

**CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES  
MONUMENTS ET DES SITES**

**ICOMOS**

**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON  
MONUMENTS AND SITES**

**WORLD HERITAGE LIST: REACTIVE MONITORING MISSION  
TO KILWA KISIWANI  
AND SONGO MNARA  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, EAST AFRICA**

**Report of the ICOMOS Mission, 23-27 February 2004**

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## **Programme of the Mission**

- Day 1: 23 Feb. 2004. Arrived Dar es Salaam 8.30am  
Discussion with Museum and Antiquities Dept. officials
- Day 2: 24 Feb. 2004. Discussions with Museum and University officials/staff
- Day 3: 25 Feb. 2004. Travel to Kilwa, discussions with Antiquities staff
- Day 4: 26 Feb. 2004. Fieldwork at Songo Mnara, Sanje ya Kati and Kilwa Kisiwani
- Day 5: 27 Feb. 2004. Fieldwork at Kilwa Kivinje. Depart for Dar es Salaam.  
Depart Dar for Nairobi at 6.00pm

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Chairman, Finances and Resources Committee, ICOM (International Council of Museums) 2002-present  
Member, Global Heritage Fund Advisory Board 2002-present  
Chairman, Governing Council, Kenya Cultural Centre 2003-present  
Director General, National Museums of Kenya 1999-2002  
Chairman, International Standing Committee on the Traffic in Illicit Antiquities 1999-present  
Commissioner, Kenya Commission for Higher Education 1999-present  
Founding Chairman, Programme for Museum Development in Africa (PMDA) 1999-2002  
Founding Chairman, Africa 2009 1998-2003  
Member, Editorial Board, *African Archaeological Review*  
Member, Editorial Board, *Public Archaeology*  
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## **Executive Summary**

Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara are historic Swahili towns found on islands off the coast of East Africa in the present day Lindi Region, Kilwa District in the United Republic of Tanzania. The two historic settlements were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1981 under criteria III. The two sites, lying on the sheltered harbours of the southern Swahili coast represent a rich and important period in the Swahili world comparable to any medieval city in the world at the time.

Kilwa was first settled around 800 AD, and rose to high prominence around the 11<sup>th</sup> Century with a culmination of great wealth and power in the 14<sup>th</sup> / 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries – a period commonly referred to as the “Golden Age of Swahili Civilisation”. Songo Mnara on the other hand rose in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, at the peak of great wealth on the Swahili Coast. The towns and sultanates traded in various commodities with the outside world such as Arabian Peninsula, India, China and even Europe. The wealth generated was translated into great works of buildings that today stand in the form of domestic houses, mosques, tombs and town walls, among others.

Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara were particularly known for their wealth and extensive trading systems that extended into the interior of Africa in one hand and as far as to the Far East on the other. Between the 11th and 15th centuries, Kilwa Kisiwani was the seat of an independent sultanate with rich and powerful rulers who minted their own currencies. Kilwa during this period was probably the richest of the Swahili states handling all the sea commerce of South-Eastern Africa, including the gold mined in Zimbabwe. By the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Kilwa was at its peak and in 1331/1332 was described by the great traveller and historian Ibn Battuta (who made a stop there) as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. While both Vasco da Gamma and Cabral called at its port, Francisco d’Almeida was not content with this and as such seized it in 1505 and established a fortress there. Kilwa declined during the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the coming of and its subsequent conquest by the Portuguese, who diverted the hitherto important Indian Ocean trade. It however recovered moderately, mostly from trade in slaves, during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Since 1800, the great sultanate of Kilwa has been reduced to a small town/village; however its imposing and prominent stone monuments, including the fort, the palace and the most splendid ancient mosque in East Africa is reminiscent of a great medieval town of international repute, with over 1,000 years of history behind it. In the subsequent years, the site has experienced conservation challenges including from the growing island population who have encroached on the site. The old structures have continued to deteriorate without any meaningful conservation mitigations or a strategy for maintenance. There has been a threat through over growth as well as beach erosion that has threatened important monuments like the Fort-Gereza, first built by the Portuguese with later additions by the Arabs. All these have combined to create a situation requiring immediate attention if this important heritage for humanity is to survive. Thus the World Heritage Centre requested ICOMOS to carry out a reactive monitoring mission to study the state of conservation of the property, make recommendations to improve it and undertake consultations for the future conservations of the site. Furthermore, the consultancy was to undertake a thorough study of the problems facing the site of Kilwa such as beach erosion and its impact on the site; to review the possibility and make recommendations concerning danger listing of the site.

## **Introduction**

The two sites of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara are located on two adjacent islands off the mainland Tanzania coast. Both were Swahili settlements representing a rich period in Swahili life; while Kilwa Kisiwani dates from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Songo Mnara did not rise up until the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and was probably a settlement town built by the sultans of Kilwa.

Kilwa itself consists of three main centres namely Kilwa Kisiwani, which is the island with the World Heritage Site, Kilwa Masoko, which is the administrative and harbour centre; and Kilwa Kivinje, which was also a former slave market, a German administrative centre and today a fishing village. This latter is located roughly 20 kilometres north of Kilwa Masoko.

Kilwa Masoko, which is the landing and dispatch point to both Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara, is 350 kilometres from Dar-es-Salaam, the capital city of Tanzania. The town is linked to Dar-es-Salaam both by road and air (the latter infrequent). While the road is under construction and the Mkapa Bridge on the Rufiji River that connects the north to the south has helped a lot, the prevailing condition of the road is still quite bad, with the journey from Dar-es-Salaam to Kilwa taking a minimum of six hours by road. Once you reach the island, the heritage is truly spectacular with a long and outstanding history.

Named by the Portuguese as the Island of Quiloa, today the ruins stand high, reminiscent of the past glorious days when the Indian Ocean was a thriving commercial space with all the maritime powers competing for its control. Many towns sprung up along the entire East African Coast that traded with overseas traders in goods such as mangrove poles, ambergris, tortoise shell, various animal skins and gold. In exchange were received beads, porcelains, Islamic monochromes and other manufactured products from the Near and Far East. Kilwa, with its good harbours and central position, grew as a maritime power whose influence was felt over more than 1,000 kilometres of the coast of East Africa at its height of power in the 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

Today, the two settlements of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara are comprised of ruins, with ancient buildings that date to as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and also to as late as 18<sup>th</sup> Century, during the revival of prosperity from slave trade; the ruins symbolise great achievements, prestige and authority of an African civilisation, and a true testimony to rich historical past and unique Swahili architectural achievement.

