

# Kenya Past and Present



Issue 41



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# Kenya Past and Present

Issue 41, 2014

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FRONT COVER  
Francis Nnaggenda's 2.7 metre tall *Lady at the gate* is one of the many remarkable pieces in the NMK permanent art collection. Curator Lydia Galavu tells us more, pages 11-16.



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Family Resident of Kenya	KSh 2,000
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Non resident Membership	US\$ 50
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To join KMS, download and fill out the application form on our website [www.KenyaMuseumSociety.org](http://www.KenyaMuseumSociety.org) and post it with your cheque for the appropriate membership category to: Kenya Museum Society, PO Box 40658, Nairobi 00100, Kenya. We also accept payment by M-Pesa, paybill no. 400800, account no. 657 157 0019.

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**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 *Kenya Past and Present*. Privileges to members include the regular *Tracker* newsletter and 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 the Nairobi Museum and regularly organises events such as *Know Kenya More!*, member safaris, lectures and other activities to raise funds for the KMS Grants Programme. The programme helps fund the development of exhibitions at the National Museums.

**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 Gallery	Box 40658, Nairobi 00100
Nairobi Museum	Box 40658, Nairobi 00100
Shimoni Slavery Museum	Box 82412, Mombasa 80100

**Sites and monuments:**

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

# KMS highlights 2013



**Patricia Jentz, Chairperson  
Kenya Museum Society**

**T**he Kenya Museum Society (KMS) is a volunteer organisation formed 43 years ago to support the National Museums of Kenya. That support historically involved training guides for the Nairobi Museum and providing funds for research and the training of museum staff.

In 2009 the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) requested that KMS change to a project-based model. In the past two years, we have worked on a series of projects. The first and perhaps most visible was funding the upgrading of the audio visual equipment in the Louis Leakey Auditorium, improving the auditorium's value for the Museum and its programmes. The upgrade also

enhanced the auditorium's potential for space rental, an income-generating activity for the museum.

Another defining project was the funding and setting up of the Joy Adamson exhibition. Designed as an interactive exhibition to enhance its educational value for school children, the Joy Adamson exhibition has been the culmination of a three-year collaboration with NMK staff. Approximately 50 of Joy's famous *Peoples of Kenya* portraits, and her animal, botanical and marine paintings, will be on display at any one time on a rotating basis. Joy's international reputation is well deserved as a best-selling author (her book *Born free*, about

*Above:* Hon. Dr Hassan Wario, Cabinet Secretary for Sports, Culture and Arts, officially opens the Joy Adamson exhibition, which was funded by KMS. He is flanked by NMK Acting Director General Ahmed Yassin and KMS Chair Pat Jentz. Photo by Ebrahim Mwangi, NMK AV Dept.

The newly-reinstated KMS Affordable Art Show showcased works by over 100 Kenyan artists. Funds raised benefited the NMK permanent art collection. Photo: Ebrahim Mwangi, NMK AV Dept.



A demonstration of spinning thread from locally-bred silkworms during a visit to ICIPE.



“Look at the puppet I made!” Children’s activities are always popular and raise funds for KMS projects.



Members visit Kiambethu Farm in Limuru, where tea was first planted in Kenya. Safaris and day outings contribute to KMS coffers.



The annual KMS safari to the Masai Mara during the migration season always yields some spectacular photographs.



raising Elsa the lion, has sold millions and was made into a Hollywood movie) and as one of the founding figures in the modern conservation movement. The exhibition opened to the public in May 2014.

A third major project has been the restoring and preserving of NMK’s permanent art exhibition. The funding for this came mainly through the revival in 2013 of the KMS Affordable Art Show, which is an open call event for artists to participate in an art sale over the course of several days. KMS organised and managed the event with support from NMK curatorial staff. Last year’s event attracted more than 400 submissions from amateurs to professionals; this number juried down to a final number of 250 pieces representing the work of over 100 Kenyan artists. All proceeds raised went towards the restoration and preservation of the permanent art collection. A specific focus of the funds raised was the upgrading of modern and secure storage space for the collection as well as the restoration of several key pieces.

Over the past decade, KMS has been the largest non-governmental donor to NMK. This is really quite remarkable for a relatively small organisation of volunteers. Funds are raised through various member activities such as lectures, movies, weekend and day outings and children’s events, as well as operating the shop in the Nairobi Museum and the revival this past year of the Affordable Art Show. The innovation of offering KMS’ evening programmes and movies at venues away from the Museum has also proven to be very popular with members and guests unwilling to brave Nairobi’s congested roads.

We look forward to another successful year with the assistance of a very hard working and dedicated Council and volunteers.

# Museum highlights 2013



**Sharon Kyungu, Public Relations Department,  
National Museums of Kenya**

## **Murumbi Collection now at Nairobi Gallery**

As part of the Mashujaa (Heroes) Day celebrations in October 2013, the National Museums of Kenya celebrated 100 years of the building that houses the Nairobi Gallery with the opening of the Murumbi Collection.

The Murumbi Collection is a world-renowned collection of pan-African art begun by the last Joseph Murumbi and his wife Sheila who have gained posthumous recognition as Africa's most famous collectors. Murumbi was Kenya's second vice president and the nation's first foreign minister. The Murumbis also partnered with Alan Donovan to set up African Heritage – the first Pan African gallery.

Murumbi started collecting African art when he was a clerk in the colonial government, prior to fleeing to London on account of his political activities with the Kenya African Union. While in London, with his future wife Sheila, Murumbi spent weekends searching for books and art on Africa, particularly those related to Kenya's history and freedom struggle. Through their efforts, they amassed a unique collection of books, postage stamps and works of art which span the African continent, and which form the basis of the Murumbi Gallery at the Kenya National Archives.

Known as one of the largest collections of African art and artefacts, the Murumbi collection features sculptures, pots, beads

*Above:*  
Part of the Murumbi collection at the Nairobi Gallery.

and ornaments, collected on numerous travels around Africa. The Murumbi art collection not only provides monumental educational insight but also showcases history not mentioned in books. In 2008, the National Museums of Kenya gazetted the Murumbi gravesite as a national monument.

The Murumbi Trust and the National Museums of Kenya have collaborated to display the invaluable African art collection through the Nairobi Gallery (the historic old PC's office in the Nairobi city centre).

The Murumbi Collection will be exhibited at the Nairobi Gallery for five years. The Gallery is open to the public daily from 8.30am -5.30pm.

**Shimoni Slavery Museum opens in Kwale**

The biggest slavery museum in East and Central Africa opened its doors in February 2014. The Museum at Shimoni, in Kwale County south of Mombasa, is rivalled only by the former slave market in Zanzibar's Stone Town.

The natural cave system in Shimoni, where the slave holding pens were located.

According to Shimoni senior curator Patrick Abungu, the museum has displays on slavery from the surrounding areas of Freetown, Gazi, Rabai and Takaungu. Vanga, the



southernmost tip of Kenya where Shimoni is situated, was one of the main slave transit centres because of its proximity to Pemba Island in Tanzania, which became a major destination for imported slaves.

The Museum is housed in the Colonial District Commissioner's residence in Shimoni, which was built in 1885 and abandoned in the 1980s.

The project was funded by the American Embassy Ambassador's Fund at a cost of KSh 2.5 million.

**Mt Kenya and Lewa Conservancy included as World Heritage sites**

In June 2013 The World Heritage Committee approved the extension of Mount Kenya National Park to include the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and Ngare Ndare Forest Reserve, also recommended by IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature). The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy serves as a refuge for threatened species including the black rhino and Grevy's zebra, which are monitored on a daily basis by highly qualified rangers.

The conservancy hosts an immense biodiversity. Lewa's mission is not only to protect wildlife, but to act as a catalyst for conservation across northern Kenya. By supporting development in the communities outside the conservancy's boundaries, Lewa has become the leading role model for sustainable wildlife conservation throughout East Africa. Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is one of the best managed conservancies in the country, combining protection of wildlife, community development and sustainable tourism. The ecological connections between Lewa and Mt Kenya and neighbouring areas allow elephants to take refuge in the conservancy during the dry season. Lewa also supports many other organisations such as the Kenya Police and the Kenya Wildlife Service.



## APPOINTMENTS

### NMK's Dr Hassan Wario appointed Cabinet Secretary

Dr Hassan Wario was appointed as the Cabinet Secretary in the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Arts in April 2013. Dr Wario joined the National Museums of Kenya in 1995 and last held the post of Director of Museums, Sites and Monuments. He has a Ph.D in Anthropology from the University of East Anglia in Norfolk, England and also worked for the British Museums for eight years, during which time he became first black African curator to be appointed. The National Museums of Kenya fraternity wish Dr Wario success in his new appointment.

### Dr Ahmed Yassin appointed acting NMK director



The Minister for Sports, Culture and the Arts has appointed Dr Ahmed Yassin, a Chief Research Scientist at the National

Museums of Kenya, as its acting Director General. Dr Yassin replaces Dr Idle Farah, whose contract term ends in 2014.

Dr Yassin previously worked at NMK for over 30 years. More recently he served as a Commissioner in the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), before returning to NMK as a Chief Research Scientist. Dr Yassin has also served as the Director of the Research Institute of Swahili Studies of Eastern Africa (RISSEA) in Mombasa, and as NMK's Director of Human Resources and Administration.

### Dr Louise Leakey appointed chairperson of NMK Board



Distinguished paleoanthropologist Dr Louise Leakey has been appointed Chairperson of the NMK Board of Directors with

effect from 10 January 2014 for a period of two years. A fourth-generation Kenyan, Louise Leakey has upheld the Leakey family legacy in the search for human origins through continuing research with the Koobi Fora Research Project in the Turkana Basin. Daughter of renowned paleoanthropologists Meave and Richard Leakey, Louise is also a National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence.

### New frog species discovered in Laikipia

Scientists discovered a new frog species at Gallmann Africa Conservancy in Laikipia in November 2013. This was a major research breakthrough, the discovery made by NMK herpetologist Victor Wesonga and visiting scientist Mike Roberts.

The army-green speckled frog was found in one of the 60 man-made dams in the central area within the conservancy. The sand frog has been named *Tomopterna gallmanni*

*SP Anura: Pyxicephalidae* in honour of the conservancy's founder, Kuki Gallman.

### Lake Turkana Festival

The annual Lake Turkana Festival took place on 24 - 26 May 2013 at Loiyangalani. Since the Festival's inception in 2008, it has brought over 10,000 visitors to northern Kenya and has now become a permanent cultural feature to help attract tourists. Additional efforts were made during the 2013 festival to attract investors as well. The festival brings together various communities



Traditional Turkana dance at the desert festival.

to appreciate and celebrate their rich culture and heritage.

Loiyangalani is a small market centre located on the eastern shore of Lake Turkana. The town was founded in the 1960s at a freshwater spring and lies within the home range of the Turkana, Samburu, Rendille and El-Molo communities. *Loiyangalani* in the Samburu tongue means “a place of many trees”, referring to the presence of water. This small town has an airstrip, fishing station, post office, campsites, a luxury lodge and Turkana traditional homesteads.

The Desert Museum in Loiyangalani was established with the aim of increasing awareness of the rich cultural heritage of the east Lake Turkana area and enhancing the cultural consciousness of area inhabitants

Donkey racers at the Lamu Festival.



of their own heritage. The Loiyangalani Museum focuses on the lives of eight communities living in that area and on the natural environment in that harsh part of the country. The communities are the El Molo, Samburu, Rendille, Turkana, and the so-called Dawtyabo (Dassanash, Watta, Borana, Gabra).

The festival was sponsored by the German Embassy Nairobi, National Museums of Kenya and Private Safaris.

### Lamu Cultural Festival

The 13th edition of the Lamu Cultural Festival took place 22- 24 November 2013. The three day annual event is a celebration of the unique Swahili heritage of the Lamu archipelago. Lamu was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001. The Lamu Cultural Festival began the same year and is a celebration of the Swahili heritage, born of cross-cultural influences spanning 1000 years. Lamu is not only an exotic destination for tourists but also a treasure to be valued, respected and enhanced for future generations. Through its mandate, the National Museums of Kenya has a major role to play in safeguarding Kenya’s cultural heritage.

The annual festival showcases traditional dances, displays of handicraft and competitions on water and land such as dhow and donkey races, Swahili poetry, and henna painting. There was also a demonstration of a Swahili bridal ceremony and many musical performances. The festival was organised by the Lamu Cultural Promotion Group and the diverse communities of Lamu.

Among the key personalities present during the 2013 festival were Lamu Governor Issa Timamy, Senator Abu Chiaba, Permanent Secretary for Tourism, Dr Ibrahim Mohammed, Managing Director of the Kenya Tourist Board, Mureithi Ndegwa, and the Lamu County Executive for Tourism, Samir Omar.

### **Mombasa Cultural Festival and Swahili Fair**

The 5th RISSEA Mombasa Cultural Festival and Swahili Fair enveloped the city of Mombasa in December 2013 to highlight the talents of artists and musicians from all over Kenya. The highlight of the festival was a street parade with representatives from the city's many cultures and communities, featuring modern and traditional music and dance. The festival is known throughout Kenya as one of the premier events in the cultural calendar. The costumes, colourful floats and lively music make this a fascinating event both for locals and tourists interested in Kenyan culture.

### **NMK at the Magical Kenya Expo**

The third edition of the annual Magical Kenya Travel Expo took place at the Kenya International Conference Centre from 18-20 October, 2013. Hosted by the Kenya Tourism Board, the expo serves as a platform for tourism networking and business transactions. Over 150 travel agents, tour operators and trade media from Kenya's tourist source markets participated in this year's expo. NMK received over 20 appointments from various international tour operators during the event. The expo also provides a networking platform between the Kenyan trade and those overseas, thereby strengthening local marketing efforts and strategies. This is the third time NMK is participating in the expo.

### **Exhibitions**

#### **Mwangalio Tofauti Ii**

The exhibition *Mwangalio Tofauti Ii* by Kenyan photographers ran from May to June 2013. The artists used an artistic social documentary approach to capture human subjects in their natural state and expressing desire for change. Participating photographers were Alex Kamweru, Amira Taj Din, Julian Njoroje, Mimi Cherono Ngo'k, Paul Munene and Phillipa Ndisi Herrmann.

### **ICRC photographic exhibition**

For 150 years the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been striving to alleviate the suffering of victims of war and violence, wherever they may be. A photographic exhibition organised by ICRC featuring images of their work was showcased at the Nairobi National Museums in May 2013.

### **Wamama wa Kazi**

A trio of Kenyan women artists exhibited their work in October 2013 at the Creativity Gallery, Nairobi National Museum. The exhibition by MaryAnn Muthoni, Esther Kariuki and Caroline Mbirwa was titled *Wamama wa Kazi* and explored the Kenyan woman as well as the rural and urban aspects of Kenyan society, capturing the beauty and diversity of our land and culture from ancestral times.

### **Artistic freedom with Kenya at 50**

In celebration of Kenya at 50 years, six leading contemporary artists explored what freedom meant to them as artists as well as to Kenyans in an economically-emerging continent. The artists expressed the concept of freedom using a multitude of media, producing a body of work that provoked viewers to think of what freedom means 50 years after independence. Exhibiting artists were El Tayeb Dawelbait, Camille Wekesa, Sane Wadu, Justus Kyalo, Chelenge van Rampelberg and Peterson Kamwathi. The exhibition took place in the Nairobi National Museum from December 2013 through to January 2014.

