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Chapter 4

Behind the Sultan of Kilwa's "Rebellious Conduct": Local Perspectives on an International East African Town

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In 1331, the renowned Arab traveller Ibn Battuta visited Kilwa Kisiwani, a large prosperous trading town on the southern coast of present-day Tanzania (see Figure 1). He declared that "the city...is one of the finest and most substantially built towns" he had seen on the East African coast, and praised the generosity and power of the Sultan (Gibb 1962:380). However, only decades later the town witnessed a dramatic economic downturn, with clear indications that the Sultan had lost considerable influence locally, to recover again only by the mid fifteenth century. By the time Portuguese explorers arrived along the coast at the end of that century, Kilwa had regained some prominence as a multi-faceted destination for Indian Ocean and coastal merchants: acting as a brokering and provisioning centre for the former who sought gold and ivory, and for the latter, as a producer and distribution point for cloth and other imported items acquired through overseas trade. The Sultan of Kilwa stood at the head of these activities and held a powerful, if not controversial, position along much of the coast (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 59-63).¹

Portuguese attempts at establishing commercial relations with Kilwa's Sultan in 1500 and 1501 failed as the Sultan refused to meet or cooperate with them. An alliance with Kilwa was greatly sought by the Portuguese based on their belief that Kilwa controlled the coastal gold trade. When Vasco da Gama arrived at Kilwa in 1502, a stand-off similar to those of 1500 and 1501 arose; this time da Gama decided to threaten violence against the town due to what he perceived as the Sultan's evasive and "rebellious conduct" towards the Portuguese (Theal v.6, 1964: 214). The Portuguese

eventually sacked Kilwa in 1505 and installed a new Sultan after the incumbent leader fled. Over the next fifty years, the town lost political and economic power and influence, such that by the mid sixteenth century, Kilwa was described only in terms of its former glory, as a place once great (Theal v.3, 1964: 210-1).

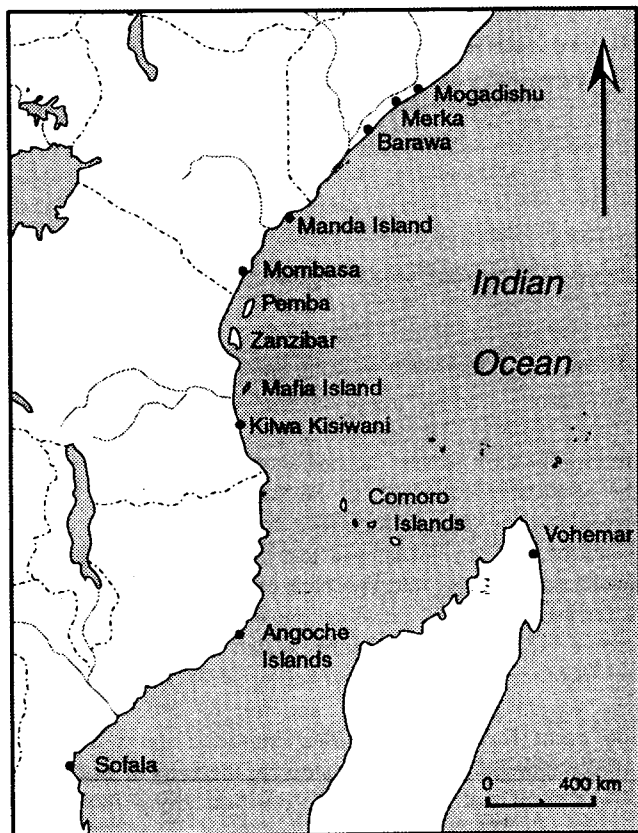


Figure 1. Sites on the East African Coast mentioned in the text

Researchers of Kilwa's history have generally regarded this period, from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, as one of local success destroyed by European intervention (Freeman-Grenville 1963; Sheriff 1987). Historians have viewed the Sultan's initial interactions with the Portuguese as acts of resistance against a perceived threat to the ruler's authority and autonomy (Axelson 1969; 1973; Strandes 1961 [1899]). Often, these events are presented in the context of those that followed—the demise of coastal towns

following Portuguese efforts to dominate Indian Ocean trade. In a sense, therefore, these events have only been considered in this post-contact context. In contrast, few researchers have contextualized the Sultan's actions within broader historical events that led to his clash with the Portuguese. This method of contextualizing the moment of contact—by pushing the time frame back instead of forward—has offered renewed understandings of other moments of contact, with rich results (e.g. Hantman 1990; Kirch and Sahlins 1992; Sahlins 1985). In particular, Hantman's use of archaeological and ethnohistoric materials to re-examine the interactions between Powhatan and the Jamestown settlers in 1607, has shown the need to "more fully characterize the indigenous cultural matrix...to describe and explain at least some aspects of the initial native response to...colonial effort[s]" (1990: 678). The present research follows such studies. It recognizes the multiplicity of voices offered by diverse sources—textual, oral historical, archaeological—and attempts to use them to trace Kilwa's economic, political and religious authority as it was negotiated between local and international spheres. In this way, I build a background to the moment of contact at Kilwa, one in which regional history and context is emphasized.

Thus, in this chapter I will review the primary and secondary sources concerning Kilwa and its Sultans, and attempt to expand the oft-emphasized international perspective of Kilwa to include a more regional and local one. Here, I will trace the trade-offs between local and foreign spheres of interaction, exploring how the office of the Sultanate attempted to negotiate these realms between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. First, I describe the background developments before the fourteenth century that led to Kilwa's significant economic and political position in the international and East African coastal world. Next, I describe the international perspective and position of Kilwa and its Sultan, al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, in the early fourteenth century. Moving from this international perspective, I attempt to build a more local understanding of Kilwa at the same time period, constructing relationships that the leaders of Kilwa negotiated in the spheres of the East African coast, the region surrounding Kilwa, and in Kilwa town. The primary tension drawn out in this section is that between a Sultan that had international intentions, yet worked diligently to retain his authority locally. I then show how these issues were of primary concern during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by examining how local problems continued to reverberate through successive changes in leadership. The conflict between local and international allows questions to be raised about the nature of the Sultanate's authority, and the pattern of booms and slumps at Kilwa during the period leading up to the Portuguese arrival. Finally, at the very end of the chapter, I return to the period of contact, 1500 to 1512. In this final section I show how the long-term historical trend of balancing

the local and international realms was a significant factor in how the initial interactions between the Sultan of Kilwa, at the time Sultan Ibrahim, and the Portuguese unfolded.

Throughout this chapter, I do not dispute the fact that Kilwa was a trade emporium recognized on an international scale—its leaders, economy, and the Muslim piety of its people were all recognized throughout the Western Indian Ocean, if not further. However, in this chapter I seek to foreground the local and regional relationships negotiated at Kilwa, to balance the emphasis that has been placed previously on international concerns. In this way, I hope to begin to establish a more internal perspective, and suggest this alternative 'voice' influenced Kilwa's successes and failures as well.

TOWARDS AN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF KILWA: MULTIPLE VOICES AND DEPTH OF FIELD

This chapter takes a single event, the Portuguese arrival at Kilwa in 1500, and seeks to offer a deeper understanding of that moment in time. There are three available aspects of this event: a Portuguese perspective drawn from accounts of the arrival of Portuguese sailors at Kilwa; a series of local oral histories detailing town rulers and their deeds; and archaeological excavations at the town conducted in the 1960s. Taken alone, each source offers a distinctive version of Kilwa's history ranging from the agent-oriented specific to the pattern-oriented general. The Portuguese documents are about people and events, distinguishing personnel both from Portugal and at Kilwa. The Kilwa Chronicles are similarly personal, but can also be read as mythic, thematic, and factionally determined. Finally, the archaeological data offer patterns of long-term change, with glimpses at historical moments (e.g. the erection of monumental structures).

This is a brief look, using published sources, to reinstate a more multi-vocal local perspective in the context of contact. When a 'historic period' begins—one of written, first-hand accounts—the written sources tend to be self-privileging. One way archaeology and a re-examination of the oral histories can balance such texts is to push the textual narrative back in time. This contextualizes the specificity of the written records within the patterns of the archaeological record. I would argue that it is not enough simply to look at late fifteenth century archaeological deposits at Kilwa as equal sources with Portuguese documents, or even with the fifteenth century sections of the Kilwa Chronicles. Since the strength of archaeological materials and oral histories lies in their long-term patterned perspective, they are not event specific. In this way, the historical archaeologist uses this range of sources as a photographer manipulates the depth of field, without

determined background or foreground, bringing various aspects of the photograph into focus to create an image.

