

and the establishment of the Home Guard patrols, chiefs became much more difficult to target. They were protected by the Home Guard and often lived behind fortifications. Even then, a number of them were killed by Mau Mau fighters.

Wamagatta's book, while well written and easy to follow, unfortunately promises more than it delivers. It is not accurate to state that Waruhiu came to be considered a collaborator 'simply because he was brutally murdered' (xi). For members of Mau Mau, evidence abounded of Waruhiu's traitorous partnership with the British long before 1952.

W. O. MALOBA
University of Delaware

ARCHITECTURE AND SWAHILI PORT CITIES

Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere.

By Prita Meier.

Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016. Pp. xvi + 231.

\$35.00, paperback (ISBN 978-0-253-01915-8).

doi:10.1017/S0021853718000543

Key Words: East Africa, urban, architecture, transnational.

This well-written, well-researched book offers a careful argument about architectural history and its cultural contestations along the Swahili coast, with emphasis on the city of Mombasa. By her own admission, Prita Meier, an art historian, took a long time to write this book, but she turns that process into an advantage: the book is not a rushed snapshot, the theoretical dimensions are nuanced, and Meier avoids popular but ultimately ephemeral scholarly trends. Meier is conversant with the literatures from many fields – most importantly, Swahili coast archeology – and her work threads effectively and insightfully through the relevant scholarship. As a result, she brings something new to this well-travelled intellectual territory. As one should probably expect from an art historian, the book is also richly illustrated, and it includes a short glossy color insert of the author's photos, mostly from Mombasa.

Meier's concise yet engaging style serves her well in articulating a sometimes abstract argument. Meier sees in Swahili cities a contradiction in that their essence emerges from globalized 'elsewheres', while their architecture projects unchanging stone permanence. This dynamic gives rise to a churning ongoing effort to reconcile 'the need for mobility and mixing on one hand and fixity and rootedness on the other' (3). She makes *material* this negotiated effort in historically grounded narratives that consider built environments, particularly Mombasa. She has benefited not only from extensive fieldwork and archival research, but also discussions of her research in numerous settings with an impressive array of key experts.

Beyond its introduction and conclusion, the book has four substantive chapters. Meier's emphasis in each chapter is 'on a small number of buildings or a series of interconnected spaces within a specific city' (22). The first chapter focuses on place and race in Old Town

Mombasa, and its engagement with the identity of the Thenashara Taifa ('Twelve Nations, Mombasa's Oldest Families'). The second chapter centers on mosque architecture in Mombasa, particularly the Mandhry and Mnara mosques. The key focus of Chapter Three rests with Zanzibar's Beit al-Ajaib ('House of Wonders'), while Chapter Four highlights the domestic displays of porcelain ware and ornamentation in homes of well-to-do Swahili peoples. In the first two chapters, Meier showcases the solidity of her knowledge of Mombasa. Much of the discussion applies to other Swahili cities: her analysis of the meanings of neighborhood names and the spirit-world geography of Mombasa resonates with my own research in Zanzibar. Meier furthermore offers an intricate and in-depth analysis of the Mandhry and Mnara mosques, as physical structures and as factors in the politics of place, while she also examines a wider range of pillars and pillar mosques in other Swahili cities.

The Zanzibar chapter takes on the historic waterfront's most iconic building – the Beit-al-Ajaib, or the House of Wonders. Meier's discussion of the building as a 'spectacle of radical modernity' (103) is excellent, despite my few minor quibbles. Queen Fatuma, on whose royal site the House was built, was an indigenous Tumbatu leader, not Hadimu as Meier reports. The collapse of its roof in December 2012, which had yet to be repaired as of January 2017, means that the building rots, once again. This subject should have been worthy of further exploration, given the ambivalent relationship between this building, on the one hand, and the city and the Zanzibari nation, on the other. Lastly, while the House of Wonders sits at the heart of the seafront image of Zanzibar, and Meier is concerned with the seafront architecture of Swahili cities, her contention that this building embodies themes of 'unyielding permanence, immobility and austerity' is less convincing because the building actually has little of what she identifies as central to Swahili aesthetics, despite its reliance on Swahili masonry and other local touches. It is, though, full of shocking 'mercurial bricolage and appropriation', the other side of Meier's dynamic, the descriptions of which ultimately make the House of Wonders worthy of its central role in the chapter. Overall, Meier's analysis of the architectural details, political context, and cultural significance of the building are masterful.

The fourth chapter is something of an intriguing departure from the others, in its focus on 'living with transoceanic things' (139). Meier traverses the coast, linking analyses from Lamu, Mombasa, and Zanzibar, concentrating on patrician families' porcelain wall hangings, decorative furniture (typically chairs), and other ornamentation. She also moves across time, showing how the interior design cultures of the Swahili coast shifted from the medieval period through the tumultuous nineteenth century and into contemporary homes. She uses the narrative of these interior spaces to show that it is 'people who set this life in motion through various actions upon things' (140).

The conclusion brings the nuances of her arguments together well, forcing a subtle move beyond analyses of the Swahili coast that emphasize ethnicity, while reiterating the contention for Swahili coast in-between-ness, as both rooted in place and in mobile elsewhere. It clearly establishes the value of Meier's work, which is to rematerialize debates over Swahili identity through a multivalent architectural aesthetic lens.

GARTH A. MYERS
Trinity College, Hartford