

Hidden Cultural Heritage : Tourism and Belief Concerning the UNESCO World Heritage of Kilwa Island on the Southern Swahili Coast in Tanzania

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Hidden Cultural Heritage: Tourism and Belief Concerning the UNESCO World Heritage of Kilwa Island on the Southern Swahili Coast in Tanzania

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1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the reconciliation of tourism activities and religious practices concerning the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kilwa Island (Kilwa Kisiwani) in the southern part of the United Republic of Tanzania. Based on cultural anthropology research results, this chapter raises specific issues for the coexistence of both local and universal values of cultural heritage.

Kilwa Island has stone ruins of mosques, palaces, fort, and cemeteries constructed from coral rocks, which were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1981. These stone ruins are precious cultural heritage that narrates the history of ethnic and cultural exchanges on the East African Coast (Swahili Coast) influenced by the Indian Ocean trade with Arab and Persian regions, as well as the European Age of Exploration.

My first visit to Kilwa Island was in 2001. At that time, it was the only place designated as a cultural heritage site on UNESCO's World Heritage List in Tanzania. However, the stone ruins were poorly managed and were nearly buried among bushes



(1a)



(1b)

Photos 1a and 1b Stone ruins had been nearly buried in bushes; Husuni Kubwa (1a) and Makutani Palace (1b) (by the author in 2002)

(Photos 1a and 1b). Less than 300 tourists annually visited the island at that time. Based on these impressions, I thought that the people of the island had few ties with the stone ruins. However, as my field research progressed, I found that some stone ruins were holy places on Kilwa Island. Secret practices and beliefs were passed down in the hidden cultural heritage shielded from the public eye.

The purpose of the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (the World Heritage Convention) is to protect cultural and natural heritage, or mixed heritage, considered to be of outstanding universal value to humanity. The people of Kilwa Island live within a World Heritage Site. In that case, what does it mean to live with outstanding universal value to humanity?

During my initial field research on Kilwa Island, I believed that the people were proud of the fact that their history and culture had gained worldwide recognition and the UNESCO World Heritage status could be used as a resource for regional promotion through tourism. However, up to the present, the management of the World Heritage property, including tourism development, has neither been well accepted by the people nor made them proud, while making little contribution to regional promotions. Conversely, people in a politically weak position suffer from various activities surrounding World Heritage sites.

The fundamental cause is that those working for World Heritage and the local people have different perspectives on stone ruins. In other words, those working for World Heritage see the stone ruins as a place of archaeological value to preserve eternally.¹⁾ However, the local people see some of the stone ruins as sacred places linked to their beliefs. For the inhabitants, the stone ruins are still a “living heritage.”

From the standpoint of protecting and preserving the World Heritage property, the people who perform rituals within stone ruins without permission or tolerate the intrusion of livestock animals do not respect the value of cultural heritage and must therefore be educated. The daily practices of the local people are even considered obstacles to the protection of cultural heritage. Consequently, the activities of these people have been restricted around the World Heritage site, and people’s knowledge and techniques regarding stone ruins have been ignored.²⁾ One of the values unique to the island was not included in the evaluation of its World Heritage status.

However, the way UNESCO thinks about cultural heritage has evolved recently; UNESCO initially put emphasis on the tangible aspect or universal value of cultures, but nowadays, they cover a wide range of intangible elements based on the value unique to the area. This is exemplified by the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention) adopted in 2003 at the UNESCO General Assembly. The convention defines intangible cultural heritages, *inter alia*, as oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices, rituals, and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship practiced by communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals. UNESCO used to emphasize the relevance of universal value, but now they have started to value the bearers of cultures and their diversities.

Considering the philosophy of intangible cultural heritage, the practices and beliefs

of the people on Kilwa Island, which have been treated as obstacles to the protection of World Heritage, can now be acknowledged as a living heritage. However, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention and the World Heritage Convention are two different conventions. Therefore, the new philosophy of intangible cultural heritage has not infiltrated the activities surrounding the existing World Heritage property. If we look at the case of the management of World Heritage on Kilwa Island, the practices within the stone ruins have yet to be considered as a living heritage.

The difficulties and challenges of living with World Heritage caused by these differences in perspectives toward the stone ruins between the local people and those working for the World Heritage of Kilwa Island are discussed ahead. This chapter first provides an overview of the history of Kilwa Island and the significance of its stone ruins, followed by a description of how the people have protected their links with the stone ruins through practices and beliefs.

2. Livelihoods on Kilwa Island and the History of the Kingdom

2.1 A Small Islamic Seashore Village

Kilwa, at latitude 9°S, is a small island located at a short distance off the southern Tanzanian coast. The island is about 23km in circumference, 12km² in land area, and supports less than 1,000 inhabitants who live on the island with the World Heritage property. Most of the people there are pious Muslims who value the good deeds of Islam, such as worship, *zakat*, and fasting.³⁾ Situated offshore from where three rivers converge, Kilwa Island has a coastline covered with mangroves on the continental side, as well as fringing reefs on the side of the open sea (Figure 1).

