

SOME NOTES ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE TRIBES  
LIVING ON THE LOWER TANA, COLLECTED BY  
MIKAEL SAMSON AND OTHERS.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

R. G. DARROCH.

INTRODUCTION.

It is hoped that the attached papers, (1) "A History of the Malachini"—or Lower Pokomo—by Mikael Samson, a Pokomo of the Buu sub-tribe, and (2) "The Story of Liongo" by Arabs and Swahilis of Kau and Kipini, may be of interest as the original work of Arabs and Africans. Both were entirely unsolicited on my part.

The story of Liongo appears in Steere's *Swahili Tales*. So far as I recollect his version is much the same as that given here, except that this one includes parts corroborating Mikael's *History*. The version here was compiled largely from written records.

Mikael's *History* is admittedly scrappy. To put it into strict chronological order is impossible, since, in fact, several sub-tribes claim to have been the first on the Tana. Actually different men may well have reached it more or less simultaneously, and lived there in ignorance of each others' proximity. The Arab story corroborates the Buu claim, but even it may only mean that Sango was the first to meet the coast people. A story given me by the Gwano also corroborates the Buu claim, but gives an entirely different account of how the first meeting occurred, to what Mikael has written. I do not give their story in full because they are not Malachini, and secondly, I want the paper to be Mikael's and not mine. With considerable diffidence I have appended a few notes, which may perhaps help to throw Mikael's story into perspective.

I can offer no comments at all on the relationship between Buu, Giriama, Segeju, etc. Undoubtedly, the Pokomo are of mixed origin, as in fact Mikael shows. His remarks may perhaps interest someone who does know Giriama traditions.

I have made a rough sketch map which shows most of the places mentioned. The rest can be guessed approximately from descriptions of how they compare with named places. To sketch in the various river-beds would require a very large map, and very accurate survey. The Tana basin is a mass of them all the way down, especially below Mwina, where large areas are flooded annually.

## TRANSLATION.

*Kipini.*  
18th October, 1941.

THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER,  
R. G. DARROCH, Esq.

I have the honour to bring you these notes about the Malachini tribes from their origin and where they came from, as the old men tell.

I have been working on this since 1930, when I was a Hut Counter at Bura, N.F.P. Every time I went on leave I talked with the old men of the Buu tribe of this and that to ask about the origin of the tribes, especially the Buu.

At first, I gave the notes to the Missionaries at Ngao, and they were very pleased with them and promised to put them in a book for children at school, but they were prevented by the war.

The man who helped me most was Headman Pwongwa of Ngao. Another man admitted to know the old events was an old man called Kode of Marembo. Both are now dead.

I could not write about the upper Pokomo, except a little about the Ndera and Gwano.

I bring you this and hope you may like to use some of it and I ask you to preserve it.

(Signed) MIKAEL SAMSON KIRUNGU,  
*Registration Clerk.*

(NOTE.—This is dated October, 1941, but was actually given to me in August, 1942.—R.G.D.)

