Part 2: Islamization of Africa

September 20
“Indian Ocean Connections”
Spread of Islam Into Africa: 7th-19th C.
Indian Ocean: monsoon winds controlled when ships could move across and around Ocean – merchants forced to spend up to six months on East African coast
Early Connections

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (1st century AD):

- well-established trade linked Arabia with Azania

- main port of trade Mocha (Yemen), southern port in Azania “Rhapta”

- exact location Rhapta uncertain: lay “two courses” from the island Menouthesias, itself “300 stadia” (about 50 km) from the coast.

- Menouthesias was "...a low island covered with trees in which are rivers...". according to the Periplus. And Rhapta lay to the south "...beside and to the east of a cape with a river..." (Ptolemy)

- some scholars argue that Zanzibar or Pemba may be the fabled Menouthesias with Rhapta lying some where between Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam.
- most recent archaeological work by Tanzanian scholars suggests specifically that Rhapta lay in Rufiji Delta, south of Dar-as-Salaam, near Kilwa.

- trade links to Mocha indicate ancestors of the Yemenis claimed ancient right to over lordship of the Azania coast (in terms of trade rather than conquest).

- Rhapta and hinterland ‘governed’ by these people, believed to be Ma'afir.

- control from the Ma'afir may explain the name of "Mafia" given to near-by Mafia Island.
East Africa & Indian Ocean 1st C.
Islam in East Africa:
Pate Chronicles

- settlement dates to early 8th century on Island of Pate (northern part Lamu archipelago), few physical remains

- Pate Town (SW coast) founded by refugees from Oman, Muslims

- re-settled early 13th century by another powerful Omani family, the Nabahani

- ‘evidence’ drawn from Pate Chronicles:
  * many versions (some very different from others)
  * in several languages (only beginning to be translated in early 20th century)
  * difficult to access

- problematic as historical ‘source’
Islam in East Africa

- some claim an original manuscript (*The book of kings of Pate*) written in early 19th C, said to have been destroyed in battle with British 1890

- others (eg Randel Pouwells) argue ‘strength of these histories probably derives as much from a rich 19th C. oral tradition as from a literate one’ [review Journal African History, 1995]

- considered by all to be important as literature, reflection evolution Swahili language and culture

- one reviewer of 1994 book presenting all known versions of chronicles encapsulated how all these observations can be drawn upon by the historian:
“Scholars have been preoccupied with attempting to use the Chronicle to establish basic facts, especially a chronological list of rulers and the duration of their reigns. Of course the Pate Chronicle presents problems in this area, but I would argue that instead of attempting to extract such information from the Chronicle, scholars should instead focus on that information which it does successfully provide. *The Chronicle is a valuable source for addressing issues of culture and identity. It is a reflection of how the people of Pate viewed themselves within the context of their struggles with other communities and forces. The text itself is part of Pate’s process of self definition as a community.* …
Islam in East Africa

... It also points indirectly to another collection of sources which might be used to supplement the Chronicle, material culture. Pate town is a rich yet underexplored archaeological site. Scholars ... have gone a great distance toward making KiSwahili textual sources useful as historical sources. A comparable effort needs to be made with archaeological evidence.”

[from review of M Tolmachova’s The Pate Chronicle, 1993 http://www.smi.uib.no/sa/05/5Pate.pdf]

- last observation also significant: draws our attention to principal ‘sources’ we have for early East African history and the evolution of Islam and Muslim peoples in that region, underscores importance of material and ‘visual’ culture [will return to in ‘Africanization of Islam’]
Islam in East Africa

- this kind of work undertaken by Mark Horton in 1980s

- eight-year archaeological dig at Shanga (SE coast of Pate) found coins, burial sites, early mosque indicating Muslims probably present by late 8th century, definitely by early 9th C.

- rebuilding of mosque mid-to-late 11th Century (larger, new style) suggests arrival Qarmatians, Shia (Muslim) group from Eastern Arabia (interpretation supported by later Portuguese account) [taken together with Pate Chronicle account of Nabahani family’s arrival, suggests pattern of movement from Arabia/Oman to East Africa coast during six centuries prior to arrival Portuguese lat 15th century]

- site abandoned in 15th C, island of Pate remained important competitor with more northern Lamu for Indian Ocean trade
Islam in East Africa

East African Dhow (off Pate Island)  ‘Shanga’ archaeological site (1980s) and ‘Pate Town’
- another major ‘chronicle’, historical source, derives from Kilwa

- c. 975, Sultan Ali bin al-Hasan bin Ali arrived/settled in Kilwa

- according to Kilwa Chronicle, he purchased island from ‘ruling chief’ (pagan? Muslim?) for amount of cloth needed to encircle island  

[Kilwa refers to Island and settlement on coast]

- Sultan married Chief’s daughter [ruled 1310-1333]

- one of (his) seven sons settled on Mafia Island under ‘Kilwa Sultanate’
Local ‘Kilwa Chronicle’ speaks of founding of city-states by Persians from city of ‘Shiraz’: [only partial copies Arabic, Portuguese remain]:

"Then came Sultan Ali bin Selimani the Shirazi, that is, the Persian. He came with his ships, and brought his goods and his children. One child was called Fatima, the daughter of Sultan Ali: we do not know the names of the other children. They came with Musa bin Amrani the Beduin; they disembarked at Kilwa, that is to say, they went to the headman of the country, the Elder Mrimba, and asked for a place in which to settle at Kisiwani.