Administratively, Kilwa Island belongs to the Kilwa district of the Lindi region in Tanzania (*Wilaya ya Kilwa, Mkoa wa Lindi*). Kilwa Masoko, where the administrative office of Kilwa district is established, is on the mainland, about 2km from Kilwa Island.

People there make a living primarily by farming and fishing, securing staple food through farming and earning cash through fisheries. Because there are no facilities for tourists, such as souvenir shops, accommodation facilities, or restaurants, almost no revenue has been generated from tourism. Although the island has a World Heritage property, the people who live there hardly gain economic benefits from it.

Lindi Region, to which Kilwa Island belongs, has been regarded as an area with the slowest economic growth in the country (Maghimbi 1997). The region was frequently isolated in the past because traffic was paralyzed and distribution channels were blocked during the period of heavy rain (*masika*: March to May). Kilwa Island is a small seashore village without electricity or water supply facilities; however, the island has a glorious history as a Muslim sultanate: the Kilwa Kingdom, which flourished due to the gold trade during the Middle Ages through the Indian Ocean trade network with the Arab/Persian regions.

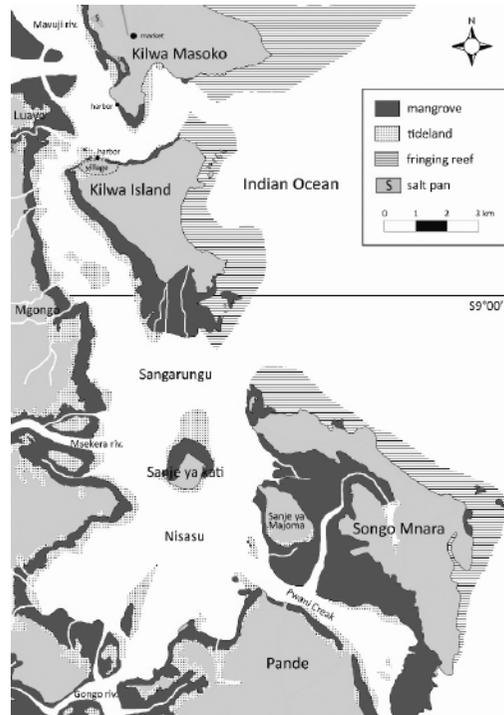


Figure 1 Kilwa island and the natural environment in the Kilwa coastal region (Nakamura 2013)

2.2 History of the Rise and Fall of the Kilwa Kingdom

The history of the Kilwa Kingdom is closely linked with the Indian Ocean trade between the East African Coast and the Arab/Persian regions, for which people sailed in wooden plank-structured boats called Dhow, taking advantage of the monsoons. They headed south along the East African coast during the northeast monsoon season and stayed in trading ports until the southwest monsoon season. Male sailors married local women and had multiracial children, who later became the bearer of the culture along the East African Coast (Swahili culture). This is why the Swahili culture is called an “Afro-Asian mixed-blood culture.”

According to *Kilwa Chronicle*, written in Arabic by an unknown author around 1520, which narrates the story of the Kilwa Kingdom from its beginning to the 16th century, Husain bin Ali, the sultan of Shiraz (present-day Iran), migrated to the East African Coast in the middle of the 10th century with his six sons. During the voyage, the seven boats were separated, but one of them, the boat of Ali bin Husain (one of the sultan’s sons) arrived at Kilwa Island.⁴⁾ He became the first sultan of the kingdom.

From the middle of the 12th century onward, the Kilwa Kingdom flourished as the intermediate port of the Indian Ocean trade to export Great Zimbabwe’s gold from Sofala, located on the coast of present-day Mozambique.

In the first half of the 14th century, during the period of the 21st sultan Al-Hasan bin Sulaiman, the kingdom was at the peak of its prosperity owing to its monopoly on the gold trade. Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan Muslim traveler who visited the kingdom around 1331, wrote, “Kilwa is one of the most beautiful and well-constructed towns in the world” (Davidson 1991; Ibn Battuta 1998[1964]).

However, during the period of the 22nd sultan Daud bin Sulaiman, the gold market in Europe became saturated and the gold prices dropped, which triggered the decline of the kingdom. What made the decline more decisive was the Portuguese intrusion into the Western Indian Ocean. The Kilwa Kingdom was occupied immediately in 1505 by a Portuguese soldier, Francisco de Almeida. Sofala (in the south of the Zambezi and present-day Mozambique) had already been placed under Portuguese rule a year earlier, and Portugal wrested the control of the gold trade from the Kilwa Kingdom.

The Portuguese continued to invade trading ports successively, such as Mombasa and Malindi (in the present-day coastal area of Kenya). However, they withdrew from the sphere of Omani influence north of Zanzibar after their defeats against the allied forces of the Kingdom of Oman and trading ports in 1698.

Afterward, the Kingdom of Oman expanded its forces along the East African coast. At the beginning of the 19th century, the sultan of Oman, Sayyid Said, moved its capital to Zanzibar (off the coast of present-day Tanzania) in pursuit of commercial profits from tropical products, such as ivory, cloves, and slaves. Thus, the Omani monopoly of the Indian Ocean trade continued until Zanzibar became a British protectorate in 1890 (Tominaga 1992).

