

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GJ-19
Bagamoyo

30 May 1972
P.O. Box 4080
Dar es Salaam,
Tanzania.

Mr. R. H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
535 Fifth Avenue,
New York, New York 10017.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

During the 18th and 19th centuries the town of Bagamoyo flourished as one of the most important trade centers in East Africa. The popularity of Bagamoyo resulted foremost from its transactions in ivory and to a lesser extent, its slave trading. In the early 19th century however, slave trading began to vie with ivory as the top economic resource. Today, Bagamoyo which remains as picturesque--with its swaying palms and white sandy beaches--is considered an historic landmark for students of African history and a potential arcadia for tourists.

Most of my information about Bagamoyo resulted from several trips I made to the area as a tourist. Additional facts regarding the town's history were supplied by an unofficial guide and longtime resident, Bwana Abdullah Mohamedi. He came to Bagamoyo almost thirty-five years ago as a small boy to attend a missionary school.

Abdullah, age 45, was born in Morogoro, a town of fair size located a little over a hundred miles west of Bagamoyo. He explained that at the time of his long safari in 1937 Bagamoyo was considered the choice spot for educating young people. Although his mother died when he was only two, a very persistent father worked and tutored him to the point where he became eligible for the Bagamoyo Roman Catholic Mission School. His father, in order to be physically close to him during the early years of his education, took a job as a shamba worker on a British-owned plantation.

During our first meeting Abdullah asserted that from an early age he was deeply



Bwana Abdullah Mohamedi

interested in the history of Bagamoyo. He spent endless hours digging up information, talking to longtime residents and exploring all the known historical sites. He said that these hours he spent studying the history of Bagamoyo, while his friends engaged themselves on the football field, have not only paid off academically, but subsequently afforded him a means of income on a part-time basis. Tourists are usually steered to Bwana Mohammedi when they arrive at Bagamoyo if they are interested in a detailed account of the area. While Abdullah sets no fixed price for this particular service, which he enjoys, he expects that each visitor realizing the value of a detailed account will pay accordingly. He now calls his program, "a very lucrative hobby."

The first question I posed to Abdullah related to the name Bagamoyo. Was there a translation or did it simply refer to a particular celebrant? After chuckling for a second he told of a running wager he has made with a friend: out of the first five questions posed to him by tourists, he wagered that one of them would be about the name Bagamoyo. He has yet to lose. According to Abdullah, there are many popular versions regarding the meaning of Bagamoyo. One account relates to the African porters who trekked hundreds of miles from the interior while carrying heavy loads of ivory. In the course of making their way to the "land of paradise" (Bagamoyo), it was not uncommon for them to be confronted with many physical hardships other than that of the driving and oppressive overseer. The name Bagamoyo was literally translated by them as "lay down the burden of your heart." These porters felt a tremendous relief at being in Bagamoyo after trudging through the seemingly unending bush where many of their comrades had fallen prey to hungry lions or hostile tribes. Their arrival at Bagamoyo meant a well-deserved rest and an opportunity to recreate in this "lively urban center." "While the porters made their way through the bush," Abdullah related, "they sang songs in order to pass the time away and to encourage each other to continue on." One of the songs went like this: "Be happy, my soul, let go all worries, soon the place of your yearnings is reached--the town of palms-Bagamoyo."

Far away, how my heart was aching when I was thinking of you, you pearl, you place of happiness, Bagamoyo.

There the women wear their hair parted, you can drink palm oil all year around in the garden of love, Bagamoyo.

The dhows arrive with streaming sails and take abroad the treasures of Uleias in the harbour of Bagamoyo.

Be quiet my heart all worries are gone. The drum beats and with rejoicing we are reaching Bagamoyo.

Oh, what delight to see ngomas where the lovely girls are swaying in dance at night in Bagamoyo."