### **Kenya at 50: A Journey through Time exhibition**

An photographic exhibition showcasing images of the old and new Kenya as part of the celebrations to mark Kenya's 50 years of independence opened in 2013 at the Nairobi National Museum. The exhibition, jointly organised by the Standard Group and NMK, is part of the *Kenya at 50* celebrations and highlights various historical developments

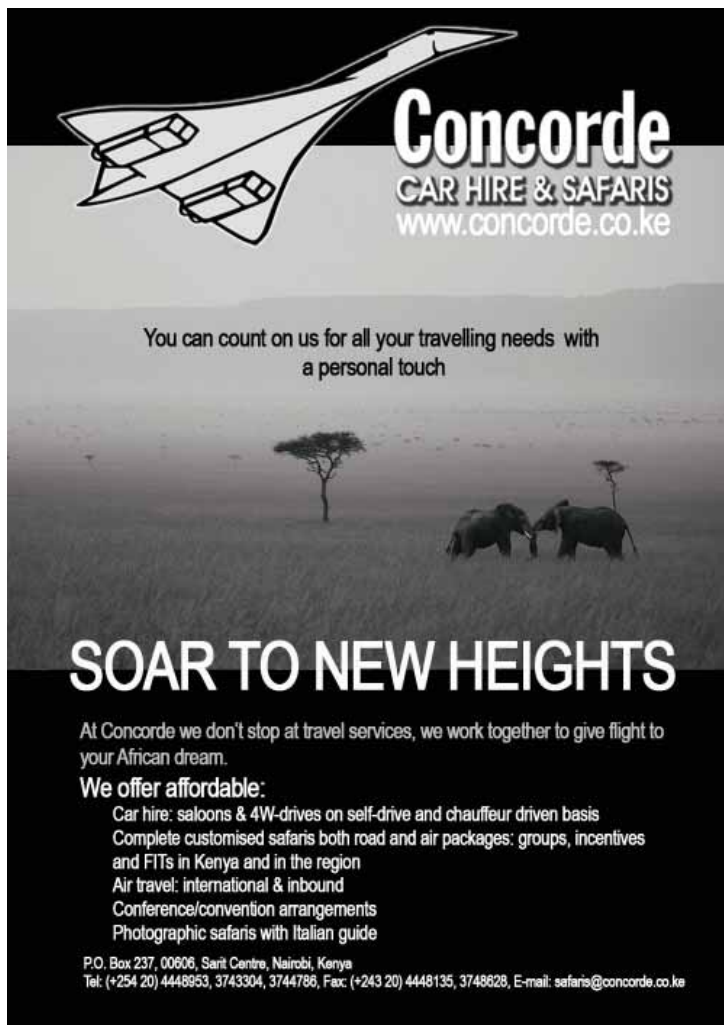
since independence that have shaped the nation. The exhibition stays in place for a year and will also be showcased in NMK branch museums in eight towns and cities. In a speech read on his behalf, Cabinet Secretary Dr Hassan Wario asked Kenyans not to dwell on the bitterness of the past but rather start on a clean slate the journey to the next great 50 years of nationhood.

Standard Group Chief Executive Sam Shollei noted that as the majority of the current Kenyan population was born after independence, the exhibition is an opportunity for them to learn and appreciate the effort and sacrifice made by individuals, institutions and the government in the social, political and economic development of Kenya.

### **Sanaa Gateja exhibition at Nairobi Gallery**

Well-known Ugandan Sanaa Gateja held a one-man exhibition at the Nairobi Gallery from December 2013 to March 2014. The multi-talented artist and designer started his artistic career in Kenya in 1970: his Mombasa gallery was among the first to highlight traditional art forms, including basketry and jewellery from northern Kenya and the East African coast. Later he became known for his brass work and barkcloth paintings. His exhibition at the Nairobi Gallery showed the many facets of the artist, including the unique abstract barkcloth creations for which he is best known.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EBRAHIM MWANGI,  
NMK AV DEPARTMENT.



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*Lady at the gate*, by famed Ugandan sculptor Francis Nnaggenda. Wood and metal, 270cm x 65cm.

# A journey through time: The National Museums of Kenya permanent art collection

**The Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Museums of Kenya explains some little known facts about the NMK's growing collection of art, past and present.**

**by Lydia Gatundu Galavu**

**C**ommunities all over the world pass down through the generations a heritage of artistic accomplishments in the way of jewellery, textiles, mats, basketry, sculpture, house decoration and other forms of creativity. To protect this heritage, collecting institutions — galleries, libraries, archives and museums — play a central role not just as repositories of information and places of research, but as social hubs which build community engagement and social inclusion at local, regional, state and national levels.

In line with the National Museums and Heritage Act (2006), the National Museums

of Kenya (NMK) has a role to acquire, collect and preserve the country's art as well as to educate the public on the historical importance and relevance of art to social and economic growth. It is a well-known fact that NMK is the custodian to some of the most celebrated heritage collections of Kenya and the East African region.

NMK's prestigious collection of thousands of extraordinary artworks traverses time. The journey begins with prehistoric art, pottery and jewellery. Some of the jewellery made from ostrich egg shells are still preserved in their original state after thousands of years; the collection also includes over 60,000 ethnographic artefacts that comprise both figurative and abstract art, and a contemporary art collection of paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, installations, photography and ceramics. From cave art to art on canvas, humans have used creative expression to record their rich cultural heritage, telling stories of who we are and where we come from.

Francis Nnaggenda's  
*Mother and child*,  
created in 1976,  
greet visitors at the  
entrance to Nairobi  
National Museum.



### The contemporary art collection

At present, the NMK contemporary art collection comprises just over 300 works by some of the most influential artists in East Africa. Contemporary art in Kenya has its roots in Uganda's Makerere University where the early generation of pioneer artists first had formal training; as such Uganda is well represented among the East African artists in the collection. The artists in the collection include Jak Katarikawe, Sane and Eunice Wadu, Wanyu Brush, Kivuthi Mbuno, Rosemary Karuga, John Diang'a, Elkana Ongesa, Francis Nnaggenda, Geraldine Robarts, Charles Sekano, Kamal Shah, Teresa Musoke, Sukuro Etale, Robert Glen, Mazola Mwashigadi, Tabitha wa Thuku, Martin Otieno and Annabel Wanjiku, as well as other prominent artists from the 50s to the 70s. Among artists of the 80s onwards are celebrated local and international names such as Elijah Ooko, Sebastian Kiarie, Julius Njau, Meek Gichugu, Penny Horsey, Dinesh Revankar, Joseph Bertiers, Allan Githuka, Shine Tani, Gakunju Kaigwa, Alexandra Spyrtos, Kioko Mwitiki and Justus Kyalo.

The history of contemporary art exhibitions at NMK began with the establishment of the Gallery of Contemporary East African Art (GCEAA), started up by Kenya Museum Society volunteers in collaboration with NMK in the mid-80s.<sup>1</sup> The lack of a national art gallery or a national collection of contemporary art in the country was the motivation behind its creation. The gallery, located in the Nairobi Museum, quickly positioned itself as the most vibrant and progressive gallery in the East African region after Gallery Watatu, which was the biggest gallery in Nairobi at the time. GCEAA is credited as the space that gave exposure to a long list of aspiring artists who today rank high in the sights of international collectors — artists such as Peterson Kamwathi, Beatrice Wanjiku, Richard Kimathi and Peter Elungat.

<sup>1</sup> Personal interview with Karmali Wendy, June. 2014

On 15 October 2005, Nairobi Museum shut its galleries to the public for an extensive, two-year rebuilding programme and GCEAA closed. Following a major facelift, the museum reopened in December 2007 as the Nairobi National Museum (NNM), transformed into a world-class tourist destination. Not all the galleries were complete and work continued in phases. Although the art space was among the galleries not ready at the re-opening, the good news was that it had been allocated the biggest space in the new museum with plans for permanent and temporary art exhibitions. It was later launched in 2008 with a new name, Creativity Gallery, but only became fully operational in October 2010. Wholly managed now by NMK, the gallery went full throttle rebuilding the reputation of NMK's art space as vibrant, attractive and dedicated to celebrating Africa's creative heritage.



*Harry Thuku demonstration*, by E. Harper Johnson, mounted in a window frame. Oil on canvas, 2.4m x 1.2m.

The NMK contemporary art collection is small but rich in content. It is currently experiencing rapid growth that can be attributed to the resounding call for greater appreciation of the arts in the country. Spectacular NMK art collections such as the pre-independence colonial government-commissioned series of Joy Adamson paintings of Kenya's peoples and plants that date from the late 1930s attract visitors and researchers from all over the world. Part of this collection can be viewed in the new exhibition<sup>2</sup> dedicated to the artist at the Nairobi National Museum, made possible by KMS sponsorship.

Another striking piece of a historical nature is the 1970 oil painting by African-American artist E. Harper Johnson that depicts the mass demonstration of 1922 outside the Norfolk Hotel, demanding the release of colonial activist Harry Thuku. The painting hangs in the *Historia ya Kenya* Gallery at Nairobi National Museum in a model

window that allows the visitor to view the scene of the violent aftermath of the demonstration as it would have been seen through the windows of the Norfolk Hotel.

While it is not possible to describe every item in the NMK art collection, it is important to mention a few interesting additions to the collection that have come through donations by NMK's international collaborators. Of significance is a historic photo collection of Kenyan cultures by Gerhard Lindblom from the exhibition *In the mirrors of time*, 2010, donated by the Russian Embassy to Kenya, and a Mexican prints (lithographs) collection from the exhibition *Imprints, independence and revolution*, 2012, donated by the Mexican Embassy.

On the other hand, the presence of Kenyan art on the international platform is heightened considerably by Kenyan artists in the diaspora who have penetrated the global art scene and are at the top of the market, such as Magdalene Odundo

<sup>2</sup> See *The return of Joy Adamson* on page 42



*Autobiography*, by world famous potter, Magdalene Odundo. Earthenware, 18cm x 30cm.

(United Kingdom) and Wangechi Mutu (New York). The most distinguished and valuable piece in the NMK contemporary art collection so far is a pot by Magdalene Odundo from her series *Autobiography*. An interesting surprise is a set of paper prints created around an environmental theme by Wangechi Mutu, which can be found at NMK's Lamu Museum.

Odundo's *Autobiography* came to NMK by way of the International Symposium for Ceramic Education and Exchange 2008 (ISCAEE) exhibition co-organised by Odundo, Kenyatta University and NMK in the months of July and August 2008. The exhibition saw NMK receive a rich donation of over 70 exquisite ceramic art pieces from prominent international ceramists such as Zehra Cobanli (Turkey) and Juliet Armstrong (South Africa).

*My lady* by Sane Wadu. Oil on canvas, 140cm x 94cm.



Pottery shards have arguably been the most important pieces of physical evidence used by archaeologists and anthropologists to gain insight into the lives of human groups. Therefore, with the origins of modern humans generally being traced to Africa, an African museum is potentially a mentor in ceramic education. The ISCAEE donation brings the world to African ceramics. It is made available to students, researchers and lovers of art through NMK's public programmes.

NMK is, then, not only tasked with preserving and conserving indigenous art skills but with management of sustainable educational programmes for contemporary art to ensure that the creative skills of the 21st Century are properly documented within human history. The museum has also been encouraging interaction by urging professional artists to step out of their studios to share and exchange skills with young and emerging artists. Through organised gallery walks, art workshops and exhibitions, the museum promotes learning and sharing of talent and skills.

One of the programmes that NMK initiated to disseminate information on art education is the Nairobi National Museum Art Club. Established in 2010, this mentorship initiative, which is managed by the museum's Education Department, targets secondary school art students and their teachers. The students are involved in stimulating and engaging learning activities that enrich their experiences and provide them with opportunities to exhibit and interact.

Art in Kenya is taking tremendous strides towards the global arena and taking with it stories of the past. This characteristic of past and present can also be seen in artworks in the museum's contemporary collection such as the art by veteran couple Sane and Eunice Wadu, the visionaries behind the Sane Wadu Trust. The Wadus have had long professional careers in the visual arts and are also co-



founders of the Ngecha Artist Association, a collection of artists located in the village of Ngecha. Sane Wadu's painting *My lady* introduces a concept of royal leadership, which may not necessarily represent any Kenyan governance policy but seems to communicate a strong message about the historical social power women hold in the society as nurturers.

Margaretta Akinyi Ocholla in her painting *The flying trunk*, based on a Swedish story of the same name written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1838, expresses issues of universal social values such as discipline and honesty. The artist, who is half Kenyan and half Swedish, is inspired by this timeless tale which has links to her historical background. She introduces bright skies enthused by her sunny African experiences and cleverly introduces humorous figures with the aim of holding the viewer's eye long enough to pick the underlying messages on important human values.

With these few examples it is clear that through Kenyan contemporary art we see a little of the rest of the world — sometimes to such a degree that we ask 'how much is really ours?' So what really inspires Kenyan artists to produce collectable art? What journeys has an artwork made before it



becomes part of a museum collection? Like any selling business in a city, the art market in Nairobi tends to be client oriented. The artist will produce what they know they can sell. Nairobi is a multi-ethnic hotpot and depending on who places the order, one will find in the art a European influence, Asian influence as well as an influence from other African regions.

Kenyan political satire:  
*Sharing the cake* by  
Joseph Bertiers.  
Oil on canvas,  
92cm x 120cm.

This tendency can be attributed to several interconnecting factors most noticeable in cosmopolitan cities where borrowing and sharing of local and outside cultures is fashionable. Exposure brings forth exchange. Even as Kenyan artists borrow away from home, others are borrowing from Africa.

Kenyan artists find themselves having to compete with artists from the rest of Africa and Europe for the global market. Because of this, their source of inspiration has changed with the times. Where religion, for example, has been an inspiration, especially in the production of traditional art, today the artist's inspiration could come from travel to foreign countries, exotic plants and animals and even

*The flying trunk* by  
Margareta Akinyi.  
Acrylic on canvas,  
78cm x 81cm.



international brands. Politics has inspired artists over history. The painter and sculptor, Joseph Bertiers, is a good example of such an artist in Kenya as can be seen in his satirical painting entitled *Cutting the cake*.

The Nairobi National Museum recognises that the creative economy has become a powerful transformative force in the world today. Its potential for development is vast and waiting to be unlocked. It is one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the world economy, not just in terms of income generation but also for job creation and export earnings.

With this recognition has also come investment in growing and preserving the collection. KMS continues to support art at the museum by purchasing pieces for the permanent collection, funding exhibitions and upgrading facilities. In October 2013 KMS revived the annual Affordable Art Show, dedicating the sales profit of half a million Kenyan shillings towards improving the Nairobi National Museum's art storage system. The growing collection of contemporary art at the museum needed additional and secure storage facilities. Through the KMS fundraising, the existing cramped storage space was modified and

The new modern art storage facility funded by KMS.



transformed into a modern, secure, and easy-to-operate mechanised system.

As a good collection needs a good story to it, the Nairobi National Museum is currently developing a permanent gallery that will tell the story of the history and development of art in Kenya from prehistory to contemporary times. The success of Nairobi National Museum in art education comes not only through short-term exhibitions of items loaned from other institutions, or through hosting high-profile exhibitions that travel to multiple destinations, but from the strength and visibility of its permanent collections and from public programmes that aim to impart lasting skills through hands-on experiences. The museum's permanent art gallery aims to have a striking impact on the museum visitor by encouraging one to consider his or her situation in a more global and historical context.

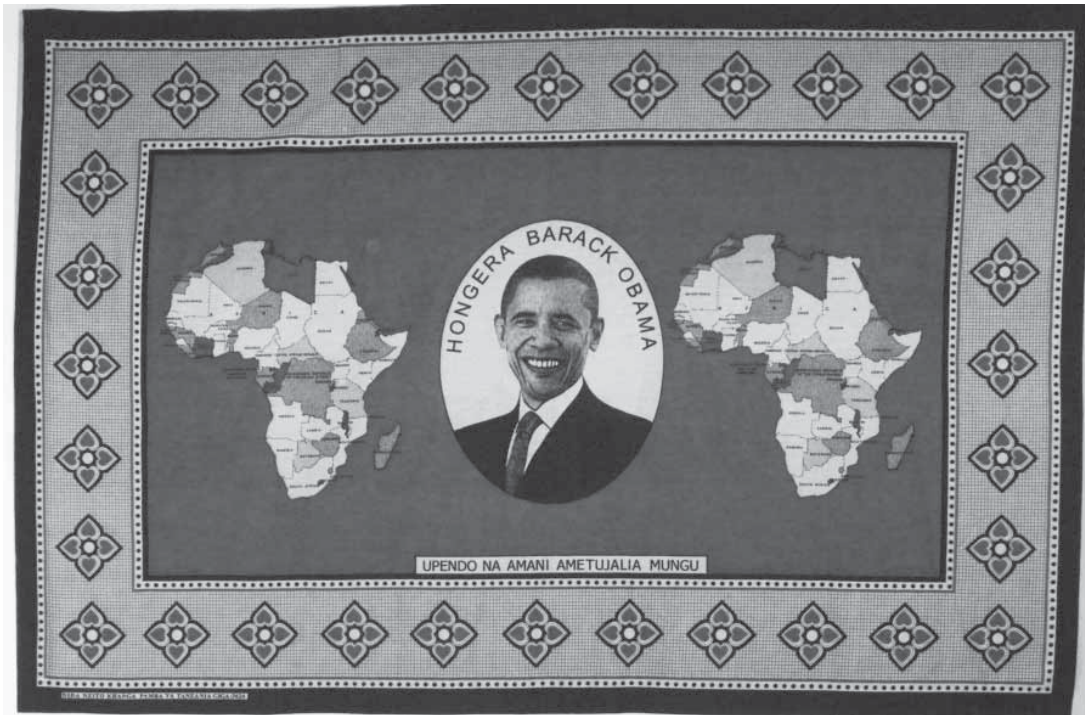
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lydia Gatundu Galavu is the Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Museums of Kenya. She holds an MA in Anthropology and has a background in art education and exhibits design. She is also a practising sculptor and painter.



