

THE HISTORY OF PATE, KENYA

In April, 1964, I was invited by the East African Swahili Committee to undertake the translation and edition of a newly found manuscript of the History of Pate, on the Kenya coast. The manuscript is in Swahili. Of this history three other Swahili versions have already been published, by A Werner and M. Heepé, an English version by C. H. Stigand, whilst there are three unpublished versions in the Lamu Political Records, all in English translation.

The new document appears to be an earlier version than any hitherto found and probably preserves the form of the original document. This was a paragraph setting out the genealogy of each ruler, followed by a second paragraph summarizing briefly the events of his reign. Other versions can be demonstrated to be expansions of this pattern, although some of them contain the detailed genealogies for some of the rulers. In its first form this history was probably written down c. 1888.

The history of Pate, however, begins with the foundation of the kingdom c. 1204, when a member of the Nabhan royal house of Oman married the daughter and heiress of the previous dynasty of Pate, the al-Batawoya. Pate is today a small fishing village but extensive ruins of the former town still exist, and include several mosques, a palace and large surrounding defensive walls. According to traditional sources the first settlement was made during the 7th Century, by Syrian Arab traders who settled down and intermarried with the local people. Clearly Pate is one of the most important sites of East Africa.

In September I was able to discuss this site with Mr. J. S. Kirkman, F.S.A., Warden of the Coastal Historical Sites of Kenya and of the Fort Jesus National Park, Mombasa. A site plan of Pate has been published in Mr. Kirkman's recent Men and Monuments of the East African Coast. Whilst most useful, this plan does not answer all the problems of a topographical nature raised by the various versions of the History of Pate, and indeed it is clear that this History cannot be fully understood without further detailed research on the site. So far, although certain buildings have been cleared, no full archaeological investigation of the site has been carried out. This is because it is extremely hard of access and because a proper archaeological expedition there would be extremely difficult to arrange. Not only is it in the part of Kenya in which security is made difficult by shifita from Somalia, it is almost waterless, and indeed the inhabitants are dependent upon supplies brought from the mainland unless they use the local supply which has become saline and brackish. This, of course, is amongst the reasons for the present decline

of the town. There would also be a labour problem, because all available local manpower is engaged in growing and attending to tobacco.

Nevertheless it was considered that serious progress in assessing the value of the History of Pate was unlikely to be achieved without a parallel excavation of at least parts of the site. This would cost, for a season of three to four months, not less than £6,000. It has therefore been necessary to set the matter on one side for the time being, although it was agreed that it would be worthwhile at a later stage to consider the possibility of an expedition in or after 1967.

G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville