

CAMBRIDGE WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY

THE ARCHAEOLOGY
OF ISLAM IN
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Trump Medieval 10/13 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 65171 9 hardback

ISBN 0 521 65702 4 paperback

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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ISLAM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: AN INTRODUCTION

Aims and objectives

This volume aims to examine the archaeology of Islam in Africa south of the Sahara. Yet this simple statement masks a great deal of complexity, for it suggests that the archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa is the residue of one uniform faith from the Cape to Timbuktu. This, however, is not the case: great diversity is evident, and although key recurring elements might be preserved (as are discussed in some detail below) African Islam has been subject to historical process. Such historical process was described by Ray (1976:176) as 'a history of several phases and types of religion . . . a history of developing orthodoxy and of developing synthesis . . . the result was not a confused syncretism, but a variety of new religious and cultural syntheses which bear the unique character of sub-Saharan Islam'. The importance of this paraphrased quote is that it emphasises the plural character of Islamic development within Africa – one Islam as structured by the requirements of faith (see below), but numerous local interpretations thereof once the core prerequisites were fulfilled.

This multiple interpretation has resulted in the creation of the archaeological record that is the focus of this study; its further aims are to provide an introduction to the richness and diversity of Islamic material culture in sub-Saharan Africa in all its many forms, from mosques and tombs through to trade goods – beads, glazed pottery and glass. Such monuments and archaeological material are found across the continent from the fringes of the Sahara in the north to the shores of the Indian Ocean in the far south. This is also an archaeological record which has been neglected to date as regards an attempt at synthesis. This is perhaps somewhat unsurprising, as Africa south of the Sahara is a vast area, frequently more dissimilar than similar and only, in many respects, unified for the purposes of this study by its geographical borders, i.e. the fact that it is bounded to the north by the barrier of the Sahara and on its other sides by ocean. Yet, conversely, it is equally surprising that the archaeology of Islam has never been considered in great detail – for the impact of Islam has been of fundamental importance in much of the continent, and has been felt on many fronts, not only ideologically, but also economically and socially. This is important, for as Brenner (1993a:59) notes, the creation of identity, both Muslim and non-Muslim (the latter also a subject with which this volume

is concerned), 'are formulated through the appropriation and reassortment of various elements or building blocks which may be religiously significant, but are also socially, politically and economically motivated'. The archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa is thus not only the residue of explicitly religious process; for, to quote an oft-cited phrase, Islam must be seen as more than a religion, it is a way of life, with all the attendant material culture implications which such a statement implies.

This is because the study of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa is not merely of religion – it provides a point of entry into the study of other institutional systems, allowing a consideration of concomitant changes in, for example, society, economy and politics. Therefore, along with the introduction of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa there are many changes in the material record in the continent south of the Sahara, and in many respects the archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa is really the archaeology of sub-Saharan Africa in the last millennium, the effects were so widespread and profound. Given these changes in sub-Saharan Africa in the last millennium, we are allowed a focus on what changed and thus must consider, to an extent, the nature of the societies and belief systems prior to Islam, and also how these survived in whole or in part and in a variety of associations with Islam.

Yet manifestations of Islamisation might be various. Within religious belief there might be a shift in emphasis from a pantheon of deities to a more immediate relationship with a single God. Economically, local trade networks could be tied into the Muslim world economy. Socially, material changes might be manifest in house types, settlement patterns, diet and funerary customs. Politically, the adoption of Arabic, of literacy and of new forms of administration could result in great change. These possibilities for change are manifold, and various aspects of this process can be traced in the archaeological record. But equally, as will be considered below, the presence of a Muslim or Muslim community might leave only an ephemeral material imprint (Insoll 1999a). Complexity, both in process and in the concepts that are to be explored in this volume, has to be recognised from the outset. This is something also remarked upon by Mervyn Hiskett (1994:184) in a study of the history of Islam in Africa, who likens the process of studying Islam in the continent to looking through a kaleidoscope, whereby 'no sooner does one pattern emerge than a thought, a forgotten factor or a sudden reservation intervenes and the whole pattern changes'.

Complexity acknowledged, it has also to be recognised that we are concerned with several key processes which it is useful to define at the outset. Critical among these is a term already used, 'Islamisation', which according to Levtzion (1979c:7) refers to religious change, though it is useful for our purposes here to use the term to refer both to religious and the frequently accompanying cultural change. This, perhaps, is of lesser importance with reference to Levtzion's research focus, that of historical sources and process, but needs to be admitted

where the focus rests upon material culture as well. A second and differing term is 'Islamism', which according to Rosander (1997:4) is focused upon *shari'ah* (Islamic law), with Islamists conceiving 'of Islam as an ideology, a total mode of life'. Islamism as defined by Rosander, and as considered here, refers to the reform of African Islam, something which has occurred periodically (especially more recently), with as its stated aim the 'purification' of African Islam 'from local or indigenous African ideas and practices as well as from Western influences' (Rosander 1997:1). A further term to be encountered is 'Arabisation', which is in fact of little relevance outside a few contexts in the continent south of the Sahara. Arabisation literally refers to the Arabising of society – culturally, ethnically or ideologically – and is of importance in parts of the Nilotic Sudan as we will see in chapter 3, and in areas of the East African coast, as described in chapter 4. Similarly, the terms 'orthodox', 'popular' or 'syncretic' will be utilised with reference to religious practice. These are considered at greater length at the end of this chapter.

Thus having considered something of the aims and objectives of this study it is also worthwhile considering how these are going to be fulfilled. Essentially, a multi-source approach has to be adopted in evaluating the archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, as each of the available sources of evidence has its limitations. Archaeological evidence devoid of the supporting interpretative props of historical sources, when they are available, can appear dry and lifeless. Fortunately for the purposes of interpreting the archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa the relevant historical source documents, written primarily in Arabic, are increasingly available in translation, facilitating their wider circulation and utilisation (see for example Freeman-Grenville 1962; Cuoq 1975b; Levtzion and Hopkins 1981; Hamdun and King 1994; and the 'bio-bibliographical' volumes edited by Hunwick and O'Fahey 1994, 1995, 1998), a trend which it is hoped will continue. Where the Arabic sources leave frequent gaps, in central Africa, for example, early explorers', travellers', and missionaries' accounts can be exploited, while oral history can also prove extremely useful in tracing Islami-sation across the continent. However, as with archaeological interpretation devoid of supporting sources, the use of historical sources in isolation is not unproblematical. The sources might provide us with the basic chronological framework of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, yet we must also turn to archaeology to begin to reconstruct the diverse social, political and economic effects of conversion to Islam, and the direct and indirect impact of the religion upon the peoples of the continent south of the Sahara. The archaeology of Islam is here foregrounded because, as in other forms of historical archaeology, there is the possibility that what we can learn from material culture not only complements and supplements the historical record, but also may contradict what we think we know from history.