# Kanga: Stories in the cloth

**The story of the kanga, a 1.5 metre by 1 metre piece of printed cotton cloth, is woven into the often tumultuous history of the East African coast.**

**by Lydia Nafula**

**T**oday, kanga fabric is used to make anything from bathrobes to handbags, but it first appeared in Africa as kerchiefs around the necks of the Portuguese sailors who sailed on 15th and 16th century voyages of exploration with legendary captains such as Vasco da Gama.

The kanga is striking because of its bright colours and characteristic designs, but it draws its distinctiveness from proverbs in Kiswahili that are printed on its lengthwise borders. Although it goes back centuries, the kanga has not lost its appeal and is constantly adapting to changing times by taking on new roles.

In Kiswahili, the language of much of the East African coast, *kanga* refers to a guinea fowl. The cloth is thought to have gained this name because many of the initial versions bore white dots printed on a dark

*Above:*  
The iconic Barack Obama kanga. Several similar designs appeared in East African shops in 2008 when Obama became the first American president with Kenyan roots.

background like the guinea fowl’s feathers. Portuguese traders who followed the sailors brought the cotton squares known as *lenço* in Portuguese to West Africa in the 1500s. These later found their way to the East African coast where Swahili women are said to have taken six of the squares and stitched them together to create a cloth that could be wrapped around the body. This larger piece of cloth became known as a “lesso”.

Fishermen on the East African coast have been wearing sarong-like handwoven cloths known as *mawis* in Somali or *kikoi* in Kiswahili wrapped around their lower bodies for centuries; with the arrival of the lessso/kanga women had their own wrapper.

Mombasa trader Kaderdina Hajee “Abdulla” Essak is credited with being the first to print proverbs or *jina* on kangas around 1890; at first they were printed in Arabic script and

were verses from the Qu’ran. Proverbs or observations in Kiswahili later replaced them. *Fimbo la mnyonge halina nguvu* (“Might is right”) remains one of the most popular.

With time the kanga became a major commercial item for the Essak family, and over the generations, they produced and sold many popular designs under the trade name *Mali ya Abdulla*.

**Common motifs**

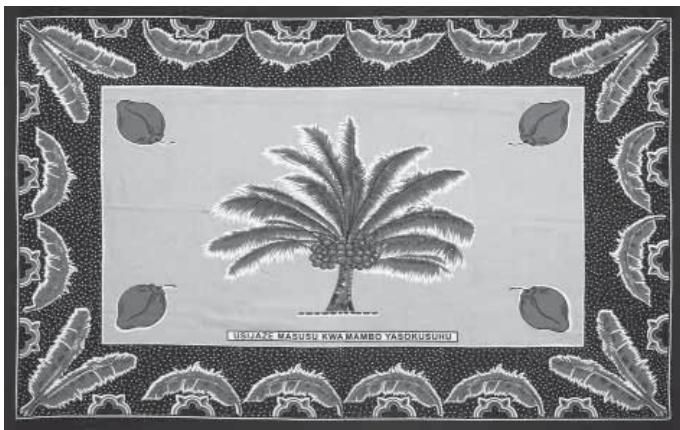
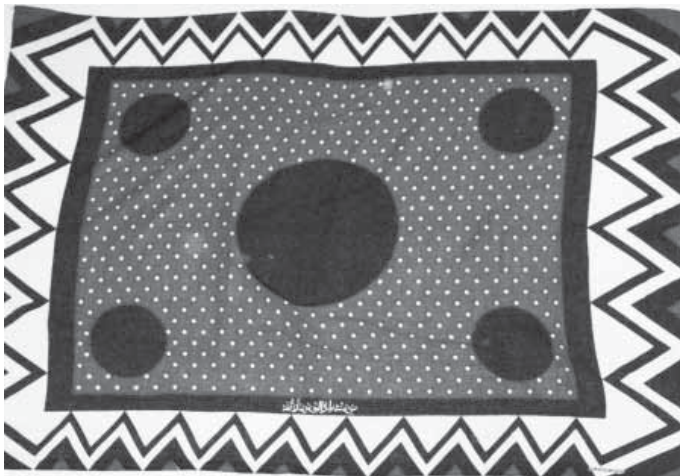
A wide variety of symbols, designs and patterns appear on the kanga, mostly floral, animal or abstract. One commonly used symbol is the dove, the universal symbol of peace. Other symbols include the mango or cashew nut, both of which symbolise peace, fertility or wealth. The same stylised teardrop shape can be interpreted as either the mango and cashew nut, depending on origin — in India the shape calls to mind the mango while in the East African context the shape is seen as a cashew nut. Both are similar to the paisley pattern, which originated in the *boteh* designs of Persia, an indication of the many cultural and religious influences on the kanga. In common with Islamic art, humans are never depicted.

The border of the kanga, known as *pindo*, is believed to come from Islamic tradition where items appear confined within a particular, controlled space known as *mji*, similar to the border-enclosed text pages of the Qu’ran.

The motifs on the first kangas were printed on cotton fabric using wooden blocks dipped in natural dyes or ink in a communal process. Later, kangas were printed in an industrial silk-screen process in the Netherlands, India and in Manchester, England; factory mass production began in East Africa in the mid-20th century.

Cotton cloth for the kangas was originally imported from Britain and India. In the 19th century unbleached calico fabric imported

Light dots on a dark background give the kanga its name.  
 Top to bottom:  
 Kanga with Arabic script.  
 Tanzanian kanga with coconut design.  
 Photo: Wikipedia.



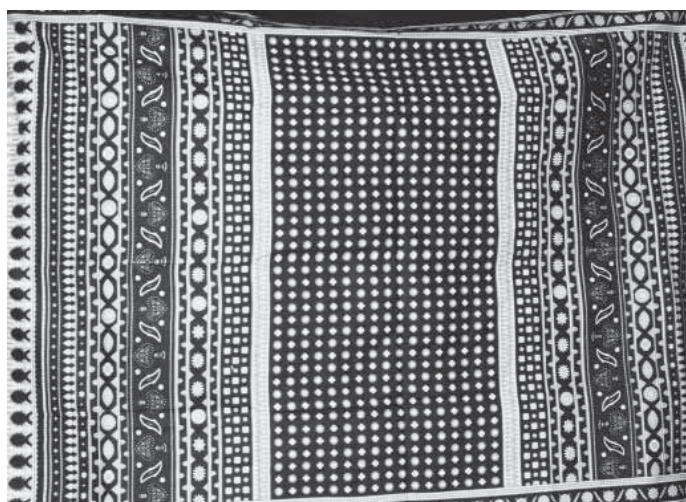
from the United States was known locally as *merikani* while dyed cloth imported from India was known as *kaniki*. As coloured cloth became increasingly popular, merchants began dyeing the *merikani* deep blue or black. Nowadays, as much as cotton remains the primary fabric for kangas, manufacturers in places like China have begun to make them using synthetic fabrics.

### Ceremonial role

Although kangas are now being turned into designer outfits, bed covers, book bags, oven gloves and sandals, they still retain their role in traditional community life in ceremonies associated with birth, initiation, marriage, old age and death.

When a child is born, an uncut and unstitched kanga is used as a wrapper to confer on it prosperity, strength and beauty as a symbol of the parents' love. After boys undergo circumcision, they wrap kangas around their waist. Kangas make up part of the marriage dowry and are laid on the ground for the bride to step on as she leaves the house. Elders in communities such as the Maasai put on kangas for certain ceremonies, and among the Swahili, kangas are given to the family of the deceased when people arrive to express their condolences.

A special kanga design known as the *kisutu* is used by the Swahili people for wedding ceremonies. Instead of a border, the design consists of stripes and includes images of crosses and tangerines, which are considered symbolic in warding off evil. The *karatini* ("quarantine"), a cross motif on the *kisutu*, is thought to derive its origin from a historical event. Around the end of the 19th century there was an epidemic of yellow fever in Zanzibar, and the sick were quarantined on a ship that flew the Red Cross flag. Traditionally printed in red, black and white, today the *kisutu* is produced in a variety of colours to appeal to a wider clientele and is often made without a proverb or saying as the design itself communicates a message.



Today the kanga is used by men, women and children. It has always been used as a wrapper, and today many women still use it as a sort of apron or cover over their clothes. Market women tie their loose change in a corner of their kangas, and women from all walks of life use the kanga to bind their babies to their backs.

Top to bottom:  
A close-up of the stylised mango/ cashew nut/ paisley motif.

The *kisutu* kanga with its *karatini* motif of small crosses, and no text message.

### Modern messages

The kanga is a means of communicating messages both through its text and images. The information that is transmitted can be political, social, religious, health or development related. During election campaign time in Kenya, kangas are used as political tools. They are printed in party colours and symbols and often bear the images of candidates. They are distributed to party supporters who wear them at campaign



A thoroughly modern kanga with an advertising message.

rallies. In the 2013 general election, the National Alliance Party of Kenya (TNA) of (now President) Uhuru Kenyatta had kangas bearing doves printed up in the party's red and white colourscheme.

When Barack Obama was elected the first African-American president of the United States in November 2008, his likeness appeared on several kanga designs in Kenya to emphasize the fact that his father was a Kenyan.

The kanga as high fashion: a display from the kanga exhibition at the National Museums' Nairobi Gallery in 2011.

Non-governmental organisations use the kanga to create awareness on health issues such as HIV and AIDS, and to fight poverty. The sayings on these kangas are often in

local languages to get the message out to a wider audience. Businesses use kangas as wearable ads to market their products, and a November 2009 piece on the brightly coloured cloth by Africa correspondent Daniel Howden appeared in Britain's *The Independent* newspaper with the headline, *Let your dress do the talking.*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lydia Nafula is a research scientist in the Cultural Heritage Department of the National Museums of Kenya. She has a BA in Anthropology and an MA in Development Studies. Lydia was part of a team that curated the exhibition *Kanga stories: The cloth that reveals* which took place at the Nairobi Gallery in 2011. An abridged version of the exhibition ran at the Nairobi National Museum in 2013.

PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS INDICATED.

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# Tracking the wild dogs of Ol Pejeta

**Professional photographer and safari guide Teeku Patel has been following a pack of endangered African wild dogs and their pups on Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia since late January 2012. This was probably the first sighting of a pack of wild dogs with pups in the conservancy for over 30 years.**

**by Teeku Patel**

**T**here has been a significant decline in the number of African wild dogs, primarily due to habitat loss and hunting. Once common in virtually every environment in southern Africa, excluding rain forests and the driest deserts, these highly intelligent and sociable animals now inhabit only the savannahs and grasslands, making them one of the continent's most endangered predators. Research suggests there are between 3,000 to 5,000 free-ranging wild dogs, found in isolated populations in central, northeast, and southern Africa (where the largest population is found). Approximately only 700 packs are left in the wild.

Major threats to the species are habitat fragmentation; contact with human activity resulting in road casualties, poisoning, or snaring; the spread of diseases like distemper

Photo above:  
The first litter of Ol Pejeta pups in January 2012. Unlike their domestic relatives, wild dogs have four toes on each paw. Their Latin name *Lycaon pictus* aptly means 'painted wolf'.

from domestic dogs; and competition for prey from larger carnivores.

In Kenya, it is believed that approximately only 6% of the historical range of the wild dogs might still support resident populations. So the news of nine puppies born in Ol Pejeta was welcomed by regional wild dog researchers who are working on continuous recording of all sightings and on radio collar monitoring. These births also contribute to the goal of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) strategy for the conservation and management of wild dogs in Kenya (2009-2014).

Laikipia, the plateau between Mount Kenya and the Aberdare range, now has more than 400 wild dogs in well-established, stable packs, thanks to conservation initiatives from the conservancies and ranches.

The last time I photographed wild dogs with pups had been in the late 1980s among the Aitong pack in the Masai Mara. They were sadly wiped out by an outbreak of canine distemper. So when I received a call from Ol Pejeta in late January 2012 telling me about the sighting of the pack with pups, I dropped everything, packed the cameras and headed north to Laikipia.

### First litter on Ol Pejeta

Every year I spend a good amount of time in Ol Pejeta with my safari clients and also take images for the conservancy so I have a good relationship with all there. One of the rangers who had initially spotted the five adults milling around some hog holes kindly took me to where the current den was, thick in dense *Euclea* and *Akocanthera* bushes. The adults were fast asleep and barely visible scattered under the bushes. After a 40-minute wait, the first pair of over-sized pup ears popped up from the den. Then another, and another, until there were nine sets of pup ears visible. The initial excitement of seeing pups for the first time in years caught me off guard, but then I steadied my camera and kept shooting. The early evening light was not the best, but it would do.

I spent the next week watching the pack and pups. They were five adults — three males (one had a collar) and two females — and nine pups: four males and five females. A pack has only one dominant breeding pair but all adult members help to feed and raise the pups. Every morning by the time I got there, the adults would be out hunting. The pups, which were about two months old, did not venture far. They would slowly

The Ol Pejeta pack against the backdrop of Mount Kenya.





emerge from the den and huddle around to catch the warm rays of the morning sun. The hungry, yelping, squirming mass would break out into a chaotic run and chase when the adults finally returned. Each adult would get mobbed by the hungry pups waiting for their regurgitated meals. Their insatiable appetites drew many a scolding from the adults. Feeding nine pups is not an easy task.

That week I was very fortunate to photograph the pups daily and get an inside view into the life of the pack. There were four dens in use, and at the slightest alarm the pups would disappear into these hog holes in seconds. The adults were very wary of the surroundings and the dens were deep in thickets of dense *Euclea* bushes. The dogs' large, rounded ears provide them with excellent hearing and help keep the dogs cool during the hot Laikipia days by dissipating heat.

Playtime for the pups was a continuous game of catch, attack and release; the smallest pup was usually ganged up on and picked on by the others. The endless bounding on their long, lanky legs seemed like a game to them, but it is essential training for the future.

Exaggerated submissive posturing and greeting ceremonies reinforce the pack's social structure, building strong bonds for its survival. The adults, like most wild dogs, were terrific hunters and did not fail to bring back breakfast for five straight days! Unfortunately, my time was running out. Luckily enough, on my last two evenings with the pack, the pups followed the adults out to the border of Scotts plain on their evening hunts. The time had come for the pups to be part of the active moving pack, returning to the den only to rest.

### Splitting up

I returned to the site a few months later to find that the dogs had left their dens and split into two packs, one comprising five



Top to bottom:

1. Sleepy pups huddled together outside the den, warming up in the morning sun.
2. A returning adult regurgitates a meal for hungry pups.
3. Two well-fed pups. Wild dogs' markings are distinctive and can be used to identify individuals.

adults and five puppies and the other two adults and four puppies. The first pack lives in Ol Pejeta while the second ranges beyond the conservancy, within the larger Laikipia ecosystem. Splitting up is normal behaviour amongst these endangered species. Wild dogs have also been observed to habitually change their dens as the pups grow — a common phenomenon as the parents introduce the pups to their home ranges. They generally avoid areas of high prey density since these attract mega carnivores leading to unnecessary competition, fights and, quite often, death.

Though wild dogs frequently move, the pack in Ol Pejeta had made the eastern sector its home for the past few months. Interestingly, many of the sightings of these lovely creatures are reported along roadsides in the conservancy. These are said to be their preferred resting places.

One year later, in December 2012, there were reports coming out of Ol Pejeta that wild dog pups had been seen again. But this time only three pups survived. It is not known how the others were lost, most likely to lions or hyenas. The pack now comprised eight adults and three pups. They had relocated their den to the open plain, less than 100 metres off the main track going to Kamok.

