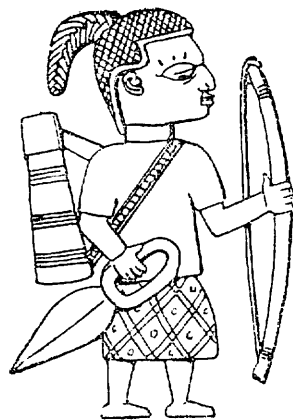


STUDIA ETHNOGRAPHICA UPSALIENSIA. XV

AFRICAN AXES

BY

CARL GÖSTA WIDSTRAND



1958

pp. 1-164

BAKER and *Dichrostachys glomerata* CHIOV., and all these species have tough and durable wood. The choice of material for the shafts is of course not limited to the species mentioned, but there is no need for further enumeration, those already mentioned will serve as examples (AL 19, p. 210; BJIC 17, p. 17; N 5, p. 24; NSS I, p. 681; BLOHM II, pl. IX: 129; B.M.L.: 1934, 4-10, 34).¹ It is not only wood that is used as material in the shafts, but also other materials such as iron, ivory, etc., for example, an iron tube with a brass head from the Tiv (BWT fig. 354; CME 4, p. 91; FA II, p. 250; OMEB I: 2/3, p. 137; PASSARGE, p. 357). In South East Africa rhinoceros-horn occurs as shaft material among, i.a. the Rozwi and Cwana tribes in the Transvaal district, Ndebele, Kwena, and Ngwaketse. The rhinoceros horn gives an elastic and pliable material which is very suitable for tool shafts and clubs. Among the Sotho, sceptres of this horn are found, and to the horn is attributed magical properties. Possibly it is this excellent material and the magical qualities of the rhinoceros horn that have made it so popular as a shaft material for "ceremonial axes" (AC 18, p. 41f; HECB p. 214; MGGW 22, p. 293f; B.M.L.: 1908, 6-23, 1).²

The material in the blade is usually some kind of metal, primarily iron, but on axes having no practical use they may be made of copper, brass and even aluminium.³ The iron, which is soft and easy to re-sharpen, is either home-made, or bought or bartered from some neighbouring tribe or other source. In the older literature it is often mentioned that the natives prefer axes of locally forged iron to the imported European variety. These latter being of steel or hardened iron were often too brittle for the extremely hard wood they were to be used upon. The edges were too easily turned and could not be re-sharpened without difficulty. The home-made variety did not maintain its edge for more than a few strokes, but the re-setting of the blade presented little trouble (DO 9 p. 121; MDS 10, p. 129; WOOD, p. 96).⁴ On the other hand, nowadays, European iron, stolen or bought, is the basis for the fabrication of axe blades.⁵ It is bought either as half-fabricated blades (so-called shokas from Birmingham, etc.) or as iron rods and pieces in a variety of shapes. The coastal tribes make axes which form a staple trade with inland districts. It is not only new iron that is used, but all kinds of scrap iron such as discarded parts of automobiles, especially the springs, tins, gasoline drums, retired bayonets, old nails, worn out agricultural implements, etc. Axes of stone

¹ BIEHLER, A Shona dictionary, Cape Town 1950, p. 327 f; BURTON, The lake regions of Central Africa II, London 1860, p. 307; DALZIEL, The useful plants of West tropical Africa, London 1937 p. 6 *et passim*, a valuable work with numerous references to other parts of Africa; MANSFELD, Urwald-dokumente, Berlin 1908, p. 47; MISCHLICH, Über die Kulturen in Mittelsudan, Berlin 1942, p. 80; REY, Unconquered Abyssinia, Philadelphia 1924, p. 218; ROTH, Great Benin, London 1903, p. 134; v. LUSCHAN in WERTHER, Die Mittleren Hochländer ... Ostafrikas, Berlin 1898, p. 338.

² HOLUB, Dr. Holub's Ausstellung. Katalog der im Pavillon des Amateurs ausgestellten Objecte. I. Theil: Der Mensch. Ethnographisch-anthropologische Abtheilung, Wien 1880, p. 15 f; KLEMM, Die Werkzeuge und Waffen,

Sondershausen 1858, p. 100; MOFFAT, Missionary labours and scenes in Southern Africa, London 1842, fig. 3, p. 535; OATES, Matabeleland and the Victoria Falls, London 1889, p. 94; THOMPSON, Travels and adventures in Southern Africa I, London 1827, p. 208 n, p. 306; WOOD, The natural history of Man (Africa) London 1874, p. 109, 321.

³ BERNATZIK, Äthiopien des Westens II, Wien 1932, fig. 303.

⁴ SCHULZ and HAMMAR, The new Africa, London 1897, p. 132, "unutterable contempt"; Southern Lunda still prefer locally made axes, McCULLOCH, The Southern Lunda and related peoples, London 1951, p. 17; SHOOTER, The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu country, London 1857, p. 17.

