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index of articles
1971-2006

Kenya Past and Present



Issue 36

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Kenya Past and Present

Issue 36, 2006

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FRONT COVER:

One of the many remarkable art deco and moderne houses that grace the Parklands neighbourhood of Nairobi. Thomas Hart explains the part they played in the evolution of the city. See page 73.

Photo by Akbar Hussein.



Kenya Past and Present

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The Kenya Museum Society is a non-profit-making organisation dedicated to assisting the National Museums of Kenya. You are invited to join the Society and receive a subscription to *Kenya Past and Present*. Privileges to members include free entrance to all museums, regional museums, prehistoric sites and monuments under the jurisdiction of the National Museums of Kenya. In addition, local members receive a monthly newsletter about society activities: lectures, slide-shows, films, birdwalks, nature hikes, weekend field trips and visits to places of interest. The Society runs the bookshops at the Nairobi Museum, the Nairobi Gallery in central Nairobi, and the Karen Blixen Museum. It organises two major public events — the Arts Festival, which aims to promote East African art and artists, and the Know Kenya Course, an informal learning programme popular with expatriates, longtime residents and those involved in the travel and tourism industry.

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**Bridget McGraw, Chairperson of KMS,
reports on**

Kenya Museum Society

The past year was momentous for the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) with the renovation of the Nairobi Museum. His Excellency President Mwai Kibaki laid the foundation stone for the expansion of the Nairobi Museum on 1 March, 2006. The Council extends its thanks to Dr Chris Thouless, Project Coordinator of the National Museums of Kenya Support Programme, for keeping us abreast of the developments and to Tim Valkhard, Project Director and lead architect, for conducting two tours of the site — one for the Council members and one for KMS members.

The Director-General, Dr Idle Farah has invited KMS to operate the bookstore in the renovated premises and we have been allocated a prime location near the main pedestrian entrance. We expect to expand our stocks and thereby increase revenue so this society can continue to offer dedicated support to the National Museums of Kenya.

Grant awards

In 2006 the KMS Council in collaboration with National Museums of Kenya agreed to focus our grant funding on regional museums, sites and monuments. KMS awarded a total of KSh2 million to various projects, such as the wetland exhibition and workshop at Kitale Museum — through this project NMK is able to carry out its mandates in environmental education in Kenya, as well as create awareness on the

importance and conservation of wetlands in the country.

The Society also funded an exhibition and workshop on the traditions associated with the Mijikenda Kaya elders around Malindi, Fort Jesus, Rabai, Gedi and the Mnarani Ruins. The objective of this project is to promote the cultural heritage of the Mijikenda communities and provide awareness to counter the declining of their culture and traditions and provide conservation awareness to the leaders in regard to the threats facing the indigenous kaya forests.

Other projects funded in the year included the rehabilitation of toilets at Karen Blixen Museum, renovation of the Kabarnet Museum building, and the purchasing of chairs for the main conference hall and screening equipment for Kitale Museum. A special donation was made towards the 2006 Lamu Maulidi Cultural festival.

Another small but important grant was awarded to have our publication, *Kenya Past and Present*, indexed (see *index*, page 28).

Know Kenya Course 2006

The KKC was a great success. The KMS Council extends its gratitude to coordinators Romala Dobie and Heidi Gürtler. As always, the course offered a wide range of topics — from a citizen's role in creating "real democracy" and theatre in Kenya to an overview of challenges facing

in
2006



Popular speakers at the 2006 Know Kenya Course included TV journalist John Sibi-Okumu (left) and social commentator Sunny Bindra (right).

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us in natural resource conservation. Performances by of dancers and musicians from the Bomas of Kenya enlivened each morning of the KKC.

We would like to offer our gratitude to Safaricom for sponsoring the Know Kenya Course for the seventh year running. This year the KMS Council in collaboration with Safaricom agreed to direct the proceeds from the Know Kenya Course towards the design and implementation of rainwater harvesting exhibits at regional museums, similar to the one that we supported at the Kariandusi Prehistoric Site Regional Museum in 2005. The objective is to solve water problems in different communities through installation of water harvesting technologies and systems.

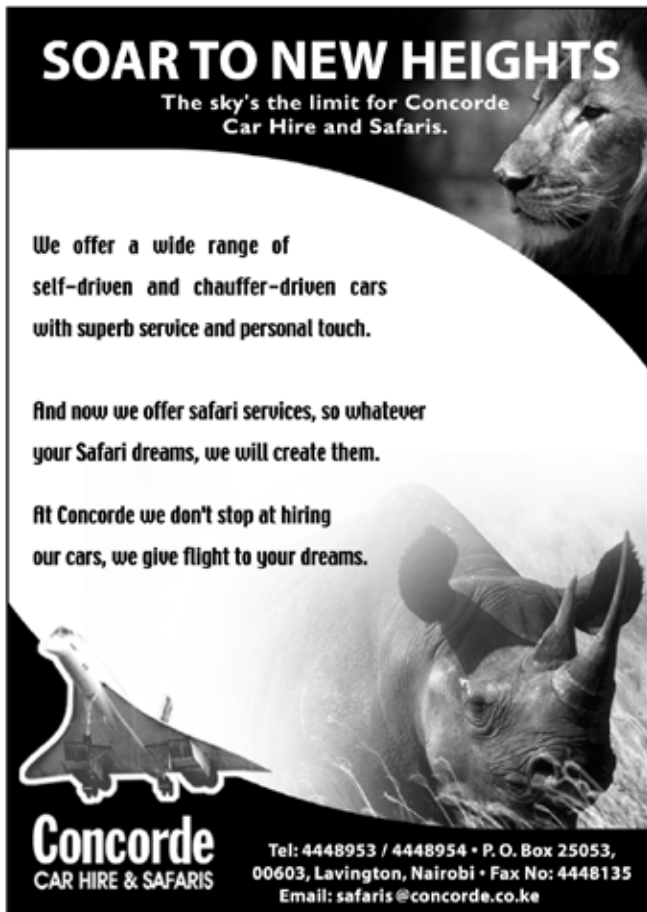
We would like to thank all our volunteers who worked tirelessly towards the success of the course, as well as the course participants for their attendance. KMS would also like to acknowledge all individuals and companies who generously donated raffle prizes and various items towards the course.

Weekend and day outings

Under the coordination of Narinder Heyer, weekend outings have been very popular. Below are some of the places visited during the year:

- The Aberdares Country Club — an exceptionally nice place dating from 1938, with a distinct colonial atmosphere and excellent food.
- Garissa Tana River Delta — this outing gave members a wonderful opportunity to visit a remote area that is semi arid, hot and very scenic.
- Marich Pass Field Studies Center, located approximately 400km northwest of Nairobi at an altitude of 300 feet. It is at the foot of Marich Pass where the Morany River emerges from the Cherangani hills onto the semi-arid plains of the Lake Turkana basin.
- Mt Kenya National Park, where members had a chance to explore the lower slopes of the mountain, as this was basically a walking and hiking weekend.
- Nguruman Escarpment located further 40 km west of Magadi; the scenery is spectacular and always hot.
- Ol Maisor and Rhino Sanctuary located in Lakipia four and a half hours drive from Nairobi; the ranch has a shady camp beside a wetland.
- Umani Springs Camp, a luxury tented camp located deep in the Kibwezi Forest Reserve.

Among other day outings, Saryoo Shah our immediate past chairperson successfully organised a tour to



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the Jain and Hindu temples in Parklands that attracted a large number of KMS members.

2006 annual art show

The Art Exhibition took place on March 10–12 at the Director's Courtyard, Nairobi Museum. The objectives of the art show are to exhibit the diversity of art produced in Kenya and to raise funds for NMK. Due to the closure of Nairobi Museum the exhibition could not be extended to the Gallery of Contemporary Art as it has been in previous years.

All KMS activities could not be possible without the help of all our volunteers who give their time and skills to assist in different activities.

The Society wishes to thank the Director General of NMK, Dr Idle Farah, and all NMK staff for their continued support and encouragement towards our fundraising events.

I extend my warmest wishes to Joanne McWilliam, the newly elected Chairperson, and the 2007-08 Council. May you all receive as much support as I did from our volunteers and committed Council members.

PHOTOS BY THE AUDIO-VISUAL DEPARTMENT, NMK, AND FROM THE PHOTO ALBUMS OF KMS MEMBERS

Outings continue to be popular, taking KMS members off the beaten track to beautiful and little-known parts of Kenya (like Shetani crater, top photo) in the company of others who enjoy similar interests.

National Museums of Kenya

at the
2006

Linda Mboya
Public Relations Department
National Museums of Kenya



Ongoing renovation at the Nairobi Museum. Left: the new quadrangle and meeting point under construction is designed to enhance the handsome proportions of the old Corydon Building. Above: the new indoor reception and ticketing area. The first galleries are expected to open at the end of 2007.

New museum takes shape

The National Museums of Kenya was a hive of activity as it hosted HE President Mwai Kibaki who unveiled the commemorative plaque to mark the revitalisation and expansion of the Nairobi Museum.

His Excellency the President was the chief guest at the event held on 1 March 2006. The President noted the importance of the museum and urged heritage managers, institutions of

higher learning and opinion leaders as well as civil society to come up with a national heritage policy.

The President stressed that the government has initiated a wide range of reforms to strengthen the capacity of the museum as the custodian of the country's cultural and natural heritage.

The project is funded by the European Union to the tune of KSh800 million and the first phase is expected to be completed by late 2007. The project, undertaken through the current reforms at the institution dubbed "Museum in Change" includes legal, management and infrastructure reforms.

The President was accompanied by Vice-President Moody Awori, National Heritage Minister Suleiman Shakombo and the head of the European Delegation in Kenya, Erick Van Der Linden, who revealed that the project is



HE President Mwai Kibaki unveils the commemorative plaque to mark the start of reconstruction work at the Nairobi Museum.

the only major EU-funded heritage programme in Africa.

Towards listing of the Great Rift Valley

The National Museums of Kenya, World Heritage Centre, UNESCO Offices in Nairobi and Paris, and UNEP organised a regional meeting on the Great Rift Valley Serial Trans-National World Heritage Property at the UN Gigiri Complex from 26 to 29 March 2006. The meeting was aimed at formulating strategies for implementation and listing of the Great Rift Valley on the World Heritage List.

The participating countries recognise the Rift Valley's outstanding value and through continued cooperation its natural and cultural heritage will be protected. Among other things, the site is famous for its huge flocks of soaring birds — a phenomenon of bird migration that offers an opportunity for bird studies and observation.

Meeting participants were drawn from Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Israel. Others at the workshop represented various organisations including Birdlife International, The Nordic World Heritage Foundation, The World Heritage Committee, UNESCO, IUCN, UNEP and Nature Kenya.

The workshop ended with participants going for a trip to the flamingo-filled Lake Nakuru National Park.

Heritage bill goes through parliament

The National Museums Heritage Bill is now an Act of Parliament. President Kibaki signed the Bill into law on 23 August 2006. Known as the National Museums and Heritage Act 2006, it took effect in September that year. The Act updates and enhances the legal framework of museums and heritage management to make it consistent with international standards and treaties. As an act of parliament, it provides for the establishment, control, management and development of national museums and the identification, protection, conservation and transmission of the cultural and natural heritage of Kenya. It also repeals the Antiquities and Monuments Act (Cap 215) and the National Museums Act (Cap 216).

The NMK legal reforms component is one of the four main components financed by the European Union through the National Museums of Kenya Support Programme. Other components are infrastructure, organisational review and public programmes.

Hollywood actress visits museum

Hollywood actress Angie Ruiz travelled to Kenya between in August and September 2006, during which time she visited the Museum. The visit was inspired by her special interest in human origins and the museum's contribution to the social and cultural development of communities. When the actress jetted into the country on 29 August she flew directly to Koobi Fora prehistoric site. She visited the National Museums of Kenya headquarters on 2 September where she was given a guided tour of the hominin fossil collection by Dr Emma Mbuu, head of the Palaeontology Department.

Stolen heritage returned

On 13 September 2006 Illinois State Museum (ISM) officials returned a Giriama ceremonial post to a delegation from Kenya headed by the Hon. Suleiman Shakombo, Minister of State for National Heritage. Present at the occasion was the Kenyan ambassador to the United States, Peter Ogeyo, Director-General



Hollywood actress Angie Ruiz poses by the statue of famed palaeontologist Louis Leakey, outside the Nairobi Museum's administration building.

The return of the 1960s Giriama *kigango* ceremonial post, stolen from a Kenyan family in the mid 80s and subsequently sold to the Illinois State Museum.



of NMK Dr Idle Farah, head of Archaeology Dr Mzalendo Kibunja, and government officials. The disputed Giriama ceremonial post (*kigango*) was made in Kenya in the 1960s to commemorate ancestors of Mr Kalume Mwakiru. When the National Museums of Kenya contacted the ISM about the post, the institution immediately began to research its claims of ownership. Once it was determined that the post had been stolen from a Kenyan family during the mid 80s, arrangements were made to return the artefact to Africa.

By the end of 2006, plans were underway to officially return the memorial posts to Mwakiru Kalume's family.

First NMK annual scientific conference

The first-ever annual NMK scientific conference was held from 15-17 November 2006 at the Kenya Institute of Education.

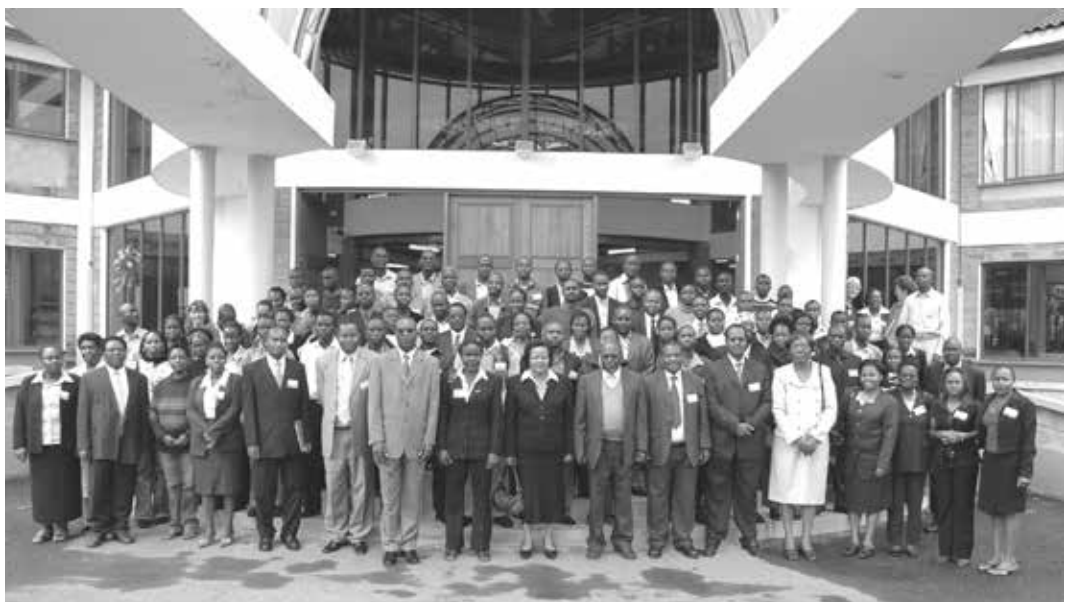
Its aim was to provide an open forum for scientists in the museum to share their findings and implications with the rest of the scientific world.

The conference theme was "Science for heritage conservation: our heritage, our wealth" which complements the museum core functions of heritage research and conservation for the benefit of mankind. In line with the conference theme and representing a cross-section of major NMK research disciplines, presentations revolved around four key subjects:

- Natural science for sustainable development: Empowering local communities for biodiversity conservation,
- Indigenous knowledge and conservation of natural resources,
- Collection management: databasing and digitisation,
- Human origins and palaeo-biodiversity.

The conference has led to an update of NMK research programmes and served as a platform for creating awareness of NMK's research capacity and products.

Scientists and researchers of the National Museums of Kenya who took part in the first annual NMK scientific conference, in November 2006.



Outposts of empires

Cynthia Salvadori



Forts, ketemas¹ and consulates on the Kenya-Ethiopian border

The ruins of the Italian fort at Mega, looking south, as they were in 1997. Now they are even more ruined. Compare with the photo of Mega Fort in its heyday (page 21).

This is the story of the Border. The Border is a jealous mistress; once you are caught in her toils she will never let you go. Her fascination is impossible to explain to the uninitiated.