The Ol Pejeta pack hunting a warthog. Wild dogs are the most efficient hunters in Africa.

On my first visit in early January 2013 the adults were sleeping by the Lodru water tank wall to cool off from the harsh Laikipia sun, but there was no sign of the pups. An hour later three pairs of over-sized ears popped up from a hog hole. It was amazing to see the same pack I had seen a year ago, grown into adults with their own pups.

This time around, being out on the open grassland made it easier to follow the adults on their hunts. Before a hunt, pack members nose and lick one another, wagging their tails and vocalising, to reinforce pack bonds and help coordinate their movements. They have a wide range of vocalisations, including an unusual chirping or squeaking sound, similar to a bird. They move at a rapid pace, covering many kilometres, and — like most members of the dog family — are cursorial hunters, using their stamina and endurance to wear down their much-faster prey in long, unconcealed chases of up to five kilometres.

Nearly 80% of all wild dog hunts end in a kill, hence their being seen as the ultimate predators. Typical prey would be gazelles and warthogs, supplemented by mice, lizards and birds. Larger herbivores like wildebeest might also be tackled if sick or injured. On many evenings I found the pack eyeing up warthogs, at times a very amusing standoff,



until the hogs disappeared down one of their holes, leaving the dogs with a very surprised look of “what just happened ?!”

I visited the pack on three different safaris in 2013 and am happy to report that the three pups are plump and healthy and regularly seen trying to keep up with the adults on their hunts. I’m glad to see that the dogs have made Ol Pejeta their home.

### **The pack over the years**

The pack has a very interesting history. Initially, six dogs were seen in February 2008. The males came from Sosian Ranch from a pack known as the Lebai pack. The Lebais split after their alpha female was lost, and there was a great migration out. The females are now up north near the Karisia Hills, and the males went south. At some point the male group split — some went even further south to Sangare, and the others, a pack of five, ended up in Ol Pejeta in April 2011.

Notable in the pack is the collared alpha male. The breeding female, known as RA19, was born into the Rat pack.

At the same den site, two females gave birth in June 2013 to no fewer than 17 puppies. The sight of all these puppies is a photographer’s dream! But this time they were born in a den only two metres off the main track that had to be closed during the first few days to give the dogs and the pups some privacy and protection. The puppies and the dogs have since moved from the den but are still sighted around the conservancy.

Wild dog litters vary in size, but they usually contain between four and eight pups. Pups are normally weaned at three months but will not go out on pack hunts until they are a few months older. Until then, they remain in the den whilst the pack hunts, normally with their mothers and subordinate females from the pack who stay and help. Of the



17 pups, 15 survived; two drowned in a cattle trough. With 15 pups to feed, the two females and the pack had their work cut out for them.

Again, I was fortunate enough to photograph the pack before and after the pups emerged from the den and am glad to report that the current pack of 24 dogs is healthy and frequently seen in the conservancy. Being members of a large pack they need to hunt daily and cover many kilometres in the process.

Laikipia is one of the best places in the world to see African wild dogs. There are now over 30 on Ol Pejeta, the new additions having contributed significantly to that number.

Top to bottom:  
The second litter on Ol Pejeta in December 2012 with only three surviving pups.

The collared alpha male.



The Ol Pejeta pack at the end of 2013 with 15 pups.

### **Acknowledgements**

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**PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR.**

This article is based on a photo-lecture that Teeku Patel gave to KMS members in August 2013. Parts of this article also appeared in the April-June 2013 issue of Swara magazine.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Teeku Patel is one of Kenya's home grown photographic talents. He spent a great deal of his early years on safari, exploring the game parks and reserves of East Africa under the expert tutelage of his father, an honorary game warden. When he was given a camera at the age of ten, Teeku was on the road to the career of his choice. As a professional safari guide, he leads photographic safaris through Eastern and Southern Africa and Asia, and his photographs can be found in libraries around the world. A preview of his images can be found at [www.teekupatel.com](http://www.teekupatel.com).





## WWII: Kenya's forgotten Italian connection

**Few guidebooks or histories of Kenya mention that between 1941 and 1945, the majority of Europeans living in what was then a British colony were not British at all — they were Italian.**

**by Aldo Manos**

*Photo above:*

The POW pillar, now gazetted as a historical monument, that stands at Ndarugu, near Thika, built by Italian prisoners at the end of World War II and dedicated to their commander-in-chief, the Duke of Aosta.

**M**ost of the Italians arrived in Kenya as prisoners of war, captured either during the campaigns in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and North Africa at the beginning of World War II, or from Italian ships seized in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. A number were interned civilians, a population that included some Roman Catholic missionaries. Some 50,000 of them were to spend five years in varying degrees of captivity, before being gradually repatriated to Italy at the end of hostilities.

Their status was defined by the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of

war signed in 1929 by all major powers, with the exception of the USSR and Japan, in the expectation that if one side in a conflict treated their prisoners decently, the other would do so as well. But this convention was often disregarded.

The majority of the prisoners were marched from Ethiopia to Mogadiscio<sup>1</sup> (Mogadishu), the capital of the Italian colony of Somalia, and transported by sea to Mombasa, while others travelled overland from Ethiopia to Kenya. A curious incident occurred during one such transport. The British had removed machinery and material after the fighting, and apparently one soldier thought of taking home a special souvenir. The story goes that an officer found a good-looking girl, half dead from thirst and exhaustion, inside a large box marked "Spare parts". But since the convoy was in the middle of a desert, he had no choice but to let her come along.

Once in Kenya, the POWs were put in sorting camps before being transferred to their final destinations that included 10 locations in Kenya and one in Uganda. The POW camps were known by their numbers:

351	Kabete (Nairobi)
352	Naivasha / Morendat
353	Gilgil
354	Nanyuki
355	Nyeri
356	Eldoret
357	Mitubiri
358	Makindu
359	Burguret
360	Ndarugu
361	Kajiado
365	Londiani
366	Jinja (Uganda)

<sup>1</sup> Mogadiscio (Mogadishu) was the administrative center of Italian Somaliland from 1905 until World War II when it was seized by the British.

Every trace of these camps has since disappeared, the wooden barracks destroyed and the sites now occupied by other buildings. But there is one exception. The site of Camp 360 at Ndarugu sub-location, Kalimoni-Juja location, Juja Division in Thika County on the Nairobi-Thika highway remains untouched; it contains two significant structures built by the POWs: a church and a monument to their commander-in-chief, the Duke of Aosta.

### Gazetted monuments

Responding to an official request from the then Italian ambassador Pierandrea Magistrati, the Minister of State for National Heritage and Culture, in consultation with the National Museums of Kenya, declared the church and monument to be of historical interest under the National Museums and Heritage Act and gazetted them through Gazette Notice No. 11252 of 6 September 2011. The notice also includes the brick manufacturing plant built and operated by the Italian POWs at Thika.

Italian forces invaded Ethiopia in May 1936 in their bid to establish Italian East Africa. A year later, Prince Amedeo, the Duke of Aosta, became the Viceroy of Ethiopia. Italy declared war on Great Britain in June 1940. The duke was in every sense a remarkable figure. Addressed as "Your Highness" by a journalist (in Italian the words can also mean "your height"), he replied: "198 centimetres, 6.6 feet". Blond and blue-eyed, a second cousin of King Vittorio Emanuele of Italy and related to the British royal family, educated at Eton College and Oxford University and speaking Oxford English, keen on fox-hunting and polo, he could out-British any of his captors. The only member of Italy's House of Savoy who actively supported Mussolini, he refused to be exchanged for several captured British generals and chose to share the fate of his troops. When his stronghold of Amba Alagi in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia was overpowered by British forces on 19

May 1941, he was given the honours of war, and his troops were allowed to march out with their colours flying.

When he was flown to Nairobi from Juba in southern Sudan, he was allowed to pilot the aircraft for a while. On landing in Nairobi he became POW No. 11590 and was moved to Juja House at Ol Donyo Sabuk on Lord Macmillan's huge estate. There he remained with a small retinue until March 1942 when, having contracted tuberculosis and malaria, he died at the Maya Carberry Clinic in Nairobi at the age of 43. The military chaplain who had assisted him cabled Pope Pius XII in Rome on 3 March 1942 that the Duke had died "a saintly death". He is buried inside the memorial church at Nyeri along with some 700 other Italian men who died in captivity.

From memoirs published by returning prisoners of war, we learn about life inside the camps, including the usual complaints about the cold and the food, mosquitoes and flies, but also interesting information on how the prisoners coped. Some started school classes for their less-educated companions, others organised sports events, especially soccer teams, theatrical performances to which local expatriates were invited, some studied languages and all anxiously awaited news from home.

In fact, throughout the war prisoners' mail was exchanged by the combatants, and a surprising number of such letters and postcards can be found for sale on the internet today. From Rome the mail went to neutral Switzerland, then by train to Bulgaria and Istanbul, by air to Jerusalem, then to Cairo, where it was censored before being sent onwards to Nairobi. At Nairobi a special post office was operated by Italian POWs. The mail did not require postage stamps and had to contain the prisoner's name and POW number, the camp number, often the section of the camp, with the indication "East Africa Command".

Presumably this was so that neither the prisoners nor their families could find out the exact location of the camps. One elderly man, who spent five years interned at Ndarugu, only knew that he was held not far from Nairobi.

Another reason for such secrecy was to prevent prisoners from escaping, although some remarkable escapes did in fact take place, a few of them successfully.

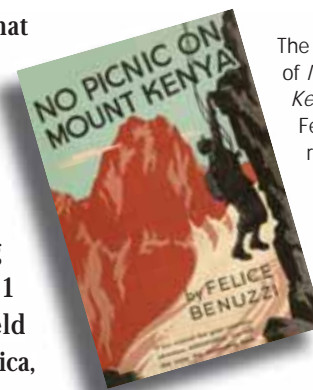
### Escapes

The best known among them was not an escape at all. It was described in *No picnic on Mount Kenya* by Felice Benuzzi, whose original title in Italian translates as 'Escape on Mount Kenya: 17 days of freedom'. Benuzzi, an officer from Trieste, and two friends escaped from Camp 354 in Nanyuki, having secretly built their equipment and saved some food in order to climb Nelion Peak on Mt Kenya where they hoisted the Italian flag. Then they returned to camp, to face some mild punishment. It took several weeks before a local expedition could be mounted to remove the offending flag from Kenya's highest mountain. The feat had all the ingredients of daring and ingenuity that led to the book being translated into several languages and made into at least two films. The flag that flew from Nelion is now on display at the Mountain Museum in Turin.

Prince Vanni Corsini and five others managed a successful escape from Camp 356 at Eldoret. The prince put on a British officer's uniform, complete with swagger stick, commandeered an old Chevrolet truck, and declared that he was transporting his "prisoners" to another camp. He even stopped at the gate to reprimand the guard for not saluting him properly. After 21 days across British-held territories in eastern Africa,



The Duke of Aosta, Commander-in-Chief of the Italian forces in East Africa, who died a prisoner of war in Kenya in 1943 and was buried in Nyeri. Photo: Wikipedia.



The first English edition of *No picnic on Mount Kenya* by Italian POW Felice Benuzzi was released in the USA in 1953.

they made it through several controls and reached neutral Mozambique.

Other escapes ended tragically for some unidentified prisoners who attempted to walk back to Ethiopia across the Chalbi desert where they died of thirst or from an attack by wild animals. Their remains are now at the Nyeri memorial church.

The fate and conditions of the POWs in Kenya and elsewhere underwent a drastic change after Italy signed an armistice with the Allied Powers on 8 September 1943. The prisoners were asked to sign up as collaborators, which gave them the possibility of working outside the camp. The vast majority accepted the offer, though a small minority refused. The latter were not necessarily bloodthirsty fanatics. As an officer is said to have explained his refusal to sign, “It is you, after all, who coined the expression ‘My country, right or wrong’”.

Several ugly incidents followed inside some of the camps, especially at Camp 359 at Burguret and 355 at Nyeri between the two factions, with beatings and some deaths. In the end, the Officers’ Camp 365 at Londiani had to be split in two — Londiani/7 for cooperators and Londiani/8 for non-cooperators — in order to separate the two groups.

The Italian-built chapel at the bottom of the Rift Valley escarpment road from Limuru to Naivasha. Photo: Peta Meyer



### Building works

POWs who were cooperators subsequently enjoyed more freedom and could work on nearby farms and road projects. They built the nine-kilometre Mai Mahiu road down the Rift Valley escarpment to Naivasha to a very good standard and then put up the small Roman Catholic chapel by the side of the road that stands to this day. Giuseppe Salzano, a former POW living in the United States, received a photo of the church, but he said it was not the one he had helped to build. “Mine was built on flat ground and had no bell tower,” the 95-year-old wrote, apologising for his shaky handwriting.

A bridge between Kenya and Tanzania inside the Masai Mara game reserve still bears the sign “Built by Italian POWs Camp 361”. Italian POWs helped build dams, houses and churches. A plaque on the Wajir District Hospital records that it was designed and built by Italian POWs. In Nairobi, POW mechanics were employed at the RAF base at Eastleigh to repair the Pratt and Whitney engines of Twin Wasp aircraft. In their spare time some of them turned scrap metal into useful objects that they subsequently sold in town.

Louis Leakey also employed several Italian POWs on his digs at Olorgesailie.

One good-looking lad, only known as Bruno, found favour with a local lady who shall remain nameless. She took him on long rides and invited him to dinner, her husband being apparently broad-minded about such matters. As a result, writes another former prisoner in his memoirs, “We all benefited because he would bring back some bottles of wine or beer, some bread and sausages, hidden from the guards, which we all shared”.

At Eldoret, Camp 356 was at a racecourse that no longer exists. A publication by the Eldoret branch of the East African Women’s League put together by Rosemary Blanche



in 1967 records the presence of the POWs and simply notes that “a lot of the game was reduced at that time when it was shot to feed the prisoners and soldiers.”

In fact, there is scarcely any memoir written by British settlers at the time which does not refer to the presence of Italian POWs on their farms or place of business.

Predictably, in the POWs' memoirs the British guards are sometimes described as bad and sometimes as good. One former prisoner dismisses them as being all “a.. holes”, while another dedicates an album of sketches to his camp commandant, “in grateful recognition for the kindness shown to me”.

Not a single bad word can be found in the memoirs about the Kenyan population. Some missionaries who were allowed out on walks under guard recall how they managed to communicate in Kikuyu with passersby by pretending to be singing, while asking for news of the nuns and their missions. Another prisoner recalls how he was cured of an illness by a bitter mixture from a local man, smuggled under the barbed wire. One soldier from the King's African Rifles,<sup>2</sup> Musili Buluu (if the spelling in my source is correct), worked with Italian POWs who had experience in dry-land farming. Years later he put his knowledge to good use and now has 300 mango trees on his farm. Many former prisoners returned to Kenya after the war and married local girls.

In addition to the information available on the conditions and life in the POW camps in Kenya from the memoirs published of returning prisoners, documents were recently released from the secret archives of the Vatican. The Holy See remained very

active throughout World War II in obtaining and relaying information about prisoners of both sides in the conflict and in 1944 sent an emissary to visit the camps in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. The balanced and exhaustive report he wrote on his return is now available to researchers.

### Vatican report

From the 1944 report by the Vatican's inspector we learn that “in Kenya there are prisoners of other nationalities, such as Germans, Hungarians, Finns and French (who had not joined the de Gaulle movement, the *Free French Forces*). They are kept together in small camps or in sections of a camp, at Kabete and Nanyuki, in satisfactory conditions.”

The inspector noted that Camp 356 in Eldoret housed 3,500 officers and nearly 1,000 soldiers. Facilities included mess halls, study rooms, a university offering various courses, four churches, sports grounds, and four theatres. “The officers can go for walks for several miles among the beautiful landscape. The altitude, though 2,100 m above sea level, is not excessive”, he wrote. Describing Camp 352 in Naivasha as “very dry and exposed to constant wind”, he said with 12,000 prisoners it had been the largest in Kenya, but the population was now down to 1,000, and the camp was soon to be closed.

