Expansion into the Congo proceded by the creation of depots and bases, which the Arab traders and their followers then used to launch forays farther afield.

The trading parties, often financed by capital from Indian merchants settled on the east coast of Africa, brought together a diverse array of individuals, including “Omani Arabs, coastal Swahili, inland Africans, and others” (Northrup 1988:23).

Despite European characterization, labor in these trading parties took highly differentiated forms and did not depend wholly on slavery.

Indeed, in East Africa, the Nyamwezi ethnic group pioneered a sophisticated culture of “wage labor shaped by indigenous precapitalist labor norms but closely linked to merchant captial and the global economy” (Rockell 2006:6)

The use of slaves as porters in the Congo – which the Arabs were just beginning to pioneer in 1870 and where other ethnic groups, such as the Bira (in the northeast) and Bisa (in the southeast), dominated trade – thus constituted a break with East African caravan norms (Livingstone 1870a:[69], Wilson 1972, Rockell 2006:17).