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Early Iron Age Sites in Tanganyika relative to Traditional History

by H. A. FOSBROOKE

NORTHERN Tanganyika represents a borderland where several ethnic stocks meet and mingle. Firstly, there are the Nilo-hamitic pastoralists, represented by the Masai and the Tatog; secondly, an unidentified stock, possibly Hamitic, of whom the Iraqw of Mbulu form the largest tribe: and, finally, the Bantu, typified by the Pare, Chagga and Meru.

All these tribes possess one feature in common; none claims autochthony, all having arrived, according to their own and neighbouring tribes' traditions, in recent centuries into their present habitat. The pastoralists arrived with their language and culture much as they are today; there is a considerable body of evidence to support this traditional belief. Much the same applies to the Iraqw group, though modification has probably been greater here.

With the Bantu, however, no tribe possesses a tradition or belief in a mass migration; all admit to entering their present areas in dribs and drabs, drawing their component elements from various tribes, and not always Bantu. There is no traditional record of the new inhabitant replacing previous agricultural folk. The Chagga record dwarf hunters in the forest (Dundas, 1924), as do the Mbugwe (Gray, 1955). The Chagga (Dundas, ibid.) also record another tribe, the Umbo, but it appears from the record that these were transitory and not settled inhabitants of the area. A remnant group, the Ngassa, is found amongst the Chagga but I have shown elsewhere (Fosbrooke, 1955) that these were probably precursors of the Nilo-hamitic Masai. Another remnant group, the Mbugu, were more numerous amongst the Pare in the past, but are today found mostly amongst the Sambaa; the latest assessment of their language (Whiteley and Gutkind, 1954) indicates that they are more likely of Iraqw, rather than of Nilo-Hamitic origin. The latter stock, however, was early in the area, as, in addition to the Ngassa mentioned above, the present-day hunters, the Dorobo, of the Ruvu Valley, speak a language of the Nandi group (Maguire, 1948), whilst early German records mention the existence of Tatog in the Kilimanjaro area.

Thus there is much evidence of comings and goings in the past but two features are noticeable; the goings seem to concern pastoral and hunting folk, the comings the agricultural Bantu, who settled in the mountain areas. There is no traditional evidence of the Bantu replacing other agriculturists in these forest areas; confirmation of the accuracy of this is available from sociological sources. Time and again a study of the clan and lineage structures of the various tribes reveals an expanding population taking up more and more unoccupied forest land till eventually the area was completely filled and the surplus population had to move elsewhere.

There is, however, a considerable body of archaeological evidence coming to light that at some time in the past there were sedentary, agricultural iron-age folk living on the plains. It is with these sites that this paper deals. In the first place they were sedentary, as proved by the fact that the mud of their wattle and daub houses has at times been turned to brick—presumably by the house catching fire—with a result that burnt brick clots of varying size are to be picked up on the site today. As shown in Fig. 1, the impression of the withies is still preserved on the internal surfaces,

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whilst on the outer surface is sometimes to be discerned the imprint of the plasterers' fingers. It is a matter of conjecture whether these huts were roofed with thatch, or with the flat mud roof of *tembe* type, characteristic of Central Tanganyika today. Further research will answer this problem for us, for it has been observed that different techniques are today used in applying the wall plaster and the mud to the roofs. The former is well puddled with water, and slapped onto the wooden framework in a very plastic state. The roof, however, is covered with dry crumbly clay, which is left in that state till the first rain falls. When thus naturally moistened it is then worked with the hands to form an unbroken surface. Internally the clay, not having been puddled, retains its crumbly appearance, and on this evidence I suggest that it represents roof clay and not wall clay. The technique of identification requires further study, but is, I am convinced, capable of being perfected.

Further evidence of the sedentary nature of the population is to be found in the size of the kitchen middens. In one case the heap of refuse was 45 yards by 15, but of no great height—probably much of the ash had been removed by wind action. I am unaware whether anyone has studied the output of refuse by a subsistance agricultural community, but it should be possible to ascertain a factor of *x* cubic feet per person per year. From this the period of occupation could be ascertained.

There is thus sufficient evidence available to prove that the people concerned were sedentary. Some villages site must contain up to 100 house sites: this is my own estimate as I have not got down to detailed survey. The sites are distinguished from the neighbouring bush by a change in vegetation type. Not all the sites are as open; some in Pare are, in fact, very thickly covered, but the ash heaps give freer drainage and varying soil composition, thus leading to different vegetational types, so that the inhabited area can be recognized.

