

Abstract

This thesis examines the chronologies and mechanisms of Islamisation, western Indian Ocean entanglements, and socio-cultural identity of Islamic settlements in the Mozambique Channel in the centuries preceding the colonial period. A brief introduction to core concepts such as Islamisation, Islamic frontiers, and the Swahili coast, in addition to an overview of the relevant Mozambique Channel archaeological locales is provided in order to contextualise the research. Archaeological remains from coastal Islamic sites in northwestern Madagascar and northern Mozambique, form the principal datasets for this study. Tangible markers of past Islamic practice, detectable as mosques, Muslim tombs, Arabic epigraphy, and specific portable material culture, are identified at the case sites. The artefactual data is arranged according to chronological sequences, informed by typological and absolute dating techniques, in order to better understand and compare relative lifeways across the Mozambique Channel through time.

Multiple possible Islamisation mechanisms are identified for the primary case study, Kingany, Madagascar, based on the archaeological assemblage recovered from the site. These include population movements of Islamic Africans and individual conversions instigated in part by *longue durée* engagement with Indian Ocean mercantile networks. Findings are then extrapolated to the region at large. Archaeologically attestable manifestations for socially embedded Islam in the Mozambique Channel appear earliest in the Comorian Archipelago in the 10th/11th centuries. However, the early coastal cities of Madagascar, the first of which emerged in the north of the island in the 10th century, embraced Islamic practices within a century of their Comorian counterparts. Archaeological evidence for analogous Muslim communities in Mozambique is absent prior to the 13th century, with the exception of the famous entrepôts of Chibuene and Sofala, though the present state of the scholarship limits interpretation. This study found that exposure to Islam in the Mozambique Channel was initially a byproduct of localised interaction with western Indian Ocean cultural spheres, with secondary Islamisation events likely linked to southward trending population dispersion phenomena beginning in the early-second millennium.

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