Connecting Continents

Seetah, Krish

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THE SWAHILI COAST OF East Africa borders the Indian Ocean along some 3,000 km of coastline and adjacent islands (map 3.1). Historically, and for at least two millennia, it was a region where the maritime trading systems of the western Indian Ocean intersected with the indigenous exchange networks that extended throughout eastern and southern Africa.¹ The Swahili, the indigenous people who live along the coast, and their antecedents came to act as cultural brokers between the African and Oceanic worlds, transforming commodities, ideas, religion, and values. While historians and anthropologists have documented this process in some detail for the early modern and modern periods,² archaeologists are only just beginning to shed light on its ancient origins.

This chapter will examine the emergence of the Swahili Coast as part of the wider Indian Ocean world, focusing on the latest archaeological
MAP 3.1. The Swahili coast, East Africa, showing sites and other locations mentioned in text.
evidence from the region for the first millennium CE. It will explore how long-distance connections developed through the expansion of Indian Ocean trade and exchange, and how this commercial exchange was interwoven with the spread of Islam to eastern Africa. This process of intensifying engagement and cross-cultural interaction is increasingly recognized as a form of “globalization” or, in its incipient phases, “protogloblalization.” Understanding of the globalizing processes active on the early Swahili Coast constitutes part of a broader recognition that globalization was a factor in world history long before the expansion of European power in the colonial era. This perspective is important to Africanists, as it enables us to argue for much earlier connections between Sub-Saharan Africa and the wider Indian Ocean world than often recognized by historical discourse—continental Africa was not an isolated appendage, but a significant element in the Eurasian world for at least the last two millennia.

The key to understanding protogloblalization processes, at least from an East African perspective, is through the study of the Swahili themselves. During the 1970s and 1980s, there were a number of debates concerning the identity of the Swahili, and whether they comprised a definable or single ethnic group, or were simply a people who happened to speak the Swahili language, a product of colonial classification, or indeed whether they were an African society at all, rather than simply a group of creolized Afro-Arab communities. Among anthropologists and most archaeologists, a consensus view has now emerged that the Swahili are a definable and complex African society of considerable antiquity. That definition includes features such as a maritime orientation and trade, largely urbanized communities, adherence to Islam, and the use of Swahili as a language. The distribution of the Swahili people and their culture is generally accepted to extend from southern Somalia through coastal Kenya and Tanzania to northern Mozambique, and includes the islands of Pemba, Zanzibar, and Mafia, as well as the Comoros (map 3.1). The southern limit of Swahili-speakers nowadays is the Kirimba Islands, although maritime contact extended further south along the coasts of Mozambique and northern Madagascar, and these communities have also been claimed as formally part of the Swahili world.

These Swahili societies and their antecedents have become the focus for archaeological work in recent decades. With an archaeological
perspective comes a longer time frame than would normally be considered by historians and linguists. Have all these features been present in Swahili society since time immemorial? Do they all need to be present to define Swahili culture? Can we think about a process of Swahili ethnogenesis? Is Islam a key defining feature, or are we able to identify pre-Islamic Swahili? Was a maritime orientation always present?

This chapter is framed around the research findings of the European Research Council–funded Sealinks Project, hosted by Oxford University, which has examined how the early settlements of the East African coast were connected to a globalizing Indian Ocean world during the first millennium CE. This has involved excavations both on the African mainland coast and hinterland, and the near-shore islands (Zanzibar, Pemba, and Mafia), and in 2013–15 extended to northern Madagascar and the Comoros. The Sealinks methodology has involved targeted, small-scale excavations at key trade and settlement sites, with a strong emphasis on the recovery of carbonized materials (such as crop seeds) to trace early agriculture, direct radiocarbon-dating of a large number of plant and animal remains to construct reliable absolute chronologies for trade and biological translocations, scientific identification of introduced fauna using proteomic and ancient DNA studies, and the recovery and geochemical analysis of other key economic indicators such as vessel glass, glass beads, ceramics, and metalwork.

