

supporters. It is little wonder that rulers of the West African forest so often insisted that it was their right to control the trade that was carried on in their territories. Trade, however, was only one factor in the appearance of cities and states in the West African forest and, like the other factors, its origins were probably within that zone rather than external to it.

Chapter 6

The edge or the centre: cities of the East African coast and islands

'Kilwa is one of the most beautiful and well-constructed towns in the world.' It was in such words that the much-travelled ibn Battuta described, first-hand, 'the principal town on the [East African] coast' in 1331. Apparently, Kilwa (properly called Kilwa Kisiwani), situated at 9° South in what is now Tanzania, was no isolated phenomenon. Over 1500 kilometres distant along the same coast, at 2° North in what is now Somalia, was Mogadishu, of which ibn Battuta could write that it was 'a very large town' (Freeman-Grenville 1975: 27-31). Ibn Battuta can be seen as representing the scholarly opinion of the fourteenth-century Islamic world. By the end of the following century, however, there were less scholarly visitors from the Christian world of Western Europe and they also seem to have been impressed with the towns and cities that they saw on the East African coast. Thus in 1498, the unknown author of the *Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497-1499* could compare 'the town of Malindi' (now in Kenya) with Alcouchette, a town near Lisbon in his native Portugal (Freeman-Grenville 1975: 55-6). Indeed, it is in the account of Vasco da Gama's second voyage (1502) by Gaspar Correa (written long after the event about 1561 but Correa probably visited the East African coast in 1514) that there occurs one of the most detailed early descriptions of an East African coastal city. This again concerns Kilwa and is worth quoting extensively:

The captain-major told the pilot to show him the port, and that he wished to go to Quiloa, which he did; and on sighting it, he entered the port with the whole fleet, which anchored round the city, which stands on an island which is surrounded and encircled by the sea water, but on the land side there is little water, which at high tide is knee-deep. The city is large and is of good buildings of stone and mortar with terraces, and the houses have much wood works. The city comes down to the shore, and is entirely surrounded by a wall and towers, within which there may be 12,000 inhabitants. The country all round is very luxuriant with many trees and gardens of all sorts of vegetables, citrons, lemons, and the best sweet oranges that were ever seen, sugar-canes, figs, pomegranates, and a great abundance of flocks, especially sheep, which have fat in the tail, which is almost the size of the body, and very savoury. The streets of the city are very narrow, as the houses are very high, of three and four stories, and one can run along the tops of them upon the terraces, as the houses are very close together: and in the port there were many ships. (Freeman-Grenville 1975: 66)

Clearly, the East African settlements would be expected to make a favourable impression on sailors several months outward bound from Portugal, who had just

endured a long journey through the eastern Atlantic on a dull if not inadequate diet. Nevertheless, historical sources like those that have just been quoted demonstrate that settlements of considerable size had already developed on the East African coast before the middle of the second millennium AD. Archaeological and oral traditional evidence supports this conclusion. The main problem has been to explain how such a development took place, a development that was limited to a narrow strip comprising 3500 kilometres of coastline, from southern Somalia to southern Mozambique and including various offshore islands, to which should be added the Comoro Archipelago and parts of Madagascar.

The distinctive culture that eventually developed along this coastal strip was at least in part urban, mercantile, literate and Islamic. Modern scholars often refer to it as the 'Swahili Culture', because of the fact that many of the inhabitants of the strip are now speakers of one or another form of ki-Swahili, a north-eastern Bantu language rich in loan-words from Arabic and from a number of other languages; although it is doubtful if the term 'Swahili' should be used in contexts earlier than the last few centuries. Nonetheless, whatever one calls the developments along this coast prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, they were clearly impressive. One can sympathize, although not necessarily agree, with the view that: 'There is little doubt that this civilization, at its zenith in the fourteenth century, was the highest in the material sense that has existed until recent times in Black Africa' (Chittick 1971: 136). Given sentiments such as these, it is not surprising that external stimulus was formerly advanced as the most likely explanation for such developments. Thus we were told that: 'We should picture this civilization as a remote outpost of Islam, looking for its spiritual inspiration to the homeland of its religion' (Chittick 1971: 137). Subsequently, however, this 'colonial-origins interpretation' has been rejected (Allen 1980: 361; see also Allen 1974; 1993), and archaeological as well as other evidence has increasingly suggested that the development of the coastal culture owed far more to its African origins than to any external influences, contributory though these obviously were (Horton 1987a; 1996). The whole debate might be regarded as an interesting case of the edge or the centre: was the East African coast merely the edge of the Islamic world, or was it the centre of an indigenous African development of substantial significance? Viewed simply, the latter now seems to be more likely, but it is also apparent that culture change on this coast was highly complex, as might be expected in such an interaction zone, and did incorporate both local and foreign elements.

Geographical location and environmental factors

The area with which this chapter is concerned consists of a long, narrow coastal strip and a number of adjacent islands. Extending from about 2° North to about 16° South and perhaps to as much as 24° South, this comprises a very large part of the eastern coast of Africa (Fig. 6.1). The cultural developments with which we are

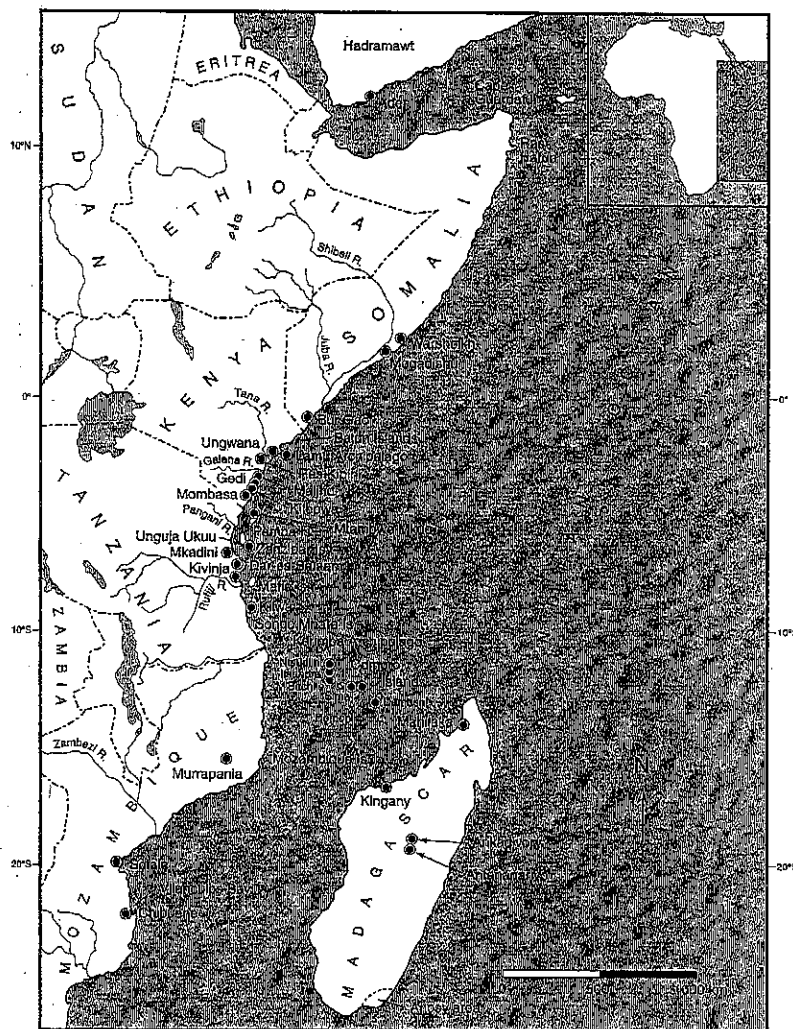


Fig. 6.1 Archaeological sites on the East African coast and islands.

concerned seem to have been restricted to that coast and not to have penetrated inland. Therefore, these developments clearly had a maritime and mercantile orientation. This situation contrasts very much with that of West Africa, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. In that case, cities and states developed far from the coast in the northern savanna, before they did so in the forested coastal region. When such developments did take place in the forest, they were always inland and often in or near the forest-savanna ecotone. Until the advent of European sailors in the fifteenth century AD the coast itself remained relatively remote and was not the scene of any major cultural developments. The explanation of this contrast can be found in the different locations and maritime environments of these two coasts. On the West African coast, the Atlantic Ocean was a barrier rather than a highway, until knowledge of the winds improved and changes in sailing technology took place during the fifteenth century. Only then could European ships both avoid and sail against the prevailing northerly winds and currents, that had previously made it impossible to return from a visit to this coast (Crosby 1986: 112-14). In addition, the more environmentally attractive parts of the West African coast are a very long way from Western Europe: a voyage from Lisbon to Ghana, for instance, would be roughly 5500 kilometres as indicated by modern marine distance tables (Caney and Reynolds 1976). The East African coast, on the other hand, has the very great advantage of ease of navigation from maritime southern and western Asia. The winds and currents of the Indian Ocean are seasonal and reverse their direction every six months. Thus, from December to March the prevailing wind on the East African coast is the north-easterly monsoon but from April till November it is the south-westerly monsoon. This enables voyages to be made from the southern Arabian coast, the Persian Gulf and the north-west coast of the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, it is possible to return to such places from the East African coast within the same year. Also, the length of such a voyage need not be so great as those to the West African coast. Thus a voyage from southern Arabia to the Kenyan coast, for example, would be roughly 2800 kilometres (Caney and Reynolds 1976). Currents also contribute to the ease of navigation to and from East Africa. In particular, the main Indian Ocean currents flow east-west, reversing each half year, and thus make it easier to sail to and from western and southern India, Indonesia and South-East Asia. These differences between the west and east coasts of Africa have had a marked effect on their respective histories: on the west coast, seaborne contact with the outside world has existed for only 500 years but on the east coast such seaborne contact has certainly been a reality for over 1000 years (e.g. Ricks 1970) and, judging by the first-century *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (Casson 1989: 6-7), there was also such contact during the Roman period. Indeed, Miller (1969: 145-8) argued for the existence at that time of what he called 'the Cinnamon Route', right across the Indian Ocean from Indonesia to Madagascar and East Africa.

As might be expected, the environment varies to some extent within this long coastal strip, although most of it belongs to the vegetational sub-region known as the Zanzibar-Inhambane Mosaic (Sinclair 1991: 181). To its north, the coast of Somalia from Cape Guardafui to round about Mogadishu is open, and has few harbours and an arid hinterland. From Mogadishu to near the present border of Somalia and Kenya, harbours are more numerous but the coast is still exposed, hazardous and somewhat barren. From the Somalia/Kenya border, however, there is a fair rainfall and the coast is frequently broken by drowned valleys that provide natural harbours. Along the northern part of this coast there is also a string of coral islands, close offshore, known as the Bajun Islands. Between them and the mainland is a sheltered channel and at their southern end are the important islands of the Lamu Archipelago: Pate, Manda and Lamu (Fig. 6.2). Only a narrow, mangrove-fringed channel separates these islands from the mainland and from here southwards there is an almost continuous offshore coral reef, providing protected inshore waters along which there are many small creeks and harbours. Much of the mainland coast is fringed with mangrove swamps but there are also stretches of steep sandy beach, the foreshores of which shelf so gradually that at low tide the sea retreats for long distances. The more protected of these beaches provide ideal landing places: the lightly built sewn boats that were used along this coast in the past could be anchored on the high tide and unloaded at low tide while they were high and dry. On the islands along the coast, fresh water could usually be obtained by digging wells and consequently they provided obvious locations for human settlements. To the south, the large ocean islands of Pemba, Zanzibar and Mafia, which are less than a day's voyage from the mainland, are particularly important, but south of them are the inshore islands of Kilwa and Songo Mnara and further south again the Kerimba Archipelago and Mozambique Island, which are the last islands of the coral reef. South of the Zambezi estuary the temperature of the sea is too low for coral growth and beyond Inhambane the coast is not relevant to the discussion here (Chittick 1971: 108-9; Garlake 1978a: 95-6). Both the Comoro Islands and parts of Madagascar are, however, and their inclusion adds further to the range of environments in the overall area. The former are volcanic, tropical and, with the exception of Ngazidja, well watered, whilst Madagascar is characterized by an environmental diversity resulting from altitudinal differences and its oceanic location.

