

The Many Narratives of the *Kiti cha enzi*:

Unresolved Strands of Dispersal and Meaning around the Indian Ocean

Magnificent in its monumental form with a high, pointed back inlaid with ivory, bone, or mother of pearl designs, a broad seat woven with strings, stretchers that extend across the floor, and a flat footrest and armrests, the *kiti cha enzi* (chair of power; plural *viti vya enzi*) is an impressive example of Swahili coast woodwork (See page 180). Once called an “exercise in angularity,” it is notable for its squared-off proportions anchored by narrow, straight, and perpendicular supports that can be taken apart and reconstructed easily.¹ The *kiti cha enzi* also denies the solidity of its parts by combining open geometry with perforated square and rectangular panels. In the coastal towns of Mombasa, Pate, and Lamu in Kenya, but also on the nearby island of Zanzibar in Tanzania, it is known as the chair of power, a title that amply conveys its longstanding function in local systems of social order, often installed in pairs to exalt high-ranking guests or to recognize the most important members of the patrician household. The *kiti cha enzi* has also played a major role outside of the domestic sphere, appearing as a seat of honor at weddings, funerals, and official state events.²

Despite the appearance of great antiquity, the earliest example of these chairs can be dated only to the nineteenth century, which makes it difficult to situate them historically and also vexes art historians who are eager to attribute to them an

ultimate place of origin and a resolved identity.³ As such, many proposals of the kiti cha enzi's distant origins have been put forth, but also disputed.⁴ The most sustained discussion of its roots was vigorously engaged by two scholars of African Islamic art, James de Vere Allen and René Bravmann, in the 1970s and 1980s. In his 1972 book about Lamu, Allen situated the kiti cha enzi within a localized evolutionary model, positing an earlier regional wooden chair type, the *kiti cha mtaawanda*, as the source for its derivation.⁵ In 1983, Bravmann attempted to enhance this assertion of indigenous development by offering European inspiration, through the avenue of Indian-made Campaign Style chairs, with their high backs, angular profiles, and caned seats, as another possible source. Moreover, these colonial objects circulated widely around the British Empire, thus providing a viable mode of transmission to East Africa during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶ In 1989, Allen issued a response to Bravmann that diverged from his original hypothesis, by accepting the impact of outside factors but crediting Mamluk Egypt and rejecting India under British rule as the ultimate source for the kiti cha enzi, basing his new interpretation on a comparison with similar types found in the Gayer-Anderson Museum in Cairo.⁷

Yet, Allen's 1989 publication should not be the last word on the transregional scope of the kiti cha enzi. In this essay, I follow the geographic path that Allen and Bravmann mapped out some thirty years ago, but not in order to assert or dispute the kiti cha enzi's proposed origins. Rather, the goal is to locate the kiti cha enzi as a widespread type, confirming the associations with furniture and craft traditions in Europe, India, and Egypt, but also in Iran and Yemen, thereby seconding Prita Meier's declaration that "[i]ts form does indeed share compelling similarities with a bewildering range of foreign chairs."⁸ At the same time, I reject any developmental schemes that seek a single progenitor for the kiti cha enzi, by linking these objects in parallel rather than dependent trajectories. Along those lines, I place the kiti cha enzi within a larger category of furniture types that carry diverse meanings and significances in their many homes. A close examination of these various chairs and the unresolved proposals surrounding their emergence also reveals why they are relatively resistant to the normalizing demands of the national art histories that have attempted to claim them or have been associated with them.

India, Portugal, Iran, and Russia

In fact, Bravmann was quite right to look to India in order to better understand the transregional history and scope of the *kiti cha enzi*, although he should have turned his attention to the earlier Mughal period for more support. No historic examples of such chairs exist in India today, but several paintings feature angular high-backed upright chairs with flat armrests, raised footrests (attached or detached), and perpendicular thin brackets that share the distinctive profile of the Swahili coast *kiti cha enzi*.⁹ However, the examples that appear in Mughal images relate to the *kiti cha enzi* in general form rather than in decoration and surface treatment. They are, by contrast, covered in gold and encrusted with jewels. Some carry lobed hoods or low flat backs rather than the pointed pediment that dominates in East African examples and a few are outfitted with cushions of red velvet. Art historian Pedro Moura Carvalho believes that this type of chair was produced in the Mughal workshop based on a European model, perhaps as early as 1580, when Emperor Akbar was said to have used a throne of the "Portuguese type."¹⁰ However, the earliest painted example is the life-size Mandu portrait of Jahangir, which is rendered on cotton and dated 1617. Later paintings, as well as decorated objects in glass and lacquer, featuring this type of raised Indian throne were produced into the mid-eighteenth century.

