Connecting Continents

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Published by Ohio University Press

Seetah, Krish.
Connecting Continents: Archaeology and History in the Indian Ocean World.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/99405.

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Africa can only be deciphered when history and archaeology are at least coordinated.

—Gervase Mathew¹

Invoking cultural flows or continuities across the Indian Ocean doesn’t help us conceptualise the nature of those connections—or account for potential divergences or disjunctures.

—William C. Bissell²
THE PURPOSE OF THIS chapter is to review three overlapping issues as they relate to the archaeology of roughly the last five hundred years of coastal East Africa (i.e., corresponding to the period following the entry of the Portuguese sea captain and explorer Vasco de Gama and his flotilla into the Indian Ocean in November 1497). One of these themes concerns the historiography of archaeology in East Africa, and in particular how the colonial context within which the first systematic efforts to document and interpret the region’s coastal archaeology took place has left a lasting legacy. Specifically, I argue that this inadvertently encouraged a general neglect of the archaeology of the last five hundred years along the coast, and refer to this as the “foreshortening of Swahili archaeology.” Related to this point, I explore how this foreshortening partly derives from contrasting definitions of “historical archaeology” and their changing application in the region. As a consequence, I suggest, there has also been a general reluctance to engage, both theoretically and practically, with the material legacies of colonial encounters along East Africa’s seaboard. I nonetheless acknowledge that even in the early decades of “Swahili” or “coastal” archaeology in East Africa there were important exceptions to this. Accordingly, the final aim of the chapter is to review work framed specifically to investigate the archaeology of colonialism and how continuing efforts in this regard have the potential to deepen scholarly understanding of the history of coastal East Africa.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORIES IN EAST AFRICA

In East Africa, there is a general, implicit tendency for archaeological research in the region to focus on the evidence from periods prior to 1500 CE. This is in marked contrast to the situation in several areas of southern and western Africa, where there has been a longer and more sustained interest in the archaeology of the last five hundred years, beginning with a focus on the archaeology of colonial encounters and the transatlantic slave trade and expanding in recent decades to cover other topics. Several reasons can be forwarded to account for the comparative neglect of the archaeology of recent centuries in East Africa. These include the low numbers of professional archaeologists, even today, across East Africa, the relative scarcity of research funds available for archaeological investigations of any kind, and the continuation of an unspoken intellectual division of labor between archaeologists and historians that
was established over half a century ago when both fields were very much in their infancy.\(^5\) This latter factor remains especially influential, even though the past decade has witnessed a growth in the number of studies that might be loosely described as examples of historical archaeology.\(^6\)

This neglect of the archaeology of the last five hundred years is particularly apparent for the East African coast, where, despite the presence of archaeological remains associated with different colonizing powers, there has been only limited study of these, and remarkably few studies, also, of post-1500 CE archaeological sites associated with indigenous populations. Again, this contrasts with the situation in some other parts of the continent, where archaeological study of encounters between indigenous African societies and European colonizing powers has been a defining characteristic of historical archaeology for over twenty years.\(^7\) It also contrasts with wider global research interests in the archaeology of colonial encounters more generally and not just those relating to the expansion of European powers after 1500 CE.

One consequence of the lack, until very recently, of any explicit effort to develop a theoretically informed historical archaeology of colonial encounters is that coastal archaeology in East Africa remains dominated by a particular temporal construct of “Swahili archaeology” that limits this to the period roughly between 750 and 1500 CE. Research conducted on this time period, sometimes considered to be the “Golden Age of the Swahili,” has unquestionably resulted in major advances in our knowledge and understanding of the archaeology of the East African littoral and offshore islands during the first fifteen hundred years of the Common Era.\(^8\) However, the reluctance to engage with the material consequences of colonialism and a corresponding emphasis on cultural continuity that downplays the role of “outsider” groups in the making of coastal traditions and cultures severely limit the contributions archaeology can make to understanding more recent historical developments along the coast. Even the idea of a “Golden Age” is problematic, since it implicitly invokes the notion of subsequent decline, rather than transformation, response, and revival to meet new circumstances and challenges, and a corresponding neglect of explaining continuities in the face of changing conditions.\(^9\) Thus, my argument here is that the spectre of colonialisitic interpretations of East African coastal history that explained change and innovation as being entirely externally driven, and primarily as a result of early Asiatic colonization, should no longer
prevent archaeologists from engaging in analytical study of the material legacies of colonialism on the East African coast. Failure to do so will constrain scholarly understanding of the changes instantiated during different episodes of colonialism and knowledge of the diverse forms of resistance and accommodation to colonial overrule that emerged within Swahili society as a consequence.

Accordingly, although certainly mindful that “an emphasis on European expansion [just as one that stresses the presence of written documents]...can lead to the centering of world history on Europe, and on a denial of non-Western histories,” new research agendas are called for that begin to address these particular weaknesses in current scholarship. However, before articulating what these research agendas might involve, it is important to explain why this reluctance to engage with the archaeology of colonial encounters has arisen, and how this reluctance relates to contrasting definitions of “historical archaeology,” both globally and regionally.

