is not effectively set back, it is overlooked by one of the towers and also from directly above, and the long entrance-passage behind it would have made it difficult to storm. The wooden door itself, with a carved, albeit now weathered, surround and centrepiece, should be original; an inscription on it, which is partly obliterated, apparently commemorated the fort's foundation. This was noted by the British explorer, Richard Burton, who was at Kilwa in 1857. The collapse of the northern wall of the fort, through being undermined by the tides, had already occurred then. The interior, roughly square and about twenty metres across, has a central courtyard with buildings around three sides (though on the west separate from the outer wall), mostly of two storeys.

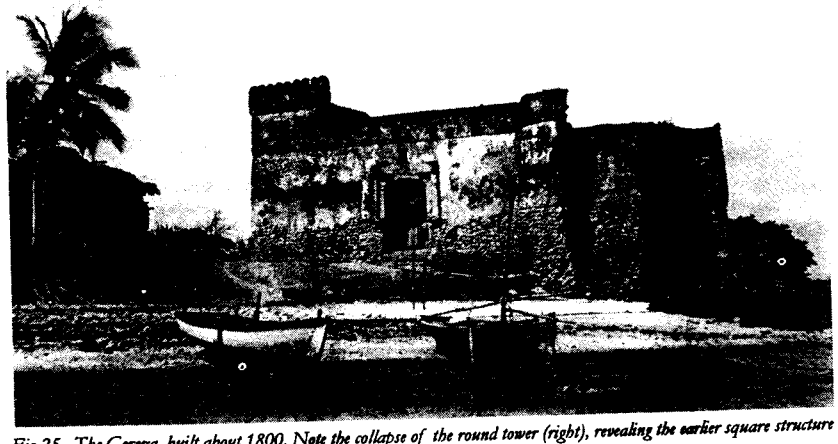
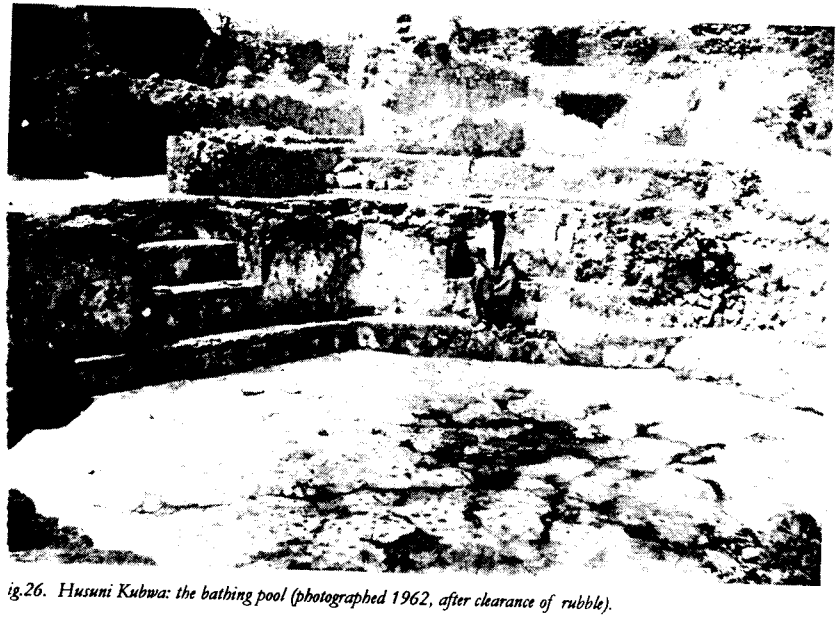


Fig.25. The Gereza, built about 1800. Note the collapse of the round tower (right), revealing the earlier square structure of the Portuguese fort of 1505.

Husuni Kubwa

The Husunis survive as a mass of masonry ruins above the cliff overlooking the harbour, more than a kilometre east of the town, and constitute the largest and most remarkable architectural complex of the whole Swahili coast. This consists in the main of Husuni Kubwa ('the big Husuni') — clearly a spacious palace built in grand and ornate style on this convenient promontory (see the air-photograph, fig. 2) — together with a large subrectangular enclosed yard attached at the back, and, separated by a small gully to the east, the rectangular walled enclosure known as Husuni Ndogo ('the little Husuni'). Despite the enormous investment of skill, labour and expenditure which the construction of this vast palace complex obviously demanded — including the services of an architect with experience of classical Islamic forms in Iraq and other lands — its was occupied for a short period only. This is shown by the rather sparse deposits of living refuse and the lack of signs of alterations or successive activity. It was built in the early fourteenth century (between approximately 1315 and 1330) when Kilwa enjoyed unusual wealth, and was then quite promptly abandoned (possibly immediately following the death of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman in the early 1330s).

The importance of Husuni Kubwa is twofold. Firstly it illustrates in the most spectacular fashion — even more than does the domed extension of the Great Mosque (with which it is contemporary) — this period of wealth derived from the world's gold requirements, with its peak in the 1320s, yielding profits on a scale beyond what the local economy and community could absorb in an effective and developmental way. Conversely its early desertion doubtless reflects the volatility of international commerce and especially that in



ig.26. Husuni Kubwa: the bathing pool (photographed 1962, after clearance of rubble).

gold, suggesting that Kilwa and its rulers were soon unable to afford the upkeep and servicing of so grand a palace. Its staffing requirements would have been extremely demanding: for instance, it has been estimated that simply to fill the bathing pool (fig. 26) — which is unique for the Swahili region — to a depth of just one metre would have required carrying some 50,000 litres of water, presumably by hand from the well on the far side of the palace (since there is no sign of a conduit or other device). The maintenance of that sort of labour force, whether largely servile or hired, and the necessary supervision, must have been based on the unreal assumption that the source of wealth, and its control by the Kilwa sultanate, would persist indefinitely. Moreover, the building of this palace separate from the town — which is unusual for the Swahili region — may have emphasised the sultan's distance from the commoners and from the wealthy merchants too, and may not have been a popular move in the long run. It may be that this Mahdali ruling house, which had seized power under al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's grandfather, still felt itself somewhat foreign — and was seen as such by the townspeople — while it maintained its family connections with the rulers of Yemen.

Secondly, Husuni Kubwa exhibits a range of architectural styles and motifs new to the Swahili coast. These were copied and adapted, albeit in more modest and appropriate ways, in the fifteenth-century architecture of Kilwa and other towns, both for secular buildings and for mosques. In Peter Garlake's judgement, Husuni Kubwa was the 'fountainhead' from which subsequent Swahili stone architecture derived. So, if the building of what was intended as a grandiose palace proved to be a wildly ambitious project, one resulting in a huge and pretentious monument condemned to decay so soon after it was opened, this brief but remarkable episode left a cultural legacy and a mark in the memory of Kilwa's greatness. It is fortunate for the record that, despite the inevitable collapse of roofs and walls over the six centuries since Husuni Kubwa was abandoned, the ruins have been relatively immune from robbing (by contrast with those of the domestic buildings of the town whose stone was reused at later periods, especially for the building of Makutani in the late eighteenth century). The opportunity provided by the excavations of the early 1960s in Husuni Kubwa to examine and measure the numerous pieces of fallen roof and wall allowed Garlake to work out details of both construction and style, and to estimate the elevations and areas of double storeys — as well as to attempt a model reconstruction of the whole complex (figs. 27 and 28).