Research on the site of Kilwa Kisiwani in particular has contributed to the understanding of both the development of Swahili architecture as well as the maritime history of the Swahili people and those with whom they came into contact. The Archaeological excavations with the resultant material have brought to light the commercial as well as the cultural exchange in which Kilwa and Songo Mnara were major players. The sites, through this research, have contributed to the understanding of the Swahili culture, the Islamisation of the East Coast of Africa and the extensive commercial activities from the medieval period to the present.

Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara have however undergone numerous problems caused by both humans and nature, resulting in the rapid deterioration of the archaeological and monumental heritage of the two islands. As far back as 1981 ICOMOS had advised

the government of the United Republic of Tanzania to institute the necessary procedures for their inclusion on the World Heritage List of endangered properties. Over the period since then, there have been various communications between Tanzanian cultural authorities with UNESCO on the problems bedevilling the two sites. However little seems to have been achieved so far.

It is due to these problems that UNESCO requested ICOMOS to carry out a reactive mission on the sites to determine the following:

- 1) Study the state of conservation of the property;
- 2) Make recommendations to improve it;
- 3) Undertake consultancies for the future conservation of the site;
- 4) Undertake thorough study of the problems facing the site such as beach erosion and its impact on the site;
- 5) Review the possibility and make the necessary recommendations concerning danger listing.

### **Legal and Administrative Framework**

Today Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara are protected monuments under the Preservation of Monuments Ordinance 1934 and under the Antiquities Act of 1964. They are administered by the Department of Antiquities under the Ministry of Environment and Tourism of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania.

The current legal framework was last reviewed in 1964 and over the time situations have changed. The existing legislations might need improvements to meet the current and challenging developments. However, I agree with Ndoro in his report of 2001 that the law is adequate. The Antiquities Act would apply effectively in the designated areas. Further, the Antiquities Act allows for by-laws to be enacted by the local authority. While the Antiquities Act does not address the issue of a buffer zone, this can effectively be taken on by the by-laws which would also address issues such as building codes, environmental protection and land utilisation, among others. As indicated in the document, the Antiquities Act also allows for a Conservation area to be designated although it does not go beyond that by explaining what it means. This however is a strength, as the Antiquities Department has the final word when it comes to definitions for purposes of management.

Currently it would appear that the legal instrument is not enforced, particularly in relation to encroachment on the Kilwa settlements. The management system that exists which appears to be very thin on the ground does not seem to work. Kilwa Kivinje is even worse as there is totally no presence of the Antiquities Department. There is definitely a need for an effective and workable system of management to be developed if these important World Heritage Sites are to be given proper protection. Otherwise the exercise of protection will continue to be “a fire fighting” exercise.

The suggestion on the Conservation and Development Plan to delegate the supervision of the site to the local authority will not solve the prevailing problems; in any case, as Ndoro (2001) has also pointed out, a World Heritage Site should be accorded the highest protection in the country and leaving it to the supervision of the local authority might not send the right signals. Thus it is imperative that the Department's presence

should not only be seen but also be felt as it effectively manages the heritage together with the community. The visible presence of the Antiquity Department will not only instil confidence in the local community but also demonstrate the seriousness and commitment on the part of the Government. Currently this appears to be missing and the officer in charge appears overwhelmed and would be totally overworked if he had to do all that was expected of him.

### **Recent interventions**

Both Kilwa and Songo Mnara have attracted international attention from as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Kilwa in particular has a long record of its rulers, its status as a commercial hub and a place with a monetary economy, etc. Arab and Portuguese chronicles have helped to understand its history.

From the 1950s up to the present, various academic works have taken place in Kilwa, particularly those of H. N. Chittick, whose archaeological excavations at Kilwa Kisiwani unearthed a dearth of information about the growth, development and decline of the city. Today therefore, historical information on Kilwa is not the problem; the problem is the state of conservation of the ruins, the management strategy and the various other forces that negatively impact on the site.

The concern for this World Heritage Site has contributed to various reports culminating in some interventions that are currently ongoing on selected monuments within Kilwa Kisiwani.

Apart from M. Roberto Bertolino's report "Rehabilitation di Site de Kilwa" of October 1999, there have been other reports, notably that of D. M. K. Kamamba, Laurent Volay and Christian Piffet, "Conservation and Development Plan for Kilwa" of April 2001. The other important reports have been those of Webber Ndoro on "Kilwa Conservation and Tourist Development Plan" of 2001, and "Report on the work done for Kilwa Kisiwani and Sensitisation Workshop in Tanzania" of March 2002. There is also a document "Kilwa: Rehabilitation and Promotion of the Sites of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara Project" by John Kimaro, who is the Tanzanian project manager of the French, Japanese, Government of Tanzania and UNESCO sponsored rehabilitation project. This last one is much more about the current project itself.

All these reports acknowledge the importance of Kilwa and Songo Mnara as World Heritage Sites; they note the threats to the sites and call for immediate action. Webber Ndoro's in particular provides a critical look at the conservation and tourist development plan developed by Kamamba et al. While appreciating the very important effort, there is clearly some shortfall in a number of areas. These may include issues on the need to have a clear and separate management plan, the issue of staffing, issues of community awareness and inclusion which are mentioned but not yet practiced; promotion of the site, and maintenance; whether the legal framework is adequate or not; the issues of other legislations e.g. by-laws among others.

## **State of Conservation at Songo Mnara and Kilwa Kisiwani**

I travelled to Dar es Salaam on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> morning, arriving at 8.30am.

Upon arrival at the Antiquities Department at the National Museums of Tanzania, I was informed that The Director of Antiquities was not in the country; I was welcomed by the Director General of the National Museums of Tanzania, Dr. Norbert Kayombo and subsequently by one of the Assistant Directors of Antiquities, Mama Maro.

On Monday I spent time with the Director General of the Museums, discussing issues on Kilwa and Songo Mnara in the morning. I also discussed with Mama Maro and Fabian Kigadye on the logistics for Kilwa. Since there was no ready transport until Wednesday, I decided to re-arrange my programme to cover the meetings I had to have with various people in Dar-es-Salaam, to take place on Monday and Tuesday.

