

# East African Trade

From around 900 CE onward Muslim and Indian traders, realizing the importance of African trade, began settling the continent's east coast. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century Muslim port cities dotted the coastline. The cities of East Africa had great cultural diversity. Muslim influence mixed with native Bantu cultures to produce the Swahili language and culture.

Major Swahili cities included Mogadishu, Barawa, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Kilwa, and Sofala. Though their cultures were mainly Swahili, these and other trading cities were not an empire. If anything, they were independent city-states competing with one another for the riches of foreign trade. Traders came to these great cities from places in Africa, the Middle East, India, and even from as far away as China seeking ivory, exotic woods, and gold.

Despite foreign influences Swahili cities were ruled for the most part by Africans. Swahili nobles held most of the power, while native commoners and foreigners were the citizens. The arrival of the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, though, ended African control. Portuguese conquered the city-states and controlled the trade for a century. Muslims from Oman, in turn, conquered the Portuguese and controlled East Africa's trade for another two hundred years.