Having been deserted so long back, the original name of this palace has been forgotten. It is now called *husuni*, a word of southern Arabian derivation, not normally understood in Swahili, signifying a fort or defended dwelling. This must have been based on a misunderstanding of the ruins, for, even if there had been some provision for defending this great palace in the event of an attack, the signs are not obvious. It was definitely a palace, with apparently a commercial function combined, not a fortress.

Another misconception, encountered locally, is that Husuni Kubwa was a Portuguese construction. There are no grounds of any sort for such a view; this mistaken notion doubtless results from the sheer size and uniqueness of the ruins, lending an air of mystification. The architectural study of Peter Garlake, conducted alongside Neville Chittick's excavations, and the dating evidence produced (coins and Chinese pottery especially), demonstrate conclusively that this was an Islamic palace built in the early fourteenth century. As mentioned, the main work would have been undertaken in the 1320s during the reign of the wealthy and powerful sultan, al-Hasan bin Sulaiman. He accordingly commemorated himself with a stone inscription which was found in the northern court (fig. 10).

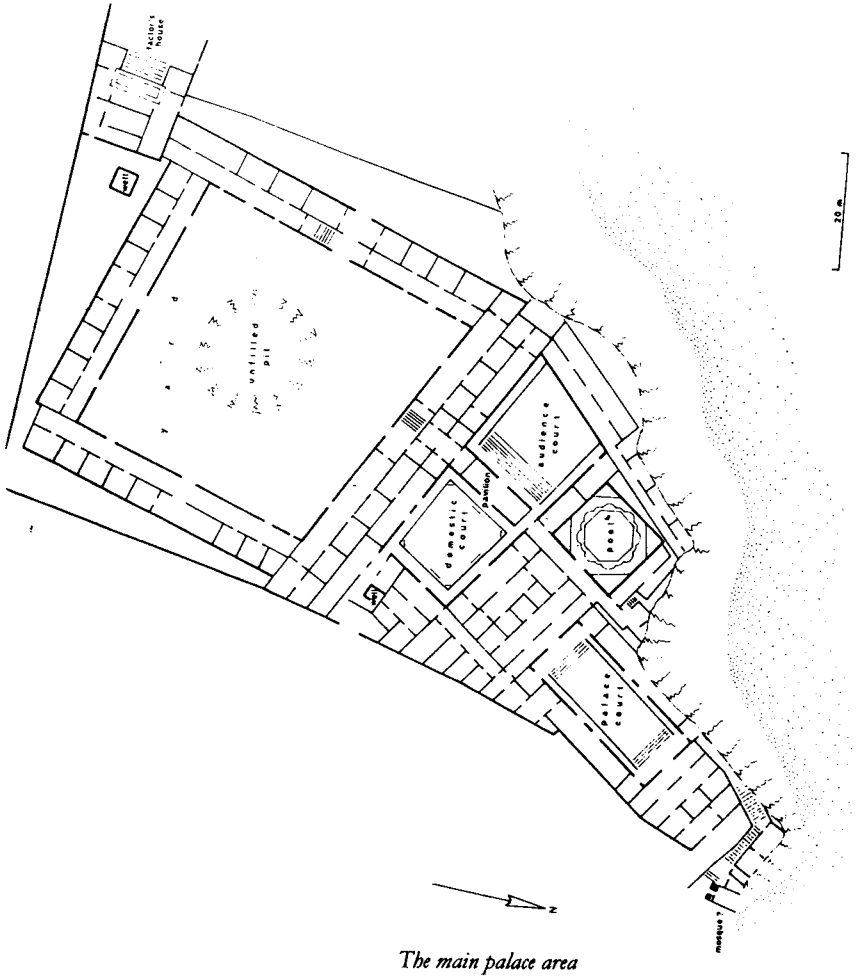


Fig. 27. Husuni Kubwa: simplified plan (after Garlake and Chittick).

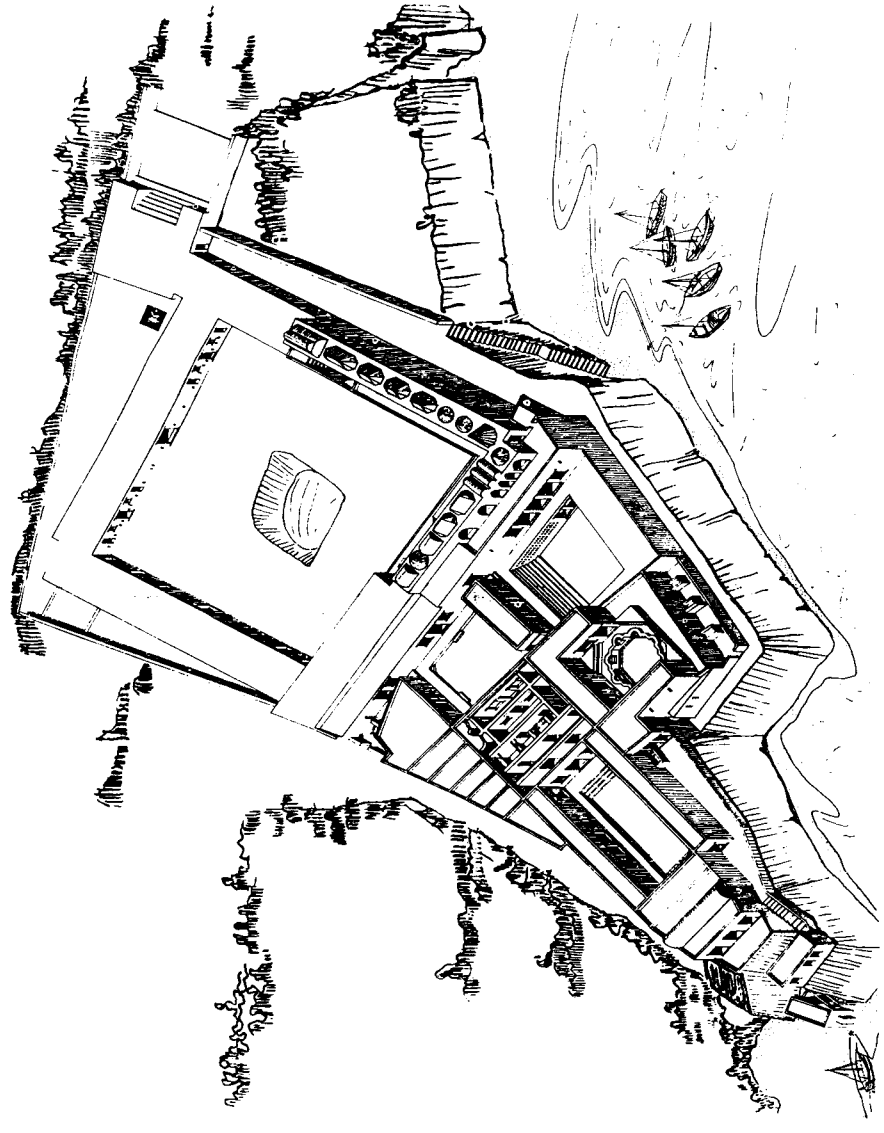


Fig. 28. Husuni Kubwa: axonometric reconstruction by Peter Garlake (1966).

