

Kenya Past and Present



Issue 38

Kenya Past and Present

Editor

Peta Meyer

Editorial Board

Esmond Bradley Martin

Lucy Vigne

Bryan Harris

Kenya Past and Present is a publication of the Kenya Museum Society, a not-for-profit organisation founded in 1971 to support and raise funds for the National Museums of Kenya. All correspondence should be addressed to: Kenya Museum Society, PO Box 40658, Nairobi 00100, Kenya. Email: info@KenyaMuseumSociety.org. Website: www.KenyaMuseumSociety.org

Statements of fact and opinion appearing in Kenya Past and Present are made on the responsibility of the author alone and do not imply the endorsement of the editor or publishers. Reproduction of the contents is permitted with acknowledgement given to its source. The contribution of articles and photographs is encouraged, however we regret unsolicited material cannot be returned.

No category exists for subscription to Kenya Past and Present; it is a benefit of membership in the Kenya Museum Society. Available back issues are for sale at the Society's offices in the Nairobi National Museum.

Any organisation wishing to exchange journals should write to the Head Librarian, National Museums of Kenya, PO Box 40658, Nairobi 00100, Kenya.

Kenya Past and Present

Issue 38, 2009

Contents

KMS report 2008-2009	3
<i>Patricia Jentz</i>	
An ISO 9001:2008 certified National Museums of Kenya	6
<i>Sharon Kyungu</i>	
The Ileret footprints: Earliest evidence of a modern gait	8
<i>Purity Kiura</i>	
Gunda-Buche: The historical earth bank enclosures of western Kenya.....	10
<i>Fredrick Z A Odede, Gordon O Magaga and Pius O Cokumu</i>	
The practice of tooth extraction	25
<i>Angela W Kabiru</i>	
Twelve mosques: The history of Islam in Kenya	33
<i>Cynthia Salvadori</i>	
Lamu: Is sustainable cultural tourism possible?	43
<i>Angela W Kabiru</i>	
Museums, tourism and the visitor experience: The Kenyan situation.....	50
<i>Ochieng' Nyamanga</i>	
An interview with John Sibi-Okumu "Holding a mirror up to society"	61
<i>Lucy Vigne and Esmond Martin</i>	



FRONT COVER

The Old Mosque in Wajir. Photo by Armando Ferrante. See *Twelve Mosques: The history of Islam in Kenya* by Cynthia Salvadori on page 33.



KMS COUNCIL 2009**Officers**

Chairperson	Patricia Jentz
Vice Chairperson	Susan Linnee
Honorary Secretary	Marla Stone
Honorary Treasurer	Peter Brice

Council Members

Grants Committee Chair	Saryoo Shah
Membership Committee Chair	Jedida Oneko
PR and Marketing Committee Chair	Kathy Vaughan
Weekend Outings Committee Chair	Narinder Heyer
Day Outings Committee Chair	Alex Oloo
Shop Committee Chair	Adelina Egle Onofre
Member at Large	Elizabeth Njoroge
Member at Large	Friedel Liebe-Savage
NMK Representative	Connie Maina
Society Coordinator	Catherine Nyakio Mukuha

Trustees

Pat Robinson
Philip Horobin

KMS MEMBERSHIP RATES

Family Resident of Kenya	KSh 1500
Single Resident of Kenya	KSh 1000
Pensioner/Student Resident of Kenya*	KSh 300
Institutional (Kenya)	KSh 1500
Overseas Membership	US\$ 50
Resident of other African countries	US\$ 50
Visitors (one month only)	KSh 500

* No publications except newsletter.

Upcountry cheques - please add KSh 200 for bank clearing charges.

Annual Membership expires one year from date of payment.

To join KMS, send name (and those of children under 18 years of age to be included in a family membership), postal address and telephone number with a cheque for the appropriate membership category to: Kenya Museum Society, PO Box 40658, Nairobi 00100, Kenya.

For further information, please telephone the Society's office: 374 3808 or 375 0136. Switchboard 374 2131/-4 ext. 2311. Mobile 0724-255299.

E-mail: info@KenyaMuseumSociety.org

Website: www.KenyaMuseumSociety.org

KENYA MUSEUM SOCIETY

The Kenya Museum Society (KMS) is a nonprofit members' organisation formed in 1971 to support and promote the work of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). You are invited to join the Society and receive a subscription to *Kenya Past and Present*. Privileges to members include free entrance to all museums, regional museums, prehistoric sites and monuments under the jurisdiction of the National Museums.

The Society runs the Museum Shop at Nairobi Museum and regularly organises events such as the Know Kenya Course, member safaris, lectures and other activities to raise funds for the KMS Grants Programme. The programme awards funds to individuals and departments within NMK, based on four priority areas — exhibits development, research, infrastructure and staff training. KMS has awarded over 22 million shillings in grants in the last 10 years.

NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA

Fort Jesus Museum	Box 82412, Mombasa 80100
Institute of Primate Research	Box 24481, Nairobi 00502
Kabarnet Museum	Box 419, Kabarnet 30400
Kapenguria Museum	Box 283, Kapenguria 30600
Karen Blixen Museum	Box 40658, Nairobi 00100
Kisumu Museum	Box 1779, Kisumu 40100
Kitale Museum	Box 1219, Kitale 30200
Lamu Museum & Lamu Fort	Box 48, Lamu 80500
Malindi Museum	Box 5067, Malindi 80200
Meru Museum	Box 597, Meru 60200
Narok Museum	Box 868, Narok 20500
Nairobi Museum	Box 40658, Nairobi 00100

Sites and monuments:

Kariandusi	Box 91, Gilgil 20116
Thimlich Ohinga	Private Bag, Makalder
Rusinga Island	Box 41, Mbita 40305
Gede	Box 5067, Malindi 80200
Hyrax Hill	Box 9535, Nakuru 20100
Fort Tenan	Box 159, Koru 40104
Kenyatta House	Box 41, Maralal 20600
Songhor	Box 143, Songhor 40110
Ologesailie	Magadi 00205
Koobi Fora	Box 152, Lodwar 30500



Through KMS trips, members discover parts of Kenya not shown in the tourist brochures. Here members catch their breath after climbing Mudanda Rock, a stratified inselberg 1.6km long located in Tsavo East National Park. Some 250 million years old, it is among Kenya's oldest rocks.

KMS report 2008–2009

This is an edited version of the report given by Kenya Museum Society chairperson Patricia Jentz at the Society's annual general meeting in 2009.

2008/2009 was an exciting and very challenging year for the Kenya Museum Society. It began with the opening of the new National Museum last July. When the dust finally settled after all the construction at the Museum, we were allocated our new permanent offices, very conveniently located across the parking lot from the main administrative block. This excellent space allows us to conduct all KMS business effectively and efficiently, providing reception space alongside staff offices and a meeting room. We are now able to concentrate our efforts on KMS business.

This past year has been very successful in our traditional endeavours.

The newly renovated Nairobi Museum Shop has performed well financially. The Bookshop Committee has overseen a transition from a bookshop to a museum shop and attempted to put it on a more businesslike basis to maximise revenues. This will continue through the next year.

Patricia Jentz
KMS Chairperson



Animal watching on top of Observation Hill, Amboseli National Park.



The 2008 Know Kenya Course was extremely successful, thanks to popular and talented speakers who shared their time and knowledge for the benefit of the National Museums.

Above
Actor and TV personality John Sibi-Okumu inspired the audience with his views on nationhood and identity.

Below
Train enthusiast Bryan Harris led the KKC fieldtrip to Nairobi's fascinating and little-known Railway Museum.



On the down side, the Museum decided not to renew African Heritage's lease at the Karen Blixen Museum. As a result, we lost that outlet for our books and all the revenue it generated. This puts into question our position at the Nairobi Museum Shop and we have redoubled our efforts to formalise the relationship. (*This has since been accomplished — Ed.*)

We had an extremely successful Know Kenya Course in November 2008, not only raising a record amount of money but attracting a truly cosmopolitan attendance harking back to the good old days of 'standing room only'.

Narinder Heyer has organised truly outstanding trips this past year. Her itineraries always seem to include something out of the ordinary with appeal to all facets of our membership.

Our new offices seemed to infuse the Society with fresh ideas. The Society undertook a re-organisation of the office to better serve our current and future needs. As the first step, a Society Coordinator was introduced. This process will continue through 2009.

Joanna McWilliam, our past Chairperson, was instrumental in introducing third party funding to the Society. Historically KMS has raised funds by putting on various functions such as the Know Kenya Course, lectures and trips. Third party funding means that we do not actually raise the money, but rather go to donors for the funds. This change in thinking was necessary due to the scale of projects we were considering. The Louis Leakey Auditorium required KSh 15 million to renovate. By approaching generous donors like the Safaricom Foundation, we were able to immediately generate the funds needed to complete the project. The scale of this funding would have been impossible by raising KSh 5,000 here and KSh 500,000 there and would have negated all attempts at budgeting due to the long timeframe.

The Council has also approved the seeking of funds for the renovation

of the Museum’s world-class Casting Department.

The Kenya Museum Society is led by a group of people called the Council made up of 13 volunteers, who donate their time and expertise. I would like to thank them for all their help and support over this past year.

With the support of the Safaricom Foundation, the Louis Leakey Auditorium was given a much-needed facelift, and reopened with fanfare in September 2009.



Top

NMK’s Connie Maina, Director of Development and Corporate Affairs, and Director General Dr Idle Farah, give guest-of-honour Prime Minister Raila Odinga a guided tour of the new-look auditorium.

Right

Hon. Raila Odinga tries his hand at the new state-of-the-art equipment installed in the Auditorium’s control room, as (L-R) Patricia Jentz, KMS Chairperson, Michael Joseph, CEO of Safaricom, and Les Baillie, Chairman of Safaricom Foundation, look on.



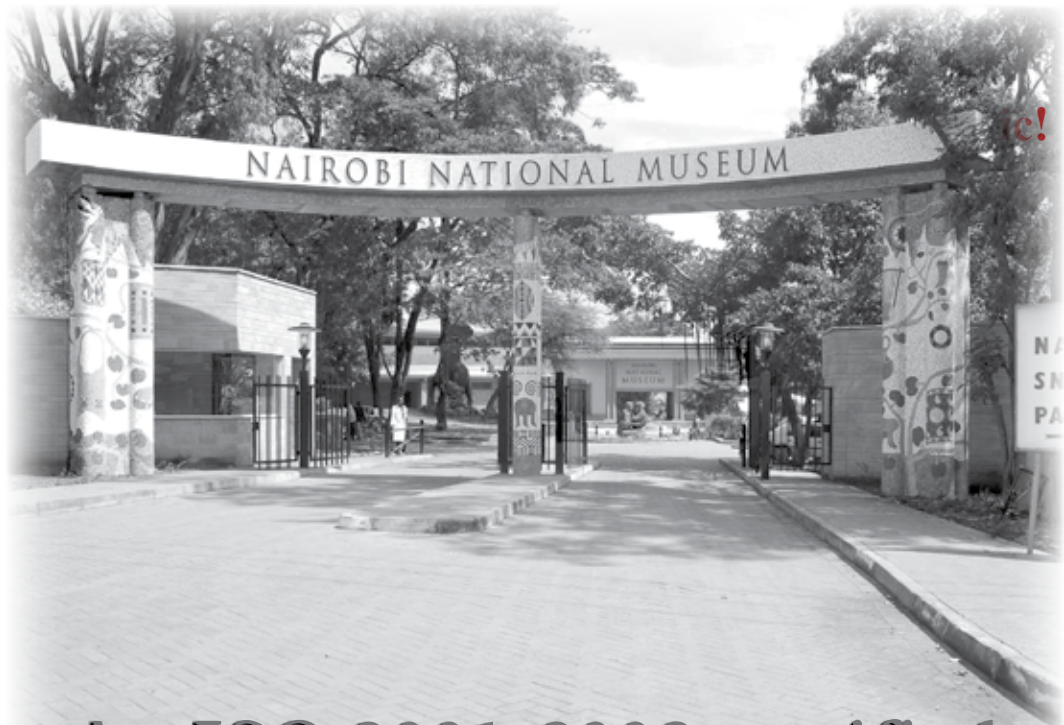
Photos by Bernice Macharia, Audio-Visual Department, NMK.

Betty Chappell, who loved people and loved Kenya



Members will be sad to hear that KMS trustee Betty Chappell passed away in November 2009 aged 89. Betty came to Kenya on a Commonwealth Exchange in 1968, as a teacher at City Council schools. Her many students, some now prominent in politics and business, still remember her fondly.

Betty loved people. She was an enthusiastic supporter of KMS and the Museums, being a KMS founding member, a life member and our longest-serving museum guide. She also sat on the council of the Kenya Girl Guides Association. Despite her arthritis, Betty was active to the end and is shown here at the NMK auditorium re-opening in September, greeting some of her many old friends. She will be missed by all who knew her.



An ISO 9001:2008 certified National Museums of Kenya

Sharon Kyungu,
National Museums
of Kenya

After a long and rigorous journey of aligning operations with the requirements for certification, the National Museums of Kenya was awarded the ISO 9001:2008 certificate at a colourful event held on 4 September 2009 at the Nairobi National Museum.

Bureau Veritas representative Mr Andrew Kinyanjui presented the certificate to the Director General of the National Museums of Kenya, Dr Idle Omar Farah, who in his acceptance speech noted that “Having gone through the registration

process for ISO 9001:2008, the National Museums of Kenya will reap a number of benefits. These include increased efficiency and revenue generation. Staff morale is likely to increase following clearly defined roles and responsibilities, accountability of the top management, established training systems and a clear picture of how their roles affect quality and overall success of the National Museums of Kenya”.

The decision to acquire ISO 9001:2008 certification is a strategic move that is part of the “Museum in Change” and public sector reform initiatives. The certification applies to all activities involved in the collection, documentation, research, conservation and dissemination of information on Kenya’s heritage.

“The registration of the National Museums of Kenya to ISO 9001:2008 by Bureau Veritas shows that we are committed to quality for our customers and a willingness to work towards improving efficiency. It demonstrates the existence of

“...the certification is not an end in itself but a means to guide the NMK in its endeavour to realise its vision of becoming a world-class heritage institution ”

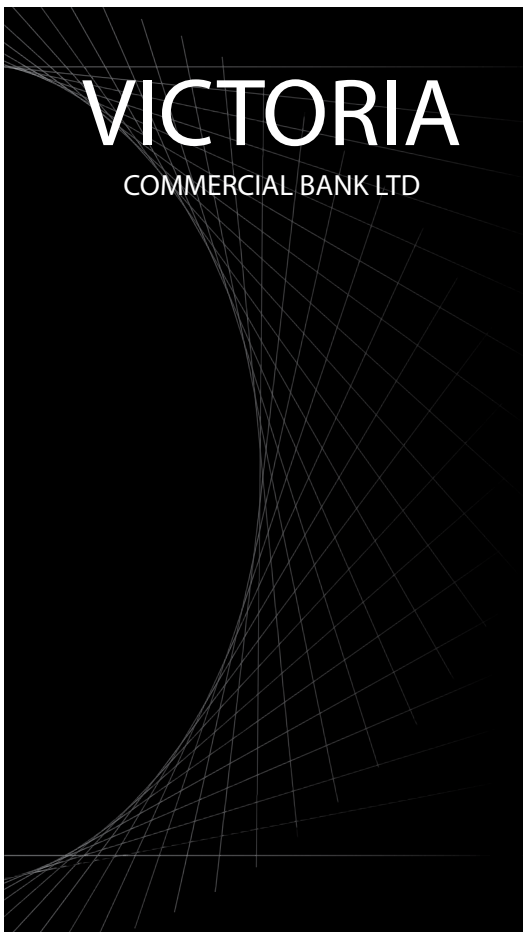
Dr Jacob ole Miaron, Permanent Secretary, Ministry for National Heritage and Culture.

an effective quality management system at the NMK that satisfies the rigours of an independent, external audit. Notably, the ISO 9001:2008 certificate will enhance our image in the eyes of customers, employees and shareholders alike. This ISO 9001:2008 certification will give the National Museums of Kenya a competitive edge in the marketing of heritage services and products as well” said Mr Issa Timamy, Chairman of the NMK Board of Directors.

The guest of honour during the launch of the ISO 9001:2008 certification was Dr Jacob ole Miaron, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry for National Heritage and Culture. In his message, he reminded all that “Whereas the acquisition of ISO 9001:2008 is a milestone, the challenge is ensuring that the NMK works continually to be an efficient, customer-focused, productive and results-oriented heritage institution that contributes to a globally competitive

and prosperous Kenya. Therefore, the certification is not an end in itself but a means to guide the NMK in its endeavour to realise its vision of becoming a world-class heritage institution”.

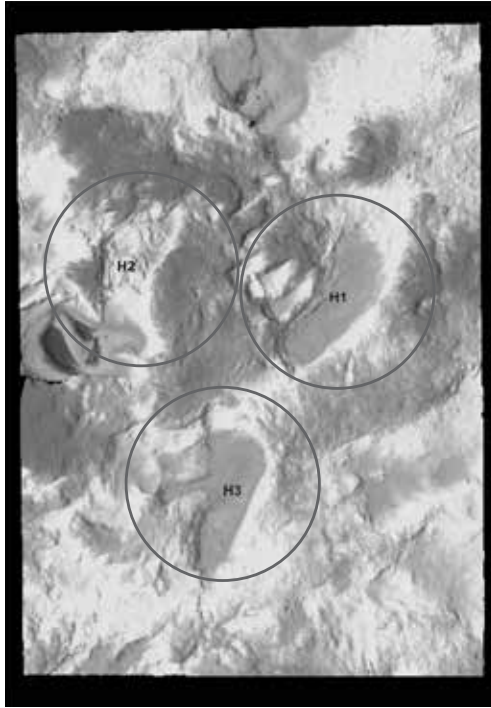
The process of acquiring ISO 9001:2008 was facilitated by a technical committee that represented NMK’s major areas of operations. The team was headed by Dr Abel Atiti and had as members Sharon Kyungu and Muthoni Thang’wa, representing the Directorate of Development and Corporate Affairs; Steven Cheche and Anthony Njogu for Human Resources and Administration; Kiprop Lagat and Elizabeth Ouma for Museums, Sites and Monuments; Drs Charles Lange and Kyalo Manthi for Research and Scientific Affairs; Dr Hastings Ozwara and Patrick Opisa for the Institute of Primate Research; and Jonathan Mwangovya for Finance.



*Offering Quality
Financial Services at
Unmatchable Levels*

Victoria Tower, Mezzanine Floor, Kilimanjaro Avenue, Upper Hill.
PO Box 41114 - 00100, Nairobi, Kenya Tel No: 2719499 / 2719815 / 2710271
Fax No: 2713778 / 2715857 E-mail: victoria@vicbank.com

The Ileret footprints: Earliest evidence of a modern gait



Mosaic of scans viewed vertically showing potential hominid prints H1 to H3 (circled for clarity).

Dr Purity Kiura
Head, Archaeology Section
National Museums of Kenya

Tanzania, by Mary Leakey in 1976. The Ileret big toe is aligned more closely with the rest of the foot, unlike the Laetoli foot with its completely splayed-out big toe. In addition, the width and length of the Ileret prints are larger.

The Ileret footprints were first discovered in mid-2004 in two distinct sedimentary layers in a single outcrop of fine-grained mud. More evidence shows that these individuals had evolved a modern human foot function and style of bipedal locomotion matching today's people. This means that early man did indeed walk upright and based on the size and stride pattern of these footprints, the individual responsible would have been about six feet in height.

The discovery of these prints is important in the study of human evolution as such evidence is rare, as is the scarcity of human fossils that tell us more about the development of the human way of walking through time. In addition, because these prints were found in association with prints of other terrestrial and aquatic animals, we can begin to analyse the kind of animal community and thus the environment at the time. Moreover, studies on human gait can enhance our understanding of landscape utilisation by hominids. Wide ranging and transport of tools over the landscape have been related to an enhanced mode of walking and the fact that these prints point to a relatively modern human gait is evidence that humans during this time period could range over wider areas on the landscape and

Paleoanthropologists at NMK in collaboration with their international colleagues announced a stunning discovery on the shores of Lake Turkana.

Footprints dated at about 1.5 million years have been discovered at Ileret, a village on the northeastern end of the lake. These footprints provide the oldest evidence of an essentially modern human-like foot anatomy. The footprints are consistent with the size, physique and body mass of *Homo ergaster/erectus*.

The fossil footprints that were discovered have a big toe that is in line with other toes, a robust heel and anklebones, a pronounced longitudinal arch and short toes that are characteristic of a modern human foot.

These new footprints differ morphologically from the 3.75 million-year-old prints discovered in Laetoli,



but also allows for their preservation since the sediments with the footprints are relatively soft and steadily eroding, thereby placing this valuable site at great risk. NMK in collaboration with Rutgers University are currently involved with finding the best conservation measures for these prints which will be a source of information not only to the local

The dry and dusty landscape at Ileret, on the shores of Lake Turkana, where the hominid footprints were discovered.

thus utilise a variety of resources. And this year, 2009 as we celebrate the silver jubilee of “Turkana Boy” (a species of *Homo ergaster/erectus* found at Nariokotome, west of Lake Turkana, in 1984), there is no doubt that the discovery of these prints will continue to enhance our scientific knowledge about the gait of this hominid species.

The discovery was made by our Kenyan paleoanthropology team which included Dr Emma Mbuu, Dr Purity Kiura and Dr Mzalendo Kibunja from NMK, and Dr Daniel Olago of the University of Nairobi. The international team was led by Prof. Jack Harris of Rutgers University, Prof. Mathew Benner of Bournemouth University, Prof. Brian Richmond of George Washington University and Dr David Braun of Cape Town University. The team has been involved with paleoanthropological research in this area over the years through the Koobi Fora Research and Training Programme which also runs the Koobi Fora Field School (KFFS), a collaboration between NMK and Rutgers University. The students on the KFFS (2004-2007) were also involved in the meticulous excavation of these prints under the guidance of the professionals.

The surfaces on which the prints were found were dated precisely via interbedded volcanic ash layers and the process of laser scanning. This not only provides a unique method of analysis of the footprints,

community but to the world at large.

Concorde
CAR HIRE & SAFARIS
www.concorde.co.ke

You can count on us for all your travelling needs with a personal touch

SOAR TO NEW HEIGHTS

At Concorde we don't stop at travel services, we work together to give flight to your African dream

We offer affordable:

- Car hire: saloon & 4WD on self-drive and chauffeur driven basis
- Complete customised safaris, both road and air packages, individual, family, groups, incentive travel in Kenya and the region
- Air travel: Domestic, Regional & International - inbound and outbound
- Conference/convention arrangements
- Guided photographic safaris with Maasai based professional wildlife photographer

P.O. Box 237, 00605, Saint Constant, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: (+254 20) 4448953, 3743304, 3743316, Fax: (+243 20) 4448135, 3748628, E-mail: safaris@concorde.co.ke

Gunda-Buche:



The curved wall of the enclosure known as Kipasi A. Modern houses can be seen just beyond the wall.

The historical earth bank enclosures of western Kenya

Fredrick Z A Odede, Gordon O Magaga and Pius O Cokumu,
Department of History and
Archaeology, Maseno University

An investigation into the distribution, design and origins of ‘Gunda-Buche’ — the Luo term for the bank-and-ditch enclosures unique to the northern Nyanza region of western Kenya. No archaeological work had been undertaken on these structures prior to this study. Pressure for land means these unique sites are now fast disappearing.