Here, I present an account that moves back and forth between trends and events, the office of the Sultanate and actions of specific Sultans. Due to the nature of the sources, I have been able to discuss the actions of two Sultans in more detail, al-Hasan bin Sulaiman in the early fourteenth century and Sultan Ibrahim at the moment of contact in 1500. Connecting these two individuals are patterns of change in both the office of the Sultanate and political and economic spheres at Kilwa during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. I thus manipulate the depth of field to construct a historical narrative that is brought to bear on the moment of Portuguese contact in 1500.

What allowed me to connect the event-oriented historical sources and the pattern-oriented archaeological ones are the Chronicles of Kilwa. These are a series of texts that document the dynastic history of Kilwa, of which there are three extant versions.² These offer a rare 'internal' perspective—explanations of changes based on the cultural logic of Kilwa's inhabitants themselves. Yet eliciting this 'logic' requires understanding how and why themes, events and stories contained in the Chronicles were preserved in order to evaluate their historicity. Historians have generated an extensive literature concerning these texts including various attempts to set them to a rigid chronology.³ However, the Chronicles also document inherent tensions in the process of establishing Kilwa's hegemony of the southern Swahili coast, providing evidence of the weaknesses and limitations of political authority at Kilwa. Therefore, while the authors of the Chronicles probably constructed them to present the strengths, virtue, and piety of the Sultans, they also offer glimpses into the costs and failings inherent in retaining such large-scale political domination. In concert with the historical and archaeological materials, the Chronicles offer insight into the political and economic life present at Kilwa during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, providing a foundation for multiple histories and voices to be explored.

KILWA BEFORE THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Like many other large coastal towns, settlement at Kilwa began in the late eighth or early ninth century. Judging from the materials excavated by Chittick (1974), the town began small, and was linked ideologically (at least) with other coastal settlements that shared a common ceramic tradition and assemblage of local and imported materials, such as beads, imported glass, iron tools and slag. During the ensuing centuries, again as in many other coastal towns, the town expanded exponentially, such that by the

twelfth century it was one of the major settlements along the entire East African coast. Features such as structures of coral rag, an increase in the numbers of imported goods, and the minting of coins all attest to the profound social and political changes occurring during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It may be argued that this period represents the initial florescence of Kilwa as a major Swahili coastal centre.

Chittick (1974) and Freeman-Grenville (1962b) ascribe this period to the Shirazi Dynasty, an erstwhile Persian ruling family thought to have settled (or expanded?) many coastal towns of the time. Horton (1996: 423-5) and Sutton (1998) have offered scenarios to explain much of the debated aspects of this theory, including the memory of Shiraz origins in the Kilwa Chronicles. They argue that the Shirazi connection, remembered as settlement by a foreign ruler (an idea supported by Chittick and Freeman-Grenville), was more likely "the propaganda used to promote legitimacy and sovereignty in a competitive situation" (Sutton 1998: 124). Also, both Horton and Sutton agree that the dating proposed by Chittick and Freeman-Grenville is at least one century too late, and place the establishment of Shirazi dominance c. AD 1000-1100. For the purposes of this chapter, however, it will be enough to note the broad changes occurring at Kilwa during this time, and the undisputed fact that Kilwa became a significant trade centre by the middle of the thirteenth century. What follows is an account of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman and his international perspective at Kilwa.

SUCCESS AT KILWA IN THE LATE THIRTEENTH AND EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURIES: THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE SULTANATE

Beginning in the mid-thirteenth century, Kilwa had settled into a pattern of success, led by an apparently powerful and successful Sultanate. Generally, these successes are viewed as the result of Kilwa's position within the gold trade, situated between Muslim merchants from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and the gold fields of the Zimbabwe plateau. This market appears to have contributed to the expansion of Great Zimbabwe, as Indian Ocean traders began calling on ports on the southern coast in order to obtain the coveted metal. Local merchants in cities such as Sofala, at Cape Delgado, and Kilwa were well situated to handle this trade, with extensive inland connections to the Zimbabwe plateau and which also supported an ivory trade in the hinterlands of Kilwa. This is not an isolated success story. Merchants at Kilwa and other coastal towns, already engaged in long-distance trade, seized this opportunity to expand their commercial

connections and also to engage in exchanges based on provisioning for long-distance traders. Other towns that fit this description, many of which have been studied archaeologically, provide evidence to support this conclusion, including Mogadishu (Chittick 1982), Mombasa (Sassoon 1980), Manda (Chittick 1984), Shanga (Horton 1996), and Gedi (Kirkman 1954; 1963). In addition to gold, these other towns brokered the trade of ivory, rock crystal and other locally acquired commodities (Horton 1987; Ricks 1970: 350). Evidence of this trade comes from rock crystal production debris and also in the increasing amounts of imported materials (Chittick 1974: 27-60).

Kilwa can be distinguished from other coastal towns, however, due to its apparent dominance of the gold trade. This dominance is regarded as the result of Kilwa's prime location along the coast. Sailing from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf to the East African coast relies on highly consistent monsoon winds and currents in the Indian Ocean which alternate every six months (Risso 1995: 4, 45). The consistency and intensity of the winds allowed traders to reach, in less than two months, the central portions of the East African coast, but not Sofala and the sources of gold. The journey down the coast and back required a step-wise progression rather than a long-haul approach. Newitt (1995: 8) explains the significance of this trade pattern:

It was difficult, if not impossible, to reach as far south as Sofala and return in a single season, and towns further north on the 'Swahili' coast acted as staging posts. It was this relative inaccessibility of the southern coast which set it, even at this point, somewhat apart from the northern coastline between Kilwa and Mogadishu which was able to enjoy much closer and more regular contacts with the centres of Indian Ocean trade and culture.

However, location alone did not determine success or dominance in trade; this depended in large measure on international patterns of trade and on the power of the Sultanate at Kilwa. As John Sutton (1997; 1998; 1999) has cogently argued,⁴ Kilwa can be viewed as holding a unique position in world history, brokering the gold trade on an "intercontinental" scale (1997: 221). He argues that world demand for gold was exceedingly high at this period, the beginning of the fourteenth century. Much of the gold seems to have gone through the Red Sea, via Aden, and onwards to Egypt. Increased demand from areas surrounding the Mediterranean may have heightened the East African trade, providing a key opportunity for the Sultan of Kilwa to expand the town's power and authority. Kilwa filled a niche as a port-of-trade through which most, if not all, of the gold passed from Great Zimbabwe, through Sofala, and onto the rest of the world. Hints at the connection between Kilwa, Sofala, and Great Zimbabwe include a copper

coin minted at Kilwa found at Great Zimbabwe, and Ibn Battuta's observation that Sofala lay just a fortnight south of Kilwa from "where gold-dust is brought from a place a month's journey inland..." (Gibb 1962: 380).

Economic success at Kilwa cannot be explained fully by international trade patterns alone. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, an apparent coup occurred at Kilwa. It left in its wake a new dynasty of rulers, known in the Chronicles as the Mahdali, initiated by one al-Hasan bin Talut. Bin Talut apparently had significant religious and possible political connections to Aden or Yemen, and may have been based previously at Tumbatu, a town settlement just off the northern coast of Zanzibar. Sutton suggests that this coup may have been instigated by a desire to seize control of the coastal gold trade, already in place and profitable (Sutton 1999). Two generations later, the Mahdali still retained their hold on Kilwa and the Sultanate was held by al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, bin Talut's grandson and perhaps the best known Sultan of Kilwa before the arrival of the Portuguese. Al-Hasan is well documented in the Kilwa Chronicles and is one of the few figures independently verified by another historical source—Ibn Battuta's account of his visit to Kilwa in 1331.