In general, the environment of the coastal strip and adjacent islands from southern Somalia to Mozambique would have been attractive to human settlement. Much of the area has an adequate rainfall of about 1000 millimetres per year and its maritime, tropical climate has encouraged agricultural exploitation in areas where there are suitable soils. The character of the coast and of its inshore waters and their resources, and that of the adjacent islands, would inevitably have stimulated the early development of coastal shipping and, because of the winds and currents of the Indian Ocean, the people of the East African coast and islands were

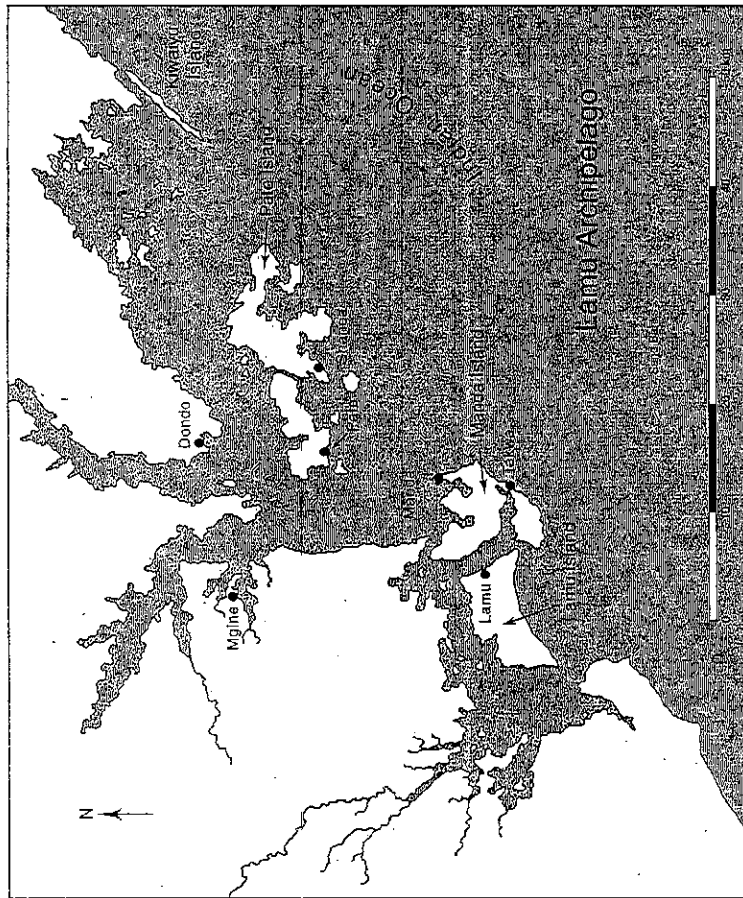


Fig. 6.2 Archaeological sites in the Lamu Archipelago, Kenya.

bound to come into contact eventually with other maritime peoples of that ocean. During the first and early second millennium AD ports in Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and the Comoro Islands and northern Madagascar appear to have become part of a vast trading network that extended as far as South-East Asia (Stiles 1992).

In contrast to this narrow coastal strip and its islands, the environment of the interior has often been described as relatively unattractive. According to this view, behind the generally narrow, sandy, often fertile coastal plain, where fresh water could be found in many places, lies a gently rising belt of dry, scrubby, savanna bushland, 100–200 kilometres in width, difficult to penetrate, harbouring tsetse flies and offering little to interest people adapted to a maritime environment. Furthermore, there are few permanent rivers, and of these only the Zambezi, at the southern end of the coastal strip under discussion, is navigable for any distance (Chittick 1977: 185–6). Consequently, it has been assumed that, although there was contact between the coast around Sofala and the Zimbabwe Plateau, there was little between the Kenya/Tanzania coast and the interior until recent centuries. For instance, Posnansky attempted to explain the apparent slightness of contact between the East African lacustrine peoples and the coast (Posnansky 1975: 217). The reality of this situation will be discussed later but it is appropriate to question here the basic idea of an attractive coast and an unattractive hinterland. A closer examination indicates a greater variety of environments, at least in some areas. Thus, in the stretch of coast and hinterland between Bur Gao (Somalia) and Ras Kipini (Kenya) Horton (1983; 1987a: 292) identified a remarkable range of ecological areas. These include: *driest woodland*, the predominant inland vegetation which was exploited by pastoralist groups; *riverine woodland*, where the fertile land of perennial river floodplains has been densely settled by agriculturalists; *lowland wet forest*, along the narrow coastal strip, important both to hunter-gatherers because of the wild animals it contained and to agriculturalists because of its productivity; *coastal swamps*, filled with rapidly growing mangroves that were a source of building timber; *island savanna*, where the soils are poor but fresh water is available at locations close to the sea; and the *reefs and littorals*, which fringe the coast and support rich fishing grounds. Consequently, within relatively short distances are pastoralists, agriculturalists, hunter-gatherers and fishing people, comprising a wide range of ethnic groups of which the pastoralists and some of the hunter-gatherers speak Cushitic languages and the farming and fishing communities speak Bantu languages. Particularly important for East African coastal societies, but formerly overlooked, are the cultivable fertile soils along the lower parts of some of the coastal rivers, such as the Shireli and Juba in Somalia, the Tana and Galana in Kenya, and the Pangani and Rufiji in Tanzania. Clearly, the environment of this whole region is very much more complex than appears at first sight.

The East African coast possessed a variety of resources that must have played an important part in the cultural developments of the last thousand years or so. To begin with, there was probably substantial food production in some areas. By the middle of the second millennium AD, millet, rice, sorghum, cocoyam, coconuts, bananas, citrus fruits, pomegranates, figs, sugar-cane and vegetables were being grown. Fat-tailed sheep, goats, cattle and chickens were raised, fish and probably other marine foods were extensively exploited and bees were kept in specially constructed hives (Chittick 1971: 136; 1974b: Vol. 1, 236, 248-51; 1977). It should be noted, however, that the list of food plants given here includes a number that were introduced to East Africa from India and South-East Asia at some unknown date before the arrival of the Portuguese on this coast (Gwynne 1975). The most important indigenous African plant foods were probably limited to millet, sorghum and a number of vegetables. Nevertheless, it is apparent that in time food resources became extensive and varied, and that the environmental diversity of this coast must have necessitated the early development of local exchange systems handling these resources. Indeed, by the nineteenth century the East African coast was exporting an increasing quantity of grain, including sorghum, maize and sesame (Spear 1978: 81-2). The last two grains were introduced to Africa and the volume of this trade was probably much greater than in previous centuries but it is probable that grain export to the dry lands of southern Asia had a long history. Thus Chittick (1977: 217) claimed that records in Aden show that rice was imported there from Kilwa prior to Portuguese contact, and he suggested that much of the rice actually came from Madagascar.

It was on the basis of other East African resources, however, that the remarkable export trade of this coast was principally developed. Most important of these seems to have been ivory, already mentioned in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* in the first century AD (Casson 1989: 16, 42) and still important in the nineteenth century (Spear 1978: 81-2). It appears to have been obtainable from areas along the whole coast, from Somalia to Mozambique, but some tusks came from deep in the interior (Ylvisaker 1982: 221). The *Periplus* also mentions rhinoceros horn and tortoiseshell, which actually would have been obtained from sea-turtles, and pearly shell (on the latter see Chittick 1981: 186). At a later date there were, in addition, numerous other resources that became important trade commodities during the first half of the second millennium AD. From Sofala, in the south, came gold and copper, both of which must have been obtained from the interior. From the Horn of Africa, to the north, came frankincense and myrrh, aromatic gum resins much sought after in some parts of the world. From more central parts of the East African coast, mangrove poles, ebony and perhaps other timbers were exported, as was iron, ambergris and sandalwood. Slaves were probably exported from the more northerly parts of the coast (Chittick 1977) but there was no substantial slave trade till late in the eighteenth century. Nineteenth-century exports included other

commodities which may or may not have been exported at an earlier date but which are an additional indication of the range of East African resources. Excluding some of obviously late introduction, these comprised copal (a tree resin used in the manufacture of varnish), hides, wax, hippopotamus teeth, coconuts, orchilla (a vegetable dye), beans, shell and livestock (Spear 1978: 82).

Some of these non-food resources would have been important for local use as well as for export. This would have been the case with iron, copper and perhaps ivory. Timber would also have been important, particularly for building construction and shipbuilding. In addition, there were other resources that were of local significance only or formed the basis of production for trade with the interior. Thus the coral reefs and the outcrops of coral on dry land provided important building materials: both stone and lime for mortar and plaster. A considerable amount of cotton was grown on the coast and manufactured locally into cloth. Even silk was produced. Furthermore, the coast probably produced salt and also made use of some of the numerous marine molluscs, either as raw material for beads or, in the case of cowries, perhaps directly for decoration, although in this area not as currency (Hogendorn and Johnson 1986: 102). The various species of coastal palms provided many things, including coconuts, wine, rope, matting and caulking for ships. Finally, the coast had fresh water, so often a problem in the dry hinterland and so crucial both for human settlements of substantial size and for ships' crews anxious to replenish their supplies (Chittick 1977).

With such a diversity of resources, it is difficult to understand why so many settlement sites of the first half of the second millennium AD were abandoned, in some cases prior to the arrival of the Portuguese. What were the constraints that could have operated on this seeming coastal paradise to produce such disasters? The most important was probably dependability of water supply. Horton (1983) has pointed out that in the Lamu Archipelago, for example, the best fresh water is found in wells closest to the sea, where it floats on the heavier, salt water. If the wells are overdrawn or the well shafts made too deep, the supply becomes salty and unusable. In fact, the wells at the abandoned settlements on these islands are today salty. As there is little or no surface water on this coast, the only alternative to such fragile well supply would have been rainwater cisterns: not a very reliable source. Another constraint on this coast would have been soil fertility, which in some places seems to have been poor and may well have been easily damaged by agricultural exploitation. A range of tropical diseases could have provided further problems and one would very much like to know whether or not the extensive maritime contacts of this coast complicated this situation still further, by introducing and reintroducing such diseases as smallpox, cholera and plague. There were also other constraints. Problems of overland communication, particularly with the interior of East Africa, have probably been exaggerated in the past but nevertheless it would have been so much easier to move by boat along the coast that communications would have tended to be con-

centrated around a coastal axis. The coast-clinging locations of the larger settlements, however, would have rendered them vulnerable to attack, both by those inland peoples over whom they had no control and from the very sea that brought them so much of their livelihood. That vulnerability was clearly demonstrated during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries AD by the Galla and the Zimba from inland and by the Portuguese from the sea (Chittick 1977: 229–31).

Sources of information

Compared with West Africa, the East African coast is well supplied with sources for the study of its past. Historical documentation is particularly extensive, commencing with the first-century *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, which is thought to have been written by an Egyptian Greek merchant from personal experience and includes an account of the East African coast (Casson 1989: 7–10). Another early historical source is Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia*, originally written in about AD 150 but in its final form probably an edited compilation of about AD 400 (Freeman-Grenville 1975: 3). Both of these sources contain information about the East African coast but it is difficult to use them and there is no further information with which to compare their contents until the ninth and tenth centuries. From then on there is a series of documentary sources, mostly from Arabic authors but with some contributions from Chinese writers, until the arrival of the Portuguese on the East African coast at the end of the fifteenth century. Perhaps the most informative of these historical sources are al-Masudi in the tenth century, al-Idrisi in the twelfth century, and ibn Battuta in the fourteenth century. Only the last of these, however, includes an eyewitness description of some of the East African coastal cities and none of these sources provides the wealth of ethnohistorical evidence to be found in the sixteenth-century accounts of Portuguese writers, such as the anonymous authors of the *Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–1499* and *The voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India*. Other similarly useful early Portuguese sources include Gaspar Correa's *Lendas da India*, João de Barros' *Da Asia* and an account written by Duarte Barbosa but there are also a number of other sources (Freeman-Grenville 1975). Collectively, these Portuguese sources give us a surprisingly detailed picture of some of the towns of the East African coast in the middle of the second millennium AD. In addition, there is information from a variety of European sources concerning the last few centuries before colonial rule, although the greater part of this dates only from the nineteenth century.

All the historical documentation discussed so far, however, consists of the writings of outsiders, visitors to East Africa who at times either did not understand or did not wish to understand what they had observed, or even writers who had never been there at all and were merely repeating information that was at best second-hand. It is fortunate, therefore, that it is possible to complement such sources with

the oral traditions of the people who lived in some of the East African coastal settlements. Best known of these is the 'Kilwa Chronicle', available both as a sixteenth-century Portuguese version and as an Arabic version that was copied in Zanzibar in 1862. Collectively, these two versions record the traditions about Kilwa that were current in the earlier sixteenth century and give some account of its origins (Chittick 1974b: Vol. 1, 13–14). There are also a number of other traditional accounts but they seem to have been written down only in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. Perhaps the best known of these is the 'History of Pate', written down about 1910 but covering the period back to 1204 (Freeman-Grenville 1975: preface, 241). Although some of these traditional histories include useful information concerning the life of the coast, much of them consists of a mixture of myth and genealogy which is difficult to use historically. For example, a substantial literature has grown up on the question of how one should interpret the Kilwa Chronicle story of a 'Shirazi' immigration to the East African coast from the Persian Gulf (e.g. Chittick 1965; Allen 1982; Horton 1996: 3). Nevertheless, oral sources do have something to tell us and Thomas Spear with his work on the traditions of the Mijikenda peoples and J. de V. Allen on those about Shungwaya have been able to demonstrate how some of the inland traditions indicate a far greater indigenous contribution to the coastal culture than the better-known oral histories would suggest (Spear 1978; Allen 1983; 1993). The fact remains, however, that historical sources, whether oral or documentary, are not able to explain adequately the origins and early development of the coastal cities. To throw more light on that problem, we must turn to the very substantial archaeological evidence that exists.