**SWAHILI ORIGINS AND THE BEGINNING OF GLOBALIZATION**

Linguistically, Swahili forms part of the Northeast Coastal Bantu group of languages, whose main distribution lies along the Kenyan and northern Tanzanian coasts. The chronology of the separation of Swahili from the other languages in this group is suggested at around one thousand years ago. It is generally thought that the NE Coastal Bantu speakers can be identified archaeologically with the first farmers, who arrived on the coastal hills around 200 CE (or possibly earlier, although there is a dearth of reliable dates), and whose pottery is generally termed “Kwale” ware, after the type site discovered in the 1960s. Pushing back the chronology of this Kwale tradition just a century or so suggests a possible identification with the inhabitants of Rhapta and the adjacent island of Menouthias, the trade entrepôt mentioned in the *Periplus*
Maris Erythraei (c. 50 CE) and Geographia of Claudius Ptolemy (c. 150 CE). These classical period texts supply detailed information on the inhabitants of the eastern African coast, then referred to as Azania, and their culture, including the use of sewn boats, dugout canoes, and fishing methods both from boats and using basket traps. In this model, we have two thousand years of continuous settlement and trade on the east coast, providing a neat scenario for Swahili origins and an unbroken record of maritime commerce connecting East Africa with the Indian Ocean world. If we can locate either Rhapta or Menouthias, we would have a much better understanding of the early stages of this process and a definite link between the classical texts and the archaeology.

Some new material from the Sealinks excavations at the Juani Primary School site in the Mafia archipelago shows that Kwale tradition ceramics were present on the East African near-shore islands, confirming the earlier discoveries of Tanzanian archaeologist Felix Chami. Study of the subsistence economy on the site suggests that the Kwale inhabitants were maritime in orientation, with fish and shellfish forming their diet, with no domesticated crops or animals. They were also manufacturing shell beads in quantity, possibly for local or interregional trade with the mainland. The Mafia evidence does demonstrate that these presumably early Bantu speakers were capable of crossing open areas of ocean and adopting a marine subsistence in a manner that closely parallels the description in the Periplus. However, radiocarbon dates so far place this occupation between c. 390 and 540 calibrated years (cal) CE, at least some three hundred years later than the time of the Periplus, so at present a direct association is not possible. Our excavations also found no in situ evidence of the early Indian Ocean trade described in the Periplus and Geographia, which is often assumed to have been active along the whole coast region even in the fifth century CE. If trade was indeed occurring at this time, however, it may have been isolated to only a few entrepôts, such as the archaeologically elusive Rhapta.

The Sealinks Project also investigated a number of cave sites on the near-shore islands where published claims have been made for classical trade items in association with seemingly early stratified Neolithic and Later Stone Age (LSA) levels (i.e., pre–Iron Age). Our reexamination of Ukonju Cave in the Mafia archipelago, for example, showed that the late first millennium BCE / early CE “Neolithic” levels, where a number of glass beads were found, in fact dated to the later first millennium CE,
and the glass beads were likely Indo-Pacific beads of types widely seen at this later period. While the Kwale ware site is just 2 km away, not a single sherd of Kwale pottery was found in our excavation at the site, suggesting that these early Bantu speakers generally avoided these caves.

The other two islands of Zanzibar and Pemba are also candidates for the *Periplus*’s Menouthias. Extensive survey in the southern part of Zanzibar failed to produce any significant Kwale sites, beyond a few sherds in cave deposits and in later levels in coastal sites. At Kuumbi Cave, excavation of a long sequence of LSA occupation that may have spanned the “classical” period did not recover a single convincing import from this period. The “Neolithic” pottery identified there by previous excavators most likely dates to the later first millennium CE or Middle Iron Age, as demonstrated by our recent direct luminescence dating of a sample of sherds.

