

# Discovering the Kenyan Coast

shared influences and common heritage

Herman Kiriama,  
Marie-Pierre Ballarin,  
Jimbi Katana and Patrick Abungu



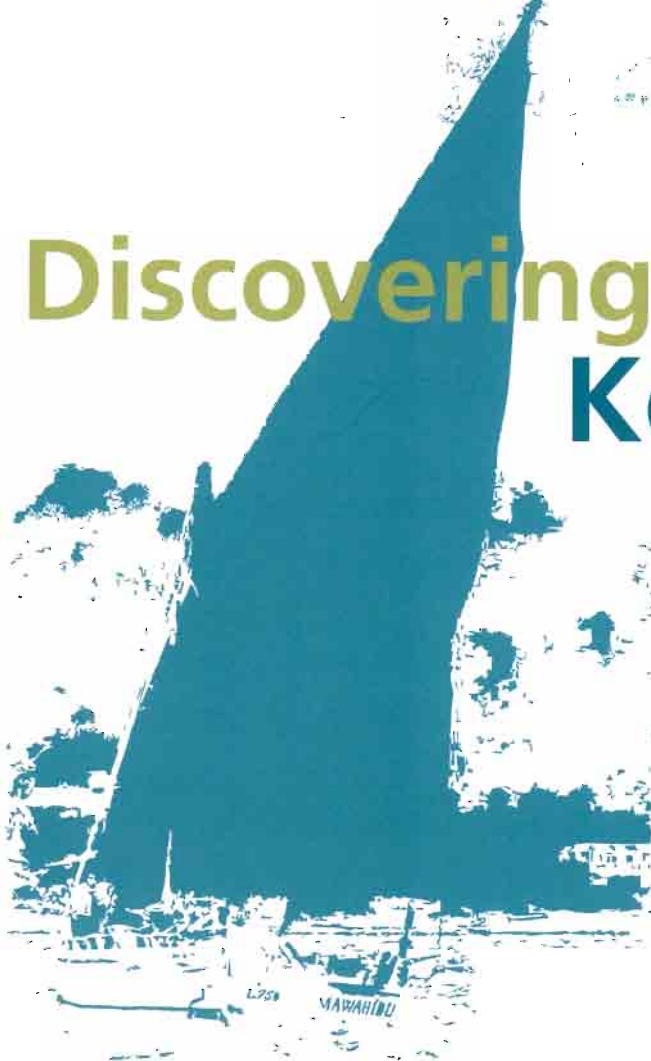
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## Acknowledgements

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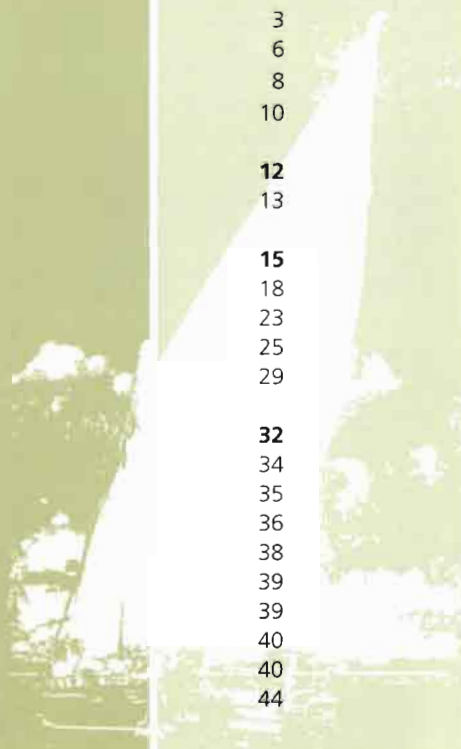
To all we say, Asante sana.

Herman Kiriama, Marie-Pierre Ballarin, Jimbi Katana and Patrick Abungu



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## Ambassadors' Foreword

The tourism sector in Kenya has been and will undoubtedly remain a dynamic engine for economic growth and social progress. Aware of the importance of this sector for the entire economy and livelihood of the communities and citizens, the European Union has been a major partner in the Kenyan tourism sector, in particular by providing technical and financial assistance through the European Development Fund. Since 2002, more than Ksh 2 billion was allocated for the diversification and the recovery of the sector following the negative impact of the terror attacks of the beginning of the 21st century.

Under the EU/France and Kenya partnership, this book, "*Discovering the Kenyan coast: shared influences and common heritage*", arrives at the right moment as a modest contribution to the recovery of the Kenyan tourism sector which has been greatly affected by the post-election crisis.

More than a tourist guide, this book mixes scientific rigour with escapism. It has involved several important partners and enjoyed a great synergy between these key actors in its preparation. This book is about the Kenyan Coast and goes beyond the sole Swahili influence without minimizing its importance. It provides valuable information on ecotourism, sustainable development, cultural heritage and on the memory of the Kenyan coast.

We strongly believe that the Kenyan tourism sector has to regain its traditional market composed of travellers seeking coconut-trees, safaris and vast white sandy beaches. But Kenya also has to open up new opportunities, diversify its markets and offers, and allow curious tourists to discover new horizons: the *kaya* sacred forests of the Mijikenda people (which have just been listed in the UNESCO World Heritage List); the Swahili sites of Takwa, Jumba la Mtwana, Gede; the Mombasa and Siyu Forts; the Shimoni slave caves; the colonial houses of Mombasa.





Broad in scope, this book also evokes the first Christian mission stations that were established in Kenya, the jewellery craft, the handmade wooden furniture and the construction of dhows, typical boats of the coast. With the necessary scientific rigour, this book is also about the complex and fascinating cultural and population intermix that took place over the last centuries on the Kenyan coast, with the arrival and settlement of Chinese merchants, Portuguese invaders, Omani traffickers, English settlers and escaped slaves.

Finally, this book is a joint contribution of Kenyan scientists from the National Museums of Kenya (NMK): Herman Kiriama, Jimbi Katana, Patrick Abungu, and of Marie-Pierre Ballarin, a French researcher of the Institute of Research for Development (IRD). They all work at the Fort Jesus Museum. This book is an initiative of the Cooperation and Cultural Affairs Service of the French Embassy, which also provided financial support, together with the European Commission and UNESCO. We would also like to thank the Ministry of Tourism and in particular Hon Minister Najib Balala who showed great interest and support for this initiative, as well as the Tourism Trust Fund for its involvement and commitment in working for the sustainable diversification of tourism in Kenya.

Eric van der Linden (Head of the European Commission Delegation to Kenya)



Elisabeth Barbier (French Ambassador to Kenya / EU Presidency 2008)





## Preamble, Minister for Tourism

When one talks about tourism in Kenya, what immediately comes to mind is the Coast, because that is where it all began. Not even the passage of time has eroded the coastal appeal to tourists both local and international.

Endowed with a long stretch of sandy beaches, the Kenyan coast has few equals on the continent and in the world. Its proximity to Tsavo and Shimba Hills National Parks provides the perfect blend of the beach and safari, which is every tourist's dream package.

Despite being the hub of Kenya's tourism, where world cultures converge, the rich heritage of the coastal people has remained pure and chaste. The ageless melodies of the Swahili taarab music and rhythmic dances of the Mijikenda, the artistry, the ready smiles and more, have always charmed the coastal visitor.

The story of the Kenyan coast is worth telling over and over again. However, there are not enough well-written books to cover the fascinating past and the unfolding future of the region. For example, only recently, the *kaya* sacred forests were entered into the UNESCO World Heritage List and certainly many other features are waiting their turn to be listed in their respective halls. Lamu, a history-soaked town, was the first to be listed. These stories need to be told.

That is why the publication of this book, *Discovering the Kenyan Coast*, is a welcome contribution to conventional knowledge about the coast. Its simplicity of language and wealth of information are certain to make it a useful companion to every coastal traveller. It gives a refreshing new account of what is known about the region and makes notable efforts to tell part of the untold stories.

Even though the coast of Kenya is the most visited region in the country, accounting for over 65% of overall tourism, there are still many tourist attractions that have yet to be discovered. From Shimoni, Diani, Mombasa, Kilifi, Malindi, the Tana River delta to Lamu — every stretch has something to compete with the best in the world.



The city of Mombasa, which is Kenya's tourism capital, needs an urban regeneration programme to transform it into a model city. The road, sea and air infrastructure calls for action that will add value to the destination and meet the growing expectations of the modern tourist. It is through publications such as *Discovering the Kenyan Coast* that such awareness can be raised and translated into action.

I salute all those who have made this publication a reality: HE Mr Eric Van der Linden, Head of the European Commission Delegation to Kenya and HE Ms Elisabeth Barbier, French Ambassador to Kenya for coming up with this initiative and publishing this book which will no doubt make an invaluable contribution to the growth of the tourism sector in the region; the authors of the book from the National Museums of Kenya, (Fort Jesus Museum, Mombasa) and the Institute of Research for Development (IRD) deserve praise for the rich input without which this publication would not have been so informative; and last but not least my appreciation is to all those who worked behind the scenes to produce this book.

Read on ... Discover the Kenyan Coast!



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

Hon. Najib Balala, EGH, MP  
Minister for Tourism



## Preface, Minister of State for National Heritage and Culture

While the Kenyan coast is famous for its magnificent beaches and resorts, it is also famous for its rich cultural Heritage. The Coast is a cultural hub that not only has traditions that link it to the Kenyan interior, but also is a gateway to the wider Indian Ocean trade route. Coastal cultural interactions go back a thousand years resulting in a rich history where centuries of trade and all kinds of cultural influences have shaped the Swahili culture. The meeting of these diverse cultures with the Arabic, European and Asian cultures led to the development of a unique and strong cultural heritage that is epitomized not only by the varied populace, but also by the architecture, cuisine, music, folklore and dances of the region.

The various towns on the coast like Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu and Pate were once leading mercantile centres that linked the African hinterland with the international trading systems. This system led to the creation of a truly global trading network long before the present idea of globalization was even born.

It is in recognition of the role of these centres that the Ministry of State for National Heritage and Culture, through the National Museums of Kenya, has designated them as National Monuments and Lamu is listed as a World Heritage Site.



It therefore gives me gratification to note that through this great initiative with our development partners and researchers at the National Museums of Kenya, this book on discovering the coast has been published to make visible to a wider public this rich coastal heritage. Indeed this book is testimony to the continuous efforts that the National Museums of Kenya is putting into preserving and conserving Kenyan heritage for posterity.

This book will at a glance allow visitors, both local and international, to experience coastal heritage and how it has developed over time.

I thank our development partners, the French Embassy, the delegation of the European Commission, UNESCO, Institute of Research and Development (IRD), The Tourism Trust Fund and the researchers from the National Museums of Kenya for making this book possible.



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

Hon. William Ole Ntimama EGH, MP  
Minister of State for National Heritage and Culture



# I. Discovering the Kenyan Coast



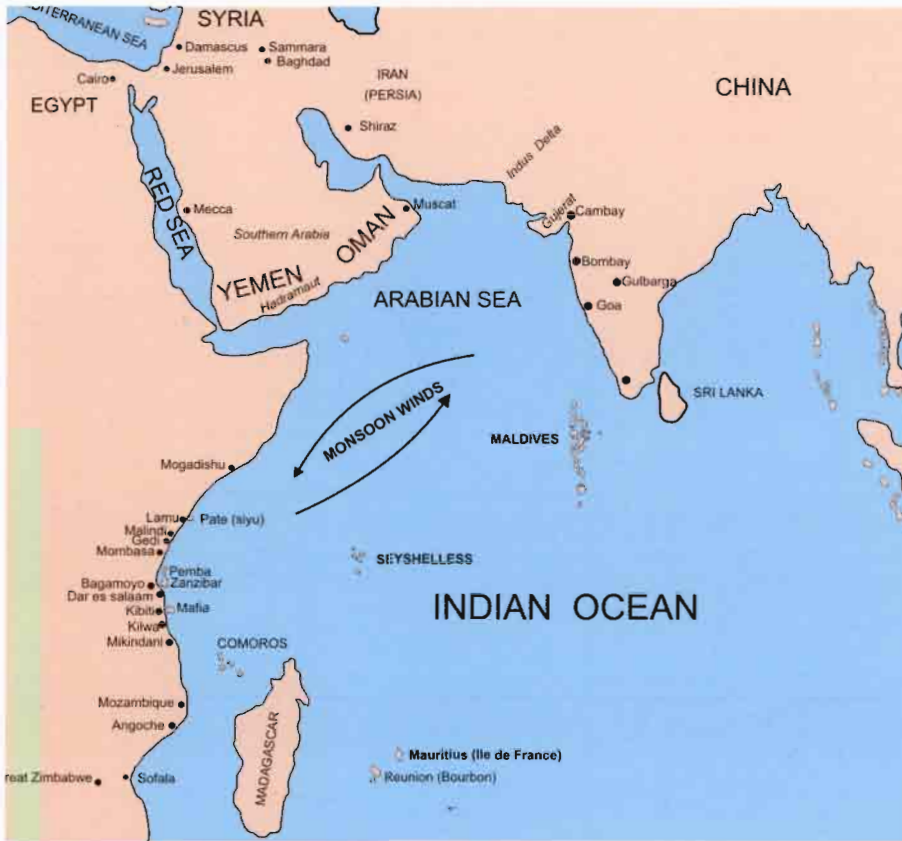
## Introduction

The East African Coast has had a rich and varied history spanning hundreds if not thousands of years. This history has been one of interaction not only between the societies living along this coastline, but also between these societies and the other communities of the wider Indian Ocean realm. The interaction has included the exchange of goods and ideas as well as the movement of people. The end result of these exchanges is the creation of both a cosmopolitan society and a culture that incorporates most, if not all, the groups that have interacted. The physical manifestations of this are the Swahili people and the kiswahili language.

The Swahili are a Bantu-speaking people who inhabit the East African coast and whose culture and language have borrowed extensively from the various groups with whom they have interacted. This interaction is seen in the unique architectural style of the various Swahili towns, both living and dead, that dot the coast, the Swahili cuisine and the way of life.

The rich Swahili culture has attracted a lot of scholarly works on the Swahili. It is unfortunate, however, that despite the many writings on the Swahili matters, none is available in a language that an ordinary person who visits this area can understand. It is therefore gratifying that the National Museums of Kenya in partnership with our friends, have come up with this book that will make this rich history of the coast accessible to the ordinary person, tourist and the public at large.

I therefore take this opportunity to sincerely thank our partners, especially the Institute of Research for Development, the French Embassy, Nairobi, UNESCO Nairobi Office, Tourism Trust Fund and the European Commission for their financial support. Last but not least let me say a big thank you to the authors of this book: Herman Kiriama (*Head of Coastal Archaeology Department*), Jimbi Katana (*Chief Curator*), Patrick Abungu (*Curator of South Coast Sites*) of the National Museums of Kenya (*Fort Jesus Museum*,



Map of the Kenyan coast within the Western Indian Ocean

Mombasa) and Marie-Pierre Ballarin of the Institute of Research for Development (IRD) for the excellent job that they have done. I am sure this book will prove invaluable in the promotion of our tourism industry at the coast.

Thanks

Dr. Idle Farah  
 Director-General  
 National Museums of Kenya  
 Museum Hill, Nairobi







# 1.

## The Kenyan Coast in context: diversity and richness of cultures



# Archaeology and history of the Coast

**W**e know about the East African coast from documents written by traders and travellers as early as the first two centuries of the Christian Era (CE). Such early documents include the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (commonly known as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*) and Ptolemy's *Geography*. These writings talk of towns and trading centres in the land of *Zanj*, as the East African coast was called by merchants of that time, referring to towns such as Rhapta and the island of *Meneuthius*. There are a great number of ancient settlements along the Kenyan coast that have been identified. While many of these settlements have been abandoned since the 17th century, others, such as Mombasa, Lamu, Pate and Malindi, still exist today. These coastal sites can be divided into a number of types, which include villages and towns with island or mainland locations. These Swahili settlements that spread from Somalia in the north to Mozambique and the Indian Ocean islands of Madagascar and Comoros in the south, first developed in the area of the southern Somalia and the northern Kenyan coast. The islands of the Lamu archipelago are thought to be the home of some of the oldest of these coastal settlements. Indeed, a report written around AD 1331 by the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta says that the coast south of Mogadishu and north of Mombasa was a "*sawahil*" country.

When they first came into contact with these towns, most foreign historians questioned their existence, believing that these towns with stone houses were built and inhabited by people from more "developed" parts of Near Asia. They also assumed that these coastal town citizens had had little contact with the African culture apart from obtaining marketable items for the overseas trade.

From archaeological work that has been conducted along the coast and the more than 250 radiocarbon dates that have been obtained, we now know that 500 years before the establishment of the stone towns of coastal East Africa there were farming communities living on the same sites. This evidence has also shown that as early as 200 years before the Christian Era (BCE) these communities knew how to make and use iron tools. The evidence further shows that from around AD 600 these Early Iron Working (EIW) communities gave rise to the Later Iron Working (LIW) and Triangular Incised Ware (TIW) communities. It has also been found that both the LIW and TIW groups were actively engaged in the international world economic system of the time. Some of the prominent early farming community sites include the site of Kwale in Kwale District, and those along the Sabaki River basin such as Mtsanganyiko. The more prominent of the stone towns include Shanga, which was a 9th century Swahili settlement on Pate Island



in the Lamu archipelago; Jumba la Mtwana, a 12th century mainland site situated about 25 km north of Mombasa; Gede, near Malindi; and the existing old towns of Mombasa and Lamu. All these coastal settlements, although differing in certain aspects, were bound together by a common culture and background, which have helped to shape their common history. Although to the visitor these settlements look Islamic and have other influences from Arabia, India and Europe due to many centuries of economic contact with those lands, the culture of the settlements remains essentially African in its roots and inspiration.

