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THE SOCIAL USES OF SWAHILI SPACE AND OBJECTS

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A dissertation submitted to the  
Faculty of Archaeology and  
Anthropology, Cambridge  
partial fulfilment of the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

March 25th 1984



I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my late husband, Dr Phillip Donley, who gave me the courage to believe I could try anything. His family, and my parents, have continued to believe in me more than I have ever deserved.

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## Summary

## THE SOCIAL USES OF SWAHILI SPACE AND OBJECTS

The dissertation begins by discussing the field of ethnoarchaeology in general and then specifically in relation to the archaeology of the Afro-Arab or the Swahili sites on the coast of eastern Africa. A more theoretical chapter follows which explores an approach to the study of societies through looking at the process of structuration; i.e. the social uses of spaces, objects and time. The third chapter is devoted to placing my study of the houses located in the Lamu archipelago, within an historical context. Next a chapter is based on the ethnographic data which I collected in thirty-two houses located in Lamu, Pate and Shela. This material is used to demonstrate how spaces and objects are given social meaning, the process which structures the society. Chapter 5 is a presentation of the comparative ethnographic data which I collected in twenty-one houses in Gujarat (north-western India). This area is linked by Indian Ocean trade to the Swahili settlements in Africa. Archaeological data from the three houses I excavated in the Lamu archipelago are described and analysed in chapters 6-9. The social meaning of archaeological spaces and finds is explained in terms of a direct

historical analogy i.e. the ethnographic data.

The concluding chapter stresses that the relationships between people, objects and spaces structure societies. This process, which has been called 'structuration' by A. Giddens, can aid in the understanding of societies in the present and past.

## CHAPTER 1

THE SWAHILI HOUSE AS A RESEARCH PROBLEM WITHIN ITS  
PAST AND PRESENT CONTEXT.

The research objective of this thesis is one that is commonly stated by archaeologists: the interpretation or meaning of man-made spaces and artefacts. The buildings and objects selected for both archaeological and anthropological investigation belonged to the wealthy Swahili (Afro-Arab) traders of the Lamu archipelago.

The Lamu archipelago is located just off the coast of Kenya near the Somali border (fig. 1). The area is still relatively isolated from Western influence. Many of the coral houses that I recorded are inhabited by descendents of the original owners. Cultural and historical continuity is supported by many written records, which will be cited in later chapters. As a consequence of this continuity, the link between the present and the past is strong.

Three coral houses were excavated and 33 houses were included in my ethnographic study. Because the Swahili towns have been greatly influenced by Indian Ocean traders and emigrants, traditional houses were also recorded ethnographically on a limited scale in north-western India.

Indian Ocean traders introduced Islam about nine centuries ago and many of the lasting and underlying principles of the Swahili society must be understood within this context. In fact, Islamic beliefs and attitudes often provide the necessary link between present and past patterns.

Houses within the same building tradition have been recorded by archaeologists, architects and historians studying Swahili coral house settlements. These towns have been dated, by ceramic evidence, back to the ninth century A.D. (Chittick 1967,44) and are located along the coast of eastern Africa from Somalia to Mozambique. These reports will be referred to later in this chapter. Published work has been primarily directed at earlier periods, with reference to historical documentation. My research in comparison is concerned with later periods, on a smaller scale (i.e. the study of houses rather than whole settlements) with an emphasis on both historical and related ethnographic data. I stress that the Swahili building-remains and artefacts must be seen within their (Swahili) cultural and historical context. If that process is followed, it will lead to an understanding of how the upper-class Swahili created and maintained their position of powerful middlemen in the Indian Ocean trade network.



## THE USE OF ANALOGY

It is appropriate to use ethnographic analogies in the analysis of archaeological remains of the coast of Kenya because a continuity of culture can be demonstrated through historical records. Later in this chapter examples will be given of how archaeologists have elucidated Swahili sites without looking at contemporary situations and produced opinions unrelated to the Swahili material remains.

This leads to the basic questions of why I believe ethnographic data to be relevant to the interpretation of archaeological material, and more generally the reasons for the use of analogy. All archaeological interpretations are based on analogy, some more openly than others. As Hodder (1982,9) writes, 'The past is the present in the sense that our reconstructions of the meaning of data from the past are based on analogies with the world around us'. We have no other choice; but which analogies we use is the critical point.

Hodder also makes a useful distinction between formal and relational analogies. Formal analogies suggest that if 'two objects or situations have common properties, they probably also have other similarities. Such analogies are weak in that the observed association of characteristics of the objects or situations

may be fortuitous or accidental' (Hodder 1982,16). Relational analogies 'seek to determine some natural or cultural link between the different aspects of the analogy. The various things associated within the analogy are said to be interdependent and not accidentally linked' (Hodder 1982,16).

Therefore analogies can be seen on a gradient from the most formal, stone-tool-making in the present and all stone tools in the past, to relational analogies, i.e. the material culture of the upper-class Swahili, excavated from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century house remains and the same objects, in the same houses, owned and used by descendants of the original owners. The latter, or relational analogy can be supported by close historical and cultural links. These links are the key to judging how 'relational' an analogy can be considered to be. The analogy can not however be 'tested'. An analogy can be very well linked, but although it is always 'like' something else, it can never be the same; just as the present can never be the same as the past. Human behaviour has too many variables for this to be possible.

#### ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY

The ethnoarchaeological approach has been discussed at length by Donnan and Clewlow (1974), Yellen (1977),

Stiles (1977), Gould (1978), Kramer (1979), Orme (1981) and Hodder (1982). It is important to understand how my use of a 'relational analogy' within an ethnoarchaeological study compared with other ethnoarchaeological approaches.

The term 'ethnoarchaeologist' is best limited to those who collect ethnographic data in the field with the intention of advancing the understanding of archaeological material (Hodder 1982). This may also involve, as in my case, the study of the social meaning of material culture (objects and spaces). It would, however, not include an archaeologist who used only previously recorded ethnographic data. Anthropologists have not, in general, shown much interest in the role played by material culture in social formation. This is one, of many reasons, why archaeologists need to do field work which provides relevant data.

There have been some general themes in recent American ethnoarchaeological work with which I am not in agreement; they are the following: testing, maximisation, the passive relationship between settlement patterns and social organisation and the emphasis on 'universal laws'. I will take each of these in turn and give an example that is widely known, and then explain how the work I have done is different and why.

There has been a desire to make archaeology more 'scientific' and this is perhaps the reason why it has become popular to state an hypothesis, usually based on an ethnographic analogy (sometimes historical and therefore more relational and sometimes formal); 'tests' are then devised. These 'tests' are the observation of specific features expected to be found in the archaeological remains if the analogy or hypothesis was correct. Classic examples of this can be found in Binford's work on the 'smudge pits' (1967), Hill's research (1965,1970) and Longacre and Ayres' (1968) work on North American Indian settlements. The function of a feature, object or space was put forward as an hypothesis based on ethnographic analogy (but generally not ethnographic field work). Then the 'test' was carried out by looking for characteristics, which were associated with the feature, object or space within the archaeological remains.

As Hodder has pointed out (1982,22-3) the archaeologists who attempt to 'test' hypotheses are only supporting the original hypothesis or the 'fit' of the analogy by increasing the number of similarities between the past and the present. They are not testing or discussing why the relationship exists between the features which they have decided to link. Why should there be a link between

the style of pots made by women and the drying of skins at 'smudge pits'? The relationships must be seen within an historical and cultural context to understand why a given association is present in a specific social system.

The analogies drawn from my own ethnographic work are not tests against my archaeological finds but are used for interpretation based on their relevance to this data, which I support through a presentation of the historical and cultural links. I also, to a lesser degree, argue that the relational analogy between the present and the past is to be seen as a part of a much larger social order, that of Islam. I can therefore draw on material from other parts of the Islamic world, as well as ethnographic materials from the African mainland near the Lamu archipelago, although this material provides less relational analogies.

Another ethnoarchaeological theme, which I do not support, that has been put forward by American archaeologists (for example Binford (1978) and Gould (1980)) is the assumption that people try to get the most from their environment with the least effort, i.e. maximisation of resources. This I believe to be simply a case of ethnocentric attitudes being projected onto other cultures. Human beings do not often live in surroundings which provide only enough



for basic survival. There are usually many plants and animals that are not eaten simply for social reasons. Maximisation of resources would certainly not aid in the understanding of the complex urban Swahili society. In all fairness, the assumption of maximisation has generally only been applied to subsistence economies, such as Binford's (1979) Nunamuit Eskimos or Gould's (1980) Australian Aboriginal groups. Environmental factors set only the very outer limits on cultural patterns. People do adapt to their environments but there are innumerable ways for that to be achieved without the culture being environmentally determined.

We will now turn to the next point of contention, and one that is certainly relevant to the urban Swahili study. What is the relationship between settlement or domestic spatial patterns and social organisation? There are two separate examples to be dealt with: the first is concerned with the determination of population figures from settlement size and the second is the relationship between the settlement pattern (such as the floor plan of the houses) and the social organisation (for example, sedentary, nomadic, hierarchical, outward-looking, inward-orientation, matrilocal etc.).

The inference of population from settlement size was approached by Naroll in 1962 by working

out a formula whereby the population size was based on the square metres of dwelling space on a site divided by 10. This seems to have been generally accepted, though a few doubts have been expressed about specific cases.

Not until ethnoarchaeological work began in earnest in the 1960s and 1970s did archaeologists start to study this relationship in more detail. Kramer (1979) and Sumner (1979), both working on Islamic settlements, found that especially in urban settings the relationship between people and space could not be described with one simple formula. Relationships were found between living spaces and population figures but they were culturally specific: and I might add, also historically specific. One society may have one level of population density during one period of its history and quite a different one at another time. For example, when domestic slaves lived in the Swahili coral houses the population density in the towns was higher than after the abolition of slavery. The Swahili society lives in both villages and towns and the population density is much higher in the towns than in the villages. Sumner's work in the Far province of south-west Iran showed the same difference between urban and village life within the same cultural context.

Fletcher (1981a) has done interesting work which shows that all people are under stress if the population density is great and where there is no easy means of 'getting away'. But as in the case of maximisation discussed above, very few settlement population figures could be based on such extreme circumstances under which few, if any, societies live.

The second relationship between settlement patterns and social organisation is concerned with a core theme or concern of this dissertation (see chapters 2, 4, 5 and 9): that there is a relationship between space and various categories of persons - male, female, slave, etc. The first ethnoarchaeological studies directed at the relationship between spatial patterns and social organisation had wide applications. Chang's (ed. 1968) book, Settlement Archaeology, contained many such examples. The Whiting and Ayres article attempted to demonstrate that from ethnographic surveys 80 per cent of the cultures with rectilinear floor plans were sedentary populations and 65 per cent with circular houses were nomadic (ibid.124). The Orma, a pastoralist group who live on the mainland near Lamu, now have both types of structures.

Other articles followed in the later sixties and seventies and many will be mentioned and



is concerned with adaptive and functional subsystems. The advocates of this school argue that the role of symbolic meaning within human behaviour is something which can be separated (and with great difficulty studied) from the functional aspects (production, technology and subsistence strategies, for example). Since artefacts and culture are seen as part of the adaptive process, it is held that 'universal laws' can emerge which set up more or less direct links between people and things. These links based on utility and function are, they maintain, predictable and 'law-like universals'. Only post-depositional affects should alter their direct reflection of social organisation. Schiffer (1976) points out that even these distortions are predictable and therefore not a negative or defeating factor. Archaeological remains cross-culturally are not, according to Binford, Gould and Schiffer, affected by the specific meaning of various objects or spaces within a cultural or historical framework. Thus, everything appears objectively rational due to the maximising of resources within the school of Processual Archaeology.

I believe that if there are 'universals' they cannot be separated from symbolic meaning and culture but that they are relational or set within cultural and historical contexts. Symbolic meaning is the

core of social organisation (Giddens 1979,1981; Douglas 1966,1979; Archer 1981; Bourdieu 1977 and other mentioned in chapter 2).

People order their environment by giving meaning to people, places and objects, which in turn give meaning to other people, places and objects. This process continues, recreates and changes itself to both maintain and alter through time. It is therefore important to know the historical and cultural context of archaeological remains. Hodder has called this approach 'Contextual Archaeology'. Is each excavation to be interpreted as a unique cultural expression? Yes, in the strictest sense this is so. Are there no generalisations which can aid in the interpretation - are there no general principles that are used, perhaps differently in each context, but nevertheless schemes that seem to reoccur cross-culturally? There are structuring principles which are used in different ways in various societies; they are often seen first as oppositions such as inside/outside front/behind, male/female. But they are not simply oppositions. These principles are linked to other concepts, such as pure/impure and dominant/submissive. Dominant or powerful groups and/or individuals change and/or maintain these symbolic systems. This is the very essence of their power. No social group is

ever in isolation or totally independent and this factor is also an important element of the social process. This theoretical approach will be discussed and expanded more fully in the next chapter.

My approach has now been compared to that of other ethnoarchaeologists and I would now like to consider it in relation to some of the previous work that has been done on Swahili settlements. This discussion for the most part will be limited to work done in the area where I conducted my archaeological and ethnographic research, although most of the archaeologists who have published their findings on Swahili material have worked at several locations on the coast: Kirkman at Gedi (1963), Ungwana, (1966) and Fort Jesus (1974) to mention only a few; Chittick at Kilwa (1974), Pate, Manda and Lamu (1967); and Wilson at Takwa (1979), the northern coast (1978), and the central and southern coasts (1980). These men have recorded hundreds of sites, many of which in a few years will have decayed to a point where valuable information would have been lost for ever. Controlled stratigraphic excavations, which they directed, combined with their extensive research concerning imported wares, have produced a good picture of when and for how long most of the coral building sites in Kenya were occupied. Their work has

generally entailed the description of standing buildings; seen as houses, mosques and tombs. Test pits were dug to determine the periods of occupation by means of known manufacture of imported ceramics. Kirkman (1974<sub>a</sub>) at Fort Jesus and Chittick at Kilwa (1974) have contributed greatly to our ability to date sites by ceramic dating. In a few cases larger areas of houses or rooms within structures have been excavated (Kirkman at Gedi and Jumba la Mtwana, Chittick at Kilwa and Wilson at Takwa). Historical reference from local and foreign sources were used or 'tested' as the backbone of the interpretation of excavated material (for example Kirkman at Fort Jesus, Chittick at Pate, especially, 'A new look at the history of Pate', 1969). These were the standard archaeological approaches of the 1950s and 1960s and they seemed objective and sound.

We are never free, however, from the influences of our own personal histories or that of the period in which we live and work. As observers and recorders we select some aspects to study and neglect others consciously and unconsciously. It is worthwhile and necessary to attempt to become aware of their influence on our reports. This will contribute an additional level of understanding of ourselves and others.

I feel required to make some general statements about the historical setting in East Africa when archaeological work first began in 1948. It is important to consider whether Kenya's modern history has influenced the archaeological research done there. When archaeological research began on the rural settlements located on the eastern coast of Africa, the area had already been divided by colonial European powers. The newly-formed countries of Somalia, Kenya and Tanganyika were governed by foreigners who knew about archaeology and were willing to provide funding or at least allow land to be used for the pursuit of this type of knowledge. Two areas of interest were given attention, that of prehistory and the early coral settlements on the coast. Prehistory has been more popular and been given more financial support because it relates to all men; it has international interest and therefore funding. Prehistoric finds have been seen as a source of pride to Africans. It could be shown that mankind originated in their area and therefore recent research directed towards prehistory is also being supported more by the modern African countries. In comparison the study of Islamic settlements which date back to only the ninth century A.D. have commanded less attention in eastern Africa and in the world at large. The



buildings at the sites are, by international standards, not spectacular, but they seemed impressive compared to other traditional African dwellings, both by modern Africans and Europeans. Archaeologists have in the past been most interested in the richest, largest and most monumental sites. It is probably for these reasons that the colonial powers saw the coastal sites as obvious candidates for archaeological research.

Arabs, Persians, Indians and Indonesians have traded and settled in the coral coastal towns for centuries. These foreigner settlers, especially the Arabs and Indians, were in colonial times considered to be superior to the other local inhabitants and given better jobs, with better pay and imported rations, such as rice. Therefore although the inhabitants of the coastal settlements were people who were of mixed Afro-Arab parentage they were considered to be Arabs. This view was supported by the Islamic belief that paternity determines the name by which a man's offspring are called. Arab men who came to settle married local African women, but the offspring were called Arabs rather than Africans. The African element was conventionally forgotten by both the 'local Arabs' and the British. These social aspects led the early archaeologists working on the coast to speak of the

towns as being Arab settlements, rather than Swahili which denotes a mixed ancestry. An example is the title, The Arab city of Gedi written in 1954 by James Kirkman, the pioneer of archaeological work on the coast who has done more than anyone over the years from 1948 until the present to explore the coastal settlements.

Because the coral settlements on the coast were considered to be Arab, the leaders of the newly-independent country of Kenya often have difficulty in viewing the coastal Swahili culture as part of their national heritage. As a result there has been some interest in trying to show archaeologically that the Swahili sites were founded by local inhabitants. Such a course would, it is hoped, encourage the country to support and fund more research on Swahili archaeological sites. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 8 in relation to excavated artefacts.

#### SWAHILI ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY

All of the historical records and archaeological findings support the idea that the coral settlements on the African coast belong to the same cultural tradition (Garlake 1966). Some traditional coral houses are still occupied by descendants of the original owners, in the Lamu archipelago. This was

certainly realised by Kirkman when he wrote that the old way of life continued in Lamu (Kirkman 1964, 29). Chittick used local informants, '(usually more than one, independently) whom we believe to be reliable' to point out the buildings belonging to the local Sultan on Pate island (1967, 58).

As early as 1956 Gervase Mathew was writing that archaeologists raise questions which only anthropologists can answer. He said that a clearer knowledge of the coast in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was possible by: (1) publishing selected documents (which, for example, Freeman-Grenville did in 1962), (2) full excavation of manageably small sites, perhaps the palace at Pate, and (3) anthropological work in Swahili coastal communities. All three approaches need to be interlocked (Mathew 1956, 68).

But how have the archaeologists working on the coast developed ethnographic research? Kirkman did sometimes mention interpretations made by local people but he said that ethnographic material had produced little (Kirkman 1965, 233). Chittick suggested that many of the local traditions were just myths created to emphasise the ascendancy of one family dynasty over another (1967, 62-3). But, if historical and cultural continuity were present



and recognised, it is inexplicable that ethnographic research produced so little or that traditions were believed to be only myths about kinship. Why, for example, were daily and ritual practices not observed and linked to the past? The sites where archaeological work was first undertaken, such as Gedi, did not have traditional Swahili communities nearby, and in fact the labourers were often Giriama. Kirkman acknowledged Mr Karisa Ndurya, his 'overseer' (1954), for having provided local views of articles from the excavation. But his views were those of a Giriama and not those of an upper-class Swahili person. It was not Kirkman's fault that he did not hire Swahili people to work with him on the excavations. First, they did not live near and second, an upper-class Swahili would never take a common labourer's job, which is what the Swahili considered excavating to be. When local, or relational analogies were lacking Kirkman used analogies with which he was familiar and as a result Eurocentric interpretations sometimes appeared. For example, a group of houses 'was clearly a family unit, corresponding perhaps to the European manor' (Kirkman 1975,239). Imported porcelain sherds were once 'certainly family heirlooms' (Kirkman 1975,239).

Imported ceramics were not only considered to be clues to trade connections or possible foreign influence on building styles but also thought to be a direct indication of wealth, as is seen for example, in Chittick's Manda report (1967,55). There is, however, no discussion of how we know that these wares were the primary or even central index of wealth. Other items, such as silk, rice or copies of the Koran, which are not archaeologically detectable, may have been the most important symbols of wealth. In fact, there is ethnohistorical evidence that porcelain was such an indication. A Zanzibar princess wrote in 1886 that shelves were arrayed with the most costly articles of glass and china; a man did not care what he spent on adorning his house niches because it reflected his position and fine taste (Said 1907,24). However, porcelain could have been like gold, and therefore linked only with one segment of the population - women. There is an Islamic tradition against the use of gold by the most pure, i.e. men. From this it is clear that the social context is an important factor in the interpretation of artefacts. To use Western analogies is dangerous and can be misleading.

I believe that archaeologists faced two additional problems in obtaining relational analogies

to aid their analysis of Swahili archaeological sites. One is that there was little anthropological work done in Islamic countries on which to draw analogies. Second, and probably to some degree related to the first, Islamic households are often difficult for outsiders, especially male researchers, to enter and conduct interviews. Islamic women are often kept in purdah and the household is usually thus a woman's world. All of the archaeologists and architects who have worked on the Swahili coast have been men. For this reason it was easier for me, as a woman, even though I was certainly an outsider, to collect ethnographic information about the social uses of space and objects within Swahili and Indian houses. Hindu women are also often kept in seclusion.

Although I was the first to attempt to collect ethnographic information directly relevant to house excavations, many others have stated that their archaeological objective was to understand the way of life within the settlements (Kirkman 1957, 16). Wilson felt that archaeological remains could 'reveal' the social organisation of the settlements (1982, 203). Sassoon was less optimistic and stated that his excavations at Mombasa were intended to date periods of occupation (1980, 4). Chittick was also less ambitious and saw archaeology as a means to 'test' historical material (1967, 37, 39).

Garlake, who did not excavate, but did record standing buildings at many archaeological sites, followed Chittick in feeling that archaeology could be used for 'testing' other sources of information, but also considered that archaeological research could produce a 'picture of everyday life' (1966,8,51).

Architects and historians have also considered the relationship between Swahili spaces (buildings) and social organisation. Usam Ghaidan, an architect, began a new phase of work in the coastal towns. He, unlike most of the archaeologists, was interested in later traditional buildings and settlements that were still occupied, especially those in the Lamu archipelago. Ghaidan stresses in all of his publications (1971,23,27; 1974a,90,88; 1974b,38; 1975,61; 1976,59,44) the relationship between space and social organisation. 'The patterning of space is culturally determined, i.e. spaces and the manner in which they are used are interdependent in the sense that systems of behaviour require specific shells, and the shells in turn give permanence to these systems' (1975,61). Although he states this repeatedly and is the first scholar to describe Swahili houses in local terms, he does not actually discuss how the use of public and private spaces structures Swahili society.



Ghaidan, although primarily working on the type of Swahili coral house found in the Lamu area, used his knowledge of these houses to discuss earlier house types which were part of the same building tradition further south on the coast. For example he noted that the floor plans in parts of the Lamu archipelago were the same as at Gedi (fourteenth century) and Kilwa (thirteenth century) (Ghaidan 1975,53). Ghaidan pointed out that houses often have a pair of rooms at the back of a house between two interconnected houses, which Garlake called 'double houses'. 'These rooms which have built-in structures which Garlake calls "beds", and the rooms accordingly "bedrooms", are difficult to imagine as anything other than for storage', (Ghaidan 1975,54-5). It is interesting to trace the debate about room functions in the literature.

It is difficult to understand where and how analogies for the interpretation of Swahili spaces developed, because the source of an analogy is seldom mentioned. Kirkman was the first to term these back-rooms 'bedrooms', 'presumably for the two wives with whom the master was living at the time' (Kirkman 1964,109). He observed as did Chittick that these rear rooms had walls of red earth and were generally poorly plastered (Kirkman 1964,109; Chittick 1974,138,145). Chittick is

more reluctant to assign functions to spaces, but he says that he follows Garlake (1966,91-9) that the rooms may be for storage and not bedrooms. Neither gives the source of the analogy used to support their interpretations, or mentions that Kirkman first termed these rooms 'bedrooms'. Once an interpretation appears in the literature it sometimes gains force. Sassoon (1976,26) and Lewcock (1976,18) followed Kirkman on the 'bedroom' theory without ever questioning the source of the analogy.

James Allen, an historian, carried Ghaidan's application of the ethnographic analogy further and said that the back rooms in both the Lamu archipelago and at archaeological sites are termed by the Swahili 'nyumba ya kati' (Allen, 1979,20). I support this association based on my interviews in Lamu, Pate and Shela and think, as does Allen, that the term which means 'house in the middle' is the same as the 'double plan' mentioned earlier. (This is discussed more fully in chapter 4).

Allen says that the 'beds' in these back storage rooms may have been used for the preparation of dead bodies for burial (Allen 1979,20). He does not state his source for this information and from my interviews with people in Pate, Lamu and Shela I learned that the nyumba ya kati was



usually used for storage if the walls were unplastered. (Interviews, Lamu K267, Fata K268 and Sheila K165, see appendix A.)

The 'beds' were platforms constructed as storage shelves. If the walls were plastered and there were no platforms the room could be occupied by a freeborn person. Only slaves were kept in unplastered areas of the house and they were not allowed to stay in rooms where surplus goods were stored, which presumably includes rooms where storage platforms were located. The area used to prepare bodies is in the ndani, the room in front of the nyumba ya kati (this is also described and discussed in more detail in chapter 4).

Allen makes an important point about the 'bedroom' concept. He says that Lamu houses now, as in the past, are multi-purpose rooms. In fact, it was not until the twentieth century that Western societies set aside a room for sleeping. Swahili people sleep in all of the main rooms of the house, but not in storage rooms such as the nyumba ya kati. Allen also rightly points out that the rooms labelled 'caretakers' rooms' by Garlake (1966,92) are analogous to the Lamu houses' 'sabule' or guest room (see chapter 4). The rooms Garlake labelled 'main private' (Garlake 1966,92) with evidence of decoration, and believed to be 'withdrawing' rooms for women would be the ndani of the Lamu

houses. Allen adds that these rooms would have been important in wedding celebrations, 'as if to compensate for the restrictions imposed by purdah' (Allen 1979,23). I did not find evidence of this attitude among Swahili women and feel this may be another example of Eurocentric ideas being applied to Swahili society. I argue later (chapters 4 and 5) that the placement and social meaning of plaster decorations within Swahili houses is far more complex.

There are more examples that could be given of Swahili spaces and objects that have been misinterpreted when relational analogies were not used, but I think that the point that ethnographic fieldwork is useful has been made. Later chapters (6-9) are devoted to my use of ethnographic data in relation to archaeology, and to seeing how spaces and objects structure the Swahili society.

Not only have the social uses of spaces and objects (such as rooms and 'beds') been misinterpreted by not linking the present and the past with relational analogies, but also population estimates made concerning archaeological sites. The mistakes made centre around the fact that mud-and-thatch houses have not been studied and because the dynamics of the social uses of space

have not been considered within an historical context. Not all Swahili live, or lived, in coral houses. Some poorer people live in mud-and-thatch houses. The culture of the lower classes is believed to be similar to that of the upper classes, and to be part of Swahili society, but it has not yet been studied as much as the cultures of the elite minority who occupy coral dwellings (Ghaidan 1975). Many archaeological sites are composed of only a coral mosque, a few coral tombs and a couple of coral houses, so presumably most people lived in mud houses. Chittick recorded the remains of mud structures at his earliest levels both at Kilwa (1974, 235) and at Manda (1967, 81). Horton (1980, 2) also described mud architecture in tenth century A.D. levels at Shanga.

Ghaidan's survey (1976, 69) of sixty mud houses states that 20 per cent were owned by Arabs, 16 per cent by Swahili, 60 per cent by Bajun (an ethnic group which also claims Arab ancestry) and the remainder by other people from the mainland. What people give as their ethnic identity changes for political reasons: people wanted to be considered Arabs during British colonial days and now want to be considered Swahili. What is important from this information is that anyone can and does live in mud houses. Ghaidan's survey of 10 per

cent of the total number of mud houses around Lamu found that an average occupancy was 5.2 persons per house, and two-thirds were single family dwellings (Ghaidan 1976,70). The average size of the mud house is 5.7 metres in width by 8.4 metres in depth (Ghaidan 1976,71). By comparison the average width of the traditional coral house is 11.3 metres and the average depth 17.6 metres (Ghaidan 1976,67). The average population density is 7.5 persons per house (173 houses were surveyed). 'About 15 per cent have more than ten occupants, with the maximum being thirty-two and the minimum being one' (Ghaidan 1976,54).

These figures might be helpful in working out population figures for archaeological sites but for two problems: no one has attempted to trace all of the mud houses at or around any of the archaeological sites, and therefore we do not know how many were generally associated with a coral settlement. There may have been more or less than are now associated with a modern town. For example, Pate people do not allow Bajun to build mud houses in Pate town, even today. Lamu people did not allow Bajun to build and live in mud houses until colonial times. The southern end of Lamu town where most of the mud houses are located grew most in the early 1960s when many Somali (shifita) attacks forced

Bajun people to move from the northern coast to the safety of Lamu town. Therefore the relationship of mud houses to coral settlements is complicated and must be seen within an historical and cultural context. Present-day Lamu cannot be used as a direct model of the past. Wilson attempted a classification of Swahili settlements based on the size of sites (Wilson 1982, 209). However, he admitted that communities change through time, and 'there is some difficulty in classifying towns that are still inhabited, where the majority of the evidence of early occupation remains buried' (Wilson 1982, 211). This fact would hold true for all sites at all periods other than the present, whether they are occupied or not.

Ghaidan writes that Lamu probably reached its zenith during the second half of the last century with a population of over 15,000 (1971, 23). But he does not tell us how he reached this figure. Allen (1974a, 302) says that he agrees with Ghaidan (see <sup>his</sup> note 14) and that the population of Lamu at its peak may have been as much as 20,000. Allen states that his figure 'is based on a personal survey of surviving and ruined buildings and on oral recollections regarding the average number of occupants of each type of house (Allen



1974a, 315). It would be useful to know more about the factors which he considered. He at least gives us some idea about how he arrived at his population figures which is more acceptable than the typical approach used on many archaeological sites. For example, 'The town of Gedi originally occupied a very large area; the outer wall enclosed about 18 hectares but this would have included a lot of farm or plantation land, and probably a number of mud and thatch houses - perhaps 2,000 people' (Sassoon 1976,30).

Chittick compares the area of modern Lamu to that of ruined Pate to arrive at his figure of 8,000 inhabitants at Pate's peak (Chittick 1967,58). He does not mention the social and historical factor described above that would make Lamu a poor choice for comparison.

Area-based figures are in general not accurate because coral houses are more concentrated and are often multi-storeyed, therefore housing more people per area than single-storey widely-spaced mud houses. Other historical and social factors distort the numbers of persons living in a house through time. In the past coral houses were often self-contained to a large extent. In the two-storey houses the slaves lived downstairs and even upstairs with the freeborn family. Many more people used the house and the concern for privacy was not as great

in the Swahili culture as it is today (see chapter 4, divided rooms, page 166). Rooms were also multi-purpose and used by many people, often of different status, even in England until the nineteenth century (Girourd 1978). The descendants of free and freed people continue to live in coral houses but I do not believe that the concentration is as great as before the end of slavery. Before Ghaidan's study was made in 1976, many coral houses that were included in his survey were bought by Europeans, and therefore the occupancy figures would not have cultural relevance. Unless the social and historical context is known and an entire settlement is excavated it is impossible to determine population figures with any accuracy.

Chapter 3 presents the historical context for my research and I attempt to place all of my data concerning Swahili spaces and objects within the context of their society. The following chapter sets out how I think a society might best be studied to learn the role of spaces and objects in structuring a culture.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE STUDY OF SOCIETY

A central theme or concern in anthropology and sociology is how to set about the study of a society. For many years scholars talked only about the patterns or classifications within different cultures, which were seen to be based on religion, kinship and/or the structure of the human brain (Durkheim 1915, Malinowski 1935, Evans-Prichard 1940, Radcliffe-Brown 1952, Levi-Strauss 1958, Firth 1964). But whatever the basis, there is a general agreement that people who share concepts of time and space and the same general social pattern or value system represent a society.

This general social pattern has often been called ideology, structure, cosmology. It is difficult to follow the distinctions and similarities between these terms. I run a risk by using a specific term of allying myself with one person's thinking, with which I may not totally agree, and yet to create new terminology seems unnecessary and likely to add to the confusion. I shall use 'structure' for the 'general order' or 'pattern' that is a society, for this term lends itself

best to my argument, and to my dependence on the theoretical stance that has been developed by Anthony Giddens.

Once scholars progressed beyond the realisation that structure was a social reality constructed by human beings, and not an order that had any separate reality, they started to note several other problems (for example see Douglas 1973). Some societies have more 'closed' or rigid structures and others are more 'open' or flexible. Advantages could be attributed to both 'types'. The more traditional highly structured societies offered stability from which members could derive a reasonable expectation about the behaviour of others. However, if the social system was 'closed' it always favoured one group over others, and the less fortunate were often unable to make changes.

The analysis of social systems was further confused by the difference between the verbal description of a custom or belief, and the observation of behaviour that was often at odds with this account. Different segments of the same society could also be seen to use the social system to achieve very dissimilar objectives. One section of the population, or a single person, might attempt to achieve a particular goal, the outcome of which was not what had been intended at all. While some



individuals or institutions were aware of the social system and consciously worked out strategies to control others, another person or group might change the structure unintentionally. The more unconscious a group was of the existence of a system, the more this seemed to constitute the 'natural order' as an established and unchallenged social system that was likely to persist. It is certainly to the advantage of those in power, who themselves are the agents who create the social structure, to maintain the system that has made them superior, relative to others (Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1979)

The process that creates a structure that ranks the individual member of a society, with reference to the Swahili society, has been my main subject of research. Any analysis of this process of social formation involves a discussion of the issues raised above, and suggests a positive step forward in the social sciences. Many 'processual' approaches have been developed by anthropologists and it is these which I want to discuss and not 'processual' approaches put forward by archaeologists such as Binford. Victor Turner saw the process of creating a social structure as one of oscillation between two forms. He called one type 'structure' and the other 'anti-structure'. When the society had a high degree of formal order (called 'closed'

above) it had 'structure', and when discarded it was in a state of 'anti-structure' which produced 'communitas' (Turner 1969). Traditional groups tend to remain 'structured' and modern ones usually have longer periods of 'communitas', but both can change or oscillate to one form or the other, with different degrees of magnitude and for varying lengths of time. Mary Douglas offered four types of societies as working models for any processual analysis (Douglas 1970,1982). The four types are the end points of two axes, one of whose lines she called the group factor, where the other is the grid factor. A society with a high group rating would be one where individual behaviour was highly controlled by pressure exerted by other people, while that with a low rating would be one where an individual controlled others. The high rating on the grid axis, on the other hand, would mean a society with a single shared system of classification or structure, while a low measure on the grid axis might be represented by an individual who had a private system of classification. In these terms, a traditional society would usually have high grid and group ratings. The identification of extreme types in this system is rare. Although this model is useful in identifying tendencies and strategies, it is of limited use in the understanding of

social change. Both Douglas and Turner emphasise the importance of investigation of the process of social formation, to which I shall return later, but the models introduced above stress the structures of society, rather than its process. Sally Falk Moore, Turner's student, improved his model after pointing out that his theory only applies to 'special cases' (Moore, 1975,233). Neither Turner's nor Douglas' models deal with the strategies that individuals and /or institutions employ to reinforce or disrupt the order of their society. Moore presents two concepts, 'processes of situational adjustment' and 'processes of regularisation', designed to analyse individual and institutional cases, which either lack a culturally patterned aspect of social life, or where an 'indeterminacy' may be 'produced by the manipulation of existing internal contradictions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities within the universe of relative determinate elements'(Moore 1975,233). This model uses the process of employing unstructured factors to create structures and changes which reduce the degree of structure as the result of internal and external interactions. The fixed or structured parts of social reality are those that are continuously renewed (Moore 1975,235). This is a model that deals more with the actual

processes of social formation than an examination of the end results of such processes.

Giddens goes a step further than this in saying that, in a sense, there is no end result, for the process itself is the structure. If the process stops then there is no structure. He calls the process structuration. If the notion of a model of structures is useful at all, then it is a 'non-temporal, non-spatial order of difference produced and reproduced in social interaction as its medium and outcome' (Giddens 1979,3).

Pierre Bourdieu likewise writes that, 'it is just as true and just as untrue to say that collective actions produce the event or that they are its product' (Bourdieu 1977,82). The difficulty in distinguishing between different terms for the same concept, that I mentioned earlier in this chapter, here begins to be manifest. Giddens uses the term social system, where others use structure. Social systems are 'composed of patterns of relationships between actors or collectivities reproduced across time and space. Social systems are hence constituted of situated practices' (Giddens 1981,26). Or, in other words, 'a structure can only be described "out of time", but its functioning cannot' (Giddens 1976,120). Bourdieu's theory of the mode of generation of



practices', 'habitus', 'structuring of structures' and 'generative schemes' (1977) seem similar to Giddens' 'theory of structuration' (1979). Douglas expands on strategies that might be considered as types of structuration but neither Douglas, Bourdieu, Turner nor Moore indicate as clearly as Giddens that the very process itself is the structure. It is difficult to reject the idea of an order, on some level.

Having outlined the 'processual camp', in the Giddens sense, I should now like to turn to aspects of structuration, and discuss the means that societies employ in the construction of their social systems. I now use the terms social system and structure in the way that Giddens has defined them above. Societies use language, time, space, boundaries, mundane and ritual activities and objects to create social systems of meaning. Although language might be considered the most important element in such systems, I shall not discuss its use, for it constitutes a study in its own right and does not bear directly on archaeological material. It is instead with the relationships between the other elements I have mentioned, as used by individuals and institutions, that the rest of this chapter will deal.

All social systems do, or did, exist within a

temporal frame while, as I have mentioned above, only abstract structures are non-spatial and non-temporal. I shall begin with an examination of how time is used in various societies, and follow this with a discussion of the concept of space, which is often linked to temporal factors. Time is not part of material culture but how time is culturally perceived is of central importance to the social meaning of spaces and objects. It is not towards how the concept of time as discussed by scientists or philosophers in the twentieth century that this dissertation is directed but towards how time is used socially within a specific cultural context, in particular the Swahili society. For example, the elite Swahili males control the times when various categories of persons use certain urban and domestic spaces and specific objects. Therefore a space may have one meaning at one time of day and a different meaning at another time, depending on the daily, annual or even life cycle events directed by Swahili men.

Additional weight is added to these practices when they are seen as having been routine habits of men and women for generations.

Swahili men are associated with things long-lasting; Islam, coral houses, 'deep lineage' but all 'others' in varying degrees are seen as not playing an active role in either the past or future. Islam adds a great

deal of unquestioned (godly) power to Swahili men because its practices are seen as having a long history and these practices are related to all daily and ritual activities. Time, space, objects and practices are used for social purposes, primarily, if not solely, to create power, both over other individuals and resources.

#### TIME

Although time and space are most often treated as linked concepts, I should like first to deal with the idea and use of time independently. Two related factors should be considered; the linear and cyclic concepts of time, and the question of whether time is a purely social concept, or whether it is limited by natural phenomena. Maurice Bloch argues that every society has two ways of organising time; one based on the natural constraints such as the seasons and crop production, whilst the other is socially determined 'ritual time'. He says that evidence for this can be found in the fact that some groups, who are involved with agricultural production, seem to be less structured and are more 'present' in orientation. These societies have fewer rituals than ones with a greater degree of hierarchy and perception of

longer periods of time (Bloch 1977,279-92).

Certainly some societies use time concepts which are linked to cyclic patterns found in nature but this could produce a sense of a long past history with forms of reincarnation or 'reversible time', in which the past and the present are seen as the same. 'Ritual' or 'social time' could be linked to natural phenomena or not, and could likewise contract or expand temporal concepts. Both are simply factors which may be used in the construction of a sense of time and not associated with any particular type of society.

Linear and cyclic notions of time are important in the process of creating power. Linear time is non-repetitive and irreversable, while cyclic time is just the opposite. Edmund Leach points out that man prefers the concept of cyclic time, because this creation allows for life after death, while linear time does not (Leach 1961,132).

Giddens (1981,34-5), building on Heidegger, points out five major ways in which human existence is peculiarly historical. I would like to use his framework as a starting point for discussing several relevant ideas about the ways in which time can be used. First, an <sup>human</sup> individual, unlike other animals, is aware of death and creates social systems



or institutions which span generations; beliefs about how the dead make their influence felt upon the practices of the living have an impact on how the living perceive their 'long-term' future.

Societies with mechanisms by which people expand their time perspective make claims in the name of ancestors and posterity. This has the affect of diverting envy and sets out rights and obligations which benefit the dominant group.

This leads to Giddens' second point. 'All societies have institutional forms which persist across generations, and which "shape" past experiences that date back well beyond the life of any particular individual' (Giddens 1981,35). These long-term institutional concepts (for example Islam) also give an over-all 'shape' to a person's day-to-day existence and provide the rationalisation for his activities. These may either provide him with power or restrict his options.

Thirdly, the West now has a form of time-consciousness which is linked to the idea of progressive social change in a 'linear' fashion, but traditional <sup>non-western</sup> societies view social systems as simply the way things are now and also how they used to be in the past. The present is known in terms of the past, which both contracts and expands

time-consciousness. It is contracted because there are no 'objective' reports of past behaviour, as in societies which are literate, and yet there is a 'sense' of a long history which gives power to the present mode of behaviour.

Fourthly, and as a result in part of the above elements of 'subjective' cyclic time, the individual gains a source of security from the traditional 'routineisation' of day-to-day life. This was mentioned earlier in relation to the advantages of a highly ordered world view, as opposed to one in which every action is seen as taking place and being negotiated in a totally open field of possibilities.

Fifthly, this 'routineisation' of daily life involves specific people or groups performing 'given' tasks at designated localities. This is a major form of structuration. Activities can be charted as paths through time and space during days, weeks, years of an individual's lifetime; for each of the various segments of society (men, women, ethnic groups, different age groups, etc); and the very separations can be given social meaning and build or constitute ranking. These paths through temporal and spatial divisions must be viewed as day-to-day patterns, within life cycles, and in relation to institutional systems, all of which overlap each other.

It is only in this way that the modes of domination or power systems can be seen to use the manipulations of time and place. When 'stretched out' over the 'lived' experience of a cultural setting, the advantages and disadvantages of these patterns to specific groups are often not obvious. Traditional societies like the Swahili have a rhythm; a time for planting, a time for weeding, a time for selling; this pace strengthens the feeling of unity and security within the group. A moral attitude develops, and those who do not follow the rhythm become unpopular rebels and outcasts.

The tempo, or rhythm, of activities is often essential to its meaning. As Bourdieu reveals, the tempo of an exchange constitutes its meaning; if a person gives another a gift and there is no delay in presenting a counter-gift, the result will not be the desired one. The gift-exchange must be deferred and different to reinforce the relationship, which is the desired result. He explains other strategies which involve the use of tempo. A person can derive power from delaying a response, or in other words, 'keeping a person in the dark'. But also a person can lose power and honour by delaying other activities, such as revenge against a wrong done to his family (Bourdieu 1977,15).



In societies which lack a well-defined social system, the ranking order of individuals must constantly be renewed within repetitive interactions. A great deal of time must be spent in reinforcing the relationships which produce and reproduce autonomy and dependence within the society. The 'cost' of time increases as more time is spent on production of goods, and the scarcity of goods diminishes. It then may become a saving to give a gift to strengthen a relationship rather than spend time with the person to obtain the same dependence or bond. Small gifts (for example, food) are often exchanged to keep friendships 'going' while large gifts are reserved as a means of marking special occasions. All human beings have limited resources to be 'spent' and it is only by means of institutionalised mechanisms, such as titles and degrees, that relationships of domination have the capacity and permanence that does not demand reinforcement in time and goods (Bourdieu 1977, 183-98).

Calendars are another means of fixing public activity patterns, which 'save' time because of the social order they promote. They are started by the demarcation of temporal dimensions (night and day, lunar etc.). 'The calendar has to be notched for annual, quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily and shorter



periodicities. These 'notches' or marks may be made by certain activities, for example rites or gift (object) exchange. The passage of time can then be laden with meaning by using objects. The calendar gives a principle for rotation of duties, for establishing precedence, for review and renewal' (Douglas 1979,65). Douglas stresses the use of goods to mark off temporal durations and Bourdieu stresses activities; of course both are important.

To link more firmly the construction of calendars with the social perception of time Bourdieu writes 'a calendar substitutes a linear, homogeneous, continuous time for practical time which is made up of incommensurable islands of duration, each with its own rhythm, the time that flies by or drags, depending on what one is doing. i.e.on the functions conferred on it by the activity in progress. By distributing "guide-marks" (ceremonies and tasks) along a continuous line, one turns them into "dividing marks" united in a relation of simple succession and correspondence between points which are no longer topologically but meterically equivalent' (Bourdieu 1977,105).

He also warns, as with gift exchanges, that if the activities which are normally not brought face to face in practice are put side by side by an analyst's

timeless mode of a social system, contradictions may appear that would never be noticed in patterns lived or 'stretched' over time (Bourdieu 1977,106).

This is related to the question of synchronic and diachronic views of societies. I do not believe that an accurate synchronic or, as it is often called 'snap shot' description is possible. If there is a synchronic manifestation of a social system, it is practically a non-temporal abstract manifestation which Giddens would call 'structure'. Patterns of interaction are situated in time; only when examined over time do they form patterns (Giddens 1979,202). 'To speak of social stability cannot involve abstracting from time, since "stability" means continuity over time. A stable social order is one in which there is a close similarity between how things are now and how they used to be in the past' (Giddens 1979,199). These very repetitive patterns are characteristic of traditional societies who believe in cyclic time, but an extended period of time (centuries) must be studied before an abstract pattern or structure can be presented for any given society. This is an important consideration for archaeologists and anthropologists who tend to specialise in one 'period' of a society's existence.

Objects (sometimes in the form of gifts ) have

been mentioned as a means of 'saving' time, or as marking intervals of time, and as a way of reinforcing relationships over time. (Further uses of objects, which are not directly related to the perception of time, will be discussed later in this chapter). Douglas writes that 'goods yield services in the course of which they are consumed more or less immediately. Consumer durables, houses and pictures, etc. yield services over a long time, flowers and food more quickly' (Douglas 1982, 28). A section of society which uses mostly durable objects will have a more linear character and this adds power to that group's social position. This strategy contributes to their mode of domination which represents their segment of the society as having a static ideological principle, which aids in the legitimation of their asymmetrical position in regard to resources (land, labour and goods). The durability of goods would then be seen as a structuring aspect of their mode of domination. The duality of the structuration must not be forgotten, for it was the group in power who were free to determine what goods were selected to represent power and stability ... social systems are simultaneously the medium and outcome. They create the social system, which in turn creates them; and the process is all there really is.

A point arises from this which is an important

consideration to archaeologists; usually only durable items are recovered in archaeological work and therefore segments of a society may be 'muted' or less evident in finds and building forms, relative to other groups who use durable goods (for a discussion of the term 'muted' see Ardener 1981,32). Unless large area or settlement excavations are undertaken a segment of the society may be spatially 'muted'. If a group (for example women) had durable artefacts associated with them but were restricted in their living context their artefacts would often also be limited spatially within the archaeological site. This leads us to a consideration of the social uses of space.

### SPACE

People, generally as part of a collective, give meaning to spaces (areas with boundaries) by association with specific categories of persons during a limited time-span. The area or space may be as large as a continent or as small as a section within a tent or the shade of a tree. It may be, for example, the Chinese living in China or virgins who occupy the left side of a nomad<sup>mongolian</sup> tent. Most of the discussion below will however be set in an urban context, with some comments about the effect of interaction with



surrounding non-urban-dwelling people. In fact most of the formalised social patterns can be visualised as taking place within and around domestic spaces.

Within traditional societies there are spatial-temporal rhythms; segments of the population are to be found performing tasks in specific locations at regular times each day, seasonally, or yearly. Women, men, children, various ethnic groups, or people of a given age, depending on the social categories considered relevant by the people in power, are assigned spaces in which to work and live. In this manner divisions of space and social formations are intimately linked ... Social identity is partly determined by 'the physical and spatial constituents of the groups' environment' (Matthews 1980,4); that is to say, space defines the people in it. At the same time, again reflexively, 'the presence of individuals in space in turn determines its nature' (Ardener 1981, 12,13). The setting of social interaction is not neutral background, and once it has been marked it exerts its own influence. So as Shirley Ardener writes, 'Space defines the people in it', and 'people define space' (ibid.12,13). Or, for example, once a <sup>christian</sup> chapel is built the activities which take place there will not be sports. Ritual and mundane activities mark spaces.

Three spatial unities will be discussed which will show how social meaning is associated with bounded spaces: the human body, the city and the house.

### THE HUMAN BODY

Bourdieu (1977,90-1) stresses that the world is perceived in relation to the body; it is the relationships that the body creates with its environment that, as infants, organise our perception of space. We see ourselves as moving through spaces; as being inside/outside, in front/behind, above/below, or going to the right or left. Although these relationships can often be usefully expressed as oppositions, binary oppositions are not an end in themselves but only tools to be used in the analysis of a social system.

Douglas does not consider the body in relation to its environment, but states that the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system, and that the body as a symbol of society can be used as a representation of the social system (Douglas 1966, 115). For example the <sup>Hindu</sup> Brahman caste is associated with the head or intellectual duties, while the untouchables are associated with the lower body, and have to clean toilets. The social and physical

boundaries between the castes are carefully guarded, and have little direct interaction. The bodies' margins, like the boundaries of any system, Douglas says, are dangerous. And the matter issuing from them, spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces, skin, finger-nails and hair clippings may also be considered dangerous because they have crossed or mark bodily margins (ibid.121). She further suggests that when rituals express anxiety about the body's orifices, the sociological counterpart of this anxiety is a care to protect the political and cultural unity of a minority group, and ensure its very survival. The Hindu and Islamic pre-occupation with purity that I cite in my own material will provide further support for this theory in later chapters.

The use of 'marginal' materials which leave the body, such as hair, blood and urine can, I believe, be expanded to include bone, which leaves the body in the process of decay, after death. Bones can be useful, powerful, and durable ritual-markers. Consider the skull and crossbones as a symbol. I shall look at other examples in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 from the Swahili cultural context, to support this idea.

From the body, as a model to be endowed with



social meaning, I shall turn to the city, and thus from the smallest to perhaps the largest unit of space that is commonly used by traditional societies as a social metaphor.

### CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE

The character of a city must be understood as a social system, which is not completely distinct from its 'environment' (including of course other societies). The city is a symbol of order, compared to the surroundings which lack form. 'There is power in the form, and other power in the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries' (ibid. 98). Like the body model, the marginal and external aspects of the city are often viewed by its inhabitants as being a source of pollution or impurity. In the Swahili towns, people who lived in the bush were considered dangerous, uncivilised and 'dirty'. The concept of purity is a 'generative scheme' in the Swahili culture, as honour is in other societies. It is expressed in many physical forms, of which the city/countryside issue is only one example which will be discussed in greater detail later.

Giddens (1981,144-9) argues with points taken from Mumford (1967,1961), Castells (1977) and



Wheatley (1971), that the city was a focus of power because of the concentration of religious, ceremonial and commercial activities which traditionally took place within its boundaries. Mumford called the city a 'container' of power, and pointed out that the city walls give the physical shape to this 'container'. Cities are, however, not autonomous and more often than not depend on their surrounding countryside and its inhabitants for their survival. The Swahili towns, for example, required export products (ivory), labour, and often wives, from the surrounding societies to produce and reproduce their urban culture.

<sup>Swahili</sup>  
 City walls were certainly a major device for the marking of social boundaries, perhaps more so than they were ever effective for defence purposes. Other spaces within the towns were also controlled by the most powerful groups. Residential areas <sup>within towns</sup> are often restricted to those who are known to live or work in a ward, while admission to religious and ceremonial centres is often limited to 'true followers'. Private homes are usually visited only by relatives, close friends and servants, in most traditional societies. There are not only spatial boundaries to be considered when looking at an urban setting, but also the temporal patterns I have mentioned above. One segment, or a number of groups, are

allowed to be in an area of the town only during certain hours. While some societies do not allow women to enter any public space, others permit them to leave their homes only when other groups within the society are not present. For example, male slaves were not allowed within the Swahili city walls after dark, when freeborn women went out into public spaces - the streets of the town. Spatial-temporal paths both 'mute' the influence of certain groups within the city, and become the source of power for others.

The physical plan of the city reflects, and reflexively creates, the power relations of the urban dwellers. The ceremonial centres (such as mosques) are a dominant physical feature, which symbolise the importance of special knowledge. Town centres may be dominated by markets or political headquarters, but the focus of power is usually represented in the central area, while the dwellings of those in power are concentrated nearby. 'The less privileged groups live towards the outer limits of the urban area, with outcasts or pariah groups scattered on the periphery, not always within the city walls, though they may claim the protection of moving into the interior of the city when under external attack' (Giddens 1981, 146-7).

As one moves from the outside of the town towards the religious or commercial centre, the people most associated with each area are seen as commanding more personal or institutional power. In Swahili towns, for example, not only does the perceived power of the individual increase, but also his purity; this does not apply to women, because only men are allowed in mosques, which are the focus of the town, and symbolise purity. Any investigation of social systems must take place from the viewpoint of various social groups because they will vary, as I have shown above. The uncontrolled 'impurity' is outside the town in the 'wild African bush' in the eyes of a religious townsman (El Zein 1974, 112). The 'controlled impurity' of his powerful group on the other hand is contained in the innermost room of his house, in the body of the women of his clan. These women are also, paradoxically, the source of his 'pure' lineage, which is deemed 'protected' when secluded in a physically 'muted' space.

Once a city is structured, spatially and temporarily, it becomes a powerful element of structuration, by the way it gives physical form and support to the mode of domination. The town plan is the setting for daily practices, and once this plan is defined also becomes active in defining categories of its inhabitants. The domestic

dwelling is also considered to be a powerful structuring force in traditional societies.

## HOUSES

Morgan (1881), Durkheim and Mauss (1903) and Mauss and Berchat (1906) were cited by Douglas (1972) as being the pioneers of the analysis of domestic architecture as models of society. Mauss and Berchat especially attack geographical and technological determinism in the interpretation of domestic organisation.

Fortes (1949 and others (for example Watson 1954, Turner 1955, Stenning 1959, Littlejohn 1967 and Sommer 1969) followed, using statements such as 'A Tallensi's home is his castle in the psychological rather than material sense, it is the centre and fount of his major interests, his dominant purpose, his deepest emotional attachments, and his whole scheme of values; it is his shelter, his storehouse, the stage of his life drama' (Fortes 1949, 46).

Another example; 'The layout of a homestead is an index to the structure of the domestic family occupying it' (Fortes *ibid.* 50) (my underlining).

Littlejohn, in his article about Temne houses, about ten years later, says, 'There is always an intimate connection between a dwelling and the kind of existence led by those who live in it. "Suburban



semi-detached"; "slum", "country house", "council houses" etc., signify for Britons not just architectural styles, but different positions in a social system and different "styles of life", (Littlejohn wrote in 1960, published collection 1967,345). It was not until later in the 1960s and 1970s that work began on how the connection between the social system and the form of the house worked 'in practice'. Bourdieu developed the idea of the house as a structuring structure, or, as Giddens would call it, a form of structuration. Bourdieu discussed the symbolic meaning of both domestic spaces and objects within a specific cultural context. However research conducted in the 1960s by British anthropologists also contributed to the understanding of structuration within a domestic setting and I would like to review their work before returning briefly to Bourdieu's constructs.

Cunningham in his article, 'Order in the Atoni House' (1964,219 in R. Needham 1973) writes that 'order in building expresses ideas symbolically, and the house depicts them vividly for every individual, from birth to death. Furthermore, order concerns not just discrete ideas or symbols, but systems; and the system expresses both principles of classification and a value for classification per se, the definition of unity and difference'. The house, he points out, was

one of the best ways for a preliterate people to encapsulate ideas.

Of all published house studies, I do not know of one that does not give evidence of spaces designed for men, with other spaces more associated with women. In Cunningham's case study, like most of the time-space paths, the male space is more public and given superior social value. Houses, such as the Atoni dwelling, often have different floor levels, with the men invariably placed on the highest level. Female space is usually internal and at the back, while male space is generally external. Goffman's analysis (1959), affords us a model (appreciated by Douglas (1966,100); Bourdieu (1977,94); Giddens (1979,207) and Ardener (1981,12)) that expands the meaning of these spaces in relation to men and women. What is done 'back stage' is hidden, for there are features of interaction which may be potentially compromising, while the 'performances out front ( usually by male "actors" ) are painstakingly fabricated: it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed' (Goffman 1959). Shirley Ardener edited a collection of papers concerned with the position of women in social and physical space (Women in Space, 1981). Women, in all the societies concerned, were placed behind, below, inside or on the periphery of the social and

physical reality. All were male-dominated societies.

Tambiah's work, which followed Cunningham's in 1969, (reprinted in Douglas' (ed.) Rules and Meanings (1973, 127-66) discussed the social significance of the house plan, carefully studied several symbolic systems, including the house, in relation to each other. The sexual relations, the animal and dietary rules of the traditional Thai household were all associated with areas of the house. All spaces, things and categories of human beings and animals were shown to have interrelated order and meaning. His ability to describe the interrelationships between symbolic systems was certainly a contribution to the anthropology of dwelling forms.

Stephen and Christine Hugh-Jones' research in Amazonia provided an example of hierarchically organised domestic space. 'Only on occasions of ritual do hierarchy and specialisation become visible and on these occasions the spatial divisions of the house and their correlates are most clearly seen' (Hugh-Jones, S. 1977, 210). Furthermore, 'in spatial terms, these associations mean that the centre of the house is identified with the female end. This is manifest in the position of the family compartments but is made even more obvious in male rituals. Here the men conduct their communal activities in the centre and front of the house, shut off from the women by a

screen to their family compartments and small communal cooking area; they communicate with one another via the plaza. (Hugh-Jones, C.1977,198). This is a good example of a case where women are 'muted' by being kept backstage, and is also an observation of ritual 'practice' which arrives at a fuller understanding of how people are ranked, by being given valued spaces.

I should like to return to Bourdieu's work (1962), 1977) because it not only describes the various symbolic systems associated with space and objects and their interrelationships with individuals through mundane and ritual activities, but also addresses, as does Giddens, the end result - domination and power. Bourdieu favours two terms; 'habitus' and 'generative schemes' which are to me variations of Giddens's theory of structuration. Both scholars stress the importance of the process of 'practice', and both refer to sets of symbols as 'structuring structures'. They also see the final goal of social relations as power or domination. To look at Bourdieu's terminology more closely for a moment: habitus can simply be seen as habits which structure reality. These can be related to language, dress, kinship, class economy, farming cycles, food, divisions of labour, proverbs, songs, the layout of the village, rites,



gift-exchanges and of course the house, which is the habitus 'par excellence'. The house is also the 'principal focus for the objectification of the generative schemes; and through the intermediary of the divisions and hierarchies it sets up between things, persons, and practices, this tangible classifying system continuously inculcates and reinforces the taxonomic principles underlying all the arbitrary provisions of this (all) culture' (Bourdieu 1977,89).

Bourdieu certainly makes an excellent attempt to combine all of the symbolic systems which human beings are capable of using. He uses examples of the way in which objects and spaces are employed, which would be useful to the archaeologist faced with interpretation of the social 'meaning' of finds/ artefact assemblages or house ruins; but has this been attempted? Work has been started in this direction in America by James Deetz and Henry Glassie. Deetz, an historical archaeologist working on material from early New England settlements (1977), certainly sees the material culture remains as containing coded messages which he 'decodes' by using historical information. Glassie works in a similar manner, but has written more on house form, and does not analyse archaeological finds (Glassie 1975). Neither, however, has ~~the~~ ~~the opportunity to~~ observed the ritual and mundane

practices which have given the objects or building they have studied their social meaning, nor have they discussed the symbolic systems or the power which they generate for select groups.

Archaeological remains are often composed of building remains, and thus I have first stressed the importance of the anthropological work which has been done on the use of space or houses, but archaeological material is also made up of artefact assemblages, or goods. Directly relevant material is to be found in Mary Douglas' and Baron Isherwood's book The World of Goods (1979) and the edited collection Women and Space (1981) mentioned above, edited by Shirley Ardener. The examples in these books are taken both from our own Western culture, and from traditional societies. In The World of Goods, the authors write about the social uses of objects. 'Forget that commodities are good for eating, clothing, shelter, forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking, treat them as non-verbal medium for human creative faculty' (ibid.,62); 'Abstract concepts are always hard to remember, unless they take on some physical appearance', (ibid.,4); 'Goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges' (ibid.,12); '... goods, then, are the visible part of culture. They are arranged in vistas and hierarchies

that can give play to the full range of discrimination of which the human mind is capable. The vistas are not fixed: nor are they randomly arranged in a kaleidoscope. Ultimately their structures are anchored to human social purposes' (ibid.,66). The purpose, which she does not state, is, I believe, control of others, or in other words power.

Renée Hirschon's paper in Woman in Space (1972,88) examines a Greek urban household, where the husband is the head of the house, but the wife 'is paradoxically the central figure through her association with the "essential objects". ' (Among these were the double bed as a symbol of marital stability, the dining-table representing the holy communion and hospitality and Icons which embodied the metaphysical, and hence sacred dimension of the home). While the husband was most powerful, the wife also served as mediator in the social exchanges of the neighbourhood. The important point is that her role as mediator was a form of power, as were the 'essential objects', but they were given to the women by men. Women are like objects if they do not create, change, or direct the process of structuration. It is of course not only women, but any group that is not in power, whose social value becomes a part of a system of domination.

## POWER

Power is derived from the social uses of temporal and spatial divisions, objects, ritual and mundane practices, together with other relationships. The study of power, Giddens says, is the analysis of the relations between autonomy and dependence; a person or party who wields power could have acted otherwise (Giddens 1979,88). The powerful groups control ideas or signification. They decide and rank, through what they do in their daily and ritual lives. The values that they give to people, spaces, time and objects within their social system creates a classification with idealogical aspects, which may often conceal their power. When the classification becomes regularised, to the degree that the members of the society see the created system of structuration as 'universal' or the 'natural order' (Bourdieu uses the term doxa), the pattern becomes a form of legitimation for the dominant group. Practices or patterns of long duration, institutional modes, are then able to maintain the interests of the dominant class which rely on the asymmetrical distribution of resources. These conditions now appear to be their natural rights and obligations. This is referred to by Giddens as the 'duality of structure', which means



that social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of the constitution (Giddens 1976,21).

In traditional societies, life is highly institutionalised, and daily life is dominated by routines and symbolic systems that are well integrated, and are constantly reproduced. This provides a sense of security not always present in today's fragmented Western societies, where people are able to reflect on their society and know that the social reality is socially created, leading them to feel more insecure, frightened, and often alone (Douglas 1966, 73-93; Giddens 1981,151). The study of society can in itself precipitate changes in the modern world.

Change is seen by Giddens in traditional societies in two broad categories. One as incremental: change that occurs as an unintended outcome of social reproduction itself, for example, the process of change in language. The other category of change is the result of the external impact of influences that produce de-routinisation. This might be the effects of sharp ecological transmutations, of natural disaster, or the establishment of relations of dependence or conflict with societies of different cultural composition. If ethnic or other forms of

sectional domination have already come into being, either within the society or in close proximity to it, these may be a source of change. Giddens defines this context between two different types of societies, for example hunter-gatherers and urban-dwelling class-divided societies, as 'time-space edges'. These are the boundaries of both societies and are therefore always more vulnerable (see above page 55) as the potential or actual area for social transformation. It is in this liminal area or boundary that Moore's process of 'situational adjustment' and 'processes of regularisation' come into play (these areas may be spaces, times, ritual stages or persons). Her model was designed to analyse individual and institutional situations where there is either no culturally determined pattern, or time-space edges which produce 'indeterminacy'. This might result from internal contradictions, or outside pressures from groups with different forms of structuration. This process, like Bourdieu's 'habitus', and Giddens' theory of structuration, again stresses that determining and fixing are never permanently achieved. Thus traditional societies which appear to be fixed, or structured, in social reality are being continuously renewed.

Structural principles contain change over time;

but how many elements (spaces, objects) which are used as structuring structures, can be introduced before the integrated social system disintegrates? Modern Western objects might be integrated into traditional social systems, as illustrated by Caroline Humphrey in her article on Mongolian tents. She writes: 'present day Mongols persistently categorise objects in terms of their position in space. This characteristic of Mongol life was noted by travellers as long ago as the thirteenth century, and it was further observed that Mongols used this categorisation to define social position' (Humphrey 1974, 273). She stresses that the Mongols still retain the same socially designated places in the tent for people and objects, and give them values, although many Western items have entered their society. This structure, persisting from the thirteenth century until the present day, is of importance to the archaeologist interested in traditional societies which persist today in the ruins of their ancestors. If, however, only physical remains of the vanished culture survive, we could make the mistake that Morgan did, by calling burial chambers houses, when the interpretation of domestic spaces first began about 100 years ago. In the following chapters historical, ethnographic and archaeological data will be presented to demonstrate how the Swahili society

constructs its power relations. The brief outline of history related to the Lamu archipelago will support the claim that ethnographic material is relevant to archaeological finds because of historical continuity and persistent patterns over many centuries. Furthermore, these patterns will be shown to be seen in the social uses of spaces and objects, some of which will later be described in more detail in relation to present-day households and archaeological remains. Chapter 4 is devoted to looking at ethnographic data which demonstrates how and what social values have been given to specific spaces within Swahili settlements and houses today through daily and ritual activities. Chapter 5 presents ethnographic data collected in northwestern India. Domestic spaces are in particular analysed and compared to Swahili house-spaces because of known trade links which have existed between the two areas since at least the second century A.D. If spaces and objects are similar do they have similar social values? Chapters 6-9 are concerned with the social values of objects, spaces and features recovered during archaeological excavations. Because of the argued link between the present and the past, not only do the archaeological spaces, i.e. the ruined houses, but also the finds have known social meaning values based on the



relational analogies.

Structures, both physical and theoretical, must be located in a social, spatial-temporal and historical setting before they can be understood. I would therefore like to review what is known about the history of the Swahili society, and of the people with whom they had contact, before setting out an interpretation of their domestic spaces and goods, as modes of structuration.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE LAMU ARCHIPELAGO WITHIN AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To say that a society has a structure, one is required to look at its process of structuration over a period of time. Structuring elements, for example, building materials, type of dress, food, religious beliefs and practices, as well as concepts of 'purity', produce a structure only if they are continuously renewed. If the process stops, Giddens reminds us (1979,3), there is no structure. If the process had stopped we would not be able to use ethnographic data collected in the present as a 'direct historical analogy' relevant to a better understanding of the archaeological past. Durable remains of structuring elements, such as house ruins, may be archaeologically detectable, but unless they are understood within a social and historical context what role they played would be difficult if not impossible to know.

My first task is to show that the Swahili process of structuration has historical depth. To do this I will cite reports from the second century A.D. to the twentieth century.

Very briefly the structuration process is

concerned with relationships between groups of persons and the social uses of space and objects. The people I refer to are Arabs,<sup>1</sup> Africans, Swahili (Afro-Arabs) and Indians (both Muslim and Hindu). Arabs and Indians believed that light skin had higher social value. The Swahili, who had darker skin than either the Arabs or Indians, used the control of space (access to towns, mosques, houses and rooms) and objects (access to imported goods) to create and maintain their powerful middleman position between the Africans and the other Indian Ocean traders, the Arabs and Indians. As their skin darkened from intermarriage their position depended more and more on their control of space and objects. Now this structuring process must be put within a social and historical context.