COASTAL HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

One of the first archaeologists working in eastern Africa to characterize their work as “historical archaeology” was James Kirkman. He did so long before the term had gained the intellectual traction it now has in North America, and the history Kirkman had in mind was not that of early modern European expansion and encounters, but of quite different times, commencing in the early first millennium CE and ending around 1500. Kirkman’s historical archaeology was primarily concerned with reconstructing the social and trade dynamics of East Africa’s Indian Ocean littoral, an area now often glossed as “the Swahili Coast.” A further difference between Kirkman’s notion of historical archaeology and the North American view of this subfield that has become the dominant construction lies in the range of historical sources he drew upon, which include texts written in Classical Greek, Arabic, Chinese, and Swahili. In hindsight, Kirkman’s coining of the term “historical archaeology” to refer to archaeological investigation of the distinctive archaeology of the East African coast, therefore, might be said to have been quite radical because it recognized the plurality and diversity of documentary sources that could assist in understanding the region’s precolonial past; their largely non-European nature (with the exception
In the event, however, Kirkman’s term for this kind of archaeology never caught on, although text-driven approaches to interpreting East Africa’s coastal archaeology remained dominant for at least the next two decades. The emphasis Kirkman gave to Arab merchants and settlers in the founding of Swahili stonetowns, such as those of Gede and Ungwana on the Kenyan coast where he excavated, and in the organization of the transoceanic trade on which their prosperity was partly based, was also criticized as being “colonial” in its orientation. Subsequent research on the East African coast, especially since the 1980s, has sought to develop alternative perspectives by bringing local agency to the fore and stressing the African origins of the Swahili and the nature of their towns. One result of this approach, after a brief popularity of the term “coastal archaeology,” is that the field Kirkman sought to define has come to be known as “Swahili archaeology.” While helpful in terms of emphasizing the indigenous origins of Swahili culture and societies, and in line with the views of historical linguists regarding the African (specifically Eastern Bantu) roots of the Swahili language, the term has become a hegemonic device that disguises elements of the internal diversity of Swahili communities along the entire c. 2,500 km of the “Swahili Coast.” By implication, it also subsumes the archaeology of other coastal-dwelling groups under this categorization, and crucially, acts to limit the archaeology of the Swahili to c. 1500 CE. In other words, to around the time that European merchants and sailors first became engaged directly in the Indian Ocean trade circuits, and shortly before the rise of the Yar’ubī Imamate in the early part of the seventeenth century and expansion of its authority over the East African coast.

This lack of interest in the archaeology of later sites is particularly unfortunate since systematic surveys of the mainland, such as those conducted by Richard Helm immediately north of Mombasa (Kenya), Jonathan Walz along the lower Pangani Valley (northern Tanzania), and Stephanie Wynne-Jones in the vicinity of Kilwa (southern Tanzania), all indicate that sites occupied after 1500 CE are much more numerous than those for any preceding period. The data from surveys on Pemba by Jeffrey Fleisher and Emanuel Kessy indicate a similar trend. Unfortunately, in most cases, these sites are simply categorized rather
loosely as “Post-Swahili” and left uninvestigated. Similarly, by largely ignoring the archaeology of Swahili towns after c. 1500 CE, scholars are missing an opportunity to investigate how the diverse status and occupational groups that inhabited them, including the various “foreign” merchant communities from elsewhere around the Indian Ocean rim, responded to and were affected by successive kinds of colonial overrule and by incursions from other mainland groups, such as the Oromo. As with the more numerous rural sites, the potential for such work (e.g., at places such as Pate, which became more prominent after the arrival of the Portuguese, and Takwa, a sixteenth-/seventeenth-century settlement on Manda Island) is enormous. Archaeological study of these sites informed by the large body of archaeological literature from other parts of the world concerning colonial encounters also has the potential to reframe and better contextualize some of the classic historical studies of the material culture of post-1500 CE urban coastal communities.

Furthermore, although aspects of the post-1500 CE archaeology along the East African coast have been investigated, the principal focus of this research has been primarily on the foreign elements. Scant consideration has been given to how the establishment of a colonial presence, whether by a European power or an Omani elite, shaped Swahili life and which aspects in particular were most influenced as a consequence. There is also an epistemic inconsistency in the de facto division of labour that on the one hand constrains the archaeological gaze to the centuries before 1500 CE, while on the other acknowledges that Swahili identities and practices persist into the present but leaves the scholarly investigation of these largely in the hands of historians and anthropologists. In this regard, despite the avowedly anticolonial stance of recent interpretive frameworks, and the wealth of archaeological scholarship in recent decades that has rightly emphasized the African origins and roots of Swahili culture, “Swahili archaeology” as dominantly conceived still reproduces an inverted colonial logic. This simultaneously reifies and homogenizes the category “precolonial Swahili” while ignoring the possible transformative consequences of multiple colonial encounters.