As with the *kiti cha enzi*, the upright Mughal throne has inspired interest in its origins, as it certainly diverges from the low wide dais that was used widely by the Mughals and other Indo-Persian rulers as imperial seats. In line with Carvalho's proposal above, it is likely that chairs imported from Portugal inspired the upright Mughal throne at a time when European settlers called upon local craftsmen to provide for them raised furnishings that were unavailable in their new home.¹¹ Thus, the Portuguese were the first to bolster India's furniture industry, ordering upright chairs, raised tables, tall cabinets, and high bedsteads from local workshops, often based upon European models. After the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English continued to spur on this sector of artisanry, which featured native hardwoods, local motifs, and long-standing Indian decorative techniques fused with structural forms drawn from imported examples. As discussed amply by Carvalho, Amin Jaffer, and Jan Veendendaal, these pieces of Indian-made wooden furniture came to comprise a new category of production and demand in the Indian Ocean arena from the sixteenth century into the twentieth.¹²

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Bhawani Das, *A Gathering of Princes*, ca. 1710. Mughal. Opaque water-color and gold on paper, mounted as an album page. San Diego Museum of Art (1990.365), USA Edwin Binney 3rd Collection/Bridgeman Images.



So, at some time in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, the angular upright throne was introduced as a new innovation in India among a whole range of more mundane European-inspired furnishings.¹³ However, it joined, rather than replaced, the longstanding low-lying platform throne type. Even if its original inspiration has been established, we should not circumscribe this chair within the purview of the inevitable forces of Europeanization, thus limiting its identity to the circumstances of its initial transmission. By contrast, it is important to understand how it operated in the Mughal context, where it was used to highlight prominent members of the royal family in imperial paintings. For instance, this particular item appears as an attribute of prestige in two seventeenth-century paintings that represent the birth of Emperor Jahangir.¹⁴ In both cases, a female figure, likely the newborn's grandmother, presides over the scene, elevated above the others on an upright golden chair placed directly adjacent to the birthing chamber.¹⁵ In a later dynastic portrait, six princes sit on raised golden thrones that diminish in size toward the bottom of the page, thus expressing a clear hierarchy of age within the group (Figure 1). The eldest, Shah Shuja and Dara Shikoh, sit under a canopy at the top, with their younger brothers Murad Bakhsh and future emperor

Aurangzeb below. At the bottom of this triangular composition, one of Aurangzeb's sons and an unidentified figure sit on much smaller thrones. The Mandu portrait of Jahangir, probably painted by Abu'l Hassan, pictures the ruler singly, seated on a raised and ornamented throne, framed by a halo, and holding a glowing orb in his hand.¹⁶ In this case, the throne does not have an attached footrest, but a patterned carpet is folded at his feet to serve the same purpose. Large in size and inscribed with a lengthy poetic encomium, it is a unique visual tribute that may have been painted to celebrate his recent military victory in the Deccan. Although it stands alone today, its inscription suggests that it was originally placed next to a facing portrait of his father Akbar.¹⁷ Each of these paintings offers an image of Mughal royal continuity by highlighting the natural succession from father to son and emphasizing family ties. In this way, they all greatly idealize the actual circumstances surrounding the transfer of power among the later Mughals, which was deeply contested since Jahangir revolted against Akbar in 1599, a pattern that continued with the following generations. As such, the upright throne appeared in Mughal India as a new prop in a number of paintings that retrospectively promoted the myth of dynastic unity and the figment of an unencumbered passage of power.¹⁸

These paintings also reveal that the upright throne chair, however new it may have been in the early years of Jahangir's reign, was quickly integrated into the wider corpus of Mughal accessories, appearing in scenes that celebrate the cohesion of the royal family. Although it was likely inspired from a European source, the throne's initial foreignness does not seem to have alienated it from the early modern Indian royal sphere during a time when Mughal kingly accessories were being culled from a range of sources. As historian Sumathi Ramaswamy has shown in regard to the terrestrial globe, which began to appear in Mughal painting around the same time as the upright throne, objects originally obtained from elsewhere could be readily incorporated into the royal vocabulary of self-presentation.¹⁹ With its sharp angularity and narrow golden crossbars, the raised throne was pictured along with other commonly featured dynastic accouterments and thus ceased to be a simple import or an object of alien exotica. Rather, it joined a corpus of repeated royal icons that undergirded the legitimacy of the ruler, a need that was increasingly pressing as the Mughal arena roiled in crisis in the early eighteenth century.²⁰

