CARAVAN PORTERS OF THE NYIKA
LABOUR, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY
TANZANIA

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of History
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Caravan Porters of the Nyika:
Labour, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth Century Tanzania

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Caravan porters were vital to the functioning of trade and transportation throughout precolonial and early colonial Sub-Saharan Africa. In nineteenth century East Africa, the world’s largest supplier of ivory, tens of thousands of caravan porters carried ivory to the coast from all parts of the interior. Porterage was the only form of land transportation because sleeping sickness precluded the use of pack or draft animals. Porters were the first migrant labourers in the region and were transmitters of new ideas. Porterage has received only cursory attention in spite of its centrality to precolonial African labour history, which to date has concentrated on slave studies. This has led to an assumption that free migrant labour emerged only from colonial economies. This view needs to be modified. In Tanzania most porters were wage labourers, and many were professionals.

The emergence of the professional porter was an African response to East African conditions rather than a consequence of the decline of indigenous entrepreneurship, or a process of impoverishment caused by outside forces. It is incorrect to imagine rural society everywhere as on the defensive. Some groups, like the Nyamwezi, were at the forefront of change. Entrepreneurship, the market, and wage labour were becoming increasingly familiar to them. Forms of caravan organization and work invented by the Nyamwezi and influenced by others became dominant. Over time, Nyamwezi work norms and leisure activities formed at home and on safari came to constitute the main features of a broad "caravan culture," an integrating way of life along the central caravan routes between Lake Tanganyika and the coast, and along the branch routes. Attention to the subtleties of culture shows how porters struggled to defend concepts of work derived from their own experience from outsiders determined to impose
different working patterns. Porters successfully bargained with employers over conditions, discipline, rations, and payment, which had become standardized by custom. Porters were able to force up wages at crucial junctures. Customary patterns of work survived into the early colonial period. Foreign travellers had little choice but to bow to custom, with some adaptations.
Biographical Sketch

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To Lu, who hung in there.
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(Adapted from John Iliffe, A Modern History of Tanganyika (Cambridge, 1979), xvi.)
# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AHS</td>
<td>African Historical Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSG</td>
<td>Bulletin de la Société de Géographie</td>
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<td>CMI</td>
<td>Church Missionary Intelligencer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
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<td>HA</td>
<td>History in Africa</td>
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<td>HCPP</td>
<td>House of Commons Parliamentary Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBEA Co.</td>
<td>Imperial British East Africa Company</td>
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<td>IJAHS</td>
<td>International Journal of African Historical Studies</td>
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<td>JAH</td>
<td>Journal of African History</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRGS</td>
<td>Journal of the Royal Geographical Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>London Missionary Society</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>Mackinnon Papers</td>
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<td>NC</td>
<td>The Nineteenth Century</td>
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<td>PRGS</td>
<td>Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society</td>
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<td>RGS</td>
<td>Royal Geographical Society</td>
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<td>RH</td>
<td>Rhodes House</td>
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<td>TBGS</td>
<td>Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society</td>
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<td>TNA</td>
<td>Tanzania National Archive</td>
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<td>TNR</td>
<td>Tanganyika Notes and Records/Tanzania Notes and Records</td>
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<td>UJ</td>
<td>Uganda Journal</td>
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<td>UMCA</td>
<td>Universities Mission to Central Africa</td>
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<td>ZEAG</td>
<td>Zanzibar and East Africa Gazette</td>
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<td>ZM</td>
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Chapter One

Introduction

*Mpagazi*, n. *wa-*carrier, bearer, caravan-porter ... *Upagazi*, n. (1) work (profession, pay, &c.) of a caravan porter ...¹

... the success and comfort of a traveller going into the interior of Africa depended largely upon the health, strength and uprightness of the porter ... the sole means of transport.²

Long distance porters played a special role in the history of nineteenth century East Africa. Travelling on foot across vast territories, in caravans ranging in size from a dozen to three or four thousand members, they linked the large and small communities of the interior with the Swahili world of the Indian Ocean coast. The search for income and profit from the ivory trade, itself an outgrowth of older regional trading patterns, and increasing demand for imported cloth, beads, guns, and other goods, encouraged people to undertake journeys sometimes several years long, often for a fixed wage. Beginning in the late eighteenth century a new way of life developed, indeed a new culture, as peoples from what is now western Tanzania, especially those called by others the Nyamwezi or “people of the moon,” made pioneering journeys. Trading caravans searched out opportunities in almost every part of East and Central Africa, at first starting from the Nyamwezi homeland on the central plateau, travelling east across the *nyika* or wilderness, to climb the coastal ranges and reach the Indian Ocean. Others traded for ivory around the shores of the great lakes — Tanganyika, Malawi and Victoria, to Katanga in the south of modern Zaire, and north to the kingdoms of Karagwe, Bunyoro and Buganda. In the 1820s coastal entrepreneurs — Swahili, Arab and occasionally Indian — joined the rush for ivory, encouraged by rising


international prices and stories of the interior. By the 1840s trading caravans entered the immense Congo rain forest.

This study is only partially, however, about trade and traders. It concentrates instead on the work force of the caravans, the professional long distance caravan porters or *wapagazi*, upon whose heads and shoulders all trade and communications in the East Africa literally rested. Travel by foot was the only possible means of transportation in nearly all of pre-colonial East Africa. The use of draft and pack animals was precluded by the presence of the tsetse fly in broad belts across the savannah. The tsetse fly carries parasites called trypanosomes which induce sleeping sickness in most domestic animals. Donkeys, asses, horses and oxen die within days of infection. Water transportation was no alternative given the lack of navigable waterways in almost all parts of Tanzania. Prior to the introduction of mechanical transport human porters therefore played a key role in economic, social and cultural change. The explorer Henry Morton Stanley described the *mpagazi* as a “useful person” who was “the camel, the horse, the mule, the ass, the train, the wagon and the cart of East and Central Africa. Without him Salem would not obtain her ivory, Boston and New York their African ebony, their frankincense, myrrh and gum copal.” This is an understatement. Without porters nothing would have moved. Little regional trade among African societies could have occurred (there was a great deal); the numerous small-scale societies of East Africa would have remained relatively isolated from each other and the rest of the world, and would have found it much harder to take advantage of innovations made by their neighbours or coming from further afield; economic development would have been impossible; no Muslims or Christians would have travelled up country and no converts would have been made in the interior; European exploration, conquest and colonization would have been infeasible. The strategic importance of caravan porters is therefore obvious.

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3 Throughout this study I use the name Tanzania, although during the nineteenth century there was no such thing. I do this because there was no name for the whole territory covered by modern Tanzania, and my material concerns both what was called Tanganyika during the British colonial period, and the island of Zanzibar (more properly Unguja).

Caravan porters were vital to the functioning of trade and transportation throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond Africa, porterage was a fundamental institution in all parts of the world where animal power could not be utilized and waterways were inadequate. This was the case in mountainous regions such as the Himalayas, in most of the Americas before the introduction of horses, and in New Zealand until the mid-1800s. In Africa the history of caravan porters is the history of the first migrant labourers, and they were an integral part of the spread of commerce and cultural change in many regions of the sub-continent. This history has received only cursory treatment, usually from limited perspectives. It is puzzling and somewhat ironic that we have numerous histories of other forms of transportation and their impact, including horses and camel caravans, canoes and river transport; railways and steamships, and even airlines, but few of porterage, the most African of transport systems. The omnipresent porter has become almost invisible — part of the scenery. History has relegated him or her to the background — to the “enormous condescension of posterity” —

like E. P. Thompson's English croppers, hand-loom weavers and artisans.\(^6\) This is despite the fact that one can hardly find a European source from nineteenth century East and Central Africa which fails to mention porters. As Cornelia Essner has noted, "... the Leitmotiv in their [Europeans'] writings is the long-winded discussions of complaints concerning the question of porters."\(^7\) For Europeans interested in Africa, a way of life for hundreds of thousands, indeed, millions throughout the sub-continent, became a feature denoting "backwardness,"\(^8\) an anachronistic waste of labour, to be made redundant by modernization and then abolished as soon as possible by colonial governments.\(^9\)

Portage is a topic of significance for the history of Sub-Saharan Africa. To this point, however, there are no more than a handful of detailed studies of pre-colonial caravan porters, although several writers have sketched the main outlines of their history when dealing with related topics.\(^10\) In the early 1960s S. C. Lamden initiated research on East African porters as an occupational group.\(^11\) However, it was only in the 1970s and early 1980s that a number of scholars approached the topic seriously. Robert Cummings contributed a pioneering study of the Kamba and their role in pre-colonial and colonial

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\(^7\) Cornelia Essner, "Some Aspects of German Travellers' Accounts from the Second Half of the 19th Century", *Paideuma* 33 (1987), 200. To be fair there was often praise as well.

\(^8\) The research of Gabriel Ogunremi has shown that portage was often more economic than other available methods of transportation in pre-colonial Nigeria. Given the conditions and needs of the time it was an "economically rational" form of transportation. See Ogunremi, *Counting the Camels*, 81-94.

\(^9\) It was not so easy, as many colonial governments found, but that is another story.


porterage, while Donald Simpson and François Bontinck published accounts of individual porters and headmen. Gabriel Ogunremi included porters in his work on the economics of transportation in nineteenth century Nigeria. Meanwhile, the first scholar to use the techniques of labour history in an analysis of a large porter work force was the Madagascar specialist, Gwyn Campbell. Campbell shows that the slave status of porters in Imenna made little difference to their ability to act collectively, defend their interests as wage workers, and create a viable work culture. In 1985 the publication of the collection edited by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Paul Lovejoy, *The Workers of African Trade*, marked a significant advance. Together, these essays for the first time allowed comparative study of porterage in many regions of Africa. Aspects of regional economies, social systems, and pre-colonial transport labour were linked for analysis. Most of the contributing authors found that porters were usually bound by kinship obligations or their servile status. In many cases porters were slaves. Less often porters could also be free wage labourers. The editors concluded that in general terms the wealth channeled to elites from the labour and trading activities of porters tended to reinforce existing hierarchies and forms of social organization, rather than contribute towards fundamental change. Thus the use of slave porters might reinforce the power of slave owning elites, and expand the slave trade and slave holding. Despite the value of this collection, few of the authors followed Campbell to consider in detail porters as

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wage workers, whether slave or free. This seems partly due to the regions selected for study, and partly due to other analytical priorities.\textsuperscript{15}

Another approach is to see porters as primary agents of economic, social and cultural change. Porters were at the leading edge of innovation in nineteenth century Africa. They introduced foreign crops and agricultural techniques to their home regions, and spread cultural innovations such as new lingua francas, religions, and forms of artistic expression across vast distances. They created new work cultures and played a major role in facilitating inter-ethnic cooperation and integration in some regions. Much new research is required from this angle if we are to understand the dynamics of shifting ethnic and cultural relationships, especially in Central and East Africa.\textsuperscript{16} Less relevant to this thesis, porterage has also been studied as an aspect of forced labour during the early colonial period.\textsuperscript{17}

Pre-colonial porterage, then, has been noticed by only a handful of scholars. Recent literature is even more unbalanced when it comes to the question of pre-colonial wage labour.


whether migrant, free, or otherwise. On the one hand, most accounts of migrant labour largely ignore examples from the pre-colonial period, despite trade workers including porters and teamsters constituting “the most ancient and one of the most massive forms of labor migration in African history.” On the other hand, free wage labour is generally viewed as a creation of colonial economies, with settlers and the state struggling to mobilize and control labour supply, often in competition. External factors are privileged, with little attention to the pre-colonial dynamics of African societies. Two very important recent studies by Keletso Atkins and Patrick Harries have helped redress the balance. However, both of these are accounts of migrant wage labour where workers originated in still independent chiefdoms and travelled to the capitalist work places of South Africa. There is still a large lacuna for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. This thesis is in part a response. My central argument is that there was indeed a large free wage labour force in East Africa which operated prior to the development of a colonial capitalist economy in the region. Caravan porters in nineteenth century Tanzania were migrants and most were free wage workers.

It is true that in many parts of nineteenth century Africa, most porters were slaves, and slavery was a factor in Tanzania. Many coast-based porters were formally domestic slaves. This was especially the case along the northern routes running from the towns of Tanga and Pangani, and in the south, from Kilwa. Coastal slave porters also worked the main central routes, but as relative late comers, and as a minority of the caravan work force, which was dominated by the Nyamwezi and related peoples. Coastal slave porters worked


for wages, had considerable autonomy from their owners, and adopted the caravan culture of the interior peoples. In comparison, there is little evidence that trade slaves or captives were used for porterage, except perhaps occasionally in the south, despite the assertions of many contemporary European observers. Inexperienced, demoralized, sick and feeble captives were hopelessly inefficient, as Andrew Roberts pointed out, and could not be used by traders for a round trip.21 In much of East Africa, especially the territory which is now Tanzania, and in parts of Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, and northern Mozambique, free wage labour of the Nyamwezi, Sukuma, and other peoples such as the Yao, Swahili, and the Kamba, was the norm along the caravan routes in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The argument that porters were mostly wage labourers rests to a large degree on the analysis of bargaining and wage payments presented in chapter six, the central chapter of the thesis. There it is shown that the fact that porters were usually paid in standardized lengths of cloth rather than cash made no difference to their structural position. Cloth in much of East Africa was a money, just as cowry shells or copper bars in other regions of Africa served as currencies. Porters bargained just as seriously over their cloth wages as workers elsewhere did over cash.

The emergence of the professional or semi-professional Porter was an African response to East African conditions and environments, and not merely a belated consequence of the decline of indigenous entrepreneurship, or a process of impoverishment caused by outside forces. I concur with the assertion of the editors of a recent volume on peasant ecology and culture in nineteenth and early twentieth century Tanzania that pre-colonial rural societies were capable of initiative and innovation.22 Long distance trade and economic change were not negative forces inspired by outsiders, as many have suggested, leading to the breakdown of isolated cultures and a simple “economy of affection.” Many individuals, and


not a few polities, societies and emerging social classes, played major roles in the social, economic and cultural changes resulting from long distance trade and political reorganization. It is incorrect to imagine rural society everywhere as on the defensive. Some groups, like the Nyamwezi, were at the forefront of change, and on their own terms. Entrepreneurship, the market, and wage labour were becoming increasingly familiar to them during the nineteenth century. My approach, therefore, is to consider what African caravan porters brought to the workplace, and what they created there, rather than what the work place brought to them, although that is not ignored.23 I draw on two “schools” of labour history, neo-Marxism and cultural studies. The insights of the neo-Marxists are still powerful. Structural and material conditions cannot be forgotten, as I make clear in chapters two and four, and cultural change is very much conditioned by material and political forces. Workers make their own history, but not usually in circumstances of their choosing. Nevertheless, greater attention in recent years to the subtleties of culture has shown how workers have struggled to defend their own concepts of work derived from their particular experience from outsiders determined to impose different working patterns.24 At the same time I am broadly influenced by recent feminist and environmental history, including work by Luise White and James Giblin, as well as Charles Ambler’s book on central Kenya.25

Chapter two lays out the material world of long distance porterage — the trade routes. The most basic material concern was the question of food supplies. This is a major sub-theme of the thesis. In chapters three and four I discuss who caravan porters were, why they took to the road, and how the division of labour at home buttressed the caravan system and migrant labour. A second important sub-theme introduced here is the role of women, both at


24 Good examples are Atkins, The Moon Is Dead!: Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal 1890-1940 (Princeton, 1989).

home and as caravan workers. I also consider how forms of caravan organization and work invented by the Nyamwezi and influenced by others in the caravans and along the routes became dominant. This is initiated in chapter three and continued in chapter five. In chapter six I marry the material with the cultural, and analyse the issues most important to porters when bargaining with employers — issues related to conditions, food, wages and payment which had become standardized by custom. Porters were able to force up wages at crucial junctures. Over time, Nyamwezi work norms and leisure activities formed at home and on safari came to constitute the main features of a broad “caravan culture,” a common and integrating way of life along the central routes between Lake Tanganyika and the coast, and far afield along the branch routes. This is seen clearly in a detailed study of the work process in chapters seven and eight. Customary patterns of work survived into the early colonial period. Foreign travellers, Arab and European, had little choice but to bow to custom, with some adaptations. As Frederick Cooper puts it, “power ... was rooted in particular cultural structures.”

It was only after several years of colonial rule that new ideas about work could be successfully imposed on porters, as their strategic position gradually weakened. In chapter nine I consider how custom and European concepts of labour discipline and authority clashed in the caravans of missionaries and imperialist travellers. The result was a pattern of individual and collective porter resistance including “hidden” forms of resistance, desertions, and strikes. The thesis ends with a brief discussion of porters as migrant wage labourers.

Sources on porterage during the period of European exploration and early missionary endeavour, that is from about 1857 onwards, and particularly after 1871, are far commoner than might be realized. Most European travellers kept diaries, wrote detailed letters, and published reports of their experiences. Just as valuable are unpublished journals, and letters and reports of missionaries, who acquired a considerable knowledge of African travel. I have relied particularly on the archives of the London Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society. Given that Europeans always travelled with African caravans,

26 Cooper, “Work, Class and Empire”, 239.
sometimes for years at a time, porters and related matters occupy a central place in their accounts. It is somewhat ironic that the less experienced European travellers often had a great deal to say on porters, although they were usually ignorant about Africans in general. Novice travellers were surprised by the organized way in which porters expressed their demands, and by the leverage which they could exert. In addition, a great deal of what European observers learnt and recorded came from discussions with Swahili, Arab and other traders, and their caravan headmen. The researcher must be careful to take into account the patriotic, racial, class and gender attitudes of explorers and missionaries, and the prevailing social and cultural beliefs held by their intended readership, which slanted the presentation of Africans and relationships between Europeans and Africans. Most European travellers were careful to record as accurately as possible what they saw and heard, and their writings are tremendously important for the historian of porterage. Nevertheless, there are huge variations in the quality of European accounts, such as between those of Livingstone, Hutley, Thomson and Baumann, on one hand, and Casati and Lloyd, on the other. A less commonly utilized source left by European travellers is porter muster roles, wage books, and contracts. These are vital for an understanding of the contestation between custom and contract, and the background to early colonial labour legislation. Additional contemporary European reports and letters are in the British consulate records in Zanzibar; private papers and collections are held in various British and Continental archives such as Rhodes house, Oxford, and the Royal Geographical Society, London. Some official reports are in the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers and the Zanzibar Gazette.

In addition to contemporary European accounts we have more than a dozen autobiographies and travelogues by African traders, porters, and Christian converts, some of whom had a great deal of caravan experience. These include the famous autobiography of Tippu Tip, the biography of Rashid bin Hassani, and other less known works, such as the


diary of Jacob Wainwright, the early travelogues of Lief bin Said and Said bin Habib, and the life stories of ex-slaves in A. C. Madan’s collection Kiungani. There is also the work of the Swahili scholar Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, the collection of Swahili porter and trader travelogues made by Carl Velten in the 1890s, and translations of Swahili prose by Lynden Harries. Added to these, insight into the African experience can be gained from songs and proverbs, and the small surviving Arab and Swahili business literature. The African voice is also heard, admittedly second hand, through histories based largely or partly on oral sources, such as the work of Andrew Roberts, Aylward Shorter and Alfred Unomah. These and other scholars of the Nyamwezi and Kimbu, working in the 1960s and 1970s, laid the foundations without which this project would be impossible.

Other valuable sources include the ethnographies compiled by German and British colonial and missionary researchers, some of which contain a wealth of detail. Added to these, the District and Provincial Books compiled by British officials sometimes provide important local information.


31 For business literature see chapter 6; for songs see chapters 7 and 8.


33 See chapter 4 for a discussion.
Chapter Two

The Long Distance Routes in the Nineteenth Century

The art of African travel involves to the very greatest extent the solution of the ration question ...

The work place of long-distance caravan porters in nineteenth century Tanzania was the complex network of foot tracks which criss-crossed the length and breadth of a huge territory of over 939,000 square kilometres, with associated market towns, caravan stops or *makambi*, and provisioning stations. These paths, along which caravan porters carried their burdens, climbed high mountain passes and crossed barren wastes and mosquito-infested swamps. Caravans on the march passed through forests and woodland, crossed vast plains teeming with game, and forded or were ferried across hundreds of rivers, great and small. Many porters walked a distance of over 1500 kilometres from the shores of the Indian Ocean to Lake Tanganyika, or in the reverse direction, yet this was often not the end of the journey. So to understand the world of the caravan porter or *pagazi* it is necessary to map the terrain, to paint the panoramic canvas, on which the porters and soldiers, servants and traders of the caravans made their great journeys and carried out their work. To that end I will describe something of the history of the routes they traversed and the geography with which they had to contend, concentrating on the central cluster of trade routes.

Several writers have described sections of the routes in the course of regional studies. Nevertheless, we lack a general history for Tanzania as a whole, except that the

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1 Oscar Baumann, *Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle* (Berlin, 1894), 15.

political significance and commercial features of the main routes have already been well analysed by Abdul Sheriff.\(^3\) The emphasis here is on the relationship between geography and the “political economy” of caravan travel. As this is primarily a study of porterage in the area which is now Tanzania I will trace the routes only as far as the modern borders, although they extended far beyond.

As trade fluctuated and grew according to alterations in supply and demand, conditions in the interior, and the fortunes of the traders, the itineraries followed by the caravans themselves changed. This was related to the inherent limitations of human porterage as a system of transportation. It is axiomatic that an army marches on its stomach. This was just as true for caravans in nineteenth century East Africa. A significant consequence of the large size of many caravans, sometimes numbering thousands of porters, was that the routes had to be flexible enough to deal with variations in local food supplies on which caravan personnel depended. Itineraries also had to be adjusted frequently to avoid areas of unrest, flooding, or famine. Thus, as Helge Kjekshus reminds us, the main termini were linked by networks of pathways connecting all the “viable communities” found on the line of march.\(^4\) These webs of tracks existed in part so that the thousands of porters passing through did not overtax the ability of communities to feed both themselves and the travellers. Such factors were almost certainly — among others related to commerce — taken into account when the routes were pioneered. The history of the routes thus revolves around the most basic and prosaic human requirements of food and water, as much as commercial and political considerations.

Contemporary observers were able to identify several parallel sets of routes extending from the Mrama coast (the stretch of coast opposite Zanzibar) and another from Kilwa on the Mwera coast, which lies further to the south. From north to south these were the Pangani


Valley, central (Ugogo), Ruaha, and Kilwa routes. Most historians demarcate three clusters, lumping together the Ugogo and Ruaha routes. I have divided them into four route systems rather than the conventional three. The central network should properly be divided into the older and more southerly roads passing up the Ruaha river into Ukimbu and southern Unyamwezi, and the set of routes crossing Ugogo in the centre of Tanzania, which became much more favoured during the second half of the nineteenth century. This will become more apparent below. The Mrima with its three trade route systems — the Pangani valley and two central networks — made up what Sheriff calls the core of the Zanzibari commercial empire.5 The fourth network connected Kilwa Kisiwani and then Kilwa Kivinje with the country south of the Rufiji river to Lake Malawi and beyond. Each of these four route clusters has its own history.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the geography of Tanzania, concentrating on the relevant features of the country through which the heavily utilized central route networks passed. In East Africa the coastal nyika or wilderness was a major barrier to penetration, both westwards from the coast and eastwards from the interior. But this did not prevent the emergence, probably during the seventeenth century or earlier, of two separate regional trading systems, one operating between the coast and the near interior, and the other centred on the plateau of the far interior. During the eighteenth century a series of migrations connected the two systems, and ultimately traders were able to travel between the coast and the great lakes of central Africa and beyond. This leads to a brief description of the two central long-distance trade route systems. The older and more southerly of the two is here designated as the Ruaha-Isanga route. The other, the Ugogo route, crossed the Ugogo plain into central Unyamwezi and on to Lake Tanganyika. Both of these routes led from (or terminated at) numerous small ports on the Mrima coast. The most important of these entrepôts during the first half of the nineteenth century was Mbwamaji. Scholars have

5 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 172.
neglected the history of this town, partly because of lack of evidence, concentrating instead on its main successor, Bagamoyo, to the north.

I then consider the reasons for changes in the favoured routes, with particular attention to the question of food supply. Changes in routes and itineraries were connected to the strategies chosen by caravan leaders when they surveyed the available options and chose routes best able to meet the requirements of the caravans. This is best shown by an analysis of the history of the important middle sections of the two alternative lines passing through central Tanzania into Unyamwezi. At first the Ruaha river valley and Ukimbu were favoured by most caravans. Then, from the 1840s, most traffic crossed Ugogo and the wilderness of Mgunda Mkali. Here I offer a reinterpretation of existing accounts of the relationship between increasing caravan traffic and Kimbu and Gogo economies, once again with the emphasis on food supply. It was provisioning of caravans rather than raiding by Sangu from the south which was the crucial factor. Physical obstacles were not a major factor affecting caravan strategies and route selection, although these often presented severe hardships to porters. This is illustrated by a discussion of the difficulties involved in crossing the Mkata flood plain, the desert of the Mgunda Mkali, the Malagarasi river, and Lake Tanganyika. Finally, there is a discussion of the main branch routes radiating out from Unyamwezi, and the Pangani Valley and Kilwa routes, in northern and southern Tanzania. Some early itineraries are discussed in Appendix 1, and a more detailed examination of the central (Ugogo) route system is in Appendix 2.

The Historical Geography of the Central Routes

The Mrima and its hinterland had particular advantages over other stretches of the coast to the north and south for travel to and from the interior. The nyika, or wilderness, which is a parched desert behind the Kenya coast, is in Tanzania of rather more benign character, although it stretches further into the interior towards the coastal range which recedes away in the south. The Tanzanian coastal nyika is relatively well watered by both the
rivers which break through sections of the hill country, and the generally adequate rainfall during the two wet seasons, although it is parched during the dry season. Thus it presented to travellers an entirely different character compared with the more hostile environment confronting caravans marching to and from the Kenya coast. About 150 kilometres inland the hilly nyika meets a broad plain, from the west side of which project the massifs of successive mountain ranges, including the Luguru, Nguru, and Rubeho chains. It was this country that the routes from the Mrima coast penetrated to the central plateau of Tanzania.

The older of the two main route systems from the Mrima coast ran south-west through Ukutu and along the Ruaha river into Uhehe and then Ukimbu. It appears that during the eighteenth century the two regional trading systems east and west of the Usagara mountains were connected by a series of migrations from Usagara to Ukimbu, with slave-raiding by Swahili perhaps being a contributing cause. Aylward Shorter argues for a date between 1700 and 1725 for the first Nyitumba migration from Usagara. The trade in conus shells from the coast, which were part of chiefly regalia in Ukimbu, may also have been a factor. The path that the migrants took later became the main trade route linking the western interior to the coast during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and perhaps earlier. It is significant that of the seven Igulwibi chiefdoms of the Kimbu, which all claim Sagara origins, and are located in Ukimbu, (there are four others in Unyamwezi), the most important is Unyangwila, which is named in early itineraries as being astride the old Ruaha route to Unyamwezi and beyond. This highlights the historical role of the Sagara in opening up the caravan routes. Once the connection was made people in the interior, especially the Nyamwezi and their neighbours, began to carry down ivory when they heard of the demand at the coast. By about 1825 coastal caravans were going up-country to trade for ivory and slaves at Isanga and Isenga in eastern Ukimbu, where they met their Nyamwezi counterparts.

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6 Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania*, 17-18, 43, 84, 180-226, 233. The date is given on p. 222. See also Aylward Shorter, "The Kimbu", in Andrew Roberts, ed., *Tanzania Before 1900* (Nairobi, 1968), 100-106; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 176. For Unyangwila see the itineraries in Appendix 1.
supplying those commodities. But by 1858 the section of the route through Uganda and Ushishia in southern Unyamwezi was no longer in use.

The pioneers of the central routes through Ugogo were almost certainly Nyamwezi and Sumbwa, who began bringing ivory down to the coast some time around the turn of the century. The destination of the Nyamwezi caravans could be any of the numerous small coastal towns along the Mrima, such as Pangani, Saadani, Konduchi, Mbwamaji, or Kilwa, further to the south. One minor branch from the Ugogo route traversed the lower Rufiji region to reach Kilwa Kivinje. During the 1840s some Nyamwezi caravans carried their ivory on this route to the coast, perhaps to evade higher customs duties charged on Nyamwezi tusks. But the main terminus was at first Mbwamaji, and then Bagamoyo opposite Zanzibar.

Caravans taking the Ugogo routes from the coast had several options, depending on their point of departure. Numerous paths crossed the nyika and the several ranges of the coastal chain. Most caravans passed through Uzaramo and Usagara or Ukutu, but late in the century the routes from Saadani through Uzigua and Ukaguru became popular, especially with the northern Nyamwezi and Sukuma. By the 1860s almost all of the central routes converged in the Mpwapwa area before diverging again. The reason was that Mpwapwa was the last place with good food and water supplies before caravans entered the Marenga Mkali.

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10 For aspects of the history of Saadani see Glassman, “Social Rebellion”, 101-110.


12 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 162-3.
or "bitter water", an almost waterless and uninhabited tract on the eastern edge of Ugogo.\textsuperscript{13} It was this expanse of dry scrubland which separated the vast expanses of Ugogo proper from the mountains to the east. Caravans crossing the Marenga Mkali were presented with special difficulties. Forced marches were necessary during the dry season to reach good water about 35 miles beyond Ugogi or Mpwapwa.\textsuperscript{14} Of the brackish variety there was no shortage. But experienced travellers had learnt to avoid the poisonous pools. The roads then led across Ugogo and the wilderness of the Mgunda Mkali into Unyamwezi, which from the 1840s became the centre of the East African long-distance trading network.

During the first half of the century the destinations of most caravans travelling the Ruaha routes were the twin trading stations of Isenga and Isanga on the eastern border of Ukimbu. However with the push provided by the increasing danger of Sangu raiders from the south, the pull exerted by the attractions of Unyamwezi for coastal traders, and the structural limitations imposed by the Ruaha route on the provisioning of increased numbers of caravan porters, Isenga and Isanga lost their privileged status, and most coastal caravans made directly for Unyamwezi. As early as 1839 Seyyid Said, the Sultan of Zanzibar, had invited representatives of an unnamed Nyamwezi chiefdom to come to Zanzibar to make "some sort of treaty for the safety and success of his subjects when on their trading expeditions."\textsuperscript{15} These diplomatic initiatives were reciprocated. In the mid 1840s when in Zanzibar the American anthropologist Charles Pickering learned from a well-travelled

\textsuperscript{13} From the above the importance of Mpwapwa is clear, although none of Burton, Speke, Grant, or earlier compilers of itineraries, mention Mpwapwa. The district probably only became important during the second half of the century, when most caravan traffic shifted away from the Ruaha-Isanga routes.

\textsuperscript{14} Sissons, "Economic Prosperity", 73.

Swahili informant “that the Imam has some sort of patriarchal influence with the
Monomoisy [Nyamwezi], and that the great caravans which come to Kilwa and to the coast
opposite Zanzibar ‘bring him a present and look to him for protection during their stay.’”16
In about 1852 the permanent settlement at Kazeh (Tabora), in the important Nyamwezi
chiefdom of Unyanyembe, was founded, and the main routes were subsequently reoriented to
pass through the entrepôt.17 But Nyamwezi had been a major centre of the long-distance
trading system before the establishment of Kazeh, not only because it was the home of the
major traders from the interior. Coastal caravan leaders had established stations in other
parts of this vast country, including the one at Kigandu near Puge to the north of
Unyanyembe, Msene in southern Usumbwa, and others. We get a glimpse of the reputation
of Nyamwezi before the founding of Kazeh in the writings of three missionary visitors to
the coast, Ebenezer Burgess, J. Rebmann and J. L. Krapf, and the Frenchman, Charles
Guillain. In 1839 Burgess heard that “The Manomoisies are the richest and most enterprising
tribe in that part of Africa.”18 Guillain who, during the late 1840s came to know the East
African coast well, heard similar reports of the Nyamwezi. “This tribe passes,” he wrote,
“for one of the richest and most populous in the interior of Africa; one praised for its mild
and hospitable customs.” Rebmann’s three journeys in 1848 and 1849 to “Jagga”, the home
of the Chagga people of Mount Kilimanjaro, were primarily inspired by the desire to seek
information about Nyamwezi and routes to that country. The missionaries believed that
routes to and from the west and east coasts of the continent converged in Nyamwezi.19


18 Burgess, in Gottberg, Unyamwesi, 96; Charles Guillain, Documents sur l’histoire, la géographie et le

19 J. Rebmann, “Narrative of a Journey to Jagga, the Snow Country of Eastern Africa”, Church Missionary
Intelligencer, 1, 1 (1849), 12-23; J. Rebmann, “Narrative of a Journey to Madjame”, CMI, 1, 12-14, 16 (1850),
272-76, 307-12, 327-30, 376-81. See also the various letters from Krapf and Rebmann in CMI, 1849-50,
passim.
In fact numerous major routes did converge in Unyamwezi. From the Nyamwezi perspective, three main branches radiated out from Kazeh. The first headed in a north-west direction to the kingdom of Karagwe and on to Buganda. The second connected Unyanyembe with the south end of Lake Victoria, and the third ran south-west to the south end of Lake Tanganyika and beyond. These will be described in a later section. The main line continued from Tabora across the rolling countryside of Unyamwezi, with its alternating stretches of woodland, swamps, and cultivation, into Uvinza and Ukaranga, to reach Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika.

For coastal caravans the arrival at Ujiji represented the climax of a journey of probably four to six months. Here porters rested, recouped their strength after the hardships of the road, and enjoyed the local market and other attractions. Although the site of the town had probably long been occupied by local fisherfolk and lake traders, and it had been used as a temporary base by coastal ivory traders since the 1840s at the latest, it only became important as a permanent station after about 1860.20

Mbwamaji: A Forgotten Caravan Terminus

Coastal and up-country caravan stops and market centres were integral parts of the route networks. Yet the study of urban history in Tanzania has barely begun. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch outlines the problem in her survey of the history and historiography of urbanization in Africa:

An accelerated urbanization process surely occurred, fostered by new trends of commerce and of political issues produced from, among other things, the emergence of the Zanzibar-Oman Sultanate and from the increased internal trade in slaves, ivory, and guns. Ports like Kilwa, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam or Bagamoyo, market-places like Tabora and Ujiji ... could but develop and enlarge under the impact of an increasing international incentive .... In fact, little is known about this urban history, not because it did not exist, but because we lack scholarly information. What do we know about the military camps of Msiri ... of Mirambo or Tippu-Tib ... except some scarce descriptions by early travellers or missionaries, which have not as yet really been compiled and compared to other (oral, archaeological) evidence?21

20 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 185-6.

21 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, “The Process of Urbanization in Africa (From the Origins to the Beginning of Independence)?”, African Studies Review, 34, 1 (1991), 31. Some recent advances have been made for
I have left an analysis of how caravan porters lived and worked in some of the new “urban centres” of the interior, particularly Mpwapwa, to a later chapter which deals with the work process. There is, however, one urban centre to which I wish to draw attention here. This is the coastal village of Mbwamaji, which was, after Pangani and Kilwa Kivinje, the most important of the Swahili entrepôts sending and receiving caravans during the first half of the nineteenth century. The history of Mbwamaji is still unknown, but I have collected together the few references to this ancient town which are available to me.

During the first half of the nineteenth century on the central and southern Mrima caravans departed from and arrived at any of a number of small ports between Saadani in the north and Mbwamaji to the south. These villages were linked by dhow or mtepe, Swahili coasting vessels, to Zanzibar, the centre of the “commercial empire.” Mbwamaji, just south of modern Dar es Salaam, was the most important caravan terminus on this section of the coast. Burton described it as “the great centre of the Mrima traffic,” but unfortunately its early trading history is lost from view. Nevertheless, we know that as Zanzibar started its rise to prosperity during the late eighteenth century, the villages on the nearby mainland, especially Bagamoyo, Buyuni, and Mbwamaji, shared in the expansion of commerce. They

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were able to tap into both the coasting and caravan trades. Annual ivory exports from these three towns combined from the late 1840s were estimated at 4,000 — 5,000 *frasila*\(^\text{24}\)* of the “best quality,” and other commodities from the interior such as rhinoceros horns and gum copal were also important. This is the same range which was given for ivory exports from Kilwa Kivinje, the single most important town at this time on the mainland.\(^\text{25}\)* Mbwamaji must have contributed a large proportion of the total, given that Bagamoyo was still a relatively insignificant place. Burton tells us that in 1859 Mbwamaji (Mburomaji, Boromaji), “the little port-village with jungle rolling up to the walls, and anchorage defended by the Sinda Islets”, was “a favourite entrance” to the interior.\(^\text{26}\)* Its importance, as well as its place in the network of roads running inland from the Mrima coast, can also be deduced from the following:

A multitude of roads, whose point of departure is the coast, form a triangle and converge at the ‘makutaniro,’ or junction-place, in Central Uzaramo. The route [taken by Burton and Speke]... is one of the main lines running from Kaole and Bagamoyo, in a general southwest direction, till it falls into the great trunk-road which leads directly west from Mbuamaji.\(^\text{27}\)*

At some point in time a few years either side of the visit of Burton and Speke the patricians of the town built a mosque which has been commented upon by more than one historian.\(^\text{28}\)* This would have been a time of relative prosperity, and the heyday of the town as a busy terminus for the caravan route, and the mosque no doubt represented the good fortune of local benefactors, probably Arabs of the Nabahani family.

\(^\text{24}\) A *frasila* is 35 pounds weight.

\(^\text{25}\) The estimates (probably understated) are from the reports of the French sailors Loarer and Guilain who sailed along the coast between 1846 and 1849. See C. S. Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast: Politics, Diplomacy and Trade on the East African Littoral 1798-1856* (New York, 1971), 86, 374, and table opposite.


Mbwamaji is first mentioned as an embarkation point for caravans in Lief bin Said’s account of his journey to the far interior in 1831. His caravan was about five hundred strong and included seventy of his own followers, the rest being “Manmoises” (Nyamwezi) returning to their homeland. The caravan or safari mustered at “Boramy [Mbwamaji], on the African main, situated a little to the southward of the south end of Zanzibar.” The numbers indicate that many Nyamwezi trading parties must have made it their destination. Guillain gives further evidence. He wrote that “The most important caravans which arrive on the Mrrima coast are those of the ... Nyamwezi; they most often proceed towards Bouramaghi.”

Mbwamaji was also the departure point given in an itinerary from the early 1840s published by the geographer W. D. Cooley. A decade or so later, just before the arrival of Burton and Speke on the coast, the missionary James Erhardt wrote of the central route that it extended from “Mboa Maji to Ujigi, a town of Uniamesi [Unyamwezi].” It was “travelled leisurely by numerous caravans, with horses, donkeys, &c., for slaves, ivory, and copper ore.”

Although we hear of Mbwamaji and the road from there sporadically through the middle decades of the century, especially in the autobiography of Tippu Tip, the routes from Bagamoyo and its neighbour Kaole, and later Saadani further north, were to become much more travelled for reasons outlined in the next section. The result was a decline into obscurity for Mbwamaji, a process which was more or less complete after two decades of


33 Several of Tippu Tip’s trading confères were from Mbwamaji. See Hamid bin Muhammed (Tippu Tip), Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Muriebi yaani Tippu Tip tran. and ed. W. H. Whitely (Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, 1974), 13 § 3, 21 § 16, 31 § 35. In September 1857 Burton and Speke met Said bin Mohammed, a trader from Mbwamaji and a relative of Tippu Tip. In 1858 they encountered a “coast Arab” from Mbwamaji called Salim bin Salih at his settlement at Iora in the district of Mfuto in western Unyamwezi. See Burton, Lake Regions, 184; idem, “Lake Regions”, 186.
German rule. In 1907 the German governor, Rechenberg, reported after a tour of the coast from Pangani to the Rufiji, that “A whole list of medium-sized places ... have practically lost all importance. Such places are Mkwa, Winde, Mbweni, Mbwamaji, Kisiju, Kiumangao, Nyamsate, Msindaji, and others. Ruins of many stone houses bear testimony to the former flourishing condition of these places.”

Porters, Provisions and Production in Ukimbu and Ugogo

The ultimate concern of any caravan leader was the success of his or her caravan journey, whatever the purpose in travelling. Given the fact that porters, usually numbering hundreds, and sometimes even thousands, in a single caravan, had to be fed every day or else carry their rations, the routes chosen had to be able to support the large scale migrations which are represented by the dozens or even hundreds of caravans on the march at any one time along the central routes. Speke puts the issue succinctly: “we must remember that the caravan route usually takes the more fertile and populous tracks.”

The availability of food supplies was always a major consideration in the strategy of caravan leaders, who usually chose one route over another in consultation with their headmen and guides. There was a shift from the Ruaha-Isanga route to those through Ugogo sometime during the early 1840s, although both routes had been used since the beginning of the century, if not earlier, and there were occasional, but temporary, blockages in Ugogo. There were clearly several factors at work contributing to the selection of the central (Ugogo) routes by most caravans.


35 The only female caravan leader known to me is the American, May French-Sheldon. See May French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan (London, 1892).

36 Usually porters would only be able to carry enough food for five or six days in addition to their regular loads. The more food they carried the lighter their loads, and the less profit that could be made by themselves or their employer from their work.

after about 1850. The primary causes were the increasing inability of the people along the Ruaha-Isanga route to support the rapidly rising caravan traffic at the same time that they had to cope with Sangu incursions, and to compound this situation, a severe famine around 1839. At the same time the Ugogo option offered advantages to travellers which will be explained below.

To a certain degree topographical variations along the routes were considered by some caravan leaders when deciding their itineraries. Sheriff suggests that the Ruaha or Isanga route was easier to traverse than the Ugogo one, and that this was a primary reason why it was at first preferred by the coastal traders. His argument is that there were no "overwhelming" natural barriers since the broken country of Usagara was bypassed by following the Great Ruaha river, and Ugogo, believed by many later travellers (and modern scholars) to be a barren and drought-prone land, was avoided. It must be pointed out that the Ruaha-Isanga route necessitated climbing the Mabruki Pass, the highest regularly travelled pass over the coastal ranges. Caravans with donkeys and perhaps other animals preferred the Mukondokwa road into Ugogo "on account of the severity of the passes on the Kiringawana road." Most of the Kiringawana [or Kilangabana] road followed a section of the Ruaha-Isanga route. Therefore for some caravans the Mukondokwa route was the easier option, not the Ruaha-Isanga one, contrary to Sheriff's view.

Another possible explanation for the shift northward of preferred routes is that the Ruaha-Isanga route became unsafe during the 1830s and 1840s due to Sangu incursions, and coastal traders preferred to travel through Ugogo from that time. But it is possible that most modern scholars, relying on Burton, have overemphasized the Sangu argument. It is

38 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 176.

39 Burton, "Lake Regions", 123. For these two options see Appendix 2.

known that the Sangu at first had good relations with coastal traders and were the first group in the interior to be armed by them. More important than this explanation, about 1839 a devastating famine in Ukimbu depopulated the already thinly spread settlements, making the provisioning of caravans impossible. In addition, the recent research of Carol Sissons has shown that the image of Ugogo as a parched and unproductive country has been much overstated. It is clear that the Nyamwezi, who were by far the most numerous of the travellers using the central routes, usually preferred the Ugogo option during the second half of the nineteenth century. The reasons for the shift in caravan traffic from the Ruaha-Isanga route to Ugogo therefore require reevaluation. It was not so much natural barriers or Sangu hostilities which were the arbitors of the routes taken by large caravans, but as Kjekshus has reminded us, the availability of food supplies. It is quite likely that as caravan traffic increased during the 1840s and 1850s the relatively sparsely populated Ruaha-Isanga line with its limited agricultural production was not able to continually support thousands of porters. Despite its later reputation Ugogo was well able to support a considerable population, and also provide a surplus to feed hungry porters.

Ugogo has until recently been a region much misunderstood by modern scholars. Virtually without exception they have presented Ugogo as being drought and famine prone and unproductive, an arid country hardly able to support its own population let alone the thousands of caravan porters who were forced to cross it. This distorted image is shattered in Carol Sisson’s careful work on the economic history of Ugogo during the late nineteenth century. She presents for the first time an analysis of the relationships between Gogo agricultural and pastoral production, caravan traffic, famine, and population. Sissons’ arguments are crucial to understanding the economic links which produced what she terms

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41 Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania*, 246-7. This is not mentioned by Wright in her discussion. See Marcia Wright, “Chief Merere and the Germans”, *INR*, 69 (1968), 42-3.

42 Sissons, “Economic Prosperity in Ugogo”.

43 Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, *passim*. Some of Sissons’ arguments are influenced by those of Kjekshus, but she pays more careful attention to her evidence. Her thesis is not listed in Koponen’s bibliography.
“economic prosperity” in Ugogo up to the collapse of the system under the stress of rinderpest during the 1890s. For my purposes her data on the feeding of caravan porters and the “balance of power” between caravans and the Gogo people is relevant. Here it contributes to my overall argument concerning shifts in preferred long-distance trade routes. The incidence of famine remained a crucial variable. There were indeed famines in Ugogo, but they have been much worse in this century than in the second half of the nineteenth century.44 According to Sissons, “between 1857 and 1889 travellers’ accounts indicate only two periods of serious famine and one period of more localized famine conditions.” This is a better record than the prevailing view would suggest. In addition, the worst consequences of most famines could be avoided by careful travellers. In central Tanzania most droughts were localized due to erratic rainfall distribution, and hence could be avoided by caravans.45

I will now consider the Sangu (sometimes known as the “Warori”) and the more logical “food supply” arguments in greater detail. The Sangu themselves occasionally raided caravans between the early 1830s and 1860 or so, although there is also evidence that they welcomed them. For instance, in 1858 the large caravan of the coastal traders Suliman bin Rashid el Riami and Mohammed bin Gharib, which had run into difficulties, was made welcome by Munyigumba, the Sangu chief, at his base near the Ruaha, and porters were supplied free of charge. These travellers had tried to avoid the Sangu because of the war between them and the Bena. Burton was informed by them that Munyigumba “would not have permitted merchants to pass on to his enemies,”46 but this was a normal practice everywhere in times of hostilities. In addition the Sangu were said to have charged “exorbitant blackmail” (hongo), which deterred caravans, and had killed two traders from

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44 See Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, chapter 4, in particular Chart IV: Famines in Ugogo and Ukaguru, 136. There is very little data available for famines before 1850 or so.


Mbwaraji in about 1852. Long-distance trade, however, was often a dangerous business, and similar incidents occurred in many parts of East and central Africa frequented by caravans. More at risk from the Sangu were the ordinary people of Ukimbu, which was never heavily populated, and thus food production was disrupted. The Sangu invasions began about 1835. Burton informs us of the consequences for caravan traffic passing through Ukimbu:

"Presently the Warori became troublesome, and Ugogo whose real or fancied perils had impelled merchants to make a long detour, was safely traversed; the stream of commerce then flowed in a direct line and Usanga [Isanga] and Usenga [Isenga] were deserted. The incursions of the Warori have caused a chronic famine in the land which deters caravans from venturing into it."  

The Sangu even raided as far as south-west Usagara, around Rudi and Malolo, where there was a small Hehe population. In 1858 Burton found that, "The Wahehe of these districts have a lasting terror of the Warori, and the war-cry is often raised at the approach of a caravan, however peaceable. Provisions are consequently scarce and expensive." The conclusion is that Sangu raids did cause a diversion of caravan traffic, but this was mostly because of damage to food production in Ukimbu rather than the threat of attack by Sangu war bands.

We know from Aylward Shorter’s research in Ukimbu that the most devastating famine on record there occurred during the late 1830s or early 1840s. It did not result from drought or crop failure, or destabilization caused by Sangu raiding, as Burton suggests, but from some kind of fungus infestation which rotted the grain after harvest. The fact that it coincided with the expansion of the Sangu has overshadowed the fact that it was a natural event.

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47 Burton, Lake Regions, 455.  
48 For Sangu caravan raiding see Burton, "Lake Regions", 298-305; Burton, Lake Regions, 453-5; Alison Redmayne, "Mkwawa and the Hehe Wars", JAH, IX. 3 (1968), 412; Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 245-9.  
49 Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 246.  
50 Burton, "Lake Regions", 300. Also quoted in Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 245. The emphasis is mine.  
51 Burton, "Lake Regions", 129. For further comments in a similar vein see ibid., 137-8.
occurrence. Called by the Kimbu *Ilogo*, the famine affected a huge area, as it is remembered in different parts of this vast country.\(^{52}\) Shorter says that “It was a point of no return in the decline of the Kimbu,” and that it “came near to wiping out the entire population.”\(^{53}\) The *Ilogo* famine in Ukimbu is probably to be differentiated from the two earliest known famines in Ugogo, designated in Kigogo *Mpingama* (“hinderance”), implying inadequate rainfall, which occurred sometime before 1850, and *Chonya-Magulu* (“hobble”), which occurred about 1850, and was also attributed to drought.\(^{54}\)

Population densities along the stretch of the route from Malolo, across the northern bend of the Great Ruaha, through eastern Ukimbu, to Unyangwila, a distance of about 400 kilometres, have historically been very low. This is suggested by all the itineraries and maps available to me.\(^{55}\) This line is north of the comparatively heavily populated highlands of Uhehe. From Unyangwila to the Ugalla in the west population densities also appear to have been relatively light during the nineteenth century, as they still are. This impression is supported by evidence provided by Shorter who, throughout his book, refers to the low population density in Ukimbu. He writes “The Kimbu have always been few in number,

\(^{52}\) Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania*, 249-255. The *Ilogo* famine is the best documented of any of the major famines in Tanzania before 1850. For a general discussion of nineteenth century famines see Koponen, *People and Production*, 126-39.

\(^{53}\) Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania*, 249.


\(^{55}\) See the itineraries in Appendix 1 which specify very few place names between Malolo and Unyangwila (1831 and early 1840s); the map in Rochus Schmidt, *Geschichte des Araberaustandes in Ost-Afrika* (Frankfurt a. Oder, 1892); the map of west-central Tanzania showing nineteenth and twentieth century place names in Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania*, xxviii; the Shell Map of Tanzania (1973). It may be argued that the distribution of place names does not reflect population density because many peoples did not live in large villages or other concentrated settlements but were scattered in *tembe* homesteads or hamlets across the countryside. See Koponen, *People and Production*, 52, 240-1, 345-359, especially 353, 364-5. It should also be pointed out that modern maps are misleading in part because the creation of the Ruaha National Park no doubt involved the movement of some people outside the park boundaries.
living in a very extensive forest area. Traditionally their preferred means of livelihood has been hunting and collecting rather than agriculture,” and, “Kimbu population has not expanded appreciably. Depopulation rather than expansion has been the experience of the Kimbu. Animal husbandry and large-scale agriculture are impossible in Ukimbu.” In a third passage he writes “in the nineteenth century the country became drastically depopulated as a result of famine and emigration.”56 The reality of famine so impressed itself on Kimbu consciousness that it was expressed in the traditional lunar calendar.57

In comparison, Sissons shows that Ugogo may have had considerable attractions for travellers in the dry season when most caravans were on the road.58 In Burton’s description of the central plateau, including the Marenga Mkali, Ugogo, and the Mgunda Mkali, there is a hint of some of these: “The heart of the region is Ugogo, the most populous and the best cultivated country, divided into a number of small and carefully cultivated clearings by tracts of dense bush and timberless woods ...”59 The advantages to caravans of the Ugogo route were as follows. Caravans passing through Ugogo had to pay hongo, taxes or tolls, which cumulatively totalled approximately 1-2% of the trade goods carried. In the case of caravans bound for the interior hongo was paid in the usual trade goods such as merikani (unbleached cotton sheeting manufactured in New England), kaniki (plain cotton sheeting of Indian origin), satini, (a thin, light, English product which appears to have entered circulation in the interior after 1860), “cloths with names” (coloured cloths of various types), coils of copper, brass, and iron wire known as masongo, and beads of many types. Downward Nyamwezi

56 Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, xxiv, 39, 97. On page 40 Shorter qualifies the first statement by saying that “hunting and collecting ... are the preferred occupations of Kimbu men.” (My emphasis.) For an analysis of the Kimbu subsistence economy see pp. 40-58.

57 Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 44-5.

58 What follows is taken from Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, chaps. 3, 5, 6, and 7. She summarizes her arguments in chapter 7. It should be noted that Sissons does not argue that the benefits derived from caravans were the sole reason for Gogo prosperity, but that they were in addition to the strong base provided by mixed farming and local trade. There were also some negative results of increased contact with caravans, but these were not very disruptive (245-254).

caravans often paid in iron hoes. Hongo was levied in each of the districts crossed by the caravans. Ugogo was not the only region in which hongo was charged — there are many examples from Uzaramo, Uvinza and Usukuma — but it seemed to be levied on a more systematic and orderly basis there. Despite complaints about hongo from Nyamwezi and coastal traders, as well as European travellers, caravan personnel received considerable benefits in return. They were guaranteed access during the dry season to water from wells and pits guarded by the Gogo, they received the benefits of surplus foodstuffs produced by the Gogo for the market provided by thousands of porters, and if the porters were well-behaved they had no security problems while traversing the districts in which hongo had been paid. Caravans were subject to the protection of the local chief or mtemi. This also prevented theft.

The system worked to the advantage of both sides. The Gogo were able to respond to market opportunities by raising production and selling a surplus. As the terms of trade through the second half of the nineteenth century increasingly favoured exporters of ivory, some of the larger quantities of cloth and other goods carried into the interior ended up in their hands either via hongo payments or the purchase of provisions. These goods could then be “banked” by investment in cattle, slaves, and other forms of wealth. Thus there was an incentive for the Gogo to respond favourably to the passage of caravans through their territory. In addition, although Ugogo was subject to severe droughts every five or ten years, the Gogo were able to ride them out due to their “savings”. As Sissons notes, if people


61 Sissons devotes nearly 60 pages to her analysis of hongo in chapter 3.


63 For the last two points see Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 91. It should be noted that penalties could be severe for caravans who failed to meet their hongo obligations. Food sales would be cut off and porters who attempted to drink at wells without paying might expect a beating. Nyamwezi caravans might be held up and the porters forced to spend time hoeing fields during the sowing season. All of these exactions and penalties were imposed at Khokho which Burton regarded as “a district now considered the nucleus of difficulties in Ugogo.” See “Lake Regions”, 154.
starved or died of thirst in Ugogo, it was not the local people, but caravan porters unable to pay their way. The long term result up until the 1890s was that population density in Ugogo increased and more land was brought under production.64 These factors combined with other aspects of the Gogo economic system less related to caravans, and with the relative political stability in Ugogo, (there was no invasion by outsiders as in the case of the Sangu in Ukimbu, or consolidation of a state by conquest, as in Uhehe), to fix the importance of the region for travellers.

For most of the second half of the nineteenth century the route through Ugogo could hardly be avoided by caravans leaving the coast opposite Zanzibar. This was partly because Maasailand to the north was considered too dangerous due to the martial qualities of that nation. Perhaps more important than the danger of attack was the inability of the Maasai to provide adequate provisions for hungry porters.65 To travel through the country of the Hehe, to the south, was also a risky venture because of continuing instability.66 But it was only with the consolidation of the Hehe polity under Munyigumba — not to be confused with the Sangu chief of the same name — during the third quarter of the century, that the Hehe became a major threat to caravan travellers.67 The danger to caravans was particularly acute during the 1880s and early 1890s during the rule of Mkwawa, when the Mukondokwa route was made unsafe by constant raids from the Hehe bases of Wota, north of the Ruaha, and Ulaya, just south of Kilosa.68

64 As well as natural increase the Gogo population grew due to the absorption of runaway porters and the purchase of slaves with ivory. This extra source of labour may also have boosted agricultural and pastoral production.

65 C. F. Holmes, "Zanzibari Influence at the Southern End of Lake Victoria: the Lake Route". African Historical Studies, 4, 3 (1971), 482, gives some support to this argument.

66 Sissons, "Economic Prosperity", 73.

67 Alison Redmayne, "The Hehe", in Roberts, Tanzania Before 1900, 37-58.

68 Redmayne, "Mkwawa and the Hehe Wars", 415-6, 420, 431. Redmayne writes (416): "... in the late 1880s the whole area along the caravan route from Mpwapwa to Mukondoa [the Hehe name for Ulaya, not to be confused with Kondo, the trading settlement south-east of Kilosa, mentioned in Appendix 2] appears to have suffered so severely from the Hehe raids that most of the inhabitants fled, abandoning their fields and their huts.
Just as there was a northwards shift from the Ruaha-Isanga route to Ugogo, for the reasons outlined above, the northern roads within Ugogo were increasingly favoured. There were three main roads traversing Ugogo with many branch connections, but at most times it seems that one route was more in use than the others. At the beginning of the period for which we have documentation the southern road was the most used. This was the one taken by Burton and Speke in 1857. Subsequently the middle road was more popular, and by the 1880s the northern carried most traffic. But at most times, as long as food was readily available, caravan leaders could choose their route. The deciding factor might then be the relative size of the hongo in the various chiefdoms. Once again the question of food supplies may have been crucial in the decisions of travellers to take the more northerly roads, although hard evidence is lacking. Sissons suggests that a period of decreased rainfall towards the end of the century may have been a factor contributing to changes in itineraries as well as alterations in settlement distribution. The Gogo were very mobile in terms of residential patterns as an adaptation to drought and famine. South-central Ugogo was an area particularly prone to low rainfall, and the important settlement of Kanyenye on the southern route disappeared completely during the twentieth century.

Obstacles

Natural obstacles along the central routes, although not the most important consideration in the strategy of caravan leaders, presented special difficulties. Mountain

many of which had been burnt by the Hehe. Travellers in Usagara, eastern Ugogo and Ukaguru generally blamed the Masai as well as the Hehe for this devastation ...

69 Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 73. For details on the routes taken by various European travellers and comments about their respective advantages and disadvantages, as well as information on individual chiefdoms, see Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 75-85. There is a map (77).

70 Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 256; Rigby, Cattle and Kinship Among the Gogo, 20. It should be pointed out that almost all of the place names along the northern as well as the southern roads on Sissons’ map of nineteenth-century caravan routes are not on the Shell Map of Tanzania, which is reasonably detailed. There are all kinds of reasons why settlements might disappear, such as twentieth century famines, inroads of tsetse fly, the impact of modern transportation, and so on.
ranges, floodplains, deserts, and rivers all tested the strength and endurance of porters, slowed caravans down, and therefore caused a drain on caravan resources. I have already discussed the coastal ranges. The next major obstacle was the floodplain of the Mkata river, then, following the crossing of Ugogo, the semi-desert of the Mgunda Mkali. The Mgunda Mkali comprises a special case because the relative difficulty in traversing it depended on political, economic and ecological conditions in the area. The other significant natural obstacles were the Malagarasi river and Lake Tanganyika.

Whether the way forward lay through Usagara or Ukutu, once the caravans passed the first mountain range they had to cross the Mkata floodplain — a wilderness of river, swamp, and grassland, abounding with game — which presented a serious challenge during the rainy seasons. In the dry season of 1857 Burton and Speke traversed the plain without much difficulty, although Burton noted that “the approach to the kraal is denoted by a dead level of dry caked and cracked mud, showing the effects of extensive inundation.”71 Travellers had a rather different experience during the masika or long rains of April and May. In April 1871 Stanley’s caravan crossed the waterlogged Mkata plain on the way to Ujiji, and the difficulties experienced in plunging through miles of mire, swamp, and inundated countryside, caused the journalist to devote eleven pages of his famous book to this episode alone. “The slushy mire of the savannahs rendered marching a work of great difficulty:” he wrote, “its tenacious hold of the feet told terribly on men and animals. A ten-mile march required ten hours ...”72

The Mgunda Mkali, often translated “fiery field,” is a “dull uniform bush” or “thin forest,” which had to be crossed before the goal of most caravans, Unyanyembe, or some other Nyamwezi chiefdom, was reached.73 The starting point was Mdaburu, the Ugogo

71 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 111.

72 Henry Morton Stanley, How I Found Livingstone (London, 1872), 110-120. The quote is from p. 111.

73 On this translation, which he believes is mistaken, Francis Nolan writes: “Mgunda Mgalí is usually written Mgunda Mkali and translated as fiery field, burning plain, or some synonymous phrase, mgunda being the Kinyamwezi for shamba or field and mkali the Swahili for fiery or burning. It seemed an appropriate name to coastal travellers in view of the discomforts of the forced marches with little water. In fact, the proper
frontier village, where provisions for a march of eight days were collected “with difficulty” in Burton’s time.74 Once again we turn to Burton for a description of the “great desert and elephant-ground”:

Like Marenga Mk’halis, it is a desert, because it contains no running water nor wells, except after rain... its ill-fame rests rather upon tradition than actuality; in fact, its dimensions are rapidly shrinking before the torch and axe. About fifteen years ago it contained twelve long stages, and several tirikeza [an afternoon forced march necessitated by lack of water]; now it is spanned in eight marches.... The traveler, though invariably threatened with drought and the death of cattle, will undergo little hardship beyond the fatigue of the first three forced marches...

Burton estimated the “diagonal breadth” of the Mgunda Mkali to be 140 miles east to west.75

The colonization of the “fiery field” was being undertaken by the Kimbu, whose homeland lay to the south and east of Unyamwezi, and the Taturu, neighbours to the north-east. Even in the near desert conditions a few small communities, such as Mgongo Tembo, or “Elephant’s Back,” named after the rocky outcrop nearby, were able to survive by selling their produce to passing caravans.76 The process of colonization continued through the 1860s, despite the instability in the area resulting from the internecine conflicts among the Nyanyembe Nyamwezi during that period. In July 1873 V. L. Cameron remarked that “things are much changed for the better” in comparison with the time of Burton and Speke. The Kimbu had continued their war on the jungle, found water sources, and cleared “large spaces” which they were cultivating.77 Passing through one of their settlements, Jiwe la Singa, Cameron observed that “The road was across a clearing, extending as far as the eye could reach, and which boasted of many herds of cattle, populous, stockaded villages and

Kinyamwezi name is Mgunda Mgali, mgali meaning broad. The name really means broad field, or, by analogy, broad stretch of bush.” Francis Patrick Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi 1878-1928” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1977), 38, f.n. 49. The other phrases are Burton’s.


75 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 155-6; Burton, Lake Regions, 198, 199.

76 For further details see Burton, Lake Regions, 199-204; John Hanning Speke, Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile (New York, 1864), 74-5; Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 245, 248-9.

77 Cameron, Across Africa, I, 127. For more details see 128-133.
much cultivation." The colony was prosperous enough to serve as a base for some Swahili traders from Bagamoyo.\textsuperscript{78} Indeed, the "desert" was being transformed. By 1881 only six stages were necessary to traverse the stretch of remaining wilderness.\textsuperscript{79}

Despite this image, there is evidence that the wilderness was not to be tamed so easily, although perhaps it was Nyamwezi politics which were the ultimate arbiter. In parts of Unyamwezi and surrounding districts, such as the Mgunda Mkali and the road between Tabora and Kahama to the north, a process of depopulation occurred during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The cause was probably migration to the bases of powerful chiefs for protection. The pattern of local warfare had changed and intensified, partly because of the increased stakes in the era of long distance trade, and partly because of the introduction of large numbers of firearms. Numerous villages in eastern Unyamwezi and the Mgunda Mkali were destroyed during the fighting between the contenders for the Nyanyembe chiefship, Mnywa Sere and Mkasiwa, in the years after Burton and Speke's visit, and others were ravaged during the conflict between Unyanyembe and Mirambo during the 1870s and early 1880s.\textsuperscript{80} The other factor was environmental — the presence of the tsetse fly discouraged permanent settlement. In 1871 at an abandoned village in the Mgunda Mkali, "The tsetse or chufwa-fly ... stung us dreadfully," Stanley noted. Because of the tsetse fly the wilderness was still a major obstacle for caravans in 1878. Walter Hutley of the London Missionary Society wrote:

\begin{quote}
We passed one village soon after leaving the camp then entered the forest again passing through a country that must have been very thickly inhabited at one time, from the look of the ground .... The greater part of the pori (wilderness or bush country) is now passed, and at present it seems an almost hopeless case for the bringing in of oxen as the fly (tsetse) exists in greater numbers here than I have seen at any other place in the road.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{78} Cameron, \textit{Across Africa}, I, 133, 134.

\textsuperscript{79} Nolan, "Christianity in Unyamwezi", 38-9.

\textsuperscript{80} Nolan, "Christianity in Unyamwezi", 39-44.

Thirteen years later another missionary described a struggle with swarming tsetse flies in the Mgunda Mkali. 82

The resulting picture, then, is rather mixed. On one hand there is evidence of progressive settlement and an easier journey through the remaining wilderness tract. On the other hand there is the incontestable evidence of abandoned villages and depopulation, which certainly made caravan travel more difficult. Part of this contradiction can no doubt be explained by the normal pattern of changes in settlement patterns as a result of shifting cultivation. 83 It also seems that most of the damage caused by war occurred in eastern Unyamwezi proper rather than in the relatively uninhabited wilderness. 84 Finally, perhaps it is a matter of perspective, with the image presented in the contemporary record depending, to some extent, on the particular road through the Mgunda Mkali taken by nineteenth century observers. Whatever the real situation, it is important to remember that the distance between settlements and water supplies was the crucial variable for caravans marching through inhospitable country. If food and water were not procurable then porters had to carry their own supplies in addition to their loads, or undergo exhausting double marches, which sometimes killed the weak or sick. The Mgunda Mkali remained an inhospitable wasteland for caravan porters, although not a barrier to their progress. Even now, under its modern appellation, the “Itigi thicket” is largely an empty landscape.

The logistics of crossing large rivers, especially when in flood during the rainy season, presented a challenge to large caravans. Perhaps the largest river on the central

82 Robert Pickering Ashe, Chronicles of Uganda (London, 1971, 1st ed. 1894), 28-31. Nolan has a persuasive critique of the ideas of Ford and Kjekshus concerning settlement patterns and tsetse fly in Unyamwezi. See Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 45-7. Kjekshus argues that it was only in the twentieth century that the “reign of the tsetse fly” became a greatly inhibiting factor on economic development, and this was connected to the breakdown of the more benign ecological system described by some early travellers, which was managed by people for their own benefit and allowed for considerable productivity. Kjekshus ignores much evidence to the contrary. His larger argument is expressed in Ecology Control and Economic Development, 5. For another critique of Kjekshus’ views on the impact of the tsetse fly see Koponen, People and Production. 21, 156-7, 248-50, 366.


routes was the Malagarasi, which lies just beyond western Unyamwezi (Ugalaganza). Burton judged the Malagarasi to be unfordable due to the canoes drawn up at every village along its course, and perhaps because of "the multitude and the daring of the crocodiles."\(^85\) The usual crossing point was at Ugaga, in Vinza territory, close to the modern railway bridge. The ferrymen operated numerous small \textit{miombo}-bark\(^86\) canoes, capable of carrying only two or three people. Large caravans might therefore spend two or three days over the crossing:

> The boatman, standing amidships or in the fore, poles or paddles according to the depth of the stream. He is skilful in managing his craft, and he threads without difficulty the narrow, grass-grown, and winding veins of deep water which ramify from the main trunk over the swampy and rushy plains on both sides .... Merchandise ... is rarely lost or much injured, though trifling accidents sometimes occur as the canoe bumps against the landing-places ... The ferrymen show considerable decision in maintaining their claims. On the appearance of opposition they pole off to a distance, and sit quietly to await the effect of their manoeuvre.\(^87\)

Major tributaries of the Malagarasi could sometimes be crossed without need for a ferry. In February 1874 Cameron’s caravan walked across the Sindi river “on a mass of floating vegetation,” three feet thick and a hundred yards wide, forming an island. Caravans occasionally attempted to pass over such natural bridges when decay had weakened the plant matting, and several were known to have disappeared into the river.\(^88\)

If it is believed that the caravan routes were selected on the basis of the easiest path avoiding natural obstacles, as Sheriff suggests, then one would expect that Lake Tanganyika would be a barrier imposing formidable difficulties for large caravans. This is especially so if the limited marine technology available on the lake is considered. Up until 1858 there was only one dhow in use.\(^89\) All other communication on the lake was by dugout canoes. In

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\(^85\) Burton, “Lake Regions”, 208.

\(^86\) \textit{Miombo (Brachysteiga)} woodland covers much of western Tanzania.


\(^88\) Cameron, \textit{Across Africa}, I, 222-3; Norman R. Bennett, ed., \textit{Stanley’s Despatches to the New York Herald} (Boston, 1970), 79. For a discussion of these floating islands known as \textit{tikatika} see David Livingstone, \textit{The Last Journals of David Livingstone} ed. H. Waller (New York, 1875), 314, 14 Jan., 1870.

\(^89\) For the first dhows on the lake see Gray, “Trading Expeditions from the Coast”, 235-6; Sheriff, \textit{Slaves, Spices and Ivory}, 186.
addition, violent storms were often a hazard to sailors. But we know that caravans from Unyamwezi and the coast had been crossing the lake for at least four decades before the visit of Burton and Speke. The lake was no great obstacle to the extension of the central route into Uguha, Urua, Manyema, and other countries in eastern Zaire. According to Speke, who made the voyage, Kabogo Point was the “usual crossing-point” for boats making for the western shore from Ujiji. The large dugout canoes of the Jiji typically skirted the east coast, and paddled south from Ujiji, crossing the mouth of the Malagarasi, until Kabogo Point was reached. Then the canoes would strike out for one of the islands close to the western shore, such as Kivira or Kasenge. Speke writes:

This line is selected for canoes to cross at, from containing the least expanse of water between the two shores between Ujiji and the south end. Kabogo ... is ... the half-way station from Ujiji to Kasenge [island], two places on opposite sides of the lake, whither the Arab merchants go in search of ivory.

Just a few hundred metres away on the western shore of the lake lay the village of Mtowa, from which caravans set off for the “El Dorado” of the ivory and slave rich regions of eastern Zaire.

**The Branch Routes**

Probably the oldest of the three clusters of branch routes radiating out from Unyamwezi was the one into the northern interlacustrine region via Usumbwa, Buzinza.

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90 Speke’s was fully loaded with 26 people and a few loads. Later, when he voyaged to Uvira with Burton, one of the canoes was manned by 40 paddlers.

91 Of course Speke is not quite correct here. The lake is slightly narrower further south at Luagala Point.

92 Speke, *What Led*, 222. This is not the first description we have of the lake crossing. A slightly garbled account which mentions “a mountainous island, Kavogo”, collected from “caravan leaders, Arabs, Suhelis, ivory-mERCHANTS, and slave dealers”, is in Erhardt, “Reports Respecting Central Africa”, 8-9. An even earlier account comes from three “Monomoisy” (Nyamwezi) met by Pickering in Zanzibar in the mid 1840s. They stated “two days are required to cross the Lake, sleeping at night on an island.” One of the informants said he had travelled the whole length of the lake by canoe, a voyage of two months. See Pickering, *The Races of Man*, 203.

93 For the caravan traffic of Mtowa as it was in the late 1870s see Walter Hutley, “Uguha and its People” (manuscript), no date, London Missionary Society Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies, London. 3/3/B. The phrase is from Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 185.
Rusubi (Usui), Karagwe, Buddu, (the southern province of Buganda), and then Buganda itself. The most important state through which these routes passed was Karagwe, not so much because of its resources, but because of its role as “gatekeeper” to the more powerful northern kingdoms. It appears that the Sumbwa and Nyamwezi had pioneered the route, probably late in the eighteenth century, and by the 1840s it was being used by coastal traders. The two most important stations established by the Sumbwa and Nyamwezi, and later used by coastal caravans, were at Kafuro near the Karagwe capital, and Kitangole south of the Kagera river and the border with Buganda.

The second road from Kazeh/Tabora ran northwards to Kagei at the south end of Lake Victoria just east of Mwanza, from where canoes embarked for Buganda, skirting the lake shores. But the lake route remained unpopular until a comparatively late date due to the long voyage to Buganda. It only became more important from the late 1870s because the land route through Karagwe was threatened by political instability and was eventually closed by Mirambo. Most coastal traders became concerned about security problems along the Karagwe route, which had previously carried most traffic. In addition the lake route was given a boost because of the difficulty of establishing a direct line from the coast through Maasailand. Nevertheless, some problems remained for caravans. Despite the general availability of provisions through populous Usukuma, there remained the risk in northern Unyamwezi and Usumbwa between the 1850s and the 1890s of raids by marauding Ngoni, known as the Watuta, and bands of brigands were often encountered in the southern Shinyanga area. In addition, the powerful chiefdoms of Nera and Busumabu imposed what

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95 For the relationships between the rulers of the centralized states of the region and foreign traders, activities of coastal traders, and the ivory trade of the region, see Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 183-5. A more general discussion of regional trade is John Tosh, “The Northern Interlacustrine Region”, in Gray & Birmingham, *Pre-Colonial African Trade*, 103-118.
many European travellers considered outrageous *hongo* and, as C. F. Holmes suggests, Arab and Swahili caravans would have been equally subject.\(^9\)

The third branch road from Tabora, favoured by Nyamwezi caravans heading to Katanga, ran south-west to Ugalla, then south through Ukonongo, Mpimbwe, and Ufipa to the south end of Lake Tanganyika. From there caravans could pass through the corridor between Lakes Tanganyika and Malawi into Urungu, Bemba country, Kazembe’s, and Katanga, in modern Zambia and southern Zaire. Much of the country between Ugalla and Ufipa was sparsely peopled. But from about 1865 the capital of the Nyamwezi chief known as Simba or Nshimba, who had carved out a state in Ukonongo, and was the brother of Mnywa Sere, chief of Unyanyembe, became an important station on the road. However, supplying caravans remained a major headache. Tippe Tip took this route in about 1870 while on his third journey and remembered the difficulties:

> If you leave Ugalla to go to Ukonongo, to Simba’s place, there are no villages along the road.... On arrival at Rivo’s [in Ugalla], we decided to buy food, enough to give the men rations for seven to eight days, since food was expensive even at Simba’s.\(^9\)

In September 1872 David Livingstone’s men had to carry rations for ten days on the journey south towards Simba’s.\(^9\) As always, caravans had numerous options. During the middle of the century alternative southern roads from Tabora ran south to Kiwele or Nkokolo in central Ukimbu and then to Ufipa, Usangu, or Ubungu, south-east of Lake Rukwa, and an important source of ivory.\(^9\)

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\(^9\) This paragraph is based on Holmes, “Zanzibari Influence at the Southern End of Lake Victoria”, 480. 482-3. 488.

\(^9\) Tippe Tip, *Maisha ya Hamed bin Mohammed*, 43 § 54-5. Roy Willis in his study of pre-colonial Ufipa, A State in the Making, Myth, History, and Social Transformation in Pre-colonial Ufipa (Bloomingon, 1981), mistakenly gives 1863 as the date of this journey by Tippe Tip through Ufipa (p. 88). This would place it during Tippe Tip’s second journey as an independent trader. In fact it was early in his third journey, which lasted from 1870 to 1882. See Bontinck, L’autobiographie de Hamed ben Mohammed, 21.


Caravans heading for Katanga or other parts of south-eastern Zaire could shorten the long journey around the southern tip of Lake Tanganyika by crossing from the Fipa port of Kirando to Moliro islet at the south-west corner. Livingstone noted that Moliro, “is the crossing-place of Banyamwezi when bound for Casembe’s country ... The Lake is about twelve or fifteen miles broad [here] ... It takes about 3 hours to cross at Morilo.” The pioneers of the lake crossing were probably the Bisa of northern Zambia. According to Burton, writing fifteen years earlier, “Travelers from Unyamwezi to K’hokoro [Nkokolo in southern Ukimbu] meet near Ufipa caravans of the Northern Wabisa en route to Kilwa,” and many caravans from Unyanyembe had taken the route all the way to Kazembe’s.

The Pangani Valley and Kilwa Routes

The other two clusters of caravan routes lay far to the north and south of the two central lines. The first of these ran north-west up the valley of the Pangani river, along the eastern slopes of the Pare mountains to Taveta, then on to Kilimanjaro, Arusha, and beyond. Sometime before 1811 traders had reached Kilimanjaro, and by mid-century, if not earlier, travellers from the coastal entrepôts of Pangani and Tanga had passed through Serengeti and reached the eastern shores of Lake Victoria. From there it was sometimes possible to round the lake through Busoga and thus knock on the gates of Buganda. The main dispersal

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100 Livingstone, Last Journals, 464, 28 Oct., 1872. The crossing is described by the Swahili trader Selemani bin Mwenye Chande in Lyndon Harries, ed. & tran. Swahili Prose Texts (London and Nairobi, 1965), 244-6.

101 Burton, Lake Regions, 374. For the Bisa see below. Kirando, on the eastern shore, was under the jurisdiction of Nkansi, the most important of the divisions of Ufipa, and the ruler made considerable profits by charging tolls when boatmen ferried caravans across the lake. At Kirando there was an important market, and in 1881, when visited by Hore of the London Missionary Society, the country around the port was under intense cultivation. No doubt much of this produce was sold to passing caravans. Marcia Wright, “East Africa, 1870-1905”, in J. D. Fage and Roland Oliver, eds., Cambridge History of Africa (Cambridge, 1985), VI, 559; Willis, A State in the Making, 96-7. Unfortunately Willis has nothing to say about the trade route through Ufipa except that there were close relations between Unyanyembe and Nkansi during the second half of the nineteenth century, especially during the upheavals of the 1860s. He suggests that the main interest of Unyanyembe was to keep the route through Ufipa and Urungu to Katanga open.

102 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices, and Ivory, 172.

point or junction was Taveta, east of Kilimanjaro; from there caravans branched out to Maasailand north and south of the mountain. However, the pioneers of the Pangani valley routes were not from the coast, or from the Shambaa kingdom of the mountains north of the river, but were probably the Kamba and then other people of the plains, such as the Digo and Zigua, who occupied a middleman role in the early regional trading networks. A struggle evolved during the middle decades of the century over who was to maintain control over long-distance trade — the plains people, the Shambaa, or the coastal elites. Coastal interests were to emerge as the dominant force.

During the first half of the century the coastal traders from Pangani and its neighbourhood had also been able to tap into the business of the central routes. Another set of routes had passed southwest through Uzigua to Nguru where the connection to the main line was made. But in the 1840s the Zigua big men who themselves wished to trade directly with Zanzibar prevented the Pangani Swahili from crossing their territory. Over the following decades the coastal traders of the northern Mrima were forced to concentrate on the sources of ivory in the Kilimanjaro and Maasai countries. The ubiquitous Nyamwezi were reported to be using the Pangani routes during the 1840s to take ivory to the coast, probably along the routes just described, but this option became impractical due to Zigua intolerance.

Caravans using the Pangani Valley routes had considerable difficulties to contend with, the most important being connected with the Maasai. The problem was probably not so much the alleged fierceness of the murran or warriors, or a lack of interest in trade on the part of the Maasai. These two long-held myths have been largely refuted in the work of

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In addition, Glassman points to the close relations between Maa speakers, in particular Baraguyu, and Swahili traders at Taveta and on the coast, although he also notes the reality of the perception of danger, which was reflected in high interest charges by Indian caravan financiers, and the occasional difficulty in the enlistment of porters. Probably much more significant was the problem of obtaining adequate provisions during the long marches across Maasailand.

The southern cluster of routes leading into the interior from Kilwa Kisinjé and other ports was much older in origin than the others and, as Sheriff points out, the hinterland of Kilwa was in many respects a “distinct sector” of the Zanzibari commercial empire due to the specialization of the southern coast in the export of slaves. Ivory was for a long period very important as well. The Kilwa coast also seems to have been less subject to direct influence from Zanzibar than the Mrima. However, the long-distance routes of this region did share the common feature with the central routes of a work force dominated by people from the interior, in this case the Yaos, the Bisa of northern Zambia, and other groups including the Balowokwa and Maravi. This differentiates the southern and central route clusters from the Pangani Valley network in the north, which came to be the preserve of coastal traders and porters, as described above.