This article presents the spatial distribution, architectural features and historical and archaeological reconstructions of Gunda-Buche and their place in the migrations and settlement history of western Kenya.

Oral traditions of the Abakuria, Abagusii and Abaluyia provide conflicting information regarding the occupation of the region by different ancestors of the present societies in the region (Osogo, 1966; Ogot, 1967; Were, 1967; Ochieng, 1971, 1974, 1975, 1994; Abuso, 1980). These oral traditions are in conflict with the Luo traditions which claim occupation of the area during more or less the same period. Conflicting information from these oral traditions can only be validated through archaeological evidence such as investigation of the possible builders of the earthworks in the region. No archaeological work had

been undertaken on these structures in the area prior to this study. A survey and location of the structures was found necessary and therefore undertaken. The aims of this investigation were accomplished through survey and mapping of the enclosures as well as surface collections and analysis of ceramic materials. Other remains included grind stones, house floors and faunal material (Odede, 2000).

The earthworks are found in Bondo District along the shores of Lake Victoria. The lake was created by intense tectonic movements during the formation of the Rift Valley (Gregory, 1965). The Nyanzian system, which dates back to the early pre-Cambrian (Ojany and Ogendo, 1973), are the oldest exposed rocks in the region (Siaya: DDP 1994-1996). The study area has a relatively shallow soil except at Kipasi area, which has waterlogged soil. The typical soil material is *murram cuirass*. The soils developed from acidic igneous rocks in the area (Jaetzold, 1982). A complex of well drained, deep, dark reddish brown to black, firm silt-clay soil occur in minor valleys such as Aredo, Waringa, Kiseke, Nyakesi, Rawa and Miri valleys within the region.

The region has a modified equatorial climate with strong influence from local relief and the expansive Lake Victoria (Ojany and Ogendo, 1973). The southern parts of the area near Lake Victoria are dry. The region has an annual rainfall of 900-1200 mm. The study area is dry grassland with scattered acacia trees. Shrubs cover a major portion of the region. Domesticated animals include goats, donkeys, cattle and sheep. Fishing takes place at the beaches of Lake Victoria and along the streams. People also subsidise their economy by growing crops such as sorghum, millet, maize and cassava.

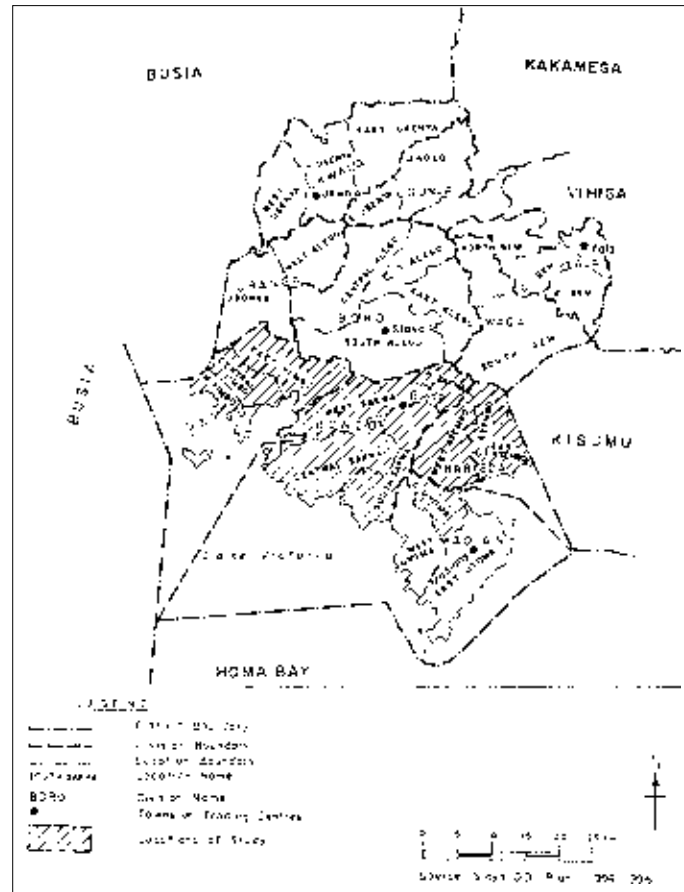
Conflicting oral traditions

Prior to the arrival of the Luo in the region, Bantu and Highland Nilotic groups extended over the area between Lake Victoria and the Nandi escarpment but retreated inland

with the Luo invasion. Wagner (1970) and Evans-Pritchard (1949) used oral traditions of the Holo, Hayo and Marach clans of the Luhya tribe to ascertain the occupation of the region by the Luhya group. Gusii and Luhya traditions indicate Bantu migration from the area between Mt Elgon and Lake Victoria into their present day western Kenya territories. The first southern Bantu groups or clans who moved into western Kenya from Bunyoro and Congo through Buganda include the Ababubi, Abasiyemba, Abakuwana and Abamalenge who settled on Sigulu Island, the Ababulu who occupied Mageta Island, both in Lake Victoria (Kenya territory); and the Abalusere, Abalwani, Abakholo, Abatsipi, Abenge, Abalungo, Ababasi, Ababambw, Abakhweri and Abakaala who settled in Yimbo at Ugoye in Bondo District.

These early Bantu immigrants preceded the Luo in Nyanza and did not have much contact with them until the 19th century (Ogot, 1967). Other pre-Luo Bantu groups

The study area in Bondo District, on the shores of Lake Victoria.



who were later assimilated by Luo invaders are today represented by the Kagwa in Uyoma peninsula (Madiany Division) in Bondo District, the Kanyibule in Rusinga Island and Waturi in South Nyanza. Kagwa, Kanyibule and Waturi oral traditions indicate they were the first inhabitants of Usenge Hill in Kadimo location, Bondo District, where the first Luo immigrants settled from Uganda and assimilated them.

The Luo also found the Highland Nilotes occupying Yimbo Kadimo location as indicated by the oral traditions of the Terik (Nyang'ori) of western Kenya who are related to the Nandi. Luo oral traditions also indicate the presence of Maasai groups during their arrival in the region. The Kamagambo and Kakraw clans in South Nyanza were originally Maasai people who accompanied the Luo from northern Nyanza and were later assimilated or incorporated by the Luo. Therefore, the pre-Luo settlers of northern Nyanza during the historic period comprised both Bantu and Nilo-Hamitic groups (Ogot, 1967).

These conflicting oral traditions make it impossible to determine the builders of the earthworks based on oral history alone, hence the need for archaeological research.

Previous research on settlement enclosures in the region

Previous studies of earthworks did not receive much attention and focus was directed instead towards the stone-built enclosures* of southern Nyanza (Gillman, 1944; Gillman, 1944; Chittick, 1945; Anthony 1972; Wandibba, 1986; Onjala, 1990, 1994). A detailed study was undertaken by Lofgren (1967) who surveyed the stone structures of South Nyanza. She listed 50 sites and described three of them in some detail. The three sites include Ogondon, Liare Valley and Marachi hill. These were place names, and her work was the

first attempt to name the structures. She identified two groups of the structures and attributed them to Luo-Abasuba and Nilotic Luo speakers respectively, on the basis of the size of the materials used and structure of the sites. She also asserted that there were similarities between South Nyanza structures and Great Zimbabwe and other Central African ruins. The first and only report of Gunda-Buche was carried in Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo's (1989) anthropological study of the cultural landscape of Siaya District. The dating of some of the South Nyanza stone ruins has been based on oral traditions (Ayot, 1979). Charcoal samples recovered from Thimlich excavations by Wandibba (1986) produced radio carbon determinations of 110 ± 80 and 200 ± 80 , using the Carbon 14 dating method. When calibrated the two give a long range of about 1650 to 1900 AD.

The Luo intrusion into western Kenya from Uganda displaced earlier groups such as Early Iron Age Bantus, thus hastening human encroachment into the forested highlands (Leakey *et al.*, 1948; Ogot, 1967; Soper, 1969).

Methodology: general survey and ceramic analysis

The survey aimed at mapping the locations of earthworks in Bondo, Rarieda, Usigu and Madiany Divisions. Mapping is the key to accurate recording of most surviving features and artefacts through foot survey (Frankhole and Heizer 1973; Hester 1976; Renfrew 1991). Foot survey was used during structure identification. The above together with 1:50,000 topographical map series of Yimbo (sheet no.115/1) and Asembo (sheet no.115/2) led to the identification and mapping of the enclosures. The positions of some of the enclosures were recorded using the GPS Magellan handset.

By the end of the general survey, a total of 17 sites and 34 structures had been

* See Kenya Past and Present issue 36, *Secrets in stone: Who built the stone settlements of Nyanza Province?*

identified. Oral history was collected to provide information on these settlements. The names of the enclosures or sites are mainly place names where the enclosures are found, e.g. the name of a hill or area such as Kipasi area. According to oral tradition, some of the structures are named after the most elderly person who was in some way related to the former leader of the clan or lineage line. For example, Ramogo site is named after the clan elder of the inhabitants of the structure, whose name was Ramogo. In case a place had a number of structures without names, the name of the place was used for all the structures. Kipasi and Oiko sites fall under this category. To distinguish each structure in such cases, alphabetical letters from A-Z were assigned to the individual structures.

Ceramic analysis relied on ceramic attributes which are sensitive to change. The attributes considered were morphological characteristics, and decorations. Spaulding (1982) considered classification into types as a process of discovering non-random combinations.

Research findings

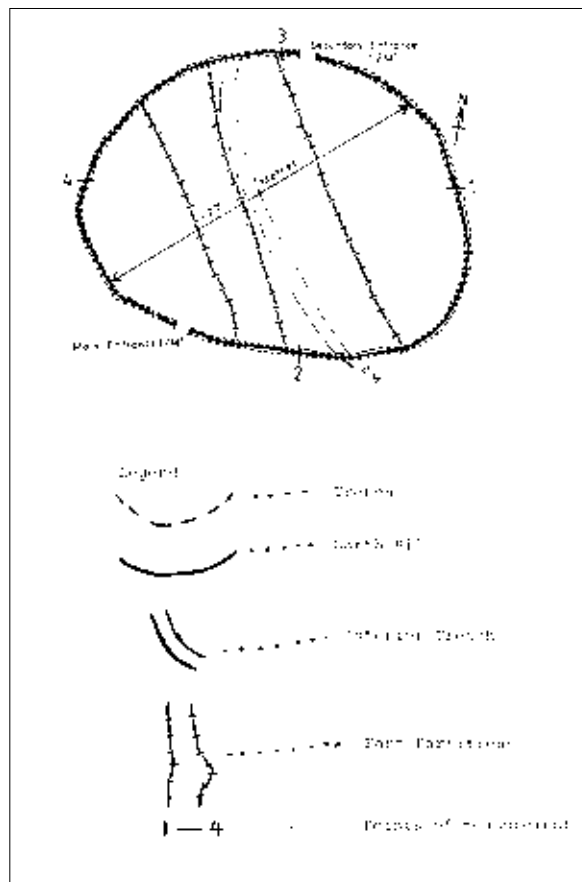
Spatial distribution and architectural features of the enclosures

A total of 34 bank-and-ditch enclosures have been recorded in the region. The earthworks are unique to northern Nyanza. The enclosures are situated in Sakwa, Asembo, Yimbo and Uyoma regions of Bondo District. The earthworks are more or less circular in plan. Several different types are known. Most of the enclosures have entrances and are characterised by external ditch and internal bank. Some of the enclosures exhibit a single entrance. A few enclosures feature internal and external ditches with a bank in between. One earthwork at Kipasi site has only one ditch as its wall. Two of the larger enclosures, Oiko

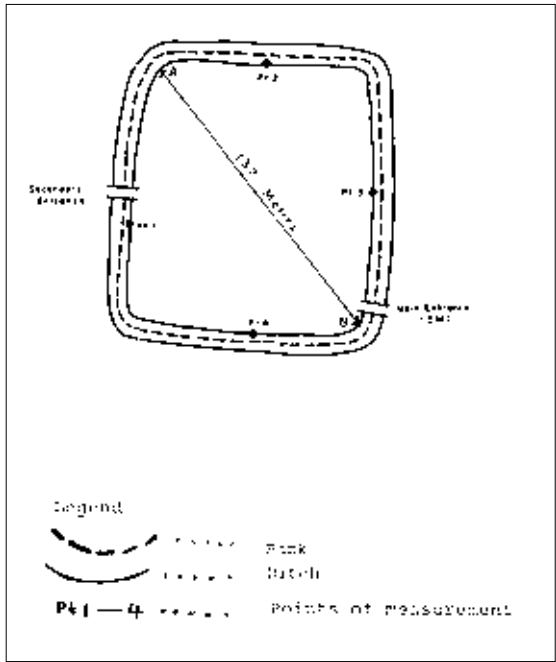


Bank and ditch (wall) at Oiko C.

B and Ajigo 1, have internal partitions. The width of the enclosures generally ranges from 80m to 120m. The largest enclosure (Ajigo 1) is approximately 280m wide. The earth-banks of the enclosures rise to 2.5m while the ditches are as deep as 2m. The enclosures are characterised by entrances whose shape is not clearly defined due to severe site destruction through human



Sketch map of Oiko B.



enclosure has relatively smaller entrances than the other enclosures within the site. The individual structures form a complex multiple site or a cluster of enclosures in the area. The main features at Kipasi (GqJb 7) site include a cluster of three enclosures which constitute the site. The enclosures vary in size but are similar in their structural planning. The structures were also labelled as Kipasi A, B and C for identification. The three enclosures at Kipasi site are more or less circular. Kipasi A enclosure has a circular ditch on the outer surface of the earth-bank while Kipasi B structure has two ditches on either side of the roughly circular earth-bank. Kipasi C enclosure has only one circular ditch but lacks an earth-bank. The individual enclosures are simple structures within a complex multiple enclosure site.

activities. Most of the sites have more than one enclosure, indicating some form of cluster settlement pattern in the region.

At Oiko site there are three structures with each of them exhibiting two entrances. The gates have undergone site disturbance. The earth hill and the ditch constitute the wall of the enclosures at Oiko site. All the enclosures display roughly circular ditch and earth hill as the wall.

Oiko A and C are 104m and 133m wide respectively, while Oiko B has a diameter of 177m. The height of the circular earth hill varies from structure to structure. The wall of Oiko A is 1.7m high. The walls of Oiko C and B enclosures are 1.5m and 2m high respectively. The average width of the wall of the structures also varies from structure to structure within the site.

The width dimensions of the walls at Oiko A and B are 7m and 11m respectively, while that of Oiko C is 14.6m. Gate space measurements did not include the height of the gates. The walls of the entrances have been destroyed. The main and secondary entrances of Oiko A are 7m and 4m wide respectively. The main entrance of Oiko B is 7m wide. The secondary entrance of the enclosure is 7.2m wide. Oiko C

Kipasi A has two entrances. Kipasi B enclosure exhibits two gates. Even though the gates are identifiable, their shape is not clear due to site destruction. Both the earth-bank and ditch form the wall of the structures at Kipasi site. The southern part of Kipasi C enclosure has no ditch because it was washed away. The inner sections of Kipasi C and B are currently under cultivation. The diameter of Kipasi A is 123m. Kipasi B and C are 137m and 89m wide respectively.

The height of the earth-bank from the bottom of the ditch to the topmost part of the enclosure varies from enclosure to enclosure. The average height of the earth-bank at Kipasi A is 1.1m while Kipasi B is 1.4m. The depth of the ditch in relation to the outside land surface also varies from structure to structure. The average height of Kipasi C ditch is 0.7m. The width of the circular ditch in all the enclosures varies slightly. Kipasi A ditch is 4m wide. The width of the ditches in Kipasi B and C are 4.8m and 4.9m respectively. The width of both the earth-bank and the ditch also varies from structure to structure within the site. The wall of Kipasi A is 9m wide, while Kipasi B has the widest wall of all the

enclosures at 14m. The ditch of Kipasi C enclosure has an average width of 4.9m. The gates of the structures were also measured, however vertical dimension of the entrances was not possible to measure.

The main entrance of Kipasi A enclosure is 7m wide while the gates of Kipasi B and C enclosures are 5m and 15m wide respectively.

Masala (GqJb 8) site features two enclosures. The enclosures vary in size but are similar in structural planning, and are known locally as Gunda Olang'o and Gunda Ramogo.

Other earthwork sites in the region

Recent archaeological survey recorded more earthwork sites in the region. The expeditions took place between 1999 and 2004 and were funded by the British Institute in Eastern Africa. The sites are described in the following gazetteer.

Iro earthworks The enclosures are located at 0618.27 S, 99981.70 E in central Yimbo, Usigu Division, Bondo District. The site has two circular enclosures, each exhibiting an external ditch and internal bank. Associated archaeological material remains include numerous potsherds on the surface. They are currently suffering serious destruction through cultivation.

Lwak earthwork The site lies at 0008.12 S, 03414.38 E in East Asembo Location, Rarieda Division, Bondo District. The roughly circular enclosure has an external ditch and internal bank which constitute its wall (see photo on this page). The wall of the enclosure has been preserved by Lwak Catholic Church stationed inside the enclosure. The Catholic mission appreciates the value of this magnificent cultural heritage. Test excavations at the site in 2004 produced knotted strip roulette decorated pottery from the three test pits.

Sigono earthworks Sogono site is situated at 0009.65 S, 03421.19 E in South Asembo Location, Rarieda Division. The

site comprises three enclosures which are roughly circular in their structural plan. Each of the enclosures exhibits external ditch and internal bank. Potsherds litter the surface of their interior sections. The earthworks are currently being destroyed through farming activities.

Asembo Bay earthworks The site is located at 0010.84 S, 3423.19 E in East Asembo Location, Rarieda Division, Bondo District. It comprises two enclosures known locally as *Gunda Kochweda* and *Gunda Raliew*. The enclosures display an external ditch and internal bank as features of the wall. They are roughly circular in their layout. Farming activities in the enclosures threaten their preservation. Numerous potsherds occur on the surface within the enclosures.

Ong'ielo earthwork It is situated at 0010.82 S, 03422.18 E in East Asembo Location, Rarieda Division. The site has one circular enclosure which is currently occupied by a dispensary. Numerous potsherds litter the surface of the site. It comprises an external ditch and internal bank which serve as the wall.

Kibuye earthworks The site lies at 0008.13 S, 03416.61 E in central Sakwa Location, Bondo Division. There are two circular enclosures. One enclosure has two ditches and a bank as its wall. The wall of the other enclosure has external ditch and internal bank. Certain sections of the

Cultivation on the wall of Lwak enclosure.





Cultivation on the wall of the interior partition at Ajigo 1.

enclosures are under cultivation. Numerous potsherds and a few grindstones are present in the enclosures.

Sigomere earthworks The site is situated at 0005.14 S, 03415.26 E in west Sakwa, Bondo Division. The enclosures exhibit external ditch and internal bank as features of the walls. Surface scatters of potsherds occur in the enclosures. Farming activities are currently destroying the enclosures.

Bondo earthwork The enclosure has partly been destroyed through the construction of Bondo District Hospital. It is located in Bondo town at 0005.94 S, 03416.19 E. The wall of the enclosure has an external ditch and internal bank. A few potsherds are present on the surface of the site.

Mahaya earthworks The site lies at 0009.00 S, 03420.39 E in west Asembo Location, Rarieda Division. The wall of each of the enclosures has a bank between two ditches. Associated archaeological remains in these enclosures are dominated by potsherds and a few animal bone fragments. Farming activities are currently destroying the enclosures.

Sangla earthwork This is a single component site. It is located at 0007.92 S, 03417.62 E in west Asembo Location, Rarieda Division. The wall of the enclosure is characterised by an external ditch and internal bank. Surface archaeological

materials were not observed. The farmers had cleared the material remains during farming seasons.

Siger earthworks It is located at 0006.82 S, 03418.72 E in west Asembo Location, Rarieda Division. The site comprises two large circular enclosures. Each of the enclosures exhibits an internal bank and external ditch as features of the wall. Associated archaeological material remains include potsherds and two grindstones. The enclosures are currently being destroyed through cultivation.

Ajigo earthworks The site lies at 0005.95 S, 03419.79 E in north Sakwa, Bondo Division. The site has five enclosures. Four of the enclosures display an internal bank and external ditch while one of them exhibits a bank between two ditches.

Ajigo 1 is extensively wide, approximately 280m in width. It has an interior partition comprising of an earth bank. Numerous potsherds are scattered in the enclosures. They are currently undergoing serious site destruction due to farming activities.

Mitiro earthwork The site has one circular enclosure which lies at 0005.96 S, 03418.76 E in central Sakwa Location, Bondo Division. Its wall features an external ditch and internal bank. The enclosure is occupied by a primary school.

Nyamira earthworks The site is situated at 0005.96 S, 03416.18 E in west Sakwa Location, Bondo Division. It has two roughly circular enclosures, characterised by external ditch and internal bank. Archaeological material remains include surface scatters of potsherds in the enclosure. Cultivation within the enclosures is a serious threat to their preservation.

Discussion

This study has considered sites as places where artefacts, features, structures, organic and environmental remains are found together (Renfrew and Bahn, 1991). In this approach, a site is studied in relation

to geomorphological forms (Zvelebel and Macklin, 1992). The paper has also incorporated the study of Gunda-Buche in relation to the immediate environment. Certain physiological factors are particularly useful in understanding the concentration and construction of the enclosures. A total of 17 sites were identified by the end of the investigations in 2004, incorporating both approaches to the study of sites as either spatial concentrations of human traces or their intimate relationship with the environment. However, a total of 34 enclosures were recorded from the 17 localities in the area. To add a regional perspective, the earthworks in northern Nyanza are similar to the earthworks at Munsa and Bigo in Uganda in terms of their architectural features. Comparative analysis of ceramics from the earthworks in northern Nyanza in relation to those from the Thimlich dry stone-walled enclosures was undertaken in order to establish their relationship.

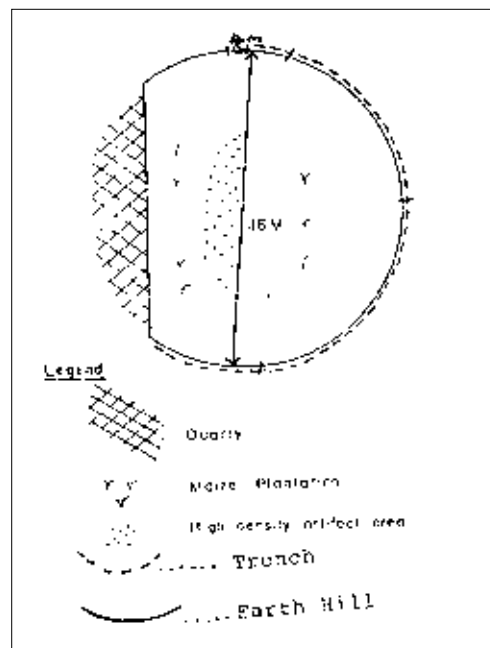
Gunda-Buche in oral history

The collection of oral history about the earthworks was aimed at illuminating major archaeological questions, such as the identity of the builders of some of the enclosures and, to an extent, underlying factors behind their construction. During interviews, open-ended questions were employed based on the above issues. Individual or group respondents were visited repeatedly to determine the consistency of their information. Discussions on certain aspects of the earthworks such as their origin, choice of location, and abandonment were employed. The discussions revealed important information about these structures as indicated below.

