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Mozambique Island: The Rise and Decline of an East African Coastal City, 1500–1700

MALYN NEWITT

Port-cities, it has been claimed, have special characteristics which distinguish them from other urban centres. This special character is derived from their situation at the point where economies and societies based on the mainland meet the societies and economies of other countries beyond the seas. Port-cities have both a foreland (other countries beyond the seas) and a hinterland (the country where they are physically situated). Very often the people who inhabit the port-cities have strong ties in both these directions and derive their special character from the interaction of the two. This paper looks at the history of Mozambique Island — a port-city which became one of the most important centres of the *Estado da Índia* and assumed a unique place in the earliest phase of European expansion, but whose history makes it very different from other cities of the early modern era.¹

URBAN SETTLEMENTS ON THE SWAHILI COAST

Urban life on the East African coast goes back at least a thousand years, and very probably two thousand, as the trade carried by the Indian Ocean monsoons was certainly already in existence at the time of the Roman Empire. By the thirteenth century (of the Christian era) there were a number of large port-cities whose wealth and prosperity was linked to overseas trade, and numerous smaller towns and settlements connected to the larger cities through ties of kinship and commerce. The coastal towns grew up where the trade of the Indian Ocean met the trade of the African mainland, and the distinctive culture of the coastal communities was derived from both.²

The larger port-cities were mostly sited on islands or on mainland sites where there were safe anchorages which could be easily protected from marauders, but they all had a close relationship with the rural-based societies of mainland Africa. The cities depended on their immediate hinterland for food, fuel and sometimes for water, and they provided markets for the sale of locally produced commodities. The inhabitants of the towns often owned or worked farms (*shambas*) on the mainland and,

¹ This paper was read at a workshop entitled *Nodes of Empire: Portuguese Colonial Cities in the Early Modern Period*, organized by Liam Brockey at Princeton, NJ, April 2004.

² M. N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders. The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

in some cases, built houses and even townships away from the coast. They married African women and established kinship ties with the local peoples. The coastal towns were as much 'African' urban centres as they were towns of the Indian Ocean rim.

Although Hindus, Parsees and, from time to time, Chinese, played an active part in Indian Ocean trade, it was Muslims who were to become the dominant trading community of the region. Islam reached the East African coast at an early date, taking root among the coastal communities and spreading southwards with the expansion of seaborne trade. By the fifteenth century the coastal towns were all ruled by Muslim sheikhs or sultans who often claimed to be *sharifs* and to have links with the Islamic lineages of the Hadramaut or Persia.

Some of the towns, like Kilwa and Mombasa, grew into large cities which attracted wealthy merchants and played a key role in Indian Ocean trade. Other towns were smaller and their economies were more locally based. Rather than taking a part in international trade, these smaller settlements often supplied the large towns with foodstuffs, raw materials and locally produced artisan manufactures. The pattern of urban expansion was for members of the urban elites to found new towns and settlements, often as the result of family or factional quarrels. These remained dependent on the mother city to provide for their commercial and economic prosperity and to establish the legitimacy of their ruling elite. However, there was no system of formal political control and certainly no 'Zanj empire' as was imagined by earlier historians.³ By the fifteenth century this urban civilization had spread down the Mozambique coast as far south as the modern Inhambane. It had also spread along the shores of north-western Madagascar and through the Comoro archipelago.

Like the other major commercial cities of the Indian Ocean rim, the cities of the Swahili coast were usually autonomous and were not controlled by states on the mainland or by maritime powers. They were ruled by Islamic elites who had kinship ties with elites in other Indian Ocean cities but their populations intermarried with locally based African societies. Their wealth derived from international trade but they depended on the mainland for food, raw materials, labour and local manufactures. The more wealthy built palaces, houses and mosques in stone or coral to designs similar to those of Arabia and the Gulf; the less wealthy employed local African building styles but demonstrated their links with the wider Islamic world by their elegant pillar tombs. As well as being merchants in their own right, the rulers of the port-cities played a key role in regulating international trade, providing pilots and

³ For example, L. W. Hollingsworth, *A Short History of the East Coast of Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1929), Chapter 4, 'The Zanj Empire'.

warehousing, facilitating sales, arranging the repair and provisioning of ships, and providing security for visiting traders.

SWAHILI MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique Island is typical of many Swahili town sites and has a geographical relation to the mainland similar to that of Kilwa and Mombasa. It is at the same time dependent on the mainland and insulated from it, embedded in Africa and exposed to influences coming from the ocean. It is situated on a narrow coral island in Mossuril Bay, about a kilometre from the mainland. The island is about three kilometres long by five hundred metres wide and is shown in a drawing of 1540 as being made up of two rocky outcrops connected by a bank of sand.⁴ With the exception of brackish water obtained from shallow wells near the sea (called *fontainhas*), the island has no fresh water supply and its inhabitants have always depended for their drinking water either on collecting rain water in cisterns or on bringing water by boat from the mainland and storing it in large water jars imported from India.⁵ Two other small islands lie in the mouth of the bay, partially excluding access to the inner harbour, but between the island and the mainland is a deep, sheltered anchorage.