The main palace area

The ground-plan of Husuni Kubwa was constrained by the choice of site, the northern part, comprising the main palace area, occupying a narrow bluff above the cliff (figs. 2, 29). The use of space here — to provide for three open courtyards, two of them stepped, with arcaded aisles, access ways and the ornate octagonal bathing pool, as well as enclosed domestic areas and other blocks of rooms — may result as much from the builders' ingenuity as the architect's vision. As Garlake observed, from a purist architectural view the overall planning has a look of improvisation, as shown in particular by the odd angle at which the large southern courtyard was attached to the main palace. Although several features, including the pool and ornate and domed roofing, required — as did the Great Mosque in the town — an architect with considerable training and

experience of other parts of the Islamic world, it is less clear whether the master-builder worked from the start with an overall architect's plan in hand.

Both Garlake and Chittick attempted to assign functions to the various courts and sets of rooms, and to distinguish the more public areas — where the sultan or his officials might have received guests or held audience — from the essentially private and domestic. These are indicated on the detailed architectural plans, completed after the excavations and published in their books; the accompanying plan here (fig. 27) is a simplified version.

The partly sunken court on the west side (situated south of the pool) was presumably intended for audience or assembly, in the evening as well as daytime, seeing that the walls contain rows of square niches, doubtless to hold lamps (fig. 29). Around this court were waiting or reception rooms, most notable being the building up the steps

Fig.29. Husuni Kubwa: view across main palace area; audience court (with lamp niches in wall) in foreground

(between this court and the domestic one to its east). This would have been an elegant and airy construction with a prospect, and has been called the 'pavilion'. Overlooking the audience court on the south side were two storeys of rooms above the arcade. The roof here (and along the adjacent side of the big yard behind) was adorned with a series of fluted cones, barrel vaults and other devices (the fallen, broken remains of which were found in the rubble when excavating the ruins). For visitors, access to this area would presumably have been from the west (as indicated on Garlake's reconstruction, fig. 28) — where a stepped entrance to the palace has presumably been lost through cliff erosion.

Nowadays, the only obvious way into the palace is up the angled staircase from the beach at the northern point. This is assumed to be the private entrance, although it may well be that this and the 'palace court' (fig. 30) — the slightly sunken oblong one which was flanked by arcades at this end of the palace — were for more than strictly family use. It was at the northern end of this court that the fine stone-cut inscription (fig. 10) naming al-Hasan bin Sulaiman with his titles was set, presumably forming a lintel above

Fig.30 Husuni Kubwa: the palace court; view from north end, with ruins of domestic area beond.

the approach to the ante-room. (Its broken pieces were recovered from the rubble on the terrace and steps during the excavation of 1961.) Also found nearby were the pieces of an elegant Chinese celadon flask (of Yüan style dating around 1300-1320; fig. 31); this would have adorned the corner of the court or an adjacent room. In the rooms above the stairs one can see graffiti of ships in the wall plaster; these may have been scratched to ensure good luck before a voyage.

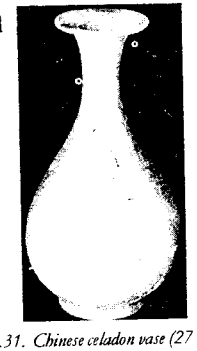


Fig.31. Chinese celadon vase (27 cm high; Yüan, c 1300-1320), found in Husuni Kubwa palace.

At the foot of the staircase, on the beach close to the high-tide level, are remains of a narrow building with watertanks attached to its southern wall on either side of the doorway. Since this building faces northwards, but at an angle diverging somewhat from the palace's orientation, it is possible, as Garlake has suggested, that it was a small mosque. (This cannot be proved however, since the northern end of the

building, which would have contained the distinctive mihrab, has been destroyed to foundation level by the sea.) Such mosques by the shore are not infrequent, and this one may have served for prayers before or after a voyage. It is also noteworthy, if not surprising, that there is no other sign of a mosque in or attached to the palace. One might have expected a private mosque for the use of the sultan and his family — with attendance at the Great Mosque in the town being reserved for Fridays.

The yard

The large subrectangular yard attached to the south end of the palace presumably served more mundane purposes. With rooms around all sides in double series — long ones flanking the courtyard, with access to a series of smaller rooms behind — it contained considerable accommodation, as well as the broad open yard itself. In the middle was a large pit (now less prominent since it was partly filled during the excavations of the 1960s). This was apparently a quarry for stone and lime, and its being left open is an indication that the building project was barely completed — and also that this yard was outside the main palace area.

While the upper rooms on the northern side of this yard and along part of the western — facing outwards below the ornate roof — may have been intended for some of the public functions of the palace, the rest, being generally plain, more probably housed staff (or possibly served in part as barracks for a select troop of the sultan). Some may have been used as workshops, not only for palace maintenance but also for activities under royal control, notably the mint. It has also been speculated that many of these rooms may have been warehouses for overseas merchandise being traded in both directions, on the assumption that this was being tightly regulated by the ruler.

Following that line of thinking, the unusual building standing out at the south-western corner, with a central platform approached by wide steps from the outside, has been called 'the factor's house', on the assumption that it related to the yard and the handling of merchandise or customs. At the back of this house is an unusually large well which had been roofed and its upper part lined with masonry.

Husuni Ndogo

This walled rectangular enclosure (to the east of Husuni Kubwa), measuring approximately 70 by 50 metres (fig. 32), is unique in East Africa; its purpose remains something of a mystery or the subject of intelligent guesswork (even more than the yard at the back of Husuni Kubwa). However, the limited excavations undertaken and the finds recovered show that it was of the same date as Husuni Kubwa (early fourteenth century) and doubtless formed part of that complex and that episode of architectural innovation. There were some stone buildings, apparently not very substantial, in parts of the interior (and perhaps some of wood too); also a well close to the entrance at the south end.

The thick surrounding wall with bastions at intervals gives Husuni Ndogo a superficial appearance of a fortress, but it is really too low for that purpose; it seems that the architect was simply following convention and imitating forms from the Islamic heartlands (where they were in fact long outmoded). It has been speculated that the enclosure might have been the barracks (if that were not the purpose of the yard behind

