

Publication

Structural dynamics of spatial complexity at the 'Palace of Gede', Kenya

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Using a set of structural and network analysis approaches, this paper focuses on the monumental structure known as 'the Palace' at the Swahili stone town site of Gede, located near the Kenya coast. Gede is one of many stone towns that flourished on the East African littoral from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries AD. The 'Palace complex' is the largest building on site and developed in at least three stages within the last 100–150 years of the site's occupation. Its palatial function has so far been considered mainly in light of its monumentality and relative size, hence on the basis of its formal properties. This article utilises approaches that examine the spatial structure of the complex, offering an analysis of its spatial organisation by studying its inherent potential in terms of movement and visibility. The interpretation of the social logic of its development presented here is based on access and visibility analyses and on network analysis and thus connects methodologies developed in the 1980s with those that have started to be more widely discussed only within the last decade. The results reveal how the configuration and use of rooms, their place in the communication network within the building and their social potential changed through time.

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