Of course, most specialists in Swahili archaeology are very well aware that the archaeology of the Swahili does not end at 1500 CE, and more comprehensive overviews of the archaeology of the coast usually extend to cover some or all of the subsequent centuries of Swahili settlement. Moreover, the foreshortening of the Swahili past is not unique
to archaeology. Historians have also separated “the Swahili past” from what came after c. 1500, although they do not agree on when that distinction should be drawn.\textsuperscript{31} Thus, my comments are not intended as a criticism of current scholarship, or to belittle the very significant research contributions made in the field of Swahili archaeology over the last several decades. Instead, I am more concerned by the conceptual limitations that the term “Swahili archaeology” can impose on archaeological research on the East African coast, however unintended these constraints might be. In particular, by limiting Swahili archaeology to before 1500 CE, some kind of disjuncture is seemingly first implied, although generally left unspecified. Then, this disjuncture is effectively denied by the lack of any sustained archaeological investigation of the period after the disjuncture, and especially overt consideration of the possibility of a refashioning of Swahili identities in relation to external, colonial constructions of those identities (and other factors that emerged after 1500).\textsuperscript{32}

ARCHAEOLOGIES OF COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS
ON THE EAST AFRICAN LITTORAL

Colonialism takes many forms and is of considerable antiquity. Also, as historical and archaeological scholarship has amply illustrated for other parts of the globe, the perspective of the colonized, their responses, and the impact of colonialism on their lives are rarely, if ever, uniform.\textsuperscript{33} On the one hand, colonial rule could provide individuals with opportunities for enrichment or political advancement, prosperity rather than destitution, an enhanced lifespan, and better prospects for their offspring. For others, however, the imposition of colonial rule could and did lead to a loss of livelihood and access to resources, physical displacement, enslavement, repression of cultural practices, and the imposition of a new identity. While colonial relations, especially during the initial establishment of colonial rule, were often violent, it is important not to assume that colonized peoples lacked the agency and power to resist, manipulate, and transform colonial practices.\textsuperscript{34} Postcolonial theory, with its emphasis on exploring the complexities of Orientalism, the subaltern, colonial frontiers, borderlands, cultural hybridization, creolization, indigeneity, alterity, mimicry, diaspora, and a host of other concepts, demonstrates as much.\textsuperscript{35}
Archaeologists working in other parts of the world have drawn extensively on this literature, particularly in connection with conceptualizing the links between archaeological practice and the uneven and unequal representation of formerly colonized peoples. Increasingly, this literature has also inspired more fine-grained interpretations of the archaeological expressions of colonialism than those offered by older models of culture contact and acculturation. Certain concepts, especially Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity (and other definitions of the concept) have proved especially popular, although misuse and overuse of the term at times has stripped it of its analytical power. Such criticism notwithstanding, concepts drawn from postcolonial studies challenge many of the taken-for-granted binaries of colonial thought and governmentality. They also underline the lack of singularity in any colonial encounter—something that many historical archaeologists working in other parts of the world are occasionally prone to forget.

This lack of singularity is especially clear in an Indian Ocean context where inhabitants of the East African coast have had to contend with Portuguese, Omani, British, and, in the case of Tanganyika also German, colonial structures. In the wider western Indian Ocean, Dutch, French, and Ottoman Turks also imposed their authority and established their own colonial enclaves and regimes. The activities of all of these extended periodically and in varying degrees of intensity along different parts of the East African coast, creating new conditions of interaction. They transformed the scale, direction, and pattern of trade and intensified natural resources extraction, while also stimulating demands for slave labor. Moreover, all of these new relations between coastal inhabitants and newcomers were played out against long-standing cosmopolitan and translocal contexts.

The entry of the Portuguese and subsequently other European powers into the Indian Ocean arena after November 1497, for instance, introduced a new dynamic to trade with which littoral societies, those located farther inland from the coast, and the already-established foreign merchant communities all had to contend. As Engseng Ho has succinctly observed, the “Portuguese, Dutch, and English in the Indian Ocean were strange new traders who brought their states with them,” and were inclined, initially at least, “to do business at the point of a gun” creating “militarized trading post empires” along the way. The Portuguese also imposed stricter regulation on cargo and mobility through the issuing
of licenses (cartaz) to ship captains in return for protection from the state. These licences specified the ports that ships could visit and the nature of the cargo they could carry. The system exerted additional control by making ships visit a number of ports around the Indian Ocean, where taxes and duty had to be paid, and so brought additional revenue to those ports under direct Portuguese control, notably Goa, Hormuz, and Diu. These were not the modus operandi of the non-European merchant groups, such as Guajaratis, Bohras, and Hadramis, that had operated around the Indian Ocean rim for centuries, where they sought to establish more intimate relations with local trading partners, including settling among them and adapting to local customs.43 Despite such changes, at least some Swahili merchants and city-states (including Pate) may well have benefitted from the new trading opportunities with the Portuguese and the Hadramawt that emerged,44 and Portugal’s grip on Indian Ocean trade may well have been weaker than was once believed.45