The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, written in about the second century A.D. by an unknown merchant (translated from Greek by Schoff, 1912,29), documents the presence of Arab and Indian traders on the coast of eastern Africa. Some Africans were at least intermittently hunting, gathering, herding and perhaps even farming on the coast when the first foreign visitors came by sea to trade. The Arabs and Indians came with the monsoon winds to trade their goods: cloth, beads, wire etc. for ivory (wanted in India), timber and slaves (both greatly

1. Arabs, people from Arabia or Persia.

needed in Arabia). Other goods were exchanged, but the above list will suffice to demonstrate the process. The ivory could be supplied by the usual hunting activities and the slaves could have been the result of captives taken in tribal conflicts.

Other writers have suggested how the Swahili settlements were founded.

Foreign traders may have first stayed in Africa because they misjudged the changing of the monsoon winds and were therefore involuntarily stranded (Sheriff 1971,27). Martin (1974,368) suggested that many people settled on the coast of Africa because of political and/or religious upheavals in their homeland. Drought, floods and earthquakes, along with individual misfortunes such as shipwrecks or illness, caused people to consider relocating in Africa. However, many of the first foreigners to stay probably thought they could make a profit by organising the collection of exports for the next year's arrival of Indian and Arab ships. Unlike the Indians, the Arabs wanted more from Africa than they had to offer in exchange, which was mainly dates and dried fish. Their land was less fertile than Africa or India and they lacked an abundance of manufactured goods. Their society, unlike that of the Hindus, promoted expansion, intermarriage and settlement abroad.



Burton (1860/1961 vol. 1,327), Bennett (1968,222) and Sheriff (1971,387) mention inland trade expansion and settlement which involved Arab traders marrying African chiefs' daughters to seal business relationships. The same practice was probably the foundation of early coastal settlements. The African leader had a better hold on the imported goods through his son-in-law's connections and the Arab had a better control over exports; both gained personal advantage. More Africans and Arabs followed this pattern until communities grew up with many of these mixed Arab and African traders, who came to be called by outsiders the Swahili. The Swahili people were Muslims because Islam reinforced their links with Arabia (which a few generations of intermarriage with the local people could have weakened). In the Muslim manner they built mosques, and tombs for their departed religious leaders. These monuments proved their credibility as Muslims and may have thereby improved their overseas credit. The building materials (coral rag) and labour force (slaves) were organised by the Swahili. This type of building was nothing unusual to the visiting foreigners. In fact such mosques and tombs were an effective way to display their affiliation. Cohen (1971,274-8) mentions that in West Africa traders became Muslims and built

large houses to create credit-worthiness.

The coral buildings of East Africa were as impressive to the indigenous people as were the other durable imported goods (beads, porcelain, etc.), especially when compared with the grass dwellings and clay pots owned by the original coastal peoples. The coral monuments could withstand the rains in a way that no grass shelter ever could, and could outlast the people who had built them, which fact could change the very concept of measurable time. A religious monument of this nature could have inspired respect for a foreign concept of God, and even for the Arabs themselves and for their descendants, who were now partly African (the Swahili).

My hypothesis is that this pattern continued, and that the Swahili used, probably unconsciously, aspects of material culture, such as houses, dress and diet, as a means of creating and maintaining their respected middleman position.

The pattern was as follows. Men traded around the Indian Ocean. In Africa there were highly valued raw materials, gold, slaves, ivory and later grain. India provided skilled labour, imported porcelain from China, and cloth. Arabia provided Islamic traders and religious men who continued to

settle on the coast of Africa and marry local women. These people (the Afro-Arabs or Swahili) exported the raw materials in exchange for the skilled labour of the Indians and manufactured goods. It was these goods which were used as their material elements of structuration and source of power or mode of domination.

The people who settled on the coast of Africa had to appear to be trustworthy middlemen, superior to their export goods, i.e. African slaves, and socially equal to the other Muslims who were trading around the Indian Ocean. This was not easy because Arabs and Indians valued light skin and the local women whom the settlers had to marry (because few women travelled long distances by boat) were dark-skinned. The process was centred around the ability to look Arab, even if one was mostly African. A Swahili family simply intermarried with light-skinned Arab immigrants as often as possible and acquired as many material goods, beliefs, and practices associated with Arabs as they could.

Because coral houses were a part of the prosperous times and therefore have more imported durable goods associated with them, archaeologists have studied the Swahili more during the time when they were more Arab-like than when they were poorer and African-like.

'The rapidity of this assimilation (between Arabs and upper class Swahilis) owed a great deal to the widespread Arab habit of taking secondary wives. Most of these women were slaves brought from the African mainland ... They learnt to speak Swahili rather than Arabic and their children were often dark in colour. Although in 1819 Albrand said the Arabs (local Arabs - Swahili) could be recognised by the olive colour of their skin, by 1834 Ruschenberger found the colour of the Arabs (Swahilis) as deep as that of the Africans, and by 1848 Guillain said it was often difficult to distinguish Arabs from Swahili by appearance' (Nicholls 1971,279). When the Swahili were asked in the 1960s how they felt about skin colour, they said that they thought that negroid features were ugly (Bujra 1968,102) and they would rather be considered ex-slaves than Africans (ibid.,273). They associated fairness of skin, culture and power with Arabs (ibid.,177). Now, in the 1980s, trade is poor. None of the highly valued goods (gold, slaves or ivory) are available for export. Very few Arabs and Indians are coming to trade or settle and the Swahili settlements are becoming less Arab and more African.



Archaeological discoveries, thus far, have only been able to document Swahili settlements back to the ninth century A.D. (Manda, Shanga and Pate in the Lamu archipelago (fig. 1). Travellers' reports can only give us a glimpse of the daily life and of the material culture which they felt was important enough to deserve comment. Often what was chosen tells us as much, if not more, about the writer and his relationship with the settlements than it does about the Swahili people themselves. However, we are also interested in what was considered by outsiders as a respectable trader's image within the Indian Ocean trade ports (see fig. 2).

The following historical accounts and observations will indicate the pace of change and determine the degree of continuity within the Swahili settlements. Both of these factors are extremely important when ethnographic or direct historical analogy is proposed for the interpretation of archaeological data. These reports of life within the Swahili towns, of various settlements on the East African coast, have been drawn from authors from different countries and backgrounds in an attempt to present a general pattern not biased by any one foreign group.

In the ninth century Tuan Ch'eng-Shih wrote the first definite Chinese information on East Africa.

He said, 'The products of the country are ivory and ambergris.

When Persian traders wish to enter this country they form a caravan of several thousand men and present them [the local people] with strips of cloth. All, whether old or young, draw blood and swear an oath, and then only do they trade their goods.

From of old this country has not been subject to any foreign power. In fighting they use elephants' tusks ... and bows and arrows ... The Arabs are continually making raids on them' (translated by Freeman-Grenville 1962,8).

However by the tenth century foreign traders had begun to establish trading centres. Ibn Hawqal, an Arab traveller, had reports that 'There is in Zingbar [sic] a race of white people, who bring from other places articles of food and clothing' (Freeman-Grenville, 1962,18).

Chau ju K'ua in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as cited by Ingrams, records that the people of Zanzibar are of the Ta'shi (Arab) stock and follow the Ta'shi (Muslim) religion. 'They wrap themselves in blue foreign cotton stuffs, and wear red leather shoes. Every year Hu-ch'a-al [Gujarati Indians] and the Ta'shi localities along the sea send ships to this country [Africa] with white cloths, porcelain,

copper and red cotton to trade' (Ingrams 1967,92). This Chinese account gave a hint of the indigenous social hierarchy when it mentioned that shoes were worn. Shoes will later be seen as an important status marker to the Swahili (pages 34, 88, 129-30). Red slippers are interesting because Drower, in an article entitled, 'Woman and Taboo in Iraq', notes that the Suq-al-Haffafin, of the street of the red slippers, is a place where evil lurks (Drower 1938,111).

The Venetian, Marco Polo, received a different view of the 'idolaters' of Zanzibar at about the same period, probably from Chinese or Arab travellers. 'They are all black, and go about naked, except that they cover their middles ... They are truly hideous.. They live on rice, flesh, milk and dates'. 'Many merchants come to this island with many ships, laden with diverse kinds of wares, and they sell everything. They then take away with them quantities of the products of the island, and especially great numbers of elephants' tusks, which are so plentiful there' (Marco Polo, translated by Benedetto, 1931,344). From Marco Polo's rude comments we learn that at least not all Zanzibaris were Muslim as Chau ju K'ua had implied. Or perhaps the Ta'shi (Arab stock) had been Africanised to some degree. However, the diet that Marco Polo was told about included rice and dates, which confirms trade with India (rice)

and Arabia (dates) but, more important perhaps, these goods demonstrate an Islamic fare. It seems that only some elements of the Muslim material culture which is heavy with social meaning was present in Zanzibar in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

At other urban trading centres on the coast, during the same period, the symbolic system or elements of later Swahili patterns of structuring were described. The Arab, Ibn Battuta, when visiting Mogadishu in the 1300s did not see himself as superior, and in fact seems to be honoured to be among the local people. 'The official robes of the Shaikhs and Viziers were Egyptian linen tunics with silk undergarments. They also brought robes for my [Battuta's] companions suitable to their position'. (Battuta, 1325-1354, translated by Gibb, 1962, 376). In a later section of his description he says, 'the Shaikh then went out of the gate of the mosque, put on his sandals, ordered the Qadi to put on his sandals, and me to do likewise, and set out on foot for his residence, which was close to the mosque. All the (rest of the) people walked barefoot' (ibid., 377).

This report expressed indirectly that Battuta and the people of Mogadishu had the same symbolic system of structuration. He is telling the reader



that they are worthy of his respect, based on the fact that they wear imported Egyptian linen tunics, worship in a 'civilised manner' etc. Once he has established their high status, he adds that they also brought robes for his companions 'suitable' to their positions. Battuta does not stop with the explanation of the relationship between 'us' and 'them'. He goes on to say that their religious and secular leaders wear shoes (as does he) and that other people who follow them are obviously inferior people because they follow barefooted.

It is appropriate to have a Portuguese account for the sixteenth century of the coast of eastern Africa, as they were, during that century, controlling much of the African trade. Barbosa has a scheme for settlement description which contains the elements of structuration central to my research. They are as follows: (1) type of housing, (2) skin colour of the inhabitants, (3) style of clothing worn, (4) religion, (5) goods traded and (6) diet. He sailed along the coast of East Africa and Malabar listing these characteristics for each site he visited. This supports my claim that these elements were considered important to all the Indian Ocean traders. He did not stop in the Lamu archipelago but he did record the settlement of nearby Malindi that was especially friendly to the Portuguese.

Malindi wanted the Portuguese to be their allies against other Swahili towns. Barbosa wrote about Malindi:

'this town has fine houses and terraces, and good streets. The inhabitants are dusky and black, and go naked from the waist upwards, and from that downwards they cover themselves with cloth of cotton and silk, and others wear wraps like cloaks, and handsome caps on their heads. The trade is great which they carry on in cloth, gold, ivory, copper, quick-silver, and much other merchandise, with both the Moors<sup>[Muslims]</sup> and Gentiles [Hindus] of the Kingdom of Cambay [north-western India] who come to their port with ships laden with cloth, which they buy in exchange for gold, ivory, and wax. There are plenty of provisions in this town, of rice, millet and some wheat, which is brought to them from Cambay, and plenty of fruit, for there are many gardens and orchards. There are here many of the large-tailed sheep, and of other meats as above; there are also oranges, sweet and sour' (Barbosa 1514, translated by Stanley 1966,13).

Bernadino described the King of Faza's dress in 1606 (Freeman-Grenville 1962,160) with admiration and went on to write about Pate. 'The inhabitants

are highly civilised and are friendly to us. In their dress they show their superiority over their neighbours' (ibid,163).

Traditional dress, as described by Ibn Battuta in the fourteenth century, Barbosa in the sixteenth century and Bernadino in the seventeenth century is not uncommon in Lamu, and is worn by most people in Pate today. Lower-class men wear only a piece of cloth, kikoi, around their waist, especially when working in the fields or fishing. Upper-class Swahili men are never seen in public wearing only a kikoi. The elite Swahili men, called 'Waungwana' (sing. Mwungwana) wear white robes, called kanzu and an embroidered cap, a kofia. On special occasions they wear an additional robe, joho and a turban. Waungwana would never go barefooted in the streets but working-class men often do.

Women were not mentioned by most of the travellers, perhaps because it was considered a status symbol for women in urban trade centres to be secluded from the view of foreigners. Today some families never, or rarely, allow their women to appear in public places. Waungwana women, when in public, wear a bui-bui, a veil that envelopes them from head to foot. Under this veil are worn two cotton sheets, called kanga, one around the body, and the other over the shoulders. In the



past, slave women wore only kanga, even in public. Freeborn women also wear only kanga if there are no male strangers present in small Swahili villages. Women now wear leather and plastic shoes, but traditionally they wore wooden shoes when, or if, they went outside the house. (Note section about shoes within the archaeological context, pages 279 and 369).

The Waungwana still cling to their often dilapidated large coral houses, and they depend on imported rice as their main staple. Lower-class Swahili now, and slaves in the past, eat grains which are grown locally.

Since dress, diet and dwelling styles seem to have altered little over the centuries it is safe to claim a slow pattern of change. Material culture is related to structuration, and shoes, for example, were clearly related to social position. Submission to Allah, a key concept within Islam, is shown by removing shoes before entering a mosque. Swahili people also remove their shoes before entering the room of a respected person. Lamu people told me that the people of Shela were not allowed to wear shoes in Lamu town up until only about twenty years ago to show that they admitted their inferior position in relation to Lamu people. Slaves, I was told, were also not allowed to wear shoes, and women wore wooden shoes, considered inferior to



men's leather slippers.

The Swahili linked themselves to Islam, which is more than a religion. It is a culture which, although diverse, is unified in many attitudes related to food, dress, household goods and physical space. Swahili social categories are seen in relationship to a vague Islamic model which does not exist in any one location, but is created within each area where Muslims have settled. Each Islamic culture is a blend of indigenous traditions and imported notions. The first such blend was that composed of Muhammad's personal ideas, his Arab tribal customs and the knowledge he had of both Christian and Jewish religions. Arabs are proud of their lineage and 'purity' because it was their means of linking themselves more strongly than other converts with the founder of Islam. Family lineage was also important to Arabs before Muhammad's time because it was an important tribal binding force.

When Arab traders married African women, their offspring became Swahili. They should have been considered Arabs, at least by Arabs, because Muslims are patrilineal, but reservations seem to appear about the 'purity' of the lineage after several generations of intermarriage with African women. Hunwick, an Arabist writing about the Islamic world

in general, says 'To be born of a slave mother was no disgrace - indeed, among the elite the proportions of such persons was, due to extensive concubinage, greater than those of pure free birth. When such unions were with 'white' concubines, a man's slave origins might scarcely have been preceptible to the uninformed. The same was not true of the offspring of black mothers. Despite the possibilities of social mobility open to a person of African ancestry, this ancestry was a social burden, whether simply on account of colour or because of the indisputable evidence such colour normally provided of slave origin. In one thing above all others the stigma of racial origin was apparent - marriage. It would have been unthinkable for an Arab, or Berber, a Turk or a Persian, to consent to his daughter marrying a black African, slave or freed. Marriages between a black slave girl and an Arab man however could and did take place, though due to the social obligation of at least offering marriage to a paternal cousin, few black girls can have been the first or sole wife' (Hunwick 1978,35). Very few Arab women it seems were ever brought to East Africa, and therefore most of the settlers' 'first or sole wife was black or the offspring of mixed parentage' (Cooper 1977,196).

Yet the following upper-class Swahili myth of creation illustrates their racialism. Adam was created from red, black and white dust and he had three sons. Sam (Shem) from the white dust represented the Arabs with the white light of absolute knowledge which was stable and controlled. Ham from the black dust represented the Africans who were ashamed of their colour because they knew that their mother had not behaved properly. Ham was associated with animalistic impulses. Yafith (Japhet) was created from red dust, and represented Europeans and Indians, who could only claim tricks and inventions, never absolute knowledge (El Zein 1974,201).

The Waungwana of the Lamu archipelago claim to be Arabs, the sons of Shem, with his inherent purity, but they are uneasily aware of the impurity within their lineage as a result of African wives and concubines. Trimingham says that 'the basic distinction was between those of free origins (asili), having a genealogy (nisba), and the 'freedman [freed by document, kartasi] and his descendants whose status was that of client to the former master's family. Arab racialism is a special brand, not based on colour but on genealogy in the male line' (Trimingham 1964,146). It is true that



the largest and most powerful Swahili family in Lamu today claims the lineage of Ma'awiya ibn Ali Sufian which dates back to 680 A.D. (Note the role they played in Lamu history, page 97 and the study of the house complex, page 159). This family and the other Waungwana families of the Waungwana are at the top of the Swahili social order, but newly-arrived Arab immigrants are always challenging their position and reminding them that they are not quite what they claim to be. Perhaps that is why the material representation and traditions of the Islamic culture are so vehemently expressed by the Waungwana.

My research, both ethonographic and archaeological, was concerned with the Swahili who live in the Lamu archipelago. We will now take a closer look at the history of the area and the conflicts between the Arab immigrants and the upper-class Waungwana.

#### THE LAMU ARCHIPELAGO

The Lamu archipelago is a series of islands near the northern coast of Kenya between  $2^{\circ}$  and  $2^{\circ} 20'$  south of the equator. There are three main islands, Lamu, Manda and Pate, as well as a number of small islands (fig. 1). These islands are thought to be the



Pyralaon Islands, the islands of the 'People of Fire' first mentioned in the second-century Periplus (translated by Schoff 1912). The name may come from burning the bush before the rains to improve the ground for cultivation (Kirkman 1966,54).

The four towns of the Lamu archipelago which will be mentioned most often are Pate, Lamu, Takwa and Shela. The earliest known record of Pate was written by the Portuguese traveller, Barbosa, in 1517. He noted that both Pate and Lamu were walled towns of the 'Moors' who carried on trade with the 'Heathens' of the mainland (in Freeman-Grenville, 1962,134). Lamu was, in fact, first recorded before this, by an Arab, Abu Al-Mahasin, who had talked with a Qadi from Lamu while in Mecca in 1441. Both Pate and Lamu have chronicles which were written out by several Europeans in the twentieth century. The several versions of the Pate Chronicle all stem from the memory of Bwana Kitini in the 1890s. This local history begins in 1204 A.D. and continues to the end of the Nebahan dynasty in 1885. The dates and the names of the rulers do not agree in the various versions although their source was the same (Stigand 1913, Werner 1914-15, Heepe 1928; see also Freeman-Grenville, 1962, Chittick 1969; and Nicholls 1971).

'Takwa is not mentioned by the Portuguese, and only casually in the history of Pate as a town conquered by the Sultan of Oman' (Kirkman 1964,71). Kirkman and Wilson both excavated at Takwa and agree that it flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was then abandoned (Kirkman 1957, Wilson 1979). People in Shela, on Lamu island, say they came from Takwa, but add that it was abandoned slowly and that there are two people still living in Shela who were born in Takwa. They also say that people from Manda town on Manda island also came to live in Shela. Kirkman writes that 'the present buildings [of Shela] are of no great age, but from the sherds found on the beach, the site has been occupied for at least five hundred years' (Kirkman 1964,73). Sand dunes cover a part of the town'. 'With the general economic decline of the area during the twentieth century, Shela has deteriorated rapidly; but judging by the scale and quality of the plasterwork in the ruined stone houses it must have enjoyed a period of wealth and confidence during the middle of the last century when it probably reached its zenith' (Ghaidan 1976,239).

The Lamu Chronicle by Shaikh Faraji bin Hamed al-Bakarij al-Lamuy (ed. Hichens 1938) says that Lamu was founded by Arabs in the seventh century A.D. There were at first two towns, located at each end

of the present town and now covered by sand dunes. The settlement to the north was called Weyuni and was founded by Arabs from Yenbo in the Hedjaz; the other town site to the south was called Hedabu. Hedabu was founded by Arabs from Oman. Chittick (1967) dug a test pit at Hedabu but found only material from the fourteenth century.

My research was located in the towns of Pate, on the island of the same name, and Lamu and Shela on Lamu island. I will therefore concentrate on the history of these three towns. The Waungwana of Pate were most powerful in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and lost their power to the people of Lamu in the nineteenth century. The Shela people were chased from Takwa town on Manda island to Lamu island by the Pate people and became subordinate to Lamu rulers in the nineteenth century (see fig.1).

The Nabahan clan from Oman were the rulers of Pate. Various historians date their arrival in Pate anywhere from the twelfth to the sixteenth century (Kirkman 1966,57 , Stigand 1966, Chittick 1979,309). Whenever they arrived, they are said to have gained their power by marrying the daughter of the ruling family, the Batawi. It is said that the Batawi also originated in Oman at some unknown time. The Nabahani did not have clear rules of succession and factionalism flourished.



The material culture of the Swahili played an active role in determining succession, for whoever acquired the royal regalia had a better chance of gaining power. The royal regalia consisted of a horn <sup>amusical instrument</sup> (siwa) and a chair. The chair was a high, fixed one and appeared to be the only raised seat in the residence of the ruler (Nicholls 1971,63). Every Pate ruler was challenged, and foreigners were invited by both sides to assist in the struggle. These foreigners were people who also wanted control, usually of trade, and were therefore eager to be involved in the local conflicts. The pattern repeated itself frequently on the coast of eastern Africa. For example the local people called on the Omanis to help them rid themselves of the Portuguese at Mombasa and the Mazrui came; but they then took over Mombasa. This fear of 'take over' by the allies was also a recurring problem for the Waungwana of Pate. Forts, like the smaller royal goods, were often 'props' which helped to create and maintain power. This was true in the conflict between the Portuguese and the Mazrui at Fort Jesus in Mombasa and it will be seen to play a part in the struggle for power in Lamu.

Harbours were also important physical features. Mombasa and Zanzibar had good natural harbours and so did Lamu, but Pate town did not. When the Nabahan



rulers controlled the Lamu archipelago it was not important because they could use the Lamu harbour 'One ruler of Pate, Bwana Mkuu, actually chose Lamu as his place of residence, making it the main harbour for vessels coming to trade in the archipelago' (taken from the Lamu Chronicle (p.18) by Nicholls 1971,64). But as the people of Lamu became more prosperous and powerful they did not want to be 'governed' by Pate. 'Fumomadi [a Pate ruler] had to exert his position by force, and he began to construct a fort at Lamu ' (Nicholls 1971,66). The Pate rulers sought support from the Mazrui in Mombasa and planned an attack on Lamu. The following scheme changed the course of Swahili history. Pate asked the Mazrui to pretend to be an ally to the Lamu people and direct the construction of the Lamu fort. They did this, but a Lamu Mwungwana by the name of Bwana Zahidi Mngumi<sup>(ma'awiya)</sup> learned of their trick and exposed their plot. War broke out on the Shela beaches between Pate (backed by the Mazrui) and Lamu. The tide changed and the attackers were stranded and slaughtered. This became known as the Battle of Shela and local historians say it took place some time between 1807 and 1811 (Nicholls, 1971,123).

Rightly or wrongly Lamu people felt that they could not stand for long against Pate allied

with the Mazrui and they sought a strong Omani ally. An Al Bu Saidi, Sayyid Said, the ruler of Muscat, came to their aid. He directed the completion of the fort, sent a governor and garrison. Lamu was protected but lost power to the Al Bu Saidi without a shot being fired. The only thing that made this less shameful and easier to bear was that the Omanis were only interested in economic power and they left local administration in the hands of the Waungwana of Lamu. From Lamu the Al Bu Saidis gained their foothold in East Africa and later (1832) Sayyid Said made Zanzibar the capital of his economic empire. Lamu grew in wealth because of its strong link with Zanzibar but it was never again independent.

In Lamu as in Zanzibar, and Pate before that, there was always an undercurrent of tension between the 'new' Arabs who had seized power and the 'old' Arabs, more commonly called the Waungwana or Swahili. The economic empire was built by the Al Bu Saidi on the export of ivory, slaves and the products produced by slaves on plantations. When 'the scramble for Africa' began between the European nations at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Al Bu Saidi knew that they would now also need an ally, and they chose Britain. The British, because of industrialisation, did not need slaves

and they took exception to slavery on religious grounds. A series of agreements concerned with slavery, between the Sultan of Zanzibar and Britain, began in the 1840s, but it was not until 1907 that all slavery was abolished. Lamu was the Sultan's furthest stronghold from Zanzibar and the one least controlled by the British ships that attempted to stop slaves from being smuggled out to slave markets in Arabia and India. For a time (before 1876) it was legal to transport slaves over land and to sell them when in Sultan Barghash's territory (Miers 1975,93). At this time slave routes developed up the coast to Lamu where plantations grew and demanded slave labour; later these slaves and others were also slipped on ships and smuggled out of East Africa (Miers 1975,92). It was also at this time, the early nineteenth century, that the British became powerful in India. Indians had traded for and with Omanis for centuries and when the Sultan of Muscat moved his headquarters to East Africa he encouraged Indians to settle there also and assist him in building his economic empire. The British interest in both India and East Africa coupled with the Omani involvements with India and Britain set the stage for Indians to settle on the coast and/or increase their seasonal trading. The Swahili were not pleased: the Indians were competing



with them for their middleman positions in the trade network, but they were powerless to stop them. The Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, contributed greatly to the Swahili culture and in the following section I will trace their influence, especially in relation to crafts associated with Swahili houses and their contents. Later, in chapter 6, I will present comparative material gathered in north-western India, the area where most of the Indians who came from India originated.

#### INDIAN INFLUENCE ON SWAHILI CULTURE AND HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

Life in an early nineteenth-century coral house is the central interest of this study and therefore the final section of this chapter will be devoted to giving a brief historical setting for the coral houses in Lamu, Pate and Shela towns during the late eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indian influences will be given special consideration.

By 1698 the Portuguese rule was over. The Nabahani, whose clan originally came from Oman, ruled the Lamu archipelago. Lamu exported coconuts and Pate is said to have been the largest supplier of ivory on the coast of East Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Sheriff 1971, 42). Both of these items attracted Indian traders who had assisted



the Portuguese during their period of domination, and had previously traded independently with East Africa. When the Portuguese left the Lamu archipelago, at the end of the seventeenth century, the local rulers took over and ruled until Omanis took control of the coast in the late nineteenth century. India's trade with East Africa was only marginally affected by these changes.

Because Arabs settled in eastern Africa and introduced Islamic beliefs, their role has been stressed more than that played by the Indians who also traded on the coast from at least the second century A.D. Mangat quoted Freeman-Grenville in an attempt to stress the need to consider India's role; he said, 'the contribution from India to the civilisation of the Swahili cannot easily be measured; but its presence is certain' (Mangat 1969,2). I have found more statistical data related to Indians collected from primary sources in Sheriff's unpublished thesis, than in all other historical accounts. Because I am interested in Swahili material culture (taken to include buildings) and believe Indians contributed most to the Swahili culture in this way I have found Sheriff's thesis most useful and have had to quote from it often.

The Arabs, who wanted to be considered the highest ranked Swahili citizens, did not want to do skilled or unskilled labour. They had African slaves to perform most tasks, but they were not familiar with coral house construction, plaster decoration and many of the skills that were commonly provided in other Islamic cities around the Indian Ocean. As the Swahili became more successful as middlemen, they wanted not only imported goods but highly skilled labourers. Indians were advanced craftsmen, builders, wood-carvers, goldsmiths etc., and although they did not settle in Swahili towns until quite late (nineteenth century) they were able to train slaves and carry out a few specialised tasks when they came to trade.

As early as 1593 an Indian mason had been brought by the Portuguese to work in the building of Fort Jesus in Mombasa (Coupland 1938, 61). That is not to say that skilled Indians did not work on the coast before this time but this was the first recorded. After all the Arabs were not particularly worried about giving credit to the Indians, whom they saw as inferiors. In bad years of drought, which were not uncommon in north-western India (Kutch and Kathiawar, also called Surashtra - both are now within the modern state

of Gujarat (fig. 2)), craftsmen came with the traders to seek six months' labour while the ships were in port, and returned with their earnings to India on the north-east monsoon. They did not usually settle or intermarry because of the caste system. If an Indian man married an African woman he would be rejected by his caste when he returned to his home in India.

Immigration records are not available before 1862, but in that year 15,000 artisans (masons, blacksmiths, coppersmiths and weavers) from Kutch sought work outside Kutch because of famine 'not only in Bombay and other parts of India, but in Persia, Arabia, Africa and China'. (Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency Vol. V, Cutch 1880, 103). The figures were similar and even larger for the following ten years.

The famine and export records also confirmed the important and often-travelled link between India and eastern Africa. From 1813 to 1834 60 per cent of the grain and coconut exported from East Africa went to India (Saurashtra) because of famine (Sheriff 1971, 122). The immigration pattern was then probably well established. Guillain, whose documents are rich in details of Zanzibar in the 1840s, says that fine woodwork comes from India and the Banians (Hindus) are the architects of the country (Guillain 1846, 139). Again Sheriff adds



to the idea that Indians were finding employment in the building trade of eastern Africa by saying that at the end of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century there was 'a revival of building activities in the Lamu area after they had been dormant for nearly two centuries' (Sheriff 1971,47). Of course the building was done by the large numbers of slaves available for the large labour force needed to build large houses and many mosques; but skilled contractors were also needed and I think based on the above material they were most likely Indians.

The style of plaster, and wood-carving, as well as the turned lac furniture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as seen in Lamu and Pate today, are similar to that which I have recorded in Kutch and Saurashtra of the same period. In fact, there are earlier references to furniture being exported from Surat as far back as Barbosa's report in the sixteenth century. Furniture was also brought from Bombay, and made on Pate island in the town of Siyu. A large variety of goods were provided by the Muslim and Hindu traders from north-western India. In chapter 8 these items of trade will be seen as finds taken from archaeological excavations and their social meaning will be derived from the 'waungwana' process of structuration.



## CHAPTER 4

## THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SWAHILI PEOPLE, SPACE AND TIME

Swahili archaeological sites consist of defined spaces (i.e. rooms, surrounded by walls), features, and finds. This chapter is devoted to a discussion based on ethnohistorical and ethnographic data, of how various groups used these spaces and features. My ethnographic data was collected through interviewing and by observing and participating in ceremonial and daily activities in the towns of Lamu, Shela and Pate since 1976.

For two and one half years, beginning in 1976, I worked for the Lamu Museum. I collected and documented ethnographic materials for exhibitions. It was during this period that the social significance of various objects first interested me and when I started to see relationships between artefacts and specific groups of people. In 1980 I spent seven months (April-October) in the Lamu archipelago, this time conducting research specifically for this dissertation. In December of 1980 and January/February of 1981 I conducted the comparative research in north-western India which is discussed in chapter 5.

Twenty-one traditional (eighteenth/nineteenth) century

houses in trade-linked towns in Gujarat were recorded. A measured drawing was made of each house and the inhabitants questioned about daily and ritual activities which took place in the house. The towns included in the survey were Bombay, Daman, Navsari, Surat, Rander, Broach, Dholka, Baroda, Cambay, Ahmedabad, Bhavnagar, Mahuva, Dui, Probandar, Jammagar, Bhuj, Mandvi, Mundra, Jafrabad, Patan and Sidpur. Students and staff from the School of Architecture and Planning in Ahmedabad, University of Baroda and the South Gujarat University in Surat helped me locate and gain admission into traditional homes and assisted me with the interviews.

April through October of 1981 was again spent doing fieldwork in the Lamu area. During the two field seasons in Kenya I conducted formal interviews. Some of these interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed, but most were written down directly.

The informants have been coded according to the number of their recorded interview in my field notebook, and this number is cited in the text. Appendix A lists the code number of each informant and gives their approximate age, their gender and location of present residence. People objected to a tape-recorder being used and even when it was allowed it was clear that the informants were inhibited

by its presence. Of course a lot of information was gathered during the course of living and working in Lamu for several years, but the 'formal' interviews were directed at gaining information about activities, objects, areas of the town and houses, as well as groups of people, both now and in the remembered past. In Lamu, I paid four upper-class Swahili girls (all in their late teens or early twenties) who spoke English, to assist me. They provided me with access to coral houses and the opportunity to interview their occupants and/or make a measured drawing of the house. After the visit to each house, we would return to my house to discuss the interview and to make sure that I had understood fully the answers to my questions. The Swahili dialects spoken by women I found more difficult to understand than conversations with men who were more accustomed to speaking standard Swahili. In Shela, none of the women spoke English and I therefore employed a respected young man who spoke English and was prepared to arrange for me to meet women who were willing to be interviewed. Although he was well thought of, he was not allowed to sit with me while I interviewed women in their homes. Nor was he allowed to attend the rituals performed by women, which I attended and participated in, while in Shela. In Pate I was extremely fortunate to

have the assistance of the Nabahani family, the descendants of the Sultans of Pate. Ahmed Shiekh Nabahany accompanied me on several visits and could interview most men and women seemingly without any difficulty. He speaks perfect English and was willing to explain points which I did not understand during interviews.

The ethnographic study of 37 Swahili households located in Lamu, Shela and Pate consisted of measured drawings of the floor plans of each house, notes on the location of artefacts, and when and how these were placed in relation to the floor plan. The categories of persons (age, sex, position in the household) who used various spaces and objects was observed within the context of daily and ritual activities.

The excavations were undertaken during August and September of 1980 and June and July of 1981. Mr Katana, who had been trained and had worked for several years for Dr Wilson, the archaeologist hired by the National Museums of Kenya to direct archaeological research on the coast, was my site supervisor for both seasons. Mr. Katana's experience and ability to manage the eight to ten other unskilled labourers who I employed on a daily basis to excavate was invaluable. He not only assisted me with the excavations, but also with the



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cleaning, marking and cataloguing of all the finds.

The following chapters explore the social uses of archaeological finds. The mundane and ritual practices of the Swahili gave social meaning to areas, objects and groups of people which created and maintained the structure of the society. In other words, I will be examining elements of the process of Swahili structuration in this and the following chapters.

As stressed in chapter 2, people define the social value of spaces and objects, but these, in turn, then play an active role in defining the social position of people. The process of structuration is a reflexive one and I am beginning arbitrarily by defining groups of people. I will later show how some of these same groups were formed by their association with specific spaces and objects.

Based on cultural and historical continuity, the archaeological sites (those of ruined coral buildings) belonged to the wealthy upper class, a small segment of the people who were affected by them. The relatively poor coastal majority will first be described, and the type of dwelling associated with them, before returning to a detailed discussion of the freeborn elite Swahili, the Waungwana, and their use of space and time within coral buildings.

The people who have lived on the mainland near the coral-built settlements have migrated frequently but their movements were not recorded until recent times. However, since at least the eighteenth century the following ethnic groups have lived near the Lamu archipelago: (1) Oromo, (2) Somali, (3) Sanye, (4) Boni, and (5) Pokomo. The Oromo and Somali were pastoral peoples, the Sanye and Boni were hunting and gathering forest-dwelling peoples and the Pokomo were agriculturalists. None of these groups lived in, or built, coral dwellings; they built shelters made of grass, sticks, bark or skins. Only the Pokomo lived in settlements that could be called villages, but certainly not cities or towns.

These were the free peoples who lived near the Swahili towns. In addition, at some undetermined time in the past, slave labour was introduced to the Lamu area and most of these people also lived on plantations outside the Swahili settlements. Most of the slaves also lived in grass shelters but I was told by a descendant of an ex-slave living in Shela that some slaves, especially the overseers, did manage to build mud-and-thatch dwellings on the plantations. Slaves were ranked by how long and how closely they had been associated with the Swahili, and were allowed housing and

objects accordingly. This topic will be discussed in greater detail later, because slaves even lived in coral houses with the Swahili Waungwana.

Arabs and Indians who settled in Lamu in the nineteenth century built coral buildings, but these were unlike the earlier houses built by the Swahili Waungwana. Indians were always a small but often powerful minority. Bohra, Shia Muslims built coral-rag shops with second-storey residences. The Omani Arabs, who settled in Lamu at the same time the Bohra built their coral shops and houses (on sea-front land-fill) also built with coral. These Arabs and Indians built their houses and shops during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Omani Arabs built houses with large central courtyards (like the Lamu Museum, (Ghaidan 1976, 21, figs. 1-15)). However, both the Bohra and the Omani dwellings are unlike the older coral houses in archaeological sites along the coast of Kenya. The Indian and Omani house forms are illustrated in Usam Ghaidan's Lamu conservation study (1976). The Bohra plan is called 'shopfront buildings' (figs. 3-8) and what I believe is the Omani plan is referred to as 'stone verandah buildings' (figs. 3-7). I made measured drawings of Bohra houses in north-western India,



which support this idea (see chapter 5) but I base my opinion about the Omani plan only on interviews with an Omani sea captain and Lewcock's (1976,19) comments about the similarities between houses in Lamu and Muscat: Arabs who live in eastern Africa but were born in Muscat are called Manga in Kiswahili, and an Arab born in Africa is called Mwarabu (Ingrams, 1967, 205). Indians are referred to as Wahindi.

As was mentioned in chapter 3 the Swahili are a people of mixed ancestry. Swahili is a collective term that has long been used by outsiders to refer to the people who live on the coast of eastern Africa, and is derived from the Arabic word sahil, meaning coast. The word Swahili was not used by the people themselves until very recent times, and even now it is only used in some areas. Many of the Waungwana also refer to themselves as Arabs, or Mwarabu, but many mixed generations often separate them from their Arab ancestors. They also freely admit that most of their families have African blood, a result of the practice of taking local women as concubines. Most of these people only have a vague idea of the Arabian origins of their clan, and present-day Arabs from the recognised Arab world would consider the Waungwana to be Africans. My research was basically concerned with the Waungwana who live in coral

houses, and not the larger poor majority, because it is this type of building which has been of most interest to archaeologists.

Swahili who lived in mud-and-thatch houses in villages or near coral settlements were poorer than the Waungwana who owned the coral houses in the large towns. There is another distinction that should be made when referring to the ethnic groups who live on or near the Lamu archipelago. The Bajun, like the Swahili, claim Arab ancestry, but they speak a different dialect of Swahili and lived until this century on the coast north of Lamu island and at certain locations on Pate island. In general the Bajun are a more rural people than the Swahili. 'Rasini, the most sophisticated of nineteenth-century Bajun towns, was not a cultural centre in the way that Pate (town) had been, or Lamu became' (Ylvisaker 1975,36). The Bajun built fewer coral buildings but their rich elite, also called Waungwana, did live in coral houses, and had slaves, as did the Swahili Waungwana. The poorer Bajun, like the Swahili, lived in mud-and-thatch houses and 'many observers did not distinguish between Bajun and Swahili, except by their location' (Ylvisaker, 1975, 33). At this point it is becoming obvious that groups are defined in part by the type of goods they have: a coral house versus a mud house is part

of the identity of who is a member of the elite class; and where (a spatial marker) a group lives on the coast may determine whether a person is a Swahili or a Bajun.

It might have been useful and interesting to describe in more detail the dwellings of the ethnic groups who live on the mainland but I did not record the data. I have visited shelters belonging to each of these groups, with the exception of the Sanye. One physical feature which was notable about the dwellings of the Boni, Oromo and Pokomo, who have adopted Islam, was the addition of a privacy panel opposite the entrance to the grass dwelling. This is a common feature of Swahili coral houses, but not a part of the Swahili mud-and-thatch house plan.

The simplest of the mud structures is lived in by a descendant of an ex-slave. This is the type of house which might have been used by slaves living on the plantations and at the edge of towns. After discussing such houses usually at the edge of towns, I will then describe a more complex mud house, one located in a Bajun village, and then one owned by a poor Swahili family at the edge of Lamu. Next the simplest coral houses will be described. This will show the possible development of the house form which led to the complex large

coral houses of the Waungwana, a central concern of this thesis. The remainder of the chapter will be devoted to looking at the social uses of the spaces and features of large coral houses. But a greater depth of understanding will result if coral houses are not seen in isolation from the houses lived in by the majority of the Swahili people. I must however stress that the research done on the mud-and-thatch houses was much less than that done on the coral houses and I hope that I will be able to add more case histories in this area later. The information that I have recorded (K 64,76,85,109,165,169,189,268,280,287,294,297), and hope to gather in the future, related to mud-and-thatch houses and small coral houses, will add not only to our understanding of larger houses but also to the analysis of mud structures detected in excavations. I will in addition attempt to suggest a connection between the small simple coral house located in Shela and the coral remains of houses described by Wilson (1979,10) at Takwa. It is not possible to say that I have traced the development of the house form in an evolutionary manner because the form of the earliest mud houses in the ninth century is not yet known. Coral houses may in fact have influenced the form of mud dwellings. I will only be demonstrating the differences and similarities



of a house form in various degrees of its complexity.

Strandes wrote about the Swahili settlements in 1899: 'today one finds the same architecture as was common 400 years ago for the towns and houses, the same contrast between relatively cultured urban populations and half-savage neighbours. The town dwellers are still "white and black Moors"; they still wear the same clothing. There are still many slaves, and few free men; amongst them still live the assiduous Indian traders. Now, as then, Indian cotton goods are the main article of trade, and the export trade is still conducted on the same lines' (Strandes 1961 ed., 86). Since the late nineteenth century there have been major changes. The abolition of slavery caused most of these changes but the effects of this institution were far reaching and died slowly.

#### MUD-AND-THATCH HOUSES

A man (K 48,83,96,280) whose father was a slave in Pate told me about the mud house that he was constructing. He said it was the type his ancestors lived in outside Pate town (see fig. 3). He and his wife live alone, as their children are grown and married. They have a bed at the south end of the dwelling which they also use as a bench and table.

This area has a privacy screen in front of the bed. The other half of the shelter lacks a roof and is used for storage and as a cooking area. The walls are constructed of vertical poles placed in the ground about 50 cm apart and thinner horizontal sticks are woven between the upright poles. Mud is then pressed in between the pieces of wood. If small stones are available they are added to the mud. In time the couple hoped to add a wash area and a toilet. The mud, called udongo, had either been taken from ruined mud houses or transported from Manda island; this house was located on Lamu island where building clay is not available. The couple did not want to give information about ritual activities in their type house and said that they followed the practices of people living in large coral houses as best they could. The man is very active in the ritual life that takes place in the mosque and the woman attends all the ritual occasions which take place in the household where her mother was a slave.

The location of this dwelling, and the mud-and-thatch house belonging to a Bajun family (K 297) discussed below, cannot be given because the owners of these houses did not want that information to be included.

The mud-and-thatch house in a Bajun village had three parallel spaces (fig. 4). The innermost area is divided between a toilet/washroom (called choo) and another room (called nlia kwisha). The middle parallel space is called nlia wa kachi and the front room of the house is called the baraza, which means meeting place. Generally the parents sleep in the nlia kwisha, the female children sleep behind a curtain in the nlia wa kachi near the choo and the male children sleep in the same room but on the opposite side. The baraza is where meals are eaten and it is now also where the kitchen (called meko) is located. The Bajun women told me that the meko had been outside, in front of their houses, until about 1967. At that time they had been ordered by the Chief to move the kitchen indoors. During rituals, such as a wedding, the women occupy the back two rooms of the dwelling and men sit or stand in the baraza or around the outside of the house. In the last few years a dividing wall had been added to the front room, the baraza, to create a separate room called the sabule. This room is used for many activities; it may be used as a guest room, or by a married daughter and her husband or grandparents. These mud houses are well built with walls up to 50 cm thick. The palm-thatch roof may need to be

replaced about every ten years but the houses are said to last up to fifty years. In the last few years some people have started to add back doors and construct a kitchen area at the back of the houses. This then became the female area of the house and the baraza became the male space. Back doors are still rare and few have been added to stone houses unless the house has been divided between two families.

Werth (1915), Ingrams (1931), Wilding (1975) and Ghaidan (1976) have described Swahili mud houses. All of their examples have dividing walls in place of curtains in the middle room but Wilding at least mentions that this plan is derived from the more open original 'parallel room' arrangement (1975,26). This agrees with what I was told by older informants both in towns and in Bajun villages. I recorded this type of mud house form on the southern edge of Lamu town (fig. 5). Most of the mud houses in Lamu were built after Kenya's independence in 1965 when the Bajun villages on the northern coast were being raided by the Somali. At that time the Kenya government made it possible for the Bajun to settle in Lamu. Before that time only ex-slaves and poor Swahilis were allowed to build mud houses in Lamu. This is



still the situation in Pate town on Pate island.

Ghaidan recorded sixty makuti (palm roof-thatch) or mud houses in Lamu, which he said is about 10 per cent of their total number. The house plan which he illustrated (1976, figs. 3-9) was similar to the one I recorded (fig. 5). He also said that 60 per cent of these houses were owned by Bajunis, 20 per cent by Arabs, 16 per cent by Swahili and 4 per cent by people representing other groups (1976, 69).

The son of the owner of the house which I recorded (fig. 5) said (K 287) that when he was young his mother and father shared the back room of the house. Later walls were added which divided the back room into two rooms and the middle room into three rooms. The east room at the back is used by his father and the west room by his mother and small brothers and sisters. Older sisters use the west section of the middle room and he and his older brother use the east section of the middle room. The outer room was also closed in later and a toilet/washroom (choo) was added. Before this area was enclosed the kitchen was located in front of the house with only a palm fence around it. The added walls are shaded on the drawing (fig. 5). The mundane and ritual uses of the spaces in this house

directly paralleled those described above for the Bajun house located in a village on Pate island and the information collected by others who have recorded Swahili mud houses. In general the basic parallel room arrangement has had dividing walls added, and kitchen and toilets added either to the front or to the back of the houses.

Some coral houses are smaller and less complex than some mud houses, as will be seen below, but there are strong beliefs and attitudes associated with building materials.

#### BUILDING MATERIALS

Ingrams was the first scholar (1931) to mention Swahili beliefs about building materials. He write, 'It is interesting to note that trunks of the wild date palm (Pheonix reclinata) are not used by the natives [the Swahili in Zanzibar] in the construction of their houses, though they last long and are not eaten by white ants. Poles of another species are invariably mixed with them, as it is said that he who lives in a house built only of mkindu poles will not live long. There seems to be a general prejudice against timber that<sup>is</sup> long lasting' (Ingrams, 2nd ed. 1967,316).

Stigand (1913) and Kirkman (1966) both mentioned

that when the Takwa people, with perhaps others from Manda, decided to rebuild their settlement on Lamu island, the more powerful people of Lamu would not allow them to build houses with flat coral roofs (Stigand 1913,157 and Kirkman 1966,69). This order was to make the Shela people admit that they were subject, and inferior, to the Lamu people. On a practical point, the houses with thatched roofs are not as fortress-like. In cases of conflicts, of which there were many between Swahili settlements, their roofs (and the contents of their houses) could easily be burned. The Shela houses also have more clay and less lime in the wall mortar. This is also a sign of inferior building construction, although some people (K 109,169,189) argue that clay mortar, called saruji, is stronger. It is used to construct water cisterns but when exposed to direct sun it is inclined to crack more than lime mortar. The beliefs about the materials seem to override the practical points and people used lime when they had the power or means to acquire it. Another reason given by Shela people (K 109,169) as to why less lime was used in Shela house construction than in Lamu houses was that they never had the amount of slave labour than Lamu people had before the abolition of slavery. Excavating coral

and burning it in a kiln is labour intensive and most of the houses in Lamu were built in the nineteenth century when slavery was at its peak, and when Lamu was the most powerful town in the archipelago. In fact, the house was 'not just the badge or symbol of its owner's status, it was also simultaneously its manifestation and its guarantee. It embodied, in its permanence and within its thick, solid wall, his cultural acquisitions and those of his ancestors before him; and he would expect to pass it on to the next generation in a way that a mud-and-thatch house owner never could' (Allen 1979,5). Allen builds on this concept by pointing out that the permanence of a coral house contributed greatly to the credit-worthiness of a Swahili middleman. It marked him off from the mud-and-thatch dwellers and nomads of the interior, as well as the Indians who came each monsoon to trade, but not to settle. The Mwungwana in the coral house would not move off and leave his large investment; he could be given credit and be located next year when the foreign trader returned (Allen 1979,5). This affected concepts of time; the Waungwana could think and plan for future generations, but the families who lived in mud or grass dwellings thought primarily of the present. Allen cites a case in



Somalia where an epidemic forced people living in coral houses to leave their settlement and build in mud; they are quoted as saying, 'people had lost heart, and now they built no more in stone, for they cared not for the future ....' (Allen 1979,6).

Coral buildings were not only a symbol of status, permanence and credit-worthiness, which led to longer preception of time, but were also associated with a concept of purity, both cultural and religious. The Waungwana believed that the people who did not live in coral houses, that is, those who lived in mud-and-grass houses outside towns, were dirty, polluting and lacked culture. The Waungwana were by comparison pure and cultured; their houses were like their purity. The mud houses were made of soil and were dark like their polluted inhabitants. These people were called the Was henzi (sing. Mushenzi), and their characteristics are plainly stated in the creation myth of the Wanguana (El Zein 1974,173, see above page 9 ). For elite Waungwana anyone who did not live in a coral house could be called a Mushenzi.

The Waungwana lost their power first to the Omani and later to the poorer majority. Both of these groups are said to reject permanent buildings for tomb markers (Leinhardt 1958-59,240).

## SMALL CORAL HOUSES

Not all coral houses were two-storeyed or large complex dwellings. Small Swahili towns and villages were often composed of small single-storey houses, but the inhabitants were still not considered to be Washenzi if the houses were constructed of coral. Most of the ruined coral houses found in Swahili archaeological sites along the coast of eastern Kenya are small compared to the large multi-storey ones which I recorded and excavated in Lamu town. Most are more like the ones which have been recorded and excavated by Wilson (1979 fig. 2 and 1982a, 104, fig.2) at Takwa. Because the inhabitants of Takwa moved to Shela and because I wanted to study examples of smaller stone houses which relate not only to seventeenth-century Takwa but to other Swahili sites, I made measured drawings and ethnographic studies of small coral households in Shela. I wanted to compare the mundane and ritual use of space of mud houses to small and then larger and more complex coral Swahili houses. It was important to work in areas that could be linked culturally and historically to archaeological sites. There are even old people living in Shela who claim to have been born at Takwa, which is now a completely deserted site. Wilson mentioned that the people of Shela, 'some of whom are supposed to have

come from Takwa', visit a tomb there twice a year to pray for rain (Wilson 1979,13).

Eight households were observed over a period of two years in Shela. Five of these lived in small coral houses with clay mortar and thatched roofs. The floor plans were the same as those described by Wilson at Takwa. They were one, two and three-room dwellings, some of which have recently had cement block additions to the front (figs. 6-10). The following ethnographic material demonstrates how the house spaces are used during daily and ritual practices.

Many of the small coral houses in Shela are in poor condition, some have had flat coral roofs added and others still have only thatched roofs. All have indoor pit toilets either in the front or back of the house and there is usually a cooking area in a front room or in a separate thatch shelter enclosed in a palm frond fence in front of the house (figs. 6-10). Rooms are added onto these houses generally at the front, first constructed in less permanent materials and later in mud, coral or now cement block. Shuttered windows, or windows which are above head height are also now being added. Curtains are placed at doorways where privacy panels or a fenced area in front of the house does not protect the houses' inhabitants from direct view from the street.

This is true for all Swahili houses whether the house is large or small, mud or coral.

There is a general pattern of daily events within all Swahili settlements, which will be described below within the context of larger coral houses in Lamu town. But many of the more personal and private ritual occasions in which I was allowed to participate and observe took place in these smaller coral houses in Shela. Out of respect to my friends I will try to present the details of these observances in a manner which will protect their identity and privacy. The reason for describing the rituals is only to support the theory that these practices give social or symbolic meaning to spaces, persons and objects. Ritual and mundane activities contribute to Swahili structuration. Once this pattern is seen it will also be stressed that the spaces and objects used are not passive but also contribute to the social meaning of the activities and persons.

Activities associated with birth, death and weddings will be mentioned throughout this chapter. I would like to start by giving a few details about these occasions which I observed in small coral houses in Shela, and expand the description as I move to larger and more complex houses in Shela and Lamu.



This organisation will stress the use of space and, I hope, reduce as much as possible repetition of ethnographic description. I will provide case studies which lead to the understanding of patterns of practices and their social uses.

A poor widowed woman does not have the objects or spaces available for her daughter's wedding that a wealthy man has for his daughter. (For a more detailed description of Swahili weddings see Donley (1979) and Coppens (1980).) Too often only the ideal situation is outlined and when archaeological material does not 'fit' there is concern that the model was not accurate. Within an archaeological site we are very unlikely to excavate the remains of the 'ideal' pattern of the society and therefore I tried to learn about as many of the variations as I could of the Swahili pattern. For example, 'ideally' a father had his slaves excavate coral and burn the coral on a kiln at the time of his daughter's birth. This coral was then allowed to wash in the rains until his daughter was about to wed. At this time a coral house was constructed for her and her husband-to-be. This house was an important object, or gift, and will be elucidated later. If, as in the case of the wedding I observed (K 143) in Shela, the father is dead and he left his family poor, no house can be

built for the daughter. In some cases (as will also be demonstrated below) a floor of the house or a room might be built or at least given to the daughter and her husband by the bride's parents. However, if a girl's parents cannot provide this and they feel that their daughter can be better provided for by her in-laws they may consent to allow her to live in a room or house given to the newly-married couple by the groom or his family. The married daughter as a result will be less powerful within her domestic setting. The widow who lived with her many children in a small coral house at the edge of Shela arranged a wedding for her daughter with the help of her relatives and friends. I watched the bride having henna applied to her hands and feet and the hair removed from her legs with a hot sugar application at her mother's house (see location of bride, fig. 6, marked A). The religious leader came to the door of the house and formally asked the bride if she consented to the marriage; she answered in a low voice that she did. At this time the bride was sitting on her mother's wedding bed, the largest and best bed in the house, which was located in the main room of the house under a high window (marked A). She was in the most honoured space and sitting

on the most prized object within this small simple house. The area behind this room was divided between a storage space and a toilet/washroom (marked B). The cement block addition to the front of the house was used as an additional sleeping area for the widow's sons at night and as a sitting room for women during the day (marked C). The room, also a cement-block addition, at the front of the house was a storage area and kitchen (marked D). This was where all of the meals were prepared for the female wedding guests. Female guests were, on several occasions, associated with wedding events in the area marked C which is where the women of the household spent the day if they were not cooking. It was also here that the bride was displayed after the consummation of her marriage. She was viewed only by women in the best dress that she was ever likely to wear, with all of the gold jewellery that she owned and her mother could borrow. While being viewed by the women, the bride sat on the couch that was bought with her bride-price, and which would be hers to take to her new residence with her husband. The religious and/or legal part of the ceremony took place in a mosque in Shela and was attended by men only. No women, not even the bride, are allowed to be present in the mosque at the time of a wedding.



Sometimes, especially if the family house of the bride is large, this ceremony takes place in the house. The women, and bride, are behind a closed door at the rear of the house. They can 'over-hear' the wedding, which is being performed by the men of both families in the front part of the house.

The marriage was not consummated in her mother's house, which is the preferred practice. The house was considered not to provide the privacy desired by the groom during the week he is required to stay with the bride in her family's accommodation. A neighbour's house was vacated, even the furnishing removed and replaced with the bride's large canopy bed and a few small items for the bride and groom (fig. 7). The wedding bed was located at the west end of the room in the area marked A. The nearby window was high on the wall and a later addition to the house.

It was possible for the house to be emptied because the owner of this house is a woman who is married to a man who works out of town most of the time, and returns to be with his family for only a few days each month. During these long periods of absence the lady spends much of her time with her children at her mother's nearby house.



Often father and brothers go to sleep in the mosque and the mother and their other daughters go to stay with a relative, allowing a newly-married daughter and her husband to stay in their house alone if the house is only one or two rooms.

The case story is just one variation on the Swahili pattern. The important thing is that the couple stay in a place provided for by the bride's family, if not for life at least for a few days. The bride's value is recognised, maintained and in some ways created by the way her family organises her wedding, and the status of her family is certainly related to this display. The wedding is a rite of passage for a woman because it is the first occasion when a girl is treated as an adult.

After the week in the small house arranged by the bride's family, the bride and her furnishings were transferred to a newly added room on top of the groom's parent's house. This took place at night without ceremony because it is considered shameful to have one's belongings seen in public. A woman in the position of this bride is never as secure as the one who owns her own house. If she becomes divorced she will be forced once again to move her belongings into public space, and risk shame.

About a year later this newly-married couple were blessed with a child and the wife returned to her mother's house to give birth, but I was not in Shela at this time and do not know the details. A Shela friend did give birth during my research period and I will relate the activities later, within the context of her mother's house. Not all of the important ritual occasions are associated with the joyous events of childbirth or weddings; and I regret to say that two friends' husbands also died while I was doing research in Shela. The following section will give an account of what happened in one of these women's houses during her period of grief.

I knew first of her husband's death when I approached her house (fig. 8) and saw a group of people, men standing outside and women, all wearing their black veils (bui bui) standing inside the house. Most of the beds which normally filled the house had been removed and the floors had been covered with palm-leaf mats. This is commonly a symbol of mtanga, the mila (custom) of female relatives sitting and sleeping on mats on the floor of the house of the deceased for intense mourning for three to seven days.

Mtanga is not required under Islamic law, sheria

(Islamic requirements) or sunna (good Islamic practice), but is one of the ways women have of showing respect for the dead and is therefore not considered to be wrong by the Swahili men (Landberg 1977,375). Caplan (1982,29) and others (Lienhardt 1968 and Widjeyewardene 1961) have pointed out that the people themselves make a distinction between religious beliefs and practices which they classify as Islamic and others which are seen as non-Islamic, even sometimes anti-Islamic, and label mila. Most of the women's practices within the houses are mila whether they are associated with weddings as described above, births or the events surrounding a death. In comparison, most of the sheria and sunna practices are performed by men in the mosques. As will be seen in the following account (K 80,125), the house is where women practise their beliefs.

Photographs which were normally hung high up on the walls had been removed. It is believed the angels do not enter houses where they are hung, and Swahili women especially want angels in the house when a death has recently occurred.

A trench called ufuko (fig. 8) was dug outside the lavatory door (see ufuko description by Prins, 1961,105). An ufuko is a trench approximately 60 cm wide, 60 cm deep and 3 metres long,



which is used in the preparation of a corpse for burial. Ulili, (a small bed with a coconut-fibre rope on top, (see fig. 26) was placed on top of the ufuko and the body washed for burial. The ulili is the only type of Swahili bed that never has a canopy. Many Lamu families use an ulili bed only for washing a corpse or inverted as a bier to convey the corpse. A widow sleeps, and, in fact, spends most of her mourning period of four months and ten days on this bed. Some women in Lamu said that the bed symbolised death to them and they would never want this type of bed in their houses for daily use. Pate and Shela women had many of these beds in their houses and seemed not to share these associations, although the bed was used in a similar manner.

The intestines of the deceased were emptied through a hole made in the woven surface of the ulili into the ufuko as is the water used for washing the body. The heavily polluted water must not be allowed to run into the open drains of the streets. An ufuko of this type (the niche within the burial chamber is also called an ufuko) is only made for washing the bodies of persons who die after maturity. A girl is considered mature after her first menstrual period and a boy when



his parents decide to refer to him as a man, usually about the age of twelve or thirteen. After the body of an immature person is washed, there is no concern about the water used because the person is considered to have been without sin and therefore the water was not polluted. All of the orifices of the body were plugged with scented materials and the corpse was wrapped in a white cloth. After the body was carried from the house, the ufuko was back-filled and the ulili was placed back on top of the fresh mound of soil. When a woman dies her oldest daughter sits on the ufuko. If she has no daughter, her mother performs the same function, and if her mother is dead, a sister or some close female relative does it. If an unmarried man dies, his mother sits on the ufuko. However, if as in this case a married man dies, his widow stays on the ufuko. When the widow has to go to the toilet her daughter or a close female relative stays on the ufuko until she returns. Women are not allowed to accompany the deceased to the cemetery. Their attention is focused on the ufuko, which is a symbolic grave (K 301).

The ufuko is also important within the context of the wedding. The bride, during the ceremony, which was traditionally performed in the house,

sat on a bed placed on top of the ufuko (K 268). It was also here that the marriage would later be consummated. However, after that, the bed would be moved to the other side of the room where it would then be expected to remain. This is where the canopied wedding bed was located in the house above (fig. 8) where mtanga was observed.

During the ada, official mourning period (four months and ten days), my friend did not leave the house. She was not seen by men whom she would later be eligible to marry. Men were not allowed to sleep in the house, even closely related men. She did not wear make-up, use perfume, or in any way make herself attractive. She wore white (widows in Lamu wear black) or old clothes and kept her head covered. Her head was shaved. Mirrors were removed or turned toward the wall. All of her female friends and relatives stayed with the widow for three days and nights. We slept on mats on the floor and all meals were taken together. The Koran was read each evening at sunset. On the evening of the third day, the Koran was read and wanda, eye make-up, was passed around for women to put on, except for the widow and her daughter. This marked the end of the mourning period for friends and more distant

relatives. Female relatives that lived far away and could not reach Shela for mtanga sat on their beds during this three-day period to show that they were also mourning the loss of a relative.

After forty days (K 180) the family met again in the evening, prayers were said for the deceased and cakes were served. The women were in the areas marked A and B (fig. 8) and the men were in the area marked C and outside the house. Pieces of cake were sent to women who were not able to attend. Who should receive a piece of cake was discussed and it was clear that the gift marked a desire to maintain a relationship with the women who were sent cakes. Small girls were given the task of taking the small gifts to the houses of the women who did not come to the ceremony. All of these practices are according to the local customs or mila.

The widow's mother and father live next door in another small coral house which is like the houses in Takwa (fig. 9). The widow's mother, who is about eighty, was born in Takwa. There is another old man living in Shela who was born in Takwa, who, people say, knows a lot about the site but who refuses to talk about local history to outsiders. However, from this we can see that



there are direct cultural and historical links between some Shela people and Takwa.

From the old woman who was born in Takwa I learned (K 24) that the wall projections at the front of her house, like the ones at Takwa, were built to support a thatch or makuti roof. The wall is sloped at the top to form the pitch of the thatch. This covered area would have a flat coral roof. The usturu is used by men when women are in the house, but used by women when men are away from the house. It had a palm-frond fence in front to protect the women from being in full view from the street. The room marked B was a later addition to the house. A room may be called ukumbi, chumba, msana, or mlia depending on the Swahili settlement. In Shela a room is called ukumbi, in Lamu mlia, in Pate msana and in Mombasa chumba. I do not know why the terms vary. If a house has three sections, the first area may be called msana wa tini or kwanza which means lower or first; the second area may be called msana wa juu or kati-kati, which means upper or middle; and the innermost room may be called ndani or mwisho, meaning inner or last (fig. 14b). I have decided to use the term msana only because Ghaidan has used this term and he was the first to write about Swahili houses using local terminology (see glossary for Swahili terminology. See Appendix B).



In Shela I was told (K 41,47,58,179) that the inner room was used by the parents and the outer room by the children until a daughter married and then, if the family could not afford to have a house built for them, the daughter and her husband were given the inner room and the parents and other children slept in the middle room. Older boys either slept in the outer room or sometimes in a separate house. If the older boys stayed in another house, they still had meals prepared for them at home that were either sent to the boys' house or they came to eat with their father.

It was interesting that when I made the measured drawing of this house (fig. 9), I could not locate a cooking area. When I asked about this, I was told that the food was prepared at the daughter's house next door. The old couple said that they had not prepared meals in their house for many years. This practice and that mentioned above, older sons living in separate houses where meals were not prepared, is the type of behaviour which produces archaeological remains that are often difficult to explain without experience with culturally relevant ethnographic analogies.

A small coral house (fig.10) had been used by the older sons of a Shela family in the manner

described above, but before that it had been the home of a concubine or souriya. Waungwana men not only had houses built for their daughters but also for the slaves who became their concubines. Of course the houses built for daughters were usually on a larger scale than those built for their souriya. Important family rituals did not take place in these small houses, but in the main house where a nana or freeborn wife lived. Therefore within a settlement there was a ranking of house types which was associated with the person who was given the house by the controlling Waungwana male, as either a father or husband. To be given a house by one's father gave the daughter more power in relation to her husband, but it also gave her father a more powerful position in regard to her husband as well. This will be discussed in more detail below within the context of the larger Lamu houses.

Two large coral houses were drawn and studied in Shela (fig. 11a and b; fig. 12a and b). These houses were 'related' in that they were built by the same extended family who were 'Arabs' from Oman who came to Shela from Manda town on Manda island. An Indian is renting one house but descendants of the original owners are still living in the other house. An old woman, again perhaps over eighty

years of age, provided information (K 22,36,54,134) about the two houses and her daughter (K 136,165) allowed me to be with her immediately after the birth of her son and to participate in the rituals associated with his arrival.

The house owned and lived in by the elderly lady and her children (fig. 11a and b) had been in her family for at least four generations. She had been born and married in the house. When she was young the ground floor was intact, the last two misana were still roofed (see area marked A), and the house to the east was connected to this house (see areas marked B). The passage is now blocked and these rooms are used by a neighbour. The outer walls of the two back rooms are standing and the walled space is now used as a garden. In this private space (fig. 11a, area marked A) fruit trees are grown, clothes are hung to dry, firewood is stored and rubbish is deposited. Glass is not placed with the rubbish which is burned in a pit, but kept in a separate area. This provided useful ethnographic information about how houses could be lived in and used when partially ruined and data on how the Swahili society deposits rubbish which later may become archaeological material.

The parents lived on the ground floor and



when their daughters were married they were each given sets of rooms on the first floor of the house (see fig.11b). When the old lady's sister and parents died, she moved to the ground floor and gave her married daughters the first-floor rooms. One of her daughters, whom I mentioned above, had moved out of her first-floor rooms down to the ground floor to be near her mother when she gave birth, which was when I became acquainted with the family. To please her mother the daughter followed traditions more than she wished. She wanted to have her child in the Lamu hospital but her mother was against this and she honoured her mother, especially because she was living in her house. The old woman controlled those who lived under her roof. If they did not do what she said she asked them to leave. That was common knowledge and I was told not unique to this household. Elderly widows who owned their own houses are powerful women within Swahili traditional society.

The old woman was pleased that I was interested in traditions and hoped that I would convince her daughter that the 'old ways' were better than the Western ones which her daughter and her friends were often eager to copy. For this reason the family was directed to allow me to participate



in all of the rituals associated with the birth which was about to take place. Before the birth I was told, step by step, what would happen. Events followed this course with few alterations.

The birth took place behind a curtain on a bed at the east end of the msana opposite where the elderly woman slept and spent most of her time (fig. 11a, room marked C). The ufuko is now also located here because the back two rooms are in ruins, but normally birth does not take place on top of the ufuko. The mpokezi, local midwife, delivered the child which was born within the amniotic sack, called the kanzu (a man's white robe). A child born in this manner is said to have baraka or blessings and be a joy to his or her family. The amniotic sack was removed from the child, dried on the wall and kept by the mother as a symbol of good luck. The placenta was buried in the walled garden with five seeds (beans, green gram, rice, maize and millet) plus charcoal and salt (see fig. 11a, area marked A). Other items such as iron and castor leaves were mentioned as being buried with the placenta by informants in Lamu and Shela. Iron prevents bad spirits from coming near.