At the end of the 18th century, the Kilwa Kingdom experienced a brief revival through slave trade with Zanzibar and France (Mauritius and Reunion). However, Kilwa Kivinje, the port used for the slave trade, was located on the mainland (about 26km north of Kilwa Island), instead of the island kingdom. By that time, the island kingdom had lost its function as a trading port. When the last sultan was deported to Oman around 1843, the great history of the Kilwa Kingdom, which lasted for about 900 years, was brought to an end.

2.3 Complex Ethnic Composition of Kilwa Island Society

Reflecting its long history as an international trading port, Kilwa Island is an Islamic multi-ethnic society. During field research in 2005, a total of 573 individuals belonging to 28 different ethnic groups or identities, organized in 101 households were counted (Table 1). There are descendants of those from East Africa, including Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique, and the Comoro Islands (Bantu-speaking people), as well as those whose origins can be traced to Arabia and Persia. Kilwa Island is a super-multiethnic society where around 28 ethnic groups live together (Nakamura 2011a). Although we refer to them as “inhabitants” of Kilwa Island, they are not a monolithic group. This becomes a problem when the government or international organizations such as UNESCO, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the World Bank operate on the island.

Table 1 Ethnic composition of Kilwa Island

Group	Identity	Original Place	Num.	% (people)		
Bantu-speakers	1	Mwera	Kilwa region	105	18.3	57.4 (329)
	2	Matumbi	Kilwa region	39	6.8	
	3	Myao	around lake Malawi	36	6.3	
	4	Nyasa	around lake Malawi	33	5.8	
	5	Ngindo	around lake Malawi	32	5.6	
	6	Machinga	Mtwara region	30	5.2	
	7	Msongo	Songo Mnara Island	17	3.0	
	8	Nbana	Pande region	16	2.8	
	9	Makonde	Southern Tanzania	13	2.3	
	10	Makua	Southern Tanzania	3	0.5	
	11	Ngoni	around lake Malawi	3	0.5	
	12	Mbisa	around lake Malawi	1	0.2	
	13	Zaramo	around Dar es Salaam	1	0.2	
	14	Malindi	Kenya coast	40	6.7	24.1 (138)
	15	Pande	Pande region	36	6.3	
	16	Kisiwani	Kilwa Island	20	3.5	
	17	Lamu	Northern Kenya coast	12	1.8	
	18	Somali	Southern Somalia coast	8	1.4	
	19	Rufiji	Rufiji region	6	1.0	
	20	—	Somewhere in the Northern Swahili Coast	5	0.9	
	21	Mafia	Mafia Island	4	0.7	
	22	Comoro	Comoro Islands	4	0.7	
	23	Mozambique	Northern Mozambique	2	0.3	
	24	Zanzibar	Zanzibar Island	1	0.2	
Others	25	Yemen	Yemen	54	9.4	13.1 (75)
	26	Shirazi	Persia (Iran)	9	1.6	
	27	Mshihiri	Hadhramaut	6	1.0	
	28	Dubai	U. A. E.	6	1.0	
Unknown			31	5.4		
Total			573 people			

n=573 person, 101 houses, based on the field research conducted in 2005
(Correction to Nakamura 2011a)

The inhabitants can be divided into the descendants of Bantu speakers (hereinafter “Bantu people”) and descendants of Arabians or Persians (hereinafter “Arab-descendants”). There is an evident economic gap between the two groups of Kilwa society. Depending on their occupation, some families are relatively wealthy, such as small shop owners, Islamic high school teachers, and government employees, the Arab-descendants who manage the salt industry, and Bantu people who are traditional healers (*mganga*). Families of Arab-descendants are generally wealthier because they are involved in more complex employment, such as fisheries, the salt industry, and sea transportation, while most Bantu people engage in self-sufficient livelihoods, particularly traditional fisheries and agriculture.

When international organizations or governmental agencies begin projects on Kilwa Island, the first people to contact, in most cases, are Arab-descendants. The opinions of Arab-descendants are more likely to be reflected in projects than those of Bantu people,

even though the latter comprise about 80% of the resident population. Furthermore, the elderly have a higher social status on Kilwa Island. Therefore, matters in the village are decided by the elders' council, which consists of male Bantu and Arab-descendant elders.⁵⁾ Opinions of young Bantu people and women are rarely reflected in the decisions made in the village.

Unless we fully understand that Kilwa Island is a super-multiethnic society and there are gaps among the ethnic groups, generations, and gender, the participation and cooperation of the inhabitants in the programs will be unbalanced.

3. World Heritage Property on Kilwa Island

While the Kilwa Kingdom went through its rise and fall, a number of coral rock structures were built. After the collapse of the kingdom, an excavation team led by British archeologist Neville Chittick discovered buildings that were half buried in the ground. The results of excavation surveys conducted on Kilwa Island from the 1950s to the 1960s were compiled in bulky two-volume books entitled *Kilwa: An Islamic Trading City on the East African Coast* (Chittick 1974a; 1974b).

These historical and archeological studies helped acknowledge the universal value of the stone ruins on Kilwa Island. Consequently, the ruins of Kilwa Island (Kisiwani) and Songo Mnara were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1981 as Tanzania's first cultural heritage.⁶⁾ However, this registration was requested by outsiders and not by the local people. Thus, one day, suddenly, the local people were forced to live with the outstanding universal value to humanity.