Arnold Hodson, one of His Britannic Majesty's Consuls for Ethiopia, 1914–1927

I know just what Hodson means. About a decade ago I lived a year in Sololo, a village in northern Kenya literally a stone's throw from the Kenya-Ethiopia border, and found it utterly intriguing — so much so that I wrote a book for the Kenya Human Rights Commission entitled *The Forgotten People Revisited: Human Rights Abuses in Marsabit and Moyale Districts*. Although it covered considerably more, the core of that report was the incursions by Ethiopian government troops across the border to hunt down those whom they viewed as rebels.

Although the book, published in 2000, documented the incursions, it certainly did not stop them. Fighting on the Kenya-Ethiopia border was much in the news in 2006 with more than the usual number of raids by Ethiopian 'militia'² across the border,

1. Ketema is Amharic for a fortified garrison town.

2. Any armed, uniformed military force other than a national army. However it can also mean members of a national army acting 'unofficially', their government disclaiming responsibility for their actions.

around Moyale and in the areas of Forole and Dukana. This should not surprise anyone familiar with the border; it is just history repeating itself — or rather, carrying on.

The physical setting:

Weeks from anywhere

The term ‘remote’ as it is typically used by journalists to describe any area inconveniently far from their desks, is totally egocentric; any place, wherever it is, is the centre of the world to the people who live there. When, for instance, I lived at Sololo, that was home; it was Nairobi that was remote. But in the case of this border, remote *is* appropriate because national borders, by definition, exist only in relation to nation-states, nation-states pivot on their capital cities, and the Kenya-Ethiopia border is as far as it can be from either. That cartographical remoteness is emphasised by the fact that the border is hard of access from those capitals, surrounded by lunar lava-stone deserts, precipitous escarpments and rocky mountains, an alkaline lake and its boggy malarial delta, and everywhere arid acacia bushland where almost every plant is armed with thorns to keep intruders at bay. Perforce the area is sparsely inhabited, and only by nomadic pastoralists relying for survival on the scant seasonal rains and the few clusters of deep wells their ancestors dug in the *luggas*, the normally dry stony riverbeds.

Even today, with modern 4x4 motor vehicles, the border is accessible only at a few isolated spots, and it is a two-day drive from either Addis or Nairobi to the main border town of Moyale, four to say Dukana or Ileret. In the era we are starting with, with the 4x4 transport of the time — mules, donkeys and camels — it took weeks of slow trekking with the baggage animals (caravans had to carry almost all their food with them), having to slog through mud en route during the rainy season, face fearful thirst in the dry. And remember, at first none of the caravans — the explorers, the adventurers and the conquerors — even knew where the hell they were going!

But what is this era we are starting with?

The historical setting:

Menelik’s conquests to the south and southwest

It all goes back to the ‘scramble for Africa’, for that is when the border was created. The scrambling was done mainly by European imperial powers, but there was one lone African scambler, Menelik II, who was transforming himself from mere King of Shoa to becoming the Lion of Judah, Emperor of Ethiopia. When England and Italy worked out their respective spheres of influence in their Anglo-Italian Protocol of March 1891, they agreed that the English sphere extended from nascent British East Africa up to Lake Abaya, and Menelik was furious. On 10 April 1901 he sent a letter to the heads of state of Britain, Italy, France, Germany and Russia in which he declared

I shall endeavour, if God gives me life and strength, to re-establish the ancient frontiers of Ethiopia up to Khartoum, and as far as Lake Nyanza [Victoria] with all the Gallas.

Ethiopia has been for fourteen centuries a Christian land in a sea of Pagans. If Powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator.

Menelik was as good as his word. In 1896, armed with modern weapons purchased from European dealers, his armies had repulsed the Italians in the north by thrashing them in the battle of Adowa. He then shifted his throne south, initially to Entoto and then founding Addis Ababa just below. With his northern and eastern borders secured, and to keep his bellicose generals and their gun-toting troops occupied (and away from causing trouble in Addis), Menelik sent them off to claim his empire — where the residents were still armed only with spears. A school history published by the imperial Ministry of Education in 1969 makes no bones about it.

Expansion to the south and west

Aims: To incorporate and assimilate the Moslem and pagan areas in the south, east and west.

Means: A large army on which Menelik

spent most of his money, and modern European firearms.

Most commonly, force was used, though the local rulers were given the opportunity of surrendering peacefully . . .

The administration in the newly acquired areas was carried out by establishing ketemas — fortified garrison towns in strategic places. A system of communication was established which meant that a large number of rifles could be quickly concentrated. . . .

1896–7 Expeditions to Borana—Fitawrari Habta Giyorgis built a fort at Mega, and took over Konso.

1898 Ras Wolde Giyorgis received the submission of Goldea and Maji and reached Lake Rudolf [going down west of the Omo].

1899 Expedition along the southern frontier to Lake Rudolf under Dejazmatch Leontieff (a Russian).

The conquest of Boranaland

Habta Giyorgis and his troops accomplished the conquest of Boranaland with a remarkable lack of bloodshed. An American had done it for them! When Arthur Donaldson Smith went through Boranaland in February 1895 he had an altercation with a group of Borana, apparently because they refused to sell him the cattle he needed to feed his caravan. Tensions rose; hundreds of Borana on foot and on horseback surrounded Smith's camp. Although they were armed only with spears, Smith panicked and had his men open fire, leaving 150 Borana lying dead. This, their first introduction to modern weapons, so

The two sides of the border

Although there was military rule on both sides of the border, Ethiopian and British practice could not have been more different. In BEA, in the Northern Frontier Province and in Turkana, the KAR officers were all salaried Brits, the native troops under them well disciplined, adequately paid and properly fed. Their purpose was to maintain a semblance of British-style law and order, collect a modicum of tax, keep raiding Ethiopians at bay and see that the border agreements about raiding and grazing and compensation were adhered to.

On the Ethiopian side, the south was the fiefdom of Menelik's generals who raised their own armies and whose soldiers had to fend for themselves, make their living out of their provinces. Well-armed (by European arms dealers), they devastated the areas they conquered, terrorizing the Borana and virtually annihilating some tribes in the southwest — but also allying themselves at times with others such as the Turkana.

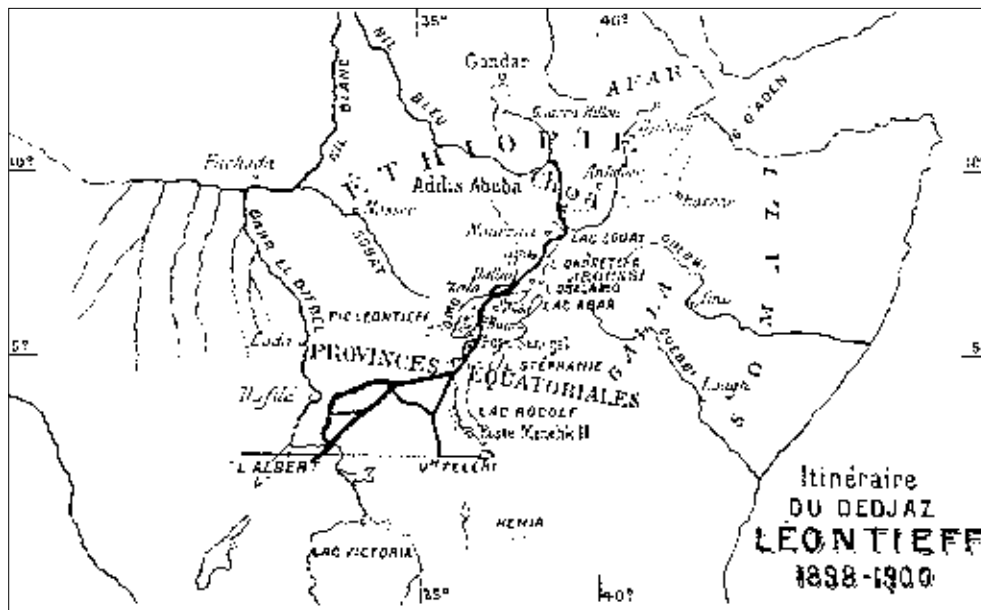
In the south, Boranaland, the situation was rather different.

It may be urged that the large Boran tribe in the south has not suffered in the same way [as those in the southwest]. The reason is really quite

simple. The Boran (who are Gallas) have, ever since they were conquered, been under one chief, the strongest man in Abyssinia — Fitawrari Hapta Georgis, the Minister for War, himself a Galla.¹ He has always kept his own officers in charge of this province, and given the strictest instructions that the inhabitants are to be looked after, knowing quite well that if they are decimated, as the other provinces have been, he will lose the large annual revenue he receives from the taxes they pay. Added to this, the Boran have many sections of their tribe living in British territory across the Border, and Hapta Georgis has the sense to realize that if they are oppressed they will flee to our side. In the south-west the tribes have no such resource, for, if they were to flee across the border-line into British territory, they would at once be murdered by the Gellaba [Dassenetch] or Turkana. (Hodson 162-63).

Naturally the Borana were not happy 'paying taxes' — a polite phrase for having their cattle stolen by the governor's troops. And so they kept trying to escape into BEA.

Wherever they were, whenever the Amhara-harassed locals did escape by crossing the borders into the Sudan or BEA, the Ethiopians would insist the British send them back.



Léontieff's map from 1900 showing the appropriation of Lake Rudolf.

appalled the Borana that when Menelik's general came down with his rifle-armed army the next year, the Borana just crumpled, gaining for themselves a rather undeserved reputation for cowardice. The Amhara settled in, building forts not only at Mega but also Arero, which Bottego described (though calling it Ascebo) as a prominent trading town when he passed through in 1896.

Planting the Ethiopian flag at Lake Rudolf

Wolde Giyorgis, who was given an even larger area to conquer, did not have such an easy time of it. This we know because he was accompanied by an observant young Russian cavalry officer who wrote a vivid day-by-day account of the campaign. Alexander Bulatovich was in the capital in 1897 when Menelik worked out his plan to extend his realm with three main military expeditions and as he recorded

3) *Ras Wolda Giyorgis, governor-general of Kaffa and of the southern region of Abyssinia, was supposed to advance from Kaffa to the south-southwest, to annex all free lands found in that direction, and to establish a foothold at Lake Rudolf. The extreme limit for his conquests was set at 2° north meridian and the source of the Nile from Lake Albert.* (Bulatovich 178)

The 'extreme limit' of 2°N is well south of Lake Rudolf. But by the time Wolde

Giyorgis's army, which started out with 15,000 men (and equal number of camp followers), got to the northern tip, around 4.5°N, they had had enough; they fortified a hillock with its own stones and planted the Ethiopian flag — then promptly turned around and trudged back to Kaffa. There Wolde Giyorgis allocated that area to one of his generals, ordering him to return and consolidate the conquest, while Bulatovich went on to do other things,

culminating in becoming a monk!

Fort Senegal and Poste Menelik II

When Menelik's troops swarmed down east of the Omo to the southwest, they built their main garrison atop a mountain called Bako (which only lately has been supplanted by more accessible Jinka). There were also several small garrisons farther south, such as the post of some 200 men encountered by Wellby in the Hamar Koke mountains in 1899, but these seem to have been seasonal camps from which the soldiers raided the locals' livestock (and, along the Omo, their crops) and gathered in all the ivory they could.

Menelik then sent a personal friend to govern the area, not an Amhara but, of all things, a Russian. Yes, another Russian, and this time a much more ambitious one. Having got into his regiment's bad books by defaulting on debts, Count Léontieff rolled up in Addis and ingratiated himself with Menelik by promoting his imperial cause abroad. Menelik was so impressed by his support that on 9 June 1897 he issued the following:

The Lion . . . hath prevailed . . .

Peace be to you [pl.] We have issued the following proclamation.

On account of his dedicated service to Our government, We have appointed Count Leontiev governor general over the whole country in southern Ethiopia. We

have granted permission to those helpers required by Count Leontiev to develop the country, to come up with everything [including] possessions and money. We have granted him permission to own the country for five years so that he may be able to cover his expenses. . . . (Bairu 488)

To develop what he called his Equatorial Provinces, which he grandiosely took to 'occupy the immense spaces between the 2nd and 6th degrees latitude', the new owner organised a multinational military expedition with nearly a dozen European officers, a company of Senegalese Rifles, a camel corps of 50 Arab scouts, and 2,000 Ethiopian cavalry and infantry, complete with their women and possessions.

In his maddeningly scant account, which resembles a *Boy's Own* story, quite the opposite of Bulatovich's detailed report, the count's amanuensis wrote merely

On August 20th, Dejaz Léontieff reached Lake Rudolf, after having explored the regions around the Omo river. Arriving at this point, Dejaz Léontieff took care to make a reconnaissance, which was able to affirm that there was perfect tranquillity in the area, the natives asking only that they carry on with their cultivation, their trade and barter....

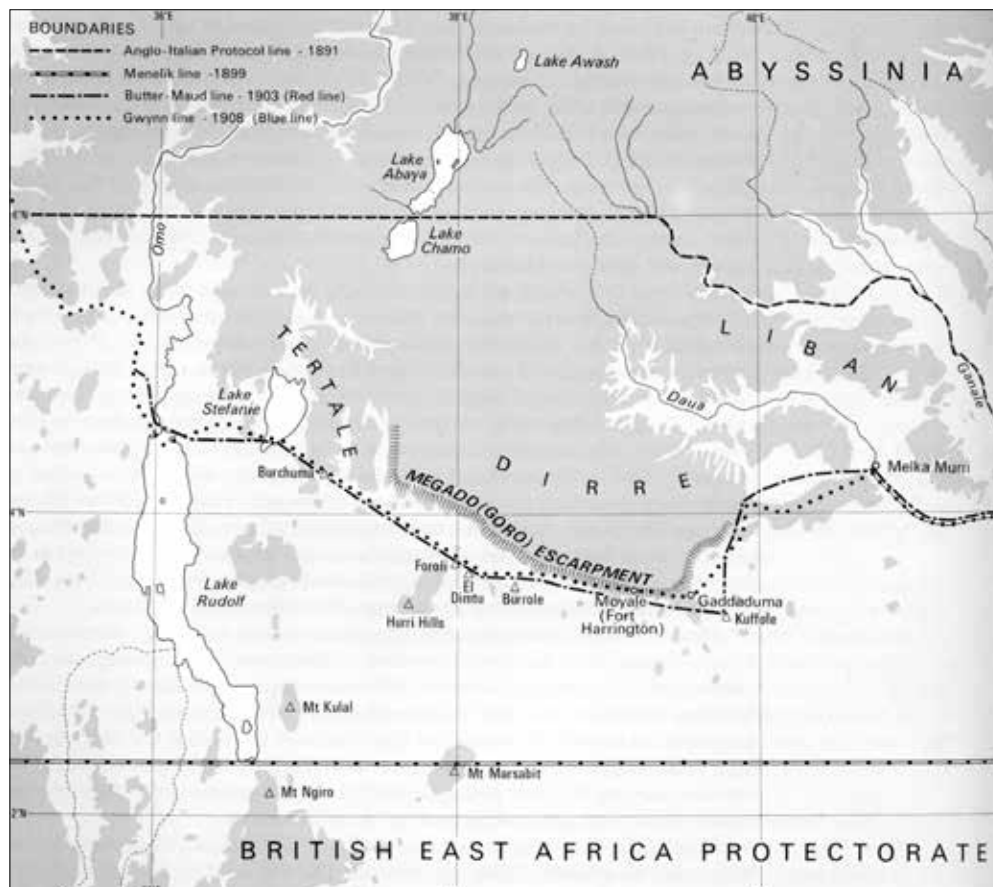
While the bulk of the column busied itself with the administration organisation in the provinces of the Omo basin, one expedition, led by M. de Schedevre, with two sections of Senegalese riflemen, pushed on towards the South, across the western parts of Lake Rudolf. Two other sections of the Senegalese company were established, under the command of Lieutenant Sébillon, close to the mouth

of the Omo river and there they constructed a fort on a rise which dominated the surrounding area. (Léontieff 31-35)

Never mind that the 'administrative organisation' was nil, that the chic count's expedition had been nothing but a glorified ivory collecting exercise (one has only to look at the photographs in his little book); that same year Menelik was able to present the European powers with his own map on which Ethiopia's southern boundary was a nice straight line running from the Juba River due west at 2°6'. He had just appropriated all of Lake Rudolf.