On Monday afternoon, I spent the time in the Village Museum where I had discussions with the Curator and his assistants and we were later joined by the Director General for further discussions.

On Tuesday, I went for further discussion with the Curator of Village Museum, his assistant and Education Officers. In the afternoon I went to the University of Dar-es-Salaam, where I met and had long discussions with the Head of History Department, Dr. Mapunda, the Head of the Archaeology Department, Dr. Mabulla and Prof. Felix Chami of the Archaeology Unit. The latter also sits on the Scientific Committee of the Kilwa Kisiwani/Songo Mnara project. This project is explained elsewhere.

The vehicle and a driver were made available on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> and we travelled to Kilwa, accompanied by Mr. Fabian Kigadye, who is a planner and a technical officer at the Antiquities Department. As the road is quite rough, it took us six hours to reach Kilwa, where we were met by Mr. John Kimaro, the Antiquities Officer in Charge of Kilwa sites and Songo Mnara. Mr. Kimaro also doubles as the Project Officer for the French/Japanese sponsored Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara project; with him was Mr. Pierre Blanchard an architect, sponsored by the French Embassy and working for the project, among others. That same evening (Wednesday) we spent with the group discussing about the sites, the activities going on, challenges and the community's expectations and also organised the logistics for Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>.

On Thursday, we went first to Songo Mnara, which is the furthest from the mainland, arriving at around 9.30am. I was taken around the site by John Kimaro and Pierre Blanchard, both of whom are not only familiar with the site but also the local people. The site, at the time we went, had a serious infestation of mosquitoes which attacked with fervour despite having applied mosquito repellent. This problem was definitely compounded by the long grass currently found in the site as a result of recent rains, and this environmental problem would need to be dealt with before visitors can be encouraged to the site. It is important to note that apart from a caretaker who was then attending a meeting in Dar, there is no other permanent staff on the site of Songo Mnara. The Antiquity Officer, Mr. Kimaro, once in a while when funds are available, hires casual labourers for a few days to clear the site. This experience is *ad hoc* and there is a need to formalise such an important exercise by empowering the Antiquities Officer, through funding, to properly take care of the site. The same situation of lack of



funding also affects Kilwa Kisiwani; although with the current project, much more is happening.

The Antiquities Officer, Mr. Kimaro has definitely done a good job by clearing the thickets that once covered both Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara to the extent that some monuments were unreachable. Today, however, what is required is constant maintenance by, at the very least, regularly cutting the grass.

It is important that while clearing the sites, large standing trees that do not interfere with the monuments and stand strong should be left to act as wind breakers, shade and protection against constant direct sunlight and rain that cause damage to the ruined monuments. It was observed that at both Songo Mnara and Kilwa Kisiwani, a lot of clearing of trees has exposed some monuments to the elements, causing damage. It was also observed that some trees that were within the sites had fallen, such as at Sanje ya Kati, destroying the monument. At Songo Mnara, a tree had just fallen by the big house (palace) when we arrived, fortunately not causing any serious damages to the walls of the adjacent house. It is noted that just as trees can provide protection to the monuments, at times they also pose a threat (See fig. 1). It is therefore imperative that great care, through constant observation, trimming and general care are provided; a thing that seems to be missing, particularly at Songo Mnara.

### **Songo Mnara: the State of the Settlement**

This is a very spectacular site that at its height was quite rich, as exemplified by the numerous well-built coral stone houses with varying degree of decorations. They include mosques, domestic houses, town wall and burial grounds. The site is generally clean, except for the tall grass that has caused a mosquito menace.

On the northern side of the site as one approaches from the beach, is a wide expanse with no houses but mature coconut trees that belonged to a local family in the past. I was made to understand that when the government took over the site, there was an agreement that the owner (an old man who has since died) would utilise the palm trees until his death. After that it became the property of the state.

This coconut grove provides a semblance of life to the settlement and there are indications that the villagers (probably the family of the late old man) still come to tap the coconut trees; this however is now regarded as an act of stealing.

It was however felt that denying the local people the use of the resources would not augur well with them. It is important to incorporate the local community within the ownership of the site and for them to feel part of it by benefiting from it. After a discussion with the Antiquities Officer, it was felt that the former owners should be allowed to continue to tend the trees, utilise them and perhaps in return, assist with the upkeep of the site; with such arrangements, the local people will feel part of the settlement and become its guardians.

After the coconut trees and on the eastern part of the site is a concentration of houses, including the main Friday Mosque. This mosque had beautifully decorated niches and a roof supported by huge pillars made of coral rag and mortar. It had elaborately decorated *mihrab* – made mostly of porities coral, which has very sharp edges. This

very interesting *mihrab* is now leaning backwards – probably due to movement of the surrounding ground and creating a loose foundation. The whole mosque is open to sunshine and rain, which in the absence of constant and planned maintenance programme is deteriorating very fast. In and around the mosque and basically all over the site, are heaps of scattered rubble of broken walls, making it difficult to walk around the site; in most cases, one finds oneself climbing over standing walls.

The remaining standing town wall found on the eastern part of the settlement is very interesting with puzzle-like cut stones, truly rare features that require protection. At the moment however, there seems to be no special attention given to them and are at the mercy of rain, sunshine and rampant growth of vegetation.

On the same side of the site near a baobab with a large protruding stem, which resembles a bottle, there is a large house, still in good condition. However, like many other structures, it has a huge tree growing on the wall and posing serious conservation problems.

On the south western part of the site are located architecturally striking houses. One particular structure, located adjacent to the main big house (the palace), has wonderful decorations on the inner side of its vaulted roof. This particular room, referred to as the Sultan's Office, has small round Chinese porcelain bowls embedded into the ceiling decoration, similar to decorations found in Kilwa Kisiwani, particularly in the House of the Portico and the small domed mosque, both dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Although the structure is still in reasonably good condition, with the walls also decorated with wooden panels, there is danger from trees growing within it.

Adjacent to the above house and located on the western side of the large house or palace, are a complex of rooms, some dating to as late as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century due to later additions. The house has within its central yard, a deep sunken court and steps found in Kilwa as well as Gede and Pate, the latter two being Swahili settlements in Kenya. The house has well decorated doorways, arches and domes, all finished in porities coral. It has numerous toilet facilities, most of them additions from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This one storey building, with Dhaka (veranda) also has a waiting room with stone benches similar to those in most Swahili towns of the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is however threatened by lack of maintenance/repairs as well as large trees growing around it. On our visit, we found one tree that appears to have fallen overnight, missing its northern wall by a few feet.

Songo Mnara has some very interesting small mosques with more or less hanging *mihrab* not attached to a *qibla* wall. One of them on the western edge of the site adjacent to the mangrove patch became a burial ground at some stage. The graves were marked by sandstone slabs only found on the mainland and as such could have been transported to the island for that particular purpose.

The mosque perimeter wall is fallen except the western wall found in two portions with two door ways to the northern wall. The *mihrab* is undecorated and such mosques are also found in Kilwa, such as the mosque at the Sultan's Palace. This may be a pointer to the close relationship of the two sites – Songo Mnara probably being a retreat settlement for the Sultans of Kilwa.

Lastly, at Songo Mnara there is a structure located inside the mangroves, and surrounded by water often referred to as *Mnara* (pillar), and from which Songo Mnara allegedly derives its name. Some have argued that the structure could have been a mosque while others point out that there was a pillar which has since broken down. Whatever the structure was, it was a heavily built but small structure of great masonry work. It is compact at the base, the reason why it has survived up to the present, yet completely surrounded by water. This is a heritage that needs to be protected at all costs since it does not only stand out as an ingenious construction, but provides the site with the name and the identity. However the way the Antiquities Department, which is charged with this responsibility, operates today, there can be little expectation for them to conserve this structure, let alone the site of Songo Mnara.

Outside the terms of reference of my mission, but closely located and related to Songo Mnara, is the adjacent small island of Sanje ya Kati. I felt that I needed to visit this lush and flat island of about 200 people, whose history is connected closely to Songo Mnara.

### **Sanje ya Kati**

The old site of Sanje ya Kati is contemporary to Songo Mnara. Although today there are not many visible standing structures of significance remaining in the old site, there are numerous ground floor foundations in many parts of the site; of however greatest significance, are the numerous and concentrated number of baobabs. This important tree along the Swahili coast would appear to have been tended by the occupants of many settlements, since there is a 90% chance of finding a site wherever baobabs are found in large concentration.

At Sanje ya Kati the baobabs are unique; there is a very high concentration, and one can notice that even the young trees are not tampered with by the residents the island. These baobabs, some dating to over 200 years, represent the old settlement of Sanje ya Kati and are just as important as the stone structures of the other islands (see fig, II). There are numerous huge trees, but one particular is awe inspiring. This particular baobab has two openings and an open interior capable of comfortably accommodating a family of four to five people. It is a house that has been created through natural phenomenon.

It should be noted that baobabs — apart from their numerous uses ranging from making rope from their fibres, making shampoo from their seeds to making containers from their pods — they also serve as religious /ritual spaces. In the past they were used as grave markers, holding the spirit of the dead and subsequently becoming ritual/prayer places. One often sees all kinds of ritual activities around such baobabs, as they hold the spirit of the various communities.

While it may be not necessary to expand the listing of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara to include Sanje ya Kati — unless the whole region was to be considered as a conservation zone with its unique baobabs — it is imperative to stress to the state party, Tanzania, the importance of protecting this heritage at a national level. The history of the place is very much intertwined with the history of Kilwa and Songo Mnara World Heritage Sites. Its unique baobabs attest to practices and beliefs that still bind the Swahili together with their past. The unique biodiversity, which still serves the spiritual as well as the physical nourishment of the people, needs to be preserved.

## **Kilwa Kisiwani: the State of the Settlement**

Of the two settlements, Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara, Kilwa is the most imposing with its huge monumental structures and a long history. Kilwa is always the one that attracts attention of both international as well as national bodies. It is therefore not surprising that with its various problems, a project supported by the Embassies of France and Japan, UNESCO and Tanzania Government has been ongoing since August 2002. This however is a project of selective conservation of the heritage, as shown below.

### **The Rehabilitation Project**

Apart from the writing of the conservation and tourism development plan document, a more tangible exercise in the form of the creation of a Steering Committee and the commencement of some rehabilitation works at Kilwa have been realised.

This project's objective in general was to assist Tanzania to develop a mechanism of protection and development of its historical heritage, in particular through the rehabilitation and promotion of the archaeological and historical sites of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara. It is part of the Tanzanian Government's poverty reduction strategy, which aims at promoting tourism at a local level using the available heritage for development.

The project is run by a Steering Committee, comprising representatives from the Department of Culture, Embassies of France and Japan, the UNESCO county office, the Department of Antiquities, the Local District Administration of Kilwa, the Ministry of Tourism, and the UNESCO National Commission. It may also incorporate a representative from other ministries or institutions that may be related to the project.

The mandate of the Steering Committee is to monitor the progress of the project activities; to find problems and propose solutions, and to provide advice and recommendations on the management of the project. The project is sponsored by the French and Japanese governments through their embassies (co-operation and cultural affairs department), UNESCO and the government of Tanzania; each has taken a particular responsibility within the wider project framework.

The French Government is supporting limited conservation work within Kilwa Kisiwani site — namely, the Great Mosque, Gereza (very limited), Husuni Kubwa and the Small Mosque. They also support, together with the Tanzanian Government, the research part which is still to commence. Furthermore, the French and Tanzania Governments are to support the construction of an Information Centre to host archival material.

The Japanese government has supported the construction of a new jetty at Kilwa Kisiwani, but which could not be completed due to variation from the quotation. However, the Tanzania Government has put more money for it to be completed and work is supposed to re-commence anytime. The jetty is aimed at creating easy access for visitors to the site, as well as assist the local community.

UNESCO supported the installation of a solar PU system and radio communication in Kilwa Kisiwani to ease communication problems, including providing one mobile radio to the community.

Furthermore, together with the government of Tanzania, UNESCO rehabilitated an old house called German Rest House which serves as a base camp for the French conservation team in Kilwa Kisiwani.

This project is a good effort on the part of the government of Tanzania and its partners. It has seen some emergency work done in some of the outstanding structure such as the Great Mosque, Gereza and currently at Husuni Kubwa. It has also brought supporting infrastructure as noted above. However, this may not provide an answer to all the problems facing the sites of Kilwa.

First, the name suggests that the project includes Songo Mnara in its activities, yet in reality however, Songo Mnara does not benefit from the projects either through rehabilitation or provision of facilities.