### HISTORY OF THE MALACHINI TRIBES.

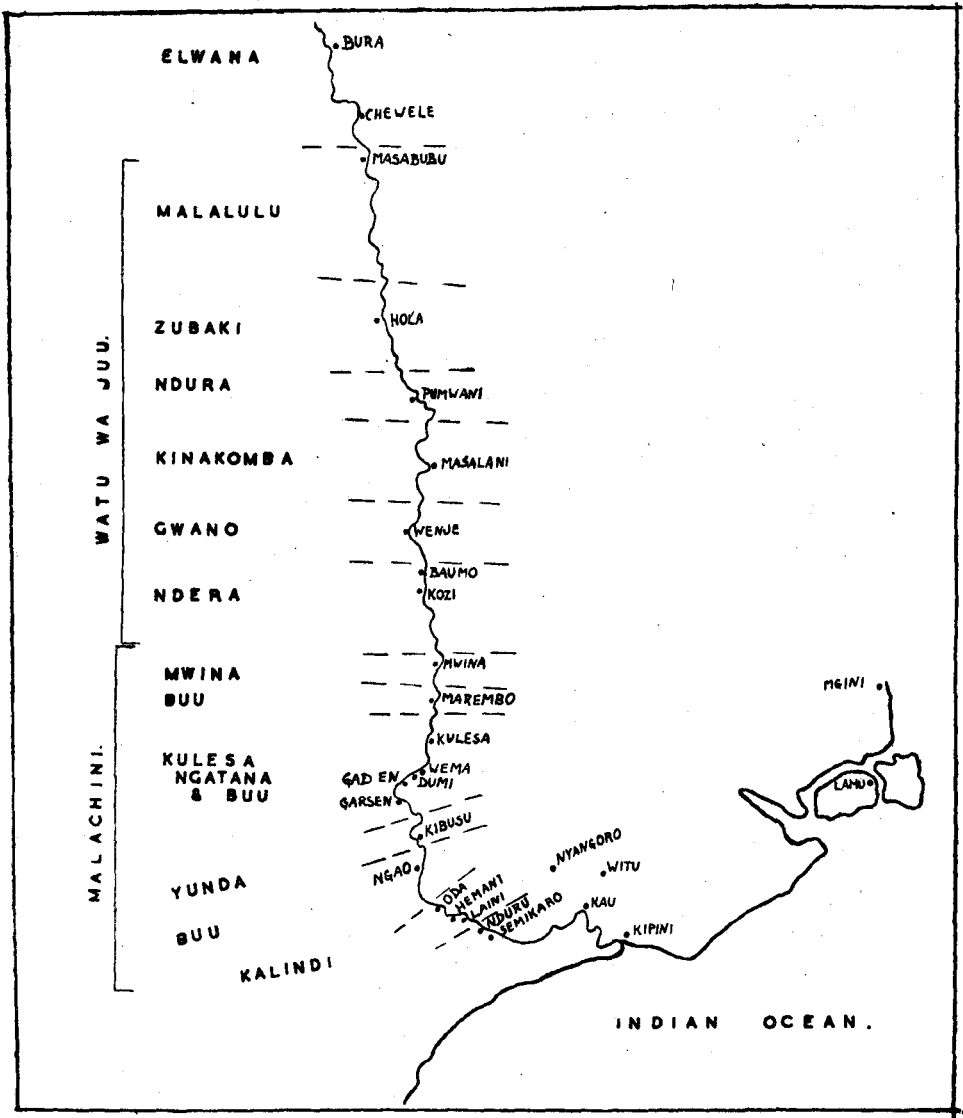
Malachini is the name used by the Upper Pokomo, but they (the Malachini) call themselves Pokomo, and they call the people from Ndera to Malalulu "Watu wa Juu."

Also the Malachini are not one tribe only, and their origins are different. There are six Malachini tribes:—

- (1) Mwina.
- (2) Kulesa.
- (3) Ngatana.
- (4) Dzunza or Yunda.
- (5) Buu.
- (6) Kalindi.

These are the Malachini tribes, but they all have one language and it is the language used in all the Mission books.

Now I will explain the origin of each tribe, and the country whence it came. All these words are as the Buu elders tell.



Sketch Map to illustrate Mikael Samson's *History of the Malachini*.  
The names of the tribes are given on the left.

Some people of these tribes would not agree with part of them, especially the parts they do not like, but they are true and no one could get more correct information without writing rubbish.

#### SANGO VERE—ANCESTOR OF THE BUU TRIBE.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Buu tribe is the most numerous of all the Malachini. They themselves say their ancestor Sango Vere came from Mungini or Mundini, in the country called Inti Kuu (Lamu District). Even now there remain Swahilis called Pokomo of Mungini. The Buu say they are the ancestors of these people. Others say the Pokomo of Mungini originally came from the Tana. But the truth is that Sango Vere, ancestor of the Buu came from that country and reached the Tana near Nyangoro and Mawa. He arrived there alone without wife or child.

Sango Vere journeyed up river as far as Gwano, without meeting anyone. On a second journey he reached a lake called Lemu near Baumo. There he met the ancestor of the Gwano. On his way back he met no one in Ndera except the Mwina. They accompanied him to Kaloni, between Gaden and Wema. They divided the country, the Buu from Kaloni downwards and the Mwina from Kaloni up to above Kozi in Ndera.

#### KALINDI—SANGO VERE'S JOURNEY DOWNSTREAM.<sup>(3)</sup>

Then Sango travelled downstream to the Lake Gana (now Matamba) below Garsen. There he met Liongo Fumo, who always went to that lake to wash his clothes. Sango and Liongo became friends and went together to Shaka where Liongo's village was. On the way they met no one on the river.

Sango then returned to Buu country. Their friendship continued and Sango often went to visit Liongo, but every time he passed through Chara there were no people there.