That was too much for the British. A Fort Senegal on the northeastern tip of the lake might have been acceptable but a Poste Menelik II on the southwestern shore was definitely not, even if it were no more than a flag temporarily hoisted on a stony hillock by a barren beach. The message got through to Menelik. In January 1900 the emperor sacked Léontieff as governor of the Equatorial Provinces; in 1902 he ordered the Russian out

The different boundaries proposed between Abyssinia and British East Africa. Map by courtesy of Monty Brown.



of the country and Poste Menelik II flapped into tatters.

Yet the immediate excuse for Leontiev's recall was the wider, international aspect of his activities, and not his financial practices. Menelik was aware that, if the Russian went unchecked, sooner or later he was bound to entangle Ethiopia in a serious conflict with Britain. The relations between the two countries were in any case strained. (Ješman 123)

Which was an understatement, which brings us to —

The Menelik Boundary

The British backed down, Menelik backed up. The former realised their claim on all Boranaland was unrealistic; the latter likewise Lake Rudolph. They agreed to agree on a boundary more or less midway. In 1902 the British organized a survey party, to which the Ethiopians attached their own contingent, to figure out a boundary which would follow a line defined by obvious natural features and, insofar as possible, coincide with tribal boundaries. To their relief, Maud and Butter found a splendid long escarpment which formed a perfect natural border, and which also (although they did not realise it) coincided with the boundary of the Borana heartland — all the area south being what the Borana themselves called *Seera Dawee*, beyond the pale. The survey was completed in six months but then ensued years of

diplomatic haggling between Harrington, the British Minister in Addis, and Menelik. It was not until December 1907 that Menelik, by then his health failing, signed his agreement to what was known as the Red Line or the Menelik Boundary.

The British then wanted to tidy up a few corners, mainly to ensure they had enough wells on their side to be able to patrol the frontier. In 1908 they out sent another surveyor, Gwynn, who followed the whole Red Line from the Dawa River to Lake Rudolf in two months, and in 1909 the British declared his slightly revised line to be the border. But the Ethiopians who were supposed to accompany him had never showed up, so this Blue Line was never officially accepted by the Ethiopians, and the wells of Gaddaduma were a source of friction for the next half century.

Once the British got the Red Line drawn, they felt they had better have someone keep an eye on it, to ensure that the Ethiopians did not step over it. Thus in 1904 the British East Africa Protectorate appointed a frontier agent. Since they needed someone who could deal with Ethiopians, on Harrington's recommendation they chose Philip Zaphiro, a remarkable Greek resident in Addis. Zaphiro took the enormous task in his stride, marching up and down along the 400-mile long border with his little frontier force of a couple of dozen Ethiopians. He made his headquarters midway along the line, on the hill known as

Churre or Moyale, building there a small bastion which he called Fort Harrington, the first British fort on the now defined border — only it happened to be slightly inside Ethiopian territory!

Zaphiro remained on the border until 1911, when the BEA administration finally moved itself to take more serious control over the northern frontier by posting a contingent of the King's African Rifles at

Moyale Fort (Fort Rose), constructed in 1913. Photo by courtesy of Monty Brown.



Moyale. When Lieut Rose took charge of the garrison in 1913, he built a more proper fort, complete with tower and crenellations — and Fort Rose was definitely on the British side of the border, what is Moyale, Kenya today.

Next on the line to keep the Ethiopians at bay was the fort that was built in 1910 on the lakeside hill of Loiyangelani. It was a flimsy affair of a few reed huts surrounded by barbed wire, not nearly as picturesque as Fort Rose.

It was certainly the most lonely post, and quite cut off from support of any kind. . .

. From across the frontier roving bands of Abyssinians had been in the habit of raiding into the Protectorate in search of ivory, camels, cattle, and anything else they could pick up. Well armed, they were desperate characters who would stick at nothing. The presence of the detachment of the K.A.R. was designed to carry out the protection of the tribes within our frontier. . . . Their method was frightfulness, and they perpetrated such terrible atrocities on those who dared to resist them, that the very rumour that the “Havash” were coming was enough to paralyze with fear the wretched, ill-armed nomads of the frontier district. (Lloyd-Jones 194–95)

But Loiyangelani was nowhere near the Red Line. The site was selected only because it had an excellent spring of fresh water, something rare in those arid parts. Only later was Banya Fort constructed on the actual frontier, well over a hundred barren stony miles further north.

Northern Turkana and the Labur Patrol

The British took the Red /Menelik Line seriously. At no time did they make any move to establish themselves north of the Line, and were exceedingly cautious about sending troops across to pursue raiding parties. The Ethiopians, on the other hand, took a much more casual view of the line,

especially its extension west of Lake Rudolf, viewing it more as a temporary measure. While an English ivory hunter who had come up from BEA was in Maji 1909–11, a new local governor, Beru (Birru) by name, was posted there.



Loiyangelani military base in 1910. Photo by courtesy of Monty Brown.

After telling me how much he admired my action in remaining at Maji, he went on to explain that he had been sent to this district by the new Governor, with orders to take over the whole of the country as far as Mount Elgon, and the Suk country, and that he and his people did not know the road, as they were new comers. Would I therefore consent to act as their guide. If I did so, he would give me one third of all the loot. (Darley 88)

It was only a fortnight later that Darley heard that King Edward VII had died (on 5 May 1910) and, as he pointed out, the Ethiopians assumed the king's realm would be up for grabs as was typically the case in Ethiopia when a ruler died.

And the Ethiopians had a good chance of acquiring that bit of real estate, for whatever it was worth, for they had found good allies in the Turkana, who had no more love for the British than did the Ethiopians themselves. For many years the Turkana had successfully remained free from undue British interference since initially their territory was divided between Uganda and BEA and neither government wanted the bother of taking responsibility for that particularly harsh and hostile area. Initially the British were content to use the Turkwell River as the northern border of Turkana, establishing a series of forts along the Turkwell, one where it enters

the lake, then a couple further upriver. As one of the officers detailed to deal with situation wrote:

So posts are flung out far to the north, to deal not only with the wild people on the British side of the border, but also to watch and hold back their little more civilised neighbours, the southern Abyssinians. These posts are the buffers between civilization and savagery; savagery that but for them would soon be knocking at the doors of the missionary, the trader, and the settler not so very far to the south. (Rayne 49)

But the northern Turkana remained ‘unadministered’ i.e. untaxed and out of control! And they increasingly allied themselves with Ethiopian outlaws and poachers and government officials, all of whom could supply them with guns.

Now better armed, the Turkana were raiding south, particularly going for the pastoral Suk, who had politely acquiesced to being put under British ‘protection’. The British may not have been terribly concerned about the welfare of the Suk but the Turkana were getting too close for comfort. The British were particularly concerned

That the strip of Soudan between our camp and Abyssinia was filled with renegade Abyssinian and Swahili riflemen; that possibly these latter considered this territory was not British, but until they were taught it was would continue to reside therein, intriguing with the wild tribesmen and engineering raid upon raid into our administered areas. (Rayne 92)

And so the British decided to deal with the Turkana and the Ethiopians in one fell swoop. In 1918, when the German war was over, Uganda, BEA and Sudanese joined forces to form the Labur Patrol to teach the Turkana a lesson and at the same time sweep any and all Ethiopians back across the border.

The Labur Patrol (named after the extinct volcano where the main operation was to start) was a major military operation, planned

for over a year, with a total of 24 European officers. Once the sweep was effected, the British built a line of forts, some 15 miles from each other, a few miles south of the actual border, and declared the intervening space a no-man’s land where any trespasser would be shot on sight.

And it was successful — as far as the British were concerned. The Turkana were now ‘administered’ and the Ethiopian officials and their soldiery ceased making large-scale forays into British territory.

But just to make sure, in 1928/29 the British stationed a KAR company on Sanderson’s Spit, ensconced in Todenyaung Fort, aka Fort Wilkinson. To which the Ethiopians responded by stationing a garrison across the gulf at Namurapus in 1930.

The British Consulates in Southern and Southwestern Ethiopia

Along with the demarcation of the border there were a series of border agreements, basically insisted upon by the British, to deal with the problems of cross-border raiding (and compensation), watering and pasturing.

The British administrators in the Northern Frontier Province and northern Turkana were at a disadvantage — they could only react to the Ethiopian incursions and restrictions once they had happened. So the Foreign Office decided to open a consulate in southern Ethiopia to watch and try to rein in the Ethiopians from that side.

The FO chose Captain Arnold Hodson to set up the first consulate, in 1914. Initially the emperor³ insisted the consulate be at Gardula, the Ethiopian garrison town on a hill south of Lake Chamo. But in trekking around his huge fiefdom, Hodson discovered Mega, a mountain massif rising 7,000 feet above the savannah, several weeks’ walk with mules and donkeys south of Addis, and fell in love with the place — although much of the cedar forests had already been devastated by two decades of Ethiopian army posted there. It also happens to command a spectacular view of all the acacia-studded

3. By then the incapacitated Menelik had been dead a year. The heir he had selected, his young grandson Lij Iyasu, was so irresponsible that in 1916 the powers behind the throne deposed him. Zawditu, Menelik’s daughter, became empress with Ras Tafari as regent; in 1930 Ras Tafari had himself crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I.

savannah to the south; on a clear day, armed with good binoculars, one was able to see the actual ‘border’ itself, hardly 40 miles away. Eventually Hodson got permission to shift the consulate there — where he created a golf course on a grassy slope.

He needed the relaxation! His book is fascinating reading, but for brevity it is better to quote a historian’s summary of his account.

During Mr. Hodson’s consulship many of the soldiers and even the local judge took to brigandage, murdering the Boran Gallas and looting their cattle. There seems, indeed, to have been little distinction between soldiers and brigands, both as to personnel and activities. The tribesmen, with few rifles, were helpless and cowed. (Perham 314).

Busk, a well-travelled mountaineer who later spent a night at Mega, wrote that ‘Mega must be the most isolated British Consulate in the world’. He obviously had not been to Maji, an Ethiopian garrison town over to the west of the Omo River in the far southwest, 8000 feet up in the mountains overlooking the Sudanese lowlands — and a centre of the slave trade. To get there from Addis, with the usual mules and donkeys and porters, took

several weeks in the dry season, in the rains months of slogging through the muddy forests of Kaffa. Communication with the capital was by mail runners, sometimes murdered en route. Nevertheless, reports of slave raids and ivory poaching across the border in the southwest by the Amhara administrators and their troops stationed at Maji had been trickling through to Addis, mainly thanks to the ivory hunter Henry Darley.

After the war, Darley was made a frontier agent because he was the only Englishman who knew anything about that frontier. His task was to instruct the Ethiopians about it.

The governor of Maji, whose geography was not his strong point, had made a small error as to the position of his frontier. The unfortunate result of this error was a fight between Abyssinian and Sudanese troops in which three Sudanese officers and several men were killed. Major Darley and I were sent with three Abyssinian commissioners to investigate and try to prevent further friction. (Athill in Darley 191)

From this ‘Maji Mission’ report, it was clear (to the British) that a closer (British) eye should be kept on the Ethiopians in Maji. Thus in 1920 Captain Brian Hawkins



The ruins of the British Consulate in Mega, looking south over the plains of Melbana to Kenya (2003).

of the 4th KAR was sent to open a consulate there. Hawkins was soon ordered to rejoin his regiment, and the mud and thatch buildings he'd constructed were abandoned for 18 months until Hodson, on home leave from Mega, was available to replace him in 1923. He spent several weeks in Addis getting his caravan together, set off (via Jimma) on 25 April and arrived, making a detour 'over one of the worst paths I have ever travelled, encountering mud, bog, and every conceivable kind of unpleasantness', some six weeks later. All that was left of Hawkins' short stint was a skeleton staff looking after a couple of dilapidated buildings and one lone camel. Within a month, the energetic Hodson had constructed a whole new consular compound,

all the houses thatched artistically, with fancy tops to match each other. The whole effect was striking — it really was a camp de luxe . . . built mainly for the sake of our prestige. . . . As soon as possible I hoisted the flag, and flew it daily, not confining it to Sundays. (Hodson 35)

He planted a stand of blue gum trees and even made proper English lawns — which exist to this day. (The terrain, more precipitous than Mega, was not suitable for a golf course, but he did his best on a patch of turf a mile below the consulate, which later doubled as a polo field.)

In 1928 Hodson was recalled to Britain to take up a new post, and was replaced by a Captain Holland. But only briefly, for in 1930 Holland died at Maji of the dreaded

blackwater fever (which he must have contracted in the lowlands).

To replace him, Captain Richard Whalley was seconded from the Sudan Civil Service (where he had been DC Opari, on the border with Uganda) to become His Majesty's Consul at Maji, and remained there, with just one home leave, until just before the Italian invasion in 1936. He spent much more time at his extraordinarily isolated post than had Hodson, time enough to write screeds, not just official reports but personal letters. He wrote most to the British minister in Addis, some to the governors of Kenya and the Sudan for good measure, about the iniquitous slave trade and oppression still being carried on — by the Amhara officials themselves.

Meanwhile back in Mega, Hodson had been replaced by Major Arthur Tremayne Miles, OBE, DSO, MC — better known as 'Tich' for his diminutive size — who was Consul for Southern Abyssinia from 1923 until he was invalided home in 1934. Fortunately his great friend Eric Dutton, a forestry officer in Zanzibar, went to spend several months with him in Mega in 1933 just before he was invalided home with TB. After Miles died he wrote an enchanting account of the visit, the life the consul was leading in his book-filled thatched cedar home, and his struggle trying to keep order along the border.

The Italian occupation and after

Despite the bureaucratic tribulations, Miles loved Mega as much as Hodson had, and it is fortunate he died before seeing his beloved Mega seized by the Italian Fascists moving in from Somalia.

The conquest of the southwest of Ethiopia had been entrusted to General Carlo Geloso since March 1936, but only at the end of June was it possible to start the occupation of Borana: Mega was conquered on the 25th and Moyale the 28th June, Yavello the 11th and AgereMariam the 23rd July. The Abyssinian resistance, the hostility of the land and the heavy rains slowed the advance of his division so that

Consul Holland's
vandalised grave at the
old consulate in Maji
(2006).





Springbok troops foregather the morning after the capture of Mega Fort from the Italians in 1941. Photo reproduced from *It's a Long Way to Addis* by Carel Birkby (1942), courtesy of Dick Moss.

it was only in the middle of October, with the help of aviation, that he completed the occupation of Borana and started to enter Sidama. (Crippa 461)

Although the Italians built a grand fortress on a lower hilltop, the officers commandeered the consulate compound for themselves.⁴

They did not live there long! When World War II broke out, the Italians attempted to invade Kenya and managed to take Moyale. But they were soon repulsed; in 1941 Kenya's KAR together with South African troops came up through northern Kenya and quickly reclaimed Moyale, then moved on to take Mega and Maji.⁵ At the same time, a freelance British force known as 'Mission 101' was coming up from the Sudan to enable Haile Selassie regain his throne. Five years later almost to the day, the Italians surrendered their Ethiopian empire.

For a couple of years the British actually ruled Ethiopia, through the Occupied Enemy Territories Administration. Gerald Reece, PC of the NFD, was now the governor of Borana Province as well, with a deputy at Mega, while Whalley was back in Maji. There was, in fact, talk of turning Ethiopia into a British

Protectorate. But soon the British turned the administration of the whole country back to Haile Selassie, and then re-established their consulate in Mega. A naturalist who travelled widely in Ethiopia visited Mega in 1943 and wrote most appreciatively

I have several times had the pleasure of spending a night or two in the tiny two-roomed house, perched high above Mega village, which is the residence of HM Consul for Southern Ethiopia. I liked this lofty, isolated spot, which offers fine walks among woods and grasslands and wonderful views over the plain. . . . It is a cold and exposed place, often misty in the mornings, soon chilly after nightfall, and it was very pleasant, after a day here, to come back to a roaring fire at the consulate. (Buxton 92).

But the consulate at Maji was never re-opened. By then it was a different era. At Maji the slave trade was almost over (the Ethiopians having wiped out most of the population in the southwest, it couldn't have gone on much longer anyway). As the British were the power behind Haile Selassie's throne, there was a fairly civilized rapport between British and Ethiopian officials along

4. They also built frontier forts, though less impressive ones, at Hobok and Gorai.

5. In his article 'Shifita', Major Klein gives an excellent account of the whole British /South African invasion from Kenya and their collaboration with the shifita (bandits), as the Italians termed Ethiopians fighting Fascist rule.

