CHAPTER 4.1

THE ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE EASTERN AFRICAN COAST

STEPHANIE WYNNE-JONES AND JEFFREY FLEISHER

Introduction

The archaeology of the eastern African coast over the past 1,500 years is by default the archaeology of Islam. This region has a long-standing community of believers and a deep history of entanglement with ideas, objects, and people from Islamic societies around the Indian Ocean rim (Horton 1987a; Insoll 2003; LaViolette 2008; Pouwels 1987). The current inhabitants of what is often called the "Swahili Coast" are today practicing Muslims, living in Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and the Comoros Islands (Horton and Middleton 2000; Wynne-Jones 2016); they trace their religious roots back hundreds of years, to the first centuries of Islam. Archaeology has shown they are right to do so, with evidence for Muslim populations from as early as the 8th century CE and an unbroken tradition along the coast since that time.

Yet the study of Islamic society on the eastern African coast is complicated, not least by a lack of direct research aimed at understanding Islam. In addition, there is only a very sparse historical record written by outsiders and visitors to the region whose accounts are decidedly partial (Sutton 2018). This means that evidence for Islamic life in the deeper Swahili past relies heavily on the testimony of archaeology and the material record: the potential for an "Islamic archaeology" is immense (although see Pouwels 1987 for a detailed consideration of east African Islam from a historical perspective). Nevertheless, only a few scholars have attempted to engage directly with Islam, primarily focusing on the timing and mode of conversion and the particular sect of Islam that might be identified. This has been important—even

transformative—work, positioning the eastern African coast firmly within the dar al-Islam from earliest times and dismissing any suggestion that Islam might have been practiced exclusively by immigrant settlers from the Arab world. In this chapter we therefore review briefly this explicitly Islam-focused research and what it has contributed to our knowledge of the coastal past. We then move on to consider how a broader archaeology of Islam might be drawn from more mundane archaeologies of the coast through the objects and practices of daily life among the majority population.

Conversion and Presence

Histories of East African Islam

The presence of Muslims on the eastern African coast can be traced in historical sources from the 10th century onward. These glimpses come via a series of travel accounts and geographies written by Arab visitors since at this time there was no written historical tradition in eastern Africa (Freeman-Grenville 1962). The ways that outsiders refer to coastal populations are varied and opaque, and their accounts are colored by their prejudices against African peoples (compare Insoll 1994 on a similar phenomenon in western Africa). Yet, by 916 CE, al-Masudi writes of a Muslim community at a town called Qanbalu, generally thought to refer to the site of Ras Mkumbuu on Pemba, or to Pemba Island itself (Kirkman 1959). These Muslims were singled out but were definitely identified as part of the "Zanj" population he describes elsewhere. Otherwise his account is mostly restricted to detail on the trade goods and activities of coastal communities who supplied the markets of Oman, China, and India with materials such as ivory, ambergris, and leopard skins. Al-Masudi's account therefore sets up a picture that is reflected across the archaeology of east African Islam; it contains only very slight direct information on Islamic adherence but abundant evidence for the integration of the coast into Indian Ocean networks dominated by Islamic traders from which we might infer knowledge and practice of Islam.

Further detail on east African Muslims does not appear until the 14th century and the account of Ibn Battuta, who describes Muslim towns along the coast at 1331 (Freeman-Grenville 1962: 27–32). Although it is possible that Ibn Battuta did not actually travel to East Africa (Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch 2003), he relays stories about Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Kilwa Kisiwani, each of them towns at which a Muslim ruler and majority population were to be found. At the time of his visit, all of these communities were practicing Sunni. Ibn Battuta's account is the richest description of life in Swahili towns prior to the 15th century and describes interactions with notable leaders there. As well as testifying to the presence of Sunni populations at these coastal towns, he provides information on aspects of life that illustrate the role of Islam.

Yet it is from the 16th century, when the Portuguese arrived on the eastern coast of Africa, that the richest historical information pertains (Prestholdt 1998; Vernet 2005). Portuguese chroniclers were responsible for transcribing the indigenous *Kilwa Chronicle* at that time, as well as recording their own observations of coastal society. The *Kilwa Chronicle* found in the Portuguese sources is the earliest source for the "Shirazi" traditions, which are found in indigenous histories from towns along the coast; many other chronicles were documented in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when much of the eastern African coast was under the colonial authority of Germany and then Great Britain (Spear 1984; Pawlowicz and LaViolette 2013). These traditions relate that the towns of the Swahili coast were founded by Persian merchant princes from Shiraz, who sailed along the coast founding seven towns. They probably relate to long-standing connection between the eastern African coast and greater Islamic world and, in particular, to first-millennium connections with merchants from the Persian Gulf (Pouwels 1984). The *Chronicles* might perhaps have some relevance to the movement of Islam to eastern Africa, and thus reflect stories about how Islam and Islamic practice came to be prominent on the coast through interaction with foreign merchants and religious leaders (Pouwels 1984, 1987; Horton and Middleton 2000). The complexity of the Shirazi parts of these *Chronicles* should caution any scholar against seeking to apply them as historical accounts (Saad 1979). For example, the *Kilwa Chronicle* claims that Persian refugees were met by a Muslim already on the island and that a mosque had already been constructed. At the very least, these stories indicate complex and varied local experiences with Islam and foreign travelers (Allen 1993).

