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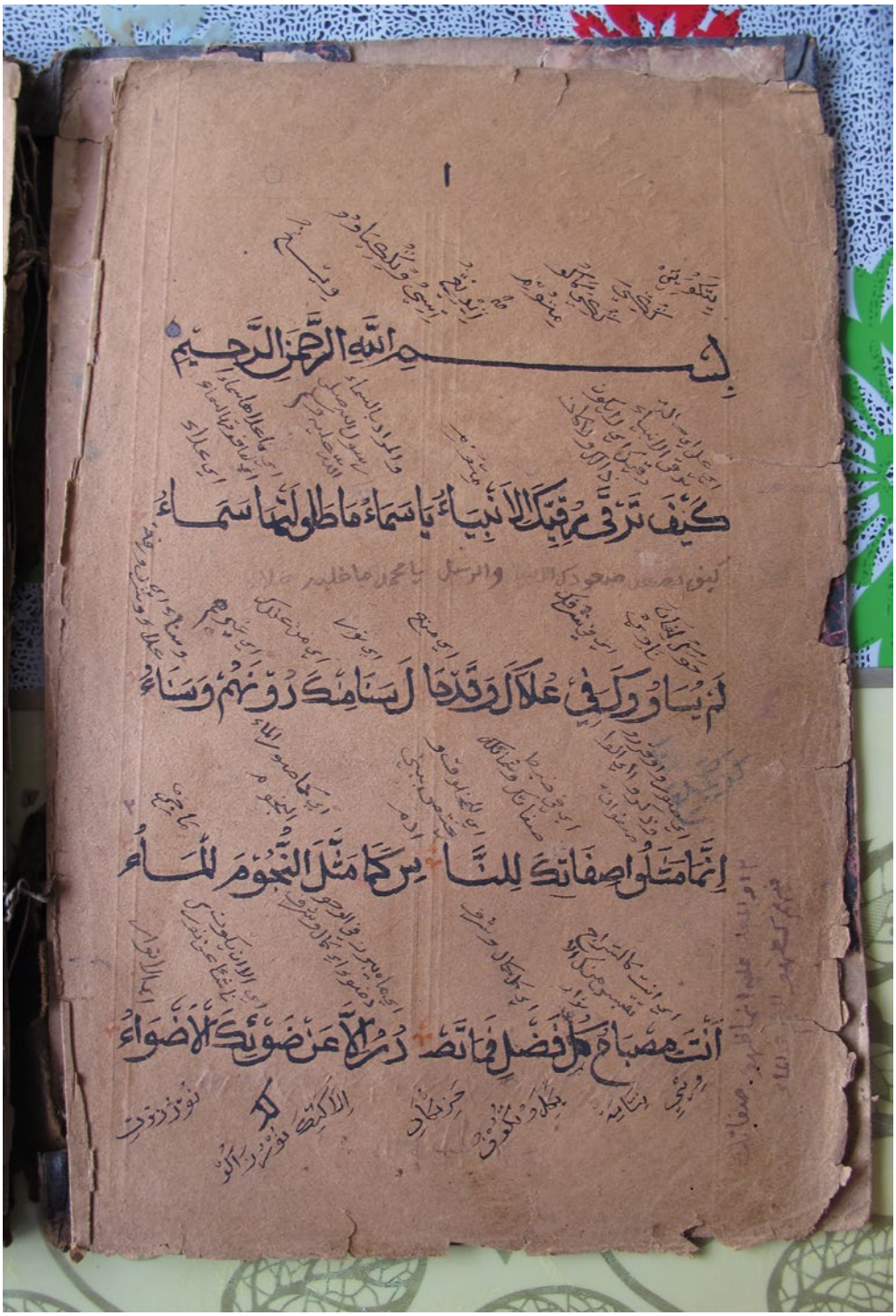

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One Text, Many Forms – A Comparative View of the Variability of Swahili Manuscripts

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First page of an Arabic *Qas īda Hamziyya* manuscript, copied by Abī Bakr bin Sulṭān Aḥmad in 1311 AH/1894 CE, with annotations in Swahili and Arabic. Private collection of Sayyid Ahmad Badawy al-Hussainy (1932-2012) and Bi Tume Shee, Mombasa.

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Swahili Manuscripts from Northern Mozambique: Some Notes on *Ajami* Correspondence Letters

Chapane Mutiua | Maputo, Mozambique and Hamburg, Germany

1. Introduction

This study provides a historical and descriptive account of northern Mozambique *ajami* manuscripts and focuses on the *ajami* correspondence kept at the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique (Mozambican Historical Archive, AHM). All the manuscripts discussed in this paper are in *ajami*, i.e. Swahili written in Arabic script with some Portuguese, Koti and Mwani loanwords. The spread of Islam along the western coast of the Indian Ocean increased geographically and socially during the nineteenth century. Consequently, Islamic education expanded quickly to all the coastal regions of northern Mozambique and its immediate hinterland. The expansion of Qur'anic schools popularised the use of Arabic script for religious and secular affairs. The *ajami* correspondence of northern Mozambique in the AHM's collection is evidence of this process. This paper aims to take a brief look at letter correspondence as part of *ajami* writing practice and at the demands for systematic research aiming at its preservation and at the diffusion of knowledge thereof. My paper is based on archival and fieldwork research and will help readers to understand the socio-historical value of northern Mozambican Swahili manuscripts as a significant component of the Swahili-Islamic heritage.

2. Swahili and *ajami* in northern Mozambique: some background information

Ajami literacy in northern Mozambique must be considered in a local context as well as from a broader perspective. It is viewed as a result of a long-lasting process involving cultural, political and economic dynamics that integrated the region into a much larger cultural entity along the east coast of Africa demarcated by the Indian Ocean. The spread of *ajami* literacy followed the paths of the expansion of Islam and the Indian Ocean trade networks that had been in place ever since the first millennium CE. From the very beginning, city-states – not only in what is now Kenya and Tanzania, but along the Mozambican coast as well – were involved in the Indian Ocean network and its exchange of goods, knowledge and texts as well as in networks along the East African coast. Apart from maritime trade, the Mozambican city-states shared a number of cultural features with the rest of the East African coast like Islam. They also shared coral stone architecture, which archaeological sites still speak of, as well as language: languages of the city-states like Mwani and Koti, which are mentioned in this article, have such a high number of Swahili features that Swahili was obviously not just used as a vernacular language all along the coast, but can even be considered an ancestor of these languages.[1] Later they became highly influenced by other Bantu languages from the hinterland such as Makonde and Makhuwa, so the Swahili linguistic features lost their prominence; the affinity to hinterland Bantu languages like Makhuwa, Makonde and Yao, which were feasible in terms of their linguistic structure and lexicon, became stronger. For Schadeberg and Mucanheia, although these languages may sometimes be considered *Maka* (from *Manga*, i.e. related to the Arabian Peninsula) due to the huge number of Swahili and Arabic words and some phonetic and grammatical features of Swahili, they have more ties to Makhuwa in the case of Koti, and Makonde and Makhuwa in the case of Mwani and Makwe.[2] The linguistic change mirrors the disruption that took place from the fifteenth and sixteenth century onwards when the Portuguese usurped the gold trade and its entrepot Sofala and destroyed Kilwa, the major cultural and economic centre for the whole of what is now the Tanzanian and Mozambican coast. For some time, Mozambican city-states became rather isolated from the rest of the East African coast and Swahili networks continued to play a lesser role in comparison to relations with the hinterland.

However, thanks to the socio-political and cultural revolution brought on by the establishment of Zanzibar as the seat of Busaid Omani rule in the 1830s, the usage and

[1] Schadeberg and Mucanheia 2000.

[2] Schadeberg and Mucanheia 2000, 1–7; Prata 1983.

diffusion of Kiswahili increased again in nineteenth-century northern Mozambique, as did the use of Arabic script. Besides extending their political influence to most of the western Indian Ocean, the Busaid rulers of Zanzibar succeeded in attracting intellectuals from everywhere in the Muslim world, which transformed the island into the main intellectual and cultural centre in the region. The social impact of this cultural revolution was the introduction of the term *ustaarabu* in the Swahili societies, meaning 'assimilation to the Arab way of life'. Among other things, this included the popularisation of Arabic literacy, a phenomenon that had started several centuries before that.[3] The northern Mozambique Swahili states which also came under the political, economic and cultural influence of Zanzibar benefited from the acceleration of Swahili *ajami* literacy through a scholarly network linking Zanzibar, Comoro and (north-)western Madagascar.[4]

At that time, Kiswahili was spoken widely as a *lingua franca* by the political and trade elite of the northern Mozambican coast. According to Eugenius Rzewuski, the process of migration combined with a practice of intermarriage caused a linguistic contact zone to be created that was marked by bilingualism and multilingualism.[5] Thus, in some areas, like Palma and Quionga, women spoke Makwe in their household, while men spoke Swahili in the business forum and public sphere.[6] While this situation may not be extrapolated to southern regions of the country, the influence of Kiswahili in the existing written evidence suggests that it was used widely in areas where it had never been the first language of household communication.

3. The AHM's collection of *ajami* correspondence

As a further result of Zanzibari influence, Swahili literature and the use of Swahili *ajami* correspondence became widely disseminated in the coastal societies of northern Mozambique. In fact, they became so widespread and such an efficient means of communication that even the Portuguese colonial government decided to adopt them: rather than Portuguese or Arabic, Swahili became the official language of written correspondence in northern Mozambique.

While Swahili was also partly employed by the German and British colonial governments in Kenya and Tanganyika, the Mozambican case is particular since even at that time, Swahili was not a first language to the people living along the coast, but rather a second or third language used in restricted contexts involving transregional communication. It was not only in trade relations, but in transregional networks of Islamic learning that Swahili played an important role as a language of instruction – on Zanzibar as well as the Comoros, to name just two prominent centres. The colonial government did not initiate the practice of letter-writing in Swahili, but rather made used of an established written register for its own purposes.

The origin of correspondence in Arabic script in the public sphere in East Africa and northern Mozambique must have started before the Portuguese arrived in the region. However, the earliest Arabic correspondence that Mozambican rulers sent to the Portuguese is a letter that Sharif Muhammad el-Alawi of Mozambique wrote to King Dom Manuel of Portugal at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[7] Although Kiswahili was well established as a *lingua franca* in the area by this time (mainly among the political and commercial elite),[8] it seems that Arabic was used for correspondence by letter. A sample of this earlier Arabic correspondence between the African rulers and the Portuguese was published by Father Frei João de Sousa in 1788 CE.[9] Upon Vasco da Gama's arrival in East Africa at the end of the fifteenth century, Arabic was the main language and the script used for international correspondence in the region.[10] Although there is not much evidence of the 'moment' when use of the Arabic language shifted to Kiswahili, later correspondence [11] reveals the important role of Kiswahili, which had become a *lingua franca* in the political and trading arena all over East Africa, and in northern Mozambique where it had been widely spoken since the eighteenth century,[12] it became the language of official communication between all the trading and political actors, including the Portuguese. The lack of people who could speak Portuguese and read and write using the Latin alphabet transformed Kiswahili and the Arabic alphabet into the most important tools for written communication between Portuguese colonial officials and

[3] Pouwels 1987, 3; Eastman 1994; Declich 2001, 47; Khamis 2001, 18; Mutiua 2015, 206.

[4] Vilhena 1905, 19, Hafkin 1973.

[5] Rzewuski 1991, 270–271.

[6] Rzewuski 1991, 271–272.

[7] Prestholdt 1998.

[8] Ferreira 1976; Mutiua 2015, 208.

[9] Sousa [1788], 85–86; Prestholdt 1998.

[10] See João de Sousa 1789; Alpers 2000, 304.

[11] See the *ajami* manuscript collection at the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique.

[12] See Bonate 2016, 66–67; Hafkin 1973.

local rulers, at least until the end of the *Campanhas de Ocupação efectiva* (1895–1918), which established *de facto* colonial rule in Mozambique. It was during this period that the Portuguese abolished the use of Kiswahili and the Arabic alphabet in official communication.