At long last, the war ended. Rosemary Dawson recalls the end of the war which had two Italian POWs as silent bystanders. The radio was soon to make the official announcement, so the woman, who was alone on her farm in Garissa while her husband John was on safari, sent a polite invitation to the two Italian POWs on the farm — the only Europeans around — which they equally politely turned down. When Winston Churchill's speech was broadcast she excitedly ran to the kitchen. “Ikuna,” she said, “It's marvellous, the war is over!”

<sup>2</sup> The King's African Rifles (KAR) was a British regiment of indigenous African soldiers from British colonies in East Africa between 1902 and 1960.



The church in Ndarugu, now a gazetted monument and in disuse but under the ownership of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. The stone over the arched entrance reads "AD 1942".



The cook was taking some biscuits out of the oven and turned his head slightly. "Yes?" he replied, "and who won?"

### **The camp at Ndarugu**

The church and monument at Ndarugu Camp 360 stand on a hill at an altitude of 1,513 m above sea level. At present a stone quarry operates on one side of the hill with a coffee plantation at the far end. In the distance, the mountain on which the Duke of Aosta was held prisoner is clearly visible. There are still many signs of the camp remaining, notably the stone bases of the wooden barracks that housed the prisoners. Stones and pieces of buildings are everywhere.

It would be a worthwhile initiative to measure and plot the entire area, perhaps with the assistance of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Nairobi in conjunction with some Italian specialised institution.

Interestingly enough, Ndarugu was already a prison even before WWII. In the National Archives in Nairobi is a letter from the British administration dated 15 September 1914 that refers to the "Ndarugu Special Prison", and gives the type and amount of food, including maize, beans, potatoes, ghee and salt, to be provided to prisoners at meals.

The number of POWs held at the camp varied over time — General Guglielmo Nasi, the Duke of Aosta's aide-de-camp, speaks of 7,000, the Vatican envoy mentions 10,000, while Giuseppe Salzano, the former POW and a builder of one of the Italian churches, recalls that there were 12,000. The contingent of guards was under the command of Colonel Charles Pennack.

On a flat area approximately 100 m long by 60 m wide and enclosed by a low, well-constructed wall stands a church built by the POWs from local stone. The building is 18 m long and 6 m wide, and over the entrance is the date AD 1942. This is likely to be the church that Mr Salzano helped to build.

The church is well preserved, down to the rows of pews, although the roof has been replaced by iron sheets. After the war it was acquired by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa which uses it only occasionally. If it were to be returned to its original Catholic origins, the PCEA would have to be compensated.

The monument to the Duke of Aosta is one km from the church. It has suffered considerable damage, and the statue at the top has all but disappeared. But what lends the monument historical significance are its two well-preserved panels.

The first shows a road zigzagging up a mountain with some huts on the side and a forest at the top. The road clearly leads to Wolcheffit (Wolkefit) Pass, a major engineering achievement, built through Ethiopia's Semien Mountains some 100 km



north of Gondar in 1936-37. An American expert, a Mr Busk, wrote: "I have a lot of experience of roads in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America, but I have never seen any to compare with this one in difficulty".

The pass was defended by a contingent of 5,000 men under the command of Colonel Mario Gonella who put up strong resistance for 160 days after being cut off from the rest of the Italian forces who had surrendered at Amba Alagi on 19 May 1941. The British Colonel Ringrose sent him a message reading: "Sir, I write to you personally, not as an enemy to an enemy, but man to man, in an effort to spare further loss of blood and suffering. The courage shown by your officers and men in the face of constant artillery fire, aerial attacks, hunger and deprivation are already an object of admiration by the British army, and it will be an honour for me to meet you when this war will be over."

The Italians surrendered on 27 September 1941, opening the way for Allied forces under General Charles Fowkes to head south, and bringing to an end the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. Two of the defenders were awarded gold medals as was Munatu Endisciau, an Ethiopian who fought with

them. In Italy there is a Wolchefit Street in Fiumicino outside Rome.

Also on this panel are two clearly recognisable Caproni Ca 310 bombers and a Fiat Falco fighter plane, a Fiat tank and an SPA Dovunque 35 lorry.

The other panel on the opposite side of the monument shows an officer waving a flag, two soldiers and an *ascaro* (African soldier) manning a Model 11 cannon, and two soldiers firing a Breda machine gun.

### Acknowledgements

I should like to put on record my gratitude to Mike Harries who first brought to my attention, and through me to that of the Italian authorities, the existence of the Ndarugu church and monument.

PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS INDICATED.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

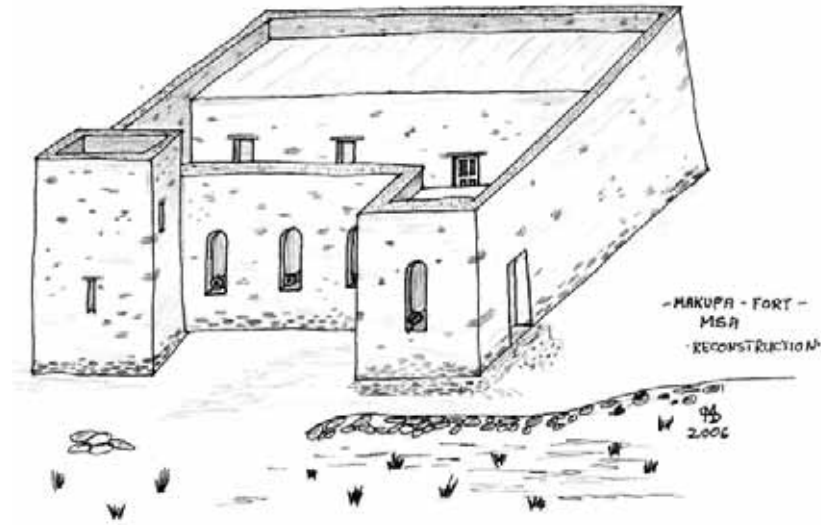
Aldo Manos, an Italian national, is a former director of UNEP, now retired and living in Kenya.

#### Left:

The author and his wife at panel one of the Ndarugu monument, showing the Wolchefit Pass in Ethiopia which the Italians built and then defended in one of WWII's most famous battles.

#### Right:

The panel on the opposite side shows an officer waving a flag, and soldiers with weapons. Note the euphorbia trees, typical of the East African landscape.



# The rediscovery of Makupa Fort

**Hans-Martin Sommer rediscovered the lost Portuguese fort of Makupa on Mombasa Island in 2006 while working as a marine archaeologist with the National Museum's Department of Coastal Archaeology. This is the report of his excavation. Official inaction has since led to the site becoming overgrown.**

**by Hans-Martin Sommer**

**W**hile doing research as part of the (then) master plan to turn Mombasa's Mama Ngina Drive into a tourist attraction, I found very old sources that mentioned two forts on the island. One was near the Likoni ferry and no longer exists (although a few stones remain), and the other was Makupa Fort. Anecdotal reports say it was destroyed during the building of the railway and the Makupa causeway at the end of the 19th century.

In July and August 2006 I together with two colleagues from the National Museum's departments of Coastal Archaeology, and Sites and Monuments, carried out a number of exploratory surveys to look for the fort.

Unlike its more famous counterpart, Fort Jesus, very few documents on the history of Makupa Fort exist. Our primary objective was to find out if any traces could be found of the vanished fort of Makupa, close to the Makupa causeway which leads to the mainland.

The second objective, once the the remains of the fortified structure were located, was to prepare a preliminary site map of the fort.

*Above:*  
Hans-Martin Sommer's sketch reconstruction of the Makupa Fort based on historical notes and his own excavation. An old photo from about 1900 shows the ruins very similar to the reconstruction sketch.

To collect construction details of the Makupa Fort, a small scale excavation was planned and carried out in September 2006. Further investigations, including an environmental survey and test pits around the site to find out more details about the whole complex according to descriptions dating back to the 17th - 19th centuries, were then carried out.

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### Historical background

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According to historian James Kirkman<sup>1</sup> a battle between the Portuguese and two ships belonging to the Turkish pirate Mirale Bey took place in 1589 AD at the Makupa Fort:

“He (Mirale Bey) sent two of his five ships to hold the Makupa Fort with their cannon, and with the remaining three awaited the Portuguese at the harbour mouth ... the Portuguese first captured the three ships in the harbour, then sailed round and sank the two ships at the fort.”

The initial aim of the Makupa project had been to locate the shipwrecks near the fort. However, because of limited financial resources for an underwater survey, only the intertidal zone of the Makupa creek could be prospected, and that by foot from the shore.

### Pre-survey and pre-excavation works

Numerous literary sources and maps were studied before embarking on the project. The internet was also a valuable help. The primary objective of the excavation was to find the outlines of the fort, because the visible remains are not in direct context to each other and covered in total an area of only five square metres. The first of the two main sources were Rezende's<sup>2</sup> description and the map of Mombasa in 1634:

The three forts of Macupa are three buildings, which are erected in a quadrangle alongside the harbour on the island of Mombasa on the side by the mainland at a place where one can cross on dry foot, as can be seen on the plan. They are used to prevent the Mozungullos [a people living on the mainland] from crossing from the mainland to the island. The middle building is larger than the other two, but is no more than a house with an upper storey above and a ground floor below. It is entered below in the middle of the ground floor and has an area of five fathoms and is as long as it is wide. It is covered by a flat roof. There are fifteen soldiers and one Portuguese bombardier in it....He (the captain) is also captain of the other two forts, which are built on each side laterally at the distance of a musket-shot. These are also each of them a building with an upper floor covered by a flat roof, but are smaller, being about half the size with an area of three fathoms. In each of them there are five soldiers, who defend it with their muskets from round loopholes. In the middle fort there are two metal sakers [small cannon] and a Portuguese bombardier.....There is a wall close to the three forts, which was formerly made by the natives for the like purpose of obstructing the said passage against the Mozungullos. It is of a small area and made of sun-dried brick.

The second important source is the description by the German explorer Baron Carl Claus von der Decken<sup>3</sup>, dated 1861:

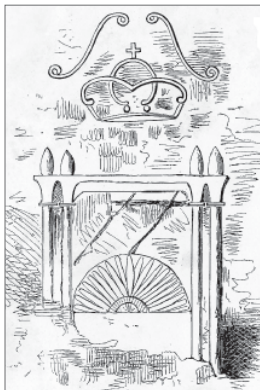
One also effortlessly reaches Makupa, a small fort in the northwest of the island built by the Portuguese and rehabilitated by the Arabs... I found a relief on the wall of the first and big room, six feet high and three and one quarter foot wide. It shows a crown

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1. Kirkman, James, 1964. *Man and monuments on the East African coast*, Lutterworth Press, London.  
 2. Rezende's description of Mombasa, 1634 in G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville: *The East African coast - Selected documents*, Rex Collings, London 1975.  
 3. von der Decken, Carl Claus: *Reisen in Ost-Africa 1859-1861*, Hamburg, 1865.



Panorama of the prospected site at Kipevu Causeway, off Kilindini Harbour.



Von der Decken's sketch of the relief he saw on the wall of the fort.

topped by a cross, with an arabesque on either side. Beneath it are four columns whose capitals seem to be the points of a lance. The columns are separated by a niche curved and shaped like a mussel shell. There was also a blurred inscription, of which only the first

letter X was visible. In my opinion, a statue of a saint probably stood inside the niche... The Fort has a square ground plan, fifty feet long and broad and twenty feet high. Three big gun ports open to the sea, a fourth gun port is in the niche of the entrance door. A dilapidated tower facing the sea served as a lookout. Some other walls, which are two feet thick and broken through by little embrasures, are partly constructed from stones not found on the island. [Author's own translation.]

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## The two surveys

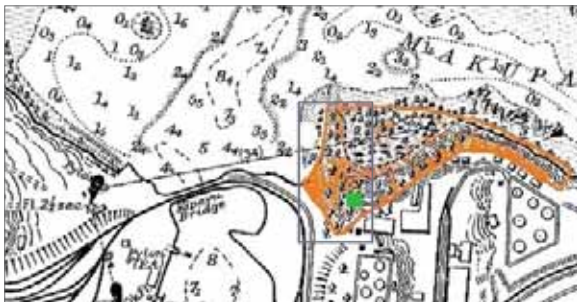
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### The survey at Kilindini

The first survey was carried out with my colleague, the surveyor Toshiki Yokogawa,<sup>4</sup> in Kilindini harbour (off Kipevu Causeway) on 20 July 2006. A provisional survey map in the museum from the year 1964 showed a horseshoe-shaped wall structure in this area, which appeared a possible site for a fortification.

Because of insecurity in this area, the survey was made under the protection of three armed harbour policemen. The area was covered with a layer of about three metres of soil, cracked concrete, sand, rubbish etc. and still being used as a dumping site for the Kilindini harbour construction works. It was not possible to find any signs of ancient buildings or even natural geological wall-like structures.

Prospected area during the first survey.



Rezende's map of Mombasa from 1634 had shown a small church or chapel at the north-western edge of Mombasa Island, not far from the Makupa Fort area. This site must be approximately in the area (marked in the map on the left with a blue rectangle) bounded by the shore, the petrol station (green square) and the railroad track. Today, the area

4. Toshiki Yokogawa was working on behalf of the Japanese aid agency JICA to train the National Museum's coastal archaeology staff in surveying and map making.

is completely built over. Remains can no longer be found. It was not permitted to take photographs inside the port area.

### The survey at the Makupa Causeway

The second survey, also carried out with Toshiki Yokogawa, had the additional and useful assistance of Paul Njoroge. Because of insecurity, the Mombasa Central Police Station again provided two armed policemen free of charge. We started the first phase of the survey in the north-east close to Makupa Causeway below the government houses, but no traces of ancient buildings were found. The second phase started between the mangroves and the Kenya Railways estate along the waterline during low tide.

Approximately 200 metres southwest of the causeway, covered with bushes, a small wall-like structure was recovered.

After a provisional clearing, two walls appeared. They are set at an angle of 90° to each other but the walls are not connected. The maximum height over the ground is about 40 cm. At a distance of about 3 m to the north-west another remainder of a wall



was found. A small piece of wall, approx. 1 m<sup>2</sup> only 10 cm above ground level, lies in a field about 9 m to the south.

The two surveyed areas with the location of the fort.

A first site plan was made and a first reconstruction attempt was sketched by the author (see first page).

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## The excavations

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### The excavation of the fort

At the beginning two trenches were planned, but a further two trenches were later added. The first trench (trench 1) led from the main wall in a northerly direction, parallel



The remains of the walls revealed after removing the brushwood and the sacred fig tree on the right side of the photo.



A remaining piece of wall, approx. 1 m<sup>2</sup>, lies in a field about 9 m from the main wall.

It can be clearly seen that the two walls (the plastered main wall at the right) are not connected to each other. The distance between the walls above the surface is about 8 cm; the walls touch only at the foundation. This yields an inclination of about 5°, perhaps a reason for the caving-in of the building.



Viewed from the east the main wall, made from coral stones and mortar, shows a thickness of about 1.25 m. At the right, the wall which is not joined to the main wall can be seen.



Top view of trenches 1 and 2.



to the wall which was not joined to the main wall. In the course of the work we found on both of the walls remains of original plaster in good condition. This indicated the foundation must be at a lower level. The trench with a width of approx. 60 cm was extended at the corner between the walls. At a depth of 100 cm the foundation of the main wall was found.

Trench 3 led along the visible main wall in an east-west direction. The highest point of the main wall is approximately 50 cm above the ground level. The total length of the wall is about 15 metres.

Until the start of the excavation works, the big fig tree seen in the background of the photos had been used as a spiritual place by a local medicine man. He shifted to another site and with his kind permission we could continue the excavation.

The main wall was built of coral stone and mortar. The adjacent wall for the most part was made of a hard, reddish rock not found on Mombasa Island. This type of stone was most likely extracted from the area between Changamwe and Mazeras on the mainland.

### The excavation of the wall

During the three-day excavation, further explorations were carried out on both sides of the fort. No references to possible remains of a tower or a wall could be found east of the excavation site or near the causeway.

A survey on the western side of the fort showed a long stretched formation with a length of approx. 25 m, an average width of 6.5 m and a middle elevation of 2.5 m. The distance between the fort and this wall is approx. 100 m.

A cut was laid out to the seaward end to show the internal structure of the wall.