During a child's first day the call to prayer or azan is repeated in the newborn's ear (right

if a male and left if a female child) by the father or a religious leader. Right is always considered to be superior and more 'pure' and this difference between male and female is reinforced throughout the child's life.

Protective charms were given to the mother and newborn; both are considered to be very vulnerable for forty days following birth. Charcoal, an iron or metal knife and an egg were given to protect the child from evil spirits, especially when his mother was away; she only left the child to go to the toilet. Wanja, or soot, was used to 'decorate' the child's forehead and eyes. A bad spirit or the 'evil eye' is believed not to affect or want to take a 'dirty' or deformed child and, therefore, the child is protected. Cowrie shells and other charms may also be given to the baby at this time. The mother is believed polluted or unclean 'during the puerperium for as long as the lochia continues' (Ingrams 1967,196).

On the tenth day (but ideally on the seventh) after the birth a ceremony took place in which I participated (K 136). This ritual, kutolewande or kuponowa, attended only by women, has been described by the Swahili author, Kindy, and two other scholars who have written about Swahili customs (Prins 1961,

126 and Ingrams 1967,197). Kindy writes, 'Several other Swahili traditions were observed on the seventh day following my birth. First, I had to be taken out and shown the sun; second, a coconut was broken, and its juice was lightly sprinkled over me. This was supposed to ensure that during my life I should enjoy rainy times - in other words, successful and prosperous days ... Then I was taken to every corner of the house by my grandmother, who pointed out to me saying "this is the veranda, this is the sitting room, this is the kitchen" and so on. After this, my grandmother took me to the front door of our house and said to me: "We have shown you the sun and everything in this house so that you will not be greedy by wanting things which do not belong [to you] and small (some?) that might be <sup>[yours]</sup> be" (Kindy 1972,7).

This is very similar to the kutolewande or kuponowa ritual which I attended in Shela. The mpokezi who had delivered the child and massaged and oiled the mother and child three times each day afterwards came to direct the ritual. Female relatives and a woman whose mother served as a domestic slave to this family came to the house in the morning at high tide. The old woman had earlier gone around the house and burned incense in all of the corners to invite the

shetwani, or good spirits who lived in the house to attend the ritual. If these spirits were not invited she believed that they would cause 'problems'. The mpokezi carried the child wrapped in a leso (woman's dress) in an uteo (winnowing basket) filled with rice, around the house. She was followed by the mother, and the others, some carrying burning incense, and bisi (popped maize) which is used to invoke blessings for the child. The child was first taken to the uwanda (walled garden - marked A on fig. 11a) where his placenta and umbilical cord were buried, and told in song that this was the room in which his great-grandmother and great-grandfather stayed. He was also told that this was where firewood, fruit and water could be obtained. He was then taken to his grandmother's bed where she sat waiting for the procession, where he was told he should come to pay respects to his grandmother and he would often be given a penny. We then went in a line to the kitchen (D) and passed the toilet/washroom (E) which were both pointed out to him. Upstairs he was shown his mother's rooms and told he would always have a room in the house if he needed one (fig. 11b). Downstairs the infant was shown the streets of the town and told the way to the mosque. Inside again, in front of the door to the uwanda, once the door to the



ndani, a coconut was broken on the threshold of the door (fig. 11a, marked C). The child in the basket was placed on the floor and turned three times, passed through the mother's legs three times and then carried by three different women who ran to three separate areas of the house, while the other women shouted. After this the women who attended the ritual ate some of the fried maize and coconut which is purported to remove envy from their hearts. The women left followed by the mpokezi who was given the egg which had been used as a protective charm, the leso that had been wrapped around the child and the rice which had filled the winnowing basket plus a small fee for performing the ritual.

This ritual states the relationships between spaces, persons and objects within the house. It gives the child his position in relation to other people, places and objects. But it not only creates his status, it reinforces old relationships within the household. Not only the child's female relatives but also, before the end of slavery, female slaves observed the ritual and it was therefore a means of transmitting the social values of the society; it was a form of structuration. The child, and indirectly all of the female members of the household, were told about the activities appropriate to each area of the house. They were told the use of each item of

furniture and on what occasions it was used. The child was taken to each member of the extended family living in the house and told what relationship it had to that person. The child was told that the large ivory and ebony chairs, viti cha mpingo, were used on special occasions and solely by honoured members of the household (fig. 27). Other respected people sat on beds, while slaves, when they were allowed to enter the main part of the house, were expected to sit on the floor. The beds were to be used by the freeborn, and perhaps by a souriya. Slaves slept on mats on the floor, in the lowest part of the house. The master and his wife slept in the ndani, the highest level of the house (ten-centimetre steps mark the boundaries between the rooms). The child was shown the dirt-floor kitchen, where the slaves were once supervised, and its many locally made cooking pots. It is not a very highly valued part of the house and its appearance transmits an inferior setting for people seen as inferior. The last place to which the baby was taken was the teka, a covered entrance just inside the front door. There, if the child was a girl, she was told that on the stone benches beyond (outside) only men were allowed to sit and talk. This was the boundary of her world. If the infant was male the kutolewande would be suitable adjusted to a description of a

boy's life in this society, and values would be given to people, places and things from a man's viewpoint.

Gradually, as the child's range of senses expanded, it would begin to perceive the people in the physical environment around it. The house became its world, the very cosmos for several years. If the child was a girl, her father might want to guard her purity to the point that she would never go outside until the day she died. If the child died before reaching the age of six months it would be buried in the back room of the house and thus would never leave the house. Even when a daughter married, she stayed in the house in which she was born, while her parents moved elsewhere, or her father connected two houses.

As the child grew up it saw that some people gave orders and others obeyed. Some had nice clothes and wore shoes and others never did. Not everyone ate the same food, and there were some people who never slept in the more prestigious beds. Space as well as objects and people began to fit into categories and the child learned not only its place in the household, but its place within the society. Thus, the child imbibed naturally and gradually that which it could not grasp when it was first symbolically spoken.

Little boys were sent out to play games in the streets, girls were expected to play in the courtyards of the house.. From an early age the child learned where and how to play its role in the context of the settlement and society.. The kutolewande ritual associated with birth demonstrates that the Waungwana rely on space and objects having social values. The rite is purely symbolic for the infant, but for the people who share in the ritual it is a way of learning and forming the social order, through expressing the association of people with certain objects and areas of the house (Donley 1982,72).

In Iraq this perambulation is known as the dawra and the baby with protective charms is taken to all of the places in the town that might otherwise be the cause of chebsa or other evil (Drower 1938,111). These similar rituals, kutolewande and dawra, may be marking out areas of conflict in the household or town in an effort to resolve problems, not only for the child but for the women performing the ceremony. There was certainly often jealousy between freeborn women and souriya who were brought into the household, and this ritual would be an occasion to state very clearly the position not only of the freeborn child of the Waungwana woman



but also of the freeborn woman's powerful place within the household.

The space given to female domestic slaves, called madada, which means 'little sister', was always inferior to that used by freeborn women. In the house (figs. 12a and 12b) 'related' to the house where the birth and kutolewande was observed this could be seen most clearly. In most traditional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century two-storey Swahili houses the ground floor was constructed and lived in by the freeborn family; and only later an upper floor was added for a married daughter. The ground floor, if completely covered by the upper storey, was not used by the freeborn family but used for storage or housed the domestic servants. A few two-storey houses were not built in stages; this house (fig.12) is an excellent example. The areas marked A and B on the house plan (fig. 12a) were the slave quarters while C and D were storage areas. None of the rooms on the ground floor had plaster on the coral-rag walls and the pit toilet in the room marked E was undecorated. This room contained only a hole in the floor and no washing facilities. Slaves were considered unclean in every way and therefore to have little need for elaborate arrangements which they would not know

how to use, having been accustomed to the 'bush' from which they came. The arrangement was very different from the one created for the master's toilet and bathroom upstairs (fig. 12b, marked F and G, see also fig. 32).

The toilet/washroom called choo in Kiswahili, of which there are usually two to each floor level in large coral houses in Shela and Lamu, has plaster decoration in abundance. The choo in the rear of the house (see fig. 12b, area marked F) was used only by the master of the house, his freeborn wife and their daughters, the toilet in the front of the house (marked G) was used by sons and visitors who were being entertained by the master in the front room, the sabule (marked H), which was separate from the main part of the house. If male guests came to a house which did not have a sabule, the women had to retreat to the rear of the house, but a sabule provided a space where men could meet for business or social reasons and yet not interfere with the activities of their female household, who were in purdah.

#### LARGE CORAL HOUSES

Examples of more complex house plans will be selected

from ethnographic data collected in Lamu town. Only eleven households were studied in Shela, the source of the material discussed thus far. Usam Ghaidan's study (1976) was less detailed than mine but was a much larger sample. In Shela his survey only recorded a couple of coral houses, but in Lamu 'one hundred and seventy three traditional coral houses were surveyed, representing slightly less than one half of the total number that are still standing. Eighty two per cent are intact and in use, although nine per cent of these are only partially used. Another two per cent are intact and vacant. Fourteen per cent are partially collapsed, but still in use, and the remaining two per cent are vacant ruins' (Ghaidan 1976, 54). His study, because of his sample size, made it possible for me to know that there was a 'typical' floor plan, and that the 16 households which I recorded, in Lamu, did not have atypical floor plans. The identifying characteristics of the traditional coral house in Lamu which he listed were as follows, 'commencing at the street (see figs. 13 and 14b):

1. Daka - exterior vestibule with stone seats
2. Tekani - interior vestibule
3. Kiwanda - interior courtyard, sometimes with a kitchen or guest toilet adjacent to one side.

4. Msana wa tini - first sitting room, opening on to the kiwanda
5. Msana wa juu - second sitting room opening on to the msana wa tini
6. ndani - master bedroom, following the msana wa juu, and
7. Sometimes a nyumba kati - back room behind the ndani
8. Occasionally the house may also have a sabule (a guest room) located near the main entrance.

Decorative carved plasterwork normally occurs in all spaces (except the nyumba kati) in increasing frequency from the front to the rear. The stone (coral) house is known particularly for its unique wall niche labarinth, called the zidaka. This building type is found exclusively in the northern part of the town, Mkomani and Mtamwini' (Ghaidan 1976,54).

The last large Shela house (fig. 12b) discussed had a sabule (marked H) on the first floor. Traditionally only this room had shuttered windows because it was the only room of the house that could be used by men to entertain male guests. When men were using the room the windows could be opened and it did not matter if they could be seen from the street. A Lamu house (fig. 14a and b) shows that a second sabule could be added, i.e. one on the



ground floor (fig. 14a) and another on the first floor (fig. 14b). The owner of this house said that the sabule on the ground floor was used to entertain men and a foreigner trader might be allowed to stay there for a short time. The sabule on the first floor could be used by the women of the household to entertain women visitors if the shutter windows were closed.

Additional features common in Lamu houses but rare in Shela were third-storey additions called kidari. Ghaidan refers to them as penthouses. 'Sixty per cent (of the traditional Lamu coral houses) have a penthouse (kidari) of some kind and more than two-thirds of these are kitchens (kidari cha meko) with thatch roofs. Less than fifty per cent of the latter appear to be in use, however' (Ghaidan 1976, 57, see also figs. 22b and 28). I was told that these kitchens were built and used when the Waungwana had many female domestic slaves working in the house. These kitchens kept the slaves and smoke out of the main part of the house but now that slavery has been abolished and only a few families can afford to hire servants the Waungwana women prefer not to carry firewood and materials for meal preparations up and down stairs, so they now cook in the courtyard kiwanda near the choo.

The kidari cha meko has a small door kipengee which leads on to the roof. Slave women used the roof to dry spices and firewood but because many of the Lamu houses interconnect or are built next to each other with no space in between the women could walk across the roof tops and pass from one house to the other. It is easy to go to as many as ten houses in this manner. The Waungwana men controlled the use of space, and only allowed certain people within the town walls, mosques, and houses (this will be discussed in detail below) but they could not go on the roofs because from the roof one is able not only to pass from one house to the other but also to look into the courtyards of other houses, where women were in purdah. Waungwana women did not attend to firewood or drying of spices and were not allowed to use the roof tops as a means of passing from one house to another. Bridges or wikio were built for this purpose, another added feature to many two-storey houses. The roof tops were therefore a space used by slave women, which it was impossible for men to control. The roof tops gave the slave women an added degree of freedom because they could then gain easy entry to other Waungwana households. The other type of kidari or penthouse was built as an additional room, sometimes for a married daughter, as the ones in Shela (fig. 11b), or for

a widowed grandparent. This additional room always had plastered walls and a flat coral roof, both details that kitchens or kidari cha meko never had. Spaces that were used for storage or by slaves were never plastered, whether it was the ground floor of the house (which was originally two storeys), a kitchen on the roof of the main house (either a one- or two-storey house), or room-sized spaces, called ghala or gumbra, approached by trap doors, that were located between the floor and the lower ceiling of some two- storey houses (fig. 14b, marked C and fig. 16b marked E). These storage areas between the grounds and first-floor levels were used for the secret storage of valuable trade items, ivory and slaves. Plaster is a symbol of purity. House walls, and even roofs in the past, were replastered for wedding celebrations and at the end of Ramadan to denote a fresh or 'clean' start. Slaves were not 'pure' and the domestic spaces associated with them were also not marked with lime plaster, the symbol of purity. This follows the pattern mentioned above concerning the attitudes about building materials.

Lamu houses are often interconnected, which adds greatly to the complexity of domestic space although the joined units contain only the characteristics already discussed. I tried to

record a group of these houses but was not allowed by all of the owners to make measured drawings, or trace the full extent of the complex. I did, however, manage to record three of the connected houses and a fourth which was not connected but used by the same extended family. I was told (K 94,231) how two other houses were linked but was not allowed to make measured drawings of these 'related' houses. The five linked houses were on plots 488, 547, 565, 546, and 482; the sixth house also used by this family was on plot 487. (See fig. 15, which shows how the houses were connected and their position within Lamu town. This Lamu map is a portion of Ghaidan's Lamu town plan, 1976, fig. 3-14). My interviews confirmed what Ghaidan said about previous owners, 'The house on plot 488 [fig. 16a and b] was the residence of Bwana Zahidi Mnguumi, the leader of the Battle of Shela in 1813, and the man who invited the participation of the Omani Arabs in building Lamu Fort' (Ghaidan 1976, 56). His descendants said that he had this house built and the others which made up the complex. If this is true it is the most precise date that we have on a traditional-style house in Lamu. There are wards, called mitaa (sing. mtaa), which are reported to be older and archaeological remains of mud buildings have been dated to the thirteenth century in



Lamu (Chittick, 1967,65). The complex of houses (located in Mtamwini Mtaa) is similar in plan and decoration to all of the other traditional coral houses in Lamu. These houses may be larger than the average coral house. Bwana Zahidi Mnguumi's house (fig. 16a) has a reception area (marked A and B) on the ground floor with benches and a staircase which leads to the sabule (fig. 16b, marked C) on the first floor, where he conducted his business. These spaces are reminiscent of Ibn Battuta's description of his visit to the Shaikh's residence in Mogadishu in the 1300s. 'On Saturday the people come to the door of the Shaikh's house and sit on benches outside [like fig. 16b, area marked A, labelled Daka.] The Qadi, the lawyers, the Sharifs, the holy men, the shaikhs and those who have made the Pilgrimage enter an outer room and sit on wooden benches arranged for that purpose [see fig. 16a, area marked B]. The Qadi sits on his bench alone, and each of these classes of persons has its own bench, which is not shared with any other' (translated by Freeman-Grenville, 1962,30). This is an explicit example of the use of space in connection with the ranking of individuals.

The lower level of this house had plaster decorations; some had been plastered over. I was unable to obtain information about the early use of this level but in recent years it has only been used as a storage area and a shop. The area marked D (fig.

16b) was blocked off from the front part of the house and a door to the street was added when this section was used as a shop, a few years ago. The well was also added later. In general, Waungwana said that they put wells in their houses when they no longer had slaves to carry water. (The same information came from many people in Pate and Shela, fig. 11a was an example in Shela and a Pate example is given below (fig. 24)). Water is still carried to many of the houses in Shela by people who are descendants of slaves and householders do not want them to enter their private bathrooms. Some houses have a hole through the bathroom wall which allows water to be put in the cistern or birika, without going into the choo (for an example see fig. 7, marked B).

Mnguumi's house (fig. 16b) also has a storage area, gumbra, between the floor levels (marked E) and two staircases to the roof; one to a kidari for sleeping (marked F) and another to a kidari cha meko (marked G). The msana wa tini (marked H) and msana wa juu (marked I) has curtain rails (shown as dotted lines) called mtatazi, which are multi-coloured lac<sup>(lacquered)</sup> poles placed across the ends of the rooms (called ngai). Beds traditionally filled the rooms but there are always a bed placed behind these poles, to which cloth was attached. These curtained-off areas provided private spaces for

people to sleep, sit and store their personal belongings. As the desire for private space increased with time, walls were added where poles with curtains had been. Curtains, called pazia, were also often placed at the opening between the msana wa tini and msana wa juu (areas marked H and I) and walls were also added here (walls shown shaded are added walls on all drawings). Shuttered windows are added to the msana when they are cut off from the air in the open courtyard by the addition of walls, if there is not an adjacent house (see for example the area marked I).

The passage, kipengee, on the back wall of the ndani (marked J) that linked this house on plot 488 to the house on plot 547 (fig. 17a), has been blocked. I was not allowed access to the ground floor of the house on plot 547 but I was told that there is a stairway that connects the ground floor to the first floor at the point where the two houses join (a shared wall). A person would leave house 488 from the ndani and enter house 547 on the stairs leading to the front door (fig. 17, area marked A). This house (on plot 547) is linked to two other houses in the complex by bridges, wikio; the house on plot 546 to the west (these houses are linked at the point marked B on

fig. 17) and to the house on plot 565 to the south (these houses are connected at the point marked C on fig. 17).

'The house on plot 547 was the residence of the Bwana Mohammed Maawiya, the last man to hold the position of Headman in Lamu. He died in the house on plot 546 across the street which was originally owned by his father! (Ghaidan 1976,56). The house on plot 546 is also connected to the house on plot 482, but I was not allowed to study either of these houses. I saw the ground floor of the houses on plots 546 and 547, and it looked as if they lacked plaster decoration, and that the houses had never been single-storey houses. In other words, the lower level of the houses had been used as a storage area and servants' quarters. The undecorated pit toilet found in the ground floor of the house on plot 565 (fig. 18a) in the area marked A was like the one in the Shela house (fig. 12a, marked E) discussed above. In fact, the ground-floor plan was also similar in that it had two spaces, one for servants (marked B and C) and another room (marked D) with a separate entrance from the street for storage.

The upper level of the house in plot 565 (fig. 18b) has had many walls and windows added and it



was difficult to be sure of the original plan. All of the plaster decorations in this house had been covered over with cement.

The last and sixth house which I was told was used by the extended family was on plot 565 (figs.19a and b). It was not connected to the complex and perhaps for a reason. This house was lived in by the older unmarried Waungwana boys of the extended family. The bachelors lived on the first floor and servants/slaves lived on the ground floor. The young men were either brought their meals or took their meals with their fathers in neighbouring houses; houses that were probably part of the complex. This is the same situation as that described for the small house in Shela (fig.10), only on a much larger scale. It was important that the young men and women within an extended family lived in houses that were separate because first-cousin marriages were common. There were many descriptions of male first cousins who visited their spouses-to-be and were not allowed to see them but were allowed to talk with them, if separated by a pazia or curtain.

The separation between female slaves and the freeborn Waungwana was often less. A descendant (K 94) of the original owner of the complex, said that the young unmarried slave women often lived

upstairs with the Waungwana, but slept on mats on the floor rather than on beds and did not sleep in the ndani. The ndani was reserved for the Mwangwana woman who owned the house and her husband or the mwungwana man who owned the house and his freeborn first wife. Older slave women, madada, who were married to slaves, slept in the ground-floor section of the house and their husbands were on occasions allowed to sleep with them on this lower level. Only madada lived on the ground floor of the houses used by bachelors. Questions of paternity were another reason for them not being allowed to stay in their parents' house where unmarried slave girls and eligible female cousins lived in interconnected houses.

From this case study we can see that the domestic spaces not only reflect social organisation but, as in the above examples, the spaces play an active role in shaping and maintaining a social pattern.

The area behind the house on plot 487 is a walled garden which also belongs to the family complex. It contains fruit trees and flowers (jasmine for example) that were used by the Waungwana family. Laundry was also done in this area, especially women's clothes; men's clothes were washed by

slaves out on the shambas or plantations and carried to and from town. Freeborn women considered it shameful for their clothes to be washed and dried in a public place. It would even be a threat to their 'purity' to have their personal belongings in such a 'dirty' environment. Below more data will be given to show how the Waungwana perceived the space outside their houses and towns.

Before turning to the material concerned with the Swahili social values placed on linked spatial patterns, I want to make the suggestion that the house complex described above is not unique to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Lamu. The palace at Gedi (thirteenth to sixteenth century A.D.) excavated by Kirkman (1963) might have been a family complex like the one described above and not a palace, with some of the meaning which that label might imply. The Court of Audience (Kirkman 1963, 4) might have been a walled garden, which would explain why the Portuguese did not comment on its political importance, something that such a large court should be expected to demand. Another interpretation of an open walled area, called by Kirkman at Gedi an Audience Court, is a slave-holding pen. The walled area known as Husuni Ndogo at Kilwa (Chittick 1974, 196-205) might also have been used for holding slaves for import and export.

This idea is based on the walled area in Lamu on plot 994 (fig. 15) which is called yumbe ('the palace' by Prins (1971,38) and 'uyumba' or 'the council chamber' by El Zein (1974,13) and Allen (1974b, 16 and 23)) and which I was told by Waungwana neighbours was used as a large slave-holding area for slaves intended for export or local sale. The house associated with this walled area was owned by a mwungwana woman who married a Liwali who was an El Busaidi (i.e. an Omani Arab). It is difficult to know when the area received its name or if the area's identification changed when its use was altered. Certainly more research is needed in connection with the use of walled spaces within towns.

When slavery was abolished, large coral houses could no longer be built, but families continued to expand. They wanted to live in linked coral houses and the mitaa of their ancestors. It was important to their status and social value to live in these areas. This was achieved in three ways: (1) as we have seen above, (figs. 14, 16, 17, 18) walls were added within the large coral houses and this provided more ndani or master-bedroom-type spaces, which allowed more couples to live together in one house; (2) houses were divided by blocking spaces



and adding a new entrance (figs. 20a and b; 21a and b); and (3) a room (nyumba kati) or house was created between two or three existing houses, i.e. the house had two walls added, a street and front wall (fig. 22). The house on plot 992 (figs. 20a and b) was a traditional house originally owned by a woman who decided to will the house to two female relatives. One (K 106), although married, was not allowed by her father to live in the house. She was forced to rent (a practice which is new in relation to these houses although Waungwana did rent stores and shops to Indians much earlier) her share until her father died, when she and her husband did move into the house. This single-storey house was divided in half when it was let to a non-relative. The front half of the traditional house plan became a separate house, with one space projecting (marked A - fig. 20a) into a new separate house. The house on plot 328 (figs. 21a and b) is the back section of a two-storey house which was divided in half. This house fragment was rented to a non-Swahili family, who found deciding how to use its spaces very difficult. At first they used the ground-level floor (fig. 21a) as a storage area (marked A) and kitchen (marked B) and the first floor (fig. 21b) for a sitting/dining area (marked C) and bedroom (marked D) but they did

not like having to go up and down the stairs to the kitchen, so they moved the kitchen up to the first floor. They used the stairs to the roof as a cooking area because of the ventilation provided by the open staircase. The couple were never happy with this house and moved to another house as soon as they could find one to let. They were so concerned about the difficulty of trying to use all of the area that they were renting that when I made a measured drawing of the fragmented house I found labels that they had printed and placed on the doorways which read, 'bedroom', 'kitchen', etc. It was more prestigious, even for a non-Swahili, to live in a coral house rather than a mud house, so that some difficulties could be overlooked.

The third way coral houses could be provided, in face of a declining economy and lack of slave labour, was to create houses between existing houses. Lamu streets now seem to have rows of 'town houses'. It is often impossible to detect where one house stops and the next begins, but this is because small houses have been added between larger houses in many cases. The house on plot 307 (fig. 22) is an example; the walls marked A and B are shared walls with the larger houses on plot 305 to the north and plot 308 to the east. In this case

one side wall, internal walls and the front wall were built to create a small single-storey house. This house is owned by a widowed Swahili woman now sharing the house with her married daughter and son-in-law. The couple use the room at the back of the house, which is the ndani equivalent. Domestic spaces have become more complex. This was demonstrated as we moved from small dwellings, first mud-and-thatch to small coral houses in Shela and Lamu, to larger coral houses in Shela and a house complex in Lamu. Then examples were given which showed how these houses have undergone change and reduction in size to accommodate more freeborn people. This pattern is not limited to Shela and Lamu, and I want to give a few case histories of houses in Pate town, to expand the data. My objective is to develop ethnographic analogies that will be useful in understanding the Swahili use of space both in the present and in the past, especially when analysing archaeological sites. My work, both ethnographic (K 268,304, 332) and archaeological, in Pate was much more limited than that undertaken on Lamu island. I was only able to do interviews during short two or three day visits and in the evenings when I directed the excavation of one room in a ruined coral house in the deserted section of old Pate town (a period of

about three weeks). Only six households were recorded ethnographically, and three of these will adequately demonstrate that the floor plans and their pattern of use is not substantially different from that described for Swahili houses in Shela and Lamu. Pate town has not been mapped nor plot numbers assigned and the families wish to remain anonymous. I can only say that my examples were taken from both sections, Mitayuu and Kitokwe, of the modern town (for the location of these sections see Ghaidan 1976, fig. 129).

Mitayuu claim descent from Pate's former rulers; those of the larger, Kitokwe, are said to be descendants of newcomers and strangers' (Ghaidan 1976, 30).

I believe that all of these houses were built in the nineteenth or twentieth century from coral taken from the older houses to the north of the modern town. I was unable to substantiate this theory because it is now illegal to take coral from the ruins, which have been gazetted as national monuments, and people are, therefore, afraid to admit that this was ever their practice.

Houses have been added on to in a similar manner as those on Lamu island. The house (fig. 23) probably started as a two-gallery house, the back section divided between a room for the parents and



a choo with another room for older children and a general working area. It may have had a palm-leaf fence in the front which gave the inhabitants more privacy. The outer rooms, which are slightly smaller, were added later as well as a wall around the courtyard that has a privacy panel at the entrance, which prevents people passing by from being able to see directly into the courtyard or house. Kitchens are usually located in courtyards under thatched roofs (for examples see figs. 23, 24 and 25b; all kitchens are marked A). Either wells or water cisterns called jabia are also located in the courtyards (figs. 23, 24 and 25).

If the house has many misana (sing. msana) or galleries, the first room behind closed doors is the ndani and the room behind it, also with doors, is a storage room (fig. 23, room marked B). The houses originally had only one toilet/washroom (choo) at the rear of the house, where women could use it even if men were in the front of the house and they had been forced to retreat into the interior of the house to maintain purdah (fig. 23). As the houses expanded, a choo was added at the front of the house or on upper levels where other couples lived. The house (fig. 24) shows where a room has recently been added (in the past three years) for a

newly-married couple (the walls are shaded). The larger, more complex house (figs. 25a and b) shows how two houses can be joined, the smaller with a second-storey wall added (shaded on fig. 25a) to create an additional ndani, or master bedroom so that three married sisters can divide and use a house together (the three master bedrooms are all marked B on figs. 25a and b).

In Pate, like Shela and Lamu, the ufuko, (see fig. 62) trench for collecting the water and other impurities from the ablution of the dead, is located at the rear of the house in the ndani on the side near the choo. Other ritual and mundane uses of the spaces are the same; marriages are consummated in the ndani, and women return to their parents' home to give birth in the msana wa juu, where their mothers attend them for forty days. Widows remain in the houses for four months and ten days and men are forced to sleep elsewhere during the first three to seven days. I could detect nothing in the course of my interviews and observations that was different from what I had observed on Lamu island. People in Pate did seem more traditional and less effected by Western influences, and this has been mentioned by almost every scholar who has done research in the Lamu archipelago. Chittick said that 'A part of the site of [Pate]

is still occupied by a village, divided into two parts, which preserve more than any other settlement the decadent remnants of the old civilisation of the coast. The inhabitants adhere to their old way of life, uninfluenced by the outer world, and indeed strongly resist any attempts to bring them into touch with what passes for progress' (Chittick 1967, 58). For this reason, the Pate research served as a confirmation of the traditional nature of the data that I had collected in Shela and Lamu towns.

#### THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND SPACE

When houses are larger and more complex the building materials used are more durable and 'pure'. The scale, from the least durable and more 'impure' to the most durable and 'pure' is paralleled by the degree to which constructed space was controlled. This analysis is relevant to the time when most of the coral houses were built in Lamu, the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, before the abolition of slavery. However, the Waungwana system of structuration was a powerful one and the process, although undergoing more rapid changes now, is still clearly evident in the ethnographic information which I was able to record about the present and oral history related to the past eighty years.

Table 1 shows the relationship between groups of people, type of building, 'purity', and degree to which space is controlled as seen by the Swahili and foreign traders.

I will first discuss how space is used by the elite Swahili men and women, summarised above, and then look at the manner in which foreign traders, both Arab and Indian, challenged the power of the Waungwana gained through their spatial system of structuration.

The Swahili and the Bajun follow the same system. The Swahili, however, have larger walled towns with coral houses as well as many coral mosques. Bajun settlements are more on the scale of villages and may only have one coral mosque and/or coral tombs owned by their elite male Waungwana. As this group gains more power coral houses will be built for their daughters. Because the Bajun have less power, fewer durable buildings and goods, and less controlled spaces, their settlements are considered to be inferior to the Swahili towns. The Bajun system of structuration is the same as that of the Swahili; it is seen as 'inferior' only in degree.

The coral mosques followed by coral grave markers are associated with Islam and known lineage. Those



Table 1:  
People and Spaces

People	Buildings - most durable, 'pure' or controlled space to least durable or controlled
Swahili and Bajun	Bajun have coral mosques and tombs, but few coral houses.
<u>Waungwana</u> males	own coral mosque, prayer niche, <u>mihrab</u> and coral tombs.
<u>Waungwana</u> females	own coral house, upper level, <u>ndani</u> , <u>mawala</u> and <u>zidaka</u> and most plaster decoration, buried near coral tombs.
concubine ( <u>souriya</u> )	coral house, upper level, outer rooms or small single-storey coral house with no plaster decoration.
female domestic slave (virgin)	coral house, upper level, outer rooms, little plaster decoration.
female domestic slave ( <u>madada</u> ) (married to skilled slave)	coral house, lower level, no plaster decoration or only that done for original <u>Waungwana</u> occupants.
male slave, skilled labour	allowed to visit and occasionally stay with his slave wife in the large coral house; lives in a mud-and-thatch house, sometimes within the town wall.
Outside town wall	no coral buildings or plaster decorations
male slave (plantation overseer) with his slave wife	Mud-and-thatch house on <u>Waungwana</u> plantation
male and female slave labour	grass dwelling on plantation
Other ethnic groups (Orma, Pokomo and Boni)	grass dwelling in 'bush'

who built mosques and/or acted as religious leaders stood five times a day near the prayer niche, the mihrab (fig. 29). This arched niche indicates the direction of Mecca, the holy city of Islam. These Waungwana males were considered to be the most pure; a purity which was God given and could not be lost.

Islam discouraged the use of explicit symbols in an attempt to avoid idol worship and, therefore, those presumably closest to Allah's teachings create religious symbols only through association. The mihrab is associated with the holy city of Islam, as well as being a known Islamic design for prayer niches and the pure Waungwana males. The prayer niche is located at the northern end of the mosque. Mosques and tombs are also built with their orientation determined by the direction of Mecca. Mecca is north of the Lamu archipelago and the mosques, tombs and houses are built ideally on a north-south axis. The most 'pure' or socially valued people, spaces and objects are those to the north; for example, the coral houses and mosques are in the northern half of Lamu town and the more recently built mud-and-thatch dwellings of the less elite are located in the southern half of the town.

Waungwana women do not own mosques, and only

rarely are they allowed to enter mosques, because the men feel that they could defile the mosque. Women are defiling when in their menstrual periods and impure for forty days after they give birth as well as after sexual intercourse. The mosque is therefore the most controlled and 'pure' space within a Swahili (now also taken to include the Bajun) settlement. It is also the most durable because the coral used to construct a mosque is never supposed to be removed and used in another building as is often done with materials from ruined houses.

The mosque is the location of the Islamic rituals considered to be most necessary to religious life, and it marks the settlement as being Islamic, not only to the townspeople but also to outsiders. Mosques associated with housing wards, mitaa, mark these restricted areas. Only those who lived, worked or were invited to trade with Waungwana living within mtaa mosque. The mosques and coral tomb markers were also associated with those with known or long lineage, which follows the pattern of 'purity', control of space, and durability - all of which create and maintain power.

How did the Waungwana men control the social value of their freeborn women; the mothers who produced their 'pure' lineage, and the daughters

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for whom they built large coral houses? As mentioned above they were seen as inferior or polluting and rarely allowed in mosques. This blocks the women from many of the most important Islamic rituals, which are staged in the mosque. Women were also not allowed to attend the rituals which took place at the graveside. By not allowing women to enter these spaces, or only on occasions when rituals were not taking place, Waungwana women were made to appear inferior to their men. It was however very important that these women be very high in social and ritual value because they were responsible for the 'pure' and most valued lineages. It is perhaps for this reason that the Waungwana women were given the most restricted space, the ndani, within coral houses, the most durable goods and the plaster decorations most associated with Islam. Women had to be controlled by men to be considered 'pure'. Men are 'pure' regardless of their actions and yet a male is supposed to control himself in all of his activities. He does not shout, run, eat or sleep anywhere at any time or do anything that indicates that he is not following the daily, weekly, monthly, yearly or life pattern known to all Waungwana males and most of the Islamic world. Women, on the other hand, are not thought able to control themselves as men do, and therefore must be controlled by men.



Purdah was most strict in the large coral houses for the Waungwana women who were given the most durable goods and considered to be the most 'pure'. In fact, the position of the most valued women was created by the males giving socially valued space and objects, but women could not threaten the man's position because they were not free to obtain either the spaces or the objects independently. The woman's space was the 'closed' space of the house.

Men placed charms and protective inscriptions from the Koran around or under the threshold of the door to the house to prevent Waungwana women and female slaves from leaving the house without their permission. One such charm was found buried under the threshold of one of the houses which I excavated (see pages 253-5 and fig. 65). Coconuts are also used as charms, termed in kiswahili kufunga ya nyumba, symbolically to close a house. (Symbolically 'closing' space is not limited to the Swahili - see Littlejohn, 1967, 332 writing about the Temne houses of Sierra Leone for another example). There was no archaeological evidence of course concerning the coconut, a ritual object used to mark the boundary of a mwungwana woman's space. However, there is a reference to a related practice on the coast in 1844. Krapf said that 'Over the last gate of the village, I saw a cocoa-nut hanging, an

uganga [charm] which at the insistence of the waganga [magicians] was hung, that the cocoa-nuts might not be stolen while the people were away on their plantations. This charm is supposed to be effectual in keeping the thieves and robbers at a distance from the (coconut) trees and the village, and many Wanika [i.e., Migikenda] suspend a similar uganga before the door of their huts; it is a kind of "cave canem": for nobody dares to enter so long as it is not removed' (Krapf 1844, 145). The Swahili women cannot thus be stolen and no one can enter that would be a threat to their 'purity'.

At the door of the ndani, the room most associated with the Waungwana women, a sacrificed animal was also often buried to 'close' or control her purity and protect the durable goods which were always placed with her in this room. '... in most poems and songs concerning marriage, the word ndani has a double meaning; (1) literally, 'inside' (a house); (2) figuratively, 'intimate!', 'secret' ... kuingia ndani means in fact to go inside, but in poetic language, the deflowering of a virgin' (Coppens 1980, 43). The material remains of this 'closing' ritual were also archaeologically detectable (see pages 270-275-6). Not only were boundaries marked to protect or control women, but also decorations were given to women's spaces which contributed to their 'purity'.

Women were not allowed to pray in mosques, but special blessings were received by those who prayed in the mosque. A few houses contained a feature that solved this problem for the secluded women: a mihrab or prayer niche like that in the mosque, called a mswala (plur. miswala) (figs. 30), was constructed in the ndani for use by the waungwana women. (Compare fig. 29:mihrab and fig. 30:mswala.) This added social value and 'purity' to the women and to the space, the ndani.

The arched niche, in the mihrab shape, appears twice more within the context of the domestic setting and both times, I argue, as a protective measure against defilement or pollution most closely associated with Waungwana women. As was described through the case histories and floor plans earlier in this chapter, marriages are consummated and later sexual relations between waungwana men and women take place in the ndani. Bodies are also prepared for burial in the ndani. These are two highly polluting activities and yet they mark passages to a state of increased 'purity'. The wall, seen from the entrance of the ndani, is almost covered with small niches called zidaka (sing. kidaka) (see fig. 29 and compare to figs. 30 and 31). These niches closely resemble the mihrab in the mosques and the miswala found in some houses. The style of the smaller niches is

so similar to the larger type that it is difficult to believe that there is no connection. It was, after all, not a 'pagan' decoration, and it was, as mentioned before, associated with prayer to Allah, the purest of pure. Perhaps powerful symbolic markers were needed as protection by the Waungwana in the focal point of their houses where defilement was threatening. The zidaka were filled with porcelain plates which I will later argue (pages 32-3) were also used as protective charms.

If the mihrab niche style became a protective decoration for certain kinds of defilement (death and sexual intercourse in the ndani), why should it not be used against defilement of another type in another room of the house? Thus, a large niche of the same style was used over the pit toilet (see fig. 32 and compare to figs. 19, 30 and 31). People now say that by putting this arch and decoration over the toilet, their ancestors committed sacrilege. This indicates that (a) they do see the arch as a mihrab and (b) the mihrab does have a religious association and is more than a decoration that gives the orientation for prayer for the Swahili. Although the mihrab was certainly not introduced into Islam as a religious symbol, it does seem to have become one by association. When foreign Muslims see the toilet decoration in Swahili traditional houses they are invariably shocked.



It was perhaps difficult to adjust to the idea of such basic defilement as human excrement within the house. The custom, before women were restricted to the house, was to use the bushes away from the settlement for this function. Toilets are not found in all houses or settlements even today. The Bajun village of Bujamwali on Pate island is only now in the process of adding pit toilets to houses. The people living in Bujamwali told me (K 298) that they did not want the 'filth' in their houses but that people from other Swahili settlements were making their women feel ashamed to use the sea shore, as was the custom of all the villagers. At first pit toilets were not added, but a type of toilet, called choo cha vigogo, was. This consisted of small logs (vigogo) placed over a shallow trench. This toilet was only for urine; everyone (women only at night) went to the sea shore to defecate. Now, as pit toilets are added, which are used for all excrement, they must not be used until the room where the toilet is located is white-washed with lime. The toilets lack the niche found in the large traditional coral Swahili houses, but it seems that the protection from defilement is provided by the white lime. This is not the first time that we have seen lime used as a means of purification (see page 158) (in connection with weddings

and the beginning of a fresh start after Ramadan). Different toilets were provided for the different categories of people that lived in the large houses. For example the type used by slaves on the ground floor (fig. 12a) lacked both decoration and white-washed walls.

Care was often taken to build the pit toilets on an east-west axis away from the direction of Mecca as directed by Islamic traditions. 'Never face the qibla [the direction of Mecca] while urinating or defecating except when screened by a building or wall' (Khan 1971, 106, translation of Al Bukhari, Hadith or 'traditions'.)

Pit toilets are also used by women to protect their small children from the bad effects of owls passing over the house. It is believed that owls cause children to have diarrhoea which leads to death from dehydration. But if a child is held upside down over the lindi, the opening to the pit toilet, when an owl is first heard, it will be protected from the harmful owl (K 71). (There are other activities which accompany this ritual but they are not relevant to the discussion of toilets.)

Plaster decoration only appears in the coral houses and mosques of the Waungwana. The Omani, who are often Ibadhi (many who now live in Lamu have become Sunni), abhor ostentatious behaviour

(Barth 1983,17). Many of the powerful people who came to Lamu in the late nineteenth century were from the ruling family of Oman (and later Zanzibar), the Al Bu Said, and they may have objected to the richly decorated house interiors. Bohra Muslims use a zidaka-style decoration only in the houses of their religious leaders, and they may have therefore also objected to the continuation of the plaster niches, so characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Lamu archipelago coral houses. More information about this will be presented in the chapter on Indian architecture. For whatever reason houses built in the twentieth century do not have plaster decoration.

Houses built for concubines, souriya, do not have plaster decorations or pure lime mortar although they may be whitewashed. I was only able to interview two women (K 119,125) who claimed to be souriya and one of these ladies was living in a house built for her grandmother, who was also a souriya. She would not allow me to make a measured drawing of the house but it was a small house, located at the edge of the ward, mtaa, where her mwungwana husband lives with his first wife. The souriya said that houses built for concubines were usually at the edge of the wards where their masters lived. The floor plan of the house was very similar

to the house which was built for a souriya in Shela (fig.10).

If a house was not given to a souriya she might be given a space in the main house by her master's first wife, who usually owned the house (the house was given to her by her father or inherited from her mother). Nana(married Waungwana women) sometimes encouraged their husbands to take concubines because it would free them from sexual demands and allow the nana to appear more 'pure' (K 88). This was of course only true if she had produced offspring to maintain a 'pure' lineage. The souriya, or slave, could never obtain the degree of 'purity' which was inherent to a nana or any Mwungwana female. Nevertheless souriya were chosen from the children of the madada, who lived on the ground floor of the large coral houses, because they were considered to be 'purer' and more cultured than slaves born outside the town in the bush. In fact the virgin daughters of the madada were not allowed to sleep downstairs with their mothers after about the age of eight to protect their 'purity' and virginity, in case the master of the house, called Bwana, decided that he might want the girl as a souriya. Souriya were also not allowed to sleep on the ground-floor level after they were selected by the Bwana; this was presumably to



remove any doubt about who was the father of her children. Male slaves married to madada were allowed to sleep with their wives on the ground-floor level of the house and it was these men who could be a threat to the 'purity' of the women of the household if spatial divisions were not maintained. These men also had mud-and-thatch houses or grass dwellings at the edge of the town and their madada wives were sometimes allowed to stay with them in these houses. The slaves married to madada were usually highly valued slaves, often sons of madada who did skilled labour, or worked as overseers on the masters' plantation (K63,65,78,92,94,100,165,169,268).

Everyone who worked and/or lived outside the town wall was considered to be inferior to those, free and slave, who lived inside the town. This boundary marked off the limits of what the Waungwana could control and defend. With a wall there could be no doubt about the nature of the visit of a group of tribesmen in town. The town gates were open during the daytime to people who dressed and talked like town dwellers. Historically, we know the Waamu (as the Waungwana of Lamu called themselves) traded with other coastal people in the sixteenth century and that there were also times of conflict. A Portuguese traveller, Duarte Barbosa,

noted in about 1517 that 'going forward along the coast is a town of Moors [Arabs] named Pates [Pate] and then another named Lemon [Lamu]. These [people] carry on trade with the inland country, and are well-walled with stone and mortar, inasmuch as they are often at war with the Heathen of the mainland' (Freeman-Grenville 1975, 134). Even the houses that could be seen over the walls must have appeared fortress-like compared to the grass or mud-and-thatch houses in which other coastal people were living. The houses were intended to protect the inhabitants in both a physical and a symbolic manner.

The town wall was not the only means of marking off the boundary between the city and the bush. In fact not all Swahili towns have a town wall. There is also a Swahili ritual to rid or 'close' the town to evil impurities called kuzinguka ngombe, 'the circulation of the bull around the town ... and this is strictly a Waungwana ritual ...' (El Zein 1974, 281).

However, even the slaves who lived and worked on the plantations outside the towns were considered superior to those who lived in the bush. People who live in the bush are thought to be 'impure' and without culture by the Swahili. The people who live in the bush can never obtain the 'purity'

of the Waungwana; they are not controlled and they own nothing which is durable. Their grass houses, skins, gourds and pots are all less durable than the coral houses, imported cloth, gold jewellery, carved chairs, beds and porcelain owned by the Swahili Waungwana. As mentioned earlier, the coral house even changes its inhabitants' attitude about time, in that the Waungwana build for future generations. They see their lineage as being long-lasting. This 'durable' quality associated with the Waungwana gives their culture a more linear character and adds to their power. Durability does not only contribute to their mode of domination but also aids the legitimation of their superior social position. The durability of the goods belonging to the Waungwana is a structuring aspect. The duality of structuration must not be forgotten. The Waungwana, the powerful group of at least the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were free to determine what goods were selected to represent power. They created the symbolic and social system, which in turn created and maintained their power to control and create.

Strobel rightly notes that 'few writers analyse cultural artifacts as an expression of different, and often competing, strata' (Strobel 1975,35). She also mentions that it is the material culture of the

elite which dominated the Lamu Museum's exhibits, but she adds that poor people tend to create fewer and less substantial artefacts. 'In order to analyse the contributions of slaves and other people from the lower strata of society, one must turn to customs, particularly dances, which did not depend upon wealth or power for their creation' (ibid.,35).

The groups dominated by the Waungwana are 'muted' even in the archaeological records of the past because only the most durable items, such as imported porcelain, are recovered (see chapter 8). Dances would be impossible for archaeologists to investigate. However, mud houses could be more fully excavated and the present household of descendants of slaves might reveal spatial patterns and artefacts that are specific to their way of life, both now and in the past. It would be interesting simply to know more about how the features and artefacts in mud houses compare with those discovered in the excavations that we made in the coral houses.

It was not only the durable material culture which created the power of the Waungwana, but also many aspects of the institution of Islam. Returning to Gidden's (1981,34-5) five major ways in which human existence is historical (see chapter 2 page 44), I would like to demonstrate how the Swahili elite



used concepts of time to create and maintain their power.

(1) All human beings are aware of death and most create beliefs about after-life which span generations. Some of these are included in the beliefs of large institutions, like Islam. The Swahili follow Islam which teaches that some people are more 'pure' than others and that these people will have a better 'long term' future than heathens. The Arabs are Allah's 'chosen people'. This makes it seem proper that they have the most valued goods (later we will see that this also applied to spaces) and that other people should serve them. This Islamic concept was certainly used by the Waungwana to their benefit. Institutions such as Islam 'save' people time when making negotiations; many of the 'reasons' for a given behaviour or a person's position of dominance are contained within the religious code. For example, a person who follows Islamic beliefs also accepts that descendants of Muhammad are superior to other people, and that these people are best suited to direct the lives of others; they do not have to spend time proving or training for this role of leadership and power.

(2) The dominant groups, in our case the Waungwana, also 'use' the fact that they are only following a pattern which has persisted in many

countries for generations. These patterns of dominance give 'shape' to past experiences as well as daily life.

(3) The present is therefore known in terms of the past, which both contracts and expands time-consciousness.

(4) Time conceived in this way creates a subjective 'cyclic' time. The Waungwana had security, based on the traditional 'routineisation' of day-to-day life. This created a highly ordered world where the stress of having to negotiate every action in an open field of possibilities was reduced. This was only true, however, for Waungwana when they were within their homes and to some degree within their cities; when dealing with the groups whom they did not control in the bush, life must have been stressful and never routine. The Swahili towns were always threatened by the people on whom they depended to produce their trade products and this may be why life in the town was very highly ordered.

(5) The 'routineisation' of daily life involves specific people or groups performing 'given' tasks in designated spaces. This is a major form of structuration. These practices follow patterns through time and space during days, weeks, years and a person's lifetime. For various groups,

Arabs, Indians, Africans, freeborn, slaves, males, females, and children there are designated times and spaces. These separations are given social meaning and constitute ranking. The paths through divisions of time and space can be viewed as daily or life patterns; most of which within the Swahili context are related to the institution of Islam. If we look, for example (K 229), at a 'typical or ideal' Swahili day, we will see how the Waungwana males obtained power through the manipulation of time and space, but when 'stretched out' over the 'lived experience' of this culture it may not be obvious how this group created and maintained its control.

The tempo and pattern of the Swahili day is linked to the five times men go to the mosque to pray. This stresses the importance of Islamic beliefs and practices and the superior purity of 'believing men' over the non-believers and all women because only the 'pure' males were allowed to use the most highly valued space in the mosque. This changed with the abolition of slavery and now the descendants of ex-slaves do attend mosques, but they pray at the rear while the descendants of the freeborn pray at the front of the mosque nearer the mihrab.

The first call to prayer is at about 5:30 a.m. Women rise before this time and help men prepare to



go to the mosque. Women bathe and pray at home usually only after the men of the household leave for the mosque. This in effect reminds a woman, if only on a subconscious level, that her position is lower in relation to men; her time and the spaces she uses are less valued. Even within the house there is a 'pecking order' for prayers, women and older unmarried girls saying their prayers earlier than younger less powerful girls. The married Waungwana women of Pate pray on a bed which is placed on top of the ufuko, the symbolic grave of their ancestors, perhaps the most valued space within the house (K 268). Houses which have miswali, prayer niches, within the ndani provide a space inferior to the mosque but superior to all other alternatives open to women. Women usually pray in the areas where they sleep and store their personal goods, and these spaces are ranked within the house. The nana has the most highly valued space in the ndani and other women of decreasing rank have spaces assigned to them in areas moving out and down from the ndani, the lowest being near the door on the ground floor. The spaces in the house are therefore a physical metaphor of the social order within the house.

When men return from the mosque in the morning they are served breakfast by their wives. It is an



insult to Waungwana men to be served by a slave on any occasion. Women honour their husbands by serving them. (See the 'Advice of Mwana Kupona Upon the Wifely Duty' : Martin and Martin 1973,18). This reinforces the roles of dominance and submission. A woman is not 'free' to do otherwise because to do so would bring shame on herself, her mother and family. This is how it has been for generations and how all 'good' Islamic women behave. [Even Allah would want it so. What power does an individual woman have in the face of the supreme power of God?]

The ideal day continues, and men and boys leave the house for activities in the towns and mosques. The women clean the house, do laundry, prepare meals, and care for children. Or the nana in former times organised her slaves to do the 'dirty tasks' and she read the Koran, prayed and embroidered men's white caps, kofia, a symbol of 'purity' worn only by men. Women also wear white cloth, but only after ablutions while saying their prayers. At all other times a woman wears coloured fabrics, khanga or leso, wrapped around her body and when in public a black veil, bui-bui. A Mwaungwana man traditionally wears a white kofia and a white kanzu. His dress stresses his 'purity' in contrast to Waungwana women and the other groups

of people who do not wear white cloth, or could not possibly keep white cloth clean in the course of performing their physical 'dirty' work. Informants (K 169,222,280) said that the work of a mwungwana male was only to talk, read the Koran and pray. The Waungwana women who wore white to pray and made the white caps were inferior to Waungwana men but superior to those who never wore white and did 'dirty' work. 'Wealth may be discreetly sensed in the clothing of men. Immaculate whiteness of clothes has been noted as an important signifier of rank. Besides indicating a nonmanual occupation'. (Barth 1983,103-4).

Men return to the mosque for mid-day prayers and when they reach home their lunch is ready and waiting for them. Lunch is the main meal of the day. Rice, meat (often spiced) or fish (often curried) is prepared and served. Ibn Battuta described the meals eaten by the upper-class people of Mogadishu in about 1331 and almost the same diet is eaten in Lamu today (Freeman-Grenville 1962,29). In Battuta's time the meals were served on wooden trays and now aluminium trays are used. Men are served by their wives or daughters while seated on mats in the msana wa tini or the front room of smaller houses, and women and children eat later in the kitchen, one of the least 'valued' areas

of the house. If Waungwana women were served by slaves after the men in the main part of the house, they ate behind the area used by the men.

The type of food eaten and the manner in which it is prepared also has value-laden symbolic meanings (K 144,160,165,225,229,268,287). The most valued meat is beef; it is eaten most frequently by the most wealthy and powerful men. Beef is considered to be 'cool' and to be beneficial to the health of the body. Goat and mutton are also highly valued but are considered to be slightly 'hotter' than beef. Chicken is 'hot' meat and can give strength to women after childbirth, 'strength' to grooms on their wedding night and sleepless nights. Cows, goats, sheep and chickens are all used as sacrifices (see pages 270, 275-6) which mediate between the human and spirit world. These foods are worthy of God, spirits and the Waungwana. Fish is neither 'cold' nor 'hot' and is not worthy of spiritual activities. It is also the meat most often given to the inferior majority. Fresh fish is superior to dried or shell fish (see pages 342 and 270). Dried shark and king fish were the most common meat rations given to slaves. Slaves were also given grains (millet, maize etc.) grown on the plantations for export and their maintenance but the Waungwana ate imported rice. Rice is known

to be the preferred grain of many Muslims around the Indian Ocean and thereby had considerable social value. Complex dishes which required many processes, spices and a lot of time to prepare were also highly valued by the elite Swahili as they are today (K 94,144). These complicated meals also required several pieces of equipment, for example coconut-graters and vermicelli-squeezers (see illustrations in Allen 1972, 16). It was impossible for a slave labourer to have the time, assistance, ingredients, or equipment required to prepare the type of meals eaten by the Waungwana. The food that was considered 'better' was only given as a reward to wives and slaves. These dishes were also given as gifts to reinforce or establish relationships with other women or to 'court' a man (K 160).

Returning to the analysis of the typical Swahili day, after lunch children have religious training. Boys go to the mosque and girls have a teacher, often a souriya who comes to the house to give them instruction. The religious knowledge given women is always therefore considered to be inferior to that given men. Adult men go to sleep after lunch from about one to four o'clock. Adult women clean up after the meal and prepare the lighter evening meal or direct servants performing these tasks. From



2.30 to 5 p.m. married women are expected to be with their husbands. Sexual intercourse often occurs during this time and afterwards, before going out, both the husband and wife must perform ablutions to remove the pollution caused by sexual activity.

Men then go again to the mosque to pray for the third time and women say their prayers at home. Some women are then free to go out and visit their female friends and relatives, others may only visit those relatives whose houses they may reach through interconnecting passages. The hour and a half that women are allowed by their husbands and society to visit friends is precious time. It is an honour for someone to use her limited time to pay a visit. Because women have little 'free' time they often send gifts of food to their friends; this 'saves' time and reinforces friendships in a similar manner to visits.

At 5.30 p.m. women are expected to return home to say their prayers and read from the Koran. Men go to the mosque to pray and remain with friends until the fifth and final call to prayer at about 8.30. Men return home for their light meal which is served to them as described above for the mid-day meal. They then talk, play and read from the Koran to their children before they are

put to bed. Men then often go out again to be with their male friends until bed at about 10.30 p.m.

Yearly patterns and even life paths are similarly prescribed by Islam. Marriages take place at a given time in the life of a male and female; weddings usually take place during a specific period of the year before Ramadan and people either marry cousins or persons in categories prescribed by the institution of Islam. In addition monsoons brought traders from around the Indian Ocean every year around January and most left about six months later when the winds changed direction.

#### THE SPACES ASSIGNED TO PEOPLE BY WAUNGWANA MALES

The remaining portion of this chapter deals with the relationships between foreign traders (Muslim, Hindu and European) and the social and physical spaces given them by the waungwana males. What areas were they assigned, and how, if ever, did they cross spatial and social boundaries? The Waungwana men regarded Arabs quite differently from Indians and Europeans (always taken to include Americans). El Zein's account of their myth of creation points this out clearly (El Zein 1974, 202 quoted above, page 91). They thought of themselves as sons of Sam

but because Arab women rarely immigrated to East Africa they knew, and were uncomfortable about the fact that their lineage usually contained 'impure' African blood, i.e. that of Ham. As a result they were willing to have their daughters marry 'pure' Arab traders. The Arab traders who repeatedly came to Swahili towns to settle were not treated as complete outsiders.

The 'liminal' concept used by Victor Turner (1969) for people and places that are of a transitional nature can be used to understand how the Waungwana handled the Arabs. The open street was too public and was not thought to offer a setting conducive to conducting a good business deal between the trader from Arabia and the wholesale local trader who might also wish to have the economic relationship reinforced by having the foreign merchant as a son-in-law. The coral house of a Swahili trader had a stone bench in a covered porch called a daka (pl. madaka) (fig. 13). Here in the daka the men could come to discuss trade, while slaves provided coffee and sweetmeats for the master to serve his Arab guests. Many houses also had an entertaining room, sabule (see figs. 12b marked H, 14a and 14b and 16b marked C), which was separate from the main part of the house and often had windows that looked onto the street

(K 4,65,87,92,142,165,267). The madaka and the sabule were as liminal and transitional as the respected foreigner was to the Waungwana society. He could not be expected to do business in the street nor could he be invited into the house where he would see and perhaps threaten the honour of the wives and daughters of the family. He could not, since he was a 'pure' Muslim, be sent to sleep in the 'bush' where the pagan lived (and would be willing to trade and therefore cut out the Swahili middleman), but he certainly could not be given a bed in the main part of the house. For the most part, the foreign trader just slept on his ship or on the floor of the mosque. Sleeping on the mosque floor was an approved practice for travelling Muslim traders, but there were no restaurants and the long stay (often six months) enforced by the monsoon trade winds made the sabule of one's own house a more attractive alternative. However Waungwana men did not allow foreign traders to build their own houses until the late nineteenth century, after they had lost their power to the Omani Sultan in Zanzibar.

In 1331 Ibn Battuta described the pattern which I was told applied until the nineteenth century. He wrote that when a ship came into port young boys carried a covered dish containing food to a merchant



on board the foreign dhow. The boy would call out: 'This man is my guest' ... 'When a merchant has settled in his host's house, the latter sells for him what he has brought and makes his purchases for him. Buying anything from a merchant below its market price or selling him anything except in his host's presence is disapproved of by the people of Mogadishu. They find it of advantage to keep to this rule' (Freeman-Grenville 1962, 27-8).

Old Waungwana trading families in Lamu (K 267, 87) say that if they were sure that a man had a respectable reputation, and he had traded with their family for a period of years, the foreigner would be allowed to stay in their sabule. The closer a wealthy 'pure' Arab trader was to the family, the more powerful a local trader could become, both at home and abroad. The most obvious way a trader might be tied to a local family was if the foreigner asked to marry a freeborn daughter. For such an alliance to have far-reaching social and economic ramifications, the wedding had to be an auspicious social occasion. But the foreign trader would only be interested in marrying a freeborn virgin of known lineage. Only this would tie him to a locally powerful family, and be an advantage to him as well as to the Swahili family.

Waungwana women were kept 'pure' since they were the reproductive means of their class. Some

women were born within the walls of the house, and only left it to be buried (K 92,128). There are three women in Lamu today who know this degree of seclusion. The women were thus protected, and this strict purdah can certainly be seen as a control. Why was the control so harsh? Perhaps because the Waungwana men had called their known lineage into question by having slave wives. If the freeborn women were not strictly controlled, the claim to a pure line could have been lost completely. No respectable man would then see it as an advantage to marry the daughter if any women in the family had brought shame to the family. After marriage all must be shared, honour and shame. Thus, women became valued objects, as controlled as other highly valued goods. If a slave or anyone could have an elite daughter, who would then want one? Not a Waungwana or a wealthy foreign trader.

The daughter of a Mwungwana or any Arab must marry either an equal, for example a cousin or a foreign Arab. A son, on the other hand, could take a socially inferior girl. The family used to arrange their son's first marriage to a Mwungwana girl to strengthen local economic and political relationships. The first wife was therefore freeborn, but after that a son could have

as many slave wives as he wanted. He could also have more freeborn wives, up to a total of four, if he could afford to keep them all in equal comfort, as was the Islamic requirement. The freeborn daughters were used for important local family unions, and to facilitate 'intercontinental' ties (K 92). If the father of a mwungwana could afford it, he had a house built, a floor added or at least a room added for his daughter, and her husband came to live with her. The purpose of such marriages was to extend the family alliances and prestige. Thus some marriages contributed to the integration of the family unit and its security (Bourdieu 1977, 58-71). The marriages to foreigners could be prestigious, but they were also more risky. These marriages could provide rich 'pure' Arab blood and good business connections, but what if the foreigner married the girl and took her back to his home in Arabia? How was this investment of the prized, freeborn, purest of daughters, protected?

If a 'pure' daughter was married to a foreigner in a small private wedding ritual and taken from Lamu, the family might well lose its investment. But if a coral house was built for and delivered to the bride, on the large and auspicious occasion of an extraordinary wedding day, the foreign trader was firmly tied to the family. The groom could

sail away forever, but not with the bride, fine house and its contents. All of this tended to make the marriages durable. There was at least some incentive to return to Lamu with each monsoon wind, if not to settle there. Often the outsiders themselves did want to settle in Africa, as this was the easiest way for an outsider to break into the Waungwana hold on local property, exports and even political power. It is often easier to join a group than fight them and even the relationship between the Omani rulers and the Waungwana was no different, even in more recent years.

One of the best known examples of such a process was the marriage between the local Waungwana family of Pate, the Batawi, and the Nabahani family from Oman back in the sixteenth century. While the Nabahani retained the Batawi family name for a period, they used the Nabahani name when they established their own ruling dynasty (Chittick 1969).

Now we have come to see that while the house was a barrier to outsiders, it could be entered by both the slaves and the male foreigners through marriage unions. Did an Indian trader have an opportunity to occupy the same spaces as the Waungwana and in time become a Mwungwana



through a marriage union? There are many social reasons why this was not allowed and most are linked to the concept of purity.

The Waungwana were not interested in the Indian traders joining their ranks because they were not seen as 'pure' Arabs. Most of the Indian Muslims were Hindu<sup>1.</sup> converts and Shia rather than Sunni Muslims as were, at least, later Waungwana. These converts and Hindus had even stronger attitudes about 'purity' and 'pollution' caused by marrying outside one's sect or caste, and therefore they did not want publicly to marry Waungwana girls. If they did so they would become outcasts if or when they returned home. It would have meant completely cutting themselves off from their families for all time. Until the late nineteenth century few <sup>Hindu</sup> <sup>2.</sup> Indians had settled on the coast of Africa because they were not allowed to bring wives from India. It was considered polluting to Hindus to travel by sea, and they were not allowed to marry local women in Africa (also for reasons of pollution). Even today Indians rarely marry outside their ethnic group, whether Muslim or Hindu. Hindus will not even eat food prepared by a Muslim.

When Indians, mostly Bohra Muslims, did settle in Lamu, the space where they located

1. Many Indian families have been Muslims for generations, others are recent converts.
2. Other Indian groups may have settled in East Africa but as yet the

fitted well into structuring principles which had gone before. Europeans (the English) who at first supported the Omani Sultans of Zanzibar and later destroyed their power, directed a land-filling operation on the Lamu seafront. (I am assuming that it was under the direction of the English, because they would have felt most the need to improve the docking facilities. Both Arabs and Indians are accustomed to using small boats to transfer goods from large ships to shore.) On the seafront, reclaimed land, the Indians built their houses and shops beside the large houses belonging to the now most powerful group, the Omanis backed by the Sultan of Zanzibar. That placed the Waungwana spatially behind them, in an inferior position, which was in reality also true in relation to their power. Trading was taken out of the houses of the Waungwana and located in front of the Omani garrisoned fort and into the Indian shops below where they lived. (More data will be given concerning the houses used by Indians in Lamu and north-western Indian in chapter 5.) Again the 'red dust' of the Europeans and Indians had been able to 'change one thing into another' and the Waungwana were left with only white dust and perhaps their 'absolute knowledge', which the 'pure' Omani Arabs questioned.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the social uses of Swahili spaces which are often bounded by coral walls. The floor plan of these houses has been seen to follow a pattern; and the most distinctive feature of these houses is perhaps their plaster decorated walls, especially the wall of niches (zidaka) in the ndani. Plaster walls and niches are not found inland in Africa and therefore it seemed natural to consider Indian Ocean influences. Because of the historical connections that the coast of Africa has had with Oman and India these were the areas to be considered for comparative material. I applied for research permits to work in Oman and was turned down. Dr R. Lewcock, an architect, who has worked in many Islamic countries on restoration projects, has cross-cultural experience concerning building form in the Indian Ocean littoral. It was because of his guidance (1971,86; 1976,22) that I compared the domestic spaces and their social uses within East Africa with those in Western India. Architectural influences have come to both Africa and India from many sources, but the periods after the Portuguese rule on the East African coast and that of the Omani domination was strongly affected by trade contacts with western India. This was

supported by historical data in chapter 3 and in the findings presented in the following chapter. Chapter 5 compares Swahili and Indian door-thresholds, floor plans and wall decorations, all aspects often detectable in archaeological remains. Both chapters 4 and 5 are preparations for the analysis of ruined houses in the Lamu archipelago (chapter 6). Without the study of contemporary Swahili and Indian house uses and meanings it is difficult to begin interpretation of archaeological remains of similar houses and the objects within them.



## CHAPTER 5

## INDIA

Indian Ocean trade, made possible by the monsoon winds, has linked parts of India and eastern Africa since at least the second-century A.D. (see quote on page 75 ). To study one area without the other would lead to an incomplete understanding of both. Not to place an investigation within a specific historical and social context would certainly lead to misinterpretation of data.

This chapter is primarily based on a nine-week comparative study of twenty-one traditional houses in the twenty-two trade-linked port towns of Gujarat, north-western India (see figs. 1 and 2). The research in India was extremely limited and much of my interpretation is based on the work of two Indian scholars, Professor R.S. Khare and Dr V.S. Pramar (Khare 1976a and b, Pramar 1980).

The traditional houses which were studied in Gujarat and the Lamu area were built during the last half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the period leading up to this time few Africans had migrated to India and very few Indians lived in Africa, although the trade

had started in the second century A.D. (Schoff 1912; Gopal 1975).

'For centuries Indian ships, particularly those of Kutch and Surat, had traded to the Swahili Coast; in fact, much of the coast's commerce had been in Indian hands in pre-Portuguese times' (Nicholls 1971,78 quoting Strandes 1961, 92-3). 'The residence of the Indians on the Swahili Coast was seasonal; before the nineteenth century they do not appear to have spent long periods there' (Nicholls 1971, 78). Hollingsworth, however, wrote that 'A few Bohras started coming to East Africa in the eighteenth century. Sir John Kirk reported records of a small settlement of Bohra on the north-west coast of Madagascar about 1750. A little later they began to form trading settlements in the East African coast between Lamu and Patta. During the early nineteenth century they ceased coming from Surat and started coming from Cutch' (Hollingsworth 1960,148).

Arabs had settled in both eastern Africa and India and many Hindus had converted to Islam by the sixteenth century. At this time the Portuguese had control of the trade between India and Africa but, as Gregory points out, the Indians did not lost their links with Africa even during this period. They continued to work for Portugues just as they had

done for the earlier and later Muslims who had controlled the trade and many of the settlements (Gregory 1971,16). For example (as cited in chapter 3, page 102 ) in 1593 Indian masons were employed by the Portuguese for the construction of Fort Jesus at Mombasa. In the seventeenth century, after the Portuguese lost their power, the contact between India and Africa increased because of the Indian market for the grains produced on the waungwana plantations, and the demand for African ivory (Sheriff 1971, 42,306).