In northern Mozambique, as evidenced in the National Archives collection, the second half of the nineteenth century was the prime period for the use of *ajami* correspondence (in Swahili with Mwani and Portuguese loanwords) in the official realm between the Portuguese colonial officers and the African rulers. This was also an important period for the expansion of Islam and Islamic education when 'court Islam' was replaced by 'popular Islam'.[13] Consequently, a significant proliferation of Islamic and Swahili literature can be found in this period. The Swahili manuscript collection kept by the Mozambican Historical Archive (AHM) is part of the 'Nineteenth-century Collection' (*Fundo do Século XIX*) and is a corpus of official Swahili letter correspondence dating back to the second half of the nineteenth century (Fig. 1)[14]. Some of the letters are accompanied by tentative Portuguese translations, related reports and Portuguese correspondence. The Portuguese reports attached to these manuscripts are fundamental in helping us understand the meaning and historical context of the correspondence.

3.1. The correspondence: languages and scripts and the role of the lingoa do estado

The nineteenth-century administrative manuscripts kept at the Mozambican Historical Archive reveal the use of numerous scripts and languages. Portuguese was the language of administration, but Kiswahili dominated official correspondence with local rulers. However, the aforementioned Mwani, the major language in coastal Cabo Delgado, was also used in the correspondence, specifically in the areas of Quissanga, Olumboa, Quirimizi, Ibo and Mocimboa. In this region, people spoke local languages such as Mwani, Koti, Sankaci and even the linguistically more distant Bantu language Makhuwa, while Kiswahili was the literary language used for correspondence, written poetry and other literary productions.

Sometimes, the Gujarati script and language were also used, not just the Latin and Arabic script. This indicates a specific situation in which languages and scripts were employed in a colonial system. It gave more prominence to the role of translators, or *lingoas do estado*, a particular position in the colonial system sometimes known as *intérprete*. The decision to rely on other scripts as well as Swahili was a strategic one: the Portuguese, who apparently controlled the region in this period in order to maintain constant access to the hinterland, where most of the foodstuffs and commodities came from, depended on the local rulers – people who could not read and write in Latin script or the Portuguese language. Accordingly, the easiest way of communicating by letter was by using Kiswahili written in Arabic script. In addition, hinterland trade was controlled by Indian traders, some of whom wrote their correspondence in Gujarati (both the language and script).

The diversity of scripts and languages can sometimes be seen in a single manuscript. A letter written in Arabic script may be signed in Latin script, for instance, or vice versa, and letters written in Gujarati can be signed in Latin script or vice versa. The use of Kiswahili and Mwani was a natural choice for the local rulers as the latter is the language of coastal Cabo Delgado societies, and they had become familiar with the use of the former in the literary, political and trade spheres through their long-lasting integration into the western Indian Ocean networks. For the Portuguese, the use of the two languages in their offices was a pure necessity, which they were forced to adopt by the practical situation they were in, as evidenced by some of the correspondence. Momba ibn Ishaka, who was Sheikh of Quirimizi (Cabo Delgado), for instance in one of his undated letters, asks the governor of the district of Cabo Delgado not to send him letters in Portuguese, but in Kimoro (literally meaning the 'language of the Moors', i.e. Mwani or Kiswahili),[15] as we can see from the following words found in one letter (Fig. 2): *'aidha ukitaka kupereka ofiso* [ofício] *kwangu usipereke letera* [letra] *ya kizungu, hakuna muno ajui kufoma kizungu. Pereka hati ya kimoro'*. Literally, the Sheikh informs his addressee in Kiswahili with a heavy Mwani influence: 'if you want to send official correspondence (*ofiso*) to me, do not send it in the Latin alphabet because there is no-one [here] to read it. Send it in the Arabic alphabet (*kimoro*)'.[16]

[13] On the spread of Islam in East Africa, see Robinson 2004; Trimingham 1964. Regarding the spread of Islam in Mozambique, see Vilhena 1905; Hafkin 1973; Bonate 2007; Alpers 1999.

[14] Source: AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, caixa ("box"), maço ("volume") 2, Letter from Boana Shaki b. Abdulatifo al-Mafazi, Sheikh of Quissanga, 1892.

[15] See the letter by Momba ibn Ishaka, Sheikh of Quirimizi, in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2.

[16] Letter by Momba ibn Ishaka, Sheikh of Quirimizi, in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2, lines 9–11.

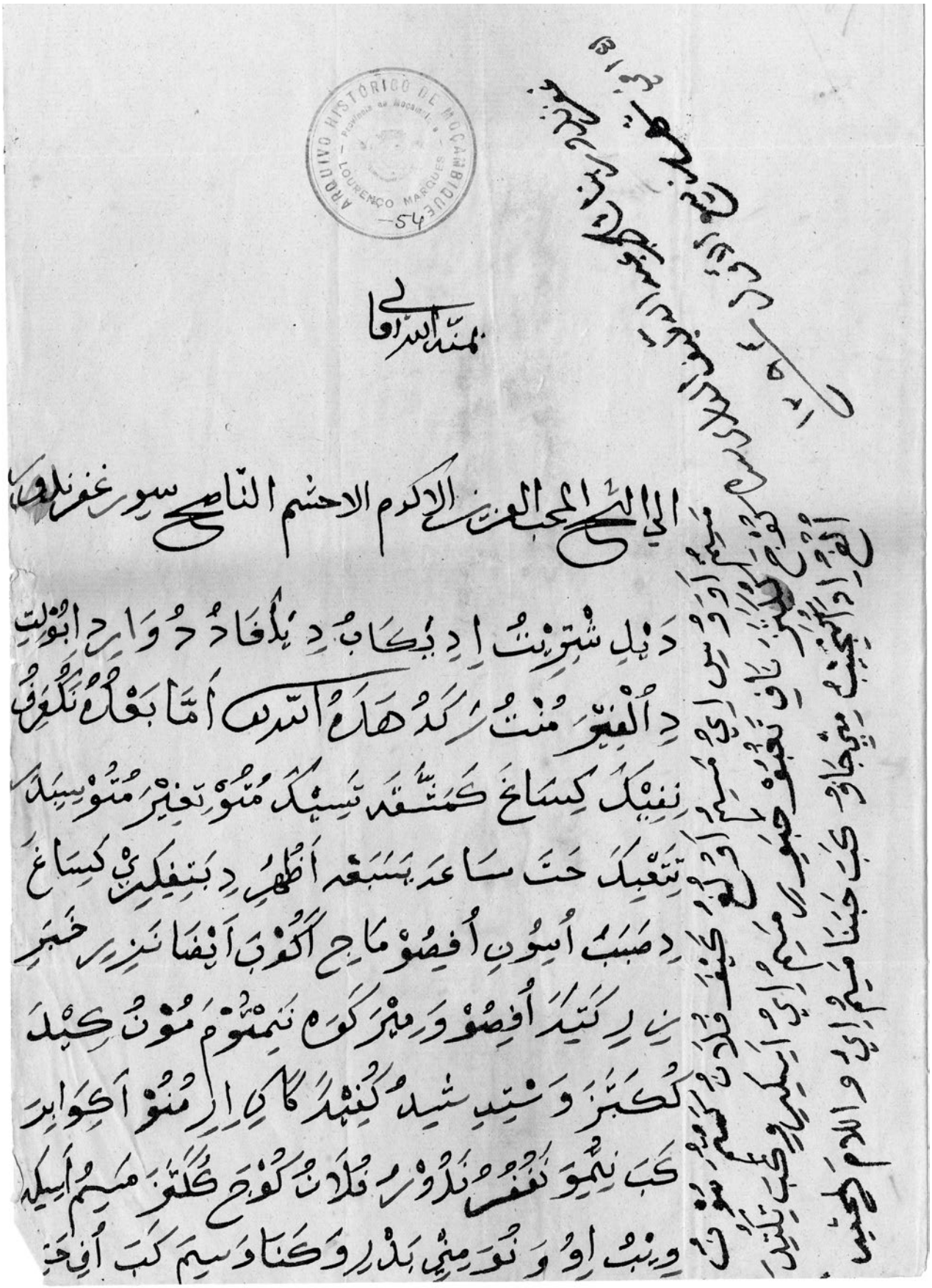

Fig. 1a: Sample of northern Mozambican Swahili correspondence held at the Mozambican Historical Archive (AHM). Letter from Boana Shaki b. Abdulatifo al-Mafazi, Sheikh of Quissanga, 1892. AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, caixa, maço 2.

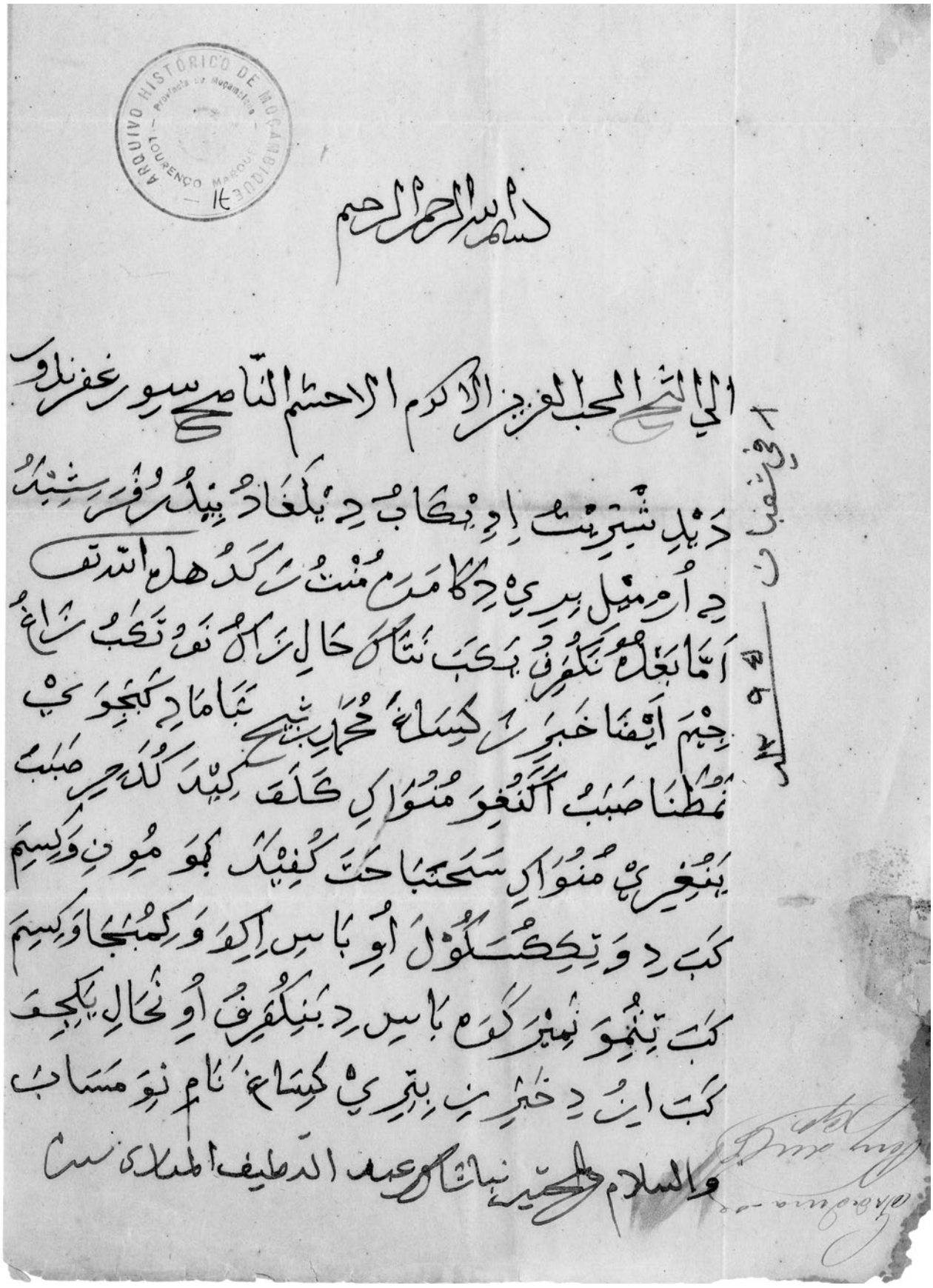

Fig. 1b: Sample of northern Mozambican Swahili correspondence held at the Mozambican Historical Archive (AHM). Letter from Boana Shaki b. Abdulatifo al-Mafazi, Sheikh of Quissanga, 1892. AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, caixa, maço 2.