The expansion of Omani Arab authority and political sovereignty over the eastern African coast from Barawa and Socotra in the north to Cape Delgado in the south46 that began during the mid-seventeenth century under the Yaʿrubī Imamate and was consolidated under the Albusaidi dynasty following Seyyid Saʿīd bin Sultan’s relocation of the Omani court to Zanzibar between 1828 and 1832, also introduced social and political changes. Omani Arabs were particularly active in the regional slave trade that was already well established prior to the arrival of the Portuguese and involved Swahili merchants, especially from Pate and other towns in the Lamu archipelago, along with Yemeni and Hadrami traders.47 The Omanis vigorously defended their growing commercial interests, sometimes with the help of Baluch mercenaries,48 and by the late seventeenth century Oman was a major naval power in its own right in the western Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.49

Colonialism and colonial rule by different powers (Portuguese, Omani, British, and German), in other words, were important aspects of the histories and lived realities of East Africa’s coastal communities for roughly five hundred years, and any attempt to understand the archaeology of colonial encounters on the East African coast, therefore, must contend from the outset with pluralities and multivocality. While all colonial powers could be said to share certain elements of practice, and thus might generate rather similar material expressions and legacies of their colonialism, there can also be significant contrasts. Chris
Gosden’s distinctions between “colonialism within a shared milieu,” “middle ground colonialism,” and “terra nullius” models offer one possible set of heuristic guidelines as to how expressions of colonial power might be manifested materially by different colonial regimes. However, other promising models and perspectives could also be drawn upon. What is important is that archaeologists working on East Africa’s coast make a more concerted effort to document and understand the distinctive characteristics of these different encounters.

**Material Manifestations of Colonial Encounters on the East African Coast**

One of the most obvious expressions of these new systems of governance and trade along the coast was the construction of fortifications and the associated militarization of the sea. Warfare between the different Swahili city-states and between these communities and inland groups had been a recurrent feature of coastal life in the preceding centuries and continued after the arrival of the Portuguese. The arrival of Portuguese carracks, caravels (naus), galleys, galleons, and frigates, armed with different calibre cannons, lighter, swivel-mounted breech-loaders (like the verso), and crews equipped with matchlock muskets, nonetheless marked a greater militarization of the sea than had been the case in earlier centuries. Forts, gun batteries, redoubts (fig. 6.1), watch-towers, barracks, and related structures were added to the landscapes of a number of Swahili settlements, and preexisting defensive features, including encircling town walls, were modified. New styles of military architecture were introduced and subsequently added to as power shifted from one colonial power to another.

These military monuments span several centuries and range widely in type from substantial well-armed structures built with clear military objectives in mind and manned by a garrison of regular troops to much more modest buildings, possibly constructed more as an architectural expression of political authority, Islamic purity, and/or urbanity than with any attainable defensive goals in mind. The earliest examples at Kilwa, on Mafia Island, and at Zanzibar and Mombasa are associated with Portuguese efforts to protect their enclaves and wider strategic interests. The best known of these structures, and the only example to have been the focus of extensive archaeological investigations, is Fort Jesus in Mombasa (fig. 6.2). Designed by the Milanese engineer-architect
Aside from these military structures, archaeological study of other aspects of Portuguese colonialism remain poorly developed, in part because Portuguese settlements were confined to a few points along the coast and had a rather different form than the feudal estates (prazos) and trading markets (feiras) the Portuguese created in Mozambique and the Zambezi valley (fig. 6.3). Consequently, the material traces of a Portuguese presence on the East African coast are more limited. On Zanzibar, trading posts (feitorias) that were simultaneously warehouses, markets, and customs offices were established during the sixteenth century at Mvuleni, Fukuchani, and at the Gereza in Stone Town, where a cruciform church was built. Another church, reputedly built by Vasco de Gama’s men in 1498 and the oldest Christian building in East Africa, survives almost intact in Malindi, which was closely allied to the Portuguese, who also established an unfortified feitoria here and erected a stone cross (padrao) to commemorate their landfall.
By far the greatest concentration of Portuguese activity, however, was on Mombasa Island, which became their center of political authority and commercial operations after 1590. The results of periodic rescue excavations undertaken on Mombasa Island and more recent maritime landscape and underwater surveys, coupled with careful analysis of available cartographic sources, provide an impression of the island’s social and economic organization during the seventeenth century. The remains of the *Santo António de Tanná*, a Portuguese frigate that sank at the entrance to Tudor Creek during the siege of Mombasa in 1697, together with its cargo and artifactual assemblages, provide additional insights into contemporary Portuguese life along the coast, including military capabilities, trading practices, and shipboard life. Nonetheless, as Rosemary McConkey and Tom McErlane have observed, we know little about the colony settlement known as “Gavana” that the Portuguese established just north of Fort Jesus, the Makupa Forts built to protect access to the island via the causeway that connected it to the mainland, or the six churches known to have been established on

FIGURE 6.2. Ramparts and cannon on the seaward side of Fort Jesus, Mombasa, Kenya. (Photograph by the author, 2002.)
the island. Little is also known about the local town of Tuaca, on the southwestern tip of the island, which was occupied from at least the twelfth century and is believed to have been abandoned in the sixteenth century after the arrival of the Portuguese. However, unlike many of the areas known to have been the site of Portuguese activities and now almost entirely obscured by modern buildings, a significant section of Tuaca has not been built over, thereby offering the greatest possibility to investigate the ways Portuguese colonialism influenced the everyday lives of the town’s inhabitants.

