

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RFG - 10
Gidas Cattle Auction

P. O. Box 308
Arusha, Tanganyika
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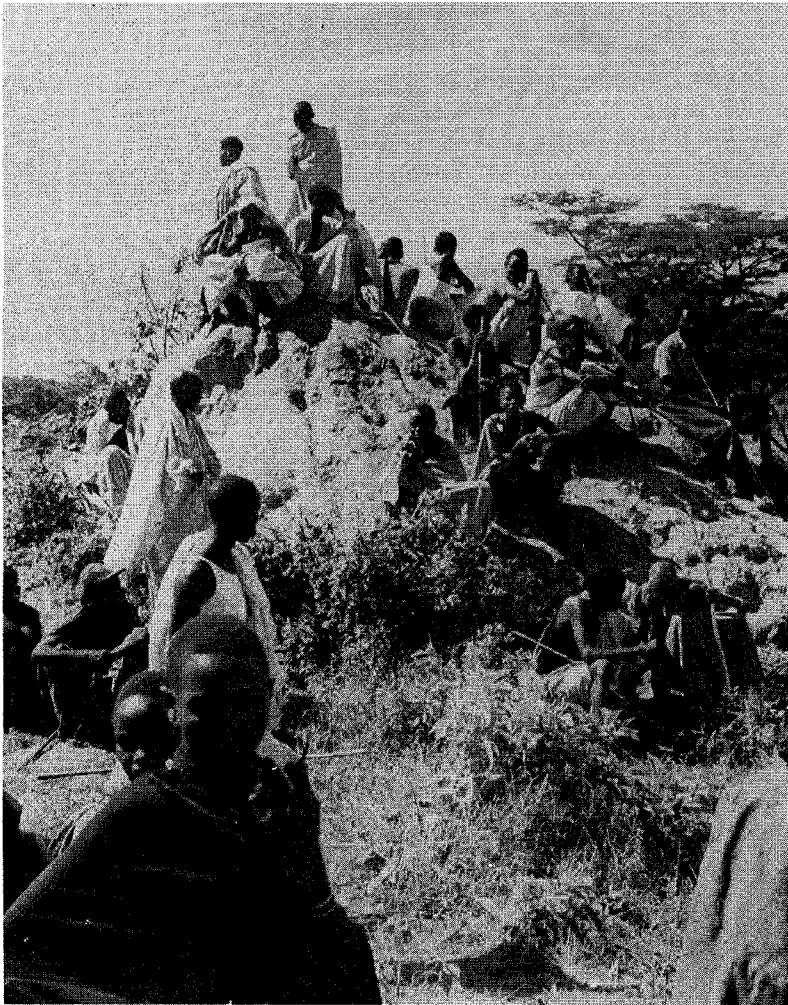
Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

After weeks of wet cloudy weather, the day dawned brightly for the opening of the cattle auction at Gidas. The cattle paddocks, normally a deserted desolate place, began to hum with activity and conversation as the first Africans arrived, coming singly and in groups by the network of footpaths which radiate through the Gorowa tribal region. With the people came cattle whose lowing added to the growing noise of the auction place as they slowly filled up the first paddock. Three or four large motor trucks rolled up in close succession and unloaded tents,

camp kit and other paraphernalia. The activity at the paddocks became more purposeful as various officials and clerks took their places. At ten o'clock the auctioneer rapped his gavel and the first bullock was offered to the bidders.

