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The (in)visible roots of Bunyoro-Kitara and Buganda in the Lakes region: AD 800–1300

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Introduction

Between 1600 and 1800, in eastern Africa's Great Lakes region, the states of Bunyoro-Kitara and Buganda formed and began to export their bureaucratic, militaristic, and religious hegemony to neighboring societies. They did so with little or no connection to intercontinental or maritime trading systems. They did so in wet, dry, highland, and lakeshore environments. They did so using metals, cattle, bananas, grains, fishing, and hunting, in varying combinations, as their technological and agricultural bases. But they also did so with less visible resources, with funds of meaning and concepts of power and with sometimes abstract units of social organization. This essay will argue that the history of these visible and invisible roots of these two states between the Great Lakes reveals that any sort of evolutionist model for state formation must take these factors into account.

Exploring these issues begins with the evidence from Great Lakes societies which diagnoses their own analytical categories for social life. If scholars choose to settle on chiefdoms as important units of study they must understand their importance to those who lived in them. Such a condition highlights the necessity of interdisciplinary scholarship. Archaeologists, comparative linguists, and comparative ethnographers generate information on the varieties of chiefdoms and, more importantly, these scholars may suggest what other sorts of social and material relations – family structure and gender – may be implicated in the development of chiefdoms. For historical linguists, such data emerge from the comparative study of retention¹ and innovation in the vocabulary (material and lexical) of power, settlements,

social relationships, and gendered identities (see Appendix). But only careful survey and excavation by archaeologists will confirm these sequences of innovation and reproduced continuity.

For the period after 800, researchers in the Great Lakes region will find fairly detailed records of change in three vital arenas: environment and climate (Hassan 1981; Schoenbrun 1994b), agriculture and settlement (Reid 1991, 1995; Robertshaw 1994; Schoenbrun 1993) and technology and material culture (Childs 1991; Connah 1991, 1996). Though few studies have addressed themselves to all these matters, the evidentiary base for exploring the roots of states between the Great Lakes is enviably dense.

This chapter builds on this evidence to summarize the regional agricultural histories of two geographical-linguistic zones within the larger Great Lakes region: Rutaran and North Nyanzan. These agricultural histories reveal some of the material bases of wealth and power. The chapter turns next to some thoughts on the opening and closing of an "internal frontier" in the Central Grasslands. Following on this, I consider the semantic histories of some words which describe forms of power. A final section recounts the historical development of units of social organization and gender relations in the context of the emergence of the internal frontier. I conclude by reflecting on how these findings require modifications to evolutionist paradigms of state formation.

Regional agricultural history

Between 800 and 1300 agricultural and technological specializations took distinctive regional forms across the Great Lakes zone. They included specialized pastoralism (Reid 1991; Schoenbrun 1993), intensive banana farming (Schoenbrun 1993; Wrigley 1996: 60–1), an entirely novel form of pottery decoration and shape (Connah 1991; Desmedt 1991; Robertshaw 1994; Stewart 1993), and the increasingly widespread practice of iron smithing (Robertshaw 1994; Sutton 1993). These developments left permanent impressions in the palaeo-environmental record from parts of the Great Lakes region. They also heralded an entirely new set of related changes in political scale, the notions of power which gave life to this new politics, and the forms of settlements which encoded intimate parts of the new politics of power (Reid 1995, 1996; Robertshaw this volume; Schoenbrun 1996a, 1996b; Tantalala 1989).

The linguistic data reveal a remarkable simultaneity in the timing of the development of both specialized pastoralism and intensive banana farming. Cattle had

been part of the legacy of Great Lakes food systems from very early on, and the span of time between the development of a breeding taxonomy and a color taxonomy is fully two millennia (Schoenbrun 1993: 45–50). When the banana arrived it seems to have been taken up at a somewhat faster pace with no more than 600 years separating the innovation of the first varieties from the development of generic and plantation terms (Schoenbrun 1993: 50–3). However, these slightly different rates of change harmonized after 1000 to 1200, with the explosion in terms for cattle colors and the development of generic terms for bananas. Reid's study of cattle bones from Ntusi and associated sites (1991, 1996: 10) strongly supports placing the emergence of specialized pastoralism in the central grasslands, probably after the twelfth century.

These changes occurred together with two other transformations recognized in the archaeological and palaeo-environmental records: the spread of a distinctive rouletted style of pottery decoration, the complete removal of secondary forests (matched by an expansion of grasslands), and a notable decrease in rainfall which the Roda Nilometer dates to between 1200 and 1350 (Robertshaw this volume, p. 131, discussing Hassan 1981). Rouletted pottery traditions rather quickly developed distinctive facies (Connah 1991; Desmedt 1991) and a distinctive seriation (Robertshaw 1994). From this sequence, Robertshaw suggests a correlation, in Bunyoro-Kitara, between seriated rouletted potting traditions and emerging site-size hierarchies (Robertshaw 1994, this volume).

The internal frontier between the Great Lakes

Distinct emphases on cattle or bananas generated conditions in which people crafted new links between religious and political forms of power. Because religious and political specialists were deemed responsible for ensuring the health of food production systems,² changes in the social relations of power accompanied radical changes in food production. Between the Great Lakes these processes heralded the earliest struggles over people and wealth recognizable in parts of the region's oral historiography, archaeology, and the comparative linguistic and ethnographic records (Berger 1981; Connah 1991; Newbury 1991; Robertshaw 1994; Schoenbrun 1995; Tantalala 1989). They form the groundwork on which later political edifices were to stand, however uncertain their tenure may have been.

People chose to emphasize bananas or cattle as a response to new social pressures as well as a response to tensions within the agricultural ecology visited on them

by climatic and vegetational changes. Dispersal and renewal of people and power appear to have been signatures of the history of the Great Lakes region, indicating thus the frustration of pursuing purely evolutionist paradigms for the progress of political centralization. While it is true that political scale grew over linear time, it is also true that its centers were precarious and fleeting.