The stone ruins of Kilwa Island can be divided into four groups: mosques, palaces/houses, forts, and cemeteries (Table 2). The mosques, palaces, and forts were located near the village. The cemeteries were located around or outside the village (Figure 2). This section introduces some of the stone ruins designated as "principal monuments" by UNESCO.

Table 2 Classification of "Principal Monuments" on Kilwa Island

Builder	Kind	Name	Century	Location
Arabian or Persian	Mosque	Great Mosque	11	①
		Small Domed Mosque	15	②
		Malindi Mosque	15	⑦
		Jangwani Mosque	15	⑨
		Mvinje Mosque	15	⑪
		Husuni Ndogo	14–17	⑩
	Palace, House	Husuni Kubwa	14–17	③
		Makutani Palace	15	④
		Great House	14–15	⑧
	Cemetery	Shiraz	16	—
Malindi		18	⑥	
40 Shehe		18	—	
Sake		?	—	
Portuguese	Fort	Gereza	16	⑤

* The location number corresponds to the number shown in Figure 2.

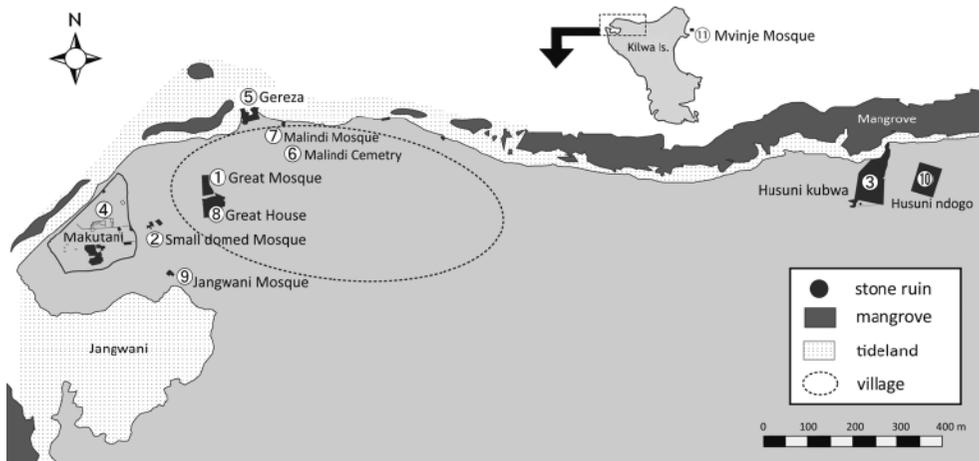


Figure 2 Distribution of stone ruins on Kilwa Island (Chittick 1974a; Nakamura 2006)

*The number corresponds to that of Table 2.

3.1 Mosques: Great Mosque and Small Domed Mosque

There are a number of mosque ruins on Kilwa Island. The most impressive among them is the Great Mosque (*Msikiti mkuu*) with its arch structure and domed roof, which is considered one of the largest mosques in East Africa (Photos 2a and 2b). The mosque is 42m × 24m in size, and the highest point of the dome is 6m above the ground. It consists of the northern and southern prayer halls constructed in the 11th and the 14th centuries, respectively.

The Small Domed Mosque (*Msikiti mdogo*), which was built around the 14th century, is considered to be a mosque used by sultans. It is a nine-domed mosque with arched octagonal columns supporting the ceiling. The pillar sticking out from the top of the central dome is characteristic of the mosque (Photo 3).



(2a)



(2b)

Photos 2a and 2b Great Mosque

Well-constructed domed roof (2a) and arch structures (2b) (by the author in 2010)



Photo 3 Small Domed Mosque. A pillar protruding from the top of the central dome (by the author in 2009)

3.2 Sultan's Palaces: Husuni and Makutani

Husuni Kubwa is a palace built around the 14th century when the Kilwa Kingdom was at its peak. The term *husuni* is derived from an Arabian word *husn*, implying “fortress, forts or castles” (Johnson 1989[1939]). It was unrivaled at that time in East Africa for its scale and architectural sophistication. It has an auditorium, a domestic court, and an octagonal pool (Figure 3, Photo 4), indicating the power of the sultans.

The term *makutani* means “long wall or big wall” in Swahili. Makutani Palace was built around the 15th century. It was the residence of sultans, standing on about two hectares of land and surrounded by long walls (Photo 5). Because it was located at the point of Kilwa Island farthest from the outer sea and surrounded by long walls with watchtowers, we can see that this palace was built with a strong focus on protection from enemy invasions.

