

Trade in the Ancient Sahara and Beyond

Saharan trade has been much debated in modern times, but the main focus of interest remains the medieval and early modern periods, for which more abundant written sources survive. The pre-Islamic origins of Trans-Saharan trade have been hotly contested over the years, mainly due to a lack of evidence. Many of the key commodities of trade are largely invisible archaeologically, being either of high value like gold and ivory, or organic like slaves and textiles or consumable commodities like salt. However, new research on the Libyan people known as the Garamantes and on their trading partners in the Sudan and Mediterranean Africa requires us to revise our views substantially. In this volume, experts reassess the evidence for a range of goods, including beads, textiles, metalwork and glass, and use it to paint a much more dynamic picture, demonstrating that the pre-Islamic Sahara was a more connected region than previously thought.

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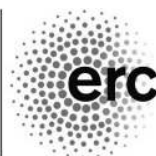
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Frontmatter

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Contents

List of Figures [page vii]

List of Tables [xii]

List of Contributors [xiii]

Preface [xv]

DAVID MATTINGLY

- 1 The Garamantes and the Origins of Saharan Trade: State of the Field and Future Agendas [1]

DAVID MATTINGLY

PART I CONNECTIVITY AND NETWORKS [53]

- 2 The Need for Nomads: Camel-Herding, Raiding, and Saharan Trade and Settlement [55]
JUDITH SCHEELE
- 3 What made Islamic Trade Distinctive, as Compared to Pre-Islamic Trade? [80]
ANNE HAOUR
- 4 The Trans-Saharan Trade Connection with Gao (Mali) during the First Millennium AD [101]
MAMADOU CISSÉ
- 5 Ships of the Desert, Camels of the Ocean: An Indian Ocean Perspective on Trans-Saharan Trading Systems [131]
MARK HORTON, ALISON CROWTHER AND NICOLE BOIVIN
- 6 Trans-Saharan Gold Trade in Pre-Modern Times: Available Evidence and Research Agendas [156]
SAM NIXON
- 7 Saharan Exports to the Roman World [189]
ANDREW WILSON

PART II TRADE IN ORGANIC MATERIALS [209]

- 8 Visible and Invisible Commodities of Trade:
The Significance of Organic Materials in Saharan
Trade [211]
DAVID MATTINGLY AND FRANCA COLE
- 9 Textiles and Textile Trade in the First Millennium AD:
Evidence from Egypt [231]
LISE BENDER JØRGENSEN
- 10 Circulation and Trade of Textiles in the Southern Borders
of Roman Africa: New Hypotheses [259]
STÉPHANIE GUÉDON

PART III TRADE IN INORGANIC MATERIALS [285]

- 11 Early Saharan Trade: The Inorganic Evidence [287]
VICTORIA LEITCH, CHLOË DUCKWORTH, AURÉLIE
CUÉNOD, DAVID MATTINGLY, MARTIN STERRY AND
FRANCA COLE
- 12 Can We Speak of Pottery and Amphora ‘Import
Substitution’ in Inland Regions of Roman Africa? [341]
MICHEL BONIFAY
- 13 Pottery and Trade in North and Sub-Saharan Africa dur-
ing Late Antiquity: The Distribution of North African
Finewares [369]
ANNA LEONE
- 14 Track and Trace: Archaeometric Approaches to the Study
of Early Trans-Saharan Trade [393]
SONJA MAGNAVITA
- 15 Glass Beads in Trans-Saharan Trade [414]
LAURE DUSSUBIEUX
- 16 Concluding Discussion [433]
DAVID MATTINGLY, VICTORIA LEITCH, CHLOË
DUCKWORTH, AURÉLIE CUÉNOD AND MARTIN STERRY
- Index* [441]

