

BASHIR DATOO, PORT DEVELOPMENT IN EAST AFRICA: SPATIAL PATTERNS FROM THE NINTH TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURIES, EAST AFRICAN LITERATURE BUREAU, NAIROBI, 1975, pp. 139, Illustrated Bibliography.

J.R. MLAHAGWA

Bashir Datto's book is based upon part of his Ph.D thesis on historical geography written for London University in 1968. According to the author revision has been made on the body of the work in the light of recent research and publications. He has also added a final 4th chapter to set the discussion of ports and trade in a wider theoretical framework based on current theory of development and underdevelopment.

Principally, the book is aimed at showing that the development of ports in East Africa was directly related to and was by and large, the result of the changing pattern of alignment of major trade-routes. He chooses these eight hundred years from ninth to the sixteenth centuries, a period which saw 'vigorous' port development in East Africa mainly because this was the time in which the East African Coast was most effectively integrated into the Indian Ocean commercial system. Thus chapter one shows the orientation of the East Africa coast to the Indian Ocean trading activities, especially the coast's connections with western India. The second chapter takes us up to the 15th century whereby the author traces the development of the ports from a dispersed pattern to fully fledged interconnected system, the bigger ports having developed smaller satellite or feeder ports. The whole of the coast between Mogadishu to Sofala became an entity. The third chapter focuses on the intrusion of the Portuguese and how this affected the existing port system. In addition, the author shows the spatial readjustments which took place in the course of the superimposition of Portuguese establishments on the indigenous port complex.

Dattoo's study, like previous studies on the area, has one major shortcoming which is that there is very little that is said in terms of the connections between the coast and the immediate hinterland. The problem of the missing link between the coast and the hinterland is an old one which many writers have not come to terms with. While the effects of the commercial activities of the Indian Ocean on the East African Coast should not be underestimated, to say that the coast had no connection with its hinterland prior to the 19th century is probably erroneous. Even for the purposes of trade only it was difficult to believe that East Africa was the Western

shoe of the Indian Ocean. The student of history finds it difficult to believe that merely on the basis of the paucity of archeological evidence there was little or no contact between the East African coast and its immediate interior. In Datoos work, some mention is made on the hinterland in relation to the positions of Sofala and Kilwa as entrepots (pp.32-37). That necessarily means talking about Zimbabwe, and much less on the immediate hinterland of such centres, especially Kilwa. Who produced the food for the merchant classes in those ports? How did these changes in the development of ports relate to the social formation, especially the mode of production in those port areas and their vicinity? These are some of the questions that one hopes to get answers from reading the study.

One has to read the added concluding chapter to get the answers to some of the questions. Apart from a forbidding penchant for models Datoos makes some useful contribution in this concluding chapter on the theory of underdevelopment. Borrowing from Sheriff, he states that "the surplus that accrued from commerce was appropriated, in the case of gold and ivory in Rhodesia partly by the ruling classes of Zimbabwe and partly by the Swahili elite of the port-towns, but the bulk was retained by foreign Arab and Indian traders who retired to a comfortable life in their homeland". (p. 118). This is appreciable, although one would like to know further the exact relationship that developed between commerce production and also the mode of appropriation. This could profitably be analysed in the body of the book; but it is a work based on a thesis with limited scope of revision; hence the inevitable problem of integration of research material and post-thesis theoretical stance.

On the whole, however, Prof. Datoos study is a useful contribution. His study of winds and sea-depth charts enables him to show us how certain harbours came to be used and preferred and why. His analysis of the monsoons is particularly interesting. For example, he shows that the monsoon does not, contrary to what many school textbooks say, allow dhows to travel northwards any time between April and September. It was thus difficult for ships from Arabia to travel further southwards than Kilwa without having to wait five months before returning and by the same token it was difficult for ships from India to travel further south than Mombasa. Hence the importance of those particular ports.