Gidas is one of the three subchiefdoms of the Gorowa Tribe of Tanganyika. It is a farming region having in its center a small village consisting of the Subchief's Baraza, a school, a dispensary, and a few shops. The mnada or cattle auction is located about a mile from the baraza. There a cattle sale is held every two months. The mnada functions, not only as an economic institution, but also as a general fair for the region. Everyone comes whether or not he has cattle to sell. About 5,000 people attended the last mnada. It is a place to meet friends and relatives, to exchange news and gossip, to make new acquaintances, and above all to talk about cattle and examine the animals which come from different neighborhoods. Although it is mainly a man's affair, a good



Watching the Auction from an Ant Hill



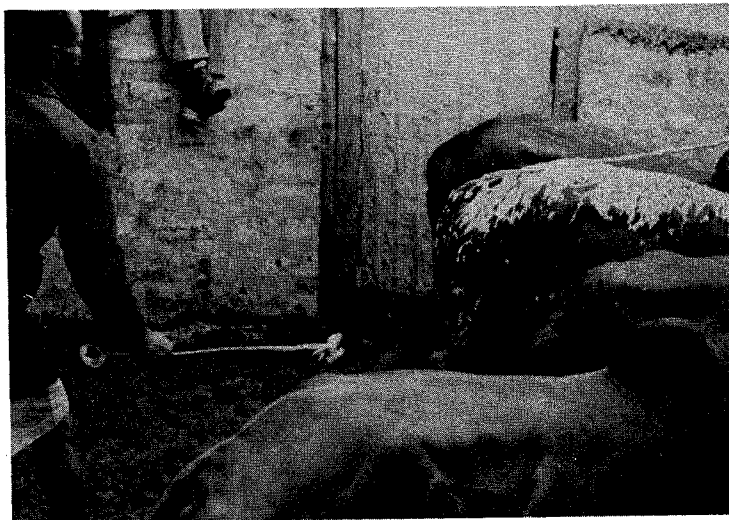
Cattle in the Auction Paddock

sprinkling of women were present. For feeding the multitude, a variety of cooked foods were offered for sale in a line of temporary stalls built of sticks and leaves. A few vendors strolled about the grounds hawking trinkets and baskets, but the interest of the people was overwhelmingly centered on cattle.

The mnada at Gidas is only one of eleven in Mbulu District. At five of these places, including Gidas, cattle auctions are held every two months. The other six have monthly auctions. These mnadas are distributed, according to the density of the cattle population, through the territories of the four tribes

of the District--Gorowa, Barabaig, Iraqw, and Wambugwe. A cattle auction normally lasts two days, but some of the larger ones go on for three days. The Wambugwe--the smallest of the tribes--are able to dispose of their surplus cattle in a one-day sale every two months. Upwards of 2,000 head of cattle are sold at auctions in Mbulu District every month. The auctions are strictly supervised by the government and efficiently operated by a special crew of men. The management of cattle auctions comes under the Native Treasury, which in Mbulu District is now a unified institution representing and supported by revenue from the four tribes. An important item in the revenue of the Native Treasury comes from the cattle auctions, where a tax of one shilling per animal sold and 5% of all money transactions is collected. These taxes are paid by the sellers rather than the buyers.

The importance of cattle in the lives of many East African tribes is well known to anthropologists. A careful study of this subject was made some years ago by Professor Melville J. Herskovits, who demonstrated that the attitude of these Africans to their cattle was¹ not strictly an economic one. In most cases cattle are valued for their intrinsic worth, not as economic commodities which can be freely exchanged for other goods. Social prestige is often determined by the number of



The Hazardous Job of Branding

¹ "The East African Cattle Complex," American Anthropologist, 1924.



Somali Trader Clutching his
Bag of Silver



Nani Mwenyewe?

("Who Owns this Beast?")

cattle a man owns, regardless of what use he makes of them. Chiefs and other persons of power are usually large cattle owners. Everyone likes to keep at least a few head of cattle, and no home in cattle areas is complete without the comforting sight and smell of cattle. Traditional warfare among these tribes was largely concerned with cattle raiding. The possibility of plundering cattle and thus acquiring the nucleus of a prosperous herd inspired warriors to feats of bravery and endurance. For these reasons the native emphasis was placed on numbers rather than quality of cattle. Apart from their economic importance, cattle served social and religious functions. Marriages were legalized and stabilized by transferring cattle from the husband's family to the wife's family--the so-called "bride price." The social structure of the tribe was reinforced by rules for the inheritance of cattle: in patrilineal tribes sons inherited their fathers' cattle, while in matrilineal tribes a boy might inherit cattle from his mother's brother so that the cattle would remain the property of the matrilineal clan. Cattle were sometimes bartered for other products, but not on a large scale. The main economic value of cattle was in their milk and butter, but milk production was low because of indiscriminate breeding and primitive dairy methods. Cattle also played a role on ceremonial and ritual occasions, particularly at sacrifices to ancestral spirits. At these affairs cattle were killed and the people ate beef, but the cattle were rarely slaughtered solely for food. To this day a backwoods tribesman would not dream of killing one of his bullocks in cold blood just for its meat.

