Swahili origins: Swahili culture and the Shungwaya phenomenon


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## Swahili origins: Swahili culture and the Shungwaya phenomenon

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Abbreviations
Journals and documents referred to repeatedly in the notes at the end of each chapter are abbreviated as follows:
AARP Arts and Archaeology Research Papers
HA History in Africa
IJAHS International Journal of African Historical Studies
JAl Journal of African History
JAS Journal of the African Society
JRAI Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute
JRAS Journal of the Royal African Society
JRGS Journal of the Royal Geographical Society
NC Numismatic Chronicle
SUGIA Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika
TNR Tanganyika Notes and Records
ZES Zeitschrift Eingeborenen Sprachen

Preface
John Middle ton
James de Vere Allen was born in Nairobi in 1936 and educated in Kenya and England. After taking a degree at Oxford he joined the Kenya Ministry of Education, teaching at what is today the Lenana School and, after a spell at the University of Malaya, at Makerere University and the University of Nairobi. In 1970 he joined the Kenya Museums and founded the Lamu Museum. He retired in 1980 and near Kwale, on the top of a hill with a distant view of Mombasa and the Indian Ocean, designed and built a charming house with a small farm. Here he wrote this book, but due to perennial lack of water could not make the farm profitable. This worry and ever-worsening sickness made his determination to
finish the book the more impressive; but it remained uncompleted at the time of his death in June 1990.

A year or so before he died he paid me the honour of asking me to edit for publication his over-long typescript on the history of the Swahili people. He was already seriously ill; he had his farm to run; he had to write and revise papers under difficult conditions; and he had neither the will nor the energy to shorten it himself.

I had met Jim in 1985 in Washington, before beginning my work in Lamu, and during the following years when in Kenya I always met with him either in his house in Lamu or at his farm in Kwale. He was hospitable, friendly, enthusiastic about anything to do with the coast and its peoples, and had a sharp sense of humour when observing the world around him which gave him so little recognition or support. Many people were puzzled by Jim, not knowing whether he was an eccentric amateur historian often scorned by professionals (he had neither a doctoral degree nor a university position), or whether he was an original and learned scholar who had devoted more years to the study of Swahili history than almost anyone else in that field. Jim was a frustrated man in his career, his writing, and his farm, and was always secretive about his work. He felt

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he had been cheated by other writers, many of whom he considered to be lightweight. He was difficult to work with, as he trusted so few people, and concealed most of his ideas until he could publish them himself without fear of their being appropriated by others.

Jim Allen was a scholar of great ability and exciting enthusiasm, although often holding ideas that were rather bizarre. He did not think much of either professional historians or linguists, and I recall his often muttering that we anthropologists thought merely about cognitive descent and missed everything else. He was also bitter about his failure to obtain research grants whereas everyone else seemed to come to Kenya with seemingly unlimited funds: I had every sympathy with him, knowing how much he could have done with proper support.

When he asked me to help him I knew how ill he was, and agreed to do so both as an act of respect and friendship to a kind man, and also as a way of ensuring publication of what I suspected might be a valuable and unique work, although I had not at that time read it.

I am glad that I have done so, although it has had to wait until I finished an ethnographic book of my own on the Swahili. In my view Jim's book is a remarkable work of learning, enthusiasm, and intellectual courage. I have read most - not all - of the same sources, and he saw much in them that I had not. He, has set the historiography of the Swahili people and their coast on a track which no one can ever now abandon. And any social anthropologist interested in the region will need to take Jim's hypotheses very seriously. Some critics will doubtless sneer at them as 'conjectures' Jim knew this and refers to it in the book: with lack of firm evidence what else can anyone do but surmise? What Jim has done is to put known 'facts' and 'events', generally agreed upon hypotheses, and
his own insights and suggestions together so as to form a single dosely knit argument with a solidly based structure. The argument is complex in its detail but is at heart straightforward and in my own view basically correct. This is not an easy book to read because there is so much detail from an amazingly wide range of sources. Jim was a commonsense and down-to-earth thinker, and was stubbornly unwilling to accept other people's constructions without thought, as well as being unafraid to contradict those whose minds were already made up. His hypothesis rests essentially on what he refers to as the ever-changing relationships, over many cultures, of long-distance trade partners and of two 'modes of dominance', the 'Shungwaya-Shirazi' mode and the 'Arab-Wangwana' mode. This runs against many views of Swahili history and identity, and numbers of people in East Africa will find it difficult to accept his views. He minimises the 'Arab' or 'Asian' elements in Swahili civilisation and stresses the 'African' elements (although he points out that these 'ethnic' terms are themselves highly misleading). While there are many points of detail in the book with which I do not agree and more that others will find hard to accept, I cannot see this as a weakness but rather a strength: as Jim writes in his final sentence, let those who disagree do better. To those learned Swahili who may be offended by some of Jim's conclusions, I would ask them to think carefully about his suggestions, and to remember that he saw Swahili

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history as the most important matter for him, one to which he devoted much of his life.

My actual 'editing' has comprised several actions. First, the shortening of the original manuscript by over a quarter, almost entirely by the deletion of repetitious sentences and paragraphs. Secondly, the omission of a long final chapter that was intended to be the summary of a second part of the book, seemingly not written: this chapter was clearly cobbled together during Jim's final illness, and is inconsequential, without footnotes, and wanders away from the Swahili: it is not in any sense a conclusion to the whole. Thirdly, the omission of four appendices that are marginal to the main account. In brief, I have shortened, but not 'edited' or 'revised', and I have tried to retain as many of Jim's comments on others' work and approaches as I could. This is a very personal work and I have tried to keep that characteristic.

This book deserves careful reading and honest criticism. It is not perfectly argued throughout, nor will all of it be acceptable to those blinkered to possible reinterpretations of the believed 'facts' of which we are now never likely to know more than we do (although archaeology seems likely to provide many new and reliable data). Jim Allen's life's work is in this book, a memorial to a devoted scholar.

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James de Vere Allen
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to Mark Horton for his work on the maps and illustrations

(M.C.H.) Where these initials appear in the notes Dr Mark Horton has added a note in the light of more recent research

Note on the Orthography of Swahili
Names & Technical Terms
In parts of the world where the Roman script is now used, the orthography of proper names requires the sanction of local or ancient usage. Virtually all Swahilis write Mohamed, Ali, Suleiman, Suleman or Suliman, Hussein, Hassan, Athman (occasionally Othman or Osman), Abubakar and so on; and so should we when writing of Swahilis. Swahilis never use 'ibn' but always 'bin' or 'wa' (its Bantu equivalent), and we should do the same, except, possibly, when directly translating a text originally written in Arabic or a coin, where 'ibn' (and sometimes an 'al' before a proper name) may be more accurate. The names themselves should be spelled as actual Swahilis would write them in Roman script, even though they derive from an Arab language context. Such has been my rule in this book.

The position is less clear when we deal with immigrant Arabs of the first or second generation. Where there is a well-known Swahili or English version of the name (as, for instance, Mazrui, plural Mazruis, or Busaidi, plural Busaidis), I have used it. I have not used an Arabic plural whose meaning is less than clear in English.

There is also some problem in dealing with the names of countries. In general, I have used well-known English forms where they exist, not only for Arab place-names but also for Swahili ones. More reluctantly, I have adopted Pate Island, as official Kenya maps have it, instead of Faza (which is what the Swahilis call the
island, reserving the name Rasini for Faza Town). I have also adhered to Lamu in preference to Amu. Where the official English form is either less well-known or more or less outdated and there is a well-established indigenous or quasi-indigenous version, I have preferred the latter: Benadir (Swahili Benadin) for the southern Somali coast, Maasai for Masai, and so on.

Absolute consistency is impossible. It is often hard to know, especially with technical terms, which Arabic words have really passed into the English language and which are merely scholarly affectations. I have assumed that a word like mihrab (for the niche in a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca) has passed into English, and so use it. (Swahilis anyway invariably use kibla or kibula, which as qibla has a slightly different connotation in Arabic, where it means the direction itself and not the niche indicating it.) Swahilis, after all, are not Arabs, and I shall be arguing that a great many of them never have been; and although it was at some

Orthography of Swahili Names & Terms

periods fashionable to sprinkle Arabic terms in Swahili speech and literature, it is certain that at any given moment only a proportion of Swahilis would actually have understood the Arabic language. Historians accordingly have no right to 'arabise' Swahilis by writing of them in terms and by names which imply that they were indistinguishable from Arabs.

Even those who continue to believe that Swahilis are a sort of Arab should reflect that clarity should be among the historian's first objectives. He or she must interpret history as dearly as possible to a given audience. When writing about the Swahilis, it is sometimes useful to show the Swahili equivalent to an English term or phrase. Sometimes we may actually use Swahili or other non-English words or phrases if there is no English equivalent, or to give the flavour of the culture or the literature, when this can be compatible with clarity. But there can be no justification for using Arabic terms or phrases where adequate Swahili ones exist, or for spelling Swahili names in what we regard as a correct Arabic manner unless and until the Swahilis themselves decide to do so. This both falls short of absolute clarity, and suggests an academic imperialism which should by now be a thing of the past.

Glosary

AH Anno Hegira: the Muslim dating system numbered from AD 622, the date of the flight of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina
deme Half of the town, each half providing a period of town government in alternation
diye Feud-compensation paying cluster of clans among the Somali
mihrab or qibla-niche Niche in mosque wall indicating the direction of Mecca
minbar Small platform or pulpit in mosque from which the Imam speaks
mtepe Sewn boats with woven raffia sails
nakhoda Ship's captain
nisba Pedigree
Qadi Originally a hereditary post as a lawyer: now a 'judge' for settling matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance (i.e. not secular matters)
shomvi Traditional patrician political title
siwa Ceremonial side-blown horn

1 A bowl of 'Wenje Ware', excavated at Shanga from ninth-century levels. This is the characteristic earthenware pottery found in both coastal and inland sites in East Africa and gives a clear indication of the African origin of the Swahili.
2 Timber mosques at Shanga. A series of timber structures were excavated below the stone mosque of the eleventh century, each on a different alignment but with a similar plan. These may date to the ninth or tenth century.

3 Monumental stone building at Shanga, with underlying post holes for an earlier timber structure of similar plan. The introduction of coral as a building material in the tenth century modified an existing local architectural form.
4 Houses at Old Kipini, probably fifteenth-century, typical of Swahili stone houses of this period. This settlement formed part of the kingdom of Ozi, a Shungwaya successor, and the traditional burial place of Fumo Liongo.

5 The great mosque at Gedi, sixteenth century, showing the main east doorway decorated with the motif of the broadbladed spear, a traditional Swahili emblem of kingship.
6 Plaster relief of a side-blown horn or siwa, another emblem of Swahili kingship, on the 'shrine' at Pujini, Pemba Island.

7 The great mosque at Kilwa. The original mosque is twelfth century, with this vaulted annex added in the late thirteenth century, the most accomplished example of Swahili architecture.
8 The Great Mosque at Tumbatu. Excavated in 1991, this was built in the twelfth century and is over twice the size of the original mosque at Kilwa. It is typical of many mosques that were built in East Africa with the spread of majority Islam.

Foreword
The Problem
of Swahili Identity
This book on Swahili origins, first conceived as a study of the cultural identity of the Swahilis throughout their history, has been narrowed down to a study of how the Swahilis began, and specifically of how the African element in their cultural
patrimony was first modified by Islam and later distorted until many Swahilis
themselves lost sight of it while some non-Swahilis denied it altogether.
While investigating the Swahils' African origins I found myself led to a number
of conclusions about Shungwaya which were new, at least to modern
historiography. So Shungwaya has come to share the subtitle. Yet the book
remains Swahili-oriented, and while I have tried to explore Shungwaya's links
with the Swahilis exhaustively, its links with non-Swahili societies have only
been examined in so far as they illuminate these links. There can be few historic
peoples whose identity is as elusive as that of the Swahilis. We may identify
'peoples' in history by the following indicators:
* a widespread consciousness of belonging together, and a willingness to be
  recognised as one people, either now or in the past;
* a common language;
* a shared culture, or at least literature, religion and customs which are common to
  a majority;
* a shared territory; and
* a shared historical experience.
Let us look at these one by one in the Swahili context.
For as long as written records exist, groups of Swahilis have described
themselves, not only as Mombasans (Swahili waMvita), Pateans (waPate),
Kilwans (walAlwa) or whatever, but also as Arabs (waArabu), Persians
(waShirazz), or something else - even, in at least one place, Portuguese (waRno) -
rather than as Swahilis, and many still do so. Indeed, it is doubtful whether even
today most of the people would in all contexts accept the name Swahili.

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Swahilis do share a language, though with considerable dialectal differences; but
efforts to trace their origin and early history solely in terms of the source and
development of this language are at best misleading. They also share a culture,
though with great regional and some class variation. Yet ironically it is cultural
differences which Swahilis themselves most often use to declare others 'not real
Swahilis' (si waSwahili haswa).
Traditionally the Swahilis themselves were certain that their territory extended
from somewhere near Kiwaiyu, in the north of the Lamu Archipelago, to Tunge
(Tungi, Tungwe), not far south of the Rovuma River in modern Mozambique, and
included the offshore islands along this coast and the Comoros. But in practice
they often spilled over to the north, south or (after c. 1800) west of these
boundaries, while others interpenetrated them, so territory is of little use to define
Swahili identity.
This leaves us with 'shared historical experience' On the face of it, there is no
single, dramatic historical experience or series of experiences whose legacy
enables Swahilis to define themselves as, for instance, the legacy of the American
War of Independence permits Americans to define themselves.' And yet the
inability to discern any historical experience shared by all Swahilis is in large
measure due to our failure to look at them as a historic people at all. It has been
my aim in this book not to cover the whole thousand years or more of Swahili
history, nor even to cover all aspects of their history up to the seventeenth century or so, but to focus on their origins and on their role during much of those first eight or so centuries.

The Swahilis in Western Historiography

For all that Swahili identity is elusive, it is only relatively recently that Western historians have questioned their historical importance, and that some have queried their very existence. The growth of this anti-Swahili prejudice is directly connected with the rise of an ‘Arab Myth’ of East African coastal history. Early European visitors to East Africa had no difficulty in recognising a large and important Swahili community with its own rich culture, quite separate from and unrelated to a second group which comprised recent immigrants from Arabia and the Gulf. The Frenchman Morice, who stayed in Kilwa in the 1770s (whose reports have been published by Freeman-Grenville under the title The French at Ailwa Island), unhesitatingly distinguished the former, whom he called ‘Moors’ and who in his time still dominated the settlement in spite of a recently attempted coup d’etat by Omani Arabs. Another Frenchman, Guilain, who travelled widely in eastern Africa in the mid-nineteenth century, and a third, Greffulhe, who lived in Lamu in the 1870s and travelled overland to Bagamoyo and thence to Zanzibar, made similar automatic distinctions between Arabs and Swahilis. The log-book of a Dutch vessel visiting Zanzibar and the Comoros in the 1770s is no less unequivocal about the Arabs being separate again. While among Germans, the historian Strandes, whose work was first published in 1899, and the ethnographer Stuhlmann, whose Handwerke und Industrie in Ost-Africa appeared in 1910, both likewise referred to the

The Problem of Swahili Identity

indigenous townsmen of the coast as Swahilis, reserving the title ‘Arab’ for those whose home was, or had been, Arabia. Among English-speakers, too, the very multiplicity of ways in which Swahili was spelled (Sowhelians, Sowauly, Sowhylese, etc.) is an indication of how they recognised them as a community in their own right. Even the Portuguese, who had called all Muslims ‘Moors’, at some stage began to speak of ‘Suaili’

The Englishman Burton was the first to make a serious attempt to alienate the Swahilis from their history. But when he first visited East Africa in the 1840s and 1850s they were still too large a community for their name to be ignored; and he himself was too honest and acute an observer to omit certain facts and traditions about them which fit ill with their later image. He did not leap to the conclusion that all who called themselves waShirazi must have stemmed from Shiraz in Persia, though he did theorise about early Persian links with the East African coast. It was an Englishman, Captain C.H. Stigand, amateur ethnographer and linguist, who, as late as 1913 published the most nearly adequate definition of a Swahili up to that date. He concluded that a Swahili, in the more confined sense of the word, is a descendant of one of the original Arab or Persian-Arab settlers on the coast. In the broader sense of the word it includes all who speak a common language, Swahili, and so in this broader sense ‘Swahili-ness’ is a cultural phenomenon,
devoid of any physiognomic implications and depending only upon language. Such a definition found few takers at the time. To most Western scholars, race (and in Africa, tribe) were paramount. It was, of course, the era of the Hamitic Myth, and of countless other theories about genetic difference linked with Social Darwinism. Culture in Africa was seen as chiefly a function of race and tribe.

Naturally the Swahilis, who had come to regard themselves in cultural rather than racial terms, and whose unity melted away once racial and tribal categories were superimposed upon them, were one of the first and most serious casualties of this way of thinking. They were regarded as inferior on two separate and not entirely compatible grounds: first, because they were 'cross-bred' Arab and African, a 'half-caste' or 'mongrel' 'race', and it was held that such races must be in some sense inferior to 'pure-bred' ones. Secondly, they were regarded as inferior in so far as the 'superior' Arab blood in their veins had been diluted by that of 'inferior' Africans. An early East African governor, Sir Charles Eliot, went so far as to express fears for their future on the grounds that 'pure Arabs are likely from now on to visit the coast in decreasing numbers'.

Stigand made few converts among his contemporaries. Major F.B. Pearce, the first official British Resident in Zanzibar, published a book in 1920 with a chapter on the Swahilis which he began by declaring ominously that they were 'a mixed race of negro stock' He went on: 'There are three essentials to be fulfilled before a person can be regarded as a Swahili; first of all, he must be of African descent; secondly, he must speak the Swahili language; and thirdly, he must have originated from the East African littoral.' One of Pearce's successors in Zanzibar, W.H. Ingrains, in a work published in 1931, agreed that the Swahilis were first

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and foremost 'a mixed race, a blend of the aboriginal coast natives, slaves brought from the up-country region, and Arabs'; and noted that 'although they would not admit it, a certain class of Arabs' should also be included under this name.6 Both these definitions at least smudged the racial borderline with a secondary set of cultural considerations. But L.W. Hollingsworth, whose A Short History of the Coast of East Africa, first published in 1929 and last reprinted, for the fifteenth time, in 1974, was used in schools (and so was presumably more widely read by the Swahilis themselves than any other work on the subject), simply described them as 'a Bantu people with a certain amount of Arab blood'. Later British administrators were more likely to have taken note of C.W. Hobley's brief reference, in a work appearing in 1929, to 'the so-called Swahili or semi-Arab people of the coast', and of his suggestion that they were so decadent that they probably had no future;8 for almost everything that Swahilis represented was anathema to British colonial administrators. The latter liked their Africans to be racially 'pure' while the Swahilis glorified in a part-Arab ancestry; and they liked their subjects to be rural-dwelling and 'tribally-minded' with, where possible, a Native Reserve to which they could be notionally if not physically relegated, whereas the Swahilis were, in Ingrains' disapproving words, 'of mixed descent', 'detribalised', and 'living in and around the towns' It did indeed seem best, from the viewpoint of many administrators, that the Swahilis should simply disappear.
And in administrative terms they very nearly did. But one or two problems had to be cleared up before this could happen. First there was the question of their history. The coast was dotted with stone-built ruins, including some very impressive ones, which the Swahilis claimed had been constructed by their forefathers. Burton had begun the process of disinheriting them from this legacy, a process which now gained momentum. Hollingsworth described a great Persian or Arabo-Persian Empire in pre-Portuguese times, which he said was known as the Empire of Zenj or Zinj. Ingrains also devoted a section of his work to the Zinj Empire, which of course never existed. In later editions of Hollingsworth's work it was translated into an account of Kilwa's 'supremacy' over a large part of the coast.9

The next problem was what to call those residual Swahilis who, for one reason or another, could not plausibly be called 'Arabs' and could not be fitted into any African tribal group either. A solution to this was found in the label 'Shirazi'. 'Shirazi' sounded, in some obscure way, 'purer' and less African than 'Swahili', with connotations of Persian ancestry at some period in the remote past. Swahilis themselves used the term waShirazi in a specialised sense which will be discussed in Chapter Eight; but it is important to disentangle this meaning, at least sanctioned by indigenous usage, from the less precise colonialist use of the term. Writers like Pearce and Ingrains, following hints dropped by Burton, seized on the name with delight as evidence of an extensive period of Persian rule in East Africa preceding Arab rule, and they used the idea as the foundation of a whole mythology about 'Persian influences' in coastal civilisation. Administrators more prosaically created a 'tribe' which they called 'Swahili-Shirazi', and used it as a sort of classificatory dustbin into which to sweep all people who, at censuses and in similar contexts, did not fit in anywhere else. By the later colonial period there were not many of them to be found. The 1962 census of Malindi, for instance, showed 2,219 'Arabs' and only 86 'Swahili-Shirazis' in that town.0 The remainder had learned to call themselves, for official purposes, Bajuni or Mijikenda or Pokomo or even 'Rhodesia and Nyasaland' (denoting slave origins).

Many of these prejudices were given academic respectability in R. Coupland's history of the coast, published in 1939 and significantly called East Africa and its Invaders. He interpreted the whole of East Africa's coastal history in terms of the colonisation of the region by immigrants from the Middle East. Lacking accurate figures for these 'waves' of invaders, he implied that they must have been vast; and in the absence of any chronological framework from archaeology or elsewhere he suggested that they would have been continuous. The indigenous inhabitants of the coast were relegated to the roles of wives of the immigrants and slaves. Coupland was responsible for another major distortion when he portrayed the whole area east of Lake Victoria/Nyanza and Lake Tanganyika, coast and interior alike, as having been devastated by Arab slave- raiders for many centuries. Ostensibly his concern was to show why many peoples in East and East-Central Africa had 'progressed' much less than their counterparts elsewhere in the
continent, and explained this purported phenomenon as the consequence of centuries of grand-scale slave-raiding. It has been suggested that he may have been motivated by a desire to represent European slave-trading in West Africa as the less reprehensible by exaggerating the antiquity and consequences of Arab slave-trading on the eastern seaboard." Whatever his motives, he projected backwards in time the scale and cruelties of nineteenth-century slave-raiding in East Africa, and his conclusions were later rejected by - among others Freeman-Grenville, who declared that before about 1780 there was little evidence of extensive Arab slave-raiding south of the modern KenyaSomalia border at all." Coupland's conclusions were widely accepted for many years, and up to about 1960 the Swahilis played little part in British administrative or historical thinking, being written off as 'non-Africans' or 'non-Arabs' as suited the prejudice of individual rulers or writers.

There was, however, reason to hope for a change in the late 1940s when James Kirkman, the first qualified archaeologist to operate regularly on the coast, began to work at Gedi near Malindi. Kirkman's importance cannot be overestimated. A competent and articulate scholar, he was not afraid of using the formidable combination of his trowel and his pen to contradict earlier 'sacred cow' theories with incisive vigour.

The first to fall beneath his onslaught was the notion that there had been a separate Persian ('Shirazi') period of coastal history which had found its ultimate expression in the Zinz empire. Pearce had believed that he could discern a 'Persian' style of architecture pre-dating the 'Arab' one in the ruined sites along the coast. To this had been added the evidence of the 'Shirazi' origin tradition of some Ailing lineages, and a few instances of Persian loan-words and supposed Persian customs. A favourite example was the term Nairuzi, sometimes used as a name for the Swahili Solar New Year rituals, which were accordingly assumed to have been derived from the Persians. But, as Chittick has pointed out, the form Nairuzi indicates that the word (like most Persian loan-words in Swahili) has passed through Arabic, so it is likely to have been Arabs who introduced the term to East Africa.

Kirkman correctly realised that Pearce's 'Persian' architecture was no more than an earlier variant of his 'Arab' one. 'The distinction between Arabs and Persians is deprecated,' he noted briskly,

It is better to avoid the use of the term Persian until there is some evidence of the use of Persian speech and Persian customs which have not been adopted by the Arabs. No doubt the strongest overseas influence in the Middle Ages came from the Persian Gulf, but the Persian Gulf is no more Persian than the German Ocean (an old name for the North Sea) is German. Today the dhows of Persian nationality are normally owned and manned by Arabs who speak Arabic in preference to Persian. No Persian inscriptions have been found in East Africa.

And in his eminently readable Men and Monuments of the East African Coast, published in 1964 and the first work to attempt a synthesis of all the ruined sites
from Mogadishu to northern Madagascar, he treated all the stone-built coastal structures as belonging to a single, continuous Muslim civilisation. Yet Kirkman too accepted the view that the coastal civilisation was an Arab-colonial one, and allocated no perceptible historical role to the Swahilis. The cultural achievements of the coast over the last millennium he unequivocally appropriated to the Arabs:

The historical monuments of East Africa belong, not to the Africans but to the Arabs and Arabised Persians, mixed in blood with the African but in culture utterly apart from the Africans who surround them.14 To understand the full implications of Kirkman's verdict it is necessary to range right back into the minds of imperialists of the nineteenth century and colonists of the early twentieth. Most early white imperialists came to Africa convinced that it had somehow got left behind in the march of human progress. In East and Central Africa there were relatively few solid relics of earlier civilisations outside Ethiopia, which many Western thinkers simply annexed to Southwest Asia anyway. And where such relics were encountered, there was a strong temptation to attribute them to some 'superior' non-African race. The best-known case was the large complex of stone-built ruins associated with Great Zimbabwe, long regarded as Phoenician. The east coast sites, which contained not only the ruins of finely built stone structures but also the debris of imported Middle Eastern and Chinese ceramics, and whose inhabitants the Portuguese had reported wore fine silks (and even wove some themselves) and elaborate gold and silver jewellery - these sites posed a similar question. Who could be responsible for them?

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Swahili claims were rejected. Pearce had hinted that the coastal civilisation might be connected with the Zimbabwe one; and he and other commentators compiled an astonishing list of non-African civilisations which had 'left traces' in East Africa. This list included Sumerians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Medes, Phoenicians, Jews, Greeks, Himyarites and Sabaeans, Indonesian-Malays and Chinese. (Of these there is not a shred of evidence that any but the last three ever even visited East Africa.) But the obvious candidates for the founders of the east coast civilisation were the Arabs and Persians, who were known to have been using the monsoons to visit the coast for two millennia or longer. And so the myth of the Zinj Empire grew up.

By 1960, however, most of the purely racist motives for falsifying African history had disappeared, at least north of the Zambezi. And Kirkman himself had played an important part in the demolition of the Zinj Empire and the whole Persian thesis. Why, then, should the history of the east coast still have been regarded in the 1960s as 'belonging to' Arabs? There were several reasons. First and foremost was the difficulty, statistically speaking, of finding Swahilis in sufficient numbers to make it plausible that they were the heirs to a widespread civilisation. It was not easy to visualise these relatively few people as the sole descendants of a community which had once been so productive over such a wide area. There were, on the other hand, many recent Arab immigrants only too ready to claim that the whole coast had been
Arab for centuries, entitling them to the various administrative privileges which the British administration handed out to domiciled 'non-natives'.

Western historical thought had also been concerned, for some time, with the distinction between 'historic' and 'non-historic' peoples. The concept is a useful one, but it cannot be interpreted too narrowly or too rigidly applied. The problem originated in the disputes over the European 'nationalities' 'Historic' peoples were defined as those who had a fully articulated class structure, with a nobility, a bourgeoisie or middle class, and a peasantry and/or proletariat. Such people were held to have ruled themselves at some stage in the past (and so, it was often argued, had the right to do so again). 'Semi-historic' peoples had only a middle class and a peasantry and/or proletariat. 'Non-historic' ones had only a working class - and even comparative liberals hesitated, on occasion, to offer such peoples self-rule. This particular concept of 'historic', 'semi-historic' and 'non-historic', peoples could obviously not be transferred to African colonial territories without modification, or many societies with a recognisable traditional aristocracy would have had to be granted self-rule immediately. But it did find modified expression in the inter-World War doctrine of indirect rule; and in the later colonial period it still appeared to have some relevance to such problems as east coast history. If there were no Swahili aristocrats and very few Swahili bourgeois, then the Swahilis could not have been responsible for an independent civilisation in the area's past. And Swahili aristocrats who still called themselves Swahilis were certainly hard to find in the 1950s and 1960s.

Foreword

Another good reason for attributing the coastal civilisation to outsiders was the great cultural gap which appeared to exist between whoever had built and lived in the coastal sites and any Africans living in their vicinity in modern times. The architecture of the stone buildings, the woodcarving, metalwork pottery, and other material culture, seemed to bear no relation to anything found among peoples in the near interior. Kirkman nowhere suggests that Africans were incapable of such achievements. Looking at their culture over the ages, however, he could see no possibility that it was closely related to that of 'the Africans who surround them'. He accordingly had to establish a provenance elsewhere; and as well as a pervasive Arab element he also detected much in it which he suggested must have derived from the region of southern Arabia and the Gulf. Kirkman's arguments were not without challengers. As early as 1960 C.R. Boxer had defined the Swahilis as 'the Islamised East Africans, whether of mixed or pure Arab blood [my italics], as opposed to the unconverted and less civilised Bantu tribes which inhabited the neighbourhood and hinterland of the Swahili towns'. And he firmly labelled all the permanent residents of the coast Swahilis. The Dutch anthropologist A.H.J. Prins, whose The Swahili-speaking Peoples of Zanzibar and the East African Coast first appeared in the same year, recognised the existence of Swahilis, but rather ominously placed them, in his subtitle, third after 'Arabs' and 'Persians'. And his Preface opens with the words, 'This is a book about the Arabs who have settled in Africa, together with the Africanised Persians and coastal Africans.' By the time of the second edition in 1967, however, Prins had more to
say about Swahilis, including a devastating critique of official census figures, which over the last half-century showed such an enormous rise in the number of 'Arabs' and corresponding decline in the number of Swahilis ('Swahili-Shirazis') as could only be accounted for by huge numbers of the latter reclassifying themselves as the former. Official census figures for coastal populations are in fact a textbook example of the fatuity of using such statistics to measure anything except peoples' changing perceptions of their own identity. Prins came up with a definition of the Swahilis which was primarily in cultural terms:

The Swahilis are a typical cultural group in which henceforth the East African Arabs are to be considered as bearers of the culture par excellence and sociologically speaking as an upper status group within the whole Swahili 'ethnic' stock.6 This definition is an impressive advance upon most of the earlier ones; but it is so densely phrased as hardly to be of any use to Swahis themselves or other laymen trying to unravel the puzzle of Swahili identity.

The real watershed in Swahili studies came with the publication in 1963 of the first volume of the Oxford History of East Africa. Gervase Mathew dealt severely with all ideas of massive immigration from the Middle East before the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and even went so far as to suggest that the coastal towns might have been founded by Africans themselves - a total contradiction of everything that had been taken for granted so far. And in his chapter on the coast between c. 1490 and 1840, Freeman-Grenville assumed the existence of an important Swahili community throughout this period. That the Swahilis were separate from, and often antithetical to, recent Arab immigrants was corroborated in some of his later publications and has been widely accepted since FJ. Berg, for instance, in his doctoral thesis and in an important 1968 article on Mombasa's early history, C.S. Nicholls in her study of the Swahili coast in the nineteenth century published in 1971, and A.I. Salim in his work on the Kenya coast since 1895 which appeared in 1973.17

One school of thought, however, continued until very recently to shun the term 'Swahili' altogether; this included the late Neville Chittick, Director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa up to his retirement in 1983, who succeeded James Kirkman as the doyen of coastal archaeologists. Another scholar associated with the same institute, Peter Garlake, published in 1966 the first major survey of coastal architecture, in which he used the term exclusively to describe the occupants of mud and thatch houses in recent times. This undoubtedly facilitated his conclusion that coastal architecture was not indigenous in origin. Chittick, in numerous papers, and also in his 1974 two-volume work on Kilwa, did not explicitly subscribe to the Arab Myth, but avoided mentioning the name 'Swahili' almost completely, a considerable semantic achievement.8 Even his posthumous (1984) publication on Manda avoids using the term 'Swahili' for the inhabitants of that settlement. The apparent ambivalence of the British Institute scholars on this
question is especially to be regretted since it was only by archaeology and, in
default of that, by a careful study of the standing ruins, that the Swahilis could be
reinstated in their proper place in coastal history. Indeed, Chittick subsequently
revived the old idea of people from Shiraz in southern Persia colonising the East
African coast. He saw the Shirazi origin tradition, as a folk-memory of an actual
migration from the Persian Gulf. This migration was not, he maintained, a
massive population movement, but rather a ‘steady seepage’; and it brought to East
Africa people who were not, for the most part, Persianspeaking but Arab-speaking
inhabitants of the Province of Fars, of which Shiraz was the capital and Siraf, up
to the tenth or eleventh century, the main port.9 He subsequently proposed that
vanguard groups would also have settled at places like Manda and on Pemba
Island.
This hypothesis first appeared in Volume Three of the Cambridge History
ofAfrica published in 1977, which thus seemed to put the clock back to before the
appearance of Volume One in 1963.20 But of course the clock could not really be
put back. Even though it was not immediately possible in the absence of fresh
archaeological data to propose a watertight alternative theory, there was never any
real chance that Chittick's newstyle 'Asian colonisation' interpretation would win
wide acceptance. Most of the arguments which had led Prins, Mathew and
Freeman-Grenville to query Kirkman's own model of Arab colonisation still
stood. And to these more recent scholars have added further grounds for rejecting
the colonisation model altogether.21

Much research has now been done on the ways in which primarily
mercantile groups attach themselves to overseas societies for trading purposes.
All we need say here is that, where levels of military technology are more or less
equal, such people seldom if ever (as one historian of the Swahili coast has put it)
'migrate and found towns, though this is invariably the way it is remembered in
oral traditions' 22 Few societies are prepared to let newly-arrived groups of
outsiders establish independent bases on their territory save for special cases, and
there are no grounds for supposing that East Africans were exceptional in this
respect. There had long been trading-posts and one or more 'emporia' on the east coast of
Africa, since the beginning of the Christian Era, perhaps longer. Chittick himself
at Kilwa, Wilson and Athman Lali at Pate and Horton at Shanga have all found
evidence of pre-Muslim populations in those places. It cannot reasonably be
doubted that, if anyone did arrive from overseas to settle, they either had to come
to terms with the incumbent population or fight. The traditions do not mention
fighting, which is anyway an unpromising way to establish a trading-post, and
which fits ill with the idea of a 'steady seepage' of immigrants.
Then there is language. One region where immigrants probably did simply sail in
and settle was Madagascar, which was apparently unpopulated when Malayao-
Indonesian-speaking immigrants first arrived. Some two millennia later languages
spoken there are still all Malayo-Indonesian. This is the opposite of the pattern on
the Swahili coast, where Swahili is a Bantu language with a proportion of Arabic loanwords.

Chittick was prepared to take at face value stories in a few traditional Swahili annals to the effect that the newcomers secured control by the simple expedient of marrying the local chief's daughter. Now, nowhere in the world do local potentates offer their daughters in marriage to newly arrived foreign merchants, as a matter of course. We do not say such things never happen, but where they do it is assuredly a symptom of some deeper need for an outside alliance and not in itself the cause of the alliance.

Why then should Swahili annals contain such stories? Other, more plausible explanations suggest themselves. Guillain, for instance, indicated that the Nabahani dynasty first came to the throne in Pate in the early eighteenth century and not, as implied in the Pate Chronicle, five centuries earlier. It is quite likely that the Chronicle, itself essentially a Nabahani family document, included a story of the first Nabahani to reach Pate marrying the king's daughter and inheriting the kingdom solely in order to absorb all earlier recorded rulers into the Nabahani line and validate Nabahani claims 'always' to have ruled Pate.

There is an unsavoury image of coastal Africans kowtowing to newly landed Asian settlers, yielding up their control of commerce without a murmur, meekly assisting them to construct great stone walls and houses, happily handing over their daughters in marriage, and supinely abdicating political power. This image dates from an earlier age in Western historiography, in which Africans always appeared as the passive recipients of new techniques and types of authority which were introduced from outside their continent. It is now totally outmoded. Recent research has revealed

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that there are far more Swahili settlements than can easily be accounted for by overseas settlement, even if the 'slow seepage' went on for centuries. Moreover, a good number of these have very poor harbours or none at all, while several important ones are inland. Account must also be taken of certain characteristically African cultural concepts which appear to pervade the Swahili settlements from their beginnings. These find expression in such things as regalia items, fingo-pots (containing magical charms and buried beneath town gates or private doorways), and in rituals such as the zinguo ceremony. And there are architectural features, aspects of tomb and mosque design and location, of house-plan and house-usage, and many more.

As for the idea that the colonisers were Arabs or Arabised Persians, and that they remained Arabs or Arabised Persians right up to relatively modern times, this had been undermined by Arabists and Arabs themselves who felt the need to replace the old, genetic notion of 'Arab' with something more usable couched in cultural and linguistic terms.

It would be hard to show that the inhabitants of the east coast settlements ever fulfilled any of these requirements, and Kirkman nowhere tried to do so. I would argue that the majority of them could not even loosely be called Arabs, among other reasons because, even if they could speak the Arabic language (which
before the nineteenth century is uncertain), their main language of literary expression was a Bantu one. On this all-important question of language and literature, however, Western scholarship over the last forty years or so has failed more dismally than in any other sphere. To the assertion, 'There is no such person as a Swahili', there has always been a very simple retort: 'Who, in that case, developed the Swahili language, and who wrote and read or sang Swahili poetry?' - but this nobody ever seems to have asked. Early twentieth-century scholars like Stigand, Alice Werner and Hichens steeped themselves in Swahili literature, and whatever their other failings they never doubted that Swahilis existed. Indeed, they sought to use traditional literature to understand the Swahili past, though not always very successfully. Later students of this literature such as the late J.W.T. Allen, and the late Lyndon Harries continued to work on it, but in what was effectively a historical vacuum: they never presumed to use literary material to add to or correct what the historians or archaeologists were saying.23

The historians and archaeologists ignored Swahili literature and its implications for their work. Neither Kirkman nor Chittick ever utilised Swahili poetry, of which an astonishing amount (over seventy epic-length poems alone) has been published, as historical material. Significantly, the only historian in the post-1950 epoch to take literature seriously was Freeman-Grenville, and it was he, together with Mathew, who wrote the coastal sections of the Oxford History of East Africa which broke with the Arab Myth.

It is hard not to sense, in this lacuna, a certain trahison des ducs, a deliberate avoidance by academics of a topic which would inevitably stir up controversy and oblige everyone to do a lot of difficult rethinking. The epitome of this betrayal came with the publication in 1969 of the first ever history of the Swahili language, Swahili: the Rise of a National Language, that contained chapters on literature and on the early history of the language, and provided a perfect opportunity for a reputable scholar to speculate on the sort of society that might have produced it. But this Whiteley did not do. He discussed the evidence for the language's existence in earlier centuries. But in every case he came up with an extremely cautious verdict of 'Not Proven'. He conceded that Swahili was a Bantu language, not a creole or pidgin or 'hybrid' in any other sense, and that Bantu languages might well have been spoken on Africa's east coast by the tenth century. But he steadfastly refused to recognise that Swahili was the language of the coastal settlements until the early eighteenth century. Such caution, if disappointing, was perhaps justified: yet he had no explanation to offer as to how the Swahili language originated if it did not originate in the coastal settlements, or of how it might have come to take over there c. 1700. And he thereby avoided naming Swahilis as a people at all, and completed a book of over 130 pages about a highly sophisticated literary language without once attributing a collective identity to those who spoke it.24

New Definitions

Where do Swahilis studies stand today? A number of new scholars have contributed to the field in the last decade or so, and many earlier distortions have
been righted. At least four new archaeologists have begun work on the Kenya coast, and none of their more important findings support Chittick's thesis. An Iraqi architect, Usam Ghaidan, has published an important study of Northern Swahili architecture which goes far to modify Garlake's conclusions. Mohamed Abdulaziz, himself a Swahili, has published an important study of the nineteenth-century Mombasa poet Muyaka which represents a step in the direction of restoring literature to its proper place in the study of the society as a whole. Finally, fifteen or more sociologists, social anthropologists and historians have since c.1970 produced work important for our understanding of the past in the Swahili world. Never again can it be seriously questioned whether Swahilis actually exist, and, if so, for how long they have done so. In one important sphere, however, no real progress has been made, and that is on the question of Swahili identity. A prolonged and many-sided debate which took place in several academic journals in the 1970s (and which was in general characterised by a marked ignorance of east coast history) brought no significant advance on the definitions of Stigand and Prins.25

We must at this point offer at least a rough, working definition of the Swahilis as they have been conceived for the purposes of this volume. We shall in fact offer two interdependent definitions. Evidence for them will appear in the following chapters.

The Swahilis with whom this book is concerned are, in the first instance, those who lived in the coastal settlements between c.800 and c. AD 1600. They are the people who built places like Kilwa and Gedi; those who worshipped in the mosques and are buried in the tombs of which so many examples survive, some of startling beauty; those who built the sewn boats which sailed along the coast of Africa and perhaps further afield, and those who produced the carved door-frames and other arts associated with the region; those who wrote, sang or listened to Swahili poetry, and among whom the Swahili language evolved to its present state; those, finally, of whom the Chinese, Arabs, Portuguese and other outsiders have left so many written accounts.

The term 'settlement' is important. It corresponds to the Swahili mji (in Northern dialects, mui; plural mji), and it is not exactly equivalent to the English 'town', for it covers, as well as populous centres such as Kilwa and Gedi, many other places too small to be 'towns' which one would rather call 'villages', or perhaps just 'a mosque with a scatter of huts' But the word mji also contains a hint of political or at least social autonomy, which can only be conveyed, in English, by calling it a 'city state' or, in rare contexts, a 'tribe' Each mji had its own dominant group, however few and poor, who theoretically owed no obeisance to the inhabitants of any other.

But it is not only the dominant groups who concern us but the whole community: the elites, but also those who lived in and around the settlements and were enmeshed in their economies; imams and householders, but also the labourers and slaves who built the mosques, houses and tombs, even if they did not (or not yet) pray in the mosques, or were destined to be buried in unmarked, non-Islamic
graves; sailors as well as nakhodas (ships' captains) and merchants; those who cut and carried the timber as well as those who shaped and carved it. We are interested here in those who stood among the crowd to watch and listen, whether at religious celebrations such as maulidis or on civic occasions such as the zgwo ritual, as much as in the protagonists on such occasions. They not only shared much of the life of members but also joined them within a few generations, sometimes completely eclipsing longer-established members.

Even as relative newcomers to the society they sometimes exercised important political and cultural influence. An early nineteenth-century Lamu poem describes how, in a meeting in the market place to discuss a joint Pate and Mazrui invasion which was imminent, the slaves were among other groups asked their views. (They were for war against the invaders.) Again, any study of Swahili dances, which are not mere leisure-activities but palimpsests of the whole society, would show that many of them were derived from other African societies.

There is another reason for studying, not just the 'owners of the settlement' (Swahili wenye mji), as the patricians called themselves, but all townsman. Between 1850 and 1920 effective ownership of the towns had passed out of Swahili hands, and yet Swahilis did not cease to exist. On the contrary, they are now more numerous than ever before. These 'new Swahilis' who figure so prominently in urban life might bear no historical relationship to the traditional ones, but just happen to carry the same name. However, it does not take long to see that this is not so, for the coastal Swahilis spilled over into the interior in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, establishing new settlements which are recognisable descendants of the older coastal ones. Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika is a case in point.

The modern Swahilis of the interior are the products either of such places or of what are sometimes called 'Swahili villages' (majengo) which are their counterparts within modern non-Swahili towns. Nor can we really draw a line between 'traditional' and 'new' Swahilis. Let us take two modern Swahili culture-heroes. Shaaban Robert (1909-1962) was of Yao origins, though born and brought up as a Muslim near Tanga, while Matiasi Mnyampala (1919-1969) was a Christian of Gogo parents born far from the coast in Dodoma, central Tanzania. Yet both were major poets in the Swahili tongue, and it would be perverse to deny to either the appellation 'Swahili' Shaaban Robert, in fact, always insisted on being so called. And if we are to call Shaaban Robert and Matiasi Mnyampala Swahilis, how can we not call the author of Desturi za wa Swahili ('The Customs of the Swahilis') one too? Though the work was until recently credited to the German Carl Velten, who was responsible for its original publication in 1905, it was largely composed by Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, born a Zaramo and just such a newcomer to a Swahili community (Bagamoyo) as we have been talking about, save that he was more articulate than most. Nor is he unique: both before and after 1900 cases multiply, and any attempt to distinguish systematically between 'old' and 'new' Swahilis is doomed to failure.
What we have to define, then, is not a tribe or any other group held together, even notionally, by links of blood or marriage, but a highly permeable population whose common factor is cultural in nature. At least, this is how a historian needs to think if he or she is to deal with the Swahilis through space and time. Swahilis themselves still often think of their identity in terms of some settlement. The Swahili community is urban or urbanising. It also covers not only those who have 'always' lived in and around these settlements but those, too, who are in the process of becoming enmeshed in them, and who are consequently becoming acculturated or Swahilised. How does one become a Swahili? The only way is by attaching oneself to an mfi or majengo, by living in a Swahili house of one sort or another, by participating in the local economy, attending maulidi, zinguo and other ceremonies, and, of course, by speaking the Swahili language. If one does this, one relatively soon ceases to be an outsider ('Swahili mgeni, also 'guest') and becomes a 'person of the place' (Swahili mwenyei, to be distinguished from mwenye mji, 'owner of the settlement' or patrician). And there is a good chance that, in the next generation if not the present one, intermarriage will be permitted with a longer-established family of appropriate social and economic standing, so family and clan links will be acquired as well. But in order to do this, it was and is still necessary to take a deliberate step outside one's former tribal or racial background into a new one which is neither tribal nor racial but to some extent acts as a substitute for either. The importance of the fact that the Swahili community is not a tribal one is widely recognised. It is no coincidence that some modern Tanzanian Swahilis are reported to refer disparagingly to their non-Swahili African neighbours as 'tribespeople' (Swahili watu wa kabila),28 for the Swahili community has always seen itself as offering, in its settlements, an alternative socio-political structure which is more appropriate for urban living.

A useful analogy is with the concept of 'Westernisation' But the analogy between being Westemised and being Swahilised should not be pushed too far. An important difference is that it has not been possible to be Westemised in any part of eastern Africa north of Mozambique for more than two, three or at the most four consecutive generations, so there are no East Africans whose origin (asili ) is 'Westernised', who are Westemised and nothing else, while there are Swahilis whose asili is only Swahili.

Another difference is that, in most parts of eastern Africa, it is difficult to be systematically Westemised without being at least relatively wealthy. This is not necessarily true of Swahilisation. The exact relationship between Westernisation and Swahilisation is one to which we shall return in the Afterword. How does one recognise a Swahili? As many observers have pointed out, the number of different sorts of people who may be recognised as Swahilis in some context or other is almost infinite. For being a Swahili is not an absolute state which precludes being anything else. We have to describe, then, both 'full' Swahilis and people in varying stages of Swahilisation (who may be called Swahilis by some and not by others according to the viewpoint of the observer).
Next, the outward signs of Swahiliness do not remain constant throughout time and space. Then again, Swahili society has always been to some extent articulated along class lines, so that different people trying to acculturate within the same settlement at the same period might have dressed and behaved quite differently according to whether they aimed at being accepted among the patricians or had no such ambitions.

Given all these variables, we dearly cannot hope to offer any detailed visual or behavioural description which will be valid for Swahilis for all places and periods. We can nevertheless set out two rule-of-thumb definitions, one for a Swahili and the other for a Swahilised person, which - while somewhat tautologous - will suffice for the moment:

1 a Swahili is a person who has (made) his/her home in or around one of the traditional Swahili settlements of the East African coast or their modern counterparts in the interior; whose lifestyle conforms to that of his/her neighbours; and who has inherited or adopted the Swahili language as his/her preferred tongue;

2 a person is Swahilised to the extent that his/her lifestyle conforms to that of one of the groups inhabiting traditional urban settlements on the East African coast or their modern counterparts in the interior, and especially in so far as he/she has adopted the Swahili language as his/her own preferred language.

Both definitions lay considerable stress on links with a settlement whether mji or majengo - as opposed to a tribe or any other political unit. How significant is this?

Many modern academics prefer to speak of 'ethnic groups', which are more loosely defined, generally speaking, than the term 'tribe' Now, it may be that 'ethnic groups' can be so loosely defined that the difference between them and Swahili settlements is one of degree rather than of kind. But that is not how Swahilis see it. As far as they are concerned their mji and, to a lesser extent, majengo is qualitatively different from, and indeed superior to, any rurally based tribe. Swahilis' loyalty to their individual mji-settlements - for example, in the face of Portuguese aggression - should be seen in this light, and not just as a perverse refusal to sink their parochial disputes and show a united front.

Marginally less stress is placed on language. This is not to imply that it was unimportant. Language is the single most important element in any culture, and Swahilisation is above all a cultural process. Furthermore, Swahilis themselves tend to attribute, if anything, even more importance to a good command of their language than do most other peoples, and value articulacy very highly. But language was never the only thing that distinguished the Swahilis from their neighbours. There were also the mji-settlements with their complex political and social structures, their urbanism, their wells and walls even, which gave a sense of belonging to a different sort, if not a different level, of society.

This insistence that no Swahilis existed before the mji settlements came into being is important, because it means Swahili origins do not disappear into the mists of
time. There was a definite moment when people emerged who both spoke Swahili (or an ancestral form of it) and lived in mjisettlements. As it happens, we can date it fairly accurately to c. AD 800. And these were the first Swahilis.

The Muslim religion is not mentioned at all in either definition. I do not deny that it was extremely important. Acceptance of Islam undoubtedly made a tremendous impact upon the lives of the inhabitants of the East African coast. On the one hand, it gave them access to all the arts and sciences to which, during much of our period, Islam alone was heir. Muslim medicine, astronomy, and other specialised knowledge became part of the intellectual stock-in-trade of every learned man; while architectural models for Swahili buildings have been recognised as far afield as Bahmanid India, Samarra in Mesopotamia, Seljuk Turkey and northern Iran. There were also countless material benefits, such as stonewares and fabrics imported from all over the Middle East as well as porcelains and silks coming from China beyond. And the spiritual benefits were incalculable.

On the other hand, converting to Islam as part of the Swahilisation process provided just that break with one's tribal past that was required to put Swahilis apart from and above other Africans. At least from c. 1100 to c. 1800, Islam was beyond question one of the main pillars of Swahili culture, and it must at times have seemed inseparable from it.

The centrality of Islam has decreased since the early nineteenth century, not, to be sure, among long-established Swahilis, who are all Muslims, but among relative newcomers to the Swahili community. The first non-Swahili Muslims for centuries were the Christianised descendants of the first freed slaves who were settled outside Mombasa in the 1890s; and Professor Terence Ranger has given a fascinating account of the

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briefly important role of this group in introducing the Beni dance into the Swahili world, a good example of the importance of relative outsiders in a Swahili cultural sphere. It would not be easy, I believe, to argue convincingly that all modem Swahilis and Swahilising groups are Muslim. Some Christians have an indisputable claim to be called Swahilis too.

One last phrase in our definitions deserves comment, namely 'preferred language'. The phrase is chosen in preference to 'first language' in East Africa, where a relatively large proportion of the population speaks (and probably has long spoken) at least two languages with reasonable fluency, this concept of a 'first language' is inappropriate, especially when discussing such themes as Swahilisation and the adoption of the Swahili language. 'Preferred language' is not entirely satisfactory either, since research indicates that many multilingual Africans prefer different languages in different contexts. Modern Swahili, for instance, is widely favoured for political jokes and conversations with sexual overtones, among other purposes. It is suggested that the ultimate test for a 'preferred language' in these circumstances is whether it is the one usually chosen for creative literary expression, either oral or written. If someone chooses regularly to compose poetry in Swahili, then Swahili is his or her 'preferred language', regardless of whether as a child he or she spoke any other language.
Armed with these working definitions, we can now set about identifying the first Swahilis. Our evidence comes from many sources: from archaeology; from oral traditions, which in this part of Africa can be used to project light a considerable distance backward in time; from eighteenth- to sixteenth-century Chinese and Arabic documents; and from many titbits in the Swahili literature and ethno-graphics of later centuries.

All these are, in a broad sense, primary sources, though it has been necessary to rely on translations for most of the documents. An additional source which has been used very sparingly is comparative linguistics. The reasons for my mistrust of this source - or, rather, of the way in which it has been used in recent years - can be summed up as follows: I regard the science of linguistics as insufficiently evolved, at present, to enable us to unravel the linguistic complexities (let alone the history) of peoples such as the historical Swahilis and their neighbours. As it is practised, linguistics is largely incomprehensible to non-specialists, who consequently have to take the findings of specialists on trust, i.e. as secondary evidence. This would matter less if all specialists reached the same conclusions on important matters, but they seldom do. No reproach is implied to linguists, who no doubt have their own priorities. But under the circumstances historians seem ill-advised to rely on any but the most widely-agreed deductions from linguistic data.

All my most important new ideas have in fact sprung from a scrutiny of the oral traditions: a prolonged study of recorded ones and a small but careful collection of new ones. These ideas are on the whole supported by recent archaeology, by a careful re-reading of the documents (especially the Chinese ones), and by the evidence of later Swahili literature and rituals; but it was the traditions that first suggested them.

Foreword

In this connection, it is worth stressing how few oral traditions have had to be ignored. The vast majority turned out either to be versions of the truth (though sometimes highly stylised ones) or deliberate but explicable perversions of it. This should not be surprising, since things that make no sense either as history or as effective ways of concealing what really happened are not likely to be remembered for long. It is salutary to remind ourselves that, if we ignore the traditions on the grounds that they do not fit our own interpretations based exclusively on archaeological, linguistic or some other sort of evidence (or simply because they seem too inherently implausible), we do so at our peril. Most have to be interpreted, some extensively so; and, if they still do not seem to fit, it is worth considering why they should tell another story. The reason, if we can establish it, may be as informative as if the story were basically correct.

What is true of oral traditions is also broadly true of historical literature. We have already noted that many earlier historians totally ignored early Swahili literature, with the result that some of it is hard to reconcile with the finished result. The classic example is the Fumo Liongo saga in which Liongo appears as very much a mainland warrior, skilled with a bow and arrow, a singer of his own praise-songs, and a thorn in the flesh of the intensely maritime and mercantile townsmen who
are just what many historians have seen as archetypal Swahilis. How could such a person have come to be more or less the folk-hero of the Swahilis, and be fitted into any period of Swahili history as it has hitherto been commonly interpreted? If he cannot, then it is not good enough just to ignore the saga. Some sort of explanation must be attempted.

Notes
1. T.T. Spear has compared the Shungwaya origin-tradition among the Mijikenda with the 'Revolution' among Americans as a shared historical experience. The Kaya Complex, Nairobi, 1979, pp. 17-18.
2. It is no coincidence that early scholars of Swahili Studies, all of whom began from a thorough knowledge of the language and worked from that as well as from evidence in all other fields, often wrote more sense about the Swahilis than their more specialised successors, linguists included. See J. de Vere Allen, 'Traditional history and African literature: the Swahili case', JAH 23 (1982), pp. 227-36.

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27. A new translation by J.W.T. Allen was published by the University of California Press in 1981 as The Customs of the &wahili People, the Desturi za wa-Swahili of Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari and Other Swahili Persons.
28. See W. Arens, 'The wa-Swahili'.

Sahara Desert
%AEN RAS ASIJ
HARAR BERBERA
Semi - Desert
The earliest detailed description of an East African coastal settlement appears in a Chinese source of c. AD 1225. The Chinese version of the name of the place is Tiung-Iji, and it is described as follows:

The inhabitants go bareheaded and barefoot. They wrap a cloth around themselves but do not wear jackets. Only ministers and the king's courtiers wear jackets and turbans as a mark of distinction. The king's residence is masoned out of large bricks and slabs of stone; the people's houses are made of palm leaves and are covered with thatch.

Their daily fare consists of baked flour-cakes, sheep's and cattle's milk. Cattle, sheep and camels are their 'big' food (that is, food eaten on special occasions).

A good deal more information about Tiung-Iji is also provided. Its people are given to 'magical tricks', changing themselves into birds, beasts and aquatic animals so as to 'bewilder ignorant people', or preventing the ships of foreign merchants from moving either forwards or backwards until their captains have settled outstanding disputes. (The government of the place is said to discourage
the latter practice, however.) The inhabitants also trap and eat large numbers of
migrating birds which alight 'outside the suburbs'. And when what are clearly
whales are washed up on the beach, they extract from their 'brains and marrow' a
sort of oil which is used for lamps or mixed with lime to caulk boats, though the
flesh is not eaten.
Ivory, frankincense, aloes and 'dragon's blood' (a product of the shrub Dracaena
sp.) are among the products of the land, while ambergris and turtle shell come
from the sea. And there is more, including a detailed account of a funeral to which
we shall return in a later chapter. Tiung-lji was in a land adjacent to 'Barbara' (the
land of the 'Berbers') but not in 'Barbara' itself, sometimes equated with modem
Somalia.'
Though the Chinese account was published in c. 1225, its author could have
collected information of this sort from Arab seafarers, as they had been visiting
both Canton and the East African coast for several centuries. It is of interest for
many reasons, not the least of which is that in many ways it describes a place
whose appearance and way of life must have
Map I (Opposite) Early East Africa

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been very similar to that of tenth- or eleventh-century Shanga on Pate Island in
the Lamu Archipelago.
The story of Shanga, as reconstructed by its excavator from six seasons of
excavation, is as follows. It was founded in c. AD 800, probably as a permanent
settlement but possibly as a mere seasonal trading encampment. Evidence for this
hypothesis is mainly dietary. There is evidence of the consumption of grain, in the
form of pottery stoves sunk into the floors, which closely resemble stoves still
occasionally used by modern Swahilis. But there is remarkably little by way of
fishbones or shellfish debris, and there is no sign of the bones of cattle, sheep or
goats, let alone camels, though these all appear a century or two later. Chickens
were eaten and some lizards, turtles, and small island gazelles as well as (perhaps)
a few rodents and snakes. It is this apparent absence of protein in the diet of the
earliest inhabitants which suggests that it may have been no more than a seasonal
trading encampment. However, larger stock may have been slaughtered and eaten
outside the settlement in the ninth century, or the basic diet could have been
supplemented with blood and milk taken from livestock which was not itself
eaten, or not often. (This is indeed what the Chinese description of Tiung-lji
implies.) On the whole, however, the question of whether ninth-century Shanga
was seasonal or permanent is best left open for the time being.2
What probably permitted the establishment of a settlement at Shanga was the
digging of a well in what was to become almost the precise central point of the
settlement. This well was lined or relined with stone (more precisely, coral) c. AD
1200 and relined many times thereafter, so we cannot say whether it was
originally constructed of stone or lined with timber. However, it is certain that it
dates from c. AD 800; and that is what we should expect, for on Pate Island, as
almost everywhere on the East African coast, no dry season aggregation of human
beings is possible without wells or large cisterns to catch and store the rain; and
on the northern part of this coast, at least, the dry season starts in December and largely coincides with the season of overseas trade, of which there is evidence from Shanga's beginning.

In view of the lack of seashore sites on this coast dating from before c. 800, we can probably assume that the earlier settlements were all far enough up estuaries to be above the high tide mark so that fresh water was always available in them. This would have changed only with the emergence of a population with some understanding of where to locate wells and/or how to construct cisterns. And it would have been the arrival of such a population c. 800 in the islands of the Lamu Archipelago which initiated the occupation of the whole coastline. This is confirmed by evidence from pottery. The occupants of ninth-century Shanga used, with a few imported ceramics, an unglazed ware of more local manufacture with a highly distinctive patterning which continued, with modifications, over many centuries; and this same pottery has been reported from the earliest levels in all known ninth-century coastal sites from Somalia to Mozambique. There can be no doubt that boats sailed between these places in the early ninth century carrying an

The Earliest Coastal Settlements identifiable people with their pots or (more probably) pottery-makers, for it is not plausible that mere unglazed pots were traded over such a wide distance between entirely new ports. The concentration of ninth-century sites in the Lamu Archipelago suggests that this type of pottery originated somewhere nearby. And by far the largest assemblage of sherds so far located is some sixty miles inland on an earlier course of the Tana River at a place called Wenje, where they cover both banks for some two or three miles. Although no major excavation has yet been carried out at Wenje, it is inconceivable that so much pottery was imported to it; and in point of fact modern Wenje potters still produce the occasional stove for the Swahili market. Wenje thus constitutes the most important link so far established between the coast and the interior. Wenje Ware seems likely to be a late derivation of the tradition of Narosura and related wares, associated with a series of Pastoral Neolithic and Pastoral Early Iron Age sites in the Central Kenya Rift spanning a period of nearly two millennia up to the eighth or ninth century AD. It is certainly not related to the early East African 'Bantu Wares' as represented by, for instance, Kwale Ware.3

The earliest settlement plan of Shanga comprised a rectangular enclosure of some 120 by 90 yards evidently surrounded by a timber fence or palisade. The well was in the centre of this enclosure, and livestock was probably initially stabled there. The houses were outside it, all of them built either of mud and timber or of palm leaves set in a mud base, and probably with palm-thatched roofs, of which no traces remain. Those to the west and southwest of the enclosure were mostly if not all circular, while those in the east seem to have been rectangular in form. While traces of iron-working were found in all trenches, the iron furnaces seem to have been concentrated in the west.
Definite evidence for the existence of two demes or moieties does not really emerge before c. 950, but it is worth noting that, to judge from the archaeological evidence, different groups (who may initially have spoken different languages) could have lived together from the beginning. And this is once again what we might expect, namely two or more communities occupying different ecological niches collaborating not only to promote foreign trade but also to exploit the new territory opened to them by virtue of the digging of the well. The occupants of Shanga in this first phase were not Muslims, nor did they build in stone (unless they used it to line their well). They seem to have established a recognised port for overseas traders, such as also sprang up elsewhere at about the same time, but there is no incontrovertible evidence that they penetrated far inland to procure ivory and whatever else they offered in exchange for imported goods. In the mid-tenth century, a second phase began with the arrival of a new group, who also, so far as we can tell, appeared in several other east coast ports at about this time. About the long-distance trade connections of the newcomers there can be no doubt at all. From this period onwards the bones of cattle, sheep and goats appear in great numbers, some of them bearing evidence of slaughter. Cattle become especially common in

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the eastern, sheep and goats more so in the western part of town, and the consumption of fish also increases rapidly in the west. Less fish is consumed in the east, but turtle and dugong are consumed mostly if not entirely there. The dearest proof of the admission of a new population into the settlements c. 950 is the simultaneous appearance, as far south as the Tana, of the first-ever permanent structures, built of finely squared Porites coral blocks and mortared, where they are mortared at all, with mud in the first instance. In Shanga, almost certainly in Manda, Kilwa, and Old Kipini (a large mainland settlement near the present Tana mouth often known as Ungwana, which has also been extensively excavated), the wooden palisade around the central enclosure was replaced about this time with a substantial wall of these blocks; and within were erected a number of monumental structures which, to judge from the associated deposits, may only have been used for human occupation. Some of them may have had a religious function, though others were almost certainly used to store trade goods. Were the newcomers Muslims? Though it is not completely certain, some may have been, for a small, two-roomed coral building in the centre of the Shanga enclosure and hard by its well could have been a mosque. It is only roughly oriented towards Mecca and had no mihrab; but there was a shallow external pilaster in the middle of the north wall which could have contained a wall-niche of the type which quite commonly indicated the direction of prayer in early mosques. If it was a mosque, it can only have served a very small section of the population, for there is room for only thirty or at most forty people to pray. Below the foundations of this coral building Horton found the postholes of at least seven earlier structures, very much smaller and with prayer-space for about ten at most. These were oriented even further off Mecca but had northern openings which could have been mihrabs. If they were mosques they might put back the
beginnings of Islam as a religion of a minority of the inhabitants by a few more
decades, perhaps longer. Alternatively, and more plausibly, they may have served
visiting Muslim merchants.4
Some at least of these tenth-century arrivals very probably were Muslims, but it is
a point which can only be finally settled by excavation of other similar sites. Even
the fact that these structures (or some of them) could be measured in Islamic
cubits does not prove anything, for the Islamic cubit is the average length from a
grown man's elbow to his fingertips, a unit of measurement which could also have
been used by non-Muslims.
The existence of long-distance trade-routes to the interior after c. 950 is proved by
the discovery of rock crystal at the appropriate levels in Shanga and Manda, and
also of haematite at Shanga. Rock crystal, more commonly known as quartz, is no
longer a rare mineral, being fairly common in the New World; but in pre-Islamic
Persia and the Muslim Caliphate it was very prestigious and much sought after,
being used for imperial medallions and jewellery and for such special items as
mosque

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lamps. We do not yet know where Sassanian Persia and the crystal carvers of
Basra and elsewhere in Mesopotamia obtained their raw crystal between the
seventh and tenth centuries; but it is generally agreed that the pieces of rock
crystal carved by the craftsmen of Fatimid Egypt in the tenth and eleventh
centuries are of such exceptional size, clarity and general excellence that they can
only have come from East Africa. There is even a documentary reference to
confirm this. The nearest source of such pieces of rock crystal to the Lamu
Archipelago is near present-day Kitui, approximately 220 miles inland (further
than any coastal trade has previously been supposed to have penetrated); but it is
also possible that some came from still further inland, from the Kerio Valley
which runs northward into Lake Turkana (Rudolf) in the Central Rift itself. The
chips that have been recovered from Shanga and Manda, some of them made into
beads, date from precisely the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the Egyptian
connection is further confirmed by the fact that, of all coins so far retrieved in
either site, almost all either are Fatimid or closely resemble Fatimid models.
Haematite, used along with ilmenite sand to produce iron of exceptional quality,
has also been recovered at tenth-century levels in Shanga, and it cannot have
come from anywhere nearer than the foothills of Mount Kenya either. And, if
these two heavy minerals were being carried out to the coast, we can be
reasonably sure that ivory and rhino horn found their way down the same route or
routes. The export of these last two items has long been known, but it has hitherto
been conservatively supposed that they would have come only from the
immediate coastal hinterland. It is also worth noting that ivory first began to be
imported into Europe in appreciable quantities at precisely this period, and a good
deal of it must have come from eastern Africa.
Yet another change of diet is reflected in the archaeological record c. 1050 when
the bones of camels, some of them showing signs of having been slaughtered,
begin to appear in the eastern half of Shanga, though not in the west. This time,
however, there is no sign in the foreign trade patterns of any new arrivals, so it is possible that the existing population of the settlements simply began to keep (or to eat) camels.  

A little later, perhaps c. 1075, some or all of the monumental buildings were dismantled, perhaps violently, along with the wall surrounding the central enclosure; and the coral blocks were subsequently reused to build what was Shanga's first indisputable mosque, a much larger building than its predecessor but - like it - hard by the well, which was of course needed for ritual ablutions. Simultaneously or a little later Muslim tombs are built both within the central enclosure and outside the settlement altogether. The advent of Islam as a majority religion in the last quarter of the eleventh century will be considered below. But, with the exception of the small earlier buildings which, as already noted, might have been mosques, there is no purely archaeological evidence for the presence of Muslims in Shanga - or, for that matter, anywhere else on the east coast of Africa before this date. On the contrary, it is as clear as we could reasonably expect that the earliest occupants of the area were not Muslims. This is

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obviously an important consideration in the interpretation of the archaeological data so far presented, to which we now turn.

Who were the founders of Shanga and the other ninth-century coastal settlements? Who dug the wells and laid out the first structures? If others joined with them from the first, who were these others? And who were the stone-builders with long-distance trade connections who were absorbed within the settlements c. 950?

To the first question an answer of sorts can be found in the early documents. The first of these comes from the mid-ninth century, when the Chinese author Tuan Ch'eng-shih mentioned the inhabitants of 'Barbara' who do not eat any cereals, but they eat meat; more frequently even, they prick a vein in one of their oxen, mix the blood with milk, and eat it raw. They have no clothes, but they wrap round their waists a sheep's skin which hangs down and covers them. The products of the country are ivory and ambergris. When the Persian merchants want to go into this country they gather about them several thousand men to whom they present strips of cloth. All, whether young or old, draw blood and swear an oath, and only then does trading begin. From of old this country has not been subject to any foreign power. In the fighting they use elephants' tusks, ribs and wild cattle's horns as spears, and they have corselets and bows and arrows. They have twenty myriads [i.e. a tremendous number] of foot-soldiers. The Arabs are continually making raids upon them. 6  

Tuan Ch'eng-shih died in 863 and was probably writing c. 850, though his sources (he was working from second-hand information) may have referred to somewhat earlier. These people were obviously not townsmen or the eaters of baked grains. They were dearly pastoralists. However, they may have been linked to the townsmen, for, though they did not eat grains, they drank blood and milk and
consumed meat occasionally. Pastoralists are often skilled well-diggers, and the layout of the early coastal settlements around a central enclosure is a typically pastoralist one. A reluctance to eat fish is also a typically pastoralist trait, though not exclusive to them.

The reference to a trade with the interior associated with Persians is interesting. Although it pre-dates by at least a century any archaeological evidence for the coastal settlements having trade links with the deep interior, if it can ever be shown that ninth-century Persian rock crystal came from East Africa, there would be grounds for supposing that such links existed early in the ninth century as well. The implication of hostility towards the Arabs and of amicable relations with Persia is also interesting in the light of the role later played by the Persian city of Shiraz in Swahili Islam.

But the crucial point is that these pastoralists who controlled international trade in 'Barbara' did not have iron, but tipped their spears with bone, horn and (remarkably) ivory. The earliest settlement-dwellers did have iron. But they may not have been homogeneous, and not all of them need have been of pastoralist origins. Suppose that some of Tuan Ch'eng-

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shil's herders decided, about the end of the eighth century, to establish coastal settlements and take up trade instead of herding (pastoralists often do this in exceptionally dry periods, and we know from the Rhodah Nilometer and other sources that in eastern and northeastern Africa the eighth century was by far the driest in the Christian era, so pastoral groups may well have been dislodged and forced to take up alternative livelihoods all over this region). If it was these pastoralists who first decided to found coastal settlements, they might well have invited the collaboration of ironworkers, probably drawn from neighbouring agriculturalists; and it could have been these iron-workers who introduced baked flour-cakes to their diet.

All this is at least partly confirmed by later documents. The Arab geographer al-Mas'udi was unique among early writers on the East African coast in that he had actually visited it, on the last occasion c. 915/916, before he described it in the mid-tenth century. He went more than once to a place called Kanbalu, to which we shall return below, not yet identified but which from his description must surely be somewhere in the Comoro Archipelago. What concerns us here is his description of the 'Zanj' who lived on the adjacent coast and possibly also in the Comoro Islands themselves. These he called atabish ('Ethiopians') who had crossed a 'tributary of the Nile' which flowed into a bay or canal, which in turn opened into the Indian Ocean. They had extended their 'settlements' southwards as far as Sufala (modern Mozambique), and had formed a 'state centre' (Arabic dar mamhka). Here they had a king with a vast army of soldiers mounted upon cattle.8

Mas'udi's aabish had dearly come to the coast opposite the Comoros from the north. The 'tributary of the Nile' which they had crossed was probably the Juba but might have been any of the great African rivers flowing towards or into the Indian Ocean north of Mozambique - the Awash, Shebelle, Juba, Tana, Sabaki,
Pangani-Ruvu, or the Rovuma itself. And his settlements were occupied by users of Wenje Ware pottery which already stretched as far south as Mozambique by the end of the ninth century. He does not mention a separate population of iron-workers, but he does mention iron, which he says was highly valued among the Zanj.

He thus confirms the ceramic evidence for a rapid ninth-century expansion southwards along the coast. And he says nothing to contradict the notion that the founders of the settlements (in the sense of the first well-diggers) might have been pastoralist in origin. On the contrary he gives some evidence which might be held to support it. This evidence concerns the religion of the Zanj. As well as a king, who could be deposed for 'injustice', there were itinerant priests or ascetics (Arabic zahid) who used their own 'elegant language', and one of whom will get up and address a large crowd of them, exhorting them to draw near to their God and render him obedience; frightening them with his punishment and authority, recalling them to the example of their former kings and ancestors. They have no revealed law to turn to but the customs of their kings.

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These must be the same people referred to in the previous century by al-Jahiz, who reported that they preached sermons even in the presence of their kings (whose judges, in the event of a charge of 'injustice', we may guess they were); and they are also described at a much later date by al-Dimishqi:
Among the northern Zanj are some who have a literary language in their own tongue so that they compose discourses, inserting tearful homilies which they recite at gatherings on their festivals and commemorations. We shall discuss these people from a literary angle later; but we may note that they sound as if they were exponents of what I may call a 'Cushitic' religion, with an all-powerful sky-god whose omnipotence was not circumscribed by any consideration of locality. This, if accepted, while it does not necessarily prove anything, must certainly strengthen the impression that some at least of the settlers were northern pastoralists in origin.

Whether they still (or ever) spoke a Cushitic tongue is quite another matter; but as it happens al-Mas'udi leaves us some clues on this question as well. He says that the king is called, in their language, 'the son of God', and gives as their term for it, waglimi. If this reading is correct (and it is much disputed), it suggests that at least the (perhaps archaic) language of court titles was still in his time a Cushitic one, since wag or waga commonly indicates the sky-god in Cushitic languages. (The senior Qq'ilu priests of the Eastern Cushitic-speaking Borana are still known as 'born of God', for whom the term waga is used; and the -/imi part of the title may be cognate with i/man which is a Borana term for 'son'.)

On the other hand, the local word given by al-Mas'udi for god is nothing like waga. Once again, the reading is endlessly disputed, but whether it is Mkalarjulu (Trimingham), Muulu Ijulu (Knappert), Unkulunkulu (Price), Namkulunjulu (Shepherd) or Ia Makalujia-lu (said to be the version of the Arabic writer al-Hamadhani who published c. AD 902), it is indisputably a Bantu word.
The most plausible assumption is thus that at least some of the early coastal settlers spoke, or had once spoken, one or more Cushitic languages, but that by the end of the ninth century a Bantu one had become the lingua franca of all the settlements (proto-Swahili). The fact that proto-Swahili was already spoken in al-Mas'udi's time permits us to complete our identification of the inhabitants of the ninth-century settlements. The languages most closely related to Swahili are those of the Tana River Pokomo and of the Mijikenda groups who live in the hinterland of Malindi and Mombasa. Though the tongue ancestral to these three may not have originated on the mainland opposite the Lamu Archipelago, the most satisfactory theory must be that a tongue ancestral to at least Swahili and Pokomo was already being spoken there in the eighth and ninth centuries. It would have been these speakers who were the first additions to the newly founded settlements of iron-less ex-pastoralists, and who were taken southwards to act as smiths in all the new settlements along the coast.

The smiths would have lived in the round houses to the west of the outer enclosure. Other groups of cultivators, and perhaps hunter-gatherers too, would also have gravitated towards the year-round water supplies, the foreign trade goods, and all the other attractions which these settlements offered. Some of these other comers may also have spoken Bantu tongues, but it was the language of the iron-smiths which, ubiquitous from the start, ousted all other Bantu as well as Cushitic tongues. And it was the iron-smiths' language which over the following centuries became the most enduring link between communities which lived, in some cases, thousands of miles apart. Only in southern Mozambique and, centuries later, on the Benadir Coast was proto-Swahili to be submerged and lost.

Some of this can be confirmed from Pokomo traditions. A river or stream running into the Wange (Mongoni) Creek in the Lamu Archipelago region is still known as Pokomoni, and some of the modern Pokomo, living along the lower banks of the Tana, have traditions linking them to it. The grandfathers of the modern Pokomo did not traditionally work iron; but they remember a section of their people known as the waPokomo wa Mgini who lived at Pokomoni and who worked iron from the ilmenite sand which is plentiful there. This community has now disappeared, perhaps absorbed among the Swahili population. Mgini is a small unexcavated site with iron-slag lying about and situated near the Pokomoni. There is a lower-status group of Swahilis on Mafia Island in Tanzania known as waPokomo, and one of the five 'kingdoms' on Pemba in Portuguese times was known as 'Pokomo' or 'Ukoma'. There are reported a few residual waPokomo wa Mgini at the mouth of the Juba, confirming a northward spread of this group. Documentary sources are much less help when it comes to identifying the stone-builders who appeared in Shanga and elsewhere c. 950. No late tenth- or eleventh-century Chinese source which adds anything to our knowledge of this part of Africa is yet known, and, although a number of late tenth-century Arabic writers mention the Zanj coast, al-Biruni is the only one who has much to say about it in
the eleventh century and al-Idrisi in the twelfth. None casts any light on who the newcomers might have been.

We can perhaps deduce a certain amount. It looks as if the stonebuilders were absorbed quite peaceably; indeed, in spite of the changes in technology and diet associated with their arrival, they may not have been very different from their well-digging predecessors. The pastoralist layout of the settlement, with its rectangular enclosure focusing on the well and surrounded by a zone of human occupation, was left intact by them. The difference between the eastern and western sectors of the settlement certainly increased and became more formal. People ate differently and built monumental stone structures within and stone walls around the enclosures, but life seems to have gone on much as before, though with an increase in overseas trade which went with the establishment or improvement of long-distance inland trade-routes.

It is, of course, conceivable that the increased consumption of domestic stock at this time had more to do with the growth of the well-diggers’

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herds than with the newcomers’ arrival. Pastoralists usually do not eat meat on any great scale until they have become well sedentarised; but by c. 950 the descendants of the original well-diggers would have been townsfolk for three, four or even five generations. So we do not need to assume that the stone-builders arrived in any great numbers, for the building changes could have been brought about by relatively few people with the prestige to set dietary and other fashions and the technological skills to build in coral instead of mud and timber.

Such people might also have had the requisite links with the interior to promote new long-distance trade-routes or enhance old ones. The newcomers may have come as invited ‘experts’ or as wealthy refugees whose background and status made them immediately acceptable. There is certainly no need to suppose that they were invaders of some sort who ousted the incumbent rulers.

There is no real doubt that they came from the Red Sea and/or the Gulf of Aden, though perhaps not directly. Not only was their arrival most probably associated with the commercial expansion of Fatimid Egypt in this direction, but the technology of shaping Porites coral blocks must also have derived from the Red Sea. Porites is a living coral which does not grow above the lowest tide-mark. For the best results it has to be carved underwater or brought up and shaped within a few hours. During this period it can be sawn to provide smooth, fine-grained surfaces or chipped and chiselled into elaborate designs. The longer it remains in the air, the harder and more unworkable it becomes. This coral was not used for building in the Persian Gulf, or anywhere eastwards to the western coast of India, from which regions it is often assumed that the inhabitants of the East African coast learned the art of permanent building. But there was a long-standing tradition of building in Porites in the Red Sea, and in the Dahlak Archipelago off modern Eritrea.5 Some other East African peoples also have traditions of coming from this direction. These need not imply that whole tribes migrated from Eritrea or beyond, but are more likely to reflect the arrival of small groups who, perhaps
by virtue of their technological superiority, could dominate others and to impose their origin traditions upon them. However, there was no perceptible change in overseas trading patterns as reflected in the ceramics at Shanga. If rock crystal began to be sent from the Lamu Archipelago region to Egypt, one might have expected traces of Egyptian pottery traded in return and not just a few pieces of Egyptian glass and a scattering of Fatimid dinars; but Shanga at least seems to have continued to import most of its ceramics from the Persian Gulf. This apparent anomaly led Horton, in his original report on Shanga, to propose an elaborate triangular trade whereby Red Sea merchants sailed first to Bhambore (Dabhol) near the Indus Delta, where they took on a cargo of light-weight goods such as spices together with bricks carried as ballast. Thence they sailed to the east coast ports where they discharged the bricks and collected rock crystal and similar items before returning to the Red Sea. It was, Horton suggested, these Red Sea merchants who first introduced the art of permanent buildings into East Africa; but coming

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directly from Dabhol they were recalled in Swahili traditions as wa-Debuli. Bricks were not found at tenth century levels at Shanga, but large ones do appear in the enclosure walls at Manda, and they have also been reported from Old Kipini, Kiunga, Kiunga-Muini, Mafia and elsewhere. Horton contended that they must have come from Bhambore, which was brick-built before its collapse in the thirteenth century.