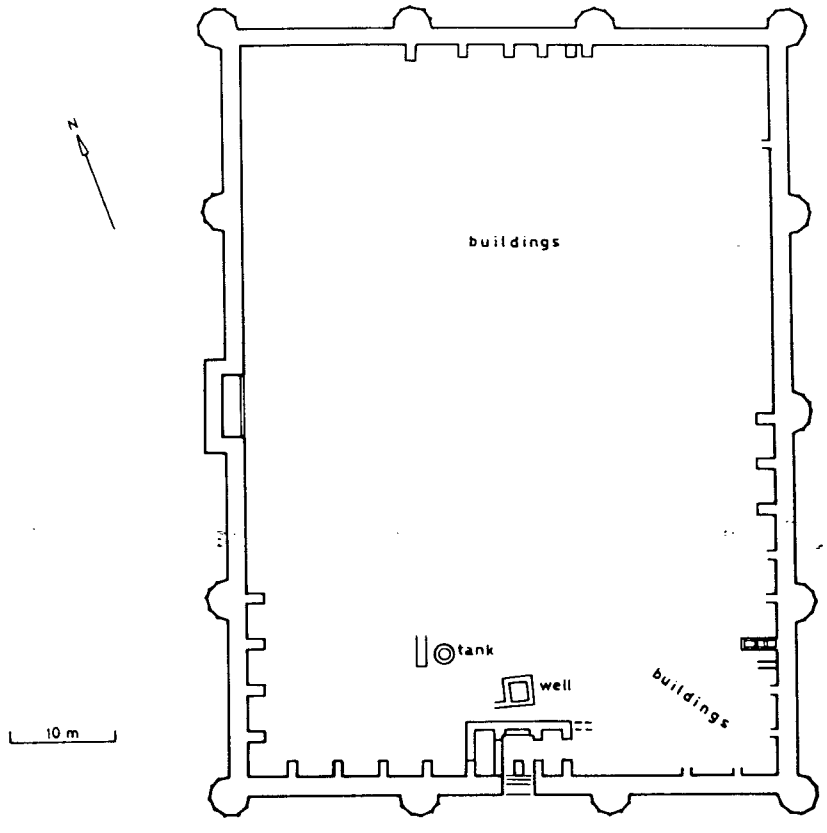


Fig. 32. Husuni Ndogo: plan (after Chittick).

Husuni Kubwa) or alternatively a merchants' reservation, in effect a maritime caravanserai for sailors and traders from overseas operating under the protection and regulations of the sultan. Against this, Chittick wondered whether Husuni Ndogo had been a mosque, noting the examples of large enclosed open-air mosques in Iraq (but again in much earlier centuries of Islam, thus underlining the tendency to architectural anachronism in the Husunis). In support of this theory he drew attention to a possible, but admittedly not very convincing, trace of a small niche between stub walls in the inside of the north wall, close to where one might expect a mihrab, and also to the strange lack otherwise of a mosque in the Husuni complex — with the possible exception of the very small structure on the shore below the palace.

Anchor shank

If one approaches Husuni Kubwa from the present village along the shore, one will notice partly sunk into the sand at one point, by the edge of the mangroves close to the high-water line, a tapering shaft of squared sandstone about one-and-a-half metres long and with two rectangular holes cut near the thicker end. This is often pointed out as part of a bedstead of some former inhabitant of the island — an unlikely explanation, since noone in modern or more ancient times would have needed a bed with such large and heavy legs!

This object is in fact a shank for the attachment of an anchor, the holes designed for accommodating grapnel tines (usually of wood tipped with iron). At the narrow end, which is broken, there would have been a round hole for attachment of a cable. This type of shank was formerly used for the mooring of sailing vessels in many harbours of the Indian Ocean (and also the Mediterranean Sea). Normally they would have remained at low-water mark or beyond and have remained less conspicuous than this surviving example.

Songo Mnara and nearby islands

Ruins of the 'medieval' period exist at several sites in the Kilwa archipelago (fig. 33). On the mainland, at Pande to the south of the bay and along the shores to the north, only slight traces remain. Those on the islands in the bay are more impressive, Songo Mnara in particular being worth visiting by *kidau*.

Songo Mnara

This island to the south of Kilwa — originally called simply Songo, the addition of *mnara*, 'the tower', being apparently quite recent — boasts the finest masonry remains of an ancient town on the Tanzanian coast. They appear to be largely of the fifteenth century, the settlement being presumably related to Kilwa and forming part of the sultan's domain (for, had it been separate or a rival of Kilwa, there would doubtless have been allusions in the *Kilwa Chronicle*). Songo Mnara contains a remarkable number of large stone-built houses set out in a manner which gives an impression (perhaps partly accidental) of town planning. Garlake, who made a special study of this site in the 1960s, produced a detailed and very useful plan (fig. 34). The sizes and complexity of the houses and the quality of the stonework are a measure of the wealth of this community of the Kilwa archipelago — or at least of its elite class.

While most of the buildings in Songo Mnara belong to the fifteenth century — and presumably fit with the main period of domestic stone architecture at Kilwa itself, that is following the restoration of the Great Mosque extension — there are numerous signs of renewed activity, with some rebuilding, alterations and additions, in the eighteenth century. This suggests that when fortunes revived at Kilwa then, the memory of Songo Mnara and its spacious villas was similarly recalled. The largest house or house complex — that towards the south-west which contains a central stepped court surrounded by arches, domes, vaults and delicately cut lamp-niches — has been called 'the palace' (fig. 35). It is not known whether this description is strictly correct; if so, it

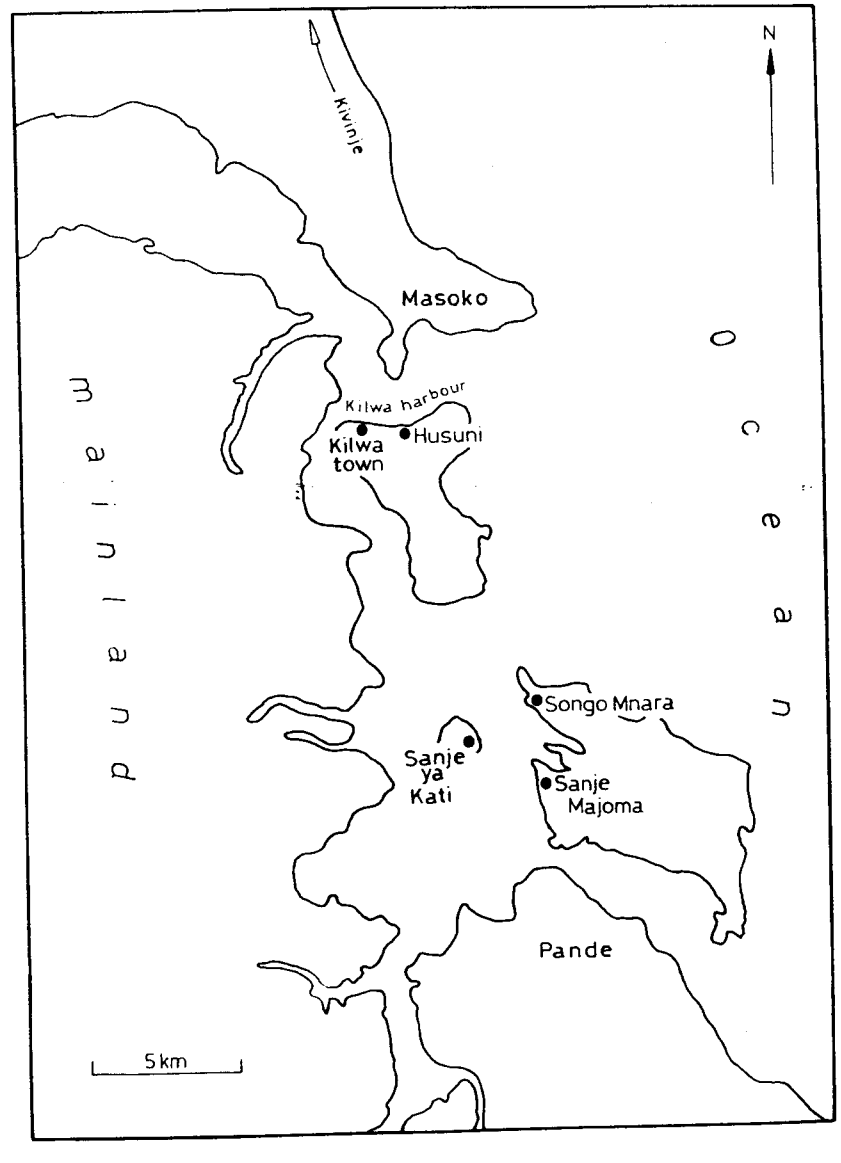


Fig. 33. The Kilwa archipelago.