A certain interdependence of sources is therefore evident, and the historical and archaeological evidence is also supplemented by anthropological,

ethnographic, linguistic and architectural data. As Levtzion (1979c:5) notes, many sources exist for studying the processes of conversion to Islam: historical texts, inscriptions, names, and even dreams (for this latter unusual source of evidence see Jedrej and Shaw 1992) – the whole conspiring to enrich our understanding of the archaeology of Islam in Africa south of the Sahara. For it is with people that we are concerned and with dynamic ongoing processes of religious conversion. This adoption of a multi-source approach is made more essential as the processes we are observing in the archaeological record, the spread and acceptance of Islam, are very much alive and ongoing today in many areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, a multi-source approach is necessary as it is somewhat presumptuous to assume ‘that any *one* discipline will provide a universal key to unlock all the secrets of religion(s)’ (Sutherland 1991:32). These are issues which this author has considered elsewhere (Insoll 2001), where it was suggested that the multi-source umbrella offered by approaches such as those encompassed within the history of religions (see Sharpe 1986) might be a useful methodological step forward for archaeological approaches to complex phenomena such as Islam, in recognising diversity, and in approaching the material sympathetically.

Geographical and temporal frameworks

The establishment of a methodological framework is a necessary step in approaching the diverse material incorporated within this study. A geographical division of the material has also proven essential, and for the purposes of discussion the continent south of the Sahara has been divided into seven regions. These are: Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa; the eastern or Nilotic Sudan (the modern republic of this name); the East African coast; the western Sahel; the central Sudan (Sudan here refers to the vegetation belt); the West African Sudan (as before) and forest; and finally, east-central and southern Africa (**figure 1.1**). Undeniably, any such division is in certain respects unsuitable, and its use does not mean that each region was a self-contained and isolated entity, as the archaeology testifies to the various contacts that took place over vast distances across the continent. These regions were frequently interconnected, as will become apparent.

This pattern of geographical progression was chosen in approaching the material as it broadly follows the chronological pattern of the initial spread of Islam, a process which begins on the Red Sea coast and in Nubia, the former area the earliest zone of Muslim contact from the very beginnings of Islam in the seventh century (and considered in chapters 2 and 3). By the late eighth to early ninth centuries Islam had spread to parts of the East African coast (for simplicity the CE (Common Era), BCE (Before Common Era) dating system has been adopted, and all dates are CE unless otherwise specified), and almost contemporaneously in the late ninth to early tenth centuries to the western Sahel.

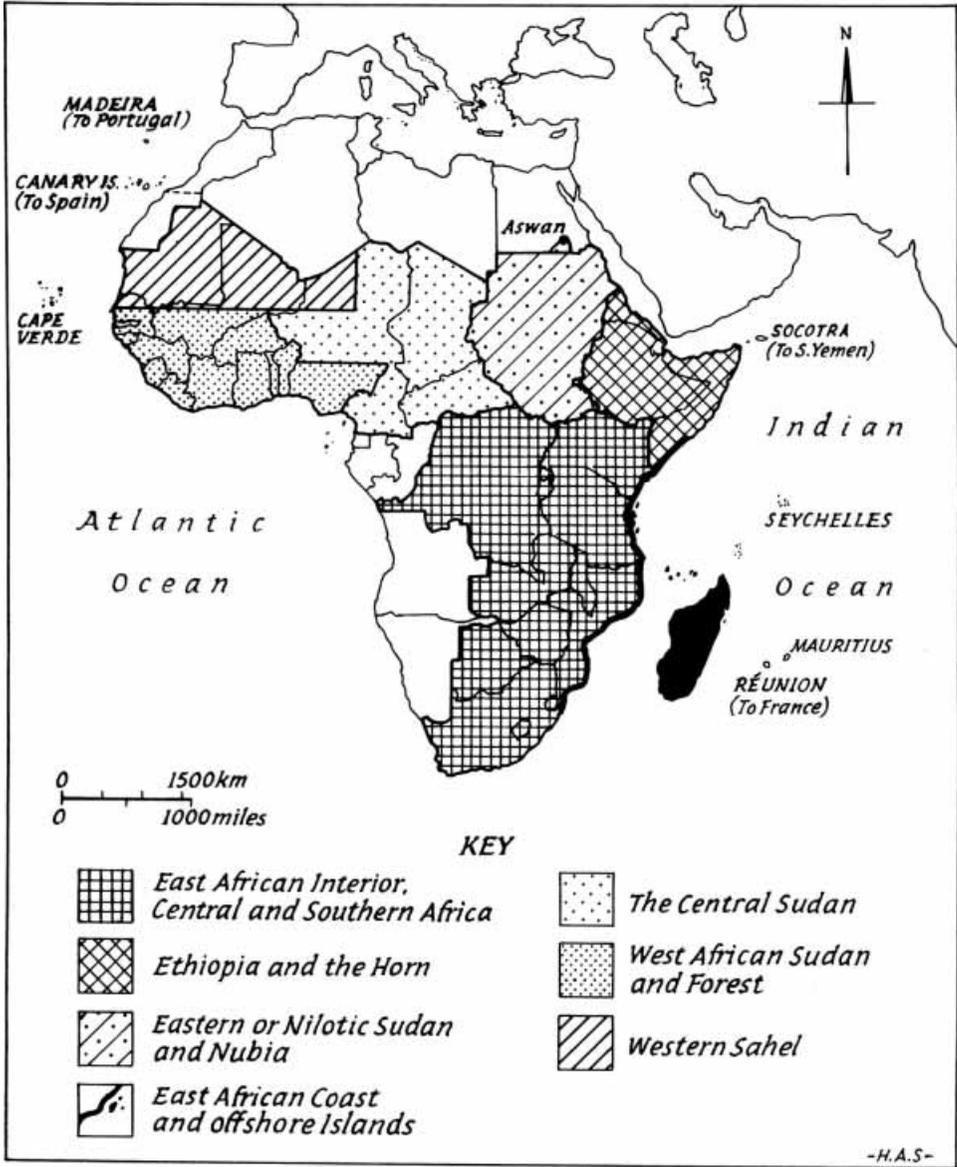


Figure 1.1 The subdivisions of the continent

Subsequently, in the eleventh century, the first tangible evidence for Islamisation is found in the central Sudan, while in the West African Sudan and forest this evidence dates from the twelfth century. Finally, on the other side of the continent, in east-central and southern Africa, the spread of Islam was much later, dating from the mid-seventeenth century in parts of the Cape, but elsewhere largely from the the nineteenth century. Discussion commences with

Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, for it encompasses part of the Red Sea coast, the importance of which during the early Islamic period has already been referred to, but also because the connections between Ethiopia and parts of Arabia have a substantial pre-Islamic history.

