

HUNTERS AND GATHERERS AND THE ACQUISITION OF CATTLE:  
A LINGUISTIC AND HISTORIC DOCUMENTATION FROM CENTRAL  
TANZANIA

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SANDAWE : Khoisan-speakers

IRAQW  
 GOROWA (or FIOME)  
 ALA(G)WA (or ASI)  
 BURUNGE

} Iraqw-cluster of languages

BARABAIGA Upland or Plateau "Nilo-hamites"

MAASAI (and BARAGUYU) Plains "Nilo-hamites". Note: there are small pockets of Baraguyu in Sandawe, Gogo, and Burunge countries.

RIMI  
 GOGO  
 RANGI

} Bantu

Much has been theorized about the transition of human society from a nomadic hunter-gatherer mode of existence to the settled way of life of cultivators. Much less is known about the acquisition of cattle by hunter-gatherers, and its consequences for their society. Yet it would appear that the disruptive effects of the acquisition of cattle might have been more far-reaching than those of settlement and cultivation.

The oral traditions of the East African Sandawe state that they first came into contact with cattle-owners only some ten or eleven generations ago, when the Alagwa arrived from the north and settled among them. This would also have introduced a limited amount of horticultural activities to them. In the outlying bushlands of Sandawe country some families continued their old way of life until the beginning of this century and even later. Oral traditions testifying to their recent hunter-gatherer existence are backed up by the traditions of neighbouring peoples, too, who claim that the Sandawe attempted to hunt their cattle. Clan histories, songs, stories, as well as rock art, geographical and clan names, and a few archaeological finds supply further evidence. But in particular, new linguistic data in the form of cattle vocabularies which I have collected during my latest study leave in the area point to the acquisition and the subsequent loss of cattle by the hunter-gatherers. This new evidence suggests that cattle have been acquired at least twice, and that the hunter-gatherers had become particularly vulnerable to raiders after acquiring cattle. The existing literature has discussed factors leading to cattle losses such as droughts and diseases, and also mentioned warfare. Social factors now appear to be at least as important.

When I started my research into the acquisition of cattle by the Sandawe I was trying to find out from whom they got their cattle, hoping also to find clues when and how this had happened. I was hoping to find corroboration of what the Sandawe had told me themselves. I did not, at the time, attempt to discover what sociological results the acquisition of cattle might have<sup>had</sup> on a hunter-gatherer society like the old Sandawe. It was only after digesting the results of my research that it began to dawn upon me that the sociological impact must have been considerable.

There are certain ambiguities in the oral traditions of the Sandawe, in particular of the Alagwa who claim to have been the first to have introduced cattle among the Sandawe (the non-Alagwa Sandawe agree with this point). They also say that the Bantu-speaking Rimi who began to settle in Sandawe country later, brought in many more cattle. The Sandawe of Rimi descent do not dispute also these points. What is unclear, however, is who were those Alagwa? The Alagwa themselves say that they came from Mang'ati, that is from the northern neighbours of the Sandawe, the Barabaiga who are called Mang'ati by non-Barabaiga. The name appears to be of Maasai origin, meaning true enemies, in recognition of the war-like qualities of the Barabaiga cattlemen. In spite of the fact that the Alagwa believe that they are related to the Ala(g)wa or Asi of the Kolo area north of Kondoa,<sup>1)</sup> who speak a language which belongs to the Iraqw-cluster which is totally different from Barabaiga (which is remotely related to Maasai) the Alagwa believe that once upon a time they were Barabaiga. For the linguistic affinities of the peoples of north-central Tanzania I refer to the map.

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<sup>1</sup> ten Raa, 1983.

In order to settle the question whether the Sandawe Alagwa had belonged to the Iraqw cluster or whether they had been Barabaiga, I went to visit those peoples. Inquiries among the Barabaiga yielded no clues as to whether there had ever been <sup>any</sup> Alagwa clans among them, but the Iraqw confirmed that Ala(g)wa clansmen had fled south in the past when attacked by Barabaiga. The cattle terminology of the Iraqw tended to confirm this: their terms for basic cattle names shows close correspondence with the Sandawe terms for basic cattle names (see below). It therefore appeared that the Alagwa had been Iraqw rather than Barabaiga. They may have crossed Barabaiga country, but they were not Barabaiga themselves. Rather, they were refugees from the Barabaiga, even though they may have been staying in what is now Barabaiga country. In fact, they were Iraqw who had been displaced by the Barabaiga; they had been staying in what is at present Barabaiga country on their way south, until they settled in Sandawe country, with the few cattle they had left, after having been raided by the Barabaiga.