Archaeological research on the East African coast commenced shortly after the Second World War and it is fortunate that its principal exponents have all been able fieldworkers, most of them excavating extensively. It has also been fortunate that substantial research programmes have been organized by both the British Institute in Eastern Africa, based in Nairobi, and Uppsala University, in Sweden. Nevertheless, until late in the twentieth century work tended to focus on sites with stone ruins, rather than looking at these sites in their overall archaeological context. This resulted from the assumption that the remarkable stone buildings on the coast derived ultimately from the cultural influence of Muslim immigrants from the Persian Gulf and parts of the Arabian coast, an assumption that the emphasis on stone buildings in turn helped to perpetuate. It was admitted that such Arab immigrants had been rapidly integrated with the local people, but it was insisted of the resulting culture that:

one can detect little in it that appears to have been derived from the indigenous peoples of the continent. On the hinterland of the coast this civilization had little impact, except for the stimulus to trade... From the point of view of the homelands of Islam, from which they drew their spiritual inspiration, these cities represented a frontier of the civilized world. (Chittick 1977: 219)

This interpretation of the culture of the East African coast has already been referred to (p. 182). The important point here is to realize that it is this view that shaped much of the archaeological research that has been conducted on this coast. While the coastal cities were thought of as semi-alien trading centres clinging to the edge of the African continent and relevant only as the periphery of an international trading system, there seemed little point in investigating their relationship with the 'indigenous' settlements of the coast or the interior, nor in bothering much about their local antecedents. As a result, much of the archaeological survey and excavation along this coast concentrated on the highly visible stone ruins of mosques, tombs and houses (e.g. Kirkman 1954; 1959; 1963; 1964; 1966; Garlake 1966; Chittick 1974b; Wilson 1978; 1980) and there was relatively little investigation of those parts of settlements built in mud, wood and thatch or of those settlements only built of such materials. In addition, the presence of complex architectural features, of inscriptions, of coins and of imported glazed earthenwares, porcelains, glassware and beads tended to concentrate much of the work on artefact studies and particularly on the detailed chronology that they provided. By the 1970s, however, the emphasis was changing, as some archaeologists came to realize the basically indigenous character of the coastal culture and began to see the cities as part of an ongoing process of African social and economic change, rather than the result of alien colonization (e.g. Allen 1980; Horton 1980; 1987a; 1996; Wilson 1982). These contrasting approaches in East African coastal archaeology must be kept in mind when reviewing the archaeological evidence relevant to the origins of urbanization and state formation.

Allen (1980) listed 173 settlement sites with stone ruins, between Warsheikh (north of Mogadishu) and the Tanzania-Mozambique frontier. In addition, there are sites relevant to our discussion in Mozambique, the Comoro Archipelago and northern Madagascar (Vérin 1976; Duarte 1993; Wright 1993; Chami 1994) and many relevant sites that have no stone ruins have still not received the attention that they deserve. Thus, in total, there must be a large number of sites spread over a great length of coast and its adjacent islands but most of the archaeological investigations that have been carried out have been on the Kenyan or Tanzanian coasts and, indeed, Kenyan sites have had rather more attention than those of Tanzania. One of the first sites to be excavated was the city of Gedi (Fig. 6.3), on the mainland of Kenya, where Kirkman was able to reveal a curiously skeletal city plan (Kirkman 1954: 185). Thus he was able to demonstrate the layout of its city walls, which clearly represented two structural phases: an earlier city of about 18 hectares and a later, smaller city of about 7 hectares (Kirkman 1975a: 239). Within that city were plotted a so-called 'palace', several houses, some of which were concentrated in a group near the palace, and a number of mosques and tombs. The excavations were extensive, but although the Jamia (or main congregational mosque) and the palace were published in detail (Kirkman 1954; 1963), the houses, city walls and

other details of this important urban site did not receive the same treatment (Kirkman 1975b). In particular, it is unclear whether Kirkman's city plan shows all the stone ruins or not. If it does, then it must be the case that much of the apparently empty space on his plan was filled with buildings of mud, wood and thatch: that is to say with the houses of the bulk of the inhabitants. Certainly the strange angular outline of the city walls would suggest that they enclosed tightly an irregular mass of houses, similar to that recorded at Shanga (Horton 1996: Figs. 5, 9, 10), where mud and thatch houses partly surrounded a central core of stone structures (compare Fig. 6.3 and Fig. 6.6).

On the basis of the dating of imported ceramics, some of them excavated from beneath a tomb with an inscription containing a date equivalent to AD 1399 (Kirkman 1960), Kirkman suggested that Gedi was founded in the thirteenth century, abandoned in the early sixteenth century and briefly reoccupied in the late sixteenth century, at which time the inner town wall was constructed (Kirkman

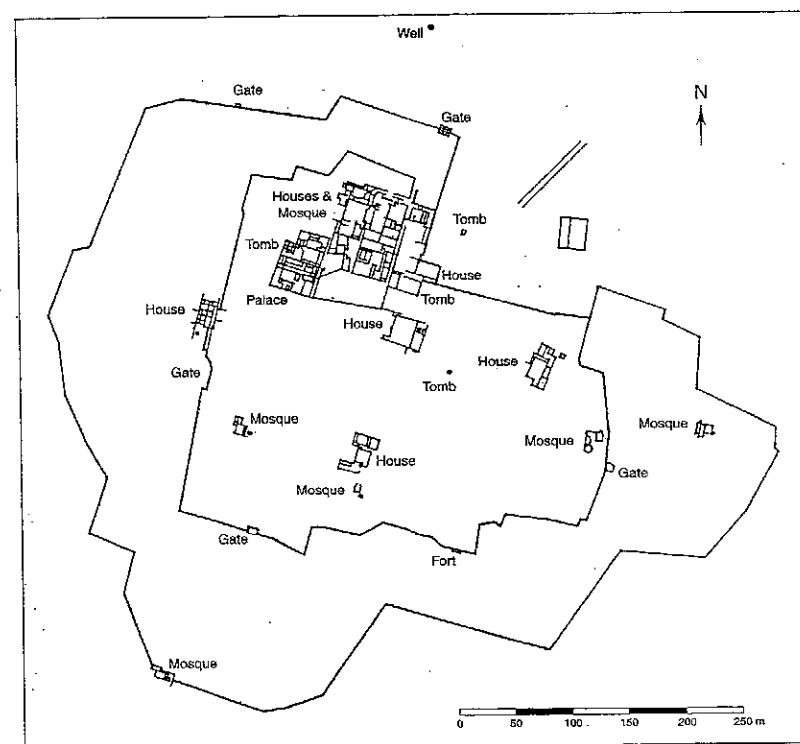


Fig. 6.3 Plan of Gedi, Kenya. After Kirkman (1964: Fig. 7).

1975a: 237–9). Most of the buildings that were excavated were, in fact, of fifteenth-century date and the house-plans that were revealed (Garlake 1966: 194) are of particular interest in throwing light on pre-Portuguese social organization. The coral ragstone houses comprised a number of narrow oblong rooms, averaging about 2.4 metres wide, their width dictated by the maximum available rafter span (Fig. 6.4). Although there was some variety of plan at Gedi, the basic house-plan both here and in other coastal settlements consisted of two of these long narrow rooms, one behind the other, with the first one fronting on an enclosed courtyard and the rear

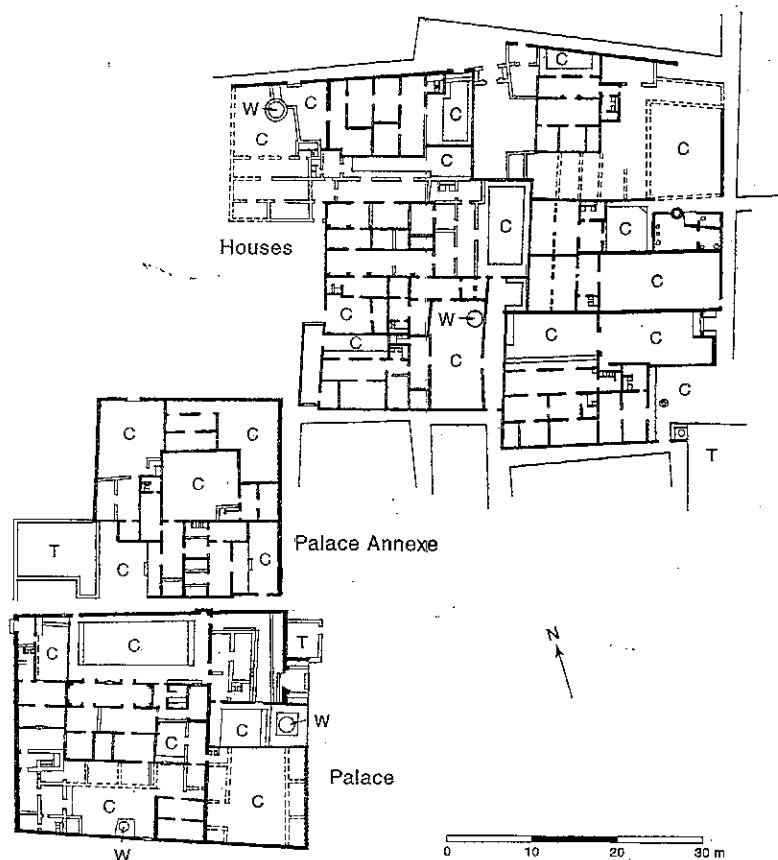


Fig. 6.4 Plan of the centre of Gedi.

C: Court. W: Well. T: Tomb. Original buildings shown solid, alterations in outline. After Garlake (1966: Fig. 76).

one opening into two or three smaller rooms behind. None of these rooms had external windows but sometimes there was another courtyard situated behind the smaller rooms. It seems probable that each house was intended for a separate family, with the rooms providing a graded privacy: most public in the front courtyard, most private in the back rooms. As argued by Allen (1979), the stone houses in archaeological sites such as Gedi are in the same tradition as the mostly eighteenth-century, stone-built mansions of Lamu, some of which are still occupied (Ghaidan 1976; Donley 1987). This would suggest that by the fifteenth century there was already in existence a class of cultured, wealthy, mercantile urbanites (similar to that later known as the *wa-ungwana*) who reinforced their position by reserving to themselves the exclusive right to build their houses in stone, thus making use of what Linda Donley called 'house power' (Donley 1982; Donley-Reid 1990). Looking at the Gedi house-plans, it seems as if a number of such families sometimes built their houses in interlocking groups, each group representing a distinct lineage or kin. Certainly such people seem to have lived at a level of material comfort higher than that of most of their contemporaries. Houses had plastered walls, inside toilets, washplaces with bidets, underfloor soakaways and rainwater drains. Indeed, at Gedi one apparent group of houses was identified by Kirkman as a palace. With its monumental arched entrance (Fig. 6.5) and its generous provision of courtyard space, this might well represent the houses of a particular lineage who,



Fig. 6.5 Palace entrance at Gedi, in 1990. Note the high quality of the masonry.

having become the hereditary ruling family, had adapted their dwellings to suit their new duties (Allen 1979: 24).

Kirkman also excavated at a number of other sites in both Kenya and Tanzania. Most significant of them was probably that of Ungwana, on the northern Kenyan coast near the estuary of the River Tana (Kirkman 1966). Here is the remains of a large walled city covering about 18 hectares and occupied from the tenth to the seventeenth century according to the revised dating by Abungu (1990: 212) but Kirkman concentrated on the mosques and the tombs, although the ruins of some stone houses were present. According to his plan, however, extensive areas of this city consisted of empty space (Kirkman 1966: 71) and, as with Gedi, it seems likely that much of this space must have been filled with buildings of mud, wood and thatch. It seems probable that Kirkman's excavation strategy was not designed with this possibility in mind. Thus at Kilepwa, a small thirteenth- to sixteenth-century settlement near Gedi where he also excavated (Kirkman 1952), the remains consisted of a small mosque, two pillar tombs and a group of houses. According to its excavator, this was 'clearly a family unit, corresponding perhaps to the European manor'. Yet we are also told that 'sherds of *sgraffiato* [imported glazed earthenware of eleventh- and twelfth-century date] were found all over the site, so it may have had a large population in the pre-building period' (Kirkman 1975a: 239-40). The last phrase is surely significant: it would appear that, to this excavator, a building that was not made of stone was not a building.

Thus, the first major point that emerges when one begins to examine the settlement archaeology of the East African coast and islands is that buildings of mud, wood and thatch must have constituted a large part of some of these settlements and, if this was the case, then the indigenous African contribution to the growth of these settlements is likely to have been far more important than has sometimes been admitted. For example, the town of Songo Mnara, on the island of that name off the Tanzanian coast, must have consisted of more structures than just a collection of uniformly planned stone houses, a so-called palace and several mosques, loosely distributed within a large walled area. These, after all, appear to have been recorded without resorting to excavation (Garlake 1966: Fig. 74). Similarly, at Kilwa, in the same area, where there have been extensive excavations, it has been estimated that the city site covers about 1 square kilometre but the stone ruins consist of only a scatter of structures. As its excavator admitted: 'Many, and perhaps most, of the buildings at Kilwa, even at the height of its prosperity, were built of mud-and-wattle, evidently in a similar style to that which can be seen on the coast today. The original settlement was probably entirely of such buildings' (Chittick 1974b: Vol. 1, 24). However, it appears that the ratio of buildings of stone to buildings of less permanent materials did vary to a considerable extent from site to site. For instance, the final phases of Shanga, abandoned in the fifteenth century and comprising a town of 8.68 hectares situated on the shore of Pate Island

(Kenya), probably consisted mainly of stone structures, which took up 6.57 hectares of the occupied area (Fig. 6.6). The three mosques, approximately 400 tombs outside the town, other tombs within the town and about 220 houses were all built of stone, leaving some but not much space for buildings of other materials (Horton 1996: 33, 38, 63). A similar but slightly less convincing case might be made for Takwa, a town now thought to have been occupied from the tenth to the seventeenth century (Abungu and Mutoro 1993: 695). Situated near the shore of the Kenyan island of Manda, the final phases of this stone-built walled town of a little over 4 hectares contained a mosque, a well, and 137 other structures, most of which were probably houses (Fig. 6.7). Allowing for open spaces for gardens and markets, there were still some empty areas that could have contained mud, wood and thatch buildings but they were limited (Wilson 1982). In contrast, the stone remains at Dondo, on the coast of the Kenyan mainland close to Pate Island, consist of only two mosques, two wells, two groups of tombs and a building and well suspected to be Portuguese. The excavator of this site has concluded that this unwall town, which is about 5 hectares in extent, was occupied between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries by people of sufficient wealth to build lavish tombs and two mosques who were, nevertheless, 'living in non-stone structures' (Horton 1980; 1996: 23-4). Indeed, a comparable site exists at Mgine, on the same part of the Kenyan coast. In this case there are scatters of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sherds over an area of some 10 hectares but there are no traces at all of stone buildings (Horton 1983). It is difficult to escape the conclusion that mud, wood and thatch buildings, and the African peoples who built them, contributed greatly to the East African coastal settlements.

