

Fragments of Pottery, Fragments of History: Oriental Trade Ceramics from Sange ya Kati and from Songo Mnara (Kilwa, Tanzania)

Dr Zhao Bing 趙冰

Centre national de la recherche scientifique, FRA

The harbour of Kilwa, situated on the southern Swahali coast and close to the harbour of Sofola, is composed of Kilwa Kisiwani and several adjacent islands. The important works carried out by N. Chittick and other British scholars on Kilwa Kisiwani since the 1950s had brought light to a site of great interest for the study of the East Africa Coast thanks to its exceptional architectural and archaeological heritage. Since 2005, a French-Tanzanian team, composed of archaeologists, architects, historians and ethnologists, had opened a new research program on two other islands of the harbour: Sangjé ya Kati and Songo Mnara. The topic of the paper is the Chinese ceramics respectively found through the excavations at the first island under the direction of Dr Stephane Pradines (IFAO), and through the conservation works at the second site conducted by Dr Pierre Blanchard (UNESCO). The corpus of some 300 items mainly includes vessels used in daily life and samples of big storage jars, all imported between the 12th century and the early 16th century into the harbour-town of Kilwa. The paper will present a precise study based upon the main ceramics categories and their distribution through the western Indian Ocean. This analysis will aim to give an insight into the significant connections between Kilwa and Gulf, Arabia, which may have strengthened Kilwa's ties with the Far East before the arrival of the Portuguese in the international maritime trade.

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