

ISLAMIZATION IN THE COASTAL REGION OF KENYA TO THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Historical Background, from the 9th Century to c. 1630

Muslim Settlers and the Early Towns

The first Muslims to arrive in what is now Kenya came by sea more than a thousand years ago.¹ Whether they were Arabs or Persians, and exactly where they came from, may never be known. Present evidence indicates that they were most likely from the region of the Persian Gulf. Some came as traders for seasonal visits, or a temporary stay; others came as immigrants and settled in island and mainland towns, always near, though not necessarily on, the coast. The first Muslim settlers were followed by others and, as time passed, the number of Muslim settlements in the coastal region increased.

Historical writing about the early coastal towns generally stresses the influence of Muslims. This is understandable, since Muslim chronicles are the main source of evidence and little is known about the indigenous African people during this period. Whether the towns were founded by immigrants from overseas, or were indigenous African foundations, in which immigrants later settled, is not certain.² At one time or another, most towns had at least some Muslim inhabitants, as is evident from the ruins of mosques, but it is unlikely that any towns were populated solely by Muslims, to the exclusion of indigenous peoples.

The early Arab geographers, writing about the East African coast, refer to towns which are not Muslim, or where Muslims and non-Muslims live together. Masudi, in the 10th century, comments that the island of

Mogadishu, Marka and Brava were Muslim towns, but that the remaining towns of the Berbera coast were pagan (as were the Zanj people), excepting the island of Unquja (Zanzibar) which had a mixed, predominantly Muslim population. In some towns, which were eventually Muslim, Islam arrived only after the towns had been in existence for some time; tradition records that the first five rulers of Vumba Kuu were not Muslims.³ Our historical common sense leads us to conclude that the founding and settlement of towns occurred in a variety of ways. Some towns had Muslim beginnings, others did not; some towns were founded by overseas immigrants (non-Muslim as well as Muslim), and others were founded by local people.

The number of towns grew steadily, especially after the 13th century, when immigration from the Arabian peninsula seems to have increased.⁴ By that time Muslim towns had come into existence along the entire East African coast, from Somalia to Mozambique, and they formed a cultural unit, generally termed by historians the 'Swahili coast'; in this context the coast of Kenya can be considered part of the northern Swahili coast. Only a few of the early towns have continued to be inhabited until the present day, but numerous ruins tell us of the towns which did not survive. The Mombasans who showed Emery some of these ruins in 1824 made the interesting observation that the towns along the coast were usually within one day's march of each other.⁵ Many of the towns were relatively small, and some could have been scarcely more than villages with mostly mud-and-thatch dwellings and only a handful of stone structures.

All Muslim immigrants settled and lived in towns. With the passing of generations, Muslim settlers and their descendants became more or less indigenized and independent of, though often in contact with, their original overseas homeland. Hadhrami *sharifs*, who had settled on the coast in the 14th and 15th centuries, played an important role in the development of local Muslim culture. Gradually and in varying degrees, towns became centres of Islamic influence. Whether all the towns came to be predominantly Muslim and, if so, when this occurred, is not certain. Migration from rural areas into the towns most certainly took place and may, at times, have been greater than immigration from overseas. Migrants from the rural areas would not have been Muslim. What proportion of the total population they represented in any given town at a given time is not known; even in some predominantly Muslim towns, there may have been many non-Muslims. The proportion of Muslims to non-Muslims would have varied greatly, throughout time and from one town to

Available evidence allows only a few general conclusions about Islamization (= the conversion or assimilation of non-Muslims to Islam) during this period; for we know few details about the indigenous African people living in the coastal region, and there is no extensive record of their relations with Muslims. In towns where both Muslims and non-Muslims resided, conversion of non-Muslim Africans to Islam undoubtedly occurred, but how many non-Muslims were converted is a matter of conjecture. We can assume that quite a bit of assimilation of non-Muslims to Islam took place, particularly through the marriage of non-Muslim women to Muslim men. Indeed it is this intermixing which is considered to have given rise to the Swahili people, all Bantu-speaking Muslims. There is no evidence of any Muslim influence in rural areas. All Islamization took place in towns, and all non-Muslims who became Muslim were assimilated into town life or had been residing in towns before their conversion.

The Migration from Shungwaya and the Abandonment of Mainland Towns

Towards the end of the 16th century, migrant groups (including the ancestors of some of the present-day Taita, Mijikenda and Pokomo) began to move into the coastal region of Kenya from the north. According to tradition they dispersed from a place called Shungwaya in the Bur Gao area of the southern Somali coast; their southward migration was a consequence of conflict with their northern neighbours, the Oromo, who were themselves moving south.⁶ At the same time or slightly later, at the beginning of the 17th century, most of the mainland coastal towns were abandoned.

These migrations conveniently divide the history of the region into three periods: 1) the period before 1570, that is, before the migrant groups from Shungwaya began arriving in Kenya, or at least before their arrival in sufficient numbers to constitute a dominant element in the population of the coast, and before the abandonment of many of the coastal towns; 2) a 'migration period' of some sixty years (c. 1570-1630), during which extensive migrations of the Oromo and the Shungwaya peoples took place; 3) the period after 1630, once the people from Shungwaya and the Oromo had already arrived and settled in approximately the same areas of the Kenya coast which some of them occupy today, and after most of the early coastal towns had been abandoned. There is evidence from Mijikenda traditions that the migration was not a mass movement of large numbers but rather a continuing flow of small, fragmented groups.⁷ Some probably

Two major changes took place during the migration period: 1) a new immigrant population moved into the coastal region, and 2) most of the mainland coastal towns were abandoned. The main cause of these changes is usually considered to be the aggressive southward advance of the Oromo. Other factors most likely also contributed to the dispersal and migration of people from Shungwaya, and there is evidence that some of the towns may have been abandoned for other reasons, such as shortage of water.⁸ Whatever the causes, the situation which had existed until then was severely disrupted. The abandonment of mainland towns resulted in a drastic contraction of the Muslim population which, from being widely dispersed in many towns along the whole coast, now withdrew to a few concentrated areas. What took place seems to have been not a loss of population, but a regrouping for the sake of protection. At the same time, the arrival of immigrants from Shungwaya introduced new non-Muslim inhabitants into the region. Some of the Mijikenda have oral traditions of finding hunting people when they first arrived in the coastal region, but no tradition of finding any settled agricultural people.⁹ We can conclude that, if there were agricultural people, they had already moved or dispersed, perhaps with the abandonment of the towns, or that they were subsequently absorbed without trace.

Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, c. 1630-1830 and Islamization in Towns along the Coast

The Muslim Presence up to the Early 19th Century

The arrival of the new non-Muslim peoples on the coast sets the stage for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims which endure until the present day. Whereas such relations before the 17th century are only vaguely known, cut off from us in the past by the changes which took place, Muslim relations with non-Muslims in the period after 1630 are a continuous thread weaving its way to the present. The early 17th century marks the start of a new era which leads directly up to the beginning of the 19th century.

The abandonment of mainland coastal towns by the early 17th century does not mean that the people of those towns simply 'disappeared'; many of them took refuge in safer island towns, particularly Mombasa.¹⁰ We can speculate, though there is not so much evidence, that people also moved from the northern mainland towns to Lamu and Pate islands. Thus, Muslims living on the coast came to be far more geographically concentrated than in the past, and long stretches of the coast either came to

remained relatively prosperous, though not flourishing, with a certain level of material well-being and cultural and religious activity. One should not generalize too much about these towns, since they faced varying fortunes. Pate reached the height of its power in the 18th century and declined thereafter; the first half of the 19th century saw the rise of Lamu to full economic prosperity. Mombasa had a relatively small population, but it carried on a flourishing trade and gradually gained importance in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹¹

At the beginning of the 19th century there were no main towns on the whole stretch of coast between Lamu and Mombasa; such settlements as Mambrui, Malindi, Kilifi and Takaungu, which were to become important centres later in the 19th century, had not yet been founded (or refounded). Towns, the only places where Muslims were permanently resident, existed in only three areas and were located mainly on offshore islands:

- i) the Lamu archipelago, including the Bajun islands to the north, the main towns being Lamu on Lamu island, and Pate, Siyu and Faza on Pate island, with some agricultural settlements on the adjacent mainland;
- ii) Mombasa island, including the town of Mombasa and Kilindini village on the southern part of the island, with some dependent agricultural areas on the mainland;
- iii) the Shirazi-Vumba (modern Shimoni-Vanga) area of south-eastern Kenya, including the settlements on Wasin and Funzi islands.

Most of the Muslims living in these areas were Swahili. Some Omani Arab traders resided in Lamu, and the Mazrui Arabs governed Mombasa. There was already a small Bohra Muslim community in Lamu, and probably some few non-Muslim Indian Banyan immigrants in both Lamu and Mombasa. The Muslims residing elsewhere were mainly Bajun (in the Lamu archipelago and islands to the north) and Shirazi (in the Shirazi-Vumba area).¹²

The island of Pemba, then dominated by Mazrui Mombasa, its main trading ally, was an area of Muslim settlement which had long-established relations with the northern Swahili coast, particularly with Pate and Mombasa.¹³ Although not within the borders of modern Kenya, it is mentioned here since immigrants and traders from Pemba played an active role in the coastal region south of Mombasa.

The Non-Muslim Peoples

Who were the non-Muslim peoples and where exactly do we find them during this period?

Large areas of the coast north of Kilifi creek were only sparsely inhabited by pastoral and hunting peoples.¹⁴

- i) The semi-nomadic Oromo, extending over a vast area from south of the Sabaki river to north of the Juba river, including the area around the mouth of the Tana river and far up along the river; the whole coastal mainland north of the Sabaki river, right down to the seashore, was subject to their pastoral movements and periodic occupation, a fact which restricted settlement by other peoples on the mainland opposite the Lamu archipelago and the Bajun islands; the Oromo were raiding quite far south, and effectively curtailed mainland settlement north of Kilifi creek until the second half of the 19th century;
- ii) The *Dahalo* hunters, closely related to the Oromo, living on the plains east of the Tana and on the mainland opposite Lamu; and the *Boni*, forest hunters, living to the north and east of Witu, as far north as Dodori creek opposite Pate Island. In the coastal plain between the Sabaki river and Kilifi creek, and further south on the inland plateau (as far inland as the Taru desert), we find another hunting people, the *Waata* (called Alangulo by the Mijikenda and Sanye by the Swahili.) Never many in number, the Dahalo, Boni and Waata were quite widespread and extended over a far larger area than at present.¹⁵

The only non-Muslim agriculturalists north of Kilifi creek were:

- iii) The *Pokomo*, a riverine people, settled along the banks of the Tana river, commonly divided into the upper Pokomo and the lower Pokomo (who extend as far north as Bubesa), depending on how far up the river they live.

South of Kilifi creek we find settled agricultural people, then known collectively as Nyika but now known rather by their modern name, Mijikenda. For purposes of our study they are best divided geographically into three groups:

- i) the *northern Mijikenda*, to the north and west of Mombasa; these include (from north to south) the Kauma, Chonyi, Jibana, Kambe, Riba, Boko, and Duma.

of hills above the coastal plain; although possibly cultivating on the coastal plain by this time, they had no permanent settlements there, but rather continued to reside in the hilltop villages where they had originally settled; included too in this northern Mijikenda group are the Giriama, with their main settlement further inland, some 30 kilometres from the coast; the northern Mijikenda had not yet begun to expand out of their original *kayas* and remained quite restricted in their area of residence until the middle of the 19th century.¹⁶

To the south of Mombasa we find the Digo, who make up the remaining two Mijikenda groups:

- ii) the *northern Digo*, spread over a wide area south and southwest of Mombasa, as far inland as Kwale, some 20 kilometres from the sea in the southern extension of the same range of hills inhabited by the northern Mijikenda, but also all along the coastal littoral from Likoni just south of Mombasa as far as Kinondo.

In marked contrast to the northern Mijikenda, the northern Digo had settled in the coastal plain immediately upon their arrival south of Mombasa in the early 17th century. One main group settled at Kinondo, and some of the second main group, who had built their first *kaya* in the hills at Kwale, soon migrated down onto the coastal plain, where they established further settlements. Being further south than the northern Mijikenda, they were safer from the threat of continued Oromo attack. Once resident in the plain and finding, according to their traditions, no other people settled there, they gradually spread throughout it.¹⁷

- iii) the *southern Digo*, extending from Msambweni, near the seashore, southwards beyond the Uмба river as far as Tanga (Tanzania), and inland some 20 kilometres as far as Kikoneni and Dzombo (the modern Jombo hill and forest); all southern Digo are originally derived from northern Digo groups.

