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Berichte und Kommentare

Graeco-Roman Trade Link and the Bantu Migration Theory

Felix A. Chami

Introduction

This paper synthesises two aspects of eastern and southern African later prehistoric scholarship which have, hitherto, been treated separately. The first is the spread of the Early Iron Working (EIW) cultural tradition. The second is the classical trade to East Africa (Azania). These two aspects occurred at the same time between 200 B.C. and A.D. 400.

The archaeological sites of early farming and iron using communities scattered over the eastern, central, and southern Africa have, hitherto, been recognised as of EIW Industrial Complex (Soper 1971; Phillipson 1976, 1993). The EIW people are also thought to have introduced iron technology and bevelled/fluted pottery to the general region (Phillipson 1993). One of the major preoccupation of the scholars dealing with the archaeology of EIW period was to try to explain how the tradition spread over the larger region of the sub-Saharan Africa.¹ Their explanation has been predicated on the theory of population movement.

The classical trade to Azania is documented in "Periplus Maris Erythraei" (A.D. 40–70) and in Ptolemy's "Geography" (A.D. 2nd–3rd centuries) (Freeman-Grenville 1975; Huntingford 1980; Casson 1989). Coins of classical times found in non-archaeological contexts have also been used as evidence of the ancient trade (Sheriff 1981; Chami and Msemwa 1997). Only recently has the first incontrovertible evidence from the archaeological context been recovered (Chami 1998; Chami and Msemwa 1997; Chami and Mapunda 1997).

It is puzzling that there has not been any attempt to relate the archaeology of the EIW communities

and the scholarship of the classical trade to Azania. The EIW communities have been seen as of hinterland Bantu speakers (Soper 1982; Phillipson 1993), more adapted to the wetter and forest areas (Vansina 1994–95), hence Mwitum tradition (see Schmidt 1988). The classical trade was conceptualised to belong to Cushitic speakers, people adapted to the drier zone of the Horn of Africa and the Rift Valley, and pastoral in nature (Horton 1990; Sutton 1994–95b). This dichotomy has rendered futile all attempts to understand the nature and the economy of the early farming and iron using communities of the region. This paper presents the first attempt to break away from this disjointed scholarship. The communities of Azania and those of the EIW tradition are seen as belonging to one and same people. Trade routes facilitated the spread of the EIW tradition. Before this synthesis is attempted, the two disjointed scholarships are summarised below.

EIW Bantu Migration Theory

It was recognised from the first half of this century that most of the people occupying the southern half of the African continent spoke similar languages that came to be labelled Bantu. A review of speculations and hypotheses developed from the 1940s onwards about the spread of Bantu speakers on the African subcontinent has been provided in several publications including Phillipson (1993) and Sutton (1994–95a).

A linguistic theory suggested the Congo-Niger region as the origin of Bantu speakers. From there they first occupied the Congo forest before spreading to the rest of the subcontinent. An establishment of the second nucleus zone at the Katanga copper belt area suggested that the movement had two stages, the early one being that of conquer-

1 Huffman 1970; Phillipson 1976; Collett 1982; Soper 1982.

ing the forest, and the second one being that of conquering the savanna (Oliver 1966). While the earlier movement was seen as responsible for the spread of crops of Southeast Asian origin, the later movement was seen as responsible for the spread of iron technology and the bevelled/fluted pottery.

The archaeological data collected in the later part of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s did not, however, agree with the linguistic reconstruction concerning the area of origin of the EIW tradition. The earliest settlements practising iron technology with bevelled/fluted pottery were found west of Lake Nyanza (Victoria) and the highlands of Rwanda and Burundi. These were dated to the 5th century B.C. (Schmidt 1997). The dates for the sites of the same tradition appear younger and younger as one moved towards the east and south of the subcontinent. It was, therefore, established that the EIW tradition originated in the interlacustrine region where it had been established by the 5th century B.C. before it was spread to the different parts of the subcontinent (Soper 1971; Phillipson 1976).

Later on, a reconciliation with linguistic data was achieved by eliminating the second nucleus zone of Katanga in favour of the movement from Cameroonian-Niger zone across the northern margin of the Congo forest to the interlacustrine region where a final stage was set towards the savanna (Ehret 1982; Soper 1982). The speedy spread from the interlacustrine region to the rest of the subcontinent, now viewed to have taken less than three centuries, has been attributed to the efficiency created by iron technology which could produce superior weapons to conquer the enemy and tools to clear the forest (Phillipson 1993).

It should be noted here that two aspects of the Bantu speakers migration theory bounded linguists and archaeologists together. These are the spread of similar language over the subcontinent on one hand and, on the other, of similar material culture including farming techniques, iron technology, and pottery making. These two, the language and the material culture, were thought to have been spread together as a "package."