During this time in the early fourteenth century, Kilwa underwent a massive expansion: al-Hasan bin Sulaiman funded extensive building projects and established the most powerful Sultanate to date. Sutton has argued that these actions should be viewed as the activities of a Sultan personally seeking international recognition as a successful ruler and as benefactor of Kilwa as a centre of Islamic faith. Again coins offer some tempting evidence: gold dinars struck with the name al-Hasan bin Sulaiman have been found at Tumbatu, off Zanzibar, 350 kilometres to the north. Although rulers of a number of towns minted copper coins at this time, only al-Hasan used gold. Gold dinars may have been more useful in the international realm, but more importantly, as Sutton notes, would have "constituted a statement of Kilwa's power, independence and Islamic credentials" (1999: 3). Another more obvious attempt to make such statements of power can be found in the building projects under al-Hasan. During the first half of the fourteenth century construction began on Husuni Kubwa (see Figures 2 and 3), a massive domestic and administrative centre located on a high bluff overlooking the ocean, approximately one kilometre east of the town limits. This contained a palatial domestic structure with stepped courtyards, ornate pools, and numerous rooms alongside an extensive administrative building with a great number of storage rooms (Chittick 1974: 174-195). Additionally the main mosque was expanded, which more than tripled the size of the previous mosque, and added features such as vaulted ceilings, anterooms, and an ablution area to the south. The stylistic references in these structures suggest that overseas craftsmen, if not

present during the construction, were consulted during their planning. Sutton suggests that both these building projects were international in intention; Husuni Kubwa was a palace made for a Muslim ruler and the new Friday mosque was now on par with those of other world centres of Islam.

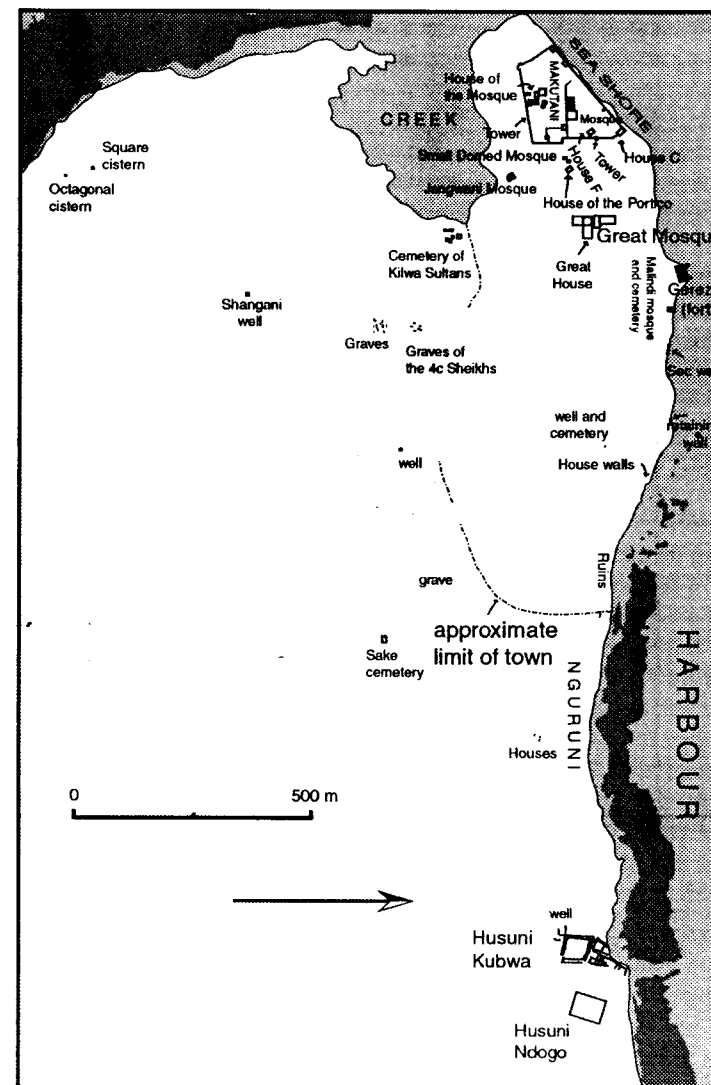


Figure 2. The town of Kilwa

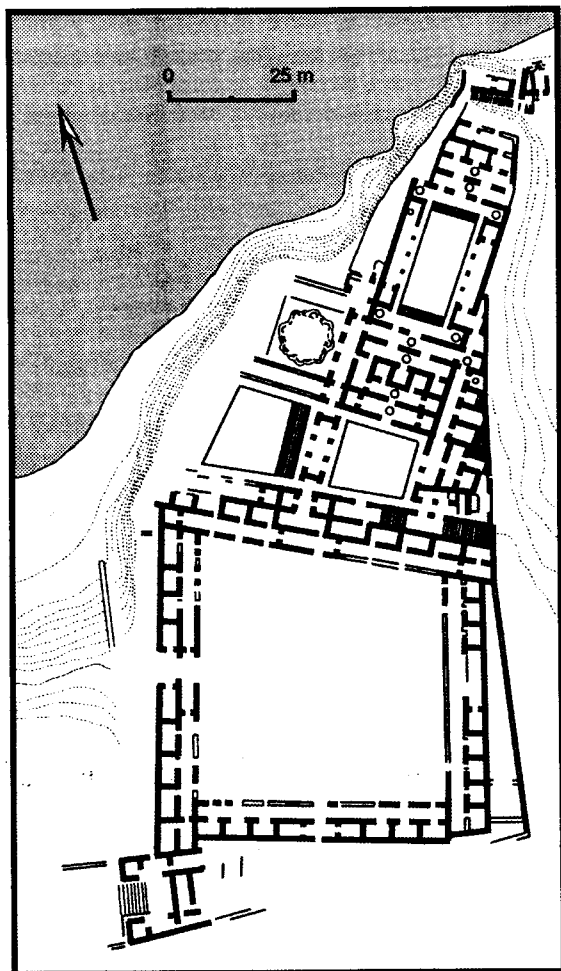


Figure 3. Plan of Husuni Kubwa

In terms of religious faith, al-Hasan bin Sulaiman was well-known for his piety and generosity; he was known in the Chronicles as Abu al-Mawahib, 'the Father of Gifts' (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 38-9). Ibn Battuta confirms his giving nature, noting that he was known for "the multitude of his gifts and acts of generosity" towards visiting Islamic scholars (Gibb 1962: 381-2). This generosity seems to have attracted an international cadre of intellectuals; this is also borne out by Battuta's description, where he notes meeting prominent teachers from the Red Sea area at Kilwa (Gibb 1962:

381). In addition, this generosity was supported by al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's religious status: the Chronicles note that he had travelled to Mecca to make the *hajj* and had studied in Aden for two years (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 38-9). Such training would have established him as a religious and intellectual leader along the Swahili coast.

When viewed in combination with his building activities and coin minting, Sutton argues that al-Hasan bin Sulaiman was actively seeking to establish Kilwa as a model Islamic city within the larger international realm. This meant a closer adherence to Sunni theology, by actively shunning the 'heterodoxy' that may have existed in many East African coastal Muslim settlements.⁵ Al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's adherence to Sunni principles was also likely to be related to the broad theological changes that occurred on the coast, shifting from Shi'i to Sunni principles in the preceding centuries (Freeman-Grenville 1978; Horton 1996: 427; Sutton 1998: 129). Within the broader Islamic world, Kilwa was seen as being situated on the borderlands of the 'unfaithful' and therefore would have been seen as an important outpost of faith, far from the centres of Islam. That al-Hasan bin Sulaiman actively developed this position, establishing Kilwa's prominence in the face of surrounding non-Muslim peoples, seems to have been viewed as a significant achievement—not only preserving the boundaries of Islam, but making Kilwa a model centre in the face of such tribulations.

Marshalling the evidence in this way suggests that the Sultan was consistently looking towards the ocean, and imagining himself primarily within the Indian Ocean world. However, for these international efforts to have any effect, the Sultan must have held considerable influence locally, requiring local efforts to keep Kilwa economically prosperous and politically sound. While there is no doubt that international recognition brought al-Hasan bin Sulaiman fame and prestige, these would not go far towards feeding an expanding population, nor convince a multi-ethnic population of his authority and power. This would have required the Sultan to be active in both international and local spheres; his long-term success, it might be argued, depended on his ability to negotiate successfully and move between the two realms. Having established the international perspective, what follows is an attempt to reconstruct a more local context for al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's actions.

MOVING FROM INTERNATIONAL TO LOCAL IN THE THIRTEENTH TO FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

THE FULL COASTAL PERSPECTIVE

Sultan al-Hasan bin Sulaiman had created an international reputation for Kilwa during the first decades of the fourteenth century. I now argue that the Sultan of Kilwa was also concerned with policies which directly affected, and responded to issues arising from, the population living in the town and nearby regions (see Figure 4). This is not to argue that the Sultan viewed the local and international realms as distinct; these are a heuristic for looking at the local implications and problems related to the Sultan's rule. For instance, Ibn Battuta provides detailed insights on how al-Hasan bin Sulaiman manoeuvred between the international and local realms. He describes how the Sultan waged war on non-Muslim mainland groups and pillaged their towns, setting aside a portion of these spoils to support visiting religious leaders from overseas lands. His ability to convert regional interactions, such as raiding or trade relations with the interior, into prestigious connections with overseas religious leaders, represents a shrewd and methodical negotiation of circumstances (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 31-2).

