CULTURE, CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITIES ON THE SWAHILI COAST

RESOURCE LIST

Resources compiled by Elsa Wiehe, Ed.D. in support of the workshop. For any questions, please contact africa@bu.edu

KEY POINTS

Selected and adapted from Wynne-Jones & Laviolette (2018)

1. Swahili coast cultures are diverse African cultures, made up of a confluence of peoples. They are traders and farmers, cattle keepers, & fisher people who have moved and interacted across land and sea for centuries (see chronology table below), and importantly, before the rise of Islam in the late 8th century. Trade is not the only story to tell about the region.

2. Swahili means “people of the coast” in Arabic. The coast and its links with external cultures has been overemphasized at the expense of the role of inland populations. For a long time, racist perspectives believed that the uniqueness and cosmopolitan aspects of the Swahili were because the Swahili were Arab immigrants. New scholarship understands the Swahili as home to African populations and similarities between inland and coastal sites show that they were part of the same society.

3. A long history of trade of various luxury goods as well as enslaved peoples set the region at the center of global intercontinental networks, linking the Swahili coast to the Arabian peninsula, China, India, and Cambodia, among other places. In the 15th century, Europe - via the Portuguese intrusion and later the Dutch and British - entered this matrix as pirates and as authoritarians seeking trade monopoly because Europe had nothing of great value to trade.

4. Trade allowed for rich cultural exchange that is evidenced in food, dress, architecture, language, and religion. The KiSwahili language is an archive that offers a rich entry point into study of the region, as it is a Bantu- (African) language to which other words in Arabic and other languages were added.

5. The key characteristic features of the coastal settlements (e.g. building with coral rock from the Red Sea) developed around the 11th century. Archaeological evidence shows a more active interaction with the maritime world at that time.

6. Many coastal Africans began identifying as Swahili in the 19th and 20th centuries, in the contexts of slavery and imperialism. When discussing past groups, referring to Swahili (in the sense of ethnic identity) to past populations is anachronistic. This is a valuable lesson for students about the construction and fluidity of Swahili identity.
**Table 1.1** Overview of the chronology of the Swahili coast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–600</td>
<td>Scattered Iron Age settlement in eastern Africa including coast; trade emporia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st century CE</td>
<td><em>Periplus of the Erythraean Sea</em> mentions Rhatta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th century CE</td>
<td>Ptolemy’s <em>Geography</em> mentions Azania, ‘Rhapta’, Menouthias, sewn boats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600–1000</td>
<td>Village life expands on coast; mixed economy of farming and fishing; craft production; evidence of long-distance trade particularly with Persian Gulf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750</td>
<td>First mosque at Shanga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>916</td>
<td>Al Mas’udi describes ‘Qanbalu’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>975</td>
<td>Destruction layer at Shanga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1006–1200</td>
<td>Swahili ‘stonetowns’ with Muslim population, trading across Indian Ocean world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1066</td>
<td>Probable date of Mtambwe Mkuu coin hoard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1107</td>
<td>Inscription on Kizimkazi mosque.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1220</td>
<td>Yaquit describes Mogadishu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1331</td>
<td>Ibn Battuta describes Mogadishu, Mombasa, Kilwa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1413–15</td>
<td>Zheng He’s voyage to eastern African coast in circuit of Indian Ocean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1498</td>
<td>Vasco da Gama rounds Cape of Good Hope, travels up eastern African coast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500–1698</td>
<td>Period of uneven Portuguese colonial domination; stonetowns continue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698 onwards</td>
<td>Omani colonial domination, but also golden age of Swahili culture and religion, centred on Pate. Later British, German and Portuguese colonialism regionally; stonetowns continue in some regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698</td>
<td>Omani siege of Portuguese at Fort Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>Omani colonisation of Zanzibar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884/5</td>
<td>Berlin Conference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence and nationalism; stonetowns continue in reduced numbers.</td>
<td>1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Tanganyikan independence from Britain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Zanzibar Revolution against Oman; union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Mozambican independence from Portugal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**RESOURCES**

This select resource list provides key links and videos on the history of trade and cultural connections on the Swahili coast.

**GENERAL**

*Connecting the GEMS of the Indian Ocean: From Oman to East Africa* (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art Exhibit, with a very useful free downloadable mobile app!)

*World on the Horizon: Swahili Arts Across the Indian Ocean* (Smithsonian NMAA)
Sailors and Daughters: Portraits and Postcards of the Swahili Coast (Smithsonian NMAA) The Indian Ocean in World History a comprehensive interactive site on the Indian Ocean, spanning the prehistoric to the modern era, centered on interactive, inquiry-based maps, featuring videos, definitions, lesson plans, and more.
   See Lesson Plans, esp. “From Mecca to Malaysia: The Spread of Islam across the Indian Ocean”
   An Ocean of Paper archive on the same site features thousands of deeds of Omani in Saudi Arabia and East Africa.