Although pottery found on the island can be dated to the fourteenth century (of the Christian era), Mozambique is not mentioned in Islamic documents prior to the fifteenth century.⁶ However, traditions suggest that the Swahili community there was an offshoot of Kilwa and that its ruling families were linked with the rulers of Angoche and Quelimane further to the south.⁷ Duarte Barbosa reflected these traditions of origin when he wrote in 1514, that Mozambique was frequented by the ‘Moors who traded to Sofala and Cuama [the Zambesi] [. . .] who are of the same tongue as those of Angoya [Angoche]’.⁸

The accounts of the early Portuguese voyages to the East provide some detail about the Swahili township of Mozambique. According to Damião de Goes, the island community was ruled by a sheikh (*xequê*), called Zacoêja, from whom merchants had to obtain permission to trade and who was able to provide Vasco da Gama with foodstuffs ‘por preços

⁴ Gerhard Liesegang, ‘Sobre o crescimento da ocupação da Ilha de Moçambique e o desenvolvimento da estrutura a observar no fim do tempo colonial’, in *Ilha de Moçambique. Convergência de Povos e Culturas*, ed. by Matteo Angius and Mario Zamponi (San Marino: AIEP, 1999), p. 46.

⁵ Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, ed. by A. C. Burnell and P. A. Tiele, 2 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1885), 1, 28.

⁶ Liesegang, p. 47.

⁷ Manuel Lobato, ‘A Ilha de Moçambique antes de 1800’, *Oceanos* 25 (1976), 11.

⁸ *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, ed. by M. L. Dames, 2 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1918–21), 1, 16.

honestos' (at an honest price) as well as pilots to guide him along the coast to the north.⁹ Water was brought from settlements around the edge of the bay which were clearly extensions of the island community on the mainland. The wealthier inhabitants of the island had adopted the lifestyle of a typical Islamic community and the sheikh assumed a style of dress which reflected his status as a ruler of an important Indian Ocean town.

He wore a robe, after the manner of the Turks, made of fine white cotton, over which he wore an open tunic of Mecca velvet, and on his head a turban of different colours woven with gold thread; he had a short sword ornamented with gold and jewels in his girdle, a dagger of the same fashion, and velvet sandals on his feet.¹⁰

Boats seized in the harbour by Vasco da Gama in 1499 were found to contain luxury items including perfume, fine cotton fabrics and glazed pottery.¹¹

Álvaro Velho's account of Vasco da Gama's first voyage is full of incidental information that shows how strong ties were with the local communities and how important the economy of the hinterland was to the functioning of the coastal towns. At each port in eastern Africa the Portuguese were offered food for sale. At Mozambique there was an abundance of melons and cucumbers as well as grain, sheep, pigeons, goats and fruit, all of which could be bought with glass beads. When the *Rafael* ran aground off Mtangata, boats came off from the shore to sell oranges. Velho also comments on the palm groves and gardens that existed on the landward side of the town of Melinde. He was very interested in the cargoes of any vessels that were captured and he describes the contents of one boat captured near Mozambique as including 'cotton stuffs, baskets, butter in a jar, glass phials of scent, books of the law, a box containing skeins of cotton, a cotton net, and baskets of millet' — a reminder, if any were needed, of the importance of cotton, both locally grown and imported, in the economy of eastern Africa at this time.¹²

Although Velho's account mentions four trading ships in the harbour at Mozambique with cargoes which the Portuguese understood to include gold, silver, jewels and spices, it is clear from the accounts of his immediate successors that Mozambique was not an important participant in international trade and played only a supporting role in the commerce of

⁹ Barbosa calls him a 'Xarife': Dames, 1, 16; but in Álvaro Velho's account of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama it was the ambassador of the ruler who was described as being a *xarif*: *Vasco da Gama's First Voyage*, ed. by E. G. Ravenstein, in C. Ley, *Portuguese Voyages* (London: Dent, 1947), p. 17.

¹⁰ Damião de Gões, *Crônica do Felicissimo Rei Dom Emanuel da Gloriosa Memória*, in G. M. Theal, *Records of South-Eastern Africa*, 9 vols (Cape Town, 1898–1903), III, 78.

¹¹ Ravenstein, p. 18.

¹² Ravenstein, p. 18.

the Indian Ocean.¹³ Although Islamic sources refer to locally made pottery, in the 'tradition of Sancul', the island's principal *raison d'être* was as a boat building centre.¹⁴ This is not mentioned specifically by Velho but he does refer to masts being obtained from Pemba which draws attention to the importance of boat-building as an industry on the East African coast.

MOZAMBIQUE AND THE *CARREIRA DA ÍNDIA*

At first the Portuguese visited the East African ports purely as stopping places on their way to India, but in 1506 the decision was taken to set up two fortified trading factories on the coast, Kilwa and Sofala being chosen because of their importance in the gold trade. Kilwa was abandoned in 1513 after the Muslim traders left the island, taking their trade with them, and the factory at Sofala then became the centre of Portuguese commercial activity on the southern part of the East African coast.