I have already discussed the importance of the gold trade to the success of Sultan al-Hasan bin Sulaiman during the first half of the fourteenth centuries. Successful brokering of the gold trade depended on the Sultan's economic and military ability to force coastal traders to use Kilwa as a way-station along the coastal route to and from Sofala. However, the Sultan did not control actual commercial transactions but enforced a complex system of taxation. This system remained partially intact until the early sixteenth century, when it was described by Diogo de Alcacova, a Portuguese captain stationed at Sofala. He describes how traders paid the Sultan percentages of gold coming from Sofala, as well as of the goods used to purchase gold, such as cloth (da Silva Rego and Baxter v.1, 1963: 397-8). In 1517, Duarte Barbosa, also noted the Sultan's earlier control of the coastal trade:

Before the King our Lord sent out his expedition to discover India the Moors of Çofala [Sofala], Cuama, Angoya, and Moçambique were all subject to the King of Quiloa [Kilwa], who was the most mighty king among them. And in this town was plenty of gold, as no ships passed towards Çofala without first coming to the island. (Freeman-Grenville 1962a:131)

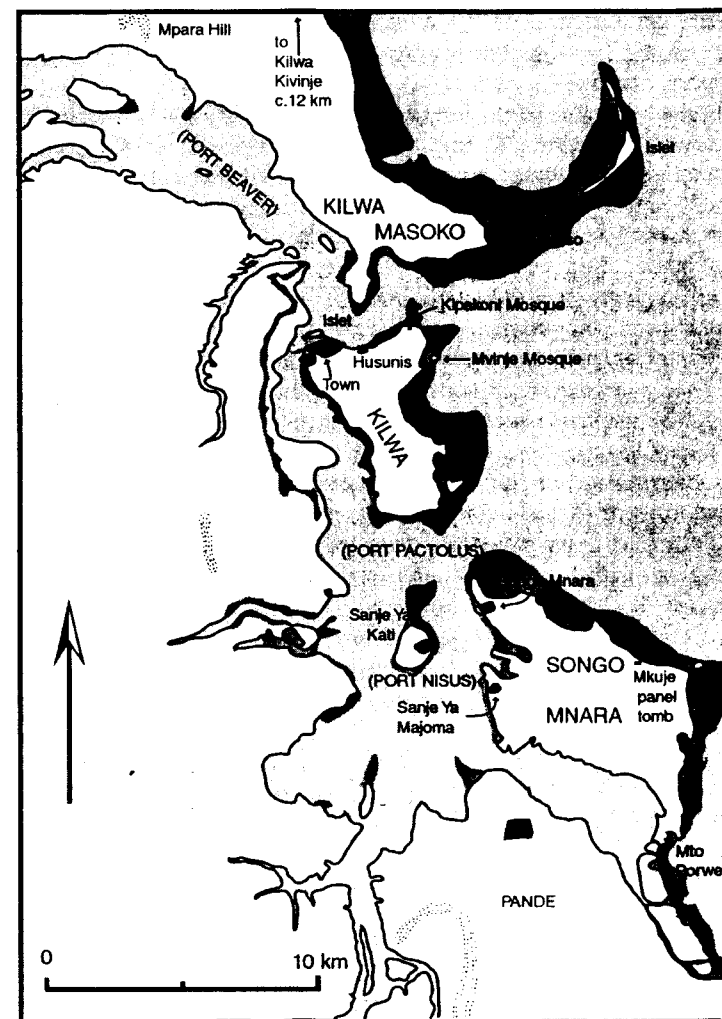


Figure 4. The Island of Kilwa and the nearby region

Although the Sultan of Kilwa had strong economic controls along this portion of the coast, his political control was by no means absolute (Wright 1993: 670). For instance, Pedro Alvares Cabral described his encounter with a gold trader headed to Malindi (on the modern Kenyan coast) who had no intention of calling at Kilwa (Theal v.1, 1964: 48). This trader claimed relation to the king of Malindi, drawing on recently established connections

between the Portuguese and Malindi. The story is also significant since it describes the growing competition of other towns to Kilwa's economic hegemony of the coast.

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, competition amongst coastal towns was increasing. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the rulers of Kilwa witnessed the expansion of many towns along the coast, with each claiming a part of the coastal trade. For instance, on Pemba alone, four major towns developed during this period: Ras Mkumbuu, Mtambwe Mkuu, Chwaka and Mkia wa Ngombe. In addition, towns on the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts such as Malindi, Mombasa and Kaole, grew exponentially, tightening competition in coastal exchange spheres. Material assemblages at all these towns, including imported ceramics, glass, and metals, suggests that they were participating in trade similar to that at Kilwa. No single town would have challenged Kilwa's prosperity, but the combination of so many towns may have begun to erode Kilwa's hold on the coastal trade. These developments suggest that during this period the northern coast may have slipped from the Sultan of Kilwa's control.

Another activity devoted to local concerns and exchange spheres was the production of cloth at Kilwa. Archaeological evidence from excavations at Kilwa, in the form of increasing numbers of spindle whorls in the late twelfth century, note a growing local production of cloth in the town (Chittick 1974: 236). This industry expanded during the period of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman and Chittick notes that it "remained an important craft into the Portuguese period" (Chittick 1974: 240). While locally produced cloth provided one of the basic means of exchange and wealth along the coast it was not a major commodity exported from coastal towns to overseas ports (Chittick 1974: 240; Strandes 1961 [1899]: 92). Specialization of production at Kilwa may indicate the Sultan's attempts to dominate coastal exchange spheres, controlling local access to wealth. If evidence of cloth production is examined coast-wide for this period, a suggestive pattern emerges: production of cloth at Shanga and Manda, on the northern Kenya coast, seems to grow from the early eleventh century, peaking late in that century and then continuing unabated until the middle of the thirteenth century. At this point, from the mid thirteenth century onwards, production declines "rapidly" (Horton 1996: 341). The pattern of cloth production suggested by spindle whorls at Kilwa, however, exhibits a later pattern of growth, peak and continuation in the early fourteenth century onwards. In the fourteenth century, Mogadishu was also known as a centre of cloth production, as observed by Ibn Battuta when he visited there, just before going to Kilwa (Gibb 1962: 374). Therefore, it seems that the centres of cloth production had shifted from one set of powerful coastal cities to another. That the Sultan of Kilwa was interested in commodity production suggests his

participation in, and focus on, coastal exchange as well as power relations. However, evidence of cloth production from other contemporary towns along the coast suggests that neither Kilwa nor Mogadishu retained absolute control over local cloth production (Fleisher 2000; Horton and Clark 1985; Kirkman 1963; LaViolette 2000)

Although al-Hasan bin Sulaiman may have been seeking to gain control over coastal exchange networks through the production of local cloth, he clearly understood its role as a 'local' good and not as a symbol of international power. Ibn Battuta's descriptions of the symbolic displays by coastal rulers of imported silks, linens, and cottons from Egypt, Jerusalem, and India make this distinction clear. Battuta noted differences in the quality and quantity of cloth between rulers and ordinary inhabitants, with the former attired in imported clothes and the latter in locally produced types (Gibb 1962: 373-382). Also revealing is a story Battuta tells of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman giving his fine robes to a poor man. This becomes remarkable only because of the distinctions between the clothes of the ruler and those of the commoner. If we remember that the same Sultan was the major producer of local cloth, then the story offers some deeper meaning: the Sultan not only controlled the symbols of power (imported cloth), but all cloth and clothing, local and imported. Acts of gift giving need to be understood as not simply proof of the generosity of a particular Sultan, but as active attempts to forge and continue important relations which empowered the Sultan and solidified his location at the pinnacle of hierarchical relationships.

