

Adrien Delmas

Writing in Africa: The *Kilwa Chronicle* and other Sixteenth-Century Portuguese Testimonies

Abstract: Based on the study of the encounter between the Portuguese and the Swahili in the sixteenth century, and on the analysis of the *Kilwa Chronicle* that resulted from it, this chapter questions the notion of ‘textual contact’. Rediscovering the way in which a text presenting the five hundred years genealogy of the kings of Kilwa could have been printed in Portuguese in João de Barros’s *Decades* in Lisbon, in 1552, is not a simple matter. While the why of the chronicle, for which there are several political reasons arising from Kilwa’s occupation in 1505, is obvious, the how of the chronicle is much less so. Through a systematic study of the two written versions of the text at our disposal, the *Crónica* and the *Kitāb*, we will show that the existence of an original manuscript which, as is generally presumed, would have been found by the Portuguese on their arrival and would have travelled up to the mouth of the Tagus, raises strong doubts. These doubts could be answered more convincingly through an alternative hypothesis, according to which the chronicle was ‘co-written’ in the sixteenth century, as a result of the encounter. In addition to the study of the conditions under which the *Kilwa Chronicle* was circulated in the sixteenth century, this article would like to illustrate the fact that it is impossible to express a view on the circulation of genres – and in this case of historiographic genres transiting between the Muslim world and Europe on the eve of its maritime expansion – independently of the circulation of texts embodying these genres.

1 Hiding texts

As is well known, Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the end of 1497 and reached Mozambique a few weeks later, on the 2nd of March 1498. Almost one century later, da Gama’s famous biographer, Luís de Camões, related the encounter on the Mozambican coast in his thirty-thousand-verse epic poem on the European intrusion in the Indian Ocean, *Os Lusíadas*:

[The Sultan of Mozambique] repeats [to the Portuguese] that he wishes to see the books containing their Law, Precept or Faith, to see whether they are in keeping with his own, and

whether these men are Christians, as he believes they are. [Vasco da Gama replied as follows:] I did not take with me the books of this powerful and infinite Man-God, as you request, for it is not necessary to carry on paper what must always be in the soul.¹

According to the poet, the discussions between Vasco da Gama and the inhabitants of South-East Africa took place in Arabic, and rapidly turned to the issue of writing and, more specifically, the Scriptures. Mutual recognition by respectively presenting sacred texts should not come as a surprise. For the Portuguese, the idea was to find Christian allies in their endeavour to circumvent Islam, and this ceremonial exchange was repeated along the East African coast, in Mombasa and Malindi, as well as on the way back in Mogadiscio and Kilwa, but also in other places in Africa and the Indian Ocean.² For the Africans, the need to identify newcomers was obvious, and while they were hoping to size up their strength by the sound of their cannons, it was through their writings that they intended to find out their intentions. But the Portuguese hastened to hide the Bible. Similarly, they celebrated Mass on a small neighbouring island, hidden from view, which again made their hosts suspicious. Nevertheless, the fact remains that before any dissimulation or recognition could take place as far as religions were concerned, men of letters were easily recognised, and the response given by da Gama, as theological as it might have sounded, did not convince anyone.

Above all, this anecdote illustrates the importance taken on by writing during this encounter between Europe and East Africa, the first of many of its kind around the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese were immediately involved in a scriptural relationship with their interlocutors. Within this relationship, there was no imposition, diffusionism or appropriation. On the contrary, with this unfortunate attempt at dissimulating their religion that day, the Europeans who had just disembarked from their caravels, were the 'illiterate' ones. Writing was even moving in the opposite direction: da Gama also reported seeing books where they landed, most likely Qurans.³ As such, this anecdote from South-East Africa appears as the perfect refutation of the generally admitted view that an encounter took place at the dawn of our modernity, between a written European culture and an oral African culture, between a literate continent and an illiterate one. Yet, is an additional refutation really necessary? The time has passed for the refutation of the dominant paradigm that has for too long contrasted a written culture with an oral one, when Europe met Africa at a time when navigation expanded to oceans. The topos of the refutation, still omnipresent in the literature about writing in Africa,

1 Camões 2013, 28–29. See Subrahmanyam 1997, 113.

2 Subrahmanyam 1997, 117.

3 Subrahmanyam 1997, 115.

goes hand in hand with the myth of African orality, almost as a continuity or extension of it. Everything happens as if each ancient or contemporary expression of written culture in Africa, characterised by exceptionalism, seemed sufficient to satisfy the scientific community.⁴ If it must be refuted, it is because the myth is still very much alive.⁵

The repetition of refutations is no longer appropriate for the study of the different 'scriptural situations' across the continent, in all their singularities and complexities; in fact, it is even counter-productive. Opening the concept of writing to realities other than the alphabet,⁶ understanding better the consequences of literacy from an anthropological point of view⁷ or studying the ways European written culture was appropriated⁸, all represent significant advances of the field during the last few years. But what about the accumulation of our knowledge on written cultures in sub-Saharan Africa before the arrival of the Europeans? Rather than being satisfied with the slightest counter-example, before thinking about new theoretical detours, it seems urgent today that we start accumulating testimonies of a poorly documented reality – i.e. the situation of written culture in Africa at the beginning of the first modernity.

2 Paintings and other scripts

To this end, as early as the first half of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese peregrinations around the African continent, aimed at reaching the Indies directly, as tangential and external to African societies as they were,⁹ offer many invaluable insights. In fact, following up on Portuguese caravels in their circumnavigations makes it possible, on the one hand, to illustrate up to a certain point the multiplicity of scriptural situations in fifteenth-century Africa and, on the other, to read the terms of ongoing debates on writing in Africa. In their rock painting records from Congo in the sixteenth century, the issue of autochthonous writing, which still fills many a page on writing in Africa,¹⁰ was raised straight away.

4 The most striking example of this has certainly been Timbuktu, truly symbolic of the never-ending discovery and rediscovery of writing in Africa. See Triaud 2009.

5 See Ficquet/Mbodj-Pouye 2009.

6 Derrida 1967.

7 This issue has been studied extensively by Jack Goody. Goody 1978, 1994, 2007.

8 See Madeira Santos/Tavares 2002.

9 See Hirsch/Potin 2009.

10 See Le Quellec 2012.

Father Diego del Santissimo Sacramento, a Carmelite missionary who stayed in Mbanza Kongo from 1584 to 1587, mentions rock art in his history. By no means does he seem ready to ascribe this art to African origin:

Since this kingdom's conversion to Christianity, we suppose (I was told this with certainty) that an Apostle came through here during the time of evangelisation. We think it was Saint Thomas who left texts on a stone and no one knew how to translate them because they were traditionally written in Hebrew.¹¹

A few decades before such a significant view, the issue of autochthonous African writing was explicitly raised by Leo Africanus, when he mentioned in his *Description of Africa* in 1550 that 'African writer Ibnu Rachich dealt with this question at length in his chronicle, i.e. whether or not Africans had their own writing, and concluded that they had it by advancing that whoever thinks the contrary must also deny that Africans had their own language.'¹² While this argument, which deliberately confuses language and writing, can appear unusual, the fact remains that such a concern had already been raised as early as the end of the fifteenth century. This was also the case for the concern for orality, defined from the outset in contrast with writing. Before acquiring the heuristic validity acknowledged today, the Portuguese missionaries questioned the validity of the genealogic accounts described centuries later by Jan Vansina as 'oral traditions':¹³

One should not expect to find anything certain on the origin of that state and from the Princes who ruled it, before navigation revealed this country to the Europeans. Everything that the Congolese relate before that term is far from certain and appears to be a long fable, badly woven and poorly invented.¹⁴

In fact, Portuguese sources not only raise doubts as far as autochthonous writing and orality in Africa are concerned – the two poles that have shaped the debates on writing in Africa since the fifteenth century – they also offer precise indications on the extent of African libraries, although these should be taken with a pinch of salt. As an example, consider the exaggerations of Luis de Urreta, who marvels at the library of Prester John in Ethiopia:

¹¹ He thus remained unable to consider these signs as something other than the trace of an external and former presence: 'Therefore I say that what the apostle sowed at the time is proof that Congo knew Christ for around 110 years.' Santissimo Sacramento 1583, fol. 24.