The part of India most associated with the Lamu archipelago was the major seventeenth century port near Surat and the areas to the north, Saurashtra (the old name for Kathiwar, recently revived) and Kutch (Kaccha, Kachchh or Cutch). This area is the present-day state of Gujarat.

Drought and unseasonable rainfall are common in Gujarat, and men were often forced to emigrate to Africa for employment, but they returned home and/or sent their earnings back to their families in India. As late as 1870 high-caste Hindu traders could not bring their wives to Africa (Pearce 1920, 98; Mangat 1961,13; Gregory 1971,34; Sheriff 1971, 354). Hindus were not allowed to marry outside their caste (O'Malley 1932,95). Indian Muslim traders, Khoja and Bohra, who were converted Hindus,



were the first to settle. However, the number of male emigrant workers who worked outside India was considerable (as noted earlier in chapter 3, page 103 often over 24,000 per year).

These skilled Indians had an impact on the material culture, the houses and their contents, of the Lamu archipelago, and many examples have been given in chapter 4 and 5. But how similar was the symbolic meaning of these domestic spaces within a different social setting, i.e. India?

To discover the symbolic meaning contained in the features of traditional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses, both in India and Africa, it was considered necessary to study houses which the occupants claimed had been built during that period by their ancestors. Within the belief systems of Hinduism and Islam change is slow and therefore ethnographic research was relevant to the understanding of the house form. The relationships between the occupants, domestic spaces and objects during ritual and mundane activities revealed the symbolic meaning of three main elements of structuration: people, spaces and objects. People create or attribute social meaning to spaces and objects, but once this meaning is established within daily and ritual activities, it is capable, by association, of playing a part in the maintenance of structuring



of a given social system. In other words, objects and domestic spaces may give social meaning to certain people, and are therefore not merely a background for social action. A few house features have been selected to point out how a social system marks boundaries around itself. These boundaries set it apart from other groups, which may have competing social systems. Categories of persons are also maintained within each of these social systems. (Within the Swahili context this was discussed in some detail in chapter 4). For example, the social system may be Hindu or Muslim, but within either system there may be 'sub-castes', slaves, concubines and a hierarchy between men and women and <sup>male and female</sup> elders. Social status in both the Hindu and Afro-Arab (Swahili) context is based on a concept of religious or ritual purity (Dumont and Pocock 1958; Dumont 1980; El Zein 1974). What is 'outside' their social order is seen as threatening in that contact may be defiling and thereby cause a loss of status. The Muslims in <sup>East</sup> Africa are a small minority, and therefore anxious about their social margins. 'The Hindu caste system, while embracing all minorities, embraces them each as a distinctive, cultural sub-unit. In any given locality, a sub-caste is likely to be a minority' (Douglas 1966, 124).

The Muslim and Hindu houses discussed in this chapter, as the Swahili houses analysed in chapter 4, are considered to be a metaphor of their bounded social systems. In both Swahili and Indian houses there is evidence of anxiety about the margins of the house, and therefore also of the boundaries of each system. This concern is represented in the protective charms associated with doorways. (These interviews in Gujarat contained ethnographic information used to write this section (G 75,111,178, 191).

Many traditional Hindu houses were built around a shared courtyard, pol, with one main gate. A room set aside for male elders was located above the gate. This gate marked the settlement boundary and was guarded not only by the elders or religious leaders who lived above it, but also by symbols of various gods and goddesses (fig. 33). Individual houses also have these protective markers located around and on the doorway (fig. 34) in India and many of the Indian shop doors in Mombasa, Zanzibar and on the main street of Lamu. The following markers were common to the Hindu houses studied in Gujarat: (1) carved in stone or wood, the elephant god, Ganesh; (2) the lotus flower, which is the symbol of the goddess Luxmi (fig. 34); (3) a peacock, the sacred bird of Hindus; (4) mango leaves, either

fresh or carved (fig. 34) on the door lintel. Some of the decorations mentioned are specifically intended to protect the fertility or wealth of the household, which are both linked to the purity or status of the occupants.

Rituals establish and reinforce these boundary markers. An elaborate ceremony is performed when the door is erected at a new house site. This was traditionally the first step in building a house and was done before the walls were constructed or, in fact, the foundation was laid. Some houses have lamp niches with stepped arches, like the dome of a Hindu temple, on each side of the main door where the ritual burning of ghee (clarified butter) protects the inhabitants of the house. Daily prayers, puja, are also performed on the threshold of Hindu houses. It is part of a ritual purification which protects the house and those within from the evil and defilement of outsiders.

There are times of course when a mechanism is needed to allow 'outsiders' to cross these boundaries, for example, when a bride is brought into her husband's household. A ritual mediates and marks her passage. Women are powerful within the patrilocal Hindu society because they are the ones most directly responsible for the purity of their caste. The caste of a child is always



that of its mother (Douglas 1966,125). Women, in one sense 'outsiders' to their husbands' households, are seen as the source of inauspicious events (Cormack 1961,164). Their passage into and out of the household must be clearly marked. If a woman dies in childbirth, a nail is placed in the threshold of the door to prevent her bad spirit from returning to the house to cause the death of future infants that might be born within the household. If the husband intends to remarry, as he is expected to do, he may not accompany his wife's bier to the cremation ground and he ties a piece of her sari to the door lintel to symbolise his interest in having a new wife.

Figurative Hindu symbols, such as the elephant god, Ganesh, are never found on Muslim houses either in India or eastern Africa because they are believed to prevent angels from entering the house (see earlier reference, chapter 4, page 134). Carved lotus flowers and mango leaves are however common Hindu motifs found on Muslim doors both in Gujarat and Kenya. The craftsmen who worked stone and wood were for the most part Hindus, both in India and Africa. Slave labour certainly made the construction of the large number of grand houses built in Lamu in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century possible, but slaves lacked the specialised skills



that the immigrant Hindu craftsmen had to offer. The fact that the craftsmen were Hindu and that the earliest Indian Muslim settlers in eastern Africa were Bohra, converted Hindus, explains the tendency toward Hindu symbols on doors both in India and Kenya.

In Lamu the earlier coral houses owned by local Sunni Muslims have doors with only a few mango leaves and lotus flowers on the centre posts. The Lamu shopfront houses on the main street were built for, or by, Indians and have more elaborate carving, not only with leaves and lotus flowers, but also the sacred peacock protecting the doorways to their businesses and homes. Muslims often ordered inscriptions from the Holy Koran to be carved on their door lintels.

On Gujarat Muslim houses, an arch, similar in style to a mihrab in a mosque, replaces the central figure of Ganesh, most common on Hindu doors. (This motif has been argued above, within the Swahili context, to be a protective decoration; see Chapter 4. Bohra Muslims, a large trading community in Gujarat and Lamu, have many practices that are related to the fact that their ancestors were Hindu. They often use a photograph of their religious leader as a protective charm over the doorways within the house in the same

way as drawings of gods and goddesses are used in the Hindu homes. Various protective symbols are used by both Muslims and Hindus as well as many other ethnic groups, to protect the entrances of their homes and compounds. Coconuts and shoes were mentioned in chapter 4 and buried charms, including buried animals, will be discussed in chapter 6 as devices used to protect Swahili doorways or to 'close' their house. When houses are seen as metaphors of a social system it is easier to understand why the marginal area, the door, requires special attention by the threatened minority group.

It is not only marginal areas of the house which are given symbolic meaning, but also internal spaces, features and objects. Their symbolic value reinforced and/or established a social hierarchy within the society. For this discussion a basic knowledge of the house plan of traditional houses in Gujarat is necessary. My sample was too small in Gujarat to be able to establish characteristic types, and therefore I am grateful to Prammar (1980) for his extensive study of Gujarat house styles. He has described three types of houses found in three areas of Gujarat, and my limited survey supported his findings (fig. 35). The three house types

which will be discussed are as follows: (1) the South Gujarat, (2) the North Gujarat and (3) the Saurashtra and Kutch.

#### THE SOUTH GUJARAT HOUSE TYPE

The South Gujarat (Bombay to Broach) house type has two or three parallel rooms with a passage along one side connecting a men's area in the front, and a back door near where the women, hearth and valuables are located. An example is the Hindus' house which I recorded in Navsari (G 202) (fig. 36). This house plan is unlike any in eastern Africa. The only similarity which it has with Swahili houses is that it has parallel rooms. There is a type found in both Lamu and Bombay but it is not the South Gujarat plan and it will be mentioned below.

#### THE NORTH GUJARAT HOUSE TYPE

The North Gujarat (north of Broach, the Ahmedabad, Baroda, Cambay area) house type also has the 'deep house' plan of three parallel rooms one behind the other. However, the middle room has a chowk, opening to the sky, and there is no rear door, unlike the southern type. A passage runs through the centre of the dwelling. Men work or entertain guests in



the front of the house, and women usually cook and perform daily activities around the chowk or in the rear of the house. Wall niches are common in the thick walls of this type of house. Each room is at a slightly higher level, the back room being the highest, darkest and most private. Wall niches and raised floor levels are also characteristics found in traditional Swahili houses in Lamu. This Indian house type is most similar to the Lamu eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traders' houses and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian shopfront houses found on Lamu's main street.

I recorded six houses of this type and although they belonged to both Hindus and Muslims they all have the characteristics of the North Gujarat house form. Two of the houses belonged to Hindus; one was located in Ahmedabad (G 45) (fig. 37) and the other, a very large and complex house, was located in Surat (G 178) (fig. 38a and b). The latter house followed the same pattern but, because of its size, rooms were more specialised in their use. For example, on the ground floor on each side of the court there were separate rooms for entertaining male visitors with guest rooms above for overnight male guests (fig. 38a and b, rooms marked A, B, C and D). On the first floor at the back of the house (fig. 38b, room marked E) there



was a room used only by women and their newborn infants for a period of seclusion. The women were considered 'unclean' and the room was not used on any other occasion.

Four of the houses belonged to Bohra Muslims. One of the North Gujarat houses studied, located in Rander (G 191) (near Surat), was owned by a Bohra of the Sunni sect (fig. 39a and b). This house had, however, been built and used by Hindus. The owner told me this, and there were water tables (shelves in niches intended for water containers) on both the ground floor and the first floor (see fig. 39a and b; water tables marked A and B). These water tables were also present in the two Hindu houses mentioned above (fig. 37 area marked A and fig. 39a area marked F).

Rander was a major port before Surat. Arabs from Kufa are said to have settled there in A.D.1225. By 1297 all of Gujarat was ruled by the Muslim Sultan of Delhi, and therefore Muslim traders were favoured. Generations of Arab traders exported silk, musk and porcelain. 'Their houses were well furnished and nicely decorated and they exhibited china in their drawing rooms' (Gazetteer of India 1962,82). Rander declined in the sixteenth century because of Portuguese raids and Surat became more important from the sixteenth century until the nineteenth.

Cambay was the major port in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, before it was sacked and burned by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. It was at that time, Barbosa wrote, that beads and cloth were being exported from Cambay to Mombasa and Malindi (Freeman-Grenville 1962,127).

Bohra, taken from the Gujarati word vohoru, meaning to trade, had their headquarters first in Cambay and then they moved to Surat, Sidpur and Bombay (fig. 2). The next three North Gujarat type houses that I recorded belonged to Shia Bohra who lived in Cambay (G 130), Sidpur (G 152) and Bombay (G 150). It was these Bohra traders who were the first Indians to settle in eastern Africa (page 212 ). The Bohra house in Cambay was two-storeyed, and had a complex system of doors which allowed men to enter the house and go to the first floor without seeing the women who were cooking, etc. on the ground floor (fig. 40a, doors marked A). The first room on the first floor was used by men during the day, like a Swahili sabule, but was used by the head of the household and his wife as their bedroom at night (fig. 40b, room marked B). Married couples are supposed to have a toilet/wash area near their bedroom, which will make ablutions easy after sexual intercourse. They must wash before they come into contact with anyone in their polluted state.

The Bohra house in Sidpur (fig. 41) was most like the traditional coral houses in Lamu (compare to figs. 42 and 41). The Lamu houses are generally larger and often a room and a second toilet is added at the back, which is used by the master of the house and his wife. The Sidpur house has niches for porcelain on the back wall, as in Lamu houses, and each room is higher as one moves back through the 'deep plan' of parallel rooms. (The niches will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter).

The Bohra house in Bombay (G 150) (fig. 43) was a large multi-storey house with a shop on the ground floor. I was only allowed to make a measured drawing on the first floor, but each floor above the ground floor shop had an open chowk with a main room at the front (fig. 43, marked A) and a second more private room at the back. The house recorded (K 341) had a terrace at the front, but not all of the Bohra houses had this feature. Some of the houses in Lamu which belong to Bohra have terraces (fig. 44a and b, areas marked A and B); they are terraces that have been closed to make an additional room) but this is not a common feature. The Bohra house in Lamu (fig. 44a and b) has a shop on the ground floor and domestic quarters on the upper



level. The stairs are located on one side of the house and enter the living space in the middle area, in both the Bombay and Lamu Bohra houses. Both houses also have an open chowk on the upper level. The front room on the upper level of a Lamu house is also used as the main 'sitting' room of the house, as in the Bombay houses. In other words the house plan is the same, as is the use of spaces.

Another smaller Indian house was also recorded in Lamu (K 307) (figs. 45a and b). This house had basically the same plan but was originally owned by the Aga Khan and is now rented by the only Sunni Indian family in Lamu. I have included it only to show another slight variation on the type of house used by Indians in Lamu.

In chapter 4 these houses were described briefly and reference was made to Ghaidan's survey which recorded 88 of these 'shopfront' buildings in Lamu (Ghaidan 1976,66). Ghaidan did not, however, mention that they were an Indian style building and similar to the ones owned by Bohra in India.

#### THE SAURASHTRA AND KUTCH HOUSE TYPE

The third type of Gujarat house plan set out by Prammar was the Saurashtra and Kutch style (see fig.35



and examples, figs. ~~45a+b, 46a+b, 47a+b, 48a+b~~<sup>49</sup>. These houses commonly have a large walled courtyard attached to the front of the house which is used for livestock. The house has a long, usually open, veranda at the front and two small rooms to the rear. When men are present women are usually in the rear rooms but when men are out of the house and courtyard the women move forward. This is the common activity pattern in both Hindu and Muslim houses in the Lamu archipelago and in Gujarat; men use the front areas of the house and women's areas are at the back.

Seclusion of women, stressed within Islam, is a factor even in the Hindu belief system perhaps because it was linked with the social status and the wealthy Moghul rulers of Gujarat (Shibani 1979, 120). It was also probably associated with controlling the women who determined the purity of the lineage or caste.

I recorded four houses of the Saurashtra and Kutch type. In Bhuj, once the capital of Kutch, two houses were measured and drawn. The first house belonged to a Hindu (G 18) (figs. 45a and b) and the second to a Shia Bohra (figs. 47a and b). The two house plans were the same. A third, similar example, was recorded in the port town of Mahuva (G 15) (fig. 48). This house belonged to a Sunni

Muslim family.

Mahuva is known for its skilled craftsmen who make carved doors, chests and turned furniture. And the same is true for the town of Mandvi, a port town, further north. In both towns I was told (L 6,7 and 16) that both Muslim (Sunni and Bohra, usually Shia) and Hindus exported goods to eastern Africa and also went to work there in lean years. The craftsmen and traders said that this had been a pattern for generations, but no one could say when the practice first started. Most of the Bohras who now live in Lamu originated from Mandvi. However, some of the Indian families who settled in Lamu said their ancestors came via Bombay and/or Zanzibar. A few also mentioned that their families came from India first to Siyu on Pate island. Siyu is also known for the production of turned furniture. This may tie in well with the reference (chapter 3, page 213) to an early (Kirk 1871) Bohra trading settlement between Lamu and Pate (Hollingsworth 1960, 148).

Unfortunately I did not record a house in Siyu. However, the houses that were measured and drawn in nearby Pate are similar to the Saurashtra and Kutch house type (compare Mandvi Bohra house, fig. 49 and Pate house, fig. 50). These Pate houses are probably not over one hundred years old and lack the plasterwork

and niches which were typical of the older and grander Pate houses. The larger more decorated houses were built in the seventeenth and eighteenth century when the main Indian ports were further south in Rander and Surat. In summary, the early Indian traders and craftsmen came from Surat and the later ones came from Kutch and Saurashtra. The earlier Swahili houses are like the North Gujarat house type, with many niches, etc. and the later Swahili houses, like some in Pate, are like the Kutch and Saurashtra type. The Bohra who came from Mandvi, Mahuva and Bombay to Lamu live in Bombay-style houses which are more like the North Gujarat type, probably because they originated in the north in Cambay, Surat and Sidpur.

All Swahili houses and Gujarat houses have 'deep plan' long narrow rooms one behind the other. If the houses have an upper level the house plan is repeated, as is generally the pattern of use. The upper level is often the more prized area of the house; therefore, the upper front room is generally used by men to entertain guests, if sufficiently separated from the women's area in the house.

#### SYMBOLIC MEANING OF DOMESTIC SPACES

##### IN INDIA

The symbolic meaning or social values associated



with the various areas of the Swahili houses were presented in detail in chapter 4. In this chapter, to provide a comparison, the same type of analysis will be applied to Hindu houses. As was noted earlier, Hindus and Muslims in India live in the same type of houses, and these vary geographically. To understand an Indian house it is necessary to understand it within the Hindu belief system, because most of the Muslims in India are Hindu converts.

The most important symbolic pattern or system of structuration within a Hindu house plan is that, as people move from the front of the house to the rear, they move from impure and public space to pure and private space. Toilets and bathing facilities should be separate, but near each other, for after defecation the least time and distance should be involved in reaching the area of purification; cooking and worshipping places should be as far away as possible from these, but adjacent to each other (facilitating the offering of pure food to the domestic deity with, again, the least involvement of time and distance once the cooked food - symbolising a transitional stage - is ready) and the pure and impure spaces should neither be facing towards each other nor located on the same side, nor



should they be in the same enclosure' (Khare 1976a, 30).

The Hindu house in Navsari (fig. 36) best follows this plan. The place of worship is marked A, the food area is marked B and the water supply (table) is marked C. In the North Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch house types this pattern is not followed. The cooking area and water table are usually either near the open chowk or the open courtyard, faliyu. The cooking area and shrine are where there is most concern about 'purity'.

'The Hindu cooking area mirrors most effectively the social and cultural world surrounding it at any particular moment. It literally is a structured space par excellence, where widely different relationships from myth, ritual and kinship, denoting a host of different meanings, are sorted out and arranged in unambiguous relation' (Khare 1976a, 28).

'One approximate measure for determining the ritual rank of the food area (at any particular point of time) can be obtained by finding out what (person) ritual object, activities and relationships can either be included in it or excluded from it' (Khare 1976a, 32).

If a lower-caste person is in the process of washing and replastering the cooking area, its rank

is low, but once that person leaves and the area is dried, the rank is 'next' to the worshipping place. The living spaces are normally ritually 'neutral' but become impure when used during the maternity period for forty days, or by a woman during her period of menstruation. A woman in either state is not allowed to prepare food for the family or even to enter the cooking area. Her impurity is stronger and more dangerous than that of a lower-caste person or an untouchable (Cormack 1961,70; Khare 1976).

From these few examples the general pattern of relationships that create meaning for spaces, objects and persons within the Hindu belief system can be seen to be based on purity and the position of women. Women are important in maintaining the purity of the caste lineage, the cultural heritage, by teaching and performing the household rituals (Cormack 1961,149,152-4,161). However, they are second to men (as in the case of the Waungwana women) because of their basic biological impurities, and they are reminded of this fact in the polluting affect they can have on the household objects and spaces. Only death within the household can cause stronger pollution. The hearth reflects and plays a part in the creation of the ritual condition of a house. When a wedding is in progress the cooking

area expands; when someone dies, no cooking takes place in the house for several days (Khare 1976<sup>a</sup>, 171).

The meaning or social value of a space within the Hindu house can be altered by ritual events or the ritual condition of persons entering a space, although there is a general pattern that can be seen under 'normal' conditions.

In the Muslim houses studied, as in the Hindu houses, the area near the front of the dwelling is more associated with men, public space and impurity. Men in both societies spend little time in the house, and if they do conduct their business from their homes a room is located in the front of the house for this purpose. In the Muslim houses, like the Hindu pattern, the most interior rooms of the house are associated with the seclusion of women and ritual activities.

Cooking is not, within Islam, a ritual activity as it is to Hindus, and therefore the location does not require religious purity. The kitchen may in fact be located near a latrine area, and menstruating women may prepare food for the family.

Bathing areas and latrines are to be found in both the front and rear of the Muslim houses, and the only stated concern (especially of the Shia Bohra) is that married couples who sleep together should



have a toilet/wash area near their room to use for ablutions after sexual intercourse, or saying their prayers or coming into contact with other people. Traditionally, married Hindu couples slept in separate rooms and sexual intercourse, considered a very polluting activity, did not take place in the house.

Muslim women are as powerful as Hindu women in the daily running of the household and in relation to rituals that are performed within the house, but like the Hindu women they are taught to believe that they contain a basic impurity connected with their procreative powers which makes them inferior to their husbands and to men in general. The houses may be primarily associated with Hindu and Muslim women but they are not equal to the mosques or temples.

The general orientation of the house is seen as important in both Islamic and Hindu belief systems. The door of a Hindu house should ideally be facing north or east (Das 1977) and a Muslim house should be on the same axis as Mecca, which is west of India and north of Lamu. All the Shia Bohra Muslims live in houses on an east-west axis in Lamu, while the Swahili Sunni Muslim houses are basically on the north-south axis in alignment with Mecca. It seems that the converted Bohra in India had all the Hindu



and Muslim directional advantages by building on the east-west axis, east for the Hindu belief system and west for Mecca. In Lamu, the Bohra shopfront houses were built on reclaimed land that ran along the harbour (fig. 15), excellent for commercial reasons but more suitably orientated for a Hindu than for a Muslim.

Another factor, concerned with the general nature of a Hindu house, is its ideal shape. The walls splay out, making the rear of the house less than a metre larger than the front room of the house. This is called a cow-faced house or gaumukhi (G 202); the reverse is a tiger-faced house, vaghmukhi, the former being the more auspicious. The difference required is so slight that I am unable to say what percentage of the houses I studied reflected this characteristic.

A final general trait, linked to Hindu building practices, is the auspicious placing of niches. The lamp niches located outside a Hindu house have been mentioned earlier, but niches are also a dominant feature within the north Gujarat and the Saurashtra/Kutch house types as set out by Parmar. Niches are related to all openings, be they other niches, windows or doors. All must be 'balanced', and to accomplish this each door or niche must face and line up with

another, or vedha occurs, which is inauspicious. The vedha, or lack of 'balance', is an unstable condition which is believed to cause the inhabitants of the house to be unable to balance their accounts, to reproduce at the desired rate, or be harmonious within their extended family. They may even die as a result. Why should niches, gokala, have such power?

Like other symbols, the meaning may be ambiguous, but clues to the ascribed meaning may be found within the cultural context. Meaning is often, if not always, learned or transmitted through action. And therefore we must look at all of the ways gokala are used. As noted above, they can house the diva (lamp), which is known as the sign of knowledge. Its shape is related to that of the Hindu temple, but not all niches have this form or function. Most of the niches inside houses are large rectangular niches. These niches may be used to house a family deity. There is a large, central and elaborately decorated niche, called ariyo, in most Saurashtra houses where the family god or goddess was said to have lived in the past, but in all of the houses I visited it was used as a cupboard without any obvious religious overtones (figs. 46a and b; niches marked A and B ).

In a North Gujarat house that had many wall niches I noticed an area on a wall where a niche

had been blocked and whitewash had been applied around where the opening had once been. I asked why the niche had not been whitewashed over, and I was told it was not painted over 'out of respect'. Later, I learned (B 173) that a broken deity had been placed on this niche. The 'life' had been removed, but a spirit of the deity, perhaps malevolent powers, could haunt the area. People are also warned to check niches, because enemies place dough figures in such places to curse the household. Gokala seem to house powerful ideas of both good and evil, and have therefore been an area of interest and attention to the occupants of Hindu houses.

Bohra Muslims, in Gujarat and eastern Africa, whose ancestors were Hindu, practise many Hindu customs and perhaps their symbolic use of niches carries some of the meaning associated with the Hindu belief system. In the earliest mosques in India materials were taken from Hindu temples. The idols housed in niches were broken and removed but the niches remained as a part of the surface decoration. This can be clearly seen in Friday Mosque, Broach (figs. 51 and 52).

In many Bohra houses in Gujarat, on the innermost wall of the house (North Gujarat type) was located a five-foot square, the naukhanah, composed of nine niches made of wood but set into the wall



(figs. 41, 53 and 54). The niches were usually filled with imported porcelain (Bombay Gazetteer 1899, 93). Traditional Swahili houses, it will be remembered, have rows of plaster niches, zidaka, in the same position within the house (figs. 42 and 31). However, there were never as few as nine, nor were they framed with wood, although they were also filled with imported porcelain.

Zidaka or naukhanah are never a part of Bohra houses in eastern Africa. During the survey of the Bohra wards of Mandvi and Mandra in Kutch and Rander near Surat, I noticed that one house in each town had plaster niches very similar to the Lamu zidaka (figs. 49 and 55). Mandvi, Mandra and Rander are the towns from which many people, including craftsmen, leave in search of work in years of famine (see above reference, page 103).

The plaster niches in the Bohra houses in Gujarat were shaped like the mihrab of the local mosque and, more importantly, were located only in the houses of Bohra religious leaders (figs. 55 and 56). Upon further questioning (G16) it was learned that these rows of small niches were considered religious charms with powerful protective qualities.

The plaster niches, found in the houses of Bohra religious leaders, were constructed of a



durable material, i.e. not wood, often whitewashed to represent their purity, and were never to be destroyed or allowed to decay. They were also associated with the magic squares of nine, which contain the names of Allah, that are often placed over doorways, and the nine wooden squares of the naukhanah. Zidaka are not found in Swahili houses after the Bohra community settled in Lamu in the late nineteenth century. Plaster niches, associated only with religious leaders in India, would have been considered a sacrilege in the average Swahili Muslim house. Once the Bohra traders and craftsmen began to settle in Lamu, the practice of the craftsmen might have been influenced by Bohra beliefs. Perhaps earlier, in the eighteenth century, it had been known to the Hindu craftsmen that plaster niches were an auspicious and protective Muslim decoration. If their clients wanted Muslim, rather than Hindu, plaster decorations, as the Swahili certainly would have, this was what they were given.

As has been described in some detail in chapter 4, the mihrab-shaped niches are found where defilement is strongest in the Swahili houses. They are located in the ndani, where death and sexual intercourse take place, and over the pit toilets. The ndani is also the room most associated with women. Even the pit toilets were required inside the house as a result

of the seclusion of women. The status of the family was linked to its 'purity', and many of the house features and spaces were given symbolic meaning intended to support that goal.

Within the context of the larger Islamic world under the Abbasides, as can be seen in Samarra, the surface of a wall can be covered with stucco niches. 'Eventually it became customary in Persia, as well as in India [see fig. 57, Red Fort in Dehli] to cover the wall with purely decorative niches' (Kuhnel 1963,350).

The origin of these decorative niches, called in Arabic mugarnas, is uncertain, but Burchardt writes (1976,74) that the oldest example (eight century A.D.) is in Syria and by the end of the twelfth century it had spread throughout the Muslim world. Grabar, an art historian, who has written extensively on Islamic decoration, feels that the mugarnas is an Islamic form which 'is a metaphor for the all pervasive but intangible divine, for the presence of God in all human creations' (Grabar 1976,2). In other words a geometric expression of God.

The symbolic meaning, and structuring objects and spaces contained in traditional Hindu and Muslim houses of Gujarat and Lamu, have been explored within a social and historical context. Each group has no doubt influenced the other in some respects, but

the fact that Hindu women did not accompany their husbands, who were traders and craftsmen, meant that Hindus did not settle in eastern Africa until after the grand houses of the Lamu archipelago were completed. Therefore, the Hindu craftsmen may have directed the work of slaves and even worked themselves on, for example, plaster decorations or furnishings for the Swahili houses. They also imported cloth, porcelain and many other goods from China. However, their Hindu practices did not give meaning to objects and spaces within the Swahili houses. The symbolic meaning within the Hindu and Muslim houses studied was dependent on the position attributed to women. It was the women's relationship to men and other women, as well as spaces and objects in the house, which structured the society. The house, Muslim or Hindu, cannot be a metaphor of society without a woman inside.

The following chapters present archaeological findings from the excavations of three Swahili houses. The house form and many of the artefacts found within may have been provided by Indians but the social meaning of these spaces and goods was the work of the Muslim Waungwana, not the visiting trader or craftsman.



## CHAPTER 6

## SWAHILI HOUSE EXCAVATIONS AND RELATED ETHNOGRAPHIC

## DATA

Three sites were selected for excavation: plot 984, also known as the Mchele house; plot 341, a house named 'Darini'<sup>in Lamu</sup> (both shown on fig. 15) and a third site<sup>in Pate</sup> which has been called No. 4 in the Ghaidan study (1976,36). This house was in the deserted section of Pate town, to the south of a ruined mosque, Msikiti wa nuru. All three of these sites are shown on maps which were published as a part of a conservation study for the Kenya Ministry of Lands and Settlement and the National Museums of Kenya (ibid.).

In all the excavations the following categories of finds were collected: (1) local pottery, (2) imported earthenware, (3) glazed pottery, (4) imported stoneware, (5) imported porcelain, (6) metal objects and fragments, (7) glass objects and fragments, (8) all faunal material (fish, bird and mammal), (9) beads, (10) shells and (11) stones which were not part of the building materials. All of the areas excavated were sieved through a 5 mm gauge screen. Each object excavated, with the exception of small metal and glass fragments and undecorated earthenware body-sherds, was catalogued and deposited in the Lamu Museum.



Chapter 3 supported the claim, based on historical material, that there is cultural continuity between the present and past Swahili settlements. Chapter 4 was devoted to discovering the social values given to specific spaces and objects within the Swahili society today and in the recent past. It was also suggested in chapter 4 that these values aided the Swahili middlemen in their power relations with women and outsiders. A general pattern of how areas of a typical house plan were valued socially was presented in chapter 4 but it was important to see these patterns in relation to other houses found around the Indian Ocean: this material was presented in chapter 5.

In this chapter ethnographic material is combined with archaeological description of walled spaces, features and finds. By doing this a time depth is added to the anthropological case studies and archaeological remains can be given social meaning. It must be remembered that houses were usually first lived in as single-storey houses and that the upper floor, with the same floor plan, was added later for a married daughter. Therefore, the ethnographic information which is given for the first floor could most likely also be applied to the analogous spaces at an earlier period of the ground floor. The house is like preserved archaeological levels which extend upward in the sky, as well as down into the earth.

The next four chapters will present archaeological data from three house sites, and then give ethnographic materials which will provide the social values associated with spaces, features and a selection of the finds. This chapter concentrates on two ruined house sites and the deserted ground floor of a standing house. The features discovered during the excavation of these houses will be described and their social meaning learned from ethnographic analogy. A test pit, dug in the ground floor of the standing house, will also be discussed in relation to building materials and earlier periods of occupation on that site.

Chapter 7 describes types of local earthenware and suggests that there may be social reasons for the use of decoration on some of the pot forms.

Chapter 8 describes and discusses the imported wares and their symbolic value. Both the earthenware and imported wares were found primarily within the context of floor fills.

In chapter 9 finds from nineteenth-century rubbish deposits to recent refuse, also found within the house sites, will be described and the social significance of each given. Again the social uses are based on relevant Swahili ethnographic information gathered from historical sources and

local interviews.

The organisation of this part of the dissertation is attempting to follow the form that archaeologists have used in the past to present their finds, i.e. buildings and their features (spaces), local wares, imported wares and other finds (objects) (for example Kirkman 1974 and Chittick 1974). Historical accounts generally precede their finds, as does mine in chapter 3. However, historical material in this thesis is not only providing the general setting of the sites but also creating a link between the archaeological data within, which will be presented below, and the ethnographic details which give archaeological spaces and objects their social value within the Swahili context.

#### PLOT 984 : THE MCHELE HOUSE

I excavated plot 984 in June 1980, and while the work was underway ethnographic information about the site was also being collected from people who had owned the plot, as well as from neighbours who live in houses nearby and people who had worked in this now walled space. Only the outer walls of a once coral house were marking the boundaries of plot 984. The ruined house site was excavated on a one-metre grid. A one-metre wide north-south and east-west baulk was left, to make section drawings



easier (fig. 58 and excavation plan, fig. 59). The one-metre squares were excavated in 10 cm levels (total 60 cm) because the stratigraphy has been disturbed. The lime floors of the ruined house had been broken, and the level that related to the outer standing walls of the last building which stood on this site were mixed. It was this period, the last time a coral house stood on the site, that I was most interested in investigating. However, above this coral house floor, there were four levels of house rubble, and soil brought into the once house site for later gardening activities plus recent deposits of rubbish which had been thrown into the space after the plot was no longer used as a garden. Although my primary interest is in house sites I have attempted to consider each level equally. Based on ethnographic information and ceramic dating (which will be discussed in chapter 8) the six 10 cm levels correspond roughly to four periods of activities on the site (see table 2).

Table 2 : Activity Periods

Levels 1 and 2	Period 4	rubbish deposits	present
Levels 3 and 4	Period 3	garden	10-15 years ago
Level 5	Period 2	coral house	19th century
Level 6	Period 1	lime floor	18th century



From table 3 it may be seen that the upper floor, or last house, may be dated to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, while the earlier lower floor may be dated to the eighteenth-century, because of few nineteenth century and more late seventeenth-century sherds. The dating of these floors was made difficult because arbitrary 10 cm levels, used because of badly disturbed stratigraphy, could not correlate with floor levels. The floors were broken because of the tambuu gardens and sherds could fall to lower levels. The house floors are also on different levels within the same house. All of these factors contributed to a slightly 'blurred' distribution of sherds, as is seen in the following table.

Table 3. Plot 984, imported sherds per ten-centimetre levels.

Ceramics	Sherds		
	Levels		
	4	5	6
modern	1	2	1
European	0	1	1
Dutch	1	1	6
Chinese 19th century	12	8	10
Chinese 18th century	14	4	17
Monochrome 17th century	0	7	16

The late sherds indicate that archaeological material was able to pass from the most recent upper levels to the lower earlier levels, therefore the number of sherds is only an indication of the period of original use.

We will now look at each of the four periods, describing the archaeological remains and then using ethnographic information to interpret spaces, features and finds, working from the present to the past.

#### Period 4 - Rubbish deposit

During period 4 the site was being used as an occasional refuse area, when the excavation was started in June 1980. Some of the artefacts from this period were collected and they will be discussed at the end of chapter 8 in connection with objects from floor fills from earlier periods. These miscellaneous objects, which within the archaeological context are only related to rubbish or floor fills, are given social meaning in relation to an historical or present living Swahili context and seen as a marker of social change in chapter 8.

The site during period 4 was marked out by the outer coral wall of the earlier house. Within the wall were several remaining features also related to the earlier period 3 garden; a well, a water cistern and clay irrigation channels. A fruit tree in

Sq. B BI, a banana tree in I II, and rubbish heaps in E VI, E VII, F V, F VI, F VII, H V, H VII, H VIII, K V, K VI and K VII (see fig. 59) had been added to the site after the space had ceased to be used as a garden.

### Period 3 - Garden formation and activities

This period was characterised by 7 features: (1) remains of a coral house roof and interior walls and (2) fill brought into the site, constituting 40 cm of the archaeological material on top of the house floor of period 2; (3) well and (4) a water cistern, constructed in the area marked 5 (fig. 59); (5) clay irrigation channel which ran from the water cistern down the centre of the plot; (6) cement block wall (shown as hatched on fig. 34) added in the north-east corner of the plot; (7) postholes were archaeologically detectable, each about 10 cm in diameter and approximately 50 cm apart, which formed a grid over 90 per cent of the walled plot.

From interviews (K 29,119,125,169) I learned from Lamu people about these features. In the late 1960s many people started to plant tambuu vines in Lamu. Tambuu plants produce leaves which are used to wrap betel-nut for chewing. It is commonly used by Indians, and is grown for export to India in Lamu today (see Martin and Martin 1973,19). Local Lamu people do not like to chew these leaves, but



it is enjoyed by many of the Swahili people who live on Pate island. Lamu townspeople told me that it had been imported from India and grown first in the towns of Siyu and Pate on Pate island. It is no longer grown in those towns because their water supplies have become brackish and it was this factor which prompted people to introduce it to Lamu. Tambuu grows best in a soil mixture of lime, coral stones, clay and sand; i.e. the remains of coral houses with some soil or sand mixed in to reduce the lime concentration. The lime and coral stones or rag contain salt which is washed away by exposure to the rains before it is used for building materials; this improves the lime for gardening purposes. The grid of postholes were the remains of the trellis which supported the tambuu vines.

There are also important social and economical factors related to the many ruined houses in Lamu, which, like this one, have been converted into walled gardens. When slavery was abolished, the Waungwana no longer had labourers to produce their export items. It was considered below the status of waungwana to do physical labour and yet many could not afford to hire workers. Tambuu gardens became a solution for some, as the gardens required less labour than a plantation and, perhaps most importantly, if men and even women and children for economic reasons



had to do the physical work required to maintain the tambuu, these tasks could be performed within the private walled gardens where people could not see them. What a man and his family do in private space is not judged by what is expected of them in public space.

It was in the late 1960s that the coral house on plot 984 was sold at a public auction and partially torn down to create a walled tambuu garden. Poles were placed 50 cm apart to support the vines; remains of these poles were still visible when the excavation was started. When the interior walls were torn down a pit toilet in the south-east corner of the plot was filled in (see fig. 59 marked A) with sand and the front, north-west pit toilet (fig. 59, area 5) was extended to the ground water level to make a well to irrigate the garden. A water cistern was built next to the well and a clay irrigation channel was made which ran down the centre of the plot from the cistern to near the south wall. The tambuu garden was successful for only five years and when it failed because the well water became brackish the owner sold the plot (1979) to the present owners.

#### Period 2 - coral house

Working from the back of the walled space to the front (see fig. 59) the major features and finds which were once related to a domestic space were:

(1) in A I there was a pit (one metre in diameter and about 4 metres deep) which contained brown sand. On the south wall between the squares marked A I and A II there was a portion of the wall which lacked plaster, which indicated where a small low wall had once abutted. There was similar evidence of a larger wall between A III and A IV. A horizontal plaster panel between these two projecting north-south walls indicated the location of an earlier water cistern. The wall marked 1 and 1a (fig. 59) had clay mortar, while all the others had lime mortar. The clay mortar walls abutted the lime mortar walls, and it was thus clear that this rear section was a later addition to the house. Interior wall foundations were located in the following one-metre excavation squares: C I-VI, E I-III, E V-VII, F I-III, F V-VIII, H I-III, H V-VIII, and I I-III (see fig. 59). In K II and K III there was a square coral staircase base with the holes still present where mangrove poles were once placed as part of the stairway support. In K V a shallow channel ran north-south. It was filled with small animal bones, which indicated that after the wooden threshold had deteriorated the cavity became a rat run. The trench, 3 cm wide and about 1 metre long marked the doorway and only entrance to the previous house. Under this threshold a small lead envelope was discovered (see fig. 65). Outside what had

once been the entrance of the house were the remains of a stone bench in K VIII as well as a wall foundation which could be traced in K V and K VI. Two other features must be mentioned, however, but because the type of activities was represented and preserved within the other Lamu house excavation, they will not be discussed in relation to this house. Infant burials were discovered in B V and E II. Both of these burials were greatly disturbed by the later gardening activities. Archaeological features and finds that gain a part of their meaning through their position in relation to excavated areas will be discussed in this chapter. The social meaning of the spaces, for example walled rooms, will be interpreted in view of both ethnographic analogy based on the research presented in the previous chapter and the information that could be obtained about the uses of spaces by Swahili families who have occupied or used the spaces which were excavated. Finds which were recovered from floor fills and rubbish deposits are discussed in chapter 8 within a more general cultural and historical context because their social meaning was not related to the context in which they were excavated.

The small lead envelope (fig. 65) which was found under the threshold of the Mchele house is



an example of a find that has meaning based on the context in which it was discovered. The lead envelope contained a black powder. A Shela man (K 280), who knows and practices local medicine, said that such charms were put in doorways to prevent female slaves and wives from leaving the house without permission from the master of the household. If a woman did pass over the charm without being given permission to go out, she contracted a 'sexual' disease, and the master then knew that she had been unfaithful, and she was being punished by the spirits he had invoked. Thresholds are often given special attention, and this example and others *that were found in other house excavations as well as those mentioned in chapter 4, 'close' and protect bounded spaces and categories of persons.*

I turn now to the ethnographic material (K 30,161, 181,201,220) that was relevant to when this house was still standing and inhabited in the early 1960s. The house was last lived in by a man named Abdulla Mchele. 'Mchele' means 'rice' in Kiswahili. This was the owner's nickname, which his friends had given him because he enjoyed speaking with an Indian accent; and rice was imported primarily by Indians. Mchele was married to a woman named Mwana Esha Saa Ngapi. (Saa ngapi means, 'What is the time?' in Kiswahili).



Mwana Esha became mentally ill and Abdulla divorced her. They had no children. Mchele had two brothers, Ahmed and Ali and the proceeds from the sale of his estate were divided between his brothers. Mchele is remembered as being 'tight' with his money; grown men now recall that he would never give them a cent, when they would come to his baraza as children. It is the custom for adults, especially old men, to give children pennies for sweets, even if they are not related. Many people told me that although he always seemed poor, four hundred shillings (about £25) were found buried in his house after he died. He had farm land, but it was no longer productive, other than a few old coconut trees, and his only known source of income was from the embroidered caps, kofia, he made and sold. He lived alone after he divorced his wife, and he used to talk with men only on his baraza, and few people saw the interior of the house. He seemed to have no one to cook for him and people thought he used to subsist on halwa (sweetmeats) which were made and sold nearby.

Mchele had bought the house from a man called Bashiri, who had inherited it from his parents, Jaffar bin Yusuf El Bakari and Mwana Esha Bwana Mzee. Bashiri, an only child, died without marrying and as a result the house was sold to Abdulla Mchele, but no one remembered who had received the proceeds

and the information was not recorded on the title.

#### THE MCHELE HOUSE PLAN

The area marked (1) on the plan and the reconstruction (figs. 59 and 60) was a back room which was a later addition to the house. This was obvious from the different types of mortars used in the construction of the walls and the abutments. The back wall is a shared wall with the house to the south; in fact this wall does not belong to the Mchele house.

Usually when a wall is shared in this manner the house owners are related; when they are not a second wall is constructed parallel to the standing wall. I was unable to find out if the original owners of the two houses were related, or at least the owners when the additional room was added. This room was created by simply building side walls (the west and east ends of the room) and making a door in the rear of the original house. By analogy to other Lamu houses the added area contained a pit toilet in square A 1 and a water cistern or birika in square A II. (See excavation plan and reconstruction plan for the location of these features). The area opposite, marked (1a) or A V, VI, VII and B V, VI, VII was a small room. The back room of a house is usually called nyumba kati, which means 'the house

in between'. I think that it was so named because these rooms were always constructed between two earlier houses. The area marked (2) or D I-VII and C I-VII was the back room, or ndani, of the original house. This wall may have had a zidaka, but there is no remaining evidence of one. There were also small projecting walls between the squares marked E and F and H and I. The original house had one msana or room plan with the toilet (marked 5) in the north-west corner of the plot where the well and cistern are shown on the plan. In the space marked (4) there was a small open courtyard and a coral staircase which lead to a kitchen on the roof. This explains why remains of a kitchen hearth could not be detected during this period. The space marked (6) was the daka or covered porch which contained the stone bench, baraza.

This floor plan and the associated features were reconstructed by combining the standing outer walls with the foundation of the inner walls, by comparison with the houses that were recorded in chapter 4 and by talking to people who knew the house before it was partially torn down. By analogy the pattern of activities, both daily and ritual, must have also taken place in this house. More archaeological evidence that the activities which were observed



recently also took place in the past was detectable in the second Lamu house excavation discussed below. The floor destruction caused by tambuu gardens obliterated a considerable amount of evidence of earlier activities at this site.

Period 1 - Eighteenth-century floor.

Swahili houses have contemporary floor levels at different heights (each area or room is about 10 cm higher as one moves from the open courtyard at the front of the house to the innermost room) and yet the site (plot 984) was excavated according to 10 cm levels because of the disturbed stratigraphy. Therefore, only a small portion of the eighteenth century floor was uncovered. Or, in other words, parts of level 6 were floor levels associated with the late nineteenth century coral house. In addition, the east wall of the Mchele house was associated with the lower earlier floor, but the west wall was associated with only the upper nineteenth century floor, and was therefore a later addition. The house had been divided, or made smaller, after it was first built. I wanted to study domestic spaces, i.e. complete house plans, and the earlier floor extended onto the plot to the west of the Mchele site, which is now owned by another family and has graves on it. Therefore, I was unable to determine the original size or form of the earlier building.



(I am grateful to Mark Horton for pointing out to me that the west wall of the Mchele house was a later addition).

Because all of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century floors had been broken and the interior walls removed to create the walled garden, the artefacts were contained in levels of mixed deposits and usually difficult to date. In a few cases it was possible to date finds in connection with sections of unbroken floors and imported porcelain, but in general I was unable to date finds from this site. In chapter 9 I will as far as possible equate the archaeological finds and features with the owners of the excavated house sites.

I will next describe the excavation at Pate because it was similar to the excavation of the ruined house excavation in Lamu. Both lacked roofs and were therefore not inhabited.

#### PATE EXCAVATION

Only one room of a house was excavated in Pate due to lack of funds in July 1981: the ndani, based on the presence of the numerous wall niches (zidaka) (fig. 61). The ndani was selected because it was the room where most of the features were discovered in the Lamu house (plot 341, discussed below), and

which could be explained in terms of ethnographic information related to activities.

The Pate room was dated on the ceramic findings listed in table 4.

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Table 4, Pate ndani, sherds in the floor foundations

<u>ceramics</u>	<u>number of sherds</u>
modern	2
Chinese 19th century	2
Chinese 18th century	16
Monochrome 17th century	3

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This sample , although small, would lead me to think that the house was built in the eighteenth century. The floors were badly broken in the ndani and later sherds could have fallen into the foundation level.

The room was excavated in 10 cm levels (total 30 cm) because of the disturbed stratigraphy. A flat coral roof had collapsed on the floor and had been carried away. Fitzgerald (1898,387) noted that Pate was in ruins and exported lime to Zanzibar. The coral roof material might also have been used to construct

other houses in Pate. A thatched roof had been used on the house at a later stage. (I am grateful to Athman Lali Omar for pointing out the evidence for this feature). The house had undergone many changes but the limited excavation of the house did not allow them to be traced.

By analogy from inhabited Pate houses this house (fig. 61) shared a wall with another house to the north. The house in which the ndani was excavated had a storage area (nyumba ya kati) (marked A). It is assumed that it was used for storage and not for more general purposes because, first, most Pate traditional houses which are inhabited today have storage areas (for example see figs. 23, 24, 25a and 50). Secondly, the walls were not well plastered, another characteristic of a storage room. The house also had, by ethnographic analogy, an ndani (marked C, D) and a walled courtyard (E). Compare this house plan to a larger but similar house in Pate town, which is still inhabited (fig. 50).

The orientation of this house was unusual. Most houses are north-south and this one was east-west in its orientation. A trench had been dug in D1-3 (see fig. 61), which was like the ufuko used in Shela in the washing of a body for burial. It was interesting to note that this trench was positioned as it would be in a north-south orientated house, which confirms



the idea that its alignment was relative to Mecca and not in relation to the orientation of the house itself. Twelve (Indian) red <sup>glass</sup> beads (drawn) were found in the ufuko. Islam required that people should not be buried with jewellery, and beads etc. were removed when the deceased women were being washed and prepared for burial, over the ufuko. The water used to wash the bodies is considered to be 'polluted' and therefore even if someone knew that a bead was lost they would not search for it in the water contained in the ufuko (then an open trench). The colour symbolism of beads is discussed more fully in chapter 9. A cannon ball was also found within the ufuko; this find will be discussed later in the chapter.

No ethnographic data specific to this house was available because the house had been deserted for several generations. However, interviews (K 246, 268 and 332) were conducted in Pate town, which in many ways has undergone less change than either Shela or Lamu towns, and the information followed the patterns presented in chapter 4 concerning the social uses of spaces and objects.

PLOT 341 : DARINI

A third excavation took place in a standing house



across the street from the Mchele house. This house, known locally as 'Darini' (which means in Kiswahili, 'inside the tall house') on plot 491 is discussed in some detail in the conservation study by Ghaidan (1976, 16-19). It is a large two-storeyed house with two 'penthouses' <sup>one is kitchen</sup> on the roof of the first floor. The ground floor was excavated as fully as it could be without causing structural damage to the standing house. The areas excavated are shown on the plan (fig. 62). This house was also excavated on a one-metre grid, but according to natural stratigraphy (total 20 cm) because the lime floor was not badly broken. Only the floor associated with the standing house (period 2) and that floor's foundation levels were examined in detail. However, a test pit and a feature associated with an earlier building (period 1) on this site was also explored and they will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

#### Darini, Period 2

Without the aid of ethnographic information, at this point, I will as briefly as possible describe the archaeological features discovered in the ground floor of the house on plot 341. Based on the ceramic evidence shown in table 5, taken from the floor foundations, this house was built in the early nineteenth century.

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Table 5, Darini, sherds in the floor foundation

<u>ceramics</u>	<u>number of sherds</u>
Chinese 19th century	12
Chinese 18th century	5

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Starting with the most interior sections of the ground floor of Darini (fig. 62) and again working forward, the spaces and features will be briefly described. Finds will only be mentioned if they were related to a feature other than floor fill or a rubbish deposit. Many of the features and finds will be described more fully below when linked to ethnographic information.

The back section of the house (marked 1) is composed of three rooms. The room on the east side of the house (A2, A1, B1, B2) had a dirt floor which when excavated according to the stratigraphy, turned out to be the top of a large underground chamber which had been filled in with brown soil. The chamber was associated with an earlier building on this site and not with Darini, and therefore will not be described further at this point. The centre room of the three back spaces also had a dirt floor, which also turned out to be a feature not associated

with Darini when it was first constructed as a single-storey house, but was related to a later upper-level toilet. Note the toilet duct behind B5 in fig. 62 and the choo above (fig. 64). It is difficult to know when to discuss first-floor archaeological features (period 3?). For this reason, and because it was a feature of this dirt floor I will describe the toilet pit and relate the relevant ethnographic information.

Because the toilet pit (fig. 62, marked B5) had been filled with uniformly coloured and textured brown soil, it was excavated in arbitrary 10 cm levels. The table below lists the 10 cm levels and the imported ceramics found in each level. The levels were mixed because of the redigging of the pit. Toilet pits are cleaned by redigging the pit about every ten years, although this varies considerably from family to family and depends on the number of people using a given toilet. Toilets are now *cleaned less often because slaves performed this task and now there are few people who are willing to do the work.* Women even joke about marrying their daughters to the son of the man who cleans the pit toilets. Table 6 lists the 10 cm levels and the imported ceramics found in each level.

The levels were mixed because of the redigging of the pit, but most of the sherds were nineteenth-century, which supports the theory that the upper



Table 6, Toilet pit : sherds in 10 cm levels.

Ceramics	Levels				Totals
	1	2	3	4	
Dutch 20th cent.	1	1	1	8	11
Chinese 19th cent.	0	0	4	5	9
Chinese 18th cent.	0	1	3	4	8
Monochrome 17th cent.	0	0	0	0	0

storey was added later in the nineteenth century, or perhaps even in the early twentieth century based on this ceramic evidence. The sample is, however, small and there was no information about what material is used as back-fill for toilet pits.

The third section of the most inner space of the ground floor of the Darini house was a choo, with a pit toilet and bathing cistern (fig. ~~61~~).

Moving forward in the house, the space marked (2) in fig. 62 contained a raised platform (Cl-6 and Dl-6) (60 centimetres from the unexcavated floor surface). The platform fill contained a wide variety of items. For example, pieces of a lac bed, bracelets, metal fragments, fish and animal bones, imported pottery and porcelain, as well as local



pottery. The social value of these miscellaneous finds is discussed in chapter 8. Table 7 shows that the platform was probably constructed in the nineteenth century at about the same time that the upper storey was added and the pit toilet for the upper floor was first dug.

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Table 7. Platform fill, imported sherds from C 4,5,6, and D 4,5,6.

<u>ceramics</u>	<u>number of sherds</u>
Chinese 19th century	19
Chinese 18th century	8

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A door on the west side of this room had been blocked at some undetermined time in the past. Areas marked 1 and 2 on fig. 62, or the back two rooms of this house had been added later. The mortar and plaster are different; less lime was used in these rooms than in the other sections of the ground-floor area of this house. There was also evidence that the west wall of area 2 did not join but abutted the south wall.

Two changes took place before the upper level was added to Darini, which could be detected in the archaeological and architectural features. The areas marked (1) and (2) were added to the house and I also suspect that the house was extended into the

street (see the area marked (7) on fig. 62). The addition at the rear of the house was probably made in the same way as described for the back room addition to the Mchele house, i.e. connecting the rear walls of two houses. One of the added rooms (area (2)) had a door which opened onto a street; both were blocked at some time in the past, but I could not determine when from either ethnographic or archaeological data.

Area (3), by analogy the ndani, had a low window (1 metre square and about a metre from the floor surface) on the east wall that had been blocked. There are many zidaka on the north wall and a clay platform (10 cm high) with a drain in the centre (marked ufuko on fig. 37). Within the drain a large amber bead was found (fig. 74) and an iron cannon ball. Two infant burials were also discovered in F1 and F2 (see figs. 62 and 63). The infants were probably stillborn (faunal reports were made, see acknowledgements) and they had been given in many respects a traditional Islamic burial. (They were Islamic burials because the infants were facing north, the direction of Mecca, and placed on their right sides with a board over the bodies. This is a typical burial for both Swahili and other Islamic communities). Porcelain sherds were associated with both (table 8) and pieces of iron

were also found with both infants.

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Table 8. Sherds placed with the infant buried  
in squares F1 and F2.

F1.	Chinese monochrome (blue) 19th century	1
	Chinese polychrome 19th century	1
	Chinese blue-and-white 18th century	1
F2.	Chinese polychrome 19th century	1
	Chinese blue-and-white 18th century	1

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These burials were in a nineteenth-century floor level and associated with nineteenth-century sherds, therefore they were buried after the beginning of the nineteenth century.

There were several small pits dug in the lime floors of this house. A hole in front of the zidaka in Square E6 (fig. 62) contained a collection of nineteenth-century sherds, two of the sherds having a hole in them.

The faunal remains of a ovicaprid were also located in a shallow pit (F6, fig. 62) in the centre of the room (fig. 63). Another pit (in F6 (figs. 62 and 63)) near the threshold of the door contained the faunal remains of a chicken and a long straight black coarse human hair.



The area marked (4) (fig. 62), or from analogy the msana wa juu, also had several pit features with associated finds (see figs. 62 and 63). A large rubbish pit was located in G3, 4 and H3, 4. It contained glass, local pottery, beads, shells, metal fragments, and imported wares. The rubbish had been buried in the house after the upper storey had been built, to judge from the ceramic evidence listed in table 9.

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Table 9. Msana wa juu rubbish pit (G3, 4 and H.3, 4, fig. 62).

<u>ceramics</u>	<u>number of sherds</u>
European 20th century	28
Chinese 19th century	4
Chinese 18th century	6

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The rubbish pit was probably dug and used in the early twentieth century. Some of the other objects found in this pit will be discussed in chapter 8.

A small glass bottle was found buried in a pit located in G6 (fig. 62 and fig. 63), a stone (fig. 65) was buried in G7, and a nail was buried in H9.

Area (5) (fig. 62) or the msana wa tini contained



only wall niche features. The lime floor in this area did not have pits containing objects.

Area (6), or the kiwanda, has a water cistern on the east wall. Square L8 near the front entrance to the house had a leather shoe (fig. 66) within the first-floor fill. A door had been blocked near L8 which probably lead to the stairs to the upper level before the enclosed staircase had been built (see fig. 62).

Area (7) has a pit toilet, water cistern, two toilet ducts (which serve toilets on upper levels) and a room which spans the street. The water cistern in area (6) may in the past have been part of an earlier washroom/toilet space and the stairways and second cistern/toilet were built later in what was either part of the street or courtyard of the house. However, this section of the house was not fully excavated and therefore there is no evidence for this theory.

Ethnographic information collected both informally and in the course of recorded interviews with local Swahili will now be used to interpret these finds and features. Many formal interviews (K 16,29,41, 47,51,58,75,78,113,122,144,190,213,214,267,280,286) included questions concerning charms, or charms would be mentioned as a possible cause or cure for a specific problem that someone was experiencing.

' ... the power inherent in the words or phrases of the quran, the names of angels and jinn, and certain numbers and symbols, can be transferred to objects and protect their wearers' (Trimingham, 1968,84). Charms took innumerable forms and could therefore be not only worn but also eaten, drunk, buried and even thrown into the sea to be made effective. Most of the items that were deliberately buried in the house were charms. Objects are therefore in this way used to mediate between the living and spirit world. Iron bracelets can be worn to protect a person from evil spirits and as in the house excavation, iron can be buried in association with other features as protective charms. The nail found in the small pit (H9, figs. 62 and 63) was intended to protect a placenta which had been placed in the pit from evil spirits. Kindy, a Swahili scholar, writing about his culture, wrote, 'the placenta is buried in or near the house with some charcoal, iron, salt and other ingredients' (1972,5). Two of the four infant burials (both of the burials in Darini) had iron fragments within the grave fill. Some informants said that the iron was to protect the souls of the dead infants from the bad spirits who had claimed their lives. Others said that grave goods were against the tenets of Islam and iron was therefore never placed with burials. An iron cannon ball was found in both the Darini and the Pate house ufuko. These were being used as protective

charms, to prevent evil spirits from being attracted to the polluted area of the house. Iron is a material often used as a protective charm, perhaps as sympathetic magic, for its strength. Knives are placed under a newborn child's pillow for protection, and in India iron is often placed over the door as a protective charm (see page 219).

Iron is not the only material used as a charm in mediation with the spirit world. Likewise stones (fig. 65), which were imported from Oman as ballast for their ships, are used in a ritual performed by women. The ritual was described to me by a Lamu woman (287). A scrap of clothing or a hair is taken from the woman's husband and buried under the stone in a place where the husband is certain to walk over it, and when he does he will become kinder and more generous to his wife. This is the desired result of the practice : as the woman said, 'The hard stone makes his hard heart soft'. There was one such stone (fig. 65) buried in Darini in G7 (fig. 62 and 63) in front of the entrance to the ndani, a path that would certainly be taken by a husband. These stones are called manga, which means Arab. Manga stones are also used to grind spices and sharpen knives.

The remains of the two animals (fig. 63) buried in the house were protective charms against evil spirits. The ritual, called kufunga ya nyumba, which



means 'to close the house', has several forms, some of which were described in chapter 4. Several versions were detectable archaeologically; the lead envelope (charm) buried under the threshold of the Mchele house was one, the animal sacrifices (fig. 63) were another and two more will be examined below. The two animals were part of a blood sacrifice to rid the house of bad spirits, usually of people who had died within the house. The ritual sacrifice is called kafara. This sacrifice, usually of a goat or sheep (i.e. ovicaprid) must not be taken to the mosque to be blessed, as a sadaka (sacrifice for blessings from god) because it would not then be able to absorb evil. The kafara must be eaten (and usually the bones buried), because it is in this manner that 'it is passed out to many people, thus diluting and dissipating the undesired element' (El Zein 1874,300). To perform this ritual, a pit is dug in the centre of the ndani, the room where people generally die and are prepared for burial. The animal's throat is slit and the blood directed onto the ground. The goat is butchered, the intestines cleaned into the hole, and the meat cooked and eaten. The bones are collected and placed within the skin. These are then placed in the pit and covered with soil.

I found evidence of this ritual under the nineteenth-century floor in the excavations of the ndani of Darini



in F6 (fig. 62 and 63). There was no doubt that a kafara had been performed to 'close' the house.

The bones of a second animal (a chicken) with a human hair were discovered in the excavation of Darini, in a pit on the inner side of the threshold of the ndani door, in square F6 (fig. 62 and 63). An informant (K 280) knowledgeable about local magic said that chickens could be sacrificed for many reasons, but because of the associated hair, he believed that it was done by a man who wanted good spirits to control his wife. Hairs and nail parings are often used with articles of personal clothing as 'love charms' by the Swahili as well as in many other cultures. It is believed that it was a woman's hair and not a man's because men used to shave their heads. If hair is a sexual symbol as Leach and many others believe (Leach, 1967,81) the type of control sought by the man was of a sexual nature. Swahili men shaved their heads, they were supposed to be controlled in all their actions and not show any signs of an animal nature. Women, who were not sexually active (i.e. widows and old women) also had to have their heads shaved.

Another indication that the buried chicken bones and the hair were related to sexual concerns comes from the Swahili attitude toward the effects of different types of meat. Goat, mutton and beef are

considered to be cooling, but chicken makes one sexually hot. A bridegroom, for example, is given chicken or dove meat to eat before going to his bride in the ndani to consummate his marriage. The goat-blood sacrifice described earlier was concerned also with a mediation with the spirit world but not about a sexual matter. In addition, another sacrifice, called akiki (Ingrams 1931,197; Kindy,1972, 7; Prins 1961,127) is performed for children before the age of one year. A sheep, goat or cow may be used, but not a chicken; the ritual is used to communicate with the spirits about the soul of the child, not about sexual concerns.

The above discussion has presented ethnographic material concerned with faunal analysis which has never before been considered by archaeologists working on Swahili sites.

The small glass bottle found buried in G6 (figs. 62 and 63), which is in front of the door to the ndani, I was told (K 287 and 280) probably contained a djinn. This spirit would have been invoked to protect the women and contents of the ndani. This sounds very similar to the pots at Gedi that were discovered by Kirkman.

'These pots buried in the makeup of the floor are part of a magical ceremony known as mafingo by which the owner of a premise hoped to

protect himself and his property against intruders. A pot containing a spell, which unfortunately must have been written on a paper, was buried in the floor with appropriate words, and it was believed thereby that a djinn (spirit) had been induced to take up residence in the pot. Anybody then coming into the room with evil intentions would be driven out of his wits by the djinn. The goodwill of the djinn was maintained by regular burning of incense over the place where the pot was buried. The practice continues to this day. These pots have been found in AL, in front of the door and from AF, CL and in front of the north-west gate of the town' (Kirkman 1963, 26).

The term, mafitigo, was not known by any of the Swahili people that I interviewed about this practice. A Giriyama man assisting with the excavation (K 206) said that fitigo means 'spell', in the Giriyama language and Kirkman may also have been given this term by a Giriyama.

A shoe was found in the floor fill just inside the main door to the house (L8, figs. 62 and 66). It is doubtful that the location in which the shoe was excavated was an indication that it was buried as a protective shoe, because it was not in a pit but within a floor fill. However, shoes are not worn



in upper-class Swahili homes. They are left just inside the door in the same place that this shoe was found. Only upper-class men wore shoes in the nineteenth century, and as a sign of respect they did not wear them inside an upper-class dwelling or inside a mosque. It was also considered bad luck to wear shoes on a boat. Informants in the Lamu archipelago (K 214,169) mentioned that slaves were not allowed to wear shoes and that the Lamu people did not allow people from Shela to wear shoes in Lamu town, as a sign of their inferiority, until recently (British colonial times). Shoes are important markers of status in many cultures. The rich blacks from Manila or the Phillippines were not allowed to wear shoes by the Portuguese although followed by thirty slaves and superbly clad (Tavernier 1676, vol. 1, 157). 'Anything belonging to the Prophet was considered exceptionally pure. Even the Prophet's sandal was used for protection because of his purity. In fact, a picture of the sandal can be found in most of the houses and shops in Lamu. In the photograph of the Prophet's sandal (fig. 9), the writing says, "This is similar to the Prophet's sandal. We do not doubt that looking at it has great benefit; it protects and secures and blesses"' (El Zein 1974,149). 'The Mekkans lose



much of the pleasure of life through their fear of the (evil) eye. Goods in store are protected against it by hanging up an old sandal on the boundary or entrance of the place' (Hurgronje, translated by Monahan 1970,98).

The ground floor of Darini was last used by a Swahili family as a store and the excavated shoe could have been a protective charm, after it was worn by an upper-class Swahili man.

Sherds, perhaps even porcelain sherds, can be used as protective charms. There were sherds buried with the infants and a collection of sherds in another pit within the Darini ndani, but as chapter 7 is devoted to the social uses of imported wares it would be better to present all of the evidence at one time in that chapter.

General patterns of the social uses of Swahili domestic spaces was developed through the case studies presented in chapter 4. These patterns presumably could also be applied to the houses which were excavated because they are within the same cultural tradition. However, I wanted to excavate a coral house that I would also be able to collect ethnographic information about in order to study the daily and ritual life within the Swahili Waungwana context. At the Mchele house and the house in Pate I had failed to achieve that goal. The Darini site

provided the opportunity to combine ethnographic and archaeological research on the same house, and thereby have the closest link between the present and past use of space within Swahili culture. Several interviews (K 89,125,169,210, 214,190,294,305 and 339) were conducted with people who had been closely associated with the people who had lived in the house, but the most detailed information about the use of spaces within the house came from two teenagers (male K294 and female K339) who were born and raised in Darini in the early 1960s. They told me about each area of the house (see figs. 62 and 64). Area (1) had always been a store but had not been used because of a bat colony that had lived in it as long as they could remember. In fact the ground floor of the house had not been lived in by a member of their family for generations. They doubted if any of their relatives had lived down there after the upper storey was built. This follows the pattern of use discussed in the earlier chapter; freeborn people do not live on the lower levels of houses. The children remembered that a relative's elderly concubine was allowed to live down there, rent free, but she could not get rid of the bats and they said that she moved out because she was unable to keep her drinking and bathing water clean. Bats

are also considered to be evil and polluting. The ground floor had been used as a storage place. Even donkeys had been kept there for a short while. They also remember that a large quantity of food, for a celebration, was once cooked in the area marked (2).

The most significant thing about the ground floor was the ufuko. They remembered that on special religious occasions their father prayed and read from the Koran, while sitting on the clay platform covering the ufuko (see the location of the ufuko in the ndani, fig. 62). The teenagers had been told that the house had been built in stages and that their ancestors lived in the lower level until the upper storey was built. They had strong feelings about the house being associated with their dead ancestors especially in connection with the ufuko. They said that they wanted to be able to return with their children, although some of their relatives felt that the house had bad spirits which had caused the family to have bad luck. An uncle was killed or committed suicide and another relative had discovered him and become mentally ill as a result. Both had lived in the house at one time and the house was blamed. Other relatives were also afraid to live in the house, although both of the teenagers did not feel this way and would like to live in the house again some day.