Fig.3. The Great Mosque of Kilwa: the domed extension, originally built in early fourteenth century, and restored (following collapse) in early fifteenth century.

dwellings were built in coastal style of wood and earth with thatch roofs — and indeed numerous houses continued to be built in that way by the ordinary townspeople and farmers, alongside those of stone occupied by the elite.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the old Indian Ocean trading system, and in particular the commerce of Kilwa and the other Swahili harbours, were irreversibly upset by the invasion of the Ocean from the south by Portuguese ships, sailing, as had never happened before, from the Atlantic. A particular concern of the Portuguese was to wrest the trade of Zimbabwean gold from Kilwa's control; they also set about regulating the whole commerce of the coast, using force where necessary to impose their suzerainty over the Swahili towns and their sultans. Kilwa itself was attacked and badly damaged in 1505. The actual Portuguese presence at Kilwa over the next two centuries was slight; but the revolution in the Indian Ocean commercial network — indeed in that of the whole world — meant that the East African coast, and especially Kilwa at its southern end, were reduced to a backwater and declined sharply.

There was a brief revival at Kilwa town late in the eighteenth century in response to international commercial trends, and in particular demands for ivory and slaves obtainable from the African interior. This period is marked by renovation of mosques and the building of a new and fortified palace complex on the west edge of the town (known in its ruined but still imposing state as *Makutani*, 'the big walls'). But this renewed burst of independent prosperity was of short duration, being suppressed at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Omani rulers of Zanzibar, who were then claiming political and economic control of this coast and who were at the same time jealous of Kilwa's

prestige as the ancient centre of East African Islamic culture. Being thus a threat to Zanzibar's growing commercial empire, the sultan of Kilwa suffered the indignity of having a Zanzibari governor imposed on him; for this purpose the rectangular fort (*Gereza*) which dominates the harbour and shore was rebuilt (on the foundations of a Portuguese structure) as a symbol of Zanzibar's control, while the harbour was effectively closed to all but very local traffic. Eventually in the 1840s the last sultan of Kilwa was deported to Oman. By this time the commerce of the southern coast and interior had been diverted to other harbours, notably a new roadstead under Zanzibari control at Kivinje, a few miles to the north of ancient Kilwa on the island.

The above historical sketch is deliberately kept summary. More detail for certain periods, especially as they relate to the archaeology and visible monuments of Kilwa, can be found below in the section on 'Kilwa and the Swahili past'. The prominent individual sites, buildings and ruins are described in turn in the latter part of this study. Before that, some brief points of explanation are offered on the name *Kilwa* and the historical legacy of the ancient town, seeing that both remain subject to varying degrees of popular misconception.

The name *Kilwa*

Kilwa is in the first place the name of this small island and of the town which flourished on it for more than a thousand years.

The 'new' Swahili town which developed in the nineteenth century at Kivinje on the mainland shore to the north is usually known as Kilwa Kivinje, thereby acknowledging its historical connection with the original Kilwa on the nearby island. Although some settlement has continued to this day on the old island site, it has for almost two hundred years been reduced to village status, with thatched houses standing close to the stone ruins of the mosques, cemeteries and houses of the successive periods of the ancient town. The place is now called Kilwa Kisiwani, meaning 'Kilwa on the island', to distinguish it from Kivinje and other places in the district (see fig. 33, below). But before the building of Kivinje it was unnecessary to add 'Kisiwani'; at that time *Kilwa* referred solely to this ancient town — and to the sultanate (or kingdom) which for many centuries had its seat there and whose fame reached distant lands.

The first known mention of *Kilwa* in writing is in the Arabic text of Yakut in the early thirteenth century, but the name must be much older than that. Almost certainly the same name was current when the sultanate was established on the island, probably in the eleventh century, and very likely it applied to the earliest settlement of the harbour front in the late eighth or early ninth century.

The original meaning and etymology of the name 'Kilwa' are uncertain, whether from a Bantu or an Arabic root. After 1498, when the first Portuguese ships under Vasco da Gama sailed past these shores, it was recorded as 'Quiloa', which spelling is found on European maps and documents of the sixteenth and following centuries. Thus the English poet John Milton, scanning the printed atlases available in the seventeenth century, recorded 'Quiloa' among the kingdoms of this region of the world when composing his epic *Paradise Lost*.

Nowadays in Tanzania, 'coming from Kilwa' may refer to anywhere in Kilwa *wilaya* or district, a wide administrative area stretching some distance both along the coast and inland. The district headquarters, established by the German East African administration

Fig.34. Songo Mnara: plan of stone architectural remains of the town (after Garlake).

presumes the presence of the sultan's representative, or the sultan himself taking up occasional residence on this site.

Of the two mosques in the main town area, that to the north-east is the more remarkable, especially for its transverse arches and fluted mihrab, the latter with its pilasters and niches of cut coral.

Fig.35. Songo Mnara: the interior courtyard of the large house called 'the palace'

There are traces of a town wall, probably of the eighteenth century, mainly on the north and west sides, towards the mangroves. Along the latter side are remains of three mosques. That at the south-west was roofed with transverse barrel-vaults; inset bowls are of the fifteenth century and a relationship to the ruined mosque of similar date in Makutani on Kilwa is suggested. The more northerly of these three mosques is not generally recognised as such, especially as the mihrab has collapsed (although its position may be discerned from the wall bases and cut stonework). This mosque is usually explained as the *mnara* or 'tower'. It may be that its position, being raised on a solid base above the beach, rendered it visible from the sea at a period when this town was occupied and when the mangroves, now so thick, were kept back.

Sanje Majoma

This site, some three kilometres to the south of Songo Mnara, also possesses stone remains of a fifteenth-century town, but they are very overgrown. The two mosques — which were domed and vaulted — are largely destroyed.

Sanje ya Kati

This island in the middle of the bay may be the site of 'Shanga', which is mentioned in an early chapter of the *Kilwa Chronicle* as a base of rivals to Kilwa or its rulers, those who succeeded Ali bin al-Hasan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The community of this site may have adhered to a different Islamic sect. The mosque has been excavated; its roof was supported by wooden pillars in two rows. The mihrab does not project through the north wall, a feature which may indicate allegiance to the Ibadhi sect.

The occupied area is quite extensive, but little is visible above ground.

Kilwa: research, conservation and prospects

Although the main archaeological research undertaken at Kilwa dates to the 1960s, our understanding of this ancient town, harbour and sultanate, and of its place in the history of the coast and of the world at large, has not stood still since then. Following the advances made in African history and archaeology generally, both in the interior and at other sites along the Swahili coast and on the islands, of Kenya as well as Tanzania, several of the interpretations which Chittick drew from his materials at Kilwa in the 1960s can now be expanded. As a result the significance of Kilwa, and of the evidence unearthed, is now immeasurably greater than it was at the time when he and his team were excavating. Not surpisingly, certain details, in particular his dating of earlier levels and finds, have been questioned if not rejected, or need now to be retested. But to do this one has to start with the published record of the excavations and finds, that is the two volumes of Chittick's *Kilwa*. (See the bibliography below — where recent work at Kilwa and in the region, undertaken by scholars in Tanzanian institutions, is also noted.) Moreover, the excavated finds are kept in the Museum in Dar es Salaam where they are available for examination and further study.