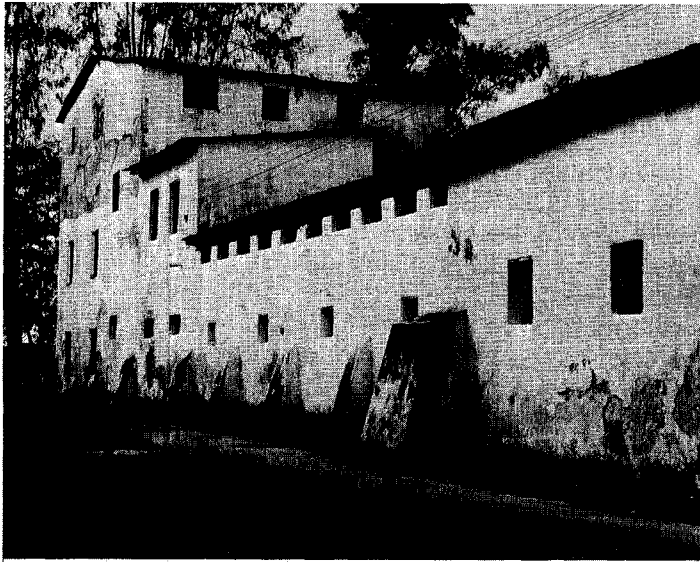
The second version of the meaning of Bagamoyo makes reference to the victims of the growing slave trade. After a very harsh and tiring journey from the interior to Bagamoyo, the last stop before being shipped to unknown parts of the

world, the slaves feeling very despondent, gave the following interpretation of the name Bagamoyo: "crush your heart for all is lost."

Although anthropological findings indicate that Bagamoyo had been inhabited by indigenous Africans, who engaged themselves in agriculture and fishing, most of the written history, according to Abdullah, begins with the Portugese, Arab and German occupation. The Arabs after defeating the Portugese in 1698 dominated the entire coastal strip. Very shortly thereafter, the whole coastal area including Zanzibar was transformed by the Arabs into a highly developed commercial center. Zanzibar located 32 miles directly across from Bagamoyo, was considered the seat of power. Bagamoyo, being the closest point on the mainland to the island benefited from their (Zanzibar's) commercial superiority. Under the leadership of Sayyid Said, who initiated a "colonial plantation economy" (cloves), the Arabs also became the "masters" of the rapidly growing number of African slaves. One account, reported Abdullah, gave a figure that over 40,000 slaves were sold on the Zanzibar market in 1839 -- the majority of these slaves having passed through Bagamoyo on their way to the island. As he related the details of some of the horrendous conditions imposed upon these African slaves by their Arab overlords, he simultaneously pointed out many of Bagamoyo's intricate underground passages leading from several buildings to the beach. These houses, used primarily as warehouses, stored the slaves until they could be loaded aboard ships in the harbor.

Although the British attempted to curb the slavery practice in the Indian Ocean in later periods, the most active drive occurred in 1870 as a result of the "Anglo-Zanzibar Treaty." Almost twenty years later the effort to curtail slavery continued as Bagamoyo came under the jurisdiction of a German representative group called the "Deutsch Ost-Afrika Gesellschaft" (German East African Society). The Germans while in power legislated a ten-part law which helped to reduce some of the barbarism associated with the East African slave trade:

1. No slave could be sold without his consent.
2. Married couples could not be separated.
3. Children (under 12) could not be taken from their parents.
4. All slaves were given religious freedom.
5. Slaves were allowed to marry.
6. A slave could claim food, board and lodging two days of every week.
7. A slave had right of inheritance to parts of his master's property.
8. The master was bound to support the slave when the latter became too old to work.
9. All slaves born after 1905 would be free.
10. A female slave became free if she married a free man who paid her dowry.