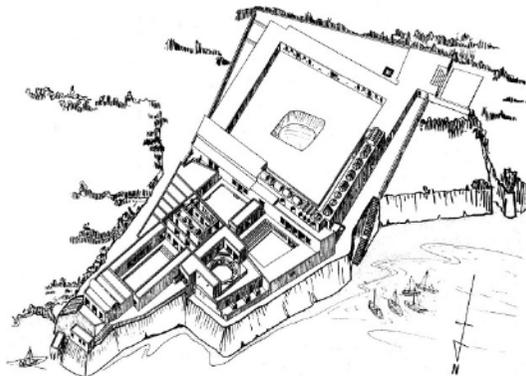


Figure 3 An expected completion image of Husuni Kubwa (Garlake 1966)



Photo 4 An octagonal pool in Husuni Kubwa
(by the author in 2012)



Photo 5 Makutani Palace, with big and long walls
(by the author in 2012)



Photo 6 Gereza, located at the harbor of Kilwa Island
(by the author in 2008)

3.3 Fort: Gereza

Gereza is a fort built in the 16th century when the Portuguese occupied the Kilwa Kingdom (Photo 6). It was extended in the 19th century after the Portuguese withdrew, and the Kingdom was ruled by the Kingdom of Oman in Zanzibar. It is the only structure of Portuguese origin among the stone ruins of Kilwa Island, while the rest are of Islamic origin.

3.4 Cemeteries

There are many cemeteries on the island, such as Shiraz, 40 Shehe, Malindi, and Sake. Usually, Muslims are buried with a headstone and footstone (thin plate-shaped gravestones) in such a way that the head faces Mecca in Saudi Arabia. However, the graves of the royal family, prominent Islamic teachers, and saints have stone structures, in addition to plate-shaped gravestones. For example, there is a grave modeled after the Small Domed Mosque in the Malindi Cemetery (Photo 7). The graves at Sake and 40 Shehe have rectangular enclosures. In the Shiraz cemetery, there are graves with a pillar protruding from the rectangular enclosure, considered to be male tombs (Photo 8).



Photo 7 A tomb in the Malindi Cemetery
The design resembles that of the Small
Domed Mosque
(by the author in 2013)



Photo 8 A tomb with pillars in the Shiraz Cemetery
(by the author in 2010)

3.5 Difficulties of Living with World Heritage

The stone ruins mentioned above are considered “principal monuments” by UNESCO. However, the structures from the kingdom period are described in cultural heritage documents as “ruins”; therefore, the remains buried underground are also included in the World Heritage property. To protect the potential of cultural heritage, Tanzania’s Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism has designated the entire area where stone ruins are located as a World Heritage site and put restrictions on people’s activities within the site. However, as we can see from the distribution of stone ruins in Figure 2, the principal monuments and the communities are located adjacent to each other; thus, entire communities are included in the World Heritage Site. This has caused significant inconvenience to local people.

For example, they are forbidden to dig the ground without permission, even inside their properties, to protect the cultural heritage that might be buried underground from damage. They cannot freely dig toilet holes and must obtain rocks for house construction from remote locations. This angered some inhabitants, causing them to destroy stone ruins buried in the forest and use them for building purposes.

Moreover, some people were in the process of building a restaurant for tourists as a joint capital investment near the Gereza Fort, which is the gateway to Kilwa Island. However, just when it was almost completed, they were ordered to stop construction by the Antiquities Division of the Kilwa government and had to abandon it before its completion (Photo 9). It is also prohibited to build accommodation facilities for tourists on the island. Some inhabitants complain that tourists spend money on staying and eating in a town located on the opposite shore instead on the island itself. Tourists’ bad behavior also causes problems. For example, female tourists walking around in swimwear are intolerable to the Muslim community, and tourists taking pictures without permission is disrespectful to inhabitants.

People’s everyday lives are restricted, and their ideas for regional promotion have been eliminated. Although governmental agencies have emphasized tourism development,



Photo 9 An abandoned restaurant built near Gereza
(by the author in 2016)

they lack consideration for those who live with World Heritage sites and discourage regional promotion. Top-down tourism development brings no benefits to local people. Moreover, it is becoming a serious problem that interferes with the practices and beliefs of the island, as described next.

4. Links between Local People and World Heritage through Belief

According to the records maintained by the Antiquities Division of the Kilwa government, only 219 tourists on average visited the World Heritage Property per year between 1993 and 2001. However, the number of tourists has increased with development. For example, the transportation infrastructure connecting the Kilwa region with urban areas such as Dar es Salaam has been constructed, and several resort hotels have been built on the beach of Kilwa Masoko. The record shows that the number of tourists was 829 in 2005 and 1,334 in 2006 (Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism 2007). Moreover, a further increase was observed: 2,112 in 2014 and 3,333 in 2015 (personal communication with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism in 2016).

A significant increase in the number of tourists has led to a new issue surrounding World Heritage Sites. Important cemeteries and graves associated with people's beliefs are listed on the tourist map. After viewing the map, tourists have started to enter these places without permission. Because the official tour guides who show the tourists around are not from Kilwa Island, they do not understand the beliefs unique to the island, which is why they take tourists to cemeteries without any scruples. There is a complex world of beliefs about Kilwa Island. Those working around World Heritage Sites need to learn that some of the ruins are sacred places closely associated with local beliefs.

In societies located along the East African Coast (Swahili Maritime Society), Islam spread from early on, and currently, many Muslims live there. Nonetheless, Islam is not the only form of belief there. People also have other spiritual beliefs. This is an Islamic subculture, but it has taken roots culturally with a rich worldview and is practiced by people in a unified, structured manner (Nakamura 2011b).