The situation remained unchanged until quite recently, but with this difference: Pax Britannica and the government veterinary services brought about a considerable increase in the sizes of the native cattle herds, with consequent overgrazing of the available pasture areas. As a result the quality of the cattle deteriorated and erosion of the land became a serious problem. The Africans became potentially more prosperous, but as their attitude to cattle remained uneconomic their standard of living was not proportionately raised. The cattle auctions such as those in Mbulu District were instituted partly for the purpose of breaking this deadlock--to reduce the cattle

population and at the same time improve the economic condition of the people by inducing them to sell surplus cattle for cash. In some places soil erosion progressed so rapidly that sterner measures were necessary. The inducement of a market where fair prices were offered for the sale of cattle produced results too slowly. This was the case with the Iraqw Tribe. There a program of compulsory destocking was required to save the land. A maximum number was declared for the size of a cattle herd which could be kept by any one person. Cattle in excess of this maximum were branded and ordered to be sold at the next local auction. The habit of selling cattle seemed to take hold, and now, with the compulsory program ended, the Iraqw auctions are the largest in the District. The Iraqw example is being followed by the other tribes and more and more cattle are being brought to every mnada.

At the recent Gidas mnada about 80% of the cattle were brought for sale by local inhabitants of the subchiefdom. The rest were brought by owners from other parts of the District who needed cash so urgently that they could not wait for the date of their local mnada. One small herd of cattle--in prime condition as usual--was brought by Masai, who are the cattle people par excellence of East Africa. The local Gorowa cattle owners rarely sell more than one or two beasts at a time. From conversations with them, I judged that the chief motive for selling cattle is sheer economic necessity. The reasons given repeatedly were the need of money for taxes, school fees, and clothing. In some cases money was needed to pay court fines which had upset the family budgets. Among these people, who grow their own food and practice a subsistence economy, there is little desire for money to be used for buying luxuries or changing their primitive style of living in any essential way. Nor are they as yet seriously concerned about improving the quality of their cattle or worried about soil erosion. (But cf. RFG - 9, p.3.)



Sellers Waiting to be Paid

A certain amount of cattle trading takes place among the natives of the District outside of the mnada, and there are no official restrictions on this trade. Some of the traditional cattle deals are rather complicated. For example, a man who desires a new heifer may trade a bullock for the use of a cow. He is permitted to use the milk of the cow, and when a female calf is born he keeps it and returns the cow. Any male calves which are born belong to the original owner. There is considered to be mutual profit in this deal. The cow owner acquires a fat ox which he may use for an impending sacrifice to the spirits of his ancestors, while the other man gets a heifer which he hopes will be fertile and replenish his herd. It



The Shrewd Buyers

is also possible to exchange grain for livestock, often with goats serving as an intermediate commodity. A poor youth who is starting life with no inherited cattle may, by energetic cultivation, accumulate surplus grain and exchange it for goats at the prevailing rate of one bag of sorghum for a goat. When he has acquired eight goats he may trade them for a heifer, which may be the beginning of a sizeable herd of cattle. Thus the economic classes of the Gorowa are not rigid. The indigenous economic system provides for the emergence of a self-made man.