It is not possible to accept this hypothesis, about which Horton himself has since had second thoughts. First of all, it is not clear why transient Red Sea merchants could have inspired east coast townsmen to build in Porites coral, and also to build monumental structures which so far as we know were entirely new. Secondly, there is no evidence that the bricks found at Manda and elsewhere came as ballast from Bhambore, or from overseas at all. Preliminary tests suggest that the Manda bricks could well have been fired from locally available clay.6 Also, Horton's hypothesis is based on what is almost certainly a misreading of Swahili traditions about the waDebuli. We shall discuss these traditions in Chapter Eight, but note here that no tradition concerning a stone building of the waDebuli has ever been recorded north of the present Kenya-Tanzania border, while the waDebuli themselves are unremembered a mere twenty-five miles north of this border.

A simpler and more plausible solution to the problem of the appearance of stone buildings, surely, is to suppose that something happened in the mid-tenth century which caused some merchants who had previously inhabited African ports in the southern Red Sea, and some traders who had operated along overland trade-routes terminating in these ports, to move southwards. Arriving at the east coast ports, of which they assuredly had foreknowledge, they were welcomed by people much like themselves, and were soon sufficiently established to introduce a new building technology and some dietary and other innovations, while the traders opened up trade-routes to interior highlands in search of rock crystal. This would not necessitate a direct trade with the Red Sea ports, for rock crystal, though
immensely valuable, was not a bulky cargo. Suitable pieces would simply have been sent off to Aden and thence trans-shipped to Egypt. This would account very adequately for the absence of Egyptian ceramics along the east coast at this date. What could have happened to force such merchants to migrate southwards? If they were Muslims, they could have been under pressure from other Muslim sects, or a rapidly increasing market for East African ivory would most easily be met by Muslim middlemen settling in the east coast settlements. But, if the newcomers were not Muslims, a plausible motive was the gradual monopolisation of commerce in these areas by Muslims. Muslims had existed in the Gulf of Aden ports since the eighth or ninth centuries, but had shared control of Ethiopia's trade with Christians and others. When the Dahlak Archipelago passed under total Muslim control shortly after 800, a number of non-Muslim merchants may have been dislodged from there and moved to Zayla and Berbera, whose share of the Ethiopian trade temporarily swelled as a consequence. When, in the first half of the tenth century, the Muslims began to tighten

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their grip on these ports as well, "it is quite plausible that traders moved to the east coast settlements. This is not as hypothetical as it may seem. There is residual evidence in the traditions and other sources for just such a sequence of events, which will be elaborated below. Also, I shall later suggest the existence of an unusually long overland trade-route running from northern Ethiopia or the Gulf of Aden (or both) right down into central Kenya. It is quite possible that some pre-Islamic merchants from the Horn ports had ancient contacts with the founders of the east coast ones which they then revived; for example, they may have been kinsmen, or invoked long-established blood-brotherhood. Some very early Muslim trading lineages certainly had representatives in both areas. Thus, a group who - later at least - called themselves Makhzumi created an African dynasty in Shoa in the 890s which almost certainly did not become Muslim until c. 1100, while the Makhzumi, alias Kina-Mte, were among the very earliest patrician clans in Lamu Town. It is unlikely that two separate African groups adopted the name of the same Central Arabian tribe independently, and we can probably assume that they were related.8 We shall also examine in more detail below a recurring pattern in the history of the area covering southern Somalia, eastern Kenya and northeastern Tanzania, which might well have begun further north in the Horn. Time and again coastal populations undertook a southward movement which appears to have been coordinated with the southward migration of inland groups with whom the coastal groups had previously had a trading relationship; and trade relations were renewed in their new terrain. If this pattern indeed began in the north of the Horn in the pre-Islamic era, the overland traders dislodged by Islamisation might well have moved southwards, first to the Harar Plateau and then on south into the eastern section of the Kenya Highlands, while their seafaring counterparts sailed round Ras Asir and down to the Benadir and Kenyan ports.
Some such sequence would also account for such dietary information as we have about the tenth-century newcomers. Immigrants from the African shores of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden who were themselves expastoralists but long urbanised might well have become accustomed to a heavy meat diet. And, if some were not Muslims, they may well also have come to regard as great delicacies turtle and dugong flesh, which their counterparts further south continued to shun along with fish. The steady growth in the consumption of fish at Shanga would reflect merely a growing number of townsfolk of non-pastoralist origins. Northern immigrants, Islamised or not, might also have acquired the habit of measuring their buildings in Islamic cubits. And they would certainly have been experienced in long-distance inland trade and in handling overseas merchants; nor would they have hesitated to deal with representatives of the Fatimids over rock crystal. Last but not least, it is easy to envisage a group of camel-eating late-comers from the Horn joining their former neighbours from there on the east coast c.1050, as the Shanga evidence seems to suggest. These would not necessarily have been fleeing Islamic monopolies, but may have been dislodged by some passing

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ecological or political crisis and followed in their predecessors' footsteps. What is significant is that, as camel-eaters with many stock, they can only have come from the Horn (here defined to include the semi-desert areas of northern Kenya). For camels do not naturally occupy humid zones such as the coastal strip south of Lamu, and do not breed well there, yet they remained numerous in the coastal settlements for several centuries. Ibn Battuta tells us that hundreds were slaughtered daily in Zayla and Mogadishu when he visited those places in the 1330s, and an eye-witness of the 1505 Portuguese attack on Mombasa tells us that they captured 'countless camels' as well as 'a large number' of cattle and, rather surprisingly, two elephants. And we have already noted the discovery of camel-bones at an early level in Kilwa. The continued dominance of an ex-pastoralist group (made up, no doubt, of lineages deriving from both the c. 800 and the c. 950 arrivals) is reflected in documentary evidence for the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Of particular interest is a Chinese description of a wedding in 'Barbara' written in the late twelfth (or possibly early thirteenth) century but which perhaps refers to somewhat earlier:

When a marriage is to be arranged the bride's family announces the agreement by cutting off the tail of a cow in calf as a [gesture of] good faith. The period of betrothal starts from the day when the tail is cut, and the marriage can be consummated only after the cow has calved.

The groom's family must respond to the cutting of the cow's tail as a pledge of the date [of betrothal] by bringing a severed 'human tail' to the house of the bride. The 'human tail' which serves as a betrothal gift is the male organ. When it arrives the bride's family, rejoicing, welcomes it with music and parades through the street for seven days after which the groom enters the bride's house and is married to her and they become one family.
We may note the remarkable combination of customs usually associated only with nomadic pastoralists with the wholly urban notion of a parade through the streets with music. This suggests the urbanisation of groups who were not necessarily even sedentarised when Tuan Ch'eng-shih described them as blood- and milk-drinkers a century or two earlier. Arguably it implies continuing social interaction and even intermarriage between the townspeople and still-nomadic pastoralists controlling the traderoutes to the interior who adhered rigidly to old values. The custom of emasculating foes and returning with what a later Portuguese writer demurely called 'tokens of the fact' (a euphemism which we shall henceforth adopt ourselves) in order to prove one's manhood was, until fairly recently, widespread in the modem territory of Djibouti, precisely between Eritrea and Zayla: we might suppose that it was the northerners who arrived from this direction in the mid-tenth century who introduced emasculation to the east coast. But in fact the custom must have existed on this coast well before their arrival, for Buzurg ibn Shahriyar al-Ramhormuzi (who collected his information in the early tenth century) and other early Arab writers make unmistakable allusions to it.21 It was practised until recently by several other Cushitic-speaking groups of northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia; was also known among several peoples in southern Somalia; and was the custom in the late sixteenth century among groups on the Kenya coast, at least some of whom spoke a Bantu tongue. It is not yet clear how much further south the custom ever extended. An early modification may have been the acceptance of evidence of the killing of some dangerous animal as an equivalent mark of bravery.

We can now revert to the pre-175 Chinese description of Tiung-Iji with which we began this chapter. This was until recently assumed to refer to somewhere on the south coast of the Gulf of Aden, largely because of the reference to the export of frankincense. The frankincense tree (Boswelia sp.) is certainly commonest in the Majjertein Highlands, but it grows elsewhere in the Horn and as far south as the dry regions northeast of Mount Kenya; and later Chinese reports mention frankincense as an export of Mogadishu and of a settlement at the mouth of the Juba River.

A second reason for locating Tiung-Iji in the arid north of the Horn was that its 'poor people' are said to use the ribs of whales as rafters, and their 'backbones' as 'doors', while they 'cut off their vertebrae' and use them as mortars. Such customs are attributed by later writers to the occupants of the island of Socotra, and they seem unlikely on the relatively well-timbered Kenya coast. But it may be that the 'poor people' were hunter-gatherers, or merely itinerant beach-combers looking for ambergris, who found whalebones more accessible and quite adequate for the basic structures of their temporary homes. I myself have certainly seen whale vertebrae used as mortars and stools in houses in the vicinity of Lamu. Having squared these few details, we find that the rest of the Chinese description of Tiung-Iji fits very well almost any settlement in the Lamu Archipelago area. Its 'King's residence masoned out of large bricks and slabs of stone' would be the central enclosure. (No bricks have been found at Shanga, but, as we have seen,
large ones exist at Manda, Old Kipini and elsewhere. The 'slabs of stone' were, of course, Porites coral blocks.) The 'people's houses made of palm and covered with thatch' would have been the impermanent structures outside the enclosure. And the diet of the people of Tiung-lji - baked flour-cakes, milk and meat of camels, sheep and cattle - fits the archaeological evidence from Shanga perfectly, at least for the post-c. 1050 period.

There are additional reasons for locating Tiung-lji in the Lamu region. As Wheatley points out, the Chinese name is a reasonable approximation of Shungwaya (Shangaya, Jungaya, etc.), a name which appears frequently in the historical traditions south of the Juba River but not in the northern Horn. Shungwaya must have been a place of some importance. So, evidently, was Tiung-lji, for our Chinese source, Chao Ju-kua, devotes more space to his description of it than to any other East African territory. As well as a settlement, he seems to see it as some sort of a state, for he attributes to it land boundaries approximately 1,500 miles long, though he adds that it is mostly unpopulated.2 Shungwaya, too, is often spoken of as if it were a state as well as a town.

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It is not suggested that Shanga is Shungwaya. It seems always to have been called Shanga, and members of a community in neighbouring Siyu Town who claim origins from it still call themselves waShanga. But throughout its existence Shanga seems to have been typical of almost any east coast settlement in the vicinity of the Lamu Archipelago, and this is a powerful reason for locating Tiung-lji in this area.

Only one problem remains. The excavations at Shanga indicate that the first mosque there may have been built in c. 950 or even earlier, while a much bigger building which was certainly a mosque was constructed c. 1050-1075, and in such a commanding position as to suggest that Islam became the official and majority religion at that date. Unless, therefore, Chao Ju-kua's description of Tiung-lji dates from a short period after the arrival of the camel-eaters c. 1050 and before Islamisation we should expect Tiung-lji to be Muslim. But he does not describe it as such. To be sure, he does not specifically describe it as non-Islamic either but he does seem to contrast it with the 'four stone towns' of the coast of Barbara, which he specifically says were Muslim. (These four towns can only have been Mogadishu, Merca, Barawa and the settlement near the mouth of the Juba which has long been abandoned.) Stone buildings are not actually described, but the Chinese term used for 'town', so Wheatley tells us, could only apply to a place which was largely stone-built. The difficulty may resolve itself if we can locate and excavate Tiung-lji/Shungwaya. Meanwhile, we can only surmise. But a reasonable conjecture is that the ruling group in this place was indeed at least nominally Muslim by 1075-1100, but that the settlement itself was an important ritual centre of the earlier religion. Its ruler had previously dominated a large state or empire largely through the quasi-religious prestige of the particular settlement in which he lived. By the eleventh century many of the neighbouring settlements, Shanga included, had adopted Islam, but his ruraldwelling subjects remained loyal to their old religion and to the Shungwaya ritual centre where he lived. Under
such circumstances, his conversion might well not be reflected in ostentatious architectural innovation. I hope that, in the course of the next chapters, this theory will come to seem much more plausible than it may at first sight.

Notes
2. This and all subsequent information about Shanga is derived from excavations carried out there in 1980, 1981, 1983, 1986 and 1988 under the supervision of Mark Horton. These form the basis of his doctoral thesis at the University of Cambridge, 1984, entitled 'The early settlement of the Northern Swahili Coast'. I am grateful to Dr Horton for permitting me to be present for long periods at these excavations and to share many observations.

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of his discoveries in person, as well as for many hours of fruitful disputation about early Swahili history out of which have arisen many of the new ideas in the first part of this book. (As will be seen, however, we have not always agreed.) As Horton argues in his introduction, it is not really feasible to accept both his interpretation of Shanga and the late Neville Chittick's interpretation of the British Institute in Eastern Africa's excavations at Manda, a superficially very similar site a bare nine and a half miles away: one or the other must be substantially wrong. In my view, having seen something of both excavations, there is no real choice. While there were no doubt significant differences between the two settlements, I am confident that the general pattern described by Horton for Shanga can, and perhaps one day will, also be identified for Manda. See also Horton's review of Chittick's Manda, 'Asiatic colonisation of the East African coast: the Manda evidence' in Jotnal of the Royal Asiatic Society 2 (1986), pp. 201-13.

4. These pole structures are most fully discussed in 'Early Muslim settlement on the East African coast: new evidence from Shanga', Antiquaries journal 67.11 (1987), pp. 290-323, where Horton pushes the date for the construction of the first unequivocal ('majority religion) mosque back from 1050-1075 to c.1000. He also suggests that Shanga itself probably came into existence c.750 rather than c. 800 as he had previously believed, making it the oldest Swahili settlement so far known, and that the earliest of these impermanent mosques dates from as early as c. 810. He gives no satisfactory reason for changing his mind on the first two points, and his assumption that pole structures, one of which was built of sticks no more than 50 mm in diameter, would each have lasted about thirty years, is unacceptable. (Ed. note: new C. 14 dates suggest a ninth century date for these mosques, M.C.H.) I prefer to adhere to his earlier timetable which fits much better with documentary and other evidence, and to assume that there was no sign of anything that even might have been a mosque before c. 900.


9. Krapf reports that, in his day, the Juba was still widely held to be a tributary of the Nile.


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12. Derek Nurse, in a recent study of the Swahili language, 'A linguistic reconsideration of Swahili origins', Azaia 18 (1983), pp. 128-50, suggests that the speakers of what he calls Southern Dialect Swahili, which includes the dialects of Vumba, Mtangata (north Tanzanian mainland coast), Pemba, Mafia, Makunduchi-Hadimu and Tumbatu from Zanzibar, Mgao (southern Tanzanian mainland coast) and Mwani (northern Mozambique), were probably the first to leave the Swahili dispersal area, so that they did not participate in the changes which later affected Northern Dialect Swahili. He dates their departure to the ninth- to eleventh-century period. This does not mean, of course, that nowhere north of Zanzibar and south of the Tana was settled in this early period, only that this region was resettled at least once at a later date by Northern Dialect Swahili-speakers.

13. That a form of proto-Swahili was ever spoken in southern Mozambique, e.g. by the founders of Cibuene, is, of course, only an assumption which can probably never be proved, though it can no doubt be shown that the number of native Swahili-speakers in Mozambique as a whole was at one time larger than it is now. For speakers of Swahili, or a tongue very closely related to it, in Barawa, Merca, Munghia and Mogadishu, see D. Nurse and T. Spear, The Suhili. reconstructing the history and language of an African sociey, University of Pennsylvania, 1985, pp. 57-61, and H.N. Chittick, 'Mediaeval Mogadishu', Paideuma 28 (1982), pp. 45, 48.


2-5; Sir John Gray, History of Zanzibar from the Middle Ages to 1856, Oxford, 1962, p. 29. 15. The paper entitled 'Ancient ports of Northern Somalia' read by H.N. Chittick at the Second Congress of Somali Studies, Hamburg, 1983 (but not published in its proceedings) indicated that he had found no remains of any antiquity at all at Berbera or Zayla, but this should probably not be taken as conclusive as his visits to both places were very hurried. Burton, for instance, noted that the nineteenth century settlement at Berbera was some miles away from the site of the earlier town. Earlier sites might have been still more distant.
16. It is too soon to be dogmatic either way, but the old view that no burned bricks were traditionally made anywhere in eastern Africa south of Meroe certainly needs revision. Some were made in the Taita region, for example, and Chittick has reported the existence of some at Suakin which may be relevant to this case. See also Horton, 'Asiatic colonisation', p. 206.


Two Shungwaya:
The Setting
The conclusions reached in the first chapter raise questions for which it has not previously been necessary to find an answer. We have already briefly considered the identity of the first well-diggers with their rectangular enclosures, but we need to know a good deal more about these people who seem to have emerged so suddenly from the interior to trade. What previous experience of trading could they have had? On what boats could they sail up and down the east coast of the continent founding new settlements? What sort of earlier contact could they have had with people living as far away as the Red Sea and the southern shores of the Gulf of Aden whose descendants appear to have joined theirs c. 950? What kinds of societies existed in the interiors of Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique at this time, and how did these stand with regard to all these innovations on the coast? Some attempt has to be made to answer these questions, however tentatively.

The key to the genesis of the Swahili settlements, and to many events in the Swahili world over the next six or seven centuries, lies in an understanding of Shungwaya. Shungwaya has long been one of the great enigmas of East African historiography. It has been variously described as a major empire and as a mere town or even an impermanent nomadic settlement; as the place of origin of at least eighteen East African peoples and of a mere four or five. It had something of a vogue among historians in the late 1950s and the 1960s, but even then nobody was able to furnish a convincing picture of what it would have been like. Since
then the pendulum has swung the other way, and almost all the societies that have
been identified as 'Shungwaya peoples' are disputed. The most recent of the few
modern historians to take it seriously sees it as a Bantu-speaking proto-tribe
occupying a fairly limited area at some indeterminate place in southern Somalia;
other historians tend to ignore it, and at least one has hinted strongly that it did
not exist at all.)

Perhaps the greatest single contradiction is the contrast between the picture of it
given in the traditions (including the Book of the Z4, a late nineteenth-century
compilation of earlier materials of which some were certainly local historical
traditions), and the relatively small role attributed to it by even the most
sympathetic of modern Western or Western-trained historians. The traditions, of which a remarkable number have been recorded
going back well over a hundred years, represent Shungwaya as an extensive and
well-known phenomenon. They seem to be found mostly if not exclusively among
the following, who are accordingly listed as 'Shungwaya peoples': the Swahili,
especially but not only the Bajuni and Kilindini sections of them; the Segeju; the
Pokomo; and the nine groups known collectively as the Mijikenda; that is, the
Kauma, Chonyi, Kambe, Ribe, Rabai, Jibana, Giriama, Duruma and Digo.

But the historical traditions of these peoples make frequent references to many
others as somehow implicated 'in Shungwaya': the Somali, Kikuyu, Meru,
Tharaka, Kamba, Taita, Pare, Chagga, Shamba, Bondei, Zaramo and 'waGala'
The area now inhabited by these peoples covers not just a small part of southern
Somalia but the whole of modern Somalia, Kenya east of the eastern branch of the
Great Rift Valley, and some of northeastern Tanzania as well. Again, the Book of
the Ze reports of a people it calls 'Kashur' that 'the most famous of their towns
was called Shungwaya [which] was the city of their king. Their laws were famous

A re-examination of all the relevant material suggests that, as so often, the
traditions are right, and that Shungwaya was a phenomenon (as we shall for the
moment continue to call it) much larger and more important than most modern
historians give it credit for; also, that it began much earlier and lasted, in some
shape or form, much longer. It must in fact have been in existence, at least in
embryo, before c. AD 800, and still existed (at least in some people's minds) as
late as c. 1725. Let us take a look at the ecology and demography of the whole
region as it was in the first millennium after Christ, and then in the early second
millennium.

First, the ecology. It will be convenient to make our southern limit about latitude
11° South (that is, a few miles south of the present Tanzania-Mozambique border).
Between here and Mombasa (about 4°S), the coast and its hinterland present a
fairly uniform picture. Inside a coral reef which runs for most of the way between
one and twenty miles offshore, sandy beaches with occasional low coral cliffs and
a few low dunes mark the eastern margin of a coastal plain which varies from less
than a mile wide in some places to twenty or even thirty miles. This coastal belt is
lush and green in the rainy seasons, which change from place to place, but can be
oppressively hot and dry at other times. Behind it, the land rises more or less
gradually to the central highlands, which are seldom less than 5,000 feet above
sea level by the eastern edge of the Great Rift. This runs from Lake Malawi in the
south to Lake Turkana (Rudolf) on the present Ethiopia-Kenya border in the
north.
Along the coastline breaks in the coralline shore formations, usually colonised by
forests of mangroves, occur at the mouths of major rivers or of rivers which used
to be major; some of these create islands offshore where areas of newer coral have
built up out to sea, and sand and alluvial soils have been deposited upon them.
Opposite, the valleys of the rivers penetrate the highlands providing natural, well-
watered communication with the interior; sometimes the

Shungwaya: The Setting
coastal plain broadens out around their lower reaches, considerably extending the
coastal strip itself. This occurs particularly opposite Mafia Island, where the
Rufiji River flows through low-lying plains for more than a hundred miles, and
further north around the mouth of the Pangani-Ruvu which drains the Kilimanjaro-
Mount Meru-Pare Highlands massif. The Pangani-Ruvu also drains the Shamba
(Usambara) Highlands which are additionally drained by the Umba River, which
flows through a surprisingly wide and flat coastal plain to reach the sea at what
looks like the delta of a much larger river than the Umba now is. Northeast of this
plain, hills once again back the shoreline, running along the edge of a flat and
narrow coastal strip all the way to ‘Mount’ Mangea about thirty miles inland from
Malindi.
North of Malindi the whole conformation of the region changes drastically. The
eastern edge of the highlands does not, as further south, follow the coast, which
here veers away toward the northeast, but takes a north-by-northwesterly
direction as far as the equator, and then further west around the base of Mount
Kenya. At this point the eastern section of the Central Kenya Highlands ends in a
series of abrupt northward-facing escarpments which bring the north-bound
traveller down from about 8,000 feet above sea level, where the soil is fertile, to
less than 3,000 feet, where semi-desert conditions prevail. Conversely, they give
the lowlanders uniquely quick access to the high-plateau and its occupants. To the
east and northeast lies a vast lowland plain of less than 1,000 feet above sea level,
which stretches some 350 unbroken miles eastward to the sea at the equator and
over 400 miles only a little further north. It covers the whole of northeastern
Kenya and includes almost all of southern Somalia as well. Moreover, it reaches
westward as far as the Rift: one does not need to climb more than 2,000 feet
above sea level to enter the Rift, which here has no eastern wall to speak of, at the
southern end of Lake Turkana. This makes it the only place between the Gulf of
Aden and the southern end of Lake Malawi where there is no serious physical
obstacle between the Eastern Rift and the sea.
If we measure the circumference of this great lowland plain from behind Malindi
to behind Mogadishu it works out at something like 1,500 miles, the figure given
by our twelfth-century Chinese source for the land boundaries of Tiung-Iji. And,
like Tiung-Iji, it is largely unpopulated. It will be the main focus of our attention
as we consider the Shungwaya problem. Indeed, we shall hereafter refer to a roughly triangular area stretching from Tanga in the south to Lake Turkana in the northwest and Mogadishu in the northeast as 'the Shungwaya region', though it must be emphasised that this label is used solely for convenience in this book and has no official or traditional sanction.

Within the Shungwaya region the great lowland plain is traversed by three important rivers. The Sabaki flows to cross the plain's southern end and debouch near Malindi. The Tana also flows round the south of Mount Kenya, but turns north to enter the lowlands through a stretch of rapids, which are known as KIduluma (or something like it in local Bantu languages) and figure in many traditions of the Shungwaya peoples. The

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Tana then changes course and flows southeastward to the sea. And the Juba rises in the highlands of southern Ethiopia and flows approximately southeast to reach the Indian Ocean very near the equator. The other great river, the Shebelle, also rises in Ethiopia and flows in a great arc to a point less than fifty miles west of Mogadishu, then turns southwest to flow to the coast as far as a swamp just north of the mouth of the Juba.

Formerly yet another great river flowed across this plain. The Ewaso Nyiro of eastern Kenya (not to be confused with other rivers of the same name) rises in the Laikipia Plateau. It flows north and eastwards around Mount Kenya, but nowadays usually disappears into the Lorian Swamp which lies northeast of the mountain. However, earth-satellite ('Landsat') photographs and on-the-spot investigations show that it once had at least three outlets to the sea, not all concurrent. The earliest course was probably that which flowed parallel to the Tana to emerge opposite Pate Island in the Lamu Archipelago. (Indeed, this whole archipelago, with the possible exception of Lamu Island itself, grew up on coralline formations opposite its estuary.) A second course joined the sea through the Bur Gau inlet in southern Somalia. A third flowed due east from Lorian, along the old watercourse that is now known as Lac Dera, to the site of modern Afmadu and then turned southeast to join the Juba just above its mouth. We do not know when the Ewaso Nyiro ceased to flow regularly into the sea in any of these places, but it still reaches it through the last two in exceptionally wet years.4

It may give a clearer picture of this plain, and help us to visualise it as it might have been ten or even twenty centuries ago, if we examine one of these rivers rather more closely. Let us take the Tana. This is still only 1,000 feet above sea level 300 miles from its mouth, and falls less than two feet per mile for the last eighty miles of its course. For the last 100 miles it meanders upon a ridge, contained by its own banks, through surroundings which are usually even lower-lying than itself. Consequently it often breaks its banks and floods areas varying from half a mile to eight or ten miles across. As these floods recede it frequently turns out to have changed its course, leaving marshy swamps and oxbow lakes on either side. Sometimes these changes of course are very considerable, especially near its mouth where small causes, including man-made ones, can result in long diversions. The best recorded case is that of the Belisoni Canal, built in the late
nineteenth century to enable small boats to cross from the Ozi River, whose mouth was at that time many miles north of the Tana Delta, into the Tana itself further upstream where it was navigable. Only about ten miles long and said to have been barely wide enough for two canoes to pass, during the 1890s the canal nevertheless caused the Lower Ozi to become the main mouth of the Tana, which it still is.’ The Juba River is much the same in its lower reaches, though less volatile inland, no doubt because more of its original gallery forest survives to line and consolidate its natural levee. The Lower Sabaki is also similar.

An interesting question is whether these rivers would have carried more water fifteen or twenty centuries ago than they do now. There is no evidence of a steady decrease in rainfall; but there is evidence of much

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more extensive delta-systems on the east coast in the past, and of many more river-mouths. These may, of course, date from a much earlier period; but there is a scattering of historical evidence which suggests that more and larger rivers were reaching the sea a mere eight or ten centuries ago. The number of river mouths may have been reduced by the steady growth of sand-dunes, which may during the last two millennia have sealed off many of the smaller ones and, in very dry spells, some of the major ones too.

We do not know the age of the many miles of sand-dune which line the shore most of the way from Malindi to Mogadishu and beyond; but some are certainly less than a millennium old. Part of the cemetery at Shanga is now submerged by dunes which must have blown up since c. 1450 when the place was finally abandoned, while traditions that an earlier site of Lamu Town was buried under a sand-dune are confirmed both archaeologically and by the Arab writer Abu al-Mahasin.6

Dunes can grow surprisingly fast. Stigand describes standing on the crest of the sand-dune in Shela, Lamu Island, in the first decade of the present century and picking coconuts from fully-grown trees. There is no trace of any coconut trees in the Shela dunes today.7 Sand can disappear even more quickly unless consolidated. But, by and large, once sizeable sand-dunes have formed they remain, though they sometimes move surprising distances under pressure from following winds.

If the lines of sand-dunes which, in most places, now neatly divide the sea from the land were nothing like as continuous in the first millennium, and especially if the rivers carried more water than they do today, almost the whole coast between Mogadishu and Malindi could have been impenetrable from the ocean side. In the twelfth century the Sabaki came out at Malindi itself, south of its present mouth, and at another (or perhaps the same) time it emerged about fifteen miles north at Ras Ngomeni.8 Likewise the southernmost mouth of the Tana is at Ras Ngomeni and its former northernmost one some seventy miles away to the north just south of Lamu Island. The southernmost Ewaso Nyiro mouth lay opposite Pate Island while its northernmost one was shared with the Juba. And the Shebelle formerly had several outlets, including those at Barawa and at Merca.9
If, as seems possible, Mogadishu itself was once on another mouth of the Shebelle, and if most of the known mouths of the five main rivers as well as a number of smaller ones were (at least during wet seasons) in existence simultaneously, then the whole coastline would have been a maze of small waterways forming part of an overlapping delta system for a distance of over 500 miles, and only small boats could have reached dry land from the ocean and vice versa. This cannot have been the position by the ninth century, when Middle Eastern vessels were already reaching Shanga. But it may well have been true in the first and second centuries after Christ when the sailor-traders referred to in the Periplus of the Eothraean &a were finding their way south along this coast. North of latitude 20 North the land in the interior climbs to the South Ethiopian Highlands. On the east coast a dry plain widens out north of

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Mogadishu and then rises westward in a series of vast steps, penetrated only by a few seasonal streams. This region seems certain to have been better watered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries than today.
The easiest route through the highlands is provided by the Eastern Rift, which at the northern end of Lake Turkana swings northeast towards Zayla and Berbera on the shores of the Gulf of Aden, and is marked by a string of lakes (Chamo, Abaya, Shala and Ziway). Lake Abaya is regarded by linguists as the area where there evolved these Eastern Cushitic languages, including Somali, Rendille, and Aweer (Boni). Just to its east lie the Bali Highlands, site of the headwaters of the Juba and a major dispersal-point, in the late sixteenth century, for Oromo-speakers.
North of Lake Ziway the floor of the Rift begins to fall again, opening out into a wide 'V' whose western arm is the Shoa-Tigre-Saho Escarpment, and whose eastern arm is the Harar Plateau where the Shebelle rises. East of the Harar Plateau are the rugged and inhospitable Majjerteyn Highlands, reaching to Ras Asir (Cape Guardafui), Ras Hafun, and Eil.
Let us now try to people the Shungwaya region and the area between an imaginary line linking Eritrea and Lake Malawi in the west and Ras Asir and northern Mozambique in the east. We shall attempt two 'snapshot' overviews, the first at the beginning of the first millennium AD, the second 1,000 or so years later. What little we know is easily summarised. Most of eastern Tanzania and northern Mozambique, along with the eastern Kenya Highlands, would have been loosely divided between two economic groups:
* hunter-gatherers possibly speaking languages of or similar to the Khoisan (Bushmanoid) language-family, some of them ancestral to those still spoken by the Hadza and Sandawe of north-central Tanzania, and
* pastoralists and mixed farmers speaking a variety of (probably Southern) Cushitic languages. The latter would have spread gradually down from Ethiopia, and it is not clear that they would have reached much further than central Tanzania. (Modern speakers of remnant Southern Cushitic languages include the Dahalo north of the Tana mouth, the Iraqw of north-central Tanzania, and the Mbugu or Ma'a of the Shanbaa Highlands.)
The different linguistic groups were presumably roughly autonomous, in separate ecological niches, the Khoisan-speaking hunters in wooded areas while the Southern Cushitic-speakers, without iron for cutting tools, more in open country. The population as a whole was sparse, land plentiful, and intensive culture-borrowing probably still unknown.

North of Lake Turkana the whole area would have been occupied by Cushitic-speakers, already much diversified. They may also have included some Beja or Northern Cushites, and some Ethio-Semitic-speakers in the far northeast. A group of classical authors, including Agatharkides (second century BC) and Strabo (who died in the first century AD), knew these people, specifically those near the coast between Adulis (opposite the Dahlaks) and Ras Asir, as 'Trogodytes' (or perhaps 'Trogodytes'). The Trogodytes were nomadic pastoralists herding cattle and sheep rather than camels. They lived on blood and milk in the cool season, while in the hot season they stayed in 'damp places' squabbling over pastures and eating the flesh of their old and diseased cattle. These had to be slaughtered by butchers, regarded as unclean. The men fought with swords and bows and arrows, and wore skins below their waists, while the women wore shells around their necks as amulets. Male animals carried bells, and at night all livestock was herded into an 'enclosure roofed with mats of palm fibre' along with the women and children while the men kept guard outside. Some of the men were circumcised. A form of intoxicating liquor was produced for commoners and a special brew for chiefs, of whom each community was said to have one. They put to death the old and infirm and buried their dead under cairns on high ground, conducting the ceremony with much hilarity and propping the horns of a goat on top of the cairn or on a stick."

Points in this description are supported by archaeology both for this region and also for rather further south, where a comparable society may possibly have existed. Chittick has described many sorts of burial cairns, in northwestern Somalia and along the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden as far as Ras Hafun, some of which date back to about the time of Christ. Some of the early-style large, rectangular cairns, with upright stones at each corner or at head and foot, are also reported further south along the Rift Valley and in southeastern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. And an admittedly weak tradition recorded in the 1920s links large cairn tombs in northeastern Kenya and southern Somalia both with Shungwaya and with the Madanle (Mathinle, Madanleh, etc.) people, who are remembered in the same region as skilled well-diggers.11

An excavation of a Middle and Late Stone Age site at Bur Heybe, 130 miles west-by-northwest from Mogadishu (and outside the area of the Trogodytes proper) revealed a burial upon which had been piled gazelle horns, perhaps a hunter-gatherers' prototype for goat horns. Prins also records that the Aweer of the Lamu hinterland sometimes mark the grave of an important person by raising cattle horns on a pole.2 Hilarity at funerals is also a fairly widespread custom, and a Portuguese priest visiting Siyu in 1606 came upon a Swahili being buried 'with festivities and rejoicing' 1 Perhaps the most significant trait of the Trogodytes
here, however, is that they were cattle-keepers who squabbled over pasturage in 'damp places' in the dry season. Cattle were said by De Barros to be common on the coast north of Mogadishu as late as the mid-sixteenth century, though they are rare there today.'4 We return to the 'damp places' below.

A somewhat more complex linguistic pattern would probably have obtained between the northern edge of the Kenya Highlands and Lake Turkana, part of our Shungwaya region. Speakers of two or three Eastern Cushitic sub-families were already in this western half of the great lowland plain, if not further south on the Laikipia Plateau and in the Central Kenya Rift, by the time of Christ. These are Mukogodo (Yaaku) and Omo Tana, the latter being further sub-divided into the Elmolo-Dasenech-Arbore

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group and the 'Sam' group.'5 Mukogodo is today spoken only by a few hunter-gatherers living in the escarpments to the north of Mount Kenya, but it may in the past have been spoken by some pastoral groups further south in Laikipia and beyond. Most modern Mukogodo speak a Maasai dialect, as do virtually all Elmolo. But the former Elmolo tongue, with Dasenech and Arbore (still to be heard around Lake Turkana), was also Eastern Cushitic, and a proto-version of it may once have been spoken further south too, perhaps near Lake Baringo.16 Meanwhile Bernd Heine believes on 'lexicostatistical and topogenetic' evidence that one or more 'Sam' languages would have been spoken by pastoralists in northern Kenya sometime between 300 BC and AD 300Y' It is also possible that the first speakers of Southern Nilotic tongues (ancestral to modem Datoga and Kalenjin) were beginning to move into the Rift from the west of Lake Turkana at about the same time.

The only evidence as to who lived in the eastern or coastal half of the great lowland plain at this time is the Dahalo language, which makes use of certain click sounds which are unknown in other Southern Cushitic languages, and which many linguists maintain must have been borrowed from a Khoisan one. Presumably, then, there were speakers of both languages in the area, unless the former had already absorbed the latter. The Mijikenda groups, along with the Kikuyu and Kamba further inland, also have traditions of a semi-pigmy people preceding them in their present homes.18

By the time of our second 'snapshot' overview, c. AD 1000, the linguistic patterns were far more intricate, not just in the Shungwaya region but everywhere east of the Rift. Not only had the 'Sam' and other Eastern Cushitic (Omo-Tana) languages spread to the east and southeast, but Southern Nilotic-speakers had been followed into the Rift by at least the first wave of Eastern Nilotic-speakers. The first Bantu-speakers to cross the Rift had also arrived, apparently from the interlacustrine region. Experienced cereal farmers and skilled iron-smiths, they moved relatively fast, probably entering Kenya from the southeast near Kilimanjaro. Their presence in the Kwale Hills near Mombasa is securely dated, both by Kwale Ware pots and by traces of iron-smelting, to the second or third century AD; and they were probably in the Pare and Shambaa Highlands by about the same time. Before the end of the millennium they were certainly also living in the vicinity of Mount
Kenya. In these places, and in Sandawe territory in north-central Tanzania, 'Bantu' pottery has been firmly identified, usually in association with traces of iron-working, which can be compared to pottery and iron-working in the area to the west of Lake Victoria/Nyanza. By this date if not before we have to abandon the simplistic picture of more or less discrete populations each living and moving together, speaking a single language and following a traditional production and economic mode. This may or may not be what happened in earlier eras; but by the beginning of the second millennium it was very clearly not what was happening, either in the Shungwaya region or anywhere in the Central Rift.

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In the Shungwaya region, a Bantu language ancestral to Swahili was being spoken opposite Pate Island by c. AD 800, and yet no 'Bantu' pottery has ever been found there. By c. 1000 at the latest, the same language was in use in settlements all along the coast, and it is likely that many other Bantu-speakers later joined these settlements: yet of all the thousands of sherds representing the ceramics of these settlements before 1200 or even 1300, not a single one can be identified as belonging to the Kwale tradition. Early Bantu-speakers were cereal farmers and iron-workers, and yet during the next few centuries at least one important Bantu-speaking group who were cattle-pastoralists were relying for their iron on the coastal settlements. The term 'Bantu-speakers' has taken on a new meaning, and we should register the fact; the same applies to other linguistic labels. Indeed, from c. 800 at the latest and at least within the Shungwaya region, we must abandon altogether labelling peoples exclusively by linguistic classifications. Such labels are inadequate and can be misleading, concealing the existence of groupings clearly indicated elsewhere. Linguistic labels can only be useful so long as linguistic boundaries are coterminous with political and/or socio-economic ones. Once they diverge linguistic labels can become a barrier to understanding historical events. They also lose much value as soon as people undergo language-shifts. Historical linguists generally assume that these are relatively rare, but they do not seem to be rare when people move into an area where the environment is so volatile that it periodically forces a redrawning of socio-political boundaries, or where institutions such as dient-systems promote conditions favourable to them. All these factors were present in the Shungwaya region by c. AD 800; and it is perhaps because they have mostly adhered to purely linguistic classifications that earlier historians have had difficulty in comprehending the Shungwaya phenomenon itself.

Let us return to the ecology of this great lowland plain inland between Malindi and Mogadishu, and see who might have been there c. AD 800-1000. The area is composed largely of poor soils (gypsiferous clays and marls and gritty sandstone) with a mean average rainfall of twelve inches or less and a mean temperature of about 83.50 Fahrenheit. Its vegetation is a mixture of low scrub and thorny thickets with tracts of desert and semi-desert, and it would certainly be far less attractive to a herdsman than the upland savanna, or to a farmer than highland wooded ridges. But from the point of view of a people driven out of the Ethiopian
Highlands or the Central Kenya Rift and its adjacent plateaux it would have had certain attractions.

First, though its rainfall is low and very variable, it has three permanent rivers, and must in the past have had more. Water for stock is therefore seldom a long-term problem, and a fresh supply of alluvial soil is carried down into the flood-plains at least once a year in which crops can be grown by irrigation. Next, it is so large that pasturage is usually available somewhere, provided that rivers and political boundaries can be crossed. Even in drought years certain isolated hills and large swamps usually provide a place for at least some livestock and some seed-crops. We have

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evidence that such places were formerly exploited for dry-season grazing, a local equivalent of those 'damp places' over which the Troglodytes squabbled a millennium earlier. Cattle-herders in the interior led their flocks into the highlands, while those living nearer the coast took theirs to well-known marshy areas and to a hill, all near the mouths of major rivers. When the rain returned, the two categories spread out again.

The coastal belt and the Lower Juba and Tana riverine zones are nowadays infested with tsetse fly. But this was not necessarily so in the past: al-Idrisi and Ibn Said both mentioned horses on the southern East African coast in Sofala, and the Portuguese encountered them in Malindi and at Barawa.22 And there could have been cleared passages through the bushland, permitting herds to reach the dry-season grazing grounds in relative safety. Our region is by no means uninhabitable. But for its occupants to enjoy permanence or security they would have had to collaborate with one another, regardless of language or economic mode. Wells had to be dug and/or sizeable rain-ponds prepared to provide yearround water in areas distant from river courses. Cultivation channels would have had to be dug and maintained. Herders would have needed the cooperation of both farmers and hunters to get their flocks across rivers and into and out of dry-season grazing grounds.

There is evidence of this sort of activity in the past. At places like Wajir, El Wak and Afinadu there are literally dozens of major wells, some of them going down sixty or eighty feet, often through layers of solid rock, where hundreds and sometimes thousands of heads of stock water daily. There is also a network of minor wells, rain-ponds, and water-holes covering the whole plain. There are irrigation-canals along the banks of the Lower Shebelle and Lower Juba, and traces of them on the banks of the Lower Tana near Ngao.23 Irrigation-canals can only have been practicable where arrangements existed between herdsmen and cultivators to prevent them from being damaged by stock going to water.

For models of the way in which the different occupants of this plain ally with one another, one may examine three specific parts of it in modern times. First, the region of southern Somalia between the Juba and the Shebelle. Here, as I.M. Lewis and L.V. Cassanelli have demonstrated, the typical unit of social aggregation is not, as in northern Somalia, an alliance of pastoralists with no territorial base, but rather an alliance between herdsmen, farmers and hunters who
The alliance takes the form of a blood-money compact or dvepaying unit (as we shall hereafter call them). These units as described by Cassanelli, incorporate individuals who agree to fight and work together [and] receive and pay the dие (blood-wealth) in common. 'Bloodwealth' is the compensation, traditionally measured in numbers of animals, due to an aggrieved person and his kinsmen. If a member of a group kills or injures a person from another dve-paying unit, his group collectively pays compensation to the other unit, the aggressor himself contributing the greatest amount. Similarly, the group distributes among its members all compensation received, the injured

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party or his immediate family receiving the bulk of the dие and the others an amount proportional to their genealogical propinquity to the injured party. Diye arrangements effectively serve to define and activate the range of kinsmen who can be called upon for mutual support. A man's most binding and most frequently mobilised loyalty is to his dvepaying group.

Somalia is mostly too hot and dry for agriculture, and so the camelherding Somali pastoralists fan out in search of water and grazing over a wider area than a small kin-group can protect. Kin-groups accordingly unite, and the territories within which they then operate overlap considerably. The position of cattle-herding pastoralists south of the Shebelle is quite different: camels can usually furnish their owners with enough milk all the year round, but these lowland cattle cannot. Cattle also have to be watered every two to three days, while milk-camels need water far less frequently. South Somali cattle-herders therefore make permanent agreements with settled cultivator-groups living along riverbanks or at wells, rain-ponds, or water-holes. The farmers give the cattle access to water and provide their owners with grain in the dry season. In exchange, the herders provide the farmers with year-round protection and also milk and hides. Their nomadism is somewhat curbed by this arrangement, but at least they survive. Hunters also play important roles, providing honey and other forest products and escorting people and livestock across rivers and through thick bush. They would also have been important links in overseas trade, for many important exports - ivory, rhino-horn, leopard-skins, even, since fishermen are technically hunters, turtle shell - originated with them.

Each of the two great tribal families of southern Somalia, the Digil and the Rahanweyn, comprises a great number of clans or sub-clans composed of people who were (and often still are) herders, farmers and/or hunters, all once no doubt speaking different languages or dialects, linked in smaller alliances and then at a higher level in a sort of territorial federation. Diverse groups may live together in settlements described as 'mixed villages' Where they centre on wells or permanent water-holes, these 'mixed villages' must resemble early Swahili settlements, though without the emphasis on international trade. Elsewhere, the alliance occupies a tract of territory and has assumed a 'tribal' structure, often inventing a single eponymous ancestor in spite of their self-evident cultural and linguistic diversity.
A somewhat different model is furnished by the 'Peace of the Boran', which until recently covered a large area north and northeast of Mount Kenya. The 'Peace of Boran' resembled one large dye-paying unit embracing the territory of four groups usually perceived as separate tribes or sub-tribes, but which from within are more like status-groups in a single society. The Borana themselves were primarily cattle-herders occupying the choicest pasturage, and regarded themselves as 'noble'. The Gabbra, who occupied a drier region and kept camels, were also 'noble'. Both groups had descent-sets and married each other's womenfolk freely. Yet they were not quite equal, because the term gabra means 'client'.

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The other two peoples were inferior. The Sakuye kept camels but had no descent-sets, and it was recalled that at one time they had had to hunt and eat game-animals. And the Warta, also lacking descent-sets, used to be hunters, smiths, or members of other despised castes.

An important difference between the area controlled by the 'Peace of the Boran' and the land between the Shebelle and the Juba was that throughout the former region the Borana were regarded as supreme, their seniority and the ranking of the others preserved by the broadly endogamous marriage patterns of each rank. Whatever languages may have been spoken in the past, all four peoples now speak Oromo, and all until recently recognised Borana religious leaders. The 'Peace of the Boran' was thus, in theory at least, infinitely expandable, so long as whoever accepted it accepted the Borana as their seniors, and Borana priests as their priests. This was not the case in southern Somalia.

The region southeast of Borana territory stretching down towards the sea at first glance has nothing in the way of such alliances. The land between the Juba and the Tana is now mostly occupied by camel-herders of the northern Somali Darod clan-family who have immigrated only during the last century or two. These people have not established ties with any farmers or hunters. Throughout the British colonial period they were on distinctly unfriendly terms both with the Aweer hunter-gatherers who live in the forests of the Lamu hinterland and with the Pokomo farmers and fishermen along the banks of the Tana. And in the nineteenth century they fought so with the Oromo-speaking Orma cattle-herders north of the Tana that it was only because the British moved the Orma south of that river that any Orma survived at all.

It may be that the problems between these groups were exacerbated by the rigidity of the colonial 'tribal' framework. Certainly, the numerous Orma cattle-herders who resisted British injunctions to move south of the Tana, and fled northwards, have recently returned to their former homeland as exclusively Somali-speaking clients of the Darod, and are now known by their older name of Wardai. Here a solution permits two pastoral groups to share the area peaceably, even if at the expense of the former language and social status of one of them. It would be unjust to attribute the absence of any dye-paying alliances in the plains south of the Juba solely to the Darod, because there are none in the area south of the Tana either, and the Darod never reached beyond the Tana. However, traces of this kind
of alliances which might have existed before c. 1600, and which have by this time become disguised as 'tribal' units of one sort or another are plentiful. Briefly, the Bajuni are a coalition of (formerly Cushitic-speaking) pastoralists with Bantu-speakers, both groups apparently once extending up the Juba; the Pokomo themselves are a whole series of 'clan-clusters' and other units, some of whom still do not speak a Bantu tongue; the Mijikenda can obviously be interpreted as a federation of nine clans or tribes straddling the mouths of streams and inlets between Malindi and Mombasa; and the Segeju are a three-language confederacy stretching up the Umba, at least some of whom were herdsmen until recently though they are all cultivators now. The Segeju do not now, of course,

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live on the great lowland plain we are here discussing, but a people remembered in the traditions as waSegju did so. However, with the possible exception of the Mijikenda,30 they do not look like alliances of the southern Somali 'mixed village' type grouped around wells or water holes. They seem to have extended along river-courses and to have focused on the dry-season grazing grounds near the river mouths, as possibly designed to control riparian trade-routes. Let us suppose that by the closing centuries of the first millennium there were trade-routes running to the interior, approximately following the courses of rivers or former rivers. Whoever controlled such routes was likely to have become wealthy and powerful, and might well have sought to dominate territorial alliances that might even have evolved into some sort of states, though now decayed beyond all recognition. The conjectural element in all this is reduced when we look at the five places remembered in the traditions as being Shungwaya. Let us take them from the north:

1 The first is a place said by a nineteenth-century missionary who visited its ruins to be called 'Keethi or Keyrthie', and called by another source Kedi. It lies on the Juba and must be somewhere near its junction with Lac Dera, once the easternmost branch of the Ewaso Nyiro. Nearby is Deshek Wama, a fertile, shallow depression about sixteen miles long by two miles wide, which was irrigated from Lac Dera and also through a permanent channel from the Juba. Deshek Wama used to be a dryseason grazing ground and was also used by cultivators. The Book of ZenJ reports that Deshek Wama and 'Shungwaya' were the last places where the 'Kashur' were able to hold out, but that they eventually had to flee from the waGala and moved down to settle along the coast, and the missionary who visited 'Keethi or Keyrthie' heard what were obviously the same traditions. The channel admitting water from the Juba had by 1913 been sealed up?

2 The next Shungwaya is still so named, and is remembered as the home of the (non-pastoralist) waShtmgwaya dan of the Bajuni. It is on the Bur Gau inlet in south Somalia, once the mouth of another branch of the Ewaso Nyiro. It is nowadays at least) a suitably shallow place for getting stock across the inlet in spite of its proximity to the sea.32

3 The third Shungwaya, not yet located, is said by nineteenth-century
sources to be somewhere in the swamps and creeks on the mainland opposite Pate Island. This was the mouth of the southernmost and main course of the Ewaso Nyiro, and this is the place we have provisionally identified as the Tiung-lji of the late twelfth-century Chinese source.33

4 A fourth Shungwaya is on a former course of the Tana north of the modem settlement of Golbanti. A few miles south of Golbanti lies the swamp known as 'Lake' Kurawa, the 'Kirau' of many traditions. This is still an important dry-season grazing ground for the Orma south of the Tana River.4

5 The fifth Shungwaya, known to modem Mijikenda as 'Kaya Singwaya',

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is on the banks of the Lower Sabaki just by modem Jilore. It lies not far north of 'Mount' Mangea. This is the only Shungwaya site to be excavated, and yielded pottery going back to at least the tenth century.

It was also, unlike later Mijikenda kayos, roughly rectangular in shape.

It is still somewhat sacred in the eyes of nearby Mijikenda, in many of whose traditions it appears as 'Mwangea'

Was Shungwaya then a state? Or, rather (since so far as we know some of these sites date from the first and others from the second millennium), several states?

We are not yet ready to answer such questions, but our conclusion must be that the ecological conditions were appropriate for some kind of settlement.

What had happened, I submit, was that sometime before the ninth century AD one or more groups speaking (probably Eastern) Cushitic languages moved into the lowland plain as a second-best homeland from the Central Kenya Rift. They may have met Khoisan-speakers and possibly also speakers of other (perhaps Southern) Cushitic languages who had preceded them. Due to the environment, these groups learned to live and collaborate together; and no doubt they also shared in any overseas trading which became possible as the river deltas dried out and sites in them became accessible from both land and sea. It makes little sense to distinguish the different groups by languages by this date, because any single linguistic group which tried to live in isolation from all the others would not long have survived. Alliances, confederations, and no doubt also language-shifts were the norm. It is likely that the volume of international trade increased considerably by the end of the century, sending some settlement-founders off down the coast to try their luck elsewhere. If, therefore, Shungwaya was one or more states, it was probably in the late eighth or early ninth century that it finally took shape.

But something more inchoate may have existed much earlier, since trade is not the only factor conducive to state-formation. Dry-season grazing ground shared between pastoralists and cultivators would be classic nodal points for state-formation, as would river crossings used by herders and their flocks. For herders are typically at their most helpless while crossing deep rivers with their animals. Camels are among the few mammals that cannot swim any distance at all; cattle, sheep and goats can usually swim some distance, but their pastoralist owners seldom can, and are also terrified of aquatic animals such as crocodiles and
hippos. Settled riverine groups, by contrast, often have an almost personalised relationship with these animals. The Tana River Pokomo, for instance, or the Rer Issa of the Lower Shebelle, are entirely fearless with them and can sometimes control them. The pastoralist has to entrust himself and his herds wholly to a people he would normally despise. Shungwaya sites near dry-season grazing grounds and/or year-round river-crossing points were possible foci for states at a more-than-local level, even without trade. Where they could be used for storing goods until such goods could be traded and sent on, the chances that they would have emerged as state capitals must have been enhanced considerably.

Shungwaya: The Setting
The fact that not all the Shungwaya sites mentioned seem to fit this description indicates that 'Shungwaya' may have been a transferable name, as 'Zimbabwe' was much further south. It is possible that, as the hinterland peoples came to perceive trade with the interior as less important and the proximity of dry-season grazing grounds and/or river-crossing points as more so, they transferred their capitals, and with them the Shungwaya name, to new sites further upstream (or in the case of Bur Gao, downstream). This would be especially likely if the trading role of the old sites had already been taken over by coastal sites with better harbours, as must certainly have occurred. The use of the terms 'Mwangea' and 'Kirau' (both dry-season grazing grounds, neither ports) in the tradition of non-maritime groups more or less interchangeably with 'Shungwaya' itself would be a symptom of the same tendency. But until all the Shungwaya sites (and there may be more) are located and excavated, this sort of speculation is of limited usefulness. There being one Shungwaya site for the mouth of each major river between Mogadishu and Malindi is best taken as evidence that the 'Shungwaya phenomenon' will probably turn out to be a series of river-based states.

Notes
1. There is a great volume of pre-1970 literature on Shungwaya which we cannot list here.


Shungwaya: The Setting

References to Shungwaya ('Shangaya') are also scattered through the writings of Krapf, Burton and New; and a number of relevant traditions, though not explicitly linked to Shungwaya, are to be found in J.A.G. Elliott, 'A visit to the Bajun islands', JAS 25 (1925/26), pp. 10-22, 147-63, 245-63 and 338-58. Finally, a number of Swahili traditions mentioning or relevant to Shungwaya are published in the five volumes entitled Studies in Swahili Dialects issued by the East African Swahili Committee in Kampala between 1956 and 1958 and written either by H.E. Lambert or by W.H. Whiteley. All references to 'the traditions' are to be found in one or more of these places unless otherwise stated.

4. I am grateful to Dr M. Gwynne of Balliol College, Oxford, for allowing me to see the 'Landsat' Series maps and for discussing this matter with me at length. His view, and that of most authorities I have consulted, is that the Ewaso Nyilo ceased to flow beyond the Lorian Swamp regularly and on any large scale well before the historical period. However, it is very hard to say when it ceased to flow regularly at all, and for how long thereafter it would have continued to flow irregularly but still sufficiently often to provide alluvial soils for cultivators, communications problems for herders, and fresh water (in wells and waterholes) for all. This is the date which interests us here.


7. Stigand, Land of 4, p. 152.

8. At some period the Sabald must also have flowed out through Mida Creek some twenty miles south of Malindi, but the excavator of Gedi, James Kirkman,
received an authoritative opinion that it cannot ever have done so in historic times (personal communication). Both al-Idrisi and Ibn Said insist that Malindi was on a large bay at the mouth of a major river, though the Sabaki flows out some miles north of it today.


20. Soper, 'Bantu expansion', p. 226. (Ed. note: a few sherds of Kwale Ware were found in 1990 at Unguja Ukuu, M.C.H.)
25. This term is chosen because it has already been popularised by historians of Somalia. Diy is the Somali, also Arabic, for blood-money; but of course many other societies have similar arrangements, and each has its own term for it. 26. 'Benaadir Past', pp. 1-2. 27. I.M. Lewis, Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali, Afar and Saho, London, 1969 edn, pp. 93-5, 118-21.
29. For an unrepentant colonialist's account of the relations of the Somali Darod with the Aweer and Pokomo during the British period, see, for example, C. Chevenix-Trench, The Desert's Dusty Face, London, 1964, p. 243 and passim. For the more complex recent history of the Wardai, see H. Kelly, 'Orma/Warday migrations

30. See pp. 138 below.


34. With the possible exception of the reference by Burton just cited, I know of no published reference to this Shungwaya.


Three
Early Trade
&
Trade-Routes
There is a view that trade connections between the interior and the East African coast south of the Juba River did not begin until relatively recent times. Indeed, the East African coast is supposed by an influential scholar to have had 'virtually no direct or measurable trade with the deep interior of those countries before the late eighteenth or nineteenth centuries' This supposition has affected our understanding both of coastal history and of the development of inland societies, limited to what the same scholar calls 'the first stage' of commercial activity,
defined as ‘one of local and regional trade and exchange of livestock, foodstuffs, pots, products of the forest and the hunt, and necessities such as salt and ironware obtainable only from particular localities and specialist craftsmen’ This is in contrast to the ‘second stage’, long-distance trade ‘ connecting directly or indirectly but through more or less regular trade-routes with the coast and overseas countries’

The time has come to modify this view in the light of new evidence and new interpretations of various oral traditions. We can suggest that there may have been some extremely important ‘second stage’ or longdistance international trade in the first millennium AD and the early centuries of the second.

Let us begin with the tenth-century period in northern Kenya where it can now be shown that there was trade between the coast and the interior, although perhaps not the 'deep' interior. We know that ivory was exported from the coast in considerable quantities from an early date, and also rhino-horn and turtle shell, as was rock crystal, of which chips are found at ninth-century levels both at Shanga and at Manda, and which cannot have come from nearer than the Kitui region. A luxury commodity such as gold, which traders are prepared to go extraordinary distances to obtain, creates trade-routes along which other items such as ivory may also be carried; similar was the tenth-century rock crystal route from central Kenya: if ivory could travel along a route, it could certainly have travelled along the route from where the rock crystal was found, and very probably did. The same is true of rhino-horn and other non-marine commodities.

Madagascar
1000
1000  2000
2000 miles 3000 km
Map 2 Early trade in cloth and cinnamon
China
Indian Ocean

Early Trade & Trade-Routes
Another item found in early levels at Shanga which must have come from the interior is haematite ore for making iron, in fact one of the commodities taken inland in exchange. There is evidence of iron-working from earliest times in Shanga and Manda, and also in Gedi, Mombasa and Kilwa; and al-Idrisi, writing of the period before c. 1150, reported that the people of Malindi and Mombasa used iron as 'an article of trade and the source of their largest profits' 3 Many iron items must have been used in the coastal settlements themselves, but relatively few have so far been found, mostly knives. Some iron was no doubt sent overseas, for people who might have been Indonesians are described by the same author as purchasing iron on the Sofala coast, and, as late as the nineteenth century, Indian and Arab merchants rated iron locally produced near Mombasa more highly than that they could import from Sweden.4 But it is likely that the bulk of early coastal ironwork went to the interior, especially as spear-blades, and there is even occasional evidence in later traditions. In addition, by the beginning of the colonial
period smiths in and to the west of the Rift Valley used bowl bellows, while those to the east of it, with one exception, used bag bellows, which must have spread slowly inland from the coast. This indicates that at some period coastal smiths were regarded as superior and their techniques thought worth imitating. There is evidence of other industries in ninth- to thirteenth-century levels at Shanga. Cowries, cone-shells, and other ornamental shells were evidently collected, probably for trade with the interior; and there were shell beads, for which several grinders (designed to smooth their outer edges) also survive. Though few such beads have been discovered inland, a hoard of 210 of them has been reported from the roughly contemporary site of Gonja in the Shambaa Highlands. A little ivory was carved for a few chips were found. And it is conceivable that some carved or shaped wood was also traded inland, though if it was we are not likely to find traces of it.

But the most important commodity for trade with the interior is likely to have been cloth. This, of course, does not survive in the archaeological record. Spindle-whorls, evidence of spinning thread, do however survive, and have been found in fairly large numbers in early sites, peaking, in Shanga, in the period 1150-1350. There is, then, evidence that the early Kenya coastal sites regularly traded with the inhabitants of the highlands of eastern Kenya and northeast Tanzania from the mid-tenth century if not before. How far the same pattern is true further south is still unclear. A number of ninth-century sites have been reported between Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo, including Mkadini, while some of the early sites on Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia established trade relations with inland societies. At Kilwa, iron was worked in some quantities at an early date; and from various remarks in the Kiwa Chronicle, which tells the settlement's story from (probably) the second half of the twelfth century, it is possible that trade-routes to the interior comparable to those originating in the Kenya coastal settlements had already been established before that date.

Early Trade & Trade-Routes
A problem concerns the spread of these coastal settlements in the ninth century, that people who do not seem to have appeared on Pate and Manda Islands much before c. 800 managed to establish settlements as far away as Kilwa and even Chibuene by the time of al-Masudi's last visit to Kanbalu in 916. They certainly could not have reached so far on foot, and it is hard to imagine newly-arrived pastoralists from the interior boarding Indonesian, Arab or Persian vessels and sailing away to seek their fortunes in unknown lands. But if the inland groups could be shown to have had experience of long-distance trade, albeit in a different direction, and to have evolved techniques for dealing with its problems before 950; and if there existed a pre-ninth-century coastal society with its own vessels which regularly sailed southward along the coast: under such circumstances both the emergence, in or before the tenth century, of commerce between the Lamu Archipelago and the Kenyan interior and the initial diaspora of the settlers would be easier to understand. We shall have here to rely on non-archaeological evidence.
There is a scatter of relevant documents, and it is to the earliest that we turn. The Periplus of the Eythraean Sea is now generally agreed to date from the mid-first century AD. It is a very down-to-earth and apparently quite reliable Greek-language traders’ manual designed for Egypt-based merchants and concerning the ports of East Africa and the Horn (among other places), with lists of available exports and of imports in demand at each.

The first thing we notice is that from Adulis (opposite the Dahlak Archipelago) to Opone (Ras Hafun, just south of Cape Guardafui) there is a constant demand for Egyptian cloth. Different types are sought after at different ports, but it is mostly the cheaper and more colourful varieties that are named. At Zayla and Berbera, indeed, such cloth is almost the only import sufficiently durable for onward trading any distance. South of Ras Hafun, by contrast, at the east coast ‘mart’ (Greek emporion) of Rhapta, there is no demand for cloth.8 For whom could such cloth have been required? In most northern Somali ports any permanent population must have been very small. In the Harar Plateau, however, and further south, the population density might have been much greater. It is not unreasonable to suppose that a well-established trade-route along the floor of the Ethiopian Rift was already well used in the time of the Periplus, and that some of the imported cloth went in that direction.

How would a cloth trade from Zayla and/or Berbera to central Kenya have been organised in the first millennium? We have only one account of a first millennium trading expedition in this part of Africa, recorded by Cosmas Indicopleustes who passed through in AD 525, of a caravan sent by the Axumite ruler to somewhere in southwestern Ethiopia or southern Sudan to acquire gold. Each expedition lasted about six months, and the ruler’s agents were accompanied by ‘upward of five hundred’ private merchants. They travelled with salt, iron and cattle which they bartered for gold. On the return journey they hurried to arrive before the rainy season swelled the rivers.9

Any caravans from the Gulf of Aden to central Kenya would

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presumably have been similarly organised; if their main item of barter was Egyptian cloth, they would have left virtually no archaeological traces. By following the Rift right down into central Kenya they would not have been seriously troubled by rivers in spate and could not have taken longer than six months.

Such merchants could have brought out of central Kenya perhaps a little gold, and ivory, rhino-horn, leopard-skins, aromatic gums and minerals such as rock crystal. Slaves are a possibility, and a good number may have been taken out by this route in the ninth century. None of these items are mentioned as exports in the Periplus. We may justifiably guess that a Red Sea trade carrying (among other things) Egyptian cloth to the Gulf of Aden would have thrived to the early seventh century, when Axum flourished as a maritime power in partnership with pre-Islamic Egypt. It would have faltered with the fall of Adulis, the Axumite port, to Islam and the subsequent withdrawal of Christian Ethiopia into the highlands. The Egyptian cloth trade may have recovered by c. 950, when power in Cairo passed
to the Fatimid dynasty whose policies included complete commercial control of
the Red Sea. How long it might have outlasted the Fatimids' loss of Egypt c. 1170
is harder to say, but it would certainly have been terminated by the droughts of the
later sixteenth century.
This is all very conjectural. However, a possible piece of evidence that at some
time Egyptian cloth reached further south than Lake Turkana stems from one
interpretation of a set of historical traditions from a wide area in Kenya, Tanzania,
and as far as Malawi and eastern Zambia. Many peoples in this area have origin
traditions of coming from Misri. These origin traditions have been considered by
a wide spectrum of scholars, but none can be said to have reached any very
convincing conclusions. But Misri is the common Arabic and Swahili name for
Egyptian cloth, and we can infer that the original wamisri (or other vernacular
terms) were not themselves Egyptians, but the distributors of a highly prestigious
(originally) Egyptian cloth. This interpretation, I suggest, makes sense of Misri
origin traditions, as evidence of a trade in Egyptian cloth which lasted well into
the Fatimid period though the term may later have been used of all imported
cloth. I also suggest that another ancient East African people also came to be
known by the name of the cloth with which they were associated. These are none
other than the Swahilis (Swahili waSwahili) themselves. Much has been surmised
about the origin of the name, which is clearly derived from the Arabic Sawahil, plural
of sah. Sawahil usually means 'coastlands' or 'lands of the edge'; but sahel
has an alternative meaning of 'a port used for inland trade', and we shall argue that
when Ibn Said and, later, Ibn Battuta referred to a particular area of the East
African coast as Sawakil it was to the Lamu Archipelago that they were referring
and that this alternative meaning was the correct one.'0
Two of the most ancient of the settlements in the Lamu Archipelago, Siyu and
Pate Town, each have a clan known as waSwahili. In Pate they are merely
described as the 'earliest' of the clans. In Siyu, the waSwahili clan is traditionally
associated with cloth-manufacture. I Cloth is no longer

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produced in the Sawahil area, but when it was it would have been called, in
Arabic, Sawahil-i, by analogy with Misr-i for Egyptian cloth, Magdish-i for
Mogadishu cloth, and other examples dating from the eighth or ninth century.
In the Swahili language Sawahil-i would easily become Swahili, plural
waSwahili, the name Swahili being applied to people and clans who were linked
in the production of Sawthil-i cloth. Cotton is unlikely to have been cultivated
in the vicinity of the Lamu Archipelago in the ninth century or for some time
after, but a form of wild cotton, Gossypium arboreum, is common in the
neighbourhood, and Gossypium herbaceum may also have grown in the past.
(Wild cotton was also used for the manufacture of paper on Pate Island as late as
the nineteenth century.) And we have the evidence of the spindle-whorls that this
was spun from an early date.
If it is accepted that traditions of an origin 'in Misri' are to be interpreted as
referring to a revived cloth-trade south of Lake Turkana after the tenth or eleventh
century, it may be possible to discern how far such a trade-route extended in
various directions. Thus one branch might have led west from the southern end of Lake Turkana to Mount Elgon on the present Kenya-Uganda border, which served as a secondary dispersal point. Another branch may have led to the present home of the Gusii in the Western Kenya Highlands. And the Iraqw-speaking people of north-central Tanzania acquired a Misri origin-tradition. Comparative linguistics may one day throw some light on this aspect. But let us go back to Rhapta.

The author of the Perilus sounds as if he had himself visited Rhapta, and his account is generally preferred to the alternative account given in Ptolemy's Geography, which is appreciably later than the Periplus. Both works agree that, after leaving Opone (Hafun), it is necessary to sail past the 'Bluffs of Azania' and other stretches associated with the names Sarapion and Nikon/Toniki. Ptolemy mentions the 'mart' of Essina north of either of them, and calls Sarapion a 'halting-place' and Toniki, at the entrance to the 'Bay of Rhapta', another 'mart' The Periplus does not mention Essina and is less specific about the nature of Sarapion and Nikon. At this point the two sources appear to diverge as regards their respective instructions. It is worth quoting both passages in full. According to the Periplus, after [Nikon] there are several rivers and a series of other roadsteads separated by several stations and courses of a day, seven in all, as far as the Puralaon Islands and what is called 'The Channel' [Greek diorux], from which a little to the southwest, after two courses of a night and a day along the Ausineitic coast, the island of Menouthias is encountered, about 3,000 stades from the mainland, low and covered with trees, in which are rivers and many kinds of bird, and mountain tortoise. Of wild animals there are none except crocodiles; but they hurt no man. There are in it small boats sewn and made from one piece of wood, which are used for fishing and catching marine tortoises. In this island they catch them in a local form of basket trap instead of nets stretched across the mouths of the openings along the foreshore. From here, after two courses

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off the mainland lies the last mart of Azania, called Rhapta, which has its name from the aforementioned sewn boats [The italics are mine]. According to Ptolemy, after [Sarapion] begins the bay which leads to Rhapta, which takes three days and nights to cross. The bay begins with the mart called Toniki; and beside the promontory is the River Rhapton and the metropolis of the same name set back a little from the sea. From Rhapton as far as the promontory of Prason is a great bay, but not deep, around which there live man-eating savages 14

It will be seen that, according to the Periplus, Rhapta is several more days and nights or 'courses' of sailing than it is according to Ptolemy. However, if we cut out from the Periplus the italicised passages and assume that the 'From here' which follows the longer of them refers to 'The Channel', and if we then equate this 'channel' with Ptolemy's 'River Rhapton', the difference between the two authors is much reduced and they could be speaking about the same locality.
It is not hard to recognise the italicised passages as a gloss, written into the margin by some scribe or copyist living much later than the author of the Periplus. Menouthias, as has often been argued, is probably Pemba but possibly Zanzibar or Mafia, or conceivably all three - and perhaps the Comoros and Madagascar as well - rolled into one. The disquisition upon local wildlife, boats and fishing techniques, while no doubt more or less accurate for the time at which it was written, is quite uncharacteristic of the rest of the text, which is extremely brief and businesslike. The scribe aired his knowledge on the assumption, probably correct, that the Greek name Rhapta was derived from the phrase in that language for 'sewn boats', rhapta ploiaria. The etymology of place names provides a likely motive for the interpolation, but the author of the Periplus was a businessman who conspicuously fails to indulge in similar speculations for any of the countless other names mentioned in his work.

It follows that Rhapta need not have been south of Pemba and/or Zanzibar as it is usually supposed to have been, since Ptolemy makes no mention of passing Menouthias on the way to it. On the contrary, in a list of latitudes he gives elsewhere, Menouthias is shown well south of Rhapta. Many scholars have computed the various 'courses' or 'days and nights' of sailing necessary to reach Rhapta from Hafun, and have come up with answers varying from the mouth of the Pangani-Ruvu to the Rufiji Delta and even beyond. Apart from the fact that they have usually included the extra journeying implied by the gloss, these calculations often exaggerate the distance that relatively small boats of that period, sailing close to the shore, could have covered in a day. To cut a long story short, Rhapta is unlikely to have been any further south than Malindi and was more probably somewhere in the vicinity of the Lamu Archipelago. This interpretation is vindicated if we plot the positions of all the East African ports according to the coordinates given by Ptolemy. These positions are generally dismissed as hopelessly incorrect, but in fact if properly plotted

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and then superimposed upon a modern map of the appropriate scale they fit the coast remarkably well and give the following plausible locations for the ports of call he mentions after Opone: "Essina is almost exactly on the site of modern Merca; * the 'halting-place' at Sarapion is a little south of modern Barawa, where there are (and no doubt long have been) some wells or year-round rainwater holes;
"Toniki (the Periplus' Nikon) is somewhere near the Juba's mouth, probably at the site later known to the Chinese asJubb; and
"Rhapta is somewhere on the mainland opposite the Lamu Archipelago, the so-called 'Rhapton Promontory' being either the headland known as Ras Kitau on the southeast corner of Manda Island or else one of the smaller promontories on either side of the channel which divides Manda from Pate Island to its north."

If we continue to plot Ptolemy's coordinates for the places south of Rhapta we find they become increasingly inaccurate, veering further and further eastward as
we should perhaps expect in view of the common notion that Southern Africa curled around to join up with Southeast Asia.

The realisation that Rhapta is likely to have been on the mainland opposite the Lamu Archipelago permits us to reinterpret the whole early history of the great lowland plain. Unfortunately no obvious site for it has yet been located. (The area is partly swampy, partly forested, largely pathless, and occupied by lions, buffaloes and other fauna whose habits tend to inhibit academic exploration.) It is likely that Ptolemy's 'River Rhapton' will turn out to be either the southernmost course of the Lower Ewaso Nyiro or one of the streams which remained as it dried out (perhaps the modern River Mangai), and that access to the sea through its delta was possible precisely because it was the first river to dry out in its lower reaches. Even so it may be noted that the Periplus' Greek term for 'channel', diorux, is invariably used of man-made rather than natural channels, suggesting that the inhabitants of Rhapta may have needed to clear a canal to secure their access to the open water. By the time to which Ptolemy's text refers this 'channel' had become a river on which Rhapta itself is situated (as in the recent history of the Belisoni Canal).

By Ptolemy's time, too, Rhapta had become a 'metropolis', something larger than a mart. The only places in sub-Saharan Africa described as 'metropolises' in the Periplus were Axum and Meroe. If the fifth-century Rhapta was even remotely equivalent in size or importance to either of these places in their heyday, then it must have a good claim to be the most important Shungwaya. In the first or second century AD, however, it was still only a mart, and it was foreign-dominated. The ruler of the Yemeni state of Ma'afir was said to 'rule [Rhapta] according to an ancient agreement by which it falls under the kingdom that has become the first in Arabia' People from Mouza, a port some fifty miles from the capital of Ma'afir, stayed in Rhapta for longish periods, inter-marrying with its people and learning their language.

Given our author's viewpoint, however, this passage should arguably be interpreted to mean that Ma'afir enjoyed a monopoly over its overseas

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import and exports, a suggestion supported by the fact that Rhapta's imports comprised almost entirely things 'specially made at Mouza', namely spears (spear-blades), axes, small swords, awls, and several kinds of glassware. Wine and corn, which had been imported in bulk into Zayla, were also useful, but 'not much, nor for trade, but for expenses in making friends with the [local inhabitants]' Exports were a great deal of ivory (which was, however, inferior to the ivory to be had at Adulis), rhino-horn, turtle shell 'next in demand to that from India', and a small quantity of pearly nautilus, a marine creature related to the cuttlefish which is still sold today for its ornamental shell. Of the inhabitants we learn only that they were tall in stature and 'of piratical habits'.

Probably the 'ancient agreement' between Rhapta and Ma'afir secured the monopoly of some item which originated in or passed through it. The two most likely commodities are frankincence and myrrh. Both are the products of trees (Boswellia spp. and Balsamodendron myrrha respectively) which grow
exclusively in arid regions in southern Arabia and the Horn and extend as far south as the dry country on either side of the Ewaso Nyiro and Tana Rivers. Frankincense was certainly being exploited in this southerly zone during the fifteenth century, and one or both could well have been exported to Yemen from Rhapta at an earlier date.

The 'ancient agreement' would have been for Ma'afir to supply Rhapta with all the glass and iron goods in exchange for its stock of spices, whose very existence would have had to be kept secret from outsiders, especially from visitors from Egypt and the Mediterranean, whither Ma'afir planned to send them. If the spices went overland to the Gulf of Aden, what is now Somalia must have been criss-crossed by trade-routes in the Periplus' time, and its inhabitants would have gained at least some experience of long-distance trading. Such a trade could well have continued long after Ma'afir's decline. By the fourth- to fifth-century period to which Ptolemy's work refers Rhapta had become a 'metropolis', and in the sixth century Cosmas Indicopleustes still spoke of the Horn of Africa as 'the country which produces frankincense'. Certainly myrrh came almost exclusively from Africa by Cosmas' time, while in modern times frankincense does so too.

Other spices which may have attracted a Yemeni monopoly are those referred to in translations of the Periplus as 'cinnamon and cassia'. The Elder Pliny, once again, reported that 'cinnamon or cassia' was produced 'near the Troglodytes' who bought it from their neighbours. The people of Rhapta could reasonably be described as the Troglodytes' neighbours. Pliny wrote that the spices were taken to Ocelis, near Mouza, and that the ruler of the Gebanitae claimed exclusive ownership of the entire crop. The problem with including cinnamon and cassia on the list of Rhapta's exports to Mouza is that neither cinnamon, Cinnamomum zelanicum, nor cassia, Cassia spp., now grows anywhere in the Horn - cinnamon, indeed, is not indigenous to Africa at all. The nearest possible source for it at the time of the Periplus was Ceylon, while it is more likely to have come from the humid lowland jungles of what is now Indonesia, where it is indigenous. Various trees of the cassia family are indigenous to Africa

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(though not to Somalia), but Cassia Ignea, the only one whose bark is nowadays used as a spice, is found only in East Asia, mostly in China. The mystery of cinnamon's connection with Somalia is not a new one. Neither it nor cassia can ever have grown there, and yet for centuries Egypt and the whole Mediterranean world seem to have believed that they did. As long ago as c.1500 BC Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt obtained (among other things) something which is generally translated as cinnamon from the Land of Punt, now generally agreed to be somewhere on the shores of the Gulf of Aden. And from Strabo (born 64/63 BC) onwards the Greeks and Romans of classical and post-classical times all knew Somalia as 'the land of cinnamon'. As late as AD 525 Cosmas Indicopleustes, for whom Somalia (which he called 'Barbaria' or 'Berberia') was primarily associated with frankincense, noted that its people brought from the interior 'many kinds of spices [including] frankincense, cassia, calamus.'
Could all these sources have been referring to any other spice or territory? The spice obtained by Queen Hatshepsut, and those usually translated as 'cinnamon' in early Hebrew contexts, might conceivably have been something else. But this explanation seems less likely for the spice the Greeks and Romans called 'cinnamon' (kinnamomon and cinnamomum respectively), since Dioscorides Pedanius noted in the mid-first century AD that the best cinnamon was obtainable at Mosullon, the next port but one to the east of Malao (Berbera) where cassia was also available; and he went on to give a fairly accurate description of the differences between the two and of how to tell the various grades. The Periplus confirms that plenty of 'cassia' was available at Mosullon, and some of this may have been 'true' cinnamon, for no fewer than four names for different grades of the spice are mentioned. It also speaks of spices generally coming from Avalites (Zayla), and specifies cassia (kasia), and sometimes also different grades of it, at all ports between Malao and Opone or Hafun. Ras Asir it actually calls 'the Cape of Spices'.

Is it then possible that the 'cinnamon and cassia' were in fact true Cinnamomum zeylanicum and Cassia lignea imported to Somalia from East and/or Southeast Asia by way of Rhapta? This is the thesis of J. Innes Miller, and is very relevant since it means that Rhapta and East Africa generally were implicated not only in an overland trade but also in longdistance maritime trade centuries before the Swahili settlements were founded. Miller held that shipments of these spices must have come periodically from Indonesia to Madagascar, which was already being settled by immigrant Malayo-Polynesian speakers. Thence they were transported onward to Rhapta.