It must also be noted here that reduction to a simple chronological framework such as that just provided is unacceptable, and it has to be realised that dynamic processes of Islamic conversion were incorporated within this historical process. Equally, the notion that a uniform suite of Muslim material culture was laid out in each of the geographical regions from the date just defined must be dismissed. On the contrary, the pattern that exists can be likened to a mosaic with some pieces the residue of Muslim communities, others followers of traditional religion, or perhaps of another world religion such as Christianity, all possibly coexisting and, with regard to the first two, frequently intermixing. For example, the western Sahel from the tenth century, the date of the earliest archaeological evidence for the presence of Muslims, cannot be thought of as completely Muslim at that point in time; it was a mosaic of different religious elements. Even today it cannot be argued that it is wholly Muslim. We are observing the residue of long-drawn-out processes rather than of a 'single act of conversion' (Levtzion 1979c:21).

The archaeology of Islam in each of the regions just defined is also a continuation of the Iron Age archaeology. It is not suddenly separated out by dint of being created by Muslims or Muslim communities. Thus this study slots into the pre-existing archaeological context, as only in a few rare instances could it be thought of as the archaeology of foreign imposition, it is African Iron Age archaeology. The pre-Islamic background was crucial in dictating the degree of Islamisation, the types of relationship entered into with Muslims by non-Muslims, the rate of Islamic conversion, and the impact of Islam upon the various societies that existed. Hence to neglect material pre-dating the arrival of Islam as unnecessary permits only an incomplete understanding of subsequent developments. However, it must also be acknowledged that this study must by its very nature privilege the Islamic element in the archaeological record, and also undeniably more so with regard to the 'religious' element of this material culture – though having said this, this study should be considered as part of the series in which it is conceived, other studies considering the non-Muslim context in much greater detail. Similarly, this study is also concerned with the residue of an African religion, Islam being as much an African religion as are traditional religions (this is considered below). For the undenied success of Islam in Africa was because 'it appropriated and had been appropriated' (Eaton 1993:303) by Africans (**figure 1.2**). The quote just used in fact refers to processes of Islamic conversion in Bengal, but it applies equally to the African situation. Islam in Africa is African Islam, albeit of diverse character, and this is reflected in the archaeology.

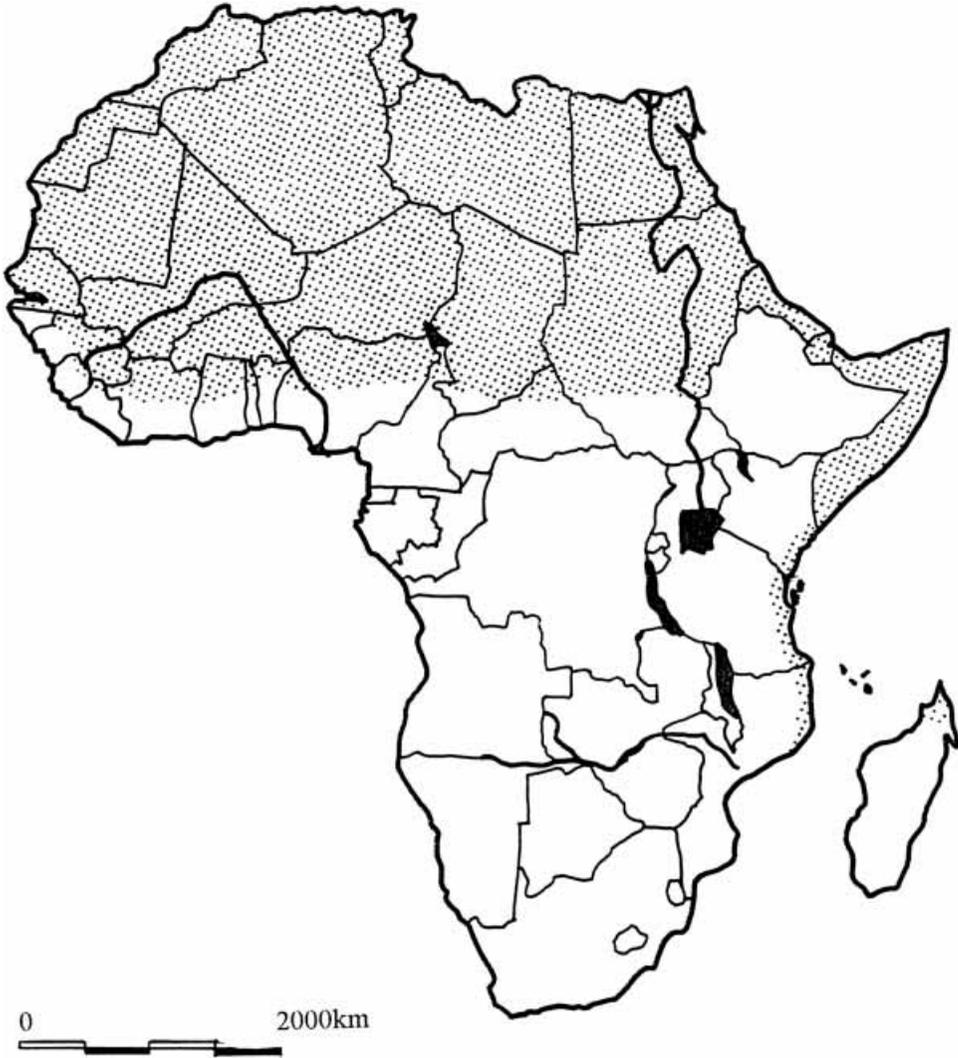


Figure 1.2 Areas in which Muslims predominate in Africa today

A history of research

This study should also be placed within the context of past research, where it has already been noted that a synthesis of the archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa does not exist. A similar situation pertains to relevant anthropological studies: much excellent and detailed research has been completed (see for example Goody 1971b; Holy 1991; Mitchell 1956), but no overall review exists, in part due to the difficulty in compiling such a volume or volumes. The nature of the anthropological evidence perhaps precludes its viable summary, in comparison to archaeological or historical data. Alternatively, this