## Results

According to the sources of Rezende (1634) and Baron von der Decken (1861), we can assume that these partly-excavated stone walls are part of the missing fort of Makupa and the earth wall at a distance of about 100 m is a part of the former “sun dried brick-wall” which protected the fort and the towers to the island side.

The following facts confirm this assumption: The approximate length of the excavated fort’s main wall of 15 m (49 ft) and the strong, reddish stones points to the accuracy of the information from Baron von der Decken. Even the distance between trench 4 and the wall remains in the field are about the same distance.

The difference in the detailed lengths between Baron von der Decken (15 m) and Rezende (5 fathoms = 9.26 m) is easy to explain: Before the fort was enlarged by the tower on the seaward end, the distance from the main wall up to the remains in the field was about 9 m. This corresponds to the detail of Rezende.



The walls in the area between trenches 1, 2 and 4 look like a square-shaped tower or an extension of the fort walls. Baron von der Decken described this as a “niche”. The fact that the walls are not connected to the main wall indicates a later expansion of the fort.

The vertical section of the expansion of trench 1 showed an approximately 15-cm-strong humus layer of a compact alluvial sand layer reaching to a depth of about 130 cm. The wall 100 metres away showed a similar result. Together with the mussels embedded in the stones in trench 4, a long period of inundation is conceivable.

Trench 4 (view from the north). A significant detail are the shells on the hard reddish stones, a sign of higher water levels over an extended time period. At the right edge of the picture is a stair-like structure.



The wall from seaward during excavation and survey.

This is also a plausible explanation for the inclination of the building and perhaps a reason for its eventual caving in.

Rezende measured the distance between the fort and the tower and/ or the brick wall

with a “musket-shot”. This is a relatively inaccurate detail. Different ancient sources indicate this to be a distance between 80 and 125 metres. This also corresponds to the measured distance of approx. 100 m.

## Other small Portuguese forts on Mombasa Island



A view of Fort St Joseph in 2006. In the foreground are the foundations of the old Portuguese chapel *Nossa Senhora das Mercês* (Our Lady of Mercy).



The remains of the fortification on the golf course. Known as the Golf Course Fort, this bastion is also called *Kaberas* after a Turkish ship which hit a reef nearby and bombarded the fort.



The Horseshoe Fort — a very small fortification guarding the entrance to Kilindini Harbour, still in reasonable condition. Little is known of its history.

As part of the (then) plan to turn Mombasa’s Mama Ngina Drive into a tourist attraction, a database of all heritage objects in the area was undertaken. This was the first project to investigate all of Mombasa’s archaeological sites and more recent buildings, including the fortifications and defensive buildings of World War II.

About 30 surveys were carried out between the area of the Fort St Joseph, the golf course and the western end of Mama Ngina Drive near the bus station, which revealed a large number of culturally and historically valuable buildings. Only about 10% had been officially documented before this time. Among them are remains of buildings like these three small forts erected by the Portuguese in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Between the baobab trees can also be glimpsed several wall remains from Tuaca, the ancient Swahili settlement that stood on the location before Mombasa was occupied by the Portuguese.

These websites have more information:

- [www.indicatorloops.com/mombasa\\_forts.htm](http://www.indicatorloops.com/mombasa_forts.htm)
- [www.colonialvoyage.com/colonial/mombasa/smallforts.html](http://www.colonialvoyage.com/colonial/mombasa/smallforts.html)

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## Recommendations

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Finding the two wrecked ships of the pirate Mirale Bey is of historical importance. During the search from the mainland, two possible locations were identified.

The continuation and the completion of the excavations of Makupa Fort is the second important aim. With that, a plan can be prepared for the theoretical reconstruction of the fort.

After the completion of the works the surfaces of the exposed walls should be covered with a protective layer of cement and mortar. This would provide good resistance to erosion and the influences of weather.

The area near the brick wall must be examined thoroughly. There is a high probability that the remains of one of the two towers will be found nearby.

Baron von der Decken mentioned a big room with a relief within the main walls of the fort. There is a high likelihood that the relief was made of mortar. With special treatment, elements of this relief can be preserved. A reconstruction therefore is not impossible.

I hope that the work can be continued as soon as possible on this interesting and important building.

The Makupa Fort, whose location had been lost over the years, was of immense importance for the protection of Mombasa down the centuries. It is an indispensable component of the Portuguese history in Mombasa. A declaration as a "gazetted monument" is recommended to enable its protection.

The building can later become a part of "Mombasa's military landscape" and represents a new and great attraction in the cultural environment of the town.

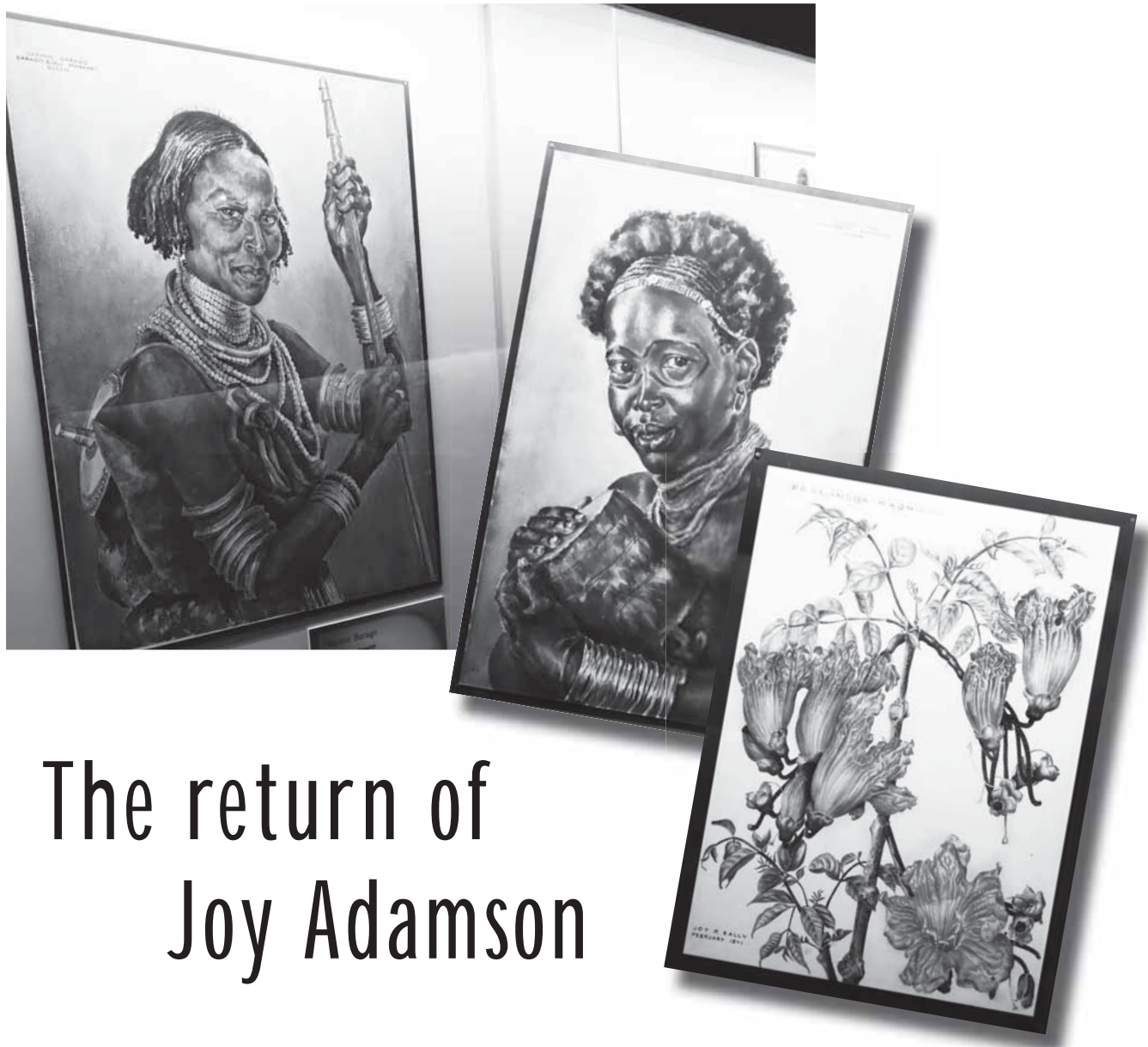
### Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for the grant from the French Embassy in Kenya which supported this and another important project. I would also like to acknowledge the great assistance of my colleagues Toshiki Yokogawa and Paul Njoroge in the excavation of Makupa and other projects we were engaged in.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND SKETCHES PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hans-Martin Sommer has an MA in marine archaeology and worked with NMK in Mombasa from 2005 - 2008 to set up a department of underwater archaeology. Apart from Makupa Fort, he found a new wreck off Fort Jesus, researched the mythical "sunken town of Ungama" at Kipini, at the mouth of the Tana River, and produced an inventory of Portuguese shipwrecks on the Kenyan coast. He is now based on Germany's Baltic Sea coast.



# The return of Joy Adamson

**The historic collection of Joy Adamson's tribal portraits, botanical studies and wildlife paintings is once again on view at the Nairobi Museum.**

**by Marla Stone**

Clockwise from top left:  
Joy Adamson's paintings of a Borana woman, a Sanye woman and an African flame tree blossom.

Many Kenyans have only been to the Nairobi National Museum once and that was on a school outing. One of the anchor exhibitions of the museum prior to its renovation in 2006-2008 was Joy Adamson's *Peoples of Kenya*. Her dramatic and detailed portraits done in the 1950s and 1960s of individuals of various communities dressed in their traditional garb were displayed on the upper gallery surrounding the main entrance hall. Those paintings constitute the principal memory of many a Kenyan's childhood visit to the museum. The exhibition was also a popular



The botanical paintings are both beautiful and highly accurate in their detail.

draw to the museum for foreign visitors. The collection was, however, put in storage when the museum reopened after its facelift.

The Kenya Museum Society and the Exhibitions Department of the National Museums of Kenya have together brought back a fresh view of the Joy Adamson collection that includes 51 reproductions from over 700 paintings preserved in the museum archives. Kenya's cultural and natural heritage are captured in the portraits and Joy's beautiful and detailed botanical and wildlife illustrations. These are complemented by a number of items from the NMK's ethnographic and scientific collections, which provide a real-life view of the items that Joy depicted in her paintings. The exhibition features headdresses, jewellery, weapons, musical instruments and circumcision practices.

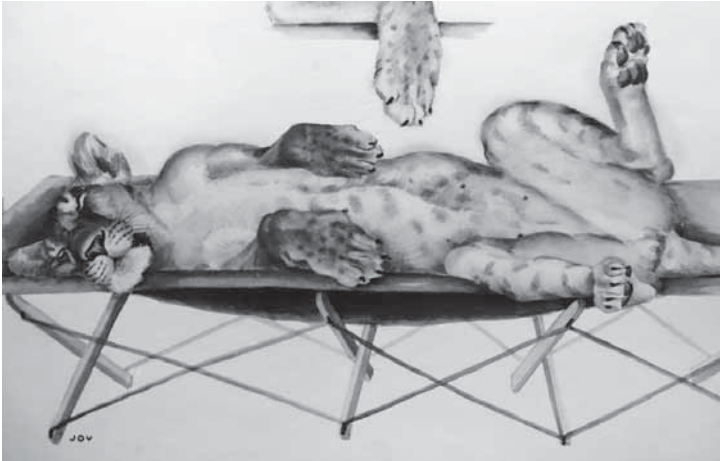
### **The story of Joy Adamson**

Joy Adamson was born on 1910 in what is now the Czech Republic and named Friederike Victoria Gessner. She originally came to Kenya in the 1930s, sent by her first husband, Viktor von Klarwill, to find a safe

place for them to escape the persecution of Jews during World War II. Later she met and married the Swiss botanist Peter Bally, who nicknamed her Joy. On her trips with Bally on his botanical expeditions, he encouraged her to use her artistic talent and training to paint the plants he was studying. She completed over 300 botanical illustrations of Kenya's herbs, shrubs, trees and other flowering plants that won her awards, international exhibitions and several publications. These vivid and detailed illustrations are still used today for research

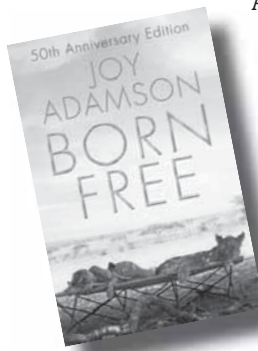
Joy Adamson painting the portrait of a Masai woman, 1960. Photo: Kenneth Rittener/Getty Images, accessed via Britannica.com





Elsa the lion, where Joy Adamson's twin loves for art and conservation intertwined.

in identifying plants. They are presented in the exhibition according to their location in Kenya's eight botanical regions.



Another category of Joy's illustrations is the wildlife and marine life of Kenya. Most people outside the country know the name Joy Adamson not through her paintings but rather the conservation work she carried out with her third husband, George Adamson, who was a game warden.

The Adamsons' pioneering efforts led to the creation of Kenya's first wildlife reserves. In the late 1950s and 1960s they released into the wild some orphaned animals they had raised: the story Joy wrote of Elsa the lion, *Born free*, became the first of three bestselling books that were made into movies, bringing the topic of animal protection to the world's attention and inspiring a generation of animal conservationists. Today the release of animals raised in zoos or reserves back into the wild has become a common restocking practice. Joy's work has stimulated environmental education in schools around the world. The small collection on show includes paintings of Joy's beloved big cats, Elsa the lion and Pippa the leopard.

The largest and most stunning component of the new exhibition is the peoples of Kenya. The collection of portraits and full

body paintings depicts the cultural norms and practices that represent Kenya's broad diversity. In 1945 while travelling around the country with George Adamson in his job, Joy began painting portraits of the men and women she met. Her initial portraits were experiments as she had never done portraiture before, but her capture of the dramatic and beautiful regalia, instruments and adornments of the various ethnic groups she encountered resulted in the colonial government of the time commissioning Joy to paint a record of all the tribes of Kenya. Travelling around the country, she completed 132 portraits in about 18 months, but continued the portrait painting long after the commission ended. She painted in total nearly 600 portraits, representing 54 ethnic groups. The collection was presented to the Nairobi National Museum (then Coryndon Museum) by the government where selected pieces hung until 2006. Some of the original paintings hang in State House.

With the thousands of school children who visit the museum every month in mind, the new Joy Adamson exhibition, titled *The legacy of Joy Adamson*, is intended to encourage interactivity with what the viewer is seeing. Much of the text and the questions in the botanical and wildlife sections focus on the issues that threaten Kenya's natural heritage. Simultaneously the section on portraits presents the rich diversity of Kenya's cultural heritage and the visitor, whether young or old, is invited to compare traditional cultural practices and dress with the norms of today.

### **The role of the Kenya Museum Society**

All the paintings and articles in the exhibition are presented in a new set of glass showcases funded by KMS. To retain the freshness of the exhibition and promote return visits to the museum, a second set of portraits and illustrations have been identified together with the exhibition curator, Head



Left from top to bottom:  
The historic portraits on display are complemented by items from the Museum's ethnographic collections.

The cover of Joy Adamson's book, *The peoples of Kenya*, republished by KMS.



of Archives  
I m e l d a  
Kithuka, to  
replace the  
current ones  
after one year.

In addition KMS has developed a pack of six greeting cards featuring selected portraits for exclusive sale in the museum shops.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Marla Stone is the Honorary Secretary and former Art Gallery Coordinator of the Kenya Museum Society. She is an education consultant who has lived and worked in Kenya and Somalia for 14 years. For this exhibition she was the KMS liaison, working alongside the NKM Design Department in design and text creation and editing.

Joy's account of her travels around the country, the people she met, their ceremonies, foods and day-to-day way of life, came together in the book *The peoples of Kenya* that she wrote in 1967. The book is still a resource for anthropologists today, especially as the costumes and cultural practices described in it are for most Kenyans a memory of another age.

The book was reprinted by KMS in 2003 with a grant from the governments of Austria and Finland.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETA MEYER UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED.