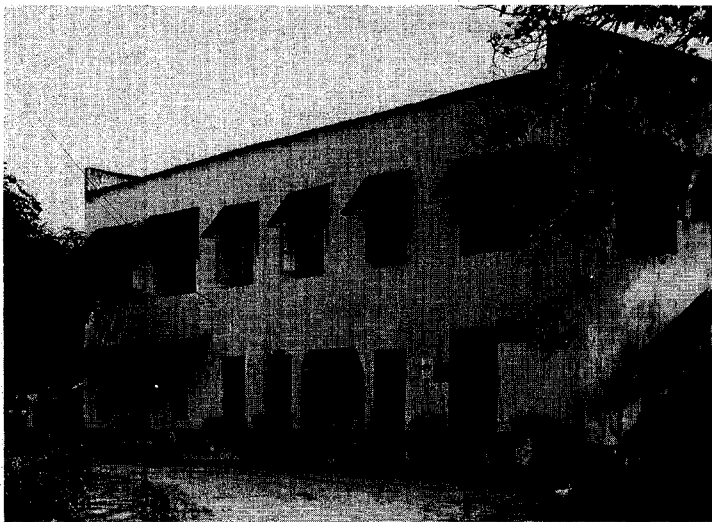


Warehouse for slaves

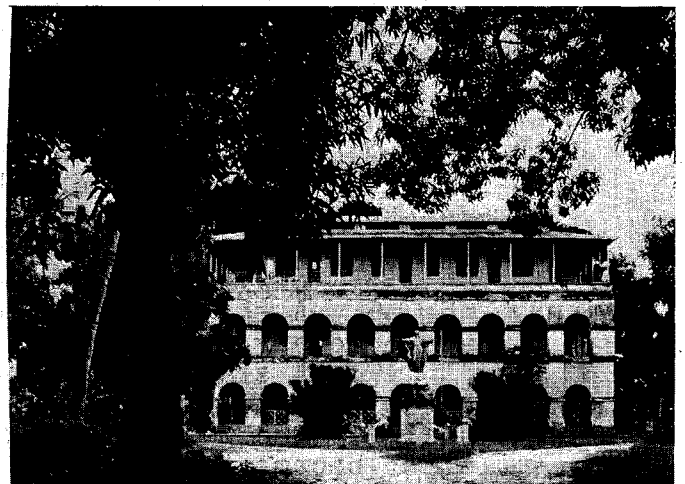


Abv: Livingstone's
Tower

Lft: Stanley slept
here.



Rest stop for Speke & Burton



Holy Ghost Fathers Mission

The German influence on slavery was amplified by their territorial expansion in 1891. Finalizing an agreement made a year previously with the Sultan of Zanzibar, who controlled the entire coastal region around Bagamoyo, the Germans bought this eastern coastal area for four million marks.

Immediately after the sale had been concluded, the Germans decided to vacate Bagamoyo as their headquarters and settle on the present site of Dar es Salaam. Although the move did not immediately affect the commercial traffic coming through the town of Bagamoyo, it did curtail the plans which would have allowed Bagamoyo to be included on a new railway line. The move to Dar es Salaam also precluded the carrying out of plans to construct a deep water harbor in the Bagamoyo area.

As a result of its commercial activity, Bagamoyo also attracted many famous explorers who found the town to be ideal for purchasing supplies, hiring experienced porters and simply for taking a rest after a long journey. Bagamoyo gained a wide reputation for being the "town of comfortable living."

On February 24, 1874, a group of African porters, after carrying the body of the renowned Dr. David Livingstone 1,500 miles from the interior, laid it to rest at the Holy Ghost Fathers Mission in Bagamoyo. The Mission which has now been transformed into a Teacher's College, was the oldest Catholic Mission in East Africa. The trip was reported to have taken nine months. The mummified body of Dr. Livingstone remained at the Mission until it was shipped to England. The Holy Ghost Fathers dedicated a tower in memorium to the great feat performed by these African porters.

Speke and Burton also used the facilities of Bagamoyo prior to their trip into the bush. Their attempt to find the source of the Nile has made them legendary figures amongst the explorers recorded in the town's museum.

The house in which Mr. Henry Morton Stanley lived prior to his search for Dr. Livingstone stands idly on the outskirts of the town. The building appears to be of little significance to the inhabitants who frequent a well located near by.

