

Discovering Kilwa's History

With illustrations by Michael Sagikwa

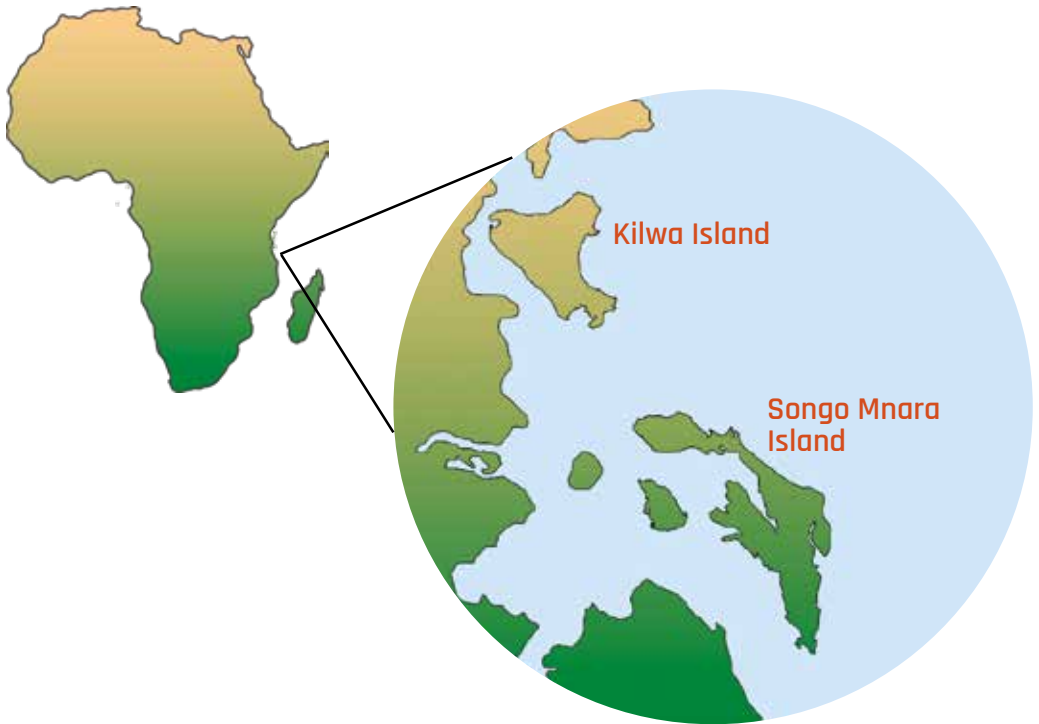


This book was funded by the University of York under
their Global Challenges Research Fund scheme


DISCOVERING KILWA'S HISTORY

This book was created by Stephanie Wynne-Jones and Jeffrey Fleisher, with assistance from Lyuba Vinogradova. Illustrations are by Michael Sagikwa. Funding for its production was given by the Global Challenges Research Fund at the University of York. It uses information from excavations at Kilwa Kisiwani by Neville Chittick during the 1960s and more recent work by Stephanie Wynne-Jones and Jeffrey Fleisher at Songo Mnara. The idea for the book came from the Village Ruins Committee on Songo Mnara, as part of interviews for the Co-Production and Community Heritage in Tanzania (CONCH) project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK, and directed by Stephanie Wynne-Jones and Sara Perry.

We are grateful for the input of Kilwa and Songo Mnara's residents at all stages of this work. They were important to all of the excavations that have taken place at the site and it was their interest in the results that inspired this book. A huge thank you to everyone involved.



Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara are a pair of islands, part of a small archipelago just off the coast in Lindi district, Tanzania. They sit among coral reefs and mangroves. They are home to communities who fish in those reefs and farm the island landscapes. The islands are also world famous due to the ruins that are found there: the remains of grand towns with mosques, palaces and houses built from coral stone. UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has listed the towns of Kilwa and Songo Mnara as a 'World Heritage' site, meaning that they are outstanding examples of Swahili civilization that should be protected by the international community.




But what do we know about Kilwa and Songo Mnara? What is the story of these places and how do we know it? How do they fit into the story of the East African, or Swahili, coast? The answers to these questions come from lots of different directions. They are found in the histories that people on the coast have passed down, which give us the stories of how towns were founded and some of the people who lived there. There are also clues in the Swahili language itself, as the words and phrases can show connections between people and places in the past. Most importantly, the sites of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara have been investigated through archaeology, which is a way of finding out about the past by looking at the things left behind by ancient people. The archaeology done at these sites has been really important for telling us about the communities that built and lived in Kilwa. It has also been central to the story of the entire Swahili coast and the ways Swahili civilization developed over the last 1500 years.