It was when the death occurred that the family moved out of the house, and went to live in a house that their mother had inherited.

The ground floor ndani had other architectural features which reflected the relationship between Darini and the house on the east side. The ndani has two blocked windows, one a small slit window, which would have been used for light and ventilation. It was blocked by the construction of the house to the east. This shows that Darini was built before the house next door. A larger window about one metre square and about two metres from the floor was more difficult to understand and the informants did not know what it had been used for in the past. Some houses have interconnecting passage ways, as was described earlier, and maybe this was a window which allowed women to talk and perhaps pass objects between the two houses after the second was built, but prohibited the women from passing into the next house. Such windows were present in Hindu houses of the same period in Surat (fig. 38a, window marked G).

The two young people knew that certain magical practices were performed in houses and were not surprised that we had discovered the remains of a goat and a chicken buried in the ndani (see excavation plan, fig. 63). They did not know when



these sacrifices had been made, but perhaps it was in their grandfather's time, they could not be sure. Maybe it was even more recently when the house was believed to be causing the family problems. I could only say from the archaeological evidence that the remains had been buried after the nineteenth-century floor was constructed. The informants said that chickens were sacrificed to remove the 'jealous desires' of others in a ritual called hasadi. Goats were sacrificed and buried to remove shetwani (bad spirits) from the house.

Moving to the upper storey, I was told that the toilet and washroom at the front of the house (see the upper-storey floor-plan (fig. 64) and the axionometric view, (fig.13) were used by everyone living in the house except by a newly-married cousin and her husband who used the nyumba kati, the room behind the ndani, and the rear toilet and washroom. Her father, who was then single, shared the west side of the msana wa tini with a young nephew. The east side of the msana wa tini was screened off<sup>1.</sup> and used as a sitting-room for men. A mattress was on the floor and a Koran was stored in the kidaka, above the mattress. Maulidi, the celebration of Muhammad's birthday, was performed in this area every Thursday night.

1. The screen was a movable wooden lattice wall.

Cement walls had been added and a room formed in the east side of the msana wa juu, the bedroom or private space for the other married couple. It was basically a house being shared by a mother and her two sons, one of whom was now single although his daughter and her husband lived there, and the other son had the private room in the msana wa juu with his wife. His two sons and five daughters also lived in the house.

The west side of the msana wa juu was where the elderly mother slept with her young granddaughters; this area was considered the general meeting-place for the women of the family and any women who might come to visit.

No one slept in the ndani, although if women relatives came to visit they would be given a bed at the west end of the room away from the entrance to the toilet and washroom. And when the young couple had their first child, the mother moved into the ndani for forty days.

Doves were kept, which were for sale, in the courtyard. Under the stairs to the kitchen large storage jars were kept to store vinegar, etc. The area just outside the front toilet/washroom was where the water was piped into the house and where the dishes and clothes were washed. A sewing machine

was near the door to the house, where one of the men used to sew kofia, caps. Meals were prepared in the kitchen kidari cha meko, the 'penthouse' on the west side of the house; and the kidari cha kulala, or sleeping room 'penthouse' on the east side of the house, was used for sleeping during the hot season, by one of the men of the family. The kidari cha kizingo, the top room in the rooms above the street, was also a spare room which was used as a playroom by the children. The 'peep' holes in the rooms over the street were a delight to the children, and allowed the adults to know who was at the front door before it was opened.

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Table 10. Darini : Pattern of use

<u>ndani</u>		OX
<u>msana wa juu</u>	Oooooo	XO
<u>msana wa tini</u>	Xxx	(no sleeping but male space)
Adult female	=	O
Adult male	=	X
Female child	=	o
Male child	=	x

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The pattern of use was a standard one. A married daughter was given the inner and most valued area of the house. This supports her image, both



within the family and in the eyes of the family into which she has married. A daughter who is given a house, or special area, is usually one who has married out of the family, not a cousin. Her husband was in an especially weak position because his wife would have had the support of not only her father but also that of her grandmother.

The couple on the right were also in an honoured position. A room had been divided off for them which was in effect like an ndani, and most of the children in the household belonged to this couple. The husband was powerful because of this and because the house belonged to his mother. The wife, however, was in a weak position because she had not been provided a house of her own. When the family moved from Darini they moved to a house which is owned by this woman and the balance of power in the family shifted.

The grandmother on the left of the msana wa juu with her five granddaughters was in a powerful position. She determined how the house was managed for the most part because men spent very little time in the house, and because her husband was dead. She was also in a good position because there were so many women in the household for her to oversee. Her area was the meeting-place for the women of the family and the



place to which female visitors went first when they entered the house. This space was 'protected' by the 'male' areas in front of her place.

The msana wa tini was a male area; on the left, an adult male and younger boy (an uncle and his nephews), on the right, nearest the front door was the space which was used as a sabule or entertaining area for men only. Women did sometimes use this area but only when men were not present, and were not expected home. These practices reinforced the idea that women were of secondary importance to men.

The purity of the women was protected in the rear of the house, or 'backstage' by the men with power on the front 'stage'. Women had their wedding beds or other prized furniture, their 'props' which were given them by men. But men directed the 'show' and thereby created the ranks within the house and society.

#### Darini - Period 1

Period 1 at the Darini site is represented by only two features, sections of lime floors and an underground chamber associated with an earlier coral building. The period 1 floor level was recorded at the base of the floor foundations of the Darini house. The reason the underground chamber was excavated was because at first I thought it was

a feature associated with period 2, i.e. Darini. The area marked (1) (fig. 62) lacked a lime floor and was at first excavated as a large pit feature related to the present house. It was only in the process of the excavation that it was discovered to be a feature of an earlier building (see figs. 63 and 67). The underground chamber was not fully excavated because doing so would have endangered the structure of the standing house above. The chamber extended below the present house's floor surface by 3.6 metres and plaster walls aligned with the north and east wall of the upper present house. The north wall extended west into an unexcavated area as did the east wall, therefore the size of the chamber could not be determined. The chamber had walls which were approximately 8 cm thick and a thinner broken lime floor.

The underground chamber (marked (1) or A 1,2 and B 1,2 on fig. 62; see also figs. 63 and 67) was filled in when Darini was constructed. It was therefore not associated with the present house but with an earlier coral house on the same site. Levels 1 to 4 were broken floor levels, showing that as the fill settled and fell new floors were constructed. A clay level under the earliest floor level on top of the chamber is like the clay levels found under all of the floors in Darini, and marks the house's floor

foundation. The clay deposit was level 4. Level 5 was the remains of a coral house wall, presumably the house which used this underground chamber; the ceramics associated with the house remains are shown on table 11 with the sherds found in the clay fill, level 6, which first filled in the chamber.

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Table 11. Underground chamber : sherds in fill  
(levels 5 and 6)

<u>ceramics</u>	<u>number of sherds</u>
Chinese 19th century	3
Chinese 18th century	10
Monochrome 17th century	7

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The table suggests that the building which incorporated the chamber occurred in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, because most of the sherds are from the eighteenth century but there are more from the seventeenth than from the nineteenth. The fact that there are nineteenth-century sherds present does not mean that it was filled in then, because there was no seal or unbroken floor level, and sherds could have shifted down during the settling process.

Several people (K 63,76,100,118) told me that



there are other underground chambers but only one location was mentioned (K 76), the tambuu plot near Kinooni mosque, in Lamu. People said that they had also heard of these underground features in Shela and Pate but no one knew their location. Underground chambers are common in traditional Hindu and Muslim houses in Gujarat, where they are called tanku when used for cisterns and tanikhana when they are underground apartments. I went into a tanikhana in an eighteenth-century house in Cambay, that was still in use. I saw many tanku filled with water in Surat in 1980. It was difficult to determine how the underground chamber which was excavated was used, but I do not think it was a cistern because of the thin walls and floors.

Porcelain was used as an archaeological tool to date the above features, the toilets or additions to the house and the presence of an underground chamber. The social significance of toilets has been discussed in some detail in chapter 4. The role played by the underground chamber is unknown to me. The Swahili people seemed to know about these rooms but they were very vague about how they were used. People most often said that people hid in them. When I pursued the question about who hid in this space people said maybe men who did not want to fight (British colonial



recruitment?) or slaves that their owners planned to export, perhaps illegally. I do not feel satisfied with these answers. More interviews in the Lamu area might provide details and comparative material might be sought in Oman, Iran or India. There are caves near the Mombasa harbour which were used to hide slaves intended for export; this would suggest that this practice was known and used on the coast. More information is needed concerning these spaces before they can be understood within the Swahili cultural context.

#### Test Pits

Two test pits were excavated, one on the Mchele site in square F VI and the other in Darini, square F 4 (figs 37, 68 and 69). These earlier levels were excavated on the one-metre grid and therefore the areas exposed was too small to determine the position of artefacts found in relation to Swahili settlements. An attempt has been made in relation to these test pits to consider the soil, sand and lime materials and by ethnographic analogy say what part of a Swahili settlement these building materials might have been related to in the test pits. (K 1,9,165,169,189,190, 210,214,219,267,268,280,297,307).

As mentioned in chapter 4, when describing building materials, clay is brought to Lamu from Manda island

and it is considered to be a socially inferior building substance compared to coral and lime. Sand of a certain texture and brown colour is used in building but not white beach sand, which is the base soil in Lamu. Beach sand was found at the bottom of the two test pits which I excavated in the two Lamu house sites. Beach sand not at the base level is in all cases assumed to be sand found around houses because it was associated with the clay and lime levels. Some streets are paved with coral in Lamu town but in Shela and Pate and most settlements the streets are covered with beach sand blown in or 'walked into' them on peoples' feet. The sherds found in the sand would therefore be part of the debris outside houses. Clay deposits are the floors of ruined houses on collapsed mud houses used as fill for coral-house floor foundations. If the clay deposits lacked sherds, but contained stones, which some of the thicker levels did, they were fallen mud-house walls. If there were clay deposits without stones or sherds (there were none in any of the test pits) they could be heaps of clay, transported for building, that were not used. Clay deposits a few centimetres thick were levels under lime floors, and formed part of the floor foundation; but thicker levels, not associated with lime floors, were mud-house remains. (see the test pit, figs. 68 and 69.

The remains of the mud houses and the beach sand deposits in both test pits contained monochromes and celadons indicating that they were levels associated primarily with the late fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The lime deposits in the test pits were later, and were associated with the destruction of earlier coral houses on the Darini and Mchele house sites. Deposits are composed of (1) pure lime levels which are floors; or (2) lime mixed with coral rag, which is a floor foundation; or (3) collapsed wall if composed of larger coral rag fragments (larger than one centimetre in diameter). Pure lime deposits are floors, if not more than 5 cm thick, and, if thicker, they may be deposits associated with building activities. Today, in Pate town, heaps of lime are often seen in the open courtyards of inhabited houses, left to wash in the rains, before being used in building activities. Deposits of lime were found in the area near the water cistern in the ruined Mchele site (fig. 59, J II and J III). This lime was used to build the cistern that held water used to irrigate the tambuu vines, after the Mchele house was partially torn down. Two other heaps of lime were discovered, both on the last floor level of the Darini house, which I believe was lime left over from either a wall plastering activity or used to make mortar when the upper storey was built,



added on to or altered.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed three excavation sites and their walled features, finds and building materials. Ethnographic information has been used to explain the social aspects of these elements. It was possible to trace the ownership of the Mchele site and learn about the personalities of some of the people who lived there, as well as how the plot had been used after the house became a ruin. This site added to our understanding of site formation and post-occupational depositions. The second excavation, a room within a ruined coral dwelling in Pate town, provided little additional information because it followed the patterns discovered in Lamu and ethnographic information specifically relevant to the house was not available.

However, with the second house site to be excavated in Lamu, much more ethnographic information was available to use in the interpretation of the archaeological remains. Previous owners, who were descendants of the original owners of the house, were willing to describe how the various spaces within the house had been used. This material followed the pattern of use which was presented in chapter 4,



but was specific to an excavated site and was therefore valuable in supporting the use of direct ethnographic analogy when interpreting Swahili archaeological sites. The artefacts, (mostly charms) discovered in relation to the archaeological domestic spaces were studied with respect to their role in mediating relations between men and women and between the living and spirit world within Swahili society. The organisation of space and the use of rooms could be seen to be the same as today.

Local and imported earthenware and imported porcelain have been of primary concern to archaeologists working on Swahili sites and it is for this reason that the next two chapters are devoted to the analysis of these two categories of goods. Examples were only recovered as sherds contained within floor fills or rubbish deposits. The sherds are therefore discussed first in this context and later within the context of the living Swahili society, as whole plates or containers.

## CHAPTER 7

## THE POTTERY

Earthenware

All of the local earthenware sherds were collected and counted from each level of the one-metre squares excavated at all three sites. The decorated sherds were recorded, as were rims and bases, but the sherds were primarily from rubbish deposits and floor fills and were therefore too small and mixed to allow pots to be reconstructed. However, from the fragments found it was clear that sherds collected during the excavations were similar to the more complete forms described and illustrated by those archaeologists who have excavated larger Swahili sites or settlements and who were able to reconstruct earthenware containers. Their forms will be compared to earthenware pots still in use today in the Lamu archipelago for the purpose of my analysis. However, first, it will be worthwhile to consider the social meaning of the sherds themselves and a possible attributed characteristic of earthenware.

A sherd is called jaya in Kiswahili. Incense is burned on jaya when spirits are being called from heaven (El Zein 1974, 272). Angels are called down

to earth while a body is being washed and prepared for burial and when people go to pray at the tombs of their ancestors. A senior religious leader at Shela (K 113) said that local people believe that the jaya used in this manner contain blessings or baraka, and should not be taken from the dead. The jaya should be left either at the ufuko in the house where the body is purified for burial or at the grave of the ancestors. People from Shela, for example, go to a tomb at Takwa biannually to pray for rain (see Wilson 1979,13) and leave the jaya used at this time at the tomb. They are not pleased when archaeologists make surface collections in this area, because they are removing the jaya which contain absorbed blessings from benevolent spirits.

The idea that the material of an object such as clay can absorb and even transmit blessings or pollution is not unique to the Swahili. In India Hindus believe that pollution from lower castes and women in an impure state, such as after childbirth, can be absorbed and transmitted by earthenware containers. Hindus will not eat with or drink from the same container used by a Muslim, whom they consider polluting. The Swahili experienced this attitude and practice through their exposure to

numerous Hindu traders who came to East Africa from early times. Brass pots for Hindus (G 202) are less able to transmit impurity, and iron both to the Hindus (G 45,141,203) and the Swahili (K 89,246, 267,280) is a material which is able to ward off evil spirits. Materials therefore, such as clay or iron, are believed to be capable of transmitting good and bad forces. Whitewash applied to earthenware pots within the Hindu context protects a pot's contents from attack from evil spirits; within the Swahili society it was argued in chapter 4 that the decorations on the wall surfaces: especially the niches, were a form of protection against pollution.

With these concepts in mind, we will now look at Swahili earthenware forms. Kirkman (1963,1966 and 1974), Chittick (1974) and Sassoon (1980) have published typologies based on rim-sherds and decorated sherds which they believed represent 'apparent classes of pottery' (Chittick 1974,317). It was hoped that with time and with large samples from many sites a typology would be developed that, coupled with the dates of production of the imported wares, could date periods of occupation more accurately. This has thus far not been possible because some local pottery forms and decorations have been used for hundreds of years (Kirkman 1974,85), and there is



a large diversity in some periods. Which characteristic to be considered in creating a typology has not been directly discussed, but it seems that the form, decoration and clay used to make the pots were the elements most often taken into account. The old problems of whether to 'lump or split' an 'apparent class' must have caused problems; but the Swahili people have not been asked by archaeologists on what grounds they classified pottery. It was as if the culture had been dead for thousands of years.

'Such classification allows controlled comparison between collections from different sites. But such classifications are entirely formal, and arrived at, by necessity, independently of what the maker (or user) of the object perceived as different types. With rich documentary materials of historical archaeology (and ethnographic data), such classifications are not only sterile exercises but potentially very misleading'. (Deetz 1977,13).

The idea of linking behaviour and/or ethnic identity is not new. For example, Kirkman found that in the lowest levels of Gedi, Kilepwa and Ungwana the pottery was identical but in the fifteenth century there was a considerable difference between the pottery from Gedi and Ungwana, showing the severance of an original link (Kirkman 1963,46). Chittick also mentions that in the earliest periods there was considerable

uniformity in the local wares as far south as Kilwa, which is not true of later periods. (Chittick 1974,317). Kirkman added that the introduction of an unusual decoration 'must be an import from another African ceramic area' (Kirkman 1974,87). Yet the question of who made the pots and who is still using similar pots today is not pursued. The introduction of slave potters, who produced their traditional shapes and decorations, at least for a short period of time after being captured, could account for an increase in variety as the settlements became wealthier and kept slaves for specialised tasks. It would be worthwhile to collect pots from the traditional groups who still make earthenware containers in the areas where slaves were taken and compare them to the pots found in earlier periods (for example the eighteenth century) in places like the Lamu archipelago where there were thousands of slaves. Lamu would also be a suitable area for comparison, because the hunter-gatherers, the Boni, and the pastoralists, the Orma, who were the free people living on the mainland, produced few if any pots. The pottery found in Lamu town was therefore not obtained from the local people. The freeborn elite men and women considered the work of a potter to be dirty, physical labour and below their station, and said it was the work of their slaves.

Pottery is still being made and used although it is rapidly being replaced with aluminium pots both in the Swahili settlements and among the other ethnic groups who live on the coast. If more relevant ethnographic information is going to be collected it should be done soon. These data could of course be linked most closely with the most recent archaeological periods, primarily the seventeenth century until the present. ~~It was to this goal that my research was directed in general although I did little work on local pottery specifically, and I can only make a few additions to the information collected by Kirkman and Chittick.~~

I interviewed women potters (K 7) at Kwa Jomvu, near Mombasa, a location mentioned by Kirkman (1974, 83) and people (K 7, 41, 51, 92, 98, 103, 113, 122, 125, 214, 246, 267) in Lamu, Shela, Pate and Siyu concerning the forms and functions of local pottery. There were only eight forms (fig. 70) or types described to me by the Swahili women at all five locations. The size could vary greatly but the form marked the function. Decoration was found only on cooking pots and medicine pots.

My information is very similar to that obtained by Kirkman (1974, 81-4) but I was able to learn more about the use of each form of pot. The earthenware from my excavations was similar to that found by

Wilson at Takwa (the town which flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on Manda island, near Lamu island). He recorded and reconstructed pots from many houses and thus had a much more representative sample than I did from only three houses. I will try when possible to link ethnographic information with the pots I excavated and the pots which he illustrated in his 1979 article and guide, Takwa : an ancient Swahili settlement of the Lamu archipelago. He used his knowledge of the historical data on diet to surmise the function of the various pot forms rather than ethnographic material.

Local typology of earthenware (fig. 70)

The chunga (form 1) is a large carinated pot which comes in many sizes and is used to cook rice or ugali, a maize meal or millet porridge (Wilson, 1979 15, fig.5:1).

A similar pot which is generally smaller, with a shorter neck and with a wider mouth, called kaango (form 2) is used to cook fish, meat and vegetables. (Wilson 1979, 15, fig.5D). Both of these forms have round bottoms and are balanced between three stones over a fire or placed on a clay stove to be described below. Both of these cooking pots have a band of decoration at the point of carination. Pots used for making medicine, vyadawa (form 3), look like small kaango, but are only about 20 cm in diameter. This form of pottery was also described by Kirkman at Gedi: 'The miniature



carinated pot, fig. 12 E, was used for some toilet preparation' (Kirkman 1963, 45). The fourth form of decorated pot, the jungu la mofa is the largest pot that may have been made locally. This pot is decorated on the outside but set into the ground, therefore the decoration would not be visible when in use as an oven. A complete earthenware oven of this type was found in the lower levels of the Mchele house test pit (F VI; see fig. 70). These ovens, set into the floor of houses, have also been described by Kirkman at Gedi (1963, 44, fig. 11N), who added that they could also be used as storage jars. They are still in use in Lamu today and the woman (K 188) whom I watched use one said that she stored sugar and medicine in her oven when it was not being used to bake her bread. Wilson (1979, 14) gives detailed information on how the oven is used to bake millet cakes. Chittick also describes these ovens at Kilwa in late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century levels, but calls them gai (Chittick 1974, 238).

Jungu la mofa which are completely buried and contain valued goods are called dafina, or buried treasure (K 41, 48, 76, 119, 125, 304). A sacrifice, sadaka, is performed to attract a benevolent spirit to guard the pot's contents (K 48, 51). This practice is referred to in the previous chapter in connection with the bottle which was found at the threshold of the door to the Darini ndani, and the buried pots

discovered at Gedi by Kirkman (1963, 26). Dafini are generally buried at thresholds; however, because the one discovered at the Mchele site was in the lower levels of the test pit, its position in relation to a building or settlement plan was unknown.

The first four forms of local pots described have all been cooking pots, and they have all been decorated. The next four forms are not in direct contact with food which will be served to men and they are not decorated. The fifth form described by the Swahili women was a lid (form 5) or kia. These lids were also mentioned by Kirkman (1975,83). There are two types, one with a knob on the top, and a second type 'with a turned-up rim, like a hat, and sometimes a handle in the middle. It was invariably carbonized' (Kirkman 1974,83, fig. 54. 15 and fig. 39.30). I have seen lids used in the preparation of rice. Charcoal is placed on the lid to brown and dry the top of the rice in the final stage of cooking.

The sixth form of pot is called by the local Swahili bunguu, or bia. This pot has vertical sides and is used for making an infusion from grated coconut, a common ingredient in many Swahili dishes. The grated coconut and spices are transferred to a

decorated pot for cooking with other ingredients (rice and meat). In other words nothing which is prepared by women in the undecorated bunguu is given directly to men. This flat-bottomed bowl is also used as a mortar for the preparation of some spices, and like the lid it is never decorated (Wilson also recorded this form: 1979,15,fig. H).

The seventh form is a clay stove. Chittick says that a form of 'horned' earthenware stove dates back to the end of the fourteenth century at Kilwa (1974,331), and Kirkman notes that on the northern coast they had not been found at 'levels which could not be earlier than the middle of the fifteenth, and are characteristic ware of the sixteenth century (Kirkman 1963, 44). These 'horned' vessels, Kirkman said, were used as portable stoves by the Swahili in their homes and on dhows, but not by coastal Africans (Kirkman 1963,44). 'Charcoal is placed in the bottom of the stove and the pots rested on the projecting "horns"'(Chittick 1974,331). Food is placed in the decorated cooking pots and cooked on these stoves. Again the food does not come into direct contact with men with this type of pot. These stoves are now rarely used and the only time I saw one used was in the house of a woman (K 136) who had recently given birth; it was placed under her bed and was being used as a small heater. I was also told that it was used next to the toilet/

washroom to heat water from the water cistern which was used in child delivery.

The eighth form of pot, called kijungu, is made only by the female children of women potters, at least this is so at Kwa Jomvu. The round pots the girls make are used for learning to cook and are played with as toys. From three to five years of age the little girls make small toy pots, older girls make medium-size pots and so forth, only mature women making standard-size pots shaped and decorated for household use and sale. The round, undecorated pots are like the ones illustrated by Wilson from Takwa (1079,15,fig. 5:B and C). I did not see round undecorated pots being used anywhere other than where they were being made at Kwa Jomvu.

I now want to look at three factors and their relationships: (1) women, men and children, (2) food and (3) decorated cooking pots; the chunga (grain), kaango (meat), jungu la mofa (bread) and vyadawa (medicine) pots. Objects, as Douglas (1981), Tambiah (1969), Hirschon (1981) and other have stressed 'are good to think with' and often represent concepts which may or may not be expressed verbally. Women are considered polluting within the Swahili culture because they were the Africans who brought the Arab lineage into question, so they were not allowed to enter mosques or pray, especially during their impure periods after childbirth or during menstrual periods.



Men, in comparison, if freeborn were impure only after sexual intercourse or physical contact with marriagable women.

Food, within the Swahili social or ritual context, can be used to rid oneself of pollution which is causing sickness or bad luck. When food has been used in this way it is called a kaffara (K 287,297,280,304). 'It is passed out to many persons, thus diluting and dissipating the undesired element' (El Zein 1974,300). 'People are naturally secretive about a kaffara and do not acknowledge it when they hand it out' (ibid.,301).

Decorated pots, and many other <sup>decorated</sup> items are associated with women and periods of transition, when the Swahili social order is most threatened. Items associated with men, purity, Islam and the established power sources are less decorated. The cooking pots are used by women, who are in general more 'impure' than men and often by slaves who are even more 'polluted'. Men might be uneasy about the pollution of women coming in contact with their food, which is believed to be a vehicle, kaffara, able to absorb and carry ill wishes. Masters also feared being poisoned, for example by a slave or concubine who would be freed at the death of her master. The pots which held food or medicine (fig. 70 1-4) while it was being transformed for men by women were marked by 'protective' decoration.

This decoration was a form of spoken ritual which preserved the purity of the food or medicine. This decoration 'worked' in the same way that the zidaka (plaster niches) and the arch over the toilet protected the men from the defilement caused by women.

This concept is not unique to the Swahili society. Braithwaite (1982) has demonstrated, for the Azande in the Sudan, that decoration is placed on pots to mark out practices which are dangerous to the social order. These decorations are symbols which communicate a message which cannot be discussed openly. If they were discussed, more power would be given to the women by the men, because the men would be admitting that the women could be a threat to them. Within the Swahili culture, food must be cooked and medicine made for men of the highest status and yet the food and medicine are made by women with low status. It is considered an insult to be served by a servant, and the freeborn serve the freeborn at weddings etc. However, female servants or, in the past female slaves, prepare the food over open fires.

Fire is also seen as a destructive element, within the Swahili society. Fire contains both light which is good and stable and smoke which is associated with darkness and evil (El Zein 1974, 179-82). Fire is like women: it can contain the purity and impurity of the family. El Zein writes,

'the Mngwana woman was considered 'a vessel: whatever her husband puts inside her will be kept inside and the child will be like his father, while the souriya (concubine) was thought to be like fire: whatever you put inside gets burned ... The pot preserves, while the fire burns. The good pot does not change the food you put inside; while in the fire, good or bad, food usually gets burned' (El Zein, 1974,33).

Thus we can see that the Swahili use pottery symbolically to represent social problems, but this is not always verbalised in detail.

As Braithwaite suggests, 'decoration may function as a ritual marker of particular breaches of the conceptual order in contexts where covert expression of the message or concepts involved is necessary or advantageous, given the social order. Decoration may function specifically in contexts and about topics that may not be explicitly expressed, but must instead be restricted to the 'area of the undiscussed' (Braithwaite 1982,81, following Bourdieu's work : 1977,169). By symbolically marking, that is, decorating the Swahili cooking pots, which can absorb good and bad elements, a non-verbal ritual is mediating a potentially dangerous process (food and medicine preparations).

#### CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen that pottery, within the

Swahili context, is a material which can absorb both the blessings of angels (goodness) and pollution. Food, kaffara, can likewise absorb and transmit these elements. Mature women contain impurity which is threatening to men, although it is not spoken of directly. For the Swahili (and within other cultures, such as the Azande), decoration can be used as a ritual marker and as I have argued earlier, within the nineteenth-century Swahili society as a form of protection. Therefore when women use pots to prepare food for men the pots are decorated (as were the first four forms of local ware described - types 1-4) but when pots are not in direct contact with food, prepared for men by women, the pots are not decorated (as in the case of the last four forms of pots described - see fig. 70). Only one of the later undecorated four comes in contact with food, the kijungu, which is only used by small girls, who are considered 'pure' and they do not prepare food for men.

In the following chapter this concept of goods being able to absorb good and bad is pursued in relation to imported wares. It must, however, be stressed that the social uses of objects must be seen within a specific historical and social context. At this point it would be unwise to say that a given class of goods, such as pottery or porcelain, has the same symbolic significance during all periods,



even within the Swahili culture. A general pattern based on historical documents, only leads us to believe that the cultural continuity present in the society from at least the ninth century will allow present ethnographic data to aid in understanding the past. Changes can and do occur within this pattern, and in chapter 8 objects and their social uses will be explored over a period of three centuries.

## CHAPTER 8

## IMPORTED PORCELAIN AND GLAZED WARES

Local pottery, glazed earthenware and porcelain have received more archaeological attention than any aspect of the Swahili material culture other than possibly the floor plans of buildings. The practical and social uses of local pottery, as sherds and as containers, has been discussed and I would now like to turn to glazed wares and porcelain. In the past, archaeologists have considered these wares as dating tools, indicators of areas with which the Swahili had trade connections, and markers of wealth. It was assumed that the bowls were used to serve food to the wealthy (Chittick 1974, 244). From interviews (K 31, 36, 41, 48, 83, 87, 94, 220, 246, 297, 348) I learned that \_\_\_\_\_ porcelain and glazed wares were used more for decoration than for serving food. Collections were made and displayed in the many plaster wall niches found in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century northern Swahili houses.

The glazed wares and porcelain found within and archaeological context are usually in floor fills as sherds. They are not found as whole bowls left in association with spaces where they were used in daily life. Did the porcelain sherds have a

social use as jaya, or sherds? Like the sherds of local pottery, I doubt if they had 'meaning' within the floor fills, but porcelain sherds may have also functioned as protective charms. Within the larger Islamic world sherds are used as protective charms. Drower writes that, in Iraq, 'Blue beads, buttons (two-holed, three-holed, five-holed and seven-holed) and even pieces of blue (glazed) pottery, are powerful against the Evil Eye and chebsa' (1938, 106). Barth, writing about Muslims in South Persia, also mentions that blue beads and broken pottery are used as protection against the evil eye, provoked by envy (1961, 144). Ingrams (1931, 242) said that broken plates on Swahili graves were not for decoration but for protection against 'devils'.

Seven Chinese blue-and-white porcelain sherds found in the Lamu house excavations had holes in them. Holes were often made in porcelain to mend broken items, but it now also seems that a few of these sherds may have been used as pendants for protection from the evil eye. Porcelain sherds were also found in association with the iron found with the infant burials, both in Darini and the Mchele house. It seems likely that the sherds were intended to protect the deceased infants from the ill effects of evil spirits or to attract and 'absorb' the spirit that perhaps was believed to have 'taken' the child and prevent it



from doing further harm to the occupants of the household. People who were asked about this practice denied that this was done, saying that to bury anything with a dead body is against the tenets of Islam. More evidence will be presented later in this chapter which supports the idea that porcelain was used as a protective charm within Swahili society, regardless of what people say today.

Imported sherds have been used by archaeologists to date Swahili sites, period of occupation and structures, as well as to *indicate trade areas, and to some degree the occupants' standard of living.* In chapter 6 ceramic wares were used to date buildings, levels and features. It is therefore important to describe these wares which were excavated and compare them to the types of imported wares found at other Swahili sites.

#### GLAZED EARTHENWARE AND PORCELAIN

##### Ceramic dating

The following section will be concerned with a description and dating of glazed wares, Chinese stoneware and porcelain and European porcelain. I will describe and date the wares found in my excavations, following Kirkman and Chittick's work, although I also consulted Mr. John Ayers at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Ms Jessica Rawson at the British Museum in London, Mr Robin



Crichton at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, Mr Michael Rogers at the British Museum in London and Dr Geza F  h  rvari at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

Kirkman and Chittick are most familiar with the poor quality Chinese export wares found in East Africa. These wares have limited interest to collectors. Little is known about the production or kiln sources in China, because until recently Europeans were not allowed in the country. The only collection that might provide comparative material is in the Philippines. The same can be said for the 'Islamic wares' or glazed earthenware, for little work has been done in the areas believed to have produced the wares and there are few relevant collections to use for comparative studies. In general the wares found in East Africa are of a poor quality compared to wares produced in other parts of the Islamic world at the same time or the wares being made during the same periods in China. I studied the imperial collection in Taiwan for one month in 1976 and found that it did not help me when dealing with the Chinese porcelain found in East Africa. There is also a Ph.D. thesis by Dr R. Wilding, which was submitted to the University of Nairobi, which might be helpful when it is published. This thesis is concerned with ceramics found on the coast of Kenya.

All of the glazed earthenware excavated at the two sites in Lamu and the one in Pate could be identified as Chittick's three types of Islamic Monochrome ware (Chittick 1974,304). Most of the sherds that I found (about 20) of these three types were in the lower levels of my Lamu test pits. The earliest type, late fourteenth to early fifteenth century was found in the lowest levels of the test pits at both Lamu locations. The sherds had buff-coloured bodies and light green glazes (see fig. 72). They were associated with sand and clay deposits and from this we may assume that this area, around Darini and the Mchele house, was not inhabited before the late fourteenth century. I do not think, however, that this is the oldest area of Lamu.

The most common type, approximately 15 of the 20 Islamic Monochrome sherds found had red paste and dark blue, blue-green or dark green glazes. Chittick describes this as 'Standard Monochrome', which he says dates to the mid-fifteenth to the sixteenth century. The form seemed to be small bowls. Only two of the sherds excavated represented his third type, 'Late Monochrome', with a buff paste and poor glaze (see fig. 72). It goes without saying that my sample was too small to add any information to this classification. The wares appeared in the test pits after the Chinese wares had stopped, except for one occurrence when the Islamic ware



was associated with Chinese celadon which could not be dated. Only one sherd of Islamic blue-and-white ware (Chittick 1974,304) was found (in a mixed level).

Professor Metha at the University of Baroda allowed me to photograph the glazed earthenware and Chinese porcelain from his excavations at Champaner, Patan and Cambay. The glazed earthenware looked like the 'Islamic Monochrome' types and 'Manganese Purple ware' described by Chittick (1974,304 and 305). Metha told me (personal communication) that, based on the fabric and the glaze, he thought that both the glazed earthenware he had excavated and the ones I had shown him from East African excavations were produced in India, although as yet no kilns have been found.

The same variety of Chinese wares commonly found on the eastern coast of Africa was also present in the towns on the Gujarat coast; the area known to have served as an entrepôt for the China porcelain trade. A photo was taken of a collection of Chinese porcelain in a Bohra's house in Mandvi (fig. 73). The Bohra said that this was the type of ware that his family sold in East Africa, during difficult times in Kutch. Some of his relatives own and operate a general store in Lamu today.

Before continuing with this typical late eighteenth-century ware which is so common both on the northern coast of Kenya and the northern coast of India, a

word must be added about the Chinese ware, celadon, which occurred in the test pits along with the 'Islamic Monochromes', to preserve the chronological order of the description of imported wares. All of the celadon found in the Lamu test pits could be classed as the 'coarse' type of ware described by Chittick (1974,309); compare with fig. 72.

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Chinese export porcelain described and illustrated by Kirkman (1974,107-110 , fig. 34,35,36,37 and 38), is based on his large collection from the excavations at Fort Jesus. The types which were most common in my excavations (see fig. 72) were the types listed as those most characteristic of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: '... small bowls with a border of rosettes (Class 12a; Pl.35.6), the dishes with "cod roe" decoration (Class 17;Pl.37.1), the bowls with trellis and spray (Class 15;Pl.36.56,6), the chrysanthemum (Class 16a;Pl.36.7,8), and the comb or character (Class 19a;Pl.37.3-5), the bowls and dishes with incised ornament and blue bands (Class 27a;Pl.38.4,5) and the blue bowls (Class 30) (Kirkman 1974,100-1). Some of these common patterns are also illustrated and discussed by Chittick (1974,312 pl.147 b,e,f) and by C. Sassoon in Chinese porcelain in Fort Jesus (1975, no. page numbers).

European plates replaced Chinese imports in the



nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Allen 1972,23). The most common was a Dutch pearlware, 1795-1815, the only ware for which I have found a production date (Stark 1981,59), and as result I have sometimes listed it separately .

#### The uses of porcelain and glazed wares

It was only the rich Swahili traders who controlled a surplus which allowed them to afford such luxury goods, to which it is even doubtful that the poorer class had access. As was discussed earlier, trade between the elite Swahili and the foreign traders took place at their homes and even admission to the towns was controlled, so people considered to be lower-class by the Swahili and foreign traders, in other words, the ethnic groups who lived outside the towns, were not in a position to buy porcelain for many reasons. Even today the Pokomo, Orma, and Boni, who live on the mainland near Lamu, rarely use porcelain, although it can now be purchased in shops in Lamu. These groups lived in grass dwellings until the last ten or twenty years, when they started to build mud houses. Because they did not use porcelain or build mud houses, it seems doubtful that the ancestors of these mainland people founded the Swahili towns. Mud construction and imported porcelain is always found in the earliest

levels (ninth century) at sites which are now associated with Swahili towns. It is more likely that the towns were founded by foreign traders who were familiar with the use of porcelain and mud construction in other countries around the Indian Ocean.

The Swahili, like other groups (Arabs and Indian) around the Indian Ocean, eat off communal trays with their fingers, and porcelain plates are used to decorate the walls. We know from nineteenth-century ethnographic material that porcelain was also displayed as an indicator of wealth in the coral houses of the Lamu area, in Arab houses and those of rich Muslims in India.

The Swahili poet, Sayid Abdallah of Pate, in his poem 'Inkishafi', describes the type of coral house that was excavated in Pate town shortly after it was deserted. He says 'spiders have woven webs in bed-canopies. The wall-niches in the houses, once inlaid (filled) with porcelain bowls, now have little birds nestled in them'. (Abdallah, 1800s, translated by Knappert 1979,134). The Sultan's daughter in Zanzibar also confirmed this tradition (see above page 23 ). In India at the same time, in a British Gazetteer report describing the material of each ethnic group and class one reads: 'At Ahmedabad in the houses

of rich Sunni trading Bohora's the shelves are ornamented with rows of much-prized old china and spoons' (Bombay Gazetteer: Gujarat Population : Musalmans and Parse. Vol. IX, 1899). Porcelain and glazed wares were not only used as status symbols but the whole bowls and plates were also used as protective charms, as were their sherds.

One of the first people to write about Swahili culture noted that 'it is probable that Chinaware with which they [the Swahili monuments] were increasingly ornamented had some magical significance' (Mathew 1956, 68). He was speaking of the plates used to decorate Swahili tombs, but the principle could be applied to houses as well. When I interviewed Swahili about the plates, most people said that they were just used for decoration, and a few rich people ate off them sometimes. However, a couple of women said that it was good luck when one broke because it meant that evil spirits had been 'absorbed' by the plate rather than a person. Within the coral houses plates are placed in the zidaka and at the bottom of the water cistern, barika. The zidaka is located in the ndani, where the most valuable household belongings are placed, where marriages are consummated, where bodies are prepared for burial, and where stillborn infants are buried.

These are objects which one would want to protect from envy and activities which could certainly be ill-affected by evil spirits. The plate which is inserted in the bottom of the water cistern may be intended to purify the standing water, which is used not only for bathing but also for ritual ablution. Darini and the Pate house both had eighteenth-century blue-and-white Chinese porcelain bowls inserted in the bottom of the birika. All of the coral houses measured and recorded had plates or evidence that plates had once been placed in the bottom of the birika.

Other Islamic societies use porcelain plates as protective charms. Marian Wenzel, in House Decoration in Nubia, writes that porcelain plates were used to protect the house from the evil eye. The plates were often placed over the entrance to the house. Before plates were available, cowrie shells were embedded in the walls for the same purpose (Wenzel 1972,40). (The Swahili placed cowrie shells in the coral roofs of their houses, for perhaps the same reason).

In this chapter we have discovered that imported plates were not used by the Swahili for food, but as status markers and as a material protective charm able to mediate between the spirit world and the living.



The sherds are used by the archaeologists for dating sites, but they are used by the Swahili as protective charms.

## CHAPTER 9

## THE SOCIAL USES OF OBJECTS/FINDS

Interviews were the primary source of ethnographic material used to analyse the social meaning of archaeological finds. However, early twentieth-century probate records were useful and provided evidence of the relationships between classes of men and women, and the goods associated with each category of person. Freeborn men owned land and trade goods. Their clothing was appropriate to their class and they had high status gifts for upper- and lower-class women. Freeborn women owned houses, furniture, fine clothes and gold jewellery. All of these were gifts from men and none of the gifts could aid her in producing wealth. This power was reserved for the upper-class men. The poor men had land enough for subsistence and a few goods; poor women had more goods but rarely land. Strobel's interviews in Mombasa support these statements as do my interviews in Lamu and the probate records below (Strobel, 1975). I have chosen four example probates which document this pattern in greater detail. The case studies <sup>below</sup> will also show the types of items associated with each class of person, some of which were

recovered in the excavations. These goods make up the 'tool kit' of each group; they are the artefacts which establish and maintain a person's rank.

At the end of the chapter we will look at excavated objects from the nineteenth century to the present and follow the Swahili pattern through periods of change.

### PROBATES

Abdalla bin Saleh

Arab - male

died 14 June 1899

1.	14 bags of local wool	
2.	blanket	3 rupees
3.	red fez	1 rupee
4.	1 bag <u>sufi</u> (pillow filling)	10 rupees
5.	<u>Kanzu</u> (man's white robe)	?
6.	2 ½ yds. <u>bafuta</u> (white cloth, good quality)	½ rupee
7.	6 <u>leso</u> (women's dress cloth)	9 rupees
8.	3 ½ yds <u>bafuta</u>	1 rupee
9.	French perfume	½ rupee
10.	teapot	1¼ rupee
11.	mosquito net	5 rupees
12.	3 yds. best wool cloth	5 rupees
13.	gold dollar nose piece ( <u>kishakasi</u> )	3 rupees

14. house sundries promised to wife	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ rupees
15. pen	2 rupees
16. cloth ( <u>dawria</u> ), white with stripe	4 rupees
17. <u>joho</u> (man's black robe)	7 $\frac{1}{2}$ rupees
18. <u>wanda</u> in bottles (3)(eye make-up)	3 rupees
19. white <u>kanzu</u>	?
20. white silk for a lady	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ rupees
21. tea set, 4 cups	6 rupees
22. rose oil perfume	?
23. 2 bottles of perfume	2 rupees
24. 3 bags of rice	27 rupees
25. 3 bags of rice	39 rupees
26. <u>shamba</u> (plantation)	1,000 rupees
27. boat	900 rupees
28. <u>godown</u> (warehouse)	3,375 rupees
29. <u>godown</u>	4,710 rupees
30. <u>shamba</u>	600 rupees
31. <u>shamba</u>	2,000 rupees
32. <u>shamba</u>	500 rupees
33. plot of land in town	476 rupees
34. door and window	40 rupees
35. millet	215 rupees
36. <u>sim-sim</u> (sesame)	292 rupees
37. 1 large stone house (divided rent between three people)	700 rupees
38. from Indian for <u>Godown</u>	625 rupees
39. house rent (per month)	7 rupees



40. 1 small stone house	241 rupees
41. 1 large stone house	700 rupees

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Aisha binti Sheikh Abdulla

died 1919 - female

trust account for lunatic woman in 1912 (freeborn)

(no values were given for the items listed)

1. pr of silver matali (earrings?)
2. taiji (gold and silver) (jewellery?)
3. 1 pr kuti (gold ear-plugs)
4. 1 kama (necklace with 37 coral beads)
5. 2 shahasi (jewellery?)
6. 1 pr zingala (gold) (jewellery?)
7. 2 gold combs
8. 1 silver mwezi (jewellery?)
9. 5 silver buttons
10. 1 string of beads
11. 13 beads
12. 2 bottles of perfume
13. 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  of UDI (incense)

Total value 423 rupees

PROPERTY OF Aisha binti Sheikh Abdulla - female

14. 10 ebynus (ebony?) chairs
  15. 10 Bombay-made chairs
  16. 8 bedsteads (of Fata)
-

17. 1 box
  18. 2 mahinti (hanging lamps)
  19. 8 chairs
  20. 2 lamps
  21. 1 carpet
  22. 1 large bedstead
  23. 4 small bedsteads
  24. 1 stone house
- 

Hamadi wa Bwana Patte

died 1903 - male

ex-slave - bought (or freed) by government

1. 1 hen, 1 chicken
2. 1 empty box
3. cashew nuts            14 anan
4. mattress
5. 1 plate
6. small mattress
7. kikoi (cloth that men wrap around waist)
8. cap
9. pillow
10. basket for food
11. bow and arrow
12. almonds
13. writing box
14. 4 beds
15. bead bracelet        8 anan

16. metal bucket	
17. 1 rice bag	
18. 2 bags of rice (uncleaned)	9 rupees
19. water jar	
20. animal skin	
21. casava <u>shamba</u>	less than 1 rupee
22. small <u>shamba</u> for food	2 rupees
23. silver ear-plugs	15 annas

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Time binti Mawbo

died 1927 - female

freed slave

1. 1 chair	5 shillings
2. 1 mat	4 shillings
3. 1 pillow	1 shilling
4. 2 knives	4 shillings
5. 3 beds	3 shillings
6. 1 Indian jar	1 shilling
7. 1 chest	4 shillings
8. 2 cups	$\frac{1}{2}$ shilling
9. 1 looking glass	7 shillings
10. 1 bowl	$\frac{1}{2}$ shilling
11. 3 bottles	?
12. 1 mud house	14 shillings
Total	44 shillings

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Some of the objects listed in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century probate records were found in the excavations. The miscellaneous finds which are going to be analysed in detail in this chapter were recovered from disturbed strata, i.e. floor surfaces mixed with floor fills and rubbish deposits found within the two Lamu house sites and at Pate. Several objects were found in mixed floor levels of the Mchele house, and although they cannot be accurately dated they were found in levels 5 and 6 and are therefore probably from the eighteenth or nineteenth century. These objects were selected for analysis because when linked with ethnographic data they provide insights into how objects were used in relation to social, spiritual and economic practices which created or maintained positions of power.

Beads and jewellery were listed in the probate records, as being owned by men and women of all classes. Men never wear either of these items, but they are important as gifts to women. I have talked with several Swahili people (K 220,221,248) about jewellery but first I would like to review what archaeologists have written in the past.

#### JEWELLERY

Sixty-two beads were found in my excavations in Lamu



and Pate (fig. 74). This is a small number compared to the thousands collected and categorised by Chittick (1974) at Kilwa and Kirkman (1974) at Fort Jesus. I have found it difficult to follow their descriptions and have decided to use Plate 1 'Selected beads' (Chittick 1874) to describe the beads from my excavations. I will also discuss the beads in terms of Swahili classification, which is based on colour. Kirkman and Chittick considered size, form, colour, materials, production techniques, origins of the beads, and numbers present in excavations during different time periods (Kirkman 1974, 129-49, fig. 80; and Chittick 1974, 460-95). Chittick, writing about the daily life in Kilwa in the fifteenth century, says that 'The Portuguese were much struck by the richness of the clothing of the upper classes, which included garments of silk as well as cotton; slaves, however, wore only a loin cloth. The rich wore much gold and silver jewellery, including earrings, and bangles for both arms and legs; none of these however, has survived. He does, however, illustrate ornaments (1974, fig. 179).

'The poorer people must have worn glass beads in great quantities to judge by the number found in the excavations' (Chittick 1974, 244).

Silver jewellery is not prized by upper-class Muslims in Lamu (Allen 1972,20) nor in India (Bombay Gazetteer 1899,107). In Lamu it is associated with slaves and evil and in India with old or widowed women (ibid.,107). It is therefore doubtful if silver jewellery was ever worn by Waungwana women, although they may have taken pride in having such jewellery to decorate their slaves with on special occasions.

Beads may have been associated with the poor by Chittick because they were a main article of commerce with the interior (Chittick 1974,460), and therefore used or worn by mainland people who were certainly poorer in material goods than the upper-class Swahili. But based on my interviews with Swahili people in the Lamu area, I believe that they were worn for several reasons and by all ranks of women of African, Indian and Arab descent. The symbolic reasons for wearing beads may have changed over the years, but some practices seem to be long-lasting and/or to be present in many Muslim countries.

The Portuguese writer, Barbosa, says in 1514 (translated by Stanley 1866,67) that the Moors wear beads on their arms in such a manner that they touch the skin, saying that they are good to preserve chastity. Beads are seen in Lamu shops today and yet I never saw

women wearing them, but thinking about the Barbosa information I started to ask women where they wore beads, thinking that they may be worn under their clothing. I found this question to be most embarrassing to my friends. (Ingrams (Zanzibar, Its History and Its People, 312 and 236) refers to women wearing beads around their waist. I pressed my informants to tell me why wearing beads around the waist was embarrassing, were they for chastity? No. they finally told me, they were worn to give their husbands added sexual pleasure during intercourse. An old man later delighted in telling me that they were 'colour coded'. If your wife wanted 'to play' she wore white beads, if she did not, she wore black and if she was having her menstrual period she wore red beads. This was difficult information to obtain and it was even more difficult to find many people who would confirm or deny the practice which, if it is still followed, is only done by a few more traditional women. Women are not supposed to refuse their husband sexual gratification, and this would have been a non-verbal means of saying no. The numbers of white beads were very rare in the finds, four in the Mchele site and two in the ndani of the Pate house. This makes me doubt that the symbolic colour-coding system was very prevalent. There were even fewer black beads,



two in the Mchele excavations and none in any of the other sites. Black beads are also used as prayer beads and should have been numerous, if the beads on the house floors and floor fills represent the colours of beads in use. One pattern was interesting and may be related to the 'colour code' mentioned by the old man. Twelve red beads (drawn) were found in the ufuko of the Pate house. One large amber bead, a blue bead and a ~~c~~ornelian were also found in the Darini ufuko, although it was not fully excavated (fig. 74). But why twelve red beads in the ufuko of the Pate house? Women while bleeding after childbirth are considered 'unclean' and are not allowed physical contact with their husbands. This may be when red beads were worn, and because women commonly died in or soon after childbirth, there might come to be more red beads in the ufuko than any other colour.

Cornelian beads (two found in the Pate house and four in the Mchele house), modern coral-coloured beads (five in the Mchele house), and terracotta beads (one in Darini) were all said by various informants to provide protection from fevers. The yellow beads (four at the Mchele house site and two in the Pate ndani) have no known significance within the Swahili context as far as I know. Blue beads, like sherds of blue porcelain, were mentioned



as being used as protective charms against the evil eye (Drower in Iraq 1938, 106 and Barth in South Persia 1961,144).

Beads should thus sometimes be seen as non-verbal codes which allowed communication between men and women on topics that were difficult to speak about while at the same time retaining their ranked positions. And beads have been used to communicate with the spirit world, which causes fevers and problems (including illness and death) caused by the evil eye.

The fifteen blue and blue-green beads (four from Pate, ten from the Mchele house and one in Darini, were all identified as having been made in India by Metha. (I took the beads from the excavations to India for his opinion.)

The only bead which I excavated which was made of an organic material was one bird bone (fig. 74). Chittick also mentions that at Kilwa he found 'pieces of bird bone' which were possibly used as beads (Chittick 1974,460). I found that children in Pate are still being given bird bones to wear around their beaks, as protective charms. The bones are taken from owls, juni la usiku, meaning night birds. These birds are believed (K 58,71,75,113,122) to cause young children to grow weak and die of

diarrhoea. 'The Swahili always regarded an owl to be an air spirit; if it happened to be flying in the vicinity, everyone with small children would panic, believing that their young ones would soon be afflicted with a disease known as babu, another name for an owl' (Kindy 1972,4). Bundi is probably the evil spirit who manifests himself as an owl (Ingrams 1967,454). Drower says, 'It will be remembered that Doughty mentions the Arabian belief that the owl was the spirit of a 'wailful women, seeking her lost child through the wilderness' i.e. a woman who had died in childbirth' (Drower 1938,108). Lamu, Shela and Pate women all reported that owl-bone charms were used to protect infants.

Gold jewellery was worn only by the most socially valued freeborn women. Their jewellery consisted of earrings, nose ornaments (ara) (fig. 73) bracelets (76) and necklaces (an excellent collection may be seen in the Lamu Museum.) Chittick also illustrates the jewellery excavated at Kilwa (1974,458,fig. 179) and Kirkman has drawings of the ornaments found in Fort Jesus (1974, fig. 84).

The Swahili women were in purdah and therefore their jewellery was seen only by household members, which included many female domestic servants and other women at social gatherings, such as weddings. Lamu women, as well as Muslim women in India and Oman,

whose customs often influenced Swahili attitudes, considered a woman's jewellery to be a reflection and measure of her social value. Swartz, writing about Swahili women, says that if a woman does not have the personal adornments that her peers perceive as the things that are thought significant, she is easy prey for those who will move themselves and their kin up the social ladder at her expense (Swartz 1981, 28). In India 'On great occasions even the poorest woman is careful to appear with a good show of ornaments. If she has few of her own, she will borrow or get her husband to borrow. If this fails, she will stay at home rather than go in public with, as the saying is, 'her limbs bare'. (Bombay Gazetteer, Vol IX Gujarat Population: Musalmans 1899, 107). In Oman, 'The clothes and even more the ornaments of women, generally worth about three thousand dollars in gold alone, are a far more flamboyant expression of wealth. But this, after all, is wealth earned not by the woman who exhibits it but by her husband, who she honours in wearing it, and he can hardly be blamed for being impolite and ostentatious thus to express his respect for his wife' (Barth 1983, 104).

Even though the Lamu women were in purdah the Waungwana men saw a display of other elite families' jewellery on one occasion. At weddings the bridegroom's



chair (fig. 27) was covered with a white cloth and the household's gold jewellery was used to decorate the chair. Grooms who considered themselves to be more orthodox did not follow this custom (K63) on the grounds that men are forbidden to wear gold in some of the orthodox Muslim traditions (Wensinck 1927,88). In brief, the gold associated with women enhanced their social value or position in relation to other women, but when a man rejected the association 'for religious reasons', it placed the men 'above' the women. His 'purity' was greater than hers. In a more 'earthly' context a women's jewellery belonged to her even in the case of a divorce and it was therefore a source of security. 'From the first day of marriage, therefore she [a Swahili woman] tries to get as much jewellery out of him [her husband] as she can as an insurance for the future (a policy which also, with luck, prevents him from saving enough money to get a second wife)' (Allen, 1972,18).

#### ITEMS RELATING TO CLOTHING

Porcupine spines and spindle-whorls were not listed in the probate records, perhaps because they would not be considered significant enough to list, but they are related to dress. Cloth, although recorded in historical records, is rarely preserved in archaeological remains, nor are the details of its



production and decoration.

A porcupine spine or quill was found in the floor fill of the ndani of the Pate house. These quills are used to make small holes which are then embroidered on the soft white caps that are worn by both upper-class Swahili men and the Omani. They are called kofia in Kiswahili. These are made by women and it is considered to be 'clean' work, and a noble way for a woman to 'keep her hands busy' and fill her hours. Upper-class men in Lamu collect and design the embroidery patterns for these caps. (For example Mchele-made caps, see chapter 6 page 256). Wealthy men on the coast of Kenya and in Oman wear these white caps and white robes (kanzu in Kiswahili and dishdasha in Arabic). Barth (1983,103), writing about Sohar on the coast of Oman (an area that traded with eastern Africa for centuries), writes, 'Wealth may be discreetly sensed in the clothing of men. Immaculate whiteness of clothes has been noted as a signifier of rank'. White is also always associated with purity. Women only wear white when saying their prayers and in this subtle way are again marked out as generally being inferior to men. Needless to say, slaves were never dressed in white.

Two spindle-whorls used in spinning the wool to make cloth were excavated. An earthenware one

was found in the Darini floor fill and a wooden one (fig. 77) was removed from mixed levels (6) within the Mchele site. Wilson found both of these types at Takwa (1979, 15, fig. J and K). Chittick illustrated many earthenware spindle-whorls (Chittick 1974, 430 and 431). The wooden spindle-whorls appear to have been made or turned on a lathe. Indians from Gujarat are famous for this craft, and it is likely that these spindle-whorls were made by them. Barbosa writes at the beginning of the sixteenth century that spun and unspun cotton was exported to East Africa from Cambay (Barbosa, ed. 1866, 27). Perhaps spinning, as is embroidering men's caps today, was a type of work that both upper-class men and women found suitable to their image. But I doubt that earthenware spindle-whorls would be considered appropriate for elite hands, therefore the wooden ones were most likely used by the upper-class or Indians, while the clay ones, made from broken pots, were used by female domestic slaves or concubines. (Male slaves were not domestic servants).

Chittick assumed that an increase in spindle-whorls indicated an increased production (Chittick 1974, 240). This seems a fair assumption, which might in turn indicate a higher demand for cotton due to increased population in a settlement, expanded overseas markets, or an increased demand on the main-

land. It was an important item used in the slave trade, along with beads, and therefore more spindle-whorls might mean more slaves, Indians or upper-class Swahili making cotton cloth with which to buy slaves from mainland people.

#### FOOD

Some foods, such as rice, were listed in the probate records, and the high-status foods are often mentioned in historical accounts; but often there is less evidence concerning a poor man's fare. Information is also usually lacking about kitchen equipment used by the poorer classes of women. The items listed below, which were excavated from a level of ash (an indication of a cooking area), are associated with food preparation and with women in general.

A shell (Arcidea Anadara maculose) used as a coconut grater. (Reeve) (fig. 79) (K 230,287).

Two shells from the edible gastropods (Cerithiidae cerithium sowerbyi, fig. 30. These were not the type mentioned by Chittick (1974,28) as the shell-fish eaten by the poor. A Lamu informant (K 230) added that gastropods were not only eaten but also used as bait. They are called tando or sheeumari by the local people. Ingrams writes that 'Everyone eats either fish or shell-fish, and the poor people subsist largely on the latter merely boiled' (1967,237).

Rotary quern, one quarter of a lower grindstone  
(see Chittick for a good description; (1974, 413 and  
illustrations, plate 155a and b).

Stone, used for sharpening knives, grinding spices  
and for magic (mentioned above, page 273 ; fig. 65)  
(K 181, 201, 286).

All of these finds, which seem to be associated  
with a kitchen area, are not socially valued objects.  
They reflect and create the low status of the  
person associated with this space. The objects  
are those to which anyone could have had access,  
even the slaves of the household, who usually  
prepared the food. From the relational analogy  
gained from ethnographic data collected in Lamu,  
we know that this space and now these objects  
were associated with domestic servants, i.e. slave  
women. Only the rotary quern is still in use today



by descendants of the elite. No one admits that they eat gastropods, which they call 'slave food' or food not suitable for a Mwungwana. No one wants to be marked as a lower-class person, and they now avoid using many objects which were closely associated with the slaves.

All of the faunal remains, including every bone fragment, were identified and weighed with the hope of being able to learn more about the diet of the Swahili through time. However, I was unable to find a way to compare bone weights to meat consumed. The remains did seem to indicate that the most common meat source was fish, followed by chicken, goat/sheep, beef and small birds. There were, as might have been expected in an Islamic community, no pork or dog remains.

The jewellery, items related to cloth-production and decoration, remains of shell-fish and kitchen tools were all found in disturbed floor levels which could not be dated. Ethnographic data provided information related to these items which allowed us to see that these goods were used to mediate relationships, usually between men and women or between social classes. A few of the beads, like many of the objects which were buried in Darini, were used in connection with the spirit world.

## RUBBISH DEPOSITS

Objects were not only found in floor fills but also in rubbish deposits, two in Darini (fig. 62, C1-6, D1-6 and G3,4, H34) and two at the Mchele house (fig. 59, one rubbish deposit, levels 1-4 of E V - E VIII, F V - F VIII and another levels 1-4 of K VI - K VIII).

I found refuse in the ruined Mchele house was easier to understand than rubbish pits located in Darini, which has been continually occupied since it was built. Sassoon, in discussing the processes of deposition related to his excavations in Mombasa, said pits for rubbish disposal would be 'alien to the culture' (1980,36). However, he did not state why he believed this to be so. Rubbish pits are found in ruined and inhabited houses and interviews revealed some of the Swahili attitudes concerning this practice.

## RUBBISH WITHIN HOUSES

In both the Mchele house and the Pate houses the rubbish had been deposited only after the houses had been deserted and ruined. Rubbish pits had been dug and used within Darini after the first floor was constructed and the ground floor was used only for storage and servants' quarters. The Waungwana may have buried rubbish under their houses when they no longer had slaves to carry it away from the house. Many upper-class families (K 22) had wells dug within their houses, when they no longer had slaves to carry water (see figs. 11a, 16a and 24.). It is considered a disgrace even today for The Waungwana to carry anything in public, much less rubbish. Two other factors may have contributed to the practice of having rubbish deposits in the house. The British government directed a land-fill project on the Lamu seafront to create better docking facilities at the turn of the century, and the Swahili were no longer allowed to throw rubbish in the sea as they had before; and the seafront was the most public place one could be seen depositing one's household debris. Another social factor which supports the others is that people who live in coral houses value their privacy very highly. They do not want their

possessions to be public knowledge and even their diet is considered private. Furnishings, although displayed to invited guests at a wedding, are also not to be seen in public. Beds, chairs, etc. are never seen being moved into or out of a house during daylight hours; they are moved only in the middle of the night. Each house or interconnected group of houses strives to be self-sufficient. All of the supplies that were required for the household were ideally contained within the house. It was only recently that shops were introduced to Pate and retail shops were opened by Indians in Lamu under the Sultan of Zanzibar's protection probably about the turn of the century. The Waungwana say it is a low-class practice to have to go out in public to a shop to buy daily necessities. To be independent of others was a show of power. To own objects which could not easily be obtained was a way of maintaining the Waungwana position of domination.

Each coral house was ideally self-sufficient and its contents known only by its family members. Rubbish disposed of in public would certainly have revealed a lot about the standard of living of the household, so it was contained within the house. This custom has not died and an old woman in Shela (K 22) buries all her rubbish in her garden, a ruined section of



her house (see fig. 11a).

On a more abstract level it might be added that this practice of burying rubbish in the house is another example of the house containing the purity and impurity of the family, as discussed in chapter 4 in relation to the seclusion of women. Rubbish and fill levels contain more than sherds which allow dating; the location of artefacts within known domestic spaces may sometimes indicate their function but this is certainly unlikely in the case of rubbish deposits. To understand the significance of the artefacts, or in other words the way they were thought of and used by the Swahili, information is needed that is not usually given in historical accounts. Historical records only rarely tell us about everyday life. But 'since the period within which historical archaeology is concerned extends to the present, nearly a quarter of the entire period since the early seventeenth century can be studied through direct interviews with people who actually experienced the life ways being studied' (Deetz 1977,7). Deetz was referring to early American sites but the same can certainly be said about later Swahili sites because their society has changed only gradually. In the following section I will look at the artefacts found in nineteenth and twentieth-century rubbish deposits

and try to decode the messages which each item contains by using the ethnographic information which I collected in the Lamu area and ideas about how objects can be used socially to create and maintain power for a segment of society.

The earliest rubbish deposit which will be discussed was part of the fill used to construct the elevated platform located in the room behind the Darini ndani (see fig. 62, Cl-6 and D1-6).

#### NINETEENTH-CENTURY FINDS IN DARINI

##### Storage containers

Twenty-six gudulia-ware sherds (wheel-made, imported, water flasks (see Chittick 1974,330; fig. 141 c-d). Eight chatty-ware sherds (Indian water-pots, thin red body, with black painted decoration, made by Indians in Muscat and Zanzibar: see Kirkman 1974, 92; figs. 63, 64.)

One large broken jar, buff-bodied, probably from the Persian Gulf (see Kirkman, 1974,93; fig. 65:16).

One large jar handle (buff-bodied, see Kirkman 1974,93; fig. 74:16).

One large stone jar neck (poor black glaze, buff body (see Kirkman 1974,117; fig. 71:8).

All of these storage containers were common imports of the nineteenth century, and in fact were one of the chief imports from Kutch and Surat, (Coupland 1938,182). Lamu and Shela people (K 41,119,214,280) said that the large containers for vinegar (made from palm sap) and honey are called kasiki (siki is 'vinegar' in Kiswahili) and the large jars for clarified butter, ghee, and sesame oil are called balasi. This agrees well with what we know, that vinegar and sesame oil were important export products at the time, and that families stored



large amounts in their homes in an attempt to be self-contained. Thus the archaeological evidence supports the contention that the elite controlled resources and this of course contributed greatly to their power over the labourers (slaves). The fact that they had a supply and did not have to be concerned about daily requirements produced a sense of security, stability, independence and power. The slaves could produce raw materials but they did not have the fortress-like dwellings or large containers in which to store them. The domestic slaves had to depend on their daily rations. The ability to plan for the future contributed to a class perception of a 'long-term' future, which was comforting to a rich Swahili minority. Now no one can be independent, everyone shops for their daily needs, and the Waungwana talk of their past when they did not have to live from day-to-day.

There were other household items in the platform fill, which are listed and described below, that were associated only with the upper-class elite.

### Glass

Mirror and frame fragments. These mirrors were probably imported from India, although European in



inspiration. Mirrors are associated with women. Widows must cover mirrors during their period of mourning, and not look at themselves. Mirrors have a slightly evil or tempting quality, maybe even the idea of 'graven images' attached to their social meaning. Angels do not enter rooms where people have died if there are pictures or mirrors present. Only the richest families, living in coral houses, would have <sup>framed</sup> mirrors of this type. A similar one can be seen in the Lamu Museum collection.

Glass rose-water sprinkler (marasha) with a metal cap. Strandes (1968,83), writing about the sixteenth century, says that rose water and glass bottles were imported from India. Rose water was sprinkled on people as a symbol of a religious blessing. There are several examples of glass rose-water sprinklers in the Lamu Museum.

#### Beds

Seven lac bed pieces. These pieces were either from

a bedstead or a baby's cradle (fig. 26). The beds in Kiswahili are vitanda vya hindi, which translates as 'India beds'. There are several reference to lac beds being made and exported from Surat (Barbosa, 65-6; Gazetteer of India: Gujarat State, Surat District 2nd. ed. 1962, 100). Jean Baptiste Tavernier wrote in 1676 (Vol. II, 19) that many of the women in Surat made lac sticks for export. Craftsmen whom I interviewed in Porbander, Mandvi and Surat, and who make lac boxes and cradles today, said that their families had exported their products to East Africa in large quantities in the past. In 1877 four hundred families in Surat were supported by lathe and lac work. (Bombay Gazetteer: Surat; and Broach Vol II, 1977). A description of the typical furnishings found in 'rich Muslim houses' in Surat in 1899 included a bed, 'one or two stool-like seats, pidi, and if there is a child a cradle, palna, of red and yellow or blue lacquer-work', (Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarat Population: Musalmans and Parse, Vol. IX, 1899,93). Lac stools, beds, cradles and curtain poles were also common furnishings for the coral houses of the upper classes in the Lamu area. Hundreds of these beds are still used in Pate town today. Some were no doubt imported and others were probably turned locally and coloured with the imported lac sticks

in Siyu. Siyu is famous for its craftsmen and known to have been the home of many Indians a generation ago. Indian shopkeepers (K 341,307) in Lamu say that their fathers came from Mandvi and settled first in Siyu, Zanzibar or Mombasa.

In Pate, where traditions change less rapidly, these lac beds, placed against the back wall of the ndani in front of the door (fig. 25a, marked B1) are the focal point of the house. They are specially decorated for weddings; the groom sits on the bed when he first enters the bride's room and later the bride is displayed to female relatives sitting on the bed. The bed is never slept on by anyone, at any time. These bridal beds with canopies may be simply the survival of the wife's tent, much like the huts women had erected for their marriage in Muhammad's time, as Smith suggests in Kinship and marriage in early Arabia (1885,200).