Finally, in the Shirazi-Vumba area, we find:

- iv) the *Segeju*, an agricultural and fishing people, living on or within a few miles of the ocean shore; the Segeju claim Shung-

mainly resident in the Tanga area, south of the modern Kenya-Tanzania border, and only a small minority of them were in Kenya. For this reason they are not considered in detail in this study, but it is of interest to note that early European visitors to the Tanga area observed that the influence of Islam was stronger among the Segeju than the Digo. That the Segeju converted to Islam before the Digo and in some cases were Muslim proselytisers among the Digo is also confirmed by oral evidence.¹⁸

Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, c. 1630-1830

In the Lamu archipelago area

As early as the middle of the 17th century some Muslims in the Lamu archipelago area, particularly the Swahili of Pate, had trading contacts with the Oromo and Pokomo of the mainland. The Oromo supplied ivory to the Swahili, and were known to have visited Pate town. The Pokomo were also trading with the Swahili of Pate and Lamu, from whom they obtained cloth and iron in exchange for ivory. This trade, which was sometimes disrupted by the Oromo, (and not entirely regular) was carried on mainly by the lower Pokomo. The upper Pokomo claim to have traded with Brava, but details of this are not clear.

There is evidence that non-Muslims lived in the island towns of the archipelago, and we can assume that some of them were converted to Islam; and non-Muslim women (Oromo and Pokomo) were assimilated to Islam through marriage. The existence of the Pokomo Mosque in Pate town, dating back to the 18th century, is evidence of Islamization among urbanized Pokomo. As in previous centuries, all conversions would have occurred in the towns. During this period the Muslims of the Lamu archipelago generally had little interest in spreading Islam among their non-Muslim neighbours, and there is no indication of any conversion in the rural areas among the Pokomo, Oromo or hunting people.¹⁹ The Muslim townsman who lived on the offshore islands must have been aware of the traditional religion of his rural neighbours, but that religion belonged to a realm other than his own from which he remained culturally aloof.

In the Mombasa Area

Further south, in the Mombasa area, some of the immigrants from Shungwaya (the Mijikenda) had established relations with the Swahili of Mombasa by the beginning of the 17th century. As we know from the Mombasa Chronicle, the History of Mazrui and oral traditions, the Mijikenda and the inhabitants of Mombasa had established relations

the 17th century onwards, and rendered each other mutual assistance. The Mijikenda sought the help of the Swahili to mediate their internal disputes and, on occasion, some Mazrui and Swahili would take refuge with the Mijikenda when quarrels broke out in the town, the classic example being that of Ali bin Uthman who later, as Liwali of Mombasa, rewarded the "people of Vanikat" for granting him aid and asylum in their country.²⁰ Armed strife sometimes occurred between the Mijikenda and the Mombasans, but this was certainly the exception; serious disagreements were usually resolved through negotiations. We should not imagine Mombasa town as the bastion of an alien Muslim people in constant conflict with and threatened by hostile non-Muslim. Nor did the town exercise control over a subject hinterland which was inferior in status and in strength; on the contrary, as is shown by documentary evidence, the townspeople made regular payments to the Mijikenda. On occasion the Mijikenda gave valuable military assistance to the town.

Emery's Journal, which he wrote in 1824-26 while living in Mombasa, makes it clear that the relations of the Mazrui and Swahili of Mombasa with the neighbouring Mijikenda of the main-land were basically friendly and represented an alliance of equals.²¹ Emery's observations of this relationship form a part of his record of daily life in Mombasa during those years: the Mijikenda would capture runaway slaves and be paid to return them; the Mazrui Sultan Suleman bin Ali consulted with Mijikenda chiefs; the Mijikenda were paid their annual payment; when there was some misunderstanding among the Mijikenda, the Swahili went to the mainland to make peace; Mijikenda leaders were called to Mombasa to be informed that the former Sultan no longer had authority over the town; the Mijikenda would be given cloth as presents; the Mijikenda regularly brought their produce into the town to trade, and Mombasa traders went occasionally to Kwa Jomvu and the mainland in search of ivory.²² Nowhere does Emery suggest that the Mombasans (Swahili or Mazrui) dominated the Mijikenda politically. In a general historical assessment of their relations Emery speaks of the Swahili as having united with the Mijikenda "in closest alliance" from the beginning of the 17th century.²³

At least by the beginning of the 19th century and probably before, the total Mijikenda population was considerably higher than the population of Mombasa town. In 1846 Guillain observed that the population of Mombasa had declined from over 5,000, twenty years earlier, to between 2,500 and 3,000. Krapf's estimate for Mombasa (in 1844) is considerably higher, between 8,000 and 10,000 whereas his estimate of the Mijikenda population is 50,000²⁴

In military terms the rural advantage in numbers may have been

means safe from rural attack. At one stage, during the only serious dispute (between the Swahili and the Mijikenda) which he recorded, Emery advised the Swahili how unwise it would be to provoke fighting with the Mijikenda. Referring to the same incident, he observed that no fighting took place because "both parties were afraid". A month later he reminded the Swahili to keep friends with the Mijikenda since they "are the whole support of the island".²⁵

Relations of the Swahili and the Mijikenda involved the whole gamut of ordinary and extraordinary contacts, and were generally characterized by respectful interdependence. Their relations varied with changing circumstances, but such variations did not affect the basic theme: two societies, living side by side, neither having permanent political or military ascendancy, or excessive economic control, over the other.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Mombasa was essentially a Muslim town. Emery described it as "wholly Mohammedan".²⁶ Its population was made up mainly of Swahili, with some Arabs and a small number of non-Muslim and Muslim Indians. There were eight mosques in the town, six of which had originally been built by the Swahili and two by the Arab community, and a ninth mosque in the nearby Swahili village of Kilindini.²⁷ The only Muslims living outside the town were in nearby dependent agricultural areas on the mainland, such as Mtwapa, a "village of 18 huts", and in Kilindini village which is described by Emery as being "in a ruinous state and thinly inhabited".²⁸ Muslims did not travel regularly off Mombasa island into the hinterland, except to go to specific markets, mainly Kwa Jomvu, which may have been held as infrequently as once a year, or exceptionally to meet Mijikenda chiefs in their villages.

As in the coastal towns of preceding centuries, Mombasa attracted non-Muslim rural visitors but few of them took up even semi-permanent residence. Some may have become urbanized and remained in the town, but the number who did so seems to have been small, with the exception of Mijikenda women married to Swahili; Emery observed that there was "constant intermarriage" between the Swahili and the Mijikenda.²⁹ Outside the town there was a marked absence of Muslim influence. There is no evidence that Muslims carried on any kind of religious proselytism, and the very nature of relations between them and the Mijikenda afforded little scope for religious interpenetration. The Mijikenda continued to follow their traditional religious beliefs and practices, and certainly there were no converts to Islam among them within their own society. If there

In the Shirazi Area

In the Shirazi-Vumba area, both the Segeju and the southern Digo developed special relations with the Vumba (the inhabitants of Vumba town). The Segeju helped the Vumba defeat the Shirazi in the early 17th century (c. 1630), and from that time on the Segeju and the Vumba had continual, close relations. At approximately the same time, the southern Digo of *Kaya Jombo* (Dzombo) also came into contact with the Vumba, and they traded regularly with each other. Relations between them became so close that, according to tradition, they never fought against each other. On occasion the Digo gave military support to the Vumba rulers. When faced with special difficulties, the Digo would in turn ask the Vumba for help, for they looked upon the Vumba as having higher supernatural powers than themselves. In spite of these close relations, the number of southern Digo who were converted to Islam seems to have been quite small. All such converts moved to live in Vumba town, where they were fully assimilated into town life.

Trading Activity Early in the 19th Century

During the first three decades of the 19th century, the pattern of trade in the Kenya coastal region was remarkably uniform. Trading activity dominated urban-rural relations and was the principal occasion for contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims. Political, military, social and other non-commercial contacts were relatively infrequent.

Overseas demand for indigenous produce came mainly from southern Arabia (for grain and timber) and India (for ivory and gum copal). Lamu and Mombasa had direct shipping contact with Arabia and India, and were centres for overseas export. Wasin carried on a specialized trade in mangrove timber with Arabia. The few other villages and towns with port facilities were less important for overseas trade, their harbours being unable to accommodate large ocean-going dhows; such places engaged in local coasting trade, among themselves and with Lamu and Mombasa, using smaller vessels to transport reduced quantities of goods. Goods destined for overseas markets were transhipped from Lamu and Mombasa. Imported items, such as cloth, beads and ironware, were unloaded at the ports of Lamu and Mombasa, and were distributed from there to smaller towns. Some trade took place with Zanzibar, but that port did not dominate or control the overseas trade of the Kenya coast. Pemba was the main supplier of grain to Mombasa.³¹

The complementary land trade within Kenya involved four main

hinterland people (the Mijikenda); iii) the Swahili; and iv) the Arabs. There was, in addition, a small group of resident Indian immigrants (Muslim and non-Muslim), but they were not of great importance until after 1830. The outline and details presented here refer to the Mombasa area; a somewhat similar pattern existed in the Lamu-Tana river area, involving the Pokomo and the Oromo, and in the Shirazi-Vumba area, involving the southern Digo.

Each of the main groups performed specific functions in the supply of produce for eventual overseas export. The Kamba and Oromo supplied indigenous goods (mainly ivory) to the Mijikenda, and to a certain extent (mainly after 1830) the Kamba also supplied directly to Mombasa.³² The Mijikenda supplied Mombasa with their own produce (ivory, grain, gum copal) and with goods (ivory) acquired from the inland people. The Swahili and Arabs obtained these goods from the Mijikenda in three ways: 1) the Mijikenda brought the goods into the town of Mombasa; 2) the Swahili and Arabs went to the mainland villages to look for the goods; 3) the Swahili and Arabs met the Mijikenda at a market town, such as Kwa Jomvu. It is not possible to know which of these three ways produced the largest volume of trade, but Emery's account of the continual carrying of goods into Mombasa by the Mijikenda, several times each month and even daily during some periods of the year, would indicate that this was the more regular way of supply. The other two ways are mentioned by Emery rather as exceptions. Only once during his two-year residence in Mombasa did the "inhabitants of the town" go to the mainland, into Mijikenda country, looking for ivory, and this was at a time of the year (September) when dhows were about to sail north and did not have sufficient cargo. The market at Kwa Jomvu is hardly mentioned by Emery. Many other writers have described this as an "annual" market, but we cannot be sure of its exact frequency or the extent of trade carried on there, in relation to the regular transport of items by the Mijikenda into Mombasa town itself. Finally, the fourth group (Arabs plus some Indians) stored the goods and eventually shipped them overseas. The chain of supply of imported items involved the same groups of people in reverse.

Direct contacts existed between inland non-Muslims, mainly the Kamba, and Muslim traders, but were infrequent.³³ In this respect the situation in Kenya was distinctly different from that of the Swahili coast south of Tanga, where Swahili and Arab traders had penetrated inland and established trading relations with the non-Muslim people of the interior by the end of the 18th or early in the 19th century.³⁴ In Kenya, the main occasion for contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims was trading at

Mijikenda brought produce into Mombasa. Unless Emery has failed to report the existence of important regular mainland markets, one would assume that, with the exception of Kwa Jomvu, no regular markets which might attract Muslim traders existed during this period on the mainland. The townspeople of Mombasa went to the mainland quite regularly to work in their fields, but not to trade. They would have known of the existence of mainland Mijikenda markets, but since these markets traded in perishables, which could be received more cheaply in Mombasa, there was no economic advantage to be gained by frequenting them. Intra-Mijikenda trade and Mijikenda trade with neighbouring people, the Bondei, Shambaa, Kamba, Waata and Oromo, was also important to the Mijikenda economy but did not involve any contact with townspeople or Muslims.³⁵

All trading contacts took place within the traditional market barter system. Trading relations were between equals and were essentially impermanent. Given the relatively high value of ivory on the world market, in comparison with the value of the goods supplied to the Mijikenda, it may seem that the town held a commercial trading advantage and accumulated some surplus. Nevertheless we cannot infer that the Mijikenda were not obtaining their own objective, the acquisition of prestige goods. The fact that the Mijikenda were able to set certain trading conditions, as in their requirement that beads and wire were to be supplied to them together, is an indication they were not altogether subservient in such matters. Since the Mijikenda were able to get ivory with relative ease, it does not appear that the town exerted undue economic pressure on the mainland. Some individual Mijikenda may have traded more or less regularly with the same persons in the town, but there is no indication of any permanent contractual trading during the early 19th century. Nor is there any evidence that Muslim traders from the town actively sought trading contacts in the rural hinterland.

The Emigration of Muslims to the Mainland

The determined effort by the Omani Busaidi Arabs to dominate the northern Swahili coast in the early 19th century was aimed primarily at the few Muslim settlements which represented actual or potential rival influence: Pate, Lamu, Mombasa and Pemba.³⁶ The effective take-over of these areas by the Busaidi (Lamu in 1813, Pemba in 1822, Pate in 1824 and Mombasa in 1837) displaced many Muslims and caused them to emigrate from the island towns to mainland rural areas. There they quickly undertook the foundation and development of new settlements. As a result

Those emigrating from Pemba were, for the most part, Mazrui and their supporters. From Pate, those displaced were Nabhani Swahili and their followers; they settled at Ozi on the mainland.³⁷ In the case of Mombasa, most of the Mazrui inhabitants emigrated, to escape the risk of reprisal or foreign rule; they and some of their followers, Swahili and slaves, quickly formed new settlements at Takaungu, north of Mombasa and at Gasi, to the south. Guillain estimated that some 1,500 persons took part in the move from Mombasa.³⁸

The above-mentioned instances of Muslim dispersal and resettlement can be compared, in a reverse sense, to the abandonment of mainland towns by Muslim at the beginning of the 17th century. Then the Oromo overland "invasion" had driven the Muslims out of mainland towns into more concentrated communities in the Lamu archipelago and Mombasa; now the Busaidi maritime invasion forced many Muslims out of the island towns.