The coastal sites played an important role in the trade networks linking India, the Persian Gulf and East Africa. Key features of that trade network were the monsoons, known for centuries to sailors, which provided the means for communication in the Indian Ocean. Early writings by Arab travellers and accounts by Europeans from the 16th century, as well as the presence of trade goods including ceramics (*Sgraffito*, *Islamic monochrome* and *Chinese*), Indian beads, glass and coins, show the importance of these trade networks and the role of the Swahili people in it. ■

## Monsoon winds

- Swahili and other sailors used monsoon winds to travel.
- The *Kaskazi*, or northeast Monsoon winds blow between November to May and enables travelling from India and Arabia
- The *Kusi* or southeast Monsoon winds blow from July to September and sailors use them to travel from East Africa to Arabia and India



## The sites in their environmental context



View of Mombasa

The Kenyan coast forms part of the East African coast, a strip of land 20–200 km wide and over 3,000 km long that extends from Mogadishu in Somalia to the north, to Cape Delgado in Mozambique to the south. It includes several archipelagos and islands in the Indian Ocean, including the Comoros, Querimba and Lamu archipelagos and the islands of Mombasa, Pemba, Zanzibar and Mafia. The coastal environment consists of various elements: the ocean, reefs, lagoons and beaches, rivers and creeks, the low-lying coastal plains and the higher and sometimes hilly hinterland. Inland of the Kenyan coast is an arid desert known as the Nyika. In parts of northern Tanzania, fertile mountains extend almost to the coastline. Behind these barriers there are savannahs, highlands and the great lakes of the interior, each of which region produces different types of foodstuffs.

The East African coast receives an average annual rainfall of 1,000 mm, supporting a variety of forests and woodlands. The climate is hot and humid by comparison to the semi-arid and arid hinterland, making the area attractive to human settlement. The patterns of monsoon winds through the year were a primary determinant of the months of the year in which trade would occur. Sailors who became muddled about movements of the winds would be stranded in East Africa for over six months.



## Boats

The Swahili are a maritime people, the majority of whom live within sight and sound of the sea. Their traditional means of transport is by sailing vessels, ranging in size from great dhows to small boats.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a Greek travellers' book, recorded that the Swahili had two and possibly three types of boats: *mitepe*, or sewn boats built without nails; *ngalawa*, or outrigger canoes which were originally brought to the East African coast from Indonesia by early immigrants; and another uncertain type called "*ema*" or "*dema*" which is described as a cage-like fishing trap. The *mtepe* (pl. *mitepe*) or sewn boat is the earliest known type of sailing vessel used by the Swahili. It had a plank hull tied together by ropes, was constructed without nails, and was caulked with fish oil. The largest ocean-going vessel (called a *dhow* by westerners) is correctly known as the *jahazi*, and is capable of sailing as far as Arabia and India. Almost all Swahili boats have "eyes" painted near the bow for protection against evil spirits.

The *mitepe*, as recorded in a Swahili poem, were made of ropes and pegs. They sailed between East Africa, India and the Arabian Gulf, carrying various goods for trade to and from lands bordering the Indian Ocean.



© Okato Ashikoye

Jahazi



To build an *mtepe*, the builder uses a T-shaped tool known as *daradaki* to join the timbers together. In between the timbers is a *dhiya* or *ziya*, which is a fibre of the doum palm that helps to prevent the boat from leaking. He then joins the timbers together and sews them with a rope. The sail was a mate made from doum palm leaves. There are two kinds of *mitepe*, differing from each other in their shape and design. These are the *utangu* and *mtepe*. The front of the *mtepe* is shaped like a camel's neck, while that of the *utangu* is shaped like the neck of a horse.

There is debate on the definition of the term *dhow* or *dau*, which is a very common boat along the Swahili coast. According to the Swahili, the *dau* was smaller than today's dhow; however, the name *dau* was and is used to refer to many types of sailing craft e.g. *dau la mtepe*, *dau la mataruma*, etc.

- *Dau la mwao*, commonly found in Pate, is long and narrow, and carvel-built; it is double-ended with a mast sloping sharply forwards, and has no keel. Decoration is old-fashioned, coloured red, black and white, and carving, if any, is incised into the boat's timbers. *Mtori* found in Kizingitini, is smaller than *dau la Mwao* and is faster. It has a keel and decoration is similar to the *dau la mwao*.
- *Dau la mataruma* is favoured in Lamu and Shela by transporters of sand, coral blocks and soil. It has a short mast, no bowsprit and is slow and ponderous.
- *Dau la utango* was very common in the 19th century but is now almost non-existent. It had a keel, its planks were sewn and it was referred to as an *mtepe*, which it resembled.
- *Ngalawa* are common in harbours along the Swahili coast. They are small, narrow outrigger dugouts, with a very deep section for balance.
- *Jahazi* is the commonest term used to refer to sailing craft. Their shapes differ from place to place, but one similar characteristic is that they have a wooden "eye" attached to each side of the boat. These are decorated and may have different motifs. One problem with identification of a jahazi is how small it must be in order to be regarded as a *kijahazi* or *mashua*. The rule commonly used is that if it is too small to have a lavatory projecting over the side near the stern, then it is not a *jahazi*. Any dugout boat other than a *ngalawa* is referred to as a *mtumbwi*, and has no rudder. *Hori* are small boats which take captains in harbour ashore and back to their boats.



Sailors have been following these monsoons and crossing the seas between India, Arabia and East Africa for more than 2,000 years. From November to May, the northeast monsoon winds (*Kaskazi*) would blow and with them came dhows from India and Arabia with their merchandise. The end of the northeast monsoon is marked by heavy rains and storms at sea, which made long-distance travel unsafe. This turbulent period is followed by the *Kusi* or southeast monsoon blowing from July until September, carrying ships and their goods from East Africa to Arabia and India. The end of the southeast monsoon winds is marked by a calm sea, but with winds that make travel uncertain. It can generally be said that the monsoons encouraged the development of a Swahili culture along the East African coastline, shaped by trade, wind and Islam. To allow for travel, it was also essential to have knowledge of how monthly lunar cycles affect high and low tides; this was very important to the Swahili, as different tides have different levels. For example, *Kimbuya* occurs between the 1st and the 8th days of the lunar month. During this time the ocean seems to be still, and the tides do not ebb and flow at all. *Kundala* is the time when water is just receding after a high tide. *Makomeamo* is the high tide that occurs between the 8th and the 23rd days of the lunar month: this tide does not ebb, staying high all the time. Knowledge of these high and low tides enabled travellers, anglers and traders to plan their activities.



Mashua in Lamu

© Circolo Asti-Koyf



The ocean is more than a source of economic wealth to the Swahili. The sea (*bahari*) is regarded as the source of potential wealth in the form of sailors and traders who bring different commodities. The ocean is a place of immense power and danger. It is the home of many spirits, yet it may be tamed and used by those who live on its shores and in its vicinity if they listen to the words of God, who created it. Knowledge of the sea and seafaring vessels has been of the utmost importance to the Swahili in East Africa. Many myths and beliefs surround the sea in Swahili culture. To sail the seas and embark upon a maritime way of life requires a kind of ethos and disposition that enables men to endure, survive and persevere. Water encompassed their livelihood. It was their means of communication, and therefore trade; it was storage for food, providing an abundance of fish for their use. From the sea came the rain that watered their crops and fed the people, as well as the mangrove poles and coral rock used to build houses. ■

## Trees

People of the coast use different trees for different purposes:

- *Mbuyu* (baobab) is used as a sacred place for sheltering, and its seeds are used to produce hair shampoo.
- *Mnazi* (coconut palm) has various uses: It provides beer (mnazi-palm wine), vinegar, and oil; its roots are medicinal; the trunk is used to make dugout canoes; and its leaves are used as thatching material. Coconut flesh is used in cooking.
- *Mkoko* (mangrove) timber is used for rafters and poles in building houses, and for making boats.





## Location

All Swahili sites along the Kenyan coast are found either on offshore islands, or on the mainland close to the shore except for Gede, which lies six kilometres from the open sea at Watamu and three kilometres from Mida Creek. It has been argued, however, that it is possible that at the time Gede was built the ocean was much closer to it than it is now, a possible indicator of environmental changes that may have taken place.

The most important consideration for the location of these sites seems to have been security: the prime locations close to the sea, rivers or mountains, or on islands, attest to this. The sea provided a quick escape route and the islands were both easy to defend and difficult to attack. Proximity to the mainland was also a security measure, especially if an island came under attack. For example, Mombasa Island can be said to have been attractive for its location, being very close



General Coastal map



to the mainland. This advantageous position provided a mainland refuge for the island's inhabitants during its many invasions. Other factors considered in locating towns were that they should be sheltered from oceanic currents and winds, and the availability of deep channels that would provide excellent anchorage facilities. Mombasa port became one of the chief terminals on the eastern seaboard for the great caravan route to the interior.

Proximity to sources of food such as farmed grains was also taken into account. The immediate hinterland to these coastal settlements has rich soils and reasonable rainfall, and was used as farmland to supply food to sustain the large urban population. Mangrove forests along the coast and the rich coral reef fishing grounds provided raw materials for building, food and commercial commodities for trade. Towns were also founded close to sources of fresh water and communication routes. For example, Ungwana was located on the Tana River delta, where the river served as a communication route to the interior as well as to the open sea. The town also had a good view of the Indian Ocean, an important security consideration. ■



## Coastal economy

From archaeological, historical and linguistic evidence, it has been shown that between the 2nd and 10th centuries AD, the Kenyan coast supported a variety of economic activities. Most of the inhabitants who lived south of Mombasa were sedentary farmers and ironworkers, while those to the north of Mombasa, mostly in the Sabaki and Tana Deltas as well as in the Lamu archipelago, had a variety of economic activities that included farming, keeping of livestock (pastoralism) and, to a lesser extent, iron-working and fishing. There was little international trade at that time.

Agricultural intensification in the hinterlands of Mombasa, Malindi, the Lamu archipelago, the Sabaki River basin and the Tana delta provided the bulk of food for the nearby towns. Under these conditions, towns such as Ungwana, Gede, Lamu, Pate and Mombasa became more diversified. The influx of wealth stimulated the growth of different kinds of population centres, and magnificent houses and mosques were built in most coastal towns. Lifestyles of most of the inhabitants of the towns also changed. New dietary staples, new types of pottery, people and classes of society, and much else were introduced. The end result of this change was a transformation of the coastal culture.

Fishing and agriculture appear to have been the very first economic activities engaged in before intercontinental trade links were formed. Proximity to the sea and the availability of marine and freshwater fish guaranteed a thriving fishing industry for local consumption and trade with the interior.



## Fishing



Catch of the day : dorado and sailfish

Principally a male-dominated activity, although women could carry out small-scale fishing in the delta areas and in the lagoons close to the shore, fishing was conducted using hooks, spears, traps and nets. Along the rivers, fishing was undertaken using hooks and traps. Each family had its special fishing area, and mudfish was the species most frequently caught.

Marine and intertidal animals have a variety of uses other than that of food: for example, shellfish are also used for decoration, as well as a deodorant. Shells were used to make beads, inlays and dyes. Cowrie shells were gathered and sent into the hinterland and interior, where they became popular for adornment, for use as currency and for ritual purposes. For those fishing offshore, the vessel in use then and still in use today is the *Jahazi* - a small fishing boat with a single sail. Current fishing methods that have been passed on from generation to generation include hooked lines and nets with large holes that measure about four square inches. The dry season when the sea is calm is always the best fishing season, while in the wet season the sea is more turbulent, and hence the *Jahazis* cannot venture far out into the deep sea.

The fishermen (they are always men) designate marine fishing and spawning areas. Spawning areas ensure future supply and hence are rarely fished. The use of hooks and large-gauge nets is to avoid catching fish fry. When a lobster is caught, the fishermen will check to ensure that it is not carrying eggs; should this turn out to be the case, the lobster is returned to the sea. The same applies to fish, where very young fish are returned to the ocean if caught. Catches include *tatatambi*, *flus*, *taffi* (coral fish), *changu*, *pono* and *papa*, *kisumba* (barracuda), *sulisuli* (marlin), *kamba* (lobster), *prawns* and *kaa* (crabs).



Navigation has always been by reference to the positions of the sun, moon, stars and the winds; today, lights of the cities and the numerous beach hotels also act as navigation guides for anglers. Anglers have certain regulations that govern their trade and those who do not follow these can be suspended or banned from fishing: for example, one must always help other people in distress even if it puts one's own life at risk. A drifting person has to be picked up, whether dead or alive. Should the person be alive, one must nurture them back to full health; if they are dead, one is obliged to bury them. The information is then passed on among other fishermen so that it is known that the dead at sea have been buried, and eventually this information is passed on to the relatives of the deceased.

## Farming

A rich arable zone occurs along the coastal belt, suitable for domesticated plants and animals. The Tana River delta, for example, has rich soils and adequate rainfall suitable for crop production and livestock rearing. This area was found to be very suitable for human settlement and over eight abandoned settlements may be found there, including Ungwana, Mwana, Shaka and Kipini, among others. The coastal market economy was based chiefly on agricultural products such as coconuts, cashew nuts, sesame, tobacco and cloves, together with mangrove poles, dried fish, animal hides and skins, cereals, and ivory, among others. Trade and contact with the East and Middle East led to the introduction of new types of crops such as rubber, sisal, cotton and bananas.

Most of the coastal farmers practised shifting slash-and-burn cultivation. A clearing was marked with a sacrifice in which goats and chickens were offered to God in supplication for an abundant harvest. The forest was then cut down; larger logs were used to make boats or furniture, while smaller branches were used as firewood. Logs were not, however, removed until after rain had fallen and the logs began to rot. Slashing was followed by a burning exercise. Amongst the Swahili, a sacrifice was made before the fire was lit. After the evening prayer, the bush and dry leaves were set ablaze and the farmers sat up for the whole night sharing riddles, poetry and songs. They returned to their villages in the morning and, if the burning was successful, they performed the *Randa* dance. This dance would be performed door-to-door, and at every house the women would serve the dancers a special juice made from coconuts. Specific prayers and sacrifices were given during harvest.



What drew farmers and pastoralists to the coast was the climate, and the resources of the forests, grasslands and the Indian Ocean littoral. Meat that was consumed was from both domesticated and wild sources, and birds were also eaten. Consumption of meat is shown by the number of bones of various animals found along the coast. Bones of cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, camels, dik-diks, pigs, dugongs, monkeys, hyraxes, mongooses, chickens, yellow-necked spurfowl, black-winged stilts, emerald-spotted wood doves, fish-eagles, crowned cranes, herons, ostriches, sea turtles and monitor lizards have been found.

## Trade

Archaeological evidence and written sources show that for the past 2,000 years, people from the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, and probably India, have been sailing to the East African Coast. This evidence shows the basic items of trade as being ivory, tortoise shell and rhinoceros horns. Written sources such as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* mention that traders gave gifts to rulers to establish goodwill prior to trading and that these traders frequently intermarried with local people and spoke their languages. Chinese porcelain has been found in Jumba la Mtwana, Gede and Manda Island in Lamu, among many other places, the earliest pieces of which (from Manda and Shanga) have been dated to the 9th century. Although this is not an indication of Chinese presence at the coast, it does, however, signify trade with the East where Chinese porcelain was used extensively at the time. Portuguese records mention that there were three ships from Bombay, northwest India, anchored in Mombasa harbour in 1505.

Commerce at the coast can be divided into three categories: coastal trade, inland trade and overseas trade. African mineral resources, forest and wild animal products, as well as able-bodied human resources have all been objects of trade; incense, mangrove timber, ambergris, iron, gold and slaves were major items for overseas trade. Mangrove poles were exported to Saudi Arabia until there was a ban in the early 1980s. Another major item of international trade was slaves, in which Arabs were the major players. Other items included dried fish, coconut oil, sesame and grains.

The traders in turn brought with them brass, dates and Persian carpets from many countries in the Middle East: from China they brought spices, celadons (pale green glazed pottery), and porcelain, while from India they brought cotton clothes and glass beads. Coastal trade was conducted among the main towns and trade items included textiles, fish and other foodstuffs. Inland trade was conducted between



the coastal towns and communities in the hinterland and interior. Goods moved from rural communities to the urban centres at the coast, where they were either consumed or processed and sold to overseas merchants. Traded goods included ivory, rhinoceros horn, skins and leather, gold, iron and slaves. In exchange the coastal towns sold cowrie shells, beads and cloth to the inland communities. This trade was still very active as recently as the 1980s, although it consisted mainly of carpets, rugs and brass items. ■

## People of the Coast

Before the 7th century AD, Greek and Roman scholars referred to the East African coast as *Azania* or *Zingion*, while from the 7th century onwards Arabic and Chinese literature refer to this area as the land of *Zanj/Zinj* or Chinese *tseng-kji* (land of black people). The first information in Arabic sources about the people of the coast is an account by an early traveller known as al-Masudi, who died in 945 AD. He reports that Bantu-speaking people occupy the land as far as southern Somalia, have a highly organized society with complex religion, elect kings, and have a regularly maintained army. Some other people, however, argue that the word *Zanj/Zinj* is a Bantu word that means the "coast" or "seaboard". The word "za" or "zi" means a large mass of water and may have thus been used by the local inhabitants



Women in Rabai



© Cyrillic Le Deaut

People of Mombasa

to refer to the Indian Ocean, and “*nchi*” or “*nji*” means territory, land or settlement. The people of the East African coast therefore claimed to have belonged to “*Zanji* or *Zanchi*” which was the land along the Indian Ocean.