A modified Miller thesis would run something like this: the spices would have been brought to Madagascar by Indonesians, who were sailing right across the Indian Ocean by at least the first century AD. Their vessels would then have conveyed the spices to somewhere in the Comoro Archipelago to trade them for such things as turtle shell, leopard-skins, ivory and probably also slaves. From there they would have been collected by boats originating in Rhapta and carried northwards. The

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Miller theory is open to a number of objections:

* It assumes that the people of first- to second-century Rhapta had boats which were capable of sailing regularly as far afield as the Comoros.
* Why should spices be carried from East and Southeast Asia by way of Madagascar rather than by one of the shorter, more usual sea or seand-land routes through India and the Middle East?
* Indonesians fairly certainly began to arrive in Madagascar as early as the first century BC, but it is extremely unlikely that they immediately established a regular supply of spices from their homeland to the Mediterranean via Rhapta.

It may be objected that the people of Rhapta in the first century BC could not have had boats engaged in trade with the Mozambique coast and the Comoros. Yet they had boats of their own, since their habits were 'piratical'; and some of
these may have been the sewn boats from which the place derived its name. If they originated in the Lamu Archipelago these sewn boats are likely to have been, as Burton first suggested, the antecedents of the Swahili mtepe or sewn boat of later centuries. Though also manufactured elsewhere at certain periods, the mtepe and related craft have always been most closely associated with Lamu and the Bajun Islands, and were still built there and continued to sail from there until the present century. Dr A.HJ. Prins, among others, has argued that the sewn boats of the Periplus need not have been ancestral to the mtepe; but the probability is greatly increased by the relocation of Rhapta itself.25 It has also been claimed that, since the Greek term ploiarion is a diminutive form, it must refer to something more the size of a dug-out canoe, rather than the much larger mtepe. But it is doubtful whether the author of the Periplus was so careful in his choice of words, and Greekspeakers often used diminutive forms to disparage the achievements of non-Greeks. It is possible that the sewn boats of Rhapta were in reality quite large by the standards of the day. In that case they could well be proto-mtepe boats; and, at least by the Portuguese period, Swahili mtepe boats were large enough to carry cattle and other livestock from the Lamu Archipelago to the Comoros. Remembering also that in the ninth century boats from the Lamu region incontrovertibly sailed as far south as Chibuene, we might well accept that Rhapta boats were already making trading trips to the Comoros at about the time of Christ.

The roundabout route taken by these spices from their port of origin to the Gulf of Aden could be attributed to the fact that only the relatively localised Indonesian migrants to Madagascar had easy access to cinnamon and cassia in their original homeland and knew of the commodities’ overseas value. Alternatively, it could be explained by the need to keep an extremely valuable trade out of the hands of Indian middlemen. If this is accepted, what we have here must be a massive conspiracy by which all the Mediterranean consumers of cinnamon and cassia were for centuries deceived as to the real source of these products. Towards the end of the pre-Christian era, when Indians who had long traded with Southeast Asia also began to trade directly with Mediterranean vessels, it

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became necessary for the South Arabians, to protect their monopoly in Western markets, to pretend that cinnamon and cassia did not reach them from Southeast Asia but came from the inhospitable interior of Somalia, whence nobody who went to check was likely to return. It must be remembered that cinnamon was and long remained one of the most valuable spices, perhaps the most valuable single one. In classical Rome it sold for 1,500 denarii per pound, which has been calculated to equal US$325 at 1920 values.26 It was also primarily in search of cinnamon that Vasco da Gama first entered the Indian Ocean. This commodity was for long of exceptional importance, almost equal to silver or gold; and it would have been worth a good deal to the people of Ma’afir and their successors to exclude Indian middlemen from the Mediterranean cinnamon trade.
But how could cinnamon, cassia and other spices be safely conveyed to the Gulf of Aden without their real provenance being revealed? The answer is that they were taken thither overland from Rhapta: a route which has already been hypothesised for frankincense and myrrh. The first two objections to the modified Miller thesis are not insurmountable. The third objection - that, while Indonesians might have organised a cinnamon trade by the time of the Periplus, it is hard to believe that they already conducted such a trade in Strabo's time when they were only just beginning to settle Madagascar - is harder to override.

Huntingford suggests that cinnamon and cassia once did grow in Somalia, but this is an ecological impossibility. Rather more plausibly, Crone has argued that some other spices once grew there which were known as cinnamon and cassia and became lost while the names were transferred to those spices of Far Eastern provenance which still bear them. It is true that spice-names have relatively often been transferred from one product to another. However, it is hard to believe that any spice as highly valued as the then 'cinnamon' and 'cassia' should have dropped completely out of sight and been forgotten. Also, Somalia has few natural resources and is not over-endowed with different sorts of vegetation among which once-famous spices could be lying undiscovered. If botanists locate a shrub growing in the Horn which fits the various classical descriptions given of 'cinnamon' better than Cinnamomum zglanicum does, Crone's case will be much harder to answer. Meanwhile, whether we accept Crone's or Miller's hypotheses, two spices at that time known as 'cinnamon' and 'cassia' remain strong candidates, along with frankincense and myrrh, for the list of Rhapta's products in the time of the Periplus.

If it was not imported cinnamon which attracted the sewn boats of Rhapta to make regular trips southwards, what else might it have been? Possibly they traded some of the iron goods they received from Mouza, for iron was still highly valued in Sofala in al-Masudi's time, being rated, so he implies, as silver and gold were rated elsewhere. Or the regular commerce between the Rhapta region and places far to the south of it did not begin much before 700 or 750 AD, and it was the rapidly swelling demand of Middle Eastern visitors to Kanbalu for slaves which drew the Rhapta 'pirates' to the south. We simply do not know, and can only hope that the site of Kanbalu itself will soon be located and excavated.

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Nothing is to be gained by further speculation about what we shall call the Misri Cloth Trade-Route and the Cinnamon Route. Such routes could have existed and both would have been firmly in African hands, at least so far as their African stages were concerned, by the sixth century AD. This gives a background for the first Swahili diaspora in the ninth century and the emergence in the tenth of a regular trade-route running inland from the Lamu area and linking up with others leading to the Zayla coast. Pastoralists from the interior migrated to the coast and linked up with the people of Rhapta. Using Rhapta's sewn boats and maritime expertise and their own well-digging skills, they established settlements all along the coast. But those who settled in and around the Lamu Archipelago did not lose contact with their pastoral kin in the interior, and by c. 950 at the latest had
developed long distance trade-routes with their help. This was also the date of the rise of the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, and of the appearance in the east coast settlements of the first stone-builders, whose origins must have been somewhere near the Red Sea or the Aden Gulf. Such a background of long-distance trading activities all converging on the Lanau region, seen in the context of the ecological forces considered earlier, also goes far to explain the rise in the ninth and tenth centuries of a state (or something very like one) which embraced most of the great lowland plain and whose capital, the earliest and greatest Shungwaya, was Rhapta's direct heir if not Rhapta itself.

It remains to establish whether the inhabitants of Rhapta-Shungwaya would have had the east coast of Africa to themselves in the first millennium, and how far they would have had to share it with vessels from Persia, Arabia, Indonesia and even India. Most historians assume that eighth-, ninth- and tenth-century Persian and Arabic references to the land of Zenj, Zunuj, Zinj or Zanj, to Zenjibar and to Sofala, indicate that Middle Eastern vessels regularly visited the whole coast from the Horn right down to Mozambique from earliest times; and some scholars suppose that the Malayo-Indonesians who populated Madagascar sailed round the northern edge of the Indian Ocean to get there, and so would also have sailed past the East African coast.

All evidence except for the rare Pemba banana suggests that a secondary dispersal-point for Indonesian influences on, and introductions to, Africa was somewhere in the southeast of the continent, probably Madagascar itself. That things like food-crops should have spread to the mainland from Madagascar is likely enough, however the first inhabitants reached that island. But it is significant that items of maritime technology usually traced back to Southeast Asia are also concentrated in the southern part of the east coast. Outrigger canoes, for example, are ubiquitous in the Comoros but become progressively rarer as one moves northwards. If Indonesians were regularly sailing along the coasts of Somalia and Kenya in the first and early second millennia on their way to Madagascar, one would have expected such features to be more evenly spread along these coasts.

There are now powerful reasons for believing that the first Indonesians to reach Madagascar did so either direct from their homeland or by way of the Indonesian colonies in southern India. They possessed both the ships and the know-how to make either trip regularly. Furthermore, a glottochronological study of modern Malagasy languages suggests that the first part of the island to be occupied was the extreme northern tip, a more natural landfall for immigrants arriving from the east or northeast.

Trading expeditions were a different matter. Indonesian or Malagasy traders may have sailed all along the east coast of Africa, but we have little or no evidence that they ventured much north of Cape Delgado before the twelfth century. More concrete evidence of Indonesian commerce appears from the eighth century. It was, al-Masudi tells us, about the time of the replacement of the Ummayad by the Abbasid dynasty (c. 750) that Kanbalu was seized by Arabs. The place was
thus formerly held by someone else - perhaps by a Malagasy dynasty or perhaps by a local Comoran one - and that it was worth seizing. It was presumably already an important trade entrepôt, exporting ambergris, ivory and tortoise shell as it did in al-Masudi's own time, and maybe also slaves collected there from the mainland.

Indonesian interests are stated in Ibn Lakis' mid-tenth-century account of an Indonesian assault upon Kanbalu which he himself witnessed. Buzurg ibn Shahriyar tells us that this man saw a huge fleet of the 'Waqwaq' trying to take the island, which was well-fortified and rose 'like a fort' out of the surrounding sea. The 'people of the country' were told by the invaders that they wanted their country, because it possessed merchandise of value in the Waqwaq homeland and in China, such as ivory, turtle-shell, leopard-skins and ambergris, and also because they wanted to obtain some Zenj people who, being strong men, are able to stand heavy labour.

'Zenji' slaves figure in lists of tribute sent by different rulers to the Chinese court in the early eighth and ninth centuries, and we hear that most wealthy Cantonese kept a few of them by the tenth; they were Africans and not Melanesians or negritos from Southeast Asia, and they are likely to have come on Indonesian ships from the Mozambique coast. Another tenth-century Arab writer, Ibn Hawqal, mentions 'white' traders on the coast of 'Zingbar' who brought 'articles of food and clothing' from other places but whose homeland was evidently a mystery to him, and these too may have been Indonesians. So, perhaps, were al-Idrisi's peoples of the 'Zabag Islands' who traded iron from the Sofala coast to 'the Indian mainland and islands'; and these might have been Comorans or Malagasy. The same author also mentions 'people of Qumr' (here certainly Madagascar) and 'the people of the Maharaja' (citizens of the Sumatran empire of Sri Vijaya) who were 'well received [in Sofala] and carried on trade there'.

There is, then, much evidence of Indonesian and Malagasy trading activities in the late first and early second millennium, but nothing to prove that they traded much further north than Cape Delgado, unless the islands six days' sail from Kanbalu were Zanzibar and Pemba. (In that case it may have been the 'Waqwaq' fleet seen by Ibn Lakis which

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destroyed Unguja Ukuu.33) By the thirteenth century this had changed, for Ibn al-Muwajir speaks of the people of Qumr (here not quite so certainly Madagascar) setting out in boats with outriggers to trade at Kilwa but overshooting it and finally making landfall at Aden.34 Probably the change came about during the twelfth century and was linked to the Islamisation of the coast. There is the evidence of 'The Kilwa Sira' dated by Dr Wilkinson to the early twelfth century AD, which shows that Ibadi Islam was already present in Kilwa at that time, and as we shall see in Chapter Seven this had probably spread from Kanbalu.5 Vessels and beads made of Madagascar soapstone (chlorite-schist) begin to appear not only in Kilwa but also in Manda and Shanga in twelfth-century levels.
There is remarkably little evidence of the presence of Indians in these early centuries. A very few Indian beads are recorded from c. 950 and a little Indian pottery appears at Shanga from c. 1000, but not enough of either to suggest vessels visiting from India itself. This changes in the midtwelfth century when Chinese porcelain of types likely to have been transshipped in India is added to a larger (though still fairly insignificant) quantity of Indian wares. Al-Idrisi writes of Sayuna, a settlement at the mouth of the Zambezi, that its inhabitants included ‘a collection of people from Hind, Zunuj [Zenj] and others’, but the ‘people from Hind’ may have been Indonesians, and in any case he wrote only c. 1150.36 Perhaps the most significant piece of evidence is al-Masudi’s remark that although most East African ivory went to India or to China, it was usually first carried to Oman on Omani ships.3 Had a significant number of Indians lived or traded on the east coast of the continent, this would hardly have been the case.

With regard to Arab and Persian vessels, it has long been supposed that by the time of the Penplus Arabs already had access to the entire coast north of the Pangani-Ruvu or Rufiji River and that later Arab and Persian vessels extended their journeys southwards. But, although many early Islamic writers referred to East Africa in vague terms, none of them showed any understanding of its real shape before al-Idrisi.8 If traders from Arabia and the Persian Gulf had really been following the eastern coastline southwards during much of the first millennium, they should have been able to pass roughly accurate information on to geographers long before this.

An impressive amount of pre-1100 imported Middle and Far Eastern pottery is to be found north of Malindi, a reasonable amount of it in Mafia, Kilwa and the southernmost sites including some in Madagascar, but very little at early sites in between, save at the single site of Unguja Ukuu in southern Zanzibar, where sherds of Sassanian-Islamic ware, imported up to the tenth century but no later, can be found in profusion, but no subsequent imports at all. This pattern does not fit the notion of a Middle Eastern trading frontier which moved progressively southwards. The relocation of Rhapta permits another interpretation. It is suggested that up to c. 1100 Middle Eastern vessels regularly plied the coast between Ras Asir and Malindi, and also sailed regularly to Kanbalu and (for a time) Unguja Ukuu. From Kanbalu they made secondary trading trips to the Mozambique mainland. But the coast from Cape Delgado or at least Early Trade & Trade-Routes

Mafia north to Malindi was largely terra incognita to them, as the preserve of the sewn boats from Rhapta-Shungwaya. These sewn boats carried ivory, rhino horn and leopard-skins from what is now southern Kenya and mainland Tanzania either north to Malindi and the Lamu Archipelago or south to Kanbalu for onward shipment overseas. They traded such little imported pottery as there was in this middle region. Of course, their monopoly would not have been absolute, but the established trade-routes did not take Middle Eastern vessels anywhere nearer to the south Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts than Unguja Ukuu, and most casual references to the Zenj country before al-Idrisi’s time would accordingly have meant Mozambique and its inhabitants.
That there was a more or less direct trans-ocean route from the mouth of the Persian Gulf to the southern Swahili coast has been known for a long time. But the proposition is new that it was the principal if not the only one used to reach that coast before the twelfth century. The alternative coastal route was avoided for two possible reasons, one arising out of the geographical conceptions of the time and the other more purely practical.

Until al-Idrisi's time and later, most Arab geographers still believed that Southern Africa curved around to link up with Southeast Asia. Al-Idrisi's own map of the Indian Ocean showed the Sofala coast facing northwards, and Ibn Said described the Sawahil country as due south of Socotra and so 'opposite' southern Arabia.4° Sofala was perceived as more or less due south of Persia and to go to it via the Sawahil country would be a long way round. The mariners themselves are likely in any case to have shunned the shore-hugging route to Sofala, as bringing them face to face with the northerly current extending to somewhere near Mogadishu. Sailing ships had to wait for the onset of the northeast monsoon before sailing much further south than Ras Asir, and must then have completed their business and be well on their way back to the Middle East before the beginning of the southeast monsoon, which is usually accompanied by fierce storms. (The common notion that one monsoon carried them in one direction and the other in the other is an oversimplification.) If they were caught on the East African coast by these storms they had to 'winter' there.

Dr Datoo has calculated that the dhows following the coastline coming from the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which cannot round Ras Asir at all until the northeast monsoon arrives, would have been able to make it to Zanzibar and back in a single monsoon. But he may have overrated the speed of early vessels, and possibly the time needed for Muslims in non-Muslim ports to unload and reload. Certainly Ibn al-Muwajir, writing as late as c. 1232, reckoned on one monsoon (Arabic mawsim) from Aden to Mogadishu, a second from Mogadishu to Kilwa, and a third from Kilwa to a/-Quir, although he admitted it could be done faster.41 Traders from southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf, who did not have the problem of getting round Ras Asir but could sail straight across the mouth of the Gulf of Aden and be poised and waiting somewhere near it the moment the new monsoon broke, could have reached further than Mogadishu but probably still not as far as Zanzibar. Malindi and, more especially, the Lamu

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Archipelago ports, were more plausible southern terminals. But those who sailed direct to Kanbalu, where there was at least a Muslim dynasty, could sit out the southwest monsoon there. Even so, theirs was a long and dangerous journey. This would explain why al-Masudi had no first-hand knowledge of the coastline north of Sofala in spite of having visited Kanbalu more than once.42 The early Swahilis and the people of Rhapta-Shungwaya before them defended their trading-zone by circulating myths about its dangers. The Periplus mentioned piracy, while Ptolemy believed that cannibals lived on the shores of a bay south of Rhapta. Then there was a story about a magnetic mountain which projected into the sea and sucked to their doom all boats which used iron in their construction
(sewn boats were presumably immune to the menace). Swahilis of a later age would exaggerate the risks of travel in the interior of the continent so as to preserve their monopoly of trade there. Nor had the inhabitants of the territory between Malindi and Delgado been encouraged to welcome strangers. Buzurg had some stories of Muslims who visited hitherto unknown parts of East Africa and returned to tell the tale, but it is by being lucky enough to get home that their tales were worth telling, and he constantly emphasised the risk of emasculation or worse. Even al-Masudi said he knew of no sea more dangerous than the Bahr az-Zanj.

An important consequence of the separation of the two routes and of propaganda about the middle coast was that Arab and Chinese authors were confused about the lands between Malindi and Sofala. Dr Trimingham has tried to demarcate meaningful boundaries between (1) Bilad al-Barbar (the Chinese Barbara or Po-pa-li/P-pa-li), (2) Bilad az-Za4, Ard azZani or Z4nji-bar (the Chinese Tsong-pa or Zengba), (3) Ard Sufala, and (4) Ard al-Waqwaq. But he cannot be regarded as having succeeded because, as he himself admits, usage is inconsistent between authors and sometimes even within the works of a single author.

The Arabic documents on the whole seem to confirm our thesis that the northern Kenya and Mozambique coasts were better known than the region in between. Let us take the mid-twelfth-century al-Idrisi and the mid-thirteenth-century Ibn Said, who were the first two to try to list East African ports from north to south. Both wrote after the Islamisation of the coast, when Muslims were already beginning to penetrate to all corners of it, but both effectively concertinaed its central section. Al-Idrisi mentioned Merca followed by 'an-Naja', 'Qarnua' or 'Qamawa', and then a place called 'Baduna', 'Barua' or 'Maruwa' which is usually identified as Barawa. From here to Malindi ('Mulanda'), a distance by sea of about 350 miles, was according to him a journey of three nights and three days. From Malindi to the next place, 'Manisa' or 'Manfisa', was another two-day journey. And thence to 'Banas', not far from 'Ajud' (assuredly Cape Delgado) was six days by land, which would have been a much slower mode of travel. Though the description of iron-working at Manisa/Manfisa seems to fit Mombasa, its location (opposite the mouth of a great river up which it was possible to sail for two days) suggests rather Mafia, which lies opposite the Rufiji Delta; and its name, too, points to Mafia, which the Portuguese called Manfia. Probably it was a conflation of Mombasa and Mafia. Two days of sailing is too long for the distance between Malindi and Mombasa but not long enough for the journey to Mafia, which is nearly as far from Malindi as Barawa is. On the other hand, six days southwards from the mainland opposite Mafia would probably take the land traveller to somewhere not far north of Cape Delgado.

Ibn Said also mentions Merca and Malindi ('Mulanda'), but says nothing of Baduna/Barua/Maruwa or anywhere else in between. And his next port, 'Manfisa', is more certainly Mombasa since he describes it as one degree south of Malindi, which is about right. Beyond Mombasa he mentions only mafaza, meaning an uninhabited stretch of land, before one reached Cape Delgado or 'Jabal Ajrad'
And, like al-Idrisi, he knows the names of many more places south of this cape than between it and Merca. However, the two lists do not tally well. Al-Idrisi mentioned 'al-Tuhnat' or - in a variant reading - 'Bathana', which Trimingham identifies with Ibn Said's 'Batina', just south of Cape Delgado. He then went on to name at least two towns and three villages in Sofala as well as several places in Waqwaq country beyond Ibn Said for his part mentions only 'Sayuna' al-Idrisi's 'Sayu'na or 'Satuna' - and 'Layrana', which was a Muslim settlement in al-Qumr and can be identified as al-Iharana or Old Vohemar in northeastern Malagasy; but he also names channels, mountains and other geographical features, in sharp contrast to the cryptic mafaza describing the coastline further north.

Al-Idrisi's inconsistent use of the term Zenji has led to some confusion. On one hand, he described Baduna/Barua/Maruwa as 'at the extremity of kaffir country part of which obeys the Berber king, the rest the Ethiopian one', and said that its people obeyed the Zenj government. According to him, the 'king of Zenjibar' lived in Mafisa/Manfisa, which was 'a dependency of the Zenj' And his Banas was 'the last Zenj dependency [which] borders on Sofala', while al-Tuhnat/Bathana was 'a dependency of both Zenj and Sofala' This sounds as if his Zenji more or less correspond with our Swahilis. On the other hand, he has no specific term for the occupants of the Sofala (Mozambique) coast, whom he also calls Zenhi. One passage of al-Idrisi which has been widely misunderstood reads as follows: The Zenj have no ships in which they can travel [the open sea] but ships come to them from Oman and other places. They exchange goods for those of the Zenj. The people of the Zabag Islands [also] travel to the Zenj in both large and small ships and engage in trafficking their goods because they understand each other's language.

This has been taken to mean that the early Swahilis, perhaps all early inhabitants of the East African coast, lacked ships; but the Perilus and al-Masudi among others assure us otherwise; al-Idrisi's 'Zenj' clearly refers only to the inhabitants of Sofala or Mozambique. The people of Zabag (usually either Java or Sumatra) were either Indonesians or Comorans.48

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they were Comorans, the common tongue was probably early Swahili, which would have been known to at least some Sufalyun.

One early Arab reference to Eastern Africa comes from al-Jahiz, (c. 815 and 868), who mentioned two places as if they were well-known, Kanbalu, source of slaves, and 'Lanjuya' (Unguja Ukuu).49 To 'Lanjuya' we shall return, but let us first consider Kanbalu, for this emphasis on slaves as one of its exports contrasts oddly with al-Masudi's failure to mention them at all after his c. 916 visit. The paradox can be resolved. Briefly, when the Arabs seized Iraq from Sassanid Persia they inherited, and decided to expand, a vast scheme for draining the marshes around the mouth of the Euphrates. For this project the Sassanids had imported many thousands of slaves, mainly from the Red Sea and the Zayla Coast, and for a while this policy was continued. They were known as Nuba, Furatiya, and Qamatiyya, and probably most came from Ethiopia and the Sudan,
though some may have reached the Zayla Coast from as far away as the Kenyan interior. By the second half of the ninth century virtually all were Arabic-speaking. The new recruits for the ninth-century excavations, however, came mostly from Africa's east coast, were known collectively as Zenj, and became the largest single group. Imported mostly after 833, they did not speak Arabic when the Great Zenj Revolt broke out in 869, but formed the bulk of the rebel army which held the armed might of the Caliphate at bay until 883, making theirs perhaps the most successful slave rebellion of all times. When the revolt was finally crushed, Arab policy with regard to Zenj slaves was sharply reversed, and the demand for them almost entirely ceased. This would explain why al-Masudi saw no slave trade worth mentioning during his visits to Kanbalu twenty or thirty years later.°

We have nevertheless to account for the Zenj slaves who were already in Iraq by 869. Their total number may well have run into hundreds of thousands, for individual work-forces varied from 500 to 5,000 men and some had as many as 15,000. Conditions were appalling, with a very high death-rate, and there were no provisions for their natural reproduction, so that the demand for fresh ones continued.

It can only be assumed that for over thirty years they were taken out in vast numbers through Kanbalu and perhaps also Unguja Ukuu. As is well known, where political conditions are sufficiently fluid, a demand for slaves creates its own supply, and we must suppose that the Mozambican and central and southern Tanzanian coasts were kept in a perpetual state of ferment by local entrepreneurs aiming to seize and sell prisoners. There were no doubt cases of enticement and a few Arab raids such as were mentioned for Barbara by the mid-ninth-century Chinese source, but it seems unlikely that at this period the Arabs had sufficient technological superiority to carry off the required numbers on their own. More probably they had local collaborators who saw to it that more or less perpetual war conditions prevailed.

It was against this background that the earliest Swahili settlements were being founded at places like Mkadini, Mafia and Kilwa, while other northerners were moving into the Comoros and striking south to Chibuene.

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Could their founders have been the Arabs' coastal collaborators, and were the early Swahili settlements the main catalysts of the slaving drive?
It seems on the whole unlikely. A newly-founded Swahili settlement would have been a very vulnerable community needing the support of all its new neighbours if it was to survive and attract local settlers. Though the pioneers cannot have lacked courage, it is hard to visualise them setting out with spears to round up potential slaves from hinterlands with which they were as yet hardly acquainted. What they may well have done was to buy and sell as many slaves as longer-established collaborating communities could provide. With their boats and their experience of trading with Arabs, they would have been well-placed to perform this intermediate role. The profits would for a while have been enormous,
permitting settlements which were established during that comparatively brief period to expand and become permanent fixtures.

We hear of Kanbalu again after al-Jahiz's time, but not Unguja Ukuu, which is not even mentioned by al-Masudi in the early tenth century. It would appear to be already in collapse by then. At the time of writing no major excavations have yet been carried out, but a tentative history may have to be suggested.

Presumably founded, like other early coastal settlements, by migrants from the Lamu Archipelago, Unguja Ukuu was uniquely able to set up in competition with Kanbalu as an overseas trade entrepôt. Its position, facing the mainland on the southern tip of Zanzibar Island, made it easily accessible from the open sea but safe from local reprisals so long as its occupants took care not to alienate the people of the island itself. It was, perhaps, a slave holding-ground (trading only in non-Swahili slaves, for al-Jahiz's remark implies that nobody had ever seen a slave originating in 'Languya' itself). Between something like 820 and 880, it could have become successful enough even to challenge the supremacy of Kanbalu. This would account for the fact that al-Jahiz brackets it with Kanbalu, and would also explain its extraordinary wealth as testified by the exceptional number of Sassanian Islamic pieces it imported. Its ruler, or the ruler of the local islanders, may even have adopted Islam and built a mosque in order to encourage Middle Easterners to 'winter' there if need be. It may have survived the collapse of the trade in Zenj slaves, though it would have been much weakened by it. Some time before c.900 (certainly before c.950, for we have no evidence of stone or Porites coral block buildings there), it was abandoned, and never again became prosperous enough to import pottery. It simply disappeared from the map so far as outsiders were concerned, being unmentioned by al-Idrisi and Ibn Said as well as al-Masudi, though Swahilis still remember it as a historic place of some ancient importance. (Its name means 'Old Unguja', Unguja being the Swahili name for the island.) Unguja Ukuu was probably the first Swahili settlement to tumble from great prosperity into utter poverty within a few decades, and its fate may have been responsible for the obsession with 'pride coming before a fall', which has been a theme of so much traditional Swahili thought and literature. Its ruins should also conceal a relatively unspoiled ninth-century Swahili settlement.

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Notes
2. ibid pp. 9, 17.
7. Soper, 'Iron-age sites of Northeast Tanzania', p. 27.
9. Freeman-Grenville, Select Documents, pp. 6-7. 10. J. Wansborough, 'Africa and Arab geographers' in D. Dalby, ed., Language and History in


17. I am indebted to Mark Horton, who first suggested the relocation of Rhapta and who did the necessary work on Ptolemy's coordinates. Cp. his 'Early settlement', p. 64. See above p.41.


23. The bark of several African cassias is used, but only medicinally, usually as a purgative. 24.JJI. Miller, The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire, Oxford, 1969. For a summary and critical review of Miller's ideas, along with a useful map, see B.A. Datoo, 'Rhapta: the location and importance of East Africa's first port', Azania 5 (1970), pp. 65-75.


26. Huntingford, Periplus, p. 128; see also W.H. Schoff, Peripus of the Erythraean Sea, originally


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Four Swahili Traditions
& Metaphors
We have made frequent references to 'the traditions' and will do so no less often in the following chapters: if we are to reconstruct Shungwaya at all, it must be mainly on the basis of these traditions. Chinese, Arabic and Portuguese documents, archaeology and linguistic data, while confirming salient points here and there and adding the occasional very important fact or date, are inadequate for us to reconstruct a continuous and plausible account. It is necessary to survey the relevant traditions and to indicate how we have interpreted them to reach our conclusions.

It may be objected that much has already been written about the interpretation of historical traditions. But if we want to know about Shungwaya there can be no substitute for a study of the traditions of the people actually living in and around it to see what, if anything, they say about it (and, if nothing, what they do contain), and how they can best be interpreted. Partly because many of the historical traditions of this area are of a special type and partly because of the unusual circumstances in which many of them have come down to us, general rules devised for the interpretation of traditions elsewhere have been of only limited use.

The historical traditions of pre-literate peoples generally are often described, by historians as well as folklorists and anthropologists, by terms like 'myth' and 'legend', with the implication that they are in an entirely different category from 'history' in literate societies. We need not here embark upon the thorny problem of whether there is any entirely objective history, but much of what is taught as history in schools in literate societies is designed to serve more or less the same social function as oral traditions about the past in pre-literate ones. The analogy is not exact, of course, but is near enough. Both tend to emphasise the importance of some group or institution, often at the expense of others; both seek to propagate certain values and decry others; and both try to explain complex phenomena either by gross oversimplification or by the use of what are, in effect, elaborate metaphors. To the extent that history serves an overtly educational purpose, then, it serves it in much the same way in both sorts of societies.

It is more useful to see the two sorts of history as equal though different.

Ethiopian Highlands
L. Turkana
Boundary of Shungwaya Region
I Kerio Valley
I Western KALLAO
'AJURAN
SULTANATE'
'DIYE
PAYING'
ZICNAL AT T
'PEACE OF BORAN'
.hlJSUNGUU',
KEETHI
IRAQW
INDIAN OCEAN
)'MOSSEGUEJOS'
KILINDINI SWAHILI
Great Shungwaya
Shungwaya successors
Associated by Tradition Mentioned in Sources Shungwaya Peoples Southern
Cushitic Group
VUMBA KUU
9 Pemba Island
SHIRAZI SWAHILI
Zanzibar Island
UNGUJA UKUU30mie
0 300 miles
0 500 km
Map 3 Shungwaya region
A
Mt Elgon

Swahili Traditions & Metaphors
The task of the modern historian of pre-literate societies is to 'translate' their traditions into our sort of history; and this we seek to do with the help of other historical sources, but also on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the pre-literate society in question, which permits us to recognise what is likely to have been emphasised at the expense of what else, and also where oversimplifications are likely to have crept in and what metaphors, if any, have been employed. Perceiving oral traditions as a type of history does not mean that we should disdain the conclusions drawn from them by scholars of other disciplines. Such disciplines are mostly concerned with society as it is 'now' (either in the actual or the ethnographic present), and we need to learn all we can about that as an aid to understanding its past. But it is proper that the historians' own questions about the traditions should be of a different sort. One aspect which particularly interests us,
for instance, is the way oral traditions concerning a given society's history change, for such changes must reflect modifications in that society's view of its own past, and these are important not only for themselves but also because they often help us to see that past from a different perspective.

The point is perhaps best illuminated by a comparison between the historian of a pre-literate society (a society in which oral traditions remain the principal vehicle for the transmission of knowledge about the past) and his or her counterpart in a literate society. The latter has documents, primary as well as secondary, while the former may only have traditions. The most important single difference between documents and traditions is that documents can usually be dated with reasonable accuracy, so that with luck we know not only what took place but also when and how things were perceived at any given time. Traditions, by contrast, are synchronic, in the sense that they appear to tell us only what is 'now' remembered as having happened or as having been believed, and so tend to kaleidoscope many different events and perceptions into a single, composite whole.

In practice, however, traditions often also incorporate, in fossilised form, fragments of earlier perceptions of it. It is only in certain sorts of society that any two traditions about a past event are likely to be exactly the same. And, where traditions exist in sufficient quantities, it is often possible to take a whole set of them, each of which describes the same person or event in slightly different terms, and separate them out into chronological order, identifying earlier and later ones and perhaps even dating some of them absolutely. They may be visualised as a series of layers, older versions being constantly overlaid by later ones but occasionally peeping through, rather like earlier texts in a palimpsest. And for certain sorts of topics (such as, for instance, peoples' changing perceptions of their own identity, with which we shall be much concerned), 'layered' traditions are only a little less valuable than datable documents.

To isolate different layers in a tradition can sometimes be done on the basis of style or content, but it is easiest when many such traditions have been recorded over a long period in documents which are themselves datable. In this respect we are lucky in our area, because many historical traditions have been so recorded at different times.

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A few very important traditions were recorded by early Portuguese historians, notably the mid-sixteenth-century Joao de Barros, whose work is generally regarded as accurate. Many more were recorded between c.1820 and 1890 by missionaries, sailors and explorers including Owen, Boteler, Guillaum, Krapf, Burton, Wakefield and New; others again in the closing years of the last century and the early decades of this one by pioneer scholars like Werner and Stigand and scholar-administrators such as Velten, Hollis and Hobley. Many more have been recorded by modern scholars. Such sources enable us to say that, by such and such a date, a given version of a group's history was already in circulation. Sometimes what is essentially the same version can still be recorded centuries later or even today, alongside what are obviously later ones which partly overlie it. Elsewhere, earlier versions have disappeared, sometimes as if there was a systematic
campaign to eradicate them by exponents of a later version. We shall encounter examples of both. The disadvantage of reading our traditions from what were often unsympathetic and sometimes not quite accurate pens is thus more than outweighed by the fact that such a practice enables us to date whole layers of other traditions from them. Before we move on to specific Shungwaya traditions, let us clarify two sets of terms, namely 'strong'/'weak' and 'clean'/'soiled' 'Strong' traditions are those which can be shown to have been believed by many people, or by a fair number of important ones, over a wide area or for a long period. Regardless of how incredible such traditions may now appear, they always deserve our closest attention, if only because they tell us something about ideas prevalent in the society or societies from which they come, either at the time of the events they describe or at some later date. If they are very strong there is a good chance that even the most implausible contain a kernel of truth, because people do not usually believe nonsense about their past for too long, though they may occasionally do so. If they seem nonsensical to us, this may be just because we have not decoded them properly. 'Weak' traditions, by contrast, are those which do not seem to have been believed by many people, or by any likely to know the truth of the matter. 'Strong' traditions are very likely to have been recorded more than once. 'Clean' traditions, on the other hand may only have been recorded once, for by 'clean' I mean that they are likely to be accurate, or anyway accurately handed down. An eyewitness account is obviously a 'clean' tradition, though just how clean will depend on the lapse of time between the event described and the recording of it, the known reliability of the informant, his or her role in the event and stake in the conclusions to be drawn from it, and other factors. And a second-hand account need not be regarded as 'soiled' just because it is second-hand if whoever retails it is known to be generally careful and reliable. Very often, of course, we simply do not know enough about an informant, or about his or her informants, to say whether they are trustworthy and reliable, and in that case we have to gauge a tradition's 'cleanliness' by cross-checking it with others, by its inherent plausibility and by what we know of the way in which traditions are passed down in

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the society concerned. In some societies the texts of traditions are learned by rote, sometimes by specialists, and so may be passed on unchanged (or virtually so) for generations. This does not generally seem to be the case in this part of Africa. There may in the past have been court historians whose special task it was to remember official dynastic histories accurately, but if so they died out before anybody could record their words in a lasting form. The Pate Chronicle,' for example, was recorded several times within a comparatively short period from the same man, yet each version of it is substantially different. A last problem about traditions at the general level is the question of what is dropped from them, what is retained, and for how long. A simple rule is that a historical event or phenomenon will be remembered in a pre-literate society not just because it was in some way important at the time it occurred or existed, but
only if, and so long as, it continues to be important to some person or group in the
society concerned. This is another way of saying what folklorist and
anthropologist critics of history based on oral traditions have long been saying,
namely that historical traditions are part of the living society from which they are
drawn, in which their function is usually to validate some ritual or institution or to
legitimise some lineage, hierarchy, secret society, or something similar. But it
does not follow that we cannot therefore use them as sources for our sort of
history. For many such validations and legitimisations go back a long way in
time, and provided that we know enough about the society in question we can
still, usually, extract the material we require. Indeed, we may even occasionally
be able to deduce information from what they pointedly omit, especially if it is
mentioned with reference to them in the historical traditions of others.
Moreover, as long as the memory of a past event or phenomenon remains
important for the functioning of a given society or some part of it, for so long will
it be remembered, even over five or ten centuries. Historians of eastern Africa
frequently generalise to the effect that oral traditions can tell us nothing of what
happened longer than about three centuries ago. It is true that many tribal
traditions only go back two or three centuries, but that is arguably because the
peoples themselves have only existed as important social units for that period of
time.
While it is obvious that the longer the time which has elapsed since something
occurred or existed which a society or part of it needs to remember, the greater the
chance that something else will happen which renders this need obsolete, yet there
is in principle no time limit for the survival of memories of past events. Because
Shungwaya lasted in one form or another for many centuries, memories of its
beginning remained very important for some peoples in our area for an unusually
long time, and we shall encounter traditions recorded earlier this century, and one
or two still extant, which seem to refer quite unequivocally to the end of the first
millennium or the very beginning of the second.
We are now ready to scrutinise the particular traditions of the Shungwaya region.
Our main concern at this stage will be with what are called 'traditions of origin'
There are, however, several sorts of tradition of origin

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in this area, not all of equal interest. A common sort traces a present-day tribal
grouping back to one or two ancestors, who were often a little more or a little less
than human, and sometimes lived in non-human places such as the top of a
mountain or the bottom of a lake somewhere near the tribe's present territory.
Traditions of this type are relatively rare in the Shungwaya region. When they
refer to the ancestry of single tribes, we can be reasonably sure that, at least in
their present form, they are not much more than three or four centuries old,
because the evidence of so many other traditions is that before c. AD 1600 tribes
did not exist as significant social units. And while they may tell us something
about the evolution of tribal consciousness during recent centuries, they are of
little use for the period before it and for the region as a whole.
Stories of tribal ancestors are only of value when those of one tribe are perceived as related to those of one or more others. Not only do these reflect earlier links between what are now separate tribes, but they often also indicate some sort of ranking of the societies concerned (the offspring of older brothers or of first or 'noble' wives being senior) and give an idea of the relative distance which is perceived as existing between them. Thus it is of interest when all the Mijikenda groups, and sometimes also the Pokomo, are described as the offspring of a single ancestor, Muyeye, with his two wives, Mبوdze and Matsezi; and of even more interest is a tradition in which Matsezi, the second or junior wife, is said to be the ancestral mother only of the Giriama, all the others (including the Pokomo) being descended from the senior wife. This gives us a hint that the origins of the Giriama, many of whom are cattle-herders, are perceived as similar to but not quite the same as the origins of the other groups who traditionally live only by fishing and cultivation.2

But the most important origin traditions from our point of view are those expressed through more elaborate and sustained metaphors. We have already observed that a historical tradition may be couched in a metaphor to explain and make more vivid what might otherwise be complex and dull facts. But a more important motive for using metaphors in oral history is their mnemonic value: a metaphor focusing the minds of both reciter and listener on a sphere in which both are well versed and deeply interested can encapsulate many more details in memorable form than a mere recitation of historical data.

Somali traditions furnish an example. Living in a harsh and lonely environment, every northern Somali herder has to know all about kin relationships so that he can instantly gauge the degree of genealogical proximity (and hence mutual obligation) between himself and any stranger who comes upon him watering his flocks at a well or pasturing them in some distant valley. He must also be able to compute the proportion of dye due to himself when a relative is murdered. It therefore makes sense that Somalis should convert many of their traditions into genealogical form. Such genealogies, far more elaborate than the story of Muyeye and his two wives, include countless collateral kin and distant cousins. Yet they are widely and on the whole accurately remembered by many people, furnishing us with an example of what we may call the Genealogy.

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Metaphor tradition of historical origin. Thus, when Somalis wish to account for the emergence of an amorphous confederation such as the Tuni, an eponymous ancestor is invented from whom all living Tuni are regarded as in some way descended. Indeed, in relatively recent times they have gone further and devised historical traditions on a national scale in the form of a vast family tree in which every group now recognised as Somali is subsumed among the descendants of a legendary ancestor of the whole race, Somali or Samale himself.3 Such 'Pan-Somali' traditions are not the only ones, for others are evidently older and tell a somewhat different story. Meanwhile, however, the Pan-Somali genealogy has become widely known, and the metaphor in which it is couched has in many minds ceased to be a metaphor and acquired a reality of its own. The
tradition thus permits and indeed fosters an enlargement of social and political scale far greater than do the cold facts of what is, to us, the historical reality. To many Somalis, as a result, the metaphor has ceased to be a metaphor and has become their 'real' history.

The Genealogy Metaphor is on the whole a concise and elegant framework for an origin tradition. It can also be fairly easily recognised by outsiders as a metaphor. Another metaphor is commonly employed in origin traditions in our region, which I shall call the Safari Metaphor. The Safari Metaphor substitutes a migration or long journey (Swahili safari) for genealogy, and describes a people's history in terms of stopping off for unspecified periods at a number of places, sometimes very distant ones. Some actual place-names are used, but occasionally the names of other peoples, of events, or even of commodities are converted into localities for the purposes of the narration. The object often seems to be to give the impression of 'coming from' as far away as possible, even from outside sub-Saharan Africa altogether. Safari Metaphor origin traditions are very ancient and widespread in this part of the world, and, like Genealogy Metaphor traditions in Somalia, in the eyes of some who retail them they have ceased to be metaphors at all and have become their 'real' history. They cannot be understood as historical in our sense of the term, however, and we have to translate them. Once we understand how this is done, we hold the key to the whole Shungwaya conundrum and to much else in the history of the Swahilis and their neighbouring peoples as well.

The first thing we have to ask ourselves is what sort of people would select such a metaphor in which to frame their origin traditions. We can understand why Somali nomads should favour the genealogy model, but who would choose a safari? The answer, surely, is traders who owed their position amongst their neighbours to their control of long-distance trade goods. This would also explain why so many traditions refer to some very distant place of origin and even to places overseas or in North Africa, for the further a commodity has to travel, the rarer and more precious it is likely to become and the more prestigious those who distribute it. Widespread networks which were able to funnel Middle Eastern goods into remote parts of the East African interior would have been particularly important, and everybody who possibly could would have wanted to be Swahili Traditions & Metaphors associated with them. It may thus have been not only among the longdistance traders themselves that Safari Metaphor origin traditions grew up, but among all those groups which lived along and at the far end of inland trade-routes and whose ideologies were influenced by the impact of foreign imports. To such people, there was often something magical about items brought from far away, and a sort of magical power also came to be associated with the names of the places they came from. To say that one 'came from' such a place was to lay a special claim to its magic, and on such claims whole social and political systems were sometimes constructed.

It may be useful to examine a few cases of Safari Metaphor traditions of origin, beginning with traditions of origin in Misri. Stories of 'coming from' Misri have
never been systematically collected and studied, but we can say a certain amount about them.

First, how old might they be? If we are correct in the hypothesis that the waMisri were dealers in (originally) Egyptian cloth which had been imported along a trade-route leading from the Zayla Coast to central Kenya by way of Lake Turkana, then Misri origin traditions must be at least four centuries old, very probably much older. The first actually recorded was collected by Holis, in the presence of a group of elders (mostly but not exclusively Segeju), at Pongwe, near Vanga, in 1899. This is much too early for us to suspect feedback from the teaching of Christian missionaries. But, assuming that the Zayla Coast-Lake Turkana route had ceased to operate by c. 1600, Misri origin traditions must have been circulating well before that, and so have lasted for more than three centuries after the route’s demise. Holis’ tradition, indeed, describes the ancestral Segeju as going from Misri ('Misiri' or 'Mishiri', located by Holis in Ethiopia, but no later Segeju informants have had any difficulty in identifying it as Egypt) to Shungwaya, and implies that Shungwaya inherited its political system from Misri. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that Misri origin traditions antedate Shungwaya ones, because there are problems about precisely what it means to have ‘come from’ somewhere before Shungwaya; but it does suggest that Misri origin traditions could be at least as old as those referring to Shungwaya.

It is certain that the Misri cloth trade must have had a tremendous cultural impact to be remembered (albeit in garbled form) for so many centuries after its collapse. Why should this have been? It is fair to surmise that cloth reached the interior in sufficient quantities to be widely known but not widely possessed, or not in any quantity: the average household would possibly have owned only one or at the most two pieces. How would they have been used? Only the very rich would have been able to afford to wear cloth regularly, even as a short skirt or apron. (Hence the celebrity of the waMisri and of the waSwahili themselves, who probably did wear it all the time.) Others may merely have hoarded it as an expression of wealth, or used small pieces of it instead of money, as was done in parts of early Ethiopia.

A likely hypothesis is that it was an item of bride-price. The ninth-century blood- and milk-drinkers of the Barbara coast who escorted

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Persian merchants to the interior were rewarded with cloth, but apparently did not themselves wear it, suggesting that they wanted it for some other purpose. Maybe it was given to the mother of the bride, who used it herself or passed it on to the bride as a baby-sling: several nineteenth-century coastal societies so used it. A Swahili term, mbeleko or uwe/e*o, means this, as do makaja (Digo), mkaja (Zaramo) and kamahumbo (Pokomo).

There is no guarantee that the practice was in existence earlier than the nineteenth century, but Mijikenda usage suggests that it may have been. The Mijikenda prefer a blue cloth for their baby-slings, especially a blue-black fabric called Msumbi. This word normally means Mozambique and it presumably refers to the introduction by the Portuguese of indigo dyeing into the Kerimba Islands in or
shortly after the late sixteenth century. Before then, blue cloth would have been very rare, though apparently highly prized. With the introduction of indigo dyeing, locally made blue-black cloth would have become more easily available. This must have been before 1850 (when the Indian-made dark blue kaniki began to oust the local product), and may have been before 1700. Assuming the Mijikenda coveted cloth even before the introduction of Msumbiji (admittedly quite a big assumption), then we have possible evidence for a high demand for baby-sling cloths long before the nineteenth century.'

A much more recent Safari Metaphor origin tradition complements the Misri one. This is the tradition of the Meru, on the northeastern slopes of Mount Kenya, that they 'came from' a place called Mbwa. This seems to have been on the coast near a former mouth of the Tana, or perhaps further north in the one-time Ewaso Nyiro delta region opposite Pate Island. Their journey would have taken place in the late seventeenth or eighteenth century. No Shungwaya-style state is known to have been functioning in that area at that period, but many Pokomo groups who still have Shungwaya origin traditions would already have been living either opposite Pate Island or along the Lower Tana, and probably in both places. Yet Dr Fadiman, who made a special study of the Mbwa tradition, tells us that no Meru informant recognised the name Shungwaya.

The explanation appears to be that it was not the magic of Shungwaya itself which remained important among the Meru but magic associated with the flight from it, led by prophets and magicians who were the precursors of the ANjuri Ncheke, a group of elders powerful in Meru society until recently. The name Shungwaya does not figure in any traditions, but Mbwa, which must be cognate with the Pokomo term Bua which is used of the dispersal 'from' Shungwaya, was converted into a place-name and became the putative homeland of the Meru.8 (Some Pokomo clans likewise claim to 'come from' Bua rather than Shungwaya.)

All we need say here is that, although some ancestral Meru no doubt knew the route to and from the coast fairly well (it would have been the trade-route which linked them to the Pokomo, with whom affinities noted include a resemblance between the A3juri .cheke and its Pokomo counterpart, the Ngadfi or Ngadzi), it is not plausible that an entire Meru proto-tribe migrated along it. The tradition is rather to be taken as a Safari

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Metaphor designed to codify tribal unity and legitimise ijuri.Ncheke magic.
If we compare Misri and Mbwa origin traditions, Misri ones can be perceived as fundamentally pre-tribal. Though many entire tribes are vaguely supposed to have 'come from' there, yet no leaders, rituals or other institutions are sacralised or validated by anything existing there. It is more likely to have been small units - clans, sub-clans, perhaps individual lineages - now scattered among many tribal groups, which actually 'came from' Misri in the first place, and whose origin traditions have now been adopted by others.

Mbwa, by contrast, is a typically tribal tradition. Only the Meru (with their Mwimbe and Muthambi sub-tribes) are said to have 'come from' there, but all but one of them - ironsmiths (Meru atun), 'honey-Athi' (Athi ba Uuki, honey-
gatherers), 'animal-Athi' (Athi ba yamaoo, specialised animal hunters) - are supposed to have been there; and the social differentiation which characterised these groups is explained and sanctified by events alleges to have happened not in Mbwa but on the road from it. So are all oaths and rituals, so that the Mbwa tradition has served as a charter for most formal aspects of Meru life.

Shungwaya origin traditions may be of either type: pre-tribal like Misri traditions, or a charter for a more recently constituted tribal grouping such as Mbwa traditions. Segeju and Swahili origin traditions are pre-tribal, Mijikenda are tribal, and Pokomo between the two; but all of them share features of both types. We must ask why Shungwaya origin traditions only exist among the Swahili, Segeju, Pokomo or Mijikenda. Although all of these mention other peoples as being 'in Shungwaya' with them. The answer must be that, almost uniquely, these four still have, or have had, some sort of key social and focal settlement, at one time sacred, which was perceived as deriving its magical power from Shungwaya. In the past other groups implicated in Shungwaya either had their own sacred settlements or looked to those in what is now Swahili, Segeju, Pokomo or Mijikenda territory.

Many non-Shungwaya peoples have, of course, permanent and traditional towns or villages that were kin-based household clusters. This made them quite different from the traditional Shungwaya-type settlement which was not initially kin-based, and whose inhabitants came from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Societies which revolved around such settlements were slower than others to evolve into 'tribes', one-language, one-culture units whose members frequently claimed a common ancestral descent. It is true that the Mijikenda, the Pokomo, and Segeju were subjected in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries to pressures to reconstitute themselves into something more like 'classic' tribes. The Mijikenda briefly emerged as nine tribes and then evolved into something more like one, while among the others the perception of themselves as more of a non-tribal confederation was undermined. Yet none of them have yet achieved the status of a fully fledged one-language, one-culture 'tribe' whose self-image relies exclusively on typically tribal traditions such as descent from a common ancestor. And the Swahilis have contrived entirely to avoid any

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sort of tribalisation, adhering instead to a more archaic social structure.

These once-sacred settlements, where the link with Shungwaya is most explicit, are the capitals of the individual Mijikenda groups. These capitals (in Mijikenda languages kaya, plural makaya; they sometimes call themselves Makayachenda meaning 'nine kayas') differ from each other in many details, but here one may take one of the smaller northern ones as typical.

Virtually all Mijikenda say that they 'came from' Shungwaya, whether directly or by way of another group's kaya, and that their clans were already in existence before they left it, which is why some of them share names. They also validate the initiation rituals of new age-sets and other customs vital for the preservation of group unity, by stories of how they first happened 'in Shungwaya' Each kaya is perceived as a replica of the Shungwaya capital ('the first kaya') in terms of the
buildings permitted in it and its general layout. It is said that each Mijikenda group brought, either from Shungwaya itself or from another kaya, a charm (Vingo) buried at the centre of the kaya beneath the sacred tree or grove (moro: in the language of Barawa, a place for stabling cattle) which is always found there. This grove also houses the main council-chamber (/wanda) where clan elders meet in strict privacy to take important decisions, and the regalia-drums (mwanza or sometimes ngoma) sounded for initiation rites and at all times of communal crisis are kept. The fingo-charm, in short, almost literally underpins the day-to-day exercise of authority within the kaya in much the same way that the Shungwaya origin tradition validates the major institutions; and the fingo itself was 'from Shungwaya'.

The kayas were all abandoned during the nineteenth century, but some are still occupied by revered guardian-elders who control traditional oaths as well as the regalia-drums. They still have to be entered bareheaded and barefoot, and special regulations are observed around their liminal areas. Mijikenda also hoped, and in some cases still hope, to be buried within them: but since no corpse may be carried through the gateways only those who die inside them may be buried there, the graves of all others, however important, being either just outside or elsewhere.'0

We know much less about the sacred settlements of the Pokomo, but they were known as ganda (plural maganda, though the term is Oromo in origin, or possibly Dahalo) and used as places of refuge from the Somalis as recently as the late nineteenth century. The population of a ganda now lives outside it and along the banks of the Tana River, and may always have done so in normal times; but its membership is the same as that of the 'clan-alliance' (kyeti, plural vyetz) which has replaced it as the most significant social unit.

Every ganda had its own regalia-drum (Pokomo ngadzi or ngadj: the same term for the society of dominant elders), with the same functions as the Mijikenda mwanza or ngoma and likewise hidden from the uninitiated. In one respect the ganda differed from the kaya, in its layout: while the kaya was divided only into occupation-areas for each clan and the central moro, a ganda was didemic, and the households of each clan within the kyeti were so far as possible lined up in a single row."

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We know still less about the so-called 'walled towns' of the Segeju. But they were almost identical in appearance to the Katwa settlements and also to very early Swahili ones,'2 and they were probably rendered inviolable by the burial within them of the Segeju 'war-magic' or regalia items (kirumba: this closely resembles kirumbi, a Swahili word for a charm carried in the turban of the leader of nineteenth-century caravans going into the interior, and in camp placed by the main entrance, where it was believed to give notice of approaching danger). The Segeju regalia comprised a sideblown horn (Segeju-Swahili baragum) and a broad-bladed spear (SegejuSwahilifwmo). Carried into battle, these rendered Segeju warriors invulnerable. Buried in an enclosed space such as a walled
enclosure where the cattle were kept at night (these were essentially the Segeju 'walled towns'), they made it inviolable, and sacred.'3

The Swahili settlement is called in Swahili mf., plural mjji. Mii-ken like Makayachenda, basically means 'Nine settlements', hence 'Nine tribes', and the Swahili mjji or its northern dialect equivalent mui can sometimes also be translated 'tribe' or 'clan'. All we need to note here is that they, too, had fingo-charms buried beneath their gateways; they too had regalia items, including either a drum (ngoma) or a side-blown horn (siwa, but also, in some contexts, baragunu, mbiusJumbe or zumbe), and a broad-bladed spear (fumo); that they too from an early date had graves both inside and outside the settlement, including those of important and unimportant people in both places; and that they too were regarded as sacred, as basically preIslamic rituals such as the zinguo demonstrate.'4

We shall see below in what sense all Swahilis and not just the Bajuni and Kilindini sections of them, 'came from' Shungwaya, whose magic may accordingly be assumed to have underpinned their settlements, though belief in it was increasingly veiled among relatively sophisticated urban Muslims. The only other people who lived within the Shungwaya orbit for whom a sacred settlement remained until recently a central feature of their political life were the Shambaa and the Pare. It seems possible that both were implicated in Shungwaya, and both are certainly mentioned as being 'in it' by the Shungwaya peoples, yet there is no mention of it in any of their recorded traditions.'5 A deliberate suppression of earlier traditions concerning Shungwaya seems to have occurred on and to the north of the River Juba during the last two or three centuries, but certain traditions survive which conflict with the more recently established version of the area's past. No sacred settlement now plays any role in the self-perceptions of any traditionally-oriented indigenous group in southern Somalia except Old Mogadishu, Merca, Barawa, and the Bajuni settlements. But sacred settlements must have existed as late as the eighteenth century and possibly into the nineteenth. These were known by some form of the Eastern Cushitic term hamar, which corresponds almost exactly with the Bantu mjji or kaya, with their various connotations. Hamar Weyne survives as a ward of Mogadishu (and a deme of the older town), the Bantu-speaking townsmen of Barawa are still known as hammaran, amarani or amrani and their Somali-

Swahili Traditions & Metaphors speaking counterparts in Merca and Mogadishu as Rer Hamar, while Oromo-speakers call all Swahili hamara. A number of ruined sites are known by the general term hamarjajab, 'smashed hamar', and some of these bear witness to the forceful suppression of earlier Shungwaya-related states and statelets.16 This would have been by northern Somali-speaking, anti-urban, camel pastoralists who drifted southwards in the fourteenth or fifteenth century but who made no real impact until the eighteenth or nineteenth. It tends to be reflected, in the traditions of those who accept the Pan-Somali Genealogy Metaphor as their real history, as the victory of true (i.e.
pastoral) Islam over the dark forces of non-Islamic sorcery, and the eponymous clan founders often appear as heroes who single-handed fought and, with Allah's aid, vanquished the previous 'magicians' Another version of the area's history can be reconstructed from the traditions of the Bajuni and others who do not see themselves as Somalis. We shall recapitulate this version in Chapter Seven.

Although many Shungwaya traditions have been lost by peoples who have wished to adopt Genealogy Metaphors, such as the Somali (we lack space to discuss this situation in detail), let us examine a few salient points from those that do survive. A curiosity of Shungwaya origin traditions is that Shungwaya itself was neither very far away from nor the source of any special trade-goods - though, as well as iron, Swahili cloth and, later, fabrics imported from India and elsewhere may have reached the interior from it as the flow of Misri cloth failed. The main motive for claiming these to have 'come from' Shungwaya must accordingly have been its prestige, as the traditions quoted earlier suggest. Its capital was an important place, its king ruled over the ancestors of many different peoples, and its laws were famous. When such places were distant, it had to be inferred from their marvellous products that their peoples had magical powers, but no such inference for the Shungwaya was necessary since it was known that it had a potent magic.

It is time to define this term more closely. Unless otherwise stated, we shall use it to mean any scientific or pseudo-scientific knowledge used for broadly political ends, save only military knowledge (including superior weapons used on the battlefield). The word thus has no pejorative overtones. Magic in this sense is frequently symbolised by concrete things and accompanied by ritual; by extension the term is also used to cover both things and rituals. Certain sorts of clothes, houses, or books can be magical. Regalia items are almost by definition magical, as are ceremonies involving their use.

Let us turn to the 'Shungwaya peoples', beginning with the Mijikenda. According to the 1961 Kenya Government Census, they now number over 500,000 (Giriama nearly 200,000, Digo and Duruma each over 100,000, Chonyi over 50,000 and Rabai nearly 30,000: none of the other groups reached 10,000). Rebmann's 1848 estimates did not show any group over 1,500, and the populations seem to have risen very sharply since. The vast majority are either farmers or fishermen, though the Giriama include cattle-keepers. Linguistically they can usefully be divided into three groups: Southern Mijikenda (Digo), Central Mijikenda (Rabai and Duruma), and Northern Mijikenda (the rest). Northern and Southern Mijikenda are fairly distant from one another, though most people can understand each other. More significantly, the Southern Mijikenda have a matrilineal descent-system, like the Zaramo and many other Bantuspeaking groups in northeastern coastal Tanzania, the Central Mijikenda have matriclans and patricians, and the Northern Mijikenda are strictly patrilineal. If we exclude the Digo, who have 58 matriclans, the 34 patriclans of the remaining groups share a mere 23 clan names. Only the Giriama do not share clan names with the others, though they do share a few sub-clan
names. The boundaries between the kayas are fairly easily crossed, a person of one group being able to join in the initiation rites of another and secure adoption by one of its sub-clans.'8

According to their traditions the Mijikenda arrived in their present homeland en masse from Shungwaya (vaguely remembered as somewhere to the north) some seven age-sets ago. Since the last age-set finished in c. 1930 and each lasts for fifty to fifty-two years, this means that they would have left Shungwaya in the mid-sixteenth century and would have reached the Mombasa-Malindi hinterland and founded their kayas by c. 1600 or 1650. This fits well enough with a people known to the Portuguese as Mossungalos (Mossungulos, Muzungulos, etc.), mentioned as living behind Mombasa in 1611. Some were subject to a 'King Manazombo' (possibly to be connected with the Dzombo clan of the Ribe), others were under a 'King of Chone' (sc. Chonyi), who in the seventeenth century controlled the port of Mtwapa just north of Mombasa. By c. 1700 these people were also known to the Portuguese as Vanica or Vanika, undoubtedly the Swahili term waJyika (literally 'people of the bush-lands') which is now used unflatteringly of all Mijikenda.19

However, it is by no means certain that either the Mossungalos or the Vanica were entirely co-terminous with the ancestral Mijikenda. Both are likely to have been vague and general terms.20 And we cannot accept at face value Mijikenda origin traditions. It is already clear that several kayas were occupied well before c. 1600.21 There is also persuasive evidence that the Digo language was being spoken near Vumba long before c. 1600, which is when, according to themselves, the Digo first arrived there.22

Most Mijikenda tales describe as happening 'in Shungwaya' only those things that are clear validations of their own rituals, customs and institutions, and supply little in the way of further detail. They tell us, for example, that every virgin bride in Shungwaya had to be deflowered by an mGala before she might sleep with her own husband, but not what sort of mGala, and not that he was the ruler of the state and perhaps also the bride's own putative father - all this we have to learn from the traditions of other Shungwaya peoples. (An exception must here be made of Southern Digo historical traditions which include a number idiosyncratic to themselves.)

Mijikenda traditions confirm that there were several Shungwayas - one 'beyond Pokomo and the Tana River', one 'on the seashore, not beyond Pokomo', and one known as Shungwaya N'dogo ('Little Shungwaya'), which

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could be the same as the one 'beyond Pokomo' 2S These and one or two other references also indicate that a few Mijikenda ancestors must indeed once have lived north of the Tana.24

Many Mijikenda historical traditions still use the Safari Metaphor, so that we can see them changing their accounts of where they originally 'came from' as their worldview changes. When they become Muslims or mix with Muslims they often speak of 'coming from' Mecca and/or Medina before (or, in some cases, instead of) Shungwaya, while if they become Christians they speak of originating in
Babel or some other biblical place. For much the same reason, towards the end of the last century some Bajuni and other Muslim informants began to add an origin in Mecca or Medina to their older traditions of origin in Shungwaya. Mijikenda origin traditions can be called 'tribal' in the sense that they validate customs and institutions unique to Mijikenda groups. For example, the different groups are often ranked according to the order in which they are supposed to have left Shungwaya, participation of members of one group in the rituals of another thereby being justified by such ranking. During this century they have also become tribal in the sense that they have helped unite all Mijikenda into a single quasi-tribal political body.

Let us now look at the Pokomo. According to the 1961 Kenya Government Census the Pokomo numbered just over 30,000. Early visitors, with one possible exception, described four 'tribes' or 'sub-tribes' under the general heading Pokomo, and most traditionally minded Pokomo, Malakote or Korokoro elders affirm that they belong to a society with four component parts. These are, from the mouth of the Tana, the Lower Pokomo (Pokomo Malachini), the Upper Pokomo (Wantu wa Dzuu), the Malakote or Elwana (Welwan) and the Korokoro or Munyo Yaya. Some add a fifth group, the waPokomo waMgini, the iron-working people who formerly lived on and opposite the islands of the Lamu Archipelago and are now mostly absorbed by Swahilis, though some say that the Kalindi, the Pokomo sub-group living nearest to the sea, are remnants. A few waPokomo waMgini are also said to survive at Kisimayu.

These sub-tribes (as we shall call them) are not exactly parallel to the Mijikenda kayas. The kaya's structural counterpart is the kyeti or clan-alliance, of which there are several in each sub-tribe except for the Korokoro, who are few and comprise sub-tribe, clan-alliance and clan all in one. Each clan-alliance has from two to eighteen clans (sindo, plural masindo), its own ganda-capital, and regalia-drum. And, as among the Mijikenda, many clans are divided between two or three clan-alliances, fifteen or sixteen out of a total of about fifty being so divided.

The Buu clan-alliance tried, perhaps only fairly recently, to create its own 'tribal' traditions with an ancestor called Sango Vere, who came from nowhere and did not die but just disappeared. His daughter, Mkabuu, was said to have married an eponymous ancestor named Buu. But the attempt failed and it is very hard today to find two Buu who know the same version.

Linguistically the Pokomo are more complex than the Mijikenda. The Upper and Lower Pokomo speak two dialects of the same 'Sabaki' Bantu sub-family to which Swahili and the Mijikenda dialects belong. The Malakote speak a third, very archaic version of this language which is incomprehensible to other Pokomo; but they are effectively bi-lingual in this and (Cushitic) Oromo. The Korokoro speak only Oromo, and call themselves and other Pokomo Munyo, 'Korokoro' being used of them only by Bantu-speakers. This linguistic pattern has led many scholars to assume that the Korokoro, and perhaps the Malakote, 'must be' separate tribes, but this is not how the people themselves see it. The elders of all four groups share the same ngadji-secrets,
Upper Pokomo, Malakote and Korokoro elders must attend one another's funerals, and various other rituals are also shared. (Lower Pokomo elders do not usually participate in common rituals.) Since it is mostly from these people that our traditions are collected, we have to assume that waPokomo and Munyo as they appear in Bantu and Oromo language traditions refer to all four sub-tribes unless otherwise specified.

The Pokomo of the traditions thus speak at least three mutually incomprehensible languages. Alice Werner proposed that the whole tribe had been dominated since at least the seventeenth century by 'Galla' (Orma-Wardai) pastoralists, who had forced the Korokoro to speak Oromo and were forcing the Malakote to do so too when British colonial rule intervened. This seemed to fit Mijikenda stories that the Pokomo had been forced by waGala to give up their cattle as a price for continuing to live along the Tana River. Those who refused to give them up fled southwards and were known as Sagidzu, that is, presumably, Segeju. This cross-checks with Orma traditions of how they attacked a community, rich in cattle, whom they call Lemado (today a place in Buu territory). The point of this tradition is that they ought not to have attacked these people because they spoke the same language as themselves, and on account of such treachery they have had bad luck ever since.3 (The Orma, like most other Oromo-speaking herders, had a convention which prevented them from warring with anyone speaking their own tongue.)

If some Pokomo already spoke Oromo before the Orma-Wardai invasions, that would dispose of the idea that the Oromo tongue was forced on Pokomo groups by conquering pastoralists. Certainly the trend today is for Oromo-speakers further up the Tana to adopt a Bantu tongue rather than the other way around. That this has long been so is suggested by the fact that Upper Pokomo have Oromo clan names as well as or instead of Bantu ones, though no Upper Pokomo speak Oromo now; and by the fact that Pokomo personal names which are neither Christian nor Muslim are invariably Oromo in origin, as are many key terms in Pokomo society including (perhaps) ganda itself.'

We return to the Lemado tradition in Chapter Seven. Here we may note that the ancestors of the Pokomo must have included not only speakers of a Sabaki tongue but also Oromo-speakers and very possibly speakers of Southern Cushitic 'Dahaloid' and even Eastern Cushitic 'Sam' languages as well. The evidence for 'Sam'-speakers will be considered later when we discuss Segeju traditions.32 As for 'Dahaloid', Werner assembled

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persuasive evidence for her view that a people whom she called the waSanye, by whom she almost certainly meant those we now call Dahalo, had been largely absorbed by Pokomo. The first recorded reference to the Pokomo by name dates from the 1820s, when Owen and Boteler visited the Ozi (now Lower Tana) region. They mention 'Pocomasi' villages along the north bank of the (then) Tana, but also speak of the 'Dowla' (sc. Dahalo) who traded with the coastal townsfolk."

Krapf referred to the hunter-gatherers in the coastal forests south of Malindi as 'Dahalo' too, and noted that their 'capital' was called Ganda.34 These were
presumably the ancestors of today's Waata-gede, who nowadays speak an Oromo dialect. If they really spoke Dahalo then, their use of the term ganda is, of course, significant as possible evidence that this word was Southern Cushitic in origin. If they spoke Oromo, it may have been an older dialect than that of the Orma-Wardai.  

We predicted in Chapter Two that the Tana and other waterways like it would turn out to have been occupied in the pre-seventeenth-century period by pastoralists, farmers and hunters who collaborated with one another in spite of the fact that they may have spoken different languages. This can now be regarded as corroborated. Ancestral Pokomo would have included Cushitic-speaking pastoralists who gave their names to clans which also contained cultivators and hunter-gatherers, at least some of whom spoke a Bantu language. Originally, no doubt, all groups co-existed in confederations centred on sacred settlements of the Shungwaya type, and their collaboration ensured the optimum exploitation of the region's resources.

As evidence for this assumption, besides the traces of irrigation channels surviving in Buu territory, we find frequent references in the traditions to deep pits (Swahili lindi or dindi) in which the Pokomo are remembered as hiding themselves in time of danger. By analogy with southern Somalia in more recent times, we can assume that these were originally underground reservoirs for storing grain (Somali gut). Ibn Battuta also stated that Mombasa was supplied with grain from this area, which he called Sawahi-li and which is still known as Swahilini.  

In the Tana Valley, the production of enough grain to store in deep pits and export almost certainly predicates collaboration between farmers and herders. The system was disrupted by the pastoralist disturbances of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some incumbent pastoralists became the clients of the newly-arrived Orma-Wardai and adopted their language, others fled southwards, while others again lost their cattle and joined their own former clients in farming and fishing, becoming Pokomo clans or sub-clans. After the over-expansion and collapse of the Orma-Wardai about 1870, ecological pressures reasserted themselves and the earlier amicable relations between the settled groups and the herders were restored. Werner herself noticed the excellent relations between Oromospeaking Orma and Pokomo. And she must have misread the linguistic evidence, for by her time the Bantu languages were spreading upstream and out from various nuclei where they had 'always' been spoken, a process that continues today.

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It may well be that the spread of the Pokomo and Malakote languages was associated with the rise to political supremacy of the elders (wako). We may conjecture that, where and when the pastoralists dominated, there had been age-sets or descent-sets, so that political power was effectively distributed, if not among all economic groups, at least between different generations. But by the end of the nineteenth century, at any rate among the Lower and Upper Pokomo, all power was in the hands of those elders who could afford to pay for entrance to the ngadji society or that of the wagangana ('medicine-men": we are reminded of the
ma-ganga prominent in Malindi in al-Idrisi's day). Like their Mijikenda counterparts, these elders had certain dress privileges (only they wore turbans), and they had power of life and death and were much feared for their oaths and curses.

It is possible that these magical powers were bolstered, like those of the Mijikenda, by a Shungwaya origin tradition. Certainly the funerals of important elders were the occasion for considerable ceremonies which took place in the gandas. But we have no particular evidence of Shungwaya being invoked, and, while this may be because the elders' power has been more effectively destroyed than is the case among the Mijikenda (by the spread of Christianity, and by Islam), it may be because the gandas played a rather different role from the kayas and were less relevant to the direct exercise of authority.

All Mijikenda were traditionally expected to live within a kaya, whose gates were locked at night, and thereafter any individual was at the elders' mercy. When the younger men took to living outside the kaya the Mijikenda gerontocracy crumbled. But Pokomos did not usually live inside the ganda in time of peace, nor did they aspire to be buried there. Nor would the average ganda be permanent since it had to be moved whenever the Tana changed its course. Pokomo elders may have relied less heavily on the Shungwaya-derived sacred settlement mystique and more upon other magical themes.

Shungwaya traditions must have underwritten the sanctity of the gandasettlements all the same, making them places where unrelated or only very distantly related groups could all feel, if not equal, at least equally at home. Bunger reports that the 'founding' clan of every ganda and its corresponding dan-alliance had a tradition of origin either in Shungwaya itself, in Bua ('Dispersal from Shungwaya'), or - in the single case of the Kalindi - in Lamu Island. (The only exception was the Zubaki clan-alliance of the Upper Pokomo whose founding clan only had an Oromo name, Uta). Each founding clan is also said to have reached its present territory either by moving upstream from Shaka, on the coast near the present mouth of the Tana (which may once have been a Shungwaya capital) or by moving downstream from somewhere beyond Hameye, the furthest upstream Korokoro settlements. Taken at face value, these two statements are incompatible, unless there was another Shungwaya beyond Hameye; and they also seem contradicted by the fact that most if not all clans were themselves composite.

But the contradiction resolves itself once we realise that to say that a Swahili Traditions & Metaphors founding clan 'comes from Shungwaya' is only another way of saying that its ganda-settlement itself was a sacred, Shungwaya-like settlement in which disparate groups could coexist peaceably. Most Pokomo clans seem likely to have originated (or anyway lived for many centuries) in territory which was at one time controlled either by Great Shungwaya or by one or more of its successor-states. The impression is that they did not come together in their present clan-alliances much before the seventeenth century and traditions about their early history are of interest to us whether these mention Shungwaya or not.
An important topic is the division between the Upper and Lower Pokomo, which is not a mere break in a linguistic and cultural continuum but something much more marked. The Upper Pokomo circumcise all males, the Lower Pokomo, uniquely in eastern Kenya, do not - and both groups insist that this pattern goes back to long before their adoption of Islam and Christianity respectively. The Upper Pokomo are exogamous, the Lower Pokomo are not. The two groups have different sets of kinship terms, that of the Upper Pokomo reflecting the Oromo one. The Upper Pokomo have been said to 'tend to deal with the Swahilis as equals, even claiming that they are really Pokomo who have forgotten their origins', while the Lower Pokomo have a far more ambivalent attitude towards their coastal neighbours. Finally, there are surprising differences between the two dialects, described as about as distant from one another as Northern and Southern Mijikenda. According to Dr Nurse, Lower Pokomo shows signs of closer contact, not only with ancestral Mijikendaspeakers but also with a 'Thagicu' tongue which he identifies as protoMeru4

The Pokomo tradition most relevant to all this is the one that mentions Funo Liongo. He is perceived as a contemporary of Sango Vere or Vere Sango. Liongo is alleged to have subdued the Tana river-dwellers as far upstream as the territory of the Mwina clan-alliance, and to have extracted an annual tribute (two girls and two boys from large villages, one of each from smaller ones) from all under his sway. We shall return to the topic of Liongo later and need only note here that he was the ruler of Ozi, a Shungwaya successor-state on the Lower Tana, in the late fifteenth century and was finally overthrown by Pate, which absorbed his domains. The upper limit of the territory of the Mwina clan-alliance, the boundary of Liongo's kingdom, coincides with the boundary between the Lower and the Upper Pokomo. The ancestors of the latter are likely to have been treated by him more or less as equals, since the maintenance of his traderoute to the interior depended upon them and upon the ancestral Malakote and Korokoro beyond. To the extent that Liongo's kingdom and that of his successors symbolised Swahilidom, this would account for the Upper Pokomos' attitude to modern Swahis, whom they probably see as kinsmen, former diye-paying colleagues, or blood-brothers. His relations with the Lower Pokomo seem likely to have been very different. According to Samson's version of the Liongo story, Sango was at first a friend of Liongo, but was later 'beaten' by him in a quarrel and forced to pay tribute. Later again,

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Sango was visiting Liongo's commercial capital at Shaka where he saw people like himself, speaking the same language. Sango made an arrangement with Liongo that these people should follow him to the river to live with him and cultivate and help pay the tribute. Liongo agreed, and gave him these people who allegedly became the Kalindi.43

Now, Liongo is known from the Pate Chronicle to have extended his kingdom until it stretched from Malindi to Pokomoni, the creek opposite Pate Island which is said to be a Pokomo homeland. It sounds as if he also expanded up the Tana to
Mwina (about forty miles from the coast) and resettled a good number of Bantu-speaking farmers on and around the Tana, presumably to produce corn of which some was taken as tribute. Those resettled would have been of client status, forbidden to intermarry with pastoralists or ex-pastoralists or to move away without their overlords' permission. Nor would they have had age- or descent-sets, and it is possible that they were forbidden to circumcise males, circumcision being the usual proof of adult status. (However, the Lower Pokomo certainly have age-sets of a sort today.) They could have included speakers of an ancestral Mijikenda tongue from near Malindi as well as some of the ancestral Pokomo-speaking groups from Pokomoni (remembered as the Buu homeland). And conceivably a few speakers of an ancestral Meru tongue also came to assist in the riverine trade.

Such a population could well have been ancestral to the modern Lower Pokomo, although this is still very hypothetical. A better collection of Pokomo traditions and the systematic excavation of Liongo's commercial capital (probably on the site now known as Old Kipini) and of the Tana River Shungwaya-site near Golbanti might indicate an entirely different story. Among other things, it might yield evidence for 'Thagicu' influence, for we shall argue later that Daisu-speaking pastoralists may have played a prominent role in Liongo's Ozi.

Notes

2. Spear, Traditions of Origin, pp. 31, 36, 45, 47 and passim.
3. For genealogies, see I.M. Lewis, Peoples of a Horn, p. 15 and passim.
7. R.J. Trillo, 'Fashion and fabrics: the symbolic use of cloth in Swahili society' unpublished

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M.A. dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1984. This also contains some stimulating ideas about the importance of cloth generally in the Swahili world. For its importance in the interior further south (for which fuller Portuguese records exist), see E.A. Alpers, Ivory and Slaves in East and Central Africa, Nairobi, 1975, pp. 21-2, 31, 35, 55, 200. For indigo plantations in the Kerimbas, see J. Strandes, The Portuguese Period in East Africa (ed. J.S. Kirkman), Nairobi, 1961, p. 122. For the unpicking and reweaving of blue cloth, see ibid. p. 79. For kabamahumbo, see Bunger, Upper Pokomo, p.
75.
21. I am grateful to Henry Mutoro of the Department of History and Archaeology, Nairobi
University, for information on this topic.
22. See below p. 151.
30. Werner, 'Some notes on the waPokomo', pp. 367-8; 'Bantu tribes', p. 328; 'Pokomo', p. 89. I owe the extremely important Orma tradition to Hilarie Kelly, to whom I am grateful.
31. Prim, Northeastern Bantu, p. 21; Bunger, Upper Pokomo, p. 20; Heine and Mohlig, eds, Language Atlas I, p. 15; and N.A. Townsend, personal communication. I owe much of my understanding of the complexity of Pokomo-Orma relations to the late Norman Townsend, and this may be an appropriate place to regret that his early death has deprived us of a scholar whose further contributions in this area would assuredly have been most valuable.
32. See below p. 104.
34. See Krapf's map of his journeys, 1837-1855, and Hassenstein's 1865 map, the latter conveniently reproduced in K. Stahl, History of the Chagga People of Milimanjaro, The Hague, 1964, p. 36.
35. See Volume V of the Language and Dialect Atlas of Kenya, edited by Heine and Mohlig, which is entirely devoted to Oromo dialects; also C.W. Hobley, The waLangulu or Ariangulu of the Taru Desert', Man 8-9, 1912, pp. 18-21.
Five
Segeju Traditions
We next turn to the Segeju traditions, and to the traditions of Other peoples about them (in Swahili and other coastal Bantu tongues, waSegju, singular mSegju; the Portuguese Mossequeos, Mocequeys, etc.). Of these there is an extraordinary number for what is now so small a group (at most 20,000 people), and they are of unparalleled complexity. They must be tackled, for of all peoples the Segeju are clearly the most central to Shungwaya.