The link between Kilwa Kisiwani and Zambesia to the south-west is ancient and well known through the journey in 1616 of the Portuguese traveller Bocarro from Tete on the

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108 Glassman, “Social Rebellion”, 116-7, 124-7. For an example of the difficulties caravan leaders sometimes had recruiting porters for journeys into Maasai country see Richard Thornton to George (Thornton?), Zanzibar, 22 May, 1861, Thornton Papers, Rhodes House MSS.Afr.s.27: “The Baron [von der Decken, the Austrian explorer] has failed in procuring men here, at one time he was nearly ready to start but his head man took fright and broke off all agreements, they refused to go unless he would take at least 200 men all armed”. See also Thomson to Bates, Zanzibar, 26 Feb., 1883, Joseph Thomson, Corr. 1881-1910, Royal Geographical Society Archives.

Zambezi to the Kilwa coast. Perhaps by the end of the seventeenth century and certainly by
the 1740s the Yao of the country on the south-east side of Lake Malawi were recognized to
be the main traders to Kilwa and Mozambique Island in Portuguese territory. However
direct penetration from the coast as far as Lake Malawi was occurring by the 1770s. When
the French slave-trader Morice visited Kilwa Swahili traders had reached at least as far as the
lake, no doubt the "sweet sea" of his report. Edward Alpers believes Swahili traders had
probably traversed the continent to reach Angola by the 1780s. During the next several
decades Arab and Swahili traders were fanning out to both the northern and southern ends of
the lake and beyond. In the middle of the nineteenth century they entered the Portuguese
sphere of influence south through Tete and even reached the Caprivi strip in modern
Namibia.112

During the first decades of the nineteenth century Kilwa Kisiwani — Kilwa on the
island — was gradually superseded by Kilwa Kivinje, on the mainland, due to the more
convenient location of the latter for the caravan trade of the interior.113 One historian of
Kilwa, David Horne, writes:

The most significant geographical advantage Kivinje had in comparison [to Kisiwani] was its closeness
to the Matandu River valley. This access provided 'better supplies of food and water for caravans
proceeding to and from the interior than did any of the small streams flowing into the harbour of Kilwa
Kisiwani.'114

Once again we can see the significance of food and water supplies.

110 Alpers, Ivory and Slaves, 64, 76, 132.

111 Alpers, Ivory and Slaves, 161-3.

112 For a more detailed discussion of the commercial development of the Kilwa routes see Sheriff, Slaves,
Spices and Ivory, 158-164. For Arab and Swahili operations in north-east Zambia see Harry W. Langworthy,
"Swahili Influence in the Area Between Lake Malawi and the Luangwa River", AHS, IV, 3 (1971), 575-602;
Marcia Wright and Peter Lary, "Swahili Settlements in Northern Zambia and Malawi", AHS, IV, 3 (1971), 547-

113 For a summary of the process see Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 162-3.

114 Horne, "Mode of Production in the Social and Economic History of Kilwa", 124. His quote is from John
The main routes west from Kilwa Kivinje to Lake Malawi, which Alpers says numbered three, passed through the territory of the Ngindo, Matumbi, and Yao peoples. The exact routes are difficult to trace now, although the one preferred by the Yao to the south was well known. Alpers writes that one of the three crossing points was at the northern end of the lake and linked Mwelya territory with the Ngonde. The middle crossing was perhaps between Manda on the east shore to somewhere between Deep Bay and Mwamlowe. But the original transshipment points were at the southern tip.115 Once caravans reached the lake they exchanged their trade goods for ivory and slaves coming from areas further west, brought to the crossing points near the south end by the Bisa, who were the link with Kazembe and Katanga further north and west. On reaching the lake the Bisa had to embark on canoes and spend three days on the crossing, and at night camp on the islands which dotted the lake.116

Several itineraries from the south coast to Lake Malawi and other parts of the interior are known from the nineteenth century. From Kilwa Kivinje there were numerous options available for travellers. One set of roads ran through Ngindo and Kichi country to Ubena. Another to the same destination passed through the countries of the Ngindo, the “Wagwangwara,”117 and the “Maviti” to “Wabena.”118 Shorter dates the opening of this line


117 “Wagwangwara” was the Yao name for the Ngoni, probably in this case referring specifically to the Mbunga, a group of Ndendeuli and Ngoni origin. See Elzear Ebner, *The History of the Wangoni* (Ndanda-Peramiho, 1987), 154, 70-72. For another use of the term referring to one of the Ngoni factions of Songea see Abdul Sheriff, “Tanzanian Societies at the Time of Partition”, in M. H. Y. Kaniki, ed., *Tanzania Under Colonial Rule* (London, 1979), 33-4. The Mbunga have also been equated with the “Maviti” (Ebner, 70-72), a name also used less specifically by later writers for the Ngoni and related peoples. See for example G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, “The German Sphere 1884-98”, in Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, eds., *History of East Africa* (Oxford, 1963), 1, 440.

118 Keith Johnston, “Native Routes in East Africa from Dar-es-Salaam towards Lake Nyassa”, *PRGS*, N.S. 1. 7 (1879), 421. There is a brief discussion of this route in Alpers, “The Coast and the Development of the Caravan Trade”, 52.
to the last quarter of the eighteenth century at the latest, but it was still well known in the 1870s. Unfortunately it is very difficult to trace this route and many others in this part of Tanzania on modern maps because of the disappearance of most nineteenth-century settlements, and perhaps name changes. No doubt this is a result of depopulation and migrations during the period of widespread raiding by the Ngoni and related peoples in the second half of the nineteenth century, the calamity of the Maji Maji rebellion (1905-7), and finally the displacement of people caused by the gradual extension of the Selous Game Reserve. However, the Ranga river of the itinerary can be identified with the Ulanga river, and is mentioned as being in “Wagwangwara” country. “Myenyemgumbi’s” (the capital of the Hehe chief Munyigumba), and then “Unyakanyaka” — the country of the “bad people” — are included in “Wabena” country, which extended much further to the north and east than is shown on most maps. The final destination was “Nangwila” probably meaning Unyangwila in north-east Ukimbu. The indication is, then, that the route was in a westerly direction to Mbunga country before turning north-west. It probably equates to the route west from Kilwa Kivinje indicated on Schmidt’s map of 1892. Even more suggestive, the Shell map shows stretches of foot-tracks extending from Kilwa Kivinje, across the Selous Game Reserve to Mahenge, which may be remnants of the old route. Both these routes from Kilwa Kivinje to the north end of the lake probably connected to the most northerly of the three lake crossings, or via the Ruhuhu river valley to the Manda crossing.

119 Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 246; Alpers, “The Coast and the Development of the Caravan Trade”, 52; Johnston, “Native Routes”.

120 Johnston, “Native Routes”, 418, 421.


122 See f.n. 55 above.

123 For the Ruhuhu river-Manda route see Alpers, Ivory and Slaves, 164.
The main roads to the south end of Lake Malawi favoured by the Yaos, and increasingly also travellers from the coast, are easier to trace. Two are indicated in the documentary sources, once again indicating that travellers always had a choice. One was the road that Baron von der Decken took in 1860 to the junction at Nasoro before taking a westward branch to “Wagwangwara” country. Von der Decken only reached Mesule, however, a few days past Nasoro. The second was the path slightly to the east taken in 1884 by the British vice-consul at Kilwa, Stewart Smith. The two tracks crossed at Kiangara, just before Nasoro. Smith provides a detailed itinerary for this section of the route. This journey was taken well after the heyday of the Yao caravans, and it was not until near the banks of the Rovuma that the vice-consul noted that “the first cultivation we have seen for 250 miles begins.” Alpers gives the general line of these routes as follows: south south-west to near the confluence of the Mbwemburu and Nakiu rivers, then south-west and roughly parallel with the Mbwemburu and beyond to pass near Tunduru and on to cross the Ruvuma river. From there the paths continued through the centre of Yao country to the various trading centres near the south end of the lake such as Mponda’s. From Lindi and Mikindani Bay a set of routes ran through the Mwera, Makonde and Ndonde countries to the south end of the lake or up the Lugenda river, which enters the Ruvuma from the south about 260 kilometres from its mouth. Another taken by Livingstone in 1866 led from Mikindani up the Rovuma river to Mataka’s, the headquarters of the important Yao chief.

124 Carl Claus von der Decken, Reisen in Ost-Afrika in den Jahren 1859 bis 1865 ed. Otto Kersten (Graz, 1978, 1st ed. 1869), Band 1, 161-177. Thanks to Uta Venemen for translating sections of this source. Translated extracts are in the Mackinnon Papers, Box 77, File 60, School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

125 Stewart Smith, “Explorations in Zanzibar Dominions”, in Royal Geographical Society, Supplementary Papers, 2 (1889), 101-118. Von der Decken returned to the coast on this path.

126 Alpers, Ivory and Slaves, 165.


129 Livingstone, Last Journals.
Chapter Three

The Pioneers: Long-Distance Porterage Before 1857

Little is known about the history of the first generations of caravan porters who worked the long-distance trade routes. It is almost certain that we will never be able to recover the details of life and work on the caravans during the pioneering phase of the first three decades or so of the nineteenth century. Our sources are not much better for the subsequent quarter century when the long-distance trading system reached some sort of maturity. In contrast to the dearth of material on caravans and porterage, there is a relative abundance of information on local and regional trade and the integration of these separate networks to create long-distance trading systems linking the coast with the far interior, thanks to the pioneering work of Andrew Roberts, Edward Alpers, Abdul Sheriff, and others. But here and there we are given glimpses of the organization of the caravans, the origins of the

porters who worked on them, and the routes they took. It is only with the publication of
detailed accounts of caravan life in the works of Burton, Speke, and Grant, beginning in
1859, that a clearer picture is available. But by this time porterage on the central routes was
already undergoing change, with trends towards professionalization, specialization, and
proletarianization.

There are two specific reasons why the year 1857 is chosen as the closing date for the
pioneering period. First, it marks the beginning of direct European participation in the
caravan system, and the commencement of imperialist activities in the interior of East Africa.
Towards the end of the century two of the consequences of this intrusion were significant
changes in the organization of caravan labour, and in the conditions of work for caravan
porters. These will be detailed in chapters six and eight. Second, the mid-1850s mark the
beginning of a surge in ivory exports from East Africa to Great Britain, at first via India, and
then directly from Zanzibar.2 The long boom of the 1850s and 1860s contributed to an
expansion of the elephant hunting frontier, a greater demand for caravan labour, and changes
in the organization of porterage. The consequences for porters are explored in chapter five.

Only certain peoples took to the work of porterage. This was because of factors
related to their domestic economy, external trading relations, geographical location, political
and historical experience, and culture. The Yaos of the south-east Lake Malawi region, the
Nyamwezi and Sumbwa of the western plateau of Tanganyika, and the Swahili of Zanzibar
and the coast, all operated caravans and worked voluntarily as porters. I include among the
Swahili the Islamicized slaves and freed slave porters of the coast acculturated into Swahili
society and known as the Waungwana. Their origins were varied, but most came from the
heavily slaved Lake Malawi region and southern Tanzania.3 In this chapter these ethnic

2 See Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 89, graph 3.2.

3 For a good definition and discussion of the Waungwana see Glassman, “Social Rebellion and Swahili
Culture”, 97-101; idem, Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast,
1856-1888 (Portsmouth NH, London, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, 1995), 61-2. There is a similar contemporary
groups are treated separately. Although they all carried for the ivory trade, the origins of long-distance porterage in each case are local and regional. The second reason is that it was only during the second half of the nineteenth century that an ethnically mixed caravan work force was the norm, at least on the central routes, and hence affected the character of caravan labour. The most important of these groups prior to 1857 were those from the interior. The true pioneers were not from the coast, although coastal traders and their followers ultimately advanced further than Yao, Nyamwezi, and Sumbwa adventurers and traders.

The first sections of this chapter consist of brief accounts of the early history of Yao, Nyamwezi and Sumbwa, and Swahili travellers and long-distance porters. This serves as a background to the final section of the chapter: a discussion of the characteristics of caravans and porterage suggested by the extremely limited data surviving from the period prior to 1857. In general terms, this account of the characteristics of porterage prior to 1857 should serve as a benchmark for the more detailed analyses of subsequent changes and continuities during the period 1857 to approximately 1890 presented in the rest of the thesis.

The Yao

The first "professional" porters of the mainland of Tanzania were the Yao. Thanks to Alpers’ research we know that the Yao of northern Mozambique were the major players on the long-distance routes to Kilwa perhaps as early as the first quarter of the seventeenth century. It was only during the mid-nineteenth century that many Yao migrated north and established their homes in Tunduru district in southern Tanzania, although smaller groups of Yao settlers established themselves in other parts of southern Tanzania in earlier times. As in the cases of other long-distance traders and porters from the interior, the Yao began as local and regional traders: it was local trade in iron and related goods which led them to travel further afield. Eventually they made contact with a second localized trading system centred

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on the immediate hinterland of Kilwa. Alpers believes that this connection had already occurred by the time of Bocarro’s journey in 1616. The evidence bears him out. Cloth from “the coast of Melinde”, specifically Kilwa, was reaching Muzura’s territory north of the Zambezi via Bocarro’s route. A demand for imported products such as salt, cloth, beads, and other goods then developed in the Yao homeland and led to the integration of the two systems as the Yao began regular travel to the coast. During the second half of the eighteenth century the Yao, and other peoples from the interior such as the Makua and Ngindo, controlled an inter-connected series of regional trading systems which delivered slaves and ivory to the coast. Sometime in the late eighteenth century a colony of “Nyasa” — Masaninga Yaos — had established themselves at Kilwa Kivinje, no doubt contributing to the rise of the town by attracting Yao caravans there in preference to Kilwa Kisiwani. By the 1840s, if not earlier, about forty “large” caravans arrived at Kilwa Kivinje each year from the Yao, Maravi, Nyasa, and Nyamwezi countries, carrying ivory, rhino horns, tobacco, Maravi iron ware, and other goods. Around this time the Yao carrying trade to Kilwa was increasingly falling into the hands of the Bisa who carried their goods the whole distance to the coast and undercut their competitors. But by the 1860s the Bisa lost their advantage


due to greater competition from coastal traders and pressure on their homeland from the Bemba and Ngoni, while Yao fortunes also improved during the last decades of the century. Large Yao caravans of up to a thousand members were reported to arrive annually at the coast near Quelimane in Mozambique during the 1890s.  

Experienced Yao traders and travellers were held in high esteem by their compatriots, while the "pounders of beans" received scant praise. Several Yao songs celebrated the roving life of the trader and porter. One song went:

See the traveller returning!
'No more short rations', thinks he;
But loaded plate, and tasty bit.
And others at beck and call.

Another went:

A-travelling I would go,
If it were not for this grain!
If I stay winnowing semsem here
How can I fortune gain?  

The Yao trader or porter represented the quintessence of Yao manhood.

The Nyamwezi

We are rather better served when it comes to a consideration of how the Nyamwezi came to be the dominant group working the central routes, as well as an important presence in surrounding countries such as Buganda, Usukuma, Manyema, Katanga, and Urungu. First it is necessary to briefly deal with the complex question of Nyamwezi identity. The country of the Nyamwezi — Unyamwezi — occupies a vast expanse of western Tanzania, beginning in the east at Tura, the first chiefdom caravans entered after crossing the Mgunda Mkali, and extending in the west to Usaguzi, abutting the Malagarasi river. To the north Unyamwezi


12 The phrase is quoted in Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, 22.

included Kahama and Bukune, and to the south, Uganda and Ugalla. The Nyamwezi, or "people of the moon", i.e. the people from the west, are a heterogenous collection of peoples of differing origins speaking variants of Kinyamwezi. The main divisions are between the Galaganza of the Ugalla river basin in the south-west, the Sagali of the territory along the Gombe river in the north-west and centre of Unyamwezi, the Kahama of the north, and the Igulwibi of the south. These sub-sections of the Nyamwezi were never united into one political unit before the time of Mirambo, the famous Nyamwezi empire builder, but rather formed a series of chiefdoms. Closely related peoples including the Sumbwa in the north-west and the Konongo in the south south-west are sometimes included among the Nyamwezi. The name “Nyamwezi” is of foreign origin and was never used by the people themselves. The Gogo, their neighbours to the east, called the Nyamwezi and all travellers passing through their country “Wakonongo” — “the uncircumcized.”

The arrival of Sagara migrants in western Tanzania over the course of the eighteenth century with their knowledge of the coast region indirectly stimulated Nyamwezi and Sumbwa traders to go down to the coast with ivory and other goods. As Shorter puts it, “The coming of the Nyitumba from Usagara was an event of the first importance, for they opened up a route linking the interior to the hinterland of the coast, and ultimately drew the peoples of the interior to the coast in search of the new objects of value they had brought ...” Despite the importance of this event (or rather series of events), the Nyamwezi had long been

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14 There is quite a large literature dealing with the ethnography and some aspects of the history of the Nyamwezi. Some of this will be introduced in the next chapter which deals specifically with the Nyamwezi. Much of this literature is only available to readers of German. Virtually nothing new has been published in any language on this very important ethnic group since the 1970s.


17 Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 225.
operating caravans over shorter distances as part of local and regional trade in items such as salt and iron.\textsuperscript{18} It was this experience which enabled them to take advantage of the opportunity opened up to them by the Sagara migrations.

The first great journeys of the Nyamwezi and Sumbwa to the coast are usually dated to about 1800. Nevertheless the Nyamwezi and Sumbwa were already experienced long-distance traders, probably working routes from their own countries to Buganda and Lake Tanganyika. Ganda traditions say that the powerful state of Buganda was indirectly receiving goods from the east coast as early as the 1780s. Several historians have suggested that the Nyamwezi may have been involved in the transportation of these goods at least part of the distance to the lacustrine kingdom.\textsuperscript{19} Between 1806 and 1810 Galaganza caravans had reached Kazembe's according to reports from two Angolan pombeiros.\textsuperscript{20} In 1809 while at Mesuril in Portuguese territory Henry Salt met some "Monjou" (Yao?) traders from the interior. He writes "They told me themselves that they were acquainted with other traders called Evéezi and Maravi, who had travelled far enough inland to see large waters, white people ... and horses." Alpers identifies these "Evéezi" with the Nyamwezi. This must not be accepted conclusively, because as stated above the Nyamwezi did not refer to themselves as such. But as Alpers notes, given the central location of Kazembe's and its links between the trading networks of the east and west coasts, it is quite possible that some East Africans had crossed the continent.\textsuperscript{21}

Certainly Nyamwezi travellers had reached Katanga not long after 1820. In April 1872 Livingstone wrote while at Kwihara, Unyanyembe, that he "saw the chief of all the

\textsuperscript{18} J. E. G. Sutton and Andrew D. Roberts, "Uvinza and its Salt Industry", \textit{Azania}, 3 (1968), 45-86; Roberts, "Nyamwezi Trade", 44-47.


\textsuperscript{20} Alpers, \textit{Ivory and Slaves}, 180. Roberts is less convinced by the evidence. See "Nyamwezi Trade", 56.

\textsuperscript{21} Henry Salt, \textit{A Voyage to Abyssinia} (London, 1814), 32-3; also quoted in Alpers, \textit{Ivory and Slaves}, 180.
Banyamwezi (around whose boma it is), about sixty years old, and partially paralytic. He told me that he had gone as far as Katanga by the same Fipa route I now propose to take, when a little boy following his father, who was a great trader.”22 If the “little boy” was ten years old then the journey would have been made about 1822. Nyamwezi and Kimbu caravans were certainly trading in Urungu, at the south end of Lake Tanganyika, during the early 1840s. It is interesting that the sources of this statement gave their home district as “Tengasha” whose “king” was Kiswagara. They also said that “Wutumbara, a large town, and the principal one of the Monomoisy [Nyamwezi] nation, is five days’ journey from them.”23 “Wutumbara” probably refers to Itumba, while the meaning of “Kiswagara” has perhaps been misinterpreted, and refers instead to the district of Iswangala in central Ukimbu. Both of these districts were on the old Ruaha-Isanga-Unaamwezi route.

The first literary mention of Nyamwezi people reaching the coast dates from 1811, when it was reported that Nyamwezi slaves were the most numerous of the peoples of various “tribes” sold in the Zanzibar market.24 It is not clear whether they were brought down by Nyamwezi caravans or perhaps through a series of intermediaries. But the same source tells us that Nyamweziland, “at three months’ distance, abounds in elephants’ teeth”, indicating that there was already a considerable trade to the coast in ivory.

The identity of the pioneers is shrouded in mystery. It is only in the cases of some of the more famous of their second and third generation successors of the 1820s and 1830s that some memories have been preserved in Nyamwezi and Sumbwa texts, and in a handful of


written sources.²⁵ A clear case is that of Lief bin Said, whose itinerary from his second journey into the interior is given in appendix one. He was “born in Zanzibar, of the Manmoise [Nyamwezi] tribe,” yet we know nothing of his parents, except that his father was also a Muslim.²⁶ Among the Sumbwa the caravan leaders Kafuku and Kasanga, both from chiefly families, have been remembered. The story of the death of Kafuku in Ugogo was told to Burton in 1857 or 1858, and is worth repeating in full:

Within the memory of man one Kafuko, of Unyamwezi, a great merchant, and a Mtoni or caravan leader, when traversing Ugogo with some thousands of followers, became involved in a quarrel about paying for water. After fifteen days of skirmishing the leader was slain and the party was dispersed. The effect on both tribes has lasted to the present day. After the death of Kafuku no rain fell for some years — a phenomenon attributed by the Wagogo to his powers of magic; — and the land was almost depopulated. The Wanyamwezi, on the other hand, have never from that time crossed the country without fear and trembling.²⁷

The great drought referred to no doubt resulted in the Mpingama famine mentioned in chapter two, which occurred sometime before 1850. This would tie in with Burton’s statement that the events described occurred a generation before his own arrival in Ugogo. Thus we can approximately date both the famine and the death of Kafuku to sometime between 1830 and 1840.²⁸ Roberts says that according to the traditions of the Sumbwa of Ushirombo, Kafuku was the first of their people to reach the coast, so he had made at least one earlier journey, but it is difficult to say how accurate the tradition is when it describes him as the trailblazer. Other cases show that the names of the true pioneers have often been forgotten. A few years earlier unnamed Sumbwa traders founded the Songo chiefdoms of

²⁵ Sheriff makes this point. See Slaves, Spices, and Ivory. 177. Unomah ignores the evidence of Nyamwezi trade to the coast before the Arabs moved up country to Isanga and then Tabora. His discussion of the ivory trade begins with the 1830s, and he sees Arabs and other coastal merchants as being the initiators. See “Economic Expansion”, 77-9 and passim.

²⁶ James Macqueen, “Visit of Lief Ben Saeid to the Great African Lake”. IRGS, 15 (1845), 371. For the last point see Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 177.

²⁷ Burton, “Lake Regions”, 161. See also Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 233; Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 177.

²⁸ Sheriff suggests that Kafuku’s death was “probably not before 1830”. Shorter suggests a date of approximately 1825, which seems too early. See “A Note by Dr. Aylward Shorter”, in Gray & Birmingham. Pre-Colonial African Trade, 230.
northern Unyamwezi while en route to the coast. A traditional history of the Songo tells us that the Sumbwa caravan leaders established camps which by about 1830 became permanently settled villages with their own chiefs. The routes followed by the Sumbwa traders to the Mrima would have passed through Iramba and Ugogo.  

The Galaganza branch of the Nyamwezi have also kept alive traditions of caravan leaders such as Mpalangombe and Ngogomi who, failing to secure the chiefship of Usaguzi, set off for the coast.  

Roberts dates these journeys to some time before 1830. The journeys of another trader from Usaguzi, Kiringawana or Kilangabana, whose name was given to one of the routes through Usagara, can be dated to the same period. In 1858 Burton and Speke met Kiringawana, chief of Kisanga, a district in Usagara on the road to the Ruaha river and Isanga, who was the son or grandson of the original Galaganza elephant hunter and trader of the same name who had established his rule over the local Sagara. The first Kilingabana (spelled “Keringawarha”) is mentioned in Lief bin Said’s itinerary as “an usurper” at “Kesunga.” As MacQueen dates Lief bin Said’s journey to 1831 the obvious conclusion is that Kilingabana was well established as a powerful man before that, and had probably led caravans to the coast. Another example from the 1820s or 1830s comes from Kimbu traditions, which tell the story of how the Galla trader Kuti founded the Nyipito chiefdoms of Ipito and Nkololo in southern Ukimbu while attempting a journey to the Mwera coast. “Nyipito” literally means “traveller.” At least one later chief of Ipito continued to send caravans to the coast on a regular basis. The Galaganza and Galla traders preferred the old

\[\text{\cite{29 Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 233-4.}}\]

\[\text{\cite{30 For the tradition and a discussion see Roberts, “Nyamwezi Trade”, 48-9. See also Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 177.}}\]

\[\text{\cite{31 See chapter 2.}}\]

\[\text{\cite{32 Burton, “Lake regions”, 126; Roberts, “Nyamwezi Trade”, 67; Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 235.}}\]

\[\text{\cite{33 Macqueen, “Visit of Lief Ben Saeid”, 372.}}\]

\[\text{\cite{34 Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 235-9.}}\]
route through Ukimbu and along the Ruaha before striking north-east to Mbwamaji or other towns as far north as Saadani. Alternatively they branched off at Isanga and Isenga to the southern road passing through Usangu, Ubena, and the Ulanga valley to Kilwa.35

Through the 1840s and early 1850s there is an occasional glimpse of Nyamwezi activity along the central routes. Large caravans regularly arrived at the coast, as Nyamwezi traders took full advantage of the then friendly relations between their home countries and the Sultanate of Zanzibar. For instance, in October 1842 Richard P. Waters, an American merchant at Zanzibar, was told by Jairram bin Sewji, the customs master, that “all my Brass wire would go soon ... as they had received news that three thousand frasillas of Ivory was on its way down to the coast.”36 The caravans almost certainly were using the central routes because Jairram also indicated that little ivory — but many slaves — was available at Kilwa. One month later the news was received that three dhows had arrived at Zanzibar “with large lots of ivory,” about 1,000 frasillas, belonging mostly to Arab traders who had “sent their people into the interior eighteen months since ...” The entry concludes, “It is said that the great Manamoise caravan will be down in two or three months’ time with much ivory,” presumably the remaining 2,000 frasillas.37 A few years later the arrival at Mbwamaji of a great caravan, 2,000 strong, was recorded.38 Such caravans probably represented the combined numbers of many smaller enterprises.

The scanty evidence available to us suggests that from an early date Nyamwezi caravans were travelling down to the coast according to a fairly regular pattern. For instance, in 1845 Cooley wrote that,

35 Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 235. But see Alpers; Ivory and Slaves, 180, and Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 162-3, who point to the probable use of a branch road off the central routes to reach Kilwa. Burton notes that “many” Nyamwezi caravans had visited Kilwa: Lake Regions, 451.

36 A frasila was a measure of weight of 35 pounds.

37 Diary of Richard P. Waters, 18 October, 1842, November 18, 1842, in Bennett and Brooks, New England Merchants, 253, 254.

38 Bennett and Brooks, New England Merchants, 254, f.n. 5; Bennett, Mirambo, 26.
"The ... Monomoezi ... descend annually in large numbers to Zanzibar. The journey to the coast and back again takes 9 or 10 months, including the delay of awaiting the proper season for returning. It would appear that they start on the journey down in March or April, probably at the end of the heavy rains, and return in September."

Guillain made an almost identical observation. According to Burton "a crowd" of Nyamwezi descended upon the coast and Zanzibar twice a year, in the months of January-February and July-August, to hire themselves out to "native traders" as pagazi. Arrival at the coast in July or August would roughly correspond with Cooley's estimate of departure from Unyamwezi in March or April, given that the journey took about three months. The months of January and February correspond to a break in the rainy season in the coastal regions, while July and August are in the middle of the long dry season. More details on the pattern of caravan travel are provided by Grant:

Natives are often obliged to travel at all seasons, but will not readily do so at the desire of a master; they prefer to travel during certain months, such as March and April, when the crops and wild fruits are about to ripen, and when they can help themselves as they pass the fields or go through the forest; or they prefer to start in August, after their crops have been gathered and they have had a feast on the new grain. At this time of the year they begin to burn down the tall grass, which might conceal wild animals. The seasons they naturally object to travel in are when the country is parched by heat in June and July, or flooded by water in December and January: in these times food has to be purchased, as the harvests have been gathered, and travellers suffer in health from hunger, heat, cold and rain.40

Caravans starting from the coast followed a similar pattern, with departures either before or after the rainy seasons. During the rains the Ruvu (Kingani) river near Bagamoyo often flooded the surrounding countryside and became impassable.41

As this information indicates, the main factor affecting the timing of journeys from the interior to the coast and back was the seasonal cycle. In Unyamwezi the rainy season or masika begins in late October or early November and lasts until May, after which there is almost no rain until the following October. Thus there are six months of dry weather and six months with fairly regular — although not constant — rain. Precipitation during the rainy

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39 W. D. Cooley, "Geography of N'yassi", JRGS, 15, part 2 (1845), 213; Charles Guillain, Documents sur l'histoire, la géographie et le commerce de l'Afrique Orientale (Paris, 1856), II, 380; Burton, Zanzibar, I, 343.

40 J. A. Grant, "Summary of Observations on the Geography, Climate, and Natural History of the Lake Regions", JRGS, 42 (1872), 251-2.

season is usually so abundant that low lying areas are extensively flooded. During the dry season the flood waters lying on the lowlands evaporate, according to regional and local variations.42 Three consequences for travellers follow from the seasonal patterns. First, because of extensive flooding along the routes, travel was much easier during the dry months. Second, because Nyamwezi porters were still attached to the land, they were busy with their families in the fields during part of the masika — the agricultural season — especially at planting time, and not predisposed to long absences when their labour was needed at home. As Burton said of his Nyamwezi pagazi: “porters during the dry, these men become peasants in the wet weather.”43 Finally, Grant reminds us once more of the crucial consideration of the availability of provisions along the route. Nyamwezi travellers (and no doubt all caravan personnel) preferred to go on safari when adequate food supplies were almost guaranteed by the ensuing harvest. There were always exceptions to this general pattern, however, and often Nyamwezi porters went on long journeys which kept them away from home for most of the year or even several years. The tendency towards professionalism during the second half of the century, employment on Arab and Swahili caravans, and the expansion of the elephant-hunting and ivory trading frontier made caravan journeys longer.

Occasionally unusually heavy rain and extensive flooding, which made travel all but impossible, interrupted the regular arrival of caravans at the coast, and hence the supply of ivory to the Zanzibar market. This was the case in the early trading season of 1849. The Nyamwezi had been “kept back” according to Charles Ward, another American merchant in

42 For a detailed account of the climate of Unyamwezi and rainfall statistics collected during 1879-80 at Urambo see E. Southon, “The History, Country and People of Unyamwezi,” II (manuscript), May 1880, LMS 3/4/C.

Zanzibar, because “Africa a little ways inland has been completely inundated. There has been more rain than before for 10 years.”

The Swahili and Arabs

Although the Bisa and the Yao, the Sumbwa and the Nyamwezi, were the true pioneers of long-distance trade and porterage, the Swahili and Arabs of the coast were venturing into the hinterland of Kilwa by the late eighteenth century. Further north, on the Mrima, the Swahili were reinforced by Omani Arabs from Zanzibar, as well as a few Indian entrepreneurs, and by about 1820 some had penetrated to the far western interior of Tanzania, and had even crossed Lake Tanganyika. It is likely that coast based caravans were already travelling as far as the mountain chain beyond the coastal nyika well before this. The Indian Khoja Musa “Mzuri” — “the Handsome” — played a significant role. He was one of the pioneers of the Ruaha-Isanga route during the early 1820s, played a prominent role along the route to Karagwe and Buganda during the 1840s and 1850s, and was a founder of Kazeh in about 1852. The Arab Saif bin Said al-Muamari led the way through Ugogo. In 1828 an American visitor to Zanzibar wrote in a letter that he had “frequently seen the elephant hunters return from thirty days’ journey into the interior and the governor of Zanzibar occasionally sends presents to negro kings a long distance inland ...” By 1831 caravans from the coast were regularly travelling to Ujiji or places nearby. Lief bin Said was familiar with the main goods traded in the countries to the west of Lake Tanganyika. Sometime

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during the 1830s Tippu Tip’s paternal grandfather visited Uyowa in western Unyamwezi, and in the 1840s his father married into the ruling family of Unyanyembe.

The Sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid bin Said, continued to take a close interest in the caravan trade of the interior during the 1830s and 1840s. In June 1839 we hear that a caravan of two hundred of the Sultan’s men had started for the interior to trade on his behalf, and were expected to be gone about one year. Guillain wrote of the 1840s that “The Swahili and the Arabs of Zanzibar often join these [Nyamwezi] expeditions to negotiate in the countries that they cross; and I am assured that several of them have remained two and three years in the home of the Wanyamwezi.” In 1844, an American visitor reported that “His Highness every year sends 100 men into the interior to explore and obtain what ivory and produce of the country ... they can ...” The survivors told of having seen “a race of whites similar to the Europeans, and having vessels which are represented as being very fine and sailing on ... large and very beautiful lakes.” Such stories were not uncommon, as Norman Bennett and George Brooks note, and in fact were heard on the coast much earlier. Hardy heard similar vague assertions while in Zanzibar in 1811, and reported that “Everybody I have conversed with in Zanzibar on this subject agree in their assertions of its [Zanzibar’s trade] going to the other side of Africa, where they say Slaves are bought and sold the same as on this side.” Although it is quite possible that Swahili traders had indeed crossed the continent, the “other side” referred to may well have been the shores of either Lake Malawi or Lake Tanganyika.

When in Kilwa Kivinje in March 1850 the missionary and explorer J. L. Krapf was told by

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49 Journal of Richard P. Waters, 24 June, 1839, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants*, 211; Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire, la géographie et le commerce de l’Afrique Orientale*, II, 380. Waters also noted that he had met “a very respectable man who has been five times far into the interior”, indicating that by this time there were professional caravan leaders among the coastal traders.


the governor of the city "of a Suahili, who had journeyed from Kiloa to the lake Niassa, and thence to Loango on the western coast of Africa." 52 There is at least one case in which there is clear proof that coast based caravan leaders were crossing the continent and returning to tell their story. In early 1845 a large "Arab" caravan "under the protection of a great force" left Bagamoyo for the far interior. By the time it crossed Lake Tanganyika it consisted of several Arabs and Swahilis and "two hundred armed slaves", no doubt Waungwana. One of these Arabs was Said bin Habib of Zanzibar. Seven years later a section of this great expedition under the leadership of Said bin Habib arrived at Benguela on the west coast of the continent. Francois Bontinck, the historian of this epic story, writes of the climax, "The arrival at Benguela, on April 3 1852, of three ‘Moors’ of Zanzibar, leading a caravan of forty porters, was without doubt a sensational event for the inhabitants of that important port ..." 53 Said bin Habib continued his slave and ivory trading business in the interior for several more years, at Kazembe’s, Katanga, and the Zambezi Valley, among other places, visiting Luanda three times in the process. In 1860 he arrived back in Zanzibar, completing a double crossing of the continent which had taken sixteen years. 54

As the sources hint, many of these unknown pioneers were Waungwana, slaves, originally from the interior, who had adopted aspects of Swahili culture. In contrast to the exploits of Said bin Habib and his followers, it was much more common for the Swahili and Waungwana of the coastal towns to combine trade and porterage over shorter distances with more prosaic activities such as farming. A good example comes from the traditional history of Sudi, a small town near the Ruvuma river. The people of Sudi operated plantations


54 For the full story see Bontinck, "La double traversée de l’Afrique" and the sources mentioned there. There is a brief discussion in Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 186-7. Said bin Habib’s own account is in “Narrative of Said bin Habeeb, an Arab Inhabitant of Zanzibar”, Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society 15 (1860), 46-8.
worked, at least in part, by slave labour. Some of the surplus food was sold to buy more slaves. Another of their occupations was to hunt elephants for ivory. The townspeople, says "The History of Sudi," also used to borrow trade goods from merchants and travel "to their former homes" where they traded for ivory and slaves. Their "former homes" were probably in the Lake Malawi region which was a major source of slaves, or perhaps nearer to Sudi in Makonde or Makua country.

From about the fourth decade of the century coastal traders were competing successfully on the central routes with upcountry caravan operators. Nevertheless, in the late 1850s caravans originating in the interior far outnumbered those setting out from the coast. Long distance trade was still very much in the hands of the Nyamwezi and other upcountry peoples, who used products from their own countries to buy the sought after ivory. But caravans from the coast were entering new countries, and expanding the elephant hunting and ivory trading frontier through Karagwe into regions north and west of Lake Victoria, and across Lake Tanganyika into eastern Zaire.

Other Long-Distance Porters

A few of the other peoples of the interior joined caravans as volunteer porters. For instance, the Digo and the Segeju of the Mijikenda group just inland from the northern coast regularly hired themselves out as porters for the Maasai routes, as did their Girima and Nyika neighbours a little further north in modern Kenya. Sometime during the mid-1840s a Girima informant told an American traveller in Zanzibar that "the Wanika [Nyika]


56 Roberts, "Nyamwezi Trade", 51.


sometimes make visits to the country of the Chaga,” i.e. Kilimanjaro. It appears that caravans of mixed ethnicity were not uncommon from an early date on the northern routes. An ivory trading expedition to Chagga country in the 1840s included Comorians, Kamba, and Swahili among its members, but no Arabs. The leader was a Kamba “who had often conducted similar expeditions, and who knew all the languages on the route.” On the central route cluster the Zaramo, whose territory lay inland from Dar es Salaam and Mbwamaji, acted as porters for Arabs “when disposed to be friendly.” But, Burton writes, “if a man dies his load is at once confiscated by his relatives, who, moreover, insist upon receiving his blood-money, as if he had been slain in battle.” The Zaramo might also be persuaded to work as porters in time of famine, although in a case described by Tippu Tip they deserted en masse just before departure, only to suffer fearful retribution. The trader collected an armed force, marched to the porters’ villages, and seized the elders and porters’ families. He then captured 800 people from “every part of Zaramu country,” put them in chains, and forced them to carry loads to Sangu country north of Lake Malawi.

**Long Distance Porterage before 1857**

Many of the basic characteristics of caravan organization and long distance porterage in Tanzania were well established before the appearance of a significant body of evidence useful to modern historians. The patterns established by the Yaos, Sumbwa and Nyamwezi were already old by the time the first detailed accounts were written in the late 1850s and


60 Pickering, *The Races of Man*, 200.


early 1860s. By the time Burton and Speke began their journey to the central African lakes, the caravan routes and caravan organization were going through considerable changes, some of which have been described above. Further change was taking place which would lead to the emergence of a large corps of professional porters. However, some of the characteristics of porterage would remain in place until the imposition of colonial rule. In this section the organization and work of the porters as gleaned from the earliest sources is presented.

Virtually no evidence from the northern Mrima has survived from this period, therefore I will deal with the workers of the central and southern route clusters only.

We know very little about the organization of Yao caravans on the Kilwa routes before the second half of the nineteenth century, despite the ancient history of Yao long-distance trade. One of the few documentary sources is from the French slaver Morice, who visited Kilwa Kisiwani several times during the mid 1770s. His description of a caravan from the interior is vague, however, and we cannot be sure which ethnic group is being referred to, although there are clues in the hair styles.

The Africans come to the coast of the mainland from the interior with their slaves carrying ivory for sale. They are naked, with only their genitals and rump covered with a skin or a piece of goat-skin dried without being tanned. Their hair is three or four inches long, and is waxed into two or three little clusters as large as pipe-stems. They are armed with knives, or with poor iron spears. By chance I fell in with a band of eighty to a hundred who had come with their slaves ...

There is some evidence relating to the operation of Yao caravans further south in Mozambique. The dispatching of caravans was subject to the authority of the chiefs and headmen of villages. Considerable attention was paid to the preservation of society while the traders and porters were absent. To this end wives of the travellers were not to engage in adulterous behaviour: the belief that unfaithfulness would imperil the lives of the travellers helped ensure stability at home. In addition, prophylactic medicines were used and ritual

63 Glassman deals only with the period after 1857. See “Social Rebellion and Swahili Culture”, 130-139.

64 “Questions Asked of Monsieur Morice about the East Coast of Africa”, n. d. (1777?), in G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, The French at Kilwa Island (Oxford, 1965), 118-9. It is possible that it is the Bisa rather than the Yaos who are being referred to. Burton notes the distinctive “crest of hair” as an identifying feature of the Bisa. See Lake Regions, 375.
bathing practised to ensure a safe journey. A French writer commenting on the slave trade as it was in the 1840s described the caravans as “usually composed of twenty or thirty persons, without counting the captives who are often as numerous as their masters, but who rarely seek to regain their liberty by force.” But because of the risk of caravan members being kidnapped while on the road, most traders combined with others and thus travelled in formidable force.

We know from the earliest sources that Nyamwezi caravans made similar arrangements. For instance, Kafuku’s “thousands of followers” probably represented numerous smaller ventures which, when passing through Ugogo, combined for security reasons and to save on hongo payments. An Arab trader returning to the coast from Unyamwezi sometime during the early 1840s travelled in a caravan seven hundred strong.

Krapf provides another example. In February 1850, while on a voyage down the coast, his dhow stopped at the Sinda Islands close to the coast at Mbwamaji. There, he recorded in his journal, “we met ... with many trading people from Unamesi who build little huts on the strand, and stay in them until they return homeward.” Of their caravans, he wrote, they consist generally of from three to four thousand men, that they may be strong enough to defend themselves on the way from the attacks of hostile tribes. These people had been here for several months; for they leave Unamesi [Unyamwezi] in September, and arrive in December at the coast; and return home again in March and April.

On the same voyage Krapf encountered a Kimbu caravan, which had arrived at the village of Mtotana, on the Mrima coast south of the Pangani river. He writes:

These people who came with their wives and children from the interior and lived in small huts by the seashore, told me that they spent three months on the journey; and had brought slaves and ivory ....

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65 Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, 19. Similar proscriptions and rituals were associated with elephant hunters.


67 Pickering, *The Races of Man*, 201.

68 Krapf, *Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours*, 421, journal entry 14 Feb., 1850; Roberts, “Nyamwezi Trade”, 52, f.n. 1. See also f.n.s. 34 and 35 above.
One of them said that he had been in Sofala, and brought copper thence; and they seem also to be acquainted with the west coast of Africa.69

When we combine this information about the Kimbu with that above it is clear that the Kimbu were full participants with the Nyamwezi in long-distance caravan porterage.

In the quotes from Krapf we see recognizable aspects of the trading activities and journeys of the Nyamwezi and related peoples such as the Kimbu. But an additional factor is present. Nyamwezi and Kimbu caravan porters included women and children among their numbers. Indeed, there seem to be no grounds to say that the men were porters and their families were not. As we shall see in a later chapter, on many caravans the work of porterage was shared out between the sexes and among different age groups.

This leads us to the observation made by several contemporary travellers and modern historians that one feature of Nyamwezi caravans was the relatively egalitarian nature of relations between caravan personnel and their leaders or employers. This is sometimes compared with labour relations in the caravans of coastal and Zanzibari traders, particularly Arabs, and those led by Europeans, where there was a more obvious hierarchy.70 The image of a rough egalitarianism among the Nyamwezi is probably more true for the first few decades of long-distance trade. We hear, for instance, that the sons of Nyamwezi chiefs sometimes worked as ivory carriers. An example is Fundikira, the son of Swetu of Unyanyembe. Burton was told the story of how Fundikira learned of his accession to the chiefship in the early 1840s. He

was travelling towards the coast as a porter in a caravan, when he heard of his father’s death: he at once stacked his load and prepared to return home and rule. The rest of the gang, before allowing him to depart, taunted him severely, exclaiming, partly in jest, partly in earnest, ‘Ah! now thou art still our comrade, but presently thou wilt torture and slay, fine and flog us.’71

69 Krapf, Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours, 420, 13 Feb., 1850. A slightly different version is given by Colonel Sykes, quoting Krapf’s journal, in “Notes on the Possessions of the Imaun of Muskat, on the Climate and Productions of Zanzibar, and on the Prospects of African Discovery from Mombas”. JRGS, 23 (1853), 117.

70 E.g. Burton, “Lake Regions”, 408-411; Burton, Lake Regions, 237-9. Caravan organization will be dealt with in more detail in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Another possible example is Mirambo who, it is suggested, may have worked as a porter for Arab traders in his youth. But there is no evidence from later periods that members of the aristocracy personally carried loads. A more usual role among the Nyamwezi was for the sons of chiefs to lead caravans and act as commercial agents for their fathers, although this meant that they mixed freely with commoners. From about the middle of the century there is plenty of evidence for the rise of a Nyamwezi merchant class or "bourgeoisie", the vbandevba, of mixed aristocratic and commoner origin, who took profit making seriously. The process is described in detail by Unomah, and is one of the main themes of his thesis. The result was the emergence of greater class divisions within Nyamwezi society, which were represented in the caravans.

We also know that the Nyamwezi used donkeys as beasts of burden, although never in sufficient numbers to replace human carriers. For one thing they were not suited to carrying ivory, but instead were used to carry other trade goods and probably provisions. In 1831 Lief bin Said noted the numerous asses in Unyamwezi and in 1845 Cooley had written of the use of donkeys by the Nyamwezi as beasts of burden. Numerous later writers commented on the use of donkeys in Nyamwezi caravans. But Roberts believes that Nyamwezi donkeys were less used towards the end of the century. These animals were quite small compared with the prized white Muscat donkeys ridden by some Arab traders, and apparently hard to manage, but they were very useful having acquired a degree of immunity to trypanosomiasis.

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72 Unomah, Mirambo, 13.
73 Unomah, Mirambo, 14.
74 Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 86-121. See also Sheriff, 180-1, 193-4.
76 See the sources mentioned in Roberts, “Nyamwezi Trade”, 58, and in Kjekshus, Ecology Control and Economic Development, 119.
At the coast by mid-century there was a considerable demand for porters to make up caravans for the far interior. In the Swahili “History of former times in Bagamoyo” there is a clear statement of the recognized value of going on safari, as opposed to staying at home. The period referred to is after the abolition, sometime during the reign of Sultan Majid (1856-70), of the tax known as the *kanda la Pazi* or *hongo la Pazi*, paid by the *madiwan* (headmen) of Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam to the Zaramo. The text reads, “The strongest men went on safaris up-country, while the fools occupied themselves washing their clothes and swaggering about the town — with no food in their homes.” The good economic sense of going on safari, (whether this be through profit making in trade or the earning of wages is unclear), is emphasized. Profiteering from the organization of caravans and porterage was of interest to all levels of society, as a more detailed account from Burton tells us:

The coast Arabs and the Wámrimá have, besides deceiving caravans [i.e. Nyamwezi caravans], another ... escape from poverty. The lower classes hire themselves to merchants as porters into the interior: they receive daily rations of grain, and a total hire of 10 dols., half of which is paid in advance ... Respectable men, by promising usurious interest to the Banyans, can always borrow capital enough to muster a few loads, and then they combine to form one large caravan. The wealthier have houses, wives, and families in Unyamwezi as well as upon the coast ...

The question as to whether caravan porters were primarily traders, or workers employed by others, or slaves, or some combination, is a complex one. The organization of caravan labour was closely connected to the relations of production in the home society of the porters, and differed on each of the main route clusters. Glassman makes a similar point, although he narrowly describes the contrast in terms of struggles over culture, and identity politics in the coastal termini of the main routes. It is my contention that as economic, 


social and political change occurred in the interior and at the coast, the terms of caravan labour also changed, but within a framework which was already well established by the middle of the century. These changes will be explored in the course of the thesis. Culture was just as much a part of this framework as economics, society and politics, but not in the way that Glassman has depicted it. Glassman argues that the Swahili culture of the northern Mrima dominated up-country porters at the coast, who were either passive receptors or frustrated repudiators of it. In contrast, the culture that I will describe below (chapters six, seven and eight) was the caravan culture of the central routes, a culture which influenced the coast as well as other regions. In other words the spread of cultural influences was a two way street. Caravan culture, which was basically Nyamwezi in origin, influenced people from the coast, just as much as up-country porters were exposed to the values of ustaarabu or uuungwana (coastal civilization). Returning to the issue which introduced this paragraph, at this point I will only deal with the evidence for the period before 1857. Later change in the organization of caravan labour is dealt with in chapters three, four and six.

The caravan system was, of course, a trading system. Although the Sagara migrations provided the opportunity, the motor was demand and therefore profit. Regional trade in both western and eastern Tanzania was extended to form the basis for long-distance trade, as local and regional economies were connected with the international economic system. This was true in two senses. Spatially, the regional routes connected together formed the long-distance routes. Secondly, the two trading networks interacted, with “regional trade providing the capital, as it were, for long-distance enterprise, while long-distance trade provided new incentives for more intensive regional production and exchange.” Even before the advent of the long distance trade in ivory and slaves in western Tanzania, people were travelling great distances to meet their own needs for basic products such as salt and iron.81

81 Roberts, “Nyamwezi Trade”, 41, 47.
Several writers have argued that in these enterprises, as well as those involving long
distance trade, Nyamwezi traders and porters were often the same person. For instance
Roberts writes,

A young man often used the wages earned on safari (which were usually paid in cloth) to begin trading
on his own account. On his second or third expedition he might carry two small tusks of his own; with
experience, he might become a caravan guide (kiongozi) and thus earn much more cloth for
investment, and eventually he might become rich enough to fit out a caravan of his own.82

This view is true to a point. However, the porter described by Roberts may not be at all
typical. There are three problems. First of all, the example does not take into account
changes in the status of caravan porters over the nineteenth century. Second, the quote
suggests that it might be normal for a Nyamwezi porter to trade “on his own account” instead
of, as I suggest, as part of a “firm.” Although the individual trader surely was common, and
there is plenty of evidence suggesting this, there is also considerable material showing that
the smaller Nyamwezi traders-cum-porters often worked on behalf of a corporate group
whose members were the family or lineage.83 What might have appeared to casual observers
as “individual” trading activities may or may not have been so. Finally, the image portrayed
does not account for increasing proletarianization of porters on the central routes, despite
continuing attachment to the land.84 Thus, the image portrayed by Roberts may well be at
least partially true for the early and middle decades of the century, but is rather less likely to
be accurate for the last three or four decades.


83 This question will be dealt with in chapter five.

84 Cummings, Iliffe, Sheriff, and Glassman all point to a process of proletarianization. Doubters include Nolan
and Koponen. Their views will be critiqued in chapters 5, 6 and 9, where I will discuss more fully porters as
workers.
Chapter Four
The Nyamwezi: People, Production and Porterage

Driven out by poverty one man goes to hoe,
The other is like dust blown away to the coast
As porter.
For me my medicines are the coast.
I sitting at home am myself the whirlwind.
You the medicines may make foolish, but not me."¹

(Old Nyamwezi song.)

The Nyamwezi and related peoples dominated long-distance porterage along the central routes throughout the nineteenth century. They were also well represented in caravans travelling the northern and southern routes. The main factor underlying Nyamwezi porterage, and ultimately extensive involvement in migrant labour during the early colonial period, was the nature of the Nyamwezi economy and the development of a system of production and social relations peculiar to the Nyamwezi. Most other peoples of nineteenth century Tanzania were unable to make or were not interested in making the same choices for reasons related to their local environments, histories, economies and social development. Where they did take part in the caravan trade and porterage, as the Swahili and Yao did, different local factors came into play. My aim in this chapter is to isolate the underlying structures of Nyamwezi society which helped make the adaptations to porterage and migrant labour possible prior to the imposition of the colonial political economy.

The key to the ability of the Nyamwezi to combine long distance trade and caravan porterage with adequate agricultural production lay in the organization of the social relations of production. As explained in chapter three, most Nyamwezi porters were still attached to the land. Between journeys they returned to their family homesteads, and after retirement from porterage they continued to work as farmers. A major influence on the ability of Nyamwezi men to leave home was the rhythm of the agricultural cycle. Most Nyamwezi

porters preferred to go on safari only after planting was complete and during the dry season. Given that the agricultural cycle was a key factor, we need an analysis of production and of the management strategies that freed many Nyamwezi men, and also women, for long-distance porterage. Agriculture was important in another sense. Food production was vital for the social reproduction of labour power in the household and village.

This chapter will concentrate on the division of labour, particularly the role of women. Changes in the labour supply will be addressed. In the first section I will discuss explanations of the predilection of the Nyamwezi for caravan work. Structural forces can be divided into those which stress political conditions, environmental causes, or cultural factors. Individual motives, including personal economic gain, will be dealt with in the next chapter. As Sharon Stichter points out, there is no reason why a choice needs to be made between analysis at a structural or individual level. Both are useful. The second and third sections introduce the environment of Unyamwezi and Nyamwezi agricultural production, specifically the main crops and productive techniques. As Alfred Unomah wrote over twenty years ago, the agricultural history of Unyamwezi has yet to be written. This is still the case, despite the historical importance of the region. The fourth, fifth and sixth sections discuss the structures and practices within Nyamwezi society, particularly those related to the organization of the social relations of production and labour supply, which enabled and facilitated long absences from home of a large proportion of young adults. These are the sexual division of labour, the immigration of Tutsi cattle herders, and the importation of slaves. The local mixed farming

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3 For a discussion of biological and social reproduction in nineteenth century Tanzania see Juhani Koponen, People and Production in Late Precolonial Tanzania (Jyväskylä, 1988), 308-332. The Nyamwezi are included.

economy was changing due to increased commercial opportunities and the availability of new sources of labour. Female expertise and labour became increasingly important for the management of agricultural production. Tutsi herders from neighbouring Buha and Burundi took over the care of most livestock, and increasing numbers of slaves were utilized as cultivators. In addition, it seems possible that as agriculture became more commercialized and porters brought home wages, shortfalls in production which in earlier times were made up by dipping into grain reserves could be overcome by purchasing grain on the market. A clear understanding of the last point would necessitate a study of markets and prices, which is beyond the scope of this study. These innovations made it easier for porters to be absent for longer periods as the ivory frontier expanded.

Modern scholars studying the pre-colonial and early colonial Nyamwezi must rely on early ethnographic and economic works. Because of the prominence of the Nyamwezi as first, traders and porters, then, during the early twentieth century, as migrant railway construction and plantation workers, agricultural producers, and members of the Schutztruppe, a substantial body of literature on them was produced by missionaries, explorers, scientists, early colonial officials, and educated Africans. Most of this is in German, but the earliest reports are in English. Detailed first-hand accounts begin with the works of Burton, Speke, and Grant. As missionaries and other European travellers became

5 An indication of the development of the market for foodstuffs along the central route, no doubt applying particularly to Unyamwezi, is given by Speke: "The Zanzibar route to Ujiji is now so constantly travelled over... that the people, seeing the caravans approach, erect temporary markets, or come hawking things for sale, and the prices are adapted to the abilities of the purchasers [i.e. the principles of supply and demand applied]... It is also to be observed that where things are brought for sale, they are invariably cheaper than in those places where one has to seek and ask for them; for in the one instance a livelihood is the consequence of trade, whereas in the other a chance purchaser is treated as a windfall to be made the most of." John Hanning Speke, *What Led to the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh and London, 1864), 357. See also Alfred C. Unomah and J. B. Webster, "East Africa: the Expansion of Commerce", in John Flint, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa* (London, 1976), V, 296.

6 Political reports and accounts of journeys in Unyamwezi are excluded, except for the early and important publications of Burton, Speke, and Grant.

familiar with the Nyamwezi and their homeland further accounts were published during the 1870s and early 1880s. With the onset of the German conquests in the mid-1880s, the increasing demand for information about the interior of the new colony of Deutsch Ostafrika led to the writing of numerous studies and reports for specialist journals and official files. In the meantime, work had begun on setting down the grammar and vocabulary of the various Nyamwezi dialects. Scholars began to take a professional interest in the preparation of ethnographic and economic material. Further material was collected and published by


missionaries and mission educated Africans. In the 1930s a major three volume work was published under mission auspices. After the First World War and the establishment of British rule colonial officials and others undertook new researches, mostly of a more specialized nature.

Why the Nyamwezi?

The Nyamwezi and related groups (the Sumbwa and Kimbu) were alone among the peoples of the interior to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the Sagara migrations of the early eighteenth century. No other group utilized in the same way the new direct connection between the western interior and the coast. What was it about the Nyamwezi which was different, which encouraged them to organize and participate in caravans to the coast and the furthest parts of east and central Africa?

One factor which may have encouraged the early development of local and regional trade in Unyamwezi, and ultimately long-distance travel and caravan porterage, was the prevailing condition of peace and stability. There is no evidence for attacks by outsiders until the middle of the nineteenth century, when parts of Ukimbu, Unyamwezi, and Usumbwa were attacked by the migrating Ngoni, known as the Watuta. Prior to this, ...

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13 Wilhelm Blohm, Die Nyamwezi, 3 vols. (Hamburg, 1931, 1933). The excellent bibliography contains many more references to the German literature.


15 See chapter two.

16 This idea is borrowed from Alfred C. Unomah, Mirambo of Tanzania (London, 1977), 7.

conflict was limited to occasional small-scale raiding of one Nyamwezi chiefdom by another. In contrast, many peoples to the east, such as the Gogo and Sagara, were subject to raiding by the Nyaturu and Maasai, and in the Sagara case, the Swahili. The Nyamwezi were relatively immune because of their smaller cattle herds. To the west the Ha had to accept Tutsi overlordship, but the Nyamwezi were left alone. In the interlacustrine area to the north-west there was constant fighting, especially between the powerful kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro-Kitara. To the south and south-west related peoples such as the Konongo and Kimbu were no threat. Stability and peace meant relative security for merchants and travellers of all kinds. By the time of the Unyanyembe civil war in the 1860s and the conflict between Unyanyembe and its Arab allies and Mirambo in the 1870s and 1880s, the Nyamwezi caravan system was long established.

A long period of peace enabled the Nyamwezi to utilize other advantages which they possessed. Several writers have pointed to the distribution of natural resources in western Tanzania and the central position of the Nyamwezi in the regional trading system.18 The Nyamwezi were essentially cultivators, producing among other crops various grains, pulses, potatoes, pumpkins and tobacco. But because Unyamwezi is a little more forested than neighbouring territories, they were able to exploit forest products such as honey, make baskets, wooden utensils, and bark cloth, and hunt wildlife. Lacking iron ore and good quality salt, the Nyamwezi had to exchange their products for Sumbwa and Konongo iron, and salt from the Uvinza pans. Other neighbours, especially the Gogo, Sukuma, and Ha, kept large cattle herds. The Nyamwezi exchanged their grain, bark cloth, honey, and other products for the cattle and hides of the herders. The position of the Nyamwezi in the centre of the regional trading system of western Tanzania, between the producers of salt and iron in

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the west, and the consumers of iron to the east and south, made them ideal intermediaries. The organization of the sexual division of labour, the absence at first of large herds of cattle, and the utilization of immigrant and slave labour, left them free to travel during the dry season when there was little work in the fields. In contrast, the nature of the local economies of other peoples in central and western Tanzania made it impossible for large numbers to be absent at any one time.

The geographical location of Unyamwezi became even more important when the main routes to and from the coast shifted from the Ruaha river line to the central route network through Ugogo and Unyanyembe. Location is not adequate in itself to explain the central role of the Nyamwezi, but other trading peoples including the Yao, Swahili and, further north, the Kamba, were all based in strategic positions for the caravan trade.

Some scholars believe that an important reason for the emergence of travel and porterage as major features of Nyamwezi society was "the recurrent severe famines in Unyamwezi," which made it necessary for the Nyamwezi to find additional means of supporting themselves beyond their traditional agricultural and pastoral activities. On the surface this is a reasonable argument. There is considerable circumstantial evidence that famine in the homeland of another important East African group — the Kamba of Kenya — encouraged them to travel and work as long-distance traders and porters from the late eighteenth century. At the end of the nineteenth century famine in central Kenya contributed, among other factors, to a flood of Kamba seeking work as porters. A British colonial official reported that:

19 See chapter 2.


During the last six months the Wakamba of Mumoni (Kitui district) have engaged in thousands, in consequence of the famine, for transport from Railhead to Machakos and Kikuyu ... fully 10,000 loads have been carried up-country by these Wakamba in connection with the Uganda relief expedition and their passage up and down through Kikuyu and Ulu has been a great strain on our food resources.  

In the case of the Amatonga of southern Mozambique famine combined with war and disease helped prompt young men to travel and seek work in Natal during the early 1860s. But despite local shortages, Unyamwezi is less prone to drought and famine than many other parts of Tanzania, including regions along the central routes. The numerous swamps or mbuga (Kinyamwezi) provide reservoirs of water not present to the same degree in, for instance, Uzaramo, Usagara, or Ugogo. If famine was the main reason the Nyamwezi turned to long-distance trade and porterage in such numbers then it has to be wondered why other groups did not do so. All of these peoples are closer to the coast than the Nyamwezi, and were affected by famine at various times in their history. In the case of the Gogo it was the nature of their economy, with its heavy emphasis on both livestock rearing and the cultivation of millet, sorghum, maize, watermelons, pumpkins, and other crops, which made porterage unattractive. There was too much work at home throughout the year for the Gogo to be absent for months at a time. Sissons tell us that “There was no way of integrating a travelling occupation, such as long distance trade during dry season months, with the demands of the agricultural cycle. Few men travelled outside Ugogo.”

In Unyamwezi the demands of local economies both impelled people towards porterage and detained them at home for part of the year. As porterage as a way of life became imbedded in Nyamwezi culture, as among some other travelling peoples, it included rewards for those who journeyed, which were expressed as a mark of Nyamwezi

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24 See below.

distinctiveness. Over a period the success of Nyamwezi trading initiatives, which brought wealth and the taste for adventure, ensured an important place for travel among Nyamwezi cultural icons. Society’s values encouraged the young to travel as traders or porters. These outward expressions suggested themselves to numerous nineteenth century writers who proposed a cultural explanation for the Nyamwezi predilection for porterage. One described the Nyamwezi as

the professional transport-agents of the East Coast. Not one of them was allowed to marry before he had carried a load of ivory to the coast, and brought back one of calico or brass-wire. It was the tribal stamp of true manhood, at once making him a citizen and warrior.26

Nyamwezi porters arriving at Zanzibar told Edward Steere that they considered any of their compatriots who never undertook a journey to the coast as a “milksop.” To reflect their heightened status in their own society, Nyamwezi men who had reached the coast would often change their names to mark the significance of their visit.27 Other Europeans who visited Unyamwezi noted that youths would copy the experienced men by walking around with mock loads.28 These outward signs have sometimes been picked up by modern writers. For instance, one distinguished historian has written, “Every enterprising Nyamwezi considered himself bound to set forth on a long and usually dangerous journey to distant markets, especially to those of the very different world of the Arab-influenced coast ...” Other historians have pointed out that porterage became a test of manliness among the Nyamwezi. The most extreme version of this view is expressed by Jonathon Glassman, who has recently written, “[Nyamwezi] caravan labor was seen not as a way to earn a living, but as a way to prove one’s manhood.”29


28 Reichard, “Die Wanjamuesi”, 259; Bennett, Mirambo, 12.

This discussion and what follows should help clear up the confusion in discussions of causal explanations between outward manifestations of migrant labour such as cultural expressions or the personal search for gain, and the underlying socio-economic causes. This important distinction was made long ago in a classic article by J. Clyde Mitchell.\textsuperscript{30} The explanation for the uniqueness of Nyamwezi long-distance trading activities, porterage, and attraction to migrant labour has a lot more to do with local economics and social dynamics than culture, political history, or geography. It is unlikely that journeys to the coast could have had much cultural significance before they became the norm. The Nyamwezi were only able to utilize the advantages they possessed, described above, because of certain characteristics in the social and economic structure of their homeland. As Kjekshus has pointed out, we must look to local factors as well as external forces when considering the expansion of the caravan trade and porterage.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{The Nyamwezi and Their Environment}

Before the issues relating to agricultural labour are dealt with an overview of some aspects of the Nyamwezi farming economy and environment is necessary. As in other parts of East Africa the management of the often harsh environment was essential for successful cultivation and livestock keeping. Nyamwezi farmers made the most of their natural and human resources, and their success is frequently attested to in early sources. Many travellers, missionaries, and colonial officials praised the industriousness and productivity of Nyamwezi farmers. Probably the first non-African to visit the country of the Nyamwezi was Musa Mzuri, who in about 1825 began a long association with his Nyamwezi hosts. Unyamwezi

\textsuperscript{30} J. Clyde Mitchell, "The Causes of Labour Migration", reprinted in Abebe Zegeye and Shubi Ishemo, eds., \textit{Forced Labour and Migration: Patterns of Movement Within Africa} (London, Munich, New York, 1989), 28-54. I will return to this issue again in chapter nine in the guise of a theoretical discussion of migrant labour in pre-colonial Tanzania. There it will be seen that long-distance porterage was a specific kind of migrant labour, although one with important differences from the more familiar migrant labour systems of the colonial period.

was at that time “richly cultivated,” he told Burton in 1858, when the wealth of the country was still evident. Burton, in a frequently quoted passage, forms an image of a satisfied peasantry, well provided for from their fields and herds.

The Land of the Moon, which is the garden of Central Intertropical Africa, presents an aspect of peaceful rural beauty which soothes the eye like a medicine after the red glare of barren Ugogo, and the dark monotonous verdure of the western provinces. The inhabitants are comparatively numerous in the villages, which rise at short intervals above their impervious walls of the lustrous green milk-bush, with its coral-shaped arms, variegating the well-hoed plains; while in the pasture-lands frequent herds of many-colored cattle, plump, round-barreled, and high-humped, like the Indian breeds, and mingled with flocks of goats and sheep dispersed over the landscape, suggest ideas of barbarous comfort and plenty.32

Burton also provides glimpses of the productivity of localities along the road. Passing through eastern Unyamwezi in November 1857, he found that the chiefdom of Rubuga was “celebrated for its milk and meat, ghee and honey.” A little further on the expedition walked through another cultivated stretch, in hilly Ukona, “where the cannabis and the datura ... disputed the ground with brinjalls and castor-plants, holcus and panicum: tobacco grew luxuriantly, and cotton-plots, carefully hedged round against the cattle, afforded material for the loom.” The country on the east side of Unyanyembe he described as “prepossessing,” with its “surrounding rice fields,” “golden stubble” and “well-hoed” ground. Usaguzi, in the far west of Unyamwezi, the recipient of higher rainfall than the eastern side was, he said, “laid out in alternate seams of grassy plains, dense jungle, and fertile field. The soil is a dark vegetable humus, which bears luxuriant crops of grain, vegetables, and tobacco: honey-logs hang upon every large tree, [and] cattle are sold to travelers.”33 In nearby Msene, in southern Usambwa, Burton, who was no doubt influenced by prevailing images in Europe of tropical bountifulness and fertility,34 waxed lyrical on the agricultural productivity of the locality:

Fertilized by a wet monsoon, whose floods from the middle of October to May are interrupted only by bursts of fervent heat, the fat, black soil ... reproduces abundantly anything committed to it .... Rice of the red quality — the white is rare and dear — grows with a density and a rapidity unknown in Eastern Unyamwezi. Holcus and millet, maize and manioc, are plentiful enough to be exported. Magnificent


33 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 191-2; Lake Regions, 423, 222, 225, 275. It should be noted that Burton’s experience of Unyamwezi was during the wet season.

Northern Unyamwezi was just as productive. In July 1858, early in the dry season and soon after harvest time, Speke was in Unyambewa, north of Unyanyembe. Here there were numerous villages, “and,” he wrote, “the country, after passing through the forest, is highly cultivated.” In Ukamba, a little to the north, he found that “the country here ... abounds in flesh, milk, eggs, and vegetables in every variety.”

Later travellers provide similar accounts. Annie Hore tells us of the countryside crossed on the six days march through eastern Unyamwezi to Tabora in 1884: “The way was through an almost continuous series of gardens, surrounding the numerous villages, some of which were ... formed by a very large tembe, enclosing within its area many fine conical-roofed huts ...” The districts around Unyanyembe were even wealthier. The chiefs were “well-to-do,” and provided milk and fruit to the Hores, while there was plenty of food for the porters to buy. Of western Unyamwezi between Tabora and Iselamagazi, Mirambo’s capital, she writes “The whole distance of this march, as indeed were several in Unyamwezi, was over cultivated ground.” In 1893 Urambo was described as “thickly strewn with villages.” Southern Unyamwezi was said in 1880 to be “a succession of well cultivated plains, some of which are wooded.”

The trader Phillipe Broyon wrote more generally that “The Wanyamwesi, although they are travellers and traders, generally remain at home at seed-time and harvest; they are for the most part good agriculturists, and for this reason provisions are always abundant in their country.”

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38 Broyon-Mirambo, “Description of Unyamwesi”, 36.
Unyamwezi is part of the central plateau of Tanzania, with most land lying at an altitude of a little above or below 4,000 feet. The rolling country is in places broken by high granite outcrops, but more usually consists of a succession of low ranges, shallow valleys, and broad plains. Beyond densely populated central Unyamwezi, settled areas alternated with strips of woodland or forest from five to twenty kilometres or more wide. During the rainy season the valleys are flooded for months at a time, creating extensive marshlands. The mbuga have been a mixed blessing for the Nyamwezi. Extensive flooding hinders movement during the wet season and provides suitable breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Until the second quarter of the nineteenth century the swampland was not utilized for agriculture. But settlements were sited near mbuga because of their usefulness as water supplies during the long dry season. Perennial streams are rare in Unyamwezi, hence proximity to slowly evaporating surface water was the foundation of survival. Wells were dug in the dry mbuga beds. In addition, mbuga were sources of small numbers of fish, poor quality salt, and clay for pottery. But with the introduction of Asian rice, access to mbuga became much more important for Nyamwezi cultivators. In the process the total area of cultivable land was significantly increased. Rice was particularly suited to mbuga cultivation due to the more or less regular flooding during the rainy season. Rice of excellent quality eventually became one of the most important crops of the region.

In Unyamwezi the rains, or masika, begin in November and continue until April or May. From that time there is almost no rain until October or November. Average precipitation in the west of the region is about 40 inches, and in the east 25 to 30 inches, with the bulk of it falling between December and March. During the dry season the rivers and swamps evaporate, and the vegetation turns brown. But at least one resident believed that:

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39 This and the following paragraph are largely based on Burton, "Lake Regions", 170; Lake Regions, 286; Alfred C. Unomah, "Economic Expansion and Political Change in Unyanyembe, c. 1840-1900" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1972), 2-8; Francis Patrick Nolan, "Christianity in Unyamwezi, 1878-1928" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1977), 24-5; Kjekshus, Ecology Control, 43.
evaporation is slower in Unyamwezi than in regions with a lower altitude because dry season temperatures are comparatively moderate.\textsuperscript{40} The main problem from the farmers’ point of view is the irregularity of rainfall, both in terms of total precipitation from year to year, and distribution within a particular year. Thus droughts have been common through Nyamwezi history, but because they were localized, districts with a grain surplus could assist those with a deficit.\textsuperscript{41}

The soils of Unyamwezi are typically of a light sandy type or, in mbugas, a sandy clay. Others of red fossil, hard-pan, or alluvial types are found locally.\textsuperscript{42} Most soils are relatively poor, however, and even virgin forest soils, especially in miombo (brachystegia) woodland, are often very infertile when cultivated for the first time. This is partly due to a shortage of nitrogen, which is monopolized by bacteria breaking down the plant residue. Partial compensation comes from the burning of remaining bush before cultivation begins.\textsuperscript{43} Nyamwezi farmers are well aware of the characteristics of the various soils. According to N.V. Rounce, Senior Agricultural Officer in the British colonial administration, the soil nomenclature of the Nyamwezi is “very comprehensive, and far better than the English one of sand-loam-clay and the intermediate types.”\textsuperscript{44}

From early times the Nyamwezi have responded in several ways to the challenge of a difficult environment and sometimes insecure conditions for cultivation. These strategies for managing risk and maintaining productivity can be categorized in terms of the ritual, social, and technical.\textsuperscript{45} Adherence to rituals and customs by the watemi, Nyamwezi chiefs with a

\textsuperscript{40} Decle, \textit{Three Years in Savage Africa}, 350; Southon, “The History, Country and People of Unyamwezi”. II. 3.

\textsuperscript{41} Blohm, \textit{Die Nyamwezi}, I. 126; Koponen, \textit{People and Production}, 135. Nyamwezi farmers even took their produce through the Mgunda Mkali to Ugogo during times of shortage there, as during the severe 1884 famine. See Hore, \textit{To Lake Tanganyika}, 120.

\textsuperscript{42} N. V. Rounce, \textit{The Agriculture of the Cultivation Steppe of the Lake, Western and Central Provinces} (Cape Town, 1949), 99.

\textsuperscript{43} Rounce, \textit{The Agriculture of the Cultivation Steppe}, 9.

\textsuperscript{44} Rounce, “The Banyamwezi at Home”, 302.

\textsuperscript{45} My discussion of ritual and social protections is largely based on Unomah, “Economic expansion”, 4-6.
strong ritual function, guarded against the possibility of inadequate rainfall. It was the responsibility of the mtemi and his or her officials to maintain a good relationship with the chiefly ancestral spirits. In this way droughts or epidemics sent by offended ancestors responding to the failure of rulers to fulfill their obligations might be avoided.

Food security was also assisted by the political and social organization of Nyamwezi chiefdoms, which enabled communities to store generally adequate grain reserves obtained through taxation. Unomah shows how in Unyanyembe all adult males with their own farms paid a tax in grain or livestock to the mtemi. The chiefs maintained a central grain store (masongoro) administered by their officials. From this store the food requirements of the state were drawn, and often grain was redistributed to the poor, elderly and sick who requested assistance. A second reserve of food stocks under the control of subordinate chiefs was the mtemi’s farm, or shamba lya mtemi, which existed in each locality. This “royal reserve” (hungugu) could be broached in times of shortage or reallocated from unaffected areas to those suffering famine. According to Unomah, the hungugu was an effective insurance system which limited the impact of famines in Unyanyembe until it was abolished during the early colonial period. A third reserve, the product of each family’s fields, was the household granary consisting of bark boxes, often of “enormous size,” such as those described by Cameron in Uganda, southern Unyamwezi, in 1873. If famine did occur on a local scale, people had the further option of travelling to neighbourhoods less affected to buy food. When the party bearing Livingstone’s body to Bagamoyo passed through famine afflicted Nguru, south east Unyamwezi, in December 1873, Jacob Wainwright recorded that “many travel to Uganda to buy seed corn for domestic use.”


47 Verney Lovett Cameron, Across Africa (London, 1877), I, 191; also Burton, Lake Regions, 255.

The Techniques of Agricultural Production

The most popular grain crops in nineteenth century Unyamwezi were *pennisetum* (bulrush millet, *mawele*: Kiswahili) and the numerous varieties of *sorghum* ("Guinea corn", *mtama*: Kiswahili), both of African origin. *Pennisetum* has the enormous advantage of producing a good crop in soils too poor for any other grain. *Sorghum* was preferred in areas of heavier soils, such as the *mbugas*. Although not as resistant to pests and disease as *pennisetum*, it was more reliable than maize, which was nevertheless entering many parts of western Tanzania from the coast during the nineteenth century. *Maize* had the advantage of higher yields than the African grains, and was suitable as an early crop and for intercropping with *pennisetum* or *sorghum*. According to most sources it remained a minor crop in this period, although in 1880 Southon gave it third ranking in importance after millet and *sorghum*.49 Another grain of foreign origin was white rice, which was of increasing importance after its introduction, partly because it was carried by porters as rations. In the 1840s Pickering heard from his Kimbu informants that the "Monomoisy cultivate 'paddy' or *rice*, also *peas ... beans, pea-nuts ... sweet potatoes, cassada* [cassava] and 'Hindi' corn [maize]." It is generally assumed that rice was brought into the interior by coastal traders, but given this early date it seems just as likely that Nyamwezi trader-porters introduced the crop to their homeland. This is Kjekshus’ view, and is supported by his evidence that the main rice growing areas around 1900 were in western Unyamwezi (Urambo, Ubagwe, Umakarundi, Ugunda) localities where coastal influence was not as great as in Unyanyembe, but well connected to the central routes. However, it is not clear whether red or white rice is referred to, and during the late 1850s it seems that outside Unyanyembe the white variety was

still a minor crop.\textsuperscript{50} This question needs further research. Certainly rice was planted in the wet lands by villagers on the western edge of Unyanyembe in 1872. A few years later Broyon noted that "much rice" was cultivated in Unyamwezi. He was probably referring to Unyanyembe and Urambo. In 1878 a missionary observed that "the great plateau of the Interior between Ugogo and the Lakes is so much of a swamp that fields of rice are frequently to be found many acres in extent." Production was such that prices in Unyanyembe, Uyui, and Urambo were competitive with other grains, although elsewhere it was more expensive. In the same year LMS missionaries bought rice flour at Ikonongo in Urambo. In 1880 Southon, who lived in Urambo, wrote that "In every damp valley and marshy place, large fields of rice are seen. It ... seems to be gaining favour with the Wanyamwezi."\textsuperscript{51} About the same time the CMS missionary at Uyui was feeding mission employees with local rice. The significance of rice was that it provided a high yield crop which, because it was cultivated according to traditional ridge techniques, did not entail significant extra labour.\textsuperscript{52} Thus the introduction of white rice must have had the effect of reducing overall agricultural labour inputs. Other significant food crops included cassava, sweet potatoes, beans of various types, and groundnuts, as well as several kinds of bananas.

\textsuperscript{50} The quote is from Charles Pickering, \textit{The Races of Man and Their Geographical Distribution} (London, 1850), 203 (italics in original). Kjekshus, \textit{Ecology Control}, 43. Dissenters might argue that Pickering’s Kimbu were referring to red rice, but, given the reference to "paddy", we can assume he was referring to the white variety. For a discussion of the traditional view of the introduction of white rice see Roberts, \"Nyamwezi Trade\", 62-3; Ehret, \"East African Words and Things\", 157-9; Koponen, \textit{People and Production}, 238. For rice cultivation during the early colonial period see Rounce, \textit{Agriculture}, 56-62. For comments suggesting a relative scarcity of white rice outside Unyanyembe see Burton, \"Lake Regions\", 189; \textit{Lake Regions}, 270, quoted above; Speke, \textit{What Led}, 371; Speke, \textit{Journal}, 116. The reports of travellers are perhaps less reliable than those of long-term residents such as missionaries.


\textsuperscript{52} Rounce, \textit{Agriculture}, 56, 49, 53 for comparison of yields per acre of rice and other grains during the 1930s and 1940s.
pumpkins, marrows, cucumbers and tomatoes.\textsuperscript{53} Tobacco and cannabis were also grown throughout Unyamwezi and traded over a wide area.\textsuperscript{54}

The Nyamwezi, along with the neighbouring peoples of the "cultivation steppe," traditionally used grain growing techniques well suited to their environment. Among these were the practices of shifting cultivation with a crop rotation, intercropping, ridging, and green manuring. Shifting cultivation or "slash-and-burn" agriculture was widespread in the \textit{miombo} woodlands of western and southern Tanzania. Shifting cultivation has many variants, and in Tanzania it was not the single widespread system assumed by most early European travellers.\textsuperscript{55} In Unyamwezi the preferred fallow was just two or three years because fallow land, often used for grazing stock, if left longer became eroded as the animals wore down tracks around the resurgent bush. A short fallow had special advantages in the more heavily populated areas of central Unyamwezi where more extensive types of shifting cultivation were not practical. The alternative was a very long fallow, protected from cattle, to allow the soil to recover. The basic limitation was the declining fertility of the soil, and crops were rotated according to the soil's condition. "This method," Rounce writes of shifting cultivation in the \textit{miombo} woodlands, "is in fact, a type of rotation, as the reversion to weed, grass and bush can be compared with the grass fallow in the European system."\textsuperscript{56} A typical rotation might be cassava, sweet potatoes and legumes in the first year, the last mentioned important for their role in maintaining nitrogen in the soil, followed by


\textsuperscript{55} Koponen, \textit{People and Production}, 222.

