

récentes recherches sur la côte orientale de l'Afrique

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The present note is intended to bring up to date in a few words the information given in my article "L'archéologie de la côte orientale africaine" published in *Arabes et Islamisés à Madagascar et dans l'Océan Indien* (Tananarive 1967).

It may be recalled that the excavations at Kilwa, 350 km south of Dar es Salaam, showed that settlement at that island town-site goes back to around the ninth century. The settlement was initially small, it did not attain really its greatest prosperity until shortly after A.D. 1300.

Since the termination of the excavations at Kilwa, the British Institute of History and Archaeology in East Africa has turned its attention to regions further north. At Manda, north of Lamu, preliminary excavations have revealed the existence of the relics of a wealthy town which flourished from the ninth century onwards. It is clear that this town had very close relations with the Persian Gulf, and probably with Siraf in particular; it may be that here we have a colony of settlers from that region. The imported pottery, which comprised some 30% of the whole (compare 0.2% at the same period at Kilwa) included a few pieces of Chinese porcelain of the ninth and tenth centuries - the earliest yet found in eastern Africa. Glass was also imported in quantity, but coins were absent and glass beads little used. While most remains of buildings in the area investigated were of mud and wattle, there was some coral stone masonry in lime mortar. Along the shore are the remains of a stone wall built of massive masonry, with blocks of up to one ton weight set without mortar. This is the only example of such masonry yet found; it probably dates from the eleventh century. A fragment of a steatite bowl may possibly derive from Madagascar, as certain objects of this material from Kilwa certainly did.

In the local historical records (which are of late date) the most prominent place is given to Pate. This, with Manda, is supposed to be the oldest city in the region, but excavation demonstrated that it was, with the exception of Lamu, the last to flourish, and was probably at its most prosperous in the eighteenth century. Other settlements of intermediate date between Manda and Pate were found. The chronicles of Pate must thus be regarded with grave suspicion as historical documents.

A preliminary survey in southern Somalia included an examination of Bur Gavo, the supposed site of the dispersal - centre of Shungwaya. Nothing of earlier date than the sixteenth century was found, which indicates that there is likely to be an earlier site of this half-mythical city. Other sites surveyed in Somalia included one of the ninth-tenth century; further work is to be carried out in 1970. These, like Manda, may be connected with the earliest migrants from the Persian Gulf. It is believed that the mixed population which thus grew up on the Somalia coast were the ancestors of the people known as Shirazi further south; there is now strong evidence that these Shirazi of Kilwa, the Comoros and elsewhere did not come direct from the Gulf.