These qualities of Great Lakes institutional history characterize a historical process portrayed elegantly by Igor Kopytoff's notion of the internal frontier (Kopytoff 1987: 3–84). Kopytoff's formulation models the development of internal tensions in older areas of settlement, their roles in ejecting members from their ancestral communities into areas of lower population density, the eventual re-establishment on this internal frontier of portions of the social and cultural codes of the ancestral areas, and the later sculpting of these codes into ideologies of firstcomer-status and of patrimonial control of both land and ritual practice. Robertshaw (this volume) has linked this process to a two-stage development of political complexity in one part of the Great Lakes region, Bunyoro, where mixed-farming communities initially settled the lands north of the Kafu River and where the development of pastoralism improved the range of environments and forms of material wealth available to leaders for use in their community-building strategies.

Between Victoria-Nyanza and the central grasslands (Figure 11.1), this process appears to lead, inexorably, into an evolutionist historical narrative. The spiral nature of the narrative, the seeming expansion of territorial reach for each new sort of settlement, follows from the successive additions of "elements of complexity" to the villages or chiefdoms. These expansions of political scale appear out of the dialectical interaction of scarcity in labor and land with the abundance of pasture and trade in salt, iron, barkcloths, and foodstuffs. The spiral straightens into a line when empty lands cease easily to be within the reach of marginalized or otherwise disaffected members of ancestral communities. No longer able to vote with their feet, the subjects of erstwhile chiefs who increasingly demand tribute (in kind and in labor) and allegiance (at court and in contract relations), must stand and negotiate. With this development, the story reaches the threshold of state-formation: the once-empty interstices between zones of ancient and dense settlement become the frozen frontiers over which the leaders of centers of population and political complexity begin to struggle for control and over which they began to deploy coercive elements of instrumental power. It is a short step from these competitions to military expansionism. And Robertshaw (this volume) has shown how oral histori-

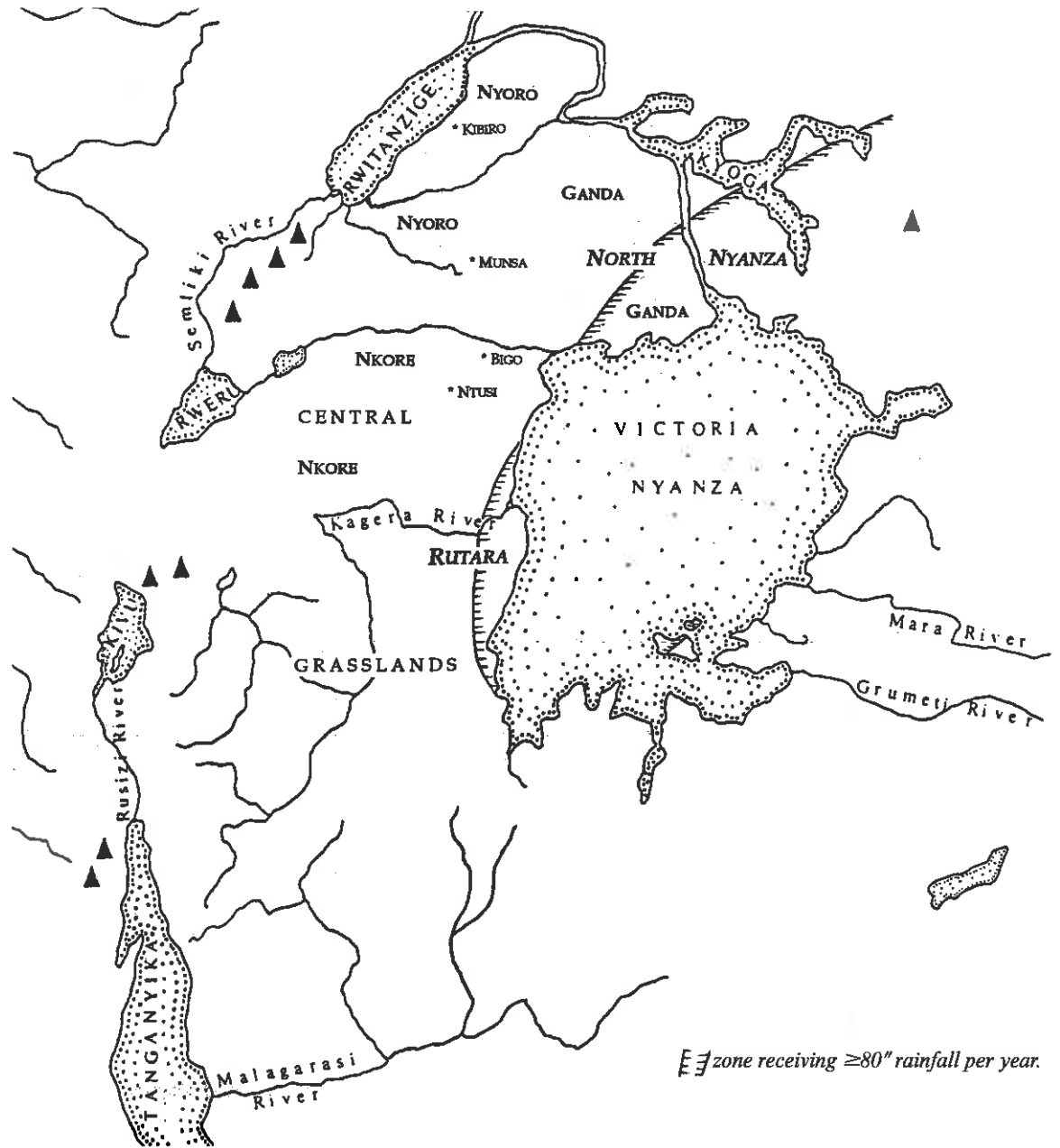


Figure 11.1 The Great Lakes region, showing language groups mentioned in text and archaeological sites.

ographies from the Bito kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara tell of such expansions and contractions. Examples quickly multiply (for example, see Wrigley 1996: 192–206).

Such stories crop up continually because their governing questions require them to take one of two characteristic shapes: linear evolutionism or a dialectical process of expansion and constriction. In neither of these genres has there been much room for historical discussions of either organizing principles of social life, like gender-relations (but see Reid 1993), or for analyses of cognitive systems which both conditioned and responded to new opportunities for creating forms of wealth and power. Archaeologists and pre-colonial historians, however, are well on their way to redressing these inequities (McIntosh 1993; Newbury 1991; Ray 1991; Wrigley 1996: 79–121).