All the local informants provided names of the sites on the basis of the most elderly and first person to acquire land and on whom other members of the clan were dependent over land-ownership claims in their place of settlement. However, some

enclosures were given names of the area where they are located. The earthworks at Kipasi and Oiko area were given place names. Ramogo enclosure was named after its clan elder who led the inhabitants in securing land ownership over the area. The occupants of Ramogo are today represented by the Asembo people who trace their origin to the Joka-Lee migrant group. Joka-Lee was one of the many Luo immigrants during the second wave of Luo migrations into northern Kavirondo (Ochien'g, 1974). Gunda Olang'o was named after a spiritual clan elder, Olang'o, who led its occupants in securing land ownership over the area. The inhabitants of this enclosure were members of the Joka-Owila Luo migrant group who are represented today by the Uyoma people. Joka-Owila was a Luo immigrant during the second wave of Luo migrations into northern Nyanza.

On the basis of oral information, the architectural history of the region covers up to the first decade of the 20th century when abandonment of the enclosures began. No structures were built after the First World War. Instead, the inhabited ones were being abandoned as people opted for settlements with homesteads fenced by timber. The earthwork tradition came to



Sketch map of Ramogo enclosure.

an end basically due to the establishment of peace and order by white colonialists in the region. Communal life was broken down in the colonial era, leading to a shortage of labour for structure construction. A drastic reduction of wildlife as natural habitats were destroyed through indiscriminate farming practices and settlement activities also hastened the demise of the earthworks.

On the basis of both the previous interpretations and oral information regarding the earthworks, the following issues are outlined below:

The Gunda-Buche earthworks are probably a consequence of multiple immigration into the area from the 16th century onwards; these groups had one cultural tradition related to their Luo origin. The structures are thus evidence of places of human occupation and land-ownership claims during migration and settlement in northern Kavirondo. Construction was possible as the inhabitants usually moved in large groups under one clan elder, which ensured clan unity and labour mobilisation useful for their establishment.

Security is a theme that runs through these interpretations and is indeed evidenced in the architectural techniques already discussed above. Insecurity was posed by the presence of wild animals in the region (Stigand, 1909; Thomson, 1985). All the elders interviewed agree that the structures were defensive mechanisms. The enclosures protected domestic animals against wild animals such as leopards and hyenas (still present) that could not escape with their prey once inside the enclosures.

The enclosures were also used to ward off human enemies (Ogot, 1967; Ochieng, 1985). Clan antagonism, which increased as more immigrants entered the region, sparked land disputes leading to insecurity as groups sought to dislodge others. During such occasions, the enclosures acted as fortresses. The earthworks had advantages over wood-built settlements, being durable and not easily destroyed or burnt down

by invaders. The enclosures also offered solid earth-banks without gaps for spying or shooting arrows at the invaders. The ditches trapped the invaders, who would fall into them and then be captured or speared to death.

A number of environmental conditions also played a key role in the construction of the enclosures. First, the availability of local murram cuirass soil limited transportation cost and enhanced structure construction, which was communally undertaken. No strict building methods were employed, the local murram soil being often used for the construction of the walls. This was an important consideration together with other requirements such as raised ground for good visibility of the surrounding landscape.

Oral information regarding the earthworks in the region is supported empirically by architectural features exhibited in the enclosures and the surrounding environmental conditions. Insecurity is a prominent theme in oral history (Stigand, 1909; Ogot, 1967; Ochieng, 1985), clearly manifested by the few entrances, high thickened walls and location of the enclosures on raised ground for clear visibility of the surrounding landscape to check against easy entry by human foes. From oral information, it is clear that people lived in large groups to enhance security as competition for land intensified, and for provision of cheap labour during construction and maintenance of the enclosures.

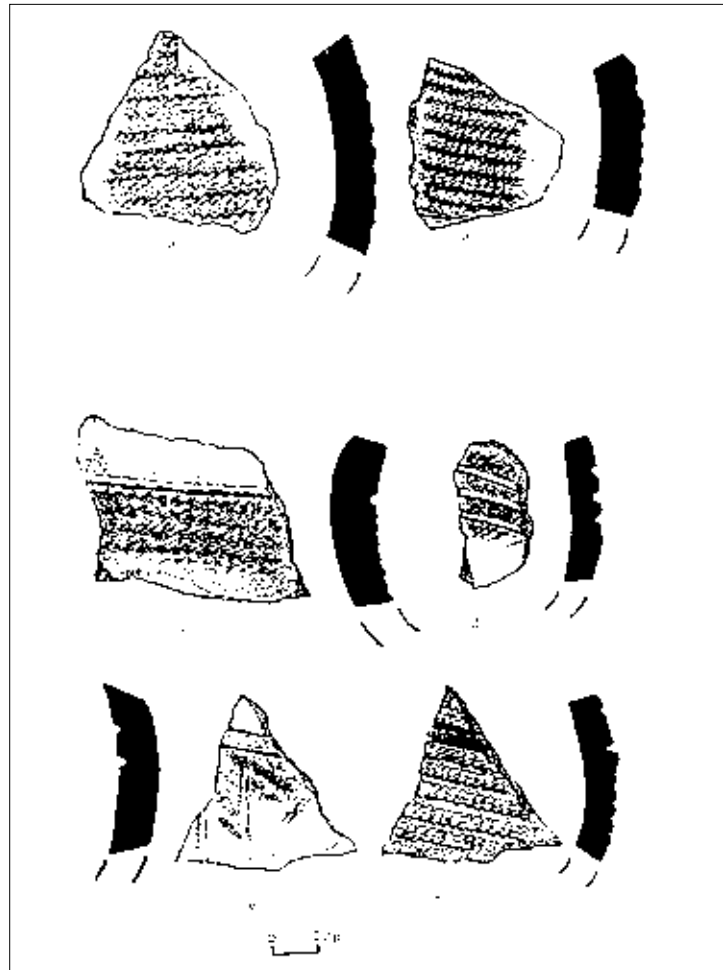
The construction of these earthworks for security purposes was enhanced by the availability of building material (murram cuirass soil), together with good drainage and proximity (200m) to water sources such as the Miri and Rawa streams. The immigrants preferred to settle on raised ground leading to a concentration of the enclosures on gentle rolling terrain. Thus, the natural environmental conditions facilitated the construction of earthworks in the region.

Archaeological inference

Ceramic attributes, styles and types have been identified as useful indicators of cultural affiliations and relationships (Matson, 1966; Egloff, 1972; Soper, 1985). They are important in reconstructing the underlying factors behind cultural relationships such as migrations, trade or exchange, and intermarriage (Kraober, 1944; Willey, 1945; MacNeish *et al.*, 1970) that can lead to sharing of ceramic traits, and subsequent resemblances in their styles (Cruxent and Rouse, 1958; Rouse and Cruxent, 1963). In view of this, ceramic analysis was geared towards the identification of the possible builders of the earthworks. Among the attributes, decoration is the most likely accurate reflection of social distinction (Soper, 1985) and especially in the Lake Victoria region (Wandibba, 1977). The study depended mainly on roulette decoration identified in this work as the means of identifying the possible builders of the enclosures.

The first clear distinction between classes of roulettes was made by Soper and Golden (1969) while Sutton and Roberts (1968) had already identified the difference in the “intensiveness” of rouletting at Uvinza. Soper (1985) finally provided a framework for identification of the different roulettes. In the study area, only knotted strip and composite roulette decorations (often executed on the body and neck of jars but less substantially on rims of bowls) were identified.

Knotted strip roulette decoration has previously been referred to as plaited cord roulette (Soper and Golden, 1969; Soper, 1971), knotted cord roulette (Soper, 1979), and plaited fibre roulette (David *et al.*, 1981). However, this work has used the term knotted strip roulette for purposes of distinction, useful in the identification of social group affiliations. Knotted strip roulettes and their resulting impressions vary with tightness, nature and thickness of the strip used in their execution, the number



of times it is rolled back and forth, and the direction of rolling the strip (flat-sectioned element). The resulting impressions and bands from knotted strip roulette decoration identified in this work include parallel linear bands, oblique lines of roulette impressions and parallel lines of roulette impressions. Oblique lines of roulette impressions are mainly associated with neck and rim potsherds, while parallel lines of roulette impressions are predominantly found in these sites. This may be attributed to the fragmentary nature of sherds which has possibly reduced further identification of the orientation of oblique lines of roulette impressions.

Knotted strip roulette decorated pottery from the earthworks.

Converging patterns of knotted strip roulette have also been identified together with overlapping patterns of the same decoration. These patterns of knotted strip roulette decorations have produced oblique

lines of impressions on the sherds. Azere (1978) also confirmed the production of overlapping patterns of this decoration through the use of knotted strip roulettes, which is in conformity with the outcome of this work.

The builders of the earthworks

On the question of the possible makers of ceramic materials associated with these earth-built enclosures, it is important to include previous information related to this work in East Africa and the lake region in particular. Although Wandibba (1977b) associated the emergence of roulette decoration in East Africa and western Kenya, in particular, with Bantu immigrant groups, Soper (1985) has connected the introduction of this decoration with the various branches of Nilotic languages. However, it is important to note that Soper (1985) based his assumption on archaeological evidence, while Wandibba (1977b) relied on oral information rather than archaeological proof. Recent archaeological work done by David *et al.* (1981), Robertshaw and Mawson (1981) in southern Sudan failed to indicate the use of rouletting before the Iron Age. In East Africa, no rouletting is associated with Neolithic or Early Iron Age (Soper, 1985), a period when Bantu immigrants were already settled in northern Nyanza as indicated by the presence of dimple-based pottery at Urewe site, which further disassociates the Bantu speakers from the origin of roulette decoration in the lake region.

Recently, Herbich (1981) asserted that ethnic distinctions in the lake region would be hard to infer on the basis of ceramic material alone, due to similar pottery traits between Luo and Bantu-speaking Luhya communities. However, in this work we intend to consider roulette decorations to be useful in the identification of ethnic groupings in the study area.

Although knotted strip roulette is present in the western Bantu ceramic decorations, especially among the Luhya,

Bukusu and Teso (Wandibba, 1995), other predominant forms of roulettes among these Bantu groups include curved-wooden (Barbour 1989) and knotted string roulettes (Soper, 1985). Moreover, the body of vessel forms among these Bantu groups are often left plain, while curved-wooden roulette decorations are concentrated on the neck/rim position of the pots (Barbour, 1989; Soper, 1985).

Ceramic analysis in this work has only identified the presence of knotted strip and composite roulette decorations, mainly executed on the body and neck of the vessel forms, while curved-wooden and knotted string roulette decorations are virtually absent in these earthworks. Twisted string roulette decoration is typically used by Kalenjin speakers in the highlands of the Rift Valley, while knotted strip roulette decorations have fairly close correlations with western Nilotic Luo communities (Soper, 1985). The presence of knotted strip and composite roulette decorations mainly on the body and neck of vessel forms alone and the absence of curved-wooden, twisted string, and knotted string roulette decorations in the earthworks do not indicate any association of these enclosures with Bantu or Kalenjin migrant groups who, according to oral history, are claimed to have invaded or inhabited the region.

It is possible from ceramic analysis to infer that the possible builders and occupants of these earthworks are the makers of vessel forms executed on the body and neck by knotted strip, and composite roulette decorations — here identified as Western Nilotic Luo social groups or immigrants. This claim is further supported by correlations between modern ceramics in the study area with archaeological pottery remains from these structures. They are very similar showing some form of continuity from prehistoric times to the present. The lack of outside influence on ceramics within and around these sites indicate that Luo pottery has been conspicuously insensitive and resistant to change during the migration

period and subsequent interactions through marriage, war or exchange, making them distinctive. Similar situations had been previously identified among Amarya pottery in Peru (Shepard, 1956; Tschopik, 1950).

However, not all ceramic assemblages produced by the same community through time need to be identical, as in the case of modern ceramics in Bondo. New and diverse pot forms such as flower, tea and sugar vessels indicate a response by the same people to different social needs, and probably represent copying from immigrant cultural values, especially the western influence, rather than direct importation of wares. Matson (1966) has suggested that analysis of a ceramic corpus may show the actual cultural impact of either a conquering, dominant political power, or the solidarity of the group — a view consistent with the result of ceramic analysis from the earthworks. Oral information supports the idea of settlement in the region and within some of the enclosures by Luo invaders who either pushed away other migrant groups from the region or incorporated them.

Bantu speakers who use rouletting are all concentrated in the lake region, and the technique is unlikely to have ever been practised by any common ancestral Bantu group (Soper, 1985), suggesting that the technique was copied by western Bantu groups from the Nilotes and not the opposite as indicated by Wandibba (1977b).

The ceramic attributes useful in the identification of the builders of the earthworks include parallel linear bands and oblique and/or parallel-knotted strip roulette decorations on the body and neck of the vessels. The makers of these vessel forms were Nilotic Luo migrant groups.

The dating: cross-dating

Typological correlations between ceramic attributes from the earthworks in northern Nyanza and those from the dry stone walled enclosures in South Nyanza (Thimlich Ohinga) do suggest that these two different kinds of architecture were built in the same

period of the Later Iron Age (Odede, 2000). The earthworks in the region are undated. On the other hand, the Thimlich site complex was dated to the Recent Iron Age, based on radio carbon determinations of 110 ± 80 and 200 ± 80 B.P. (Wandibba, 1986). Although oral information provides slight variations in the settlement of the regions under study, comparative ceramic analysis indicates similarities in the attributes and motifs of pottery from the two areas, pointing to the occupation of these sites during the same period of Recent Iron Age (Odede, 2000). The differences in structure preservation among the sites suggest slight variations in site abandonment in the regions under study, during the same period of the Recent Iron Age.

Conclusion

The Gunda-Buche earthworks are evidence of land ownership rivalry by migrant sub-groups. The earthworks are located on raised ground and acted as defensive mechanisms against wild animals and human invaders, in particular against the threats posed by inter-clan land disputes and by cattle raiders. Environmental conditions such as the abundance of murram cuirass soil, good drainage and the presence of water sources together with the communal lifestyle facilitated the construction and maintenance of the earthworks.

All the earthworks in the region exhibit similar architectural features, which signify one construction tradition widely spread along the eastern side of the Lake Victoria basin in northern Nyanza. Analysis of ceramics from these enclosures has proved that the construction and occupation of the enclosures can be attributed to Nilotic Luo-speakers who shared one cultural tradition. The earthworks are thus evidence of Luo migrations and settlement in the Lake Victoria region. The traditional Luo pottery repertoire has been resistant to external influence or change for a long time,

indicating the predominance of Luo speakers during the migration and settlement of the Lake Victoria region.

The earthworks are currently under serious threat from human activities such as cultivation, quarrying and re-use of the archaeological materials by the local people.

Further archaeological work is needed in the region, including excavation of the enclosures to establish their internal organisation, an investigation into their socio-political and economic organisation, a study of their cultural practices such as burial rituals and finally, radiocarbon dating of the enclosures. Conservation measures need to be put in place by the National Museums of Kenya in order to prevent their further destruction, which is happening at an alarming rate.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND DIAGRAMS BY THE AUTHORS

Acknowledgments

Special thanks go to the former director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa, Dr Paul Lane, who not only advised us on writing this paper for publication but also provided research funds and all the other logistic support for the investigation of the earthworks in 1999 and 2004. His predecessor, Prof. John Sutton, had keen interest in these enclosures and provided financial support in 1998 for their initial survey. Former Director General of the National Museums of Kenya, Dr George Abungu, was the person who not only informed us of the existence of some of these settlement sites in northern Nyanza, but also provided useful information during our preliminary investigations in 1998. We also acknowledge the enormous support we had from graduate attachment students of the British Institute in Eastern Africa who on certain occasions assisted us during field surveys, especially in 1999 and 2004.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Fredrick Odede is an archaeology lecturer at Maseno University with interests in settlement archaeology, Later Holocene prehistory and the River-Lake Nilotic peoples of East Africa.

Gordon Obote-Magaga is a history lecturer and the head of the History and Archaeology Department in Maseno University.

Pius Cokumu is a history lecturer at Maseno University with research interests in Kenyan Elections and constitutional changes.

Bibliography

- Abuso, P A. 1980. *A traditional history of the Abakuria*. C A D 1400-1914. Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi.
- Anthony, B. 1972. *Iron Age archaeology in Kenya*. Staff seminar paper, Department of History, University of Nairobi.
- Ayot, H O. 1979. *A history of the Luo-Abasuba of western Kenya C. 1960-1940*. Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi.
- Azere, J E. 1978. Roulette decorated techniques in West Africa. In R Soper, (Ed). *The African Archaeological Review* Vol 3. Pp. 31-33. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Barbour, J. 1989. Western Bantu: Avagoli. In J Barbour and S Wandibba, (Eds). *Kenyan pots and potters*. Pp. 41-46. Oxford University Press, Nairobi.
- Binford, L R. 1992. Seeing the present and interpreting the past and keeping things straight. In J Rossignol and L Wandsnider, (Eds). *Space, time and archaeological landscapes*. pp 43-57. Plenum Press, New York.
- Chittick, H N. 1965. A note on stone built enclosures in South Nyanza, Kenya. *Man* 147: 152-153.
- Clarke, D L. 1972. Models and paradigms in contemporary archaeology and provisional model of an Iron Age society and its settlement systems. In D L Clarke (Ed), *Models in Archaeology*. Pp. 1-60. Methuen, London.

- Cohen, D W and E S Atieno-Odhiambo 1989. *Siaya: A historical anthropology of an African landscape*. Heinemann, Nairobi.
- Cruxent, J M. and I Rouse. 1958. An archaeological chronology of Venezuela. In R F Matson (Ed). *Ceramics and man*, pp. 94-99. Mathuen and Company Limited, London.
- David, N, P Harvey and C J Goudie. 1981. Excavations in southern Sudan, 1979. *Azania* 16: 7-54.
- District Development Plan, Siaya, 1994/96.
- Dunnell, R C and W S Dancey. 1983. The siteless survey: A regional scale data collection strategy in *Advances in archaeological method and theory* 6: 267-287.
- Egloff, B J. 1972. The sepulchral pottery of Naumata Island. In D E Arnold (Ed). *Ceramic theory and cultural process*. pp. 1-2. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Evans-Pritchard, E E. 1949. Luo tribes and clans. *The Rhodes Livingstone Journal* vii: 24-40.
- Fagan, B M. 1981. *In the beginning: An introduction to archaeology*. Little Brown and Company, Boston.
- Gillman, C. 1944. An annotated list of ancient and modern indigenous stone structures in East Africa. *Tanganyika notes and records*, 17: 75-88.
- Gregory, A. 1965. *The rift valleys and geology of East Africa*. Seeley, Service and Company Limited, London.
- Heizer, R F and J A Graham 1967. *A guide to field methods in archaeology: approaches to the anthropology of the dead*. Rev. ed. National Press Palo Alto, Mayfield.
- Herbich, I. 1981. *Luo pottery: socio-cultural context and archaeological implications*. Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi.
- Hester, T R, Heizer, R F, and J A Graham. 1975. *Field methods in archaeology, 6th ed.* National Press Palo Alto, Mayfield.
- Jaetzold, R. 1982. *Farm management handbook of Kenya: natural conditions and farm management information*. Vol. II/A. Ministry of Agriculture, Nairobi.
- Knudson, S J. 1978. *Culture in retrospect: an introduction to archaeology*. Rand McNally College Publishing Company, Chicago.
- Kroaber, A L. 1944. *Peruvian archaeology in 1942*. Viking Fund Publications, New York.
- Leakey, L S B and A Owen, 1945. *A contribution to the study of Tumbian culture in East Africa*. Coryndon Museum, Nairobi.
- Leakey, M D, W E Owen and L S B Leakey. 1948. *Dimple-based pottery from central Kavirondo, Kenya Colony*. Coryndon Memorial Museum, Nairobi.
- Lofgren, L. 1967. Stone structures of South Nyanza, Kenya. *Azania* 2: 75-88.
- MacNeish, R S, F A Peterson, and K V Flannery. 1970. *The prehistory of the Tehuacan Valley*. University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Matson, R F. 1966. *Ceramics and man*. Mathuen and Company Limited, London.
- Meulemeester, J de. 1975. Cord roulettes from Kororfa, Nigeria. *West African Journal of Archaeology* 5: 209-211.
- Ochieng, R W. 1971. A traditional history of the Gusii of western Kenya. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Department of History, Nairobi.
- Ochieng, R W. 1974. *An outline history of Nyanza up to 1914*. East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi.
- Ochieng, R W. 1975. *A history of Kadimo Chiefdom of Yimbo in western Kenya*. East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi.
- Ochieng, R W. 1985. *A history of Kenya*. Macmillan Publishers Limited, London.
- Ochieng, R W. 1994. *Pre-colonial history of the Gusii of western Kenya C.A.D. 1500-1914*. East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi.
- Odede, F Z A. 2000. *An investigation into stone structures and earthworks in Bondo Division, Lake Victoria Basin, Kenya*. Unpublished MA thesis. Department of History, University of Nairobi.
- Ogot B A. 1967. *History of the southern Luo*. East African Publishing House, Nairobi.
- Ojany, F F and R B Ogendero. 1973. *Kenya: a study of physical and human geography*. Longman, Nairobi.
- Onjala, I O. 1990. A contribution to the study of the South Nyanza stone structures with special emphasis on architecture, distribution and the settlement history of the region. Unpublished B.A. dissertation. Department of History, University of Nairobi.

- Onjala, I O. 1994. Spatial distribution and settlement systems: a case study of the south western Kenya stone structures. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Department of History, University of Nairobi.
- Osogo, J. 1966. *A History of the Buluyia*. Seminar paper, pp. 30-75.
- Renfrew, C and P Bahn. 1991. *Archaeology: theories, methods and practice*. Thames and Hudson, London.
- Robetshaw, P and A Mawson. 1981. Excavations in eastern Eupatoria, southern Sudan, 1980. *Azania* 16: 55-95.
- Robertshaw, P.T. 1993. Gogo Falls excavation at a complex archaeological site, east of Lake Victoria. *Azania* 26: 65-195.
- Rouse, I and J M. Cruxent. 1963. *Venezuelan archaeology*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Schiffer, M B. 1976. *Behavioural archaeology*. Academic Press, New York.
- Shepard, O A. 1956. *Ceramics for the archaeologist*. Carnegie Institute of Washington, Washington D.C.
- Soper, R C. 1969. Radio carbon dating of "dimple-based ware" in western Kenya. *Azania* 4: 148-153.
- Soper, R. 1971. Iron age sites in Chobi Sectore, Murchison Falls National Park, Uganda. *Azania* 6: 53-87.
- Soper, R. 1979. Cord rouletted pottery. *Nyame Akuma* 15: 9-12.
- Soper, R. 1985. Rouletted decorations on African pottery: their technical considerations, dating, and distinctions. *The African Archaeological Review*. Vol 3, pp. 29-51.
- Soper, R and B Golden. 1969. An archaeological survey of Mwanza Region, Tanzania. *Azania* 4: 148-153.
- Stignand, C H. 1909. *The game of British East Africa*. East African Publishing House, Nairobi.
- Sutton, J and A Roberts. 1968. Uvinza, and its salt industry. *Azania* III: 45-86.
- Thomson, J. 1985. *Through Masailand. A journal of exploration among the snow clad volcanic mountains and strange tribes of Eastern Equatorial Africa*. Frankcass, London.
- Tschopik, H. 1950. An Andean ceramic tradition in historical perspective. *American Antiquity* 15: 196-218.
- Wagner, G. 1970. *The Bantu of western Kenya*. Vol. 2. Frankcass, London.
- Wandibba, S. 1977a. Attribute analysis of the ceramics of the early pastoralist period from southern Rift Valley. Unpublished MA thesis. Department of History, University of Nairobi.
- Wandibba, S. 1977b. *The origin of cord rouletted pottery in western Kenya*. Discussion Paper No. 80. University of Nairobi.
- Wandibba, S. 1986. Thimlich Ohingni. *Azania* 21: 134.
- Wandibba, S. 1995. *Seeking the past in the present: archaeological implications of ethnographic pottery studies in Kenya*. In A Lindahl and O Stilborg, (Eds). *The aim of laboratory analysis of ceramics in Archaeology*. Gotab, Stockholm, pp. 161-168.
- Were, G S. 1967. *A history of the Abaluyia of western Kenya*. East African Publishing House, Nairobi.
- Whisson, M G. 1964. *Change and challenge*. Christian Council of Kenya, Nairobi.
- Willey, G R. 1945. Horizon styles and pottery traditions in Peruvian archaeology. *American Antiquity* 11: 49-56.
- Zvelebel, M S W G and M G Macklin. 1992. "Archaeological landscapes, lithic catters, and human behaviour". In J Rossignol and L Wandsnider, (Eds). *Space, Time, and Archaeological Landscapes*, pp. 193-223. Plenum Press, New York.