¹² L'Africain 1981, 49.

¹³ Vansina 1961; Vansina 1985; Perrot 1989; Hofmeyr 1994; Barber 2006.

¹⁴ Cavazzi 1687.

These beautiful libraries and all the famous ones [he said while talking about the libraries of Alexandria, Rome or Constantinople], are in no way comparable and would lose fame and glory were they to be compared with the library which the Prester John had in the monastery of Santa Cruz del Monte Amara; because it holds so many books that they cannot be counted.¹⁵

The enthusiasm of Luis de Urreta certainly stemmed from the political will of the time to make of Christian Ethiopia a strategic ally.¹⁶ Nonetheless, it is still an invaluable testimony, reminding us about the persistence of the specificity of Ethiopianist studies which, to date, are generally classified as part of the Orientalist, and not Africanist, field of study.¹⁷ On a different ground, it is hardly necessary to say, since the Portuguese and the missionaries accompanying them were behind this phenomenon, that the Portuguese sources can also inform us on the extent to which the Latin alphabet had penetrated sub-Saharan Africa before the systematic colonialist movement of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ The Congolese example is a particularly significant one, in which, barely a few years after the 1482 contact, writing found its place in all social domains: the elites, and the sons of King Alfonso in particular, were sent to Lisbon to learn how to read and write; language was fixed in the Latin alphabet for evangelisation purposes in particular; correspondence between the kingdom and Portugal, as well as between the local provinces, increased so much that they developed into the first archives; and written passes began to regulate the flow of goods and people soon after Portuguese irruption.¹⁹

Portuguese sources also give us unique information about another alphabet reaching Africa, an alphabet they had experienced over several centuries already, namely, the Arabic alphabet.²⁰ This was the case in North Africa, with the conquest of Ceuta in 1415, which usually marks the starting point of Lusitanian overseas expansion. It was also the case in West Africa; after rounding Cape Bojador in 1434, the Portuguese had no difficulty in recognising the alphabet of their archenemies. The roots of their antagonistic relationship with Arabic writing stemmed from the Muslim presence in the Iberian peninsula,²¹ although one

15 Urreta 1610, Chapter VIII.

16 Pennec 2003.

17 This argument can be found with Ficquet/Mbodj-Pouye 2009.

18 For a case study, see Madeira Santos 2002; Goody 1978; Delmas/Penn 2012.

19 Hilton 1985, 79; Balandier 2013; Randles 1968.

20 Hunwick/ O'Fahey 1994–2002; Moraes Farias 2003; Krätli/ Lydon 2011. Concerning East Africa, the literature is far more restricted and concerns more recent periods, see Bang 2011.

21 See Monroe 1970.

should at once recall that such antagonism also marks a certain closeness, familiarity and even skill with the language and alphabet of the Quran.²² It is in fact this familiarity that enabled them to enter the linguistic complexity of the Indian Ocean, and, before that, to communicate on African shores.²³ This linguistic familiarity with Arabic is clearly found in West Africa, where the first early modern trans-oceanic contacts took place. While the coast slowly revealed its secrets, the interior was widely fantasised about, as confirmed by the fact that the Portuguese, at the end of the fifteenth century, confused the Niger River with the Nile, for example, and were unable to locate Timbuktu. Yet, there was no need to go to this capital city, where many scholarly writing practices converged at the time (and where Europe continued to fantasise about a ‘written Africa’), in order to testify to the ancient presence of writings at the coast. Valentim Fernandes, for example, a printer of German origin based in Lisbon and a collector of travelogues, mentioned at the end of the fifteenth century that in ‘Gyloffa’ (the Jolof Kingdom of Senegal),

The king and all the nobles and lords of the Province of Gyloffa are Muslims and have white *bischerijs* [marabout] who are priests and who preach Mohammed and know how to read and write. These *bischerijs* come from a long way in the interior, for example, from the kingdoms of Fez and Morocco, and they come to convert the blacks to their faith by their preaching. These *bischerijs* make amulets written in Arabic and the blacks hang them around their necks and also those of their horses.²⁴

Because of its earliness, this quotation testifies to the antiquity of certain writing practices, the Quranic slate in particular, which is discussed at length in this book. As to the way the slate was perceived by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, it seems to forecast the amulet paradigm that Europe applied to Muslim Africa from the nineteenth century onwards and sometimes up to today – a simplistic paradigm whereby everything written in Africa is perceived as relating to magic.²⁵ As recalled by Leo Africanus in the sixteenth century, again relying on Ibnu Rachich, ‘it has been 900 years since Africans use Arabic characters’, before

²² Kennedy 1996; Borges 2008.

²³ This is what is related by Gomes Eanes de Zurara, for example, in the famous *Chronicle of Guinea*. Zurara 2011, 113.

²⁴ And it continues as follows: ‘When the Christians bring the horses which a great lord has bought or which he intends to buy, he brings one of the *bischerijs* with him who, before the horse is handed over, writes his blessings on a tablet of wood. He then takes a wooden basin full of water and washes the letters off the tablet and then gives the water to the horse to drink. After this the lord leads him away’. Newitt 2010, 76.

²⁵ Often called ‘Black Islam’. See Hamès 2007.

concluding, ‘it is hardly surprising that African letters have disappeared’.²⁶ The link between autochthonous writing and the Arabic alphabet penetrating sub-Saharan Africa was already complete.

Autochthonous writings and explanations for their disappearance, doubts on the heuristic values of oral narratives, orientalist frenzies, talismanic readings and appropriation of foreign alphabets: these are avenues that make it possible to go beyond the sterile opposition between written and oral cultures. All these processes can be documented and historicised thanks to Portuguese sources. In this article, rather than following one of those avenues, we will propose a new one: encounter as the actual place for the irruption of writing, what we call the scriptural paradigm of encounters. Not only are encounters valuable testimonies, evidence-like almost, of the historical situation of the cultures involved,²⁷ as in the case of the encounter between Portuguese and Africans in the sixteenth century, they also generate writings of their own. To forge such a ‘third’ paradigm, which attempts to move away as much from the myth of the encounter between writing and orality as from its blind refutations, we will reconsider the encounter between Portuguese and Swahili on the East African coast, and more particularly the *Kilwa Chronicle*, which, in its written version at least, was most likely the fruit of this encounter.

3 Scriptural encounter

On the Swahili coast, once they had rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1497, the Lusitanians immediately became aware of the fact that they were making contact with a literate society. Many elements, such as architecture, clothing or, particularly, language, referred them back – with dread – to their ancient enemies the ‘Moors’ (they actually used this term to designate the residents of Southeast Africa, a term that marks par excellence that ‘strange familiarity’ evoked earlier on). One of the first preoccupations of the Portuguese, as mentioned by Camões, was to search for religious texts, whether to finally convince themselves about the dominant religion on the coast, or to identify – in vain – Christian allies. More than the quest for Scriptures, the use of writing from their very first meeting is still the best proof that the Portuguese were aware of the literacy of their new interlocutors. This is reflected in the fact that, for example, they immediately wanted to sign a treaty,

²⁶ L’Africain 1981.