However, almost from the start, it was realized that, although Sofala was an important centre for the gold trade and a suitable port for the coastal dhow traffic, it was too shallow for the Portuguese *naus*. A deep water harbour would be needed to provide a way-station for the ships of the *carreira da Índia* which were usually unable to make a non-stop voyage from Europe to India.¹⁵ Mozambique Island seemed exactly to meet what was required, although time was to show that the entrance to the anchorage was difficult and dangerous. Vasco da Gama and Cabral had both been able to water and re-victual their ships there and in 1503 da Gama had made use of the boat-building facilities to assemble a caravel whose timbers had been shipped out on board one of his larger vessels.¹⁶ He also built a store house on the island and left some of his men in charge of it. Soon after the captaincy of Sofala was founded in 1506, a *feitoria* was built on Mozambique Island and in 1507 a small fortification was erected which became known as the *torre velha*, and was placed under the command of an *alcaide-mor*.¹⁷ Writing a few years later, Barbosa described how 'our ships now take in at this port water, wood and provisions which are found in that land, and there they mend the ships that need it [...] and from there they send supplies to the Portuguese at Sofala'.¹⁸ In 1517 a letter to the king of Portugal even

¹³ Ravenstein, p. 14.

¹⁴ Gerhard Liesegang, 'O Quadro Histórico da Região antes da Chegada dos Portugueses', in Angius and Zamponi, pp. 36-43.

¹⁵ For the argument over the route the *naus* should take to India see C. R. Boxer, 'Moçambique Island as a Way-station for Portuguese East-Indiamen', *Mariner's Mirror* (1962), pp. 3-18.

¹⁶ Goes, p. 99.

¹⁷ Goes, p. 131.

¹⁸ Dames, I, 16.

claimed that at Mozambique 'there are such carpenters as cannot be bettered by those in Lisbon'.¹⁹

The inhabitants of Mozambique Island, therefore, continued to provide the same services for the Portuguese as they had for the Swahili merchants — a function dictated by the needs of seaborne commerce along a thousand miles of African coast. Here, as elsewhere, it is necessary to stress continuity rather than discontinuity in the early modern history of the Indian Ocean and its societies.

For twenty or thirty years the settlement on Mozambique Island remained subordinate to the fort and factory at Sofala, but its importance grew steadily as a place where ships could be repaired and the India fleets could be serviced. In the first twenty years of the *carreira da Índia* thirty-nine ships outward bound from Lisbon wintered on the East African coast (though not all of them at Mozambique). For the rest of the century only forty-four wintered at Mozambique while fifty-seven ships that had arrived late continued their journey to India taking the route outside Madagascar. On the return voyage forty-eight ships wintered at Mozambique in the course of the century and a total of 152 stopped there. Taking outward and return voyages together, 131 ships wintered on the East African coast (108 of them at Mozambique) so that at least one ship a year was spending up to six months in the port.²⁰

It has been claimed that 30,000 men died at Mozambique in the years up to 1558. This figure is certainly exaggerated but for many Indiamen arriving from Portugal, Mozambique provided the first landfall in six months and there were many sick on board.²¹ A building had been constructed to serve as a hospital in 1507 and this was rebuilt at the personal expense of one of the captains in 1538.²² In 1522 a chapel, dedicated as Nossa Senhora do Baluarte ('Our Lady of the Bastion'), was constructed within the battery erected at the end of the island.²³ Francis Xavier spent six months there, August 1541-February 1542, and his work in the hospital was especially remembered as only forty seamen died there during this time, an exceptionally small number.²⁴ To fill the gaps in the crews caused by the numbers of seamen who died on the voyages, slaves

¹⁹ Letter of Cristovão de Tavora to the King, Mozambique 20 September 1517, in *Documentos sobre os Portugueses em Moçambique e na África Central 1497-1840*, ed. by A. da Silva Rego, and T. W. Baxter, 9 vols (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos and National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 1962-), v, 198-205.

²⁰ T. Bentley Duncan, 'Navigation between Portugal and Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in *Asia and the West. Encounters and Exchanges from the Age of Explorations*, ed. by C. K. Pullapilly and E. J. Van Kley (Indiana: Cross Cultural, 1986), p. 5.

²¹ Bentley Duncan, p. 18.

²² Boxer, 'Moçambique Island as a Way-station for Portuguese East-Indiamen', p. 14.

²³ This date is given by A. Viana de Lima, *A Ilha de Moçambique em Perigo de Desaparecimento* (Porto: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1983), p. 51; other authors give 1527.

²⁴ James Broderick, *Saint Francis Xavier* (London: Burns and Oates, 1952), pp. 101-05.

were assembled at Mozambique to be drafted aboard the Indiamen as crew, an example being the twenty-seven slave seamen obtained by Tristão da Cunha for his fleet in 1507.