The practice of tooth extraction



What do the Luo, Turkana, Rendille, Maasai, Kalenjin, Pokot, Nuer, Karamajong, Bari and Dinka have in common? First, they are all communities whose languages fall in the African Nilotic language group. More than that, they are all communities who deliberately extract some of their front teeth early in life for various reasons. Although the practice is not as widespread as it was a century ago, it is still possible to meet a good number of people who have gaps where their front teeth should be.

Photo

The skull of a Neolithic male from the Makalia burial site, Elementaita, whose two central lower incisors had been removed very early in life. (The teeth in the upper jaw fell out after burial.) From *The Stone Age cultures of Kenya Colony*, by Louis Leakey, Cambridge University Press, 1931.

**Angela W Kabiru, Earth Sciences
Department, National Museums of Kenya**

The practice of tooth extraction is widespread among the indigenous inhabitants of Africa, but is mainly a Nilotic custom in Kenya, Tanzania and the Sudan. What many do not know is that this custom was practised during prehistoric times, long before present African communities settled on the lands they occupy today. Although regarded by some as characteristic of black (negroid) populations, there is evidence to show that it was practised in Palestine in prehistoric times by people who were not negroid (negroid here is an anatomical description that occurs only in Africa especially south of the Sahara).

Negroid populations

Negroid peoples form the greatest majority of the population south of the Sahara, from East, West and Central Africa to the Cape of South Africa. North of the equator there is at present a mixture of Negroid and Caucasian types, but there is evidence to suggest that the distribution of the Negroid population in the Sahara and North Africa was more widespread at a time when the Sahara was greener. Skeletal remains are all there are to show of these populations, and scientists have used definable skeletal characteristics to analyse them. These characteristics must however be considered with care, as it has been discovered that the metrical ranges of many individual features overlap markedly between different groups, which

makes it difficult to differentiate between modern types, especially in Africa. Some Negroes were therefore considered 'less negroid' than others simply on the basis of their occipital index (Leakey, 1950). Where individual skeletons occur, it is difficult to make conclusions concerning group affinity, and only with groups of skeletons can such attributions be made.

While many of these characterisations are made on the basis of the skeletal features, they are sometimes based on the nature of the archaeological artefacts found in association, but this has also proved rather misleading. For instance, the nature of the stone industry at Gambles Cave, Elementaita, was thought to indicate the presence of 'an essentially foreign, non-African population' (Phillipson, 1977). The skeletons found here were also first described as 'non African' due to their 'narrow skulls, prominent chins and nasal bones'. However, when the skeletal remains were re-examined, they were found to fall within the range of modern Negroid populations.

Another interesting case is that of Njoro River Cave where the high quality of stone beads found led Leakey (1950) to conclude that they were the work of a 'foreign influence' because it is otherwise 'difficult to explain on other grounds the adoption by a primitive people of such an essentially specialised craft'. The skeletal remains were first described as 'non Negro' because the occipital index was shown to be lower than that of the average Bantu Negro, while the nasal index was lower than that of the Galla or Somali, and therefore labeled as non-African. This was a Stone Age culture and it is still not known how the stone beads were cut, drilled and polished.

Prehistoric Negroid populations that occupied northern and eastern Africa have mostly been found in association with a hunting/fishing culture that made a characteristic wavy line pottery, also found in more recent Neolithic contexts. The Negroid population of Early Khartoum was described as having 'thick skulls with

massive facial features, particularly the jaw, with flat and wide noses'. They were also rugged and heavily built. Similar skulls are reported from Asselar, northeast of Timbuktu, Tafarjit-Tamaya in Algeria and from a site south of Guir in the southwestern Sahara. Remains from Kadero in the Sudan are described as 'individuals of the black variety' with prominent facial features (Prominska, 1989). Skeletons from Lothagam in Northern Kenya are reported as having alveolar prognathism and heavy mandibles. Alveolar prognathism, or forward-projecting jaw, is considered a basic Negro trait. A male cranium from Lowasera had a broad and flattened nasal aperture, although the cranium was long and narrow. A skull from the Bromhead site in the Central Rift Valley was also grouped as Negro.

Incisors were extracted from both upper and lower jaws, but missing lower incisors were (and still are) more common than missing upper ones. Missing lower incisors have mostly been associated with Negro populations, while in many cases the missing upper incisors are associated with populations that are not Negroid. However, this is not always the case. For instance, the Negro population of Jebel Moya extracted their lower incisors while that of Early Khartoum extracted their upper ones. One skull from Asselar has no upper incisors and neither do skulls from Beni Segoual on the Gulf of Bougie in Algeria. Both these latter groups are classified as non-Negroid. Arkell (1949) suggests that the extraction of incisors, which was common to the hunting/fishing populations between latitudes 19° N and 15° N, could have been diffused between the southern Sahara and North Africa because a Mesolithic Negroid culture once existed all the way from Timbuktu in the west to Kassala, Sudan in the east.

East Africa

There is evidence that the practice was also common among populations living in the

Kenyan Central Rift Valley in the last 10,000 years. Sites that have yielded human remains whose incisors were extracted early in life include Njoro River Cave, Willey's Kopje and the Makalia burial site.

The sites were excavated by Louis and Mary Leakey in the first half of the last century. This area is especially interesting because up to about 4,000 years ago, the lake levels were considerably higher than they are today. Available evidence suggests that at one time lake levels may have been about 200m above present levels. These lakes and rivers therefore supported large numbers of plants and animals, and human populations depended on them for food and other resources. The large variety of Later Stone Age and Neolithic assemblages found in this region demonstrates that there was much human activity going on at the time and after the lake levels subsided. Apart from the microlithic industries present, many human remains were also preserved in burials, although not as well and extensively as those of the Sudan. Intentional burials are believed to have developed as cultural components of communities that adopted agriculture and a sedentary lifestyle.

At the site of Willey's Kopje, three separate burials were excavated, and all three crania had their lower incisors missing. The first skeleton lay on its right side with the face towards the south-east and the limbs in a semi-flexed position. The second one was in a similar position but the face was directed towards the north, while the face of the third skeleton was directed due east. All the skeletons were buried in shallow circular graves beneath small mounds of stone, commonly referred to as cairns. Flexed and semi-flexed burial positions were common in this period, a component of complex burial customs at the time.

The skeletons from the graves at Makalia site were buried in the same way as those at Willey's Kopje. They also had their central lower incisors missing. Extracted lower incisors are also reported from the Bromhead site.



Robert Moru, a Turkana from Kanapoi, had his two lower incisors removed at the age of 13 on the order of his father. Among Turkana men, tooth extraction is an optional practice. Photo by Ebrahim Mwangi, NMMK.

Njoro River Cave is named after the Njoro River on whose bank it is located. The site is dated to about 850 BC (Leakey and Leakey 1950) and is considered one of the most important Neolithic sites in Kenya. Inside were found cremated burials accompanied by numerous stone bowls, pestles and lower grindstones, beads, a carbonised wooden vessel, basketry, gourds and potsherds. Some of the pestles and grindstones have traces of ochre, and may have been used for crushing both ochre and grain, while some stone beads are said to resemble those from predynastic Egypt (Leakey 1931). The skeletons of about 80 individuals were recovered from the cave, and the burial is considered one of the finest examples of intentional burials from this period. Although most of the crania were badly crushed or burned, several were in fairly good condition to show that they had their two lower incisors missing. Though the connection with Egypt has not been proven, Arkell (1951) has pointed out other cultural connections between the people of the Njoro River Cave and the C group people of Nubia. Indeed, several burial sites

in the Sudan have revealed hundreds of individuals with missing lower incisors.

The site of Jebel Moya 320 km south of Khartoum, consists of an extensive cemetery whose graves were first excavated between 1911 and 1914 by the Wellcome expedition. This site may have been occupied about 1000 BC and abandoned around 400 BC. An interesting assortment of grave goods, including large numbers of lip plugs and beads, were found in the burials. When the skeletal remains were analysed, it was discovered that a good number of individuals had their two lower incisors taken out early in life. Other sites in the Sudan where this practice was found to be common include Early Khartoum and Shabona.

Just as the removal of teeth was not confined to the lower jaw, not all negroid skulls had their incisors missing. For instance, at the site of Kadero in the Sudan, no incisors were found to have been extracted, as is the case with some skulls from the Kenyan Neolithic. If the removal of incisors was a cultural trait, and if the Khartoum Neolithic is considered a development of Early Khartoum, why are there missing incisors at Early Khartoum sites while Khartoum Neolithic sites such as Kadero do not have any extracted incisors? In East Africa, Ambrose (1984) grouped specimens with and without incisors in the Savannah Pastoral Neolithic (SPN) and Neolithic-Elementaitan respectively. The Neolithic-Elementaitan is dated to about 2500–1300 years before present (bp) and has skulls without central incisors while the SPN is dated to around 5200–3300 bp in the lowlands and 3300–1300bp in the highlands and have no missing incisors. This means that some Negroid populations did not practise it, or there were periods in history when it was not practised. Would this mean that the practice died out completely at particular times and was reinvented periodically, or was there a remnant population that kept it from dying out completely? And what is the relationship between the Sudanese and

the eastern African Neolithic? Since the Neolithic in eastern Africa is considered to have begun much later than in the Sudan, would the removal of incisors, if indeed it was a cultural trait, also have been spread by diffusion or migration from the north? Or did the practice also develop independently much later in East Africa within the groups that practise it presently?

Migrations

Before colonisation, indigenous Africans moved around the continent freely and, in the strictest sense, there were no group boundaries. They were flexible and permeable (Newman 1995). The migrations of the indigenous peoples of Africa within Africa are difficult to explain. The movements may imply a powerful underlying causative factor, and may be linked with the desiccation of the Sahara, forcing out pastoralists and grain collectors into the Sahel and savannah zones (Ambrose 1982). Ambrose also argues that it was the more abundant and reliable food source that led to an increase in population, and groups were forced to migrate to seek new lands to establish their food producing economies. 'The search for land and its valued resources fostered competition, which in turn, kept populations on the move' and '...the subsequent population interweaving created a highly complex genetic cloth' (Newman 1995). The result is the complex mixture of languages and cultures that we see today.

Ambrose (1982) states that 'Even the most cursory survey of ethnic and linguistic groups in East Africa reveals an astonishing degree of heterogeneity... Many language families however show(ed) disjointed distributions, suggesting that former tribal boundaries and culture areas may have been remarkably different and indicating a long history of migrations and population expansions by some groups at the expense of others... The complexities of human geography in East Africa thus present an intriguing challenge to oral historians,

historical linguists and archaeologists alike, all of whom have attempted to document the places of origin and the times and directions of movements and contacts’.

This means that in order to study the customs and languages of any communities, either as part of a language group or in isolation, the history of migrations and contacts with peoples they displaced or absorbed should be taken into consideration. It means therefore that particular customs may not have been practised by a particular group until they adopted the practices of people that they came into contact with, and also incorporated borrowed words into their own language, especially of things and ideas that were new to them.

The Nilotic people of Kenya mainly live on the western highlands and all the way from Lake Turkana to the shores of Lake Victoria and into northern Tanzania. Linguistic studies show that the southern and eastern Nilotes migrated into Kenya in two waves. Southern Nilotes, who include the Kalenjin of Kenya and the Tatog/Barabaig of Tanzania, entered East Africa from a nuclear area on the Uganda/Sudan/Ethiopia border (Ambrose 1982). They moved south all the way to southern Tanzania but they did not settle anywhere east of the Kenyan Rift Valley. This movement is believed to have begun more than 2000 years ago and displaced or absorbed speakers of a southern Cushitic language along the way, some of whom still live near the Pare Mountains. This contact between the Nilotes and Cushites is recorded in the southern Cushitic loanwords in Nilotic vocabulary. Indeed, southern Cushitic loanwords are found in nearly every language between Lake Victoria and the Indian Ocean because the speakers of all the other languages came into their present territories much later. In the first millennium AD eastern Nilotes moved south from the Uganda/Sudan border through central Kenya along the Rift Valley into the northern Tanzanian highlands. They include the Maasai, Samburu and Ilchamus

of Kenya and the Ongamo of Tanzania. They also absorbed and/or displaced the southern Nilotes who occupied this area, which is why the southern Nilotes are separated by Maasai living on the Serengeti plains. The Luo are also known to have migrated from near the Sudanese border and displaced the Bantu who had earlier settled in the Lake Victoria basin.

It may therefore be postulated that the Nilotes had links with prehistoric Sudanese populations such as those of Jebel Moya (Phillipson, 1982); Addison, 1949), or that it was a Nilotic population that lived at Jebel Moya. It may never be known if the link was genetic or one of contact, but the practice of tooth extraction seems to have undergone some changes in the long course of its existence. Although most of the groups today still extract two lower incisors, the Luo extract six lower teeth as a form of initiation into adulthood. Meanwhile, others like the Kalenjin, Pokot and Maasai practise circumcision as a rite of passage even though they still extract some teeth. Circumcision and the naming of age sets are practices that are believed to have been adopted by the Bantu from the Cushites, and may have been adopted by Nilotic speakers as well. At a site known as Kokumartakore in northern Kenya where some stone ring burials were excavated, it was discovered that some individuals had extracted two while others had four lower incisors missing. Stiles (1982) concluded that the occurrence of stone ring burials (Cushitic)

Joy Adamson's painting of a Turkana woman wearing a lip plug. All Turkana women have their two lower incisors extracted at an early age. Taken from *Peoples of Kenya*, by Joy Adamson.



An assortment of lip plugs from the NMK collection.
Photo by Angela Kabiru.



and incisor evulsion (Nilotes) together could only be as a result of close contacts between these two groups. He concluded that the burials were those of the Rendille and that the transformation of the custom of lower incisor extraction from four to two took place sometime between the 15th and 19th centuries AD.

Gender

Just as the number of teeth removed differs or differed between communities, so does the gender associated with the practice. Among the Luo it was done by both men and women. However in other cases it was known to have been done only by women. At the sites of Early Khartoum and Shabona in the Sudan, some skeletons that were identified as female had their upper central incisors missing. And at Jebel Moya, the men did not like to lose their teeth, for the two lower incisors were only missing from skeletons that were identified as female. All the women among the Turkana of northern Kenya also have their two lower incisors extracted at an early age but this is only done by men who opt to wear a lip plug, otherwise they are under no obligation to do so. Among the Bari of Sudan, women undergo initiation by the extraction of the lower incisors. In most other cases it is done by both sexes.

Lip plugs

The use of lip plugs has also been associated with the extraction of incisors, the argument being that they can only be worn by people who have had their incisors extracted.

Indeed, sites such as Jebel Moya have yielded such large numbers of lip plugs they can only be considered to have been part of everyday use. The first 78 burials yielded a total of 28,000 lip plugs made of stone, pottery, ivory and bone. The lip plugs are described as 'mostly cylindrical with a head like that of a large old fashioned nail, sometimes with a similar feature at the other end'. As in the case of Jebel Moya, all women among the Turkana of northern Kenya remove their two lower incisors and nearly all of them wear lip plugs. Lip plugs are also worn by Pokot girls when they get married. Other tribes using lip plugs are the Teso and Karamajong.

However, not all prehistoric sites whose skulls lack incisors have yielded lip plugs and so their connection is not straightforward. Beech, in his book *The Suk: Their Language and Folklore* writes, '...two middle teeth of the lower jaw are extracted, and the space thus left is called *wotut*. The dimple of the chin is pierced and a leaf of a tree inserted, or else a ring or a common nail is worn in the hole with the head inside the lips.' He claims that although an old man told him that the object of *wotut* was to enable a nail to be inserted through the hole with ease, it was obviously not the reason for extracting the teeth. The author has observed Turkana women shoot spit through the gap in the teeth and the hole in the chin, without opening their mouths. It has not been established if this was one of the reasons the holes were made, or shooting spit was just a habit that developed from having the gap and the hole.

If perhaps the plug shaped like a nail was not a very good reason to extract teeth, other plugs or discs certainly were, as it would be impossible to fit one with the teeth in position. (Refer, for example, to the lip plates shown on www.ezakwantu.com). Body modification was a common practice in many parts of the world, and each type has its own meaning. Wearing lip plates is certainly a form of modification,

and although it is considered a form of beauty in some communities, the wearers look so uncomfortable it seems to create the opposite effect. In extreme cases such as these, it is possible that it is the plate that is of paramount importance, and the teeth simply have to be pulled out due to the size of the plates/plugs. The larger the plate, the more beautiful the wearer is considered to be, or the more important in society he/she is. There are conflicting reports on why this practice began — although those who practise it talk of beauty, researchers on the subject argue that it developed as a defence mechanism against slave raiders. Bah (2003) examined such defence mechanisms and refuge sites that communities used to protect themselves against slave raids. Slave raids and warfare arising from the slave trade were so horrific, argues Kusimba (2006), that people killed themselves together with their children to avoid enslavement. Yet others mutilated themselves to repel the slave raiders. He quotes Perham (1979) to illustrate the story of the Makonde:

‘These were the first people I met who mutilate themselves as a decoration, except for the fairly common elongation of the ear. The women here make a hole in the upper lip and plug it with a piece of wood and stretch it with increasingly large plugs until they call to mind the duck-billed platypus. Their appearance is so horrible that it is depressing to go through their country. They cannot smile at you — they can hardly talk — when drinking water they have to pour it down their throats and their faces have no expression... It is said that it was done at first to make them repulsive so they would not be raided by the slavers’.

Whichever preceded the other — incisor extraction or the wearing of lip plugs — it is clear that the two practices are very closely related, at least in more recent African prehistory, with plenty of literature and pictures on the subject. However in prehistoric times the relationship is harder to prove as only skeletal material remains. But if the relationship existed even then, does it tell



Husband and wife of the So tribe of northeastern Uganda, circa 1969, both wearing lip plugs. Photo by Charles Laughlin.

us that this kind of mutilation did not begin with the slave trade, and that it is a practice going back many thousands of years? If this is the case, the wearing of plugs and/or plates is only a modification of the same behaviours. Just as no one in modern times can satisfactorily explain why plugs were worn, neither can existing communities explain why they extracted the number of teeth that they did.

Members of many communities claim that at one time there was an outbreak of lockjaw disease and the gap was to enable the sick to be fed through the gap. But why should the Luo knock out six teeth when clearly two teeth would have done? And why would it have been practised by one sex and not the other among other communities? Why then did the practice not die out when the epidemic passed? And why do those who extract their incisors also wear lip plugs? Among the Luo, the removal of six lower teeth was also considered a rite of passage and as a mark of differentiation when tribal warfare was rife (Onjala, per verbal communication). Among the Turkana it could simply be an issue of aesthetics. But as Beech says, the real reasons for extracting the incisors may vary and the original meaning may now be lost in the course of history. Older members of the community may know these reasons but to the young people, it's just one of those things that people did a long time ago. This is an opportunity for researchers to record what information is available on the subject before it is too late.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela Kabiru is a Research Scientist in the Department of Earth Sciences, Archaeology Section, at the National Museums of Kenya. She has a BA in Archaeology and an MSc in Tourism Management, so her interests are both archaeology and tourism. Her article on Lamu appears elsewhere in this issue. Her other research interests include later African prehistory, notably prehistoric beads.

Further reading

- Addison, F (1949) *Jebel Moya*. Oxford University Press.
- Ambrose, S H. (1982) "Archaeology and linguistic reconstructions of history in East Africa". In: *The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History*. Ehret, C and Posnansky, M (Eds). University of California Press.
- Anderson, W. (1992). "Badarian burials: Evidence of social inequality in Middle Egypt during the Early Predynastic Era". *JARCE*, 29, pp 51-56.
- Arkell, A J. (1949) *Early Khartoum*. Oxford 1949.
- Bah, T M. (2003) "Slave raiding and defensive systems south of Lake Chad from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century". In: *Fighting the slave trade: West African strategies*. Edited by A Diouf, 16-30, Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Beech, M. (1911) *The Suk: Their language and folklore*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- David, N. (1982) "Prehistory and historical linguistics in Central Africa: Points of contact". In: *The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History*. Ehret, C and Posnansky, M (Eds). University of California Press.
- Derry, D D. (1949) "Report on the human remains". In: *Early Khartoum* by A J Arkell. London. Oxford University Press.
- Kusimba, C M. (2006) "Slavery and warfare in African chiefdoms". In: *The archaeology of warfare: Prehistories of raiding and conquest* (pp. 214-246). Arkush, E N and Allen, M W (Eds). University Press of Florida.
- Leakey, L S B. (1931) *The Stone Age cultures of Kenya Colony*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leakey, L S B and Leakey, M D. (1950) *Excavations at the Njoro River Cave*. Oxford University Press.
- Perham, M. (1979) *East African journey: Kenya and Tanganyika*. 1929-30. Faber, London
- Phillipson, D. (1977) *The later prehistory of eastern and southern Africa*. Heinemann Educational Books, Nairobi.
- Stiles, D. (1982) "Preliminary results of archaeological and palaeoenvironmental research in northern Kenya". *Nyame Akuma* No. 20.

Twelve mosques:



Cynthia Salvadori

The history of Islam in Kenya

Islam is an integral part of Kenya's multicultural scene. Approximately 30% of the people of Kenya are Muslim, and the provinces where Islam dominates — the Coast, Northern Eastern and Upper Eastern — comprise something like 75% of the country's land mass. Virtually every town in the country has at least one mosque (Lamu has more than 30), and these mosques are architectural records of the introduction and spread of the religion in this country, in its various forms.