The increase in Muslim presence on the mainland, which was not an objective but certainly a consequence of Busaidi aggression, greatly extended the restricted areas of Muslim settlement as they had existed for the preceding two centuries. Muslim communities in the new mainland settlements found themselves living far closer to non-Muslim rural people, both south and west of Lamu archipelago, and north and south of Mombasa. The potential for contacts between Muslims and non-Muslim Africans was now greater than at any time since the beginning of the 17th century.

The Effect of Economic Change and the Growth of Trade on Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims after 1830

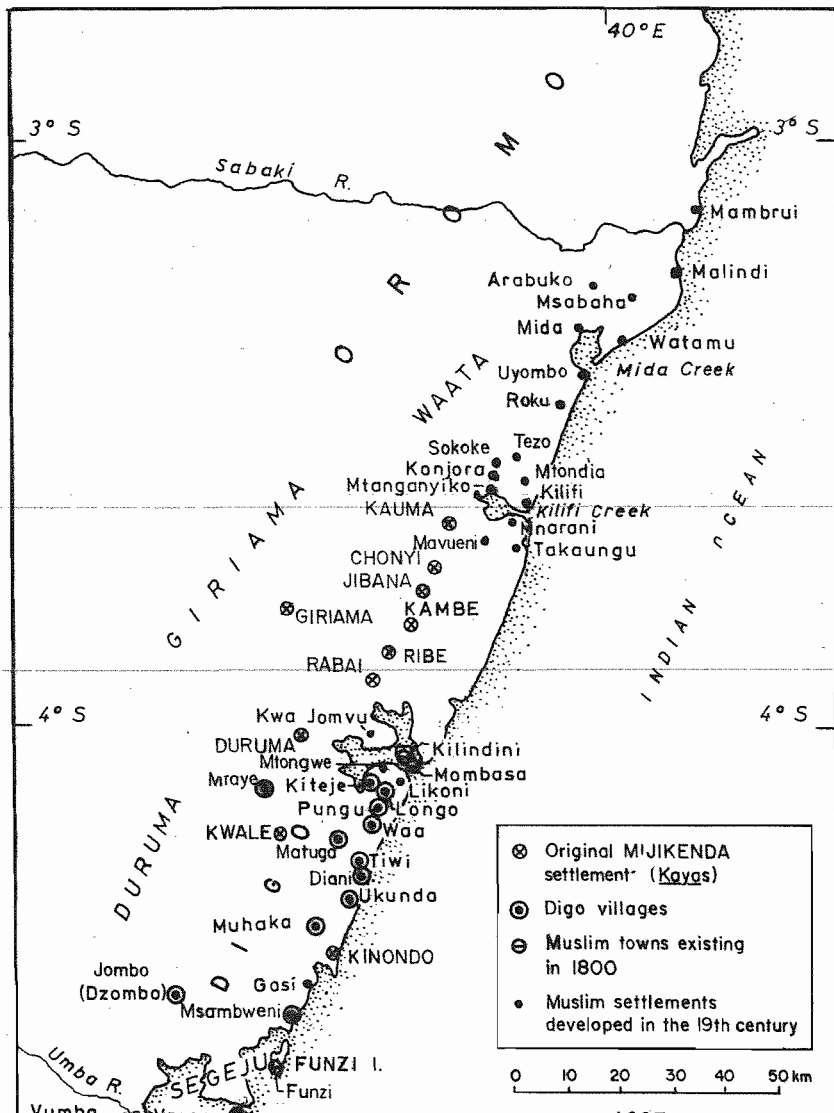
The pattern of trade which had prevailed on the Kenya coast during the first three decades of the 19th century began to change in the 1830s. Although Lamu and Mombasa fell subject to Busaidi political control (centred at Zanzibar after 1840), their trade and economic development progressed along somewhat independent lines, stimulated by the same external economic forces which the Omani Busaidi Arabs manipulated so successfully in building their East African commercial empire.³⁹ The two ports continued in their traditional role as suppliers of grain and ivory, with an important difference: the demand for both these products rose after 1835.

As to ivory, the entry of the United States and the western countries of

supply was unable to respond to this stimulus, and therefore Arabs and Swahili, who in the early 19th century had been satisfied to depend on the Mijikenda, Pokomo and Oromo to bring them ivory, sought direct access to its source. Swahili-Arab caravans began moving inland from Mombasa in the late 1830s, and from Vanga possibly earlier, as the level of potential profit made it worthwhile to incur extra cost. By the 1840s there were regular caravans into the interior, but they were still relatively small. At first this caravan traffic merely supplemented the traditional sources of ivory. By the 1860s, however, Swahili-Arab caravans dominated the trade. Similarly, expeditions from Lamu, and later Kau, moved inland as far as the upper Tana river in search of ivory.⁴¹

As to grain, the traditional pattern of export, from Lamu and Pemba to Mombasa and southern Arabia, was disrupted by the development of extensive clove plantations on the islands of Pemba and Zanzibar, both of which became large importers of grain because the great numbers of slaves used on the newly developed clove plantations produced no food but had to be fed. It has been estimated that the resident slave population of Zanzibar and Pemba more than tripled, from 59,500 at the beginning of 1830 to 183,000 in 1876.⁴³ The Kenya coast, from Vanga to Lamu, became the granary of East Africa during the 1840-1890 period, as Muslim enterprise developed large and small plantations: in the Vanga area (rice) and the Shimboni peninsula, around Gasi, on the mainland south and north of Mombasa, and in the Mazrui-dominated areas between Takaungu and Msabaha.⁴⁴ Further north, Malindi was refounded in 1861 and prospered as a plantation town, and there was also a general increase in agricultural production on the mainland coast of the Lamu-Tana river area.

Each town and area had its own peculiar economic character. When Malindi was refounded, its rural hinterland was unoccupied. Vast tracts of land were subsequently brought under cultivation, and there was almost no limit to plantation expansion; in 1877 Kirk described fields of millet extending 10-15 miles inland. In the hinterland of Mombasa the soil was generally poorer, and plantation growth was limited because parts of the surrounding coastal plain were already inhabited. Mombasa increased its grain output beginning in the 1840s, but the increase was proportionally less than that in the Takaungu, Malindi and Lamu areas. The economy of Mombasa continued to rely heavily on trade throughout the century. Malindi, in contrast, had virtually no inland trade.⁴⁵ These differences were important in determining the nature and extent of contacts between



Even this increase in agricultural production was not able to meet the demand, and the Swahili and Arabs in the coastal towns intensified trading contacts with their rural African neighbours, in particular the Mijikenda, in the search for grain (millet, maize, sesame, rice).⁴⁶ Muslim traders were no longer simply content to receive goods from rural people, as in the past, but tried to increase their supply, seeking commercial advantage at its source. Something similar had happened on a smaller scale in the 1820s in Mombasa: a last-minute quest for ivory on the mainland before dhows made their seasonal voyage north. But now the quest for increasing supplies from rural people was not a mere seasonal effort. It was the beginning of a trend which was to persist and increase for the next half century.

By the middle of the 19th century, trade on the coast had entered fully into a period of expansion. Stimulated by initiative from the town, contacts between Muslim traders and non-Muslim potential trading partners intensified. As competition increased, Muslim traders sought contractual arrangements in order to ensure supplies, and thereby their rural counterparts in turn, acquired market power. As each side foresaw an opportunity for gain, personal relations stemming from trade grew up; these had no precedent in earlier centuries. The transition from a market to a contract system did not take place instantaneously or uniformly throughout the coast, nor did it affect all persons involved in trade. In some areas, where urban-rural relations were basically unstable or unfriendly, no perceptible change occurred. Even in more favourable areas, such as the coastal plain south of Mombasa, where "bonds of personal attachment" came to exist, the new circumstances seem to have affected only a minority of the traders.⁴⁷

The opening up of caravan routes into the interior is a classic example of economic penetration inland. The circumstances that stimulated the drive into the interior also encouraged trade and economic development in the inland areas of the coast itself. With similar motives, Arab and Swahili entrepreneurs began to engage in commercial ventures even nearer home, in the rural areas near coastal towns, particularly in the more easily accessible parts of the coastal plain. If ivory was the coveted product of the distant interior, grain was its less glamorous counterpart in rural areas near the coast. Whether or not there was a connection between the rise in demand for these two products and the Omani Busaidi occupation of the island towns, it is clear that the occupation, and the ensuing migration of Muslims to the mainland, accelerated economic change.

the overseas Muslim world than with the African continent. Without assessing the absolute validity of this statement, we can say that it was less true after 1820 than before. The Muslims who moved to the mainland coastal plain, to settle, plant, and trade, found their livelihood dependent on their relations with mainland rural people. In some places Muslims were living adjacent to, and even intermingled with, rural non-Muslims. Migration to the mainland, coupled with economic growth, produced a double effect. Not only were Muslims settled nearer to rural people than at any time during the previous two centuries, but economic circumstances were such as to encourage them into closer trading contacts than before. Even those Muslims who continued to live in the island towns, including new Muslim groups (notably the Baluchi) who came with the Busaidi invasion, turned their economic sights inland.

Economic growth and an increase in demand led to a change in the nature and scope of trading contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims. This change was marked especially by the increase of urban initiative in promoting trade with the rural areas, and, as we might expect, led to a change in the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. As Muslim entrepreneurs took the initiative on the mainland, relations which had previously been official and group-oriented came to be more informal and personal.⁴⁸

Oral evidence indicates that a high proportion of the first conversions to Islam in the rural areas came about through trade and commercial contacts with Muslims. This is not to imply that proselytism and conversion were commercially motivated, but simply that they arose as a consequence of an initial trading contact; commercial interests created common affinities, which in turn gave rise to personal relations favourable to conversion. Proselytism was not carried out corporately by Muslim groups, but by individuals. A number of traders were learned Muslims, who were well versed in the doctrine of their faith and had a genuine belief in the value of Islam and its ennobling qualities. In many cases the Muslims who befriended early converts are remembered by name, an excellent testimony to the personal nature of Muslim proselytism. The number of individuals involved in such relationships seems to have been only a minority and was never very high, but there is no doubt that the friendships were real. Many informants relate the history of these early conversions by referring to the non-Muslim by name, and by them stating "he had a friend" and naming the Muslim friend.⁴⁹

Although trading initiative shifted to town centres, rural settlement

people were bringing goods into the towns, differences in distance from rural villages to urban centres were relatively unimportant, within certain limits; the urban recipient of rural produce cared little whether it came from 10 or 30 kilometres away and, all other factors being equal, had no reason to discriminate as to place of origin. The town constituted the single market place attracting the surrounding rural inhabitants to bring in their goods. As long as goods and labour were not scarce, carrying added little to their value or cost. So, for example, in the Mombasa area in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, as far as we know, all Mijikenda groups participated in the town trade, wherever they lived. All had access to the town on equal economic terms, and no single group dominated the trade.⁵⁰ The entrepreneurial energies of the active town trader, however, extended into the entire hinterland of the town, and had no single focal point. He looked widely, viewing the whole rural area selectively, and sought to establish contact first with those places and people who lived nearest to him or who represented the largest prospective market and source of supply.

The Extension of Islamization into Rural Areas, 1830-1900

The Lamu Archipelago and Tana River area

There were many variations in local situations, and relations of Muslims and non-Muslims differed from one part of the coast to another, and even from one rural village to another in the same part of the coast. Whereas general conditions arose after 1830 which led to closer relations between Muslims and non-Muslim, and consequently proselytism and conversion, specific circumstances varied. The beginning of conversions occurred in different times at different places, and in some places did not occur at all. Similarly, where initial conversions had taken place, Islamization did not follow its course in a uniform way but in varying local patterns.

The Lamu Archipelago and Tana River area

The Oromo pastoralists with a strong traditional religion, tended to resist Islamic influence. Until the beginning of their decline in the middle of the 19th century, the Oromo dominated the mainland opposite the Lamu archipelago, and north and south of the Tana river. They ranged from the present-day Somali border as far south as Kilifi creek and effectively restricted settlement by other people (except the Pokomo) in this whole area.