According to the anthropologist John Middleton, non-living intermediaries in the Swahili maritime society can be divided into *jini* and *mzimu* (Middleton 1992). The term *mzimu* means “ancestors’ spirit” and the word *koma* is also used on Kilwa Island with a similar meaning. The term *jini* means “spirits” and their existence is acknowledged in the Koran as “a creation of God” similar to human beings. People also worship Prophet Muhammad (*Mtume*), Angels of Islam (*malaika*), Saints of Sufism (*Shehe*), and magic (*uchawi*). Some of the stone ruins on Kilwa Island are places linked with the worship of spirits and ancestors.

Many people have witnessed *jini*, who cannot usually be seen, at the palaces of the sultans and the Great Mosque. In particular, at Husuni Kubwa, many witnesses have seen *jini* at night, and people say that there is a town of *jini* underground.

Many of the stone ruins of Kilwa Island are located near the village, but Husuni Kubwa stands on a small hill far from the village, facing the Indian Ocean. When the rehabilitation project of Husuni Kubwa was about to begin, it was decided that night guards should be deployed there to guard the equipment. However, no one showed any interest in becoming a night guard because those who live on Kilwa Island believe that *jini* gather around Husuni Kubwa at night and were too scared to stay there at night. Consequently, a strong lock was installed on the warehouse, and the hut for the night guards was built at a distance from Husuni Kubwa. The people were so afraid of going near Husuni Kubwa during the night that no guards were necessary because even thieves would have been afraid of *jini*.

The people are tolerant about tourists going to the stone ruins where *jini* live during the day. However, they do not like tourists to visit without permission the cemeteries where they worship Allah through their ancestors’ spirits.

5. Cemeteries as Places of Worship

The people who live on Kilwa Island perform a ritual called *dua* to pray to Allah through their ancestors’ spirits for success before engaging in important tasks, such as boat construction or large-scale fishing (Photo 10). The ritual is usually performed under the guidance of an Islamic leader. It can occur anywhere, such as the house of the organizer. However, if one has a “big wish,” the ritual may occur at a cemetery. A “big wish” means a wish beyond human knowledge or ability, for example, immediate and extreme economic success or cursing a person to death. When people want to satisfy an intense desire, they avoid the public eye while they go to the cemeteries because they sometimes get involved in *uchawi* (a bad form of magic [sorcery] that intends to harm someone).

Cemeteries are usually called *kaburi* (pl. *makaburi*); however, the cemeteries where worship rituals occur are specifically called *tembe* (pl. *matembe*). Hereinafter, they will be referred to as “place(s) of worship.”

The places that the people on Kilwa Island use for worship are the cemeteries such as Shiraz, 40 Shehe, Sake, Shehe Ndembo, and Chani (on the southern part of the island). To use these places of worship, people must follow certain rules. For example, they must visit on a designated day of the week (e.g., Wednesday in the case of the Sake



Photo 10 A scene of *dua* ritual (by the author in 2013)

cemetery) or use certain clothes, offerings, or prayers. When the place of worship has a supervisor, they must obtain permission for use.

At places of worship, they first sweep the area clean. Then, they stay and sleep there for three days without eating any food. During that time, the Koran is read, and frankincense (*ubani*) or incense sticks (*udi*) are burned. A ritual called *kafara* for offering a sacrifice is sometimes performed using a chicken, goat, or sheep. Such practices vary from place to place, as shown in the following.

Shiraz Cemetery — Supervised by the Shiraz People

The Shiraz cemetery is considered to be the graveyard of the royal family of Shiraz, who established the Kilwa Kingdom. The people who call themselves the descendants of the royal family and live on or off Kilwa Island supervise the cemetery and use it as a place of worship.

40 Shehe Cemetery — Supervised by the Sharif

The cemetery of 40 Shehe is a place where 40 shehe (sheikh) who died on the same day at the end of the 18th century were buried. The Swahili word *shehe* is equivalent to the Arabic word *shaykh*, meaning “elder, old person,” especially an “important person/saint in Islam.”

A person of Arab descent who is given the title of Sharif, implying a descendant of Prophet Muhammad, supervises the 40 Shehe cemetery. Those who wish to use it as a place of worship must ask the Sharif for permission. Unlike the Shiraz cemetery, anyone can use it irrespective of their origin, as long as permission is obtained from the Sharif. People consider it a powerful place of worship, probably because as many as 40 shehe are buried there. Many people even from outside the island visit this place.

Sake Cemetery — Supervised by the Village Chief

The village chief of Kilwa Island, called *ubalozi*, supervises the Sake cemetery. The *ubalozi* is different from the village chair, called *mwenikiti wa kijiji*, who is in charge of administrative work. The *ubalozi* is a traditional chief who maintains order in the village

by advising in case of civil complaints, and so on. He used to be in a position to govern the representatives in charge of ten houses of the village, but now only gets involved in marital quarrels or disputes among the people. His status appears to have been lowered; however, he still assumes the important role of supervising the Sake cemetery. Those who wish to use the Sake cemetery for worship must ask the *ubalozi* for his permission. Upon doing so, they give him cash or chickens.