During the early twentieth century Bagamoyo declined rapidly as one of the leading commercial centers. Although dhows still bring in goods from different parts of the Indian Ocean, the lack of a deep water harbor has sorely limited its shipping activities. The Dar es Salaam harbor handles all the big freighters coming from abroad. Fishing constitutes the major source of food as well as the top money making activity of the inhabitants of Bagamoyo. The huge fish market in the center of town is one of the big attractions for tourists. The distinctive odors from the variety of fish being smoked for the Dar es Salaam markets and the sounds coming from the fierce

bargaining of retailers for the recent catches, gives the fish market a very unique and intriguing aura. Although the forty-five miles from Dar es Salaam to Bagamoyo becomes a little difficult for vehicles to negotiate during the rainy season, a large convoy of lorries as well as seven buses shuttle goods and people back and forth on a daily basis.

Farming is looked upon as a part-time activity for most of the people living in Bagamoyo. Each household grows just enough produce to feed themselves during the year. The staple food crops are mihogo (cassava), mpunga (paddy) and kunde (cowpeas). Bagamoyo is also noted for its large crops of nazi (coconut)--for many residents it has recently turned into a cash crop. On a smaller scale the local people raise mkorosho (cashew nut trees), ndizi (bananas), machungwa (oranges), nanasi (pineapples), mihindi (maize) and viazi vitamu (sweet potatoes). Most of the cultivation associated with these products is carried out by hand.

Travelling around the town of Bagamoyo one is not slow to notice the absence of animals. Inquiring about the paucity of livestock in the area, I was informed by Abdullah that only a few people raise goats and even fewer attempt to breed cattle. No reason was given. Most of the animals are kept for family consumption or for some festive occasion which involves the community.

Social activities in Bagamoyo are very limited. The population, which is dwindling as a result of the few young people migrating to the large cities, does enjoy an occasional ngoma (a celebration which usually includes dancing, singing and eating), but more often than not, seems simply to concentrate on the laborious activity of earning a living and running a household. To the tourist, the style of life appears to be very picturesque, but for the indigenous population it is an austere existence.

The majority of the people in Bagamoyo have no electricity or running water in their dwelling units. Water has to be carted from a local well which is only in operation three times a day. The task of fetching water is relegated to the women who can be seen throughout the town scurrying back and forth with large buckets balanced gracefully on their heads. During the rainy season, most of the households attempt to catch the rain water in receptacles which are placed in strategic positions around the compound.

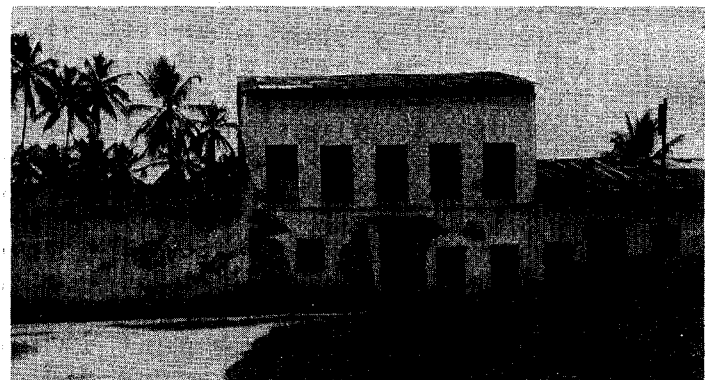
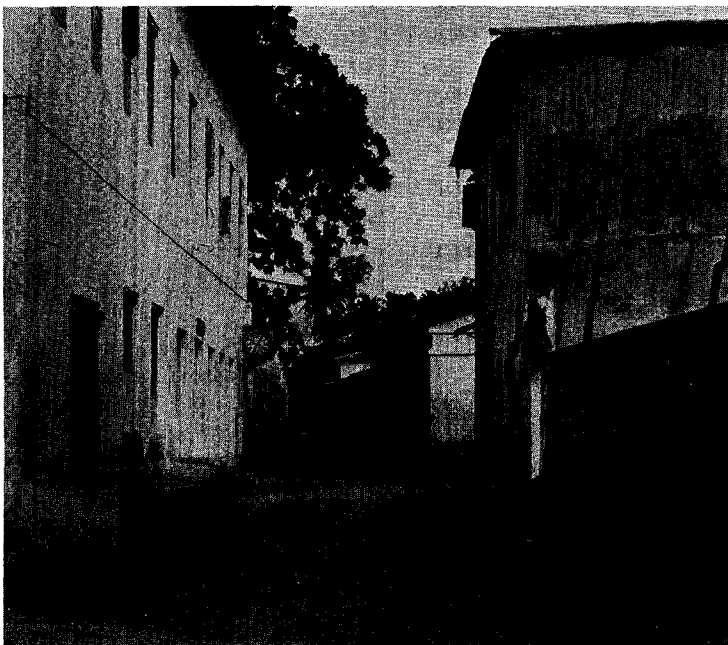
Because most of the cooking is performed over the jiko (small charcoal stove), preparation of the three daily meals becomes a seemingly unending activity. Each meal must be calculated with precision, owing to the lack of refrigeration. Most excess goods spoil very rapidly in this moist and hot climate.