The island of Pemba fits the *Periplus*’s description of Menouthias more closely than either Mafia or Zanzibar. It is a very fertile island with many small rivers and low-lying hills, and also lies close to the African mainland, where many of the significant Kwale sites have been found. Its topography closely matches the *Periplus*’s description: “It is low and wooded and has rivers, a wide variety of birds, and mountain tortoise.” Pemba’s identification as Menouthias was until recently largely rejected, as the *Periplus* described crocodiles present on the island, and none are there now or were known historically. However, the Sealinks excavation of a cave at Makangale in northern Pemba has revealed the presence of crocodile bones with dates through the second millennium CE. The cave also contains cultural remains dating back to the seventh to eighth century CE, alongside evidence for introduced Asian black rat. The crocodiles may have been using the cave as a nest or were possibly the result of human predation. Nonetheless, despite very comprehensive and systematic survey in northern Pemba, not a single piece of Kwale pottery has yet come to light. The explanation may be related to rapid deposition of soil in some places and heavy erosion in others, making site location difficult. Alternatively, it is possible that during the *Periplus* era, Pemba was not occupied by Iron Age groups with Kwale ceramics, but rather by more mobile foragers whose ephemeral archaeological signature has yet to be recognized on the island.

Thus, while good historical accounts of classical-era trade exist, actual archaeological evidence for it remains elusive. Since the 1980s,
a significant number of projects have intensively surveyed and studied many of the likely areas with minimal results. Early Iron Age sites with Kwale tradition ceramics of the right period have been located on the mainland but no certain imports have been found in clearly stratified contexts—an archaeological absence that is difficult to reconcile with expectations that imported and identifiable trade goods such as glass beads, vessel glass, and pottery would also occur. One explanation may be the complex ways in which these exotic commodities were being processed and exchanged within indigenous Iron Age society. The presence of shell bead-making at Juani hints, for example, at a degree of craft specialization that might be linked to a trade network with the interior (where shell beads have also been found). The quantity of classical imports may have been at such a very low level that simply not enough sites have yet been excavated or recovery has not been good enough to locate this material.

The beginning of significant globalized trade with East Africa therefore really belongs to the seventh century onward. In the seventh century, when Mediterranean trade was at a low ebb, the Indian Ocean world was developing monsoon-based trading systems that connected the late Sasanian Gulf region, western and southern India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and probably beyond into the Gulf of Thailand, as evidenced by the recent discovery of an eighth-century Western-type shipwreck near Bangkok. These trade routes led to the spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia, and Islam into India and East Africa following its rise in the seventh century CE. The growth of port cities such as Siraf and Sohar in the Gulf was linked to the development of this monsoon-based trade, which by the mid-eighth century also connected China and island Southeast Asia with the western Indian Ocean.

In East Africa, there was also an important disjunction in the cultural sequence in the seventh century CE, which complicates claims for Swahili continuity from the Early Iron Age. Archaeologists have identified and excavated a number of key sites along the East African coast, where occupation, dating to the second half of the first millennium CE, can be recognized as “Swahili,” both in urban form and historical and ethnographic record. In some cases, these sites continued to be occupied into the early modern period or beyond. Examples include Shanga and Manda in the Lamu Archipelago, Tumbe/Chwaka and Unguja Ukuu on Pemba and Zanzibar, and Kilwa in Tanzania. In all of these cases
(and many other sites known to date to the second half of the first millenium CE), the earliest ceramic is not Kwale, but a distinct tradition known as Tana (or Early Tana Tradition [ETT], or TIW). The dating of ETT pottery in all the investigated sites has been shown to be no earlier than the late sixth century CE, suggesting a short break, or possibly an overlap, between Tana and Kwale. On some early Tana sites such as Unguja Ukuu and Fukuchani (also on Zanzibar) there are small quantities of Kwale pottery, but in amounts suggestive of exchange with Kwale groups rather than any transition between the traditions. Despite several attempts to show that Kwale “evolved” into Tana ware, many archaeologists continue to argue that they are distinct traditions, with different Iron Age origins in Africa. It seems possible that the “Tana” populations displaced the earlier “Kwale” ones at some point in the middle of the first millennium CE. Much more systematic research on these ceramics as well as secure dating evidence is desperately needed to clarify their stylistic, technological, and chronological relationship to one another.

