

The Galla in the South:
The Evidence for Oromo Expansion and Settlement
in South-east Kenya and North-east Tanzania

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Eastern Cushites in what is now Tanzania.

The presence of the Galla is well attested in the north, but not south of Mombasa and the line of the road and railway. One problem is the dating. How far did they go and how long did they stay there?

Give the paper a historical sequence:

Why did the Galla go south?

When did they go south?

Who did they come into conflict with?

How far south did they go?

How long did they stay?

What kind of life did they live?

Why did they leave?

When did they leave?

What did they leave behind?

The Southward Expansion of the Galla

How it began from a homeland in Ethiopia: the reasons for this (Spear 1978). The effects in northern Kenya (Schlee). Appearance on the Somali coast and the destruction of Swahili settlements as far south as Mtwapa (check if this is the southernmost). Counter the argument that these settlements were abandoned for other reasons. The dating of these movements and destruction of the sites.

Movement inland is not well attested archaeologically - simply because the relevant sites have not been investigated. But lots of discussion in Mijikenda traditions. The problem that these could be derived from the Segeju, who were clearly pushed south by the Galla, and also had an input into Mijikenda traditions. The traditions should be treated very carefully, except when specific places are mentioned. (Absence of traditions from the Tana River Orma which we could check with).

The Southernmost Extent of the Galla

This is evident from some specific traditions of the Digo, e.g. about the presence of the Galla in the Chwaka area (Spear 1982). Also Vumba traditions from the early 17th century (Hollis 1900), although this has been questioned by Allen (1993).

Then there are the traditions of the peoples of north-eastern Tanzania. Check Zigua etc. Shambaa (Feierman etc.). Check Taita.

There are strong Pare traditions (compare with the standard work on Pare history, which questions some of Soper's conclusions).

The following is from the South Pare Hills:

"On the east side of the hills all the sites on which the Pare do not remember having lived themselves are ascribed to the Galla, who arrived in the area at about the same time as the Pare and were persuaded to depart after making themselves unpopular by cutting off the breasts of any of the local women they could catch. They are historically recorded as having been in the hinterland of Vumba in the seventeenth century (Hollis, 1900) and can hardly have been in the Pare Hills much before this, so that if the radiocarbon dates are correct they cannot have been responsible for either Group A or Group B [pottery types]. As far as can be seen none of the pottery found in the South Pare area has any close resemblance to current Galla pots in southern Ethiopia (Haberland, 1963); the Galla of north-east Kenya are reported to obtain their pots from the Pokomo. On the west side, stories of the Galla are rare and the sites are variously attributed to the Mbugu and Reno, while all the iron smelting is said to be the work of the Shana, the iron-working clan of the Pare and Taita. An Mbugu clan still exists in this area and is probably related to the

small cattle-keeping tribe of the Usambaras; the Reno are generally taken to be the Portugese and stories of them are widespread over a large part of Tanzania, although it is almost certain that they never penetrated far into then interior. In addition to the above there are traditions of a tribe of small hunters called Vimbiji who lived in the hills before the arrival of the Pare and retreated before them without very much opposition; no living sites are attributed to them except for the rock-shelter of Ndololi near Gonja which produced little in the way of archaeological // remains. In general therefore the traditions give novery reliable evidence as to the identity of the people responsible for the Iron Age remains" (Soper 1967: 29-30).

Are there any records of the Galla engaging in such mutilation of women? Certainly they castrate males, and will even kill pregnant women in the hope of getting a trophy. This last practice may have given rise to the story.

The following is from North Pare:

this is from Kimambo (1969) "When the first immigrants arrived, the following groups are said to have been living here:
Vimbija or Sivira. These were small people said to be hunters and gatherers. //
Vasi or Wasi. These were also hunters and gatherers. They lived in the bush without building houses.
Wagalla. These were agricultural, and were found on the eastern slopes near Lake Jipe.
It is not possible to identify these groups with any living or historically known group. They might have been non-existent, driven out, or absorbed by the Pare" (Odner 1971: 92-93).

Galla Settlement in the South?

The question is how long did they stay? Was it just a quick conquest and withdrawal? Or seasonal forays? Presumably there was some seasonal element in Galla movements in the south. What took them so far south and what, if anything, was their motive for staying there? The control of trade routes? The supply of hunting produce? Livestock grazing? (What was the tsetse situation then? The supply of water?).

Aside from oral traditions, which collapse time, there is the evidence of stone cairns (see Thornbahn). Can these be certainly attributed to the Galla? Or can they also be associated with Southern Cushites who preceded the Galla? Were the Galla or some cattle-keeping predecessors in the hinterland even earlier? What was the purpose of these cairns? Have any been dated? Are there any other possible remains, e.g. wells?