²⁷ Bertrand 2011.

as unequal as it was, thereby showing that the co-signatories were aware of each other's sovereignty and of its scriptural nature. Also, during Vasco da Gama's second trip in 1502, 'he at once sent his scribe from the shore, with a leaf of gold, upon which all was written down, and signed by the King.'²⁸

The most direct element in this scriptural encounter is still the fact that both sides used letters to perform the first exchanges. Whether Vasco da Gama (1498, then 1502), Pedro Alvares Cabral (1500) or Francisco d'Almeida (1505), all used this medium. When he arrived in Kilwa in 1505, d'Almeida handed over to the Sultan 'a gift and a letter, of which one section was written in Arabic, the other in Portuguese.'²⁹

Not only did the Portuguese have interpreters at their disposal, they also had proper translators who could handle both alphabets. While a few mistranslations might have taken place now and then,³⁰ these written exchanges helped avoid the physical encounters that were feared by both sides. Negotiations on whether meetings should take place on board the ship, in the Sultan's palace or on the beach, were endless. More so, the written correspondence made it possible to put not only the ship and the coast in direct contact, but also the two monarchies – despite the fact that the Portuguese King was thousands of kilometres away.³¹ Nevertheless, writing rapidly reached its limits as a peace intermediary. When it became clear 'that this could not be settled by letter',³² it meant that open conflict, which characterised this early sixteenth-century encounter, was not far away. And while in the context of generalised distrust, writing on paper remained a mark of honesty,³³ the desire of the Portuguese to take over the commercial network of East Africa meant that this encounter would soon turn into armed conflict. Since Vasco da Gama's first trip, assassinations and hostage-taking were routine practice, although in 1505 the conflict assumed a larger scale. Acting on

28 Freeman-Grenville 1962, 70. 'He instructed them to say that they were the ships of the king of Portugal, and that they came there from him to make a treaty' (60). More generally, on treaties, see Biker 1983. For a review of the literature on these treaties, see McKenzie 1985 and Delmas/Penn 2012.

29 Freeman-Grenville 1962, 62.

30 For a discussion on these texts in the Portuguese archives, see Aubin 2000. For Mozambique, see *Documentos* 1962.

31 'He carried my letters and messages for its king, to establish peace with him, and a treaty concerning purchases and trade at the said mine.' Freeman-Grenville 1962, 64. Correspondence as a tool for governing remotely is discussed by Delmas 2013, 157–184.

32 Freeman-Grenville 1962, 67.

33 '[Capitain major] should send him [King of Kilwa] a signed paper, affirmed upon the head of the King of Portugal, to the effect that he would do him no harm, nor use constraint, and would allow him to return to land freely.' Freeman-Grenville 1962, 67.

instructions from Lisbon, the Viceroy of the Indies, Francisco d’Almeida, organised the sacking of Kilwa, thereby initiating a difficult occupation that lasted until 1512 but was never really completed. It was a short yet no less devastating occupation of a city that, up to that point, had dominated the East African coast, from Mogadiscio to Sofala. Kilwa had traded with the entire Indian Ocean region, and its economic and cultural influence reached far into the African hinterland.³⁴

The humiliating Portuguese occupation is related in the *Kilwa Chronicle*. While correspondence and treaties are found in other African contexts (in the majority of them, in fact), and describe the *modus operandi* of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the salient element of the Lusitano-Swahili encounter is that we have written testimonies of the respective views of this conflict. And the gap between the two views of the same event is considerable, as shown by the Swahili narrative of the arrival of the Portuguese:

They had three ships, and the name of their captain was al-Mirati [Vasco da Gama]. The Lord of Mafia rejoiced, for they thought [the Franks] were good and honest men. But those who knew the truth confirmed that they were corrupt and dishonest persons who had only come to spy out the land in order to seize it.³⁵

4 Variations

The Portuguese sought to know ever more about the outrageous prosperity of Kilwa, a city they simply had to admire.³⁶ They did so in order to break the commercial circuits established by Kilwa between Africa and the Indian Ocean, wherever they could not turn them to their own advantage. Learning about its history was the key. While the readings of that very first encounter are unavoidably different, both Portuguese and Swahili, by the sixteenth century, seem to agree on the history preceding the Portuguese irruption on the East African coast, the ancient history of the island, the history of its ‘foundation’ and ‘its kings’:³⁷

³⁴ For a comprehensive study of the commercial role played by Kilwa in the distribution of goods throughout the Indian Ocean, see Beaujard 2012, 287–320.

³⁵ Freeman-Grenville 1962, 48.

³⁶ ‘There are many vaulted mosques, one of which is like that of Cordova’ (Freeman-Grenville 1962, 108).

³⁷ For the Portuguese version, we use Barros 1932, 308 sq. The first modern version is by McCall Theal 1898–1903, 233–244.

The reason for their leaving Shiraz in Persia was their Sultan one day dreamed a dream. He was called Hasan Ibn Ali: he was the father of these six men and the seventh of those who left.³⁸

And so begins the *Kilwa Chronicle*, that long genealogical story of the kings of Kilwa, from the foundation of the city by Persians from Shiraz in the tenth century until the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Following a dream about the fall of his kingdom, Ali, the Sultan of Shiraz, or son of the Sultan, sailed with his six sons to found a new state. Hugging the East African coast, he stopped on the island of Kilwa, which is very close to the coast, and which he supposedly bought by paying with colourful clothes that were in such quantities that, sleeve to sleeve, they could circle the island. If today, the Shirazi origin of the Swahili is the subject of major debate,³⁹ nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Portuguese in the sixteenth century took this origin at face value. Indeed, we have at our disposal two versions of the said Chronicle: the Portuguese version, which appeared in the first of the famous *Decades* by João de Barros in 1552,⁴⁰ and the Arabic version, linguistically as well as alphabetically, referred to as the *Kitāb al-Sulwa*. Although the two *Kilwa Chronicles* offer two diametrically opposed readings of the sixteenth-century conflict, they match almost perfectly where the genealogy of the ancient Kings of Kilwa is concerned. The chronicles relate the successes and defeats of the descendants of Ali, how the latter were credited with the development and beautification of the city, how Kilwa's sovereignty was extended to neighbouring islands, how a fisherman unexpectedly discovered Sofala and its lucrative gold trade, how the Shirazi dynasty was replaced by the Mahdali dynasty in the thirteenth century, as well as the endless succession conflicts that followed until the fifteenth century.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the *Chronicle* and the *Kitāb* differ on more than one occasion. To begin with, the two stories do not agree on Ali's rank before he left Persia. In Barros's words:

38 For the Arabic version, we use the Omani version *Juḥayna: al-akhbār fi tārikh zanjibā*, and Freeman-Grenville's translation (correct most of the time). The first modern edition was completed by Strong 1985, 383–430.

39 Briefly, nineteenth-century colonial historiography tended to take the Shirazi genealogy of the Swahili at face value, a bit like the Portuguese had done in the sixteenth century. As a reaction, an important revision was carried out after Independence and consisted in uncovering anthropological or cultural features that made the Swahili descendants of Africans, and not of an external civilisation. See Pouwels 1984; Allen 1982; Horton 2000; Spear 1984; Middleton 1992. Of note also are the archaeological works of Chittick who questioned written sources in the light of the material evidence, Chittick 1974.

40 The original text is Barros 1552–1553.

41 The most complete work on this genealogy to date is that of Saad 1979.

According to what we learn from a chronicle of the kings of this town, [...] [The Sultan of Shiraz], at his death, left seven sons. One, named Ali, was held in little esteem by his brothers, as his mother was a slave of the Abyssinian race, and their mother was of noble lineage of Persia. As this son was a man who made up in personal qualifications and prudence for what he lacked in lineage, to avoid the insults and ill-treatment of his brothers, he set out in search of a new country where he might perchance enjoy greater fortune than among his own people.⁴²

According to Barros, Ali supposedly packed up and left with a view to founding a kingdom to which he could not lay claim back home, due to his maternal lineage that, in Asia, was felt to be marked by its origins in African slavery. The Arabic version seems to contradict this assertion when, after relating Ali's departure in greater detail, it announces that:

This is based on strong evidence, that they were kings in their own country, and is a refutation of those who deny it. God knows all the truth!⁴³

Another important variant – and at this stage I would like to apologise for mobilising this philological vocabulary, these variants being so flagrant – concerns the other end of the genealogical tree structuring the story. It concerns the legitimacy of the monarch in power when the Portuguese arrived. As such, the Portuguese version intends to show that Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān (or Abraham, i.e. 'Habraemo' for the Portuguese), the monarch on the throne when the Lusitanians arrived, was a usurper, a 'tyrāno', and that his forced exile on the continent was greatly justified. Ibrahim's exclusion from any kinship ties with the royal family also helped the Portuguese justify their opting to crown a puppet monarch, Rukn al-Dīn, known to them as Mohamed Ancony ('Mahamd Anconij'), who had been co-operating since Cabral's trip in 1500. He was then rewarded with a forced enthronement five years later,

Dom Francisco received [Mohamed Ancony] most kindly, raised him in his arms, and began to console him, telling him not to be alarmed, as a loyal man like himself should have no fear, but had only to expect favours and honours, and that the title of King of Kilwa which he wished to bestow upon him in the name of the King his Lord would be the first honour.⁴⁴

One can see right through it: the narrative strategy of the Portuguese consisted in placing the story of the imperial conquest of Kilwa in the continuity of the ancient history of the island's sovereignty. In fact, such a strategy had been applied prior

⁴² Freeman-Grenville 1962, 89.