Another people who have had much influence on the cultural development of the Sandawe are the Rimi who are Bantu-speakers and arrived from the North-west; like the Alagwa they were cultivators and cattle-keepers. They arrived later than the Alagwa but settled in greater numbers, populating much of the north-west quadrant of Sandawe country. Not all of them have been totally absorbed by the Sandawe yet: some of their descendants still speak a Rimi dialect at home, or have retained some knowledge of it. On the way to visit the Barabaiga I passed through Rimi country, and took down their cattle vocabulary for comparison. Subsequently I also collected Maasai terms from the Baraguyu Maasai who live in and close by Sandawe country, the Burunge and the Gogo. Notes which I had collected on the Rangii and the Alawa (Asi) cattle vocabularies were lost in a flooded river, but not until after I had established that the Rangii list showed no

correspondences with its Sandawe equivalents, and that the Alawa list was almost identical with the Burunge, while also showing some correspondences with Iraqw. This is not surprising. The Rangii have had little contact with the Sandawe, except as traders of iron hoes which they supplied to the Sandawe against beeswax and, since the middle of the 18th century (in particular after the arrival of Arab traders in Kondoa), also some ivory. Apart from that, the thick belt of tsetse fly in the North Sandawe hills seems to have kept the Rangii and the Sandawe apart. The Alawa and the Burunge have been one people until split apart by the Rangii, and both remain clearly members of the Iraqw cluster of peoples.

In the following pages I shall now present my cattle vocabularies. The terms are presented as I have heard them: this explains some slight variations in spelling which may be due to individual variation between informants or my hearing. My difficulties in taking down the terms were compounded by the rapid speech habits of the Barabaiga and the speakers of Iraqw-cluster languages, and also the Maasai. I have arranged the items in groups and numbered them as follows:

- 1 to 14 physical characteristics of cattle
- 21 to 28 " " " goats
- 31 to 39 " " " sheep
- 41 to 77 colour patterns of domestic animals
- 80 to 92 physical defects and special uses of domestic animals

For easy comparison I have numbered

- the Sandawe (Khoi-san) terms in a 100 series,
- Iraqw (Iraqw cluster) terms in a 200 series,
- Burunge (Iraqw cluster) terms in a 300 series,
- Barabaiga (Upland Nilo-hamitic) terms in a 400 series,
- Maasai (Plains Nilo-hamitic) in a 500 series,
- Rimi (Bantu) in a 600 series,
- Gogo (Bantu) in a 700 series, and
- English (the referent language) in a 800 series.

When comparing these terms it becomes immediately clear that many items have been borrowed by the Sandawe from other languages, and also that some borrowings have ~~come to~~ the Sandawe not direct from its source, but via another language. Finally, the Sandawe have also used some vocabulary items from their own language to describe **domestic** animals. For example, hon//'o phoo (No.162) is a Sandawe descriptive term (literally 'forehead white'), but mará is a borrowing from the Rimi mará (No.662), who got it from the Barabaiga mára or meér (No.462). It would seem that the Gogo ili-mala derives from the same source. For quick comparison-at-a-glance I have marked the Barabaiga term with a large figure 1 (because the term is of Barabaiga origin), the Rimi term with a number 2 (because it is derived from 1), and the Sandawe term with a number 3 (because it is derived from 2). The Gogo term is marked 2a because it appears to be derived from 2 but without passing it on to the Sandawe. In the same manner, the Sandawe appear to have borrowed their word for 'steer', éwa, from the Iraqw au, or auèè (Nos.114 and 214 respectively). Therefore, the Iraqw term is marked 1, and the Sandawe 2: this shows that the Sandawe would have borrowed this term from the Iraqw direct, presumably from the Iraqw Alagwa who settled with their cattle among the Sandawe some ten generations ago. Original Sandawe terms, like hon//'o phoo (No.162, referred to above), are marked by the number 1.

When we now look at the results a surprising pattern emerges. It appears that the Sandawe have derived their vocabulary for the physical characteristics of their domestic animals, i.e., the basic terms, from the Iraqw (except the word for cattle, humbu (No.101) which is an onomatopoeic rendering of the sound which this animal produces, and a very few other words, the derivation of which is not certain).



The situation in respect of colour patterns is totally different, however. These are all derived from the Barabaiga, through the Rimi. In other words, the Sandawe did not **get these terms** from the Alagwa who introduced cattle to them originally, but from the Rimi, who **had received them** from the Barabaiga. How can we explain this?