After the Prophet Mohammed died in 632 AD, his followers immediately split between Shi'a (*shi'ali*), those who followed the Prophet's son-in-law Ali and his descendants, and Sunni, the followers of the *sunna*, 'the way' as formulated by popularly elected imams. During the two centuries after the Prophet's death, four orthodox Sunni 'schools of law' (*madhhabs*) developed — the Hanafite, Malikite,

Shafi'ite, and Hanbalite. Later others came into being, such as the puritanical Ibadhite, followed by the Omanis, and the ultra-puritanical Wahabite which, now known as Muwahiddun (Unitarians), is the rule of law in Saudi Arabia. Although Sunni mosques are open to every Muslim, naturally people congregate at a mosque of their own particular school. The Swahili of the east African coast follow the Shaafi School (although their one-time overlords, the Sultans of Oman and Zanzibar, were Ibadhi), as do the Somalis. But due to the Hanafi heritage left by the Mogul emperors of India, virtually all the Sunni Muslim Indian groups who settled in Kenya followed the Hanafi, the school which incorporates much of mystical Sufism.

But how did Islam come to Kenya, and when? Unlike Christianity it was not introduced by professional missionaries but simply came with Arabs and Indians

Photo above: The Noor Mosque in Wajir, better known as the Old Mosque. Photo by Armando Ferrante.

who were trading on the east African coast. They had been coming and going with the monsoon winds as far back as the latter part of the first millennium BC, but of course they were not Muslims then — the faith did not come into being until the revelations made to the Prophet Mohammed, which started in 610 AD. Then slowly the Arab and some of the Indian traders became Muslim, and thus slowly, quietly and peaceably Islam was introduced to East Africa.

From Arabia and India, across the Indian Ocean

So far, the oldest remains that have been found of any mosque in Kenya are those at Shanga in the Lamu Archipelago. These consist of the post-holes of a succession of 9th century wooden mosques below the remains of the 10–11th century stone mosque, all excavated by Mark Horton. In the succeeding centuries a number of trading towns grew up along the east African coast, which reached their peak in the 14th and 15th centuries with the building of substantial stone towns such as Songa Mnara down by Kilwa; Gedi, just south of Malindi; and Jumba la Mtwana north of Mombasa — each and every one with its mosque(s). These collapsed and decayed into ruins and their roles as trading centres were replaced by other stone towns. The traders were not only Arabs but also Indians, many of them Muslims, from the northeast of the subcontinent. It was this mixture over centuries that created the Swahili culture as we know it today.

In time the seasonal traders settled down, and a number of specific Muslim communities took root. They flourished under the Sultan of Oman when in 1832 he shifted his capital from Oman to Zanzibar and posted a *liwali* (prime minister) in each coastal town. Along with the Omani Arabs came their Baluchi mercenaries who kept them in power; it is recorded that Jemadar Amir Chotah had been in Mombasa with his troops in 1664, but it was not until 1875

that the Baluchis built their own mosque there, near the Fort where they were stationed. Coming in increasing numbers were groups of the many caste-like Indian Hanafite Sunni communities, and several distinct Shi'ite groups as well — the Ismailis, Ithnasheris and Bohras.

Around via Kampala

Although Arab slave and ivory traders were long settled on the Kenya coast, the waterless Taru Desert and the militant Maasai discouraged the development of trade directly inland to the Great Lakes. However there were well-established caravan routes from Bagamoyo right across to Lake Tanganyika. In the 1840s there were several Arab traders in Karagwe and one had penetrated Buganda to the north. The first Zanzibari caravan, that of Snay bin Amir, reached Buganda in 1852; shortly thereafter a Baluchi, one Issa bin Hussein, managed to ingratiate himself as a sort of advisor to the Kabaka. When Speke, the first European to visit Buganda, arrived in 1862 he found a sizeable Arab-Swahili community which had not only won a substantial number of converts but also had ready access to the throne. The explorer Stanley arrived in 1875, the first Protestant missionary in 1878 and the Catholics the following year. In the early 1880s the Kabaka, Mutesa, was having a splendid time playing Muslims, Protestants and Catholics off against one another, and for a brief time the Kingdom of Buganda was a Muslim theocracy. From Uganda the religion seeped eastwards to places such as Mumias (Chief Mumia was a relative of Mutesa's successor, Mwanga) which was becoming a major caravan centre and as such was where the Imperial British East Africa Company established one of its original posts, and to Kisumu on the shores of Lake Victoria.

Inland, from Somalia

There was similar influence in the coastal trading towns of what is known as Somalia.

From the coastal towns, Islam spread until within a very short time the Somalis were all Muslim, even the nomadic pastoralists. It was they who moved steadily westward, towards the Tana River. But unlike their settled Islamic brethren, the nomadic Somalis did not build stone mosques, so there is little physical record of their dispersal. But the results are clear: virtually all the inhabitants of North Eastern Province and many of those of Upper Eastern today are fervently Muslim.

Behind the British

While all this was going on in what became Kenya, Christianity had long since been established to the north, in the highlands of Ethiopia, thanks to two young Syrian Christian boys who got shipwrecked off the coast in the 4th century and converted the king! But the old Ethiopian Christian kingdoms, isolated in the highlands, had no effect whatsoever to the south. It was only when colonialism began that Christianity was introduced to inland Kenya. But the British themselves also brought two more waves of Muslims to Kenya, one small and one quite overwhelming.

The first wave consisted of the Nubian troops from the Sudan who were employed by the British in their colonial conquest at the end of the 19th century. It was these Nubians who founded some of the first mosques in places such as Kisumu, Eldama Ravine and Kibera. The second wave came from northwestern India — the great majority of the 30,000 labourers from the Punjab recruited by the British to build the Railway into the interior were Muslim Punjabis. And it was they who founded the mosques all along the line of rail, from Mombasa to Kisumu. In their wake came an increasing stream of Indians from Cutch and Gujarat, many of them Muslims, all inspired by the profits to be made from doing business with the Railway, its employees and the European settlers.

All the while, the Muslim immigrants from all directions were converting the local people, not so much by professional proselytising but simply by example and by intermarriage. As a result today there are mosques in virtually every town in Kenya, and in the predominantly Muslim areas there are little mosques in all the villages as well. Some are community mosques, others are mosques founded and maintained by individual families (something typically Islamic). The twelve mentioned here are some of the most historic ones, recording the spread of Islam in its various forms in the country.



1 The Great Mosque, Gedi

The coastal town of Gedi, just south of Malindi, was a flourishing trading centre in the 14th and 15th centuries but in the 16th century the site was abandoned, perhaps due to lack of water, perhaps due to attacks by Oromo pastoralists (then called Galla), and the buildings slowly decayed and were overgrown by the lush coastal vegetation. Four centuries later, in the 1950s, the ruins were excavated by James Kirkman, the then Coast Archaeologist, and their history reconstructed.

The Great Mosque was built in the middle of the 15th century and rebuilt a hundred years later. Like many coastal mosques it has no minaret; there was simply a flight of steps going up to the roof, from

The ruins of the Great Mosque at Gedi. Photo by the Audio Visual Department, National Museums of Kenya.

where the call to prayer was given. As was also common to the times, the *mihrab* (the niche from where the Imam leads the prayers) was originally decorated with imported porcelain bowls. The roof was supported on three rows of six rectangular pillars, the middle row running down the centre of the building and obscuring the view of the *mihrab*. According to the guide book to the Gedi ruins, this curious arrangement is found only in East Africa, which indicates a well-established local architectural tradition. Below the rectangular pillars one can see the square pillars of the original mid-15th century mosque.



Mandhry Mosque, Old Town Mombasa. Photo by Taibali Hamzali.

2 The Mandhry Mosque, Old Town Mombasa

The Mandhry Mosque, close to the old dhow harbour, is a Shafi’ite mosque with a foundation date of 1570/1 which makes it the oldest mosque still in continuous use in Mombasa — it appears on early Portuguese maps of the town. It has, however, been rebuilt several times and none of the present structure dates back to the 16th century. On the evidence of the fine carved doors and windows, the oldest existing part probably dates to c. 1830. The simple minaret and plain lime-washed walls are typical of Shafi’ite mosques on the coast of East Africa of that period.

Badala Mosque, Old Town Mombasa. Photo by Taibali Hamzali.

The mosque is called the Mandhry Mosque because the Mandhry family, originally from Oman, have long been the custodians of the mosque and continue to be responsible for its upkeep. The Omanis were of the puritanical Ibadhi sect of Islam (which disapproved of minarets), but the Mandhry, one of the old settled Arab families of Mombasa, were amongst the first to turn to Shafi’ism, the form of Islam followed by the Swahili, giving up the puritanical beliefs of their forebears and intermarrying, thereby identifying themselves with the Swahili. It was a Mandhry who was the last *liwali* of the Sultan of Zanzibar before the Kenya government took over the administration of the coastal strip in 1963.

3 Badala Mosque, Old Town Mombasa

The Indian Sunni Muslims who settled in Mombasa were of many sorts, Cutchi Sunni groups each with their own traditional skill, and also Memon merchants. But all were united in that they followed the Hanafite school of Islam, rather than the



Shafi'ite school preferred by their Swahili neighbours. In 1880 they combined to build the Jamia Mosque on the edge of Old Town. Then in 1910 the Cutchi Sunnis broke off from the Memons to build their own mosque in the middle of Old Town.

The Badalas, being seamen by profession, had been the first Cutchi Sunni arrivals on the east African coast: it was a Badala pilot, Ahmed ibn Majid 'Cunha', who in 1498 showed the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama the sea-route from Malindi to India; by 1705 the Badala *nakhoda* (captain) Jusub Adam was settled in Mombasa. Since the Badalas were not only the oldest but the largest Cutchi Sunni community in Mombasa, their name has been synonymous with Cutchi Sunni in that town. Thus the new mosque, originally a simple single-storey structure, was known as the Badala Mosque.

By the 1950s the Cutchi Sunni population in Mombasa had greatly increased and the mosque was extended to accommodate its congregation consisting of Cutchi Sunnis of all sorts. But it is still known as the Badala Mosque.

4 Khoja Ithnasheri Mosque, Lamu

The Ithnasheris (Twelvers) are an ancient Shi'ite sect who are known by that name because they follow a line of 12 imams, starting with Ali and ending with Muhammed al-Mahdi who disappeared ('went into seclusion') in 879. Those in Kenya, however, are of relatively recent origin, all being Khoja Ismailis (see below) who broke away in the latter half of the 19th century due to a dispute over the management of the community finances. Members of the newly-forming Khoja Ithnasheri community in East Africa gravitated in large numbers to Lamu where one of their leaders, Dewji Jamal, and others had been trading (as Khoja Ismailis) from perhaps as early as the 1850s, certainly from 1870. Around the turn of the century, Dewji's youngest son, Nasir, built the Ithnasheri Mosque below the great Omani



Above
The Khoja Ithnasheri Mosque on the Lamu waterfront.



Left
...with the name still clearly visible over the entrance.

Photos by Cynthia Salvadori.

Fort, on seafront land that was just being reclaimed. (One date given is 1890–91; another, perhaps more probable, is 1905). By 1897 there were about 300 Ithnasheris in Lamu and later, during the colonial era, as many as 350. By the 1980s there was not one! The Ithnasheris have handed the mosque over to the local community, but it still looks much as it did when it was built over a century ago — with its four quaint green spires it's the prettiest building on Lamu's famous waterfront. And the name Shia Ithna-Asheri Mosque-Lamu is still clearly visible over the entrance.

5 Riyadhha Mosque, Lamu

The Riyadhha Mosque's location outside the Stone Town reflects its unique history. Around 1850 a youth named Habib Swaleh from the Comoros Islands was sent by his



Riyadha Mosque, Lamu, with the house of Habib Swaleh in the foreground. Photo by Cynthia Salvadori.

family, who originated in the Hadramut in Yemen, to Lamu to live with his uncle, Habib Ali, who practised traditional medicine and was a successful religious teacher. From 1885 Habib Swaleh began to teach and dispense in his own right. He was greatly influenced by his fellow Hadrami, the poet and scholar Habib Ali al-Habshi, who encouraged music and chanting in the mosques, and dancing as a form of religious expression. This shocked Lamu’s conservative Muslim elders, who generally disapproved of Hadrami sharifs

and their tendencies towards Sufi mysticism, and eventually they expelled him from the town. He set up shop in a hut on the outskirts, and his school was so well supported that he was able to build a large teaching mosque, the ‘College of the Sacred Meadows’, *Ribat al-Riyadha*, which opened in 1901. In 1909 Habib Swaleh inaugurated Lamu’s present musical recitation of Maulidi prayers when verses composed by Habib Ali al-Habshi were first performed inside the Riyadhha Mosque to the accompaniment of tambourines and drums. Over the decades the celebration of Maulidi at the Riyadhha Mosque started attracting visitors from other towns, other countries, and now, exactly a century later, it is an internationally known religious festival. The old mud and wattle building where Habib Swaleh used to live, just in front of the mosque, is being kept as a museum.

6 Bohra Mosque, Mambrui

The Bohras (or Tayyibis) are a tightly-knit Shi’ite sect which came into being in 1132 when the child al-Tayyib, the 10th Fatimid caliph and the 21st Ismaili imam, disappeared. The Ismailis in Yemen, led by a woman, remained faithful to their vanished imam, saying he had gone into ‘indefinite seclusion’, and appointed a *Dai el-Mutlaq*, a Supreme Missionary, to rule in his absence. At that critical juncture, a Yemeni trader took home two orphan boys from Cambay; they became devout Tayyibis and subsequently returned as missionaries and began converting Hindus in their homeland. Over the centuries, because many of the Gujarati converts were artisans and traders (*vohras*), they became known as Bohras.

Enterprising Bohras followed the Sultan of Oman to Zanzibar and they soon spread all along the coast. The first Bohras settled in Lamu in the 1850s, then by the 1880s they were settling in Mombasa, with sizeable communities in Mambrui and Malindi, smaller ones at Takaungu and Vanga (and later, upcountry). Everywhere they built their own exclusive mosques, distinctive



The handsome doors of the Riyadhha Mosque, installed when the old mosque was rebuilt, were carved by Ali Swabu, originally from Siyu but who grew up and practised his skill in Lamu town. The elegant arched doorhead depicts the *shajraa*, the family tree of Habib Swaleh, tracing his descent, as all Sufi masters do, from the Prophet; each leaf bearing the name of an ancestor. Photo by Cynthia Salvadori.



The old Bohra Mosque in Mambui, still in use because Bohras from Malindi have been visiting it once a week to pray. Photo by Taibali Hamzali.



in that they always have a section for women. As Mambui declined in economic importance, the Bohras shifted to Malindi. There the Bohra population has grown to such an extent that their substantial mosque, built in 1928, was recently demolished and a more grandiose one built in its place. But every Thursday, Bohras from Malindi have been going to Mambui to pray, ensuring that the old Bohra Mosque there remains in use to this day.

(The grandest Bohra mosque in Kenya was built overlooking Mombasa's old dhow harbour in 1902 by A M Jeevanjee, the great entrepreneur who was responsible for so much of Kenya's early development. But Jeevanjee also became the leader of a Bohra reformist movement and so his beautiful, unique legacy was demolished in the early 1980s to be replaced by a replica of a 'politically correct' Bohra mosque in India.)

7 Seyyid Baghali's Tomb, Mackinnon Road

When railway workers died, the Hindus and Sikhs were cremated while the Muslims were buried in unmarked graves. However the hefty young Punjabi known as Seyyid Baghali (his real name was Seyyid Fateh

Shah) was an exception. He was so strong that people attributed miraculous actions to him — when he carried a basin of earth it did not rest on his head but floated effortlessly above it. Because he was a *seyyid* (a descendent of the family of Mohammed), which gave him moral authority, as well as being exceptionally strong, he was made a foreman. In 1902 he met his death at Mackinnon Road when the railway trolley on which he was riding veered out of control. He was buried by the track near the station and because he was a *seyyid* with miraculous powers a tomb was built to mark the spot. People travelling between Mombasa and Nairobi would halt to pay their

Seyyid Baghali's Tomb, Mackinnon Road. Photo from *Through Open Doors* by Cynthia Salvadori.



respects and pray for blessings; if they arrived safely at their destination, they believed it was because they had prayed at Seyyid Baghali's tomb. In the 1940s someone built an open-sided structure to protect the tomb, which then was expanded into a small prayer hall. A mosque was built beside it and eventually a whole rest-house complex was developed to accommodate travellers. To this day, Muslim-owned buses often stop at the Mackinnon Road Mosque — and trains slow down and blow their whistles as they pass.

built by two famous Mogul emperors, that of Shah Jehan at Delhi and that of Aurangzeb at Lahore. The municipal council objected that the minarets were too high so they were duly lowered — but it still was to be the tallest building in Nairobi for many decades. Work started in 1925 and became a remarkable collective effort, for although it was spearheaded by the Punjabi Muslims, by far the most numerous group of Muslims in Nairobi, everyone pitched in. The committee published a booklet which lists every contributor — their tribe, their profession and their donation, even if a single shilling or (from women) a bangle. One finds not only Sunnis and Shias (the Aga Khan was a major contributor), but also Hindus, Sikhs and Parsees. The mosque was completed in 1933 and it remained an outstandingly beautiful landmark until recently overwhelmed by modern skyscrapers.



Nairobi's splendid old Jamia Mosque, behind its relatively new entrance. Photo by Bernice Macharia, NMK.

8 The Jamia Mosque, Nairobi

The earliest mosques in Nairobi were simple iron sheet structures, the Railway Landhies Mosque in the railway quarters and then soon — it was in existence by 1904 — a more centrally located Jamia Mosque, near the bazaar. As the railhead became the colony's capital, the congregation soon overflowed the original Jamia Mosque, and in the early 1920s the Muslims decided to build a much grander one in its place. The plans were modelled on mosques

9 The Khoja Mosque, Nairobi

The Ismailis, popularly known as the followers of the Aga Khan, are a Shi'ite sect that traces its ancestry back through the Fatimid Empire in North Africa. But the Ismailis in Kenya are a special group known as Khoja Ismailis, a trading community originating from Lohana Hindu converts

The Ismaili Khoja Mosque in Nairobi. Photo from *Through Open Doors* by Cynthia Salvadori.



in Kathiawar, Cutch and Gujarat. Khoja Ismailis had begun settling in Zanzibar perhaps as early as the 16th century; by the 19th they had become one of the most numerous and most powerful of the Indian communities in the Sultan's realm. It was via Zanzibar that the first (known) Ismaili arrived in Kenya, a young Kathiawari named Waljee Hirjee who landed in Mombasa in 1867. Being a very tightly-knit community with distinctive religious rituals, the Ismailis have their own places of worship called *jamatkhana*s, community halls, rather than mosques. The first Kenyan *jamatkhana* was built in Mombasa in 1888, in the Kuze quarter then on the edge of Old Town. Then in 1903 another was constructed in Nairobi, at the edge of the bazaar. By 1914 there were 14 *jamatkhana*s in the East Africa Protectorate*, and the centre of gravity was shifting inland. In 1920–22 the Ismaili headquarters, the great grey stone Darkhana *Jamatkhana* was built in Nairobi to replace the original small one. The massive edifice immediately became one of the growing town's main landmarks — the famous Khoja Mosque.

10 Ahmadiyya Mosque, Nairobi Among the thousands of Punjabi Muslims who came to Kenya in the early days were several dozen who were known as Ahmadiyya, followers of a 19th century Punjabi reformist preacher called Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. They were typically well educated and enterprising, some coming to work for the Railway and the Administration, others in private capacities, as professionals and (a few) as merchants. These early pioneers were dedicated men who not only pursued their own careers but also worked as missionaries amongst their fellow Punjabis.

For many years the growing number of Ahmadis worshipped together with their fellow Muslims in whichever mosque was at hand, but in 1917 they formed a community



Ahmadiyya Mosque, Nairobi. Photo from *Through Open Doors* by Cynthia Salvadori.

association and in 1923 opened a fund to build their own mosque in Nairobi. Relying solely on contributions by east African Ahmadis, this took time, but in 1931 their elegant white mosque with its two minarets was opened on Fort Hall Road (now Murang'a Road). Ahmadiyya missionaries continued their work amongst the local peoples, and by the 1980s there were around 30 Ahmadiyya mosques in Kenya, ranging from simple mud buildings to substantial stone ones. But the first one, the lovely white mosque on Murang'a Road, remains their architectural jewel.

11 The Arab, Nubian and Swahili Mosques, Kisumu

At least a decade before the Railway reached the shores of Lake Victoria in 1901, there was a thriving international Muslim community living in an area known as Bandani.

The first Muslims to settle there were Barawas, traders from Barawa (Brava) on Somalia's Benadir Coast, along with

* The East Africa Protectorate became Kenya only in 1920.

Arab and Swahili traders from the Kenya-Tanzania coast. Then arrived a contingent of Nubian soldiers (with their families) from the Sudan, who came with the British army in the late 19th century after fighting in Uganda. The Nubians joined the existing Muslim community, but were later allocated land in Kibos, which became known as Nubian Village and where the Nubian language is still spoken. In 1905 their original Nur Mosque was replaced by the present building.

Towards the end of the first decade, an Arab named Yassin Abdul bought from the Barawas a house and a mosque, both made of mud and thatch, in what would later be called Manyatta Arab, the settlement scheme for the Arab community. In 1910 he rebuilt both structures in stone. The historic mosque is now unfortunately scheduled for demolition to make way for a larger modern one.

At the beginning of World War I the three communities were relocated from Bandani. The Swahili were given an area still known as Kaloleni, and the mosque they built there is still in use.

following their pastoralist customers — not only fellow Somalis but also Borana, Gabra, Rendille, even the far-to-the-west Turkana — who were always on the move. But when the British took over the area in the early 1900s and established their administrative posts, many Somali traders settled down to do business from shops. And whereas hitherto they had been content to face Mecca in whatever spot they found themselves at prayer time, now they began building mosques. In Wajir, the main post of the Northern Frontier Province, the heart of Kenyan Somali country, the original mosque was doubtless made of mud bricks and iron sheets, but as the little colonial post became a populous town, that mosque proved too small. So in 1948, a group of sheikhs from Somalia organised the building of a handsome permanent mosque, large enough to hold 150-200 faithful. It is situated in the heart of the old town, and although it is officially named the Noor Mosque (after the leader of the group of sheikhs), it is often called simply ‘The Old Mosque’, the oldest mosque in Wajir.



The Noor Mosque, Wajir seen from across the cemetery. Photo by Armando Ferrante.

12 The Noor Mosque, Wajir
 From the proverbial time immemorial, Somali traders with goods from the ports of the Benadir Coast loaded on their camels trekked their way west around the deserts of northern Kenya,

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgements go to Taibali Hamzali and Armando Ferrante for their generous assistance with photographs. And thanks to both Judy Aldrick in Kent and Yusuf Giansiracusa in Riyadh for their help with the text.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cynthia Salvadori is a Kenya-based historian and anthropologist who first wrote about some aspects of Islam in Kenya in her 1983 book *Through Open Doors, A View of Asian Cultures in Kenya*. Following one of those cultures in more detail she recently compiled *Settling in a strange land: Stories of Punjabi Muslim pioneers in Kenya*. She is currently staying in Lamu — what more perfect place to write about anything Islamic?



Is sustainable cultural tourism possible?

Angela W Kabiru
Earth Sciences Department
National Museums of Kenya

Lamu Old Town is a unique historical living heritage site on the Kenyan coast, with almost one thousand years of continuous occupation. In 2001, it was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Nearly a decade later, there is still no management or development plan for the island.