It is a different matter altogether when cattle are sold for cash to be taken out of the District. In that case, to protect the natives against possible abuses of unrestricted trading, cattle must be brought to the mnada and sold at open auction to licensed traders. A license for cattle trading, costing 20 shillings a year, entitles the trader to bid for cattle at any mnada in the District and to be issued with a permit to transport the cattle he buys out of the District to a stated destination. For many years Somalis have been the main cattle traders of East Africa, being comparable in this respect to the Hausa of West Africa. But more recently men from other tribes have been entering the trade. Of the sixteen licensed traders at the Gidas mnada, five were Somalis, the rest being Africans from various Tanganyikan tribes. With so much money changing hands rapidly, I was surprised to note the absence of any Indians at the mnada. Nearly all of the cattle purchased at the auction were destined to be slaughtered for beef. Most of the Gidas cattle were taken to meat markets at Arusha and Moshi to provide meat for the Africans in those areas



Anxious Sellers

who follow urban occupations or raise cash crops. One herd left Gidas for Korogwe, twenty-five days' march away. The largest buyer was a plump African called "Charley" from Moshi who claimed to have left his home at the beginning of the month with £2,500. He spent his last shilling at Gidas, which was the third consecutive auction he had attended. The prosperous Chagba Tribe of Moshi District provide a

market for all the beef he can supply. Other buyers are commissioned to buy cattle for feeding the labor forces on European farms in the highlands of northern Tanganyika.

Each trader has a crew of three or four herdsmen to take his cattle to Arusha or Moshi—treks of 140 or 190 miles respectively. The cattle of two or three traders are often joined together in one large herd for the journey. The caravans follow well worn cattle tracks which stay clear of the Great North Road. As they are obliged to pass through long stretches of bush infested with tsetse fly, a certain proportion of cattle become infected with trypanosomes and are doomed to die of nagana (trypanosomiasis of cattle) unless treated. To avoid losing them, they are commonly slaughtered within ten days of arriving at their destination. After their long walk the cattle arrive in lean condition, and there is a growing tendency to keep them for a period in special pastures near the meat markets in order to fatten them for slaughter. Animals due to be fattened in this way are preventively treated against nagana before leaving Gidas. The government has ordered that all cattle be inoculated against anthrax before leaving the District. This is done at the mnada at the end of the auction. The chief dangers to their cattle which the herdsmen encounter are lions and Masai raiders. Hair raising tales are told about the attacks of these two enemies.



Ali Shauri Lasseko
Cattle Market Inspector

In addition to helping the Africans of the District, the cattle auctions were planned with a view to increasing the meat supply of the British Commonwealth. A special government official of the District, the Livestock Marketing Officer, carries out his duties with this aim in mind. His job is to encourage the sale of cattle by every possible means, including the guarantee of a fair minimum price for every sound beast offered for sale. No seller at the Gidas auction, however, took advantage of this offer. In every case the bidding exceeded the minimum price or the owner refused to sell. The present Livestock Marketing Officer, Mr. Charles Griffiths, is also a buyer for Tanganyika Packers Ltd., a meat company which is subsidized by the Tanganyika Government who own 49% of the stock. Mr. Griffiths attends all auctions in the District and buys roughly one third of the cattle which are sold. Since his



Faru Juma, the Auctioneer

cattle are sent to the Arusha factory to be canned as corned beef, he buys only lean animals. For this reason bidding competition is not keen between him and the other traders who prefer to buy fatter cattle. He also buys runts and old animals which are suitable for canning, but whose chances of surviving the journey to Arusha are less. Mr. Griffiths travels from mnada to mnada with 27 men. As Livestock Marketing Officer he is assisted by ten African veterinary assistants, guards, and so on; and as a buyer he employs a crew of 17 clerks and herdsman. Like the other buyers he has his own branding iron, which is kept red hot during the bidding, and an assistant who brands the cattle he buys while they are still in the bidding ring.