If mud, wood and thatch buildings meant indigenous contribution, does this imply that stone buildings meant alien contribution? At one time many writers would have answered with a categorical 'yes'; now the question would be considered far more difficult to answer. Garlake, seeking the origins of the architectural styles of the stone buildings, could find various parallels in different parts of South-West Asia but came to the overall conclusion that before the eighteenth century the architectural style of the coast was, 'to a large extent, indigenous to the coast' (Garlake 1966: 116). Clearly, alien influences might be seen in the fourteenth-century palace and commercial centre of Husuni Kubwa, just outside the city of Kilwa, with its audience court, open-sided pavilion, bathing pool, domed and vaulted roofs, and Arabic inscriptions (Fig. 6.8). The same might be said of the nearby site of Husuni Ndogo, a large rectangular enclosure of unknown purpose that could have been a mosque, a market or a barracoona (an enclosure for slaves). These sites, however, are exceptional and the stone buildings of the coast and islands have a far wider range of quality. Thus, Takwa, which Allen called 'the poorest stone settlement so far excavated', consisted mainly of small houses whose 'comfort was little if any greater than that enjoyed by mud and thatch dwellers

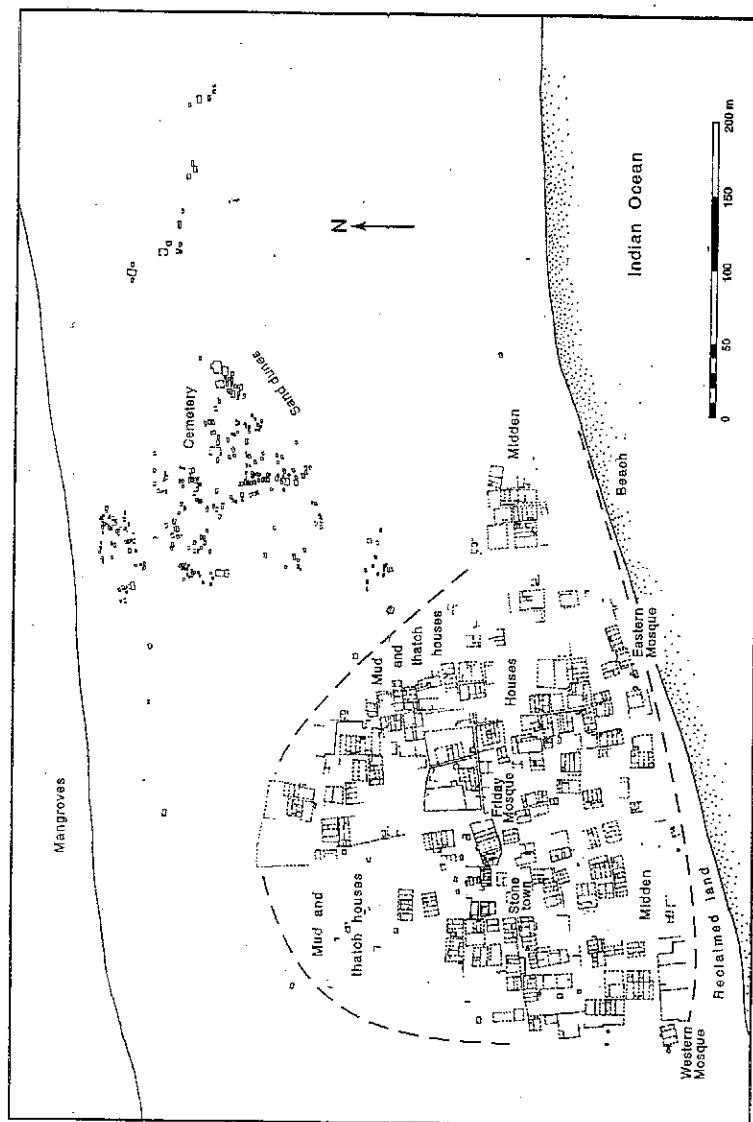


Fig. 6.6 Plan of Shanga, Kenya. The broken line indicates the limits of the settlement: note the areas of mud and thatch buildings as well as those of stone. After Horton (1996: Fig. 5).

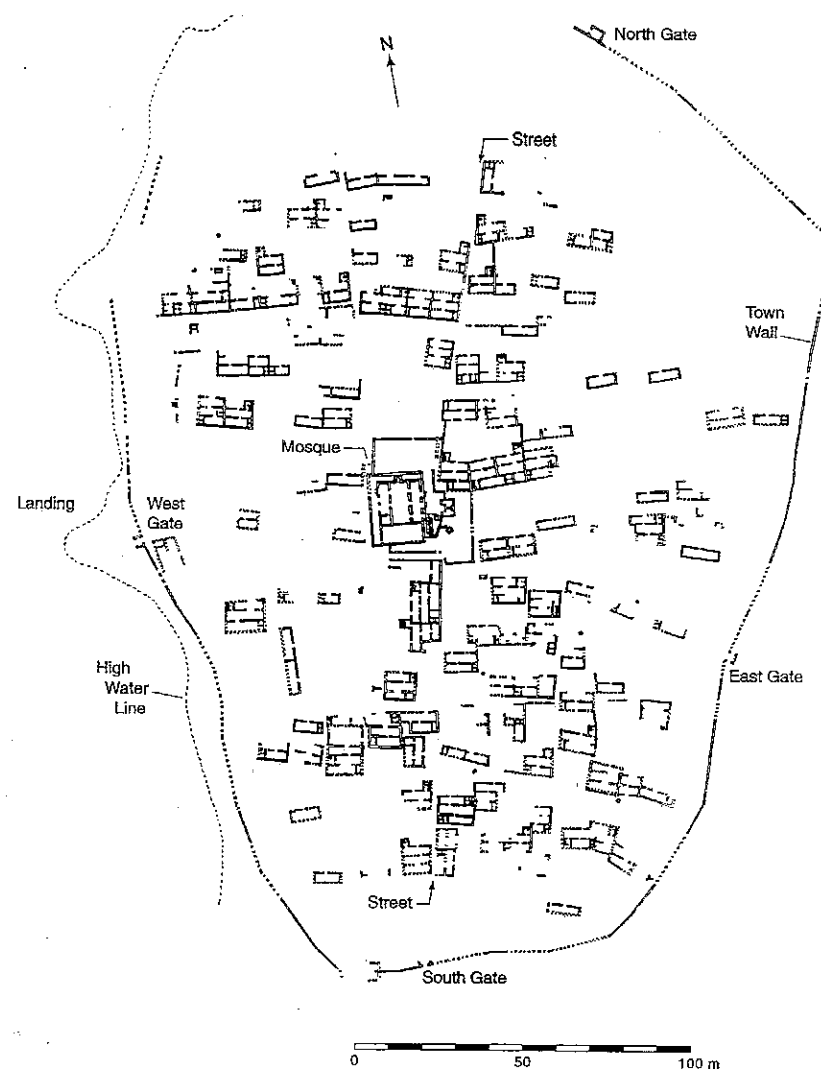


Fig. 6.7 Plan of Takwa, Kenya. After Wilson (1982: Fig. 2) but revised to 1999 on his advice.

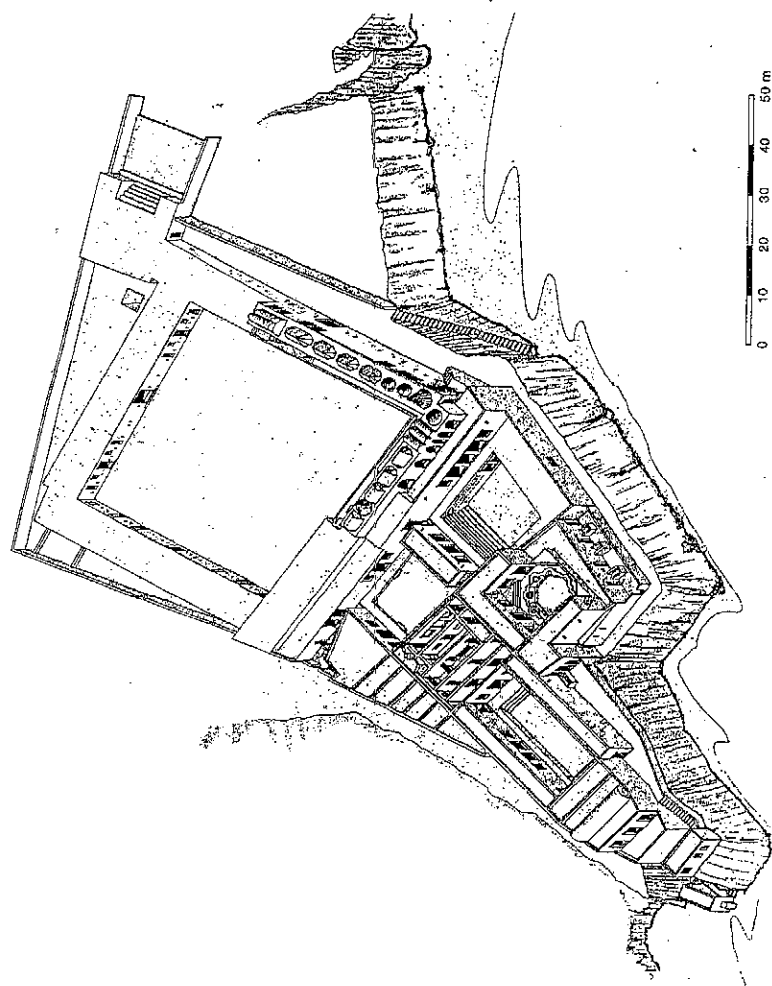


Fig. 6.8 Axonometric reconstruction of Husuni Kubwa, near Kilwa, Tanzania. After Garlake (1966: Fig. 69).

(and well below that enjoyed by some mud and thatch dwellers today)' (Allen 1979: 27). Indeed, as has already been argued, stone buildings, whether houses, mosques, tombs or other structures, were only one aspect of these coastal settlements. Thomas Wilson showed that coastal sites in southern Somalia and Kenya could be subdivided into five classes, based on their size, ranging in area from over 15 hectares to less than 2.5 hectares. Significantly, the smaller sites tended to have fewer buildings built of stone and tended to lack stone-built houses (Wilson 1982). In this way, we begin to see the stone buildings as an integral part of an overall settlement pattern, rather than as the major features of coast-clinging, trading cities of alien merchants, that some might once have thought them. Moreover, when that settlement pattern is analysed for location and date, it appears that this supposedly coast-clinging culture has 30 per cent of the southern Somalian, Kenyan and Tanzanian sites located in places that have 'poor or no harbours' (including six that are actually inland) and it also appears that 'although . . . Swahili society became overwhelmingly sea-oriented, it looks as if it might have been much less so in earlier centuries' (Allen 1980: 362).

In the end, the question of the significance of stone-building is bound up with the question of the origin of these coastal settlements and here the archaeological evidence is becoming increasingly helpful. Ceramics excavated at Ras Hafun, near Cape Guardafui in the far north of Somalia, indicate trading contacts with the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and perhaps South Asia as early as the first century BC, and with the Persian Gulf and South Asia in the second to fifth centuries AD (Smith and Wright 1988). Nevertheless, the earliest indications of trading settlements further south on the East African coast belong in the main to the last quarter of the first millennium AD. In spite of the mention by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* of an East African port called Rhapta, it has not been possible to identify this early-first-millennium site (Dato 1970), which was most likely in the Rufiji delta region (Chami 1999a: 210). Although four glass beads of Roman origin have been recovered from an approximately fourth-century deposit at Mkukutu in this area (Chami 1999b) and two sherds of Roman pottery were found in a fifth-century context at Unguja Ukuu on the island of Zanzibar (Juma 1996), none of the supposed discoveries of early-first-millennium coins on this coast is thought to be reliable (Freeman-Grenville 1960; Chittick 1966). Some of the best-published early evidence for a trading settlement is still that from Kilwa, where it is thought that occupation commenced about AD 800. Neville Chittick's excavations at Kilwa are particularly interesting for the light that they throw on the early occupation of this site. The dating of the various excavated 'periods' was partly on the basis of imported ceramics, indicating that the settlement had overseas trading contacts from its very beginning. In Period Ia (ninth century (?) to about 1000) buildings were at first lacking and were then in mud and thatch with a little coral stone used with mud mortar. Similar buildings were found in Period Ib (about 1000 to late