The argument now must turn to consider the extent to which long-neglected aspects of pre-colonial African political history, like intellectual histories of power, constitute some of the visible and invisible roots of African states. This tack leads the story back to the agency of people – men and women at the edges of chiefly or state power – too-often left out of the arguments about the origins of states.

The two powers: instrumental and creative

Power takes a variety of forms but seems to break down into two types: instrumental and creative. Instrumental power secures outcomes through the control of people's actions (Blanton et al. 1996: 2–3; Roscoe 1993: 112–14). Creative power manipulates and invents forms of meaning (Bourdieu 1990: 112–21). These meanings possess several capacities. They can legitimate instrumental power, they can help people renegotiate their social relationships, or they can help groups establish and superintend the boundaries between disorder and order. The two forms intersect repeatedly because one is not epiphenomenal on the other. Since instrumental power is crafted within the semantic universe of moral agency – precisely that universe in which creative power works – the two forms must be studied together. For example, chiefship and healing each brings together aspects of both sorts of power.

The fusions of instrumental and creative power achieved by persons in these institutions, and the borders they draw around the two sorts of power may be studied historically by pursuing the semantic histories of words which represent important distinctions in Great Lakes theories of power (Table 11.1). The following terms will be discussed: **kupánga* “create,” **kudèma* “order,” **kugábá* “give out, apportion,” **kukída* “surpass, over-

come,” **mána* “capacity to create life,” and **-gàlá* “physical principle of life.” The semantic histories of these terms lack chronological precision,³ but the forgiving reader will be rewarded with a sense of the historical development of the visible and invisible contents of the state.

Relations between the two powers

Great Lakes Bantu societies understood that one axis along which they could negotiate their social lives connected the capacity for creating-order to the capacity for life. The ancient verbs *kupánga* and *kudèma* expressed this first principle and the nouns *imàana* or *imàanyi* and *-gàlá* expressed the latter idea (Cf. Table 11.1).

The most widely distributed meaning for **kupánga* is “to act, create or make something corporeal” (see also Wrigley 1996: 81–2). This ancient meaning narrowed to “to seize by magic, control by powerful speech plus a material item” and narrowed further still in the Proto Great Lakes Bantu noun meaning “supernatural creative power, including the creator personage.” From this meaning, Western Lakes and West Nyanza communities derived terms for “bloodpact,” “to prevent rain,” and “to shine intensely (of the sun),” respectively (see Table 11.1).

The verb **kudèma* carries two meanings with tantalizing hints at a common origin. The very same phonological and tonological shape means both “to become heavy” and “to create a corporeal thing (like making a drum or stringing a bow).” Both meanings may be reconstructed for Proto Savanna. In the latter meaning, the verb overlaps with **kubumba* “to fashion a pot” (in some languages the two are synonyms [i.e., in Haavu]). These two meanings produce interconnected semantic histories. In Proto Mashariki the meaning “to overwhelm, fail” appears to have been derived from “to become heavy.” In Proto Western Lakes the noun “creator, maker (an attribute of the creator personage)” appears to have been derived from the Proto Savanna meaning “to create a corporeal thing.” In Proto Rutara this meaning narrowed further in the verb “to control, govern, dominate.” The interrelationship between the two fields of meaning comes in Rutaran times. By adding to a verb for creative power the meanings of legitimate political power, Rutaran communities brought into existence the claim that both the King and the Creator ruled by overcoming obstacles and thus ruled by creating power from their acts of domination.

Great Lakes societies built other semantic bridges from creative power to instrumental power. In the meaning “physical life force,” the ancient noun **-gàlá* (class 5/6) reaches its widest meaning. It came also to mean (class

Table 11.1 *A semantogram for five terms for power in Bantu*

	*kupánga	*kudèma	*kugàbá	*-mànJa	*-gàlá
Proto Savanna └ └	“Act, create something”; Creator”	“Become heavy”; “Put in order”	“Give out, distribute”	“Think”	“Physical principle of life”
Proto Mashariki └ └	“Seize by magic; Give power to object via speech”	“Overwhelm, fail”	“Make decisions, command”		
Proto Great Lakes Bantu └ └ └	“Super-natural creative power; name for agent of creation”; “shine (of sun)”	“Creator, maker (attribute of creator)”	“Divide up, distribute”	“Life force, capacity to give the life force”	
Proto Rutara Bantu		“Control, govern, dominate”			
Proto Western Lakes	“Blood pact”; “Prevent rain”	“Creator, maker [retained]”	“Gift exchange of cattle [Proto West Highlands]”		“Rich person, leader”; “Sons [Proto Forest]”

Explanatory guide: Read the semantogram from top to bottom in order to move from the past towards the present and thus to follow that linear course of semantic retention and shift. Blank squares indicate retention of earlier meaning. Words with asterisks preceding them (“starred forms”) are proposed phonological reconstructions of the sound shapes as they existed in the Proto Savanna (or earlier) communities. Rules of regular sound correspondences underlie these proposals.

1/2) “rich person or leader” and (class 5) “sons (those whom a single wife bore and who will stand to inherit a father’s property)” in the Western Lakes Bantu-speaking communities of the Great Lakes region. As well, the ancient verb **kukida* “to pass over, surpass” narrowed to mean “to heal, cure” before Western Lakes-speakers added the meaning “to become rich.” Finally, the Proto Great Lakes noun **mána* “life force, capacity to give the life force” appears to have been derived from the Bantu verb *-*mànJa* “to think” (Schoenbrun 1997). The derivation means that, late in the dissolution of the Proto Great Lakes dialect chain, people understood a direct connection to exist between knowledge and creative power. And they understood that such a connection served as a central feature in legitimizing the instrumental power of politics.

Not all terms which spoke of power redrew the boundaries between the instrumental and the creative. Some never crossed this semantic divide. The verb **kugàbá*, in its widest meaning, expressed the act of giving away something, of dividing something up between two or more individuals. Languages from Cameroon (Duala) to Natal

(Zulu) express this action with a reflex of the verb **kugàbá*. In Proto Mashariki, the meaning narrowed to “to exercise power, execute decisions.” Proto Kivu society felt the necessity to distinguish acts of giving things from acts of distributing things by having added a prepositional suffix to the ancient verb root to express the latter meaning. A later step in the elaboration of gift-exchange ideology occurred in Proto Rutara society, where the Proto Kivu prepositional verb **kugàbúlira* came to mean “cattle contract” in a class 14 deverbative form.