Kilwa Kisiwani

The first houses that have been found at the site of Kilwa Kisiwani were built about 1,100 years ago (276AH/AD890). They were made of packed earth over a wooden frame. They probably looked a bit like earth houses today, with a rectangular shape and a roof made of thatch. The people who lived in those houses were farmers and fishers. They farmed and ate local foods like millet and sorghum, and caught a lot of fish and shellfish in the coral reefs. They kept goats and cattle, although they ate meat less often as animals were probably less plentiful than the fish. Meat may have been kept for special occasions and festivals.





We don't know a lot about these early inhabitants of Kilwa. The traces of their houses have been damaged and made invisible by the much larger houses that were built on the same location in later years. The objects that they used tell us that they practised a lot of crafts. Pottery from these early homes was made locally and then used for food storage and for cooking. One of the fascinating things about this pottery is that the shape and decoration is similar to pots made all along the coast of Tanzania and Kenya, and even at some places far inland. In all of these places, people made and used pots in the shape of large wide jars. They may have been used to share food among a family or group. The pots are decorated with designs scratched into the wet clay; often these are cross-hatched lines, or triangle shapes around the neck of the jar. The fact that people in all these places made the same pots suggests that they were in contact and also that they shared some of the ways they ate meals. Although it seems amazing that people living so far apart would have made and used the same objects, remember that those people also spoke the same language! All along the coast at this time people spoke an early form of Swahili (proto-Swahili) and so we know that they were part of the same community and that they were connected in all sorts of ways, probably by land and also by sea.



As well as the pottery, early inhabitants of Kilwa made beads from shells and objects from iron. They may have woven grass mats and baskets, or made cotton cloth. They traded with sailors who came from the Persian Gulf. At Kilwa, we find pieces of large jars with a blue glaze, which were made in what is now Iraq and which were used on ships to carry dates, oils and perhaps wine. Those ships would then sail home to the Persian Gulf having exchanged their cargoes for products from Kilwa. This could have been mangrove wood, ambergris, iron, ivory or even slaves. It is hard to know. What we do know is that the trade was a very small part of life at Kilwa at this time. Only a few of these blue jars were found in the town, compared to many thousands of pieces of local pottery.



During the eleventh century (from about AH390/AD1000) things began to change at Kilwa. The town began to grow, with many more houses being built. Those houses were still made of earth and wood, but the inhabitants also began to build using coral stone. They used two types of coral. Walls were built using coral stone dug from the ground in the form of rubble, but people also started to take living coral from the reef. This could be cut easily into smooth and beautiful shapes, which they used to make elegant structures like the arches of doors. At this time a mosque was built at Kilwa. It had a mihrab with an arch cut from this living coral, which you can still see today at the northern end of the Great Mosque structure. This mosque is the first evidence for Muslims at Kilwa. There may have been a Muslim community here earlier, either local converts or visitors from overseas, but the mosque is the first permanent sign that there was a community of Muslims here.



