

Learning by Ear – Aprender de Ouvido

“Once upon a time...in Africa”

Episode 2: “ANCIENT EMPIRES”

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CHARACTERS:

Intro/Outro (female/male)

Scene 1:

- June (13, female)
- Mum (38, female)
- Grandpa (77, male)

Scene 2:

- June (13, female)
- Mum (38, female)
- Dad (40, male)
- Neighbour (35, male)
- Man (37, male)
- Grandpa (77, male)

Scene 3:

- June (13, female)
- Grandpa (77, male)
- Mum (38, female)

Scene 4:

- Dad (40, male)
- Neighbour (35, male)

Scene 5:

- Mum (38, female)
- Grandpa (77, male)
- June (13, female)

Intro:

Hello and welcome to “Learning by Ear” and to the second episode of “Once upon a time... in Africa”, the series where we travel into African History! Today, June complains about going with the goats to the pasture and asks Grandpa Peter how nomads can make a living out of it. That reminds him of those people who thought the same a long, long time ago. Stay with us to find out how the Kanuri and the Zagawa peoples built up one of the big empires of antiquity in Africa...

Music 1, then cross fade with SFX

First Scene: Arriving at home at the end of the afternoon.

SFX: Goats, footsteps from one person on gravel path. In the background: chickens, birds, then fade under

1. June: (talking to the goats) Come on, we're home now! Everyone inside, come on!

SFX: Goats, little wooden door being closed, footsteps coming nearer on gravel path, chickens, birds, kitchen (pots, fire), then fade under

2. June: (tired) I'm back! Ufff, what a job, looking after those goats all the time!

3. Mum: Work is not play, June!

4. June: (sighing) No, Mum, it isn't, you're right! How is it possible to spend ones entire life taking animals to the pasture? Grandpa, the nomads are the ones who are always going from one place to another with their cattle, aren't they?

- 5. Grandpa:** **(laughing)** That's them, yes. But, you know, there are also nomads who changed their way of life. The Zagawa, for instance: at first, they were nomads who lived in the Northeast of Lake Chad, on the way to Libya. Every time they changed their base, they built new huts. They are said to have founded the Empire of Kanem. And the Kanuri, another people of the region, founded the Empire of Bornu, some time at the end of the eighth century. Later, they joined together and formed the Empire of Kanem-Bornu. And by then they had already ceased their nomadic way of life.
- 6. June:** Kanem-Bornu? I've heard nothing about that empire!
- 7. Grandpa:** Probably... Besides the lack of information, several other empires developed and existed at the same time.
- 8. June:** **(enthusiastic)** Which ones, Grandpa?
- 9. Grandpa:** Well, the empire of Mali, then Songhai, Ghana... But those ones appeared later.

10. June: But how did they change from a nomadic way of life? Did they just start to build permanent homes?

11. Grandpa: **(laughing)** It wasn't just like that! It took centuries! In the beginning, they raised cattle but later on they started growing food. And then, they had to wait for the crops to grow. And so they stayed longer and longer in the same place. Some Kanuri, from Bornu, lived partly in oases in the Sahara desert. There they started growing date palms. They even boast about having been the first ones to plant them! But there is no proof of that.

(whispering) If you had lived at that time in Bornu, you'd have probably helped mum and dad at the harvest. In fact, the whole community joined together – families, friends and neighbours. The date harvest was a very important event for the Kanuri...

Flashback Music

Second Scene: At the date harvest.

SFX: Someone climbing on a palm tree with a rope. In the background: people talking, birds, then fade under

12. June: (from below) Come on, Dad, climb a little bit higher up the tree, just a bit more! There are lots of them at the top!

13. Mum: Sssh! Let your father alone, child! He knows what he's doing! (proud) He's a master at harvesting dates!

14. Dad: (from above, shouting) Here come more of them! Be careful down there!

15. Neighbour: Throw them, Charles!

16. Man: Watch out for your heads!

SFX: Palm branches falling on gravel ground. In the background: footsteps on palm branches, people talking, birds, then fade under

17. Grandpa: June, go hand me that bunch, my back just doesn't bend as it used to anymore...

18. Neighbour: Eh, mister Peter, not like that! Do you want all the dates for yourself? What about the others? We're not here working just for fun, you know!

19. Man: **(murmuring)** That's true, they always keep the biggest bunches...

20. Grandpa: Oh, Mr. Neighbour, give me a hand and don't complain! What about the debt you owe me? Or have you forgotten the goods I've sold you some time ago? I still remember!