Hadrami immigration and links to Yemen developed apace in the 18th century, contributing to the growth and dominance of Shafi'i teachings on the coast, with a powerful center at the Riyadha in Lamu (Bang 2003, 2014). This growth was also understood as a reconnection of family ties in Yemen and Oman, suggesting earlier migrations and existing Shafi'i connections, yet, before the 18th century, they are poorly documented and difficult to see. The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed the expansion of a textual tradition that encompassed the eastern African coast, involving the circulation of Islamic texts, so this phase is better documented. Omani colonialism of the late 17th century onward brought Ibadi Islam to the coast, but this stayed largely with Omani populations and new converts (Martin 1971, 1975; Horton 2013); it became a point of distinction between the newer arrivals and older Shirazi groups who remained Sunni (Prins 1961; Middleton 1992; Glassman 1995).

Identifying Islam Through Archaeology

Most explicitly "Islamic" archaeology on the eastern African coast has focused on locating a Muslim population and identifying the sect to which they might have belonged (see summary in Insoll 2003). The latter is often a proxy for understanding the timing and direction of conversion of African populations by linking to known Shi'ite or Sunni centers in the Persian Gulf and Hadramawt.

For the earliest excavators, whose work comprises the majority of the archaeology done on the coast, Swahili towns were in themselves evidence for Islam. The eastern African coast is dotted with a series of towns known collectively as "stonetowns," but actually built of coral and lime (Figure 4.1.1). The most prominent of these today are Lamu, Zanzibar Old Town, and Mombasa, all of which were important during the 18th and 19th centuries due to Omani colonial settlement. These towns are also the heirs to a much longer tradition of Swahili stonetowns that began in the 11th century, themselves often built on the foundations of first-millennium settlements without stone architecture (LaViolette and Wynne-Jones 2018). This urban tradition is also an Islamic tradition. The standing remains of these past towns evoke parallels with Islamic towns elsewhere around the Indian Ocean and Red Sea; they contain mosques, stone houses, and tombs; and the artifactual record demonstrates a long-standing connection with Islamic trade networks through quantities of imported ceramics, glass, and beads (Horton and Middleton 2000; Wynne-Jones 2016). The presence of Muslims was assumed by the first archaeologists in this region. Indeed, they interpreted these ruins as relating to immigrant traders settling on the coast (Kirkman 1964; Chittick 1975).

Early excavations at Gede (Kirkman 1954) and Kilwa Kisiwani (Chittick 1974) thus set the scene for an Islamic archaeology that sought to trace the chronology and origins of Muslim urbanism on the coast. These works set the agenda for interpreting coastal towns as the ruins of immigrant settlements, but also established some of the priorities for coastal archaeology that continued for many years. Excavations explored the foundations and occupation of the major stone buildings, which at Kilwa included the Great Mosque (Figure 4.1.2) as well as the palace of Husuni Kubwa. Here the *Kilwa Chronicle* provided a guide to the history of the site, and much effort went into reconciling the archaeology of this African settlement with the chronology and the list of rulers found in the *Chronicle* (Chittick 1965; Freeman-Grenville 1957).

At both sites, excavation recovered evidence for a long-standing urban occupation with Indian Ocean connections from at least the 11th century. What distinguished Kilwa from Gede was stratigraphic evidence of occupation extending back to at least the 9th century CE. Chittick carried out two extremely large-scale excavations at Kilwa. Excavations at the Great Mosque served to detail several phases of construction and destruction, including an early prayer hall of the 11th century and a large domed extension during the 14th century. At Husuni Kubwa, excavations recovered a palace structure with associated audience courts and spaces probably constructed for the storage of trade goods and perhaps the conduct of trade.

More recently, one of the most consistent scholarly contributors to the archaeology of Islam on the eastern African coast has been Mark Horton. His research at Shanga transformed the landscape of coastal archaeology conceptually and methodologically (Horton 1987b, 1996). In effect he developed a new Islamic archaeology, exploring the chronology and development of Islamic practice as a component of urban life in context, rather than assuming the population were Islamic by default (Horton 1991). Although his starting assumptions were quite different from his predecessors, his objectives at Shanga mirrored those of other stonetown excavations and the

FIGURE 4.1.1 Map of the eastern African coast, showing locations of prominent towns.

FIGURE 4.1.2 The Great Mosque at Kilwa Kisiwani.

investigation of the Friday mosque formed the core of the work. Yet this was accompanied by a broader approach to life within the town and the investigation of less grand houses as well as public spaces.

Horton began with an assumption that the Swahili had indigenous roots—he had been influenced by research by historians and linguists of the time who were beginning to build the argument against a colonial thesis for Swahili origins (e.g., Nurse and Spear 1984; Allen 1993). This research still stands as the model sequence by which urban development along the coast is understood. His excavations revealed the indigenous development of a coastal village with trade connections, one dominated by early wattle and daub structures that were not just precursors, but ancestors, of the stone architecture that would be constructed later. Excavations revealed continuities in the architectural footprint between earlier and later buildings and documented the gradual evolution of an indigenous architecture. The research also explored the town's ongoing and changing involvement in trade through quantities of imported goods (calculated in absolute quantities), local craft practices, and how the layout of the town was related to its social organization.

