

1. Research project objectives and hypotheses

My project is aimed at an analysis of the organisation of international trade of Zanzibar in the period 1837-1888, i.e. from the moment Zanzibar became the capital city and entrepôt for the whole coast of East Africa until the end of the pre-colonial era in the region. The issues to be addressed include the modes of competition, information flow, risk assessment, commodity and credit availability, price negotiating, use of bullion, barter transactions, the role of markets, preparation of products, storage facilities and management of labour. The other, subsidiary, objective is to reassess the volume and structure of international trade in the period under scrutiny in the light of sources that have not yet been used for this purpose. These issues will be considered in multiple contexts related to the socio-political environment, such as:

- Institutional setting (including administration, judicial and customs systems, the abuse of power that affected the execution of contracts, supervision of measures and weights).
- The problems arising from the overlapping of Muslim economic ethics with the trade practices fostered by Hindu Indian and European entrepreneurs, as well as methods of trust-building among trading partners that were rooted in different cultures.
- Issues related to socio-cultural background, including clientship, ethnic and religious allegiances, ethnically motivated violence.

Through the analysis of its practices with relation to political and social environment, I am going to demonstrate the ways it could have affected the whole society including the islands, coastal areas, and the hinterland. In other words, I am going to establish a cause-effect relationship between changes in the global economy and the local, traditional communities of the region in question. Also essential for the project is to look at ways the specific mixture of cultures of Zanzibar became imprinted on international trade, seen as a local variety of a global phenomenon.

2. The research to be carried out

The following archives have been already consulted: Zanzibar National Archives, National Archives in London, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, National Archives and Record Administration in Washington, DC and College Park, MD, and the Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes. The bulk of the relevant manuscript sources of these archives consists of correspondence and reports of the British American and French consulates in Zanzibar including a vast amount of material written by, or concerning, British-protected Indian merchants and traders, as well as French-protected Arab and Swahili traders.

However, the most important part of the project is the research on the documents of private merchant houses operating in 19th century Zanzibar. The most time-consuming task, the research in the Phillips Library of the Peabody Essex Museum (Peabody, MA) has been already done. The archive contains the written legacy of the family-based merchant houses of Salem, MA, i.e. the town where American trade with Zanzibar was concentrated during the period in question. These documents include business and private correspondence, diaries, account books, ledgers, logbooks and other documentation of the companies' ships, correspondence concerning various cases involving American and Zanzibar businessmen that were arbitrated by diplomats of other countries, etc.

The remaining part of the project includes a four-week period of research in the Staatarchiv in Hamburg, Germany where the documents of the merchant firms O'Swald & Co and Hansing & Co (both operating in Zanzibar from the 1850s until the end of the period in question) and a two-week research period in the two archives of southern France: Le centre des archives d'outre mer, Aix-en-Provence, and the archive of Chambre de Commerce et de l'Industrie de Marseille where there are documents of various French firms operating in the South-West Indian Ocean Region. Also, the project includes a conference trip to the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association in Chicago in November 2017 that will give an opportunity to present and discuss the preliminary results of the project with the international community of researchers who are interested in the subject. The last point of the plan is a research trip to London early in 2018 that will allow the researcher to complete the research on the documents of the British Agency in Zanzibar as well as to consult the newest literature on the issues involved the projects according to the needs of the project. The manuscript of the project will be ready by July 2018.

3. The reasons for choosing the research topic

The reasons for choosing the research topic are:

- the lack of research in the field
- the need of expansion of knowledge on the clash of 19th century traditional Asian and African societies with the products of the West of the era: industrial revolution, revolution in transport and communication.