Although most of the India-bound fleets stopped at Mozambique Island, the captain of Mozambique and Sofala always found difficulty in providing for their needs. As early as 1506 food, cloth, pitch and wax had to be sent from Kilwa to supply the ships that were at anchor at Mozambique.²⁵ In 1559 Francisco Barreto, returning to Lisbon in the *Aguia* after serving as viceroy in India, was forced to put into Mozambique for repairs. Barreto had to wait seven and a half months at Mozambique supporting the officers and crew of his ships from his own purse because there was no proper public provision to pay for crews which had to ‘winter’ (*invernar*) on the island. He was able to carry out repairs to his ship, employing local carpenters and using timber of ‘very good quality’ cut on the mainland. However, although Mozambique had its own dockyard (*ribeira das naus*) there were no proper facilities for careening and this had to be done by making use of the dangerous practice of hauling the ship over on its side while afloat.²⁶ Ships were sometimes broken up at Mozambique but no large *naus* were ever built there as they were in India.²⁷ As Boxer long ago pointed out, in spite of the importance which for three centuries Mozambique had as a port of call for the India fleets, it never acquired adequate dockyard facilities.

More than any other city of the *Estado da Índia*, Mozambique had a fluctuating population which could double over night with the arrival of ships from Portugal. Hundreds of sick would be landed and the crews would come ashore, often in a semi-starving condition. The city then had to provide care for the sick while food had to be found for the extra mouths. When Jean Mocquet arrived in Mozambique in 1608, just after the Dutch had departed, he recorded that over 750 sick persons from the fleet died on the island. There was no food to be had for gold or silver until eventually he found an African who sold him a small fish fried in oil. Only brackish water was to be had and he had no accommodation until someone allowed him to build a hut of palm fronds in a garden.²⁸

Supplying the city with food was a perennial problem. As the island itself was small and waterless, it relied on its immediate hinterland and on a wider region which stretched hundreds of miles to the north and south

²⁵ Orders from Pero Fogaça, captain of Kilwa dated 10 Septeber 1506, Rego and Baxter, 1, 654–65.

²⁶ Diogo do Couto, ‘Narrative of the loss of the *Aguia* and *Garça*, 1559–60’, in *Further Selections from the Tragic History of the Sea 1559–1565*, ed. by C. R. Boxer (London: Hakluyt Society, 1968), pp. 34–35.

²⁷ Bentley Duncan, p. 14.

²⁸ Jean Mocquet, *Voyage à Mozambique & Goa* (Paris: Chandeigne, 1996), pp. 54–70.

for its supply. Much of the food it needed was sent from India but local boats sailed to Madagascar, the Comoro Islands, Querimba and to the Zambesi delta in search of supplies. The extent of the trade between Mozambique Island and the Comoro archipelago shows how dependent the city was on the surplus production of the neighbouring societies, and the spread of the Portuguese language and the circulation of Portuguese and Spanish coins shows how important the consumption patterns of the Portuguese town had become to the wider regional economy. When visiting the Comoro islands in 1591, Sir James Lancaster used a Portuguese interpreter and in 1602 the Frenchman, Martin, found 'plusieurs individus qui parlaient portugais'.²⁹ The same year the Dutch admiral, Spilbergen, found Portuguese to be spoken on Mohéli and captured a boat full of Portuguese mulattos carrying rice, cloth and slaves.³⁰ Sir Thomas Roe commented on the large boats that carried on the trade with the Portuguese and recorded that

Many of them speake and writt the Arabique in a fair Character, and some few Portuguese, trading to Mosombique in junks of 40 touns made of Cocor, sowed instead of Pinns, Cawked, tackled, and wholly fitted, victualed, and fraighted with the Vinversall tree.³¹

Christopher Newport in 1614 also remarked on the islanders' trade with the Portuguese and said that on Mohéli Portuguese was spoken by many of the inhabitants. The situation was summed up in the words of François Pyrard, who visited the Comoros in 1601, 'the Portuguese of Mozembic likewise come and traffic there. These islands are of the utmost convenience to Mozembic and to the Portuguese who dwell there for the supply of provisions'.³²

As well as food and fresh crews, the *naus* that stopped at the island required naval stores and water. Coir for rope making, pitch and resin came from Querimba and Mafia and timber for masts from Madagascar. Demand also grew for local artisan products like pottery, woven mats and baskets, straw hats, cotton cloth and small coasting craft.³³ Mozambique Island was waterless and the city relied on a well located at Cabaceira on the northern arm of the bay. However, this source was always inadequate when demand was high. Mocquet records, for example, that he had to

²⁹ *The Voyages of Sir James Lancaster to Brazil and the East Indies, 1591-1603*, ed. by Sir William Foster (London: Hakluyt Society, 1940); A. & G. Grandidier, *Collections des ouvrages anciens concernant Madagascar*, 9 vols (Paris: Comité de Madagascar, 1903-20), 1, 281-85.

³⁰ Grandidier, 1, 310-20.

³¹ *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the court of the Great Mogul, 1615-1619*, ed. by Sir William Foster (London: Hakluyt Society, 1899), p. 21.

³² *The Voyage of François Pyrard*, ed. by A. Gray, 2 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1887-90), 1, 47.

