

BOOK REVIEW

Yusuf M. Juwayeyi. *Archaeology and Oral Tradition in Malawi: Origins and Early History of the Chewa*. Suffolk: James Currey, 2020. vii + 242 pp. Photographs. Maps. Bibliography. Appendix. \$37.95 Paper. ISBN: 978-1847013507.

Yusuf M. Juwayeyi's volume, *Archaeology and Oral Tradition in Malawi: Origins and Early History of the Chewa*, is a comprehensive account of the historical origins, early migrations, and internal organization of Malawi's largest ethnic group, the Chewa. The most recent national population census, conducted in 2018, puts the Chewa at 34.4 percent of the country's population. The language of the Chewa, called Chichewa, is also the most widely used vernacular in the country, owing in large part to the policies of both the colonial and early post-colonial governments. The latter, for instance, in 1969, declared Chichewa to be the only official vernacular language for radio broadcasting and for instruction in schools (5). The author adopts archaeological and ethnohistorical methods, largely because of the dearth of reliable written records for the Chewa peoples for the period under study, roughly from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries. Those with an interest in the field of archaeology should first jump to Chapter Five. There, the author introduces the field, focusing on such areas as locating archaeological sites; using modern technology, such as the GPS; the excavation process; chronological determination; and the analysis and dissemination of results from archaeological fieldwork (66–88).

An ardent archaeologist, Juwayeyi traces the Chewa (or “Maravi”) people's history, having conducted field work at their headquarters, called Mankhamba, located in central Malawi. The Chewa were led by a succession of kings, using the title of “Kalonga.” Juwayeyi accessed material remains, including glass beads, Chinese porcelain, glazed ceramics (pots and bowls), smoking pipes, grinding stones, and objects made using iron (such as tangs, iron points, bangles, axes, and razors) and copper (such as needles, fish-hooks, necklaces, rings, and bangles), among other items. While most of the materials were locally made, others represent elements of nearby and long-distance trade between the Chewa and other societies.

Chapter One (out of the fourteen in this volume) provides a brief historical overview of Malawi, covering the pre-colonial, colonial (British

colonial rule), and post-colonial periods. Apart from the Chewa, other major ethnic groups in the country include the Yao, the Ngoni, the Tumbuka, and the Lhomwe. In passing, Juwayeyi narrates aspects of their cultural traditions (2–5). There is also recognition of the ethnohistorical collections and accounts by early colonial administrators, European explorers and settlers, Malawi's early post-colonial historians, and final-year history students at the University of Malawi in the late 1960s and early 1970s (12–19). However, the early collections and contributions, including some on the Chewa, were devoid of archaeological expertise and evidence, a gap which Juwayeyi fills in this volume.

In the next three chapters, the author relies on the available oral and written evidence, substantiated by archaeological research, to (among other things) trace the Chewa's original homeland; their socio-economic activities; the gender-specific rituals; their political organization under the Kalonga; their religious beliefs and sacrifices to their god (called Chisumphi), led by their priestess called Makewana; internal disputes (including Kalonga's splits with Undi and Lundu); and their migrations and expansion in Malawi, including settlements at Kaphirintiwa-Msinja and Mankhamba. The origins of the Chewa are traced to Uluwa, in the Katanga province of modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This confirms the Chewa's position in the Bantu linguistic family, which is comprised of ethnic groups drawn from parts of central, eastern, and southern Africa. The Malawi Chewa peoples were part of the "eastern stream" of Bantu migrations (22–27). In the course of their migration, the Chewa, primarily led by the Banda and Phiri clans, left traces of their iron age working and material culture, which also included elements of animal domestication and cultivation of crops. They also made pottery of various types, including *kwale*, *nkope*, *kalundu*, *mawudzuzi*, and *bambata*.

Among the key revelations to come out of this volume include the fact that environmental considerations determined the settlement sites of the Chewa. For instance, the Mankhamba area, which Juwayeyi "discovered," is close to Lake Malawi, whose waters were essential for both domestic and economic needs. Apart from fishing activities, the soil near the lake was also very rich and fertile, which supported the pottery industry and extensive agricultural production (of such crops as millet, cassava, and sorghum). The available trees in the area were used as sources of firewood and the charcoal needed in iron furnaces (89–108). The fauna in the region, both wild and domestic, included zebras, elephants, impalas, elands, cattle, sheep, goats, chickens, and pigeons. Many of these were essential sources of food, as well as used for their skins (used for bedding, clothing, and carrying children). Animal horns were also used in international trade along the Indian Ocean coast from the eighteenth century onward (159–65). Juwayeyi's narrative of the factors causing the fall of the Maravi Empire is also fascinating. Factors such as succession disputes, the disloyalty of territorial chiefs, and their loss of international trade contacts (204–6) could easily be compared to developments elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

This volume is a must-read for those with an interest in the fields of archaeology, ethnohistory, history of material culture, and public history (heritage studies). It offers insights into an era for which there is a scarcity of written records for Malawi as well as for most other parts of the sub-Saharan African region. The author's extensive use of illustrations, including maps, pictures, and plates, is evidence of the meticulous research that produced this work. The notable shortfall of this book is the limited comparative analysis of the experiences of the Chewa (and their Maravi Empire) and those of other ethnic groups in pre-colonial Malawi and beyond during the same study period. Briefly mentioning the other ethnic groups in the introduction is certainly not sufficient. Perhaps this should be left to current and future students of archaeology to pursue. That omission aside, this empirically rich volume will be a worthy addition to your bookshelves and syllabi.

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