There are stone cairns as far as the Usambara Mountains:

"Only two stone cairns were seen, close together at the northern foot of Mavumbi mountain; they were approximately 70 cm high and five and six metres in diameter. They are of a type which is commonly found from the foot of the Taita Hills across to the Athi/Galana River area and which probably will be found to occur throughout most of the dry nyika bush of the coastal hinterland. These examples are very unlikely to be connected with Iron Age remains described above" (Soper 1967: 33).

The co-ordinates of these cairns are given as 4°42'40"S, 38°45'35"E.

According to Stiles and Munro-Hay (1981) the most common type of stone cairn around the Chalbi Desert in northern Kenya (Marsabit District) is the simple circular mound, ranging from approximately 2 m to 10 m in diameter. This type of cairn is still commonly constructed for burials today by the Gabbra, Boran and Rendille in the area, though the average size of those built today is smaller than those of the prehistoric period (1981: 151). The following tradition was collected about the stone cairn burials they excavated at Kokurmatakore on the eastern margin of the Chalbi Desert:

"Local Gabbra and Boran oral traditions ascribe them all to a former people whom they call the 'Wardaa' or 'Wardai'. These Wardai were supposedly a race of giants who herded cattle, not camels, and who were the diggers of the ancient wells in the area as well as the builders of the ancient cairns. They are thought to have been giants because of the size of the cairns, which are much larger than those constructed today for the dead. The Wardai are said to have left the northern Kenya area and to have migrated south, described variously as towards Mombasa or Nairobi. The reason for this move is not known. It is possible that these Wardai were ancestors of at least some of the present day Orma

found along the Tana River (Haberland, 1963; Kelly, 1980). The Gabbra and Boran interviewed can give no date for this migration, except that it was before the great rinderpest epizootic of the 1890s (tchin tita guracha), but Sobania (1979), basing himself on Samburu oral traditions, suggests that it might have been in the first half of the nineteenth century" (Stiles and Munro-Hay 1981: 163).

While radio-carbon dating of (mostly bone) materials from the excavated cairns indicates that not all of them can have been built by Oromo speakers, some of them (platform and ring cairns) could have been. Otherwise the traditions are interesting in themselves: there was an association in oral tradition between the Oromo speakers who move south and stone cairn burials.

Another piece of evidence which suggests that the Galla may have remained for quite some time is the presence of the Oromo-speaking Waata hunter-gatherers and their relatives the Vuna and the Degere (see Walsh 1990, in press). Holman's map showed Waata in northern Tanzania. It has been suggested that these hunter-gatherers were originally Southern Cushitic speakers living in the same area. This is not proven, although there is some circumstantial evidence for it. On the other hand, some Waata and Degere claim to have come from the north and share clans with the Oromo, although this does not really prove anything. The solution will lie in historical linguistics: and it already seems that some of the Waata (see Hobley) have a linguistic substratum from Southern Cushitic. Mijikenda certainly borrowed vocabulary from Southern Cushitic hunter-gatherers - and honey collectors - who are no longer evident, but must have been absorbed.

Someone must have shown Galla raiders where to obtain water etc., and this may well have been the role of the pre-Waata.

The Withdrawal of the Galla

This is difficult to date. It is also difficult to guess the reasons for it. The withdrawal of the Galla from north of Mombasa is well attested

in 19th century records: this was a part of the drastic loss in Galla power which culminated in attacks from the Somalis and their eventual restriction to the area around the Tana River: hence they became the Tana River Orma (Townsend, Kelly), with a massive impact upon the Pokomo and the Elwana (or have they shifted to Pokomo and Elwana as they have become sedentarised? The existence of Oromo clan names etc. makes this seem likely).

It is not clear, however, how much earlier the Galla withdrew from the south, or whether these were concurrent events. It seems that there was less of a security problem among the Digo: hence the proliferation of kayas - though this is not necessarily the correct interpretation. It is generally agreed that the Maasai took over the aggressive role of the Galla in this area, which some Maasai still live in.

When the Galla withdrew, they did leave the Waata behind (however we think the Waata were formed in the first place). These (and possibly the Degere) are now the southernmost Eastern Cushitic speakers.

History repeats itself, and if it had not been for the Pax Britannica Somali herdsmen might well have filled the gap left by the Galla. As it is they have continued to press south whenever political and economic conditions have made it favourable, e.g. during the shifta wars, and more recently as a spillover from the ongoing civil war in Somalia. Somali 'bandits' are now raiding settlements on the Mombasa-Nairobi road (e.g. Taru) and others south of it (e.g. Buguta and towards Kasigau Mountain). In doing so they just seem to be following a time-honoured pattern (though of course there are tremendous differences in their objectives: or would raiding be a prelude to settlement in the past? [develop this thesis]).

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