

COINS FROM MOGADISHU, c. 1300 to c. 1700

During 1957 the late Dr. John Walker, Keeper of Coins and Medals in the British Museum, arranged for me to have access to an important private collection of coins in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, amounting to over 7,500 pieces. These have now been studied in conjunction with the collection of the Mogadishu Museum, a small collection in the British Museum, a description of some coins found in Somalia by Professor Enrico Cerulli, of Rome, and some specimens of Mogadishu origin found in Tanzania, at Kilwa and in the Mafia Islands. This work has presented considerable technical difficulties, but it is now at press and will shortly be published in the Numismatic Chronicle, 1964. An offprint of the work will be placed in the library.

This study is important for a number of reasons. It includes the first dated coin from East Africa, dated 1322. It shows that the coinage of Mogadishu was related to the coinage of Kilwa, in that both coinages have the characteristic rhyme between the legends of the obverse and reverse. It appears to show that when the Turkish naval commander Amir Ali Bey raided the East African coast in the late 16th Century, Mogadishu was able to defy the Portuguese for a long period, perhaps the whole of the 17th Century, in employing a local coinage which followed the Turkish pattern, thus proclaiming an attitude of independence in regard to the Portuguese. It includes no less than twenty-six rulers of whom all but three are new both to numismatics and to history.

G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville

THE AUGUSTINIAN MISSIONS IN EAST AFRICA, 1596-1730

It was necessary earlier this year to correct an English newspaper, the Universe, which stated that the first Christian missions in East Africa were started only in the 19th Century. The year which saw the foundation of the Augustinian Mission in Ghana, 1572, also saw the foundation of an Augustinian Mission in Goa, which gradually increased the number of its stations in India and also reached Persia, and, finally, Mombasa, on the coast of the present Kenya, in 1596.

Some recent publications of documents by Professor A. de Silva Rego have

added much detail to the general outline of the history of the Augustinian mission in East Africa as described by Sir John Gray, Early Portuguese Missionaries in East Africa, 1958. These are volumes 11 and 12 of A. da Silva Rego, Documentação para a Historia das Missoes do Padroado Portugues do Oriente, 12 volumes, Lisbon, 1949-1958. But they are largely the obituary notices of the mission fathers, and tell us very little of local life. What is clear, however, is that the success of the mission was less amongst the Muslims of the coast than with the local African population of the hinterland, amongst whom an average of a thousand converts a year was claimed. It has now been learnt that there are a substantial number of documents in the Augustinian house at Coimbra, Portugal, which have never been sorted, let alone examined, since they were brought from Goa, and in addition a substantial quantity in the archives of the Augustinian Order in Rome.

I received an invitation to examine those in Rome in July, 1965.

It is to be hoped that these documents may contain some solutions to certain very difficult problems concerning the history of Mombasa during the 17th Century. It has been found that a detailed account of the death of Father Antonio de Paixao, who was martyred for his faith in the rebellion of 1631, still survives. An exact chronology of the course of this rebellion is greatly to be desired. Another Augustinian Prior of Mombasa was also killed at the time of the attack upon Mombasa by a fleet from Oman in 1660, but at the present very few details of what took place are known. Finally it is to be hoped that some light may be shed upon language problems. In spite of the search for Swahili documents conducted by the East African Swahili Committee for the past seven years, a poetical manuscript preserved in the Hamburg University library is still the earliest known Swahili manuscript. It is dated 1728. Considering the number of converts claimed by the Augustinians and the period of their residence on the coast, it would not seem unlikely that some of them at least learnt Swahili, and even translated prayers or portions of the Scriptures into it. If such documents should come to light, they would be valuable for the history of the Swahili language, concerning which, before the late 19th Century, we know all too little. It is certain that at least one Augustinian learnt Swahili thoroughly, for in 1729, when the Portuguese were finally evicted from Mombasa, a certain Padre Miguel was warned in advance and enabled to escape as a result of a four line Swahili poem written by a Christian Swahili woman.