might be due to the fact that, to quote Morris, anthropology texts 'largely focus on the religion of tribal cultures and seem to place an undue emphasis on its more exotic aspects' (1987:2). So-called tribal religions are split up into phenomena – myth, witchcraft, magic etc. – whereas in contrast, as Morris also notes (1987:3), world religions are treated according to a quite different theoretical framework whereby they are classified as discrete and distinct entities, such as 'Buddhism' or 'Islam', with these classifications provided by historians rather than anthropologists. Besides this synthetic archaeological and anthropological lacuna (other than a basic introductory article on the archaeology by this author: see Insoll 1996a), the literature on Islam in Africa is vast, and only a selective consideration can be supplied here, focusing upon more widely available works.

In general, the relevant study of Islam in Africa at a regional or continental level has predominantly been one of historical synthesis and survey with attention paid to archaeological evidence, if at all, only in passing. Spencer Trimingham could be regarded as the doyen of such approaches, certainly as regards Anglophone scholarship, with his series of detailed regional studies of Islam in Africa (1949, 1952, 1959, 1962, 1964), along with one continental overview (1968). These are still invaluable sources as starter works for orienting oneself with regional developments and the 'classical' texts of scholarship on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. However, it should be borne in mind that these are also dated in content, and old-fashioned in style and approaches. Trimingham perceives Africa as marginal to the Islamic world, evident in comments such as 'the adoption of Islam brought little change in the capacity of Africans to control the conditions of their existence for they were in touch but in a peripheral way with the developed civilizations of other Islamic peoples' (1968:1–2). This is the opposite of the implicit premise in this study that Africa was an integral part of the Muslim world. Trimingham also speaks of the spread of Islam as if it is a depersonalised amorphous entity 'penetrating' (1968:37) the continent. No allowance for the individual is given, and though group dynamics are obviously significant in the conversion process, individual decision making cannot be excluded either.

Further, what could be termed 'old-fashioned' studies of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa (in English), are provided by the volumes *Islam in Tropical Africa* edited by I. M. Lewis (1966, 1980b), and *Islam in Africa* edited by J. Kritzeck and W. H. Lewis (1969). Yet these cannot be criticised in the same way as Trimingham's work. Lewis's volume, for example, is a landmark study, admittedly not so much for the series of regional historical surveys of Islam in Africa that are provided, but rather for the introductory study by Lewis (1980a) which considers in detail the factors underpinning conversion to Islam and the interplay between Islam and traditional religions. Francophone equivalents (this emphasis on English and French literature reflects the author's linguistic capabilities,

not the complete literature on Islam in Africa) of these general historical syntheses are provided by the volumes written by, among others, J. C. Froelich (1962) and Joseph Cuoq (1975a). Cuoq's volume differs from those just described in that although he employs a similar pan-continental emphasis, a gazetteer-type format is utilised in an attempt to place Muslims 'dans leur communauté concrète actuelle' (1975a:8). Similarly, dated regional syntheses in French, comparable to those already noted for Trimmingham, also exist, but these are usually more circumscribed in geographical focus or subject (see for example Marty 1917; Chailley et al. 1962; Monteil 1964). The latter study is certainly still of interest in drawing together a number of strands including a history of Islamisation in West Africa imaginatively entitled 'les Fétiches ont Tremblé', and a reference to Shehu Ahmadu's comment on hearing the Bambara guns during the opening of his *jihad* in Masina in 1818 (Fisher and Rowland 1971:220; see chapter 7).

A general observation that can be drawn from comparing Anglophone and Francophone studies of Islam in Africa is, continental syntheses aside, that the regional focus very much reflects spheres of interest and colonial subdivisions. Colonial process is also sometimes manifest much more overtly in the archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa through the interpretations proposed by archaeologists of the colonial period. These are issues which will be reviewed in the following chapters, but as Robertshaw (1990:93) notes in a general context, 'many of the theories that buttressed colonial ideology have been overturned and replaced by models emphasising indigenous innovation and development'. Within Francophone West Africa, for example, the origins of the great 'medieval' empires, which were among the first polities to be exposed to Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, were sought outside Africa. Individuals such as Maurice Delafosse (1922) argued that Ghana was 'founded and ruled by Judeo-Syrians from the fourth to eighth centuries AD' (de Barros 1990:161), and foreign origins were sought, be they of 'Jews, Yemenites, Arabs' (Holl 1990:300). Colonial focus in this region was upon the capitals of the empires, sites that could be tied to Arab texts, and the civilising effects of Islam were promoted. Holl (1996:193) describes how French colonial scholarship served to provide data up the chain of command, allowing those at the top to use this for grand interpretation 'of the historical precedence and superiority of white people over black natives, thus reinforcing their *mission civilisatrice*'.

The excesses of these Delafosse-type interpretations might have been diluted over the subsequent years of colonisation in West Africa, but notions of backward locals and innovative foreigners persisted, frequently tied to a civilising Islamic input. The influential French archaeologist Raymond Mauny (1961:390), for instance, drew parallels between settlements such as Koumbi Saleh, the reputed capital of the empire of Ghana, and the neighbouring trade centre of Tegdaoust, also in Mauritania, and the manner in

which European cities were superimposed next to the medinas of the colonial Maghreb. Consciously or subconsciously, archaeologists of the colonial period were thereby justifying their own presence. Colonisation had occurred before, thus they were only continuing a long tradition. Similar processes are evident elsewhere in the continent – on the East African coast, for example (see chapter 4). In general there was, as Trigger (1989:138) succinctly notes, ‘a significant but complex relationship between archaeology and the colonial setting in which it was practiced in Africa’. But such processes of colonial justification can hardly be said to be unique to the interpretation of Islamic archaeological remains in Africa, or indeed to African archaeology in general. Chakrabarti (1997) has recently reviewed such processes with regard to Indian archaeology, while in a more general context such issues have been examined by Kohl and Fawcett (1995), Stone and Molyneaux (1994) and Pels (1997).