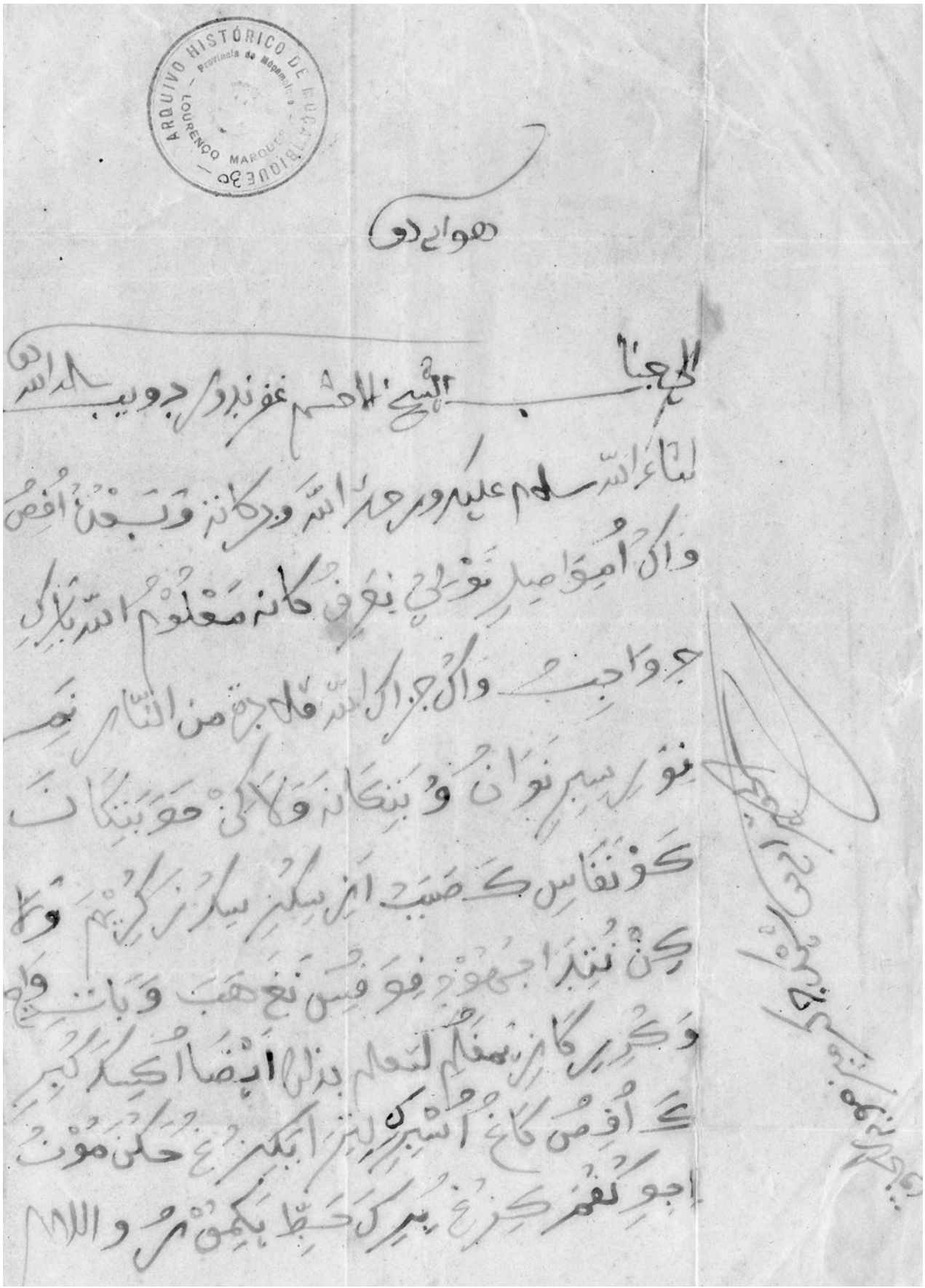

Fig. 2: Letter written by Momba ibn Ishaka, the Sheikh of Quirimizi (1880). AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2.

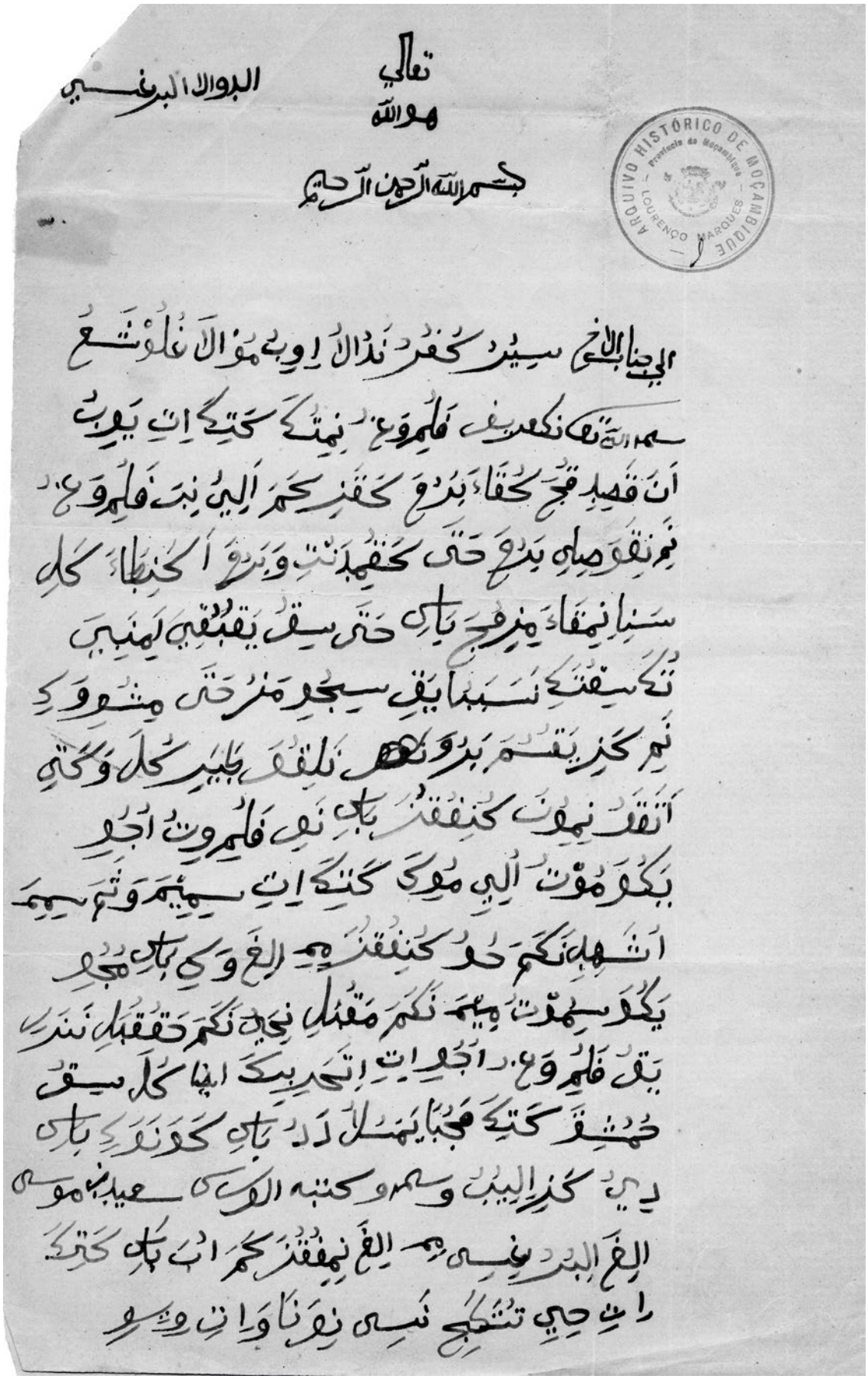

Fig. 3: Letter by Said ibn Musa, a *lingoa do estado* in Tungi. AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 14, maço 1.

Table 1: Tansliteration and transcription of the letter by Said ibn Musa, a *lingoa do estado* in Tungi (Fig. 3).

Line A1: Hua Allahu taala	Him, the Great Allah[17]
Line A2: Al-dula al-purtugisi	In the Portuguese land
Line A3: Bismillah rahman Rahim	In the name of Allah, the Merciful
Line B1: ila janabi al-akhi siyuru kufurunadulu I wibu Mola [probably Moura] Gulushão	This letter to my brother, Mr Governor of Ibo, Mola [or Moura] Gulushão [Garção].
Line B2: nakuarifu falume wangu nimetoka katika inti ya wibu	I inform you, my King, I come from the land of Ibo.
Line B3: anakasidi kuja kukaa barua kwa kazi kama alio nipa falume wangu	I came to stay as my King ordered me in the letter of employment.
Line B4: nami nikawasili barua hata kwa kumidanti wa barua akanitwaa kali [kazi]	And I took the letter to the commander, who gave me the work.
Line B5: sani [sana] nimekaa mwezi mmoja basi hata siku yakupokea amenambia	I stayed for a long time, worked for one month until the day of payment. He told me
Line B6: toka sikutaki na sababu yake sijui mwanzo hata mwishowe wake	'Go away. I don't need you'. I don't know what the reason was [for the dismissal].
Line B7: nami kazi yakusoma barua nalikuwa tayari kula wakati	And as for the work of reading the letters, I was ready to do it any time.
Line B8: atakao nimeona kuniongoza basi nawe mfalume wetu ujue	I think you must direct me – you, my King, should know this,
Line B9: ya kuwa mtu uliomweka katika inti si mwema wa tamma si mwema	that the person you placed in the land is no good [wa tamma], he is no good,
Line B10: Ushahidi na kama huo kunifukuza mimi língua wake basi mujue	the evidence is this, [is] that he wants to fire me, his [own] translator, get yourself informed
Line B11: yakuwa si mutu mwema na kama mukubali ni hayo na kama hakukubali na zari	that he is not a good person and if you agree and if they do not agree then
Line B12: yaku mfalme wangu ojue inti etaharibika ina kula siku	you my ruler know that the land is being destroyed every day.
Line B13: hamushika katika majuba ya masuludadu basi ka wanawake basi	The soldiers entre into our houses for the women.
Line B14: Ndio kazi iliopo wasalam wakatabahu al-waraka Sa'idi ibn Musa	That is the work they do. Greetings. Yours Sa'idi ibn Musa,
Line B15: língua al-portugesi mimi língua nimifunguza kwa mambo basi katika	I am the official interpreter of Portuguese and I inform you about the news in this land.
Line B16: inti hiyi tutakaji nasi ni wana wa inti wenyewe	We are the inhabitants of this land, we are the real sons of this land.

[17] The text in Arabic script does not have punctuation, but I added some in the English text to make it easier to understand.

Another example can be found in a letter by Bwana Shaki ibn Daly, the 'Governor of Moors' of Quissanga, who informs the Governor of Cabo Delgado, João Lobo Teixeira de Barros, in an undated letter that he could not reply to a letter because he was unable to find anyone who could read Portuguese and translate it for him.[18] Due to this situation, the Portuguese used *lingoas do estado* (official translators), who were local intellectuals[19] who translated and wrote *ajami* letters for the Portuguese officers.

The position of *the lingoas do estado* was problematic sometimes, however, and was influenced by the political context of the epoch and region, as we can see in a report by Said ibn Musa, the official translator of Tungi. In his letter dated 20 February 1888 CE (Fig. 3, Table 1), he reports that the military commander of Tungi was not paying him his wage for the position of the official translator, although Said had been recommended for the post by the governor of the district. He also informs us that this military commander, whose name is not actually mentioned in the letter, was not behaving properly towards the people of Tungi either.[20] This may not be a problem that the translator only encountered, but rather part of a more complex political problem in this region, as witnessed by several correspondences from the period. The transliteration and translation of several lines of the letter shown in Figure 3 attests the complex role of the *lingoas do estado* (see Table 1).