The local ceramics from Kilwa at this time also present a means by which the Sultan sought to distinguish himself locally. Most, if not all, archaeological discussion of ceramic variation on the East African coast relies on a passive model of ceramic styles. This model holds that variation in ceramic styles results from behaviour that is "acquired by rote learning and imitation and is employed automatically" (Wiessner 1985: 160-1). However, there are more active ways of viewing ceramic styles in which they do not simply reflect behaviour, but are active sites of communication and agency. This position, championed by Wiessner (1985) and Plog (1980; 1990; but see also Conkey and Hastorf 1990; David et al 1988; Hall 1987; Hegmon 1992; Hodder 1982) suggests that through style:

people compare their ways of making and decorating artifacts with those of others and then imitate, differentiate, ignore, or in some way comment on how aspects of the maker or bearer relate to their own social and personal identities. Style is thus not acquired and developed through routine duplication of certain standard types, but through dynamic comparison of artifacts and corresponding social attributes of their makers....While isochrestic behavior functions to make life predictable and orderly, stylistic behavior presents information about similarities and

differences that can help reproduce, alter, disrupt, or create social relationships. (Wiessner 1985: 161; see also Plog 1990: 62)

We can, therefore, re-evaluate changes in ceramic styles at Kilwa as more overt social or political statements, specifically with regard to broader coastal stylistic patterns.

Until the fourteenth century, the local ceramic assemblage at Kilwa was dominated by a tradition of decorative motifs involving incised lines and punctates. Beginning in the earliest periods, the ceramics conform to widespread coastal types, and can be included in what Horton has termed the "Tana Tradition"⁶ (Horton 1996: 243-270). Therefore, from the eighth or ninth centuries until the beginning of the fourteenth century, local ceramic forms and decorative motifs are virtually indistinguishable from those of other towns along the coast (see for comparison, Chami 1994; LaViolette and Fleisher 1995; Sinclair 1982; Wilson and Omar 1997; Wright 1984). Although there is an extensive literature on this phenomenon (Chami 1994; 1998; Horton 1987; 1996; Mutoro 1994-5; Schmidt 1994-5; Wright 1984), all interpretations assume a passive role for ceramic style. The widespread occurrence of these styles cannot be linked to the dispersal of a single group of people; styles evolved in similar fashion at multiple locations, though with regional affinities (Chami 1994). Additionally, such discussions often focus on the eighth-to-tenth centuries, when stylistic similarity tends to be at its peak along the coast. Even a cursory review of later, eleventh-to-fourteenth century ceramic styles, however, suggests continuing adherence to similar conventions. For instance, there are continuities between ceramic styles and forms at Kilwa, Shanga, and sites on Pemba and northern Madagascar, in the form of spherical pots with punctates just below the rim, and small-necked bowls and jars with incised lines and punctates (see Figures 5 and 6; Chami 1992: Plate 6; Chittick 1974: Figures 102, 103; Fleisher 2000; Helm 2000; Horton 1996: Figures 183, 186; Radimilahy 1998). Although ceramic assemblages in general became more differentiated regionally during these centuries, such stylistic continuities cannot be rejected as coincidental; they suggest that ceramic styles continued to retain symbolic meaning in the coastal realm well into the fourteenth century.

However, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, with the initiation of the new dynasty at Kilwa, a dramatically different assemblage of local ceramics was produced, specifically those of Husuni Modelled ware, Wealed ware, and Red Painted ware (see Figure 7; Chittick 1974: 325-328), which offered a sharp break from coastal styles. This break in ceramic styles may be read as an active attempt by the Sultanate to distinguish Kilwa and the products produced there from other coastal locations. Since local ceramics had held an important symbolic connection—whether political or

economic—between distant locations, an active break from those connections may have been an attempt by the Sultan of Kilwa to symbolically reject previously held alliances with other coastal towns.

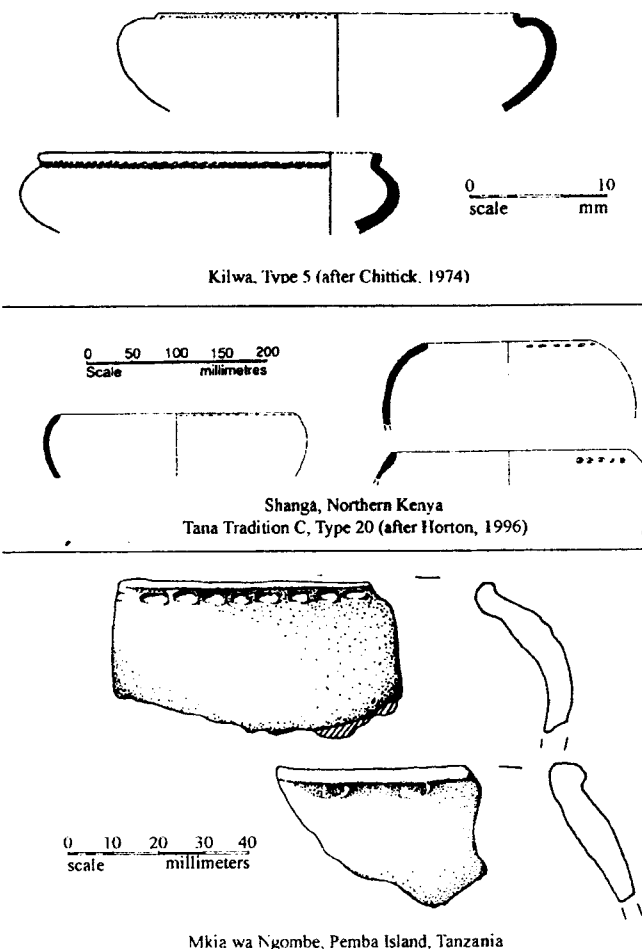
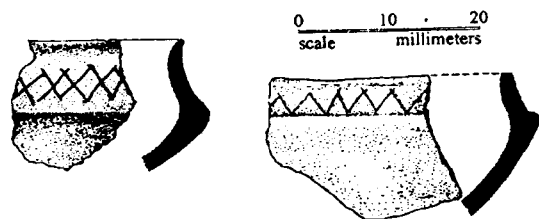


Figure 5. Local pottery with rim punctates from Kilwa, Shanga and Pemba

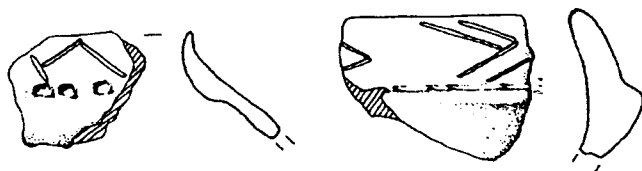


Kilwa, Type 4, (after Chittick, 1974)

0 50 100 150 200
Scale millimetres

Shanga, Northern Kenya
Tana Tradition C, Type 23 (after Horton, 1996)

0 10 20 30 40
scale millimeters

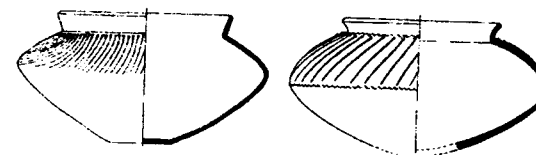


Mkia wa Ngombc, Pemba Island, Tanzania

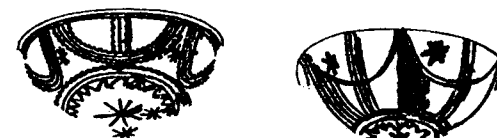
Figure 6. Local pottery with incised motifs from Kilwa, Shanga and Pemba

Central to this argument is that these are ceramics intended for consumption by Swahili only, and therefore can be considered outside the realm of international trade. However, the results of this action are intriguing. Although these wares dominate the assemblage at Kilwa, they are rarely, if ever, located in other contemporary settlements and had little effect on the ongoing development of ceramic styles on the rest of the coast (Chittick 1974: 320). This can be interpreted in at least two ways: first, that Kilwa carefully guarded the production and distribution of Husuni Modelled, Wealed, and Red Painted wares in order to keep itself distinct.

Alternatively, they may be viewed as a symbol of the lack of sway the Sultanate held over other parts of the coast. The latter conclusion is problematic since architectural styles developed at Kilwa in the same period had a great influence on coastal building styles generally (Sutton 1997: 231). Therefore, it may be that these new ceramic styles—and cloth production as well—were symbolic of the increasingly competitive political and economic environment along the Swahili coast, and the Sultan's attempt to assert his place in it. While Sultan al-Hasan bin Sulaiman was concerned with relationships along the entire stretch of the East African coast, his attention was also focused on the more immediate region surrounding the island of Kilwa—that of the towns and villages on the nearby islands and mainland.