Great Lakes Bantu-speaking communities classified the powers in their world in part by fashioning discursive distinctions between instrumental and creative powers. Instrumental power involved getting people to do things. It included conceptions of warfare and violence. The main division in this field separated the power of order from the power of conquest or domination. This sort of divide within instrumental forms of power represents a classic means to establish political legitimacy – a leader is a civilizer, a conqueror, or a civilizing conqueror. A leader bridges this divide between conquest and order. On the other hand, creative power involved the mysteries of the

life force and the quest for balance and health. The main division in this field lay in distinguishing the capacity to give life (**mâna*) from the force of life itself (**-gâlâ*). This phenomenological construction enabled the art of healing through acts of empowering words (such as the words spoken over medicines or as the words spoken in divination). The conceptual separation of the gift of life from the force of life itself meant that people expected or hoped that healers possessed a practical knowledge which could have bridged that gap. Healers, through their knowledge and their speech, made possible the maintenance or re-establishment of a link between the sources of life (rain, blood, milk, semen, etc.) and its different manifestations (crops, children, cattle, etc.).

People transformed what had been instrumental power into creative power, and vice versa, by reapplying terms for the one to qualities of the other. Redrawing the divides between one or the other sort of power may represent social processes of metonymy. For example, when Proto Rutara-speakers added the meanings “control, govern, dominate” to the verb **kulêma*, which had meant before “to create or make a corporeal thing,” they expressed both an attribute of chiefship and an attribute of **imâna*, the force which gives life. Proto Rutaran society brought into discursive existence a metonymic joining of king and spiritual force, and they made it possible thereby to pose moral hypotheses about the conditions of the one by reference to the actions of the other. The familiar dyad of “sacral kingship,” where a king represented his people and his kingdom and possessed moral responsibility for the health and fertility of both, comes partly into existence through the kind of semantic extensions and colonizations of hitherto distinct sorts of power which the example of Proto Rutara **kulêma* illustrates.⁴

The dispersed creative powers so far discussed probably were the prerogatives of internal frontiersmen who sought through them to set up ritual and hegemonic control over the land. But they were also the nemeses of would-be centralizers of instrumental power (and, later, of the coercive form of state power) because they and their practitioners were so difficult to supervise (Tantala 1989: 674–9) and because they so easily formed bases for armed revolt. Familiar figures in this regard come to us through oral historiographic representations of rebellious or innovative healers like Nyabingi, Ryángombe, Kiranga, and certain Cwezi figures. In this regard, the historical development of “powers” cannot be studied apart from the historical development of the units of social organization and gender relations in and through which “power” had life.

Social organization and gender

To grasp the elusive qualities of divides in the semantic fields of words for “power” we must review the history of some Rutaran and North Nyanzan units of social organization and gender relations. These institutional and ideological dimensions to the social history of the region, before states formed, represent key locations for the generation of divides and connections between creative and instrumental power. Thus, together with agricultural histories, the social history of institution and gender must be integrated into any social history of the roots of state-formation.

Some visible contents of power: space, gender, and food

Among the many interconnected semantic fields that bear traces of the history of the social organization of space in Rutara and North Nyanza, five will be discussed here: “clan,” “lineage,” “agnates,” “valuable farmland,” and “courtyard.”⁵ The etymology for one of these terms, **-kika*, reveals its earlier meaning to have been limited to that of “homestead,” where it has now taken on the meaning of “clan” in North Nyanza. Another, **-gândá*, has an important residential dimension to its meanings elsewhere in Bantu, but has come to refer to the highly dispersed exogamous, totemic, and (rarely) corporate clans of Rutaran societies. A third term, *ssiga*, refers to a maximal patrilineage in Ganda (and in Kuria). Another term, **-dá*, in the meaning “family” (Ganda) or “lineage” (Haya, Soga, Nande), seems to have been derived from the Proto Bantu root for “womb, interior (of the body).” The noun **-bânjâ* means “building site, place of authority,” in its widest distributions. It came to mean, as well, “dispute” and “debt,” in Great Lakes Bantu before West Nyanza-speaking farmers added the meaning “valuable farmland (especially with bananas).” The last term for which a reconstruction and an etymology may be offered here is **-buga*. This means “courtyard” (in class 7/8) and “Queen Sister” (in class 11) in Ganda and Nkore. All these terms express histories of the social relations of power. And the histories of the development of new meanings for each of them reflect the development of social complexity and the creation of institutional locations for the deployment of creative and instrumental powers (Table 11.2).

Changes in gendered identities drove these historical processes. For example, ethnographic evidence exists to define the hearth (**-higa*) and the house (**-ka* and **-ju*) as female domains (Ehret 1998: 151). On the face of it, this suggests that the extension of meanings for these terms, in Rutara and North Nyanza, to include patrilineage and

Table 11.2 *A semantogram for five terms for social organization and space in Bantu*

	*-ka 5/6, 7/8	*-gàndá 11/10	*-pIga 5/6	*-buga 7/8, 11/10	*-bánjà 5/6, 7/8, 11/6
Proto Bantu, Savanna, or Mashariki	"House-hold, homestead" [Mashariki]	"House, village, leader's compound" [Bantu]; "Clan or matriclan" [Mashariki]	"Firestones" [Bantu]	"Free land near home" [Bantu]	"Building site" [Bantu]; "Place of authority" [W. Bantu]
Proto Great Lakes Bantu	"Homestead or house (possibly patrifocal)" ⁶	"Relatives, family of agnates"			"Building site" 7/8; "Dispute" 5/6, 11/6; "Debt" 5/6
Proto West Nyanza Bantu	"Homestead or house"	"Agnatic descent group, possibly patrifocal"; ["Dispersed patrilineage" in Western Lakes].	"Eponymous patrilineage"		"Valuable farmland, Debt, Dispute"; ["Building site and Dispute" retained in Western Lakes]
Proto Rutara Bantu	"Patrifocal household" 5/6, 7/8	"Dispersed patriclan"	"Clan settlement" [S. Rutara]	"Courtyard; large open space; village, town"	"Valuable farmland, developed farmlands (esp. with bananas)" 7/8
Proto North Nyanza Bantu	"Homestead" 5/6 "Clan" 7/8 [Class 7/8 normally augments size]	"kinship, relatives, family" 1/2, 9/10	"Branch of patriclan"	"Chief's residence" 9/10 "Royal capital" 7/8	"Valuable farmland, developed farmlands, (esp. with bananas or potential for them)" 7/8

patriclan can be expected to reflect the outcome of a struggle over the gendered control of material and cultural resources referred to by the new meanings added to the old words: children, productive lands, livestock, and jural process (Håkansson 1989). Even though the material contexts in which such struggles took place in North Nyanzan and Rutaran societies, before 1500, are fairly well known, the plain fact is that we can have no hope of recovering the precise social contexts for the initial use of metaphors based on the house and on the female body to express various sorts of units of social organization.