The view west towards the Sudan from the British Consulate in Maji, the gum trees planted by Hodson in 1923 in the foreground (2006).



their mutual borders enabling them to try to control and arrange compensation for cross-border raids, while enabling the sundered peoples and their livestock to pass back and forth fairly freely.

The borders today

Then the winds of change blew hard over Africa. Britain gave Sudan its independence in 1957, Kenya its in 1963. As the British then had nothing — officially — to do with the new republics, they closed the last of their old frontier consulates.

After Kenya became independent, a new joint boundary commission was formed which recommended some minor alterations to the border that were accepted by both countries in 1970. Then in the 1980s, the border west of Lake Rudolf /Turkana was quietly moved north so the Ilemi Triangle became part of Kenya. Just as the British and Ethiopians had done, the Kenyans built ‘forts’ — politely called police posts — to prove their ownership.⁶

Ethiopia underwent two major upheavals. In 1974 the still semi-feudal empire was overthrown (and the emperor, Haile Selassie, murdered) by the Marxist military ‘Derg’.

Two decades later the Amhara-dominated dictatorial Derg was in turn overthrown by a Tigre army marching down from the north. Large garrisons were established at Hiddilola and Tuka, highland vantage points literally stones’ throws above the Kenyan villages of Dambala Fachana and Sololo, and at Gorai farther west.

The old British forts along the border have long ago disintegrated. In Maji an astonishingly pristine park-like sward surrounded by enormous gum trees is all that is left of the consulate compound, with Holland’s vandalised grave overgrown by bush. A similar stand of gum trees on the ridge at Mega survives where the postwar consulate buildings fall into unlamented decay. The once spectacular ruins of the Italian fort on a hillock below have in the last several years been almost completely demolished by Ethiopian army units camping there on their way to and from the Kenyan border.⁷

Now the most vivid reminder of the old days is the resurgence of incursions into Kenya by Ethiopians from their new *ketema*!

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

6. This may have been in return for Kenya’s support for the southern Sudanese fight against the north, or it may have been simple land-grabbing. In the 1990s Kenyans from the police post attacked the Ethiopian village of Kibish Wells, which resulted in the closure of the Swedish mission and the school there.

7. The ruins leave passing tourists mystified because, although conspicuous right beside the highway, they are not mentioned in any guidebook.

About the author

Cynthia Salvadori, the Kenya-based historian and anthropologist already known to readers of KP&P has travelled and lived in and around the Kenya-Ethiopia-Sudan border since the early 1970s. She is currently writing a book, *Slaves and Ivory, Continued*, based on the letters of Richard Whalley who was the British Consul at Maji in the 1930s.

She and KP&P would like to express their special gratitude to Monty Brown for allowing the use of the map and photographs from his excellent book on the area, *Where Giants Trod*. Thanks also to Dick Moss for the use of his library.

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Memoirs of a frontier man



Above: Mervyn with Dubas (tribal policemen) at Marsabit.

Below right: The young civil servant at the start of his career in the British administration.

The Goan contribution to the Kenyan administration

Mervyn Maciel

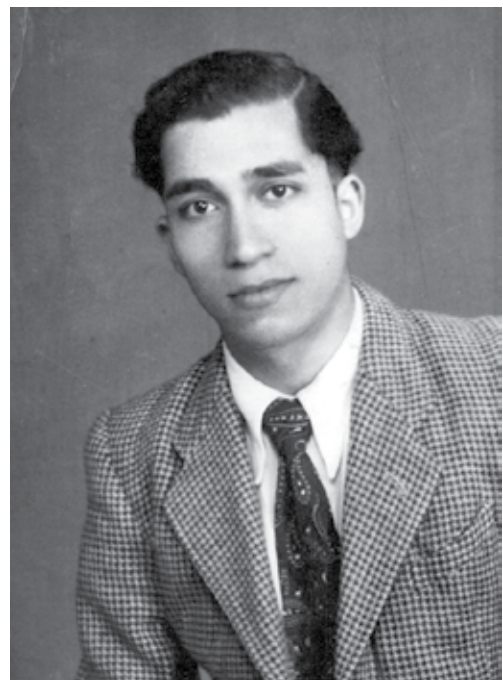
risks, settled for the “safe and pensionable” jobs the civil service offered.

By this, I am not suggesting that there were no Goan businessmen; far from it! Indeed, among the early Goan pioneers, one can count wine merchants, general store owners, bakery proprietors and tailors of course. Nor must one forget those great Goan medical practitioners — Dr Rosendo Ribeiro (famous for his secret malaria cure, and often seen riding on a zebra in Nairobi) and Dr ACL D’Souza. Both were greatly interested in the education of Goans and did much for the community. Dr Ribeiro was honoured by having a Goan school named after him. Goans also made their mark in other fields such as the legal profession, journalism, music and politics. Here one name that stands out is that of independent Kenya’s first martyr, Pio da Gama Pinto.¹ One also cannot overlook

The Goan contribution to the development of the Kenya nation has been immense but scant, if any, written recognition has been given to this fact. I hope this short article will help set the record straight.

I am myself a Kenya-born Goan, and as the reader may be unaware of the early history of Goan migration into British East Africa, I should mention that this started in the late 19th century during the construction of the Uganda railway.

While many of the Indians (the Goans were regarded as a ‘separate race’ even in the official East African census reports published until the late 50s) were employed as labourers on construction work on the railways, the Goans, thanks to their Christian values, loyalty, integrity and fluency in the English language, were much sought after by the British administration. Furthermore, because of the lack of educational facilities for the Africans during that period, educated Goans (who were recruited from British India or Portuguese Goa) encountered no difficulty in obtaining jobs within the civil service, where job security was guaranteed. Besides, while the other Asian communities moved into business, the Goans, always wary of taking



1. Pio da Gama Pinto was a well-known activist of the Mau Mau era. He died in 1963, the first Kenyan political figure to be killed following independence. His murder is still unexplained.



Mervyn with Rendille warriors at Marsabit.

the invaluable service rendered by the many Goan female stenographers and secretaries.

Being Roman Catholics, the Goans were regarded as pillars of the Church, and many of the churches in Nairobi (including the Holy Family Basilica) and elsewhere in Kenya, owe their existence to the collective and financial efforts of our community.

While we Goans were much in demand and highly praised for our honesty and loyalty, being often referred to (verbally at least) as “the backbone of the civil service”, we were little more than a source of efficient and cheap labour. This is borne out by the fact that while many white settlers were unhappy about the predominance of Goans in the civil service, and even made representations to the then visiting Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, a later Commission (Mayor/Wade) decided against the employment of European clerks, concluding that in their opinion, “increased economy and efficiency could not be attained in this way”. They noted being favourably impressed by the “dedication with which the majority of Goan clerks do the work required of them”, and spoke highly of their loyalty. Sadly, largely because of the racial structure of the civil service, salaries were paid, to put

it bluntly, on a racial basis and not on ability to do the job.

This was the status quo until a few years before Kenya’s independence when, happily, merit and not race became the deciding factor. This was also a time when many Goans were appointed to senior positions, some on expatriate terms.

Since most of my service was with the Provincial Administration, I shall confine myself to talking about life and experience within that department (other Goans may now feel encouraged to record their own experiences).

Being posted to an outlying and remote part of the country was not always appealing to the younger members of the community, who preferred to work in the larger towns like Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru or Kisumu where there was a variety of social life. For me though, the pitiless deserts of Northern Kenya beckoned, and this is how I landed at Lodwar in the Turkana district at the early age of 19. Kenya’s first President Jomo Kenyatta referred to Lodwar as “a hell on earth where you sweat from morning to night”.²

Like our European colleagues, we Goans endured the intense heat and discomforts of life in Lodwar and other frontier stations,

2. In the years leading up to Kenya’s independence, Jomo Kenyatta was imprisoned by the British and moved initially to Lokitaung and later to Lodwar in Turkana district. His jail is now a museum.



With a camel caravan near the Chalbi Desert in Marsabit District.

but found that the hardship (and other) allowances we received were far below those paid to the Europeans. This was despite the fact that we were mostly confined to our desks, while European officers enjoyed the luxury and variety of outdoor safaris with all their attendant perks of subsistence and travelling allowances etc.

As I've said earlier, we Goans were much in demand because of our honesty and integrity, and in speeches on various occasions, successive Governors and senior officials (including prominent African leaders), were known to remark that the keys of the Treasury were invariably held by Goans or Scots. In this particular respect, there is one aspect that has always concerned me. Here we were, mere clerks, but still expected to hold and be responsible for what in those days were large sums of money; the amounts being held in the safe often considerably exceeded our monthly salaries. Not infrequently, because of the DC's absence on safari, and the need to pay traders' and other bills, the Goan cashier would be left with a number of blank signed cheques (the cashier being the second signatory on cheques). Such was the trust placed in the Goans; but the salaries were hardly compatible with the responsibilities! It is no exaggeration to state that the Provincial

An abortive plot to murder

When I first arrived in Marsabit in the 1950s, there was no European District Officer. Consequently, I found myself handling tasks which were, rightly speaking, within the DO's portfolio.

On one occasion I had to commit a known Somali crook to prison for house breaking and stealing a bottle of gin (this by an alcohol-prohibited Muslim!). The initial uproar among policemen of his tribe soon subsided when I got a Sudanese Kenya Police Sgt Major to arrest and escort the man to the nearby prison. A scuffle broke out in the prison compound during which I narrowly escaped being assaulted (saved only by the able-bodied Kikuyu Prison Corporal's quick action in locking the man up for the night).

On arrival home, I was surprised to be confronted by a delegation of local Somali worthies, who produced a letter from a European departmental officer asking me to release the prisoner. I politely told them to mind their own business since, in the

DO's absence, I took full responsibility for my action.

Later, when this individual was released on bail, a plot to murder me was hatched, an attempt to attack me even being made during one of my daily walks through the township. Fortunately, some of my loyal Somali friends (including the Govt Chief) 'leaked' the plot to me. This resulted in the accused being brought before the District Commissioner's court, sentenced to a term of hard labour and transferred to Nairobi prison. His threat of "having me done" on his release never materialised since I had been transferred on promotion to South Nyanza in the interim. The prisoner's father was so grateful that I had put his "black sheep of the family" away, that he even brought me a *zawadi* of a dozen eggs!

Scary though the whole episode was, it has not diminished my love for the people of Marsabit for whom I have great admiration and with whom I keep in touch to this day.

Administration was predominantly a Goan preserve as, much to the annoyance of other Asians, the British administrators preferred Goan staff. This also applied “unofficially” at least to other departments such as the Government Coast Agency and Customs & Excise at Mombasa.

In the smaller stations, and particularly in the Northern Frontier, Goan district clerks were more like personal secretaries to the DC. In later years, and especially during and after the Mau Mau Emergency, it became almost fashionable for most DCs (with the exception of Frontier stations) to have their own female European secretaries. This in no way diminished the workload of the district clerk since many of the secretaries were employed on a part-time basis.

It is sad to have to record that the blinkered colour bar policy which operated at the time worked so much against us, hindering our job prospects and general advancement within the service. Furthermore, the segregated educational, medical and housing facilities added greatly to our frustration and disappointment during those early years.

All said and done though, I must confess that my days with the Provincial Administration were the best of my service career, and I feel truly proud to have worked in such an elite department, proud too in the certain knowledge that my Goan colleagues and I made some contribution, however insignificant, to the development of the Kenya nation.

PHOTOS ARE THE AUTHOR'S OWN



Passing time with Rendille at Archer's Post.

About the author:

Kenya-born Mervyn Maciel, who now lives in Britain, had a distinguished career in the Kenya civil service spanning some 20 years. His experiences are recounted in his UK-published memoirs *Bwana Karani* (Merlin Books, Braunton Devon, 1985). His heart is still in Africa, especially among the peoples of the old Northern Frontier District with whom he still keeps in touch and tries to assist from time to time.

His writing interests continue from his Surrey *manyatta*. In their retirement, he and his wife Elsie rent a plot from their local council growing organic produce, and are now well and truly *watu wa shamba*.

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Celia Nyamweru
and
Catherine Gombe

From coronation robes to car seat covers: the changing uses of Ugandan barkcloth

Barkcloth is generally known, at least in eastern Africa, as a Ugandan fabric that is made into a variety of small decorated items. Few visitors return from Uganda without a barkcloth hat, a set of place mats or perhaps a wall hanging. Those with more knowledge of the country may know that large pieces of plain barkcloth are on sale in Kampala for use as burial shrouds by the Baganda people, and that in July 1993 Kabaka Ronald Mutebi II's coronation included his ceremonial robing in barkcloth.

Celia Nyamweru, of St Lawrence University, USA and Catherine Gombe, of Kyambogo University, Uganda tell us about the history of this fabric and the people who make and decorate it.

Many published sources tell how, in the past, barkcloth was made and used over a wide area of Africa. In eastern Africa, barkcloth was formerly made and worn in a zone extending across southern Uganda to northwest Tanzania, through western Tanzania to northern Mozambique and Malawi (Burt 1995). LP Cullen described visiting a village of the Lala ethnic group of northwestern Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) in the mid-1930s, where the people dressed almost exclusively in barkcloth. Over 50 years ago, EG Kimwani described the equipment and methods used to make barkcloth in Bukoba District in western Tanzania; they are almost identical to those we observed in Rakai and Masaka Districts in Uganda in the early years of the 21st century.

Making barkcloth

We watched men make two horizontal cuts right round the trunk of a ficus tree, about 2–3m apart. Depending on the size of the

Photos above: Kabaka Ronald Mutebi II appears on Baganda ceremonial occasions in robes of barkcloth and leopard skin; members of his entourage also wear barkcloth over their business suits. Photos by George Semwezi.



Beating bark in Rakai District: These two young men have learned the craft from their father Benedicto Lule, a traditional Muganda barkcloth maker.

trunk, they would then make one or two vertical cuts and proceed to ease the bark gently off the trunk using a blunt knife or a sharpened piece of banana stem. A complex sequence of folding, beating and stretching the bark follows, turning a piece of juicy bark about 3m long and 50cm wide into a panel of barkcloth about 3.5m x 3m. The final stages of the process include kneading the barkcloth by hand to soften it, patching any holes or tears, and spreading it out in the sun for several hours, which adds to its rich brown colour. The trunk from which it has been stripped is wrapped in green banana leaves for a few days as the healing process begins, and after about a year it is ready to be stripped again. Unlike the paper mulberry trees used to make *tapa* barkcloth in the Pacific, the ficus trees are not killed when their bark is removed in this way.

It appears that during the mid- and late 19th century the making and wearing of barkcloth may have been spreading from Uganda to the Luyia people of western Kenya, though this trend was cut short by the arrival of traders with woven cotton cloth from the 1870s onwards. Several species of the ficus trees used to make barkcloth in Uganda grow widely in the central highlands of Kenya, and one of them (*F. natalensis*) is the sacred *mugumo* tree of the Kikuyu people. However there seem to be no records of the Kikuyu or other Bantu peoples of the central

highlands ever making cloth from bark. Further east, among some of the Mijikenda peoples of the Kenya coast, the false mvule (*Antiaris toxicaria*), one of the less favoured trees used for making barkcloth in Uganda, is known as *mguonguo*. *Nguo* is the Swahili and Mijikenda word for cloth. Anecdotal evidence from a Digo elder suggests that the Mijikenda may have made cloth from this bark in the not too distant past but, as far as we know, no samples of such cloth have been preserved.

Despite these tantalizing scraps of evidence about a wider distribution of barkcloth-making in eastern Africa in the past, most sources focus on Uganda and in particular Buganda as the region within which barkcloth making was an important craft, and where different qualities of barkcloth had a wide variety of uses. According to John Roscoe, writing about Buganda in the first decade of the 20th century, "... the art of barkcloth-making was widespread, and the humblest peasant had his trees". Lucy Mair spent several months in Buganda in the early 1930s and by then the trees were apparently less widespread, as she said "with the advent of imported cotton goods, the barkcloth-tree has lost this position [as a necessity] and one now sees relatively few". Our sense is that she was a bit quick to comment on the disappearance of these trees. F Wendogambi, a graduate student of Makerere University doing fieldwork 40 years later in parts of the former Buddu District, found a number of barkcloth makers still practising their craft, though he commented that "the *mituba* trees from which barkcloth is obtained are decreasing at a supersonic rate". Given the continued steady production of barkcloth that we observed between 2001 and 2007, Wendogambi's fears may be somewhat exaggerated, though some of our informants expressed concern that the younger generation were not interested in preserving the ficus trees as a source of bark, seeing them instead as sources of timber and firewood.