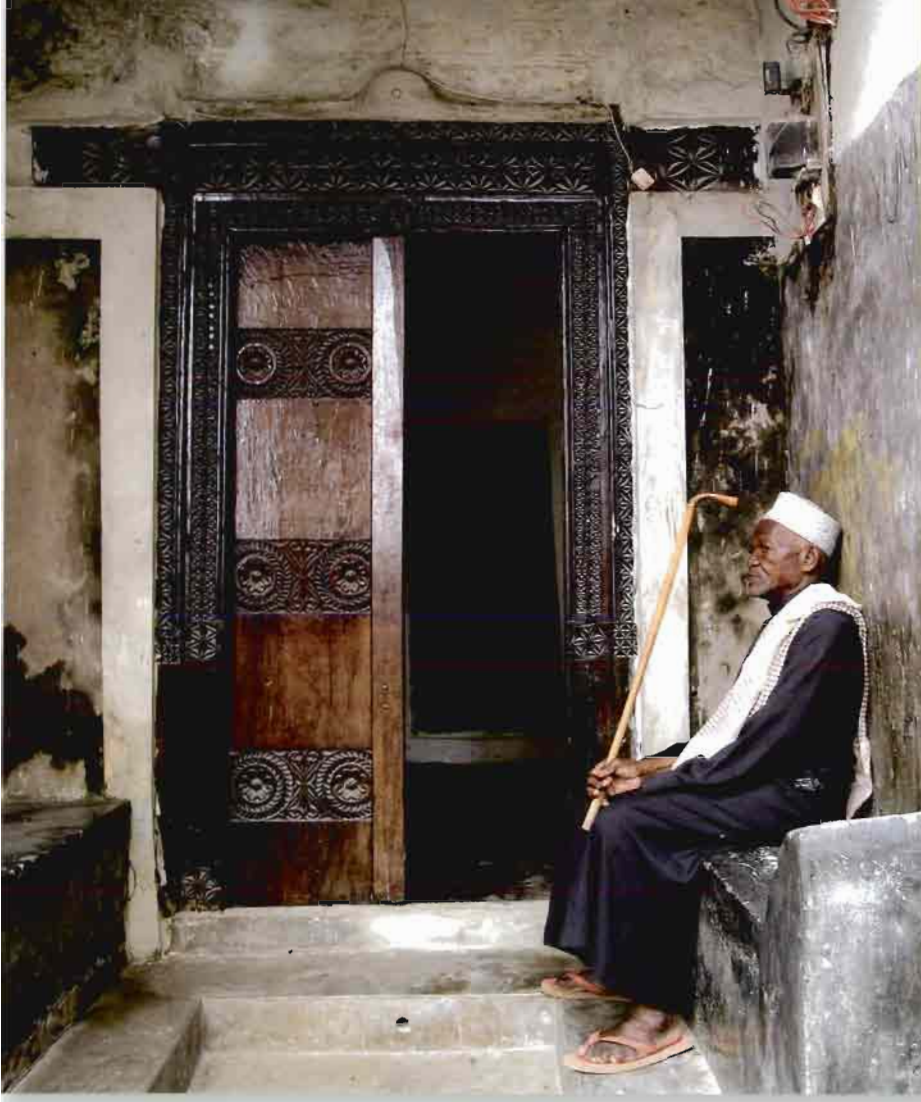
Coastal people include the Swahili, Mijikenda, Pokomo, Sanye, Waata and Orma. The Swahili inhabit the coastal area and the offshore islands; the Mijikenda and Sanye inhabit both the coast and the immediate hinterland, while the Pokomo and Orma inhabit the immediate hinterland. The Waata, Sanye and Orma are eastern Cushitic speakers, whereas the Swahili, Pokomo and Mijikenda are Bantu speakers. We should note here that the Mijikenda (*miji* - villages; *kenda* - nine) are an amalgam of nine related groups claiming a common ancestry.





The Waata are variously referred to as the Ariangulo, Liangulu, Langulo, Laa, Waat, Waatha, Wasi and Asi. In Ki-giriama, the name Ariangulo is a derogatory term meaning “meat-eaters”, as in both the past and present, these people are eaters of meat obtained through hunting.

Currently, the Sanye and Waata are dispersed from near the mouth of the Tana River in the north down to the Tanzanian border in the south. They are dependent on wild animals, wild fruit and berries. The Orma are pastoralists, and the Swahili and Mijikenda are farmers and fishermen. Many Mijikenda have integrated with their neighbours to such an extent as to be almost indistinguishable from them. For instance, they have adopted a variety of Orma (Galla) cultural traits such as ornamentation and circumcision. In some cases however, Galla influence has been submerged under assumed entities; for instance, along the Tana the Mijikenda superficially resemble the Galla while in the Malindi hinterland they resemble the Giriama, and on the Kenyan south coast they resemble the Digo and Duruma. ■



## 2.

# The Swahili Heritage

# Who are the Swahili?

Arabic, *sahel* or *sahil* refers to a coast, or shore, but by the 14th century AD some Arabs were using this word to refer to the specific group of people inhabiting the East African coast from the mouth of the River Juba in the north, to Cape Delgado in the south. The term carried with it cultural and political implications. One of the ways suggested by linguists of identifying an Mswahili is the language. Those who speak Kiswahili as their mother tongue or as a second language could be referred to as the Wa-swahili. Other scholars use Islam as a way to mark the Swahili apart from other tribes. Some of them divide the Swahili into three groups; the first are those born of Swahili parents; the second are those born of non-Swahili fathers, but Swahili mothers; and the third are those who were born elsewhere but have adopted the Swahili culture and disowned their own culture completely.



Elders during the Lamu festival

© Cyrille Le Deaut



Before the Swahili were given their present name, they were referred to as the Wangozi. When the Arabs arrived, they called the Swahili "*Sahil*" which means "coast" in Arabic. Some oral Swahili traditions say that when the Arabs came to the coast and asked the coastal people where they were from, they said "*Siwa hili*" which means "this island". The Arabs then thought that was the name of an ethnic group. Subsequently, the term "Swahili" came to be used instead of Wangozi to refer to these people of the coast. The word "*swahili*", however, was first used in AD 1331 by Ibn Battuta, an Arab from Morocco who had visited Mogadishu. According to his description, the "*sawahil*" country was the land between the coast of southern Somalia and northern Kenya, probably the Lamu archipelago. The rest of the coast was still the land of the Zanj. New archaeological evidence shows, however, that it was probably not until after AD 1250, when the entire East African coast had adopted Islam, that "*Swahili*" replaced the word "*Zanchi*".

The Swahili are basically African Bantu who converted to Islam over time through trade contact with Arabs. Oral narrative has it that environmental changes or harsh conditions such as severe drought often caused other communities from further inland to sometimes invade, capture and inhabit the settlements for some time. For instance, Portuguese documents of the 16th century describe the people of Kilwa as "*Moors*" or "*Suaili*" as opposed to the Arabs, who are described as people whose home had been Arabia. The present-day Swahilis therefore are a Bantu people with a myriad of influences both from the hinterland and Asia. ■

## Language

Kiswahili is a Bantu language belonging to the North East African Coast Bantu Sabaki subfamily (*ki* is a Bantu prefix meaning "language"). Kiswahili has, however, incorporated words from languages such as Arabic, Portuguese and Chinese. These derivative words tend to mirror a set of specific cultural values and literature, which probably signifies the transfer of these ideas from Arabic sources. Arabic has been for some time, and continues to be, the language of learning for Islamic scholars, even in East Africa.

Although it is not known when Kiswahili came into being, al-Masudi in his 10th century book says that coastal people spoke a Bantu language. He listed words in this language that are similar to those in use today, such as *wafilimi*, i.e. today's *wafalme* (kings). Though not entirely reliable, the Kilwa and Pate Chronicles (books that were written by local people on their history), show that



Kiswahili had come into being by the 13th century. What is definitely known however is that Kiswahili developed as a result of the need to communicate during trade transactions and inter-marriage. With time and the continuing conversion to Islam, Arabic became a common language as it was the only means by which the Koran could be read. An inscription on a mosque near the sea at Jumba la Mtwana indicates that Arabic was widely used, especially in religion.

A study of the Swahili language reveals that it contains many words borrowed from the various visitors to the coast. In spite of these borrowings, Kiswahili remains an African language in its basic sound and grammar and is closely related to Bantu languages of Kenya, northeast Tanzania and the Comoro Islands, within which areas it spread before the adoption of the Arabic vocabulary. Several Kiswahili dialects are spoken along the Swahili coast, including Kiamu, Kibarawa, Kitukuu, Kipate, Kisiyu, Kimvita, Kivumba, Kijomvu, Kimtangata, Kingare, Kiunguja, Kipemba, Kitumbatu, Kimgao, Kingazija, Kimwale, Kimayote and Kinjuani. ■

## Religious values

Before the arrival of Islam on the East African coast, the Swahili worshipped according to the traditions of their ancestors. The central theme was belief in God (*Murungu/Mulungu/Mungu*), accompanied by belief in the mystical powers of living and non-living intermediaries. The Swahili believe in God who is the creator (*Muumba*) of the universe. Not all prayers are made directly to God. Sometimes they pass through various categories of intermediaries known as *koma* (spirits).

The main religion among the Swahili today is Islam that came to the coast around the 8th century AD; the earliest mosque on the Swahili coast dates to the 9th century, at the town of Shanga on Pate Island in the Lamu archipelago. The dominance of Islam is very clear from the concentration of mosques in all the settlements. To residents of the urban centres, Islam was more than a religion—it was a way of life. Starting from the very tender age of three years, through the madras and other forms of socialisation into adulthood, Islam fully governed social standards and continues to do so to this day.

Despite being Muslims, a substantial number of the traditional beliefs of the Bantu have a strong influence on the lives of the Swahili. The maintenance of sacred sites parallel to the mosques is one indication. The other is the presence to this day of traditional

healers with the ability to communicate with the spirit world, which from interviews we understand to be forbidden by Islam. The religious life of the Swahili is based on the acceptance of God's power, compassion and order. The spirits and the living are engaged in never-ending attempts to gain and exercise power. The Swahili acknowledge the fact that perfect happiness cannot be reached during life, but that some degree of earthly harmony and order must be sought. They see evil, ill-health and pollution as being everywhere, and every person and community counter them to purify and reconstruct flawed sectors of experience. ■

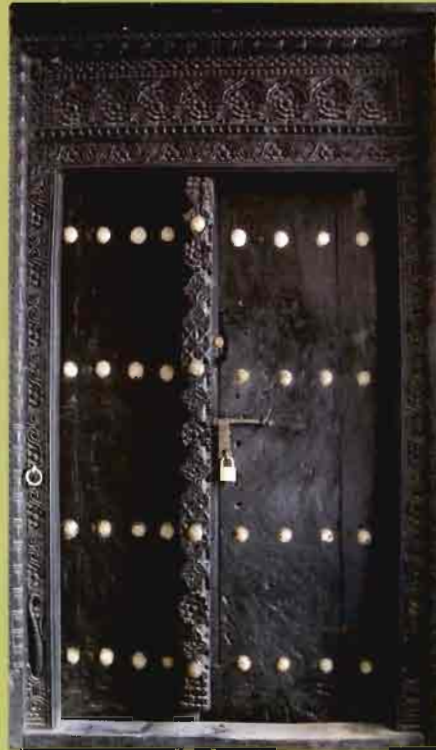
## Sacred sites

The common types of sacred sites found along the Kenyan coast include forests, caves, open-air sites, rock shelters, monumental tombs, abandoned and ruined mosques and large trees (especially baobabs). Particular types of objects are to be found here, including incense-burners, perfume bottles, broken pottery, coconut shells and pieces of cloth. Sites belong to individuals, families and sometimes the community. It is at these sites that healers communicate with the spirit world and call upon the spirits to come to their aid. An interesting fact to note is that although this practice is not allowed in Islam, during prayers communicating with the spirit world, Islamic verse and prayer are used alongside African traditional ones. Sacred sites are often identified by certain colours associated with spirits, such as red, white, and black. ■

## Carving

Carving is an art form that is important among the Swahili and brings income to those involved in it. The carver artist is known as *Mjomi*, carving and engraving on timber, gold, silver, brass and iron. Their work can be seen on doors, chests, windows and furniture. Woodcarving is prevalent among the Swahili, especially door carving. Carving involves the use of both tracing and freehand methods to produce a pattern, followed by a lengthy process of chiselling and finishing. Today, artisans have taken to a new art form where old or new wooden chests are patterned with brass studs and sheeting. The old art form of lac-work—applying lacquer-like vegetable colouring to turned pieces, small round pots and the like—is slowly dying out.

The art of woodcarving, part of the Omani lifestyle, is testimony to the multiple influences along the western Indian Ocean.



Omani carved door, Lamu

© Okoko Ahikoye



Carved chair

© Okoko Ahikoye

## Arts



© Okoko Afrakaye

Swahili calligraphy

The Swahili pride themselves on certain distinguishing cultural features such as types of house, clothes, poetry and notions of beauty and purity. Swahili visual arts include expression through painting, sculpture, embroidery, weaving, pottery and plasterwork on walls of houses. The Islamic influence is seen in the fact that many artworks feature all forms of creation excepting human figures. This is especially so for women, of whom portraits were rarely made. Art provides a means of expression and often replaces speech. The *kofia* (hat) and prayer mats are examples of such forms of art and expression. ■



## Goma and Siwa

The Swahili used both drums and horns in communicating with each other, and in entertainment.

### Goma

The *Goma* is a large drum that was used to communicate messages of birth, death, war and weddings. The same big drum would be beaten to different rhythms to announce different occurrences. Permission to beat the drum to send a message came from the *Timamu* (town or village leader).

### Siwa

These were horns, often made of antelope horn or elephant tusks; the larger the horn, the more prestigious it was. They were used as signs of nobility, chieftainship or *ufalme*. The *siwa* horn was also blown to announce deaths, births, weddings and war. In war especially, it was used to encourage fighters to fight harder. There are two major *siwa*: one of the Sultanate of Pate, and one of Lamu. One of the songs sung by groups belonging to the noble groups owning a prestigious horn went thus: "*Tumekuja Sikamo ndisi wanawamuali pembe*" .... which translates as "We have come to the palace as the children of the royal horn".



The Siwa of the Sultanate of Pate



## Smithing and weaving

The most common form of smithing among the Swahili was silversmithing, which barely survives today, the market for such commodities having shrunk due to the high price of silver. Other forms of art amongst the Swahili include weaving (especially of sleeping and sitting mats), boat-building and pot-making, especially among the people of Jomvu. The Swahili were also expert tanners, making sandals, scabbards, shields, belts and book covers. From the 9th to the 19th century, Siyu town in the Lamu archipelago had a flourishing trade in cloth and crafts. Writing in the late 16th century, the Portuguese writer dos Santos says that Pate Island, and especially Siyu, manufactured excellent cotton and silk clothes that were worn by the elite of the coast and some Portuguese women. Other Portuguese travellers to the East African coast also describe the fine silks and embroidered cloths that were produced at Siyu in the 16th and 17th centuries, while visitors to the northern Kenyan coast talked of the existence of cotton ginning, spinning and weaving on the Lamu archipelago and the adjoining mainland. In the 1870s, Charles New noted that a coarse cloth called *Lemale* was being woven at Lamu, Pate Island and was also sold to the Galla. ■

## Swahili women

Swahili women play a very important role in society; what to an outsider may appear like segregation is an acknowledgement of their power over the menfolk. In the past, education ensured that children of both genders understood what their responsibilities were. Girls attended special schools where they were inducted into the art and skill of being a Swahili woman. Teachings covered areas such as cookery, needlework, religion and an in-depth discussion on matters of sexuality. Islamic law insists that a woman covers her body while out in public. Traditionally, women did not attend any social functions; today this is changing but even so, they go in groups, cover themselves from head to toe by wearing a *buibui* and are sheltered in a tent called *Shiraa*. Women often organize entertainment concerts and variety shows especially for themselves. At these events, where men are not invited, they can take off their *buibui* and dance to the enticing beats of *chakacha*. Although women's subjection to male authority is accepted, women hold defined rights in property ownership and inheritance. A sister inherits half of what goes to a brother. While wives possess the rights of residence in their houses, husbands do not. The greatest weakness in women's emancipation, however, is the disadvantage they face in law. For instance, whereas a man's word is accepted as evidence in a dispute, a woman needs witnesses. Patrician women possess the quality of purity, which ensures honour and reputation, whereas non-

patrician women have a lesser role but play a far greater part in reproduction and are engaged in food production. Men hold general authority and play most formal, political and other roles. Women's roles differ and are based on whether they live in the stone towns or the country towns where they have always played a greater role in farming and petty trading.

Among the Swahili, matrilineal descent is as important as patrilineal. By Islamic law a woman inherits half of what a man inherits, though she has a right to her future inheritance or may leave it to her children. She is of considerable formal, economic and social importance and plays a role of equal importance to that of her male kin in most affairs affecting her family. A patrician woman holds certain rights in the house and other property through her marriage, and is able to acquire wealth and keep it as her own to do with as she thinks fit; she also controls the running of the household. Unfortunately, she is subject to

many personal constraints linked to Islam and the moral purity of lineage, which are strictly enforced by her male kin. These include observance of house seclusion; virginity at marriage; possibility of being divorced by her husband without a formal trial; need to be veiled when outside



Woman in buibui

© Okoko Ahikoye



Henna painting

© Okoko Ahikoye





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Jewellery

the house; and inability to divorce her husband without appropriate witnesses. Men are allowed to worship in mosques and sit on seats in the streets. Women, on the other hand, are not allowed in mosques in certain towns and where they are allowed, they are separated from men.

After conversion to Islam, the Swahili adopted Islamic Law (*sharia*). According to *sharia*, women get their rights from their husbands. *Sharia* also incorporates certain aspects of traditional Swahili culture. Swahili women remain at home and may not go out without reason and permission from their husbands. Dowry is paid to the woman who is free to use it as she sees fit: her husband cannot obtain a single cent unless she gives it to him as a gift. If she owns a business or works, all earnings belong to her and she has no obligation to

share them with him. The same goes for her inheritance, with which she can do whatever she pleases. If her husband dies, her brother can take her in and look after her; this is the reason why brothers get twice a sister's share of inheritance, in order to be able to look after her. ■

## Buibui and jewellery

Muslim women do not appear outside their houses uncovered. Their arms and legs are not exposed to the view of strangers. When in the streets or in public, women wear the buibui, a shroud of black or red muslin enveloping them from head to foot, often leaving only the face exposed. Hadrami women introduced the buibui to the Swahili, who developed it over the years to make it a universally used garment.