The fact that the inhabitants were agricultural is proved by the presence of grindstones, Fig. 2. The fact that the granite is worn through testifies to the period of use. A line worth taking up is the varying techniques employed when grinding. In Northern Tanganyika today there are tribes who use an elongated upper stone whose ends protrude beyond the sides of the lower: this means that the latter eventually wears into a saddle shape. Others use a small upper stone which results in a bowl formation, as illustrated, whilst others again practise a technique of grinding such that the lower stone wears evenly and continues to present a flat surface until it is worn out. So side by side with any archaeological work undertaken in the area I commend a study of existing grinding methods and their relations to the grain being ground.

That the people were iron-age is undoubted, as slag and broken *tuyères* are to be found in all the villages, varying from isolated occurrences to profusion. I distinguish these villages from known iron-smelting sites used till recently by the Rangi and the Pare; I have recently described (Fosbrooke, 1954) one such site where 800 *tuyères* were found on the surface, with indications of many times that number underground. In the villages the profusion is not so great, but enough to indicate that the ironworking took place in the village. This disposes of one misconception held by the Pare who equate the inhabitants of these village sites with the Galla. For the Galla, in common with the Somali, Masai, Tatoga, etc., regard their smiths as belonging to a lower caste; though Huntingford (1955) does not specifically say so, by implication and analogy we may conclude that the smiths lived apart in villages of their own. Thus evidence of ironworking would not be found in the centre of the villages—that is, unless they were specifically smiths' villages; and if so, where did the rest of the Galla live?—for evidence of ironworking occurs in practically every site. In one case two anvil stones have been found. Their use for this purpose is proved by the underpinning stones placed so that the anvil presents a level surface. This technique is used today by the local Rangi; in fact, further work is necessary on this site which, although now uninhabited, may prove to be the work of the Rangi and not their predecessors.

With the exception of one tiny iron ring, such as might have been used for decorating a bow tip, no iron work has yet been found, but this is understandable as all evidence so far consists of

surface finds and any iron objects must have by now oxidized away; but not so the potsherds and shell beads which are the main indicators of sites.

The potsherds, to be found in considerable numbers on the sites, present features absent from the adjacent areas today. The double rim from Pare (Fig. 3) is something unique, as is the massive construction of the vessel which carries it. Pierced lugs are also common in this area and thereby hangs a tale. The early Pare lived side by side with the 'Galla', the latter having a repulsive habit of catching young Pare girls and cutting their breasts off. These they stewed up in pots; one such sacrificial site is pointed out today where elders still alive remember a complete pot standing as left by the 'Galla'. The association between lugged pottery and a breast legend is very suggestive of a rationalization.

Many of the patterns are very distinctive and show greater richness than anything to be found in the area today. The zigzag pattern (Fig. 4) occurs frequently and the technique of its application is plain. A fragment of curvilinear material, probably gourd, is impressed edgeways on the damp clay. It is then pivoted on one end and again pressed, pivoted on the opposite end and pressed, and so on till the rim of the pot is reached. The wavy-line specimen (Fig. 5) is almost identical in pattern with an example of Khartoum Mesolithic reproduced by Sonia Cole (1954) but too much significance must not be placed on this, for, as Mrs Cole herself says, 'Pottery is the favourite artifact of many archaeologists; from a handful of sherds they work out zones of contact, spheres of influence, migration routes over half a continent, and many other things besides. All this could not be plotted on a map if individual pot makers departed from the accepted pattern of their culture; if they did not, they must have been very dull fellows.'

Beads are a line which should help to date the sites, though the surface finds reveal the inhabitants as depending more on their own resources than on trade beads. A profusion of shell beads is to be found on all Pare sites: their occurrence gets less the further west one goes. Ostrich shell is used (Fig. 6, upper row), though snail shell is the more common material (Fig. 6, lower row). Beads, other than shell, are illustrated in Fig. 7. These are mostly stone, but the varying materials have not yet been identified so their origins are uncertain. At the left hand end of each row is illustrated a glass bead, the lower a half section. These are so patinated as to present the appearance of stone.

One pendant of snail shell has been found (Fig. 8, top row, centre), whilst the occasional cowrie indicates contact with the Coast. But they are few and far between, and being surface finds might have been dropped by the traders or the Masai who are known to have passed through the area in the nineteenth century. In fact the technique of cutting out the back of the cowrie (Fig. 8, top row right) is that practised by the Masai today when sewing cowries on to leather garments or gourds. The hole drilled in the top (second from right) is a non-Masai feature.