We can, however, recognize that the contexts for their use were not infinite. They were located within wider but

finite fields of production, reproduction, and cognition (S. Feierman, personal communication, 1994). If it is safe to say that a limited number of forms of production and reproduction strongly suggest a limited number of possible forms for house or lineage metaphors, then we may make some headway toward social histories between the Great Lakes. If such a generative approach proves untenable, we had better stop here and admit the futility of searching for the spatial contexts of social and economic life, contexts which we rightly suspect to have been as fundamentally important in the past as was "the environment." Considering the ethnographic evidence for some of the distinctive features of the social space expressed by house and lineage metaphors offers a way to proceed

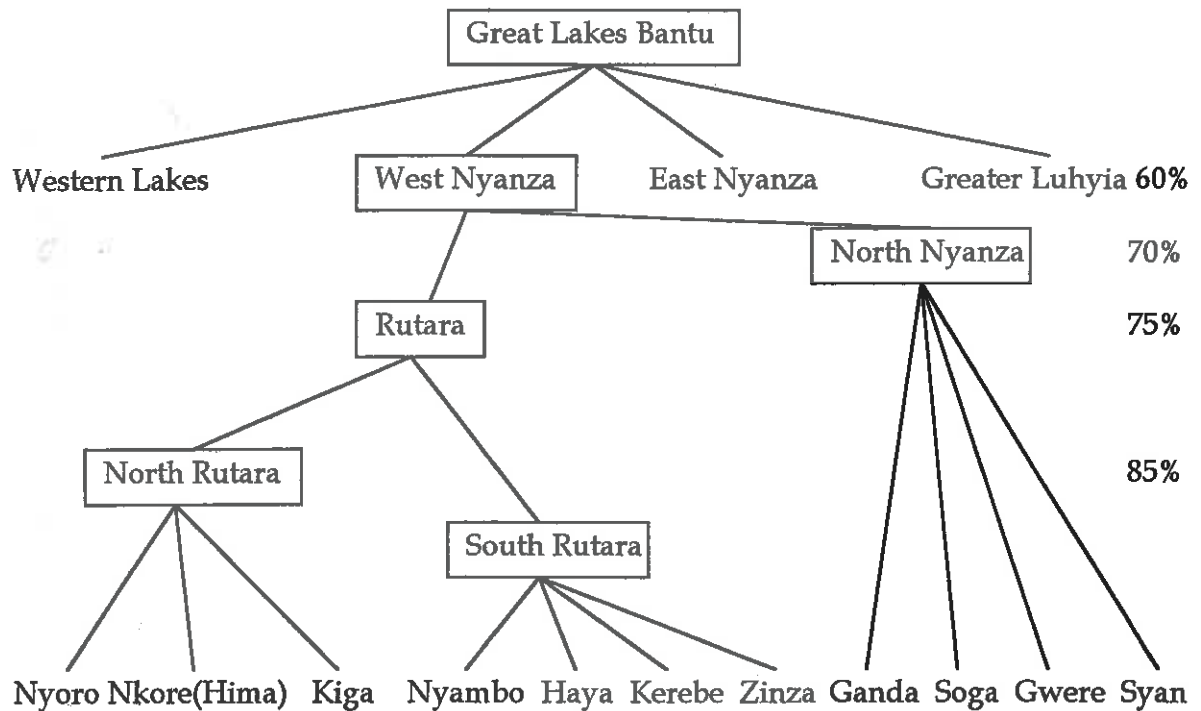


Figure 11.2 Great Lakes Bantu and its subgroups: glottochronology reckoned at a shared retention rate of 86% per 500 years.

(Schoenbrun 1996b). Because of restrictions on space, I can offer here only a summary of this social history for two geographical-linguistic portions of the Great Lakes region: Rutaran and North Nyanzan societies (see Figure 11.2)

Between 800 and 1300, families changed their structure by emphasizing patrilineality over undifferentiated descent or an older matrilineality (Ehret 1998: 149–55; Schoenbrun 1995: 8–13). The linguistic evidence for this consists in the fact that individual terms for undifferentiated or bilateral forms of descent are more widely and discontinuously distributed in Bantu than are individual terms for lineality. These latter terms are more numerous and have narrower and more densely packed distributions. Together, the distributional evidence and semantic histories suggest that explicitly gendered lineality, whether matrifocal or patrifocal, is the more recent (though still quite ancient) social innovation (Ahmed 1996; Ehret, 1998; Vansina 1990).

Complex levels of patrilineality, which held explicit claims to landuse rights, emerged during the period when Rutara and North Nyanza groups formed. With these

developments, fertility came to be controlled jurally by males and ritually by both men and women (Berger 1995; Tantalà 1989: 674–9). The jurial control wielded by men perhaps assisted them in concentrating people and their descendants on productive property (*-bânjà*), in the contexts of growing economic specialization and competition.

These developments formed part of a response to an environmental crisis near Lake Victoria and in the highlands east of the Kivu Rift (Schoenbrun 1994b; Robertshaw this volume, pp. 126–7) and to social conflict in those same areas. They also formed part of a response to the new challenges to homesteads which lay in the open savannahs (Reid 1991, 1993; Sutton 1993) and in the dense banana gardens (Schmidt 1978: 32–5; Schoenbrun 1993; Wrigley 1996: 60–1). The emphasis on lineality grew to include the control and distribution of new forms of surplus, like cattle (in North Rutara society, controlled by the homestead head, the *nyineka*) and perennial croplands (*-bânjà* and **-taka*) rich with the invested labor of wives (in North Nyanza society, controlled by the family head, the *mukulu*, or by the lineage head, the *mutaka*).