Secondly, the rehabilitation work has only chosen a few “important” structures to restore due to inadequate finances. The majority of the monuments will not be rehabilitated. And apart from the Great Mosque and Husuni Kubwa, the others like Gereza have only received patch work. Husuni Kubwa itself, as is indicated in the document, has major problems beyond the capacity of the present conservation and rehabilitation team’s mandate or capability.

Thirdly, the steering committee composition has left out a very important segment – that of local community who are not represented. Thus in a way, the work currently ongoing is seen as that of Antiquities Department and *not* of the local community. The local community still have no ownership of the site.

However, it has to be said that this is a very commendable start and both the Antiquities Department in particular and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania need to be commended. The same goes to the donors who have appreciated the value of this world heritage site.

### **Present State of Kilwa Kisiwani**

As one alights at the entrance of the harbour of Kilwa, the picture that one is confronted with is a carpet of material culture on the seabed, comprising of iron slags, shells, and local pottery and porcelain sherds. The cultural material spreads into the sea for about 80 metres interspersed with stone pebbles, a reflection of the great erosion of the edges of the town and the mass destruction of the archaeological record on this once great city (See fig. III). From an archaeological point of view it could be described as a disaster to the site and to knowledge.

However, unlike when Roberto Bertolino visited the site in 1999, it has since been cleared and most of it is now in the open grass with nearly all of the major buildings both at Kilwa Makutani and Husuni Kubwa and Husuni Ndogo clearly visible (see figs. IV & V). This of course ensures that one is capable of observing in detail the condition of the buildings.

As noted above, the beach has continued to be eroded on a daily basis, removing wall foundations and large amounts of material. The small Malindi mosque by the beach, not far away from the Fort, Gereza, is threatened by active erosion, which has taken quite a portion. There is a need for a sea wall, similar to some found in Swahili towns such as Lamu.

### **Gereza (Fort)**

Gereza (Fort), while it has somehow has remained stable up to now, has portions of it within the high water mark. Both sea waves and the salt spray in the air are constantly causing damage to the fabric (See fig. VI).

The northern wall of the Fort has collapsed. The arch and the flat roof on the main entrance have also recently collapsed and many other portions may follow. Other walls that were observed show signs of large cracks and may soon collapse.

The tower on the Fort is also cracking and although the French team has done some strengthening, this will not last for long. According to Pierre Blanchard, one of the architects, the work that has been done here was to avoid disaster, which was eminent; however, this was not part of their programme and they do not intend to do any further work. With what has been done, the Fort may be safe for up to a maximum of five years, but not more.

It is also important to note that the once beautiful wooden door on the main entrance is now 50% lost and requires urgent conservation work if the main parts are to be retained. It can also be said that although the sea erosion is a bit slow, this is unpredictable and any major rise in water level would cause serious damage.

Currently, part of the fort is protected by the huge boulders that fell from the outer tower, added to the Portuguese one by the Omanis; they act as wave breakers. In addition, part of the southern part of the fort is protected by a line of mangroves that also serve the same purpose. This however is not a solution to the numerous problems befalling the structure and require urgent attention. The project noted by Bertolini in his report, which was supposed to be supported by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for the renovation of the Gereza, has not materialised and there is no indication that it will ever take off.

### **The Great Mosque**

This mosque is indeed grand, both in architecture and also in size(fig VII). It consists of two sections, with the northern part being the oldest. This part had a flat roof with an ablution area located to the western part of the *Mswala*. The southern part, which was added later, was the grandest with a roof of a combination of barrel vaults and domes, with a complex of ablution area located to the southern side. The roof was supported by huge pillars. The earliest part is dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and the latter to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Earlier reports indicated the delicate nature of the structure; today after the renovation by the French team, there are no more threats to the mosque. Both the domes and the

walls have been repaired, cracks repaired and missing key stones on the pillars and arches replaced. The replacements have been marked to show which are the original and which are new materials. The team has done a commendable work in this site and it is now the responsibility of the Antiquities Department and the community to stop the damage caused by, among other things, goats that frequent the structure, climbing up to the roof and posing danger to weak parts. There is also need to keep the site clean through constant upkeep, including constant repairs where necessary. After three weeks of renovations, there were already weeds growing on the wall; this needs to be addressed. The other problem which is common to all the site is the population pressure. The mosque is surrounded on three quarters of its periphery by domestic dwellings and any more pressure may interfere with the structure as people set up little kitchen gardens all around. This too is the responsibility of the state party to put controls. Otherwise there are no more structural problems. Behind the great mosque and adjacent to it is the Great House that could have been used to host visitors. Today however only a half the wall covered in green moss remains. There are also plants and weeds growing on the wall and there is a need for constant upkeep.

### **The Small Mosque**

Located between the Great Mosque and Makutani Palace area, it is a small beautiful mosque with a domed roof, although some domes have fallen (fig Xa). The inner part of the roof is decorated with bowls in similar form and style as the Sultan's Office at Songo Mnara. The mosque has no structural problems; however there are cracks which allow water to infiltrate the structure; there is therefore a need for quick restoration work and removal of the trees growing on the walls. There is already a threat of the outer door pillar collapsing.

The French team plans to work on it and this may solve the problem. There is an open well nearby that poses danger to both humans and animals and requires a protective barrier. This is an exercise that can be carried by the Antiquities Office in Kilwa. It is a common problem and the Antiquities Department were notified of this and other similar cases and have agreed to address them.

### **Makutani Palace**

This is an impressive complex of houses that housed the Sultans and his family/relatives from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The whole complex is now very clean after the vegetation was cleared including the removal of tree stumps. Situated near the beach, the imposing complex with its various structures appears not to be in so much danger structurally, in both its residential as well as the reception areas; the walls appear intact except for large cracks on the palace walls(fig VIIIa). The huge stone masonry supports, probably put by Chittick, are not noticeable anywhere. The complex was surrounded by a wall, now collapsed in many places. One of the remaining wall towers (gate house) has a large crack leaving the structure hanging. (see fig. VIIIb).

Other structures within the complex include the house of the mosque. The little mosque in the house is similar to the small mosque at Songo Mnara, with no *Qibla* wall, leaving a hanging *Mihrab* and two passage ways on both sides of the *Mihrab*.

There is a House F (according to H. N. Chittick's naming) which appears to have serious structural problems. This house is now exposed to both rain and sunshine with no cover and with very weak walls, full of cracks both inside and outside the walls (see fig. IXb).

One interesting observation made was the present usage of the space at Makutani. It is a quiet pleasant place now that it has been cleared, providing a place for both meditation and concentration. We found students from the Islamic School either in groups or singly, reciting the Quran and other religious books in this area. When asked why they preferred this place to either the grave-yard or to the Great Mosque, many replied that it was clean, no noise, quiet and had fresh air, all needed for concentration. Such usage of course ensures cleanliness and contributes to the well-being of the monuments, something that should be encouraged. More so, the local community comes to appreciate the site as a living, usable space.

There are other interesting spaces and monuments adjacent to Makutani. These include Shirasi (or Sultan's) cemetery. It is a concentration of graves, tombs with enclosures with various decorations, mostly in porcelain. Some graves have stepped sides, a design popular in other Swahili towns. The majority of the graves are dated to 18<sup>th</sup> century, and are in good state of conservation. What is required is constant upkeep.

### **Janguani Mosque**

This mosque, located on the northwest side of the site, has fallen and only parts are still standing. The Janguani house is adjacent but is now only a mound. The roof was made up of domes which have now fallen and scattered. Down by the doorway to the prayer hall (*Mswala*) lies a carved one-metre long sandstone which was definitely an import into the island. Other features in the landscape include wells, which were needed for both domestic as well as for religious/mosque purposes (ablution). An interesting one is *Kisima cha Njia Toto* located between the village and Janguani mosque. It is claimed to have three tunnels which were said to go to the Great Mosque, Makutani and Gereza respectively. However this has not been proved – and if anything it appears the tunnels do not go far from the well.

### **Other observations within this Area**

This part of Kilwa where the majority of the monuments are located faces three major threats that require urgent attention. The first is the deterioration of the structures, with no management plan with strategy for maintenance and conservation.

The second problem is the threat from the population. The sites are slowly being surrounded by settlements and there is no demarcated or otherwise buffer zone. This has come with its problems as the integrity of the sites are compromised by new structures with iron roofs around them (fig VII). This is particularly true of the Great Mosque and not Makutani or Husuni.

Thirdly, there is evidence that people are using stones from houses as wells as for marking of pathways (fig XI). This is an interference with the site including the archaeological heritage. It is however clear that the Department of Antiquities has not



only put in place a plan to tackle all these problems, it appears overwhelmed by the problems and little can be expected from it at the moment.

### **Husuni Kubwa**

Both Husuni Kubwa and Husuni Ndogo are located a couple of kilometres to the east of Kilwa site and can be reached both on foot and by boat. They occupy strategic positions overlooking the channel between Kilwa Kisiwani and Kilwa Masoko. By sea, they are reached after walking through a mangrove channel, then ascending staircases dug in the rocks and the red soft sandy soil, which forms the cliff on which the Husunis are located(fig XII).

Husuni Kubwa, which has now been cleared and is undergoing restoration by the French team, is dated to the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. At its time, it was the largest structure in Sub Saharan Africa and is comprised of two parts – namely residential and commercial. Built as a palace, the residential part located on the north consisted of two open sunken courtyards around which the rooms were located; the southern part had the commercial section with numerous rooms: stores, shops, etc. It also had an open space surrounded by numerous rooms with the guest wing open to the sea for view and breeze. The great entrance at the back for business offered people a view of the palace with its opulence. There were also imposing staircases.

Husuni Kubwa also had a swimming pool that has now been cleaned with a depth of up to three metres and there is a section that has been arranged so visitors can dangle their feet in the water (fig Vb). The swimming pool is elaborately decorated and even had water outlets, now clearly visible after cleaning. This building indeed was a masterpiece, an attempt to achieve the best, the most prestigious and the largest. It has its comforts as well as its functional values. There was a huge audience court; the back pavilion domestic court could have been used by the Sultan to receive guests. There was also a small palace court. The sunken courts were well decorated with sandstone brought from the mainland and similar to the ones found at the Small Mosque at Songo Mnara and also the one at Janguani Mosque. The Sultan had a viewing room where he could see happenings on the channel as well as enjoy the breeze.

The French team have concentrated their work on this site and have done some commendable work. One area where I disagreed with them was on their intention to fill and close one room behind the staircase – which I believe to be the strong room – and put a stone masonry staircase for lookout. Instead I suggested they put a wooden staircase which is easily reversible.

The site however faces a major threat to its structural integrity. Husuni Kubwa is built on a cliff of yellow porous sandy soil (fig XIIa). This soil is open to water infiltration and penetration which is what is happening currently. As opposed to the Fort-Gereza where the threat is coming from sea water, Husuni Kubwa's stability is threatened by rain water which is penetrating the soil and rendering it loose and collapsible. Already the palisade has fallen, the small mosque is gone, there was a small structure at the end of the stairs which also disappeared, part of the stair case has collapsed and the other will soon go if nothing is done. The front part of the Sultan's viewing room has also gone. While many of these disappeared in the 1950s and 60s, the remaining threatened portions have been slowly disappearing. It is a problem of the ground on which the

building stands, and not the building itself per se. Thus although the French team is restoring the structure, they will not be able to solve the problem of the eroding cliff. Suggestions have been made including anchoring the hill and experts have quoted for the work. I am however not optimistic that the government of the United Republic of Tanzania would currently have the resources to put into this exercise. The site is under great threat and there is a need for an urgent solution.

The adjacent Husuni Ndogo although has been cleared, the undergrowth has grown once again to cover most of its remaining walls. Apart from the threat from vegetation and cracking walls, the other threat to Husuni Ndogo, and by extension the Husuni Kubwa, is encroachment through cultivation. A family has cultivated up to the wall of Husuni Ndogo, using its wall as a barrier/fence; there is completely no buffer zone between the activities of the farmers and the site itself; even the farmers are not aware that they are a danger to the site. This responsibility however falls on the shoulders of Antiquities Department and they are aware of this.

Most of these problems such as human interference, are due to lack of supervision and the lack of community involvement, and yet it is absolutely necessary that these sites have to be protected. In the absence of a management plan which incorporates community awareness and participation, the task of conserving the site will not be easy.

### **Kilwa Kivinje**

One of my terms of reference was to extend my mission to Kilwa Kivinje and to look at the state of the site and possibility of extending the present World Heritage Site status to include it.