Washing clothes is another ordeal. After carting an



Downtown Bagamoyo

Typical urban-
fringe dwelling
unit.



Multi-family housing units--
urban center.

added supply of water, the women must then prepare a series of jikos on which the water is heated. The women then spend hours pounding, wringing and scrubbing their clothes on cement blocks (usually found outside the kitchen area). Since these cement blocks are situated at ground level, the women must squat throughout the entire cycle. The clothes are finally wrung out and hung on lines where they will dry in the sun. Ironing (with a charcoal heated iron) is normally done in the afternoon.

Although many of the houses I visited were in disrepair on the outside, the interior was generally clean and neatly arranged. Furniture in the majority of the homes is very sparse. Most of the people sleep on multi-colored straw mats at night and during the afternoon rest period. These mats (mkeke) are also used to sit on during meal times.

The division of labor is dependent upon the number of women living in the household. If there is more than one, the duties are arranged so that when one is washing or cleaning the other does the marketing (obviously the more able of the duties). These decisions are made by the senior wife or the eldest woman of the household. Shopping entails dressing in one's better clothes and parading around town seeking good prices for mboga (vegetables). It is an opportunity not only to see friends but also a chance to test one's skill at bargaining.

The coastal people are very child-oriented. Little people are given undivided attention during the day when they are awake. Older siblings are usually held responsible for the safety and recreation of younger family members although the very old also generally take it upon themselves to keep an eye on the small ones during certain periods of the day.

After lunch, which takes place between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m., the entire family usually takes a rest for about an hour. At this time of day Bagamoyo looks almost like a ghost town. Very soon after the rest period however, the town comes alive once again with just as much activity as in the morning. This part of the day is enjoyed by the women especially because they get to go to the seashore where they await the fishermen to see if they can get a good buy on freshly caught fish (before it gets to the market). If the women make a purchase, they usually remain at the water's edge where they clean the fish and again socialize before returning home to iron and begin the evening meal.

The evening meal is customarily the largest of the day. Most families will serve a dish called Pilau. Pilau is made up of mchele and viazi (rice and potatoes) spiced with tanguwizi (ginger), vitunguu sumi (garlic), bizarhi (chili powder), ndalasini (cinnamon), karafuu (cloves), iliki (cardamon) and zabibs (raisins). If there has been success at the morning market one might add samaki (fish), kuku (chicken) or nyama (beef)

to the pot. A side dish of chapatis (a paper-thin bread of flour, ghee and water) is generally added to this very appetizing meal. Matunda (fruit) such as maembe (mangoes), machungwa (oranges), machenza (tangerines) and korosho (cashews) are served as dessert.

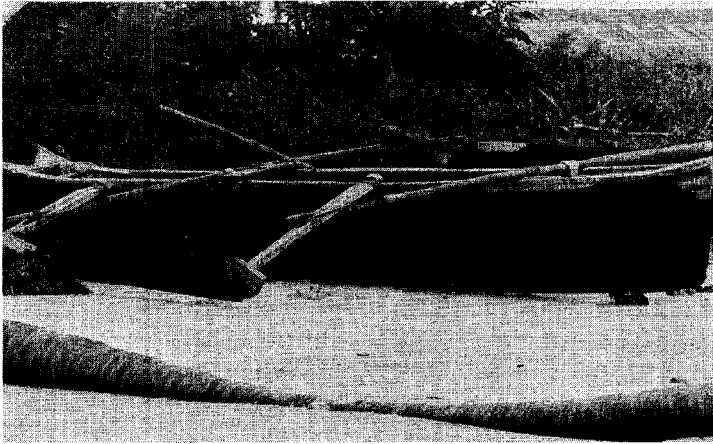
The coastal people take every opportunity possible to just sit and talk to friends. Men and women alike can be seen in their separate little groups discussing the latest politics, the weather or "the old days when...." The women also enjoy donning their brightly-colored kitenge, although usually covered by the drab black buibui, and sauntering around town. It is very seldom that one sees a man and woman walking together. If they happen to be going to the same event such as an ngoma, the man will walk in front while the woman trails behind.