0 10
scale mm



first row: Husuni Modelled ware (Type 22)
second row: Wealed ware (Type 23)
third and fourth rows: Red Painted ware (Type 20)

Figure 7. Fourteenth-century pottery types at Kilwa (after Chittick 1974)

Kilwa's Surrounding Region

Moving down a level from the coastal milieu to that of Kilwa's surrounding region, I now examine relationships with groups on the mainland and interior, an area where the Sultan of Kilwa remained economically powerful with little political influence. While much of Kilwa's success relied on brokering the gold trade from Sofala, merchants there also traded goods such as ivory which would have come through trade paths to the interior regions (Horton 1987). It is unclear if merchants from Kilwa travelled inland to acquire goods, yet contentious relations existed between mainlanders and the inhabitants of Kilwa. Ibn Battuta reported that the people of Kilwa were "engaged in *jihad*, because they are on a common mainland with the heathen Zinj people and contiguous to them..." (Gibb 1962: 374). The Kilwa Chronicles also allude to conflict between non-Muslim mainlanders and Kilwa's inhabitants. In the origin myth of the Chronicles, after the initial Sultan (Ali ibn al Husain) purchases Kilwa Island from an "infidel" who ruled it, he is warned that the previous non-Muslim ruler "is very fond of this island and will undoubtedly return to despoil you and yours of all your possessions and kill you" (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 37). Such memories of the rivalry between Kilwa and the mainland may have still resonated in the fourteenth century.

Although Ibn Battuta noted religious differences as a source of tension, there may have been economic concerns as well. Strain between Kilwa and mainland groups may have been exacerbated due to the town's ever-increasing population and need to expand agricultural fields. Soils on Kilwa Island are remarkably poor for intensive agriculture and were probably easily over-cultivated (Chittick 1974: 6). This may have forced the people of Kilwa to import greater quantities of food or to expand to the nearby mainland (Wright 1993: 670). Similar agricultural needs existed for cotton to supply the extensive cloth production in town, as illustrated above. Since cloth was a key trade item along the coast and Kilwa's most productive industry, the inability of Kilwa's ruler to produce or acquire adequate amounts of cotton would have had serious effects on their ability to conduct coastal and mainland trade. Although no evidence exists of whether cotton was grown on the mainland, Portuguese observers at the beginning of the sixteenth centuries noted that cotton was one of the primary crops on the island itself (Chittick 1974: 250).

Finally, there were also conflicts between other nearby towns. The Chronicles explicitly mention a town on Mafia Island, 150 kilometres to the north, and describe these actions of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman: "When he was established [as Sultan of Kilwa] he revenged his father upon the people of Mafia, and fought and overcame them. He was the first king to rule Mafia

independently until our times" (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 39). Although the nature of the conflicts between Mafia and Kilwa is not stated, it is clear that the disputes were referenced in terms of deep historical roots and point to the delicate balance of power and force needed to rule Kilwa (see Saad 1979).

This regional scenario is highly suggestive; these are assumptions built on hints in the historical and archaeological data. Interpretations at this regional level of analysis are difficult, because archaeological research radiating out from the main site at Kilwa has not been carried out. This is a problem common to archaeological research along the coast, where single sites are examined to build regional chronologies (Connah 1987: 181-2; Fleisher 1999). Research which takes 'the region' as the unit of analysis, rather than 'the site', offers a more representative understanding of the settlement system, within which larger towns resided. A few studies have begun using such an approach and have uncovered a range of site types in which to contextualize developments in coastal towns (Fleisher 2000; Helm 2000; also this volume; Radmilahy 1998; Wright 1992). Such work at Kilwa, both on the island itself and extending to the mainland, would undoubtedly offer a more complicated settlement picture, and allow researchers to tackle the issues of town/countryside interaction more thoroughly.

Kilwa Town

With this renewed understanding of the coastal and regional challenges facing Sultan al-Hasan bin Sulaiman at the beginning of the fourteenth century, I now consider the town of Kilwa to re-examine the more local meanings of his construction projects as well as his political activities. As presented above, the building of Husuni Kubwa and the extensions to the Great Mosque are often listed as evidence of the Sultan's increasing international position, both as an economic and religious leader. However, the hints offered by Ibn Battuta and the Chronicles as to the regional conflicts in which al-Hasan bin Sulaiman was involved, as well as the growing competition from numerous other coastal towns, suggest that this control was far from complete. The primary question I would like to explore here is whether these construction projects represent a Sultan at the peak of his achievement, or rather an attempt to disguise a faltering and tension filled Sultanate.

One key feature of Husuni Kubwa was its location: this structure stood more than one kilometre from the town. This is in marked contrast to earlier 'palace' structures at Kilwa, especially those of the previous generation which were connected to the Great Mosque in the town's centre (Chittick

1974: 100-131). By constructing Husuni Kubwa at a distance from the town, the Sultan made a strong physical break from the townspeople. Such an action may have reflected his desire to reposition himself hierarchically by distancing ambitious merchants or royals who coveted the Sultanate. Although the documents are silent on this issue in al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's reign, there is much discussion in the Chronicles in years following his reign that deals with the politics of succession and disputes between royal and non-royal lines. The issue of location and spatial distance also contrasts sharply with the image offered by Ibn Battuta and parts of the Chronicles. Both sources note the Sultan's generosity, to overseas visitors and the local population alike. As the story of the Sultan giving his clothes to a local man suggests, this was a leader who desired to be regarded as a man of the people. Yet the physical presence of Husuni Kubwa—its distance, size, grandeur—would have provided a daily reminder to the local population of their subservient place in the local hierarchy.

An additional oddity of Husuni Kubwa is its association with a large secular administrative centre rather than the Friday Mosque, as was the case in earlier periods. As discussed above, at this time most of the town followed the doctrines of Sunni Islam, which, in comparison to the Shi'i Islam of previous generations, did not support an unchallenged, authoritarian ruler. There is considerable debate as to the effects of Shi'i Islam on the coast. Horton (1996: 427) has argued that "most of the coastal communities were probably Shi'i" until the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, while Pouwels (2000: 256) has remarked that "the long-term effects of early Shi'ism on coastal Muslims are nebulous." Whatever the early or lasting influence, Husuni Kubwa still provides a striking contrast to the more republican form of government that would have been favoured under Sunni doctrines; Horton (1996) has argued for such a government type in contemporary Shanga. To reinforce the contrast, it is noteworthy that this was a time on the coast when many towns were constructing community mosques with closely associated royal and merchant domestic spaces. The construction of Husuni Kubwa must also be viewed in the political context of the coast at this time, with many towns beginning to compete with Kilwa's hegemony. In this regard, the construction of structures including Husuni Kubwa and the Great Mosque can be seen not only as a means to secure an international position, but also as a means to differentiate itself from other coastal towns. That Husuni Kubwa is closely associated with Husuni Modelled, Wealed, and Red Painted wares makes this point clearly—these provide concrete evidence for symbolic breaks from well-established East Coast traditions.

Perhaps the most important aspect of these buildings, however, is their rapid demise. Husuni Kubwa appears never to have been finished (Sutton

1999: 8) and was abandoned either during or just after al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's rule. Additionally, the Chronicles note: "during the reign of al-Hasan ibn Sulaiman the Friday Mosque collapsed" (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 39). Sutton has argued that their entropy was the result of waning international markets and poor construction (in the case of the mosque). However, in light of the regional and coastal tensions, it may also have been the first public recognition of an embattled ruler. Surely the inability to complete Husuni Kubwa was related to the lack of funds and waning economic strength, but it is also likely that abandonment of the palace complex was an indication of political instability as well, an acknowledgment of failed tactics to conceal a faltering authority. This conclusion is supported by the actions of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's successor, his brother Daud. After al-Hasan's death, Ibn Battuta received word of Daud's rule, and noted:

[when] his brother Daud became ruler, [he] acted in the opposite manner. If a poor man came to him, he said: 'The giver of gifts is dead, and has nothing to give.' Visitors stayed at his court a great number of months, and only then did he give them some little thing, so much so that eventually no one came to visit him. (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 32)

Was Daud's fiscal conservatism the result of al-Hasan's generosity? Possibly. However, I would argue that al-Hasan's generosity and image-building campaigns had as much to do with local and regional relations as with international ones—one cannot be understood without the other. And therefore, al-Hasan's rule may be viewed as the beginning of a problematic period for Kilwa, rather than a zenith from which it fell.

The bulk of the discussion to this point has been centred on the rule of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman and his immediate successors in the fourteenth century. Next, I take the tensions and challenges that I have described for the fourteenth century and show how they reverberate throughout the fifteenth century, until the arrival of the Portuguese. Therefore, this next section does not emphasize any single Sultan, but attempts to sketch more general patterns during the century leading up to the arrival of the Portuguese.