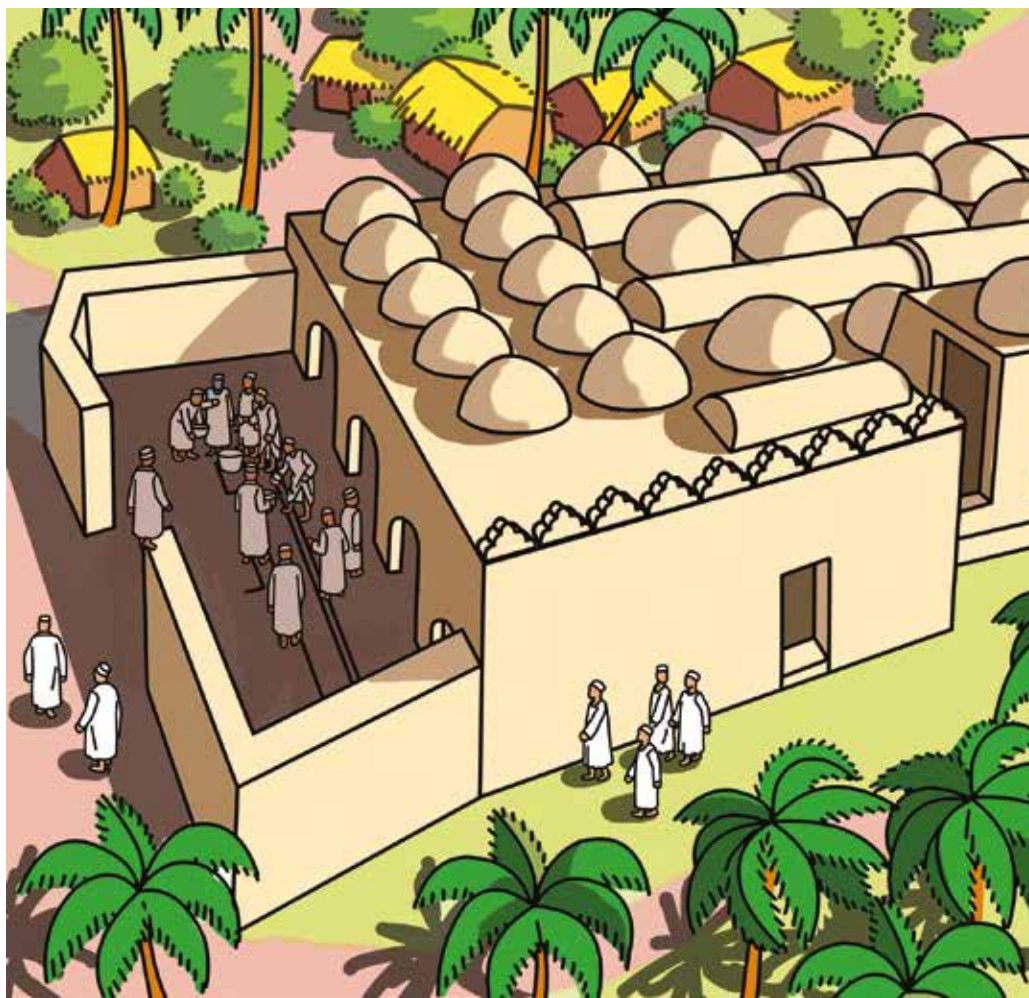


At this time, the people of Kilwa also began to grow richer. They had more possessions, including new types of local pottery that included beautiful painted and decorated bowls.

Inside the town, workers were producing metal objects in large quantities. Iron was being made, probably for tools like hoes and knives, but also perhaps for sale to partners on the mainland and from northern lands. As well as iron, workers at Kilwa were making objects from copper, such as spoons, containers like boxes, and jewellery. They also used copper for making coins. These were made at Kilwa and were used in the town. They are a clear sign of the growing wealth of the Kilwa community. They minted coins in copper, silver and possibly gold. The coins record the names of rulers of Kilwa, starting with Ali bin al-Hasan, who is the first named ruler we know of from the town. This shows that some people at Kilwa were not just growing rich, they were also powerful and there were rulers emerging among them. The Sake cemetery at Kilwa has the tombs of these rich people from a thousand years ago, with tombs built of coral and lime plaster where people left coins to remember them after they died. We tend to call these rulers 'Sultans', but Ali did not use that name on his coins and we don't know if it was a title used in these early years or if it has been added later.

As Kilwa grew, it also seems to have become more involved in trading with partners overseas. The objects that were brought to Kilwa included larger numbers of ceramics from the Persian Gulf, and from as far as China. A lot of these were bowls, which give us a picture of the ways life at Kilwa was changing, with rich households eating from Chinese porcelain, probably dressed in imported silks as well as local cotton. At this time people at Kilwa began to import many glass beads, coming from India as well as from the Persian Gulf. These would have been worn by wealthy women, and possibly men, within the town. They may also have been used like a currency and traded with communities on the mainland. Glass beads travelled on from towns like Kilwa, arriving across eastern and southeastern Africa. Many glass beads found in places like Zimbabwe are thought to have entered Africa via Kilwa and then travelled on to many other groups.

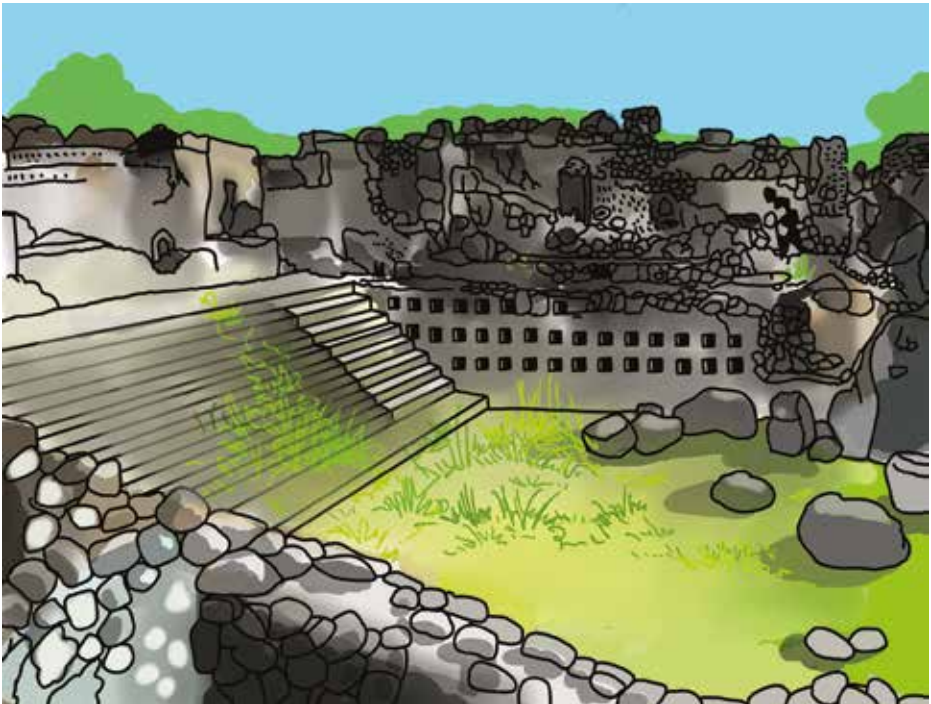







Most of the buildings you can see today at Kilwa were built later, during the 14th and 15th centuries (AH698/AD1300 – AH904/AD1500). The town grew enormously during this time. We see this especially because so much building happened using coral, instead of the earthen houses from earlier times. Some of the biggest monuments at Kilwa were built at this time. The Great Mosque was expanded, perhaps because of a growing Muslim population. It was given a large prayer hall to the south of the earlier mosque, with beautiful pillars and a domed roof.