Barkcloth and the Baganda

Certainly over the last 50 years or so there has been a major change in the uses of barkcloth in Uganda. Published sources and oral accounts described it as having been used for a wide variety of functions in the past — sacred and secular, ritual and mundane. Until the arrival of cotton cloth during the mid-19th century, barkcloth was the main fabric available to the Baganda. It was used widely in the rituals of the Buganda kingdom, where members of the Otter clan were (and still are) the official barkcloth makers to the Kabaka. In his account of the building of a new court for a new kabaka, Roscoe described how.

“Barkcloth-trees were planted near the main entrance by the priests of each principal deity, at the time when the king’s houses were built, and offerings were placed under each of them for its particular god; the trees were carefully guarded and tended, because it was believed that as they grew and flourished, so the King’s life and power would increase”.

According to some sources, the kabaka occasionally made barkcloth himself; Margaret Trowell mentioned that within the *lubiri* (the palace compound) there were “houses where the Kabaka might practise bark-cloth making and smithing”. A map of the royal palace as it was in the mid- to late 19th century shows *ndiulira*, the house where the king made barkcloth, on the right as one enters the front gate. Barkcloths and leopard skins were among the gifts that three Baganda representatives of Kabaka Mutesa I took to Queen Victoria in 1879.

At his coronation, the kabaka is ceremonially robed in several large pieces of barkcloth. In the past, barkcloth was also worn daily at the royal court, as well as by the population at large. According to Kiwanuka, in the mid-19th century, cotton cloth

“was still scarce enough for the king to condemn to death a man who was in possession of it...only the queen mother and the queen sister and one or two other dignitaries had the royal permission to wear cotton cloth”, implying that everyone else had to wear barkcloth.

At the royal court, barkcloth was also used for more mundane purposes. Roscoe described how “the King and chiefs had barkcloths piled upon their beds, until they were two or three feet high, and quite springy”. According to an Otter clan dignitary whom we interviewed in 2004, the Semwanga lineage of the Otter clan supplied a particular kind of barkcloth known as *njegula* to the royal court for the kabaka to use as toilet paper. Further light on this intimate matter was shed by Levy Zimbe in a letter to the *Monitor* newspaper of Kampala in which he described the role of another clan, the Omusu, who were “directly concerned with the King’s sanitation requirements. Initially, the kabakas used to relieve themselves on bark-cloth and the clan members were responsible for the faeces’ disposal”.

Members of the Otter Clan in barkcloth clothing at a Baganda cultural festival. Photo by George Semwezi.



Barkcloth had many ritual and ceremonial uses in Baganda society outside the royal court. Nearly all of life’s defining events, from birth to marriage to death, were marked by the use of barkcloth in one way or other. An infant’s umbilical cord was wrapped in barkcloth; barkcloth was given as gifts by the bridegroom to several members of the bride’s family, and at death people donated large pieces of barkcloth to the bereaved family, in which to wrap the corpse. Mair described how each person who came to condole brought a barkcloth to wrap the corpse, saying

“to the survivors it was a matter of great concern that their dead should be

'buried well' in a great many barkcloths, the concrete sign that he had many friends to mourn him"

while according to Chanell

"...it is not uncommon, when an important chief or dignitary dies, for the body to be wrapped in as many as 40 or 50 bark cloths before the burial ceremony".

Barkcloth today

Funerals and the subsequent ceremonies for the installation of an heir to the deceased are events that still today require the ritual use of barkcloth by the Baganda. Nyanzi, writing in 1996, said that even if people today are wrapped in modern fabrics, a piece of barkcloth will always be put into the coffin. During our fieldwork we observed large pieces of barkcloth being sold from shops located next to coffin dealers in Kampala. One of our rural informants, interviewed in July 2001, was optimistic, saying "barkcloth is very much liked as it is essential to bury the dead. [I] see a bright future; it will stay".

We have also observed that even among Christian Baganda families, during the preparation of a body for burial, strips of barkcloth are torn from the large pieces, to be tied round the waists of the widow/widower and the deceased's children. These days, particularly in the towns, the barkcloth strips might not be worn throughout but

they will be carefully hung up in the family home, at least until the funeral rites are over. Other mourners may tie a small strip of barkcloth around their upper arms, much as a black ribbon has been used in the West.

Funeral rites are not complete in Buganda until the formal installation of an heir or heiress, which in the past took place several months after the death. The core of the

ceremony includes the robing of the heir or heiress in clothing made of barkcloth. For a man, this is in the form of the 'toga' which is knotted over the right shoulder. For a woman, the robe is the sleeveless garment known as the *suuka*, though today the robing is done over other clothes - a *kanzu* (or possibly even shirt and trousers) for men, and a *busuuti* (the square-necked sleeved dress) for women.

In the past, barkcloth of a poorer quality was also used for a wide range of agricultural and architectural purposes, including laying out coffee beans to dry and for room dividers. It was used as slings and diapers for babies, and Baganda in their 60s and older who grew up in the rural areas remember the comfort and warmth of sleeping under barkcloth bedding. Today cotton and synthetic fabrics have replaced barkcloth for most farming and household uses, as cheaper and more durable alternatives, and the ubiquitous — and iniquitous — *buveera* (black plastic bags) have replaced the barkcloth bags of the past.

As far as we can tell, in the past most Ugandan barkcloth, whether used for ceremonial or mundane purposes, was undecorated, though several sources refer to the use of plant and mineral dyes to create stenciled or stamped patterns. Today many different techniques of decoration are used, and a wide variety of items of decorated barkcloth are on sale in Kampala and exported from Uganda. Our research in the craft and curio shops and workshops around Kampala and in Nairobi between June 2004 and January 2007 showed us a great variety of barkcloth items that are decorated in many different ways, and also combinations of barkcloth with a variety of other materials. We visited several of the creators of decorated barkcloth items and were able to observe some of them at work.

Decorating with barkcloth

Mrs Nkata Namwandu of Mukono learned to decorate barkcloth objects at school and for over 60 years has been making and selling a variety of items. She showed us embroidered maps of Africa and Uganda,

Mrs Nkata Namwandu at work with the tools of her trade, including the screens for printing on barkcloth.



table mats, zipped pencil cases, bookmarks, handbags, tea cosies, cushion covers and wall hangings. She does embroidery using raffia threads in a range of bright chemically-dyed colours; her motifs include flowers, trees, birds and people. She also uses a version of screen printing in which the design is on acetate and placed between the screen and the barkcloth. She uses a squeegee to rub the paste through the screen. She has several screens of different sizes and buys the screens and paste in Kampala. All her screen printed designs are done in black, and include images of animals and people as well as lettering.

Mrs Maria Musoke has been making and selling barkcloth items since 1945, working from her home in a village west of Kampala. She makes lots of barkcloth hats, both plain and decorated with broad painted patches of green and red. She cuts the hats herself, making sure that each one is cut from a single piece of barkcloth to avoid variations in colour. Her hats sell well because she is very careful about this. Her grandson sews the hats on a sewing machine located in a small room a few yards from the main house.

Mrs Musoke also makes small bags, pencil cases, photo frames, maps and table mats. Some of the table mats are embroidered with coloured raffia fibres; her grandchildren do this work. Others are stiffened with a paper lining and may have palm leaf or banana fibre decorations on one side and plain, pale barkcloth on the other (lower) side.

Two younger, more educated women are also active in designing and producing barkcloth items. Sarah Nakananze is a graduate of the Department of Fine Arts at Makerere University who has trained women to work to her designs creating mats, wall hangings, cushion covers, bags and purses. Her creations are decorated using two main techniques — machine embroidery, mostly in a range of earth tones, and printed black patterns picked out in natural raffia. She told us that she employs 12 women to do embroidery for her. The women work in their own homes close to Kampala; each woman buys her own thread and four of them have their own

machines, which they use to embroider the animal, plant and abstract motifs that Sarah has designed.

Sara Katebalirwe is also a graduate of Makerere University who works from her home in a Kampala suburb. When we visited, her three-bedroom house was full of rolls of barkcloth, partly completed items, sewing machines and a loom. She makes a variety of decorated items and has had notable success with her handbags, having recently produced over 300 ‘lizard bags’ on order from Ten Thousand Villages, an internet trading company based in the USA.

When we were there she had a whole table on which small squares with a black zebra pattern were drying. These were to be made into ‘little girls’ bags’. She said the black design protects the surface of the barkcloth and is particularly good to use on the rougher, poorer quality cloth. When the pieces are dry they are distributed to her team of women who do the pale raffia handstitching along the edges of the black shapes; they are then brought back to Sara’s house for assembly.

Anthony Joseph Bukenya creates masks and bowls in papier-mâché which he covers with small overlapping pieces of barkcloth. He said he has sold 12 masks in the last two years, mostly to foreigners or visitors to Uganda.

Sanaa Gateja has his own gallery and workshop at Lubowa, west of Kampala, as well as a small shop at the Kampala Sheraton. Sanaa is widely travelled and trained in Italy as a jeweller and goldsmith; recently he had an exhibition at a gallery



Some of the different handbags made by Sara Katebalirwe out of barkcloth.

Anthony Bukenya: papier maché mask with patches of barkcloth and black paint.





Sanaa Gateja's wall hangings are decorated in appliqué using dyed barkcloth, in shades of deep red, purple, dark blue and dark brown.

in Washington DC. Sanaa's wall hangings range in size from about 1m square to 3m x 4m; some are on double layers of barkcloth, others are lined with cotton/tetron and bordered with cotton or silk.

Ugandan barkcloth is also on sale through the internet, in particular through a German-Ugandan company which exports large pieces of cloth from Rakai District and markets it both in its natural state and in a variety of highly processed forms. Their website has developed steadily over the last few years, and in May 2007 they were offering numerous varieties of the natural cloth as 'Bark Cloth®' and the processed cloth as 'Barktux®'. They claim that the barkcloth is produced on 'eco-certified farms', with about 700 farmers involved in the production, which combines "archaic authenticity and state-of-the-art textile finishing processes". One of

A page from the www.barkcloth.de website that offers everything from fashion items to car seat covers made out of Ugandan barkcloth.



their products, 'Barktux® No Buffalo', is advertised as "the vegan's favourite imitation leather" and can be used for furniture and upholstery in cars and yachts.

Barkcloth seats and dashboard in your Mercedes — truly this ancient fabric has come a long way from its Ugandan roots!

PHOTOS BY CELIA NYAMWERU UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

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Celia Nyamweru of the Department of Anthropology, St Lawrence University, New York, USA and Catherine Gombe of the Department of Art and Industrial Design, Kyambogo University in Kampala, Uganda are longtime friends and former colleagues from Kenya's Kenyatta University. They have done extensive field work and research on the Ugandan barkcloth industry and this article is a much-abridged extract from an unpublished report on their research.

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The rock art



of Lake Victoria

Rock art is the oldest and most extensive record of human thought and imagination. Unknown to many, it is richly represented in the Lake Victoria region — particularly in the Suba District of Kenya. David Coulson of TARA, the Trust for African Rock Art, takes us on a quick tour of the sites.

Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa and the source of one of Africa's mightiest rivers, the Nile. Its northern shores are situated just below the equator and three countries — Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda — share its waters. Looking out from the shore, visitors have the impression of being at the edge of an ocean for it is impossible to see the far side.

Many islands punctuate this vastness, most of them in Ugandan and Tanzanian waters. Yet Kenya also has its islands. Two of these, Mfangano and Rusinga, with their adjacent shores, provide the nucleus of Suba District. The largest island, Mfangano, rises steeply from the great lake, a hunched-over giant covered with vegetation. Its rocky backbone rises over 300 metres above the lake and is exposed as tall red cliffs in

David Coulson

Photo above: Painted concentric circles and spirals on the walls of Kwitoni rock shelter, Mfangano Island, most likely represent the sun and the moon and were used in rain-making rituals.



Looking out of the mouth of Mawanga cave, near the shore of Mfangano Island.

some places. The shore is edged by black rocks with overhanging fig trees, beaches with black volcanic sand and narrow stands of reeds.

This region is the site of many ancient

migrations and the setting of a large number of rock art sites. Rock art is the oldest and most extensive record of human thought and imagination. Found all over the world, it is richly represented in the Lake Victoria region, particularly in the Suba District of Kenya. The art in Suba District was created long before the arrival of the Abasuba people roughly two centuries ago. In some cases it has retained power and importance in the culture of the Abasuba and this has helped protect it from damage and oblivion.

Rock paintings inside Mawanga cave, Mfangano Island.

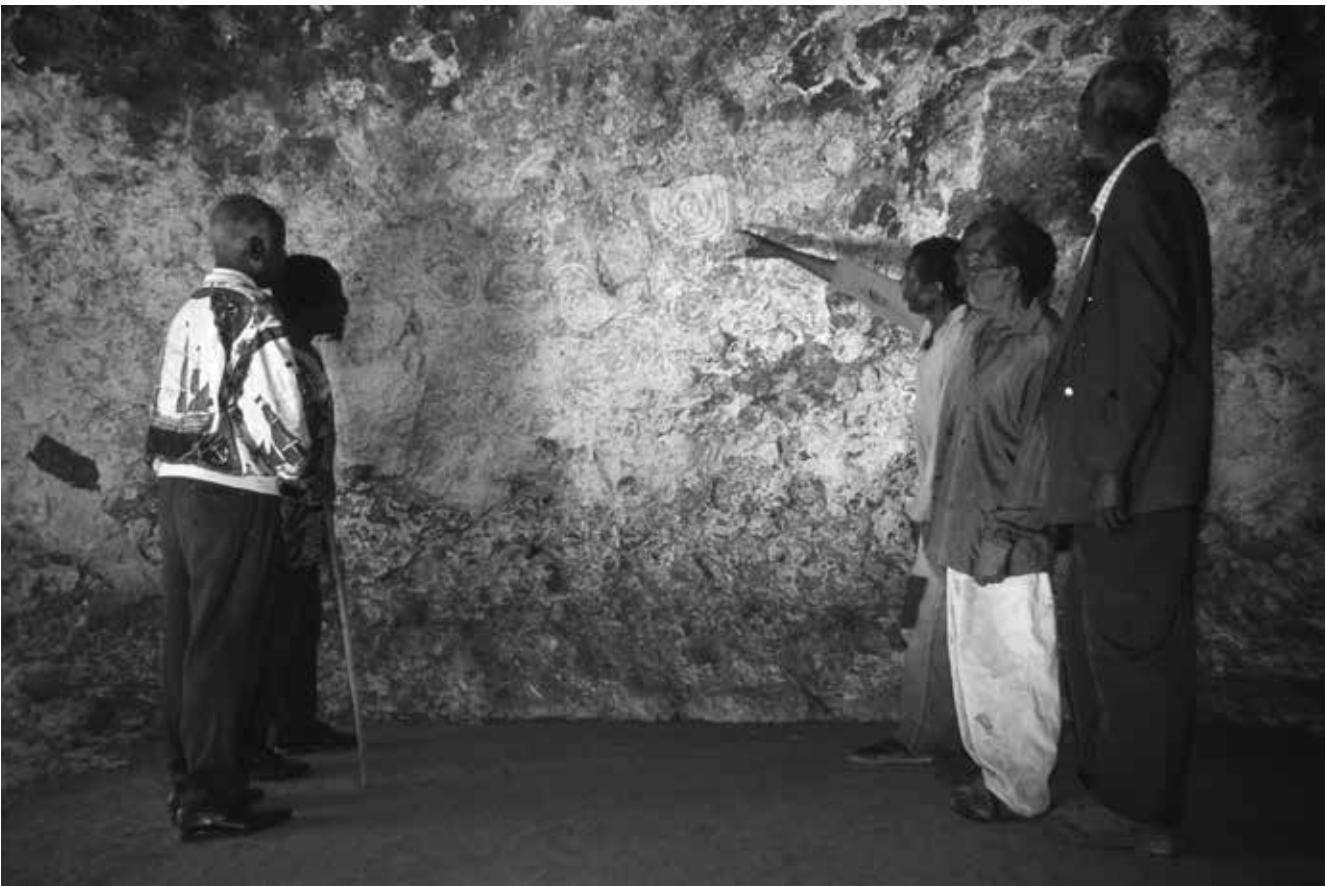
The people of Suba

The Abasuba people are Bantu-speakers who are believed to have originally come to this area from Uganda around 200 years ago. Some of them went first to Tanzania before settling here. The word *suba* means “the people are always wandering”. The arrival of the Abasuba displaced the Nilotic cattle-herding Luo who moved further north. The rock art, however, pre-dates these migrations and is thought to be the work of ancestral Twa, a forager-hunter, Ndorobo-type people.