The makers of Tana pottery were linked into Indian Ocean trade networks from the earliest phase of settlement in coastal villages and towns, beginning at around 600 CE. This is clear from the ceramics at these sites, with imports forming between 3 and 10 percent of the total ceramic assemblage, as well as from the presence of imported glass beads and vessels. At Fukuchani, in northern Zanzibar, which dates to the early seventh to eighth century, the imports are characterized by unglazed torpedo jars—the type-fossil of late Sasanian trade from the Gulf. The site of Unguja Ukuu, dated in Sealinks excavations by some thirty-one radiocarbon determinations, began by the mid-seventh century, with a sequence that extends to the eleventh century. It contains a remarkable assemblage of imported ceramics, including Gulf, Indian, and Chinese wares, that makes up to 10 percent of the total pottery assemblage at the site, as well as glass, glass beads, copper and bronze, and much iron and iron slag. It has no masonry buildings until the tenth century. Subsistence was based around fish and shellfish, hunted wild animals, and a small minority of domesticated animals. The crops from the Unguja Ukuu excavations are almost entirely African millets though small quantities of Asian rice, mungbean, and wheat have also been found. Unguja Ukuu and many other sites were the settlements of African fishing and farming communities, who were able to exploit
their location to engage in long-distance maritime trade and through this become increasingly large and wealthy. Unguja Ukuu began as a small village of 2–3 hectares (ha.), but at its height in the tenth century, covered over 20 ha.

One aspect of the globalization of these early Swahili sites that is still extremely poorly understood is the possible impact of Austronesian or Southeast Asian contact. Investigation of this axis of interaction has drawn us to investigate sites in both the Comoros and Madagascar, where the presence of Tana tradition pottery is more slight and balanced with the presence of shell-impressed and red-slipped wares (known in the Comoros as Dembeni-phase ceramics). Indeed, there is a cline across the Comoros in which the westerly island of Grande Comore has a higher proportion of Tana pottery, the most easterly island of Mayotte has a higher proportion of Dembeni wares, and Anjouan, in the middle, has a mix of the two. Another feature of the Comoros is the near absence of African crops, with subsistence assemblages instead dominated by Asian rice and mungbean. The sites are probably eighth century onward. Dembeni ceramics have not yet been found on Madagascar, although a local variant decorated using shell-impressed dentates has been found in post-tenth-century levels at Mahilaka, the main early trading settlement in northwest Madagascar. A site with pure Tana ceramics, possibly a Swahili colony, has been found in the south of the island but has yet to be excavated and properly recorded.

It seems plausible, based on the archaeological patterns observed at sites in the Comoros and Madagascar, that the Austronesian / Southeast Asian settlement of Madagascar may have been via or coincident with the settlement of the Comoros, and that the Comoros may have had a mixed Proto-Swahili and Austronesian culture in the first millennium. This cosmopolitan cultural milieu may have provided a route for Southeast Asian elements (such as bananas and coconuts, rice cultivation, outrigger canoes, and domestic chicken) into Swahili culture. The potential role of the Indian Ocean slave trade in the Southeast Asian settlement of both the Comoros and Madagascar has been little discussed apart from occasional references. These often observe the description in the c. mid-tenth-century Book of the Marvels of India (Kitab al-Ajaib al-Hind) of the attacks by people called Wakwak—frequently identified with Austronesian speakers from Southeast Asia or Madagascar—on African populations dwelling on the near coastal islands and coastal
mainland. These Wakwak apparently sought leopard skins, slaves, and possibly iron. Claude Allibert suggests two separate corridors of slave trading: the more well-known route between Africa and Arabia that was controlled by the Arabs, as well as another possible African-Asian route dominated by Southeast Asians, who may have settled in small Islamized communities in the Comoros and Madagascar. The ability of archaeology to shed light on this slave trade in the absence of historical sources is currently limited, though genetic studies have a potential role to play.

**ISLAM, URBANISM, “MARITIMENESS,” AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SWAHILI CULTURAL IDENTITY**

The early Swahili sites of the mid- to late first millennium CE were neither urban nor Islamic. Self-evidently, if early Tana sites date from c. 600 CE, their earliest levels cannot be Islamic. The process of Islamization can be seen at Shanga, where the earliest mosque dates to c. 780 E, and where a series of timber mosques was rebuilt on the same site until the tenth century. Thereafter, there is a small stone mosque, followed by a much larger structure that continued in use until the fifteenth century. This timber-to-stone mosque sequence has also been found at Ras Mkumbuu on Pemba, where there is a timber building followed by two stone mosques, and possibly at Old Sima in the Comoros, where post-holes were found below the stone mosque.