This they obtained. And they gave Mrimba presents of trade goods and beads [this translation not specifying ‘cloth’]. Sultan Ali married Mrimba's daughter. He lived on good terms with the people."

[Excerpt from East African Coast, Select Documents, G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville. Cited BBC Story of Africa…. East Africa]
Indian Ocean Connection

Wealth of Kilwa, like other ‘Swahili city-states’, depended on trade in ivory and other goods with Eastern/Arab merchants; importing cloth, jewellery (glass beads), porcelain (Chinese); taxes

- most important commodity was gold (controlled by Kilwa alone)

- gold mined in southern Africa’s Great Zimbabwe, taken to coast at Sofala (Mozambique), shipped up the coast via Kilwa

- thirteenth century, Sultans of Kilwa seem to have gained direct control of Sofala

- Kilwa had its own mint; only place in sub-Saharan Africa to issue coins (gold)
1332 visited by Ibn Battuta who described it as one of the most beautiful and best-constructed towns he had visited [see Additional Readings]

“We stayed one night in this island [Mombasa], and then pursued our journey to Kulwa, which is a large town on the coast. The majority of its inhabitants are Zanj [more on ‘Zanj’ in discussion Muslim Slave Trades], jet-black in colour, and with tattoo marks on their faces. I was told by a merchant that the town of Sufala lies a fortnight's journey [south] from Kulwa and that gold dust is brought to Sufala from Yufi in the country of the Limis, which is a month's journey distant from it. Kulwa is a very fine and substantially built town, and all its buildings are of wood. Its inhabitants are constantly engaged in military expeditions, for their country is contiguous to the heathen Zanj.” [Believed to be the people who finally destroyed town in 1588]
“The sultan at the time of my visit was Abu'l-Muzaffar Hasan, who was noted for his gifts and generosity. He used to devote the fifth part of the booty made on his expeditions to pious and charitable purposes, as is prescribed in the Koran, and I have seen him give the clothes off his back to a mendicant who asked him for them. When this liberal and virtuous sultan died, he was succeeded by his brother Dawud, who was at the opposite pole from him in this respect. Whenever a petitioner came to him, he would say, "He who gave is dead, and left nothing behind him to be given." Visitors would stay at his court for months on end, and finally he would make them some small gift, so that at last people gave up going to his gate”

[Ibn Battuta ‘Additional Readings’]
- wealth of Kilwa legendary mentioned by Milton in 'Paradise Lost' where it is called 'Quiloa' (Portuguese name)

- 1498 Portuguese sailed up East African coast (Vasco da Gama), sited Mafia

- returned to sack Kilwa (and other coastal cities) 1505 [Davidson, ‘Africa: Caravans of Gold’ Additional Readings Sept. 27, narrates witness account of sack]

- Portugal formally annexed East African Coast in 1515 (after Papal Bull 1514 divided known World between warring Portugal and Spain)
“Quiloa” (Kilwa) as seen by Portuguese

[http://www.lunacommons.org/luna/servlet/detail/Stanford~6~1~10110~238:-Aden,-Mombaza,-Quiloa,-Cefala--]
Portuguese Era (16th – 17th C.)

- next two centuries, fought for ‘real’ control coast and Indian Ocean trade

- some Swahili states resisted, others ‘used’ Portuguese military force to combat neighbours

- some states sought defensive Omani support against Portuguese/neighbours

- defeat of Portuguese by Omanis in Mombassa 1698 gave Oman control of coast from Lamu to Kilwa (Portuguese remains limited to fortresses in Mombassa, Kilwa)

- provided base for 19th century Omani ‘move’ into Africa via Zanzibar
Birth of Swahili Culture

Combination of growing commerce and Muslim communities led to ‘new culture’: Swahili [see Additional Readings for Sept 13-17]

- most important part of process: intermarriage with locals Bantu (African) women by merchants

- while women may not always have converted, children of these marriages were brought up as Muslims: necessitated teachers, mosques, following of Islamic ritual/celebrations

- some local traditions provide ‘glimpses’ of how process evolved both on ‘common’ and ‘royal’ levels

- suggests upper-class women may have been married for access to land; (African) slave women may have been married for children
- Initially, Swahili language (combination indigenous Bantu and Arabic, with additions Persian) most outward identity [as above, Sept 13-17]

- by 17th century, Swahili written in Arabic script, distinctive intellectual and artistic society evident

- Developed into what is now called ‘Swahili Culture’ (architecture, literature, rituals/celebrations) [more under ‘Africanization of Islam’]
Swahili Culture

Local Dress (left); Prophet’s Birthday (right)

[“Swahili Coast”http://www7.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/10/01/html/ft_200111001.6.html#]