Horton's excavations in and below the Friday mosque at Shanga likewise changed our understanding of the history of coastal Islam. Beneath the standing ruins of the 14th-century Friday mosque, Horton documented a series of earlier mosques dating back to

the mid-8th century CE, giving evidence for the presence of Muslims in the earliest coastal communities. This mosque is discussed in more detail later.

Sectarian Distinctions

A range of sources, including historical documents and features of mosque architecture, have been used to explore possible sectarian distinctions among early east African Islamic communities, including Shi'a, Ibadi, and Sunni/Shafiʿi. Horton has offered a number of arguments about the earliest Islamic communities in east Africa and their sectarian distinctions. During the late first and early second millennium, he identifies architectural features that might indicate Ibadi communities. These may be linked to the first Imamate situated in Oman (750–790 CE; Horton 2013; Horton and Middleton 2000: 64–7). Ibadis, Horton (2017: 255) argues, built modest mosques with "shallow mihrabs, lacking minarets and minbars" that resonated with their "austere egalitarian ethos." Such *mihrabs*, which are set into a double-thickness *qibla* wall (rather than extending to the exterior) can be found in mosques at Ras Mkumbuu and Chwaka on Pemba during the 11th century and at a contemporary mosque on Sanje ya Kati near Kilwa. A final example is on a side aisle constructed at Tumbatu mosque in the 13th century, possibly—argues Horton—to cater to Ibadi refugees fleeing Kilwa.

Other evidence might suggest the presence of Shi'a communities on the coast during this period. The *Kilwa* and other coastal *Chronicles* describe the earliest settlers as Muslims fleeing the Middle East, and Horton (2017: 255) has argued that such refugees might be "Shiʿa groups living in the Yemen from the late eighth century onwards who were periodically oppressed by the Abbasid caliphate." The Shirazi traditions themselves might be a "cultural idea" (Horton 2017: 262) related to Shi'a Islam that was adopted by coastal towns: the town of Shiraz, in the Persian Gulf, was significant during the late 10th and early 11th centuries, under the control of the Shi'a Buyids, the period during which Shirazi-style mosques were built at a number of settlements along the coast. The development of different mosque styles, especially in the shape and embellishment of the *mihrab*, may also provide clues to sectarian differences. In the 11th and early 12th centuries, there were two *mihrab* styles on the coast (Horton 2004: 81): a plain style with few decorations and a more elaborate one that included inscriptions, carved coral, and inset ceramics. The former might be related to Sunni-Shafi'i groups while the latter associate with Shi'a.

By the 14th century, however, most coastal communities were Sunni/Shafiʿi, based on the observations of Ibn Battuta (Freeman Grenville 1962: 27–32). Horton argues that this sectarian transformation along the coast was "probably the result of missionary activity, and the movement of noble or sharifian families from Arabia from the twelfth century onwards" (Horton 2017: 256; see also Martin 1975). However, as Horton notes, the "success of Sunni Islam may have disguised the much more heterodox situation in earlier centuries," hints of which can only be found in archaeological remains.

From Islamic Presence to Islamic Practice

The archaeology of Islam in east Africa is thus understood primarily through particular assemblages of architecture, features, and artifacts, featuring mosques, burials, and locally minted coinage. Each of these sources has provided evidence about the origins and emergence of Islam on the coast and has allowed archaeologists to chart the growth of Islamic communities. This section discusses each of these data classes and how they have been used to mark the origins and presence of Islamic communities. However, going forward, the archaeology of Islam in east Africa will need to move beyond its emphasis on origins, documenting the centrality of Islam by focusing on the grandest mosques, and simple tracing of foreign influences in coastal materials and practices. There is an effort in some research in Islamic archaeology to reiterate and trace the way that Swahili towns and their Islamic practices were part of the larger Islamic world and then to use these connections to explain how Islam must have been practiced or experienced on the coast itself. While there is no doubt that the former is true, researchers must frame east African Islam within the larger regional and Indian Ocean world of which it was a part. However, there needs to be greater research attention paid to the way that Islam and Islamic practice structured daily life on the coast to begin to reveal unique and complicated Islamic Swahili pasts; this will not be accomplished by excavating the Friday mosque alone or reporting on only imported goods.

Mosques

The most informative line of inquiry for understanding the emergence of Islam and Islamic practice in eastern Africa has been the archaeology that has documented the architecture of east Africa's mosques. As discussed, this is partly because of the history of research here, which has meant that the mosque has often been the best-excavated part of the site. Mosques are also the most unequivocal evidence for a Muslim population and aspects of Islamic practice.

Mosques in east Africa are part of a distinctive and coherent architectural tradition. Although aspects of them *evoke* architecture in the Arabian Peninsula, they are not directly comparable with structures elsewhere and instead should be seen as a regional tradition (Garlake 1966; Horton 1991). The regional aspects of this tradition are reinforced by its great diversity, part of it chronological, part functional. What we understand about the development of Islamic practice comes primarily from the development of mosques and mosque architecture: the sizes of mosques are often regarded as proxies for the size of the Islamic community, and both the permanence of the building materials and the style of the mosque have been interpreted as indicating local adherence to Islam as well as the influences from particular Islamic regions outside of Africa.