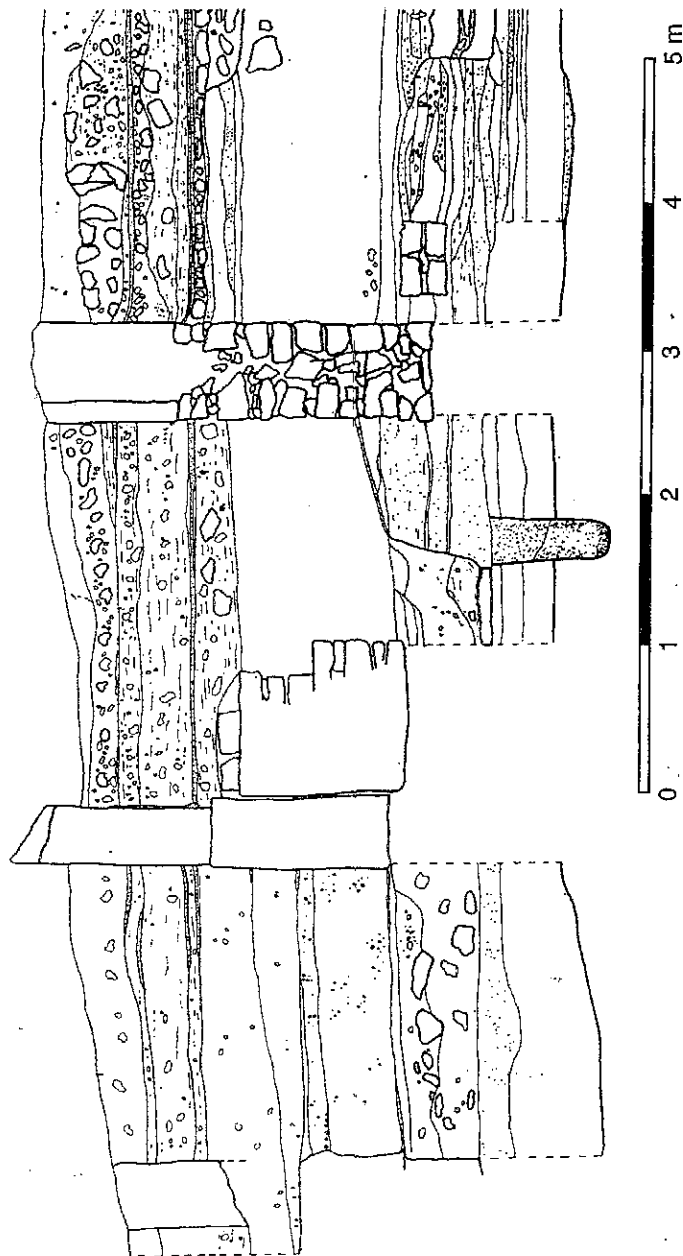


Fig. 6.9 Section through deposits in the prayer hall of the Friday Mosque, at Shanga. See Fig. 6.6 for location. After Horton (1996: Fig. 117).

twelfth century) and it was only in Period II (late twelfth to late thirteenth century) that the first substantial building in lime-mortared stone was found, at the same time that the first coins appeared. It was, indeed, not until Periods IIIa and IIIb (late thirteenth century to about 1400, and about 1400 to about 1500, respectively) that the real floruit of stone-building occurred. Chittick interpreted the evidence as indicating that the earliest settlement was a pre-Islamic fishing village, with Islam beginning to arrive in Period Ib and becoming firmly established by Period II, by which time 'Kilwa had become a substantial and prosperous town' (Chittick 1974b: Vol. 1, 18-19, 28-9, 235-41). Thus the early evidence at Kilwa suggests the gradual development of both building techniques and settlement complexity, rather than any sudden arrival of these cultural characteristics from outside.

Another site with evidence of early settlement is that of Manda, on the island of the same name in the Lamu Archipelago. This was also excavated by Neville Chittick and showed the existence of a flourishing town as early as the ninth century, with occupation continuing until perhaps as late as the nineteenth century. Again, according to the excavator, there was evidence of overseas trade from the beginning of the settlement but in this case buildings of both mud, wood and thatch and of stone were said to have been constructed from the very start, the stonework of the latter sometimes being set in lime mortar, sometimes in red earth. There were also 'sea walls', some of which were of massive masonry that was set without any kind of mortar. In addition, unique for the East African coast, there were structures made of burnt brick set in mud mortar and it was suggested that these bricks could have been imported from the Persian Gulf, perhaps as ships' ballast. From the overall evidence, Chittick deduced that the town was founded by immigrants from the Persian Gulf and that at least some of the inhabitants were Muslim from the settlement's beginning (Chittick 1967; 1971; 1984). This interpretation would make Manda an exception, compared to other similar sites on the East African coast, and Horton (1986) convincingly challenged Chittick's conclusions. The earliest stone buildings were shown to be later than the excavator had thought and to be influenced from the Red Sea rather than the Persian Gulf. Indeed, it seems that the Manda evidence differs little from that from Shanga, only 15 kilometres away on Pate Island. Substantial excavations, during six seasons spread over nine years, have made Shanga (Fig. 6.6) of major importance in any attempt to understand the origins of urbanism on the East African coast. Its excavator, Mark Horton, established a building sequence from mud, wood and thatch to stone, with imported ceramics present throughout (Fig. 6.9). This sequence extends from the late eighth century to the beginning of the fifteenth; mud mortar and stone buildings first appearing in the tenth century and lime-mortared stone buildings not until the twelfth century, becoming more important by the fourteenth century. It seems that the primary occupation at Shanga was non-Islamic but there are the remains of mosques from the end of the eighth century onwards.

Not only does the sequence at this site suggest the indigenous origins of coastal culture, but the ten stages identified during the excavation of its central area (Fig. 6.10) allow us actually to see the evolution of a coastal settlement over a period in excess of 600 years (Horton 1996).

In fact, an increasing number of coastal sites now appear to have had an early origin. Thus, Mogadishu has been shown to have been occupied by the eleventh century AD (Broberg 1995; Dualeh 1996); Mombasa by about 1000 (Sassoon 1980); Pate by about 800 (Wilson 1982: 214–15; Wilson and Lali Omar 1997: 63); and in the Lamu Archipelago alone there are eleven known sites with probable occupation in the ninth century (Horton 1986: 204). Most remarkable of all, Chibuene, an occupation site far away on the southern Mozambique coast, was probably first occupied from the seventh to ninth century and contained imported Islamic glazed wares as well as glass beads and bottle fragments (Sinclair 1982; 1987: 86–91, 168; 1991: 190, 216). It seems, therefore, that early sites are so widely distributed along the coast and on its adjacent islands and so likely, as research progresses, to prove more numerous that one would have to postulate a huge migration from southern Asia to attribute their simultaneous development to external stimulus. Such stimulus doubtless existed to some degree but its relative importance is perhaps indicated by the very small percentage of total pottery in excavated sites that is constituted by imported wares (as little as 0.2 per cent in Period Ia at Kilwa (Chittick 1974b: Vol. 2, 302)). The bulk of the recovered sherds are of indigenous wares and in the earliest periods there is considerable uniformity amongst pottery from widely separated areas. Thus, what is now known as 'Triangular Incised Ware' (often abbreviated to 'TIW') (Chami 1994), but was previously called 'Early Kitchen Ware' (Chittick 1974b: 320–2; 1984: 109–18) or referred to as pottery of 'the Tana tradition' (Horton 1987a: 313–17), has been found on many coastal sites dating to the tenth century and earlier and extending from Somalia to southern Mozambique, as well as on the Comoro Islands and in northern Madagascar. Similar pottery has also been found inland, particularly along some of the river valleys such as that of the Tana River in Kenya, where it has been recorded as much as 250 kilometres upstream (Abungu 1995). In addition, it has been excavated from some of the Mijikenda *kaya* sites of the immediate coastal hinterland in Kenya (Muroro 1995). There has been some disagreement about the antecedents of this pottery: Horton (1987a: 315–17; 1996: 410–11) and Abungu (1995: 253–5) apparently preferring an ancestry in 'Pastoral Neolithic' pottery made by Cushitic pastoralists of the interior, whereas Chami (1994: 94–8; 1995) has seen its origins in 'Early Iron Age', or what he calls 'Early Iron-Working' (abbreviated to 'EIW'), wares produced by Bantu agriculturalists. Nevertheless, it is clear that the presence of Triangular Incised Ware, in first-millennium AD contexts on the East African coast, argues strongly for an indigenous origin for the settlements concerned. This probability is further strengthened by the work of Chami and Msemwa (1997) on

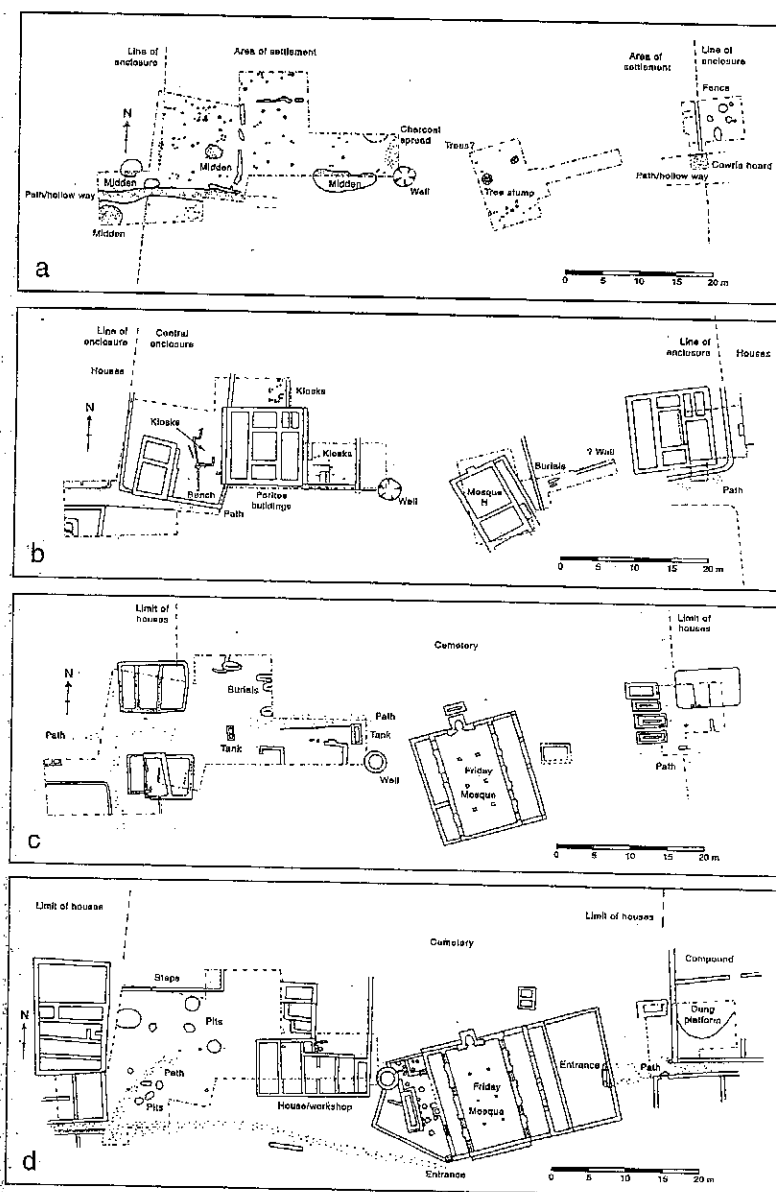


Fig. 6.10 Four of the ten stages in the evolution of Shanga, as identified during the excavation of its central area. a: Stage A, c. 760–780. b: Stage D, c. 920–1000. c: Stage G, c. 1075–1250. d: Stage J, c. 1375–1400. After Horton (1996: Figs. 296, 299, 302, 305).

the central coast of Tanzania, investigating sites dating from the first to the seventh century AD. They have found evidence of Early Iron-Working farmers both on the coast and islands and in the interior, with Triangular Incised Ware clearly overlying Early Iron-Working pottery at the important site of Kivinja that dates to the fifth and sixth centuries. Also at that site were imported ceramics from the Middle East and glass from the Graeco-Roman world, showing that both local and trans-oceanic trade had already developed by the middle of the first millennium. Confirmation that this was the case is provided by other sites, such as Unguja Ukuu, on Zanzibar Island, where again both forms of indigenous pottery have been found, in conjunction with a wide variety of imports dating to the fifth to seventh centuries, from India, the Middle East and even Roman sources. Indeed, both Triangular Incised Ware and Early Iron-Working pottery were also found at an eighth-century site near Dakawa, some 200 kilometres inland from the Tanzanian coast, along with indications of substantial iron production (Haaland 1995). Increasingly, therefore, archaeological evidence is providing verification of the pre-Islamic origins of the East African trading network.

Significantly, that network eventually embraced not only a substantial length of the East African coast and its immediate islands but also the Comoro Archipelago and Madagascar. In these places archaeological research has made considerable progress since the 1950s, demonstrating the commencement of settlement in the first millennium AD, most likely in about the eighth century (Sinclair 1995: 100–1; Allibert and Vêrin 1996). Linguistic evidence indicates that Malagasy, the most commonly spoken language in Madagascar, has its closest relatives in Indonesia (Adelaar 1996) but archaeological research has been unable to confirm the arrival of people from that source (Wright 1993: 659) and it seems likely that settlers from the East African coast were also important (Dewar 1996). By the late first millennium AD, iron-using villages on the Comoro Islands that depended on fishing and domesticated animals and plants were also trading with the Persian Gulf, East Asia and the coast of East Africa, as is shown by the ceramics, glass beads and glass vessels recovered from their sites (Wright 1984). Best known is the site of Dembeni, a large village of mud, wood and thatch buildings on the island of Maore (also known as Mayotte), its earliest occupation dating to about AD 850–880, and a later one to about the tenth to eleventh centuries (Allibert, Argant and Argant 1990). The occupants of such settlements, the larger of which were 3–6 hectares in size, were probably supplying tortoiseshell and marine shell, and perhaps other commodities, for the Indian Ocean trade. The presence of Triangular Incised Ware indicates contact with the East African coast, and items made from chlorite-schist, that must have come from Madagascar, show connections with that island also. Furthermore, the bones of house mice in several Dembeni Phase sites suggest that some of the ships visiting the Comoros were large, long-distance vessels (Wright 1992: 84–5). As Sinclair (1995: 101) has

claimed, the Comoro Islands 'were significant hubs of the western Indian Ocean trading systems, articulating Madagascar and the southern coasts of Mozambique with the East African coast, the Gulf and India'. In origin, these developments were pre-Islamic but Islam gradually became established as the settlements increased in size; the towns of Sima and Domoni, on the island of Nzwani, growing to about 8 hectares during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and to about 11 hectares during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Wright 1992: 124). By the eighteenth century the Comoros seem to have been characterized by fortified towns, like Itsandra and Ntsudjini on Ngazidja Island, which controlled adjacent territories (Damir 1988; Dahalani 1992).