Shehe Ndembo Cemetery — Used by the First President Julius Nyerere

The person who supervises the Shehe Ndembo Cemetery is unknown. When I first visited the cemetery, it had been swept clean, and a plate used to burn incense was left behind. This suggests that someone had performed a worship ceremony a few days earlier. Existing archeological studies do not mention this cemetery, and the Antiquities Division of the Kilwa government also has no knowledge of it. However, it is known on the island as a place of worship used by Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania.

While practices of worship are supported by local beliefs, even outsiders can potentially become worshippers through such mysterious experiences as I had. I began studying the world of belief on Kilwa Island around 2003, the third year of my field research on the island. During the process, I learned that some cemeteries were associated with ancestor worship and began visiting them with my friend M (name withheld for privacy reasons).

One day when I was out on field research, I visited the Sake cemetery with M without following the rules of the place of worship (visiting the cemetery on a specific day of the week, wearing the right clothes, obtaining permission from the village chief). That night, *wanga* came to M's house. *Wanga* are not spiritual beings. They are human (mostly old people), but rather peculiar people who wander around the village naked at night. They sometimes come in groups late in the night and make a strange noise in front of a house using flutes, whistles, and drums, trying to keep the people in the house awake and making them tired. *Wanga* may seem strange, but they serve as an indirect warning to those who break the rules of the village by making noise in front of their houses in the middle of the night. Therefore, M immediately understood that the reason for the *wanga*'s visit was their way of warning us for breaking the rules when we visited the Sake Cemetery, which is what he told me.

We followed the rules when we visited the Sake Cemetery for the second time. However, on the way back from Sake, M and I also visited the Shehe Ndembo Cemetery unintentionally. It was a day when visits were not allowed. That night, I could not sleep because many cats kept howling all night. When the morning came, I asked the head of my host family, "I could not sleep last night because the cats were howling so loudly. Did you hear them?" However, he said that he had not heard any cats howling, and he added that the cats' howling was a warning from *wanga* because of my visit to the Shehe Ndembo Cemetery without following the rules.

Even the villagers, as in the case of M, receive a warning if they do not follow the rules of the places of worship. Therefore, it is utterly unacceptable for non-Muslims and

foreigners, including tourists and myself, to visit these places without permission. I believe that *wanga* use warnings to try and protect the order of the holy places. At least, my friend M and the head of my host family interpreted it as such. By the way, that was the only night when I was tormented by the howling of cats.

6. Conclusion: Hidden Cultural Heritage

6.1 Coexistence between World Heritage and Places of Worship

The cultural heritage of Kilwa Island was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2004 because some of the stone ruins were on the verge of collapse. The rehabilitation project led by the Tanzanian government began with cooperation from Japan and France in 2001. The rehabilitation project, which included cultural heritage on the adjacent island of Songo Mnara, continued until 2013. During this time, between May and October 2008, a researcher consigned by UNESCO conducted field research on the intangible cultural heritage of the island. The rehabilitation of the principal stone ruins was completed in 2013, which led to their removal from the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2014.

The Frenchman Pascal J. Bacuez conducted a six-month field research on the intangible cultural heritage of Kilwa Island in 2008. Bacuez is a sociolinguist who began studies on Kilwa Island before me in 1998, and had finished a long-term field survey on Unguja Island, or Zanzibar, before he came to Kilwa Island. He is so proficient in the Swahili language that he wrote a novel in the language (Bacuez 2015), and he has a deep understanding of Swahili culture. I met Bacuez in 2003 on Kilwa Island and had a number of opportunities to conduct field research with him. He led me to study ancestor and *jini* worship.

In his report on the intangible culture of Kilwa Island (Bacuez 2009), Bacuez divided the cultural heritage of the island into those that are associated with local practices and beliefs and those that are not. The intangible cultural heritage associated with local practices and beliefs is the cemeteries used as places of worship. He pointed out that if tourists without permission enter the cemeteries that are strongly tied to the beliefs of the island, the local order will be destroyed. He suggested that “if we consider that ruins-related practices and beliefs might foster social cohesion in the communities, we should remove the holy places from the map available to tourists and classify them as ‘holy places not to be violated’” (Bacuez 2009: 22).

His suggestion aims to achieve a balance between the practices and beliefs that are of local value, and the World Heritage property, which is of universal value, by prohibiting tourists from entering the holy places while allowing them to visit other cultural heritage sites just as they have been allowed to so far. Considering how the World Heritage property has been managed on Kilwa Island, I also agree with his standpoint that the two should coexist through such separation. It suffices for tourists to visit the mosque, palace, and fort if they wish to learn the history of the Kilwa Kingdom. They do not need to go to cemeteries.

The places of worship have survived as a living heritage linked with ancestor

worship because they have been supervised and managed by the local people, separately from the operation of World Heritage sites. Cutting down the trees around the cemeteries or installing the information boards for tourism has nothing to do with the continued existence of the practices and beliefs of the island. Rather, it interferes with the intangible cultural heritage of the island by encouraging the invasion of outsiders.

To achieve the coexistence between the local value unique to the area and the universal value, I believe that “separation” is the best strategy at this point. Considering that living heritage is becoming the key to the operation of the World Heritage Convention, by a clear distinction between the two values, the possibility that the World Heritage on Kilwa Island will become a living heritage linked with local practices and beliefs can be left for the future.