We visited Kilwa Kivinje on the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> February and carried out a survey of the Old Town. The town is located about 20kms north of Kilwa Masoko., and is quite active compared to both Kilwa Kisiwani and Masoko.

This former slave market was the German Colonial headquarters and is now a fishing village; it is an extremely dynamic space where it would appear every household is engaged in fishing. The fish, which is brought in large quantities in the morning, is roasted and dried on special sticks, after which they are loaded into trucks for different destinations. The act of fishing and preparation alone is so unique that if it were to disappear, a heritage would have been lost.

The harbour is dominated by the grand former German administrative building called the *Boma*. Although in a derelict state, the Boma is still structurally sound. It was used as an office until 1990 when it was abandoned.

Behind the *Boma* and to the north, there are a number of historically important houses including the Doctors house and the Missionary's house. They are in a dilapidated state but are still structurally sound.

One unique problem with Kivinje is that it forms part of the living town and most of the historic buildings are private property. Some of these people may not be able to afford renovations and even those who can have to decide whether it is a priority. Thus in the

absence of conservation funds which may be accessed by the property owners, it becomes a very tricky case.

One of the most important and outstanding streets in terms of historical buildings is Mgongeni. This street of one-storey houses has magnificent buildings with a very high concentration of carved doors more or less similar to those in Zanzibar, and in Mombasa and Lamu Old Towns. Although there are no great varieties in door styles, the high concentration of these doors in this historic area is unique.

Most of these houses are dilapidated but are still inhabited and as such the doors so far have been safe. However, a couple of houses which have since been abandoned, had their wonderfully carved doors on the ground rotting. There is an imperative need to protect this unique architectural heritage, at least the doors, before it disappears. The State Party, if only in the short term, should draw up a programme of documentation, gazettelement and protection of these properties. In the long term, recommendations are below.

### **Specific Issues:**

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

From the above report, numerous issues emerge that require attention for the sites to be protected. Among the emerging issues are damage caused by sea erosion; collapsing monuments due to non-intervention; the problem of zoning or non-existent buffer zone and population pressure; non-participation of the community; unclear management systems leading to inactivity; and an old legal framework that may require revision, among others.

There are issues concerning the nomination, which was only based on the archaeology and historical importance. Kilwa Kisiwani however, also has a living part with a community that impacts on the site physically and even spiritually. This should be taken into consideration. There are myths, music, crafts, religious significance, all associated with the common and shared experience of the site that were never taken into consideration. If they had been, it would not be imperative to review the original nominations in order to involve the local communities and include both tangible and intangible factors that were limited. Access and pride among the communities of their heritage is paramount in the protection of heritage – particularly world heritage.

The other issue that has emerged is the need to conserve Kilwa Kivinje and more so to even extend the World Heritage status to cover it. If this is the case, as suggested below, would the heritage: Kilwa Kisiwani, Songo Mnara and Kilwa Kivinje still be considered under Criteria III? Or should it, because of the nature of both Kilwa Kisiwani and Kivinje having a dynamic living population that impacts on the heritage, be considered as historic cities? At a national level however, would it not be prudent to declare Kilwa Kisiwani, Songo Mnara, Sanje ya Kati, Kilwa Kivinje a conservation area with building codes as part of the regulations in the area? The Antiquities Act allows for both a conservation area to be designated as well as the setting up of by-laws that could be used to manage this area.

What emerges is therefore that the heritage in the Kilwa area, including the World Heritage Sites, are of paramount importance to Tanzania as well as to the rest of the

world. The heritage, as noted above, has some major problems, some of which are through omission.

So far the pressure put on the World Heritage Sites by the different elements including population pressure could cause considerable and irreversible damage to this heritage of humanity. It is also clear that a place like Kilwa Kisiwani, for example, is a living place with people who have their expectations and needs. Currently there is a proposition to have a 500-metre buffer zone; yet in reality people have already constructed on the designated areas and it would be quite difficult to move them, given even the current shortage of land in the area.

The situation has reached a state whereby if no control is put in place; the whole listed heritage will become a living thriving town with modern houses. Where can we strike a balance, to create a situation where people live with the monuments, their needs met by preparing all the features that give the heritage its special character and identity; this could be the case for Kilwa Kisiwani & Kilwa Kivunge.

Based on the various demands and the state of the heritage on the ground, coupled with the fact that the heritage needs the good will of the community, my first recommendation would be that the State Party reconsider the criteria under which the sites are listed, and to be listed as historic towns. This will not only incorporate the archaeology and history of the monuments, but will carry along the community and their identity, recognising their tangible and intangible heritage that forms the rich heritage of Kilwa.

Further more, this will allow the government to increase the size of the World Heritage Site and to incorporate some of the currently inhabited areas. These areas also included could be designated buffer zones and building and land utilisation regulations put into place.

It is therefore recommended as follows:

1. Considering the importance of the World Heritage Sites of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara, any programme or projects, local international should take into cognisance the recommendations included in international documents, particularly UNESCO conventions and recommendations and ICOMOS charters.
2. The erosion that currently takes place along the beach at Kilwa Kisiwani is of great concern. It does not only pose a danger to the Gereza but to the whole site. There are alternatives to solving this problem but the most obvious would be to construct a sea wall as those found in Lamu and Zanzibar. However, in doing this, there is a need for research to ensure that by putting up of the sea wall this will not lead to an erosion problem elsewhere in the island. The other alternative would be tide breakers in the form of large boulders put along the shore, like what is found on the pier at Robben Island. This however will not only be quite expensive but may change the cultural landscape/seascape of Kilwa, deforming its original look. Furthermore, the mangroves by Gereza should, as much as possible, be protected and if possible extended through continued growing. This will reduce the ferocity of the water but not completely stop the erosion of the

beach and the threat to Gereza and Malindi Mosque. My first choice is therefore a sea wall.