In 1810 the Somali were mostly north of the river Juba (although there is evidence that they had been further south in earlier centuries). At

Oromo, they started a steady southward migration; this continued for the rest of the century and brought them across the Juba river into northern Kenya.⁵¹ The Somali were already Muslim when they began arriving in Kenya. The main Islamizing influence on them had been Hadhrami and Yemeni Araos, who had immigrated into Somalia beginning in the 14th century. By the time of the ascendancy of the Ajuran state (1500-1650) in the Benadir, Islamization among the Somali was well under way, and it continued after the Ajuran decline from power.⁵² Therefore, in relation to the history of Islamization in the coastal region, the Somali are simply an immigrant Muslim group.

The Oromo and the Somali lived an uneasy co-existence, which fluctuated from mutual understanding to sporadic disagreement. As the 19th century progressed and the Somali pushed further south at the expense of Oromo grazing land and territory, relations between them became less friendly and eventually changed to a continual open conflict. By the 1860s the Oromo had lost control of the area between the Juba and the Tana rivers. The Oromo-Somali conflict reached its climax in the 1865-70 period, when many Oromo were killed, captured or dispersed, and the Oromo population was reduced.⁵³ The aggressive behaviour of the Somali caused the Oromo to resist Islam and to consider almost all Muslims (including the Omani Busaidi Arabs) their enemies.

The Nabhani Swahili of Pate, with whom the Oromo had carried on trade from the middle of the 17th century, constituted an exception to the general Oromo enmity towards Muslims. The Oromo continued to have friendly relations with the Nabhani Swahili and to trade with them throughout the 19th century, even after the Nabhani had abandoned Pate island and taken up residence on the mainland. Their relations had begun mainly for purposes of trade, but were reinforced by political circumstances, when the Oromo and the Nabhani Swahili allied with each other against the Somali-Busaidi axis.⁵⁴ Nevertheless this alliance remained very much one of convenience, in view of religious differences and the general hostility felt by the Oromo towards Muslims. It has been estimated that whereas in the 1860s there were some 20,000 Oromo in 1893 only 2,000-3,000 Oromo remained in the Tana river area.⁵⁵ There are few known written sources which mention Muslim Oromo before the end of the 19th century, and these refer to Oromo who had left their own people and joined up with Muslims: in one case with Bwana Mataka of Siyu (in the 1840s) and in another case with a band of Somali (in the 1890s).⁵⁶ After 1870 some Oromo settled near Witu (traditionally their territory), where they maintained their own separate villages, between Witu and the Tana

Witu), and some of them may very well have been converted, but to all extents they had abandoned their nomadic ways.⁵⁷ Few Oromo were converted to Islam before the end of the 19th century. Most Oromo who remained in the Tana river area after 1870 were not converted until the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁸

During the 19th century the Boni were in contact with Bajun who had settled in mainland agricultural villages to the north of Lamu, and there was some intermarriage between them, but Boni traditional society was not affected by Islamic influence. Even in the late 1880s the inland settlements where Boni, Bajun and escaped slaves lived together comprised separate ethnic villages, and there is no evidence of Boni conversion to Islam. After the decline of the Oromo north of the Tana river, some Boni became friendly to the Somali who moved into the area.⁵⁹ A number of present-day Boni villages are Muslim; their Islamization did not take place until after 1900 but its history has not yet been recorded.⁶⁰ There is no evidence of Islamization among the Dahalo and the Waata in the 19th century.

The friendly relations of the Pokomo (particularly the lower Pokomo) and the Nabhani Swahili began in the 17th century and continued throughout the 19th century. The Nabhani suffered reverses during this period and were forced to migrate on more than one occasion, but their relations with the Pokomo were not interrupted. During the second decade of the 19th century some Nabhani Swahili moved from Pate, then under pressure from the Busaidi, to Ozi in the Tana river delta area. Even earlier some Nabhani may have resided at Ozi, in a subsidiary mainland settlement.⁶¹ After 1822 the ruler of Pate, Fumo Luti bin Sheikh, moved into exile at Ozi; the mainland history of the Nabhani Swahili of Pate begins at that time. The Nabhani maintained their claim to the town of Pate but never returned to rule there.

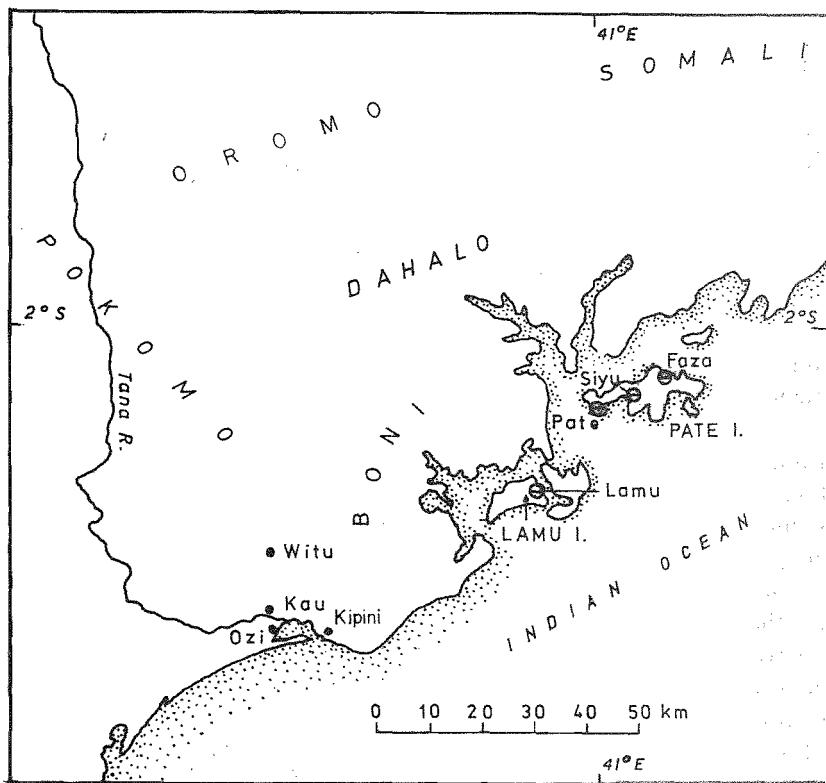
In the middle of the 19th century, the Nabhani set up their capital at Kau, about 15 kilometres up the Tana river in lower Pokomo country. During the years the Nabhani Swahili resided at Kau and in the Ozi area, some Islamization undoubtedly occurred among the lower Pokomo who lived near them. When Krapf visited Takaungu in 1846 he was offered the guide services of Haji Abdallah, a Pokomo Muslim convert from Kau who had moved to Mombasa.⁶² In 1862, when the Busaidi Arabs attacked and captured Kau, the Nabhani Swahili were forced to move further inland to Witu, from where they continued their longstanding relations with the lower Pokomo. Such relations seem to have varied from one clan group to another. Whereas the Buu Pokomo made regular tribute payments in

operative or subordinate to the Swahili, who occasionally raided them and took grain by force. Some of the Pokomo who worked on Swahili plantations near Witu were converted to Islam, as were Pokomo married to Swahili. These were all persons who had effectively left their own society.⁶³

By the time the Busaidi captured Kau, the town of Lamu was well-established as the main northern port of their East African empire, with a thriving slave trade (as a point of re-export) and a prosperous expanding plantation economy on the mainland. Kau became an advance trading base for Lamu, and in this way the Busaidi commercial network penetrated directly into Pokomo country. Traders from Lamu, as well as Swahili and Arabs who were resident at Kau, organised expeditions up along the Tana river in search of ivory. The Pokomo also brought ivory downriver to Kau (and Kipini), where it was bought and then forwarded to Lamu.⁶⁴

The Pokomo also had relations with the Somali, but these were less frequent and more distant than their relations with either the Swahili or Arabs. The Oromo-Somali conflict spilled over into Pokomo country, in the form of attacks and sporadic raiding by the Somali, mainly against the upper Pokomo, throughout the remainder of the century.⁶⁵ The fact that the Pokomo were occasionally raided by Muslims (the Swahili at Witu and the Somali) is indicative of the general situation. Intra-island and inter-island political feuds, the Nabhani-Busaidi struggle and the Oromo-Somali dispute, all entailed armed warfare and created a prevailing atmosphere of instability. This affected the daily life of the Pokomo, because they found themselves caught in the cross-fire of multiple conflicts, sometimes even within their very homeland. There was more contention and instability in this area than anywhere else on the Kenya coast, with the possible exception of the area around Gasi (from 1865-85). Few Pokomo villages would have lived securely without experiencing direct hostility or threats at some time during each decade of the century. The circumstances were anything but favourable to stable peaceful relations with their Muslim neighbours, and it is not surprising that the influence of Islam among the Pokomo was negligible, especially when we remember that Pokomo social and political organization remained very much intact for most of the century.⁶⁶

By 1875 Kau and Kipini were growing in importance as trading centres, and there is evidence that trade was increasing and becoming more varied. The international demand for ivory remained high, and the usual items of exchange (iron implements, cloth and beads) were supplemented with new varieties of cloth and other items: kerosene, sugar, salt, jewelry and, by the



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a Pokomo's sole livelihood, but now the number of Pokomo involved in some aspect of trade increased. At the same time, in the 1880s, a number of upper Pokomo (from Ndera, Gwano, and Ndura) began to migrate to lower Pokomo country and to settle among the Kalindi in Chara, where there was a large land surplus; most of these immigrants were young men with no strong ties to their traditional religion.⁶⁸ A variety of reasons are given for their migration: to escape Somali raids, to escape sorcery accusations, to get rice land from the Kalindi, and to trade and get cloth at Kau. Once settled in Chara, they began to produce a rice surplus and to trade with the Muslim traders who had moved into the area from Lamu.

In 1890 several important events occurred in the Lamu archipelago and Tana river area: the signing of the 2nd Anglo-German agreement, by which the Germans agreed to withdraw from the area, the issue of a far-reaching anti-slavery decree, and the capture of Witu and the destruction of Swahili power there by the British.⁶⁹ As slave labour became scarce and the production of Lamu's mainland plantations declined, Muslim traders were particularly anxious to acquire the surplus grain which the upper Pokomo immigrants at Chara were able to supply. Under the influence of these Muslim traders, a number of whom were also religious teachers, the upper Pokomo in Chara began to be converted after 1890. Had the upper Pokomo stayed in Chara, it is possible that they would have remained nothing more than a community of immigrant Muslim converts, but about 1910 some of them began to return to their upper Pokomo homeland, where the British presence had restricted Somali raids and brought peace. The arrival of indigenous upper Pokomo Muslim, together with Arab and Bajun traders who entered upper Pokomo country for the first time, set the stage for an intense struggle between the traditional Pokomo elders and the Pokomo Muslim converts. During the First World War Islam was already beginning to spread as more upper Pokomo were converted, and today most upper Pokomo are Muslim.

Although some Kalindi became Muslim, other lower Pokomo, notably the Buu, were less well disposed to Muslim influence. In 1887 the first Lutheran missionaries arrived at Ngao to begin their work among the lower Pokomo. By the mid-1890s some Ngao and Ngatana children were already attending mission schools, and by 1914 it was clear that the lower Pokomo were opting for Christianity. To this day Islam has made little progress among them.⁷⁰

Mazrui of Takaungu and the Swahili of Mombasa. The Mazrui move to the mainland (at Takaungu and Gasi) changed but did not rupture their long-standing contacts with the Mijikenda. The Mazrui at Takaungu found themselves particularly close to the Kauma, and closer than before to the Chonyi and the Giriama, especially as the latter expanded northwards. On the other hand, the Jibana, Kambe, Ribe, Rabai and Duruma, all of whom were now further away, had only limited relations with the Takaungu Mazrui and never came strongly under their influence. These five northern Mijikenda groups continued their traditional contacts with the Swahili of Mombasa; as the Swahili settled in the outlying mainland areas, where they undertook trade and cultivation after 1840, such contacts tended to take place not only within Mombasa town but outside as well. With the Busaidi Arabs, however, the northern Mijikenda did not have close relations.

In 1837 many Mazrui abandoned Mombasa and went north to Takaungu, a small village which had been founded by Mazrui some three years earlier.⁷¹ The Mazrui at Takaungu sought good relations with the nearby Mijikenda for evident reasons. As a refugee group, still under threat of attack by the Busaidi Arabs (now entrenched in Mombasa some 50 kilometres away), they could not afford to antagonize their new neighbours. For several months, until they were able to harvest sufficient crops, the increasing Mazrui population at Takaungu depended on the Kauma and others for food. The Kauma *kaya*, the closest Mijikenda village to Takaungu, was only 20 kilometres distant. Some of the agricultural land then being cultivated by the Kauma in the Mavueni area was even closer to Takaungu, only some 10 kilometres away.⁷² Previously the Kauma had been the most distant Mijikenda, and perhaps the least in contact with the Mazrui and Swahili in Mombasa, but now a Muslim community was established in the coastal plain directly below their hilltop village; as it turned out, the demand of that community for Mijikenda-supplied goods was to grow steadily.