\textsuperscript{56} Koponen, \textit{People and Production}, 228; the quote is from Rounce, \textit{Agriculture}, 10. For further details and variations see pp. 9-11.
pennisetum or sorghum in the second. When the soil was exhausted it was left fallow for grazing.57

The second technique practised by Nyamwezi farmers was intercropping, described as “universal” during the early colonial period. The aim was to maximize the harvest produced from a given soil and to minimize labour expended on tilling and weeding. A typical example would be a combination of certain grain crops, such as maize, with cassava and legumes, the taller crop protecting the smaller from strong winds and heavy rains, and also reducing soil erosion.58 In northern Unyamwezi in 1861 Grant saw sesame intercropped with sorghum.59 The combination of a well managed crop rotation and intercropping helped ensure maximum productivity from poor soils.

The most conspicuous technique for grain cultivation practised by the Nyamwezi, and one attracting a great deal of praise from foreign travellers and residents, was the ridging of fields. Pater Müller of the White Fathers wrote that “the Nyamwezi clear their lands most carefully and then dig furrows so deep, as even a normal plough is not able to. These are on average 50 cm. deep, however I have also seen such in potato fields which had a depth of almost 1 metre.”60 Each year before planting, the soil on the sides of the ridges was turned over so that trenches replaced them, new ridges being built up in the process. Ridging resulted in several benefits for farmers. The light soils were aerated and weeded without too much disturbance, and the heavy digging necessary if farming on the flat was much reduced. Ridges acted as drains during heavy rains and retained water at other times, because of the greater surface exposed to the rain. Where the top soil is shallow ridges also had the advantage of deepening the layer of good soil. And when farmers threw up the ridges they

57 Declc, Three Years, 350; Rounce, Agriculture, 9-10.

58 Declc, Three Years, 349; Rounce, Agriculture, 10. See also Koponen, People and Production, 227.

59 Grant, A Walk Across Africa, 60.

60 Pater Müller, from Deutsches Kolonialblatt, XVI (1905), 190-191, quoted in Gottberg, Unyamwezi, 103.
green-manured the soil by digging in weeds at the same time. There is also some evidence that Nyamwezi farmers tried to ensure constant seed quality by renewing their seed supplies every few years. Seeds were traded from far afield, such as from Ugo or Lake Tanganyika, and high-yielding varieties available locally were sought after. Agricultural tools were basic, the hoe and axe serving most purposes. According to some authorities the most significant technical weakness of Nyamwezi agriculture was the failure to systematically use cattle manure to improve fertility, although ashes from bush clearings and stubble were applied. This can perhaps be explained by the relatively short period during which cattle had been an important part of the Nyamwezi productive system prior to the German conquest. In precolonial times it was usually Tutsi cattle herders who alone cared for Nyamwezi cattle. These points will be dealt with below.

**The Farming Community and the Management of Labour**

The division of labour in African agricultural societies is a subject to which scholars have only recently given much attention. Analyses of the work of rural women are usually presented either in the context of the study of problems of economic development, or as contributions highlighting the position of women in society. But most of these works deal

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62 Koponen, *People and Production*, 104.


64 A pioneering work is Hermann Baumann, “The Division of Work According to Sex in African Hoe Culture”. *Africa*, 1, 3 (1928), 289-319.

with the colonial or post-colonial periods; there are as yet few studies which deal with women’s agricultural work in the late precolonial period. Articles by Elizabeth Eldredge and Elias Mandala, discussed below, show that it is dangerous to project backwards knowledge of agricultural labour as it was in the colonial period. Almost no original research has been carried out on the history of women’s agricultural labour in Tanzania.

The few available studies of female labour during the nineteenth century indicate that although there were similarities in each case, there were also considerable differences in the organization of household labour from region to region in eastern and southern Africa. Even in the examples given below there are gaps in our knowledge. This is partly explained by the extreme paucity of data and the differing aims of researchers. The variations in labour organization are the result of different patterns of economic development in different regions, different historical experiences, and the emergence of manifold variations in social relations and ideology. I will briefly consider the work of Carolyn Clark on the Kikuyu, Elias Mandala on the Mang’anja, and Elizabeth Eldredge on the Sotho, before discussing agricultural labour in nineteenth century Unyamwezi.


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The work of Clark and Mandala concerns rather broader issues than the division of labour or female productive work. They both suggest that it is necessary to look beyond the household to the community to assess women’s contribution to the economy and society. Clark, using a political economy approach, shows the political significance of female agricultural work in nineteenth century Kikuyu, particularly on the expanding Kikuyu frontier. She shows how the social relations of production “generate” or at least significantly influence political relations, and thus the status of women. She argues that it is “analytically false” to separate the “subsistence” (cultivation, processing, and distribution of food) from the “prestige” (long-distance trade) economies. These sectors were necessarily and ineluctably linked. Kikuyu women were partners — albeit unequal ones — with their husbands in the total political economy. Women did not have community-wide political roles, although a limited dual sex system operated. The organization of subsistence labour was most significant for women’s status given their limited formal power. Through the production of food and beer by wives, husbands were able to provide hospitality, thus increasing their prestige and influence and thus that of the household.69 Beyond the female sphere power came from trade in the products women produced. For instance, grain grown by women was traded by them to the Maasai in exchange for cattle which increased the wealth of the household. Female productivity developed the political economy of the household and community, giving women an indirect political voice through negotiation.

The weakness of Clark’s study from the historian’s point of view is that although her conceptions are theoretically useful, the lack of an analysis of historical change makes comparisons with other societies difficult. Mandala, on the other hand, deals with successive historical phases between 1860 and 1960. He argues for the matrilineal Mang’ anja of the

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lower Tchiri valley during the period of the slave trade that because agricultural work was shared on a roughly equal basis, gender status derived from non-agricultural production and local exchange where women had great influence. Women participated equally with men in salt production and trade. Women in each household were autonomous because uncles only had power over sisters’ children, not sisters themselves. In addition, Mang’anja women had formal political representation on the village council, and controlled the most important religious institutions. Thus high female status rested in the community beyond the household. This was upset by slave-raiding and then intervention by the Kololo and missionaries who established themselves after 1860 as protectors. Because Mang’anja men lacked guns, women turned to the missionaries and Kololo for protection from slave raiders. Elite women lost their communal roles as Kololo big men centralized control. Salt production and trade by free women was replaced by slave labour. But ordinary women continued as agricultural producers along with their men, first growing food crops and, from the late 1870s, sesame as a cash crop. Thus, Mandala argues, peasant women sustained their autonomy from and equality with men until the colonial period.

Women were no less important to production and the accumulation of wealth in Lesotho in the nineteenth century. “Women were the primary agents of accumulation and growth” in Basotho society, Eldredge writes.70 They were the most important force in agricultural expansion, and they were willing to innovate. In addition they were significant producers of other goods and services. Eldredge’s focus is the household rather than the community. She limits her study to women’s productive activities, choosing to exclude material relating to kinship, religion and politics. Nevertheless, she reaches broad conclusions about the “subordination” of Basotho women, suggesting that although the household is not the only site of female inequality, it remains important when considering female status, and also because most decisions about production and consumption in Lesotho were made at the household level. Men controlled the allocation of most household

resources including land, but women negotiated access according to their own interests. Because they were relatively powerless and vulnerable during times of scarcity it was in the interests of women that they lived in a prosperous household. Thus as a gender they had a vested interest in increasing production to ensure the security of themselves and their children.

Women’s productive work included gathering wild roots and vegetables, caring for pigs and poultry, hoe cultivation (men cleared virgin land), watering the fields, bird-scaring, harvesting, and threshing (although over time young men took on this work, with the women preparing food and beer for work parties). When the ox-drawn plough was introduced in the middle of the century men became responsible for all field preparation. However the use of ploughs led to a great expansion in cultivation, and as women were responsible for all other agricultural work their work load increased dramatically. Cash cropping came late to Lesotho and men never replaced women as the primary agricultural producers. Eldredge shows that women made important direct economic contributions to the household during the nineteenth century. The most important was through grain sales in exchange for livestock. Men could increase their cattle herds as a consequence of their wives’ labour. Surplus grain was also used to buy tools and other goods and services. Indirect economic contributions were also made by women through food preparation and other work. Women provided and prepared food for male work gangs who cleared land for planting.

The introduction of the plough led to some reallocation of tasks as male work gangs took over some female work in weeding, harvesting and threshing, and men took up growing winter wheat in response to the demand from the mines. With the growth of male migrant labour in the 1890s and early 1900s women’s productive labour became even more important for household survival.

Eldredge concludes that because men prevented women from gaining access to material resources in order to control female productive and reproductive powers, with the aim of ensuring female dependence, women sought to advance their position as much as
possible through their agricultural labour. "The primary role of women’s labor in cultivation therefore empowered BaSotho women, albeit in a very limited way, because they benefited directly from the fruits of their own labor — thereby exercising some control over their own fates." Men remained dominant, however, because women’s rights were realized only through their male relations.71

It can be concluded from these examples that where women lacked formal religious or political positions in the community, their major productive contribution guaranteed them a certain degree of “reserve” power through benefits deriving from their own labour, and from negotiation with their male kin. Where they had recognized community-wide roles, these added to their reserve power. We can utilize insights gained from the work of Clark, Mandala, and Eldredge for a study of women’s position and work in nineteenth century Unyamwezi, and the implications of this for porterage. For this study the question of the relative autonomy of Nyamwezi women is crucial in two respects. First, it signifies to what extent Nyamwezi women could manage their households in the absence of their men. Or to put it another way it will suggest how long male absences on safari were made possible by female labour. Second, it indicates to what extent women who accompanied caravans with or without male relatives were acting as autonomous agents, or as partners of their husbands or lovers or other kin, rather than the manipulated objects of patriarchal male porters, as implied by Glassman.72

No studies have been made of the history of the Nyamwezi household over the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, we have some knowledge of Nyamwezi community organization and the division of labour. During the nineteenth century the typical Mnyamwezi lived in a small community known as a kaya (plural makaya).73

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72 Glassman, Feasts and Riot, 59. Female porters will be considered in chapter 7.
say that there were no changes in residential patterns over the century — there were. The major commercial developments from mid-century and the introduction of large numbers of firearms led to the concentration of much of the population in larger defensible capital villages. But probably most people continued to live in makaya except when there was a serious military threat. The numerous makaya in a chiefdom were under the jurisdiction of the mteti, based at his or her capital or ikulu. A typical kaya consisted of numerous extended family units, although unrelated people were also often resident, living in either square flat roofed tembe or round thatched huts. The population might be between twenty and one hundred people. The founder or mzenga kaya was the senior resident, and had some judicial functions but was not an appointee of the mteti. If the mzenga kaya was successful and well liked then people were attracted and the kaya population increased, otherwise people could leave for another kaya or establish their own. Surrounding the kaya was land divided into family plots which was worked according to the regime of shifting cultivation described in the previous section.

Before the extension of commercial relations led to a great expansion in the ivory, cloth and slave trades, family members probably supplied most labour power. Family labour could be supplemented by bride service if a son-in-law was not able to pay bride-wealth in full. In polygynous families new wives were married during the dry season so they would be able to participate fully in farm labour during the next rainy season. Sometimes a household head would request assistance from neighbours, especially if the fields were not prepared in time for the rains. But only the better-off households with adequate grain reserves could afford this because the work gang had to be well provided with food and beer (pombe). A degree of occupational specialization is indicated by the payment of tribute by part-time

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74 The spatial organization of Urambo at the peak of Mirambo's power is described in Southon to LMS, Urambo, 8 Sept., 1879, LMS 2/2/A and Southon to Whitehouse, Urambo, 1 Nov., 1879, LMS 2/2/C. See also Unomah, "Economic Expansion", 232-3; Nolan, "Christianity in Unyamwezi", 42-8; Koponen, People and Production, 172-3, 178, 341-2, 344, 349, 353-6, 359.
fishermen and wax collectors in the form of fish or wax.\textsuperscript{75} Not all labour services were necessarily supplied by \textit{kaya} members, however. Specialist craft skills were held by outsiders in the locality who bartered their products such as bark boxes, baskets, pots, stools, mortars and pestles from village to village. Smiths practised their calling: diviners (\textit{mafumu}), medical practitioners (\textit{maganga}), experts in initiation rites and twin birth ceremonies, porcupine hunters, and others performed special services.

The earliest direct documentary evidence concerning the division of labour in Nyamwezi society comes from the reports of Burton, Speke and Grant. Although imprecise, the evidence is suggestive. In the middle of the nineteenth century, according to Burton, women controlled grain and vegetable production. Each gender grew their own tobacco. Referring to the northern Nyamwezi Grant noted that the harvesters of the rice crop were women and girls. In another passage he wrote “The women slaves are the first to rise in the early morning and they work all day, grinding corn with a stone upon a slab.” They worked hard the rest of the day harvesting grain which they carried in from the fields, cooking, and preparing food and \textit{pombe}. Some women accompanied coast bound caravans, taking their babies, and a few hired themselves out as porters.\textsuperscript{76} Unfortunately it is unclear from the context whether Grant was describing the work of all women, or just those he believed were slaves.

The brewing of \textit{pombe} was an important task, and one which Speke described as “the chief occupation of the women.” This was perhaps the case at the particular time of year (August, the dry season) of Speke’s visit to the village of Mgogua, near modern Kahama in northern Unyamwezi. Twenty years later Reichard found that brewing depended “completely on the good will of the women,” who had to “prepare meal in great quantities for it” before beginning a batch. Pombe brewing was an efficient way of extracting the


maximum nutritional value from surplus grain which could not easily be stored for long periods. "This fermented beverage ... is said to be so palatable and satisfying — for the dregs and all are drunk together — that many entirely subsist upon it," Speke writes.77

Illustrations in Speke’s published journal show women harvesting sorghum, separating the grain from the chaff with a large wooden mortar and pestle, and then grinding the grain on a stone slab. There is a description of the harvest in Ukune, matching the illustrations:

The women on the 3rd June were clipping with a knife the tops of the sorghum, putting them into baskets, and carrying the whole on their heads to the village, where the grain, after being thoroughly sun-dried, was threshed out by lines of men with long-handed rackets ... They sang and beat the grain to a chorus, winnowed it in the S. E. breeze, divided it into shares, and by the 1st of July all was housed for the year ... After the harvest, the poorer people were allowed to glean the potato, ground-nut, and grain fields, glad to have some refuse ...

In Unyanyembe in 1861 Grant noticed women walking through the fields with small implements, weeding and aerating the soil.78 In December 1873 (the early rainy season) in Uganda Cameron found that the whole population except the old women, the young children, the chief and a few elders went out to work in the fields every morning. Numerous other observers commented on the long hard work of women preparing food.79 Women also practised crafts such as pottery, and making baskets and mats, and did some construction work such as collecting udongo or clay for plastering buildings.80


79 For instance Livingstone, Last Journals, 433, 19 June, 1872, describing women husking rice and preparing maize at Kwihara, Unyanyembe. In a later account, from the early 1880s, Reichard describes women’s work in food preparation including grinding grain, drawing and carrying water, and cooking: Reichard, “Die Wanjamuesi”, 316-320.

80 Cameron, Across Africa, I, 190; Grant, A Walk Across Africa, 88; Blohm, Die Nyamwezi, I, 154, 148-50; Wolf, Central African Diaries, 281, 6 Sept., 1881.
Men were responsible, Burton writes, for livestock including cattle, goats, sheep and poultry. Grant reported that they cared for cattle, milked cows, hoed the fields in preparation for planting, took part in military duties, and in the case of some, long distance trade. In areas where cotton cloth was made, men manufactured this on simple looms. Perhaps surprisingly, Grant includes as men’s work the carrying in of firewood from forest areas. In illustrations men are depicted threshing sorghum with long rackets, as described in the quote above. Men are also shown working iron, specifically operating bellows and smithing, although it seems most likely that women collected the ore and were involved in other preparations. A few male tasks were carried out communally. We have seen that this was the case for the threshing of sorghum, as it was for house building and guard duties.

Children also had responsibilities. Girls assisted their mothers in much of the work of food preparation and household maintenance. Boys and girls cultivated the fields along with their elders. In Urambo in the wet season of 1881-82 Southon saw boys planting, hoeing, and guarding the fields. Boys also cared for goats and other livestock.

There are further descriptions of the division of labour in agriculture from the early colonial period. In 1905 a White Fathers missionary based at Ndala, north of Tabora, described Nyamwezi agricultural labour in the following terms, which despite the

81 Burton, Lake Regions, 296.
82 In most parts of Unyamwezi Tutsi men looked after cattle. See below.
83 Burton, Lake Regions, 480; Grant, A Walk Across Africa, 88. In one Nyamwezi/Sukuma creation myth the male creator, Kilya Matunda, leaves his hut to collect fuel, indicating that this had been a male task for many generations. See Hans Cory, “Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Sukuma/Nyamwezi Tribal Group”, TNR, 54 (March 1960), 15.
84 Grant, “Summary of Observations”, 249-50; Speke, Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile, 129. 103. The illustration of men threshing sorghum is reproduced on the front cover of Koponen’s People and Production. For a description of the processing of sorghum, including threshing (men’s work), and pounding in a mortar and grinding between stones (women’s work) see Cameron, Across Africa, p. 193. On probable female involvement in ironworking see Koponen, People and Production, 284-7.
85 Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 43.
86 Southon to Thompson, Urambo, 30 January 1882. LMS 4/4/A; Reichard, “Die Wanjamuesi”, 305; Koponen, People and Production, 289.
ethnocentric tone, gives us an indication of the care which Nyamwezi farmers took in their work:

Generally the Nyamwezi work very carefully, and if one wanders through the open fields after fieldwork is completed, not a blade of grass is found on the ground. Everything is neatly and tidily cleared or dug under the earth. I believe the work of a Nyamwezi cannot be distinguished from that of a European, except that the furrows could be dug somewhat more regularly. This fieldwork is shared by the men and the women. The men pile up the furrows, the women scatter the seeds and cover them with earth. 87

Female labour was probably increasing during this period as Nyamwezi men were increasingly involved in migrant wage labour as porters, railway construction labourers on the central line and plantation workers in north-east German East Africa. 88 Sometimes descriptions of female drudgery reflected stereotypes about the “lazy African male” who, of course, would be “taught” to work under the colonial system. Nevertheless, the following quote referring to western Unyamwezi does suggest the consequences of a trend which had been underway for half a century or more, and was exacerbated under colonial rule:

While the men prefer to travel about as porters, especially in the dry season, and the adult men who have not seen the coast do not enjoy a good reputation, the women have to do the work of the household. Of course the man usually helps at the commencement of field tilling, if he is there, as he also fells and sets up poles when a house is built and then roofed. But the main work ... remains the business of the woman. She has to till and clean the fields ... reap, grind and cook, she has to do the clay work for house building, etc., i.e. all work that is not done by other workers, like tailoring, smithing, weaving, etc. While the man has many opportunities to receive new impressions through his travels, the woman is and remains a workhorse. 89

Much labour was also expended on hunting and collecting in the forests of Unyamwezi. Materials for house building and wickerwork were collected by men and women, and men felled trees for timber. 90 Hunting and honey production have long been

87 Müller in Gottberg, Unyamwesi, 103. A description of planting in Urambo in 1893 shows once again that this was women’s work: Deele, Three Years, 349.


89 M. H. Löbner, “Fragebogen-Beantwortung für ganz Wanyamwezi”, 458, in Gottberg, Unyamwesi, 128. Emphasis in original. As has been seen women often travelled with caravans during the earlier part of the century, and they continued to do so into the 1880s, but opportunities for female participation declined as the caravan workforce came under closer European control. Thus the last sentence in the quote from Löbner reflects a consequence of colonization.

important activities of Nyamwezi men. Specialist honey collectors hung their bark or wood hives — which could number in the hundreds — from marked brachystegia trees, or distributed them on a territorial basis. During the dry season the honey collectors would set up camp in the forest for four to eight weeks and extract the honey and wax from the hives.91 Hunting for meat had always been important, but during the nineteenth century elephant hunting became a specialist occupation, with its own secret societies and rituals, requiring a high degree of skill and courage.92 Women gathered mushrooms in the bush near their villages, as well as the leaves of various wild plants. This was a rainy season activity, as well as a response to famine. Jacob Wainwright noted in December 1873 that in Nguru where “…famine prevailed … women and children go into the forest to search around for wild fruit to eke out their lives …” Termites and other edible insects were collected.93 Some writers have envisaged male forest pursuits before the commercial expansion of the mid-nineteenth century fulfilling a similar role to porterage in the sense that men took part in non-agricultural production during the dry season. But this argument is overstated. Most traditional hunting and gathering took place during relatively short trips; there was no wage component and few of the multiplier effects deriving from long-distance trade, wage labour, and exposure to the international economy. Most Tanzanian peoples hunted and gathered for part of their subsistence needs, but few took to porterage or migrant labour on a large scale before the colonial period. The hunting of elephants and hippopotami for their tusks and

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91 Burton, Lake Regions, 222, 466-7; Reichard, “Die Wanjamuesi”, 325; Blohm, Die Nyamwezi, I, 94-7; Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 9-10. See Shorter, Chiefship, 46-58, for the forest pursuits, including honey collection, of Kimbu men.


teeth must be considered a special case because this was not part of traditional hunting and gathering.

A combined calendar of the agricultural cycle and the workload of women and men is a useful method of comparing female and male participation in the economy. 94 It also shows how the organization of the gender division of labour allowed for the absence of large numbers of men for much of the year.

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94 I have adapted the format used in Eldredge, “Women in Production”, 719. For the Nyamwezi agricultural calendar see Grant, “Summary of Observations”, 252-53; Decle, Three Years, 349-50; Blohm, Die Nyamwezi, 1, 122. An agricultural calendar for the Sukuma, neighbours to the north, is in Buluda A. Irandala, "A History of the Babirwa of Usukuma, Tanzania, to 1890" (Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1983), 208. Note that there would have been geographical variations according to the number of cattle in local economies, whether a particular locality produced rice, the accessibility of large forest tracts and good hunting grounds, the degree of commercialization and involvement in porterage, and other factors.
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**Table 1** The annual labour cycle.

In the 1950s the division of labour remained largely the same, except that women had taken over full responsibility for the ridging of fields, perhaps a change which had taken place much earlier as suggested above, and the shelling of ground-nuts, which by this time had
become an important cash crop. Men appear to have become responsible for all building work except the final mud plastering. In the nineteenth century women were reported to have been responsible for thatching.

In addition to the crucial productive work of Nyamwezi women, in the nineteenth century they had numerous community-wide roles which tended to boost their status, increase their relative autonomy, and add to their reserve power. Women could belong to secret societies, common among the Nyamwezi, such as the Bagota and Babasana, which were connected to the birth of twins. The membership of these secret societies was geographically widespread, and brought women together. Diviners were sometimes female. Elite women had numerous opportunities to gain political influence or power. Among the important officials in each chiefdom were the chief’s main wives, who had roles in some of the royal rituals, and were usually installed at the same time that the chief acceded to the chiefship. Another important position always held by a woman was the nina wa mtemi, literally “mother of the chief.” She was usually the mtemi’s biological mother, and held the right to advise him or her. In many areas the nature of chiefship changed over the nineteenth century from ritual control to military overlordship based on control of guns and trade, and hence the nature of the above positions may also have been subject to change. For instance, it is likely that the influence of the senior wife of a mtemi was greater earlier in the nineteenth century than later. This is the implication in Tippu Tip’s discussion of his

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95 Abrahams charts the sexual division of labour as it was in the 1950s in *The Peoples of Greater Unyamwezi*, 51. His information shows women and men both bringing in firewood, the men for brewing, the women for cooking.


father's marriage to Karunde, daughter of Fundikira of Unyanyembe from his "first and chief wife," sometime after 1840: "... the chief wife at that time in Unyamwezi held power comparable with the chief, so that my father was greatly respected." Nevertheless, numerous female *watemi* are known from the late nineteenth century. The *mtemi* of the important chiefdom of Ugunda from 1882 was a woman named Ndisha, also known as Kumiloa. In the 1890s the chief of Ndala, a small chiefdom north east of Tabora, was a woman. Unyanyembe, the most important Nyamwezi chiefdom, had two female chiefs in succession after the death of Isike in 1893. These were Nyaso (ruled 1893-1899), and Karunde (ruled 1899-1917). More examples could be mentioned. Finally, women could also be important "headmen," especially in divisions not bordering enemy territory.

Although it would be difficult to claim that women had absolute equality with men in nineteenth century Nyamwezi society, there is plenty of evidence to show that they had a considerable degree of power and influence. Their productive and reproductive labour and economic independence without question made them a considerable force which could not be ignored. Combined with their political and ritual powers, this gave them a high degree of autonomy. In addition some women could accumulate property such as houses, cattle and rights to land, starting with an inheritance if widowed. Unlike the practice in many


101 A degree of gender inequality is suggested by the observation in the early 1880s that in southern Unyamwezi women were forbidden to eat meat. This was a region relatively poor in cattle and other sources of protein. See Reichard, “Die Wanjamuesi”, 321.

surrounding societies Nyamwezi women were not circumcised.\textsuperscript{103} And although polygyny was not uncommon, most men had only one wife.\textsuperscript{104}

\textbf{New Sources of Labour: The Tutsi}

If many women were well positioned to maintain production and assert themselves in the absence of their porter and trader husbands, or to make free choices as to whether or not they should accompany their men on caravan safaris, the commercialization of aspects of the regional economy in the middle decades of the century made their task easier. New sources of labour became available, in particular from Tutsi immigrants who cared for livestock, and slaves, who could be put to work in the productive sectors. The introduction of these outsiders into Nyamwezi society and its implications has in neither case been researched. Detailed investigations are beyond the scope of this thesis. According to Unomah and Koponen, cattle were not significant in the Nyamwezi economy before the second quarter of the nineteenth century, except perhaps in the north.\textsuperscript{105} The social adaptations and skills necessary for cattle herding were not present in most parts of Unyamwezi. Nyamwezi men had neither the inclination nor the skills to specialize in cattle herding. Tutsi pastoralists were only attracted to Unyamwezi after the commercial expansion was underway because it was only then that wealth from the ivory trade and other sources was available for investment in cattle. The result was that Tutsi immigrants, attracted by the new opportunities, came to an arrangement with their hosts to care for the latters' cattle. This relationship enabled successful Nyamwezi traders and porters to continue to operate caravans and at the same time invest in cattle.

\textsuperscript{103} Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 295; Koponen, \textit{People and Production}, 322.

\textsuperscript{104} Reichard, "Die Wanjamuesi", 254-5; Blohm, \textit{Die Nyamwezi}, II, 7, 9, 26. An important aim in having more than one wife was to increase the capacity of the household for work. There is a good discussion of marriage and various aspects of reproduction and production in several Tanzanian societies in Koponen, \textit{People and Production}, 309-332.

\textsuperscript{105} Unomah, "Economic Expansion", 106; Koponen, \textit{People and Production}, 247.
During the first decades of the nineteenth century in Unyanyembe the population was low, there were few cattle, and cattle herding was relatively insignificant for overall production. In his discussion of the early nineteenth century economy Unomah mentions as livestock “a few goats, sheep and poultry.” Only when migrants from Unyangwila and elsewhere settled the area and cut down much of the tsetse infested bush was the human population able to increase. Success in agricultural production and commercial activity related to the ivory trade, combined with a reduction of tsetse infestation, then made investment in cattle possible, with the Nyamwezi elite and Arab traders running big herds.\(^{106}\)

A similar situation almost certainly existed in the western districts of Unyamwezi inhabited by the Galaganza. In 1878 Broyon wrote “The Wagaraganza originally possessed no cattle: and this is shown by the repugnance which they exhibit to take charge of those they now possess, for they leave them, as a rule, to the care of the Watussi.”\(^ {107}\) The Galaganza obtained their cattle, Broyon believed, by raiding the Sukuma. More likely they traded for them. In Ukimbu there were originally very few cattle, although there may have been more by mid-century. They never became numerous except in one or two localities.\(^ {108}\)

Reports such as these and evidence collected from informants by modern researchers suggest that cattle may have been more numerous during the middle decades of the nineteenth century in central and southern Unyamwezi than in earlier and later times. This argument should be contrasted with that put forward by Kjekshus, who instead contends that cattle were always important in western Tanzania until the onset of colonization. He gives numerous examples from the middle and late decades of the nineteenth century of the presence of cattle in Unyanyembe, Msalala to the north, and western Unyamwezi, but presents none from earlier periods.\(^ {109}\) Further citations for the period 1830 to 1880 can be

\(^{106}\) Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 7-8, 42, 106.


\(^{108}\) Shorter, Chiefship, 66.

\(^{109}\) See Kjekshus, Ecology Control, 62-4.
made, supporting my argument. Lief bin Said reported “bullocks four for one dollar” in southern Unyamwezi in 1831. The Arab travellers who left Bagamoyo in 1845 and reached Benguella in 1852 noticed much livestock in Ugalla. Burton commented that in 1858 the ruler of Rubuga in eastern Unyamwezi, “Sultan Maula or Maura ... was celebrated for his wealth in cattle: the herds appeared peculiarly fat and well-grown.” The people of Tura, the first district in Unyamwezi possessed “numerous herds,” while the large village of Hanga, on the eastern border of Unyanyembe, was “rich in cattle.” Just north of Tabora Speke noted the “small and short-horned” cows of Ulikumpura, and said the country between Tabora, at 5° south, and the equator “teems with cattle and goats.”

Cattle were also present in western Unyamwezi. I have referred to the Galaganza. In 1858 Ulyankulu, later one of the two chiefdoms together known as Urambo, the core of Mirambo’s empire, was “a highly cultivated flat, peculiarly rich in black cattle.” Twenty years later Southon found two kinds of cattle in Urambo, one humped, along with sheep, goats, asses, geese, ducks, pigeons and poultry. Of the cattle he writes, “The oxen thrive fairly well in certain localities, but the presence of the Tsetse fly all over the country is not favorable to them ... King Mirambo has many large herds which in the vicinity of Urambo do remarkably well, but the cows never give large quantities of milk.” From the 1860s the number of cattle fell in some parts of Unyamwezi, particularly in the east. The reason was probably increased infections from sleeping sickness, and then in the 1880s and 1890s, rinderpest, which killed approximately 90% of all cattle in many parts of Tanzania. The argument for the spread of sleeping sickness


11 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 187; Southon, “The History, Country and People of Unyamwezi”, III, 17. Mirambo told another missionary that “the oxen round here give very little milk on account of a particular kind of fly which attacks the teats.” Wolf, Central African Diaries, 44, 29 July, 1878. Hutley also commented on the prevalence of tsetse in western Unyamwezi at this time. See ibid, 42,47: entries for 22 July and 6 August 1878. Given the information from Southon, Roberts seems to have exaggerated the situation when he wrote “in Usoke and around Mirambo’s capital, there were no cattle by 1878, due to warfare, raiding, concentration of settlements, and the spread of tsetse.” See “Nyamwezi Trade”, 58, f.n 5 and sources cited.
sickness rests on the considerable evidence that some districts were abandoned during the conflicts of the 1860s and 1870s, hence allowing the spread of woodland, wildlife and *tsetse* flies where there had been cultivated land.\(^{112}\) Rinderpest has been well discussed by Kjekshus, who ignores the earlier spread of the *tsetse* fly, and Koponen. The latter also raises the question of East Coast fever.\(^{113}\)

Dating the arrival in Unyamwezi of Tutsi cattle herders is difficult given that virtually no research has been undertaken on the Tutsi of this part of Tanzania. The history of the Tutsi of neighbouring Buha is better understood, however, thanks to the work of G. C. K. Gwassa and J. F. Mbwiliza.\(^{114}\) Given what we know about the arrival of Tutsi immigrants in Buha it is possible to extrapolate and make some tentative suggestions for Unyamwezi. From about the middle of the seventeenth century land feuds in the well watered Buha highlands became common. This was the situation when Tutsi immigrants from Ruanda and Burundi entered Buha and established themselves through their control over cattle, formerly scarce in this region. Over time the Tutsi, along with wealthier sections of the Ha agriculturalists, emerged as a superior social class. Tutsi immigration increased during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a result of wars of succession in Burundi, Ruanda and Karagwe, land shortages, and periodic famine. At the same time the existing population of Buha grew, shifting cultivation became less viable, and disputes over land increased. Tutsi immigration exacerbated the problems of access to good highland land. A complex situation emerged with changes in the division of labour and class structure, leading

\(^{112}\) See chapter 2. An example of the negative evidence which gives some support to the argument is that in July 1873 when in the district of Ngulu east of Unyanyembe Cameron noted that the people kept pigeons, fowls and sheep. He made no mention of cattle. See Cameron, *Across Africa*, 1, 142.


ultimately to the emergence of what Gwassa and Mbwiliza term “feudal relations.” They stress, however, that the Tutsi came in small numbers and were accepted by the agriculturalists because of the productive possibilities which they brought with them through their cattle. These included manuring of peasant lands, the agriculturalists needing to intensify their land use and hence its fertility. Mbwiliza describes the economic relationship between the pastoralists and the agriculturalists:

Whether the exchange of cattle was through bridewealth, *ugabire* [the feudal relationship between Tutsi cattle owners and those without cattle] or *ukubitsa* [a transaction in which cattle are temporarily loaned], these were more than [a] redistributive mechanism in that they ultimately served as mechanisms through which the donors had access to the labour of the clients.116

During the first decades of the nineteenth century there was internal conflict and the main kingdoms splintered. From this time the Tutsi looked for further support from the Ha agriculturalists, cattle were redistributed to non-Tutsi cultivators, and a greater degree of mixing between Ha and Tutsi occurred.117

Given the above, we can imagine that a trickle of Tutsi migrants entered the western and northern chiefdoms of Unyamwezi, which borders Buha, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. With the break-up of the Heru kingdom, instability in Buha, and a loosening of Ha dependence on the Tutsi through their trading activities and increased access to cattle, many Tutsi probably took advantage of better opportunities in the successful trading chiefdoms of Unyamwezi. Another possibility is that cattleless Tutsi or those owning just a few beasts, probably from Buha, offered their services to Nyamwezi cattle owners or were invited into Nyamwezi chiefdoms to care for cattle obtained from other sources, perhaps Usukuma.118 It is known from later in the century that Sukuma caravans periodically brought cattle to Tabora for sale.119 Ambitious but poor Tutsi would then have had the

118 Cf. Unomah and Webster who suggest that the Tutsi came “with large herds of cattle”: “East Africa”, 297.
opportunity to build up herds of their own, as well as care for the cattle of Nyamwezi chiefs, traders and porters. There is a hint of such a situation in southern Unyamwezi in the early 1880s: “Humpbacked cattle are never kept by the Mnyamwezi ... but only by the immigrant Watusi,” Reichard writes. “The cattle owning Mnyamwezi always hands over his animals to a Watusi, who only possesses a few of his own cattle.” Southon writes more generally: “The Watusi are scattered all over Unyamwezi and though occasionally owning a few head of cattle, they are generally found in the capacity of herdsmen to chiefs who own cattle.”

Other Tutsi entered Unyamwezi from the kingdoms further to the north-west, such as Ruanda or Karagwe. The numbers were never great, however. Figures from the 1957 census, although far removed in time, may have some validity because the Tutsi rarely intermarried with the Nyamwezi. At that time 7% of the population of Tabora district were Tutsi, 2% of Nzega district, and 2% of Kahama district. No doubt a proportion of these figures represents immigration during the periods of German and British colonial rule.

Tutsi herders were certainly present in Unyanyembe and Msene in 1858. In the latter place there was “a large floating population of ... Watusi, and fugitives from Uhha.” In both places they lived, according to Burton, by selling cattle, milk, and butter. But their relationship with local Nyamwezi and Sumbwa must have been more complex than this. As Koponen says, the nature of the symbiosis between the Tutsi, the Nyamwezi elite, and the ordinary Nyamwezi cultivators and porters is not properly understood, although clearly it was of an entirely different nature than the situation in Buha. The buswezi possession cult had been brought by the herders from the north-west to Unyamwezi. Tutsi diviners played a

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121 Abrahams, The Peoples of Greater Unyamwezi, 19; Abrahams, The Political Organization of Unyamwezi, 3-4.

122 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 188, 288; idem, Lake Regions, 269.

123 Koponen, People and Production, 245.
significant role in Nyamwezi life, and had a reputation for skill in settling disputes.\textsuperscript{124} Such roles may have been part of the equation. But it is most unlikely that the Tutsi in Unyamwezi ever formed a significant element of the ruling class, let alone a dominant one, despite some claims to the contrary.\textsuperscript{125} The kinds of feudal relationships based on tribute and cattle redistribution usual in Buha could not develop in Unyamwezi, especially in Unyanyembe, where a rising class of Nyamwezi and Arab trading elites and estate holders, the \textit{vbandevba}, backed by followers armed with muskets, was establishing itself.\textsuperscript{126} In Unyanyembe any chance of Tutsi power was snuffed out when chief Mnywa Sele had some killed and others driven out of the chiefdom in about 1859.\textsuperscript{127}

Despite Mnywa Sele’s ruthless actions, the Tutsi remained well established in Unyanyembe from the middle of the century. In 1861 Musa Mzuri employed Tutsi cattleherders from Karagwe who kept half the milk produced by his herd. Livingstone in 1872 noted “The Batusi are the cattle-herds of all this Unyanyembe region.” The following year they were a notable presence. In Tabora the big Arab traders were said to have given over their cattle to the Tutsi who then returned “half the produce.”\textsuperscript{128} In northern Unyamwezi numerous Tutsi were in \textit{Ukune} in 1861, and there was a Tutsi settlement in \textit{Uyui} in 1881. They were living in southern Unyamwezi during the early 1880s. The Tutsi

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Iltie, \textit{A Modern History}, 31; Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 57-8.
\item \textsuperscript{125} The claim is made by Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 57-8, and disputed by Abrahams. \textit{The Peoples of Greater Unyamwezi}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{126} A missionary familiar with conditions in Urambo wrote in 1881: “... the greatness of a man here consists in his property especially in his dwelling place.” Williams to Thompson, Urambo, 10 August, 1881, LMS 4/2/C. On the rise of the \textit{vbandevba} see Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 86-96, 104-16, 151, 155-179; Sheriff, \textit{Slaves, Spices and Ivory}, 180-1.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 161-3; Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 57-8. In 1877 Broyon wrote that before the rise of Mirambo the Tutsi had “tyrannised over all the tribes of Unyamwezi.” The situation was reversed once Mirambo unified central Unyamwezi: “the Watussi, from being masters here, have become the servants ...” See Broyon-Mirambo, “Description of Unyamwesi”, 30, 31. There is no evidence for this version of Tutsi history in Unyamwezi.
\end{itemize}
presence was also significant in western Unyamwezi, as already noted, an area strongly involved in the caravan trade. In Uyowa Hutley noticed Tutsi *bomas* close to the cattle enclosures and separate from Nyamwezi villages. The large herds of cattle at Mirambo’s *iku lu* or capital, the spoils of war, were in the care of Tutsi herdsmen whose leader was Mkalya.  

During the German period there were still “a lot” of Tutsi, originally from Buha, in Urambo and especially nearby Usoke. They were described by Lübner as “cattle breeders” and did not mix much with the Nyamwezi population, maintaining their own language and customs. In 1890 Tutsi cared for the cattle in Unyanyembe. In 1891 there was a Tutsi settlement outside the capital village of one of the chiefdoms of eastern Unyamwezi.

### New Sources of Labour: Slaves

An even bigger blank in the literature is the question of slavery and pawnship in Unyamwezi and western Tanzania. This should be compared with the extensive research undertaken on coastal slavery and important works on eastern Zaire.  

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integrally connected in the same ivory and slave trading system. So far we only have brief accounts of the slave trade and slavery in western and central Tanzania. Even less attention is given to the question of slave and pawn labour for productive purposes. One reason for our ignorance is that most slaves retained by the Nyamwezi were probably female, and therefore were rarely noticed or commented upon by observers. The issue, however, cannot be avoided. Slave labour, in addition to that of Nyamwezi women and Tutsi pastoralists, made possible the professionalization of porterage for tens of thousands of Nyamwezi men, in addition to supporting the increasing numbers of young men employed as ruga-ruga or professional warriors by Nyamwezi chiefs and warlords. In contrast most pawns would have come from within Nyamwezi society and therefore cannot be considered a new source of labour, although they were probably important for accumulation.


There are a few sentences in Roberts’ account.

Koponen, People and Production, 336. According to Unomah the illegal and underground slave trade in Unyamwezi known as vhungi vhungi targeted women and children: “Economic Expansion”, 108. Apart from the role of female slaves in production, another reason for the probable preference for female slaves can be deduced from the following: “The Wanyamwezi have adopted the curious practice of leaving property to their ... children by slave-girls or concubines, to the exclusion of their issue by wives; they justify it by the fact of the former requiring their assistance more than the latter, who have friends and relatives to aid them.” Burton, Lake Regions, 295. In most respects the Nyamwezi were patrilineal. The change in inheritance norms was perhaps a reflection of the trend towards the accumulation of wealth which could be kept by such practices from being dissipated by distribution among kin.

The two main outlets for slaves in Tanzania were the export trade and plantations on the coast or on Zanzibar and Pemba or, towards the end of the century, in other centres of plantation agriculture in the interior, such as Tabora and Ujiji. But Koponen argues that throughout the nineteenth century numbers of slaves were employed in smaller productive units such as African households and other domestic groups. By the 1870s this became much more common because fewer slaves than before reached the coast, despite the continued "production" of slaves in the interior. The main reason was probably the increased risk involved in moving and dealing in slaves in coastal regions in the face of the legal restrictions imposed by the British/Zanzibari treaty of 1873. The result was a surplus of slaves in the interior which made it much easier for the Gogo and Nyamwezi among others to purchase servile labour.137

It has long been believed that the Nyamwezi were not greatly involved in the capture and selling of slaves in their own country, but were net importers of servile labour.138 In 1839 it was reported in Zanzibar that the Nyamwezi had many slaves, some owning as many as 400 or 500.139 In 1858 the main sources of slaves used by the Nyamwezi were the regions around Ujiji, the south-east shores of Lake Tanganyika, Ufipa, Ugalla, and the interlacustrine kingdoms of Bunyoro, Buganda, and Karagwe. A much rarer source was the sale of convicted criminals.140 During times of famine in Unyaturu, to the north-east, the Nyamwezi travelled there to buy children.141 Later, during Mirambo's wars, many Fipa, Sukuma and

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139 Burgess in Gottberg, Unyamwesi, 96; Roberts, "Nyamwezi Trade", 59.

140 Burton, Lake Regions, 301; Roberts, "Nyamwezi Trade", 59. An example of the last point is in Grant, A Walk, 48.

other peoples were enslaved by his *ruga-ruga*. The numbers of slaves in the general population of Unyamwezi varied greatly from chiefdom to chiefdom, and locality to locality, according to the level of commercialization. In the small chiefdom of Ndala estimates of the proportion of the population in the late nineteenth century, the majority of whom were immigrants, who were of servile status, range from 5% to 20%. This was because involvement in long-distance trade was less the norm here compared with some neighbouring chiefdoms. On the other hand, in commercially orientated Ushirombo the majority of the population were slaves, according to one of Nolan’s informants. Unyanyembe was a heavy importer of slaves, both the Nyamwezi and coastal traders importing large numbers. Coastal traders active in eastern Zaire supplied thousands of Manyema captives to the Tabora market, with an estimated 1,000 arriving annually in Unyanyembe. In 1900 two thirds of the populations of Tabora town and Tabora district, which were estimated by one scholar at about 35,000 and 100,000 inhabitants respectively, were said to be slaves. But the total population given for the district appears much too low. Another contemporary source suggests 235,000 slaves for Tabora district in 1898/1900. This sits well with the estimate by the Tabora district authorities in 1900 of a slave population of two thirds of the total population.


143 Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 205, 49.


145 F. Weidner, *Die Haussklaverei in Ostafrika* (Jena, 1915), 38-9, 41; Raum, “German East Africa”, 168. This estimate, and a slave population of 70,000 in Tabora district, was thought in 1921-2 to be “exaggerated,” according to a source quoted by Nolan. But the demography of Tabora was considerably altered during the First World War. For the citation see Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 49, f.n. 95. For various estimates of the population of Tabora town between 1872 and the early 1920s see Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 259.

population of roughly 350,000. Whatever the real number, many of these were slaves of coastal traders resident in Tabora, but tens of thousands must have been owned by Nyamwezi traders and farmers, particularly members of the entrepreneurial elite, the vbandevba. A large slave population also existed in Urambo from the time of Mirambo's conquests during the 1870s and early 1880s. By 1910, when missionary Löbner wrote his report for the colonial authorities, these people, "from various countries", were "completely absorbed into the population."148

A large slave population was established in those districts of Unyamwezi which contributed large numbers of free porters to caravans. There is considerable evidence of the employment of slaves in the households, armies, caravans and entourages of the Nyamwezi elite and Arab and other coastal traders in Unyanyembe. But because of the lack of research it is difficult to show that many of the slaves were employed in agricultural production in the Nyamwezi makaya and villages. Nevertheless, Roberts, Unomah and Webster, and Sheriff believe that many slaves were put to work on Nyamwezi farms, releasing labour and perhaps leading to increases in food production to meet the new market opportunities provided by the caravans.150 It is suggestive that in Urambo in 1893 Decle found that the average brideprice valued at forty to fifty doti could be paid in slaves, cloth, or


148 Löbner in Gottberg, Unyamwezi, 129. Roberts states that Mirambo also exported slaves to the coast and in the direction of the Nile valley. As he suggests, the source of these slaves (and probably also the others incorporated into society in and around Urambo) was most likely the territory he conquered between Lakes Rukwa and Victoria. See Roberts, "Nyamwezi Trade", 59. It should not be forgotten, however, that Mirambo's caravans traded far and wide and slaves may have come from territories beyond his empire.

149 Grant, A Walk, 48, 50; Cameron, Across Africa, I, 164; Roberts, "Nyamwezi Trade", 60-1; Unomah, "Economic Expansion", 107-8, 112-4, 141; Nolan, "Christianity in Unyamwezi", 260-1; Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 180.

copper. But it is not yet clear how slaves were integrated and what the implications were for female labour. The sparse literature suggests treatment was “generally humane,” and slaves frequently cohabited and ate with their owners. When delayed for nearly 4 months in Ukune Grant found that “The slaves of the Wazees are very well dressed, and treated with great kindness...” Many were able to work for themselves as well as for their owners and of these a number accumulated their own property in livestock and slaves.  

151 Decle, Three Years, 347.

Chapter Five

The Emergence of the Professionals

Kagulu isabo idako ilalizya.

Legs are a great asset, but one’s bottom is only for sitting.¹

Mzigo mzito mpe Mnyamwezi.

Give a heavy load to a Mnyamwezi.²

By the second half of the nineteenth century long-distance caravan porters exhibited all of the characteristics, and others besides, which we commonly associate with wage labourers in areas penetrated by merchant capital. Many porters made a long term commitment and worked on a professional or semi-professional basis developing specialized skills and a pride in their work. A particular caravan culture evolved, highly influenced by Nyamwezi cultural norms, which regulated caravan organization, working hours and routines, conditions, and to some degree discipline. Porters bargained for their wages and rations (Kiswahili: posho), developed their own techniques of persuasion, and resisted vigorously when norms were violated. A high degree of consciousness is at times indicated by collective action including “go-slows”, mass desertions, and strikes. All of the above was mediated and made possible by the extension of the common caravan culture all along the central routes between the coast and Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika. The way porters arranged their working and domestic lives suggests that they can be compared with migrant labourers in other places and times.

In this chapter I will consider the emergence of a large corps of specialist caravan porters, dominated by the Nyamwezi in both numerical terms and in the organization and


² Swahili saying. In other words, a person carrying a heavy load is compared to a Mnyamwezi. Thanks to Selina Mushi.
culture of the caravans. The forms of caravan organization which they invented and working norms which they established became the standards which were accepted by others until the disruption of colonial penetration. In the first section I discuss the dynamics of labour supply and demand. The increase in the numbers of wage earning professional porters from the 1860s was due less to the pauperization of formerly independent Nyamwezi caravan operators, as has been argued by Abdul Sheriff, than to the expansion of the ivory trade and European activities in East Africa, which in turn led to an increased demand for labour. At the same time small groups of “trader-porters” continued to operate their own caravans, as they had from the beginning of the century. The “pull” factor influencing the labour market — increasing demand for porters — worked in combination with the “push” of increased demand in Unyamwezi for imported commodities. This is discussed in the second section. The third section continues in more detail the discussion of Nyamwezi caravans begun in chapter three. In the fourth section I define the characteristics of semi-professional or professional porters.

The Development of the Labour Market

There are two ways to look at the question of caravan labour supply. These are in terms of either supply or demand. So far only the supply side of the equation has been considered. The result is an inadequate understanding of the dynamics of the emerging labour market along the central routes.

The limited evidence we have from the first half of the century suggests that many, perhaps most, caravan porters travelling on the central caravan routes between the Mrima coast and Unyamwezi and beyond were small entrepreneurs, perhaps carrying for a master or larger trader, but at the same time profiting from the sale of their own stocks of goods, or those of their household or lineage. For the interior peoples such as the Nyamwezi and the Sumbwa, who had taken to long distance trade in large numbers, the predominant pattern was dry season travel, with the demands of the agricultural cycle exerting a homeward pull the
rest of the year. This tradition continued to the end of the century and into early colonial times. But alongside it from about the middle of the century a large body of caravan porters emerged who travelled year in and year out, often moving from one caravan to another, and who after ending a journey were open to other engagements in exchange for wages and rations. From this point on a large part of the labour requirements of caravans travelling the central route was met by specialist porters. Many Nyamwezi, attracted to the travelling life and a steady income, joined the caravans of coastal traders. Even before the founding of Tabora by entrepreneurs from the coast in 1852, their Nyamwezi counterparts travelled “in large numbers” to the Arab depot of Isanga in Ukimbu to do business, and Nyamwezi youths followed them and offered to work as porters for the Arabs and carry loads to the coast or to Unyanyembe. There is plenty of evidence from the late 1850s that Nyamwezi porters were working for coastal traders. In September 1857 Burton and Speke met a large caravan of 400 Nyamwezi porters, apparently employees of four Arab traders, when encamped in the Inenge basin under the Rubeho Range. They encountered another in eastern Ugogo in October of the same year about 1,000 strong, under the command of four slaves of Salim bin Rashid, an Arab trader based at Unyanyembe. Fifteen years later, when Tippu Tip travelled to Urua in eastern Zaire, he took with him about 800 Nyamwezi porters, and Nyamwezi porters continued to work for him along the Lualaba river. Other coastal traders operating west of

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3 See chapter 3.

4 Burton dated the innovation of Nyamwezi porters hiring themselves out to coastal traders travelling the central route to “a few years ago”, i.e. a few years before 1857-58. Prior to then “servile gangs” hired at the coast or Zanzibar had been used, and were still employed on the routes leading from the northern Nsimi to the Maasai country and beyond, and the southern roads to Lake Nyassa. See Richard F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa* (New York, 1860, repub. Michigan, 1971), 235; Alfred Chukwudi Unomah, “Economic Expansion and Political Change in Unyanyembe (ca. 1840-1900)” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1972), 77.

5 Burton, *Lake Regions*, 153; 186. It is possible that many members of these caravans were independent traders who had joined the larger group for security.
Lake Tanganyika in the 1870s, such as Jumah Merikani, also employed gangs of Nyamwezi on a permanent basis.6

The trend toward the hiring of porters accelerated during the 1860s. This was the period during which massive ivory exports to the United Kingdom from East Africa began, in addition to the existing large trade in Indian re-exports from East Africa, and exports to the United States and elsewhere.7 In addition, some Nyamwezi trader-porters may have found that the discriminatory duties on ivory levied at the coast by the Zanzibari Sultanate from 1864, and the greater advantages accruing to the coast traders because of easier access to capital and market information, hindered their own trading activities.8 Given the established and rising demand for cloth, guns and other goods in the interior, many Nyamwezi took up regular wage work as hired caravan porters. Thus, from about 1850 to 1890, the expansion of trade in both quantitative and spatial terms had as one of its consequences the enlargement of the caravan porter workforce.

For much of this period, it is clear that Africans from the interior such as the Nyamwezi, and further south the Yao, remained competitive caravan operators, as well as working for others on a wage labour basis. Their caravans carrying ivory, cloth, beads, wire, and other goods, dominated the trade routes for most of the remaining decades of the nineteenth century. Burton believed that a "far greater" number of caravans of up-country traders than Arabs plied the central routes. During a visit to Bagamoyo in 1866 a French missionary noted that Nyamwezi porters worked both for coastal traders and organized their own caravans.9 Nyamwezi caravans were probably more numerous than those of coastal traders.

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8 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 122-6. These points will be discussed below.

traders until at least 1880, later than has been realized. In June and July 1876 when LMS missionary Roger Price travelled from Saadani to Mwapa, his party met almost daily “a goodly number” of ivory caravans bound for Whinde and Bagamoyo, and presumably Saadani. He emphasized the dominance of Nyamwezi and other caravans from the interior: “These were all purely native caravans.” In 1878 another missionary travelling up-country met numerous Nyamwezi caravans en route over a two month period. In the same period he noted just one large Arab led caravan, and its porters were also Nyamwezi.10

This evidence should be compared with that presented by Abdul Sheriff.11 Sheriff argues that the ability of the Nyamwezi to compete against coastal traders was undermined by the early 1870s, and hence they were forced to work for others. This led to a reduction in the number of Nyamwezi caravans and an enlargement of the available labour force. By the 1890s, he states, “The Nyamwezi had become a nation of porters, and their country a labour reserve, a foretaste of the colonial situation.”12 There are several problems with this hypothesis. In the first place it does not account for the many Nyamwezi who worked on a wage basis for other Nyamwezi. Second, the direct evidence which Sheriff cites for the reduction in Nyamwezi caravans comes from Cameron’s account of his journey in 1873-4. But Cameron was travelling during the period of hostilities between Mirambo and Unyanyembe (1871-75), and caravan traffic from west of Unyanyembe was greatly disrupted, as British Consul Kirk noted in March 1873: “On enquiry I satisfied myself that

10 Roger Price, Report of the Rev. R. Price of His Visit to Zanzibar and the Coast of Eastern Africa (London, 1876), 23, 39; James B. Wolf, ed., The Central African Diaries of Walter Hutley 1877-1881 (Boston, 1976), 25-6 (5 May), 30 (30 May), 34 (16 & 17 June), 35 (18 June), 37 (24 June). The first of these was not an ivory caravan but one of work seekers. In another entry Hutley notes that at the Kidete river, on the road to Mwapa, “several caravans ... passed during the day, some going in and others coming out.” There is no indication here whether these were Nyamwezi or Swahili/Arab caravans. Wolf, Central African Diaries, 19-20. 7 April, 1878. Note that Price and Hutley used the same route from Saadani to Mwapa. The situation may have been different on the Usagara road. See also Francis Nolan, “Christianity in Unyanyembi 1878-1928” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1977), 59.

11 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 181-2. I am a great admirer of Sheriff’s work, but on this occasion he has made an influential argument relating to the interior based on very limited evidence.

this year it is quite impossible to obtain a large number of Unyamwezi 'pagazi' or porters, few having come down owing to the interruption of the Ivory trade.'\textsuperscript{13} Kirk was referring to the situation at the coast, but conditions were much the same at Tabora. Early in 1874 Murphy, Cameron's companion, reported that "In October last we were ... unable to move from want of porters, the whole surrounding country being filled, if not with Mirambo's men, with at least imaginary robbers and allies of his, which prevented the Wanyamwezi from offering themselves." Cameron himself found that "not a soul would follow me" when he attempted to pass through to Ujiji on the direct road from Unyanyembe.\textsuperscript{14} The situation had been the same during 1871 and 1872. During the months July to September 1871 Stanley was not able to advance beyond Unyanyembe in his quest for Livingstone due to the war. Few caravans were moving, Nyamwezi porters were not procurable and it was only by hiring thirty \textit{Wangwana} at triple rates that the expedition could continue. In June 1872 Livingstone also cited war as the cause of difficulty in hiring porters.\textsuperscript{15} Thus there may well have been fewer Nyamwezi caravans on the road at this time, but this was not necessarily typical.

In addition Sheriff presents several circumstantial arguments for the decline of the Nyamwezi merchant class (\textit{vbandevba}), which contributed to a larger wage labour pool. The

\textsuperscript{13} Kirk to Major E. Smith, Private Secretary to Sir Bartle Frere, Zanzibar, 10 March, 1873, Cameron Papers, VLC 6/1, Royal Geographical Society. See also Murphy to Kirk, Bagamoyo Camp, 19 April, 1873. Cameron Papers, VLC 3/4, RGS, and Walter Thaddeus Brown, "A Pre-Colonial History of Bagamoyo: Aspects of the Growth of an East African Coastal Town" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1971), 158. Murphy believed that there were, in fact, sufficient Nyamwezi porters in Bagamoyo for the expedition, but that they were demanding excessive wages and the entire amount in advance, rather than just the usual installment. In addition the porters he succeeded in hiring quickly deserted, and others were seized by Arabs because they were 'Mirambo's' men. It is probable that these conditions reflected the great insecurity of the time.

\textsuperscript{14} Murphy to Sir B. Frere, Zanzibar, 7 March, 1874, VLC 3/4, RGS; Cameron, \textit{Across Africa}, I, 175-6. On numerous occasions Cameron points to the disruption of trade and the difficulties and dangers of travelling in western Unyamwezi as a consequence of the war. For instance, of Uganda in January 1874 he wrote, "In consequence of the disturbances between Mirambo and the Arabs, trade had suffered much and the whole country was very unsettled". See ibid., 77, 151, 161-2, 163, 175-6, 201, 212. The quote is from 201.

first (and best) concerns the differential tariff structure at the coast which discriminated against ivory carried down by Nyamwezi caravans. But Sheriff does not give figures for the proportion of ivory registered at customs subject to the various levels of duty, so it is difficult to say that this policy in fact put Nyamwezi caravans out of business. His second argument — that coastal entrepreneurs had much greater access to credit and capital than their Nyamwezi counterparts — is overstated. This must have been partly offset by the lower costs of the latter. Sheriff’s third argument is that there was a drop in ivory exports from Tanganyika because of the destruction of elephant herds. This is based on a comment by an American trader at Zanzibar concerning ivory from Unyamwezi, and figures for ivory exports from Zanzibar and then German East Africa. There may have been a reduction in ivory produced in Unyamwezi, but in the second half of the century Nyamwezi ivory traders no longer relied on sources from their own country. Sheriff quotes export figures from Zanzibar showing an annual average during the 1860s of 24,000 tusks weighing over five pounds, with a drop to an annual average of 15,000 tusks exported from German East Africa during the early 1890s. The problem with this evidence is that like is not compared with like. As Sheriff shows so well, a large proportion of Zanzibar’s exports in the 1860s came from beyond the borders of the future German East Africa. One would expect that the export figures from GEA would show a reduction compared with exports from Zanzibar in the 1860s because of the smaller territory available for exploitation. Some ivory sold by Nyamwezi traders must have passed through British territory, or even down the Congo, and that should be taken into account.

16 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 181, 122-3, 125.

17 Charles Stokes gave Smith, Mackenzie and Co. of Zanzibar a quote of MTS30 per load to transport goods to Msalala in northern Unyamwezi for the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition. The quote was based on the cost of hiring Nyamwezi porters. The usual charge using coastal porters was MTS40. See Smith, Mackenzie and Co. to Gray, Dawes and Co., Zanzibar, 7 Oct. 1887, Box 83, Mackinnon Papers, School of Oriental and African Studies, London. The difference is partly explained by the heavier loads carried by the Nyamwezi, and perhaps by Stokes’ special relationship with them, which was equivalent to that of a large Nyamwezi trader.

18 Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 181-2, 198 n. 59.
There are difficulties with Sheriff’s other arguments, including his chronology. He suggests that Nyamwezi traders responded to their declining position in three ways: by engaging in commercial agriculture, by migrating to distant regions to establish new polities or aid existing rulers, or by turning to porterage on a professional wage earning basis. The first option can be seen as a symptom of success rather than failure. As Sheriff himself notes, numerous successful coastal traders including Tippu Tip also invested in plantations either at the coast or around Tabora.\(^\text{19}\) The second, migration, often occurred during early periods of successful trading activity. The examples given in chapter three are clear evidence. The \textit{vbandevba} were undermined, but this occurred later and was more closely related to colonial conditions than those suggested by Sheriff.\(^\text{20}\)

In contrast, my argument is that the Nyamwezi elite and smaller traders continued to operate their own caravans well into the 1890s, and provided employment at the same time that many young Nyamwezi men were working for coastal traders and Europeans. During the late 1880s and 1890s there were still many caravans of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma (a related people) visiting the coast. In 1888 at the start of the coastal uprising against the Germans Nyamwezi caravans were in Bagamoyo, and another “large Nyamwezi caravan” was diverted to Dar es Salaam with its ivory. Even during the fighting a large Sukuma caravan with great quantities of ivory, cattle and goats entered Bagamoyo in September 1889.\(^\text{21}\) In October 1889 the survivors of Stanley’s Emin Pasha expedition met a Nyamwezi caravan 1,500 strong at Ikungu, on the eastern edge on Unyamwezi. In June, 1890, a German traveller returning to the coast encountered a large Nyamwezi caravan numbering about 1,200 in Ugogo, then another “great Wanjamwesi caravan” under the German flag, followed

\(^{19}\) Sheriff, \textit{Slaves, Spices and Ivory}, 108.

\(^{20}\) I make some suggestions in chapter 6.

by several others in the Marenga Mkali. Another European traveller wrote of the Nyamwezi from his experience in 1891-2:

The energies of the people [the Nyamwezi] are ... absorbed in travel, and they trade in ivory, copper wire, salt, honey, and so forth, over the whole of central Africa, frequently journeying in large caravans, and being absent from home for two years or more. These expeditions are generally commanded by Arabs ... But very frequently voluntary associations are formed every spring: a drummer beating up recruits from village to village, which journey down to the coast or into the interior.

And in June 1893 a missionary bound for the coast met in the Mgunda Mkali “a huge native caravan — fully a thousand people ... all carrying up to what seemed their utmost capacity.” The description of their loads suggests a Nyamwezi or Sukuma caravan. Hundreds of smaller Nyamwezi and Sukuma caravans arrived at the coast during these years.

There is other evidence which is ambiguous, in the sense that it is not clear whether the caravans in question were led by Nyamwezi or, perhaps, Swahili or Arab traders. Travelling up-country in July, 1891, Stairs, the commander of the Belgian caravan to Katanga, mentions in his diary huge quantities of ivory being carried to the coast. At Mbuyuni, four days from Bagamoyo, he wrote, “Considerable quantities of very fine ivory tusks are now on their way towards the coast, coming from Unyamwezi ... This morning, we saw almost fifteen hundred ivories file past which will net the Germans 14,200 [MT] dollars thanks to export duty.” At Morogoro, eleven days later, he wrote: “A huge caravan overburdened with ivory passed through our camp ...” It is probable that the porters were Nyamwezi and Sukuma because earlier, when at Bagamoyo, Stairs had commented on the “numerous close columns of Wanyamwezi” which arrived virtually every day.

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23 J. A. Moloney, With Captain Stairs to Katanga (London, 1893), 57.


26 Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 193, 8 July, 1891, 197, 19 July, 1891, 190, 2 July, 1891.
was complicated because by this time Nyamwezi caravans carried the German flag, confusing the evidence.27

A closer look at the local level illustrates the vitality of both big and small Nyamwezi traders during the late 1880s and early 1890s. During the early 1880s in northern Unyamwezi the insecure political conditions in the region between Uyui and Msalala chiefdoms persuaded many Nyamwezi caravan operators from the Kahama and Shinyanga areas to move east to new bases in Usiha, east of modern Shinyanga in Sukuma territory. As well as relative stability Usiha had the advantage of its location on the route from northern Unyamwezi to the coast and that to Mwanza and Kagei on Lake Victoria. Philip Stigger describes the initiative as an apparent “general movement of independent Nyamwezi traders” who included well established entrepreneurs such as Ndekeja Holo of Kahama and Mlabu of Lohumbo.28 Eastern Usiha quickly became an important centre sending many caravans to the coast. From 1885 numerous smaller operators including the sons of chiefs became associated with Ndekeja, and local Sukuma attached their caravans to those of the powerful trader. One of Stigger’s informants travelled with Ndekeja’s great caravan to the coast in about 1893:

He left Mwadui with two castrated goats and nine companions who had cattle, sheep and goats. They met Ndekeja, a tall, thin, rather dark man who wore nothing on his head but was dressed in a rich, multi-coloured, fringed cloth, at the assembly point. By the time the caravan left, it contained a thousand or more people, escorted by **rugaruga**, thirty of whom were armed with muskets.

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27 Konczacki, *Victorian Explorer*, 202, 1 Aug., 1891. Stairs’ companion Moloney noted “several large caravans, under German command” near the Ruvu crossing just out of Bagamoyo. Were these perhaps Nyamwezi caravans under the German flag, given that he does not mention specific German caravan leaders? See Moloney, *With Captain Stairs*, 36.

The route lay eastwards through Usiha then south south-east through the modern Singida district to Kilimatinde, on the main route to the coast. A contemporary of Ndekeja and another important caravan leader operating from Usiha was Telekeza.

The crucial factor driving the expansion of the labour market was the high demand for labour, rather than surplus supply originating from impoverishment of interior peoples. As trade boomed there was a parallel massive increase through the century in the demand for carriers. As the ivory frontier was pushed back into the furthest parts of the interior the routes lengthened, caravans spent more time on the march, and caravan journeys became more protracted affairs. More and more regions and peoples were drawn into the orbit of the Zanzibari "commercial empire." In addition, the second half of the nineteenth century was the age of European expansion in East Africa. The demand for porters further increased from the early 1870s as numerous expeditions and caravans of European explorers and missionaries competed with local traders and each other for labour. During peak periods experienced porters could pick and choose among the numerous caravans leaving the coast. In many years coastal and interior towns were almost cleared of porters as demand outstripped supply. In March, 1879, porters were reported to be “scarce” in Tabora because of the large number of caravans on the road. The labour market at Bagamoyo in the dry season of 1882 was described in the following terms by the agent for the trading house Boustead, Ridley and Co.: “Although an immense number of Wanyamwezi have come to the coast this season, they have all been hired at high rates, some very large caravans of traders

29 Stigger, “The Late 19th. Century Caravan Trade”, 9-10. According to Holmes and Austen, Stokes' Sukuma name was Ndokeji, suspiciously similar to Ndekeja. It is possible that the two caravan leaders have been confused in tradition. See Holmes and Austen, "The Pre-Colonial Sukuma", 391. I accept Stigger's account given his extensive research in Usiha.


31 The description is Sheriff's.

32 Wolf, Central African Diaries, 86, 7 Mar., 1879.
having been dispatched." In Zanzibar the situation was often the same. A European traveller describes the state of the labour market as it was in early 1883:

The African Association on the Congo had drained off the very best porters in the town. Several large caravans, missionary and otherwise, had just left for the interior, so that there was hardly a good porter to be had .... To cap the situation, two large caravans were about to be organized for the interior, one for Victoria Nyanza, and another for Karema. These comments do not take into account the demand for labour created by Arab caravans. Again, in June 1891, Stairs heard "of a great dearth of men" in Zanzibar resulting from the large number of caravans leaving for the interior. Around the same time another traveller was told "there were no porters to be had, even at Zanzibar, so many caravans had been equipped for the Germans as well as for the I.B.E.A. Co., and for some private expeditions that had combined to drain the country of available porters." Thus, in many years, demand far outstripped supply. On much rarer occasions there was a surplus of porters at Bagamoyo, beyond the demands of the various caravans leaving the town. This was the case late in the dry season of 1878. Pagazi were unusually cheap and plentiful. "Some men," wrote a missionary, "have even despaired of getting work and are building and planting and will stay here till next season." The workers who took to porterage as a way of life increasingly came from diverse groups, but as outlined in chapter three a few in particular dominated. The Nyamwezi remained the most important. The Sumbwa travelled in great numbers to the coast to find employment as porters for caravans travelling up-country. One missionary wrote, "Often they stay where they can get work for three or four years together; they will then gather up

33 Muxworthy to Thompson, Zanzibar, 14 July, 1882, LMS 4/5/D.


35 Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 188, 13 June, 1891; May French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan (London, 1892), 85.

36 Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 79, 17 Aug., 1878.
their goods, spend their earnings in cloth and other necessaries, and return home.”  The Yao, who had long worked the southern routes to Kilwa and other coastal towns, also became professional carriers. Many others were from Swahili society along the coast, increasingly including the Waungwana. In the last decades of the century the Sukuma from the south end of Lake Victoria and Manyema from the eastern Congo basin became caravan porters in large numbers.  

**Personal Motives**

For many porters the desire to obtain a gun was the most important motive impelling them to seek work. This was particularly the case during periods of political upheaval such as during the Nyanyembe civil war (1861-4), the numerous wars instigated by Mirambo’s invasions (late 1860s-1884), and those in north-west Unyamwezi (1870s-early 1880s). Referring to the last area Stigger writes “The priority ... was firstly a musket and secondly cloth, which only became the objective of a visit to the coast once the gun had been obtained and probably involved an additional journey.” From the 1870s porters were sometimes paid part of their wages with a musket as firearms poured into the interior, and might trade a gun for ivory.


Imported cloth was the second commodity sought by the Nyamwezi porters, although cotton and bark cloth was manufactured in Unyamwezi. Nolan sees the high demand for cloth as the leading motivation for long distance trade to the coast. “It represented a universally acceptable form of currency and was a convenient form of storable wealth. It was a means of paying wages and gave social recognition to work values. It bestowed elegance, modesty and prestige on the wearer. A store of cotton cloth was an invaluable political asset to a chief.” At first mass produced cloth was worn more by women than men. Speke describes as “their national costume” the cloth wound under the arms and over the breast. According to Grant the women of central and northern Unyamwezi were better dressed than the men: “all of them wear a cotton cloth from the waist to above the ankles ...” Female dress was augmented by bead necklaces, brass and copper wire armlets, the raw materials for which were imported or, in the case of copper, traded from Katanga, and thin bands known as *sambo*, made of the tail hairs of giraffes bound with fine iron or copper wire. Men usually wore loin cloths while at home, but while travelling often wore just a goat skin hanging from their shoulders “in a rather indecorous manner.” Their ornaments were similar to those of the women, except that the long wire coils on the arm were replaced by thick copper or brass bracelets, and might be augmented by heavy ivory bracelets. For special occasions some wore ornamental monkey or ocelot skins and a zebra mane or ox tail head dress, or a plume of ostrich, crane or jay feathers. Two decades later many Nyamwezi men were wearing “fine clothes, the produce of India, as under-garments, with long Kanzus ... over all.” By this time virtually all the men wore some kind of cloth, while the women wore “fine coloured


43 Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 27.

handkerchiefs, prints, blue or white calico.” Only in remote villages did anyone still wear skins.45

For porters the acquisition of cloth and other foreign goods was, of course, a means to very varied ends, the details of which are beyond the scope of this study. As the previous paragraph makes clear domestic consumption was important. For many young men a prime aim was to earn sufficient wages to pay bride price. One missionary reported that the young men of his caravan worked to obtain enough cloth “to buy a wife.”46 Porters from northern Unyamwezi and Usukuma used cloth from the coast to generate wealth in cattle and perhaps enter the stock trade.47 Some ambitious men aimed at establishing themselves as independent ivory traders, and used their wages to buy trade goods. Others of smaller means invested part of their wages on a small quantity of goods to trade on the side, which they carried over and above their employers’ cloth or ivory. One such worked in the caravan of a European traveller in 1886, who wrote,

Rumoago, one of my carriers, who had asked me to reduce his load, was found to have tied this to one end of a bamboo stick, with another private load of salt tied to the other. It was not because of the weight he had asked to have a smaller load, but because he wanted to speculate in salt.48

Some porters bought slaves with their wages, either to sell elsewhere or to work their mashamba.49 Slave porters could use their wages to buy their freedom. The best known case

45 Walter Hutley, “Mohammadanism in Central Africa. Its Influence”, manuscript paper, in Hutley to Thompson, Urambo, Aug., 1881, LMS 4/2/D; also quoted in Bennett, Mirambo, 32.


48 Per Hassing and Norman Bennett, “A Journey Across Tanganyika in 1886 (translated and edited extracts from the journal of Edvard Gleerup)”, TNR 58 & 59 (1962), 133.

49 Burton, Lake Regions, 326, 384; Lionel Decle, Three Years in Savage Africa (London, 1898), 319. In both these cases the slaves were bought in Ujiji, in 1858 and 1893 respectively, and taken eastwards, probably into Unyamwezi.
is Rashid bin Hassani. For specialist porters often it was only the wages and adventure which attracted them to the occupation, as they made the safari a way of life.

**Nyamwezi Caravans**

Because the peoples of the western interior pioneered the caravan system, and because the majority of porters and caravans working the central routes were Nyamwezi, it was Nyamwezi social and cultural norms which prevailed. Nyamwezi caravans had characteristics which influenced other groups such as the Swahili and coastal Arabs, although in some respects coastal caravans may have been more hierarchical. As the role of coastal caravan leaders and European employers increased towards the end of the nineteenth century, Nyamwezi influence on the culture of caravan travel diminished.

There was no single pattern of Nyamwezi porterage, or of caravan organization. For porters a range of options existed between occasional journeys and full time specialization. Nyamwezi caravans could be small scale ventures of a dozen or so traders and porters, or massive undertakings of a thousand or more people, as the case of Ndekeja shows. Many Nyamwezi rulers were entrepreneurs, but lesser citizens, such as subordinate chiefs, hunters, medicine men and ordinary people also operated trading caravans. Often the caravans were formed by individuals carrying their own trade goods, and small employers who hired just a

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51 Glassman notes this point, but in the context of his argument concerning the defence of Nyamwezi autonomy against Swahili domination of the trade routes. See Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 59-60. I would argue that Nyamwezi cultural dominance in caravans working the central routes predated coastal economic domination.

52 See below.
few porters each. These numerous petty traders banded together for protection, and selected from among themselves a caravan leader.53

Nevertheless, some common characteristics of caravan organization and the division of labour among caravan workers can be identified. Some of these were outlined in chapter three. The pattern for many porters of dry season travel with agriculture being the priority during the wet season survived. The reluctance of most Nyamwezi porters hired at the coast to travel beyond their home countries on the return journey remained typical. These points were much commented upon by European travellers. Burton and Speke were held up for a month at Kazeh, the former writing “Our gang was paid off and another was not easily collected: porters during the dry, these men become peasants in wet weather.” Cameron, when in Ugunda in November, 1873, found it “impossible to obtain any pagazi ... as they would not leave home during the sowing season.” In 1876 a CMS caravan was on its way to Lake Victoria. In December at Hambu, near Nguru, the Nyamwezi porters left the missionaries, having met the terms of their contract. New porters had to be engaged, but “it was useless to attempt it, for, the first rains having fallen, the whole population was employed in preparing the ground for sowing, and until all the seed was sown no men would engage as porters.” After the task was finished a few weeks later, “several gangs” of men signed up. Another missionary reported that it was difficult to recruit porters in November 1883 in Tabora. The men of Unyanyembe preferred to remain in their villages and prepare their fields for the coming rains. In contrast, volunteers were numerous in February.54

The pattern of small-scale enterprise remained common throughout the century. In small chiefdoms such as Ndala, where there were no indigenous traders as rich as those in

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54 Richard F. Burton, Zanzibar, City, Island, and Coast (London, 1872), II, 298; Cameron, Across Africa, I, 183; Wilson and Felkin, Uganda, I, 76-7; François Coulbois, Dix années au Tanganyka (Limoges, 1901), 48. Similar comments are in Mackay to Wright, Uyui, 25 May 1878, CMS CA6/016; Broyon to McGregor, Zanzibar, 1 Oct., 1879, LMS 2/3/D.
Usumbwa, Unyanyembe or Urambo, caravans remained till the end of the century cooperative affairs of several small traders. A few weeks before harvest, in April, a drummer would tour the villages broadcasting the news that a caravan would soon depart. Porters would then gather at the appointed place. Some would have their own goods, or perhaps those of their family, to trade at the coast or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{55} Sheriff suggests it was probably such small bands which used the Pangani Valley route during the 1840s and perhaps earlier, taking their ivory down to the coast at various times during the year. The northern Nyamwezi and Sukuma made similar journeys to Pangani in the 1850s. During the 1870s and 1880s they took their ivory instead to Saadani and Whinde.\textsuperscript{56} The survival of this tradition of small bands of trader-porters showing the security problems they faced when not combined into larger caravans, is suggested in a missionary’s account of a meeting with a Nyamwezi caravan in the Marenga Mkali in August 1891:

About midday a number of Wanyamwezi travellers came into our camp looking extremely excited, and told us a sad tale of murder and robbery. They said that shortly before ... they had been attacked by a number of predatory Wahehe ... who had killed their leader, and carried off two tusks of ivory and between thirty and forty goats which they had been taking to the coast.\textsuperscript{57}

This caravan, given the circumstances and the small quantity of stolen goods, probably only consisted of a dozen or so individuals. There were also porters who were hired by some of the bigger Nyamwezi traders, or worked for them as a personal service. A third category included those who took nothing to the coast but joined a party hoping to find paid work in a returning caravan.\textsuperscript{58} An account from Usambiro in northern Unyamwezi in 1891 highlights

\textsuperscript{55} Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 36, 201-2. See Koponen, \textit{People and Production}, 114, 116. Sägger, “The Late 19th Century Caravan Trade”, 11-17, has accounts of small scale trade in northern Unyamwezi and Usukuma leading to participation in caravans to the coast.


\textsuperscript{57} Ashe, \textit{Chronicles of Uganda}, 22.

\textsuperscript{58} Bennett, \textit{From Zanzibar to Ujiji}, 64, 2-8 May, 1878; Nolan, “Christianity in Unyamwezi”, 36, 201-2.
the attraction for up-country porters of wage earning in caravans leaving the coast. Although the context was recruitment for a missionary caravan the traditional method was used:

A drum was sent out into all the villages round about, in order that by its ‘safari’ beat the people might know that there was a caravan going to the coast .... The drummer, on such occasions, would usually return with a crowd of followers — some anxious to carry loads to the coast — others wishful simply to follow in the ... train, as a protection .... The men who did no work paid their own way down-country by selling tobacco or spades [hoes] of their own manufacture, which they carried with them. The main object of porters and followers alike was to get to the coast and to carry back a load for which usually good wages were paid.59

A Swahili view of the arrival of a Nyamwezi caravan at the coast during the last decades of the nineteenth century is given by Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, the noted scholar:

When the Nyamwezi come down from up-country they bring cattle and goats and ivory, hippo and ostrich teeth. And a Nyamwezi does not come to the coast unless he has a friend in the town, a chief or a young man of the town. He sends him word, ‘I have reached Usako, get my house ready, and put a lot of beer (ready — ed.)! His friend will rent a house for him, for his headmen and for the porters. On arrival in the town he goes into his house, and the ivory is sent to the customs, and for six or seven days he stays drunk. The Indians go back and fore to ask the headman of the caravan, ‘When will you do business for your ivory?’ And when the porters arrive they sell the things they have brought ... And they buy presents to fasten up ready to take to their kinsfolk up-country.

After lengthy negotiations with the Indian merchant, through a Swahili go-between, a deal would be struck for the ivory.