Meanwhile, the Abasuba long ago embraced the art as part of their own ancient heritage.

The community is divided into 14 clans and different clans have different ritual responsibilities such as for rain-making ceremonies or ritual cleansing. Each clan has its own special relationship with the others.

The Suba make their living along the shore from fishing. The catch is exported to major towns in Kenya and from there to Europe. Further inland they are agriculturalists; Suba



District is well known for its fruit production, especially oranges and bananas. Living along the water with a developed system of water transport, the Suba people are highly mobile and will often move throughout the Lake Victoria region in search of fishing and trade.

The rock art

There are two types of rock art in this region — rock paintings and rock engravings or carvings. Most rock painting sites in the area feature a geometric style of art, usually concentric circles painted in red and white. This particular style is the dominant style in the Lake Victoria Basin and is also found in a number of different parts of Kenya, including one site only 70 km from Nairobi.

These paintings are attributed to the Twa, a people originally related to the Pygmies of the eastern Congo who predate the Luo. Most of these paintings are thought to have been made between 1,000 and 4,000 years ago and may have been used in rain-making rituals. It is known for instance that similar paintings in eastern Uganda only 200 km north of Suba District were used for this purpose.

Cupules

Rock engraving sites in the area include cupule sites, where cup-shaped depressions have been ground into the rock surface, as well as a rock gong. Although cupules often resemble a *bao* game, their original use is likely to have been for ritual purposes, such as initiation. They are found all over the world and are thought to be amongst the oldest form of rock art, probably predating paintings such as those in Suba by thousands of years.

In Suba, cupules are found both on Mfangano Island and on the mainland. They do not retain any ceremonial powers but are still in use for the traditional game of *bao*, which in Suba is played with four rows of eight holes.

Rock gongs

Rock gongs are normally free-standing boulders balanced on solid rock. They have a natural resonance and often bear large numbers of cupules. When the boulders

are struck with a stone they emit a ringing tone like a beaten gong. Rhythmic striking produces a series of notes that carry great distances. A number of rock gongs are found in the Lake Victoria basin and in the Moru Koppies in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park, as well as in the area north of Mt. Kenya.

The rock painting sites of Mfangano Island

Mawanga: The cave at Mawanga is only a five-minute walk from the boat landing, of which the last few metres are quite steep. The paintings are similar in style to those found in many places around the Lake Victoria basin and feature red and white painted concentric circles, spirals and sunbursts. They are thought to be between 1,000 to 4,000 years old.

Although they relate to a vanished mythology, the cave, the paintings and the surrounding area retain powers in the traditions of the Abasuba. The Wasamo clan, who live around the cave, are the rain-makers of the Abasuba, and the elders agree that the paintings have been used for rain-making ceremonies, with the red paintings representing the moon and the white ones representing the sun. It is possible that they may still be used for rainmaking to this day.

Kwitone: On the upland part of Mfangano Island is the Kwitone rock shelter. The art here is similar to that at Mawanga, although retaining more of its colour and vibrancy.

The rock gong of Mfangano Island. Rhythmic striking with a stone produces a series of notes that carry a great distance.



Different motifs appear in the rock paintings of Lukuba Island on the Tanzanian side of Lake Victoria. Little of it has been satisfactorily explained and more research needs to be done.



The elders of the Wagimbe clan explain that if you wanted to come to Kwitone to talk to the ancestors, you were not allowed to call the site by its name or tell anyone that you were coming. You were also supposed to abstain from sex. If you followed these recommendations, when you arrived at the site you might see old women, hens and women drinking alcohol. If you didn't follow the recommendations, when you came to the site, you might see nothing at all, not even the art. The Wagimbe also say that their grandmothers were the painters although in reality the paintings were made long before the Abasuba arrived.

According to the elders, in times of war and trouble, people would come to the cave to ask the ancestors to bring peace. In the war between the Wagimbe and the Wasaki clans about 200 years ago, the Wagimbe had taken refuge in the cave. The women dressed up as men and, standing in the mouth of the cave, scared the attackers into thinking that there were double the number of warriors as was actually the case. The Wagimbe were victorious and people still come to the cave to ask their ancestors for victory and success in their various endeavours.

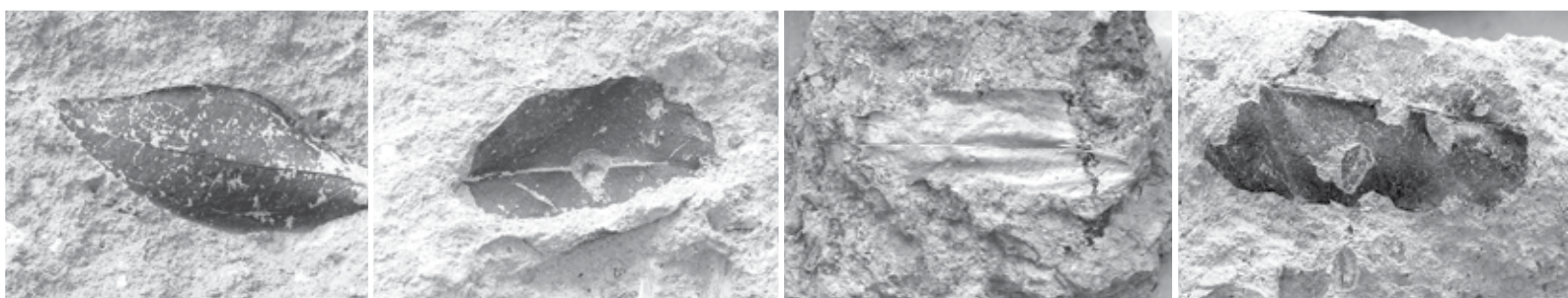
Although Kwitone has no special ritual purpose today, trees around the site are sacred and should not be cut down. The site can be visited with a guide from the Suba Museum and requires a hill trek of about one and a half hours to reach.

More general information about rock art in East Africa can be found in the short guidebook, *Rock Art in East Africa*, published by TARA, the Trust for African Rock Art. It is available at the Suba Museum or in bookshops and museums around Kenya.

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

About the author

David Coulson is the executive chairman and founder of TARA, a Nairobi-based international not-for-profit organisation concerned with the awareness and conservation of Africa's extraordinary rock art heritage. David is also a world-renowned photographer who has produced several major books, including *African rock art, paintings and engravings on stone*. TARA's work has been endorsed by Nelson Mandela and Kofi Annan.



Some of the remarkably well-preserved leaf fossils from Mutonga.

The unique plant fossils of Mutonga

Jillani Ngalla and Alfreda Ibui,
Palaeontology Division, NMK

Fossils provide the only direct evidence for organic evolution as a historic event and plants are a particularly rare occurrence in the fossil record. The uniquely well-preserved plant fossils found in Mutonga, east of Mount Kenya, have the potential to contribute towards a better understanding of palaeoenvironments in human evolution ... if the site is preserved.

Plant fossils, like footprints, are a rare occurrence in Kenyan palaeontological sites along the floor of the Rift Valley. When found, they are always preserved as petrified stems and leaf impressions in former muddy deposits. They are very useful in reconstructing the factual vegetational history of an area.

A new site outside the Rift Valley system, east of Mt Kenya, has yielded exclusively plant fossil material with a unique preservation never before seen in the fossil record of Kenya's numerous palaeontological sites.

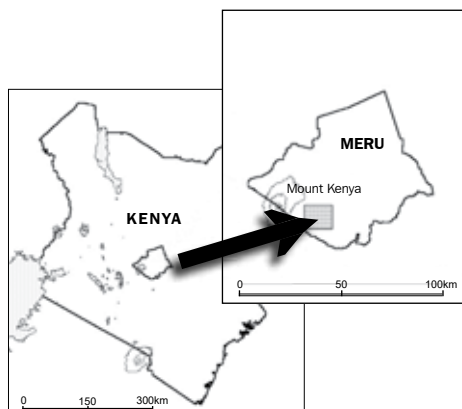
The site covers an area of approximately 20 sq km in Chogoria, Meru South, along the Mutonga River valley. It was found as a result of quarrying activities for building blocks in Mbaria village. The quarries align in a roughly east-west direction, and have

yielded very beautiful and uniquely preserved plant material of great palaeontological significance.

The plants are preserved as leaf skeleton impressions on rocks while the stems are preserved as charcoal, at a depth of 25–30m below the surface of cliffs. This kind of preservation has not been found elsewhere among the prehistoric sites in Kenya.

Site background

Mr Gitonga Micheu reported the presence of the fossil plants to the Palaeontology Division of the National Museums in October 2001. Jillani Ngalla and Alfreda Ibui made a short trip to the site in the same month and confirmed the presence of very good and uniquely preserved fossil plant remains. A sample collection was made for accessioning



Location of the Mutonga valley site, on the eastern slopes of Mount Kenya in Meru.



Fossil excavation underway on the well-quarried cliffs of Mutonga. Quarrying activities still continue at the site today.

and inclusion in the division's general collection. Since palaeontological collections must always be preceded by geology studies, such studies were planned and completed in January 2002. Two geologists, Dr Eliud Mathu and Dr Daniel Ichang'i, from the Geology Department of the University of Nairobi, conducted the studies. Jillani and Alfreda did the routine administrative reporting to the District Officer in addition to general fossil collection.

The study covered an area of approximately 10 by 4 sq. km. Four major quarries were covered during the study. They were designated quarry 1-4. Detailed studies and collection were concentrated on quarry 4, which was designated as the type-site. Preliminary analysis of the material recovered indicates the presence of a once dense forest with a thick canopy. The palaeoenvironment of the site at the time of deposition is therefore

Plant fossils are embedded in the rock at all locations along the site.

reconstructed as a closed habitat with a thick forest stand. Only plant fossil remains have been recovered from the site.

The site can be linked to a very important time period in human evolution studies since Mt Kenya is an isolated extinct volcano of possible Pliocene age. Gatarakwa, a site already worked on the west side of the mountain, is likely to be of the same age; the only difference between the two sites is that Gatarakwa has yielded exclusively animal fossil remains.

Fossil preservation

The plant fossils at Mutonga were exposed due to quarrying activities. They show a unique preservation never before seen in any palaeontological site in Kenya. The leaf skeletons are well preserved with their secondary and tertiary venations clearly visible. Most have reticulate venation with areoles clearly visible in some. The leaf

mesophyll/cuticles are clearly preserved and seen peeling off from the rock surfaces in some specimens, leaving very beautiful impressions. Leaves are simple. They are found either isolated



or in clusters on single rock blocks. Leaf skeleton impressions are narrow to broad. Where seen, leaf shapes are either lanceolate or elliptic while their bases are cuneate, oblique or rounded. Apices are acuminate, obtuse or rounded while margins are mainly entire.

Stems are preserved as charcoal. (Workers at the quarries have been using the charcoal to heat and shape metal bars and rods, to quarry the rocks.) Where the bark is still in place, they show clear outlines of their outer morphologies. Where the stems are not in place, hollow spaces left behind in the rocks indicate the stem sizes. They range from 15cm to 50cm in diameter. Where visible on cut surfaces, whole tree stems standing upright show some branching patterns at heights well above 20m.

Despite having been transformed into charcoal, the stems show clear undistorted internal structures ranging from solid 'wood' structures to laminated ones with annual growth rings clearly visible. A piece of a hollow segmented stem is that of a bamboo *Arundinaria alpina*, a high altitude water-dependent riverbank plant found in mostly cool highland settings. Another twisted stem with bark still intact and what would appear to be a simple internal root-like structure is possibly *Adenia gumifera*, a climber.

Potential for further research

These uniquely preserved fossils of a possible forest buried under volcanic activity are of great palaeontological interest for their location outside the Rift Valley system, as well as for their unique plant fossil richness. The site has the potential to provide great insights into the volcanic activities of Mt Kenya and the surrounding ecosystem in their geologic infancy.

Given the site's possible pliocene age of 5–3 million years ago, the findings will help in reconstructing the palaeoenvironments of the time. This particular time period is thought to be the approximate time that ape and human lineages diverged.

Owing to the volcanic origin of the deposits, absolute dating of the Mutonga sites should be possible and this will shed



Fossil stem with annual growth rings clearly visible.



Hollow segmented stem of bamboo.

more light on the past fauna and flora of the Mt Kenya region. It is now being realised that the Mt Kenya region is of palaeontological significance, particularly in palaeoenvironmental reconstructions.

Conclusion

The Mt Kenya region has great potential for palaeontological research given the volcanic origins of its deposits. It has immense potential to contribute useful data that will give insights into studies of human origins and the general evolutionary trends of East African mammals.

Besides the potential of the site to yield a collection of value for biochronological correlation with other sites in East Africa, the unique fossil preservation of the exclusively plant material has not been seen elsewhere in Kenya's palaeontological sites. Cuticular covering of plants has special significance for palaeobotanists. Although in the truest sense cuticles are very superficial parts of the plant body, their composition is such that they are often the only parts preserved in coalified compression fossils, which reveal microscopic cellular structures of potential taxonomic value.

The occurrence of climbers is clear evidence for the presence of a closed stand of tall trees with a thick canopy. The stem sizes and heights are characteristic of a thick tropical forest stand.



Twisted stem, still covered with bark, possibly that of a climber.

Earlier geological studies of this region have correlated its geology with that of important palaeontological sites such as Lothagam on Lake Turkana, which has deposits that date between the late Miocene to Pleistocene. Unfortunately, since the initial study leading to this article, no further research has been done at the site due to lack of funds. Further, because the Mutonga sites are all on private property, quarrying activities (and charcoal harvesting) still continue, to the eventual degradation of the site and possible loss of valuable specimens. Further funding is needed before research work can resume.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Kenya Museum Society who funded this research project. The provincial administration, Meru South, and the entire community gave valuable support to the research team while in the field. Rev. Micheu and his son, Gitonga Micheu, provided insight on the historical background of the locality. The staff of the Palaeontology Division provided logistical support to the team. The late John Mutero aka "Masai" ensured that every minute in the field was utilised profitably by driving the team to every destination on time.

PHOTOS BY JILLANI NGALLA

About the authors:

Jillani Ngalla is a research scientist in the Earth Sciences Dept, Palaeontology Division of NMK. He has carried out both archaeological and palaeontological research in Gatarakwa in Central Kenya. An analysis of the animal and plant remains from these sites is now underway. His main research interest is brain evolution in hominids, and he intends to carry on with doctoral studies in the same line.

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Alfreda Ibui is a senior research scientist in the same department. She has a great interest in plants, both past and present, and did her masters degree on fossil plants from sites in Kenya. Alfreda is currently winding up her PhD research on human-plant relationships among the Ameru in Central Kenya, looking at correlations with survival skills used by our ancestors in the past.