Figures

- 1.1 Map of the Trans-Saharan zone, showing names of modern countries and main regions. [page 3]
- 1.2 Map of the major landforms (massifs and sand seas) in the Sahara. [9]
- 1.3 Map of the principal oasis groups and areas of modern vegetation in hyper-arid and arid areas of the Sahara. [10]
- 1.4 Diachronic map of the principal Saharan trails and some key oases. [11]
- 1.5 Garamantian oasis settlements in Fazzan. [17]
- 1.6 Map showing the distribution of chariot and horse rock art from the Sahara. [23]
- 1.7 Location of the main sites mentioned in the chapters of this book. [33]
- 2.1 Sites mentioned in the chapter. [56]
- 3.1 Sites mentioned in the chapter. [82]
- 4.1 (a) Map showing location of Gao in West Africa; (b) Map showing locations of Gao Ancien and Gao Saney. [102]
- 4.2 Pits dug by looters at Gao Saney. [105]
- 4.3 Long banco wall structure and rectangular mudbrick structure in the ACGS unit at Gao Saney. [106]
- 4.4 The major types of distinctive pottery at Gao Saney. [108]
- 4.5 Examples of copper crescents from Gao Saney. [109]
- 4.6 (a) Glass beads from Gao Saney; (b) Melted and unfinished glass beads from Gao Saney. [111]
- 4.7 Structures and units excavated at Gao Ancien. [113]
- 4.8 (a) The Long House structure at Gao Ancien; (b) The Pillar House structure at Gao Ancien. [114]
- 4.9 The basin with pedestal located east of the Pillar House. [115]
- 4.10 GKM-S3 unit at Gao Ancien. [116]
- 4.11 Sample of glass fragments from Gao Ancien. [118]

- 4.12 (a) Examples of glass beads from Gao Ancien; (b) Glass and carnelian beads from Gao Ancien. [119]
- 4.13 Copper objects from Gao Ancien. [120]
- 4.14 Glazed ceramics found at Gao Ancien. [121]
- 4.15 Segmented bead and eye beads from Gao Ancien (GA) and Gao Saney (GS). [123]
- 4.16 Map of trade routes and goods. [124]
- 5.1 Map of East Africa and the Indian Ocean (inset) showing places mentioned in text. [132]
- 5.2 Imported beads from Unguja Ukuu, Zanzibar. [143]
- 5.3 Imported ceramics from Unguja Ukuu. [144]
- 5.4 Model of a *mtepe*, a traditional craft sailed on the East African coast. [148]
- 6.1 Close-up of page from The Catalan Atlas (AD 1375) showing the West African king Mansa Musa holding out a gold nugget to a Saharan merchant. [157]
- 6.2 Map showing major early Islamic Saharan trade routes, the principal West African gold fields, and sites discussed. [158]
- 6.3 Gold foil with repoussé decoration found within an excavated tomb in Fazzan, Libya. [165]
- 6.4 Gold ingots (cut) excavated at Tegdaoust. [177]
- 6.5 Selection of gold dinars from Sijilmasa, Morocco. [180]
- 6.6 Fragment of ceramic mould for producing gold coin blanks, excavated at Tadmakka, shown together with radiograph (top right) and close-up of individual prills trapped in surface. [182]
- 7.1 Suggested Saharan trade routes in Antiquity, showing foggara oases and finds of Roman material within the Sahara. [190]
- 8.1 Textiles from UAT008.T86. [221]
- 8.2 Textile from UAT008.T87. [222]
- 8.3 Textile from ZIN220.T19. [223]
- 9.1 Map of sites discussed in the chapter. [232]
- 9.2 Twist directions Z (clockwise) and S (anti-clockwise) and Z- and S-ply yarns. [238]
- 9.3 Proportion of weaves. Sites where data are available. [240]
- 9.4 Loom types. (a) Ground loom. (b) Warp-weighted loom. (c) Two-beam loom with revolving beams. (d) Two-beam loom with tubular warp. [242]
- 10.1 Map of sites discussed in the chapter. [262]