After the business is over the Nyamwezi go to the bush-country to cut cords. These are long strips for tying up the bales. Then they get their payment for returning up-country. They buy what they want .... And if (a porter — ed.) has bought a lot of rubbish, he must still carry a bale [for the mtongi], and his own things he fastens round his waist.60

During the period from about 1840 to 1890 the Nyamwezi also operated much larger caravans, representing the commercial status of the members of the trading elite of Unyanyembe and other large chiefdoms. Burton describes the formation of such a caravan:

In collecting a caravan the first step is to ‘make,’ as the people say, a ‘khambi,’ or kraal. The mtongi, or proprietor of the goods, announces, by pitching his tent in the open, and by planting his flag, that he is ready to travel; this is done because among the Wanyamwezi a porter who persuades others to enlist does it under pain of prosecution and fine-paying if a death or an accident ensue. Petty chiefs, however, and their kinsmen, will bring with them in hope of promotion a number of recruits, sometimes all the male adults of a village, who then recognize them as headmen.

59 Alfred R. Tucker, Eighteen Years in Uganda and East Africa (London, 1911), 57.

60 Lynden Harries, trans. and ed., Swahili Prose Texts (London and Nairobi, 1965), 180-1. This account agrees in its essentials (but not tone), with an earlier one by Burton, Lake Regions, 46-7.
Once the porters were assembled and all was ready the *mtongi* oversaw the allocation of loads (Kiswahili: *mizigo*). The more powerful chiefs, as members of the *vbandevba*, could mobilize a huge work force, drawing on their status as chief, rich trader, and warlord. In 1882 Mirambo sent a caravan to the coast in the charge of his uncle and chief commercial agent Mwana Seria which numbered some 1,300 porters. They carried 314 large tusks to buy cloth, guns and powder, and another 20 “fine” tusks as a present for Sultan Barghash (which was declined). Soon after the return of this caravan Mirambo despatched trading caravans for ivory to Buganda, Karagwe, Usukuma, Katanga, Manyema and other places, indicating his large resources of trade goods and manpower. In September he still had sufficient porters available to send a “large” ivory caravan under Mwana Kapisi to Unyanyembe and the coast. Such large caravans of Nyamwezi porters were almost certainly organized according to the model adopted by the Irish caravan leader and trader Charles Stokes, who successfully managed columns of 2,500-3,000 porters during the 1880s and early 1890s. Stokes was unique among Europeans in East Africa in the ease with which he could attract porters, largely because he learnt and applied the methods of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma. Among the northern Nyamwezi and Sukuma he gained a good reputation, partly through his marriage to Limi, cousin of Mtinginyi of Usongo, and partly because of his demonstrated belief in non-violent caravan management and racial equality. Thus he was able to gain access to the labour resources of Usongo, “a land of porters,” and other parts of northern Unyamwezi.

The future Bishop of Uganda encountered Stokes’ caravan at Saadani in July 1890. His

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62 Southon to Thompson, Urambo, 17 April 1882, LMS 4/4/B; Griffith to Thompson, Uguha, 1 July 1882, LMS 4/4/C; Coppestone to Thompson, Uyui, 2 Sept. 1882, LMS 4/5/A; Roberts, “Nyamwezi Trade”, 65, f.n. 5. Mwana Kapisi’s caravan only got as far as Uyui. For more on Mwana Seria see Stokes to Lang, Uyui, 18 Dec. 1884, CMS G3A6/02.

63 Anne Luck, *Charles Stokes in Africa* (Nairobi, 1972), 59, 63-5, 68, 85, 157-8, 163, 203; Harman, *Bwana Stokes*, 23, 34-47, 54-6; Blackburn to Lang, Uyui, 2 July, 1885, CMS G3A6/02 (quote). Stokes wrote soon after his first wife’s death, thankful to be on safari, that he was “quite at home” with his “‘wild boys.”” Stokes to Lang, Kulehi camp, 26 July, 1884, CMS G3A6/01; Luck, *Charles Stokes*, 59. See also Harman, *Bwana Stokes*. 142
description is worth quoting in full for the details it provides of Nyamwezi porters and caravan organization:

... away from the sea ... some 2,500 Wanyamwezi porters were encamped. These men had come down to the coast, under the leadership of Stokes, and would each carry back a load weighing some seventy pounds. They were mostly fine, stalwart-looking men. Some had brought their wives, who cooked and carried the cooking utensils and food — often no light burden .... Many [of the porters] were swaggering about in ... a few yards of white calico floating in the wind as they walked .... Others had cloth ... wrapped about their heads as a turban or folded round their waists as a loin-cloth. Others, again, were simply clad in skins. All apparently were armed with spears, bows and arrows, or antiquated muzzle loaders ...

These 2,500 porters ... were divided into fifteen camps and companies. For instance, there had been assigned to us for the portage of our loads some 300 Wasukuma. These men were in [the] charge of a 'nyampara,' or head-man, named Simba ... Under him were five or six subordinates who had charge of companies. Four or five, or a larger number ... messed together. These smaller companies also had each its head. It was each man's duty in turn to cook for his fellows, draw water, and fetch firewood.

Thus the whole caravan was organized ... 64

Apart from the merchants the most important caravan officers were the wanyampara 65 (literally "grandfathers"). The origins of the name and function clearly lie in the political structure of Nyamwezi, Kimbu, and Sukuma chiefdoms. Northern Unyamwezi and Usukuma, according to the missionary C. T. Wilson, were divided into numerous districts, each ruled by a chief or "monungwa." Under the "monungwa" were several "lesser chiefs" or "banyampara": "... it is under these niamparas", he wrote, "that the porters or pagazi go down to the coast to engage in caravans going up into the interior." 66 Wilson was actually describing sub-districts of chiefdoms governed by batemi. Nyampara is most correctly described as "elder." 67 We have accounts from central Unyamwezi and Ukimbu of the role of wanyampara as members of chiefs' councils. 68 Despite Wilson's view, it is

64 Tucker, Eighteen Years, 26-7. Tucker implies that it was Stokes who had created this system. In fact, as will be seen in chapter 7, this ordered arrangement was typical of most caravans, whether Nyamwezi, Sukuma, or coastal. The cloth noticed by Tucker was probably a portion of the porters' advance wages.

65 I use the Swahiliized wanyampara. In the original political context in Usukuma, for example, the correct term is banamhala.

66 C. T. Wilson, "A Journey from Kagei to Tabora and Back", PRGS, N. S., II (1880), 619; also quoted in Achim Gottberg, Unyamwesi, Quellensammlung und Geschichte (Berlin, 1971), 120.

67 Holmes & Austen in "The Pre-Colonial Sukuma", 384, state that a banamhala was "an advisory council of village elders," subject to the authority of ng'wanangwa (pl. banangwa), who was subject to the miemi.

68 Copplestone to Hutchinson, Uyui, 22 March 1881, CMS G3A6/01; "Beantwortung des Fragebogens zur Erforschung der Rechtsverhältnisse der Naturvölker (der Wanyamwesi) von Professor J. Kohler", Tabora, 1899. Deutsches Zentralarchiv Potsdam, Auswartiges Amt, Kol. Abtlg. Bd. 4990, Bl. 66-78, published in Gottberg,
unlikely that it was the same individuals sitting on chiefs’ councils who regularly went on safari, as they are described as “elders” or “elderly,” and presumably were needed at home to exercise their governing functions. Rather it seems that the title and authority was transferred to influential caravan headmen, (who may later have become council members). The title was also used in caravans of coast-based porters, so it was therefore accepted in a multi-ethnic environment, where its original meaning was lost. This is the implication of Raum’s statement that “the leaders of the porters, the wanyampara, were self-made men of great physical strength endowed with moral stamina and a sense of justice. Famous leaders spent their best years on the caravan paths, passing from one expedition to another.”

Another important caravan official was the mganga, or traditional doctor and diviner, present in almost every caravan, and who acted as advisor and provided ritual protection against the dangers of the road. Important diviners were sometimes also ivory merchants, and organized their own caravans. Waganga advised unsuccessful itinerant traders to carry out the “gourd of travel” ritual to improve their fortune. Apart from protecting caravan personnel the mganga also ritually cared for the ivory. Ivory tusks were ensured safe arrival at the coast after they had been ritually marked with spots, lines and figures. The mganga carried only a light load “in view of his calling.”

The fourth important caravan functionary was the kirangozi (pl. virangozi), the guide or leader on the march. The kirangozi was usually elected by the porters. He was not

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73 Also kilangozi or kiongozi, from -ongoza, Kiswahili: to drive forward, carry on vigorously, lead.
necessarily from a special rank or section of society.74 Any individual with experience and some standing among the porters, and with good knowledge of the road, could be chosen. The kirangozi had no substantial power; the position was more a matter of honour and status, with a few more opportunities for personal gain than were available to regular porters. According to Burton he had to “pay his followers to acknowledge his supremacy,” and purchase “charms and prophylactics” from his mganga. While on the march the kirangozi preceded the porters, who would be fined if they stepped ahead of him. His work was to lead the caravan along the correct route, and at the same time to mark off the paths which stragglers were not to take. This was done by blocking off the path to avoid with leaves or sticks or drawing a line across it. Sometimes porters were lost who “walked on mechanically, never noticing these signs, and were only brought to their senses by arriving at a strange village many miles out of their way.” He might also negotiate hongo with chiefs along the route. Despite his responsibilities the kirangozi was the butt of abuse “for losing the way, for marching too far or not far enough, for not halting at the proper place, and for not setting out at the right time.” His perquisites included better rations, a lighter load, and sometimes the attendance of a slave.75 At the beginning of journey the kirangozi was entitled to a goat “to make the journey prosperous,” and perhaps other presents.76 According to Unomah the office was similar to that of the flag bearer of the Unyanyembe army, especially in the use of ritual implements, including a small drum.77 This is another example of the way

74 Although on one journey Southon described his kirangozi as a “Wanyamwezi chief,” and Wilson believed he was usually chosen from among the wanyampara. Southon to Whitehouse, Lagula, Ugogo, 6 Aug. 1879. LMS 2/1/D; Wilson & Felkin, Uganda, I, 43.


76 Speke, Journal, 50. Burton is incorrect when he says that a present was optional at the end of a journey. His evidence on wages and customary payments is unreliable given his own failure to pay his porters according to their agreement with the British consul in Zanzibar.

Nyamwezi cultural forms were incorporated into caravan culture. A *kirangozi* at the head of a caravan made a powerful statement. Accompanied by a porter pounding a large drum, he himself carried the red flag of the Zanzibari Sultanate if the caravan belonged to an Arab or Swahili. In Burton’s words:

> The dignitary is robed in the splendor of scarlet broadcloth ... with a central aperture for the neck, and with some streamers dangling before and behind: he also wears some wonderful head-dress, the spoils of a white and black 'tippet-monkey,' [colobus monkey?] or the barred skin of a wildcat, crowning the head, bound around the throat, hanging over the shoulders, or the gorgeous plumes of the crested crane. His insignia of office are the kipungo or fly-flapper, the tail of some beast, which he affixes to his person as if it were a natural growth, the kome, or hooked iron spit, decorated with a central sausage of parti-colored beads, and a variety of oily little gourds containing snuff, simples, and 'medicine' for the road. strapped around his waist.78

### The Professionals

The earliest European travellers into the far interior found that porters could readily be hired at the coast for an agreed wage, although there were variations in supply according to the extent of demand, the season, the political situation in the interior, epidemics, and other factors. This was not only the case at entrepôts such as Bagamoyo, Pangani, and Saadani, where caravans initiated and terminated their journeys, but at many of the more important market centres and caravan stops along the central routes. In the numerous descriptions of caravan travel published from the 1860s the term “professional” crops up time and time again. This does not contradict the ample evidence of the continuation of the older tradition of dry season travel practised by small up-country traders and porters, a distinction first noted by Cummings among modern historians.79 However, many historians consider only the latter, and neglect or discount the appearance of a large corps of professional wage earning caravan leaders, headmen and porters.80 But others have recognized that the role of

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80 Roberts, “Nyamwezi Trade”, 65, writes “The carriage of ivory to the coast became a most important feature of Nyamwezi life, but it was not essentially a specialist activity.” Given the limitations imposed by his topic
specialists was an innovation with important consequences, including the beginnings of regular migrant labour, and the transfer of capitalist ideas, as well as other cultural consequences. On an occupational level the profession was marked by a distinct way of life and the development of professional status and pride. Specialist porters showed a long term commitment to porterage, learned the skills necessary for success and sometimes survival, and proved their endurance and strength. None of these characteristics were greatly affected by the continuing partial attachment of most porters to the land. A distinct "caravan culture" which crossed ethnic lines was also created.82

The earliest mention in the contemporary literature of "professional" carriers dates from 1860, when Burton writing of his experience in 1857-9 described the Nyamwezi as "the only professional porters of East Africa."83 Sometimes the merits of specialists were less directly stated. In 1861 Speke was told by Musa Mzuri, an Indian trader at Kazeh, that using his own slaves as porters was "more trouble than profit"; hired porters were "more safe."84 In 1879 a missionary wrote: "Wanyamwezi take more care of their loads than Zanzibar men."

this conclusion is not surprising. A more extreme position is taken by Nolan, who attempts to argue that Nyamwezi porters cannot be considered to be specialists or wage workers before the colonial period. See his "Christianity in Unyamwezi", 72-3. Juhani Koponen provides in many respects the most balanced account of economic and social organization in nineteenth century Tanganyika, but writes "... the impression created by some later historians that porterage was wage labour comparable to colonial migrant labour does not seem particularly well-founded. Rather, I should like to argue that among porters more important distinctions than those between slaves and free labourers were, first, between what might be called 'trader-porters' and 'worker-porters' and, second, between those who worked on their own and those who acted as commercial agents for their political leaders." See People and Production, 113-4. Differing with Koponen I argue that "worker-porters" did share many characteristics with colonial migrant labourers. From the point of labour history it is the frequency or rate of migration or level of specialization which is important, as well as the experience of the labour process. In addition, Koponen’s reformulation of categories does not clarify matters. There were, in fact, no hard and fast divisions, but considerable overlap. These questions will be dealt with in chapter 9.


82 Caravan culture had an impact beyond the caravans themselves. This topic will be further discussed in chapters 6, 7 and 8.


The former are professional pagazi [porters], the latter seldom ..."85 But in time coastal porters were also designated professionals. The former British Consul at Zanzibar, F. Holmwood, had this to say concerning coastal slave porters in 1893:

I notice, in the account of a recent anti-slavery deputation to Lord Rosebery, that a statement was made in regard to the employment of slaves by European travellers and by the British East Africa Company, which was calculated entirely to mislead the public as to the true nature of such employment...

It is true that a large proportion of the porters, guides and guards of all expeditions from Zanzibar to the interior is composed of slaves, in a technical sense. Whilst representing England at Zanzibar, I engaged, both for the company, for Mr. Stanley, and for other travellers, more than a thousand of such porters.

These men are professional travellers whose livelihood is gained by such work, and the fact of their being slaves or otherwise has no bearing on their engagement, for no master can compel a slave to travel, and, practically, the moment he is outside the coast region he can desert and settle as a free man in the interior.86

May French Sheldon noted “the muscular development” of Nyamwezi porters’ shoulders through their long experience carrying loads. A missionary wrote that the Nyamwezi were “the professional transport-agents of the East Coast.” In 1905 a German anthropologist described almost all his Nyamwezi men as “Professional carriers. sturdy fellows with tremendous chest-measurement, broad shoulders and splendidly developed upper-arm muscles.”87 Nevertheless, by this time the day of the “trained professional porter” was almost over. In later years, according to one experienced traveller, those who intermittently worked as porters rarely had the physical attributes “of the old type who made it their life’s work.”88

The long term commitment of specialized porters is readily evident. Many worked the caravan routes for a number of years before returning home. In 1861 Speke succeeded in


86 Zanzibar and East Africa Gazette, 26 April 1893, 10. (Reprinted from The Times). The italics are mine. Holmwood’s assertion that slave status had little impact on the professionalism of caravan porters is borne out by the case of slave porters in the Merina kingdom of Madagascar, where a large corps was continually employed on the transport routes. See Gwyn Campbell, “Labour and the Transport Problem in Imperial Madagascar, 1810-1895”, IAH, 21 (1980), 341-356.


acquiring the services of a specialist *kirangozi* or caravan leader named Ungure: “He had several times taken caravans to Karagwe, and knew all the languages well ....” At Lumeresi’s in Buzinza, south of Lake Victoria, Speke met an old acquaintance called Saim, a porter in a caravan arriving from Karagwe: “Saim told me he had lived ten years in Uganda, had crossed the Nile, and had traded eastward as far as the Masai country .... Kiganda, he also said, he knew as well as his own tongue; and as I wanted an interpreter, he would gladly take service with me.”

Saim was a trader, but also a professional porter, perhaps carrying his own goods at times, but otherwise prepared to hire himself out to others. Many porters made several long safaris with the aim of accumulating enough wealth to invest in their farms or slaves, or buy ivory to sell at the coast. In 1876 Mackay of the CMS noted that one of his men had travelled five times to Ukerewe island in Lake Victoria from the coast town of Wanga. In his study of the history of Unyanyembe, Alfred Unomah interviewed several old men who had made numerous journeys to the coast during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. One, Mwana Kakulukulu of Kazima in Unyanyembe, was over 100 years old at the time of the interview in 1968. He had travelled to the coast seven times; after the fourth safari he had enough capital to establish his cattle business. Men such as Mwana Kakulukulu were not very different from the migrant labourers of the colonial period. Others made porterage a lifetime’s work. One German writer met some elderly Nyamwezi who had walked to the coast more than twenty times.

Specialist caravan leaders and porters also worked the northern and Kenya routes. A leader of the thousand strong caravan from Pangani to Laikipia in 1868 had travelled to Maasailand fifteen times. May French-Sheldon found that many of her men had previously worked for European travellers and big game hunters. The *kirangozi* in Oscar Baumann’s


90 Mackay to Wright, Zanzibar, 12 Dec., 1876. CMS CA6/016.

91 Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 399. Unomah also gives another slightly different version of Mwana Kakulukulu’s story, 89, f.n. 23. See 386-389, 391, 399, for other examples.

expedition of 1891-2 was Mkamba, a slave, who “roamed uninhibited through Massailand year in year out.” Baumann recognized in him “the typical 'msafari' (caravan man) of Pangani. He returns from Lake Rudolph only a few days later to set out again for Kavirondo; in one caravan his poor wages are counted out to him and in the other he names his advance for the next journey.”93 Like other experienced European travellers Baumann admired the competence of such experts as Mkamba, his headman Mzimba bin Omari, and other specialist caravan operators and porters. During the 1890s Waungwona or “Zanzibaris” tramped the central routes through German territory or from Mombasa to Uganda in the British sphere. In 1892, a few days after the return to Zanzibar of W. G. Stairs’ Katanga expedition, numerous headmen and porters, “unwarned by experience,” signed on to a Uganda bound caravan.94 Many of their friends had starved to death in the famine associated with the collapse of Msiri’s empire in Katanga, partly a consequence of the aggression of their employers. Another veteran was missionary A. B. Lloyd’s cook, who had travelled “several times” to Uganda prior to the disastrous journey through German East Africa of the CMS caravan of 1894-5.95

When Protestant and Catholic mission societies established stations up-country from 1876 many porters found regular work for a number of years on supply caravans and caravans taking up missionary reinforcements, as well as on mail services. The expansion of demand for experienced caravan personnel caused by European activities meant that many porters could move from one European caravan to another, as they were required.96 In 1880 one LMS missionary travelling to Ujiji noted that the caravan had “a very good chief, Ulia

93 James Christie, Cholera Epidemics in East Africa (London, 1876), 222; French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan, 105; Oscar Baumann, Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle (Berlin, 1894), 4-5 (my translation). This was Baumann’s third caravan journey, so he speaks with some authority.

94 Moloney, With Captain Stairs to Katanga, 277.


[Ulaya]" who had worked some years before for another LMS man.97 In the meantime Ulaya had been employed by the French traveller, the Abbe Debaize. Other porters in the caravan had been with earlier LMS expeditions.98 Mandara, a porter with Stairs’ Katanga expedition, had previously worked for Joseph Thomson, Frederick Jackson, and Bishop Hannington. Bega and Mirabo Ngumba had survived Stanley’s Emin Pasha Relief Expedition.99 Mission societies and imperialist expeditions thus represented part of the expansion of opportunity for specialist caravan porters. Many must have worked for Arab, Swahili and Nyamwezi caravans in addition.

Age and experience were respected virtues among porters. Youths looked up to "gray-beards": "... the older men, who have learned to husband their strength, fare better than their juniors, and the Africans, like the Arabs, object to a party which does not contain veterans in beard, age, and experience."100 Such depth of experience was a resource which could be drawn on in difficult times. During the long months at Fort Bodo in the eastern Congo rainforest, the porters of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition vented their frustrations in comparisons between their current predicament and the “saffari ya zamani,” former caravan journeys, during which there was “more food and fiercer natives, more cattle, longer marches, and bigger men.”101 Experience often showed that conditions did not live up to those on previous safaris. The result, as we will see below, was individual or collective resistance.

97 Ulia is the same as Ulaya, meaning Europe.

98 Wookey to Whitehouse, Maguhika, 23 June 1880; Southon to Whitehouse, Urambo, 6 July 1880. LMS 3/2/B. For short accounts of the careers of other professional caravan headmen in East Africa see Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 192; Hobley, Kenya, 200-201.

99 Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 264. See the “Who’s Who of Africans” in Simpson, Dark Companions, 191-8, for a list of many of the better known porters and headmen who worked for European travellers in East Africa.

100 Burton, Lake Regions, 112; Cummings, “A Note on the History of Caravan Porters”, 113.

The work of a professional caravan porter required considerable skill and endurance. One experienced European traveller wrote in praise of Nyamwezi professionals: "These Wanyamwezi are really marvellous people .... It is hard to imagine anything more admirable than the skill with which they manage to meet all difficulties." But beyond bald statements such as that of Andrew Roberts — that ivory porterage was "a skilled and arduous task best performed by fit and experienced young men; undisciplined and demoralized captives would have been of very little use" — we have no analysis of what these skills were. Certainly, familiarity with the caravan routes must have been essential for the professional porter. Weule found that some of his carriers were so knowledgeable of the main caravan routes that they were able to reproduce them in rough but extremely accurate maps covering the central route to Tabora and beyond, and branches to the north and south. Perhaps one of the most important skills learned on the job would have been some knowledge of the various languages of the road and the peoples whose countries were traversed. This meant some ability with Kiswahili and Kinyamwezi, as well as, for example, Kikuguru, and Kigogo. Porters on the northern routes found Kizigula, Maa, and other languages spoken in northern Tanzania and Kenya valuable. A third type of skill was the ability to acquire a fund of knowledge for survival on the road and in far off countries. Such knowledge included familiarity with practical survival techniques for coping with provisioning problems and food shortages, bad weather, and other hardships of the road. Porters needed hunting skills and a knowledge of edible plants and insects. They also had

102 Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 206, 10 Aug., 1891.

103 Roberts, "Nyamwezi Trade", 61; Koponen, People and Production, 113.


105 Weule, Native Life, 373-5; 9 (map).

106 For an interesting discussion of the necessity for multilingualism at the commercial centre of Mazinde in north east Tanzania, see Steven Feierman, The Shamba Kingdom: A History (Madison, 1974), 199-200.

107 Grant, an experienced hunter, admired the resourcefulness and hunting and survival skills of his and Speke's Nyamwezi porters: James Augustus Grant, A Walk Across Africa (Edinburgh, 1864), 42-3.
to understand inter-ethnic cultural support networks including utani or joking relationships through which aid could be provided in times of need. For trader-porters some commercial knowledge of the long distance trading systems would have been essential. Other useful practical skills would have included facility with food processing and knowledge of traditional medicine.

Great stamina was another mark of specialist porters. Stanley believed the Nyamwezi to be superior to the Waungwana on account of their greater ability to resist disease, their enormous strength and endurance, and “The pride they take in their profession.” By the early 1900s Nyamwezi porters were “famous for their almost incredible powers of endurance.” Joseph Thomson wrote of his 150 “Zanzibari” porters’ toughness when climbing the Uchungwe mountains west of Mahenge in 1879:

The power of lung and muscle displayed by the Zanzibari porter is certainly remarkable. With a load of from sixty to seventy pounds on the head or shoulder, and a gun in the one hand,—the other being occupied steadying the bale,—he will patiently toil up a precipitous mountain by the hour together without stopping to rest, and probably shouting or singing all the time.

J. A. Moloney wrote of the mwungwana or Zanzibari, “His powers of endurance are marvellous: they defy alike hunger, cold, rain, swamps, and malaria.” Moloney put this down to “the easy fatalism” of the “patient and cheerful” coast porter. A less ambiguous endorsement of Yao professionals highlights their toughness. Joseph Thomson believed that “The Wahyao are perhaps ... the most industrious and energetic people to be found in East Africa ... The best coast porters have been originally brought as slaves from the Yao country. Nearly all my best men ... are Wahyao, and the experience of many other travellers has been the same.” W. P. Johnson of the Universities Mission to Central Africa endorsed these

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108 Very little has been published on the important topic of utani, but considerable research was carried out at the University of Dar es Salaam by Stephen A. Lucas and his students during the 1970s.

109 Stanley, Through the Dark Continent, I, 41; Weule, Native Life, 40.


111 Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 223. There is further praise of “the Zanzibari as a marvel of stamina”, 263-4.
views: "A trained Yao will carry a load, keep up with any European [who of course did not carry a load], and when he has built the latter his booth to rest in, will go off to look for honey, or if the halt be in a village, will dance all night, and come up smiling next morning." 112

Beyond description, perhaps the best measure of endurance is the time taken to walk (or jog) routes commonly traversed. LMS mailmen are a case in point. Although not caravan porters in the usual sense because of their light loads and relative freedom to set their own pace, they sometimes made long journeys along the central caravan route in remarkable time. Southon of the LMS Urambo station, about 1,250 kilometres march from the coast, reported that he had received letters from Zanzibar in just thirty three days. 113 A trading company at Zanzibar reported a letter from Ujiji, over 1,500 kilometres by foot, arriving in 45 days. Another from Unyanyembe took 39 days for a journey of perhaps 1,100 kilometres. Such times were quite normal and numerous other examples could be cited. 114 The LMS mailmen were mostly Waungwana. But the Nyamwezi were generally considered to be the strongest and most robust messengers and porters. According to Southon,

Twenty five to thirty miles a day for ten consecutive days would be considered good walking for the average Mnyamwezi. Their pace is generally about four miles an hour.

Men who are practised runners & habitually employed in carrying messages, are capable of trotting long distances, and often make short journeys in an incredibly short space of time. Forty to fifty miles are often made in one day by such men. Mirambo once told me that some of his men had made the journey from Urambo to Ujiji in six days. To do this they must have averaged about 40 miles a day. ‘Runners’ are almost always shod with hide sandals and are seldom loaded with a gun or other heavy weapon. A spear or bow & arrows, are generally carried, & as the runner is not troubled with much clothing, he jogs along during the greater part of the day, and seems alike insensible to heat, hunger or fatigue. 115

112 Quoted by W. P. Johnson in an extract from The Nyasa News, reprinted in the Zanzibar and East Africa Gazette, 31 Jan. 1894, 9; Johnson, ibid., 10. When the origins of the “Zanzibaris” of Thomson’s first caravan (1879-80) are considered, the largest group were Yaos: Simpson, Dark Companions, 145.

113 Southon to Whitehouse, Urambo, 24 Dec. 1879, LMS 2/3/B.


Large caravans with heavily laden porters were of course much slower. The LMS caravan of 1879 from Saadani to Ujiji took 100 days. This good time was facilitated by the few desertions and little property loss. Even better time was made by the experienced porters of the LMS caravan managed by Juma, which reached Urambo from the coast in 72 days. One of the quickest journeys on record must be that of Bishop Tucker and his caravan who marched from Nasa, Usukuma to Zanzibar during the dry season of 1893. The journey took just 44 days including the passage to Zanzibar, but this was only possible because there were at least two porters for each load. When a LMS caravan arrived at Saadani from Ujiji with 70 half loaded porters, the journey had been completed in 62 days, making an average day’s march of 24 kilometres. But when the 12 rest days are excluded the average daily march was 30 kilometres. Clearly such arduous journeys could not be undertaken successfully by amateurs.

Nyamwezi, Swahili, and Arab caravans, however, usually travelled at a more leisurely pace. First, their purpose was trade, not just conveyance of the stores of explorers or missionaries. Second, Nyamwezi caravans to the coast often included herds of goats and cattle, the latter sometimes acquired from the Gogo, which necessarily slowed the march. Third, up-country porters often had to spend more time finding provisions on the march, given the more limited quantities of barter goods available to them compared with porters working for coastal traders and Europeans. Finally, Nyamwezi porters had their own work culture which differed from the more regularized pattern preferred by European caravan leaders.

116 Wolf, Central African Diaries, 282, 17 Sept., 1881; Southon to Whitehouse, Ujiji, 29 Sept. 1879, LMS 2/J/B.

117 Tucker, Eighteen Years, 134-5.


On a more personal level many porters celebrated their strength and endurance. When Southon discussed the weight of some large tusks with Mirambo, he casually said, “I suppose these large tusks will be carried by two men?” Mirambo laughed and said “No, we have plenty of men who can carry much larger ivories than these, and one man to each is plenty, in fact, some men would carry two of the small ones.” “But,” said Southon, “no ordinary pagazi [porter] could carry so heavy a load for any distance.” “That is true”, the chief replied, “but many Wanyamwezi men take a pride in carrying heavy weights, but then they cannot make a very long journey. Some men will carry a heavy bale but cannot carry a tusk, whilst others can carry a large tusk but are unable [to] carry a bale. It all depends upon what a man has been used to.”

Livingstone saw one such herculean porter, who carried six frasilas or 210 pounds of ivory from Unyanyembe to the coast. Sometimes when loads were apportioned, especially the heaviest and most awkward, the strongest of the experienced porters were reminded of their previous deeds and were urged by their headmen to set a good example. These veteran carriers had considerable pride which would not allow them to take the lightest burden. This was the case with Songoro, one of the porters who worked for the French explorer, Giraud. Songoro told Giraud that he had gone with Stanley “from Zanzibar to the second sea” (the Atlantic Ocean) carrying a section of his boat. Working for Stanley in the Congo, he claimed to have carried no less than 25 boat sections from the Atlantic coast to Stanley Pool.

Another remarkable porter was the Mnyamwezi Bundula, who habitually marched near the head of missionary S. T. Pruens’s caravan. He had lost his right hand years earlier.

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120 Southon, “The History, Country and People of Unyamwezi”, V. 8. Southon’s emphasis. The 8 tusks in question averaged 78 lbs. Five were over 90 lbs. and the other 3 were below 60lbs. There are many examples in the literature of porters making long journeys carrying such loads.

121 Livingstone, Last Journals, 418, 23 April, 1872. For other examples of porters of exceptional strength see Burton, Lake Regions, 112; Lloyd, In Dwarf Land, 37; Marius Fortie, Black and Beautiful (London, 1938), 57-8.


123 Perhaps “Bunduki” or “gun” in Kiswahili.
earlier in a gun accident, and "yet managed to carry his madala load (two loads tied on at opposite ends of a pole), and to tie it up most skilfully every morning, not withstanding this defect." 124

Specialist caravan porters were proud of their occupation and their skills and endurance. They were men of the world who had travelled far and experienced life to the fullest. A code of honour developed at least as early as mid-century, and particularly among Nyamwezi porters. Its most obvious expression, commonly noted by travellers, was the predilection of Nyamwezi porters when deserting to leave their loads and sometimes their advance pay behind rather than damage their collective reputation. "The porters," Burton wrote, "hold it a point of honor not to steal their packs; but if allowed to straggle forward, or to loiter behind, they will readily attempt the recovery of their goods by opening their burdens, which they afterward abandon upon the road." 125 A decade later a French observer echoed Burton. Nyamwezi porters, he wrote, were "of a proverbial honesty and exemplary docility. However there would be danger in treating them harshly," he warned, "not because they revolt against bad treatment, but because they save themselves by abandoning their loads intact." 126

There are many examples. On the very first day of Speke and Grant’s journey to Unyanyembe, in September 1860, eleven of the porters disappeared, including ten of the freed slaves provided by Sultan Majid of Zanzibar, and one Nyamwezi pagazi. Only the Mnyamwezi "deposited his pay upon the ground." Later, near Zungomero, three more Nyamwezi porters deserted, leaving their loads on the path. At Kanyenye in Ugogo eight of the Nyamwezi absconded. Although they took a part of their burdens with them, this probably represented what they considered to be wages owed to that point. 127 In 1893 the


125 Burton, Lake Regions, 198; also ibid., 236. For examples see ibid., 195-6, 384.


127 Speke, Journal, 45, 64, 75. In contrast the less experienced Grant wrote that they "had no claim to honour or honesty — 113 of them, although handsomely paid, deserted us, carrying away a considerable quantity of
tradition was still alive. A Nyamwezi porter deserted the caravan of Lionel Decle on the Unyanyembe border, leaving his gun, ammunition, and the 49 rupees which was owed him in wages.128

In general terms the Nyamwezi had a good reputation for honesty whether they deserted or not. Livingstone spoke highly of “Banyamwezi” porters who “as usual” carried goods “honestly to Unyanyembe” in advance of himself. Stanley had an equally good experience in this regard on his first expedition, not losing any goods from the small caravans sent ahead of his own party to Unyanyembe. “The Wanyamwezi as a rule are honest people they will not open a load & take anything out,” wrote one missionary.129 But the Nyamwezi were not the only porters to have a code of honour. One of Cameron’s Waungwana went so far as to find a replacement to carry his load to Unyanyembe when he deserted in the Mgunda Mkali in July 1873.130 Southon’s Waungwana and coastal porters showed pride in their work on the journey up-country in 1879 by taking extreme care of the goods entrusted to them, with not £1 in loss, damage or theft by the mid-way point. The missionary wrote that “They are very faithful in all things & honest beyond measure, so that I never trouble about locking things up ...” During 1879 and 1880 Thomson had the same experience with his Zanzibaris who “… never once presumed to put forth their hands unlawfully to take what was not theirs …”131 Deserting porters did not always show such scruples, however. In April 1873 one of

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129 Livingstone to Lord Stanley, Bamberre, Manyema country, 15 Nov., 1870, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, C.598, m.f. 78.621; Bennett, Stanley’s Despatches, 5-6.; Henry to Wright, Mpwapwa, 1 Oct. 1878, CMS CA6/012. See also Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 201, 31 July, 1891. Reichard generally belittled the Nyamwezi, but in some respects praised their scrupulousness: “Porters only use the part of their wages advanced to them if they are completely sure that they are to go on the journey ...” P. Reichard, “Die Wanjamwezi”, Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft Für Erdkunde zu Berlin, XXIV (1889), 308.

130 Cameron, Across Africa, I, 135.

131 Southon to Whitehouse, Lagula, Ugogo, 6 Aug. 1879, LMS 2/1/D; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 205-6. See also Pruen, The Arab and the African, 97-8, for a lengthy testimonial of the honesty of Zanzibari porters. Sir Philip Mitchell recorded similar experiences in British East Africa: of 10,000 odd loads carried
Cameron's *Waungwana* named Uledi disappeared with his load near the Mkata swamp. When returned by chief Kisabengo he was flogged "as an example." The porters "agreed that the punishment was well deserved, for on this part of the road, although it was not thought any disgrace to desert, yet it was considered a point of honour that a man should never run away with his load."\(^{132}\) What is notable about this case is that collectively porters were just as interested in maintaining their reputations as employers were in enforcing discipline.

Collective pride was expressed in other ways. Porters insisted on being well dressed when departing on a long journey or arriving at major caravan termini. In contrast they often wore old rags while on the march.\(^ {133}\) Nyamwezi porters took pride in their tradition that once on the road from the last camp stop, they would not backtrack.\(^ {134}\) Besmirching the honour of porters could have serious consequences for employers. In one case in 1879 near Mahenge mass desertion was almost the result of an unintentional smear by Joseph Thomson on his *Waungwana* porters' honour. Describing the incident the youthful explorer wrote:

> Seeing a porter offering beads of a kind suspiciously like my own to a woman to pound rice for him, I asked Chuma [his headman] where the man got them. The latter, who heard what I said, immediately went off among the men, telling them I was accusing them of stealing beads. A dreadful row was at once raised, the drums were beat frantically, and the horns blown to call all the men together. From all sides they came rushing, bringing their guns, etc. These they laid down at my feet with the air of injured innocence. They had never been accused of stealing before! 'Here are our parcels,' cried they; 'look and see if we have anything belonging to you. Now give us our tickets of discharge, that we may go back to the coast, for we cannot go with you to be looked upon as thieves!' Every one was in the utmost excitement. Personal articles were packed, and preparation for a general return made, as if an unpardonable aspersion had been cast upon their unsullied honour, which as immaculate men they were bound to resent.

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\(^{132}\) Cameron, *Across Africa*, I, 59-60. This raises the question of the extension of a code of honour to ideas about justice. This will be examined in chapter 9.

\(^{133}\) For discussion see chapter 7.

Thomson was forced to back down and apologize.\textsuperscript{135}

Another way to view specialist porters is a comparison with amateurs. The latter had less discipline and motivation, could not or would not carry heavy loads, had no pride in the work (often considering carrying the work of slaves or women), marched erratically, and would not travel far.\textsuperscript{136} Explorer Frederick Elton was struck by the prodigious strength of professional porters working the central routes in comparison with his earlier experience of porters in Usangu, Ubena and Uhehe:

After our experiences of Wasango and Wachungu carriers, the immense loads undertaken by these ... porters of Zanzibar and Uniamwesi [Unyanwezi] astonished us. Some of these fellows are magnificent developments of the human animal, with herculean frames; but even the smaller ... possess a capacity for endurance, as well as a muscular strength, that makes us Europeans feel very poor creatures. I have seen them slide and stagger along a path, which a diminutive torrent has worn into a narrow deep winding groove, with slippery sides, or over a marsh, ankle-deep and knee-deep in black tenacious mud, for six and eight hours at a time, without once taking their loads off their heads.\textsuperscript{137}

Experienced carriers themselves differentiated between their own abilities and those of amateurs. In 1883 Johnson travelled to the country of the Konde at the north end of Lake Nyassa, and reported his porters' view of its inhabitants:

They have, I have been told, the poorest reputation as carriers, and I have heard my own porters compare a caravan of them to a string of ants, each ant carrying a very tiny bit. Any little joke like this is kept up and rubbed in, as it helps the carriers of larger loads to forget the strain on their own muscles.\textsuperscript{138}

Thus there were good practical reasons for regular porters to take pride in their work.

\textsuperscript{135} Thomson, \textit{To the Central African Lakes}, I, 195-6.

\textsuperscript{136} See for examples, Elton, \textit{Travels and Researches}, 324-5, 331 (Chungu or Bena, north of Lake Malawi); Frederick L. Maitland Moir, “Eastern Route to Central Africa”, \textit{The Scottish Geographical Magazine}, I, IV (1885), 107 (Lake Malawi-Tanganyika corridor); Johnston, \textit{The Kilima-Njaro Expedition}, 42-3, 51-2 (Nyika and Rabai); Last, \textit{Polyglotta African Orientalis}, 18 (Sangu); Alison Redmayne, “Mkwawa and the Hehe Wars”. \textit{JAH}, IX, 3 (1968), 428 (Hehe); Konczacki, \textit{Victorian Explorer}, 201 (Sagara); Moloney, \textit{With Captain Stairs}, 131-2 (Tabwa?).

\textsuperscript{137} Elton, \textit{Travels and Researches}, 396.

Chapter Six
Recruitment, Bargaining, Wages and Power: Who Called the Shots?

Culture was an important agent shaping the way porters worked and caravans operated. To a large extent this was a development of early patterns of work in the ivory trade. Experience over the years and norms and conditions which were routinely expected solidified into “custom.” But structures and institutions also played a major role. Old institutions such as chiefship were adapted to aid in recruitment. Increasingly the caravan trade and changes in economy and society along the routes encouraged specialization, so that in the end recruitment “agencies” emerged with considerable power to influence the labour market. The market itself was a structural factor which shaped porters’ and employers’ behaviour. But porters retained considerable bargaining power, especially in larger caravans, which they used to ensure their mobility, maintain their customary rights and, where possible, increase their wages.

With increasing European intervention from the late 1870s came new ideas about work. But attempts to impose on porters employed by Europeans definitions and patterns of work derived from European (and sometimes Indian) conditions and stereotypes about Africans were contested, and sometimes rejected. From the point of view of porters, innovations and regulations were acceptable if they largely coincided with custom, or offered some improvements. But if this coincidence of interest was missing custom prevailed. On a formal level the result in British caravans was a compromise which was reflected in contracts and the earliest labour legislation.

The chapter begins with an outline of the development of recruitment practices. The nature of the hiring context influenced the degree to which porters were able to defend their basic demands, and played a role in the development of caravan culture and the consciousness of experienced pagazi. Regularized procedures and practices were known and utilized by those “in the business.” They include organized recruitment methods with variants operated by Africans, Asians, and eventually, Europeans. In the second section I
consider changes in the negotiation of agreements. Bargaining was often collective in nature, and porters readily exploited the increasing demand for their labour. In order to maintain pressure on employers porters engaged in the typical stratagems and tactics of wage workers wherever merchant capital was a powerful presence: strikes, go-slows, desertions, theft.¹ Towards the end of the period written employment contracts were the norm on European led caravans. There was some loss of freedom for porters as contracts were interpreted more rigidly by European employers, and in time contracts came to represent attempts to impose new ideas about work. But many porters were able to safeguard basic claims, particularly the principles of advance payment and payment by the month. These non-negotiable "rights" were embedded in the earliest colonial labour legislation enacted by the Zanzibar Protectorate government.

Of equal importance to porters were rations and wages, the subjects of the final two sections. Life was hard in nineteenth century East Africa, and a porter’s life was harder than most. Adequate rations went a long way towards guaranteeing survival, and many worked for a full stomach. A standard ration became a condition of employment in most caravans. Payment of rations in barter goods sometimes gave porters an entry into petty trade. In either case claims were defended.

The average porter, as a wage labourer, demanded fair remuneration. Wages rose at crucial junctures during the second half of the century as porters pressed their temporary advantage in the labour market, but tended to fall after several years of German imperial government. Downward pressures were exerted by economic changes, colonial regulation of African caravans, and the use by the colonizers of state power. Porters were paid either for the anticipated journey or by the month. Nyamwezi porters were well placed within the labour market because of their high reputation and the structural advantages of their position within the caravan system.

¹ These will be dealt with in detail in chapter 9.
Recruitment

Structural and institutional aspects of the caravan business indicate increasing specialization and an elaboration of the division of labour during the second half of the nineteenth century. The first of these is the tendency towards regularization of recruitment practices at the main termini, so that employers could hire porters without a long search. Recruitment "agencies" emerged at the coast, a tendency which matched specialization in other aspects of the caravan business. This was particularly the case at Bagamoyo: "The whole and sole occupation here is preparation for journeys to the interior," wrote a missionary in 1878. "Everywhere the signs of a large pagazi business are apparent." Porters were able to find work easily either individually or through a popular headman by registering with recognized recruitment agents. In Unyamwezi the important chiefs regulated access by outsiders to porters. None of these patterns of recruitment displaced the old Nyamwezi style described in the previous chapter.

The important role of Indian entrepreneurs in the coastal towns, especially Bagamoyo, is the most notable and commented upon feature of the enlistment of caravan porters in the late nineteenth century. From the earliest journeys of Europeans into the interior Indian merchants were involved in outfitting caravans and recruiting porters. Burton's headman Said bin Salim was assisted by the "Cutch banyan" Ramji when the first gang of porters was hired at Bagamoyo. Ladha Damji, the Zanzibar customs master, sent a caravan of Nyamwezi porters to Kazeh with Speke and Grant. Jemadar Isa bin Kunari of Bagamoyo, according to the historian of the town, "very quickly realized the monetary

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3 Nevertheless, we are still in need of an detailed account of the activities of Indian capital on the coast during the nineteenth century. For earlier times we have Edward A. Alpers, "Gujarat and the Trade of East Africa c. 1500-1800", IJAHS, 9, 1 (1976), 22-44. The basic account for the nineteenth century is Abdul Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar (London, 1987), 82-87; 202-208 and passim. Martha Spencer Honey, "A History of Indian Merchant Capital and Class Formation in Tanganyika c. 1840-1940" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, 1982) is unfortunately disappointing on the mid-nineteenth century, but see 5 following, 102-4. See also Robert G. Gregory, South Asians in East Africa: An Economic and Social History 1890-1980 (Boulder, 1993), 44-5.
rewards of becoming involved in the caravan trade,” and by the 1870s was closely concerned with the hiring of porters, making the most of the position of his headquarters just behind the customs house. In 1873 another Bagamoyo resident, the local customs master “Soorghy,” by hard bargaining frustrated the attempts of Murphy of Cameron’s expedition to find porters.  

Indian recruiters were active in other coastal towns. In Saadani in 1884 an Indian “merchant” found porters for LMS missionaries. The Indian trader, Hamis Tarrier of Zanzibar, is mentioned as being able to recruit porters, although he did not satisfy the CMS missionary requesting them. Recruitment of porters for the southern routes was also handled on occasion by Indian traders, as Livingstone found at Mikindani in 1866.

All of these traders and officials had significant business interests aside from enlisting and hiring out porters. It is only when we consider the well organized recruiting methods of Sewa Haji of Bagamoyo that a fully developed system is apparent. Sewa Haji’s name is well known to scholars of the Mrima coast, and I do not propose to recount his career here. But a few comments are in order. Starting off in his father’s general store in Zanzibar in the 1860s, Sewa Haji moved to Bagamoyo and into the business of supplying caravans with their trading goods and purchasing the ivory, rhino horn and hippo teeth which they carried down to the coast. At the same time he expanded into the recruitment and supply of pagazi, a role first apparent for Stanley in January 1871, as well as operating transportation services and

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financing caravans of Arab and Swahili traders. Thus, as Brown comments, he became involved “in virtually every phase of long distance trade.” But by the early 1890s, according to Baumann, Sewa Haji was to be distinguished from wholesalers such as Taria Topan, and had largely given up trading deals: “His firm is now a ‘staff placement’ bureau in the greatest style, he is a carrier and worker agent …” Some historians have stated that Sewa Haji was frequently able to monopolize all the porters in Bagamoyo, so that caravan leaders had to accept his terms. That he had achieved this level of dominance is disputed by Brown, the historian of Bagamoyo. Nevertheless, Sewa aimed at monopoly, and was successful in manipulating debt: 

Sewa Haji recruits porters for all, for Germans, British, French and for the Congo State…. Whereas he gives even to the coastman at the most 10 Rps. per month, to the Mnyamwezi and Msango only a few yards of cloth, the European [employer] must pay 15-20 Rps. monthly. Through small sums which Sewa advances to the Blacks in their leisure time, and then extortionately charges interest on, he knows that there will always be people on hand. He wins influential caravan leaders by high payments, for which the others’ hard earned wages are so much reduced. In addition to the advances, which increase with interest and compound interest to infinity, still more ‘charges’ are subtracted from them, particularly if it is a question of dealing with naive interior people.

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8 Oscar Baumann, Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle (Berlin, 1894), 3. There is evidence, however, that Sewa was still heavily involved in trade in the Lake Victoria region. See Brown, “A Pre-Colonial History of Bagamoyo”, 190-1.


10 See Glassman, “Social Rebellion”, 94-7, for a general discussion of debt relations and caravan porters at Bagamoyo. According to Glassman (“Social Rebellion”, 95) by the late 1880s Sewa Haji was “skimming off half the cash advance typically to Nyamwezi porters.” But Glassman gives no specific evidence for this. He also suggests that “Free Nyamwezi porters thus gave up to Sewa Haji the same proportion of their wages as slave-porters gave to their masters” (note 13). The first problem here is that if the first statement is not proven, then the second is only supposition. Even if true, the comparison is invalid. The wage subject to deduction was only the advance wage in the case of free Nyamwezi porters, but all of slave porters’ wages. For the latter case see “The story of Rashid bin Hassani of the Bisa tribe, Northern Rhodesia”, in Margery Perham, ed., Ten Africans (Evanston, 1963), 100 and, for the northern routes, Glassman, “Social rebellion”, 132. Second, the statement does not reflect the position of Nyamwezi porters at the coast in earlier decades.

11 Baumann, Durch Massailand, 3-4 (my translation).
Thus on the coast new forms of labour extraction were developed to meet demand and impose new working conditions. However, the situation described by Baumann represents a new period in labour relations, one in which the conditions of imperialism and early colonial rule played a part.

Sewa Haji was frequently criticized by European travellers, as Brown notes. But he was (and is) judged unjustly when it came to his treatment of porters. For instance a condition of the contract under which he supplied “good” porters to the German Friedrich Kallenberg in 1891 was that flogging of porters would be prohibited. Kallenberg was proud of his record in keeping to the agreement. Sewa Haji established the first hospital in Bagamoyo and a hospice for sick porters, operated by the Holy Ghost Fathers, as well as making other major charitable contributions. Among these were donations for hospitals in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. His continuing concern for Nyamwezi porters, without whom his business would have been nothing, was reflected in his will. In it provision was made for the future care of “sick Wanyamwezi and poor persons” in the Sewa Haji Hospital (Dar es Salaam).

At the coast entrepôts serving the central routes porters for Swahili and Arab caravans were recruited locally through patron-client, slave, or pawnship relationships or through the recognized agents. Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari tells us that “If an Indian or an Arab wanted

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12 Brown, “A Pre-Colonial History of Bagamoyo”, 186-7, and sources there. For example, Stokes accused him of cheating his porters: Stokes to Lang, Uyui, 18 Dec., 1884, CMS G3A6/02. But a few years later Stokes himself was making business deals with Sewa Haji. See Matson, “Sewa Haji”, 91.

13 Friedrich Kallenberg, Auf dem Kriegspfad gegen die Massai: Eine Frühlings-Fahrt nach Deutsch-Ostafrika (München, 1892), 45; Kieran, “The Holy Ghost Fathers”, 356; Brown, “A Pre-Colonial History of Bagamoyo”. 193. Flogging was routine in most caravans, especially during the 1890s, and Sewa Haji was in advance of European opinion. Thanks to Harald Sippel for the reference from Kallenberg.

14 Quoted in Brown, “A Pre-Colonial History of Bagamoyo”, 197.

15 For a fictional account in which pawnship serves as one type of recruitment mechanism see Abdulrazak Gurnah, Paradise (London, 1994). For the northern routes from Pangani and Tanga see Glassman, “Social Rebellion”, 130-139; idem, Feasts and Riot, 74-8. Here the situation was rather different than at Bagamoyo and along the central route. Most porters working the northern routes were either slaves, and worked for their owner or another entrepreneur and, at the same time, perhaps themselves, or were free Swahili recruited through patron-client relationships.
porters, the person who supplied them ... was given a rupee for each porter as the jumbe's
due. This levy was not all sent to one jumbe, but to the jumbe to whom the caravan had
come."16 The suggestion is that anyone with sufficient contacts could collect porters as long
as the local jumbe (chief) received the recruitment tax. Alternatively, and it seems especially
in the middle decades of the century, when demand for labour was increasing but coastal
recruitment facilities were not yet well established, porters were hired directly from among
the thousands of Nyamwezi and other up-country porters who arrived each year. Even this
was not enough to ensure sufficient porters for coastal entrepreneurs and madiwan (public
officials) seduced by the tempting opportunities in the far interior. The result was that
procurers or "touts" were sent up to 250 kilometres or more inland to persuade downward
Nyamwezi caravans to divert to their particular village, both to secure porters and to profit
from the visitors' ivory sales and purchases of cloth, beads, and other goods. "When they
[porters] are rare," Burton wrote, "quarrels take place among the several settlements, each
attempting a monopoly of enlistment to the detriment of its neighbours, and a little blood is
sometimes let."17

Europeans on the coast requiring porters at first relied on Indian agents, but soon
developed their own recruitment systems. Some travellers relied on their headmen to enlist
carriers. Southon believed that this was the best method because "He [the headman] will
know the capacity of the men and their trustworthiness better than anyone else."18

16 Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, The Customs of the Swahili People ed. and tran. J. W. T. Allen (Berkeley, Los

Oct., 1860; Richard F. Burton, "The Lake Regions of Central Equatorial Africa"; *IRGS*, 29 (1859), 57, 80;
*idem*, *Lake Regions*, 82, 119-20, 236. For similar activities by "couriers" in the Kilwa Kivinje area see David
Lawrence Horne, "Mode of Production in the Social and Economic History of Kilwa to 1884" (Ph.D. Thesis,
UCLA, 1984), 156. For a discussion of the activities and role of agents of coastal merchants ("touts") see James
L. Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania, 1840-1940* (Philadelphia, 1992), 46-
8.

18 Southon to Whitehouse, Urambo, 18 Dec., 1879, LMS 2/3/A. See also Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across
Africa* (London, 1877), I, 11; Bennett, *Stanley's Despatches*, 158-9; Last to Whiting, Mamboya, 4 Oct., 1881,
Ashe to Lang, Msalala, 10 Feb., 1883, CMS G3A6/01; Muxworthy to Thompson, Zanzibar, 24 May, 1882,
LMS 4/5/D; Beidelman, "The Organization and Maintenance of Caravans", 610. From his experience in the
1890s Hobley wrote: "Having selected his principal Mniapara [mnyampara], the leader, if wise, left the
selection of the junior headman in his hands, and each of the juniors then collected his own squad of porters.
Sometimes in these cases a kind of sub-contracting system operated. This was a forerunner of the system of anonymous hiring of Mombasa dockworkers, described by Frederick Cooper, which lasted into the 1930s. Workers were hired by intermediaries who then presented an entire gang to the stevedoring, shipping and warehousing companies of the port. Europeans with considerable safari experience sometimes found their own porters. The best known case is that of Stokes. Stokes also found porters for other European travellers, especially CMS missionaries. In 1892 Baumann, after two previous safaris, preferred to find his own men in various coastal towns, making sure that each had a known guarantor who was contracted to pay back the porter’s advance in the case of desertion. Slave porters were usually guaranteed by their master.

Increasing European interests in Zanzibar led to the establishment of alternative recruitment services with greater European control. From the late 1870s trading firms such as Smith, Mackenzie and Co. and Boustead, Ridley and Co. were active in fitting out caravans and hiring porters on behalf of the British Protestant mission societies, the Congo Free State, the Imperial British East Africa Company, and others. In 1886, for instance, Smith, Mackenzie and Co. recruited 620 porters for Stanley’s Emin Pasha Relief Expedition. In June 1891 the company assisted in procuring porters for Stairs’ expedition to Katanga.

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19 For an example of a porter list in which only the headman’s name plus the number of men in his gang is given see MacKenzie to Jackson. 10 Nov., 1888, Mackinnon Papers, Box 63, IBEA Co. File 1A. 1888-9; Frederick Cooper, On the African waterfront (New Haven and London, 1987), 30, 36-40. See also Stephen Rockel, “Relocating Labor: Sources from the Nineteenth Century”, History in Africa, 22 (1995), 448.


21 Baumann, Durch Massailand, 7.

Rashid bin Hassani, a slave of Bisa origins, tells how he was recruited in Zanzibar by Smith, Mackenzie and Co. and introduced to a porter’s life:

... I saw one day an amazing sight. There were Goan shops that sold wines and cognac and this day I saw Swahilis spilling money and throwing about rupees. We asked where they got their money and were told ‘You are all fools here; you will only get women; go abroad and you will get money. We went with a European from Smith Mackenzie’s. Have a drink first and then we will go along.’ We sat and drank two or three days and were given money; these men were like Europeans. Eventually we went and saw three Europeans at a table; one had no left hand. Some of us were written on for a safari to the mainland. We were to get 10 rupees a month; half we drew and half was paid to our masters.23

Often much of this work was sub-contracted out to Indian traders.24 Another example of the common interest in porter recruitment linking European imperialists and Indian merchants was the partnership in 1880 between Sewa Haji and the Frenchman Emile Segère. Their aim was to establish a caravan business, including transport services and supply depots, which would be utilized by travellers in the interior. The caravans were to be operated by a permanent carrier work force. The partnership quickly folded, but Sewa Haji continued on his own.25 In the first years of colonial rule the state established bureaux for the recruitment and registration of porters. This was the case in Zanzibar, where there was a persistent demand for porters to serve on the mainland into the 1890s.26

In the interior the role of chiefs was paramount. In Unyanyembe Tippu Tip’s father married the daughter of Chief Fundikira sometime in the early 1850s, and from then on was

23 "The Story of Rashid bin Hassani", 99-100.

24 Especially at Bagamoyo and Saadani. E.g. Baxter to Lang, Zanzibar, 4 Aug., 1884, CMS G3A6/01.


26 The editors of the Zanzibar Gazette included the following information in the edition of 21 November, 1894, as part of a rebuttal of criticism from the London paper The Freeman on the handling of the slave trade by the Protectorate government: “A tax of ten rupees per head ... has been levied for some years past upon every porter engaged in Zanzibar for caravan work, whether the said porter be a slave or a free man. The object of this tax is chiefly to cover the expenses incurred by the Zanzibar Government in keeping up a bureau for recruiting and registering porters, an institution established for the welfare of the porters themselves ...” Unfortunately I have no further information on this bureau. However, given the increasing demand for labour, an argument can be made that the formalization of recruitment practices during the early colonial period was also for the purpose of controlling labour and limiting opportunities for negotiation, i.e. for controlling costs. This can be seen in the legislation regulating porterage which was decreed in most of the East African colonies in the first few years of colonial rule.
able to gain access to many Nyamwezi followers. The policy of Mkasiwa (1861-77) towards the caravan system was generally one of laissez faire. But his successor Isike (1877-93) became more interventionist as the position of the Arabs in Unyanyembe weakened from the middle of his reign, and major rivals in other parts of Unyamwezi and western Tanzania — Mirambo, Nyungu ya Mawe, and Msimba — died. Arab traders had to pay high recruiting fees and a tax on caravans. They were subject to a new labour law aimed at protecting porters, servants and slaves from indiscriminate summary justice meted out by Arab and Nyamwezi masters and employers. Isike utilized this law when he imprisoned and heavily fined several Arabs when two Nyanyembe slave porters were murdered in 1884. He then suspended Arab recruitment of Nyamwezi porters to ensure compliance and no doubt submission. Isike's power was such that again in 1887, 1889, and 1892 he was able to prevent the recruitment of porters by Arabs for months at a time and, therefore, the movement of many coast bound caravans. The Arabs demurred because their business was reliant on the good will of the Nyamwezi. These conditions lasted until his death resisting the Germans in 1893. Unomah believes that Isike's commercial and labour policies were a significant part of his overall programme of building up royal power and reigning in potential opposition forces in Unyanyembe, including the vbandevba. From 1893 new realities intruded. The Germans were now the paramount power in Unyanyembe. Under the terms of

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27 Burton, Lake Regions, 184; François Bontinck, trans. and ed., L'autobiographie de Hamed ben Mohammed el-Murjebi Tippo Tip (ca. 1840-1905) (Bruxelles, 1974), 22, 41. Tippo Tip said, "Whatever he [his father] wanted in and around Tabora he got ... at this time he was as though chief in the Nyamwezi manner, having much property and many followers ..." Hamid bin Muhammed (Tippo Tip), Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el-Murjebi yaani Tippo Tip tran. & ed. W. H. Whitely (Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, 1974), 13 § 2.

a treaty of submission imposed by imperial representatives Nyaso, Isike’s successor, was bound to “assist European caravans with agents, [and] assist them with porters.”

Elsewhere in Unyamwezi other chiefs including Mirambo in Urambo and Mtinginyi in Usongo played a similar role in porter recruitment. In other parts of the interior chiefs supplied porters to travellers, often for a fee. In at least one case porters were supplied as part of tribute payments. The southern Kimbu chiefs sent porters to Mnywa Sele of Unyanyembe from his accession in 1859 until his deposition in 1861. Thus, in the interior, existing institutions largely met the labour demands of merchant capital, as Coquery-Vidrovitch and Lovejoy note for Sub-Saharan Africa generally.

In Ujiji recruitment was in the hands of the Arab and Swahili elite of the town, who utilized various sources. These included their slave and client retainers, Nyamwezi, local Jiji and Guha (Holoholo) and, increasingly during the 1870s to 1890s, Manyerna from eastern Zaire. As at the coast and Tabora political conditions had a great impact on the availability of porters. In June 1881 Hutley found it very difficult to find porters due to the war

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29 A translation of the “contract” is in Unomah, “Economic Expansion and Political Change”, 357. In an earlier treaty signed by Isike and Dr. Schwesinger, Tabora Stationschef on 2 October 1892, Isike committed himself to cancel the ban on porters signing up with the Germans. The text is in Achim Gottberg, Unyamwezi, Quellensammlung und Geschichte (Berlin, 1971), 351. See also O. F. Raum, “German East Africa: Changes in African Tribal Life Under German Administration, 1882-1914”, in Vincent Harlow and E. M. Chilver, eds., History of East Africa (Oxford, 1965), II, 176-7; Temu, “Tanzanian Societies and Colonial Invasion 1875-1907”, 107.


31 Livingstone, Last Journals, 69, 7 July, 1866 (Yao); J. F. Elton, Travels and Researches Among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa (London, 1968, orig. pub. 1879), 320, 323-4 (“Wachungu,” north end of Lake Malawi), 326-8, 355 (Sangu); Marius Fortie, Black and Beautiful (London, 1938), 65, 100 (Masanja of the Sukuma).


conducted by the coastal traders against neighbouring Urundi and Uvira. By the 1880s the power of Tippu Tip and Rumaliza, the greatest Arab traders, was such that European travellers frequently turned to them for help with labour. When missionary Francois Coulbois left Zanzibar for Ujiji in July 1883 his 406 porters were provided by Tippu Tip. The porters of Congo Free State official Edvard Gleerup for his journey from Stanley Falls to Zanzibar in 1885-6 were supplied by Tippu Tip and Rumaliza in turn, and in 1886 the explorer Wilhelm Junker had to turn to Tippu Tip for very expensive carriers when the trader was at Tabora with his ivory caravan.

Collective Bargaining and Contracts

Porters along the central caravan route found that their labour and skills were in high demand, and that they held considerable negotiating power. As an occupational group they were similar to migrant wage workers in other occupations, times and places. There is considerable evidence over several decades that they collectively bargained with their employers over wages, rations and conditions, went on strike, and adopted other negotiating tactics and forms of resistance, such as desertion and go-slows. Whatever the identity or consciousness of the porters, all of these characteristics indicate to some degree that there was an understanding of a common interest which was separate from that of the employer. Professional or semi-professional porters acted in defence of themselves, their fellows and their profession. They did so according to their own ideas about work, according to their own "work ethic," in Keletso Atkins' words. Porters, especially the Nyamwezi, defined the working routines of the caravans and created the caravan culture of the central routes long before Arabs and Europeans made a significant impact in the interior.

35 Wolf, Central African Diaries, 270, 21 June 1881.

36 François Coulbois, Dix années au Tanganyika (Limoges, 1901), 15; Per Hassing and Norman Bennett, "A Journey Across Tanganyika in 1886 (Translated and edited extracts from the journal of Edvard Gleerup)", TNR, 58-9 (1962), 129, 132; Wilhelm Junker, Travels in Africa During the Years 1882-1886 (London, 1892, reprinted 1971), 559-562.
European travellers constantly ran up against the facts of caravan life. For decades they had no choice but to accept most aspects of the system, rail as they might against the frustrations set in their path by an apparently uncomprehending workforce. Outsiders requiring a cooperative workforce had to adapt, as Arab traders did, hence it is not surprising that the most successful European caravan leaders, such as Stokes, were the most flexible. Others less adaptable in their ideas about work, especially missionaries, struggled to impose a regular weekly work regime, with, for instance, no marching on Sundays.37 But from the late 1880s the onset of colonization and increasingly harsh discipline in European-led caravans made collective action a riskier business for porters. While African traders were eventually undermined by increased penetration up-country of foreign traders, the construction of the railway in British East Africa, the fall of ivory prices, and the gradual imposition of restrictive regulations on their caravans by the German authorities on the mainland and the British on Zanzibar, European employers were increasingly able to utilize the coercive authority of the new colonial state.38 During the late 1880s and 1890s European power was most concentrated in and around the coastal entrepôts and along the caravan routes, exactly where porters were when not on the march. The first military posts were established in coastal caravan termini such as Bagamoyo, Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Pangani, Saadani and Kilwa. Once the Germans were strong enough to support permanent military stations in the interior they built in 1889 a boma or fort at Mwapwa, the most important junction town, another in 1890 at Tabora, the biggest market centre, and a third in 1891 at Kilosa. Other bomas were constructed along the central routes at Kilimatinde (1895) and Ujiji (1896), and


38 In German territory from the late 1890s Africans needed permits to take caravans to the coast. Further restrictions on elephant hunting, trading and firearms acquisition were imposed in the early years of the twentieth century. See Philip Stigger, “The Late 19th. Century Caravan trade and Some of its Modern Implications”, unpublished paper (Simon Fraser University, n.d.), 18-19. Enforcement of firearm regulations was probably spotty until after Maji Maji. See Juhani Koponen, Development For Exploitation: German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania, 1884-1914 (Helsinki and Hamburg, 1994), 541.
along the northern route at Mazinde and Moshi.39 These centres of power were useful to employers because German authorities along the routes could punish rebellious porters with imprisonment, forced labour or whippings. Meanwhile, the British in Zanzibar held similar powers, and imprisonment in the old Portuguese fort was sometimes used to control and punish disputatious porters.40

Another useful weapon for controlling African workers, including porters, was the imposition of contracts and colonial decrees and ordinances backed up by the force of the incipient state. This can be seen as part of the process of developing — as imperialists saw it — a more efficient exploitation of labour, with the aim of securing African resources.41 Since porters were the first group of African labourers encountered by imperial representatives on the East African mainland, and for many years the most important, it was logical that they should be the target of early attempts to “reform” African labour practices. These factors — economic changes, the projection of European military power, regulation, and the use of contracts — suggest a diminution of the bargaining power of porters. In reality, as will be shown later in the thesis, the clash of ideas about caravan work could go either way. Caravan culture remained an effective protection until the deskilling of the early 1900s. During the 1880s and 1890s porters maintained their power of veto through desertion, as many travellers discovered.

A few examples of the bargaining process point to the power of the porters and in some cases their collective solidarity. Burton, with Speke the first European in the far interior, tells us that “The porter will bargain over his engagement to the utmost bead, saying that all men are bound to make the best conditions for themselves.”42 In early 1861, Speke

39 Koponen, Development For Exploitation, 114-5.

40 See below for an early case.


42 Burton continues, “yet, after two or three months of hard labor, if he chance upon a caravan returning to his home, a word from a friend ... will prevail upon him to sacrifice by desertion all the fruits of his toil.” This did not diminish the intensity with which porters bargained for the best wages and conditions. There will be more on the apparent contradiction here in chapter 9.
and Grant were in Unyamwezi trying to recruit porters to continue their journey to Buganda. Grant wrote this account of the experience:

Men were in abundance in the country, and if a solitary one ran away, he could always be replaced ....But to collect one or two hundred we found a most difficult task: they are as fickle as the wind .... They haggle pertinaciously about their hire; and after they have been induced to accept double wages, they suddenly change their minds, think you've got the best of it, and ask for more, or more commonly disappear. 43

This was a time of upheaval and disturbance in the western interior of Tanzania, with civil war in and around Unyanyembe. To the north Mpangalala's Ngoni ("Watuta") were "on the wing" and people were loath to leave home in the service of unknown wazungu. Even "double wages" might seem insufficient inducement to take the risk. Here the prime issue was security — an issue always at the forefront given the high risks which caravan porters often faced — rather than wages. Some months later, when the kirangozi was asked why it was so difficult to persuade porters to join the expedition, the answer was that many were harvesting (it was late May — the end of the rainy season) while others were concerned about the Watuta menace. 44 In 1873 Cameron found bargaining with his pagazi "most dreadful work." 45 The following year Stanley found porters at the coast taking a tough negotiating position:

In 1871 and 1872 I employed Wanyamwezi and Wanguana [sic] at the rate of $2.50 per month each man; the same class of persons now obtain $5 per month, and with some people I have had great difficulty to procure them at this pay, for they held out bravely for a week for $7 and $8 per month.

In addition, the porters, along with other caravan personnel including servants and askari, demanded four months pay in advance according to "custom." 46 In early 1883 Thomson was

43 James Augustus Grant, A Walk Across Africa (Edinburgh, 1864), 76-77.

44 Grant, A Walk, 57, 121; Speke, Journal, 131. On 22 Sept., 1872, when near Simba's, 27 days from Tabora. Livingstone tersely recorded: "The pagazi, after demanding enormous pay, walked off." Livingstone, Last Journals, 458. For some other cases of wage bargaining, with the threat of desertion sometimes used for leverage, see Rev. Dr. Krapf, "Journey to Wadigo, Washinsi, and Usambara, July-Sept. 1848", Church Missionary Intelligencer, 1-2 (1849-50), 155; Grant, A Walk, 112, 121; Bennett, Stanley's Despatches, 160; A. M. Mackay, "Journal", 18 Aug., 12 Sept., 1883, CMS G3A6/01; Gordon to Lang, Msalala, 5 Nov., 1883, CMS G3A6/01; Bennett, Mirambo, 83. The usual result was a compromise.

45 Cameron to Sir B. Frere (?), Shamba Gonera, 18 March, 1873, VLC 2/14, RGS.

looking for porters for his expedition to Maasailand. "So great is the fear inspired by the Masai," he wrote, "that I was not able to get a single man to volunteer to go for the customary #5 [sic] per month and it was only when I promised a dollar extra per month to be given as a present on their return if they proved good men that they began to turn up." One wonders whether the fear of the Maasai was exaggerated by the porters to create an upward pressure on wages.

Porters also bargained over their ration allowance. Dodgshun described in his diary a dispute with his porters over the quantity of cloth issued to buy provisions:

(Dec. 28, 1877) At Pamagombe all day on account of the wet. The men refuse a shukka [a cloth two yards long] for 8 [porters] and want one for 6. All day the dispute goes on, but neither side gives way. We offered the medium 7, but they refused.

(Dec. 29, 1877) Up to 2 o'clock, in spite of various confabs, the revolt continued and we consequently lost the day's work. Then Waidingugu [a headman] came to say they agreed to a shukka a day for 7 men. So we served out the cloth and got all arranged in messes of 7.

In this case the porters were clearly taking collective action forcing negotiations, with a strike the consequence of non-compliance. The porters had a spokesman who represented their case to the missionaries. The end result was a partial victory for the porters, but to their employers this outcome was also acceptable. It was a compromise which allowed the caravan to resume the journey to Ujiji.

Apart from basic questions of wages and rations, porters were particularly concerned to maintain control over both the pace of work and their mobility — their freedom to move from one caravan to another if conditions so demanded. This was reflected in their bargaining strategies. Up until colonial times coast-based porters were able to defend the twin principles of advance payment and payment by the month. They had several motivations for retaining the "custom" of advances. First, advance payment made it easier for them to secure payment than if the full amount was to be paid at the end of the journey. Second, losses were minimized if desertion became preferable to tolerating unduly arduous

47 Thomson to Bates, Zanzibar, 26 Feb., 1883, Thomson Corr., RGS.

conditions. In fact advance payment made desertion easier, as both porters and caravan leaders well knew. If a porter successfully deserted during the first months covered by an advance payment then he might possibly end up with a net gain. Third, if porters had to wait until the end of the journey for payment, they could be more easily coerced by the caravan leader.

The size of advance payments varied, but for journeys along the central routes two or three months’ pay was typical. In Zanzibar in June 1891 a missionary travelling to Uganda found that he had no choice but to accept taking men on with a three month advance. When he objected to these terms “They all simply walked off.” He was forced to back down and hire “on their own terms” those who had not joined other caravans. For unusually long journeys, or when the route was off the well trodden roads, larger advances were demanded. Porters hired for the Royal Geographical Society expedition to Lakes Nyasa and Tanganyika in 1879 demanded four months’ advance before agreeing terms because the route was not well known. The men of Stairs’ Katanga expedition also received four months’ wages in advance.

Many porters preferred a month by month arrangement to a contract for a whole journey which would take an unspecified period of time. Under the “piece work” system whereby they were paid per journey or to go a particular distance porters were subject to a faster pace of work, i.e. they had to walk further with fewer stops. This was because if they went at a more leisurely pace they would be spending more time on the road for the same wage. Payment by the month removed this possibility and allowed more leisurely journeys. “Porters were never in a hurry to accomplish a journey,” a missionary observed. “They received their daily rations, and were happy to remain on the road as long as possible, because they were paid by the month. Hence their wages accumulated ...”

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51 John Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years in East Africa (Cambridge, 1921), 48.
Porters returning from the coast to their homeland had a different perspective. They had less reason to dawdle on the way, and hence were frequently happy to accept payment for the whole journey when hired by travellers and traders bound for the interior. Payment by the month was considered so important to porters that they bargained hard to retain it, even at the cost of a reduction in overall wages. This is the logic of another dispute, this time in Zanzibar, recorded by Dodgshun: “Early today a number of pagazi came for engagement, but we could not come to terms. We wished to give so much for the whole journey; they can’t understand it and want to be hired by the month.” The next day the porters returned and agreed to the rate of $5 per month, “less than we really offered at first,” wrote the bemused Dodgshun. Once the deal was struck more porters made themselves available. 52

From the 1860s in European led caravans, negotiated agreements were commonly formalized in written contracts which were potentially enforceable at the coast. Usually contracts were made with the porters and registered with the appropriate consul, thus increasing powers of enforcement. 53 But there may have been precedents. There is reason to suggest that written contracts or at least records of employment terms may have been used by Arab, Indian and Swahili traders and merchants as well. Some business documents written in Arabic, Gujarati, or Swahili have survived from the nineteenth century. 54 Coastal traders

52 Dodgshun, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 45-6, 26 Nov., 1877. For another example of bargaining see Speke. Journal, 127.


were usually brought up in the Koranic tradition and were literate. Many coastal (and Yao) caravans employed a secretary, nominally a Muslim missionary, during the last decades of the nineteenth century.\(^5^5\)

By the 1890s labour contracts had become an important tool used by the state in its goal of imposing the rule of law in the interests of colonial capitalism. As Frederick Cooper puts it, writing of the coastal plantation sector, “The contract system [on the plantations] ... put the exercise of labor discipline under the rubric of generalized rules and enforcement by courts of law.” However, although contracts were far-reaching in their implications, in the rural plantation areas they were ultimately unenforceable.\(^5^6\) On caravans the situation was somewhat different given that porters and caravan leaders were always in close proximity except in cases of desertion. And far from contracts representing a disinterested rule of law applied by a neutral authority, as the colonial state wished itself to be recognized,\(^5^7\) they represented the specific interests of European caravan leaders and European imperialism. But caravans subject to coastal authority, whether of the Sultan, consular officials, or the early colonial state, were very much removed from officialdom when in the far interior. The reality was that authority was often arbitrary, and porters responded accordingly (as will be seen in chapter 9).


\(^{5^7}\) Cooper in “Contracts, Crime, and Agrarian Conflict”, 229, writes, “Against the personalistic authority of the slaveowner [read caravan operator], the colonial state posited a civilizing universalism: a rule of law in accordance with a code specified in advance, applied to all, and enforced by the disinterested institutions of the state.”
The origins of British consular attempts to exert control over porters when there were disputes between them and caravans of imperial subjects lie well before there were any British caravans travelling on the mainland. The 1839 commercial treaty between Great Britain and the Omani Sultanate included a term (Article 5) defining the extra-territorial judicial rights typically demanded by Europeans for their citizens living in “backward” countries. A dispute between one of the Sultan’s subjects and a British subject was to be decided by the British consul if the complainant was the first mentioned. If the complainant was the British subject then the dispute was to be judged by the Sultan or his nominee. In this case the Consul or his deputy should be present at the hearing.58 Growing British influence during the second half of the century must have made the Sultan’s decisions very susceptible to British pressure when consular representatives could attend the sultan’s court.

The earliest surviving contract is from Speke and Grant’s expedition to Lake Victoria, Buganda, and ultimately Egypt.59 Its terms were formalized by Speke and the permanent employees of the expedition on the 8th of September, 1860, at the British Consulate in Zanzibar.60 The presence of the consul in this and other cases was to bring dignity and formality to the proceedings and impress the porters, creating an element of theatre, and more practically, to act as a deterrent against desertion. It reads as follows:

These men all severally agreed, before Colonel Rigby, Sheikh Said, Bombay, and myself, to serve as my servants on the following terms, as registered in the office-books at the British Consulate, Zanzibar, on the 8th of September, 1860:

Supposing I gave Sheikh Said $500 — Bombay, Baraka, and Rahan $60 each — the Wanguana $25 each — and Sultan Majid’s Watuma [slave] gardeners $7 each, in ready money down, and promised to give them as much more on arrival in Egypt, as well as free clothes and rations on the journey, and a free passage back from Egypt to Zanzibar, then they bound themselves to follow me wherever I chose.


60 Printed in Speke, *Journal*, 553.
to lead them in Africa, and do any kind of duty, without hesitation, that men in such positions, while traveling with caravans, might reasonably be expected to do.

Then follows a "List of men engaged at Zanzibar — their Pay, their Appointments, and how disposed of."

Another early survival is from Livingstone's last journey. The British Consul in the Comoros Islands, William Sunley, recruited on the 9th of March, 1866, ten "Johanna men" who were to "serve ... as porters, boatmen or in any other capacity ..." They were to serve twenty months at MT$7 per month and received two months' advance pay. Musa, their headman, was paid MT$10 per month. 61

A third example, from Stanley's second expedition of 1874-1876, was made with 237 Waungwana, Nyamwezi and coastal pagazi and askari in the presence of their friends and relatives, and witnessed and registered by the American Consul. Note that there is no statement referring to an obligation to provide rations in the formal contract, although Stanley elsewhere refers to a further agreement in which he promises to provide rations.

Then follows a list of porters, the name of their "referee," the monthly wage paid to each, and their advance. Stanley elaborated further terms and conditions in his published account of the expedition. 63 Whether these were mutually agreed with the porters and askari is not clear. According to Stanley the porters and escort promised (in the explorer's words) "that they would do their duty like men, would honour and respect my instructions, giving me their united support and endeavouring to the best of their ability to be faithful servants, and would

61 Simpson, Dark Companions, 57.

62 See the photograph of the original in Depage, "Note au sujet de documents inédits relatifs à deux expéditions de H. M. Stanley", 132; also partially quoted in Bontinck, L'autobiographie de Hamed ben Mohammed, 250; Tippu Tip, Maisha, 89-91 § 117-118.

never desert me in the hour of need.” Wages varied from MT$2 to MT$10 per month. Adult porters received MT$5 and youths MT$2.50 per month, with four months in advance. Stanley promised to supply them cloths for clothing “at reasonable prices”; to “treat them kindly, and be patient with them”; to provide medicine and the best rations available, and if patients could not walk, to ensure that they would be left at a safe and convenient place with adequate cloth or beads to pay for support and a “native practitioner”; to ensure impartial justice in the case of disputes among the men and prevent bullying; to act as “father and mother” to them, and to do his best to protect them from “savage natives” and “lawless banditti.”