**Omani-Era and Later Monuments**

A rather similar pattern of research characterized by a focus on the more obvious monuments can be discerned for the Omani period. Specifically, after assuming control of the coast north of Cape Delgado in the later seventeenth century, the Omani built forts in Zanzibar Town, at Chake Chake on Pemba, and at Siyu and Lamu, and modified Portuguese forts such as those at Kilwa and Fort Jesus. Archaeological study of these monuments has been limited to Mark Horton and Kate Clark’s

![Figure 6.3: The main entrance to the historical fortress of Sena, Zambezi Delta, Mozambique. (Photograph by Hilario Madiquida, 2007, reproduced with permission.)](image-url)
work on the Old Fort in Zanzibar Town during the 1980s, and Stéphane Pradines’s survey a decade and a half later.\textsuperscript{65}

Later military structures associated with the German and British colonial eras—such as World War II gun emplacements and pillboxes—also survive, especially near the waterfront of major commercial ports and at the sites of former colonial administrative centres. These have been the focus of even less archaeological interest and study than Omani-era structures. Daniel Rhodes has documented the most prominent of these German and British colonial buildings and port structures, work that provides a theoretically informed overview of their important role as symbolic expressions of colonial power and the spatial logics of its implementation.\textsuperscript{66} As his studies show, under both colonial powers widespread restructuring of the social zoning of settlements resulted in greater conformity of spatial layouts and a proliferation of shared architectural forms. Waterfronts became more formalized, new administrative centers were imposed, hospital sites were established, military infrastructure expanded, and residential areas became largely racially segregated. Cumulatively, these architectural strategies all worked to underpin and reinforce the centralization of political control, greater facilitation of economic extraction, and enhanced surveillance of the colonial state’s populace.\textsuperscript{67}

\textbf{COLONIZING SPACE AND PLACE}

Aside from the growing militarization of the sea and coastline, other arguably more dramatic and certainly more imposing architectural changes were introduced. These became especially apparent on Zanzibar during the nineteenth century, following Seyyid Sa’îd’s relocation of his court to the island. In particular, several palaces were added to the landscape, notably the Beit al-Sahel, the slightly later Beit al-Hukm, and the Beit al-Ajaib (House of Wonders; constructed in 1883) in Zanzibar town, and the Mtoni palace (fig. 6.4) a few kilometers to the north for use by the Sultan as a private retreat. The earlier of these palaces, built between 1826 and the late 1830s, had “plain exterior façades hiding an inner courtyard containing decorative tile work and wall niches housing glassware and ceramics,” while internal space was stratified on gender lines and social position. Slaves occupied the ground floor, while the “uppermost internal room, the \textit{ndani}, was for the sole use of the owner
of the house.” Balconies were added to some later structures, such as the Beit al-Ajaib, an addition that reflected an increasing absorption of European and Indian influences especially as British colonial power grew in significance. Although far less ostentatious, new, culturally hybrid architectural styles are also evident at a number of coastal towns on the mainland, especially in Lamu, where a distinctive form of elite dwelling emerged probably in the eighteenth century. These incorporated some of the older principles of social space and material expressions of distinction found in Swahili-era stonetown architecture, but are best understood as architectural hybrids specific to their time. Elsewhere, coastal towns, such as Pangani in northern Tanzania, although no less socially stratified, exhibit considerable architectural diversity, with a blend of Indian, Arab, and European influences coexisting alongside older African styles (fig. 6.5).

Of far greater consequence in terms of both the scale of landscape reorganization and the effects on the lives of ordinary men and women
on the coast and further into the interior (although initially only indi-
rectly related to the growing presence of Europeans in the Indian Ocean
sphere72) was the development of plantation agriculture (notably for
cloves on Unguja/Zanzibar and Pemba and sugar on the mainland) and
the associated transformations in the nature and extent of slavery and
slave raiding. During the German and British colonial eras, plantation
agriculture was extended still further, especially as sisal and cotton were
added to the mix of commercial crops being cultivated. Yet, despite the
acknowledged importance and impact of plantation agriculture, Sarah
Croucher’s study of the different materialities of plantation life on
nineteenth-century Pemba and how these materialities effected transfor-
mations in ethnic identities, gender relations, and sexuality among the
enslaved and the elite plantation owners73 remains the only archaeo-
logical study of these systems. Historical archaeologists working elsewhere
in the world, including parts of the Indian Ocean, by way of compari-
son, have paid considerable attention to plantation life.74