In recognition of its importance in world history, and also of the need to conserve properly and manage the whole site and its various archaeological and architectural monuments, Kilwa (together with Songo Mnara) has been placed on UNESCO's 'World Heritage' list. While this accolade does not in itself ensure the preservation of the remains or the allocation of trained staff and funds which are essential for their constant attention, it is very appropriate and welcome as a symbolic gesture. It should help draw attention to the weighty responsibilities incurred, not only at the official level by the Tanzanian Antiquities Department — which is legally entrusted with the administration and protection of antiquities — but more generally with the public, both local and international.

While Kilwa is a Tanzanian archaeological site, it is also a Swahili one. New research needs to be planned in that context and will require thorough conversance with the coast and islands as a whole, their history, archaeology and museum holdings — that is of Pemba, Zanzibar and the Comoros as well as the coastline of Tanzania and Kenya. The old Swahili sites continue further, into southern Somalia and, in the other direction,

to well beyond the Zambezi on the Mozambiquan coast. With such a geographical extent, the subject demands cooperation between scholars and also between institutions, both the academic ones committed to research in these fields and also the museums and antiquities bodies responsible for conserving and administering archaeological sites in the various countries.

Research and writing on Kilwa, its history, archaeology and architecture

As a town with such prominent stone monuments, including an ancient mosque of unusual size and design, Kilwa has for many centuries prided itself on a history, arguably as long as any in this part of the world. This consciousness of a past is reflected in *The Kilwa Chronicle*, a rather subjective history of the town and its sultans, of which two somewhat variant, and apparently rival, versions were recorded in Arabic in the sixteenth century. One of these was further copied in the nineteenth century; that copy came into the possession of Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar, from whom it was passed, through the consul, Sir John Kirk, to the British Museum. (It is preserved in the British Library's manuscripts collection; fig. 36.) The other sixteenth-century version of the *Chronicle* was taken to Portugal and summarised by Jão de Barros in his book *Da Asia* of 1552; in that case the original has not survived.

Various visitors to Kilwa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries showed an interest in the history of the town and its ruins. Notable among these were James Prior, a British naval surgeon, who left an account of his visit of 1812, and the explorer Richard Burton in 1857, who included some brief observations in his *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast* (1872, vol. II, p.356f). Despite such early examples of scholarly interest and enquiry, there was no attempt at systematic archaeological research at Kilwa (or elsewhere along the Swahili coast) before the mid-twentieth century — although architectural details and other items, including tomb inscriptions, were recorded before then, besides numbers of the copper coins being collected from the beach at Kilwa (and from Mafia island and other places along the coast). As early as 1900, during the period of German rule, the government became concerned about the activities of collectors at Kilwa; apart from coins, some individuals had begun removing architectural fragments, inscriptions and imported ceramics which decorated tombs and mosques. (Certain of these came to rest in museums in Germany.) Moreover,

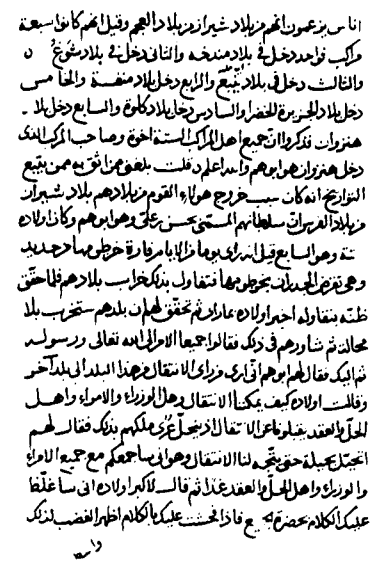


Fig.36. The Kilwa Chronicle: a page of the extant nineteenth-century manuscript (courtesy British Library)

in the 1930s, during the British mandateship of Tanganyika, concern was expressed about the decay of the architectural monuments and the need for restoration or conservation work. Accordingly, the Great and Small Domed Mosques were cleaned out, some supports were attempted for pillars in the Great Mosque extension, and limited repairs and clearing were undertaken in the Gereza.

In the 1950s, the growing interest in East African history, and especially that of the coast, encouraged more systematic research efforts pursued along two essentially complementary lines. The first concentrated on documentary sources. These fell into two broad categories, one consisting of internal accounts, notably the *Kilwa Chronicle*, the other of the rich range of external documentation, which includes both Portuguese accounts of the sixteenth century and more fragmentary earlier ones, mostly in Arabic. Particularly instrumental in this exercise of locating and translating these documentary records was Dr G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville — who was at the same time deeply involved in cataloguing and studying the Kilwa coinage as an essential concomitant to the *Chronicle* for reconstructing the history and chronology of Kilwa and its sultanate.

The second line of research pioneered in the 1950s — and expanded effectively in the 1960s — was more specifically archaeological, much though its practitioners continued in good part to rely, for chronology as well as interpretation of the buildings and other features, on the documentary and numismatic evidence. A notable spur to this was a brief foray to Kilwa in 1955 by the visiting archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler, then the Secretary of the British Academy, and Rev Gervase Mathew of Oxford, an enthusiast for East African history and archaeology who was already conversant with the region and its ruins. They were accompanied appropriately by Freeman-Grenville and also by James Kirkman, who had been pioneering the study of medieval archaeology on the Kenya coast ('Arab' relics as they were then called). A small excavation was undertaken in the old town of Kilwa — a site immediately behind the shore walls being selected for the purpose — and was reported by Kirkman in *Tanganyika Notes and Records* (no. 50, 1958). The scientific results of this expedition were less important than the longer-term effect, in particular in encouraging the Tanganyika government to establish a department responsible for antiquities, their scheduling, care and research. This occurred two years later with the appointment of Neville Chittick as Conservator of Antiquities.

Chittick from the start gave special, but by no means exclusive, attention to coastal archaeology and architectural remains. He immediately appreciated the importance of Kilwa, the need for urgent conservation measures there, and equally the enormous potential of this site for research through excavation. As Wheeler had foreseen — from his experience in India as well as Britain — and as Kirkman was already demonstrating on the northern Swahili coast, one could use coins and more especially imported ceramics, both Chinese and Islamic, as well as architectural comparisons and documentary sources, as the essential pegs for constructing coastal chronologies. Chittick's approach was broadly in the same tradition, and he immediately put to use his previous acquaintance with Near Eastern and Islamic archaeology for dating and interpreting Kilwa and its architecture. Until 1961, he worked energetically, with the emphasis on recording and essential conservation at Kilwa and the nearby islands — as well as conservation projects and excavations on other coastal sites (notably Kisimani Mafia, Kaole and Tongoni), all of which proved important for comparison and context. Then, from 1961 to 1965 — following his appointment as Director of the new British Institute of History and Archaeology in East Africa (which in those early years had its headquarters in Dar es Salaam) — he conducted larger-scale excavations at Kilwa in annual seasons. It was

during this period that the bulk of the investigations mentioned in this account were undertaken — in and around the Great Mosque, of the Great House immediately to its south, in other mosques and sites in the town area, in the Gereza and in Makutani, and also of Husuni Kubwa and Husuni Ndogo to the east of the town, as well as on the nearby islands of Songo Mnara and Sanje ya Kati.