Above all, this was a dialectical process of historical change which included environmental parameters, the deploying of power, innovations in the character of units of social organization, and profound changes in gendered social relations. It was not determined by any one of these factors, as the differing histories of units of social organization charted below reveal.

In North Nyanza, the word *ekika* replaced the word *orugàndá* in the meaning "dispersed patrilin." It did so at the same time that North Nyanza societies innovated a host of new words (including *-bànjà*) which reflected agricultural experiments with intensive banana farming. During this period (between 1000 and 1300) the concentrations of population around the best banana-bearing lands made local collections of homesteads the new foci of the social relations of clanship. This differed from the widely dispersed character of clans (sing. **-rugàndá*) elsewhere in West Nyanza societies like Rutara. Land for bananas was indeed plentiful in Buganda, but the best plots were then, as they are now, not often contiguous. They were separated by swamps and tongues of barren, rocky hilltops. Moreover, this era coincided with a period of reduced rainfall amounts (Hassan 1981), very likely rendering the best banana gardens less numerous than they have been at any time since. What seems an environmentally determinist argument must not obscure the dialectical relations between the physical locations of the discontinuous, relatively rare lands best for bananas and the instrumentality of local collections of homesteads in providing the labor required to convert these "better" lands into banana gardens. Localities did not provide labor automatically. They did so through marriage ties and through gendered divisions of labor. As wives, women were the knot in the marriage tie between patrilineages. Why all this should have taken place may become clearer if we consider the role of the cognatic family group (sing. *olulá*; pl. *endá*) in this scenario.

The center of *olulá's* semantic domain is "inside" the body, and quite often the womb itself. The North Nyanza referents specify that cognatic family groups (pl. *endá*) rarely attain the status of lineages capable of establishing legal claims to the land based on first-come status (and, later, as granted by the king). Nor did family groups succeed in establishing ritual claims to productive land, a right normally achieved by burying three or four generations of its members on the same plot (Mair 1934: 164; Roscoe 1911: 134). In Ganda society, the cognatic family group (sing. *olulá*) is generally fewer in number than the maximal patrilineage (sing. *ssiga*). This contrast reveals the central challenge to reproducing groups through time:

because one womb cannot achieve this alone, others must be brought *inside* as wives or husbands and their children must be given legal status as insiders, as "us" not "them," as agnates not affines. Why North Nyanzan-speakers came to draw this line around those sharing real or putative patrilineal descent and not around those sharing matrilineal descent cannot now be known.

To the west and south of North Nyanza societies, Rutaran societies manipulated these combinations of environmental realities and social change very differently. In the Rutaran lands, the development of pastoralism had radically changed the conditions under which Hima women could improve their positions as wives. In the central grasslands, specialized pastoralism began as early as AD 1100 (Reid 1991: 255–69, 1993: 22–4). One of the possible outcomes of struggles for control over pastoralist knowledge may have been the exclusion of women from herding. This exclusion perhaps followed on from men having succeeded in developing control over cattle, in the first place, through an ideology of patrilineal descent and inheritance. This would have put livestock in male hands at the sort of mixed farming sites, such as Ntusi (and, later, Bigo), around which experiments in specialized pastoralism flourished (Reid 1991; Robertshaw 1994; Sutton 1993).

On the closing internal frontiers, formed by the specialists in herding or in banana farming who had settled just beyond or within nodes of ancient mixed-farming communities, clan heterogeneity had an enduring nature. With respect to perennially cropped banana gardens (*kibànjà* or *lusuku*), small families (pl. *endá*) would not have been able to conserve their holdings as consistently, from generation to generation, as larger ones might have been able to do. With fewer members, the holdings of an heirless departed member of a small family (sing. *olulá*) would have more often reverted to the "homestead or patrilineage head" (sing. *mukúúú* in Rutara and West Highlands) or to the "person holding lands in the name of the clan" (sing. *mutaka* in North Nyanza), for reassignment to strangers. Where larger cognatic families (pl. *endá*) lived, heirless plots would have been rarer because it would have been correspondingly more likely that when a brother died another member of the succession lineage (an adelphic group in North Nyanza society) would have been approaching adulthood (Fallers 1956: 84ff).

On the early internal frontier, where land was plentiful but labor scarce, a leader of a small family (sing. *olulá*) or clan (sing. *ekika*) would thus have been in a position more often than leaders of larger families or clans to remake the content of their group by allocating land to outsiders. This condition would have had the effect of emphasizing

unequal amounts of instrumental power over land and people because the Rutaran lineage head (sing. *mukūlū*) or the North Nyanza clan lands holder (sing. *mutaka*) both held potential reallocation rights to much of the land. Wherever the most desirable lands were in short supply, as around North Nyanza and Southern Rutara banana gardens, the only way a cognatic family (sing. *ohulā*) could grow was through having more children, hence the value of marriage and wives. And it is precisely in these contexts that the house and belly metaphors emerged together to represent small and large patrilineages. Where lands or pastures were abundant (as, perhaps, at Ntusi) an enterprising homestead head (sing. *nyineka* or sing. *mukūlū*) could add potential land-holding strangers to its group, as recipients of reallocated rights to cleared land or new rights to clear new fields. In these homesteads (pl. *amaka*), wives' fertility provided the ultimate insurance against a clan's or a cognatic family's disappearance.

Conclusion: the invisible contents of political society before the states

In an excellent article on practice theory and state formation, Paul Roscoe argued that the potential for political centralization – the concentration of power over others – exists “wherever humans have wants that can best or only be satisfied through the agency of others, since these conditions promote struggles for dominion to satisfy these wants” (Roscoe 1993: 114–15). The functional logic of the North Nyanzan cognatic family (sing. *ohulā*) and of the Rutaran homestead (sing. *eka*), in their historically variable forms, constitute such conditions. But the struggle for dominion follows more than one path because the resources – the forms of power – also differ. Differences between, for example, the sizes and character of clans and lineages, reflect outcomes of “the creativity of interested humans operating both within and on these and other, non-material circumstances to augment their power and satisfy their wants” (Roscoe 1993: 115). Material circumstances condition the human capacity for manipulating redistributions of wealth, engineering shortages of key goods (including wives or husbands), and deploying surplus as forms of political entrepreneurship.