A recent study describes the Segeju as speaking three languages. Those living along the coast speak Swahili and only Swahili; the clan or moiety (Prins calls it a sub-tribe) living up the Umba River and around Bwiti below the escarpment which marks the northern edge of the Shambaa Plateau speaks Daisu; those living in between speak 'Digo-Segeju', which is not easily distinguished by outsiders from the language of the Digo, but which is differentiated from it by the Digo and Segeju themselves) Of these tongues, Swahili and Digo-Segeju belong to the 'Sabaki' sub-branch of Northeastern Bantu, along with Pokomo and Mijikenda dialects, but Daisu belongs to the 'Thagicu' or Central Kenya Highland sub-family together with Kamba, Kikuyu, Meru, and others including - by one classification Sonjo.2 Many scholars have assumed that Daisu must be the 'real' Segeju language, and that those speaking others are on their way into or (more probably) out of the Segeju tribal unit. Segeju traditions suggest that people who were known as Segeju have long spoken several languages, including some which they do not speak any longer. And when we recall that they live along the Umba, stretching from the coast to the edge of the highlands, it looks as if they might be, like the Pokomo, a confederation of different economic and linguistic groups lining a potential trade-route to the interior rather than a one-language, one-culture tribe. Although their traditions mostly concern nomadic pastoralists, the modern Segeju are all either townsmen or cultivators with few if any flocks. Presumably the herders who in the past dominated one or more groups of non-pastoralist clients within a single community have disappeared, leaving their traditions to their clients as being their heirs. There are many parallels to this situation in Somali history.3

We may sort Segeju traditions into four levels. These levels are similar

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to the 'layers' of which we spoke in Chapter Three, but the topmost level is defined, not as the most recent but as the most superficial (in the sense that it raises fewest problems). At Level One the story is relatively simple. A group of pastoralists is known to have reached the coast from the interior some time in the sixteenth century, and to
have taken up residence behind Malindi. They are described, c. 1571, by a Portuguese historian:

They have neither holy days, cultivated land, nor houses; they live in the fields or woods and cover their heads with stinking day, the smell caused by its being mixed with different oils, and to them it is very delicious. They have large numbers of cattle and subsist upon their blood and milk mixed together, which they eat raw, and they have no other ordinary food according to report; they bleed their oxen on alternate days.

The account goes on with a rather garbled story about how they emasculate their enemies, taking the severed parts back to their king; but a slightly later Portuguese document makes it clear that this and the mudpack on the head are part of an age-set or descent-set system of some sort. From boyhood they have mud crowns fastened on their hair which are steadily enlarged, sometimes weighing five or six pounds, [until they kill a foe and show.] tokens of the fact [to their leader], which only makes them free and knights of their caste. Segeju traditions indicate that these herders came to the coast from somewhere near Kiluluma, to the southeast of Mount Kenya where the Tana River flows down through rapids into the great lowland plain. This is still recognised as the home of the Daisu (Dhaicho, a-Thaisu, Thagicu, etc.) By c.1585 they had an agreement with the King of Malindi to defend his settlement in exchange for periodic payments of cloth and iron; and in that year began their short period of prominence in coastal history.

First they successfully defended him against the waZimba, remembered as a cannibal horde moving northwards from somewhere south of Kilwa, sacking Swahili settlements all along the coast. A little later, the Mossequejos themselves attacked Mombasa, but departed after looting it and moved back into the interior. They apparently passed behind the hills of the Mijikenda homeland and reappeared in their present territory, having lost their cattle on the way. They played a role in the history of Vumba Kuu, to whose ruler they were later in some sense subordinated, before c. 1630, though Portuguese sources mention a few of them living near Malindi as late as 1640.5 Perhaps they were for a short while broken up into smaller groups, some still behind Malindi and others on the Umba River. Later they linked up again and lived under Vumba's suzerainty for about two centuries, becoming cultivators, as most of them still are today.

Such are the bare bones of the history of the Segeju as it has been outlined by more than one scholar, and as it appears from Level One traditions.6 At first sight it is not easy to fault. Some traditions have been accepted, though others (the majority), including those referring to the pre-Kiluluma period as well as most of those collected from other peoples, are rejected. Portuguese references are made to fit, if only just, and a proto-tribe' is shown speaking a language ancestral to that supposed to be the 'real' Segeju tongue. One justification for ignoring the pre-Kiluluma traditions is
that most of these do not refer to the supposed Segeju ancestors as wa&gyu but as waAthrhu, waAgumba, waSinga, waKilio, Mohamed Aiio, or something else. Whatever the reason for this (and it would be unusual and perhaps unique for an African society to refer to its alleged ancestors by six or seven different names at different stages in their history), it can arguably be taken as evidence of genetic or at least linguistic discontinuity. There is, however, one piece of evidence for Segeju history which is not compatible with this simplistic version. This has nothing to do with the above-mentioned traditions, but, if we now take other traditions into account, they will give us our Level Two. The evidence in question could hardly be more solid since it is archaeological. There are, spread out along some 125-150 miles of coast from Galu, some thirty miles south of Mombasa, to Kipumbwe Mtoni, south of Pangani in modern Tanzania, at least eighteen deserted sites associated with the Segeju and known as 'Segeju walled towns' (The modern Segeju territory does not stretch so far north or south.) A typical 'walled town' is roughly rectangular in shape (although where on the sea their walls follow the shoreline), and encloses anything from one to seven acres within a coral rag and mortar wall which, we are told, was usually preceded by a wooden palisade. These walls are mostly well-constructed and more or less indistinguishable from those built by Swahilis, the usual height being seven to ten feet. Most of them have defensive bastions and one or more gateways, usually with gatehouses and often also upstairs guardrooms above the entrance. The majority of these sites are believed to be of mid- to late nineteenth-century date, which the presence of enfiladed slots for firing on attackers (a typical architectural feature of this era) would seem to confirm, but some are undoubtedly earlier. The only two to survive in modern Kenya, at Galu and Tumbe, look earlier (they have no bastions), and the Swahili story entitled 'The Taking of Tumbe Town' certainly refers to prenineteenth-century events, though it is not clear that it refers to the Tumbe site in question. Of those in Tanzania, one at Chongo-liani is also said to be older, while Burton was told that the one at Ndumi, near Tanga, was built during the time when the Yarubi ruled Oman, which would make it early eighteenth-century at the latest. Each 'walled town' includes at least one well, and a few also have mosques or Muslim tombs of older or contemporary date. They are remembered as being constructed to defend Segeju cattle against 'Maasai', although some at least were never completed. The Segeju themselves did not live inside the walls, but in impermanent structures outside them. Unless we reject the connection of the Segeju with these sites, we must modify our Level One version of Segeju history considerably. For, while it might be possible for people whom the Portuguese described as ferocious nomads living 'in the fields and woods' behind Malindi in the 1580s and 1590s to become fairly innocuous sedentary farmers in the course of the next three centuries, it is harder to believe that people who
were not even building houses, while living near Malindi as late as 1640, were producing coral rag and mortar walls indistinguishable from those of the Swahilis at Ndumi, south of Tanga, a maximum of sixty or eighty years later. We have to hypothesise a number of different small groups of Segeju reaching the coast at different times and places between Maliridi and Tanga from, say, c. 1500 if not earlier. Some of these groups must have moved south from Kiluluma by an inland route while others followed the coast and entered into closer and more prolonged relations with the townsmen than did the Malindi group of the 1580s and 1590s. The longer established parties became sedentarised, perhaps adopted the Swahili language, in some cases adopted Islam, and in general became Swahilised to the point that, when more nomadic groups threatened their cattle, they built permanent enclosures around wells to protect them.

At least the Ndumi enclosure was built on the site of an earlier Swahili settlement, for the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century walls there enclose a mosque which Chittick estimated was built in the fourteenth or fifteenth century on the site of a still earlier one. In such cases the later settlers would have made use of the disused walls. Other 'walled towns' were still being built in the nineteenth century when they were abandoned. Possibly the 'Maasai' captured the Segeju cattle before the enclosures were complete. More probably their construction was interrupted by one of those terrible outbreaks of smallpox or plague, or of bovine disease, which punctuate the history of eastern Africa in the 1860-1900 period. In that event, the cattle would either have died or been disposed of, and those coastal Segeju who survived would either have been absorbed into the coastal settlements or joined their less Swahilised counterparts in the interior as cultivators. This would also account for the shrinkage of Segeju territory and for the virtual disappearance of the pastoralist element of Segeju society.

As well as explaining the 'Segeju walled towns' and the Swahilispeaking element among the modern Segeju, this version of Segeju history permits us to accept several 'strong' and/or 'clean' traditions. One concerns the Kilindini, one of the 'Three Tribes' which, in confederation with the 'Nine Tribes' (in Swahili, respectively Thelatha Taifa and Tsa Tajfa), make up the Swahili community in Mombasa. Guillain, generally a meticulous recorder, heard in the mid-nineteenth century that the ancestral Kilindini preceded the main Mijikenda and Segeju groups in the 'flight from Shungwaya', though some Segeju accompanied them 'as servants' (perhaps wahadimu, 'clients'). These people must have settled on the mainland near Mombasa (first at Ukunda near Galu, later opposite Mombasa Island itself) long before 1571, when the Mossequ&os were first mentioned near Malindi.

Portuguese sources relate that, after their defeat of the waZimba, the Mossegujos remained near the coast. They attacked Kilifi, apparently at Malindi’s request, and intervened once more to save Malindi itself only a year or so later when it was invaded by a force led by the ruler of Mombasa. The Mombasa ruler and his sons were killed, whereupon the
AMossequejos sacked Mombasa and, having looted it, offered it to the King of Malindi in place of his own settlement. This does not sound like the action of a hoard of savages intent on rapine and 'tokens' who had first heard of the Malindi ruler a mere twenty years before, but suggests that the relationship with Malindi was of much longer standing. They would have known how Malindi's prosperity had been undermined by Mombasa's better natural harbour and more vigorous trade, and would have understood that their royal patron's success could best be restored by placing these things at his disposal. The whole operation was evidently carried out with sufficient diplomacy to satisfy the Portuguese, who briefly toyed with the idea of installing a scion of the Kilifi royal house in Mombasa instead of the Malindi one.

The supposition that the Kilindini were urbanised Segeju would also explain how, in time, they came to be the patrons of the Digo and Duruma, Mijikenda peoples whose kayas were 'founded' by Segeju refugees from the north.0 The Level Two version also enables us to accommodate the tradition that Ivoo, the ruler of Vumba Kuu who sometime before c. 1630 invited Segeju warriors to help him suppress his waShirai Swahili neighbours, was himself an mSegu. He chose a Segeju throne name - the ivoo (in Mijikenda dialects luvoo) is the ivory armlet worn as a symbol of high status, in origin permitted only to those who had taken at least one 'token' but later assumed by all influential figures 11 Assuming this was his real throne name, he would have had to select it during his enthronement rituals; and the fact that he chose a Segeju term where all his predecessors had selected either Swahili or Digo ones seems a clear affirmation of strong Segeju affinities.'2

This Second-level version of Segeju history is preferable to the Level One version. It takes account of the archaeological evidence and enables us to accept several additional traditions, and also more nearly fits Nurses linguistic conclusions.' And it is inherently more probable. Although clusters of nomads may occasionally have gyrated over the face of the continent as the waZimba allegedly did, this would not have been a common occurrence. Given that Segeju ancestors were already living on the Upper Tana and not far from the Upper Sabaki, it is likely that they had long-standing relationships with the coastal settlements, and that some of them also lived at or near the coast, permanently or seasonally, long before the main population moved down to it in the late sixteenth century. Such people would have become in some degree Swahilised. The Level One version is an example of what we shall call the unilinear model: it visualises a single population doing a one-off migration and becoming sedentarised and converted to cultivation at a uniform speed. Although such unilinear models are often adopted in a people's own historical traditions, it is not how things usually happen. It is much easier to believe that different groups reached the coast at different times and places and became sedentarised at different rates, some ending up as Swahili townsmen and others joining the Mijikenda kayas or 'founding' new ones, while others again became the modern Segeju. In this way

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there is no paradox in the Kilindini being kinsmen of the Malindi Mossequejos, or
in Ivoо, the Muslim ruler of Vumba Kuu, being an mSegeu simultaneously with
the non-Muslim warriors he summoned to his aid. They were just at different
stages along the road to urbanisation.
But the Level Two account of Segeju history still forces us to dismiss most of
their own traditions and of other peoples' traditions about them. Even if we ignore
those Segeju origin traditions which go back to a preShungwaya period, there are
still numerous others which cannot be made to fit it. These fall into two
categories:
1 those which suggest that the ancestral waSegeu (waziirau, waNgumba,
waSINGa, waKilio, Mohamed Kilio, etc.) were in some way linked with groups,
all of them living north of the Tana and some of them north of the Juba, who
either still speak Cushitic languages or who can be
shown to have done so formerly; and
2 those which link them only to people who, now at any rate, speak a
Bantu tongue and live either on the Tana, like the Pokomo, or south
of it like the Mijikenda.
The Segejus' own traditions belong almost exclusively to the former category.
Though they occasionally mention the Digo, neither the Pokomo nor any other
Mijikenda play any important role in them. It is Pokomo and, above all,
Mijikenda tradition which constantly stresses these peoples' links with the waegju.
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Although many of the traditions suggesting a Cushitic connection are stronger and
cleaner than those suggesting a link with fellow-speakers of Bantu languages,
only Prins has ever made any serious attempt to interpret the former. Reluctance
to do so seems to arise out of an assumption that there is an additional racial gap
between 'Cushitic' and 'Bantu' which makes the linguistic gulf between them
harder to cross than the gulf between, say, the 'Thagicu' and 'Sabaki' sub-families
of Northeastern Bantu. A great many former Cushitic-language-speakers in our
area have adopted Bantu ones, though the reverse would be harder to prove. It is
accordingly wrong to dismiss strong or clean traditions about the waSegeu simply
because they seem to involve links across the BantuCushitic linguistic divide.
They may reflect Cushitic-speakers who became Bantu-speakers, either during or
before the Kiluluma period of Segeju history, or they may merely reflect non-
tribal or pre-tribal connections based on economic or other interests which existed
between speakers of different tongues.
Let us approach this Level with the three traditions of the Pokomo and the
Mijikenda regarding the Segeju. These are still numerous - of thirty Mijikenda
traditions collected by Spear in 1971 and subsequently published, one in three
mentioned the Segeju, all but one under that name. But, except for Digo ones,
they are seldom specific about plausible historical persons or incidents.5 We hear
only of the 'flight from Shungwaya', the Segeju usually being listed as the first to
leave.
A common theme is that they were in some respect 'the same as' one of the
Mijikenda. Werner recorded a Kauma tradition that the Segeju,
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Digo and Kauma were miango mmo a (literally 'from one door or gateway'), while elsewhere the Segeju are also equated with the Digo, the Chonyi, or one of the other groups. It is the Mijikenda whose traditions suggest that the Segeju and the Pokomo were once united, and that it was only during the 'flight from Shungwaya' that the Pokomo were separated from them. There are various Pokomo traditions mentioning the Segeju. Krapf, for instance, heard that the Segeju language was the same as that of the Chara, one of the Lower Pokomo clan-alliances, and there is a story of a late nineteenth-century missionary on the Tana who visited Segeju territory in modern Tanzania and found he could speak their language.

If we now turn to traditions regarding the ancestral Segejus' links with Cushitic-speakers, we find a very different picture of fascinating and often verifiable details. Perhaps the strongest set of traditions is the one linking the Segeju with the Katwa. This was first recorded by Hollis in the last century and was still to be heard some fifty years later when Baker published his Segeju traditions. It is also confirmed, at least in part, by the Katwas' own traditions and by clan names, as well as by a quite independent tradition collected in Mandera, in northern Kenya, in c. 1930.

But first, something about the Katwa (Swahili waKatwa or a-Katwa). They are divided into the Katwa section of the Bajuni (classified as Swahilis for our purposes) and a much smaller Northern Swahili Katwa group.

The Bajuni themselves are clearly a confederation. They claim eighteen clans (kamasi, although the term is unknown in other Swahili dialects save that of Siyu). These eighteen are known as the 'Ten of the Miuli and the Eight of the Bana' (Kumi za Miuli na Nane za Bana). The 'Ten' appear to be of sedentary stock, or at least to have been sedentarised much longer ago than the 'Eight'. The latter are the Katwa Bajuni, still pastoralists until forced to accept a settled existence in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Many still refuse to eat fish (a common pastoralist trait) in spite of the hardship which this entails now that most of them live where meat is often unobtainable.

The non-Bajuni (Northern Swahili) Katwa are very probably also former pastoralists. They live mostly in the settlement of Siyu but some may also have lived in Pate Town. (Neither Siyu nor Pate Town is or ever has been a Bajuni settlement, though the other two principal places on Pate Island, Faza and Kizingitini, are now effectively Bajuni, and Kizingitini may always have been.) A fifth, slightly smaller settlement known as Tundwa (pronounced by Bajunis as Tchundwa) is occupied almost entirely by Katwa Bajurui; and, although it is a bare hour on foot from Siyu, its Katwa have little connection with the non-Bajuni Katwa of Siyu and seldom intermarry with them. However, many Katwa now also live in Mombasa, where one of the Tua Tafa or 'Nine Tribes' is the aKaitwa, including both Bajuni and non-Bajuni Katwa and distinct from another tafia known as Bajuni.

Katwa clan-names pose some problems. Some but not all are common to both Bajuni and non-Bajuni Katwa, although it is not always easy to establish which.
There are many more than eight. This might be because some are exclusive to the Siyu Katwa (and so should not be counted)

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among 'the Eight'), and/or because some are alternative to others. Since there are many more than ten non-Katwa Bajuni clan names as well, it seems likely that this is an instance of having more proper names than numerical slots to fit them into - a common phenomenon in Swahili history which will be discussed later. Different clans are perceived as 'senior' in the two Katwa sections. Katwa Bajuni accept that the Autila (Avatula, Abtila, a-Vutila, etc.) is their foremost clan, while among the Siyu Katwa it is the a-Mishin" (Ameshire) and a-Dail (a-Dilh, Andille, etc.) who are senior. Moreover, though it is hard to put a firm date to the arrival of the Katwa in Siyu, it is likely to have occurred from fifty to a hundred years earlier than the arrival of the Bajuni Katwa on the southern Somali coast. And, though both groups 'came from Shungwaya', it looks as if they refer to different Shungwaya-sites.19

Although all Katwa now speak either the Bajuni or the Siyu dialect of Swahili, their clan names show that they did not formerly do so. Clan names are not always an infallible indicator of language. Some Aweer groups living in modern Kenya, for instance, have Oromo clan names yet speak Aweera, which is of the 'Sam' sub-family of Eastern Cushitic20 But, where clearly Cushitic clan names are in the process of being Bantuised (whence so many variants of each), it can only be because their owners formerly spoke a Cushitic language. However, Katwa clan names do not tell us which Cushitic language they formerly spoke, or even that they all spoke the same one. Some, like a-Bimali and Herti, suggest a Somali dialect, but Abugado, sometimes given as an alternative to a-Bimali, sounds typically Oromo, as does rava; Andille is a nineteenth-century variant of Rendille; while a-Kilio, quite apart from its Bantu (or anyway Segeju) associations, suggests a link with a large Aweera-speaking group of semipastoralists living near the Bur Gau Inlet known as the Ailii.21 Other clan names like Ferado or Firago might be Oromo, 'Sam', or something else again. Only a-Mishiri which is evidently a variant of a-Misri (cp. a-Mishir" or a-Misiri in Hollis' 1899 Segeju tradition), need not be Cushitic at all.

A different aspect of Katwa identity is illuminated by their traditions about the Aweer. Though some Kenya Aweer say that they are 'the same as' the Katwa, the Katwa deny this, and Sacleux's dictionary, likely to be based on Bajuni or (more probably) Siyu traditions collected by him in Zanzibar at the end of the nineteenth century, reported that the Katwas' 'main place of residence' was on the mainland opposite Pate Island 'where they treat the Boni [Aweer] who live among them as clients (Swahili hadimu zao)' 22 This is partially confirmed by the history of one Avatula bin Bahero Somali, a late nineteenth-century figure who was known as 'king' of the Aweer living near Witu in the Lamu hinterland. Avatula himself is said to have been neither Aweer nor (in spite of his name) Somali but a Katwa Bajuni. His capital was at a village called Balawa, which may be why Krapf thought that the Katwa lived near Barawa, though some Katwa are also linked in the traditions with the Barawa in Somalia.23 It is curious that one list of Siyu
Katwa clans should include the Hartikawa, described as exclusively hunters: one would have expected them to be relegated to client status and so to count as Aweer.

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J.A.G. Elliott, whose traditions collected among the Bajun in the 1920s remain in many respects the fullest and most useful, does not mention any Aweer affiliations but is emphatic that the Bajuni Katwa were, in origin, Garre (Gerra, Gurreh, Gare, etc.) Indeed, he nowhere even mentions the term 'Katwa', calling the members of the Eight clans 'Gurreh' throughout. This alternative is corroborated by a historical tradition of the Garre themselves. The Garre form a much larger group than either the Segeju or the Katwa, for in the 1961 census there were some 50,000 in Kenya alone, and it is likely that at least as many more were at that time in Ethiopia and/or Somalia. They live along the Juba River and, like the Segeju and the Pokomo (also river-dwellers), they speak several languages.

The southernmost group, centred at Audegle on the Lower Shebelle just southwest of Mogadishu, speaks a dialect which is classified as closer to Aweera than to any Somali dialect. Other Garre are clients of the Bimaal, Galjaal or Rahanweyn, or have become absorbed into the Tunni Confederacy, and inhabit the hinterlands of Barawa and Merca as well as of Mogadishu; whilst two other autonomous (i.e. non-client) populations live or used to live on the Upper Juba. A fourth group lives in northeastern Kenya, in an area focusing on the El Wak wells and the Daua River, a tributary of the Juba which flows through Mandera. This fourth group is the one we have already mentioned which is composed of Oromo-speaking cattle-herders and (Northern) Somali-speaking camelherders, and it is possible that the second and third groups were once similarly constituted.

An unpublished Garre tradition collected at Mandera c. 1930 by Pease, a British colonial administrator, touches on the Garre-Katwa link. The Garre regard themselves as originating 'near the Red Sea coast north of Harar', and having moved to only some 'forty or fifty miles north' of the present Kenya-Ethiopia border near Mandera. On the way they built stone houses and (allegedly) mosques, the remains of which were visible. In what is now northern Kenya they were defeated by the Borana, whereupon they fled eastward to Rahanweyn country near the Lower Shebelle. Two sections are said to have been left behind: the Gabbra, who had too many camels to flee and so stayed on to become Borana clients, and the Rendille, who were 'bush-dwellers and always refused to live in or near Garre villages' Both the Gabbra and Rendille are acknowledged to have a Garre component.

The ancestral Garre fled at first as far as Afmadu (on Lac Dera near where it joins the Lower Juba - an established junction for various longdistance routes). There they spent some time and dug the famous wells. Then they split, the majority crossing the Juba and moving on to Audegle and other places. But 'a small party from the Ailia, Bana and Birkaya [sections] turned aside at the Juba to make for the coast between Kisimayu and Lamu, where they settled with the Bajun' Here we have an unmistakable reference to the Katwa or 'Eight of the Bana', although it
may be significant that the Ailia (the Aweer Kilii and the wa/iilio or aKilio of Bajuni, Swahili, Digo and Segeju traditions) are mentioned separately from the rest. Bana, Birkaya and ilia sections still exist among

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the Garre. The Mandera Garre tradition concludes that the main party returned up the Juba once more and established trading-posts. Pease estimated that this would have been early in the nineteenth century. Given that the Borana were not a force to be reckoned with in northern Kenya much before the early or mid-seventeenth century, the Katwa Bajuni could have reached the southern Somali coast c. 1700-1725, which is what Elliott estimated, and a movement back into the interior from Audegle might well have begun c. 1800. These dates do not fit so well with the earlier arrival of the Siyu Katwa. Once again, the tradition has adopted a unilinear model, whereas we can be fairly sure that neither the flight from the Borana nor the return to the interior were one-off migrations but rather a series of movements by different groups reaching different destinations. A fluctuating tide of Garre groups coming out of the interior from c. 1500 (perhaps even earlier) up to c. 1750 and moving back in again c. 1750-c. 1950 is a much more plausible interpretation of the story. Conceivably the Garre have occupied much of their present area since c. AD 800-1000.
The earliest tradition to be recorded which links the Segeju and Katwa is Hollis', at least the section of it which begins 'in Shungwaya' and ends in Kiluluma, which in a sense is the sequel to the Mandera tradition, at least as regards the 'faint-hearted' Iilia, Bana, and Birkaya.2' The Kilii clan first arrived 'in Shungwaya', to which it had been led by its leader, Avruna, because the 'Mishi"i' (sc. Misri) ruler claimed seigneurial rights over his daughter. In Shungwaya they encountered sixteen other clans of their own tribe who had left the country (sc. Misri) at an earlier date. These sixteen were divided into six Bartashavuli clans and ten Muli ones. In time, Avrune was elected (note the verb) as overall ruler (hakim: judge' or 'arbitrator' might be a better translation). At first all went well but in time Avrune, too, began to make sexual claims upon his female subjects. His two brothers deserted him, each leading a separate group of iip out of Shungwaya. One settled with his descendants in Barawa while the other took his followers to Chovai, a small island settlement (now Swahili-speaking) near the Bur Gau inlet. The leaders of the Autila clan rebelled against Avrune and slew him, forcing the remaining members of his clan into exile. (The Autila are still the senior clan among the Bajuni Katwa.) Leadership of the J -iio refugees passed to a younger brother of Avrune, Bole, who took them first to Mwathi and Emethi (now known as Mea and Emezi on the mainland opposite Lamu) and then to nearby Dondo, where they split. Bole's own group lived for a while at Magogoni (opposite Pate Island) as 'guests' (or clients) of the ruler of Pate Town, but later crossed to Siyu to help defend it against Pate. As a reward they received half the settlement of Siyu and an equal share in its government. A second group took to the forests and became the Aweer, while a third moved inland to Maranga, on Mount Kenya, and thence to Kiluluma, from where they went on to become the Segeju.
It is noteworthy that all the Bajuni clans are said to have originated 'in Misri' and
to have moved to live 'in Shungwaya' (I know of no Bajuni
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tradition which mentions a residence in Misri, though it is implicit for the
ancestors of the a-Mishiri clan itself.)
The main interest of this tradition lies in the detail of its telling. It reflects a
remarkably accurate knowledge of Bajuni history and of the northern Swahili
world generally. It speaks of sixteen dans where we might expect eighteen (or
seventeen not counting the Kio thenfiselves, who are nowadays usually regarded
as one of 'the Eight'). The ten Muli clans all bear names which are attributed by
the Bajuni themselves to 'the Ten of the Miuli', while only one Banashavuli name
is not recognisable among 'the Eight of the Bana'.28 Mea and Emezi are two very
minor sites, but also associated with Bajuni newcomers in traditions collected by
Stigand and Werner; while Dondo, though once briefly occupied by the
Portuguese, and remembered in Siyu traditions as the place from which the Siyu
Katwa, and earlier the Farnau clan (said to have been the settlement's 'founders'),
crossed over to Pate Island, has become so obscure a ruin that it was not relocated
by modern scholars until 1967.29

It is remarkable that an elderly Segeju should have been able to name such places
in 1899. He even mentioned Maranga, which figures in Kikuyu and Embu
traditional histories but is not a place one would expect to find known in the
Kenya-Tanzania coastal border region.3 All this must lend a certain verisimilitude
to Segeju claims to have shared Katwa history as well as that of the Daisu-
speakers of Kiluluma.31

Later traditions were somewhat less detailed but made the same point that the
Segeju and all these northern groups, especially the Katwa, were somehow the
same. Evidence from proper names supports the claim in part, for the Swahilis of
Vanga and some Digo still call the Segeju waKilio. We might feel inclined to
reject the notion, but for the fact that in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries,
languages apart, the cultures of at least the Segeju and the Katwa do seem to have
been remarkably similar.

A striking feature of the Segeju/Mossequeos way of life in the sixteenth century
(from Portuguese sources) is that they were organised into age-sets or descent-sets
in which promotion to adult status, and hence permission to marry, was dependent
upon producing a man's 'token' We can assume that the emphasis on this declined
as they became sedentarised and began to build stone enclosures or to move into
Swahili settlements; but it would nevertheless have been remembered of them for
some time. We have no contemporary evidence that the custom was followed
among the sixteenth-century Katwa or other groups north of the Tana; but Burton,
describing the rout of a mid-nineteenth-century Zanzibari force sent to bring Siyu's
leaders to heel, mentions among the defenders 'Bajuni warriors .. [who] charged
in a firm line, brandishing spearheads like those of the waMasai a cubit long, and
shouting as they waved their standards, wooden hoops hung around with the dried
and stuffed spoils of men. '32
He might have been exaggerating - he loved to shock his Victorian readers. But the picture of the 'standards', of a type not recorded elsewhere, has a ring of truth; and we can infer that the Katwa were remembered as sometime emasculators. Evidence for the Garre and other groups

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is even less direct. Age-grades or descent-sets which formerly existed in southern Somalia would long have disappeared, since they would cut right across the principle inherent in dje-paying units. But I.M. Lewis has noted various traces of them, some among members of the Dir clan-family still living in the northwest of the country near the modern Afars, but mainly among residents of southern Somalia such as the Rahanweyn and TransJuban Darod. And Dracopoli, near the Bur Gau inlet in 1913, heard that among 'certain tribes' it was still not permitted for a man to marry until he could sport the feather headdress (Somali bal) and ebony spear-shaft which indicated that he had killed a foe. Mijikenda traditions also contain references to the ritual emasculation of a man and the severance of his right hand as a prelude to admission into adult age-grades, and can probably be taken to refer to practices which existed north of the Tana in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All in all, it looks as if the customs of the late sixteenth-century Malindi Mossequisos were paralleled among the Katwa, Garre (in so far as distinguishable), and other peoples, though, save among Oromo-speaking groups such as the Borana, they seem to have decayed or been modified earlier than in the MalindiMombasa hinterland.

When we turn to material culture, and especially to stone-built sites, although they have never been recognised, the Katwa too had 'walled towns', which were in most respects identical to the Segeju ones. One of the best surviving examples is at Emezi (Imezi, Imidhi, Midhi, etc.), listed as a 'Katwa town' by Hollis' informant (who called it Emethi) and also mentioned in the Stigand-Werner traditions. It is a rectangular enclosure roughly 250 yards by 150 yards with at least one gateway and some sort of gatehouse. Inside is a mosque and a well but no trace of human habitation. The walls, like those of contemporary Swahili and later Segeju structures, were of coral rag and lime mortar and about eight feet high. Pottery sherds found outside them suggest a sixteenth- to seventeenth-century date. Mea has not been so well surveyed, but, if it is the place called 'Mwathi' by Hollis' informant and 'Miyao' in the Stigand-Werner traditions, we might conclude from the sherds found there that a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century 'Katwa walled town' was superimposed on an earlier and longer-lived Swahili site.

Possibly the most interesting 'Katwa walled town' is that near the Bur Gau inlet described as 'Shungwaya Site I' by Chittick. It is clearly in the same category as Emezi and the somewhat later 'Segeju walled towns', and is listed as another 'Bajuni town' by Stigand and Werner. From Chittick's account it would be of late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century date and has no mosque; but it does contain a well, and also what he calls a building 'unlike anything else to be seen on this coast' This looks from photographs like a typical sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Swahili kuba or dome-roofed tomb with a low door giving access to its
interior and a niche to burn incense. It may cover a grave or may be a tomb-like shrine; it was evidently a place of Islamic pilgrimage.36

The Katwa, then, were building 'walled towns' much like those of the

Segeju Traditions

Segeju, but one or two centuries earlier than the Ndumi one and perhaps three centuries before the last 'Segeju walled town' on the north Tanzanian coast. They also had some sort of age- or descent-set system which encouraged the emasculation of foes, though again this may have decayed earlier among them. The Bajuni Katwa described by J.A.G. Elliott as arriving on the southern Somali coast in the early eighteenth century almost certainly did not practise emasculation regularly, for they moved directly into existing Swahili or non-Katwa Bajuni settlements. Nor are they known to have built 'walled towns' They claim their ancestors dug the wells in Afmadu, and so were probably at least semisedentarised before they reached the sea.

Neither ancestral Katwa nor ancestral Segeju worked iron, and both relied on the coastal settlements for it. The Katwa are said to have tipped their spears with oryx horn until the Queen of Ngumi, the island next to Chovai, arranged a supply of iron spear-blades. The Mossequejos got theirs, along with cloth, from Malindi (and later perhaps Mombasa).37 The circumstance that their spear-blades came from the coast confirms that both groups would have been visiting it before they finally migrated down to it, and reinforces the probability that each people consisted of clans comprising many smaller groups in different stages of sedentarisation and Swahilisation, held together by economic forces connected with the traderoutes.

An interpretation of these Level Three traditions can now be attempted.38 They clearly do not reflect a period when society was structured along tribal lines, in which those who spoke a single language tended to feel solidarity with one another as against speakers of another language, whatever social distinctions existed between them. On the contrary, the society they reflect can only have been one in which socio-economic distinctions cut across linguistic ones. Supreme in this society were a number of ranked pastoralist clans, of several groups in different stages of urbanisation and sedentarisation. These clans no doubt regarded themselves as 'noble' and perceived as 'commoners' all other groups, whether cultivators, hunter-gatherers, or merely pastoralists who - like the Sakuye - had lost their stock and subsisted for a while as hunters. Separate from the distinction between 'nobles' and 'commoners' would have been that between 'patrons' (or perhaps 'freemen') and 'clients' No 'commoners' could qualify as 'patrons', but a 'noble' clan might be forced to be the clients of another 'noble' clan, as the Gabbra until recently were of the Borana. Because both were 'noble', intermarriage was permitted. Indeed, intermarriage was probably permitted between members of 'noble' clans who were traditional enemies, as it was between the Borana on one side and the Rendille and Somali on the other. But marriage between 'nobles' and 'commoners', long-time neighbours with the same language and sharing a single political unit, would not have been acceptable.
This caste-like differentiation between nobles and commoners, combined with the less rigid one between patrons and clients, sustained over a long period of relative stability, would inevitably have affected cultural patterns and coloured historical traditions. The 'noble' clans not only shared age- or descent-set systems with similar initiation customs, they also built similar 'walled towns' (By c.1750 they may even have dressed similarly: both Katwa and Segeju are remembered as wearing sarong-like wrap-around cloths rather shorter than those of the Swahili and neither wore white caps or kanzus, even after they had been Islamised for some time, though all Muslim Katwa and Segeju wear them now.)

Thus their historical traditions reflected a degree of sameness, of unity covering a wider area (and incidentally indicating control of long-distance trade-routes), which could not be reflected in the traditions of their 'commoner' clients. 'Commoners' might claim a degree of oneness with their particular patrons, as the non-Digo Mijikenda and perhaps the Pokomo did with the Segeju and the Aweer with the Katwa, but they could claim no links with other 'noble' clans or clan-families. Also, the more distant the 'noble' or pastoralist element among the Segeju became from the descendants of other 'noble' clans and the greater the proportion of 'commoner' clients within Segeju society, the heavier the emphasis in Segeju historical traditions on the pre-Kiluluma period and on their connections with the Katwa, Rendille and others who were by this time living far to the north of them. We have not yet considered Segeju traditions belonging to the earliest phase, which suggest an origin in 'preShungwaya' conceived either in space or time. These belong to our Fourth Level, and will be considered later on.

Notes
3. I.M. Lewis, 'Nomadism to cultivation', pp. 68-9. The Somalis call such peoples soar, a term which, as Lewis points out, is both vivid and accurate, since it more strictly refers to a tree whose own growth has been sapped by an over-luxuriant parasitic growth.
6. See, for instance, Spear, Traditions of Origin, p. 16.
9. Guillain, Documents, Im, pp. 240-5.
Seg4u Traditions
A.C. Hollis, 'Notes on the history of the waVumba, East Africa', JRA! 30 (1900), pp. 279-82.
28. The only Banashavui clan which does not figure in Swahili or Bajuni lists is the Mwiwa. Could they be the people of Mea?
35. Horton,'Early settlement', p. 359 (where Emezi is called Wange); T.H. Wilson, The
Six Shirazi Traditions

The Composition of Shungwaya

Swahili traditions of origin furnish an excellent example of the layering of historical traditions, each layer making use of a different Safari Metaphor. It is usually supposed that the earliest or lowest layer is the tradition indicating an origin in Shiraz, Persia. A story tracing back to Shiraz the first ruler of Kilwa (and also, in one version, his ministers) appears in the Kilwa Chronicle, which was probably written in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, and this tradition was already embedded in De Barros' history by the middle of that century. But in fact we can trace another layer for which there is an indirect piece of evidence in a still earlier document, although as a historical tradition we only find it 'peeping through' in later contexts.

We can best explain it by beginning with a tradition collected by Burton, who heard that Malindi was founded by various sheikhs from Shiraz who had, however, stopped off in Shungwaya on their way. With this can be compared - amongst others - a tradition collected by Lambert in the present century that Jomvu's founders came from Medina by way of Shungwaya. Such traditions remind us of modern Mijikenda ones about 'coming from' Mecca and Medina via Shungwaya. As we have seen, what these really reflect is part-acceptance of Islam and all its magic combined with a reluctance to relinquish totally their former 'place of origin' in Shungwaya and its magic. Is it possible that the Swahili traditions likewise represent a somewhat reluctant Islamisation, albeit at a much earlier date, and that the Shiraz episode is merely tacked on to the front of an earlier Shungwaya origin tradition? And, if so, might a Shungwaya stage merely have been omitted from the Kitwa Chronicle version, rather as it is omitted in a few Bajuni and Mijikenda traditions which are for the consumption of outsiders rather than of the Swahilis themselves?

The evidence is persuasive. Indeed, the two names 'Shirazi' and 'Shungwaya' are sometimes interchangeable. In 1847 Krapf was told that Shungwaya, though 'now a decayed place on the coast of Patta [Pate]', was 'the original seat' of the Swahilis, who were driven out of it by the 'Galla' and fled, first to Malindi and later to Mombasa. At about the same
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time another Swahili informant told him that the 'original homeland' of the Segeju was 'the town of Shangaya or Shiraz, which was situated opposite Pate Island, but which is now destroyed' The Segeju were said to have been driven out by the 'Galla' and Swahilis jointly, and to have 'fled to the Ozi River, then to Kilifi Bay, and finally to Tanga. (Note the unilinear format of both traditions.)

On the other hand Burton reports that 'the Shirazi or nobles [of the Swahili] derive themselves from Shangaya, on the coast north of Lamu in about South Latitude 2° [i.e. opposite the island of Kiwayuu: J. de V Allen], whence they extend to Tungi, four days' sail south of the Rovuma River'.

Shungwaya and Shiraz continue to be bracketed. As late as 1920 Pearce published a tradition to the effect that the white pennant on the topmast of the mtepe symbolised a 'Persian Sultan', Ali of Shungwaya, who was also remembered as the founder of Kilwa. This would presumably be the same person as Ali bin Hassan al-Shirazi of the Allwa Chronicle and/or Ali bin Selemani al-Shirazi who is described as the founder of Kilwa in the Swahili Chronicle of Kilwa Kisiwani which was recorded by Velten c. 1890. Burton, by contrast, gave as the name of the first ruler of Kilwa Sultan Yusuf of Shangaya, -who is likely to be the same person as Yusuf bin Hassan al-Shirazi, and is said to have founded Kilwa Kisiwani (the historic Kilwa) in the Swahili Chronicle of Kilwa Kwinje, also collected by Velten.4 Whatever his name, it is evident that the place from which he came was known as Shirazi to some and Shungwaya to others.

Does Shirazi as it appears in Swahili traditions always, then, mean Shungwaya? The reality is more complex. What must have happened was that the Shungwaya-site opposite Pate Island at some stage acquired the additional name of Shirazi (as we shall hereafter call it, to distinguish it from the Persian Shiraz) as a result of the conflation of two separate traditions of origin. Sometimes it was called by one name, sometimes by the other, but sometimes the two were consecutive, so some Swahilis must have regarded the two places as separate. They were usually interchangeable, however.

It seems extremely likely that the Shungwaya origin tradition was the older one, and that Shungwaya itself was an older name than Shirazi, which came to be used only c. 1100 (or possibly much later) as a result of Islamisation. This could indeed reasonably be regarded as proved if we could only find evidence of Shiraz as the source of early Swahili Islam, so that traditions of 'coming from' Shirazi by way of Shungwaya would be parallel to later ones of 'coming from' Mecca and Medina by way of Shungwaya.

Such evidence exists. The Sung Shih or Annals of the Sung dynasty of China, compiled in c.1345 but referring to the period 960-1279, describe the visit to China in 1071, and again in 1081-3, of an embassy from 'Zenjistan', whose ruler was described as the Amir-i-Amiran or 'Amir of Amirs' Zenjistan is the Persian form of the Arabic Zenjibar for the East African coast, and the only place known to us on that coast whose ruler might have sent an embassy to China in 1071 was Shungwaya. Amir-i-

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Amiran is a title which, in the Caliphate itself, was used solely by the Buwayhids, whose brilliant dynasty ruled in Shiraz from AD 952 to 1055. The Shungwaya ruler must have known about the Persian city under its former Buwayhid rulers. His embassy probably used the Persian language - whence ‘Zenjistan’ - and he took what had been an exclusively Buwayhid tide as his own. Even if he was not yet completely Islamised in -1071, we can fairly conclude that he was on his way to becoming a Muslim, and that Shiraz with its Buwayhid court was his model.

We shall consider the possible links between the Persian city of Shiraz and the East African coast, and especially that Shungwaya-site which was later known as Shirazi, in Chapter Eight. Here we suggest that certain other Swahili titles seem to have been derived from the Shiraz court, while it has been suggested that one of the prototypes for some of the earliest East African coins, probably minted in Kilwa sometime during the period c. 1160-1190, was a Shirazi issue, though belonging to the later Atabeg dynasty, 1162-1175. All this supports the argument that Shiraz was a model for the first Muslim rulers on the East African mainland, which in turn explains the conflation of Shungwaya and Shirazi origin traditions.

Given that the earliest tradition of an origin in Shungwaya was overlaid by an Islamising tradition of origin in Shirazi, were all settlements with Shirazi origin traditions founded by Muslims? Evidently not, since not only was Malindi founded (in the sense of having a well and a central enclosure) in pre-Islamic times but so was Kilwa itself. Later, however, the Swahili word for founding a settlement (-buni) came to refer specifically to the construction of the first mosque. A pre-Islamic ‘foundation’ would therefore be to modern Swahilis a contradiction in terms.

Those who are remembered as the ‘founders’ of pre-Islamic settlements were probably in reality the creators of the first dynasties in Muslim times or else early Muslim leaders. Thus the Arabic version of the Kilwa Chronicle names as ‘founder’ of Kilwa Ali bin Hassan al-Shirazi, who probably did establish the first dynasty there, but the Portuguese version names Ali bin Ali, who was probably no more than the leader of an early Muslim faction. Many settlements were, of course, founded after Islamisation, and their founders were no doubt also ‘founders’ in the Swahili sense. Does a tradition of Shungwaya origin mean that the first settlers actually arrived direct from the Shungwaya-site opposite Pate Island? Support for this supposition may be found in the frequent references to ‘sailing from Shiraz’ since Shiraz itself lies far from the coast, nobody could have sailed directly from it; but, if Shiraz here stands for Shungwaya-Shirazi, then these references can be understood more literally. It is, however, unlikely that early settlers sailed directly from Shungwaya-Shirazi itself. They must have set out from somewhere near it, as their use of Wenje Ware pottery shows. But, as we have seen, to have ‘come from’ Shungwaya need not always be understood literally. It may also mean to subscribe, in whole or in part, to the traditional Shungwaya belief-system, or to claim access to Shungwaya magic, and it is more likely that the phrase as used of the early settlers bears one of these meanings.
Shirazi Traditions & the Composition of Shungwaya

In the twelfth century Shungwaya origins began to alternate with Shirazi ones, but in time these Shirazi ones, too, fell into disuse, at least in the north. Briefly, between c. 1400 and c. 1630 new leaders took over in most of the settlements north of Vumba (or rather Vanga, to which Vumba's inhabitants had moved by c. 1630); and where the former leaders survived, most changed their style of leadership, though in Jomvu and perhaps elsewhere the old style endured. Differences between old and new-style leaders were mostly social and economic, but the dispute was largely couched in religious terms; and, since they were Swahilis, it also affected their traditions of origin.

The old-style 'Shirazi Muslim' leaders were accused of not being 'proper' Muslims, their critics claiming to represent a purer form Islam. The new men dropped the tradition of origin in Shirazi or Shiraz and claimed instead to have come from 'the Arab world' (Swahili Arabuni) for what could be 'purer' than an origin in the homeland of the Prophet himself? South of what was to become the Kenya-Tanzania border, however, the Shirazi origin traditions generally survived. So, in modified form, did 'Shirazi Islam'

The earliest recorded Arabising tradition comes from Somalia and is also to be found in the works of De Barros. He incorporated much of the Kilwa Chronicle into his own history, including the account of how the 'Sultan of Shiraz' and his six sons sailed to East Africa and 'founded' the first seven Swahili settlements, a tradition that combines the Safari Metaphor with the Genealogy Metaphor. It was often recorded, and can occasionally be heard today, though the 'settlements' are seldom exactly the same in any two versions, and it may be said that it was seven royal brothers who sailed from Shiraz.8 Mogadishu and Barawa had also been 'founded', so De Barros heard, by seven brothers from the Persian Gulf. But they were said to be Arabs from 'Lacah' (presumed to be al-Hasa, near Bahrein), and Shiraz was not mentioned.9

This Arab tradition must be a pastiche of the other, Arabs from al-Hasa being substituted for Persian princes from Shiraz to suit the townsmen's new perception of themselves. In any case, Arabian origin traditions were beginning to circulate by the mid-sixteenth century if not earlier. This fits well with the demise of Shirazi traditions in most places north of Vanga by the first quarter of the seventeenth.

In spite of the al-Hasa reference, most early 'Arab' traditions referred merely to Arabuni. What usually concerned the new elite was not the precise spot their ancestors were supposed to have set out from but the length of time that their forefathers had lived on the Swahili coast. In time, however, as coastal inhabitants either were themselves Arabs or knew about Arabia, it became necessary to be more specific. This trend began in earnest with the establishment of the Omani hegemony and reached its peak under British rule.

Traditions of Arab origin accordingly became more elaborate. Leading lineages whose knowledge of Islamic history was sufficient appear to have selected appropriate-sounding names of leaders or lineages of the early Caliphate. Thus the Maawia family of Lamu claims descent from
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Mucawiya I, the Fifth Caliph, who ruled from Damascus until AD 680. (This may account for the claims of the Lamu Chronicle and one version of the Pate Chronicle that Lamu and Pate were ‘founded’ by Syrians sent out by the Caliph Abdul Malik al-Muriani in AD 696.10) An Egyptian scholar, the late Abdulhamid el-Zein, has argued that most leading Lamu lineages acquired their Arab patronyms in this way only in the nineteenth century.” Other groups looked for personal or place-names in the Arab world which resembled their own or those of their settlements. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw Swahili literati indulging in an orgy of such folk-etymologies, seen in contemporary documents such as the Book of the Zenj and the Qurratul cuyunifi Jlsbatil Bajuni.12 Few if any of such traditions date from much before c. 1875.

It may be as well to remind ourselves that many modern Swahilis are of Arab descent, either wholly or in part. Arabs were absorbed in the Swahili settlements just as non-Swahili Africans were, and we know that Arab immigrants settled from the fourteenth century onwards, and the Persians who settled may have been few until an influx of them into Zanzibar in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. But the subject of immigration does not concern us here. Until recently, traditions about Swahilis ‘coming from’ Arabia were not primarily about immigration. They were designed to support the claims of those who retailed them to have access to the magic of the Arab world, or to be purer and better Muslims than those who did not have such origin traditions. They were thus parallel to traditions of origin in Shungwaya or Shiraz.

That Swahili origin traditions have always remained metaphors, figures of speech by which those who had them asserted something about their own powers, can be shown by two localised and deviant ones recorded in the last hundred years or so. The first comes from Zanzibar and Pemba. After the c.1630 defeat of the waShirazi Swahilis by the waVumba under Ivoo, some of the vanquished patricians took refuge in Pemba and Zanzibar; but they would not have been many. From about 1900 however, the number of people on the two islands claiming Shirazi origins began to rise very sharply. This was most marked on Zanzibar, where anti-Omani sentiment led many people to deny links previously claimed with Arabia, and yet there was general reluctance to re-assume a ‘native’ or African identity. During the following years, there was the adoption of Shirazi origin tradition by many families, and by Independence a large proportion of Zanzibar’s citizens styled themselves waShirazi.’3

The other example comes from Siyu on Pate Island, a centre of opposition to Zanzibari dominance during the fifty years before 1865. The Fanau, the ‘founding’ clan which furnished the nineteenth-century rulers, adopted a tradition of Portuguese origins. The rationale, still occasionally repeated, appears to be that the Portuguese Empire was older and finer than the Arab one, so that Portuguese magic was an appropriate antidote to that of the Zanzibar dynasty. Some modern scholars have been tempted to accept Famau claims of Portuguese ancestry, but a quick
The scrutiny of the following facts shows such claims to be baseless:

A Famau sub-clan is called Bunu Renu, said to stand for Banu Reno, 'Portuguese clan'; but, even if the term Banu could be used of the Portuguese, there is no legitimate linguistic permutation by which Banu Reno could have become Bunu Renu. Nor is the folk derivation of waFamau from wafa-mai (‘they died in the water’, i.e. were shipwrecked) permissible.

* The Farnau clan claims, plausibly, to have ‘founded’ Siyu, and archaeology shows that this occurred well before 1498.

* A Catholic friar who visited Siyu in 1606 reported that nobody spoke Portuguese, and, though some Portuguese settlers lived briefly at Dondo, there is no Portuguese record of their intermarrying with Siyu patricians. A 'princess' of nearby Faza who married a Portuguese and became a Christian is, by contrast, the subject of an interminable official correspondence.14

One important set of origin traditions remains to be investigated, and we must return to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After Shiraz origin traditions fell out of favour north of Vanga, most established townsmen adopted traditions of origin in Arabia. People who subsequently converted to Islam, however, did not. Possibly the longer-established families refused to share their newly-found 'Arab' origins with the newcomers. Yet the latter were assimilated as patricians, so it was by choice that they did not adopt Arabising traditions but retained those of Shungwaya. It is paradoxical that Shungwaya traditions, once replaced by Shirazi ones, should now be acceptable again to Muslims who no longer approved of the latter. But Shungwaya origin traditions were recorded for all subsequently converted Muslim groups of the Kenya coast and southern Somalia: the Kilindini of Mombasa, the Bajuni, the Islamised Segeju and Muslims among the Mijikenda and Pokomo.

Non-Muslim Pokomo, Mijikenda, and Segeju also claimed Shungwaya origins, as did the Bajuni, of whom the Katwa section at least was at first non-Muslim. This may be an additional argument for the view that the sixteenth- to twentieth-century Muslim converts retained Shungwaya origin traditions by choice, unwilling to surrender the magic of their previous belief-system. It is not difficult to understand the revival of Shungwaya origin traditions, and the date and locality of their reappearance fit with the rejection of Shirazi ones. (South of Vanga, Shirazi ones remained acceptable and were presumably adopted by more recent converts.5) However, could Shungwaya remain so important as to be widely cited in the origin traditions of a second period four, five or even six centuries after the first? We shall later show this survival by the emergence of a number of successorstates, most of them also with a ritual capital known as 'Shungwaya', some lasting into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and one probably into the nineteenth. It would still have been reasonable to claim to have 'come from Shungwaya'
A Shungwaya origin tradition was not the only thing the pre-Islamic pastoralists who founded the Swahili settlements in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries had in common with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Katwa and Segeju. The pastoralists drank blood and milk and emasculated their foes, as did the Katwa and Segeju. The ninth- to eleventh-century coastal settlements comprised rectangular enclosures, walled at first with wooden palisades and later with coral and mortar, containing wells and used as livestock pens. So were the Katwa and Segeju 'walled towns', larger settlements whose construction resembled contemporary and not earlier Swahili ones. The first Swahilis lived outside these walls even, as did the Katwa and Segeju. Early Swahili regalias contained more or less the same things as later Segeju ones; side-blown horns were certainly important among Katwa regalia. (Also an ivory side-blown horn is said to be one of the appurtenances of chieftainship among the Gabbra.) Both groups also had some sort of go-charm buried beneath their settlements.

The parallels between the coastal pastoralists of the ninth to twelfth centuries and the Katwa and Segeju of the sixteenth and seventeenth are almost uncanny, and all the more mysterious by relations between the later Swahili townsmen and the Katwa and Segeju themselves being so close. The Mossequejos saved Malindi from the waZimba, attacked Kilifi at the Malindi ruler's behest, and captured Mombasa Island and handed it to him. The townsmen of Siyu made half of their settlement over to the Katwa, as presumably did those of southern Somalia to the Katwa Bajuni. Also, several Segeju 'walled towns', and at least one Katwa one, were on the sites of former Swahili settlements and made use of their wells. Both Katwa and Segeju were presumably taught how to build coral rag and mortar walls by contemporary Swahili craftsmen, who may even have built them for them. This was not how Swahilis normally conducted themselves: why should they have interacted so successfully with the Katwa and Segeju?

The only possible explanation is that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Swahili patricians perceived themselves as kinsmen of the Katwa and Segeju. There are three possible reasons:

1. they really were kinsmen since at least the ninth century;
2. they were not real kinsmen but were bound by links which led them to treat one another as kinsmen since the ninth century; or
3. they had become kinsmen by intermarriage, or pseudo-kinsmen through other sorts of links, only in the fifteenth or (at the earliest) late fourteenth centuries when Katwa and Segeju vanguard appeared at the coast. In that case, the parallels between the Katwa and Segeju of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the founders of the Swahili settlements in the ninth, tenth and eleventh must be coincidence, which is implausible.

If the age and genuineness of this perceived kinship dated back to the ninth century it throws a good deal of light on the identity of at least some Shirazi Traditions & the Composition of Shungwaya
early Swahilis. How real was the kinship? Were the early Swahilis called waSegeju too? A scrutiny of the traditions provides some evidence for this view, for we find pre-sixteenth century individuals and groups being called 'Segeju', implying that they are of the same stock as Segeju of later generations. The most important fifteenth-century personality so called is Fumo Liongo who ruled a Shungwaya successor-state on the Lower Tana known as the Kingdom of Ozi in the late fifteenth century. Though usually regarded as an mShirazi par excellence, he was affirmed by one of Werner's more knowledgeable informants to have been an mSegju.17 He belonged to the al-Bauri clan which, in spite of numerous attempts to Arabise it,18 undoubtedly derived from somewhere on the Tana River, perhaps the modern Bura. 

Liongo's legendary rival Mringwari is also said to have been al-Bauri,19 and if he were a Segeju who spoke a 'Thagicu' tongue, that might account for the form of his name (normally Mlingali in Northern Swahili). The Malindi royal family was also of the al-Bauri clan, and, if the throne there was held by Segeju rulers, then waSegeju were certainly on the coast as early as the thirteenth century and probably earlier. This would also throw a whole new light on the Zimba-Mossequitos episode.) There is also a branch of the family at Vanga, where it still forms one of the four waVumba clans, and another in Pemba. A fifteenth-century Pemba ruler is sometimes described as a Segeju, the man responsible for building the important fortified building at Pujini, and known by the nickname M'kame M'dume or 'Milker of Men' Like Liongo, M'kame M'dume was not only known as a Segeju, but also as mShirazi, mLDiba, and even mMvita ('Man of Mombasa').20 There are also traditions suggesting an earlier Segeju community, most of these stemming from Zanzibar and Pemba. The Segeju are said to have been 'ancestors' of all the waPemba as well as of the two indigenous communities of Zanzibar, the waTumbatu and waHadimu. Segeju are also sometimes alleged to have introduced stone (coral) building into Pemba, where it appeared before 1500, though this is more usually attributed to two mysterious peoples, the waDebuli and waDiba.21 References to Segeju mostly refer back only as far as the fifteenth century, and the others occur only in Zanzibar and Pemba; nor can any of them be dated before the present century, so it would be rash to regard them as proving a blood relationship from the beginning.

Another aspect of the relationship between the Swahili and the Segeju is suggested by the usage of the Swahili term mjomba, plural wajomba. Mjomba is primarily a reciprocal kinship term: a mother's brother and his nephew or niece. Such people treat one another with great respect, and cross-cousin marriage is approved among most Swahili groups.22 Used between members of different communities, mjomba also carries a connotation of intermarriageability. Thus a (Muslim) Swahili man might refer to a Muslim Mijikenda girl or one of her family as mjomba, but a non-Muslim non-Swahili could not refer to a Muslim Swahili girl by the same term. Hinterland groups often refer to members of their own communities who

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have become Muslims as wajomba, especially the Mijikenda living around
Mombasa, and they call the Swahilis themselves as a community wajomba, in a
non-reciprocating sense.
When Vumba Swahilis use the term wajomba without further elaboration, they
invariably refer to the Segeju, not to Muslim Digo or to other Muslims.23 This
implies that they regard intermarriage with Segeju as suitable, and much has
occurred in that area. It is tempting to believe that this has been the case since the
seventeenth century, at least as regards Islamised Segeju, conversion and
intermarriage going hand in hand.
There is another piece of evidence suggesting that Segeju who had not converted
to Islam were especially obnoxious to nineteenth-century Swahilis. The entry on
Segeju in Krapfs dictionary reports that 'the Swahili call them makafiriya
kwisha, i.e. the most consummate infidels, on account of their abominable
practices.' Hollis explains these 'abominable practices' as a form of 'second circumcision' and intercourse between
a widow and her future new husband before the deceased husband is buried.25) Such particular odium perhaps arose precisely because Islamised Segeju were
regarded as uniquely suitable marriage partners, and pressure was applied to non-
Muslims to convert. Certainly ex-pastoralists among both the Segeju and the
Katwa seem to have converted more rapidly than their 'client' Pokomo and
Mijikenda peoples, who were under no pressure whatever to convert much before
1890 or even 1920.26
A somewhat different concept which is also relevant to Swahili- Segeju relations
is utani (the prefix u- denoting the abstract); it is usually translated 'joking
relationship' Watani are people who do not have to behave with decorum towards
one another but can relax and joke. Among Swahili, grandparents and
grandchildren are watani, the relationship not requiring the degree of formality
that intercourse between parents and children does.7 But cross-cousins may also
be watani. As already noted, they are often the preferred marriage partners, and
where either marries someone else the mtani of the opposite sex is entitled to
claim 'compensation' (Swahili ugongo) in the form of money. The same
compensation can be claimed for any rite of passage, even death, and at Swahili
funerals male watani customarily dig the grave and have the right to prevent
burial of the corpse until they have received their dues. Joining a
bloodbrotherhood is a rite of passage for these purposes.28
Between communities utani is more complex. Sometimes one community is
clearly superior to its partner, as in Mafia29 or when conquering societies become
watani to those they have conquered. An intercommunity utani meant that the
non-Swahili partner would provide military assistance, while the Swahilis paid
'compensation' in cloth or iron whenever their settlement or its ruler underwent a
'rite of passage', as for example when a new ruler was installed. Utani between
Swahilis and their neighbours was very widespread. The Mossequejos of 1585
were almost certainly watani of the al-Bauri clan to which the Malindi ruler
belonged, which would explain why Malindi had to disburse to them gifts of
cotton
Shirazi Traditions & the Composition of Shungwaya cloth and iron from time to time. Mombasa may have had an utani relationship with one of the neighbouring Mossungalos groups in the 1630s, for we hear that much cloth was handed to them periodically. Kilwa would appear to have had watani on the nearby mainland by the eighteenth century; the Kilwa ruler, although titled al-Shirazi, was identified with the mainland watani rather than with the Swahili townsmen, and once even threatened to lead a mainland army against them. Various Katwa clans must have been watani to different northern Swahili communities or lineages, for Portuguese records speak of Maracatos being sent for to aid the factions on Pate Island.

The best-recorded case of utani linked the rulers of the Vumba Swahilis with the Segeju and one Digo clan (the Birini). As part of his installation ceremony, the new ruler had to meet with Segeju and Digo elders and dispense two thousand ells of cloth to them. The warriors of both groups raised their spears and swore to defend him. Similar gifts were made when a ruler underwent a rite of passage. But it was only the Birini clan of the Digo who on the ruler's death entered Vanga and neighbouring plantations and took away anything they wanted.

A third institution linked Swahili patricians with the herdsmen of the northern hinterland, namely usare or blood-brotherhood. Blood-brotherhood does not constitute 'real kinship', but it could be just as binding as real kinship. It was taken very seriously in the Shungwaya region, though most evidence dates only from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was then virtually impossible for any but the most powerfully armed European-led expedition to penetrate the interior without its leader becoming blood-brother with local inhabitants.

Nineteenth-century Swahili trading caravans also relied on blood-brotherhood to safeguard them in the interior. Two or more parties took an oath that they would accept each other's 'brothers' as their own brothers; that they would give forewarning if they knew of any attack to be made on the others; and that they would not oppose one another in council. Swahili participants, as Muslims, found repugnant the rite of consumption of fresh blood, but they had to accept the demand of their inland partners.

To recapitulate the main problem, some fifteenth-century Swahili rulers are remembered as having been wa&gyu, as are some stone-building cansestor's of the populations of Pemba and Zanzibar, but traditions are inconclusive as proof that the seventeenth-century Segeju and Katwa were descendants of the (ex-)pastoralists who founded the earliest Swahili settlements. Pseudo-kinship (ujomba, utani and usare) linked the Swahili settlements with hinterland peoples. But these cannot be shown to date back to before the seventeenth century.

We cannot study the Somali traditions in any detail, but they too seem to reflect two separate migrations of pastoralists towards the east coast. The first comprises a two-pronged movement, one, of the Pre-Hawiye coming from the northwest of modern Somalia, the other, the move of the Digil clan-family. Rather further south than the Pre-Hawiye, there was the
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prolonged migration of the great Hawiye, Dir and Darod clan-families from the northwest and north, and that of the Rahanweyn from the Ogaden.

Somali traditions reflect two migrations, one before 1100 (conceivably as early as the ninth century and so 'pre-Shungwaya') and a prolonged one several centuries later. These clearly parallel the migrations which we have discerned further south. Might not the latter be part of the same population movements? And, in that case, might not the first wave of migrants from the Somali interior have been much the same people who, further south, founded the Swahili settlements?

The people with traditions about the Swahili settlement-founders and the Segeju are the Segeju themselves - and so we come to the Fourth Level of Segeju traditions, which all speak of an origin 'in Shungwaya' Two points must be made about these nineteenth-century traditions: they appear to have derived from Swahilis, not from Segeju, and they seem to have referred to two, three or more different Shungwaya-sites. Krapf's was on the mainland opposite Pate Island; Guillain's was 'northwest of Pate', which might be the same place or the Bur Gau orJuba River site; one of Burton's was the same as Krapf's, but on another occasion it might have been the Tana River site; and Wakefield's was undoubtedly the Shungwaya on the Lower Sabaki 'near Mount Manga' These traditions do not tell us anything about 'before Shungwaya', but that during the nineteenth century the Segeju were inseparable, in the eyes of most Swahilis, from Shungwaya and its successor-states. They were 'Shungwaya people' par excellence. Of the Segeju's own traditions, the earliest recorded was Hollis' in 1899, which traced the Segeju back to Misri, from which they moved to Shungwaya. To the extent that 'Misri' can be understood as a geographical location, it must mean the Miri cloth traderoute from the Gulf of Aden down to central Kenya, a reasonably accurate description of where the earliest lowland pastoralists to reach the east coast did come from.

The next published tradition of Segeju origins was the 'el-Buhry version', in an anonymous document entitled Asiliya Afrika ('Pedigree of Africa') collected by Baker in 1918. His traditional version of Segeju history must be regarded as relatively clean, and possibly strong. The family came from the Pemba branch of the al-Bauri clan, distant kinsmen of the Malindi rulers, and through them of Fumo Liongo. They were wellplaced to know about the Swahili-Segeju past, and may have had family documents about it. According to this version, the ancestral Segeju originated in Misri. From there they moved to two 'cities' One, Rikhami, 'near Somaliland' was ruled over by a chief called Kanaani; when it collapsed its citizens scattered to become waSomali, waAlubi, waBarabara and waSinge, these last being the ancestral Segeju. The other 'city', Niran, was in a territory called Singa 'near the Galla country or, as others say, at Karamojong in Uganda', and was ruled by Ali bin Kanaani, presumably the son of the ruler of Rikhami. When Niran too collapsed after some natural disaster, its citizens became, with the waSinga, the waRusambo, waMbali, waSongo and Muware Daruwesh.

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The waSinga of Rikhami and Niran then moved to Kirau 'in search of fresh grazing for their cattle', and acquired the name waKrau, but were also known as Kilio Mohamed and are said to have 'shared a territory' with other groups, the suffix 'Mohamed' usually denoting Muslims or lapsed Muslims. From Kirau they went first to Malindi and then to Kiluluma where they 'settled with' the Daisu.38 Mist we take to be Egyptian cloth and the route by which it was brought into the East African interior. The names of the 'cities' reflect confusion with another and fairly widespread tradition according to which every African tribe originated in one or other of nine such cities. The waSinga are perceived as coming from two different cities, though it is the inland one which lies on a mountain called Singa from which they take their name. Rikhami sounds as if it might have been among Cushiticspeakers, while most of Niran's inhabitants sound like Bantu-speakers. The waSinga are differentiated both from the waBarabara and the waSomali. The waSongo could be the Sonjo, who now live in the North Tanzanian Rift near the Ngorongoro Crater, but who were originally 'waSegju from Shungwaya'. But about the waRusambo and Muware Daruwesh we can say nothing. Rikhami might stand for Berbera or some nearby port, while Niran might conceivably have been on Mount Elgon, a possible terminus for one of the Misri trade sub-routes, and it is 'near Karamojong' (It is also a defunct volcano.) Or perhaps Niran symbolised somewhere near the Ngorongoro Crater (not far from which the Sonjo now live, and also the Iraqw, among whom Misri origin traditions occur) or the Laikipia Plateau (from where the Sonjo are sometimes said to have moved to their present homeland). In that case, what lay between the two cities was the Misri trade-route. It was also from this route that Hollis' informant saw the Segeju as coming 'to Shungwaya'.

The waSinga may represent our early wave of pastoralists migrating to the east coast. We know of no other reference to the waSinga unless, as Prins has suggested, the name is to be connected with Shingani, one of the demes of Old Mogadishu.40 The word might be derived, as an alternative form waSingaji suggests, from the verb -singa, and so could mean either 'those who move about' or 'those who straighten their hair' (waBarawa and other Northern Swahilis still regard long, straight hair as a proof of 'purity of descent'). Neither of these derivations is certain, and both of them are compatible with the notion that the waSinga were our first wave of pastoralist migrants. If we accept this, then here is a clear reference in the traditions to the migration which took place over a thousand years ago and resulted in the founding of the early Swahili settlements. The second way to analyse the el-Buhry version is to see it as a series of memorable paradoxes, each of which crystallises one aspect of a leading Segeju lineage's perception of its own past. Each succeeding paradox can then be seen as containing a parable illustrating one such lineage's ideas of what is right and wrong for all Segeju. Here are the main paradoxes:

1 The waSinga live both in Rikhami and in Niran. This suggests that it is regarded as quite appropriate for the community to be divided into a coastal and an inland group. When both 'cities' collapsed, they
2 Jiran was ruled by the son of the ruler of Rikhami. While one group lived inland and the other along the coast, a junior age- or descent-set of the coastal group would join those in the interior, to control trade from that end.

3 The waSinga moved to Kirau 'in search of fresh grazing.' Though 'city' dwellers and traders, the waSinga remained first and foremost herdsmen. It will be recalled that both the early Swahilis and, later, the Segeju and Katwa kept their livestock within their walled enclosures. It will also be recalled that the dry-season grazing grounds played so important a role within Shungwaya that their names are often used almost synonymously with it. Or this could be interpreted as stressing the importance of those pastoralists who rotated between two temporarily fixed poles at either end of the trade-route.

4 In Kirau (Shungwaya) they 'share a territory, this time with lapsed Muslims like themselves. We need to note the absence of any notion of territorial exclusiveness.

5 Though they come from the north, the general movement of both populations is towards the south. It is a fact that groups of Segeju moved from the Tana to the Sabaki and then on to the Umba, while a later group moved from the Juba to the Mombasa hinterland. Perhaps because desiccation in this area usually advances from the north, bringing with it pressures from other pastoralist groups, the natural tendency would be to move to the south.

6 Neither apology nor explanation is given for frequent name change. As evidence regarding the problem of kinship versus pseudo-kinship, this may be the most crucial paradox of all. The impression conveyed is that there have always been pastoralist-dominated trade-routes between Africa's east coast and the interior. These began in the north and slowly moved or spread southwards as overseas trade extended further south. The Segeju (or perhaps just the Bauri), it is implied, are heirs to this pattern, who in their time spread the system from the Tana (or perhaps the Ewaso Nyiro or Juba) to the Umba. But they are commercial heirs rather than actual descendants of the earlier traders further north this, at least, could be the message encoded in the frequent and unexplained changes of name.

In other words, while the el-Buhry version is, at one level, a 'tribal' history couched in the usual Safari Metaphor, at another it is much more like a dynastic charter designed by and for one or more 'core' lineages such as the Bauri themselves. In an earlier chapter we hypothesised that Misri origin traditions were not 'tribal' in origin, but represented the history of a few leading lineages dispersed through different tribes, whose prestige originally arose from their association with the early cloth trade. The Bauri were just such a lineage, and this is their historical tradition as well as that of the Segeju generally.

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We can now refine our interpretation still further, treating the story as an encoded set of rules and precedents for a long-established line of merchant adventurers who were not limited to any one linguistically defined group. Indeed, they made it a point not to be: for it was precisely because they placed the interests of trade and commerce first that the Bauri and those like them managed to transcend any linguistically-defined communities. A dominant trading lineage in eastern Africa from perhaps as early as the ninth or tenth century, they would have been motivated by economic motives first and only secondarily by motives of kinship or shared culture. If the interests of commerce demanded that they spread or move into a new area (Paradox 5), or if the herders' search for new pastures made this possible or necessary (Paradox 3), they would do so. They would likewise marry new wives and adopt new customs for the sake of commerce (Paradox 4). This was especially true (as one would expect) of the younger generation (Paradox 3). But they took care not to let these new loyalties interfere with their older loyalties to each other and to trade (Paradox 1).

As their network became both denser and more widespread, they accumulated relatives and clients in such numbers that, when tribes came into fashion, they already more or less constituted one in their own right. This had its risks, for an overdeveloped sense of tribe might inhibit them from moving into new areas, marrying new wives, and doing whatever else was necessary to extend their commercial domain still further. This tradition, at least as we have interpreted it, could serve as a charter for almost indefinite expansion and migration, for intermarriage with new groups, for adopting new languages - for almost everything, in short, which might promote the interests of a freemasonry of dynamic trading families (Paradox 6). The el-Buhry tradition is a most unusual one, and could reflect the historical ideas of a lineage which perceived itself as supra-tribal.

At a different level, memories of a non-tribal past have been converted into traditions about a place where many tribes lived together and were ruled by one king - Shungwaya itself. By the present century the historical waSegju (including the Katwa) must have become very widely dispersed. Some are Northern or Southern Swahilis; others must have settled among the Rendille, Gabbra, Aweer, and probably also among the Kamba, Kikuyu, Meru and Sonjo; others again became Pokomo or Mijikenda, while more were 'lost' among the Pare, Chagga, Shambaa, Bondei and Zaramo or within the various Somali clan-families. The Segeju themselves and other 'Shungwaya peoples' recall these links by saying that all these tribes were 'in Shungwaya' with them. The el-Buhry version enables us to clarify a little more how this comes about. It was ancestral waSegou, and especially members of their core lineages, who spread out and implicated these other communities in the Shungwaya trading-system. As the coast-inland trade dried up, such people lost their influence and were replaced (except among the Pokomo and Mijikenda) by other leaders whose authority was based upon a different ideology. Such new leaders did not see traditions of origin in Misri as any
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sort of a threat, since they referred to the distant past, so they permitted them to be retained. But Shungwaya origin traditions did represent a threat to their newly-found tribal identity, and so were stamped out. But the Swahilis and Segeju did not forget them.

The discovery in Somali and Segeju traditions of what appear to be references to a wave of ninth- to eleventh-century coastward migrants who are represented - at least in Segeju traditions - as being involved 'in Shungwaya' on arrival strengthened the case for a genuine blood relationship between the early Swahili patricians and the Katwa and Segeju of the seventeenth century. But arguably they do not confirm it beyond any doubt. We shall refer to the relationship between these two groups as one of 'kinship or pseudo-kinship', with the understanding that the second does not necessarily exclude the first, and that those institutions we have bracketed under the term 'pseudo-kinship' (ujomba, utani and usare) would have been required to maintain the link between the two communities during the eight or so intervening centuries.

It remains to devise names for the various categories of people in the Shungwaya region during this pre-seventeenth-century period which can be used throughout the rest of this book. Since tribal identities did not really begin to evolve until the seventeenth century, and in some areas were hardly recognisable before the later nineteenth, it makes no sense to continue to speak of 'ancestral' Mijikenda, Pokomo, Taita, Segeju, etc. Indeed, doing so can only obscure the fact that, as the traditions dearly show, pastoralists living along river routes to the interior saw themselves as having more in common with each other than with their non-pastoralist neighbours and clients, though it was usually with the latter that they later formed tribal units.

For the first wave of pastoralist migrants to reach the east coast we shall use the term 'Pre-Segeju' This does not necessarily mean that they had a shared ancestry with the Segeju and Katwa (though they may have had, and that was probably how the Segeju and Katwa perceived them), only that they reached the coast several centuries before them and were remarkably similar in culture. The Pre-Segeju can be divided into two groups: those who began to found settlements in and around the Lamu Archipelago and further afield in the ninth century, who became the first Swahili patricians (though the Bantu-speaking iron-smiths and others of non-pastoralist origins who joined these settlements also count as the first Swahilis, albeit 'commoners'); and those who remained in and around Shungwaya-Shirazi and the other Shungwaya capitals and who probably did not, for the most part, become Muslims - or, anyway, not as early as c. 900-1100. This second group fades imperceptibly into the coastal and inland pastoralists who subsequently controlled the trade with the interior. Some of these were no doubt Pre-Segeju in origin, others were indubitably ancestral to the Katwa and Segeju. (The ambivalence is reflected in the traditions, which sometimes see men like Longo, Mkame Mdume and Ivo of Vumba Kuu as waegju and sometimes as waShirazi or members of some other Swahili group.) The second wave of pastoralist migrants who
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appeared on the coast after c. 1550 we shall refer to as Katwa-Segeju, regarding
the two as a single category, as they seem to have done themselves, in spite of the
fact that they probably spoke unrelated languages.
Cultivators and hunter-gatherers of the pre-1600 era emerge less clearly from the
traditions than do pastoralists and ex-pastoralists, though they were almost
certainly more numerous. Perhaps the pastoralists' obsession with pedigree lends
to their traditions a time-depth which those of the non-pastoralists seldom
possessed. But even the Portuguese do not have much to say about the
Mossungalos, as they called them, before the seventeenth century. We shall label
them 'Musunguli', a name which is both reminiscent of the Portuguese one and
still in use in southern Somalia, for precisely this category of people.
The Portuguese are sometimes reproached for their failure to discern tribal
groupings in eastern Africa north of Kilwa. Such reproaches are not merited, for
until the very end of their time no such groupings really existed. Their
Mossequjos were almost certainly the same as our Katwa-Segeju, for they are
marked on Portuguese maps as living all the way from somewhere near Kiluluma
to the middle Juba and beyond.41 Their Mossungalos were numerous little
separate communities of farmers, hunters, or (most often) mixed farming and
hunting peoples scattered about between and behind the Swahili settlements.
Though they are most often mentioned in the hinterland of Mombasa (where at
least three separate groups were discernible in the early seventeenth century), they
may well have lived as far north as the Juba, and perhaps also some way further
south.42 The Portuguese name must come from Musunguli or an earlier version
of it.
The African term, when used by pastoralists, refers to anyone who is not of
pastoralist stock, and who accordingly stands (or used to stand) in the relationship
of a client to themselves. People who recognise this relationship apparently
survive in modern Somalia but are rare or unknown in Kenya. Musunguli, then, is
our term for the small groups of farmers, hunters, or mixed farmer-hunters who,
in the pre-seventeenth century period, generally lived in symbiosis with the
pastoralists but were regarded as clients by them. Many would have spoken Bantu
tongues but some, no doubt, Cushitic ones, for the term, like its counterpart
Katwa-Segeju, has no linguistic implications.
One more generic name covers those other pastoralist groups who, from c. 1550
onwards, finally destroyed the Shungwaya traditions, and it is all too often
assumed that they were all Oromo-speakers - perhaps because that is what the
Somali equivalent of the term now usually implies. For such people we shall use
some such phrase as 'non-collaborating pastoralists', once again leaving their
linguistic affiliation vague.
This wariness of identifying peoples by their language is contrary to the usual
modern trend,43 but it is not accidental. Linguistic labels are of little use to
historians if they do not correspond with socio-political boundaries, which in the
Shungwaya region they did not do before recent centuries. And anyway, save in
the case of the Swahili townsmen, we simply do not know what language or languages any groups spoke at the time. The Pre-

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Segeju almost certainly spoke Cushitic tongues. At one stage some KatwaSegeju certainly spoke at least one Bantu tongue (ancestral Daisu), but others unquestionably spoke Cushitic ones. The pattern among the Musunguli is likely to have been still more complex.44 Moreover, bilingualism or multilingualism must have been very widespread (as they still are45), and language-shifts are likely to have been frequent in our area, because changing patron-client systems often lead to language-shifts, and these were quite common. Under these circumstances, linguistic labels cannot be any more precise than those that we have selected, vague as they are; and, in an area where a principal source is historical traditions which do not themselves distinguish groups by language, they are more likely to lead to confusion.

Since our discussion of historical traditions has been spread over three separate chapters, a brief recapitulation of our conclusions will be in order. The well-digging former herders who founded Shanga and similar coastal settlements c. 800-1100 were undoubtedly implicated in Shungwaya, a fact reflected in several traditions which speak of the Swahilis 'coming from Shungwaya' and by rather more which mention 'coming from Shirazi', which is in effect a Muslim way of saying the same thing. The economy of Shungwaya was based on trade between the coast and the eastern regions of the Kenyan and South Ethiopian Highlands, which may have existed before c. 800 but which was greatly enhanced by the events of the ninth and (more especially) tenth centuries. The trade-routes were dominated by lowland pastoralists, of whom the earliest arrivals comprised Pre-Segeju. Swahili patricians themselves were descended from some of the Pre-Segeju, who first reached the coast in the vicinity of the Lamu Archipelago, whence, beginning in the ninth century, they founded all other Swahili settlements. And the trading herders, also Pre-Segeju at first but later Katwa- Segeju, regarded them as kinsmen, and continued to do so even when the Swahilis became Muslims, which most of them did c. 1050. For several centuries the Swahilis reciprocated the sentiment.