Then Sango and Liongo quarrelled and fought, and Sango was beaten. From that time Liongo made Sango pay tribute, every year one girl, and Sango paid. Later generations refused this tribute, and it was changed to a tribute of food, and they paid it till Government came.

#### ORIGIN OF THE KALINDI.<sup>(4)</sup>

Before Sango was lost he went to Liongo at Shaka, and saw people like himself, speaking the same language. Sango made an arrangement with Liongo that these people should follow him to the river, to live with him and cultivate and help to pay the

---

<sup>(2)</sup> The numbers refer to notes beginning on page 250.

tribute. Liongo agreed and gave him these people. They followed him to Semikaro and Oda, and later as far as Ngao which was then uninhabited. They divided the country: from Ngao downwards to belong to the Kalindi, and above Ngao to the Buu. The descendants of these people live at Oda, Hemani, and Laini now, but they are not many, and even half the inhabitants of those villages are Buu.

The meaning of the name Kalindi is that they lived in holes. They often hid themselves in holes in their shambas when danger threatened. Therefore, the Swahilis called them Kalindi.

(NOTE.—According to Miss Werner “Dindi” means a hole where fish lie.—R.G.D.)

The origin of these people is not known properly, nor whence they came, but we can guess they were Swahilis (i.e., from the Coast) and that their origin is Bantu. By law they ought to rule the country of Chara, because all other Pokomo in that Location came from up-river, but they were there originally.

#### ORIGIN OF THE NGATANA.<sup>(5)</sup>

It is said that the Ngatana were originally Wata, who came to the river in Zubaki country. Then they stole and were beaten and one woman was killed at a place called Hancholoko. The Wata ran away to Mwina country and settled there as guests of the Mwina at Wema. Later they were called Ngatana.

#### ORIGIN OF THE KULESA.

The Kulesa are not Ngatana. Their origin is Elwana (Malankote). They fought among themselves and perhaps two of them ran away and became guests of the Mwina. The Mwina gave them a place among the Ngatana, and they live there even now. The Kulesa and Ngatana have now combined to form one tribe because they are not numerous. Even the Elwana agree that this is a true account of the Kulesa, and their Headman Bukuro Guyo showed me the village whence they came near Chewele.

#### BUU AND MWINA.

Then the Ngatana and Kulesa increased and the Mwina decreased. They fought many times and the Mwina were beaten. When they beat them the Ngatana cut skin from their buttocks and rubbed ashes on the sore places. Even now people call the Mwina “Ba Nyonga” (from “pala” to skin and “nyonga” the rump), meaning people who have had skin cut off their buttocks. It is a term of contempt.

Seeing themselves oppressed the Mwina went to the Buu and asked for men, and the Buu sent men from every family, and the Mwina gave them land among the Ngatana. There are Buu at Marembo even now. Their agreement with the Mwina was that they help the Mwina if the Ngatana attacked them. After that the Mwina lived in peace because the Ngatana were afraid of the Buu.

#### QUARRELS OF THE BUU AND NGATANA.<sup>(6)</sup>

- (a) The Ngatana married a Buu woman and the Buu gave them a piece of land for this woman to cultivate from Kaloni to Mbewee. Mbewee is above Dumi and Kaloni is above Gaden.
- (b) Also there are two lakes near Gaden called Mumbo. One belongs to the Buu and the other to the Ngatana.
- (c) Behind the lakes is the forest of Mihaja. The Buu and Ngatana quarrelled about it, and in 1941 it was given to the Buu.
- (d) There is a village, the last Buu village, called Muryikicha near the Mihaja forest.

The Ngatana often fished in the Buu lakes and the Buu were fierce. They often fought especially at a place called Lolani (Lola is the Oromo for war.—R.G.D.) above Dumi, with fists and clubs before the Buu left that country.

#### DZUNZA OR YUNDA.

This tribe has always been very small and their country is on the old river east of Kibusu. From long ago some of the Buu lived above them and some below. They were in the middle. From old times they were under the protection of the Buu so that other Pokomo tribes could not oppress them. When the old river dried up they and the Buu came to the new river at Kibusu and they are still there.

The Buu say the old river to which Sango Vere came is the Magogoni, which is to be seen at Kau. Following up that river you come to Gambi, Mawa, Mwanapaka, and Ashaka Matolo. Then you pass through the forest at Nyangoro towards Garsen, where you can now see a channel. The Buu call this river Milaoni (Mila means custom.—R.G.D.). Sango Vere reached it near Mawa. They say the other Malachini were never on that river.

