

8

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PRE-ISLAMIC KILWA KISIWANI (ISLAND)

Felix A. Chami

The Swahili coast is well known for its Islamic towns, dated by colonial and post-colonial scholars to the 10th century who attribute them to Middle Eastern immigrants. Post-1980s work by Mark Horton demonstrated the growth of Swahili Islamic settlements from the ancestors of the Swahili people themselves who adopted Islam and engaged in trade. This author's excavations have demonstrated cultural continuity from the Early Iron Working communities. This work is another demonstration of cultural continuity of the largest Swahili town of Kilwa, beginning in about 3000 BC. The ceramics dating to the last three millennium BC are known in the Rift Valley and the Nile Valley as Neolithic.

La côte swahili est bien connue pour ses villes islamiques datées d'avant le 10e siècle par des chercheurs de la période coloniale et post-coloniale et qui les ont attribué à des migrants du Moyen Orient. Les travaux de Mark Horton postérieurs à 1980 ont clairement illustré que ces établissements se sont développés depuis les ancêtres des swahili eux-mêmes. Ces derniers ont adopté l'Islam et se sont engagés dans le commerce. Les fouilles archéologiques du présent auteur ont établi l'existence d'une continuité culturelle à partir de la période de l'Age du Fer Ancien. Cette continuité culturelle est une fois de plus illustrée à Kilwa, la plus grande ville swahili datée de 3000 avant JC environ. La céramique des trois derniers millénaires d'avant Jésus-Christ est connue comme Néolithique dans la Vallée Rift et dans la Vallée de Nil.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a scientific report of the archaeological research conducted on the island of Kilwa, also known as Kilwa Kisiwani (Figs 1 and 2) in June-July 2004 and January-February 2005. This research was sponsored jointly by the African Archaeology Network, Tanzania Government (Department of Antiquity) and the French Embassy in Dar-es-Salaam. Whereas the African Archaeology Network has had an islands component of its research agenda with the purpose of delineating ancient Indian Ocean cultural growth and trade Networks, the objective of the Tanzanian government and the French Embassy was to collect more data on Kilwa to assist in the conservation work. Both objectives were put under the general umbrella of establishing the pre-Islamic settlements or cultural horizons for Kilwa Kisiwani. In this report I shall also mention the results of the work conducted recently by another member of the Network, Emael Sasi, who is conducting post-graduate studies at the University of Dar-es-Salaam under the sponsorship of the Network. This is to show how his work has come to confirm the hypotheses advanced earlier by the present author.