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Elements in the Global Middle Ages

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SWAHILI WORLDS IN GLOBALISM

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Swahili Worlds in Globalism

Elements in the Global Middle Ages

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Abstract: This Element discusses a medieval African urban society as a product of interactions among African communities who inhabited the region between 100 BCE and 500 CE. It deviates from standard approaches that credit urbanism and the state in Africa to non-African agents. East Africa, then and now, was part of the broader world of the Indian Ocean. Globalism coincided with the political and economic transformations that occurred during the Tang-Sung-Yuan-Ming dynasties and Islamic times, 600–1500 CE. Positioned as the gateway into and out of eastern Africa, the Swahili coast became a site through which people, inventions, and innovations bidirectionally migrated, were adopted, and evolved. Swahili people's agency and unique characteristics cannot be seen only through Islam's prism. Instead, their unique character is a consequence of social and economic interactions of actors along the coast, inland, and beyond the Indian Ocean.

Keywords: urbanism, globalism, medieval, Swahili, Indian Ocean

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