⁴³ Freeman-Grenville 1962, 36.

⁴⁴ Freeman-Grenville 1962, 94.

to the printing of the chronicle. The narrative genius of Barros, who included the story of the Portuguese intrusion into local history, is quite evidently the continuation (or complement) of the political genius of Almeida who, once he was on site in 1505, also called upon genealogy to legitimate the conquest.⁴⁵ During the coronation ceremony, which took place in both languages, with ‘an interpreter repeating his proclamation in Arabic’,⁴⁶ he had promptly inscribed the new Portuguese sovereignty into a long history:⁴⁷

Dom Francisco d’Almeida, although he had not such detailed information on the succession of these kings as we have related, nevertheless learned from Mohamed Ancony that the people were not satisfied with the said Abraham, and how much they all desired to raise to the throne a king nearer the royal line.⁴⁸

The aforementioned Mohamed Ancony did not last long. He was assassinated the following year. The Portuguese then insisted that his son should take the throne, to no avail: his sovereignty was not accepted and the trade that had brought so much wealth to Kilwa did not pick up again. They had to face the fact that genealogical tampering was not easy. Ibrahim’s nephew, closer to the royal lineage, was then enthroned in 1506. In the end, Ibrahim himself, at eighty-four years of age, was thrilled to re-ascend the throne after the Portuguese left in 1512. This restoration after the Portuguese interlude is related in the *Kitāb*, in the last three chapters to be exact, which are unfortunately missing, and which are otherwise mentioned in the table of contents.

The why of these variants, i.e. the diametrically opposed views on the Portuguese irruption, or the disagreements about the legitimate heir to the throne, is easily explained: in either case, we are dealing with political writing, and where

45 This manipulation of genealogy in a context of conquest is reminiscent of many other cases, particularly in the Americas where the Spaniards looked for Inca and Aztec monarchs. See Bradshaw 1993. Otherwise, for a critical review of the status of genealogy in early modern Europe, see Bizzocchi 2010.

46 Freeman-Grenville 1962, 94.

47 ‘To this place all the principal Moors of the town came, summoned by a proclamation that Dom Francisco had caused to be published, and when they were assembled an officer proclaimed in a loud voice in Portuguese – an interpreter repeating his proclamation in Arabic – the different motives of their meeting, the treachery of Abraham, who had been governor of the town, in taking up arms against the king his lord, which treachery had been the cause of his losing the government of the town [and he] delivered it over, with the title of king, to the honourable and loyal Mohamed Ancony.’ Freeman-Grenville 1962, 94–95.

48 Freeman-Grenville 1962, 93.

the genealogy dates as far back as possible it only serves to legitimate contradictory views on the sovereignty of the island and the region in the sixteenth century. If explaining the why of the chronicle is not so difficult, the how is not so obvious: how can it be that the same chronicle has two versions that, while differing at the extremities, match in content in most of the text? How could one have been printed in Lisbon in 1552, while the other, handwritten in Arabic went from the archives of the Sultan of Zanzibar to the British Museum in the nineteenth century? Should we believe that, as has been implied to date, there is an original version of the *Kilwa Chronicle*?⁴⁹

5 Co-writing

João de Barros was quite evidently the most important contemporary chronicler of Portuguese maritime expansion, so much so that he is perceived today as the true ideologist of Lusitanian imperialism. In his attempt to portray this overseas undertaking, he not only produced the most accomplished theoretical and legal texts, but he also brought together every move of the expansion in his famous *Decades*. After Barros's death in 1570, this patient work was resumed by Diogo do Couto in Goa, not Lisbon, which his predecessor had never left.⁵⁰ Barros had been appointed *Feitor da Casa da Índia* in 1532, a position that enabled him to draw on many sources while writing his *Decades of Asia*. Somehow, he became the Crown's official historiographer. At *Casa da Índia*, he had access to the official correspondence with Portugal's possessions in Asia, to cartographic and administrative information, to written stories as well as stories that were reported verbally by all sorts of travellers, captains and other survivors of Portuguese peregrinations. From Lisbon, he could also use written sources gathered by travellers throughout the Indian Ocean and brought back to Europe. Such philological appropriation is found throughout the *Decades*. For instance, before embarking on

49 Quoting all the works in which the *Kilwa Chronicle* is taken to be sufficient evidence for the existence of a written tradition on the East African coast prior to the European irruption, or even as evidence of a local historiographical tradition, would take too long. Freeman-Grenville considers for example that we are dealing with two summaries of the same text: 'the following passage [of Barros's *Asia*] includes a brief summary of a Chronicle of the Kings of Kilwa. Another summary, based upon the same source as that of de Barros, is to be found in an apparently unique Arabic manuscript in the British Museum, Or. 2666.' Freeman-Grenville 1962, 80.

50 We still lack a comprehensive biography of Barros. See however Banha de Andrade 1980; Boxer 1980 and Subrahmanyam 2005a.

the story of the Muslim penetration of India, he specified that, ‘in this account that we have made, since we have had all the chronicles and they were translated for us, we will now follow the version of the Moors’.⁵¹

Better still, in the introduction, he specified that he elaborated his work by ‘following what the Persian and Arabs [wrote] in their Tarigh’.⁵² The way Barros used material from all over the world led some historians, such as Charles Boxer, to make of him the ‘father of Orientalism’.⁵³ Even if he explicitly criticised this laudatory designation, Sanjay Subrahmanyam has made Barros the champion, or at least the missing link, of another tradition, that of ‘global history’ or ‘xenologic writing’, and this because of the books that travelled from far away to the shelves of his library:

While Barros’ collection did not reach us, we know that he succeeded in laying his hands on texts in Chinese, Arabic, Swahili, Persian and Kannada.⁵⁴

Given that the *Kilwa Chronicle* was an Arabic text in language and alphabet, Subrahmanyam’s appellation, ‘a text in Swahili’, seems out of place to say the least.⁵⁵ But in Subrahmanyam’s defence, while Barros explicitly refers to some non-European texts brought to him, he tells us nothing or almost nothing about the *Kilwa Chronicle*, save for what he wrote in the second chapter of the second book: ‘according to what we learn from a chronicle of the kings of this town’. How

51 ‘Of the site of the city of Ormuz, situated on the island of Gerum; and on its foundation, and the kings it had since it was founded until the year 1507 when Alfonso de Albuquerque arrived here’ or still further in the same chapter on ‘how the moors made themselves lords of the Decan Kingdom and the state of Goa’. On that occasion he explained that ‘[t]here is considerable divergence on the [matter of] the entry of the Moors by arms into India, between the Gentiles and them, particularly in regard of the concordance of dates; because the Moors of the Gujarat kingdom write of it in one way, those of Deccan kingdom in another, and the chronicles of the Gentiles kings of Bisnaga take another route [...] And in this account that we have made, since we have had all the chronicles and they were translated for us, we will follow the version now of the Moors [...] because they conform closely in the matter of the dates with the General Chronicles of the Persians, which is the Tarigh of which we made mention in the beginning, which we possess together with other volumes of history and Persians cosmography from those parts’. Barros 1932, 48 (Chapter 2 of the Second Book of the Second *Decade*).

52 Barros 1932, I, 5, 8.

53 Boxer 1980, 119.

54 Subrahmanyam 2014, 45. Subrahmanyam certainly understands Swahili at the linguistic level, which does not justify his mistake, if nothing in the chronicle is borrowed from the Swahili language.