In the meantime there has been a rapid growth in the economy from tourism, increased investment in tourist facilities, a proposed expansion of the airstrip to cater for more visitors, growth in other sectors e.g. construction, an increase in property values, growing public awareness for conservation of culture and expansion of administrative offices. There are complaints of too many new investors, a sharp rise in the cost of property and shortage of space for expansion of existing and additional facilities. Increased demand by foreign investors is making property too expensive for Kenyans to buy. There are concerns that

Above
The waterfront at
Lamu Old Town.
Photo by Ebrahim
Mwangi, NMK.

if this is not checked, the town may end up in the hands of foreigners. To accommodate the increasing visitors, many buildings sport illegal extensions that do not conform to the Lamu architectural style that has given the town its identity. Lamu's fresh water supply comes from the sand dunes at Shela on the island's southern tip, but there is a danger that this area will be sold to private developers, possibly contaminating or stopping the supply altogether.

These observations indicate the dilemma that is faced by many heritage destinations — how to conserve them and retain their authenticity while developing them for tourism. A compromise must be reached, and measures put in place to regulate development while minimising the effects of development on the local population. A management plan is therefore essential, but it is only one of several measures that must be implemented for tourism to develop sustainably.

Sustainable tourism development

The World Commission on Environment and Development in the Brundtland Report (1987) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable tourism, according to the Federation of Nature and National Parks (FNNP, 1993) includes all forms of tourism development, management and activity that maintain the environmental, social and economic integrity and well-being of natural, built and cultural resources in perpetuity. Tourism Concern and the World Wide Fund for Nature define it as tourism which operates within natural capacities for the regeneration and future productivity of natural resources; recognises the contribution that people and communities, customs and lifestyles make to the tourism experience; accepts that these people must have an equitable share in the economic benefits of tourism; and is guided by the

wishes of local people and communities in the host areas (Tourism Concern & WWF, 1992).

Though these definitions usually differ in their focus or level of elaborateness, the main message of the Brundtland Report seems to be more and more accepted by the tourism industry all over the world. However, the notion of sustainability is a very complex one, with many ramifications (Mowforth & Munt, 1998) and several dimensions (Ko, 2001). These are:

- Political
- Economic
- Socio-cultural: Production structure, quality of services and products
- General environmental impacts
- Ecosystem quality
- Biodiversity of flora and fauna
- Environmental policy and management

The different aspects of sustainability do not compete, but must be seen as equally important. High level of economic profitability must not be considered a tool to cover the damage done to social or natural resources. Neither should the relatively fragile nature of these latter create a planning environment where economic considerations are not being taken into account. Sustainable tourism development has to be economically viable *and* naturally and culturally sensitive at the same time (Ratz and Puczko, 1998).

Inappropriate tourism development results in increasing stress on destinations and consequently in negative changes in the destinations' physical, economic and socio-cultural characteristics. In order to avoid or minimise unfavourable impacts, decision-makers must be aware of all the factors that play a role in the development process (Ko, 2001). In the measurement of the progress that an individual destination is making towards sustainable tourism development, indicators of sustainability are commonly accepted as one set of useful tools (WTO, 1996).

Lamu Old Town is characterised by narrow streets. Note the walkway above the street that joins two separate houses.



Indicators of sustainability

Indicators are defined as ‘*measures of the existence or severity of current issues, signals of upcoming situations or problems, measures of risk and potential need for action, and means to identify and measure the results of our actions. Indicators are information sets which are formally selected to be used on a regular basis to measure changes that are of importance for tourism development or management.*’ (UNWTO Guidebook, 2004).

Indicators depend on a destination’s attributes and their importance to tourists, and help managers to understand links between tourism-related activities and the continuing capacity of the environment to sustain them. The relative significance of these factors depends on their relevance to the development objectives of a given destination, and on their importance to tourists. Indicators reduce the risk of inadvertent damage to the resource base on which the industry depends, and so measure information with which decision-makers may reduce the chances of unknowingly taking poor decisions (WTO, 1996).

Indicators are also used to warn of areas of concern so that action can be taken in time. They are designed to encompass environmental factors and sensitivities, measures of human actions which stress the environment, measures of results of human impacts, and measures of the human and biological consequences of these impacts. This is because tourism relies heavily on the environment, and so is sensitive to the qualities of the natural and human environment. Aspects of the industry may degrade the very features which support its existence (IWGIST-WTO 1993).

The identification and measurement of indicators can identify specific cause and effect relationships between tourism and the environment (Bramwell, 1998). Effects and impacts resulting from tourism can be exhibited through indicators. The success of a destination can lead to its demise as tourist numbers and activities negatively affect the ecology and culture of areas they visit.



Visitor accommodation on Lamu Island.

Managers need to identify attributes that make a destination a success, and make valid and reliable indicators to measure impacts on its development (WTO 1996).

The International Working Group on Indicators of Sustainable Tourism to the Environmental Committee (WTO 1993) proposed the following factors to consider when proposing indicators — destination attractiveness, site stress, carrying capacity, the existence of an integrated area management strategy with tourism/ environmental components and the existence of a comprehensive environmental review process.

Following recommendations by the World Tourism Organisation (1996, 1993) the following are the selected indicators for the Lamu Old Town Heritage Site. Although it is described as urban, it has more differences than similarities to a modern town, and somewhat hangs between rural and urban. Indicators have therefore been selected from both rural and urban attractions in order to cover all areas.

1 Stress:

Number of tourists visiting the area per annum

The number of visitors to Lamu is not known because although its point of entry is the sea, most visitors get there from the

interior. No records are kept for visitors entering Lamu except those of hotels and lodging establishments. To compound the problem further, most hotels only have a record of bed nights as opposed to the number of visitors, and so it is impossible to estimate how many are housed in any one season. Attempts by the tourism office to acquire these statistics have not been very successful, and it may take several months to get correct figures. More accurate figures can however be obtained from entries in places such as the Lamu Museum.

2 Social impact:

Ratio of visitor/tourist numbers to local population per annum



Donkey racing along the Lamu waterfront.

Although the population of Lamu district is known (73,000), the social impact cannot be calculated if the number of visitors is not known. In addition, it needs

to be established if the whole population of Lamu should be used to calculate this impact, or only the small population that lives in the Old Town area.

3 Employment:

Number of local residents employed in the tourism industry

Reliable sources indicate that natives of Lamu do not take employment in the service industry (both bed and eating establishments) and that most of those employed are Giriama from the mainland. Furthermore, establishments are rather unwilling to state exactly how many people they employ, both permanent and casual. It therefore cannot be said exactly how many jobs are generated by the tourism industry, except perhaps by the number of people operating boats that ferry visitors to and

from Mukowe on the mainland. However it is not only visitors that use this means of transport, there being no other way to connect to the mainland.

4 Economic contribution:

Proportion of total tax income generated by tourism as a percentage of local GDP

Although most of the locals agree that tourism has brought in extra income, it is not easy to quantify the income generated by tourism. As tourism seems to be the main income-generating activity, the proportion of total tax income generated by tourism may be close to the total GDP. This indicates an over-reliance on tourism, which may prove disastrous should the industry collapse. There is a lack of other income-generating activities. It also seems that most of the best hotels are owned by foreigners, indicating a high level of leakage since the income does not go to indigenous Lamu residents.

5 Crime levels:

Number and types of crime reported

Few cases of crime are reported, mainly because Lamu is a closely knit community with values based on Islam. It is safe to walk at night. It is however reported that instances of drug use have increased, but whether these have any effect on the crime statistics has not been established. Statistics on number and type of crimes can be obtained from the local police station.

6 Attractiveness:

Attractions and accessibility

Historically, all attractions along the coast have been marketed as beach destinations, and heritage/culture was not a priority until the town was declared a World Heritage Site. Similarly neglected are the other attractions on the neighbouring islands, such as the wildlife on Manda Island. Heritage attractions are still not well developed, especially considering Lamu's very long history. The sale of local crafts would

generate a bit of income for the local residents, but very few shops engage in this kind of trade — most goods on sale are imported from the mainland. The National Museum is partly to blame for not doing enough to stimulate this kind of trade. Because one of the main attractions on the island is the Lamu Museum, their shop should display a wide



Close-up detail from one of Lamu's famous carved doors.

variety of products that can be bought in the town. Instead, the museum shop is a dark, dusty, almost empty room that does not have anything interesting to buy. The postcard racks are empty, the t-shirts dusty and not properly displayed, the sandals obviously very old, and generally there is a lack of initiative on the part of the staff manning the shop and of the management to improve the image of the establishment. Some of the displays inside the museum also lack suitable labelling in English, obviously ignoring the fact that few tourists understand Kiswahili. Generally, however, the exhibits are well displayed and in good condition.

What needs to be done is to include activities that the public can participate in especially during the very busy tourist seasons, such as *kofia* (cap) embroidery for men and henna painting for women. These, together with dhow tours and fishing, would bring in some added income and keep young people gainfully employed. Residents should also be encouraged to consider home stays for visitors, as this adds to the authenticity of the whole experience. Since it is cheaper than staying in hotels, visitors could stay for longer periods of time.

Lamu Fort is also one large empty building, dirty and unkempt, with little to see. There is no literature on the history of either the island or the fort, and only a

few dusty photographs on the upper floor to attract the visitor. Although some of the rooms are being used as offices, most of the space is going to waste, and it should be considered to use some of it for commercial purposes if only to raise money for the general upkeep of the historic building.

Accessibility to Lamu is not very good as there are few scheduled buses daily, and the air fare from Mombasa or Malindi is relatively high. There is a proposal to upgrade the airstrip on neighbouring Manda Island to accommodate more flights, but entry onto Lamu itself is still only by boat. Reliable sources say that there was a proposal to build a bridge connecting with the mainland but this was resisted by boat operators, who said they would be rendered jobless.

The Kenya Ports Authority offered to build a recreation centre, berths and a hotel on land reclaimed from the sea, but several parties claimed ownership of the land (including the County Council), with the sole purpose of subdividing it and selling it to investors. Entertainment facilities are confined to commercial establishments, and more needs to be done to get visitors from Shela to spend more time on other parts of the island.

Henna painting on the hands and feet is a traditional Swahili practice that could earn extra revenue from tourists. Photo by Vasant Dave.





Dhow racing during the Lamu cultural festival.

Public facilities such as toilets also need to be built.

**7 Planning process:
Economic impact study and management strategy**

This is needed to help in the planning process and address important issues such as housing, transportation, the economy and the environment. There is as yet no management plan in place.

8 Pollution

There are few vehicles on the island, so the pollution from vehicle emissions is negligible. The power station is very noisy, but when it was proposed to move the station to the mainland, the locals would hear nothing of it. More disturbing is the litter on the streets, most of which ends up in the sea and is exposed when the tide is out. The open drainage to the sea does nothing to improve the image of the town, and when it rains, the outlets from the flat roofs drain directly over pedestrians' heads onto the streets. There are insufficient litter bins so people throw litter everywhere, and the narrow streets are always covered in rubbish and donkey droppings. There is an urgent need to educate residents to dispose of rubbish in the right places as all rubbish washes out to sea when it rains. The County Council needs to collect rubbish more often to make the seafront more presentable.

**9 Tourist satisfaction:
Overall satisfaction of tourists concerning the quality and the value/price ratio of the complex tourist product**

No such survey has been carried out as yet, but one is being planned. Statistics include percentage/change of repeat visits compared with first-time visits. Most foreign tourists recorded are repeat visitors from America and Britain.

**10 Local satisfaction:
Overall perception of tourism's impact on the local community**

Since no study has been done so far it cannot be established what the locals' perception of tourism is. Many of them think it is a good thing as long as the money comes in, but their awareness of negative impacts needs to be established.

11 Perceptions of main stakeholders

This kind of survey has not been done yet, and the full list of stakeholders has yet to be identified. Their perceptions are important because they make important decisions concerning Lamu's development and management.

Recommendations

Sustainable development requires coordination of all economic activities to enhance the quality of life of the local community and safeguard the natural environment. As a subsector of economic activities, the tourism industry should monitor its contribution to sustainable development. Standards are needed to measure the progress towards (or regression from) sustainable tourism development, as no assessment of progress can be made unless a measuring point is provided (Ko 2005).

The UNWTO (2004) recommends that where no plan exists, as in the case of Lamu, the procedure by which indicators

are developed should be the first step in plan development. This involves the identification of the key assets and key values associated with the destination, the assessment of the actual problems, current or potential impacts or risks associated with development, as well as documentation of the major current or expected trends or events which these may affect. An indicators study can be the catalyst for development of a formal plan or planning process, which begins with identification of potential issues (pollution, loss of access, impacts of development in other sectors). This exercise can help identify key elements that must be included in plans, such as the resource base for the industry, or risks to the assets or product. Performance indicators can be defined relative to the specific goals and targets of the plan. Each specific development project can integrate performance indicators in order to measure the success of management actions in the implementation phase. This information will serve to decide whether corrective actions are needed and also can provide a tool for continuous monitoring.

Used properly, indicators can become key management tools — performance measures which supply essential information to both the managers and all the stakeholders in tourism. Good indicators can provide in-time information to deal with pressing issues and to help guide the sustainable development of a destination. Only if these indicators are taken into consideration does

the destination develop sustainably, and a lot of effort is needed in the case of Lamu to develop it into a competitive destination of the 21st century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO THE LAMU TOURIST OFFICE AND IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT FOR PROVIDING SOME OF THE INFORMATION USED IN THIS ARTICLE

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

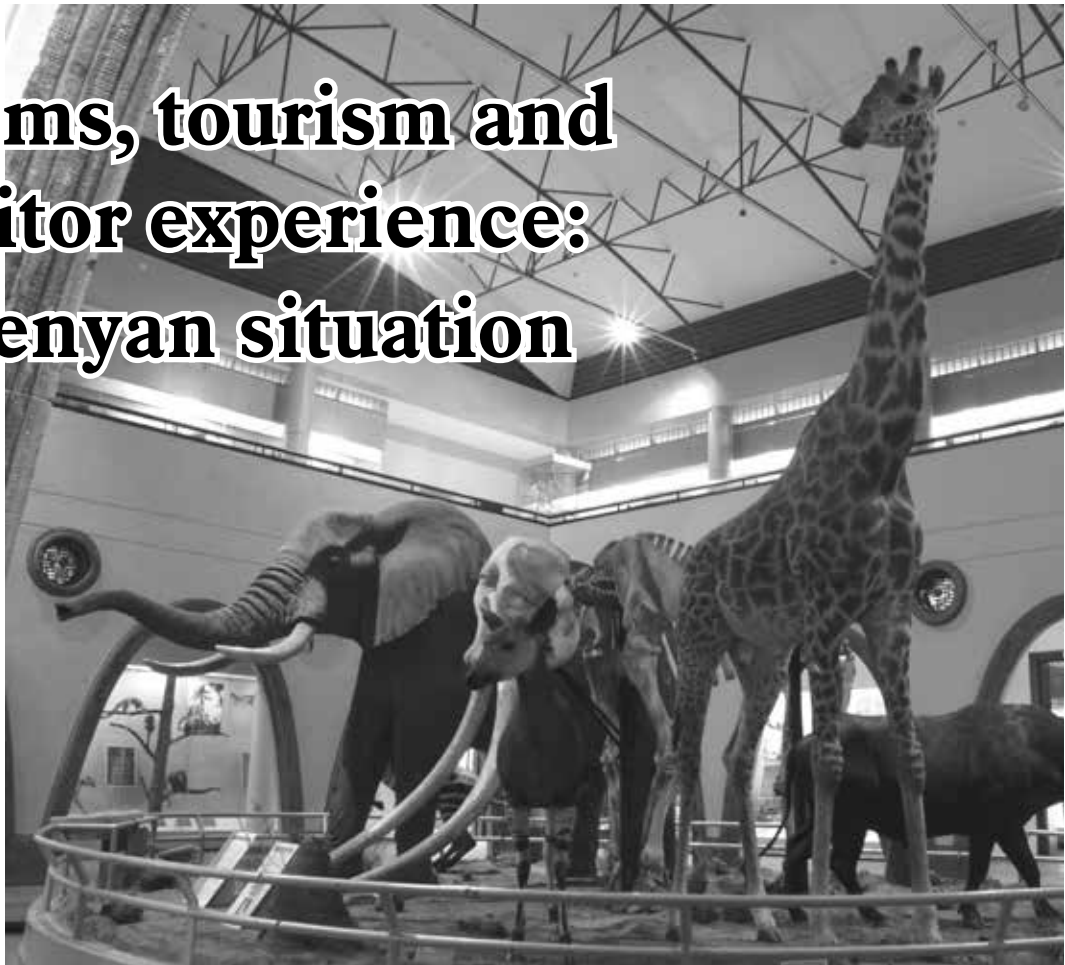
References

- Ko, T G. (2001). Assessing progress of tourism sustainability. *Annals of tourism research*, Vol. 28 (3), pp. 817-820.
- Ko, T G. (2005). Development of a tourism sustainability assessment procedure: a conceptual; approach. *Tourism management* Vol. 26 (3), pp. 431-445.
- Mowforth, M and I Munt (1998). *Tourism and sustainability: New tourism in the third world*. London & New York, Routledge.
- Ratz, T and L Puczko (1998). Rural tourism and sustainable development. Paper presented in the Rural tourism management: Sustainable options international conference, September 1998, SAC, Auchincruive, Scotland. www.ratztamara.com/rural.pdf. Accessed 05/05/06.
- Tourism Concern –WWF (1992) Sustainability in Tourism*. www.tourismconcern.org.uk/resources/research-papers.htm. Accessed 05/05/06.
- World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- World Tourism Organisation- International working group on indicators of sustainable management (1993). *Indicators for the Sustainable Management of Tourism*. Winnipeg, World Tourism Organisation.
- WTO (1996). *What Tourism Managers need to know*. A practical guide to the development and use of indicators of sustainable development. Ottawa, Consulting and Audit Canada.
- UNWTO Guidebook* (2004). World Tourism Organization. www.world-tourism.org. Accessed 08/05/06.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela Kabiru is a Research Scientist in the Department of Earth Sciences, Archaeology Section, at the National Museums of Kenya. She has a BA in Archaeology and an MSc in Tourism Management, so her interests are both archaeology and tourism. She would like to see Kenya better develop its cultural heritage for tourism, having seen how the traditional focus on beaches and wildlife has led to the neglect of other attractions. Her other research interests include African prehistory, notably prehistoric beads.

Museums, tourism and the visitor experience: The Kenyan situation



The Great Hall of Mammals in Nairobi Museum.

Ochieng' Nyamanga,
Cultural Heritage Department,
National Museums of Kenya

Museums hold important heritage treasures that local and international visitors value for education, entertainment and research. Though museums existed long before the Christian era (Alexandria Museum in Egypt being the oldest known), museologists believe that modern museums originated in Europe from the 17th century (Kikuchi 2000; Wittlin 1977).

From the very early days museums served a special class of visitors — the highly educated, elite members of society. Due to modern changes, museums now serve a diverse clientele as measured by their age, sex, education and socio-economic background. The elite, with their special needs of showcasing class, prioritised on the exhibition of high culture and the curiosities of their time, and the masses were invariably excluded from enjoying these treasures.

A ceremonial siwa (ivory) horn from Lamu.



Museums in the developing world, in turn, tended to focus on nationalism (the portrayal of nationhood by integrating the diverse ethno-cultural groups) and the harnessing of national resources for development. The changes wrought by modernisation and globalisation continue to produce characteristic changes in the demands and needs of museum visitors of the 21st century, further challenging traditional museum functions and missions. The opening up of museums to all and sundry tremendously increased museum visitation, and the rising visitor numbers against the dwindling economies have strained the service levels of the visitor attractions with resultant mixed experiences.

Taking a glimpse at the tourism challenges Kenyan museums face and the management strategies that have been put in place to address them, this paper highlights the needs of visitors, and how museum exhibits/attractions have been tailored to their satisfaction.

have an educationally rewarding and socially gratifying experience, museums need to be more committed to their fruitful realisation as espoused in their vision and mission statements. Beeho and Prentice (1995) assert that a museum’s failure to deliver appropriate expectations and benefits to visitors could lead to its commercial failure in the increasingly competitive market.

This article raises more questions than answers as it seeks to stimulate a critical look at the museum, its visitors and their experiences, besides providing the reader with a bibliography of references for further consultation.

Museums must have suitable management policies to guide their operations and activities (research, conservation, education, exhibition and facilities), their marketing services and their staff (researchers, curators, guides, security, etc), with the ultimate goal of satisfying their diverse visitors (Fig.1 below).



Fig. 1:
Framework for
museum quality
service

The museum visitors’ expectation is to get maximum satisfaction for their leisure and education vis-à-vis the cost of their visitation in terms of money and time. The visitation experience could be gratifying or disappointing depending on the facilities and services provided. The level of visitor satisfaction can be measured by the comments they leave in the visitor books and suggestion boxes and by the level of visitation in terms of numbers and repeat visits. For the diverse museum clientele to

The balance between heritage conservation and tourism consumption has remained a crucial concern for scholars, heritage managers and owners (see, for example, Fyall & Rakic 2006; Robinson *et al.* 2000; Timothy 1997). The impact museum visitors have must be checked against their own expectations and that of the museum administration. A variety of approaches could be used to gauge visitor perception and experience (Beeho & Prentice 1995; Johns & Clark 1993; Manneby *et al.* 2002;

Table 1: Desired places to visit in Kenya

Museum	Parks	Natural Features	Lakes/Beaches	Arts	Forests	Monuments	Others
27	27	2	4	1	-	-	-
17	18	4	6	6	3	2	7
17	21	3	3	6	4	-	3
12	7	11	3	1	2	1	8
73	73	20	16	14	9	3	18

Source: Njuguna 2003

Seagram *et al.* 1993) and focus primarily on ‘museum products’ at six phases of the museum visit: pre-visit; arrival, entry, visit, exit and follow up (Johns & Clark 1993). Cunnel and Prentice (2000) provide substantial review of the various approaches to quality service evaluations, their strengths and weaknesses.

**Tourist attractions in Kenya:
Where museums stand**

Kenya is a country endowed with abundant natural and cultural attractions that for more than a century have made the country a popular tourist destination — the country boasts of visitor arrivals increasing from 1.6 million in 2006 to 1.8 million in 2007 with an attractive revenue of KSh 65.4 billion in the latter year up from KSh 56.2 billion in 2006 (GoK 2008; Otieno 2008). While a great majority of the tourists visit national parks and beach attractions, accounting for nearly 70% of arrivals, the rest are interested in cultural heritage, so they visit museums (largely based in towns) for a quick glimpse of the nation’s heritage, as well as villages to

interact with ordinary Kenyans in their rural settings and visit their monuments.

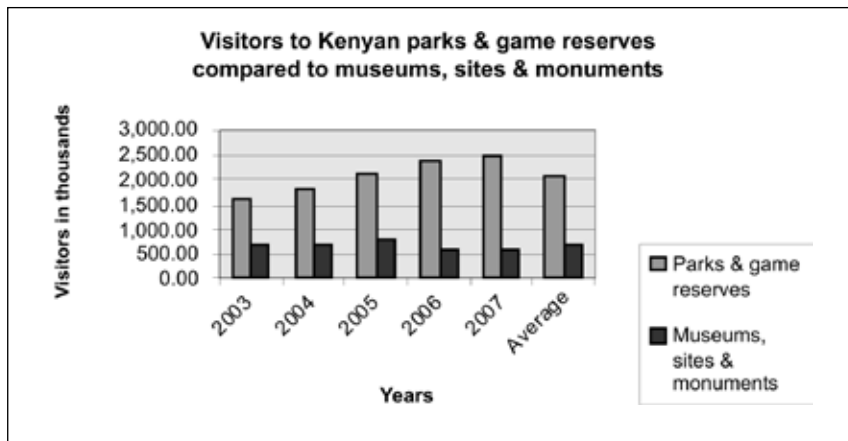
Which are the most popular natural and cultural attractions in the country? Where do the museums fall in the ranking of tourist attractions in Kenya? How large is the visitor number and revenue? Table 1 summarises the ranking of tourist attractions in Kenya, based on Njuguna’s interview with museum visitors in 2003.