Since the arrival of early visitors to the Kenyan coast over a millennium ago, the Swahili people have benefited from a lively sea trade that has brought them jewellery designs and techniques from India, the Middle East and Arabia. The silver armlets, bracelets and anklets worn by Swahili women are reminiscent of Indian and Arab designs.



© Chico Athroye

Buibui

Valuable pieces of jewellery are often secured in chests, and brought out only on special occasions. Among the most valued are the *karmali*, a large silver belt made of many separate sections and fastened with a breast-shaped buckle; the *jambia* or *kucha*, an ornamental dagger worn by men; large bolt anklets in the shape of signet rings; and the *hirizi*, the flat box pendants which hold religious verses. All of these types of jewellery can be seen in use on formal occasions, particularly during weddings in the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula and Zanzibar. Of typical Swahili origin is a small disc made of velvet and decorated with glass beads, and large silver discs, all of which are used as decorative earplugs by women.



## Literature

The artistic spirit inherent in the Swahili culture manifests itself in beautiful Kiswahili prose and poetry. The artistic qualities embodied in verse and sentence, in which the gentleness and piety of Swahili culture find expression, can only be fully appreciated in the local context of mostly festivals or rituals in which they are recited or sung. The beautiful form without the gentle voice of a woman or the sonorous one of a man is an empty shell. Swahili romance expressed in song or poetry is poignant indeed. For instance, lullabies written by Fumo Liyongo, who lived around the 8th or 9th century, are in existence and are some of the earliest Kiswahili compositions.

On the other hand, the Swahili use riddles to show off their knowledge of the language. A riddle can also be used to express feelings of joy during a marriage celebration. Songs (*nyimbo*) are used during weddings to pray for the happiness of the bride and the bridegroom, to welcome guests and bid them farewell, and for making jokes about one another.

Swahili poetry (*ushairi*) is an art regarded as the most important form of Swahili literature, following a set of rules handed down from generation to generation. The Swahili regard poetry as the backbone of their literature, as through it they express their thoughts, joys and agonies. There are different kinds of poetry:

- *Utendi* or *Utenzi* is a form of poetry used to record historical events, e.g. the history of a place or the life-history of a famous person. It is also used by elders to advise young persons on good behaviour and to admonish the faithful against evil deeds.

Other forms of poetry, though not as common as the above, have their own purpose. For instance:

- *Inkishafi* is a form of poetry used to teach good behaviour, the fear of God and about the day of judgement
- *Kawafi* is used to tell prophetic stories
- *Tiyani Fatiha* is used to pray to God for relief when in difficulty and for forgiveness of sins
- *Hamziya* is used to praise Prophet Muhammad and is also recited when a bridegroom is taken to the bride's home



- *Utumbuizo* (lullabies) are used to soothe babies, and women sing them as they grind millet or to welcome their husbands home after a hard day's work in the fields.

Swahili farmers use the *wawe* poetry as they prepare their land for cultivation. *Kimai* is used by fishermen and sailors. ■

## The Swahili use prose and poetry for different reasons

- To express feelings of love or hate
- To sing praises to God
- To soothe babies to sleep
- To welcome loved ones back home
- To record historical events
- To motivate workers such as farmers and fishermen



## Swahili cuisine



© Chikoko Ashikoye

### Swahili food

nourishment, Swahili food also enhances social cohesion. Food is used to bring people together at festivals, celebrations such as weddings, and even funerals. Food is used to welcome new neighbours and to seal trade deals; in fact, there is no special event that is not marked with the preparation of a sumptuous meal. Given this fact, the preparation of food becomes a social activity in which many members of the family and community participate, especially the women. ■

Swahili group their foods into two categories: *Uandazi* and *Miili*. *Uandazi* are foods made of flour, mainly from wheat, rice and millet. Each food made with flour and rice is *kuanda*. Foods prepared in this way include *kaimati*, *mahamri*, *matobosha*, *mkate wa mofa* and many others. *Vyakula vya miili* are vegetables and meats. Vegetables used include *mchicha* (a kind of spinach), pumpkin, cassava leaves and cowpeas (both leaves and pods). These foods also include grains that are not ground into flour.

Swahili cuisine is very rich, and borrows from Arabian and Indian cuisines. Some of the borrowed dishes include *pilau*, *biriani* and various meat and vegetable curries. Local dishes include fish and other marine products. Besides being used as

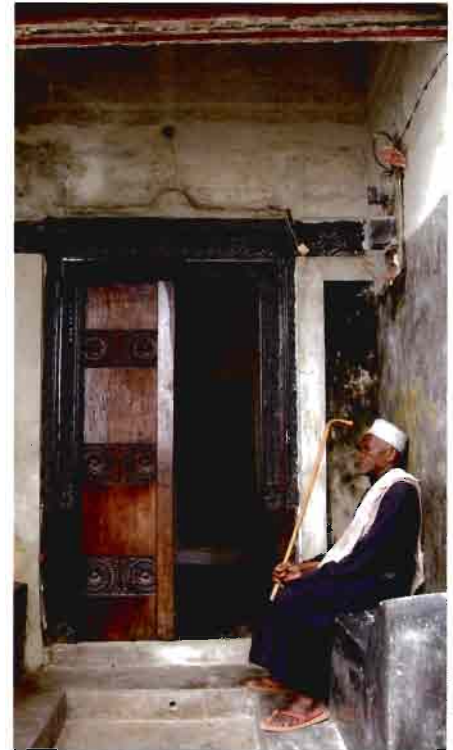




## The Swahili towns: architecture and physical organization

The Swahili had two distinct architectural designs; that of the stone towns, and another for country towns. The stone towns belonged mainly to rich merchants who lived in close-knit areas of large coral houses, separate from the common people. Many of the stone towns had surrounding walls (*boma*) or bastions (*buruji*); for instance, walls surrounded Mombasa, Lamu, Pate and Jumba la Mtwana. The country villages, on the other hand, were mostly owned by fishermen and farmers and were made of less important materials such as wattle and daub, with coconut palm leaves (*makuti*) for roofing. Early builders quarried coral from the reefs and used it for building. For decoration, they used *Porites* coral. Coral rag or rock is excellent for building because it is both light and porous, and lime improves in quality when exposed outdoors. These are indications of a highly developed knowledge about the science of building.

The towns boasted a unique fusion of Arabic, Indian and Swahili architecture. Most permanent buildings were constructed of coral rag for the walls; floors were built of clay and plaster over a layer of coral chips, and the roof beams were made of *mwangati* (*Terminalia brevipes*) and sometimes *muhuhu* (*Brachylaena hutchinsii*) or *mbamba kofi* (*Azelia quanzensis*) hardwoods. Roofs were mainly made from palm leaves (*makuti*), with windows having beautifully carved shutters. Doorways were always arched or squared and their side posts (jambs) and columns (pilasters) were often decorated with niches (*vidaka*) that were used to hold books and pottery lamps in which castor oil (which burns with a smokeless flame) was burned. The inner courtyards and verandas contained elaborately-carved wooden doors that bore a deep Islamic influence and reinforced their magnificence.



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Doorway in Lamu Town



Vidaka in Pate Island

© Cynille le Déaut

Swahili houses were designed as an inward-looking, self-contained complex with a plan organized around a central courtyard. Houses were built in gallery style and not individual rooms. This style has been maintained to this day, especially in Lamu and Pate. Most Swahili houses have four galleries, each of which serves a specific purpose. Entry into the house is through the *daka* or *madakani*, a kind of reception room with stone benches on either side, which opens directly onto the street. The wall directly facing the entrance is covered with niches for decorations. Many guests do not go beyond the *daka*, where they may be served with *kahawa tungu* (coffee) and sweetmeats (*halwa*). The entrance hall gives way to the *tekani* (inner porch) through double doors. After the *tekani* is the courtyard, through which light enters the house. On the left of the courtyard is the kitchen, and on the right is the toilet. Above the toilet is the *sebule* (guestroom). Visitors who spend the night use the *sebule*, the entrance of which is designed in such a way that it is impossible for the visitor to see into the house properly. To the south of the courtyard is the first gallery, known as *mwana wa tini* that is used as a living room. This is followed by *mwana wa yuu (kati)* or central gallery. Both these rooms are well furnished and contain beds known as *samadari* as well as chairs such as *viti vya mpingo*, *viti vya enzi*, *karasi*, *mdodoki* and *viti vya jeuri* (proud chairs). Beyond these two rooms is the *chumba cha kati* or inside gallery. This is divided into two: *chumba cha kati*, which is used as a store for keeping food, oil and grain, and *ndani*. At one end of the *ndani* is a toilet with a small door known as *kipenge*. The *ndani* has an *ulili* or bed that is used for different activities at different times. Swahili houses had no outward-facing windows apart from a high ventilation hole in the bathrooms. The lack of windows was related to the practice of secluding women. The guestrooms or *sebule* were the only ones with windows and were self-contained, with access directly from the streets to avoid the risk of seeing the womenfolk. In other houses the women were restricted to the inner bedroom before male outsiders could be admitted. ■



## Basic characteristic of Swahili houses

- Built using coral rag, lime and mortar
- Were built in gallery style
- Had no outward-facing windows
- Each gallery served a specific purpose. For example, visitors were entertained in the *madakani* (stone benches opening to the street) while mothers gave birth in the *ndani* gallery.
- Visitors who spent the night slept in the self-contained *sebule*

Initially, most Swahili towns were small agricultural or fishing villages. In time they became richer, larger and more complex with a variety of specialized areas. Most settlements were subdivided into *mitaa* (sing. *mtaa*) or wards that initially reflected the ethnic or kin relations of the occupants. For instance, in Pate, people who were considered to be high class (*wa-ungwana*) inhabited *Mitaayuu* (upper sections) while the rest, the commoners (*watwana*), occupied *Kitokwa*. The structure of these towns was affected by the availability of suitable land and security. Towns on small island and fortified mainland sites were built close together as their populations grew. In certain towns, multi-storied buildings were erected to solve congestion problems.



Interior of a coffee shop in Old Town



Those towns that were vulnerable to outside attacks were fortified with walls; a strong outer wall with few gates ensuring security surrounded the towns. This was in most cases reinforced by an inner wall. The centre of the enclosure held the permanent houses including the palace, mosques and residential houses of the ruling class and other important members of society. Surrounding these were temporary houses of mud, wood and *makuti*. These could have been the homes of the townspeople. Houses were separated from one another by long, winding, narrow streets, which provided shade and created a cool microclimate in the hot, humid environment. Such a town structure can be seen at Pate, Lamu and Mombasa Old Town. The small narrow streets and alleyways with their *buibui*-clad women, *hamali* cart operators who sell their goods door to door, roving coffee-sellers, and mosques which call the faithful to prayer five times a day, are all indications of how life must have been in the past.

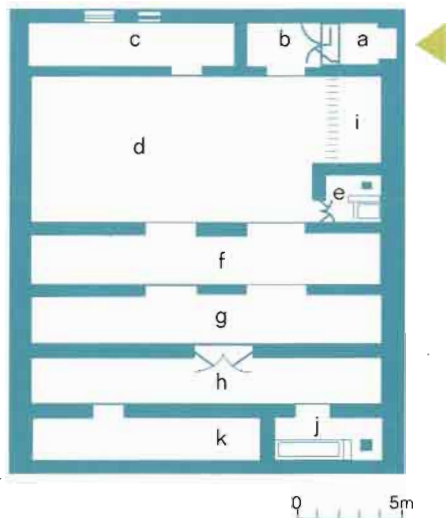


Fig. Structure of a Swahili house

- (a) *daka* (porch) ;
- (b) *tekani* ( inner porch) ;
- (c) *sebule* (common area) ;
- (d) *kiwanda* (courtyard) ;
- (e) *choo* (toilet) ;
- (f) *mwana wa tini (chini)* (outer living room) ;
- (g) *mwana wa yuu (chuu)* ;(inner living room) ;
- (h) *ndani* (women's room) ;
- (i) *choo* ;
- (j) *nyumba ya kati* (for washing the dead) ;
- (k) *jikoni* (kitchen)



0 5m



The Swahili coast is an area of low annual rainfall. To take care of their daily water needs, each town had one or more wells which were used as a source of fresh water. Many of the mosques within a town's walls were located close to the well. Cisterns drained into underground soak-pits filled with coral limestone, which acted as natural filter for the water. The towns also had a drainage system that received water off roofs and diverted it away from town. For instance, in Pate and Lamu there were straight streets that ran rainwater off the roofs and into the sea. Many of the houses had toilet facilities in them. These pit latrines were created in such a way as to prevent the foul smell from spreading into the house.

Settlements close to the sea always had a mosque on the beach, which served sailors and traders who may have been visiting the town for short periods of time only. Many of these towns had narrow streets. Because of their narrowness, the streets provided shade and also produced a slight draught due to the wind-tunnel effect that occurs in a narrow street. In some houses, wind funnels were placed on roofs of houses to catch the air and channel it into the interior of the house. Extremely thick walls, about one to one-and-a-half metres thick, characterize the houses. The thickness not only gave extra coolness, but also acted to deaden sound. ■



3.

The  
Swahili and  
their  
neighbours:  
past and  
present



# The Portuguese influence

**A**t the end of the 15th century, the Portuguese sought to improve their trade routes to India. The Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama was commissioned by his king, Manuel I the Fortunate, to gain control over this commerce. He set out with four small ships and provisions for three years to explore the Indian Ocean, navigating the Cape of Good Hope in 1498 and finally arriving in Mombasa on April 7 of that year, finding that migrants from Arabia were already established. Vasco da Gama was attacked by the inhabitants of Mombasa, so he sailed on and landed in Malindi. However, the Portuguese interest in Mombasa remained and after several battles against the resident Arabs, the town succumbed. The Portuguese captain then moved his headquarters to Mombasa.



The Vasco da Gama Pillar in Malindi

© Okata Achikoye

The foundations of Fort Jesus were laid in 1593, and the fort was completed in 1596. The Portuguese ruled the coast until 1696, when seven Omani ships with an army of 3,000 men entered the port. The great siege of Fort Jesus had begun. It lasted thirty-three months and ended with the Omani victory in December 1698. Prior to the siege of Fort Jesus, the power of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean had been seriously eroded from various directions by the appearance there of the Turks, the Dutch and the British,



© Cliffo Athikoye

Fort St Joseph in Mombasa

amongst other rivals. A page of history had been turned and, apart from a brief period in 1728-29 when the Portuguese were able to retake the fort while the Omani forces were occupied elsewhere, the days of the Portuguese in Mombasa were at an end. Sultan Seif of Oman appointed governors in settlements along the coast, but their authority became fractured with neighbouring cities fighting for control and independence. During the Portuguese occupation, there were soldiers who were for the most part Goans or local inhabitants. In addition to these, up to fifty Portuguese civilian families were living at any one time in Mombasa. This small Christian community had their houses in the area directly opposite the fort, down a street known as "La Rapozeia", which appears to have followed the line of the present-day

Ndia Kuu. They lived as close as possible to the fort, where they would take refuge whenever hostilities were suspected. Without certitude, only the site of the Church of the Misericordia can be identified today. Portugal's most lasting legacy to the Kenyan coast is Fort Jesus and Fort Saint Joseph in Mombasa, as well as the Portuguese Chapel and the Vasco da Gama Pillar in Malindi. ■





## The Omani period

During and after the 18th century there was much immigration to the Kenyan coast. From south-eastern Arabia hailed the Omanis, who are closely identified with the Sultanate of Zanzibar. The Hadramaut from southern Arabia settled in towns along the coast during the final years of the 19th century, contributing greatly to the creation of an international mercantile community renowned for its wealth, education and high religious authority. They also played a major political role during the past.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Mombasa was ruled by the Mazrui family who had originally been installed as governors by the Sultan of Oman in the 18th century but who became independent from Oman. During the same period, the Busaidi dynasty took control of Zanzibar and Kilwa. Following a long struggle, the Busaidi gained power in Mombasa in 1837 and the Mazrui family fled to the south and north of Mombasa where they created large coconut plantations which can be seen today at Gasi on the way to Shimoni, and at Takaungu on the Malindi road north of Mtwapa. Sultan Seyyid Said moved his power base from Muscat to Zanzibar and by 1840 the entire East African coast was under Omani rule. During the Busaidi period the coast and the islands were ruled by governors (*liwali*) with almost absolute power in their own domains but who owed allegiance to Zanzibar. Both the Omani Busaidi and the Mazrui made Fort Jesus their headquarters in Mombasa and appropriated the Portuguese settlement as their own, which they extended around the bay and surrounded with a wall.

The Zanzibari period in Mombasa (1837-1888) was one of increasing economic activity. In the early 19th century, Zanzibar had established itself as the main commercial centre on the coast, and after 1837 Mombasa benefited as a convenient feeder port. Zanzibar was a notorious slaving entrepôt fed by human merchandise from central Africa via slaving routes that permitted them to become a strong economic and political power. With increasing prosperity, Mombasa began to take on the appearance it has today. After 1850, Indian traders started arriving, mainly from Zanzibar and India, and started building many houses in the Old Town. In 1859 the population of the town was estimated to be about 10,000; by 1897 it had grown to 25,000. Mombasa was by then a cosmopolitan town where merchants from Europe, India and the Middle East met and where *dhow*s anchored in its harbour. Omani landowners, dressed in their fine robes and turbans with daggers across their bellies, negotiated mortgages for their plantations as they drank coffee together. Omani beliefs produced a specific culture, which greatly influenced domestic architecture, woodcraft



Siyu Fort built during the Omani period in Pate island

and jewellery. In 1856 Seyyid Said died, leaving his sons disputing control of the sultanate and forcing it to be separated. One son obtained Muscat and Oman, while the other took over the East African coastal strip, which was governed from Zanzibar. The British, who were competing with the French for the East Indian trade route and wanted to abolish the highly prosperous slave trade, took advantage of this weakness. In 1887 the Sultan leased Mombasa as a concession to the *British East Africa Company*, which in 1888 turned into the *Imperial British East Africa Company*. In 1895 the Company's territory became a British protectorate under the nominal authority of the Sultan of Zanzibar. ■



## Leven House

Leven House is unique in Mombasa: its history can be traced back over 190 years. The house took its name from the arrival of the *HMS Leven*, a British naval survey ship that visited Mombasa in 1824. Officers from this ship came ashore and were given permission by Captain Owen to conduct their anti-slaving operations from here. These officers rented this house, which became their anti-slaving base. Lieutenant James Emery, who administered Mombasa under the first British Protectorate (1824-1826), paid freed slaves to build the tunnel and steps leading down to the jetty in 1825. Initially the Mazruis, the governing family, invited the British naval patrol ship to provide protection to the citizens of Mombasa from imminent attack by the Omani fleet, so preserving their independence. Until 1697, the coast of East Africa was under the control of the Omani Arabs, who governed the coast through locally based hereditary governors. In the case of Mombasa, the governing Mazrui family broke away from Oman and ruled autonomously between 1741 and 1837.