The letters are thus linked to the local context of Islamic literacy and spread through Islamic education, as mentioned above. Although there is no clear evidence of the presence of Qur'anic schools in the region in the letters, the historiography of the area suggests that their authors, and in some cases their scribes, attended a Qur'anic school in Mozambique or elsewhere in East Africa where Islamic education was propagated by trading ulama who came from different regions of East Africa. This point of view links the process of *ajami* literacy in northern Mozambique to the wider area of East Africa through Islamic scholarship, trade and political connections.[21]

In contrast, *ajami* literacy came to play an important role in the secular context of the colonial administration as part of official communication between the Portuguese officers and the local rulers. Thus, although the process which gave birth to these manuscripts is part of the dynamics of Islam's diffusion in the area, the documents cannot be classified as religious texts. Although the letters reveal so many Islamic words and sentences, for instance in addressing people, what needs to be understood is that their purpose or use was not a religious one. The secular and administrative use of these letters marks the interface of two distinct cultural entities: the Portuguese on the one hand and the northern Mozambique Swahili rulers on the other. This twofold representation makes this correspondence different from other Swahili *ajami* correspondence in the region. Its peculiarity can be evidenced by several Portuguese loanwords that made their way into the introductory formulas, in the dates of the letters or even in its corpus. Thus, while the introductory formulas are common to East and Central African *ajami* correspondence,[22] the integration of Portuguese words such as *senhor* (Sir or Mister), *governador* (governor), *mando recado* (I send my salutations), *ordem* (order), *capitão-mor* (captain-major), *comandante* (commander), *surdado/soldado* (soldier), *receber* (to receive), *licença* (licence), *excelência* (excellence) and *perdoar* (to forgive) reflect the specific northern Mozambican context.

3.2. Size of the collection and date range

The *Fundo do Século XIX* of the Mozambican Historical Archive is divided into a host of regional and administrative collections and includes a total of 665 *ajami* manuscripts. The collection of *ajami* manuscripts comes from two main regions in northern Mozambique: the District of Mozambique, now Nampula Province, where the capital city (in the Ilha de Moçambique) was located during most of the period, and the District of Cabo Delgado comprising the current territories of Niassa and Cabo Delgado Province. The former District of Mozambique has 109 letters (representing 16.3% of all the works in the collection), all located in the 'Fundo do Governo Geral de Moçambique', 'Fundo do Governo do Distrito de Moçambique' and the 'Fundo do Governo do Distrito de Angoche'. The Cabo Delgado collection has 556 letters (representing 83.6% of the collection) located in the 'Fundo do Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado', most of

[18] See the letter by Bwana Shaki ibn Daly in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2.

[19] See Bonate 2016, 67 for more details about the role of the lingoa do estado.

[20] See Said ibn Musa's letter to the Governor of the District of Cabo Delgado, 20 February 1888, in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 14, maço 1.

[21] See Hafkin 1973.

[22] See Luffin 2014.

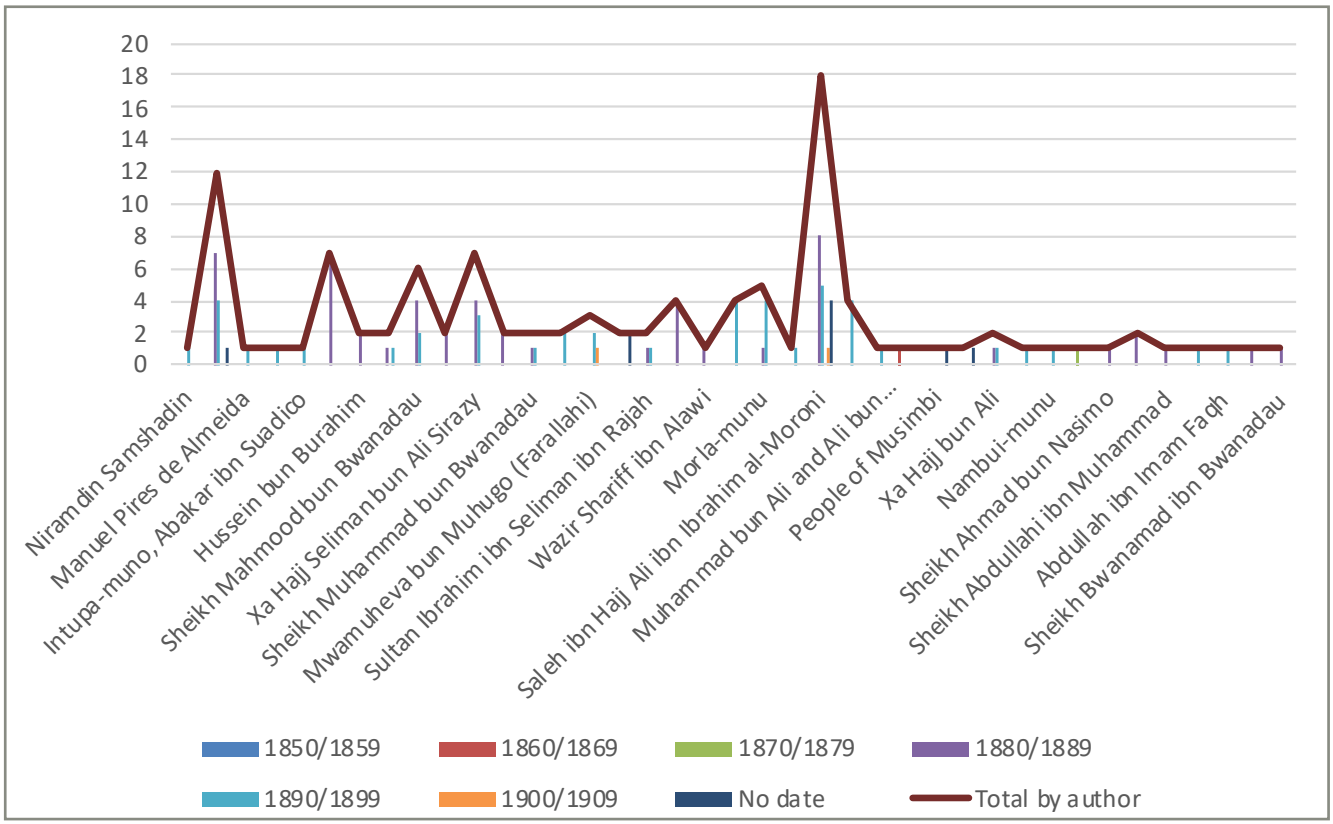

Fig. 4: Diagram showing the number of letters per author from the district of Mozambique.

them addressed to the island of Ibo, where the capital of the district was established as the main Portuguese settlement in the area.

As regards the period covered, the collection ranges from 1858 to 1898 CE: the earliest letters come from Cabo Delgado, from Fumo Matika of Shanga (1858) and from Sultan Said Ali ibn Sultan Abdallah of Messanja in Pemba Bay (1858), while the most recent ones come from Naguema and Muhaburika (1898) in Mozambique district and Mussaka bun[23] Mweka (1898) in Cabo Delgado. Figure 4 shows the number of letters by author in the district of Mozambique.

3.3. The authors

The two regions (Mozambique district and Cabo Delgado district) have a total of 116 authors between them: 39 came from the former (Fig. 4) and 77 from the latter (Fig. 5). The most important authors of these letters according to local oral history[24] and Mozambique historiography include Farallahi, Hussein Ibrahim, Mussa Phiri, Saleh ibn Hajj Ali, Maulid Volay, Bwanamad ibn Banadau, Xa Hajj Ali, Nunu Fatima binti Zakariya, who were all from Mozambique, and Mwaliya Mwidala, Bwana Shaki ibn Abdulatifo, Abdulgafur ibn Abdulatifo, Said Ali ibn Sultan Abdallah, Aburary ibn Sultan Abdurabi, Yussuf ibn Abubakr and Mussaka ibn Mweka from the Cabo Delgado region.[25] The Portuguese authors in this collection include the governors of Cabo Delgado, Valentim Hermenegildo de Campos and Duarte (or Eduardo) Humberto de Oliveira, and the local-born *mestiços* of European descendants, who even had Portuguese names like João Carrilho, Francisco Valente and Dona Maria Lopes (the Queen of Arimba), who were normally considered *Wana wa Wibo*[26] and were able to speak Portuguese and Kiswahili and other local languages and wrote their correspondence in Swahili *ajami*. In Mozambique, Portuguese authors such as Manoel Pires de Almeida and Agostinho Teixeira de Almeida can be found (both held the post of *Capitão-mor das Terras da Coroa*, that is, the person responsible for the administration of the Mussoril mainland).

[23] *Bun* is a local variant of the more common *ibn/bin* 'son'.

[24] Collected during fieldwork research for my MA thesis in Sancul, Mogincual, Sangage, Angoche, Quissanga and Pangane in 2013 and 2014.

[25] Mutiua 2014; Conceição 2006; Pelissièr 1987; Medeiros 1999; Hafkin 1973; Amorim 1910; Albuquerque 1897; Coutinho 1935.

[26] 'Offspring of Ibo', indicating that they were indigenous people!

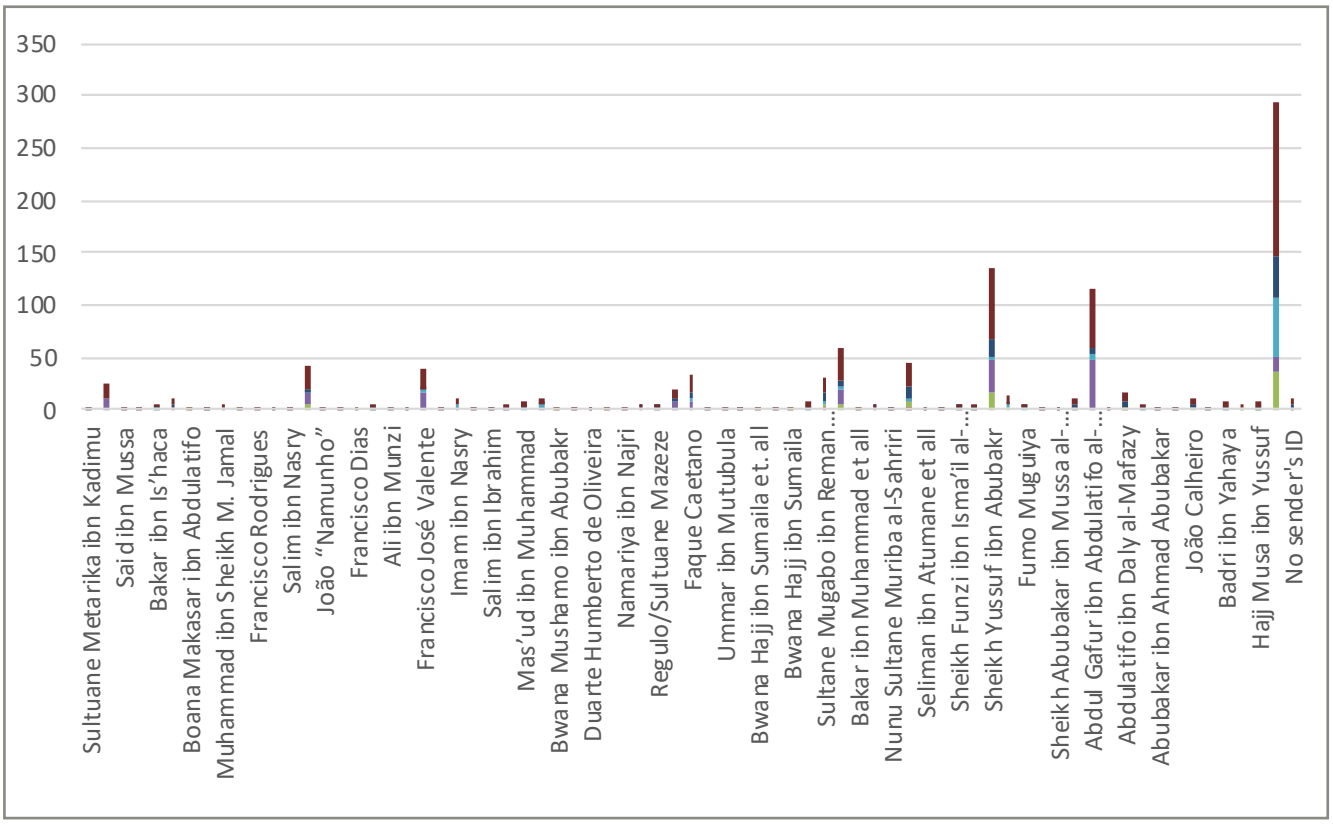

Fig. 5: The number of letters per author in the district of Cabo Delgado.