However, the national statistics could give more accurate data on visitation as a useful guide for ranking the attractions. Of the over 800,000 visitors to Kenya annually in the mid 1990s, only a small percentage visited the museums, sites and monuments (NMK 1995); a continuing trend as Fig 2 reveals (see GoK 2008).

Kenya has a unitary museum system under the management of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), a statutory body mandated with the conservation and interpretation of the country’s natural and cultural heritage. There are close to 30 museums and sites accessible to the public (NMK 1995; Nyamanga 2003). The museums in Kenya trace their origins

to 1910, when natural history enthusiasts founded a small museum near Jevanjee Gardens opposite the Nairobi Central Police Station (Maikweki 1979; Njagi 1996). As the rented room was soon too small, the search for space saw the museum move to a larger building constructed in 1922 along

Fig. 2: Visitors to Kenyan museums, sites and monuments



Nyerere Road, near the present-day Serena Hotel and YWCA, before the government provided the land adjoining Nairobi River (overlooking Hotel Boulevard).

As public institutions, museums serve general audiences as well as specialist groups. People visiting museums range widely in age, sex, level of education, occupation and ethnic background as well as ideological (politico-economic and religious) affiliation. The young and old, educated and uneducated, male and female have made museum visitation one of the avenues of using their available leisure time. School and college visitors drift into the museum both during their normal school sessions and during the holidays. Museum visitors normally have wide-ranging expectations that the museum must fulfil in order to continue attracting their diverse visitors.

Since the museum must endeavour to satisfy the various needs of this visitor diversity, it calls for improvement of exhibitions, guiding services, interactive programmes, security and other essential public facilities (toilets, visitor centres and restrooms, gift-shops and cafeteria among others).

This paper highlights the services and facilities available to museum visitors in

Kenya and asks whether they meet the visitor needs for a gainful experience. For this purpose, we take a look at the two most well-known Kenyan museums, Nairobi and Fort Jesus, both of which are located in urban centres (as are most museums of the world) — Nairobi Museum in the capital city and Fort Jesus in Mombasa.

Museum exhibitions in Kenya: Nairobi and Fort Jesus

Nairobi National Museum

Nairobi hosts the headquarters of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). Dating from 1929 when modern facilities were developed at the new site on Museum Hill, Nairobi National Museum was until December 1964 known as the Coryndon Memorial Museum, in honour of Sir Robert Coryndon, the colonial Governor who contributed immensely towards its establishment (NMK 1995; Lenga & Thitai 1989). The museum, whose background rests with the East African Natural History Society (now Nature Kenya), developed a multidisciplinary approach.

Together with permanent exhibitions, Nairobi Museum houses the Snake Park, a nature trail and a botanic garden with



The newly-refurbished Cradle of Humankind gallery in the Nairobi Museum.

indigenous plants. Built in 1961, the Snake Park displays live snakes, lizards, crocodiles, tortoises and fish. Nairobi Museum houses such exhibition galleries as Geology/Nature, Space, Mammals, Ethnology, Prehistory, Birds, Marine, Asian-African, Lamu, etc, to capture both the natural and cultural riches of the nation.

Table 2: Most interesting exhibition in Nairobi Museum

GALLERY/EXHIBITION	N1	%	N2	%
Asian-African Heritage	4	4.9	29	15
Art	7	8.5	13	7
<i>Fadhili Williams</i> (temporary exhibit)	4	4.9	-	-
Marine	4	4.9	16	8
Birds	24	29.3	27	14
Snake Park/Reptiles	5	6.1	3	2
Prehistory	16	19.5	52	26
Mammals	7	8.5	26	13
Ethnography	5	6.1	7	4
Geology	2	2.4	9	5
Space	2	2.4	3	2
Lamu	-	-	1	1
None	-	-	4	2
Total	82	100	200	100

Source: Njuguna 2003 (N1), Kikuchi 2000 (N2)

Whether permanent or temporary, exhibitions should facilitate visitor education, inspiration and enjoyment. Visitor satisfaction depends on properly designed and mounted exhibitions that are interesting, interactive and informative. The mounted exhibitions require an adequately lit environment as well as clear and audible audio-visual displays. While these exhibitions were developed to satisfy a diverse clientele, most displays remained stagnant and unchanged for many years until recently when the museum underwent a one-year renovation, expanding its space and upgrading exhibits and other visitor facilities (parking area, customer care centre, cafeteria, public toilets, sitting spaces etc).

What is the state of museum exhibitions today and how do they bolster or lower the visitor experience? Kikuchi (2000), Maikweki (1979), Njagi (1996), and Njuguna (2003) capture some of the views regarding museum visitation and visitor

experiences in the old museum that are vital for this essay as a background assessment for the new museum with 13 galleries, whose first tier of exhibitions include four permanent exhibitions: The Hall of Kenya, The Great Hall of Mammals, The Cradle of Humankind and The Cycles of Life and temporary exhibitions such as Rock Art (KMS 2008), have elicited highly mixed reactions from the visitors. Most of the visitors to Nairobi Museum surveyed by the above researchers rated the museum favourably, holding that they 'enjoyed and would come again', a comment that Hudson (1980), considers an important mark of a good museum.

Of the 200 persons interviewed by Kikuchi (2000), 86% said they would revisit the museum, while 28% said they would not. In Maikweki's (1979) study whereby 245 visitors were interviewed, 83% said they enjoyed the visit and would come back, 69% said they learned from the visit, 7% were not impressed and 3% did not know (rather, were unsure of or could not express their experiences). Apart from such comments as 'very good', 'impressed', 'pleasant', 'keep it up', museum visitors also indicated certain areas that required improvement such as using vernacular languages in captions to identify specimens, improving tour facilities and toilets, improving ventilation, reducing entry charges, among others. Thus, 229 of Maikweki's informants suggested need for provision of refreshments (88), seats (56), toilets (50), guidebooks (20) and signposts (15).

Surveys on visitor experiences have rested on the comments about the quality of services and such questions as 'Which exhibition did you like or find most interesting?' or 'Which one was least interesting?' Table 2 highlights two research findings, which depict birds and prehistory as the most interesting exhibits in Nairobi Museum, perhaps a reminder of the museum's natural history background and its emphasis on human development.



Fort Jesus Museum, Mombasa, is built inside the walls of the 16th century Portuguese fortress.

Fort Jesus Museum

Fort Jesus Museum is situated in Mombasa old town, a gazetted conservation area on the eastern side of Mombasa Island. Built and opened to the public in 1960, Fort Jesus Museum was established in the late 16th century Portuguese fortress. The permanent exhibitions within Fort Jesus include Mombasa Shipwreck, Coastal Sites of Kenya, Mijikenda, Portuguese Wall Paintings, Omani Arabs, Armoury and Transport.

According to a recent study (Imasiku 2005), these exhibitions are not interactive enough and have unduly neglected the fort's history and significance. The coastal sites take about 60% of the exhibition space in the main gallery. Perhaps this is because Fort Jesus is the headquarters of the coastal museums and also because of its close link with archaeology. Moreover, according to Imasiku (2005), the general layout, the labels and texts as well as signage for these exhibitions do not suffice in achieving one of the core aims of the NMK — to educate the public on heritage and its importance. The exhibitions have too much text, labels are imprecise, showcases have too many

potsherds and objects from other coastal sites have been mixed with those related to the history of Fort Jesus. The Mijikenda exhibition in the main gallery and the Gede model at its entrance do not directly relate to the history of the fort, yet they take up much space. There are no guidebooks or leaflets to give visitors orientation on how to approach the exhibits. Apart from a brochure on the history of the site, details of the exhibitions are left to be explained by captions and freelance tour guides. As the tour guides are neither trained in interpreting museum exhibitions nor employed by the NMK, they are likely to pass inaccurate information to the visitors as they owe no ethical obligation to the museum other than being their source of livelihood. While Imasiku thinks that the museum exhibitions in their current form do not encourage return visits or frequent visitor use, it is interesting to know that Fort Jesus remains the most highly visited monument in the country. Hudson (1980) observes that an enormous number of visitors, especially foreign tourists and school parties, is no guarantee of a museum's quality. If Imasiku's observations are correct,

many people could be visiting Fort Jesus for the monument's sake and not the quality of its exhibits.

Visitor management challenges

Museum services and programmes influence the degree and frequency of their use by visitors of diverse expectations. The museum visitor needs a rewarding experience, gained by contact with the museum staff, exhibitions and the general museum settings, including visitor facilities. Experience is understood as what one goes through at a particular time in a given circumstance based on one's expectations. Museum visitor experience could be positive or negative, based on the museum meeting or failing to meet such expectations. The basic experience measured in terms of the museum's ability to educate and entertain its visitors, should be rewarding and not disappointing. As highlighted above, most of the visitors to the Nairobi Museum have had beneficial experiences and would be willing to return some time later.

Visitor numbers, the museum staff and the services they offer to the public are all important components that ideally contribute to the measure of visitor experience. Increased visitor numbers not only strain the available resources and facilities but also overwhelm staff resources as the latter become overworked and less enthusiastic. They also degrade the museum environment by their breath, sweat, abrasion and litter, not to mention the dust and germs carried in on their garments and the graffiti some of them are known to write on the walls, trees, and exhibition panels. Additionally, the security situation can get out of hand and so can the noise, especially from school groups.

What this means is that as an attraction becomes increasingly more popular, its management demands must be adjusted to keep pace with the attendant challenges. One of these is visitor management, largely geared towards regulating their impact on the attraction. As Mason and Kuo (2006)

remark, managing visitors is one of the important ways of attempting to control the impacts of tourism, particularly to reduce negative impacts. Visitor control mechanisms employed elsewhere in the world have included: diversion from highly visited centres, hardening or resurfacing paths, and modifying visitor behaviour through education and interpretation (Beeho & Prentice 1995; Hall & McArthur 1996; Mason 2003; Kuo 2002), as well as increasing entry charges, limitation on visitor numbers, reducing visiting time and prior booking arrangements to check over-visitation (Norwich 1991). Language use and approach are important ingredients in realising good experience for the museum visitors; as Koliou (1976) says 'providing a warm welcome in different languages at the museum entrance can win over visitors.' How have these approaches been used in Kenya? Have these mechanisms enhanced visitor experience or minimised it?

Officially labelled 'a place of discovery in research, education and entertainment' (KMS 2008), Nairobi Museum now 'offers greatly enhanced flexibility for viewing, studying and interacting with the collections while providing dynamic museum experiences for our visitors and establishing an innovative new model for object based learning' (NMK 2008) and the 'welcoming ambience of harmony between the landscape and the entire museum makes a visit to the Nairobi National Museum a very enjoyable experience' (ibid. p. 5). A critical assessment of the renovated museum from the visitors' perspective gives a rather ambivalent situation as captured in Table 3 and Fig. 3 on the next page. As in previous studies, most museum visitors rated Nairobi Museum favourably.

Conclusion

Museums depend on tourism for the sustainability of their revenue, to justify their existence as essential institutions in service to society and as avenues for education, leisure and development. Not

Table 3: Visitors’ comments on the renovated Nairobi Museum

Comment	Key Concepts	Number	%	Notes
Positive	Impressive, good, excellent, delightful, informative, clean, educative, happy, fantastic, colourful, very interesting, marvellous, very nice, classic, lovely, wonderful, fancy, well done, exciting, enjoyable, better, lively, fascinating, fabulous, appealing, enthralling, exceptional, splendid, very beautiful, unforgettable, hilarious, super, great, stunning, amazing, phenomenal, etc.	299	52	A majority viewed the new museum favourably but also highlighted certain shortcomings that need timely rectification. These beautiful-sounding positive remarks should not lead to a neglect of the negative, suggestive and corrective sentiments.
Negative	Bad, dirty, disgusting, expensive, waste of time, nothing changed, no guides, previous exhibits missing, some areas lack access, dislike, pathetic, great disappointment, shoddy display, out of fashion, outdated, smelly, blank walls, below expectation.	82	14	Although appearing small in proportion, the negative views are so strong that they must not be neglected. They curtail the experience levels and give the museum an unfavourable look in the visitors’ eyes.
Suggestive	You’ve tried, it’s improved, everything changed, keep up, step up, do better, look forward to seeing. We’ll come again, need guides, need more, bring back ... etc.	151	26	Several visitors felt there was need to make amendments ranging from entrance charges to display captions, and reintroduction of former exhibits, among others.
Corrective	You should change ... , modernise, do better, charge once, take to, show ... in motion, make look ... etc.	37	6	Misspelt words, letters, names, uses, sound, lighting etc.
Undecipherable or irrelevant		10	2	Languages used were not immediately understood by the researcher.
TOTAL	All	579	100	All

Source: Nairobi Museum visitors book

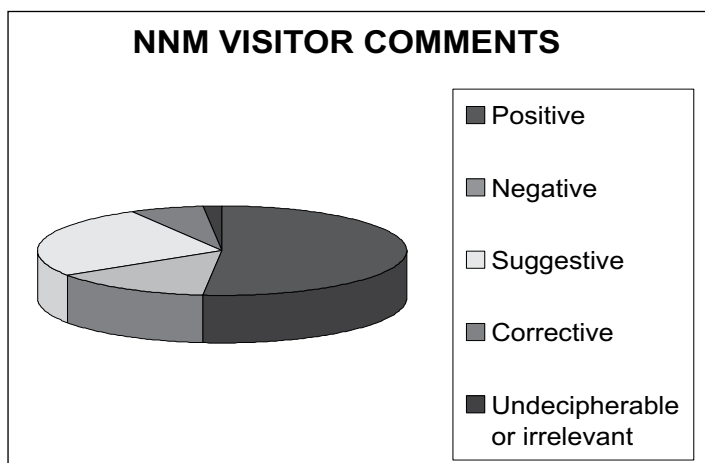
only does tourism provide revenue, it allows for gaining of respect for humanity across the globe through travel and contacts provided at/by attractions. Yet tourism has gravely affected the attractions upon which it is so dependent, making it necessary to put in place certain management systems in various visitor institutions in the world. Such controls have targeted the visitor in an attempt to satisfy his or her needs and therefore impart a rewarding experience, the visitor experience being a museum’s core product (Cunneil & Prentice 2000).

The National Museums of Kenya undertook an upgrading mission through the completed renovations and introduced certain security measures to satisfy the visitors’ needs and expectations and prevent them from harming the treasures. There are now new or redesigned exhibitions with audiovisual supplementation accessed through TV screens, more sitting and parking spaces and a modern cafeteria, among other basic needs of museum visitation. These measures are in no way unique as they

have been used elsewhere. However, the effectiveness of these measures needs to be established, by periodic assessment of the opinions of both the management and the visitors.

The big question remains, how has the new look museum sought to boost visitor satisfaction for a gainful experience? Can the visitor now more than before, locate himself or herself easily within the museum? Is the

Fig 3: Visitor comments by percentage



visitor able to find the giftshop, the toilets and enjoy the museum visit? Are the gallery attendants, ticket clerks, giftshop attendants and museum security guards pleasant to the visitor? If so, then visitor experience would be more rewarding and the museum would be assured of improved visitation, good reputation and good revenue. Table 3 highlights some crucial views of the museum visitors and is a useful guide that the NMK could use to evaluate its services.

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY BERNICE MACHARIA,
AUDIO-VISUAL DEPARTMENT, NMK**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ochieng' Nyamanga has an MA in Anthropology and is a research scientist in the Cultural Heritage Department of the National Museums of Kenya. He first joined NMK in 1998 as an assistant research scientist based at the Coastal Archaeology unit in Fort Jesus Museum. In 2004 he was transferred to the Sites and Monuments Department in Nairobi. He later moved to the Cultural Heritage Department where he was promoted to research scientist after completing his masters degree. Nyamanga is interested in culture, heritage conservation and management, community history and development, religion and environmental education.

Bibliography

- Abungu, G H O. 2000. Opening new frontiers: Museums of the 21st Century. In *Museum 2000: Continuities and challenge*, pp. 37-43. Stockholm: Swedish travelling exhibitions, ICOM Sweden and the Swedish Museum Association.
- _____. 2002. The African museums: Defining new roles. In *Guidelines to improve museum quality and standards*. Proceedings of an international committee for regional museums (ICR) project 1999-2002.
- Manneby, H, H Prasch and R Hofmann (Eds), pp. 56-61. Sweden: ICOM.
- Beeho, A J and R C Prentice. 1995. Evaluating the experiences and benefits gained by tourists visiting a socio-industrial heritage museum: An application of ASEB grid analysis to Blist Hill Open-Air Museum, the Ironbridge George Museum, United Kingdom. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 14 (3): 229-251.
- Booth, B. 1998. Understanding the information needs of visitors to museums. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 17 (2): 139- 157.
- Cunneil, D and R Prentice 2000. Tourists' recollections of quality in museums: A service scape without people? *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 18 (4): 369-390.
- Erdos, A. 1976. A bold new architecture in the historical site of the Vatican: Three museums cope with tourism. *Museum*, XXVIII (2).
- de Varine-Bohan, H. 1976. The modern museum: Requirements and problems of a new approach. *Museum*, XXVIII (2): 131-143.
- Falk, J H. 1992. *The museum experience*. Washington, D C. Whalesback Books.
- Ferguson-Cameron, D. 1995. The pilgrim and the shrine, the icon and the oracle: A perspective on museology for tomorrow. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 14 (1): 47-55.
- Fyall, A and T Rakic 2006. The future market for World Heritage Sites. In *Managing World Heritage Sites*. Leask, A and A Fyall (Eds), pp. 159-75. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Ginsburgh, V and F Mairesee. 1997. Defining a museum: Suggestions from alternative approach. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 16 (1): 15-33.
- GoK 2008. *Economic Survey 2008*. Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.
- Hall, C M and S McArthur (Eds) 1996. Visitor management: Principles and practice. In *Heritage management in Australia and New Zealand*, pp. 37-54. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Hudson, K. 1975. *A social history of museums: What visitors thought*. London: The Macmillan Press.
- _____. 1980. *The good museums guide: The best museums and galleries in the British Isles*. Oxford: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Imasiku, A C. 2005. *Museum exhibitions as educational tools: Case study of Fort Jesus Museum, Mombasa, Kenya*. PGD, University of Nairobi.

- Johns, N and S L Clark. 1993. Customer perception auditing: A means of monitoring the service provided by museums and galleries. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 12 (4): 360-366.
- Kikuchi, Y. 2000. *Analysis of the gallery services at Nairobi Museum*. Nairobi: NMK/JIKA.
- _____. 2002. Museums. In *The 1st Gallery Service Training Course. Nairobi Museum, 23rd & 24th July 2002*. Nairobi: Education Department, NMK.
- KMS 2008. *Tracker*, June 2008. Nairobi: KMS, pp. 10-12.
- Koliou, A. 1997. Foreign languages and their role in access to museums. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 16 (1): 45-70.
- Kotler, N and P Kotler 2000. Can museums be all things to all people?: Missions, goals and marketing's role. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 18 (3): 271-293.
- Kuo, I-L. 2002. The effectiveness of environmental interpretation at resource-sensitive tourism destinations. *International journal of tourism research*, 4(2): 87-101.
- Lenga, F K and G N W Thitai. 1989. *A review of the status of research activities at the National Museums of Kenya*. Nairobi: National Council for Science and Technology.
- Lennon, J J and M Graham. 2001. Prognostication of Scottish culture and heritage sectors skills profile. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 19 (2): 121-139.
- MacDonald, S. 1992. Cultural imagining among museum visitors: A case report. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 11 (4): 401-410.
- MacGregor, N. 1990. Scholarship and the public. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 9 (4): 361-366.
- Maikweki, J N. 1979. *A study of museum visitors and their reactions to exhibits*. Dip. thesis, University of Nairobi.
- Mason, P. 2003. *Tourism impacts, planning and management*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Mason, P and I-L Kuo. 2006. Visitor management at Stonehenge, UK. In *managing world heritage sites*. Leask, A and A Fyall (Eds), pp. 181-194. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- McManus, P M. 1993. Memories as indicators of the impact of museum visits. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 12 (4): 367-380.
- Mirara, F K. 2002. Visitor flow in Nairobi Museum. In *The 1st Gallery Service Training Course. Nairobi Museum, 23rd & 24th July 2002*. Nairobi: Education Department, NMK.
- Monreal, L. 1976. African museums in quest of its future direction. *Museum*, XXVIII: 187.
- Moscardo, G. 1996. Mindful visitors, heritage and tourism. *Annals of tourism research*, 23 (2): 376-397.
- Ndegwa, L W. 1984. Extending museum education in Kenya. *The Museum as educator. Museum*, 144: 228-232.
- Njagi, F K. 1996. *The role of museums in tourism: A case study of the Nairobi Museum*. BSc. dissertation, Moi University, Eldoret.
- Njuguna, A. 2003. *Attitudes of local visitors towards museum exhibitions*. PGD, University of Nairobi.
- NMK 1995. *National Museums of Kenya: Integrating culture, environment and development, 1995-2010*. Nairobi: NMK
- _____. 2008. *Museum News*. April-July 2008. Vol. 1 (1).
- Norwich, J J. 1991. Tourist pollution: The future's most pervasive problem. *Museum management and curatorship*, 10 (1): 45-52.
- Nyamanga, O P. 2003. *Managing ceramic collections in Kenyan museums*. PGD, University of Nairobi.
- O'Neill, M-C. and D Dufresne-Tasse. 1997. Looking in everyday life/gazing in museums. *Museum management and curatorship*, 16 (2): 131-142.
- Otieno, A. 2008. Tourism booming again. *The People Daily*, June 23 2008, p. 24.
- Piscitelli, B and D Anderson. 2001. Young children's perspectives of museum settings and experiences. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 19 (3): 269-282.
- Poliness, B. 1998. Frontline: Communicating with visitors to the National Gallery of Australia. *Museum National*, 7 (1): 22.

Prasch, H. Visitor Service. In *Guidelines to improve museum quality and standards: Proceedings of an ICR project 1999-2002*. H. Manneby, H Prasch and R Hotman (Eds), pp.

Prentice, R. 1994. Perceptual deterrents to visiting museums and other heritage attractions. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 13 (3): 264-279.

_____. 1998. Recollections of museum visits: A case study of remembered cultural attractions visiting on the Isle of Man. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 17 (1): 41-64.

_____. 2001. Experiential cultural tourism: Museums & the marketing of the new romanticism of evoked authenticity. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 19 (1): 5-26.

Prentice, R, A Davis and A Beeho. 1997. Seeking generic motivations for visiting and not visiting museums and like

cultural attractions. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 16 (1): 45 -70.

Price, D R. 1990. Factors influencing museum visits: An empirical evaluation of audience selection. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 9 (2): 149-168.

Robinson, M, N Evans, P Long, R Sharpley and J Swarbrooke. 2000. *Tourism and heritage relationship: Global, national and local perspectives*. Gateshead: Athenaeum Press.