As Meier has stated for the *kiti cha enzi* in the Swahili context, the tall and rigid shape of the chair molded the body of

the sitter into an elevated posture of dignity that implicitly invoked respect.²¹ While Mughal social dynamics cannot be assimilated to those of the Swahili coast, it is clear that these chairs could work effectively in the hierarchical politics of that court for similar reasons, by setting certain individuals high above those seated around them, thus crystallizing unequal relationships spatially and visually. That the upright throne became a naturalized element of the engrained language of Indo-Persian kingship is clear when we look to neighboring Iran in the following Qajar period, where hierarchies of seating were also central to royal protocol. In several instances, the ruler Fath 'Ali Shah and his sons were shown seated in what one scholar has dubbed the Qajar "chair of state," with a tall back, clad in gold, studded with gems, and topped by a radiating sun disk at its crest²² (Figure 2). Carvalho proposed that the first gilded throne chair was brought to Iran by a Portuguese ambassador in the early years of the seventeenth century and that this gift may have been made in India.²³ As with the Mughals, this upright throne never replaced the low-lying platform type, which Fath 'Ali Shah was pictured sitting upon more often.²⁴ But, the taller version fulfilled a practical purpose, as it was primarily used while outdoors during tours of inspection, hunting expeditions, and races, or when traveling, because it was relatively lightweight and could be easily disassembled and reassembled, unlike the bulky fixed thrones of the dais type.²⁵ The Naderi Throne, with its lobed hood and golden surfaces, which is still held in the Central Bank of Tehran today, is associated with Fath 'Ali Shah, but may have been refurbished in the late Qajar era. This sumptuous seat was featured prominently in the lavish coronation ceremony of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1967, which suggests that it wielded considerable resilience as a Persian kingly icon into the modern era.²⁶

The appeal of this type of throne extended outside of the Indo-Persian domain as well. In 1659, an Armenian gem merchant from Isfahan named Zakharia Shahrmanian gave a similar chair as a gift to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, in his entreaty for a trade concession, which was eventually granted.²⁷ The throne was made in Isfahan, possibly by Shahrmanian's own father, and apparently satisfied this recipient's interest in Eastern regalia during a time when imports from Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Iran received great favor at the Romanov court.²⁸ It should be noted that this commercial mission, replete with a lavish bestowal that prominently displayed the merchant's own wares, was not conducted on behalf of the state, even



2

Mihr 'Ali (attributed to),
*Fath 'Ali Shah Seated on
a Chair Throne*, 1805.
Qajar. Oil on canvas.
Musée du Louvre. ©
RMN-Grand Palais / Art
Resource, NY. Photo:
Herve Lewandowski.

though Shahrmanian subsequently worked as a royal merchant for Shah Sulayman and his key vizier. This offering helped him to forge a Russian trade agreement for the Armenian merchant community of New Julfa during a time when political relations between the Safavids and the Russians were far from smooth.²⁹ Angular in form, wood-framed, plated with gold and silver, and decorated with turquoise and diamonds, the chair shows two winged figures supporting a crown and bears a lengthy celebratory inscription to the tsar. Prized as the Diamond Throne in Russia, it was used for coronation ceremonies there until the end of the nineteenth century. As such, in India, Iran, and Russia, it is clear that these upright thrones, clad in gold and encrusted with jewels, were deeply associated with imperial power and, in some cases, drew their appeal from their status as imported objects. Yet, in all of these sites, the raised throne chair was accepted into the local court culture as an integrated item of royal regalia.

Egypt, Yemen, and India

If Bravmann was right to look to India, then Allen was also correct in turning his gaze toward Egypt, although he should have pursued a deeper examination of the upright inlaid wooden chairs at the Gayer-Anderson Museum, upon which he based his 1989 article.³⁰ Indeed, the five chairs that Allen refers to are quite comparable to the emblematic *kiti cha enzi*—composed of flat surfaces set at right angles to each other, with straight armrests, low footrests, and caned seats (Figure 3). However, the chairs in Cairo are much wider in girth than the slim *kiti cha enzi* and some of the pointed backs are ornamented with rows of scalloped fringe or undulating lines. One of the examples carries a canopy topped with a perforated hood made of rattan (Figure 4). Each of the Cairo examples features an ambitious decorative program of ivory or bone inlaid in mastic that mirrors those of the *kiti cha enzi*, at least in technique. However, in each case, these motifs cover not only the broad pointed back section, but also many of the chair's surfaces and crossbars, organized in rows of rosettes and medallions framed by thin contrasting slivers, and also comprised of small polygonal and rectangular mirrors or panels painted with flowers in red and green. As with the *kiti cha*, the Cairo chairs use short pieces of turned wood to bridge