Then that river dried up and the river was the Ntumba ya Mudando on the plain near Gaden.

Then it dried up and the river was the Mbewee between Dumi and Gaden, which flowed to above Ngao, to a place called Galana Duesa (means the dead river.—R.G.D.). We believe that river dried up about 70 years ago, because there are people still living who were born on it.

When that river dried the Buu had nowhere to cultivate and were forced to move to the new river, but from Ngao to Kibusu the new river went through one lake Ashaka Babo, and above Kibusu there was a lake called Gana or Matambo. Their Chief Buko Doyo came to Ngao with many of the Buu who were under him, and a few went up to the Buu of Mwina, that is to say to Benderani. From Ngao downwards it is the old river where the Kalindi live.

#### BUU AND GIRIAMA.

The Buu say that there were originally no Oromo. Then the Oromo came and fought them very much. The Buu were beaten and decided to look for country. Many of them ran away by way of the hill of Gede. Those Pokomo who ran away were called Sagidzo. Possibly they are those called Segeju who live in Tanganyika, because there is a page about them in a Swahili book called *Zamani Hata Siku Hizi*. It says the Segeju passed Malindi and met the Reno there. This book confirms what the Buu tell.

Then the Oromo attacked them more and more and others followed the route of the Segeju. These are the Giriama. Even the Giriama say their origin is Pokomo.

It is known that there are people called Shungwaya.<sup>(1)</sup> They live near Kismayu. Shungwaya are the Pokomo tribes who came from there, especially the Buu. So did the Giriama, Digo, Segeju, and other coast tribes.

The Buu also say that their origin is from Mungini, and there are people there now called Pokomo of Mungini. Mungini is the country of Inti Kuu. Perhaps the Buu came from Shungwaya, Kismayu, and Mungini, and came to the Tana and built Sangeju Mawa between Witu and Ngao.

The Giriama, Digo, Segeju, and others agree that they are related to the Pokomo. They say they came from Shungwaya. Of the Pokomo only the Buu have a tradition of Shungwaya.

#### NOTES ON ABOVE BY R. G. DARROCH.

- (1) In translating I have used the names of tribes other than Pokomo, which those tribes use when speaking of themselves, e.g., Oromo, Wata, and Elwana, instead of Galla, Boni, and Malakote, the names generally used by Europeans, copying the Swahilis. I have also avoided use of the prefix "Wa" which is correct in Swahili, but not when using English.
- (2) It is interesting to compare Mikaei's account with that given me by Arabs and Swahilis of Kipini and Kau, and with articles by Miss Werner in *Journal of the African Society* of April, 1913, and *Folklore* of December of the same year. Miss Werner was told that Sango's father Vere was the first to reach the Tana and that Sango and three daughters, Mkabuu, Habune, and Habuya, were born here. The last two had only illegitimate offspring from whom some of the Buu claim descent. One would have expected all to trace from Mkabuu (called

Mke wa Buu by the Swahilis). Mikael had heard this version, but believes Habune and Habuya were Sango's daughters. The Swahilis say Sango had two sisters, Mke wa Buu and Nangowa, the latter being the first tribute girl handed to Liongo.