Two pieces of pigment have been recovered (Fig. 8, top left), pieces of haematite obviously shaped by rubbing on stone. These come from Pare and the fact that there are no rock paintings, save some Late Whites, in the area indicates that the pigment was more likely used for personal adornment than for rock painting.

The association between the sites and the 'Late White' style of rock painting, as defined by Fosbrooke *et al.* (1950) seems to be more than fortuitous. In Pare the only known rock paintings are of Late White style at Tusa Hill, within 10 miles of two or three iron-age sites. One of the two painting sites, both Late White, known in Masailand is within a few hundred yards of the Lerug occupation site. As can be seen in Fig. 9, one or two of the designs are modern, e.g. the shield device, but that is merely illustrative of the fact that painting attracts painting. In general the designs and styles are identical to the Kondoa Late Whites, which again occur in close proximity to the iron-age sites in the vicinity.

Though just outside the area here dealt with, the association between Late White paintings and the inhabitants who preceded the present tribes is recorded by Culwick (1931) at Bahi in Gogo Country, at a point about 100 miles south-west from the Kondoa sites. Mnyampala (1954) describes the evidence of these pre-Gogo inhabitants as consisting of hut sites, grindstones, pot-

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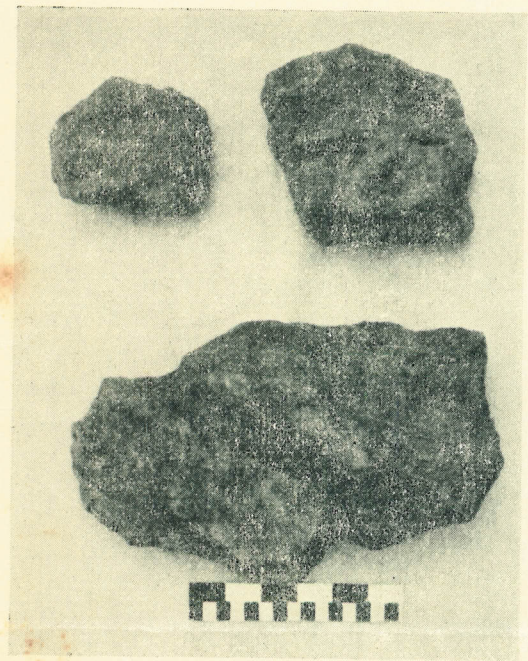

FIG. 1. Clay from wattle and daub structure turned to brick. Note : grooves indicate position of woodwork

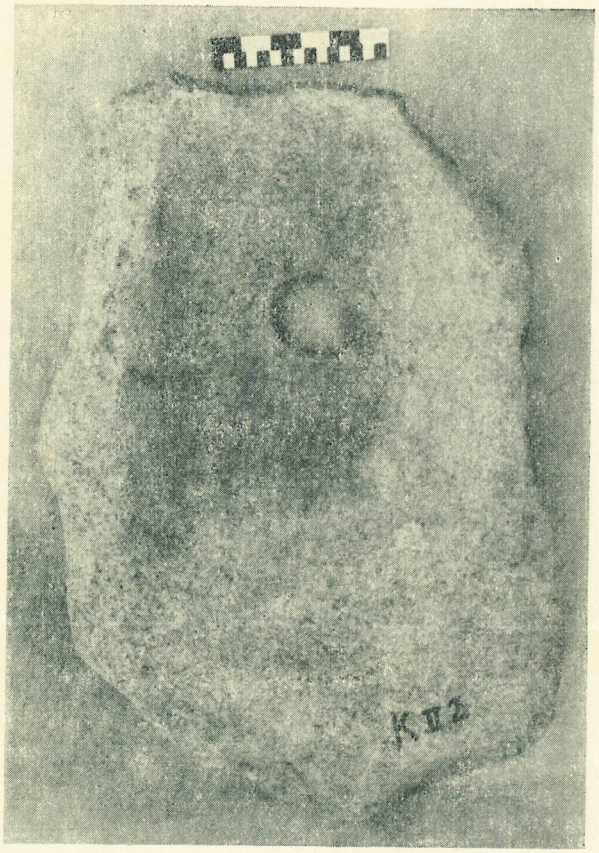

FIG. 2. Push quern from Kondoa site, worn through with prolonged use.