The bed was certainly one of the major items which was bought by the father for his daughter with her bride-price, and remains her property even in the event of a divorce. It is part of her 'proven' social value. The present-day equivalent, a plastic couch, will be analysed below, when the twentieth-century deposits are examined.

### Jewellery

Two glass bangle fragments. (Several examples were found in the Lamu excavations, fig. 76). Kirkman notes that they are most common in the seventeenth- and nineteenth-century deposits. Some levels were mixed but most of the bangles found in my excavations also occurred in nineteenth-century levels (Kirkman 1974, 158; fig. 84: 11-16). Kirkman also states that the bangles were probably imported from India. 'North of Mahi [which is north of Bombay] bangles are of glass, to the south of wax and gold or silver tinsel' (Bombay Gazetteer, Gujarat Population: Musalmans, 1899, Vol. IX, 107). Glass and gold bangles were worn only by married Swahili women. Widows and unmarried girls were not allowed to wear jewellery. Jewellery is worn to honour the husband both in Lamu and in other Islamic communities such as Gujarat (ibid., 107) and Sohar in Oman (Barth, 1983, 104). Even Hindu women wear the same glass bangles and break them on the day of their husband's death (Tavernier, 1676, Vol. II, 162n). This practice may also be followed by Muslim women



and account for the fragments found in the excavations.

All of objects found within the storage area of the coral house were imported items which had high social value. Some were associated with trade and therefore men, and others were for the domestic use of freeborn men and women. They were all goods that would not be found in eastern Africa in the nineteenth century outside a Swahili settlement. These goods mark their space, as they did their owners and their spaces in the past; they were the symbols of Waungwana power.

#### TWENTIETH-CENTURY FINDS

Now we will look at the finds from the early twentieth-century rubbish pit, which was buried in the msara wa juu of Darini (fig. 62). The artefacts, in addition to the porcelain listed above (page 264 ) were as follows:

##### Jewellery

A glass bracelet fragment and a bead. These finds indicate that both beads and bracelets were still being imported and worn by Swahili women.

### Iron

Iron leg-iron (fig. 81). This also hints of slavery but informants said that leg-irons were not only used on slaves but also on their own freeborn children who misbehaved in Koran school. I saw one being used in this way in Brava in 1978. There is also a photograph showing this practice in the Lamu Museum collection.

### Shell

Three cowrie shells. Over one hundred cowrie shells were found in the two house excavations in Lamu. Most were located at the back, storage area, of the Mchele house in the eighteenth-century levels.

#### COWRIE SHELLS IN THE MCHELE HOUSE

Levels 1-3 : Nineteenth and twentieth centuries	38
Levels 4-6 : Eighteenth century	70

The cowries (Moneta annulus (Linne)) were usually 2 cm long and unbroken. At first the only interpretation for their presence was that they were

lost shells intended for the export market :  
'cowries could be obtained in larger quantities in the Lamu archipelago than at any other place on the Swahili coast. In the 1770s two to three hundred tons a year were taken thence to India'. (Nicholls 1971,71). A Mombasa informant (K 246) told me how girls collected cowries in the Kigunga area and exchanged them for sugar or were paid ten cents for each string. The shopkeepers either sold them to Indians or to the Orma who used them to decorate their gourds. This practice, he said, was common until only a few years ago and I believe that it is very similar to the process which goes back many centuries. Kirkman, while working at Gedi, describes the store-rooms in the back of the houses which were used for keeping bags of cowries, 'which were the currency of East Africa... The official rate for the Indian Ocean in the fourteenth century, the time of Ibn Battuta, was 400,000 cowries to the gold dinar, and this was still the official rate when the Portuguese arrived in the sixteenth century' (Kirkman 1963,20). Singh, writing about Surat in the second half of the seventeenth century, says that cowries and almonds were used for all small transactions (Singh 1977,82). François Pyrard of



Laval, writing in 1624 (1928,240), says that in Cambay and elsewhere in India cowries were set in articles of furniture, 'as if they were marbles or precious stones'. Lamu people said the shells could be used for decoration, and I have seen them used to decorate picture frames but a more unusual use that I discovered was the idea of placing them in the top of the roof preventing the roof from leaking. Sometimes the shells were ground and mixed with the lime, which would make a stronger mortar, but many times the cowries were placed whole on the top layer of the binding material of the roof (K 201,219,246). Kirkman (1974,133) also mentioned that some of the cowries he excavated were pierced.

These two practices suggest a symbolic or ritual significance and a search of ethnographical accounts gave the answer.

The Sultan of Zanzibar's daughter, Salama bint Said, wrote her memoirs in 1886 in which she records 'for a child's protection against the supposed evil-eye it is given certain amulets, which with the lower classes consist of onion, a piece of garlic, a bone or a shell, perhaps fastened to the left arm in a small leather bag' (Said, 1886, translated by Strachey 1907,68) '... a cowrie shell is fastened round the



neck on a string to keep evil away, and hirizi, or charms, are used for the same purposes' (Ingrams 1967,197). 'The small shells called cowries are especially considered preservatives against the evil eye; and hence, as well as for the sake of ornament, they are often attached to the trappings of camels, horses, and other animals, and sometimes to the caps of children' (Lane 1836; 1973,251). The first two <sup>Islamic</sup> reports were from the Zanzibar cultural context in the early twentieth century, and the third was from Cairo in the early nineteenth century. Also Wenzel (1972,40) mentioned that in Nubia cowrie shells were placed on houses as protective charms.

A large species of cowrie shell (Cyprea tigris (linne)) was also discovered in Darini. A local informant (K 286) said that this type of shell was used in the past as a "sex educational tool" for the instruction of young boys about the female anatomy (fig. 80) and as a musical instrument by virgin girls.

The objects found in this collection are related to domestic spaces only in that rubbish is buried after the upper-class family is no longer occupying the ground floor of the house. The goods are not necessarily related to any one social group as those found in a kitchen area collection. The artefacts were ones associated with trade (cowries), slaves and

religious training for youngsters and women and not with the activities which took place in the space in which they were found. Goods are not closely related to space when recovered from rubbish deposits and it is important to analyse each object separately when considering their social uses. Their symbolic meaning can only be known through placing them within their cultural and historical context.

We will now look at the upper levels of rubbish that were deposited on top of the broken eighteenth- and nineteenth-century floor levels of the Mchele house, which were discussed earlier. This rubbish deposit (levels 1-4 of E V, VI, VII, VIII and F V, VI, VII, VIII, fig. 59) was located near the well. The walled garden was owned by an upper-class Swahili man who lived nearby; as the walled garden was locked, and from the nature of the rubbish found, it was his family who used this area as a refuse area after he could no longer grow tambuu leaves. Rubbish could be thrown over the walls on the street side or by neighbours to the east and west; even at the rear of the site, rubbish could have been thrown from the neighbour's windows, but the area we are now examining is located in the middle of the site and could only be reached by someone who unlocked the garden gate. The plot was sold to Americans

in March 1979 and remained locked. Therefore the finds were probably placed there as rubbish in the early 1970s.

This twentieth-century material still contains imported porcelain, although people had started to plaster over their zidaka. The modern wares are poor quality from the Republic of China, and imported by Indian shopkeepers. The porcelain is no longer brought via India in dhows to Lamu but the product, persons involved and patterns of use have changed little from earlier times. It is still the upper-class elite Swahili who own more porcelain than any other ethnic group in Lamu, other than perhaps Europeans. Table 12 lists the sherds found in the rubbish deposited by the Swahili family who owned the garden plot.

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Table 12. Twentieth century: porcelain found in a rubbish deposit at the Mchele site.

<u>ceramics</u>	<u>sherds</u>
Modern	5
Dutch	2
Chinese 19th century	1
Chinese 18th century	2

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The only storage container found in the rubbish



was a water flask (gudulia ware). Large storage jars are now rare because the plantations no longer produce a surplus which, in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, was stored for household use or export.

Furniture is no longer imported from India, although the present styles are influenced by European fashions, as were the late nineteenth-century Indo-European beds, tables and chairs. (Examples can be seen in the nineteenth-century period rooms of the Lamu Museum. Couches, called coach in Kiswahili, with two matching chairs, have replaced the bridal beds. A collection of metal springs from a three-piece set was part of the refuse. Along with these inner-springs were pieces of formica which are used on the small end tables, which are often also used as stools. These have replaced the small turned lac stools/tables, common in India and in Siyu today. Bridal beds are now made, often with carved head-boards, locally and are still an important item to be purchased by the bride's father. However, the coral houses of the elite are being altered, walls are being added, and there is no longer a large open area in which to celebrate weddings or display the new bride. Now that the bride is no longer viewed in front of the porcelain-filled zidaka, there is possibly less motivation to spend money on items to display in the niches.



Brides are now veiled and taken to community halls or theatres and viewed sitting on their new couches with the matching chairs and small tables with formica tops on each side. Maybe it seemed less appropriate to have a bride sitting on a bed in a more public setting, although men are not present. Or perhaps the couch set replaced the ebony (inlaid with ivory) chairs, viti cha mpingo (fig. 27), which were used by the bride and groom during wedding celebrations in the nineteenth century. The couches are even taken to men's events (stick dances) and used by the bridegrooms just as the chairs were used in the past. The kiti cha mpingo was an important marker of status, reserved for the most elite, an old man from a highly respected Waungwana class told me, and a slave could lose his or her head for sitting in one of these 'throne' chairs. Couches are related to these chairs, but do not carry as much importance. However, the Waungwana have lost a lot of their power and so likewise has their symbolic system.

*excavated*

Another <sup>excavated</sup> item, which tells us about the Swahili way of life, was the cup of a ladle made from a coconut (fig. 82). Bathing is accomplished by dipping water, with a ladle, from the water cistern, birika, and pouring it over oneself. The ladle is used for bathing, carrying out daily ritual ablutions.

and those performed before burial. If the ladle touches the dead body during this ritual it must be discarded, because it has become polluted. These coconut ladles have now been replaced in most homes by empty cooking-lard tins.

A green bottle of the type used to bottle 'Tusker' beer in Kenya and a perfume bottle were the only complete glass objects found in this rubbish deposit. The beer bottle might have been considered shocking considering Islamic prohibitions against the use of alcohol. Wilson wrote about a bottle found at Takwa, 'It looks suspiciously like a wine bottle, but as that would not be appropriate in the house of a good Muslim it may have contained something else' (Wilson 1979, 15 fig. L). A careful look at the shelves in the local shops produced a respectable answer: such bottles are sold filled with rose water. Even this is a bit surprising, considering that the local Muslims know that beer is usually sold in these bottles. I know from personal experience that when a local mosque lends glasses, a catering service for women's wedding celebrations, the religious leader is concerned that the glasses are not polluted with alcohol. The Swahili must believe that the bottles have not been used for beer before being used for rose water. Kirkman

noted that most of the rose-water sprinklers were made of green glass and this may have contributed to making the green beer bottles more acceptable.

Glasses for drinking water do not occur in archaeological material until the twentieth century, and are imported from Europe. Lamu people said that liquids were drunk from cups made from coconut before glasses were imported, but more information should be collected on this subject.

The next glass find, a perfume bottle, is only associated with women. The glass fragments in excavations are usually too small to determine the shape or size of the object they once formed. The glass from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was probably from perfume bottles, rose-water sprinklers, and mirrors. Window glass was used only in the later buildings on the seafront and along the main street of Lamu. I believe that perfume bottles and rose-water sprinklers go back centuries and could account for most of the glass fragments found in excavations on the coast. Kirkman said that most of the glass vessels found in Fort Jesus were the necks of rose-water sprinklers (Kirkman 1974, 126; fig. 76-9). Chittick describes glass beakers, bottles, bowls, flasks and phials which date from the ninth to the nineteenth century,



but he does not offer any ideas on what the glass objects might have contained.

### 'YESTERDAYS' FINDS

The reason for bringing this study up to the present is twofold; one, I want to discuss changes in the material culture which are rapidly taking place in Lamu and two, I want to discuss how this change reflects and shapes the society, as a structuring process. The descendants of the elite Swahili are not in power; they are no longer able to control access to the areas of the town; they do not determine what goods will have high social value or decide who is given these items.

Some goods are introduced into the material culture and they follow old patterns of social meaning and other goods enter the symbolic systems with meaning from other African cultures or Western societies. The traditional society of the Swahili which changed very slowly within the larger Islamic culture is now being changed rapidly in many ways which alters the social uses of time, space and objects. The items found in the entrance to the Mchele site will support this view.

The gate to the walled site is located in the same area as was the covered porch, daka, and remains



of the stone bench are still to be seen on the west side of the site (marked area (6) on fig. 59 K VI, VII, VIII). The quality of the gate had never been good and after the plot was no longer productive as a tambuu garden (for at least the past eight years) it has been possible for people to deposit refuse through, around or over the now flimsy gate.

Lamu people do not always like to pay the extra fee required to have their rubbish collected by the City Council or to be seen carrying it to the designated town-fill areas which are a long way from the centre of town. They are also fined if they are seen dumping rubbish into the sea, so they often use an empty plot or ruined house.

Buttons were found in this modern rubbish, evidence of the use of Western-style clothing. The descendants of the old elite still prefer the kanzu, which was once one of their exclusive symbols of power. Now, even ex-slaves wear these robes, perhaps enjoying the thought that they will not now be stopped or ridiculed as they once would have been. Maybe the lower classes like to wear them as a sign of their newly-gained equality and power. But most people (descendants of the freeborn and ex-slaves) are now emulating the dress of the once powerful British, and wearing Western clothes.

Two broken rubber thongs were recovered from the trash, one from a child's and the other from an adult-size sandal. Shoes were discussed in detail above, in relation to the leather shoe found in the nineteenth-century deposit in Darini. They were not only restricted to the upper-class elite males, but there were also wooden shoes ( which did not survive in archaeological remains) for the bath/toilet area of the house. These adult rubber sandals are their modern-day equivalent. Adults who wear rubber sandals of this type in public are considered to be unthinking lower-class people, wearing 'polluted' toilet shoes in public. Children are to some extent exempt, although they are not allowed to wear them to school. In an upper-class person's house no one wears shoes, nor are shoes worn in a mosque under any conditions. In this case the newly-introduced artefact is following the old Waungwana pattern of material structuration which maintained systems concerned with purity, pollution and social position.

Pieces of the black veil, now worn by all Swahili women, in public, were found cut into ribbons. These ribbons are used only by young unmarried Swahili girls, who often wear their hair in two braids. They were found next to a black hair net, an item not used by

upper-class Swahili women, and so may have been discarded by the Pokomo, for example, who are also living in Lamu.

'Mud fish' bones, also found in this deposit, can also be attributed to the Pokomo. 'Mud fish' are a type of catfish which inhabit the Tana river, and are dried and eaten only by the Pokomo; the Swahili would not think of eating such a fish. All dried fish are considered to be low-class food because domestic slaves were given dried fish, often shark or kingfish, for their daily ration, along with a locally grown grain, usually millet or maize. The powerful wealthy ate imported rice (which could only be obtained by trade) and chicken, beef, goat and lamb. These animals, especially the cattle and chickens, were kept by other ethnic groups on the mainland for their products (milk, eggs, skins) and perhaps for trade, but were not generally eaten. The upper-class had dishes that were complex with many ingredients, imported spices and involving time-consuming procedures, which would be difficult if not impossible to produce without a lot of equipment and servants. What a person ate reflected his rank and if a slave performed his task well, he or she was often rewarded by being given 'better' food - food that was generally eaten by the upper class.



A chicken was usually the reward for work well done. Food was codified by the Waungwana as was the clothing, and other artefacts. They generated the symbols of rank and in turn sustained them. If a man lived in a coral house, ate rice, wore a white robe and had many servants he was a Mwangwana.

The process of structuration has not stopped but it has changed. Westerners, and those who have adopted their materials, are now more powerful and their goods are now playing the role once played by Waungwana symbols. Food, like clothing, is in the shops for everyone to buy but old Swahili families still import fabrics via relatives or friends in Saudi Arabia for dresses that are worn to weddings. However, other Africans, who lack these connections, counter this by buying their clothes in England or America, when studying abroad or on holiday or political missions.

Imported foods are controlled by the Kenya government. However, people who claimed to be Arabs, as many of the people we are now calling Swahili did during British colonial times, are not given a larger portion of the imported foods (i.e. rice) as they were during that period. By this we can see that British administrators knew that it was important to reward those to whom they



gave positions of more responsibility with the symbols of their rank, although I am sure they did not think of this practice in these symbolic terms.

Other Western practices have had less symbolic effect, but they have certainly contributed to the decline of a life-style. A plastic measuring cup from a Nestlé's formula container was found in the rubbish heap. Swahili mothers have been encouraged by Western advertising to buy their infants' formula milk with the understanding that this food was 'better' for their children. Not only have the infants lost the physical contact with their mothers, which is a positive psychological side effect of breast-feeding, but the formula milk lacks the antibodies contained in the mother's milk. As a result children are dying of dehydration caused by diarrhoea. Any item can be attractive if it is used by powerful people, even one which can kill one's children.

Medicine bottles and school supplies (a protractor and a divider) were also found in this modern deposit. Modern medicine and education are the two elements which have done the most to destroy the Waungwana structuring process. In the past they controlled access to the most socially valued knowledge, that of Islam; they decided who was allowed to be a Muslim and after that the amount the people should know

about the religion. When people are taught to read Arabic, the religious language of Islam, they are not taught to translate or speak the language, even to this day. This prevents them from interpreting the Koran for themselves. Now anyone is free to become a Muslim and there is a mosque college that teaches Arabic even to descendants of ex-slaves. Public schools, supported by the Kenya government, are based on the English system of education and are also available to all children. The knowledge they obtain there teaches them that their traditional ways were inferior and gives them the type of education that can put them in positions of power within the present Kenyan political system. It is Western education that provides the knowledge which is now most socially valued.

The medicine bottle is a result of the existence of a Government hospital located in Lamu town. Now that people go to this hospital when they are ill, about to give birth or die, the rituals associated with these activities, which gave social meaning to categories of persons (midwife etc.), objects and spaces within the dwelling, are not practised. These practices and the symbolic meaning that people, artefacts and rooms acquired through their mundane use was what constituted the old Waungwana process of structuration and constructed their

social hierarchy and power. When bodies are prepared for burial in the hospital and infants are born there, the old symbolic system will gradually be replaced by a more Western system of structuration. In this case, by doctors, hospitals, operation rooms and artefacts such as bed pans.

There was one other item of Western design which, when 'decoded', will reveal the effects that an introduction of a different material culture can have on another structuring system. Fragments of cement were present in the rubbish heap which could have been deposited yesterday. Cement is being used in both new construction, which removes the need for a large cheap labour force (slaves) to build a large house, and for repairing and 'improving' eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses. The 'improvement' usually comes in the form of new dividing walls, which have been discussed earlier, and cement floors. When people put cement on their floors they no longer use the ufuko, or bury stillborn infants, manga stones or sacrificial goats and chickens in the house. It seems that such aspects of the Western material culture would not be adopted, if people could resist following the patterns determined by the powerful. And the Western world



is certainly seen as being more powerful than the Waungwana. Everyone knows who ended slavery and much of the Waungwana power depended on having slaves.

### CONCLUSION

In the last four chapters archaeological data has been linked to ethnographic information. The floor plans, or constructed spaces, were recorded at the three excavation sites and were interpreted in the light of how Swahili families today stage their daily and ritual activities within the same style of house. It was assumed that the present-day analogy was appropriate because of historical and cultural continuity between the eighteenth century and the present and the fact that features such as the ufuko, and practices such as infant burials within the house, are understood today and detectable in the archaeological remains of the past.

Ruined single-storey eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses, such as the Mchele house and the house excavated in Pate, proved difficult to analyse because the lime floors were broken by the collapse of the house and further disturbed by the removal of the thick coral-roof debris. The Mchele house



had also had walls removed and material added and mixed with the original building materials. Finds and features in both houses were therefore difficult to date in relation to ceramic evidence which was also greatly mixed. To interpret the finds from these houses and those recovered from rubbish deposits, found at all three sites, observations, interviews, historical accounts and probate records concerned with the social uses of goods were cited. In addition similar information was used from other Islamic, African and Indian cultures when there was a direct link between that society and the Swahili from the eighteenth century to the present.

The Mchele house provided a study of how deposition can change as the uses of an urban space changed from a house, to a walled agricultural plot, and finally to a contemporary refuse area.

Darini, a two-storey house, still standing, provided the best-preserved setting for an examination of the relationships of objects and features in relation to domestic spaces. The ufuko, infant burials, buried animal sacrifices within the ndani, and the buried objects used as protective charms could be seen in relation to the spaces of the house. Even the rubbish deposits found in this house were more likely to have belonged to the Swahili family

who inhabited it than was the rubbish deposited at the other two house sites excavated.

The house finds and spaces when linked to ethnographic data produced an explanation of how the Swahili Waungwana created and maintained their powerful middleman position until the British abolished slavery and they lost their labour force. When they lost their power, the material culture found in the remains changed and reflected the presence of the new European power. Western goods, as well as the British themselves, have started to reshape Swahili culture. For example, porcelain and earthenware sherds found in rubbish deposits from the nineteenth century to the present, which were studied at Darini and the Mchele house, have declined steadily as shown in the table below.

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Table 13. Sherds from three rubbish deposits of equal size.

	<u>local earthenware</u>	<u>imported porcelain</u>
'yesterday'	16	6
20th century	178	39
19th century	533	48

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Local pottery is being replaced by aluminium cooking pots. Porcelain is being displayed less and used more for serving tea. Everyone can now

buy this ware in shops, the elite no longer control the supply, and as a result it is no longer a status symbol. The Arabs are no longer powerful in eastern Africa, and therefore they are not emulated as much by the Swahili elite. Now weddings rarely take place in the house, and therefore the niches have been plastered over; the main occasion for display has had a change of venue. Western and Islamic education is trying to suppress ideas and the use of objects which were symbols of Waungwana superiority. This is not necessarily a conscious effort but by such innovations as the abolition of slavery, banning the sale of ivory, limited trade with other Indian Ocean countries, immigration laws, work permits, the old process of structuration, controlled by the elite Waungwana, is failing.



## CHAPTER 10

## CONCLUSION

It was possible to conduct ethnographic research in the Lamu archipelago which produced an analogy relevant to the interpretation of archaeological remains. By learning about the social or symbolic meanings associated with objects and spaces within the cultural and historical context of the Swahili society today, I discovered a pattern which was detectable through time. This was supported by looking at historical and archaeological data. The similarity between the archaeological features of the nineteenth century and their present counterparts (e.g. ufuko, child burial) is one clear outcome of this thesis. The Swahili use of space has an historical dimension. This continuity in the use and meanings of space helps explain the long-term continuity of the social dominance of the Waungwana.

Specific spaces and objects were given social meaning by the powerful male segments of the society, perhaps simply because they were the spaces and objects used by these men. However, once this pattern of use was established these spaces and objects had social meaning which played an active role in maintaining the position of the powerful elite. The



Swahili (Afro-Arabs) were part of the Indian Ocean culture and they selected objects and building forms (spaces) which carried social meaning known to foreign traders who came to trade and settle in eastern Africa. This was especially true in relation to the Islamic world, because most of the foreign settlers were Muslims, who wanted to maintain their trade credit and social link with their homeland.

Indians may have imported objects (porcelain, cloth and rice) and the design of spaces (coral building types with plaster decorations) but these goods and spaces were associated with Islam and were markers of purity and power, controlled by the dominant Muslim Waungwana males. The daily and ritual use of goods and spaces was the process which structured the Swahili society. This type of process is, I believe, the essence of not only the Swahili culture but all societies. The social meaning given by those in power to objects, spaces and other people is the structure of a given society. There is no universal social meaning for any of the elements (objects, spaces or persons), only that which is given by a powerful individual or institution within a specific social and historical context.

Many of the goods used by the powerful Waungwana were imported via or from India. Many of the highly skilled craftsmen and builders were also from India.

at least in the nineteenth century. Therefore not only were the objects but also the house form and decoration similar to those which I recorded in Gujarat. The social uses of goods and house spaces were similar in some cases, which is not surprising because of the presence of Islam in India and East Africa. But there is also another major process of structuration present in India, that institution known as Hinduism. Within the Hindu society some of the same objects and graded spaces, which are also found in the Swahili society, have been given different social meanings. If powerful Hindu leaders had used marriage with 'outsiders' as a means of extending their power, as Muslims did, the Hindus would have settled and married local African and Swahili women. The Hindus were not only not allowed to marry local women, they were not allowed to bring their wives or women with them when they travelled by sea. These two factors prevented the Hindu systems of social meaning from being transported to Africa. In other words if the process of structuration, or the social uses of objects and spaces is not the same, those objects and spaces may be similar in India and Africa, but their social meaning will be different.

The analogies used in archaeological interpretation

should be taken from socially and culturally linked sources, when possible. The more 'relational' the analogy the greater the possible knowledge of the concepts, for example 'purity' and power, associated with certain objects, spaces and people. The study of structuration within a society leads to a better understanding of its archaeological past, but the exploration of its past also reflexively reveals the degree to which the analogy is relational or demonstrates the changes which have occurred in the process of structuration. It is therefore impossible to investigate a society without looking at its past in terms of its present and vice versa.

This is what was attempted in this ethnoarchaeological study of Swahili houses and their contents. I interviewed people who claimed to be descendants of the original owners of the same type of traditional houses which I later excavated. The social uses of domestic spaces and objects were learned within the living context, and provided the analogy used for interpreting the archaeological spaces and finds. The link between the ethnographic material and the archaeological data was based on recorded historical and cultural continuity. This relational analogy not only provided the social meaning for excavated spaces and objects but also elucidated how these elements created and maintained the powerful



position of the Swahili men.

This research may be a step in the direction of showing how specific models can be developed within a living culture, which can then be used to understand in greater detail that same culture's archaeological past. It may also prove helpful in a broader way, by suggesting features to look for when excavating other domestic sites within the Islamic world at large. The ritual activities connected with buried charms, the ufuko, and infant burials were all hitherto unexplored archaeologically in Muslim houses, as was the symbolic significance of the plaster decoration found in Swahili dwellings. That houses are built for concubines and others are used only by bachelors are factors which might be detectable within other Swahili settlement remains. Retail shops and buildings for specialised tasks other than religion (mosques) seem to have been unknown within the Swahili context before the twentieth century. The coral houses of the Waungwana were the headquarters for political, domestic and economic activities.

There were positive and negative aspects of this research. I would like to mention those of which I am aware. The most important contribution which I hope this dissertation will make is that the present-



day Swahili culture should and can be used to interpret archaeological sites on the coast of eastern Africa. I feel that gathering relevant ethnographic information about domestic activities was easier for me, simply because I am a woman and men, especially outsiders, have difficulty in gaining permission to enter houses, which are primarily a woman's world within the Swahili society. It was also an advantage to have lived and worked in Lamu for 2½ years before starting my research. People knew me, and although certainly still an outsider, I had been observed and judged as at least reasonably respectable. Also I jointly owned (with another woman) and lived in a large coral house in Lamu which gave me the needed status to enter coral houses and record the lives of the more secluded upper-class women without their families fearing that, by their wives' or daughters' association with me, shame would come to their families. My reputation was especially important in regard to the young Lamu women whom I employed to assist me.

The ethnographic study was made more difficult in Lamu because just after the Ghaidan conservation study, sponsored by the Kenya government (1976) there was an increase in property tax. Some people felt that their taxes had been raised because the study had revealed the quality of their homes, not

before seen by outsiders. There was no connection between Ghaidan's study and the tax increases, but the situation made people even less willing to allow me to make measured drawings of their homes. I was often told that if their taxes were raised or in fact any ill came to their household after my study that I would be blamed, along with my assistants.

There were two major problems connected with the excavations in Lamu. The first was a cultural problem. I needed to be considered a 'respectable woman' to be allowed in the home of the Waungwana and yet physical labour is not considered proper for a respected man or woman. The excavations were therefore not open to the public; one took place within a walled area (plot 984), one inside a standing house (plot 341) and the third in a deserted part of Pate town. This prevented me from being seen (especially by women) performing this 'degrading dirty' work. When Swahili women did learn about my work and wanted to visit my excavation site I tried to be dressed in a long skirt to show that I was at least to some extent behaving 'properly'. My work was difficult for them to approve of but being an 'outsider' provided me with a lot of excuses. That this work was required as part of my university education seemed to be the most acceptable reason for my deplorable behaviour. Many of the men and

women of Lamu and Shela do now seem to value and respect Western education.

The selection of the Mchele plot was the second major problem in relation to the archaeological research. The upper, later levels, in which I was most interested, had been too disturbed by tambuu gardening activities. Had I realised how much evidence would be lost by this damage another site would have been selected. It would now be good to excavate a larger urban area and consider the features analysed here in relation to earlier coral and mud domestic remains.

The direction in which I would like to see ethnoarchaeological studies of the Swahili culture develop would be a combined ethnographic study and parallel archaeological excavation of mud-and-thatch buildings. Coral buildings are associated with only the rich Swahili minority. To understand Swahili society the whole population should be considered, including of course the poorer people who live in mud-and-thatch houses.

More research is also needed that will look at the other cultures with which the Swahili have had contacts for centuries for comparison. No society exists in isolation and the relationships between the peoples and their goods through time is complex but promises a new level of human under-



standing. My attempt to include a comparative study of Indian households in trade-linked Gujarat was too limited to provide the needed details and sample size. To demonstrate a general pattern that could be used in comparison with the Swahili data much more information is needed. More Indian women should have been interviewed to balance the male viewpoint which was recorded in greater detail. Work is also required in Oman, Portugal and southern Arabia to build a theory of an Indian Ocean culture, which I feel may exist, or may have existed in the past.

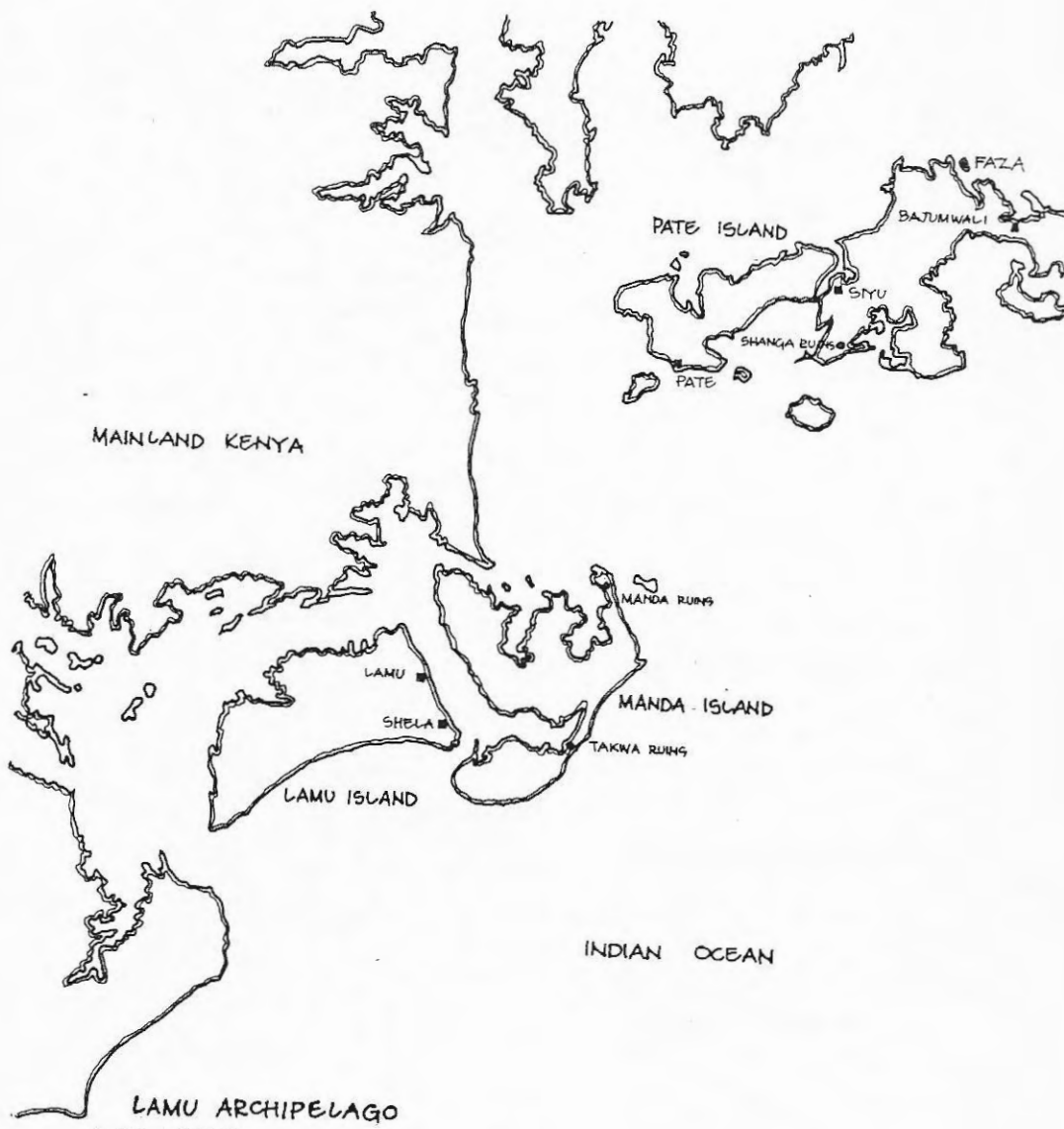
Because indigenous women, who were taken as wives and female slaves, at least lived within the towns and many within the coral houses, much more information is needed about their practices, which might be archaeologically detectable. The people living on the mainland opposite the Lamu archipelago could be interviewed, especially about rituals which they perform that would leave material remains. For example, the ufuko, or symbolic grave, does not seem to be known in other Islamic countries and may be related to a local African practice.

It has been asked whether 'general concepts, as used to the rituals can be recovered from archaeological evidence?' (Alexander 1979, 215). The concepts of 'power' and 'purity' were basic recurring themes in this culture. It seems that this study has shown



that Swahili men created power by controlling spaces and goods in relation to outsiders and women. Women were elevated by being given status goods, porcelain and furniture, which were displayed in the ndani, but this assigned space also contained the strongest pollution known to the culture - that associated with birth, death, sexual intercourse and body wastes. The ndani was 'protected' not by aspects of 'pure' Islam but by ritual practices believed to be of a 'lower' order. These general concepts of power and the desire to control perceived 'pollution' were evident in the archaeological remains. If this evidence has not been seen within an historical and cultural context, however, it is doubtful whether much symbolic interpretation could have been developed plausibly.

At least my research will add to the mass of information which is needed before archaeological patterns emerge which may lead to the interpretation of cultural remains for which there are no written records.



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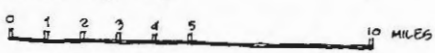
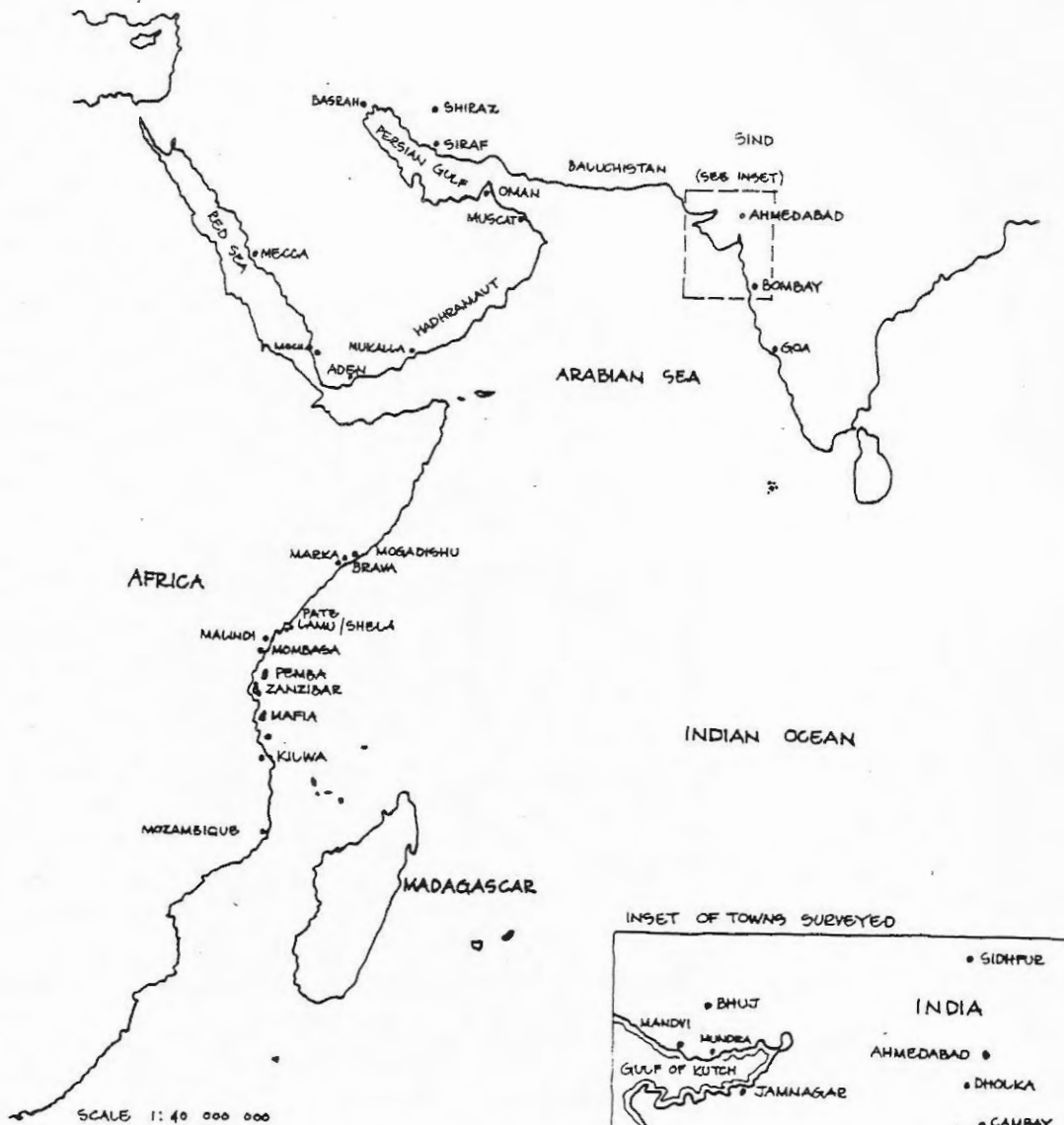
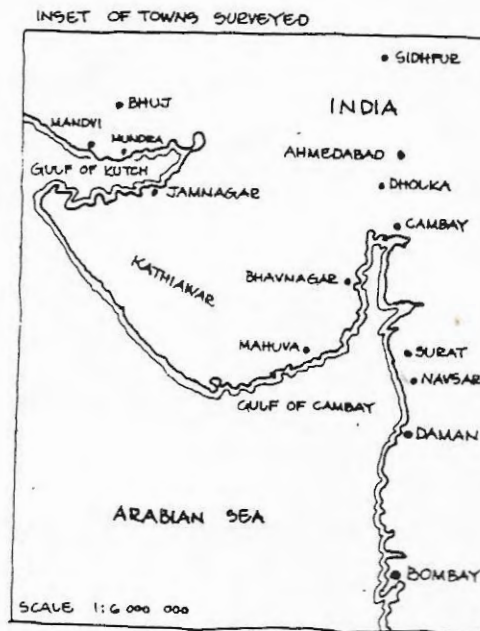


FIG. 1



SCALE 1:40 000 000

FIG. 2



SCALE 1:6 000 000

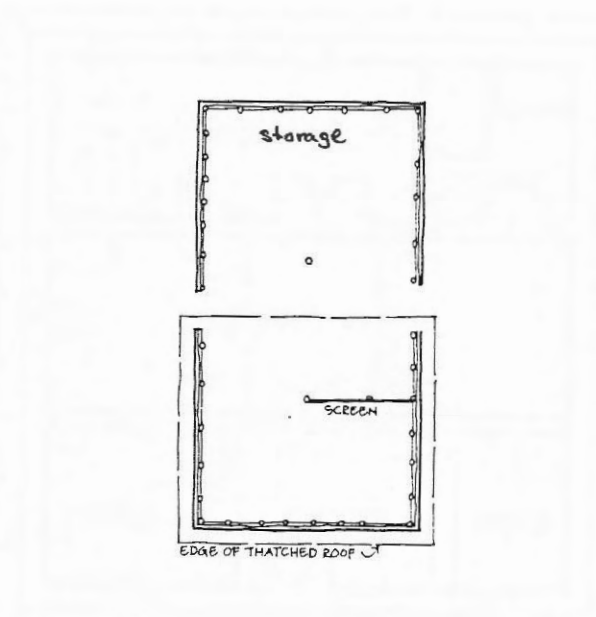


FIG. 3

MUD AND THATCH HOUSE





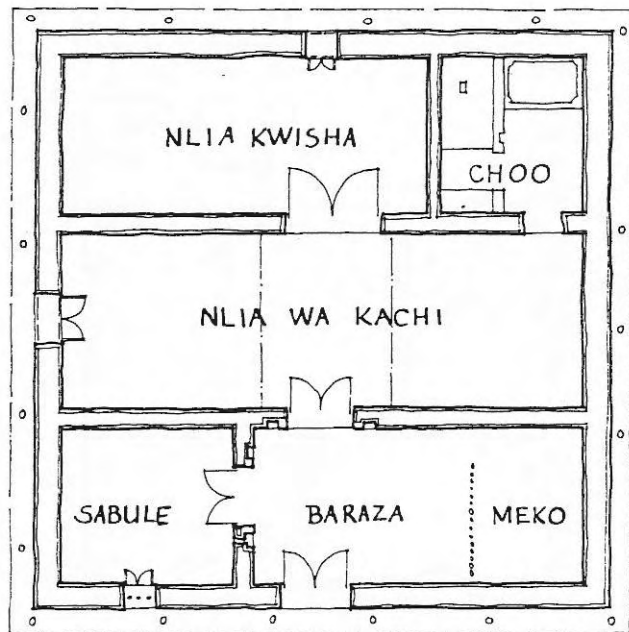


FIG. 4



MUD AND THATCH HOUSE  
BAJUN



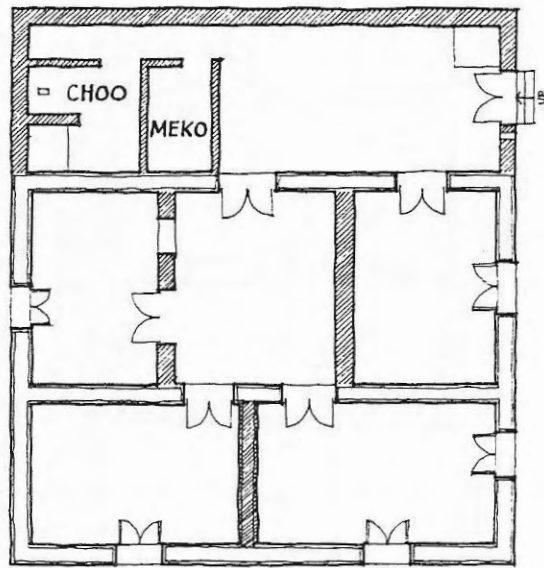
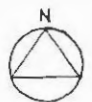


FIG. 5

MUD AND THATCH HOUSE  
LAMU





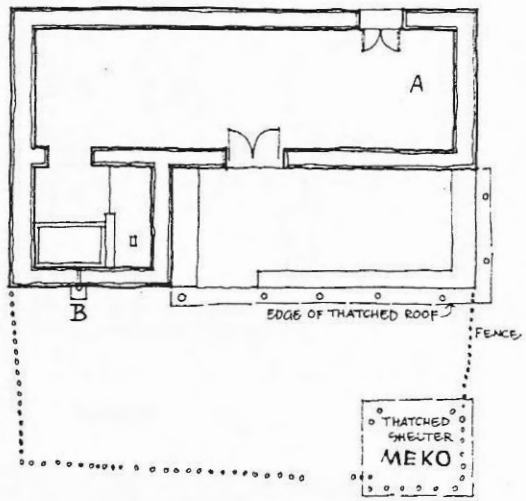


FIG. 7

CORAL HOUSE  
SHELA





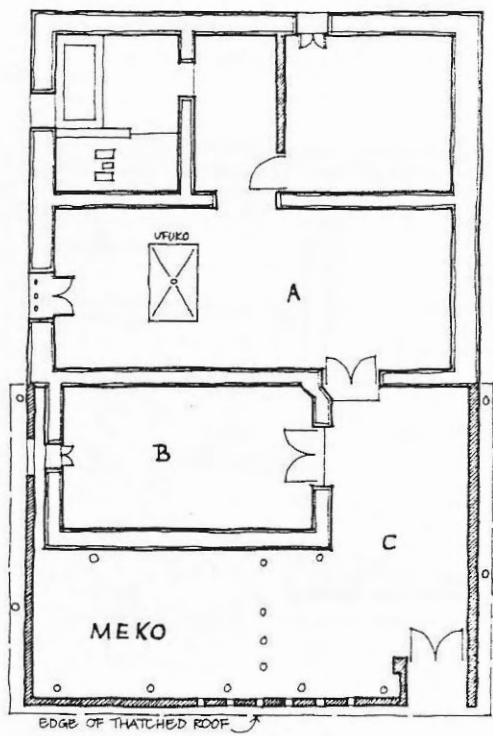


FIG. 8

CORAL HOUSE  
SHELA



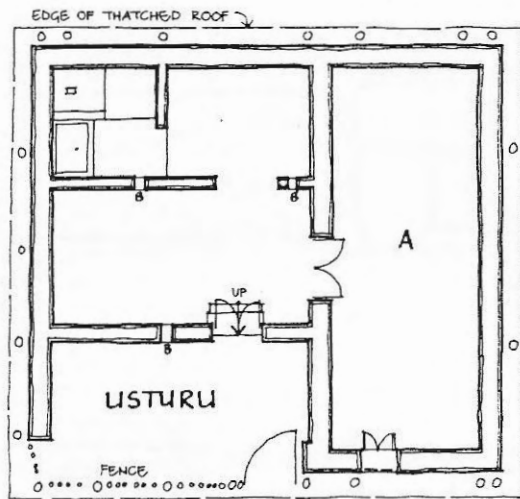
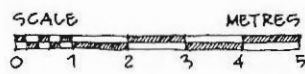


FIG. 9

CORAL HOUSE  
SHELA



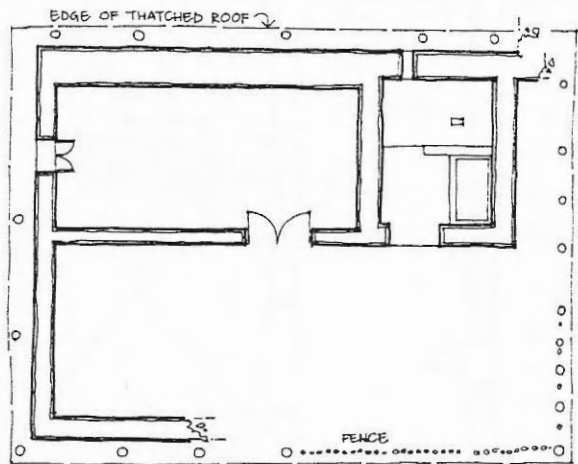


FIG. 10

CORAL HOUSE  
SHELA



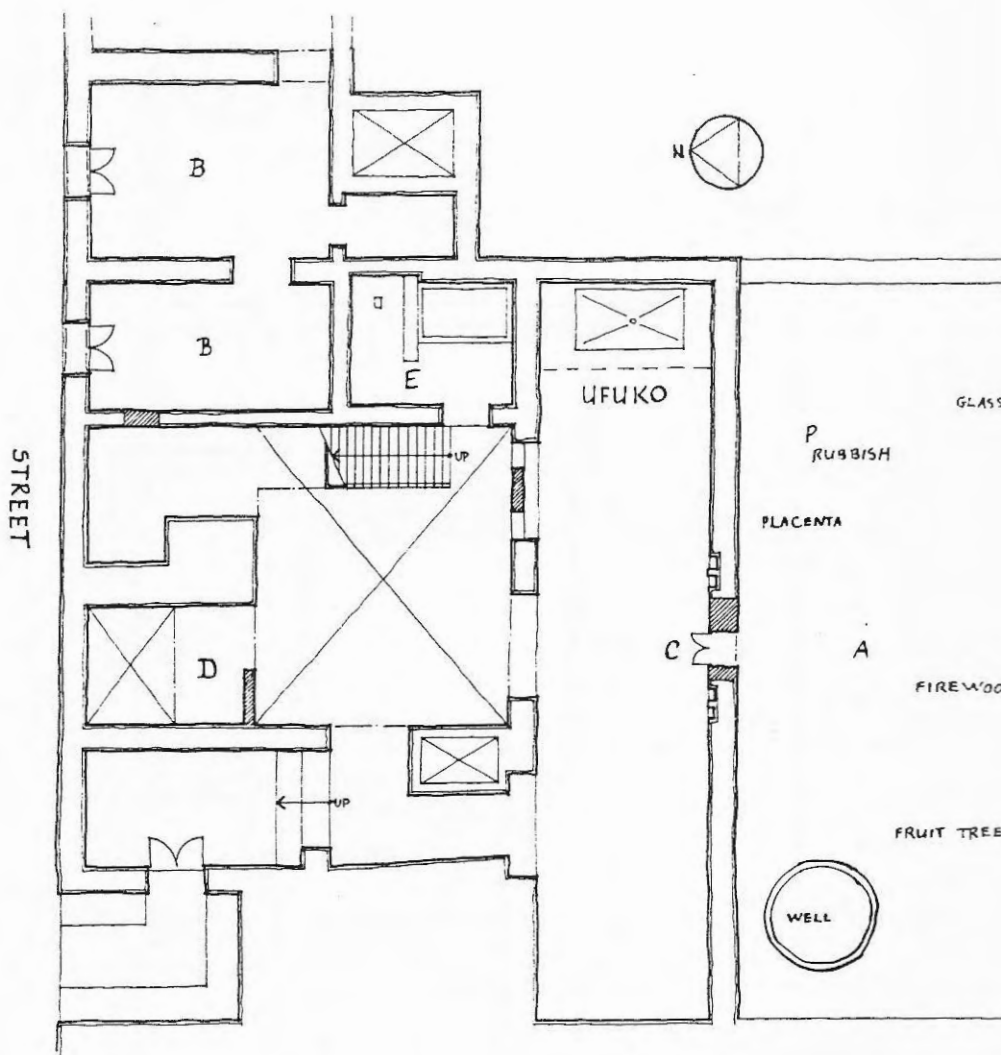
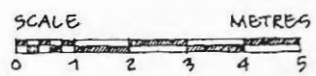


FIG. 11a

CORAL HOUSE  
SHELA

GROUND FLOOR PLAN





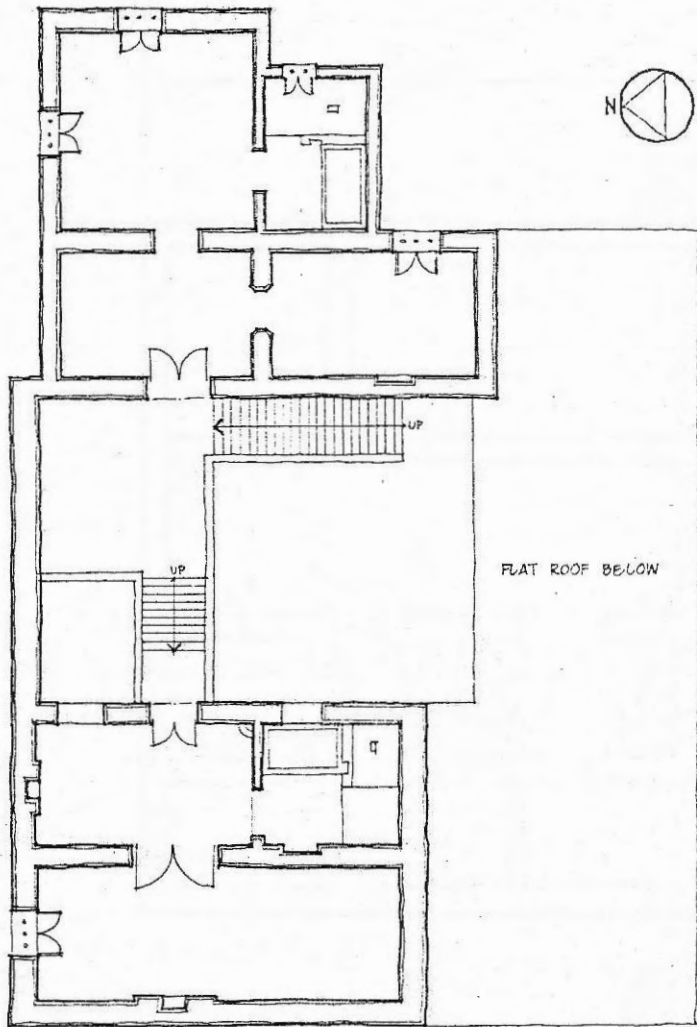
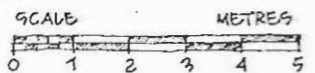


FIG. 11b

CORAL HOUSE  
SHELA

UPPER FLOOR PLAN



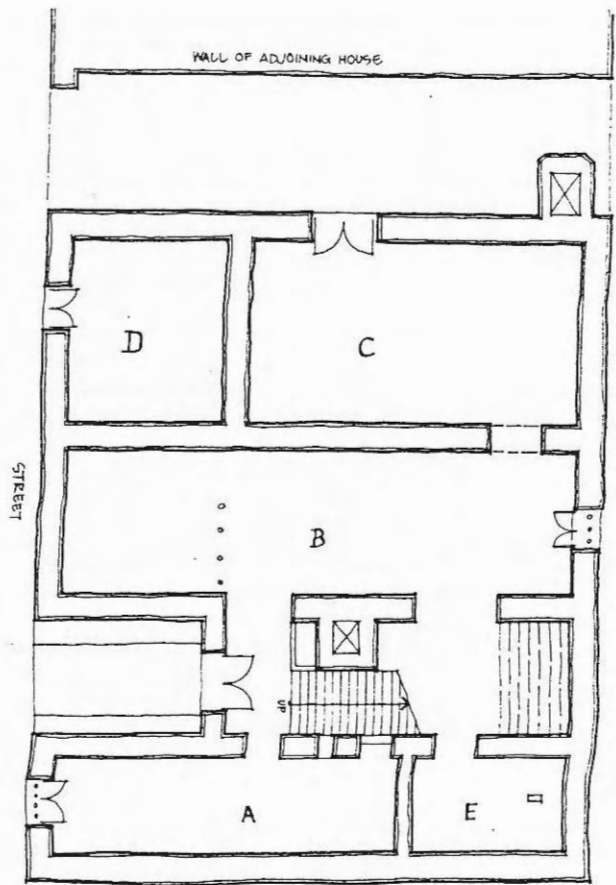


FIG. 12 a

CORAL HOUSE  
SHELA  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

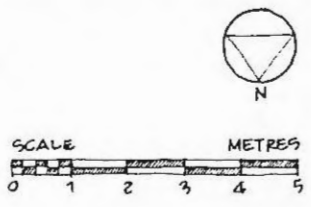
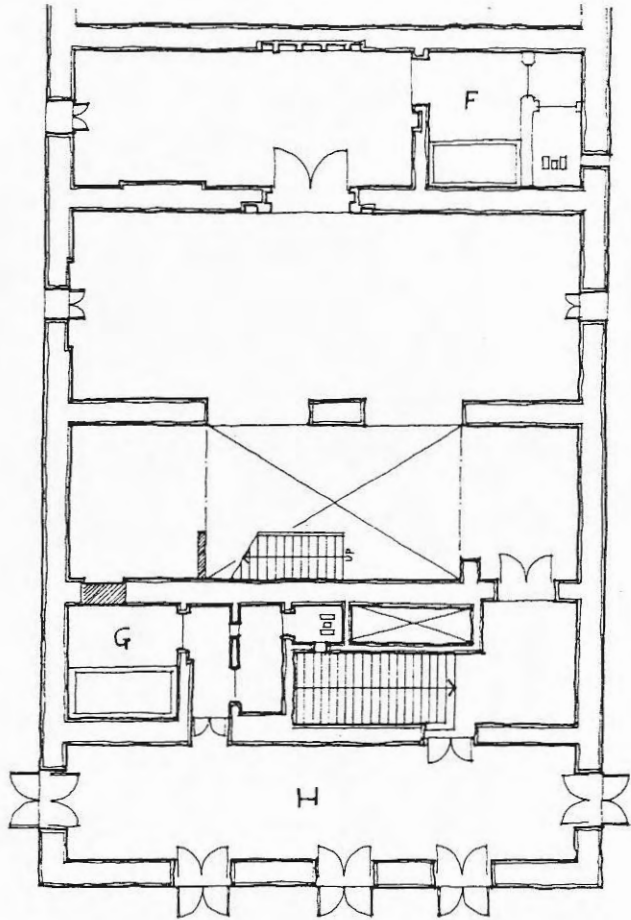


FIG. 12b



CORAL HOUSE

SHELA

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



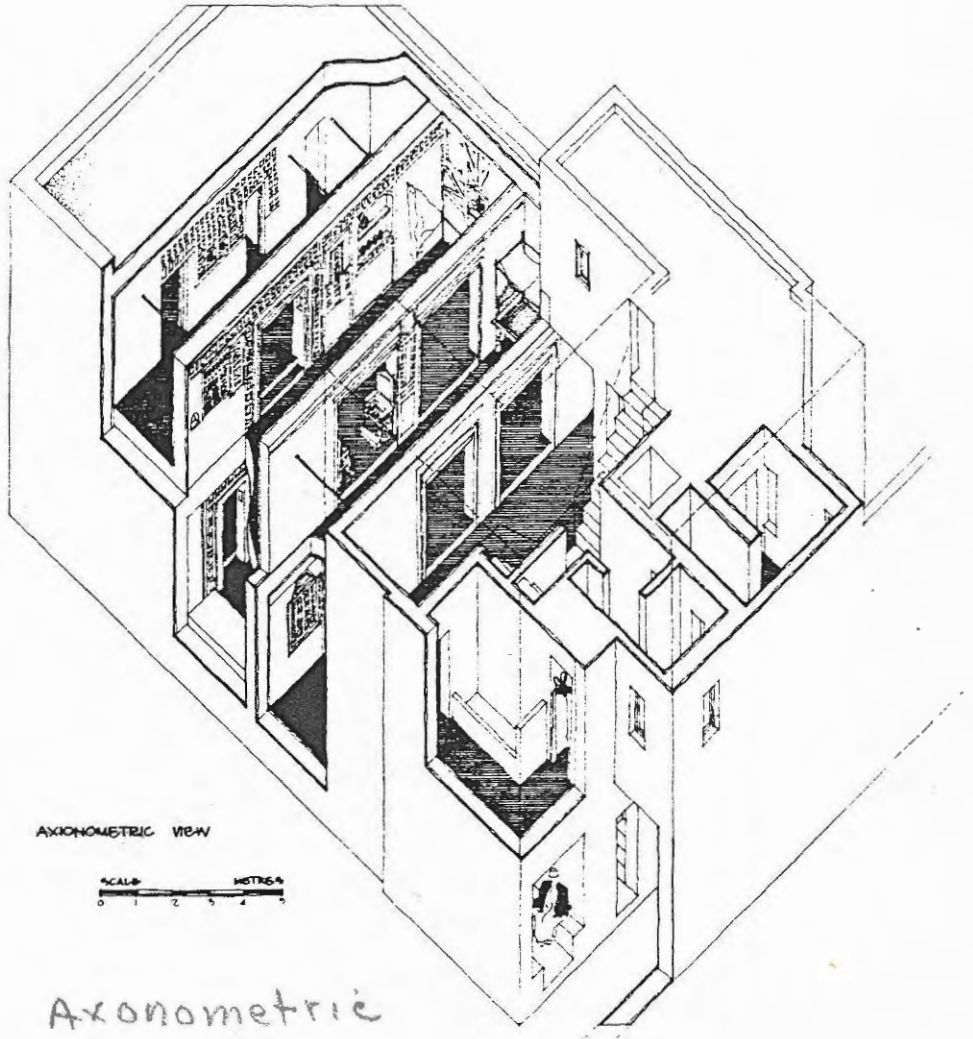
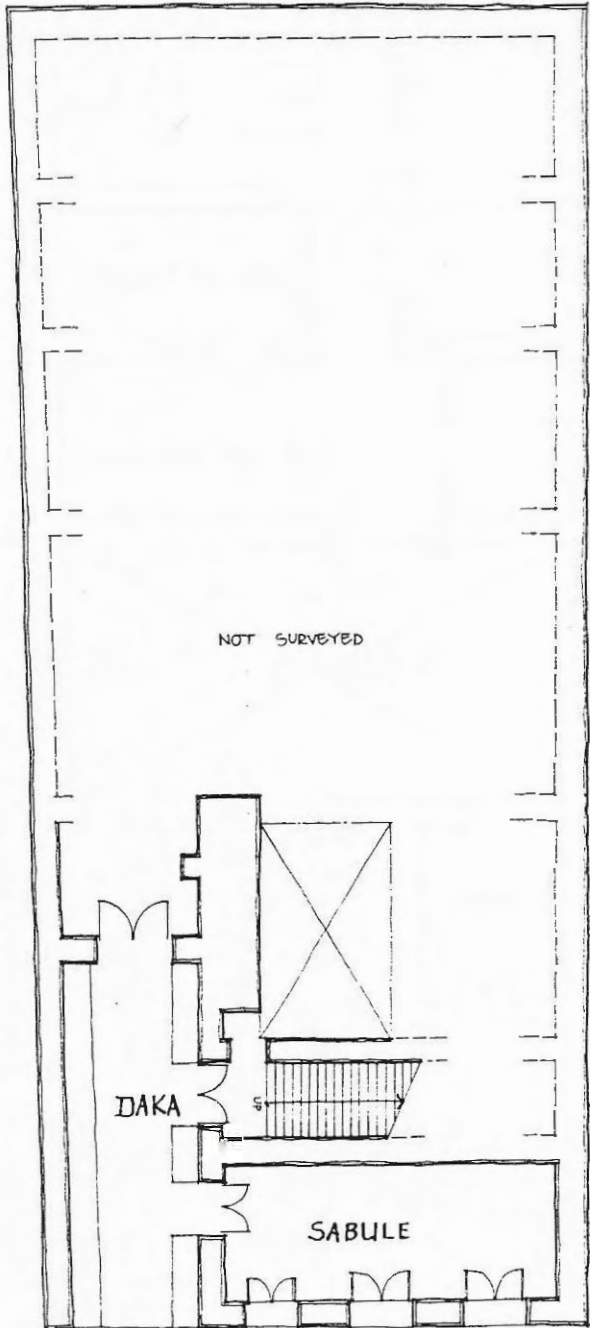


FIG. 13



FIG 14a  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU



PLOT 495  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



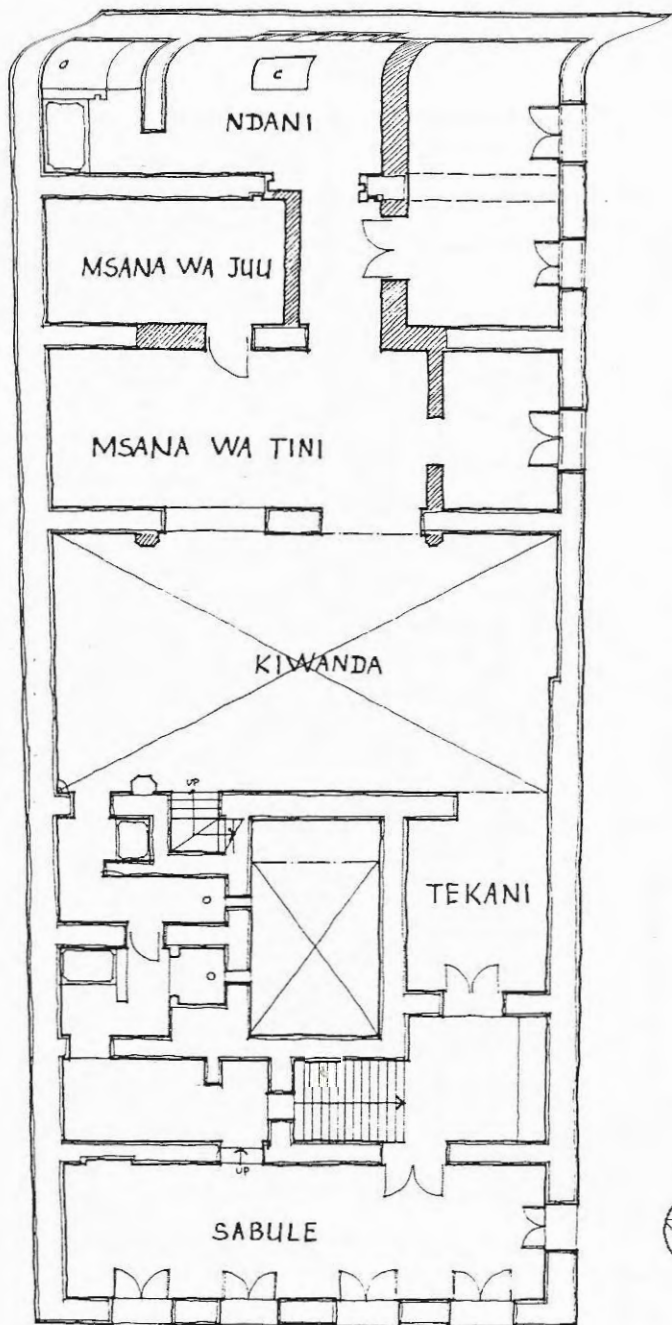
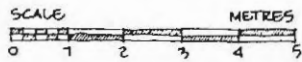
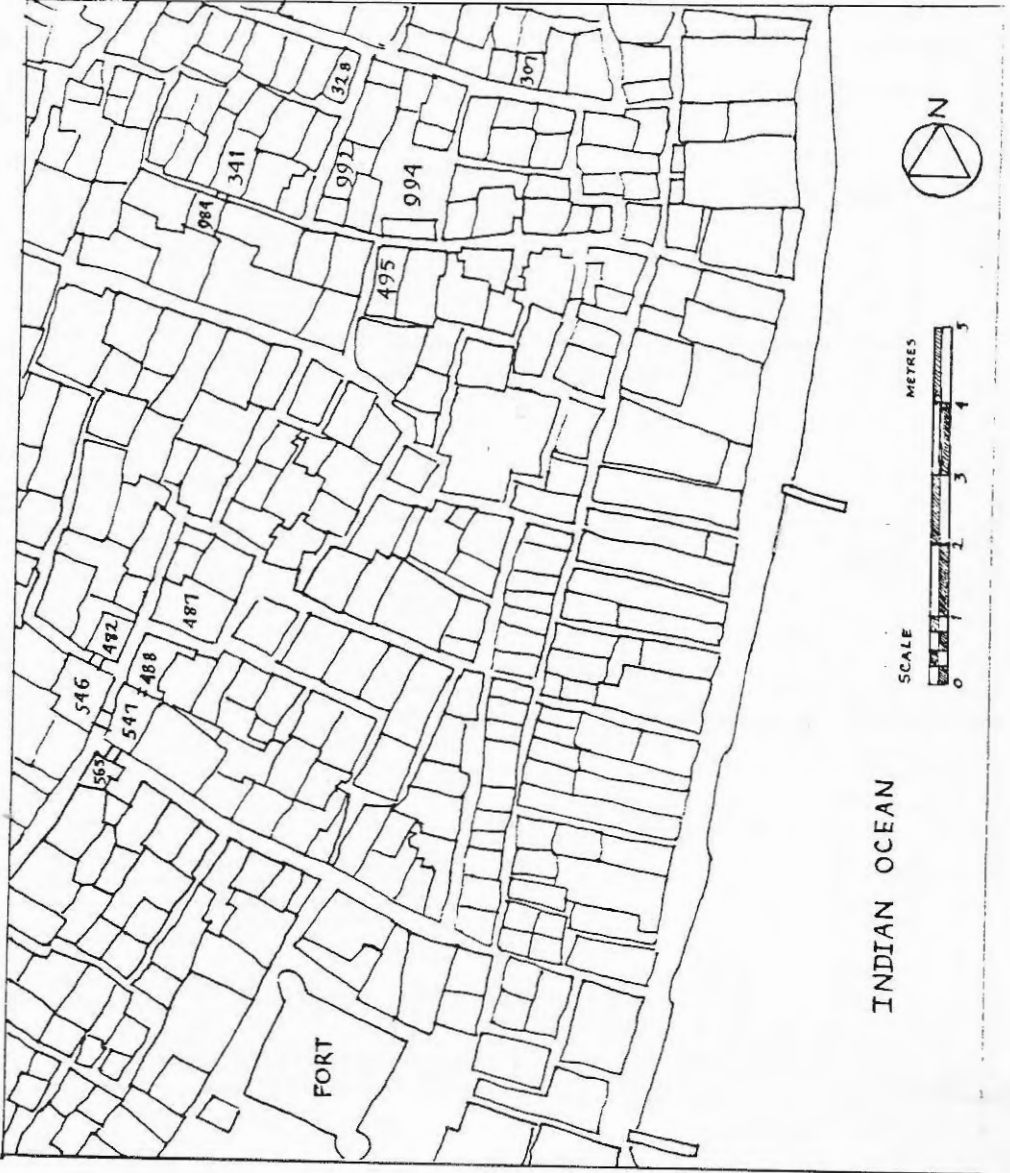