At this juncture, it should also be noted that, except for Gramly (1978), virtually all scholars grappling with the question of the spread of the two aspects have subscribed to the theory of population movement for explanation. This school of thought believes that it was due to movement of people from the interlacustrine region that Bantu language and the associated cultural elements were spread

as a "package."² The Bantu speakers are thought to have displaced the Khoisan-speaking foragers who were yet to adopt iron technology, pottery making, and agriculture (Phillipson 1993: 7).

Vansina has slightly varied suggesting that there was no "siege giant wave" of Bantu-speaking immigrants with "overwhelming superiority over earlier settlers." "Three different dynamics must be considered here: the initial adoption of rudimentary farming, the formative period until farming had become the main source of food, and, finally, later innovations in mature farming system" (1994–95: 16). Vansina seems to believe that the people involved in the formative period were non-Bantu speakers for as he puts it, "foragers converted to farming, fused with Bantu-speaking immigrant farmers in the area and eventually adopted their language" (20). In this case Vansina subscribed to the Bantu migration theory as he concluded that "substantial migration may have been involved" in the spread of the EIW tradition.

Notwithstanding the existing consensus on the Bantu migration theory, there has been a disagreement on the causes and actual mechanism of the migration. One school, made of Huffman (1970) and Collett (1982), views the cause of the movement to have been population growth and social stress at the nucleus area. This would have caused conflict that would disperse population to different regions of the subcontinent where Bantu speakers are found today. It should be stressed that this displacement would have happened only once, a process compared with pellets sent to the different directions by a shotgun (Huffman 1970: 18). This model has been known as "cataclysmic discontinuous-spread" (Collett 1982: 182).

The second school, advocated by Soper (1971, 1982) has viewed the cause for the movement being the growth, at the nucleus area, of population beyond carrying capacity. This would necessitate community fission, pushing some people to the adjacent unoccupied areas. A repetition of this process would have taken the EIW people to the rest of the subcontinent. This model is better known as "continuous wave-of-advance" (see Collett 1982: 182 f.).

The strength of the first model is said to lie in its ability to explain how the spread of EIW tradition took about 300 years to cover 3,000 km from the interlacustrine region to South Africa. Computer simulations found that for the second model to work it would have taken the EIW people

2 Phillipson 1976, 1993; Soper 1971, 1982; Huffman and Herbert 1994–95; Collett 1982.

a millennium to cover that long distance; a time period enough to make the material culture at the final destination quite different from that of the nucleus area. Since the pottery of the two opposite ends share a fair amount of attributes, including bevelling/fluting (Klapwijk 1974; Cruz e Silva 1980), this suggests that the second model is incorrect. Also the recent historical South African Mfecane peoples movement, that saw a population thrown out by conflict reaching as far as south of Tanzania, has been used to substantiate the first model (Collett 1985).

However, the strength of the "continuous wave-of-advance" model lies in the pottery attribute analysis which has established variants within the EIW tradition. It was observed that EIW pottery slightly changes as one moves away from the Urewe-interlacustrine nucleus area. Soper (1971) found that pottery of central Tanzania (Lelesu) had stronger cultural affinity to that of Urewe compared to the pottery from the eastern highlands of Tanzania and the coast (Kwale). The affinity was found to be weaker and weaker as one moved to Malawi (Nkope) and then to South Africa (Matola; see spatial pottery seriation in Soper 1982: 227). Although, as noted above, this model would not account for the speedy spread of the EIW tradition, it strongly suggests that the spread of the EIW tradition occurred in stages, a process that enabled the formulation of Soper's (1971) EIW pottery variants.

Therefore, the failure of the two models to offer a parsimonious explanation of the phenomenon that occurred shortly before and in the early centuries A.D. calls for an alternative explanatory model. A new model must help to explain how the tradition was spread in stages, but also in fairly speedy form. Before dealing with this problem, the question of Graeco-Roman trade connection to East Africa, which provides light to the new model, should be reviewed.

Graeco-Roman Documents about East Africa

Writers of classical times have passed to us knowledge of cultural and economic links that existed between the Roman Mediterranean, the Nile, the Middle East, and East Africa. Data exists in the reports pointing to an early trade route from the Mediterranean Sea to East Africa via the Nile and the interlacustrine region. Both Strabo (1st century B.C.) and Pliny (early century A.D.) proposed the source of cinnamon and cassia to the area south of the Sudd (Marshes of Nile), the latter suggesting

that the spices were brought to East Africa from a long sea travel that took five years (Huntingford 1980: 169, 127 f.). Miller (1969) has suggested that the spices were carried to the Nile and the Red Sea from East Africa through central Kenya (for doubts see Sheriff 1981). A review of this problem now places the cinnamon route via central Tanzania to the interlacustrine region and then to the Nile (Chami 1999).