- (3) Liongo is mentioned in Steere's *Swahili Tales*. His village was Waungwana wa Mashaa, about a mile from Kipini, where his grave can still be seen. Some Pokomo say his mother was a Pokomo, but this is contradicted by Swahili tradition, which is almost certainly the safer to follow.
- (4) The tradition is that Sango (or Vere according to Miss Werner) was not born and did not die, he merely disappeared.
- (5) Some of the older Ngatana have given me an entirely different account. They say their ancestor Kanjala Dima (both Hamitic names) came from Kismayu—see Mikael's final paragraph—and reached the Tana before Sango, who arrived to find the Ngatana settled from Mtapani to Mwina, during Kanjala's lifetime. Mtapani (the place of Borassus palms) is on the main road about four miles east of Garsen, on what was then the main channel of the Tana. Probably there is some truth in both accounts, since the Pokomo seem to contain a good many ingredients. The Ngatana clan names are Kidziwi and Bure, neither of which sound Hamitic, and the Wata are of Boran origin. Miss Werner gives a list of Pokomo clan names. Of these almost all the Malalulu and Zubaki ones are Boran. She says the "Deno" clan of the Buu is also Hamitic, but it is not a Boran clan name. Both Malalulu and Zubaki have a "Meta" clan, as have the Munyo (Korokoro) and Elwana (Malakote) of Garissa District, who say the Meta were slaves who escaped from the Oromo. The Zubaki admit to having a good deal of Kamba blood, probably derived in this way. Some of the middle Pokomo tribes (Ndura, Kinakomba, Gwano, and Ndera) say they are of Boran origin. Probably all these stories have some truth in them, though the Pokomo language is Bantu, with a number of Hamitic words, whose proportion increases as you go northwards. The Munyo (who speak nothing but Oromo) and Elwana (whose language is very like that of the Northern Pokomo) are not Pokomo, and dislike being called so, though they often are by Europeans.
- (6) The Buu-Ngatana quarrel exists today. It may have started as Mikael says over the woman's dowry, or it may be due to the alleged boundary at Kaloni—see paragraph headed "Sango Vere Ancestor of the Buu"—since if Kanjala Dima really settled the country from Mtapani to Mwina, the Ngatana would resent Sango's claim to the land from Mtapani to Kaloni. Both tribes have cultivation in this area now and no boundary could separate them, unless some of one or both be moved. As to the dowry, this custom is still known, but not universal. It has, of course, nothing to do with the brideprice paid by the suitor. Such land descends through the children of that wife only, and is not like the rest of the holding of the husband's family.
- (7) There is a lake near Kibusu called Singwayu, which may confirm Mikael's belief that Sango came from near Kismayu, since it is quite near where Sango [and Kanjala, see Note (5)] first reached the Tana. Mikael is wrong in saying that only the Buu have a tradition of Kismayu—see Note (5).
- (8) All the above notes are offered with considerable hesitation. I have only been in contact with the Pokomo for the last two years, when war-time duties gave little leisure for collection of information. I do know that the traditions of the Munyo and Elwana of Garissa District are very different to those set out by Mikael for the Malachini. His effort was entirely spontaneous so far as I know, and it is highly commendable that a comparatively young man should have taken the trouble to try to preserve the traditions of his elders.



*TRANSLATION OF A LETTER WRITTEN BY ARABS AND  
SWAHILIS OF KAU AND KIPINI, TO THE DISTRICT  
COMMISSIONER, KIPINI.*

SIR,

Please read these records of this country, you will understand the events of old time.

We give you the story of Shaka, whose King was Mringari of the tribe of Albauri, of the people of Ozi. He ruled Shaka from the year 121 from the Hegira of the Prophet of God.

Then Fumo Liongo came from the land of Jawa (Persia) and settled as an inhabitant of Shaka. He asked for a wife from Said bin Sheikh Ahmed Albauri, who gave him his daughter Somoe Mwana binti Said in marriage. She bore him a son who was named Liongo Fumo.

Liongo became a strong man, and the King and the people of the town loved him for his strength. Some time later disaffection arose, and some of the people told the King: "Understand he will take the kingdom from you." The King summoned the people for a dance called Gungu. Now Liongo was very expert at this dance, and went to the King's house and danced before the people.

He was seized and handcuffed, and was only allowed one loaf a day so that he might die of starvation in prison. His mother used to make a loaf and give it to a slave-girl, who took it to the door of the prison and gave it to the gaoler to give it to Liongo. After some time Liongo said to the slave-girl: "Greet my mother and tell her to make two loaves, one good one and one containing chaff, into which she can put a file."

His mother did so, and put a file into the loaf which had chaff in it, and gave both loaves to the slave-girl, who took them to the prison. When she reached the door the gaoler said: "Why have you brought two loaves? Every day he gets one only. Give them to me." She gave them to the gaoler, who took the good one, and returned the loaf with chaff in it to her saying: "Take this to your master in prison."

Liongo broke the loaf and took out the file. He then ate the loaf. When he had eaten it he sent the gaoler to the King to ask for the dance Gungu. The gaoler told the King, who gave the people of the town permission to dance the Gungu outside the prison door. When he heard the music of the Gungu, Liongo filed gently till he cut through the handcuffs. Then he broke the door of the prison and came out to join the dance. Everyone ran away for fear of him, and he went home.

After leaving the prison Liongo became King of the town, and the people sought other means to kill him. They ate dom palm nuts together (this makes an agreement binding everyone).