- 10.2 Major routes between the oasis of Bahariya and Oxyrhynchos. [271]
- 11.1 Map of the main early Trans-Saharan routes and centres in relation to Fazzan. [289]
- 11.2 Sherd numbers and proportions of diagnostic ceramics from the Fazzan and Desert Migrations Projects. [291]
- 11.3 Relative amount of amphorae collected from the DMP excavations and surveys over time. [292]
- 11.4 Relative amount of finewares collected from the DMP excavations and surveys over time. [293]
- 11.5 The pattern of ARS fineware distribution from excavations and surveys in North Africa. [294]
- 11.6 Relative amount of imported coarse wares collected from the DMP excavations and surveys over time. [295]
- 11.7 Relative amount of handmade wares collected from the DMP excavations and surveys over time. [296]
- 11.8 (a) AF AM Type 15 amphora; (b) UAT050 tomb 50, showing ARS fineware bowls and plates; (c) Graffiti on amphora; (d) Graffiti on the base of an ARS fineware bowl. [298]
- 11.9 Painted pottery form AF HM Type 614 of the fifth century. [300]
- 11.10 Examples of complete and substantially well-preserved glass vessels from the excavations of Charles Daniels at Saniat bin Huwaydi. [304]
- 11.11 MnO plotted against Sb_2O_5 , by weight percentage, for the five categories of vessel glass defined. [306]
- 11.12 MgO plotted against Fe_2O_3 , by weight percentage, for the five categories of vessel glass defined. [307]
- 11.13 Al_2O_3 plotted against Fe_2O_3 , by weight percentage, for the five categories of vessel glass defined. [308]
- 11.14 MgO plotted against CaO, by weight percentage, for the five categories of vessel glass defined. [308]
- 11.15 (a) Ellipsoid coral bead from GSC031.T7; (b) Cylindrical coral bead from GSC031.T7; (c) Cowrie shell from UAT050.T1; (d) Cowrie shell from UAT050.T5. [311]
- 11.16 Glass and Carnelian bead necklace from TAG001.T237. [313]
- 11.17 Tin, zinc and lead contents of the Fazzan objects showing a wide variety of alloys. [318]

- 11.18 Lead isotope ratios of objects from Fazzan, Kissi in Burkina Faso, Marandet in Niger, Carthage in Tunisia and Tunisian ores. [320]
- 11.19 Metal objects from Fazzan of presumed Mediterranean and local origin. [323]
- 11.20 Numbers of diagnostic vessels from Saniat Jibril by phase. [324]
- 11.21 Sites in Fazzan with Garamantian-era ceramic imports. [326]
- 11.22 Sites with glass vessels/fragments. [328]
- 11.23 Percentage of cemeteries and settlements with imported material culture by region. [329]
- 11.24 Distribution of imported ceramics 400–1 BC. [330]
- 11.25 Distribution of imported ceramics AD 1–300. [331]
- 11.26 Distribution of imported ceramics AD 301–600. [332]
- 12.1 Main surveyed sites of the inland non-coastal pre-desert regions. [342]
- 12.2 Main (African) Red Slip ware production areas. [345]
- 12.3 ARS ‘import replacement’: Tripolitanian Red Slip Ware. [348]
- 12.4 ARS ‘import replacement’: Numidian Red Slip Ware. [350]
- 12.5 ARS ‘import replacement’: Red Slip Ware of South-Western Byzacena/Eastern Numidia. [350]
- 12.6 ARS ‘import replacement’: Red Slip Ware ‘A/D’ from Lambaesis. [351]
- 12.7 ARS ‘import replacement’: Possible interconnections between fabrics and forms. [352]
- 12.8 Amphora ‘import replacement’: Local wine? Amphora from Lambaesis. [354]
- 13.1 Sites mentioned in the chapter. [373]
- 13.2 Principal Late Antique ARS forms (Hayes typology) recorded by the Libyan Valleys Survey. [375]
- 13.3 Principal Late Antique ARS forms (Hayes typology) recorded by the Jerba Survey. [376]
- 13.4 Principal Late Antique ARS forms (Hayes typology) recorded by the Segermes Survey. [378]
- 13.5 Principal Late Antique ARS forms (Hayes typology) recorded by the Leptiminus Urban Survey. [379]