Further indications that a Nile route to East Africa existed was given by the expedition(s) sent by Emperor Nero in the mid-first century A.D. to explore the source of the Nile and to provide military logistics to police the trade route (Shinnie 1967: 21). The king of Meroe gave a letter of introduction to be used by the crew of the expedition on the way to the source of the Nile. The king's letter suggests that Meroe had some kind of relationship with the interlacustrine region. Also the resulting report that the trade route had shifted to the Red Sea (Welsby 1996: 70) strongly indicates that Meroitic Sudan had been obtaining some of its needs from East and Central Africa before the end of the 1st century A.D. The shift of the trade route to the Red Sea, in the later part of the 1st century A.D., coincides with the control of the Romans of the Red Sea and the north of the Indian Ocean after their defeat of Arabs (Miller 1969: 70) and then being aware of the monsoon winds driving vessels to and from East Africa. This sea route provided more information about the coast of East Africa and its hinterland.

"*Periplus Maris Erythraei*" was a mid-first century A.D. trade guide for sailors and traders aiming for the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Most important to this work is the description of the emporium of Rhapta on the Azanian coast. Located towards the southern coast of East Africa this was the last market known south of the Roman empire. It had "big-bodied" people who were agriculturalists (Casson 1989). Arabs of the Red Sea coast had settled in Azania, intermarrying with indigenous people and speaking their language. There was colonial kind of relationship between the two. Goods imported to Rhapta included ironware and glassware, those exported included ivory, rhinoceros horn, and tortoiseshells.

Ptolemy's "Geography," of the 2nd/3rd centuries A.D., has hitherto been seen to have confused the picture provided in the "*Periplus*" (see Chami 1994: 25). However, reexamination of the report indicates that Ptolemy has clarified the picture provided in the "*Periplus*." Ptolemy provided grid references (long. and lat.) for all the settlements and features of interest to travellers. However,

the grid references of the hinterland features are not very reliable because they were based on the information collected at the coast. The only contradiction the two documents have regards the location of the island of Manuthias. This can be explained by the fact that Manuthias was a concept for "mass of land in the ocean" (island) rather than the actual name for a specific island (Chami 1996: 166). The location of Manuthias would, therefore, differ depending on where the information was obtained. Ptolemy shows that Rhapta had grown to the status of metropolis. It was located near a river a bit to the hinterland. The East African coast was then known as far south as the northern coast of Mozambique. Comoro Islands are also known (Ptolemy's Manuthias).

In the deep hinterland a range of mountain of Moon was noted to have been providing water for a lake which was the source of the Nile. Ptolemy's data, including grid reference which puts the mountain of Moon about 15° west of the coast, suggests that the mountain group is Ruwenzori which provides water to Lake Victoria, the source of the Nile. Huntingford's (1980) preference for Kilimanjaro as the mountain of Moon should not be sustained. By the way, Kilimanjaro is represented in Ptolemy's report by mount Phalangis which is located on the Equator near the coast with three peaks. Kilimanjaro has three peaks of Kibo, Mawenzi, and Siha. The knowledge of the source of the Nile at the coast is interesting to this work because it provides further evidence for a relationship between the coast, the interlacustrine region, and the Nile.

Scholars interpreting the classical documents have been locked in controversies over several issues including the exact location of Rhapta. Majority of them have favoured the area between Dar-es-Salaam and the Rufiji (for conspectus see Casson 1989). Recently, Horton (1990) has suggested the mouth of Tana River on the north coast of Kenya, and Chami (1994: 95) has proposed the Rufiji region south of Dar-es-Salaam. Ptolemy placed it near a river at about 8° S, a location which fits nowhere else but Rufiji. As it shall be seen below archaeology has started providing invaluable information about this location.

Another controversy is about who were the "big-bodied" people of Azania. The majority of scholars have preferred Hamitic/Cushitic speakers, people of the Horn of Africa and the Rift Valley (for conspectus see Casson 1989 and Horton 1990). Recently Chami (1994, 1996; Chami and Msemwa 1997) has suggested Bantu speakers.

As it will be shown below archaeology of the Rufiji region is uncovering sites of EIW tradition attributed by archaeologists to the Bantu speakers (Phillipson 1993). Some of these sites have remains of ancient trade goods some from the Mediterranean Sea.

