

THE COASTAL TRIBES OF THE NORTH-EASTERN BANTU

East Central Africa
Part III

A. H. J. Prins

ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY
OF AFRICA



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Volume 3

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NORTH-EASTERN BANTU
(POKOMO, NYIKA, TEITA)

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ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF AFRICA

edited by

DARYLL FORDE

EAST CENTRAL AFRICA

Part III

THE COASTAL TRIBES
OF THE NORTH-EASTERN BANTU
(Pokomo, Nyika, Teita)

by

A. H. J. PRINS

INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE
LONDON
1952

This study is one part of the Ethnographic Survey of Africa which the International African Institute is preparing with the aid of a grant made by the Secretary of State under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts, on the recommendation of the Colonial Social Science Research Council

ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF AFRICA

FOREWORD

The preparation of a comprehensive survey of the tribal societies of Africa was discussed by the Executive Council of the Institute as far back as 1937, but the interruption and restricting of its activities caused by the war resulted in the postponement of the project. Events and developments during recent years, however, have led to a wider recognition of the need for collating and making more generally available the wealth of existing but uncoordinated material on the ethnic groupings and social conditions of African peoples, particularly in connection with plans for economic and social development. Moreover, it appeared that the International African Institute, as an international body which has received support from and performed services for the different Colonial governments, was in a very favourable situation for undertaking such a task.

The Institute, therefore, in 1944, applied to the recently established British Colonial Social Science Research Council for a grant from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund to finance the preparation of an Ethnographic Survey of Africa, and a grant was allocated for a period of five years from 1945, and was subsequently extended for a further period of three years. A committee, under the Chairmanship of Professor Radcliffe-Brown, was appointed to consider the scope and form of the survey, and collaboration was established with research institutions in South Africa, Rhodesia, East Africa, French West Africa, Belgium and the Belgian Congo.

The aim of the Ethnographic Survey is to present a concise, critical, and accurate account of our present knowledge of the tribal groupings, distribution, physical environment, social conditions, political and economic structure, religious beliefs and cult practices, technology and art of the African peoples. The material is to be presented as briefly and on as consistent a plan as possible, and the text will be supplemented by maps and comprehensive bibliographies.

The Ethnographic Survey is being published as a series of separate, self-contained studies, each devoted to one particular people or cluster of peoples. It is hoped that publication in this form will make the results more quickly and readily available to those interested in specific areas or groups. A list of the sections which have already appeared is given on the cover of this volume.

Since the unequal value and generally unsystematic nature of the available information constituted a chief reason for undertaking this survey, it will be obvious that the material here presented can make no claim to be complete or definitive. Every effort has been made, however, to scrutinise all available literature and to check it by reference to unpublished sources and to workers actually in the field; thus it is intended to present a clear picture of our existing knowledge and to point out the directions in which the need for further studies is most pressing. Any assistance from those who are in a position to remedy deficiencies and correct inaccuracies by providing supplementary material will be greatly appreciated.

The International African Institute expresses its thanks to the Colonial Social Science Research Council, for recommending the grant which has made possible the initiation of the work, and also to the many scholars, research workers, administrative officers and missionaries in Europe, South Africa and the various African territories who have so generously responded to our appeals for information and who have spared time to correct and add to the drafts.

DARYLL FORDE,
Director.

Acknowledgements

Most of the information contained in the section on the Teita is based on field investigation carried out in a very short tour of three months in 1948 as an anthropologist working for the Kenya Government. I must especially mention the help of Mr. H. E. Lambert, Senior D.C. at Nairobi, and also of Mr. K. Cowley, D.C. Voi in 1948. The Rev. V. V. Verbi, a retired missionary who has worked for over forty years among the Teita, supplied some of the information on religion. Among my native informants were Andrew Mwawaza of Kigombe; Francis Mwaganga of Msau; Shadrack Isaac and his son Alfred, my interpreter, both from Wusi; Chief Norman of Chawai; my cook Jackson; Augustin Ngoda of Ndara and Heman Mwashagadi (temporarily) of Ngerenyi.

A. H. J. PRINS.

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INTRODUCTION

The Pokomo, Nyika and Teita are presented here as together forming one ethnic cluster under the title of the Coastal Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu. The use of the term 'North-Eastern Bantu' to refer to a group of tribes living mainly in Kenya and separated from other Bantu-speaking Africans by the Masai is only a matter of convenience. So far no accurate account of the characteristics of the group as a whole and of those which distinguish them from surrounding tribes is available, but Paumann and Seligman have used the term consistently and with identical meaning and reference.

There are two reasons for dealing separately with one part of the whole North-eastern group. The Coastal cluster occupies the Coastal Province of Kenya, while the Kamba, Kikuyu, Meru, Tharaka etc., which might be called the Central cluster, occupy the interior Central Province. The remainder of the North-eastern Bantu, consisting of such tribes as Chaga, Pare and Taveta, are found further south, and, with one exception, live in Tanganyika Territory. They can conveniently be called the Kilimanjaro cluster.

It is true that the Taveta are found also in the Coastal Province of Kenya, while most of the Segeju, as well as a good many of the Digo, live outside it. But the Digo belong historically to the Nyika group of tribes and their settlement south of the Kenya border is of fairly recent date. The Segeju, living between the Digo and the sea, although of different origin have become closely associated with the Nyika, by whom they are cut off from other Bantu peoples. But they might have been grouped with the Swahili, since they have been Islamised to a very considerable degree, as are a large number of the Digo.

These coastal peoples have, with the exceptions noted, a common tradition of origin and migration from Shungwaya, the legendary town or territory supposed to have been situated on the southern Somali coast, somewhere in what is now Juba-land. The name of this traditional homeland has, so far as we know, been lost by the Teita and this also holds for the tribes in the northern part of the Kikuyu Land Unit, who seem to have come from the same area in Somaliland. But the traditional ties between Pokomo, Nyika and Teita are very clearly asserted, whereas efforts by scholars to establish traditional links between the coastal branch and at least some of the tribes of the Kenya highlands are based in the main on historical reconstruction alone.