The evolution of the Friday mosque at Shanga is crucial to this interpretation. Mark Horton's excavations there in the 1980s revealed a stratified sequence of mosques at the center of the settlement, including nine re-buildings from 780–1000 (Figure 4.1.3). The first phases, from 780–920, included small mosques of wattle and daub (Buildings A-E), with close-set rammed posts and mud walls. A small *mihrab* is evident by 850. After this mosque, Building F, Horton documents a period of transformation, in which the mosque is rebuilt first as a wooden structure (Building G), with large posts, and then from coral (Building H), at approximately 920. Building H was built with Porites, a form of coral mined from coastal reefs. This mosque was in use for less than 100 years, and was then replaced by a larger Porites structure at approximately 1000. Horton refers to this as the first "Friday mosque" at Shanga, arguing that it was a "building large enough to accommodate the majority of the male adult population" of the settlement and thus that it indicates majority conversion. This mosque forms the basis for the Friday mosque that endured at Shanga until 1425 when the site was ultimately abandoned. On multiple occasions during these 400 years, the structure was enlarged and embellished to accommodate an ever-expanding town population and new architectural styles. At approximately 1050 there was a dramatic destruction episode at Shanga in which buildings of Porites were destroyed and robbed of their materials. The mosque itself remained intact. Over the following 200 years, the site was rebuilt (Horton calls it an "urban renewal"), with the mosque expanding in size. At first, houses and other structures continued to be built of wattle and daub, but after 1250, houses were rebuilt with coral rag, a rubbly limestone quarried on land from the remains of ancient coral reefs.

This sequence is interesting for many reasons. Of course it is fascinating because we see evidence for Islam being practiced as early as 780 on the eastern African coast, merely a century after the death of Prophet Muhammad. We also see the development of the mosque in lock-step with the process of urban evolution, yet it becomes comparatively more prominent as time goes on. At the start, the central position of the 8th-century mosque in the settlement testifies to its importance, but it was only large enough to accommodate a small group of devotees. Horton (1996; Horton and Middleton 2000) has therefore developed a model of Islamic conversion revolving around a small initial group of (foreign?) Muslims and a gradual conversion of the wider population. The mosque also shared the central space with several other structures, including large structures interpreted as "clan houses," or at least as communal spaces, as well as kiosks and less permanent structures. The clan structures were also constructed in Porites coral, but, by the period of urban renewal, these were dismantled, and the central space was more thoroughly Islamized, as home not only to the Friday mosque but to Islamic burials and tombs.

For a long time, the early mosque at Shanga remained the only pre-1000 mosque known on the coast. There are now several possible contenders. Geophysical survey at Unguja Ukuu on Zanzibar (Fitton and Wynne-Jones 2017) and at Tumbe, Pemba (Fitton 2017) has shown large structures at both sites that, in scale and orientation, may have been early mosques. At Ras Mkumbuu on Pemba Island, Horton has found evidence for an (undated) wattle and daub structure beneath an early stone mosque, itself

FIGURE 4.1.3 Mosque sequence at Shanga.

Courtesy of Horton (1996), reproduced with permission.

dated to the early 10th century. The role of these early, earthen mosques and the identity of the worshippers are still quite unclear. They may have served visitors to the region, a small population of local Muslims, or both. Horton suggested that the early presence of Muslims at Shanga led to a population of local converts and that it was these east African Muslims who then spread down the coast founding "Shirazi" mosques, leading to the emergence of a series of 10th- and 11th-century Porites mosques. The possible early mosques on Zanzibar and Pemba might make this less tenable, suggesting instead equivalent processes at multiple locations.

What is more easily discerned in the archaeology of mosques is the widespread conversion represented by the establishment of Friday mosques built of Porites at settlements along the coast in the 11th century. At this time, coral-built mosques in the "Shirazi" style are seen from Lamu to the Comoros, presumably reflecting the existence of an Islamic community. Key features of these mosques include a rectangular prayer hall; a floor laid on raised, white sand deposits; four columns/pilasters along the side walls; three doorways on the east, west, and south sides with external steps; and a deeply recessed and decorated *mihrab*. An excellent and perhaps quintessential example of this style of mosque can be seen at the site of Kizimkazi at the southern tip of Zanzibar (Figure 4.1.4). This mosque can be dated by a Kufic inscription on the *mihrab*, marking its construction date as 500 AH (1107 CE). Later (regional) additions to the coastal mosque tradition include the domed style that may have been developed at Kilwa in the 14th century—similar mosque elements can be found farther north, apparently influenced by developments at Kilwa. The Friday mosque at Chwaka on Pemba is a good additional example.

There is also ample evidence that links mosques, Islamic practice, and local power. For example, the *Kilwa Chronicle* documents how the 14th-century Sultan and wealthy merchants debated over who would renovate the Friday mosque and thus gain prominence locally (Sutton 1998, 2018). Similarly, Fleisher (2010) has also argued that embellishments of imported pottery within the Great Mosque at Chwaka represent the active efforts of a leader to reiterate local power and authority. Evidence for feasting has been found in spatial association with the mosque at 15th-century Vumba Kuu, Kenya (Wynne-Jones 2010). Additionally, grand mosques were often found adjacent to grand houses, creating a spatial linkage between political economic power and religious authority. The entrance to the Great Mosque at Kilwa Kisiwani faced what Chittick called the Great House, a large palace structure; a similar situation exists at Songo Mnara, where the Friday mosque (which was not the original, central mosque) has steps that face directly onto those of one of the largest houses (Wynne-Jones and Fleisher 2016). Thus, powerful Swahili residents built a clear spatial link between their houses and the Friday mosque, structures that were likely built with elite sponsorship. In this way, local townspeople would enact, through their daily movements associated with Islamic prayer, the structures of authority in the town.

