

A Study of Faunal Assemblages from 19th Century Caravan Trade Halts in North-eastern Tanzania

Thomas J. Biginagwa¹

Abstract

This paper examines aspects of animal economies practiced by local communities inhabiting the Lower Pangani River Basin, north-eastern Tanzania, against the context of caravan trade expansion in the 19th century. Faunal remains retrieved from three former caravan trade halts of Ngombezi, Old Korogwe and Kwa Sigi were analysed to establish whether, as argued by historians, i) animal economies in areas crossed by caravan trade routes were transformed following the demands for supplying the expanding caravan trade; ii) new herd management strategies were adopted by local communities to ensure production of surpluses for sale to the passing caravans; and iii) these developments combined to cause subsistence stress for local communities. This study shows that a wide range of wild animal species and fish supplemented domestic stock as sources of food at these caravan halt settlements. Such a consumption pattern of mixing both domestic and non-domestic resources is evident in the pre-nineteenth century, early nineteenth century, and later 19th century levels. Furthermore, there is a general lack of evidence suggestive of consumption pressure placed on domestic stock since over half of the cattle and caprines were left to survive to over three and two years, respectively. These findings contradict the arguments made by historians and suggest that the growth of the caravan trade had a less transformative effect on animal economies of the local communities lying along the main caravan trade routes than has hitherto been believed.

Introduction

In East Africa, trade in elephant ivory and slaves expanded dramatically during the 19th century (Beachey, 1967; Sheriff, 1987; Alpers, 1992). Such expansion was in part a response towards increased global demands for ivory triggered by the rapidly expanding industries, including cutlery, comb, piano and billiard-ball manufacturing—as part of broader changes in leisure activities and patterns of consumption by the growing middle classes in North America and Europe (Thorbahn, 1979; Flanders, 2006: 359). Since ivory from East Africa was highly appreciated for being softer to work than ivory sourced from other parts of the continent, the region became a major focus of interest. Consequently, over the course of the 19th century,

¹ University of Dar es Salaam,
College of Arts and Social Sciences
Department of History and Archaeology
Email: bigj@haceal.eu