Between AD 1000 and AD 1500, the conditions of specialization constrained some and facilitated others' ability to “remove themselves entirely from the oppressive power of others . . . through relocation” (Roscoe 1993: 115). To some degree, the communities which first relocated to the central savannahs were forced to do so by circumscribed access to the mixed farming lands in the old

core nodes of ancient settlement. Those who remained in the core nodes converted to intensive banana farming. Those who fled re-established the old mixed farming system at sites like Ntusi, only to release into specialization a range of persons who became herders. These latter communities effectively “closed” the internal frontier which their ancestors had opened.

Evidence from the Later Iron Age sites discussed by Robertshaw (this volume) add flesh to this skeletal outline. Ntusi's excavators, principally Andrew Reid, have unearthed evidence of an ivory atelier together with a few cowrie beads (Reid 1991: 217). The still rarer finds of glass beads, at sites some distance from Ntusi itself, surely suggest exchanges with the coast (Reid 1991: 216; Wrigley 1996: 87) and hint at novel forms of adornment. While no firm argument may yet be offered for a chief's or a healer's having monopolized trade “routes” (but see Tantalala 1989: 671–9), the clear links between these artefacts, Ntusi and its surrounding sites, and the challenges faced by those who pioneered the internal frontier invite reflections on the correlation between new powerful people, new forms of power, and new forms of adornment.

At Kibiro, Graham Connah discovered a pottery sequence which reveals settlement there from the tenth century. Connah also believes that production of high quality salt is nearly as old, beginning perhaps early in the present millennium (Connah 1991: 491). Robertshaw's excellent work brings us to the verge of some compelling correlations between archaeology, comparative linguistics, and oral historiography. Though he feels uncertain that heterogeneity in rouletted pottery traditions from earthworks sites reveals those sites to have been “centers of small and competing regional polities” (Robertshaw this volume, p. 145), the evidence offered here for changes in gendered units of social organization in Rutaran communities means that we may interpret his and Reid's findings at Ntusi to represent the earliest phases of the opening of the internal frontier. At that stage a homestead's principal challenge lay in the struggle for followers. This challenge may well have generated the still-poorly understood presence of bead ornamentation at Ntusi. Perhaps the gift-exchange of beaded items marked early patron–client relations.

However, the size and complexity of polities are not the same thing. If leaders must guarantee the safety, fertility, and fecundity of the land and people under their rule as well as distribute resources so as to create and maintain social relationships, then the size of a chiefdom or kingdom will be a function of the combination of productivity and the proximity of neighboring competitors. Wrigley argues that this point means that early Ganda

political power could well have been based on very small territories and populations (1996: 84).

Telling the story of the development of monarchy thus depends as much on cognitive codes for instrumental and creative power as it does on material conditions for prosperity and threat. The joining of creative and instrumental powers in the persons of chief and healer, during the West Nyanza eras, echoes Wrigley's argument, and marks "chiefship" or "royalty" as having existed during periods well before 800. The initial movement into an internal frontier, then, offered the potential to change the character of this joining of the two powers. To be sure, Rutaran images of leadership redrew boundaries between the two powers, boundaries perhaps initially described by the creative healers who enjoyed successes in meeting the challenges of life in the drier zones surrounding places like Ntusi. Both Rutaran and North Nyanzan societies participated in this first movement at the same time as they generated an internal frontier within the wetter zones just inland from Victoria Nyanza. In the latter case, North Nyanzan conceptions of royalty looked familiar to Rutaran views. Both, however, lacked a set of institutions to create a state from a king (Wrigley 1996: 241–51). These institutions developed around service and loaning, to bind together far-flung communities in debt-relations using the institutional ideology of kinship and clanship as exclusionary means to generate a hierarchy of first-comers and newcomers within the structures of service and clientship.

The two powers, then, were made to serve the interests of corporate groups (whose leaders held control of land, cattle, and ritual sites) in the era of the closing of the frontier. During the period after 1300 communities recognizable as Ganda, Nyoro (or Rwanda, Nyambo, and Haya) formed. And they ushered in a sea change in social life, gender relations, conceptions of the two powers and of divides between them and they joined these changes to agricultural and environmental changes to render their descendants capable of building monarchies which connected the vision of the Monarch to the vision of the State (Carlson 1993: 322–8; Wrigley 1996: 84–9).

The historical development of the central elements of this complex revolved around tensions between ideologies of lineal descent and inheritance and the opportunities for political aggrandizement offered by institutions of clientship and blood-brotherhood. This pitted patrifocal families against offices of chiefship, on the one hand, and between chiefship and healing specialists, on the other hand (Schoenbrun 1995; Tantala 1989: 671–9). The contest circled around concerns with fertility and fecundity as the moral grounds on which chiefs accepted the

offer of their right to redistribute wealth and to exercise ritual control over production. Concerns with fertility and fecundity also formed the moral grounds for the power of healers to restore social balance and to exercise ritual control over reproduction. The patrifocal family seems to have been constructed around gendered divisions of labor and around differing rights to labor and property, rights determined by both gender and by an individual's particular position in the stages of the human life-cycle.

Moral economies of health and politics were encoded in theories of redistribution and fertility, theories whose historical existence emerges from comparative semantic studies and from the posing of etymologies for the relevant terms. Because vital dimensions of gender relations and of divisions of labor appear in the gendering of parts of Rutaran and North Nyanzan homesteads, and in the semantic histories of the words which name these spaces, a discussion of these data should reveal to archaeologists that studying settlement patterning offers them more than the chance to construct site-size hierarchies. It offers the chance to see possible ways in which such hierarchies were understood by their makers to operate. And, more importantly for the themes of this volume, it offers insights on the ways in which hierarchy was reorganized and subverted inside distinct forms of agriculture. The historical study of social space thus links archaeology, comparative linguistics, and comparative ethnography. It also presents data which modify sweeping evolutionist theories of "state formation" and which restore to different groups their differing relations to the "state" embodied in the form of their roles in contesting and renegotiating the terms and conditions of political and social power.⁸

Appendix

History from linguistics between the Lakes

Historical relationships between Great Lakes Bantu languages emerge from comparisons between core vocabulary lists which allow the provisional establishment of regular sound correspondences and the recognition of cognates (Schoenbrun 1994a). By counting rates of cognation in core vocabulary, for each pairing of the languages under study, a preliminary subgrouping of Great Lakes Bantu takes shape. Higher percentages reveal more recent divergence while lower numbers show earlier divergence. For example, Nkore and Ganda have a 59 percent cognation rate; they share 59 out of the 100 core vocabulary items. But Nkore and Nyambo have a 81 percent cognation rate. All three tongues are related, but Ganda

began to diverge from its ancestral speech community, proto-North Nyanza, long before Nkore and Nyambo began to diverge from theirs, proto-Rutara (see Figure 11.2).