Archaeological research has also been able to trace the socio-economic changes that led to urbanization and state formation in some parts of Madagascar. By the 1850s both processes seem to have been well advanced, as was recorded by the Reverend William Ellis (1859) during his visits to the island (Fig. 6.11). Amongst the most important early archaeological evidence is that from Kingany on the north-west coast of Madagascar, a town site with stone ruins that seems to have been occupied from the ninth or tenth century AD to about the sixteenth century, and some of whose inhabitants participated in the Indian Ocean trade (Vêrin 1986: 161–7). Subsequently, a town site on the island of Antsoheribory, in the same area, was occupied from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century and has yielded evidence of trading contacts with the Near East, the Far East and Europe (Wright *et al.* 1996: 55–66). Another important early town site is that of Mahilaka, further north along the same coast. Occupied from the tenth to the fifteenth century, this site had a walled area of more than 60 hectares, within which were a few stone structures but many others of less permanent materials (Radimilahy 1992; 1998; Wright 1993: 668). At its greatest extent, the population of Mahilaka has been estimated to have been in the range of 780–3000 and to have had wide trading connections, possibly exporting rock crystal, chlorite-schist and gold, as well as other products such as mangrove wood, copal, tortoiseshell and slaves. Rat bones from the site suggest plague, brought to the island by visiting shipping, as one possible cause of the town's abandonment (Radimilahy 1998: 110, 202–6, 208–11). Radiocarbon dates from sites in the Anosy area in the south-east of Madagascar show that even the more remote parts of the island were occupied by early in the second millennium AD (Rakotoarisoa 1998) but it seems to have been in the central highlands that the most remarkable socio-political developments took place, leading to the emergence of the Merina state by the eighteenth century. Ankadivory, near present-day Antananarivo, is one of many ditched settlements in this area and has been dated to about the thirteenth century. It has also produced evidence that by that time even the inland of Madagascar was in contact with the Indian Ocean trade (Wright and Rakotoarisoa 1990: 28–9; Sinclair 1991: 196–8).

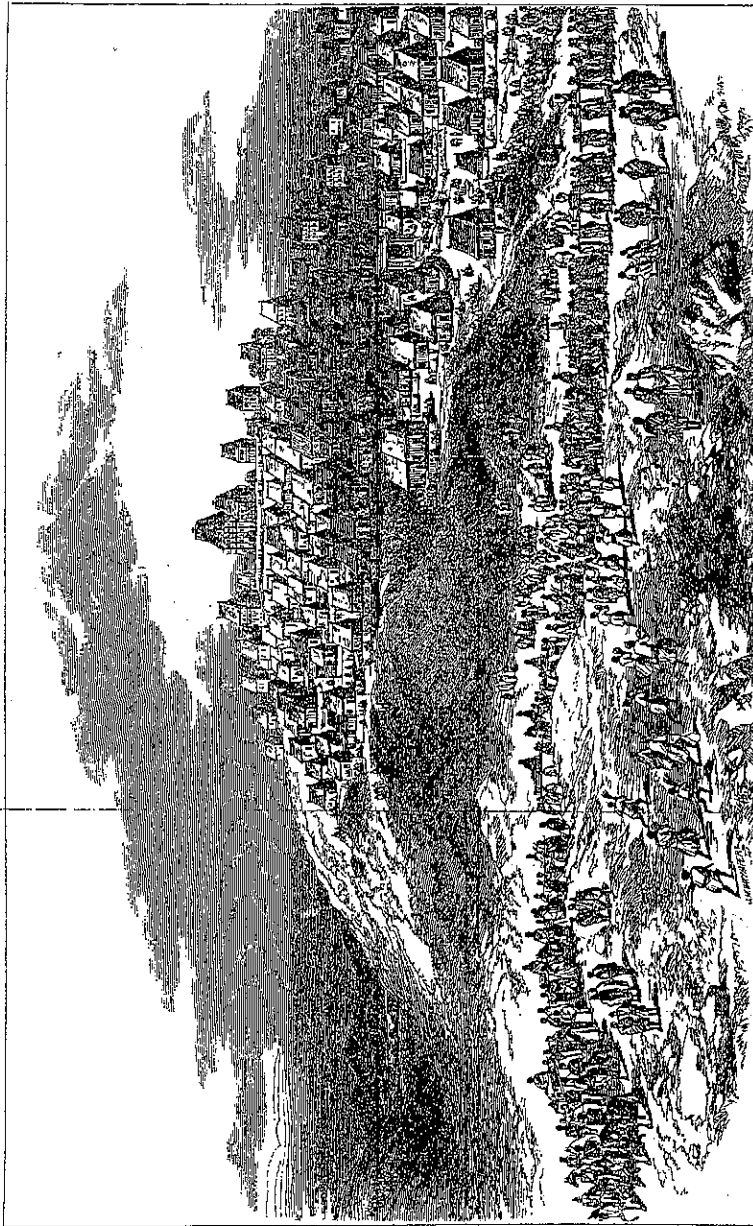


Fig. 6.11 Antananarivo, Madagascar, in the 1830s. Showing a royal procession passing along its eastern side. From Ellis (1859: 365).

Subsistence economy

It remains to examine the archaeological evidence reviewed above, to ascertain what can be learnt from it about the origins of cities and states on the East African coast and islands. The basis of these developments must have been the subsistence economy, so what does the archaeology have to tell us about this? In the past, archaeologists sometimes neglected this subject, probably because the ethnohistorical sources from the end of the fifteenth century onwards are so informative, and indeed it is these which have already been used to discuss the food resources available at the middle of the second millennium AD (p. 188). However, we cannot be sure that the descriptions in such sources can be applied to the end of the first millennium AD, unless we also make use of such archaeological evidence as is available. For example, the cultivation of sorghum in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is presumably attested by the recovery of carbonized sorghum from a layer attributed to Period Ib at Kilwa (Chittick 1974b: Vol. 1, 52–3). Also the early deposits at Kilwa produced plentiful evidence for the eating of fish and shellfish, while the filling of a well dated to the late thirteenth to fourteenth centuries produced the mandible of a very immature camel, an animal not now found on this coast and not recorded there historically (Chittick 1974b: Vol. 1, 28, 43, 98). The evidence from Chibuene is of rather more value, indicating the presence of sheep and cattle and the exploitation of fish and shellfish in the lower occupation level at this site, dating from the middle and late first millennium AD, although there is no direct evidence for plant husbandry (Sinclair 1982: 152, 162; 1987: 88; 1991: 190, 216). Similarly, at Shanga, botanical evidence appears to be lacking but the faunal record is substantial and highly informative. At this site seafood seems to have been particularly important and included fish of reef, inshore and (rarely) deep-sea type, dugong, turtles and shellfish. In addition there were domesticated cattle, sheep and goat, camel and chicken. Cats and dogs were also kept and the hunting of wild animals contributed a small part of the diet. Significantly, the black rat was present throughout the sequence, suggesting relatively dense human occupation and, as a vector of bubonic plague, perhaps one of the causes for the eventual abandonment of the site. It is probable that a mixed economy was practised at Shanga, although the absence of plant food evidence (presumably because of poor conditions of preservation) is a problem and both domestic animals and fish appear to have had only a minor role during the earliest periods (Horton and Mudida 1993; Horton 1996: 378–93). A broadly similar subsistence economy is suggested by the excavations at Manda, which have provided evidence of goat or sheep, of cattle, of domestic fowl and of the domesticated cat. In addition, dugong, turtles and fish were exploited. Camel was present and a small amount of land game was hunted. Again, this site seems to lack evidence for plant food (Chittick 1984: 215).

A more complete insight into diet has been provided by the sites of Dembeni, Old Sima and M'Bachile in the Comoro Islands. Excavations at these sites produced evidence of substantial use of fish, particularly from in or near the coral reefs, the hunting of turtles and of some wild animals and birds, and the keeping of domesticated sheep or goats, most probably goats. Importantly they also yielded botanical evidence for the cultivation of rice (*Oryza sativa*), millet (possibly *Setaria*), coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) and sesame (*Sesamum cf. indicum*) (Wright 1984: 48–54; Allibert, Argant and Argant 1990: 153). The site of Mahilaka, in Madagascar, has also provided a remarkable insight into subsistence, with evidence of rice cultivation and the use of coconut, the keeping of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, chicken, guinea fowl and ducks, and the hunting of wild animals and birds, as well as fishing, turtle catching and shellfish gathering (Radimilahy 1998: 195–9). Finally, the approximately thirteenth-century site of Ankadivory has produced evidence for the keeping of cattle in the central highlands of Madagascar (Sinclair 1991: 196).

This selection of evidence suggests that by late in the first millennium AD, when the earliest known of the coastal cities and towns were first settled (earlier sites could have been lost owing to coastline changes), there already existed a varied mixed economy in which the resources of both sea and land played a part. Livestock husbandry and fishing could between them have provided ample animal protein and, although the archaeological evidence is often lacking, plant food must also have made a significant contribution to the diet. In particular, it is likely that an important role was played by a number of plants originating in South-East Asia, that were introduced to East Africa possibly about the beginning of the first millennium. It is tempting to see the introduction of Asian rice, coconuts, bananas, sugar-cane and some other plants as a direct result of the settlement of Madagascar by Indonesians at about that time (Shepherd 1982; Ehret 1998: 277–9). In a paper that some regarded as controversial, Shepherd argued that the southern end of the East African coast, particularly the Comoro Islands, played an important early role in the development of the coastal culture. If this was so, then perhaps one may be justified in seeing the enhancement of the coastal subsistence economy by the South-East Asian food plants as a vital factor in the growth of the coastal settlements. As the archaeological evidence is beginning to suggest, rather than being peripheral to the African coast, Madagascar and the Comoro Islands may have been a gateway for new ideas. Whether such a view is justified or not, however, it is clear that by the second half of the first millennium AD, the subsistence economy of the East African coast must have been able to produce a surplus adequate to support a growth in social complexity. In particular, the environmental diversity of the coast, its islands and its hinterland probably allowed, and even encouraged, great flexibility in the subsistence economy. Thus, the camel bones that have been recovered from some coastal sites might be an indication of resource exchange with nomadic pastoralists of the dry interior.

Technology

Archaeological evidence from the East African coastal and island sites clearly indicates considerable technological sophistication. The main problem in interpreting that evidence is to determine how much of it originated from overseas trade, rather than from local expertise. Nevertheless, indigenous technology seems to have attained a remarkably high level. Particularly important were a range of metal-working skills. As might be expected, iron was both smelted and forged and evidence of one or both of these processes occurred, often at an early date, at Kilwa, Manda, Shanga and Chibuene, as well as at Dembeni and Old Sima in the Comoro Islands, and at Mahilaka in Madagascar. In addition, some of these sites produced evidence of working in copper or copper-base alloy, in the form of copper slag or of crucibles containing traces of copper, and there are also indications that gold, silver and lead were sometimes worked (Chittick 1974b; 1984; Wright 1984; Sinclair 1987; Horton 1996; Radimilahy 1998). An impressive variety of metal artefacts seems to have been manufactured on the coast and adjacent islands but it was perhaps the minting of coins that was most notable. These have been recovered from many coastal sites and were produced at Kilwa, Mafia, Zanzibar, Mogadishu and perhaps other places. Usually they were of copper or copper-base alloy, but over half of the coins found at Shanga are of silver (Brown 1996) and most of the over 2000 coins in the eleventh-century hoard found at Mtambwe Mkuu on Pemba Island are of silver (Horton, Brown and Oddy 1986). Also from East African coastal sites there are rather less common coins from other parts of the world of Islam and even from China, most of the gold coins recovered coming from the former source.