The results of this work were written up in Chittick's two-volume report, *Kilwa*, published in 1974 (see below). The details of the activities year by year are recorded in the Tanganyika Department of Antiquities *Annual Reports*, and for the 1960s also in those of the British Institute of History and Archaeology in East Africa (which was later renamed the British Institute in Eastern Africa). A substantial preliminary report appeared in 1966 in the first volume of the Journal *Azania*, published by the Institute through Chittick's initiative.

While Chittick's excavation results remain the principal body of evidence for interpreting the monuments and archaeology of Kilwa and for the history of the coast more generally, they do not of course constitute the complete and final story. An important complementary study in the early 1960s was that of Peter Garlake, while a student of Chittick and the British Institute, on the Islamic stone architecture of East Africa. For this Garlake worked systematically along the whole coast, of Kenya as well as Tanzania, and produced an invaluable set of architectural plans and, where appropriate, elevations of surviving and ruined buildings. These are reproduced in his book of 1966 (listed below), which has barely been superseded yet — despite the advances made more recently in both Swahili archaeology and Islamic architecture generally, and new observations on certain details of coastal architecture (notably those arising from Horton's work, below). Many of Chittick's plans of buildings at Kilwa, as well as observations on structures and styles, rely heavily on those of Garlake (some of them, including the reconstruction of Husuni Kubwa palace, being used again in this publication; fig. 28). Moreover, Chittick's own continued interest in coastal archaeology, and especially his excavations at Manda off the northern Kenyan coast while the Kilwa volume was in preparation, influenced his thinking, especially on the earlier periods and Persian Gulf connections from the ninth century.

At the same time other scholars, concerned at what they perceived as the uncomfortably strong external focus of coastal archaeology — illustrated not only by Kirkman's and Chittick's search for dating evidence and comparisons, but also by their historical interpretations which highlighted overseas connections in the Islamic world — endeavoured instead to vindicate the continuity of Swahili society as an African population. This revisionist line involved some reexamination of the excavation results from Kilwa and Manda (and of the lower levels of Kirkman's sites), and on the northern coast in particular a quest for up-country commercial, cultural and even linguistic connections. An enhanced stimulus was given to the recognition and study of 'Tana tradition' pottery, both on coastal and on inland sites, as that came to be regarded as diagnostic of the 'formative' period of Swahili history in the late first millennium AD.

This historiographical issue (in which J. de V. Allen played a prominent role) generated some lively debate in the 1970s and 1980s. It became obvious, however, that some of the essential questions of chronology and of the early evolution of coastal society and its towns, and of the Islamic factor in these, would require more than extended scholarly argument. Their resolution called for renewed archaeological research efforts, with suitably devised strategies and meticulous excavation methods. A valuable contribution in the late 1970s was the careful survey and documentation of sites on the Kenyan coast by a National Museums' team led by Thomas Wilson, followed by test excavations

in the town of Pate, on an island close to Manda. This confirmed settlement on that site back to about 800 AD, as was already established for Manda and Kilwa, thus correcting the view of Chittick — who had earlier examined Pate briefly and dug test-pits at the edge of the town and close to the harbour — that this particular site was not settled till the fourteenth century.

Especially important was the programme of excavations at Shanga, an abandoned site on the same island as Pate, conducted by Mark Horton over several seasons in the 1980s, together with the same archaeologist's survey and excavations on Pemba and Zanzibar. The results of these have demanded considerable reevaluation of coastal history as a whole, especially in the earlier period of the Swahili settlements and Islamic contacts. New coin finds and improvements to the dating of the East African coinages have helped here; so have finer dating of early Islamic and Chinese ceramics. More liberal use has been made of radiocarbon testing, although for Swahili sites generally the ceramic and numismatic evidence seems to provide more precise chronological guidance — with fewer technical problems and anomalies to be explained.

This work on the northern coast and islands has obvious implications at Kilwa, in particular for dating the earlier levels and structures, those of the twelfth century back to the ninth (or late eighth?), and for the interpretation of the settlement during that period. In retrospect it seems that Chittick did not fully appreciate how much of the settlement accumulation at Kilwa preceded the thirteenth century; in particular his 'Period II', which he regarded as beginning late in the twelfth century, needs to be pushed back 150 if not 200 years. While he recognised that the dating scheme already established by Kirkman for the coast erred on the cautious side, he was reluctant to revise the chronology too radically. In the present study an attempt has been made to incorporate the essential revisions as currently understood.

But this is 'long arm' reinterpretation. Some of the details — particularly confirmation of the stratigraphy and dating in the area of the Great Mosque, and the question of the date of the first mosque structure, which would plausibly have been built of wood — may require renewed excavations at Kilwa. These may not need to be large-scale, but would demand the direction of an experienced excavator conversant with Swahili sites, their complex stratigraphy and architecture. (Some excavations to test specific points at Kilwa were undertaken under the aegis of the Department of Antiquities in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with support from SAREC's 'Urban Origins in Eastern Africa' project. These are mentioned in *Journal of African History* 1991, p.187. A report by Elikunda Matteru on the 1989 season is included in the proceedings of the 1991 'Urban Origins' workshop, edited by Paul J.J. Sinclair and Abdurahman Juma.)

Equally important have been endeavours, in the late 1980s and 1990s — in Kenya (by teams associated with the National Museums) as well as in Tanzania (by archaeologists and their students at the University of Dar es Salaam), some of this encouraged directly or indirectly by SAREC's 'Urban Origins' project — to locate agricultural settlements of the earlier part of the Iron Age on the mainland and certain islands, including Mafia. The recognition and examination of hinterland sites with 'Tana tradition' pottery, such as is found also in the lowest layers of Kilwa and other harbours, as well as those with older materials of the Early Iron Age, are now providing a regional context for the development of Kilwa and the Swahili settlements as a whole in a way that was not possible when Chittick was excavating. (See *Azania* XXIX-XXX, 1995, special volume on *The growth of farming communities in Africa from the equator southwards*, p.227f; and F.A. Chami on Mafia island in the Early Iron Age, and its relationship with sites on the mainland to the north of the Rufiji estuary, in *Azania* XXXIV, 1999.)

Kilwa: chronological chart

	9th	10th	11th	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th centuries (AD)
K i l w a	harbour and settlement established		Ali b. al-Hasan		Mahdali al-Hasan b. Sulaiman coup c1315–35	'new rule'	Portuguese attack, 1505	loss of independence, trade and wealth		trade revival French treaty	Zanzibari control sultanate abolished 1840s
	TT local pottery Persian Gulf imports		copper coins first stone mosque	mosque modifications	copper coinage revived gold dinars 1320s	stone buildings in town					Makutani Gereza
					Great Mosque extension collapse	restoration					
					Husuni Kubwa						
Swahili general	numerous Swahili settlements on coast and islands; Tana Tradition ceramics; overseas artefacts; first mosques		'Shirazi' cultural and sectarian links		enlargements of towns	rise of Malindi and Mombasa	Portuguese control		Omanis defeat Portuguese, 1698		rise of Zanzibar (and Omani rule)
Wider world	ivory trade and Zimbabwe gold; Persian Gulf axis		Red Sea reopens		increase in gold trade	Indian trade increases	Portuguese in Indian Ocean				slave and ivory trades
					G2-Sofala-Kilwa-Turkana-Yemen-Egypt-route						
					rise of Great Zimbabwe						
	Abbasid empire		Fatimids in Egypt		European gold currencies 1250s–	Black Death 1346–9	gold trade revives	impact of New World metals			European Industrial Revolution
	800	900	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	1900 AD

Bibliography

The definitive excavation report of Neville Chittick is *Kilwa: an Islamic trading city on the East African coast* (British Institute in Eastern Africa, Memoir 5, Nairobi, 1974, 2 volumes). For architectural detail one should also consult Peter S. Garlake, *The Early Islamic Architecture of the East African Coast* (BIEA Memoir 1, Oxford U.P., 1966).