Secrets in stone

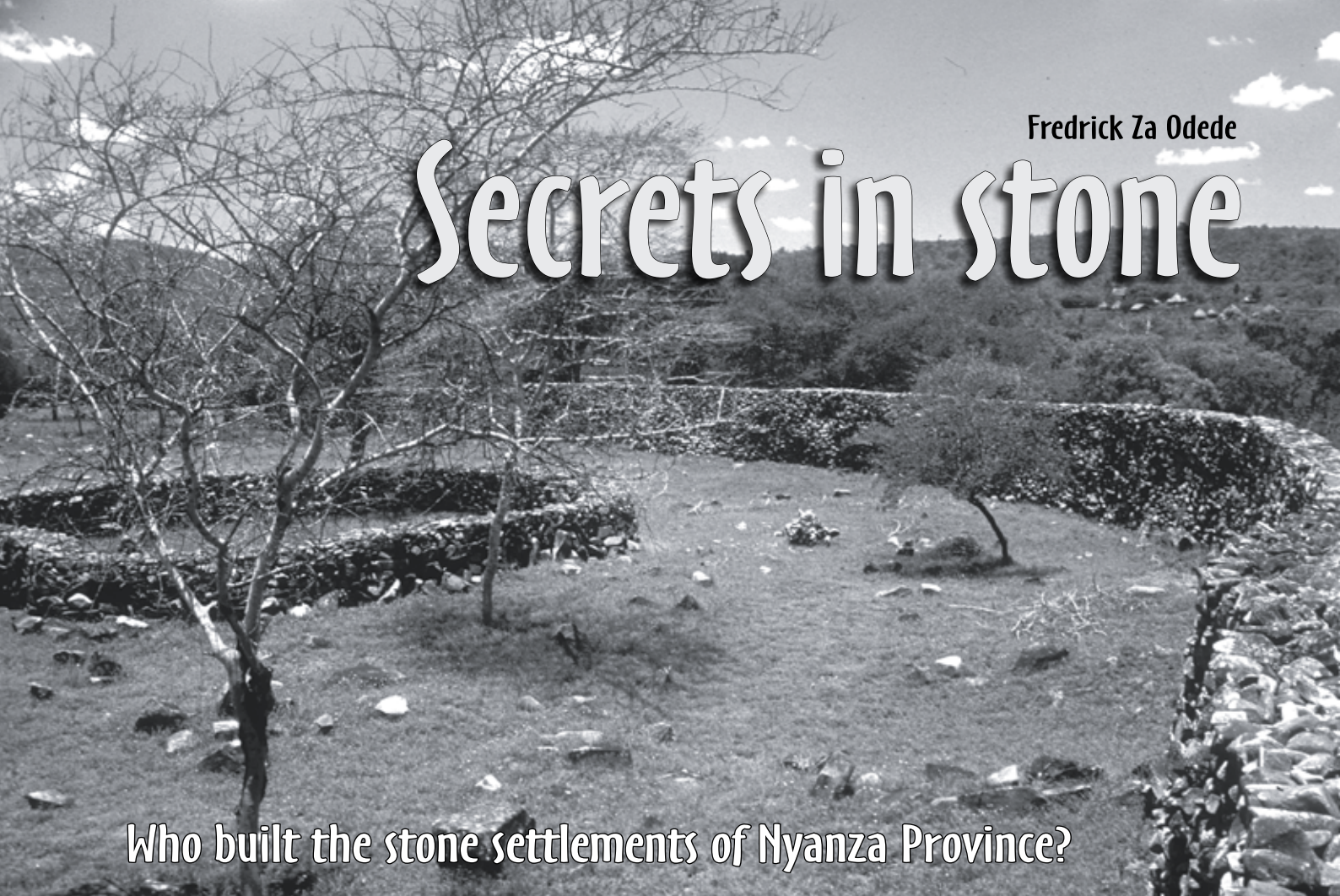


Photo by National Museums of Kenya

Who built the stone settlements of Nyanza Province?



General distribution of stone-walled enclosures in Nyanza Province.

Ohingni (singular: ohinga) are ruins of dry-stone walled settlement enclosures unique in Kenya and East Africa. They are architecturally similar to the dry-stone structures of Zimbabwe and Botswana, though less skillfully made. The biggest and most elaborate structure in Kenya is Thimlich Ohinga, in Migori District, which in 2000 was named in the List of 100 Most Endangered Sites by the World Monuments Watch.

At least 521 dry-stone walled enclosures are presently known in South Nyanza, where their distribution is highly clustered. Of the stone-built enclosures in Northern Nyanza, some 20 have already been surveyed.

Oral history has it that immigrant groups built stone-walled enclosures in the Nyanza region of Western Kenya around 500 years ago. The first communities to settle here during this time were Bantu speakers, followed by highland and river-lake Nilotes. Oral information suggests that either Bantu or Nilotic Lwo speakers built these enclosures.



Enclosure wall with buttress. External walls range in height from 0.5–4.2m, with a thickness of 1m. They were made of loose stone without any dressing or mortar, and care must have been taken to ensure their stability.

The early settlers introduced the stone building tradition in the region due to urgent security requirements as different immigrant groups sought to dislodge each other over land ownership. They used the enclosures for protection against enemies, cattle raiders and wild animals. The construction of the enclosures was made possible due to the availability of loose surface rocks on the hills. Their highly-organised communal lifestyle also made labour mobilisation easy.

Architecture

Ohingni architecture is both captivating and unique. The enclosures were built using intersecting, curved and zig-zagging walls made of loose stones of various shapes and sizes. The walls were constructed from uncoursed random rubble made from local basalt without any dressing or mortar, and care must have been taken to ensure their stability.

The walls range from 0.5–4.2m in height and have a base of larger blocks, but no dug foundation. On the base, inner and outer wall phasing was erected and joined with a core of small stones. The walls are free standing, and 1m in thickness. They are dotted

Built for defence: view from inside the enclosure, showing low entrance gate and watchtower. All enclosures are situated on hilltops.



with buttresses, which add to the enclosures’ general stability. In Northern Nyanza, architectural features* such as rock pillars, stone linings, natural wall defence utilising the steep face of the hill, and piled rocks constitute the wall of the enclosures.

The gates of the enclosures are always similar in size at about 1–1.5sqm, but the number of gates per enclosure varies from one ohinga to another. The entrances feature stone lintels, loopholes and engraved markings.

Internal features

Immediately behind the entrances are watchtowers for good visibility of the surrounding landscape to spot advancing enemies. Elsewhere behind the walls are usually buttresses for structural stability. Within complex enclosures such as Thimlich Ohinga in South Nyanza, there are a series of interior partitions. The outer wall also encompasses several smaller enclosures, each measuring 10–20m in diameter.

External features

External features are mainly additional semi-circular enclosures, which are not part of the original enclosure. They are known as abutting structures. Their formation was dictated by the need for more space due to population increase within the main enclosures, which in turn sparked off expansions of simple enclosures to form complex ones.

* Explanation of terms: Rock pillars — single isolated long rocks which are vertically anchored perpendicular to the ground surface; Stone lining — individual stones which are arranged in a long winding line as part of the wall or demarcation; Piled rocks — an accumulation of numerous rocks on the surface as part of the wall.

Organisation of space

Archaeological investigation into these fortified settlements has shed light on some aspects of the organisation of domestic space. An important feature is the enclosure wall of the structures. The walls, which are oval in shape, were used for defence during conditions of hostility between different immigrant groups. They were also seen as territorial demarcations or signs of communal land ownership. A communal way of life thrived within these enclosures.

The entrances (gates) were narrow and low to allow a limited number of people to enter the structure at a given time.

Houses (huts) are represented within the enclosures by a series of circular depressions and raised platforms (house foundations), which are arranged in a circular pattern close to the walls, a fact potentially predetermined by the general shape of the enclosures themselves. The circular depressions and raised platforms are assumed to represent domestic areas (houses) due to associated material culture such as house floors, house stone linings, cooking places (hearths) and daub.

The houses were possibly built of mud and thatch. Several circular stone-built livestock kraals occur within some of the main enclosures while the largest livestock kraal was usually situated at the centre of the compound. The occurrence of several livestock kraals in one enclosure could be explained in various ways. There could have been population increase or an increase in the herd. It could also be a shift in ideology from communal to family ownership or the presence of many economic units in a single large enclosure. An example of single enclosures with several cattle kraals is Thimlich Ohinga in South Nyanza. However, some enclosures have a single central livestock kraal such as those in Northern Nyanza. Smaller kraals (10m wide) were places for keeping goats, sheep and calves.

Certain areas were designated for recreational activities such as *bao* (game board), engraved on a stone slab to the



north-eastern side of the main enclosure at Thimlich Ohinga site.

Blacksmithing activities were carried out at a partially stone-walled area, just outside the main enclosure at Thimlich Ohinga. Archaeological excavation at this place yielded numerous pieces of iron slag, broken pieces of *tuyeres* (smoking bellows), iron objects and rock surfaces with marks left during preparation of iron objects.

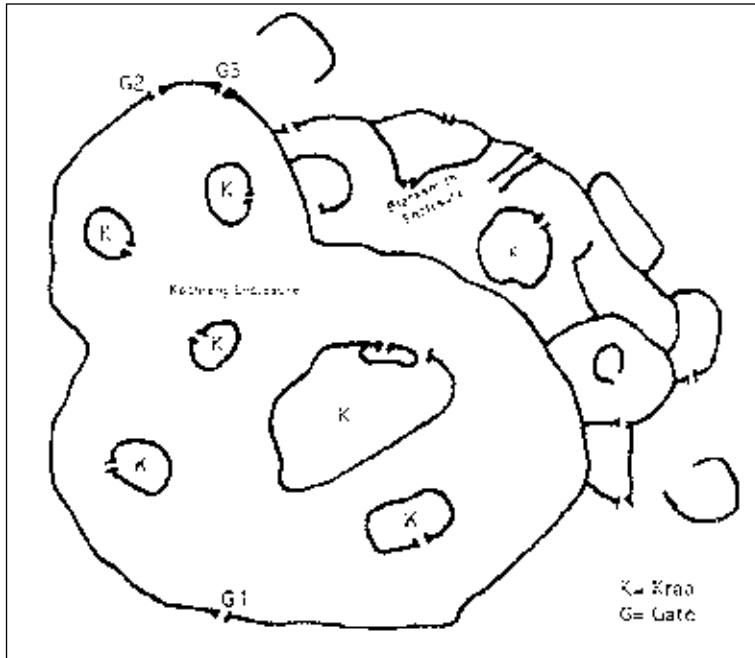
Abutting structures (semi-circular enclosures) are external extensions from the main enclosures, built to accommodate excess population. The external extensions usually enclose few house depressions, and one livestock kraal. Their size (30m across) and limited associated features indicate that few people occupied them.

Dating of ohingni

The dating of dry-stone walled enclosures is confusing. The majority of settlement sites have not been securely dated, but oral history suggests they were built about 500 years ago. Carbon-14 dating of charred bones from an early 1980s test excavation at Liare Valley (the earlier name of Thimlich Ohinga) showed that ohingni were built about 300 years ago during the Recent Iron Age period.

Cross dating of ohingni based on ceramics from Northern Nyanza enclosures in relation to pottery from Thimlich Ohinga enclosures in South Nyanza shows that ohingni from the two regions are contemporaneous. Further

Thimlich Ohinga livestock kraal. The presence of several kraals (each 10–20m diameter) inside the enclosure give an indication of the sizeable human and animal population living within the walls, and the highly-organised culture that built them.



Organisational plan of Thimlich Ohinga. The walls cover an area of over 0.7 hectares.

investigation is required to provide exact dates for these fortified settlement sites.

Oral history

Oral information regarding ohingni highlights certain issues about their origin and factors behind their construction. The interpretations of oral traditions of the inhabitants around Lake Victoria have not focused on explaining the ohingni, but rather, the broader issue of population migration. There is very little association between oral tradition and ohingni even in places where enclosures could provide strength to the explanation of settlement and population expansion. However, a few interpretive references to the structures are contained in oral traditions.

Oral traditions of the Luo indicate the occupation of dry-stone walled enclosures in Northern Nyanza mainly by Lwo speakers and a mixed race of Luo and Bantu clans known locally as Kagwa.

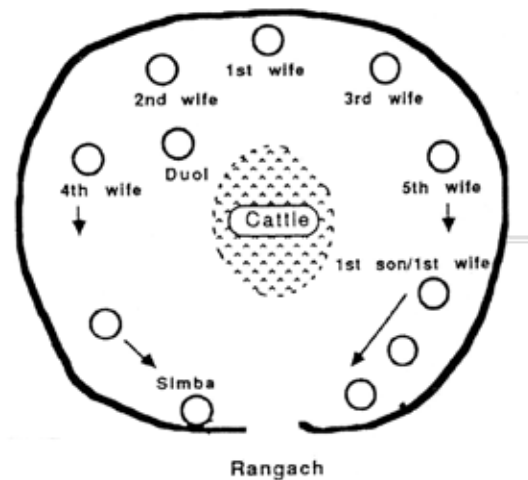
Oral traditions of the Luo also provide information about the underlying factors behind the construction of ohingni. The enclosures were used as defensive mechanisms due to insecurity posed by the presence of wild animals and external invaders in the region. The enclosures acted as fortresses on hilltops as more immigrant groups moved into the region and sought to

dislodge others. Insecurity is a prominent theme in oral history, and it is clearly seen in the enclosures' architectural features such as watchtowers, lock holes, small-sized entrances and high-thickened walls. Large complex enclosures (approx. 0.7 hectares) are evidence of communal life that offered enhanced security as competition for land intensified, as well as cheap labour during the construction and maintenance of the enclosures. The construction of ohingni on hilltops was made easier by the availability of building material (loose surface rocks) on hilltops, which reduced transportation costs during their construction and maintenance.

Ethnographic analogy

The general organisation of space in ohingni resembles the typical layout of more recent traditional Luo homesteads. Within a circular Luo homestead, the focal point is known locally as *duol*, the main male meeting place. On its right is the central circular livestock kraal. The location of the livestock kraal is the same as in the ohingni.

The arrangement of huts in a Luo homestead mirrors that of the stone walled enclosures. The alignment of huts next to the fence conforms in pattern to the circular house depressions within stone walled enclosures such as Thimlich Ohinga. The conformity between the ideal Luo settlement layout and the organisation of space in ohingni is



A typical Luo homestead. The layout of traditional Luo homesteads reflects the general organisation of space found in ohingni.

significant in the understanding of the origin and use of stone-walled enclosures.

Archaeological inference

The identity of the inhabitants of ohingni can further be inferred from pottery recovered from these enclosures. Ceramics found within ohingni are mainly knotted strip roulette-decorated, necked or neckless vessel forms.

In East Africa, no rouletting is associated with the Early Iron Age, a period when Bantu immigrants were already settled in the region, which means the introduction of roulette decoration cannot be associated with Bantu speakers.

Twisted string roulette decoration is typically used by Kalenjin speakers of the highlands of the Rift Valley, while knotted strip roulette decorations have fairly close correlations with western Nilotic Luo communities.

Curved-wooden and knotted string roulette decorations are virtually absent in these enclosures which show that ohingni were not inhabited by either Bantu or Kalenjin immigrant groups who, according to oral history, are claimed to have invaded Western Kenya. Therefore, the occupants of dry-stone walled enclosures in the region — makers of knotted strip roulette decorated pottery — can be here identified as Western Nilotic Lwo speakers.

This claim is further supported by comparisons between modern Luo ceramics with pottery remains from the structures. They are very similar, showing some form of continuity from prehistoric times to the present.

Conclusion

All the three main sources of information have confirmed the occupation of ohingni by the early ancestors of Lwo speakers. The spatial distribution of these enclosures is a manifestation of Luo expansion in Western Kenya during the Later Iron Age period (roughly between 500 and 300 years ago). The enclosures fell into disuse by the first decade of the 20th century as conditions of hostility were replaced by peace and order during the

establishment of colonial administration in the region. The stone walled enclosures were not abandoned, rather individual families moved out of the enclosures to establish individual Luo homesteads fenced by euphorbia as means of territorial demarcation and land acquisition. There was a shift in ideology from a communal lifestyle within the enclosures to individual family units outside the enclosures.

Preservation of ohingni

Thimlich Ohinga, the largest and most complex of the stone structures of Nyanza, is under the care of the National Museums of Kenya and open to the public. However, although the World Monuments Watch gave funds for the preservation of Thimlich Ohinga, the rehabilitation of the enclosures was not completed due to inadequate funds. The last enclosure is still in a pathetic condition with fallen walls and gates, collapsed interior partitions, and overgrown trees which have reduced visibility as well as accessibility. There is an urgent need for the completion of the restoration work on these beautiful and unique historical structures.

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

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Fredrick ZA Odede is an archaeology lecturer at Maseno University, Western Kenya, in the Dept of History and Archaeology. From 2000–2004, Odede was the Western Kenya archaeologist at the National Museums of Kenya. In the early part of 2000, he served as a research assistant at the British Institute in Eastern Africa before he joined the National Museums of Kenya. He undertook his MA in Archaeology at the University of Nairobi where he is currently undertaking a PhD in archaeology.

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The art deco houses of Parklands

Thomas Hart

The Parklands district of Nairobi, originally allocated to European settlers, changed character in the 1930s and 40s to become the first area in which prosperous Asian (Indian) families were allowed to build. Choosing an up-to-date style conspicuously different from the Cotswold cottage and country house patterns aped by the white settler community, the Asian bourgeoisie often built in art deco and moderne styles.

While much of this housing was modest, some are quite distinguished examples of what the McAlesters term “modernistic” houses in their *A Field Guide to American Houses*. As a group, the area bears striking architectural parallels to the hotels and apartments of the Miami Beach Art Deco Historic District, and is exceptional in its single-family use of a style “extremely rare in domestic architecture” (McAlester, 465). As such the neighbourhood reflects the multiracial history of the development of Nairobi in the first half of the 20th

century, from its origin as a British colonial railroad centre dependent on Indian labour.