The palace of Husuni Kubwa, which is a huge structure on a cliff above the sea to the east of the main town, was also built in the early 14th century. This building is unlike anything found elsewhere on the Swahili coast. It has many rooms, some of them probably a home for one of Kilwa's rulers and his household.



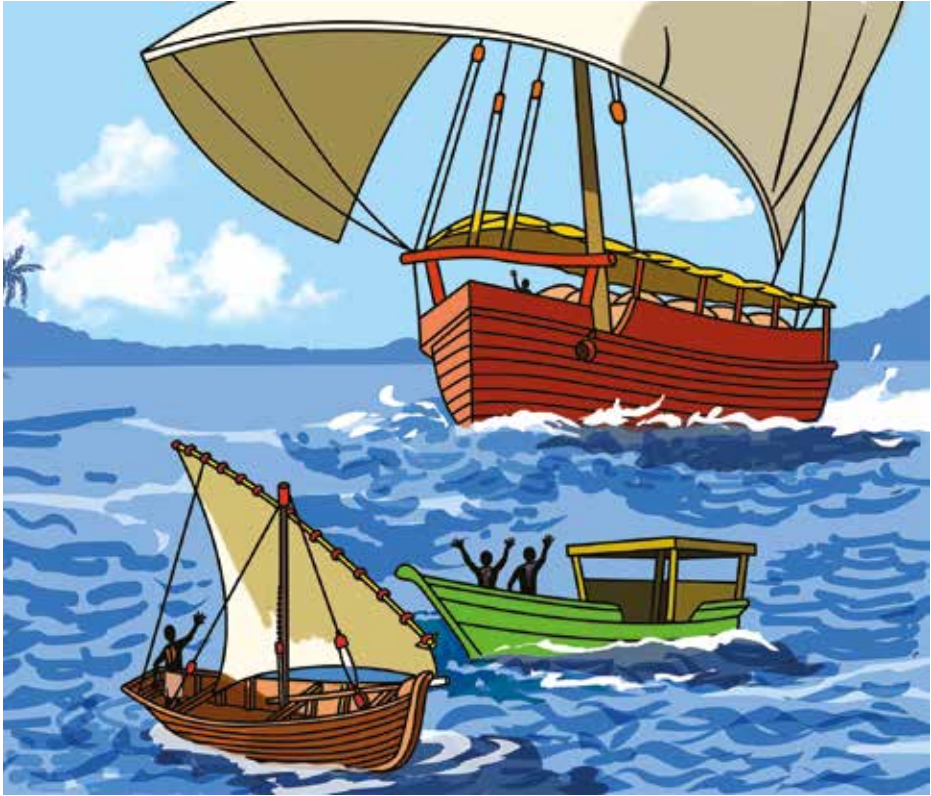


One of the most famous rooms at Husuni Kubwa contains an octagonal bathing pool, which would have had to be filled by servants carrying water from the well, or perhaps up the stairs from the sea. The palace also has some large spaces thought to be more public, including one known as the ‘audience court’ where it is thought that visitors would have been introduced to the sultan. Husuni Kubwa was a huge building project, but it seems that it was never finished and the building was abandoned when the residents moved back to the town.



The main town of Kilwa started to look very different at this time too. Instead of using coral only for mosques and tombs, the residents started to use coral for building houses. Most of the ruins you can see today across the town were built in the 15th century. These include houses with unique features, which have been named after them. The ‘House of the Mosque’ had its own small mosque inside for the inhabitants to pray. The ‘House of the Portico’ contained a beautiful porch structure, which included dozens of bowls imported from the Persian Gulf inlaid into the ceiling. Several small mosques were also built, such as the ‘Small Domed Mosque’ in the centre of town, and the Malindi Mosque to the north of the island.

What was happening at Kilwa during this time? Why was there such a growth in building? Some of the answers come from the fact that Kilwa had become an important centre for overseas trade. It was known as a place to buy gold. Merchants from other countries in the Indian Ocean would come to Kilwa to collect that gold and Kilwa’s merchants would probably carry it on voyages themselves. This meant that there was a lot of wealth in the town and people used that wealth to build fine houses and sponsored projects like the mosques. The merchants at Kilwa were becoming more powerful. The palace at Husuni Kubwa shows us the wealth of one household but then it was abandoned and people in the town started building elaborate houses. This looks like a shift in power, perhaps from a ‘sultan’ or ruler back towards a group of merchants in the town.