³³ Malyn Newitt, 'The Southern Swahili Coast in the First Century of European Expansion', *Azania*, 13 (1978), 119-21.

wait all day to obtain water from the one well because sailors from one of the ships were filling their water casks there.³⁴

MOZAMBIQUE AS A COLONIAL CITY

By 1540 Mozambique had become the most important naval base for the *carreira da Índia* apart from Goa itself, but the subsequent decades saw the town transformed into one of the two or three most important captaincies of the *Estado da Índia*. Early in the seventeenth century it was especially targeted by the Dutch, who tried three times between 1604 and 1608 to capture it.³⁵

Three factors account for the growth in importance of Mozambique. The first was the expansion of its trade. By 1540 the captains of Sofala had shifted their residence from the small fort on the sand spit at Sofala to Mozambique Island, which thus became the effective centre of all Portuguese operations on the coast. This move coincided with the gradual usurpation by the captain of the royal ivory and gold trading monopoly with the result that, for the first time since the arrival of the Portuguese, Mozambique Island became an important commercial centre as well as simply a naval base. Goods, mostly cloth, brought by the ship operating the voyage from Goa to Mozambique, were landed and warehoused on the island, while the ivory and gold traded on the East African coast was now concentrated at Mozambique for shipment to India. So important had the gold trade become that Father Monclaro reported in 1570 that gold dust was the current medium of exchange in the island.³⁶ Bentley Duncan, in his detailed analysis of the *carreira da Índia*, claimed that it was the trade of Mozambique as much as the dockyard and service facilities that made the outward and homeward bound *naus* stop so regularly at the island.³⁷ In 1586 the Crown formally agreed that the captain of Mozambique might operate the Crown's commercial monopoly in return for a substantial payment. The captain now had exclusive control of the trade of Sofala and the Zambesi valley, a vast commercial hinterland whose trade was channelled through Mozambique Island, giving the island a status similar to that enjoyed by Kilwa in pre-Portuguese times.

The second factor which enhanced the importance of Mozambique Island was the decision taken in 1545 by the viceroy, João de Castro, to replace the *torre velha* and the old bastions on the island with a major fortress. Castro feared the expansion of Turkish power in the Indian

³⁴ Mocquet, p. 71.

³⁵ For the sieges see E. Axelson, *Portuguese in South-East Africa, 1600–1700* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1960), pp. 15–30; Mocquet, pp. 161–88.

³⁶ Francisco Monclaro SJ, *Relação da Viagem q Fizerão os Padres da Companhia de Jesus com Francisco Barreto na Conquista de Monomotapa no anno de 1569*, in Theal, III, 208.

³⁷ Bentley Duncan, pp. 4, 6.

Ocean and decided that the fortress at Mozambique should be one of the largest in the *Estado da Índia*. The same military architects were employed who worked on restoring the fortifications at Diu and construction of the new fortress began, probably in the late 1540s. The massive scale on which fort São Sebastião was designed meant that it was not completed till 1583, while the great cistern for storing water was only finished in 1605 after the first Dutch attack.³⁸ The cost of maintaining the fort and paying the garrison fell to the captains who frequently neglected their obligations. Although there was supposed to be a permanent garrison, when the Dutch attacked Mozambique in 1604 and again in 1607 there were only sixty soldiers in the fort.³⁹ Linschoten observed that the defence of the fortress really depended on the *moradores* who 'are all bound to keep the Castle'.⁴⁰

The third factor transforming Mozambique Island was the arrival of the Jesuits and the beginning of active rivalry in the mission field between the Society and the Dominicans. Mother houses for both orders were constructed on the island and Mozambique became a centre from which they planned to expand their activities in central Africa.

The Dominican friar, João dos Santos, whose account of East Africa was published in 1609, described Mozambique Island as it was before the Dutch attacks. The fortress of São Sebastião which had recently been finished had its own water cistern and storehouses. Outside the fortress was an open square which provided a free field of fire for the two inward facing bastions. On the square was the Dominican church and beyond that the Portuguese town which, Santos thought, had a total population of about 2,000, and where the old fort, now the residence of the factor and the *alcaide*, was situated. Beyond that was the royal hospital which was run by the brothers of the Misericórdia.⁴¹ This city was largely destroyed by the Dutch in 1607–08 and had to be rebuilt early in the seventeenth century during what was the last period of growth of the *Estado da Índia*.

The new town, described in 1634 by António Bocarro, was dominated by its churches, like other Portuguese towns in the East. There was the church of São Sebastião in the fortress, the Jesuit and Dominican churches served by a total of eight to ten priests, the church of the Misericórdia, paid for by the *moradores*, the chapels of Nossa Senhora do Baluarte and Santo António and the private chapel of Nossa Senhora da Saude. However, unlike Goa, Malacca and Cochin, Mozambique was never the

³⁸ Viana de Lima, pp. 34–41.

³⁹ Axelson, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Linschoten, I, 28.

⁴¹ João dos Santos, *Ethiopia Oriental* in Theal, VII, 316–17.

seat of a bishopric. Instead the church on the East African coast was run by an ‘administrator’ subject to the archdiocese of Goa.⁴²

As the colonial city grew, relations with the local Swahili population had undergone considerable change. Soon after their arrival the Portuguese obtained space for themselves on the island from the sheikh and there is evidence that the ruler tried to negotiate a favourable position in Indian Ocean trade as an ally of the Portuguese. However, these negotiations failed and, conscious of the violent conflict that had ended the cooperation of the Portuguese with the rulers of Kilwa and Sofala, the ruling families of Mozambique decided that it would be wiser to leave the island and found new settlements on the mainland. The sheikh himself relocated to Sancul on the southern shores of the bay, which became an important centre of Swahili culture and trade, while another settlement was founded at Quitangonha to the north.⁴³ The Muslim population resident on the island declined in numbers, although when Francisco Barreto’s expedition arrived there in 1570 there were still the remains of the ‘Moorish’ village located at the far end of the island from the fortress and a local population, described as a mixture of Indians and *cafres*. Linschoten, describing the city ten years later, thought there were 300–400 ‘straw houses and cottages, which belong to the natural born people of the country’,⁴⁴ while Santos, early in the seventeenth century, describes a ‘village inhabited by a small number of Moors, most of whom are sailors, poor and wretched, and as a rule usually in the service of the captain and of the Portuguese’.⁴⁵ Portuguese coastal shipping was wholly dependent on the local Muslim sailors. When the viceroy tried to enforce a system whereby all Muslims sailing from Mozambique Island to the Zambesi were forced to give a surety for their return, this was opposed by the local missionaries ‘because of the need that there is of seamen to sail the pangayos’.⁴⁶ Nevertheless the Swahili town (*zona de macuti*) survived, occupying approximately half the island until the end of the eighteenth century, distinguished from the *zona de cimento* by the style of building — the Muslim inhabitants of the island adhering to their traditional style of rectangular houses made of poles, mud plastered and thatched with palm.⁴⁷ Although the ruling family of Mozambique Island had relocated to Sancul it retained close ties

⁴² Agostinho da Zevedo, *Apontamentos pera V Magde ver sobre as Cousas do Estado da Índia e Reyno de Manomotapa*, in Theal, IV, 33–37; Pedro Baretto de Resende and António Bocarro, *Livro das Plantas de Todas as Fortalezas, Cidades e Povoações do Estado da Índia*, in *Arquivo Português Oriental*, ed. by A. B. Bragança Pereira, 11 vols (Bastora: 1936–40), tom iv, vol. 1, part 1, p. 12.

⁴³ Lobato, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Linschoten, I, 29.

⁴⁵ Santos, VII, 317.

⁴⁶ Letter from the king to the viceroy, 25 January 1601, in Theal, IV, 47–48.

⁴⁷ Liesegang, p. 49.

with the Muslims resident on the island and with the Portuguese. The Dutch had expected the local Swahili to support them during the sieges of Mozambique, but the opposite was in fact what happened. The mainland peoples refused to supply the Dutch and helped the Portuguese by sending food to the fortress and assisting in the evacuation of surplus personnel.⁴⁸

The Portuguese community on the island was made up of the members of the religious orders, the captain and his followers who were quite numerous as the captain had assumed the responsibility for raising and paying the soldiers of the garrison, and the small but growing population of *moradores*. In 1634 António Bocarro estimated that there were seventy Portuguese *moradores* able to bear arms and a further thirty mestizos. He went on to calculate that each of these had between fifteen and twenty slaves. Bocarro was primarily concerned with the ability of the fortresses of the *Estado da Índia* to defend themselves, but his figures enable one to make a rough calculation of population which would suggest around 400 free inhabitants and 1500 to 2000 slaves: rather larger than Santos's estimate twenty years earlier.⁴⁹ As in other cities of the *Estado da Índia*, relations between the *moradores* and the captain were always strained. An early indication of the difficulties that existed was given by Francisco Monclaro who reported the reluctance of the *moradores* to send cloth to the army encamped in the Zambesi valley in 1573.⁵⁰ The *moradores* were not allowed to trade in the areas covered by the captain's monopoly, which comprised the Zambesi valley and Sofala, but they clung tenaciously to their right to trade directly with the Africans of the mainland opposite the island and with Madagascar, the Comoro Islands and the Querimba Islands. These rights were always being challenged by the captains and relations were frequently stormy.⁵¹ The *moradores* found their businesses interfered with and were subject to confiscations of their property. If the captains needed cloth, which was the currency of trade and politics in Zambesia, and the trade ships from India had not arrived, they frequently seized the cloth in the possession of the private traders. Likewise the captains were accused of sequestering the property of orphans.⁵² The *moradores* petitioned the Crown to be allowed to establish their own town council (*Senado da Câmara*) which, if granted, would have put them on the same footing as Goa or Malacca, but the Crown always refused. As a result the *moradores* had to make do with unofficial assemblies to coordinate their action and represent their views to the

⁴⁸ Axelson, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Resende and Bocarro, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Monclaro, p. 248.

⁵¹ Resende and Bocarro, p. 14; Manoel Barretto, *Informação do Estado e Conquista dos Rios de Cuama*, in Theal, III, 464.