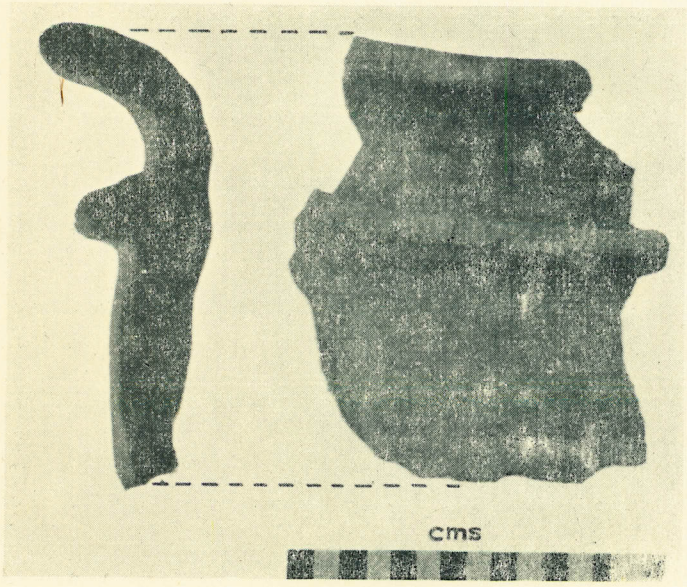

FIG. 3. Fragment of massive pot with double rim of type not found today. Section reveals thickness as approximately one inch