Archaeology had, until recently, offered no much information to vindicate the classical historical documents. Several coins of Roman and other Middle East emperors had been found and reported but all of no archaeological context (Sheriff 1981; Chami and Msemwa 1997). These had been collected from the mainland area north of Dar-es-Salaam and from Zanzibar. Neville Chittick is known to have surveyed many parts of the coast of East Africa with the aim of identifying indicators of the ancient culture and trade centres. All the monumental areas he excavated dated to the period after the 9th century A.D. His disappointment is clear when he remarked that "no settlement of pre-Islamic era has been found" (Chittick 1975: 189). His final attempt before his death was the survey of the Rufiji delta where he was rightly convinced that the ancient Rhapta was located. He pessimistically concluded that "plentiful evidence of massive erosion in some places, and build-up of mudbanks in others, was obtained, and it remains possible that all traces of Rhapta have been washed away or buried" (1982: 58).

From 1994, a Tanzanian team led by the author has had several expeditions in the Rufiji region and the offshore islands with an attempt to identify the Azanian culture involved in the ancient classical trade (Chami 1999; Chami and Msemwa 1997; Chami and Mapunda 1997). More than 20 EIW sites have been found now dated to the period between 200 B.C. to A.D. 500. The excavation of some of these have provided invaluable data in the understanding of the culture of the coast of East Africa in the early centuries A.D. Goods traded to Azania including those of the Mediterranean origin have been recovered from the archaeological context. It is this data used in the following section to relate, for the first time in the scholarship of East and southern Africa, the Graeco-Roman trade and the spread of the EIW cultural tradition.

The Roman Trade and the Spread of the EIW Cultural Tradition: A Synthesis of Disjointed Scholarships

The importance of trade and exchange in the understanding of the preindustrial communities has been pointed out in several anthropologi-

cal and archaeological works.³ Trade has been viewed to imply organisation which necessarily regulates human activities both in terms of procurement (movement of goods including raw materials) and of social relations (human encounters with exchange of information and goods) (Hodges 1989: 13). The conceptualization of the economic base as key in understanding forces responsible for adaptation and cultural change has been central to Marxists and cultural materialists schools (Harris 1968; Gibbon 1984: 180).

Before embarking on the task of articulating how the Graeco-Roman trade to East Africa affected the iron-using communities, three points need to be mentioned.

Firstly, trade has been regarded as one of the factors that can cause a spread of products, technologies, and cultural styles (elements) to a larger region. According to Renfrew (1977) this trade model can be broken into four parts: down-the-line trade (the law of monotonic decrement), prestige chain network, redistribution, and directional trade (also see Hodges 1989: 18 f.). For our case in eastern Africa down-the-line trade would be important to understand how trade was responsible to a formation of central places (gateway communities) which controlled movement of goods and cultural elements to a distant peripheral settlement. The prestige chain network could also throw light on how precious and luxury goods transported between central places, between East Africa, the Nile, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean Sea, stimulated cultural and economic growth over the larger region.

Secondly, it has been argued that the validity of trade models to the preindustrial community studies would rely on the extant supporting ethnographic or historical data (Adams 1975). The mention of trade links between the classical world and the coast of East Africa, the mentioned knowledge of the hinterland as far as the mountain of Moon and the source of the Nile and the recent archaeological data provide a kick-off foundation data for this criterion.

Thirdly, if trade has to be successfully related to the spread of the EIW tradition the issue of the spread of the Bantu language should be separated from the spread of iron technology and bevelled/fluted pottery tradition. Gramly (1978) has already proposed that the Bantu speakers had been on the land where they are found today many centuries before the arrival of iron technology

and bevelled/fluted pottery tradition. While the language is likely that it was spread by gradual, but continuous, peoples' movement from the Congo-Niger region, the spread of the EIW tradition was spread by a different medium. Gramly (1978) attributed this to the movement of craftsmen of unidentified origin.

Building on Gramly's (1978) thesis, this work evokes a trade model to explain how the EIW tradition was spread over the eastern and southern Africa. It is traders, craftsmen, ideologists, and artists moving along the trade lines and sideways who were responsible for the spread of the EIW tradition.

This shift to the trade model does not mean to undermine the role played by peoples' migrations in the history of humankind. Population movements have acted as a natural means to exploit new resourceful areas. Some movements have also been caused by stress and conflicts in the nucleus areas. Such population movements have been responsible for the spread of cultural traditions (Collett 1982). While one can not totally rule out the existence of some movements, it has been shown above that population movement models evoked to explain the spread of EIW tradition have failed to explain how the tradition was spread in stages, but fairly fast (Collett 1982).

