

Learning by Ear

“Unce upon a time... in Africa”

Episode 3: “TRADE IN AFRICA”

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CHARACTERS:

Intro/Outro (female/male)

Scene 1:

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

Scene 2:

- Singh (40, male) (with an INDIAN accent)
- Abou/Dad (40, male)
- Harbor worker (40, male)
- Men unloading ship

Scene 3:

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

Scene 4:

- Abou/Dad (40, male)
- Singh (42, male) (with an INDIAN accent)

Scene 5:

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

Intro:

Hello and welcome to the “Learning by Ear” series “Once upon a time... in Africa” about African History! In today’s episode June is happy with her first business at the village market. And Grandpa Peter tells her about the commercial talents of the peoples from the East coast of Africa. Stay with us to find out how trade worked a long, long time ago...

Music 1, then cross fade with SFX

First Scene: Outside the house.

SFX: Someone washing clothes, someone counting coins, someone hitting with wooden pole on cement ground. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

1. June: (counting coins) 4, 5, 6, 50, plus 20, makes 6... and 70... (speaking loudly)
Mum! I made 6 and 70!!

SFX: Someone washing clothes, someone counting coins, wooden pole stops hitting on cement ground. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, fade under

2. Mum: (washing clothes) Big business woman you are, just like Grandpa! So, father, don't you have any stories to tell about your businesses? Or those of your friends?

3. Grandpa: (hitting again with wooden pole) Ha, I have many by the way...

June stands up and sits next to grandpa

SFX: Footsteps on cement ground. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

4. June: (enthusiastic) Tell me, Grandpa, what do you know about business? Teach me all the tricks so that I can go to the market every Saturday and make a lot of money!! Hihi!!!

- 5. Grandpa:** Do you know who were the great masters of negotiating for a long, long time? **(June: Hmhm!, like saying “No”)**
The Swahili people!
- 6. June:** Really, Grandpa? And how did they do it?
- 7. Grandpa:** Well, they adopted many trading techniques... But they’ve always had two natural factors on their side. One: the coast of the Indian Ocean. And two: the winds favourable to the sea traffic, which the merchants made good use of to get to the Swahili coast. From the Somali capital at the Horn of Africa to Sofala, which today lies in Mozambique, the Swahili people founded many city-states.
- 8. June:** **(surprised)** They were all connected?!
- 9. Grandpa:** Well, these cities were politically independent from one another but united by the cosmopolitan culture of the region at that time. And, of course, by the common language, Swahili – which is actually a mixture of Bantu languages with Arabic influence. And which means “coast”. These city-states even grew to

become big centres of economic power in the fifteenth century. But even before that, they used to exchange goods and above all ideas and modern technology.

10. June:

Who did they trade with, Grandpa?

11. Grandpa:

With many, many peoples! With Arabs and Persians, with Indians and even the Chinese!

12. June:

They must have been reeeeeeally good then!

13. Grandpa:

They were indeed! They even created trade routes that linked the interior of the continent, Great Zimbabwe, for instance, with the East coast, where the city-states were: Mogadishu, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Kilwa, Sofala.... And there, on the coast, they traded with navigators and merchants from abroad.

14. June:

(enthusiastic) And did they make much money with chickens, too, Grandpa?

15. Grandpa: (laughing) No, dear! Above all they sold gold, ivory and slaves. And bought cloth, porcelain and spices... If Dad had lived at that time, let's say around the ninth century, he could have been a merchant...

Flashback music

Second Scene: At the harbor of Kilwa.

SFX: Sea waves on beach sand, seagulls, a ship being unloaded. In the background: many people talking and shouting

16. Singh: I've been told you're the right person to trade my goods with...

17. Abou: And you've been told very well! I see this is your first time in Kilwa... My name is Abou. I'm a merchant, and I work directly with the sultan of this sublime city, Ali Bin Al-Hassan! Pleasure to meet you!

18. Singh: Singh Raj. My pleasure! The splendor of your city is known in every land to the East! I haven't been that far south yet but I'm sure it will be worth it!

19. Abou: Ha, it will, good man, it will!

20. Singh: But I tell you: What a trip! We hadn't expected the monsoon to start before arriving here...

21. Abou: The winds have been changing for a while now! So I advise you: stay in Kilwa until the monsoon is over! And enjoy its charm! Afterwards, you won't want to leave anymore, you'll see...

22. Singh: I'm very much looking forward to getting to know the city... now, if you don't mind, I have to supervise the unloading of my goods!

23. Abou: I would like to invite you for dinner at my place tomorrow. Anyone will be able to tell you where it is. At six o'clock!

24. Singh: Then I will see you tomorrow! I come with pleasure!

SFX: Footsteps from one person going away on stone ground and another one walking on stone ground. Sea waves on beach sand, seagulls, ship being unloaded. In the background: many people talking and shouting

25. Singh: **(shouting)** Eh, men! Be careful! I have a lot of fragile goods in there! **(pause)** Yes, that's it! Very carefully!

26. Harbour worker: Sir, I see you come from India!
(murmuring) I saw you talking with that merchant. Maybe you're interested in my products... They're of a very high quality, sir! I have ivory, I have gold dust... everything's much cheaper and you don't need to declare anything... What do you think?