Shungwaya as a belief-system based on the magic of sacred settlements (but also closely connected with dry-season grazing grounds) pervaded the whole Shungwaya region as we have defined it and also, under the alternative name Shirazi, heavily influenced coastal Islam for a while. A diagnostic feature of the various places known as Shungwaya and the various sorts of settlements modelled on them, including Swahili ones, was that unrelated and culturally different groups were able to share a single territorial unit, though they did not necessarily regard one another as equals. Ecological considerations must have forced the Pre-Segeju and Katwa-Segeju (lowland pastoralists) into close symbiosis with Musunguli (farming and hunting groups), but they did not intermarry with them more than they could help, treating them as clients. And Swahili patricians regarded the non-patrician elements in their settlements (including the all-important iron-workers) in much the same light.
Links between the Swahili patricians and the Pre-Segeju/Katwa-Segeju lowland pastoralists, having survived the coming of Islam, also

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survived the overthrow of Shirazi Islam north of Vanga and the rise of an Arab origin-legend. Where the sense of kinship became attenuated, bloodbrotherhood reinforced it. In the late sixteenth century, however, coast-interior trade in the northern Swahili coast, which had been declining for some time, finally collapsed as a result of fresh population movements in the deep interior. These sent many Katwa-Segeju groups fleeing down to the coast. South of the Juba many of the Katwa-Segeju refugees (and probably some of their clients too) were absorbed into the Swahili settlements, while others moved south to regroup with old or new clients along the Tana and the Umba or in the hills behind Mombasa and Malindi. These were to become the foci of the Pokomo, Mijikenda and (modern) Segeju peoples.

In the ensuing confusion, social and political boundaries were substantially redrawn. The concept of kinship between the Swahilis and any of the hinterlanders finally disappeared (save, perhaps, in the case of the Segeju themselves), leaving the Swahilis free to elaborate stories of Persian and Arab origin. In what is now coastal Kenya, the ancestral Pokomo and Mijikenda found themselves clustered in relatively small groups around a number of sacred settlements based on the Shungwaya model and underpinned by Shungwaya magic. Between these communities and the nearby Swahili settlements, trade and other contacts were fairly quickly restored. But the Katwa-Segeju as such disappeared from the coastal region.

We have so far dealt mostly with the area between the Juba and the Umba, that is, the core of our Shungwaya region. But Swahili settlements had from the first spread both south and north of these. To the south, where few if any Swahili settlements had hinterland populations to whom they were bound from the beginning by kinship or pseudo-kinship, matters developed rather differently. But at least some places - Kilwa Kisiwani and Sofala, for instance - seem likely to have developed utani relations with hinterland peoples, and both later became openings for dendritic trade-routes stretching far inland.

North of the Juba early Swahili settlements undoubtedly had large groups of herdsmen in their immediate hinterland, and we have no reason to suppose that before c. 1600 the general pattern between the Juba and the Shebelle was very different from what it was south of the Juba. After 1600, however, events followed a rather different course as non-collaborating camel-pastoralists who were already Muslims (but in an anti-urban tradition) occupied the whole region permanently and most traces of involvement in Shungwaya (including the essentially urban 'Shirazi' type of Islam) were systematically eliminated.

It is important for our understanding of Swahili identity to realise that, as a result of the population movements of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the lowland pastoralists were eventually more or less eliminated, many Katwa becoming Bajuni while the rest, and most Segeju, were absorbed into other
Swahili settlements. All the Shungwaya successor-states which had sprung up north of Mombasa since the disappearance of Great Shungwaya itself eventually collapsed (though the

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one on the Juba survived into the eighteenth century and one or more statelets may have lasted rather longer). Similarly most trade-routes to the interior disappeared, taking with them all traces of kinship or pseudokinship between the Swahili and any inland peoples. The 'Handelsverbindung' arrangements linking the people of Barawa and, to a lesser extent, Lamu with the interior did, however, survive into the nineteenth century, which accounts for the fact that New found Swahili spoken near modern Marsabit, 4 and for the special relationship of the Lamu Archipelago Swahilis with groups such as the Aweer and the waKore. After c. 1600, Mombasa, which had never had a major riverine traderoute in its hinterland, managed to reconstruct its trading relationship with the Mossungalos, whose Kilindini leaders the Swahilis presumably recognised as clients rather than as kinsmen. There was also the episode of the Witu State or (more correctly) Swahili Sultanate, a nineteenthcentury attempt on the Tana to turn the dock back. But it was really only on the Umba that any echo of the older relationship between coastal townsmen and interior peoples survived in Vumba Kuu, the last of the Shungwaya successor-states. It was lost during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the emergence of officially-recognised 'tribes' including the Segeju and Digo. Since c. 1850 (and in some areas for much longer) all memories of Swahili townsmen's kinship or pseudo-kinship with inland peoples have consequently disappeared, leaving the field wide open for those arabising traditions which have probably existed in competition with them since as long ago as c. 1400.

Notes
1. Freeman-Grenville, Select Documents, pp. 35-6, 89.
2. Burton, 'Lake regions', p. 51; Lambert, Chi-Jomvu and ki-gare, pp. 13, 82.
5. Wheatley, 'Analaecta', pp. 104, and personal communication of 9 November 1982. I am indebted to Professor Wheatley for providing me with further information on this important reference.
8. For a list of published versions of the Shirazi origin tradition, see Shepherd, 'Making of the Swahili', p. 142n.
9. Freeman-Grenville, Select Documents, p. 84.

Marina Tomalcheva, 'They came from Damascus in Syria: a note on traditional Lamu

11. Abdulhamid el-Zein, The Sacred Meadows. a Stru al Ana4sis of Religio
Symbolism in an East African Town, Chicago, 1974, pp. 51-2. See also, however, P. Romero, The sacred

Shirazi Traditions & the Composition of Shungwaya meadows: a study of "Anthropologyland" versus "Historyland"', HA 9 (1982), pp. 337-46. 12. Both documents are published in Cerulli, Somalia. See also Kawkab al Duriya li-A kbar frigia, quoted in J.S. Kirkman, 'Omani relations with East Africa before the arrival of


14. Documentos remettidos da India, Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa, 1880, pp. 50-1 (King of Portugal to Viceroy of India, 15 December 1606 with marginal note of 24 December 1625 et seq.). I owe this reference to Dr A.HJ. Prins.

15. A possible exception to this generalisation is mentioned in Baker, 'Notes on the waSegeju', p. 33.

16. I am indebted to Dr Aneesa Kassam for this information. 17. Wemer, 'Notes on the Pokomo', p. 336; 'Bantu coast tribes', p. 333. 18. A.E. Robinson, 'Shirazi colonisation (11)', passim; B.G. Martin, 'Arab migrations to East Africa in medieval times', FJAHS 7.3 (1975), p. 387 (where he spells it al-Bawri, and even contrives to furnish an Arab pedigree for a Vumba ruler whose throne-name was Ruga, a Segiju word meaning 'strength of an ox'. Ruga's mother was an al-Bauri).

perspective).


22. See also Prins, Swaifli-speahi,,g Peoples, p. 84. 23. McKay, 'Southern Kenya
cost', p. 170. 24. Krapf, Diconiaiy, s.v. mnSqu.

25. Hollis, 'waSegeju'.

26. D.C. Sperling, 'Islamisation in the coastal region of Kenya to the end of the nineteenth
More recently, however, Dr Sperling has located some Mijikenda lineages which were permitted to convert somewhat earlier (personal communication). Perhaps these lineages were regarded as eligible on account of supposed pastoralist ancestry.

40. Prins, 'Shungwaya, die Urheimat', p. 276. Shingani is sometimes, but I believe incorrectly, spelled Shangani.
41. See, for instance, Bartolomeu Velho's 1561 map, Plate 204 of Volume II of Dr Armando Shirazi Traditions & the Composition of Shungwaya Cortesao and Avelino Teixeira da Moto, Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica, Lisbon, 1960.
42. Kirkman, 'Muzungulos', passim. For evidence that Musunguli also existed in the hinterland of Merca, see the -marica' and 'ma-caia' (sc. ma-rika and ma-kaya: both likely names for Musunguli-type settlements) shown on various Portuguese maps in A.
These maps date from 1590 to 1643. The term Muli which continually crops up in the traditions and elsewhere may carry much the same meaning, in which case it is worth mentioning that an early Kilwa ruler fought against the 'heathen Muli of the mainland.


44. For evidence that Cushitic languages were once widely spoken in areas of the coastal hinterland whose populations are now solidly Bantu-speaking, see e.g. D. Nurse and C. Ehret, 'The Taita Cushites', SUGIA 3 (1981), pp. 125-68; Nurse, 'History from linguistics - the 'Tana River'

45. Harry Johnston observed of the Pare notables of the trading town of Gonja that 'not only they but the people they governed were great linguists. They spoke ki-Zeguha, kiPare, ki-Swahili, a little Arabic, and Masai. The latter language they were quite versed in.' (Quoted in S. Feierman, The Shambaa Kingdom, Wisconsin, 1974, p. 200.) This may have been a little exceptional, but would not have been very different from other parts of the Shungwaya region.


Seven Great Shungwaya &
Its Successor-States

In Chapter Two we provisionally described Shungwaya as a 'phenomenon' We can now improve considerably on that. We have identified the term, as it is used in the traditions, as referring sometimes to a non-Islamic belief-system which influenced early East African Islam (and traces of which still remain among non-Muslims); sometimes to sacred settlements, most of which have been located, which were the foci of this belief-system; and sometimes to a coast-interior trading system.

I would submit that this last was the economic basis of an important early state, which we may call 'Great Shungwaya' (for convenience, for we have no evidence that it was ever so called). This name distinguishes it from its ritual capital, which we call Shungwaya-Shirazi, and from a number of successor-states based on the same economic network, some or all of which are also collectively remembered as 'Shungwaya' in the traditions.
Historians of Africa are as a rule willing to apply the term 'state' only when it is clear that a section of the population was able to coerce and extract labour from the rest. (Two other terms, 'dynastate' and 'empire', are occasionally used for a political unit which appears to have covered a wide area and several distinct populations, but for which there is no very clear evidence of a 'state' in the narrower sense.)

It will not be easy until much more archaeological material is available to prove beyond doubt that Great Shungwaya was such a state. But the sum of many fragmentary pieces of information, taken cumulatively, leaves no real doubt, even though exact chronology and the administrative details of government remain to be worked out. Nor can we say when Great Shungwaya ceased to be a dynastate or empire and emerged as a state, or when it ceased to be the latter. It already existed by the second half of the ninth century and had completely disintegrated by 1500, for the Portuguese scarcely mention it. In fact it is unlikely to have been of much importance after c. 1300. But we can discern at least the synchronic outlines of a state and its main political institutions.

Let us begin with al-Masudi and his dar mamlaka or 'state centre' His last visit to eastern Africa took place c. AD 916. His knowledge of mainland affairs was almost entirely based on what he heard in Kanbalu. He described this 'state centre' as having a high king, supreme ruler over several minor kings. The power of his court was buttressed by legions of soldiers mounted upon oxen, which were used as beasts of burden as well as for war. [They] are harnessed like a horse, and run as fast' The king's archaic title was waqlimi, said to mean 'Son of the Great Lord' The king was chosen 'to govern justly', which sounds as if there was some elective principle; but, if he was 'tyrannical' or 'strayed from the truth', he was killed and his seed excluded from the throne for ever (a hereditary principle may also have been recognised). Since both criteria for election and grounds for deposition are couched in quasi-religious terms, it appears that the king was the apex of a state religion which recognised a single God as the fulcrum of the moral order and the ruler as His executive.

Powers of election and deposition were probably in the hands of a collective of the itinerant holy men mentioned by al-Masudi himself, by al-Jahiz up to fifty years earlier, and by al-Dimishqi, who died in 1327. (This last specifically associated them with the 'Northern Zanj'.) These holy men apparently commanded the support of the population, and through them of the ruler himself, largely if not entirely by their rhetoric. If waqlimi, a Cushitic term, was 'archaic', we can probably assume that they spoke in a Bantu tongue, early Swahili.

The name Shungwaya is nowhere mentioned by any Arab author. Because he mentions the founding of the 'state centre' after describing the spread of 'Ethiopians' down to the mainland opposite Kanbalu, it has been supposed that it was in modern Mozambique. But there can be little doubt that it is to Great Shungwaya that he was referring, especially since al-Dimishqi attributes the collective of itinerant preachers to the Northern Zanj. The survival of a Cushitic term as an archaic title for the ruler and the fact that the dar mamlaka is associated
with 'Ethiopians [who had crossed a] tributary of the Nile', who can only have been the first Swahilis, provide further evidence for the identification. It is perhaps more surprising that al-Masudi should have been able to learn so much about it from so distant a place as the Comoros. But it appears that the itinerant holy men from the Lamu region regularly visited all the early coastal settlements, so it is quite plausible that he should have been able to glean a good deal of information about it.

The next documentary evidence we have of Great Shungwaya is the Chinese account of the Amir-i-Amiran of Zenjistan's embassies to China in 1071 and 1082. There can be no real doubt that this was the ruler of Great Shungwaya. We know that, about this time or later, its capital came to be remembered by the additional name of Shirazi and that many features of Shiraz and its Buwayhid court were imitated and adapted to an African context both in Great Shungwaya itself and in some of its Swahili offshoots. Nor is it logical to suppose that a ruler who called himself by a title otherwise used only by Buwayhids could have come from any other place. Historians of Africa have sometimes queried the reliability of this

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Chinese information; but it cannot be doubted that, if a dynastic history reports that a man claiming to be a subject of the Amir-i-Amiran of Zenjistan led an embassy to China in 1071, such a man actually existed and came to China. It is likely that the leader of the Zenjistan 'embassy' was principally a merchant, though possibly a highly-placed one with a certain amount of official backing, who was persuaded by Chinese courtiers or some senior Chinese customs official to 'present' his goods as 'tribute' to the imperial court, knowing that he would receive gifts of at least equivalent value in exchange. He made a considerable impression at court, and, on his second visit, received a large amount of 'white gold' in exchange, as well as being given treatment due to an honoured guest. His name is given as Zengiiani, but he was accorded a Chinese title meaning 'Lord Guardian of Prosperity' He is said to have taken 160 days to reach China, passing through Sohar in Oman, Kulam-Malay in South India, and Palembang in Sumatra. This suggests that he trans-shipped more than once. No doubt some of the items which he described as 'products of his land' were acquired en route - glass, for instance, and pearls and camphor.

He and his colleagues provided the Chinese with a description of their homeland which was dutifully recorded. The main list of its products ivory, rhinoceros horn, camels, frankincense, ambergris and 'dragon's blood' - indicates that it was on the northern coast of eastern Africa. Indeed, the list is almost identical to that of the products of Tiung-Iji which we have already quoted. As in Tiung-Iji, he and his colleagues, as 'nobles', wore turbans and silks. They are said to have ridden horses and elephants in their homeland. (We should not forget the two elephants the Portuguese found in Mombasa in 1505, which may have been used for royal occasions. The Malindi king still rode a horse on ceremonial occasions in Portuguese times.) Cattle are not mentioned and were perhaps no longer ridden by this date.
The 'nobles' received official emoluments, and there was a code of laws, minor offences being punishable by beating and major ones by death. The Amir-i-Amiran is also reported to have minted his own coins in copper and silver. This may have been so, but we have yet to find any and it is possible that this detail was 'borrowed' from the dependent subdynasties in Zanzibar, Pemba and Kilwa (at least the two first of which were minting silver and copper coins by this date). The capital of Zenjistan was six or seven miles from the sea, and the people had their own language 'like Arabic.' This might indicate that a Cushitic language was still spoken or, more probably, that when asked to write some words of early Swahili the delegates wrote them in Arabic script. The fact that such a long-distance trading expedition could be mounted not once but twice suggests that the Amir-i-Amiran had the resources of a relatively sophisticated and well-organized state. The next Chinese reference to Great Shungwaya, this time actually called Tiung-Iji, also implies that it was a state by referring to a king, courtiers and ministers, and by describing its boundaries as 4,000 li (approximately fifteen hundred miles) long. It may seem unlikely that the Chinese could have obtained an accurate estimate of these boundaries. But it is worth noting that, if we exclude the coastline, a land boundary running up the Sabaki River to approximately 5,000 feet above sea level, then following an imaginary contour northward to cross the Upper Tana, the Ewaso Nyiro, and along the western edge of the Rift to the Upper Juba, turning when it meets the Upper Shebelle, and following the line of latitude 40 North to meet the sea, would be approximately fifteen hundred miles long, and would more or less encircle the whole of the great lowland plain. Given that early Chinese information on such topics is sometimes surprisingly accurate, this may turn out to be more or less the extent of the territory controlled by the Great Shungwaya ruler at the peak of his power. The Chinese document in question dates from c. 1225.1

These are the only indisputable references to Great Shungwaya in any known contemporary documents, although both al-Jahiz and the tenth-century Buzurg ibn Shahriyar al-Ramhormuzi make references to elective kings in eastern Africa who may have been Great Shungwaya rulers or their sub-rulers. The failure of other ninth- to twelfth century writers in Arabic to mention states in the area is not all that significant, since none of them knew the area at first hand and most were interested in it solely as a provenance of trading commodities. In general, Chinese writers were much more inquisitive about culture and politics. Ibn Rattuta's failure to mention Great Shungwaya directly in his account, however, must be taken as evidence that, by the early 1330s, it was at best somewhat shadowy, though perhaps not totally disintegrated. He evidently sailed from Mogadishu to Mombasa, with at the most an overnight stop somewhere near the Lamu Archipelago ('Sawahil country'); and from Mombasa he went to Kilwa, well beyond the range of any Shungwaya state. The only information in his account is that the ruler of Mogadishu still called himself 'Sheikh' rather than 'Sultan.' As the latter would have implied total independence, this monarch may
possibly have regarded himself as a sub-king still notionally subordinate to a Great Shungwaya overlord.

Earlier we commented that even those scholars who believed in the existence of Shungwaya had not been able to provide a picture of what it would have been like. Let us therefore attempt a tentative sketch of its institutions. What can we learn about Great Shungwaya from the traditions even though they are more likely to describe the social and political institutions of one of its successor-states than those of Great Shungwaya itself?

The two basic institutions which could have knitted together its many disparate communities are blood-brotherhood and dive-paying units. The latter are more appropriate for creating law and order at a parochial level, while the former are better for securing long-distance communications. There is evidence for the fairly early existence of both: that for bloodbrotherhood has been discussed above, that for dive-paying units occurs mainly in Mijikenda traditions and will be cited below.6

It is possible that both coexisted and overlapped from the beginning, but it seems likely that blood-brotherhood was the older institution, and

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that dive-paying units only gained ground later. Our reasons for supposing this to be the case are as follows:

"From evidence which will be set out below, age- and descent-sets were of extreme importance among most if not all early lowland pastoralists, Pre-Segeju and Katwa-Segeju alike, although as time passed an increasing number adopted a segmentary structure in their place. Where age- or descent-sets are well-entrenched, it is not easy for dive-paying units to emerge on any scale. The ideology of age- and descent-sets emphasises loyalty to one's age- or generation-peers rather than to one's kin. In a dive-paying unit, by contrast, kinship plays an extremely important part, deciding the level of every member's involvement in any particular activity.

"The steady evolution of segmentary social structures in our region would logically promote the growth of dive-paying units at the expense of age- and descent-sets, and would lead to political fragmentation of the type associated with the decline of Great Shungwaya and the rise of its successors.

We should thus probably visualise Great Shungwaya as having been, in origin, an extensive web of blood-brotherhoods with a few dive-paying units (though the latter grew in numbers and importance). Bloodbrotherhood pacts would have linked the different pastoralist clans living along a single river-route to the interior, and occasionally bind those on two or more adjacent routes. Non-pastoralists would at first have been treated merely as clients. Conceivably pastoralist 'clans' were in origin composed of members of a single age- or descent-set, so that they sometimes came to speak different languages from each other and to be in such differing stages of sedentarisation. The
obligations imposed upon age-set peers are often similar to those imposed upon blood-brothers. Age-set peers, too, must allow each other access to their homes and the right to share their property; they must give warning of any projected attack upon each other of which they have foreknowledge; and they are forbidden to oppose one another in open council. The main difference is that age-set peers are expected to be more active in mutual defence and to join in raids. Perhaps bloodbrotherhoods in this region originally created pseudo-age-set peers rather than pseudo-kinsmen, and constructed a series of super-age-sets (or superdescent-sets) embracing several existing ones in a single territory. In that case, the emergence of kin-linked clans may have been part of a general process of segmentarisation.

The rise of dive-paying units would have improved the lot of the nonpastoralists, who were usually included in them on fairly equal terms with the pastoralists. We are unlikely ever to uncover enough evidence to prove or disprove such hypotheses absolutely. But we may assume that the conflict between age-set systems and segmentary ones was at the root of much change within Great Shungwaya and its successor-states. However, neither a vast blood-brotherhood pact nor a network of doe-paying units is a state, although either could evolve into a state fairly easily if one or more permanent arbitrators emerged who claimed a lion's share of bloodmoney awarded and had the means to exact it. Whether the ruler of Great Shungwaya was also an arbitrator of major disputes is uncertain, but seems likely, from the use for him, in Hollis' 1898 tradition, of the title Hakim, 'judge'.

A third institution which characterised the Shungwaya states would have capped both blood-brotherhoods and doe-paying units and made them instruments of a centralised state power. This institution, complementary to the other two, is discerned in traditions about the two northernmost successor-states, one associated with the Shebelle River and the Ajuran clan and the other with the Juba and the Bur Gau inlet; but there are occasional traces of it at least as far south as the Tana. The supreme ruler of these states had, and seems to have exercised, the right of deflowering all virgin brides in his realm before they went to their husbands. He was regarded as progenitor of their subsequent children. He had the right to set the bride-price for these brides and to collect all or part of it himself. This meant that he was a member of every bloodbrotherhood and dive-paying unit, and in his person linked the whole realm together. More practically, he could levy a marriage tax in the form of bride-price from every would-be bridegroom among his subjects - or to commute the tax to a period in his service. A remark about Shungwaya in the Book of the Zenj makes it sound as if he often did the latter. Scholars have studied the leverage which the elders in certain African societies held upon the labour of the younger generation by their control of bride-price; but only in Shungwaya, I believe, did this leverage come to be concentrated in the hands of the king.
There is clearly much that we do not yet know about the practical aspects of the Shungwaya ruler’s power. Did he deflower virgin brides from earliest times? Perhaps not, for the twelfth-century Chinese description of a Barbara wedding already quoted says nothing about it. Was it for all virgins he played this startling role or only some - perhaps only those belonging to pastoralist clans? We can only guess that in practice it was usually only the daughters of the most prominent clans and lineages, mostly pastoralists who were submitted to him. Among the Muslim Bajuni it was common as late as the 1960s for the (usually very young) virgin daughters of less well-educated families to be given in temporary marriage to a sharif however old or otherwise unsuitable he might appear to be. These ‘marriages’, though celebrated in Islamic fashion, usually lasted only one night, being terminated by a Muslim divorce the following day. Given that a Great Shungwaya ruler was known as the 'Son of the High God', it may well be that many girls’ parents were only too pleased to have him play his traditional role at their weddings, in spite of the diversion of the bride-price. It seems likely that a Shungwaya ruler had the theoretical right to deflower any virgin, his right to do so being an extension of the king's role as arbiter of all rites of passage. In societies with age- or descent-sets, the authority to permit or delay ceremonies connected with the promotion of any such sets is a source of great personal power. In theory the traditional Great Shungwaya & its Successor-States Borana gallus had the right to delay descent-set promotion-ceremonies, because the names of the leaders in each new descent-set had to be approved by them before such ceremonies could be held.", The Shungwaya rulers could well have exercised this power, and may have been able to promote some individuals and to hold others back. It will be recalled that the Mossequos of 1585 had to present 'tokens' to their ruler before becoming adult 'nobles' with full rights including the right to marry. If all non-Muslim would-be bridegrooms of the leading pastoralist clans in Great Shungwaya had to do the same, then their ruler had an opportunity to reject certain candidates for permission to marry. At the very least he could make their promotion conditional, such as on a period in his personal service. He had, however, to 'govern justly' or risk deposition, when he would be executed and his line barred from the throne for ever. In that event a new ruler - perhaps one of his sub-kings - would be elected in his place. We shall examine below a case in a successor-state where this apparently occurred.

We have so far considered only pastoralists, and no doubt they saw themselves as the only 'real' citizens of Shungwaya states, for their traditions rarely bother to mention non-pastoralist groups. The reality was otherwise, non-pastoralists having considerable leverage when they needed it. Farmers were essential to the herders as producers of corn for the dry months, while hunter-gatherers procured the ivory and other important trade commodities, and were indispensable for their skills, which included medical and veterinary expertise. But their single most
important resource was the knowledge of iron-working. The ironsmiths' position was indeed paradoxical: in probably most pastoralist societies in Eastern Africa they are and presumably have long been treated as low-caste and despised, while among cultivator-groups they were so important and highly esteemed that they often emerged as rulers. In Shungwaya states they were probably never accepted as the social equals of pastoralists; but their economic importance may have won them an institutionalized form of recognition, and it was certainly their Bantu tongue which became the lingua franca of the coastal settlements.

Another crucial group would have comprised those - usually hunters who ferried the herders and their flocks across rivers or escorted them through forests to dry-season grazing grounds. Smiths did not always operate in Shungwaya-capitals, but usually preferred Swahili settlements. But these others must have lived in or near the capitals, and their importance, and that of Musunguli groups generally, was tacitly recognized by the fact that these capitals were (or became) didemic, the semi-sedentarised pastoralists occupying one deme while non-pastoralists occupied the other.

The situation must have become more complex as pastoralists became entirely sedentarised, living either in the Swahili settlements or in and around the Shungwaya-capitals. Though presumably still ranking as pastoralists for social and marital purposes, they would increasingly have come to share at least the economic interests of non-pastoralists, such as favouring grain-production in the dry-season grazing grounds. So long

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as institutions of pseudo-kinship worked effectively, those pastoralists who regularly arrived from the interior no doubt learned to distinguish between sedentarised ex-pastoralists and non-patrician groups which had 'always' been settled. But if the less sedentarised groups chose to ignore the institutions of pseudo-kinship, or when new and non-collaborating pastoralists arrived on the scene, the caste-like distinction between expastoralist 'patricians' and non-pastoralist 'commoners' must have been submerged, and all risked being subjected to the hands of the newcomers.

Orma traditions about the Lemado provide an example. The Orma described them as intolerably fat and idle, implying that they ate too much corn for herdsmen and deserved to be treated as cultivators. The newcomers attacked them and seized their herds just as if they were cultivators. The Lemado chief, Godana Abiyo, was even pursued into Lake Kurawa, almost certainly a sacred sanctuary, where, at a place still known by his name, his nose and ears are said to have been cut off."

The royal clan in a Shungwaya state would have been especially prone to sedentarisation. Some successor-state rulers are even known to have moved into Swahili settlements, which became their commercial capitals in contrast to the ritual ones, most of which in most cases remained a short distance inland. Where did such people live when the ritual capitals were re-divided into new demes to accommodate a fresh influx of herdsmen from the interior? Did they remain in the pastoralists’ deme? Or did they move into the demes reserved for sedentary groups? Might not the waShungwaya clan of the non-Katwa Bajuni, for example,
once have been pastoralists, who by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had become entirely sedentarised? And, if so, did they retain or lose the status of pastoralists when the Katwa arrived?

At the root of these problems was the inexorable growth of a class of town-dwellers who had more in common with each other, both economically and culturally, than either of them had with pastoralist backwoodsmen from the interior. Pastoralist newcomers would have treated farming and hunting groups living in the countryside as clients, but neither Muslim Swahili townsmen nor the long-term inhabitants of the Shungwaya capitals would have appreciated being so treated. Swahili townsmen had one escape: if unduly exploited, they could sail away to another Swahili settlement or found their own elsewhere, taking their valuable overseas trading links with them. But this was not practicable for the inhabitants of Shungwaya capitals, and, if exploited by incoming pastoralists, there cannot have been much that they could do about it.

We may now consider the story of Punun the Kilio - not yet as history (we shall do that below), but for what it can tell us about how Shungwaya states operated, and the position of settled populations within them. The story of Punun is recalled in Siyu, among the Bajuni, and among both the Digo and Segeju, though their versions differ somewhat and he is not always known by precisely this name.

The fact that the tradition is so widespread indicates not only that it recalls a historical event, but that it contains an important socio-political moral. The event appears to have been the collapse of the last of the old-style

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Shungwaya regimes on the Juba River in the early eighteenth century.

1 Punun the Kilio was a junior ruler in a Shungwaya state who wrongfully seized supreme power. He may have decided that it was time to have a 'true' pastoralist as High King rather than a sedentarised one, or he may have been the leader of an age- or descent-set who felt that the time had come for his generation to hold power. Whatever the details, all versions of the story agree that Punun was in the wrong.

2 He evicted Borali bin Mwenye Mwii, the rightful ruler, from the throne and occupied the non-pastoralists' deme. Borali bin Mwenye Mwii was evidently a Swahilised Muslim. (Mwenye Mwii must be the same as mwenye mui, 'Possessor of the Settlement', a title used by many Swahili patricians in their own settlements and favoured by at least one later Swahili ruler.'3) He may have represented an old line of pastoralists, now wholly sedentarised and living in the non-pastoralists' deme since the arrival of the Kilio or other less sedentarised newcomers. (A royal Fama clan of Siyu lived in the non-pastoralist deme after the arrival of the Katwa.) Or he may have been of non-pastoralist origins and power in the royal capital may have rotated between the heads of the two demes (as it did, for example, in pre-colonial Lamu Town). Whichever was the case, Punun refused to share power and overran his rival's deme, in political terms a serious crime.

3 Once in power, Punun abused his sexual prerogatives. He is said to have
deflowered virgins with his big toe instead of by more conventional methods. It is not his right to deflower virgins which is criticised, but his perversion of that right.

4 Unable to reassert himself on his own, Borali appealed to the ruler of a nearby Swahili settlement. Confronted with an act of aggression by semisedentarised pastoralists who, as pseudo-kinsmen, should have been his allies, Borali could only appeal to the Swahilis with whom he shared so many economic and cultural interests.

5 The Swahili ruler, a queen of Ngumi who was the supplier of spear-blades to the interior, summoned another, less sedentarised pastoralist clan, remembered as Garre or waGala, to Borali's aid. Though Punun now controlled the whole ritual capital, the economic centre of gravity had long shifted to the Swahili settlements on the coast, whose rulers were thus able to act as powerbrokers. At least one Bajuni version ends with Punun being killed by the Garre or waGala newcomers and Borali ruling happily ever afterwards. But most add another episode. Some describe a civil war among the Kilio, with a 'minister' (Swahili wazin) leading an anti-Punun faction. Other versions see Punun's overthrow as more directly due to Garre/waGala intervention. But those versions which have this additional episode all agree on its end:

6 Punun was killed and the I-lio ousted from power and exiled, but it was not Borah who succeeded, for the newcomers decided to retain power for themselves. 'Shungwaya' consequently collapsed, sending all sedentarised and semi-sedentarised peoples southwards. The ousting of the whole Kilio clan reminds us of al-

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Masudi's remark about a deposed ruler's *seed* being excluded from the throne for ever. The fact that the victory of another, even less sedentarised pastoralist clan is seen as the end of the Shungwaya state suggests that a de facto equilibrium had to be maintained between nomadic and settled groups if the state was to survive. It may be significant that the collapse was indirectly attributable to Swahili interference, but the blame undoubtedly attached to Punun, who upset the equilibrium in the first place.

Many political morals can be drawn from this tradition: do not upset the didemic system, do not rely on Swahilis to restore the status quo ante, do not trust nomads who come to town, do not deflower too many virgins (and never by unorthodox means). But the single one most commonly drawn was probably that pastoralists and non-pastoralists, nomads and settled groups, must coexist and collaborate. It is curious that one of the groups to retail this tradition should have been the Famau clan of Siyu, for though at first the waFamau and Katwa newcomers shared power in that settlement through a diarchy, the most famous nineteenth-century Famau ruler of Siyu abrogated this arrangement, dispensed with his Katwa co-ruler, and ruled alone 'like a sultan' (though admittedly leaving the Katwa deme intact). Perhaps they wished to compare the /i/o of Shungwaya with their own Katwa population, and to suggest that earlier rulers - the Famau - were
still the only legitimate ones, or it was to square the discrepancy between theory and practice that they sometimes insist that it was in order to escape Punun's excesses that the first waFamau came to Pate Island and 'founded' Siyu. Punun as a historical personage must have lived at least four and perhaps six centuries after Siyu was so 'founded' 15 In most contexts, however, Punun is not a historical personage. His story is a parable, a cautionary tale which incidentally reveals a fair amount about how a Shungwaya state (admittedly a late one) functioned. Reverting to Great Shungwaya, we can see how it could have evolved from a loose empire or dynastate comprising a network of pseudo-kinship units held together at the apex by the ruler's person into a well-organised state whose leaders could coerce and extract labour and wealth from their subjects. The legions of ninth- and tenth-century soldiers mounted upon cattle were no doubt members of one or more age-sets, only too ready to assist in coercion in the hope of securing the 'tokens' which were their passports to adulthood and marriage. Those who served for seven years after marriage in lieu of bride-price may also have been soldiers; but since they were technically past warriorhood they were more probably put to caring for the royal herds, to digging wells and irrigation-canals, excavating grain-storage pits, and constructing rain-ponds and dams along communication routes.

The ruler accumulated wealth through bride-price, and perhaps by arbitration fees and fines. He no doubt also redistributed a good deal to his fellow-clansmen and supporters in feasts and used it for the maintenance of his army. Taxes may have been levied on agricultural produce, though we do not know exactly how: a fixed annual tribute of corn and bodies taken from every agricultural community, such as Liongo levied on the Lower Pokomo, is the most likely. Possibly customs dues were collected on ivory and other goods, though it is more likely that the monarch, like his later Swahili counterparts, was content with a few monopolies and with the right to purchase all the best items at a low price and retail them later. (The Pate Chronicle observes that it was from the Portuguese that the people of that place first learned how to levy customs dues.) In the sphere of commerce, however, a Shungwaya ruler was heavily dependent upon Swahili goodwill; and as time passed the Swahilis no doubt demanded an increasingly heavy price for co-operation, in the form of exemptions from various exactions to which his non-Muslim subjects still had to submit.

As well as Shungwaya successor-states there were also Shungwaya successor-societies - the individual Swahili settlements, the Mijikenda and Pokomo sections, the Meru and Shambaa perhaps - and from an examination of their cultural features we may deduce more about Shungwaya rulers generally and the ruler of Great Shungwaya in particular. His person was apparently regarded as endowed with supernatural powers, as would become the 'Son of the High God' He would be held responsible for prolonged droughts and other natural disasters, for a later Pate sultan had to abdicate after seven years of drought, as did at least one Digo
chief, while the rulers of Vumba Kuu counted rain-making among their most important duties.‘6

To touch his person was to gain sanctuary: this was true of the Borana qallus (though theirs is not exactly a successor-society), and also of the Shambaa ruler in Burton's time." Muslims usually attributed these powers to royal or state regalia items rather than to the ruler's person. In Vumba Kuu runaway slaves had only to beat a special regalia-drum standing outside the ruler's palace to be safe from their pursuers, though they then became owned by the ruler himself. The Swahili siwas and regalia-drums were also credited with bringing general prosperity, good harvests, and a sense of wellbeing to all who heard them. Regalia instruments were also associated with rites of passage. The Pokomo and Mijikenda regalia-drums were used at all initiation ceremonies, but were played at the funerals only of important leaders. In most Swahili settlements no ruler could assume power unless the siwa or regalia-drum had been played at all his or her previous rites of passage, and it was also played at subsequent ones. Among Northern Swahilis there was particular competition to have the siwa played at patrician weddings. Another function of side-blown horns among several successor-societies - PreOmani Zanzibar, Shambaa, and other peoples living in or near the Shungwaya region - was to summon the people either to levee or corve, that is, either to war or to forced public labour.‘8

Magic would not only have invested the royal regalias but also the sacred enclosure of every royal settlement or ritual capital, as it did the endosures of Swahili settlements, Mijikenda kayas and Pokomo gandas. No harm could come to people or goods within them, and as sanctuaries they

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were especially suited for such activities as mediating, divining, curing, consulting auguries, negotiating treaties, and no doubt for straightforward business agreements.

Of the personnel of the Great Shungwaya state we know very little. The Chinese mention both ministers and courtiers, all with dress privileges, probably all of 'noble' pastoralist extraction and perhaps bearing non-Muslim and Muslim titles. The itinerant holy men were probably also pastoralists. They might have been members of the king's own age- or descent-set, whence the power to depose him. Perhaps, like wandering Muslim divines, they relied largely on charity, especially royal charity, and on rewards for their sermons. We do not know the exact difference between the holy men and the 'sorcerers' whom al-Idrisi mentions at Malindi and who were called maqanqa. It is tempting to suppose that the wandering holy men operated largely among nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists while the maqanqa catered mainly for farmers and hunters. If that was so, the latter would have been largely non-itinerant. But this may be a simplification, for al-Idrisi specifically says that his Malindi maqanqa handle poisonous snakes and make them harmless to everyone 'save those they wish to harm', and this sounds rather like the Borana qaalluus.19 Al-Idrisi's maqanqa also 'pretend that lions and tigers [sic] cannot harm them', while the sorcerers of Tiung-lji claimed to be able to turn themselves into land and aquatic animals.
These sound less like qaalluus than like hunters or farmers whose speciality was escorting the herds across crocodile-infested rivers and through forests to dry-season grazing grounds.

Finally there were the magicians who could prevent boats from sailing either forward or backward. One of them forced an arrogant sixteenth-century Zanzibar-based Portuguese to mend his ways, while as late as the seventeenth century similar magic prevented the forcible removal of the remains of a Muslim saint from the southern Somali coast.20 This sounds like a different and perhaps older magical expertise and perhaps already existed when Rhapta was the only port on the East African mainland known to the Mediterranean world. Magic of all sorts clearly played a central part in the Shungwaya ideology.

We do not have sufficient evidence to say where or how the Great Shungwaya state or dynastate emerged, except that it must have existed by the end of the ninth century. But there is evidence that it may have emerged before then, suggesting that it evolved, not in the lowland plain itself but along the Miri trade-route leading south from the Gulf of Aden.

First Zengjiani, the Amir-i-Amirans ambassador, told the Chinese that his ruler's dynasty was already five centuries old.21 This may of course have been an idle boast, but if not it indicates the existence of a royal line somewhere in East Africa or the Horn as early as c. AD 571. Such a line might have ruled from what became the capital of Great Shungwaya if, as we believe, this was the same place as Rhapta, for Rhapta was already a metropolis by the time of the final revision of Ptolemy's work in the fourth century. But it might also have reigned further inland, and have moved to Great Shungwaya only, say, c. 800, as part of the first migratory wave of lowland pastoralists. A second piece of evidence would suggest that this was the case, and that it came from the Misi trade-route as also suggested by Holis' 1899 Segeju tradition. It must be admitted that this interpretation remains fairly tenuous.

A Chinese military officer, Tu Huan, was captured by the Arabs at the Battle of Talas River in AD 751 and imprisoned at a place called Mualien, of which he wrote an account after his return to China in AD 762. Mua-lien has been supposed to have been places as far from one another as Malindi and Mauritania. Recently, a reliable version has become available, not Tu Huan's own, which is lost, but one incorporated into an encyclopaedia compiled by his brother or father's brother, Tu Yu, who is recognised as a sober and reliable scholar. From him we learn that Mualien was a town occupied by the representatives of three religions, Monophysite Christianity, Islam, and a local traditional religion, and that its people ate Persian dates and fed their horses on dried fish.

Several Sinologists have identified Mua-lien as Meroe, which fits with a reference to the Besharya (Bisharin, one of the Beja peoples) to the northeast of the town, as being reached across a vast desert.2 But we may hardly believe that the people of Meroe, by this time in decline, ate Persian dates and fed their horses with dried
fish, a detail which Tu Yu is hardly likely to have invented. This diet seems more appropriate to somewhere on the Gulf of Aden, on whose northern shores dried fish is fed to livestock even today.

Mua-lien accordingly seems more likely to have been Berbera, the Malao of the Periplus. The Monophysite Christians and the Muslims would be the agents of Ethiopian and Arab merchants respectively, while the group with its traditional belief-system would be indigenous to northern Somalia, and probably controlling the (non-Ethiopian) inland trade-route to Lake Turkana and beyond, our Misri cloth trade-route. Some Beja may have extended into northern Somalia at that date. But they certainly lived astride the land route from the Talas River. If Mualien is Berbera, it is important because the description of the population following its traditional belief-system refers to their 'incestuous habits', the Chinese term used - so Wheatley tells us - for incest with a member of an older generation. This seems applicable to a society with the politicalmarital customs ascribed to the rulers of Great Shungwaya. And it suggests that a society with a system comparable in this respect to Great Shungwaya's was already operating at Berbera in the mid-eighth century.

This evidence may seem inadequate for the idea of a Shungwaya archetype along the Misri trade-route from Berbera to Lake Turkana or beyond, but there is a little more. It looks as if successor-states of such an archetype, with customs closely paralleling those of Shungwaya successor-states further south, existed in the northern Somalia-Djibouti-eastern Ethiopia area in later centuries. Among the evidence, court ceremonies and rituals were markedly alike. The early fourteenth-century ruler of Zayla was surrounded on his throne by titled office-bearers, moved about under an umbrella, and was preceded by a band of musicians with a huge side-blown horn at their head. He sounds almost exactly like the ruler of Great Shungwaya & its Successor-States

Mogadishu at the time of Ibn Battuta's visit to that place, and like rather later Shirazi-Muslim rulers of Shungwaya successor-states further to the south. (The Afar Sultan of Assa still had heralds blowing horns as late as the 1920s.24) It is hard to see these customs coming from Great Shungwaya directly, but they might well have come from a predecessor to it based on the northern leg of the Misri trade-route. The so-called Makhzumi, prominent in this locality in the late eleventh or twelfth century, reappear in the Lamu region, where they are more usually known as Kinamte, possibly at the same time or a little later. They, or similar but somewhat earlier groups, could easily have brought with them this particular part of the political system which we have identified in Great Shungwaya. There is thus at least a case for some sort of 'Pre-Shungwaya' (the 'Mishiri' of Hollis' 1899 tradition) running along the Misri trade-route by the eighth century, which did not necessarily decay earlier than Great Shungwaya.

We now turn to five of Great Shungwaya's successor-states: OziMalindi, the early Umba State, its successor Vumba Kuu, the Ajuran Imamate, and the Juba-Bur Gau State. There were no doubt others almost certainly Merca-Mogadishu and Barawa were separate state units before their absorption into the Ajuran Imamate. Even for these five the boundaries, if they had any, are far from clear. Malindi
may have been separate from Ozi before the late fifteenth century, and the Juba State may never have been united with the Bur Gau one. But these are the main discernible political units which inherited mixed Muslim/non-Muslim and pastoralist/non-pastoralist populations comparable to Great Shungwaya's and which dealt with their problems in a comparable way. Places with more homogeneous populations such as Kilwa-Mafia and Zanzibar, while no doubt independent polities and perhaps even states in our sense, do not qualify as successor-states.

We might have expected that successor-states would begin to appear as soon as Great Shungwaya itself disintegrated, by the early fourteenth century. But we hear of none till the late fifteenth. Perhaps various subkings were independent from c.1300 or earlier, but the main dynasty managed to hold its own in the sacred capital and preserve a shadow of unity and control for up to two hundred years later. The little evidence we have suggests that the real struggle began when one or more of the sub-kings tried to absorb into his territory the original sacred capital, Shungwaya-Shirazi itself.

The first challenge is mentioned in connection with Fumo Liongo, King of Ozi. Ozi was the Lower Tana successor-state which embraced the River Ozi (now part of the Lower Tana), probably because, as in the nineteenth century, its mouth provided a better harbour than the Tana's own. Liongo's legendary capital is usually called by Swahili poets 'Shaka', probably the site a mile or so north of Kipini now known as Old Kipini (Kirkman's 'Ungwana'); but this may only have been his commercial capital, for there are traditions about how he used to move upstream, allegedly to wash his clothes in a lake near the modern Garse, but perhaps in reality to visit a ritual capital sited at or near the Shungwaya-Shirazi site.

The earliest reference to Fumo Liongo in any historical document (as distinct from literary ones) is in a version of the Pate Chronicle, where he is described as ruler of the seven mj'i (often translated 'towns', but here almost certainly 'tribes' or 'clans') between Komwana and Shaka. Komwana is likely to be the present 'Mwana', one of the two sites near Old Kipini. Liongo is also said to have subdued the country from Mpokomoni to Malindi, and this district was called Ozi' His realm extended some forty miles up the Tana; and if it stretched as far up the Sabaki it would also have taken in the Sabaki River Shungwaya-site (and
perhaps also 'Mount Mangea). Mpokomoni we have already identified as the Pokomoni Creek which enters the larger Wange (or Mongoni) Creek opposite Pate Island. This area is sometimes remembered as a Pokomo homeland, and lay near to Shungwaya-Shirazi itself. Liongo's extension of his domain up to it suggests that he may have had designs on the ancient capital as well. The late fifteenth-century Sultan of Pate, Omar bin Mohamed 'the Conqueror', is said to have fought long against Liongo, and finally to have defeated him only shortly before his own death, c.1487. The war is explained by the Chronicle as the result of the Pate dynasty's expansionist policies; but it sounds as if the royal house was especially anxious to defend a place called 'Tukutu', which it had conquered shortly before. Tukutu is now the name of a mangrove-girt islet a few miles from Pate Town, but at that time it must have been somewhere on the mainland. Pokomo traditions speak of a River 'Sukutu' where they once lived, which was probably the Pokomoni or a tributary of it.2S

The likeliest explanation is that Tukutu in this context is yet another name (perhaps Cushitic) for Shungwaya-Shirazi, and that the anti-Shirazi rulers of Pate seized it and eventually destroyed it to prevent its becoming the focus of a revived pastoralist-dominated state. They may have taken a puppet ruler back to Pate Town, or installed him for a while on what is now Tukutu Islet, though no remains are visible there today. But first they had to deal with the threat of Liongo, who no doubt hoped to capture Shungwaya-Shirazi and establish himself there instead. The Pate-Liongo wars were, in that case, for ritual supremacy throughout the whole Swahili world and the former Great Shungwaya territories. When Pate won, it soon controlled the whole coast from Mogadishu right down to the Kerimba Islands in northern Mozambique - or so its Chronicle tells.

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Evidence also comes from a Portuguese work, the Decadas da Asia of De Barros, mainly based on information gathered in Malindi in the early sixteenth century. The al-Bauri king of Malindi had effectively succeeded Liongo as ruler of the Ozi-Malindi state, or what was left of it (after the death of Liongo, Pate forces absorbed his territory as far south as the Tana). It did not do Malindi much good, for its overseas trade was steadily eroded by an upstart ruler of Mombasa, while Pate threatened its northern borders. The king's first thought, when the Portuguese sailed into Malindi in 1498, was whether he could use them against his enemies. He became their steady ally in their struggles with Mombasa. He was almost immediately successful, for in 1507 he induced Tristan da Cunha to sack 'Oja' or 'Hoja' (the Portuguese for 'Ozi'). It is uncertain which adjacent site near the (present) mouth of the Tana 'Oja' represents, but probably Old Kipini (Liongo's commercial capital 'Shaka') had already been partially destroyed by Pate and 'Oja' was one of the other two in which the pro-Pate party had established its headquarters. De Barros writes that our friend the Sheikh of Malindi claims to equality of rank with
the oldest states, saying that he is descended from kings who lived formerly in the
city of Kitau, which is eighteen leagues from Malindi [which places it near the
present mouth of the Tana]. Today it is a poor settlement, but the lofty towers and
ruins which are still standing and can be seen, show that it was once an important
place. Others say that nearby Luziwa was once lord of all, and that Paremunda
[but perhaps an error for Pate, Manda], jac [Shaka], Oja and other towns in the
area all obeyed her. If it is true that our King of Malindi is descended from those
who were lords of Kitau or Luziwa, it seems that his claim to ancient descent is
correct. It would appear from its
situation that one of them is the town of Rhapta

My interpretation is that a Luziwa-based sub-king had been the first pretender to
the throne of Great Shungwaya and all its territories, but that he was superseded
by Liongo. It could have been the Luziwa claimant whom Pate reinstated as its
puppet and who is remembered in literature as Mring-wari. There can be little
doubt that the squabbles about who was 'lord of all the land' refer to a Great
Shungwaya succession-dispute between different sub-kings. And, since the
Tristan da Cunha episode fits with the Pate Chronicle, it must refer to the
aftermath of the overthrow of Liongo. The literary evidence fits this interpretation
and I am confident that when archaeology determines which ruined site is 'Oja'
and which Kitau, and tells us more about Old Kipini and Luziwa, it will be seen to
be substantially correct. Liongo's activities on the Lower Tana, where he forcibly
resettled some client populations with a view to developing the agricultural
potential of the area, and where he levied a tribute of boys and girls from each
village, have already been mentioned in Chapter Four.

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We may add that in 1571 a Portuguese Jesuit who had visited Pate mentioned
among the royal party 'a high ecclesiastical official whose authority extended over
the whole coast' Strandes suggests that this was an influential sharif, but it seems
more likely that this was a later puppet ruler of Great Shungwaya, by this date
Swahilised and an impeccable Muslim, but confined to the Pate court. The anti-
'Shirazi' party had by this time controlled Pate for at least 150 years. The people
of Pate were heirs by conquest to Great Shungwaya as well as to Liongo's Ozi
(the Tana section of which remained under their control until the Orma-Wardai
invasions of the seventeenth century, which sent to Pate Town a refugee
population still known as wa-Ozi); and they no doubt found it expedient to
maintain a tame pretender to both thrones.

We shall also have more to say later about the nineteenth-century Swahili
Sultanate (often but incorrectly known as the Witu Sultanate), but we may
observe here that it too owed some of the principles upon which it was based to
Great Shungwaya, though strictly speaking it was a successor-state to Ozi, to
which the nineteenth-century royal house of Pate was reviving its claims.
We thus know quite a lot about the Ozi-Malindi State, and still more about the
subsequent history of its Malindi rump-state. About the Early Umba State we
know virtually nothing, but may deduce a certain amount from the story of its
successor, Vumba Kuu.
Vumba Kuu was founded by the ruler, sometimes remembered as a Segeju, who took the throne-name Ivoo c. 1610, and who may have ruled as late as c.1650. It was founded on the ruins of the Early Umba State which seems to have been in decay for at least a century. The new state was made possible by the arrival, between about 1580 and 1640, of Segeju pastoralists who were prepared to assist Ivoo against nearby Swahili settlements. The latter called themselves (and still do) wa-Shirazi but we shall use their alternative name of Mi Minane ('Eight Settlements' or, more probably, 'Eight Tribes' or 'Eight Clans'). They had presumably taken advantage of the decline of the Early Umba State to corner all the inland trade and had even set up, near the mouth of a stream known as Vikuarani, a rival ritual capital, still known today as Shirazi as well as by its older name of Kifunzi. Ivoo finally brought them under control; and the peace terms turned them into clients of the Vumba.

Because the Miji Minane had been practising an avowedly Shirazi form of Islam, the new regime was at first solidly anti-'Shirazi' This explains why it adopted, as a hypothetical date for the 'founding' of Vumba Town, the year AH (Anno Hegira) 600/AD 1204, the same year as that adopted by the Nabahanis for the 'founding' of their dynasty in Pate. The same anti-'Shirazi' and pro-Pate bias was reflected, in due course, by the acceptance of a siwa at the hands of a Pate ruler (or perhaps a post-Liongo Ozi one). But many local Shirazi client forms of government crept back into use. There was, however, no talk of 'coming from' Shiraz, nor, so far as we know, was the Vumba Kuu capital ever called Shungwaya. Neither age- nor descent-sets seem to have played an important role in Vumba Kuu, though the first two rulers both reigned for approximately forty years, a common period for descent-sets. We have no traditions of rulers deflowering virgins, but they did select their wives from the important groups in the population, including the Segeju.

One might query whether Vumba Kuu was really a successor-state, or indeed a 'state' in the strict sense at all, especially since the Digo and Segeju denied that they were vassals of the waVumba and saw themselves as their equals instead: their watani and, with the Segeju, their wajomba as well. But there is a sense in which Vumba Kuu was a state as well as a successor-state. First of all, the four clans of the waVumba (al-Bauri, alJadid, Ba-Alawi and Ba-Amiri), although spoken of as Swahilis, were more akin to the Segeju. They were more nearly the local equivalent of the Kilindini of Mombasa who derived from one of the sedentarised and urbanised vanguard groups of the main Katwa-Segeju migration. The local counterparts of the longer-established Mombasa Swahilis were the Mi Minane, and they were coerced for they always knew that if they tried to recover their former patrician status the Vumba could use the military strength of the Digo and Segeju to force compliance. This ceased to be true before 1863, when the last great Vumba ruler died; but by then Vumba Kuu as a successor-state had also ceased to exist.

If we think of the Vumba as Swahilised Segeju, their regime can be more easily equated with that of other Shungwaya successor-states. Their ruler can be seen as
a small-scale high king, with various Digo hereditary chieftains and Segeju clan or age-set leaders as sub-kings under him in the sense that they relied on him to mediate their quarrels, and deferred to his superior magic. They relied on his rain-making magic. They consulted him on such questions as the proper name for new settlements, auspicious dates for the departure of caravans, and the best day to begin rice-planting and harvesting. They also attended his installation (which continued in the sacred ruins of Vumba Kuu long after its abandonment) and funeral obsequies. The Segeju and Digo leaders were also the Vumba ruler's subordinates in terms of wealth. No magic consultation was performed free; and a successful Vumba ruler could acquire vast wealth if he had sufficient magical expertise.

Only one ruler was not a celebrated magician. That was Shehe or Shekuwe, who ruled c. 1802-1824 and employed other magicians to work on his behalf; but during his reign Vumba Kuu began to disintegrate more than before. The disintegration was reversed under his successor, Pinda, who was so celebrated a magician that Kimweri of Shaxnbaa, and even Seyyid Said bin Sultan al-Busaidi, the Omani Sultan of Zanzibar, consulted him. It is said, and may well be true, that in the 1850s he stopped a Kwavi invasion of Vanga single-handed. A ruler with such a reputation was not to be trifled with.38 Let us examine the four clans.9 We have noted the affiliation of the al-Bauri with the Segeju. Closely associated with the al-Bauri are the el-Jadid clan. They claim to be sharfs, but as McKay has pointed out, this may be questioned. It is not easy to lay a false claim to sharifian descent, because records are preserved in the Hadramawt. But Serjeant's The Sayyids of the Hadramawt, states that the el-Jadid line of shanjs had died out there by the end of the twelfth century, which rules out a tradition about el-Jadid origins which has them sail into Vumba Kuu directly from the Hadramawt, arriving later than a third clan, the Ba-Alawi. The Ba-Alawi, a larger and better-known sharifian line, probably came to East Africa in the late fourteenth or fifteenth century. But even the Ba-Alawi are most unlikely to have reached the Swahili coast, much less the Vumba region, before c.1200.40 Hollis obtained a nineteenth-century genealogy from the Chief Qadi of the East African Protectorate that shows that for long periods the el-Jadid line is the same as that of the Ba-Alawi. This does not necessarily mean the former are spurious sharfs - the two lineages could have been closely related over many generations - but it suggests the possibility that an eminent local lineage, having married into the Ba-Alawi, sought to maintain its separate identity by appropriating the name of an extinct sharifian lineage. This would have distinguished it from the Ba-Alawi without lowering its social standing in Islamic terms.

Great Shungwaya & its Successor-States there by the end of the twelfth century, which rules out a tradition about el-Jadid origins which has them sail into Vumba Kuu directly from the Hadramawt, arriving later than a third clan, the Ba-Alawi. The Ba-Alawi, a larger and better-known sharifian line, probably came to East Africa in the late fourteenth or fifteenth century. But even the Ba-Alawi are most unlikely to have reached the Swahili coast, much less the Vumba region, before c.1200.40 Hollis obtained a nineteenth-century genealogy from the Chief Qadi of the East African Protectorate that shows that for long periods the el-Jadid line is the same as that of the Ba-Alawi. This does not necessarily mean the former are spurious sharfs - the two lineages could have been closely related over many generations - but it suggests the possibility that an eminent local lineage, having married into the Ba-Alawi, sought to maintain its separate identity by appropriating the name of an extinct sharifian lineage. This would have distinguished it from the Ba-Alawi without lowering its social standing in Islamic terms.

The third clan, the Ba-Alawi, is at first sight a very different proposition, for its sharifian pedigree is impeccable; and sharifs are conventionally regarded as Arabs par excellence. There have been Ba-Alawi sharfs in the Swahili world since well before 1517, when one of them wrote a letter, preserved in Portuguese records, as ruler of Mozambique.4' They would have been completely Swahilised by c. 1650,
and some were apparently Segejuised as well. The first Ba-Alawi to rule in
Vumba took the Segeju throne-name Ruga. He was a product of at least four
generations in East Africa, two in Pate (to which his ancestors may have gone
from Ozi) and two in Vumba itself. Moreover, his mother was a BaAmiri (sister
of his predecessor), as was his first wife (a daughter of the same man), while his
second wife was an al-Bauri and his third a Pemba Swahili, possibly connected
with Mkame Mdume and the el-Buhrys. His successor, a son by the second wife,
also married three times: once from Lamu, once from Pangani, and once from
Tanga. The Pangani wife may have been a Ba-Alawi but the others were of
unambiguous Swahili stock. It thus makes little sense to insist that the Ba-
Alawi of Vumba were 'Arabs' simply because they were sharis.

The fourth clan, the Ba-Amiri, was the only one that did not arrive from
the northern Swahili coast after c. 1600. Theirs was recognised as the earliest clan in
the region, and was ritually senior; for instance, the most senior member of the
Ba-Amiri placed the turban on the head of a new ruler during installation
ceremonies. They had probably lived in the vicinity since at least c. 1400, for it
can only have been through them that the other wa Vumba, all immigrants from
the north, came to accept certain matrilineal principles (unknown on the north
coast) and the Vumba dialect, unambiguously a Southern Swahili dialect. Ivo's first successor was a Ba-Amiri, and it is not impossible that he was one
himself, as well as being a 'Segeju' (just as Liongo had been an al-Bauri and a
'Segeju').

Robinson wrote that the Ba-Amiri too originated in Ozi. Possibly the name, which
does not figure in the Encyclopedia of Islam, derived from a tided official from
Great Shungwaya, Ozi, or one of the other successor

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states, known as amiri. Such an official might have pioneered the first wave of
Segeju expansion southwards into the Umba plain c. 1350-1400. This hypothesis
fits with the interpretation of the Early Umba State.

All we know for sure about the Early Umba State are the thronenames of eight
rulers. These are from a lost Vumba Chronicle, presumably included to give
verisimilitude to the place's claim to have been 'founded' in AH 600/AD 1204.
There is no reason to suppose that they are incorrect. Significantly, the first six are
Digo terms. The seventh is said to have been ruling c. 1500, which indicates that
speakers of an ancestral Digo tongue were in the area long before c. 1600 when
they arrived 'from Shungwaya' in the north.

Since the Vumba rulers often chose Segeju throne-names in deference to the
Segeju's furnishing much of their military strength, we may conclude that the
military muscle of the Early Umba State was provided by Digo-speakers. But it is
unlikely that they were pastoralists; for, while Segeju throne-names include words
like 'Tether' and 'Strength of a Bull', any hint of herding is absent from the Digo
ones, which include 'CornStubble' and the name of a small bird which feeds on
rice-fields. Given that the modern Digo still have complex rituals for the planting
and harvesting of rice and other crops, and that the ruler or his representative
figures prominently in them, we may conclude that the Early Umba rulers were
involved with agriculture, and especially rice-growing. Even today Vumba rice-growing techniques involve digging extensive irrigation channels and raising numerous three-foot-high mud walls, and necessitate much communal labour and central direction. Such a state could have evolved independently of states to the north of it, but this is unlikely, since they too organised irrigation-agriculture in river valleys like that of the Tana, while the site of Vumba Town, which so far as we can tell without excavation would have been founded at the beginning of the fourteenth century, is typical of Shungwaya-state capitals elsewhere. There may also have been some sort of royal prerogative of deflowering virgins, for one of the throne-names means mons Veneris. This custom would not have made much political sense in a matrilineal society, but there is no reason why the ruler should have renounced it. But the Early Umba State, and to some extent Vumba Kuu after it, also had a distinctly local flavour. Throne-names were unknown in other successor-states, as was matrilineal succession. It seems most likely that a relatively small number of Pre-Segeju or Katwa-Segeju ex-pastoralists enough to found a state based on irrigation-agriculture, but too few to impose their northern dialect and patrilineal preferences on the local population - established themselves there about 1300. The Ba-Amiri might represent such a group, who adopted local customs and a Southern Swahili dialect but retained links with their former kin to the north and west which were utilised centuries later in Ivoo's time. They could produce a useful rice-surplus upon which to build their wealth; and Vumba, though now totally ruined, appears to have been an extensive settlement with one or two mosques, monumental stone tombs, and a stone wall encircling at least part of the town. An inscribed boss, apparently unread but said to resemble one from a fifteenth-century Kilwa mosque, suggests that the architecture peaked during that century, and various collections of surface sherds tend to support this conclusion. By c. 1450 Vumba would appear to have been well on the way to being a flourishing Swahili settlement as well as a Shungwaya-style capital. We do not know what went wrong. The Lower Umba may have dried up or moved northwards or southwards leaving the Vumba site hopelessly remote from the sea. What is more certain is rivalry between the waVumba and the coastal Swahilis of the Mj'i Minane. These settlements seem also to have been founded during the fourteenth century, and to have grown steadily richer throughout the fifteenth and also the sixteenth. Up to c. 1500 the rulers of the Early Umba State are said to have been nonMuslim, which may have assisted in their relations with the local rural population. But the sixth ruler is said to have been converted to Islam, and was succeeded by his son-in-law, a Mombasa Swahili and possibly also a 'Shirazi' Muslim. Whether the non-Muslim Digo-speaking farmers lacked faith in the magical powers of a Muslim outsider or whether the seventh ruler was too much influenced by the Mi Minane Swahilis, who saw themselves as 'Shirazi' Muslims,
all we know is that the eighth ruler does not appear to have been related to the seventh, and that he was the last before Ivoo, who could not have acceded much before c. 1610. He is remembered as Mwenda-na-waGala, a nickname rather than a throne-name, which can only mean 'He who went off with the nomads' My guess is that he was a Segeju, a herder installed by the anti-M'i Minane faction as being a non-Muslim who would recover the support of the non-Muslim Digo-speakers and be a rallying point for other KatwaSegeju herders from the north. He probably wearied of urban politicking and simply returned to a nomadic life with his herds. We are on surer ground in saying that the next known ruler, Ivoo, took a Segeju thronename and did lead Segeju newcomers in a successful war against the Mi Minane, whereupon Vumba's fortunes began to look up once more.

From these southernmost Shungwaya successor-states, we turn to the northernmost, the so-called Ajuran Imamate. For ecological reasons pastoralists were heavily dominant where the Ajuran ruled, on the Shebelle River and between it and the Juba. Their state is believed to have emerged c. 1500 and to have begun to disintegrate some century and a half later. What follows relies heavily upon Cassanelli's account but differs in some details.49 The Ajuran capital was not near the sea but on the Middle Shebelle at Kallafo near the present Somali-Ethiopia border. Some old maps still mark a Rer Hamar population in its vicinity,50 and we can take it that it was, like other Shungwaya capitals, a site where pastoralists and nonpastoralists needed each other and so met on equal terms. That the Imamate was a state in the full sense of the term is indisputable. At its peak, it extended from the coast near Mareg (north of Mogadishu) to Barawa (though the coastal ports were semi-independent, as they were

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further south), and inland as far as Bardera on the Juba and some point above Kallafo on the Shebelle. It did not necessarily control all the intervening territory at any given time. Hamar Jajab, the ruined stonebuilt site near Mareg, sounds like a typical sacred settlement of the Shungwaya type, and from its description would closely have resembled Kedi, the Shungwaya-capital on the Lower Juba.51 There were other administrative centres, including Merca and, on the Lower Shebelle, Audegle. Stone-built ruins also survive in a number of other places.

Ajuran rule is associated with compulsion. Cassanelli quotes a document that the people under the Ajuran dug the earth for kelliyo [irrigation channels leading from the river] and for gut [pits for storing grain]; they worked the fields and excavated wells; they planted trees and built houses; they were the shepherds for the camels and sheep and horses of the Ajuran.

Tribute was levied in the form of grain, livestock, and young girls, and the existence of an agricultural surplus in Ajuran times is confirmed by a sixteenth-century Portuguese account which mentions grain as a Mogadishu export.52 Many stone wells also date from Ajuran times, as does the elaborate system of dikes and dams which help irrigate the Lower Shebelle region.
Cassanelli is inclined to attribute the rise of this state to the southward migration of the Hawiye in the fifteenth century and to the arrival of Arab lineages displaced by the collapse of the jhad of Ahmed Gran in Ethiopia. For reasons already outlined this is unacceptable, and it is unthinkable that a Shungwaya successor-state should have been created by people who only arrived after the collapse of Great Shungwaya itself. More interesting is the tradition which suggests that the Garen, the ruling sub-clan within the Ajuran, had previously ruled some sort of state in the Ogaden, which recalls the evidence for a 'Pre-Shungwaya' state existing along the Mi'ri trade-route. Conceivably the Ajuran Imamate was more a successor-state of this 'Pre-Shungwaya' than of Great Shungwaya itself. But most traditions see it as spreading up into, rather than down from, the Ogaden region.

Many traditions link the Ajuran with a people known to the Somalis as Madanle (Maanthinle, Madinle, etc.) who were celebrated well-diggers in southern Somalia and northeastern Kenya and are strong candidates for our Pre-Segeju. Many traditions ascribe Madanle origins to Barawa, and at least one attributes to the Madanle the only stone-built rectangular enclosure in the deep interior so far adequately described. This is at Binega or Binaiga, some miles due east of Mandera not far from the junction of the Daua and Juba rivers. It is said to have had solid stone and mortar walls some four foot six inches high in places. Inside were wells which had at some point been filled in.

More problematical is the ideology of the Ajuran state. On one hand, it tends to be depicted as wholly Islamic. The signs are that its Islam was of a typically 'Shirazi' type, at least inland. There were title-bearing amirs, wazirs and other aristocrats, most with bureaucratic duties; and the Ajuran court was associated with great opulence, including imported items which reached it through the Mudhaffar sub-dynasty in Mogadishu. Ostentatious royal courts of this type are most unusual in Somali history but typical of the 'Shirazi' Muslim regimes on the coast further south. On the other hand, some traditions refer very clearly to non-Islamic practices. The deflowering of virgin brides by the ruler was widespread as was the appropriation of their bride-price. Again, Ajuran genealogies - the stuff of which so many Somali historical traditions are made - often list as the two sons of an eponymous Ajuran ancestor Wollamogi, meaning 'They do not know Allah', and Waqle, 'The people of Waq' Waq was of course the high god of the traditional religion, whose name also appears in Waqlini, given by al-Masudi for the ruler of Great Shungwaya.

Possibly the Ajuran Imam presented himself to his Muslim subjects as a strict if magnificent Islamic ruler and to his non-Muslim client ones as an old-style pastoralist monarch. This was almost certainly how Liongo conducted himself, and presumably also how the Great Shungwaya rulers behaved after the theoretical conversion of their court to Islam. Another possibility is that the Ajuran rulers were non-Muslims, but became Shirazi-style Muslims, thereby assisting the spread of the Islamic religion in what is now Somalia. They are, however, recalled in the traditions as being Muslims from the beginning.
Cassanelli argues that the cement which held the Ajuran State together was a mixture of baraka (‘blessedness’) deriving from a supposed Arab ancestor, Balad, and marriage alliances which kept the rulers in a central position vis-à-vis other clans. A weakness here is that this does not account adequately for the Ajurans’ capacity to coerce their subjects. Also a non-sharifian Arab ancestry is unlikely to have carried much weight as early as c. 1500, though it might have done so by a century or so later. Balad as an Arab would seem to be a late tradition. An alternative hypothesis is that in the early stages of the Ajuran Imamate, as in its archetype further south, descent- and age-sets played an important role, though tending to give way to segmentary structures later on. At one point Cassanelli notes that ‘the Ajuran proper felt themselves superior and only married their own, while other tribes were constrained from inter-marrying because of custom or “caste” distinctions. He attributes this to the same sort of prejudices against inter-marriage which prevailed in the ‘Peace of the Boran’; but it could equally well be because some clans were ‘legitimate’ in terms of descent-sets while others were ‘illegitimate’ and so could not intermarry with them, which would indicate the importance of descent-sets in the political system.

As we shall see below, the ‘Shirazi’ mode of Islam which the Ajuran zealously followed is particularly suited to societies in which significant traces of age-sets and even descent-sets survive. If the Ajuran ruler was arbiter of descent-sets and/or age-sets and could hold back those whom he did not wish to promote immediately, his capacity to coerce would have been enormously enhanced. He would have had numerous bridegrooms or

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would-be bridegrooms to dig canals and wells, excavate grain-pits, build houses, herd flocks, and so on. Finally, the decline of the Ajuran court could be accounted for by the spread of segmentary social structures consequent upon the ‘Somalisation’ of its population. On that somewhat inconclusive note we leave the Ajuran Imamate and turn to the Juba-Bur Gau State. About this we do not know when it emerged, or whether it was always (or ever) a single state. It certainly contained two separate places remembered in the traditions as ‘Shungwaya’ One of them, also known as Kedi or something like it, was on the Juba, somewhere near Deshek Wama and the junction of Lac Dera (formerly the northernmost course of the Lower Ewaso Nyiro) and the Juba River. Our evidence is a second-hand account of it by the missionary Wakefield, who actually saw it some time before 1884. He mentions the ruins of Ke’ethi or Keyrthie, a town two or three days’ journey from the coast. It had stone houses and seven gates, but was abandoned owing to the quarrels between the Kilio and Garra families. Its inhabitants settled at various places along the coast and became known as Wab’unya or ‘robbers’ [In reality, they became known as waGunya (in Portuguese, Vana gunes), another term for Bajuni].
The passage clearly refers to the Punun episode or its prelude, but does not mention the name of Shungwaya. Neither does Elliott's reference to Kedi, based on Bajuni traditions collected in the 1920s. He writes:

the Bajuns of this descent [i.e. the 'Gurreh' or Katwa Bajuni: J. de V Allen] claim kinship with the Randile. They also say that their ancestors came down from the north, striking the sea first at Kismayu.

They claim to have been at one time settled there, on the Deshek Wama, and at Afmadu, and before that at a place or in a country called Kedi near Lugh and again before that possibly Egypt.59 Elliott's Kedi is clearly mislocated, for it would have been after Afmadu and possibly also after Deshek Wama on the Katwas' southward migration. He may have confused it with Biniga, which is not far from Lugh. Wakefield had actually visited it and says it is only two or three days from the coast, and his account is obviously to be preferred.

This also fits recently-collected Bajuni traditions and poems (including an epic-style poem, Utendi wa Shungwaya), which refer to double-storeyed (i.e. stone-built) houses in 'Shungwaya', and say that its inhabitants left it to go either to Kisimayu or to Koyama, the northernmost of the island settlements off the southern Somali coast. From there they moved South to the other island settlements, then to Bur Gau (which they usually call Buri Kavo) and on into what is now Kenya.60 The identification of this Shungwaya with Kedi is sealed by the Book of the Zeni, which speaks of a Shungwaya on the Juba which it brackets with Deshek Wama.61

Other Bajuni traditions, however, speak of Bur Gau as the Shungwaya from which they 'came', and Bur Gau is also remembered as the home of the waShungwaya clan. Elliott identifies Bur Gau as the Shungwaya, and recounts the story of Punun the Kilio and Borali in relation to it. Punun's

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full name is sometimes given as Punun bin Malau bin Gau, and the name Bur Gau could mean 'Hill of Gau' Finally, Elliott mentions what sound like encampments on the open ground near the Bur Gau settlement. He heard that the names of these encampments were Ndoa, Shea, and Puluni (a corruption of Pununi), but says that only at Ndoa were any ruins visible above ground, namely 'a small mosque and one or two graves' A more recent visitor to the area confirmed the names of these sites, though she thought the ruins at Ndoa were those of stone houses.62 There were, then, two Shungwaya-capitals, and the Kilio were associated with the downfall of one while Punun the Kilio with that of the other. This second collapse would have taken place c. 1725 - at least the Pate Chronicle refers to a war between m/&lio (note the singular form) and the waKatwa during the reign of Bwana Tamu the Younger, who ruled c. 1711-1748. This must be the same affair, and the date can be roughly confirmed from Garre traditions and from evidence by Elliott regarding the arrival of the 'Gurreh' or Katwa on the southern Somali coast.63

We do not know the relationship between the two places - they may have been consecutive capitals, or Bur Gau may have been the capital of a sub-king - if Kedi
really had double-storeyed stone houses, it was probably the earlier. Swahilis began to build stone houses inside their sacred enclosures (whose perimeters were then extended to embrace the whole settlement, or at least a deme or other section of it) no later than the fifteenth century. If these were imitated by well-established and entirely sedentarised populations within the Shungwaya-capitals of successor-states, this would have happened about the same time or only a little later. The Bur Gau enclosure, by contrast, looks like a typical late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Katwa 'walled town', unless it turns out upon excavation to have been built near or on top of an older enclosure.

Elliott worked out that Mwana Asha Ngumi, the queen of the Swahili settlement on Ngumi Island, whose subjects furnished the nomads with spear-blades, and who summoned them to dislodge Kilio and restore Borali bin Mwenye Mwii, would have died shortly before 1686.64 His reasoning is sound, and fits well with other evidence. A plausible sequence of events would be for the sedentarised groups in Kedi under Borali to have been overrun by Punun or some other Kilio leader shortly before her death and to have moved to the coast. The Kilio themselves might later have retreated in the same direction before being forced to abandon that too. With the fall of Kedi and Bur Gau, the last surviving Shungwaya-capitals were gone, which evidently had a considerable impact upon the Swahilis and their neighbours and which is widely remembered, but the two collapses tend to get confused or fused into one.

We know a little more about the Juba-Bur Gau successor-state. Its rulers obviously deflowered virgin brides - at least, Punun the Kilio did. The -paying units seem to have been widespread towards the end, for many Mijikenda traditions, which can only have been introduced by eighteenth- or nineteenth-century refugees from this successor state, make unambiguous references to them.65

Questions about Juba-Bur Gau remain unanswered. Why did no port Great Shungwaya & its Successor-States grow up near the mouth of the Juba to replace Juba itself (the Chinese Chupu, and probably the 'Old Kisimayu' mentioned by Elliott), which was already fairly deserted when the Chinese visited it in c. 1415, and which never recovered?6 What was the state's relationship with Barawa, which is somewhat nearer to the Juba than is Bur Gau? How far upstream from Kedi did the state's influence extend, and was it also influential along the Lower Shebelle? How was it organised internally?

But perhaps the two greatest mysteries remain: who were the Kilio? Were they just another Katwa-Segeju clan, or were they different even before they seized power in Kedi? And who precisely were the Garre/ waGala who sacked Kedi and forced the abandonment of Bur Gau? Much undoubtedly remains to be learned about the efflorescence and fall of the last two places to be known as 'Shungwaya' in the traditions.

This brief summary of Great Shungwaya's successor-states underlines their common features: magician-kings, some at least of whom deflowered their subjects' brides; age- and descent-sets giving way to segmentary social structures,
and blood-brotherhoods probably being increasingly replaced by die-paying units; and varying degrees of coercion, which led to the construction of more wells and water-holes, the digging of more irrigation-channels and grain-pits, and the accumulation of more agricultural surpluses, than have ever been known in the region until modern times.

The states had to contend with many inherent contradictions. Most of these can be seen as weak links in an imaginary chain drawing the fierce nomads of the interior in the direction of the urbane townspeople of the Swahili settlements whom they perceived as their kinsmen. The first weak link occurred when the nomads found they had to collaborate with sedentary groups or even obey them. It was a fracture here which brought down the Juba-Bur Gau State. The next weak link was the acceptance of Islam and the abandonment of descent-sets. It was probably this link which snapped in the early Umba State. It may also have snapped in Ozi, though Liongo’s glory was that he seemed to have reconciled a fairly orthodox ‘Shirazi’ form of Islam to the requirements of a Shungwaya successorstate. It was his misfortune that, by then, his northern neighbours in the Lamu Archipelago would no longer tolerate ‘Shirazi’ Islam either.

Even when virtually the whole elite of a state had been safely led into the settled Muslim fold, one more weak link remained - between purely maritime Swahilis, who no doubt had pastoralists among their ancestors but who had no serious kinship or pseudo-kinship links with pastoralists living in their hinterland, and the Swahiliised Segeju of places like Vumba Kuu. There the state was virtually built on an alliance between the Swahiliised Segeju (or Segejuised Swahilis), Digo, and Segeju against the maritime Swahilis of the Mi Minane. It survived for some two centuries but was never the strong, centralised state that all the others seem to have been at their peaks; eventually it degenerated into a cluster of squabbling chiefdoms.67 Underlying the decline of all these successor-states was the steady diminution of a genuine two-way trade between the coast and the interior which probably began as early as c. 1300.

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Notes
2. Though Strandes quotes a sixteenth-century Portuguese source, the Geography of Duarte Lopes, as saying that 'the kingdoms of Kilwa, Mombasa and Malindi bordered to the west on the great country of Monemugi whose ruler lived at peace with the coastal states, for they had a mutual interest in trade and he required an outlet to
the sea' (Portuguese Period, p. 83). Strandes suggested that 'Monemugi' stood for Unyamwezi. It seems more likely that it represented Mwenye Mui, a title we shall meet again (see note 13 of this chapter), and that this was a confused reference to the Great Shungwaya state which had already long collapsed.


4. Filesi quotes Duyvendak's opinion that many of the 'ambassadors' who visited the Chinese court in the fifteenth century were in fact merchants, who were presented by courtiers anxious to flatter the emperor as ambassadors come to pay homage to the imperial throne (China and Africa, pp. 31-2). It seems quite possible that this also happened as early as the eleventh century. I am indebted to Philip Snow and Professor Paul Wheatley for information on this reference. For Tu Huan, see also ZhangJun Yan, 'Relations between China and the Arabs in early times', Journal of Omani Studies 6.1 (1983), pp. 96-7.


6. See note 65 of this chapter.


8. The work of Claude Meillassoux must be particularly mentioned in this connection.

9. See above p.33.


11. See above, p.92.

12. For the Siyu version of the Punun story, I am once again indebted to Howard Brown of Indiana University. For the other versions, see Prins, 'Shungwaya, die Urheimat', pp. 274-7; Dammann, 'Geschichte der Digo'; and 'Zur Überlieferung der Segedju' in D. Drost and W. König, eds, Beiträge zur Volkerforschung Hans Damm zum 65 Geburtstag, Berlin, 1961, pp. 91-8; Elliott, 'Bajun Islands', pp. 354-6.