The establishment of trade connection between Meroe and the interlacustrine region and then to the coast of East Africa must have formed the backbone of the earliest traded network of East Africa in the last centuries B.C. to the 1st century A.D. This trade route would have facilitated the earliest spread of the EIW cultural elements from the Urewe-interlacustrine region to the coast of East Africa and the immediate areas. The emergence of this long-distance trade stimulated procurement and production of goods demanded by traders. This would send a chain reaction in the early farming communities: leading to the emergence of craftsmen, artists, and people of various specialities depending on the demand of traders. This would lead to the growth of a wealthy class of people and the growth of agriculture which would cater for the population growth around the centres and trade posts. Competition, among different specialists (including craftsmen), at the centres and trade posts, would necessitate the movement of others far away along the line and sideways. This would necessarily spread key cultural styles of the centres to the peripheral areas in stages, but fairly fast (Hirth 1978; Renfrew 1977). Since the pre-EIW communities of Azania belonged to a similar cultural tradition, they easily integrated

3 Dalton 1975; Renfrew 1977; Hirth 1978; Hodges 1989.

the new cultural elements spread along the trade lines. That is how, in the recent history, Swahili cultural elements were easily spread among the Bantu speakers of East and Central Africa.

Establishment of trade posts at some key villages along the line, guarded by warriors, ensured continued trade and cultural assimilation of the distant communities as it occurred in the Roman empire (Greene 1992: 124; Hodges 1989: 6). A similar security system along a trade route was reported in 1616 by Gaspar Bocarro, a Portuguese traveller, who followed such route from Tete in the hinterland of Mozambique to the town of Kilwa on the southern coast of Tanzania (Freeman-Grenville 1975: 164). Also in the recent history Zanzibar sultanate extended its trade and cultural links to the interlacustrine region and to central Africa as far as Katanga copper belt region. The trade route was guarded by Baluchistan soldiers on the littoral and Nyamwezi warriors in the deep hinterland.

The existence on the coast of East Africa of a cultural and a trading centre, the emporium of Rhapta, is very much reminiscence of the historical centres such as Kilwa and Zanzibar. The documentary and now archaeological data suggest that Rhapta may have survived for more than 400 years from the last century B.C. This long life would have offered its culture enough time to be spread along the trade network to diverse parts of the hinterland and to the south as far as South Africa.

The rise of Rhapta, most likely on the Rufiji river region, can be understood in two ways: first by local processes of adaptation to rich riverine, deltaic, and marine environments which would offer adequate food resources and security for population growth; and secondly by the rise and expansion of the Roman trade to Africa and Asia with its demand for spices, gold, and iron.

As it pertains to trade, it has been mentioned above that the earliest route would link Rhapta with the interlacustrine region and then to the Nile. Several trade goods are known to have been trafficked along this route. According to Hakem: "Since ancient times the main exports from Nubia were gold, incense, ivory, ebony, oils, semi-precious stones, ostrich feathers, and leopard skins. Although some of these goods originated on Meroitic territory, the origin of others is clearly from countries far to the south" (1981: 316).

One of the significant item of trade in this trade line were spices. Cinnamon was the most priced spice in the Roman empire. It was always exchanged for gold. The Azanians are reported to have known its source in Southeast Asia and

passing it to the Mediterraneans along the Nile route (Miller 1969: 146, 150–160).

Another significant trade item that could figure important along this route is iron bloom. The excavation of the EIW Limbo (Urewe) type site in the Rufiji region has yielded large quantities of slag and many pieces of iron. The large quantities of slag from the Limbo site suggested that the site was industrial producing iron for a larger demand (Chami 1994: 43). Excavations of similar sites in the interlacustrine region of Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi have yielded similar data including many ancient furnaces capable of producing carburated iron steel (Schmidt 1997). Meroe has been found to have had similar intensity of iron working (Welsby 1996: 170). Intensive iron production at the three regions, now thought to have been linked by a trade route, suggests increased demand for iron between 200 B.C. and A.D. 300.

Tylecote (1976: 53) has shown how the Roman empire was responsible for the dissemination of the best techniques of iron smelting that existed anywhere in the Romanized world. "This dissemination was not limited to the Roman area but affected the iron working groups living on its periphery, who both traded in metals with the Romans and used them for defending themselves against the imperial power." Tylecote (1976: 53) has also shown that there was a enormous increase in the demand for iron in the Roman empire for military and civil needs and that it is possible that Romans penetrated into Meroitic kingdom and further south.

The improvement of smelting technology in the interlacustrine region, which led into the production of carburated steel iron, although regarded as local innovation (Schmidt 1983), could have been a response to a high demand of carburated steel iron at the centre of the Roman world. This type of iron was required for the production of big nails used to make ships and instruments of war (Tylecote 1976: 53).

The only evidence of connection between Meroe and the coast of East Africa is the find of four Roman beads in the hinterland site near the Rufiji river (Chami 1999; Chami and Mapunda 1997). One segmented bead, gold/silver-in-glass, was very valuable. Previously, Meroe was the southern most find of this kind of bead. This bead was produced at the Rhodes Island in the Mediterranean Sea (Boon 1977). The valuable beads could have been traded to the Azanians in exchange for valuable items such as cinnamon from the Southeast Asia. The beads were found in association with iron objects around a blacksmithing area.