27. Singh: **(serious)** Man, I am in Kilwa for the first time but I do know that I will have to declare every single grain of dust that I take with me! **(shouting, angry)** Get out of here, you dishonest scoundrel! Now!

Flashback music

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

SFX: Footsteps from one person entering the house. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

- 28. Mum:** Come on both of you, come inside the house, it's getting colder! June, as you did so well at the market, you can keep half of the money!
- 29. June:** **(happy)** Really, Mum? Thank you!! May I go again next Saturday? I promise I will sell even more chickens!
- 30. Mum:** We'll see how you behave until then! I may consider about it – if you help me in the house...
- 31. Grandpa:** Did you hear your mother? **(June: Hmhm!, like saying "Yes")** But always be serious in your business, my child! Take the example of the foreign merchant, Singh! The harbor worker tried to talk him into smuggling! **(serious)** Never give way to the temptation of making easy money, if it involves something illegal.
- 32. June:** **(serious)** No, Grandpa, I won't! **(surprised)** But explain to me, did the Swahili people also trade in slaves?

33. Grandpa: At that time, slaves were exported to old trade partner countries. When the slave trade reached its peak in the eighteenth century, the French, for example, got their slaves for the plantations on the islands of Mauritius and Reunion, from the Swahili coast! But let's go back to the ninth century! Because in Kilwa business is getting interesting...

Flashback music

Fourth Scene: Late afternoon at Abou's house.

SFX: Toast with two glasses. In the background: musicians playing local instruments, birds, then fade under

34. Abou: Welcome to my home, Singh!

35. Singh: Thank you, Abou! I must say you have a magnificent house!

36. Abou: Thank you!

37. Singh: **(delighted)** And the city... What splendor, how delightful to walk around the streets of Kilwa! Foreign merchants negotiating their products with local traders, scholars talking about new theories, Arabs walking together with Indians and holding the arms of African women... This really seems to be the center of the world! Not to mention the opulence of the mosque at the central square and the sultan's palace!

SFX: Wine being poured in both glasses. In the background: musicians playing local instruments, birds, then fade under

38. Abou: From what you're saying, my friend, you won't get bored if you decide to stay here for the next two monsoon months... The winds won't calm down again before January! Or are you still planning to leave any time soon?

39. Singh: I wish I could stay, Abou, I do wish! But business awaits me back home! I have to head back as soon as possible!

- 40. Abou:** If that's so, let me get straight to my point: I have a proposal to make to you. What goods do you have on your ship?
- 41. Singh:** Well, a bit of everything... some porcelain from China, silk from India, spices...
- 42. Abou:** **(interrupting)** Spices, hmmm... very well! **(pause)** My proposal is as follows: You leave the spices with me, some silk for my wife, perhaps some Chinese tableware. In exchange, I will give you a brand-new astrolabe that I bought from an Arab who arrived here after some business with the Greeks. And you promise to return to Kilwa again and give me the monopoly of your spices! What do you think?
- 43. Singh:** With all respect, Abou, I have never heard about that astro... what is it called again?

44. Abou: **(laughing)** It's the most up-to-date technology! It's an instrument used by navigators like yourself to find the direction in which you wish to travel! It will help you come back to the East coast of Africa and to know the most convenient time to return home. **(pause)** I'll give you two days to think about it! For now, let's have our dinner!

SFX: Bell calling the domestic servant. In the background: musicians playing local instruments, birds, then fade out

Flashback music

Fifth Scene: At home in the evening.

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

45. June: **(enthusiastic)** lllllhhhh, Grandpa, what a business!

- 46. Grandpa:** **(proud)** That's how we Africans are! We, too, can do very good business! As you know, there have been caravans all over our continent bringing goods in exchange for other products since the early times.
- 47. June:** Like the ones passing through Kanem-Bornu?
- 48. Grandpa:** Yes, just like them! But for the Indian Ocean route and for establishing relations with cultures from other continents, the Swahili people were very important!
- 49. June:** **(curious)** What kind of new things did they introduce to Africa?
- 50. Grandpa:** **(meditative)** Hmmmm... Let me see... They introduced, for instance, rice through trade with Asia. Oh yes, and through Madagascar, they got bananas and coconuts! The East Coast was very advanced as far as trade was concerned! But then, at the end of the fifteenth century, when they were searching for the sea way to India, the Portuguese arrived at the Swahili coast.

And after seeing the greatness of the city-states, they came back a few years later and some of them looted and stole things. They finally subjugated the local merchants and sultans to the control of the King of Portugal.

51. June: **(disappointed)** What a pity!

52. Grandpa: **(sighing)** It is... But there are still many traders who envy the success of the Swahili people! **(pause)** And do you know what? I haven't told you yet about the tactic that brought them the best trading opportunities! Many rulers of the city-states claimed to be descendents from the Arabs in order to get favored treatment from their trading partners. Indeed, the Arabs had been living within the Swahili society for a long time and started marrying women from the region. So the Islam religion was adopted by the Swahili people quite early on... As you see, that was also good business!

53. June: **(enthusiastic)** Haha, I'm also going to mingle with Muslims then! Maybe I will have even more success at the market in the future!

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

Outro:

And so we reach the end of the third 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!