More recently, a wealth of excellent studies of Islam in Africa have been written. These, however, seem to have changed in focus in comparison to earlier works, with emphasis now upon specific subject areas or regions, rather than a pan-continental emphasis. Exceptions are provided by Mervyn Hiskett’s (1994) historical survey of Islam in Africa, which follows a traditional vein of scholarship, and which is drawn upon in the following pages, and the similar but much larger study by Levtzion and Pouwels (2000), which is likewise a useful volume. More characteristic of contemporary scholarship are studies such as Brenner’s (1993c) edited volume looking at Muslim identity in sub-Saharan Africa. Brenner also reviews various relevant contemporary currents in scholarship, where he notes (1993b:12) that, importantly, African Muslims are now organising their own conferences on Islam in Africa such as that held in Abuja (Nigeria) in 1989. These, he argues, are creating a vision of Africa as unified through Islam which will ultimately ‘become increasingly competitive with the other “Africas” which are projected in the African discourse’, the geo-political Africa of pan-Africanists, the Africa of the diaspora, and of ‘Black Africa’ (1993b:17). Again this notion of multiple voices is not unique to scholarship on Islam in Africa, but its recognition shows that scholarship on the subject has come of age.

Such more nuanced approaches are also manifest in other recent studies. Rosander and Westerlund (1997), for example, consider, as the title of their edited collection implies, the concepts of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ within African Islam, encapsulated in the ongoing conflict between the processes of Islamism and popular religious tradition. Conversion processes have also been the focus of some attention, most notably by Nehemia Levtzion (1979a; Levtzion and Fisher 1986), and again by Sanneh (1997), while debate has also been recently initiated over the nature of African Islam. Ross (in press), for instance, has criticised the ‘persistent tendency in the authoritative literature to view Africa as being outside of normative Islam’. What exactly is normative

or orthodox Islam is debatable in itself (and is considered further below), but Ross is right in critiquing the former emphasis in scholarship whereby Africa was not usually 'considered as a contributing source – as an active ingredient – in the construction of Islam', it is seen as passive, 'simply receiving Islam' (in press). These are points already isolated with regard to sentiments expressed by Trimmingham, and Ross is adding a further element to scholarship on Islam in Africa. Diverse themes are also increasingly being explored within recent Francophone scholarship, as exemplified by Coulon's (1983) study of Islam as counter-culture in Africa and its role in power negotiations in society.

Thus far emphasis has been upon studies of Islam in Africa which, if they deal with it at all, only touch upon archaeological evidence. This might seem strange within a study concentrating upon the archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, but it does in fact make sense. Various regional archaeological syntheses of pertinent data exist, either wholly or partly concerned with Islam, but these are reviewed and utilised within the following chapters, and it would be merely repetitious to include such a discussion here. Having said this, it is worthwhile noting that relevant archaeological research did not start until comparatively late in many regions of Africa. This might not be so in Francophone West Africa, for reasons already described, but was certainly true of elsewhere in the continent where emphasis was upon the Stone Age and hominid origins at the expense of Iron Age studies. Reasons for this were various, as Kense records (1990:142), and included the perception that research on the Iron Age might carry political undertones, linking in turn to points already made about colonial approaches. Appropriate archaeological research was therefore, comparatively, a later development, as on the East African coast, where it largely began following the establishment of the British Institute in the region in 1959 (Robertshaw 1990:88). The institute itself has not been immune from criticism, perhaps unfairly, as having a 'European-dominated agenda, colonial setting, European membership' (Schmidt 1996:129). Today, there is cause to be much more positive, as increasingly Iron Age archaeology, including that focusing on Islamic material, is being completed by indigenous scholars pursuing their own research agendas, exemplified by Felix Chami (1998) on the East African coast, Ayele Tarekegn in Ethiopia (1998), or Tèrèba Togola (1996) in the western Sahel.

Yet once initiated, the quantity of relevant archaeological research has similarly varied across the continent. Some areas can be said to have been more privileged than others – the East African coast, for example – while other equally important regions have been almost wholly neglected, such as large areas of the central Sudan. The reasons for this imbalance in archaeological research are many. These include, admittedly as viewed from an overseas perspective, the perceived importance of the region, the visibility of the archaeological remains, the ease of working in a particular area (civil strife, logistics etc.), the

presence of research centres such as the British Institute in Eastern Africa, or the existence of research initiatives such as the Swedish (SAREC) funded Urban Origins in Eastern Africa project, which can facilitate archaeological fieldwork in many ways. Therefore it has to be acknowledged that the apparent lack of archaeological remains in one region need not necessarily mean that the people there were not exposed to Islamic influences, but rather may be a reflection of a lack of archaeological research.

Islam: an introduction

As well as considering the context of scholarship in which this study is placed, it is also necessary to introduce the two main elements with which we are concerned, Islam and African traditional religions, and their corresponding material manifestations; firstly, Islam.

Origins

Briefly summarised, Islam ('submission' to the will of God) originated in the Arabian Peninsula when the Prophet Muhammad (b. c.570; d. 632) began to receive his first revelations from God, via the Angel Gabriel, in about 610. Initially, Muslim converts were few, but by 615, Muhammad could be regarded as the leader of a community (Lapidus 1988:25). This community was established in Mecca (contemporary Saudi Arabia), but owing to difficult conditions there, Muhammad and his followers moved to Medina in 622 (also in Saudi Arabia), in an event known as the *hijrah* or migration, and forming Year One of the Muslim calendar (1 AH, *al-hijrah*). With this move the formal establishment of the Muslim community, *ummah*, can be considered to have taken place. Conflict with the non-Muslim Meccans continued until an armistice was signed in 628, and in 630 the Muslim occupation of Mecca was completed. In 632 the Prophet died in Medina, where he was buried (Lapidus 1988; Waines 1995, Insoll 1999a).

The progress of Islam in its first century was swift; Muslim power in Arabia was rapidly consolidated, and under the successors to Muhammad, the Khalifahs or Rightly Guided Caliphs, the Muslim armies spread into and conquered Palestine, Iraq, Syria, large parts of Iran, and Egypt between 633 and 650. These initial conquests were shortly followed by others under subsequent dynasties; between 674 and 715, a Muslim Central Asian frontier zone was established with the conquest of Transoxania, and by the end of the first quarter of the eighth century, the conquest of the Maghreb (North Africa) and al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) was complete (Lapidus 1988). Thus Islam was established in the Arabian Peninsula across the Red Sea from Africa, north of the Sahara in parts of the Maghreb and in Egypt, all three areas bordering or adjacent to parts of sub-Saharan Africa with which we are concerned.