⁵² António Bocarro, *Decada*, in Theal, III, 351.

captain or the viceroy. These meetings took place in the church of the Misericórdia, the one institution of importance that was under their control.⁵³

The households and mainland *fazendas* of the Portuguese *moradores* were maintained by slaves bought from the Makua chiefs of the interior. Santos recounts anecdotes which throw a rather lurid light on the master-slave relationship. One story tells of a slave trader offering a slave for sale to one of the *moradores* at a price she was unwilling to pay. According to Santos, the trader then proceeded to kill and eat the slave, while the Portuguese authorities punished the woman for not having saved the slave from this fate. Another story tells of four slaves who murdered their master (after he had murdered his wife) and escaped to the mainland. By making a payment to the local chief, the Portuguese recaptured the slaves who were then tortured and executed.⁵⁴

On the mainland opposite the island there was a narrow peninsula of land which separated Mossuril Bay from Conducia Bay. Here, like the Swahili townsmen before them, the *moradores* had plantations and country houses. These were loosely grouped in three settlements, Mossuril, Cabaceira Grande and Cabaceira Pequeno where the fresh water well that supplied the island was located. These plantations began to ease the chronic problem of feeding the city and Father Monclaro believed that the improved health of the citizens owed a lot to the fresh food they were able to obtain from the mainland.⁵⁵ A hundred years later Father Manoel Barretto SJ said of the orange trees planted on the mainland by the Portuguese, 'if golden apples are possible, these are they', and he recalled that 'old men remember a time when the two chief villages of the mainland opposite supplied the island in such a manner that, with no assistance from without, it could furnish meat and vegetables to whole fleets from the kingdom'.⁵⁶

These *fazendas* and *palmares* were an additional source of income for the *moradores* whose livelihood otherwise depended entirely on commerce. These settlements also provided the Portuguese with opportunities to maintain their contacts with the African populations from whom they bought ivory and slaves. In 1667 these mainland territories of Mozambique Island were described as being two leagues square, stretching from the river Calundi to Quitangonha point, the inland boundary being marked with a small wood and earth fort, or *chuambo*, which had been built to provide some security to the coastal settlements. On the southern arm of the bay, the sheikhdom of Sancul was also fortified

⁵³ Resende and Bocarro, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Santos, VII, 314-15.

⁵⁵ Monclaro, p. 208.

⁵⁶ Barretto, pp. 502-03.

against attacks from inland and was formally under the protection of the Portuguese of Mozambique Island.⁵⁷ In reality, however, the security of these settlements depended entirely on the maintenance of good relations with the neighbouring Makua chiefs. If these relations broke down, as they did during the 1580s, the houses and plantations might be attacked or the Portuguese residents there subjected to threats and intimidation. Slaves in Portuguese service would escape to the neighbouring Makua villages and their return would depend on the favour of the local chiefs.⁵⁸

MOZAMBIQUE ISLAND AND THE DECLINE OF THE *ESTADO DA ÍNDIA*

The impressive structure of the *Estado da Índia* was largely demolished, 1622–63. Ormuz, Muscat, Malacca, Ceylon and the Malabar towns were all lost and the *carreira da Índia* dwindled until only one or two ships a year made the voyage from Portugal. Mozambique Island survived but with the decline of the *carreira da Índia*, its importance as a naval base diminished. After 1663 Mozambique remained the administrative headquarters of the captaincy and a commercial centre of some importance. The ivory trade with India remained significant and increasing numbers of Indians settled in Mozambique and turned it into a base for their commercial penetration of the African markets. In 1752 East Africa was separated from the viceroyalty of Goa and became a province in its own right with Mozambique Island as its capital. Shortly after this the French began large scale purchases of slaves for their Indian Ocean plantations and Mozambique became a centre for a new and highly profitable commerce. However, the island's importance in the global economy had gone for good and when East Africa once again became central to the concerns of the developed world it was to be Mombasa and Delagoa Bay, not Mozambique Island, that were to grow into modern cities. In 1901 it ceased to be the capital of the colony and sank into picturesque decay, becoming a museum that was recognized as a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1983.⁵⁹

At the height of its prosperity and importance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Mozambique had been one of the richest captaincies of the *Estado da Índia*. It had been a centre of missionary enterprise and it had been the principal dockyard and way-station for the ships of the *carreira da Índia*. As a Portuguese city Mozambique resembled Luanda, Malacca, Ormuz or Diu. It had combined a role in a global European empire with a position as a centre for local trade with an extensive hinterland from which it drew its supplies and with which it had

⁵⁷ Barretto, pp. 463–64.

⁵⁸ Santos, VII, 312–15.

⁵⁹ Viana de Lima.

commercial ties. Its population continued to reflect this multicultural orientation. Portuguese, Indians and local Swahili made up its inhabitants, and the city spilled out beyond the narrow confines of a waterless island to villages and settlements around the bay which formed an outer ring of suburbs both for the Portuguese themselves and for the Swahili. However, in spite of the varied functions of this city, Mozambique failed to grow into a modern metropolis. The narrow geographical confines of the island, its lack of fresh water and its unhealthy climate all inhibited its growth. However, these factors characterized other cities that managed to grow and prosper. So there must be other factors in the history of Mozambique Island that explain its failure to develop in the longer term.