Indian Ocean Trade Routes (ThoughtCo article with a good map) Int’l Commerce, Snorkeling Camels, and The Indian Ocean Trade (Crash Course WH) Boston University African Studies Center Resources, including Lesson Plan: Language as Evidence Swahili Coastal City States (Ancient History Encyclopedia) The Story of Africa: Swahili (BBC) Kilwa (Ancient.eu)

CLOTHING, FOOD, LANGUAGE, MUSIC
Kanga Cloths: Wearing what which cannot be spoken In Bibi’s Kitchen Cookbook: The Recipes and Stories of Grandmothers from the Eight African Countries that touch the Indian Ocean by Hawa Hassan and Julia Turschen KiSwahili Proverbs - BU African Studies Center features ten advanced level Kiswahili lessons, each linked to a proverb with an improvised skit. If too advanced, here is a shorter activity KiSwahili Proverbs with some guiding questions (BU African Studies Center). Swahili Coast and Indian Ocean Exchange, Lesson Plan (using language as evidence) by Eric Beckman A Gateway to the Black Indian Ocean (Africa is a Country Radio)

ARCHITECTURE
Zamani Project Gede: The Ruins of Gede (Kenya) Zamani Project Lamu Fort (Kenya) Zamani Project Swahili House Museum (Kenya) Zamani Project Shela Mosque (Lamu, Kenya) Zamani Project Kua Ruins of a Swahili Town (Juani Island, Tanzania) Zamani Project Kilwa Kisiwani (Historic Trading City, Tanzania) Zamani Project Songo Mnara Stone Town, the Palace and Friday Mosque (Tanzania) Zamani Project Songo Mnara, Persian Bath (Tanzania) Zamani Project Zanzibar (Tanzania) Zamani Project Beit El Amani (Zanzibar, Tanzania)
PRIMARY TEXTS

*Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* (mid 1st c.)
Claudius Ptolemy’s *Geography* (mid 2nd c.)
Al Masudi (10th c.)
*Ibn Battuta’s Journey from the Red Sea to East Africa and the Arabian Sea* (an excellent resource documenting the traveler’s famous journey from 1328-1330 by U of Berkeley ORIAS)
*Kilwa Chronicle*

PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS

*Reading Artifacts*
*Archival Artifact Analysis Worksheet*
*Artifact Analysis Worksheet 2*
*Analyze an artifact*
*Reading Portraiture: Guide for Educators* (National Gallery Guide for analyzing visual clues)

LITERATURE

*The Song of Lionogo: A Free Graphic Novel* to download from the Smithsonian Institution. It is based on a Swahili mythological figure from East Africa and was inspired by the cultural connections between the Arab peninsula and the Indian Ocean.

VIDEOS

*Africa Insights: Arts of the Monsoon* - a series of short online videos (2-5 minutes) highlighting the key items, trade and exchanges in the Indian Ocean.
*Africa Episode 3*: Basil Davidson (The Swahili coast segment starts at min. 30:15)
*Coast and Conquest: History of Africa with Zaineb Badawi* focused on Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique
*Kilwa Kisiwani* (Smart History)
*Swahili Cultures*, a useful, 15 min video introductory presentation by Marc Milo with excellent references.

CURRICULA AND LESSON PLANS

*Africa Unit Overview Presentation* - Kristin Strobel
*Lamu and the Swahili* - Kristin Strobel
*Indian Ocean World Introduction* - Kristin Strobel
*The Indian Ocean Trade: a Classroom Simulation* - BU Africa Studies Center
World History for Us All: especially Era 5 Landscape Lesson “Consolidating the TransHemispheric Trade Network” - Patterns of Interregional Unity (UCLA)
Indian Ocean Trade Simulation (Center for Middle Eastern Studies, U of Arizona)
Swahili Coast and Indian Ocean Exchange, Lesson Plan (using language as evidence) by Eric Beckman

POEM SAMPLES (FOR PIER PECIN'S SESSION)
Samples of student work: poems written by youth about the Swahili coast inspired by the Smithsonian GEMS App

ACTIVITIES USING THE INDIAN OCEAN IN WORLD HISTORY WEBSITE (SUSAN DOUGLASS’ SESSION)
Activities Folder

BOOKS
African Voices, African Lives: Personal Narratives from a Swahili Village by Pat Caplan
A Choice of Flowers. Chaguo LA Maua: An Anthology of Swahili Love Poetry by Jan Knappert
Four centuries of Swahili verse: a literary history and anthology by Jan Knappert
Mwana Kupona: poetess from Lamu by Kitula G King'ei
The Rise and Fall of Swahili City States by Chap Kusimba (1999)
Swahili port cities: the architecture of elsewhere by Prita Meier
Three Swahili women: life histories from Mombasa by Sarah Mirza
City-States of the Swahili Coast by Thomas H. Wilson
Many picture books, even for younger readers, will offer some useful and insightful perspectives on life on the Swahili coast (e.g. Fly Eagle Fly), including basic language lessons (e.g. Jambo Means Hello). See a list at Africa Access.