Teachings, components and obligations

The precepts and principles of the Qur'an, regarded by Muslims as the immutable word of God, form the basis of the Islamic faith. The Qur'an (lit. recitation or reading) was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad via the Angel Gabriel in the form of verses, which are arranged in 114 chapters or *surah*. Second only to the Qur'an as the source of *shari'ah* (Islamic law) are the Prophet's sayings and doings, the *hadith* (traditions), which were transmitted by either, or both, oral and written methods from their original source. Six major collections of *hadith* are recognised by almost all Muslims as genuine. These, in chronological order, were compiled by: al-Bukhari (d. 870); Ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 875); Ibn Maja (d. 887); Abu Dawud (d. 889); al-Tirmidhi (d. 892); and al-Nasa'i (d. 915). Together these form the *sunnah*, the way of the Prophet, which should form the example as to how to lead one's life for all Muslims (Gibb and Kramers 1961). The *shari'ah* is the law of Islam, which by its origins and nature is sacred in character. Besides the Qur'an and *hadith*, the other two main roots of the law are analogy through reasoning, *ijtihad*, and consensus, or *ijma*.

The essential principles of the Islamic faith as contained in the Qur'an and *shari'ah* are the Five Pillars of Islam, which are the requirements for believers. The first is the credo, or *shahadah*, 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God', which is the expression of absolute monotheism. The second is ritual prayer five times a day in the direction of Mecca (*salat*). The third is the fast (*sawm*) in the tenth month of the lunar year, Ramadan. The fourth is *zakat* (alms), that is, giving between 2.5 and 10 per cent of one's wealth to the needy. The fifth is *hajj*, making a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's life if one has the necessary means to achieve this. Within sub-Saharan Africa, often this was not the case, and many alternative pilgrimage centres developed, examples of which will be considered in the following chapters where necessary.

Fortunately, the Five Pillars lend themselves to archaeological recognition and are key criteria to the archaeological recognition of a Muslim community both in general (see Insoll 1999a) and in sub-Saharan Africa. The general categories of evidence which might allow the material recognition of a Muslim community are varied and are described in further detail below. But specifically with regard to the Five Pillars, archaeological evidence indicating their existence could include: for the *shahadah*, inscriptions in many different media; *salat* by the mosque and other places of prayer; alms-giving by inscriptions and through the system of endowments (*waqf*) by pious and wealthy individuals of buildings such as hospitals, mosques, religious schools etc.; *hajj* by pilgrims' hostels, routes, wells, milestones etc. It is only *sawm* that will be unlikely to be recognised archaeologically. Each of these categories of evidence, theoretically at least, should be present in sub-Saharan Africa, and their archaeological visibility is assessed in the following chapters.

Muslim groups in sub-Saharan Africa

Different approaches in interpreting the *shari'ah* led to the emergence of four legal schools – the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali – which are named after the scholar-jurists who founded them, and which were largely consolidated by the tenth century. All the four legal schools are Sunni, meaning the adherents of *sunnah*, and these dominate in Africa south of the Sahara. The four Sunni legal schools differ in how they interpret points of the law, which is the domain of learned men (*ulama*), and administered by the religious judges (*qadi*). But it should be noted that the existence of a class of learned and legal men does not equate with that of a priesthood, which does not exist in Islam (excluding, perhaps, Shi'ah Islam). Even the imam, here meaning the leader of congregational prayer, can be 'any respectable Muslim, sufficiently versed in the technique of *salat*' (Gibb and Kramers 1961:165). Interestingly, a correlation between the school of law present and the geographical diffusion of Islam has been made. To quote Eaton (1993:130), 'in the Islamic World generally, converted populations have tended to adopt the school of law adhered to by the carriers of Islam in their region'. This is of significance for our purposes, and assists in establishing Islamisation processes in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere.

The Shi'ah, numerically the second most dominant group in Islam, developed their own laws, but these differ little from orthodox Sunni law (Schacht 1964:16; Halm 1991). Shi'ism has been defined as 'the general name for a large group of very different Muslim sects, the starting point of all of which is the recognition of Ali as the legitimate caliph after the death of the Prophet' (Gibb and Kramers 1961:534). Essentially, the core Shi'ah beliefs do not diverge substantially from Sunni ones: the Qur'an is central, the Five Pillars are the same; as Akbar Ahmed (1988:57) notes, 'the Sunni ideal also holds for the Shi'ah'. However, it is in the position of the imamate, or religious leadership, that the real difference lies, as in the Shi'ite view, the Caliphate became corrupted through the wrong succession. Ali was the first Imam designated by the Prophet, followed by a line of twelve or seven Imams, depending on tradition. The majority 'Twelvers' believe 'that the Twelfth Imam (last seen in 873) was the *Mahdi* or "guided one" and is still alive, though hidden, waiting for God's instruction to appear and establish the kingdom of God on earth' (Bruce 1995:82; and see Momen 1985). The 'Seveners' stop the line at the seventh Imam, Isma'il, and are thus known as Isma'ilis.

Within sub-Saharan Africa these differences are largely meaningless, as only small numbers of Shi'ah are found in parts of the continent south of the Sahara, with the Isma'ilis of East Africa forming the most important community. This community is almost wholly of Asian origin and is in turn subdivided, with a useful introduction to these Isma'ili groups being provided by Amiji (1969). The Isma'ili Khojas are centralised 'around the person of their living Imam' (Amiji 1969:145), the Aga Khan, and are set apart from other Muslim groups

through some of their practices. For example, *zakat* comes first rather than the more orthodox fourth or fifth in their prioritising of the Five Pillars of Islam. Similarly, they lack mosques in the strict sense of the definition (see below) but have *jamat khanas* (assembly halls) which include a special prayer room containing a portrait of the Aga Khan at one end, and 'the devotees pray squatting on the floor facing the portrait of the Aga Khan' (Amiji 1969:153). They are also set apart by other features of belief and practice. A second important Isma'ili group found in East Africa are the Musta'lian Isma'ilis or Bohras. They have a concealed Imam, who is represented on earth by the Dail Mutlaq, 'the absolute summoner'. The Bohras accept the Five Pillars but, according to Amiji (1969:163), add another: 'ritual cleanliness'.