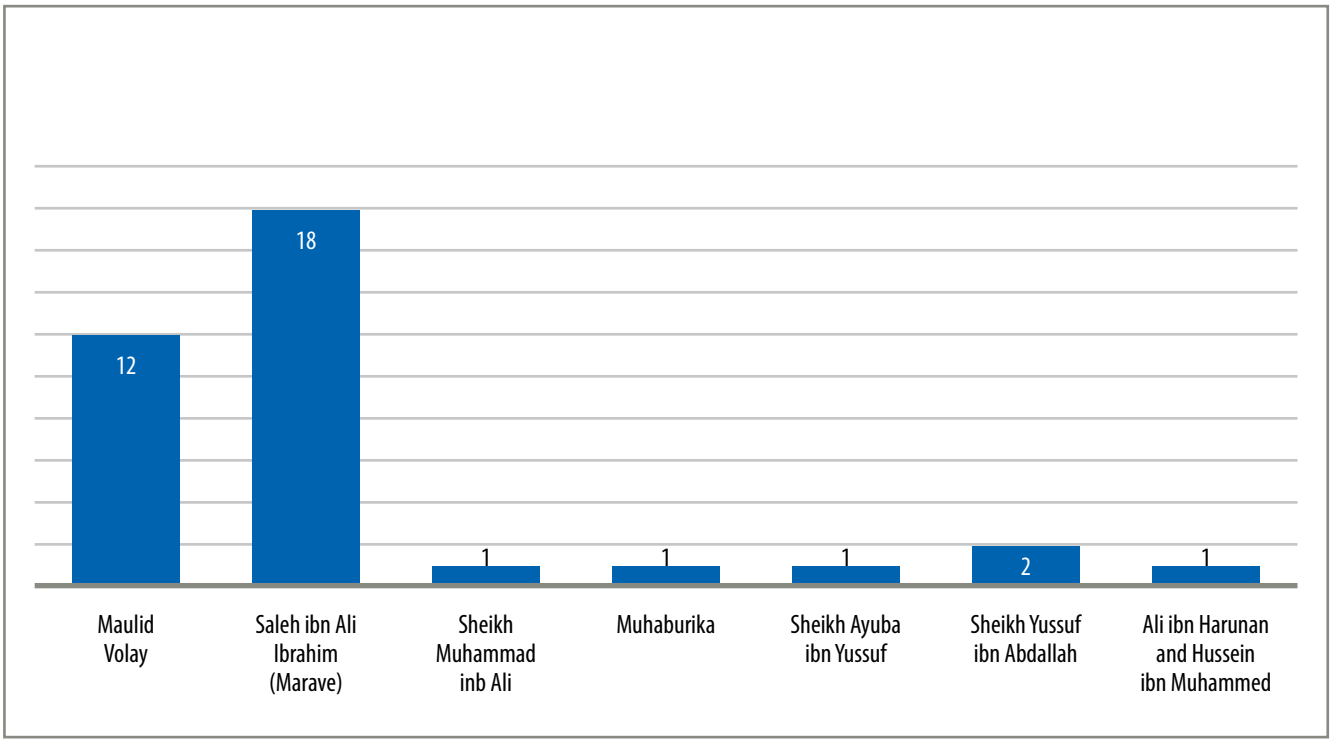

Fig. 6: The number of letters per author in Sancul.

Collective authors can also be found, mentioned in letters written on behalf of many people or signed by more than one sender, like the soldiers of Matibane, the people of Musimbi (Quitangonha Sheikhdom) and certain noblemen or political and community leaders who wrote on behalf of their people, like Ali ibn Harun, Hussein bun Ummar, Muhammad bun Ali and Ali bun Abdullah, all of whom came from Sancul. Cabo Delgado not only leads in terms of the number of letters and individual authors, but also in the number of collective authors, some examples being the people of Pangane and noblemen from Tungi and Arimba, who all wrote on behalf of their people – complaining about the appointment of colonial officers who were not of their approval and requesting to postpone the payment of taxes and even open shops in their villages.

The correspondence mostly consists of official and administrative reports. Consequently, the collection is not a good source for examining the biographies of the authors, although it does provide some notes, which can help in understanding the family trees of some of the writers and their succession in the political structure.

The figures above, which show the dynamics of correspondence per author, are not conclusive, but they do indicate trends for certain authors and regions such as Sancul (Fig. 6) and Quissanga (Fig. 7).

Figures 3 and 4 can help to clarify the tendencies found in Figures 1 and 2 as the former show the distribution of the letters in terms of their authors and the areas where they were written. In Cabo Delgado, 235 letters corresponding to 42.26% of the collection from the region (556 letters) come from Quissanga, and 220 of these letters, or 93.6% of them, come from the al-Mafazi family, whose most important representative was Bwana Shaki ibn Abdulatifo al-Mafazi, an author who wrote 147 letters ranging from 1872 to 1893. The letters from Quissanga correspond to 12 authors among the 77 from Cabo Delgado. This distribution illustrates the important role Quissanga and its rulers played during a specific historical period in the Cabo Delgado region due to its key geo-strategic location, lying on the mainland opposite the most important island in the Quirimba Archipelago. The first capital of the district of Cabo Delgado was established on the Island of Ibo in the sixteenth century and became the most important harbour and seat of representative companies later on. It was moved to Porto Amélia (Pemba) during the rule of the Nyassa Company (1893–1929). The geo-strategic role of Quissanga as a source of power that the Bwana Shaki family wielded in this period is illustrated by this collection, which tells us about the integration of local rulers into the Portuguese colonial administration (vassalage treaties), the ivory trade, slavery, the impact of *mfeqani*[27] in the region, crime and the administration of justice, demographic movements and payment of taxes, among other things.

Quissanga and Sancul have certain similarities which deserve our attention when it comes to studying northern Mozambican *ajami* manuscripts. The sheikhdom of Sancul was located in front of Mozambique Island to the south. It was through the territories of Sancul (to the south) and the sheikhdoms of Matibane and Quitangonha that Mozambique Island accessed the mainland of Mussoril and the rest of Makhuwana in the hinterland. Access to the hinterland was of vital importance for the development of trade that connected Mozambique Island to the wider Indian Ocean, but it was also key to the supply of foodstuffs, manpower and later on for effective occupation of the region as well.

Sancul additionally gave access to Infussi and Moginqual to the south across the coast on a route which took the caravans to Angoche through Sangage, while Matibane linked Mozambique Island to the north through a coastal route going to Quitangonha, Lúrio and the southern areas of Cabo Delgado.

Out of a total of 109 letters from the district, 39 come from Sancul, representing 35.7% of the total number of letters in Mozambique. The most important authors in this collection are Saleh ibn Hajj Ali Ibrahim al-Moroni with 12 letters (1886–1896) and Maulid Volay with 18 letters (1887–1896). Maulid Volay and Marave were members of the same family, but fought for the leadership of the sheikhdom during most of the late nineteenth century. Both of them claimed or were appointed to the chair of Sheikh of Sancul and were appointed one after the other as *Capitão-mor*[28] of Sancul by the Portuguese, which created even more rivalry between them.

[27] The *mafiti* or *maviti* and *maguanguara* raids that reached Quissanga and other coastal villages between 1874 and 1876 and interrupted the caravan routes that linked the Zambezi valley and the margins of Lake Nyasa to Ibo. For more on the impact of *mfeqani* in northern Mozambique, see Medeiros 1999; Palmer and Newitt 2016; Hafkin 1973.

[28] Captain-major, as the title is known in some English bibliographies, was a designation bestowed on certain members of the local political elite who demonstrated – or were expected to demonstrate – some loyalty to the Portuguese. According to Newitt (1995), the rank was equivalent to honorary consul, representing Portuguese sovereignty. Although a *capitão-mor* did not automatically receive any administrative or military powers, those who were appointed to such a position did gain some authority. When bestowed upon a Portuguese citizen (like the title of *Capitão-mor* das Terras Firmes do Mossuril, for example), the position always went hand in hand with exercising military and administrative authority.

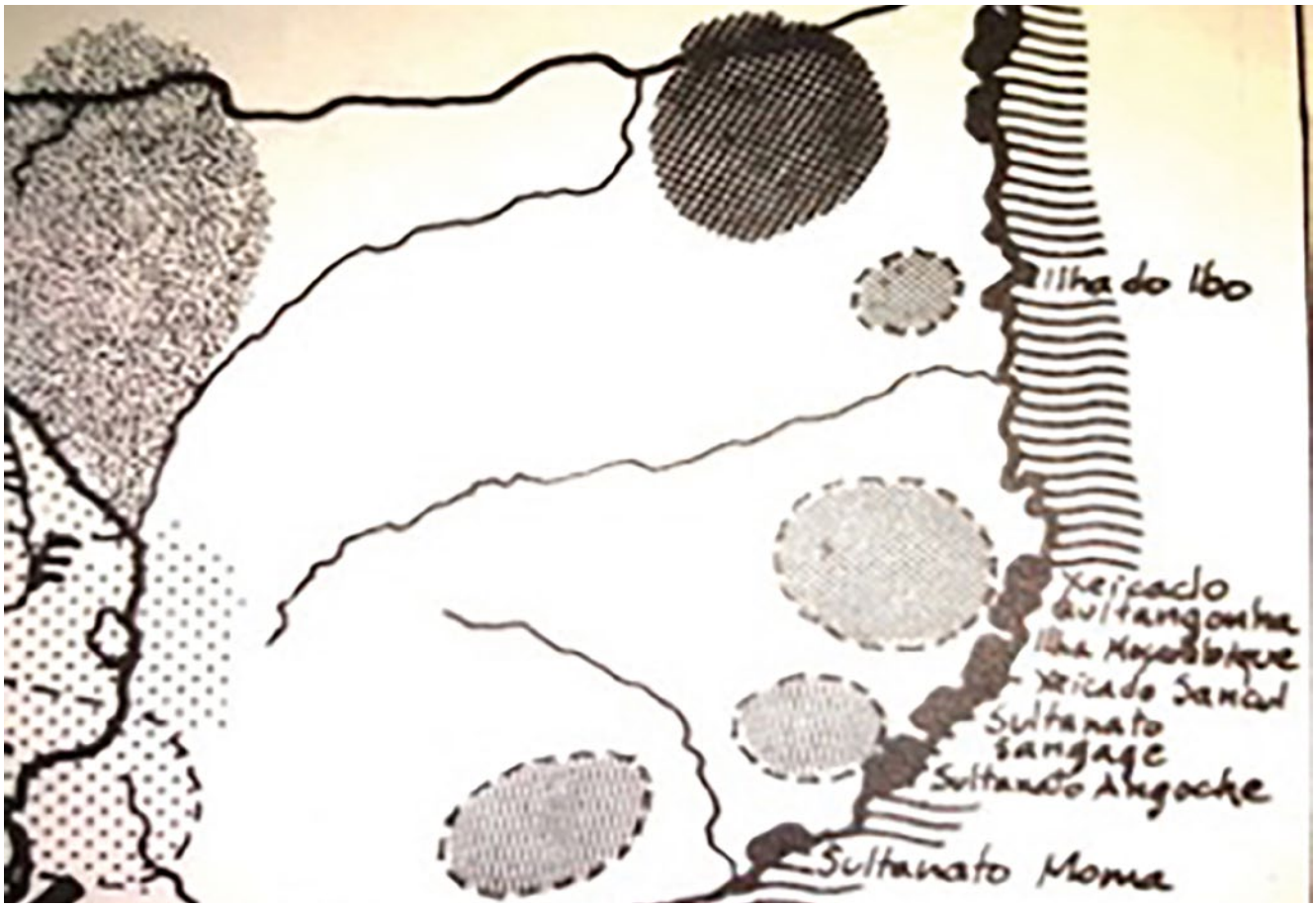

Fig. 7: Map of the coastal area in northern Mozambique.[29]

Sancul was the closest sheikhdom[30] to Mozambique, where the Portuguese had established their government, and controlled the main trade routes which linked Mozambique Island to the mainland, while Quissanga played the same role in Cabo Delgado, where Ibo Island was the main centre. These strategic roles provided more political power to their rulers in negotiating with the Portuguese settlers on Ibo and Mozambique Island.