In contrast to the last example, the contract made between Keith Johnston, leader of the RGS expedition of 1879-1880, and the expedition’s porters, includes a promise by Johnston to supply rations and arms. The “Draft of agreement with porters at Zanzibar — April 17th,” made before Dr. Kirk, the British Consul, reads:

I. Keith Johnston representing the Royal Geographical Society, on the one part, and the under named men in the other part hereby agree as follows:—
I. Keith Johnston will pay the undernamed men wages at the rates hereinafter noted, and will provide them with daily rations, and arms for defence, during the journey which it is proposed to make from Dar-es-Salaam to Lakes Nyassa & Tanganyika & other parts of the interior of Africa. The under named men, in consideration of the above payments will follow Mr. Keith Johnston, or other leader appointed in his place, during the journey indicated above, and will serve him faithfully and remain with him till such time as the journey shall have been completed.

Then follows a list of 138 porters detailing names, ethnicity, previous experience, wage per month, and the total advanced. The wage rates varied from MT$4 to MT$10, with MT$5 the standard rate, and all the men received four month’s pay in advance.64

It is clear from these contracts and descriptive sources that porters successfully defended the principles of advance payment and monthly wages. But on the employers side, as Gwyn Campbell explains for porterage in the Merina kingdom in contemporary Madagascar, “there was a concerted effort to regulate the conditions of carrier supply. The

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terms of work and pay and the penalties for non-fulfilment of contracts were stipulated.” In Merina the most careful regulators were the missionary societies.65

At the coast the willingness of porters to defend their prerogatives, and the intrusive power in labour matters of the British Consul, John Kirk, are both clearly seen in a dispute in June 1876 between LMS missionary Roger Price and his porters. Price believed that he had arranged with his men to give them one month’s pay in advance the day before departure from Zanzibar. This was a much smaller advance than usually given.

When the time came, only a few of the men would adhere to this arrangement, most of them demanding two months’ and some even three months advance. I thought that possibly they might be brought to their senses if I took them to the British Consulate; this I did, and Dr. Kirk was kind enough personally to interrogate them on the subject. Finding that they still held out for two months’ advance, contrary to the original agreement, he at once ordered one of his soldiers to take away the spokesman of the party to the Fort to be there imprisoned.

The missionary went further.

Some days previous to this I had given, according to custom, to each man four yards of calico as an outfit for the road. The agreement having now been broken, I requested permission from Dr. Kirk, and the service of a soldier, to deprive all the men of the cloth which I had thus supplied to them, and which they had had made up at their own expense. This was very summarily done at the Fort, where I found them in [the] charge of the soldier, and bemoaning the ill fate of their comrade. I had now fairly the upper hand of them, and they came one after the other to beg themselves back into my service, willing enough to submit to any terms I liked to propose. I took most of them back, rejecting only a few whom I considered to be the ringleaders. Having, by their own obstinate and unreasonable conduct, broken their engagement with me, I felt I had a perfect right to draw out a fresh one, which I did, dating from that day; and thus they deprived themselves of about a fortnight’s pay.66

In its description of the porters’ solidarity, their sense of grievance, the response of the author and his appeal to the consular authorities, and the ready involvement of the representative of imperial power and capital, this account reads like dozens of other labour disputes. Clearly the porters felt that the contract violated “custom,” the time honoured and hard won right to two to four months’ advance payment, and that they could negotiate a compromise. Their major mistake was to attempt to do so while still on the island of Zanzibar. They would have held considerably more negotiating power on the mainland. Just as clearly, the newcomer was prepared to ride roughshod over custom in defence of a somewhat dubious contract.


The terms of the above contracts may be compared with the first regulations concerning caravans and porters proclaimed by the government of the new Zanzibar Protectorate in October 1894. The regulations were aimed at protecting Zanzibar's labour supply and reducing the harm caused by often harsh conditions in caravans. According to the "Regulations to be observed by caravan leaders and others in the engagement and treatment of Porters" those hiring porters had to register details of the intended journey and the number of porters required with the government "Registrar of Porters," and pay a fee of ten rupees for each porter. Clearly official registration had the same purpose as in earlier decades: to make detection and punishment of deserters easier. Written contracts were to be submitted to the First Minister for approval, and had to include identifying details of each porter, information as to the caravan's destination and length of absence from Zanzibar, an agreement that the hirer would pay two months' advance wages and passage to and from the mainland, and an agreement that the porters and caravan leader would abide by these regulations. Before departure of the porters from Zanzibar a deposit was to be lodged at the British Consulate as a guarantee for claims against the expedition. A suit of clothing was to be provided to porters before they left Zanzibar, and "when practicable" replaced every six

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67 For mention of two more contracts see Konczacki, *Victorian Explorer*, 188, 15 June, 1891, where Stairs writes, referring to C. S. Smith, the British consul in Zanzibar, "the contracts must be submitted to him and signed in front of him. I've obtained [H. H.] Johnston's contract and taken it as a model." Johnston had left for Nyasaland, taking Zanzibari porters.


69 For background to the issuing of the regulations see L. W. Hollingsworth, *Zanzibar Under the Foreign Office 1890-1913* (Westport, Conn., 1975, 1st ed. London, 1953), 88-90. As precipitating factors Hollingsworth points to the drain of porters from Zanzibar during the 1880s and early 1890s to serve in British and German East Africa and the Congo Free State, thus threatening Zanzibar's labour supply, and the harsh conditions suffered by porters, which sometimes led to death. In September 1891, on instructions from the British consul, the Sultan had forbidden the recruitment of porters for service in territories beyond his own dominions, particularly the Congo.


71 Similar registration procedures were proclaimed by the Imperial British East Africa Company at Mombasa. See *ZEAG*, 12 Dec., 1894, 8.
months. Porters were also to be issued by the government a blanket and sheet every twelve months. Each porter had to be given a water bottle and every six porters a cooking pot. Medicines were to be taken on the journey for the porters’ use.

Some of the most important sections regulated rations supplied to porters. These were to include a kibaba — a measure of about one and a half pounds — of grain and vegetables plus four ounces of meat or fish daily per man, and “a sufficient quantity” of salt. Maximum loads including everything a porter had to carry were set at 75 pounds. Given the sometimes extreme punishments meted out to porters, there were provisions to curb exceptional brutality by caravan leaders. Lloyd Mathews, the First Minister of the Zanzibar government, and formerly commander of the Sultan’s army, a man of lengthy experience in East Africa, had heard of cases of caravan leaders ordering 150 lashes for rebellious porters, and considered this extreme. Corporal punishment was therefore limited to 30 strokes and was only to be carried out after proper investigation. Only in “grave emergency” was any punishment other than flogging, chaining or a fine to be awarded. In such a case the caravan leader was to form a court of not less than two Europeans or Americans to try and sentence the offender. Finally, records were to be maintained of distances marched each day, offences by porters and subsequent punishments, as well as deaths, desertions and discharges of porters, and disbursements of cloth and other materials supplied to porters.

The regulations contained several sections of benefit to porters, specifically the recognition of advance and monthly payments (although two months in advance was probably the minimum they would accept) and limits on punishment. But given the colonial context in 1894 porters were gradually losing the struggle over control of crucial aspects of caravan work, including bargaining, control over their own arms, and petty trading, and were

72 Rations will be discussed below.

73 Compare this with the extreme punishments of up to 300 lashes meted out on Stanley’s Emin Pasha expedition. See Ruth Rempel’s forthcoming Ph.D. thesis on this expedition.

increasingly subject to foreign ideas about work and justice. The reality of the working conditions faced by porters will be discussed in later chapters.

There was no similar code governing the recruitment and treatment of porters in German territory on the mainland at this time, probably because there was no tradition in Germany like the Master and Servant legislation which was utilized by governments in most parts of the British Empire. Regulations issued by the Germans in respect to caravans had different aims. In the early years of German colonization "excesses" committed against peoples along the main routes by members of European caravans often led to revenge attacks on other caravans. To help prevent such attacks Governor von Soden in 1892 decreed that foreign caravans could not travel through German East Africa without permission from the colonial authorities and, with exceptions, payment of a deposit which would be used as security for indemnification of African claims against caravan leaders. A second decree issued by Governor von Schele in November 1893 had the very limited aim of ensuring government access to porters, and gave the administration the power to intervene into private agreements and divert porters hired by a private employer to government service. There was to be compensation for the employer but none for the porters. It was only in 1896 that decrees setting standards for labour contracts and the punishment and discipline of Africans were issued. But much of this legislation was very short lived; that governing contracts was amended in 1897 and abolished in 1899.

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75 See the papers, soon to be published, of the International Conference on Masters and Servants in History. York University. Toronto, April 1996.

76 Zanzibar Gazette, 14 Dec., 1892, 6, ZNA.


78 Koponen, Development For Exploitation, 364-5.
The Importance of Posho

Whether or not formal contracts existed provisioning was a central concern for both caravan leaders and porters. Inadequate attention to provisioning could lead to conflict with communities along the route when porters plundered fields, and easily wreck a caravan. For traders the consequences might include bankruptcy. For European travellers it could mean the end of an expensive expedition, or worse. Nor could regular employers of large numbers of porters afford to gain a reputation for stinginess, as porters always had the option of deserting when rations were inadequate. For the average porter a poor diet over extended periods of backbreaking work sometimes meant death. In Arab, Swahili and European caravans rations or posho (Kiswahili) were provided in addition to wages, and were at least as important. However, posho varied considerably in quantity and quality. In Nyamwezi caravans various provisioning strategies were employed.

During the second half of the century three main “systems” of caravan provisioning were practised. The first was utilized by small parties of Nyamwezi and Sukuma trader-porters on their way to the coast, as well as coast-based porters. Maximizing local and regional market variations in the value of cattle, iron hoes, slaves and other goods they traded these “products” in Ugogo and other countries for food for the journey. “The Wanyamwezi travelling parties,” Burton found, “live by their old iron hoes, for which grain is given by the people, who hold the metal in request.” The second, of “ancient custom,” was the kibaba

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79 Burton, Lake Regions, 153; Sissons, “Economic Prosperity in Ugogo”, 184-5, for examples from two Arab caravans. Some earlier European writers believed that Arab caravan leaders did not usually provide posho, preferring to give their Nyamwezi and Sukuma porters “licence” to plunder villages along the way. See e.g., W. Robert Foran, African Odyssey: The Life of Verney Lovett-Cameron (London, 1937), 200; S. C. Lamden, “Some Aspects of Porterage in East Africa”, TNR, 61 (1963), 159. This practice certainly occurred at times, but is better documented for European caravans than Arab or African. The self-righteous attitudes associated with imperial advance were partly responsible for such beliefs. Associated with this was a general hostility towards anything Arab, particularly in the 1890s. See the discussion in Bennett, Arab Versus European, introduction.


system, in which rations were measured by the employer at one kibaba of grain per day per porter. By the time of May French-Sheldon’s journey (1891), and perhaps much earlier, the kibaba had gained official recognition as the standard unit of measure for posho in Zanzibar’s sphere of interest. She describes it as “A brass measure, like a straight tumbler ... which should legitimately bear upon it the official imprint of the Sultan ...” If grain was not available then cassava or sweet potatoes or other food stuffs were substituted. In addition, porters expected to share in an occasional present of a bullock or the “spoils of the hunt and war.”

The kibaba system was the norm in most Swahili, Arab, and many Nyamwezi caravans, and was preferred by some European travellers.

In most European and many Arab and Swahili caravans the third, sometimes called mikono, system operated. Every few days posho was given in so many mikono (or other measure) of beads or, in the case of cloth, in so many mikono, shuka or doti, with which


83 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 14, 58; Lake Regions, 27, 236; Ch. De Vienne, “De Zanzibar à L’Oukami”, BSG, 6, 4 (1872), 359 (Nyamwezi); Cameron Papers VLC 4/2, notebook, 3 May, 1873, RGS; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, 1, 294-5; Junker, Travels in Africa, 558; French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan, 118; Baumann, Durch Massailand, 11.

84 A mikono, similar to the English ell, was the length from a man’s elbow to the tip of his finger, and was used to measure strings of beads or lengths of cloth.

85 For details of a few of the roughly 400 types of beads used for commercial transactions in the interior of East Africa see Burton, Lake Regions, 113-4; Livingstone, Last Journals, 150-1; Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 52-6.

86 A shuka was about two yards of cloth, named after the basic male attire worn around the waist. A doti was four yards of cloth, the requirement for female dress. On the mainland the most widely accepted currency was the doti merikani, or four yards of American unbleached cotton. Sissons, the authority on currency in late nineteenth century mainland Tanzania, describes the doti merikani as “a complete money in that at various times it fulfilled all the functions of money.” But porters were often paid in other types of cloth or other goods. Other commonly used units of measure included the kete, “the penny” of East Africa, a double length of strung beads passing around the thumb to the elbow. See Burton, Lake Regions, 113-4, Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, xix, 136-7, and especially Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, chapter 2, for measures, currencies, and the complex relationships among them.
porters would purchase their rations from peasant farmers along the routes. Porters could then take advantage of low prices where grain was plentiful. Thus in 1861 Grant’s Zanzibaris held out for a few days, not accepting their rations, then demanded a double quota to take advantage of changing prices. In another case porters would not accept salt to buy rations because the caravan was carrying large quantities and the market was saturated. Later in the journey salt was acceptable.\(^8^7\) The converse of course also applied, and high prices for basic foods could make it extremely difficult for porters to find adequate foodstuffs at a price they could afford, often leading to disputes with caravan leaders. An inexperienced or careless caravan leader might not adjust the posho allowance in areas where food prices were high, thus forcing his porters to make do with less or try to negotiate a better deal or, if all else failed, desert.\(^8^8\)

Only a few sources mention the *kibaba* system, although it was the usual method of issuing rations. Baumann describes it in his caravan to Maasailand as follows:

> At 5 o’clock in the afternoon the kambì [camp]-elders are assembled by Mzimba and receive ‘posho’ provisions. The rations, either brought or acquired from the natives, have previously been collected, and every elder is poured onto a spread cloth with the kibaba, a wooden bowl, so much a portion as he represents people.\(^8^9\)

The *kibaba* system entailed both advantages and disadvantages. For porters the advantage was that they did not have to buy their own food. Caravan leaders invariably found it cheaper than the *mikono* system because they could buy in bulk. In areas off the main caravan routes where provisions were sometimes unobtainable two to four weeks supply of grain had to be carried by the porters. In these cases the *kibaba* system might be utilized. Alternatively porters would be issued extra cloth to buy provisions in well stocked areas before entering the wilderness. Where there was a possibility of friction between porters and

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87 Grant, *A Walk*, 75; Bennett, *From Zanzibar to Ujiji*, 80, 26 Aug., 1878. See also Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes*, i. 294-5.

88 Cameron Papers VLC 4/2, notebook, 3 May, 1873, RGS; Baumann, *Durch Massailand*, 11-12; Sissons, "Economic Prosperity in Ugogo", 184.

89 Baumann, *Durch Massailand*, 11. For the following discussion see also Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes*, i. 294-5.
local people, the kibaba method lessened the chance of conflict. When porters had to tramp around the nearest villages looking for food to purchase there was always a chance of disputes erupting. From the caravan leader’s perspective there was another significant advantage over the mikono system. The further into the interior the higher was the value of imported cloth. Thus when caravans entered the far interior caravan leaders aimed to gradually reduce the quantity of cloth issued as posho when operating the mikono system. This was the cause, Baumann observed, of “storms of indignation and not seldom desertions,” which employers preferred to avoid. Finally, if well managed, the kibaba system regulated porters’ food supply, avoiding the possibility that they might not make the best use of their barter goods and thus be short of food until the next disbursement, which itself often led to theft from fields along the routes or desertion. A regular provisioning system was of benefit to the caravan as a whole. Thus we see the rationale for the entrenchment of the kibaba system in the Zanzibar Protectorate regulations of 1894. On the negative side and from the caravan leader’s point of view, some trouble was involved in collecting together sufficient rations for the whole caravan. From the porters’ point of view, as they were not given barter goods, they could not profit when food prices were low, or where cloth had a high value, and a switch mid-journey from the mikono to kibaba system might result in protest. A case in point is from Cameron’s expedition: “The pagazis came up yesterday about the cloth v[ersu]s grain question, but I w[oul]d not give in and then they had the cheek to ask for cloth or beads to pay for the Indian corn being pounded.”

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90 “On the African coast the shuakkah merkani is worth about 0.25 dollar=1s. 0 1/2d., in the interior it rises to the equivalent of a dollar (4s. 2d.), and even higher”: Burton, Lake Regions, 115; Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 45-6.

91 Baumann, Durch Massailand, 11-12. For an example see Wolf, Central African Diaries, 57, 7 Sept., 1878.

92 See above.

93 Baumann, Durch Massailand, 11-12.

94 Notebook, 12 May, 1873, Cameron Papers VLC 4/2, RGS. For another example see Speke to Rigby, Kazeh (Tabora), 10 March, 1861, printed in Russell, General Rigby, 239.
The *mikono* system, favoured by most European travellers, resulted in considerable variations in both the quantity of cloth or beads issued to porters, and the quality and quantity of their provisions. But the main factor determining what porters were able to buy was local prices. Unfortunately little research has been carried out to document market conditions in nineteenth century East Africa. Often we have to make do with hints. In 1849 when missionary J. Rebmann visited Chagga country in the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro he gave his Wanyika porters a food allowance of just “a handful of beads” to last them the journey.95 This suggests that the beads in question had a high value, although it is clear that all the caravans operated by the CMS missionaries from Rabai near modern Mombasa in the 1840s and 1850s were very short of barter goods. Another difficulty was that there were local preferences for particular types of beads or cloth, and sometimes caravans ran into trouble because they had no stocks of the required articles.96 In Ugogo in 1857 the people would “rarely barter their sheep, goats, and cows for plain white or blue cottons, and even in exchange for milk they demand pink, coral or blue glass beads.” The Maasai would only accept bead strings of a particular type, and cloth for male dress had to be prepared in an acceptable form.97

Perhaps the easiest way to compare fluctuations in *posho* is through presentation in a table. Table two shows selected examples from European caravans travelling the central routes of disbursements of barter goods for *posho*. During the early years of German rule there was a clear tendency for the substitution of cash payments for barter goods where possible.

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96 This indicates how limited the development of a single market in mid-nineteenth century Tanganyika was, even along the main caravan routes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Caravan</th>
<th>Posho</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Speke/Grant Tabora-Buganda</td>
<td>1 string beads/man</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Price (LMS) Bagamoyo-Mpwapwa</td>
<td>1/3 yard calico/man</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Marno/Cambier (IAA)</td>
<td>1 doti or coloured cloth/man</td>
<td>3 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Dodgshun (LMS) Zanzibar-Ujiji</td>
<td>2 yards calico/man</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Hore (LMS) Zanzibar-Ujiji</td>
<td>2 yards “cheap calico”/man</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Mackay (CMS) Saadani-Kagei</td>
<td>2 yards/man (Zanzibaris)</td>
<td>8 or 10 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Mackay (CMS) Saadani-Kagei</td>
<td>1/6 yard/man (Nyamwezi)</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Baxter (CMS)</td>
<td>1/2 yard/man (Nyamwezi)</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Hore (LMS) At Ujiji</td>
<td>2 yards/man</td>
<td>14 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Giraud Bagamoyo-Urungu</td>
<td>2 yards/man</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Griffith (LMS) Uguha</td>
<td>2 yards/man</td>
<td>12 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Copplestone (CMS)Saadani-Uyui</td>
<td>2 yards/man</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Ulaya (LMS) Bagamoyo-Urambo</td>
<td>5 doti/man</td>
<td>journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882-3</td>
<td>Swann/Hore (LMS) Bagamoyo-Ujiji</td>
<td>2 yards calico/man</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Hore (LMS) Saadani-Ujiji</td>
<td>2 yards/man</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Watt (CMS) Saadani-Mamboya</td>
<td>2 yards blue &amp; white calico</td>
<td>days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>or 10 strings of beads/man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>Pruin (CMS) general comment</td>
<td>2 yards calico/man</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Stairs Bagamoyo-Tabora</td>
<td>2 yards/man</td>
<td>5-6 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Moore Ujiji-Uganda</td>
<td>2 yards calico or 1/2 rupee</td>
<td>7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>per man or equivalent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Posho: the central routes, 1860-1899

Table three shows that cash payments for posho in pice, a sub-unit of the Indian rupee, which was in widespread circulation in Zanzibar before the colonial period, were often made for the first few days of travel along the central routes from the coast, and that over time there was a gradual spread inland of the cash nexus. Porters, particularly coastal


100 Sissons suggests that pice may have been acceptable currency in Ugogo in the 1870s: “Economic Prosperity”, 38-9.
porters, were the first major occupational group prior to colonization to become used to cash payments, and were important agents of the expansion of the cash economy into the interior.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Caravan</th>
<th>Posho</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>Mackay (CMS) Bagamoyo</td>
<td>2 pice/man</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>Mackay (CMS) Saadani</td>
<td>3 pice/man</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>K. Johnston/Thomson (RGS) Pongwe</td>
<td>“pice”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Southon (LMS) Saadani &amp; Ndumi</td>
<td>7 pice/man</td>
<td>1 day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Wookey (LMS) Saadani &amp; Ndumi</td>
<td>5 pice/man</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Giraud Bagamoyo-7 days inland</td>
<td>copper currency of Zanzibar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Hore (LMS) Saadani-”a few days inland”</td>
<td>“Indian coppers”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>Pruen (CMS) Saadani-10 days inland</td>
<td>5 pice/man</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Stanley Zanzibar (Feb. 5)</td>
<td>8 pice/man</td>
<td>4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Stanley Zanzibar (Feb. 9)</td>
<td>8 pice/man</td>
<td>8 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Posho : cash payments in the coast region

The evidence suggests a tendency towards standardization at the rate of two yards of cotton cloth per man every seven days. However, not too much should be read into this, as there was so much variation. Extra posho might be issued for long marches. Porters responsible for particularly heavy or difficult loads such as large tusks were sometimes given double rations. Headmen, the kirangozi, and mafundi (artisans) received extra posho, ranging from one and a half to as much as four times the standard ration. Glassman


102 Mackay, Diary, 1877; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 90; Southon to Whitehouse, Urambo. 18 Dec., 1879, LMS 2/3/A; Wookey to Whitehouse, Zanzibar, 12 June, 1880, LMS 3/2/B; Giraud. Les lacs, 58; Hore, To Lake Tanganyika, 66; Pruen, The Arab and the African, 172; Notebook “Stanley’s Expedition”. Zanzibar Museum.

103 Thus Thomson was wrong when referring to his experience of 1879-80 he stated that “each man now with the European caravans receives two yards for four days’ food.” Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 294-5.


believes that there was a further differentiation according to ethnicity, with Nyamwezi porters receiving less posho than “contracted slave porters from Zanzibar.” There is little evidence for this. Most caravans included porters of various identities or ethnicities, and if porters were hired at the coast on the same basis they received the same ration, with the variations noted above. The difference is rather that, as explained above, Nyamwezi caravans tended to use the kibaba system or more ad hoc provisioning arrangements, while in most European and some Arab caravans the mikono system was preferred.

Wage Trends

Ukimpa mtu kazi patanani ujira.

If you give a man work, come to an agreement about the wages.

Wages were just as important as posho to porters working the central routes. As we have seen increasingly in European and probably Arab caravans two key conditions which had to be met before coast based porters would work were advance payment and payment by the month. It is true that in large measure the aim was to buttress bargaining strength and ensure maximum mobility, but porters also strove to defend and improve wages per se. Burton, with typical jaundiced eye, was well aware of the realities of caravan travel: porterage, he wrote, “knows but two limits: the interest of the employer to disburse as little as possible by taking every advantage of the necessities of his employé, and the desire of the employé to extract as much as he can by presuming upon the wants of his employer.”

Unfortunately, a stereotype lives on which suggests that pre-colonial Africans voluntarily worked for all kinds of reasons, including trading opportunities, but had no

Hore, To Lake Tanganyika, 66; Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 199, 24 July, 1891; French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan, 118-9.

Glassman, “Social Rebellion”, 96; idem, Feasts and Riot, 60.


Burton, Lake Regions, 236.
interest in wages. These other motivations are usually related to aspects of the social system or to cultural imperatives. One reason for such assumptions is that many writers assume that wage labour was non-existent in nineteenth century Africa. Glassman takes a slightly different approach when he argues that “Nyangwezi porters who came down to the coast did not perceive of themselves as proletarians, who lived by alienating their labor in return for a wage. Rather, they thought of themselves as autonomous agents ...” Leaving aside the question of whether or not they saw themselves as “autonomous agents,” the absence or otherwise of a “proletarian” consciousness makes little difference in the end. One could just as easily argue that there was no concept of proletariat in eighteenth century rural England, although there was a vigorous class struggle, and wage workers aplenty. As E. P. Thompson noted, “far too much theoretical attention (much of it plainly a-historical) has been paid to ‘class’, and far too little to ‘class struggle.’” It is well recognized now that workers in pre-industrial and early industrial settings brought their (usually rural) culture with them, and expressed their grievances in its own terms, as well as according to the custom which emerged out of the experience of the work process. Together these made up new working cultures. In pre-industrial societies wage workers almost certainly did not see themselves as members of a larger working class, but they certainly engaged in class struggle. The conclusions which arise from the following analysis are therefore different from those

109 See the discussions of Nyamwezi group and personal motivations in chapters 4 and 5 and the sources mentioned there.

110 See my own suggestions on how to deal with the difficulties inherent in studying pre-colonial African workers in Rockel, “Relocating Labor”, 1-8. Of course there can be a significant structural difference in the position of a “wage worker” and “proletarian,” which is sometimes not understood.


113 Thompson, “Eighteenth-Century English Society”, 149.

reached by Coquery-Vidrovitch and Lovejoy in their introduction to The Workers of African Trade. There they write:

... porters, teamsters, and canoemen remained attached to the working value of their remuneration — so attached that they were even able to strike not to sell their work. They did not want to sell their work; they wanted to exchange it. This fact is characteristic of societies in transition, where the method of exploitation was rooted both in the domestic and capitalist spheres. African societies were not exceptional in this sense. Hobsbawm (1964) has observed how long it took before the English worker calculated his wages on the basis of market demand rather than on use-value. At the beginning of the industrial era, workers still did not understand the rules of the economic game; they had to learn to sell their work like merchandise.\(^{115}\)

This is too broad a generalization, and it is based on studies which do not provide any sustained analysis of worker culture or wage levels. Monthly-paid porters in nineteenth century Tanzania were certainly at least partially aware of the “rules of the economic game.” They bargained and struck work over wages, which increased when there was a shortage of labour at crucial junctures. They were able to make decisions based on knowledge of the labour market, although they did not know how much foreign employers could afford to pay. Wages for monthly paid porters were fixed, and they would not work for less than the going rate. As will be shown, the doti merikani, with which they were usually paid, was not just a “currency of equivalencies,” but a “real money.”\(^{116}\) It was recognized everywhere along the main routes, and had a set value against the Maria Theresa Thaler in which wages were calculated. Porters required payment in cloth not so much to avoid proletarianization, but to maximize the value of wages in the interior, and enter all markets.

One of the great difficulties of attempting to measure changes in wage rates or, for that matter, any other economic activity along the caravan routes in nineteenth century East Africa, is the extremely complex currency system in use until the 1890s, and the fluctuations in the value of its main components: the Maria Theresa Thaler, a widely used currency in Zanzibar and on the coast,\(^{117}\) the rupee, and the doti merikani.\(^{118}\) The Thaler and the rupee


were related in a direct way in that the sub-units of both were annas and pice, but the number of pice to the Thaler varied according to the supply of the former. In addition the value of the Thaler against the rupee fluctuated, being between 2.14 and 2.23 rupees between 1800 and 1850, and 2.13 and 2.15 in 1857. There were also obvious variations in cloth currency, which along with beads and other forms of currency such as brass wire or masongo, was preferred in the interior. Merikani could be from 32 to 38 inches in width. To further complicate the issue there were other cloths of lower quality, such as kaniki and satini, and expensive coloured cloths or "cloths with names," which were also used as currency. But the standard remained the doti merikani.

Despite these complications there is some evidence to suggest that actions by porters mediated through caravan culture or custom, as well as changes in the labour market, led to increased wages and better rations until the colonial period, when progress ceased from the 1890s. In purely cash terms wages of porters hired at the coast increased in leaps at crucial junctures. Otherwise they tended to remain steady, with short-term fluctuations, so that a graph of cash wages over time would show long plateaux separated by one or two steps. This applies particularly when we consider wages paid by the month, but there is also evidence for increases in wages paid per journey, as in the case of many Nyamwezi porters returning to their homes. Burton noted in 1860 that

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119 The rate varied between about 112 and 140. See Sissons, "Economic Prosperity", 37.

120 For masongo see Burton, *Lake Regions*, 115-6, 531; Sissons, "Economic Prosperity", 56-8.


122 Unomah and Sheriff make similar arguments but with limited evidence. See Unomah, "Economic Expansion", 98; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory*, 182. In Imerina there was also a noticeable increase in porters' wages towards the end of the nineteenth century: Campbell, "Labour and the Transport Problem", 353, 355.
When the Wanyamwezi began to carry, they demanded for a journey from the coast to their own country six to nine dollars’ worth of domestics, colored cloths, brass wires, and the pigeon’s-egg bead called sungomaji. The rate of porterage then declined; the increase of traffic, however, has of late years greatly increased it. In 1857 it was 10 dollars, and it afterward rose to 12 dollars per porter.\(^\text{123}\)

In the late 1880s there was a further increase to about MT$15, then a decline as colonial oppression forced down wages.

At the coast monthly wages increased during the early 1870s. “In consequence of the scarcity of porters wages are at the present moment excessively high,” Consul Kirk noted in March 1873, and in 1874 Stanley complained that porters would not work for less than twice what he had paid in 1871 and 1872.\(^\text{124}\) But porters were usually paid in trade goods, especially cloth, measured in so many \textit{doti} according to the wage value in Maria Theresa Thalers. For example, a porter paid MT$5 per month would receive MT$5 worth of cloth for a month’s work. Prices at Zanzibar for \textit{merikani} gradually decreased into the 1860s as Sheriff has shown.\(^\text{125}\) But after the initial purchase \textit{merikani} was recognized to have a standard value compared with the dollar.\(^\text{126}\) This had a regulating effect on wages when cloth wages were exchanged for goods in Zanzibar, where one \textit{dotti merikani} was purchased for approximately MT$0.25. But on the mainland the fixed value of the cloth increased in stages. On the coast it was MT$0.50, and in Ugogo MT$1.00.\(^\text{127}\) Hence a Nyamwezi porter paid a cloth advance at the coast might expect to double its value or more if he exchanged it in the interior. These increases in value probably reflected in part the cost of porterage of cloth to up-country destinations. So for several reasons the argument for increases in porters’

\(^{123}\) Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 236.

\(^{124}\) Kirk to Smith, Zanzibar, 10 Mar., 1873, Cameron Papers, VLC 6/1, RGS; f.n. 45 above.

\(^{125}\) Sheriff, \textit{Slaves, Spices and Ivory}, 77, 88, 102, 253-6.

\(^{126}\) Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 45-6. Earlier I hypothesized that increases (or decreases) in the value of wages could perhaps also be calculated by an analysis of changes in the ratio between the price of cloth received by porters and the \textit{thaler} in which wages were reckoned. It might have been shown that over time porters paid on a monthly basis would have received more cloth per month, even if the cash value of the wage stayed the same. But a rereading of Sissons has convinced me that this is not a viable approach. See Stephen J. Rockel, “Wage Labor and the Culture of Porterage in Nineteenth Century Tanzania: the Central Caravan Routes”, \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East}, 15, 2 (1995), 20.

\(^{127}\) Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 46.
wages stands. The image presented by Iliffe when he states “Wages for labourers hardly increased from Stanley’s time to the 1930s” is superficially correct, but should be modified to take into account a longer trend from earlier in the nineteenth century, increases in the wages of those Nyamwezi paid by the journey when travelling to their homeland from the coast, and the theoretical ability of Nyamwezi porters to profit from higher cloth prices in the interior. From the late 1890s colonial policies suppressed wages to some extent. During the 1890s and early 1900s changes in the political economy of the region and restrictive colonial regulations resulted in the gradual deskilling of the caravan workforce. Despite a further increase in the demand for porters during the early colonial period as the economy expanded and the Germans established their administration, “pacification” resulted in a substitution of forced labour for the semi-professional or professional porter or Träger in many parts of the colony. A flat rate per journey, or even per day, tended to replace payment per month.

Whether during early colonial or pre-colonial times it is clear that porters collectively aimed to maximize their pay. But through experience expressed as custom they also retained the idea of a “fair” wage. A wage was fair when it was seen to be the same for all in a particular caravan, with recognized exceptions for certain skills. When employers failed to pay fairly, porters made their feelings clear. This was even the case when wages may have been higher than usual, as in the caravan of Speke and Grant in Uzinza in October 1861:

> With at last a sufficiency of porters, we all set out together .... Indeed, we ought all to have been happy together, for all my men were paid and rationed trebly — far better than they would have been if they had been traveling with any one else; but I had not paid all, as they thought, proportionally, and therefore there were constant heart-burnings, with strikes and rows every day. It was useless to tell them that they were all paid according to their own agreements — that all short-service men had a right to expect more in proportion to their work than long-service ones; they called it all love and partiality, and in their envy would think themselves ill used.

128 Iliffe, A Modern History, 45.


130 Speke, Journal, 174 (emphasis in original). See also ibid., 108.
The same violation of custom is apparent in an episode which occurred in Mvumi, Ugogo, in June 1873. Cameron’s assistant Murphy had hired a gang of Nyamwezi porters in Bagamoyo, but payment of their wages was arranged with a Khoja trader, Abdullah Dina. The trader gave the porters “such villainous cloth” compared with the “superior material” which the other porters in the caravan had received that the gang finally deserted en masse in anger, and stole a load of cloth from a small caravan accompanying the main party.\(^\text{131}\)

Custom also rewarded porters with particular skills, such as artisans (Kiswahili: *mafundi*), personal servants, and headmen (*wanyampara*), who received higher wages than the average *pagazi*. For instance, Cameron paid his headman, Bombay, MT$12 and his porters MT$5 per month. The RGS expedition to lakes Nyasa and Tanganyika paid the headman, Chuma, MT$10 per month and MT$6 to a few particularly experienced porters. LMS missionaries paid MT$10 for a headman, Juma bin Nasibu, and MT$6 per month for *mafundi*, while regular porters received MT$5. Other specialized caravan personnel such as guides and armed escort (Kis.: *askari*), also received higher pay.\(^\text{132}\) Boys, for example Pesa and Jacko in Cameron’s caravan, were typically paid MT$1 to MT$3 less than adult porters.\(^\text{133}\)

Table 4 shows wages paid to Nyamwezi porters for the journey from the coast to Unyamwezi. Most of my evidence comes from estimates of wages per porter for caravan travel to Unyamwezi, but wages paid for specific journeys are indicated. Most porters

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\(^\text{131}\) Cameron, *Across Africa*, I, 95. It was also difficult to hire porters in the interior if the necessary form of currency, such as *merikani*, was unavailable. For an example see Burton, *Zanzibar*, II, 198. Compare with Malagasy porters who were “fastidious in ensuring that they were paid in ‘good’ money.” Campbell, “Labour and the Transport Problem”, 353.


travelling from the coast were Nyamwezi who had brought down ivory in their own or Arab caravans and were then employed by coastal merchants or others travelling up-country. This was a continuation of the old pattern under which Nyamwezi porters earned their way back to their homeland. Given the paucity of information prior to 1857 for the central routes, a comparison with wages paid on the northern routes is useful. In 1848 Rebmann paid his coastal porters MT$7 for the return journey from Rabai, near Mombasa, to “Jagga,” Chagga country in the foothills of Mt. Kilimanjaro. In the same year Krapf paid the same rate for a journey to Shambaai after a “boisterous demand” from his men to increase their wages from the original MT$5.134 In 1850 Krapf learned that ivory porters employed by Tanga based merchants were paid MT$10 for the journey to Mlozo in Maasailand. “For this, each bearer carries there and back again a heavy load of fifty-four pounds, and is often absent six months.”135 In 1857 porters were paid MT$10 for the trip from Pangani or other towns on the north coast to Maasailand, Nguru or Chagga, and in 1861 MT$12, and even MT$14, half in advance, indicating a substantial increase in wages over fourteen years.136 In 1857 Burton hired porters at Zungomero on the central route for MT$15 for the return journey to Ujiji. The first leg implied a somewhat longer distance than the coast to Unyanyembe, indicating a wage well within the pre-1857 range. In this and the following year the rate paid to Swahili porters on a per journey basis to Unyamwezi was MT$10, half in advance, and therefore similar to that paid to Nyamwezi porters.137

134 Krapf, “Journey to Wadigo, Washinsi, and Usambara”, 155. See also Krapf, Travels, Researches, 230, 248, 258, 266.

135 Krapf, Travels, Researches, 416.


137 Burton, Lake Regions, 103; idem, “Lake Regions”, 58.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Caravan/s</th>
<th>Rate per journey</th>
<th>Advance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-1857</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>MT$6-9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857-58</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>MT$10-12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857-58</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>9-10 <em>shuka mrkni</em> (MT$9-10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Speke and Grant</td>
<td>MT$9.25 (to Tabora)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>MT$7.5-12.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>25 <em>dotti</em> (MT$12.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>MT$10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>MT$11</td>
<td>MT$5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>50 shillings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>MT$13.5 (to Lake Victoria)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>various caravans</td>
<td>MT$7.5-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>various caravans</td>
<td>MT$6.5-11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>One of Mirambo’s caravans</td>
<td>2 “pieces of Amerikani”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Ulaya (LMS) to Uyui</td>
<td>MT$12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Ulaya (LMS) to Urambo</td>
<td>MT$10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887-89</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>MT$15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Selemani bin Mwenye</td>
<td>6 <em>gorah</em> calico and 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coloured cloths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897-99</td>
<td>Kandt</td>
<td>MT$15 (30 rupees, no <em>posho</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Wage rates for Nyamwezi porters per journey 1850-1900: coast to Unyamwezi

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139 This must mean 2 *gorah merikani* or 15 *dotti merikani*, thus cloth worth about MT$7.5 at the coast. For the *gorah* see the next footnote. Given the excellent relations between Mirambo and Southon, this was perhaps a discount rate. See Southon to Thompson, Urambo, 15 Aug., 1881, LMS 4/2/D.

140 The *gorah* or “piece” of cloth differed greatly depending whether the cloth in question was *merikani* or *kaniki*. If the former then it was usually about 30 yards long or something over 7.5 *dotti*. If the latter, then it was just 2 *dotti* or 8 yards in length. This suggests that the cloth in this case was *kaniki*, otherwise the wage would have been extremely high. Sissons estimates that in Ugogo coloured cloths were worth on average three times the *dotti merikani*. If we give the plain cloth a value of MT$6 at the coast then with the coloured cloths the wage is still higher than in earlier years, and consistent with Nolan on the late 1880s. See Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 44, 46, 49-52.
Wage rates are known for numerous other destinations and journeys. For instance in 1859 coastal porters in a trading caravan were paid MT$8 to MT$10 for the long march to Ubena and back, half in advance, although porters also had good opportunities to profit from slave trading. In 1860 Tippu Tip paid Zaramo carriers MT$10 for the similar round trip to Urmi (Usangu).\footnote{Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 453-4; Tippu Tip, \textit{Maisha}, 19 § 12; Heinrich Brode, \textit{Tippoo Tib: The Story of His Career in Central Africa} tran. H. Havelock (London, 1907), 26-7. Whiteley dates this journey to 1863, whereas Bontinck argues for 1860. Bontinck’s reckoning in \textit{L’autobiographie}, 21, is to be preferred.} These figures are low, lower than Nyamwezi porters were getting at the same time for the march to Unyanyembe, when distance and journey time are compared. In many other cases it is difficult to make comparisons because arrangements were ad hoc and routes varied so greatly.

Table five shows wage rates for monthly paid porters. The selections are just a sample from the hundreds of European caravans travelling the central routes, but are probably quite representative. Because of the paucity of information before the 1870s the information is skewed towards the last third of the century, and hence partially masks the significant jumps in wages in earlier decades. As a baseline it is useful to compare the rates for caravan porters with wages for labourers in Zanzibar, who in 1856 were almost all “negro slaves” paid about 12 1/2 cents (pice) per day or MT$2.50 to MT$3.00 per month. Overseers earned MT$7.5 to MT$10 and \textit{mafundis} MT$5 to MT$7 per month. In 1858-9 Burton and Speke’s slave \textit{askari}, always more highly paid than \textit{Waungwana} or Nyamwezi porters, were paid MT$5 per month, half for themselves and half for their owner, with an advance of six months, the rest paid at the end of the journey. In 1878 labourers employed by the CMS on road construction from Saadani were paid MT$5 per month.\footnote{Mansfield to Marcy, Zanzibar, 31 Jan., 1856, in Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks, eds., \textit{New England Merchants in Africa} (Boston, 1965), 50; Speke, \textit{What Led to the Discovery}, 194; Simpson, \textit{Dark Companions}, 14; Mackay to Wright, Ndumi, 2 Feb., 1878, CMS CA6/016.}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Caravan</th>
<th>Rate/month in MTS(^{143})</th>
<th>Advance(^{144})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860-63</td>
<td>Speke and Grant</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866-74</td>
<td>Livingstone</td>
<td>5-7 (10-14 rupees)</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871-77</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873-74</td>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874-77</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Price (LMS)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877-78</td>
<td>Elton</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187?</td>
<td>Mwana Sera</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>Thomson (RGS)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Stokes (CMS)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Hore (LMS)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Juma bin Nasibu (LMS)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Thomson</td>
<td>5 (plus bonus)</td>
<td>3 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>H.H. Johnston (northern route)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Smith (southern route)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887-89</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>IBEAC</td>
<td>5 (10 rupees)</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Hore (LMS)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-93</td>
<td>Baumann (northern route)</td>
<td>5 (10 rupees)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897-99</td>
<td>Kandt</td>
<td>5 (10 rupees)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Moore</td>
<td>5 (10 rupees)</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Monthly wage rates in Maria Theresa Thalers, 1860-1900

A glance at the above tables should dispel the idea that Nyamwezi pagazi were somehow super-exploited in comparison to Swahili and Waungwana porters, a view which has recently found favour. Glassman, for instance, writes that “Nyamwezi porters soon came

\(^{143}\) Where wages are given in rupees I have approximated the conversion to Maria Theresa dollars at 2:1.

to be regarded as cheap caravan labor, and their pay was regularly lower than that given to contracted slave porters from Zanzibar,” and elsewhere that “... Nyamwezi porters came to be regarded as the cheapest of caravan labor, more abject even than slave porters.” 145 In fact, wages paid to Nyamwezi on a per journey basis from the coast were more susceptible to the labour market, and therefore fluctuated to a greater extent than wages paid on a monthly basis. which only rarely rose above the MT$5 mark. Sometimes the wages of Nyamwezi were below those of monthly paid porters, particularly for downward journeys which were paid at a lower rate, but at other times they were higher, given that the journey to Tabora took between two and three months. The Nyamwezi were recognized as the best porters in East Africa, and therefore when there was a labour shortage, their wages rose accordingly. But frequently the Nyamwezi were cheaper than coastal porters from the employer’s point of view. There were several reasons apart from labour market fluctuations. Firstly, they carried heavier loads than coastal porters.146 Secondly, they had a good reputation for honesty and professional pride.147 Thirdly, they were famous for their endurance and, in addition, generally made the journey from the coast to Unyamwezi in faster time than monthly paid and coastal porters for the reasons explained above. Note also that Christian porters sometimes employed by missionaries, such as the former slaves resident at the UMCA station at Mbweni, Zanzibar, were not necessarily paid any more than non-Christian porters.148

Apart from provisions and wages porters were occasionally given gifts or bonuses for performance of special services, work well done, or as compensation for unusually arduous conditions. In many caravans porters were given a cloth “outfit” before commencing a safari of one doti. Speke gave his men gifts “for the severe trials they had experienced in the

146 See chapter 7.
147 See chapter 5.
148 See the entries for Johnson in Table 5.
wilderness once Tabora was reached,” and when in Buganda arranged with Kabaka Mtesa for gifts of a small tusk for each of his Nyamwezi porters returning home. Livingstone gave each of his porters, except for “defaulters,” a bonus of two doti and a handful of beads when in Urungu in 1872. The porters of another missionary traveller accepted extra payment in tobacco or salt for special care in carrying him across fast flowing rivers, and for unusually long marches. Stairs gave a MT$2 bonus to porters who worked especially hard during the crossing of the Mkata river.149 Such small gifts were customary for porters in Madagascar as well.150 But overwhelmingly it was wages and profit from trade which were the tangible rewards for work. Another factor giving flexibility to the wage system was money lending within the caravan. Those porters who had used up their posho, or who had no private trade goods to buy food or pay gambling debts, might borrow from their fellows or take an advance on their final pay. Influential caravan members such as Bombay and Bilal wadi Umani, headmen of Cameron’s expedition, might act as “banker,” lending money to needy porters and receiving payment at the end of the journey.151


151 See Cameron, “Men’s Accounts”, RGS. There was a similar practice in the Merina kingdom. See Campbell, “Labour and the Transport Problem”, 353.
Chapter Seven

On Safari: The Culture of Work Along the Central Routes

We have tired of the ocean,
We want the safari:
Marching in the sun,
Sleeping when it rains.
Lift the loads, lift the loads!
Lift, lift, lift!  
(Nyamwezi marching song)

Ndaũwe luikinda, nakidaga mlawo, odisaya, nsala munda, kunegela wuluile; wandewa kunzila kumakakema, nhemelele, nawuka, adisenge misambwa ya migongo; mlingi nagawulila.
Mwanamumeta, sambula ya wugolole.

I will die the death of the bell, I say goodbye in the morning
I cry, hunger is in my body, it hurts like a sickness
The vbandevba are on the way to the coast
I shall search for food, I set off, I will pray to the spirits of the dead
The singer, Mwanamumeta, I give out the fringed cloths to all.  
(Nyamwezi marching song)

This is the journey we took the year before last. And the trouble we had was considerable. Everywhere we went, when we fought we fought, when we paid tribute we paid tribute, when we built stockades we built them, when we cultivated the fields we cultivated them, when we died we died.
Nor did we reach somewhere near, we went far away. A journey has trouble like sleeping on an empty stomach, or spending a day thirsty; there is no comfort not even once. And if a man has not yet journeyed up-country, he knows nothing of the trouble in the world. You will realize each day that comfort and peace are in your home, with good clothes, a good bed, and good food. You know nothing of the trouble people can have until you go up-country, then you will know for sure that there is trouble up-country. Does it not mean sleeping on the ground, and journeying the whole day long, with never any rest? That is the fact about up-country.

(A Swahili view in the 1890s of the trials, tribulations and achievements of a fast disappearing way of life.)

1 Marius Fortie, Black and Beautiful (London, 1938), 29.

2 Seminar für Orientalischen Sprachen, “Lieder und Sangesweisen und Geschichten der Wanyamwezi”. Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, IV, 3 (1901), 56 (my translation from the German translation of the Kinyamwezi). This travelling song is probably much older than the 1890s. The German editor notes that the song was sung by the caravan leader (merchant). The first lines suggest that it was, in fact, sung by the kirangozi, who usually took the lead in marching songs. The bell refers to the bells worn by the kirangozi or fastened to ivory tusks and the legs of ivory porters (See Richard F. Burton, The Lake Regions of Central Africa (New York, 1860, repub. Michigan, 1971), 242, 481). The singer means that he may die on the journey. Mwanamumeta was a caravan leader from earlier, perhaps pioneering, times.

3 Selemani bin Mwenye Chande on his journey in 1891, recorded in Lyndon Harries, tran. and ed., Swahili Prose Texts (London and Nairobi, 1965), 92-121, trans. 234-259; idem, “Safari Yangu Ya Barra Afrika”, in Carl Velten, Safari za Waswaheli (Göttingen, 1901), 1-50; idem, “Meine Reise ins Innere Ostafrikas bis zum Tanganyika”, in Carl Velten, tran., Schilderungen der Swaheli (Göttingen, 1901), 1-56. The quote is from Harries, 259.
Msafiri masikini ajapokuwa sultani.

A traveller is poor, even if he be a sultan.4

(Swahili saying)

The dominant image in the above texts is one of hardship and suffering, of a relentless struggle for survival, of a constant battle to find food and water along the caravan routes. Caravan life was to a large extent unremitting toil, with survival the number one objective. Once this was assured then economic advancement was perhaps possible. But there are also notes of optimism and a sense of achievement. Amidst the very real harshness of the life of the average Nyamwezi pagazi or Mwungwana there were opportunities to be grasped. Porters were at the forefront of change in nineteenth century Tanzania and were exposed to new ideas about cultural and economic developments, including capitalist relations, which they then transmitted.5 As Selemani bin Mwenye Chande put it, "... if a man has not yet journeyed up-country, he knows nothing of the trouble of the world."6

In the same way, the work of porterage was not just endless marching, with little relief from boredom and monotony. A German traveller in the late 1890s found that the constant walking of the porters produced a mesmerizing effect: "Head somewhat sunken, eyes on the ground, they pay attention to nothing but the legs of the man in front and the narrow path reflecting the glaring sun ... they set one foot before the other so mechanically that eventually the path seems to slide backwards faster than they themselves move forwards."7 But this gives the wrong impression. As harsh conditions and opportunity went...
together. the endless marching must be seen in conjunction with a vigorous social life and considerable variety in work. There were good times to be had, adventures to be experienced. Porters relished these and lived life to its fullest, both collectively and individually. There were dangers to be faced and crises to resolve. Camp life developed a pattern of its own, with songs, dance, storytelling, and recreation with games, drugs and sex. But always there were threats, especially from the “three horsemen” of hunger and thirst, pestilence, and war, which often arrived together.  

Collective experience was the key to both survival and the reaching of larger goals. It was experience of caravan life and the caravan routes when mixed with pre-existing cultural norms which created the new working culture of the caravans and, I believe, ultimately contributed to the cultural cohesion of twentieth century Tanzania. The roads followed by caravans were the skeleton around which formed the territory of modern Tanzania; the central route was the back bone. Caravan life, reoccurring across vast spaces, the intermixing of peoples, combined with other associated changes — the spread of Islam and Swahili, the slave trade, the acceptance almost everywhere of utani relationships — gave body to the emerging nation.

This and the following chapter are about day to day patterns of work and leisure which helped forge “caravan culture,” the “custom” which I have already introduced in previous chapters. Apart from the broad background of eastern African cultures of the late Iron Age, the first influence on caravan life was interaction with the physical environment, as people travelled to hunt, migrate, or trade. Paths went in and out of use and changed their shape as the forces of nature conspired against human activity. But economics and culture prevailed. During all but the most difficult conditions caravans continued to cross East Africa, and porters struggled to survive the elements. This is the topic of the first section of this chapter. In the second section the basic work of long distance porters — the carrying of

8 See chapter 2 and Juhani Koponen, People and Production in Late Precolonial Tanzania: History and Structures (Jyväskylä, 1988), chapter 4.
loads — is discussed, along with the various types of burdens. These ranged from individual loads to sections of dismantled steamships. A particularly obnoxious change introduced by Europeans was the expectation that porters should sometimes carry human beings. The rhythm of the daily march, with its associated rituals of departure and arrival, is described in the third section. The hard labour of porterage was eased by the unique work songs and music of the porters, which bound them together and served to maintain morale. Then follows a brief discussion of Yao caravans, which serves to highlight questions dealt with in much more detail in this and the following chapter, as well as elsewhere in the thesis. The chapter ends with an analysis of the work of caravan women and their role as reproducers of labour power, which benefitted both male porters and caravan leaders. Caravan women are also considered as early female migrant labourers, whose history is otherwise only known from the colonial period. Finally, in this section, the caravan is envisaged in terms of a community, with the participation of children, as well as men and women.

Porters, Paths, and the Natural Environment

We have been left with numerous descriptions of East African paths or “roads.” In 1857 Burton found that

The most frequented routes are foot-tracks ... one to two spans broad, trodden down during the travelling season by man and beast, and during the rains the path, in African parlance, ‘dies,’ that is to say, it is overgrown with vegetation. In open and desert places four or five lines often run parallel for short distances. In jungly countries they are mere tunnels in thorns and under branchy trees, which fatigue the porter by catching his load. Where fields and villages abound, they are closed with rough hedges, horizontal tree-trunks, and ... rude stockades, to prevent trespassing and pilferage. Where the land is open, an allowance of one fifth must be made for winding; in closer countries this must be increased to two fifths or to one half ... 9

By the late 1880s the main caravan routes differed from paths connecting villages in that they were a little wider, much smoother, and less covered with vegetation.10 The windy, sinuous nature of all paths arose from the peculiarities of the landscape, weathering — especially


flooding — and the very limited time spent in construction and maintenance. A missionary observed how new paths came into existence and were continually undergoing change:

Wherever the ground is fairly even, and uncovered by brushwood or thorns, there the native makes his path in a direct line towards his goal; but unfortunately this is only occasionally the condition, and he is thus driven to make circuitous routes, taking advantage of every furrow and cleared space worn by the temporary streams which are originated each rainy season, and, to a larger extent, following the innumerable wild beast tracks which cross and intercross with wonderful complexity... Thus, without axe or pick, and with only the occasional use of the billhook, a native will find a path from any one point to any other. Once started, the path, never very straight, soon becomes still more circuitous on account of fortuitous circumstances. Every strong wind in Africa brings down some tree which has lived out its allotted span, and some of these will necessarily fall across the road... to a native with a load, a climb over a trunk not quite touching the ground, or a scramble underneath it, is not so expeditious as going round the tree, and round it he goes.11

Eventually such detours became part of the permanent way. Diversions were also created by new patches of cultivation started by farmers, and by stretches of heavy mud during the rainy season. Where many paths crossed, the ones to be avoided were closed off by the caravan kirangozi with a branch or a handful of grass, or a line drawn with the foot or spear. Failure to mark the route for porters in the rear could lead to much wasted time and the dangerous dispersal of the caravan.12

Seasonal weather patterns had a marked impact on the condition of the paths — partly because of growth and decay of the surrounding vegetation — and hence on the working conditions faced by porters. During the rainy season most travel was suspended. Roads were flooded and huge expanses of country turned into swampland. Defying the elements, caravans struggling through the water and mud of river valleys and bogs had a particularly trying time. One missionary wrote of his porters' experience during the rainy season of 1878:

Hours together we waded knee-deep — thigh deep — in mud and water, and in several places the whole caravan consisted for a time of a row of heads and shoulders above the surface of the slimy

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water. At a deep place in the centre of one of these morasses one fine tall man stood, and aided, by the support of his hands, each man to get across the gap.

Another missionary asserted that “sometimes I have been carried for the best part of an hour with the water up to the men’s chins.” Even unflooded country was tough going: “The roads are very bad being very slippery from the late rains, and where it is not thus slippery generally there is a thick black mud which is very disagreeable to pass through,” a missionary travelling from Saadani to Mamboya in April wrote. He added, “The long, strong grass is very trying to the men carrying loads — when standing upright [it] is ... from 8 to 12 feet high... when this is broken down by wind & rain across the path it makes it very difficult for the men to get along. This is certainly the worst time of the year to make a journey.” The high grass in this region was like a “dense screen” and porters had to contend with blows from the recoiling reeds and injuries to their feet from sharp broken stalks.

The crossing of swamps and bogs was always a difficult undertaking for heavily laden porters. Apart from the Mkata swamp (discussed in chapter two) some of the worst were in Uvinza and Buha. Burton described the paths of western Uvinza as “truly vile, combining all the disadvantages of bog and swamp, river and rivulet, thorn-bush and jungle, towering grasses, steep inclines, riddled surface and broken ground.” Another European traveller described how a bog extending from the banks of the Mogunja river in Buha presented a tough problem to porters:

The natives have built a bridge over it, about 100 yards long, but it does not reach the dry ground on either side of the bog, so that to get to it it is necessary to wade for a distance of nearly ten yards through liquid mud about three feet deep. It took my caravan three quarters of an hour to get across, but my donkey had now to be taken over. He could not pass over the bridge, consisting of a few logs of wood supported by piles, and he had therefore to be driven through the mud. Ten men had to work for three hours before they could succeed in landing him safely on the other side. Several times one or

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14 Last to Wright, Mamboya, 16 April, 1879, CMS CA6/014 (quote); Last to Lang, Mamboya, 19 Feb., 1883, CMS G3A6/01; Burton, Lake Regions, 86.

15 Burton, Lake Regions, 234.
two of the men and the donkey disappeared entirely under the mud, and it took the united efforts of all the others to extricate them.16

When the Hore’s caravan crossed the Luiche river valley near Ujiji, several miles wide, covered in bush, reeds and thorns, and very swampy, porters were first knee-deep and then up to waist-deep in mud. One man, Uledi, on being asked what the swamp was like replied, “Oh, it is all right, but you must feel about, there is a big snake in the mud just here, and if you don’t mind, you will fall over him as I did!”17

In some places great rivers ran where none existed during the dry season. In Uzaramo in January 1878 LMS missionaries reached a river one hundred yards wide where formerly there had only been a “dry ditch” in the midst of a desert waste. “To add to the horror,” one among them wrote, “the people say that crocodiles have lately nabbed two Wanyamwezi here and our men are afraid.” The porters refused to cross until a rope was secured to trees on either bank.18 Caravan members assisted each other when crossing rivers, as Gleerup shows when the large caravan he accompanied forded the Ruchugi river in Uvinza: “It was a strange sight to see the carriers with their heavy loads, children and women supported by those who ... had got their bundles across, goats with horns tied, naked babies clinging tightly to their likewise naked mothers, all splashing in the water and struggling to prevent themselves being carried away by the strong current.”19

Once the rainy season was over floodplains and marshes dried up and were replaced by great expanses of dried mud. These deserts presented their own difficulties for caravans traversing them. During the rains the mud was cut up in many areas by the hooves of

16 Lionel Decle, Three Years in Savage Africa (London, 1898), 328.

17 Annie Hore, To Lake Tanganyika in a Bath Chair (London, 1886), 148-9.


19 Per Hassing and Norman Bennett, “A Journey Across Tanganyika in 1886” (Translated and edited extracts from the journal of Edvard Gleerup), TNR, 58-9 (1962), 133. For another vivid account of a river crossing see Fortie, Black and Beautiful, 92-3. For various techniques for crossing flooded rivers see John Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years in East Africa (Cambridge, 1921), 8-9. Occasionally rivers were bridged by trees.
domestic animals and game so that the surface became extremely irregular. Then when the
rains ceased the sun baked the ground as hard as stone. Such rough surfaces were very hard
on porters with their bare feet.20 The porters of more than one caravan must have had an
especially painful experience when the game in question had been elephants, which left
footprints perhaps over a foot across and nearly as deep, which then might be covered over
by vegetation making it impossible to avoid falling in them.21 Another hazard during the dry
season were the great stretches of thorn jungle, particularly around Mpwapwa and through
the Marenga Mkali and Ugogo. Annie Hore wrote of the approach to Mpwapwa late in the
dry season of the famine year of 1884: “Towards noon the heat was terrible, the whole face
of the country seemed scorched up, not a green leaf was to be seen for miles. We were shut
in by thickets, and even in some places by trees, but no leaves, only bare thorns everywhere
... and not a bit of shade to be had anywhere.” Another missionary travelling through
northern Ugogo complained of “The long terrible thorns [which] tore our clothes and bags,
and ripped up the covers of our bales of cloth.”22 Thorn bushes were a particular trial for
porters, dressed, as they were, minimally. Sometimes they made themselves hide sandals to
protect their feet.23 At any time of year jungle paths presented porters with another
difficulty. Bushes and the boughs of trees growing close on either side of the path met just
above head level. Porters who carried their loads on their heads had to stoop to avoid loads
catching on branches.24 However the dry season presented more advantages than

20 Joseph Thomson, To the Central African Lakes and Back (London, 1968, 1st ed. 1881), 1, 127; Hore. To
Lake Tanganyika, 104-5.

21 E.g. Beardall to Waller, Dar es Salaam, 27 April, 1879, Mackinnon Papers, box 77, IBEA Co. file 61.

22 Hore. To Lake Tanganyika, 82; O’Flaherty to Hutchinson, Uyui, 29 Nov., 1880, CMS G3A6/01. Burton
wrote of thorns which “tenacious as fish-hooks, tore without difficulty the strongest clothing ...” Lake Regions,
177.

23 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, 1, 128; J. L. Krapf, Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours
During an Eighteen Years Residence in Eastern Africa (London, 1968, 1st Eng. ed. 1860), 269; Carl Claus von
May French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan (London, 1892), 162-3.
disadvantages in terms of road conditions. Most of the long grass, “such a terrible obstruction to progress,” was burnt down, clearing the paths.\textsuperscript{25} Bogs shrank and rivers retreated to their natural courses or disappeared altogether.

The more direct effects of the climate were just as ravaging. At night, during the dry season, temperatures in the mountains and on the savannah plateau could feel extremely cold to scantily clad carriers. Porters climbing over the Usagara mountains in August, 1857, were exposed to “thick vapours and spitting clouds, and at nights the thermometer ... sinks to 48° Fahr., — a killing temperature in these latitudes to half-naked and houseless men.” In the same month of 1891, also in the Usagara mountains, porters of another expedition “suffered severely from the cold.” The open expanses of Ugogo are swept by cold winds off the Usagara mountains after sunset, so that extreme changes of temperature were common during the dry season. Porters exposed to sudden drops in temperature had to huddle around their fires, losing sleep, and caught chills or became sick from other causes.\textsuperscript{26} Conversely, from September to April temperatures are often very hot. The effect on porters of the hot sun in the mountains of Urungu, south of Lake Tanganyika, is described by Livingstone: “The sun makes the soil so hot that the radiation is as if it came from a furnace. It burns the feet of the people, and knocks them up. Subcutaneous inflammation is frequent in the legs, and makes some of my most hardy men useless. We have been compelled to slowness very much against my will.” One remedy utilized by porters preparing for a lengthy exposure to the


\textsuperscript{25} Hore, To Lake Tanganyika, 64.

burning sun was to cover themselves with a layer of fat or oil. Other options were to make short marches early in the morning, or to travel at night.27

Loads

Most loads were managed by one individual, but there were others which required two or even four carriers. Special techniques were required to transport these. The types of loads varied according to the needs of the employer or, in the case of trader-porters, the business at hand. The most hated loads of all were human beings. The machila or palanquin became a symbol of colonial oppression.

Porters used three different techniques to carry single loads, varying according to the kind of physical environment they were most familiar with, the customary methods which they learned from their elders, and the physical characteristics of the load. Nyamwezi and Sukuma porters carried loads typically weighing about thirty two kilos (two frasila) or more on their shoulders.28 Carrying on the shoulder was much easier in wooded or forested country than head-loading, as shown above. There were two methods of packing loads for shoulder carriage. Cloth bales were packed so that they were about one and a half metres long and between thirty five and sixty centimetres across, and wrapped in tough matting.29 The bale was then bound to flexible sticks lashed in a roughly fork-shaped cradle about two


28 Compare with the Merina empire where loads were up to 40 kilos or 90 pounds, but frequently between 27 and 32 kilos. See Gwyn Campbell, “Labour and the Transport Problem in Imperial Madagascar, 1810-1895”, IAH, XXI (1980), 349.

29 This part of the packing process was often carried out by specialist packers at the warehouses of Indian merchants in Zanzibar or on the coast. See Henry Morton Stanley, How I Found Livingstone (London, 1872), 46-7; Norman R. Bennett, ed., Stanley’s Despatches to the New York Herald (Boston, 1970), 10-11; C. T. Wilson and R. W. Felkin, Uganda and the Egyptian Sudan (London, 1882), I, 24-5; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 37.
and a half metres long. This had four advantages for the porter. He could keep a good grip, the load was kept firm, and it could easily be set down by resting the long end against a tree or other support, so that the weight of the bale never had to be lifted from the ground. From either the porter’s or employer’s point of view the cradle helped keep the load dry and, by keeping it above ground level, protected it from termites and ants.\(^{30}\) Beads in sacks were tied to smaller cradles and carried in a similar fashion.\(^{31}\) The second variation was to suspend two half loads, such as coils of brass wire or small boxes or barrels of gunpowder, from each end of a pole, a contrivance known as a \textit{madala}. This could then be supported on the shoulder, which was protected by a grass, leather, or rag pad.\(^{32}\) Some Europeans, including Frederick Jackson, later governor of the Uganda Protectorate, were impressed by the way Nyamwezi and Sukuma carriers used verbal cues at the end of the chorus of a marching song to transfer in unison their heavy loads from one shoulder to the other by “simply ducking the head downwards and then, with a sideways sweep, upwards.”\(^{33}\)

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\(^{32}\) Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 113, 531; de Vienne, “De Zanzibar a L’Oukami”, 360; Bennett, \textit{Stanley’s Despatches}, 10-11; Mackay to Hutchinson, Zanzibar, 5 March, 1877, CMS CA6/016; Henry to Wright, Mpwapwa, 1 Oct., 1878, CMS CA6/012; Thomson, \textit{To the Central African Lakes}, I, 38; Reichard, “Vorschläge zu einer Reiseaurüstung”, 56; Pruen, \textit{The Arab and the African}, 179; Fortie, \textit{Black and Beautiful}, 100. See the illustration of a load of hoes in John Hanning Speke, \textit{Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile} (New York, 1864), 103. In the Merina Empire porters also carried loads on their shoulders suspended from bamboo poles, as was the norm in East Asia. See Campbell, “Labour and the Transport Problem”, 349. Campbell is incorrect, however, when he contrasts this technique with that of African porters on the mainland.

Swahili and Waungwana, on the other hand, preferred to head-load, the second technique. This was less efficient than carrying on the shoulder, but the difficulties were minimized by a good carrying technique, as described by May French-Sheldon:

The Zanzibaris carry their loads sometimes balanced with their hands extended overheard one either side of the load, but with their bodies and heads perfectly erect, never looking at the immediate footpath, avoiding with deftness the overhanging branches or side projections. They put one foot directly in line of the other, without turning the toes out, making a very narrow tread...

They universally carry long stout staffs ... which they thrust ahead of them, and bear upon when ascending or descending mountains, and employ to sound streams when fording ...

A headload had to be lighter, averaging about twenty eight kilos, was difficult to manage in forests, and much greater exertion was required to lift it from the ground. To protect themselves porters made head pads from cloth or grass and rushes. Despite the awkwardness of boxes for porters, many European travellers used packing cases for their goods. In both Nyamwezi and coastal caravans headmen and merchants usually did not carry a load, but had to be ready to take over from sick porters, or when desertions threatened their property.

The third technique was that utilized by forest peoples such as the Manyema of eastern Zaire who, in the last decades of the century, were frequently found in East African caravans. They carried loads either on their backs or shoulders, making it easier to pass through the tangles of creepers lying across forest paths. A member of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition noted that caravans of Manyema slaves and followers of Arab traders in eastern Zaire included numbers of women who carried baskets of food and other necessities. These baskets are borne on the back, and suspended from the forehead ... The carriers do not, like

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34 French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan, 122.

35 von der Decken, Reisen in Ost-Afrika, I, 232; Dodgshun, “List of requirements”, LMS 2/1/B; Hore, To Lake Tanganyika, 23-4; Lloyd, In Dwarf Land, 37; Southon to Whitehouse, 29 Nov., 1880, LMS 3/3/D.

36 Tate’s sugar cube boxes were of such convenient size that large numbers of them were carried up-country where they were converted into beehives. Pruen, The Arab and the African, 58.

37 Burton, Lake Regions, 113; von der Decken, Reisen in Ost-Afrika, I, 232; Weule, Native Life in East Africa, 80. For an exception see Lamden, "Some Aspects of Porterage", 159-60.
our [Zanzibari] porters, cut their way through the bush, but trail along the native tracks, stooping under the low natural archways ...”

Exceptionally heavy or awkward loads which could not be divided, such as large tusks or boxes, often had to be carried by two porters. Heavy boxes were especially detested; tusks were easier to manage. Double loads were difficult to manoeuvre up and down hills and across swamps. The usual carrying technique was to lash the load to a pole supported by two men walking in single file. This device was known as a mzigaziga. Sometimes a strong porter would prefer to bear a very heavy load himself rather than have the extra problems of sharing it with another man. Men of herculean strength were known to carry 120 pound tusks. But where double loads were unavoidable Nyamwezi pagazi could carry heavier weights than coastal porters. Gleerup described “sweating figures struggling under the heavy burdens of ivory,” weighing up to 160 pounds. A large cow bell, which rang continually during the march, was tied to the sharp end of the tusk, which faced foward, while the porters’ personal property was attached to the bamboo pole of the mzigaziga. Large tusks reaching Zanzibar averaged 80 to 85 pounds, with tusks weighing 140-150 pounds being common. Of the largest, the American Consul in Zanzibar had seen several of 175 pounds and had one in his own house of 182.5 pounds. “Probably in the interior are many as large, perhaps larger,” he wrote, “but the negroes will not bring them to the coast, owing to their great weight.”


40 Hines to Seward, Zanzibar, 25 Oct., 1864, in Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks, eds., New England Merchants in Africa (Boston, 1965), 529. On large tusks Burton writes, (Lake Regions, 540) “The tusk is larger at Zanzibar than elsewhere. At Mozambique, for instance, 60 lbs. would be considered a good average for a lot. Monster tusks are spoken of. Specimens of 5 farasilah [sic] are not very rare, and the people have traditions that these wonderful armatures have extended to 227 lbs., and even to 280 lbs. each.”
Caravans led by missionaries and explorers differed considerably in terms of the type of loads carried compared with those of traders. Merchant caravans carried almost exclusively trade goods, whereas missionaries and other European travellers employed porters to carry personal possessions, provisions, and the equipment and tools necessary to construct and run mission stations, or survey and map territory, as well as the trade goods necessary for progress. The list of “all the property in and pertaining to the English Mission House at Ujiji” gives a good idea of the quantity and type of the very functional goods which porters employed by the London Missionary Society carried 1,500 kilometres to Lake Tanganyika. The complete list is too long to reproduce fully, but included large quantities of cloth, beads, and wire, a year’s supply of European provisions, clothing, a huge variety of implements, machinery, and tools, furniture and household effects, kitchen equipment, an assortment of guns and ammunition, books, stationery, a medicine chest, a great variety of “miscellaneous stores” such as 26 panes of window glass, canvas, blankets, a saddle, a tent, and so on, a set of marine and scientific equipment including an anchor and chains, life-buoys, tar, ship’s sheathing metal, nails, navigation aids, etc. CMS missionaries in Buganda had three and a half tons of New Testaments carried to the kingdom in one caravan in 1894. The porters of Johnston’s Kilimanjaro expedition had to carry loads of the usual cloth, bead and wire currency, plus other trade goods including sacks of cowry shells, barrels of gunpowder, percussion caps, mirrors, knives, bells, mousetraps, and rough musical instruments. There were gifts for chiefs such as musical boxes, accordians, good quality guns, playing cards, “fine snuff,” and “gaudy picture books.” European food supplies included loads of potatoes, onions, preserved goods, and live fowls. Among more prosaic items the goods of Abbé Debaize borne to Ujiji included bizarre things such as “twelve boxes

41 The full list is in Hore to Whitethouse, Ujiji, 8 Jan., 1880, LMS 3/1/A.


of rockets and fireworks, which would require about forty-eight men to carry them, several boxes of dynamite ... two coats of armour, several boxes of brandy, two loads of penny pop-guns ... and even a hurdy-gurdy.”

In addition to the employer’s load or, in the case of trader-porters, their merchandise, porters carried numerous personal effects and weapons. The necessities of life for a frugal African traveller might include a mat, an axe to cut firewood, a pipe, an earthen cooking pot, and a spear for defence. In the case of von der Decken’s coastal porters a kit for the road consisted of

... a kitoma or squash bottle filled with water, a pack with foodstuff, their bedding, and small reserves of stuff, ‘kaurs’ and similar things for their own use or in order to acquire this or that, which happens to catch their eyes during the trip, a pair of leather sandals which they wear where thorns lie on the path, a heavy musket, if they have proven their authorization, and every fifth or sixth person a cooking pot: it is indeed difficult to find a little bit of room for something else on the head, back, shoulders and hips.

Many of Hore’s men took with them “a little sleeping mat, a best ... shirt, and a tiny bag containing smaller properties ... this, with perhaps two to three yards of calico worn as a wrap, and a small sheath-knife stuck in his girdle, completes the outfit ... of one of these hard-working adventurous men.” A Nyamwezi porter working in British East Africa might carry “a thick pad of cloth ... wrapped round his stomach, a couple of coils of brass wire dangling from his belt, and a neatly made and sausage-like bag of selected beads also to wrap around his waist, or in a leather bag to sling from his shoulders ... to enable him to buy extra food.” Rashid bin Hassani carried two lengths of cloth, a cooking pot, a blanket and a short Snider rifle as well as his load to Uganda in the early 1890s. Other weapons often carried

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45 François Coulbois, *Dix années au Tanganyka* (Limoges, 1901), 202. This was almost identical to the 10 pounds of personal baggage allowed to Fortie’s porters: Fortie, *Black and Beautiful*, 101.


included bows and arrows, small battle axes, large knives or *sime*; various types of flintlocks and other obsolete muzzle loading firearms, the occasional pistol and, towards the end of the century, modern breech loading rifles.\(^49\) Provisions in areas where there was little food to buy added further weight. In 1857 each porter had to carry at least eight days' food to cross the Mgunta Mkali, and it was the same in 1882. The Nyamwezi carried extra food in goatskin bags.\(^50\) Such accoutrements added twenty or thirty pounds to each carrier's burden. The result was that a porter's total load might be ninety to one hundred pounds, or more.\(^51\)

Increasing European interests in East Africa led to even greater demands on their carriers, without whom imperial and mission expansion would have been impossible. In the 1870s porters transported the first of many disassembled steam ships to the central African lakes. The imposition of this new burden began earlier, when well-equipped European travellers took collapsible boats as part of their outfit. In 1867 the Livingstone search expedition of the Royal Geographical Society took a steel boat for use on the Zambezi and Shire rivers and Lake Nyasa which had to be disassembled and carried by Kololo porters up and around the Murchison cataracts on the Shire.\(^52\) In Tanzania Stanley was the first to make


use of porters in this way, and in 1874 took a collapsible boat, the *Lady Alice*, on the expedition across Africa, sailing her on Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika, before abandoning her on the lower Congo. Each boat section was the responsibility of four “herculean” porters, who alternated in pairs. They were paid higher wages than all the headmen with the exception of Manua Sera, the “chief captain,” received double rations, and had “the privilege of taking their wives along with them.” Nevertheless, this was a terribly arduous experience for the boat porters, as the occasional reference to their troubles keeping up with the rest of the caravan indicates. When in the Uregga forest on the bank of the Lualaba river Stanley wrote in his diary: “Boat came today, people utterly fagged out and disheartened.”

In 1878 Johnston and Thomson’s porters had to manage the difficult load of “a long mahogany collapsible boat” which was carried by “two giants.” The 1882 CMS caravan to Buganda, managed by Stokes, included a heavy oak boat carried in sections. The loads gave the Nyamwezi and coastal porters great trouble as some sections had to be carried by two or more men. The result was constant tension on the march. Stairs’ expedition to Katanga also took dismantled boats. The carriers of the sections “had a most arduous experience” in the Usagara mountains, “as, in addition to the rocks, the road was frequently obstructed by fallen trees.”

In 1882 the LMS also organized a large caravan with the aim of launching a 32 feet

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54 Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes*, I, 87; Simpson, *Dark Companions*, 146, 147, 150.

long life boat, the steel plated *Morning Star*, on Lake Tanganyika. Nearly one thousand porters were required for the specially designed boat, its fittings, and the usual loads of currency, provisions, camping equipment and so on. The six heaviest sections including the fore and stern compartments were pulled by porters on narrow carts, two men harnessed in tandem. But five other very heavy sections weighing 180, 171, 150, 121 and 110 pounds were carried in the usual manner, along with many loads of normal weight. Before departure the prevailing opinion in Zanzibar was that it would be “impossible” to get the sections to Ujiji. The difficulties encountered included dragging the carts over the steep paths of the Usagara mountains, during which one slipped over a steep precipice, dangling by its harness, thereby endangering the lives of the porters pulling it. By the time the caravan reached Uyui the porters were “quite knocked up.” On completion of the epic journey Hore wrote, “We only want a newspaper reporter to make it the greatest work yet done in Central Africa.”

The first steamship carried up the central route to Lake Victoria was the CMS vessel, the *Daisy*. The Zanzibari and Sukuma porters engaged to carry her had great trouble, and the Sukuma demanded very favourable terms to complete the journey. The boilers and some of the machinery failed to reach the lake and so the *Daisy* was launched as a sailing boat. Most of the parts of another mission vessel, the *James Hannington*, reached the lake in 1889, but construction was never finished. In 1939 Chasama, the old chief of Uzilima, still remembered how the porters were struck by the weight of the loads of rivets, despite their small bulk. In 1896 the steamship *Ruwenzori* was launched at Mwanza after the CMS had handed over the project to Boustead, Ridley and Company due to the great cost of porterage

(quote); Konczacki, *Victoria Explorer*, 202, 1 Aug., 1891. The boat porters received extra rations. In 1889 Stokes’ porters carried a sailing vessel, the *Limī*, to Lake Victoria: Harman, *Rwana Stokesi*, 100.

from the coast. The Germans had their own schemes for launching ships on Lake Victoria, and a small steamer was assembled at the lake in 1892. Steamships were also carried to Lake Tanganyika. In 1880 and 1882 caravans of the Belgian branch of the International African Association transported a small steamer, the Cambier, up the central route to Karema. Taking a different route the LMS steamer Habari Ngema ("Good News") was carried in 1883 from the north end of Lake Malawi to the south end of Lake Tanganyika. One of the greatest feats by East African porters was the overland transportation of the Nile steamer Khedive from Gondokoro to Dufile on Lake Albert (now Lake Mobutu Sese Seko) between 1875 and 1879. The Khedive was 85 feet long, weighed 108 tons, and 4,800 porters were used, 600 hauling the boiler.

The most unpopular burdens of all were of the human type. The use of the palanquin or machila in some parts of East Africa, particularly in Portuguese territory, has a long history. But on the mainland of Tanzania they were unknown until the late nineteenth century. "The porters of East Africa do not carry persons, but only things," Rebmann wrote in 1850. "In these countries people know nothing of carrying persons, but everybody is


58 "Wissman Dampfers — Bericht uber Victoria Nyanza", 1891, G6/21, TNA. Stokes arranged transportation. Thanks to Laird Jones for the reference.


62 See the detailed description of palanquins and their bearers in Mesuril, near Mozambique island, in 1809, in Henry Salt, A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of that Country (London, 1867, 1st ed. 1814), 28-9; also Cole-King, "Transportation and Communication", 76.
required to move on his own feet."63 This remained the pattern until the arrival of Europeans in the interior. Most preferred to walk, or occasionally ride a donkey where conditions permitted. Livingstone was carried "in illness" in a bed-like frame for the first time in his life in January 1869, after a quarter century of African travel.64 But frequent ill-health encouraged many to rely at times on the strength of their porters for personal locomotion.

Burton found that the six slave porters hired from a Tabora Arab were

like all porters in this part of the world, unable to carry a palanquin. Two men, instead of four, insisted upon bearing the hammock; thus overburdened and wishing to get over the work, they hurried themselves till out of breath. When one was fagged, the man that should have relieved him was rarely to be found; consequently, two or three stiff uudges knocked them up and made them desert.

Another set of six hammock men were hired "with difficulty" at Usagozi, only to desert eight days later.65 When a sick Englishman in another expedition had to be carried, "the Swahili men refused the laborious and what they considered menial task of carrying him in a hammock ..." Other porters had to be found.66 These travellers' comments say more about the relative egalitarianism of pre-colonial Tanzanian society than anything else. Nowhere do we have reports of chiefs or African traders being carried by machila. Apart from sick Europeans the machila was particularly associated with European women, especially missionaries, who began to travel up-country in the last two decades of the century.