FIG 14b  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU



PLOT 495  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN





SECTION  
OF  
LAMU  
TOWN

FIG. 15

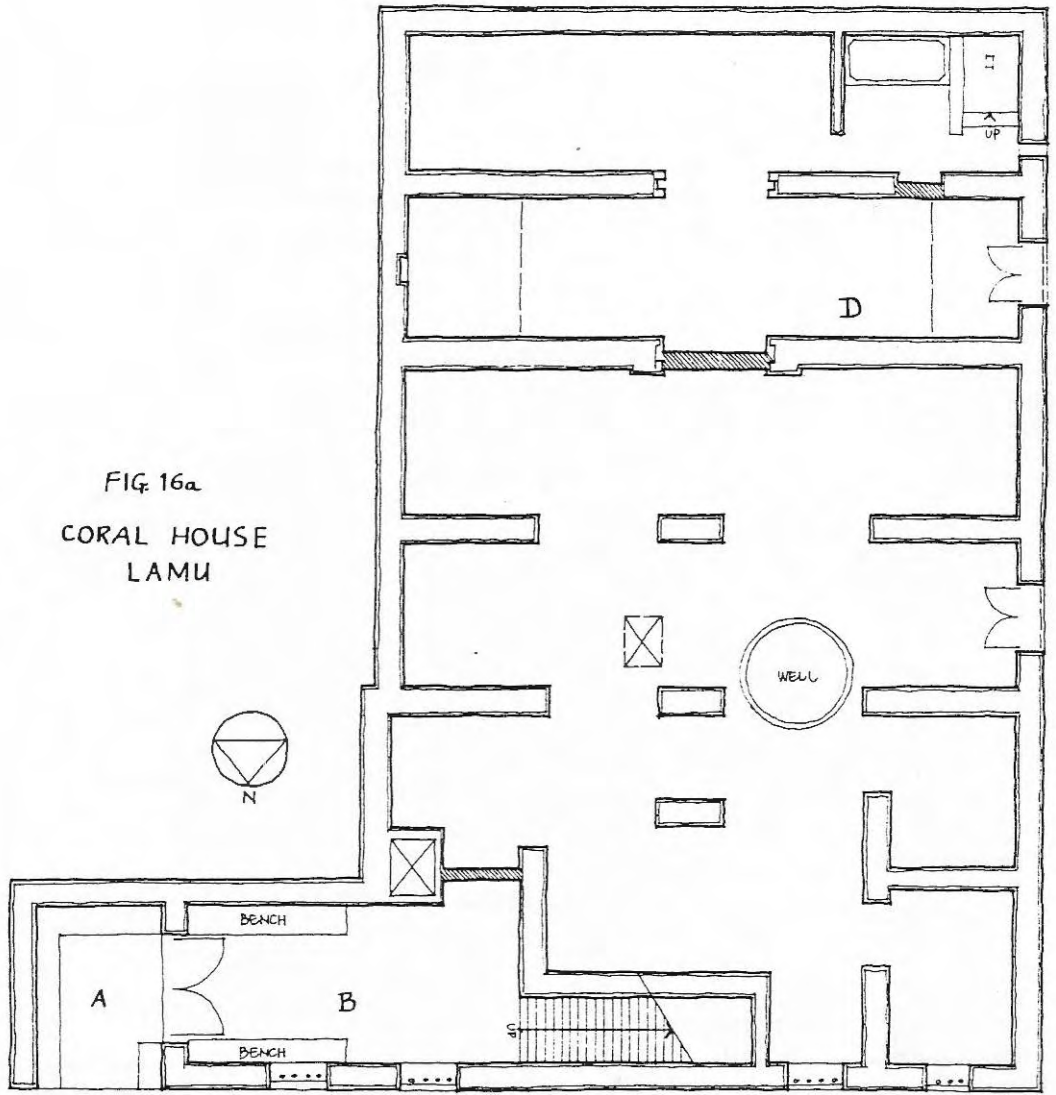


FIG. 16a  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

PLOT 488





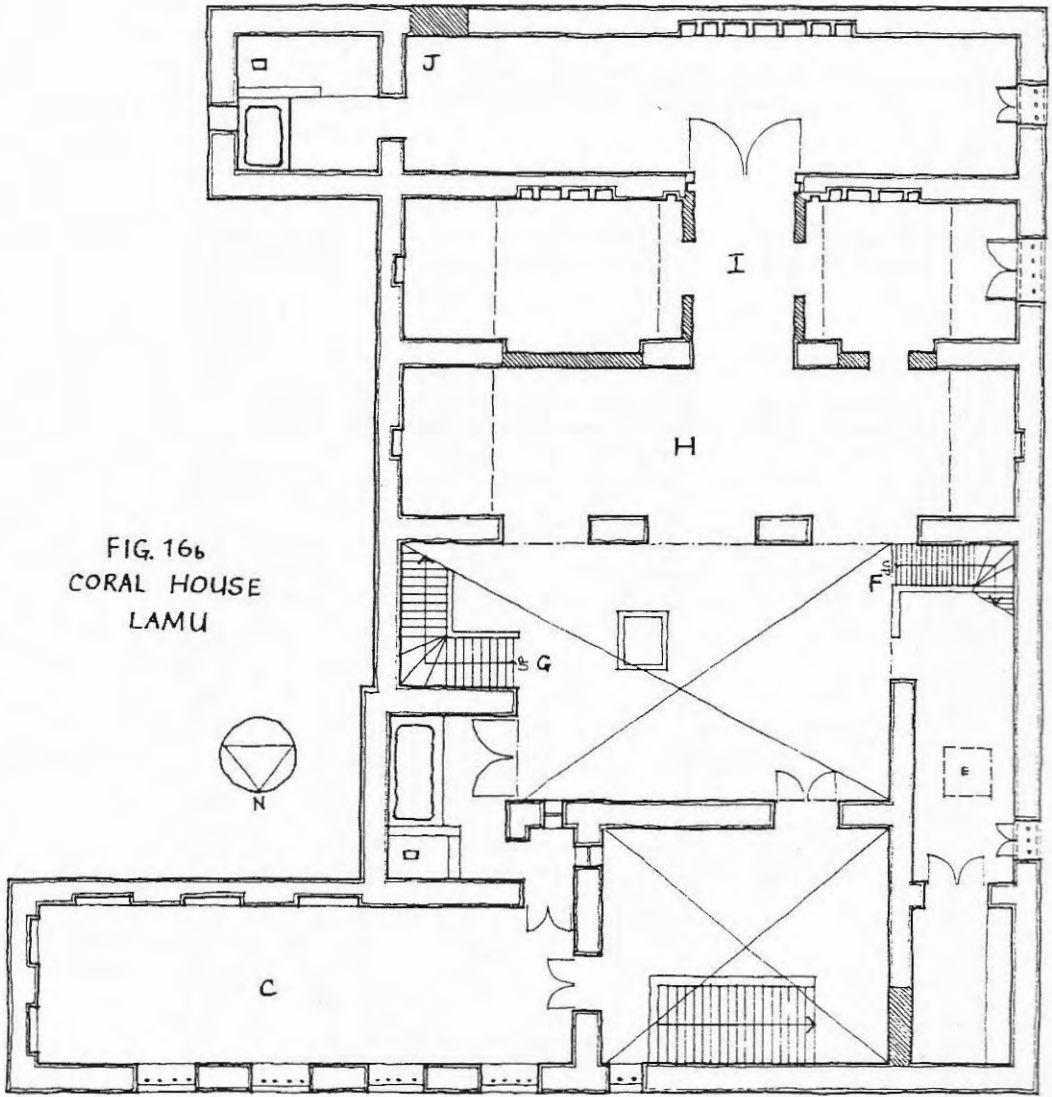
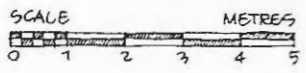
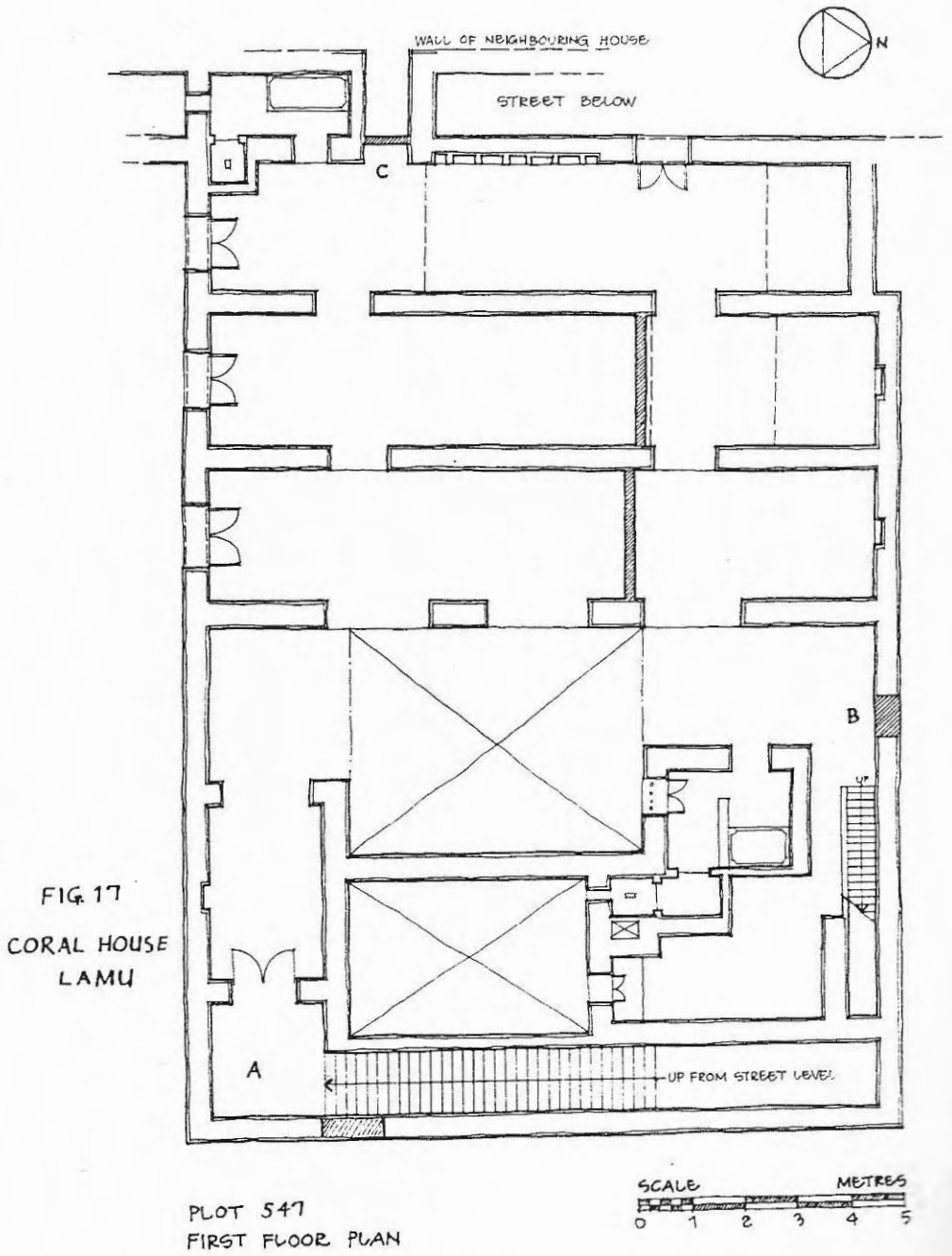


FIG. 16b  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU

PLOT 488

FIRST FLOOR PLAN





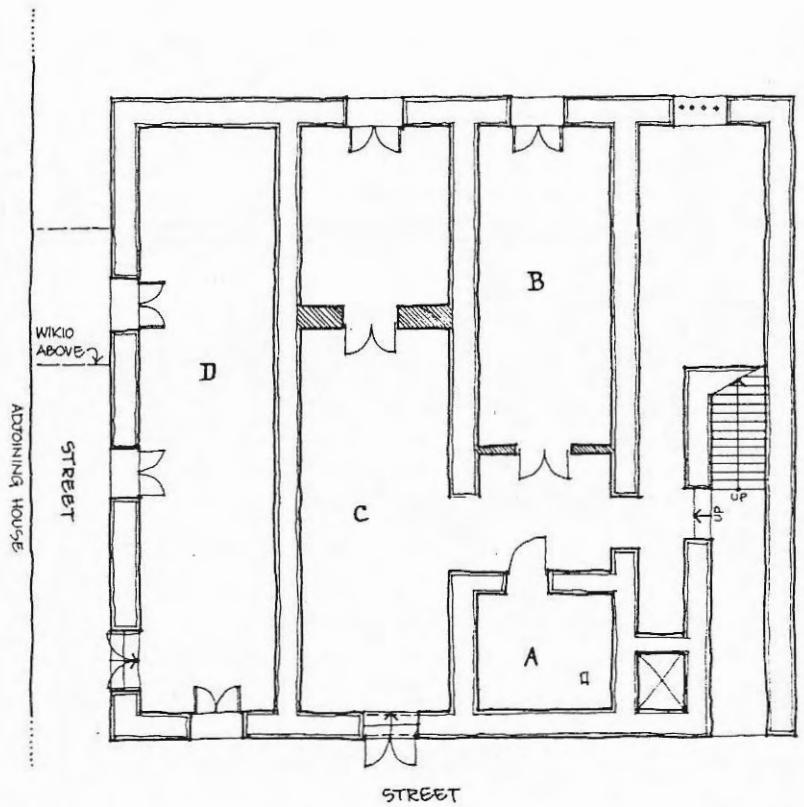


FIG. 18a  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

PLOT 565



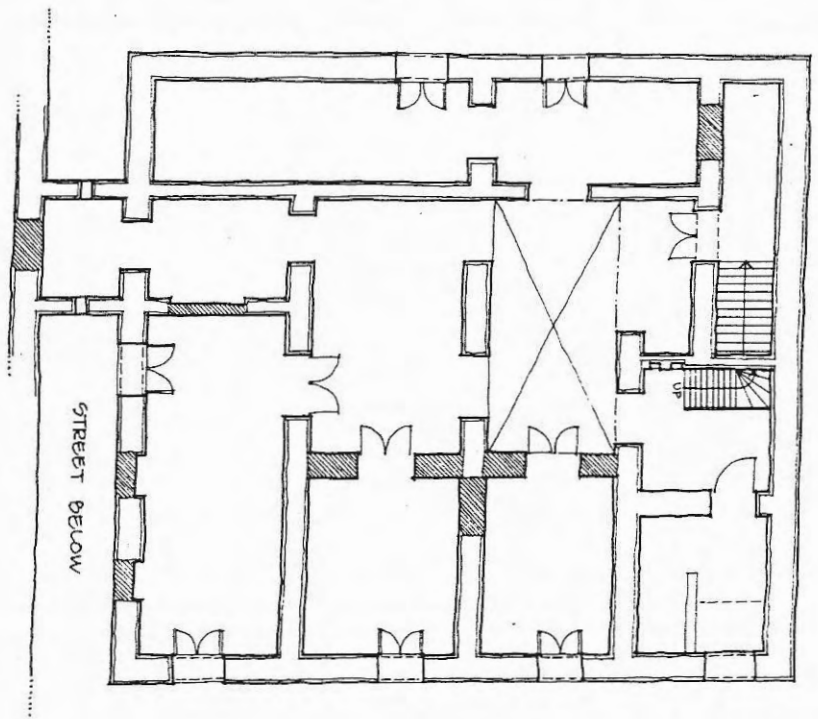
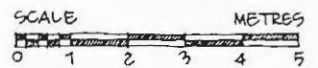


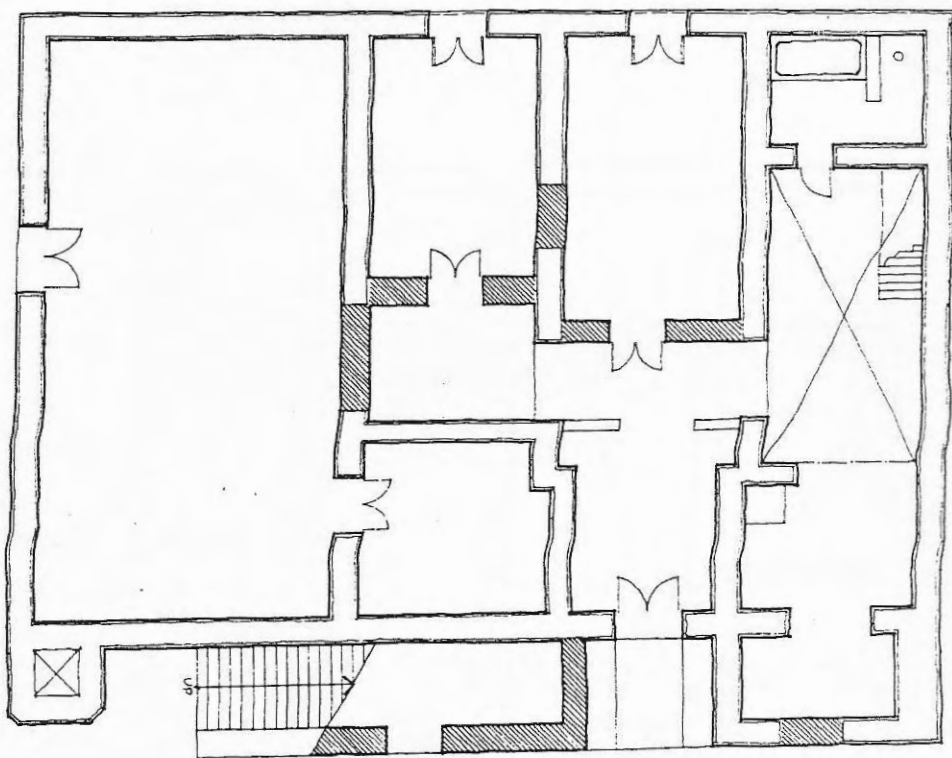
FIG. 18b  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



PLOT 565



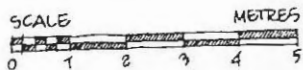




STREET

PLOT 487

FIG. 19a  
 CORAL HOUSE  
 LAMU  
 GROUND FLOOR PLAN



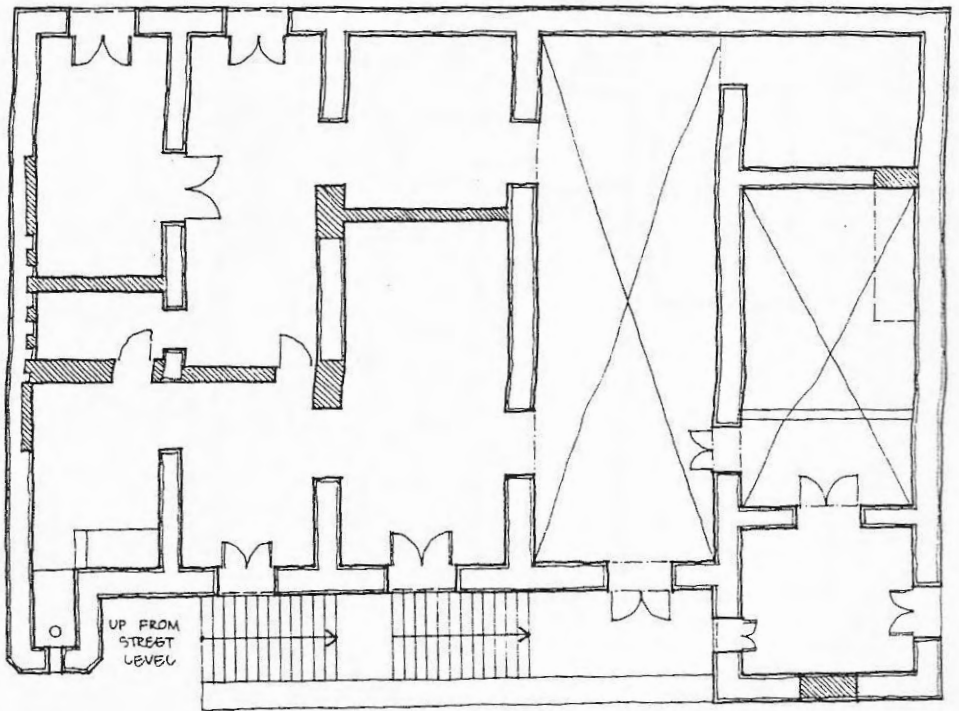


FIG. 19b  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

PLOT 487



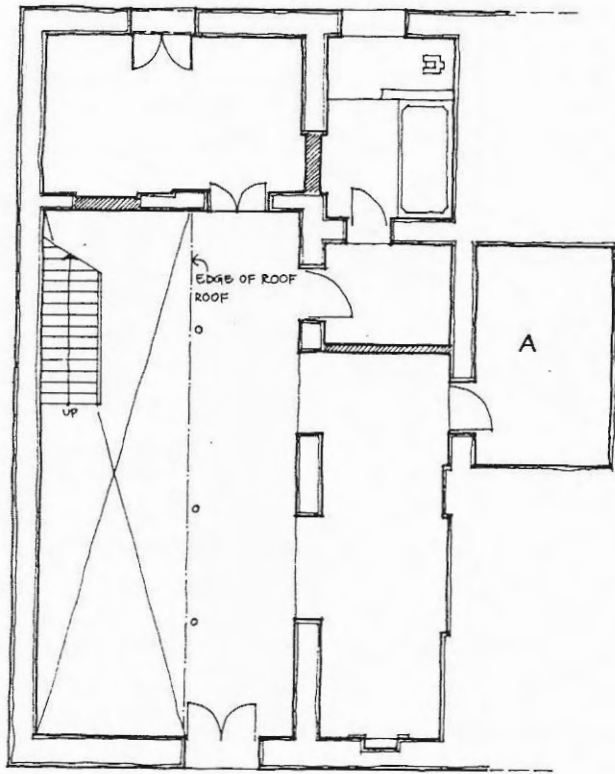


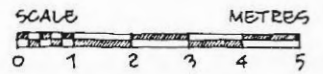
FIG. 20a  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU

PLOT 992

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



LAMU



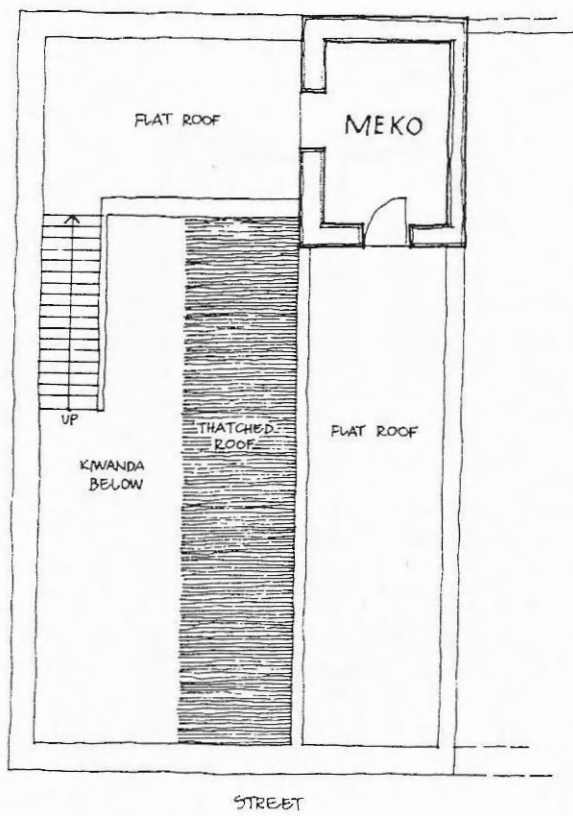


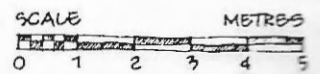
FIG. 20b  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU

PLOT 992

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



LAMU





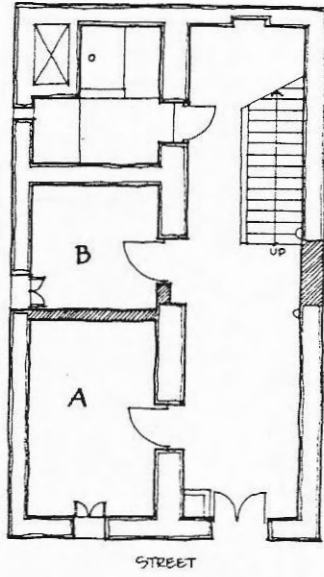
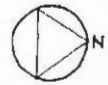


FIG. 21a

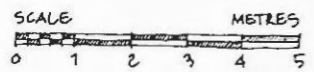


CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU

PLOT 328

LAMU

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



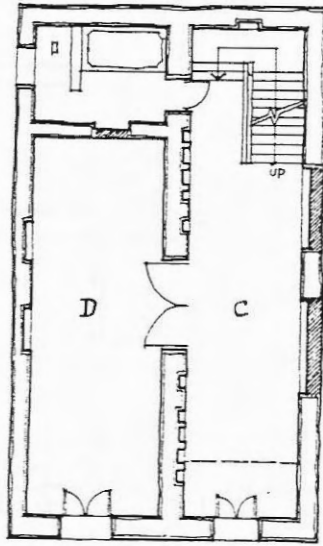


FIG. 21b

CORAL HOUSE

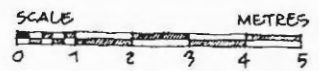
LAMU

PLOT 328

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



LAMU



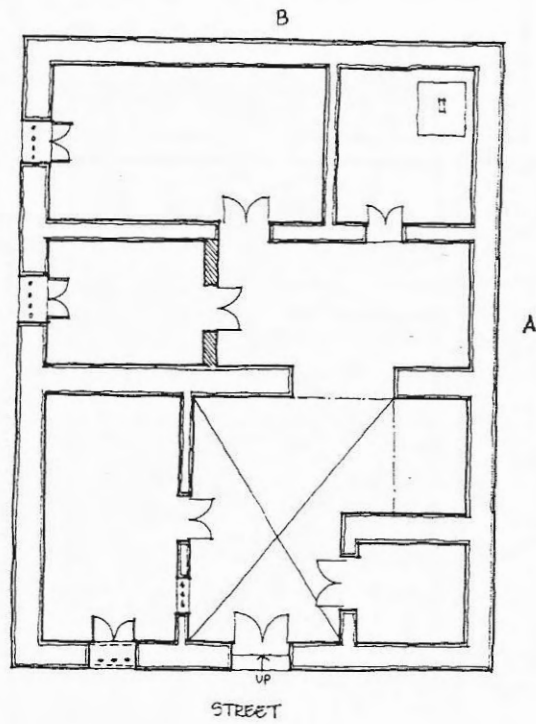
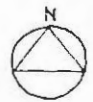


FIG. 2.2

CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU



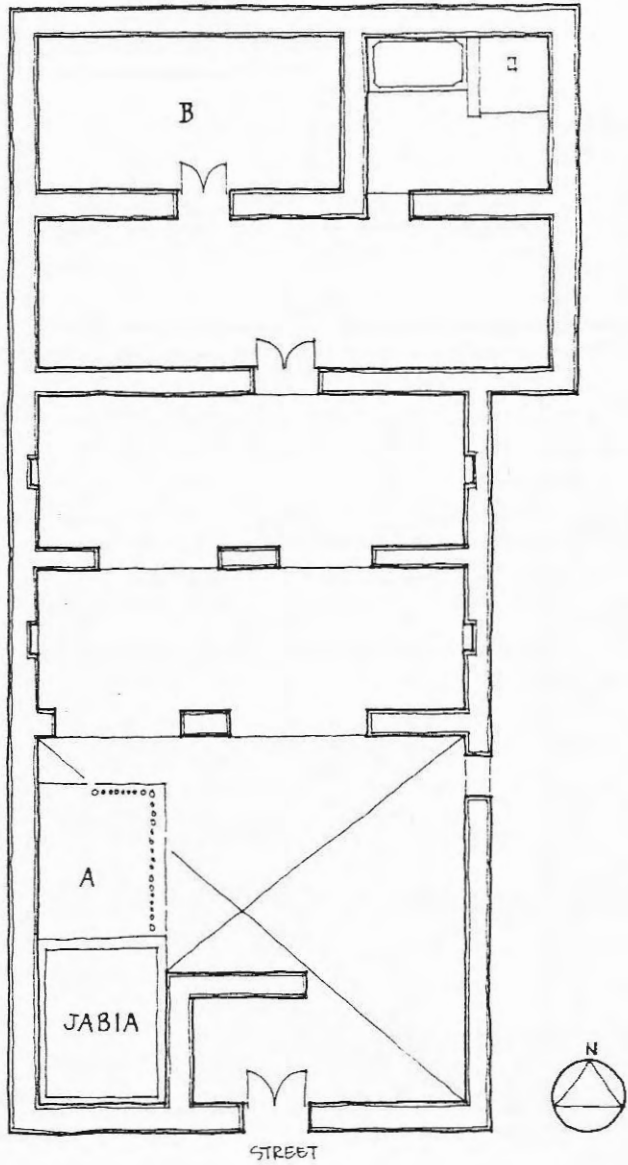
PLOT 307

LAMU

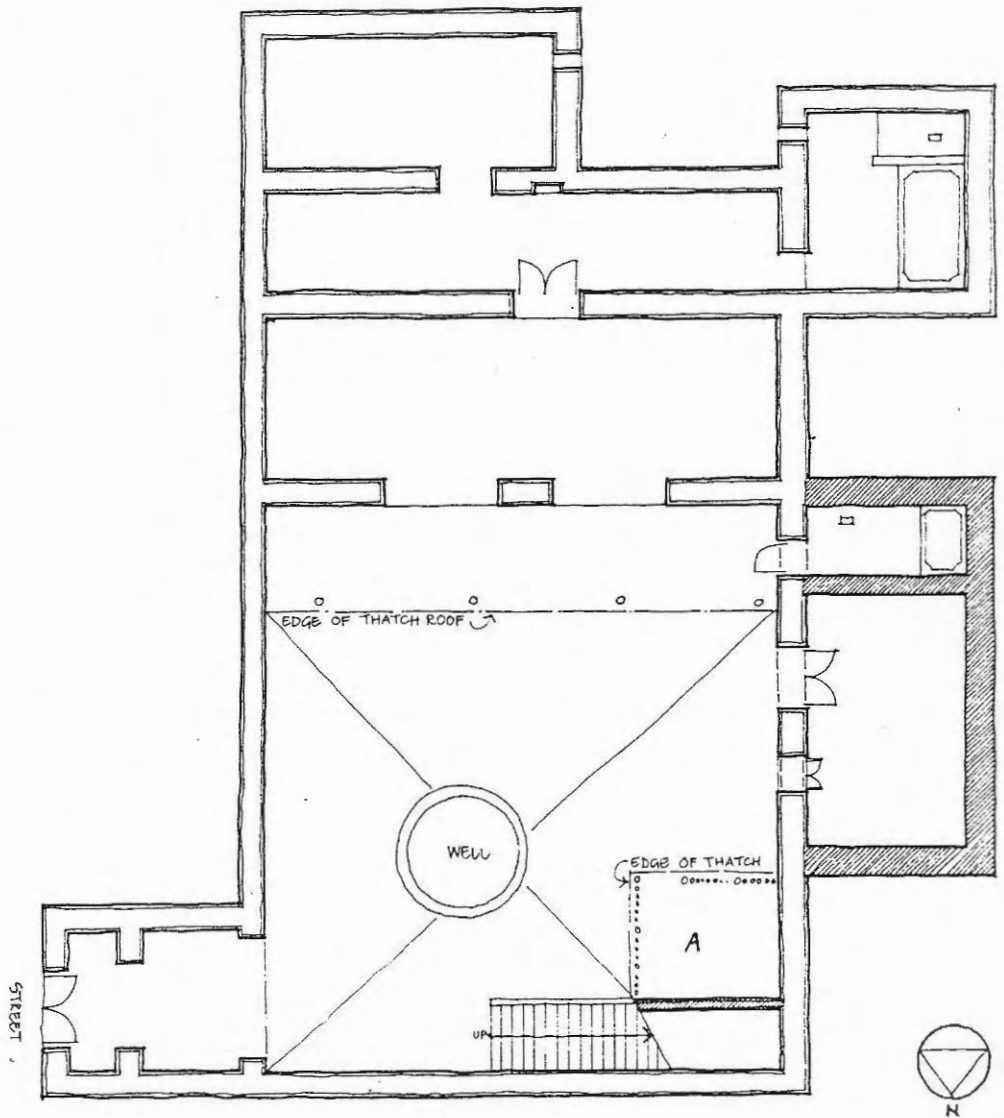
PLAN (SINGLE STOREY HOUSE)



FIG 23  
CORAL HOUSE  
PATE



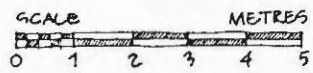


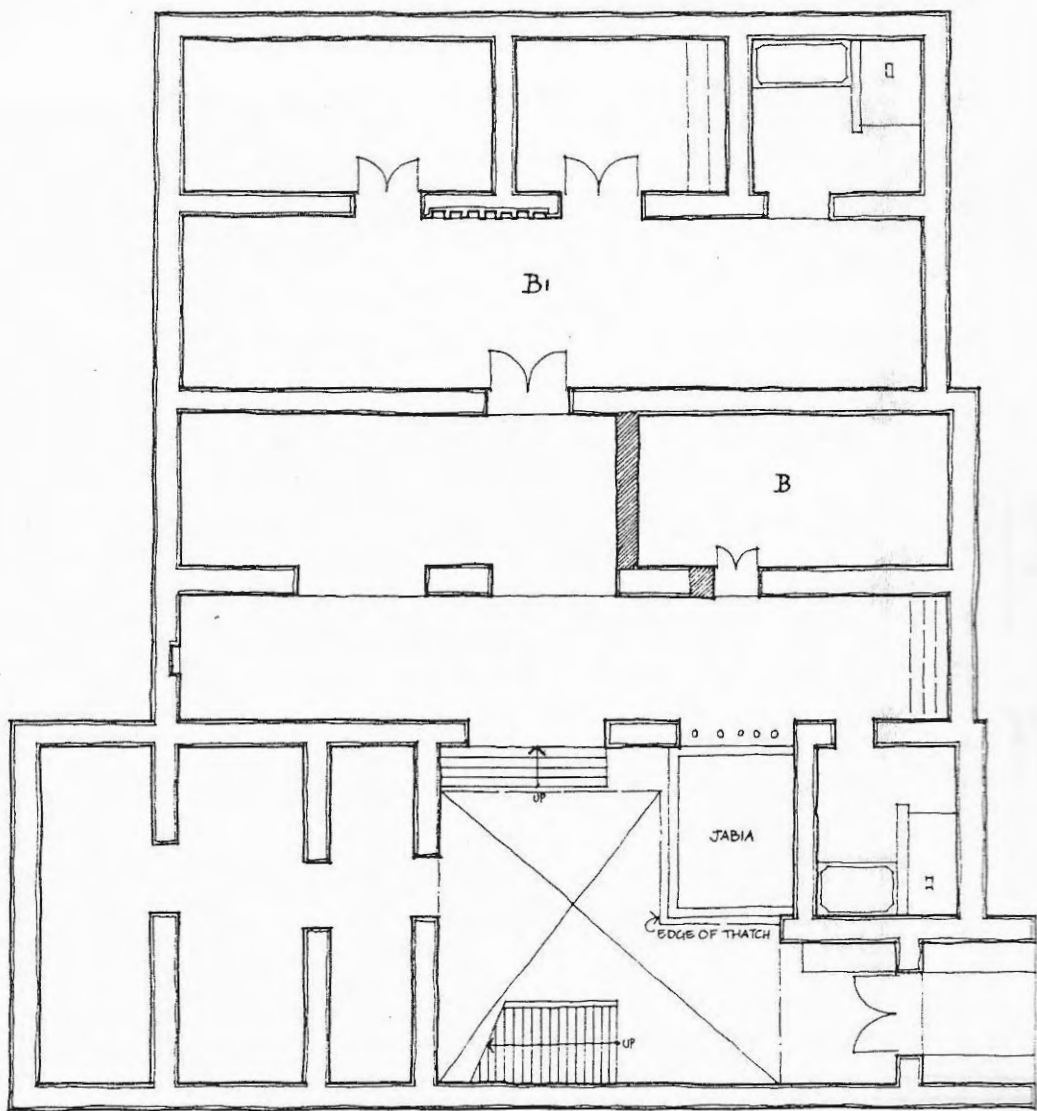


CORAL HOUSE  
PATE

FIG. 24

GROUND FLOOR PLAN





CORAL HOUSE  
PATE

FIG. 25a

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



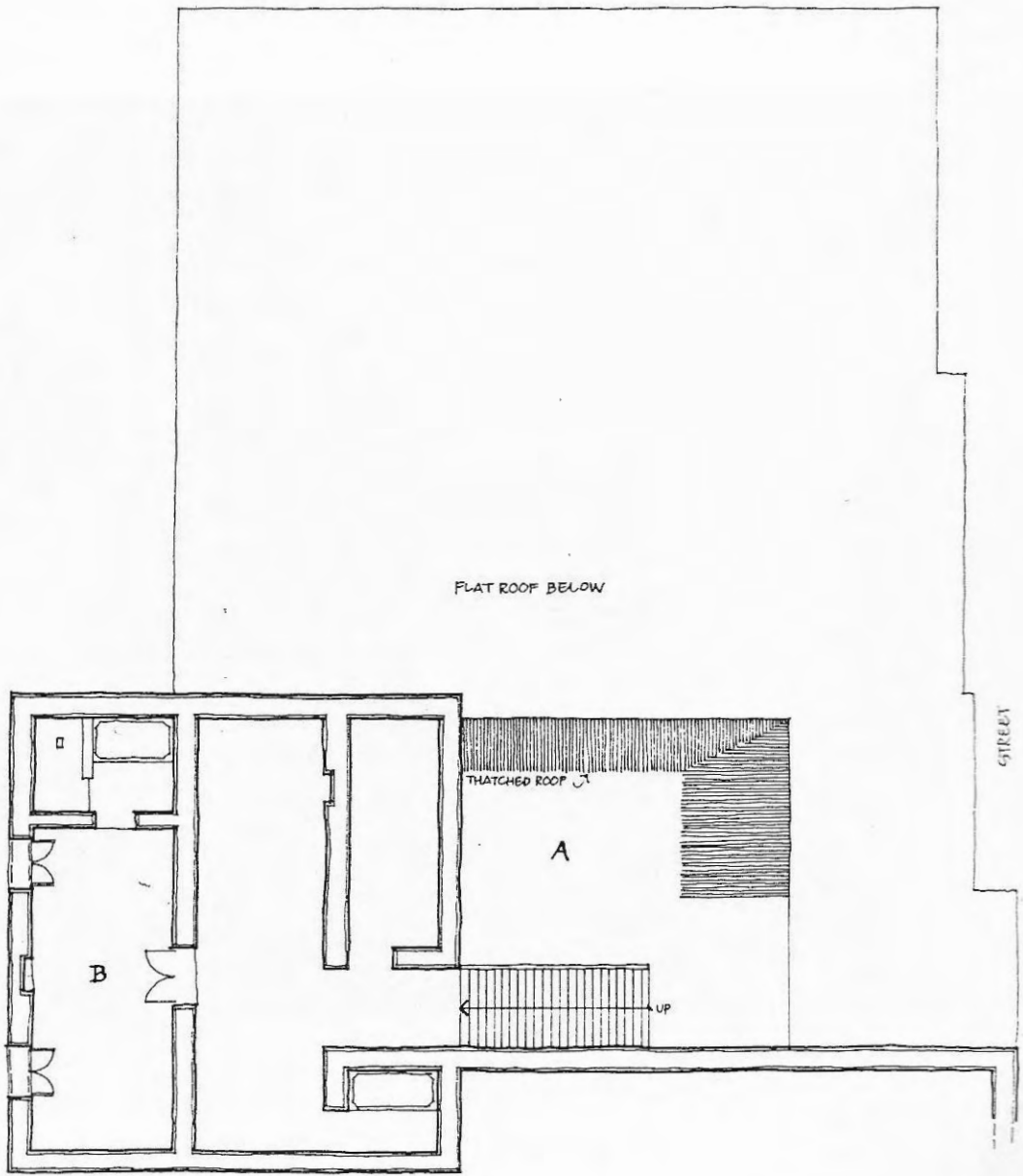


FIG. 25b

CORAL HOUSE  
PATE

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

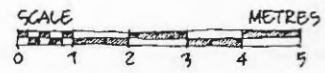




Fig. 26 An ulili bed (left) and a turned lac canopy bed (right) are within a traditional Pate house.





Fig. 27 Kiti cha mpingo, the ebony and ivory inlaid chair of the Swahili elite.



Fig. 28 Roof-top view of Lamu.

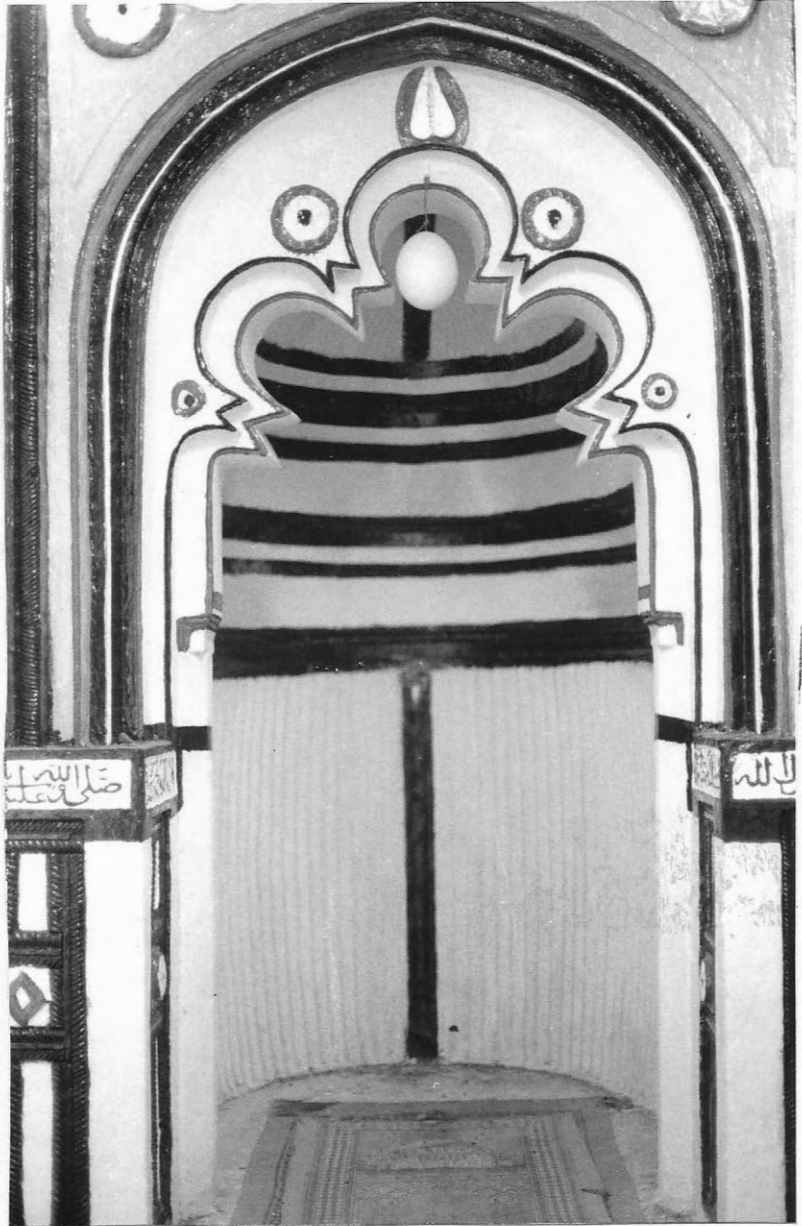


Fig. 29 Mihrab, prayer niche, within  
a Swahili mosque.





Fig. 30 Mswali, or prayer niche within a  
ruined Swahili house in Shela.





Fig. 31 Zidaka, niches within the ndani of a Swahili house.

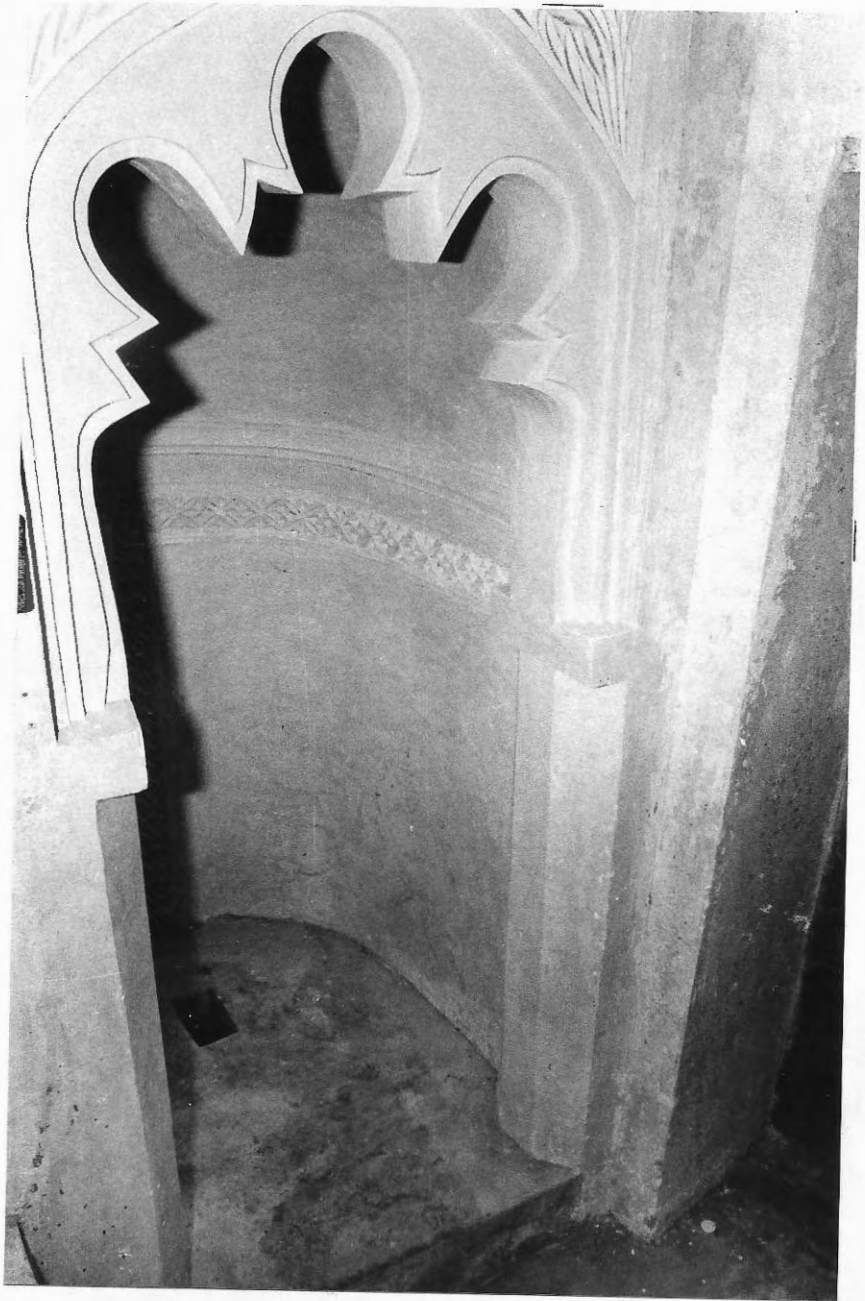


Fig. 32 Plastered niche over a pit toilet.





Fig. 33 Main gate to a shared courtyard,  
or pol.

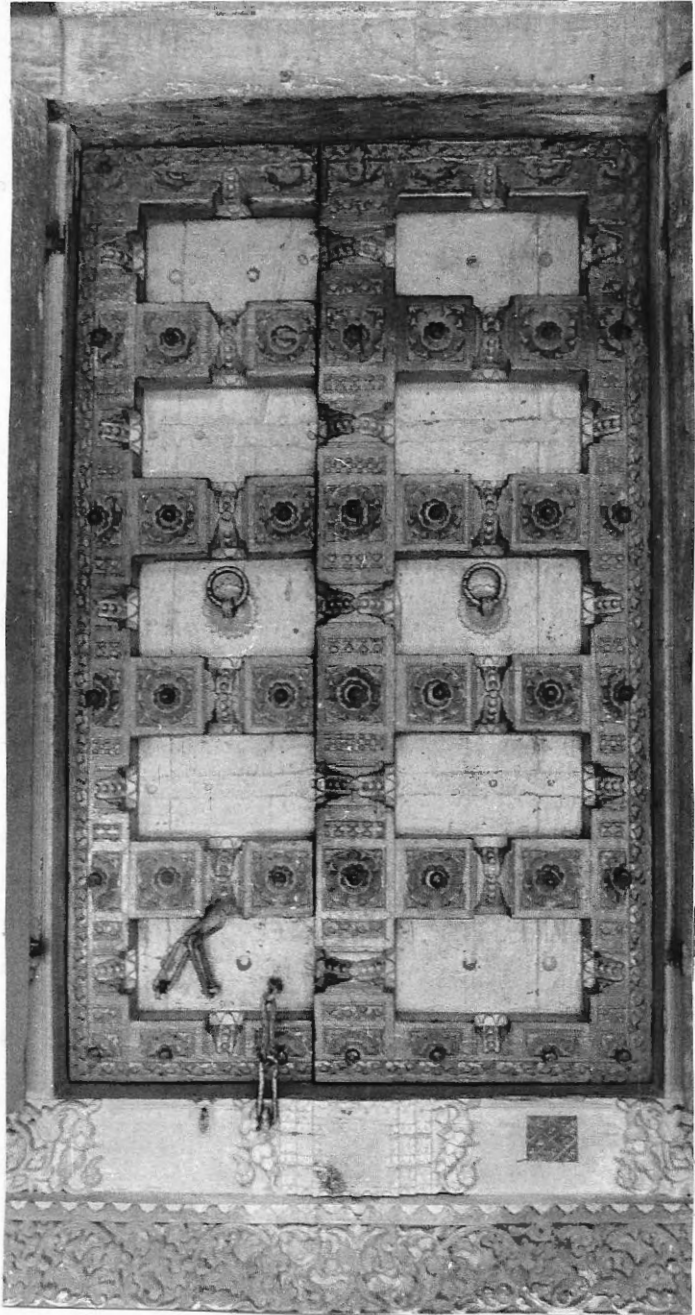
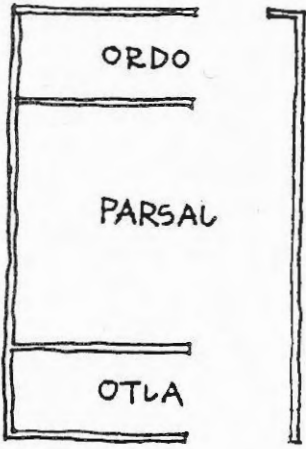
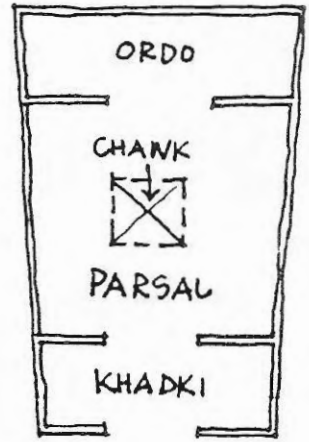


Fig. 34 Indian door with carved mango leaves along the lintel and carved lotus flowers on the door.

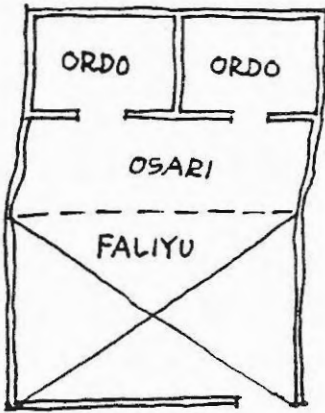




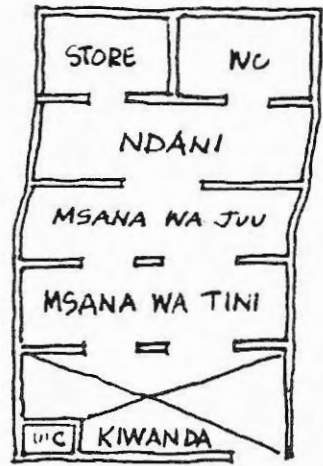
SOUTH GUJARAT



NORTH GUJARAT



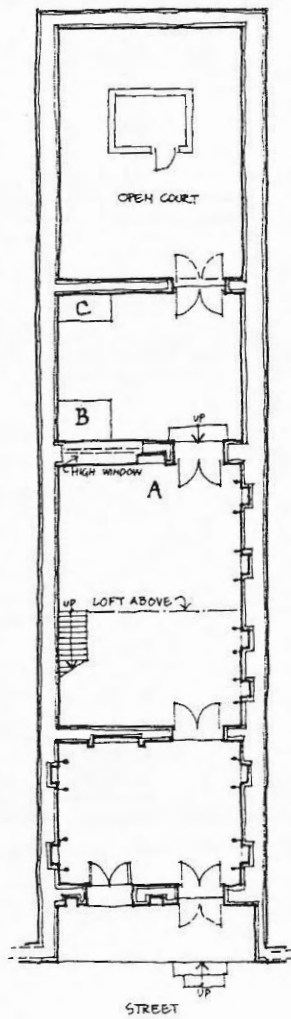
SARAUSTR  
KUTCH



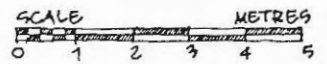
LAMU

HINDU HOUSE  
NAVSARI

FIG. 36



PLAN



HINDU HOUSE  
AHMEDABAD

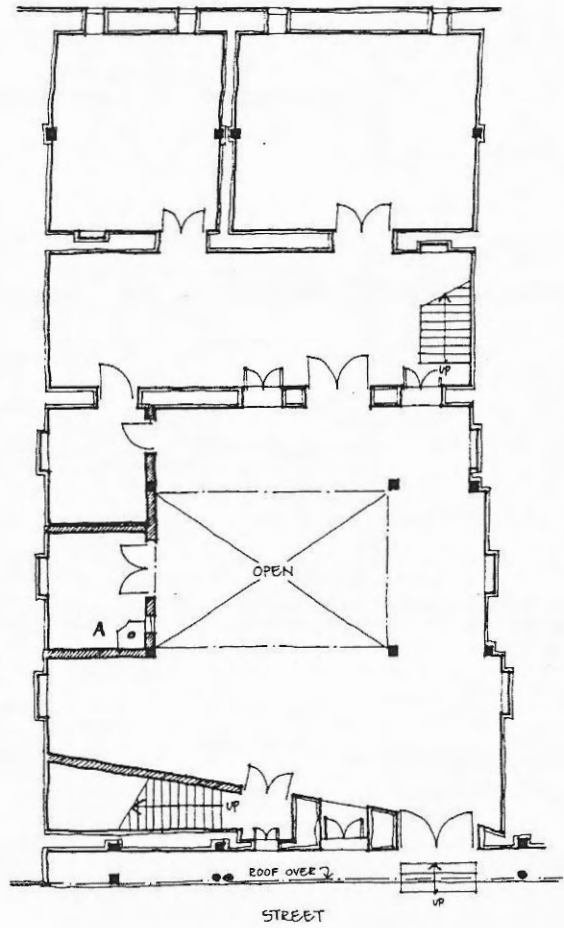
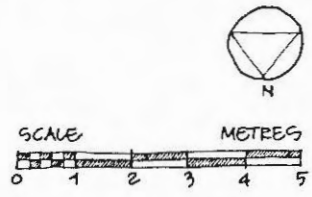


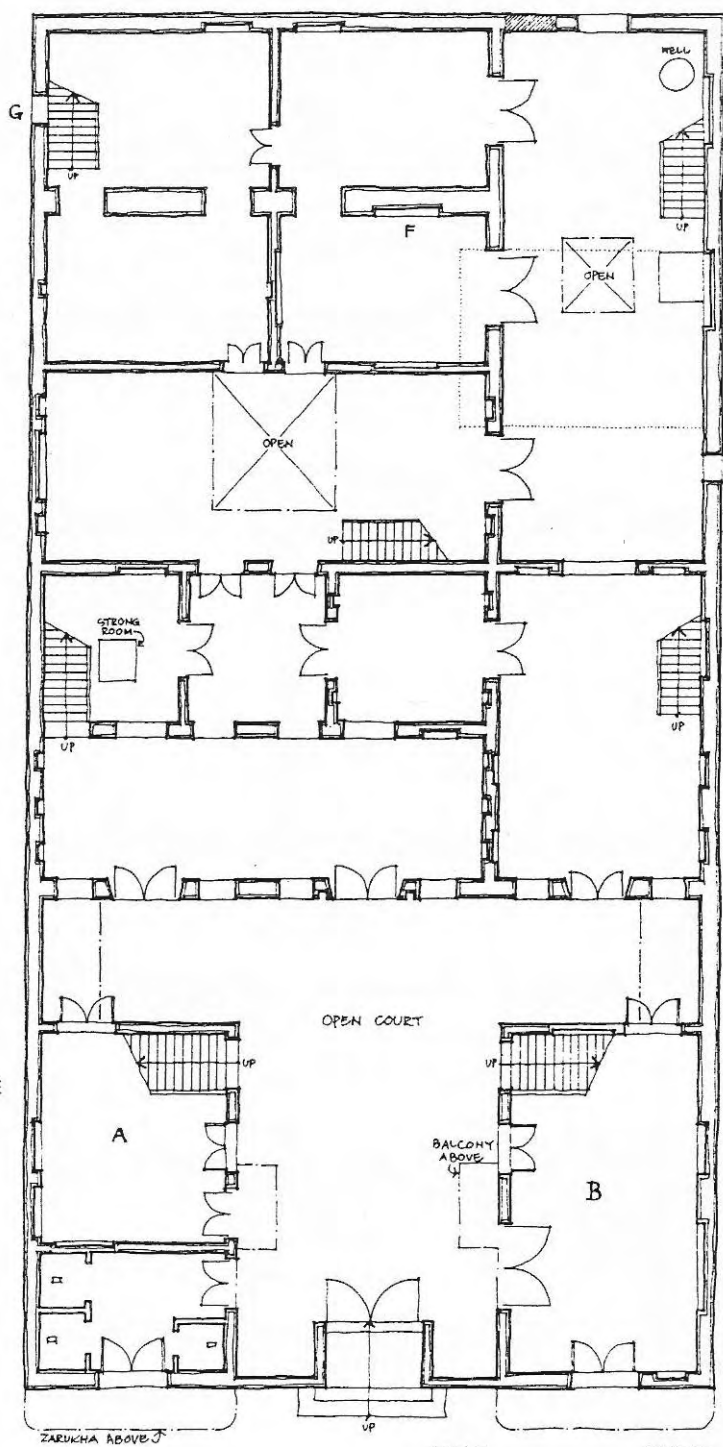
FIG. 37

PLAN



HINDU HOUSE  
SURAT

FIG. 38a



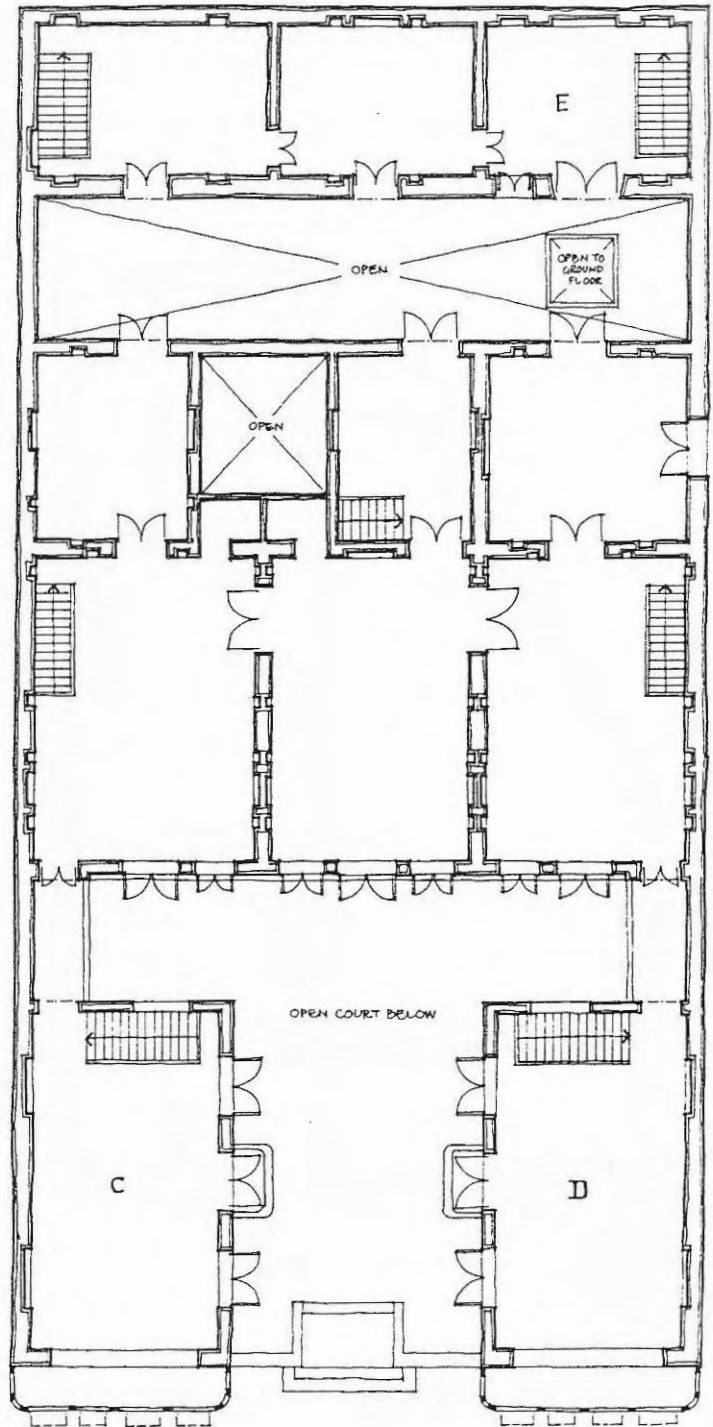
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

SCALE METRES  
0 1 2 3 4 5



HINDU HOUSE  
SURAT

FIG. 38b



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



BOHRA HOUSE  
RANDER

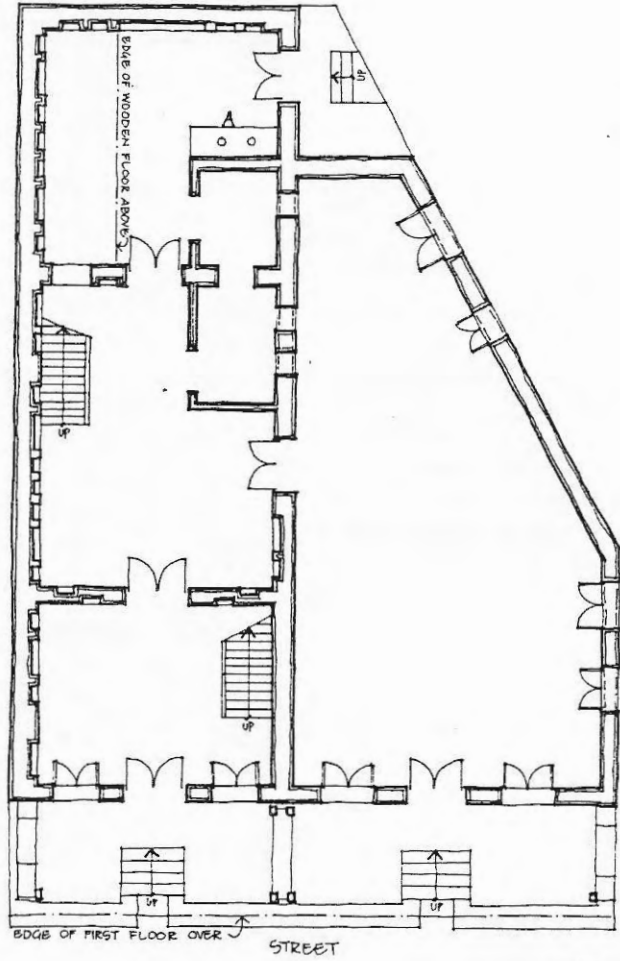


FIG. 39a

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



BOHRA HOUSE  
RANDER

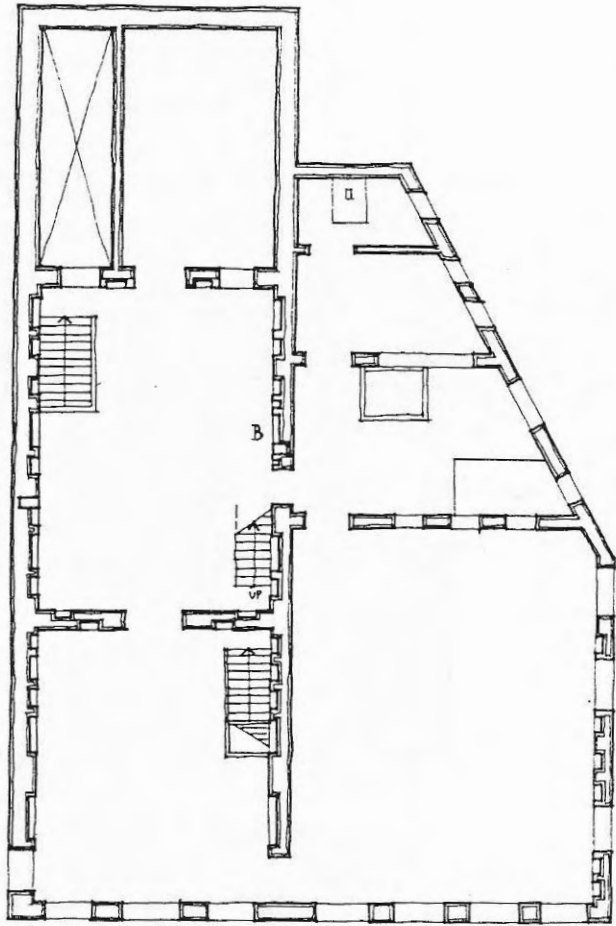


FIG. 39b



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



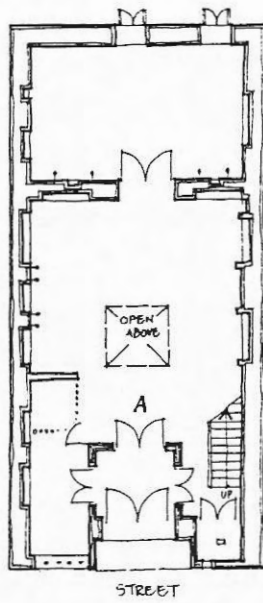
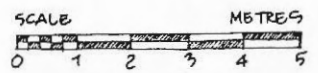