It might be argued that these early mosques represent places for visiting merchants to pray. This is, however, unlikely, as the burials excavated in contemporary levels at Shanga include both women and children interred according to Islamic conventions, suggesting that local communities had been, or were in the process of, converting to Islam. Excavations at Shanga were also able to identify a converted African “dynasty” that minted Islamic-style silver coins from the ninth century onward. While stone inscriptions from East Africa, using locally carved coral, only date from the early twelfth century, evidence of local issues of coins such as this shows clearly that local Muslim rulers were minting their own coins in between the ninth and twelfth centuries, not just on Shanga (and nearby Manda), but also on Pemba, Zanzibar, and Mafia.

The archaeological evidence provides a more robust case for the early conversion to Islam of coastal East African communities than do
the historical sources, which are very ambiguous and often contradictory. For example, while al-Mas’udi provides an eyewitness account of what he implies is the only Muslim community living on the island of Qanbalu (most likely Pemba / Ras Mkumbuu) in 916 CE, later writers, such as twelfth century al-Idrisi,\(^50\) deny the presence of Muslims south of Barawa (in Somalia), although al-Idrisi does note a mixed Muslim community in the Comoros.

The tone of many of the Arab writers is for a non-Islamic East African coast. In fact, their descriptions are useful in visualising the nature of indigenous religious practices more so than Islamic. Abu Said al-Hasan, writing in the ninth century, describes men “devoted to religious life” who are covered in leopard or monkey skins and who make long and eloquent speeches,\(^51\) a practice that is recorded widely in African ethnography. Al-Mas’udi notes the key role that religious leaders rather than kings enjoyed and the significance of ancestors in religious practice.\(^52\) Al-Idrisi describes standing stones being worshipped and anointed with fish oil.\(^53\) This is a curious reference, as standing stones are not known on the East African coast.\(^54\)

These traditional religious practices may have made the conversion to Islam rather easier, creating a preadaptation to Islam with a partly institutionalized religion that ensured that an acceptance of Islam did not require too many social or political changes. The adoption of Islam by coastal communities would also have facilitated their connection into the trading world of the Indian Ocean, which Chaudhuri describes as a “Muslim lake” by the latter half of the second millennium CE.\(^55\) Visiting merchants and seafarers could be guaranteed safety in the Islamic ports, and the material culture and social practice that may have come with Islam would have provided for a degree of comfort and familiarity. Critically, there was a demand for Indian Ocean luxuries such as ceramics, glass, and cloth that were not locally available.

We do begin to see changes in the archaeological record, in material culture, cuisine and food consumption, as well as religious practice and architecture, that can be linked to Islamization, but only gradually. Literacy in Arabic was clearly implied among an elite, with the minting of coins and production of inscriptions. Where sites have been excavated that span the likely period of conversion to Islam in the later eighth century, it is noticeable that there are a few cultural changes that mark the shift. The clearest sequence is at Unguja Ukuu, where the earliest stone
building is likely to have been a mosque, dating to the tenth century, but there are a full three centuries of earlier occupation associated with timber and daub structures, as was also recorded at Shanga. One interesting find in levels dating to the mid-eighth century CE was a bronze incense burner, an imported artifact, but used for burning locally sourced copal incense, and perhaps associated with Islamic practice.

The remarkable living stonetowns of Lamu and Pate, or the walled towns on the Comoros, such as Fumboni, give the impression of great age for this urban culture, backed up by the many ruined sites such as Shanga, Gedi, or Kilwa. When the Portuguese arrived on the East African coast in the late fifteenth century, they too found a fully urban culture with large stonetowns, facing the sea and using ships that were larger than their own. This was a well-developed “city-state culture.” In fact, this stone architecture began not that much earlier than Portuguese contact.