Many other offshoots of Islam also exist, but are of little relevance in sub-Saharan Africa. An exception, however, is provided by the Kharijites, who are in turn divided into a number of sub-groups, the Nukkarites, Sufrites and Ibadis. The Kharijites have been described as espousing 'intransigent idealism' (Waines 1995:106), and were democratic in outlook, believing that anyone could be elected head of the Muslim community, if they possessed the right qualifications. The Ibadis are the most important for our purposes, surviving to this day in Oman, and in parts of North and East Africa. However, the relevant background history to the Ibadis is provided later where the significance of this movement is considered in its appropriate regional contexts. Similarly, other features of Islam such as Sufism (religious orders, usually of a mystical nature), which are popular in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, are discussed later.

Material manifestations of Islam

It should also be noted that to briefly summarise the material manifestations of Islam, i.e. literally what might signify the former presence of a Muslim or Muslim community in the archaeological record, is difficult to achieve with brevity. Thus for further detail the reader should consult Insoll (1999a), though elements are further expanded upon in the following chapters.

The mosque

A convenient starting point in establishing the archaeology of Islam is provided by the mosque, and the criteria that define a mosque are simple: 'a wall correctly oriented towards the *qiblah*, namely the Black Stone within the Ka'bah in Mecca. No roof, no minimum size, no enclosing walls, no liturgical accessories are required' (Hillenbrand 1994:31). Prayer itself occurs at four levels: individually five times a day; congregationally at noon on Friday; communal (village or town prayer) at festivals; and at the level of the entire Muslim world. Material manifestations of these prayer requirements are: firstly, the prayer rug and a simple *masjid* or prayer hall; secondly, the *jami* or Friday (congregational)

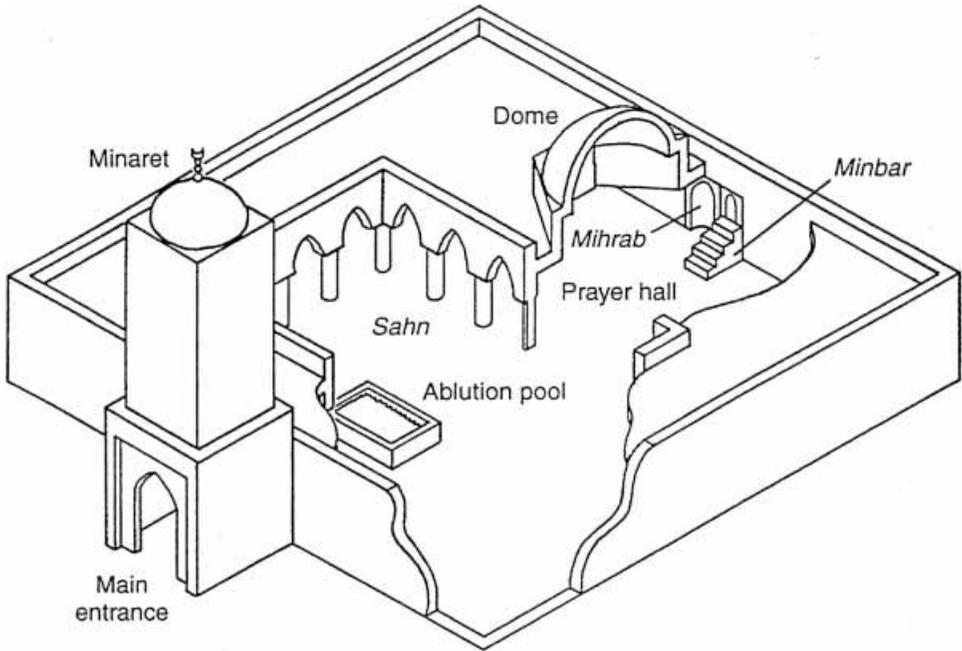


Figure 1.3 Stylised plan of mosque components

mosque; and thirdly, the *musalla* (place of prayer) – a common term, but sometimes used specifically to denote a place of prayer used at festivals. A physical embodiment of the fourth level of prayer does not exist, but pilgrimage to Mecca, or *hajj*, can perhaps be seen as what Dickie terms ‘a congregation of all the Muslims of the World’ (1978:35). The actual act of prayer is also reflected in the form of the mosque, with the rectangular shape of the mosque sanctuary, the *haram*, reflecting the need to pray in rows parallel to the *qiblah*, the wall facing Mecca (figure 1.3).

Various features might be incorporated in a mosque which could aid its archaeological recognition. Primary among these and related to the question of orientation is the physical marker of the direction of prayer, the *mihrab*, an almost universal feature which is built into, or as a salient from, the *qiblah* wall, and forms the focus of the mosque sanctuary. From in front of the *mihrab* the prayers are led by the imam, and although almost always a niche in form, it can be decorated in many ways. Other features include the *minbar*, a flight of sometimes movable steps placed next to the *mihrab*, from which the imam preaches a sermon at Friday prayers. Another is the minaret, which has been called the ‘Symbol of Islam’ (Bloom 1989). It is usually a tower, attached to or near the prayer hall containing a staircase leading to a balcony for the *muezzin* to make the call to prayer. To these could be added an enclosed courtyard (*sahn*) attached to the sanctuary containing an ablutions area. Washing prior to prayer

is obligatory, and thus a fountain, tap or a pot of water should be provided for the use of worshippers. The entrance to the courtyard and thence to the sanctuary could also be of significance, a marker between the sacred and the profane. A number of other features may or may not be present: a screened area for women; a raised and screened enclosure (*maqsurah*) for the ruler or Imam; Qur'an stands and chests; and a *dikka*, a platform formerly used by the *muezzin* to transmit responses to the prayers to the congregation before the advent of loud-speakers (Gibb and Kramers 1961; Kuban 1974; Dickie 1978).