As Croucher reminds us, the growth of plantation agriculture was
intimately related to the rise of a mercantile and capitalist economy
that was supported by transformations in slave trade economies around
the western Indian Ocean as a consequence of abolition movements.
A further and related factor for the expansion of plantations was the growth and transformations in the nineteenth-century caravan trade and increased demand in Europe and North America for elephant ivory to feed newly emergent marks of social distinction among the burgeoning middle class. Recent archaeological studies have documented some of the sites along these mainland caravan routes and explored some of the material consequences of the trade for local communities.75 There have also been several archaeological studies of the changing manifestations of enslavement on the coast and its hinterland, including sites associated with fugitive slaves.76 These have yet to be articulated with the issue of colonial encounters, however, except in the fairly loose sense that the escalation in slave raiding in the nineteenth century can be attributed, in part, to the expansion of Omani Arab authority along the coast and their increased influence over coastal economies.77

**COMPLICATING ARCHAEOLOGIES OF COLONIALISM ON THE EAST AFRICAN LITTORAL**

After decades of virtually ignoring the archaeological record of the last five hundred years, archaeologists working in eastern Africa are starting to pay greater heed. The archaeological manifestations of the caravan trade, enslavement, Omani Arab elites, and British and German political authority have all received attention, and in some cases, have explicitly explored the “differential power of material culture” that colonial encounters bring with them “to galvanise and move people.”78 In this regard, it is perhaps telling that the two archaeologists who have engaged explicitly with the issues of colonial encounters on the coast, Sarah Croucher and Daniel Rhodes, have consciously sought to situate their studies in wider disciplinary discourses. Thus, Croucher’s study of the interplay of slavery and capitalism on Omani-owned clove plantations on Pemba is intended specifically to offer postcolonial and feminist perspectives on the historical archaeology of slave plantations as an alternative to the models developed for Atlantic world plantations in the Caribbean and United States.79 Daniel Rhodes’s study of nineteenth-century colonial architecture and settlement layout on the coast, especially in what was German East Africa, with its initial focus on maritime landscapes and its subsequent reliance on using historical geographical ideas about urbanism and port formation, was similarly
developed as a project distinct from traditional notions of what Swahili archaeology entailed.80

Recognizing that neither colonialism nor globalization was a new phenomenon even in 1500 CE, neither author adopts wholesale the conventional wisdom that historical archaeology is all about the origins and spread of “modernity,” capitalism, the rise of the West, and indigenous, non-European responses to the creation of the Atlantic world-system.81 Instead, both treat Omani and European colonial rule as adding layers of complexity to an already “complicated”82 Indian Ocean world that required both local and foreign actors to learn how to negotiate and manipulate new materialities, ways of placemaking and belonging, and forms of habituated practice, alongside enhanced levels of resource extraction, violence, dislocation, and ecological disturbance.

Important though these developments have been, there is still a common tendency in the archaeological literature to treat the last five hundred years of Swahili Coast history as one of relative sociocultural stasis coupled with economic decline. While the Portuguese realignment of transoceanic trade may have initiated a marked fall in the prosperity of some Swahili city-states after 1500 and possibly contributed to the abandonment of many the stonetowns, this was not the only factor that shaped their later history. Portuguese impact also needs to be understood against wider historical currents and changing environmental conditions across the region.83 Considerable scope exists, therefore, for a comparative analysis of those towns that continued to be occupied after 1500 CE, some of which prospered either as a consequence of their rulers allying themselves with the Portuguese or Omani Arabs, or precisely because they resisted these colonizing powers. Others went into decline but continued to be occupied, including the towns of Ungwana/Osha and Shaka.84 We know comparatively little about how these towns’ inhabitants fared under these different political and economic conditions; the prevailing regional sociopolitical and cultural landscapes in which they were embedded; the full extent of their transoceanic connections; or, whether those that prospered were in a position to forge new constructions of identity and/or a new social habitus of urban dwelling that were then taken up elsewhere on the coast as the political context changed. Likewise, we know comparatively little about how those differently situated in terms of economic status, political authority, and social distinction were (or were not) able to advance their position and
that of their families through constructive engagement with colonial authorities. These are precisely the kinds of issues that the historical archaeological study of colonial encounters elsewhere has been able to resolve.