In many respects Mozambique under the Portuguese had been shaped by the Swahili town that preceded it, and the Portuguese had taken over the roles of the original Swahili ruling elite. The captain, particularly after he was awarded the Crown's trade monopoly, acted very much like the sheikhs before him. He governed the town and was responsible for regulating relations with outsiders whether Africans on the mainland or those who arrived by sea. His position enabled him largely to control the terms on which trade was carried on and he was responsible for the safety, security and maintenance of the port and those who used it.

The Swahili inhabitants also remained to form a substantial proportion of the island's population during the Portuguese period. Those living on the island retained their own quarter of the town and were employed as seamen, fishermen and pilots (*malemos*) working for the Portuguese port authorities. At Sancul and Quitangonha on the mainland there were autonomous Swahili sheikhdoms which continued to have close links with the Muslims on the island, with the wider Muslim coastal community and with the Portuguese.

Portuguese society on the island also reflected many of the features of the old Swahili town. The Portuguese *moradores*, many of them *mestizos*, lived by trade and maintained a network which linked them to the mainland where they bought ivory and had their *shambas*, to the *moradores* in the Querimba Islands, and to the Comoro Islands and Madagascar where they went to purchase food supplies and naval stores. They had also taken the place of the Swahili merchants who traded to the Zambesi valley and had turned their settlements there into Portuguese townships. These local trade networks still operated in much the same way as they had before the arrival of da Gama — Indian cotton cloth was the principal form of currency, supplemented by imported pottery and metalware, while gold and ivory remained the main exports.

In pre-Portuguese times the Swahili elites had intermarried with the local African population. In Zambesia this pattern repeated itself among the Portuguese, and a Luso-African population had emerged by the

second half of the sixteenth century. Luso-African *mestizos* were also to be found along the coast from Delagoa Bay to Mombasa. Many of the *moradores* of Mozambique Island were *mestizos* or were married to *mestizo* women although there is little direct evidence of intermarriage between the Portuguese and the Africans on the mainland immediately opposite the island.

Mozambique differed from other Portuguese colonial cities in that its immediate hinterland on the mainland opposite the island was of less importance than the Zambesi valley which was some three hundred miles distant but which was, in a very real sense, the island's true hinterland. The significance of this can be seen in the way an indigenous Christian population emerged. Although the Jesuits and Dominicans both had their mother churches on Mozambique Island, their sphere of missionary activity was the Zambesi valley and central Africa. There were no missions sent to the mainland immediately opposite Mozambique Island and no local Christianized population was created there.

Mozambique Island was not only a commercial town but became a highly important military, naval, administrative and ecclesiastical centre. During the prolonged struggle with the Dutch Mozambique was one of the key strategic strongholds controlling European maritime trade. In January 1607 the king wrote to the viceroy about his concern that

The great importance of this fortress calls for special care for its safety and defence, especially at this time when the rebels covet it on account of its being so conveniently situated for the Indian navigation that if they were to occupy it, it would completely prevent the sailing of my fleets in those parts, as it is customary for the ships to put in there both on the outward and the homeward passage, and very often they are compelled to winter there; beside which the said fortress protects and preserves the great riches of those provinces.⁶⁰

A fortified city of such importance had the opportunity to develop a varied and diversified economy with investments coming from the *Estado da Índia* and purchasing power injected by the regular arrival of the *naus* of the *carreira*. The large market which the island represented should have stimulated the local economy and led to the emergence of local industries and to distinct groups of entrepreneurs and skilled artisans. However, the records suggest that there was always a shortage of supplies and that the ship repair facilities of the dockyard never worked satisfactorily. As for an entrepreneurial class, the rivalry of the captain and the *moradores* seems to have prevented the accumulation of commercial wealth by the population of the city who were also prevented from taking any active part in the operation of the of the shipyards, the maintenance of the fleets or the building of the fortress. Except for a short period after

⁶⁰ King to viceroy, 18 January 1607, in Theal, iv, 56–58.

1594 Mozambique never had a customs house and the trade of the coast was a closed monopoly until late in the seventeenth century.⁶¹ The clue to the failure of Mozambique to thrive as an urban centre must lie in the restrictive policies of the captains, and the colonial governors after them, who were determined to maintain their commercial privileges and prevent the free development of commerce.

As generations of *moradores* came to believe, wealth in Africa was always best extracted by adopting local African trading and production methods, not by introducing European technologies or business practices. So, by and large, the Portuguese in eastern Africa used local boats, produced food in the manner of the local population, used carriers rather than draught animals, and traded by making use of African intermediaries. There were no windmills or watermills, no wheeled vehicles and, although cisterns were built to store water, no water raising machinery was adopted.

Although to outward appearances Mozambique was a Portuguese town, the everyday realities, as well as the long term trajectory of its history, were determined by the rhythms of Africa and the inherited traditions of coastal commercial life.

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⁶¹ Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *Les Finances de l'Etat Portugais des Indes Orientales (1517–1635)*, Fontes Documentais Portuguesas XIX (Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1982), pp. 42–44.