FIG. 40a

BOHRA HOUSE  
CAMBAY



GROUND FLOOR PLAN





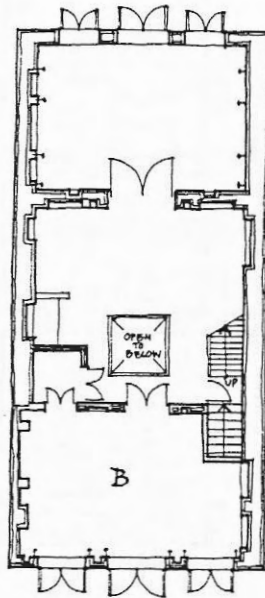
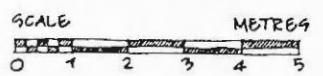


FIG. 40b

BOHRA HOUSE  
CAMBAY



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



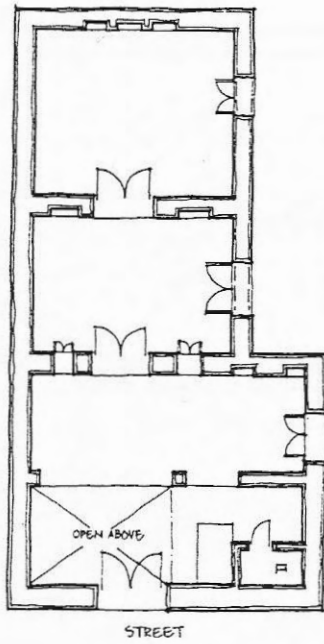
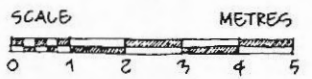


FIG. 41

BOHRA HOUSE  
SIDPUR



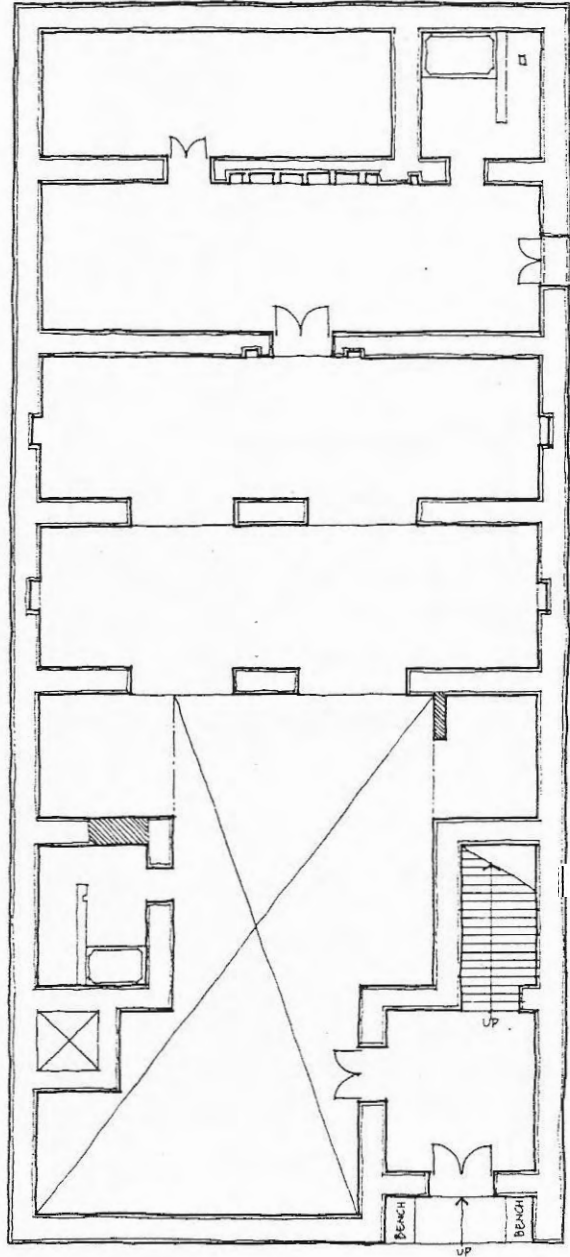
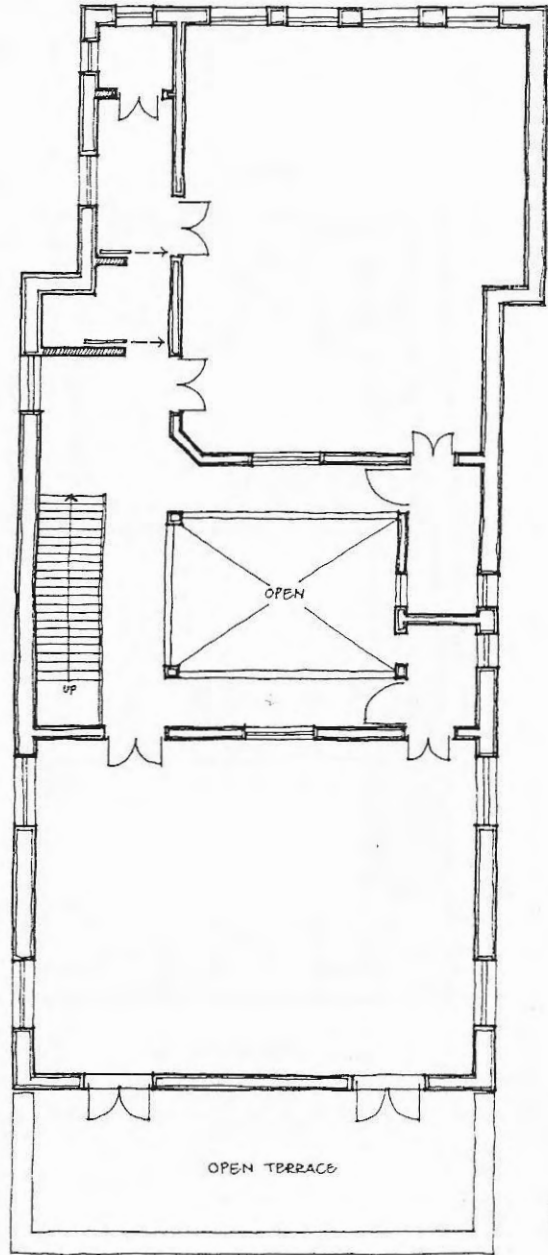


FIG. 42  
CORAL HOUSE  
LAMU

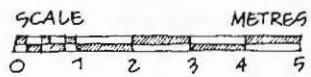


GROUND FLOOR PLAN

FIG. 43  
BOHRA HOUSE  
BOMBAY



UPPER FLOOR PLAN





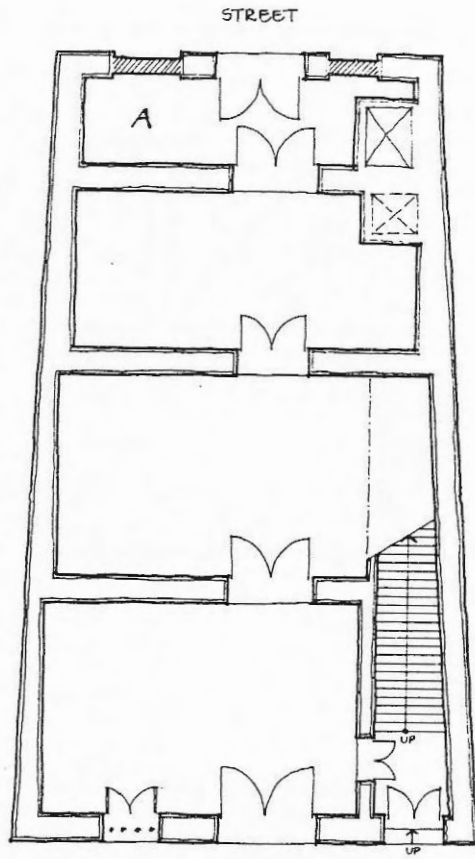


FIG. 44a

STREET  
BOHRA HOUSE  
LAMU



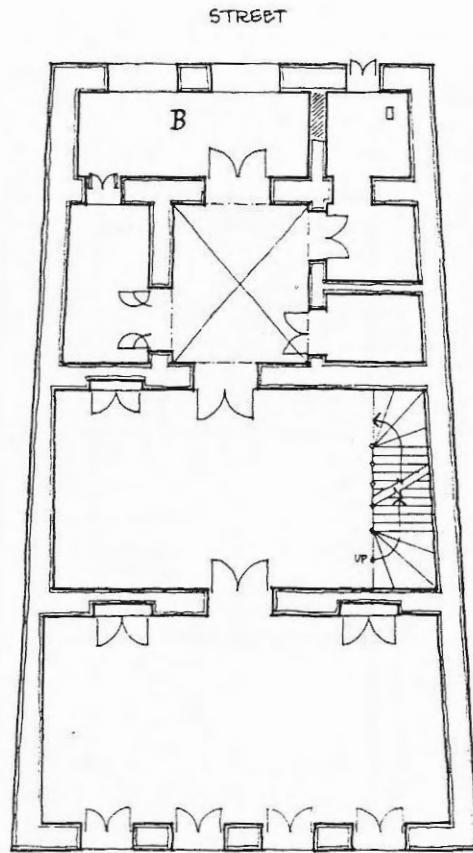
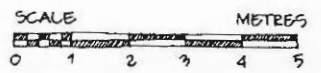


FIG. 44b

STREET  
BOHRA HOUSE  
LAMU



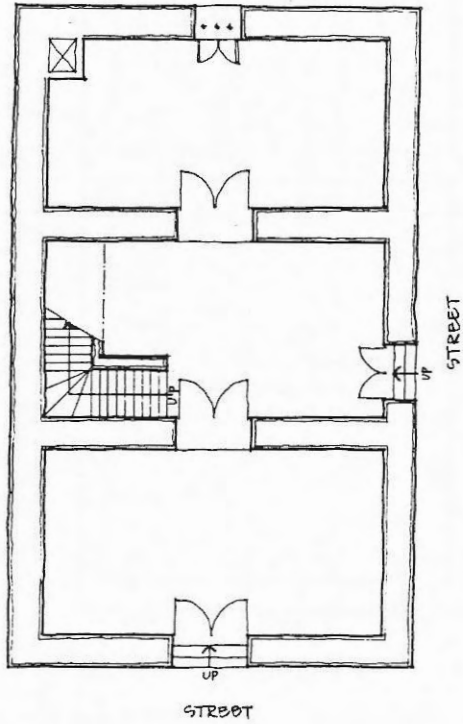


FIG. 45a

PLOT 776

LAMU



INDIAN HOUSE  
SUNNI MUSLIN  
LAMU  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



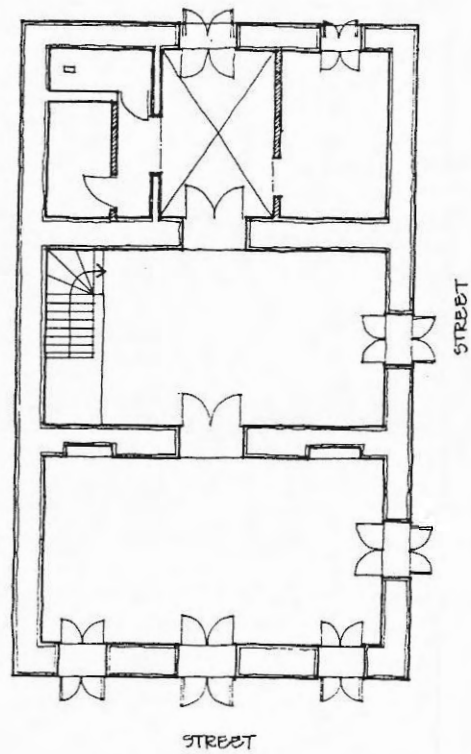
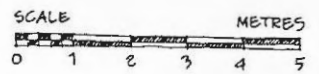
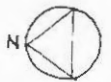


FIG. 45b

PLOT 776

LAMU

INDIAN HOUSE  
SUNNI MUSLIN  
LAMU  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN





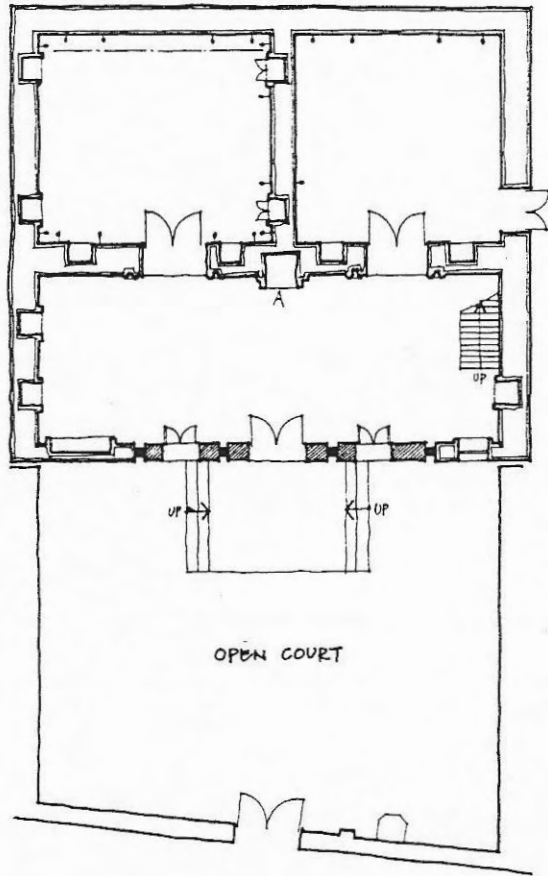
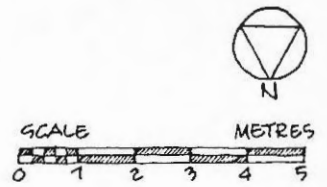


FIG. 46 a

HINDU HOUSE  
BHUJ  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



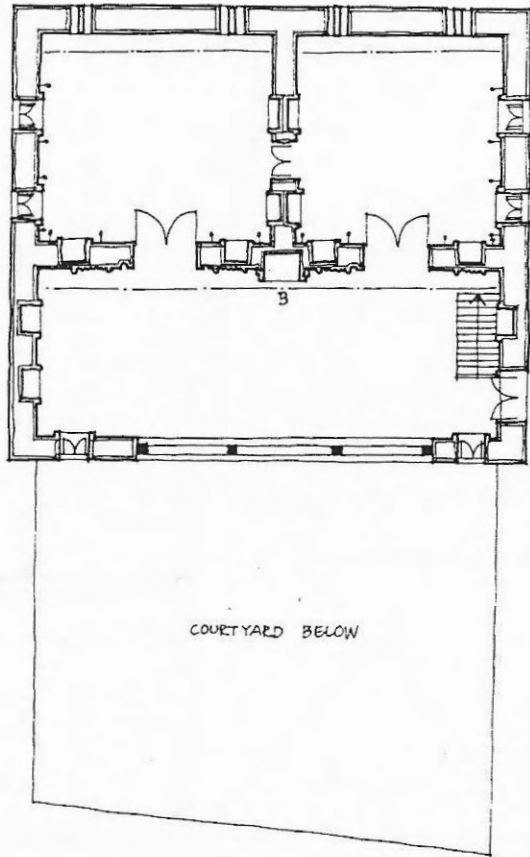
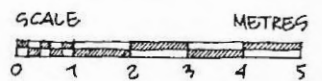


FIG. 46 b

HINDU HOUSE  
BHUJ  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



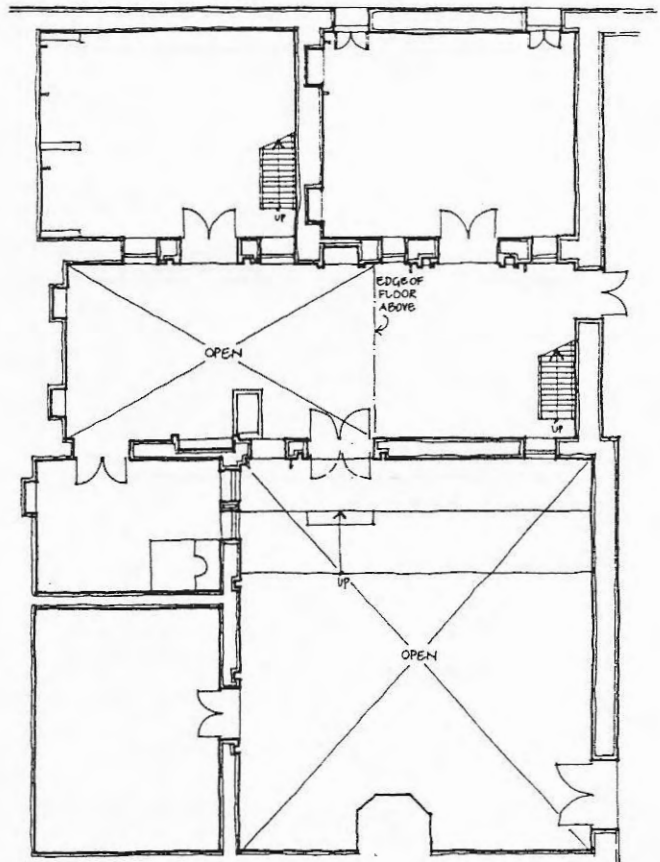
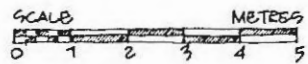
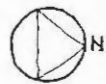


FIG 47a

SHIA BOHRA  
BHUJ  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



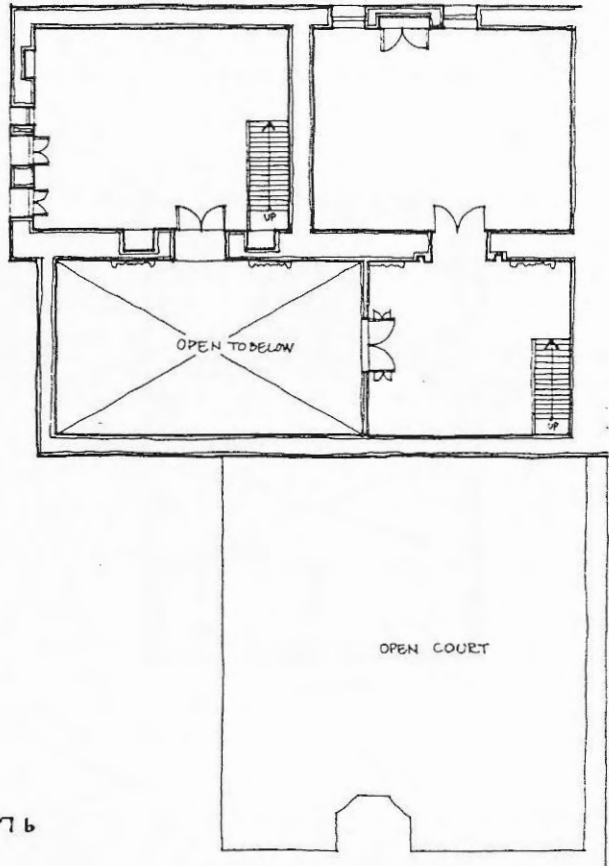
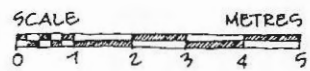


FIG 476

SHIA BOHRA  
BHUJ  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN





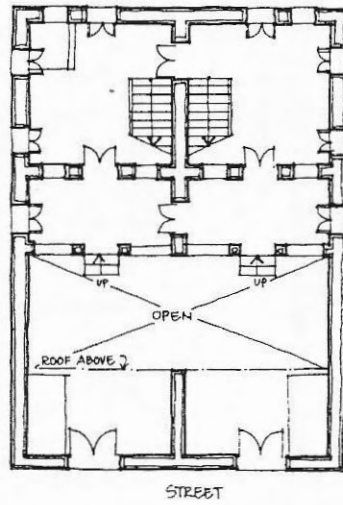
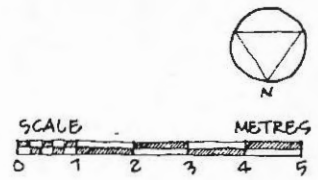


FIG. 48

SUNNI MUSLIM  
MAHUA



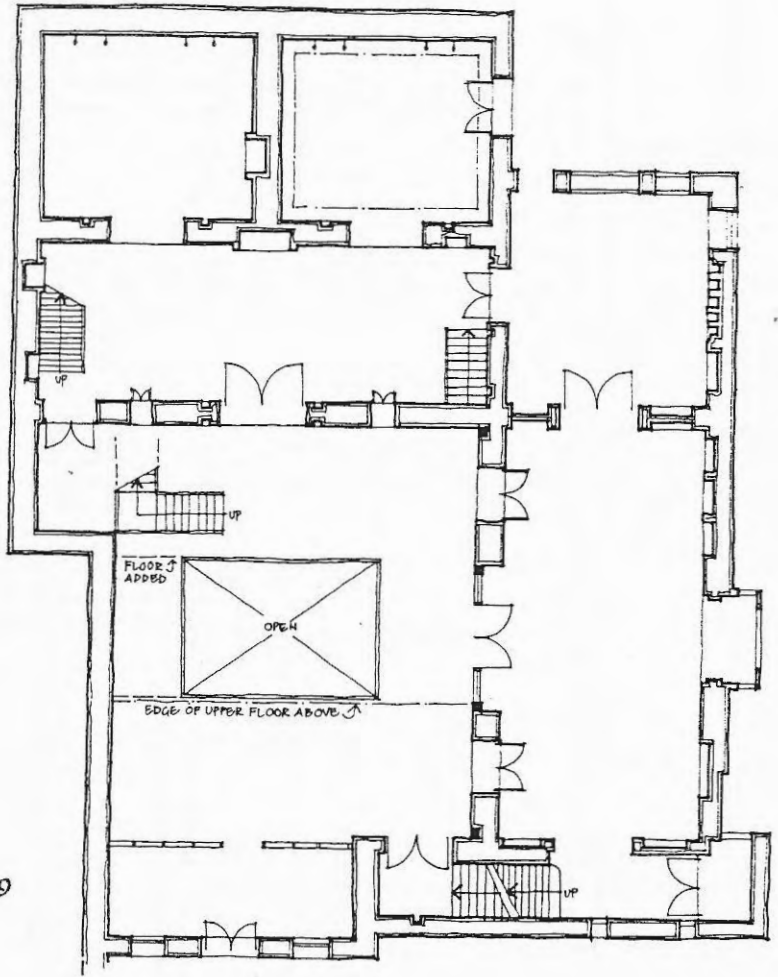
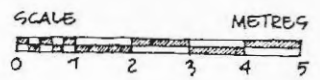


FIG. 49

BOHRA HOUSE  
 MANDVI  
 FIRST FLOOR PLAN



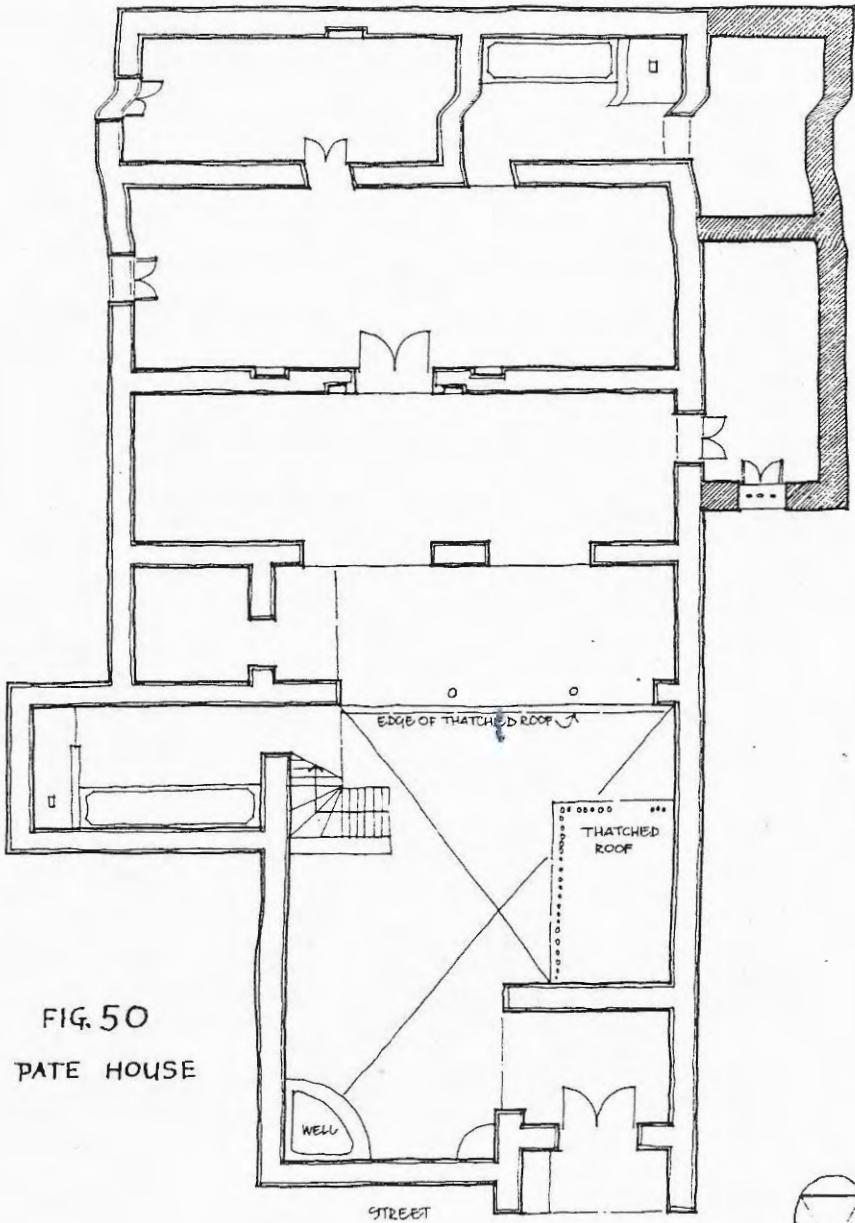


FIG. 50  
PATE HOUSE

PLOT  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN





Fig. 51 Hindu temple columns, with figures in the niches, used in the Friday mosque at Broach.





Fig. 52 Hindu temple columns, with figures removed from the niches, also in the Friday mosque at Broach.



Fig. 53 Bohra house with wooden niches on the back wall.



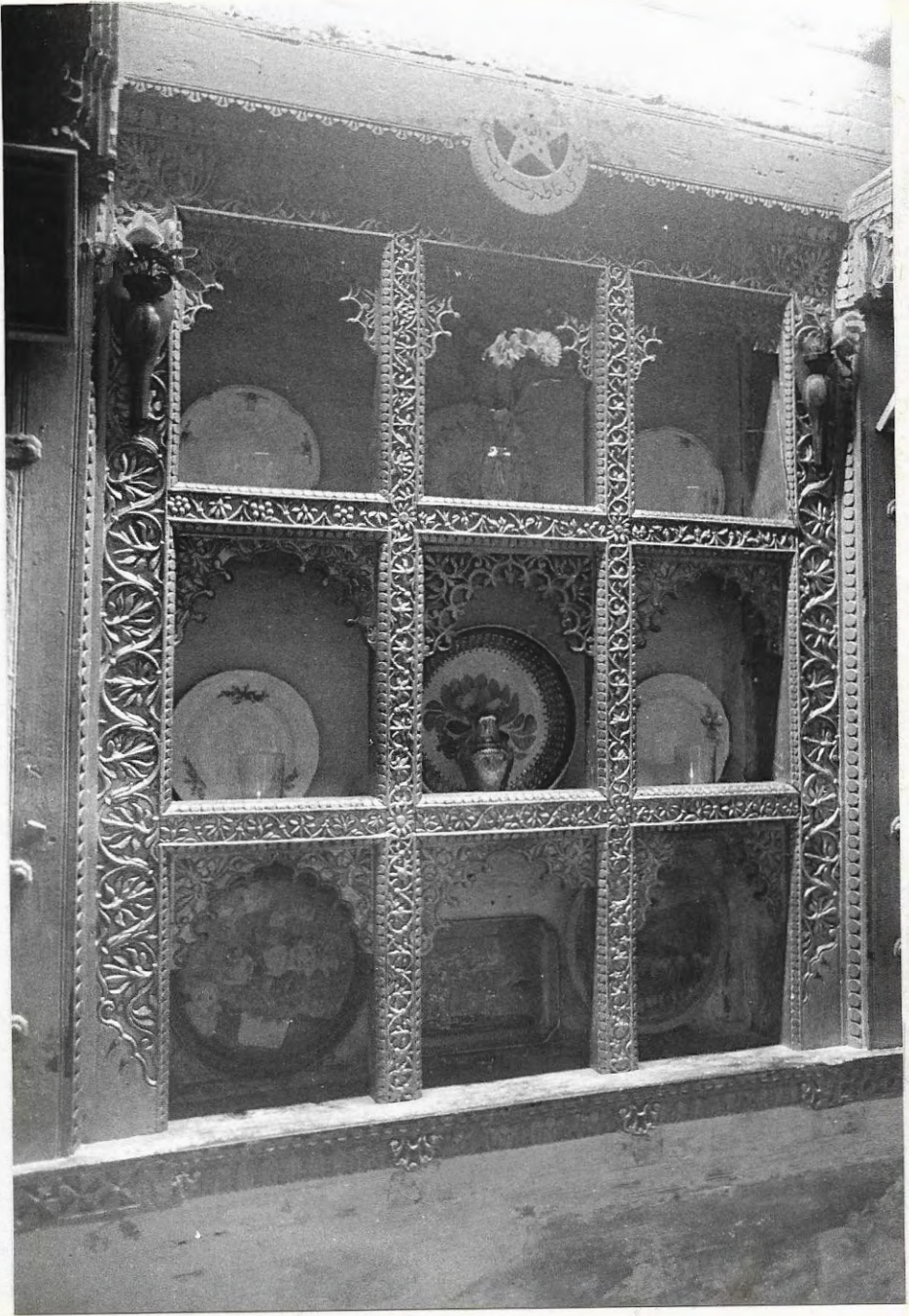


Fig. 54 Wooden niches in Bohra house.





Fig. 55 Plaster niches in the home of a Bohra religious leader in Rander.





Fig. 56 Mihrab in a Bohra mosque in Rander.



Fig. 57 Muqarnas in the Red Fort at Dehli.





Fig. 58 Plot 984, the Mchele house site in Lamu.

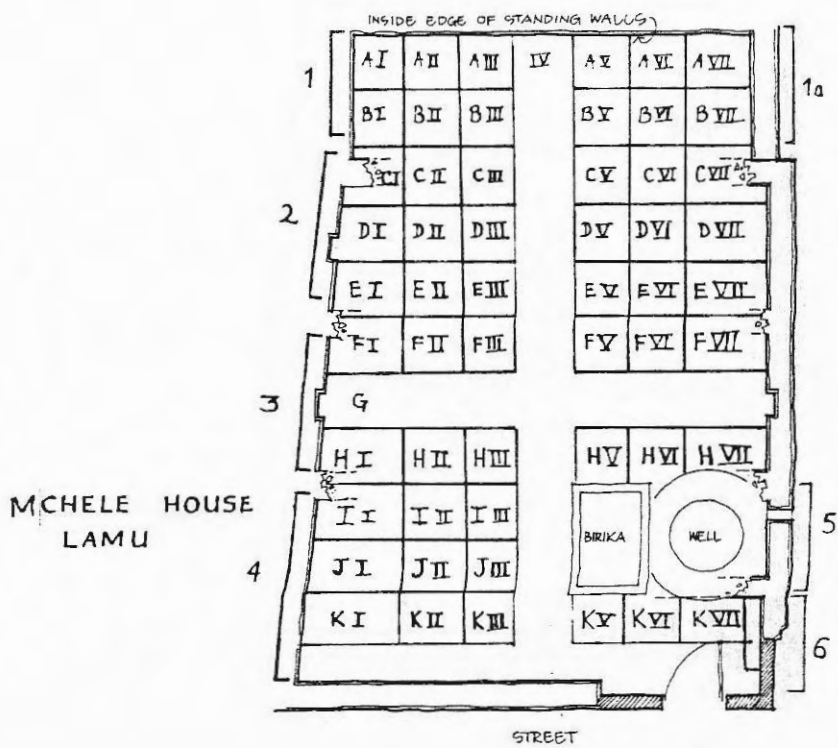
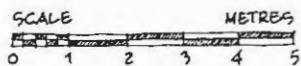


FIG. 59

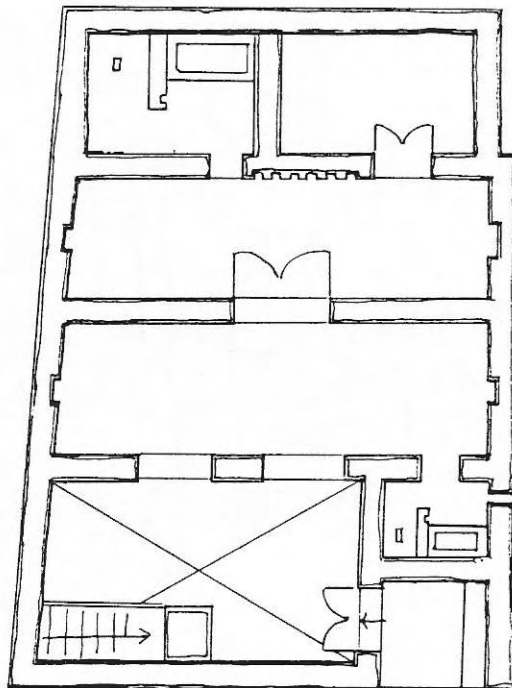
EXCAVATION PLAN

PLOT 984





M'CHELE HOUSE  
LAMU

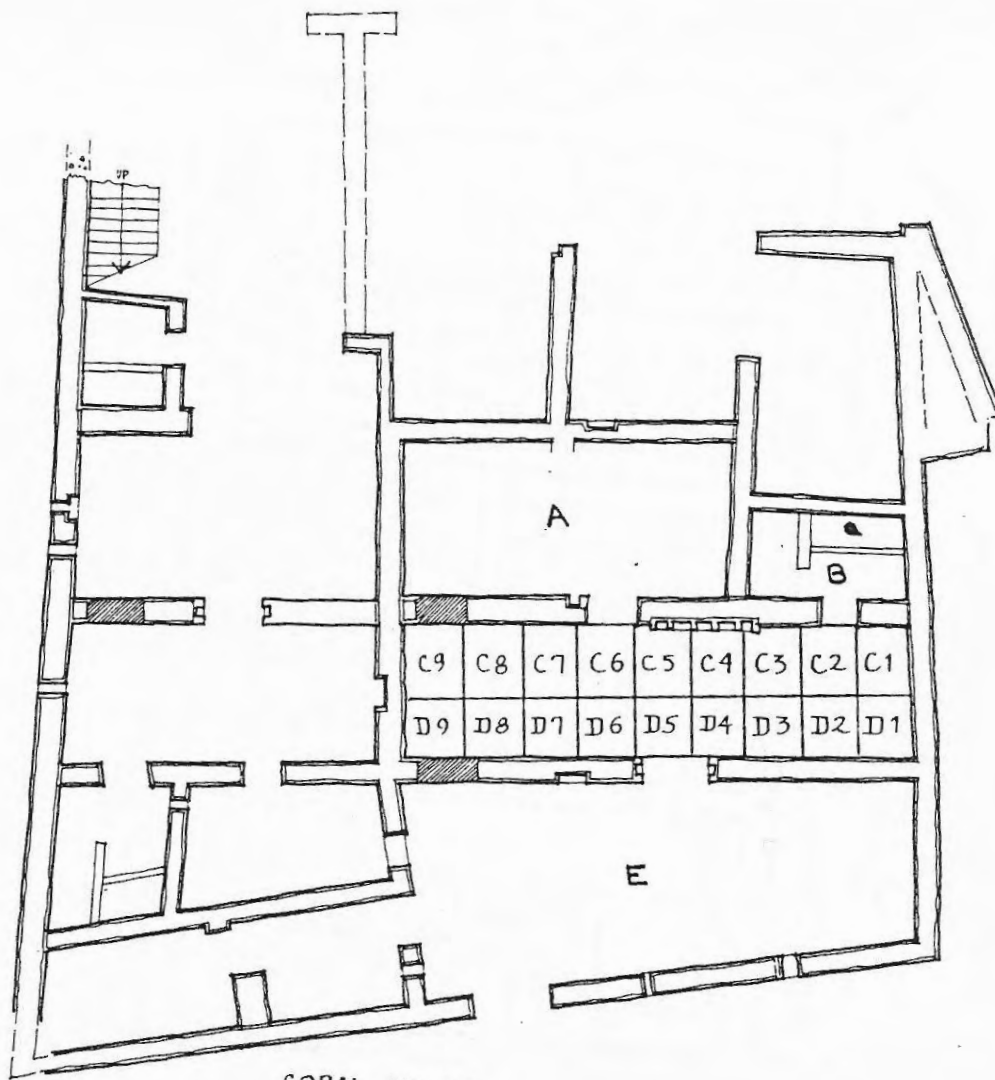


STREET

FIG. 60

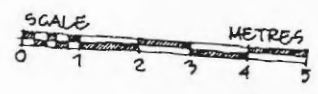
RECONSTRUCTION

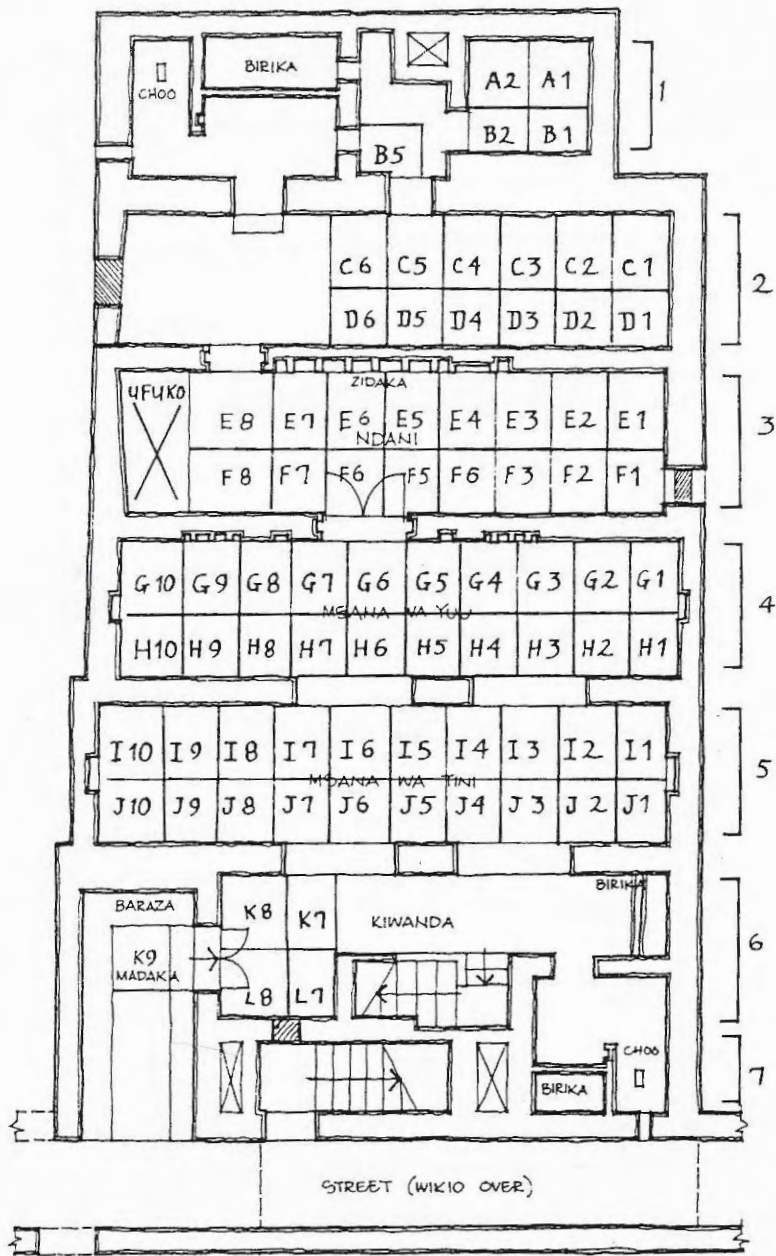




CORAL HOUSE  
PATE  
EXCAVATION PLAN

FIG. 61





DARINI  
LAMU  
FIG. 62

EXCAVATION PLAN

0 1 2 3 4 METRES

PLOT 341



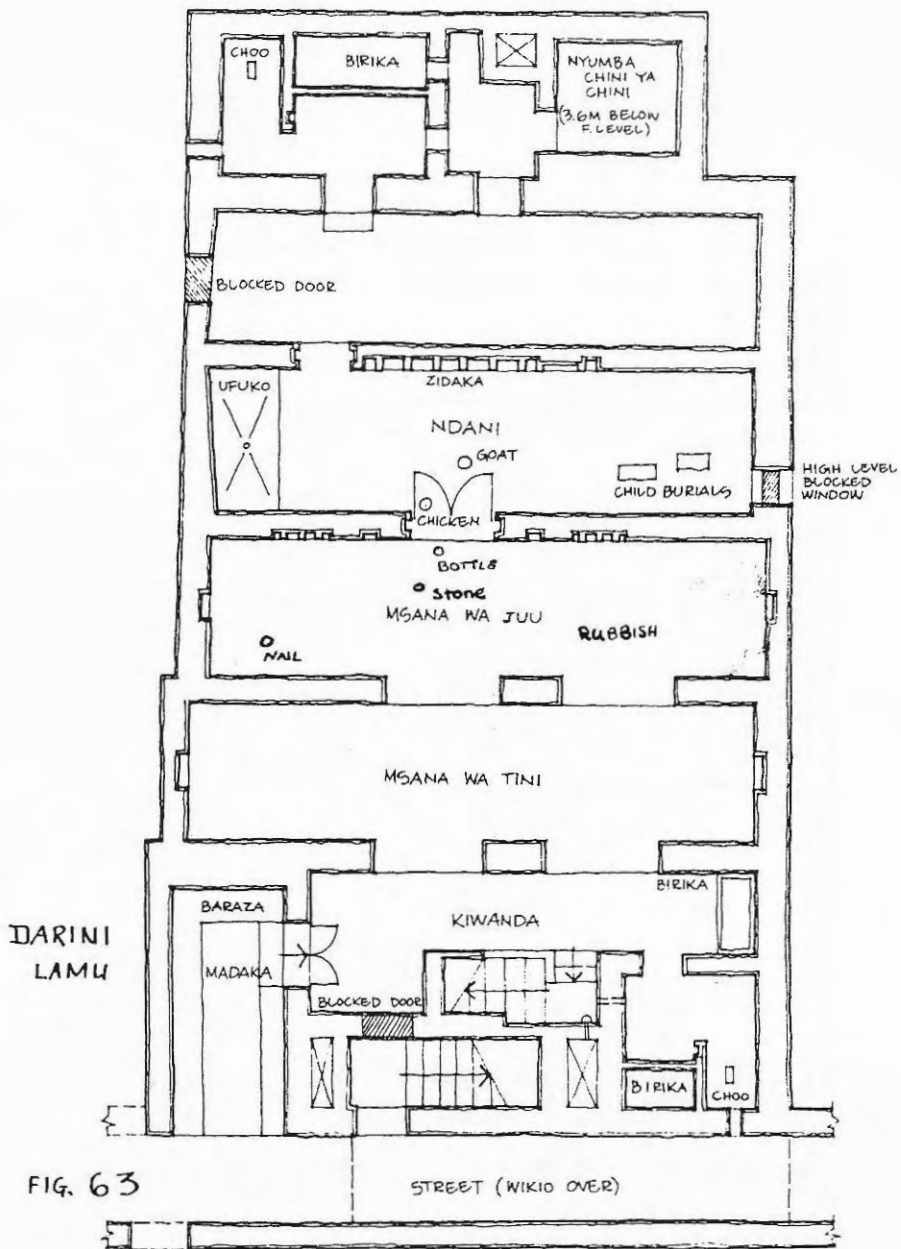


FIG. 63

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

PLOT 341



0 1 2 3 4 METRES



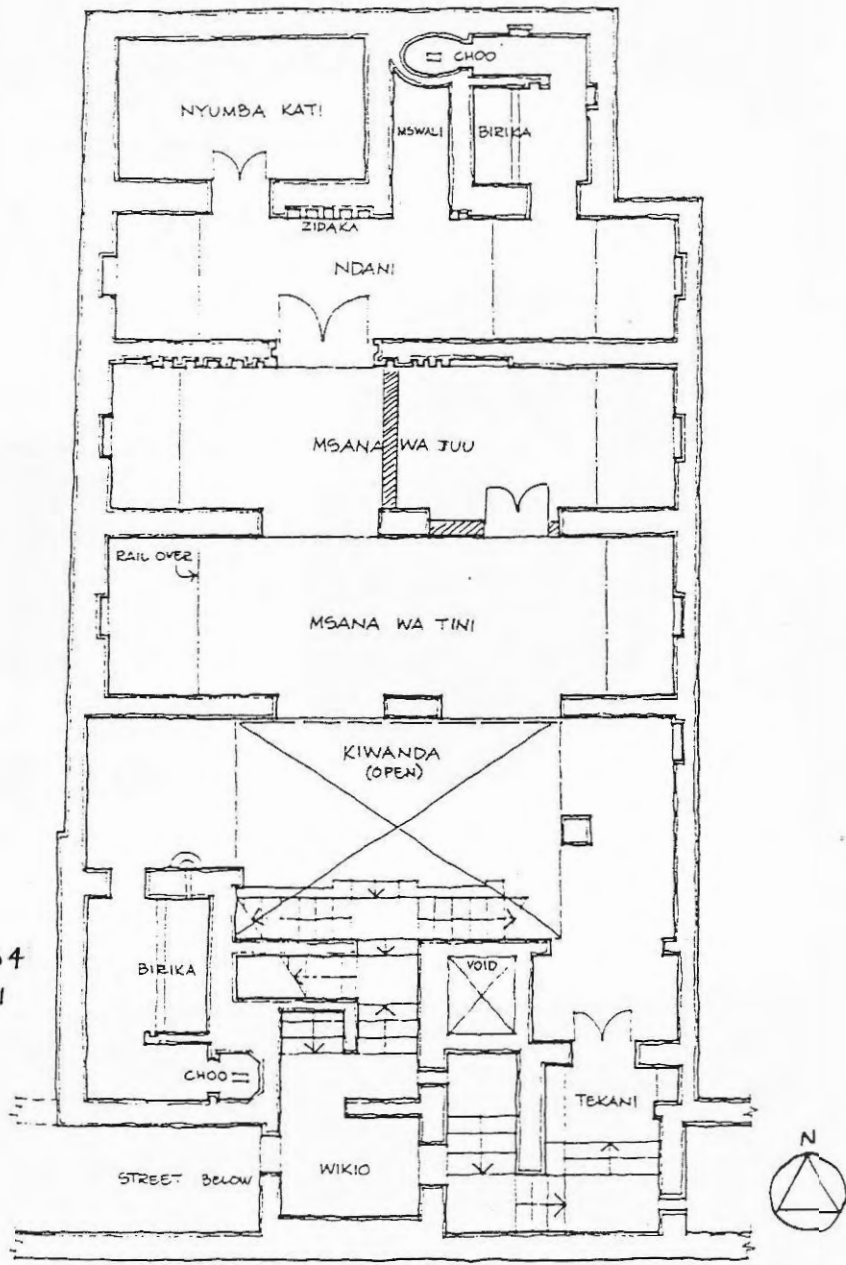


FIG 64  
DARINI

FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
0 1 2 3 4 METRES

PLOT 341



Fig. 65 Lead envelope, charm found under threshold (left)  
and manga stone, also a charm (right).



Fig. 66 Leather shoe.





Fig. 67 Underground chamber.



# DARINI

Test pit F 4

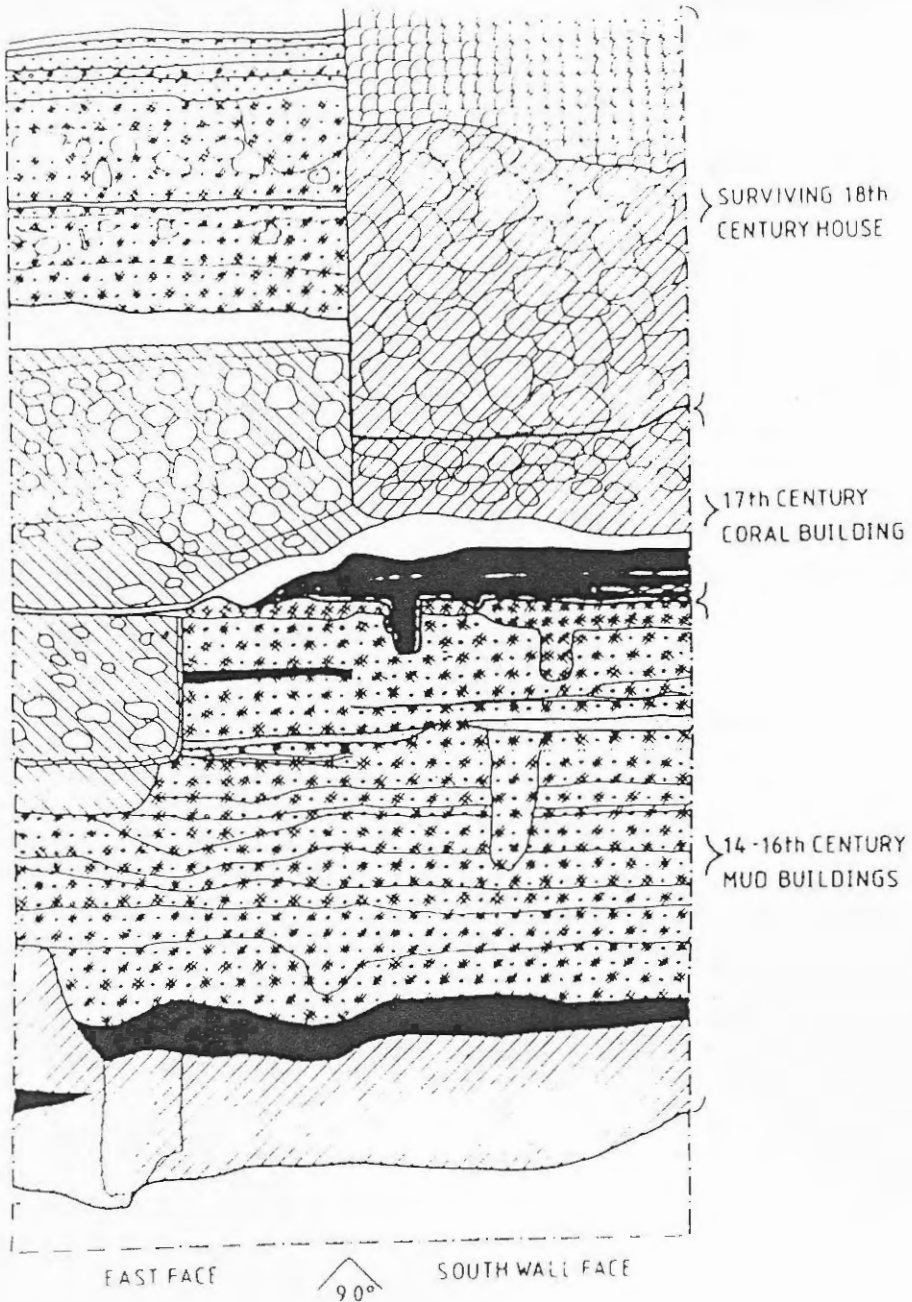


FIG. 68

0  1 METER

Darini Test Pit F 4

Key based on Ethnographic Analogy

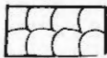


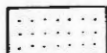

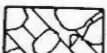
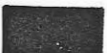
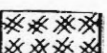


-  Coral rag with lime mortar and plastered surface = wall of coral building
-  Coral rag with lime mortar and no plastered surface = foundation of coral building
-  Lime = floor for coral building
-  White sand = beach sand, base soil and redeposited sand around buildings
-  Coral pebbles and lime = lime floor foundation in a coral building
-  Collapsed coral rag/lime mortar = collapsed coral building
-  Charcoal/ash = occupation level
-  Clay with no stones = clay floor in mud and thatch building
-  Clay with stones = mud and thatch building or lime floor foundation
-  Brown sand = building material used to make wall mortar

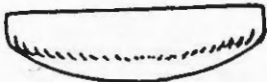
Fig. 69



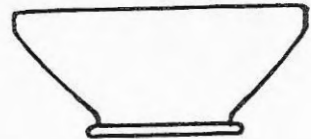
1. CHUNGA  
*Vy - pe.*



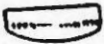
5. KIA  
*Vi - pe*



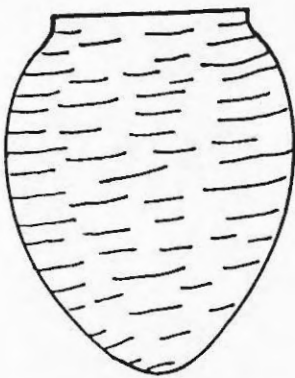
2. KAANGO  
*Vy*



6. BUNGUU  
*Ma*



3. VYADAWA



4. JUNGU LA MOFA  
*Ma*      *X9*



7. MZIGA  
*Mi - pe*



8. KIJUNGU  
*Vl*

Fig. 70 Local Earthenware forms based on Ethnographic information.





Fig. 71 Jungu la mofa, bread oven.





Fig. 72 row 1 19th c. Chinese polychrome  
 row 2 18th and 19th c. Chinese blue and white, left to right the decorations are:  
 1) border of roselles 2) 'cod roe'  
 3) trellis and spray 4) chrysanthemum 5) comb or character  
 6) blue bands and 7) blue monochrome  
 row 3 Chinese celadon  
 row 4 Islamic monochrome, late 14th to 17th c., left to right 1) early  
 2) middle and 3) late



Fig. 73 Porcelain in a Mandvi Bohra home.





Fig. 74 Beads from the excavations, left to right red, white, black, large amber, carnelian, yellow, blue and owl bone.



Fig. 75 Swahili gold jewellery, ear-ring (left) and nose decoration (right).



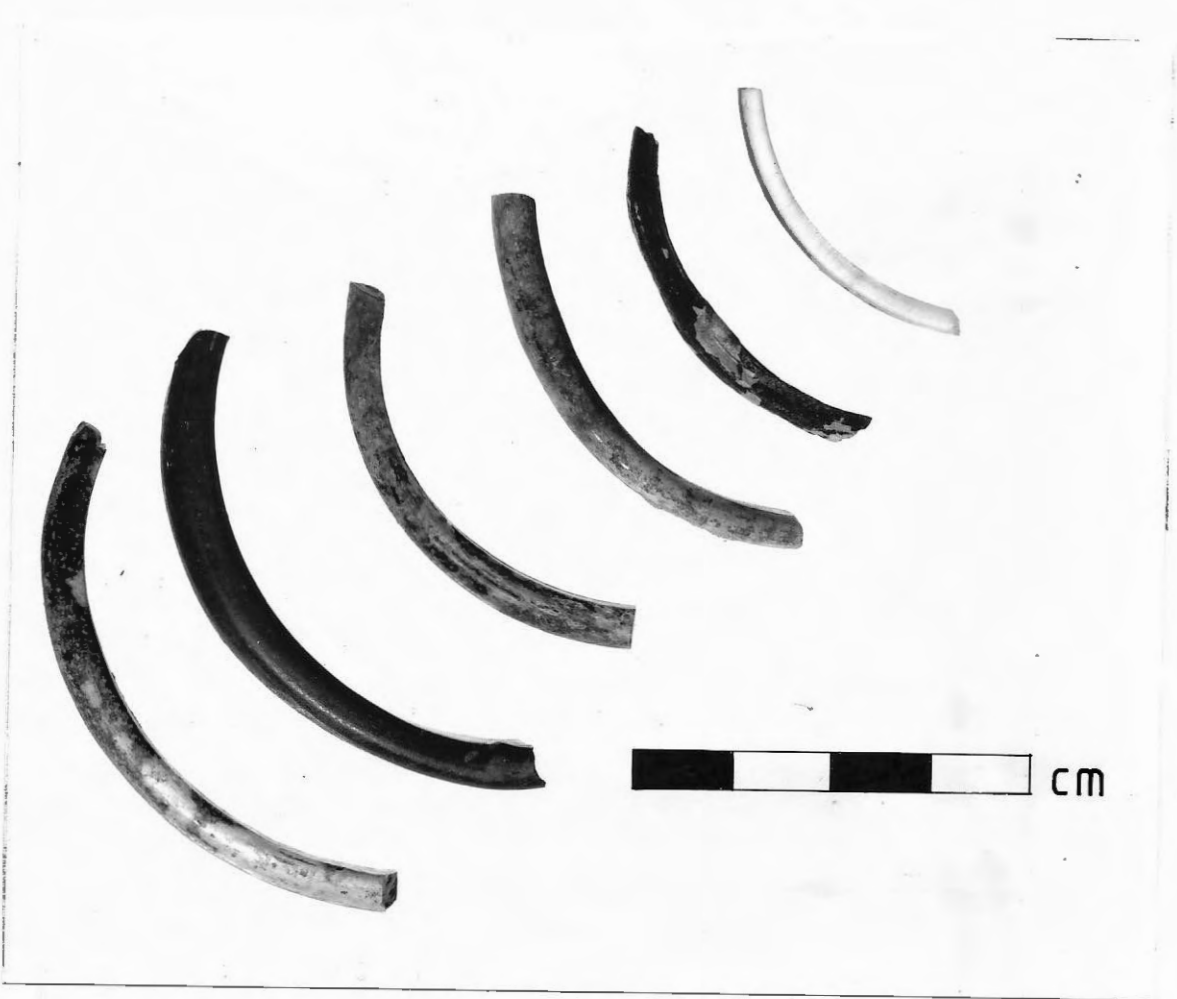


Fig. 76 Glass bracelet fragments.



Fig. 77 Wooden (left) and clay (right) spindle-whorls.



Fig. 78 Coconut grater, shell



Fig. 79 The shell of an edible  
gastropod.



Fig. 80 'Sex educational tool'.





Fig. 81 Leg iron



Fig. 82 Coconut ladle.

PENDIX A

Formal interviews

= Kenya

= Gujarat

<u>id number</u>	<u>gender</u>	<u>approximate age</u>	<u>location</u>
	M	40	Lamu
	F	30	Kwa Jamvu Kuu
	M	40	Mombasa
	M	30	Shela
	M	40	Lamu
	M	40	Lamu
	M	20	Shela
	F	80	Shela
	F	80	Shela
	M	60	Shela
	M	18	Lamu
	M	40	Lamu
	M	30	Lamu
	F	80	Shela
	F	50	Shela
	F	40	Shela
	F	40	Shela
	M	30	Shela
	M	70	Shela
	F	40	Shela
	F	80	Shela
	M	60	Shela
	F	25	Shela
	F	20	Shela
	F	55	Lamu
	F	60	Lamu
	M	55	Lamu
	F	35	Shela

## APPENDIX A

## Formal interviews continued

K70	M	60	Shela
K71	F	40	Shela
K73	M	50	Lamu
K75	F	50	Lamu
K76	M	50	Lamu
K78	F	50	Lamu
K81	M	60	Shela
K83	M	60	Shela
K85	M	35	Shela
K87	M	60	Lamu
K89	F	40	Lamu
K91	M	40	Lamu
K92	F	50	Lamu
K94	F	50	Lamu
K96	M	60	Shela
K98	M	80	Shela
K100	M	19	Lamu
K103	F	20	Shela
K106	F	25	Lamu
K109	M	70	Shela
K112	M	18	Lamu
K113	M	50	Shela
K118	F	55	Lamu
K119	M	50	Lamu
K122	F	20	Shela
K125	F	50	Lamu
K132	F	80	Shela
K136	F	40	Shela
K144	F	25	Lamu
K161	M	50	Lamu
K165	F	40	Shela
K169	M	45	Lamu
K177	F	17	Lamu



## APPENDIX A

## Formal interviews continued

K179	F	30	Shela
K180	F	40	Shela
K181	M	40	Lamu
K183	M	30	Lamu
K188	F	50	Lamu
K189	M	50	Lamu
K190	M	45	Lamu
K201	M	45	Lamu
K205	F	35	Shela
K206	M	17	Lamu
K208	M	50	Lamu
K210	M	20	Lamu
K212	M	40	Lamu
K213	M	35	Lamu
K214	M	30	Shela
K219	M	45	Lamu
K220	F	70	Lamu
K221	F	23	Lamu
K222	M	55	Siyu
K225	F	25	Lamu
K229	F	20	Lamu
K231	F	45	Lamu
K246	M	55	Mombasa
K267	M	65	Lamu
K268	F	40	Pate
K280	M	65	Shela
K286	M	30	Shela
K287	M	20	Lamu
K294	M	20	Lamu
K297	F	50	Bajun village
K304	M	50	Pate
K307	M	35	Lamu
K332	M	50	Pate

## APPENDIX A

## Formal interviews continued

K333	M	40	Lamu
K339	F	17	Lamu
K341	M	30	Lamu
K248	F	30	Lamu
G6	M	40	Mahuva
G7	M	40	Mundra
G15	M	50	Mandvi
G16	M	30	Mandvi
G18	M	40	Bhuj
G45	M	50	Ahmedabad
G108	F	40	Surat
G111	F	50	Rander
G130	M	40	Cambay
G141	M	25	Bombay
G150	F	50	Bombay
G152	M	55	Sidpur
G178	M	60	Surat
G191	M	60	Rander
G202	M	40	Navsari

## APPENDIX B

### GLOSSARY

This is not a complete list of the vernacular words used in the text but those terms used most frequently.

<u>baraza</u>	sitting place, inside or outside the house
<u>bariki</u>	bathroom cistern, normally with an inset plate
<u>Bohra</u>	Shia Muslim, usually an Indian trader
<u>bui-bui</u>	black veil worn by Swahili women
<u>Bwana</u>	man
<u>choo</u>	washroom/toilet
<u>choo cha vigoo</u>	toilet used for urine only
<u>daka</u> (pl.madaka)	covered porch outside a traditional coral house.
<u>dafina</u>	buried treasure
<u>ghala</u>	storage place
<u>gumbra</u>	storage place
<u>gokala</u> (Gujarāṭi)	niches
<u>jaya</u>	sherd
<u>joho</u>	black robe worn by upper-class elite
<u>kaffara</u>	sacrifice which absorbs evil
<u>kanga</u>	cloth worn by Swahili women
<u>kidari</u>	penthouse room, used for sleeping or kitchen
<u>kikoi</u>	cloth worn around the waist by Swahili men
<u>kipengee</u>	small passageway, often onto roof
<u>kiwanda</u>	courtyard
<u>kofia</u>	Swahili man's cap
<u>kutolewande</u>	women's ritual, showing an infant the household
<u>kufunga ya nyumba</u>	ritual to 'close' or 'protect' the house
<u>kuponowa</u>	ritual of taking a child around the house, same as <u>kutolewande</u>

<u>kuzinguka ngombe</u>	ritual of taking a bull around the town
<u>lindi</u>	opening of pit toilet
<u>madada</u>	female domestic servant
<u>makuti</u>	palm-leaf roof
<u>manga</u>	person born in Arabia, also a type of stone
<u>matanga</u>	traditional practices associated with death
<u>meko</u>	kitchen
<u>mihrab</u> (Arabic)	prayer niche in a mosque
<u>naukhanah</u> (Gujarati)	nine wooden niches set into the back interior wall of a house
<u>mpokezi</u>	midwife
<u>muqarnas</u> (Arabic)	many wall niches
<u>msana wa tini</u>	lower room
<u>msana wa juu</u>	upper room
<u>mswali</u>	prayer niche in a house
<u>mtaa</u> (pl. <u>mitaa</u> )	ward
<u>Muhindi</u> (pl. <u>Wahindi</u> )	Indian
<u>Mushenzi</u> (pl. <u>Washenzi</u> )	lower-class person
<u>Mwarabu</u>	Arab born in Africa
<u>Mwungwana</u> (pl. <u>Waungwana</u> )	freeborn, upper-class elite
<u>nana</u>	freeborn elite married woman
<u>ndani</u>	room at the rear of the house, usually decorated with many niches
<u>nlia wa kachi</u>	middle room of a Bajun house
<u>nlia kwisha</u>	innermost room of a Bajun house
<u>nyumba ya kati</u>	room at the rear of a house
<u>qibla</u> (Arabic)	direction of Mecca
<u>sabule</u>	room used to entertain guests
<u>saruji</u>	clay used to build houses
<u>shetwani</u>	benevolent or malevolent spirit



## APPENDIX B

## Glossary continued

<u>souriya</u>	concubine
<u>tambuu</u>	leaf grown to chew with betel nut
<u>ufuko</u>	trench in house, used to collect water and pollution from a dead body
<u>ukumbi</u>	room
<u>ulili</u>	wooden bed with woven top
<u>usturu</u>	front room of a house
<u>uwanda</u>	walled garden
<u>wiki</u>	bridge over a street between two coral houses
<u>zidaka</u> (sing. <u>kidaka</u> )	many niches, located in the <u>ndani</u>

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