It has been shown by the classical documents that the inland trade route via the Nile shifted to the Red Sea in the 1st century A.D. (Welsby 1996: 70). In this specific time traders sailed from the Red Sea via the Horn of Africa and then catching up with the monsoon winds to Azania in which land was the last market known as Rhapta. It has been shown above that the influence of this cultural core, now established to have been of the EIW people, reached southern Mozambique and South Africa where EIW sites have been found dated to the 1st century A.D. (Klapwijk 1974; Cruz e Silva 1980; Sinclair 1991).

It is not clear now what trade items forced the Rhaptanoids to extend their cultural link to the rest of the continent in the A.D. 1st century. According to "Periplus" document, goods imported to East Africa in the A.D. 1st century, included iron spears, axes, knives, and small anvils (Casson 1989: 61). Those exported included ivory, rhinoceros horn and tortoiseshells.

It is apparent that the dominance of iron tools in the list of the imported goods does not mean that the Azanians lacked iron technology (Sheriff 1981). It has been suggested above that Azanians could have traded in iron bloom. As this was demanded by traders, metallurgists would exchange it for locally demanded finished goods, e.g., iron weapons (mentioned in "Periplus"), clothes, beads, and jewels. This is reminiscence of the modern foreign economy in which, for instance, coffee growers sell unprocessed coffee to buy finished and packed coffee and other items from the markets. Iron factories in the Middle East were known to have bought steel-iron bloom from the indigenous people (Tylecote 1976: 53).

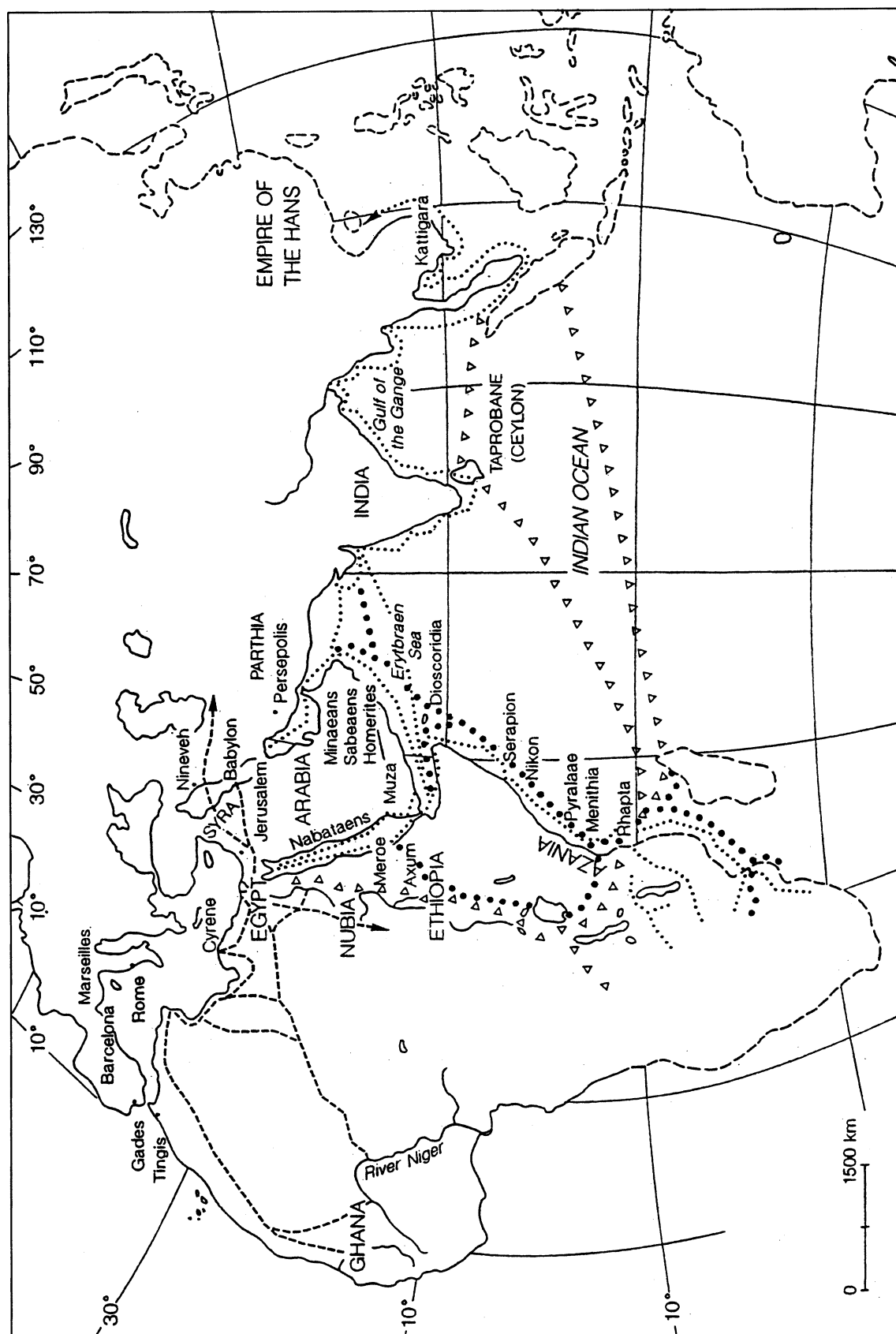
It is noted above that in the 2nd/3rd century A.D. Ptolemy provided a better picture of places in East Africa supported by grid references (Freeman-Grenville 1975; Huntingford 1980). Several markets of the coast of East Africa were then known. Rhapta had then become a metropolis.