55 We do not know of any text in Swahili from this period. The earliest Swahili ‘*ajamī*’ dates to seventeenth century. My acknowledgement to D. Bondarev for this information.

did this chronicle end up on his desk in Lisbon, in which language was it and in which format, if indeed it ever really fell into his hands?⁵⁶ There is that second mention also, already noted, in which Barros says that he knows a bit more than d'Almeida about the ancient genealogy of Kilwa,⁵⁷ although here again nothing confirms the presence of a text brought back from Africa.

Before returning to this theme, let us look at the scriptural situation in Kilwa at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese. The inscriptions and coins excavated by archaeologists can reassure us on that score,⁵⁸ inasmuch as very few of the many observations made by travellers concern manuscripts. On their arrival, the Portuguese who were staggered by the beauty of the decorations and inscriptions did not notice a single library or mention any specific manuscript. Before them, Arabic testimonies, such as that of Ibn Battuta who also marvelled at the beauty of the place, do not at any time mention writing practices.⁵⁹ While the absence of evidence is not proof, we still presume that, as a Muslim society, Kilwa did possess the Quran of course, some *hadiths* most certainly, as well as some works of *tafsīr* and the juridical literature, or *fiqh*. Some say that climatic conditions are almost certainly behind the fact that, today, we have no trace of these ancient books in East Africa, unlike in other Islamized regions of Africa.⁶⁰ There is nothing or almost nothing regarding writing at this time, save for the well-known anecdote, at the very beginning of the Muslim religion in East Africa, of an act of

56 To take but one example, Elias Saad, as precise as he is, seems to take this at face value: 'Barros became Factor of the India House in Lisbon, and there had access to all the documents of the Portuguese discoverers and officials who served under the Viceroy of the Indies. Among others which came into his hands was a "Chronica dos Reyes de Quiloa", a "Chronicle of the Kings of Kilwa"' (Saad 1979, 51). Likewise, Sir John Gray 1951, 2: 'The *Kitab* was certainly in existence at the time of the first advent of the Portuguese at the very beginning of the sixteenth century. One copy thereof came into possession of some Portuguese official who took it back with him to Lisbon. The copy was translated into Portuguese and the translation was used by historian, John de Barros, in the completion of his *Da Asia*, the first volume of which appeared in 1552.'

57 'Dom Francisco d'Almeida, although he had not such detailed information of the succession of these kings as we have related.' Freeman-Grenville 1962, 93.

58 See Chittick 1974.

59 The actual travel of Ibn Battuta to Kilwa was recently questioned, fairly convincingly, by Fauvelle-Aymar/Hirsch 2003.

60 One can only wonder why we have never thought about the Swahili culture in relation to writing. The recent literature mentioned above (n 41) completely omits the issue of written culture, even though this is an essential characteristic of an Islamic society. One recent exception is Vierke 2014.

reading that would make it possible to distinguish believers from infidels and the island from the continent:

Cloth was spread from the island to the mainland and Mrimba passed over. But Mrimba decided to return and strike down Sultan Ali, so Ali had the Quran read out as a spell so that Mrimba could not cross over the island.⁶¹

Was there a written historiographical tradition in Kilwa when the Portuguese arrived? Must we continue to consider the *Kilwa Chronicle* as sufficient proof of the existence of a historical library in Kilwa, as the literature on the chronicle blindly assumes? Not only are we desperately short of evidence that could corroborate such a tradition, but the *Kilwa Chronicle*, rather than proof of its existence, could just as well be a sign of its absence. The main argument in favour of this somewhat disillusioned hypothesis is that the content of the Arabic chronicle clearly makes one think that it is a reply to the Portuguese chronicle. The two chronicles somehow seem to converse from a distance and reply to each other. First, chronologically, the fact that the story of the Portuguese irruption is found in the *Kitāb*, even though the last three chapters did not reach us, compels us to consider that one draft is from the sixteenth century at the earliest. Secondly, the variations between the two versions, as previously pointed out, do indeed make us think that the Arabic chronicle was written in response to the allegations of the Portuguese version. The chronology of the two texts can be seen very clearly in the genealogical tampering in the sixteenth century, and the restoration of the royal lineage when the Portuguese left. But it is even more explicit as far as the more or less noble origin of the tenth-century founders is concerned, where it is specified that it is 'a refutation of those who deny it'. Who first rejected Ali's rank if not the Portuguese version of the chronicle? Finally, the title 'The Book of Consolation of the History of Kilwa' suggests that one piece of writing is a response to another, i.e. the *Crónica* is not so much a result of the reading of the *Kitāb*, it is rather the opposite. The fact remains that the content of the two versions of the *Kilwa Chronicle*, a text that, for so long, sufficed to proclaim or even celebrate the presence of a historiographical tradition on the Swahili coast, can also corroborate honest scepticism, and might even replace one silence with an even more established silence.

As such, the hypothesis of 'writing as a response', or of a 'co-writing' of the chronicle, where the two versions reply to each other, is quite plausible, certainly

⁶¹ The reference is that of 'histoire ancienne de Kilwa Kisiwani', translated from Swahili and published by Velten 1907. Quotes from Pouwels 2000, 257 who himself quotes Freeman-Grenville 1962, 222.

more so than that of an original text supposedly crossing oceans to end up on a printing press in Lisbon. Nonetheless, it leaves many questions unanswered, starting with the improbable Swahili reading of Barros's printed book.⁶² And before that, if Barros did not have an original text at his disposal, how did he manage to obtain so much information on the ancient history of Kilwa? This question could be answered with the hypothesis of an oral story reduced to writing. Rather than a written chronicle, it is possible that Barros had at his disposal the work of informants who gathered the elements of a genealogical tradition, still very much alive at that time. Such transcription work would be reminiscent of the one carried out in anticipation of the previously mentioned ceremony of 1505. It might even have started earlier, specifically with Mohammed Ancony, who was so quick to collaborate with the Portuguese after 1500, and who could have offered such a version of Kilwa's genealogical history. This would explain, for example, why the last three monarchs – Sulaiman, Kiwab and Abraham – were described as 'tyrants' in the Portuguese version. The linguistic argument also goes in the direction of this hypothesis: the phonetic spelling of the proper nouns in the *Decades* seems to indicate oral transmission and transcription. This is particularly the case for some of the first Shirazi kings: 'Alī b. Bāshatī became Ale Busoloquete and Khālīd b. Bakr became Ale Bonebaquer. If these names had been directly transliterated from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, their spelling would have been quite different.

6 Copying

The copy of the Arabic version kept at the British Museum under shelfmark Or. 2666 is dated from 1837. It was taken from the collection of Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn, who was Qadi of Zanzibar between 1837 and 1870, and was handed over by Sayyid Barghash to the British consul Sir John Kirk in 1872. This copy is incomplete and ends with the mention 'lacuna', handwritten by the copyist; the colophon informs us:

The writing of this book was completed on Saturday 8th Jamad [sic] al-Awal A. H. 1294 (20 May 1877). It was done at the command of the ruler [which] Almighty God has set over us,

⁶² Published in 1552, the book would have had to cross oceans, and someone capable of reading Portuguese would have had to propose a reply, in writing this time, which seems rather unlikely. For the distribution of Portuguese books in the Indies, see Subrahmanyam 2005b.

the Imam of the Muslims, Sayyid Bargash ibn Sa'id ibn Sultan. May God increase his wisdom and power! The scribe was the creature of God 'Abdullah ibn Musbah al-Suwafi, and he wrote with his own hand.⁶³

Unfortunately, the previous colophons were not copied in the nineteenth century. However, throughout the *Kitāb*, other extracts tell us about its writing, or even its author. For instance, in the introduction, the author speaks about an order given by the Sultan of Kilwa, whose name is not mentioned: '[i]t was His Highness the Sultan who desired me to write a book to inform him of the history of the kings who ruled Kilwa'.⁶⁴

As indicated previously, two elements compel us to consider that such an order was given in the sixteenth century. Firstly, although the content of the last chapters is missing, nevertheless, the titles of these chapters give the names of the Sultans who reigned in the sixteenth century, Chapter 10 being entitled 'The Reign of Sultan Muhammad Mikatu, Son of the Amir Kiwabi, and the Rest of the History of the Restoration of the Amir Ibrahim'. Secondly, like the expression 'restoration', the expressions 'consolation', as found in the title, or 'sorrow', when mentioning a contemporary reader of the draft, certainly refer to the Portuguese occupation. 'When I gave it to a critic to read, it drove him to talk of his sorrows',⁶⁵ says the author. Better still, Chapter Seven offers two very specific indications concerning the author:

The writer of this book was born on the 2nd Shawwal, 904 A. H., which began on a Monday, in the time of Sultan Fudail and the Amir Ibrahim. The writer was called by the name of the writer we have already mentioned.⁶⁶ [...] When the people of Kilwa saw there was no means of evading him, they sent the Amir Ibrahim in a vessel. He was accompanied by the commander Sulaiman, Faqih Ayub and Faqih Omar. These two were the sons of Faqih Muflah al-Malindi, and they were maternal uncles of the writer of this book.⁶⁷

⁶³ Saad 1979, 49.