We should remember that the Alagwa clans of the Iraqw had been cultivators who also kept cattle, and that they undertook the trek into the unattractive country of the Sandawe because they had been attacked by the more war-like Barabaiga who were Nilo-hamitic cattlemen and militarily superior to the Iraqw. **It is likely that the Ala(g)wa** of Kolo, Kondoa, together with their brethren the Burunge started their journeys down south as the result of the same series of attacks by the Barabaiga, and **possibly** at more or less the same time. Sandawe country was unattractive to cattlemen because its centre consists of **rocky hills** covered in thorny vegetation with only little grazing ground, and surrounded by **areas** inhabited by tsetse fly, fatal to cattle. Thus the Alagwa were refugees with only a few miserable cattle which they had managed to retain or recoup from their pursuers, the Barabaiga, to whom they had lost most of their cattle wealth. They fled into poor cattle country, losing probably a good deal of their remaining cattle possessions to the tsetse fly, only to find that the local Sandawe considered their few remaining beasts good hunting objects. In order to secure the continuation of their lineages they married Sandawe women, so their children grew up as Sandawe. This also resulted in the Sandawe receiving their first cattle (as bridewealth, having used beehives and arrows before then). But the infusion of cattle into Sandawe society was so small that individual families did not have to distinguish between their animals, and they adopted no vocabulary of colour patterns from the Alagwa. Indeed, it is likely that the Alagwa themselves were so poor in cattle that they soon lost the use of colour-distinctive terms anyway. What the Sandawe received from the Alagwa was a small

number of domestic animals (not only cattle, but also goats and sheep), and a correspondingly poor vocabulary to describe those animals. But the Alagwa brought more than just a few domestic animals into Sandawe country: rainmaking expertise, and lineage-awareness. To the non-Alagwa Sandawe the lineage principle is not important, and few can remember the names of their ancestors beyond their paternal great-grandfather (the Sandawe are organized in patrilineal clans), but most Alagwa Sandawe know the names of their patrilineal ancestors beyond six or seven generations, and sometimes more, including details like who was a good rainmaker or war-medicine man (much-coveted iron armlots are passed down the line in families with outstanding men of this kind). Youngsters who show promise are instructed by their fathers or fathers' brothers in the secrets of successful rainmaking, learning about cloud patterns and atmospheric conditions, the secrets of which are jealously guarded by their lineage elders. When the rainmaking efforts of other clans fail, the Alagwa make rain for them: that is, when the signs are good, and against payment. Payment is in domestic animals, including cattle. It is in this way that the Alagwa have maintained, and are still maintaining and expanding, their wealth in cattle. They also maintained and built up their social prestige among the Sandawe, to the point that when the Germans arrived at the very end of the last century, it was the Alagwa who got themselves recognized as Chiefs of the Sandawe - although in traditionally chiefless Sandawe society it took the appearance of foreign rulers who needed local representatives through whom to rule, to get chiefs with temporal powers recognized (As soon as the government of independent Tanzania abolished the temporal powers of chiefs, the chiefly status of the Sandawe Alagwa "chief" disappeared like snow under the hot tropical sun). It is true, however, that the Alagwa have built up, and maintained, a somewhat higher social prestige than the other Sandawe among whom they live. Together with this social prestige went

a degree of economic ascendancy (cf. ten Raa, 1968 and 1983).

These developments were not without reverses, nor were they rapid. If we estimate the time of the arrival of the first Alagwa at, say, the <sup>middle or the</sup> second half of the 18th century (ten or eleven generations ago!), the first Rimi settlers (their clan histories speak of six or seven generations ago, possibly more or less contemporaneously with the first Nyamwezi traders or, say, during the first half or the middle of the last century) left descriptions of conditions in Sandawe country much as the first Alagwa had found them. That is, the Sandawe, including the Alagwa, had reverted to a hunter-gatherer existence. There were no cattle or even people but only the (strange click) language: the people went in hiding when strangers passed. The Alagwa had apparently lost their cattle, and so had the other Sandawe. Alagwa clan histories appear to confirm this: they mention a number of war leaders (medicine men, rather than fighters) who suffered serious reverses at the hands of both the Barabaiga and the Maasai. These traditions speak of recurrent losses in cattle, and only rarely of a counter-raid, and only one with more than limited success (against the Barabaiga, under the Alagwa headman Amás). Famous leaders, like a man called Sóno, appear to have fought only losing battles or not to have fought at all. One exception is the trapping of a contingent of Barabaiga raiders in a hastily-built long thorn fence and the retrieval of the cattle stolen by the Barabaiga (a Sandawe with school education proudly described this as the Sandawe Chinese Wall). The Rimi, who were (and their descendants still are) far more numerous than the Alagwa, were ardent cultivators. It was also the Rimi who re-introduced cattle among the Sandawe. According to their clan histories the Rimi settlers also suffered reverses and serious cattle losses, to the same traditional enemies. But, in spite of this, the Rimi and their non-Rimi Sandawe neighbours (who intermarried with them) often owned enough cattle to necessitate

colour-pattern terms in order to distinguish between various animals in a herd. Thus the Sandawe acquired this category of their cattle vocabulary from the Rimi, and not from the ~~Iraqw~~ Alagwa. The previous acquisition of these terms from the Barabaiga could be explained by the sufficient numerical strength of the settled Rimi cultivators in their contacts with the Barabaiga cattlemen.