3
Chair. Gayer-Anderson
Museum, Cairo. Photo:
Francis Dzikowski.

4
Chair with a canopy.
Gayer-Anderson
Museum, Cairo. Photo:
Francis Dzikowski.



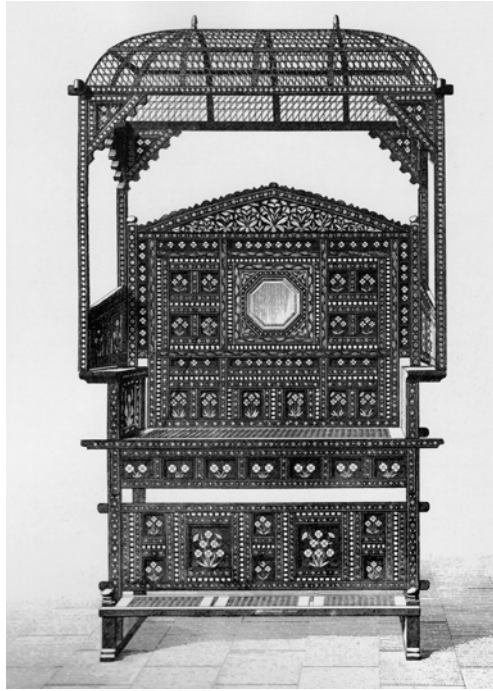
the gaps between the larger panels, although these stubby knobs are attached only on one end and thus do not fulfill any connective purpose.

In 1989, Allen assumed that these chairs were manufactured during the Mamluk period (1250–1517), a premise that cannot be proven in any measure. There is no evidence that chairs of this type were used in Cairo earlier than the nineteenth century, when they began to appear in visual and textual representations left by British and French travellers to Egypt.³¹ Most notably, the Egyptologist Émile Prisse d'Avennes published an image of a chair that closely matches the Gayer-Anderson examples in his *L'art arabe* (1869–1877), a monumental multi-volume study of Islamic art and architecture in Cairo, based on years of research undertaken in that city³² (Figure 5). Like the Gayer-Anderson chair pictured in Figure 4, Prisse's example has an octagonal mirror set in the center of the backrest and features floral designs and rows of medallions and rosettes. The caned panels of the seat and footrest are visible and a rattan hood stretches above. In the text, Prisse singled this chair out as a noteworthy specimen and highlighted its formal similarities to western examples. But he also emphasized that this chair served a wholly ceremonial purpose, rather than a practical one. On the wedding night, it would be situated next to the bed for the groom to place his turban upon, earning it the labels, *kursi al-'imma* (chair of the turban) or *kursi al-'arusa* (chair of the bride). This association with wedding rites, once again, brings us back to the Swahili coast, where the *kiti cha enzi* may be offered to the groom as a cherished seat. For this reason, in Lamu it is referred to also as *kiti cha bwana harusi* (groom), a term that mirrors Prisse's *kursi al-'arusa*.³³

Prisse's relatively brief description of the chair's function borrows directly from Edward Lane's 1836 *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, an influential source for information about Egypt, apparently even for someone who had spent a great deal of time there himself.³⁴ In this classic text, Lane drew a tight connection between marriage rites and the sort of caned chairs found at the Gayer-Anderson and illustrated by Prisse. Often included as part of the dowry, the chair would be conveyed in procession to the groom's house. Using an alternate label for the word turban, Lane called the chair *kursi al-'imama* and described it as being of a "large size, but slight make; the bottom and back being generally made of cane-work; sometimes with a canopy."³⁵ He also confirmed that it was never meant for sitting. Rather, the groom would place his turban upon it, and

5

"Kourcey el-emmeh."
 Source: *L'art arabe
 d'après les monuments
 du Kaire*, by Émile
 Prisse d'Avennes
 (Paris, 1877), vol. 4,
 pl. 25.



when offered in a pair, the bride would place her headgear upon the second one. It is clear that Prisse viewed Lane as an authority on this matter, although he omitted some of the latter's ethnographic observations and did not provide a direct citation to his work.³⁶

Lane's interest in this type of chair extended into his other projects, including his later translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, particularly in the story "Nur al-Din and his son and Shams al-Din and his daughter." In reference to the groom's turban, which had been placed upon a chair on his wedding night, Lane added a footnote that included an extended discussion of the kursi al-'imama, drawing his wording about this fictional chair almost directly from his own earlier *Manners and Customs*.³⁷ However, the original text (at least one of its many versions) offers no specification on the features of the chair in question, while also referring to the turban as *shash*, rather than *'imama*.³⁸ As the geographer Derek Gregory has shown, through his twin projects of ethnography and annotated translation, Lane mapped the fictional stories of the *Nights* onto the landscape of Cairo.³⁹ In this case, he provided a fixed visual association for a generic textual reference, while also bringing this nineteenth-century chair into a timeless world of ritual.⁴⁰