3. Gereza needs urgent attention addressing both the erosion threat as well as the collapsing building fabric. There is an urgent need to rehabilitate the building through a conservation strategy that will involve strengthening the structural integrity, addressing all the cracks and the collapsing roof portions as well as urgent conservation of the door. There is also need to address the material composition for restoration, particularly the lime. Already the plaster patchwork that had recently been done is already peeling off at a very fast rate. It appears that the lime used currently either has a lot of salt content and does not match with the existing fabric, or the combination of the lime and sand is not done in a proper way. However, the Zanzibar Stone Town Conservation Development Authority (STCDA) has done good work with lime-making and it may be important that they get involved in the project or asked for advice on the same.
4. The re-enforcement of the structurally weak monuments should apply to all the other monuments having the same problems, eg. the numerous huge cracks found in nearly every building at Songo Mnara and Kilwa Kisiwani.
5. There is urgent need to create a buffer zone or enact by-laws governing new settlements. Thus the current encroachment of the sites, particularly at Kilwa Kisiwani, may lead to total inclusion of the monuments in the new town. However, to balance the needs of the people with the needs of the heritage both at Kilwa Kisiwani and Kilwa Kivinje, the State Party should revisit the criteria for listing of Kilwa to include a living historical town. There is immediate need to involve the community in the conservation and protection of the heritage. This can only be done if the community is made to be part of what is going on – such as inclusion in the steering committee, their expectations and their visions on the heritage need to be integrated, and there is a need to realise that heritage management is about reconciling differing values. The community must also feel that their voices are being heard, that they benefit from the site. Currently when you ask them what they see as benefit, they will tell you the sharing of money paid by tourists to visit the site, which is not much and cannot even maintain the site. Thus community awareness to create a sense of belonging as part of a management strategy is urgent. More so, benefits can come in many ways such as employment, support of schools and health centres, etc. At the moment, the heritage is seen to belong to the Antiquities Department, based in Dar-es-Salaam.
6. It is absolutely necessary that a proper management structure and mechanism be put in place to manage the World Heritage Sites. The current Manager, Mr. John Kimaro is qualified, hardworking and positive. However, he needs support and guidance. The Antiquities Department must be seen to be present and effectively managing the heritage together with the community.
7. Based on what is on the ground at Kilwa Kivinje, it is recommended that the State Party moves with speed to extend the listing to cover this site. This will result in Songo Mnara, Kilwa Kisiwani and Kilwa Kivinje Historic Settlement Towns.

8. From the above report it is clear that the heritage sites of Kilwa Kisiwani, Songo Mnara and Kilwa Kivinje are seriously threatened. The longer the problems take to address, the more destruction will occur.

The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, through the Antiquities Department, seem overwhelmed. There seem to be no proper plans nor any foreseeable resources specifically allocated to carry out the major work that will save the sites. Based on all the facts given above, it is my considered opinion that all the three sites be put under the Danger list. While Kilwa Kivinje is still undergoing listing procedures; the other two World Heritage Sites of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara should be immediately put on the list of World Heritage in Danger.

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I was also able to visit the sites of Kilwa Masoko, Kilwa Kisiwani, Songo Mnara, Sanje ya Kati, Kilwa Kivinje, in addition to Dar es Salaam on the mainland.

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Nairobi, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2004

George H.O. Abungu, PhD



Fig I: A tree growing on a wall at Kilwa

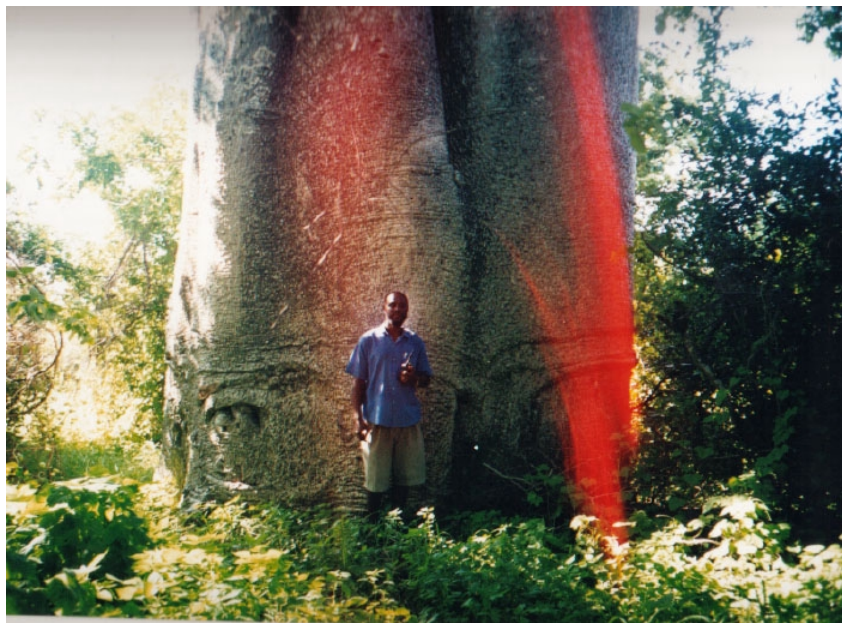


Fig IIa: A baobab at Sanje ya Kati





Fig IIIa: Beach erosion at Kilwa



Fig III b: Beach erosion at Kilwa





**Fig III c:** Pieces of Malindi Mosque by the beach



**Fig IV a:** Makutani Palace compound





Fig IV b: Makutani Palace Kilwa



Fig IV c: Makutani Palace compound, Kilwa Kisiwani





Fig V a: Husuni Kubwa facing the channel



Fig V b: Husuni Kubwa with the swimming pool on the far left



Fig VI a: Gereza, wooden main door



Fig VI b: Gereza, Outer Arab tower added to the Portuguese one





Fig VI c: The Gerezza, High water mark with collapsed northern wall



Fig VI d: Gerezza, Damage to wall fabric by weathering



Fig VI e: Gerez, Collapsed arch and flat roof



Fig VI f: Gerez, Temporary repairs showing cracks on the left





Fig VIIa: Great Mosque northern section adjacent to living quarters



Fig VIIb: Great Mosque exterior





Fig VII c: Great Mosque Interior with large pillers supporting the roof



Fig VII d: Great Mosque Roof after renovation combination of barrel vaults and domes





Fig VIII a: Makutani palace with cracked wall



Fig VIIIb: Makutani Tower gate with cracks





Fig VIIIc: Makutani palace with wall support



Fig IXa: G. Abungu in house F at Makutani complex



Fig IXb: House on the edge of Makutani Complex with exposed and cracking walls



Fig X a: Small domed Mosque





Fig X b: Small domed Mosque with collapsed roof. Outer door pillar collapsing



Fig XI a: A pathway to school marked by stones from monuments





Fig XI b: A modern house partly built with stones from the monuments



Fig XIIa: Husuni Kubwa from the sea



Fig XII b: The red porous sandy soil forming the cliff at Husuni Kubwa