A final example of how archaeology can begin to explore the social life of Islam more fully in Swahili towns comes from our research at Songo Mnara. Most excavations of mosques have focused on the largest, most elaborate mosques within towns, even

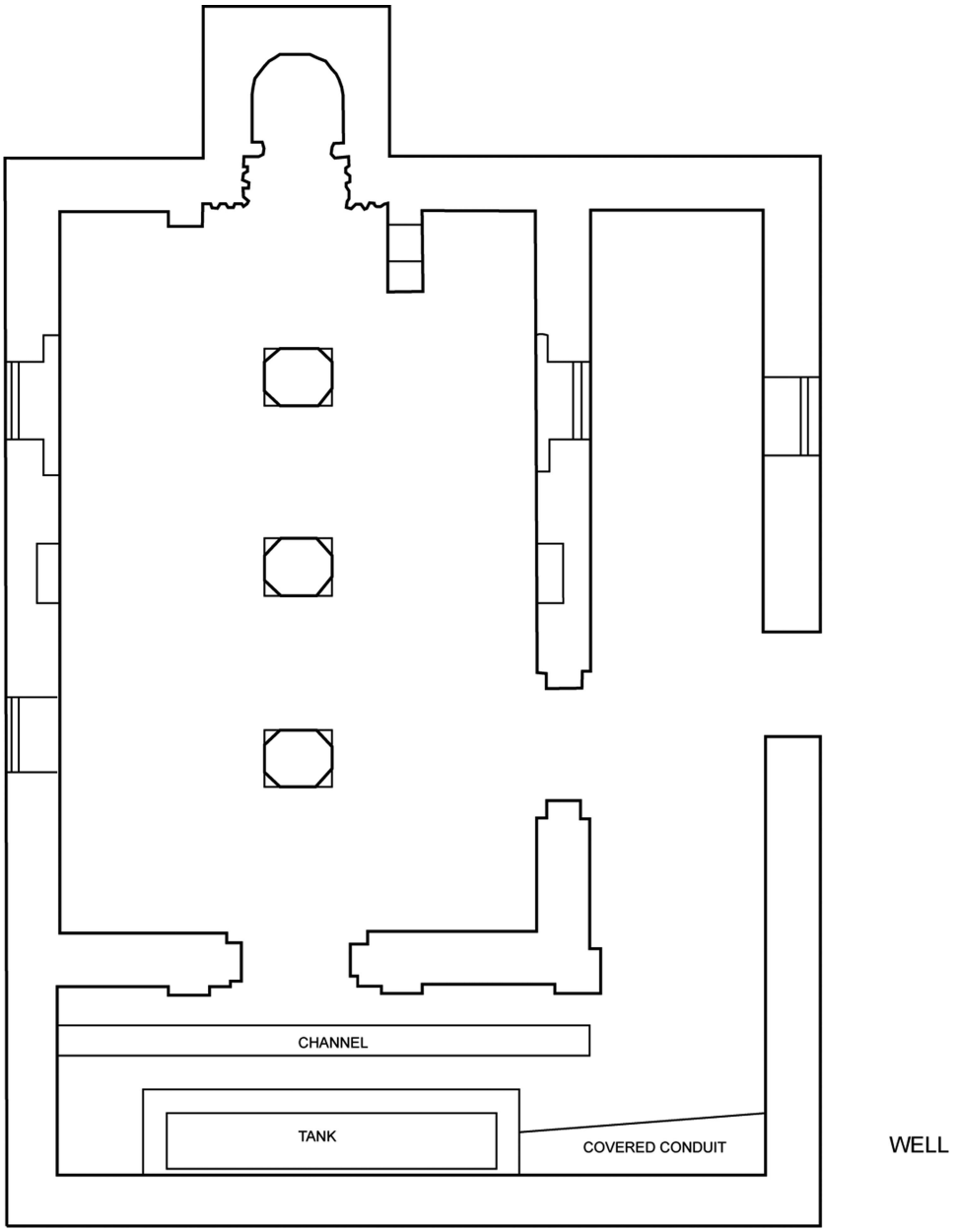

FIGURE 4.1.4 Shirazi mosque from Kizimkazi.

Courtesy of Garlake (1966), reproduced with permission.

though most large towns contained two or more mosques. Previous work at Songo Mnara continued this trend, with excavations by Chittick (1960) at the Friday mosque and then a reinvestigation of that same mosque more recently (Pradines and Blanchard 2005). However, this is just one of six mosques within the town, and our

investigations of these additional mosques have allowed us (with Mark Horton) to explore connections between their positioning, use, and life in the town. We argue (Horton et al. 2017: 184) that "the relationship is a complex one that needs to take into account ritual practices, emerging social complexity, gender roles, and the evolving urban landscape." This includes insights into how mosques were positioned to make statements about Islamic adherence (four of the mosques line the western edge of the site, providing a visual landscape that greets approaching visitors, see also Pollard 2008), as well as understandings of the linkages between mosques, burials, and ongoing forms of memorialization. Key here is placing mosques within the broader urban context (Horton et al. 2017: 184): "[t]oo often mosques have been seen as isolated buildings; here we believe that understanding their chronological and spatial context within the urban framework is central in not only interpreting their architecture but also in placing Islamic practice with its wider social landscape."