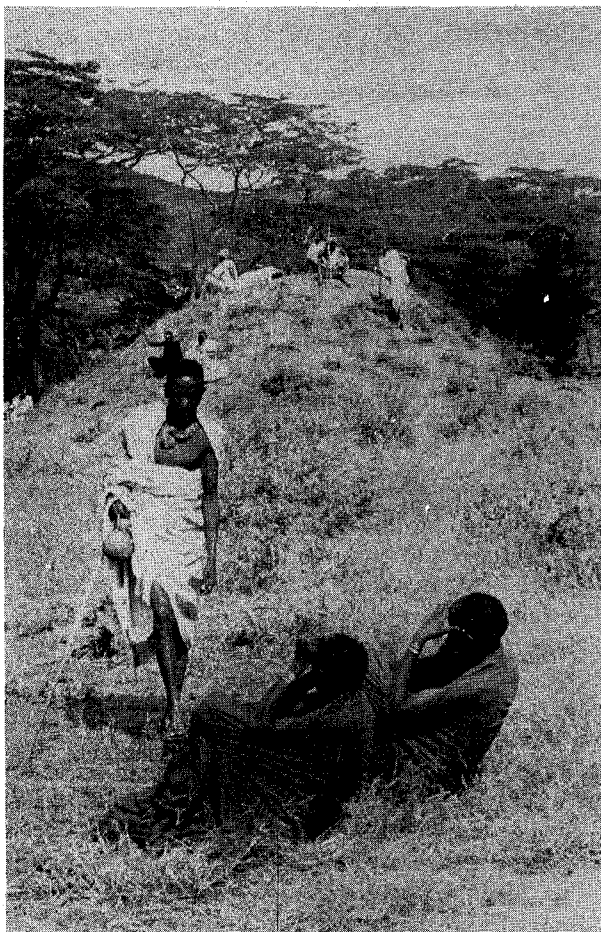
I spent most of the two days of the Gidas mnada wandering about the grounds talking to the people and sitting at the bidding ring watching the proceedings. The mnada structures consist of a treasury office, a bidding ring and three cattle enclosures built of stout poles which have sprouted green twigs and poles from their tops, thus providing shade for the paddocks. The first enclosure, for unsold cattle, holds about forty animals. These cattle are conducted through a corridor to the bidding ring in

groups of five or six at a time. As cattle leave the receiving enclosure others are brought in. After an owner has arrived at the mnada he may have to wait a long time before there is room for his cattle in the enclosure. In the meanwhile he parks them somewhere on the grounds and squats by them with friends and relatives, discussing their merits, the probable price they will fetch, and the minimum he will accept. Animals and people mixed together form a continuous throng round the auction place.

The bidding ring, twenty feet in diameter, is surrounded by a five-foot stone wall. It has two large doors for cattle and a narrow slit by which the branding man enters and leaves the ring. The buyers sit on the wall along its closed half, and the auctioneer sits opposite them. The sellers have a short stretch of wall where there is room for three or four of them to stand and watch their cattle being auctioned off. There is no room for the general public to watch the bidding except from the tops of distant ant-hills. When five or six cattle have entered the ring the door is shut and the bidding begins, each animal being sold separately. After the bidding on a beast has finished, the owner is asked whether he accepts or refuses the price offered. In most cases the sellers--simple tribesmen unable to understand the lingo of the bidding--are not sure what price they have been offered. A special official has the task of explaining this to them. Even then they often stand on dead center with their mouths open, unable to make up their minds. The official sometimes has to beat them with a stick to bring them to a decision so that the auction can go on. When the cattle in the ring have been auctioned and the branding done, they are taken out through another door and placed in one of two

enclosures--a small one for cattle whose owners have refused the price offered, and a large one for sold cattle. Then another group of cattle are brought into the ring and the bidding starts again.