The kursi al-‘imama’s potential for use in the Orientalist imagination is further demonstrated by the nineteenth-century French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme, famous for his sensuous oil paintings of an exoticized East (Figure 6). His 1874 portrait of Marcus Botsaris (1788–1823), who was revered as a Greek national hero for fighting against the Ottoman army, features the edges of the chair’s recognizable triangular pediment and flat armrests visible under the sitter’s heavy robe. The painting carries all of the classic hallmarks of Gérôme’s renderings of the Orient: resplendent textiles and sumptuous architectural details, along with a ubiquitous water pipe and ornamented regalia. Hardly triumphant in its portrayal, the figure of Botsaris is rendered slack and drooping, seated on a chair that was, if we are to follow Prisse and Lane’s specifications, supposed to be used only for ceremonial purposes. Thus, the painting exemplifies what Sophie Makariou and Charlotte Maury have referred to as Gérôme’s “surprising combination of photographic ‘high resolution’, aesthetic alterations, and functional distortions.”⁴¹

Under the gaze of nineteenth-century Orientalist writers and artists, this chair type takes on a very different set of significations than its counterparts in the Mughal, Qajar, and Romanov courts, where it was tethered to prestige and royalty.

6

Jean-Léon Gérôme,
Markos Botsaris, 1874.
Oil on canvas.
Courtesy of Terence
and Katrina Garnett.



In Egypt, the kursi al-'imama was, like the East African kiti cha enzi, a key attribute of marriage rites. But Lane took this connection even further, by mobilizing the chair as a material tool that bridged the fictional world of *The Thousand and One Nights* and the urban expanse of Cairo that he observed directly. For Gérôme, the same chair was sufficiently exotic to assume a role as one of many props in his imagined and pastiched Eastern interiors.

The museum lacks information on their acquisition, but it is clear that these chairs must have been added to the collection of the British enthusiast of Egypt Major Robert Grenville Gayer-Anderson Pasha sometime between 1906 and 1942, when he resided in Cairo and eventually moved into the houses that now constitute the museum under his name.⁴² Allen had, in 1989, assumed that the presence of such chairs in the Gayer-Anderson Museum was evidence enough to attribute them to Egyptian manufacture, without taking into account that the collection includes objects from Syria, Iran, India, and China as well. On the place of production, Prisse provides yet another possibility. When he published the image of the kursi al-'imama he placed it adjacent to another inlaid wooden chair of a more conventional form, which he labeled the "Indian armchair" (Figure 7). He differentiated the two chairs from those manufactured locally in Egypt, stating specifically that both specimens were produced in Yemen in the suburbs outside of the Red Sea port city of Mocha. Then, a bit further in the same text, seemingly in contrast to his own assertion of Yemeni manufacture, he specifies that the one pictured in Figure 5 was not made by an Arab woodworker, but, rather, was the product of a "Muslim artisan from the Indies" for Middle Eastern consumption.⁴³ Prisse's impulse to look to Yemen was not unfounded and it is indeed possible that an Indian artisan could have produced either of these pieces while based in or around Mocha.⁴⁴ In fact, Yemen's woodworking industry was quite robust, particularly along the Red Sea coast, and migrant Indian artisans are often associated with inlay traditions in the wider southern Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁵ Prisse had visited the Red Sea coast in person and, as a result, heralded its woodwork, particularly the carving of *mashrabiyya* in ports such as al-Hudayda and Jidda, as superior to that of Egypt, which he felt was on the decline.⁴⁶ While Prisse has been amply critiqued for the many errors of fact that appeared in *L'art arabe*,⁴⁷ I am not necessarily concerned with whether Prisse was right or wrong about the place of production of these chairs, but rather would like to point out,

7

“Fauteuil indien.”
Source: *L'art arabe
d'après les monuments
du Kaire*, by Émile
Prisse d'Avennes
(Paris, 1877), vol. 4,
pl. 26.



once again, the ways in which this class of items seems to obstruct easy classification. It is clear that Prisse observed a relatively cosmopolitan world of wooden furniture consumption in nineteenth-century Cairo, where local workshops were producing objects of turned wood, but where raised seats from various origins were also coming into the market; he mentions the presence of garden chairs imported from Malta as well.⁴⁸

The origin of these chairs has, by no means, been resolved today. The museum's guide refers to them as “Indian wedding chairs,” a title that likely comes from a fusion of Prisse's various, and admittedly confusing, references to the chairs' production and function.⁴⁹ More recently, the author Nicholas Warner stated that the identity of this group of objects is still uncertain.⁵⁰ According to Allen, the museum had originally classified them as Syrian.⁵¹

This journey has followed a circuitous geographic path, which began in East Africa then moved eastward to India, Iran, and even Russia. After arriving in Egypt, we were sent down Yemen's Red Sea coast, only to end up looking back at India. The goal of this roundabout journey was to reveal that the *kiti cha enzi* and a diverse class of chairs similar to it occupies an uncommonly wide geographic purview. This itinerary of travel

should have also demonstrated that the original goals of ascription of Allen and Bravmann are quite impossible to sustain for a type of furniture that could be associated with countless traditions, almost all of which point to a secondary site of production. Commonly cast as an import, rather than a native ware, the kiti cha enzi and its cognate types repel the strong impulse to attribute that often drives the work of art historians.