The Mazrui had more than one reason to seek the friendship of the Mijikenda groups living nearest to them. They needed to establish contacts to replace suppliers who had been bringing them goods in Mombasa. Some of the Mazrui at Takaungu had previously engaged in exporting from Mombasa to Arabia and India, and they now required local supplies of grain, copal and ivory in order to continue that trade. Any raiding or fighting with their mainland neighbours would have damaged immediate and future trading prospects. Throughout the 1840s the Mazrui remained

Krapf visited Takaungu at the end of 1843, he described it as a "threatened refuge settlement".⁷³ Borrowing the advice given by Emery to the Mombasa Swahili in 1825, we might say that the Kauma, the Chonyi and the Giriama were the "whole support" of the Mazrui community at Takaungu. Good relations between the Mazrui and these northern Mijikenda groups were certainly of mutual benefit. The Kauma and the Chonyi developed regular trade with the Mazrui.⁷⁴ The Giriama shifted much of their ivory trade from Mombasa to Takaungu, which was closer to their source of supply among the Oromo and the Waata; as the century progressed, the Giriama supplied vast quantities of grain and copal. The Mazrui also had occasional direct trading contacts with the Oromo, to whom they paid a "friendship tribute".⁷⁵ In contrast, the numerous and prosperous northern Digo on the mainland south of Mombasa, who were among the main suppliers to the Mazrui before 1837, did not have easy access to Takaungu and continued to direct their trade to Mombasa town.⁷⁶

Oral traditions indicate that the original settlement pattern of the northern Mijikenda was a consequence of hostile relations with the Oromo. When the Mijikenda first arrived in the hinterland area of Mombasa, continuing Oromo aggression forced them into palisaded refuges (*kayas*), where they lived in relative isolation from outside contacts and influence.⁷⁷ The northern Mijikenda carried on extensive trade among themselves and with their mainland neighbours (the Waata, the Kamba and eventually the Oromo), as well as with the Arabs and Swahili of Mombasa. There was considerable inter-*kaya* migration and intermarriage, but little increase in numbers or expansion into new territory. This was in contrast with the settlement pattern of the Digo, who specifically mention their growing numbers as one of the reasons for their expansion throughout the coastal plain south of Mombasa during the latter part of the 17th and the whole of the 18th century.⁷⁸

Neither the Kauma nor the Chonyi were very numerous; in 1848 Rebmann estimated their numbers at 1,000 and 1,500 respectively.⁷⁹ We have already noted that in 1837 the total population of Takaungu, including Arabs, Swahili and slaves, may have been as low as 1,500; in 1845, when Krapf found the Mazrui developing agricultural land south of Takaungu, he estimated that there were 40-50 heads of families and 3,000-4,000 slaves.⁸⁰ These general figures are a useful indication of the population scale which prevailed at the time. Probably there were no more than 200 adult men among the Kauma, and only slightly more among the

there was only one mosque, the Jumaa Mosque built by Rashid bin Salim bin Abdallah (who had led the whole migration from Mombasa) is further confirmation of the smallness of the community.⁸¹

In the late 1830s and early 1840s some Kauma were already visiting Takaungu. At the end of the 1843 Krapft was told about the "heathen Nyika and saw several belonging to the Kauma tribe" who were in the town at the time. Oral tradition confirms that a number of Kauma moved back and forth between *kaya* Kauma and Takaungu in order to trade, occasionally residing temporarily in the town and eventually moving permanently into Takaungu.⁸² The number of Kauma taking part in this trade was small, possibly only a handful in the beginning.⁸³ Oral evidence indicates they were probably innovative individuals whose energies were channelled into commercial enterprise. Once they had taken up residence in the town, they adopted Islam. It is not easy to date the precise beginning of such conversions, but as early as 1846 Krapf mentions one Mtwana wa Kai, an early Mijikenda convert in Takaungu.⁸⁴

By the middle of the 19th century the Oromo had begun to withdraw towards the Tana river, vacating large areas north of Kilifi creek. It thus became possible for other people to expand into this area. The Giriama, the Mazrui and the Busaidi all took advantage of the Oromo retreat and the subsequent availability of high-potential agricultural land. The Giriama, the largest northern Mijikenda group, with a population of some 8,000 at this time, were already expanding north of their original *kaya*; by 1850 some had settled in the Godoma area west of Takaungu. From Godoma they continued to spread steadily northwards along the inland plateau; by the late 1860s they were west of Mida creek, by the 1880s they had reached Jilore, and in about 1890 they crossed north of the Sabaki river.⁸⁵ The Mazrui expansion northwards throughout a 50-kilometre stretch of coastal plain as far as Msabaha and Arabuko, paralleled that of the Giriama and in some cases may have been prompted by it. Further north still, possibly in response to Mazrui expansion in that direction, the Busaidi established and extended their sphere of territorial influence, with the 1861 founding of the plantation towns of Malindi and Mambri (on the sites of long-abandoned earlier settlements).⁸⁶

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, groups of Mazrui, moving north away from Takaungu, established several new villages on the coastal plain, which they found uncultivated and uninhabited, with the exception of Waata hunters. Some Mazrui may have moved because of internal disputes, after the succession to power of Rashid bin Khamis, who was not

new villages maintained a second home in Takaungu — since the Kwavi were then raiding the coast, and a Busaidi attack remained a possibility until the early 1860s. The new Mazrui villages were basically agricultural, and in some cases may have been started in order to increase the output of grain, already known to be profitable export commodity. This phase of expansion lasted approximately ten years, c. 1855-1865, and marked the beginning of a revival of Muslim settlements on the mainland north of Kilifi creek. Numerous small villages sprang up throughout a part of the Kenya coast which had been the exclusive domain of hunters and pastoralists for the preceding two centuries: Mnarani, Mavueni, Kibokoni, Mtondia, Mkenge, Mtanganyiko, Koweni, Konjora, Roka, Sokoke, Uyuombo, Shaka, Mida, Watamu, Tezo, Msabaha and Arubuko. Specific Mazrui families are associated with the origins of each village. Not all the villages were of equal agricultural or commercial importance; some were more like large family manor estates. Many of the villages still exist today; others flourished until near the end of the century and then were abandoned.⁸⁷

The reconciliation of the Takaungu Mazrui with the Busaidi Arabs took place in the mid-1860s and was confirmed by the visit of Rashid bin Khamis to Sultan Majid in Zanzibar. The military outcome of the reconciliation (a Mazrui-built fort at Takaungu was garrisoned by a Hadhrami military force answerable to the Sultan) was of minor importance in comparison with the economic consequences. Takaungu and all the other Mazrui villages were fully incorporated into the Zanzibar commercial system, with a subsequent rise in the external demand for grain, and the entry of outside capital and enterprise, starting with the Hadhrami who manned the fort; these developments, in turn, stimulated agricultural expansion in the new villages and an increase in trade with the Mijikenda.⁸⁸

The Mazrui built mosques in most of the new villages, and some of the villages became important centres of Muslim influence. This was particularly true of villages which were well-situated to develop close trade relations with neighbouring Mijikenda, and of villages where a strong Muslim personality (or personalities) lived. The towns nearest to *kaya* Kauma and *kaya* Chonyi attracted Kauma and Chonyi immigrants, whereas the towns further north tended to have closer relations with the Giriama who lived inland from them.⁸⁹ Soon after its foundation sometime in the 1850s, the port of Mtanganyiko became more important than even Takaungu as a commercial and trading centre. Its site at the head of Kilifi creek made it more accessible to the K...

Takaungu together were exporting more grain than Mombasa; in the 1890s Mtanganyiko exported twice as much as Takaungu.⁹⁰ Some Kauma Muslim traders moved from Mavueni and Takaungu, to Mtanganyiko, and new Kauma immigrants were attracted there from the *kaya*. Mtanganyiko came to be the main urban residence of Kauma converts and the eventual site of a Quranic school (*chuo*) whose impact was felt even on the coast south of Mombasa.⁹¹

All Kauma converts lived in Muslim villages or towns, and none resided in *kaya* Kauma. They would go back to visit their village and relatives, but the only ones who went back to stay on in the village were those who abandoned Islam and returned to their traditional ways. Some converts may have encouraged individual friends or relatives to leave the *kaya* and move to the town; this is probably how the number of converts initially increased. To some extent the presence of an immigrant convert community in a village or town tended to attract more immigrants and converts to that town. Thus some villages came to have a number of converts, while other villages had none. Even in towns with large numbers of converts, the converts did not represent more than a minority, of the total population of any given Mijikenda group. There is no record of any attempt to proselytise from within the *kaya*. Thus, though the converts influenced some individuals within traditional society, there was no direct challenge to traditional society itself. When visiting their original village, the converts would pray alone. Since they had a mosque in town, it did not occur to them to build a mosque in or near the *kaya*. For them, Islam was distinct and incompatible with the traditional, at least in broad terms, and was associated with a move to the town.

There is evidence that the Mazrui took the initiative in fostering close relations with the Kauma, the Chonyi and the Giriama. The name of individual Mazrui who did so are well remembered, and these persons are described as “the one who went to the Giriama” or “the first to befriend the Kauma”. Their motives were almost always commercial, for example, the quest for local goods (ivory, grain, and copal), but at the same time their relations with the Mijikenda were not limited to trade. Abdallah bin Muhammed bin Nassor, one of the first traders to be in close contact with the Kauma, was a “religious teacher who converted many Kauma”. Juma bin Khamis bin Mbaruk, who established trading contacts with the Giriama and also founded the village of Roka and built its mosque, was a competent medical practitioner (“hodari wa utabibu”); he cured many Giriama, and some of them were subsequently converted to Islam. Some

Giriama convert, for example, was the brother of a girl married to a Muslim.⁹²

The rate at which individuals were converted is not certain, but by the 1880s the Kauma in Mtanganyiko were running a Quranic school. The three Kauma teachers there (later joined by two more) were all children of converts. The pattern of unschooled converts sending their children to school (as also happened among the Digo) was instrumental in injecting a certain vitality into the convert community. Indeed the most impressive aspect of Kauma Islamization was its intensity not its extent. Kauma converts were known among the Mazrui for their faithful adherence to Islam, and few Kauma converts returned to live in their traditional society. By the 1880s, a second generation of Kauma Muslims existed. They were not many in number, but some of them had been schooled in their faith and were active in spreading it. The Kauma Quranic school, the first Mijikenda-run school at the coast, came to be known throughout northern Mijikenda country and south of Mombasa among early Digo converts; some Digo Muslims came to live in Mtanganyiko or sent their children to learn there, since the first Digo Quranic school had not yet been founded.⁹³

None of the early Kauma converts continued to live in the rural areas. Their conversion was clearly associated with a move away from their rural home to a town or village with a foreign Muslim population. Since the early converts were sufficiently numerous to maintain their own ethnic identity and were not totally assimilated by the foreign culture or community (with the exception of women married into it), it would be inaccurate to consider their conversion as thoroughly detribalising. The converts established their own communities in the towns where they lived and so became one more among resident Muslim groups. The first converts were known as *haji* (plural: *mahaji*), a term adopted by non-Muslims to refer to Muslim converts as persons who had gone over to Islam. (The term is more appropriately applied to a Muslim who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.)

Conversions split the Kauma community into two groups, the majority remaining traditionalists. Since the converts moved away from the *kaya*, no ideological conflict or internal struggle developed within Kauma society. The two groups lived apart, with some movement of individuals between them, but at no time did the Kauma Muslims attempt to Islamize the whole of Kauma society. From the 1870s onwards, as the second generation of Muslims grew up away from the *kaya* (the first generation to do so), their contacts with traditional relatives decreased, and bonds between Muslims and traditionalists

circumstances but in smaller numbers than the Kauma. On the whole the Chonyi and the Giriama were considered to be less ready converts than the Kauma, and some of those who were converted are said to have practised their faith half-heartedly or to have left off being Muslim altogether.

The Giriama who migrated and settled north of Kilifi creek after 1850 (the only northern Mijikenda to do so in large numbers) were well situated to develop contacts with the inhabitants of the northern Mazrui villages. We have already seen how the Giriama brought much of their surplus grain to the port of Mtanganyiko. The other Mazrui villages were primarily plantation settlements; but they carried on some local trade with the Giriama; such villages as Roka (through Wesa) and Watamu were small ports and attracted the usual items of export. In the 1880s, when the Giriama reached the Jilore area, they established contact with Muslims resident in Malindi and Mamburi, but these two towns were then at the height of their plantation prosperity and had almost no tradition of hinterland trade. Such trade increased marginally during the 1890s but did not really develop until after 1900.⁹⁴ Giriama settled in Malindi and in some of the Mazrui villages, and were converted to Islam; there were *haji* communities of Giriama converts in Mida, Watamu, Roka and Tezo. Towards the end of the century a Giriama Muslim community also grew up inland at Kakuyuni, under the influence of Muslim traders from Malindi. The *haji* community at Mida, which had close relations with the converts at Kakuyuni, became particularly important and established itself as an independent settlement apart from the Mazrui.⁹⁵ The number of Giriama in close contact with Muslims was small, and only a minority of the Giriama were converted to Islam; the great majority continued to adhere to their traditional religious beliefs.

