This oversight has occurred, in part, because of the sustained and intense critical focus on Livingstone himself, a trend that strecthes back to Henry M. Stanley’s writings (1872, etc.) and even earlier.

It’s worth noting, however, that late nineteenth-century travel in East and Central Africa placed explorers like Livingstone squarely in the middle of Zanzibar’s evolving African empire.

This empire, which reached its height during the tenure of Sultan Barghash (r.1870-1888), exerted direct or indirect influence over a vast portion of the continent and “was aggressively expansionist in its ambitions” (Kennedy 2013:120-21).

The workings of this empire compelled European explorers who visited the region to subsume their ambitions with the broader ambitions of the empire and, indeed, often to “bend to the will” of the emprie’s objectives (Kennedy 2013:100, 126).

In the late nineteent-century, one of the empire’s principal expansionist tendencies the form of a fierce quest for ivory to satisfy global demand – particularly in the Congo – which, Livingstone notes in 1870, “at present is like gold digging” (1870a:[32], cf. [24]-[33]).

The Congolese ivory collected by Arab traders and their followers served the needs of “an extraordinary range of industrial products and decorative arts” including “billiard balls, knife handles and piano keys” as well as “all manner of lesser uses.” (Hyam 2002:217)

Much of the ivory passed through London to the rest of Europe, but there was also significant demand in the Middle East and in Asia.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 considerably facilitated trade from Zanzibar and the Indian Ocean (Hyam 2002:217-18; cf. Livingstone 1874:89-92).

In eastern Congo, such world demand for ivory translated into the arrival of Arab traders in the mid to late 1860s including the most famous of such traders Tippu Tip, the widescale introduction of firearms, and the advent of slavery, particularly to supply harems for the Arabs and porters for transporting the ivory (Northrup 1988:27-28).