Burials

Burials offer another important archaeological dataset for Islamic practice. To date, there have been very few excavations of burials on the east African coast due to sensitivities among current residents. Some burials have been excavated during larger projects on a town, when encountered in the course of other excavations, such as at Shanga, Kilwa Kisiwani, and Ras Mkumbuu. In all cases, burials followed standard Muslim practice, with the body aligned east–west and the face turned north toward Mecca. Based on the positions of the bodies, most appear to have been wrapped tightly in cloth, buried without ornaments or items, and placed in a partially flexed position. At Mtambwe Mkuu, twenty burials were found perpendicular to the standard arrangement, suggesting again the possibility of a Shi'ite presence here (Horton and Middleton 2000).

More recently, some projects have directly targeted burials through excavation. At Mtwapa, on the Kenya coast, Raaum et al. (2018) have excavated a number of graves from the 15th century in order to extract aDNA. The results are still not fully published, so little can be said about burial practice. The DNA evidence suggests more complex population dynamics than the standard Arab versus African debate has implied, with a range of mitochondrial DNA from populations in Arabia and also in the deeper interior of Africa.

At Songo Mnara, a limited program of burial excavation complemented a larger project of excavating tombs and memorials around the spaces of a 15th-century town in the Kilwa archipelago. The burials were, as expected, aligned according to standard Muslim practice with faces toward Mecca. They were tightly bound in shrouds before interment, evidenced by the positioning of the limbs upon excavation.

Perhaps more interesting than the burials themselves, though, were the grave markers at Songo Mnara. Both built tombs and simple graves (with head and foot stones) were excavated. Many had been used more than once, particularly the stone-built

tombs, which had often been reopened for the interment of another body. Several children accompanied adults in the tombs. The memorials built above the graves were shown to have been constructed sometime after the burial, and the original location had often been partly forgotten or obscured, meaning that the tombs cut across limbs, marking the location of bodies only approximately. A wide range of offerings on the tombs suggested a long-term process of memorialization at these sites. One grave (marked with just a simple head and footstone), had more than 5,000 quartz pebbles laid across the ground surface above it, probably left as individual offerings over many years. Other tombs had coins, pottery, incense, and phytolith remains indicating palm fronds laid at either end. All of these suggested an important role for graves within Swahili society here. Some of the tombs are still remembered as the graves of sharifs, and offerings are still made today (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2012).

Coins

Another indirect line of evidence for Islam and Islamic practice in east Africa are locally minted coins. These bear witness to the presence of Muslim rulers in the towns in which they are found. The earliest coins were found at Shanga, where 8th- to 9th-century silver coins bear legends demonstrating the existence of a Muslim elite/ruler at that early date. On one side, the coins offer praise for particular rulers, while on the reverse they offer praise for Allah: "Muhammad / trusts in Allah"; "The kingdom is Allah's / and in Him trusts Abd Allah."

Unfortunately, there are no other sites that are known to have minted coins before 1000 CE. After that, the most prolific mint was at Kilwa Kisiwani, where many thousands of copper coins were struck from the 11th century onward. These were used by Chittick (1973) as a way of reconciling the archaeology with the *Kilwa Chronicle*, but this was hampered by the fact that coins seem to have very long periods of circulation. Coins that contained the names of 11th- or 12th-century rulers were in active circulation until the 15th century, making them less useful as a guide to relative dating. Archaeological finds of Kilwa coins did, however, confirm the existence of several of the rulers named in the *Kilwa Chronicle*, including the founder of the "Shirazi" dynasty at Kilwa, Ali bin al-Hasan, and the most famous ruler of the "Mahdali" dynasty, al-Hasan ibn Sulaiman. They confirmed their faith in Islam, knowledge of Arabic script, and also their awareness of the coinage systems used in the Islamic world. They did not, however, follow caliphal conventions or weight standards (Wynne-Jones and Fleisher 2012; Perkins 2013).

Horton and Middleton (2000: 56–61) have argued that an analysis of locally minted silver and copper coins offers a way to reconstruct the emergence and spread of African Muslims along the coastal corridor. Based on the first-millennium silver coins found at Shanga and a remarkable coin hoard of more than 2,000 coins found at Mtwambwe Mkuu on Pemba Island (Horton et al. 1986), they argue that these coins can be ordered chronologically through the names of the rulers listed on them. The Mtwambwe Hoard

provides coins that bridge the early silver issues from Shanga and the copper coins found in the Kilwa archipelago. The names on these coins can be linked to rulers at Kilwa, but also those on Pemba, Zanzibar, and Mafia. Horton and Middleton (2000: 57) thus argue that there was a "familial relationship between rulers/minters" on these islands "suggesting that a closely related dynasty may have lived on these islands from c. 1000–1150." The names on these coins, they argue further, indicate Shi'ite associations in that they come from the Old Testament; a phrase on an early Kilwa issue, "trusts in the Lieutenant of God," also provides support for the idea that the earliest African Muslims were Shi'a.