Leven House

In 1837 the Sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid Said, appropriated Leven House from the Mazruis. Next, various missionaries (Ludwig Krapf in 1844, and Rebrmann), explorers such as Burton and Speke, and administrators (such as the first British Consul, Commander Gissing,



© Dikoko Adukkoye

The Leven steps

in 1884) stayed here at different times. Mr G.S. Mackenzie, administrator of the *Imperial British East Africa Company*, rented the house and later bought it in 1891. In 1895, it passed to the Colonial Government. The house was much altered and enlarged after 1900, when a German shipping company, *Oswald & Co.*, purchased it. The only original part of the building was the warehouse section on the ground floor. Between 1908 and 1928 it was renovated and occupied by the German Consulate.

Leven House was gazetted as a National Monument and acquired by the National Museums of Kenya in 1997. The site comprises a number of different components that include the house, an open space in front of it, a tunnel connecting it to the sea, open steps, a well and a jetty. It is a three-storey structure with walls made of coral stones bonded with lime and sand mortar. One can see interesting details such as the Swahili-style balcony, staircases, wooden doors and teak panelling that give the house its aesthetic value.



## The heritage of the slave trade in the Kenyan coast

The late 18th century saw the integration of the East African coast into the developing world economy. The coast, which hitherto had produced goods for direct local consumption and some for export, was now required to produce significantly more surplus products for international trade. This international mercantile exchange system sometimes encouraged the actual physical transfer of labour (in this case slave labour) from East Africa to other countries where demand existed. Cities along the coast such as Mombasa, Moçambique Island, Kilwa Kivinje and Zanzibar town became major slave trading centres. Because of increased demand, the mechanism for acquiring and selling slaves became more complex; it now meant that caravans going to the interior in search of slaves had to be formally organized. Slaves were brought from both the hinterland and the interior to the coast where they were held prior to being shipped to Zanzibar, where they would either be absorbed into the labour pool or exported to the northern coast as far as southern Somalia or to the Arabian peninsula and India. In those days, Mombasa had an important role as an entrepôt port of the Indian Ocean trade. Ships arrived at Mombasa from India and the Gulf with salt, dried fish, cloth and iron. They in turn purchased ivory and foodstuffs. The town was also a clearing-house in the trade up and down the coast and between the islands of the coast and the interior. Slavery was a major feature of this complex trade.

The imposition of successive anti-slavery policies by the British on the Omani rulers of Zanzibar, the abolition of slavery in Britain in the 1830s and the establishment of a British consular presence in Zanzibar meant that there were increased British naval patrols along the East African coast in search of slave traders. This made the export trade a much riskier business than it had been. Traders now sold slaves on the coast to wealthy people who used them on their mainland plantations.

In 1837, the Mazrui Arabs were defeated by their Omani rivals from the Busaidi dynasty at Zanzibar. Some of the Mazrui moved to Takaungu to the north of Mombasa and created a settlement there, while another group moved to Gasi, south of Mombasa. At Gasi they subdued the local population and established their plantations. Needing cheap labour to work these plantations, they turned to slave traders to supply them. The slaves used in these plantations were obtained from as far away as Tanga on the northern coast of what is nowadays mainland Tanzania. After coming to Shimoni, they were stored in a cave to avoid detection by the British. They were then taken and sold to plantation owners. The working conditions in these plantations were harsh to the



extent that some slaves escaped from their Mazrui masters and hid in forests until they were rescued. When the British got wind of what was happening, they sent an expedition to Gasi to try and stop slavery there. It was during such an expedition that one British soldier, Captain Frederick Lawrence, was shot dead by an Arab trader and was buried at Shimoni, where the Imperial British East Africa Company had established its first mainland headquarters in East Africa specifically to stop the slave trade in Shimoni and its surroundings. The ruins of these buildings are still visible today. ■

## The spread of Christianity: evangelization and the anti-slavery crusade

In 1844, a German missionary named Johann Ludwig Krapf, arrived at Mombasa with his wife and new-born baby, hoping to establish a mission amongst the tribes inland from the east coast. Within three months of their arrival the family was struck down with malaria, which killed Mrs Krapf and their child. Their graves can still be seen at Mkomani, in mainland Mombasa. A fellow German, Johannes Rebmann, joined Krapf in 1846 and they established a mission at Rabai, 25 km inland of Mombasa on land (part of a sacred *kaya* forest) given by the council of elders, where Krapf and Rebmann opened the first mission school in Kenya.

The mission lay on a slave-trading route and was to be a base for expeditions among the Akamba and Chagga people. Krapf returned to Germany in 1855 and for twenty years Rebmann worked alone as he studied the local language and was joined by the Bombay Africans attached to the Rabai mission as catechists. The Bombay Africans were freed slaves who had been sent to India to be educated and converted to Christianity. Rebmann later became blind and was cared for by a small group of Christians. The new converts cohabited and mixed with the Mijikenda group in Rabai. Today this place represents a mixture of the rich history of Christianity, slavery and the Mijikenda culture whose evidence is still in place.



In 1872, a fresh start was made. The British government sent Sir Bartle Frere (a former British governor of Bombay and a fierce anti-slavery campaigner) to negotiate a treaty with Zanzibar for the suppression of the slave trade. On Frere's return he urged the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to establish a settlement near Mombasa for slaves freed from Arab raiders. The society sent out the Reverend W.S. Price, who had been working with such slaves in a well-established missionary centre at Nasik, near Bombay in western India. Land was purchased for an industrial colony (named Frere Town) and work began in 1875. Progress was slow, but in 1885 the missionaries began to spread their faith to the interior. German annexations in Tanganyika, however, swiftly led to opposition from the local people and eventually to the severing of all communications. As a result Frere Town and Rabai remained the two main centres of the Kenya mission for the remainder of the century.

In 1873 Sir Bartle Frere pressed for the closure of the slavery market in Zanzibar, while Sir John Kirk, the British consul in Zanzibar, forced Sultan Bargash to ban the trade in slaves in his lands. It was not enough just to free slaves, as once freed they had no means of support and could not usually return to the country from where they came. This is why the CMS bought a plot of land on the mainland at Kisauni, where nowadays the Nyali Bridge leads to the Malindi Road, as a rehabilitation centre for the freed slaves. Here they could learn a profession, earn a living, become Christians and have an education.

The earliest map of Frere Town (1881) shows how the area was divided into *shambas*, which were cultivated for food. There were also a church, dormitories for men and women, a school and workshops as well as a prison, a cricket pitch and houses for the missionaries, some of which are still occupied. There was also a large coconut plantation just before the present Bamburi estate on the old Malindi road, which provided the settlement with added income as it was intended to be self-supporting. The whole settlement covered about 1,000 acres. Many world-famous missionaries were to work at Frere Town, such as H.K. Binns, W.E. Taylor and the doctor R.K. Shepherd.



© Okoko Ashikoye

The Ngao Church in the Tana River District

A.C.K. Emmanuel Church, which can still be seen today, was built in 1894 to replace the old wooden church. The bell tower, thought to have first been erected in 1878, is another relic and symbol of Frere Town. Relations were not always good between the Muslim town on the island and the Christian freed slave colony just across the water. Sometimes raiding parties came to try and steal the slaves back and the bell was rung as a warning. One such attack is recorded in 1880 and there was another more serious attack on Frere Town in 1895/6, when many of the buildings were damaged. Usually, however, the bell was rung for more peaceful purposes such as calling the inhabitants to prayer, to meals and work. The National Museums of Kenya recently restored the bell tower and a replica of the original bell, which now hangs in the church, was placed there. ■

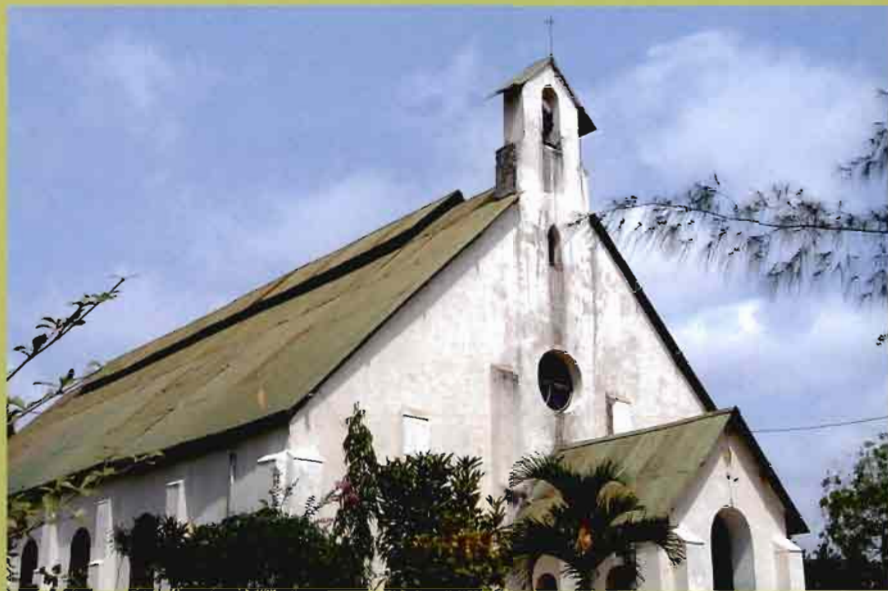




## Missionary establishments on the Kenyan coast

The Krapf Memorial Museum was established at Rabai in 1998. Rabai itself is home to the first Church Missionary Society of England mission station in Kenya, founded in 1846 by pioneer German-born missionaries Dr Johann Ludwig Krapf and Johannes Rebmann. The site was one of the early European missionary settlements introducing western formal education.

Rabai played an important role in the abolishment of slavery in that it served as a refuge for freed slaves who assimilated themselves with the indigenous Africans, diversifying their economy. Apart from the Krapf Memorial Museum, the other early church establishments were at Mazeras and Ribe, near Rabai. Other pioneer missionary stations were established in Ngao and Gulbanti, in Tana River District.



Saint Paul Church in Rabai was dedicated in 1887

© Okoko Ashloye

Rabai is also the site of five sacred *kaya* forests. There is a conservation project under the supervision of the National Museums of Kenya with the assistance of the French Embassy, whose the main objective is to enable the local people to use their heritage to improve their livelihoods. This project focuses on the *Rabai kayas* but is integrated into a broader Rabai cultural landscape consisting of the five Rabai kayas and the Mission Station. Indeed, the history of the Mission Station is intractably linked to the *kayas*, and is the reason why the National Museums of Kenya presents the entire Rabai cultural landscape in an integrated manner.



## The British influence on the coast



Mombasa today

In 1888, the chartered trading company the *Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEACo.)*, was created and was responsible for administration in what is now Kenya. The first administrator of the *IBEACo.* was George S. Mackenzie, who arrived in 1889. At that time Leven House in the Old Town was the only available accommodation and was used as the administrator's residence. Apart from the CMS missionaries and the representative of *Smith Mackenzie and Co.*, there were no other Europeans on the island of Mombasa. A number of Indian traders had residences and stores in Ndia Kuu, but the main inhabitants of Mombasa



were native Africans, Swahilis, Arabs (divided into twelve tribes) and Baluchis from India. In 1890 a new administrator, Sir Francis de Witona, a director of the company, arrived. One of his first tasks was the laying of the first rails of the "Central African Railway". This was a very short line, only reaching seven miles inland. It was later taken up and used for trolley lines on the island from Government Square (in the old port) to Kilindini docks and could carry goods and passengers. In 1891, Mombasa, Malindi and Lamu were connected by telegraph and at the end of the same year Captain James. R. Leslie Macdonald and a party of Royal Engineers arrived to start a reconnaissance survey of the proposed Mombasa to Lake Victoria railway, which was completed in 1901. The landing of equipment for the railway focused attention on Kilindini, and the big shipping companies moved to new quarters along the approach road to Kilindini harbour.

In 1896, the coming of the British administrative machinery began a movement out of the Old Town, which remained known as the Omani Mombasa. It contains many others buildings of diverse origins (Portuguese Catholics, Asians and colonial). The first British Commissioner, Arthur Hardinge, following the example of the Arabs and Portuguese, had an office in Fort Jesus. Many buildings, described in the Mombasa tour trail, appeared during the first years of the 20th century. Mombasa was the centre of the administration and colonial life between 1900 and 1907, when the capital was transferred to Nairobi. This varied past makes Mombasa very rich and unique today.

The British influence can be seen in different places all along the Kenyan coast; remains of many buildings are still found from Vanga on the Kenya/Tanzania border, to Kiunga in Lamu District on the Kenya/Somalia border. All of these are testimony of the interaction between different peoples of diverse backgrounds and, at the moment, represent a heritage in danger that has to be preserved and be given a new lease of life. ■



## Witu and Shimoni



© Cynille Le Douaut

Colonial buildings in Witu

Witu and Shimoni are two very interesting sites on the north and south coasts of Kenya respectively, which tell the story of the occupation by the European colonizers in East Africa while competing for power and fighting against the slave trade and slavery.

**Witu** was a Swahili town ruled by sultans engaged in the slave trade within the international mercantile landscape. The first British visit to Witu was in 1885, when Jack Haggard, the Lamu Vice-Consul, concluded that the place should be destroyed as it was clearly having a detrimental effect on British relations with the Zanzibar Arabs and the agreement to fight against slave-traders. The Germans on the other hand, attempted to promote Witu and made a treaty with Sultan Ahmed in exchange for a grant of land for German settlers, while Ahmed was offered

German protection. Witu was seen as the way into Africa, gaining access to Uganda and beyond. The Germans set up the Witu Company to trade in their new concession; a canal was dug at the mouth of the Tana River; and a Post Office was set up in Lamu and postage stamps were issued in the name of the Swahililand Sultanate. After the Berlin Conference in 1890, the Witu sultanate passed to the British, and the Germans relinquished their ambition to colonize the Nile headwaters. Witu was, however, destroyed to discourage further German claims. This illustrates the way in which British and other foreign powers established their colonial authority.



**Shimoni** historical conservation area has relics of the slave trade and colonial history, forming an invaluable part of Kenya's heritage. *Shimoni* is a Swahili word for 'place of the hole', and was named after the many caves and tunnels at the site. The caves are geological formations that extend for 7 km inland from the shoreline. The local community used these caves as a shrine and hideout during inter-tribal incursions. Between the 18th and 19th centuries the caves were used by Arab traders for holding slaves before shipment to the Zanzibar slave market and to Gasi Mazrui's plantations. In 1887, when Zanzibar became a protectorate of Britain, E.N. Mackenzie and Sir Lloyd Mathews were deployed by the Sultan of Zanzibar to survey the ten-mile coastal strip and make treaties with local chieftaincies, among them the Twaka, Chuyu and Shimoni, allowing the *British East African Association* (BEAA, later IBEA), under Sir William Mackinnon to establish trade links between the coast and the interior. Through the treaties the chieftaincies received protection, and as a result a flag post was built at Shimoni on the present site of the fish market latrine. The flag area became the venue for meetings of the Vumba people from Wasini, and the Digo, Segejuu and Wakifundi from Shimoni.



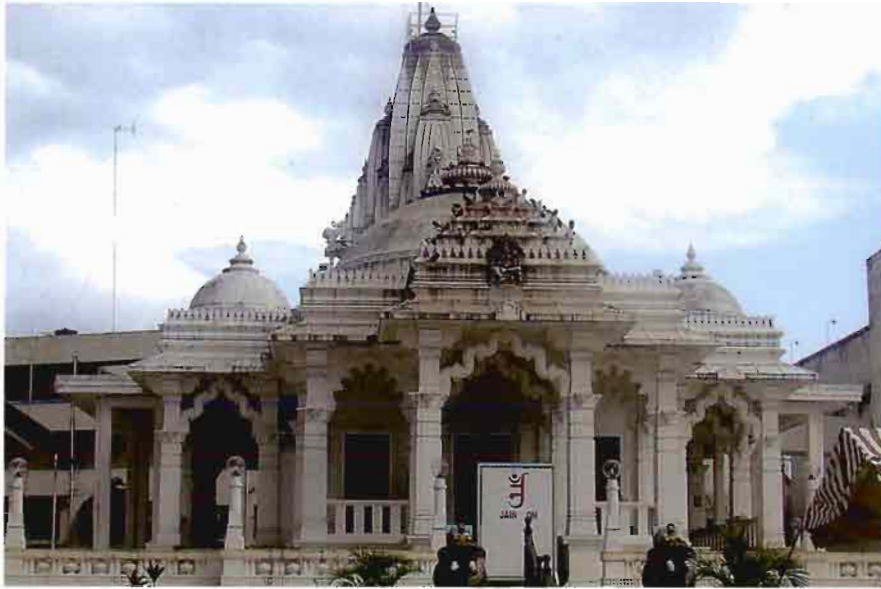
Grave of Captain Frederick Lawrence killed during the anti-slavery crusade

The colonial buildings at Shimoni have a historical link with the caves. They were built by the British to boost their campaign against the slave trade, while at the same time providing an administrative centre for enhancing alternative plantation imperialism. The buildings are the colonial District Commissioner's office and residence and the prison and cemetery. Other sites of interest in the Shimoni conservation area are Kyangai (Kichangani) Mosque, the old jetty and a nature trail through indigenous vegetation, showcasing plant species of the East African coastal environment.