Archaeology has recorded the rise of a new phase of the EIW tradition dated to the time of Ptolemy, A.D. 200 – A.D. 500. This phase, with its coastal pottery known as Kwale, was derived from the earlier Limbo/Urewe phase (Chami 1998; Chami and Mapunda 1997). Kwale pottery has been found to be dominated by a motif of false-relief-chevron (Soper 1967; Chami 1998) which also become prominent in the pottery of Kapwirimbwe in central Zambia in the 5th century A.D. (Phillipson 1968, 1970). Many sites of this phase are now known along the coast as far north as south of Somalia (Chittick 1975), in the eastern

highlands of northern Tanzania and Kenya (Soper 1967, 1971) and in the offshore islands (Chami and Msemwa 1997). Similar sites are also found in Mozambique (Sinclair 1991). This archaeological observation suggests that, by the 4th century A.D., the EIW tradition had been spread to many parts of the eastern and central Africa. This second stage of the spread of the EIW tradition now seems to have taken place from the Rufiji coast of Tanzania where EIW communities grew stronger as they benefited from the new transoceanic trade link to the Middle East and the Red Sea.

The extension of this coastal culture to Zambia is quite interesting for it strongly suggests trade connection to the mineral rich area of Africa. It is immediately afterwards, in the 5th-7th centuries A.D., some coastal sites are found to have a lot of iron wire, copper beads, and lead objects (Chami 1994: 64–66) pointing to a long-distance trade with central Africa (compare copper beads in Chami 1994: 66 with similar in Phillipson 1970: 107). Sites of EIW tradition in Zambia were located in areas rich of iron ore. Smelting activity at Kapwirimbwe "appears to have been unusually intensive" (Phillipson 1968: 102). Cosmas, called Indicopleustes, writing in the A.D. 6th century, documented continued trade in iron and gold between the Axumites and the people of deep hinterland of East Africa. The gold came from Sazu, a region near the coast (Freeman-Grenville 1975).

In the map, I have illustrated three phases of ancient trade connecting East Africa and the rest of the world. The 200 B.C. – A.D. 200 and A.D. 200 – A.D. 500 trade networks have been discussed in this work. The former coincides with the spread of Urewe phase of EIW tradition and the latter to the spread of Kwale. The A.D. 500 – A.D. 700 trade coincides with the rise of the Sasanid domination of the north Indian Ocean trade, and hence being pre-Islamic. In the rivalry between the Sasanians and the Axumites the Red Sea connection to East Africa seems to have been in crisis. The Mediterraneans and the Axumites resorted to the ancient inland route towards the interlacustrine region as documented by Cosmas Indicopleustes (Freeman-Grenville 1975). The coast was directly connected to the Middle East and India (Chami 1994). The coast of East Africa and the deep hinterland of Tanzania is marked, at this time, by archaeological sites with pottery of Triangular Incised Ware (TIW) tradition (Chami 1994).



Map: Ancient Trade Routes (modification of Freeman-Grenville 1988: xiv) (see legend page 213).

Conclusion

It should be noted at this juncture that the pattern of relationship between different EIW communities in eastern Africa is just beginning to emerge. It was shown above that the attempt to explain the relationship in terms of population movement has proved failure. It has also been shown in this paper that the consideration of the classical data concerning cultural and trade connection between East Africa and the rest of the ancient world can help provide an alternative model to explain the EIW cultural spread phenomenon. The rise of cultural centres and trade connection between them and the rest of their peripheries have been articulated above as an alternative to population movement theory. The model is now being supported by new archaeological data from the coast of Tanzania augmented by new interpretation of the classical documents.

What archaeology is now to show is the diversity of goods exchanged in the ancient trade because only a few are mentioned in the historical documents. Trade items not mentioned may include beads of various kinds (Huntingford 1980: 142) now found in good amount in the archaeological contexts (Chami 1994; Chami and Msemwa 1997). Other items include early ceramic wares, clothes, iron bloom, and various jewels.