Mention has also been made of the large number of rural sites about which virtually nothing is known. “Colonialism,” as Gosden notes, “brings a new quality (or rather inequality) to human relations,” and this would have been as true for the occupants of fishing and farming villages along the coast as for those who occupied the stonetowns. Archaeological study of such settlements has the potential to offer new insights into how the development of extractive economies, the introduction of new subsistence crops such as maize and commercial crops such as sugar, cloves, tobacco, and sisal under Portuguese, Omani, British, and German colonialism altered labor and gender relations, influenced local populations’ health, and introduced new diseases—all topics that have received considerable archaeological attention elsewhere. The waning of both Portuguese and Omani colonial authority and the uneven distribution and intensity of their activities also allowed several communities to retain high degrees of autonomy. Some of these, such as Pate in the Lamu archipelago, are well-known to have been at times centers of resistance and as a consequence also a focus of military attacks and destruction, and at other times centers of cooperation. Yet, to date, there has been no attempt made to investigate archaeologically any of the known episodes of resistance and revolt that occurred during the Portuguese and Omani Arab eras or those that took place on the coast in response to the imposition of German or British colonial rule, events that form key components of local historiography and notions of local identity.

Colonial encounters on the coast certainly took different forms that could encompass symmetrical patterns of exchange between foreign and indigenous inhabitants as well as more asymmetrical interactions often predicated on violence and the use of force. An obvious interpretative challenge, therefore, is to determine how to differentiate social and material changes directly associated with colonialism from those initiated by other social processes and structural conditions. An equally important challenge is determining the particular agents of colonially induced material change. Specifically, there is often an unexamined assumption that colonial authorities, because of their greater political, military, and possibly economic power, determined the direction and form of change.
This was certainly so in the case of major construction projects (both urban and agricultural) that involved forced or compulsory labor. In many other contexts, however, the diverse colonial powers were often heavily dependent on local African agents, resident and visiting Arab and Asian merchants, and Indian mercantile capital to accomplish their goals, the consequences of which could extend beyond the East African coast and interior to the other side of the Indian Ocean and even Europe and North America.88

If archaeologists genuinely want to contribute to decolonial historical narratives of East Africa, they must engage with the legacies of colonialism in all its dimensions and especially with its material expressions and the consequences of that materiality, something that has often been neglected by historians, who usually lack the necessary skills and sensibilities to interpret such evidence. Doing so will require the development of multisited, collaborative research teams operating simultaneously on different continents, closer involvement with local communities aimed at a coproduction of knowledge about different episodes and kinds of colonial encounters and evaluations of heritage legacies, and a willingness to explore, both theoretically and substantively, the complexities of these encounters and their lived reality for the coast’s diverse populations over the last five hundred years.89

NOTES

2. William C. Bissell, “From Dhow Culture to the Diaspora: ZIFF, Film, and the Framing of Transnational Imaginaries in the Western Indian Ocean,” *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 3 (2012): 488.
3. I use “East Africa” in its strictest sense to refer to the areas encompassed by the modern nation-states of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, and “coastal East Africa” to refer to the seaboard, coastal littoral, and offshore islands (including Pemba and Zanzibar) of Kenya and Tanzania. I recognize that “Swahili” archaeology extends well beyond these modern national boundaries both to the north and south, to more distant islands in the western Indian Ocean, such as the Comoros and northern Madagascar, and even into the interior.
4. For broader discussion, see Stahl, “Archaeology of African History”; Christopher R. DeCorse, “Historical Archaeology: Methods, Meanings,

5. For further elaboration of this point, see Lane, “New Directions”; and Reid, “Constructing History in Uganda.”

6. The concept of “historical archaeology” is a deeply contested one, as some of the following sections elaborate. Space precludes a detailed review of all these debates, especially as they pertain to the use of the term with reference to Sub-Saharan Africa; see, however, Seetah and Allen, this volume. For the purposes of this essay, I use the term simply to imply the archaeological study of any period for which oral and/or documentary sources that supplement material evidence are available.


8. For reviews and more detailed coverage, see, inter alia, Chapurukha M. Kusimba, The Rise and Fall of Swahili States (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 1999); Horton and Middleton, The Swahili; Adria LaViolette, “The Swahili World,” in Mitchell and Lane, Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology, 897–910; and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, A Material Culture: Consumption and Materiality on the Coast of Precolonial East Africa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).


11. Kirkman, “Historical Archaeology in Kenya.”

12. For discussion of the latter, see, inter alia, Seetah and Allen, this volume; and Lane, “New Directions.”

13. Many of the key sources are those included in Freeman-Grenville, East African Coast.

14. The concept of “triangulating” different types of historical sources, such as oral, documentary, and material, has become commonplace. In this kind of usage, the term refers to the iterative process of comparing the content of different types of sources concerning a particular subject so as to check the perspective, biases, and omissions of each, thereby adding breadth and depth to the interpretation of an event or process. See, for example, Jeasik Cho and Allen Trent, “Validity in Qualitative Research Revisited,” Qualitative Research 6, no. 3 (2006): 319–40.


16. By designating a particular interpretive framing of archaeological evidence as “colonial” in nature, what is implied is that interpretive priority is given to external forces, population migration, cultural diffusion, and foreign settlers or visitors as the primary drivers of technological innovation and social change, over independent invention and indigenous populations. For further discussion, see the definitions offered by Bruce G. Trigger, “Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist,” Man 19 (1984): 355–70.