6.2 Secret Places of Worship

The idea of keeping the holy places secret by removing them from the tourist map is not an extreme suggestion, because being “secret” is an important condition for the places of worship. There is a secret place of worship on the island, and most people know nothing about its location and rules. I heard a few years back that there was a place that had the strongest power among the many places of worship on Kilwa Island. However, even when I asked the older residents about it, they all said that they neither knew of any such place nor had they ever heard of such a story.

However, when I visited Kilwa Island in 2012, my friend M, with whom I used to visit cemeteries, said, “I finally found the secret place of worship.” M’s father did not tell him about the place even though he had asked several times, but he found the place by following his older brother, who is a *mganga wa jini* (a traditional doctor using the *jini*’s spiritual power for treatments and rituals), and was about to perform a ritual at the secret place of worship.

Early Wednesday morning (the same day of the week that M’s brother visited the place), M and I went to that place. To my surprise, the place was located only about a ten-minute walk from my house. I had walked around this area many times in the past, but never noticed the existence of a place of worship. After going off the path into the bushes, there was an open space, which was where the secret place of worship was located.

I found this place after twelve years of conducting research on Kilwa Island. It was a mosque-shaped grave constructed from coral rocks (3m × 1.8m, 1.5m high). Half of the ceiling had collapsed, but we could tell that it used to have two domes. It looked like the grave in the Malindi cemetery, which is considered to have been modeled after the Small Domed Mosque (see Photos 3 and 7). Rushed by M, who seemed anxious to leave the place as soon as possible, I took some photos and walked away quickly from this secret place of worship.

Afterward, I was able to find out the name and some rules of this place of worship; however, out of respect for the secret nature of the place, I will not reveal any photo, location, or name in this chapter.

6.3 Hidden Cultural Heritage

During my study on the beliefs of Kilwa Island, I was fortunate to be able to see the secret place of worship with the help of my friend. The existence of this place was shocking for me because I was fully confident that there were no places I did not know of on this small island, owing to my twelve years of experiences there. However, this should not have been a surprise, because people do not easily reveal what is really important. It is all the more true when it comes to worship practices involving secret rituals.

When I asked Bacuez about the secret place of worship, he said he knew about it, as I had expected. M's brother took him in 2008. To keep this place of worship secret, he did not write about it in his 2009 report. Under normal circumstances, I would not have written about this secret place, which the elderly of the island were trying to hide. However, I decided to write about it here because I wanted to show that there is a sacred place and worship practice that people try to hide even from their children.

On Kilwa Island, tourism development concerning UNESCO World Heritage began to disturb the order of places of worship where ancestor worship occurs. Although it was suggested that the holy places be removed from the tourist map and outsiders forbidden from entering them, no action seems to have been taken so far. Irrespective of such concerns, the people of Kilwa Island have protected their practices and beliefs in "hidden cultural heritage" without being captured by the values imposed by outsiders such as World Heritage and tourism developments.

If anthropological heritage studies respect and focus on the practice of its bearers, we need to value practices and beliefs in the hidden cultural heritage of Kilwa Island as a typical example of living heritage that has been protected autonomously by the local people, and keep them secret in accordance with the intentions of the local community.

Notes

- 1) According to the 1981 report by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS 1981), the ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara are two archaeological sites of prime importance to the understanding of the Swahili culture, the Islamization of the east coast of Africa and the extensive commerce of the medieval period and the modern era, and fall under Criterion (iii) of the World Heritage selection criteria, which is to "to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared."
- 2) For example, when constructing a foundation or walls of a building by stacking coral rocks, the people there use a mixture of sand and calcined limestone of coral rocks called *chokaa* between the rocks as a fixative. By burying and setting down the calcined limestone underground for over a year, it becomes "old limestone (*chokaa ya zamani*)," which solidifies harder than the ordinary kind. Because this "old limestone" is used in the ruins, the people were advised to use the same type of limestone for repair, which was ignored.
- 3) The form of Islam practiced on Kilwa Island initially was that of the Khawarij, which was replaced by the Shafii school of Sunni Islam around the 13th century. The Shadhili and Qadiri

tariqa (Sufi order), which were introduced in the 20th century (Iliffe 1979), are what are currently found on the island.

- 4) When Ali bin Husain migrated to Kilwa Island, a man named Mlimba lived on the island as a lord who governed the Kilwa area (Freeman-Grenville 1962a). It has been said that Ali bin Husain obtained Kilwa Island by sending a cloth of the same length as the circumference of the island (about 23km) to the lord (Clarke 1960).
- 5) For example, the doors of Gereza Fort were replaced with new ones in 2013 by the World Monuments Fund (WMF), but the people, especially the youth, were opposed to it. However, the replacement of the doors with new ones was decided by the elders' council in an assertive fashion. Criticizing them, the youth said, "The elders sold our properties (doors) (*Wazee kauza mali etu*)."
- 6) Songo Mnara comprises two islands located about 4km south of Kilwa Island. The archeological sites on these islands are inscribed on the World Heritage List as "Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and Ruins of Songo Mnara."

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