The original Parklands district lies directly north of Nairobi city centre, on the first bluff of the highland area above the Nairobi River. Along this bluff runs Parklands Road, forming the southern boundary of the district. Above Parklands Road, six streets



named First through Sixth Parklands Avenue run approximately east to west for two long blocks. On the east the area is bounded by Limuru Road and the City Park; to the west, its original boundary was Mpaka Road. The northern edge of the district abuts the still undeveloped area of the Sigiria Forest. The overall scheme is roughly rectangular, about one square kilometre in area.

An approximate count indicates over 50 examples of art deco and moderne style in the Parklands district. Most of them are along the streets that, according to interviews with long-term residents, were developed first — Parklands Road, Limuru Road, and Second, Third, and Fourth Parklands Avenues. The neighbourhood includes both ‘high style’ examples and smaller tract homes.

One difficulty in documenting the neighbourhood is that most houses do not post street numbers. Indeed the street numbering system seems to have fallen out of use entirely, since even the residents profess ignorance of their street or plot numbers and identify their locations by reference to other landmarks. Thus houses are referred to here by owner and style as well as street numbers.

The Parklands group of deco/moderne houses is notable for its architectural merit. The full panoply of stylistic gestures is

employed in the best of these houses: inlaid terrazzo, streamlined corners, recessed corner windows, portholes, railings, prows and other nautical motifs, fluting, sunbreaks and ‘eyebrows’, tripartite façade elements, roof copings, horizontal grooves and striping, and zigzag and other stylised motifs. The fact that these are private houses in most cases — rather than apartments or offices — marks the Nairobi use of the style as unusual, and the presence of so many examples in a small area increases the significance of the whole. Yet the use of these internationally recognised styles is flavoured with distinctive Asian touches: the capitals of columns, the wheel-of-dharma motifs, or the manner of the zigzag elements themselves.

High style houses

According to Mr HK Shah, current owner of 95 Limuru Road and a resident of Parklands since the 1930s, three architects, all of Indian background, were active at the time. Their names are not available at this time of writing. Access to and the condition of municipal records in Nairobi City Hall makes research on the subject challenging. The five residences discussed here are all large showplace homes which would have demanded an architect’s skills.

The Jetha House. Built for the Jetha family in 1949, this spectacular mix of moderne and deco styles is located on a one-acre corner plot at the intersection of Limuru Road and Second Parklands Avenue. The front of the two-storey house features a curved, projecting *porte-cochere* supported by five sets of twinned columns and topped by a nautical-style steel railing; the capitals of the columns appear to reflect traditional Mughal

The Jetha house with its spectacular mix of art deco and moderne styles. It was built in 1949.





influence. The central façade block has fluted windows on the right side that carry through the full elevation. At either side of the *porte-cochere* are angular zigzag style lozenges with windows, again carrying to the upper storey, and the pediment is broken by a projecting flagpole holder that echoes the lozenges. A row of five vertical portholes runs down the left side of the central block. The overall shape of the façade is asymmetrical. The left side of the house is a lower rectangular block; a rectangular breeze block has projecting horizontal stripes; a small door at the extreme left is enveloped

by a curved roof with another porthole. To the right of the central façade block, a large semicircular wing taller than the central element houses the ground floor living room and upper floor master bedroom. The rows of windows curving around the projection are framed by vertical concrete stripes. To the right rear is a curved terrace, with the right rear side terminating in a corner breeze block and portholed exterior door similar to that of the left front. Contrasting paint (brown on beige) highlights the cornices of the flat roof and the many projecting decorative concrete elements.

The Jetha house in different side elevations. The close up directly above shows the columns and railings of the first floor balcony, with their mix of moderne and Mughal styles.

The HN Shah House. This was built for HN Shah (brother-in-law of informant HK Shah) in 1945. The house is located on a one-acre lot (now reduced by apartments) at the corner of Second Parklands Avenue and Ita Road. The Second Parklands Avenue side of this house is a wonderful example of horizontal moderne, with spectacularly striped and curved terrace and upper rooms looping twice along the “L” of the overall structure. Curved sunbreaks or (‘eyebrows’) follow the corners above the window line on both floors and continue around the entire building to the left. The flat roof includes nautical elements — a small ‘captain’s bridge’ mechanical block with horizontal windows, and a long railing. At the square left corner we note typical wrapped, recessed windows for both storeys, although the structure is not sufficiently cantilevered (or the architect brave enough) to entirely eliminate the corner post in Miami Beach style. A semicircular terrace and balcony



projects from the left side, and to the right a low projecting service block has a similar shape to the *porte-cochere* of the Jetha House. The right side of the house appears to have been altered by later stone additions.

The HN Shah house at the corner of Second Parklands Avenue and Ita Road is a wonderful example of horizontal moderne, with striped and curved design elements.



The centred *porte-cochere* is almost identical to that of the Jetha house, but the central façade block is simpler, with protruded concrete vertical framing in typical ‘rule of three’ deco composition. The left side is finished with rounded corners and sunbreaks and a double-pillared recessed porch on the second floor. The horizontal windows and sunbreaks match on left and right wings.

The house plan is a reversed ‘U’ around an interior courtyard. The sides are mirror images of each other (apart from the front right rooms); the owner explained that it no doubt was designed for extended families. Twinning of kitchens and baths on both upper and lower floors offered

the possibility of four virtually independent suites.

95 Limuru Rd is also notable for its exceptional multicoloured terrazzo flooring. The terrazzo is carried up to the chair rail level in the front hall. Inside, a terrazzo roundel in a lotus or wheel-of-dharma design lends an Asian touch. Inside also hangs a watercolour of the current owner’s original family premises, Pembro House, in the old bazaar district in the city centre, nicely illustrating the historic context of Asians in Nairobi.

Unlike many other art deco and moderne homes in Parklands, 95 Limuru Road is well maintained. The decision to convert from residential to office use has kept the building alive in an area that is once again on the cusp of redevelopment.

95 Limuru Road. This very large house of mixed deco and moderne elements was built for Mr MP Shah, progenitor of one of East Africa’s largest industrial families and relation of informant and current owner HK Shah, in 1951. It is now used as offices. The rather recent date indicates that deco and moderne survived late in East Africa (although in Miami Beach also, examples are found from the late 40s and even 1954). Here the plan is quite symmetrical, with the exception of expansion of the downstairs living room and upstairs master bedroom into a semicircular bulge on the right front, similar to the Jetha house.





Hidden behind the asymmetrical moderne façade of the AMA house is a rear wing built in Nairobi stone, indicating that the moderne front may have been added to an older British cottage. Both styles of architecture, reflections of Kenya's multicultural history, are now threatened by the proliferation of apartment blocks.

The AMA House. This is another large, striking and very unusual moderne structure. Two symmetrical rectangular wings have been filled in the centre with curved projected elements that crowd in upon the front door. These rounded sections are pillared on the ground floor, with the left somewhat larger than the right, and carried above the roofline to a third tower storey with connotations of a ship's bridge. The unusual arrangement results in a narrow, darkly recessed entryway.

Continuous projecting sunbreaks wrap completely around the sides and front of both floors, and again on the tower. The rear of the house, oddly enough, is in Nairobi stone with an orange tile roof, indicating that the Moderne front may have been added by the Asian purchaser of an older British cottage. The entryway is distinguished by a fine purple and grey terrazzo seal bearing the initials AMA, presumably those of the original owner of the house.



The Moolraj House. The long, ship-like stepped façade of this showpiece residence dominates its section of Parklands Road, third in a row of fine moderne houses. Constructed in 1947 for Harnamdass Moolraj, a dairy magnate, the asymmetrical front centres on a three-storey-high round projected prow, with portholes along the flanking upper floors reinforcing the nautical design. The right side of the building is two storeys high (although it appears to be three), and rounded terraces, upper and lower, curve around the right corner. On the left, three single-storey blocks step elegantly back and down behind another curvilinear terrace, extending even to a fourth little curved doorway set back again on the extreme left



The Moolraj house is one in a row of three moderne residences along its section of Parklands Road.

(not shown). Sunbreaks and roof cornices provide horizontal striping across the entire façade. One of the current occupants of the house comments that there were many like it in Mumbai, most now torn down in that city's recent hyperdevelopment.

Tract houses

Alongside the impressive examples cited above are a large number of modest bungalows and small apartment houses in the same styles. Many were evidently built by Kenya Builders Ltd, according to both HK Shah and the current resident of no.18 Second Parklands Avenue. The sons of the deceased owner of this business still live in Nairobi. Retired Nairobi architect David Blackhurst believes that these smaller, more standardised structures may have been based on pattern books published by the Indian concrete industry to promote concrete and cement as building materials.

18 Second Parklands Avenue. This house was purchased by the current resident and original owner in 1948 from Kenya Builders Ltd. The simple flat-roofed 'L' shape is enhanced by a sunbreak around the square terrace extending to the rear, more sunbreaks on side windows, cornices, and a recessed band of striping



The house at 18 Second Parklands Avenue is one of many in a similar style, possibly built according to pattern books published by the Indian concrete industry.

around the roofline. Numerous variations on the design are spread throughout Parklands: flipped left to right, for example, or with rounded rather than square corners, or featuring different decorative striping and breeze blocks.



Gulab Shah Apartments (above). Another very typical design is this symmetrical U-shaped single storey block of three apartments. The windows in the projecting wings are in vertical rule-of-three configuration. Here the recessed central block has been filled by a terrace that in turn features a very clean semicircular central portico on plain columns. A sunbreak line projects around the entire building, linking to the roof of the terrace and portico with strong horizontality.

209 Second Parklands Avenue. This is an inversion of the preceding model, with a projecting central block flanked by recessed wings stepped down at the roofline. This single-family model has a rounded porch and doorway on the left; again the sunbreak extends around the whole building above the window line. Particularly typical of the smaller bungalows of Parklands, and seemingly Indian in inspiration, are the circular breeze blocks set in an incised cruciform pattern of triple stripes.

The state of preservation of this group of residences is remarkable. They not only remain in their original location, their setting remains a primarily Asian family residential suburb of Nairobi. While some additions and 'improvements' have been made throughout the district, many art deco or moderne properties remain in their virtually original, if often neglected, state. It appears that



those residents with the means to rebuild or renovate chose instead in later years to move or build in even more exclusive areas. The materials and workmanship thus remain undisturbed in these examples. The best maintain their feeling as show houses of a striving class, seeking to be up to date in an international style displaying subtle touches of their Asian associations.

But why Parklands?

Nairobi was founded in 1899 as a railhead on the route of the Uganda Railway, the building of which drew upon Indian skilled and unskilled labour. Thus from its earliest days the East African Protectorate (and after 1920, Kenya Colony) and its urban centres were Indian (or 'Asian') as well as British and African. In the first formal census in 1948, for example, the population of Nairobi was made up of 64,397 Africans, 43,749 Asians, and 10,830 Europeans.

The European community controlled the administration of the colony, and 'settler' elements looked to South African models to ensure that they were accorded a special status above that of both Asians and Africans despite their paucity of numbers. This was reflected, for example, in the make up of the Nairobi Municipal Council where, after a period of Asian boycotts in the early 1920s, a formula of five whites, four Asians, and two appointees for African interests (later nine/seven/three) was agreed. Separate housing areas were imposed, but settler aspirations suffered a setback in 1923 when the British government declared that legal segregation of residential areas, or commercial areas, would not be approved for Kenya.

Nevertheless, the white settlers protected their areas through the use of legal covenants in the deeds which allowed only Europeans to live on the property. As Andrew Hake notes in *African Metropolis*, "the large area of high ground...to the west and north had been chosen for the building of estates reserved by covenant or otherwise for European occupation" (Hake, p. 57).

Asian residents like Mr HK Shah, descendant of the owners of 95 Limuru Road, recall that "Muthaiga and the presidential [government] area were purely European areas in those days." Land records in the National Archives indicate that prior to 1928, Parklands, the closest-in of the suburbs on high ground, was in entirely European hands.

The Asians were confined to the central 'bazaar' areas along the present Biashara Street and River Road. They were the tradesmen, while the British dominated government, agriculture, and the direction of the railroad. With growth and development of the city, a class of very prosperous Asian traders arose, people of wealth and social status with nowhere suitable to live. The Virjee family, for example, contributed the equivalent of almost 50,000 pounds sterling to the construction of the Khoja Mosque between 1920 and 1923, at a time when the African wage was about one pound a month.

After 1928 however, it is clear from the numerous listings of land records in the Kenya National Archives that the Parklands area was being subdivided and sold to Asians. Typical titles of files include:

*Transfer, European-Asiatic plot 1489
Parklands Mr, Mrs RF Mayers to Eboo
Pribhal...1929*

*Transfer European to Asiatic plot No.
60, 62 and 653 – Parklands Mrs NR
Douglass to ST Thakore...1929*

And so on for 24 more examples between 1928 and 1932, the majority in 1930. What happened? European landowners may have been under financial pressure at the time due to the onset of the great depression. In any case European prosperity in Kenya, dependent on

Photo left:
Particularly typical of the smaller bungalows of Parklands, and seemingly Indian in inspiration, are the circular breeze blocks set in an incised cruciform pattern of triple stripes.

the cash-intensive agriculture of large estates, was always viciously cyclical — prey to the unfamiliar African weather and diseases as well as the vagaries of global export markets. But they did have land, lots of it, granted to them cheaply by the government. Pressure on Europeans to capitalise on their speculative holdings may have combined with pressure from the Asian community to get out of their inner city ghetto.

Perhaps most significantly, the archives also record the legal fight by an Indian from Portuguese Goa, a Dr ACL de Sousa. Bizarrely enough, the protective covenant system did not prevent non-Europeans from buying or owning such land — but they could not live on it. De Sousa, who had bought property in Parklands in 1924, appealed to the governor to be able to live on his own property. He won his case in 1928, apparently sparking the flurry of ownership changes.

Panic selling clearly occurred in Parklands around 1930 as Asians moved into the neighbourhood. In testimony before the 1933 Kenya Land Commission, Mr HA Carr, Municipal Native Affairs Officer, commented “the Parklands area in Nairobi used to be very much more valuable than it is now, and the value of the land has gone down because so many Indians have gone to live there.” (Kenya Land Commission, *Evidence*, Vol. I, p. 1120.)

Why did the new Asian owners choose moderne and art deco styles? Probably because it was thoroughly up to date, a statement of modernity and efficiency. Deco was radically different from the stodgy stone bungalows with tile roofs that characterised their nemesis, the white settlers, and so a stylistic poke in the eye to the establishment. Further,

as for their depression counterparts in Miami, deco houses could be built impressively in inexpensive materials — cement, concrete and stucco. The cool cement walls, sunbreaks, flat roofs, projecting

terraces, porches, and open *portes-cocheres* were suitable for the climate. The emphasis on external applied décor allowed big, expandable interiors suitable for extended Asian families.

By the census of 1962, the population of Parklands, by then a larger area, was listed as over 58,000 Asians, compared to 16,000 Africans (mostly servants, judging by the high proportion of adult men), and somewhat over 2,000 Europeans.

The character of Parklands is still distinctively Asian, and Sikhs and Gujaratis still throng the Diamond Plaza shopping centre for saris, pirated bollywood videos, and chapattis and chicken tikka. But Parklands is no longer elite — as the best upland neighbourhoods became available for Asian residency after Kenyan independence, the richest went there. The massive increase in the size of the city has made the neighbourhood, particularly along Limuru Road, congested and dingy. But the amazing shapes of the big old streamlined houses still tell the surprising story of an Indian community’s struggle and progress in the growth of an African city.

PHOTOS BY THOMAS HART AND AKBAR HUSSEIN

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Thomas Hart conducted research for this article while attached to the American Embassy in Nairobi from 2000 to 2003. He currently works as a historic inspector renovating the old War, Navy and State office building next to the White House in Washington, DC. He is also the author of “Gazetting and Historic Preservation in Kenya” in *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* (Winter 2007). Educated at Princeton, Oxford, and Columbia, Tom lives in Virginia, USA, with his family but looks forward to spending more time in Kenya.

Extra photographs for this article were taken by Akbar Hussein of Expo Camera, Nairobi. Akbar is well known as a photo-historian; he provided historic photos of Nairobi for the Museum’s exhibition on Nairobi’s centenary and contributed a photo-essay on the subject for *Kenya Past and Present* (“The Nairobi that was”, issue 30).

A fine example on Second Parklands Avenue, with dramatic vertical stairwell.



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