14. Elliott, 'Bajun Islands'.


22. Ibid, pp. 95-6, citing Velgus; Wheatley, personal communication; Philip Snow, personal communication.


24. Pankhurst, Ethiopian Towns, pp. 56-7; L.M. Nesbitt, Desert and Forest, the Exploration of Great Shungwaya & its Successor-States


25. See above, p. 32. They are also recorded in early Mogadishu, see B.G. Martin, 'Early Arab migrations', p. 375n.

26. See, for example, Alice Werner, Myths and Legends of the Bantu, London, 1933, p. 146. 27. See below, p. 150.

28. Freeman-Grenville, Select Documents, pp. 248, 253-4; Stigand, Land of Zij, pp. 38, 44-5. Liongo's name is not mentioned in other versions, though the war is. 29. See also below, p. 202.


33. See below p. 205.


40. bid., pp. 61-2.
43. Lambert, Ki-Vumba.
44. See also Cassanelli, 'Benaadir past', p. 39. 45. 'Rice cultivation at Vanga', Appendix Three in McKay's 'Southern Kenya coast'. See p. 248n for comparable Digo practices.
47. This statement is based on my own impression, so far untested by archaeology, that the surviving (ruined) mosques at Munge and Shirazi are of early or middle sixteenth century date. See Wilson, Southern sra Coast, pp. 26-37.
48. See Hollis, 'Notes on the wa-Vumba', p. 281; Robinson, 'Shirazi colonisation (11): Vumba', p. 93, and McKay, 'Southern Kenya coast', pp. 42n. 49. Cassanelli, 'Benaadir past', pp. 20-42. 50. See Paulitschke's 1893 (revised) map. I.M. Lewis notes that the Rer Issa (Rear Cise,) celebrated for their fearlessness of crocodiles, are 'Ajuran freedmen' on the Upper Shebelle, and that the Shebelle themselves, a non-pastoralist confederacy in the same area, 'recognise the authority of a lineage of the Somali Ajuran for the purpose of electing their chief' (Peoples of the Horn p. 41).
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Great Shungwaya & its Successor-States
57. Ibid, p. 31.
60. Nurse, 'Bajuni historical linguistics', p. 38. I am grateful to Dr Nurse for supplying me
with copies of his transcriptions of relevant poems and traditions. 61. Ce rulli, Somalia I.
63. Freeman-Grenville, &lect Documents, p. 261; Elliott, 'Bajun Islands', pp. 250-2 and passim. 64. Elliott, 'Bajun Islands', esp. p. 254. 65. Spear, Traditions of Orgin, p. 92, is only one example of a Mijikenda tradition which mentions the wa-Ga/a demanding compensation for one of their number who had been murdered. Only when compensation was refused were the ancestral Mijikenda allegedly attacked, which can only mean that they had previously been members of a die-paying unit which also included the wa-Gala group in question.

9 The mihrab in the mosque at Kizimkazi on Zanzibar, dated 500 AH/AD 1107. Some restoration was undertaken in the eighteenth century, but much of the structure is original including an inscription in floriate Kufic, using a style very similar to that found at Siraf in the Persian Gulf.
10 A block of the floriate Kufic inscription from Tumbatu Island, excavated in 1989, probably carved at the same time as that at Kizimkazi. Both inscriptions use local coral, showing that there were competent Swahili craftsmen in the early years of East African Islam.

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Eight
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Our review of the Shungwaya successor-states has carried us far beyond any semblance of chronological order. Now we must return to the story of the Swahilis and the sudden appearance, during the ninth and tenth centuries, of early mji-settlements, each with its own central well surrounded by a sacred enclosure, from Gezira (if not Mogadishu itself) south to Tunge, 'four days' sail beyond the Rovuma River' Tunge came to be recognised by traditionally-minded Swahilis themselves as the southern limit of their 'territory'  I The fact that Tunge came to be recognised as the southernmost Swahili mainland settlement might indicate that Swahili vessels regularly sailed as far as the Comoros, for which it would be a convenient jumping-off point, but seldom further. Here we consider how and why these people with their iron-working clients should suddenly have founded settlements along this lengthy coastline, and how it happened that these settlements accepted Islam two or three centuries later. It is possible to offer at least two (not always mutually exclusive) explanations for
almost everything that happened in the first few centuries of Swahili history. Thus, in answer to the question why did these well-digging newcomers appear on the north coast when they did, we can reply that it was due to the devastating droughts which we know to have characterised the eighth century over much of Eastern Africa, or we can suppose that it had to do with the takeover of a long-established east coast trading system previously run by the inhabitants of Rhapta. Perhaps the eighth-century droughts first led the pastoralists to drive their herds down to the coast, seldom so immediately affected by droughts as the interior, and later forced them to seek refuge in seashore or island settlements which were centred around wells. Or, if we accept that Great Shungwuya's capital was the same place as Rhapta, on the Lower Ewaso Nyiro, then this stretch may have dried up, forcing those groups in the interior which had formerly traded through it to come down and open up new ports themselves. It will be recalled that Zengiani told his Chinese hosts in 1071 that his ruler's capital was some five miles from the ocean. Just conceivably the southernmost course of the Lower Ewaso Nyiro dried.

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MOGADISHU
GONDERSHE
MERKA
MUNGHIA
BARAWA
SHAKAN
R. Tana
M.VINDINI
NGUMI -KOYAMA
CHULA CHOVAI
VEKU
MNARAN BUR GAU
MIANDI KISKICHI
KIAMBONI
WITU
MATONDON
R. Sabaki
\ýMAMBRU MALINDI
LUZIWA
GEDI MNDARANI
OLD IPINOZI SHELA
R. Pangan
MTWAPA UMBA LA MTWANA
TIWI MOMBAKA
SHIRASI GAZI
VUMBA KUU- MUNGE
WASIN

MOGADISHU
GONDERSHE
MERKA
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VUMBA KUU- MUNGE
WASIN
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up because of efforts by inland pastoralists to dam it somewhere near the present Lorian Swamp: it would not have been very difficult do this. Whatever brought the Pre-Segeju to the coast in the first place, it seems they joined up with the remnants of the population of Rhapta upon their arrival there, and fused with them almost completely within a short space of time. Our main reason for supposing that the inhabitants of the former metropolis were absorbed into early Swahili society is that it is hard to see how the founders of the early settlements could have sailed up and down the coast without them. Pastoralists and ex-pastoralists do not easily take to a seagoing life. The Pre-Segeju may have
been exceptions, but it makes more sense to suppose that they linked up with an existing population of sailors and traders, whose capital also was or became their principal centre, and used their sewn boats and maritime skills for their own purposes.

Al-Masudi’s comment in c.916 suggests that quite a few settlements were founded south of the Tana by the mid-tenth century, and according to Horton sherds of ninth-century pottery, both imported and Wenje Ware of that period, have been found at Malindi, Kiifi, Mkadini (near Bagamoyo), Unguja Ukuu, Kisimani Mafia, Kilwa, and at least four places in the Comoro Islands as well as at Chibuene. The same source notes tenth-century ceramics at an additional seven southern and central sites (including Gedi, Mombasa, and two places on Pemba Island); so it is likely that at least, say, twenty were in existence by c. 950 when the first stone-builders arrived on the scene.

North of the Lamu Archipelago, Kiunga and Kiunga-Muini just south of the present Kenya-Somalia border and Barawa, Gezira and Munghia to the north of it have also all yielded ninth- or tenth-century ceramics. Assuming that one out of every five new settlements failed for some reason or other this means that between c. 800 and c. 950 at least one settlement was founded every five years on average outside the Lamu Archipelago. (An additional eight are known to have been founded within the Archipelago itself)3 A good number of pastoralists must have conquered their aversion to sea travel and sailed off to seek their fortunes up to a thousand miles away; and they would hardly have done this without total confidence in the sewn boat people.

What could have provoked this massive diaspora? A simple answer is trade. Middle Eastern commerce with the lands south of Cape Delgado swelled rapidly after the seizure of Kanbalu by its Muslim dynasty c. AD 750. As we have seen, the slave trade, in particular, must have flourished in that region till c. 880, when it tailed off sharply. North of Malindi, too, there is ceramic evidence of a steady and, after c. 950, fairly spectacular increase in the number of trans-ocean boats visiting the coast: by the tenth and eleventh centuries Pate, Manda and (to a slightly lesser extent) Shanga were quite rich little settlements.

Many of the commodities sought by the visiting Muslim traders, including ivory, ambergris and rhino horn, were also widely available between Malindi and Cape Delgado, but needed to be collected and ferried to the northern and southern entrepôts. The first Swahilis can be envisaged as setting out to perform this task. If enough of them could create viable settlements in which they and their posterity could hope to hold an honourable position as founders, others would have followed their example. The most successful attempts - Unguja Ukuu before its collapse, Kilwa and Kisimani Mafia, for instance - may well have attracted secondary and tertiary waves of migrants from the Lamu region, some of whom stayed to swell the local patrician ranks while others struck out on their own.

That the founders arrived in sewn boats (mtepe) is clear, both from the traditions concerning the flags of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mtepe boats which
connected them with 'Sultan Ali of Shungwaya' and his sons, and from various traditions which refer to individual settlements being so founded. It is also pretty certain that livestock was carried in these boats. Voeltzkow, who visited the Lamu Archipelago in 1903, and Pearce, writing from Zanzibar some time before 1920, both mentioned cattle first in their lists of mtepe cargoes, and they were surely carried in earlier times too. The association of mtepe boats with livestock is also suggested by the custom of slaughtering an animal at the launching of any new Swahili-made boat. As late as the 1930s oxen were still sacrificed for the launching of new vessels in Lamu, and a photograph taken by Professor E. Dammann shows the tufted tail of one suspended from a bowsprit in a way strongly reminiscent of the 'tassles' which always hung below mtepe bows. (These tassles are now rather unconvincingly remembered as Islamic talismans.) Presumably camels were also carried, for it is hard otherwise to account for the camel bones found at early levels in Kilwa. The story retailed by Pearce identifying the mtepe itself with a Quranic she-camel seems likely to be an Islamisation of older tales linking mtepe boats with the camels of Great Shungwaya. Horses, painted on rudders or modelled from straw and carried as mascots in races, are also commonly associated with boats in the Lamu Archipelago today. Perhaps they too were common enough in the past to have been ceremonially slaughtered on occasion.

One or more mtepe boats, then, would have set out, after sacrifices, bearing a group aiming to found a new settlement together with some of their livestock and perhaps also a few young coconuts or other plants. On arrival at a site, which had probably been reconnoitred beforehand, the immediate task would be to construct an enclosure, probably of wood in the first instance, within which work on the well could be started and where the stock could be kept.

We may pause here to consider the precise meaning of found in this context. Later Swahilis used the term -buni to refer specifically to the initiation of the first stone mosque. Thus the nineteenth-century Swahili-language epitaph of Sultan Ahmed 'Simba' Fumoluti of the Swahili Sultanate proclaims that he 'founded Witu' (Swahili aliobuni hapa Witu), and gives not only the year but also the month and the day when he did it. By that time 'founding a settlement' was perceived as a special act, no doubt accompanied by appropriate rituals and sacrifices. Very probably it was similarly perceived in earlier times, although before c. 1100 there would have been no mosques involved, and before c. 950 no stone structures of any sort. A settlement would be founded in this sense where a fair number of people already lived. Most if not all Swahili settlements would in fact have been established near existing populations. One would not expect the initial moves to be other than peaceable, since the Swahilis or proto-Swahilis would not have been very numerous and needed to attract local people to join them. No doubt there was often a gift of cloth to a local chief or elders in exchange for a piece of land, as the stories in some versions of the Ihwa Chronicle and Pate Chronicle suggest. Once the well was dug, the wall around it would be consolidated (after c. 950, rebuilt of stone) and houses built outside the enclosure, and then the business of
attracting new settlers began in earnest. The newcomers could offer the local people more cloth, iron and other trade-goods, not to mention well-water in the dry months, and they were usually fairly successful; a reasonably sized settlement of 800 or more people might be established in the first one or two seasons. Local wives were no doubt taken, but at some point patrician wives may have been fetched from the Lamu region, and also more livestock and perhaps new settlers. The first overseas trading-vessel to call in would be a cause for celebration; but the ultimate seal of success would be the first visit from an itinerant holy man, bringing news of Great Shungwaya and carrying out rituals and blessing ceremonies. Once this happened, the new settlement could be regarded as on the map, at least as far as adherents of the Shungwaya belief-system were concerned.

This is an explanation of the first diaspora; but is it correct, or the only correct one? An alternative hypothesis is suggested by traditions surrounding the waDebuli (waDaburi, waDubura, waDubuki etc.) and wa-Diba. Both names figure prominently in oral traditions of people living in Pemba, Zanzibar, Mafia, Kilwa and the Comoros as well as those inhabitants on the mainland south of and a few miles north of Vanga. The waDebuli are never mentioned (except by southerners) in any traditions recorded north of this point, while the waDiba occur only once. Nor are either mentioned in any Portuguese or other documents, save that the Arabic version of the Kilwa Chronicle attributes the nisba-by-town (pedigree according to the group's social standing in a town) al-Debuli to an important early sixteenth-century Kilwa politician, and noted that a Mozambique ruler of the Ba-Alawi lineage used the same nisba c. 1500 in a letter to the Portuguese authorities.9

These are peoples known only in South-Central Swahili traditions, but in their traditions they appear constantly, being depicted as hated and feared outsiders who arrived in sewn boats with square sails made of matting and established settlements in all centuries between the ninth and the eighteenth. They forced local people to dig wells and carry stone (coral) over long distances to construct mosques and other buildings. Their rulers exercised power capriciously and meted out cruel punishments. They are never mentioned as going away again, and yet nobody today ever admits to being descended from them. And none of the wells or other stone structures associated with them differ noticeably from each other.

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other or from nearby ones which are admitted to have been built by Swahilis. (One exception may be the 'fortress' at Pujini on Pemba Island. Often attributed to the waDiba, near the island's east coast, it is reported to have been quite distinctive architecturally, though from the available descriptions and plans of it, it does not sound as if it falls entirely outside the broad parameters of Swahili building traditions. It has now been largely destroyed so only archaeology can finally answer the question for us.) Finally, on several occasions a mosque is attributed to them but not the tombs in the surrounding cemetery, which one would normally expect to belong to the 'founding' ancestors of the present population.0
Those historians inclined to perceive coastal history as little more than a succession of Asian civilisations impinging upon the African continent have had a field-day with the waDebuli and waliba. The waDiba have been widely agreed to be Maldivians, whose islands were known as Diba or Dibdib in Arabic. But about the waDebuli there has been some dispute. Sir John Gray believed that they came from the Deccani port of Dabhol, which flourished under its Bahmani dynasty in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As evidence he adduced the facts that Bahmani coins, like those of Kilwa, have rhyming couplets on the obverse and reverse sides, and possible architectural links between the Bahmani Great Mosque at Gulbarga and Kilwa's Great Mosque. Chittick, however, argued that Dabhol flourished much too late, and proposed that they came from Daybul (Bhambore), an Indus port that flourished in the ninth century."

As regards the waDiba, a historian of the Maldives has pointed out that their reputation for violence, cruelty and arbitrary conduct fits ill with the usual picture of Maldivians, who impressed outsiders by their extremely gentle and law-abiding nature. As for the waDebuli, Freeman-Grenville has argued that coins with rhyming couplets on their obverse and reverse sides were minted in Kilwa before the Bahmani kings even came to power in the Deccan, while Garlake insists that there is no real, structural resemblance between the Great Mosques at Gulbarga and Kilwa.

It is reasonably clear that neither the waDebuli nor the waDiba of these traditions were Asian immigrants at all, and that both comprised groups of Swahili or would-be Swahili settlers, who were presumably known by these names for much the same sort of reason that other Swahilis were known as waShirazi or waArabu. Their sewn boats were, of course, mtepe boats (which had square sails of matting into the present century); and their digging wells and building stone mosques (or, between c. 950 and c.i 1100, other stone structures) or having these built for them, is exactly what we should expect. A shared Swahili identity explains why their constructions are indistinguishable from each other and from other more or less contemporary Swahili buildings in the vicinity, and why they continued to arrive over eight or nine centuries without anybody noting their departure from any Asian homeland.

Finally, there are several layered traditions in which the same person is described in one place as a Swahili and in another as an mDebuli or mDiba. The builder of Pujini in Pemba is recalled as an mDiba, an mShirazi, a Mombasa Swahili (mMvita), or even an mSOu. (Builders in stone are 170

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often assumed to have been waSegeu in Pemba traditions.) This ruler's son, Haruni, was reputedly buried in a nearby tomb decorated with a motif of a side-blown horn in raised plasterwork. A similar motif has recently been re-excavated on a well inside the Pujini 'fortress' This would appear to clinch the matter, since side-blown horns, while common regalia items among both Segeju and Swahili, are unknown in any context in the Maldives or anywhere in Asia.'5
The identification of the waDebuli and waDiba as Swahili groups, however, appears to contradict our earlier hypothesis that almost all Swahili settlements were established peacefully through friendship with the incumbent populations, for waDebuli and waDiba are specifically remembered as behaving violently and cruelly. This contradiction can be resolved by supposing that they were Swahilians of an unusual type; more precisely, by identifying them as 'illegitimate' in terms of a residual descent-set system which outlasted the conversion of the Swahili coast to Islam by many centuries. The existence of this descent-set system is proved by the case of those Swahilis who first established settlements from the sea on what is now the northernmost Tanzanian coast and the southernmost Kenyan one. These people, the Swahilis of the Mji Minane, called and still call themselves waShirazi and have a local ritual capital at a village called Shirazi, also known as Kifunzi or Kifundi. The waVumba called them waDebuh (or waDubura), and refused to have anything to do with them. They eventually attacked them, with the support of nonSwahili Segeju warriors, and either clientised them or drove them from the area altogether. All this happened c. 1610-1630; but as late as c. 1970 McKay collected a tradition (though he noted that other informants denied it) that members of one mji or clan were at one time forbidden to intermarry with members of the other seven.'6
This sounds as if the other seven clans comprised 'legitimate' Swahilis who, with the acceptance of Islam, eventually consented to intermarry with the eighth, which was 'illegitimate', thereby making themselves all 'illegitimate' in the eyes of those neighbours who still took the descent-set system seriously. The Muslim waVumba and non-Muslim Segeju were both in this category; and in due course the former, as 'legitimate' Swahili, tried to exterminate the latter lest their own children should intermarry in the future. We may even identify the eighth mji. Hollis, writing in 1899, heard that one of the Segejus' own clans was known as waDubura, though this name is no longer publicly recalled. Possibly the waDebuli/waDubura clan of the Mji Minane were not seaborne Swahili settlers but landborne nomads, who had already intermarried with the settlers who had arrived by sea before the later Segeju parties arrived.
There is no other satisfactory explanation for the people of one Swahili mji being forbidden to intermarry with those of others, or of what happened when they eventually did: few Swahili wars were as bloody as that one. The idea that all waDebuli and wabiba were (or were seen as) 'illegitimate' in terms of a descent-set system explains why nobody today claims descent from them, for the fact that they were in some sense impure is recalled, why mosques are sometimes attributed to them but not

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the surrounding cemeteries, since the cemeteries contain the tombs of ancestors of surviving lineages who now claim to be 'legitimate' waShirazi or waArabu. It also explains why traditions about them survive only south or a few miles north of the Kenya-Tanzania border, the southernmost limit of the Shungwaya successor-states, the furthest south that non-Muslim pastoral nomads ever held or shared political power for any period. It was from these pastoralists that the
'illegitimate' groups fled southwards, because only non-Muslim herders in the hinterland would ever drive them out or exterminate their children.

There remain the exceptions to the above-mentioned generalisations. Mohamed Rukn al-Din, the Kilwa politician with the al-Debuli nisba-bytown, may well have come from Daybul or Dabhol, or had distant origins there. As Freeman-Grenville has pointed out, double names like his are very rare among Swahilis. He could thus have a genuine Asian forefather and be unrelated to the waDebuli of the traditions.7 The Ba-Alawi who ruled in Mozambique c. 1500 and signed himself al-Debui was more likely to have been a Swahili sharif of a line which had intermarried with an 'illegitimate' waDebuli community and emerged as its leader, and who thought to impress the Christians by using an Asian nisba-by-town.

As for the waDiba, the only northern tradition about them known to me was recorded by the maritime historian Lydekker. A party of them was shipwrecked off the Bajun Islands (north of Lamu) and settled down to live among the Bajuni. They might have been real Maldivians. It is significant that they were amiable survivors of a shipwreck and not bullying and tyrannical invaders like the waliba of southern and central traditions. But the second half of Lydekker's account, that these Maldivians taught the Bajuni how to make mtepe boats, is unacceptable and renders the whole suspect. Sewn boats in the Maldives, pace Hornell, bear no resemblance to mtepe boats save that both are sewn and have square sails. Lydekker's informant may have wished to invest the mtepe with some of the 'magic of overseas'. It is in any case a weak tradition.8

At this point we may consider the more general evidence for descent sets in east coast history. No previous historian, so far as I know, has even suggested them in this area, yet there are a number of puzzles which can only be solved by assuming their existence, and the evidence for them is quite adequate.

Descent-sets are of several types, even those which still exist in societies surrounding the great lowland plain of the Shungwaya region: the Borana, the Meru (especially the Tigania Meru), and the Mbughu (Southern Cushitic-speaking pastoralists on the Shambaa Plateau with the Shambaa). Traces can be seen in traditional Kikuyu, Embu, and Kamba society, among the Rendille, among Southern Somali groups, the Pokomo and modern Segeju.19

It is in Segeju traditions that we can most clearly discern them. The descent-sets of the Katwa-Segeju (and probably of the Pre-Segeju) would have most closely resembled those of the modern Borana. And, as Borana descent-sets survived intact until recently, we shall use them as our model.

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with the proviso that earlier systems are unlikely to have been static over centuries, and may have differed quite considerably from the Borana archetype.20 Age-sets and descent-sets (also known as generation-sets21) define rank in society. In both, men (and sometimes women) go through a series of promotions: in the case of males, from youth to warriorhood, from warriorhood to adulthood, and in some systems also from adulthood to elderhood (though these are usually treated as one and the same). Each promotion is marked by a rite of passage, and each stage has its special rights and obligations. Both systems extend throughout
the society regardless of lineage or locality, and thus cut across any segmentary or
territorial distinctions, giving every male equal access to a period of military
power as a warrior and of political power as an elder. Thus far, age-sets and
descent-sets are indistinguishable from one another. However, age-sets are based
on actual age, so that all their members are roughly age-peers, while descent-sets
are based upon generations. Among the Borana, for instance, there is a new
descent-set (Borana luba: in other Oromo languages, usually gada) every eight
years, but no man may enter a luba less than forty years (i.e. five luba periods)
after his father. This has been the system since at least the seventeenth century.22
More recently, Borana men were ideally circumcised shortly before puberty, so in
theory all Borana men became elders (gadamoj) at about fifty-two to fifty-five
years. Clearly, this was not how it always worked in practice. A man may
continue to have sons for forty years or more, and since all of these sons had to
belong to the same luba, some would have been much older than others at
warriorhood and adulthood. This gap between real age and 'generational age'
mattered most in respect of two activities: military performance and marriage.
Obviously a luba which, in the long term, could come to include men of totally
different ages was no basis for a regiment; and men who had the misfortune to be
born shortly after their father's circumcision could not be expected to wait until
they were over fifty before marrying and begetting children themselves.
Military requirements were met by setting up a parallel system of age-sets, so that
men went raiding or took part in warfare in company with their age-set peers
(hariya), or else with neighbours who were of roughly the same age. Descent-sets
remained the senior institution, as one could not be a Borana male if one did not
belong to a named descent-set.
A modification to the system prevented men from marrying when they were too
young, even if they were entitled to do so in terms of their luba: they could not
take a wife until they had 'made their head' (mata midasa), that is, either produced
the 'token' of a human male slain by themselves or else killed a prescribed
dangerous animal single-handed. They then grew a special tuft of hair on their
head (gutu dirra: this was not shaved off until they became elders or gadanz); sang
songs in praise of themselves (geraarsa) at public meetings; and were entitled to
become 'fathers of a household' (aba worra). Less easily solved was the problem
of men who, in terms of their luba, could not marry until they were too old.
Borana are known by the name of their luba; and, where this luba has not yet
achieved
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elder status, they are known as 'sons of the elected leader of their fathers' luba.
But the offspring of men who did not have their own luba name could not be
called 'sons of sons of A' and so had no luba. They could not be circumcised,
could not 'make their heads', marry, or become gadamoji. Any children they might
have were, in the past, exposed at birth or given away to the Warta or some other
'non-noble' peoples.
We have discussed this descent-set system because occasional remarks in the historical traditions of coastal peoples recall what can only be a part of some such system. We have also cited some Borana terms because, occasionally, a name or term in coastal history calls them to mind. Thus the alternative name for the a-Bimali clan of the Katwa (who sound like the Somali Bimaal) is Abugado, which is reminiscent of aba gada, 'leader of a descent-set' in Oromo. However, verbal similarities are not always so close as to imply that the Oromo term is the direct source of the coastal one. Usually they are just about close enough to suggest that both terms might be derived from a third, perhaps older Cushitic language. For example, Oromo-speakers call those who are 'illegitimate' in terms of their descent-sets (and hence forbidden to marry and procreate) raba; while Sheikh Ali bin Hemedi elBuhry tells us of -ramu, a name which frequently crops up in Segeju traditions, that according to former tribal customs the child of a woman who had conceived before the beginning of her initiation-rites - i.e. before she could be married - was called mRamu [plural, waRamu], while those whose mothers had completed the rites were known as waTumbulu. Each section, he adds, lived 'in its own separate village' But he also affirms that 'there is, no other distinction between the two subdivisions' -Ramu is reasonably reminiscent of raba considering one is a Bantu term and the other a Cushitic one. In traditional Ethiopia the Borana raba did not live in separate villages but went around together in bands. Baker, the collector of Segeju traditions, was told that the ancestor of all the Somalis was called Ramu, for of course the Somalis' rejection of descent-sets, and of the idea of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' sections within a single, 'noble' society which they entail, has long been a major issue between them and their Oromo-speaking neighbours. We may reasonably guess that waTumbulu and waRamu were not allowed to intermarry. There must have been periods when male waRamu were not permitted to marry from among the Segeju at all but had to migrate and seek wives elsewhere: for there is no other reasonable explanation for the recurrent refrain in Segeju traditions, 'We left our women-folk behind at such and such a place, and had to marry the local women in our new home.' Elsewhere the waRamu and waTumbulu are described as engaged in civil war, which is likely enough if they were respectively the 'illegitimate' and 'legitimate' sections of the Segeju population.

An intriguing incident occurred when a Segeju elder gave Baker a list of names of Segeju descent-sets which, he. said, were not cycling because (as in the Borana system) each descent-set had a different name. Beginning with waTumbulu and waRamu, he got as far as the seventh name. 'When he had got thus far a younger man said "Stop! If you talk thus openly of the past you will die!" The elder looked confused and said, "Now we are Muslims we do not use the names. If we did we should be ... I could not catch the name and he would not repeat it.'24 Remembering the reluctance of McKay's informants to speak
about the eighth clan of the Mjji Minane and marital taboos formerly associated with it, one must wonder whether there is not something ominous about the eighth in a sequence in Segeju culture. It is certain that, as the comment on the Segeju in Krapf's dictionary also suggests, the Islamisation of those non-Muslim nineteenth-century Segeju entailed painful social changes for them, presumably including the acceptance as social and marital equals of descent-set 'illegitimates', and many of their traditions may have become distorted in the process.

Some Katwa-Segeju groups, then, had one or more descent-set systems, probably (originally) all of them. So may have the Pre-Segeju, since they also emasculated their foes, usually a custom associated with such systems. These systems periodically provoked civil wars (such as the war against the Mjji Minane) and sometimes obliged purely male groups to flee and seek brides elsewhere. As already indicated, it is probable that the first Segeju group to reach the Vumba/Vanga hinterland, later remembered as the waDubura, comprised victims of discrimination against descent-set 'illegitimacy'; and such considerations may have divided the ancestors of the modern Segeju right into the second half of the nineteenth century, when the conversion of the remainder to Islam at last brought about an uneasy unity. But they may still have suffered the scorn of neighbours who retained descent-sets. Baker heard that, when the German colonial regime forbade the Mbughu pastoralists of the Shambaa Plateau to exterminate the offspring of 'illegitimates' in terms of their descent-set system, they took to giving them to the Segeju instead, just as the Borana gave theirs to the Warta.

But it is one thing to show that non-Muslim pastoralists from the interior were sometimes forced to migrate across country by descent-set considerations, quite another to suggest that Swahilis periodically took to mtepe boats and set off to found new settlements for the same reason. What is our evidence, other than that it is the most satisfactory way of accounting for the waDebuli and waDiba?

First of all, the problem is incorrectly phrased. It was not the long established Swahili of old Islamic stock who retained socially divisive descent-set systems, but those of pastoralist origins who were either about to become Swahilis and/or Muslims or who had just done so who were concerned with descent-sets and descent-set 'legitimacy'. In the early period it would have been the Pre-Segeju (not all of whom would have been converted by c. 1100), and in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries the Katwa-Segeju groups on the edge of Swahili settlements or only recently absorbed into them. These were the people who furnished the 'illegitimate'.

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founders of Swahili settlements south of Vanga or who drove them southward. To understand how groups like the waDebuli and waDiba arose, let us try to put ourselves in their places. Among a cluster of Pre-Segeju or Katwa-Segeju clans living in encampments encircling a Northern Swahili port settlement is a large and growing population of waRamu (or whatever they are called locally). At first, though forced to live separately and to marry outsiders, they are tolerated - they are, after all, brothers, cousins and fellow-clansmen of the waTumbulu or their
equivalent. But as time passes the waRamu become more numerous and less closely related to the waTumbulu, and pressure against them builds up. The waTumbulu may eventually attack them. Even if they do not, their existence must eventually become intolerable. Some may revert to a life of pastoral nomadism, and set off overland with stock to settle undisturbed. Others, perhaps the majority, feel themselves too sedentarised and Swahilised to return to nomadism. They accordingly convert to Islam, which they know does not officially recognise descent-set 'illegitimacy', and move into the settlement. There their presence rapidly becomes an embarrassment as it will irritate and alienate the waTumbulu upon whom inland trade and defence ultimately depend. So the newcomers are sent off in mtepe boats to 'found' a new settlement which will both reflect glory upon its metropolis and serve as a trading-partner for it.

The probable sequel fits so well with archaeology and the traditions, and promises to solve many other problems of African and Indian Ocean history, that we cannot reasonably doubt that the sort of descent-sets we have postulated actually existed. Some groups travelled enormous distances. We have mentioned the figure of 1,500 miles for the length of the Swahili coastline, but Chibuene is nearer 1,800 from the Lamu Archipelago and unlikely even to have been within the normal range of Muslim traders based at Kanbalu. Other, later groups appear to have sailed up the Zambezi or some other southeastern river and gone overland southwards and westwards. (We are here thinking mainly of the ancestors of the Ba-Lemba people of Zimbabwe and Transvaal, who might in origin have been Swahilised pastoralists of northern stock.27) Others again may have introduced certain pastoralist customs into Malagasy and even into South Africa.28 And I have proposed that others migrated to the Maldives and India, where they became the core-group of a people known there as Sidis39

Though these far-flung exiles did not abandon trade, it seems their first consideration was to put as much distance as possible between themselves and their 'legitimate' kinsmen on the Northern Swahili coast. But not all 'illegitimates' who took to the sea went so far. Some sailed only as far as Pemba, Zanzibar, the Comoros and the Tanzanian coast, and the primary consideration, in the selection of their sites, may have been to establish new Swahili-style trading centres. Descriptions of the waDebuli and waDiba fit these people. As recently sedentarised pastoralists they might just about have regarded well-digging as a form of labour befitting their status, but they would certainly not have carried stone for building

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if they could make someone else do it for them. We are told that one group introduced the coconut palm into Pemba - presumably at a relatively early date. This is not a typically pastoralist thing to do, but it is by no means impossible, since their object was allegedly to provide fibre for the building of new mtepe boats which they would need for trade.

This story underlines an important distinction between 'illegitimate' and 'legitimate' (or solidly Islamised) settlement-founding parties. The latter would
have left their metropolitan settlements on amicable terms. They could go back to them for things like coconut fibre. This was not true of the 'illegitimates', who had to take all they needed with them on their first departure, for there could be no return. This may have made them harder taskmasters in their relations with incumbent populations; and some of them would also have been in a hurry to procure local wives, which also soured these relations. But the harshness of the waDebuli and waDiba may be exaggerated. The desire of modern Central and Southern Swahilis to distance themselves from the waDebuli and waDiba (many of whom must be their ancestors) may have coloured the traditional record. Let us not forget that the ruthless Mkame Mdwne of Pujini, 'Milker of Men', is not remembered as an mlìba by everyone, but sometimes as a Mombasa Swahili or an mShirazi instead.30

If the waDebuti and waDiba were 'illegitimate' ex-pastoralists, one might expect a correspondence between the periods of their greatest activity and those centuries when massive new pastoralist waves were reaching the coast. The earliest remembered waDebuli in Zanzibar, so Sacleux recorded, and in Kilwa, so Chittick heard, arrived before the waShirazi, which could mean in the ninth and tenth centuries, linking them with the Pre-Segeju migrations further north in those times. S's Gray heard that some waDiba reached Pemba even before the waDebuli, which could make them equally early.32

A later wave of waDebuli is associated with the installation of the waShomvi as a new ruling group in the Bagamoyo region. The waShomvis' 'founding father' traditionally died AH 1000/AD 1595 or 1596, but modern research suggests that he in fact died c. 1700. Many waDiba are also dated to the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries, and Haruni's tomb is definitely sixteenth-century, though Pujini itself might be late fifteenth.3 These are all possible dates for Katwa-Segeju refugees, though the fourteenth-century Diba migrants, if they existed, would be rather out of phase. Some buildings which are attributed to the waDebuli are late eighteenth- and even nineteenth-century. Even if some attributions may be incorrect, we should probably still take it that the absorption and (in the case of the waDebuli and waljiba) non-absorption of ex-pastoralists by Northern Swahili settlements was a more or less continuous process which, though it peaked around 1000 and again c. 1650, lasted over nine or ten centuries.

My own guess (and we can only guess) is that the names waDebuli and waDiba were not used, or not widely, in earlier centuries, and that the descendants of 'illegitimate' founders of successful early settlements created their own age-sets, some of whose names cycled but in time

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became tribal or clan names, accounting for the confusion about the waRamu and waTumbulu in Segeju traditions. It would also account for traditions such as that recorded in Kilwa Kivinje by Velten in the late nineteenth century. This mentions two early 'tribes' in Kilwa who preceded the waShirazi there. These were the Ngarwe and the Buruma, and the author of the tradition 'heard that they were the children of the waDuburi or their slaves' 4 It is interesting that they both occupied the same settlement. Perhaps they were not originally tribes, and theirs were, in
origin, the names of cycling age-sets; or perhaps the 'slaves' were those who were illegitimate in terms of a new descent-set system, while the 'children of the waDubune were legitimate. Later the names waDebuli and waDiba came into use in imitation of the 'legitimate' names waShirazi and waArabu. This was before the Mozambique ruler wrote to the Portuguese using al-Debuli as a nisba. Why were two names necessary? Perhaps waDebuli and waDiba also cycled. Perhaps one comprised people born of Ramu fathers and the other those born of Ramu mothers. Or perhaps they simply compared themselves to followers of the Shirazi and Wangwana mode respectively. This last is the most likely, for it would be typical of Swahili culture for members of outcast groups to adopt grandiose names and conduct themselves in parallel with 'legitimate' patricians. The same thing occurred frequently - though of course on a smaller scale - in nineteenth- and twentieth-century dance-societies.35

One important question remains: is it not possible that all the early Swahili settlements outside the Lamu Archipelago were founded by 'illegitimate' groups, the successful ones being legitimised later, perhaps, by waShirazi who converted them to Islam and reconciled them with their Great Shungwaya heritage? If so, we should revise our earlier interpretation of Shungwaya and Shirazi traditions and say that Shungwaya origin traditions among Southern Swahilis were not only earlier than Shirazi ones but also referred to a different event, since the 'foundation' (-burn) referred to in Shirazi traditions would be the conversion to Islam rather than the original formation of the settlement. It is hard to believe that all pre-Islamic settlements sprang up solely from commercial motives. Some of the most distant ones - Chibuene for instance - must surely have been founded by refugees from the same inequitable social system which may later have driven similar groups to Madagascar, the interior of Southern Africa, and to India and the Maldives. But some of them, at least, were founded from commercial motives. Those north of Malindi seem particularly unlikely to have been founded by descent-set illegitimates, since the coast of southern Somalia was in Great Shungwaya territory, and as such would hardly be suitable for them to flee to. And traditions describing, for example, Mogadishu as being founded by waShirazi seem parallel to others describing the Shirazi foundation of Kilwa, so it would be perverse to assume that the latter in fact refers to quite a different event.6

On that somewhat indecisive note we leave the first Swahili diaspora and turn to the Islamisation of the whole Swahili coast c. AD 1050-1150 AD. By this time the coastal settlements had been exposed to Middle

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Eastern traders for up to three centuries. These visitors, with their wealth, their clothes, their trade goods, and their knowledge of the wider world and of the latest in Muslim medicine and science generally, must have seemed possessed of a very superior magic. This would have made their Islamic religion seem infinitely preferable to the old Shungwaya one.
Such ideas may not have been too disruptive around the Lamu Archipelago, where the Great Shungwaya court itself was near at hand and the proximity of its warrior regiments was hard to forget. But the further north and (especially) south one lived, the less valid these counterconsiderations would have become. Particularly in distant islands like Mafia and Kilwa, much of the ascetic and livestock-oriented doctrine of the itinerant holy men from the north, all that the longer-established families knew of the traditional Shungwaya religion, must have seemed remote and irrelevant to daily reality. By contrast, the urban nature of the Islamic religion as represented by the merchants and traders who sailed in on the annual monsoons would have made it very attractive.

The allure of Islam did not matter very much to Great Shungwaya and its outposts until the Muslim world itself was ready to proselytise East Africa, and there is good evidence that, as late as the mid-tenth century, the average Middle Easterner visiting the region had no such intention. Buzurg ibn Shahriyar al-Ramhormuzi, just such a person, lived and wrote his Book of the Wonders of India some time between c. AD 900 and 953. This comprised travelling merchants' yams about various places in the Indian Ocean, many of which Buzurg had himself visited.

One tells of a certain Ismailawayh, who in 922 was shipwrecked somewhere on the Zanj coast. He reached a kingdom which traded with his part of the world, where the ruler treated him kindly until he could be picked up by a passing ship. But when the king and his party came aboard to see Ismailawayh off, he kidnapped them and in Oman sold them into slavery. Years later, Ismailawayh was again shipwrecked, and again made his way to the same trading port, where he found the same man had returned a Muslim, and was again on the throne, his subjects also now Muslims. The ruler forgave him, explaining that, for Ismailawayh's action in taking him to the Middle East, he would not have had 'the grace God has given me and mine, of knowing the precepts of Islam, what is permitted and what is forbidden: for no man else in the land of Zanj has obtained a similar favour.'

The story is not even remotely historical, but the background is likely to be accurate, and it is improbable that Buzurg would have said that 'no man else in the land of Zanj' had been given the chance to convert to Islam if Muslim missionaries were active on the East African coast in his day. The mainstream traditions of the Islamisation of the coast are unquestionably those which connect it with the waShirazi, who stand for Great Shungwaya converts. But before considering them we should note two others which indicate the beginnings of Islamisation at a somewhat earlier date at the northern and southern extremes of the Swahili world. The first comes from De Barros' mid-sixteenth-century work, though there is no unequivocal record of it since. In an oft-quoted passage he wrote that

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the first people who came to settle [in East Africa] were a tribe of Arabs called Zaidites [in Portuguese, Emozaidi], and the Moors consider them heretics they worked their way like a slow plague along the coast, taking possession of fresh settlements, until there arrived [founders of Mogadishu and
Barawa]. As the Zaidites held different opinions from these Arabs regarding their faith, they were not willing to submit to them and withdrew into the interior, intermarrying with the non-believers and adopting their customs. These are the people the Moors who live along the coast [i.e. the Swahilis of De Barros' time] call Baduis, a common name. 39

Arabs and arabising authors have usually assumed that this tradition refers to a major migration of Muslims from the Persian Gulf region following the murder in AD 739 of Zaid bin Ali, founder of the Shiite sect named after him. The problem is that if we accept (as we must) that the Muslims who drove them into the interior were Shirazi Muslims, these were not widespread before c. 1050; so we must believe that the Zaidites were spreading along the coast for 300 years without leaving substantial traces.

More plausible is the interpretation that the Zaidites appeared in East Africa not immediately after the death of their leader but some two centuries later, after they had established themselves in Yemen. From there they would have crossed to Zayla and Berbera and spread southward thereafter. Evidence for a Zaidite presence in northern Somalia comes from al-Dimishqi and from Ibn Battuta. How far south might they have extended? Two theories are possible. One is that they did not reach south of the Juba, evidence being the view of the Somali historian Ali Hersi, who argues that their Shiite opinions influenced the subsequent development of Somali Islam, and no such influence has been detected in coastal Kenya.40 The Zaidites, however, left another legacy in the interior with the tradition, shared by the Rendille and the Gabbra, that their ancestors were once Muslims who later lost their faith. There may be an element of truth in it if Zaidite Muslims who had never been more than an influential minority on the Benadir coast in the pre- 1100 era joined nomadic pastoralists on traderoutes to the interior.

The name Badui or Baduj by which the Swahilis knew them, and which De Barros describes as 'common', is also recorded from Java, as a derogatory epithet comparing a rural community there to the Bedawi(n) of Arabia because they resisted Islam.41 It is certainly the derivation of the name Bajuni(i). There are Katwa Bajuni clans whose names link them with the Rendille and the Aweer Kilija, and others associated in traditions with the Gabbra. It seems likely that among the remote ancestors of these people were some Zaidite refugees. The Bimali Mohamed, Garra Mohamed, and Kilio Mohamed of Segeju traditions are also likely to have been 'Badui’ clans in this sense. These Baduis probably did not venture far south of the Juba River before the sixteenth century, by which time their Islam would have been little more than a memory.42

An alternative interpretation is more likely. If it can be established that

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the small structure built beside the central well in Shanga c. 950 by stonebuilding newcomers from the southern Red Sea or Gulf of Aden area was a mosque, then we should probably assume that it was a Zaidite one. Not only did the Zaidites come from precisely that direction and at about that period, but De Barros’ description of them as not founding any notable settlements of their own but
'working their way along the coast taking possession of fresh settlements', would fit the introducers of stone building perfectly. The destruction of their mosque, designed to accommodate only a small minority of the population of Shanga, and its replacement by a much larger one reflecting the mass conversion to Shirazi Islam c. 1050-1075, would also fit De Barros' account. We must either assume that the Shi'a influence in Somali Islam had some other source or suppose that it was only the northernmost Zaidites who fled to the interior. The Zaidites of Shanga and others in the Lamu Archipelago either fled northward before moving inland or else sought refuge elsewhere, possibly in Zanzibar and Pemba Islands. The second deviant tradition regarding the conversion of Swahilis to Islam is in the sixteenth-century I(lwa Chronicle. This reports that, when Ali bin Hassan al-Shirazi arrived to 'found' Kilwa, he met 'a man who was a Muslim, followed by some of his children his name was Muriri wa Bari. They found one mosque there, said to be the one he is buried in, called Kibala.' Muriri was not the ruler of the territory who sold Kilwa Island for cloth, who is described as 'an infidel from [or, of the] Muli'; but he was definitely in residence before the Shirazi party arrived.45 On the face of it, this tradition refers to non-Shirazi Muslims (with non-Muslim names) resident in but not controlling Kilwa when the first dynasty was established. These were probably Ibadis, a fact which the Chronicle perhaps seeks to conceal by saying that their leader was buried in a mosque 'called Kibala', for strict Ibadis often do not have a mihrab or qibla-niche (kibla or kibula in Swahili). The first dynasty, which stemmed from Ali bin Hassan, may have been an Ihabi one, which the chronicler, an ardent supporter of a much later Shirazi group, could not be expected to confess. His solution was to describe Ali bin Hassan as one of the seven Persian princes from Shiraz, but to concede a prior non-royal Muslim presence in Kilwa in the form of Muriri wa Bari 'followed by his children' (though the Julanda were not specifically Ibadis, the Muslims of Kanbalu were, and may have become in time Ibadis as a result of their continuing trade links with Oman, which was itself the champion of Ibadism during these centuries. This Ibadi form of Islam spread northwards along the southern Swahili coast, perhaps as far as Mafia or Zanzibar and Pemba, though before the twelfth century it was neither a majority nor an 'official' religion anywhere.

The First Swahili Diaspora & the Coming of Islam outside Kanbalu. The majority of converts were almost certainly Swahili patricians, descendants of the original settlement-founders, motivated by the sort of considerations outlined above. Though they may not have achieved political supremacy outside Kanbalu, the first converts are likely rapidly to have acquired wealth and influence as a consequence of their better access to visiting traders. This would have been the position when exponents of 'Shirazi Islam' first
appeared on the scene; but, whereas the Zaidites in the north were vanquished and fled inland, the Ibadis on the southern Swahili coast stayed to compete with them. Such is the most satisfactory explanation of two Omani documents concerning early Kilwa discussed by Wilkinson. One, which he dates fairly precisely to c. 1116, is a letter from a hard-line Ibadi religious leader in Oman urging doctrinal purity on Ali bin Ali and Hassan bin Ali, who are seen not as princes but merely as leaders of the Ibadi faction in the settlement. The second document, dated less precisely to 1200, is a sort of victorious paean, again written by an elderly Omani divine, in the form of an imaginary conversation between an Ibadi missionary sent from Oman to help Kilwa's Ibadis, and the leader of a rival faction comprising what Wilkinson identifies as an extremist 'Twelver' Shiite sect originating in Persia.

There are two ways of interpreting these documents. One is to take them at more or less face value and to suppose that there really was a fierce doctrinal dispute raging within this relatively small and provincial Muslim community at the southern end of the Swahili coast, in which devout and knowledgeable Ibadi scholars confounded exponents of a little-known south Persian heresy. The other, preferred here, is that this was how the bigoted Omani clerics responsible for both documents chose to see it, and that the reality was different. The real conflict was between two parties of Swahili patricians, the Kanbalu-oriented Muslims whose preferred trading-partners were the Omanis and who professed Ibadi principles, and the Shirazi Muslims who appeared on the scene c. 10501100, who looked to the north for their inspiration. Their religion would have accommodated many elements of the old Shungwaya belief-system which their opponents found shocking. And, in theory at any rate, the Shirazis had better relations with non-Omani traders from the shores of southern Persia and Iraq, though they called themselves, if anything, Sunni-Shafei. In brief, by the beginning of the twelfth century there were Ibadi Muslims in Kilwa, and possibly also in Mafia, Zanzibar and Pemba, as well as in Kanbalu.

We now turn to the mainstream traditions about the conversion of the Swahili settlements to Islam. These are the Shirazi ones rather than any which suggest that the Arabs were responsible. Versions of the story of seven ships bearing seven royal missionaries from Shiraz have been recorded all along the coast of East Africa since at least the sixteenth century. Despite De Barros, the vast majority of traditions suggesting Arab origins (and so an Arab source for Swahili Islam) date only from the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and even twentieth centuries. And there are a few places where the Arab traditions are unknown but practically none

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where the Shirazis are not supposed to have landed. Finally, evidence from the early centuries - the ninth-century Chinese description of Barbara, where Persians came to trade but Arabs only to raid for slaves, and the twelfth- to thirteenth-century document indicating the Persian orientation of the Great Shungwaya court
- all support the view that Persia, not Arabia, was the inspiration for most early Swahilis.

It may be objected that the IKIwa Chronick gives a tenth-century date for the 'arrival' of the Shirazis; but that date is merely an attempt to capture for East African Shirazis the magical power of the Buwayhid dynasty of Shiraz in the tenth century. It is not to be taken literally as the date of the 'arrival of the Shirazis', that is, the mass conversion of the East African coast. For the actual date of Islamisation, we have only the archaeological and documentary evidence cited in Chapter One, but that is adequate.

It is often assumed that the new religion would have reached the Somali coast and extended southward over many decades or even a century. De Barros' statement that Kilwa was founded some seventy years after Mogadishu was held to confirm this, but now that we know that both were pre-Islamic foundations it does not do so. Rather we can visualise Ibadi Islam creeping northward from the southern end of the Swahili coast at about the same time that the Zaidites were extending southwards to the Benadir - probably during the second half of the tenth century and the first half of the eleventh. But neither of these brought about wholesale conversion. This was the achievement of Shirazi Islam, which burst on the scene c. 1050-1075, and which had probably triumphed in all major settlements save Kilwa within fifty years.

This success was possible because it had the weight of the Great Shungwaya (alias Shirazi) court behind it. There was no opposition from the established religion. A possible indication of the speed with which it spread is that the two earliest dated Islamic inscriptions so far recorded were written within a year of each other: one of AD 1104/1105, most probably associated with the Shirazis, comes from Barawa, while the other of 1106/1107, unequivocally Shirazi, is at Kizimkazi, southern Zanzibar, some thousand miles to the south.

Islam held many attractions for the Swahili townsmen. Shirazi Islam, as presented to them, would have been particularly welcome, since it offered them all the advantages of becoming Muslims - freer access to Islamic knowledge as well as Islamic trade-goods, acceptance as equals by Muslim merchants visiting them from the Middle East, and a valid reason for discarding some requirements of the old religion - without jeopardising the principal benefit of their link with Great Shungwaya. This was that its magic underpinned their own settlements and helped to set them apart from most of the non-Swahili groups of the interior. Nor did Islamisation require any very radical change in the lifestyle of most of them. Their sacred well now became a mosque well, while the central endosure retained its sanctity by becoming a burial-ground for some Muslims. Burial cairns, if and where they had them, turned into monumental or semi-monumental tombs, though at first nothing like as big as they later became. Their regalia items continued to be used much as before,

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though they became Muslim regalia items, sometimes redecorated accordingly. They were simply able to substitute the already-prestigious name of 'Shirazi' for 'Shungwaya' and carry on as before.
The Islamisation of the Swahili settlements would have been of very uneven depth. Pre-Islamic beliefs and customs could not be forgotten instantly or new Muslim ones immediately absorbed. Some people would have remained unconverted perhaps for one or more centuries. Pre-Muslim rituals which survived would have taken some time to acquire an Islamic veneer, while certain non-Islamic ones which were of political significance presumably coexisted with Islam for some time. Several Arab writers commented on the survival of groups of non-believers, and the Chinese description of Shungwaya-Shirazi itself published in 1225 does not make it sound Muslim at all. Malindi, for long the capital of a successor-state, was described by the Portuguese Bishop Osorio as 'pagan' centuries after its supposed conversion.49

The basic principle underlying the Swahili settlements was that the Shungwaya ritual centre was infinitely reduplicable, each copy of it being a Great Shungwaya in miniature, a sacred place where peoples with different languages and cultures could live together on peaceful if not altogether equal terms. The substitution of a new, quasi-Muslim Shirazi magic for the old Shungwaya-type magic would have necessitated the simultaneous conversion of these settlements to Islam. But, apart from a few sub-capitals near rivermouths, there do not seem to have been any comparable sacred settlements in the interior - at least, not by the eleventh century. Rural dwellers were thus not under the same constraints. They had little first-hand knowledge of the urbane Middle Eastern merchants, from whom the Swahilis effectively and quite deliberately insulated them, and were not tempted by the new doctrines, which were largely irrelevant to their lifestyles. Apart from the Somalis, whose brand of Islam was to have a markedly anti-urban and anti-Shirazi flavour, no purely rural populations in the East African interior embraced Islam en masse before the second half of the nineteenth century or the early twentieth.

In addition, by the year 1100 Swahili towns were developing a sizeable middle class, whose social and economic interests would be served by a loosening of the central control of what they saw as an archaic, pastoralistoriented regime with its bands of itinerant priests. People were becoming rich on trade, and no longer wanted to trudge through the cattleenclosures to get water from the central well, or to live in impermanent houses made of mud and palm leaves, much less to have to listen to sermons about the virtues of a 'just' life and the example of some herdsman ancestor. They also wanted to deal directly with people bringing trade-goods from the interior, without interference from Shungwaya-capitals lying upstream. In the interior, by contrast, the role of the old-style Shungwaya magic was as indispensable as ever. It ensured the sacrosanctity of a dry-season grazing ground, permitted farmers, herders, and hunters to coexist, and preserved a sort of peace over a wide area. Institutions such as descent-

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set systems were also important in keeping open long-distance traderoutes. There was no incipient bourgeoisie agitating for a relaxation of central control, and the new religion found no followers in the hinterland.
This being so, how did it come about that the Great Shungwaya court was converted to Islam in the first place? Did the ruling group in Great Shungwaya hope to pre-empt the erosion of its power by Zaidites on the north coast and Ibadis in the south by itself adopting Islam, though in a form which, by continuing to emphasise the importance of the old capital, promised to perpetuate at least some of its former authority? This seems quite likely. Did it then invite missionaries from Shiraz or Siraf? If so, we should expect Shirazi Islam to have been, from the beginning, emphatically Shi'a, whereas it seems always to have been Sunni-Shafei in so far as it was anything at all.

Yet, if missionaries came from a Sunni-Shafei society, we should not have expected so much overt imitation of the Buwayhid court. It could be argued that no Middle Eastern missionary of whatever school or sect would have tolerated the construction of Muslim graves with Quranic inscriptions all round the mihrabs of early mosques. A similar tomb under the mihrab of the central mosque was reported by Kirkman from Old Kipini. Saints or benefactors are occasionally buried near mosques in the Middle East. But an entire cemetery encircling the mosque would not normally be acceptable. The nearest place where anything of the sort can be seen today is probably the Maldive Islands, which were being Islamised at approximately this same period so could not have been a source of Swahili Islam.

It does not look as if the bearers of Islam were professional or full-time missionaries. A second interpretation would have the new religion introduced by Muslim immigrants from the Middle East who, by their technological superiority over local people, came to power in many Swahili settlements and in time, perhaps, even in the Shungwaya capital itself. Such people might have been political or religious refugees from their homelands but they would primarily have been merchants, craftsmen or the like, many of whom married local women but passed on their Muslim faith to their children. The Kizimkazi inscription, whose Kufic lettering is strongly reminiscent of that found in Siraf inscriptions of about the same date, has been cited as evidence that craftsmen from Siraf must already have been resident in East Africa at the end of the eleventh century.

The majority of such immigrants must be presumed to have been Sunni-Shafei in view of the Swahilis’ ultimate adoption of that school. A difficulty here is that there is no evidence whatsoever for such immigration except the Kizimkazi inscription and one or two others. There are no inscribed epitaphs such as would be normal on the tombs of Arab or Persian Muslims of this period (though some early tombs bear lengthy Quranic inscriptions in Kufic lettering). Nor are there any unambiguous records of such migrations from the Middle Eastern end. Indeed, very few Middle Eastern immigrants would have reached East Africa before the fourteenth century, when we have epitaphs for a few men bearing Persian names and nisbas in Mogadishu.

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A third hypothesis, which is perhaps more acceptable, also suffers from a shortage of positive evidence. This would have the conversion of the Shungwaya court
carried out either by Swahili patricians or by citizens of Shungwaya-Shirazi itself who had visited the Middle East and particularly Shiraz, had been converted to Islam there, and - like Buzurg's African king - came back to introduce the new religion to their homeland. Such people certainly seem more likely than Middle Eastern missionaries or immigrants to have introduced the particular blend of Islam and the old Shungwaya religion which made up Shirazi Islam. They would also be more likely to have introduced a Buwayhid tide for the ruler and other Arabo-Persian titles such as amir and wazir which, along with purely Bantu ones like mwenye mkuu orjumbe, characterised Shirazi regimes in the Swahili world. Such things suggest that the innovators wanted to imitate a complete cultural package including the whole -Buwayhid court hierarchy; that makes it easier to understand how the Swahilis ended up by being Sunni -Shafeis rather than Shi'as. If such a group had spent some time in Shiraz or Siraf, some of its members might well have learned to carve Kufic inscriptions on stone and have brought that particular skill home with them. Others may have been trained to chip comers off raw rock crystal and convert them into beads - another craft which requires considerable skill. Others again may have specialised in medicine or metalwork or in some other activity which served them as 'superior magic' when they reached home. Just conceivably they were freed slaves, but it is more likely that they were members of the royal house, courtiers, merchants, or merely well-connected young men who chose to spend some years outside Africa as guests of their Persian blood-brothers and other commercial contacts.

Unfortunately for this hypothesis, there is no particular evidence of East African freemen visiting the Persian Gulf during the relevant period, though there is one reference to 'Africans' (usually assumed to have been slaves) resident in Siraf. It is possible that some of these 'Africans' were visitors from Great Shungwaya. It need not have taken very many inhabitants of Great Shungwaya and its affiliated coastal settlements who had visited Shiraz and other places in the Muslim world to overthrow the ancien regime upon their return. There were many more East Africans voluntarily sailing round the Indian Ocean in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries than has hitherto been recognised. There is the evidence for bands of descent-set illegitimates sailing great distances up and down the East African coast in their sewn boats, and the probability that long sections of this coast had been monopolised by African sailors for most if not all of the first millennium. And it seems likely that others embarked on foreign boats to see the world. For instance, we have the unimpeachable story of Zengjian, who by 1083 had visited the Chinese imperial court not once but twice, changing boats at two or three foreign ports en route. And, at admittedly a much later date, merchants from no fewer than four Swahili settlements, Mogadishu, Malindi, Mombasa and Kilwa, were all discovered by the Portuguese aboard Gujarati vessels in the harbour of Malacca.

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There is one fairly compelling reason for supposing that the Islatnisation of the coast was by a relatively small group of Great Shungwaya citizens just returned from Shiraz or Siraf. This is that the lineage of Ali bin Hassan, alias Ali of
Shungwaya, seems likely to have been composed of just such people. Within the first 100 to 150 years after mass Islamisation, local dynasties appeared in Pemba, Zanzibar, Tumbatu, Mafia and Kilwa, and very probably in the Kerimba Islands and other southerly settlements as well. Some at least of these petty rulers struck coins bearing their own names, and several thousands of these coins have been identified from different places, mostly Pemba, Zanzibar, Mafia and Kilwa. These coins are remarkably similar, made of silver, copper, or in some cases an alloy, and most bearing the already-mentioned rhyming couplets on their obverse and reverse sides. None of them carried the title 'Sultan', though this does appear on some of the later Mogadishu coins, presumed to date from the end of the fourteenth century. The rulers may all have called themselves 'Sheikh', like Ibn Battuta's ruler of Mogadishu, perhaps, as in his case, because they were no more than sub-kings within the Great Shungwaya framework. However, the title 'Sultan' only came into general use in the mid-eleventh century so may not yet have reached East Africa when the early coins were minted.

Who were these petty rulers? It is possible that, as the power of Shungwaya-Shirazi and the old religion waned, separate and unconnected patrician lines rose to prominence in most or all settlements, and that the wealthier of these struck their own coins in imitation of each other and of a Fatimid original. (Several Fatimid gold dinars have been found in association with these East African coins.) If this was what happened, traditions implying that all these royal houses stemmed from a single family are pure myth. But this seems unlikely. First, the names of the rulers are remarkably homogeneous. Even if certain names may have been fashionable among all Swahili patricians at certain periods, it cannot be coincidental that the names of the first three Caliphs, Abubakar, Athman and Omar, figure seldom if at all, while that of the fourth, Ali, and those of his two sons Hassan and Hussein, are very common. Also commoner than might have been expected are Daud, Suleiman, Ishaq, and perhaps Said, while Ahmed and Abdalla occur less frequently than is usual in Muslim dynasties. This might indicate a widespread Shi'a orientation, but there is no particular evidence for this. It could merely reflect a Persian connection, and this seems more likely, because of three rare names which each make a single appearance, two of which - Bashat and Bahrain - are typically Persian. The third, Talut, implies a Yemeni link, but does not appear before the end of the thirteenth century. We may note that the Sheikh of Mogadishu in Ibn Battuta's time was called Abubakar bin Sheikh Omar, while the three earlier Mogadishu rulers known to have produced coins which did not bear the title 'Sultan' were called Abubakar bin Mohamed, Rahman bin Musaid, and Yusuf bin Said respectively: no particular evidence of a Persian link there.56

More significant is the fact that one name, Ali bin Hassan, belongs to a ruler who - to judge from the distribution of his coins - appears to have been ruling somewhere in Pemba in the twelfth century, but also to a Kilwa ruler about the same time or a little later; and the likelihood that it was the same person...
is increased by the fact that the coins from the two places bear a strong resemblance to one another, although they are not quite identical. Ali bin Hassan is, of course, the name of the first so-called Shirazi ruler of Kilwa according to the Arabic version of the Aiwka Chronicle, and we have already presumed that he was also the 'Ali of Shungwaya' of the mtepe tradition. We can probably take it that he ruled in at least two places, either simultaneously or at different times. It looks, then, as if these local rulers who sprang up on the south coast immediately after mass Islamisation belonged to a single family, or at least to a closely-knit group whose members frequently intermarried; and they had Persian connections. We cannot believe that they were Persians, but they may well be, or be descended from, a Pre-Segeju or Swahili patrician group which had spent some years in the Buwayhids' domains. They may have been, in origin, major or minor members of the Great Shungwaya court or royal family, or they may have belonged to a growing class of wealthy merchants and craftsmen. It would be quite natural if, after Islamising the Great Shungwaya court, they moved into some of the more important Swahili settlements to supervise their Islamisation and reap the commercial fruits of their success.

We might have expected that coins would also be issued in the settlements of the Lamu Archipelago, in Malindi, Old Kipini, and the Benadir towns; but none have been properly cleaned and identified, so we must for the moment assume that, when Zengiiani told his Chinese hosts that silver and copper coinage was struck in his homeland, he was referring to the southern mints. Perhaps the settlement-rulers nearer to Shungwaya Shirazi were more hesitant about proclaiming their virtual independence of it.

There is one flaw in this interpretation: if Ali bin Hassan al-Shirazi, 'Sultan Ali of Shungwaya', and his coterie and kinsmen were the originators of Shirazi Islam, how did it come about that the Kilwa dynasty at whose head he stood was an Ibadi one? The evidence for its affiliation is convincing. We have Wilkinson's c. 1116 Omani document addressed to Ali bin Ali and Hassan bin Ali. The former is named in the Portuguese version of the Aiwka Chronicle as the first ruler, while the Arabic version names Ali bin Hassan bin Ali, presumably the son of the second addressee, as the first 'king of the land'.

If the dynasty did not really take shape until some fifty or sixty years after the date of the first Omani letter, the family might have changed its religious affiliation in the meantime. But in c. 1232 the Arab historian Ibn al-Mujawir noted that Kilwa had recently 'reverted to Kharijism' (Ibadism) after a period of Sunni-Shafei rule, and this seems likely to refer to the expulsion of the second usurper (as he is called in the Chronicle), Mohamed bin Hussein al-Mundhir or al-Manghir, probably the same leader of the anti-Ibadi faction who appears in the second Omani document as 'al-Munghira'. This man must have been non-Ibadi, presumably a Shirazi Muslim, who ruled in nearby 'Xanga' (Portuguese version) or 'Shagh' (Arabic version), probably Sanje ya Kati." It would be he, and not Ali bin Hassan and his posterity, who stood for a Shirazi Muslim regime in Kilwa, a fact
which the chronicler had to hide by representing him as a territorially acquisitive outsider.
Yet the fact that 'a-Munghira' was an exponent of Shirazi Islam while his opponents were Ibadis need not mean that they were not close kinsmen. Given the somewhat casual attitude towards sectarian affiliation in these early years, a brother or a cousin, having been baulked of his ambition, might well embrace the rival sect in the hope of achieving it with the aid of another faction. Indeed, according to the second Omani document, this was precisely what happened in this case: 'Munghira' and his brother were both seeking to become leader of the Ibadis (a post the document names as Qadi rather than Sheikh), and when his brother got the post 'Munghira' apostatised. (Chittick collected a tradition in the 1960s suggesting that the early ruler of Sanje ya Kati who invaded Kilwa was in fact the Kilwa ruler's brother.58)
At this distance in time we may never learn precisely what happened but we can surely assume that this was the sort of thing that happened quite regularly. It supports our earlier assumption that sectarian loyalties among early Swahili Muslims would have been subordinate to commercial links, so that where it looked as if, by changing one's sect, one could acquire better overseas contacts one did not hesitate to do so, even if it meant turning one's close relatives into religious foes.
We must assume that the first Ali 'of Shungwaya' was a Shirazi Muslim. But his two sons Ali bin Ali and Hassan bin Ali (if they were his sons) may well have adopted Ibadism in order to become the leaders of Kilwa's Ibadi faction. (Possibly the Yusuf bin Hassan of some traditions was another son who remained a Shirazi Muslim and so became their rival. His line may have taken power in Sanje ya Kati.) Ali, the son of Hassan bin Ali, would also have been an Ibadi, who briefly held power in Pemba or Zanzibar, before returning to establish the Kilwa dynasty. He probably acquired considerable wealth in Pemba, where silver coins were the norm, for he was the only Kilwa ruler to mint in silver.59
Ali bin Hassan may not have been the only princeling who ruled in more than one settlement; nor is it impossible that royal exiles periodically took refuge with close relatives who did not belong to the same sect as themselves. We are dealing with a relatively small world, in which a single lineage, or at the most two or three closely connected ones, first established several more or less independent little dynasties on the strength of their prior possession of the new magic from Shiraz, and then juggled with them, amalgamating two or more here and moving from one to another there, in order to retain power. Such juggling might involve changing one's overseas commercial partners, and this sometimes meant changing one's sect. If so, it was unlikely to be taken very seriously by one's kinsmen, who might have to do the same themselves tomorrow. And only rarely was anyone killed in the course of such disputes.

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Notes
1. The phrase is Burton's. Tunge was recognised as the southernmost limit of Swahili
settlement until well into the Zanzibar era. It was the last settlement within the Sultan's jurisdiction as late as the European powers' verbal of 9 June 1896; but in 1897 Portugal seized the coast as far north as the Rovuma River, which was then confirmed as the colonial boundary despite Zanzibar's protests. For a brief account, Ingrains, Zanzibar, pp. 166-7.

2. See above, p. 103.


5. Chittick, */iwa I*, p. 98.

6. Pearce, Zanzibar, p. 29, citing Steere; Voeltzkow, 'Witu-Insel'; Beatrix Bellingham, A Guide to Mombasa and Surroundings, Mombasa, 1933. I am indebted to Professor E. Dammann for photographs of the Lamu boat-launching in 1936. A.H.J. Prins, Saiiwigtom Lamu, Assen, 1965, p. 96, quotes a passage from the Swahili traditional History of Aia, Juai Island, Ktsimani-Mafia which suggests that humans were also sometimes sacrificed at the launching of new ships. A reasonably old boat model in the Lamu Museum has a horse depicted on its rudder and I have myself seen model horses used as good luck mascots in Lamu boat-races.


One of the traditions about the waDebuli asserts that they used cannon, which makes a pre-thirteenth-century cut-off date for them impossible, and there are many others which must refer to later centuries - see below.
14. See pp. 115, 118.
15. Gray, 'WaDebuli and uaDiba', p. 33. For Haruni's tomb and the Pujini well (recently reexcavated by Horton), see Kirkman, Men and Monuments, p. 183, and illustration in Pearce, Zanzibar, opp. p. 399.
J. Homel, 'The sea-going mtepe and dau of the Lamu Archipelago', Mariners'Mirror 27.1 (1941), pp. 54-68. Since writing the above I have noticed that, according to Sir Ali Mbarak al-Hinawy, one of the sub-clans of the Kipungani clan which is in turn part of the Pate mf in Mombasa is known as Diba. This must be regarded as strengthening Lydekkers tradition about Maldiviam on the northern Swahili coast. Kipungani is a
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village on the southernmost tip of Lamu Island.
19. Curiously, I can find no clear sign of descent-sets (as opposed to age-sets) among the
modem Mijikenda.
20. Baxter, 'Boran'.
21. The term 'generation-set' is very occasionally used to cover both age-sets and
descent-sets. Otherwise, it is a commoner variant of 'descent-set'.
22. P.T.W. Baxter, 'Boran age-sets and generation-sets' in P.T.W. Baxter and Uri Almagor,
168-9.
pp. 20-1. Could the eighth name have been waDuburu? 25. See above p.155.
28. This suggestion - for it is no more - seeks to reconcile the evidence on this question


30. See note 15, above.

31. Sacleux, Dictionaire, s.v. 'Dibui'; Chittick, '"Shirazi" colonisation', p. 290.


36. See above, p. 182.

37. Freeman-Grenville, Select Documen, pp. 9-12. 38. For a possible reference to the Zaidites in the traditions, see Lambert, Cki-jomvu and Ai.Np'e, pp. 82, 98.


42. Chittick, 'East coast, Madagascar and the Indian Ocean', p. 199. 43. Freeman-Grenville, Se/t Documen, p. 36. 44. See above, p. 136.


46. Wilkinson argues that the difference between the ports on either side of the Persian Gulf at this period have been exaggerated. Nevertheless, in view of the earlier history of that area, it is permissible to assume that some merchants were inclined to favour Ibadi clients while others favoured non-Ibadi ones. And the Swahilis themselves would almost certainly have perceived two competing types of magic stemming from two different places.

47. For a recent though not definitive list of the appearances of the Shiraz tradition, see Shepherd, 'Making of the Swahili', p. 142n. See also R-L. Pouwels, 'Oral historiography and the Shirazi', pp. 256-8, and Ingrains, 7anibar, pp. 517-18. 48. Freeman-Grenville, Se/t Documen, p. 89. 49. Osorio's account is quoted in E.B. Martin, History of Malindi. a Cgraphical Analysys of an
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It is possible to date the first mosque at Old Kipini to a considerably earlier date than he there proposes. Mark Horton, personal communication.


53. For the view of Whitehouse (excavator of Siraf) on the affinity of the Kizimkazi inscription with Sirafi ones I am indebted to Dr G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville.


Malyn Newitt, in 'The southern Swahili coast in the first century of European expansion', Azania 13 (1978), p. 116n, refers to a settlement called Shanga (in Portuguese, Meshangai in modem times, Mechanga) on Amisa Island in the Kerimbas, and suggests that this may be the place referred to, though it is usually assumed to be either Songo Mnara (Freeman-Grenville, Select Documents, p. 90) or Sanje ya Kati (Chittick in the article cited in note 58 below). Only excavation of all three sites will finally settle the question.


59. Freeman-Grenville, Select Documents, p. 38.

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Nine Shirazi Islam

&

The Shrazz & Arab- Wangwana

Modes of Dominance

Any one of three separate groups might have been the main propagator of Islam in East Africa in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries: Muslim missionaries from the Middle East; Middle Eastern immigrants resident on the east coast; a (probably well-connected) group of citizens of Great Shungwaya, or of one of the nearby Swahili ports, who had spent some time in the Muslim world, especially in
Siraf or Shiraz under Buwayhid rule, and returned home as Muslim converts determined to introduce a new order in their homeland. We gave as the main reason for concluding that the third group was probably the key one, the 'particular blend' of Islam and the elements of the old Shungwaya religion which came to be known as 'Shirazi Islam'.

'Shirazi Islam' was not the Shiite Islam of Shiraz: it was the Islam of Shungwaya, and of the Great Shungwaya capital which at some point acquired the additional name of 'Shirazi', and from the vicinity of which the founders (and 'founders' in the Swahili sense) of most major settlements originally set out. True, the Buwayhid court was a model for its Great Shungwaya counterpart; but it could not be reconstructed in detail in the wholly different conditions of East Africa. All that could be done was to graft parts of it on to the living society of the east coast settlements.

In the long term the Islamic religion was by far the most important graft. But the fact that the Swahili settlements did not slavishly imitate Buwayhid Shiism suggests that it may not have been regarded as the most important single innovation. Not that Swahili Islam was particularly Sunni-Shafei at first either, probably being doctrinally inchoate and ritually diverse. It would have emerged as solidly Sunni-Shafei only during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when an increasing number of such people came to be, or to be influenced by, immigrants from southern Yemen, Hadramawt, and other non-Shiite areas, some of whom were sharis.

Even then, beliefs were not uniform. Ibn Battuta did not record any significant Shiite presence in Mogadishu, Mombasa or Kilwa. Yet pockets of Shiite doctrine survived at least into the sixteenth century, and in the settlements south of Vanga where Shirazi Islam survived possibly even later. Ibadite ideas were also tolerated, even in the royal house which in the nineteenth century moved from Oman to Zanzibar and came to dominate the coast.

Since there is no record of any serious tensions between different sorts of Swahili Muslims, we can assume that the same extreme tolerance which is the hallmark of modern Swahili Islam dates back to its beginnings, and was never varied save when religious nuances reflected different and competing trading networks, as happened on the central and southern coast in the late eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The awareness of the immense territory in their immediate hinterland belonging to nonbelievers may have led Swahili Muslims to ignore what were often relatively minor doctrinal and ritual issues.

There are two ways of looking at Shirazi Islam: as a local type of Islam and as a part of what I call the Shirazi mode of dominance. As a local variant of Islam we have to treat it synchronically, for we do not have data to trace its evolution. It is best perceived as the Islamic religion as it existed c. 1100-1250 in the southern central Islamic lands, superimposed upon an African society whose traditional
belief-system resembled it in certain important ways and so did not have to be rejected in toto.
The old Shungwaya religion was not a revealed religion, but in some other ways it was closer to Islam than to other, localised Eastern African religions. Like the deity of the Muslims, the sky-god of the pastoralists knew no territorial boundaries. Again, his itinerant priests were not unlike the wandering Islamic holy men; like them, they were concerned with universal concepts such as 'justice', and sought to influence the behaviour of subjects and rulers alike. Shungwaya-Shirazi as a sacred ritual centre was preserved in Shirazi Islam, and we may assume that its priests were also respected and only later shunted aside to a politically less central role.

Another feature of the Shungwaya religion appears to have been its concern with ancestors. Al-Idrisi speaks of upright stones somewhere on the north of the coast which were anointed with fish-oil and 'worshipped'. The prominence of monumental tombs including pillar-tombs (which could derive from these 'upright stones') and of graveside rituals associated with ancestors, which were until relatively recently characteristic of Swahili Islam, may be derived from its non-Islamic precursor (though similar features, excluding the pillar-tombs which are uniquely Swahili, occur in many other parts of the Islamic world, so an alternative provenance cannot be ruled out.)

Swahili monumental and pillar-tombs and graveside rituals are not the exclusive prerogative of Shirazi Muslims, though monumental tombs probably commemorate Shirazi Muslims more often than others. But one rite is associated only with Shirazi Muslims, and is perhaps from the old Shungwaya religion. This is the custom of strewing broken pots over graves at the funeral and on various occasions after it; pots may have been broken on the spot as part of the ritual. This custom is still occasionally to be observed on Wassini Island, along the coast of Tanzania, and in the Comoros. It is no longer recorded in the (non-Shirazi) Northern Swahili world, but some tombs in twelfth- to fifteenth-century Shanga.

The society to which Shirazi Islam was introduced was intensely hierarchical. The settlement-founders and 'founders' and their descendants (henceforth 'patricians') were former pastoralists, and would have been ranked even before they left Great Shungwaya with earlier-initiated descent-sets senior to later-initiated ones. There may also have been a ranking by clans, no doubt according to genealogical propinquity to the ruling group in Great Shungwaya. Katwa clans were certainly ranked according to their political importance 'in Shungwaya', and Segeju and Pre-Segeju ones may have been too.
Once the settlements had been established, two, three or more ranks could have been added to the lower end of the social scale, one to cater for the ironsmiths (and perhaps others) who were not patricians but at least 'came from Shungwaya', one for commoners of local origin, and one for slaves, a certain number of whom, we may suppose, were present in all Swahili settlements from a very early date. Shirazi Islam did not make any attempt at social levelling. On the contrary, it brought with it all the additional ranks and titles associated with Buwayhid Shiraz, some of which may have been adapted to fit existing distinctions but several of which only served to subdivide the patricians still further. At Mogadishu Ibn Battuta saw amirs, wazirs, shanfs, 'military commanders' (apparently distinct from the amirs) and 'lawyers' (perhaps the clansmen of the Qijzi (Muslim judge), whose post was hereditary in his clan), all ranked separately; and in at least two widely distant regions later groups arose known as Ba-Amiri, of whom it has been plausibly suggested that they were the descendants of former amirs who saw themselves as distinct from other patricians. An interesting aspect of the several versions of the Kilwa Chronicle is that in the Arabic version the wazir invariably takes precedence over the amir which is not so in the Portuguese version, while in the Swahili version waziris are not mentioned at all.

Shirazi secular and religious ceremonies were marked by the same sense of hierarchy. For the former we have some architectural evidence. The central open-air meeting-place in some old Comoran towns (in Comoran, fimbom) has tiered steps upon which the various ranks sat or stood in debate. For fourteenth-century Mogadishu Ibn Battuta described processions to and from the Friday Mosque, in which the Sheikh walked under an umbrella topped with golden birds preceded by court musicians and followed by amirs, wazirs, and others in meticulous order. This would have been a typically Shirazi occasion, although we have no evidence from elsewhere for a maqsura or royal enclosure within the mosque.

Shirazi religious architecture was ornate, especially around mihrab niches. The mihrab-wall in the Friday Mosque at Shanga, which was never remodelled after the destruction of the mosque in c. 1430, was patterned in carved coral with numerous inscriptions. It had been frequently re-embellished, though with deteriorating skills. All the earliest Swahili inscriptions were in Kufic lettering, and only one is known to have been non-Quranic: the long Kufic inscription from Kizimkazi in southern Zanzibar which dates from AD 1105-1106 must have belonged to an elaborate, Shirazi-style mihrab-wall, though the one which it at present adorns is of much later date. Half of it is Quranic, but the other half commemorates the mosque's royal founder in a grandiose style which fits our image of the ruler as the apex of a strongly hierarchical society. This founder (or 'founder') is probably buried in a monumental tomb almost under the first mihrab-niche.

There are many precedents for hierarchical societies which moulded the Muslim religion. Shirazi Islam was distinctive in the way it coped with the social structure
of the ex-pastoralist groups. No brand of Islam worthy of the name could ultimately tolerate descent-sets, and they must fairly rapidly have disappeared among Shirazi Muslims; but Shirazi Islam may have tolerated them in the short term, and certainly accommodated the age-sets which must have replaced them. Shirazi Muslims - at least patrician ones - appear to have had two major communal rites of passage for men, and probably the same for women." One for males occurred about the time of adolescence and the other marked the end of 'warriorhood' as a precondition of marriage. Both were important rituals in age-set societies, and both were apparently Islamised, either by adding Muslim prayers at the beginning and/or end of what was basically a pre-Muslim custom or by instituting a separate but parallel ritual.

There is only one documentary reference to a communal rite of passage, the story in one version of the Pate Chronicle of the sultan whose throne was disputed and who tried to force the mother of his rival claimant to have the boy circumcised at the same time as his (the ruler's) own sons. She, however, refused. The fact that a joint circumcision was even proposed suggests that it was formerly more normal.2 But Bajuni Swahilis (some of whom were, like the early Swahili patricians, descended from pastoralists with a descent-set system) also held communal circumcisions until quite recently, and still often circumcise their sons at the relatively late age of eight or ten. Interestingly, they use for circumcision ceremonies the term harusi which is also used (and by most other Swahilis used exclusively) for wedding ceremonies and rituals.3

Such communal rites of passage may well have lost their importance before Shirazi Islam had any serious challenger, which would explain why residual traces of them survived in non-Shirazi Islam as well. But, if evidence for them is scant, evidence for an 'age-set mentality' in the early centuries is relatively abundant, and this survives only among Shirazi or Shirazi-type Muslims, so that it may have been consciously eliminated among non-Shirazis. It can be seen, for instance, in Comoran terminology for the bridegrooms in two different sorts of weddings. Comorans have two types of marriage: the ordinary marriage, of which men and women alike may make as many as they wish, and the 'great marriage' (Swahili harusi kuu or, among Shirazi Swahilis, harusiya ada, 'fee marriage' or 196

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'customary marriage'). The latter is a rite of passage not only for the bride, who must be a virgin, but also for the groom, so he too may only make one such marriage though it need not be his first. The enormous cost of a harusiya ada (calculated in 1974 at between two and seven thousand pounds sterling) prevents most Comoran males from making it until late middle age, and many never manage it at all; only those who have made it may be known as 'adults' (Swahili mtu mzima, Comoran mru mzima): all others remain 'children of the settlement' (Comoran wanamfi) irrespective of age and of how many 'ordinary' marriages they make and how many children and grandchildren they have. It looks as if the harusiya ada was also at one time a prerequisite to holding senior political power, since an alternative name for those who have achieved it is wafaumeya m
The only possible explanation for this nomenclature is that Comoran society once had fairly rigid age-sets, and that the status for which adulthood presumably once qualified virtually everybody has been appropriated by the wealthy, others remaining throughout their lives 'children'.

Though Vumba Kuu's was not, in theory, a Shirazi regime (the seventeenth-century war of the waVumba against the self-styled waShirazi of the M#i Minane was probably seen by the former as 'cleaning up' the Islam of the latter), the regime subsequently re-adopted many typically Shirazi features. We may therefore call the Islam of the area a 'Shirazi-type' Islam; in Vumba too the age-set mentality survived at least to c. 1900.

What evidently happened was that to establish himself the ruler had to undergo more rites of passage than anyone else. As a circumcised teenager he was known, as were his patrician age-peers, as a kijana (plural vzjana), 'youth'; but after making a harusiya ada to a virgin of a suitable lineage he became a mwole. Those who had never made such a marriage were known as mondo, and had to obey any mwol without demur, regardless of age or lineage. If oxen were slaughtered at the hausiya ada, it was known as harusiya ngombe, 'cattle wedding', the groom acquiring even more honour. The next stage was another public feast, this one presumably paid for by the groom himself rather than his father, when he became a mtenzi ('distributor' or 'diversifier': the term also refers to those who have written an epic-style poem, utenzi or utend). Further promotion, again dependent upon paying for public feasting, accompanied the birth of a son to his wife.

Thus far any patrician might rise. But there ensued a series of other feasts and rituals, with endless gifts to prescribed Muslim and non-Muslim personages, which finally elevated one man to the throne, after which he never went unannounced by the royal siwa horn and without an umbrella and chair which were carried for him. Evidently only one person at a time could embark on this extra series and, as it took time to assemble the necessary funds, it was common to have a prolonged interregnum between rulers.

By the end of the nineteenth century nobody could any longer afford to become ruler of Vumba Kuu but what had happened there was still happening (or had only just ceased) in the Shirazi statelets to the south of Shirazi Islam.

Faint memories of the 'age-set mentality' lasted even longer. In 1955 Freeman-Grenville recorded a traditional History of Kua-Juani, Mafia Island, which tells of the vjana of one settlement being sent on a delegation to another. His informant, uncertain about the precise identity of these people, said that there were only six or seven of them, a fact which he explained by saying that there was 'some sort of qualifying examination' I7 Presumably this served to distinguish patricians, who alone could be vjjana, from commoners.
Perhaps the earliest documentary reference to the existence of an ageset system among Swahili Muslims is a thirteenth-century episode in the Kilwa Chronicle, about people who may have been Ibadite. The Kilwa ruler had been expelled by the 'usurper' al-Mundhir and had taken refuge in Zanzibar. The 'young men' had thereupon been stirred into action by their elders. The v4ana elected one of their own number as their own king (presumably, age-set leader or junior king), selecting the exiled ruler's son. They then imprisoned the usurper or his representative and summoned the exile back from Zanzibar, threatening that his son would replace him if he did not come. When the captive escaped and opposed his landing, they slew him.18

This makes sense only if we assume that arms could properly be borne only by men of warrior age (i.e. vjiana), who could not elect a senior king or sultan but who could if necessary elect their own leader. This man would have a strong claim to the high king's throne when his age-peers became elders, which would perhaps happen automatically if the old ruler abdicated. The Portuguese mention a sixteenth-century king of Malindi whose father was still alive and had possibly abdicated upon reaching a certain age, a hint that patricians may have recognised a post-adult agegroups.9

Another reference occurs a little later in the Kilwa Chronicle when Hassan bin Talut, the founder of a new dynasty, seizes the kingdom by force 'with the help of his own people' (Arabic ahl, that is, if I am correct, age-set). Hassan bin Talut was probably of fairly recent Yemeni descent, so it appears that outsiders (even non-African ones) who met the patricians' requirements for one of themselves could be absorbed into the system by being initiated into the appropriate age-set. Having thus acquired supreme power, Hassan bin Talut modified it so that he did not have to share power with his age-peers30

To resume, then, Shirazi Islam was (and to some extent still is) an emphatically African variant of the Muslim religion, with ritual centres remembered as Shungwaya and/or Shirazi, and with at least a temporary role for the priests of the old Shungwaya belief-system. It catered for an intensely hierarchical society and accommodated a pervasive age-set system which itself derived from an earlier system of descent-sets. At one time Shirazi Muslims would have had communal circumcisions for patrician youths, a comparable rite of passage for those ready for marriage,

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and possibly other rites as well, at least for would-be rulers. Promotion from one patrician rank to another continued to be described in terms appropriate for age-sets, although in reality such promotion increasingly depended upon personal wealth and pedigree rather than age or valour.

It is not easy to put a date to any of the stages in its evolution. We can, however, see it in a somewhat better time-perspective for Shirazi Islam if we examine it as one facet of the Shirazi mode of dominance. I first set out my ideas on the Shirazi 'mode of dominance' and its 'Wangwana' counterpart in 1982.21 My conception of a 'mode of dominance' in the context of Swahili history has been widely misunderstood,22 and I begin by redefining it.
When the first Swahili settlements were founded, and for many centuries thereafter, their patricians were mostly minorities among alien and potentially hostile groups. They could not have imposed themselves and their settlements solely by force, nor could they have been technologically much superior to the peoples among whom they settled save in their well-digging skills. They must have made themselves acceptable by tactical means. These tactics were later reinforced by their trading connections, by intermarriage with influential locals, and in other ways: but they are unlikely ever to have been entirely replaced. Even when established for some centuries, it would still have been necessary for patricians to impress on their non-patrician fellow-citizens and non-Swahili rural neighbours alike that their powers and privileges were non-transferable. This could only be done by representing themselves as unique and irreplaceable. They made great play of their magical powers. Magic, as defined above, was scientific or pseudo-scientific knowledge plus all its paraphernalia - the water-diviner's staff, regalia items, charms, manuscript books, the sacred settlements themselves, and so on - utilised for political purposes. These things had to be represented as the hereditary monopoly of the patricians, who alone could handle them either for the general good or to vanquish any military force or purely local magic pitted against them.

Swahili modes of dominance arose out of these circumstances, new modes appearing when new patrician or would-be patrician elites sought to replace old ones without jeopardising the patriciate as an institution. They were not social or political institutions as such - these might be shared by followers of more than one mode - nor did they necessarily reflect modes of production, though connected with them. (There are good grounds for linking the decline of the Shirazi mode with the rise of a mercantile bourgeoisie.) Rather, different modes stood for different ways by which broadly similar groups of patricians tackled similar problems. They differed mainly in style, in the scope of magic used and the ways in which it was manipulated. They were not the infrastructure of political power but part of its superstructure, not so much distinct political ideologies as different vocabularies of politics.

Let us compare and contrast the Shirazi mode and (as I now prefer to call it), the 'Arab-Wangwana mode' as they existed simultaneously in the later nineteenth century in Bagamoyo and Lamu respectively. Each

Shirazi Islam settlement had its patrician group of ex-pastoralist origins (though these origins were very distant). Each group sought to perpetuate its dominance over Swahili commoners and non-Swahilis without having the means to impose its control if really challenged. Neither group had a monopoly of local wealth, since there existed wealthy outsiders and newcomers, some of whom were Hindus or Shiite Muslims from the Indian sub-continent. Neither settlement had a sultan, though Lamu's institutions were more republican in tone than Bagamoyo's. There were numerous differences between the two places, but both were relatively large and prosperous Swahili communities depending heavily upon trade, both had more or
less the same strengths and weaknesses, and their social structures were broadly comparable.
And yet the two elites conducted themselves in wholly different ways. The most senior rulers of Bagamoyo and nearby settlements were known as jumbe or as shomvi or diwani. There were several in each place, and it was difficult if not impossible to become ajumbe if one's father or grandfather had not been one. However, not all descendants of jumbes were jumbes because, as in Vumba-Vanga, one had to make sizeable presents to a number of prescribed people (including the incumbent jumbes) and to undergo extra rites or quasi-rites of passage. before one could be 'elected'

Beneath the jumbes were many other titleholders, each ranked separately, all apparently elevated by similar procedures. Titles varied according to time and place, but those recorded from the north Tanzanian coast included waziri, amiri, mwenye mkuu, shaha or sheka, akida, Iai and several others. Different titles ranked differently in different places. The most senior titleholder in pre-Omani Zanzibar was the mwenye mkuu (whereas elsewhere the mwenye mkuu was relatively junior).

Some titles may have been enjoyed for life, but others had to be held by members of a younger generation and presumably dropped with age. The amiri was usually head of the vjana, and so may have had to be one himself. By contrast, the mwenye mkuu of the north Tanzanian mainland coast was 'the chief elder', while the shaha or sheha served as the jumbe's 'double', so these belonged to the same generation as the jumbe himself or to an older one.

Each rank had slightly different privileges of dress, and the senior ones, at least, also enjoyed economic perquisites. Thus, only ajumbe might wear a turban when dancing Bagamoyo's Ngoma Kuu ('Great Dance' or 'State Drum'), while only a waziri wore a cap: other patricians had to dance bare-headed, while non-patricians might not dance at all on this occasion. Again, when an ox was slaughtered the jumbes were entitled to the hump, and when sharks or dugongs were caught the choice parts had to be brought to them. The jumbes had salvage rights in a shipwreck, and if the owner came to reclaim his property he still had to pay 'fees', known as mboni.

Should such customs be ignored, the jumbes 'became angry' and had to be appeased. For instance, a mound of salt which appeared annually on some salt flats near the settlement might not be touched until the jumbes had performed a ceremony over it. They first ceremonially 'swept, their ancestors' graves, then approached the place with music accompanied by their retainers. Half the salt was reserved for them with the shehas and waziris, the remainder being left for non-titleholders to collect on another day." All these rules and privileges were jealously watched, for whoever diminished them diminished the whole system upon which all patricians depended.24

More or less every adult patrician in Bagamoyo either had a title or stood in close relationship to someone who had one, each title implying a slight difference of
rank. In nineteenth-century Lamu, by contrast, there were no titles, and jumbe (in northern dialects, yumbe), was used only as the name for the chamber in which the councillors met. This is not to say that all adult male patricians in Lamu were equal - some lineages were senior to others and the head of each family or lineage was normally senior to any other members of it. But within the patrician community overt ranking was anathema: there were no privileges of dress and there were none of the many rules and regulations which sub-divided the Bagamoyo patricians.

The theory, at least so far as outsiders were concerned, was that one patrician was much like another, and anyone trying to set himself apart was regarded as behaving in a manner inappropriate for a Muslim gentleman (Swahili muungwana or mwungwana, plural waungwana or wangwana). Such egalitarianism was not extended to non-patricians. It was only ‘real’ people, the descendants of ex-pastoralists, who were included in the collective patriciate which was a central feature of the Arab-Wangwana mode.

The Lamu patricians also made much less use of magic than Bagamoyo ones. Indeed, they themselves would indignantly have rejected any comparison, and have insisted that their elevated status was due to their higher state of Islamic purity, tied in with their adoption of a tradition of Arab origins. Closer investigation suggests that the differences between the two groups were more of style than of substance. Lamu patricians, for instance, preferred to use (and discouraged non-patricians from using) personal names associated with the family of the Prophet Muhammad. This was regarded as their birthright and as a reason for their high status rather than a reflection of it. Instead of a single, central mosque, Lamu had some twenty or so small, semi-private mosques, most of them very simple and relatively undecorated in contrast to earlier Shirazi ones. These were all or almost all associated with patrician lineages and regarded as enhancing their worldly authority as well as their spiritual welfare. Likewise, the Lamu patricians’ houses were full of manuscript copies or part-copies of the Holy Quran, many of them in specially designed niches, which were held to make their inhabitants superior and more secure from evil spirits. And the houses themselves were of a special stone-built type, elaborately decorated within and with great wooden doors (occasionally carved with Quranic inscriptions), which marked their occupants off from the commoners, who lived in mud and thatch huts. These eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century patrician Lamu houses were of considerable interest as a unique Islamic architectural type, were hedged around with all sorts of rituals, many of them secret, which added to the impression of religious superiority claimed by their occupants. But in fact such rituals and ceremonies were in many cases wholly un-Islamic. Babies who did not survive more than a few days after their birth were buried inside, a practice wholly contrary to Islamic teaching but traditionally also observed among some inland East African peoples. And great weddings, childbirth and funerals were celebrated within them in a number of rituals unknown elsewhere in Islam.
It was not an absolute rule that patricians following the Arab-Wangwana mode utilised 'stone house' magic in contrast to the 'clothes and titles' magic of Shirazi Muslims. In some places houses had to be built either of stone or of mud because of a lack of the alternative, and stone houses also existed in some Shirazi-ruled settlements. There does, however, seem to have been a loose connection between the growth of a stone house-dwelling class and the decline of the Shirazi mode. Evidence for this offers the best explanation for the supplanting of the Shirazi mode.

Let us return to Shanga, where the townsmen were still living, c. 10501075, in impermanent structures around a central enclosure from which they had to fetch their water. Whether the enclosure still contained livestock is uncertain, but the arrangement must still have been fairly inconvenient, especially by contrast with the stone-built houses with their own private internal plumbing which already existed in some Middle Eastern towns. Mass Islamisation no doubt improved the situation, but Shirazi Islam as it evolved seems unlikely to have jeopardised the dominance of the former elite, which no doubt continued to control the political machinery from the houses surrounded by cattle-pens in the northern part of the settlement. The evidence suggests that over the next 100 to 150 years this northern area did not benefit economically from conversion as much as the southern deme. Not only was the southern deme adjacent to the sea, but to judge from the architecture its inhabitants were more innovative, more ready to adopt and adapt new ideas, a more imaginative and energetic lot generally. The most likely explanation is that they were less bound up than their social superiors with the keeping of uneconomic livestock and with elaborate and expensive rituals. During the fourteenth century important changes began to take place in Shanga, the most significant being the building of houses in stone (coral) for the first time. The number of stone houses in the south far exceeded the number in the north (where most mud and thatch houses remained unaltered), and reflected a much greater variety of design and lay-out. Land beyond the shoreline was reclaimed by means of walls built out into the sea, the enclosed areas filled in with rubble and sand. Two small new mosques were also built in the south, each with a well. Indoor sanitation became the rule. And two southern houses even had sets of wall-niches made out of carved Porites coral, of the type later associated with Arab-Wangwana rather than Shirazi wedding rituals.26 The northern deme reflected economic stagnation, changing only very minimally between 1100 and 1450.

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One architectural innovation which was restricted (in Shanga) to the northern deme was the pillar-tomb. Two of these appeared, both surrounded by mud and thatch dwellings, in the late thirteenth or very early fourteenth centuries. In southern Somalia monumental tombs dating from the middle Islamic period (but without the pillars, found only south of Bur Gao) have been linked with indigenous local saints. Further south, too, they may have originated to commemorate purely indigenous religious leaders, who at this period may have
found the outward-looking, overseas trade-oriented atmosphere of the southern
demesmen less congenial. If this picture is accurate for other settlements as well as Shanga, it is not hard to
understand how the Arab-Wangwana mode of dominance originated and spread. Southern demesmen, hitherto excluded from political power by the fact that they
lacked livestock and traceable links with Shungwaya-Shirazi, found that because
they were not bound to a social system which revolved around the possession of
uneconomic animals they were better able to profit from the new commercial
opportunities opened up by Islamisation. Possibly their numbers included some
patricians who, for one reason or another, had ceased to support the ancien
régimes and who were prepared to contemplate a new order in which they would
emerge as leaders. Such people would take the place of the old elite rather than
destroy it. As far as we can tell, the new mode of dominance emerged in the first
decade or so of the fifteenth century, shortly after the arrival of an important
group of Ibadite immigrants from Oman. They came first to the successful
international trading-port of Pate Town, and the new mode spread from there to
the other settlements in the Lamu Archipelago and thence further afield.

My reasons for believing that a group of Ibadite Muslims connected with the
wealthy Nebhan dynasty of Oman (and perhaps including some members of the
Nebhan clan) settled in Pate Town c. AD 1406, will not be repeated in full here.
They did not become sultans, but rapidly acquired considerable influence, partly
because they held the key to a very lucrative trade with the Omani interior, and
partly because their Ibadite beliefs and prejudices offered the discontented
merchants of Pate Town the justification to overthrow their own Shirazi regime.
For the hierarchical nature of Shirazi regimes and their galaxies of titleholders
would have been anathema to Ibadites, whose regimes in Oman were devoid of
any such institutions. The early fourteenth-century traveller Ibn Battuta described
a Nebhan king or malik of Oman who 'has the custom of sitting outside the door
of his house in the place of assembly [in his capital]. He has neither chamberlain
nor minister and no one is forbidden to enter there, whether stranger or otherwise
' A greater contrast with the formal and ceremonial atmosphere of the Shirazi
court which he described at Mogadishu would be hard to find.
The Ibadites would naturally have detected religious heresy in Shirazi rituals,
exactly what the Pate merchants needed as a pretext for overthrowing them. There
was, of course, an old tradition of anti-Shirazi and pro-Ibadite Islam in East
Africa, and its success in Pate Town was highly

Shirazi Islam
significant, for this settlement lay in the heart of the original Shungwaya belief-
system country and within striking distance of the Great Shungwaya ritual capital,
Shungwaya-Shirazi itself. Great Shungwaya must by this time have been in
virtual collapse. It was another half or three-quarters of a century before its capital
was to become the target of the ambitions of various mainland successor-states
including Liongo's Ozi, but apparently it was already incapable of maintaining its
supporters in the government of Pate Town, and the anti-Shirazi faction took over.
At this point the Pate Chronicle offers invaluable information. The first place to be attacked by the new rulers of Pate, so most versions tell, was nearby Shanga; and the excavations at Shanga show that a decaying Shirazi regime there, still controlling the mosque but impoverished by comparison with a more mercantile group at the southern end of the settlement, was attacked and violently overthrown about 1430 or 1440. Some Shanga inhabitants moved to Siyu, others to Pate Town itself. The ornate Friday Mosque was burned. The whole of Pate Island was then subdued, and the conquerors moved north to seize the whole coast as far as Mogadishu and southwards towards Malindi, absorbing Liongo's kingdom on the way.

This list of military conquests cannot be taken literally; but as a disguised account of the gradual spread of the Arab-Wangwana mode it is up to a point accurate. The Shirazi-style dynasty which was ruling when Ibn Battuta visited Mogadishu was subsequently replaced by one remembered as much more austere, which may well have been of the Arab-Wangwana persuasion. The overthrow of Liongo seems to fit the Chronicle's chronology rather better. And the setback to the advance of the new mode which resulted from Malindi's initial resistance, and from Tristan da Cunha's attack on 'Hoja' in 1507, led to a significant delay before Malindi came voluntarily to accept Pate's overlordship.

That the Chronicle, in fact, refers to the defeat of the Shirazi mode, described as a series of military victories by Pate's forces, seems pretty certain, for of two of the places on the Tanzanian coast whose 'conquest' was specifically mentioned, Saadani and Tanga, the latter would not actually have existed at the time in question; but by the nineteenth century, when the Chronicle was recorded, both were centres of Shirazi-style confederacies, so their submission to Pate had to be made explicit.

Let us re-examine the 1400-1500 period of the history of Malindi, Mombasa and the Vumba region in the light of these ideas about the Shirazi and Arab-Wangwana modes. Malindi was part of the Ozi successorstate, and, having resisted Pate and her allies in the campaigns which resulted in Liongo's kingdom being swallowed up by pro-Arab-Wangwana forces, had by the end of the fifteenth century become the commercial capital of a rump state which was assuredly of the Shirazi type (conceivably, for a while, the religious capital, the 'Shungwaya on the sea-shore, not beyond Pokomo', of Mijikenda traditions). But Malindi was an extremely important site long before this. It was presumably for most of its early history the main settlement at one or other mouth of the Sabaki Delta (which may explain why there are so many different little sites over such a wide area) and was clearly in existence by the end of the ninth century, at least a century before Mombasa. It remained the more prominent of the two settlements until c. 1200 if not later. But Mombasa had the advantage of an infinitely better harbour, and at some stage it began to supplant Malindi as the leading international port on this section of the coast. It seems probable that rivalry between the two began under Mombasa's 'Shirazi' (i.e. The Shirazi & Arab- Wangwana Modes of Domination
first Muslim) dynasty. The dynasty was founded by one Shehe Mvita with the help of a ruler of Mtwapa (on the small creek a few miles north of Mombasa). Shehe Mvita ousted an earlier dynasty associated with a queen, Mwana Mkisi of Gongwa (perhaps the modern Kongowea, though this is now on the mainland). Until recently the date of Shehe Mvita's accession to power was guessed on the basis of such slender evidence as the style of his alleged tomb, at which certain annual Siku ya Mwaka or Solar New Year rituals are still performed. In 1976 Hamo Sassoon carried out excavations at the Coast General Hospital site and found no stone walls dating to earlier than the thirteenth century. He tentatively concluded that Mwana Mkisi's would have been a pre-Muslim regime and that Shehe Mvita would have established himself between c. 1150 (when al-Idrisi reported that there were no Muslim regimes south of Barawa) and c. 1330, when Ibn Battuta describes the settlement's mosques. He probably took power during the twelfth century. 3 Though Sassoon may have erred in linking stone buildings with Islamisation, his timetable fits well enough our conclusion that Islam became a majority religion all along the Swahili coast only in the period c. 1050 to 1200; and the additional facts that Shehe Mvita is remembered as 'founding' the settlement rather than Mwana Mkisi, and that his supposed tomb is the site of a typically Shirazi Muslim ritual which is often associated with founding or 'founding' lineages, tend to confirm his hypothesis. Shehe Mvita would have originated somewhere near ShungwayaShirazi in the Lamu region, and would have been one of the many Muslims to move southwards bearing the new religion. But he does not seem to have been one of the original, coin-striking 'Shirazi' group, and traditions also relate that he was 'refused permission' to live in settlements further north, eventually winning Mombasa only with the Mtwapa ruler's aid.36 Another reason for doubting whether Shehe Mvita belonged to the original 'Shirazi' group is that when, in Portuguese times, one of his successors declared himself a 'king' instead of a mere 'sheikh', the rulers of Kilwa, Malindi and Zanzibar were incensed since they alone were entitled to be so styled. This was probably because by then their houses had legitimate claims of descent from the first 'Shirazis'; Mombasa's Shehe Mvita dynasty would have had no such claim. This contradicts Berg, who cites Portuguese sources that the Shirazi rulers of Mombasa were kinsmen of those of Kilifi and Ozi, but these refer only to the sixteenth century. By then intermarriage may well have created kin links. Eventually even the Bauri of Malindi intermarried with Shirazi Islam the descendants of Shehe bin Misham, the last Shirazi ruler of Mombasa, but this was decades if not centuries later. McKay more correctly notes that Shirazi rulers were not necessarily kinsmen at all. Shehe Mvita is most unlikely to have been related to the Malindi king, unless very distantly. Though genuinely from the Shungwaya-Shirazi region, he was probably a comparative upstart, who established himself in Mombasa in defiance of the wishes of the Bauri ruler of Malindi and other longerestablished lines; and either he or a successor
compounded his crime not only by his success in attracting international commerce, but by claiming to be entitled king and to have an equal share of the 'Shirazi' magical power and by setting up a typically Shirazi regime. This illustrates an important development in the Shirazi mode, the emergence of new Muslim dynasties which adopted it simply on the basis of an origin (perhaps humble or distant) in the Lamu region. Shehe Mvita may or may not have been the first to do this but he was certainly not the last. By the fifteenth century when Shirazi regimes began to be overthrown, three and a half centuries had elapsed since the original conversion, and it is unlikely that many of the Swahilis who then called themselves 'Shirazis' and claimed Shirazi magical authority were true descendants of the earliest coin-striking kings.

During the fifteenth century Mombasa's international trade thrived, largely at the expense of Malindi's. The story was the same in the first half of the sixteenth, during which a high degree of prosperity was maintained almost everywhere on the coast but Malindi sank to a new low. Malindi retained political importance, partly from its links with the Mossequejos and the Portuguese. But archaeological evidence suggests a steady decrease in its imports, and documents tell the same story: by 1606 a European visitor described its inhabitants as living in 'utter poverty'.

Malindi did not sink without a struggle. Faced with ideological (possibly occasional armed) assaults or forays from Pate and its allies in the north and economic strangulation from the south, its only hope was to find a new trading ally who would distract its enemies militarily. The sudden appearance in the region, in 1498, of a wholly new, albeit Christian power must have seemed an answer to the townsmen's prayers. This explains the Malindi king's celebrated decision to welcome the Portuguese fleet of Vasco da Gama and offer him an instant alliance. Henceforth Malindi adopted a two-pronged policy of providing the Portuguese with a safe staging-post on the east coast and all the supplies and pilots they needed, while at the same time feeding them with misinformation about the behaviour of the Bauri's enemies.

At first the omens were promising. As already noted, the Christians were induced to carry out at least one wholly unprovoked piece of violence on Malindi's behalf when they attacked 'Hoja' in 1507,39 and the
beeswax, and ivory, some of which would have been within the Malindi ruler's own monopoly. In 1512, too, the Portuguese evacuated their trading post at Kilwa and retreated southward to Mozambique. Thereafter many of their vessels which had previously visited Malindi cut straight across to India and so by-passed the Northern Swahili world completely.

The main reason given for the closing of the Portuguese factory in Malindi was that the king 'had lost control of the town's trade, and consequently lost much revenue' 40 It is not hard to guess how this happened. Shirazi-style rulers in nineteenth-century Tanzania could generally insist, by threats and their control of amenities, that anyone bringing tusks, livestock or other commodities from the interior should present such things to them first, so that they could take their pick for their own trading. They also collected a tax on certain items.41 Assuming that the procedure had been comparable in pre-Portuguese Malindi, it looks as if the ruler's magical powers were no longer sufficiently feared for him to achieve this. This in turn implies that the merchants of sixteenth-century Malindi had either migrated elsewhere or were, by c. 1510, adherents of another mode of dominance or no longer unduly impressed by the Shirazi one.

Let down by the Portuguese, the Bauri were forced to come to terms with at least one of their foes, and chose Pate. Sometime between 1500, when a Portuguese account depicts the Malindi ruler mounting a horse to ride over the body of a sacrificial sheep, and performing other non-Muslim and typically Shirazi rituals, and the middle of the sixteenth century, when De Barros heard that all east coast patricians 'came from' Arabia,42 the Malindi court must have effectively abandoned the Shirazi mode and adopted a form of the Arab-Wangwana one. This appears to be what happened in Malindi Town. The Bauri retained the throne and preserved a few of the old Shirazi forms when dealing with Christian visitors, but the ruler can no longer have relied on Shirazi magic for his political authority. We hear nothing more of ranks or titles, nor are there subsequent accounts of non-Islamic rituals either in Malindi or in Mombasa after the dynasty moved there in the 1590s.

We may guess that elements of the old dispensation survived in the Bauris' dealings with the Mosqueeos in the hinterland. When in 1593 the Malindi rulers moved to Mombasa after their Mosqueeos allies had killed the last Shirazi ruler of that place and his sons, the change of mode seems to have caused a problem with the Musunguli of the Mombasa hinterland, who had enjoyed some sort of an utani relationship with Shehe Mvita's heirs whom the impoverished Bauri had supplanted. The Shirazi Islam difficulty may have been resolved by permitting Jomvu, a small settlement on a creek behind Mombasa which dealt most directly with the peoples who were later known as Mijikenda, to retain a Shirazi regime even when all other settlements south to Tanga had been converted to the Arab-Wangwana mode. Thereafter most of Mombasa's trade dealings with its hinterland were channelled through Jomvu's Shirazi patricians.43
Malindi, then, was at best half-hearted in its adoption of the Arab-Wangwana mode, but it ceased to offer any effective resistance to Pate’s desire to spread the new doctrine and, after the dynasty’s move to Mombasa, Mombasa’s regime too became to all intents and purposes Arab-Wangwana. The next Shirazi stronghold to the south comprised the Mji Minane of the Kenya-Tanzania border who were defeated and dispersed by the waVumba and their Segeju allies some time before c. 1630. To the south of Tanga Bay, Shirazi rulers survived and in some places in the Comoros flourished until relatively recently. An understanding of the feud between adherents of the Shirazi and Arab-Wangwana modes of dominance certainly helps the modern historian to understand the events of the Northern and Central Swahili world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and especially such things as the ‘Hoja’ episode and the reaction of the Malindi ruler to the Portuguese newcomers. But what light do these events throw on the concept of a mode of dominance? The rise of Arab-Wangwana regimes between c.1400 and c.1630 almost certainly reflected the intrusion into the Swahili patriciates of new groups whose political power had not previously corresponded to their share of the wealth of the settlements - represented the success of something suspiciously like a new bourgeoisie at the expense of something not too different from an established feudal order. The Arab-Wangwana criticisms of Shirazi practices as un-Islamic concealed a contradiction between the political system and the economic reality, and the rivalry between the two parties was in fact about political power and who was to wield it. But after c. 1630, if the rise of the Arab-Wangwana mode indicates the accession to power of at least some members of a new class, why did the Shirazi mode survive south of the Umba until relatively recently? One would have expected comparable groups to take power in the southern settlements long before. And how could it have come about that, in Vumba Kuu itself, Shirazi practices crept back by the eighteenth century?

The most satisfactory explanation for the fact that modes of dominance ceased to be important enough to justify violence and wars is that, in the seventeenth as in earlier centuries, the Swahilis were only prepared to go to such lengths when their overseas trade links were at stake, and that after about 1630 this ceased to be the case. If the Arab-Wangwana mode was originally associated with the Nebhan party in Oman, it is likely that it was also associated with one or more Indian Ocean-wide trading networks competing with other networks more particularly associated on the Swahili coast with Shirazi regimes. The politics of maritime trade networks were assuredly fluid, so there would have been frequent shifts of alliance and numerous ups and downs in the next 150 years; but it is likely enough that each mode still had its own supporters among rival networks of Indian Ocean traders in the mid-seventeenth century when Arab-Wangwana parties triumphed as far south as the Umba River.

What then must have happened is that the network or networks supporting the Shirazi regimes lost out. Perhaps they disintegrated due to domestic politics or
Portuguese policies, or were somehow defeated by, or did a deal with, those merchants associated with Arab-Wangwana ports. Thereafter, all Swahilis had to trade with the latter whether they liked it or not; and though the rivalry between Shirazi and Arab-Wangwana parties spluttered on it lost its passion and economic significance and ceased to be a useful vehicle for socio-economic conflicts, because it no longer made much difference which group was in power. Possibly the final defeat of the Nebhan faction in Oman, following its expulsion from Sohar in 1616, permitted the Yarubi dynasty to unite all Ibadi-oriented trading networks under a single banner and defeat any rivals in the Eastern Africa trade zone. Or the final disappearance of the Nebhans may have permitted the two competing networks to reach an amicable arrangement which effectively left Eastern Africa to the group which had hitherto supported the Arab-Wangwana settlements. All we can say now is that it seems most likely to have been some external event like this which put an end to the violent competition between Shirazi and Arab-Wangwana parties in the Swahili world. But such an external event would not explain the reversion of Vumba Kuu to the Shirazi mode. For this the reason must be sought in Africa itself, among Swahili commoners and the non-Muslim, non-Swahili subjects of the Vumba rulers. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the one place where a Shirazi mode was re-adopted was the southernmost point of Arab-Wangwana expansion. It looks as if societies lying on and south of the Umba were simply less susceptible to the Arab-Wangwana type of magic than those further north.

For modes of dominance have to be acceptable to the dominated as well as to the dominaters, and it is dear that the Arab-Wangwana mode was less acceptable to the subjects of the Vumba Kuu state than the Shirazi one. The latter was accordingly revived, though without the panoply of titleholders which characterised it elsewhere. The area controlled by Vumba Kuu in some respects constitutes a socio-cultural watershed, and the ancestors of the modern Digo and Duruma, who would assuredly have formed the majority of Vumba Kuu's population, share certain important cultural traits with peoples further south in spite of their political links with the other Mijikenda to the north. It is to be hoped that the concept of a mode of dominance as used here is by now clear. It was not solely a question of political institutions: thus, while only Shirazi regimes had ranked titleholders, it was possible for both Shirazi -and Arab-Wangwana ones to have monarchs - though the monarchs in the Arab-Wangwana mode tended to be regarded as no more than primus inter pares. Nor did it invariably involve a wholesale change of elite - the Malindi royal family adopted a modified form of the Arab-Wangwana mode in the course of the first half of the fifteenth century and survived the change, though many, perhaps most, of Malindi's patricians dispersed during this period to revive the Shirazi mode in the Southern Swahili world. Nor can Shirazi and Arab-Wangwana ruling elites respectively be identified as the ruling classes of feudalism and bourgeois capitalism tout court.
After the mid-seventeenth century the particular mode adopted by any given settlement became less important and tells us less about the group in power and the rise of new elites. It was only between c. 1400 and 1630 that modes of dominance occupied the centre of the stage in the Swahili world, mainly because during this period they reflected different overseas trading networks, although the nature of the population the patricians sought to dominate appears also to have been a factor.

Nevertheless it is essential even for historians of the later centuries to understand Swahili modes of dominance in order to make sense of the documentary, traditional, and, in some contexts, archaeological and ethnographic evidence which is so often influenced by them. Their importance for our understanding of origin traditions was explained in Chapters Four, Five and Six, and their significance for East African Islam considered in the early part of this chapter. Those who would dismiss them as a historical fiction must offer more satisfactory explanations.

Notes
1. See, for example, B.G. Martin, 'Arab migrations to East Africa in medieval times', JAHS 7.3 (1975), pp. 367-90. I shall be suggesting, however, that Dr Martin exaggerates the numbers and the secular influence of early Hadrami immigrants.
5. See below, p.199.
6. See above, p. 106.
7. See above, p. 154.
8. Freeman-Grenville, Mediaa1 Tagayika Coast, pp. 154, 155.
10. S. Flury, 'The Kufic inscription of Kizimkazi mosque, Zanzibar, AH 500 (AD 1107)', 210
11. Evidence for this is even harder to obtain in the case of women than men; but see

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27. Cassanelli, 'Benaadir past', pp. 47-50. 28. Another version of the Pate Chronicle describes Pate as having acquired authority over the Benadir coast before the overthrow of Shanga, which may be a veiled way of admitting that the Benadir settlements dropped the Shirazi mode even before Pate Town itself. 29. Quoted in S.B. Miles, The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf, London, 1966 (single volume edition), p. 483.


35. H. Sassoon, 'Excavations at the site of early Mombasa', Azania 15 (1980), pp. 1-42. 36. He is recalled in traditions as coming from 'the Shirazi towns', which I once suggested would have been the Mjif Minane south of Mombasa, though I no longer think this likely.

For traditions about him, see FJ. Berg, 'Mombasa under the Busaidi Sultanate: the city and its hinterland in the nineteenth century', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1971, pp. 34-6. The ruler of Mtwaya was also 'king' of the Chonyi. When Mtwaya was finally evacuated, his descendants moved to Mombasa and intermarried with descendants of both the Mombasa and the Malindi Shirazi rulers. Prins, Swahili-speaking Peoples, p. 99, citing Guillain, Documents I, p. 245; Kirkman, 'Muzungulos of Mombasa', pp. 79-80. It seems likely that the 'Chief of Mombaz' who in the 1840s told Krapf about the Shungwaya origins of the Swahili, and who is also described as 'Chief of the Chonyi', was a descendant of this ruler perhaps the leader of Mtwaya tafa in
Mombasa's 'Nine Tribes' or Tisa Taia.
37. FJ. Berg, 'The Swahili community of Mombasa 1500-1900', JAH 9 (1981), pp.36-7;
McKay, 'South Kenya coast', p. 29.
42. Quoted in Kirkman, UngWana on the Tana, p. 9.

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43. This is anyway the only explanation I can offer for the fact that Jomvu, so far north of any other Shirazi regime, seems to have managed to preserve a Shirazi regime of its own, and to have provided a haven for so many Shirazi exiles, until relatively recently. 44. See above, p. 152.

Ten
Shungwaya
&
The Swahili Settlement
A Swahili is principally a person who lives in or around a traditional Swahili settlement, mi, or its modern equivalent, majengo. In order to bring the Swahilis in history into clearer perspective, we shall here consider certain aspects of the traditional settlement, and also note features which suggest a link with other sacred settlements in the region, and hence with the historical Shungwaya-Shirazi, whether as a ritual centre or a political capital.
The typical mi was very small in terms of population. In 1981 I listed 173 sites dating from earliest times to c. 1900 (at least 106 of them estimated to have flourished before 1700), and calculated that of these no fewer than 116 were 'small', probably with populations of under 1,500, while only 21 were 'large', likely to have exceeded 5,000. Most documentary information refers to the large settlements, but I suggested that over the ages only about one in three Swahilis would have lived in them, the other two living in medium (population c. 1,500-5,000) or small ones. Since then new sites have come to light, especially in Mozambique and the Comoros, and some of my-estimates (notably what I called 'periods of efflorescence') have had to be revised, but I doubt whether the overall percentage of medium and small sites, and of the total Swahili population living in them in any century before the present one, would be much different. Before c. 1600 the proportion in large settlements would, if anything, have been smaller. I would maintain that a handful of settlements - Siyu and Lamu Town in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Pate in the seventeenth and eighteenth - may have topped 20,000 inhabitants, but that otherwise very few places ever exceeded 10,000. In the pre-1900 era maybe only Kilwa, Malindi, Zanzibar, Witu, and Mombasa would have been so populous.
A population of 10,000 is often regarded as appropriate to a mere village; and although most large and medium Swahili settlements fulfilled many of the usual criteria for a town (they serve as an administrative headquarters, most are craft centres, and boast wholesale and retail trades), and though the ethos of almost all of them is aggressively urban, yet there are certain things which small population units simply cannot achieve. An important limitation of small populations is lack of manpower. The east coast environment is a fickle one with the constant threat of droughts and diseases related to the water supply, of moving sanddunes burying settled areas, of epidemics or famines. Against such forces when they struck, small populations usually had no defence save to move away and start new settlements elsewhere. The large number of settlements which lasted for one, two or at most three centuries has to be understood in this light. Again, small population units can seldom afford an aggressive foreign policy. Though the Swahilis had cannon in Portuguese times, they do not seem to have used gunpowder regularly before c.1800. Political and social disputes seldom entailed much bloodshed, and administrators of justice tended to avoid sentencing condemned parties to death: in severe cases they enslaved them, for the labour of a slave was worth more than a corpse.

The sparseness of the total Swahili population (never more than half a million people, usually nearer a quarter of a million, spread out along some 1,500 miles of coastline and offshore islands) and its lack of military zeal also have implications for the coast's economic history. Swahili settlements are frequently portrayed as parasitic and exploitative, drawing their incomes largely from trade between the interior and the outside world. But it must be remembered that basically non-aggressive settlements of under 5,000 people could 'underdevelop' their hinterlands only to a very limited extent.

The larger ports could make a considerable economic impact on the East African interior, and periodically did. But it is misleading to portray most Swahilis as merchant middlemen living solely by commerce. This image is at odds with the large proportion of Swahili settlements (about one in three) which either have very poor harbours or none at all. A large number of Swahilis throughout the ages must have made their livings from agriculture or herding, or by being craftsmen. Only a minority lived exclusively by trading. However, virtually everybody did a little trading, and even in the inland settlements dealing in imports and exports was all-important culturally, if not economically pivotal. Living mostly in small communities on the fringe of the African continent, the townsmen were vulnerable to military or other pressures from what were often more populous societies in the interior. How did they gain security for themselves and their way of life? The answer is that they played, skilfully and continually, on the notion of the 'magic of abroad'. This was the secret weapon of the Swahilis (and especially of the patricians). Ibn Battuta's account of his reception in Mogadishu, echoed by Burton centuries later, showed that the townsmen ensured...
that no visiting traders dealt with or through anyone who did not belong to an appropriate Swahili family. Merchants might not even disembark before this had been arranged. No outsider might do business directly with non-Swahili Africans - the whole import-export business must be a Swahili monopoly. This enabled them to create a mystique around it: to withhold allegedly magical items for the exclusive use of their own patricians, and to allow others to percolate only to a few selected clients among the

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mainland groups. The appeal to 'magic' was more overt in the Shirazi regimes than in Arab-Wangwana ones, but it was common and essential to both. It was no coincidence that Swahilis energetically opposed nineteenth-century Indian merchants when the latter began to move into the interior (the Swahilis' own caravans had bristled with magical precautions), or that the success of Indian pioneer traders, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a headlong decline in Swahili wealth and power. Without their monopoly of foreign trade, the Swahilis' magic disappeared.

Perhaps the most important consequence of the smallness of most Swahili settlements here was the essential parochialism of much Swahili life. A Swahili might pretend that he was an urban creature and quite different from the rural-dwelling villagers around him whom he affected to despise; but he resembled them much more closely than he resembled the average town-dweller of modern times. Like them he dealt most of the time with either close friends or relatives, many of whom were also neighbours. Under such circumstance it was hard for secrets to be kept, personal weaknesses to be concealed, political power wielded unchecked; hard too for discrete socio-economic classes to evolve. Even religious disputes sometimes look more like family squabbles or commercial rivalries than ideological struggles.

There was, however, one social barrier which was probably never completely obscured by smallness of social scale, and this may have retarded or concealed class formation as usually understood. It was the barrier between patricians - nominally descendants of the ex-pastoralists (and especially of the founders or 'founders' and other long-established expastoralist groups) - on one hand and commoners on the other. The latter might include original settlers such as blacksmiths and other non-pastoralists who had accompanied the founders 'from Shungwaya/Shirazi' and also embraced later arrivals of non-pastoral stock. The distinction between the two groups was rigidly preserved up to relatively recently, and was for long central to all aspects of Swahili life.

The barrier itself was not always insurmountable. Individuals and even lineages crossed the dividing line in both directions, such crossings probably becoming more frequent as the original founding or 'founding' was obscured by the passage of time. In Shirazi regimes the gradual substitution of wealth for other criteria of social elevation would have led to many promotions and demotions; and even in earlier centuries before wealth became so important it was apparently possible for an acceptable outsider ('acceptability' in terms of Islamic pedigree and physical
appearance) to be absorbed into patrician ranks by being initiated into a patrician age-set. Hassan bin Talut in Kiwa would be an example.

In Arab-Wangwana communities upward social mobility may have been harder in some ways, but certain categories of person - such as Swahilised Arab immigrants, and in particular sharfs - could win acceptance into the patriciate so long as they were not too impoverished or otherwise anomalous.

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One newcomer who could probably always find his or her way into any patriciate (more easily, perhaps, than sharifs, who sometimes encountered opposition from entrenched religious leaders) was the ex-pastoralist kinsman or pseudo-kinsman of an established patrician family. Evidence suggests that such people were almost immediate candidates for conversion to Islam (which other African newcomers were not), and then became eligible for intermarriage with other patricians.

Sometimes a whole group of them would arrive at once and be conceded a deme and a share in the government, as apparently occurred with the Siyu waKatwa. Elsewhere the original patriciate might be so attenuated that an incoming group of already Muslim ex-pastoralists could simply establish itself as a new patriciate. Conceivably this was what the Zaidites did in places like Shanga c. 950. It was certainly the origin of the waShomvi, who came from the Barawa region to settle around Bagamoyo in the seventeenth century and were accepted as patricians with shomvi as a sort of title. The primacy of supposed ex-pastoralists also accounts for the social ascendancy of Bajunis in places like Mafia.7

The barrier between patricians and commoners persisted in Swahili settlements despite the fact that cultural gaps were progressively reduced over time. Indeed, it may have been because behaviour and physical appearance became steadily less useful as social markers that the social distinction, though increasingly artificial, was so tenaciously observed. Linda Donley-Reid has proposed that, as stone house-dwellers became de facto less Arab, they required more and more symbols to demonstrate their 'Arabness' 8 The argument convinces save that, in my view, most were never real Arabs but waArabu, patricians whose mode of dominance predicated claims of origin in Arabuni.

It was in reality the dilution of patrician self-confidence, as memories of their ex-pastoralist origins became dimmed by the passage of time, which forced Swahili patricians to insist that they were different from and superior to the rest of the population. Hence their obsession with making socially 'equal' marriages. Hence too their surviving preference, if they marry African outsiders, for those of real or notional pastoralist backgrounds.

We may here consider, briefly and tentatively, the question of slaves or 'people of slave origins' in traditional Swahili settlements. That there were slaves of one sort or another in Swahili society from an early stage is certain, though they may not have been very numerous before the late eighteenth or nineteenth century. But it is not clear that all those referred to in the later nineteenth century as 'slaves' or 'of slave origins' were in fact slaves even in the loosest sense. Three of the words
usually translated as 'slave' or 'ex-slave' merit our attention. One is mtwana, a
diminutive form of mtu whose literal meaning would be 'a little person' or
something of the sort. While most modern Swahilis declare that this is a term for
slave, a traditionally oriented one will occasionally aver that it does not exactly
mean 'slave' but merely 'inferior person' or 'not a freeman' (si mungwana). If we
take mungwana to mean 'free man, one who is not a slave or of slave blood' (as
Swahilis would), then its opposite is, of course, a

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slave. But once we realise that, especially in settlements where the Arab-
Wangwana mode prevails, mungwana is also the only term for a patrician, then it
becomes clear that one who is not a mungwana may in fact only be a commoner,
not a slave at all. Krapf's dictionary translates mtoana as (male) slave and kitoana
as slave boy, but under mtwana reports that Erhard (a colleague) believed it meant
'a free man as opposed to a slave' An alternative explanation is that Erhard's
informant gave a meaning of the term which was already rare and archaic and
which has since almost totally died out.
For further evidence for the view that some people who are now generally
regarded as 'of slave blood' may in fact be no more than commoners in the sense
of non-patricians, the 'tribal' name for the longestablished Swahili population in
Zanzibar Island, waHadimu, might be cited. If wahadimu really means 'slaves' as
modern dictionaries insist, it is hard to imagine how a whole population has come
to call itself by the name. If, however, it can equally well be translated 'clients' (as
when used by Sacleux, whose informants were nineteenth-century Zanzibaris),
the acceptance of the name is easier to understand.
Evidence regarding a third word for slave, mzalia, comes from Siyu. Siyu people
are divided over the precise nuance of mtwana, but are virtually unanimous that
the term mzalia which is generally supposed to denote slave origins does not do
so. Literally 'one who is born', mzalia is held to mean 'a slave who is born within
a settlement' (i.e. a Swahilised slave, as opposed to an unacculturated, newly
enslaved person). In Siyu many sub-clans are categorised as waZalia (including
several within the Famau or 'royal' clan) and the term is held to imply 'freeborn
people who for various reasons were unable to attain waungwana status, but were
accorded a position in society higher than that usually given to people of slave
descent' 10
The upper classes in nineteenth-century Zanzibar must have chosen to pervert the
original meaning of three words for 'commoner' and/or 'client', mtumwa, hadimu,
and mzalia, and to imply that all such people, since they were not waArabu, must
be of slave descent. Such a notion clearly suited many, not least relatively recent
immigrants from Arabia who could pass (in colonial eyes) as woArabu. In
practice not all Swahilis use the words with this precise implication; but, due to
the accident that 'Standard' Swahili is based on late nineteenth- and early
twentieth-century* Zanzibar usage, this interpretation has become universalised
and received the sanction of the lexicographers. This does not mean that Swahilis
of slave descent do not exist, only that some groups and lineages who have been so described may be more accurately perceived as of commoner or client origins. Overlapping the division between (nominally) ex-pastoralist patricians and (nominally) non-pastoralist commoners was a different range of distinctions between patrons (founders or 'founders') and clients. This is best explained by a rough comparison with traditional southern Somali society. 'Mixed villages' in southern Somalia distinguished between urud (strictly 'first-born'), dalad, duhun and shegaad (clients). The urud represented

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the lineage remembered as having first occupied a territory, along with lineages which may have arrived later but were closely related, whereas other, unrelated 'noble' lineages were merely dalad. Likewise all clients were originally shegaad, but long-established and closely acculturated groups might be promoted to duhun, though without full, equal political rights.

The Swahili counterpart to urud would be the founders or 'founders', wenye mji ('owners') of a settlement. They were patricians, and in northern settlements following the Arab-Wangwana mode usually lived in fine stone houses. Commoners were required to live in mud and thatch structures and to share public wells. In this respect they were comparable to the Somali shegaad, 'clients', who were not permitted to build permanent (i.e. stone) houses or own wells."

The distinction was complicated by intermediate groups (counterparts to dalad and duhun). Not all non-founders or non-'founders' were necessarily commoners. Patrician newcomers to an established Swahili settlement would expect some of the rights of wenye mji, such as the right to build stone houses and own wells, even if they did not immediately gain full political rights. Thus the Pate Chronicle reports of a group of newcomers to Pate Town, the Hatimi from Barawa, that they 'bought houses and even bought firewood and wells', so that in that respect they were granted automatic patrician status, but without the same weight politically as longer-established families. These would be the counterpart of Somali dalad. But in certain circumstances they might not be allowed to build stone houses and dig wells and were relegated to commoner status. Such was the fate of the refugees from the three settlements on Manda Island, Takwa, Kitau, and Manda Town itself, who sometime after 1600 sought permission to settle in or near Lamu Town. Presumably because of their poverty, they were told that their new homes must have thatched roofs and that they might not wear shoes in Lamu streets.

The Manda refugees settled at nearby Shela, and some still go barefoot when visiting Lamu Town. But they did not willingly abandon patrician pretensions: some flat-roofed stone houses were built, though few with private wells; others attempted to recreate the wall-niches and plasterwork of a stone house inside thatched houses with walls which were, structurally speaking, of mud and upright poles. The last two of these would-be patrician dwellings survived in ruined form into the 1970s but have since collapsed.'2
We may note two features about Mijikenda kaya settlements. Swahili commoners were not permitted to dig their own wells or build permanent houses, and there are no wells or permanent houses in Mijikenda kayas either. This is an odd omission in settlements one of whose main functions was to have been defensive. There are many Mijikenda traditions about old-style Mijikenda houses within kaya boundaries, which have no walls but grass thatched roofs which reach right down to the ground. It is agreed that this type of house was ordained in Shungwaya, the 'first kaya' Traditions agree that the grass walls permitted the waGola to spear.

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kaya-dwellers from outside; like the thatched roof houses of Swahili commoners, they put their owners at a military disadvantage. Some traditions refer to other types of houses in the past: to a nineteenth-century figure who tried to build a rectangular, gabled house which was contrary to what was permitted and had to be torn down, and to what seems to have been an earlier type of kaya dwelling, called mwilawala, built of mud or baked mud bricks to prevent spears penetrating from outside. There are stories of an earlier Giriama kaya called Kaya Mwikwa with such houses; the waGala attacked its inhabitants ferociously, after which it became known as Kaya Mwijo ('Punishment Kaya').

This makes sense only if we assume that, at least after c. 1600, Mijikenda kayos were occupied not, like Swahili mji-settlements, both by patron groups and client ones, but exclusively by people in the status of clients to the waGala. The latter, of course, would be (in our terms) Katwa-Segeju pastoralists, and would punish any kaya-dwellers who constructed houses to which they were not entitled.

Swahili society was divided not only horizontally but also vertically. Names for segments and sub-segments within Swahili society are legion: as well as the mji, there was the kabila, the tafa, the mlango, and the mbari; also the ukoo, the ahal and the uladi, and the utanzu; and there are still more, often localised, terms and usages. The meaning of many of them is deliberately vague, permitting a flexibility of practice over time characteristic of much else in Swahili political culture.

But one term (or rather concept, for it is expressed by various terms), the clan, deserves closer examination because it looks as if it was central to settlement plans and can be identified archaeologically. We have spoken of the clans of Great Shungwaya and its successor-states, minimally defined as populations smaller or subordinate to the tribe, but probably preceding tribes (in the sense of one-language, one-culture units). We specified that they might or might not represent groups linked by kin; might or might not stand for groups speaking a common language and sharing a common culture (Katwa-Segeju 'clan', for example, might include a number of unassimilated clients); and might or might not survive as 'clans' over a long period.

Within Swahili settlements the term is no less loosely defined and some clans in the non-Swahili sense reappear as Swahili clans bearing the same proper names. It is, therefore, permissible to continue to use the same term, though clarity may
require us to specify that it is the Swahili type of clan we are talking about. The old Swahili term for 'clan', still used in Siyu, was mji, the same word used for a whole settlement. When necessary, therefore, we shall speak of an mi-dan as distinct from 'non-Swahili dan' on one hand and mji-settlement on the other. Although being fellow-members of an mji-settlement does suggest a degree of shared autonomy, it does not imply kinship, even in the theoretical sense of sharing an eponymous ancestor, and the same applies to an mji-clan. All members of an mji-clan might happen to be kinsmen indeed, the clan might be composed of a single lineage but also include a coterie of clients, country cousins (pseudo-kinsmen), and other hangers-

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on, perhaps even including slaves. (To distinguish groups of the latter type from the former, Swahilis sometimes use the prefix kina-, also used in some Segeju and Pokomo clan names: the etymology is obscure but it does not derive, as Krapf supposed, from the Arabic. The Swahili jamaa is sometimes used with a comparable meaning.15) An mji-clan might equally well be composed of completely unrelated lines originally bracketed together for linguistic or cultural reasons, or merely for administrative convenience; within clans of this type patrons and clients, freemen and slaves or ex-slaves might be partially or wholly submerged.

Swahili clans have in common, in the last resort, that they are called clans16 and fulfil all the functions of a clan in settlement affairs. An mjidan represents no more than a slot in any settlement's particular system, and any population - lineage, sub-lineage, extended family, refugee group, cluster of families originally speaking a common (non-Swahili) language or sharing some other cultural trait, or any other unit of the settlement's population - which fills that slot for any period qualifies, for that period, as a dan.

Swahili settlements began as sacred enclosures, usually rectangular and palisaded or (after c. 950) walled, each with its own central well. Impermanent houses were built around the outside of the enclosure but not within it. The excavations at Shanga suggest that this remained the basic pattern, with modifications, right up to the later fourteenth century (by which time permanent stone houses were being built); and it is likely that most Swahili settlements founded before that date were similar. As late as the 1920s a British administrator in what is now Somalia was told that a rectangular central enclosure in the small Swahili settlement on Koyama Island, which was devoid of buildings save the mosque, was 'simply kept for worship and for purposes of defence' 1

At Shanga, during these first six centuries of the settlement's existence, the boundaries of its enclosure, the streets and gates leading into it, and property boundaries generally, seldom moved more than a foot or two in any direction - a remarkable record of urban stability. Another feature which its excavator identifies from the very earliest levels was the division of its population into seven mji-clans, each with its own territory within the settlement and its own area for graves in the large cemetery outside the settlement. (Whether the graves in the
central enclosure also fell into seven distinct groups he could not discern.) Horton also asserted that each of the original seven clans had its own entrance into the central enclosure.

Such a lay-out was probably the norm, and apparently still survives in some archaic Cormoran settlements. There, the open central area known as fwnboni, used for public meetings and rituals, is entered through doorways each owned by an individual dan. In the past as now the Swahili term for such an entrance would have been miango (‘door’ or ‘gateway’), a word commonly used for some sort of dan or sub-clan. The assumption must be that each settlement (or at least every early one) had a preordained number of gateways into the sacred enclosure which could not later be varied even if the number of would-be clan-groups increased.

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Only by access to such a miango could a clan become a clan, the miango being the ‘slot’ that defined it.

If accepted, this assumption explains a common anomaly. The number of clans in Swahili settlements often seems to be fixed although the names available for them are far more numerous; or, to put it another way, everybody agrees that there is only a certain number of clans within a settlement but no two authorities can ever agree on which they are. Common numbers in early-established settlements are seven, nine, and twelve, the last usually composed of nine plus three. Pate Town, for instance, claims always to have had seven clans, Siyu to have had nine, and Lamu twelve, nine patrician and three commoner. Mombasa also acquired twelve, the ‘Three’ and the ‘Nine’ Barawa, unusually, had fourteen - twice seven. Fumo Liongo is remembered as controlling seven mji, but this almost certainly refers to mji-clans rather than m#-settlements. The Mijikenda also comprise nine mjji or makaya, one of whom, the Digo, is sometimes broken up into the ‘Digo proper’ and three other groups, making twelve in all. And some lists of Pokomo clan-dusters (kuetz) add up to nine and some to twelve, though Werner and others have listed thirteen.8

If Horton is correct, Shanga had seven clans from its foundation; and, since the number of gateways into its enclosure could not be increased, clans which arrived or were formed at a later date had either to oust established ones or join them, initially as clients, and share their gateway. The two clans then described themselves as miango mmoa, literally ‘one gateway’, a phrase whose original significance most Swahilis themselves have forgotten.

Might the idea of having a fixed number of gateways into the central enclosure, and also the numbers 7 and 12 (the latter equal to 9 plus 3) themselves, both derive ‘from Shungwaya’? We have no positive evidence that Shungwaya-Shirazi ever had nine or twelve gateways, but two southern Somali sites associated with Shungwaya successor-states (and one at least of them remembered by the name Shungwaya) both had seven. One was the Shungwaya-site on the Lower Juba near Deshek Wama. The notes of the nineteenth-century missionary Wakefield who visited this place (which he knew as ‘Keethi or Kyrthie’ and which Elliott, the British administrator in the 1920s, spelled ‘Kedi’) are said to have described it as
having 'stone houses and seven gates' It is beyond any reasonable doubt the place which is remembered in the Book of the Zini as 'Shungwaya' No more modern account of this site exists, and we do not know when it was founded, though it was probably abandoned c. 1715. There were also seven gateways in the outer wall of another ruined stone-built settlement in Somalia, some 600 miles north of Mogadishu and a little way inland on a seasonal stream near Obbia, and which is associated in Somali history with the Ajuran Imamate. It was excavated in the Italian colonial period. 9

In both these cases the gates were in an exterior wall and not into an internal enclosure. The pattern in Swahili settlements further south was for the enclosure wall to disappear some time after the mid-fourteenth

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century, permitting houses to be built within the area it formerly enclosed, while a replacement wall was built around most or all of the settlement, the whole of which thereby became in some sense sacred. Sometimes an enclosure wall survived, and sometimes there were several exterior walls, either representing different periods of expansion or contraction or defining particular wards or demes.

Where internal enclosure walls of Swahili settlements gave way to external town walls, the rectangular shape was generally sacrificed. Pate no longer has seven town gates, but in 1966 Chittick reported that its people cited seven gates in their town wall. Siyu originally had twelve town gates, one for each of its clans. And there is also a tradition that Lamu originally had a gateway in the town wall for each mtaa.9

It looks as if the original number of gateways (if not the rectangular shape) were transferred from the inner to the outer wall. If so, Kedi and the Obbia site furnish reasonable evidence that the number of enclosure gateways in early Swahili settlements was derived from the original Shungwaya capital itself, or from one of the earlier successor-state capitals.

Can we link these clans and clan territories with the town wards (mtaa, plural mitaa) which are still a feature of all traditional Swahili mji settlements? Horton stopped short of identifying the Shanga clan territories with town wards, presumably on the grounds that we cannot be certain that Shanga even had such wards, and because modern mitaa tend to be fluid, both socially and spatially, and are less important than dans, which they no longer accurately reflect. However, mitaa did at some time in the past reflect clan territories: the epic poem al-Inkishafi, which mentions certain mitaa in Pate Town in association with specific lineages, is only one of the pieces of evidence which shows that they continued to do so well into the nineteenth century.2 It is clear that wards existed from an early date. The geographical units within the early settlements may have been called mita(l)a, for the root is a widespread Bantu one meaning something like homestead or village. We shall use the term mtaa for all periods.

Mita would have been (to some extent still are) of three main types. Patrician mitaa (in Arab-Mangwana foundations built of stone from the start) would usually
have been established around the nucleus of a single house, to which were appended other houses as daughters got married and set up their own homes. Such nuclei originally shared courtyards and sometimes external doorways, which in the case of founding families may have opened directly on to the enclosure with its well. Being associated with important lineages, patrician mitaa could and did expand at the expense of other mitaa but later, at least in larger settlements, some sort of grid-plan became indispensable to urban existence, and thereafter they could only grow upwards into two- and three-storeyed buildings, such as were already in existence when da Gama entered the Indian Ocean.22 Commoners' mitaa were usually more diffuse, focusing on a number of households lumped together for cultural, linguistic or other reasons. These 222

Shungwaya & the Swahili Settlement would have looked rather different from patrician ones, including more people and more separate menages. They may also initially have looked different from one another, houses being constructed and disposed according to the customs of peoples of different origins. Nor were they necessarily all equally poor, for some may have belonged to relatively wealthy newcomers whom the local patricians refused to accept as fellow-patricians. Access from commoners' mitaa to the central enclosure was likely to be more difficult than from their patrician counterparts. Then there were mitaa occupied by Swahili refugees from elsewhere. These often brought the name of their former settlement with them as a clan and/or mitaa name. Shela on Lamu Island comprises three mitaa, Takwa or Twaka, Manda, and Kitau, all names of former settlements on Manda Island; while there is an mitaa called Shela in Malindi and one called Malindi in Zanzibar Town. A refugee mitaa of would-be patricians might not be easily distinguishable to the archaeologist from a patrician one. But it would not be likely to have easy access to the central enclosure. Like most commoners, such refugees would have had to seek an miongo mmoja arrangement with a patrician clan to get to the well at all.23 Politically speaking the mitaa system is best visualised as a small-scale federal structure. It reflected the fact that all Swahili settlements existed through the more or less voluntary coming together of a number of diverse groups, giving each group some participation in the affairs of the settlement as a whole while permitting it limited internal autonomy. Each mitaa originally had its own leader or leaders. A patrician mitaa of one lineage would be controlled by the head of that lineage, and he would represent it on a council which, whether under a monarch or in its own right, administered the settlement's affairs. Non-patrician mitaa might have several elders (wazee wa mitaa: these might be lineage heads, or chosen by other means), and normally only one of them would attend the council at any one time. Mitaa-communities, especially those comprising patrician lineages, periodically split, and it would usually have been by the establishment of a new mitaa that the splinter group won access to council participation.
Over the centuries Swahili mi-settlements had governments of all types - monarchies, tyrannies, oligarchies, republics - and all would have gone through alternating periods of strong and weak central government. During the former, the views of the mtaa leaders would have counted for little, but their authority would seldom have been entirely eroded, for, so long as mtaa reflected different groups each with their own ideas and interests, it was not easy to administer a settlement without them.

Up to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century the mtaa system was probably operative in most settlements. But what had once been a close correspondence between clan and mtaa would have become less close, and mtaa boundaries ceased to reflect socio-political reality. During the nineteenth century, these affairs anyway passed increasingly out of local hands, being decided by the Sultan in Zanzibar or by some colonial or post-colonial authorities. The importance of clans was likewise diminished, though they are still important in such contexts as marriage and inheritance. But the main function of mtaa today is directional, their names indicating a certain part of the traditional settlements.

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inheritance. But the main function of mtaa today is directional, their names indicating a certain part of the traditional settlements.

The mtaa system mitigated tensions which arose from the necessity for groups with different cultural and economic backgrounds to coexist within the same settlement. It is logical to suppose it stemmed from the original Shungwaya-Shirazi settlement, but it was not well-designed to resolve tensions between long-established groups and newcomers. Particular stresses arose when large new populations arrived whose culture was very different from that of the longer-established inhabitants. To deal with this sort of difficulty, another institution seems likely to have been present from the beginning and to have derived 'from Shungwaya'. This was the deme (Swahili mkao, plural mikao).24 Each settlement was divided into two demes, each in theory embracing a fairly wide social spectrum including both patricians and commoners, but one in practice housing most of the longer-established groups.

Siyu provides a clear paradigm. The two demes of Siyu lie to the east and west of a main thoroughfare which bisects the settlement. One deme belonged to the Katwa groups, to whom it was awarded in the eighteenth century shortly after their arrival (when its former occupants, if any, presumably moved into the other deme), the other to the (longer-established) non-Katwa dars led by the Famau. There is also a northsouth division marked by another major thoroughfare (the Friday or Congregational Mosque lying near to where the two paths cross); those who live to the north of this are considered patricians (Swahili waungwana), while those to the south of it tend to be commoners, mostly known as wa-zalia.25 Possibly the occurrence of fourteen rather than the more normal seven dans in Barawa, reported as early as the sixteenth century, reflects an early split along this line.

Paradoxically, the main function of the didemic system was unifying. It took the numerous centrifugal forces which were an inevitable feature of settlement
politics, and polarised them around the two demes, as binary opposites. Northern or eastern demes can often be characterised as 'noncommercial', 'elegant', 'conservative', and 'landward-facing', while their counterparts can be seen as 'commercially-oriented', 'successful', 'economically innovative' and 'seaward-facing'. This meant that all townsmen, long-established families and complete newcomers, patricians and commoners alike, were encouraged to take one side or another in the competition between the demes which was everywhere a feature of Swahili life. The number of divergent forces having been thus reduced to a manageable two, tensions between them were catharsised by a number of forms of ritual aggression: competitive dances, poetry competitions, solo wrestling performances and the like.

Did Swahili demes derive from Shungwaya-Shirazi? The suggestion runs counter to several traditions which suggest that the demes of several major mj'i originated as separate foundations. Traditions regarding the origins of both Lamu and Mombasa have been interpreted in this sense. It is possible that the Punun tradition's reference to a didemic system 'in Shungwaya' (presumably the capital of either the Juba or the Bur Gao) is anachronistic. If so, it could be designed to provide a moral for mj'i-settlements in which mikao had developed subsequent to their separation from Shungwaya, and would not be evidence of a didemic system in Punun's actual capital.

But it is more likely that the opposite is the case, and that stories to the effect that Suudi and Zena, precursors of today's Langoni and Mkomani demes in Lamu, and Gavina and Mji Kale (Mombasa's demes) originated as separate foundations were born of the inter-deme antagonism of later times. There is no unequivocal archaeological evidence of anywhere now regarded as a single mj'i-settlement having originated as two separate ones. What undoubtedly happened in some settlements was that the early inhabitants split into two groups who settled half a mile or more apart. This phenomenon can clearly be seen in the so-called Shirazi sites, the abandoned settlements of the Mji Minane near the present Kenya-Tanzania border. Both in Munge and in Shirazi (alias Kifundi or Kifunzi) itself, there is a northern mosque (which, incidentally, could be characterised as 'elegant' and 'landward-facing', since it is ornately decorated and lies inland near its own well) over half a mile north of the southern mosque (which is much simpler and more austere and lies right by the sea, in which ablutions were apparently carried out). The same general pattern can be identified at Kongo (a 'Shirazi site' not far north of Munge and Shirazi), at Jumba la Mtwana, Old Kipini (Ungwana), and Mwana.

A final verdict must await excavation, but by the fourteenth century (probably the earliest date for these mosques) it may have become a feature of Shirazi regimes to segregate a section of the population - either commoners or newcomers, perhaps both - at a considerable distance from the original settlement with its well and congregational mosque, and to insist that they worship in their own mosque.
This is not incompatible with the Shirazi mode with its emphasis on hierarchy and on the exclusivity and cattle culture of the patricians. It would be no surprise if the southern, newcomers' or commoners' quarter sometimes became hotbeds of Arab-Wangwana sentiment; and it is indeed the case that in Jumba la Mtwana and at Old Kipini, though not at the other sites mentioned, it is the (main) southern mosque which appears to have been or become the congregational one (msikitiyajumaa). Where the Arab-Wangwana mode later prevailed, it might well suit the new leaders to represent their former, lowly quarter as a separate foundation.

We cannot be sure until more excavation is done, but it does look as if a great deal in the lay-out of Swahili settlements, including both mitaa (clan territories) and mko (demes), may have existed in Swahili settlements from their beginnings and have been imitated from Shungwaya-Shirazi or a later Shungwaya capital. This tends to be supported by comparative evidence from the lay-out of the traditional sacred settlements of other peoples in the region.

The 'walled towns' of the Katwa and the Segeju were, so far as we can tell, identical to early Swahili settlements in every respect. Some were even re-established on the sites of earlier Swahili settlements, making use of their wells. But, since we have already identified the Katwa-Segeju closely with the Swahili patricians, this is only to be expected. Here we concern ourselves only with Mijikenda kaya-settlements and Pokomo ganda-settlements, with a reference to Vugha, the traditional capital of Shambaa.

Mijikenda kayas were divided into clan-territories in a manner comparable to early Swahili mjji, each clan-territory having access (though not through a formal gateway) to the sacred central area or moro. This was where the regalia-drums were kept, along with (in most cases) the underpinning charm orfigo which had allegedly come 'from Shungwaya' It was an obvious counterpart to the sacred enclosure in Swahili settlements. Pokomo gandas may or may not have had a similar central area comparable to the early Swahili enclosures, but houses within them were arranged in lines, each clan having its own. This would incidentally tend to make them rectangular, which Mijikenda kaya-settlements were not.

Mijikenda clan-territories did not have their own gateways out of the kayas. Paths out of the kaya, which was ringed with dense forest, were limited in number (often only two), very narrow, and usually passed through two or more gates between which it was forbidden for pedestrians to pass one another in either direction. Shoes were not worn, and in some kayas entry is still forbidden to anyone wearing clothes with pleats or hems. Presumably this ensures that everyone passes over a charm or spell buried in or beneath the path which guarantees the security of the settlement. Such charms were sometimes visible, and there is even a photo of what looks like one in FitzGerald's book, published in 1898. He ascribes it to the 'Wakamba village called Singwaia', but from his account it is obviously the place we have referred to as the Sabaki River.
Shungwkyacapital ('Kaya Shungwaya' or 'Kaya Singwaya'), which belonged by his time to the Kauma.7

The Pokomo also had charms for their villages. FitzGerald described two ganda-settlements of the Upper Pokomo, Ndera and Gwano. They were built in the middle of dense forest, and all paths out of them led to the river, so that access was only by canoe. Both he and Gedge, who travelled up the Tana a few years earlier, mentioned a bottle half-buried in the ground with a little hut over it which is described as a talismanic 'medicine' designed to ensure the safety of the settlement.28

The location ofingo-charms in Mijikenda kayas varies. In the northern ones they are remembered as being buried only under the moro, but among the Southern Mijikenda each household or duster of households has its own. Swahilitigo-pots were found in both places - Kirkman found one buried under a town gate and another under what he called the 'palace' at Gedi, while others were beneath individual houses both in Kilwa and in Takwa. Sacleux definesmgo la mji as a 'charm guaranteeing invulnerability placed at the entrance to a village' 2

Mijikenda kayas were apparently not didemic, but Pokomo gandas were; and so was Vugha, the royal capital of Shambaa. Shambaa villages are sub-divided into three types. One type is occupied by a single commoner lineage, another contains several lineages mixed with commoner ones, the former taking precedence even if not the first to have settled. Villages

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of this third type are called kitala, from the same root as mtaa, and more closely resemble Swahili settlements than the others.30 All but one of them contain a central enclosure where members of the royal lines are buried. The exception is Vugha, the capital, since the bodies of former kings are buried in a special burial site near another royal village elsewhere. Vugha focuses on a royal palace, and, as in kayas, there are strict building regulations governing the whole settlement. If we also compare the lay-out and architecture of Swahili settlements to the typical Islamic towns of the Middle East, in the Middle East the notion of a central enclosure is generally absent. A congregational mosque may be centrally placed and is on occasion separated from the rest of the settlement by some sort of precinct, but this is not used as a cemetery and is not sacred independently of the mosque itself. A Middle Eastern Muslim town is often divided into areas in which different groups of citizens are centred, but as often as not these groups are (or used to be) guilds defined by profession. If we except Swahili ironsmiths (whose forges seem to have been concentrated in certain areas), this does not seem to have been the case in traditional mii. Conceivably many or all Swahili clans (and hence mitaa) originally specialised in certain crafts, as was the case of the 'Swahili' clan who made Siyu's cloth. Perhaps the most marked difference is the absence from traditional Swahili settlements of a central market (suq or bazaar) and of several categories of public building: these include a public bath-house (hammam), a caravanserai or hostelery for visiting merchants (khan or sunduq) and, as a rule, some sort of citadel or fort. Swahili trading methods, of course,
made public markets, public baths and hostellries for merchants unnecessary, for merchants became the guests of patrician homes and transacted all their business from there.

Nor did the structure of traditional Swahili society encourage the establishment of public buildings such as large, stone-built citadels, forts or palaces whose occupants were well placed to dominate the townspeople as well as repel invaders. There were no purely Swahili forts before the late eighteenth century, when they began to be built from Arab and Portuguese models. Here and there we see a complex which can be identified as a palace, but usually it can equally well be identified as a stone-built mtaa, or part of one, later modified and embellished to reflect the political ascendancy of the lineage which occupied it. Even the early Shirazi rulers, as far as we can tell, never created monumental public buildings separate from their own personal houses. Such a thing would have required a higher degree of central control than the patriciate was prepared to accept. The Swahili aversion to public buildings almost extended to mosques. All settlements had a Friday or congregational mosque, and some of these were comparatively large. But most were regarded as under the care of a particular lineage (usually the 'founding' one), while secondary mosques were almost all small (sometimes minute), and resembled private chapels rather than public places of worship. Kilwa appears to be an exception, with its huge Great Mosque, its great citadel-like palace of Husuni Kubwa ('Great Husuni'), attached to which were accommodation and bathing facilities for visiting merchants.

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and the nearby walled enclosure known as Husuni Dogo ('Small Husuni'), which was a walled market of the Middle Eastern type and under royal control. But the significant point about Kilwa's architecture is precisely that most of these great public buildings were never even finished, indicating that a typical Middle Eastern Islamic capital was not economically feasible in the quite different context of Swahili society. Two structures were completed. The Friday mosque was even enlarged, but when part of it fell down there was a problem about its repair. And the northern or palace section of Husuni Kubwa was also more or less completed and may have been occupied fairly briefly. But the southern section, evidently designed to provide accommodation and bathing facilities for visiting merchants, was never finished, nor was Husuni Dogo.

The most likely explanation is that the Kilwa rulers were unable to amass anything like as much wealth as their Middle Eastern counterparts. While their fellow-patricians expected a sultan to pay for the restoration of the congregational mosque out of his own pocket they were unwilling to see him monopolise all imports and exports and play sole host to the merchants who dealt in them. The attempt to impose the superstructure of a Middle Eastern Muslim town on a Swahili settlement foundered, not because the type and scale of buildings were beyond local capacities, but because the economic and political infrastructure was lacking. Kilwa points to the same moral as all other Swahili settlements, that Swahili settlements were quite different from Middle Eastern towns.
We turn now to Swahili material culture, and specifically to a key element, namely the regalia items of the Swahili settlements. Swahili regalia items may be divided into state regalia (in settlements where there was no clear hereditary monarch) and royal regalia (where a royal house traditionally existed). Both comprised much the same sort of things and were used in much the same way. They had a personal function - used, for example, to register any rite of passage in the life of some or all patricians - and communal or state functions, to summon people to war or forced labour (levée or corvée), and were regarded as bestowing blessings upon the community in the form of good rains, good harvests, or general prosperity. They were also employed in diplomatic contexts to reflect relations between different settlements.

Swahili regalia commonly include thrones (Swahili, kiti cha enzi or 'chair of power') and broad-bladed spears (Swahilifumo). A broad-bladed spear motif decorates one of the doors in Gedi's Friday mosque, and recurs above the mihrab niche of many other northern mosques. And Fumo, often translated 'Prince', was used as an honorific (rather than as a Shirazi-style title) by the Nabahani, Pate's royal family, who may have adopted it from the line of Fumo Liongo when they defeated him in the late fifteenth century.

The commonest Swahili regalia item is a side-blown horn, siWa. Much has been written on the importance of siwas and of the magical powers with which they were credited. They date back at least to pre-Portuguese times: at Pujini, a Pemba site dated to the fifteenth century, the Well 228 Shungwaya & the Swahili Settlement within the 'fortified enclosure' has a plaster representation of a siwa, as does or did a nearby tomb attributed to a son of the place's founder. Vasco da Gama saw two at Malindi, and there are several other Portuguese references to them. Not many survive, but among those that do are the Lamu and Pate siwas, respectively made of bronze (cast by the cire perdue process) and ivory, and both now in the Lamu Museum. Both are among the most impressive Islamic artefacts of all time. Side-blown horns (as opposed to end-blown ones), though common throughout Africa, are almost unknown elsewhere. Swahili siwas are accordingly of indisputable African origin, in spite of their superb Islamic craftsmanship. They cannot have 'come from' Arabia, Persia or elsewhere in the Middle East. The simplest assumption is that they were already important in the pre-Islamic society (or one of them) from which the early Swahili emerged. Though broad-bladed spears do occur in many nonAfrican contexts, they are commonly associated with leadership throughout Eastern Africa, so the same is likely to be true of them as Swahili regalia pieces. This is a near-certainty, because the Segeju have (or had until the mid-seventeenth century) a broad-bladed spear (fumo) and a sideblown horn (baragumu) in their 'war-magic' (kirunda). While it is always possible that they got these things from their Swahili allies, the traditions suggest that it was the other way round. The plaster renderings of siwas on the well in the enclosure at Pujini remind us that the Segeju kirunda could be used not only for attack but for defence, being buried within an enclosed space to render it inviolable. And it
is not hard to envisage the evolution of the Muslim mji-settlement of later Swahilis, endowed with its Islamised siwa regalia item, from Pre-Segeju or Katwa-Segeju pastoralists' inviolable cattle enclosure with its buried baragumu. The early Swahili sacred enclosure with its figo-charms would be an intermediate stage.