⁶⁴ Freeman-Grenville 1962, 34.

⁶⁵ Freeman-Grenville 1962, 34.

⁶⁶ Unfortunately, there is nothing in the remainder of the text that allows us to find that name again. Here is the Arabic version: *Wa-qīla sanat al-ithnayn, wulida mu'allif hādhā al-ta'rif yawm al-ithnayn, thānī min shahr Shawwāl sanat arb'ah wa-tis'ami'ah. Wa-dhālik fī dawlat al-Faḍl wa-al-Amīr Ibrāhīm, wa yusammā al-mu'allif bi-ism al-mu'allif al-madhkūr.*

⁶⁷ To be more specific, in the Arabic version, 'I' is used instead of 'writer of this book': *Fa-jahazū al-Amīr Ibrāhīm wa ṭala'ūhu ilā markabihim. Wa-ṣaḥābahu fī al-ṭulū' al-muqaddam Sulaymān, wa-al-faqīh Ayyūb, wa-al-faqīh 'Umar, wa-humā awlād al-faqīh Muflīḥ al-Malandī, wa humā akhwāl al-mu'allif.*

In short, one of the authors of the Chronicle, whether through his date of birth, his family or the Sultans under whose reigns he lived, is clearly identified as being a contemporary of the Portuguese irruption and the restoration. Is this enough to refute any writing prior to the sixteenth century? In the fourth chapter, a final reference is made to the writing of the text. It concerns a tree deposited by the waves on the shore of Kilwa, as if by a miracle, at a time when a lack of wood prevented the Mosque from being rebuilt:

The author has himself seen the man who saw the tree as mentioned, and he is Sultan Muḥammad ibn Sultan al-Husain ibn Sultan Sulaiman. The latter gave the order for the rebuilding of the mosque, while the first named ordered the writing of this history.⁶⁸

The final remark certainly seems to indicate the existence of an earlier text. Indeed, the reconstruction of the Great Mosque of Kilwa, which is confirmed archaeologically,⁶⁹ dates from the reign of Sulaymān b. Muḥammad (1421–1442). We could then be dealing with a chronicle that was written and rewritten on different occasions, by scribes whose function was not only to reproduce an identical manuscript, but also to complete it. However, given Ibrahim's age when he re-ascended the throne in 1512, i.e. no less than eighty years old, it is quite plausible that he is both the son of the Sultan who had the Mosque rebuilt and, at the same time, the person sponsoring this genealogical work after the departure of the Portuguese, certainly with a view to ensuring that no future intruder would be able to modify his genealogy at will.

7 Sharing historiographical genres

The lack of evidence as far as the material production and circulation of the *Kilwa Chronicle* is concerned calls for caution. Nevertheless, none of the evidence at our disposal seems incompatible with the previously mentioned hypothesis according to which the chronicle would have been co-written as a result of the encounter. The existence of a common genealogical substrate from which both texts

68 Freeman-Grenville 1962, 40. And for the Arabic version: *Wa-qaḍ ra'aytu man ra'a tilka al-khashabah 'alā ṣifatihā al-madhkūra. Wa-huwa al-sultān Muḥammad b. al-sultān Ḥusayn b. al-sultān Sulaymān. Wa-huwa alladhī amara bi-binā' al-masjid al-madhkūr, wa al-sultān Muḥammad huwa alladhī amara bi-ta'lif hādihā al-tārikh. Wa-Allah a'lam.*

69 Chittick 1974. This is also Saad's hypothesis: 'Our central thesis is that the earlier chronicle was written in the mid-1400's and was subsequently censored or in some other way damaged before reaching the author.' Saad 1979, 197.

drew is not in doubt, but the existence of an original written chronicle, of which the two known versions are supposedly only two distant variants – or two ‘abstracts’, in the words of Eli Saad⁷⁰ – does create doubt. That genealogical tradition precedes the arrival of the Portuguese is one thing; that the need to reduce it to writing only emerged later is another. According to us, this need to reduce it to writing was born of the sixteenth-century encounter. On the Portuguese side, it resulted from the desire to know ancient history in order to include the new imperial possessions into the work of narration. The *Decades of Asia* embodies such a political and historiographical endeavour. On the Swahili side, writing – or updating – a chronicle seems to be a response to the sovereignty challenges posed by the European occupation. In any case, the paradigm of the scriptural encounter should certainly be put to the test in other situations, in West Africa for example.⁷¹

This paradigm of a common origin of writing born of an encounter,⁷² regardless of any possible disagreement it might raise, also raises the issue of genres. Barros’s inclusion in his history of a ‘chronicle of the kings of this city’ seems to short-circuit tradition. Indeed, to what extent can we say that they belong to two different genres if they are born of a shared (although opposed) necessity, resulting from contact? On several occasions and without any further details, the author of the Arabic chronicle refers to ‘historians’ (*ahl al-tawārikh*):

Historians have said, among their assertions, that the first man to come to Kilwa came in the following way’ [...] or ‘I understand from a person interested in history, and one whom I trust’ [...] or still ‘In the time of Sultan Sulaiman ibn al Malik al-Adil historians say that the Friday mosque, which collapsed in the reign of Abu al Mawahib, was restored.’⁷³

70 ‘De Barros does not provide a direct translation of the Sunna al-Kilawia of which the Arabic version is an abstract. [...] In sum, we have two different abstracts from two different points of view.’ Saad 1979, 51–52.

71 This hypothesis is reminiscent of other cases, in West Africa for example, where the famous Timbuktu Chronicles as found in the *Tārikh al-fattāsh*, could just as well be the result of Moroccan intrusion (see Moraes Farias 2008, 95–108). Or, still, in Madagascar, where the seventeenth-century *Sorabe* followed the arrival of the Europeans (see Beaujard 2007, 219–265). Apart from this, this hypothesis seems to correspond to R.L. Pouwels anthropological hypothesis, according to which the Portuguese irruption provoked a kind of “renaissance”, and, at the same time, led to the displacement of the centre of the Swahili coast towards Paté (see Pouwels 2000, 251–271).

72 Rather than two views on the same event from two traditions, the *Kilwa Chronicle* must be conceived of as the – double – fruit of an encounter. This goes against the ‘symmetrical history’ as proposed recently by Romain Bertrand who considers that two opposite perspectives on the same encounter build two incommensurable traditions. Bertrand 2011.