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## The Asian community



Hindu Temple in the Old Town, Mombasa

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The creation of the British colonies and the building of the Uganda Railway gave the coastal region a dynamic hinterland linked to international trade, mainly around Mombasa. Indian migrants came, joining those who were already involved in international trade. They left their cultural and architectural stamp and still continue to leave their distinctive marks on the Kenyan coast. The Uganda Railway reached Kisumu on the shores of Lake Victoria in December 1901 and in the next few years it was to revolutionize transportation and communication in East Africa. In 1897, 4,800 railway workers of Punjabi Muslim origin had been brought in for the construction of the railway along with 300 Punjabi Muslim soldiers. Trade goods and supplies that were formerly sent by slow, laborious caravans of hundreds of porters carrying loads on their heads, covering on average less than thirty miles a day, could

now be sent by rail. By far the most important commodity carried to the coast by the caravans was ivory, which was shipped to India to be made into bracelets and ornaments, and to Europe to be turned into billiard balls, piano keys and small vanity items such as combs or hand mirrors.



The Indian community is not a single close-knit community. There are over thirty different sects and communities, each with its own traditions, religion and cultural attainments; many of them are descendants of workers brought over from India to take part in the construction of the railway. Others have been associated with the Arab ships and the importance of the trade in the western Indian Ocean. The different communities tend to be individualistic and intermarriage is still rare.

The Aga Khan Shia Ismaili community is one of the most important Muslim groups. They first came to Bagamoyo in Tanzania as early as 1815, but did not settle in Mombasa until 1900. The earliest pioneers were Sheth Allidina Visram, Sheth Waljee Hirji and Sheth Suleman Virjee, names which are well known throughout East Africa. Their housing schemes and educational facilities help to maintain the Ismailis as a closely-knit community. In Mombasa, they are known as Khojas. The Dawoodi Bohra community is another important group who, like the Ismailis, were converted from Hinduism. They settled in Mombasa in the 1880s, and the two pioneers who are remembered are Mr Esmaili Lookmanji and Mr Essaji Gulumdar. One of their interests was to acquire land and this has been a major source of their wealth. They provided well-organized educational, sports and social facilities. One of their mosques is a landmark on the Old Harbour front. Another small community is the Baluchis, who were brought over as mercenaries of Seyyid Said to man the fort. Many of them took part in the building of the Uganda Railway. They have tended to associate themselves with the Arabs, both linguistically and culturally. When the garrison of the fort was disbanded during the British Protectorate era, they were settled on land now occupied by the new Post Office, the Jamhuri Gardens and the Central Police Station.

Amongst the Hindu, the Patel community is quite an important one. Traditionally farmers, they come from Gujarat State and from near Bombay. They first came to work on the railway, then came in larger numbers and have taken up a great variety of professional and business enterprises. Several Hindu communities formed the Hindu Union in 1899 "to promote the ideals of Hindu philosophy, religion, culture and civilisation". The building of Lord Shiva's temple is one of their achievements. The Union also manages the Hindu Crematorium. Many other groups existed and are still active today, such as the Shree Visa Oshwal Vanish who were pioneers in trading in Mombasa at the end of the 19th century, or members of the Sikh community brought to Mombasa in 1895 as artisans for the railway. There are several Sikh societies catering for social welfare and cultural interests, and the Sikh Union promotes sporting activities. The Goan community can also be seen as a specific group because of their contact with the Portuguese since the early 16th century. They are predominantly Catholics, settling first in Zanzibar. Their earliest migration to Mombasa was after the establishment of the *IBE*A Co., where they succeeded in business activities. ■



## The Mijikenda



Elders climbing into the *kaya* in Rabai

In the 19th century many Europeans wrote of the difference between the civilization of the Swahili coast and the “savagery” of the hinterland. One of the largest subgroups inhabiting Mombasa town claimed that they came from the mainland, from a place to the north called Singwaya. The Mijikenda are closely related linguistically and historically to the Swahili of the coast.

The Mijikenda, or “nine houses”, are linguistically and culturally related Bantu speakers who live in the immediate hinterland of the Kenyan coast, where they occupy four districts of the Kenya Coast Province. In their oral traditions, the Mijikenda, who include the Agiriama, Akambe, Aribi, Aravai, Achonyi, Adigo, Aduruma, Adzihana and Akauma, claim that they migrated from their original

homeland of Singwaya, thought to be in modern-day southern Somalia, to settle at their present locations. Singwaya is, as Justin Willis (1993) mentioned, a name and an idea that reveals ethnicity issues and the relationships the Swahili had with their neighbours, and the distinction between town and hinterland. Initially, the ancestors of these groups settled in six individually fortified hilltop villages or *kayas* along ridges inland from the Kenyan coast. Three more *kayas* were later added. Settlement in these nine distinct *kayas* defined each of the nine distinct groups that make up the Mijikenda. However, research conducted by the Coastal Forest





Conservation Unit (a body of the National Museums of Kenya), as well as by Justin Willis (1993), has led to the identification of many more than nine *kayas*; about 50 can be identified nowadays. Each of the main groups is said to have remained within the *kaya* for lengthy periods until conditions became more secure and their populations grew, from about the late 19th century. The various groups left their forest refuges and began to clear and cultivate in areas away from them. The sites of the original *kaya* settlements were maintained as sacred places and burial grounds by local communities, led by their elders. The cutting of trees and destruction of vegetation around these sites was prohibited, the main aim being to preserve the surrounding *kaya* forest as a screen or buffer for the forest clearings.

While surrounding areas were gradually converted to farmland, the *kaya* sites were left as the few remaining patches of indigenous forest and man-made landscapes. Many of the forest paths to the historical villages are still quite distinct, and in some cases the remnants of gates and palisades are also visible. The *kayas* are therefore an integral element in the history of the Mijikenda. They were not only centralized residential villages and politico-religious complexes, but their physical design was a manifestation of Mijikenda cultural ideals. The various clans, the *fangos* and the *kayas* derived their legitimacy from Singwaya and the communities trace their origins to the original settlements in the central clearings. In many cases, the *kaya* elders committees still exist. In most *kayas* ceremonies including prayers for good harvest, fertility, rains, healing, peace and others, are held for the good of the community. ■

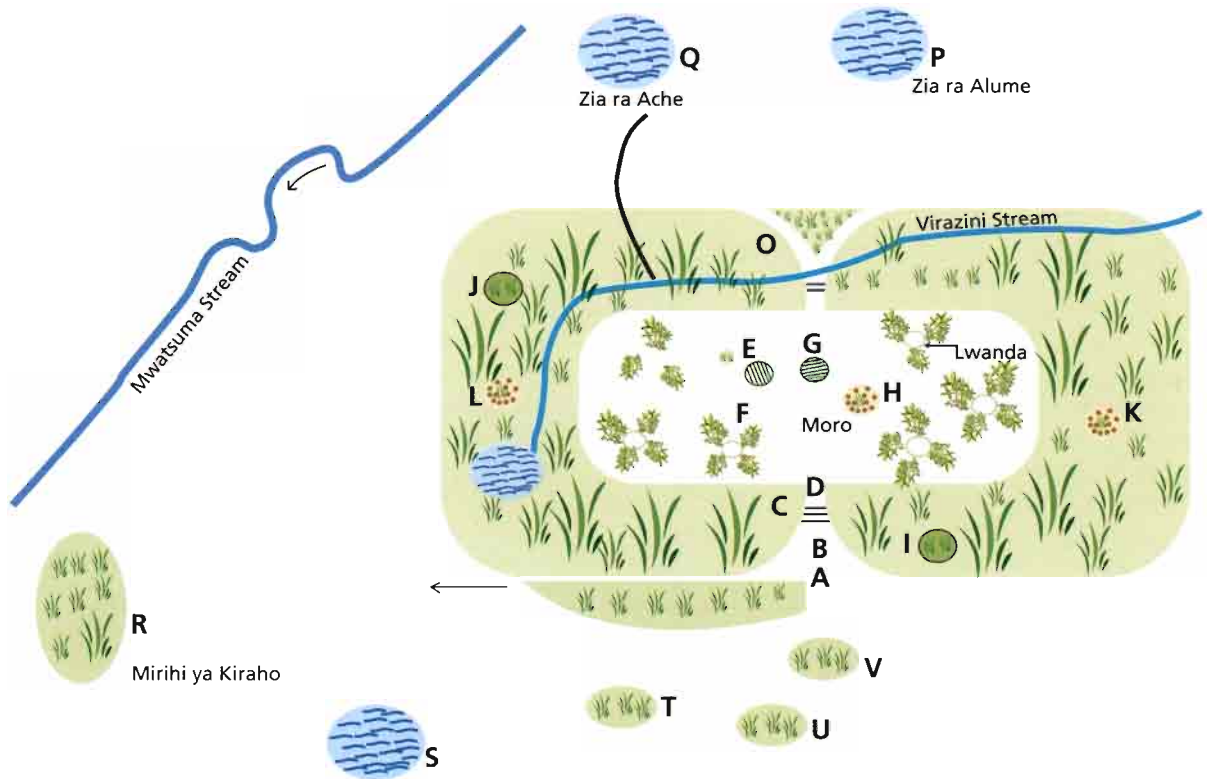
## Vigangos

*Vigangos* are wooden statues, considered sacred by Kenya's Mijikenda ethnic group and erected on the graves of revered elders.

To the Mijikenda community, *vigangos* are small gods believed to hold the spirits of departed elders. The carved wooden statues depict human faces and are erected on the graves of members of the Gohu society, a powerful tribal council. *Vigangos* can be from four to six feet high, their size determined by the status of the Gohu member. The Mijikenda believe the *vigangos* bring luck and prosperity as the dead elders intercede with God to bring good tidings to the family and the community.



# Spatial set-up of kaya Giriama





- A. Eastern entrance
- B. Spot where a charm (*vingo*) is believed to be buried to protect the *kaya*
- C. Path to *mirihi ya kirao* (R) and wooden gates with stone supports
- D. *Kiza*, pot acting as a “rain hauhe” and used by clan elders when offering prayers for rains
- E. *Kazarani* shrine where all rain prayers and libations were made
- F. Central *vingo*
- G. *Moro*, the house in which were kept the insignia of office, relics, trophies and musical instruments, including the *mwanza* drum
- H. *Kinyakani*, the arena for ritual dances after prayers at the *kazarani*
- I-J. *Pala ra habasi*, wide clearings where ceremonies such as boy initiations were conducted
- K. *Kulungu ra alume*, medicinal “armoury” of the male leadership
- L. *Kulungu ra ache*, southern part of the forest, corresponding area for women
- M. The two western entrance gates
- N. *Mwamba wa miziji*, the entertainment area
- O. Another *vingo*
- P. *Zia ra alume* frequented by elders from a sub-clan to deliberate on rain prayers
- Q. *Zia ra ache*, frequented by senior women
- R. *Mirihhi ya kiraho*, a brachyteria forest about 8km south of the *kaya*
- S. *Mtsara wa kaya*, Pond dug by senior elder to protect the community from pollution
- T-U-V. Three small areas between the *kaya* and the pond
- *Katsaka ka ache*, changing or dressing place for women on their way home from fetching water at the pond
- *Katsaka ka ana ai*, where new-born babies considered to be abnormal were got rid of by drowning in a pool of water
- *Katsaka ka p'engu mbii*, a place where visitors had to discard malevolent talismans before going to the *kaya*

From Tinga Kalume (1997). “Spatial Organization of a *kaya*”, Kenya Past and Present, 35-41. A Publication of the National Museums of Kenya, Issue No 29.



*Kayas* are still regarded as ultimate references for customs and identity, and are central to the vision of the Mijikenda past. The singularity of each group is the root of their identity and the trajectory of the rise and decline of the *kayas* is also the trajectory of Mijikenda social cohesion. Currently, 45 *kayas* have been identified, 40 of which have been gazetted by the Kenyan Government either as National Monuments or Forest Reserves. The *kayas* themselves are residual forest patches averaging between 10 and 400 hectares. A typical *kaya* is a clear circular opening several hundred metres across, with a wooden fence or stockade all around it and paths to it through a dense primeval forest. The gates into the clearing had dry walling two metres in height and a wooden door-frame. These gates would be protected by powerful charms and armed guards. Village meetings by the council of elders (*ngambi*) would be held in a grove of trees or a large thatched structure called a *moro*, located in the centre of the *kaya*. Certain sacred and protective objects known as *fungo*, which elders say consist of a pot full of an assortment of medicine brought from the original homeland of Singwaya that are essential to the well-being of the community, were and still are believed to be buried in a secret location in the *kaya*. The residential part of the *kaya* is known as a *boma*, a large expanse of land where houses were built together. Around this area are coconut palms from which a traditional brew – *mnazi* or *tembo* – was tapped. The council of elders is responsible for the day-to-day running of community affairs, including spiritual, social and economic matters. The council meets regularly to deliberate on issues related to food, water and security. Elders qualified to sit in the council are respected members of the community who have gone through various initiation rites. *Kayas* are still regarded as the ultimate reference of the customs and identity of the people and they are something that should not be missed by visitors, who will have an opportunity to encounter another type of life on the Kenyan coast.





## Conclusion

The Kenyan coast cannot be separated from its historical background of mercantile society, fishing villages and modern ports. Each of the elements in this book presents a distinct set of economic and social relationships between the African interior, the Swahili middlemen and the ocean traders. Today's Kenyan coast is the result of all these encounters, giving it its singular identity. Mombasa and its sister coastal settlements were once celebrated cities and busy harbours that attracted merchants, migrants and travellers from all over the ancient world. Visitors today will find living cities, full of activity and people from diverse origins. Cultural traditions on the Kenyan coast are strong, with distinctive religious practices, ancient customs and rich indigenous knowledge. No one can deny the fact that the Kenyan coast is not only a testimony to the wealthy Swahili culture but also a living heritage of the hinterland's people, with cultural traditions that they have practised for centuries. We do hope that, through the proposed tour trails, the visitor will be able to appreciate the interaction of the different cultures within this unique region of Kenya. ■



## II.

# Itineraries of discovery



# Mombasa Island: Architecture and History

**M**ombasa town dates back to medieval times, when it was an important Islamic trading port and one of the main centres of the Swahili civilizations that flourished along this coastline between the 13th and the 15th centuries. Throughout its chequered history under various Portuguese, Arab and British administrations, Mombasa retained its special character and managed to survive as a thriving community.

## Fort Jesus

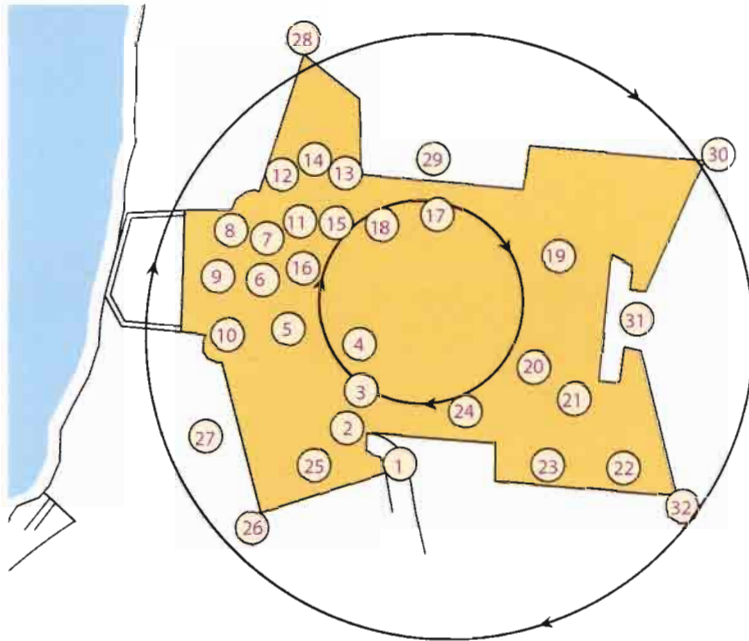
The Portuguese regarded themselves as representatives of Christendom rather than of Portugal, and for this reason they sailed under the flag of the Order of Christ. Jesus was therefore an obvious name for the new fortress. Designed by an Italian architect from Goa, angular form was dictated by the considerations of military defence. The fort now lies tranquilly in the sunshine, but it was not always so.

Fort Jesus has endured a long history of murder, siege, starvation, bombardment and treachery that makes our modern world seem quite tame. Every sail that appeared on the horizon must have been a cause for



© Okoko Ashkoye

Fort Jesus



Fort Jesus Tour Trail

hours of nerve-wracking anxiety to the small colony of probably never more than a hundred persons, six months' sailing time from home.

Fort Jesus has preserved the same basic form as when it was built, nearly 400 years ago. Such long, clear vistas into the past are rare; if you leave Mombasa without visiting this major landmark from the history of East Africa, you may find it a cause for regret.

Two options for tours are suggested: (a) the inside of Fort Jesus, and (b) a tour of the outside of Fort Jesus.