Not only cattle (and domestic animals in general) have been repeatedly lost in Sandawe history. Traditions also speak of the loss of people (and the loss of animals to droughts and pests) (ten Raa, 1966 and 1983). The loss of people has been on at least one occasion a serious one. It is said that raiders from Mang'ati (Barabaiga) entered Sandawe country, stole all the cattle they could lay their hands on, and after driving off the animals, turned on the Sandawe further south in the corridor between what is now Kwa Mtoro and Sanzawa, and chased them right out of Sandawe country. The unfortunate Sandawe lost all their cattle and fled south beyond Bahi and Kilimatinda into sparsely inhabited Kimbu country, never to be heard of again. Sandawe traditions speak of half the Sandawe people which got lost in this event. This could mean half the population of <sup>only</sup> the area concerned, which is the most densely populated part of Sandawe country today. Whatever the case may be, losses in population seem to have been serious. Only a few returned, most of these after an absence of many years.

When Sandawe informants are questioned about the reasons why their ancestors lost virtually all their cattle wars, the stock answer is that the war-medicine of The Barabaiga and the Maasai must be stronger than theirs. Not even superior numbers or better training in cattle warfare ever seem to be mentioned. But the principal reason would have to be sought in traditional outlook and social organization (warlike organization is part of social organization).

Traditionally the Sandawe were hunter-gatherers. This means that the bulk of their food comes from the bush, gathered by the women. The men also bring in some food, by hunting (mainly small animals. Meat of large animals is mainly derived from carrion). Hunter-gatherers subsist therefore on resources which are nobody's property before it is obtained, and consequently they have no stock that has to be defended against hungry or greedy competitors. The only things to be defended are the people themselves, their spouses, and their children. The Sandawe tradition is to do this not by fighting but by hiding. There is nothing to fight for, and, in particular if the family lives in simple half-shelters which are no objects worth fighting for by enemies anyway, the easiest thing is to abandon them and to remain invisible as long as necessary. Sandawe children learn the art of khapé at an early age. Khapé means to turn around a tree so that a stranger who passes cannot see you. They also learn to be quiet and to avoid breaking twigs with their feet, so they cannot be heard. The Sandawe are renowned for their bowmanship, and little children spend much time competing with each other in shooting their arrows at melons and similar objects. First the melons are placed in a row, but after a while they are thrown and they have to be hit when in motion. It is the boys who do this training, but the object is not warfare, but learning how to hunt rock hares, dwarf antelopes, and the like. Circumcision has been introduced among the Sandawe by the Rimi, and their circumcision camps rarely contain more than a dozen boys, and they have no age-groups. In these camps, they are taught songs, and they have to make their own hunting weapons and show proof of hunting ability to enter adulthood, but there is no emphasis at all on looking after and defending cattle. The Nilo-hamites, on the other hand, have age-groupings as perhaps the most important principle of social cement, possibly more important than descent and the family, and their age

groupings are organized in regiments of age-mates, trained in warfare and mutual support in their large circumcision camps, involving youths of whole groups of ages; their military strength is therefore considerable. They are not only strong in defending their cattle, but they are also formidable raiders. The Sandawe have none of this. Their survival as a people having been dependent on avoidance and hiding rather than open battle (and also the unattractive nature of their country for cattlemen), they became immobile and vulnerable to raiders as soon as they acquired even a few cattle. They acquired things which had to be defended, but they did not acquire the traditional attitudes and social organization to defend these things. Their position became far more difficult than that of traditional cultivators who acquire cattle. Hunter-gatherers do not produce their sustenance, they only harvest what is available. Therefore, they cannot support a large population. Cultivators, on the other hand, do produce their own food and can support a heavy population, even much heavier than cattle-centred societies. It appears that the Bantu-speaking Rimi cultivators had become numerous enough to survive their contacts with the cattle-oriented Barabaiga in spite of the fact that they do not have the latter's military social organization. **Hunter-gatherers have neither that nor the numbers; instead, upon acquiring cattle they lose their mobility, their invisibility, and much of their ability to survive. They lose their cattle wars and they lose their cattle and even their people who are driven out and end up either eking out a meagre existence in harsh surroundings (like the bushlands south of Bahi and Kilimatinde) or perishing altogether.** It is perhaps not overstating the case to say that the Sandawe may well have been saved as a people by the advent of colonialism in their country, which put an end to cattle raiding.