This reconstruction offers a counternarrative to the colonial foundation of Swahili towns by Muslims from abroad. In this new model, Islam begins to be practiced by local communities during the first millennium CE on the northern Swahili coast from which a local, African Muslim dynasty is built. It was this dynasty that was able to influence settlements farther south, "founding mosques, introducing coinage…[and] convert[ing] non-Muslims or displac[ing] Muslims of other sects" (Horton and Middleton 2000: 61). This would fit with the connection between rulers named on these coins and the town of Shiraz, which, in the 11th century, was under Buyid control. Thus, the stories of Shirazi migrations may represent the movement of African Muslims and their distinctive form of Islam down the eastern African coast during the early second millennium CE.

Conclusion

As presented here, the eastern African Swahili coast is an Islamic society of long standing, with traditions of Islamic practice that extend back to the century after the death of Prophet Muhammad. Archaeological research offers clear evidence of the importance of Islam in Swahili towns and villages from the earliest centuries; this includes evidence of the central positioning of mosques in towns, the role of Arabic script in references to Islam on coins, and the importance of Muslim graves and memorialization in the life of the towns.

Despite these important insights into the history of Islam on the coast, it is still difficult to understand the details of Islamic practice, including the sects that dominated on the coast at various times and places and the way Islam shaped the daily life of town residents. What prevents these types of interpretations are the nature of archaeological research and evidence, a lack of historical sources that bear witness to such features/activities, and the colonial archaeological legacy in which "foreign" elements were prioritized over local ones. The current shift in research emphasis in many projects from documenting the *presence* of Islam to the *practice* of Islam in towns and villages has begun to expose the complexity of Islam along the coast during its many centuries of development and practice. New perspectives on Islam and the ways that it shaped daily life, as well as the nature of any syncretic adaptations are sure to follow.

References

Allen, J. de V. 1993. *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon* (London: James Currey).

Bang, A. K. 2003. *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa: 1860–1925* (London: Routledge).

Bang, A. K. 2014. *Islamic Sufi Networks in the Western Indian Ocean (c.1880–1940): Ripples of Reform* (Leiden: Brill).

Chittick, H. N. 1960. *Annual Report of the Department of Antiquities* (Dar es Salaam: Government Printer).

Chittick, H. N. 1965. "The 'Shirazi' colonization of East Africa," *Journal of African History*, 6, 3, 275–294.

Chittick, H. N. 1973. "On the Chronology and Coinage of the Sultan of Kilwa," *Numismatic Chronicle*, 13, 192–200.

Chittick, H. N. 1974. *Kilwa: An Islamic Trading City on the East African Coast* (Nairobi and London: British Institute in Eastern Africa).

Chittick, H. N. 1975. "The Peopling of the East African Coast," in H. N. Chittick and R. I. Rotberg (eds.), *East Africa and the Orient: Cultural Syntheses in Pre-Colonial Times* (New York/London: Africana Publishing Company).

Fauvelle-Aymar, F.-X., and Hirsch, B. 2003. "Voyage aux frontières du monde : topologie, narration et jeux de miroir dans la Rihla de Ibn Battûta," *Afrique & Histoire*, 1, 75–122.

Fitton, T., and Wynne-Jones, S. 2017. "Understanding the Layout of Early Coastal Settlement at Unguja Ukuu, Zanzibar," *Antiquity*, 91, 359, 1268–1284.

Fitton, T. 2017. *Pushing the Boat Out: A study of spatial organisation and harbour spaces in the early Swahili ports of the Zanzibar Archipelago, 550-1100 CE*. PhD thesis, University of York.

Fleisher, J. 2010. "Rituals of Consumption and the Politics of Feasting on the Eastern African Coast, AD 700–1500," *Journal of World Prehistory*, 23, 4, 195–217.

Fleisher, J. B., and Wynne-Jones, S. 2012. "Finding Meaning in Ancient Swahili Spatial Practices," *African Archaeological Review*, 29, 171–207.

Freeman-Grenville, G. S. P. 1957. "Coinage in East Africa Before Portuguese Times," *Numismatic Chronicle*, 17, 151–179.

Freeman-Grenville, G. S. P. 1962. *The East African Coast. Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Clarendon Press).

Garlake, P. S. 1966. *The Early Islamic Architecture of the East African Coast* (London: British Institute in Eastern Africa & Oxford University Press).

Glassman, J. 1995. *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast 1856–1888* (London: James Currey).

Horton, M. C. 1987a. "The Swahili Corridor," *Scientific American*, 257 (Sep), 86–93.

Horton, M. C. 1987b. "Early Muslim Trading Settlements on the East African Coast: New Evidence from Shanga," *Antiquaries Journal*, 67, 290–322.

Horton, M. C. 1991. "Primitive Islam and Architecture in East Africa," *Muqarnas*, 8, 103–116.

Horton, M. C. 1996. *Shanga: The Archaeology of a Muslim Trading Community on the Coast of East Africa* (Nairobi: British Institute in Eastern Africa).

Horton, M. C. 2004. "Islam, Archaeology and Swahili Identity," in D. Whitcomb (ed.), *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives* (Chicago: Oriental Institute Seminar no. 1), 67–88.