LATE FOURTEENTH AND EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURIES AT KILWA

In the years between al-Hasan bin Sulaiman's rule and the arrival of the Portuguese, troubles within local and regional spheres continued to resonate. These can be seen most clearly in the Chronicles, which are almost completely devoted to issues arising from the succession of rule in Kilwa.

However, within this trope of succession disputes, we can see the negotiation of local and regional conflicts.

I have already established the context of the mid fourteenth century, when the Sultanate of Kilwa faced multiple challenges from growing coastal competition, increasing conflicts with the mainland, and a general decline in the gold trade. However, this period is also marked by a complex series of factional disputes, based partially on problems with the rules of succession for the Sultanate. The only apparent requisite for eligibility for the Sultanate was that the claimant's father had to have been Sultan. In early generations only the few sons of the Sultan could make claims to the throne, of whom the eldest was chosen. However, through time, the number of claimants to the Sultan's position grew, as additional generations made claims to the throne alongside their elders.⁷ Elias Saad (1979: 184) argued that this complex system weakened the power of the Sultanate and eventually "offered the opportunity for...usurpers" to seize control. However, in light of the problems described above, it might be more appropriate to argue that internal political disputes resulted from the Sultan's growing inability to control political and economic spheres at the coastal and Indian Ocean level.

The same successes that established the Sultan as an authoritarian ruler of Kilwa also created a wealthy extended royal family and sizable merchant class. By the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century, these merchants and royals capitalized on the Sultan's loss of power and wealth and contested his authority. Notably, during this period, the positions of the amir and wazir, both counsellors to the Sultan (but not necessarily from the royal line), are more frequently mentioned in the Chronicles. Throughout the fifteenth century, the Chronicles lay increasing importance on the decisions of the individuals in these offices, culminating in the middle of the fifteenth century with the installation of the first non-royal Sultan, Amir Muhammed. This succession was remarkable since it marked the first time that wealth was the deciding factor in selecting a successor rather than blood relations. For example, when Amir Muhammed assumed the Sultan's position in approximately 1450, the Chronicles note: "[he] was elected Sultan. It is not the custom for amirs to rule the kingdom, but this man was an exception on account of the weakness of the kings and the scarcity of wealth" (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 42). The circumstances surrounding the rebuilding of the Great Mosque—which had collapsed during the reign of al-Hasan bin Sulaiman—also indicate the relation between wealth and the power of the Sultan:

The prime mover [to rebuild the mosque] was Sayyid Hajj Rush ibn Sultan Husain...he asked Sultan Sulieman permission to rebuild it at his own expense. Permission was not given, but the sovereign gave him 1,000 mithkals of gold and said: Rebuild the mosque with this money.

And Sayyid Hajj Rush meditated the matter and said to himself: Unless I take this money permission to rebuild the mosque will be refused. Thus it is best to accept the money, but I shall rebuild it at my own expense. So he took the money, and rebuilt it at his own expense until it was complete. When Sultan Sulaiman died, Hajj Rush returned the money to his heirs. (*ibid*: 40)

This story illustrates the ability of wealthy royals and merchants to challenge the authority of the Sultanate through their control of superior sources of wealth. This would suggest that, by the end of the fifteenth century, the Sultanate's position at Kilwa was the site of heated disputes between factional parties based on the Sultanate's declining economic and political authority. Archaeological evidence supports this idea: during the fifteenth century there is an increase in stone building construction in the town, both domestic and religious. These construction projects most likely represent the wealth of an expanding merchant class and other wealthy townspeople (Sutton 1998: 130).

In the regional and coastal spheres, conflicts continued between Kilwa and nearby non-Muslims (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 39) and with other towns. In the case of other Swahili towns, the Chronicles imply more complicated negotiations, rather than simply the defeat of others (as in the case of Mafia). The best example is of a disputant to the Sultanate who travelled to Zanzibar to seek the support of the Sultan there. Although the disputant eventually relinquished his claim, his actions suggest that other town rulers were perceived as equally powerful to Kilwa's leaders. Additionally, there is a story of a foreign ruler who sought support from the leaders of Kilwa. Here, the Chronicles are explicit about the interdependence of town rulers: "...he resolved to renew their friendship and affection. For it is a custom of sovereigns in such circumstances to resort to other kingdoms to seek help and support" (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 43). However, rather than providing strong support, the Chronicles note that Kilwa is in no position to be of help: "The great men of Kilwa told him: Do not return again, for the country has changed and the people are exhausted. Do not come to us lest we and your own self be disgraced" (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 43-4). Two features are noteworthy in this story. First is the self-acknowledgement of Kilwa's diminished economic and political power within the international realm, based on local 'exhaustion' (whether that be political or economic). Second, the voice of authority has changed from the individual Sultan to the "great men of Kilwa". This story encapsulates the renegotiations between local and international that had been occurring during the previous centuries, coupled with the decreasing authority of the Sultanate of Kilwa. Having established these themes as well as the multiple spheres within which the Sultans of Kilwa manoeuvred—

international, coastal, regional, local—I now turn to the events of 1500-1512, when the Portuguese attempted to establish relations with Sultan Ibrahim of Kilwa during their initial journeys into the Indian Ocean.

'REBELLIOUS CONDUCT' IN PERSPECTIVE: KILWA'S INITIAL INTERACTIONS WITH THE PORTUGUESE

In 1500, Captain Pedro Alvares Cabral landed at Kilwa and attempted to establish personal contact with the Sultan of Kilwa, with the desire of breaking the Sultan's control of the coastal gold trade by making him a vassal of the Portuguese king. The Sultan agreed to the meeting, which was to take place on water, each within a small boat, since Cabral was barred by the Portuguese king from going ashore. During the meeting, Cabral gave gifts and letters from the king and urged the Sultan to relinquish his control of the gold trade in exchange for protection by the Portuguese. The Sultan refused to conclude on these propositions, stating that

it was necessary in order to reply to them, to have more time than either of them had at his disposal, and further as they were of such a nature as made it necessary to communicate them to the chief members of his council, the greater number of whom were not present... (Theal v.6, 1964: 201)

Stating he would send word in two days, the Sultan returned to town, and Cabral to his ship. The Sultan, however, did not offer an answer to Cabral's requests but sent only "excuses that the members of his council were absent, being engaged in a war which he was carrying on with the Kafirs [non-Muslims]" of the mainland (Theal v.6, 1964: 202). After three days, a frustrated Cabral left Kilwa harbour and continued north along the coast.

A similar scenario occurred when João da Nova arrived at Kilwa in 1501 where, according to the Portuguese, he was greeted by the Sultan "more by words than by deeds" (Theal v.6, 1964: 207). Da Nova also left after a few days without the vassalage of the Sultan, suspecting that the town was preparing to attack the Portuguese ships. The next Portuguese to arrive at Kilwa were a fleet under Vasco da Gama in 1502, who notes that he "sought to meet the king to make peace and friendship with him but he would not meet me, but rather did he use me very discourteously..." (da Silva Rego and Baxter v.1, 1963: 37). Accordingly, da Gama made moves to attack the town, drawing ships with artillery towards the shore. At this show of aggression, the Sultan agreed to meet with da Gama and consented, in words, to his vassalage to the king of Portugal, accepting to pay an annual

tribute in gold. Satisfied with these results, da Gama left Kilwa (Theal v.6, 1964: 213-4).

Can the Sultan's 'rebelliousness' be interpreted as resistance to potential Portuguese domination of the coastal gold trade? In light of the historical processes at Kilwa leading up to these confrontations, which I have attempted to elucidate, it is apparent that the Sultan's decision not to establish relations with the Portuguese stem from very different reasons. These reasons included his much greater preoccupation with worrisome local challenges to his economic and political control. In short, the Sultan evaded the Portuguese because he did not perceive them as his most serious threat: a perspective which the Portuguese, and subsequent historical analyses, have failed to consider.

By the end of the fifteenth century, economic competition from other coastal towns had grown such that Kilwa's authority was recognized as one amongst many powerful towns. Kilwa now shared the revenues of its extensive tax system with Mombasa (da Silva Rego and Baxter v.1, 1963: 397-8). At this period, Mombasa had surpassed Kilwa in size and possibly wealth, with its population close to 10,000, while Kilwa reportedly contained only 4,000 inhabitants (da Silva Rego and Baxter v.1, 1963: 535, 537). Sofala, the coastal gold-trading port, had also declared its independence from Kilwa, a move that would have substantially affected the Sultan's ability to collect revenues. As we have seen, other traders along the coast, from ports such as Malindi, began bypassing Kilwa's tax system completely (Theal v.1, 1964: 48). All of these losses to Kilwa's economic authority reveal a dire financial situation for the Sultan of Kilwa who, at the time of the Portuguese arrival, would have been struggling to remain economically competitive along the coast. The Sultan of Kilwa probably dismissed the Portuguese threat as minor, preferring instead to concentrate on the 'real' threats of coastal competition. Within his system of relations, of which many were problematic, the Portuguese were not regarded as being worthy of important economic or political relations. Specifically, Portuguese demands of Kilwa's subservience in the gold trade would have appeared ridiculous, since the Sultan's ever-decreasing revenues earned from taxes would have been one of the town's remaining sources of income.