European men assumed that European women could not walk long distances, and the women

63 J. Rebmann, "Narrative of a Journey to Madjame, in Kirima, during April, May, and June, 1849". CMI, 1, 14 & 16 (1850), 381.

64 Livingstone, Last Journals, 286, 8 & 9 Jan., 1869.

65 Burton, Lake Regions, 240, 264, 266, 275, also 384-5. C.f. attitudes in early nineteenth Yorubaland. Ogunremi writes, "When Clapperton reached Ijanna and asked for some hammock-men to carry the invalids in the party, he was promptly told that the Oyo people 'could not and would not carry a hammock — that a man was not a horse.'" See Gabriel Oundeji Ogunremi, Counting the Camels: The Economics of Transportation in Pre-Industrial Nigeria (New York, London, Lagos, Enugu, 1982), 74. For another example "Deji Ogunremi, "Human Porterage in Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century — A Pillar in the Indigenous Economy". Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, VIII, 1 (Dec., 1975), 42, f.n. 9. Of course horses could not be used for Tanzanian travel.

66 Elton, Travels and Researches, 388, 15 Dec., 1877. It was wishful thinking for French-Sheldon to write that "They [her porters] have no objections to carrying a mzunga [sic] (white man), but they very much object to carrying a fellow pagazi (porter)": Sultan to Sultan, 117. See also Southon to Whitehouse, Mpwapwa, 16 July, 1879, LMS 2/1/D.
accepted this view, although they were prepared to walk some of the time.\(^{67}\) Annie Hore was pushed, pulled and carried in “one of Carter’s wicker bath chairs, with a broad double wheel ... and fitted with short poles for lifting the whole affair over difficult places ...” Sixteen men were allocated to carry it. May French-Sheldon was often carried in a \textit{machila}.\(^{68}\) As the century progressed and the use of the \textit{machila} by European administrators and others became commonplace, it was even more resented. Tony Woods writes of colonial Malawi, “... \textit{machilla} travel was more than a psychological affront; it was also a symbol of colonial repression.”\(^{69}\) But for most porters the difficulties of coping with a human burden did not often arise. Into the 1890s and the new century trade goods, export commodities, and the miscellaneous baggage of imperialism continued to make up the standard load.

\textbf{The Daily Routine}

A safari was a serious business. Dangers lay ahead. A methodical order underlay the routine of travel to help ensure success. Over the decades a work regime was established which through experience regulated the customs of professional porters. A set pattern of marching and rest stops emerged, with variations for special circumstances. It was not always easy for foreigners to discern the patterns that ensured that a caravan of hundreds of porters reached its destination with adequate rest for the reproduction of the porters’ labour power. Misunderstandings and arrogance led to disputes, with sometimes serious consequences. When outsiders tried to alter by force the successful system of the past the result was sometimes the death of hundreds or thousands. A good example is from the British East African Protectorate where, in 1898, five thousand Bugandan and Busogan porters, who

\(^{67}\) See Griffith to Whitehouse, Ujiji, \textit{?} Oct., 1879, LMS 2/2/B.

\(^{68}\) Hore, \textit{To Lake Tanganyika}, 8; French-Sheldon, \textit{Sultan to Sultan}, 16, 103, 121, 245.

\(^{69}\) Tony Woods: “Capitaos and Chiefs: Oral Tradition and Colonial Society”, \textit{IJAHS}, 23, 2 (1990), 260-1. Woods cites the case of a megalomaniac colonial official who had his dogs carried in a \textit{machila}. The humiliations of the \textit{machila} became part of the general view of colonialism remembered by Wood’s Malawian informants. See also Cole-King, “Transport and Communications”, 82.
rarely travelled outside the lake region, were conscripted and taken from their own countries as the transport corps for the Indian Regiment, which was being moved from Uganda to the coast. Unaccustomed to the food and conditions of the high plateau, or infected at Kivi, the railhead, with a virulent form of dysentery not encountered in the lake region, three quarters of them sickened and died. In contrast to this disastrous episode, imposed on Africans by imperialists ignorant of the consequences, the conclusion reached by the majority of foreigners — Arab or European — was to adopt most aspects of the indigenous caravan systems of the Nyamwezi, Swahili and Yao.

If the dominant theme while travelling was order, there was a sub-theme of disorder, especially associated with departures and arrivals. But here too there were elements of ritual. For two or three days prior to departure from any of the main caravanserais, such as in Bagamoyo, Tabora, or Ujiji, porters made the most of their remaining time. “The most prudent ask that their advance be given them in cloth,” Stanley wrote in Bagamoyo. “Those who have money require three days to spend it in debauchery and rioting, in purchasing [i.e. paying bride price for] wives, while a few of the staid married men, who have children, will provide stores for their families.” Baumann wrote rather more explicitly of the wait in Tanga before the safari to Maasailand. *Askari* and *pagazi* indulged in the usual drinking, carousing, brawling and womanizing which preceded long and dangerous journeys.

Baumann was in continual conflict with the local authorities over his men’s behaviour. The camp was frequently visited by women who had been “seduced,” and old people, children, and others who had been beaten. All required “Bakschisch.” The *wali* of Tanga, an “Arab burgermaster,” gravely insulted by a Manyema carrier, was compensated with a bottle of

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71 Bennett, *Stanley’s Despatches*, 160-1.
cognac. Up to this point, however, all was going well, until a Manyema porter was beaten to death for assaulting a woman.\textsuperscript{72}

This seems to be an extreme case; more peaceful rituals also marked the beginning of a safari. Before Swahili and European influences became strong, that is, before the 1890s, the night before departure Nyamwezi couples followed the ritual of mapasa. Plastering their faces with flour, the man and woman exchanged affronts with the aim of creating a symbolic break to make parting easier. An offering of flour and a pot was then made at a fork along the path.\textsuperscript{73} The kirangozi of Giraud's caravan invoked the blessing of the moon and the stars some hours before sunrise on the day before departure from Bagamoyo in order to ensure safe travelling. At departure time LMS Waungwana sang a hymn, Kwanza twomba Mungu — “First let us pray to God.” Other mission Waungwana setting out for Lake Tanganyika, “full of spirit and eagerness, shout out their determination to go to Ujiji without stopping; others dolefully express their belief that they shall die under their load; others seek to encourage themselves and their comrades by such cries as ‘I am an ass,’ ‘I am an ox and want two loads,’ ‘I am a pagazi,’ etc.”\textsuperscript{74} When departing the coast Nyamwezi porters dressed with care to make the maximum impression, as a Swahili observer recorded:

... a happy feature about the travellers is that when (the caravan) is leaving the town they all get red straps to wear, and some wear bells on their legs, and as they go the bells jingle. The same goes for their leader, but he wears a plume made from the feathers of every kind of bird, they (the feathers) are collected and fastened together, and he wears it on his head.\textsuperscript{75}

In contrast, when on the road the porters wore their “worst attire.” The selection of loads was a serious business as an unusually heavy, hard, or awkward load could mean grave

\textsuperscript{72} Oscar Baumann, Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle (Berlin, 1894), 7-8. For similar scenes see Stanley, Through the Dark Continent, I, 57-9; Victor Giraud, Les Lacs de L’Afrique Équatoriale (Paris, 1890). 45. According to von der Decken it was an “old caravan custom” for the caravan leader to slaughter an ox and distribute the meat among the porters the day before departure: Reisen in Ost-Afrika, I, 228.

\textsuperscript{73} Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, Customs of the Swahili, 165, 297 f.n. 18. See also Decle, Three Years, 345.

\textsuperscript{74} Giraud, Les Lacs de L’Afrique Équatoriale, 45; Wolf, Central African Diaries, 133, 22 Oct., 1879; Hore, Tanganyika, 47-8. For similar jokes and boasts see Burton, Lake Regions, 240; Hore, Tanganyika, 35-6.

\textsuperscript{75} Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari in Harries, Swahili Prose Texts, 181.
difficulties for a struggling porter in the interior. Such loads could cause sores on head or shoulders, or handicap the carrier so that he was forced to lag behind his companions, exposing him to dangerous exhaustion or perhaps attacks from robbers waiting for stragglers. Making these calculations, porters competed for the cloth bales and other more desirable burdens; at the beginning of a journey there was often a mad dash for the best loads, with the headmen struggling to keep order. When all was ready, in the case of a caravan departing Dar es Salaam:

The signal was at last given to start. The drum beat its monotonous tum-tee-tum. The plaintive pleasant notes of the barghumi echoed and re-echoed from afar. Crack, crack, went gun after gun from porter or onlooker. The men with lusty shouts laid hold of their loads as if they were treasures, and then, with a sonorous recitative from the kirangosis, and answering chorus from the men, they commenced the long march.

Caravans marched only a short distance the first day from the coast or up-country trading centres "to deter to the last the evil days of long travel and short rations." There were always last minute difficulties. Porters could not be found or had deserted and had to be replaced, others delayed joining the main body due to conjugal obligations, some were sick, and often additional loads had to be packed. Everyone was out of condition and unused to their heavy loads. After a few days the regular routine of East African travel was established. Each day's march began at about six and generally lasted until late morning, with a short halt at about 8.00 or 9.00 a.m. Twelve to twenty kilometres would be covered. The porters preferred an early start in the morning because during the middle hours of the day paths became extremely hot to bare feet. A special strategy to cross waterless country

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76 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 81-2; Swann, Fighting the Slave-Hunters, 35-6.

77 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 88. For a similar account see Livingstone, Last Journals, 196. 2 Nov., 1867. A barghumi is made from a kudu horn, and its sound resembles the "sad, sweet music" of a French horn. See Burton, Lake Regions, 470.

78 Burton, Lake Regions, 53-4 (quote); Murphy to Kirk, "shamba" 3 miles from Bagamoyo, 21 April, 1873; Cameron, "Journal", 28 Mar., 1873, VLC 3/1, RGS; Cameron, Across Africa, I, 156-162, 171-177; Last to Whiting, Mamboya, 4 Oct., 1881, CMS G3A6/01.

79 Burton, Lake Regions, 239-244 (for a detailed account); de Vienne, "De Zanzibar a l'Oukami", 359-60; Last to Whiting, Mamboya, 4 Oct., 1881, CMS G3A6/01; Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years, 8; Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 32; Swann, Fighting the Slave-Hunters, 36. Von der Decken describes a somewhat different routine
necessitated an alteration of the marching pattern. A long and exhausting double march called a *terekeza* or *telekeza*, literally in Kiswahili “cause to put on the fire,” took travellers on to the next water supply faster than any alternative, as Cameron explains:

A *terekeza* is so arranged that by starting in the afternoon from a place where water is found and marching until some time after dark, leaving again as early as possible on the following morning for the watering-place in front, a caravan is only about twenty hours without water instead of over thirty as would be the case if the start were in the morning. And as the men cook their food before moving from the first camp and after arrival at the second, no water need be carried for that purpose. 

The normal marching order was the *kirangozi* at the head, followed by a winding column up to three or four kilometres long in the case of large caravans. Porters carrying ivory, the load signifying highest status, were in the vanguard. Then came carriers of cloth and beads, followed by those of miscellaneous trade goods such as rhinoceros teeth, hides, salt, tobacco, brass wire, iron hoes, and camping equipment of the merchants or caravan leaders. In separate groups interspersed with the porters marched the *askari*, women and children, each with their baggage, and donkeys and other animals. In the rear were the merchants or other employers, partly to act as a deterrent against desertion. Porters on the march, like Stairs’ Zanzibaris, tramped “steadily forward, their arms swinging like pendulums, except when a hand is raised to steady the load for a moment or two.”

Music and song were essential components of caravan culture, whether on the road or in camp. Sonorous chanting and singing in call and response patterns led by the *kirangozi* along the northern route of marching with numerous short breaks until an hour or two before sunset; Reisen in Ost-Afrika, I, 232. However, this was not the practice along the central routes.

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81 Burton, *Lake Regions*, 241. See also Cameron, *Across Africa*, I, 75; Bennett, *From Zanzibar to Ujiji*, 73. 19 June, 1878; W. G. Stairs, “From the Albert Nyanza to the Indian Ocean”, *NC*, 29, CLXXII (1891), 955-8. Cameron believed that struggles for the best loads were more to do with the desire for “a dignified position in the caravan” than a light load.

82 Moloney, *With Captain Stairs*, 32.

83 There is no space here for an analysis of the content of specific songs. Instead, I concentrate on the role of songs and other forms of music.
helped maintain marching rhythm. Burdens felt lighter, aches and pains were relieved when porters joined in one of the many work songs of their profession. Songs were also a vehicle to express sorrow, excitement, frustrations, grievances, social comment, or protest. Most importantly, the song performance helped create the boundaries of a work-based community, defining membership. To know porters’ songs along with other aspects of caravan culture, was to be initiated into the profession. Departures and arrivals were marked by mass singing for maximum effect. Hard repetitive work requiring coordination such as cutting wood, or passing loads overhead across a deep river, was accompanied by song. The Nyamwezi, in particular, were known for their precision timing and harmonious recitatives, which delighted foreign listeners. Many of the words of their songs were recorded by European travellers and missionaries. According to Unomah, writing of early

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90 See the examples quoted above, and others in Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, I, 112-3; Pruen, *The Arab and the African*, 101-3; Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, *The Customs of the Swahili People*, 165-6; Seminar für
1970s Unyanyembe, “The great safari and war songs composed during the period [of 19th century Nyanyembe power], like Manyumba Nazovba (I have Travelled Far and Wide), or Vhavba vbalifuma Nhwaní (Father is Returning from the Coast) are still sung with great emotion and pride. They recall for the vbanyanyembe [the people of Unyanyembe] the prosperity and glory of the days gone-bye.”

Among a caravan’s personnel there was always room for at least one drummer. When two or more caravans combined, several drummers might precede the main body of porters, thumping the safari beat and creating a formidable impression. The usual Nyamwezi safari beat became so well known along the routes that it quickly became the tattoo for the prayer drum at the protestant church in Buganda. A small band of drummers and part-time instrumentalists, such as zomari and barghumi players, performed in camp, leading dances, and on other appropriate occasions in many caravans. In addition, many Nyamwezi porters carried a goat’s horn, used something like a bugle. Livingstone wrote of the emotional impact of the call of the safari drum and barghumi at the start of a march:

“These sounds seem to awaken a sort of esprit de corps in those who have once been slaves. My attendants now jumped up, and would scarcely allow me time to dress when they heard


92 Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 73, 19 June, 1878; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 87; Wolf, Central African Diaries, 35, 18 June, 1878.


94 Thomson describes several examples: To the Central African Lakes, I, 91, 306-8. A zomari is a wind instrument in the shape of a clarinet but sounding something like a bag-pipe. See ibid., 50.

95 Burton, Lake Regions, 294.
the sounds of their childhood, and all day they were among the foremost." When a particularly difficult section of road was in front, the vigorous pounding of the drums and calls of the zomari and barghum from the van of the caravan, combined with much singing and shouting, helped encourage exhausted porters.

After weeks, and perhaps months on the road, porters underwent an almost ritualistic transformation when near their goal, usually one of the major termini such as Tabora or Ujiji. Professional pride was at stake, and they had to look their best: the more imposing the better, as is clear in an account by Thomson of the approach to Kwihara, Tabora, of his caravan in March 1880.

In front marched the giant, bully, and butcher of the East African Expedition, appropriately named Ngombe (the ox). He was dressed in the usual shirt-like garment of the Waswahili. Tied round his neck, and hanging loosely down his back, he had a large scarlet joho. In front he wore a fine ox-hide Ubena shield, and in the other an immense Manyema spear.

Following him came the caravan band, the drummer, and the zomari player, with their faces painted and bedaubed, wearing black johns flowing to their heels, and also leopard skins.

Next in order marched a boy, dressed also in a black joho, carrying the flag which had led us so many hundreds of miles. This was guarded by three of my headmen, in European coats and jacket, with bandera (red stuff) trousers, and voluminous turbans. These had guns slung on their backs, and spears in their hands. After these came about ten kiringosis, dressed to some extent like our leader, Ngombe, but having various other fantastic appendages in place of the leopard-skins.

The main body of porters came next, attired as if they had newly left the coast.

The rear was brought up by myself ... surrounded by a picturesquely clothed group of headmen, in snow-white shirts and wonderful turbans.

Appearances were so important that traders took on the responsibility of making sure that their porters were correctly attired when entering their home town.Selemani bin Mwenye Chande wrote in advance to his creditor requesting clothes before his caravan would enter Bagamoyo. Before entering Ujiji the Hores’ mud-stained porters stopped to rest and

96 Livingstone, Last Journals, 196, 2 Nov., 1867.
97 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 201-2.
refresh themselves, and “... from carefully preserved little bundles, brought forth clean white garments, and various array, for the entry into the town.” Even the “nearly naked, and starving” followers of Livingstone, bearing his body, made an attempt to present themselves in the usual style of a caravan making a grand entry at the end of a journey when they reached Kwihara. On such occasions the townspeople gathered to welcome the newcomers and join in the celebrations, shouting and firing guns. “In the past people fired salutes all the way to the customs house” Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari wrote of the arrival of Swahili caravans back at the coast. Very soon after entering the towns many of the porters would be “under the influence of liquor” and enjoying themselves to the full; Livingstone’s “set of orderly followers was for several days converted into a drunk and riotous mob.”

Nyamwezi women had a special welcome for their long departed menfolk: “When the wife hears that her husband is about to arrive from a journey to the coast, she dresses herself in a feathered cap and in the best costume she possesses, and proceeds with other women in ordinary dress to the sultana’s, where they sing and dance at the door.”

Yao Caravans on the Road

A brief discussion of the work process in Yao caravans shows similarities with that in Nyamwezi and coastal caravans operating further north; the growing importance of wage earning (although slave porterage was common in the south); the role of ritual; camp life; the problem of food; and the value of women to male porters. Along the southern routes there was a resurgence of Yao activity during the last third of the nineteenth century. Yao traders and hired porters visited the coast in greater numbers than at any time since the 1840s. Some


102 Grant, A Walk Across Africa, 99. Chiefs were sometimes referred to as “sultans” by travellers. The welcome ritual of Sukuma women was slightly different. See Kollmann, The Victoria Nyanza, 164.
time near the beginning of this revival, in November 1860, von der Decken encountered about a thousand free Yao and Bisa porters, including women, at their camp near Kilwa.  

Alpers tells us that there was a change in Yao caravan organization and hence in the status of porters compared with earlier times. At first most Yao caravan porters hunted for the ivory which they then carried to the coast for sale, but by the 1870s many porters were employed by traders who, instead of hunting elephants themselves, procured ivory from others. The missionary W. P. Johnson recorded that "Every man had a great ambition to buy an elephant’s tusk and then to borrow men to carry such tusks to the coast." Yao traders now cut out the Bisa and coastal middlemen, organized their own caravans, and employed their own people. “From the time I left Kilwa until I neared Lindi, I saw no Arabs,” wrote Vice-Consul Smith, who travelled the Tanzanian section of the southern route in 1884. Perhaps it is this period that Abdallah refers to when he writes:

In those days when a man was engaged to carry a truss of calico, in paying him his wages they gave him four yards of cloth and half a yard of red calico; this he would tie round his waist and go home preening himself, and say, ‘I have been to the coast and look how wealthy I am.’

As in the cases of Nyamwezi and coastal caravans those of Yao chiefs and “big men” were often mixed in composition. A large proportion of “poor honest men,” but also “coast men” and slaves made up the work-force of one of chief Mataka’s caravans in early 1880. The leader of another taking ivory and slaves to the coast was Ndembo, headman of a ward.

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105 Charles Stewart Smith, “Explorations in Zanzibar Dominions”, in Royal Geographical Society Supplementary Papers, II (1889), 105.

of Mataka’s capital. Johnson, travelling with this party, paid close attention to the ritual associated with departure, the aim of which was presumably to ensure a safe journey.

No caravan can go without an elaborately-prepared charm called a ‘tail.’ This may be, literally, an elephants’ tail, and in it are enclosed the ‘medicines’ carefully prepared by wise men which make it an effective charm. It is always supposed to go first and point out the encampment, but I noticed on the journey that very often some disorderly person would go first and choose for himself. I now discovered that there was an elaborate ceremony, akin to baptism, before the caravan started. A large bark canoe was placed near the encampment; this was filled with water so that a man kneeling in it would be nearly covered, and each member of the caravan had to be immersed and to get out at the end of the canoe and pass under some ‘medicine’ (charm); — I think it was the elephant’s tail.

Once the journey was underway the caravan would set out each day at dawn and stop at about eleven in the morning. Then the camp had to be constructed.

This would be a rough quadrangle, formed of continuous booths; one opening would be left, and a large bundle of thorns was prepared, to close this at night. A number of camp fires were kept blazing. As night settled down and those who had food had eaten it, the headman, Ndembo, harangued the people ... dwelling on any topical subject; for instance, the escape of a slave during the day, or whether we should have to go far for water in the morning — and exhorting the younger members not to stray away from the main party. After this the charms in the elephant’s tail were carried round the encampment and all evil influences were adjured not to hurt us, towards the four points of the compass in succession.

The ordinary caravan members had little to eat except maize. The coastal people seemed to fare somewhat better, as Johnson mentions being offered several times some “delicacy,” either flour or roasted sorghum, by one coast man from the large pot carried by his wife. This compares with Livingstone’s experience when travelling in the company of a number of Yao near Lake Nyasa: “Six handsomely-attired women carried huge pots of beer for their husbands, who very liberally invited us to partake.” Clearly porters travelling with their women were much better equipped for the rigours of the road.


108 Johnson, My African Reminiscences, 73. For Yao rituals and their role as a vehicle for the advance of Islam see Alpers, “Towards a History of the Expansion of Islam”, 172-201.

109 Johnson, My African Reminiscences, 73.


111 Livingstone, Last Journals, 100-1, 22 Sept., 1866.
**Women and Porterage**

Female participation was a most important feature of the work process along the central routes. When caravan personnel included both men and women there were clear advantages for all. Although there were rarely as many women as men in a single caravan, a kind of partnership is evident in the division of labour. Men provided protection and, when paid, access to food and clothing through their wages and *posho*. Women provided domestic and sexual services, companionship, and lightened the men’s burdens by carrying loads themselves. This was not unique to Tanzania, however. In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa women took on similar roles. The work of women in caravans travelling across East Africa suggests that women were migrants or itinerants long before the impact of colonization. Children, both slave and free, also carried loads and assisted in camp chores. Caravans, therefore, can be described as mobile communities with the ability to reproduce labour power and transmit porter culture to newcomers and down the generations.

There are numerous examples of female porterage in nineteenth century East Africa. In his study of Kamba porters in Kenya, Robert Cummings has shown that from the second half of the eighteenth century women were partners with men in the kinship bodies which organized local trade. In this early stage family groups travelled about with trade goods or acquired foodstuffs, the wives being the carriers. Sometimes the senior wife was the head of the small caravan. Later, control over long distance trade trade fell to warriors and hunters, who utilized institutions which cross-cut society beyond clan confines to provide labour and supervision, and took more tightly organized caravans to the coast and elsewhere.112 Women accompanied them. They had several motivations for leaving home and they filled various roles in the caravans. The more privileged went either as small traders with their own goods or as seers or diviners. Others, taking their children, went with their husbands to assist in

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112 Robert Cummings, “Aspects of Human Porterage with Special Reference to the Akamba of Kenya: Towards an Economic History, 1820-1920”, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975). 58-75. The role of *nzama* or elders’ councils in Kamba caravan organization can be compared in some respects with that the *nyampara* in Unyamwezi. See chapter 5.
carrying either family or an employer’s trade goods. It also seems that barren women joined caravans because of community hostility to their presence at home. In another case, Mang’anga women of the Tchiri valley were just as engaged as their husbands in local and regional trade, carrying bags of salt into the highlands. The numerous wives of chief Kimsusu of the Mang’anga carried Livingstone’s loads and provisions for several days, in return for payment. I have already noted above the female carriers of the Manyema. Nyamwezi and Sukuma women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century also took part in local and regional trade. Sukuma salt caravans to Lake Eyasi consisted largely of unmarried young women. In Uvinza, the major source of salt in western Tanzania, it seems that women did not play a direct role in salt production but, according to a Vinza elder, they came to the salt camps and cooked for the men. Many Nyamwezi women must have taken part in salt caravans judging by the quantity of Nyamwezi cooking vessels found at the springs. No doubt the women worked as carriers as well. These were precursors to female participation in long distance porterage into the early 1900s.

Women in many other parts of Africa participated in or even led trading caravans. Among the Bete of the Guinea forest all aspects of trade were dominated by women. They managed all stages of kola production and marketing. The big female merchants controlled large numbers of dependents, including apprentices, female porters, and hired porters. Nevertheless, males still dominated most aspects of political life.


115 See references in f.n. 38. In his discussion of the traditional gender division of labour in Eastern Zaire, David Northrup notes that in addition to their other work, women did a “considerable share” of carrying: Beyond the Bend in the River: African Labor in Eastern Zaire, 1865-1940 (Athens Ohio, 1988), 18. See also Alfred Sharpe, The Backbone of Africa (London, 1921), 94, 96-7, on Regga female carriers.


Yoruba caravans were also predominately female affairs. Women dominated trading activities, and female slaves and members of traders’ households provided most of the labour. But these caravans were on the road for just a few weeks in most cases — distances travelled were much shorter than in East Africa. In 1829 the explorer H. Clapperton wrote of Hausa caravans with up to one thousand members, men and women, and perhaps the same number of baggage animals, who travelled the 900 kilometres from Salaga to Kano in northern Nigeria: “They carry their goods on bullocks, mules, asses, and a number of female slaves are loaded .... Some of the merchants have no more property than what they can load on their own heads.” The historian of pre-colonial transportation in Nigeria suggests that women dominated in head loading in local trade “probably because when men were armed for defense against animals and enemies ready for combat, women followed, loaded with their belongings and carrying their offspring.” Other factors may have been time consuming male agricultural roles in parts of Nigeria, and the tradition of female local trading activities. These may be partial explanations, but they do not account for the structural place of women in trade and caravan operations noted by Coquery-Vidrovitch and Lovejoy in some regions.

We have already seen that whole families travelled to the coast from Unyamwezi and Ukimbu during the late 1840s and early 1850s. The earliest European travellers into the interior in the late 1850s and early 1860s also noted the presence of women and children in their own and other caravans. Some of Speke and Grant’s Nyamwezi porters brought their wives with them. They were, Grant thought,

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118 Falola, “The Yoruba Caravan System”, 114-5, 121.


120 Ogunremi, Counting the Camels, 73; idem, “Human Porterage in Nigeria”.

121 In chapter 3.
quiet, decent, well-conducted, tidy creatures, generally carrying a child each on their backs, a small stool and et ceteras on their heads, and inveterately smoking during the march. They would prepare some savoury dish of herbs for their men on getting into camp, where they lived in bell-shaped erections made with boughs of trees. 122

Nyamwezi women at this time continued to travel to the coast with caravans, taking their infants with them, and occasionally hiring themselves out as porters. 123 Speke wrote of the „marriages” between Waungwana porters and women in his caravan when in Uzinza, “Many of my men had by this time been married, notwithstanding my prohibition. Baraka, for instance, had with him the daughter of Ungurue, chief of Phunze; Wadimoyo, a woman called Manamaka, Sangizo, his wife and sister ...” Later Manamaka was described as the “head Myamuezi [sic.] woman” of the caravan. 124 High status women such as Manamaka influenced caravan management through their relationships with headmen and others. When Burton and Speke were travelling coastwards from Unyanyembe the caravan mganga’s unnamed sister-in-law, “cook and concubine to Seedy Bombay,” the headman, played a role in negotiations between Burton and the kirangozi Twanigana over the route to the coast. 125

The tradition of Nyamwezi female travel continued into the late nineteenth century and the last years of the long distance caravan trade. 126 Cameron’s caravan included “women and slaves” of some of the porters. In Stokes’ great caravan in 1890 there were many women “who cooked and carried the cooking utensils and food.” The CMS caravan of 1891 to Buganda included female porters. A missionary mentions among travellers who

122 Grant, A Walk Across Africa, 43.


124 Speke, Journal, 192, 11 Nov., 1861; 360, 20 April, 1862.


126 This also appears to be the pattern across the continent in the Congo Free State, where women and children participated in caravans carrying the equipment of Belgian colonization from the cataracts to Stanley Pool. See William J. Samarin, “The State’s Bakongo Burden Bearers”, in Coquery-Vidrovitch and Lovejoy, The Workers of African Trade, 272.
joined his caravan for protection a couple. The woman carried her baby and a small load of camp paraphernalia, while her husband carried her regular load along with his own. In the 1890s Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari stated that “Both men and women carry loads” in Nyamwezi caravans visiting the coast.\textsuperscript{127} Large numbers of Sukuma women walked to the coast with ivory caravans or gangs seeking hire for the return journey. “The women generally carry the cooking pots, corn, and apparatus of the camp,” wrote a missionary, “but it is no uncommon thing to see women carrying a load of cloth or beads nearly as large as the men ... carry.” Many of Carl Peters’ porters had their wives with them who were responsible for their private baggage.\textsuperscript{128}

Women were also present in the caravans of coastal traders. The bigger Arab traders travelled with their wives and female slaves, who walked the full distance in bare feet or sandals, often twenty five or thirty kilometres a day “without appearing bothered.” When at rest the trader’s tent was pitched behind a fence, so that a primitive harem was constructed to seclude his wives and concubines.\textsuperscript{129} Females, mostly domestic slaves, made up about 18\% or 200 out of the 1,300 personnel of Arab caravans encountered by a European traveller during one day in August 1891. He described them as “plump and glossy”. They had small tents to sleep in and for protection from the hot sun.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{127} Cameron,\textit{ Across Africa}, 1. 72; Tucker,\textit{ Eighteen Years}, 26; Ashe,\textit{ Chronicles of Uganda}, 26; Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari,\textit{ Customs of the Swahili}, 164; Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari in Harries,\textit{ Swahili Prose Texts}, 181.

\textsuperscript{128} J. T. Last,\textit{ Polyglotta Africana Orientalis} (London, n.d.), 21-2 (quote); Peters,\textit{ New Light on Dark Africa}, 64, 71. See also Hannington,\textit{ Peril and Adventure in Central Africa}, 96 (sketch); Hassing & Bennett, “A Journey Across Tanganyika”, 141; P. H. Yeo, “Caput Nili — the Travels of Richard Kandt in German East Africa”,\textit{ TNR}, 63 (Sept. 1964), 208; Moore,\textit{ To the Mountains of the Moon}, 152; Randabel to Superior General, Karema, 2 Aug., 1885, quoted in P Majerus, “Extracts from a History of Karema Mission 1885-1935”, in Mpanda District Book, TNA.


\textsuperscript{130} Burton,\textit{ Lake Regions}, 184; Coulbois,\textit{ Dix années}, 41 (quote); Konczacki,\textit{ Victorian Explorer}, 207, 10 Aug. 1891.
The scattered sources telling us about these intrepid caravan women leave us with little more than a snapshot. We do not know if the majority of them were married and returned home with their husbands, or whether they were “caravan wives” and led an independent life. Certainly, some were widows, and others were slaves or freed slaves. Some were both. No doubt there were others — slave or free — who fled abusive husbands. Abused women also ran away from caravans. Hutley, a credible witness, observed at Mtowa, Uguha, on the western shores of Lake Tanganyika, that slave women belonging to a coastal trader fled his caravan at the instigation of his senior wife, indicating a degree of female solidarity.

When caravans passed through Ugogo, Unyamwezi and other territories, it was quite common for local women to visit the camps and hold dances for themselves, which, a traveller noted, were “highly relished” by the porters. It is not difficult to envisage relationships being initiated on these occasions, as well as during longer stops at Bagamoyo, Tabora, Ujiji, and other towns. Livingstone’s attention was drawn to a “poor woman” from Ujiji who had gone with one of Stanley’s porters to the coast, only to be “cast off,” along the way, and then “taken by another.” But this woman was no subservient dependant. She had an “excitable” temper, was “a tall, strapping young woman,” and “must have been the pride of her parents.” Missionaries and other European travellers often stated their moral objections to any “doubtful feminine,” meaning unmarried woman, forming liaisons with their porters. No bride-wealth or in-law obligations resulted from caravan “marriages,” and


132 Wolf, Central African Diaries, 213, 29 Sept., 1880.

133 Wolf, Central African Diaries, 39, 4 July, 1878, 43, 26 July, 1878.

134 Livingstone, Last Journals, 457, 8 Sep., 1872.

relationships were often short. Sometimes fights resulted from disputes about women. Given that women always had other prospective partners, they were probably able to achieve some advantage by attaching themselves to the higher status males, such as headmen and askari. Caravan women were of “very mixed” origin — although there must have been large numbers of Nyamwezi — but by the 1890s at the latest many wore the Swahili kanga, ear ornaments and hair style. Raum believes they gave up “the inland virtues of diligence and humility and the tribal ideal of child-bearing.” This comment probably reflects missionary disapproval and ideological preferences as much as anything, but does indicate an independence of spirit, and perhaps infertility or the use of methods of birth control or abortion. Compare Raum’s comment with another from a European traveller on the fertility of Nyamwezi women in 1893:

Families are very small, males predominating; women with more than one child are the exception ... Three children are the most I found belonging to one wife. Drugs are employed to produce sterility; this and the practice of abortion account largely for the small size of the usual family. The doctors administer drugs for this purpose, but they keep them secret ...

If this is accurate, then Nyamwezi women clearly limited their fertility, and perhaps we can see this as part of a strategy to ensure their relative autonomy.

For women not formally married there were numerous “push” factors encouraging them to join caravans. These were, first, the impact of the various wars in western Tanzania during the second half of the nineteenth century which must have created a mobile refugee population: second, the consequences of the slave trade which forced lone women to find


137 Quarrels over women are mentioned in Burton, Lake Regions, 176; Wolf, Central African Diaries, 231. 27 Nov., 1880; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 76-7.

138 Raum, “German East Africa”, 169. Raum’s comments are part of his larger argument concerning “detribalization.”

139 Deele, Three Years, 348.
protected; and third, problems at the household level. For both married and unmarried women “pull” factors included the opportunities provided by taking part in clan, family and perhaps individual trading activities, wages for the few female porters who were paid by an employer, and possible freedom for fugitive slaves. But we know very little about where such women came from or where they went after the end of their journey.

The work of caravan women has been somewhat obscured in missionary and other sources important for this study. One missionary described women caravan members as “supernumeraries.” Other European travellers wrote almost nothing about women, although many accompanied their caravans. In Decle’s caravan, for instance, there were about forty women, but they are hardly mentioned. Fortunately some other European observers were not quite so obtuse. Stairs, an intelligent and careful observer of caravan life, had considerable insight into the valuable work of caravan women in European expeditions, and is worth quoting at length:

It is a great mistake to suppose that black women are a hindrance in any way to the rapid marching of a caravan in Africa, and that therefore they should be forbidden to follow their husbands from the coast to the interior. On the contrary, women are of immense help to the men, and consequently to the leader of an expedition. The porter, loaded with his box or bag of sixty pounds, his rifle and ammunition and mat, has quite enough to carry through eight hours of marching, and is thoroughly fatigued at the end of it. His wife then, if allowed to accompany him, carries for him his cooking-pots, and food enough, perhaps, to last both of them six or eight days.

On arrival at camp she prepares his evening meal, gets the camp ready, and, if necessary, washes his clothes for him, and helps in a hundred ways her tired husband. Besides doing this, the women on the march enliven everybody with their pleasant chatter and cheery singing. It adds immensely to the comfort and happiness of the men if their wives are allowed to follow them into the interior. It is only on very rare occasions that a Zanzibar woman is not able to march just as far and just as fast as her husband. More than all this, I would advocate the enrolment of the women on the caravan books, and pay them so much per month. If only for the reason that to the leader of the expedition they act as a small provision-transport corps, and help his men on by allowing them the free use of their limbs to the carrying of their loads and using of their rifles. I have seen a woman carrying twelve days’ rations for herself and her husband, as well as the necessary cooking pots. Had this man

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141 Mackay to Wright, Wami River, 18 Sept., 1876, CMS CA6/016; Mackay to Wright, Magubika, 27 May, 1877, CMS CA6/016; Bennett, Stanley’s Despatches, 86; Decle, Three Years, 320-1. Burton, generally a mine of information, has little to say on caravan women.
been single, he would probably have carried only three to five days’ provisions, and no pots or utensils to cook them in.\(^{142}\)

Stairs was somewhat in advance of his time in recognizing the central role of women in the reproduction of labour power, but his observations were shared by (or shared with) at least one other European “man on the spot.” In February 1893 Emin Pasha was on the Lualaba river near Nyangwe with a column of about 680 African soldiers and porters. In one of his last letters he wrote:

> The health of the men has been splendid. We have several of those who served with Stanley, Wissman, and Cameron. They are delighted, as there are very few ulcers and only five cases of smallpox. They cannot understand why we have not suffered; but I do. Every one of our men has at least one woman; every man builds a house every night on the road. The women carry all the food and prepare it, so the men are well housed and fed. On the road the men only carry a gun and 200 cartridges, and a long knife and a mat. If a man is sick, the women carry even these. In this way we made a march of seven days without seeing a living thing or a bit of food, and yet the men hardly suffered at all. Mons. Delcommene, who has just gone home from the Katanga, lost sixty-three men in five days’ march without food, and the whole expedition lost eighty-seven per cent of their soldiers and men. They had no women.\(^{143}\)

Women’s role in the reproduction of African labour power is a theme which modern historians and social scientists such as Luise White and Jane Parpart have only recently begun to investigate, specifically in relation to the “stabilization” of African workers in colonial urban centres.\(^{144}\)

> The study of female migration both for labour and other purposes is still at an early stage.\(^{145}\) The work of Janet Bujra and Luise White on migration and prostitution in Kenya initiated by the environmental, economic and political catastrophies of the 1890s and early

\(^{142}\) Stairs, “From the Albert Nyanza to the Indian Ocean”, 958. See also his comments in Konczacki. *Victorian Explorer*, 202, 1 Aug., 1891. 206-7, 10 Aug., 1891.

\(^{143}\) *ZEAG*, 11 Oct., 1893, reprinted from *The Standard*.


\(^{145}\) There is a discussion of various economic and non-economic causes of female migration, some of which are also applicable to the pre-colonial period, in Stichter, “The Migration of Women in Colonial Central Africa”.
1900s is important for the colonial period. But Nyamwezi and other women had been involved in migrant and itinerant labour for perhaps a hundred years before that. When the construction of the central railway line eroded the importance of the central routes and caravan traffic fell, many Nyamwezi men turned to railway construction for employment. Nyamwezi women went independently or with their men to the construction camps, as they had earlier to the caravans. This pattern of migration was the continuation of an old tradition, not the beginning of a new one, and was not necessarily connected to environmental disaster as in Kenya. As for migrant labour in general we should pay more attention to the pre-colonial era.

Another way to envisage caravans is as mobile communities, with a distinctive culture shared by travellers. Aspects of caravan culture spread beyond the caravans, along the routes and among the peoples providing porters. The customs of the road became familiar to more than one people, region or town. Caravan culture and the horizontal links it embodied were reproduced within the community of the caravan, which might involve almost all of the adults in a locale. As Raum and Cummings have pointed out, women had a major impact in the formation of caravan culture. But cultural and social reproduction were possible in part because children, as well as women and men, were socialized by the experience of porterage. Thus, a traveller in Northern Rhodesia described his long column as “a twisting, travelling town ... more than one hundred men, women and boys wriggling through the tall grass ...” The caravan community might exist on a much larger scale.

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When Tippu Tip returned to the coast in 1881 after a long stay in Manyema he was accompanied by about 3,000 men carrying 2,000 tusks, and by women and children. Children are even more invisible than women in the sources. Yet many porters were themselves scarcely adults. In the small caravans of Nyamwezi trader-porters organized by individual kaya, numbers of young boys, hardly in their teens, gained training by participating in journeys to the coast. They carried loads such as cooking pots and took over the loads of tired porters for short periods. They learned to hunt and to use weapons. "Boys," paid lower wages than adult porters, are mentioned in several porter lists of European travellers. In southern Tanzania UMCA mission porters were sometimes extremely young. Johnson’s porters were laughed at by Ngoni warriors because of their youth. The most famous East African boy traveller to Victorian readers was Kalulu, Stanley’s young companion for several years, who was immortalized in the title of the book, My Kalulu, King and Slave. Child slaves commonly assisted traders and porters, their masters, by carrying cooking equipment, sleeping mats, and other items. Burton mentions the purchase by some of his porters in Ujiji of slave children, including one who, "apparently under six years, trotted manfully alongside the porters, bearing his burden of hide-bed and water-gourd upon his tiny shoulder." There were fourteen slave children in Decle’s caravan (1893). There were slave children, the property of porters, in the 1894 CMS caravan to

150 Norman R. Bennett, Mirambo of Tanzania 1840–1884 (New York, 1971), 146.


153 Johnson, “Seven Years Travel”, 524. For mentions of children see Mackay to Wright, Wami river, 18 Sept., 1876, CMS CA6/016; Hore, To Lake Tanganyika, 84; Majerus, “Extracts from a History of Karemna Mission”; Stairs, “From the Albert Nyanza to the Indian Ocean”, 957-8.

154 Mc Lynn, Stanley, passim.
Buganda. A slave boy taken in by the UMCA mission school at Kiungani, Zanzibar, had travelled to Unyamwezi, his job being to carry calabashes, an iron cooking pot, and a bag. Another, from Bunyoro, gave details of his life on the road from Buganda to Unyanyembe in the caravan of his Swahili owner:

When we left Kiswele, and went to the country of Nyambo, I was badly treated, and made to carry a great many things. I carried my master’s mats ... an eight days’ march. We stayed for a time, and then left, and I was very well treated then, and many others were treated well too, but some badly. From the time we left Nyambo to Sumbua [Sumbwa] I was sometimes treated well and sometimes badly, and it was the same with the others. But master and slave all fared alike as to food.

A little girl — it is not specified whether slave or free — is mentioned carrying a water container on her head in the caravan bearing Livingstone’s remains to the coast.

The caravan as community did not just exist through the socialization of children and outsiders. Despite a low rate of reproduction, women sometimes gave birth on caravan journeys. A CMS caravan stopped for a day when the wife of a mganga had a son. The couple had joined the travellers for protection. Both the woman and the baby died the next day. Usually the mother would have to begin the march again after one day’s rest, and therefore in a weakened condition. In another case, described in rather casual terms by a missionary, a woman marched right up until the time of delivery, gave birth to the baby, then was ready to go on after a delay of “an hour or two.” Another European traveller wrote that one of the women in his caravan “... dropped to the ground, declaring that she could go

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156 A. C. Madan, tran. and ed., *Kiungani; or Story and History from Central Africa* (London, 1887), 78.

157 Madan, *Kiungani*, 111.


159 Clark to Wright, Mpwapwa, 27 Sept., 1876, CMS CA6/07.

160 Roscoe, *Twenty-Five Years*, 51. This type of description might say more about the attitude of some missionaries to African (or any) women than the event itself.
no further. I left her in charge of another woman and an Arab: later in the evening she walked into camp carrying a newly-born baby, and looking very little the worse for it.”

161 Declé, Three Years, 320. See also Jephson, The Diary of A. J. Mounteney Jephson, 410, for women dropping out of the column and giving birth during the journey from Lake Albert to Bagamoyo of the survivors of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition. This is an exceptional case given that most of the women were Emin’s people and therefore refugees. For more on the women among Emin Pasha’s followers and their work see Jephson, Diary, 343, 6 April, 1889; Parke, My Personal Experiences, 454, 12 July, 1889.
Chapter Eight

On Safari: The Culture of Leisure and Food

In this chapter further questions related to every day experience are introduced. Danger from robbers, wild animals and insects, and from fire, was always close by. Periods of political instability in certain regions added to the danger. Attacks on caravans and the closing of routes against competitors were part of the armoury of chiefs and big men. But most contact between porters and peoples along the routes occurred more or less peacefully at road junctions, market centres and caravan stops. Mpwapwa was one of the most important of these centres. In the second section I briefly summarize its history and discuss its role for caravans and porters. The third section is a discussion of camp stops, and the social and cultural life of porters in their more leisured moments on the road. The rest of the chapter returns to the theme of provisions, to consider what porters ate and drank, and how they obtained food and water. The section ends with a brief discussion of the 1884-85 famine, its impact on porters, and how they responded.

Excitement and Danger

The pleasures of community life added variety but also a measure of security to the work of porters. But going on safari was always an uncertain and hazardous undertaking. The routine of marching and setting up camp could be suddenly broken. There were numerous sources of insecurity, and death was commonplace. Famine and disease were the big killers.1 Otherwise the biggest threat came from hostile strangers. Conflicts with villagers along the routes over hongo, food supplies, women, and other causes were common. In times of war caravans of opposing sides were frequently threatened.2 Beyond settled areas

1 See below for famine.

2 See Alfred Chukwudi Unomah, “Economic Expansion and Political Change in Unyanyembe (ca. 1840-1900)” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1972), 217, for attacks on caravans during the war between Unyanyembe and Urambo. For the threat to a CMS caravan caused by the war between the Germans and the coast Arabs see S. T. Pruen, The Arab and the African (London, 1986, 1st ed., 1891), 95-7; Robert Pickering Ashe, Two Kings
there were always robbers who lay in wait for the unwary. Periods of instability in regions straddling main routes gave them free reign. There were also encounters with wild animals which provided considerable excitement and occasionally led to casualties. Insect pests could reduce a caravan to chaos if not avoided in time. Finally, camp fires sometimes got out of control and threatened caravan personnel and goods.

Robber bands operated in three ways. Attacks most commonly came from small groups who watched caravans from a distance and, when the time was right, ambushed struggling porters who had become separated from the column, often killing them and stealing their loads. This could happen almost anywhere, but the greatest risk areas were Ugogo and the Mgunda Mkali. In these regions travellers at all times up until the mid 1890s were in danger. An alternative was theft by stealth. In Ugogo a game called mgugumbaro involved competition by young men who would enter the protective thorn fence of a caravan camp to steal cloth. The contest was won by whoever succeeded. The third strategy was a direct assault on a weak point of a caravan by bandit gangs.

Numerous travellers recorded ambushes by robbers who cut off stragglers. While marching through the forest between Kigwa and Unyanyembe an old porter of Burton and Speke's caravan, lagging in the rear, was beaten by three robbers who stole his load. One of the attackers was captured by chief Kitambi of Uyui and executed. A straggling porter of a missionary caravan was attacked and robbed at Muhalala, just before entering the Mgunda Mkali. The local chief returned some of the lost goods to the missionaries. Another case shows in more detail how many Nyamwezi chiefs tried to protect traders and caravan porters

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of Uganda or, Life by the Shores of the Victoria Nyanza (London, 1970, 1st ed., 1889), 274-283. In these cases political motivations seem to have been more important than mere robbery.


from bandits. The chief was mtemi of Uyui and a successor of Kitambi. A CMS missionary wrote:

I don’t think any one can accuse Magembe Gana of having a ravaging spirit. There are individuals who are thus disposed but they dare not carry out their pranks in his country or anywhere else. Only a few days ago some of his people knowing that some natives of Magingali had taken some ivory to Tabora to sell, got to know when they would be returning and way-laid them in the Pori [the forest] and succeeded in getting over one hundred cloths. For this they suffered the extreme penalty of the Unyamwezi [sic] law, and I saw them being led by my place to execution. They are generally speared.5

As these examples show, local authorities struggled to maintain order,6 and several other cases are noted of robbers who attacked porters being captured and executed or otherwise punished by chiefs, who also endeavoured to return stolen goods and warn travellers of thieves.7 But justice was often too late or not available. A porter from an Arab caravan was killed by a “Ruga-Ruga” a few days east of Tabora while walking with some companions to a village to buy food with some hoes. In 1890 near Kisokwe a CMS porter was speared in the back and his load of cloth taken. During the same journey three more porters were attacked and robbed in the Mgunda Mkali. Two of these were killed by their assailants.8

Direct assaults by robbers on the main body of a caravan were almost as common, especially in times of endemic warfare. Large bands capable of frontal assaults operated throughout the central and western regions. A missionary describes an encounter with bandits in Ugogo in 1891:

5 Copplestone to Hutchinson, Uyui, 22 Mar., 1881, CMS G3A6/01.

6 See Burton, Lake Regions, 512, on the diplomatic, military, and other powers of chiefs with reference to travellers.


A number of these gentry suddenly rushed out upon the caravan from the thicket, on both sides of the path, uttering shrill war cries, and brandishing their spears in the faces of the frightened porters, some of whom were women. The boxes and bales went down ... dropped in sudden panic by the terrified porters, who scattered right and left. The robbers whipped up four loads ... and vanished with them ... as quickly as they had come.

Strangely, given other recent attacks, the porters had not been issued with ammunition, hence were relatively defenceless. But one porter sat on his load determined to save it, and warded off his assailants with his empty gun. In 1878 a caravan of the Catholic White Fathers was attacked in the Magunda Mkali with the loss of two porters killed and twenty loads lost.

Selemani bin Mwenye Chande experienced numerous struggles during his travels, including a battle with robbers in the Mgunda Mkali in which three of his men were killed. Periods of instability, for instance in western Buha and Uvinza during late 1881 and 1882, gave marauders carte blanche. The war between Tippu Tip and the Vinza made the paths between Urambo and Ujiji unsafe. As a result of the disturbances other peoples in the region including the Tongwe, Karanga, and Ha were up in arms, attacking all who travelled along the main routes. For a time in 1882 it was unsafe to go far outside Ujiji unless with a well armed escort because of the danger of being robbed or enslaved. Among other incidents twenty of Mirambo’s men were attacked on their way to Ujiji by Ha marauders and ten loads were stolen. Some of the robbers were killed. Mission mailmen were at considerable risk, and several were killed or injured during this period. One robber band, mostly Sagara, operated from Ikombo near Mpwapwa during the early 1880s. Although not especially powerful they made numerous attacks on Arab caravans. But resolute action by porters

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9 Robert Pickering Ashe, Chronicles of Uganda (London, 1971, 1st ed. 1894), 26-7. For earlier incidents in Ugogo involving “Wahumba,” “Wataturu” and Maasai see Southon to Whitehouse, Urambo, 4 May, 1880, LMS 3/1/D. An attack by Hehe on a Nyamwezi party in the Marenga Mkali is recorded in Ashe, Chronicles of Uganda, 22. For other cases see Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years in East Africa, 48-50; Stokes to Lang, Uyui, 6 Oct., 1884, CMS G3A6/02.

10 Hore to Mullens, Kawele, 25 Feb., 1879, LMS 2/1/A; Selemani bin Mwenye Chande in Lyndon Harrics, ed. and tran., Swahili Prose Texts (London and Nairobi), 235.

11 Griffith to Thompson, Uguha, 15 Jan., 1882, LMS 4/4/A; Southon to Thompson, Urambo, 30 Jan., 1882, LMS 4/4/A; Griffith to Thompson, Uguha, 13 Mar., 1882, LMS 4/4/A; Southon to Thompson, Urambo, 17 April, 1882, LMS 4/4/B; Southon to Thompson, Urambo, 12 June, 1882, LMS 4/4/B; Griffith to Thompson, Ujiji, 16 Oct., 1882, LMS 4/5/B.

12 Price to Lang, Mpwapwa, 5 Aug., 1884, CMS G3A6/01.
might frighten off assailants. When thieves tried to rob a Nyamwezi caravan at night east of Mpwapwa the porters fired off their guns and forced a retreat.13

In Unyamwezi robber gangs were often referred to by European travellers as rugaruga.14 This is a misnomer. More correctly rugaruga were the standing armies of Nyamwezi chiefs, consisting of young, unmarried warriors.15 A few legitimate chiefs resorted to highway robbery, nevertheless, robber bands were usually under the control of big men out to increase their power by accumulating firearms, cloth, and other goods, which enabled them to attract followers.16 They thrived during periods of instability, and were sometimes strong enough to make direct assaults on caravans, often with great loss of life.

Even less predictable were encounters with wild animals, a staple of European travel accounts, yet no less real for all that.17 The possibility of experiencing the excitement and fear of meeting a rhinoceros, lion or other beast on the road was part of the safari experience for porters and employers alike. Just a few days from Bagamoyo lions killed two porters in one night during Selemani bin Mwenye Chande’s journey to Manyema, despite the building of a stockade.18 The threat was often present even if not realized, as Southon reported:

One night a lion entered our camp near the Gombe River and after leisurely walking round my tent & pausing within six feet of where I was sleeping, he went off and at a distance ... gave vent to his

13 Baxter to Hutchinson, Kadali, 7 Sept., 1880, CMS CA6/05.


16 Burton, Lake Regions, 224.

17 One only needs to read British district reports from the 1920s under the heading “Game” to realize that lions, buffalo, elephants, and crocodiles were responsible for sometimes hundreds of deaths in a single district in one year. But that was after Africans had been effectively disarmed.

18 Selemani bin Mwenye Chande in Harries, Swahili Prose Texts, 235. On the borders of Kenya’s Athi plains a pride of 27 lions attacked a caravan in 1894. See Decle, Three Years, 482-3, and 477-8, 496; May French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan (London, 1892), 182-3, for separate incidents.
dissatisfaction [sic] in a few load roars. This roused the men who put more wood on the fires and soon made everything light as day. Shortly after when the fires had burnt low, the lion came again and stood for a short time between my tent and the sleeping forms of the men who were a short distance away. I could distinctly hear his loud breathing but could not see the outline of his form nor could I fire at him for fear of injuring the men beyond. I, however, fired into the air which had the effect of causing him to give vent to a loud roar and to bound rapidly away.

The missionary asked his men why none of them sleeping in the open had been carried off.

The answer was that all the porters slept in a row under a tarpaulin, and none was isolated from his companions.\(^\text{19}\)

Hyenas and leopards were almost as dangerous as lions, especially at night, and were known to kill or maim. A porter was killed by a hyena at Dodoma in Ugogo. Another had his nose bitten off while he slept. A hyena, attracted by drying goat meat, penetrated into a camp site in the Pare mountains and bit a porter on the heel. A woman was carried off by a leopard from a camp site in the Kagera river valley.\(^\text{20}\) Rhinoceroses were rare along the central routes, but in the late nineteenth century were still common in the northern parts of Tanzania. The Swahili saying “Ukiona pera, ukiona mti — kwea” (If you meet a rhino, and you see a tree — climb it) governed the correct response to an encounter with a rhinoceros.\(^\text{21}\)

Crocodiles were an ever present threat in the rivers, including several crossed along the central routes. Stanley’s donkey was dragged under by Malagarazi river crocodiles.\(^\text{22}\)

Snakes were more rarely seen, but the deadly mamba certainly killed, and according to


unnamed Arabs was "known to oppose the passage of a caravan ... Twisting its tail round a branch, it will strike one man after another in the head with fatal certainty."23

Perhaps more devastating in their effects on caravan members were insect swarms of various kinds, including tsetse flies, mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, bees, scorpions, termites and ants. The most commented upon were biting ants of various species, including those known as siafu and maji moto or "hot water." Ant invasions caused considerable consternation among porters. When swarming over camp sites they could only be deterred by fire or boiling water, and frequently drove travellers to abandon their chosen resting places.24 Scorpions were a pest around camp sites in Ugogo. A European traveller described them as "great black fellows, six inches in length. At night they swarm out of the ground, and flock to the camp-fires, or take refuge from the rain in one's tents and baggage."25

Camp sites were dangerous places in another respect. Fires, once out of control, could quickly sweep through the concentrations of stick and grass huts erected by porters. The huts were especially susceptible to accidents of this kind, a missionary wrote after a fire destroyed his caravan's camp, "... as the men sleep ... with only a small hole to creep out of, making a roaring fire just near to it ..."26 The danger came not just from the flames, but from the stores of gunpowder and ammunition usually placed at the centre of the camp. When a fire broke out at a camp site at Misogwere during Thomson's first expedition, twelve kegs of gunpowder were inside the ring of burning huts, and explosions of porters' loaded muskets and powder-horns threatened everyone trying to save the caravan's goods. In this case the

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23 Waller in David Livingstone, The Last Journals of David Livingstone, ed. H. Waller (New York, 1875), 539. A mamba bit and killed a young girl in Susi and Chuma's party bearing Livingstone's body to the coast.


25 Elton, Travels and Researches, 394. For termites, tsetse flies, and bees see Burton, Lake Regions, 140, 149-50, 178-9; Murphy to Kirk, Tonda, 25 April, 1873, VLC 3/4, RGS; Decle, Three Years, 358-60.

26 Clark to Wright, Mpwapwa, 27 Sept., 1876, CMS CA6/07.
gunpowder was quickly removed from the danger and the bales of cloth and other goods were saved. The porters were lucky, no deaths or serious injuries resulting, although many lost all their personal effects. During the dry season bush fires could cut routes, forcing caravans to take detours. Decle recorded an incident in July 1893 near the Muserere river east of Ujiji in which an Arab caravan 500 strong lost three men “burnt to death” in a bush fire.

Mpwapwa: Caravan Stop and Market Town

The dangers of the road were offset to a large degree by the pleasures of the major caravan termini and trading towns along the roads. Here porters had a chance to relax, refresh themselves, collect provisions, and meet old friends. Men could enjoy the pleasures of female companionship if this was not available in their caravan. Merchants could engage in trade or, if en route, reorganize their goods and hire fresh porters. The best known of these towns are Bagamoyo, Tabora, and Ujiji. But there were numerous others along the central routes. In the east in Ukutu there was Zungomero before its decline from the 1860s, although it was still on a route described to Livingstone by a coastal trader in 1870, and Beardall mentioned it in early 1881 as a place to buy food. In the far west in Burton’s time there

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27 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 299-302. For other similar incidents see Roger Price, Private Journal of the Rev. Roger Price (London, 1878), 50-1, 2 Aug., 1877; Elton, Travels and Researches, 362-3. Fires were almost as much a danger in villages, the larger of which were often trading bases. See Livingstone, Last Journals, 181, 24 July, 1867, 191, 23 Sept., 1867; Burton, Lake Regions, 447.

28 Decle, Three Years, 319.


30 Burton, “The Lake Regions of Central Equatorial Africa”; JRGS, 29 (1859), 78-81; idem, Lake Regions, 450; Speke, Journal, 61, 23 Oct., 1860; Livingstone, Last Journals, 335, 10 Oct., 1870; William Beardall, “Exploration of the Rufiji River Under the Orders of the Sultan of Zanzibar”, PRIS, N.S. 3, 11 (1881), 656, 11 Feb., 1881. In 1878 Johnston believed Zungomero to be “ruinous and abandoned” but he mentions nearby “Kisake.” By 1884 Kisaki was the base of Mbunga raiders from Mahenge who threatened the Bagamoyo routes to the north. See Keith Johnston, “Native Routes in East Africa from Dar es Salaam towards Lake Nyassa”. PRGS, N.S., 1. 7 (1879), 419; L. E. Larson, “A History of the Mbunga Confederacy ca. 1860-1907”, TNR, 81 & 82 (1977), 38. Given Beardall’s statement there was probably some confusion about the two settlements.
was Msene in southern Usumbwa;\textsuperscript{31} in the late 1880s and 1890s Usongo when Stokes was based there\textsuperscript{32} and, during the 1870s and 1880s, Mirambo’s capitals at Ikonongo and Iselemagazi,\textsuperscript{33} among other places.

One of the most important caravan stops was Mpwapwa, “the great junction for the trade routes” where, by the 1870s, almost all the roads from Whinde, Saadani, Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam merged.\textsuperscript{34} Mpwapwa is situated in a region of cultural intermixing and overlapping, where people of Gogo, Sagara, Kaguru, Maasai and Hehe origins intermarried and lived alongside one another.\textsuperscript{35} There is no mention of the district in the writings of Burton and Speke. Further south Ugogi, “rich” in cattle and grain, partly fulfilled Mpwapwa’s role at that time.\textsuperscript{36} But with the northward shift of the main caravan routes Mpwapwa must have risen in significance. Its importance can be judged from several estimates of the number of caravan personnel passing through each year during the late 1880s and early 1890s, ranging from one hundred thousand to one hundred and sixty thousand, counting return journeys.\textsuperscript{37} Annie Hore, who passed through in 1884, describes its role:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Burton, “Lake Regions”, 190; \textit{idem, Lake Regions}, 269-72.
  \item Burton, “Lake Regions”, 123; \textit{idem, Lake Regions}, 174-5.
\end{itemize}
Mpwapwa has always been a place of importance, although nothing much in itself. It is a...point
where many roads meet, and a terminus of a stage on the road for all travellers, whether from
the interior or the coast. To the first it is a welcome resting-place after the vexations of the tribute-
demanding people of Ugogo, and the heat and hunger of the desert between that country and
Mpwapwa; to the others it is a place to halt, consider, recruit, and prepare, before entering upon the
desert and the anxieties of Ugogo. 38

Like most “towns” in the Tanzanian interior Mpwapwa was really a concentration of many
villages, each one consisting of a large tembe. These villages were “widely scattered,” and in
1880 the number was about 40. In the late 1880s Pruen, a resident missionary for several
years, estimated its population at about 2,000. At this time Mpwapwa consisted of “a
collection of about a hundred tembés, scattered over an area about two miles by one, each
tembé sheltering three or four families, usually people related to one another.”39 Given that
the number of inhabitants of each tembe in Mpwapwa averaged about 40, Pruen’s figure is
probably too low. 40 For caravans, Mpwapwa was far more important than its modest size
suggests, being the last place to buy provisions before the Marenga Mkali. Just as
significant, the Mpamvwa river cutting across the plain was as near to a perennial stream as
exists in central Tanzania, and thus a reliable source of water for parched porters. Along its
banks were fine tamarind, sycamore, cottonwood and baobab trees which provided welcome
shade.41 In May 1871 Stanley and Arab traders such as Sheikh Thani and Abdullah bin
Nasib found food cheap and plentiful, including eggs, milk, honey, mutton, beef, ghee,
matama, mawele (bullrush millet), sweet potatoes, nuts and beans. When Cameron’s caravan
entered Mpwapwa in June 1873 at the end of a scorching terekeza from Ugombo it was like
arriving at a desert oasis: “The sight of fresh green trees and fields of maize, matama and

38 Hore, To Lake Tanganyika, 87.
39 Stanley, Through the Dark Continent, I, 77; Clark in CMI (Sept., 1879), 530-1; O’Flaherty to Hutchinson,
Livingstone, 135, for an earlier description of Mpwapwa and its surroundings.
40 See the discussion on tembe size in Mpwapwa in Sissons, “Economic Prosperity in Ugogo”, 207.
41 Last to CMS, Mpwapwa, 24 Dec., 1878, CMS CA6/014; Stanley, Through the Dark Continent, I, 77; Hore,
To Lake Tanganyika, 85, 88; Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 204, 4 Aug., 1891. Last and Stanley both suggest
the stream was perennial. Price and O’Neill differ, but state that water could always be obtained by digging in
sweet potatoes, and streams of beautiful crystal water running in threads through a broad sandy course ... gladdened our eyes.”

Given Mpwapwa’s location on the marches of the territories of several peoples, its nearness to the different ecological zones of plain and mountain, and its status as a junction town on East Africa’s most important caravan routes, it is not surprising that the population was very mixed. In 1878 CMS missionary Last recognized Mpwapwa as “an intermediate place between at least 5 places, or districts, and to belong to none of them. The people pride themselves on the name Wagogo, but very few indeed are really Wagogo. There is here a mixture of all the tribes round about & also a number from very distant places.” The great number of caravans passing through Mpwapwa contributed to the heterogeneous nature of the population, a characteristic which lasted well into the twentieth century. The “all-pervading Wanyamwezi” were present “in considerable numbers” in 1876. Almost eighty years later the community was described as

of diverse stock, which includes clans from other areas of Ugogo as well as people who are, by origin, Kuguru, Tumba, Sagara and ‘wetiliko’ (half-bred Hehe-Gogo), to say nothing of little pockets of aliens such as the descendants of Nyamwezi porters and of the ‘wanyekulu’, runaways from the Arab caravans who sought protection at the courts of the Gogo chiefs.

Numerous traders were based there. During the 1870s ivory traders from the coast were resident, and the Swiss Phillipe Broyon lived there for some time, undercutting the Swahili and Arabs through his access to cheap cloth. Recognizing the importance of the location, in 1876 the CMS established temporary quarters near chief Lukole’s residence, and then a permanent station at Kisimando, on the slopes east of Mpwapwa. In 1887 the Gesellschaft

42 Stanley, How I Found Livingstone, 130-2; Cameron, Across Africa, I, 85. In December 1874 conditions were very different: “... provisions were extremely scarce, and at famine prices. Even the natives journeyed far to purchase food for goats and cattle.” Stanley & Neame, Exploration Diaries, 31, 13 Dec., 1874.


47 O’Neill in CMI (Sept., 1879), 531; T. Griffith-Jones, “Some Notes on Stanley’s First and Second Expeditions through Mpwapwa”, Dodoma Provincial Book, I, TNA. Griffith-Jones also provides information
Für Deutsche Kolonisation set up a station in the town which, after being sacked during Bushiri’s rebellion, was converted to a military post for imperial troops. By August, 1891, the district was in a state of temporary decline due to rinderpest — which had virtually wiped out the herd of six thousand cattle — the consequent poverty of its people, and the effects of continual German raiding in the area.48

Despite the historic events taking place in and around Mpwapwa its function for porters remained much the same until the construction of the central railway. An account of the arrival and stay of a two mile long column of porters in the late 1880s would equally apply to much earlier times:

... the large caravan ... had arrived; and ... it had taken up its quarters down by the river bed, amongst the shade of the stately fig-sycamores. The leaders ... were contemplating a prolonged stay of two days, for the purpose of drying their bales of calico, which had been soaked by the unexpectedly heavy rains of the previous few days. Two or three miles of this material lay on the bushes around, drying in the tropical sun, giving the camp the appearance of an enormous laundry establishment.

During the afternoon the porters ... came up into the village to barter their goods for fowls and grain. For this purpose they brought with them cloth, wire, tobacco, and little supplies of gunpowder. perhaps half an ounce, wrapped up in dirty pieces of rag. With these they purchased the fowls and grain they required, pounded the latter in the mortar, lent by the seller, some of the more energetic also grinding it on his stones ...49

The next day a cow was slaughtered to sell in small pieces to some of the porters, for which the owner received calico, coloured cloths, gunpowder, percussion caps, tobacco, beads, wire, cheap knives, and hoes.50

Relationships between porters and the local people were not always so mutually beneficial and, as elsewhere along the main routes, disputes were common. The great volume of traffic placed pressure on limited resources, both foodstuffs in lean years, and the good will of Mpwapwa’s inhabitants. When numerous caravans descended on the district, draining food supplies and leading to high prices, tempers were often short. Fights between

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48 Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 43-4; Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 204, 4 Aug., 1891; Beidelman, “History of Ukaguru”, 19, 24, 27. Beidelman covers the history of the German period in some detail.


porters and residents commonly broke out over food supplies, thefts, women, and abuse of local people. A missionary resident reported an incident in which some Nyamwezi porters "... stole wood from [a] tembe and began pulling down [the] chief's house." The inevitable consequence was that the local people sounded the war cry and gathered in large numbers, but did not commence hostilities because of encroaching darkness, and perhaps because of the presence of missionaries.\(^{51}\) In October, 1876, there was an unusual incident. The CMS caravan of Clark and O’Neill had been joined by that of Wilson and Robertson. The porters had in the meantime been employed building a mission house. On the 5th of October, according to Clark’s journal,

... all the men some 240 marched out of camp without their loads intending to desert — the people of Mpwapwa thinking of this, went after them and a great fight took place on the great plain below us lasting some hours ... In the end the Mpwa got them so that they could not proceed, and the fight ended.

The casualties were not high. The next day the pagazi left without their loads again, but were persuaded to return.\(^{52}\) One could speculate on the causes of this fracas — was it really that the people of Mpwapwa were concerned for CMS interests, or was there some feud between the two sides? There was conflict on another occasion when Arab caravans robbed by the bandits of Ikombo, close to Mpwapwa, retaliated by attacking their molesters.\(^{53}\)

Environmental degradation was a cause for complaint. By the 1880s the great fig-sycamores along the river where porters camped were gradually being destroyed by the fires built at their base, and this alarmed residents, fostering resentment.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{51}\) Baxter to Wright, Mpwapwa, 9 Aug., 1878, CMS CA6/05. See Shergold Smith to Kirk, Pembireh Nyambwa, 7 Nov., 1876, CMS CA6/012, for a dispute which led to the death of one mission porter and the wounding of another. The cause is not quite clear, but Shergold Smith had directed some porters to cut grass for thatching, apparently without permission from local authorities. The porters reacted by preparing to desert, when the “Gogo” attacked them. For another dispute over the theft of some goats from an Arab caravan see Price, Report of the Rev. R. Price, 38. Many other such incidents could be cited for other places along the routes.

\(^{52}\) Clark to Wright, Mpwapwa, 27 Sep., 1876, CMS CA6/07. The letter is a copy of Clark’s journal, hence the dates progress.

\(^{53}\) Price to Lang, Mpwapwa, 5 Aug., 1884, CMS G3A6/01.

\(^{54}\) Puen, The Arab and the African, 135.
As the Browns point out, there was a degree of inevitability to social unrest in caravan towns such as Bagamoyo, Tabora and Ujiji: “The food of immigrant settlers and transient porters ... created explosive pressures that could not be contained by political deals between a new and old elite.”55 This was partly true for Mpwapwa as well. If the pressures of congestion were not such a factor as in the major entrepôts, there was still the continual rub of Nyamwezi and coastal porters against local tolerance complicated by a heavy intake of pombe and bangi (cannabis or marijuana), and general competition for resources. Over time this dialectic contributed to and was mediated by aspects of caravan culture including utani or joking relationships and the spread of the Swahili language. From the porters’ point of view, leisure in the towns and camp stops became inseparable from work life. Each was part of the whole of the safari experience.

Caravan Culture: Camp and Social Life

Nothing was more central to the working lives of caravan porters and to the shaping and expression of caravan culture than the collective familiarity of the camp stops or makambi (sing.: kambi).56 If no accommodation was available in villages along the way, and it was often not for security reasons,57 each march would end at a recognized camping site, or a new kambi would quickly be erected by the porters out of materials at hand. At the same time food was bought from local peasants and meals were prepared. When food was plentiful, feasting could last for hours. The late afternoon and evening were available for rest and recreation, a temporary respite before the labours of the next morning. A vigorous social life revolved around music, song and dance. Smaller groups engaged in games sometimes involving gambling; some consumed intoxicating beverages or bangi. Sexual activity was


56 The same word was used universally the whole length of the central routes between the coast and Ujiji: Burton, “Lake Regions”, 64, f.n.

another way to relax, and it is most likely that both heterosexual and homosexual relationships were engaged in, although the sources are almost silent on this aspect of caravan life.58 During the hours of darkness porters huddled around camp fires and swapped stories. Although camp life was organized around small groups of five or six porters — also called makambi59 — who supported each other by dividing their labour when carrying out camp chores, and who shared a camp fire, it was a collective experience, and bonded people from different ethnicities and regions, aiding the creation of a horizontal consciousness. This collective consciousness could then be mobilized when disputes arose with caravan leaders.

The essential factors governing the site of a kambi were, first, that it was as near as possible to a normal day’s march beyond the previous camping site; second, if near some obstacle such as a river or mountain pass or occupied clearing it was on the far side according to the direction of march, third, that it had water. Thus, most makambi were on or near river banks, lake shores, or wells, and, if at an obstacle such as a river, were situated so that porters did not have to begin the next day’s march with the hard labour of a river crossing, which may become more difficult if rain fell over night. In such places camp sites were in pairs, on either side of the obstruction.60

As soon as Bagamoyo’s sphere of influence was behind, when leaving the coast, caravans utilized large makambi, constructed by porters. “In this region,” Burton wrote,

they assumed the form of round huts and long sheds or boathies of straw or grass, supported by a framework of rough sticks firmly planted in the ground and lashed together with bark strips. The whole was surrounded with a deep circle of thorns which — the entrance or entrances being carefully closed at nightfall, not to reopen until dawn — formed a complete defense against bare feet and naked legs.61

Long huts were erected by Swahili porters, round peaked ones by Nyamwezi pagazi. Several European travellers noted the “good taste” or “good thatch-work” shown in hut construction,

58 But see Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 217, on visits by women to his porters’ camp at night. Abdulrazak Gurnah’s novel Paradise is quite explicit about sexual activity on caravan journeys.


60 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 111; idem, Lake Regions, 137, 243-4, 245; Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 32-3.

61 Burton, Lake Regions, 55-6.
even though they were built in very short time, and materials sometimes had to be collected from a distance.\textsuperscript{62} Such huts gave reasonable protection from the rain, and often lasted for months, so that the porters of many caravans in succession could benefit from them.\textsuperscript{63} Where good building material was absent, as in the Mgunda Mkali, rough lean-tos were made of dry stalks and grass, and surrounded with a thorn fence. In heavily treed regions during the rainy season, for instance in Uvinza, the best huts were made of bark sheets. Where there was no cleared space for hut building porters might cut out the heart of a bush, making a kind of nest for protection from the elements.\textsuperscript{64} By the 1890s many porters slept in small tents, and there were other indications of a slight improvement in material well-being for some. “These people travel very peacefully and comfortably. All the elders have their tents, their wives, and their cooks,” Stairs wrote of the 500 Nyamwezi porters travelling with his caravan for protection.\textsuperscript{65} Swahili and \textit{Waungwana} made tents utilizing their cloth head pads. But the traditional boothy remained popular. Towards the end of the German period tents were to be provided by law, but compliance was patchy.\textsuperscript{66} Always, camp sites were spatially ordered. In the middle were the tents of the caravan leaders: merchants or European travellers. Beside them were stacked the loads in huge piles. The porters erected their huts, or arranged existing ones, around the tents and goods. Beyond the huts, when required to keep out thieves or wild animals, a thorn or brush \textit{boma} fence ringed all.\textsuperscript{67} Arab traders travelling in


\textsuperscript{63} Hassing & Bennett, “A Journey Across Tanganyika”, 134; Moloney, \textit{With Captain Stairs}, 54.

\textsuperscript{64} Burton, \textit{“Lake Regions”}, 139-40, 209; \textit{idem, Lake Regions}, 244, 245; Thomson, \textit{To the Central African Lakes}, I, 287.

\textsuperscript{65} Konczacki, \textit{Victorian Explorer}, 202, 1 Aug., 1891.


large caravans with their women set up camp slightly differently. Each trader and his wives had a tent surrounded by a shallow drain, and shielded by cloth screens or grass enclosures, like a private compound, ensuring a degree of protection from prying eyes.68

Although porters were experts at efficient camp construction, sanitary facilities were non-existent and, at regularly used makambi, where up to two thousand or more people might be crowded together at one time,69 conditions quickly deteriorated. The heavily used camp site at Mvumi was, wrote Hore, “not unlike a dirty bare common in England,” and was “horrible with the filth and refuse and ashes of many caravans.” Stairs described the Mpwapwa camp site as “dirty and nauseating.”70 Accumulated excrement and rubbish in old camps contributed to outbreaks of disease such as smallpox, dysentery, cholera, and tick borne fever. The threat of disease as well as the general filth and smell led some European caravan leaders to avoid them, or to minimize their stay to twenty four hours or less.71 When conditions became intolerable after a few months of use, the remedy was to destroy the camps by fire. Travellers noted the charred remains of huts and boma fences at camp sites along the roads, although often this was the unintentional consequence of fires left burning after a caravan’s departure, or perhaps accidents.72

Porters organized themselves so that an efficient division of labour minimized the time and effort required for camp chores. Thomson’s Waungwana quickly established order at camp sites where no huts were available:

In half an hour an entire village was run up with surprising dexterity. The men had already separated themselves into messes, for mutual convenience and comfort, and by the division and organization of

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68 Burton, Lake Regions, 184; Cameron, Across Africa, I, 47, 108; Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 54.

69 Hassing and Bennett, “A Journey Across Tanganyika”, 141.


71 Pruen, The Arab and the African, 181 (referring to Stokes); French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan, 148; Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years, 14. Stairs also noted how porters sometimes inadvertently polluted water supplies from cisterns. See Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 208, 10 Aug., 1891.

their labours the most remarkable results were achieved. On arriving in camp each man in a particular mess or ‘kambi’ knew exactly what to do. One as cook got out his pot, made a fire, and commenced boiling water for the rice or other cereal; a second went foraging for the food; others, again ... commenced building a hut or shed. Of these, one man would prepare the ground; a second bring poles; a third grass for thatching; while numbers four and five would do the building. The grass for beds would then be laid in. By the time this was finished the mess meal was ready, and they could sit down under cover and enjoy it in defiance of wind and rain. The rapidity with which a whole camp was run up was really marvellous.\textsuperscript{73}

A further advantage of such cooperation was that each \textit{kambi} (in its second sense: mess, or “kitchen association,” in Keletso Atkins’ phrase) had access to a greater variety of foodstuffs shared among its members than if each individual porter, perhaps with his wife, was responsible for his own purchasing and cooking arrangements.\textsuperscript{74} Another account of the cooperative division of labour, from the northern route, highlights advantages for cooking:

\begin{quote}
After a suitable place has been found for the night ... the porters put their \\msigo [loads] down in the middle of it and go out, some to find firewood, others to get water in pots and pails and some to prepare for cooking, i.e. three stones are put together for a hearth on to which is put a thick-walled earthen cooking pot. After the others group themselves around a fire the five to six man strong cooking club receives their rations communally. While the food is cooking, a banana is eaten, a piece of sugar-cane is chewed ... or a cob of corn is roasted in the fire.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

When women were present they carried out much of this labour. They pounded or ground grain, cooked meals, cut wood, and attended to numerous other camp chores such as washing clothes, while their tired men recovered from the march.\textsuperscript{76}

The common small group experience of work and play, eating and sleeping, and sometimes strikes and desertions, made for very close bonds among porters in a \textit{kambi}. It is likely that in each group porters were tied by family relationships, origin in the same village or prior experience travelling together. Speke came to this conclusion when he tried to integrate Sultan Majid’s slave gardeners (supplied as porters) with his professional

\textsuperscript{73} Thomson, \textit{To the Central African Lakes}, I, 95. For similar accounts see Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 244; Cameron, \textit{Across Africa}, I, 38; Pruen, \textit{The Arab and the African}, 173-4; Decle, \textit{Three Years}, 321; Lloyd, \textit{In Dwarf Land}, 44; Konczacki, \textit{Victorian Explorer}, 207.

\textsuperscript{74} Watt, \textit{In the Heart of Savagedom}, 39.


Waungwana by rearranging the various kambi of his caravan. The effort was a failure. The Waungwana insisted on keeping the makambi intact. Just as important as pre-existing relationships was the camaraderie of the safari experience and the kambi, a point noted by Atkins for the very different context of the “kitchen associations” of Zulu migrant workers in Natal. Real obligations to work-mates and deep friendships resulted from shared cooking, eating, and socializing in the fire side circle of the kambi and, as in the urban centres of Natal, any efforts by employers to disrupt these voluntary associations would be resisted.

The work culture of the central routes was reinforced across the numerous ethnic groups involved in porterage by observance of and participation in artistic performance. Music and dance were central to camp life and, along with story telling, expressed and transmitted the experiences and interests of porters. The history of music and dance in Tanzania, Iliffe writes, “illustrates ... the mingling of peoples.” For porters the kambi was the focus of social life and cultural life. “When camp is reached, not the public shelter, not the chief’s compound, not the white man’s tent, but the campfire becomes the point toward which all converge ...” In the evening small groups of porters sat around their fires, conversing, singing and telling tales. A few had simple stringed instruments with which they accompanied themselves in song. Moloney even heard some of his porters singing tunes such as “The Bay of Biscay”, “Home, Sweet Home”, and “God Save the Queen,” which they

77 Speke, Journal, 52.

78 Atkins writes of Zulu migrant “kitchen associations”: “...these interpersonal relations united the different parties in the duties of friendship, brotherhood, and matters of social import. Masters [employers] who held this custom in little account, or who attempted to deprive African workers of the deep emotional satisfaction as well as the social support it provided, encountered spirited resistance.” Keletso E. Atkins, The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money!: The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic (Portsmouth NH & London, 1993), 122.