Other substantial **archaeological excavations of Swahili town sites** are reported in H. Neville Chittick, *Manda: excavations at an island port on the Kenya coast* (BIEA Memoir 9, Nairobi, 1984) and Mark C. Horton, *Shanga: the archaeology of a Muslim trading community on the coast of East Africa* (BIEA Memoir 14, 1997). For Pate, on the same island as Shanga, see Thomas H. Wilson and Athman Lali Omar, 'Archaeological investigations at Pate', *Azania* XXXII (1997), pp. 31-76. A further volume by Horton on Pemba and Zanzibar is in preparation. James S. Kirkman's work on Gedi and other sites, mostly on the Kenyan stretch of coast, is reported in several publications; see his *Men and Monuments on the East African Coast* (London, 1964) for a useful, if rather idiosyncratic, survey. For details of these sites and their visible remains, one should refer to Thomas H. Wilson's two volumes for the Kenya National Museums on *The monumental architecture and archaeology* of the Kenya coast (1977, sites north of the Tana; 1980, the central and southern Kenyan coast); see also George Abungu's doctoral thesis (Cambridge 1990) on the Tana Mouth.

While involved in the Kilwa research, Chittick produced a brief *Guide to the Ruins of Kilwa* (Department of Antiquities, Dar es Salaam, 1962; revised and enlarged 1965). This very useful summary description of the place and its antiquities has long been out-of-print. It is also out-of-date on several aspects of Swahili archaeology and history, and one of the purposes of the present publication is to help satisfy these desiderata. Chittick also summarised the results of the Kilwa excavations in more general essays on coastal history, notably the *Cambridge History of Africa*, volume 3 (1977, pp. 183-231, edited by Roland Oliver). That similarly is overtaken by later research and discussion, but was a useful statement of the position at the time.

Criticisms of Chittick's interpretations and external outlook, as noted above, were articulated by Mark Horton in the 1980s, in particular in his review article of *Manda* — 'Asiatic colonization of the East African coast: the Manda evidence', *J. Royal Asiatic Society*, 1986, pp.201-13. More general historical criticism and revision are argued by J. de V. Allen; see his paper on 'The "Shirazi" problem in East African coastal history', in *Paideuma* 28 (1982), pp. 9-27 (special volume in honour of James Kirkman: *From Zinj to Zanzibar*, edited by J. de V. Allen and Thomas H. Wilson), and his book *Swahili Origins*, which was published posthumously (London and Nairobi, 1993).

For other surveys and reviews, see Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear, *The Swahili: reconstructing the history and language of an African society, 800-1500* (Philadelphia 1985); and F.A. Chami, 'A review of Swahili archaeology', *African Archaeological Review* 15 (1998), pp. 199-218.

G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville's study of **the Kilwa sultanate and the chronology** of the town, making detailed use of the *Kilwa Chronicle* and other documentary sources as well as the coinage, is set out in *The Medieval History of the Coast of Tanganyika* (Berlin and Oxford U.P., 1962). The principal documents relating to coastal history are reproduced in translation in his *East African Coast: select documents from the first to the earlier nineteenth century* (Oxford, 1962) — a very helpful reference compendium for working purposes (though for specialist purposes and critical textual discussion, one needs to return to the originals or definitive editions).

Chittick's arguments for **reinterpreting the *Kilwa Chronicle* and the chronology of the sultanate and the coinage**, *contra* Freeman-Grenville in several respects, are set out in 'The "Shirazi" colonization of East Africa', *Journal of African History*, VI (1965), pp. 275-94. In the present study, an attempt is made to reach a considered view, especially of the dating of the early sultanate, based on the findings, including coins, from other Swahili sites (as noted above). This follows my summary illustrated treatment of Kilwa in *A Thousand Years of East Africa* (BIEA, Nairobi, 1990) and in my paper 'The southern Swahili harbour and town on Kilwa island: a chronology of booms and slumps' (conference on *Urban Origins in Africa in global perspective*, Mombasa, 1993, in press). The international factor is further explored in my article, 'The African lords of the intercontinental gold trade: al-Hasan bin Sulaiman of Kilwa and Mansa Musa of Mali', *Antiquaries Journal*, 77 (1997), pp.221-42.

The study of the **Kilwa copper coins**, which began with beach collections and poorly provenanced hoards, owes much to the pioneer work of John Walker (notably in *The Numismatic Chronicle* for 1936, reprinted in *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 45, 1956, pp.33f) and of Freeman-Grenville in the 1950s (see *Medieval History*, 1962, ch.X). Their occurrences in specific contexts during Chittick's excavations in the 1960s gave these coins and their sequence an enhanced importance, and also indicated some errors in previous attempts to arrange them in order (*Kilwa*, ch.21). The main recent study of the Kilwa and other coastal coinages of the medieval period has been by Helen Brown: see her summary, 'Coins of East Africa: an introductory survey', *Yarmouk Numismatics*, 5 (1993), pp.9-16; also 'Three Kilwa gold coins', *Azania*, XXVI (1991), pp.1-4 (describing the gold dinars struck at Kilwa in the 1320s, found at Tumbatu off Zanzibar). The dating of the earlier coins was assisted by the discovery of the eleventh-century Mtambwe hoard on Pemba in the 1980s: see M.C. Horton, H. Brown and W.A. Oddy in *Azania* XXI (1986), pp.115-23.

It now appears that two main periods of minting coins at Kilwa should be recognised, the first in the eleventh century, the time of Ali bin al-Hasan (and his approximate contemporaries or successors), the second in the early fourteenth century, the time of the Mahdali dynasty, especially the reign of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman. This grouping contrasts with the previous tendency to assign coins rather randomly to various sultans, some of very short reigns, whose names happen to be recorded in one or other version of the *Kilwa Chronicle*. The possibility of small numbers of coins being minted at other times between the twelfth century and the Portuguese arrival is not ruled out, however, and it may be that certain types which do not bear a sultan's name belong to the fifteenth century.

For Kilwa in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island* (Oxford, 1965), which includes Morice's 'treaty'; and E.A. Alpers, 'A revised chronology of the sultans of Kilwa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Azania* II (1967), pp.145-63. (Other important documents are reproduced in Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast*. These include Prior's account of Kilwa: see Alpers, p.148, for dating his visit to 1812.) The background to this period of late revival and subsequent subordination to Zanzibar is told, from somewhat contrasting angles, by Christine S. Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast: politics, diplomacy and trade, 1798-1856* (London, 1971); and Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar, 1770-1873* (London, 1987).