Just how long ago people spoke Proto Rutara Bantu may be surmised from glottochronology, a subset of lexicostatistics. Glottochronology uses the empirical finding that random change in basic vocabulary tends, over periods of centuries, to accumulate at a regular pace, and thus differences in cognate percentages can be given extremely rough chronological value.⁹ About sixteen out of 100 items will be replaced each 500 years, either by semantic shift, by morphological analogy, or by borrowing from another language (Ehret 1988: 564-6; Vansina 1990: 9-16). Thus, using the rate given above, Nkore and Nyambo lost their easy mutual intelligibility a little more than 500 years ago. On the other hand, North Nyanza, the speech community ancestral to Ganda, lost its easy mutual intelligibility considerably earlier, say 1,200 or so years ago. Dialects of Proto-West Nyanza, the speech community ancestral to both North Nyanza and Rutara, lost their easy mutual intelligibility in the still more distant past, well over 1,500 years ago. Figure 11.2 depicts the historical relationships between several intermediate groups of Great Lakes Bantu and offers rough chronologies for their development.

The existence of these intermediate speech communities and their historical relationship to each other, and to their ancestral and descendant forms, implies a process of cultural spread across a geographical region. This process may be described by charting the geographical extent of modern languages and, then, attributing equal strength first to modern tongues, and then to their ancestral speech communities, as they must have moved across the geographical plane in order to account for the current distribution (Sapir 1916 [1985]: 410-25). Thus, in the Figure 11.2, because the bundle of modern languages constituting the North Nyanza branch of West Nyanza Bantu centers on the northwest corner of Victoria Nyanza and because the corresponding group of languages making up Rutara Bantu centers on the area south of the mouth of the Kagera river (see Figure 11.2), these all must have developed out of a zone midway between these two areas; the West Nyanza territories must, then, have lain around the Victoria Nyanza shore and inland along the Kagera river.

The question of how languages spread is both historical and sociological (Cooper 1982: 5-62). Therefore, the principle of least moves represents only one sense of the historical regions in which emerged different Lakes proto-linguistic identities. Social, environmental, and economic

factors all shaped the spread of Lakes Bantu speech. For example, the early spread of proto-Great Lakes Bantu certainly was facilitated by settlement along the lake-shores and riverbanks and by the use of canoes. What is more, processes of language shift may have lain at the heart of the entire story. Pre-existing communities of farmers, hunters, gatherers, and fishers may have gradually shifted the choice of a first language to Bantu speech from Sudanic, Cushitic, or the unknown tongues of ancient food collectors. Such possibilities remind us that languages may spread without the movement of people and that they may spread by the sometimes discontinuous settlement of the niches preferred by each community.

Reconstructing vocabulary and documenting its retention and its transformation follow the work of genetic classification. The fruits of these labors provide precisely what archaeologists desire most: evidence for the all too often invisible parts of social and economic change. If the historical linguist can reconstruct a word for "cattle" or "banana" to the chronologically and geographically defined West Nyanza Bantu speech community, then archaeologists may search fruitfully in those areas for material evidence of these food sources. If the historical linguist can reconstruct, for West Nyanza Bantu, words for "govern" or "courtyard," archaeologists can begin to search as well for evidence of those social and spatial relationships. Their search will offer the possibility of confirming or denying inferences from comparative linguistics and comparative ethnography.

But words like "banana" and "govern" carry referents which differ widely in the social contexts for their use in daily life. We may feel confident that a reconstructed word for "banana" reflects the existence of knowledge of that fruit in the lives of West Nyanza Bantu speakers. Together with other words for varieties, banana gardens, tools, and cultivating techniques, we may even feel confident that such knowledge existed not from mere familiarity with banana fruit but from its actual production. Yet words for "govern" and for different parts of a settlement emerge in contexts of negotiation and contest. The semantic histories of words for "govern" and for "homestead" bear traces of the social contexts in which their makers moved, disputed, and agreed with each other. Because they do not exist as isolated bits of practical knowledge, they must be reconstructed as pieces of interlocking sets of semantic fields, the content of which describes the dimensions of thought on such matters as government and social space. Retrieving interlocking sets of semantic fields proceeds through uniting ethnographic description with the rigors of lexical reconstruction and of etymology (Vansina 1990: 9-16; Schoenbrun 1997: 10-18).

Notes

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- 1 It should be pointed out that "retention" must not be confused with "static." It will be obvious that where innovation occurs its effects cannot be limited in any rigorous way to a specific part of social life. Retained words for "homestead" will not have had the "same" contexts of usage where one community builds its homesteads next to perennially cropped fields and the other builds its homesteads into cattle kraals.
- 2 Tantala (1989: 462) develops this for cattle, employing a perhaps too-literal interpretation of a drought metaphor that recurs in regional oral traditions.
- 3 The genetic classifications inside of which I build these histories come from Ehret (1995) and Schoenbrun (1994a).
- 4 The example of *kuhanga* expresses this process as well: note its meaning extensions in Proto West Nyanza and in Proto Western Lakes to include what individuals can do with properly superintended creative power.
- 5 For full treatment of the linguistic evidence for these, and other terms, please see Schoenbrun 1997.
- 6 Kuria has *eka*; *icika* "patricentered family, dispersed and exogamous."
- 7 In class 1/2, the word also means "elder" more widely in Bantu.
- 8 For historians working with Great Lakes oral traditions this is not a novel insight. See Berger (1981); Newbury (1991); Ray (1991); Tantala (1989); and Wrigley (1996).
- 9 For generally favorable views on this vexed question see Anttila (1989: 396-8); Ehret (1988: 566-9); Swadesh (1955: 121-37). For an unfavorable view see Bynon (1977: 266-72).

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