Songo Mnara

At this time, while grand houses were being built at Kilwa, some people began to build on the neighbouring island of Songo Mnara too. The town at Songo Mnara is not like Kilwa, in that it does not have earlier, buried, houses beneath the coral buildings. Instead, the whole town seems to have been built quite quickly, just at the end of the 14th century and at the start of the 15th century (approximately AH791/AD1390 – AH832/AD1430). The people who built here were certainly from Kilwa. We can see similarities in some of the buildings, but the main clue is in all the objects that they had. Their pottery was exactly the same as the pottery at the time in Kilwa, they had the same metal objects and beads, and they used coins made in Kilwa for buying things in the town. We don't quite know why some of Kilwa's inhabitants moved to Songo Mnara. Maybe they needed more space, or wanted to get further away from the powerful groups at Kilwa? Perhaps they were hoping to set up a rival trading post for foreign trade? Some archaeologists have even suggested that it was a holiday home, where Kilwa's wealthy families would go during the hottest months.

One thing we can say about Songo Mnara, though, is that it was a religious place. There is a mosque right in the centre of the town, in a space that all the houses look towards. Next to that mosque is a graveyard with a wall around it. The graveyard, and perhaps the mosque, are the earliest things on the site. So perhaps Songo Mnara was a place where Kilwa's inhabitants would bury their ancestors, and then they built a town around those graves?



The central space near that mosque continued to be a place for burying the dead. Many hundreds of people were buried there during the time the town was occupied. The people who lived at Songo Mnara would remember those ancestors with offerings on the graves. They would lay palm fronds on the tombs and eat food near them in moments of remembrance. Some of the graves were obviously for important or holy people, and people would make offerings of coins or special objects such as white stones on top of those burials.

Once the town at Songo Mnara was built it became a busy and wealthy place. The inhabitants lived mostly in large and beautiful coral buildings. The whole town is made up of those buildings and unlike Kilwa there are very few earthen houses at the site. The buildings were entered by climbing a large stairway and entering through a door carved from living coral. Inside the door you would clean your feet on a large round coral stone just inside the doorway. This was a bit like the washing areas of mosques at the time.



Then the first room you would go into would be a large courtyard with steps along the sides. These rooms are important in the houses of Songo Mnara. There are similar rooms at Kilwa and at other towns along the Swahili coast at this time, but Songo Mnara is the place with the largest and most beautiful courtyards.



The steps were built of coral and then sandstone was placed on top to make hard surfaces. People probably sat on those steps to talk. We know that food was served here, in beautiful painted bowls made locally, and in glazed bowls brought from Arabia and from China. The room was beautifully decorated. Cloth would have hung on the walls, which were painted white using lime plaster. Niches (zidaka) on the walls would have held lamps, Kuranic texts and beautiful objects. The middle floor at the bottom of the steps would have been made of packed earth, specially brought into the room, which was bright red. The whole space would have been very dramatic and would have been a wonderful area for inviting guests and impressing them with your house and your hospitality.



Further inside the houses, the inhabitants of Songo Mnara had many rooms for sleeping and for storing goods. They had many washrooms, containing a latrine and with large jars of water and cisterns to allow them to stay clean. They also used the houses for working, doing activities like processing crops from the nearby fields. One key thing that people did in houses was that they made cotton thread, spinning it and perhaps then using it to make cloth for clothes and for trade. This work was probably done by women, who were very busy in the life of the town. We find evidence for women's work all over the town, and some of the places with the richest objects were also spaces where women worked. In one kitchen area of one house, many hundreds of coins were found, in spaces where women were cooking and making cloth.

The houses were obviously important to Songo Mnara's inhabitants. They built them using strong and lasting materials and these became places where they would keep and display their most valued possessions. But the outdoor spaces of the town were also important. Songo Mnara's community had six mosques. As well as the central mosque in the middle of the town, there was a large and decorated mosque in the northeast of the town. This one is often called the 'Friday Mosque' because it is the biggest and could perhaps have held the entire Muslim population