73 Freeman-Grenville 1962, 35.

In these three cases, it might be less a question of referring to a real and identifiable historical library than to giving weight to the veracity of a distant event. The simple fact of mentioning historians, which is in no way evidence of a reading act, is an affirmation of memory, as though historians were those who knew how to remember. But there is a fourth case, in the introduction this time, where the author explains that: ‘[I have] begun my work by giving an account of the intellect and the arts of the mind and have followed that with an account of history and its cause’.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, this theoretical introduction, which could have informed us about the tradition the author perceived as being his, did not reach us. The fact remains that references to “historians’ readings” are sufficient to corroborate the fact that the *Kitāb al-Sulwa* is certainly part of a richer generic tradition. There is nothing absurd about thinking that the historico-genealogical genre, found extensively in the Middle East at the time, was imported into East Africa via the Muslim religion, and via the Arabic language and alphabet.⁷⁵ But while the genealogical genre in the Muslim world, which often goes back to the Prophet, is well known, the material conditions of its exercise are much less so.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, they are the ones which largely determine the content of genealogical history. In the case of the *Kilwa Chronicle*, it seems that it is not about accumulating information in the form of archives and compiling them in a *Tārīkh* or *Kitāb* but, rather, about completing information on the past by adding information about the present, even if it means possibly erasing previous information. It is not so much about accumulation as it is about updating. The copyist necessarily becomes both author and historian⁷⁷, responsible for filling in the temporal distance between himself and the previous copyist. But we are still dealing with suppositions here, as the historiographical consequences of the medium, i.e. the manuscript, still have to be established.⁷⁸

As soon as Barros included it in the *Decades*, the *Kilwa Chronicle* could no longer claim to illustrate the Muslim world alone, or the so-called African Islam tradition. We are dealing here with a ‘textual contact’ carried out by including an

⁷⁴ Quoted by Saad 1979, 4, 48 before commenting, 49: ‘The introduction is a philosophical treatise, irrelevant to the history of Kilwa, and may be ignored’. Freeman-Grenville 1962, 34 seems to have thought along the same lines: ‘This translation has been made by the editor of the British Museum manuscript, with the omission of the introduction, which is a theological disquisition wholly irrelevant to the history’.

⁷⁵ See Insoll 2003.

⁷⁶ Rosenthal 1968; Donner 1998; Al-Duri 1983; Khalidi 1994; Robinson 2003; Robinson 2015.

⁷⁷ For such a view, see Canfora 2012.

⁷⁸ See Déroche 2004.

African chronicle in a European compilation. What exactly does the inclusion of an allogenic genre into a wider story mean? The *Kilwa Chronicle* and, more generally, the scriptural paradigm of encounters where writing emerges from a common necessity, goes against a vision in which the respective recording systems necessarily lead to incommensurable written traditions, even when they deal with the same event.⁷⁹ On the contrary, if two chronicles can be the unique fruit of the same encounter, resorting to a “third language” to assess their difference becomes obsolete.⁸⁰ Barros’s inclusion is not the expression of an impenetrable boundary between historiographies, as Romain Bertrand for example would seem to prefer, but exactly the opposite. Are we thus dealing with a qualitative or epistemological ‘leap’, as proposed by Subrahmanyam?

I think Barros [...] is an important man for [...] his openness towards the non-European sources of history, and for his desire to give up a universal and symmetrical history in favour of a global and cumulative history, built around connections.⁸¹

While this may be so, the fact remains that we cannot study the circulation of genres, the porosity found between *Tārīkh* and *Crónica* for example,⁸² independently of the circulation of the texts embodying these genres and, at another level, of the material and social conditions of their being written, kept and circulated. In other words, the study of the circulation of genres, which is above all a

79 With the encounter between Portuguese and Africans on the East African coast, we are far from –even on the opposite side of – Romain Bertrand’s conclusion concerning the encounter between Dutch and Javanese a few decades later: ‘As such, in a certain way, the encounter between the Dutch and the Javanese did not take place – at least in the form of shared awareness of a fact likely to be narrated’ Bertrand 2011, 308. ‘History on equal grounds’ should not consist – even in the name of documentary symmetry – of building up and reifying incommensurability, when writing and even historiographical genres were actually born of the encounter.

80 ‘In order to challenge these incommensurabilities, it is impossible to adopt an overhanging position or to resort to a third language transcending all other reasons: as soon as one must account for an encounter between social worlds that were separate up until then, any viewpoint is biased. Consequently, to somehow conduct the story, there are no other possibilities but to navigate constantly between worlds, without mooring more than necessary to one or the other.’ Bertrand 2011, 321. In the case of Kilwa in the sixteenth century, the two worlds were well moored, to the extent that they spoke the same language and wrote the same story.

81 Subrahmanyam 2014, 47 or, still, 43: ‘Confronted with this vast world, the Portuguese – who were not in great numbers – could not envisage mass conquest. Nonetheless, they still had ambition for an epistemological conquest, i.e. to write down their explorations by focusing on their homeland.’

82 Subrahmanyam 2010.

circulation of texts, can certainly not do without a philology capable of apprehending ‘textual contact’ in all its dimensions, and, specifically, in its material dimension. The challenge for Barros, and for the Portuguese who provided him with a publishable text, was political and immediate, as was in fact Ibrahim’s. It is nonetheless epistemological: tampering with royal lineage can only be carried out on an authoritative text. The necessity of mobilising a foreign chronicle to establish one’s own history becomes obvious. In this light, the European colonial canon could not but rely on extra-European writing.⁸³ Its heuristic authority was granted only through this generic exteriority. Such a necessity can be found at the very beginning of European imperial expansion, again with the Portuguese, and again on African soil. In the *Crónica da tomada de Ceuta*, Gomes Eanes de Zurara, who also became the chronicler of Guinea, adopted and relied on an Arabic text to relate the foundation of Ceuta:

And it is recounted by Abilabez [Abi al-‘Abbas], who was a man of great learning among the Moors, that this city was founded two hundred and thirty-three years after the destruction brought by the flood. [...] And he states that the city’s founder was Noah’s grandson and that this was the first city he founded in all the lands of Africa.⁸⁴

Barros’s integration of the *Kilwa Chronicle* into the eighth book of his first *Decade*, one century later, was motivated in the same way. The Portuguese needed to impress the authority of their own writings on those they encountered, even if this meant writing a chronicle that had never been written before.

References

- Al-Aziz Al-Duri, Abd (1983), *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*, Princeton University Press.
- Aubin, Jean (2000), ‘Les documents arabes, persans and turcs de la Torre do Tombo’, in Jean Aubin, *Le latin et l’astrolabe*, II: 417–452.
- Balandier, Georges (2013), *Le royaume de Kongo du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris: Fayard.
- Bang, Anne K. (2011), ‘Authority and Piety, Writing and Print: A Preliminary Study of the Circulation of Islamic Texts in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Zanzibar’, in *Journal of the International African Institute*, 81(1): 89–107.
- Banha de Andrade, António Alberto (1980), *João de Barros: Historiador do pensamento humanista portugueses de quinhentos*, Lisbon, Academia Portuguesa da História.

⁸³ See Delmas 2016.

⁸⁴ Quoted by Blackmore 2006, 35.

- Barber, Karin (ed.) (2006), *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barros, João de (1552), *Asia de Joam de Barros, dos factos que os Portugueses fizeram no descobrimento e conquista dos mares e terras do Oriente*, Lisboa, impr. per G. Galharde.
- Barros, João de (1932), *Ásia, Primeira Década*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade.
- Beaujard, Philippe (2007), 'Les manuscrits arabico-malgaches (sorabes) du pays Antemoro (Sud-Est de Madagascar)', in Constant Hamès (ed.), *Coran et talismans : Textes and Pratiques Magiques en Milieu Musulman*, Paris: Karthala.
- Beaujard, Philippe (2012), *Les mondes de l'océan Indien*, Paris: Armand Colin.
- Bertrand, Romain (2011), *L'histoire à parts égales. Récits d'une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVIe-XVIIe siècle)*, Paris: Seuil.
- Biker, Julio F. J. (1983), *Collecção de tratados e concertos de pazes que o Estado da Índia Portuguesa fez com os reis e senhores com quem teve relações nas partes de Asia e Africa oriental desde o princípio da conquista até ao fim ... justo império asiático dos Portugueses*, Lisbon.
- Bizzocchi, Roberto (2010), *Généalogies fabuleuses, inventer et faire croire dans l'Europe moderne*, Paris: ENS.
- Blackmore, Josiah (2006), 'Imagining the Moor in Medieval Portugal', in *Diacritics*, 36(3/4): 27–43.
- Borges, Antonio (ed.) (2008), *Portugal na Espanha Arabe*, Lisbonne: Editorial Caminho.
- Boxer, Charles R. (1980), *João de Barros: Portuguese Humanist and Historian of Asia*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing.
- Camões, Luís de (2013), *Les Luisiades*, Paris: Robert Laffont.
- Canfora, Luciano (2012), *Le copiste comme auteur*, Paris: Anacharsis.
- Cavazzi, Giovanni Antonio (1687), *Istorica descrizione de' tre regni Congo, Matamba and Angola sitvati nell' Etiopia inferiore occidentale e delle missioni apostoliche esercitateui da religiosi Capuccini*, Bologna: Giacomo Monti.
- Chittick, Neville (1974), *Kilwa: An Islamic Trading City on the East African Coast*, Nairobi: British Institute in Eastern Africa.
- Delmas, Adrien (2013), *Les voyages de l'écrit. Culture écrite et expansion européenne à l'époque moderne. Essais sur la Compagnie Hollandaise des Indes*, Paris: Honoré Champion.
- Delmas, Adrien (2016), 'Imperial and Philological Encounters in the Early Modern Era: European Readings of the Codex Mendoza', in *Philological Encounters*, 1/2.
- Delmas, Adrien, and Nigel Penn (2012), *Written Culture in a Colonial Context, Africa and the Americas 1500-1900*, Leiden: Brill.
- Déroche, François (2004), *Le livre manuscrit arabe. Préludes à une histoire*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.
- Derrida, Jacques (1967), *De la grammatologie*, Paris: Minuit.
- Documentos sobre os Portugueses em Moçambique e na África central (1962)*, Lisbon: Silvas.
- Donner, Fred M. (1998), *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton: Darwin Press.
- Fauvelle-Aymar François-Xavier, and Bertrand Hirsch (2003), 'Voyage aux frontières du monde', in *Afrique & Histoire*, 1(1): 75–122.
- Ficquet, Eloi, and Aïssatou Mbodj-Pouye (2009), 'Culture de l'écrit en Afrique. Anciens débats, nouveaux objets', in *Annales Histories, Sciences Sociales*, 4(64): 751–764.