It should be clear, however, that an angular high-backed chair with a flat footrest and straight armrests, sometimes inlaid with designs in contrasting materials, is important beyond the scope of East African art. Whether it is called the kiti cha enzi, the Mughal throne, the Qajar chair of state, the Diamond Throne, kursi al-'imama, or the Indian wedding chair, we have seen the visual potency of this varied and widespread type across space, time, and media. Clearly, many different observers based around the Indian Ocean sphere saw this chair as a significant item worthy of inclusion in manuscripts, decorative arts, prints, and an oil painting. Thus, its broad-reaching history is carved in wood, but also tangibly traced in two and three dimensions. Whereas Bravmann and Allen directed us toward India and Egypt on the basis of the kiti cha enzi's visual similarities to other chair types, I have used that formal comparison as a springboard, but not to pin down origins or reassign lines of influence. Rather, the goal was to obtain an understanding of the variant uses and social meanings of this class of objects across a wide, yet interconnected region. The kiti cha enzi and other chairs that may be associated with it sustained their status as widespread icons of power and prestige, but were also tied to the essential human rites of marriage and death. They were deemed valuable and useful for many reasons, such as their lofty profiles, their practical mobility, and their unique capacity to stand out from other more utilitarian seats, but also for their seeming exotic value and power to point to other distant locations.

- 1 René A. Bravmann, *African Islam* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), 109.
- 2 Prita Meier, *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 157.
- 3 The Peabody Essex chair (page 180) is the earliest example that can be dated. Edward D. Ropes, who held the position of US consul to Zanzibar from 1856 to 1870, originally acquired it. There is no firm evidence, other than comparative analysis, for the seventeenth-century date that was tentatively proposed for this chair when it was published in 2001. Amin Jaffer, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon: A Catalogue of the Collections in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 2001), 215, fig. 43; Meier, *Swahili Port Cities*, 157.
- 4 Meier, *Swahili Port Cities*, 156. For instance, Meier describes the “doubtful” claims of Portuguese inspiration that were put forward by nineteenth-century European observers.
- 5 James de Vere Allen, *Lamu* (Nairobi: Regal Press, 1971), 12.
- 6 Bravmann, *African Islam*, 109–111.
- 7 Allen mistakenly refers to the Cairo museum as the “Gayer-Henderson” throughout the article. James de Vere Allen, “The *Kiti Cha Enzi* and other Swahili Chairs,” *African Arts* 22, no. 3 (May 1989): 56.
- 8 Meier, *Swahili Port Cities*, 157.
- 9 Jaffer, *Furniture*, 114–115.
- 10 The original quote is from the Jesuit observer, Father Antonio Monserrate. Pedro Moura Carvalho, “What Happened to the Mughal Furniture? The Role of the Imperial Workshops, the Decorative Motifs Used, and the Influence of Western Models,” *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 80.
- 11 Although the shape of these chairs is accepted as Portuguese-inspired, the gilding of furniture, by contrast, has been cast as a local decorative approach that may have predated the arrival of the Portuguese. Pedro de Moura Carvalho, “Goa’s Pioneering Role in Transmitting European Traditions to the Mughal and Safavid Courts,” in *Exotica: The Portuguese Discoveries and the Renaissance Kunstkammer*, ed. Helmut Trnek (Lisbon: Gulbenkian Foundation, 2002), 74. The well-supported contention of Portuguese inspiration in Indian furniture may not, however, be transferred directly to similar arguments that Portuguese models were the ultimate source for the Swahili Coast *kiti cha enzi*. Amin Jaffer, *Luxury Goods from India: The Art of the Indian Cabinet-Maker* (London: V&A Publications, 2002), 9–12.
- 12 Carvalho: “What Happened,” “Goa’s Pioneering Role;” Jaffer: *Furniture; Luxury Goods*; Jan Veenendaal, *Furniture from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India* (Delft: Volkenkundig Museum Nusantara, 1985).
- 13 My focus of inquiry hones on the raised chairs that are the most similar to the Swahili coast *kiti cha enzi* in shape and construction. By contrast, ordinary upright chairs were generally present at Indian courts since the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Jaffer, *Furniture*, 113.
- 14 These two similar paintings are held in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and in the Dorn Album at the National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg.
- 15 Carvalho, “What Happened,” 80.
- 16 This painting was sold at auction in 1995 and 2011. It also likely served as the model for Athanasius Kircher’s portrait of the same ruler in *China Illustrated* (1667). Rosemary Crill, *The Mughal Portrait, 1560–1860* (Ahmedabad, IN: Mapin Publishing, 2010), 76–77.
- 17 “A Life-Size Portrait of the Emperor Jahangir Holding a Globe,” *Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures, Sotheby’s*, October 18, 1995, 77.
- 18 The decorative items that feature the angular upright throne, such as a lacquer casket at the V&A and a glass bottle at LACMA, represent the chair and its users in a markedly more generic way than the paintings on paper and cotton.
- 19 Sumathi Ramaswamy, “Going Global in Mughal India,” Duke University (2015), accessed July 15, 2016, <http://sites.duke.edu/globalinmughalindia/>.
- 20 William Dalrymple and Yuthika Sharma, “Introduction,” in *Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi, 1707–1857*, eds. W. Dalrymple and Y. Sharma (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 3.
- 21 Meier, *Swahili Port Cities*, 157–158.
- 22 Samuel Petersen, “Chairs and Change in Qajar Times,” in *Modern Iran: The Dialectics of Continuity and Change*, eds. M. E. Bonine and N.