The Mazrui dominated the area from Takaungu as far north as Msabaha, but did not exert much influence south of Takaungu, where the Jibana, Kambe, Ribe, Rabai and Duruma tended to maintain relations with the Swahili of Mombasa. The Swahili, who had always played an important commercial role as traders were also small-scale agriculturalists and had been cultivating for centuries, on Mombasa island and in parts of the surrounding mainland. Even the Swahili who used slave labour in their fields very often worked side by side with their slaves.

After 1840 agriculture expanded, though farms in the Mombasa area remained small, on the average, in comparison with the plantations of Malindi and Mamburi. Swahili (and Arabs) began to move off Mombasa island to develop mainland farms, especially along the coastal plain to the

agricultural expansion; this continued throughout the 1850s and 1860s, and was so vigorously carried on by the mid-1860s that New, in commenting on the Swahili, could term agriculture "one of their chief pursuits".⁹⁶

At approximately the time the Swahili were moving north off Mombasa island to occupy parts of the coastal plain, the northern Mijikenda began to disperse out of their *kayas*. This began to take place among the Rabai and the Giriama in the 1840s, among the Duruma, Ribe, Chonyi and Jibana in the 1850s and among the Kambe and Kauma in the 1860s.⁹⁷ During the second half of the 19th century the Duruma expanded along the inland plateau to the south (in the same way the Giriama expanded northwards). As a result many Duruma moved some distance away from Mombasa, into areas where they had almost no contact with Muslims. The dispersion of the other northern Mijikenda was more of a local residential expansion, to settle on the hillsides surrounding the *kayas* and on the nearby coastal plain, in areas which had previously been used only for cultivation. By 1870 the residential pattern of the northern Mijikenda had been dramatically transformed. Instead of living all together in densely-populated *kayas*, they had dispersed into scattered homesteads. This change in residential pattern, with a corresponding change in social and economic organization, can be considered the beginning of a decline in the central authority of the *kaya* elders and all they stood for. Nevertheless, the northern Mijikenda still constituted a strongly-traditional society and were little affected by Muslim influence for the remainder of the 19th century.

In some areas north of Mombasa, there was an intermingling of Mijikenda and Swahili, and their farms came to be interspersed. Extra-*kaya* expansion and off-island agricultural development progressed along a collision course; this could have led to tension and conflict between the Mijikenda and the Swahili, had it not been for the existence of a good deal of land that was still unused. In the mid-1860s New observed how Swahili farmers were "encroaching year by year" on Mijikenda land, but at the same time he noted that most of that land was "left to run wild" and that by paying a small fee the Swahili could "settle where they pleased".⁹⁸ The Mijikenda, now residing in dispersed homesteads, still looked to the elders of *kaya* for ritual and judicial authority, but their new decentralised living pattern meant that individuals were in a better position to develop trade and other contacts with Muslims.

After 1840 Mombasa's inland trade also expanded, as part of the general economic growth then taking place throughout the East African coast.

Swahili and Arab entrepreneurs, some of whom were agriculturalists as well began their search for ivory in the interior; at the same time small-scale traders were increasingly active in the hinterland of Mombasa, looking for local produce such as grain and copal (and, later, copra and rubber), for which there was an overseas demand. The northern Mijikenda tended to go into the town less; they maintained trade relations rather with the townsmen who had settled in the outlying areas or who came into those areas specifically to trade. Relations between the northern Mijikenda and the Muslims of Mombasa gradually changed from being corporate and group-oriented to a variety of individual contacts; this increase in personal relations encouraged and facilitated proselytism and conversion. Small villages such as Magombani and Kidutani became intermediary trading centres where Mijikenda and Swahili met to carry on the numerous small commercial transactions that increasingly made up urban-rural contacts. As the century progressed, some of these villages came to have small groups of resident Mijikenda converts, such as the Jibana Muslim community at Kidutani.⁹⁹ A number of northern Mijikenda also continued to visit and to settle in Mombasa town, where they were converted, but details of this are not known. The trend was for Swahili to move to the mainland, closer to the northern Mijikenda, where they developed more personal relations than in the past and attracted a few Mijikenda to settle near them. Few Muslims are known to have settled in or to have lived near the northern Mijikenda *kayas*; the main instance was a small Muslim community which began at Ribe (where they still live today) when New brought a Muslim helper with him to the Mission Station there.¹⁰⁰

In 1865 New remarked that, though the Mijikenda "have been associating with the Muhammadans of the coast for centuries, Islam has made scarcely any impression upon them . . . the great body of the people remain unaffected by Muhammadanism". He described Mijikenda converts as persons "who have left their infidel relations and taken up their abode with the faithful."¹⁰¹ The description was valid for all northern Mijikenda converts; those who were converted as a result of contact with Mombasa Muslims opted out of *kaya* life, as did those under Mazrui influence. The Mijikenda had been in contact with Muslims for some 250 years, possibly more, but not until an energetic Muslim commercial expansion took place on the mainland did appreciably closer relations develop between Muslims and the Mijikenda. Even then, only a small number of northern Mijikenda were converted. The process of Islamization among them involved a peripheral emigration of individuals, leaving the core of their society intact. By the end of the century convert

north of Mombasa, and in some places existed in their own right. The pattern of northern Mijikenda Islamization was firmly fixed, moving along a tangent away from traditional society.

South of Mombasa: the Digo

At first glance it might seem that the northern Digo found themselves in more or less the same circumstances as the northern Mijikenda, but a number of factors caused their relations with Muslims to develop differently. The geographical position of the northern Digo favoured trade with Mombasa and with the Swahili village of Mtongwe. Between 1830 and 1900 Muslim (Arab, Swahili, Baluchi) entrepreneurs established more extensive trade relations with the Digo than with any other Mijikenda group. The volume of Digo trade with Mombasa (and Mtongwe) probably exceeded that of all the northern Mijikenda together. More important than volume of trade was the fact that some Digo became trading agents and partners, working in collaboration with Muslims. Near the end of the century a number of Muslim traders settled in Digo villages, adding to the already growing Muslim influence among the Digo. And the spread of the Qadiriyya Muslim brotherhood (*tariqa*) south of Mombasa served to intensify Islamic fervour among early Digo converts

The Digo were by far the largest Mijikenda group. In 1845 Krapf estimated their number at 30,000, and that of all the other Mijikenda at 20,000. While not distinguishing between the northern and southern Digo, Krapf did mention the names of various Digo sub-groups (Mtawe, Shimba, Lungo, Digo and Jombo) in a way indicating that the northern Digo constituted the majority of the total Digo population.¹⁰² Oral evidence relating to their migration and expansion throughout the coastal plain between Likoni and Kinondo is corroborative. The northern Digo, definitely more than half of the total, probably numbered some 20,000.

Furthermore, many of the northern Digo lived on the coastal plain near Mombasa, and so had easier access to the town than did the northern Mijikenda. Whereas the latter had settled in the hills, relatively far inland, and had remained within their original *kaya* villages, the Digo had initially settled both in the hills, at Kwale, and on the coastal plain, at Kinondo. The village of Kinondo was the only original Mijikenda *kaya* to have been founded on the coastal plain, and was an exception to the overall pattern of 17th century Mijikenda settlement. Before the end of the 17th century some of the Digo who had settled at Kwale, in the northernmost ridges of the Shimba hills range, moved down onto the plain to found *kaya*...

Timbwani, Boffu and other villages south of Mombasa.¹⁰³ This expansion brought about the northern Digo nearer than any of the northern Mijikenda to Mombasa town.

In 1837, at the beginning of the Busaidi period in Mombasa, there were fourteen northern Digo villages (all called *kayas*, but without the precise historical Mijikenda *kayas*): Kwale, Mtaye (Mtawe), Boinbo, Kiteje, Boffu, Timbwani, Similani (Pungu), Longo, Tiwi, Waa, Diani, Likunda, Muhaka and Kinondo. Twelve of these (all except Kwale and Mtaye) were in the coastal plain; seven of the twelve were within ten kilometres of Mombasa; and four of the remaining five were easily accessible by boat since they were not far inland. At this time the Digo were steadily expanding into new areas, and a number of subsidiary settlements surrounded the main *kayas* and were dependent on them.¹⁰⁴ Viewed in economic terms, the northern Digo villages were in a unique position: they were especially attractive to traders who sought trading opportunities on the mainland, and at the same time they restricted Swahili agricultural expansion south of Mombasa. The northern Digo were of considerable commercial importance to Mombasa, political changes having caused some of the northern Mijikenda to shift their trade to Takaungu.

Being a matrilineal people, the Digo had a complex network of family and clan relations among various villages.¹⁰⁵ They also had a long history of dispersion and migration from one village to another. Firm social controls existed within each village, but there was an absence of rigid regimentation; variation was tolerated to a high degree, and there was considerable scope for personal initiative. These circumstances facilitated initial conversions among the Digo, as well as contacts between early converts, and helped Islam to spread from the villages where it first took root.

The northern Digo consistently testify that they were first attracted to Islam because of their friendly relations with the Tangana Swahili living at Mtongwe on the southern mainland. The village of Mtongwe had been founded by immigrants from the island of Pemba. Pemba had a long history of close relations with Mombasa and formed part of the Mazrui sphere of influence from the middle of the 18th to the early 19th century. Throughout this period there was a constant movement of people and goods between the two islands. Pemba supplying grain to Mombasa; Guillain says that persons would withdraw temporarily to Pemba in time of troubles in Mombasa town, and that Pemba attracted immigrant settlers from Mombasa.¹⁰⁶ After the Busaidi occupation of Pemba in 1822, contacts between Mombasa and Pemba declined but we know from

Pemba in 1824-26. At sometime during the late 1820s or the early 1830s a group of Tangana Swahili emigrated from Pemba and settled near Kilindini creek on the mainland south of Mombasa, and founded the village of Mtongwe. Muslim villages are known to have existed previously on the southern mainland (Rezende's map of 1634 shows two such villages) but apparently no permanent Muslim settlement existed there during the early 19th century.¹⁰⁷ Oral tradition has it that Mtongwe was founded on the site of an earlier abandoned settlement.

The Tangana, one of the "three tribes" of Mombasa had been traditionally allies of the Digo since the 18th century, and most likely sought the approval of the Digo elders of *kaya* Longo and *kaya* Kiteje (the nearest Digo villages) before settling at Mtongwe. The Digo say they themselves were already in the Mtongwe area and drew back peacefully when the Tangana came to live there. It is not certain why the Tangana settled on the mainland instead of on Mombasa island. They had been agriculturalists in Pemba and conditions on the mainland were probably like those they were accustomed to, suitable for growing cereal crops and for pasturing goats and cattle. Perhaps they anticipated difficulty in integrating into town life, or they may simply have wished to escape the then prevailing tension and intrigue in Mombasa town. The settlers comprised members of two main family groups, some smaller families and a number of slaves. The new village at Mtongwe established itself quickly. Describing his visit to the southern mainland in 1845 Krapt mentions the "Mohammedan village of Mtongwe". Von der Decken's 1868 map shows two settlements in the Mtongwe area, "Mkugoni" and "Kwa Djaka", with cultivated fields lying to the west.¹⁰⁸ These two settlements corresponded to the original areas occupied by the two main family groups, each of which had dug a well and built a mosque. Mtongwe's first mosque, the Mkunguni Mosque (the first to be built in the southern hinterland of Mombasa in the 19th century), is said to have been built on the foundation of older mosque ruins; the second mosque, the Girande Mosque (also known as Jaka's Mosque), was built some time after the Mkunguni Mosque.¹⁰⁹ Both family groups planted coconut trees and began to cultivate extensively; some family members established trading contacts with the neighbouring Digo. A second southern mainland village, Likoni (also on Von der Decken's map), was founded by Kilindini Swahili. Some trade was carried on there, but it remained primarily agricultural and did not develop into as important a commercial and trading centre as Mtongwe.

Muslim migration to the south of Mombasa began in much the same way as that to the north. Swahili farmers and traders moved to Mtongwe

coast at Gasi. Subsequent developments, however, were quite different from what occurred north of Mombasa and north of Takaungu, for the Digo already occupied much of the coastal plain and effectively prevented further expansion and settlement by Muslims. The Swahili at Mtongwe and Likoni extended their plantations quite far to the south and the west — in the 1860s New noted the “thriving plantations” of “Mtongwe and Lakone” — but the presence of nearby Digo villages limited further growth.¹¹⁰ The Mazrui remained in the immediate vicinity of Gasi, and established only one other settlement south of Mombasa, a refuge-retreat village which they built for defensive purposes in the inland hills at Mwele. The Gasi Mazrui had friendly contacts with the Swahili of Mtongwe, but were more important to the southern than the northern Digo.

The establishment of Mtongwe meant that Muslims and non-Muslims were living closer to each other than in any other part of the Mombasa hinterland, and possibly closer than on any other other part of the Kenya coast at this time. Thus began the friendly relations which have continued up to the present between the Tangana of Mtongwe and the Digo. Their relations were (and are still) so close that, according to the northern Digo, the relationship between them and the Tangana is not one of blood-brotherhood, rather the Tangana *are* Digo. By 1860 they were collaborating in many ways. The Digo were involved in regular trade with the Tangana; some Digo had taken up residence in Mtongwe for purposes of trade and business or to work for the Tangana, and some Tangana had married Digo women. Relations were particularly close between Mtongwe and the villages of Longo and Kiteje; Tangana elders knew and met regularly with their Digo counterparts from these two villages.