3.4. The 1880s and the growth of ajami *correspondence*

The figures below[31] suggest that the 1880s CE were the most active decade in the district of Cabo Delgado in terms of *ajami* correspondence and, as indicated, the same tendency occurs in Mozambique as well (Fig. 8). As a consequence of the Portuguese military occupation and the vassalage treaties with local rulers, there was a sudden growth in correspondence from the 1850s, reaching its zenith in the 1880s. No letters from the first decade of the twentieth century have been found in the district of Cabo Delgado.

[29] Taken from Medeiros 1988, 9.

[30] Ruled by the local Swahili elite, who had moved from Mozambique Island after the Portuguese occupation. See Hafkin 1973.

[31] These figures are not definitive as there are almost 150 letters which still need to be dated (see the column entitled 'No date').

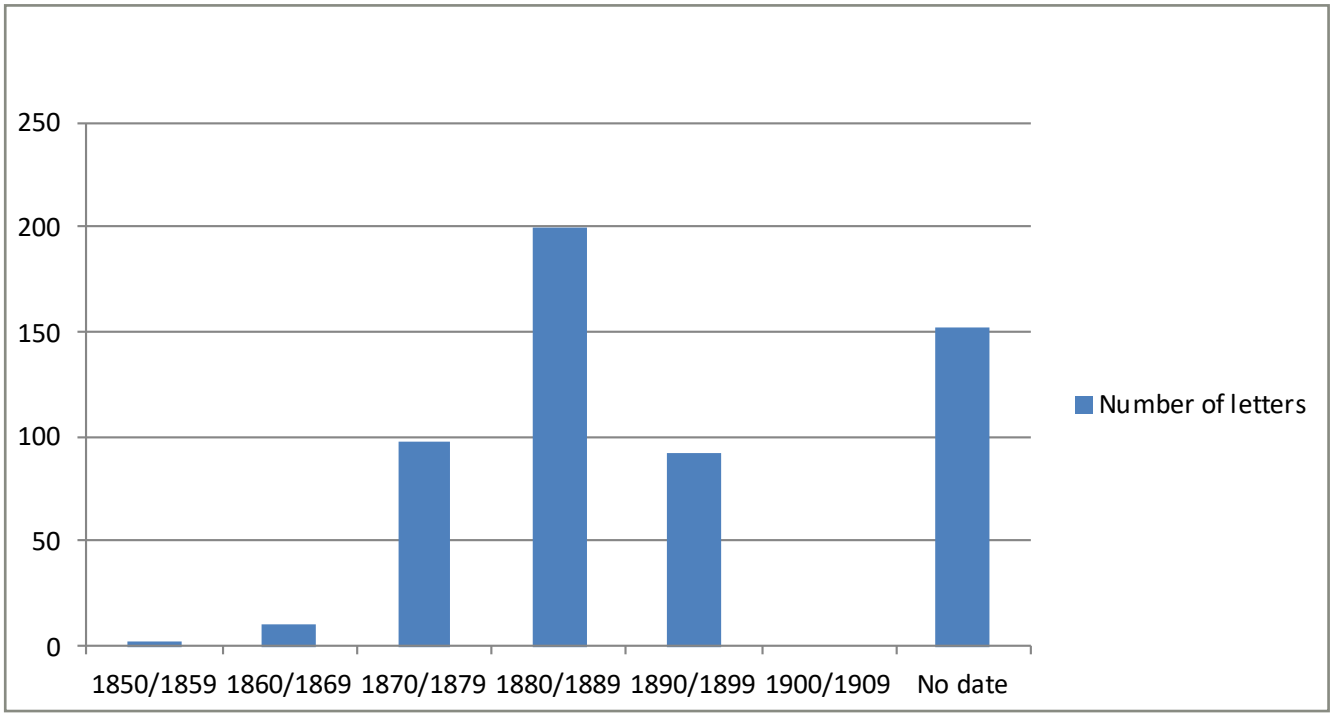

Fig. 8: Number of letters from the district of Cabo Delgado in chronological order.

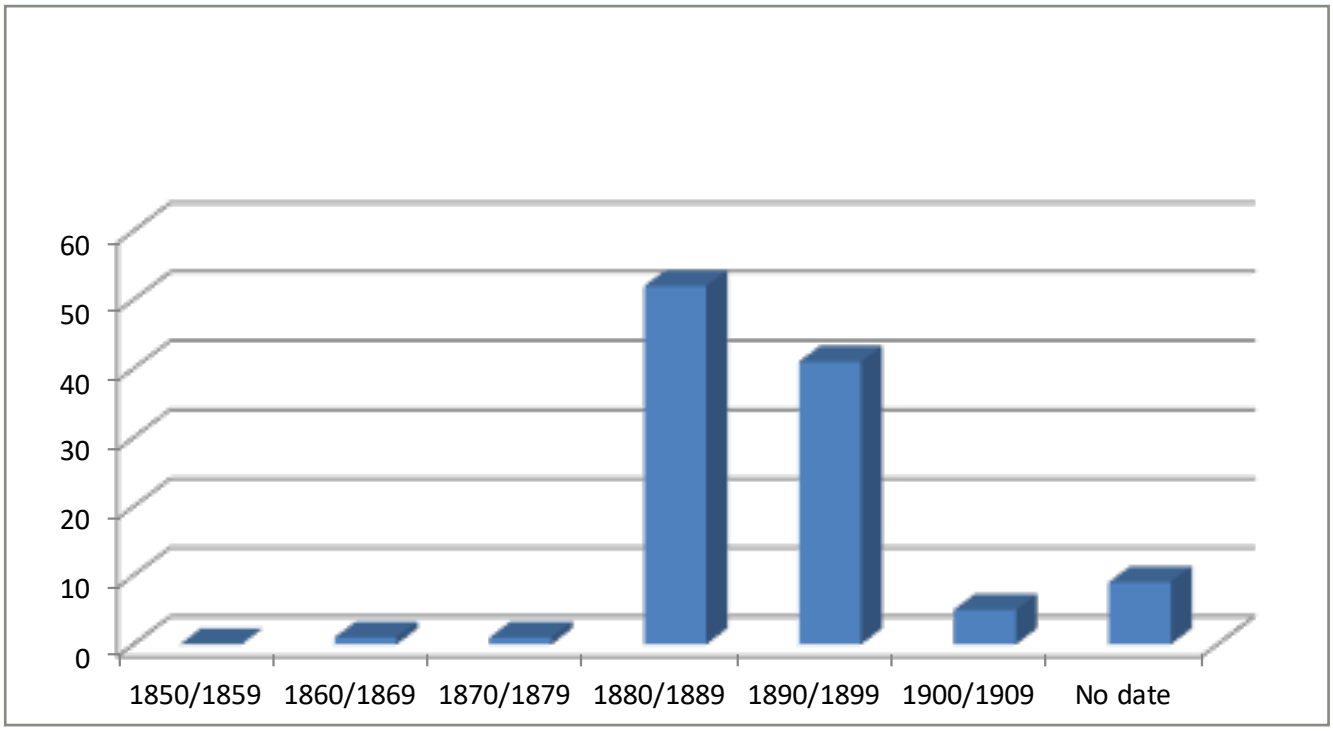

Fig. 9: Number of letters from the district of Mozambique in chronological order.

In Mozambique district, although one letter exists from the 1860s and another from the 1870s, the figure suggests that regular correspondence in Swahili between the Portuguese and local rulers must have peaked in the 1880s and began to decline in the following decade (1890s) until the first decade of the twentieth century when it was suppressed from the official realm (Fig. 9).

The concentration of letters in the 1880s raises the question of why this happened in this period – a question which could be answered in several ways. From the 1880s onwards, the European colonial powers were engaged in the partition of Africa with the establishment of certain rules set out at the Berlin Conference (1884–1885).[32] This meeting was preceded by exploration campaigns (in the 1870s to 1880s) such as those conducted by Serpa Pinto, Cameron, Livingstone and others.[33] Serpa Pinto, who was in Cabo Delgado and Niassa from 1884 to 1886, is mentioned in some of the letters by Bwana Shaki ibn Abulatifo al-Mafazi, Abdulgafur ibn Abdulatifo al-Mafazi, Muhammad ibn Sheikh and Mwaliya[34] as an ally whom they worked with or helped during his trips from coastal Cabo Delgado to Nyassa. This international conference affected Portuguese–African relations afterwards. Many treaties were signed during the period to 'legitimise' Portugal's colonial power over the territory. As Portugal did not have sufficient military power to ensure control over the vast territory of Mozambique, the Portuguese had to rely on local African rulers through vassalage treaties (with certain sheikhs and sultans) or even bestowing the titles of *Capitão-mor* and *Sargento-mor* in a system that Hafkin has called 'survival strategy'.[35]

Fig. 10. Letter from Mussaka ibn Mafiga Maniga, 16 August 1888. AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 8, maço 4.

In this system, local rulers agreed to hoist the Portuguese flag in their own territories and received a monthly allowance in return. In practice, however, they often broke the agreement and rebelled against the Portuguese.[36] Correspondence from this period provides evidence of these dynamics. In two letters from Mussaka ibn Mafiga, we can see just how fragile the relationship between the local rulers and the Portuguese was (see Figs 10 and 11). Mussaka ibn Mafiga was the most powerful Swahili leader of all in the region of Palma, Cabo Delgado, and he often helped the Portuguese. He also rebelled against the colonial power on occasion, though. His letters display both friendship and enmity (see Table 2).

[32] Newitt 1995, 352.

[33] Ki-Zerbo 1992, 67–87.

[34] See letters from Bwana Shaki ibn Abdulatifo al-Mafazi to the Governor of the District of Cabo Delgado, 26 October 1885 and 11 August 1885 in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2; letters from Abdulgafur ibn Abdulatifo al-Mafazi to Secretary Júlio, 21 December 1884 and 28 December 1884 and to the Governor of Cabo Delgado, Francisco de Ornela Pery da Câmara, 13 February 1885 and 29 April 1885; letters from Muhammad ibn Sheikh to the Secretary of the Governor of Ibo, 14 July 1885 and 31 August 1885, all in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2; and letter from Mwaliya Mwidala to the Governor of Cabo Delgado, (26) December 1884 in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 8, maço 3.

[35] Hafkin 1973.

[36] Pelissièr 1987; Medeiros 1999; Hafkin 1973.

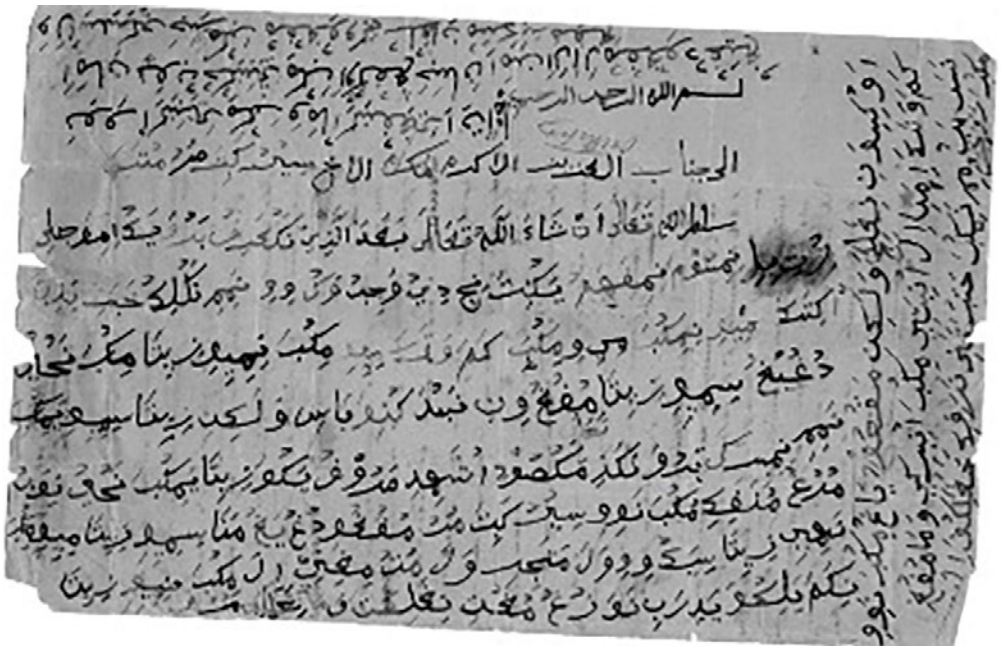

Fig. 11: Letter from Musaka ibn Mafiga Maniga, 23 October 1888. AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 8, maço 4.