Swahili “stone” architecture uses coral rag and lime construction—drawing on materials readily available on the coast—which produces permanent and impressive ruins. However, for domestic architecture at least, this method of construction dates only to the beginning of the fourteenth century; before this most houses were built from wattle and daub. Even after this date, many of the “towns” were constructed using these organic materials, and stone houses were often a rarity. Only mosques and tombs were built in stone, and many of the earlier examples use undersea-quarried Porites coral rather than the much harder terrestrial coral rag. At Chwaka (Pemba), a major fifteenth-century site with import-rich levels, there was a single stone house, although there were both stone tombs and three stone mosques. Recent excavations in 2013 in the “open” areas of the large stonetown of Songo Mnara located several daub-walled houses, providing a different plan to that achieved from simply mapping stone ruins.

An interesting insight into the urbanization process comes from Jeff Fleisher’s work in northern Pemba. Through extensive and randomized survey, he was able to map the distribution of sites over time. This exercise showed a dense rural population, located in small settlements during the early Tana period, up until the eleventh century. At this point there was widespread abandonment of these rural sites and a shift to the developing ports (such as Mkia wa Ngombe, Mtambwe Mkuu, and Chwaka). These proto-urban sites contain stone tombs and mosques.
and cover up to 15 ha. in total area, with assumed populations of several thousand. Many of the large first-millennium CE sites, such as Unguja Ukuu and Tumbe, which were little more than overgrown villages but with extensive trade networks, were abandoned around the turn of the millennium, and a new kind of Swahili settlement seems to emerge around these new towns, with a stronger sense of urban planning and spatial order.

We would argue that Swahili communities acquired both Islam and urbanism over time, and while these features may have defined “Swahiliness” in later centuries, they were not necessarily always present from the start but gradually adopted as part of a process of globalization in which these African societies were exposed to ideas, practices, and material culture from around the Indian Ocean.

A similar argument can be applied to the adoption of a maritime culture. The Swahili have long been considered to be strongly maritime. The sea dominated their food, location of settlements, the practice of trade, even their literature and poetry. As all the early Swahili sites are found on the coast, it might be assumed that this was always the case. However, Swahili ‘maritimeness,’ like Islam and urbanism, is something that Swahili communities acquired over time. A range of evidence, from the study of fishbones to the study of mosque and house location, suggests that the strong maritime identity of the Swahili only dates from the twelfth or thirteenth century, and before this sites were often set back a little from the sea, fishing did not involve open sea activity, and diets were terrestrial in focus. The emerging towns develop plans that are sea-facing, with the provision of mosques that are located on the beach and are intended to be seen from the sea.

**FACING MECCA ACROSS THE SEA**

The current renewed interest in global histories, and with this, aspects of world systems theory, tends to take a position that civilizations create networks of interaction that may extend to peripheral zones. Understanding the culture-history of these peripheries requires an understanding of wider global forces that may be operating, often a large distance away. The Swahili are sometimes seen as one such peripheral zone, responding to global economic forces that were operating in the late classical, Islamic, European, or even East Asian worlds. In particular,
their practice of Islam is seen as marginal and distant from the central Islamic lands.

For those of us working on the East African coast, the core/periphery model seems somewhat inappropriate, removing any agency from the Swahili to develop their own global networks, and seeing them as passive responders to global forces. As more research is done in the western Indian Ocean, it is clear that there was a major African presence beyond African shores in the medieval period. Tana pottery, largely used for cooking, has been found at Sharma (Yemen), Ras al-Hadd (Oman), and Siraf (Iran), suggesting the presence of African communities there. Africans seem to have been sailors (as shown, for example, on the famous thirteenth-century Hariri ship illustration), and through the slave trade, could have moved to important political positions (such as the later Mamluks did), or formed distinct local communities far away from African shores.