21. Neighbour: **(angry)** You've been making me pay for those goods since you've sold them to me!

22. Grandpa: **(appeasing)** Mr. Neighbour, let that be for now and help us!

23. June: **(from a distance)** That's right, let that be!

SFX: People picking dates off the bunches. In the background: footsteps on palm branches, people talking, birds, then fade under

24. Neighbour: **(angry)** Here are your dates! And don't bring the goods up again!

25. Grandpa: **(appeasing)** Oh, man, it's all right! keep them! We all have to eat something! And there are plenty!

26. Neighbour: **(calming down)** Huh? What do you mean? Aren't you charging me for anything else?

27. Grandpa: Do you know what, Mr. Neighbour?
(speaking loudly to everybody) Hey, everybody! There are dates for every one of you today!

Flashback Music

Third Scene: At home at the end of the afternoon.

SFX: Kitchen (pots, fire). In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

28. June: **(amused)** It seems our neighbour had some never-ending debts with you.

- 29. Grandpa:** For the Kanuri, dates were not only good to eat and sell but they were a very common product to pay off debts with, too.
- 30. Mum:** **(from a distance)** What do you think about forgetting about the dates and debts for now? It's getting late and dinner has to be made, little girl!
- 31. June:** **(speaking loudly)** Just a little bit longer , Mum! **(talking to Grandpa)** Tell me, Grandpa, did the Kanuri only live from the dates? What about the rest of the year? And was it because of the dates that they became a big empire?
- 32. Grandpa:** **(laughing)** Huh, Daughter! One question after another! No, they didn't only live from dates, although a well-kept date plantation was enough to feed a whole family! **(pause)** But they also traded slaves, for instance.
- 33. Mum:** **(from a distance, murmuring)** I seem to be a slave myself! There is absolutely nobody to help me in this house...
- 34. June:** Slaves, Grandpa? Were there already slaves by that time!

35. Grandpa: Daughter, there have always been slaves! Many, if not all, the big empires possessed slaves! Just think about the Roman or the Greek empires... or Egypt – who built the pyramids? That was even a long time before the empire of Kanem-Bornu?

36. June: So the slaves were so important in the empire?

37. Grandpa: Slaves were, let's say, one of the products they traded with. And they raised cattle and had wheat and alfalfa gardens which were very important to ensure the livelihood of the oasis population during the warmer season because then the desert caravans from the North didn't pass through Kanuri territory. **(pause)** And there was, of course, the salt production, which was seen as the least prestigious work since it was also the hardest...

Flashback music

42. Neighbour: At least, Charles, there is one thing for us to look forward to! **(enthusiastic)** I've heard from the last caravan that they will need a lot of yellow salt for their cattle the next season! I'm glad they want more of that one instead of the white one...

43. Dad: Yes, you're right, Neighbour! We'll have enough of the yellow salt, the cattle will feast on it! Well, we cannot complain about the quantity! As for the white one, for OUR food, we're not that lucky! And this work kills a man!

44. Neighbour: What do we have left, Charles, apart from this?

45. Dad: **(meditative)** What do we have left... Nothing. But the work!

SFX: Slow footsteps from one person over a salt pool, then stop, someone taking earth with a shovel

46. Dad: **(from a distance)** Mr. Neighbour, come see! We can already take the salt from here! It's on the surface! Come see!

Flashback music

Fifth Scene: At home in the evening.

SFX: Kitchen (pots, fire, kerosene lamp). In the background: crickets then fade under

47. Mum: (from a distance) Is the story over, Father?

48. Grandpa: (speaking loudly) Yes, it is! Just one more thing!

49. June: (speaking loudly) Just one more thing, Mum!

50. Mum: (from a distance, murmuring) Endless stories! One more thing, one more thing...

- 51. Grandpa:** **(talking to June)** To answer your question about the base of power of Kanem-Bornu: with the enlargement of the empire from Lake Chad almost to the Mediterranean coast in the North, to Darfur in the East and the region behind Niger in the West, the empire was a very important area for all kinds of trade. And why was that? It's simple: trade both from North Africa to the region South of the Sahara and between East and West passed through Kanuri soil. It was also because of that commercial power that the Kanuri left their nomadic life!
- 52. June:** **(enthusiastic)** Aha! Now I understand! The empire of Kanem-Bornu was located in a strategic region!
- 53. Grandpa:** Exactly! And it was a very important empire for many centuries because of all those trade routes they controlled.
- 54. Mum:** **(from a distance)** June!

Outro:

And this is the end of the second episode of “Once upon a time... in Africa”, the “Learning by Ear” series about African History!

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Good-bye until next time!