Linking all three is the kirumbi or 'magic wand' of leaders of nineteenth-century Swahili caravans, carried at the head of the caravan by day to ensure its safety and stuck in the ground at the entrance to campsites at night to ward off attacks. It was the Swahili equivalent of the kirunda and at the same time a close parallel of afingo-charm. Among the Mijikenda the Duruma, at least, have a war-charm called chirumbi which is also used in both ways. (It is a small bag, one of whose contents is said to be a human 'token' 33)

A few mji-settlements, including the surviving waShirazi or Mji Minane ones of the southern Kenya coast, have in their regalia, no side-blown horn but one or more drums, used in an almost identical way and credited with almost identical powers. Historical accounts of early Shirazi regimes - Battuta's description of Mogadishu, for instance, and da Gama's of Malindi - mention side-blown horns, and one might expect surviving waShirazi to treasure this particular regalia item above all. Yet several waShirazi have claimed never to have heard the term siwa and 'always' to have used a drum.34 All Mijikenda kaas also use, and the Pokomo gandas formerly used, drums rather than side-blown horns to signal successful rites of passage. There is a temptation to suppose that clientised societies, whose settlements

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were required to be militarily vulnerable to their patrons, were forbidden the use of side-blown horns (which were supposed to convey invulnerability) and had to make do with drums instead. There is other evidence that the kayas (and possibly also the gandas) originated as client settlements, while the waShirazi Swahilis of the Mji Minane were unquestionably reduced to client status after their seventeenth-century defeat by the alliance of waVumba Swahili and Segeju. But it may be less simple. Siyu town, for instance, is unlikely ever to have been a client settlement; yet so far as we know it never had siwas, while it retains one or two named drums so important even today that they may be relics of regalia. Perhaps there were intermediate stages for settlements. A ruler of eighteenth-century Vumba, for example, received a siwa from the ruler either of Pate or of Ozi, and by doing so not only aligned his mji firmly with the Arab-Wangwana faction, but also unequivocally expressed his subordination to (or alignment with) the donor. Swahili regalia items can certainly tell us something important about the origins and circumstances of Swahili mkisettlements, and other aspects of Swahili material culture may give further insights when examined more systematically than is here feasible.

Next we come to the ritual life of the typical settlement, and shall concentrate on two sorts of rituals, personal ones associated with first or 'great' weddings (which
are themselves of two types), and communal ones which involve leading a sacrificial bull in procession around the bounds of the settlement. Let us take ceremonies of the second type first. These do not (or not now) occur in by any means all Swahili settlements - indeed they are relatively rare; but traces of them are reasonably widespread among Northern Swahilis and sometimes survive elsewhere (at Makunduchi in southern Zanzibar, for instance); and one may suppose that they were commoner when patrician groups were more aware of their pastoralist antecedents than today. A general Swahili term for them is zinguo, meaning roughly 'a leading around', because the central theme is the leading around of the bull (kuzungusha ngombe). This ritual occurs in a number of different contexts. One of the best known is the Solar New Year ceremony as it is practised in Mombasa; it is known as Sikuya Mwaka, or simply as Mwaka, though its Zanzibar counterpart is more usually called Nairuzi or Nowroz.31 But in Lamu (for instance) zinguo ceremonies may take place at any time of communal crisis; and elsewhere they have been recorded on a number of other occasions as well as, or instead of, the beginning of the Solar New Year. Underlying them all is the feeling that it becomes necessary to purify the settlement, to keep evil (bad spirits) out of it, and to retain purity or goodness (friendly spirits) within it. The original boundaries of the settlement are followed with an ox or bull, normally led by the lineage head of one of the senior patrician families (usually but not invariably the founding or 'founding' lineage), usually accompanied by the other clan and/or lineage heads. Settlements which have siwa-horns or other royal or state regalia instruments also make use of these. The animal is ceremonially killed and communally eaten; certain parts are not eaten but treated in a manner unusual on such occasions. (In Mombasa the relevant organs are wrapped up in red, white and black cloth and thrown into the sea; in Lamu half the liver is thrown into trees and bushes outside the settlement, allegedly 'for the spirits'.) Like all Swahili rituals this is clothed in an Islamic guise, being preceded by Muslim prayers, but like many others it is clearly non-Muslim in origin, although no part of it is indisputably contrary to the teachings of Islam. The fact that, in Lamu at least, the leading lineages take part in it along with everyone else including clients and slaves, while in Mombasa it is not the modern boundaries which are circled but the old ones, suggests that it derives from the Swahilis' pre-Islamic belief system. From what we know about early Swahili settlements, it probably originated in a pre-Islamic ritual dominated by ex-pastoralist patricians and focusing on the perimeter of the sacred central enclosure. One of the purposes it serves is much the same as that served by the fingo-pot buried beneath Swahili settlement gates, the kinumbi at the entrance to caravan camps, and the magical charm buried beneath the gateways of M–jikenda kayas and somewhere about the Pokomo ganda, the exclusion from the settlement of evil and the admission only of good.
An almost identical ceremony is recorded from among the Pare of northeastern Tanzania (sometimes cited in other peoples' traditions as having been 'in Shungwaya'). It is said to have been introduced 'about eight generations ago'

Analysing the Pare version without reference to its Swahili counterpart, Omari and Kimambo emphasised the inadequacy of 'ritual centres modelled on the idea of mobilising kin-groups [to meet] the needs of expanding scale'; they describe how a famous leader of the Bwambo in south Pare decided that the unity of Bwambo country ought to be defined on a territorial rather than a kinship basis. He organised a state ritual in which every member living within the territory, whether Bwambo in kinship or not, could participate. The ritual of the state bull consisted of taking the ritual bull around the boundaries of the territory claimed by the group; it gave a chance for every person within that territory to participate in the ritual during the procession and identify himself as a member of this territorial community regardless of his kinship affiliation.

Among the Swahilis it was usually an area no larger than the settlement which the bull encircled; sometimes it was only a deme or an mtaa-ward.

We are tempted to conjecture that zngo rituals may have been among the earliest organised by the founders of Swahili settlements after their foundation, and designed to emphasise that in the new order kinship units were subordinate to the mo-community as a whole, and to impress one and all with the magical qualities of the new settlement.

Wedding rituals vary from settlement to settlement and they have also changed over time. We can discern an all-important difference between

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those of Shirazi and those of Arab-Wangwana societies. Among Swahilis following the Shirazi mode, marriage - the first or 'great' marriage - was one among many rites of passage which added socio-political seniority to those who passed through them. Even today Comoran patricians continue to be called wana wamji ('children of the settlement') regardless of their actual age until they have made their harusi ya ada ('customary' or 'fee marriage'), when they are known as wafaume wa mji ('princes of the settlement'). This emphasis on difference of status between patricians as determined by rites of passage hints at a pre-Islamic origin for Shirazi wedding ceremonies, when residual age- or descent-sets were all-important among pastoralist and ex-pastoralist groups. The actual ceremony of the Comoran harusiya ada gives further evidence.

The groom first spends a considerable sum acquiring the prescribed pieces of jewellery. When these are ready, he is escorted by friends to the bride's home and presents them to her father. They are then displayed on a circular copper tray (in Northern Swahili dialects, gungu) and taken in procession around the settlement with music and all sorts of other pomp. This stage of the celebrations lasts seven days, and only then does the actual wedding take place. One is reminded of the Chinese account of weddings in Barbara in the thirteenth century, where it is a severed male organ which is presented to the bride's family.
African cultures have rituals which last for seven days, and the parallel might be mere coincidence.

The ‘great wedding’ (harusi kuu) of Swahilis following the Arab-Wangwana mode is also a rite of passage, but these have less political significance among them than among Shirazi Swahilis, and the wedding ceremonies are less reminiscent of those described in the Chinese document. There is no period of seven days of public processions with music, nor is there any close Arab-Wangwana parallel to the groom’s presentation of jewellery in Comoran weddings: in Arab-Wangwana weddings, it is the bride’s family which presents her with jewellery.

Another difference is that Arab-Wangwana ‘great’ weddings focused on the stone (coral) mansions in which most patricians lived. Marriages were often if not always uxorilocal, and wealthy parents sometimes started preparing the building materials for their daughter’s house at the time of her birth. It was often upstairs from, or in some other way adjoining, her parental home. This was still true in Lamu well into the present century, and, from the ruins of earlier Arab-Wangwana settlements, was probably true wherever the mode prevailed.

Some features of the Arab-Wangwana harusi kuu seem to derive, not from Shungwaya or from anywhere in Eastern Africa at all, but from Maghribian societies of Northwestern Africa. Briefly, the coral mansions of eighteenth-century Lamu were carefully designed so as to have, on each floor, a central pillar from beside which one could get an optimum view through an open doorway to a large panel of carefully focussed wallniches in an adjoining room. In these wallniches (also found in Arab-Wangwana sites from the fourteenth century onwards) were displayed certain items reflecting the bridal family’s wealth; and in front of them the bride in all her finery displayed herself, after the consummation, for at least her female guests. Elaborate plasterwork dadoes and friezes, the gifts (Yola la wazo) of wedding guests, also decorated other parts of the house interior. Some plasterwork motifs found in the dadoes, friezes and wall-panels of eighteenth-century Lamu are identical with others recorded from archaic Muslim settlements in southern Libya and Algeria. It also appears to have been the case that, in both places, the consummation of the marriage was celebrated by painting red the outlines and designs on the plasterwork which were in normal times rendered in white. (In Lamu, if one scrapes off the layers of whitewash which now usually cover such plasterwork one can sometimes still find an inner layer which is unmistakably coloured red.) This particular parallelism can be no coincidence. We must be looking at a type of wedding ritual which at one time spread from the Maghrib to the East African coast.

For further confirmation, we need only look at the role of the central pillar in Lamu mansions at the time of the birth of the newly-wed couple’s first child. The expectant mother had to be touching this pillar at the moment of giving birth - in spite of the fact that it was in the part of the house where the men were sitting. This is required of expectant nomads among certain Maghribian pastoralist
groups, with the difference that in their case it is the central tent-pole which the mothers-to-be have to touch. The great stone houses of eighteenth-century Lamu are thus, in a sense, the Arab-Wangwana counterpart of the nomadic tents of the Sahara region.\(^40\) This is not the only evidence for a significant Maghribian influence on Swahili culture (though it is the most solid at present known to me), and some explanation must be offered. Such an influence might possibly have originated through the Ibadis, a Muslim sect found only in Oman, the Maghrib and East Africa. As already noted, Ibadī influences from Oman may have been responsible for the origin and early success of the Arab-Wangwana mode in the Swahili world (and particularly in Pate Town). There might have been an important cowrie trade between the Swahili world and the Maghrib, which the Ibadis would have been well-placed to direct. Ibadī merchants might well have been responsible for certain cultural innovations in Arab-Wangwana societies. Wealthy Ibadis from the Maghrib could also have settled, bringing with them a whole set of flamboyant wedding rituals which were then adopted by the Pate patricians. Indeed, a footnote on the Pate Chronicle’s reference to the Hatimi of Barawa (as published in Stigand’s Land of Ziy) indicates that these newcomers, who were so rich that they ‘bought stone houses and bought firewood and even wells’, originated in Andalusia. It must be conceded that reference to the source quoted by Stigand does not support his assertion, and that today’s Swahili Hatimis are not Ibadī. But the latter proves little. Stigand may have been right about the original homeland of the Hatimis, whose advent to Pate was so important as to merit a mention in its chronicle. A Swahili region even more closely associated than Pate with the Barawa Hatimi is the Mrima coast, where they established themselves as washomvi from c. 1700 onwards; and

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mosques in that area often have their coral-built minbars recessed, a feature which is recognised as a Maghribian speciality.\(^42\) Given the susceptibility of Swahilis to the ‘magic of abroad’, it would only require one sufficiently successful immigrant family to introduce Maghribian wedding and childbirth customs which were then grafted on to existing Swahili ones. Recent parallels abound even within modern harusi kuu ceremonies themselves: for instance, the dress donned by the bride for her public inspection often closely resembles the dress of a Western Christian bride.\(^4\) Arab-Wangwana weddings resembled the one described for thirteenth-century Barbara much less closely than the hamsiya ada of the modern Comorans. But even Arab-Wangwana ones had certain purely local features. These included two rituals explicitly associated with Fumo Liongo, which if my understanding is correct, symbolise two pre-Islamic and typically Shungwaya-derived customs, and owe nothing whatever to ideas or rituals introduced from the Maghrib or anywhere else.

We conclude this review of Swahili settlements with a look at an episode of nineteenth-century history. Sometime in the second decade of that century Sultan Fumoluti bin Sultan Sheikh Nabahani of Pate, finding his independence threatened by the Busaidi dynasty of Zanzibar and its Lamu allies, decided to
move to the mainland and revive a multi-ethnic state for which Ozi was almost certainly the archetype.

He created the Swahili Sultanate (customarily mislabelled 'Witu Sultanate'), and it deserves attention for its name alone, since historians sometimes claim that Swahilis have never used the name of themselves. That this was its real name is testified by, among other things, the sets of postage stamps Fumoluti's successor issued in 1889-90, on which were printed, in Arabic script, the words 'Sultaniiyya Swahiliyya'. This same ruler's grave is also the first known monument to carry an inscription in Swahili (in Arabic script) as well as one in Arabic."

The Swahili Sultanate originated in 1817 when Sultan Fumoluti moved to Kau, on what was then the Ozi River but is now the Lower Tana. The site was reminiscent of earlier Shungwaya-sites, though we have no evidence that Kau was ever called Shungwaya, and it is unlikely that it was. The ruler may already have planned to dig the Belisoni Canal to link the Ozi with the then Lower Tana. The change in the Tana's course appears to have happened in the last decade or so of the nineteenth century, and probably resulted from the excavation of this canal under the aegis of the Swahili Sultanate.

At the beginning of 1862 Kau was abandoned and a new capital established at Witu. Witu was 'founded' by Sultan Ahmed, also known as 'Simba' ('the Lion'), son and successor of Fumoluti. We know more about the founding and early development of Witu than of any other Swahili mji, and it was the last major Swahili settlement of the old type to be founded.45

Though we do not know why Sultan Ahmed abandoned Kau, it was probably not because of military pressure from his enemies, as only a short time* later the Zanzibari troops, who had occupied Kau after him, found themselves at the mercy of his Orma allies, who controlled all the neighbouring territory. We should envisage a deliberate and unhurried

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move to the Witu area which had been carefully reconnoitred in advance. That it was an area traditionally controlled by the Orma (Witu is an Oromo name) would have been in its favour, but the main reason is likely to have been that it had the potential for a large population - a fertile environment with better-than-usual rainfall, adequate water-supplies, and a site on a ridge which lay above the flood-line even in the heaviest rains. The population of the new settlement would have comprised a core of patricians who came to Witu with Sultan Ahmed - mostly probably from Pate by way of Kau, but possibly including some from Siyu. The 'founders' would have been the families and descendants of those who were present on 12th Rajab, AH 1278 (10th January 1862), when the ruler 'founded' the settlement. Precisely what ritual this involved we do not know. It may have been the consecration of a new mosque (or the laying of its foundation-stone), or it may have involved a zinguo of some sort.

It is likely that at least one non-patrician ironsmith accompanied the group from Kau, possibly more, for before long Witu was an important local centre of metalwork and other crafts. Either then or soon afterwards the population of the
settlement was increased by a sizeable number of new, mostly commoner settlers: no Oromo (or not many), since they were technically nomads, but Aweer (Boni), Pokomo, Bajuni, and a good number of fugitive slaves (Swahili wotoro) from Lamu and other coastal settlements. The descendants of all these people are now among Witu's Swahili population. A fair number of freeborn Swahilis from the coastal settlements also moved to Witu, attracted by the relative stability and prosperity of Sultan Ahmed's regime.

All new arrivals were taken to the Sultan in person, who assessed them for degrees of u-ungwana or 'patricianness' and directed how much land or other assistance they should be given and where they should live. The ruler also appointed headmen from each community to act as his link-men among them and deal with intra-community affairs. There seem to have been local military leaders, drawn from among the Swahili patricians. And there was at least one 'sub-king': Avatula bin Bahero Somali, the Katwa Bajuni referred to in British documents as 'king of the Boni' (Aweer).

Witu probably differed from most earlier Swahili mji-settlements in that there were not only the main settlement, but a number of Aweer and exslave villages which were in varying degrees subordinate to it, but which in some cases lay quite a distance away. It is likely that these places were included in the population-estimate of Brenner, an Austrian traveller who visited Witu in 1867 and guessed that the population was 45,000. Even so, and even if his guess was too high by 100 per cent, the new settlement must have been remarkably successful in its first five years when we recall how few other mjji ever reached even 10,000.

There are two reasons for supposing that the Swahili Sultanate was a conscious effort to revive that part of the Ozi state which had passed under Pate's control after Liongo's fall. First, its boundaries probably coincided to some extent: it is unthinkable that the rulers of the new state were unaware of their celebrated predecessor. And, secondly, an annual tribute was levied from the Lower Pokomo on the grounds that Liongo had levied one. The Swahili Sultanate, however, commuted the traditional tribute of youths and maidens to bags of corn. (Sultan Ahmed was not an insatiable slave-trader - he could not have afforded to be, since many of his subjects were wotoro.)

A crucial part of the ruler's machinery of control was his nearmonopoly of trade. There was only one Indian merchant in Witu in the 1880s, and he was heavily taxed. Sultan Ahmed's best hope of security, like that of so many of his predecessors in Swahili history, lay in a careful manipulation of exports and (more especially) imports so that he and his patricians appeared indispensable to his subjects and his mainland neighbours alike. His trade in firearms was particularly important to him. It was almost certainly the British efforts to deny him these, combined with the overwhelming defeat of his long-term Orma allies by Somali newcomers which later weakened his position. This led him to sign, in 1885, a treaty with the Germans which it suited the British to interpret as converting his state into a German protectorate. (It is unlikely that the ruler
himself saw this grant as very different from many others he had made to various African applicants during his reign.) For the remaining years of his life Sultan Ahmed, though old, tired and ill, was able to ward off the consequences of this interpretation. But his young successor proved far less able both as ruler and as diplomat.

Ironically, it was in retribution for the death in 1890 of a German, killed when he forced his way through Witu's town gate (heavily defended and almost certainly hedged about with magic charms as well, so that the intrusion would have smacked of blasphemy), that the British first sent a military expedition which destroyed and looted the settlement. Desultory campaigns continued for some years before a puppet ruler (not a Nabahani) was finally installed in 1895; but the first British attack had finished Witu, annihilating its stone palace and houses and hence its patrician character, its quintessential mji-ness. When the Sultanate was abolished in 1922, in plain defiance of the treaty signed in 1895, there seems to have been no protest whatever.

If we look at the Sultanate's second capital, Witu, simply as a Swahili mi-settlement, there was much that was typical of what had happened so often before. It was founded or rather 'founded', it flourished for most of the century, and then it collapsed and all but disappeared within a relatively short period. The stone buildings, along with their finely carved doors and with the crafts, learned books and other manifestations of utamna-duni and u-ungwana, were destroyed or dispersed.47 It was not, perhaps, typical of all Swahili settlements over time. If these were to be arranged on a spectrum ranging from maritime and commercially-oriented to landward-facing and agriculturally-inclined, Witu would certainly be near the latter end of the spectrum. But so might most of the small, short-lived mji whose ruins still dot the coastline of Eastern Africa. Even the most maritime settlements of the pre-1850 era are best conceptualised, like Witu, not as typical Islamic towns based on Middle Eastern models, but as something

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that evolved out of the African continent itself, although overseas trade links and an African mode of Islam became all-important to them. And an important part of their Africanness was their link - in spatial structure, in socio-political institutions such as mitaa and mikao, and in ritual, ideology and magic - to the Shungwaya successor-states and, ultimately, to Great Shungwaya itself.

Notes
3. 'Swahili culture and the nature of East Coast settlements', p. 324.
5. See above p. 198.
6. See, for example, P. Lienhardt, 'The mosque college of Lamu and its social background', TNR 53 (1959), pp. 228-41.
16. More recently the Arabic derivatives kabila and, especially in Mombasa, taifa (pl. mataia)
have sometimes been used interchangeably as equivalents to the second sort of mji. But
23. For a fuller discussion of mitaa, see Allen, 'Swahili houses', pp. 6-9, and 'The origin and
evolution of settlements on the east coast of Africa', paper presented to a Seminar on
'The Indigenous African Town' University of California, Los Angeles, 1980.
24. P. lienhardt, 'A controversy over Islamic custom in Kilwa Kivinje, Tanzania' in I.M.
speaking Peoples of AJra's
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25. Howard Brown, 'History of Siyu', pp. 112-15. Not all mif-settlements had such dear socio-spatial arrangements. The northern deme in Lamu, for instance, traditionally housed both the longer-established clans and most of the patrician lines.


31. Freeman-Grenville, Select Documents, p. 40; Chittick, Ailwa, passion; Garlake, Ear_0 Islamic Architecture, pp. 31-2, 36-7, 50-1, 54-6, 76-7, 80-1, 90-2, 97-107, 113-14, 118-19.


el-Zein, Sacred Meadows, pp. 281-321; L, Giles, 'Possession cults on the Swahili coast: a
36. LN. Kimambo and C.K. Omari, 'The development of religious thought and centres
among the Pare' in T. Ranger and I.N. Kimambo, eds, The Historical Study of Afikan
37. See Pouwels, 'Oral historiography and the Shirazi of the East African coast',
discussion and illustrated details of wall-niches and plasterwork motifs in Swahili stone houses, J. de Vere Allen, 'Swahili ornament' and. 'Swahili houses'.
40. I am indebted to Dr Labelle Prussin for information on this topic. For an
illustrated
account of the colouring of plasterwork to mark the consummation of a wedding
in a traditional Libyan settlement, see 'Mimar gallery' (no author given) in Mimar I (1981), pp. 17-23, and for a more scholarly description J. Aymo, 'La maison ghadamsie',
41. J. de Vere Allen, 'Swahili culture reconsidered', pp. 122-4, and 'Swahili
ornament', p. 8. 42. Stigand, Land ofZinj, p. 51. I am assured by Dr Rex Smith
that the Arabic work Stigand
calls the 'Fatuh at Baladin' cited by him as his source contains nothing on the subject. See, however, B.G. Martin, 'Arab migrations to East Africa in medieval times'. For recessed minbars, see Schacht, 'An unknown type of minbar' and 'Notes on Islam in East Africa'. 43. Francoise Le Guennec-Coppens, Femmes voildes de Lamuw variaions culturelles et dynamiques sociales, Paris, 1983, analyses modern Lamu weddings. 44. The text of the epitaphs is as follows:
(a) (Swahili) Yhryu bwana aliobuni hapa Witu 12 Rajab AH 1278 ('This is the man who
founded this (settlement ot Witu on 10January 1862').
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(b) (Arabic) 'Known as Simba, the late Sultan Ahmed bin Sultan Fumoluti bin Sultan
Sheikh Nabahani, died AH 1309.'
45. See also M. Ylivsaker, Laru in the Mnetenth Centu... Land Trade, and Politics, Boston, 1979,
pp. 122-55 and passim, and 'The origins and development of the Witu Sultanate',
JAHS 11.4 (1978), pp. 669-88; J. de Vere Allen, 'Witu, Swahili history and the historians' in
46. We are told that Sultan Ahmed preferred the Bantu appellation Mwenye Mui, almost
certainly a legacy of Great Shungwaya and Ozi, although it is his nickname, or
possibly throne-name, 'Simba' which appears in his epitaph. Unlike his father and
both his successors, he never used the title Fumo, which also had echoes of
Liongo and his times.
But the omission may have been solely on grounds of euphony.
47. The (manuscript) personal Quran of Fumo Omaxi bin Sultan Ahmed Simba
(who himself ruled Witu briefly in the period of the British campaigns against it)
ended up in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society in London, having
presumably been looted by one of the British soldiers. See Simon Digby, 'A
Qur'an from the East African coast', AARP 7 (1975), pp. 49-55. The carved door
from the royal palace (admittedly that of the puppet ruler who acceded after 1895)
was sold to a big game hunter and is now, along
with all his trophies, in the Boston Science Museum.

Afterword
Swahili Identity Reconsidered
We promised, in the Foreword, to return at the end of the book to the problem of
Swahili identity, to see whether the tentative definitions of Swahilis which were
there offered needed modification or refinement in the light of our investigation of
the relationship between Swahili history and the history of Shungwaya, alias
Shirazi. Let us first consider one other question about Swahili identity. This
question concerns the role in east coast history of immigrants from outside Africa.
How important have Persians been, and people from the Indian sub-continent, and
above all Arabs, in the centuries since the ninth? This question has been much
debated but what is said and written about it is still often incorrect; and it will be
worth recapitulating the arguments here to try to set the record straight.
The Role of Overseas Immigrants: Arabs
Let us consider Arabs first. Today's Swahilis unquestionably include a large
proportion (just how large depending upon one's definition of a Swahili: my own
guess would be something like twenty-five per cent, but others might say fifty per
cent or more) who can genuinely trace their ancestry on one or both sides back to
some part of the Arabic-speaking Middle East. In the nature of things, the vast
majority of these are recent arrivals whose parents, grandparents, or great-
grandparents (or some of them) were immigrants. But, if Arab immigrants
constituted that proportion in earlier centuries too, then there can hardly be any
Swahilis left who are not at least partly Arab by descent. However, the percentage
in earlier centuries is unlikely to have been so large. Immigrants from Arabia,
from Aden and Hadramawt in particular, flocked to East Africa at an
unprecedented rate between c. 1880 and c. 1950, within transport was cheap and
Pax Britannica assured them reasonable security and a better chance to make a
living than in their homelands.
Official figures underestimate the numbers. Port records show that from 1907 to
1918 Mombasa alone received an average of about 200 dhows per year, and about
166 per year between 1918 and 1939. Nearly half of these were Arabian, the
remainder Indian, Swahili and Iranian.'
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According to Alan Villiers, who himself sailed on Arabian dhows, there were also many Arabian ones whose arrival went unrecorded. And, as his photographs vividly show, most were literally crammed with immigrants, many of whom also went ashore unregistered. The flood of immigrants in this period must have been exceptional, and undoubtedly largely accounts for the high proportion of Swahilis who can substantiate their claims to Arabian ancestry. An estimate of 80 dhows from Arabia in an average year, each carrying an average of 100 passengers, gives us 8,000 immigrants per year. Even if this is 100 per cent too high, we are still talking about 160,000 people between 1907 and 1947 or some 4,000 a year. There were earlier periods when Hadrami immigration into East Africa might have involved several hundred or even a thousand in an exceptional year, but none when it reached anything like this rate.

For the number of Arab immigrants in earlier centuries we have to rely on occasional documentary references and on the cultural evidence. References can be grouped in two categories: those in works by late nineteenth- or twentieth-century Swahili, Arab (usually Hadrami) or Somali writers, and those in the works of other authors, including earlier Arab ones. Most of the first group have in common a desire to emphasise the 'Arabness' of Swahili and/or Somali society, and they are not immune to what J. Spencer Trimingham has called 'the Arab racial myth' (the notion that one Arab paternal ancestor, however remote, is enough to make anyone an Arab) and 'the strong Arabism of Hadrami influence'.

At their worst these works are self-evidently fictitious: many late nineteenth-century Swahili genealogical treatises, for example, are based on nothing more than folk-etymologies. Others are at first sight more convincing, and some scholars have accepted their statements about Arab immigration, especially as regards the Swahili world. We may cite Dr B.G. Martin, who has claimed, almost entirely on this sort of evidence, that from as early as c. 1250 Hadramis of all classes, mercenaries and peasants as well as merchants, scholar-gentry (Arabic mashaykh) and sharifs, have been pouring into East Africa. At times he even seems to accept the Arab racial myth: seldom if ever is any member of a sharifian lineage whose eponymous ancestor originated in the Hadramawt, however long ago, called anything but a Hadrami sharf. More recently Dr R.L. Pouwels has published an interpretation of Swahili history between 1400 and 1800 which also relies heavily on the view that Arabs especially Hadramis, and to a lesser extent Yemenis - were flooding into the Swahili world from the thirteenth century onwards, and which describes as 'Arab' some sharifian lines which had been resident in East Africa for at least two or three centuries before they acquired supreme political power from what he calls 'more African' leaders in the seventeenth and eighteenth.

It is not possible to deny such stories of Arab migrations altogether. They may have occurred, but virtually no Portuguese or even Arab writers of the pre-1700
era refer to them. One passage in the work of the sixteenth-century Portuguese historian De Barros speaks of 'Arabs' taking

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over the whole Swahili coast, but this is most satisfactorily understood as referring to the victories of the Arab-Wangwana mode of dominance as I have described them.) Ibn Battuta mentions a Yemeni beggar and visiting foreign theologians at the court of Kilwa, but these hardly constitute evidence of mass immigration. And the Portuguese were sometimes able to communicate with Swahili rulers in Arabic, but that proves nothing either way. The Swahilis' own traditions, where they can be interpreted as definitely referring to the pre-1700 era rather than as genealogical fantasies, make no mention whatever of Martin's mercenaries, merchants and peasants. (Interestingly, when such people arrived from Hadramawt after c. 1880 they were accorded very low status, and it was only their numbers that made an impact.) Nor do they mention resident Hadrami merchants (as distinct from sharfs), and only a few mashaykh can be recognised as coming from South Arabia in this period. We have suggested that either a group of Nebhan or some merchants closely associated with them must have settled in Pate c. 1400, but these people came from Oman, not Yemen or the Hadramawt. A few other lines of early immigrants, mostly of fairly high status, can also be tentatively traced back to Oman before 1700. Otherwise it is hard to find convincing evidence of Arab immigration before that date from plausible Swahili sources.

It may be protested that we are merely playing with definitions: if people (1) have Arab forebears, (2) claim to have 'come from' Arabia, and (3) call themselves Arabs, then historians have no right to call them Swahilis. But it is not so simple.

1 The number of female immigrants from Arabia was negligible throughout most of history, so the chances of anyone born in East Africa before the present century having two Arab parents are slight. (We have almost no evidence that Swahili shaifs ever returned to Hadramawt to find brides, or had them shipped out to East Africa.)

2 Many people - Islamised Bajuni, Mijikenda and others - also claim to have 'come from' Arabia who certainly did not do so.

3 While it is true that many Swahilis call themselves woArabu, they do not use this term for immigrants from Arabia, speaking of waShihiri (for Hadramis), waManga (for Omanis) or something else. The same people often describe themselves as something other than waArabu sometimes, indeed, as waSwahili - in other contexts. In these circumstances we simply cannot call them 'Arabs' In any case, though some may have had a knowledge of Arabic, Swahili was undoubtedly their preferred language since many of them actually composed poetry in it.7

We are thus forced back on the cultural evidence. If Arabs settled in the Swahili world in appreciable numbers, or if those who settled achieved rapid social and political eminence, we should expect to see evidence of the fact in Swahili
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culture: not so much in religious ideas, which would naturally have tended to flow from Arabia regardless of migration

patterns, but in things like architecture (especially mosque and tomb architecture), dress, literature, vocabulary even. The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hadrami immigrants made their mark in all these spheres: about 1900 Swahili mosques began, for the first time, to have courtyards and to resemble Hadrami ones in other ways; early in the present century Swahili women adopted the full-length black veil of Hadrami women, previously unknown; Arabic terms invaded the works of nineteenth-century Swahili poets, especially those of Pemba; and many non-religious Swahili terms of Bantu origin were replaced by others of Arab origin. (Religious and philosophical terms were, in most cases, already derived from Arabic.)

But no comparable evidence of Hadrami influence is perceptible before 1700. Swahili mosques and monumental tombs remained quite distinctive - indeed, from the fourteenth century until the seventeenth or eighteenth monumental tombs became, if anything, even less like any counterparts in the Arab world - and epitaphs, widespread in Arabia, were virtually unknown in East Africa before 1500 and relatively rare before the eighteenth century. (Quranic texts were inscribed on early tombs in Shanga, but were rare or unknown in southern Arabia.) Swahili dress does not seem to have followed any Arab fashions, even in settlements adopting the Arab-Wangwana mode. And no recensions of Arab poetry are recorded before 1700 - or at the very earliest, 1690 - when a tradition of written Swahili poetry, mostly on religious themes, grew up alongside the older, oral tradition which had little or no Islamic content.

In other spheres, too, Swahili culture seems to have been relatively untouched by Hadrami or Yemeni influences. Indeed it was surprisingly free of any south Arabian (as distinct from Islamic) influences at all before the eighteenth century. We must deduce either that the volume of pre1700 immigration from Yemen and Hadramawt was much smaller than Martin and Pouwels have supposed, or that, if many peasants, mercenaries and (non-sharifian) merchants did settle, they were - like their nineteenth- and twentieth-century successors - of low status, and because less numerous made little impact on Swahili life. The former seems more likely.

As for those sharifian lineages which settled in East Africa before 1700, along with the Barayk and other scholar-gentry from Hadramawt and the few Omani immigrants, we can only assume that they won acceptance and prominence in Swahili society by adopting Swahili ways and intermarrying with local patricians rather than by imposing the culture of their homeland.

Such evidence as we have confirms this: those sharifs who emerged as rulers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries - the Ba-Alawi in Vumba Kuu, for example - appear to have done so largely by becoming wholly Swahilised and manipulating typically Swahili political techniques. They married the daughters of former rulers and members of other important local families, followed the Shirazi
or the Arab-Wangwana mode whichever was appropriate (even, in Vumba, readopting a form of Shirazi one when the need arose), accepted gifts of regalia items

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to cement political alliances, established utani-relations with mainland clans, acquired magical expertise where this was expected of rulers, and generally behaved in a wholly Swahili fashion. Only one thing marked them off from their Swahili predecessors, but it marked them off from their fellow-immigrants too. This was the blood of the Prophet Muhammad which ran in their veins, and which they did not hesitate to exploit to secure an edge over any non-sharifian rivals. Being a sharif was itself potentially magical, in the sense in which we use the word.

Nor is the extent of their Swahilisation surprising. The Ba-Alawi had been resident in the Swahili world for several centuries before they became rulers of Vumba. With one exception to which we shall return below, the same was true of all other lineages of recognisably Arabian provenance which established dynasties, at least until the eighteenth century, when the Mazruis established a defacto if not dejure dynasty in Mombasa. Even the non-sharifian Nebhans from Oman did not emerge as the Nabahani dynasty of Pate until they had been resident there for up to three centuries.

The Mazruis learned to behave more like Swahili patricians than like Omanis, and it was not until the arrival in the nineteenth century of the Busaidis sultans of Zanzibar that the Swahili pattern of government really changed. But with regard to the original acquisition of political power, neither the early Mazrui governors of Mombasa nor the first Busaidi sultans could be fairly described as having become Swahilised before assuming power, and in this respect both regimes represented a break with Swahili traditions.

The exception to all these generalisations about the pre-1700 era was Kilwa. There the man generally recognised as founder of the Madhali dynasty, Hassan bin Talut, seems almost certain to have been a recent immigrant, perhaps only first generation Africa-born, since he still bore a characteristically Yemeni name; and he and his successors attempted a number of major innovations which reflect, if not specifically Arab, at least Middle Eastern and non-Swahili ideas. These innovations ultimately failed, but it is significant that in this instance a relative newcomer from Arabia was able to become a Swahili sultan. How did this come about?

Pouwels believes that his kinsmen had already been rulers of Mogadishu for some time.8 If this was so, the link would almost certainly have helped to compensate for Talut's own lack of patrician qualifications, but the evidence does not yet seem conclusive. A more likely explanation may be that Kilwa's fortunes had sunk so low through squabbles between pro-Ibadi and pro-Shirazi members of the earlier dynasty that an unusual number of its people were ready to accept as ruler an ambitious and no doubt wealthy outsider with no particular commitments to either faction. Perhaps both hypotheses are correct. He had been adopted into a Swahili
age-set, indicating that he was regarded as suitable to qualify as a Swahili patrician. His rapid elevation thereafter, being unique in Swahili history before c. 1700, can only be attributed to a combination of exceptional circumstances. It gives no reason for supposing that Arab parvenus were often able to accede to Swahili thrones.

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To resume: available evidence indicates that, although Arab immigrants to the Swahili world (and especially sharfs) may have had a better-than-average chance of achieving patrician status, only a limited number of sharfs and a few shaykhs from Yemen and Hadramawt actually settled, and with one exception their descendants were all well and truly Swahilised before they were accepted as rulers. Otherwise Arab immigration was probably negligible in most areas before c. 1700, and did not really assume significant numerical proportions until 1880 or 1900.

The Role of Overseas Immigrants:
Persians and Indo-Pakistanis
What is true of Arabs is a fortiori true of immigrants from Persia and the Indian sub-continent. A Persian immigrant might have won easy access to the patriciate in a Shirazi regime, but we know of none of any importance before the nineteenth century, when one of the Persian brides of Sultan Seyyid Said brought companions and craftsmen with her. Their impact on Zanzibar can still be traced in architecture and material culture and probably also in a few local terms, including Nowroz for Nairuz ('Solar New Year'). But no earlier Persian impact is detectable.

As for the Indian sub-continent, Freeman-Grenville has ingeniously suggested that Haji Mohamed Rukn al-Din al-Dabuli, whom the Portuguese briefly installed as a puppet Sultan of Kilwa in 1506, may have originated there. Not only did he bear the nisba of al-Dabuli (presumably Dabhol in western India) but he also had a double name (Rukn al-Din being a complete name and not a name and patronymic), which is not common among Swahilis. If he is correct, this man and his brother would be early examples of immigrants from India who achieved some eminence in the Swahili world.9 But it is not possible to prove this. There is surprisingly little of Indo-Pakistani or (after the eleventh century) Persian influence in Swahili culture. Horton discovered a small bronze lion at a tenth- or early eleventh-century level at Shanga, but although it looks like a typically Hindu religious figurine there are, as he points out, a number of difficulties about concluding that it is, and we certainly cannot deduce from it that Indians were actually present in East Africa.10 Lewcock claims to have found evidence of western Indian influence in Swahili architecture, but most of his examples refer to the nineteenth century, when there was a period of energetic Indianising in certain spheres, coinciding with an influx of influential Indian merchants. Indian fashions became particularly strong after Sultan Seyyid Barghash's visit to India." Such cultural parallels from an earlier period are mostly between the Swahili world and the Deccan, where African
mercenaries played a political role from the fourteenth century onwards, and parts of which were actually ruled by dynasties of African origin in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of these mercenaries and perhaps even some of the rulers may have stemmed from the Swahili coast, and some of the cultural parallels may result from innovations introduced from East Africa to the Indian sub-continent and not the other way round.12

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Immigrants of Indo-Pakistani origin might have settled without markedly affecting the architecture, but there is little evidence that they did so much before 1800. Such people would probably have been very tenacious of aspects of their indigenous culture, but we have found remarkably little in the way of the Indian style pottery and metalware, or the Indo-Pakistani tomb types we should expect them to have brought with them. Almost none of the present Indo-Pakistani communities in East Africa can trace their residence in the Swahili settlements before 1800, and no datable graves are earlier. Certain settlements on the Swahili coast may have received groups of immigrants from the Middle East or India between the tenth and eighteenth centuries which were large enough to make their mark locally. One example: the so-called 'Nofalle Arabs', who occupy some of the Bajun Islands in southern Somalia, while they might be no more Arab than the Makhzumi of Lamu, alias KinaMte, who were Pre-Segeju, may be descendants of a colony of Omanis who migrated to East Africa during these centuries. They would presumably be derived from the al-Nuwafl (singular Nufili), an Ibadi (Hinawi) clan living near Sohar, reported in 1873 to have some 450 males.13 But the number of adult males among the 'Nofalle' of Somalia is unlikely ever to have exceeded 450 either, so they would hardly have affected the percentage of Arab immigrants in the overall Swahili population.

Immigrants and the Swahilisation Process
Let us also look at overseas immigrants, so to speak, from the Swahili end, as recruits to Swahilidom. Before c. 800, by our definitions, there were no Swahilis. The entire Swahili population which grew up thereafter was composed of non-Swahilis of one sort or another who became Swahilis. Although we suggested in the Foreword that it was possible to be Swahili by kabila as well as by asili, in the sense that one's ancestors were Swahilised so long ago that one has forgotten what they called themselves before, this would not have been the case in the first one or two centuries of the coastal settlements' existence. Throughout the centuries since, the Swahili population has been increased not only by natural reproduction but by the further absorption of outsiders. They entered Swahili society at different levels. Ex-pastoralist kinsmen or pseudo-kinsmen became patricians while ex-cultivators and ex-hunters became commoners and others again were absorbed through the status of slaves. At each level they might be absorbed at different rates. But at any given time we can take it that a certain number of outsiders were becoming Swahilised and a certain number of Swahilised persons were becoming full Swahilis.
By an accident of geography, some of these outsiders came from Asia and others from Africa. Now, it happens that at the present time Africans tend to see themselves as having more in common with other Africans than they have with Asians, and suppose the reverse to be true. A natural corollary of this belief - not a particularly logical one, but natural nonetheless - is the assumption that, if a society is composed exclusively of people who are recognisably Africans, it is more homogeneous than if

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it is composed of a mixture of Africans and Asians. And, to the extent that Swahili society is composed of a mixture of Africans (living in Africa, therefore not 'immigrants') and Asians (by definition 'immigrants'), it is accordingly perceived as more likely to be heterogeneous and also in some sense less 'African'. When the matter is put like this, it does not take long to see that the assumptions on which it is based are incorrect. Whatever the position today, it is obvious that in the past peoples living around the Indian Ocean littoral may well have had more in common with each other than they had with peoples living inland from them. They often knew more of one another, since sea communications were often easier than land ones. Even if coastal Africans and coastal Asians were still fairly dissimilar in terms both of culture and appearance, that was no reason why either of them should not have been able to acculturate newcomers from other shores of the ocean at least as successfully as they could acculturate newcomers from their own continent. Both groups, after all, had to immigrate into the coastal regions, though only one had to cross the sea. And there is no sound reason why a culture like the Swahilis', which is perfectly geared to acculturating outsiders and making them feel they belong, should be any less successful at absorbing newcomers from another continent than it is at absorbing those from its own. What we have is a quasi-urban culture which was in some respects maritime (though it is arguable that its 'maritimity' has in the past been exaggerated') which has for centuries absorbed Africans and Asians with equal facility. Some Africans - slaves or their offspring and most commoners - were initially absorbed into the lower levels of Swahili society: but so were some Asians, such as the impoverished late nineteenth-century Hadramis of non-sharifian descent. Likewise some Africans - ex-pastoralist kinsmen and pseudo-kinsmen of the patricians, people like the Siyu and Bajuni Katwa and other Katwa-Segeju achieved high social status rapidly, perhaps even upon arrival. After Islamisation, and even more after the victory of the Arab-Wangwana mode, Muslim newcomers from Asia could likewise often start some way up the social scale, but only seldom as high as the Katwa-Segeju. How the newcomer’s social status increased or diminished thereafter was a question of personal qualities tempered by luck. But, once newcomers had entered Swahili society at whatever level was deemed appropriate, their pre-Swahili background soon became irrelevant unless they were sharifs (and sharifs can count as Africans). Even if we could compute the Swahilis' genes, distinguishing between 'Asian' and 'African' ones, there would
surely be no cause to do so. For if modern Africans require an answer to the
question, 'Was Swahili culture and civilisation basically an African or an Asian
achievement?' - and this would be a legitimate question at a certain level - an
answer should be based, surely, on an assessment of African and non-African
inputs into Swahili culture past and present, and not on any futile attempt to
calculate genetic input into the present Swahili population.
There are, then, unusually good grounds for avoiding calling historical
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figures or lineages Arab, Persian or Indo-Pakistani unless we are very sure that
these adjectives give an accurate cultural description of them. To do so is as
inappropriate as to call all long-standing Swahili iron-working lineages 'Pokomo'
and much more misleading. For those for whom what Trimingham calls the 'Arab
racial myth' is an irrefutable historical fact, it is of course perfectly legitimate, but
they should perhaps define how they use the term 'Arab'
The Role of Overseas Imports
How, it may reasonably be asked, do we reconcile these assessments of Arab,
Persian and Indo-Pakistani influence on the Swahili coast before c. 1700 with the
importance to Swahilis of the 'magic of abroad' and of overseas contacts
generally? We must distinguish between those things and ideas which came from
abroad and were appropriated by Swahilis on their own terms and for their own
use, and those which were imposed on them (as the Mazruis in the eighteenth
century and the Busaidis in the nineteenth). The former are not adequate evidence
of overseas influence, while the latter are. The crucial test, not always easy, is
how the import is handled within Swahili culture.
Let us take first the case of imported artefacts. Some were seized upon, modified
perhaps, and then used for a purpose quite other than that for which they were
originally intended. To give two examples: as early as the fourteenth century
Chinese and Persian glazed ware was set into mosques, tombs, or cisterns within
houses, as well as - presumably - used for eating off, while in the nineteenth
century Ottoman glass tulip vases designed for a single bloom were fitted with
perforated tin caps and used as rosewater sprinklers. It makes no sense to see such
imported artefacts as evidence of foreign (Ottoman or Chinese) influence in the
Swahili world.
Other imports were accepted for what they were but used to serve the ends of
Swahili magic. For example, the Portuguese reported that Swahilis imported blue
cloth from overseas, unpicked it and wove the blue threads into pieces of their
own locally-made white cloth. The significant point is that blue dyes were
unknown in East Africa until the Portuguese themselves planted indigo in the
Kerimba Islands. Blue cloth was a great rarity and endowed with quasi-magical
powers. But the Swahilis did not fear these powers, and did not treat imported
blue cloth with special reverence. They pulled it apart to create more cloth with
blue thread in it, the better to utilise the magic of blue-ness for their own
purposes. Again, we cannot cite imports used in this way as evidence of overseas
influences on Swahili culture. On the contrary, the Swahis appropriated them and used them (or tried to) to influence other Africans.

What about clothes? There seem to have been few major changes in fashions in men's dress between da Gama's time and the beginning of the present century, though women's clothes changed more often during that period. Since 1900, however, and still more since c. 1950, many Swahili males have adopted what are generally called 'Western' clothes, while most urban women have assumed the long black veil known as buibui

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adopted from Hadrami women, though if they can afford to they often wear 'Western' women's dothes beneath it. The buibui we have cited as an example of Hadrami influence: should we also perceive the 'Western dress' beneath it and the trousers, coats and ties favoured by Swahili men as evidence of the influence of the colonial powers or of Westerners generally? Such a case is less clear-cut, but we can say that, while Western clothes for men (and under their buibuis for women) do to some extent reflect Western impact, they also reflect a worldwide trend which has more to do with people's perceptions of being 'modern' and 'up to date' than with ideas about a Western-dressed society being superior or deserving imitation. The difference between the wealthy Swahili woman's buibui and the mini-skirt, trouser-suit or Parisian costume she may also wear is that the buibui is thought of as something which Swahili women ought to wear because other Muslim women - specifically, Hadrami ones - do, whereas the other clothes testify to the individual wearer's modishness, her contacts with the wider world and her awareness of 'the latest thing' in that wider world (vaguely conceptualised as 'out there', and not particularly associated with any specific society).

More complex were the so-called Beni dance-societies which sprang up in many coastal towns in the 1890s and early 1900s and spread far inland. Here Swahilis dressed themselves up in countless Western costumes - kilts with sporrans and bagpipes, soldiers' and sailors' uniforms, the khaki shorts and wide-brimmed hats of white settlers, cowboys' jeans and boots with spurs, and many others - and marched around to the music of Western-style brass or military bands (Swahili ben). They appointed from their own number kings and queens (kingi and kwint), kaisers, governors, generals and admirals, and spent much time and money in what appeared to most colonial officials to be childlike imitation of European customs and institutions. Few such societies survived the colonial era, although a few &otchi' bandsmen with home-made kilts and the remains of imported bagpipes still perform at some Mombasa weddings at the time of writing. On the face of it, such behaviour must be interpreted simply as an attempt to 'play at' being members of the colonising race, arising out of admiration for them. But Dr Terence Ranger has shown that the reality was far less simple. There was indeed an element of admiration, especially for the hypnotic effect created by having large numbers of people march in immaculate ranks and perfect time. But the Swahilis sought to utilise this effect, this new form of magic, for their own ends,
and town demes competed with one another to produce the most mesmeric - as well as the most expensive, innovative, and generally striking - display. Ideally one deme would so far outshine the other that enthusiasm would melt into admiration and good humour, victory would be conceded, and interdeme tensions were once again catharsised without actual violence - at least until the next Beni dance.

There was also an element of satire in Beni dances: on one hand they furnished an opportunity to lampoon well-known colonialist individuals or types, on the other the mere fact that ordinary Swahilis (and most Beni dancers were of relatively low social status) could dress up and be

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honoured in public as kings, queens, governors and the like was itself a sort of joke, a cutting down to size of important figures in the colonial pantheon and a demonstration of familiarity with them. Beni dancesocieties often served as mutual self-help societies, and on occasion fulfilled other functions. They turn out to be almost as good an example of Swahis appropriating something foreign and using it in their own way as Chinese porcelain, Ottoman tulip vases and imported blue cloth.

Beni dances were in a long-established tradition of competitive interdeme dances in Swahili society. Arab-Wangwana weddings, though incorporating elements that seem to have derived from the Maghrib, also placed them in a setting of Liongo-related rituals which were purely Swahili. These are only two examples of the way in which Swahilis took over practices which were derived from abroad without in any way breaking with their own traditions or diminishing their own cultural autonomy.

Swahili culture may not have been as badly distorted by the colonial era as that of some other societies. At least the Swahilis had no cause to lose confidence in their language, which became the colonial lingua franca even though it did for a while take second place to the colonial tongue. Much of their poetry survived and continued to be extremely important, and Swahili literature has even acquired new genres, especially since 1950.

Moreover, the fact that they have long had the only indigenous East African culture traditionally adjusted to urban existence may have helped the Swahilis, as towns in the region came to dominate rural areas. The position of most of them as the longest-established Muslims, and of a few as early Christians, was also valuable to them in certain contexts. He or she may have been through hard times, but there was always room somewhere in colonial East Africa for a Swahili-speaking Muslim or Christian who felt at home in an urban context, whereas many non-Swahili-speaking herdsmen, cultivators or hunter-gatherers found themselves obliged, at some point in the colonial era, to change their ways radically if they wished to survive at all.

All the same, it was a time of extreme difficulty for the Swahilis. The traditional pattern of settlement, with countless small and medium-small communities scattered up and down the coast, gave way - mainly due to new maritime
technology and changing patterns of Indian Ocean commerce - to a few large
towns, in some of which Swahilis rapidly became minority populations. More
than ever before their politics were subject to sustained supervision by non-
Swahilis - first by the Busaidi dynasty in Zanzibar (though that too became
Swahilised in certain respects), then by European colonial regimes.
Trade with the interior passed almost entirely into the hands of immigrants from
the Indian sub-continent, who also dominated most of the more lucrative
commerce on the coast, leaving many Swahilis more impoverished than they had
ever been. And, finally, the very concept of a Swahili people with its own
distinctive culture was subject to a powerful attack by colonial scholars and
administrators. Under the circumstances, it

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is hardly surprising that the Swahilis' confidence in their culture and traditions
faltered. And it was during this period that Hadrami and other Arab immigrants
left a perceptible imprint on Swahili culture.
During the seventy-five or so years after 1880, Swahili culture underwent what
were probably more far-reaching changes than any that had taken place in a
comparable span of time since the introduction of Islam. Much of the material
culture of the past cannot be recognised from that of the post-1955 era. Most
crafts seem to have been forgotten, as apparently were many old traditions and
rituals. Hardly any settlements still have a recognisable patriciate (Lamu being a
notable exception), fewer still one in the direct line of descent from its pre-1880
predecessor.
In particular little or nothing is visible today of what we may call the Shungwaya
elements in Swahili culture. Few mji-settlements are any longer in any sense
sacred. All traces of cattle-keeping and camel-keeping have finally disappeared
save in one or two places like Siyu and Mambrui, and in the dietary preferences of
the Katwa. Liongo is no. longer remembered at weddings; indeed, his name is
hardly recalled at all save in a few local rituals such as the Mombasa Siku ya
Mwaka or Solar New Year festivities. And any link between Shungwaya and
Shirazi seems to have been long since lost.
Have Swahilis then experienced an irreparable break with their past, and have
overseas influences had such an effect on Swahili culture that some of the old
elements within it, including those derived from Shungwaya and its successor-
states, are irrelevant to its future? The question is central to the theme of this book
and cannot be entirely shirked.
A short answer is that the proposition is based on a misunderstanding of what
cultures are and how they work. Cultures are not rubber bands attaching us to our
pasts, which can be stretched up to a certain point by periods of rapid innovation
but then snap and cause us to lose contact with our own backgrounds. Rather the
working of a people's culture throughout its history resembles coloured threads in
an unfinished tapestry. Without the threads the tapestry has no significance and
ceases to be a tapestry at all: similarly, without its own culture, a people ceases to
be identifiable as such and becomes just so many human beings.
Threads of new colours may make their appearance (for all living cultures change), sometimes a great number of them at once: but the old ones may still be there somewhere, tucked away behind the frame, for it is still the same tapestry. And any thread that has ever been used, even if only once and that long ago, may at some time resurface, whereupon the perceptive observer will note that its colour has been used before and that its reappearance creates some sort of a pattern. While the tapestry continues to be worked - so long, that is, as a people survives as a recognisable group with its own culture - no colour of thread should ever be regarded as exhausted, and no pattern or image created by use of that colour is necessarily complete. It is only when a people dies out or disappears and its culture ossifies that historians and archaeologists can afford to say that this or that cultural feature only surfaced for a while and was not important to the tapestry as a whole.

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Let us apply the tapestry metaphor to one episode in Swahili history: the Swahili ('Witu') Sultanate. At first sight this might not be easily understood, for why should a Nabahani claimant to an island settlement's throne suddenly withdraw to the mainland and try to establish a new type of non-tribal polity inland? But once we realise that the area had a long tradition of non-tribal Shungwaya successor-states which focused on sacred settlements; that the original state capital at Kau closely resembled Shungwaya-capitals elsewhere; that the Pate throne, to which the Nabahanis had acceded, was intimately associated, since its defeat of Liongo and the inheritance of Ozi, both with the tradition and with the locality; and that this nineteenth-century sultanate saw itself as the successor to Ozi in important ways (for instance, as the heir to Liongo's right to tax the Lower Pokomo villages) - once we realise all this, the whole episode falls into a pattern.

Of the coloured threads that form the cultural background to the Swahili Sultanate, one first appeared in the eighth century or earlier when the first Shungwaya itself emerged, while another disappeared from view in the late fifteenth with the overthrow of Liongo, and a third dates from some later era when Pate's de facto control over the Ozi mainland crumbled away. Any assumption that, because the various Shungwaya elements in traditional Swahili culture seem to have been submerged for about a century, they are no longer relevant to future Swahili history is clearly premature. This is not to predict that another Swahili Sultanate will one day arise: that is extremely unlikely. But some at least of the elements which surfaced in it may still survive within Swahili culture, and, even if future generations of Swahilis only know of them from books and poems, they may yet resurface in some new but recognisable form.

Contemporary Aspects of the Problem of Swahili Identity
We return to the question discussed in the Foreword, namely how to define a Swahili. We are attempting to trace a cultural boundary rather than a genetic one. Swahilis have never made any serious claim to be a single race or tribe descended from a common ancestor, even a mythical one; and, though many of them, especially among the patricians or would-be patricians, have an idea of what they think a 'real' Swahili (mSwahili haswa) looks like, there is little correspondence
between the ideas of different people in different areas - or even, often enough, in
the same area. When Swahilis are pressed, it often turns out that they much more
nearly agree on how a 'real' Swahili behaves. These are cultural matters, and
cultural boundaries are easier to determine than racial or other genetic or pseudo-
genetic ones. But there is still scope for dispute. To cite one example: it has to be
established how much variation - usually regional or class variation - is permitted
within the bounds of a single culture, or, to put it another way, when a sub-culture
ceases to be contained within a bigger culture and becomes a separate culture on
its own.
A good summary of what it means to be a Swahili, written by a highly252

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educated man who regards himself as one, listed the key features (his list with
comments is reproduced almost verbatim, but the emphasis in the last sentence is
mine):
* lugha - language; but Uwashili ni tabia bali si lugha ('Swahili-ness is habits
- mannerisms and customs - and not language');
" mila na dasturi - customs and habits. Examples: hatusi (weddings) and
other ceremonies; mapishi (cookery); and sherehe (functions - both social
and religious);
* mavazi - dressing,
* tabia - mannerisms; and
umbo - 'one's physical appearance. You can tell from looks a Swahili from a non-
Swahili even in the case of a pure Swahili Alkuyu or Kamba.'
One suspects that most Swahilis would go along with this account, save perhaps
for the last remark, though old-style patricians would probably add a rider about
belonging to one of the acknowledged clans or lineages. Interestingly, its author
was not himself of coastal stock at all, since his mother belonged to what was in
colonial terms one up-country tribe and his father to another. He stressed that one
did not have to come of an inter-tribal marriage to be what he called a 'pure
African blooded Swahili' as opposed to a mwanbao or 'coastal strip' Swahili: both
parents might belong to the same tribe so long as they were Muslims and so long
as one was oneself brought up 'in a Swahili settlement' speaking Swahili and
acquiring Swahili tabia, dasturi na mila.
He also suggested that it was only 'mwambao Swahilis (those of mixed blood or
those closely related to Arabs)' who tended to discriminate against other
Swahilis, criticising many of them as 'not real Swahilis'; he himself was inclined
to deny that one could be a Swahili if one was not a Muslim, though he modified
this statement by adding that 'those who have become Swahilised and not
Islamised are dser to the Muslims than Christians in mannerisms and habits' He
implied that there were more such people in Tanzania than in Kenya, where many
non-Muslims spoke 'harsh' Swahili 'whereas Swahili ni lughaya ki ungewana -
Swahili is spoken in a very polite manner.'
What is the lesson of Swahili history outlined in this book regarding the
boundaries of Swahili society? Leaving aside, for the moment, those who are only
in the process of being Swahilised, have there not from the very beginning been
both patricians - the ex-pastoralist founders or 'founders' of the coastal settlements (some of whom may not even have spoken a Bantu tongue in the earliest years) - and also commoners, protoSwahili-speaking ironsmiths and perhaps potters and others who also came from the vicinity of Great Shungwaya, as well as others from elsewhere, without whom the earliest settlements could not have survived? We have no way of knowing for sure, but it must be doubted whether these original Swahili commoners resembled their patrician counterparts in terms of their mi/a, dasturi na tabia, while their umbo, like their lugha, was almost certainly quite different.
The simple fact is that culture depends upon several variables, one of 253

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which is socio-economic status. This is especially so in urban contexts; and, while there can be no objection to what is clearly an old Swahili custom of constantly striving after cultural uniformity by denying the title of mSwahili haswa to anyone who does not pass one's own cultural test of Swahili-ness, historians should not accept such denials at face value but interpret them as evidence that the Swahili community has always contained various sub-cultures. These reflect not only its many different regions but also the social stratification within the mi-settlements of which, for most of their history, the patricians have been the special guardians.
The other important point on which my non-coastal Swahili informant differs with the definitions provided in the Foreword is the knotty one of whether Swahilis must be Muslims. He insists that, since most ti/a, tabia na dasturi are Muslim, one cannot be a 'real' Swahili unless one is a Muslim too. We have noted a considerable amount which is, in origin, non-Muslim in important Swahili customs and rituals (including some which are either unique to or at least shared by patrician lineages of the most impeccable credentials). This is true even of weddings, specifically cited by my informant as typically Muslim occasions: for as we saw the great weddings both of the Shirazi Muslims and of those following the Arab-Wangwana mode contain much that was not Muslim in origin (though in the latter case it seems to have been imported by Muslims from the other side of the continent), and specifically Muslim rituals constitute only a small part of either sort of hansi ceremony.
This is not to imply that such rituals are in any sense improper for Muslims (though some Muslims have themselves suggested at times that they are.) It is generally accepted that most if not all Muslim societies have customs which reflect some other, usually pre-Muslim belief-system, and that no particular form of Islam is 'purer' than any other in this respect. This applies to Swahili Islam, whether of the Shirazi or Arab-Wangwana variety: neither is necessarily flawed by its non-Muslim elements.
The fact remains that much in their culture that Swahilis tend to look upon as entirely and exclusively Muslim is not so. Islam has been tremendously important to Swahilis for some nine centuries, but it may not be quite as indispensable to true Swahili-ness as my informant and many like him believe. It would be
interesting to poll a representative sample of Swahilis who had been adequately informed about early coastal history, including the fact that the earliest coastal settlements were founded (as opposed to 'founded') by non-Muslims and remained basically non-Muslim for up to two and a half centuries, and to ask whether they thought the inhabitants of such settlements should be called (as we have called them throughout this book) 'Swahilis' If the majority agreed that the name was applicable, it would not destroy the case of those who now argue that 'real' Swahilis must be Muslims, but it would certainly weaken it.

There is, however, another dimension to this problem as it confronts Swahilis in Eastern Africa today. It arises out of the notion of modernisation. Modernisation is much sought after in all the new states of Africa. It

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is a hold-all term which means different things to different people and in different contexts: but most indigenous East Africans of the younger and middle generations, Swahili and non-Swahili alike, would share a fairly clear picture of what it entailed. Most of what they regard as modernisation - Western-style clothes, modern transport systems, electrification, piped water, and so on - is widely associated with an urban rather than a rural existence. Certainly towns are where its outward manifestations, 'the latest' in cars, clothes, radio, television and video sets, etc., are most likely to be encountered. It might not be impossible to be 'modern' in the countryside (Swahili mashamban:), but it would be much easier in an urban setting.

How does one get to enjoy the fruits of modernisation at the present time? To most Swahilis, who see themselves as having been far more 'modern' than other East Africans for many centuries, the method is simple: one becomes a Swahili, a Muslim but a 'modern' one who wears trousers, jacket, and tie when necessary (but equally traditional Swahili dress if that is appropriate), and then one carries on as Swahilis always have, that is, seeking always to be the first to know what 'the latest' is and to benefit from mediating between it and non-Swahili Africans. But many East Africans nowadays believe that there is another route to successful modernisation: baptism as a Christian, a sound grasp of English or another Western language, and as dose an adoption of Western ways as is feasible. There is, in short, perhaps for the first time in East African history, a dispute as to whether Swahilisation is the quickest road to modernity, or even a road at all. To Swahilis it self-evidently is, as it always has been. But, to their dismay, they find that some East Africans now despise them as backward, dismiss their religion as 'non-African' and even reactionary, and seek modernity by the alternative route. This is, of course, an over-simplified account of a much more complex debate about 'progress', but it suffices for our purposes, for it explains the fierce resistance of many Swahili Muslims to any suggestion that urbanised Christian Africans might merit the name 'Swahili': to them such people often appear as urban parvenus who stand for the very antithesis of Swahili-ness as it has evolved over centuries.
There is, however, a significant difference between, on one hand, urban African Christians who seek modernisation by uncritical imitation of Westerners, including the adoption of a Western language, and on the other those who are more selective about what they adopt, and who see the Swahili tongue as more appropriate and as adequate for most purposes. Nobody would wish to call the former 'Swahilis', but the latter might qualify, at least as 'Swahilising persons' as we defined them in the Foreword. It can be argued that, as Swahilis themselves believe, the Swahilisation process is the modernisation process in an East African context, or overlaps substantially with it. Only very few East Africans can afford to take the Westernising route to modernisation, for it involves spending a good deal of money on education and in other spheres. Rural-dwelling East Africans (the large majority) seeking to become, in a loose sense, 'more modern' by moving into towns are probably most likely to succeed in their ambitions if they adopt the Swahili tongue and a way of life approximating to that of the traditional coastal mji-settlement or its up-country equivalents, the marengo - if, in other words, they become Swahilised; and a great many do.

For the mi and majengo provide the simplest way for most people to ease themselves into an urban, basically non-tribal existence - which is precisely what they were designed to do. Mtaa (town-ward) and mkao (deme) go some way to replace the sense of solidarity provided in rural contexts by clan and lineage. There are also numerous safety valves for cultural differences, and devices comparable to the Beni dance to assist with culture-shock. And the Swahili language offers access to more areas relevant to urban existence than do most other indigenous East African languages, deriving from rural-dwelling societies. Of course, the overlap is not complete. In some respects even the most modernised Swahili may seem 'anti-modern' to other East Africans. Nevertheless, modern East African towns, coastal and non-coastal, contain, as well as a very large number of people who would qualify as partly Swahilised, a good proportion of people who could be classified as actual Swahilis. Where there is resistance to being labelled Swahili, it is often based on the assumption that Swahilis must be Muslims.

Swahili History and Identity

We asked ourselves, in the Foreword, how we identified 'peoples' in history, and concluded that in the Swahili case there were problems about using many of the usual indicators: common language, shared territory, common culture, and a widespread consciousness of belonging together. It looked as if our best hope might be to discover a 'shared historical experience'.

By now, some of the problems about the first four indicators have been resolved. It is true that some Swahilis may not have spoken the Swahili tongue (or indeed a Bantu tongue at all) for a short period at the very beginning. But, if we date the origin of a specific Swahili identity from the moment when the first Shungwaya-inspired coastal settlement was founded, then there can only have been a
negligible number of people for a very short time for whom some sort of Swahili was not the 'preferred language' What would be erroneous would be to try to trace the Swahili language back in time as a source of evidence for Swahili history. This would work only if all its speakers had always been Swahilis, whereas, as we have seen, before the foundation of the earliest settlement (on present evidence, about AD 800) they were more likely to have been iron-working waPokomo wa Mginí; and, even after 800, the early Swahili tongue may not have been spoken exclusively by people we would define as Swahilis. The territorial factor is also somewhat clearer, though not in the sense that we can draw lines on any map and say that those who lived within them were Swahilis. But we can affirm with reasonable confidence that before c. 1900 almost everyone who lived for any period within a coastal mi-settlement or (after about 1840) its inland counterpart or majengo was

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a Swahili, and that no appreciable number of Swahilis existed for long outside such places.

The shared culture and the sense of belonging together may also have been more effective indicators of Swahili identity than the evidence initially suggested. Though different Swahilis spoke of 'coming from' places as diverse as Shungwaya, Persia (Shiraz) and the Arab lands (not to mention Portugal), they did not necessarily understand these statements in any strictly literal sense, and the same person might describe himself as coming from two or more of these places according to whom he was addressing. Moreover, Shungwaya in a sense became Shiraz(i), while some lineages which began by 'coming from' Shiraz later remembered themselves as coming from the Arab world. Once we realise this, it is possible to visualise a more real sense of belonging together than one would previously have thought possible.

It becomes easier to conceive of an overall Swahili cultural unity once we acknowledge the existence of socio-economic, as well as regional, subcultures, and once we accept that the apparent cultural contrast between Shirazi Swahilis and Arab-Wangwana bnes was primarily a temporary manifestation of an incipient class conflict. Some Swahilis may say of other Swahilis that they were 'not real Swahilis', but this does not mean that a certain degree of cultural unity is absent: such people are trying to modify the borderline between Swahis and Swahilising people to suit their own preconceptions. This borderline is admittedly hard to define precisely. A fair rule of thumb is that a Swahilising person becomes a Swahili at that moment when Swahili becomes his preferred language. The historian will only seldom be able to say for sure of any group or individual when that was. While it may be important to a Swahili to be able to tell an mSwahili haswa when he meets one, it is only seldom important to the historian.

So far as culture is concerned, the really surprising fact is that so many small settlements scattered over such a wide area managed to maintain as high a degree of cultural uniformity over a millennium as they in fact did. Just as our modern
Swahili informant claimed to be able to recognise a Swahili when he saw one 'even in the case of a pure Swahili Kikuyu or Kamba', so we can recognise a single culture underlying societies living as far apart as Hamarweyn (Old Mogadishu) and the Comoros. The languages spoken in these two places are now mutually unintelligible; but the traditional architecture is broadly similar, as are the clothes people wear, the festivals they celebrate, the manner in which young and old, men and women conduct themselves, and countless other details of tabia, dastwi na mila.

This high degree of cultural unity can only have been maintained over such great distances by continual visits between even quite distant settlements; and these are still very typical of Swahili existence. There is a constant coming and going between different settlements, not only to trade but for funerals, religious occasions, and sometimes on what appear to non-Swahilis to be quite trivial pretexts. The compulsion to attend the funerals even of quite distant connections may stem from the times when

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they were the occasion for all blood-brothers to demonstrate their solidarity, and when anyone who did not attend might be suspected of encompassing the death. But such explanations are not available for all the numerous sorts of visits, and it is hard to resist the conclusion that the custom of making them grew out of a conscious need, quite understandable in such small and isolated communities, to maintain cultural links.

Swahilis, then, are not without a sense of belonging together, and have almost always enjoyed a certain degree of linguistic and cultural unity as well as being associated with a certain sort of territory - the mji or mjengo. Do they also have any particular 'shared historical experience', real or imagined, which helps us to recognise them as a 'people in history'?

It is surely a reasonable conclusion that they used to do so, and that the fact that most of them have forgotten this experience has contributed to their present crisis of identity. Would not one of the functions of the Shungwaya/Shirazi origin tradition have been to furnish precisely such a 'shared historical experience' to the Swahilis of earlier centuries, just as it did to Mijikenda (and presumably also Pokomo) in a later age?

Whether their ancestors actually came from Great Shungwaya or merely from the neighbourhood of the mji-settlement in which they lived need not have mattered, any more than it matters to Mijikenda who now claim Shungwaya origins whether their forefathers joined the kaya-settlements 'from Shungwaya' at the time of their establishment or from somewhere else long afterwards. From the viewpoint of establishing a sense of historical unity, all could perceive themselves as 'coming from' this state or empire 'the most famous of [whose] towns [was] Shungwaya', and whose laws were still recalled, as late as the end of the nineteenth century, as 'famous'.

For how long would a Shungwaya origin-tradition have been effective as a way of giving Swahilis a sense of historical unity? The first recorded Swahili tradition of
'coming from' anywhere other than Shungwaya/ Shirazi was already in circulation in the mid-sixteenth century, when De Barros heard that the founders of Mogadishu 'came from' al-Hasa in the Persian Gulf. But as late as the nineteenth century the knowledgeable 'Chief of Mombaz' told Krapf that Shungwaya, also known as Shirazi, was the 'original seat' of the Swahilis, while Burton heard traditions to the same effect; and it is likely that a good proportion of Swahilis still saw themselves at that time as sharing some great historical experience connected with the ruler and princes, commemorated in the flags which flew over mtepe boats, and also with Liongo. A conviction that one had shared such an experience was not, after all, necessarily incompatible with the supposed links of Arab-Wangwana followers with the Arab world. Most probably traces of a collective memory of Shungwaya/Shirazi have only been erased in the period since 1880, at the time when the Arabisation of Swahili culture was at its peak. If this is correct, then might not Shungwaya/Shirazi be important enough in Swahili history to be mentioned, albeit only cursorily and in a way leaving room for many different interpretations of what it actually was, in any definitions of a Swahili? Certainly the traditional mji-settlement

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owed much to it, although majengo-dwellers would be linked to it only indirectly through the mji. Ultimately this is a question which only Swahilis themselves can answer. If they come to feel that Shungwaya/Shirazi is a part of their historical inheritance sufficiently important to figure in the definition of a Swahili, then it will assuredly come to do so. Otherwise our original definitions of Swahilis and Swahilised persons, which make no mention of Shungwaya, may be considered adequate for most contexts.

How would Shungwaya/Shirazi figure in a definition? A somewhat more elaborate pair of definitions than that already provided might run as follows:

1 a Swahili is a person who has made his/her home in or around one of the traditional Muslim settlements of the East African coast which were originally legitimised by their link with Shungwaya alias Shirazi, or in one of their modern counterparts; whose lifestyle conforms to that of one of the sub-cultures existing there; and who has inherited or adopted the Swahili language as his/her preferred tongue;

2 a person is Swahilised to the extent that his/her lifestyle conforms to that of one of the sub-cultures inhabiting the traditional Muslim settlements of the East African coast which were originally legitimised by their link with Shungwaya alias Shirazi, or their modern counterparts, and especially to the extent that he/she has adopted the Swahili language as his/her preferred tongue.

It will be noted that we have inserted the word 'Muslim' between 'traditional' and 'settlements' As we now know, Swahili settlements were not the only ones in the coastal region which were legitimised by their link with Shungwaya/Shirazi. The reference to Islam excludes Mijikenda kayas and Pokomo ganda-settlements.
On the other hand, in our reference to majengo-settlements we have omitted the phrase 'in the interior' after 'counterparts'. This is intended to indicate to the meticulous that majengo-type settlements also exist in modern coastal towns, and that these may not necessarily be solidly Muslim. Freretown on the outskirts of modern Mombasa, long the home of (mostly Christian) freed slaves whom I would wish to classify as Swahili, would be an example. The locality is now more or less swallowed up in the larger area known as Kisauni, home to many Muslims and Christians, a large proportion of whom would also qualify as Swahilis (and many more as Swahilised persons) by these new definitions.

A last modification of the earlier definitions is the insertion of a reference to the several sub-cultures existing both in mji-settlements and in majengo-type settlements. This is designed to warn against the common Swahili custom of declaring other Swahilis siwaSwahili haswa. It cannot be emphasised too often that the Swahilis comprised not just the patricians or even the wholly Swahilised sections of the population. At times of economic expansion every urban settlement contained a large number of people who were, culturally speaking, on their way into Swahili society. These more than once furnished the patricians of the next generation (or

Aflenord anyway some of their mothers), and a few of the non-patrician leaders as well; and their role in Swahili history may not be neglected.

Let us conclude with two brief observations, one on the findings of this book, and one on the sort of evidence upon which they have necessarily been based. Our main concern has been with Swahili identity, and especially with what we called in the Foreword 'the African element in their cultural patrimony'. It may be objected that we have paid too little attention to the contribution of Islam to Swahili thought and culture. There has certainly been no intention to minimise this contribution: the proposal that the term 'Swahili' should be so defined that it can, if necessary, include Christians is made with an eye to modern trends. It has little bearing on the early period with which we have been mainly concerned since the first significant population of Christian Swahilis would have been freed slaves and would not have appeared before the late nineteenth century. (Swahilis who were baptised by the Portuguese were not numerous enough to qualify as a historically significant population, though a few individual converts were of course important.) It must be confessed that the impact of Islam upon Swahili society has not been dealt with in any detail here except in connection with modes of dominance and where it was relevant to the modification of pre-Islamic customs and rituals. This is partly because it was not the principal theme of the book.

The second observation concerns the nature and amount of evidence that are available to historians trying to reconstruct the societies and events of Africa up to a millennium or more ago. The evidence for this sort of project is usually so sparse that it is rarely even attempted. In the case of the Swahilis we are fortunate not only in having more than we have in the cases of most other African societies,
but also in its variety: Chinese as well as Arabic and, later, Portuguese and Swahili documents; a good deal of archaeology, including some excellent new data; ethnoarchaeological information, much of it collected in places like Lamu, Siyu and Pate Town where traditional Swahili society was until recently largely intact; well-studied languages and a reasonable amount of indigenous literature in published form; and, of course, many traditions, some still remembered and others recorded over several centuries. These give us many complementary perspectives on the Swahili past.

But there are still huge gaps, and much of what is proposed here necessarily contains an element of surmise. We have tried, as far as possible, to indicate just what evidence exists for each interpretation which is offered, and have not been shy about using such phrases as 'It seems reasonable to assume from this that ' or 'The only plausible explanation for this is that', which give the careful reader the chance to reflect and, if necessary, disagree. Even so, some readers may be shocked at some of the conclusions reached, however tentatively, on such slim evidence.

No apology is offered for occasional audacity. It is a feeble historian who never ventures an interpretation which may later have to be retracted in the face of new evidence; and, where existing evidence is so slight, no progress will ever be made unless someone is prepared to risk being proved wrong. This is not to say that any major innovation proposed here is unsupported by evidence. I have sought to adduce as much evidence as possible for every hypothesis; and, though some individual theories rest on very little, the coherence of the whole argument is additional corroboration for each of its parts. This needs elaboration. As anyone who has studied it will know, Swahili history is shot through with apparent contradictions, unsolved problems and unexplained facts. To name just a few:

1 What are we to make of several early Chinese references to typically pastoralist customs on the East African coast in the pre-1300 period?
2 Who were the waDebuli and the wabiba?
3 Who were the Mossequeos, and why should they have saved Malindi from the Zimba, then attacked Mombasa, and finally handed Mombasa Island over to the Malindi ruler?
4 Who were the Katwa, with their curiously un-Bantu clan names? And why were they 'given half the government' of Siyu, some of whose longer-established clans also have curiously un-Bantu names?
5 Was Fumo Liongo a historical figure, and how does he, in many respects a typical mainland warrior, come to be a hero of Swahili folklore?
6 Why did some traditional rulers of Swahili settlements have elaborate rules of dress and numerous ranks and tides while others had none of these things?
7 What is the significance of traditional Swahili wedding rituals, and why were they of two different kinds?
8 What are we to make of traditions collected by Krapf and Burton indicating that the Swahilis, or anyway those among them styled as woShirazi, originated in a place called Shungwaya, somewhere on the mainland opposite Pate? How can these traditions be reconciled to others referring to places called Shungwaya which were clearly elsewhere and which are described as the place of origin of many Mijikenda, Pokomo, Segeju and others? Most previous studies - especially those influenced by the 'Arab Myth' of East African coastal history - have simply ignored most of these difficulties. While we would not claim to have resolved for ever all such contradictions, or to have provided a definitive explanation for all of the puzzling facts (for much revision will no doubt become necessary as more evidence becomes available), yet the account of Swahili origins and early Swahili history offered here does, I believe, both take into consideration and offer a possible explanation for many more of them than before. Let the historian whose instinct is to reject all in this book that seems too hypothetical first try to compose an account which, if correct, would explain one half as much.

Aflenword
Notes
3. Islam in EastAfrica, p. 22. By the latter phrase I take Trimingham to be referring to the characteristically (though by no means uniquely) Hadramii talent for persuading populations among whom they have immigrated that the local customs of their (Hadrami) homeland represent Arab, therefore orthodox, Muslim practice and should be adopted forthwith.
6. The passage is quoted in Kirkman, Ungwana on the Tana.; p. 9.
7. Dr B.G. Martin, loc. cit., p. 383, describes eighteenth-century Swahili poets of shaifian pedigree as 'bilingual' writers 'translating' Arabic religious poetry into Swahili. But there is, with due respect, a great difference between a recension - a perfectly respectable literary form in many cultures - and a translation; and, though they presumably knew enough Arabic to read the originals, we have no evidence whatsoever that these people were bilingual in the normal sense of the term. I
myself have translated one of the poems he there mentions from Swahili into
English verse, but could in no way claim to be
bilingual in English and Swahili.
Burton, "Indian" metalwork in East Africa: the bronze lion
11. R. Lewcock, 'Zanj: the East African coast' in P. Oliver, ed., Shelter in Afica,
London, 1971, pp. 80-95; 'Islamic towns and buildings in East Africa', paper delivered to
the colloquium on 'The Islamic city and its role in art' held at the Institute of
Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, 1971; and 'Architectural connections between
Africa and parts of
12. 'Habash, habshi, sidi, seyyid' in J.C. Stone, ed., Africa and the &a, Aberdeen,
1985, pp.
131-51.
13. For the Nuwafil, see E.G. Ross, 'On the tribal divisions in the principality of
Oman',
Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society 19.3 (1873), p. 192. I am
indebted for information on the possible origins of the Nofalle to Drs Dale
Eickelman and Daniel
Varisco. See also Miles, Peoples and Tiibes of the Persian Gulf, pp. 433, 455.
14. See J. de Vere Allen, 'Swahili culture and the pattern of east coast settlement',
IJAHS
1975.
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