Runyard, S. 1993. *Museums and tourism: Mutual benefit*. London: Museums & Galleries Commission.

Sandel, R. 1998. Museums as agents of social inclusion. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 17 (4): 401-418.

Seagram, B C, L H Patten and C W Lockett. 1993. Audience research and exhibit development: A framework. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 12 (1): 29-41.

Stam, D C. 1993. The informed muse: The implications of 'The new museology' for museum practice. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 12 (3): 267-283.

Stephen, A. 2001. The contemporary museum and leisure: Recreation as a museum function. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 19 (3): 297-308.

Timothy, D. 1997. Tourism and the personal heritage experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24 (3): 751-754.

Well, S E. 1997. The Museum and the Public. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 16 (3): 257-271.

Wilton, A. 1990. In museums, is knowledge at risk from commercialism? *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 9 (2): 191-195.


Wittlin, A S. 1977. Museum. *The Encyclopaedia Americana*, 19: 619-623.

**ONE STOP
CENTRE**

FOR:

- * **EDUCATIONAL BOOKS**
- * **BOOKS OF GENERAL INTEREST**
- * **AFRICANA BOOKS**
- * **OFFICE AND SCHOOL STATIONERY**
- * **COMPUTERS & COMPUTER ACCESSORIES**
- * **ART & CRAFT MATERIAL**
- * **GREETING CARDS & GIFT VOUCHERS FOR EVERY OCCASION**

TEXT BOOK CENTRE



KIJABE STREET, P. O. Box 47540, Nairobi 00100
Tel: 310699, 310700 - 4 Fax: 2225779
Email: sales@tbc.co.ke

SARIT CENTRE, Tel: 4419680-1-2-3 Fax: 4419685
Email: generalbookstop@tbc.co.ke

TEXT BOOK CENTRE ... much more than a Bookshop!

An interview with John Sibi-Okumu



John Sibi-Okumu as seen on television as the presenter of *The Zain Africa Challenge*.

“Holding a mirror up to society”

Lucy Vigne and Esmond Martin

John Sibi-Okumu gave a lecture at the November 2008 Know Kenya Course at the National Museum. He was voted best speaker. The teacher, writer, actor, director and TV presenter spoke about ‘The Challenges of Nationhood and Identity’ and inspired the audience with his views. Lucy Vigne and Esmond Martin interviewed him for *Kenya Past and Present*.

When and where were you born?

I was born in Western Kenya in July, 1954 at Nangina Mission Hospital in what was then Bunyala — but as part of political jerrymandering it has now become Bundalangi District, represented since Independence by politicians James Osogo, Peter Okondo, Raphael Wanjala and, currently, Ababu Namwamba. The press tends to highlight it as an area of flooding, with dykes bursting annually. However, there is more to the region than just floods. For one thing, the countryside is very beautiful and it’s an ornithologist’s paradise.

What was your education and what took you to the UK and France?

Formally (as I am still being educated by the day!) at the age of seven I first went to school in the UK. My father was born in 1929, a

year before Tom Mboya. They were amongst the first bunch of Africans to study abroad and they were friends. My father wanted to become a lawyer. It was a standard colonial ploy to educate leaders' sons, to create the first dynasty of Kenyan leadership; therefore my grandfather must have been a hotshot somewhere on his patch of land. My father became an inspector in the Kenya Police at the start of the Mau Mau Emergency. Family lore has it that he came under the influence of one Benedicto Kiwanuka (one of the first Ugandans to study law in the UK) whom he was assigned to guard on one occasion. Kiwanuka asked him if he wanted to remain a cop for ever. This was the impulse that led him to head for London in August, 1954 when I was just six weeks old. So he worked by day and studied by night eventually to become an 'utter barrister of Lincoln's Inn.' I left the village with my mother seven years later and joined my father. I was put into a London state primary school called William Pattern School in Stoke Newington. I joined in Year 3 and remember suffering with maths — the era of pounds, shillings and pence left me with an abiding confusion over all things mathematical!

I was there for three years and when we returned to Kenya I went to Muthaiga Primary School (within walking distance of where we lived). Dad was first made a Senior State Counsel after Independence and thereafter Kenya's first African magistrate. In 1967 I went to the Duke of York School in Nairobi, which became Lenana School. For those who were there at the time, I was in Speke House, with Nigel Slade, who became an influential mentor and guardian, as my housemaster. I owe my inclination to letters as opposed to sciences as much to nature as to the nurture of teachers whom I found both inspiring and inspirational. I suppose the story of us all. My parents separated during those high school years and I saw myself to university, first in Nairobi and then, with a French Government scholarship, I went to the University of Toulouse to study French literature in 1976.

Describe your career

When I came back to Kenya I ended up in an advertising agency but I soon found out that the cut-throat world of business didn't quite suit my temperament! Therefore I went into teaching. I felt much happier and 'useful' teaching French than I did for example, working on a campaign to persuade consumers to pay more for a drink in a new-look bottle that actually contained less than before! I taught at Hillcrest Secondary School in Karen, Nairobi, for close to 20 years between 1980 and 2001, broken with a short stint seeking creative challenges abroad, marked by time working as a producer-cum-presenter with the BBC in London. After Hillcrest, I joined ISK — the International School of Kenya — where I worked, still teaching French at various levels from elementary to high school, until June 2008. I now present a TV show called *The Zain Africa Challenge*. Clashes between the recording schedule and the school calendar obliged me to resign from teaching and embrace a novel existence as a 'media consultant,' which, happily, allows me more time to indulge my parallel enthusiasms as a writer and man of the theatre.

Tell us first about your early writing

I used to write for various publications. Significantly, a profile column for the *Standard* newspaper under the pseudonym *Mwenye Sikio* (Kiswahili for 'the one with ears' or, less literally, 'the listener'). I interviewed people whom I thought were outstanding contributors — across gender, race and religion — to the national well-being. Having had a multi-racial and multi-cultural experience myself I do not see race or colour-coding in any context; I believe I genuinely adhere to the old maxim that 'people are people.' And I would agree to being called part of a crusade to make Kenya yet another 'rainbow nation.' So it was that I spent hours at a time in conversation with the likes of Richard Leakey, Bethuel Kiplagat,

Swaran Singh Sodhi, Anil Vidyarthi, Marjorie Oludhe-Macgoye, Martha Koome, James Falkland and so on. I had no particular favourites because, as I have said, personal admiration, at least at the time, was the point of departure.

You also had a television interview show on KTN called *The Summit* — tell us about it

The Summit had a simple formula. I would honour what my guest speaker did *not* want to talk about first and then we would talk for 24 minutes, in real time, unedited, about anything else that I fancied, following my own research. To the annoyance of some, my own personality was as important to the mix as the interviewee's. But by Kenyan standards to date, viewers saw Big Men and Women being subjected to some pretty strident and non-deferential questioning. I famously asked ex-President Daniel arap Moi how he felt about being viewed by some as a dictator! Even die-hard bar proppers would dash back home so as not to miss an episode. Once again, I was very conscious of historical memory as an agenda. Of voices and visions that had to be preserved for posterity. So, once again, we logged — though this time on screen — the likes of Leakey, Macgoye, Falkland and Kiplagat alongside Paul 'Maddo' Kelemba, Yusuf 'Surgeon's Diary' K Dawood, and also, Robert Mugabe, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Wangari Maathai, Mwai Kibaki, Raila Odinga, Uhuru Kenyatta. You name them, we had them on *The Summit*. That was before the programme was effectively — how shall I put it?... strangled to death.

There was obviously an element of risk with the programme — did you worry for your personal safety?

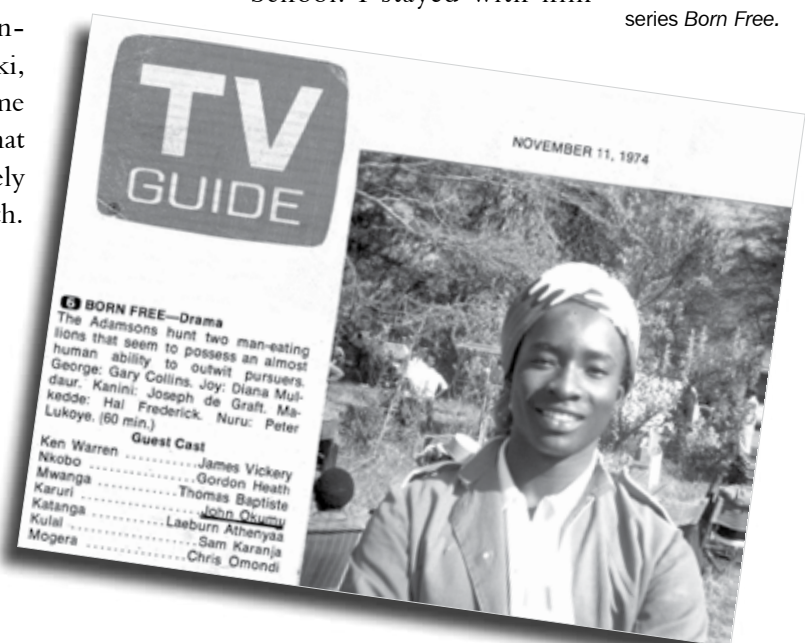
There is the realisation that none of us would do many things if we were sufficiently scared. I was conscious of being followed at times. There would

be people sitting at the table next to me to see whom I was speaking to and why. There was the odd nasty phone call. But our press had gradually become freer, over time, and a lot of people had suffered brutally to get us to where we were then, allowing the likes of me to be that much more contentious. I simply seized the historical moment. We walk on the shoulders of giants...

Tell us about your interest in the arts

My interest in the theatre started as a child in UK where I performed in school plays as the clever little black boy who had learned English in extra quick time. Later at Muthaiga Primary School, BBC-seconded producers — Robert Beaumont, Roma Baraclough and Peter King — came on a talent search and auditioned us for the radio. I was Pip on an educational radio broadcast of Dickens' *Great Expectations* when I was about 11. On reflection, I would put it all down to my teachers. There are names that come back to mind. Mr Green in London. Mrs Freeburn at Muthaiga. Nigel Slade, Peter Doenhoff, Pete Mills, Kevin Lillis and Lawrence Sail at the Duke of York / Lenana School. (Incidentally, Sail was to become the poetry editor for Faber and Faber and one of Britain's most accomplished poets). Then there was Ron Marks of Machakos School. I stayed with him

The young Sibi-Okumu played Karuri in the 1970s American TV series *Born Free*.



for some months so as to make it possible for me to play Romeo in a controversial production opposite Pat Smith as a white Juliet. Teachers do indeed feed dreams. From those beginnings I went on to appear in roles on stage that would be any actor's dream, including Shakespeare's Oberon and Shylock, Beckett's Krapp and Vladimir, Sophocles' King Oedipus, Creon in Anouilh's *Antigone*, Percy in Mtwala/Ngema/Simon's *Woza, Albert!* and Robert Mugabe in Fraser Grace's *Breakfast with Mugabe*.

In what direction is acting headed in Kenya?

Towards where it should be — that is, as a commercially viable means of existence. In my day we did it largely for love. At the end of every run at the repertory Phoenix Players' one would open the white envelope bearing one's name in which there was the honorarium of one hundred shillings per performance! Since then vibrant companies are using any number of ploys to make acting pay. Adapting farcical European standards to the local stage, in local languages; educational theatre backed

Working with the BBC in London as the presenter of the radio programme *Arts and Africa*.



by NGO funding and with ever more increasing original scripts emerging. I myself have written *Role Play*, hailed by *Newsweek International* as '...an unapologetic look at racial stereotypes in modern Kenya,' and *Minister...Karibu!*, a political satire which somewhat prophetically pointed to the post election violence in January 2008. Stage actors are occasionally called to feature on the big screen in foreign and local productions. Hence my own involvement in *The Constant Gardener*, *Shake Hands with the Devil* and *Project Daddy*. And to the small screen to feature in the many series in response to the growing craze for 'local content.' However, for all this activity, we would do well to appreciate that acting is a craft with skills that ought to be taught and learnt. I'd say we need acting schools.

Have you seen the Vision 2030 document?

Yes. It describes what Kenya is going to be like in 20 years, but it has no reference to the word "culture". It does not say 'we will have a social hall in every town, we will build a theatre in every district, we will have film festivals in every major city'. If you have political thinking that doesn't include a civilising, artistic quotient, that society has lost the plot! We talk about eight lane highways that will make it easier for the person who is robbing you to get away, but there is nothing to bind Kenyans within their hearts! The *Vision 2030* document needs to put a lot of funding aside for the arts. Poor as we are, we need to place subsidising the arts as a national priority, perhaps in preference to purchasing state-of-the-art fighter jets.

I ask myself why our newspaper headlines, day in, day out, have to be about elections three years from now when many of us could well be dead! It is an insult to presume that readers want another picture of Prime Minister Raila Odinga looking meanly at President Kibaki to communicate that the standoff continues. We have created an environment of fear in this society. Things cannot get better if we always

accentuate the negative, with headlines like ‘Machetes in readiness for bloodbath’. We want to address the issues of land and health as promised in political manifestos before the last elections. Many people in Kenya do splendid jobs, including in the arts, but we are let down by the politicians. They have failed us miserably.

As a linguist, what are your views on languages in Kenya?

English is a world language, which I readily acknowledge. The second most important language here is Kiswahili. It is the most widely spoken African language on the entire continent, excluding Arabic. But if we insist on English, let it be as close as possible to the Queen’s English. If you wish to write the great Kenyan novel in English, you have to have a good command of the English language. The excuse cannot be that it is not your mother tongue. How many languages can we, realistically, master? In my opinion, two is enough. We are not unique in having a fractured society with many languages, but other countries have succeeded, historically, in marshalling language to the cause of nationalism. I think it was Napoleon who forced people to abandon ‘tribal languages’ in favour of standard, Parisian French. The same is true of the evolution of English in the United Kingdom. Languages need not be static. They can grow, as necessary. In France you now have *le weekend*. We can do the same with Kiswahili. Let computer become *komputa*. Why not? That’s why I say let’s go for two languages, and forget the rest. I, for one, do not agree with author Ngugi wa Thiongo’s long held stance that to lose our ‘national’ languages, as in Kikuyu and Dholuo, is to lose our identity. What identity? As xenophobic vigilantes? To my mind vernacular languages undoubtedly encourage ethnicity and division. My vernacular tongue is unlikely to die of its own, but should I create a body of literature in it for 70,000, or another author add to El-Molo literature for a reading public of 128, say. What of the poor dears



As first son opposite author Francis Imbuga in Joe de Graft’s *Muntu*.

who want a return to speaking Latin? Or Sanskrit? This is ridiculous sentiment. Language is about communication. What we need is good communication between the greatest number, not division-inducing dispensations. Our challenge is to be a homogeneous, united society and to see ourselves as one.

You left teaching for your present role as presenter of *The Zain Africa Challenge* — tell us about it

Sponsored by the mobile service provider Zain, it started in 2007 with university representatives from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Because of the political troubles in Kenya in early 2008 we had to move from Nairobi to make recordings in Kampala, where we have since stayed. The production company is American. Candidates for the quiz show have to be from a nationally accredited university that has been running for more than three years. It is a knock-out competition, currently involving 32 universities from eight countries: Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania; Malawi and Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. It’s an ‘education Olympics’ of sorts – a game that emphasises the fact that to be educated means you must be knowledgeable in disparate spheres. If, for example, the first part of a question asks for the name of an animal beginning with Z and one answers ‘zebra’, the follow-up part is harder and asks



With competing teams on the set of *The Zain Africa Challenge*.

for the names of two, specific species of zebra. Questions range from popular music to history. Viewers have been amazed at the breadth of the competitors' knowledge. The programme has made it 'cool to be nerdy'! The winning university gets \$50,000 in grants and members of the winning team get \$5,000 each, so there is a lot to play for. It is pre-recorded. Zain pays for flights, accommodation, food, and other, take-away freebies. It brings students together, introducing young Africans from all over the continent to each other, making for enduring contacts. The 31 episodes are watched in all 8 competing countries. As a teacher, I think it's all for the ultimate good.

How do you feel about now being a celebrity?

It's something of a curse wrapped in a blessing. To paraphrase Henry Kissinger, success is an aphrodisiac and people do respond to you differently as a celebrity. But, by the same token, they will treat you like dirt, so to speak, before they are made aware of such a celebrity status. Which is why I particularly cherish the truer friendships that preceded all this exposure. Plus I try to resist the urge to become a pontificating spokesman for causes that I know next to nothing about. On the blessing side, I have been moved to business class when it transpired that the stamping officer was a big fan. With the greater leg room and glass of champagne that came with it. Not bad!

What would you like to do in future with your career?

I would like to use the greater time on my hands, having abandoned an eight to five existence, at least for a few more years, to establish myself in peoples' minds first and foremost as a writer. A man of letters or, more prosaically, a cobbler of words. A hero of mine here in Kenya is the writer Michael Asher (who you have also interviewed for KP&P). I admire the fact that he sits in a cool, dry place and writes for a living that takes in family. I have already written *Role Play* and *Minister...Karibu!* for the theatre. I have also written a kiddies' book called *Tom Mboya — Master of Mass-Management*. I am very proud of my role as a teacher of thousands of young people, a great number of whom I like to delude myself will remember our association fondly. I delight in being called *Mwalimu* (Kiswahili for 'teacher'). But I must confess that my plan for myself was to become nothing less than a great writer and other achievements notwithstanding, I'd still like to have a stab at fulfilling it.

We have had a defection of qualified Africans going overseas — is there any solution?

It is a loss we have to take on board. Some will come back when they have made their millions. To have here paradise on Earth, I could not imagine living anywhere else! I have had my English winters and watched the leaves change colour in autumn. But if others are happy to leave, good for them and tough for us! There are 40 million of us and growing. The brain drain results in 50% of our gross national product being money from overseas that is sent home. But after another generation of intellectuals winning *The Zain Africa Challenge*, more will want to stay. At the moment the university-educated like to go to societies where intellectuals are valued. Therefore we have to create a society that is attractive to them. The number one job description here is still to be an MP or minister or president and people look at such

people in awe and trembling. In 2030 I hope presidents will be shopping in supermarkets alongside the rest of us. I hope that people will get fed up of glorifying them, even as they make a mess of things for short term personal gain.

What of the future: is democracy the solution?

I don't think so — not as it is perceived and executed in the West. But I suppose it is a question of semantics. In Kenya a whole bunch of people queued up for the ballot box for the previous elections, but in 2012 a great mass of Kenya's populace won't go because they were so disappointed last time they went. If I were to be an MP I could not do it without lots of money; it affects all political systems — in the US too. So the way forward lies in education. I am always biased as I have been a teacher for close to 30 years. But I believe education is key to making people aware of the options. If I go to my village and ask about HIV they probably know nothing about it other than if they are unlucky and have sex with the 'wrong' person, something nasty might happen. Instead of buying tanks we need money to educate people and for more pay for teachers. Education will not bear fruit in two years but it *will* in 20, 40, 100 years. Education gets very short shrift. There is very little hope for the next 100 years unless the education system is made to work. It is dire. I believe in the people on the ground, not necessarily the leaders who are thrown at us every day in the papers. As long as there are good leaders (not politicians) there is cause for hope. I, like others, am pretty convinced that the political violence in early 2008 was orchestrated by hired killers, not by individuals waking up and saying things like 'Let me go and incinerate some children in a church today!' We Africans, given our singular history, will have to produce political thinkers who can make it conceivable for there to be a Barack Obama of the El Molo in Kenya.

If the US model has not been seen to work in Kenya, what will?

To be honest, I don't know. But I do feel that the US system cannot be exported to us, lock, stock and barrel. We need more representatives of our society in Parliament, not just nearly all black people, that is retrogressive. If we have a Mr Mohamed or a Mr Patel who have been to study, and can, for example, solve our transport problem, we need legislation to include them in our Parliament. We praise Obama for becoming President of the US but we don't have a system in our own country to allow an Obama as president from an acknowledged ethnic or racial minority. I think the idea of flying in monitors to confirm that we Africans have obeyed due democratic process is manifestly failing. And I find it unpalatable that in a world with billions of people there is only one, universally acceptable way of choosing leaders.

Do you want to get into politics?

No. Not particularly. One can't be all things to all men and women. I have already confessed to considerable literary ambitions. However, I wouldn't deny that people need leaders. But those leaders need

A regular contributor on cross-cutting topics, here in the August-October 2008 issue of Awaaz.



to be described as being either good or bad. Somehow a great many of us in this country and, dare I say, on this continent are convinced that leaders are political incarnations of ourselves. By analogy, all black people everywhere should delight in the fact that one of their own has made it to the top. He can have any number of faults but we yearn only to wave at his presidential motorcade. It is the transition to favouring propensity over provenance that will drastically change our lot.

On a continent where there is much illiteracy, the electorate favour boisterous, bellicose rhetoric over competent pragmatism. It's almost a crime to be well-educated and have pretensions to political leadership. Barack Obama is a messiah, viewed from afar, but I doubt that his highly articulate, Harvard-polished persona would have gone down well had he presented himself as a candidate to the Kenyan masses. Again, speaking as a teacher, I do believe that we have capable Kamaus, Otienos, Smiths,

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWERS

Lucy Vigne came to Kenya in 1983 working for endangered wildlife. She has been on the Editorial Board of *Kenya Past & Present* since 1985. Esmond Bradley Martin came to Kenya in the mid-60s to study the dhow trade and stayed on to become an internationally acknowledged champion of Africa's endangered rhino. He is one of the founding members of KMS and Chairman of the Editorial Board for *Kenya Past and Present*.

Shahs, Patels and Khans — all Kenyans born and bred — who are not encouraged to contemplate the political life because we as a society do not encourage ourselves to contemplate political alternatives.

At the risk of sounding overly cynical, the great leap forward will not come before we choose our leaders on criteria other than size of bank account and number of concubines.

I myself shall be content to hold a mirror up to our society in the process of change.



Lamu World Heritage

Wonderful Accommodation
at

KIJANI HOTEL

The only Charming Hotel in Shela
Lamu Island – Kenya



Contact your Travel Agent or Call us at

Tel: +254 042-633235 / 6 / 7, +254 020-2435700

Fax: +254 042-633374

Mobile: +254 0733-545264 or +254 0725-545264

Email: kijani@africaonline.co.ke

Website: www.kijani-lamu.com

The new Ford Everest.
Get noticed.



Nairobi. Tel: 6932301 / 6932304 Eldoret. Tel: (053) 2062565/6/7 Kisumu. Tel: (057) 202006/1/2 Kitale. Tel: (054) 30382/3 Meru. Tel: (064) 30984 / 30991
Mombasa. Tel: (041) 2230490/1/2/3 Changamwe. Tel: (041) 2434721 Nakuru. Tel: (051) 2211875/6 Nanyuki. Tel: (062) 30033 Website: www.cmcmotors.com



Quality through Integrity

Enjoy 10Mb of FREE wifi!



Fairview

the country hotel in town

Rooms from Ksh 9,400 (approx \$125)**
inclusive of Bed, Breakfast, all taxes and Wifi*

Bishops Road - Upperhill • PO Box 40842 - 00100 GPO Nairobi, Kenya • Tel: (254 20) 2881000
E-mail: book@fairviewkenya.com • Website: www.fairviewkenya.com

**Rate is for a single, double rates are higher. The Fairview offers 4 categories of single rooms. **The approximate dollar rate will fluctuate daily.*