"LOPAE: GEOGRAPHICAL DISPERSAL OF FRIENDSHIP IN TURKANA"

By

Melanie Patton Renfrew

Working Paper No. 472

ABSTRACT

Lopae are special friendships among the nomadic Turkana pastoralists based on the exchange of stock animals and other gifts. This study of lopae among semi-sedentary southern Turkana has shown that: (1) Lopae serve as an investment, insurance, and risk dispersal over a wide geographical area, and (2) settlement itself does not hinder exchanges or diminish the friendships. Indeed, many Turkana in the settlements gained new lopae because of grain from their agricultural plots and their access to purchased food and goods.

This study is part of larger research on sedentarization and social changes among the Turkana. The paper outlines the methods and testing of the following hypothesis: "If the stock-associate (Lopae) networks will deteriorate". This hypothesis was proved false, and results are given about their number of friends, gifts exchanged, and reasons why friends break off and remain. The geographical dispersal of lopae friends is illustrated with maps.