The most remarkable aspect of East African coastal technology, however, was undoubtedly seen in building craftsmanship. As well as a continuing tradition of working in timber, mud and thatch, considerable skills were developed in the construction of stone buildings. Coral was quarried, either from the offshore reefs or on land, and Horton (1996: 26–7) distinguishes between well-coursed walls of dressed pieces of *Porites solida*, from the first source, and rougher walls of coral rag from the second. Traces of quarrying for both materials have been found near Shanga and those for the *Porites* coral are of particular interest because they are underwater, implying a specialized knowledge of diving and of underwater quarrying (Horton 1986: 206). Both types of walling could be bonded with either mud or lime-mortar, the latter being obtained by burning coral and mixing sand with the lime produced. The use of lime-mortar seems to have become more common as time went on, and plaster for internal wall surfaces and rendering for external surfaces were also made with a similar lime base. Stone structures were built which were sometimes of considerable height, and scaffolding, presumably with lashed mangrove poles, seems to have been well understood. Roofs consisted usually of a

combination of mangrove rafters, stone and lime-mortar but they could also be supported with columns and beams or could consist of vaults or domes (Fig. 6.12). Doors and windows usually had fitted woodwork, most houses possessed internal pit-toilets and washing places, and drainage was provided both inside and outside of some buildings (Garlake 1966). Wells were dug to provide convenient water supplies. All of this implies considerable craftsmanship and specialization: there must have been quarrymen, lime-burners, stone-masons, plasterers and carpenters, to name only the most obvious. In addition, some knowledge of architectural skills was obviously present. Whatever the contributions to this overall expertise from alien sources, the bulk of the actual work must have been done by local craftsmen and it is worth pointing out that the so-called 'pillar tomb', that is so common on the East African coast, has no known parallels elsewhere.

A particularly important part of coastal technology must have been concerned with boat-building, although there is as yet no archaeological evidence to support this claim. Nevertheless, sewn boats were recorded on this coast by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, nearly 2000 years ago (Casson 1989: 9) and the Portuguese (who knew as much about boats as anybody) noted them with interest at the end of the fifteenth century (Ravenstein 1898: 26). All the materials needed to construct these boats were available on the East African coast and it is likely that the *dau la mtepe* and the *mtepe*, with their sewn hulls and matting sails, were in fact often constructed on this coast. Although we now have very few details of how they were

built (Chittick 1980; Prins 1982), the frequent graffiti of such boats, scratched into the wall plaster of houses and mosques up and down the coast, show how important they must have been to many people (Garlake and Garlake 1964; Chittick 1974b: Vol. 2, 266-7). It should be noted that boats constructed in the manner that these were stand up particularly well to the rough treatment of the frequent strandings caused by the character of much of the eastern coast. It is also apparent that some of them were of considerable size: in 1866 David Livingstone was able to have one loaded with 'six camels, three buffaloes, and a calf, two mules, and four donkeys' (Waller 1874: Vol. 1, 9). Furthermore, it seems that the people of the East African coast not only had developed the necessary skills to build these boats but also knew how to use them effectively. The evidence of frequent contact between Madagascar, the Comoro Islands, and the East African coast and islands, not to mention the probability that Indonesian seafarers reached Madagascar, implies a substantial knowledge of seamanship and of winds, currents, tides and weather conditions.

Of the variety of other crafts practised on the coast, probably the most important was the spinning and weaving of cotton cloth, suggested by the number of spindle-whorls which occur in contexts dated to the first half of the second millennium (for example Horton 1996: 337-41). There was also the making of salt by evaporating sea water, for which there is some rather unsatisfactory ninth- or tenth- to late twelfth- or thirteenth-century evidence at Mkadini on the Tanzanian coast (Chittick 1975). In addition, there was carving of ivory and bone, manufacture of shell beads and of semi-precious stone beads using rock crystal and carnelian (for example Horton 1996: 323, 332-3, 346-7, 349-50), and the production of a range of pottery including some with complex painted patterns and including lamps (Chittick 1974b). Of particular interest is evidence from Mahilaka that is thought to indicate glass-bead manufacture, probably by melting broken glass from imported items (Radimilahy 1998: 184, Plate 7.1d, h, j, k), and the possibility exists of similar activity at Shanga (Horton 1996: 332).

It seems that by the end of the first millennium AD there was already a sound technological basis on the East African coast. In the centuries that followed, that foundation was able to support an increasing complexity of technological expertise and this in turn must have led to an increasing functional specialization within coastal society.

Social system

The archaeological evidence on the eastern coast and islands is more explicit on the subject of social organization than is such evidence in some other parts of Africa. We are able to study the plans of a number of settlements, some of them walled, which range in size from villages to cities. The use of stone for some buildings has

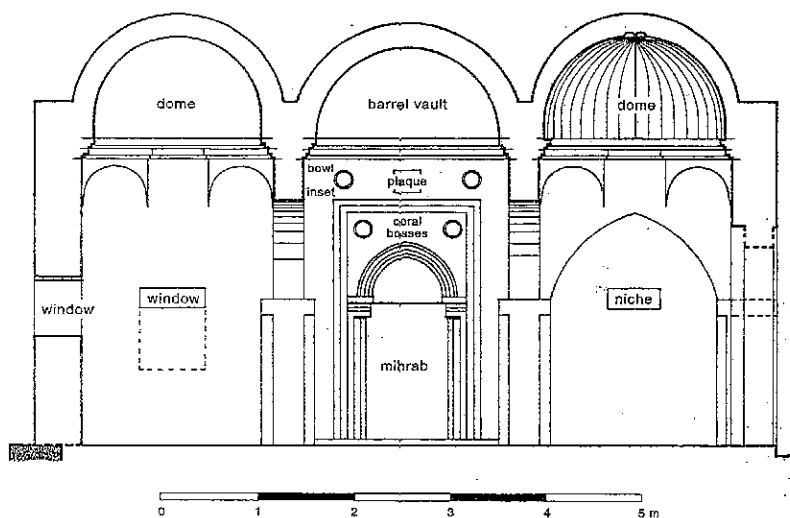


Fig. 6.12 Section through Small Domed Mosque, Kilwa. After Garlake (1966: Fig. 14).

left us with clear evidence of the progress which urbanization had made in the area prior to Portuguese contact. Apparently, this was a society where many people lived in towns or cities but where many also remained in the rural areas. One suspects that the level of functional specialization was much higher in the larger settlements, with the bulk of the inhabitants of smaller settlements still engaged in primary production. In addition, the degree of social stratification seems to have been greater in the larger settlements. This is suggested by the range in quality and size of the houses, both within the settlements and between different settlements. At the bottom end of the scale were mud, wood and thatch buildings, about which little is known, although the excavations at Shanga have shed some light on the subject (Horton 1996: 235–42). Above these were small stone houses of one to three rooms only but with the larger houses provided with toilets, like those at Takwa (Wilson 1982: Fig. 2). Higher again were multi-roomed houses with an enclosed courtyard, like some of those at Songo Mnara (Garlake 1966: Fig. 74). At the top of the scale were large multi-roomed houses with multiple courtyards and monumental features, such as imposing entrances, like the so-called palace at Gedi (Kirkman 1963: Fig. 2). Surely this is a classic example of social and economic stratification fossilized in archaeological evidence? The various houses suggest a society that ranged from slaves or lowly menials, to successful artisans, to wealthy merchants, to ruling merchant princes. There are also signs that social differentiation became more marked with time. For example, building in mud, wood and thatch was at first the most usual practice but building in stone gradually became more common. Also, the so-called palaces of Gedi and Songo Mnara probably originated as a group of interlocking houses belonging to one extended family. These could have been subsequently transformed into a 'palace', by the addition of monumental features, when the head of that family became the hereditary ruler of the settlement (Allen 1979: 24; also this book, p. 195). An indication of the elevated status to which some of these rulers eventually aspired is given by the coins bearing their names that were issued by various rulers, particularly during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Indeed, at least one ruler seems to have been outstandingly ambitious, if the luxury of the 'palace' of Husuni Kubwa at Kilwa is considered. Perhaps of more general importance, however, is the indication, both from the number of medium-to-large stone houses and from the wide use of imported ceramics, that there came into existence a socially superior merchant class comparable to the *wa-ungwana* class of recent Swahili towns and cities (Allen 1979; Donley 1982; Donley-Reid 1990). Indeed, the many stone tombs that were constructed along the East African coast have been interpreted as providing additional evidence of the existence of such a class (Wilson 1979).

It remains to consider the extent to which these social developments along the coast led to state formation. Little has been said on this subject in the present chapter, largely because the available archaeological literature offers comparatively

little relevant information. However, the existence of a few much larger settlements, and their geographical relationships to neighbouring settlements of medium or small size, suggest that some cities, for example Mogadishu, Pate, Malindi, Mombasa and Kilwa, controlled the territory around them, a possibility reinforced perhaps by the issue of coinage by some places. Indeed, the considerable prosperity apparent in the early fourteenth century at Kilwa has been interpreted as evidence of an extension of Kilwa's authority at that time, so that it included control of the gold trade from the Sofala area, far to the south in what is now Mozambique (Chittick 1977; on the problematic archaeology of Sofala see Liesegang 1972). A coin minted in Kilwa even got as far as Great Zimbabwe (Huffman 1972: 362 and Plate 1). It seems most likely that some of the east coast cities did function as small city states from early in the second millennium AD and that, as time went on, some of these city states came to dominate others. Documentary sources since the sixteenth century suggest a political pattern of this sort, with Zanzibar, for instance, controlling much of the coast during the greater part of the nineteenth century.

Population pressures

The distribution and density of old settlements and of settlement sites along the East African coast and on its islands suggest that prior to Portuguese contact a long, narrow coastal strip together with its adjacent islands supported a substantial population. Provided with both land and sea resources, with food supplies augmented by South-East Asian domesticated plants, and with fresh water available in many places, the coast and its islands must have contrasted strongly with the dry lands that characterized much of the African interior. Thus the coast could well have provided a stimulus to population growth but with nowhere for excess population to go, other than further along the coast or further out into its islands, for it is difficult to believe that coastal peoples would have been willing to adapt to the dry interior. In this way one can perhaps understand the long, narrow distribution of the East African coastal culture. However, the optimum coastal conditions, that must have been one factor in the development of this culture, were not limitless and to both the north and the south those conditions gradually petered out. In addition, even within the area of optimal attraction, soil character and water availability varied considerably, making some localities more attractive for settlement than others. In such circumstances, population pressures could well have been one of the factors that brought about the development of the coastal cities and city states. Two things suggest that such pressures did indeed exist. First, a significant number of settlements, on the coast itself and also in the Comoro Islands and in Madagascar, were protected by walls, suggesting that population levels had reached a point where competition for resources was causing inter-group conflict or threat of conflict. A particularly remarkable example is the fifteenth- to seventeenth-century fortified

site of Pujini, on Pemba Island, Tanzania, whose 'crenelated, fortified surrounding wall appears to have been a manifestation of, and contributor to, island tensions – political, economic, social' (LaViolette 1996: 81). Second, although archaeological evidence is so difficult to identify, the export of slaves from this coast does seem to have had a long although somewhat varied history (Horton 1996: 415–16), implying the existence of excess population that could be exploited as a source. Nevertheless, it is possible that most of the slaves came from inland rather than from the coast itself.

Indeed, the situation was probably more complex than often stated. The hinterland is not all dry, unattractive country. As has been pointed out (p. 187), cultivable fertile soils along the lower parts of some of the coastal rivers must have made important contributions to the coastal economy, so that Mogadishu for instance, although situated on a dry coast mostly unsuitable for cultivation, was largely maintained by the productivity of the Shibeli River area inland to its west (Dualeh 1996). That such interaction of coast and inland riverine plains was important in the past is indicated by the coastal and interior distribution of first-millennium AD Triangular Incised Ware in both Kenya and Tanzania (Abungu 1995; Chami 1995). It was this relationship of coastal and interior peoples that must have formed the basis of the trading networks that provided the commodities sought by the Indian Ocean trade (Mutoro 1998). Like the coast, however, the more productive inland areas were limited in extent and are quite likely to have experienced population pressures, particularly during periods of environmental stress. According to Herring (1979: 48), the eighth and ninth centuries AD could have been a period of severe drought in the interlacustrine regions, and it has also been suggested that there were dry conditions in Ethiopia and Equatorial Africa between about AD 500 and 800 (Hassan 1997: 219–20). Much more information on environmental history is now becoming available and it will be of some interest if it is found that there were indeed periods of reduced rainfall at about the time that the earliest of the settlements that grew into the coastal cities and towns were being established.

Ideology

As with the cities and states of the West African savanna (Chapter 4), Islam was the major ideological factor in the cities and states of the East African coast and islands. At many sites there is at least one stone-built mosque and, significantly, the main congregational mosque usually occupies a central position within each settlement. In addition, the care and expense that was lavished on the building of mosques reinforces the impression that Islam filled an important role in coastal life. The adoption of Islamic beliefs by East African coastal communities was undoubtedly of great significance to those communities. Islam was the faith of urban, mercantile, literate South-West Asia and its adoption brought East Africa

into a huge common market; in particular it ensured commercial and cultural intercourse with the Arab lands to the north. It is surely significant that in Swahili the word for 'civilization' is *ustaarabu*, often understood to mean 'becoming like an Arab' (Chittick 1971: 112; Jahadhmy 1981: 10). On the East African coast, to become like an Arab meant to follow Islam, to live in a stone house in a city, and to be involved in trade.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that Islam was the primary cause of urbanization and state development on the East African coast, whatever the extent of its later influence on those developments. As in the West African savanna, Islam seems to have arrived after the initial changes had already taken place. Thus, in the fourteenth century when ibn Battuta visited Kilwa, Islam had already been accepted there, but in the tenth century when al-Masudi visited the East African coast some at least of its occupants were clearly animists: 'Every man worships what he pleases, be it a plant, an animal or a mineral' (Freeman-Grenville 1975: 31–2, 16–17). The archaeological evidence now available from some sites confirms that Islam was usually adopted only some time after initial settlement. For example, the primary occupation at Shanga, dated to about AD 760–780, contained no evidence for Islam, although from the late eighth century onwards there was a succession of buildings which have been interpreted as mosques (Horton 1996: 394–406). At Gedi there may have been a much longer pre-Islamic period, because the site of the congregational mosque was probably occupied by houses until as late as the middle of the fifteenth century (Kirkman 1954: 8–9, 14). At Kilwa its excavator thought that Islam began to arrive in the eleventh to twelfth centuries (Chittick 1974b), although at Manda the same excavator thought it probable that some of the inhabitants were Muslim from the time of its earliest settlement in the ninth century (Chittick 1984: 218, but see Horton 1986 concerning the chronology of Manda). Overall, we can conclude that although Islam played a very big part in the developments on the East African coast, it did not necessarily inaugurate them. So far as ideological input was concerned, unknown animistic beliefs probably contributed substantially. The strength of those beliefs may be judged from the fact that East African Islam has remained markedly syncretic until recent times.