Northern Digo contacts with Muslims were not limited to the Tangana of Mtongwe. Many Digo who had previously (i.e. before the 1830s) been taking produce into Mombasa town now found it more convenient to direct their trade to Mtongwe, but others continued to ferry goods across Kilindini creek to the island. Eventually Mtongwe succeeded in capturing a large share of the northern Digo carrying trade, but this success never constituted a monopoly. As the century progressed an increasing number of Digo took up semi-permanent residence in Mombasa to do business or to trade, and Digo are also known to have moved to settle in Takaungu or Mtanganyiko where they came under Muslim influence. Perhaps more important for relations of Muslims and non-Muslims was the fact that Mombasa traders found themselves forced to adopt a more aggressive approach to trade with the Digo, in order to counteract Mtongwe's influence. Muslims (Baluchi, Swahili, Bajun and Arabs) from Mombasa

large market of Ngare (*chete cha Ngare*), in an effort to maintain and promote trading contacts. Ngare market, the largest indigenous market in the whole area, was held every four days in accordance with Digo custom, and attracted traders from Mombasa and Mtongwe and from all the northern Digo villages, including the inland *kayas* of Kwale and Mtaye. Mombasa traders seem to have bypassed Kiteje and Longo (where the Mtongwe Tangana were known to have special interests), and sought instead to establish and strengthen ties with such villages as Pungu, Waa and Tiwi which were slightly further south.

In some cases Digo acted as the local trading agents of Muslims or came to have a Muslim patron in town who assisted them in their trading ventures. In addition to engaging in local and urban trade, the Digo also got involved in the incipient trade with the interior, for which they were well situated, since the early inland caravan routes from Mombasa passed through Digo and Duruma country. Mijikenda, including Digo, acted as caravan porters, and there is evidence that a few wealthy Digo joined caravan expeditions and traded upcountry in partnership with Swahili and Arabs. Some Digo, from Diani and further south, carried on regular trade with Pemba.¹¹¹ Thus the northern Digo developed a wide range of commercial contacts. As trade grew the Digo became more involved with Muslims. Through their relations with Muslim traders a number of northern Digo were attracted and converted to Islam. One informant described how his father was converted by an Arab trader who said: "You are a Mnyika, convert, and let's eat together."¹¹²

Conversions to Islam also took place as a result of sickness and spirit possession. Muslim healers or medicine-men (*mganga*, pl. *waganga*), who were sometimes religious teachers as well, carried on an active practice among the northern Digo, and came to exert a marked influence on them. Digo would go to Mtongwe or Mombasa for medical treatment, when their traditional cures failed them, and Muslim medicine-men frequented the rural hinterland in search of patients. As early as the 1840s Krapf came across a wandering-Muslim *mganga* in a village south of Likoni.¹¹³ That the Digo turned to Muslim *waganga* was consistent with their concept of sickness and the spirit world. Traditionally they practised a variety of therapeutic treatments and ceremonies (including exorcism), depending on the sickness or spirit involved. Once a Digo had become closely involved with non-Digo Muslims, he also considered himself subject to the influence of alien Muslim spirits. The malevolent action of these spirits could only be counteracted by the corresponding medicinal power of Islam possessed by a Muslim *mganga*. Conversion to Islam represented full-

identification with that power. One Muslim healer is described as having told a Digo who was seriously ill: "You are possessed by the spirit of an Arab; if you convert, you will get better."¹¹⁴

Some writers have noted the appeal to traditional societies of Islam's superior "magical" or spiritual efficacy.¹¹⁵ There is no doubt that some Digo sensed a higher form of healing strength in Islam. What really seems to have mattered, however, was the suitability of specific cures, not whether Muslim medicine was more powerful than traditional medicine. Digo methods were considered to be impotent against Muslim spirits, because such spirits came from outside Digo society. Through conversion the convert gained access, without rejecting traditional cures, to supernatural resources which could cope with foreign spirits (and perhaps with a few local ones as well). The spiritual power of Islam could prove equally ineffectual in dealing with a Digo (non-Muslim) spirit; Muslim converts afflicted by traditional sicknesses and spirits turned to their own *waganga* when Muslim medicine failed.¹¹⁶ Muslim and traditional *waganga* may have competed, but their methods complemented each other. The use of Muslim charms, side by side with traditional ones, came to be widespread, even among non-Muslims.¹¹⁷

Conversions arising out of treatment by Muslim *waganga* were recognized by the Digo as leading to a particular kind of Islam, *Uislamu wa pepo*, what we might loosely call "Islam brought on by spirits", as if the convert had somehow become a Muslim in order to deal with some spirits which otherwise would have got the better of him. Such conversions tended to be superficial, in comparison with conversions resulting from trading contacts and friendships with Muslims. They did not imply any change in traditional beliefs and practices; the world of Muslim spirits was simply incorporated into a traditional context.

In the middle of the 19th century, northern Digo society was decentralized. There was no single overall ruler, nor had there been a strong centralized polity since the founding of the first two settlements at Kinondo and Kwale. Each village (*kaya*) had a predominant clan (usually the founding clan, but occasionally a later usurping clan), which took precedence in the *kaya*. There were a number of prominent elders, who were the recognized guardians of tradition, religious well-being, social order and justice; the senior elder (*mzee*) was usually chosen from among the matrilineal descendants of the original founder of the *kaya*. The village *ngambi*, a kind of council which had specific powers and operated in semi-secrecy, had several grades of membership. Promotion was not automatic,

elders of two or more villages would meet as necessary to settle disputes and to consider matters of mutual interest. Because of extensive inter-village marriage and migration, many of the elders were known, and in some cases related to the elders of other neighbouring *kayas*.¹¹⁸

The Muslims who entered Digo country first established contact with village elders, usually to request permission to trade. Early Muslim traders are known to have close relations with the *mzee*, and other Digo elders, of such villages as Kiteje, Longo, Similani (Pungu), Waa, Tiwi and Diani, and also with the elders of a number of smaller villages. A high proportion of the early Digo converts were elders and members of the *ngambi* of their village. They were men of influence, and there is unanimity in attributing outstanding personal traits to a number of them.¹¹⁹ It is clear that they came into close contact with Muslims because of the positions they held, though there is also evidence that other less influential Digo had contacts with Muslims. Were we to compile a "Who's Who" of 500 prominent northern Digo in the 19th century, many would have been in contact with Muslim traders at some time before 1885, and possibly as many as 50 of them had been converted to Islam by that time. In terms of total population the converts were few, but because of their status they legitimized Islam, and had an influence far beyond their numbers. Collectively their conversions probably had a greater impact than the conversion of a single powerful ruler of a centralized state.

Some Digo may have become Muslim during the 1830s and 1840s, and moved to live in a Muslim town or village such as Mombasa or Mtongwe. It was not until the 1850s or early 1860s that a number of Digo converts decided to continue to live in their home village. Oral tradition confirms that those who did so were few; in one village they were "a handful" and in another "between fifteen and twenty".¹²⁰ When we remember that the total Digo population numbered in the thousands, the proportion of converts appears insignificant; there was no mass movement of conversions. Given the prominent status of many of the converts, it is not surprising that they chose to remain in their home villages. For them, choosing Islam was in some way a re-enforcement of their status as leaders and did not represent a rejection of their traditional way of life. Through conversion they came to share in the prestigious and encroaching world of Islam, whose values and success (material as well as spiritual) must have been genuinely attractive to them. That some Digo converts decided to continue to live in their rural homes was an unprecedented innovation which had never occurred during previous centuries, as far as we know, and which did not

In the mid-1860s New observed how “a few Wadigo . . . have partially adopted the Kisuaheli dress, and proudly call themselves Islam (sic)”.¹²¹ The implication of New’s statement is that the Digo who had simply adopted Muslim dress were not really Muslim at all. Early Christian missionaries were quick to observe that it was relatively easy for the African to accept Islam and to claim to be a Muslim. They considered Islam to be a highly accommodating religion, since it required only verbal assent to an all-powerful God and recognition of Muhammed as God’s prophet, and little immediate change on the part of the convert. A Muslim convert was not expected to conform to the demands of Islamic orthodoxy, even allowing for the broadest interpretation of orthodoxy.¹²²

The initial demands of Islam on the individual Digo convert who remained in his village were minimal; in most ways his life went on as before. Indeed, it continued as before to the degree that he wanted it to, for he was living in an environment where there were no mosques, no Muslim teachers, no call to prayer and no social pressures to conform to accepted Muslim standards. The early convert did not feel any conflict of interests or incompatibility between traditional customs and Islam. He may have lived according to his new religion in such details as dress and giving Muslim names to his children, or in more important matters directly related to religious practice, such as prayer and fasting. Most converts behaved as Muslims in some way; but behaviour varied widely. For example, many early converts did not bring up their children as Muslims; others not only raised their children as Muslims; but even sent away wives who refused to be converted. Among converts to *Uislamu wa pepo* some were nominal Muslims and did not show any Muslim behaviour whatsoever. Others are said to have even forgotten their Muslim names and to have gone back to ask the Muslim who had converted them what their Muslim name was.¹²³

The Muslim convert who learned to pray and actually prayed his Muslim prayers, with whatever frequency, tended to become a person apart, but many traditional and family customs existed to counteract this tendency. Most early converts did not discard customary practices; they continued to attend traditional ceremonies and meetings, even when some of these involved behaviour contrary to orthodox Islam, for example, the drinking of alcohol (palm-wine) at *ngambi* meetings. When two or more converts began to meet, for example, to pray together, they formed a group apart and created social tension. As the number of converts increased, they came to form a small community in a particular village. They began to establish norms for themselves as to what was considered correct or

the open the latent conflict between Digo customs and the basic tenets of Islam, not at the level of sophisticated points of Islamic law or asceticism but as regards the most elementary requirement of their new religion.

The converts who were in regular contact with foreign Muslims in Mtongwe and Mombasa tended to adopt higher Muslim standards. More important for the initial consolidation of Islam in the rural areas, converts were in close contact with each other. When they realized they should not eat the meat of an animal which had died a natural death (*mfiu*) or had not been slaughtered according to proper ritual, some converts began to eat apart. On Fridays they would go to pray in one of the mosques in Mtongwe. During the month of Ramadhan they would fast, and then go to Mtongwe (or Mombasa) to celebrate the Idd. By eating and praying apart, and celebrating Muslim feasts together, the Muslim converts acquired identity as a separate group; they were encouraged in this by their Muslim friends in Mtongwe.¹²⁴

Only three mosques were built by Digo in the 19th century. The first two mosques were built in the 1880s: the Tuliani Mosque, built by Mohamed Mwaganyuma in Pungu, and the Kingwede Mosque, built by Hamisi Mwapodzo in Ndenyenye (present day Ngombeni). The third mosque, the Tiwi (Mkoyo) Mosque, was built by Mwinyi Haji wa Bwika in Tiwi just at the turn of the century. There is evidence that the building of the first two mosques, and their subsequent use, provoked hostility among Digo traditionalists. There were a number of influential elders among the converts, but the great majority of elders had not adopted Islam. As long as the religious practice of the early Digo converts was centred on Mtongwe and Mombasa, their new faith was, to a great extent, removed from village life and was tolerated. When the first mosques were built in Digo villages, and the small Muslim community began to practise its faith within the village, attitudes changed. The presence of an Islamic institution (a mosque) within Digo country increased anti-Muslim feeling among the traditionalists, and marked the beginning of a struggle between them and Muslim converts, which was to continue well into the 20th century. The term *haji*, which was applied to converts, is remembered as being originally a term of contempt. Converts and their families were still a part of traditional society, but their faith meant some personal inconvenience; for example, converts sometimes found it difficult to get girls to marry them. The Kingwede Mosque fell into disuse (and ruins) after Hamisi Mwapodzo's death. "People did not want religion" and "We didn't need it" are the kinds of explanation given for this happening.¹²⁵

The early converts had little or no religious training, but as a result of

Mtongwe and Mombasa, and even as far away as Mtanganyiko, to learn in Quranic schools. In some cases their children, fully schooled in the Muslim tradition, later became prominent teachers and exerted a strong personal influence on religious propagation and standards. Ali bin Mohamed, the son of Mohamed Mwaganyuma, went to study in Mtanganyiko. When he came back to Pungu in the 1880s, after finishing his studies, he began to proselytise among his fellow Digo. He would go with his father to the market at Ngare (where his father was trading) and preach Islam there. Popular reaction was hostile ("he was jeered and shouted down") but this does not seem to have deterred him. Ali began to teach the children of Digo converts. He taught Saidi, the son of Hamisi Mwapodzo, and Saidi himself became a teacher and went to Matuga, where he is said to have converted many people. Other pupils of Ali were also instrumental in spreading Islam in other parts of Digo country. Ali even convinced his father, Mohamed Mwaganyuma, to stop taking part in the *ngambi* because some elements in it, for example, drinking palm-wine, were incompatible with Islam. The Digo themselves, in this case, a few of the educated second generation Muslims, took the initiative in propagating Islam in an active, crusading way; it was clear that Islam had taken root among them.¹²⁶

The new generation of educated Digo Muslims were few in number, but they were helped greatly in their efforts to sustain and to spread Islam by the arrival, in the 1880s and later, of a small number of foreign Muslims, who took up residence in various Digo villages, mainly to cultivate and to trade. In most cases the Muslim settlers had been invited by a Digo friend who knew them from visits to Mtongwe or Mombasa. The settlers lived among the Digo, in some cases married Digo women, and in general became very much a part of the village community where they settled. Included among the new settlers were Muslim teachers, who gave further impetus to the growing influence of Islam among the Digo.