This procedure went on for two days from ten o'clock in the morning till five in the afternoon. The noonday break was very short because most of the mnada staff were Mohamedans who were fasting for Ramadhan and could not eat during the day. The staff is headed by the District Cattle Market Inspector, Mr. Ali Shauri Lasseko, a large friendly African who is responsible for the general conduct of the auction and keeping the accounts. Ali Shauri is half Masai and half Iraqw. He speaks the Masai and Iraqw languages, as well as Swahili (the language of the mnada), and has a smattering of English. Each month he travels with his staff around the District managing the different cattle auctions, and he is also inspector for the nine produce markets of the District. In addition to his official duties, he engages in some private cattle trading, and is reputed to be one of the wealthiest Africans of Mbulu District. There are few educated Africans in this part of Tanganyika. Apart from hereditary chiefs such as Amri Dodo (RFG - 9), the emerging leaders of the people are shrewd capable men like Ali Shauri and J.S. Mchinja (RFG - 8) who have deep concern for the economic development of their country, but seem to be little interested in political advancement.



Greeting Old Friends

Another important member of the mnada is the chief auctioneer or dalali, Mr. Faru Juma, who bears the official title of Market Master. He is a small wiry man who chatters incessantly like a teletype machine while in the auctioneer's seat, but has little to say off duty. When bidding is in progress, Faru Juma and the buyers seem to retire into a world of their own in which their strange mechanical language is supplemented by queer gestures. Bids are often indicated by movements of the fingers as well as by voice. The buyer Charley, his hands being full of money, commonly signals his bids by sticking his tongue out. The work of the auctioneer is too much for one man, and an Assistant Market Master, Juma Baridi, relieves Faru Juma at intervals. Ali Shauri also takes an occasional turn, but he is not a born auctioneer as his words can be clearly understood even by a layman.

In order to prosper at his trade, a buyer must be a shrewd judge of cattle. As I watched the bidding, it was not always clear to me on what basis the animals were evaluated. A small beast sometimes provoked lively bidding and sold for a high price; while what appeared to be a splendid large bullock might go for half the price. When I asked about this, the buyers spoke cryptically of

"solid" and "hollow" cattle. The buyers and the native owners did not seem to apply the same scale of values to the cattle. Thus when bidding was low on a large "hollow" beast, the owner often refused to sell. The auctioneer usually set a comparatively low price to start with so that there would be lively bidding even when the final bid was low. Ali Shauri explained that this was a deliberate policy: sellers like to hear lengthy bidding on their cattle and are more apt to sell in that case than if only one or two bids are made. After an animal has been sold, the seller is given a credit slip for the agreed price. The buyer or his agent must then pay over cash to the treasury clerk who enters the sum in his records. The seller may then collect his money, minus taxes, from the treasury window on presenting his credit slip. One attempt at forgery was made during the mnada. A twelve-year old boy sold a small calf for 14 shillings and then changed the number on his credit slip to 44. The forgery was detected by the treasury clerk. The boy was given summary punishment on the spot of ten strokes of the cane, and promised never to cheat again.

Prices at the Gidas.mnada ranged from 4 shillings (for a small decrepit bullock) to as high as 350 shillings (\$50.00). A total of 491 head of cattle were sold in the two days. The record of money paid in was not summed up till later at Mbulu, but Ali Shauri estimated that the total came to 66,000 shillings (\$9,240). This would work out at an average price of about 140 shillings (\$20) per head. No record was kept of the cattle whose owners refused to sell at the price offered, but I estimated these at about 100. At present no fee is charged for presenting an animal at auction unless it is sold, but the mnada staff would like to have the one-shilling tax applied to all cattle whether or not they are sold. This would reduce the waste of their time caused by owners who bring their cattle to auction just for the adventure or hold out for an unreasonable price.

The sale of cattle is the only large source of money entering the Gorowa tribal area. The development of cattle auctions, together with a dawning appreciation of the civilizing amenities to be acquired through money, appears to be the most promising solution to the backwardness of these people. It may also emancipate the Africans from their curious uneconomic attitude towards cattle and mobilize their traditional skill in cattle raising for their own welfare and advancement. The cattle resources of Tanganyika, if rationally exploited, could go a long way towards relieving the general poverty of the country.

Sincerely,

Robert F. Gray

Robert F. Gray.

Received New York 6/29/55.