80 John Iliffe, A Modern History of Tanganyika (Cambridge, 1979), 35.

81 Fortie, Black and Beautiful, 30.
had picked up while serving on British ships in the Indian Ocean. Examples such as this show how porous cultural boundaries were. Games were popular. Many Nyamwezi were avid gamblers, either playing *bao* or “heads and tails.” Zanzibaris on Stanley’s Emin Pasha expedition played a game “very like draughts,” no doubt *bao*. In another caravan some porters even played cards. When the camp was situated in the wilderness, with just a roughly built thorn or log enclosure to keep wild animals out, few moved away from the fire. “The more timid become like Scheherazade’s sister in *The Arabian Nights*. They keep asking for stories and more stories to take their minds from the howling and whining shapes that flit through the darkness outside,” Fortie wrote. Johnson described his porters as “interminable story-tellers.” The performance involved audience participation, with the listeners helping out the less gifted. The subjects might include earlier safaris, perilous adventures with wild animals or hostile villagers, the fate of old comrades, or accounts of the character and mannerisms of employers. One missionary found that a good way to please his men was to read them a Swahili tale.

Always, porters found extra energy, “the astonishing resiliency of Africans,” and held vigorous dances, sometimes in larger groups. On the bigger occasions young men and women from nearby villages might attend. The *Waungwana* of one RGS expedition were dedicated dancers, and “danced themselves to sleep” most nights.

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85 The phrase is Iliffe’s, in *A Modern History*, 250.

long and exhausting marches, revived themselves and danced into the night, keeping the rhythm by drum beat, clapping and stamping.\textsuperscript{87} Along with song, the catharsis of dance was central to the celebration of important occasions, such as arrival at a long sought destination, or the farewell of a caravan on a long wilderness journey.\textsuperscript{88} Minstrels and itinerant dancers sometimes visited caravan campsites, providing high calibre entertainment for delighted porters.\textsuperscript{89}

The other major social activity was the consumption of psychoactive substances, or “drugs” in modern western usage.\textsuperscript{90} These included tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and, more rarely, datura.\textsuperscript{91} The use of the first three was widespread in many Tanzanian societies during the nineteenth century. Tobacco was traded along the central routes, the major region of production being Ukutu.\textsuperscript{92} In the interior alcohol usually came in the form of pombe, which was locally produced.\textsuperscript{93}

Here I will discuss cannabis only.\textsuperscript{94} In East Africa Arabs and Africans smoked it in large water pipes, the former with tobacco, and the latter without.\textsuperscript{95} Among other peoples,


\textsuperscript{89} Moloney, \textit{With Captain Stairs,} 89-90.


\textsuperscript{91} For datura see Burton, \textit{Lake Regions,} 81; W. D. Raymond, “Native Materia Medica”, \textit{TNR,} 5 (April 1938), 74-5.


\textsuperscript{93} For \textit{pombe} see chapter 4. For porters and \textit{pombe} see Burton, \textit{Lake Regions,} 81; Thomson, \textit{To the Central African Lakes,} I, 256; Wolf, \textit{Central African Diaries,} 247; Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, \textit{Customs of the Swahili People,} 114.

\textsuperscript{94} Cannabis use was common in the Islamic world in medieval times. Archaeological evidence indicates its use in Ethiopia in the fourteenth century. Presumably it was known along the Swahili coast and in the interior well before the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century cannabis was part of the \textit{materia medica} of many East African societies. Burton wrote that “In the low lands ... it grows before every cottage door.” Like tobacco, it was traded over long distances. In the south, cannabis grown in Ngoni country was taken as far as Kilwa. See Andrew Sherratt, “Alcohol and its Alternatives: Symbol and Substance in Pre-Industrial Cultures”,
the Nyamwezi were regular users of bangi. In Nyamwezi society bangi use was a significant part of male bonding, and for the same reason porters regularly smoked together. The warriors of rugaruga regiments smoked bangi to enhance combativeness and ferocity in battle.96 Ordinary Nyamwezi men — there is no mention of women smoking anything except tobacco — smoked bangi in their village iwanza or men’s club.97 There is ample evidence that porters smoked cannabis while on safari, often expressed in terms of moral condemnation. Burton noted they might smoke bangi or tobacco when having breaks during the march, and between meals when in camp. Stanley wrote of his porters on the 1874-6 expedition, “They smoke banghy until they literally fall down half smothered.” Such escape was hardly surprising given the terrible conditions the explorer’s style of travel exposed them to. During the return of Stanley’s Emin Pasha Relief expedition, Nyamwezi porters ground cannabis (leaves?) to a powder and then took it as a snuff, or chewed it “half roasted,” as well as smoking the leaf in large pipes. Casati believed that the Nyamwezi learned the use of “the fatal hasheesh” from Zanzibar Arabs. This is almost certainly incorrect, and not only because hashish as opposed to marijuana was unknown in Tanzania. Stokes’ great caravan in 1890 included many “wretched bhang smoker[s]” among the porters. Stairs believed the “craze for smoking hemp” contributed to illness among his porters during the first weeks of travel before they became conditioned.98 Clearly cannabis use seen in this light diverted attention


96 Stanley & Neame, Exploration Diaries, 120, 17 May, 1876; Stanley, Through the Dark Continent, I, 397-8; Shorter, Nyungu-ya-Mawe, 13; Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 256-7; Unomah, Mirambo, 22; Kabeya, King Mirambo, 12, 13, 15.

97 Mackay, “Journal”, 11 Sept., 1883, CMS G3A6/01; Copplestone to Wigram, Uyui, 21 May, 1881, CMS G3A6/01. Speke (Journal, 99) believed the Nyamwezi to be “desperate smokers and greatly given to drink,” although it is not clear if he refers to tobacco or cannabis use. French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan, 119, and Cameron, Across Africa, I, 39, refer to porters relaxing by smoking, although they do not specify what.

98 Burton, Lake Regions, 243, 246; Stanley & Neame, Exploration Diaries, 146; Casati, Ten Years in Equatoria, II, 297-8; Tucker, Eighteen Years, 29; Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 193, 8 July, 1891. See also Livingstone,
from the real causes of illness. During the first days of Reichard’s journey up-country he was frequently surprised by the cries of ecstatic hemp smokers:

The smoker quickly draws three to four puffs one after the other through the gurgling water and, when he has expelled the ... smoke with raw ... coughs, he begins to utter his own special cry in the strangest falsetto tone: one a cry like a child, another sings a phrase such as ‘njamera matimanumda timonumda njemu,” which means roughly, ‘hemp smoking is beautiful.’ The third barks in falsetto like a jackal ‘woa’ woä’, another utters his war or travel name, always in falsetto.99

When a missionary commented to a Nyamwezi bangi smoker that he was “making a great noise over it,” the reply included a cultural defence: “God told them to smoke Bhang.” An old Sukuma song asserts the superiority of bangi over tobacco, and bangi users over casual smokers:

I put Indian hemp in my pipe,  
Because I like to smoke it.  
Tobacco is not to be compared with it.  
My friends, mix it with the crust  
Inside the cooking pot and we will smoke.  
The tobacco smokers will fall down.  
If you tell them before, ‘It is strong,’  
They do not listen.  
They smoke and sleep with open eyes.100

Food, Water, and Famine

One of the themes of this study concerns the most basic of human concerns: how to ensure some degree of food security, and how to obtain adequate provisions and water in the short term. This was a central question for both caravan leaders and porters. A careful selection of routes, and the use of the provisioning systems outlined in chapter six, were usually adequate in normal years to ensure basic provisions for caravan personnel over the course of a journey. Even when famine on a local level prevailed porters, being mobile, were usually able to march on to a district with a surplus. The same applied for water shortages.

99 Reichard, “Die Wanjamuesi”, 328. For other descriptions of smoking practices see Copplestone to Wigram, Uyui, 21 May, 1881, CMS G3A6/01; Burton, Lake Regions, 81; Casati, Ten Years in Equatoria, II, 297-8; Raymond, “Native Materia Medica”, 74.

In October, 1876 there was no food for sale in Mpwapwa “except at very great distances and at extraordinary prices.” The demand of porters, therefore, was to move on. In October, 1880, when Hods’ caravan ran into difficulties in the Mgunda Mkali because two water holes had unexpectedly dried up, they were able to survive by making a series of forced marches. During the infrequent years of major famine these strategies were not enough to meet the food needs of porters, who were therefore forced to resort to extreme measures, or starve. And starve they sometimes did. Porters on the road were among the most vulnerable when famine struck because as strangers they lacked deep access to local resources. Their local support networks such as utani were not strong enough to guarantee aid when people along the routes were themselves starving. This was the case during the 1884-5 famine in Usagara and Ugogo. An obvious option was not to travel at such times. When famine was widespread caravan traffic was considerably reduced. But travelling was often necessary if famine conditions prevailed over a large region. Travelling could not be avoided when a caravan might be two or more years away from home. This was the achilles heel of the long distance caravan system.

When porters had to find their own provisions, they had three options. They could buy food with their posho allowance from peasants who brought their produce to recognized markets or caravan stops. Second, they could visit neighbouring or more distant settlements in order to buy food, or forage in the countryside around their camp sites, taking whatever they could find from fields, drawing the risk of retaliation from aggrieved farmers. The third option was to hunt game, collect edible wild plants, and fish in the rivers and lakes along the routes. The section begins with a discussion of food and drinking water during normal times — what porters ate and drank along the road, and how they obtained it. I then consider the options available when harsh conditions prevailed. The section concludes with a brief look at the 1884-5 famine.

101 Mackay to Wright, Mpwapwa, 14 Oct., 1876, CMS CA6/016; Clark to Wright, Mpwapwa, 4 Nov., 1876, CMS CA6/07; Edward Coode Hore, Tanganjika: Eleven Years in Central Africa (London, 1892), 173.
A porter's diet was monotonous, although there were occasional treats. Despite preferences according to place of origin, religion, and customary taboos, survival and health depended on adaptability. Preferences and taboos were ignored when necessary. When marching porters ate only one or two meals per day, but on rest days they ate as frequently and as much as possible. Porters arriving at a well stocked village after a march through desert or famine stricken country were able to consume enormous quantities of grain, vegetables, meat, honey and other foodstuffs. As described above, the meal was prepared and eaten in a small group of five to ten porters. The normal daily ration under the kibaba system was one kibaba (one and a half pounds) of grain. The staple food for most was ugali, a stiff porridge of flour and water, with a little salt added. Meat, fish or vegetables supplemented it if available. When porters were too exhausted or hungry to pound or grind grain, they boiled it whole. This filled the stomach, but was difficult to digest, and perhaps limited in nutritional value. The Nyamwezi preferred ugali made with sorghum flour, although millet or maize were acceptable, and sometimes they ate rice. Swahili porters ate a basic diet of maize and beans, bean stew with meat once or twice a week, or rice. Waungwana ate mostly rice, with meat or dried fish when possible. Rice for a whole caravan was packed in sixty pound makanda (Swahili, sing.: kanda), long matting bags, and,

102 Burton, Lake Regions, 246; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 208-9; Watt, In the Heart, 157; Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 33; Stanley & Neame, Expedition Diaries, 55.

103 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 14; idem, Lake Regions, 495, 464; Pruen, The Arab and the African, 117.


in French-Sheldon’s caravan, enough for the first eight or nine days was carried. When
Zungomero was an important stop, it was the last place before Unyamwezi where rice could
be purchased.106 Thus the evidence agrees with Ehret’s conclusion based on the linguistic
context regarding the introduction of rice into the East African interior, that it must have been
“a very important element in caravan provisioning.” 107 Porters also consumed grain in the
form of pombe when this was available at camp stops and in the towns, according to the
common practice in the interior. 108

The other basic food was cassava. However, the root had a major disadvantage for
travellers. Several references to cassava poisoning in the nineteenth century show that some
porters were unfamiliar with preparation of the more toxic bitter varieties, or took chances
with their lives due to lack of time for the long soaking process necessary to make toxic bitter
cassava safe. The result was cyanide poisoning which caused attacks of the epidemic
paralytic disease known as konzo.109 If properly prepared cassava was safe. Decle’s porters
bought cassava flour en route between Ujiji and Tabora, which they ate without ill effects.110
But about 1870 the 4,000 strong combined caravan of Tippu Tip and his associates was
devastated by the effects of cassava poisoning from a bitter variety after passing through
mountainous and famine stricken Urungu at the south end of Lake Tanganyika. This variety
required soaking for six or seven days before fermentation and then drying, after which the

106 French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan, 118; Burton, Lake Regions, 81.


108 Burton, Lake Regions, 81; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, 1, 256; Wolf, Central African Diaries.
247; Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, Customs of the Swahili People, 114.

109 See the recent research on konzo and other diseases related to the consumption of cyanide from improperly
prepared cassava. Some examples are Hans Rosling, Cassava Toxicity and Food Security (Uppsala, 1987); W.
Tropical and Geographical Neurology, 2 (1992), 102-108; Mayambu Banea, Nigel H. Poulter, and Hans
Rosling, “Shortcuts in Cassava Processing and Risk of Dietary Cyanide Exposure in Zaire”, Food and Nutrition
Rosling, “Determinants of Cyanide Exposure from Cassava in a Konzo-affected Population in Northern
Tanzania”, International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition 44 (1993), 137-144.

110 Decle, Three Years, 317.
cassava could be safely consumed. But starving Nyamwezi and slave porters chewed the roots raw, or roasted them unsoaked. The next morning hundreds of porters were stricken with vomiting and diarrhoea. Forty porters died. Many others were saved, Tippu Tip believed, by eating a broth of peppers, ginger, and goat meat. A second reported case occurred when the survivors of the Emin Pasha expedition were in Karagwe in August, 1889. Two young porters, ravenous and impatient, died in agony after eating raw roots purchased locally, despite several earlier warnings from their more experienced comrades. Waungwana porters of the same expedition had earlier become ill with cassava poisoning when travelling up the Congo river. In a third case, in one day in December, 1894, eight starving porters of the CMS Uganda caravan died in Iramba country after eating “a poisonous root,” almost certainly bitter cassava. Numerous others were very sick. All of these cases occurred in contexts of hunger and almost certainly a low protein intake, both associated with konzo.  

Porters added whatever vegetables, sweet potatoes, nuts and other foods they could obtain to eat with the high bulk staple. Posho went further with the addition of edible herbs and roots collected in the vicinity of camps. During the rainy season travellers could collect mushrooms in the pori or bush country. When locust swarms appeared Nyamwezi and Sukuma porters ate the insects. Hungry porters ate wild fruits and termites as famine food. But the most sought after addition to the pot was meat. For some people the opportunities for meat consumption along the road were better than at home, according to Burton, and this was one inducement to work as a porter. There were two sources: domestic animals and wild animals. From the first category, goat meat was popular. Although too expensive for the


112 Burton, Lake Regions, 495; Copplestone to Lang, Uyui, 4 Mar., 1882, CMS G3A6/01; Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, Customs of the Swahili, 140; Speke, Journal, 88, 15-20 Dec., 1860.

113 Burton, Lake Regions, 463.
average carrier, headmen occasionally bought a goat and divided it. Fowls were considered taboo by the Nyamwezi, but they were known to break the custom and eat them on journeys. *Waungwana* porters ate them regularly. On special occasions, such as the day before departure or on arrival at a destination, and after especially hard marches, the caravan leader would slaughter an ox and distribute the meat among the porters. At market towns porters might be able to buy pieces of beef from a local herder. When Baumann’s caravan defeated the Mbugwe in March, 1892, the 250 captured cattle kept his porters and *askari* in meat for months. Elton’s companion Cotterill captures the seriousness with which hard working porters dealt with the carcass of a young bullock:

Nothing could better describe than certain well-known passages in Homer the busy scene of slaughter and skinning and cutting up, and roasting entrails and titbits, strung upon spits with alternate layers of fat. Libations and meat offerings are wanting in the African ceremony. The final scene is alike in both cases. Until ‘all love of meat and drink is lost’ they feast and make merry through the livelong night, cramming down their throats huge lumps of half-baked flesh, until the whole beast — be it cow, or zebra, or rhinoceros — has vanished, except a few cracked, marrowless, blackened bones.

Success in hunting led to the same activities. When Gleerup shot a giraffe near Kondoa in Usagara, towards the end of a long journey to the coast, “all the carriers came running with their knives ready and shouting their gratitude ...” Hundreds of porters quickly gathered around to compete for pieces of meat. The Watts’ porters devoured a zebra in an evening after a series of hard marches on short rations. A successful buffalo hunt in Ugalla by some of Cameron’s porters forced a delay to the journey until all the meat was brought to camp and divided. The shooting of an elephant might mean two or three days and nights spent drying the meat in hot ashes, or smoking it on a platform over a slow fire, to carry on

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the journey. Three of four pounds of smoked meat, an unobjectionable addition to the load, would then be carried on long sticks “like gigantic kababs.”¹¹⁹ When Stanley shot successively a giraffe, an antelope, five zebra, a buffalo and a wildebeest after a period of short rations, some of his Nyamwezi porters added nearly 35 pounds of dried meat to their loads.¹²⁰ For the Muslim Swahili and Waungwana certain game presented religious difficulties. Wild boar, warthogs and hippopotami were considered unclean, and so were normally left to Nyamwezi caravan members. None of Cameron’s men would bring in a wild boar shot near the Ugalla river. “Only the faithful are down on their luck,” Elton wrote after a successful buffalo hunt. Despite “almost starving” the Muslim members of the party would not eat the meat because “no true believer was present to ‘halal’ either beast. They are afraid of each other’s tongues.”¹²¹ But during hard times on the road principles of pollution were often suspended out of necessity.¹²² The same applied to the eating of carrion. The Nyamwezi were known to eat lion kills and putrid meat others would not touch, despite the possible consequences. Reichard considered the practice the enjoyment of “racy” behaviour. More likely it was a cultural adaptation to decades of safari experience.¹²³ Less commonly, river pools provided fish, which were smoked in large quantities to provide food for the road. The Sukuma made full use of this option, many living close to Lake Victoria and thus being

¹¹⁹ F. L. M. Moir, After Livingstone: An African Trade Romance (London, n.d.), 103. The same process for a buffalo took a complete day; Elton, Travels and Researches, 375, 2 Dec., 1877. Various techniques for smoking and drying meat are described in Burton, Lake Regions, 463.

¹²⁰ Stanley, Through the Dark Continent, I, 104.

¹²¹ Cameron, Across Africa, I, 204; Elton, Travels and researches, 375, 2 Dec., 1877.

¹²² For examples of “backsliding” see Stanley & Neame, Exploration Diaries, 44, 11 Jan., 1875 (wild boar); Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 96-7 (hippopotamus).

¹²³ For discussion and examples see James Christie, Cholera Epidemics in East Africa (London, 1876), 311; Wolf, Central African Diaries, 41, 18 July, 1878; Reichard, “Die Wanjamuesi”, 322.
used to a fish diet. Up caravans from the coast sometimes carried dried shark into the interior for use as a side dish.124

Although gathering, hunting and fishing met some food needs, porters relied heavily on being able to purchase foodstuffs from the surplus of peasants along the routes. The marketing system in nineteenth century Tanganyika was relatively undeveloped compared with, for instance, that in much of North or West Africa. Nevertheless, most peoples of Tanganyika were familiar with permanent or temporary markets.125 The most developed markets were in the north-east region and along the established caravan routes, where commercial activities were most pronounced, and market values were relatively standardized, although subject to great variations according to supply and demand.126 Porters found markets of some sort where foodstuffs were available at most of the bigger villages and towns along the central routes. In these places, such as Zungomero, Malolo, Mwapwa, Tura, Tabora, Msene, Ujiji, and many other places, there was little problem obtaining food during normal times, except perhaps at the end of the dry season, although prices could fluctuate greatly.127 Much of this is known in outline to historians, although no serious study of nineteenth century markets or market response exists for the central routes, with the exception of Carol Sissons’ work on the Gogo and Beverly Brown’s on Ujiji.128 Elsewhere


127 See, for instance, Cameron, Across Africa, I, 122, on the difference in prices in Ugogo in 1873 compared with Burton’s time.

128 Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, passim; Beverly Bolser Brown, “Ujiji: The History of a Lakeside Town, c. 1800-1914” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1973). See my comments in chapter four. There is a brief discussion of the demand for foodstuffs created by the caravan trade and farmer response in Unyamwezi in
in populated districts peasants commonly brought their surplus produce to the camp sites to sell to caravan members. In 1857 the thriving peasant economy of Rumuma and other places along the routes in the Usagara and Rubeho mountains supplied caravans with their needs, after leaner days on the march from the coast. “Here, for the first time,” Burton wrote, “the country people descended in crowds from the hills, bringing fowls, hauling along small goats, lank sheep, and fine bullocks — the latter worth twelve cloths — and carrying on their heads basket-platters full of voandzeia, bajri, beans, and the Arachis hypogoea ...”

The same applied in much of Ugogo. At Ziwa, the oasis on the eastern fringe of Ugogo, and the first major provisioning place after the Marenga Mkali, porters could buy bullocks, sheep, goats, poultry, watermelons, pumpkins, honey, buttermilk, whey, curd ed milk, and flour. Twenty years later Hutley wrote of Mvumi, “We had not arrived in camp long before it was thronged with people anxious to sell food, some with meal others with nuts, goats, sheep, fat, etc.,” and soon after, in Mstumbuyu: “The camp at an early hour was thronged by the natives anxious to sell their goods, of which they brought a great variety.” In many places peasants continued to respond in the same way during the early years of colonial rule. In 1893 near the village of Unyonga, in south-west Buha, villagers approached Decle’s caravan to sell potatoes and cassava flour. Nearby, in the Muserere river valley, a market was held on the path, with salted meat, potatoes, millet, bananas and other produce for sale to passing porters.


See the discussion of peasant response to the demand for foodstuffs created by caravans and British imperialist activities in the Dagoretti and Machakos areas of central Kenya in the 1890s, in Charles H. Ambler, Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism (New Haven and London, 1988), 109-10, 115-6.

Burton, Lake Regions, 147. Voandzeia is maize; bajri is millet; arachis hypogoea is the pig-nut.

Burton, Lake Regions, 182. See also ibid., 81-2, 153, 445, 166-7, 448, 449.

Wolf, Central African Diaries, 34, 17 June, 1878, 36, 20 June, 1878. For similar accounts from Ugogo see Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 93. See also Kjekshus, Ecology Control, 47.

Decle, Three Years, 317, and also 321.
When peasants did not bring their surplus to the porters, and in times of shortage, when there was little surplus to be had, porters had to tramp around villages, hamlets and homesteads in the neighbourhood of camp sites to find food to buy, or forage across the countryside and along the margins of fields, collecting edibles or stealing whatever they could get away with. If there had been earlier altercations between porters and peasants then a chief might forbid his or her people to visit camp sites, forcing porters to “send about the country” to obtain provisions. In any case, porters visited villagers who provided services, such as grinding grain, for a small fee. Inevitably there were disagreements, and sometimes violence, when hungry porters plundered local food supplies, or carried a high hand, or were themselves abused or insulted. Caravan personnel were vulnerable in these circumstances, scattered across the countryside in small groups. The potential for serious conflict is evident in cases such as when Tippu Tip’s immense caravan, three thousand strong, reached the village of Mtowa, in December 1881. A missionary observed

> Of course in such a collection ... there are a great many ruffians & plundering of the natives consequently is very common, in which matter the Arabs themselves are not blame-less for the rations they distribute to their men are far from being sufficient. On account of this they have very nearly come in collision with the Wagha & should it occur it would be a terrible disaster. The whole of the country would rise against their oppressors like one man ...

The following example shows how a relatively trivial incident could precipitate a serious conflict. During Tippu Tip’s third great journey to eastern Zaire circa 1870, when in Ugalla, the Nyamwezi and Waungwana carriers in his small advance caravan spread out to get their millet pounded for the seven day trek across the uninhabited country stretching to Simba’s in Ukonongo. One man, a slave from the coast, complained of being attacked without provocation in Riova’s village after some grain was spilled. A confrontation resulted, with

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136 As Gleerup noted of porters passing through Uvinza, who were in great risk of being killed if thefts from fields occurred. See “A Journey Across Tanganyika”, 134-5. For an example of Gogo villagers beating porters who had probably stolen food from them, see Konczacki, *Victorian Explorer*, 211, 20 Aug., 1891.

137 Griffith to Whitehouse, Uguha, 24 Jan., 1881, LMS 4/1/A.
numerous deaths on both sides. It appeared that Tippu Tip and his people would all be killed. Then another of his caravans arrived, and the village was captured. But at least seven more porters were killed in the nearest villages, and sixty Nyamwezi porters and some of the trader’s slaves deserted, hearing of the fight, and returned to Unyanyembe. After a few days the remaining members of the two caravans were attacked by a large force of Galla and Konongo warriors under chief Taka, brother of Riova. This time the victory of the traders with their slaves and porters was complete.\textsuperscript{138} The outcome of such incidents very much depended on the diplomatic skills of caravan leaders and local chiefs,\textsuperscript{139} and on the balance of power which — with the exception of very well armed and led caravans — usually lay with the peoples of the interior.

When negotiations broke down death stared porters in the face. Belligerency on both sides, or failure to compensate villagers for thefts by porters, could lead to the partial or complete destruction of a caravan and the massacre of its work-force. A large Arab caravan from Tanga, trading in the region east of Lake Victoria, and armed with 400 to 500 guns, was destroyed by the Maasai in the early 1850s — the consequence of a dispute over the burning over of some grazing land.\textsuperscript{140} Twenty two members of Stanley’s caravan were killed in running battles in Ituru, north east of Unyanyembe. The dispute ostensibly arose over starving porters’ thefts of milk and grain.\textsuperscript{141} In 1890 the Gogo “almost utterly destroyed” an Arab caravan numbering about 500 porters — men, women and children. The cause of the

\textsuperscript{138} Tippu Tip, \textit{Maisha}, 43-9 § 55-61.

\textsuperscript{139} For examples where chiefs or elders negotiated an end to conflicts with caravans see Hore, \textit{To Lake Tanganyika}, 69-70; Wolf, \textit{Central African Diaries}, 275, 7 July, 1881; Stanley & Neame, \textit{Exploration Diaries}, 44-5, 13 Jan., 1875; Stanley, \textit{Through the Dark Continent}, I, 89; Lloyd, \textit{In Dwarf Land}, 95-6. In another case a porter accidentally stabbed a villager in Ukinga and was set upon by local men. The dispute was resolved with the payment of compensation to the injured party. See Thomson, \textit{To the Central African Lakes}, I, 273-4.

\textsuperscript{140} Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 416. The Shashi of this region were also known to have massacred caravans. See Paul Kollman, \textit{The Victoria Nyanza} tran. H. A. Nesbitt (London, 1899), 177.

bloodshed is not stated, but it must have been related to a dispute over food or water.\textsuperscript{142} As late as 1891 chief Makangi of Kilimandini (Kilimatinde?) in Ugogo was strong enough to harass a strong Belgian expedition and destroy an ivory caravan.\textsuperscript{143} According to a vague report current in 1890-91, the members of a Swahili caravan had earlier been massacred in Umbugwe, near Lake Manyara, turning this region into a virtual no-go area. Less catastrophic but still fatal collisions were common. During Baumann's visit to Umbugwe in March 1892, eight of his porters were killed while out buying provisions.\textsuperscript{144} Towards the end of 1894 twenty two porters of a CMS caravan were killed in Irangi when they plundered villages for food.\textsuperscript{145}

Despite the continuing strength of many of the societies of the interior, by the late 1880s and 1890s the balance of power was shifting in favour of caravans. By this time some porters and \textit{askari} were armed with breech loading rifles, and Europeans had repeaters.\textsuperscript{146} In areas near German stations caravan leaders could call in the \textit{Schutztruppe} to quell disturbances if they felt aggrieved. In addition, the volume of traffic was so high along the main routes, and demands on peasants so insistent, that in places homesteaders near the paths abandoned their settlements and retreated two or three miles into the bush. In 1891 the countryside along the road from Bagamoyo extending three days inland was devoid of its

\textsuperscript{142} Harford-Battersby, \textit{Pilkington of Uganda}, 94-5. This was probably the massacre at Makengi, mentioned by Stairs, in which 300 Nyamwezi porters were said to have been killed. See Konczacki, \textit{Victorian Explorer}, 210, 17 Aug., 1891.

\textsuperscript{143} Moloney, \textit{With Captain Stairs}, 63-5.

\textsuperscript{144} Baumann, \textit{Durch Massailand}, 18.


\textsuperscript{146} In 1890 the German East Africa Company introduced regulations forbidding African ownership of breech loaders, and African caravans were forbidden to carry more than one pound of gun powder per man. Registration of all arms was made compulsory. But Africans could use breech loaders when working for Europeans, and there seems to have been little effort to enforce regulations beyond licensing and registration. See R. W. Beachey, "The Arms Trade in East Africa". \textit{IAH}, III, 3 (1962), 456-7.
former inhabitants. They feared harassment from passing caravans, and the result was that it was impossible to buy provisions.\(^{147}\) For the same reason porters in many areas were denied access to stockaded villages.\(^{148}\) Villagers and homesteaders remaining near the main lines of traffic were always insecure. In 1883 the chief of Kisokwe, near Mpwapwa, asked the local CMS missionaries for a flag for his village. The reason given was that large caravans of Nyamwezi working for an Arab were about to pass through, and it was feared they would devour everything in the fields. If the flag of the \textit{Mzungu} was over the village then the Nyamwezi would be less likely to touch the crops.\(^{149}\) When disputes arose along the routes a few European travellers, bent on “pacifying” Africans, directed their men in ruthless acts of destruction and pillage, or allowed their hungry porters free reign to loot. Arab and Swahili caravan leaders were guilty of similar behaviour.\(^{150}\) Bellicose Europeans, aiming to stamp out the practice of \textit{hongo} collection by Gogo chiefs, “let them have lead” instead of payment.\(^{151}\) In April 1892 at Ipuli village in Unyanyembe, thefts from the maize fields of one of Chief Isike’s sons by members of a German column precipitated the conflict which ultimately led to the end of Nyamwezi independence.\(^{152}\) Other, less aggressive, caravan leaders found it difficult to maintain order when their hungry porters raided villages and


\(^{148}\) Livingstone, \textit{Last Journals}, 218, 16 Jan., 1868, for an example from north east Zambia.

\(^{149}\) Henrietta Cole to Lang, Kisokwe, 3 July, 1883, CMS G3A6/01.


\(^{151}\) Konczacki, \textit{Victorian Explorer}, 208, 12 Aug., 1891.

\(^{152}\) Unomah, “Economic Expansion”, 314.

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homesteads. In 1891 when Stairs' caravan approached Nyangara village, near Mamboya, the inhabitants all fled. His porters immediately started pillaging their huts, stealing dozens of goats and chickens, bows and arrows. The next day Stairs returned everything he could find to the rightful owners, and for the rest, paid an indemnity which was to be subtracted from his porters' wages. Later, he gave seven lashes each to porters caught stealing from villagers. The balance of power seems to have tipped in the years 1892-1893. In 1892 at least three large African ivory caravans were wrecked in East Africa due to the instability in the interior accompanying colonial conquest and famine. In 1893 no such cases were reported. By 1897 the change in conditions was such that the German traveller Richard Kandt professed to be taking askari with him more to protect homesteaders from his porters than the reverse. Caravans in the colonial context were seen as "a necessary cancer," stripping small and poverty stricken communities of the necessities of life.

"And in the vast bush while the sun burns down there is much trouble about water," Mtoro bin Myinyi Bakari wrote of the safari experience. Water, or lack of it, was indeed a source of great difficulty during the dry season, when caravan traffic was at its peak. During the dry season in regions such as Ugogo, the wells consisted of pits fifteen to thirty feet deep, which gave poor, slimy water, or shafts, which could be covered over by brush to prevent access and evaporation. In the Usagara mountains deep pits were dug in stream beds which

153 See the discussion in chapter six of the German decree creating an indemnity fund for villagers plundered by caravans. The existence of the decree is itself evidence that such behaviour was routinely associated with colonization.

154 Stairs, "De Zanzibar au Katanga", 47, 29 & 30 July, 1891; Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 202, 1 Aug., 1891, 209, 14 Aug., 1891; Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 40-1. The CMS missionary Ashe, travelling at the same time, also paid compensation for "damage" caused by his men in Mamboya.

155 ZEAG, 27 Dec., 1893, 6.

156 P. H. Yeo, "Caput Nili — the Travels of Richard Kandt in German East Africa", TNR, 63 (Sept. 1964). 209.

157 In Harries, Swahili Prose Texts, 183. The translation in Bakari, Customs of the Swahili, 160, is slightly different.
gave good water.\textsuperscript{158} Control over wells was the source of Gogo power in the dry centre of Tanzania, power which all caravans had to come to terms with.\textsuperscript{159} There were numerous tales current of caravans led to destruction over water disputes. The case of Kafuku's death in Ugogo has been recounted.\textsuperscript{160} Burton also mentions a (different?) Nyamwezi caravan which was wiped out by the Gogo as a result of a dispute over access to water.\textsuperscript{161} In 1886 an Arab trader known as Kambi Mbaya (Bad Camp) was killed in Usukuma with all his slaves and porters. According to one account the dispute arose when his men tried to take water for themselves ahead of Sukuma herders who wished to water their cattle. "Angry words arose, blows were struck, the natives collected in force, and in vain the Arab endeavoured to restrain his followers." Another version had it that his men had thrown the corpse of a porter into a well used by the Sukuma.\textsuperscript{162} Pruen tells the story of how an Arab caravan refused to pay \textit{hongo} when passing through Ugogo to the coast, trusting on their strength. The Gogo did not respond with force of arms, but closed all the wells along the route, themselves using others unknown to the travellers. Except for a handful of survivors who reached the coast, everyone in the caravan died of thirst.\textsuperscript{163} Less catastrophic but still fatal consequences of disputes over water were common.\textsuperscript{164}

Even when general access to wells was assured, the huge numbers of people travelling in combined caravans sometimes led to struggles as individuals competed for the scarce liquid. The strongest came first. To ensure that his porters were not denied water by the more than 1,700 members of two Nyamwezi caravans accompanying his expedition,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[159] See Sissons, "Economic Prosperity", chapter 3.
\item[160] In chapter three.
\item[161] Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 181.
\item[162] Ashe, \textit{Two Kings}, 241-2.
\item[163] Pruen, \textit{The Arab and the African}, 184.
\end{footnotes}
Siairs had his askari stationed around one water hole in Ugogo.165 The Tuturu wells in the middle of the Mgunda Mkali were the site of tragic events on more than one occasion. In late September, 1890, Stokes’ huge caravan arrived at the site. Tucker of the CMS describes the scene:

These wells are narrow and the shafts deep — some seventy feet. According to our custom, we [the missionaries] arrived first at the camping-ground, and were able, with the assistance of our tent-ropes, to get sufficient water for our use before the arrival of the huge caravan itself. The scene on its arrival is one that will never fade from my memory. There were three wells to supply 2,500 men [and women].

The struggle for the water was terrible, not that the men fought — they did not do that. But the crowding the well-tops and the eager pressing into vacant places almost amounted to a fierce struggle, terrible to witness. In the course of the day three lives were lost by men losing their foothold, and falling headlong down the well. All night long the crowding continued, and when morning dawned there were yet men with their thirst unquenched.166

When strategic water sources such as the brackish springs of the Marenga Mkali dried up, as they sometimes did at the height of the hot season, then thirst resulted in death for careless porters.167 In the dry season of 1891 the shortage of water along this stretch of the route made for particularly hard marching, and caused great worry to travellers. Stairs’ diary is full of his concern about the lack of water for his porters. At one camp there was no water “except what the Europeans had.” Later, he wrote, “I doubt whether one can find a gloomier, more desolate spot than the Marenga Kali or ‘bitter waters’ this month, seeing that for the last forty-two days no rain has fallen and that, curiously enough, even dew does not settle overnight.” One of his porters died of “thirst and fatigue” in this desert.168

Options did exist to deal with water shortages. The telekeza march was a strategic response.169 When marches were unexpectedly tough and long, and foot sore stragglers remained behind without food or water, the first to reach new supplies might return with aid.

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165 Moloney, *With Captain Stairs*, 53.

166 Tucker, *Eighteen Years*, 33. Another missionary reported seeing the bodies of porters who had died of thirst within reach of the wells, and on one occasion a body in the water inside a well shaft: Roscoe, *Twenty-Five Years*, 52.

167 Burton, “Lake Regions”, 147; *idem, Lake Regions*, 177-8.

168 See Konczacki, *Victorian Explorer*, 204, 4 Aug., 1891, 205, 6 Aug., 1891, 206, 7, 8, 9 & 10 Aug. 1891.

169 See chapter 7.
for their comrades. As an alternative, when the pace was forced to reach emergency supplies of food or water, loads could be abandoned along the road to be retrieved the following day. This option was forced on Swann’s LMS caravan during a severe eight day march through the Mgunda Mkali. A third possibility was to march at night during the period of great heat before the rainy season, carrying as much water as possible. ¹⁷⁰ When all else failed sick and exhausted porters were known to offer a month’s pay for a gourd of water, and on at least one occasion a porter offered himself as a slave to a headman in exchange for water. ¹⁷¹

Much drinking water was barely fit for human consumption. Traversing Buzinza in late August, 1889, the height of the dry season, the Emin Pasha expedition were forced to make do with water from stagnant pools frequented by cattle and other animals, or liquid obtained from swamps and their outlets of “porridgy consistence,” due to suspended mud and organic matter. Hannington wrote that drinking water found along the road, “... when not absent altogether ... was often so thick and black that it is scarce an exaggeration to say that one looked at it and wondered whether it came under the category of meat or drink.”

Cameron’s porters’ thoughts ran in the same direction. During the crossing of the Mgunda Mkali in late July, 1873, the drinking water was so thick with suspended matter that the pagazi scornfully called it pombe. Another missionary provides further local colour on East African water supplies. Drinking water was “... at best, muddy and disagreeable in flavour, and of all shades of colour, from the light brown of weak tea to the deeper shades of coffee or chocolate, while in a few cases one meets with it white and milky.” ¹⁷²


¹⁷¹ Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years, 52. Water brought by Gogo villagers cost porters two yards of cloth per gourd in December 1874. See Stanley and Neame, Exploration Diaries, 32.

¹⁷² Parke, My Personal Experiences, 476, 30 Aug., 1889; Hannington, Peril and Adventure, 23-4; Cameron, Across Africa, I, 138; Watt, In the Heart, 33. For similar accounts of dry season water supplies see Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 127; Hore, Tanganyika, 35-6.
The 1884-85 Drought and Famine

Widespread famine in eastern and central Tanzania occurred much less often during the forty year period from 1850 to 1891 than in the five decades from 1891 to 1941, roughly coinciding with the early colonial period. In her analysis of famine in central Tanzania between the years 1860 and 1890, Sissons identifies only two periods in which there was much loss of life among farmers, 1860-1 and 1884-5. But famines or even shortages could be much more devastating for caravan porters who, as short term visitors and marginal outsiders, with little claim on extremely scarce local resources, and often having only their posho disbursements to pay for food selling at prices beyond their means, were the first to starve. One of the worst famines on record was the great famine of 1884-1885, caused by drought, in eastern and central Tanzania. Several countries straddling the central routes, including Uzaramo, Uzigua, Ukaguru, Usagara and Ugogo, were especially hard hit. By 1884 the CMS mission stations at Mamboya in Ukaguru and Mpwapwa were well established, and at this time several Europeans were travelling to other parts of the interior, passing through the affected regions. So a useful, if limited, documentary record exists, enough for a discussion of the impact of the famine on porters.

The rains were late in the growing season of 1883-1884, and the crops failed. By February, 1884 the shortage of rain in the Mpwapwa area portended the approach of famine. By July and early August famine conditions were apparent along central and eastern sections of the central routes. Ugogo was struck early. In the east, at Mpwapwa and in Usagara, there was still a little food, and many Gogo left their homes for these places. This is consistent with the Gogo name for the famine, Chilemu, meaning migration. But by November most people in Mamboya were "on the verge of starvation" and some were dying. A little to the north, in the Nguru mountains, and in outlying areas of Uzigua, nearer the coast, through the

175 See the short account in Sissons, "Economic Prosperity", 143-4.
famine years many poor farmers were forced to turn as suppliants to big men and chiefs, and lost their independence. Others had no choice but to pawn or enslave themselves or family members. Everywhere Maasai, Baraguyu and Gogo herders had great trouble finding pasturage and water for their cattle. In the west, Unyamwezi was relatively unaffected, and when famine conditions continued into 1885, some Gogo went to Unyanyembe for relief. The harvest was good, and small groups of Nyamwezi carried surplus grain through the Mgunda Mkali to sell in famine stricken Ugogo and to caravans. At the coast, porters from Unyamwezi and Usukuma arrived on their last legs. In July, 1884, Stokes was in Saadani and then Bagamoyo, organizing his caravan to Uyui. He had to feed his up-country porters for fifteen days before they were fit to carry loads. "A more miserable set of skeletons you could not see," he wrote. At Bagamoyo the death rate was enormous; porters who arrived from the interior in bad condition were left to starve. Missionaries of the Holy Ghost Fathers did what they could, "having something like 200 at a time in a dying state." A few porters recovered, but most were too far gone.

The scarcity of food earlier in the year and the impossibility of obtaining adequate provisions affected the labour supply at the coast. Few porters were available compared with normal years. Thousands of Nyamwezi and Sukuma on their way to Bagamoyo and other towns turned back. Stokes believed thousands died along the roads. The Indian "touts" who normally found men for travellers "had not a man to sell." The most powerful merchants of the interior, such as chief Mirambo, had to leave large quantities of goods at the coast because there was no one to carry them. Stokes eventually found enough porters, partly because he was able to get all the surviving Nyamwezi from Uyui and most of the Sukuma to


177 Stokes to Lang, Kulehi camp, 26 July, 1884, CMS G3A6/01.

come to him, as they had travelled down to the coast with his headmen, and partly by hiring *Waungwana* from Zanzibar. The labour crisis also affected Zanzibar slave owners. Acting through the European consuls, Sultan Barghash ensured that caravan leaders did not hire slave porters without their master's consent.\(^\text{179}\)

In late July, Stokes’ caravan left for Uyui. Only one of the Ugogo routes was passable, with food for sale. The journey was marked by extreme hunger and many cases of dysentery among his porters. Forty to fifty sick porters had to be left at various points along the road. Many others died, and others again deserted. At Mvumi the caravan was attacked in its camp by robbers in collusion with the chief, whose defence was that “The devil had entered his people.” Two porters were killed and others wounded. The consequences would have been much worse but for Stokes’ mild response and payment of a large *hongo*.\(^\text{180}\) In early October the LMS caravan of the Hores set off from Saadani for Ujiji. At Kondoa near the eastern entrance to the Mukondokwa valley the porters were able to buy food. They reached Kirasa in the Usagara mountains towards the end of the month. There they heard of hard times ahead in Ugogo, of caravans broken up or forced to return due to the grim conditions.\(^\text{181}\) Marching on, the caravan passed through the dry region on the east side of Mpwapwa. Lake Gombo was a dry basin. Annie Hore, on her second attempt to reach Ujiji with her husband wrote, “Every now and then I saw curious dark objects lying on, or beside the path, and shortly afterwards became aware that they were the dead bodies of helpless laggards from the various hungry caravans that had passed that way. The heat and drought had been so great, that these bodies were perfectly hardened and preserved. It was a terrible sight ...”\(^\text{182}\) In Ugogo the famine was at its height. At Msanga and elsewhere the people were eating husks and, in a reversal of normal conditions, came to the camp to try to

\(^{179}\) Stokes to Lang, Kulehi camp, 26 July, 1884, CMS G3A6/01.


\(^{181}\) Hore, *To Lake Tanganyika*, 76, 77.

\(^{182}\) Hore, *To Lake Tanganyika*, 80-1.
purchase food from the caravan. By the time the caravan reached Mpara, many of the porters had finished their rations, and were in despair on being told that there was no water. Some were obviously starving and sick. Others, perhaps more careful, or with private resources, were able to manage with less hardship. A little muddy water was bought with tobacco and cloth.\textsuperscript{183} The condition of the porters deteriorated the rest of the way through Ugogo, despite being issued with extra cloth. The only food procurable was sheep and goat meat, which caused dysentery for the weakest. Some had to be left behind with a little cloth for maintenance.\textsuperscript{184} One wonders what became of them in their extremity. During this journey the Hores lost eighty porters out of 200, fifty by desertion, and several deaths.\textsuperscript{185}

There was virtually nothing for travellers to eat along the 250 kilometre route between Kwamambwa near Morogoro and Bagamoyo. In Mamboya between December, 1884 and March, 1885 hunger killed many of the poor and elderly, who could not survive on a diet of grasses and wild fruits. In January, 1885, a European traveller reported that the people between the coast and Mpwapwa existed on “poisonous roots,” probably toxic varieties of cassava, “for which they scour the jungles.” The porters of one missionary searched the countryside for food for up to two days at a time, sometimes returning to camp with their cloth empty handed. They survived by buying plantain trees “which they cut down and ate for lack of anything better.”\textsuperscript{186} In this region famine strengthened slavery; a reversal seen by a missionary “as though satan was making another struggle against the kingdom of God.” People were “carried off by night,” women disappeared while working their fields, and clients’ children were sold by their chiefly patrons.\textsuperscript{187} In parts of Ugogo famine conditions prevailed through much of 1885, not so much through continuing lack of rain, but because of

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{183} Hore, \textit{To Lake Tanganyika}, 97-8, 100-2.
    \item \textsuperscript{184} Hore, \textit{To Lake Tanganyika}, 102-6.
    \item \textsuperscript{185} Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 143.
    \item \textsuperscript{186} A. Bloyet, “De Zanzibar à la station de Kondoa”, \textit{BSG}, 7, 11 (1890), 361; Roscoe to Lang, Mamboya, 7 Sept., 1885, CMS G3A6/02; ? to Wigram, Mpwapwa, 17 Jan., 1885, CMS G3A6/02 (quotes).
    \item \textsuperscript{187} Roscoe to Wigram, Mamboya, 1 June, 1885, CMS G3A6/02.
\end{itemize}
the earlier consumption of seed, and debility. In the dry season of that year most Gogo
seemed to be able to survive, partly by migration to more favourable areas, although they had
very little to sell to caravans.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{188} Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 144.
Chapter Nine
Porters, Workers and Pre-Colonial Labour History

East African caravan porters created their own work culture in the unique context of the nineteenth century. But this does not mean that they were unlike other migrant workers. Like workers in other times and places they acted to defend their interests and protect their autonomy. Like other nineteenth century workers in Africa, Asia and elsewhere they were increasingly exposed to prevailing European concepts of work, authority and discipline. This chapter is largely about authority, discipline and protest in European led caravans, given the relative lack of evidence from African caravans. Disputes often arose when long standing customs embedded in the work culture of caravans were violated by outsiders. The concept of legal pluralism — the existence of competing legal institutions or practices — helps crystallize the nature of authority and protest in many caravans. Conflicts over discipline and order were subject not just to alternative interpretations, but were expressed in different “languages.” Porters saw their rights and the normal expression of authority in terms of the norms of caravan culture. Foreign caravan leaders, including Arabs and Europeans, used alternative languages — those of Islamic and Western notions of contract, and the prerogatives of legally constituted authority. In one of Speke’s many disputes with his porters, he invoked the contract established at the British Consulate: “There all their engagements were written down in the office-book, and the consul was our judge.” In contrast porters invoked custom, long standing work practices, the principle of equality with their work-mates, and their right to work or not work. But in addition they were quick to cite

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a breach of contract when it suited them.³ Foreign attitudes towards work and workers in East Africa were expressed in other ways. European employers brought with them the class as well as the racial biases of their own societies, and sometimes made direct comparisons between what they believed were characteristics of porters and their equivalent among the Victorian working class. One explorer, for instance, wrote of the typical porter that “Despite his best interests, he will indulge the mania for desertion caused by that mischievous love of change and whimsical desire for novelty that characterize the European sailor.” Another, commenting on an argument which he observed between a Nyamwezi porter and his wife described the scene as “amusingly reminiscent of an East End row.”⁴

Similarities with European workers went beyond superficial stereotypes. Travellers’ accounts are full of reports of porter resistance and protest, which took many forms, including strikes, go slows, and more individualistic or “hidden” forms. The most commonly mentioned protest action was desertion. Desertion was almost universal in that virtually no caravans were unaffected. It could range from the secretive disappearance of one or two individuals to the open desertion of a whole work force, perhaps hundreds of porters.

Desertion was the response to a whole range of threats and problems — from the “modern” issues of wages, conditions, etc., to fear of known or unknown dangers ahead. Strikes were also frequent occurrences, and often occurred in conjunction with mass desertions. Porters had considerable leverage over employers, and if they were united could effectively defend their autonomy and customary patterns of work, remuneration, and discipline.

All of this applies to the late pre-colonial period, but with the imposition of colonial rule a new trend becomes apparent. The gradual changes in patterns of authority and protest

³ For an example referring to Stanley’s caravan in December, 1876, see Hamid bin Muhammed (Tippu Tip), Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi yaani Tippu Tip ed. and trans. W. H. Whitely (Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, 1974), 89 § 117-8; Frank McLynn, Stanley: The Making of an African Explorer (Chelsea MI, 1990), 304; and especially the discussion in François Bontinck, trans. & ed., L’autobiographie de Hamed ben Mohammed el-Murjebi Tippo Tip (ca. 1840-1905) (Bruxelles, 1974), 250-1, notes 320 & 321.

originating in increasing commercialization and foreign interest in East Africa were profoundly altered by the realities of German and British colonialism. Bargaining power diminished as Africans were disarmed, their caravans regulated, and their autonomy undermined. Porters were still necessary but their protest became restricted to the more hidden forms, and especially desertion, as discipline was imposed much more systematically than in the past. Punishments, always applied ruthlessly, became systematically brutal.

The thesis concludes with a short discussion of porterage and pre-colonial migrant labour. It is argued that porters had much in common with colonial migrant labourers, but that the nature of pre-colonial social and economic relations was more important for the emergence of large scale migrant wage labour than external forces.

The Language of Authority: Paternalists, Authoritarians, Discipline and Punishment

Bill Freund points out that there are rewards for paying close attention to, rather than assuming, the nature of authority at work, the way in which employers establish cultural and political control, and how workers relate to each other.5 This section discusses the language of authority and the reality of caravan discipline and punishments during the period of European imperialist activity. First, the attitudes of porters themselves towards authority and justice are outlined.

In small Nyamwezi caravans organized at the kaya level, the control of labour probably rested to a large degree on the hierarchies of domestic or kin relationships, with due deference given to age, experience and social position. This parallels in part the argument offered by Coquery-Vidrovitch and Lovejoy for sub-Saharan Africa in general:

The sons, nephews, and other dependents recruited for commercial journeys on a regular basis by their elders, lineage heads, and chief merchants were certainly exploited. That is to say, only a part of the

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5 Bill Freund, The African Worker (Cambridge, 1988), 46-7. Freund wrote of the colonial context, but the comment is just as relevant to nineteenth century East African caravans.
surplus as well as the product went to these dependents. They were ... conscious of this situation ... [But] social constraints and the obligation of submission counted for a lot ... 6

Discipline was maintained in part by the authority and status of the mtongi, the wanyampara, and other officials. 7 In larger caravans famous headmen and caravan leaders such as K'shimba, one of Stokes’ right hand men, commanded obedience through great personal prestige. K’shimba was known as a fearless msafari and an autocratic caravan manager, who led caravans many times between Lake Victoria and the coast. 8 In 1894 the missionary Albert Lloyd travelled with a large caravan commanded by the Mnyamwezi to Lake Victoria. His authority and the respect which porters accorded him were clearly evident when he addressed the caravan on the first night of the journey:

As we looked on ... a sudden hush falls upon the men, and silence reigns as K’shimba mounts a little rising in the middle of the camp, and, stretching out his hands, begins to deliver a great oration. His eloquence is wonderful, judging from his gesture and rapid flow of language. We, of course, could not understand his words, as he spoke in the Wanyamwezi lingo; but our cooks told us that he was exhorting his men to be faithful to him as chief, and to the Europeans as ‘great white masters’; bidding them neither to steal their loads, nor raid any of the villages through which they might pass. After he had continued some time in this strain, he changed his tone a little, and to a kind of chant he said, ‘Will you obey K’shimba,’ and then all the men replied in the same tone, ‘We obey you Kshimba.’ This was repeated over and over again, and them suddenly K’shimba stepped down from his elevated position. and walked with great state into his tent. 9

It is not surprising that porters had ideas of their own about matters of authority, discipline and justice, given the vigour of caravan culture, and the strong bargaining position they held in relation to employers, especially foreigners. “They have a keen sense of unjust chastisement and strongly resent it," wrote a missionary. 10 If a porter’s behaviour was a significant transgression of the code of honour and customs of professional carriers, then independent collective action might be taken by his fellows to rectify the matter. Theft of

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7 For the roles of Nyamwezi caravan officials see chapter 5.

8 Lloyd, In Dwarf Land, 43-4.

9 Lloyd, In Dwarf Land, 45.

property from either a work-mate or employer could result in punishment and the restitution of the stolen goods. In one case, the kirangozi and the cook of a LMS caravan informed one of the missionaries that a porter, Nasibu, had stolen some tobacco which was mission property: "... they said he ought to be flogged. So the fellow was tied up and thrashed ..." Not only was such a theft contrary to the ethics of professional porters, but it could cast suspicion on all members of the caravan if not detected and punished. Later in the journey, a young porter removed a piece of merikani from his load. On being discovered, he gave the excuse that his load was too heavy. Despite this, he was "rather severely handled" by his comrades, to the point that he agreed to divulge where the cloth was hidden. An missionary describes a similar incident in another caravan of 150 Nyamwezi porters:

One night I heard a noise in the camp & I jumped up to see what was the matter. I saw about 50 men surrounding one, & on enquiry I found he had been caught in the act of taking away one of the loads of cloth. They asked me what the[y] should do with him, (he was a Swahili & not of the porters). I told them to tie him & watch him during the night. Next morning as we were about to start I told another Swahili to give him a few lashes. This is a lesson to all in the caravan.

Porter justice could be harsh. When the cook in Cameron’s caravan was accidentally shot and slightly wounded by the explorer’s servant Mohammed Malim, a number of porters demanded that Mohammed be put in chains, "otherwise they would shoot him." Cameron’s reaction to “this gross piece of impertinence” was to instead chain “the insolent ruffians.”

There was to be no collective decision making in this caravan! This attitude must have contributed to the constant disputes between Cameron and his porters, and desertions from the caravan. Annie Hore believed punishments approved by porters to be harsher than those preferred by her husband in their LMS caravan. “The porters always unanimously adjudge more punishment than Edward would be satisfied with, so that by simply taking no part, but

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12 Henry to Wright, Mpwapwa, 1 Oct., 1878, CMS CA6/012.

13 Verney Lovett Cameron, Across Africa (London, 1877), I, 112-3; also ibid., 155-6.
to lessen it on the plea of mercy, or the weakness of the culprit, the community is satisfied by being permitted to carry out their own customs ...”

The rough collective justice of Nyamwezi porters prevailed in their own caravans, however. Another traveller reported, “Some Unyamwezi [sic] men who had been in the same part of the camp as I, but who had started earlier in the morning, had flogged or choked a big, strong man to death. The naked corpse lay just beside the footpath tied to a tree with a bark rope around the neck.” The nature of the man’s crime is not stated. Such punishments often came after a shauri or meeting of the interested parties and senior caravan members had heard from witnesses, talked the matter over, and decided on a penalty, rather than instantaneously in the heat of the moment. Justice in Nyamwezi caravans was not always a collective decision, however. The vbondervba, the commercial “bourgeoisie” of Unyanyembe, had the legal power of life and death over porters until some time in the early 1880s. It was only then that Isike forbade the killing of servants, slaves, and porters by the vbondervba. It is not clear how often this practice took place.

European caravan leaders can be broadly divided into two groups when considering the issue of authority. On one hand, there were those who preferred a paternalistic approach and, on the other, those who imposed discipline arbitrarily with great violence. The former

14 Annie Hore, To Lake Tanganyika in a Bath Chair (London, 1886), 121.


group were more prepared to negotiate with their porters, and sometimes took advice from those especially trusted. The more humane among the missionaries and explorers preferred lighter punishments than was normal in the caravan system. A tiny minority — Stokes was one — treated Africans more or less as equals. A few Europeans straddled both “camps,” for example, Stanley who, in his writings, cultivated an image of concern for his porters, but nevertheless treated them brutally at times. It is clear that some explorers, missionaries, and colonial agents were extremely brutal to their porters, and often suffered the consequences. Probably most European caravan leaders, however, fitted the “paternalist” label. I shall now investigate in more detail how the “paternalists” and the “authoritarians” tried to set the tone on their caravans and what some of their views were on the question of disciplining porters. It should be noted that almost without exception caravan leaders — African, Arab, and European — used violence to a greater or lesser extent to impose discipline.

The paternalistic approach is exemplified in the writings of E. C. Hore of the LMS. On the opinion of one “African authority” that porters were “black villains” and “the despair of every traveller,” he wrote:

[I] had already learnt so to depend upon and love some of our much-abused followers as to be confident in undertaking an enterprise on which even the safety of my wife and child would depend, in great measure, on their kindness and faithfulness ... and was not disappointed.

Hore was referring to the carrying of his wife, Annie, and their young child the 1,500 kilometres from Saadani to Lake Tanganyika. However, Hore’s good relations with his porters were coloured by his general views on Africans. Writing of the “various interior natives” of the Lake Tanganyika region, he described them as “infantile:” “They are adult

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18 For an expression of this contradiction see Stanley’s instructions to his European officers in the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition. These emphasize the hardships that porters endure, with due allowance to be made for them, but at the same time prescribe “for trivial offences a slight corporal punishment.” See T. H. Parke, My Personal Experiences in Equatorial Africa as Medical Officer of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition (London, 1891), 21. More generally for the contradictions in Stanley’s character see McLynn, Stanley, passim.


20 For some episodes from the journey see chapter 8.
neither in wisdom nor in wickedness, but will become so as they are trained.”

Dodgshun held similar views, although his experience in Africa was to be much shorter than Hore’s.

During the first stages of his journey he reported that the Africans were “all more or less out of sorts” (as were the European members of the caravan). He felt that by adopting a better attitude, they would be less affected and therefore less “lazy.” Thus, when the next day, “Mr. Price conducted the p.m. and gave the Kafirs a rousing address on the subject of their neglect of their health in yielding to every feeling of lassitude,” the Africans “... took the hint and greatly improved in buoyancy and liveliness ...” or so Dodgshun thought. On another occasion nearly a year later he expressed his views as to how the Swahili porters and South African teamsters managing the few remaining ox carts were best managed: “I find that to be willing to help them in bad places and to treat them kindly makes them willing to try and try again.”

Southon found that a caravan leader could make himself popular with his porters by knowing each one’s name, and by paying attention to each individual, “perhaps making a joke at his expense — jokes are generally well received and Wangwana rather like being made the subject of one — or inquiry as to his health &c.”

In Southon’s view the “the facetious Leader will always be popular even though he be a strict disciplinarian.” The best way to deal with Swahili porters was with kindness: “… if you punish, they will run away if they can, but be careful to cultivate every means for their comfort and you are their friends for ever.”

These three LMS missionaries presented a relatively humane approach to

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21 Hore, Tanganyika, 163-4.

22 Dodgshun died at Ujiji soon after arriving in early 1879.

23 Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 26-7, 18-19 Aug., 1877, 64, 2-8 May, 1878. A number of South Africans were employed by the missionaries.


25 Southon to Whitehouse, Urambo, 18 Dec., 1879, “Hints for Missionaries Proceeding to Central Africa”. LMS 2/3/A. Southon uses the labels Waungwana and Swahili interchangeably. Compare Southon’s approach with the almost ritual quality of the mutual “boosting” session when Thomson reached Lake Tanganyika with
caravan discipline, despite the paternalistic language, condescension and stereotyping. Such paternalism rested to a large degree on the common endeavour shared by Europeans and Africans on long journeys, as others, including Livingstone, recognized: “Our sympathies are drawn out toward our humble hardy companions by a community of interests, and it may be perils, which make us all friends.” But as with other paternalists, Livingstone did not admit any equality between Europeans and Africans, speaking of the “inferiority” of his porters. He later wrote “... it is immense conceit in mere boys to equal themselves to me.” 26 Another missionary, highly experienced, held similar views on the treatment of porters:

The stories one so often hears of African travellers having perpetual rows with their caravan, of the carriers throwing down their loads and deserting, are probably in most cases due to the inexperience or fault of the traveller himself. If you treat your men like human beings, and not like beasts of burden, show a little tact in dealing with them, asserting your authority when there is really need of doing so, and using common sense when difficulties do arise, you can get on quite well even in long journeys of hundreds of miles. 27

Many European travellers found that by following Hine’s advice they received service above the ordinary, as well as respect from their porters. Hine himself had no trouble with his Likoma porters during his short safari in September 1893, nor did he on his long journey to Masasi in 1901 when his porters were Unangu Christians. 28 In 1876 when Wilson of the CMS discharged his Nyamwezi porters at Hambu, he writes that they bid the missionaries a “most affectionate adieux.” Later, some of the same porters were met in a grain caravan going to the coast, and “... stopped and shook hands with us, and seemed much pleased to see us.” Discipline does not seem to have been much of a problem; at least Wilson does not mention any major incidents. Of the brave “human donkeys” who pulled the carts loaded with steel boat sections to Lake Tanganyika for the LMS, not one had deserted when


27 John E. Hine, Days Gone By (London, 1924), 275.

28 Hine, Days Gone By, 130, 175.
the caravan finally arrived at Ujiji. CMS missionary Mrs. Watt tells more than one story of how her husband's life was saved by their porters, and how she wept over the death of one of their men.29

A harsher attitude, evident in both words and action, was probably more typical of European caravan leaders. When new to East Africa in 1876, the CMS "hero" Mackay wrote, "To be every day at the mercy of a few hundred half savage porters, who are absolutely self willed, and whom one can control in no other way except occasionally through their stomachs — is the real difficulty of African travel." Eleven years later his approach to dealing with porters had not changed much. When departing Bagamoyo in 1887 he dealt with demands for more pay from his porters by making "violent threats."30 Those who professed a preference for more gentle methods still frequently resorted to violence. Even the comparatively gentle Dodgshun was not exempt. At Kirasa in September, 1878, he used his stick and shot through the roof of a hut to get his men out to work. From then on he found himself in disputes with the pagazi "almost daily." Swann of the LMS assaulted a drunk porter whom he believed had insulted his wife, the justification being that an example had to be made for its deterrent effect. In general he was not averse to such methods to control porters whom he considered were not sufficiently respectful towards Europeans.31 French-Sheldon acted the paternalistic "master" with her porters after an early "mutiny" was suppressed at gun-point. Standing on a box, she heard cases from porters who brought up grievances. But flogging was still imposed as she thought necessary.32


30 Mackay to Wright, Mpwapwa, 14 Oct., 1876, CMS CA6/016; Mackay, Diary, 19 Apr., 1887, Bagamoyo, CMS CA6/016.

31 Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 82-3, 16 & 29 Sept., 1878; Swann, Fighting the Slave Hunters, 152-3.

A lengthy analysis of what she considered to be the correct method for dealing with porters, in which violence had its place, is given by Mrs. Watt. It was her opinion that very few European travellers who journeyed into the interior of Africa with "a native caravan" were not "greatly tried, at times by the insubordination of their porters." She considered the issue of discipline and how to deal with "an aggressive spirit of disobedience" to be an important matter. Effective discipline would, she felt, only be established through the use of measures which would, in the event of the likelihood of rebellion, "nip it in the bud." One example of a missionary caravan leader who she considered adopted an entirely reasonable standard in this matter was Bishop Hannington, who, she wrote, "... found it necessary ... to snatch firebrands from the camp fire and hurl them at the recalcitrant porters, who obstinately refused to take up their loads and move out of camp ..." Another example was the (unnamed) missionary, "much liked by the porters," who "often raised his toe to propel a native towards the task which he had refused to perform." Mrs. Watt believed, after witnessing one such incident, that the two porters involved "evidently considered that the chastisement was just, and the administration of it ... quite natural."

She then quotes an interesting (uncited) document to support her case that the occasional use of violence against porters was perfectly acceptable. This was "a printed leaflet of recommendations to Missionaries" distributed by the CMS in the early 1880s to those about to work in Africa, which contained suggestions on how to act towards "the natives" in different circumstances. One heading in the leaflet was "Punishments." In this section was written: "Stopping men's pay is not much good as the negro does not look forward. Stopping their 'posho' ... when not actually on the march, and flogging in extreme cases are best." According to Mrs. Watt these recommendations were only "temporarily adopted." As an old African hand of twenty-five years she realized that you could not stop

33 Watt, *In the Heart*, 96-102.
34 Watt, *In the Heart*, 96-9.
35 Quoted in Watt, *In the Heart*, 99.
rations for the porters on whom your own life and property depended.36 Besides, it was a “heartless and cruel” suggestion. Nor was flogging recommended by her, despite its popularity among many European travellers in East Africa as a means of maintaining discipline while on a journey. Mrs. Watt believed that flogging had “an obdurating and degrading effect upon the character of the native, making him more sullen, revengeful and treacherous ...” (not to mention the degrading effect on the European who ordered it!). Instead, she recommended, “The short, sharp, though somewhat blustering punishment ... which comes momentarily and expectedly in the very nick of time.” Such a punishment had “a telling effect upon the offender;” whereas flogging would destroy the traveller’s reputation among the Africans and not improve them, either.37 From the missionary point of view, it was Mrs. Watt’s belief that: “The man who can administer a brisk and righteous reprimand to a native one minute, and be just the same cheery, joyful master, father and friend the next, is the man who has an ever open door into the heart of the African savage.”38

No doubt Mrs. Watt would have supported Thomson who, in an account reading like a story from Boys’ Own, in which the great white explorer suppresses single handedly a potential rebellion, describes his “conquest” of his Waungwana porters. This story can be seen in the context of the “conditioning” of European readers of African travel accounts to “accept a particular kind of relationship between the two sets of peoples,” meaning Africans and Europeans.39 There are often distortions in such accounts, meant as attempts to meet the prevailing patriotic, racial and class attitudes of the nineteenth century readership. For the labour historian, the play to such attitudes may indicate a misrepresentation of real power.

36 Most other European travellers came to the same conclusion. See Wolf, Central African Diaries, 117, 14 July, 1879. Exceptions were Burton and CMS missionary Gordon. See Burton, Lake Regions of Central Africa, 432; Gordon to Lang, Msalala, 5 Nov., 1883, CMS G3A6/01.

37 Watt, In the Heart, 100-1.

38 Watt, In the Heart, 102.

relationships between European travellers and their porters. It might also represent merely an exaggeration of the actual language of authority. When in Manda, Uguha, in January, 1880, Thomson was faced with a strike organized the previous night by all 29 porters over his decision to travel into what they believed was cannibal country near the Lualaba river. According to Thomson, he unbuckled his belt and, without warning, struck left, right and centre at the sleeping men, and drove them out of camp with their loads. A few days later, at Makalumbi, six days down the Lukuga river, there were more protests. The explorer wrote, "... my men came in a body, headed by Makatubu, [a headman] and declared that they were determined not to go any further — that I was just forcing them along like donkeys to the Manyema, who would murder and eat them. In this determination they were firm, and neither threats nor promises could move them from the position they had taken up." After a series of quarrels a compromise was reached in which the explorer gave up his plan to reach the Lualaba, and the porters agreed to take a shorter route through Urua and then south east to Iendwe on the south west side of Lake Tanganyika to rejoin the main body of the expedition.

When the local chief placed obstacles in the way of departure and failed to provide a guide, the porters again protested. Thomson refused to listen:

... I was now roused to such a state of excitement that I vowed I would compel them to march though I had to shoot one of them as an example. I therefore ordered the men out, and told them to pick up their loads. No one stirred. I unbuckled my belt, and walking up to one I pointed to his load. Nobody spoke, and he did not move. With all the strength in me I brought the belt down upon his bare back. This made him wince, but it required another of the same before he obeyed me. I did not require to repeat the cure with the others. They shouldered their burdens, and in a sullen procession moved off towards the river.

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40 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 104-5. For further go-slows and protests on this section of the journey see ibid., 106-8.

41 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 114.

42 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 114-5.

43 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 115-6. More physical confrontations occurred before Thomson’s "conquest" was complete. See ibid., 116-8.
This was an extreme case: Thomson was one of the more humane European caravan leaders in East Africa, and was most critical of those who used excessive force. He was successful in preventing desertions throughout the RGS expedition, and there was only one death of a porter, a remarkably low figure. Nevertheless, his reliance on "the short, sharp, though somewhat blustering punishment" recommended by Mrs. Watt is clear.

Mrs. Watt tells us quite a lot about the attitudes of the paternalists on the question of discipline. Karl Weule, who was perhaps a little more enlightened than the average German soldier or colonial official in 1905, would probably have agreed with her to some extent, although he started off holding different views. "One thing ... which I absolutely fail to understand is the furious fits of rage to which every white man who has lived long in the country appears to be subject," he wrote soon after arriving in German East Africa. Then he qualified this statement, saying, "I cannot judge for the present whether life is really impossible without thrashing people — but I hope it is not the case." After some time in the colony he decided that a little corporal punishment was not such a bad thing after all.

One of the majority of the white men prone to "furious fits of rage" was Edvard Gleerup. In April 1886 his small party was travelling alone from Urambo towards the coast — the large ivory caravan which they had accompanied had left before them. He ordered his porters to keep close together because of the danger from bandits. But his people ignored him and some went ahead. He wrote:

Sick and nervous as I was, I was seized by an uncontrollable anger. A big, unpleasant carrier ... threw his load to the ground and fled. I seized a heavy club from one of the other carriers and threw it after him with all the power at my command, but he bent over; the club whistled just above his head and fortunately did not hit him.

44 E.g., Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 191.


Judging from the words of travellers such as Weule and Gleerup, there was some ambivalence about the use of violence as a means of imposing discipline. But those in what I call the “authoritarian school” had no qualms whatsoever about using violence to impose their will on their porters. Decle wrote of his march from Ujiji to Tabora in mid 1893: “... it is a pleasure to look back and remember that I was obeyed to the letter. My Wangwana soon learnt that they had to obey as well as the others. Of course I had to commence by using ‘kiboko’; but after a short time this was unnecessary, and I had only to give an order for it to be obeyed at once.” More extreme were the views of Carl Peters, who aimed to “... carry out a thorough physical authority over the porter element ...” using his Somali *askari* as his agents. He continues: “Such African masses of men can only be kept in control by a determination uncompromisingly to carry out one’s will in the teeth of all opposition.”

Ewart Grogan was of a similar mind. He declared himself “a great believer in the Germans’ African methods,” which were, he thought, “not restricted by the ignorant babblings of the professional philanthropist,” as he believed British officials in South East Africa were. Like Peters, Grogan did not just theorize, but put his beliefs into daily action. One example should suffice here. While in the Rwanda area in 1898, Grogan and Sharp’s Manyema porters were continuing to resist, despite the harsh punishments meted out. After two of the men were flogged for a petty theft in the presence of some of the local Tutsi, about thirty of the porters attempted to desert. The response of the two British was to threaten them with loaded weapons, and then to attempt to murder the “ringleader” as he disappeared.

48 Lionel Decle, *Three Years in Savage Africa* (London, 1898), 321. Decle’s clear approval of corporal punishment for Africans is expressed in *Three Years*, 203. A *kiboko* is a hippopotamus hide whip. For its frequent use during the German colonial period see Juhani Koponen, *Development For Exploitation: German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania, 1884-1914* (Helsinki and Hamburg, 1994), 360-6.


51 Ewart S. Grogan and Arthur H. Sharp, *From the Cape to Cairo: The First Traverse of Africa From South to North* (London, 1900), 101. This book contains a litany of racist invective and accounts of brutality well beyond even the contemporary standards of the decades of high imperialism.
porters were then brought back to camp along with their leader, who was luckily unharmed, the bullet going through his fez.52

The murder of resisting porters by European caravan leaders may have been more common than the evidence suggests. While in Usagara Mackay shot at his porters, wounding four of them, as they were deserting after a protracted dispute. He then defended himself from a summons issued by Consul Kirk after the porters lodged a complaint in Zanzibar on the grounds that he had no choice given the “mutiny” of his men and the possible loss of CMS property, and that Kirk was overstepping his consular authority. The charges were eventually dropped on payment of MTS200 compensation to the wounded porters by the CMS agent in Zanzibar, Smith MacKenzie and Co.53 Stanley had two porters executed for desertion during the Emin Pasha Expedition. Others were sentenced to death but their lives were spared.54 The British scientist J. E. S. Moore regarded desertion as a capital offence, and when some of his porters disappeared near Lake Kivu, he requested the local chief to “catch or kill” any of them found in the district. The tone of his writings suggest he would not have considered such an attitude unusual or extreme; he even found it hard to understand why the English were reputed to be kali sana (very fierce) as employers in Ujiji, and found it so difficult to recruit porters there.55 Peters on one occasion ordered the murder of two

52 Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 122-3. In April, 1888, near the Ituri river, Stanley shot at two Waungwana porters “as they were not working as well as they might,” grazing the heel of one man. See A. J. Monteney Jephson, The Diary of A. J. Monteney Jephson: Emin Pasha Relief Expedition 1887-1889 ed. Dorothy Middleton (Cambridge, 1969), 235, 12 Apr., 1888.


55 J. E. S. Moore, To the Mountains of the Moon (London, 1901), 140, 161-2, 169. Thirty three porters deserted between Ujiji and the south end of Lake Kivu.
deserters, whose bodies were to be thrown into the Tana river and, on another, abandoned a porter unable to carry his load because of tuberculosis. Writing afterwards the German commented that the unusually load roaring of lions on the night in question, "left no doubt as to the poor fellows fate."56

Many caravan leaders availed themselves of insurance against troublesome porters in the form of askari who, during the early colonial period, were sometimes supplied by the German authorities. This change in the use of askari from a defensive to coercive police force paralleled the change in the balance of power between caravans and communities along the routes, outlined in chapter eight. As mentioned above, Peters relied on his Somali askari to discipline his porters. Once at Ujiji, Grogan and Sharp were provided with soldiers by the Germans "to avoid any trouble with the men." Authority in Fortie's caravan of 1902 was backed up by "guards armed with long muzzle-loaders." Their function was clearly demonstrated when one of them shot and killed a porter deserting with a box of copper coins. The porters themselves were unarmed. Weule's caravan similarly included askari, although in this case protection from attack was a major consideration as he was travelling in areas very recently disturbed during the Maji Maji rebellion.57

Floggings or summary beatings were resorted to by almost all European caravan leaders, whether paternalist or authoritarian in outlook, as well as Arab and African traders.58 Stokes appears to have been an exception. Burton "cooled" arguing porters with a "long pole," and on another occasion had "disorderly" porters "summarily flogged." Speke wrote "... I often had occasion to award 100 and even 150 lashes to my men for stealing ..." During the journey of the caravan of Bishop Steere of the UMCA from Lindi to Masasi in 1876 a


57 Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 95; Marius Fortie, Black and Beautiful (London, 1938), 27-8, 52, 101; Weule, Native Life in East Africa.

58 The paternalists do not mention flogging in their writings as often as the authoritarians. Whether this was because of a reluctance to discuss the subject, or because in reality corporal punishment was not often used by them to impose discipline, is difficult to decide. I suspect a little of both. For evidence of Arabs who flogged their porters see Decle, Three Years, 314.
Zanzibari porter was convicted of stealing and sentenced to a flogging, “fastened to the wheel of the cart.” Other floggers included Vice-consul Smith who, travelling on the Kilwa route, punished a porter wishing to break his contract with “fifty blows with a stick,” administered by Smith’s cook. In 1878 LMS missionaries gave “the usual ten strokes” for petty thefts in their caravan. CMS missionaries in the 1894 caravan to Buganda resorted to public floggings to punish and prevent thefts. Peters habitually had resisting porters chained and flogged. Grogan and Sharp imposed discipline with a hippo whip, while Fortie resorted to corporal punishment on occasion.

Stanley was an ardent flogger, with ideas on discipline and punishment probably beyond customary views and practice, as well as contemporary European standards. He acted accordingly throughout his African career. In one incident, in April, 1871, he had his cook so severely flogged for pilfering that the man’s companions, alarmed by the harshness of the punishment, aided his desertion. In July, 1875, a porter was murdered by a fellow, Fundi Rehani. Rather than have Fundi Rehani executed according to the recommendation of the “court” set up to judge the matter, Stanley decided that he should be given 200 lashes, then be chained until he could be delivered to the Sultan in Zanzibar. Others involved in the fight which led to the murder were given 100 lashes each. During the Emin Pasha Expedition’s march from Matadi to Leopoldville in April, 1887 “a few examples” were made “by whipping in incorrigible loiterers.” This set the tone for the next two years and eight


60 Smith, “Explorations in Zanzibar Dominions”, 106; Wolf, Central African Diaries, 49, 12 Aug., 1878, also 24, 27 Apr., 1878, 279-80, 14 Sep., 1881; A. B. Lloyd, In Dwarf Land and Cannibal Country (London, 1900), 92-3; Peters, New Light, 62-3; Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 96, 103; Fortie, Black and Beautiful, 58, 100. For further examples see Livingstone, Last Journals, 69, 7 July, 1866, 456, 30 Aug., 1872, 465, 3 Nov., 1872, 488, 14 Feb., 1873; Cameron, Across Africa, I, 241-2, 298; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 114, 155-58: 193; Thomson, Through Masai Land, 57; Moloney, With Captain Stairs to Katanga, 40-1.

months of the expedition, in which "wholesale flogging" was the norm. Examples are scattered through the accounts of European expedition members. In one case starving porters received 180 lashes for being absent searching for food, in another personal servants were given up to fifty lashes for stealing maize from a tent. At Fort Bodo sentries caught sleeping were sentenced to twenty five lashes. A second offence was punished with up to fifty lashes and extra duties, while fines of MT$ 5 or MT$10, in addition, were imposed for third offences.62

It is possible to compare European attitudes and willingness to flog in late pre-colonial and early colonial East Africa and contemporary standards in the British army and in colonial contexts elsewhere.63 In the British West Indies a Colonial Office Order in Council of 1824 limited the number of lashes permitted in the Slave Law for work place discipline to thirty nine lashes.64 This was modelled on the "biblical limit" of thirty nine strokes (Deut. 25: 2-3; 2 Cor. 11: 24), which was also apparently observed in the plantations in the Deep South and in British India. In Hong Kong the Magistrates Ordinance of 1862 gave magistrates the power to order up to two public or private whippings in the case of male offenders. Each whipping was to be a maximum of thirty six blows of the rattan cane. No racial distinction was made in the law, but in practice only Chinese and other Asians were flogged. At the Supreme Court level an ordinance of 1865 gave the court the powers to sentence persons convicted of crimes involving offensive weapons to up to three whippings (in addition to the prison sentence) of up to fifty strokes each. This was restricted to male offenders.