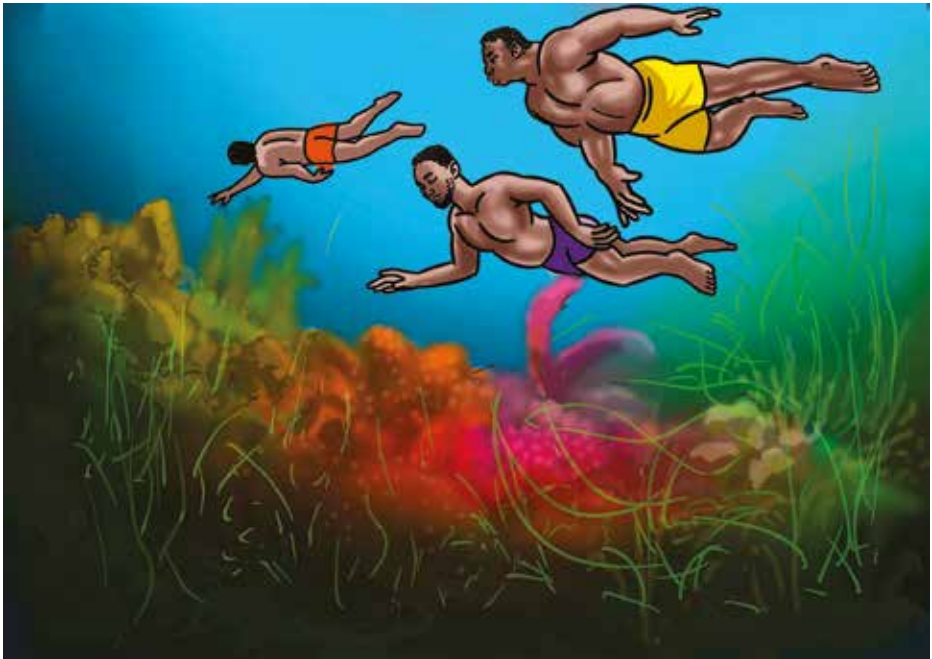
of the town. Smaller mosques are found on the edges of town, particularly along the shore where they would have been visible to sailors arriving at Songo Mnara. The most unusual of these is the small mosque called the 'mnara' (perhaps meaning tower), which is on a tiny coral mound and is surrounded by water at high tide.



The inhabitants of Songo Mnara were farmers and fishers. They ate a lot of fish and shellfish, found in the reefs around the island and also in the deeper waters – they would venture offshore to find large fish and also animals like turtle and dugong. They also kept animals. Goat and sheep were common in the town. They were kept just outside the houses, near the front door, so the spaces that seem very empty now would actually have been full of life and dirt! They also ate cattle, and used milk, although these came from outside the town, probably herded elsewhere on the island. They farmed fields across the island, watering them using wells that can still be seen in the landscape.



Inside the town, the people were also busy making things. They made beads from a type of shell called aragonite, which comes from the Giant Clam which they must have lifted from the coral reef by hand. The beads were made in a workshop built of wood and earthen walls in the western area of the town just near the shore. That space would also have been a place where fishermen would have dried their nets and the fish they had caught. There were other workshops too, part of a group of earthen houses here. Some of them are difficult to understand, but it seems they might have been making and dyeing cloth, or making leather from the skins of the sheep and goats they kept. A forge was found in this space, with iron smiths making iron tools for use within the town.



As well as this activity, Songo Mnara had trade connections, similar to those at Kilwa. Glazed ceramics from Persia, Arabia and China show that they were meeting the same merchants and making the same business as their neighbours at Kilwa Kisiwani. They had glass beads from India, which they wore in their daily life and also traded with others. It seems they might have been making glass beads too, by taking some of the ones they imported from India and from China, and then melting them and shaping them into bigger beads with multicolour patterns. One of the other major things that Songo Mnara shared with Kilwa was their money. They used Kilwa coins, made of copper, and these were important in buying food and objects in the town. Coins were used in day to day shopping. They had the names of Kilwa's rulers on them and so it is possible that Songo Mnara was in some way ruled by Kilwa. The same coins are also found on Mafia Island, which was also said to be ruled by Kilwa.






History and Archaeology

Many of the people whose names are printed on Kilwa's coins are familiar to us from history. At lots of towns on the Swahili coast, stories were passed down from generation to generation, telling about the town's origins and stories of some of the early rulers. At Kilwa, these traditions are well-known because they were written down by the Portuguese when they arrived in AH909/AD1505, creating a document normally called the 'Kilwa Chronicle'. Other later written versions also exist which tell a similar story.

These traditions tell the story of the founding of Kilwa by a Persian prince from Shiraz. He was one of six brothers who sailed along the East African coast. This prince paid with cloth to buy Kilwa Island from a local king. The stories tell us that he also brought Islam to the region. The Kilwa traditions then tell us about a series of rulers at Kilwa. Some of them can be matched up with other things we know. Ali bin al-Hasan, for example, who is named on many of the Kilwa coins, is often linked to Ali from the origin story. The descendants of the first ruler, according to the Chronicle, had varying success. Some of them were deposed, one was beheaded, and one thrown down the well.



However, the traditions also tell us that Kilwa became very rich on trading gold between Sofala and the Persian Gulf and was taken over by another dynasty, the Mahdali, in around AH698/AD1300. Kilwa's new Mahdali ruler al-Hasan bin Talut extended the Great Mosque with the domed prayer hall. Then, during the reign of his grandson, al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, from approximately AH718/AH1320, the grand palace of Husuni Kubwa was built. Al-Hasan bin Sulaiman was famous. He was known as Abu al-Mawahib, or “the Father of Gifts”, and he strengthened connections with Yemen, built mosques, and invited prominent Islamic scholars to stay at his palace. The 100-room palace, Husuni Kubwa, was the largest one built on the whole of the Swahili Coast.