The Pare of Tanganyika might with advantage have been included among these coastal tribes, as they seem to be close kin to the Teita, closer for instance than the Taveta, who inhabit the extreme western part of the Teita District. There are, however, ethnographic reasons for grouping the Pare with the Chaga and Taveta, who also include strong Teita and probably Nyika elements.

Finally, attention must be drawn to a number of small dispersed groups of Nyika living in the interior of Somaliland. At least one group is easily identified by its name - Warabei. Probably the Ribi also belong to

this category. No ethnographic material on them appears to be available. They may represent stragglers who lost contact with the main body of Shungwaya migrants, but it is more likely that they are descendants of slaves who escaped from their Islamic masters in the coastal towns and re-integrated into tribal units. A German map by Brenner shows various slave colonies and these also existed along the Sabaki river until some decades ago, though here they seem to have become amalgamated with the larger Nyika tribes. Italian sources might yield further information about the Somali Nyika, but I have not had access to these.

Since this study was written, the detailed results of the 1948 Census have been published. These figures, based as they are on geographical or territorial divisions, do not yield clear information on tribal distributions, but they modify to some extent the statements given on pp.7, 42, 43, 101, of the present work. Thus, the Pokomo population of the Tana River district is given as 16,355 (89% of the total district population), but it is probable that some thousands of Pokomo inhabit the northern frontier district.

With regard to the Nyika, the following tribal totals are given, but these may be a little below the actual numbers: Kambe, 3,100; Rabai, 7,400; Kauma, 4,300; Chonyi, 13,000; Jibana, 4,600; Ribe, 1,300. The division into Kilifi Nyika, Malindi Nyika and Vanga or Kwale Nyika does not give any clue to the total numbers of Giriama, Duruma or Digo. The Vanga Nyika, comprising most of the Digo and all the Duruma, number 97,400; but there are 12,900 Vanga Nyika in Mombasa district. Similarly the Kilifi Nyika, comprising the majority of the Giriama and some of the minor tribes, number 116,750; but 2,500 Kilifi Nyika inhabit Kwale district, and 6,700 live in Mombasa. The 49,700 Malindi Nyika may include a large proportion of Giriama and probably some of the smaller tribes.

The totals given for the Teita are 52,200 in Teita district and 3,400 on Mombasa Island, but it is possible that the last figure includes some Taveta.

THE POKOMO

TRIBAL AND SUB-TRIBAL GROUPINGS; DEMOGRAPHY

NOMENCLATURE

The official tribal name always appears as *Pokomo* or, more correctly, *Wapokomo*. This is the Swahili pronunciation of the native name *Wafokomo*, in which the *f* represents the bi-labial *f* characteristic of the Pokomo language.⁽¹⁾ The spelling of the native name is rendered by another author as *Mbfokomo*, the plural form of which should be *Wabfokomo*.⁽²⁾

For the natives themselves their tribal name denotes, according to Wuertz, something temporal as opposed to the eternal qualities of Muungu, the High God. One might translate the name Wapokomo as "those who come to their end",⁽³⁾ or "those who will finish". They are known to their Galla neighbours as *Munya*; to the Digo as *Muno*⁽⁴⁾ and to the Segeju as *Wabokomu*.⁽⁵⁾

Curiously enough the Teita of Kasigao seem to use the word Mbakomo to denote, not the Pokomo, but the Nyika. This is stated by two authors⁽⁶⁾ apparently following Krapf.⁽⁷⁾

TRIBAL TERRITORY

The Pokomo occupy the Tana Valley, in the north-eastern part of Kenya Colony. The Tana River (*Tsana* in Pokomo; *Galana maro* or *dima* in Oromo; *Kiluluma* in Kamba and *Gururuma* (Upper Tana) in Swahili⁽⁸⁾) rises on the southern slopes of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares. In its upper course it flows to the north-east, its middle course is towards the south-east. Here, a few miles south of the equator (Lat. 0° 3' South; Long. 38° 55' East) was formerly situated the village Hameye,⁽⁹⁾ the northernmost outpost of the Pokomo.⁽¹⁰⁾ Gedge⁽¹¹⁾ states that "Kidori ... is the last village on the Tana in which true Pokomo are found ..." This village is situated 0° 57' S. by 39° 48' E.; it is taken as the frontier by Werner also, who says: "Their farthest north-western limit appears to be about 39° 30' E. on the bend of the river. This is the district of the Korokoro (sub-) tribe".⁽¹²⁾ Between Kidori, in the Malakote district, and the Korokoro settlements the river is bordered by the hamlets of an agricultural branch of the Sanye,⁽¹³⁾ one of the nomad hunter tribes of Kenya. The Korokoro district seems never to have been real Pokomo country. It used to be

(1) Werner, 1917, p.88.

(2) Wuertz, *Nachlass*, 1895, p.191.

(3) Ibid, p.192: "Die zu Ende gehenden".

(4) Dammann, 44.

(5) Baker, "Notes on the history of the Wasegeju", *Tanganyika Notes*, June 1949, p.27.

(6) Denhardt, 1884, p.142; v.d. Decken, 1869-70.

(7) Krapf, 1858, Vol.I, p.324.

(8) Denhardt, *op.cit.* p.129.

(9) Fischer, 1878-9, p.16; Gedge, 1892, p.520.

(10) Denhardt, *op.cit.* map.

(11) Gedge, *op.cit.* p.519.

(12) Werner, *op.cit.* p.88.

(13) Gedge, *op.cit.* p.520.