FIG. 4. Potsherd from Pare bearing zigzag pattern not now used

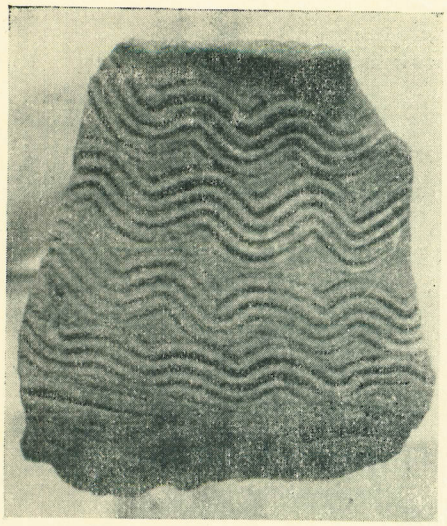

FIG. 5. Potsherd from Pare with wavy-line pattern, also not used today

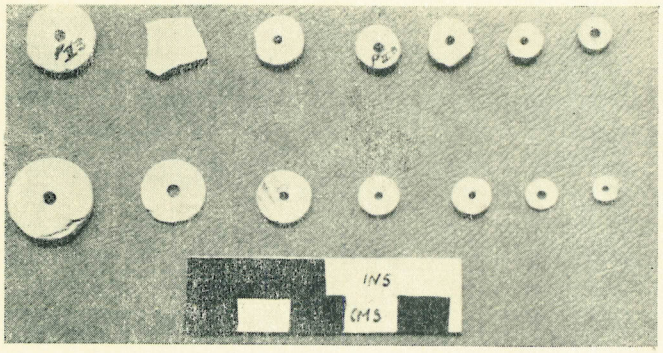

FIG. 6. Shell beads from Pare site. Upper row ostrich, lower row snail shell

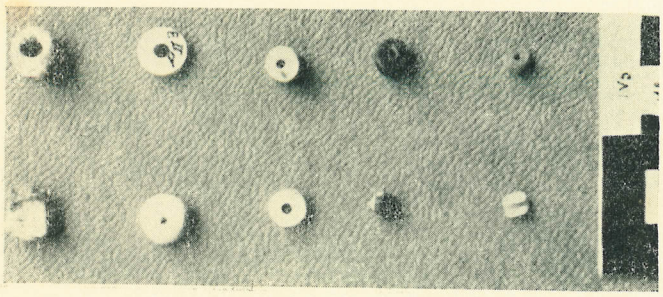

FIG. 7. Glass and stone beads from Pare sites

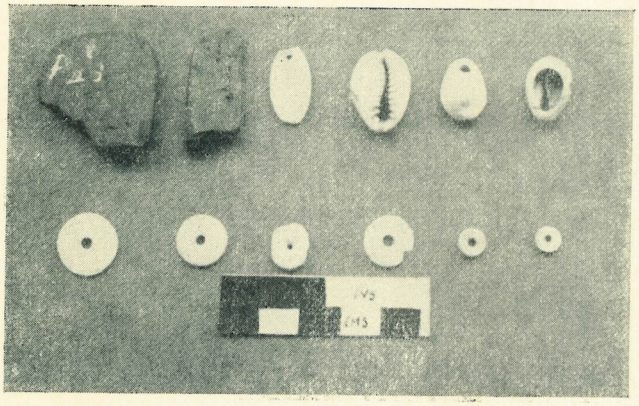

FIG. 8. Pigment, pendant, cowries and shell beads from Pare sites

FIG. 9. Late 'White' painting from Lerug, South Masai—3 alternatives

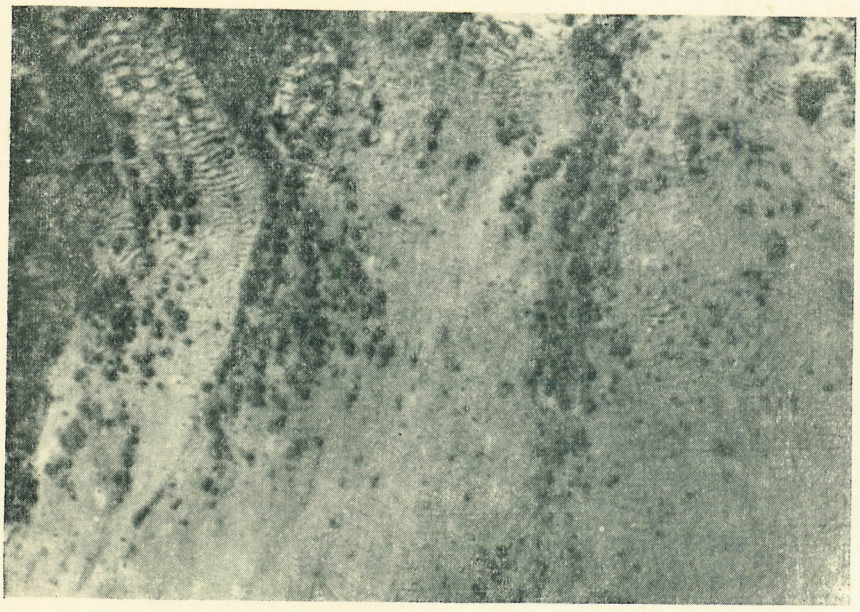

FIG. 10. Engaruka from the air: the North Ruins with terraced dwelling sites top left, at base of scarp, and irrigation basins on right

(Air Survey Division, Dept. of Surveys, Tanganyika.)

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miles north of Engaruka. Though not linked with the late inhabitants by legend or by physical type—for no skeletal material has yet come from Engaruka—there are points in Sonjo culture suggesting that they were picked up from Engaruka. The position of the villages, the terraced house sites and paths, the stone fireplaces and the irrigation system are examples of this.

Back then to Engaruka, with 8,000 acres under cultivation to feed its 40,000 inhabitants. The duty of irrigation water varies tremendously according to the crop, the nature of the soil and the time of year. Figures in the authorities are as low as 40 acres per cusec for sugar-cane or rice and up to 250 for general crops when merely supplementing rainfall. A reasonable figure for Engaruka conditions would be 100 acres. The hydrologists of the Tanganyika Department of Water Development and Irrigation have measured the Engaruka stream and find that at minimum flow it carried eight cusecs. This would irrigate 800 acres or precisely a tenth of the area required to feed the estimated population.

It must be borne in mind that Engaruka is in an area of tectonic disturbance, at the base of the Rift Wall, with an active volcano, Oldonyo Lengai, only 25 miles to the North. Thus it might be argued that water which previously flowed on the surface has been lost through some fault or crack appearing. To set off against this, 72 cusecs is an awful lot of water to lose, about 36 million gallons every 24 hours, sufficient to serve a town of nearly one million inhabitants in Europe.

Further evidence of desiccation is available in the form of glacier recession on Kilimanjaro, reduction of lake levels and the shrinkage of forests on mountain tops, but these points cannot be developed here: suffice it to say that on archaeological grounds alone a strong *prima facie* case is made out, which only further research, including careful excavation of the sites already discovered, can confirm or refute.

It is the arid nature of the country in which these sites are found which has so far preserved them from agricultural activity and consequent destruction. But population pressure and modern technological progress—drilled or piped water supplies, sisal production, etc.—is leading to the utilization of these marginal areas and the destruction of this evidence, hence the urgent necessity for excavation.

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