# Kenya's natural cultural sites:

## Changing contexts, changing meanings

**In the past, all of Kenya's ethnic groups recognised 'special places' in their landscapes, places where the normal daily activities of farming, herding or hunting were forbidden or strictly controlled. Such places might be trees, forests, rock outcrops, lakes, hills or mountains, and are often referred to as 'natural sacred sites' or 'natural cultural sites'.**

**Anthropologist Celia Nyamweru explores their meanings in the past and in the Kenya of today.**

**by Celia Nyamweru**

**N**atural cultural sites have meanings related to indigenous religions, or to locations where 'first settlement' by the ancestors of a particular ethnic group occurred, or they were sites for particular community meetings and rituals. After the imposition of colonial rule, many such sites were destroyed or degraded, but others have survived and are now the focus of conservation efforts by a wide range of stakeholders, from local community members to national and international NGOs.

I have been studying Kenya's natural cultural sites for nearly 20 years, in particular the kaya forests of the Kenya coast. In this paper I talk about four clusters of natural sites of cultural significance: the kaya forests of the Kenya coast; Mount Kenya and other sites of the central Kenya highlands; cultural sites in the Lake Victoria basin, including Ramogi Hill and Kit Mikayi; and highland sites in northern Kenya occupied primarily by pastoral nomads, including Mount Nyiro and Forole Hill.

### **Beliefs and practices associated with natural cultural sites**

There are several ways of classifying natural cultural sites; one obvious way is based on the physical nature of the site — vegetation sites (forests and groves), water sites (rivers,

*Above:*

Sunrise over Mount Kenya. The country's highest peak is recognised as the home of God by the Kikuyu and related ethnic groups of the central highlands. Photo: Joo Beng Koh.



lakes, swamps, ponds), rocks, caves and mountain sites. Another way is to look for the meaning of the site to the community in which it is located. We need to recognise that a particular site may be given several different categories of meaning, and that the meanings change through time. In my analysis, I identify six general categories of site by meaning, as follows:

**(i) Origin and first settlement sites** are those at which a group ancestor and his immediate descendants are said to have taken up residence on first migration into a particular area.

**(ii) Religious sites** are those at which deities are believed to reside, or visit regularly. This category also includes sites at or towards which sacrifices and prayers are directed or located.

**(iii) Indigenous governance sites** are those at which community affairs are discussed or managed. As well as regular meetings of community leaders, these sites would also be the location for community-wide rituals, such as initiations and age-set promotions.

**(iv) Political sites** are cultural sites of political significance. Some may have been sites of resistance to colonial rule, or to post-colonial nation states. In Kenya the Mau Mau struggle has given rise to sites of political meaning such as caves where freedom fighters sheltered, or trees in which messages were left.

**(v) Conservation sites** are sites whose importance stems from the conservation efforts directed at them, either as elements of the 'natural' environment (vegetation, water, rocks) or as 'cultural' features (homesteads, fortifications, places of worship).

**(vi) Tourism sites** are those that have become the focus of national or international tourism. Tourism is among the world's

fastest-growing industries and increasing numbers of tourists seek experiences of cultural value. Cultural sites may attract international tourists or draw citizens of the host country to learn more of their own history and culture. Tourism may be encouraged as a means of income generation for the community controlling a cultural site, for example the kaya forests Kinondo and Mudzimuvya.

### Coastal sites:

#### The kaya forests

The word kaya (plural *makaya*) means a settlement in the Mijikenda languages. This is a clue to the primary meaning the Mijikenda themselves attribute to these forest patches, as the locations of the first defensive settlements established by their ancestors when they migrated into this area several centuries ago. Each of the nine Mijikenda groups identifies its own primary kaya settlement, from which dispersal occurred as populations increased and the threats from neighbouring groups subsided. These settlements, and the forests that surrounded them, also had supernatural elements; Thomas Spear describes the central patch of vegetation in the kaya, in which the *finjo* (a powerful protective magical charm) was buried, and the surrounding forest, which "served as a safe place to store those medicines too powerful to be kept safely within the confines of the kaya itself."<sup>1</sup>

As they declined as centres of population and settlement, the kayas began to be more recognised as sacred centres and the sources of Mijikenda identity. Cynthia Brantley, who studied Kayafungo (the central kaya of the Giriama people) in the 1970s, comments that "the kaya changed from the core of Giriama population and government into the Giriama ritual centre and a symbol of Giriama unity. As the store-house of all

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<sup>1</sup> Spear 1978, pages 47-48



Mr Mwanza Mwangiri Ndoro, Secretary to the Kaya Kauma elders, demonstrates how surface mining of iron ore is reaching to the very edge of the kaya forest (photographed March 2014).

medicines and the burial ground of the ancestors, the kaya became sacred.”<sup>2</sup> David Parkin<sup>3</sup> provides a list of the supernatural attributes of the kaya, including its power to bring about good (rain, fertility, health, success in war) and also to control the evil of witchcraft. Even today, prayers and sacrifices for rain are held in kaya forests.

Parkin also refers to the governance function of the kaya, describing Kaya Giriama as “an intrinsic source of ritual power ... providing its elders with legitimacy in their handling of crises.”<sup>4</sup> The indigenous governance system of the Mijikenda was based on the *kambi* or council of elders. Though this system has been replaced by other institutions, involving government-appointed chiefs and headmen, elected local councillors, and elected national and county representatives, kaya elders still exert influence at both the local and national levels. Would-be politicians recognise the benefits of being seen to be closely linked to kaya elders and institutions. Justin Willis describes how one prominent Mijikenda politician, the late Karisa Maitha, was elevated to kaya

eldership and the position of ‘King of the Mijikenda’ in 2003. Non-Mijikenda have also sought recognition in this way; in April 2003 Mwai Kibaki, then recently-elected President of Kenya, made his first official visit to the coast and was ‘initiated’ as an elder of the Mijikenda at a public ceremony. According to the account by Justin Willis,<sup>5</sup> this “involved wrapping him in an array of cloths and a headdress, and was performed by a man who was described as representing the ‘Council of Kaya Elders.’”

Despite their cultural, spiritual and political significance, many of the kaya forests have been destroyed, drastically reduced in size, or degraded. People cleared the trees for farm land and also made use of the timber resources for building and for firewood. Others are at risk from mining activities, such as Kaya Kauma (see photo). The power of the elders to protect the forests has been reduced due to the influence of Christianity, Islam and western education that have caused people to lose respect for the indigenous beliefs. Economic pressures are also great because of the poverty, unemployment and landlessness in the surrounding communities.

Interest in the kaya forests from a conservation perspective appears to have begun in the 1980s; in 1981 a report by the Oxford University Ethnobotanical Expedition to Kenya described the kaya forests as threatened ecosystems containing a variety of rare plants and animals. The researchers spoke with a number of kaya elders about the status of the forests, and were particularly impressed with the elders of Kaya Rabai, whom they described as being “strong-minded in their resistance to the detrimental effects of westernisation.”<sup>6</sup> Recognition of the need to conserve the kaya forests, and of the kaya elders as important

2 Brantley 1981, page 40

3 Parkin 1991

4 *ibid.* page 37

5 Willis 2009, page 233

6 Hawthorne et al. 1981, page 32

allies in this goal, continued to grow in subsequent years, in particular through the work of botanists Ann Robertson and Quentin Luke. Robertson describes how her interest in kaya forest conservation started at Kaya Waa, in Kwale District, where she “felt every sympathy with Mzee Selimu when he bemoaned the fact that there was no one coming after him to care for the kaya forest as all the youngsters wanted to do was go to bars and dancing.”<sup>7</sup> In a project carried out from 1988 to 1991, Robertson and Luke did floristic surveys of kaya forests and other Kenya coastal forests, and held discussions with kaya elders. They noted that “there was local concern about the disappearance of the indigenous plants used in traditional medicine, as well as awareness of environmental degradation resulting from forest clearance.”<sup>8</sup>

Government responsibility for kaya forest conservation has been through the National Museums of Kenya, and specifically the Coastal Forest Conservation Unit (CFCU). Funded by WWF-International between 1992 and 2002, CFCU focused on supporting kaya elders in efforts to reduce the rate of extraction of forest resources. They also worked on mapping the kaya forests and on the gazettement of a number of them as national monuments, allowing the local community to retain control but at the same time providing legal protection from the sale or destruction of the forest. Despite these initiatives, my research has shown that even in the communities surrounding the kaya forests, people’s attitudes and practices may not be totally supportive of forest conservation. In 1997 I headed a team that carried out interviews with over 400 Mijikenda men, women and children from six different communities close to kaya forests. People’s opinions about the value of the forests varied greatly. Women were three times as likely as men to say that



the kaya forests had no value, and over six times as likely to say that they did not know their value. This was particularly true of young women of estimated ages 18 to 25 years. In general, younger people (especially members of revivalist Christian churches) tended to be ignorant of and openly hostile to the belief systems represented by the kayas. While older Mijikenda believe in the importance of the forests as sites for prayers to avert drought and other disasters, the reality is that kaya degradation is an ongoing process.<sup>9</sup>

Locally-based ecotourism projects have been suggested as a way to combine kaya conservation with income generation. Such projects operate at Kaya Kinondo (see photo) and at Kaya Mudzimuvya (one of the Rabai kaya forests). Visitors are taken on short walks through the forest, a local guide explaining the cultural significance of the kaya and pointing out its botanical highlights. However, tourism is an uncertain and highly competitive industry and these projects do not yield huge financial benefits to the local community. At the same time, they provide a useful way in which local school children and college students can be educated about these important cultural symbols.

From left to right: Information poster at the Kaya Kinondo visitor centre.

Mr Salim Edward shows a visitor around Kaya Kinondo. All visitors are loaned black cotton wraps to wear as they visit the sacred forest (photographed January 2013).

7 Robertson 1987

8 Robertson and Luke 1993

9 Nyamweru 1997, Nyamweru et al. 2008

### Cultural sites of the central highlands

The oral traditions and indigenous belief systems of the Bantu-speaking groups of the central Kenya highlands (Kikuyu, Embu, Mbeere, Meru and Kamba) recognise a variety of cultural sites, including Mount Kenya, sacred forests, groves and trees species, sacred lakes and caves. The most prominent cultural site in this cluster is the 5199-metre snow-capped peak of Mount Kenya, one of the first Kenyan sites to gain UNESCO World Heritage listing. The glaciated rocky peak rises over 3,000 metres above the surrounding plateau and is visible over a wide area. According to Jomo Kenyatta,<sup>10</sup> God (*Ngai* or *Mwene-nyaga*, possessor of brightness) lived on the mountain and all prayers and sacrifices were offered facing the mountain. The Embu and Mbeere identify the mountain as the favourite resting place of their deity, *Mwene Njeru* (owner of the sun) where he would “sit and rest there after his numerous journeys and watch all the country.” Certain Embu and Mbeere ceremonies (especially healing rituals and the blessing of infants) involved participants facing Mount Kenya.<sup>11</sup> Mount Kenya’s religious function was almost entirely fulfilled from a distance; among all the groups surrounding the mountain, actual prayers and sacrifices were carried out under sacred trees or at other local cultural sites.

During the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s, several thousand freedom fighters lived in the forests of the Aberdares and Mount Kenya. Karari Njama’s account of his life in the forests makes frequent mention of morning prayers and prayers before meetings uttered while facing Mount Kenya; he also faced Mount Kenya on two of the occasions he took Mau Mau oaths. Njama describes how in August 1953:

we could see the snow cap of Mt. Kenya while saying our morning prayer and eagerly staring at the sacred Home of God asking Him to guard and guide us. Though I did not believe that God *lived* there, I believed it to be a holy place. Firstly, this traditional belief, which had begun with the creation of our tribe, must have originated from something to do with God and not from nothing.<sup>12</sup>

The indigenous belief systems of the peoples of central Kenya recognised many cultural sites related to trees and sacred groves, their meanings being both religious and linked with indigenous governance. Leakey describes how Kikuyu clearing forestland for cultivation will always leave a number of large trees standing — to provide homes for the spirits of all the former trees in the neighbourhood. Special rituals had to be performed if it became necessary to cut down such trees. Favoured species included the mugumo (*Ficus natalensis* or *F. thonningii*) and mukuyu (*F. capensis* or *F. sycamorus*), but “by no means was every mugumo or mukuyu a sacred tree, nor did a tree, once dedicated, remain a sacred tree for all time.”<sup>13</sup> However, while a tree was recognised as sacred:

no person could cut down or break any branch of the tree, nor could anyone cut down or clear the bush round it. Anyone who desecrated it or its environment in any way was heavily fined, and a sacrifice of purification had to be made.

As land was lost to European settlers and population pressure increased, many sacred trees and groves were cut down. The weakening of the indigenous belief systems under the spread of Christianity also played a role. Kenyatta tells how, when he was a child in the early 20th century, only one sacred tree in his neighbourhood of

10 Kenyatta 1938

11 Mwaniki 1973

12 Barnett and Njama page 244

13 Leakey pages 117, 1080

Kiambu survived; “The other sacred trees had been cut down by European planters who were clearing the newly acquired land for cultivation.” He also describes how the elders had prevented Kikuyu Christians from cutting down a sacred tree “to destroy the abodes of the old gods so as to make room for the new.”<sup>14</sup> Castro describes an incident in Nyeri, from 1911, when an Italian priest desecrated sacred groves, but states that “such assaults on the sacred groves were not common in the first two decades of colonial rule.” Based on his fieldwork in the early 1980s, Castro reported that, while the sacred groves were no longer used for ceremonies, “respect for tradition has caused many landowners, including devout Christians, to preserve local groves. Another informant suggested that people still fear the sacred groves, suspecting misfortune if they harm them.”<sup>15</sup> Even now, in the 21st century, large mugumo trees can still be found in many parts of central Kenya, surrounded by farms, houses and market places.

In the last few decades, recognition of the conservation value of trees and groves has begun to play its part. People also recognise other utilitarian reasons for preserving these trees, such as the shade they provide (for example at market places) and their role as windbreaks and as sources of seeds and cuttings. In recent years a combination of outside funding and local initiatives has worked towards the conservation of some of the cultural forests of central Kenya. In an illustrated booklet published in 2005, Muhando and Thuku list a total of 32 ‘sacred sites’ within five districts surrounding the mountain, including Mount Kenya itself, forests, wetlands, caves and single trees. The sites are undergoing degradation from population pressure, logging and charcoal burning and the invasion of exotic plant species. Publication of the

booklet was associated with rehabilitation projects supported by several national and international agencies, among which they list the African Initiative for Alternative Peace and Development (AFRIPAD) and KENRIK. The bulk of the funding was from UNDP, the United Nations Development Programme.

Among the cultural sites being protected through this initiative is Giitune sacred forest, less than eight km from Meru town, which is a shrine for several Meru clans. Its main function is as a prayer forest, though controlled collection of wood and medicinal plants is allowed. Despite having lost about one-third of its area to cultivation, it was gazetted as a National Monument in 2003 and it is now being preserved through the activities of a coalition of agencies.<sup>16</sup> Care of the forest is also the concern of the Kenya government through the national administration, the forest department and the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA). Local people have formed their own group, Giitune Environment Conservation Group (GECOG), whose objectives include promoting Giitune as an educational and eco-tourism centre and establishing other income-generating activities such as tree nurseries.

Another central Kenyan site that had both religious and indigenous governance functions is Karima Hill in Nyeri district, an area of 107 hectares supporting two small sacred forests that include large sacred fig trees. In the past prayers and sacrifices for rain would be made under these fig trees. Karima Hill suffered intensive logging during the 1990s; however in 1998 there were attempts to initiate tree planting, and in 2006 local residents formed a group to protect the forest and plant indigenous trees. On my visit in 2013 I was well received by

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14 Kenyatta, pages 249-250

15 Castro 1995, page 122

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16 Thuku and Gichere 2006



The entrance gates to Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, photographed in 2013. The name of the site refers to a particular species of tree (mukurwe) and certain small birds (nyagathanga). The other words on the gate identify it as the origin of the Kikuyu people and as a sacred place.

group representatives and given a walking tour of the hill and its mugumo trees.

Mukurwe wa Gathanga (or Nyagathanga) in Murang'a district is a four-hectare site identified in traditions as the original home of Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi, the ancestors of the Kikuyu people.<sup>17</sup> The site today displays a number of disparate natural and man-made features, resulting from different attempts to 'develop' it. Its status as an origin site is represented by reconstructions of 'traditional culture': Mumbi's house, Gikuyu's house and a few large indigenous trees (mugumo, mukurwe and muringa). There are also nine little circular dwellings, modern cottages that represent each of the nine Kikuyu clans descended from the nine daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbi. When I last visited the site in 2013 these cottages had not been completed, and the site also has several other 'modern' structures in varying stages of construction and disrepair. On my visits to the site in 2005, 2008 and 2013, I was received by informal local 'custodians', who showed me around for a modest fee. The site is fenced and has metal gates (see photo), but much work remains to be done to provide a satisfying experience for local and international visitors.