- Keddie (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1981), 385–386; Layla Diba, “Fath ‘Ali Shah Seated on a Chair Throne,” in *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 181, cat. 38; Maryam Ekhtiar, “Prince Muhammad ‘Ali Mirza, Dawlatshah (1788–1821),” in Diba, *Royal Persian Paintings*, 191–192, cat. 45; Basil Robinson, “The Court Painters of Fath ‘Ali Shah,” *Eretz-Israel* 7 (1964): 101, 103; *Sotheby’s Fine Oriental Miniatures, Manuscripts, and Qajar Paintings*, April 4, 1978, Lot 86.
- 23 Carvalho, “Goa’s Pioneering Role,” 72; Petersen, “Chairs,” 383. Yet, high-backed raised chairs as a general category have a long history in Iran, as prominently featured in the stone-carved reliefs of Persepolis, for instance.
- 24 Maryam Ekhtiar, “Muraqqa’ (album) of Portraits and Calligraphers,” in *Royal Persian Paintings*, 176–177, cat. 35; Judith Lerner, “A Rock Relief of Fath ‘Ali Shah in Shiraz,” *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1991): 31–43.
- 25 Petersen, “Chairs,” 386; Diba, “Fath ‘Ali Shah,” 181.
- 26 “In Iran a Crown Well Earned,” *Life Magazine* 63, no. 10 (November 10, 1967): 29. This article misidentified the Naderi Throne as the more famous Peacock Throne.
- 27 Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 150.
- 28 There are many variations of his name, including Zachariah Sceriman and Zakhary Saradarov. Hourri Berberian and Sebouh Aslanian, “Sceriman Family: A Wealthy Persian-Armenian Merchant Family,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition (2009), accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sceriman-family>; Valadimir Loukonine and Anatoli Ivanov, *Lost Treasures of Persia: Persian Art in the Hermitage Museum* (Bournemouth, UK: Parkstone Press/Aurora Publishers, 1996), 224–225, cat. 232. On the Russian interest in Persian art and design, see Amy S. Landau, “From the Workshops of New Julfa to the Court of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich: An Initial Look at Armenian Networks and the Mobility of Visual Culture,” in *Metalwork and Material Culture in the Islamic World: Art, Craft and Text*, eds. Venetia Porter and Marian Rosser-Owen (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 413–426.
- 29 Rudi Matthee, “Russian-Iranian Relations in the Mid-Seventeenth Century,” in *The Tsars and the East*, ed. Alexey Konstantinovich Levkyin (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 16–17.
- 30 These chairs are currently on view at the Gayer-Anderson Museum, located in the harem and the celebration hall. I thank Nicholas Warner for generously providing images of them.
- 31 The earliest mention is Lane’s, published in 1836. In 1989, Allen also mentioned a chair featured in the *Description de l’Égypte*, which, with its low-slung wide seat, sharply-sloping back, and relatively unadorned surfaces is a much less effective comparison to the *kiti cha enzi* than those in the Gayer-Anderson. Allen, “*Kiti*,” 57, fig. 4.
- 32 This plate appears in the monochrome volume that accompanied the majestic atlas-size chromolithographs that are more frequently reproduced. Émile Prisse d’Avennes, *L’art arabe d’après les monuments du Kaire* (Paris: A. Morel et cie., 1877), 4: 185.
- 33 Rebecca Gearhart, “Forming and Performing Swahili Manhood: Wedding Rituals of a Groom in Lamu Town,” in *Gendered Lives in the Western Indian Ocean: Islam, Marriage, and Sexuality*, eds. Erin E. Stiles and Katrina Daly Thompson (Athens: Ohio University Press), 276; Kalandar Kamalkhan, “The Swahili Architecture of Lamu, Kenya: Oral Tradition and Space,” (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 2009), 150, 174.
- 34 On the frequent reuse of Lane by fellow Orientalists, see Paulina Banas, “The Orientalist Book Industry (1840–80): Prisse d’Avennes, Systems of Borrowing and Reuse, and the Marketing of Egypt,” (Ph.D. diss., Binghamton University, 2016), 82–85; Derek Gregory, “Performing Cairo: Orientalism and the City of the Arabian Nights,” in *Making Cairo Medieval*, eds. N. Alsayyad, I. Bierman, N. Rabbat (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 69–94.
- 35 Edward William Lane, *An account of the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians, written in Egypt during the years 1833, -34, and -35, partly from notes made during a former visit to that country in the years 1825, -26, -27, and -28* (London: C. Knight and Co., 1836), 1: 50, 221–222.
- 36 Lane’s observations about these practices were again repeated without citation in later publications. Edward Thomas Rogers and Mary Eliza Rogers, “Family Festivals and Fete-Days in