Equally important for the future archaeology of trade is to delineate the extent of the long-distance trade. This may take time to be accomplished because, if any, few archaeologists working in the region have had interest in this kind of research. Those inclined to this kind of research were probably happy to confine the research to the coast (Sheriff 1981; Chittick 1975). Some did not believe that the EIW people could have been involved in the ancient trade (Horton 1990). And even now it will be easy to protest against a trade model used to explain the

spread of the EIW cultural tradition rather than providing material support for it (Horton 1990; Sutton 1994–95b; Abungu 1994–95).

It should also be reiterated here that trade goods would be more realised at the cultural and trade centre and less so as one moves far away along the trade line to periphery (Renfrew 1977). In the deep hinterland of Rhapta and far south to South Africa one would expect fewer imported objects. The absence in the distant sites of remains of imported goods should not be taken, therefore, to imply absence of long-distance trade. A clear picture of this kind of trade network has been shown for the sites of TIW tradition (6th–8th centuries A.D.) where more imported objects are found on the littoral and island sites and fewer and fewer as one moves to the hinterland (Chami 1994). The same should apply to the EIW ancient trade.

It is suggested here that a research geared towards identifying trade connection to the south and hinterland of the coast of East Africa should start to yield what was not seen before. Probably the data already exist in some areas but not properly interpreted. It is just recently that similar research on the central coast of Tanzania started to yield what was viewed enigmatic before (Phillipson 1993: 221). From the new archaeological finds the cultural sequence of the coast of East Africa has been provided for the first 15 centuries A.D. (Chami 1998).

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Legend to map on page 212

- ▽ ▽ ▽ ▽ cinnamon and cassia route before mid-first century A.D. (spread of Urewe tradition)
- Roman trade connection with the Indian Ocean A.D. 200–500 (spread of Kwale tradition)
- Trade routes connecting the Zanzibar Channel with the Middle East and the Red Sea A.D. 500–700 (spread of Triangular Incised Ware tradition)
- Ancient trade route to West Africa
-  Unknown land in the ancient times

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Oral Traditions and the Political History of Borgu

Olayemi Akinwumi

Introduction

Oral tradition is an indispensable source of any preliterate society in the world.¹ Yet, in spite of this, it has not been fully utilised for the purpose of reconstructing the history of many areas, especially the noncentralised societies of Africa.² This has resulted into our lack of historical and anthropological knowledge of so many areas of the African

continent. Borgu, our area of focus in this paper, is one of the areas that is to receive full academic attention by scholars in and outside Africa. The few available academic works on this area are not only one-sided, they also lack comprehensiveness of the historical knowledge of the area.³ It is the intention of this paper to attract attention to this important precolonial African region by focusing on the precolonial history of the area until 1898, when it was partitioned by the Anglo-French pact of the same year.

Migrations and Establishment of Borgu States

Until 1898, Borgu was a vast precolonial country inhabited by various ethnic groups. In other words, it was not an homogeneous country as conceived by many people.⁴ The various groups that inhabited the country could be linguistically grouped into two main linguistic blocks. The Boko and related languages belonged to the Mande language family, while the Gur language, a Voltaic family member, is represented by the Baatonu speakers of the country (Akinwumi 1995: 2; Williamson 1987: 25). There were other language groups in Borgu beside these two language groups. These were migrants, who were established in Borgu in the 19th century, and as such they are not our focus in this paper.

As mentioned above, Borgu was a vast precolonial African country until 1898. The country stretched from the Atakora chain of mountains in the west to river Niger in the east. It shared its border in the north with the Hausaland, and in the south with Yorubaland (Anene 1965: 212). It was this precolonial country that was partitioned by the Anglo-French pact of 1898 (Anene 1970; Hirshfield 1979). The western and eastern sections of Borgu are now known as Beninoise and Nigerian Borgu respectively.

The Kisra legend or Kisra migration to Africa is generally taken as the starting point of the history of the establishment or foundation of Borgu country. There are many versions of the legend (cf. Akinwumi 1997: 1–19), which were reactions to the political developments of this century.

The various versions have the following points of agreement:

1 This issue has been addressed by many scholars including Jan Vansina, David Henige, and J. F. Ade Ajayi in their various works.

2 In Nigeria, for example, history of noncentralised states are seen as appendices of the history of the centralised states. This is why, until very recently, noncentralised states were not the focus of many Nigerian historians.

3 Nigerian Borgu is one of the regions yet to attract scholarly attention.

4 Until date, most Nigerians consider the various groups in Borgu as homogeneous. The Yoruba, for instance, refer to them as Bariba.