Table 2: Transliteration and translation of the letter from Musaka ibn Mafiga Maniga, 16 August 1888 (Fig. 10).

1st line: Ila janabi shehe al-aziz indana sinyuru shirijeto [sargento] salamuhullahu ta'ala	This letter [is] to the leader, the great [one], to Senhor *Sargento*, [may the] peace of Allah be upon you.
2nd line: wama ba aduhu nakuarifu yakama hali yangu jema wa zaidi	I inform you that I am fine. Then
3rd line: ya habari nimesikia Adurabi umufungu basi nataka	I heard that you arrested Adurabi (Abdurabi). I want
4th line: wufungue allah allah tazama allah allah wufungue kwa amuri yangu tafadhali	you to release him! By God, consider it, by God, please, release him as if by my order!
5th line: usifanye mengine usifanye matata na usifanye matata nadari yako	Don't create any further problems, don't cause any further trouble and don't cause trouble to you.
6th line: basi nami nafanya matata ila ufungue basi ukifungua basi	Because I will cause trouble unless you release him. If you release him, [everything] will be fine.
7th line: hapana matata mimi nawe walakini iwapo aukufungua fahamu	There will be no conflict between me and you, but if you do not release him, remember,
8th line: mimi nawe hatupatani maisha yangu kana wataka wema mimi nawe	you and I will not make up as long as I live. If you want peace between us
9th line: ili fungue mwinyi Adurabi basi ndi habari yangu	release Mwinyi Adurabi. This is my concern.
10th line: wasalam bwana Musaka ibn Mafiga Maniga	Greetings, Bwana Musaka ibn Mafiga Maniga

Table 3: Transliteration and translation of the letter from Musaka ibn Mafiga Maniga, 23 October 1888 (Fig. 11).

1st line: Ila janabi al-aziz al-akram al-mukarram al-akhi sinyuru Kapitamoro Mutapa	To the great, respectful, respected, brother Senhor *Capitão-mor* Mutapa
2nd line: Salamuhullahu taala insha allahu taala baada ladhi nakuarifu barua yako imewasili	[May the] Peace of Allah, the Highest, be upon you. After that I inform you that your letter has arrived.
3rd line: nimesoma nimefahamu yakunita nije ndiyo wajibu wako wewe na mimi nakuliko habari ya zita	I have read it, I have understood that you summoned me to come [to Ibo] – this is your responsibility. And I will inform you about the war.
4th line: Ukitaka menyewe ni Mikumba menyewe Mikumba kama wataka menyewe Mikumba ni menyewe zita Mikumba na huyo	If you want to know who caused the war, it was Mikumba. If you want to know the instigator, Mikumba is the instigator of the war, [but],
5th line: ndugu yango si menyewe zita mufungueni [nabuda kuniwa] basi walakini zita si menyewe ya Mikumba	my brother, is not the one who started the war. Release him [. . .]; it is not his war, it is Mikumba's.
6th line: Na mimi nimepereka barua na kazi makusudi ushahidi marufu yakua zita ya Mikumba na huyo niwapo	And I sent a letter with the intention to provide an important testimony that the war is due to Mikumba and that
7th line: Mrugu munafiki mkubwa na wewe sinyuru kapitamoro mufungue ndugu yangu mana si menyewe zita menyewe Mikumba	Mrugu is a great destabiliser and you, Senhor *Capitão-mor*, release my brother because it is not his war. It is Mikumba's war.
8th line: Nahie(?) zita si yako wewe wala matajiri wala mutu mwingine ila Mikumba nimenyewe zita	And this war is not yours, nor the traders', nor any other person's except Mikumba's; it is his war.
9th line: Ni kama yalikua ya (A)durabi ni wazungu mugoti ningalikata ninka-likenda Murue	And if it was [a war] caused by Adurabi and the Portuguese, I would kneel down to apologise and I would go to Murue
10th line/right margin: Au kisiwani ningalikuja walakini makusudi yangu Mikumba na wewe	or I would come to the island [of Ibo]. But my purpose [is to tell you] that it is Mikumba's fault. And you,
11th line/right margin: Kama wataka imani ila unipatiye Mikumba unipereke-re wama mufunge	if you want peace, you have to get Mikumba for me, bring him to me or arrest him.
12th line/right margin: Na sababu mimi na Mikumba hatupatani na rafiki hungalikufa ila Mikumba *rauki yaru* (?)	Because Mikumba and I do not get along. And it was Mikumba who killed my friend(?).[37]
13th line/ top margin: Ukinipatie Mikumba wama ukinifungie itie amani	Get Mikumba for me or arrest him for me, and make peace,
14th line/top margin: Amani iwapo hukunipatie Mikumba ao kufunga hakuna imani allah allah mufungue ndugu yangu	so there is peace. If you don't get Mikumba for me or don't arrest him, there will not be any peace. By God, release my brother!
15th line/top margin: Wala usisikie habari ya Mikumba mufungue wakataba-hu Sultane Musaka ibn Mafiga	And don't listen to what Mikumba says, [just] release him! Written by Sultan Mussaka ibn Mafiga

[37] The two lines 12 and 13 can be interpreted in different ways and there are two words I cannot discern ('rauki yaru') at the end of line 12. But based on the Portuguese interpretation available in the same archival file, it seems that Mikumba was responsible of causing war and of killing João Carrilho who was a friend of Mussaka. And this was the topic in these lines. However, the Portuguese document is an interpretation and I tried to make a translation of the letter.

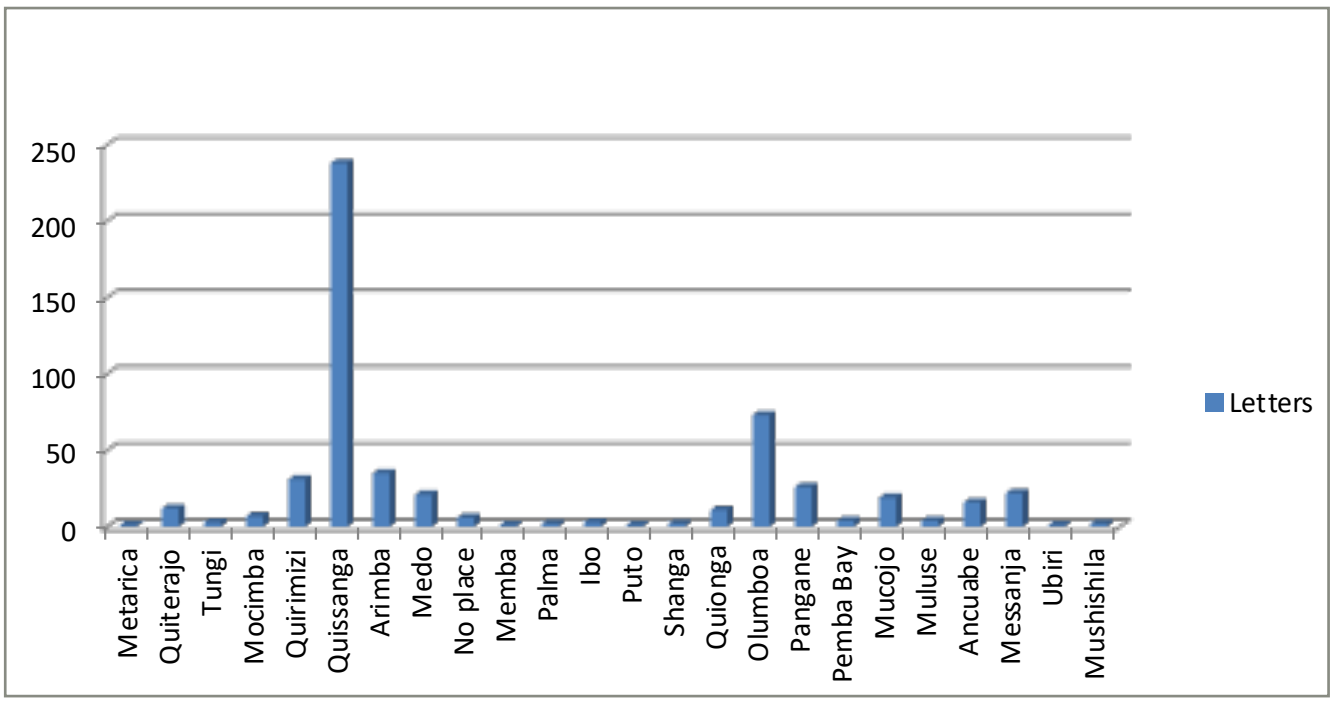

Fig. 12: Letters per area from the district of Cabo Delgado.

The vassalage treaties that could grant Portugal the right to act as the colonising power could only be signed if the African local rulers agreed to them. How could this be achieved? The African rulers of northern Mozambique had been involved in the slave trade, which accorded them respect among their partners on the western Indian Ocean coast and among some French and Portuguese slave dealers and made them wealthy until the late nineteenth century. How and why, then, would they change their opinion and accept Portuguese authority, as demonstrated in their correspondence? The answer is a complex one because there are so many factors involved. First of all, Zanzibar had been under British influence in the 1880s, which led to the Protectorate being created in 1890[38] and the power of the Sultan, who was a 'guiding force' for many East African rulers, decreasing. Second, the British were engaged in the promotion of legitimate commerce in the region and the abolition of the slave trade, which was also the aim of Brito Capello, Serpa Pinto and Roberto Ivens, who all started their African campaigns in 1877.[39] Thus, some of the local rulers accepted the treaties as a way of guaranteeing the survival of their political and social status and having Portuguese protection against attacks by their enemies, who were mostly neighbouring local rulers. In Cabo Delgado, for instance, *mavite* or *mafiti* warriors attacked several Makhuwa and Mwani communities in Cabo Delgado, while in the district of Mozambique, hinterland Makhuwa kingdoms and those of the coast shifted their relations between enmity and friendship according to their immediate interests. Others accepted the treaties to distract the Portuguese and continue trafficking slaves out of Portuguese and British inspections.

3.5. The content of the letters

The content of the letters includes various topics relating to the social, political and economic history of the northern Mozambique region with a focus on the establishment of Portuguese colonial administration, which meant the integration of the local political elite (sheikhs, sultans and *mwenes*)[40] into the administration structure under the rule of Portuguese colonial officers as *Capitão-mor*, *Sargento-mor and Cabo*, all of whom performed administrative functions and were under the subordination of the Sheikh

[38] Bang 2003, 7.

[39] Pelissiér 1987, 138. These Portuguese explorers were forced to travel by the pressure of other European colonial powers who demanded the effective occupation of the territories to confirm them as colonial possessions, as agreed at the Berlin Conference. Another factor was the Portuguese anti-slavery decrees of 1832 and 1854/69 and the Anglo-Portuguese agreement on the abolition of slavery, which was signed in 1842. See Medeiros 1988, 28–31.

[40] The title of 'Sheikh' is used according the designation given to the heads of northern Mozambican Swahili states such as Quissanga, Sangage, Sancul or Quitangonha. In the same way, 'Sultan' is a title used to refer to the heads of the Sultanates of Tungi and Angoche. The term *mwene* used in this article is the Makhuwa word for 'King', although its etymology can also be interpreted in Sacleux's way (cf. Sacleux 1939).