The East African perspective also enables us to understand how global pressures may have impacted (or been ignored by) local communities. An interesting example is the adoption of rice—an Indian and Southeast Asian crop. Rice first appears as a main staple food in the eighth century in the Comoro Islands. Mahilaka in northwestern Madagascar also became a major rice consumer, with archaeological evidence indicating a massive investment in irrigation systems and the construction of dams, reservoirs, and paddies in the vicinity of the site. This adoption of rice does not spread to the central and northern Swahili Coast for another three hundred years. Early Tana sites such as Unguja Ukuu used African millets, and only a few grains of rice have been recorded—probably from ship-borne cargos. The switch to rice was recorded at Chwaka in Pemba (another ideal place to grow rice) in the twelfth century, where it rapidly became the dominant food. By the sixteenth century, historical sources record that Pemba became a major supplier of “grain,” by which was probably meant rice, to Mombasa and adjacent areas. Even in recent times two similar towns, Pate and Lamu, adopted different staple foods—communities in Pate ate millets, whereas those in Lamu consumed rice. The conclusion is that this global crop, even though well known, was only selectively adopted, for complex and little-understood cultural reasons.
glass, beads, metalwork—and these may be not fully representative: items such as cloth may have been one of the major imports, as it was in the premodern period. However, these inorganic materials do offer an indicator of the main direction of trade and exchange. Glass beads are particularly useful, as they can be chemically analyzed, and much work is currently being done on bead provenancing. What emerges from these studies is a pattern of complexity across space and time. The four main glass bead–producing areas (Middle East, western and southern Asia, southeast Asia) are represented on many Swahili sites, but in different proportions and at different dates. Significantly, glass beads are also items that find their way into the African interior, allowing the prospect for more fully understanding coast-interior exchanges. That glass bead types found on archaeological sites reflect African consumer preferences, as observed in more recent African societies, is a possibility that is rarely considered. These beads likely reflect both consumer desires and the trade relationships in which Africans played an active role.

Complex patterns and intracommunity differences are also observed in the imported pottery from early archaeological sites on the coast, where assemblages provide quite different compositions of wares from Arabia, the Gulf, western and southern India, and East Asia. Thus, for example, the eighth-to-ninth-century site of Chibuene in southern Mozambique has imported white-glazed pottery, but little turquoise-glazed ware, in complete contrast to contemporary Unguja Ukuu, while the Comoros sites have both, but early Chinese pottery is absent. A little later, in the thirteenth century, the Pemban sites continued to trade with the Gulf, while sites on Zanzibar, Lamu, and Kilwa reoriented their networks toward southern Arabia. Tumbatu, a small island off Zanzibar, imported exceptionally large quantities of Indian pottery in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, far in excess of any other site at this date. The pattern that seems to emerge is of particular towns or polities developing their own trade networks across the Indian Ocean world. While the Swahili were cultural brokers between that world and the African interior, they were also active in setting up and developing their own long-distance relationships, supplying and receiving commodities from very different worlds.

Globalization is not only about trade, but also about shared culture across global spaces. One of the key globalizing forces in the medieval
world was Islam, which created a relatively uniform set of rules and practices across vast areas of space. By being part of the Islamic world, the Swahili were able to develop commonality with their most important trading partners. However, they did not simply adopt Islamic forms as slavish copies of Middle Eastern practices, but often developed their own styles. Thus, for example, the Swahili did not build courtyard mosques—the commonest form of congregational mosque in the Islamic world—but instead built rectangular halls with internal columns. Their mihrabs, such as at Kizimkazi on Zanzibar, were also distinctive and unique and cannot be paralleled in any Middle East architecture. Minarets are very rare, and are generally found only after the sixteenth century. The designs on cut *Porites* coral used on mosque decoration show a strong indigenous influence, which can be seen in more recent ethnographic material such as woodcarving and cloth.

Today, the Swahili face probably the greatest set of challenges in their history, with the rise of fundamental and radical Islam, exported from Somalia, and the massive commercial pressures, for example in the heartland of the Swahili in the Lamu Archipelago, where an enormous port development is planned. As archaeologists, we are able to observe a much longer history. From their origins in the seventh century, the Swahili have been part of a globalizing world, both responding to and actively shaping global forces. The strong and resilient nature of Swahili culture today in the face of the modern globalization process is probably a result of this long history of choice and adaptation.

Archaeology and history offer different perspectives on the Indian Ocean world. It is commonplace to describe these perspectives as complementary, but what is far more interesting is when one perspective contradicts or challenges the other. Archaeology not only extends the concept of the Swahili into earlier time periods, it provides an alternative understanding of the nature of the Swahili identity and the globalization process. Historical texts prioritize particular economic, social, and ethnic groups, and in the case of the Swahili, for early periods at least, these were often outside groups from other parts of the Indian Ocean and Islamic world. Archaeology has been able to provide a view of Swahili development from a local perspective and to rewrite and challenge dominant historical narratives. Archaeology has a key role to play in understanding the processes of globalization that shaped the Indian Ocean world in eastern Africa and beyond for millennia, though there
is still much work to do to improve coverage of underresearched regions and time periods, more systematically recover diverse types of remains, and apply new methods and technologies in tandem with greater dialogue with historians and others.

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NOTES


15. Crowther et al., “Coastal Subsistence.”


17. Crowther et al., “Iron Age Agriculture.”


20. Shipton et al., “Reinvestigation of Kuumbi Cave.”


32. For example: Chami, *Tanzanian Coast*; and Helm, “Conflicting Histories.” See also the review in T. Spear, “Early Swahili History


35. Though radiocarbon dates obtained during previous archaeological investigations indicate there may be sixth-century deposits elsewhere on the site; see Juma, *Unguja Ukuu on Zanzibar*.

36. See also Horton, *Zanzibar and Pemba*; and Juma, *Unguja Ukuu on Zanzibar*.


38. Allibert, “Austronesian Migration.”


41. Parker-Pearson et al., *Pastoralists, Warriors and Colonists*.


43. The expedition took place in 945 and a thousand small ships attacked the town of Qanbalu (on Pemba) after pillaging islands six days away, and then several towns in the region of Sufala (the Mozambique coast). They had sailed a year to reach East Africa, and wanted ivory, tortoiseshell, panther skins, and ambergris, but especially the Zanj, “because they were strong and easily endured slavery.” G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, ed. and trans., *The Book of the Wonders of India by Captain Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar of Ramhormuz* (London: East West Publications, 1981), 103.

44. Allibert, *Archaeology of Knowledge*.


47. Wright, “Early Seafarers”; and Wright, “Early Islam.”
54. The closest standing stones are in northeastern Kenya, near Lake Turkana, 530 km from the coast; these date to around 5000 BP. Katherine M. Grillo and Elisabeth A. Hildebrand, “The Context of Early Megalithic Architecture in Eastern Africa: The Turkana Basin c. 5000–4000 BP,” *Azania* 48, no. 2 (2013): 193–217. Pillar tombs and towers are, however, found within an Islamic context, but the earliest are late thirteenth century. However, these may be a syncretic expression of pre-Islamic practice. Horton, “Islam, Archaeology and Swahili Identity,” 85–86.
57. Crowther et al., “Use of Zanzibar Copal.”
61. Jeffrey Fleisher, “Housing the Market: Swahili Merchants and Regional Marketing on the East African Coast, Seventh to Sixteenth Centuries...


63. Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, “Ceramics and Early Swahili.”

64. Fleisher et al., “When Did the Swahili Become Maritime?” See also Crowther et al., “Coastal Subsistence, Maritime Trade.”


68. The most famous illustration of an early Indian Ocean ship, dating to 1237, is found in the *Maqamat of al-Hariri*. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, Ms Ar 5847, 119v.


70. Walshaw, “Converting to Rice.”

71. The townsmen of Pate would all cross to the mainland to clear the fields and plant their crops in a communal group led by a farm leader, or *jumbe ya wakulima*; as this was shifting dryland cultivation, it seems that millets and some maize were grown. James de Vere Allen, “Swahili Culture Reconsidered: Some Historical Implications of the Material Culture of the Northern Kenya Coast in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Azania* 9, no. 1 (1974): 128–29. Lamu had a very different system, in which slaves were largely employed in the fields, which included rice fields in the Tana delta. Marguerite Ylvisaker, *Lamu in the Nineteenth Century: Land, Trade and Politics* (Boston: African Studies Centre, 1979).

72. Walshaw, “Converting to Rice”; and Boivin et al., “Indian Ocean Food Globalisation.”


76. Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*.


79. Wright, “Early Seafarers”; and Allibert et al., “Le site de Dembeni.”

80. Horton, *Zanzibar and Pemba*.