- Cairo," *The Art Journal* (1875–1887) New Series 6 (1880): 260; Elizabeth Cooper, *The Women of Egypt* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1914), 44.
- 37 Edward William Lane, trans., *The Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called, in England the Arabian Nights' Entertainment* (London: C. Knight and Co., 1839), 1: 284, no. 52, 325.
- 38 R.P.A. Dozy, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements chez les Arabes* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, [1845] 1969), 343, no. 1. Half a century later, Burton translated the same chair as "settle" (perhaps a transcription error for "settee"), thus undermining any certainty that the chair followed a specific form or make. Sir Richard Burton, trans., *A plain and literal translation of the Arabian nights entertainments, now entitled The book of the thousand nights and a night* (Printed for the Burton Club, n.d. [1885]), 1: 229. Elsewhere, the *kursi al-'imama* is described as a stool. C. L. Huart and J. Sadan, "Kursi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition (Leiden: Brill, 1986), V: 509.
- 39 Gregory, "Performing Cairo."
- 40 Lane's identification of this generic chair as *kursi al-'imama* has become fixed through a set of circular references. Under the subentry for *kursi al-'imama*, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* refers to Dozy, who, in fact, cited only Lane's two works as substantiation. C.L. Huart and J. Sadan, "Kursi," V: 509; Dozy, *Dictionnaire*, 343, no. 1.
- 41 Sophie Makariou and Charlotte Maury, "The Paradox of Realism: Gérôme in the Orient," trans. J. Sly, in *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904)* (Paris: Skira, 2010), 263.
- 42 Theo Gayer-Anderson, "Foreword," in *Legends of the House of the Cretan Woman* as told by Sheikh Suleiman al-Kretli and put into English by R. G. "John" Gayer-Anderson Pasha (New York: American University of Cairo Press, 2001), 5–8.
- 43 Prisse d'Avennes, *L'art arabe*, 4: 186.
- 44 Nancy Um, "From the Port of Mocha to the Eighteenth-Century Tomb of Imam al-Mahdi Muhammad in al-Mawahib: Locating Architectural Icons and Migratory Craftsmen," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 41 (2011): 390–391, 393–398.
- 45 Guillemette and Paul Bonnenfant, *L'art du bois à Sanaa* (Paris: Edisud, 1987), 22, 111.
- 46 Prisse d'Avennes, *L'art arabe*, 4: 187.
- 47 For example, see Briony Llewellyn and Mercedes Volait, "Review of Émile Prisse d'Avennes," *Arab Art, Arabische Kunst, L'Art arabe* (Taschen, 2010), addendum by Caroline Williams, accessed July 16, 2016, <http://www.astene.org.uk/emile-prisse-davennes-arab-art-arabische-kunst-lart-arabe-reviewed-by-briony-llewellyn-and-mercedes-volait/>.
- 48 Prisse d'Avennes, *L'art arabe*, 4: 185.
- 49 Nicholas Warner, *Guide to the Gayer-Anderson Museum Cairo* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Supreme Council of Antiquities, 2003), 19.
- 50 Email with Nicholas Warner (September 17, 2011).
- 51 Allen, "Kiti," 56.