Towards the end of the century, in the 1890s, Sheikh Swalehe Az al-Din of the Qadiri brotherhood (*tariqa*) came to Mombasa from Brava. Through his efforts the Qadiriya began among the Digo; by 1900 it had spread to Mtongwe, Pungu and Bombo. A number of the early converts, and their educated children, came into contact with the Qadiriya and became active members. In this way they were encouraged to go deeper in their faith and to increase their efforts to proselytise among their fellow Digo.¹²⁷

The southern Digo in the Jombo area were subject to the same kinds of Muslim influence as the northern Digo, but Islamization among them

conducive to regular, peaceful trade. Hostilities between the Mazrui (at Gasi) and the Busaidi (at Zanzibar and Mombasa) continued almost to the end of the 19th century; and there was frequent raiding in the countryside, of the Mazrui against the Digo, and of the Digo against one another. The southern Digo had a wide range of contacts with Muslims. In addition to their long-standing relations with the Vumba, they had contacts with the Segeju living at Pongwe and with the Mazrui at Gasi. Towards the end of the 19th century, the southern Digo began trading with the Tangana of Mtongwe and with itinerant Baluchi traders from Mombasa. Being further inland than the northern Digo, however, they were somewhat isolated, and were not intensively exposed to Muslim traders. The southern Digo also had close relations with Digo further south (in present-day Tanga Region of Tanzania), some of whom had already been converted to Islam. Conversions among the southern Digo were slow and sporadic. By the end of the century no Digo mosque had been built in Southern Digo country. The few southern Digo who were converted seem to have had close relations with northern Digo converts (some of whom were their relatives or members of the same clan), and made regular visits to fellow converts in some of the northern Digo villages.¹²⁸

In assessing the historical significance of Islamization among the Digo, a distinction must be made between: 1) Islamization as an urban or town-centred phenomenon, which does not appreciably affect traditional rural society, and 2) Islamization which occurs in rural areas. In the former, which we may call "urban Islamization", persons visiting or migrating to towns from rural areas come under the influence of Islam (one of many urban influences) and are converted. Their conversion is an integral part of their urbanization; ultimately they remain or settle in the town, possibly returning to the countryside for occasional visits, but no longer committed to their earlier way of life. Islamization centred in towns is usually a detribalizing process, similar to what Tringham calls Islamization "by assimilation" (although groups of converts often retain some sense of tribal identity).¹²⁹ Islamization in the rural areas, or "rural Islamization", implies the spread of Islamic religious (not only cultural) influence outside towns, either through the conversion of indigenous persons who continue to live in rural areas, or through the return of town converts to their original rural home. Urban Islamization has been going on for centuries along the Kenya coast, ever since the first Muslim immigrants settled there. As far as we know, it was the only kind of Islamization which occurred for approximately one thousand years. Rural Islamization only began in the second half of the 19th century. This may seem surprising, in view of the

Islamization in rural areas can occur quite rapidly; where circumstances are unfavourable, the relations of Muslims and non-Muslims may bring no appreciable Islamic influence to the non-Muslims, even over a period of centuries.

FOOTNOTES

1. H. N. Chittick, "Discoveries in the Lamu Archipelago", *Azania*, II (1967), pp. 37-67, and "Manda and the Immigration of the Shirazi", Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi, Paper No. 119, May, 1979
2. J. de V. Allen, "Swahili History Revisited", Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi, Paper No. 76, February, 1977, pp. 2-5; H. N. Chittick, "The Peopling of the East African Coast", pp. 16-43, in H. N. Chittick and R. I. Rotberg (editors), *East Africa and the Orient*, New York, 1975.
3. C. Pellat (ed), *Less Prairies d'or*, Paris, 1962, p. 84, 93; C. H. Stigand, *The Land of Zinj*, London, 1913, p. 9; J. S. Trimingham, "The Arab Geographers and the East African Coast", pp. 115-146 in H. N. Chittick and R. I. Rotberg (editors). A. F. Robinson, "The Shirazi Colonization of East Africa: Vumba", *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 7(1939), pp. 92-112. The reference on p. 93 is to oral information from Omari bin Stambuli, then Qadhi of Tanga. Also, oral information from Saggaf Ba-Alawi, Wasin Island, 24th July, 1976.
4. A. H. J. Prins, *The Swahili-speaking Peoples of Zanzibar and the East African Coast*, London, 1967, pp. 34-35; J. de V. Allen, "Settlement Patterns on the East African Coast. AD 800-1900", Paper presented to the VIIIth Panafrican Congress for Pre-history and Quarternary Studies, Nairobi, 1977, Table I, and "Some Aspects of Swahili Economic History", Dept. of History, University of Nairobi, Staff Seminar Paper No. 6, December, 1976, p. 5.
5. Letter of J. B. Emery to W. D. Cooley, 20 December, 1833, Records of the Royal Geographical Society, Emery Ms file.
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8. J. Kirkman, "Historical Archaeology in Kenya", *The Antiquaries Journal*, Jan-April, 1957, Vol. 37 Nos. 1-2, pp. 16-28.
9. T. T. Spear, *The Kaya Complex*, pp. 30-31.
10. F. J. Berg, "The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500-1900", *Journal of African History*, IX, 1 (1968) pp. 35-56, Cf. pp. 36-40; Prins, p. 45-46; C. R. Boxer and C. de Azevedo, *Fort Jesus and the Portuguese in Mombasa, 1593-1729*, London, 1960, p. 42.
11. C. S. Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast*, London, 1971, pp. 61-62, 87-93; J. de V. Allen, "Swahili Culture Reconsidered; Some Historical Implications of the Material Culture of the

12. M. Ylvisaker, *Lamu in the Nineteenth Century: Land, Trade, and Politics*, Boston University, 1979, p. 21, 23; J. Gray, *The British in Mombasa 1824-1826* London, 1957, p. 60. Prins, pp. 11-20.
13. Nicholls, pp. 86-87.
14. Ylvisaker, Chapter 2.
15. Von der Decken's map of 1868, published in C. C. Von Der Decken, *Reisen in ost Africa*, Leipzig, 1869, shows the Dahalo, not the Waata, occupying the entire coastal plain from Kilifi North to Malindi. As the Giriama migrated north after 1850, they met only Waata hunters. Spear, pp. 67-68, 89.
16. Spear, pp. 108-III. Guillaïn states that the northernmost village is that of Kauma. Guillaïn, *Documents*, Vol. II, Paris, 1845, p. 245. Even the 1868 map of Von der Decken, based on his 1862 trip, shows no villages north of Koromio, which is due west of Takaungu.
17. Oral information, Mohamed bin Matano Mwakutanga, Mtongwe, 20th August 1969; Juma Zani, Kundutsi, 19th December 1967, 12th September 1968, 27th April 1970; Hamisi Mwatuwano, Waa, 14th December 1967.
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19. Ylvisaker, pp. 22, 38-39; T. Boteler, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia*, Vol. 1, London 1835, p. 387, 394; R. Bunge, *Islamization among the Upper Pokomo*, Syracuse, 1973, p. 5, 59-60; Nicholls, pp. 61-62.
20. Capt. W. F. Owen, *Narrative of Voyages to explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar*, 2 Vols, London, 1833. Vol. 1, pp. 420-421.
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25. Emery's Journal, entries for 11-12-13/7/1825 and 16/8/1825.
26. Letter of J. B. Emery to W. D. Cooley 20/12/1833, Emery MS. File, Royal Geographical Society.

28. Letter of J. B. Emery to W. D. Cooley 5/2/1834, Emery Correspondence Block 1834-1840, Royal Geographical Society.
29. Letter of J. B. Emery to W. D. Cooley 20/12/1833.
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31. A. M. H. Sheriff, "The Rise of a Commercial Empire: an Aspect of the Economic History of Zanzibar, 1770-1873", Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1971, pp. 307-310. McKay, pp. 164-169. Nicholls, Ch. III, pp. 74-100.
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47. The expression quoted is used by M. Nash, "The Organization of Economic Life", in G. Dalton (editor) *Tribal and Peasant Economies*, New York, 1967, p. 7.
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48. Berg, p. 108.
49. Oral information, Hamisi Mwatuwano, Waa 14/12/67, Abdallah Mwatari, Diani, 23/1/72, Mwinyi Hamisi wa Bwika, Tiwi, 13/12/79.

79. Spear, p. 8.
80. See footnote 38. Koffsky, p. 38; Krapf, p. 151.
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82. Oral information, Mohamed Abdallah Mazrui, Takaungu, 12/12/79.
83. Spear, p. 92.
84. Oral information, Mohamed Abdallah Mazrui, Takaungu, 12/12/79; Koffsky, p. 39.
85. Spear, pp. 109-110.
86. Cooper, pp. 82-83; Koffsky, p. 71.
87. Oral information, Mohamed Abdallah Mazrui, Takaungu, 23/10/79; Koffsky, pp. 31-32, 68-71.
88. Koffsky, pp. 63-66.
89. Oral information, Yusuf bin Husein, Gede, 22/10/79.
90. Spear, p. 83.
91. Oral information, Mbarakali Mwapodzo, Ngombeni, 6/11/66; Uthman bin Sheikh Mwinyi, Pungu, 3/9/73, Mohamed Abdallah Mazrui, Takaungu, 23/10/79 and 12/12/79.
92. Oral information, Bakari Shombo, Dabaso, 21/4/79, Yusuf bin Husein, Gede, 21/10/79, Mohamed Abdallah Mazrui, Takaungu, 12/12/79.
94. Berg, p. 254; Cooper, p. 145; Spear, pp. 88-92, 138.
95. Oral information, Yusuf bin Husein and Binti Maalim Jumaa, Gede, 22/4/79.
96. Cooper, pp. 98-103; New, p. 62.
97. Spear, pp. 108-111; Berg, pp. 249-251.
98. New, pp. 75-76.
99. Berg, 107-108, 209-210; Spear, 93-94, 137.
100. Oral information, Mwidani wa Tofiki, Ribe, 10/4/80; New, p. 138.
101. New, p. 57, 102.
102. Krapf, Vol. II, pp. 91, 97-100.
103. Oral information, Juma Zani, Kundutsi, 19/12/67 and 12/9/68; Mohamed bin Matano Mwakutanga, Mtongwe, 20/8/69.
104. Oral information, Abdallah Mwatari, Diani, 13/12/67; Juma Zani, Kundutsi, 27/4/70.
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108. Krapf, p. 267. See footnote 15.

51. E. R. Turton, "Bantu, Galla and Somali Migration in the Horn of Africa: A Reassessment of the Juba/Tana Area" *Journal of African History*, XVI 4(1975), pp. 519-537.
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53. I. M. Lewis, "The Somali Conquest of the Horn of Africa", *Journal of African History* I, 1(1960) pp. 213-239.
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55. Von der Decken, Vol. II, pp. 374-375; A. Le Roy, *D'Aden a Zanzibar*, p. 320; Ylvisaker, p. 25.
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66. Miller, p. 4.
67. This statement and what follows about Islamization among the upper Pokomo is based on Bunger, Chapter IV, pp. 57-79.
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69. Bunger, pp. 63-64; Miller, p. 6.
70. Koffsky, pp. 12-14.
71. Koffsky, p. 18.
72. Koffsky, pp. 11-13; Krapf, p. 151.
73. Spear, pp. 91-92.
74. Koffsky, p. 16.
75. Spear, pp. 96-97.
76. Spear, p. 46, 113; oral information, Joseph Denge, Kaya Fungo, 5/5/69, Juma Zani, Kundutsi, 27/1/70.

bin Amri, Mtongwe, 3/11/66; Saidi bin Khalfan, Likoni, Bomani, 9/8/68; Ali Koka, Mtongwe 23/2/71.

110. New, p. 54.
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112. Oral information, Mbarakali Mwapodzo, Ngombeni, 10/11/67.
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116. Oral information, Yusuf bin Husein, Gede, 11/4/80.
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119. Oral information, Abdallah Makanzu, Diani 19/12/67; Baruti Zidiheri, Gasi, 3/5/69; Hamisi Mwatuwano, Waa, 17/12/67.
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