- 13.6 Principal Late Antique ARS forms (Hayes typology) recorded by the Leptiminus Rural Survey. [379]
- 14.1 Sites mentioned in the chapter. [395]
- 14.2 Fragment of an eye-bead, Nin-Bèrè. [395]
- 14.3 Kissi 14C, Grave 2. Glass bead and brass bracelet. [396]
- 14.4 Simplified graph of general glass groups, according to alkalis (potassium vs. ratio of lime and magnesia). The bead fragment from Jenné-jeno, dating to the third century BC to first century AD, falls within the range of Asian potash glass. [399]
- 14.5 Simplified graph of general glass groups, according to alkalis (potassium vs. ratio of lime and magnesia). The bead from Kissi 14C, grave 2, dating to the first to fourth centuries AD, falls within the range of soda-lime plantash glass. [400]
- 14.6 Kissi glass groups, according to magnesia (MgO) and potassium (K₂O). [401]
- 14.7 Simplified graph of general glass groups, with data from Kissi, Jenné-jeno, Marandet and Dourou Boro. [402]
- 14.8 Simplified graph of general glass groups, with additional data from Igbo-Ukwu. [402]
- 14.9 View from the archaeological site of Marandet to the Falaise de Tigidit. [405]
- 14.10 Some of the beads and a glass fragment found at Marandet. [407]
- 14.11 Pottery found at Marandet of non-local origin. [408]
- 15.1 Plot reporting on the PCA1 and PCA2 obtained from the MgO, P₂O₅, CaO, Cr, Rb and La concentrations from glass v-Na-Ca glass samples from Essouk and Chibuene. [417]
- 15.2 Bi-plot for the Cr and La concentrations in the v-Na-Ca glasses and the high lead glass from Essouk. [423]
- 15.3 Bi-plot for the MgO and Rb concentrations in the v-Na-Ca glasses and the high lead glass from Essouk. [423]

Tables

- 1.1 Postulated main trade commodities of pre-Islamic era trade between Rome and the Garamantes and between the Garamantes and the Sub-Saharan zone. [*page* 26]
- 4.1 Counts of glass and imported ceramics from excavations at Gao Ancien and Gao Saney. [117]
- 9.1 Land and labour requirements for flax, wool and cotton. [237]
- 10.1 Textiles mentioned in the Zarái text. [261]
- 11.1 Diagnostic ceramics from the Daniels, Fazzan and Desert Migrations Projects. [290]
- 11.2 Sources of glass under discussion. [302]
- 11.3 Average compositions (wt.%) of the five major sub-divisions in the vessel glasses from Fazzan, Ghirza and Sabratha. [305]
- 15.1 Different v-Na-Ca glass groups identified in Sub-Saharan Africa. [418]

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Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

xiv

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Preface

When I was working on my PhD thesis on the Roman province of Tripolitania (north-west Libya) in the early 1980s, I became intrigued by a desert people who inhabited Fazzan, the area of the Central Sahara to the south of Tripolitania. This was my first introduction to the Garamantes. They were regularly mentioned in the ancient Greek and Roman sources, though seldom in complimentary terms – for the most part being depicted as nomadic and uncouth barbarians.¹ However, some pioneering archaeological work in the 1930s and then again in the 1960–1970s had revealed their physical traces to be considerably more sophisticated than would be assumed on the basis of the literary stereotypes.²

This volume arises out of my subsequent direct engagement across twenty years now with the archaeology of Fazzan. In 1996, I was given the chance to renew field research in what were effectively the Garamantian heartlands. Following an initial scoping visit that year, I directed the Fazzan Project across six years, carrying out excavations and surveys around the capital of the Garamantes at Garama (Old Jarma), with an emphasis on tracing evidence for their settlements, but also mapping other archaeological features including cemeteries and irrigation systems.³ A notable result of this work was the clear demonstration of the sophisticated and substantial network of oasis farming settlements that lay at the heart of the Garamantian territory. Rather than being ‘nomadic barbarians’, the Garamantes now appear to have been predominantly sedentary oasis farmers, living in substantial permanent and complex settlements of mudbrick buildings. That is not to say that the Garamantes did not also incorporate pastoral elements, as will be further discussed in Chapter 1, but simply to highlight the unexpected density and sophistication of sedentary oasis settlements. There is strong evidence to

¹ See in particular, Mattingly 2003, 79–81; 2011, 34–37 on the concept of ‘progressive barbarisation’ imposed by ancient authors as a factor of distance from the Mediterranean.