64 Mary Turner, Paper presented at the International Conference on Masters and Servants in History, York University, Toronto, April 1996.
offenders. There was no racial distinction in law, but when in 1866 the Court started to sentence Europeans to whipping there was a major outcry in the colonial community. Before the 1860s, flogging with the rattan cane had been the main punishment in the magistrate's court, with sentences of up to 100 strokes. This was often compared with the practice in China, in which people sometimes received up to 800 strokes. In the British army the number of lashes of the cat-o'-nine-tails was set at fifty in 1847, following the death of a private soldier after he received 150 lashes. In 1871 the maximum was reduced to 25, and in 1881 flogging was abolished in the army except in military prisons. In African colonial armies flogging was retained for much longer, was used frequently and harshly during the 1890s and early 1900s, and survived until the Second World War. The number of lashes permitted by military regulation in the West Africa Frontier Force during the late 1890s was limited to 36 for stealing and a lesser number for other offences. The same maximum was legislated for the WAFF by an Ordinance of the Gold Coast Government in 1900. In practice corporal punishment was meted out more often and more severely than mandated. In East Africa during the late pre-colonial period and first years of colonial rule floggings were only meted out to Africans and most floggings of porters appear to have been in the order of ten to thirty lashes, which would not have been considered excessive in British colonies. The Germans were noted, however, for the frequency with which they resorted to corporal punishment, and a legal limitation on corporal punishment to twenty five strokes on one occasion was not introduced until 1896. As noted in chapter six, legislation in Zanzibar in 1894 limited the number of lashes to thirty. But brutality far beyond these standards was not uncommon.

65 Personal communication from Chris Munn.
66 Killingray, “The Rod of Empire”, 203.
67 Killingray, “The Rod of Empire”, 203.
68 Koponen, Development For Exploitation, 337-8, 359-66.
69 See the discussion p. 185.
At least one European traveller believed that porters themselves preferred flogging to other forms of punishment, such as fines.70 Thomson writes that he tried to get fines substituted for flogging when misdemeanours occurred. His Waungwana argued against it, saying that flogging was a punishment they were used to, whereas fines were an unknown thing to them. A flogging was over in a minute, but fines would mean they would travel for months only to return without wages, which would be fined away. A strike, precipitated in part by fining, during which a mass desertion was planned and then rehearsed as a bargaining counter, caused Thomson to back down. It was only when he promised to drop his insistence on fines as a form of punishment, and reintroduce corporal punishment, that the porters relented. They quickly and “triumphantly” returned to camp, picked up their abandoned loads, and set off on the march again.71 We can see in this dispute once again the successful defence of customary working conditions and wages, both so central to Tanzanian porters.

Other punishments were imposed by some. Smith preferred to humiliate rather than flog quarrelling porters by making “one of the two to come and sit close to myself till his temper was cooled ...” Other offending porters were punished by making them carry the heaviest load — Smith’s tent.72 Stanley used one room of his house at Kwihara as a jail in 1872, confining his “incorrigibles” without food for 40 hours when he deemed it necessary.73 Many travellers and traders whether African or foreign used slave chains to discipline and make examples of deserters and other recalcitrant porters.74 The slave chain was one of

70 Killingray, “The Rod of Empire”, 207, notes that some evidence exists for a preference by Africans for flogging instead of fines and extra duties in colonial armies.

71 Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, I, 221-5.


73 Bennett, Stanley’s Despatches, 40.

Stanley’s tools throughout his African career. He was so pleased with the effectiveness of chaining recalcitrant porters during his first journey that he wrote that he would “never travel in Africa again without a good long chain.”75 Deserters arrested at the coast were often handed over to the Sultan and imprisoned, or sentenced to labour in a chain gang for short periods and fined.76 Colonial conquest and the establishment of German stations in the interior in the 1890s, with their local police forces, meant that European caravan leaders still up-country could hand over deserters to colonial officials for three to six months hard labour on a chain gang.77 Grogan and Sharp were particularly sadistic. These two travellers continually had difficulties due to the passive resistance of their porters. The latter often lagged behind the Europeans, delaying their arrival at camp until two or three hours after their employers had reached it, thereby, according to the two Britons, hoping to avoid campsite duties. Grogan and Sharp devised the following punishment to deal with such incidents:

We allowed them half-an-hour’s margin, and every one who arrived after that, without having obtained permission in the morning for sickness or some valid reason, was made to stand with his load on his head in the middle of the camp until sunset, or as long as was deemed sufficient for his particular case. We found this must more effectual as a punishment than flogging or fines ...78

One only needs to remember that the porters’ loads were at least sixty pounds, that they would probably be standing in the hot sun for several hours, and that they had already completed a long day’s march. No wonder Grogan and Sharp found this torture effective.

75 Bennett, Stanley’s Despatches, 61, 62, 63 (quote), 64; Stanley, How I Found Livingstone, 116. Stanley did, in fact, chain porters on his next expedition. See Stanley & Neame, Exploration Diaries, 37, 30 Dec., 1874, 50, 24 Jan., 1875, 55, 6 Feb., 1875, 86-7, 4 & 5 July, 1875; Stanley, Through the Dark Continent, 1, 209; McLynn, Stanley, 137.


77 Moore, To the Mountains of the Moon, 162; Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 103. Captured deserters were also returned to the coast to be dealt with by company authorities there. See French-Sheldon, Sultan to Sultan, 106; Decle, Three Years, 496-7, for a case in British East Africa.

78 Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 103-4.
Whatever the style of caravan management adopted by European, African or Arab travellers and traders, an experienced, efficient and cooperative headman was essential if porters were to be controlled, disciplined and productive. Many headmen made names for themselves during the years of colonial conquest. One was the Zanzibari, Omari bin Omari who possessed, from his British employer's point of view, all the right qualifications:

In Zanzibar he was a person of some importance; the men respected his direct speech and his big imposing form, and I never saw a porter or any of the men disobey or question an order from him ... in the more remote interior, African travel depends as largely upon the head man as does an army upon its sargeants. It is the native head man, and the native head man only, who can tell you the real condition of the porters ... whether they have food and shelter, and anything else it may be necessary to know. It is the head man who can work the whole caravan into good humour towards the European leaders ... it is only the head man who can explain the necessities of the case from a native point of view, and get the natives themselves to believe that the Europeans are neither fools nor playthings.79

It is not surprising that authority was imposed more effectively during the early colonial period than before. Prior to colonial rule porters had more options which they frequently exercised, and the balance of power was not so tilted towards imperialist interests. But whatever the options available to them, porters as workers and then as colonized Africans resisted, and used what power and opportunities they had.

**Hidden and Individual Forms of Resistance**

Porters struggled to maintain control over the work process and defended themselves against dangerous working conditions, abusive authority, and violations of custom, the working norms which were embedded in caravan culture. Protest took several forms which can be categorized as “hidden,” as well as more open collective expressions such as strikes and go-slows.80 Some types of porter resistance relate strongly to those described by Charles

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79 Moore, *To the Mountains of the Moon*, 116-7.

van Onselen in his work on migrant labourers in the Rhodesian gold mines during the early decades of this century. In Freund’s words:

The migrant workers to the Rhodesian gold fields in van Onselen’s study are involved in a large range of activities that he considers to be resistant to capital, including desertion, slacking and destruction of tools, disguised forms of strikes (as well as some actual ones) and shrewd ability to operate between different employers.

Such worker resistance in fact reflects a kind of worker consciousness. In addition to some of the activities listed by Freund, particularly desertion, slacking, and strikes, porters resisted by creating a work culture with aspects of resistance within it, feigning illness to protest against impossible conditions, manipulating employer confusion over individual porter identities, stealing from the caravan, and using drugs and alcohol. This section deals with hidden and individual forms of protest, particularly fraud and theft. Because desertion was so pervasive I shall treat it separately.

Resistance often took the form of a continual struggle to assert autonomy against the will of the caravan leader. Nyamwezi porters hired by Burton to carry his machila on the return journey from Ujiji to Unyanyembe at first “worked well, then ... fell off.” Asserting their independence and using a repertoire of tactics to control the work process they held the upper hand until the explorer threatened force:

In the mornings when their names were called they hid themselves in the huts, or they squatted pertinaciously near the camp-fires, or they rushed ahead of the party. On the road they hurried forward, recklessly dashing the manchil, without pity or remorse, against stock and stone. A man allowed to lag behind never appeared again on that march, and more than once they attempted to place the hammock on the ground and to strike for increase of wages, till brought to a sense of their duty by a sword-point applied to their ribs. They would halt for an hour to boil their sweet potatoes, but if I required the delay of five minutes, or the advance of five yards, they became half mad with fidgetiness ...

Grant described his Nyamwezi porters (who eventually deserted) as

... frank and amiable on first acquaintance ... but soon trying to get the upper hand, refusing to make the ring-fence round camp, showing sulks, making halts, or going short marches, treating with perfect contempt any message sent them even to sit apart from your tent ...


83 Burton, Lake Regions, 384-5.

84 James Augustus Grant, A Walk Across Africa (Edinburgh, 1864), 42.
According to one missionary, Waunguana porters on the march were “always trying to shirk their work” and “perpetually concocting dodges” to gain increased rations. On Hore’s journey to Mpwapwa in 1878 the 150 porters expressed their “discontent” several times, with demands for more food and shorter marches. The missionary, however, was understanding of their protests, given “their endurance and wonderful spirits,” and their “rough, faithfulness and loyalty to their work,” and in consideration of the extremely difficult working conditions.

One stratagem attempted by some of Peters’ carriers to avoid harsh conditions was to disappear at the beginning of the day, and reappear at the next camp without their loads. It was discovered that the loads had been left behind at the previous camp. These porters did not desert, but instead protested by not carrying the loads allocated to them. In effect this was a strike. Peters responded by having some of the offending porters chained and flogged. He informed the porters that there was now in effect a scale of punishments for those caught deserting or throwing down their loads, some of which were carried out on the spot. He also instituted a system of discipline to ensure early starts each day and record-keeping to match men with their burdens.

Another tactic was to feign illness. An example was noted by Grogan in 1898:

One of our boys ... announced [on the march north of Ujiji] that he had smallpox; this was rather alarming, so I had him stripped, but could find no signs of the disease. As we did not want to give our boys any excuse for bolting or grumbling, a medical board of three headmen sat on the case, and having unanimously agreed that he was lying, we subjected him to the hippo-whip cure; next day he and his mate were not forthcoming ...

Presumably, this means that the men concerned deserted, so Grogan’s attempt to avoid this outcome failed.

85 Wilson & Felkin, Uganda, 1, 15-16.
86 Hore, Tanganyika, 34-5.
87 Peters, New Light, 61-3.
88 Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 96.
Another form of deception occurred when Waungwana porters fraudulently attempted to collect wages at the coast. In October, 1879, one Fundi Athman arrived at the Zanzibar office of Boustead, Ridley and Co., agent for the LMS, bearing a letter from CMS missionary Last. According to the letter, Fundi informed Last that he had arrived in Mpwapwa after having been robbed while serving as a mailman for the LMS, after earlier service in a caravan to Ujiji. His three companions were killed and his package of letters and pay note had been lost, but he claimed fourteen months pay. While investigations were underway in Zanzibar Fundi disappeared. It was discovered that he had never, in fact, been associated with the LMS.\(^8^9\) Another case was more easily detected by Boustead Ridley and Co., as explained in a letter to Southon:

> We may mention that Swedi holds the pay tickets of several men who have apparently stayed at Urambo and elsewhere. It is however, said that the men were in Zanzibar, and as we always prefer to pay the men personally ... we told him to produce the men, and as he brought two different sets of men who had probably never been out of Zanzibar and did not know the names on their tickets — we told him we should put him under the gun if he tried to cheat us again. He now waits until the right men arrive in Zanzibar.\(^9^0\)

A more sophisticated dodge attempted by dishonest porters was to claim a wage ticket from missionaries at two different stations, each missionary unaware of the other's actions, then to give one ticket to another man who would at the coast pretend to be the porter in question, and with it claim outstanding wages. The ruse would succeed when the real porter subsequently appeared at the coast with his ticket to claim his wages. In the face of a genuine ticket and correct identity the employer would have no choice but to pay up for a second time, unless a connection between the two men could be established.\(^9^1\) Perhaps the most common method of false representation with the aim of securing unearned wages occurred before departure of a caravan, when porters presented themselves two or more times


\(^9^0\) Muxworthy to Southon, Zanzibar, 6 Jan., 1880, LMS 3/4/D.

\(^9^1\) For examples see Boustead Ridley & Co. to Southon, Zanzibar, 6 Feb., 1880, LMS 3/4/D.
for their advance pay, playing on the naïveté of newly arrived Europeans. This was the experience of Moloney who wrote: “Thanks to my ignorance of Swahili, several pagazi presented themselves at least twice for their pay, and when taxed for the offence, took refuge in a number of aliases that a London pickpocket would have envied.”92 The more seasoned Stairs believed that “A great number of carriers have no other trade except to sign up in order to get their advance pay, then ... go and hide in the swarming hovels of Bagamoyo.”93

The theft was another form of hidden resistance which occurred from time to time, although it conflicted with the code of honour of professional porters, both Nyamwezi and Waungwana.94 Nevertheless, Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari wrote: “The leader of the caravan must keep careful watch on his porters, or they will steal people’s goods without the owners’ permission.”95 If porters stole from their caravan it was often because they were starving, as was the case when Speke and Grant’s caravan crossed Ugogo. Food shortages caused the porters to complain and resist:

The spirit of our men sank, and a deep, gloomy silence hung over camp, when we had no grain, and continuous days of bad sport with our rifles. Not a man would obey orders; they refused to march, and discipline had to be upheld in several instances by inflicting corporal punishment for the crime of stealing cloth to buy food.96

More systematic pilfering occurred in some caravans, particularly of beads, which could be taken in quantities small enough to evade detection. One European traveller lost sixteen loads of beads in this fashion, and another two loads out of thirty.97 Sometimes deserters stole caravan goods. A porter deserted from a CMS caravan taking a load of cloth and a gun, escaping into grass three metres high. Mrs. Watt mentions the case of a Kamba porter who

94 See chapter 5.
96 Grant, *A Walk*, 32.
deserted after failing to break open a box. When forty inexperienced Zanzibari porters deserted from another caravan seventeen loads were lost.98 A more sophisticated variant was the propensity of some Manyema carriers “when in a country of thieves ... to conceal a load of cloth during the night; in the morning they arrive in great distress and say that a load has been stolen.”99 During the early colonial period the response of many caravan leaders to the possibility of theft of caravan goods was to pack loads in boxes which were chained together. This had the added advantage of deterring desertion while on the march.100

**Desertion**

Desertion should be considered a special category of resistance because it was by far the most common expression of protest throughout the period under discussion. The caravan which arrived at its destination with the same porters that it left with was a very rare one. Desertion was usually a continuous trickle, especially in the vicinity of the porters’ homes. *Waungwana* and Swahili porters were more likely to desert within easy range of the coast, so that caravan leaders had to be particularly vigilant during the first week or two on journeys inland. Sore muscles and sometimes unaccustomed hard work were added incentives, as a traveller wrote in his diary after recording sixteen desertions during the first week out of Bagamoyo:

> The most dangerous moment for a caravan is this: still unused to their loads, the men become stiff. their morale is affected, and they desert. It takes not less than a fortnight’s march for the carriers’ muscles to become supple while remaining firm. But it’s a thankless task to draw this agility out of them. I exhaust every means in my power trying to coax things along. I’ve strictly forbidden that the

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99 Grogan and Sharp, *From the Cape*, 120-1. However, the possibility remains that the carriers were speaking the truth: Grogan does not say whether the missing loads were recovered. For a similar case see Decle, *Three Years*, 474. Other cases of theft by porters from their employers are mentioned in Wolf, *Central African Diaries*, 189-90, 2 June, 1880, 193, 6 July, 1880; Griffith to Thompson, Ujiji, 21 Oct., 1882, LMS 4/5/B; Decle, *Three Years*, 483.

100 Fortie, *Black and Beautiful*, 27. For a Nyamwezi painted gourd depicting porters with chained loads see Wilhelm Blohm, *Die Nyamwezi; Gesellschaft und Weltbild* (Hamburg, 1933), Tafel X, Abbild 142.
men should be beaten, harsh words are prohibited, our stages are short, and I'm generous in the distribution of cloth. I hope, in this way, to advance slowly for ten more stages.  

Porters most often disappeared in ones, twos, and threes — but there were many cases of mass desertions of most or the whole of a caravan’s labour force. Porters quit for a variety of reasons, not all directly related to wages and conditions. Sometimes it was for political or religious reasons — the failure of the caravan leader to propitiate an important chief or local cult, for example. Porters saw such failures as a direct threat to their own well being further down the road. Other cases resulted from obvious dangers ahead — perhaps war, famine, or disease. Desertion was one of the easiest ways for porters to protect themselves, and at the same time force caravan leaders to meet customary standards of rationing, rest days, work load, payment, discipline and other matters. As Harries writes of Mozambican migrant labourers in South Africa, “What was considered desertion by employers was a traditional mechanism of survival to men ... brought up to see mobility as a traditional means of coping with adversity.”  

Harries’ Amatonga tramped from work site to work site, taking advantage of their mobility to defend fair labour practices and improve working conditions.  

Porters in Tanzania were even better equipped to use their mobility as a collective bargaining tool, as great mobility was the very essence of their work. Both porters and employers were well aware of the bargaining strength of the former, hence the mere threat of mass desertion, whether intended or not, could have the desired effect.

Tales of desertion occur in virtually all accounts of East African travel. Thomson’s safari to Lake Tanganyika is a notable exception. Burton wrote that on both expeditions in

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102 Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910* (Portsmouth N.H., London, Johannesburg, 1994), 42. Stichter writes more generally, “Too often the scholarly work on labor migration has ignored the dimension of labor protest, while the work on labor protest has had difficulty in coming to grips with the impact of migration or temporary proletarianization ... entering or leaving the labor market can be in itself one of the main responses workers have to the terms and conditions of their employment.” See Sharon Stichter, *Migrant Laborers* (Cambridge, 1985), 3-4.


Tanzania during the years 1857 to 1859 “we found ... an unmitigated evil in the universal practice of desertion.” On the first expedition “... there was not, in the party of 80, an individual who did not at some time or other desert or attempt to desert us.” And on the second expedition, which “fared not a whit better: we find in it 123 desertions duly chronicled.” Coastal merchants also suffered from this problem: they “complain loudly of the ‘Pagazi’ ... these porters are prepaid $10 for the trip, and the proprietor congratulates himself if, after payment, only 15 per cent abscond.” Porters in Speke and Grant’s caravan were very quick to perceive the dangers of famine in Ugogo in 1860, and many decided the effort of marching on short rations to Unyanyembe was too much. Stanley did not have this experience of mass desertion during his first journey, but there was a steady loss of porters in Ugogo and between Kwihara in Unyanyembe and Ujiji. During his second journey about fifty porters out of 347 deserted during the twenty five days’ march to Mwapwa, and eighty nine by the time Urimei was reached, a month later. In April and May, 1873, Cameron’s caravan lost thirty eight porters during the first 250 kilometres’ march from the coast, and there were more individual desertions while passing through Ugogo. Many more porters abandoned the caravan between Kwihara and Ujiji later that year. A large Arab caravan met a few days from the coast was having similar difficulties. The French Geographical Society’s caravan led by Victor Giraud had a similar record. On the fourth or fifth day of the journey in 1882 five Ganda porters deserted, taking with them their

105 Richard F. Burton, Zanzibar, City, Island, and Coast (London, 1872), II, 294-5. He refers to the free porters as “undisciplinable,” while the slaves and ex-slaves were “apt to abscond.”

106 Burton, Zanzibar, II, 147.


108 Bennett, Stanley’s Despatches, 19, 50, 61; Simpson, Dark Companions, 116; Stanley & Neame, Exploration Diaries, 46, 16 Jan., 1875.

advance wages and their guns. From then on labour disputes recurred with regularity. Finally, in May, 1884, after a long journey to Lakes Bangweulu and Mweru, the caravan’s Zanzibar porters rebelled for the last time, leaving the Frenchman at Mpala on the west coast of Lake Tanganyika, and returned to Zanzibar. During the first years of German rule at Tanga it was a standing joke amongst Europeans that any German led caravan leaving for the interior would have to return to the coast the day after departure, the reason being the disappearance of three quarters of its porters.

It is not always possible to ascertain the reasons for particular desertions. Frequently, however, desertions occurred because of porters’ well founded fears, based on experience. In July, 1857, nine porters hired at Dutumi deserted Burton and Speke’s caravan in dread of being carried into slavery, an idea suggested to them by the Arab Sayf bin Salim. In 1861 Speke and Grant’s “Wezee” (Nyamwezi) porters deserted in Ugogo because they feared being attacked, so Grant believed, after a Gogo chief made threats if he was not satisfied with hongo payments. This happened again in the country north of Ukune on the road to Karagwe. Grant writes, “We no sooner heard ... the war-drum to collect the natives, and to intimidate our party into the settlement of the tax, than our porters would desert; and when the drums beat a ‘receipt’ ... and we were free to move ... our Wezee porters would get up a row with us, and demand more cloth ...” Sixty of Tippu Tip’s Nyamwezi porters disappeared when other porters of the caravan were attacked and killed in Riova’s, near Ukonongo. They had deserted and returned to Tabora out of fear.

110 Victor Giraud, Les lacs de L’Afrique Équatoriale (Paris, 1890), 51. Giraud writes that the Ganda looked down on the carrying of loads, claiming that they should be askari instead.

111 Giraud, Les lacs, 474-8, 509-519.

112 Oscar Baumann, Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle: Reisen und Forschungen der Massai-Expedition des deutschen Anti-sklaverei Komites in den Jahren 1891-1893 (Berlin, 1894), 8.

113 Burton, Lake Regions, 100-103.

114 Grant, A Walk, 22-3, 42, 121.

115 Tippu Tip, Maisha, 43-9 § 55-61. See the account in chapter 8.
Dodgshun and the trader, Broyon, hired porters to go to Mirambo’s. The porters of both Europeans deserted before the destination was reached, perhaps out of fear of the warriors of the powerful Nyamwezi chief, Nyungu ya Mawe, or because their preferred destination was Uyui. Von Wissman had sixteen of his thirty carriers desert south east of Lake Tanganyika. They had received half their wages in advance. New carriers were hired, but these too ran off after abandoning their loads, the cause being the proximity of a village with which they were in dispute. According to the Swahili trader Selemani bin Mwenye Chande, seven Nyamwezi porters deserted from his caravan in Usauwira (Usawira) beyond Ugala country. The reason was that Simba, the powerful local chief, had played his drums as the caravan arrived, frightening the porters who abandoned their loads. Porters were always terrified of marauding bands of Baraguyu (“Humba”) or Maasai warriors. Mrs. Watt reports one case in which her caravan came across the site of a previous Maasai attack on another caravan, the evidence being many human bones and the remains of the massacred travellers’ weapons. The next night twelve porters deserted with their rifles, although they were later brought back by Stuart Watt and six loyal men.

The war between Mirambo and the vbandlevba of Unyanyembe caused many porters to have great concerns for their security. The difficulty Cameron had in 1873 persuading his porters to advance west of Unyanyembe into territory disputed during the war has been discussed in chapter five. Cameron wrote “the pagazi declare they are afraid,” and that they “deserted at every opportunity” during this stage of the journey. They had good reason. A Bugandan caravan of seventy-five was blocked by Mirambo’s forces as they tried to leave

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116 Dodgshun to Mullens, Uyui, 8 Jan., 1879, LMS 2/1/A; Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 114; Norman R. Bennett, Mirambo of Tanzania 1840-1884 (New York, 1971), 89-90.


118 Harries, Swahili Prose Texts, 239.

119 Watt, In the Heart, 152-6.
Unyanyembe along a northern route. Only one man escaped to return to Unyanyembe.\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Waungwana} porters, co-religionists with the Unyanyembe Arabs, and frequently their slaves or clients — which placed them in opposition to Mirambo — were often in an awkward position when their missionary employers visited his territory, and consequently deserted in droves. “When my men heard I was going up Mirambos [sic] road to the lake [Lake Victoria], there was fear and trembling, for none of the men knew the road, and Mirambo is dreaded.” Stokes wrote. “I however stuck to my purpose of trying the new road up through Msalala. I named my day for starting, and just as I thought the evening of starting, I found about sixty of my porters deserted.”\textsuperscript{121} Desertions also occurred for the opposite reason, as many porters originated from Urambo or allied chiefdoms. Broyon’s porters, “natives of Mirambo,” deserted because the Swiss trader “would not pass through their country.”\textsuperscript{122} In another case, in August, 1878, the first White Fathers’ caravan into the interior reached the eastern borders of Unyamwezi. In the evening, as was usual, the \textit{kirangozi} addressed the assembled porters. He said: “Tomorrow, at Tura, we reach two roads: one goes to Tabora, the other to Uyui. The wazungu wish to take the first; we shall take the second. (Loud cheers). Each of you must throw down the white man’s load and follow me.” The following morning the porters took the wages owed to them from their loads and left the remaining goods — 250 loads — beside the path. In their ignorance and inexperience the missionaries had hired porters who were from chiefdoms allied with Mirambo and thus could not safely enter Unyanyembe. Their employers were left stranded until new porters could be found.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{120} Cameron, \textit{Across Africa}, I, 156-62, 171-177 (quotes 159, 172); Dillon to ?, 8 Oct., 1873, Unyanyembe. VLC 3/6 RGS.


\textsuperscript{122} Broyon to McGregor, Zanzibar, 1 Oct., 1879, LMS 2/3/D.

Desertion or the threat of desertion were also responses to poor wages, insufficient rations, violations of custom, and extreme brutality. The earliest known wage dispute in East African travel occurred in November 1849, during Krapf’s journey from the Rabai mission station near Mombasa to Ukambani. The conflict was precipitated by the arduous conditions experienced by the porters, their water supplies having run out. The first of the Swahili porters to become “restive,” according to Krapf, belligerently exclaimed: “Am I to receive only eight dollars for this journey?” Two weeks later the missionary wrote:

I passed a night of trouble. As my people knew that to-day we would reach Kivoi and that our journey was drawing to its close, they asked with the greatest insolence for an increase of pay; and now demanded thirteen instead of the eight dollars which had been agreed upon at Rabbai. They said that three dollars had been already consumed by their wives and children, and had been received in advance before leaving Rabbai; and now they insisted on receiving ten dollars more. Besides this they demanded all the ivory which Kivoi might give me in return for my presents. Should I refuse compliance, they threatened to abandon me forthwith ...

Krapf promised to yield to the porters “if the demand were recognized as a just one by the authorities at the coast;” the porters continued the journey.124 Insufficient rations or wages usually led to a steady stream of desertions. This was the case with an Arab caravan met by Burton and Speke led by Isa bin Hijji, who had insufficient cloth to buy food for porters and slaves.125 In another case, all the porters and servants of the French White Father missionaries in Ujiji deserted in April, 1879, because they were paid five doti per month with no posho.126 A mass desertion hit the first expedition into East Africa of the International African Association, representing the interests of Leopold II of Belgium and led by Lieutenant Cambier. Perpetual labour troubles beginning at Bagamoyo culminated when 300 porters deserted en masse over an outstanding wage claim.127 The 1877-9 LMS expedition to Ujiji lost their porters when they deserted en masse at Kirasa in January, 1878. The issue

124 Krapf, Travels, Researches, 288-9, 292-3.

125 Burton, Lake Regions, 153.


127 Bennett, Mirambo, 86. See also the case discussed in chapter 6 in which Nyamwezi porters hired by Murphy for Cameron’s expedition deserted “en masse” over the poor quality of their cloth wages.
was that their pay was to be docked for "losses and mutinies." As noted earlier the European concept of fining was an infringement of customary ideas about punishment. The pagazi "took offence" and returned to Zanzibar without rations, with only eleven under one headman remaining to continue their employment. By quitting the porters lost the pay owed to them, but they believed that if they stayed their wages would be threatened and their freedom of action conscribed if a system of fines was instituted for misdemeanours.128 Three months later the caravan lost several more porters whom Dodgshun described as "the laziest half dozen fellows we have experienced." However the missionary was at a loss to explain the desertion of some "good and trusty fellows" three weeks later, except to mention the "difficult work," and "perhaps an inborn tendency to idleness." Racial stereotypes were always handy if explanations for porter resistance were not readily available. During the remainder of the journey porters continued to abscond as the expedition struggled on to Ujiji.129 In 1898, the various gangs of porters employed by Grogan and Sharp showed their dislike of their employers' brutal methods by running away. On one occasion even the ten askari and cook disappeared, which gives some idea of the discipline meted out to Africans on this expedition!130

Although in some of the above cases the reason for the desertions is not clear, it is obvious that porters acted collectively as well as individually. The work culture of the caravan routes bound them together in defence of their common interests. This was despite the fact that carriers in a particular caravan were often of different ethnic origins, spoke different languages (although Kinyamwezi and Kiswahili were both lingua franca) came from far flung regions, and had different religious beliefs.


129 Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 63, 19-25 Apr., 1878, 66, 11-12 May, 1878, 69, 28 & 29 May, 1878; 114, Dodgshun to Mullens, Uyui, 8 Jan., 1879, LMS 2/1/A; Wolf, Central African Diaries, 19, 6 Apr., 1878, 27, 11 May, 1878, 30, 31 May, 1878.

130 Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 65, 99.
Deserters had several options open to them. Most probably returned home if it was not too far away. Others sought hire with caravans travelling in the region. Sometimes they joined private armies such as the rugaruga of Nyungu-ya-Mawe, who had taken up the cause of Msabila, the deposed chief of Unyanyembe, after the latter’s death in 1865. In Ugogo deserting porters were encouraged to remain in settlements to increase their population and augment their strength, although it is not clear how many did so or how they were assimilated. This could be a dangerous proposition, however, perhaps leading to enslavement. Many deserters probably hid in the bush for several days existing on whatever food they could find, rather than risking capture when entering a Gogo village.

Employers also had options, and throughout the period used various methods to prevent desertions and to punish and at the same time make examples of those who were caught. As noted above, a favourite device used to restrain recovered runaways in both African and European led caravans was the slave chain. Dodgshun wrote referring to a Nyamwezi caravan: "There were many pagazi, the first 20 in red clothes — nearly all had guns. 8 runaways were in chains — serve them right." Tipu Tip used similar methods, yoking together eight hundred Zaramo men who were rounded up after a mass desertion after the original Nyamwezi porters had deserted because of famine along the road. The porters of CMS missionary, J. Morton, deserted before he arrived in Unyanyembe in mid-1877. He thought it unusual enough to comment that "... instead of my absconding porters having

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133 Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujjii, 72, 14 June, 1878. Dodgshun also refers to chained deserters in an Arab caravan. See Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujjii, 73, 19 June, 1878.

134 Tipu Tip, Maisha, 19-21 § 12-15.
bolted with my goods — I got some cloth, guns etc. of theirs, and on coming here found 6 of the ringleaders and put them in chains for 3 days."  

One missionary wrote that he had “even known an Englishman send runaway porters up country in slave-chains; the only way to oblige them to work out the time of which they had defrauded him.” One gang of about thirty prepared their escape by investing in files in Zanzibar. One night about fifty miles from the coast they filed through their chains and had fled the caravan by morning. To prevent desertions Peters at one point chained all his porters from Lamu and Witu, whether deserters or not.

Even more ruthless measures were taken by some caravan leaders, including Peters. At Ngao along the Tana River in 1889 seven porters hired at Dar es Salaam deserted, probably influenced by the news that had been received concerning the famine among the Pokomo in the country ahead. Peters’ response was to send some of the Somali askari to hunt for them among the Gallas who had settled near Ngao. His message to the Gallas, stated in the hearing of his pagazi, was “simply to cut ... down” any porters who would not return. Despite this unambiguous response more porters (those hired at Witu) disappeared. When some of the Manyema porters deserted with their wives from the encampment at Mwina, further up the Tana River, two were killed by the askari and thrown into the river. Once colonial rule was established, travellers were able to call on the German authorities to discipline recaptured deserters. Thus, in 1898, Grogan and Sharp used the colonial police force to track down several deserters in the Ruzizi Valley who had taken a month’s pay and two months’ rations with them. The offenders were flogged and sentenced to three months

135 Morton to Smith, Unyanyembe, 25 July, 1877, CMS CA6/03.


137 Peters, New Light, 94-5.

138 Peters, New Light, 84-6, 104-5. By 1896 Peters had gained such a reputation for brutality that he was dismissed from the German colonial service after being tried for various abuses. See W. O. Henderson, “German East Africa 1884-1918”, in Vincent Harlow and E. M. Chilver, eds., History of East Africa (Oxford, 1965), II. 146; Koponen, Development For Exploitation, 363.
on a chain gang. Stairs, determined to hunt down a deserter named Sudi in order to severely punish him as a deterrent to others, sent squads of men thirty miles across the countryside and along the main route and offered a reward of fifty dollars and five bales of cloth for his capture. Contemplating the death penalty, he decided against it because “in a country supposed, like this one, to have a good administration, it could be that I haven’t the right over life and death.”

Supporters of authoritarian methods believed that brutal punishments were the best way of discouraging unhappy porters from deserting. But most European employers took measures of a less extreme nature, such as the one outlined by Southon: “The chief and best way to prevent desertions is to cultivate such an acquaintance with each individual pagazi that he shall have a personal liking for every member of the Expedition.” If desertions occurred near the coast, the caravan should halt for a day while the deserter’s headman with others were sent to bring him back. Other practical steps were taken by many caravan leaders. As mentioned in chapter six, Baumann found guarantors for each of his porters hired at the coast. In some caravans extra porters were taken from Bagamoyo or Zanzibar to allow for desertions. Occasionally porters deserting near the coast were rounded up by local authorities and sent back to the departing caravan, as when the merchant Abdallah Dinah sent back to Murphy two men caught by Jemadar Saba of Kaole. Stanley, expecting desertions after leaving Bagamoyo on his second expedition, posted a “strong guard” at the Kingani River after the caravan had crossed to the far bank, as well as another between Bagamoyo and the river. During the first nights of the Maasai expedition Thomson chose camps free

139 Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 103.
140 Konczacki, Victorian Explorer, 199-200. 25 July, 1891.
141 Southon to Whitehouse, Urambo, 18 Dec., 1879, “Hints for Missionaries”, LMS 2/3/A. Judging by the low number of desertions in Southon’s caravan — only three out of 168 porters deserted between Saadani and Mpwapwa — his advice was good. See Southon to Whitehouse, Mpwapwa, 16 July, 1879, LMS 2/1/D.
142 Baumann, Durch Massailand, 7; Murphy to Kirk, Bagamoyo, 19 Apr., 1873, VLC 3/4 RGS; John Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years in East Africa (Cambridge, 1921), 7; Murphy to Kirk, Tonda, 25 Apr., 1873, VLC 3/4 RGS.
143 Bennett, Stanley’s Despatches, 190. He does not mention if the askari intercepted any deserters.
of bush so that anyone leaving camp could be seen. To drive home the message, "In the hearing of the men, bloodthirsty orders were given to the night-guard to shoot down without warning any one observed to go outside camp." The head men were to take turns making rounds of the camp and report to Thomson or his assistant Martin every two hours. Thomson believed such precautions were particularly necessary on this journey given Zanzibar porters’ fear of the Maasai. Giraud’s porters were hired at Zanzibar, and he was worried from the outset about the possibility of desertions at the beginning of the trip. So after landing on the mainland at Dar es Salaam with his men, he spent only a day there, giving little time for the porters to abscond. As a further precaution the French ship which had carried the 120 strong caravan to the mainland remained at anchor in Dar es Salaam, causing the porters to believe that this was for the purpose of picking up deserters. Roscoe writes somewhat disingenuously that when his porters were given a month’s pay in advance at Zanzibar sometime in the 1880s,

Crowds of people ... awaited these men when they were being paid and made great demands upon the wages they received ... The latter had therefore to be guarded and kept in a locked yard after they were paid, until they could be marched to the beach and shipped to the mainland ... If these precautions were neglected, the unfortunate men were left without money to purchase the numerous small comforts which they wished to take with them on the journey.

Then comes the real point of this exercise: if the porters were not in this way controlled it was feared that they would not keep their contract, and would slip away, or stay with their friends, thus losing to the expedition both money and porters. A more reckless method of preventing desertions was taken by an expedition to Mozambique which left Zanzibar in

144 Thomson, Through Masai Land, 35.

145 Giraud, Les Jacs, 42.

146 Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years, 5. Thomson describes a similar scene in To the Central African Lakes, I, 66-7, making the point that most of the crowd were the porters’ wives, left behind and perhaps never to see their husbands again.

147 Roscoe, Twenty-Five Years, 5.
June, 1891. An observer described it in language full of the stereotypes and unintentional ironies of imperialism:

... the S.S. Juba, of the Imperial East Africa Company started for Mozambique with a caravan of one hundred and fifty bearers commanded by Lieutenant Sclater, R.E., and accompanied by Mr. Whyte, naturalist. When the ship prepared to weigh anchor, she was surrounded by a perfect flotilla of shore boats, hovering around to pick up any double-dealing porter who thought to jump overboard with his three month’s pay. Fortunately a steam launch of H.M.S. Conquest came to the rescue, and the officer, after due warning given, charged the interlopers and sank some five of them. No loss of life ensued, as the negroes can swim like fishes. Then the blue-jackets armed withsingle-sticks, dealt some shrewd blows to the right and left on the thick Zanzibari pates. After this gentle admonition the would-be rescue party sheered off, and the Juba steamed out of harbour ... 148

Clearly European employers found it much easier to use such tactics to control porters during the years of imperial expansion than, for example, in the time of Burton, Speke, and Grant.

Collective Forms of Resistance

Despite the prevalence of desertion as a form of individual and mass protest during both the pre-colonial and early colonial periods, porters frequently engaged in collective actions including strikes and go slaws. In the nineteenth century caravan trade, Iliffe writes,

A distinct pattern of labour relations grew up. The employer appointed the headmen and settled routine problems with them, but strikes were frequent and were conducted as collective actions to prevent the employer identifying ringleaders, a distinction between appointed spokesmen and anonymous action common in the early stages of labour organization and carried forward to colonial plantations. 149

As we have seen, in many cases “ringleaders” did step forward and present demands or negotiate grievances, and sometimes headmen acted as spokesmen for the porters. 150 Slacking and go-slows were part of the regulation of the work process, which porters always tried to control, as many travellers including Grant found:

When the captain put down his load for as many minutes as he thought necessary, the rest ... would also stop and refresh themselves with pipes, snuff, grain, dancing, and singing choruses. Generally

148 Moloney, With Captain Stairs, 19-20.

149 John Iliffe, A Modern History of Tanganyika (Cambridge, 1979), 46.

150 See Morton to Smith, Unyanyembe, 25 July, 1877, CMS CA6/03; Mackay to Wright, Uyui, 24 May, 1878. CMS CA6/016; Thomson, To the Central African Lakes, II, 114; Tippu Tip, Maisha, 89 § 118; Stairs, “Shut Up in the African Forest”, 56; Grogan & Sharp, From the Cape, 122-3.
there was an argument to settle how long the march should continue; and many were the excuses found for a halt, no water ahead being a common one. 151

Strikes by caravan porters took place over the usual grievances: insufficient rations, wages, too few rest days, overly long marches, brutal treatment, concern over dangerous conditions ahead, and in defence of advance payments. 152 In other cases insufficient details are available to ascertain the cause. 153

The issue of insufficient rations is one which crops up time after time in the literature. Porters frequently met their employers head on over this issue, and showed a united front to many an impotent or insensitive caravan leader. When Speke and Grant's caravan ran short of food in Ugogo, "Not a man would obey orders; they refused to march." 154 In 1873 Cameron's expedition had only reached the approaches of the Usagara mountains when the porters struck work, in Cameron's words "claiming extravagant amounts of cloth in lieu of rations." In this case, faced with Cameron's refusal to negotiate, the porters withdrew their demands (although many had already deserted). Later in the journey, in Uganda, the porters refused to leave the place until they had finished processing their grain rations. In this they were supported by the headman, Bombay. Cameron had no choice but to give way on this occasion. 155 Twice during Stanley's first journey strikes almost occurred over the issue of a day's halt to hunt for meat. In the first case a confrontation ensued between the explorer and

151 Grant, A Walk, 24, also 75.


153 E.g. in Last to Lang, Mamboya, 7 June, 1882, CMS G3A6/01; Ashe to Lang, Kagei, 13 Mar., 1883, CMS G3A6/01.


155 Cameron, Across Africa, I, 68, 196; Foran, African Odyssey, 54, 57, 104.
the guide, both threatening to shoot the other. Stanley was only able to suppress the threatened revolt through the prompt action of the veteran Mabruki, who probably saved his life. In the second instance the porters approached him “in a body” to request a day to hunt and strengthen themselves for the remainder of the journey. Again Stanley turned them down, saying that they could halt on the banks of the Malagarazi River. The men agreed to pick up their loads and march, but with much grumbling.  

A similar incident occurred during the march of one LMS caravan, although the outcome was different. The porters wanted to remain at the Lingerengere River for a day because of the plentiful food supplies there. The missionaries were forced to yield to them. Food was also the issue at Uyui in Nyamwezi territory when fifty porters deserted from Bishop Hannington’s caravan probably sometime in late 1882. The same evening the remaining porters refused to go any further, being too tired, and having no food or water at hand. Hannington does not indicate how discipline was restored, although he says that the next day was the same.

Porters also struck work when rations were stopped to punish them, as was the case in a CMS caravan marching from Kagei on Lake Victoria to Msalala in Unyamwezi. In this case the proximity of the caravan to the missionaries destination diminished the porters’ bargaining power. One of the missionaries described the conflict:

> We resumed our march on Friday but the guide of the caravan purposely went to the wrong village where they were drinking beer. I was behind myself being unwell & Wise did not know the road, on arriving at the village I refused the men posho. They then struck work & refused to go on, & Saturday was spent in trying to bring them round, but being in Urima I did not mind, as we were only 2 days march from the port & I sent off 2 men to ask Mackay to send what Wangwana [sic] he could spare. More than half the Wasukuma porters came to terms & I paid the others off ... The Wangwana arrived on Monday.


157 Bennett, *From Zanzibar to Ujiji*, 80, 29 Aug., 1878.


159 Gordon to Lang, Msalala, 5 Nov., 1883, CMS G3A6/01. See the discussion of stopping rations as a punishment, above.

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Other strikes resulted from attacks on the principle of advance payment, customary ideas about rest days, and overwork. As has been argued earlier, porters believed that the right to advance payment was fundamental. After the arrival of Cameron's expedition at Unyanyembe, the porters who had been hired only to go thus far were paid off. Others had been hired on different terms — by the month. These now went on strike, demanding two months' pay in advance. Cameron saw the wisdom of making some concession, otherwise he could possibly have been left with no porters at all, as they had warned him that they would quit en masse. He therefore gave them one month's pay in advance. This was still inadequate to many of the men and sixty of them quit.\textsuperscript{160} In 1861 Speke and Grant's \textit{Waungwana} successfully struck work in Unyamwezi over the question of overwork. They "mutinied for a cloth apiece, saying they would not lift a load unless I gave it." The issue was a demand for extra wages because of the shortage of porters — loads were being carried in relays.\textsuperscript{161} Related to overwork was the question of rest days. In 1882, after a difficult climb in the Usagara mountains, Giraud's men made it clear that they intended to have a large say in the progress of the caravan and the issue of rest days. They lined up in front of Giraud's tent "avec des visages de mélodrame." and through a spokesman explained that they were tired, and that they did not intend to set off again the next day. They needed one more day to rest. They argued that normal caravan practice was to have one rest day every seven, and if it was necessary to march ten days straight, as they had just done, then they rested two days instead of one. At this point the porters retired en masse to the far end of the village to discuss the situation. After some time — we have only Giraud's version — they decided to give up the protest and continue the march the next day. The porters' argument was reasonable, based as it was on the accepted practice of Arab and Swahili caravans, but Giraud

\textsuperscript{160} Cameron, \textit{Across Africa}, I, 152; Foran, \textit{African Odyssey}, 73. Strikes also occurred over unpaid wages. See Speke, \textit{What Led}, 197, 200-1.

\textsuperscript{161} Speke, \textit{Journal}, 133, 3-6 June, 1861.
preferred to portray the porters as madmen and imbeciles, citing their protest as “un prétexte de tout pour satisfaire leur besoin de tumulte.”

As with desertions, concern over the state of the country ahead led to strikes or attempted strikes. When in August, 1861, Speke was at Chief Lumeresi’s in Buzinza, his Waungwana had second thoughts about continuing the journey:

... they swore it was no use my trying to go on to Karague; they would not go with me; they did not come here to be killed. If I chose to lose my life, it was no business of theirs, but they would not be witness to it. They all wanted their discharge at once; they would not run away, but must have a letter of satisfaction, and then they would go back to their homes at Zanzibar. But when they found they lost all their arguments and could not move me, they said they would go back for Grant, but when they had done that duty, then they would take their leave.

In this case the porters appear to have backed down. But many strikes were more successful. Even Livingstone, who in Stanley’s words received “universal respect” from all, both Arab and African, had to deal with a strike by his porters while travelling through Manyema early in 1871. They would go no further, and were only persuaded to continue by an increase of wages to MT$6 per month “if they behaved well.” On more than one occasion in 1877 and 1878 Dodgshun’s pagazi “were rebellious and refused to go further ...” the missionaries being “helpless against them.” Again he wrote: “The pagazi struck again and threatened to desert en masse but came round in time. They are afraid of the unknown country beyond. Thus we lost a day’s march.”

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163 Speke, Journal, 159. This was one of many strikes during the journey; there was a repetition in September (p. 172). A successful strike had earlier been mounted by the expedition’s Nyamwezi porters over fear of the Ngoni. See Speke, Journal, 144-6, 17 & 19 June, 1861, and also 443; Grant, A Walk, 112-3, 114-5, 121.

164 Livingstone, Last Journals, 357, 11 Feb., 1871. Livingstone told Stanley at Ujiji, “... my men would not budge a step forward. They mutinied and formed a secret resolution that if I still insisted on going on to raise a disturbance in the country, after they had effected it to abandon me, in which case I should be killed ... the hearts of my people failed, and they set about frustrating me in every possible way:” Bennett, Stanley’s Despatches, 99. Allowance should be made for Stanley’s probable exaggeration of Livingstone’s account.

165 Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 52-3, 31 Dec., 1877 & 3 Jan., 1878.

166 Bennett, From Zanzibar to Ujiji, 55, 19 Jan., 1878. Over this period there was a continuous trickle of desertions as well. For other examples see O’Flaherty to Hutchinson, Uyui, 29 Nov., 1880, CMS G3A6/01.
Sometimes porters struck work because of the fear and respect with which they beheld powerful chiefs. One case occurred during the first expedition of Burton and Speke in 1857, when the porters demanded that proper respect be shown to King Kimwere of the Shambaa, whose territory the caravan was approaching, otherwise bad spells might be directed at the expedition. In Burton’s words:

We were startled from our observations by a prodigious hubbub. The three fresh porters positively refused to proceed unless a certain number of cloths were sent forward to propitiate the magnates of Fuga [in the lower Pangani River region]. ... Sultan Kimwere was a potent monarch, not a Mamba. His 'ministers' and councillors would, unless well-paid, avert from us their countenances. We must enter with discharge of musketry to salute the lieges ...

Despite the forceful response of the Baluch guard who loaded up the porters “deaf to all remonstrance,” the required salute was given, although not the cloth.¹⁶⁷ When Thomson’s caravan was near Mkomokero in Mahenge, the guide refuse to move, and was supported by the rest of the caravan. The expedition was forced to wait until the chief was satisfied with an adequate present the next day. In another case in 1884 Johnston’s Rabai porters successfully struck work, citing the orders of Mandara, King of the Moshi. Such cases show that sometimes porters preferred to bow to powerful African authorities rather than their employers.¹⁶⁸

Not all strikes were defensive. In one case porters struck work, ostensibly to improve living conditions, although economic gain might have been a more important motivation. On the 13th of July, 1858, just out of Unyanyembe, Speke’s Nyamwezi porters refused to move unless they were given more cloth, arguing that they “were suffering from the chilling cold at night.” The explorer’s belief was that this was an “imposture,” “a pretence too absurd to merit even a civil reply,” and he told the headmen that such tricks should not be allowed to succeed, as advance wages had just been paid in cloth. The issue came to a head nearly three

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weeks later, in Urima, Usukuma. It was in fact very cold at night, but the porters real motive was to increase their stocks of cloth, as Speke wrote in his journal:

Two days ago they broke ground with great difficulty, and only [continued] on my assuring them that I would wait at the place a day or two on my return from the Lake, as they expressed their desire to make a few halts there, and barter their hire of cloth for jembes (iron hoes), to exchange again at Unyanyembe, where those things fetch double the price they do in these especially iron regions. Now, to-day these dissembling creatures ... stoutly refused to proceed until their business was completed, — suspecting I should break my word on returning, and would not then wait for them. They had come all this way especially for their own benefit, and now meant to profit by their trouble.

Speke only got his way through the support of the Beluch escort, who pointed out that the porters had been hired to carry out Speke’s business, not their own, that it was only his cloth which had got them so far, and that if they bought hoes on the outward journey, they would have to carry them all the way to Lake Victoria and then back to Unyanyembe. In addition “other persuasive means” were adopted. The porters gave way, and were able to buy their hoes on the return march.169

During the first years of the colonial period it was inevitable that protests such as strikes would be less effective than before, despite increased proletarianization. Strikes seem to have been resorted to less often than during the 1850s to 1880s. Desertion was the main form of resistance. By the mid-1890s porters were largely disarmed and resisters had the full force of the colonial government opposed to them.

**Conclusion: Porterage and Labour Migration**

Iliffe has pointed out that caravan porterage was a first stage in the development of migratory labour in Tanzania, and made migrant labour familiar to many Africans, particularly the Nyamwezi, the Sukuma, and other related groups of western Tanzania. These peoples dominated the wave of labour migrations during the early colonial period to 1908 or so, when the construction of the central railway brought other peoples into wage

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labour. Agreeing with Iliffe, I differ with Koponen who, referring to the German period, quotes Blohm on the Nyamwezi: “An independent merchant became a wage-earning porter, as the form of commercial dealings demanded, and gradually a caravan traveller became a migrant worker who remained away from his native country for long periods.” Koponen makes an artificial division among what he describes as three categories of pre-colonial porters: “slaves working for their masters,” “independent entrepreneurs or ‘merchant porters,’” and “‘worker porters’ engaged for a wage.” The reality was that there were no such rigid boundaries. A slave could be (and often was) a wage worker, and at the same time a petty entrepreneur. A free porter working for wages often did a little trade on the side. A small trader would take wage work when it was available. All were migrant labourers when they accepted wages and took part in cyclical or more complex patterns of migration along the caravan routes between their home communities and the main trading centres or imperialist bases. This is not to disagree that wage earning became more common during the early colonial period. In sum, we must look for the roots and pre-conditions of migrant labour in the late pre-colonial period, rather than just in the operation of colonial political economies. As Stichter writes,

... when explaining the origins of the migrancy system, as distinct from its continuance, there is reason to argue that conditions specific to African pre-colonial social formation themselves, in addition to external forces, contributed to determining that migrancy would be the predominant form of wage labor for the first half-century of capitalist development.

171 Wilhelm Blohm, Die Nyamwezi (Hamburg, 1931), I, 167-8; Koponen, Development For Exploitation, 612.
172 Juhani Koponen, People and Production in Late Pre-colonial Tanzania (Jyväskylä, 1988), 113-6; Koponen, Development For Exploitation, 612.
173 For one of the essential characteristics of migrant labour, the oscillation between home and workplace, see J. Clyde Mitchell, “The Causes of Labour Migration”, in Abebe Zegeye and Shubí Ishemo, eds., Forced Labour and Migration: Patterns of Movement Within Africa (London, Munich, New York, 1989), 45-8. See also pp. 146-7, f.n. 80, above.
174 Stichter, Migrant Laborers, 2. In other respects Stichter plays down the importance of pre-colonial migrant labour.
Like colonial migrant labourers, porters combined wage earning with continued access to household production on the land. In Unyamwezi, increased cultivation on mbuga lands and the adoption of white rice increased agricultural production, facilitating the absence of a large proportion of the adult population. This contrasts with colonial migrant labour in some parts of Africa, where wages were not necessary invested in agriculture. Nyamwezi porters used their earnings and profits to invest in cattle and their farms, the more successful paying for additional labour in the form of wives, slaves, or client Tutsi cattle herders. In turn, access to these sources of labour made porterage possible. Thus the nature of gender and other social roles were crucial, as I have attempted to demonstrate.

There are other comparisons. During the 1950s about half the population of able-bodied men of many rural societies participating in migrant labour were absent at any one time. Most of the rest had migrated for work at periods in the past. A similarly large percentage of Nyamwezi adult males may have participated in porterage during the second half of the nineteenth century. Coulbois described an annual migration to the coast after harvest time of about fifteen to twenty thousand. Stuhlmann estimated in 1890 that about one third of the Nyamwezi male population travelled each year to the coast. Sissons’ estimate is that up to 90,000 Nyamwezi males could have worked as porters and travelled to the coast at any time during the second half of the nineteenth century, with perhaps 30,000 actually doing so.

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175 See the discussion in Stichter, who concludes that in the colonial period increased agricultural productivity may not have been associated with migrant labour: Migrant Laborers, 46-8.

176 Stichter, Migrant Laborers, 10-12, 35-9, 58, and passim.


Something of a paradox emerges when we consider caravan porters in the early twentieth century. Contrary to the usual position of scholars that migrant and wage labour only developed under the aegis of the colonial economy, in East Africa the opposite occurred as far as porterage is concerned. A process of de-skilling began. By this I mean that porterage became more and more a short term occupation and, in fact, a form of oppression for people who were often conscripted by the Germans and then the British as forced labourers. After the Maji Maji rebellion (1905-7) in the southern part of the colony thousands of the defeated peoples were forced into porterage as a form of punishment. A smaller corps of professional porters continued to work for the colonial authorities and the Schutztruppe, but many former Nyamwezi and Sukuma carriers moved to plantation labour or railway construction. By the time of the First World War porterage was dreaded and symbolized the worst features of colonial oppression. Even as late as 1930 the British colonial administration employed porters for 331,386 man/days during the year, this figure representing some 40,000 conscripted and voluntary carriers and the figures were certainly much higher during the four previous decades. In general terms more and more people worked as porters during the early colonial period as the colonial economy expanded, but the old specialist caravan porters gradually disappeared. Officials on tour preferred to take porters for the day from villages en route. There were other factors at work, particularly the construction of the central railway which gradually shortened the caravan routes, the movement up-country of Swahili and Indian traders, and government restrictions on African

180 See the collected papers and interviews of the Maji Maji Research Project, University of Dar es Salaam, 1968.


caravans. The borders created by the new colonial states also cut through many of the long distance routes. The era of the professionals was over.
Appendix 1 Some Early Itineraries

What seems to be the first report of one of the central routes comes from an officer of the Royal Navy who visited the coast in 1811. According to Lieutenant Hardy, Nyamwezi travellers called it the “Condohee” route. Sheriff suggests that this refers to the valley of the Mkondoa (or Mukondokwa), the upper reach of the Wami river which formed a pass through the Rubeho mountains.¹ A further relationship is suggested by the existence during the second half of the nineteenth century (and perhaps earlier) of a trading station at the village of Kondoa just to the east of modern Kilosa. Kondoa was situated on a site which dominated the low country of the approaches to the Mukondokwa valley.² A problem arises, however, when we compare this identification with details given by Hardy. Although I do not have access to Hardy’s original report the relevant section is quoted by both W. D. Cooley, the nineteenth century geographer, and Richard Burton, the explorer and linguist, and is as follows: “The western branch of this river ... is called Condoha, and it is said to go 4 or 5 months’ journey to its source. Marrorre [Malolo] is a town on its banks ... and Singosera [Usagozi in western Unyamwezi] is another, about two months; the tribes inhabiting the western branch are called Wangarah ...”³ Clearly the Ruaha is being referred to because it is “the western branch of this river” (i.e. the Rufiji or “Lufiji” in Cooley’s spelling), and in fact Malolo is close to the Ruaha and is mentioned in other itineraries of the Ruaha route. The “Wangarah” people referred to may have been the Galaganza sub-group of the Nyamwezi. Hardy goes on to tell us that beyond Unyamwezi were said to be the two lakes of Wangarah and Zawarah which were twenty-eight days’ journey apart. Sheriff believes that these were Lakes Tanganyika and Victoria respectively.⁴ This is fine, but the difficulty is that if we take

¹ Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 176.
³ W. D. Cooley, “Geography of N’yassi”, JRGS, 15, part 2 (1845), 208; Burton, “Lake regions”, 307. “Condoha” is the spelling in both cases (c.f. Sheriff). Of course the Ruaha does not have its source anywhere near either Lake Victoria or Lake Tanganyika, or, for that matter, Usagozi.
⁴ Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 176.
Hardy literally, then what he calls the “Condohee” route actually refers to that along the Ruaha river. He describes the Ruaha river route but designates it the “Condoha.” Surprisingly Sheriff does not comment on this confusion in his discussion.

In 1839, an itinerary of a trading expedition sent into the interior from Zanzibar was reported by an American missionary who briefly visited the island. The point of departure is not given. The itinerary, which was probably fairly typical, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zamzam</td>
<td>(Uzaramo)</td>
<td>5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cootoos</td>
<td>(UKutu)</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toombahs</td>
<td>(Itumba)^5</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggarahs</td>
<td>(Usagara)</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagogo</td>
<td>(Ugogo)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waroris</td>
<td>(UKimbu)^6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The itinerary ends, “and lastly the Manomoisies [Nyamwezi], whose country extends to a great inland lake. It is as far through the territory of the Manomoisies, as from Zanzibar to their border.”^7 Thus, as became the norm in Zanzibar, all the peoples of western Tanzania were lumped together as “Nyamwezi.”

Another itinerary, of a large “Arab” expedition which left Bagamoyo in 1845, (and a section of which crossed the continent to reach Benguela in Angola in April 1852), is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bacamonio</td>
<td>(Bagamoyo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giramo</td>
<td>(Uzaramo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuto</td>
<td>(UKutu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segora</td>
<td>(Usagara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gogo</td>
<td>(Ugogo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimbo</td>
<td>(UKimbu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mgunda Mkali</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garganta</td>
<td>(Ugalaganza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muga</td>
<td>(Ugalla)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nugigi</td>
<td>(Ujiji)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanganna</td>
<td>(Lake Tanganyika)^9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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^5 The Itumba mountains are in Ukaguru, through which several of the major routes passed.

^6 At this time UKimbu was occupied by the Sangu or Warori as they were known, of southern Tanzania.

^7 Burgess, in Gottberg, Unyamwesi, 95. For a brief discussion of this itinerary see Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 242.

^8 See chapter 2 for a discussion of the Mgunda Mkali.

We have two detailed itineraries for the Ruaha-Isanga route, one from 1831 and the other from approximately 1840. The first is that of Lief (Khalif?) bin Said, a trader born in Zanzibar of Nyamwezi descent who, departing in September 1831, travelled to Lake Tanganyika for the second time to trade for ivory. The second itinerary was passed on to Cooley in the form of a map drawn by "an Arab merchant of Zanzibar." The routes taken by the two travellers were very similar. The place names, many of which can be found on a good modern road map, show that the road began at Mbwamaji, followed the Ruaha, and passed through southern Unyamwezi to Ujiji or thereabouts. The itinerary of Lief bin Said is presented first:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Days to Reach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boramy</td>
<td>(Mbwamaji)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazinga</td>
<td>(Mzizima)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qua</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beonee</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Kunda</td>
<td>(Mkumbi Mkambi?)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konjee</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moktanero</td>
<td>(makutanero)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deejamora</td>
<td>(Dege la MHora)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedonda</td>
<td>(Kidunda)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onegata</td>
<td>(Mgeta river?)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Datomee</td>
<td>(Dutumi)</td>
<td>? days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koto</td>
<td>(Ukutu)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zohgomero</td>
<td>(Zungomero)</td>
<td>6 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loamby</td>
<td>(people)</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wamefee</td>
<td>(people?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesunga</td>
<td>(Kisanga)</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marora</td>
<td>(Malolo)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osagara</td>
<td>(Usagara)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


12 Such as the 1973 Shell Map of Tanzania or the Hildebrand map.

13 The middle and western sections of the two itineraries have been compared in tabular form in Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 241. Here, however, the complete itineraries are presented.

14 See f.n. 32 below.

15 A junction in the paths.

16 The beginning of Kutu country.

Bahar  (Ruaha river?)\textsuperscript{18}
Matoney\textsuperscript{19}  (Ruaha river)
Yoaha  (Hehe people)
Powaga  (Pawaga)
Osanga  (Isenga, Ilundu)\textsuperscript{20}
Sanga  (Isanga)\textsuperscript{21}
Toomba  (Itumba)\textsuperscript{22}
Jangwera  (Unyangwila)\textsuperscript{23}
Sangara  (Iswangala)\textsuperscript{24}
Ganda  (Ugunda)\textsuperscript{25}
Shesha  (Ushisha)\textsuperscript{26}
Sanjee  (Usange?)\textsuperscript{27}
Sagosee  (Usagozi)\textsuperscript{28}
Ogaree  (Ugalla river)
Magrazie  (Malagarasi river)
Oha  (Uha)
Grand Lake  (Lake Tanganyika)

8 days along the river to
5 days to
3 days to
5 days to
3 days to
2 days to
3 days to
5 days to
3 days to
5 days to
2 days to
3 days to
5 days to
3 days to
2 days to
3 days to

Cooley’s description of the route outlined on the map of the Arab merchant begins as follows:

From Zanzibar the traveller to Monomoezi and the lake crosses over to Buromaji, a town with a small river on the main land ... the course taken at first starting is S.W., and the tribes dwelling due W. of Zanzibar are not touched on by the route.

\textsuperscript{18} See Shorter, \textit{Chiefship in Western Tanzania}, 241.

\textsuperscript{19} The Swahili word for river is \textit{mto}. \textit{Mioni} means “at the river.”

\textsuperscript{20} Isenga, in Ilundu chiefdom. See Shorter, \textit{Chiefship in Western Tanzania}, 241.

\textsuperscript{21} A Kimbu chiefdom.

\textsuperscript{22} A Kimbu chiefdom.

\textsuperscript{23} A Kimbu chiefdom.

\textsuperscript{24} A Kimbu chiefdom.

\textsuperscript{25} In Unyamwezi.

\textsuperscript{26} In Unyamwezi.

\textsuperscript{27} In western Unyamwezi. See f.n. 42 below.

\textsuperscript{28} Galaganza chiefdom of Unyamwezi.
Cooley is probably referring here to the Zigua. The itinerary continues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buromaji</td>
<td>(Mbwanaji)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazinga</td>
<td>(Mzizima)²⁹</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiwáha</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyúni</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mokúndi</td>
<td>(Mkumbi Mkambi?)³²</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sungwi</td>
<td>(Sungwi)</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>(Chole?)³³</td>
<td>3 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rúvu</td>
<td>(Ruvu river)</td>
<td>1 day to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidonde</td>
<td>(Kidunda)³⁴</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M'gaita</td>
<td>(Mgeta river)³⁵</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dotumi</td>
<td>(Dutumi)³⁶</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riguru</td>
<td>(Uluguru)</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zungoméro</td>
<td>(modern Kisaki)</td>
<td>6 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“through the Rohambi people”³⁷</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kisanga</td>
<td>(Kisanga)</td>
<td>2 days to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maroro</td>
<td>(Malolo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point the itinerary becomes less specific and more descriptive, with fewer place names mentioned. Cooley writes:

Proceeding on his journey, the traveller marches through the country of the Woháha [Hehe], 8 days, crossing the Kidéji [Kidaji river?], which joins the river of Maréro; he then goes on to Powaga [Pawaga], 8 days, and there he meets the Swaha river [Ruaha river], which is said to come from the lake. This river cuts through a chain of mountains 2 months journey in length,³⁸ and abounding in salt

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²⁹ Cooley states (206) that “the river of Mazinga is, according to our Arab traveller’s map, identical with the Majisima (i.e. cool water), which enters the sea about 10 miles N.E. of Buromaji.” This can be identified as the village of Mzizima, which was eventually absorbed by modern Dar es Salaam. But note the alternative rendition of Mzizima given in “The ancient history of Dar es-Salaam”, in G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, ed., The East African Coast: Selected Documents From the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century (Oxford, 1962), 233: “The original name of Dar es-Salaam was Mzizima, which means the healthy town.” Mzizima faced the open sea rather than the harbour, which was of little use to dhows able to run up on the reef-protected sandy beaches of the Mrima. Mzizima was typical of most coastal trading villages in that it had ancient roots. See J. E. G. Sutton, “Dar es Salaam. A Sketch of a Hundred Years”, TNR, 71 (1970), 3.

³⁰ Same as “Qua” in Lief bin Said’s itinerary above?

³¹ Same as “Beonee” in Lief bin Said’s itinerary?

³² Same as “Ma Kunda” in Lief bin Said’s itinerary? This could be Burton’s Mkumbi Mkambi.

³³ Almost certainly not modern Kola as Kola is well to the north of Sungwi, and as the direction of the itinerary is to the south west this would not make sense.

³⁴ See Lief bin Said’s itinerary. Cooley notes “The last 6 days through the country of the Zaramu [Zaramo]”.

³⁵ The Mgeta flows into the Ruwu. Cooley understandably confuses the two rivers in his comments.

³⁶ In Ukutu.

³⁷ See f.n. 17 above.

³⁸ This passage is not quite understandable unless the reference is to the central plateau of Tanzania. Of course the Ruaha does cut through the Rubeho mountains but the escarpment is only 150 kilometres or so west of
and iron. The eastern extremity of this mountain chain is inhabited by the Woháha [Hehe], and above them by the Lucósi [?]. Below these mountains the Swaha [Ruaha] receives the river of Maroro [Malolo], and soon after runs into the Lufiji [Rufiji]. From Powaga to Isenga [Isenga], 5 days; and thence to Sanga [Isanga], 2 days; the road going along the left bank of the Swaha, but at the last named place the river and the hills are left to the S[outh].

From here the itinerary again includes more place names, as Ukimbu and the more populated regions of southern Unyamwezi are traversed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Distance to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atumba</td>
<td>5 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onanguira</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casandarara</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suangara</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogunda</td>
<td>4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshisha</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osenji</td>
<td>3 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osagozi</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogara</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oha</td>
<td>4 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cooley concludes with the comment: “From the last town in Oha to the nearest shores of the lake [Tanganyika] is a distance of 4 days.”

Malolo. Alternatively, if the “2 months” mentioned by Cooley is changed to “2 weeks” then the itinerary would make perfect sense, as 150 kilometres at the slow pace generally taken by coastal caravans could easily take two weeks.

39 The trading centres of Isenga and Isanga have not been positively identified, although the Isanga chietdom is well known. Shorter equates Isenga with Ilundu chietdom on the Njombe river, a major tributary of the Great Ruaha, and now the western boundary of Ruaha National Park. See the maps in Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, xxviii, 234. There is a settlement named Isanga marked on the Shell map, on the south side of the Njombe river, roughly where Shorter places Isenga.

40 Cooley, “The Geography of N’yassi”, 206-207.

41 Cooley writes (207): “the first town of the Monomo6zi country,” although it is more usually reckoned to be in Ukimbu. See Shorter, Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 241.

42 Shorter. Chiefship in Western Tanzania, 241, identifies Osenji with Usenye in the far west of Unyamwezi. However Burton, “Lake Regions”, 194-5, states that Osenji was Usange, an insignificant village one march east of Usagozi. This would correspond with the order of the itinerary. Usenye was beyond Usagozi to the west and hence Shorter’s identification would mean the order of the itinerary is incorrect. But in favour of Shorter is the fact that Usenye was a junction of two routes, and was therefore more noteworthy. Given that Lief bin Said also places “Sanjee” before Usagozi, Burton must be preferred over Shorter.

43 Cooley, “The Geography of N’yassi”, 207.
Appendix 2 The Central (Ugogo) Route

After 1850 or so most caravans preferred the central (Ugogo) routes over the Ruaha-Isanga option, and Bagamoyo superseded Mbwamaji as the main terminus on the coast. The roads from Bagamoyo and Kaole, its neighbour, passed through Zaramo country once the coastal strip was left behind. In 1811 the first documentary notice of the route to the west tells us that the Zaramo occupied territory some seven days’ march into the interior. We know that a trade route ran from a town (not named, but probably Bagamoyo) near the mouth of the Ruvu (or Kingani) river into the interior through their country. Sheriff says that Hardy recorded two itineraries from the accounts of two brothers, probably coastal traders, who were familiar with the routes, particularly the eastern section to the mountains. ¹ It is likely that these itineraries were close to the roads described later in the century.

The first difficulty on the Bagamoyo route was the crossing of the Ruvu river, just a few kilometres from the starting point of the journey. Here ferrymen conveyed caravans across the crocodile infested river. ² Caravans departing Bagamoyo could join the lower road from Mbwamaji via Ukutu, or carry on further west through Uzararno. Taking the first of these options involved passing to the south of the Uluguru Mountains and north of the Hehe escarpment through central Ukutu. Here travellers in the time of Burton and Speke reached the junction of Zungomero on the Mgeta river. Speke describes the subsequent stages as follows:

Zungomero is a terminus or junction of two roads leading to the interior — one, the northern, crossing over the Goma Pass, and trenching on the Mukondokua River, and the other crossing over the Mabruki Pass, and edging on the Ruaha River. They both unite again at Ugogi, the western terminus on the ... great Unyamuezi line. ³

¹ Sheriff, Slaves, Spices and Ivory, 175. See also Brown,"A Pre-Colonial History of Bagamoyo", 115.
³ J. H. Speke, Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile (New York, 1864), 63. Ugogi lay on the western edge of the Rubeho mountains, south-west of Mpwapwa. It was the starting point for the southern road through the Marenga Mkali and Ugogo, discussed below. For a brief description of the district see Burton, “Lake Regions”, 123; Burton, Lake Regions, 174-5.
According to one scholar the roads through Ukutu were not popular because they were “beset by Hehe” and in addition were longer than the more direct routes to Unyamwezi further north.4 The relative unpopularity of the Ukutu route is certainly true if Bagamoyo was the point of departure, but not if travelling from Mbwamaji. In any case we know that the Hehe were not an obstacle in the first half of the century because the “old” Ruaha road to Isanga and Isenga and beyond ran through their territory.

The other of the two options mentioned by Burton and Speke passed through the vicinity of Morogoro, and crossed the flood plain of the Mkata river near Mkata village to reach Kimamba and the area of modern Kilosa in the west. From there the way lay to the north-west up the Mukondokwa valley, past Lake Gombo, and onward to Mpwapwa. This is the same line followed by the railway, and was in fact the old “Condoha” route.5 Like all the routes, it was closed from time to time. One such occasion was the famine of the mid 1850s. Perhaps it was memories of this famine and the subsequent plundering of the local people by starving porters which drove the Wasagara to attack a caravan of Swahili and Nyamwezi “numbering 700 or 800 guns” in 1858. The commander was Abdullah bin Nasib, known as “Kisesa.” He therefore “carried off the cattle, burned the villages, and laid waste the whole of the Rubeho or western chain.”6 With the rise of Hehe power during the second half of the nineteenth century and the threat of Hehe raids on caravans, European travellers believed the Mukondokwa route to be more dangerous than those to the north. Nevertheless, many of the expeditions of the imperialists took this road, although others preferred the Saadani routes.7

The roads from Saadani, about 50 kilometres north of Bagamoyo, passed a little to the north of those from Mbwamaji and Bagamoyo, although they eventually united with them at


5 Beidelman, “A History of Ukaguru”, 13. The Mukondokwa River is the upper course of the Wami which empties into the Indian Ocean north of the Ruvu.

6 Burton, Lake Regions, 169.

Mpwapwa on the western side of the coastal ranges. Instead of passing through Ukutu and Usagara these routes passed over the southern Nguru mountains to the north and through Ukaguru. The great advantage of this line was that it avoided the Mkata floodplain, which gave caravans travelling during the rainy seasons such problems. The disadvantage was the steep and difficult country which had to be crossed, and therefore the slightly longer time on the march. The Ukaguru route further subdivided into northern and southern options. A missionary familiar with the country in a later decade gives an itinerary for the northern:

The chief villages on the road to Mpwapwa [from Saadani] are Magubika, Mamboia [Mamboya], Kitangi, Lebehu [Rubehu], Mlali & Tubugwe ... There is a great mixture of people living in these villages. The people of the land are Wakaguru, but there are to be found with them a great number of Wasagara, Waguru, Wagogo, & Wanyamwezi as well as the Wakwafi [Baraguyu or Ilparakuyu Maa speakers].

It is clear from this account that travel and trade had introduced numerous “foreign” populations into the region. The southern of the two “Saadani” roads ran through the lowland part of Ukaguru from Mvomero to modern Kilosa where it joined the important Mukondokwa valley route.

In 1857 there were three routes to choose from when leaving western Usagara to cross the Marenga Mkali and traverse Ugogo. The northernmost, known as “Ya Nyika,” meaning “of the wilderness” was, in fact, according to Burton and Speke’s guides, well watered and inhabited by the subjects of eight “sultans.” The middle route was called “Marenga Mkali” after the camp of the same name. Burton writes that “it is invariably preferred when water is scarce.” But even so, for caravans opting to take the “Marenga Mkali” the barren plain stretched for four long marches to Ziwa (meaning “pond”), on the eastern border of Ugogo. Provisions were unobtainable for this stretch and water could only be found at one place along the way. Hence each porter had to carry, in addition to his or her load, enough grain

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10 The question of gender is important to this study. See chapters 3, 4, 7 and 8.
to last six days, and water to last overnight. At the “oasis” of Ziwa caravans could recover from the rigours of the forced marches and consume the abundance of supplies provided by the local people.\footnote{Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 182.} To the south the third route, known as “Nya Ngaha,” was a continuation of the southern “Kiringawana” path through the Usagara mountains. Burton’s sources told him that provisions were available on this route, but “the people cause much trouble.”\footnote{Burton, “Lake Regions”, 145-6; \textit{Lake Regions}, 211, 176.} This southerly line was the most popular in the 1850s, but traffic shifted to the middle and then the northernmost roads in the 1870s and 1880s. In practical terms the choice was often based on the level of taxation or tolls known as \textit{hongo} levied in particular districts by Gogo chiefs, or on the appearance of famine along one of the routes.\footnote{Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 73.}

Ugogo and the Mgunda Mkali have been dealt with in detail in chapter two, and therefore will not be considered again, except to mention that as through Ugogo, three routes were available to travellers crossing the Mgunda Mkali. These were the “Njia T’humbi” to the north, which led to northern Unyamwezi, and Usukuma, a middle track called “Karangasa” or “Mdaguru,” and the Uyanzi route to the south, which originated at Khokho in Ugogo. After the hardships of the Mgunda Mkali the roads to Kazeh merged and caravans entered the first district of Unyamwezi, Tura (also Tula and Itula, depending on the dialect). “Tura” means “put down” in Kinyamwezi, and therefore represented a homecoming to tired porters, and somewhat of a respite from the rigours of the road. “Here, according to the immemorial custom of Unyamwezi,” writes Burton, “the caravan, without awaiting an invitation, enters the nearest village, unloads, and applies to the chief for shelter.”\footnote{Clement Maganga and Thilo C. Schadeberg, \textit{Kinyamwezi Grammar, Texts, Vocabulary} (Köln, 1992), 307; Burton, “Lake Regions”, 159.} From Tura, a further seven days’ march across the gently rolling countryside of Unyamwezi, with its alternating patches of cultivated clearings and woodland, brought travellers to the

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\footnote{Burton, \textit{Lake Regions}, 182.}
\footnote{Burton, “Lake Regions”, 145-6; \textit{Lake Regions}, 211, 176.}
\footnote{Sissons, “Economic Prosperity”, 73.}
\footnote{Clement Maganga and Thilo C. Schadeberg, \textit{Kinyamwezi Grammar, Texts, Vocabulary} (Köln, 1992), 307; Burton, “Lake Regions”, 159.}
powerful chiefdom of Unyanyembe. At Kigwa, the last stop before Kazeh/Tabora, the main Arab and Swahili settlement in the interior, many caravans dispersed over the undulating Unyamwezi landscape to different parts of Unyanyembe and other chiefdoms.

From Kazeh/Tabora the routes to Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika passed through western Unyamwezi (Ugalaganza), to the ferry at the Malagarasi river, and onwards through Uvinza and Ukaranga. About twenty marches were required for this section of the route. There were two main roads, although during the 1870s a long detour to the south, and another lesser known to the north, were opened up to avoid Mirambo’s territory because of his war with Unyanyembe. The northern of the two regular roads was the longest. This path diverged to the north to take in the market centre of Msene in southern Usumbwa before dipping south-west. From Msene to the Malagarasi river, a journey of seven long marches — and “no favourite with the traveller” — led caravans through border regions occupied by several ethnic groups including Sumbwa, Nyamwezi, Vinza, and Ha. The countryside became gradually less populated, with fewer villages. The southern road ran more or less directly to Usenye (modern Usinge?), where the Msene road rejoined it, passing Usange (Cooley’s “Osenji”), and Usagozi, before traversing Uvinza. According to Burton the longer route was preferred by caravans travelling upcountry if trade was desired or were porters needed, while downward caravans with slaves and ivory preferred the direct road so “the temptations of Msene” could be avoided.15

The Malagarasi river was crossed at Ugaga, where boatmen operating small canoes ferried caravan porters and their loads to the far bank.16 Six days from Msene, at Wanyika, just past “Rukunda” or “Lukunda,” (still on the Shell and Hildebrand maps as Lugunda), to the south of the Malagarasi river, hongo had to be paid to the Vinza chief holding jurisdiction over the river crossing. In Burton’s time this was Mzogera, “the Lord of the Malagarazi.” At

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15 Burton, “Lake regions”, 185-6, 190, 193. See pp. 186-8 for a detailed description of the northerly path to Msene, and 190-4 for the way from Msene to the Malagarasi.

16 For a description of the ferry see chapter 2.
the river a further *hongo* had to be paid to his representative. In addition boatmen’s fees were required, in the form of numerous *khete* or strings of beads, according to the quantity and value of goods freighted.\(^{17}\)

From the Malagarasi crossing to Ukaranga and Ujiji there were alternative paths available, as for the previous stages. In Burton’s time travellers were discouraged by the Vinza from the south bank of the river, but there were several paths along the north side. The Vinza were considered by travellers a potential threat so, as in other areas where this was the case, caravans combined for maximum security. There were few substantial settlements along the “trunk-road,” known as the Jambeho road, to the lake, and caravans had little opportunity to buy provisions.\(^{18}\) They therefore hurried for as long as the porters had endurance, both for this reason, and to avoid robbers.\(^{19}\) The roads on this section of the central line continued to change, and as elsewhere, were said to be “dead” if they had been out of use for some time and had become blocked up with vegetation. For instance Walter Hutley of the LMS, who had travelled up to Ujiji in 1878, noted on the return journey three years later that his former route was “dead.” The new road lay along the flood plain of the Malagarasi, a way which would have been flooded during the *masika*, or long rains.\(^{20}\) Eventually those in the vanguard of the caravans sighted the lake in the distance, and the thankful and excited porters hurried on to reach Ujiji the next day.

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\(^{17}\) Burton, *“Lake Regions*”, 193-4. When Ebenezer Southon of the London Missionary Society passed en route to Ujiji in 1879 he also crossed at Ugaga, where he says the *hongo* was usually paid to the “Sultan” of Uvinza’s representative. Southon to Whitehouse, Ujiji, 29 September, 1879, LMS 2/2/B.

\(^{18}\) For a description of the “Jambeho” route see Burton, *“Lake Regions*”, 209-216; *Lake Regions*, 310-11.

\(^{19}\) Burton, *“Lake Regions*”, 207-8; *Lake Regions*, 312.

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