17. Kirkman was highly critical of the suggestion that there had been an Arab-Persian empire along the coast, but did express the view that “the historical monuments of East Africa” nonetheless belonged “not to the Africans but to the Arabs and Arabized Persians, mixed in blood with the African but in culture utterly apart from the Africans who surrounded them.” Kirkman, Men and Monuments of the East African Coast (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), 22.

18. For a review of these trends and supporting evidence, see Kusimba, Rise and Fall of Swahili States, 43–66.


20. Helm, “Conflicting Histories.”


24. This term is most commonly used as a catch-all categorization for the final phase in coastal ceramic typologies, variously defined as spanning from the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth or nineteenth century, or even the formal commencement of either British or German colonial rule.


26. An important exception to this is the research by Adria LaViolette on the site of Pujini (Pemba) which, although it emerged as a small fortified Swahili settlement in the eleventh century, was under the control of Mkame Ndume around 1450 and was subsequently abandoned around 1520, although it is not clear if the Portuguese were instrumental in this or not. See: LaViolette, “Swahili Archaeology and History on Pemba, Tanzania: A Critique and Case Study of the Use of Written and Oral Sources in Archaeology,” in Reid and Lane, African Historical Archaeologies, 125–62; and LaViolette, “Swahili Cosmopolitanism in Africa and the Indian Ocean World, AD 600–1500,” Archaeologies 4, no. 1 (2008): 24–49.


31. The division is often placed around 1750 or 1800 CE; however, Justin Willis’s book *Mombasa and the Making of the Swahili* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), which covers the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, implies that the key temporal fracture line is more recent. Much the same can be said for most histories of the wider Indian Ocean: Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 15–22. Important exceptions include Alpers, *Indian Ocean in World History*; and Vernet, “Les cités-États Swahili.”

32. For an extended discussion of many of these other factors, see, inter alia, Vernet, “Les cités-États Swahili.”


38. “Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority).” Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 159.


40. On this point, with particular reference to the East African coast, see LaViolette, “Swahili Cosmopolitanism.”

41. To which list we must also add the French and Germans.

42. Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, xxi.

43. Ho, xxi.


46. This was formally restricted to a narrow strip just 10 nautical miles (18.5 km) wide after the Berlin Conference of 1884.


53. The great Chinese treasure fleet under the command of Admiral Zheng He, which arrived off the East African coast for the first time around 1418, was also heavily armed, but seemingly had none of the lasting consequences of militarization in East Africa that followed the arrival of the Portuguese, although whether these were truly “voyages of friendship,” as many have argued, or an early example of protocolonialism is a moot point. See Geoff Wade, “The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment,” *JMBRAS* 78, no. 1 (2005): 37–58.


56. Known in Portuguese sources as João Baptista Cairato or Carrato.


61. For a synopsis of what is known about the vessel and its contents, its history, and its excavation, see Paul J. Lane, “Maritime and Shipwreck Archaeology in the Western Indian Ocean and Southern Red Sea: An Overview of Past and Current Research,” *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 7 (2012): 10–14 and references therein. This also summarizes the current state of shipwreck and maritime archaeology in the region and the potential for new studies.


69. Rhodes, Breen, and Forsythe, 345–51.


76. See, especially, Marshall, “Interpretation of Identity Formation”; and Marshall, “Politics of Memory.” For a wider landscape perspective and additional sources, see Paul J. Lane, “Slavery and Slave Trading in Eastern


79. Croucher, *Capitalism and Cloves*.

80. Rhodes, *Historical Archaeologies*.


83. For a useful synopsis of these trends, see Paul Sinclair and Thomas Håkansson, “The Swahili City-State Culture,” in *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures: An Investigation*, ed. Mogens H. Hansen, Historisk-filosofiske Skrifter 21 (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Sciences, 2000), 463–82.

84. For a sense of the range of “Swahili” settlements and their approximate periods of occupation after 1500 CE on the northern Swahili Coast, see Wilson, “Spatial Analysis.”


86. On the scope (and challenges) for reconstructing changing labour relations archaeologically, see Lane, “Archaeological Potential.”

87. Or other, less overt forms of defiance, as explored elsewhere. For example, Given, *Archaeology of the Colonized*; and Matthew Liebmann and Melissa S. Murphy, eds., *Enduring Conquests: Rethinking the Archaeology of Resistance to Spanish Colonialism in the Americas* (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2010).

88. Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*.

89. I would like to acknowledge the editors for their patience and many helpful suggestions that greatly improved this chapter, and Karin Pallaver and Thomas Vernet for their very helpful comments on previous drafts, and Colin Breen and Hilario Madiquida for kind permission to reproduce some of their illustrations. I remain solely responsible for any errors and shortcomings. My participation in the Stanford conference was supported by the Morgan Family Foundation, and I am grateful to Professor Lynn Meskell for enabling a visit to Stanford to coincide with the dates of the conference.