### a. Inside Fort Jesus

1. Main gate with inscription above
2. Covered entrance — history of the fort, historiography
3. Ticket office/reception/souvenir shop
4. Main court — signage point
5. Passage of the arches
6. Ammunition store
7. Passage of the steps
8. Turret (observation tower)
9. Cannon emplacements
10. Turret (observation tower)
11. Audience Hall
12. Refreshment points
13. Prison kitchen



14. Swahili door with Arabic inscription
15. Portuguese wall paintings
16. Mazrui Hall
17. Archaeological and Ethnographic Gallery
18. History and the firing system of cannons
19. Portuguese Chapel
20. Cistern and well
21. Skeleton
22. Omani house
23. Tram railway transport system
24. Barracks
25. Gunpowder room

## b. Outside Fort Jesus

The tour begins from the main entrance, where there is a bridge and orientation panel:

26. Saint Matias bastion
27. Football pitch and main watergate
28. Saint Mateus bastion with Portuguese coat of arms above
29. South moat bordering the Swahili Cultural Centre
30. Saint Alberto bastion with Portuguese coat of arms above
31. West moat
32. Saint Felipe bastion with Portuguese coat of arms above



Football players in the Fort Jesus grounds

© Dedeck-Allikoye



## The colonial circuit



Colonial Circuit Tour trail

After 1900, the British moved their administrative centre to new, more spacious quarters built around Treasury Square, and built government residences along the seafront. Treasury Square opened in 1901 and became the administrative centre during the British colonial period. Starting from Fort Jesus, the tour covers:

- 1 Wavel Memorial Park
- 2 The Old Law Court Building
- 3 Colonial buildings and military bunkers in the grounds of the Swahili Cultural Centre (handicraft showroom, butterfly flying cage and visitor parking)
- 4 Mombasa Hospital
- 5 The Aliens Registration building
- 6 The Second Old Post Office
- 7 The Kenyan Commercial Bank building
- 8 The District Commissioner's office
- 9 The Municipal Council offices
- 10 Treasury Square Garden



© Okoko Ashikoye

## The Old Law Court Building

Built in the late 1800s, it was opened in 1902 by the then British Colonial Governor, Sir Charles Elliot. The original building was rectangular, its four wings organized around a central courtyard open to the sky. The courtyard was later covered by transparent roofing sheets to house temporary exhibitions. It had three courtrooms, with a number of offices on the first and the second floors. The first floor is reached from the courtyard by a magnificent wooden teak staircase. The façade features an arcade on the ground floor and a small uncovered veranda on the first floor, with a central portion consisting of a clock tower about 15 metres high. A section was added to the rear of the building in 1969 to accommodate the large number of court cases, possibly due to population increase.



© Okoko Ashikoye

## Swahili Cultural Centre

The *Swahili Cultural Centre* grounds consist of two main colonial buildings built in the 1900s to accommodate senior police officers. It also has the remains of a military bunker built and used by the British during the Second World War. Currently, the old colonial buildings have been converted into training centres for Swahili traditional crafts and the Research Institute of Swahili Studies in East Africa (RISSEA). There are plans to build a butterfly flying cage.



© Okoko Ashikoye

## Mombasa Hospital

*Mombasa Hospital* was originally known as the Catherine Bibby, or European Hospital. It was established in 1891 and was initially staffed by Catholic nuns. Nowadays it is a large modern hospital, but the original building has been restored and still remains in use.



© Okoko Ashikoye

## Alien Registration Building

The *Aliens Registration Building* was constructed around 1890 and is believed to have housed the chief administrator of the Imperial British East African Company that administered Mombasa between 1888 and 1895. It portrays a fine example of early colonial architecture, with its external staircase on the façade, a portico on the ground floor on two sides (with arches), a balcony on all four sides with decorative woodwork, and iron and plasterworks on the first floor. The building was also used later by the Ministry of Livestock. Currently it houses the Ministry of Wildlife and the Aliens Registration Office.



## Treasury Square Park

*Treasury Square* is surrounded by several fine colonial-style buildings all dating back to the 1900s. On the west part, sits the *Municipal Council Offices*, followed by the *Second Old Post Office* on the north of the Square. The Treasury building that nowadays houses the office of the *District Commissioner* is on the east side of the square. In the southeast corner, another fine building is occupied by the *Kenya Commercial Bank*.

The square was opened in 1901, becoming the colonial British administrative centre after their move from Government Square. A bronze statue of Allidina Visram sits in the square; born in India in 1851, he arrived in Mombasa in 1863 at the age of 12. He became a rich merchant and planter, encouraged education and had an important place in public life until his death in 1916. Originally a statue of Sir William Mackinnon (1823–1893), the founder of British East Africa, stood here but it was removed at Independence.” ■



Statue of Allidina Visram



District Commissioner Building



KCB Building



The Municipal Council offices



The second Post Office



Treasury Square park



## Archaeological and historical routes



Mbaraki Pillar



Mama Ngina Drive

From Fort Jesus the route passes through *Treasury Square*, *State House* (formerly the colonial Governor's home), *Provincial Police Headquarters*, *Mombasa Golf Club*, and then to *Mama Ngina Drive*, named after a former Kenyan First Lady, Mama Ngina Kenyatta.



Attractions include *Fort Saint Joseph* (an old Portuguese fort pre-dating Fort Jesus), underground military tunnels and bunkers and other military installations from the Portuguese to the British colonial periods. The route ends at *Mbaraki Pillar*, a 16th century monument associated with Twaca, an archaeological settlement at Mama Ngina Drive Park.

The visitor may also enjoy the serenity and scenic beauty of the waterfront which is the gateway to Kilindini harbour, and the *Mama Ngina Drive Park* which is a popular public destination in Mombasa. ■

## The Old Town tour

Interactions between occupying foreign powers and the indigenous peoples of Mombasa have produced a fascinating and varied historical and cultural lifestyle, full of contrasts. This tour gives the visitor rare insights into this colourful, multiracial town. Starting from the *Fort Jesus Museum*, which can be visited in an hour, the tour proceeds along Mbaraki Hinawi Road where one may see the *Mombasa Club*, the *Africa Hotel*, the *Mandhry Mosque*, the *Old Port Government Square*, the *Bohra Mosque*, and *Leven House*. On Ndia Kuu Road, notable features include *Reitz House*, the presumed site of the *old Portuguese Church*, *Mombasa House* and *White House*, the *Lookmanji* and *Ali's Curio Shops*, *Jubilee House*, and the *Mazrui Graveyard*.



The Mackinnon Market

© Oroko Aunhaye



The second part, the Mombasa Old Town tour covers Fort Jesus to the *Datoo Building*, *Basheikh Mosque*, and *Piggot Place*, passing through the Old Town. On the way to the *Old Mackinnon Market* is a magnificent *Hindu Temple* on Old Kilindini Road, which should not be missed. Still following Old Kilindini Road, from *Reitz House* one is able to access the *Basheikh Mosque* and reach the *Old Mackinnon Market* through *Piggot Place* and the *Hindu Temple*. Samburu Road, in front of the Police Station (built in 1902) is another way of reaching the Old Market, with interesting Indian architecture and delicate balconies.



© Okoko Aulikiaye

Datoo's sale room, built in 1903, furniture and equipment are still auctioned every week



Apart from displaying the rich architectural heritage, this tour shows visitors the living culture of the Old Town through experiencing traditional centuries-old ways of trading. All these features portray a blend of European and local cultures.



The Basheikh Mosque

Swahili Friday mosque. There is still decoration on the building apart from the carved doors and the minaret, which is typical of Swahili mosque architecture

For you information: The booklet on Mombasa Old Town published by The NMK and CRATerre Ensag is an excellent complement to this booklet (Mombasa Old Town, Ed. CRATerre, 2009)

# Mombasa Old Town



## Places of interest

1. Fort Jesus
2. Mombasa Club
3. Africa Hotel
4. Mandhrey Mosque
5. Old Post Office
6. Old Port and Government square
7. Sanaa Gallery
8. Bohra Mosque
9. Leven House and steps
10. "Waltz house"
11. Site of an ancient Portuguese Church
12. Mombasa House
13. The "White House"
14. Loikamaji Cutro ship
15. Ali's Curio Market
16. Jubilee Hall
17. Mazraa Graveyards
18. Old Law Court
19. Dattoo's Sale Rooms
20. Piggon Place
21. Banihalik Mosque
22. Treasury Square
22. Swahili Cultural Centre
24. Alien registration building
25. Mackinnon Market

## Note to the visitors

Although walking without a guide in the old town is possible, we recommend that you take a guide since it is easy to get lost, and you might miss the most exciting parts of the town. Knowledgeable guides who really know the area can easily be found around Fort Jesus.

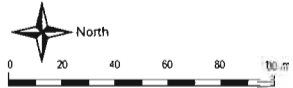
## Walking Tours

A walking tour starting from Fort Jesus are suggested on this site:  
 Green tour: 9:30am-12pm    Blue tour: 14h-15:30h    Red tour: 17:45-20:30h



## Key

- PARK
- VIEW POINT
- HISTORIC BUILDINGS
- INTERESTING BALCONIES
- CARVED DOORS
- MOSQUE
- BOAT TOURS
- CRAFT WORKSHOP (Wood/Brass)
- SOUVENIR SHOPS
- CAFE (drinks & snacks)
- RESTAURANTS
- STREET RESTAURANTS
- WALKING TOURS





© Okoko Ashikoye



## The Mombasa Club

The *Mombasa Club* was built by the trader Rex Boustead in 1897. It is the oldest club in Kenya, and when opened was for the exclusive use of European settlers; total membership was probably not more than 50, and was determined by income. Nowadays it is multiracial and women as well as men are admitted to membership. Queen Elizabeth stayed here during Kenyan Independence ceremonies in 1963. The building is a good example of a late 19th century administrative building, combining local and western materials and construction techniques.

© Okoko Ashikoye



The *Africa Hotel* opened around 1901, when it was one of the first hotels in Mombasa and appreciated for its 12 bedrooms and veranda, with views over the sea from the balcony. In 1904 it was bought by Souza Junior and Diaz, Goans who ran a grocery and tailoring business on the ground floor. Thereafter, it might have housed the Portuguese Consulate. The building is in a traditional Mombasa style, with a carved wooden balcony two storeys high and Indian influences evident in the use of vegetal designs. The doors and windows of both storeys are arched, and surmounted at the ground floor by fancy openings.



© Okoko Ashitoye



The *Mandhry Mosque* is one of the oldest mosques in use in Mombasa. It was founded in 1570-71, although the present building probably dates from about 1830. The apse-like *qibla* in the north wall indicates the direction of Mecca. The well for the mosque is just over the road, the elaborate frontage of which is dated to 1901.

© Okoko Ashitoye



*Government Square* consists of the Old Port, the Old Post Office, the fish market and the former colonial government office buildings.

The *Old Port* was for over a thousand years one of the major ports of the triangular dhow trade of the Indian Ocean and Arabian Gulf. The *Old Post Office* was opened in 1899 to enable Indians who built the Mombasa-Nairobi railway to send news and money home to their families.

© Okoko Ashitoye



*Government Square* is one of the most important public spaces in Mombasa because of its location adjacent to the Old Port. Historically, it served for many years as the centre of business and commerce in Mombasa. When the British arrived in the 1890s, they set up most of their government buildings here because of the flourishing character of the port area, thereby giving the square its name. In the early part of the 20th century this area continued to thrive as a government and business area, and opened interior trade with the rest of the world. With the emergence of Kilindini Port, this area declined in terms of commerce and administration, as services were moved to Treasury Square along the road to Kilindini.

The Square also contains the *Saana Gallery*, which in the past was the office of Allidina Visram, a successful Ismaili merchant who came from Bagamoyo in present Tanzania in 1863.



© Okoko Ashikoye



## The Bohra Mosque

The present *Bohra Mosque* was built in 1982, replacing an earlier one built by A.M. Jeevanjee in 1901. It is magnificent, with architectural features such as a prominent minaret and crenellations.

© Okoko Ashikoye



## The Leven House

*Leven House* was built at the turn of the 19th century. The house took its name from the arrival of the HMS *Leven*, a British naval survey ship that visited Mombasa in 1824. Officers of this ship came ashore and were given permission to conduct their anti-slaving operations from this house. It was then occupied by missionaries (including Krapf), and later used by the first British Vice-Consul and a German shipping company by the name of Oswald & Co. Between 1908 and 1928 the building was renovated and used as the German Consulate. It became dilapidated due to neglect, but due to its history and architecture, was gazetted as a national monument in 1997 under the Antiquities and Monuments Act of 1983. It currently houses community commercial activities, the Mombasa Ethnographic Museum, and offices of the Mombasa Old Town Conservation Offices (MOTCO). It has two guest rooms on the third floor.



© Okalo Ashikoye

*Reitz House* stands on a site formerly occupied by a Portuguese warehouse. The name may have originated from the fact that Lieutenant Reitz, one of the British naval officers engaged in the prevention of slavery, stayed in this house until his death in 1824. The house is said to be haunted by its former Portuguese and British inhabitants.

Next to *Reitz House*, an empty space is believed to be the site of a *Portuguese Church of the Misericordia*. It was first mentioned by Captain Guillain of the French vessel the *Ducouëdic*, who visited Mombasa in 1846, and later by the British explorer Richard Burton in 1857. Lieutenant Reitz of the Royal Navy ship *HMS Leven* could have been buried on this site.



© Okalo Ashikoye

*Mombasa House* was built in 1880 by a former customs master to the sultan of Zanzibar. This is a fine example of a traditional two-storey Mombasa house. It has a carved door on the ground floor and an impressive closed balcony on the first floor composed of a balustrade of wooden boards assembled in geometrical design, surmounted by wooden shutters with lattice patterns. It is supported by carved wooden brackets, with designs showing an Indian influence. The balcony roof is made of wood and supported by pillars regularly arranged along its external edges. Its function is to preserve the privacy of the family, notably the women, who remain hidden from public view in accordance with Islamic practice. The closed balcony allows air to penetrate into the house, for the comfort of its occupants.



© Okalo Ashikoye



The *White House* was built towards the end of the 18th century by Esmailji Jeevanjee, a Bohra Indian. Its name might be derived from the colour of its paint. In 1893 it was rented to the Church Missionary Society to house unmarried lady missionaries, and was therefore referred to as the “Ladies House”. It then housed the first American Consulate to Kenya in 1915. It formerly had a very fine carved door that has since been removed from the house and sold. The present doors and windows have been carved in a Zanzibar style with a wealth of vegetal designs.

© Okalo Ashikoye



*Lookmanji's Curio shop* is another example of Swahili architecture. The balcony is screened for privacy following the strict Muslim custom of shielding women from the glances of strangers.

*Ali's Curio Shops* were built in 1898 as the first police station in Mombasa. It later became the Nazareth Bar, attracting a very varied clientele. It is a very good example of British period architecture, built during the British administration due to the need for offices, houses, clubs and shops. In this building, rails were used as ceiling joists (the railway was built during the same time in Mombasa) and as pillars, and the walls were built using coral rag. The mixing of Swahili and European elements is characteristic of the colonial architecture of the town. A typical functional feature of British colonial architecture is the shady veranda that surrounds the building, allowing cooler air to enter. Its overall design is harmonious, comprising a frontage with Swahili-style carved brackets, neatly glazed and shuttered round-topped windows, and a



© Okoko Ashiloje

pitched roof decorated with gabled windows and scalloped woodwork. The plasterwork on the frontage of the building is modern.

In front of this building, *Jubilee* house was built in 1897 for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Until the 1950s it was used as a *baraza* for town meetings. The original building was open-sided. Currently, it is used as a Forex "bureau de change". The graveyard next to this house belongs to the Mazrui, who ruled Mombasa in the 18th century. ■





## The Christianity Tour

The growth of Christianity in Kenya began in 1844, with the arrival in Mombasa of the German missionary Ludwig Krapf and his family. His objective was to establish a mission station among the inland tribes in Africa. However, within three months of his arrival, while staying at Leven House, his wife and newborn daughter were struck down with malaria and passed away. They were both buried at Mkomani, on the mainland north of Mombasa. He was later joined by a fellow German, Johannes Rebmann, in 1846 and together they founded the Rabai Mission Station under the Church Missionary Society of England, 25 km inland from Mombasa.

The A.C.K. Emmanuel Church was later built in Frere Town, where freed slaves were settled by the Church Missionary Society as a result of the British anti-slavery crusade. Around that time, another church founded by the Methodists was built in Mazaras.



A.C.K. Emmanuel Church

© Okoko, AghaZay

The tour highlights the establishment and spread of Christianity, and the abolishment of slavery and the slave-trade in the region.



## In and around Mombasa



© Okoko Achikoye

Kengeleni bell tower

From Fort Jesus the tour proceeds to *Leven House*, where Krapf and his family lived before the founding of the *Rabai Mission Station*. One may then continue by road to the *Krapf Memorial Park at Mkomani*, where the graves of Mrs Krapf and her daughter are to be found.

One may then return to Frere Town, where the *A.C.K. Emmanuel Church* and *Kengeleni bell tower* may be seen. The bell was used to summon freed slaves to prayers and to warn of incoming slave ships.

## Outskirts of Mombasa

Twenty kilometres along the Mombasa–Nairobi road we find Mazeras town, a Methodist mission station where a church and related structures (cemetery and missionary houses) are located.

The visitor will be able to branch off to Rabai, where one may see the first Christian church in Kenya, built by the Church Missionary Society in 1848. It currently houses a community museum displaying information on the history, establishment and development of Christianity in East and Central Africa. The second church, *Saint Paul*, was built much later by converts (most of them freed slaves) in 1887, and is still in use. One may then continue to Ribe, a few kilometres further in the direction of Kaloleni, to see another Methodist mission station of the same period as that of Mazeras. ■



## The Swahili settlements

The Kenyan coast has numerous ancient Swahili settlements, extending from the border with Somalia in the north to the Tanzanian border in the south, a total distance of about 500 km.

Along the coast north of Mombasa are settlements such as Jumba la Mtwana, Mtwapa, Mnarani, Gede, and Malindi, and sites in the Lamu Archipelago. Some of these sites date back to as early as the 8th and 9th centuries (Shanga, Manda and Pate), the majority dating back to the 13th century. Most were abandoned around the 16th and 17th centuries, while a few - such as Mombasa, Malindi, Witu, Lamu and Pate - have been continuously occupied until the present.