² Ayoub 1967; Daniels 1968; 1970; 1971; 1989; Pace *et al.* 1951.

³ There were five seasons of fieldwork (1997–2001) and a finds study season (2002). The results are now fully published as Mattingly 2003; 2007; 2010; 2013a. Funding for the Fazzan Project came primarily from the Society for Libyan Studies, the Leverhulme Trust, the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

identify the top level of their settlement hierarchy as ‘urban’ in character and their overall society as an early Saharan state.⁴

My work on the Garamantes has subsequently evolved through a series of further projects. In 2007–2011 I directed the Desert Migrations Project, which had a particular focus on Garamantian burials and funerary traditions.⁵ The increasing availability of high-resolution satellite imagery opened a new avenue of research in 2011, the Peopling the Desert project, which extended research on the Garamantes to another of the major oasis bands in Fazzan, the Murzuq depression.⁶ The Trans-SAHARA Project (2011–2017) marked a further evolution of this body of work, as it sought to place the Garamantes in their Saharan context and to address the wider implications of the results obtained in the earlier work.⁷

The work of the Trans-SAHARA project was organised around a series of four workgroups, each one supported by early-career, post-doctoral research associates, and each dealing with a discrete group of themes: trade; migration, burial practice and identity; mobile technologies; urbanisation and state formation. As a key element of the work programme, a workshop was held at Leicester for each of the workgroups, to which international scholars working on neighbouring areas of the Trans-Saharan zone were invited. From the outset, these workshops were conceived as offering a chance to engage a group of leading experts in the field in a high-level debate about the implications of the new information on the Garamantes for studies of the wider Trans-Saharan world. Papers were commissioned for an intended series of agenda-setting volumes on Trans-Saharan archaeology and pre-circulated so that the workshop sessions focused entirely on discussion of their content.

This volume, the first in a projected series of four with the Society for Libyan Studies and Cambridge University Press, thus presents some of the key work of the Trans-SAHARA team and an international pool of collaborators on the theme of trade. The recent systematic work on the Garamantes has amplified the earlier hints of significant levels of imports of goods from the Mediterranean to the Jarma area during the Roman period.⁸ Several contributions to this volume describe and analyse some of

⁴ Mattingly 2013a, 530–34; Mattingly and Sterry 2013.

⁵ Five planned seasons of fieldwork were completed by 2011, but the scheduled study season could not take place in 2012 because of the Libyan civil war. Interim reports have been published in *Libyan Studies* in 2007–2011, Mattingly *et al.* 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010a/b; 2011a. Funding for the Desert Migrations Project came primarily from the Society for Libyan Studies.

⁶ Sterry and Mattingly 2011; 2013; Sterry *et al.* 2012. The Peopling the Desert Project was funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

⁷ The Trans-SAHARA project was funded by the European Research Council (grant no. 269418).

⁸ Fontana 2001; Mattingly 2010, 313–38, 523–30; 2013a/b.

the main evidence for the trading connections of the Garamantes, while others present complementary studies on neighbouring regions and later time periods.

As we are asking our readers to often step outside their core areas of knowledge and expertise to engage with material from other parts of the Trans-Saharan zone, place names and their mapping have exercised us all. Systems of transliteration and spelling of place names across the Trans-Saharan region vary enormously and the same site can be presented in several distinct ways. We have tried to impose a measure of consistency in the transliteration of names, following the practice I adopted for the *Archaeology of Fazzan* series. However, for ease of recognition some exceptions have been allowed for sites whose canonical spelling is so well established in the literature. We trust that the maps provided will prove helpful with the identification of places named in the text, but hope that readers will share our sense of being on a journey of discovery as they read the following contributions.

David Mattingly

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