Wars with mainland groups were also acute at this period, an example of which the Sultan himself mentions to the Portuguese. These conflicts may have been based on continuing concerns with food for the town. Food shortages quickly became a problem for the Portuguese once they established a fort at Kilwa. For instance, in a series of orders from Pero Ferreira Fogaca, Captain of Kilwa in 1506-7, he insists on more rations due to the dire food shortages on the island (da Silva Rego and Baxter v.1, 1963: 485-489). This may suggest that local expansion onto the mainland to

cultivate fields was met with resistance from other groups. Wars may also have been carried out in an effort to better control coastal-interior trade routes, as new trading towns were founded farther inland. When Gaspar Bocarro travelled from inland to Kilwa in 1617, he encountered a "village of the Moors" some ten miles from the coast which appears to have been connected politically and economically with Kilwa (Theal v.3, 1964: 418-9).

A primary concern of the Sultan during this period was with factional disputes about the rightful heirs to the Sultanate. Since the time of the first usurpation of the Sultanate by the non-royal Amir Muhammed in 1450, the Sultan's authority had waned, as the amir, wazir, and council took increasingly larger decision-making roles in the town. Such a situation is evident in the Sultan's response to the Portuguese that he needed to consult with "the chief members of his council" (Theal v.6, 1964: 201) before making any significant decisions.

The most serious disputes, however, were between the present Sultan, Ibrahim, and one Muhammed Rukn al-Din, the son of Amir Muhammed. Ibrahim was descended directly from the original founders of the Mahdali dynasty and therefore represented a return of control to the royal line. Rukn al-Din, the "keeper of the treasury," was part of a noted and wealthy merchant family, as the Chronicles state: "[he and his brother] were men of business and very rich" (Freeman-Grenville 1962a: 49). As such, he posed a significant threat to the Sultan, whose royal family had decreased in wealth and power steadily since the beginning of the fifteenth century. While the Sultan rebuffed the Portuguese in an effort to focus on other matters, Rukn al-Din seized on relations with them to further his claims to the Sultanate. During Cabral's and da Nova's visits to Kilwa, Rukn al-Din provided information to the Portuguese, suggesting that Sultan Ibrahim was intentionally avoiding the Portuguese and had plans to attack their ships. Da Nova found Rukn al-Din "so loyal that if the said Mohamed [Rukn al-Din] had not advised him of the treacherous plots which the king planned in order to get him into his power, some catastrophe would have undoubtedly occurred" (Theal v.6, 1964: 208). Rukn al-Din's actions were clearly a ploy to place himself in favour with the Portuguese, whom he must have felt could help further his plans to acquire the Sultanate. For instance, during one of the visits of the Portuguese, he sent word to da Nova urging him "not to be deceived by the king [Sultan Ibrahim], as he will not meet him [da Nova], and to remember me" (Theal v.6, 1964: 228). The Portuguese were impressed with Rukn al-Din's loyalty and after sacking Kilwa in 1505, installed him as Sultan while Ibrahim fled to Mombasa. This event set off a series of related actions in which factions supporting Ibrahim and Rukn al-Din continued to fight for control of the Sultanate. Much to their dismay, the Portuguese became increasingly involved in the political affairs of this

dispute, which eventually drove much of the population from the town (Strandes 1961 [1899]: 93). In 1512, as Kilwa's economic and political system became more fragmented due to the disputes, the Portuguese decided to abandon their fort at Kilwa, removing themselves from factional disputes they had originally exacerbated.

The events surrounding the initial interactions between the Portuguese and the Sultan of Kilwa cannot be viewed simply as acts of resistance to a perceived threat. They must instead be examined within a broader context that takes into account the steady decline the Sultanate of Kilwa experienced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and growing challenges from local and coastal competition. Rather than seeing this event as one in which the Portuguese dominated, we can see it as the end result of a long series of internal issues: the decline of Sultanate authority, growing competition and conflict in local and coastal spheres, and waning influence in international trade relations. All these factors contributed to the way the events of 1500-1505 unfolded.

Although it might have been possible to make this argument based solely on the Arab and Portuguese historical documents and Kilwa Chronicles, it is ultimately the multivocality of archaeological data, textual and oral historical sources which led me to reconsider the local and regional context. By combining these sources I have attempted to focus on multiple fields—coastal and town trends, historical events, oral historical memories—and ultimately to present an historical moment in the context of long-term political and economic change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This chapter had a long gestation; the original version was written in 1997 in a seminar with Joseph Miller in the Corcoran Department of History at the University of Virginia. The seminar participants provided abundant insightful criticism and commentary on that version. The initial inspiration for that first version was Jeffrey Hantman's approaches to understanding moments of cultural contact, and these ideas continued to guide the paper's development. The version presented here was adapted from that original paper, as well as the paper I gave at the 1998 Society of Africanist Archaeologists meeting. In preparing the present chapter for publication, both Paul Lane and John Sutton offered useful and critical comments. Libby Vann provided local support. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the encouragement and comments of Adria LaViolette, without whom the paper would not have reached publication.

NOTES

1. Pedro Alvares Cabral, the second Portuguese explorer to visit the coast, and the first to call at Kilwa, was told of Kilwa's prominence by a merchant at Sofala. Vasco da Gama had also heard of Kilwa's prosperity during his initial voyage of 1497 (Ravenstein 1898: 32).
2. The three versions are as follows: an Arabic version copied in the nineteenth century from an earlier text and translated as "Anonymous: An Arabic History of Kilwa Kisiwani c.1520", in Freeman-Grenville (1962a: 34-7), a version embedded in the Portuguese chronicler João de Barros' sixteenth century account of the Portuguese explorers, de Barros, "Da Asia", p.239-246, and a version collected in Swahili and translated by C. Velton, a German translator who visited the coast in the 1890s, "The Ancient History of Kilwa Kisiwani", in Freeman-Grenville (1962a: 221-6).
3. The earliest attempts to reconstruct a chronology based on the Chronicles relied on simple methods of calculating the reigns of Sultans and counting backwards to establish a founding date, for example see Strong (1895); Walker (1936); Gray (1951/2); Freeman-Grenville (1958; 1962b). More recent analyses have used more sophisticated methodologies to examine the themes represented in the Chronicles, related to extensive archaeological excavations at Kilwa, in order to understand local ideas of historical change and process. However, due to the early date that some of these Chronicles were documented (early in the sixteenth centuries), correlating evidence gained from Ibn Battuta's visit to Kilwa in 1331 (he named the current ruler in his descriptions which matches the ruler noted in the Chronicles' chronology), and based on overwhelming comparative archaeological evidence in the form of numismatics and architecture, many researchers have agreed on the accurate historical value of many of the Chronicles' thirteenth through sixteenth century details, for example see Chittick (1965), Saad (1979), Nurse and Spear (1985).
4. Sutton has written elegantly about Kilwa's role in international relations and the gold trade in particular and much of the discussion here stems from his work (e.g. 1990; 1997; 1998; 1999).
5. The idea that the Islam of the coastal Swahili was non-conformist or heterodox would have been the view from the Red Sea areas. From a local perspective, this may simply be regarded as a local variant, or a more 'logical' form of Islam. Therefore, coastal Islam only becomes 'heterodox' when viewed within the international realm.
6. Now also known as Triangular Incised Ware or TIW (see Chami 1998).
7. The Chronicles foreshadow these disputes in a story in which al-Hasan bin Sulaiman tests his brother's loyalty after al-Hasan returned from travelling abroad. When questioned whether he will cede the Sultanate to his brother, Daud (presumably the younger brother) remarks, "There will be no quarrel between us when he comes. The land is his land and I shall obey him" (Freeman-Grenville 1962a). Increasingly, succession became more complicated. For example, Saad (1979: 184) notes that after the first few generations "the rights of surviving brothers became paramount and, they in turn gave way to cousins who vied for the throne among them."

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