- Freeman-Grenville, Stewart Parker (1962), *The East African Coast: Selected documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Goody, Jack (1978), *La raison graphique. La domestication de la pensée sauvage*, Paris : Minuit.
- Goody, Jack (1994), *Entre l'oralité and l'écriture*, Paris : Puf.
- Goody, Jack (2007), *Pouvoirs et savoirs de l'écrits*, Paris : La dispute.
- Gray, Sir John (1951), 'A History of Kilwa', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 31.
- Hamès, Constant (ed.) (2007), *Coran et talismans. Textes et Pratiques Magiques en Milieu Musulman*, Paris : Karthala.
- Hilton, Anne (1985), *The Kingdom of Kongo*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Hirsch, Bertrand, and Yves Potin (2009), 'Le continent détourné. Frontières and mobilité des mondes africains', in Patrick Boucheron (ed.), *Histoire du Monde au XVe siècle*, Paris: Fayard, 154–191.
- Hofmeyr, Isabel (1994), 'We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told': Oral historical Narrative in a South African Chieftdom, Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Horton, Mark C., and John Middleton (2000), *The Swahili: the Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Hunwick, John O., and Rex Sean O'Fahey (ed.), *Arabic Literature of Africa, vol. 1, The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa to c. 1900*, Leiden: Brill, 1994; vol. 2, *The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*, 1995; vol. 3 *The Writing of the Muslim Peoples of North-Eastern Africa*, 2002; vol. 4, *The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa*, Leiden: Brill.
- Insoll, Timothy (2003), *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Kennedy, Hugh (1996), *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus*, Londres: Lonman.
- Khalidi, Tarif (1994), *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krätili, Graziano, and Ghislaine Lydon (eds) (2011), *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, Leiden: Brill.
- L'Africain, Jean-Léon (1981), *Description de l'Afrique*, Paris, Maisonneuve and Larose.
- Le Quellec, Jean-Loïc (2012), 'Rock Art, Scripts and Proto-Scripts in Africa: the Libyco-Berber Example', in Adrien Delmas and Nigel Penn (eds), *Written culture in a colonial context*, Leiden: Brill.
- Madeira Santos, Catarina, and Ana Paula Tavares (2002), *Africae monumenta. A apropriação da escrita pelos Africanos*, Lisbon, Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical.
- McCall Theal, Georges (1898–1903), *Records of South-Eastern Africa*, London.
- McKenzie, Donald (1985), *Oral culture, Literacy & Print in early New Zealand: The Treaty of Waitangi*, Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Middleton, John (1992), *The World of the Swahili, an African Mercantile Civilization*, New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Monroe, James T. (1970), *Islam and the Arabs in Spanish Scholarship (Sixteenth Century to the Present)*, Leiden: Brill.
- Moraes Farias, Paolo de (2003), *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali: Epigraphy, Chronicles and Songhay-Tuareg History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moraes Farias, Paulo F. de (2008), 'Intellectual Innovation and Reinvention of the Sahel: the Seventeenth-Century Timbuktu Chronicles', in: Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *The Meaning of Timbuktu*, Cape Town: HSRC Press.

- Newitt, Malyn (2010), *The Portuguese in West Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pennec, Hervé (2003), *Des jésuites au royaume du prêtre Jean (Ethiopie). Stratégie, rencontres and tentatives d'implantation (1495–1633)*, Paris : Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Perrot, Claude-Hélène (ed.) (1989), *Sources orales de l'histoire de l'Afrique*, Paris, éditions du CNRS.
- Pouwels, Randall L. (1984), 'Oral Historiography and the Shirazi of the East African Coast', in *History in Africa*, 11, 237–267.
- Pouwels, Randall L. (2000), 'The East African Coast, c. 780 to 1900 C. E.', in Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (eds), *The History of Islam in Africa*, Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Randles, W.G.L. (1968), *L'ancien royaume du Congo des origines à la fin du XIXe siècle*, Paris : Mouton.
- Robinson, Chase F. (2015), 'Islamic Historical Writing, Eighth through the Tenth Centuries', in Sarah Foot, Daniel R. Woolf and Chase F. Robinson (eds), *Oxford History of Historical Writing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, Chase F. (2003), *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenthal, Franz (1968), *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden: Brill Archive.
- Saad, Elias (1979), 'Kilwa Dynastic Historiography: A Critical Study', in *History in Africa*, 6, 177–207.
- Santissimo Sacramento, Diego del (1583), *Relación Del Viage De Guinea que hizo el Padre Fray Diego Del Santissimo Sacramento, con sus compañeros Fray Diego De La Encarnacion y Fray Francisco Indigno. Año de mil y quinientos y ochenta y tres*, Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (dossier: 89r–111v).
- Spear, Thomas (1984), 'The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions, Culture and History', *History in Africa*, 11, 291–305.
- Strong, Arthur (1895), 'History of Kilwa', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27/2: 383–430.
- Subrahmayam, Sanjay (1997), *The Career and Legend of Vasco de Gama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay (2005b), 'Taking Stock of the Franks: South Asian Views of Europeans and Europe, 1500–1800', in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 42/1: 69–100.
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay (2005a), 'On World Historians in the Sixteenth Century', in *Representations*, 91: 26–57.
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay (2010), 'Intertwined Histories: Crónica and Tarikh in the Sixteenth-Century Indian Ocean World', in *History and Theory*, 49: 118–145.
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay (2014), *Aux origines de l'histoire globale. Leçon inaugurale au collège*, Paris, Fayard.
- Triaud, Jean-Louis (2009), 'Tombouctou or le retour du mythe. L'exposition médiatique des manuscrits de Tombouctou', in Daouda Gary-Toukara and Didier Nativel (eds), *La fabrique des savoirs en Afrique subsaharienne*, Paris, Karthala.
- Urreta, Luis de (1610), *Historia ecclesiastica de la Etiopia*.
- Vansina, Jan (1961), *De la tradition orale. Essai de méthode historique*, Tervuren : Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale.
- Vansina, Jan (1985), *Oral Tradition as History*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Velten, Carl (1907), *Prosa und Poesie der Suaheli*, Berlin.
- Vierke, Clarissa (2014), 'Akhi patia kalamu: Writing Swahili Poetry in Arabic Script' in Meikal and Versteegh (eds), *The Arabic Script in Africa. Studies in the Use of a Writing System*, Leiden: Brill, 319–339.
- Zurara, Gomes Eanes de (2011), *Chronique de Guinée (1453)*, Paris : Chandeigne.