

= Lamu Fort =

Lamu Fort is a fortress in the town of Lamu in northeastern Kenya . Originally situated on the waterfront , the fort today it is located in a central position in the town , about 70 metres (230 ft) from the main jetty on the shore . The powerfully built two @-@ story stone building contrasts with the Swahili architecture of the other buildings in the town .

Lamu Fort was built between 1813 and 1821 with Omani assistance . Initially it provided a base from which the Omanis consolidated their control of the East African coast but the town later lost its economic importance . During the British colonial period , and after the independence of Kenya , the fort was used as a prison . Today it houses an environmental museum and library , and is often used for community events .

= = Building = =

Lamu Fort is a defensive structure that was erected at the southeast corner of the old stone town of Lamu . The fort was built beside the Pwani Mosque , the oldest known mosque in Lamu , with origins in the 14th century . The fort originally lay on the waterfront , which then ran along the main street of the town but has since retreated .

Thomas Boteler , who visited Lamu in 1823 , described the fort as " a large square building , with a tower at each corner , but constructed so slightly that in all probability the discharge of its honeycombed ordnance would soon bring the whole fabric to the ground . " It had a " large vaulted entrance ... [and] consisted of three stories of balconies , supported inside by arches . Captain W. F. W. Owen , who visited at the same time , noted that the fort was " one hundred yards square , and surrounded by walls from forty to fifty feet high . "

Today the fort is in a central position in the town . It is situated about 70 metres (230 ft) from the main jetty on the shore . The fort today is a massive two @-@ story stone building . The squat and powerful structure contrasts with the elegant Swahili architecture of the other buildings in the town .

= = History = =

Construction of the fort appears to have been started by Fumomadi , Sultan of Pate . The Mazrui leader Abdalla bin Hemed , in an uneasy alliance with Pate , was also involved in the construction . One story was built , but with the death of Funomadi in 1809 construction halted . In 1812 Lamu gained an unexpected victory at the Battle of Shela over the forces of Pate and Mombasa . The continued threat prompted them to call for help from Oman . Said bin Sultan , Sultan of Muscat and Oman (r . 1804 ? 1856) , was said to have assisted in the renewed construction , which began in 1813 and was completed around 1821 .

Sultan Sayyid Said bin Sultan sent a governor to Lamu around 1814 . He provided a protective garrison of Baluchi soldiers . According to Boteler , the main guard consisted of " about twenty Muscat soldiers , lounging on the stone benches on either side , with eye intent on vacancy , and armed with their shields , swords and pikes . A large assortment of matchlocks , suspended from the walls above them , resembled those used by the primitive small @-@ arm men in England . " However , the security offered by the fort encouraged construction around it during the 19th century , including a shopfront .

The importance of Lamu in the Lamu Archipelago grew at the expense of Pate in the years that followed the fort 's construction . The Sultan used Lamu Fort as a base for defeating the Mazrui rebels in Mombasa , and for establishing control over the East African coast . He moved the capital of his sultanate to Zanzibar . With its strategic importance lost , Lamu soon declined in economic importance in comparison to Mombasa and Zanzibar .

Lamu Fort was turned into a prison in 1910 by the British colonial administration . In the 1950s Mau Mau detainees were held in the fort . The fort continued to be used as a prison after the independence of Kenya until 1984 . It was then given to the National Museums of Kenya , who converted the fort into a museum with help from the Swedish International Development

Cooperation Agency . The Lamu Fort was declared a scheduled monument on 15 May 1984 . Restoration was undertaken carefully . A temporary exhibition was opened in 1993 .

The fort today includes a museum with an exhibition on the ground floor mainly concerned with environmental conservation . The courtyard is used by the local community for meetings , weddings and public performances . There are offices , laboratories and a workshop on the second floor , and a conference facility that is available for rent . The fort houses a library with an excellent collection of Swahili poetry and reference material on Lamu . The ramparts of the fort give panoramic views of the town .