The absence of movies, dancehalls and other recreational facilities can certainly be singled out as factors leading to the very sparse population between the ages of 17 and 30. The lack of jobs has also had a negative effect upon sustaining this age group in Bagamoyo. Fishing, farming and shopkeeping being the main occupational fields available limits the ambitions of most young people. A great number of young men can be seen however, slowly gravitating to automobile mechanics. I suspect as better roads are constructed and farming is developed into a more mechanized endeavor the field of mechanics will hold more young people in the area.

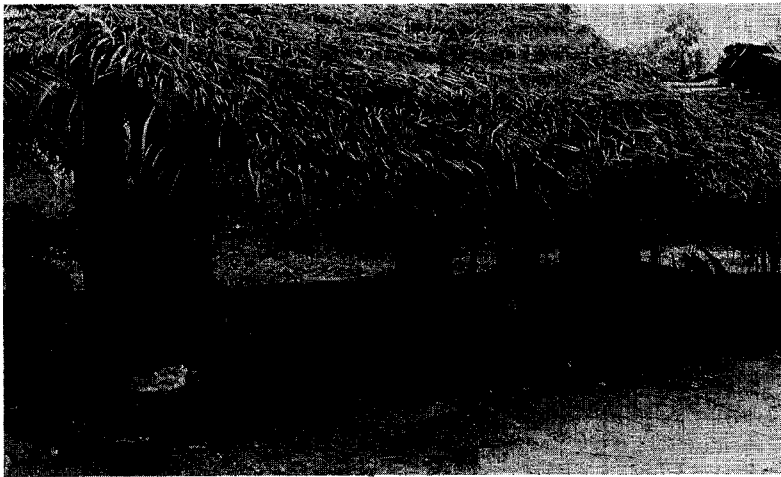
The future of Bagamoyo, according to many of the town planners, seems to be heading towards a period of rapid growth. A new secondary school which will board 500 students is now under construction. It should be completed by 1973. This new construction is not only helping the immediate job problem, but can be seen as a long-term source of employment for many of the town's residents.

There is also speculation that very shortly planning will get underway for the construction of a number of hotels along the Bagamoyo coastline--geared mainly for the tourist population. The coastline, which runs from Bagamoyo to the ruins of Kaole, three miles away, is said to be the most beautiful strip of land along the whole Indian Ocean. The beauty of the land, the interesting sights and the inviting beaches coupled with the historic interest of the area will hopefully serve as attractive enough forces to bring tourists from all over the world--another source of employment.

For the romanticists, who are eager to maintain the casual living style which presently exists in Bagamoyo, the new planning program is received with contempt. For people like Bwana Abdullah, however, who have been without continuous work for a considerable period of time, there is excitement over the possible changes. I personally side with both groups. I would



Small fishing vessel



Preparing fish for the market.



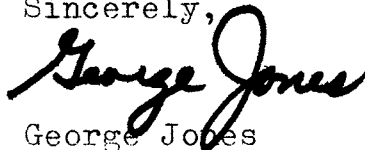
Community Well



Construction site for the new boarding school.

hope the planners will take the opportunity to build safeguards to protect the natural beauty which gives Bagamoyo its appeal. At the same time with the changes which will eventually come they should strive to bring a bit more comfort to the everyday life of the Bagamoyo inhabitants. Making water and electricity available to all would be a good beginning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George Jones". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

George Jones

Received in New York on June 14, 1972