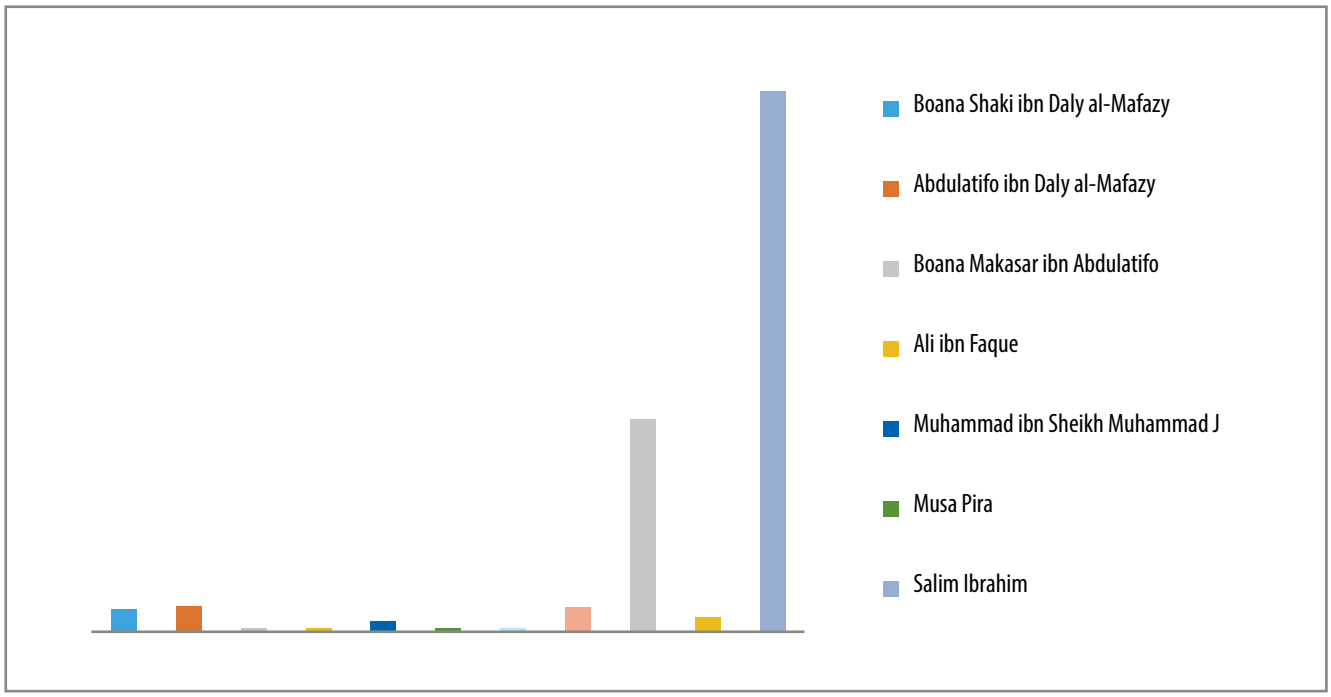

Fig. 13: The authors of the letters from Quissanga.

(in the Sheikhdom) and the Sultan (in the Sultanate). This also meant the legitimation of the sheikhs and sultans by the Portuguese Military Authority through their official appointment and inauguration of their seats of power. This resulted in many conflicts among the African ruling elites in the region, who wanted to gain advantages from the new 'client'. The word 'client' in this context is suitable when trying to understand the way this process developed in this period as the 'collaboration system' between the Portuguese colonial officers and the local rulers. In practice, it only worked on the basis of specific interests. The Portuguese were interested in securing trade routes and extending their authority to the hinterland through the local rulers, who used the opportunity to maintain their independence and earn a monthly 'allowance' while continuing to practise the slave trade behind their backs.[41] See the letter from *Capitão-mor* Saleh bun Ali Ibrahim from 1894, to quote just one example among many; in this letter, Saleh bun Ali Ibrahim (Marave) reports on the attack perpetrated by Maulid Volay (his uncle, and Sheikh of Sancul) on his land. Volay was *Capitão-mor* himself prior to Marave, and Marave was later reported to be a rebel and support the War of Namarral Makhuwas against the Portuguese.[42]

The slave trade had developed a social and economic network through which East African rulers, including those of northern Mozambique, could access commodities from Europe and Asia. The declining benefits of this network as the slave trade was abolished provoked a scarcity of these commodities among northern Mozambique rulers. The 'alliance or integration' into the Portuguese Authority was an alternative method for the local political elite to gain access to prestigious goods through the Portuguese-controlled networks. Thus, we can find requests for cloth, umbrellas, paper, guns and gunpowder in some of the correspondence.[43] It was also a strategic political option to maintain their political and social authority among their people in the context of growing Portuguese military power aiming to achieve an 'effective occupation' (*Ocupação efectiva*), which was the campaign of military submission of all of Mozambique's territories, precipitated by the agreements made at the Berlin Conference (1884–1885), which stipulated

[41] To quote just one example, see the letter from *Capitão-mor* Saleh bun Ali Ibrahim in AHM, Governo Geral de Moçambique, Fundo do Século XIX, caixa 8, maço 1, 1894; in this letter, Saleh bun Ali Ibrahim (Marave) reports on the attack perpetrated by Maulid Volay (his uncle, and Sheikh of Sancul) on his land. Volay was himself *capitão-mor* before Marave was appointed one. And Marave was latter reported to be a rebel and support the War of Namarral Makhuwas against the Portuguese. For more details on the 'collaboration system' that defined the integration of local rulers into the Portuguese administration before the end of *Campanhas de Ocupação efectiva*, see Hafkin 1973; Pelissièr 1987; Medeiros 1999.

[42] For more details on the 'collaboration system' that defined the integration of local rulers into the Portuguese administration before the end of the *Campanhas de Ocupação efectiva*, see Hafkin 1973, Pelissièr 1987 and Medeiros 1999.

[43] Mutiua 2014 and 2015.

that all the colonial powers should exert effective authority in their colonial territories. In Mozambique, its severest period lasted for 20-30 years from 1880.[44]

The political, social and economic integration of local societies into the Portuguese colonial order by such means as the demographic census, registration of slaves and freed slaves,[45] reports on raping of local noblemen's wives by Portuguese soldiers and the end of slave trafficking,[46] the influence of Indian merchants on the development of trade [47]and the payment of *décimas industriais* ('industrial tax')[48] all serve to exemplify the variety of topics broached in these manuscripts. Other topics are also mentioned such as the continuation of the slave trade (in many other ways), the ivory trade from the hinterland (Nyassa, Zambezia and Medo – in the south of Cabo Delgado, integrating the areas of Montepuez, Balama, Namuno, Ancuabe and Chiúre), crime, trade and links to the Swahili coast.

The links to the Swahili coast are not a specific issue in the manuscripts, although some letters refer to the appearance of 'Wajojo' in the region, who were associated with the slave trade,[49] like those reported in Francisco Valente's undated letter,[50] or the presence of 'Waswahili', such as an employee of Sultan Said Barghash of Zanzibar[51] who travelled along the coast of Cabo Delgado from Tungi to Ibo looking for a Zanzibari *mlunguana*[52] who was supposed to be in that area. The presence of European foreign citizens (non-Portuguese citizens) is also reported in the correspondence. In his letter of 26 April 1886, for instance, Abdulgafur ibn Abdulatifo al-Mafazi reports that soldiers were looking for two Welsh citizens who had apparently got lost in the Quissanga hinterland, while on 6 and 7 July 1884 the same author reported the presence of an English citizen who was looking for a house to rent or a place to build his own house. In the district of Mozambique, Sheikh Yussuf ibn Abdallah of Sancul reports that an English consul was crossing the River Mutiquiti on his travels.[53]

[44] Kizerbo 1973; Pelissièr 1987; Newitt 1995.

[45] See the letters that Boana Shaki ibn Daly sent the Governor of Cabo Delgado, João Lobo Teixeira Barros, on 15 November 1861: AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2.

[46] See the letter by Ali ibn Munzi (of Palma), 2 November 1893, AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 28, maço 2. Also see the letters from Francisco Valente in AHM, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 8, maço 2; Francisco Valente also reports about the state of trade, which was mainly under the control of Indian and Makhuwa merchants.

[47] See the letter by *Capitão-mor* Boana Shaki, for instance (undated), asking the Governor of Cabo Delgado to send Indian traders to his land (Quissanga), in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2, and the letter by Maulid Volay (25 February 1893) reporting about Indian shops in his land (Sancul-Quivolane), in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo Geral de Moçambique, caixa 150, maço 1. These are just a few of the numerous letters reporting on these issues (see Mutiua 2014 for more examples and details).

[48] Letter by Boana Shaki ibn Abdulatifo al-mafazi, 3 October 1877, in AHM, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2.

[49] The letter by Maulid Volay (2 January 1886) in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo Geral de Moçambique, caixa 152, maço 2 refers to Wajojo (Comorians) who were trading in slaves in Infusi with the local sheikh and Sultan of Angoche. Sheikh Ayuba ibn Yussuf (the interim sheikh of Sancul in 1874) also reported on the presence of Wajojo in the same area of Infusi for the purpose of trading slaves. In his letter from February 1886 (in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo Geral de Moçambique, caixa 149, maço 1), Sheikh Saleh ibn Xa Ibrahim of Moginqual also reported on the presence of Wajojo slave-dealers in his land. The arrival of eight Wajojo dhows was also reported in Arimba (Quissanga region, in Cabo Delgado) in an undated letter written by *sargento-mor* Mzungu Xico (Francisco) Valente, in AHM, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 8, maço 2. Juma ibn Hamisi and Omar ibn Maulid reported in their letter dated 11 March 1885 that a dhow of Wajojo was embarking slaves in Tandanhangue (Quissanga), in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 9, maço 3.

[50] See the letter by Francisco Valente (signed mzungo Xico Valente) in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 8, maço 2.

[51] See the letter from Tahiri ibn Mussa al-shirazi, *Capitão-mor* of Quiterajo (Cabo Delgado), 13 August 1885, in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 3.

[52] 'Noble man' in Kiswahili.

[53] See letter from Sheikh Yussuf ibn Abdallah, 27 August 1881, in AHM, Fundo do Século XIX, Governo Geral de Moçambique, caixa 147, 1; letter from Francisco Valente, undated, in AHM, Fundo do Seculo XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 8, maço 4; letters from Abdulgafur ibn Abdulatifo al-Mafazi, 26 April 1886, 6 and 7 July 1884, in AHM, Fundo do Seculo XIX, Governo do Distrito de Cabo Delgado, caixa 10, maço 2.

The relationship between the local African rulers in northern Mozambique can also be seen in these manuscripts. As mentioned earlier, the opportunity for forging an alliance with the Portuguese as an alternative method of accessing material wealth exacerbated the competition for power and prestige among the African rulers. The case of Saleh bun Ali Ibrahim (Marave) and Maulid Volay, both of whom came from Sancul, is a vivid example of this rivalry. More examples can be found between the Guernea and Morla, the two most important rulers of the Imbamela Makhuwa. However, the manuscripts also provide evidence of friendly relations such as those between Bwana Shaki and Mwaliya of Medo. Mwaliya was a Makhuwa king (*mwene*) of the southern hinterland of Cabo Delgado who studied the Qurʾān in Quissanga and became a Muslim, adopting Swahili culture. This is also attested in a letter written by the newly appointed *mwene* Mwaliya, who wrote to the Portuguese governor in Ibo to inform him about the death of his uncle, Mwaliya Mwidala, and requested cloth – 'not trousers, but cotton fabric as I want to dress like Wajojo do'.

4. Conclusion

The *ajami* manuscripts of northern Mozambique held by the Mozambican Historical Archive (or Mozambique National Archives – AHM) are a testimony to the role that local rulers played in the process of establishing the Portuguese pre-colonial administration. In this sense, *ajami* literacy emerged from the religious sphere and became an important medium of communication in the secular, political and administrative realm. The process of diffusing literacy through Islamic education and the use of Arabic script in Kiswahili links this literary tradition to the wider Swahili region. Its integration as part of the colonial system of communication and the use of loanwords from Portuguese and northern Mozambican languages make *ajami* manuscripts unique to northern Mozambique.

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