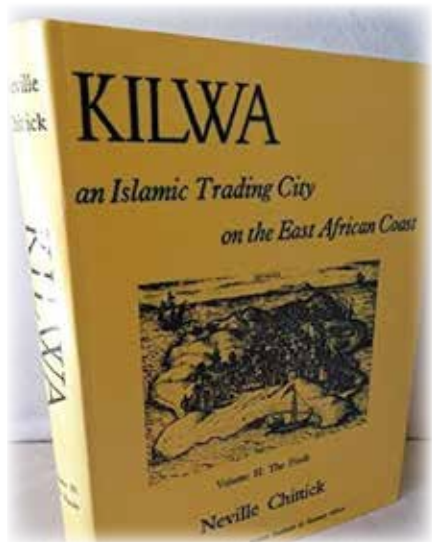
These histories give us some details about some of the individual people who were powerful in Kilwa. We also understand the stories they told to keep that power, including telling stories of their origins in Persia or Arabia. What they cannot tell us is what life was like in Kilwa and Songo Mnara, or what most people in the town did. Archaeology has shown clearly that the town grew over time from a small settlement of fisherfolk, and that most of their activities and belongings were locally produced. During the colonial period in Tanzania, historians sometimes claimed that the people at Kilwa were Arabs, but recent research has made it clear that this was not true. It is clear that almost all of the inhabitants of Kilwa would have been African. Some of the best evidence for this is the Swahili language itself, which is a Bantu language that developed over centuries on the East African coast. Arab words in Swahili are all very recent, coming from the last few centuries.




The Kilwa histories tell us about a few powerful people and the stories they wanted to tell about themselves. Most of what we know about life at Kilwa and Songo Mnara comes from archaeology. There has been a lot of archaeological research at both sites! Archaeology is a way of finding out about the past using objects and physical remains. Past people built houses, dropped rubbish, left objects lying about, and scattered food remains. They also left things deliberately – the most obvious of these are the burials of people, the tombs built to remember them and the objects left on those tombs. Those buildings, objects and rubbish can still be there, even hundreds of years later. The oldest things get buried by the newer, making layers of rubbish and remains. Archaeologists look for those remains, and they dig down through the newer layers of rubbish and the earth that has built up to reach the earlier stuff beneath.

At Kilwa Kisiwani, the first archaeology was done by a British man called Neville Chittick. He was the Director of Antiquities for Tanganyika when he began working at Kilwa in the 1960s. After Tanzania gained independence from Britain, Chittick moved to be a full-time researcher at the British Institute in Eastern Africa, based in Kenya. He continued working at Kilwa and he published the information from his excavations in a book in 1974.

Chittick's excavations were not just the first at Kilwa, they were some of the first excavations on the coast of East Africa and he was mainly interested in trying to figure out how old the ruins were, and who had lived there. This meant that he mainly cleared the buildings. When Chittick arrived at Kilwa a lot of the large old buildings were buried. You could only see the tops of the walls of Husuni Kubwa, for example,



because earth had built up all around it. Chittick had a team of local workers, men and women who worked hard to clear a huge amount of earth. They dug down to the floors of Husuni Kubwa, as well as clearing the Great Mosque, smaller mosques and several of the large stone houses. In the area around some of these houses today you can still see how they sit in a little dip in the ground – this is due to the earth being cleared out around them.



As well as clearing the houses, Chittick paid a lot of attention to the objects found inside them. He counted, recorded and wrote about lots of different types of evidence, but his big interest was the imported pottery. There were two reasons for this. First, Chittick was trying to figure out the age of the ruins at Kilwa, and the imported pottery was already known from places like Iran and so he knew roughly how old it was. Second, Chittick believed that Kilwa was a town built by Arabs who had come to the coast of Africa. He was less interested in the ‘African’ objects like local pottery, although luckily for us he did record it!

Chittick’s excavations showed that Kilwa Kisiwani was a very old town. He dug down below the floors of the houses and was the first person to see the earth houses from the 9th century. He described a long history for the town, from this settlement built of earthen houses through to a grand trading town from the 11th century onwards. He also used the objects found in the town to imagine what life was like here in the past. He focused mainly on the imported ceramics and also the glass beads, discussing how Kilwa became an international port and showing those connections with the objects from overseas. One of the places he spent a lot of time was trying to understand the coins produced at Kilwa, trying to match them with the rulers mentioned in the Kilwa Chronicle.

The kind of excavations made by Chittick are quite old-fashioned now. Archaeologists in eastern Africa have shifted their interests to think more about what life was like, instead of just mapping dates and trade connections. At Kilwa there have been some follow-up projects by an archaeologist called Professor Felix Chami, from the University of Dar es Salaam. One of the important things Chami did was to explore some of the areas in the town beyond the coral buildings. He pointed out that an area called Nguruni, near Husuni Kubwa, has no buildings but has a lot of ancient rubbish from the production of iron. He imagined this area as a place where iron was being made on a vast scale. This kind of thinking, which imagines Kilwa as a town where people lived and made things, is quite a different way of imagining life in the town.





More recently, excavations at Songo Mnara by Professor Jeffrey Fleisher and Professor Stephanie Wynne-Jones have shifted the ways we can imagine Kilwa even more. Their work at Songo Mnara used new archaeological techniques so that they could do more than just dig down and find out what was underneath the houses. For example, they tested the earth all over the site and looked at its chemistry. This meant that they could see places where animals had been kept in the past, outside the large houses, because the animal dung had changed the chemistry of the soil. They also used techniques like geophysical survey, using machines to scan the whole area of the site and find buried remains like areas of iron smithing, or earth houses that were not visible on the surface any more.

Fleisher and Wynne-Jones also dug a lot across the town of Songo Mnara. Unlike Chittick, they recorded everything in the earth, mapping the rubbish dropped by Songo Mnara's inhabitants in all the different spaces of the site. This meant they could talk about what people actually did in different areas and buildings. It is from this work that we can see that people sat in the coral houses and made cotton thread for cloth. We know that women gathered at the well in the centre of town, where they also often lost some of their beads, or broke the jars they were carrying. We can see offerings laid on tombs in the centre of the site, and areas where animals were kept. Fleisher and Wynne-Jones also spent a lot of time thinking about the rubbish left by Songo Mnara's residents. They recorded and identified every animal bone, so we know what they ate, and even every burnt millet or rice grain. By recording everything and thinking about where every different type of object was, paying attention to every object, local and foreign, they have given a much richer picture of life in the towns. A lot of what is written above comes from this work.








Portugal, Oman and the later centuries

In AH909/AD1505, a boat of Portuguese soldiers arrived in Kilwa. At this time the Portuguese had found a way to sail around the south of Africa, and were travelling up the coast from the south to the north. They wanted to take over the trade in the Indian Ocean. They were particularly interested in gold from southern Africa and spices from India. Although Kilwa did not have gold itself, the town had been the main port for trading gold from southern Africa. The Portuguese began to take the gold from Mozambique directly, cutting off some of Kilwa's supply. They also decided to destroy Kilwa's power and they returned to attack the town. They put a garrison of soldiers at Kilwa. There were only 12 soldiers, but they had guns, and they also had the whole Portuguese navy behind them!




The Portuguese built a fort at Kilwa, called the Gereza, which in Portuguese means church but in Swahili has come to mean prison. This gives us some clues as to how local people experienced Portuguese settlement.

Kilwa declined quickly at this time. The Portuguese were violent in their takeover of power, but it is likely that the bigger reason was the loss of economic control for people in the town. They could no longer trade in gold, and it is possible that life in the town became difficult. It seems that a lot of people simply left the town at this time. The houses were abandoned and many fell down and were not repaired.

Another clue in Kilwa's abandonment at this time comes from archaeology at Songo Mnara. The town here was abandoned completely and it seems it was not inhabited again. Excavations at the site have shown that there were a lot of burials at this time, including burials of children. It is impossible to tell from looking at the graves, but it is possible that the Portuguese brought disease such as smallpox with them to Kilwa, and that this added to the abandonment of the towns at Kilwa and Songo Mnara.

In AH1108/AD1698 the Portuguese lost a long fight against Omani forces at Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Kenya. The Omanis soon took over a lot of Portuguese colonies on the coast. At Kilwa, they expanded the Gereza to become a larger fort. The structure today looks much more like an Omani building than a Portuguese one.



During Omani colonial rule in the 19th century, they went one step further than the Portuguese and they built a new port, further up the coast at a place called Kilwa Kivinje.

The port at Kilwa Kisiwani was now no longer the centre it had been. It had been robbed of power and trade relationships, and the people had scattered, possibly due to disease. Yet in the 18th century the town had one more moment of wealth, when the ruler of Kilwa signed a contract to supply slaves to French colonies in Reunion and Mauritius. During this time, Kilwa was briefly rich again, although the buildings and the town were quite different. The rulers of the time built a large walled enclosure now called 'Makutani', along with a large palace for those getting rich from the trade. The grand stone houses from earlier centuries were not rebuilt or lived in, so it is possible that only a few groups in Kilwa were getting rich at this time.

Yet, the story of Kilwa is not over. The people who live on the islands of Kilwa and Songo Mnara are the inheritors of this long story. They are Islamic, and they can trace that religion through their ancestry to some of the earliest centuries of Islam. They keep and tell the stories of the rulers and inhabitants of the past. And they are the latest chapter in the story of Kilwa, an island community based on local resources and opportunities,



adapting to a changing global situation. Today, World Heritage tourism is an important part of the economy in Kilwa and this should involve local communities as they continue to use those local resources to create the Swahili world today.