Each day one man climbed palms and gave the people nuts and they ate their fill. When everyone except Liongo had taken his turn, the people of the town said to Liongo: "Today it is your turn to climb." They meant to kill him if he climbed up. Liongo took his bow and shot an arrow and cut a branch of the palm, so that enough nuts to satisfy all fell down. Thus the plan to kill him failed.

Liongo realized that he was more and more in danger. Even when he wanted to wash his clothes he used to go to Gana, an old lake, because of the danger he was in. He used to go there on a Friday and wash his clothes and return the same day in time to pray at Shaka. Liongo was a very great man.

Soon after this the King died, but Liongo still went to Gana to wash his clothes. When many days had passed, he met a man followed by two women. Liongo asked: "Who are you?" He replied: "I am Sango Vere, and these are my sisters Nangowa and Mke wa Buu." They had come to Yunda and settled on the Sakutu river. Liongo agreed to let them live there. After a time Sango disobeyed Liongo's orders. They fought and Sango was beaten, and made to pay tribute. Sango handed over his sister Nangowa as tribute.

Nangowa was compelled to marry Bwana Mkuu, and bore him a son called Bwana Haji bin Bwana Mkuu.

Liongo killed the son of his stepmother Fatuma binti Bwana Hatibu Albauri. She when she married already had a son who was Liongo's stepson. The people of the town took counsel together and said to Liongo's stepson: "Ask your father what weapon can kill him." His stepson asked Liongo, who laughed at the boy and said to him: "You have been deceived. Understand you will be killed also. The weapon which can kill me is if a needle be driven into my navel, while I sleep."

The boy went and told the people of the town. They said to him: "Watch your father, and when he is asleep drive a needle into his navel. We will then make you King."

The boy watched his chance and drove a needle into his navel whilst he slept. Liongo jumped up with great strength, and took his bow, and went and knelt in the doorway for three days, with an arrow on the bowstring. He prevented those who were in the town from going out, or those who were out from coming back. The people went to Liongo's mother, and said to her: "We are starving, and thirsty. Tell your son to leave the doorway." Liongo's mother put on fine clothes, and went and took hold of her son. He fell down, and she returned to the town wailing. The people knew that Liongo Fumo was dead, so they buried him. After the funeral they took counsel together and said: "If you kill a snake you must cut off its head, lest it revive and bite you again. We had better kill the boy." So they took the boy and killed him.

The origin of the Kalindi. They are the remnant of the Pokomo of Mgini (Lamu District). They were defeated in war by the Kilio, and came to us at Shaka. We asked them: "Whence do you come?" They replied: "We have come from Mgini, where we were defeated by the Kilio, and ran away." The men of Ozi put them at Sada. Then the Oromo came and fought them and captured them, and took them to Mongo near the town of Gedi (Malindi District). Then the Ozi went to the Oromo and asked for the Kalindi. The Oromo demanded 400 dollars for them. The Ozi collected 200, and the Mungama 200, and they took the Kalindi and returned them to Sada. Sango Vere, the Pokomo, got completely lost. His sister Mke wa Buu went to look for him. She found him at Nduru, and told him that there were Pokomo at Sada. Sango said: "How will we get these Pokomo?" Mke wa Buu said: "Ask your brother-in-law. He will give them to you."

Sango went to his brother-in-law, who went with him to Sada crossing the river by the road of Bwana Shekiko. Sango saw the Kalindi and wanted to take them. The Kalindi said: "We are slaves of the Ozi. Go and ask them if you can take us." Sango went to the Ozi, and asked to be allowed to take the Kalindi because the Oromo were distressing them. The Ozi said: "Take them so that they may help you in your work." Sango took them to the river and settled them at Mji Mkuu. The Kalindi said: "We are strangers. What will we eat?" Sango replied: "Eat what your spears provide, and what you can find in the bush."

Then the tribute of a girl was changed, and the tribute was one of food from Chadhoru to Mwina.

#### NOTES ON ABOVE BY R. G. DARROCH.

- (1) Gana was a lake a little south of Garsen.
- (2) Yunda is near Kibusu; it is the name of one of the Pokomo sub-tribes.
- (3) Sada is about two hours' walk from Kipini, south of the Tana.
- (4) Mji Mkuu is about an hour's walk south of Ngao, on the Tana.
- (5) Nduru is on the Tana, at the extreme limit of the ten-mile strip.
- (6) Chadhoru no longer exists. It was about an hour's walk above Nduru.