The Muslim burial

The Muslim burial is another primary category of evidence, but one which, because of understandable prohibitions on disturbing such sites, is largely theoretical in importance. Throughout the Muslim world an essentially uniform funerary rite should be employed, and should be straightforward, unostentatious and simple (Hastings 1911:501). This should entail the corpse being washed and perfumed immediately following death, and then being enveloped in the shroud or grave clothes. Burial is rapid, and the stretcher or bier is carried to the place of burial by men, followed by the funeral procession (**figure 1.4**). The corpse is lifted out of the bier and placed in the grave (a coffin is not usually used), the head in the direction of the *qiblah*, so that it lies on its right side with the face toward Mecca (sometimes supported in this position by bricks, or by a narrower grave-shaft). The grave itself should be reasonably shallow to allow the deceased to hear the *muezzin's* call, but also deep enough to allow the corpse to sit up for its interrogation by the angels Munkar and Nakir and thus gain entry to paradise. Only the place where the head of the deceased is laid may be commemorated with a marker stone or piece of wood. However, in reality great variety with regard to grave markers is found, according to the Islamic legal school or sect followed and geographical area (Gibb and Kramers 1961:89–90, 515–17; Hastings 1911:501–2; Dickie 1978:44–6; Simpson 1995:241–2, 244–5). Needless to say, many exceptions to these rites occur. Among the Shi'ah, for example, Rogers (1976:130) records that the corpse was sometimes buried with the feet in the direction of Mecca (and see Insoll 1999a:172–3). However, it is above ground that complications arise, and ideals and reality diverge, for it is the means of commemorating the dead – the funerary monument – that is subject to great variability, and this applies equally to sub-Saharan Africa.

The domestic and community environments

Further possibly important material manifestations of Islam are provided by the traditional domestic (house, tent) and community (settlement) environments. Obviously, the concept of privacy was not invented by Muslims (see



Figure 1.4 Muslim burial stretcher, Kizimkazi mosque, Zanzibar

Insoll 1999a:64), but domestic space is referred to in both the Qur'an and the *hadith*, where the sacrality of the house is indicated, and strict rules to maintain domestic privacy are outlined (see Petherbridge 1978; Campo 1991). The primary and overriding concern is with privacy and the protection and seclusion of women (in certain cultural contexts referred to as *purdah*) and the sanctity of the family. To achieve this, physical space is often segregated into two spheres, be it in two halves of a tent, within a single or double courtyard, or spread over several palatial complexes. The private area is for family life, including the harem or women's quarters, which is the arena for domestic activities and from which all men except immediate male relatives (husbands, sons, brothers) are usually excluded. The second area forms a male-communal sphere usually referred to within the literature as 'public' or 'semi-public', and which can include a reception room or rooms, or area where guests (usually male) are entertained, and possibly separate men's living quarters. Numerous permutations are possible, and many devices can be used to ensure privacy.

Within the traditional courtyard house, the dominant permanent type which might be encountered archaeologically, privacy can be further maintained through a deliberate inward orientation of space. Exterior windows, which are usually few, are above street level, to avoid views inward, and the exterior walls are usually austere and undecorated and entered by a single door; a second (women's) door is sometimes present. Angled entrance-ways are employed to deny the passer-by a view into the interior of the house, and guest rooms are placed close to the entrance so the family quarters are left undisturbed (al-Azzawi 1969). Allied with the social requirements that Muslim domestic architecture might aim to satisfy, cultural and environmental factors must also be considered, and it is perhaps best to define traditional Muslim domestic architecture as a mix of varying local cultural, religious, social and environmental factors. Such concerns are also manifest in structures built both by nomadic pastoralists and sedentary agriculturists in less durable materials. The fact that such people frequently live in shelters constructed of ephemeral materials – cloth, skin or reeds, for example – does not mean that they were excluded from structuring their domestic space according to Islamic custom (see, for example, Feilberg 1944; Faegre 1979; Banning and Köhler-Rollefson 1992).

The Muslim community environment, be it city, town, village, hamlet or camp, also functions in a socially important manner within Muslim life, and can be archaeologically recognisable as such. Certainly the Muslim city has in the past provided a convenient unit of study, and – based upon a limited number of examples, mainly drawn from North Africa and the Near East – wide-ranging generalisations were made as to the overall character of the Muslim city everywhere. These studies were one of the first manifestations of the Orientalist approach, whereby the structure of the city was defined in terms of religious requirements (and often linked with the erroneous assertion that Islam can only

flourish in an urban environment, as exemplified by a point made by Levtzion, 'because it is in the urban milieu that one can fully practice the Muslim way of life' (1979c:15)), and a similar form was said to exist from Morocco to Indonesia. This process of the creation of a stereotypical Muslim city has been examined by a number of scholars (Bonine 1977; Abu-Lughod 1987; Haneda and Miura 1994). The stereotype which was created comprised a standard kit of elements, such as the *medinah*, or central urban entity, within which was the *casbah* or walled citadel, a city within the city containing the ruler's residence, mosque, barracks, stores etc. The *medinah* would be walled with several gates, and perhaps surrounded by *rabad* or *rabat* – outer suburbs. The inhabitants lived in distinct quarters according to ethnic or economic background in groups of courtyard houses connected by winding alleyways and narrow streets, supposedly characteristic of the 'oriental' or Islamic city. The *medinah* would also contain a number of core elements: the Friday mosque, other local mosques, *suq* or *suqs* (markets) arranged spatially according to the goods sold, baths, hostels for travellers, schools, shops, cemeteries perhaps (usually outside the city), and all the other prerequisites of urban life.

Although such a checklist-type approach does not work in identifying a Muslim settlement, it is possible to identify a Muslim settlement archaeologically. However, by no means can the aforementioned suite of traits be expected to be encountered everywhere (if anything, questions of scale will rule this out, as a village will obviously not have all the facilities of the city). Secondly, some of these features are very rare in sub-Saharan Africa – *hammams* (baths), for example, though prevalent in North Africa, are absent in the western Sahel, and in most of the other regions discussed. Which components are present and how they are manifest will vary, as will the structuring principles behind both the development and form of the Muslim settlement, and even within Africa south of the Sahara great diversity is evident in the form of the Muslim settlement.

Diet

Muslim diet should also be structured by religious law, and in theory this should also provide another category of evidence which might indicate the existence of a Muslim community archaeologically. Issues of non-observance must be acknowledged, and differences between the Islamic schools of law recognised, but in general terms a number of binding rules exist. Three categories of food exist: *halal*, that which is lawful; *haram*, that which is prohibited; and *makruh*, that which is reprehensible, but which is not subject to the degree of prohibition as *haram*. Alcohol, spilt blood, pork, dogs, excrement, carrion and the milk of animals whose flesh is not eaten are forbidden, and a complex body of laws regulates in great detail which food is considered lawful and when