

Herders without horde or hunters without history? Investigating the history of East-African hunter-gatherer groups

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The large amount of hunter-gatherer groups in East Africa are often regarded to be remnants of “the original inhabitants” who have always been there – not just by outside researchers, but also by their neighbours, and sometimes the groups themselves. But evidence hints towards more complicated and intricate stories. This paper aims to take our insights into the history of four hunter-gatherer groups in Kenya and Tanzania, namely the Hadzabe, Waata, Akiek and Okiek, one step further. For this case study, evidence from different angles is accumulated: First, lexical evidence in the domains of both pastoralism as well as hunting and gathering may give insights into both language shift and changes in lifestyle. Secondly, the oral traditions of these groups, especially those explaining how they became hunter-gatherers will be considered. Finally, the current situation and distribution of these groups, together with the available genetic evidence, may shed some light into their history as well. Based on the clues collected from these angles, hypotheses about the history of these four hunter-gatherer groups will be made.