17 Kenyatta pages 3-4

### Cultural sites of the Lake Victoria basin

Most of the Lake Victoria basin is densely populated, and centuries of farming and livestock keeping have had significant impact. The area is underlain by very old crystalline rocks, which in places form spectacular rocky outcrops, several of which are cultural sites. The lake basin also contains ample water supplies, including Lake Victoria itself, a number of smaller lakes, and several rivers; some of these also have cultural significance to the local people. Ramogi Hill (*Got Ramogi* in Dholuo) lies in the far western corner of Kenya, close to the Uganda border. It consists of two hills, Minyegira (200 hectares) and Nyaidi (83 hectares).<sup>18</sup> Luo origin stories collected in the early 1900s tell how Apodtho or Podho, the 'Adam' of the Luo people, lived to the north in Uganda and that his son Ramogi "migrated southward, and came and settled on a hill in Kadimu country (near the mouth of the river Nzoia); this hill is called after him to this day. His offspring founded the Ja-Luo race."<sup>19</sup> The hill provides a defendable site overlooking a wide area of lowland and is surrounded on several sides by natural barriers of lake, river and swamp. Water and grazing for livestock were nearby. In popular culture Ramogi Hill takes its place next to Shungwaya and Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga as the origin site of one of Kenya's ethnic groups. Unlike Mount Kenya, Ramogi Hill has never been identified as the home of a deity: the Luo high god Nyasaye is a remote god, "believed to dwell high up in the sky, often close to the sun or the moon."<sup>20</sup>

In 1993 and 1994 Bagine surveyed biodiversity on the hill and found pronounced evidence of selective tree cutting, grazing and hunting. He also found that "the community surrounding Ramogi Hill forests use the forest resources not

18 Bagine 1998

19 Hobley 1903, page 326

20 Hauge 1974, pages 99-100

only as their source for day to day needs, but also for cultural and religious practices,” mentioning that traditional healers collect medicinal plants from Ramogi Hill. A report by Onditi claimed that “the richness of Got Ramogi as a source for medicinal plants attracts herbalists from as far as Angola, the Central African Republic, Mozambique and Malawi.”<sup>21</sup> Also in 1998, a National Museums team reported some degradation at the site, with charcoal burning and land clearing, and people obtaining pot clay, medicinal plants and wood from the hill.

Plans to develop Ramogi Hill as a tourist destination were put forward by, among others, the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Foundation, and they included the rehabilitation and reconstruction of ‘sacred sites’, construction of a community museum, and the promotion of ‘folklores, dances, poetry, traditional religion’. I visited Ramogi Hill in July 2010 and saw buildings for a village polytechnic constructed at the base of the hill, though the polytechnic was not then operating. Just above the polytechnic was the entrance to Got Ramogi, with impressive metal gates and several permanent structures, including a pit latrine and a building which I was told is to be a craft and curio shop. A few hundred metres up the rocky track is a tourist resort, apparently built on the homestead of the original Ramogi. There were four stone-walled cottages in various stages of completion. It appeared that considerable amounts of money had been spent on the site — the grounds were landscaped, there were parking areas, and one cottage was fully furnished including a luxurious bathroom — but there was no water supply, and the guide explained that external donor funding had run out.

Along the stony path to the hilltop we were shown sites where several local churches (‘Roho,’ Legio Maria,’ and ‘Last God

Appeal Church’) come to pray, and the area was scattered with fragments of plastic, candle wax and other waste material. Local worshippers are charged KSh 50, while ‘outsiders’ pay double: they may remain praying on Got Ramogi for three or four nights. We were shown another interesting small site just below the resort — a rock about one metre high, protruding from the ground in a patch of woodland, through which Ramogi is said to speak and ask for sacrifices of alcohol, goats or hens. People would also pray there when preparing to fight or in times of disease or drought. In 1964, the rock was broken by members of Legio Maria, and it is alleged that the pastor who led this desecration died 24 hours later, struck by lightning. Sacrifices are still done there by a direct lineal descendant of Ramogi, most recently during a drought in 2004, when rain followed the sacrifice.

Slightly further east along the Lake Victoria shoreline is Kit Mikayi, a rocky outcrop that has powerful cultural and spiritual connotations for Luo. The name means ‘the stone of the first (or senior) wife’. One explanation of the name was given by Luo women interviewed by the late Nancy Schwartz, who told her that the rocks formed after a first wife was rejected by her husband in favour of their child’s nursemaid, whom he took as his second wife. The rejected wife went to reflect at the site and a storm and earthquake occurred during which the first wife, her husband, the second wife, and her child were turned into rocks. A 32-year old man interviewed in 2007 gave a different story, of a Luo man with five wives who lived nearby and “liked to spend most of his time on the rock smoking pipes. Ngeso’s love of the site led to the name Kit Mikayi.”<sup>22</sup>

In the same article, Warigi described Kit Mikayi as “arguably the most famous traditional shrine in Luo Nyanza, better

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21 Onditi 1998

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22 Warigi 2007



Part of Kit Mikayi with the 'office' of the KitMikayi Tourism Cooperative Society, photographed in 2010.

known even than Ramogi Hill.” In the past it was a place of sacrifice in times of drought, and it is said to have healing powers, even for individual problems like infertility. Like Got Ramogi, the site has become important to churches such as Legio Maria, which originated as a breakaway from the Catholic church and shares much of its iconography. Members believe that the Virgin Mary, whom they see as “protector of women, provider of healing, and proponent of the use of holy water ... came to Kit Mikayi and increased the healing properties of its waters, making them holy.” The rock itself is a complex structure of massive granite boulders — one climbs into it rather than onto it. In between the boulders are wide cracks that lead into small caves. For a number of years, members of Legio and other sects have held overnight prayer vigils in the caves, with the aid of small paraffin lamps and candles, paying a fee of KSh 50, as they do at Got Ramogi. People also come to the rock to pray for promotion and other successful outcomes, especially in politics. According to Warigi, the rock has become a favoured destination for politicians seeking good luck. According to residents, a beeline of parliamentary and civic aspirants from Kisumu Rural and beyond have been trooping to the spot. Actually, this happens whenever an election is around the corner.

Even Jaramogi Odinga used to come to the shrine.<sup>23</sup>

Kit Mikayi is visually spectacular, with the massive granite boulders rising up from a grassy area, and a number of trees growing around and on the rocks. When I visited in 2010, the site was fenced, well maintained and clean, with a small open-walled structure that served as an ‘office’ for the receptionist employed by the KitMikayi [sic] Tourism Cooperative Society Limited, which was responsible for the site (see photo).

### **Cultural sites of northern Kenya**

The pastoral and agro-pastoral peoples of the plateau areas of northern Kenya recognise a number of cultural sites, often located on mountains or hills. These groups include the Gabbra, pastoral nomads who occupy extremely arid rangelands south of the Ethiopian border in Marsabit District. Though some Gabbra have converted to Islam or Christianity, many elements of their indigenous culture and belief system are still widely practiced. Among these are regular ceremonial migrations to sacred sites, several of which lie across the international frontier in Ethiopia. Gabbra oral history identifies these as sites of origin. According to Schlee,<sup>24</sup> “the lineage ancestor (a boy or a man) with his household and camels, was found by members of some other lineage at some place, the very place where his descendants hold their sacrifices. These do not seem to have ever been residential sites, and Gabbra settlements are not clustered around them today: ritual migrations can cover tens of kilometres. Schlee joined a ritual migration in 1986, and gave a detailed account of their complexity, in terms of the people, the precise choice of dates on which to reach ritual places, and the procedures to be followed scrupulously during the migration. He described these events as being closely

23 Ibid.

24 Schlee 1992, page 121



connected with the age-set promotions that take place on these journeys.

These sites can also be identified as conservation sites, where vegetation and wildlife are protected by Gabbra norms. According to Schlee, at the Mount Forole ritual site (defined by the rocky slopes of the mountain itself and an area of red soil rising gently to its foot) “it is forbidden to hunt, and no plant or plant parts may be removed; even fibrous twigs used as toothbrushes have to be left behind and no herding sticks or tent poles are cut. Swearing or talking indecently are forbidden.” Even in a non-ceremonial year, appropriate behaviour on and relating to the mountain is required; Schlee’s Gabbra escorts rebuked him for describing part of the mountain as a ‘bad place’. Other sources also stress that “despite changing times, these places remain sacred today.”<sup>25</sup> It is reported that even during conflicts, “the Boranas fully respect the sacredness of the Gabbra ritual sites, such as the Forole Mountain, and the inherent restrictions, directly ensuring conservation of these unique sites.”<sup>26</sup>

The Samburu, another pastoral group, have diverse perceptions of their deity, *Nkai*. The deity’s home is believed to be somewhere in the sky, but mountains (as the sites of clouds and rain) are the deity’s preferred places on earth. One of Bilinda Straight’s informants explained that “there is no mountain that *Nkai* is not in... there is no mountain without *Nkai*.”<sup>27</sup> Mount Nyiro, on the edge of the Rift Valley, may now be the Samburu’s most sacred place, seen as a cultural site of religious, social and environmental significance. It is described as having served as a defensive site for generations, a place of refuge for Samburu escaping from the threats of Turkana and other enemies. Another source describes how *Nkai* is said

to live on Nyiro, on the Kosikosi peak, at a rock called *Ndadapoi*.<sup>28</sup> The mountain is the site for prayers and the sacrifice of livestock, made at an open site known as *Lorian le kosikosi*. The Samburu pray facing Mount Nyiro, and ceremonial houses must be built with the door facing either Mount Nyiro or Mount Kenya. Several Samburu diviners, prophets and healers are said to live around the slopes of the mountain. There are several environmental reasons for the significance of Mount Nyiro. Seven permanent springs rise from its lower slopes, and it is also an important dry season grazing area. This draws people and livestock to the area and raises the threat of degradation. High levels of insecurity between Samburu and their Turkana and Pokot neighbours have also led to the Samburu spending more time on the mountain than is ecologically sustainable.

The Pokot, an agropastoral community living to the west of Samburu territory, recognise at least one sacred hill, *Mutelo* (or *Mtelo*). Pokot have seen it as a site of origin, a religious site, and a site relevant to indigenous governance. According to Barton, the name *Mutelo* means a landmark, or that which is known of all; another interpretation is ‘visible and perfect.’<sup>29</sup> Barton adds that “Old men say *Mutelo* is the navel of the Suk [Pokot],” implying a sense of origin or core ethnic identity. Interestingly, during my own fieldwork a *Mijikenda* informant made the same comment to me of the *kaya* forest: “*Kaya ni kitovu ya dunia*” (the forest is the navel of the world). The Pokot high god *Tororut* was said to manifest himself widely in natural phenomena, and another divine figure, *Ilat*, expressed himself in rain and lightning and lived among the clouds on *Mutelo*, described by Peristiany as ‘the Pokot Olympus’.<sup>30</sup> In the past the Pokot buried distinguished individuals with their stomachs facing Mount *Mtelo*.

25 Ganya et al. 2004, Ganya 2006

26 Ganya 2006

27 Straight 2007 pages 52-66

28 Bernbaum 1990

29 Barton 1921, page 98

30 Peristiany 1951

Describing the prolonged Pokot initiation ceremony, Huntingford tells how the boys were stabbed in the hand and leg by what they were told is “the *kipsikutua*, a fierce animal which is supposed to live on Mount Mutelo.”<sup>31</sup>

In 2006 a Kenyan news story headed “Sacred hill where raiders, politicians meet the gods” highlighted Mutelo’s current role as a political site.<sup>32</sup> Pokot still believe it is important to consult the ‘gods’ on the hill before undertaking a major enterprise like livestock raiding, as well as to thank them with a sacrifice after a successful raid. The ancestors and gods who reside on the hill also play a role in confirming community leaders, all leaders having “to visit the hill before assuming their positions.” The hill is also the site for cleansing the bewitched, curing the terminally ill, and bringing fertility to barren women.

**Conclusion:  
Meanings and management**

Since the nineteenth century there have been major changes in the meanings attributed to Kenya’s cultural sites, and in the ways in which they are managed. In pre-colonial time representatives of Kenyan ethnic groups exercised local control over sites, usually through the agency of committees of male elders. Access might be very limited (as with Meru’s Ka-aga groves) or open to controlled use by local community members (as with kaya forests). Some sites were shared between lineages or occasionally with neighbouring ethnic groups; others were specific to particular lineages or families. Some sites had meaning that transcended human life spans; many mountain resting places for the deity fall into this category. Others had finite life spans — for example Kikuyu sacred groves or trees might lose sacredness and new cultural sites

be created. Cultural sites and landscapes have never been static.

During the colonial era control of all natural resources was centralised, largely at the national level. The agents of colonial rule saw landscape largely in practical terms and initiated and enforced policies of resource use that laid down which groups (racially or ethnically defined) could use which soil, vegetation, water and animal resources, and how. Many African cultural sites were destroyed, and communities lost control of other sites. Some sites became incorporated into protected areas — the national forests and parks — created by the colonial government. We thus see two contradictory forces at work during the colonial years: outright destruction of some cultural sites and landscapes, and ‘fortress conservation’ applied to others. The agency of local communities to manage sites was largely ignored. Christian influences brought about further destruction of cultural sites, and undermined the belief systems that attributed meaning to them.

Since the early 1990s there has been a major shift in attitudes and policies toward cultural sites. Connections between the local and the global have helped bring this about. At the international level UNESCO and its World Heritage Centre have been important, as well as the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA). Focusing more on the physical environment are UNEP, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), and a host of others.

At the national level, the National Museums of Kenya has played the leading role in the management of Kenya’s cultural heritage, while the Forest Department and

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31 Huntingford 1953

32 Lucheli and Nyaboke 2006

the National Environment Management Authority have also been active. Other national or continent-wide initiatives include the African Initiative for Alternative Peace and Development (AFRIPAD) and the Green Belt Movement. Many Kenyan scholars, including botanists, ecologists and anthropologists, as well as environmental and social activists, now play a prominent part in the conservation of natural cultural sites, while the local press regularly reports on matters of cultural and environmental conservation.

Amid these developments, cultural sites have acquired new meanings. Religious meanings continue to be important at many sites, as does indigenous governance. But the real shift has been in the emergence of ecological issues, with cultural sites being viewed as islands of biodiversity in an increasingly homogenous landscape. Tourism has played its part in strengthening such arguments too. Local communities now make alliances with national and international groups to support conservation and tourist development of cultural sites. While this is a welcome counterbalance to the cynical exploitation of Kenyan natural resources that took place at the highest levels of government for several decades following independence, problems remain. One of these is sustainability: how sustainable are some of these locally-based conservation initiatives? Many of them are still at an early stage of institutional development and community support. Marketing sites as eco-tourism and cultural tourism destinations is not easily achieved and, if successful, may have damaging impacts on the ecosystem and on local practices. The marketing of sites as cultural tourism destinations leads also to the question of cultural essentialism: will such sites contribute to the forging of a national Kenyan identity, or exacerbate existing ethnic tensions?

Cultural sites remain contested locations. A kaya elder interviewed in 1998 gave a vivid

account of a local Christian sect that built a church at the entrance to Kaya Kambe “on the spiritual way used by the elders,” explaining how elders directed that it be demolished immediately. A similar conflict was reported from Laikipia in 2002, when an African Christian preacher led his followers in cutting down and burning a sacred fig tree, the site of prayers and sacrifices by community elders, who then “condemned and cursed him through traditional chants.”<sup>33</sup> Christianity is widely followed in Kenyan society, and not all Kenyans welcome the cultural renaissance associated with the conservation of cultural sites. Even among those who do support such initiatives, agendas and alliances can be contentious. External funding agencies have their own agendas, as do the national institutions such as NMK. Things may be no more united at the local level, as issues of cultural preservation draw on clan and family loyalties. Whatever the future holds for cultural sites, it is likely to be dynamic and highly contested as Kenyans write and re-write their own local and national histories, and make plans for their future.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED.

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<sup>33</sup> Daily Nation, 2002, January 7

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