Horton, M. C. 2013. "Ibadis in East Africa: Archaeological and Historical Evidence," in M. Hoffmann-Ruf, A. al-Salimi and H. Gaube (eds.), *Oman and Overseas* (Tübingen: OLMS), 93–106.

Horton, M. C. 2017. "Early Islam on the East African Coast," in F. B. Flood and G. Necipoğlu (eds.), *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons), 250–273.

Horton, M. C., Fleisher, J., and Wynne-Jones, S. 2017. "The Mosques of Songo Mnara in Their Urban Landscape" *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*, 4, 2, 163–188.

Horton, M. C., and Middleton, J. 2000. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society* (Oxford: Blackwell).

Horton, M. C., Oddy, W. A., and Brown, H. 1986. "The Mtambwe Hoard," *Azania*, 21, 115–123.

Insoll, T. 1994. "The External Creation of the Western Sahel's Past: The Use and Abuse of the Arabic Sources," *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, 13, 39–49.

Insoll, T. 2003. *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Kirkman, J. 1964. *Men and Monuments on the East African Coast* (London: Lutterworth).

Kirkman, J. S. 1954. *The Arab City of Gedi: Excavations at the Great Mosque, Architecture and Finds* (London: Oxford University Press).

Kirkman, J. S. 1959. "Excavations at Ras Mkumbuu on the Island of Pemba," *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 53, 161–178.

LaViolette, A. 2008. "Swahili Cosmopolitanism in Africa and the Indian Ocean World, A. D. 600-1500," *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress*, 1, 24–49.

LaViolette, A., and Wynne-Jones, S. 2018. "The Swahili World," in S. Wynne-Jones and A. LaViolette (eds.), *The Swahili World* (London: Routledge), 1–14.

Martin, B. G. 1971. "Notes on Some Members of the Learned Classes of Zanzibar and East Africa in the Nineteenth Century," *African Historical Studies*, 4, 3, 525–545.

Martin, B. G. 1975. "Arab Migrations to East Africa in Medieval Times," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 7, 3, 367–390.

Middleton, J. 1992. *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Nurse, D., and Spear, T. 1985. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society AD 800–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

Pawlowicz, M., and LaViolette, A. 2013. "Swahili Historical Chronicles from an Archaeological Perspective: Bridging History, Archaeology, Coast, and Hinterland in Southern Tanzania," in P. Schmidt and S. A. Mrozowski (eds.), *The Death of Prehistory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 117–140.

Perkins, M. J. 2013. *The Coins of the Swahili Coast c. 800–1500* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol).

Pollard, E. 2008. "The maritime landscape of Kilwa Kisiwani and its region, Tanzania, 11th to 15th century AD," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 27, 265-280.

Pouwels, R. L. 1984. "Oral Historiography and the Shirazi of the East African Coast," *History in Africa*, 11, 237–267.

Pouwels, R. L. 1987. *Horn and Crescent. Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Pradines, S., and Blanchard, P. 2005. "Kilwa al-Mulûk. Premier bilan des travaux de conservation-restauration et des fouilles archéologiques dans la baie de Kilwa, Tanzanie," *Annales Islamologiques*, 39, 25–80.

Prestholdt, J. 1998. *As Artistry Permits and Custom May Ordain: The Social Fabric of Material Consumption in the Swahili World, Circa 1450 to 1600* (Evanston: Northwestern University).

Prins, A. H. J. 1961. *The Swahili-speaking peoples of Zanzibar and the East African Coast: Arabs, Shirazi and Swahili* (London: International African Institute).

Raaum, R., Williams, S., Kusimba, C., Monge, J., Morris, A., and Mohamed, M. 2018. "Decoding the Genetic Ancestry of the Swahili," in S. Wynne-Jones and A. LaViolette (eds.), *The Swahili World* (London: Routledge), 81–102.

Saad, E. 1979. "Kilwa Dynastic Historiography: A Critical Study," *History in Africa*, 6, 177–207.

Spear, T. 1984. "The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions, Culture, and History," *History in Africa*, 11, 291–305.

Sutton, J. E. G. 1998. "Kilwa: A History of the Ancient Swahili Town with a Guide to the Monuments of Kilwa Kisiwani and Adjacent Islands," *Azania*, 33, 113–169.

Sutton, J. E. G. 2018. "The East African Coast: Researching Its History and Archaeology," in S. Wynne-Jones and A. LaViolette (eds.), *The Swahili World* (London: Routledge), 53–66.

Vernet, T. 2005. *Les cités-etats Swahili de l'archipel de Lamu, 1585–1810: Dynamiques endogenes, dynamiques exogenes*. (Unpublished PhD diss., Centre de recherches africaines, Université Paris I Panthéon, Sorbonne.)

Wynne-Jones, S. 2010. "Remembering and Reworking the Swahili Diwanate: The Role of Objects and Places at Vumba Kuu," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 43, 3, 407–427.

Wynne-Jones, S. 2016. *A Material Culture: Consumption and Materiality on the Precolonial east African Coast* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Wynne-Jones, S., and Fleisher, J. 2016. "The Multiple Territories of Swahili Urban Landscapes," *World Archaeology*, 48, 3, 349–362.

Wynne-Jones, S., and Fleisher, J. B. 2012. "Coins in Context: Local Economy, Value and Practice on the East African Swahili Coast," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 22, 1, 19–36.