From Mombasa, the tour route covers:

1. *Mtwapa*, a 16th century settlement with mosques, town wall, tombs and residential buildings, plus a wealth of flora and fauna.
2. *Jumba la Mtwana* is another 16th century settlement with mosques, town wall, tombs and residential buildings, located next to a beautiful sandy beach with camping facilities. It has a picnic site, especially popular with families on weekends. There is also a temporary exhibition hall.
3. *Mnarani Ruins* are located on a steep cliff overlooking Kilifi Creek. Established around the early 13th century, the name Mnarani is derived from "*mnara*" which refers to a minaret or pillar. Today, the name has grown to encompass the whole of the town of Mnarani. Abandoned in the 16th century the ruins consist of one of the primary ancient mosques, with elaborate inscriptions and stone carvings. It has a mirhab with interesting multiple arches and inscribed jambs. The site also has a smaller mosque, giant baobabs and a spectacular seafront overlooking the old ferry jetty, the creek and the new Kilifi bridge.
4. *Gede Ruins* are located along the Mombasa-Malindi road about 100 km north of Mombasa and 20 km from Malindi. The site consists of the ruins of a 15th century Swahili settlement that includes eight mosques, a palace, a large concentration of houses,



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The Gede Palace

wells, and different typologies of tombs (one with an inscribed epitaph dated to AH 802/AD 1399). The importance of the dated tomb is that it provides a fixed point in time to which the other buildings at Gede can be related. All these features are surrounded by inner and outer town walls, the outer wall having four gates. The site has a newly-constructed interpretation centre, cafeteria, shop and butterfly farm (Kipepeo).

5. *Malindi town* is 125 km from Mombasa, and is one of the ancient Swahili settlements that has enjoyed continuous occupation. Sites with important historical features are:

a. The *Vasco da Gama Pillar* is probably the oldest surviving European monument in tropical Africa. It was erected by Vasco da Gama in 1498 to welcome ships to the

harbour. It is topped by a cross made of Lisbon limestone, and inscribed with the coat of arms of Portugal.

- b. The *Portuguese chapel* and graveyard: a small edifice built by the Portuguese in the southern part of the town in the 15th century, the chapel is the first Christian church in East Africa. Saint Francis Xavier, a renowned Roman Catholic missionary, buried two sailors here who died during his journey to India in 1542. The chapel is currently used by the Roman Catholics.
- c. The *pillar tombs* are located near the old Arab market. They were probably built around the 15th century, and are believed to be phallic.



- d. The *Malindi Museum* is housed in a 19th century building known as the House of Columns, formerly used as the first district hospital in Malindi District during the colonial period. It has also been used as offices for the Fisheries Department, Kenya Wildlife Services and the Livestock Development Department.
- e. The former *administrative colonial building* was constructed in the late 19th century by the British colonial government and continued to serve as the Malindi provincial administrative headquarters after independence. Due to its history and architecture, the building and surroundings were later gazetted as a national monument by the National Museums of Kenya; the building is being restored by them as a coastal ethnographic museum. The frontage, which occurred as a result of the sea receding, is dominated by *Casuarina* woodlands. This area will be developed as a cultural village representing the diverse coastal communities.
- f. While in Malindi it is possible to visit Mamburi town, which is a 10-minute drive to the north. It was historically known as Quelimanci by the Portuguese, and dates to the 15th century. In the 19th century it was a populous town with many shops, large plantations, narrow streets and simple living styles. The site includes one of the oldest mosques in Malindi, and a pillar tomb.



The Lamu Archipelago



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Lamu waterfront

6. The Lamu Archipelago is considered to be the birthplace of the Swahili culture and language. It comprises the islands of Lamu, Manda, Pate (the largest), Ndau and Kiwayu.

a. On *Lamu Island* the visitor will be able to see and experience the old town of Lamu, its narrow streets and the Swahili lifestyle. The town consists of three parts: the old town, west of the main street where Swahili stone houses are to be found; the 19th and early 20th century Indian additions along the promenade, east of the main street; and the mud and wattle section, mainly to the south. One of the most significant features within Lamu town is the fort, built in 1821 just behind the seafront. Originally built for military purposes, during the colonial and postcolonial periods it was used as a prison. Currently it houses offices

of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), and its grand central courtyard is used by the community as a social centre. Other areas of interest are the Lamu Museum on the seafront; the German post office; the 18th century Swahili House Museum; carved wooden doors, and traditional houses. Lamu is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

b. In *Shela* on the south-eastern tip of Lamu Island, the visitor is able to see the interesting Friday Mosque, which has a conical minaret approached by a spiral staircase of 58 steps. The ruins of the *Dheule Mosque* are the remains of perhaps one of the oldest mosques in Shela village on Lamu Island. Their preservation is one of the objectives of the National Museums of



- Kenya, owing to its unique architectural and historical significance. To the west of *Shela* are sand dunes, which act as the water catchments for Lamu Island.
- c. *Manda Island* has two important archaeological sites. One is *Manda Old Town*, which dates back to the 9th century, and the other is *Takwa* - a 16th century settlement. *Takwa* is currently the only ancient settlement on Manda Island open to the public, and is accessed by boat through a tidal channel flanked by mangroves. The site contains a mosque, residences, a tomb and a town wall with remains of gatehouses. It also has a campsite overlooking the Indian Ocean.
- d. On *Pate Island* there are three very important ancient settlements, some of which date back to the 8th century. These sites are currently not easily accessible, but there are plans by the National Museums of Kenya to implement a triangular tourist circuit connecting Pate, Siyu and Shanga. Interesting characteristics of these settlements include architectural features, town planning arrangements, the Omani period Siyu Fort and the historical Chinese relationship with the town of Shanga. Visitors interested in visiting these sites may obtain information from the Lamu and Fort Jesus museums. ■



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Lamu narrow street



## The Mijikenda Kayas



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The Rabai kaya, Bomu Fimboni

The *kaya* forests are areas of indigenous vegetation owing their existence to the cultural beliefs and history of the Mijikenda people. They are an illustration of the evolution of human settlement through time, under the physical constraints and opportunities of the natural environment, and socio-economic and cultural forces. They are an example of the continuing existence of traditional forms of land use that support biological diversity.

As the natural and cultural aspects of the *kayas'* heritage are so closely interlinked, it follows that the integrity and security of this heritage is closely linked to its authenticity. In other words, the *kayas* will continue to exist and be protected for as long as local beliefs and regard for or use of them persists. In total there are about 40 *kayas* in

Kwale, Kilifi and Malindi districts. However, the most outstanding ones accessible to the public are *Kaya Kinondo* in Kwale District, and *Kaya Mudzi Muvya*, which is one of five *Rabai kayas* in Kilifi District. Both Rabai and Kinondo have ongoing community projects designed to promote the social and sustainable economic well-being of the communities living around them. On 7th July 2008, 11 *kayas* - among them *Kaya Mudzi Muvya* in Rabai - were inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List.



*Kaya Kinondo* is located on the south coast about 20 km from Mombasa. From Mombasa, visitors will have to use the Likoni ferry connecting the island of Mombasa to the mainland to the south. At Ukunda, the visitor turns left to Diani and follows the beach road to the right all the way to *Kaya Kinondo*. Access to *kayas* requires the company of accredited *kaya* tour guides who know the traditions and beliefs that have to be respected while in the *kaya*, as well as the cultural and natural values of the *kaya*. The *kaya* can be visited according to a specific timetable.

*Kaya Mudzi Muvya* is in Rabai, 25 km from Mombasa on the way to Nairobi, branching off to the right at Mazaras on the way to Kaloleni. It can also be accessed from the sea through the Tudor Channel. This is the route that pioneer missionary Dr Ludwig Krapf followed to reach *Kaya Mudzi Muvya* during his quest to establish a Christian mission station in the hinterland. The site has two trails: one is cultural, taking visitors to places that were inhabited by different clans within the Rabai community, while the second is predominantly botanical and leads to unique plant species, most of which have medicinal value. There is ongoing development of a visitor centre that will display information about the Rabai *kayas*. ■



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Kaya elders graves in Rabai



# Memories of the slave trade and slavery



South Coast Map

**H**istorical sites related to the slave trade and slavery include Leven House which housed the British during their anti-slavery crusade in Mombasa Old Town; Frere Town with its A.C.K. Emmanuel Church, bell tower and cemetery on the mainland to the north; the Rabai site on the way to Nairobi; the Mazrui plantations at Gasi; and Shimoni on the south coast. We have already described most of these sites, but special mention is made of Shimoni here.

*Shimoni* is on the coast about 90 km south of Mombasa. Its interesting historical features include slave caves, colonial buildings, cemetery and the Kichangani ancient settlement. Due to its history of slavery during the slave trade and its abolishment, the National Museums of Kenya gazetted Shimoni as a conservation area. One of the old buildings is being converted into an information centre and museum in order to display this important segment of history.

Other interesting cultural sites to visit in Shimoni are the remains of the old colonial administrative offices, prison house and cemetery. To the east of the Shimoni Conservation Area is the Kichangani ancient settlement, which includes the Kyangai Mosque and the old jetty. Natural sites accessible from Shimoni are the Coral Gardens at Wasini Island; and the Kisite and Mpunguti marine parks managed by the Kenya Wildlife Services. Above the cave open to the public, within the conservation area is a nature trail through indigenous vegetation typical of the East African coastal environment. ■



Shimoni cave

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## Chronology

Century	Kenyan coast and related events	Surviving sites and monuments
200 BC	Evidence dating back to this time shows that the local communities along the coast knew how to make and use iron tools.	
2nd century	Mention of the East African coast in <i>Periplus of the Erythraean Sea</i> and Ptolemy's <i>Geography</i> , confirming the existence of early city states in this region.	
6th century	<i>Later Iron Working (LIW)</i> and <i>Triangular Incised Ware (TIW)</i> artefacts indicate established communities actively engaged in international world economic systems.	Ungwana, Mwana, Shaka in Tana River delta
8th century	Islam comes to the Kenyan coast.	
9th century	Establishment of Swahili stone towns; Shanga rises to prominence.	Lamu Archipelago: Shanga, Manda, Pate
10th century	Al-Masudi gives the first account of the Coastal Bantus in Arabic sources.	
13th-14th centuries	Jumba La Mtwana and Gede rise to prominence. The Old Towns of Mombasa and Malindi also flourish. Trans-Indian	Jumba la Mtwana, Gede, Mtwapa, Mnarani



Century	Kenyan coast and related events	Surviving sites and monuments
	<p>Ocean trade is dominated by the Chinese. Islam becomes firmly established on the East African coast.</p>	
<p>15th century</p>	<p>Vasco da Gama opens up the East African coast for Portuguese conquest. Malindi is established as an unfortified Portuguese base.</p> <p>Establishment of other Swahili settlements.</p>	<p>Vasco da Gama Pillar and chapel in Malindi</p> <p>Mambrui, Siyu</p>
<p>16th century</p>	<p>1586: Brief attacks by Turkish forces on Portuguese interests; Portuguese retake Mombasa in 1588 and shift base from Malindi.</p> <p>1593: Foundations of Fort Jesus are laid, completed in 1596.</p> <p>Establishment of other Swahili settlements.</p>	<p>Fort Serani, Fort Saint Joseph</p> <p>Fort Jesus, Makupa fort</p> <p>Takwa</p>
<p>17th century</p>	<p>Several settlements along the Kenyan Coast are abandoned while others are in continuous occupation (Pate, Siyu, Faza...).</p> <p>1696-1698: Great siege of Fort Jesus by the Omani who take control of the fort.</p>	<p>Gede, Mtwapa, Mnarani, Jumba la Mtwana</p>



Century	Kenyan coast and related events	Surviving sites and monuments
18th century	Sultan of Oman installs the Mazrui family as the governors of Mombasa.	Modification of Fort Jesus
19th century	<p>New players arrive to participate in the regional trade for ivory and slaves.</p> <p>1824-1826: First British Protectorate administered by James Emery.</p> <p>1837-1888: The Zanzibar Period. Tremendous economic growth. Growth of Siyu settlement.</p> <p>1837: The Busaidi dynasty gains power in Mombasa against the Mazrui family.</p> <p>1844: Johann Ludwig Krapf and family arrive in Mombasa, followed in 1846 by Johannes Rebmann. They establish the Rabai Mission Station under the C.M.S.</p> <p>Mid 19th century: The Mijikenda begin to move out of the kayas.</p> <p>Mid 19th century: British activities against slavery and slave trade.</p>	<p>Siyu Fort</p> <p>Gasi and Takaungu plantations</p> <p>Krapf Memorial at Mkomani Rabai Church Mission station</p> <p>Rabai <i>kayas</i> and <i>kaya</i> Kinondo</p> <p>Leven House, Shimoni</p>



Century	Kenyan coast and related events	Surviving sites and monuments
	<p>1850: Many Indian traders from Zanzibar and India come to Mombasa.</p> <p>1872: British Government sends Sir Bartle Frere to negotiate a treaty with Zanzibar for the suppression of the slave trade.</p> <p>1874: Establishment of the <i>Frere Town Mission Station</i> by the C.M.S as a freed slaves' settlement.</p> <p>1887: The Sultan leases Mombasa as a concession to the British East African Company, which later became the <i>Imperial British East African Company</i> (IBEAC).</p> <p>1895: British Protectorate in Mombasa until 1907 when Nairobi becomes the capital.</p> <p>1897: Work begins on the <i>Uganda Railway</i>.</p> <p>1899: Creation of the <i>Hindu Union</i> to promote the ideals of Hindu philosophy, religion, culture and civilization.</p>	<p>Mombasa Old Town</p> <p>Shimoni</p> <p>Frere Town: Kengeleni bell tower (1878) and Saint Emmanuel Church (1894)</p> <p>First colonial buildings in Mombasa Old Town</p> <p>Colonial buildings in Mombasa</p> <p>Hindu temples in Mombasa</p>
20th century	1900: The Aga Khan Shia Ismailia Islam Community settles in Mombasa.	Indian buildings in Mombasa from the 1940s and 1950s



Century	Kenyan coast and related events	Surviving sites and monuments
	<p>1901 The <i>Uganda Railway</i> reaches Kisumu (formerly known as Port Florence) on the shores of Lake Victoria.</p> <p>1963: Kenya gains independence.</p> <p>1970: Fort Jesus used as government prison until 1958; is gazetted as a National Monument.</p> <p>1992-1997: 40 <i>kayas</i> are gazetted as National Monuments.</p> <p>1997: Leven House is gazetted as a National Monument.</p> <p>1998: Krapf Memorial Museum is established at Rabai under the auspices of the National Museums of Kenya.</p> <p>2001: "Lamu Old Town" inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List</p> <p>2006: Shimoni is gazetted as a Conservation Area.</p> <p>2008: 11 <i>kayas</i> inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List.</p>	





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## Abstracts “Discovering the Kenyan Coast”

Pwani ya Kenya, kwa muda mrefu ni eneo la mtandao wa biashara, utamaduni, wa kusini wa Uwarabu, Ghuba ya Uajemi, Uhindi na Africa barani wameingiliana kwa muda mwingi. Ni vigumu kutenganishwa historia yao ya zamani ya biashara, ya jamii, mitaa ya wavuvi na bandari ya kisasa. Kila kipengele katika kitabu hiki kinaonyesha, mahsusan wa uchumi, na uhusiano wa kijamii, baina ya Africa barani, Waswahili, wafanyi biashara na mabaharia. Pwani ya Kenya ya leo imetokana na yote haya, kuipa utambulisho. Mombasa na maeneo na miji mingine wakati mmoja ilikuwa maarufu kwa shughuli za bandarini. Uliowavutia wahamiaji na watalii kutoka pande mbali mbali za ulimwengu nyakati za kale.

Leo hii, wageni wataona jiji linaloishi kinani, lenye shughuli nyingi na watu wa asili tofauti tofauti. Utamaduni wa kale na pwani zina nguvu sana dini, desturi za kale na utajiri wa akili ya asilia. Hakuna mtu anae kataa ukweli kwamba Pwani ya Kenya sio tu dhihirisho kuwa ina utajiri wa utamaduni wa Kiswahili pia ni turaji zinazoishi za watu wa eneo la ndani, zilieo na utamaduni wa kigeni na zilizofatwa katika siku nyingi. Tunatarajia kwamba kupitia kwa safari pendekezi wageni watatambua utangamano baina ya makabila tofauti ya eneo hili zuri la Kenya.

La côte kenyane est située au carrefour des réseaux commerciaux de l’océan Indien, où différentes cultures venues du Sud de l’Arabie, du golfe Persique et de l’intérieur de l’Afrique se sont croisées depuis plus d’un millier d’années. On ne peut la dissocier de son passé mêlant société marchande, villages de pêcheurs et ports modernes. La côte kenyane est aujourd’hui le résultat de toutes ces rencontres, qui lui ont donné cette identité bien singulière. Mombasa comme d’autres villes de la côte est une riche cité, un port attractif qui de tous temps a accueilli des commerçants, des migrants et des voyageurs du monde entier. Chaque élément du livre vise à montrer la complexité des relations économiques et sociales entre l’intérieur africain, les intermédiaires swahili et les acteurs du commerce maritime. Aujourd’hui, les visiteurs trouveront dans cette région des villes vivantes, animées et cosmopolites. Les traditions culturelles sur la côte sont fortes, avec des pratiques religieuses multiples, des coutumes variées et une véritable identité autochtone. Chacun notera combien la côte kenyane témoigne de cette riche culture swahilie, mais reste aussi l’expression des traditions centenaires de l’intérieur. Nous espérons, au travers des circuits proposés, que les voyageurs sauront apprécier l’interaction entre les différentes cultures de cette région unique du Kenya. ■

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The Kenyan coast has long been a crossroad of the Indian Ocean trading network, where the cultures of southern Arabia, Persian Gulf, India and the African mainland have intermingled for more than a thousand years. It cannot be separated from its historical background of mercantile society, fishing villages and modern ports. Each of the elements in this book present a distinct set of economic and social relations between the African interior, Swahili middlemen and the ocean traders. The Kenyan coast today is the result of all these encounters, giving it its singular identity. Mombasa and its sister coastal settlements were once celebrated cities and busy harbours that attracted merchants, migrants and travellers from all over the ancient world. Today's visitors will find living cities full of activities and people of diverse origins. Cultural traditions on the coast are strong, with distinctive religious practices, ancient customs and a wealth of indigenous knowledge. No-one would deny the fact that the Kenyan coast is not only a testimony of the wealthy Swahili culture, but is also a living heritage of the people of the hinterland, with cultural traditions that have been practiced for centuries. We hope that, through the proposed tours, visitors will gain an appreciation of the interaction between the different cultures of this unique region of Kenya.

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