⁵ RICHARDS, Land, labour and diet in Northern Rhodesia, London 1951, p. 290 n. 1.

AC = Africa

HECB = Handbook Ethnogr. (u. a.). B. M. 1910.

MGGW = Mitt. Ges. f. Ges. u. W. in

B. M. L. = British Museum, London.

BAKER and *Dichrostachys glomerata* CHIOV., and all these species have tough and durable wood. The choice of material for the shafts is of course not limited to the species mentioned, but there is no need for further enumeration, those already mentioned will serve as examples (AL 19, p. 210; BJIC 17, p. 17; N 5, p. 24; NSS I, p. 681; BLOHM II, pl. IX: 129; B.M.L.: 1934, 4-10, 34).¹ It is not only wood that is used as material in the shafts, but also other materials such as iron, ivory, etc., for example, an iron tube with a brass head from the Tiv (BWT fig. 354; CME 4, p. 91; FA II, p. 250; OMEB I: 2/3, p. 137; PASSARGE, p. 357). In South East Africa rhinoceros-horn occurs as shaft material among, i.a. the Rozwi and Cwana tribes in the Transvaal district, Ndebele, Kwena, and Ngwaketse. The rhinoceros horn gives an elastic and pliable material which is very suitable for tool shafts and clubs. Among the Sotho, sceptres of this horn are found, and to the horn is attributed magical properties. Possibly it is this excellent material and the magical qualities of the rhinoceros horn that have made it so popular as a shaft material for "ceremonial axes" (AC 18, p. 41f; HECB p. 214; MGGW 22, p. 293f; B.M.L.: 1908, 6-23, 1).²

The material in the blade is usually some kind of metal, primarily iron, but on axes having no practical use they may be made of copper, brass and even aluminium.³ The iron, which is soft and easy to re-sharpen, is either home-made, or bought or bartered from some neighbouring tribe or other source. In the older literature it is often mentioned that the natives prefer axes of locally forged iron to the imported European variety. These latter being of steel or hardened iron were often too brittle for the extremely hard wood they were to be used upon. The edges were too easily turned and could not be re-sharpened without difficulty. The home-made variety did not maintain its edge for more than a few strokes, but the re-setting of the blade presented little trouble (DO 9 p. 121; MDS 10, p. 129; WOOD, p. 96).⁴ On the other hand, nowadays, European iron, stolen or bought, is the basis for the fabrication of axe blades.⁵ It is bought either as half-fabricated blades (so-called shokas from Birmingham, etc.) or as iron rods and pieces in a variety of shapes. The coastal tribes make axes which form a staple trade with inland districts. It is not only new iron that is used, but all kinds of scrap iron such as discarded parts of automobiles, especially the springs, tins, gasoline drums, retired bayonets, old nails, worn out agricultural implements, etc. Axes of stone

¹ BIEHLER, A Shona dictionary, Cape Town 1950, p. 327 f; BURTON, The lake regions of Central Africa II, London 1860, p. 307; DALZIEL, The useful plants of West tropical Africa, London 1937 p. 6 *et passim*, a valuable work with numerous references to other parts of Africa; MANSFELD, Urwald-dokumente, Berlin 1908, p. 47; MISCHLICH, Über die Kulturen in Mittelsudan, Berlin 1942, p. 80; REY, Unconquered Abyssinia, Philadelphia 1924, p. 218; ROTH, Great Benin, London 1903, p. 134; V. LUSCHAN in WERTHER, Die Mittleren Hochländer ... Ostafrikas, Berlin 1898, p. 338.

² HOLUB, Dr. Holub's Ausstellung. Katalog der im Pavillon des Amateurs ausgestellten Objecte. I. Theil: Der Mensch. Ethnographisch-anthropologische Abtheilung, Wien 1880, p. 15 f; KLEMM, Die Werkzeuge und Waffen,

Sondershausen 1858, p. 100; MOFFAT, Missionary labours and scenes in Southern Africa, London 1842, fig. 3, p. 535; OATES, Matabeleland and the Victoria Falls, London 1889, p. 94; THOMPSON, Travels and adventures in Southern Africa I, London 1827, p. 208 n, p. 306; WOOD, The natural history of Man (Africa) London 1874, p. 109, 321.

³ BERNATZIK, Äthiopien des Westens II, Wien 1932, fig. 303.

⁴ SCHULZ and HAMMAR, The new Africa, London 1897, p. 132, "unutterable contempt"; Southern Lunda still prefer locally made axes, McCULLOCH, The Southern Lunda and related peoples, London 1951, p. 17; SHOOTER, The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu country, London 1857, p. 17.

⁵ RICHARDS, Land, labour and diet in Northern Rhodesia, London 1951, p. 290 n. 1.