External trade

So considerable is the archaeological evidence for long-distance external trade that has been found in the East African coastal and island sites, that it has often dominated discussion of those sites and greatly influenced interpretations. The cities and city states of the East African coast and islands have been seen as a direct response to the growth of that trade. According to this now questioned view, the cities grew up as the trading bases of agents for overseas mercantile interests. As

such, they originated as colonial settlements of alien and sophisticated culture, clinging to the coast of a hostile continent, in which they had no interest other than the acquisition of primary products for export. In the long term, the settlements had little influence on the interior of the African continent and themselves were gradually Africanized as intermarriage took place between the colonists and the indigenes. In the process, however, African people adopted some aspects of the alien culture and there evolved that distinctive coastal culture which in recent times has come to be called Swahili.

Such an interpretation is now doubted by many people but it is nevertheless important to examine the extent to which the available archaeological evidence might or might not support it. Certainly, the evidence of long-distance, overseas trade is remarkable. The greater part of this consists of imported ceramics, material that is quite distinct from African potting traditions and can usually be assigned both to an area of origin and to an approximate date. At Kilwa, for example, the earliest deposits of the ninth and tenth centuries contained Islamic glazed wares that probably originated somewhere in the Persian Gulf area or were trans-shipped in that area. Although the types of ware changed with the passage of time, and the places from which they came also changed to some degree, such Islamic glazed wares continued to be imported till well after Portuguese contact. In addition, from about the thirteenth century, Chinese ceramics began to arrive in Kilwa; indeed from about the fourteenth century onwards they equalled or exceeded the quantity of Islamic glazed wares. It is probably the occurrence of these Chinese products, both at Kilwa and at other East African coastal sites (at Shanga for instance they occur throughout the sequence), that has most profoundly convinced archaeologists of the extent of the long-distance trade of this coast. No doubt the Chinese material was usually trans-shipped several times but the distance involved is still most impressive. However, imports other than ceramics have also been found in East African coastal sites. At Kilwa, for instance, glass vessels and beads of glass, carnelian and other semi-precious stones occurred widely distributed through time. Copper kohl sticks (metal rods for the application to the eyelids of antimony as a cosmetic) were probably also imported. The carnelian beads and perhaps the glass beads may have come from western India, the other items probably from various parts of the Islamic world (Chittick 1974b; Davison and Clark 1974). Furthermore, this whole collection of trade-goods consists only of those which happen to have survived in the archaeological record. As was the case with the trans-Saharan trade discussed in Chapter 4 (p. 141), one wonders about the imports that have left no trace. For instance, it is thought that cloth would have been one of the principal imports, particularly high-quality cloth and coloured cloth (Chittick 1977: 216). Such a commodity could have been drawn from a very wide area indeed. So extensive and substantial was East Africa's international trade that Islamic, Indian, Sri Lankan and Chinese coinage reached the

Swahili coast and, to further facilitate commercial transactions, local rulers struck their own coins.

Why did overseas merchants supply so many things to the East African coast and islands? What did they get in return? Basically, they were tapping the natural resources of the African coast and interior, as has already been discussed when examining the available resources of East Africa (pp. 188-9). These primary products included ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoiseshell, ambergris, gold, copper, iron, rock crystal, frankincense, myrrh, mangrove poles, ebony and other timbers, sandalwood and slaves, not to mention other commodities such as spices about which there is less certainty. Many of these exports would have come from deep in the African interior but the imported goods have not been found in the interior; with the notable exceptions of very small quantities of Chinese pottery of the type known as 'celadon', which reached the site of Great Zimbabwe in the fourteenth century, and of some later Chinese wares which have been found at other sites on and south of the River Zambezi (Chittick 1977: 216).

What sort of a trade could this have been that gathered so many African resources but gave nothing in exchange? The answer lies partly in the differential preservation of the archaeological evidence, for not only would imported cloth not have survived but we would know very little at all about the exports without historical sources. Nevertheless, this does not explain why imports that do survive in the archaeological deposits of the coastal sites, are not in general found in the interior: after all, Chinese ceramics are tough material. The only explanation that seems possible, is that the pattern of trade was more complex than a direct, simple exchange of overseas goods for products of the African interior. Chittick put his finger exactly on this problem, by distinguishing not two categories of goods that were traded, that is to say imports and exports, but four categories. These consisted of: (1) the African goods sought for export; (2) the goods imported for trade with the interior; (3) the goods imported for use in the coastal towns; (4) the goods produced in those towns for trade with the interior (Chittick 1977: 215). Thus, the East African coastal settlements were acting as entrepôts: that is to say as commercial centres of import, export, collection and distribution, at a more complex level than might be expected in a simple coastal trading town. Two sorts of imports arrived from overseas: cloth that could be traded into the interior and luxury goods that were sought by the more successful occupants of the coastal cities and towns for prestige purposes. These exotic manufactures, of which the ceramics and some other items are all that has survived, were probably restricted by both economic and social factors to the coastal elite. To trade with the peoples of the interior, the merchants of the coastal settlements used much of the cloth that had been imported from overseas but they also transported into the interior considerable quantities of cotton cloth manufactured in the coastal settlements. In addition, before the thirteenth century, beads of marine shell were manufactured on the

coast and large numbers of cowrie shells collected. Both of these were probably used for the inland trade, although imported glass beads seem to have taken the place of the shell beads in later times (Chittick 1977: 216).

It is also likely that the coastal communities traded some of their agricultural surplus into the interior, just as inland riverine cultivators must have traded their surplus both to the coast and to more immediate neighbours. Nomadic pastoralists, residual groups of hunter-gatherers and even the farmers of the drier areas would probably have welcomed such additions to their diet. Very likely they would also have welcomed salt that was probably produced in substantial quantities on the coast. In return for these various commodities, recipients in the inland gave the primary products that the coastal merchants sought and which they, in turn, exported to the lands overseas. Some indication of the possible antiquity of such contacts between the coast and the inland is provided by the seated burial excavated at the site known as Murrápania IV, near Nampula, deep in the interior of Mozambique. Dated to the beginning of the first millennium AD, the burial was associated with an elephant tusk and with pottery decorated with marine-shell impressions (Sinclair 1991: 188).

It should be observed that a key factor in this somewhat complex pattern of trade was local input, of primary products and manufactures that originated from the coast itself. Environmental diversity and the consequent unevenness of resource distribution must have necessitated the early development of local exchange systems on the East African coast and between it and its hinterland. In particular, coastal trading in small vessels could be expected to have developed early on a coast that was generally suited to inshore navigation. Some indication of this local trade network was found at Kilwa, where stone vessels made of distinctive chlorite-schist appeared from about the eleventh to twelfth centuries onward. These are thought to have originated probably in Madagascar (Chittick 1974b: Vol. 1, 237). In addition, it was no doubt because of such a local, coastwise trading network that Kilwa was able to profit from the export of gold, from the Zimbabwe Plateau, by southern Mozambique coastal settlements. Indeed, it seems that the more successful of the coastal cities, like Kilwa, were successful not only because of their location on trade-routes connecting the interior to overseas markets but also because of their location on coastal trade-routes which enabled them to act as collecting points where local products could be bulked and as distribution points from which prestigious imports could be dispensed. Horton (1987b) wrote of what he called 'The Swahili Corridor', stressing movement of goods along the coast, but Sinclair (1995: 107) preferred the idea of a 'Swahili trading wheel', with its hub located in different places at different times, such as the Comoro Islands, Kilwa or Zanzibar. Such a circular trading network, or a series of such networks, may have linked the long East African coastal strip to the offshore islands and to

Madagascar, as well as to parts of the African interior such as the Zimbabwe Plateau, and then linked the whole complex system into the Indian Ocean trade.

Thus, it is probably not the case that the East African towns and cities resulted simply from the development of external trade with overseas markets. Certainly such trade had a substantial influence on their subsequent history but that trade was only part of a complex network involving local exchange systems that almost certainly pre-dated the overseas connections. As to the origins of these settlements, the situation was probably far more complicated than has sometimes been claimed. Trade was obviously a factor of some importance but to treat the settlements as alien trading colonies is to ignore the existence of a number of other factors that, as we have seen, suggest a basically indigenous origin.

Conclusion

The processes of urbanization and state formation on the East African coast and adjacent islands have sometimes been treated as though they resulted from a classic case of external stimulus. In particular, the larger settlements of this coast have been regarded as Islamic trading cities, founded by colonists who originated from the Persian Gulf area. Such a view has held that this coast was significant only as the edge of the wide Indian Ocean trading world, to which it supplied the products of the African interior and from which it received some of the products of the most sophisticated cultures of that time. Unfortunately, this interpretation has been arrived at by looking at the results rather than at the causes of the remarkable East African coastal developments.

Obviously external trade was extremely important to the settlements of this coast; no doubt there were some mercantile colonists from outside. But what was there that already existed on this coast to attract such attention? This question cannot be answered by excavating the more remarkable stone-built settlements of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, which is where so much of the archaeological field research on this coast has been concentrated. It is doubtful if it can even be answered by excavating the important settlement deposits of the ninth and tenth centuries, that are now commanding more attention. The answer must lie in the investigation of the coastal settlement archaeology of the last millennium BC and the first millennium AD, a task that archaeologists have only recently begun to tackle. In addition, the large coastal settlements of the first half of the second millennium AD would undoubtedly be better understood if they could be viewed in the context of the whole settlement pattern of which they formed a part: in short, archaeologists have to look for and investigate the smaller settlements that were contemporary with such places as Kilwa, or Gedi, or Shanga. Already there are indications that, when these things are done, it will be found that the indigenous

contribution to cultural development on the East African coast was more substantial than previously thought and that the origins of the East African coastal culture were African-not Asiatic. We have seen that there probably existed a strong subsistence base, capable of producing a surplus, encouraging complex local exchange networks. There is also the possibility that the introduction of the South-East Asian food plants had a catalytic effect on coastal cultural evolution. To these things should be added the existence of a sophisticated technology, that encouraged functional specialization, and there should also be added the possibility of complex population pressures within increasingly hierarchical societies, whose socio-economic order could be legitimized first by indigenous animism and later by Islam. As yet, the archaeological evidence is limited but surely it is significant that, during the second half of the first millennium AD, similar locally made pottery was in use both at widely separated coastal settlements and in parts of the interior? It is also significant that some early coastal sites show a gradual change from construction in mud, wood and thatch to stone and that some of the later coastal sites remained substantially settlements of mud, wood and thatch buildings, some of the less important ones almost entirely so. In addition, so widespread were these coastal and island settlements that a really massive immigration would have to be invoked if they are to be explained as alien foundations. It seems reasonable to conclude that the large settlements of the East African coast and islands were not merely the edge of an outside world but the centre of remarkable cultural developments that were of African origin, although subsequently incorporating substantial foreign elements.

Chapter 7

A question of context: Great Zimbabwe and related sites

Great Zimbabwe is one of the best-known and perhaps one of the most ill-used of the archaeological sites of Africa. Its fame is such that it has given its name to the country in which it is situated, the country formerly known as Rhodesia and before that as Southern Rhodesia. Its ill usage has had both intellectual and physical dimensions and started at the moment that it first became known to Europeans. The first such visitor was a German geologist, Carl Mauch, on 3 September 1871. After giving a careful account of the impressive stone ruins that he had seen, Mauch felt it necessary to explain their presence deep in the African interior and did so by associating them with King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Summers 1963: 19). Perhaps it is understandable that a nineteenth-century European, flushed with the excitement of something new and unexplained, should grasp at such an unlikely but respectable biblical explanation (which had already been used in the seventeenth century by the Portuguese writer João dos Santos, for stone ruins on Mount Fura in northern Zimbabwe (Theal 1964: Vol. 7, 275-6)). Unfortunately, however, the myth of alien origin for the Great Zimbabwe buildings was to survive for a long time, even surfacing as a political issue in the troubled period of the 1960s and 1970s (Garlake 1973: 209-10). This was probably because such a belief became psychologically essential for some of the European colonial settlers of this part of Africa. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the whole African colonial experience was the attempted denial to African peoples of their own cultural heritage, of which the attribution of Great Zimbabwe to outside influence, without a shred of evidence, must be the classic example.

This is not the place to discuss the long controversy about whether the origins of Great Zimbabwe were exotic or indigenous. There was never any doubt about its African origins in the minds of those who really understood the archaeological evidence and the whole subject has, in any case, been discussed extensively by others (for example, Summers 1963; Garlake 1973; 1978a; Mahachi and Ndoro 1997). The controversy has been mentioned here because it has influenced so much of the research that has been conducted at this famous site. Intellectually, it has dictated the questions that have been asked by researchers; physically, it has sometimes occasioned both excavations and restoration work that were conducted in such a way as to destroy much of the archaeological evidence, without allowing it to yield the information that it must have contained. Excavations by Theodore Bent in