

Kenya Past and Present



Issue 40



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Kenya Past and Present

Issue 40, 2012

Contents

KMS highlights 2012	3
<i>Patricia Jentz</i>	
Museum highlights 2012	7
<i>Juliana Jebet and Hellen Njagi</i>	
<i>Mung'aro</i> , the Shining: Ritual and human sacrifice on the Kenya coast.....	11
<i>Martin Walsh</i>	
The architectural heritage of the Lamu Bohra mosque	23
<i>Taibali Hamzali</i>	
Is it or isn't it? The intriguing story of amber	29
<i>Rhodia Mann</i>	
Neither here nor there: Stories from the Asian-Africans in Kenya	34
<i>Narinder Heyer</i>	
Part male, part female: Gynandromorphism in insects	41
<i>Laban Njoroge</i>	
Of land, ritual and disposal of the dead	45
<i>Angela W Kabiru</i>	
The case of Kisumu: Urban history and cultural heritage in the face of modernisation.....	53
<i>Stephen Agong', Fredrick Odede and George Anang'a</i>	



FRONT COVER

This family of Asian-Africans is part of a little-recognised aspect of Kenya's history, told by Narinder Heyer on pages 34–40.



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Family Resident of Kenya	KSh 2,000
Single Resident of Kenya	KSh 1,500
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Up country membership (new category)	KSh 1,200
Corporate (8 individuals)	KSh 15,000
Non resident Membership	US\$ 50
Visitors (valid for one month)	KSh 800

* No publications except newsletter

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Annual Membership expires one year from date of payment.

To join KMS, download and fill out the application form on our website www.KenyaMuseumSociety.org, and post it together with your cheque for the appropriate membership category to: Kenya Museum Society, PO Box 40658, Nairobi 00100, Kenya. We also accept payment by M-Pesa.

For further information, please call the Society's office:

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E-mail: info@KenyaMuseumSociety.org

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KENYA MUSEUM SOCIETY

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

The Society runs the Museum Shop at the Nairobi Museum and regularly organises events such as *Know Kenya More!*, member safaris, lectures and other activities to raise funds for the KMS Grants Programme. The programme helps fund the development of exhibitions at the National Museums.

NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA

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

Sites and monuments:

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

KMS highlights 2012



Patricia Jentz, KMS Chairperson

During the year 2012 the Kenyan Museum Society organised a variety of activities that attracted a diverse group of participants from among KMS members as well as newcomers and the general public.

The *Know Kenya more through films* programme continued to showcase the talent of Kenyan film directors and to attract an audience traditionally not involved in most KMS activities. In June *Know Kenya more through films* began a series of screenings at the Karen Country Club with a well-attended launch and more than 150 attendees at the five screenings. We thank Karen Country Club for their invaluable collaboration and look forward to working together in the future. We are also in discussion with Muthaiga Country Club to co-host more Kenyan films next year. We will continue to screen films at the

Louis Leakey Auditorium on the grounds of the Nairobi Museum, but the satellite film screenings have proved attractive for those not willing to battle Nairobi traffic. 2012 was also a year of transition as Yuriko Uehara, our former Evening Programmes Director who introduced the concept of Kenyan films as part of KMS events, left Kenya for Zimbabwe. Lucy Waithera and Dorothy Mkala, our very competent office staff, are now handling the programme.

The last KMS event of the year was the very successful screening of the National Geographic special documentary *Bones of Turkana* on 14 November. It was attended by more than 230 KMS members, NMK staff, students and members of the general public. Dr Richard Leakey introduced the film, which was presented in cooperation with the Prehistory Club of Kenya.

Above:
KMS Chair Pat Jentz presents over 150 copies of *Kenya Past and Present* to NMK Resource Centre Manager, Ashah Owano, for inclusion in NMK's Heritage House library and for an exchange programme with museums around the world.



Dr Richard Leakey poses beside the statue of his father, pioneer palaeontologist Louis Leakey, at the showing of the National Geographic documentary *Bones of Turkana*.

The ever-popular weekend outings under the leadership of Narinder Heyer continued to be very successful. Members had the opportunity to travel to truly beautiful and interesting places in Kenya such as Sleeping Warrior Camp in Naivasha, the Masai Mara game reserve, Ewart Grogan’s Castle in Tsavo West National Park, Happy Valley, Amboseli National Park, the Chyulu Hills and various private game reserves in Laikipia. These outings are an important source of revenue for KMS operations and activities. We salute Narinder for her unstinting efforts in making all safaris educational as well as exciting.

Stopping to admire the scenery on one of our many popular safaris, organised by the indefatigable Narinder.

KMS day outings, organised for an all-too-brief period by visiting costume designer Lena Sands, included a visit to the fascinating Brown’s cheese factory in Limuru, the Kuona Trust art studios and Paradise Lost in Kiambu.



This year’s second-hand book sales were a great success thanks to all members who donated books, CDs, games and magazines.

All funds raised through KMS programmes and activities support the National Museums of Kenya. This year’s fundraising success will be followed by some exciting projects in 2013 as NMK moves to broaden its scope and add to its exhibitions.

Grants in 2012

During the year the Kenya Museum Society spent KSh 2.1 million from the Art Gallery Reserve Fund to buy 19 works of art by some of Kenya’s most well-known contemporary artists to add to the NMK Permanent Collection. An exhibition to display the collection is expected to be held at the Museum in early 2013.

A KMS grant of KSh 255,000 to the Nairobi Botanic Garden on the grounds of the Nairobi Museum made it possible for the developers to prepare and mount six information panels with species names, natural habitats, population status, associated species, uses of the plant and pertinent socio-economic issues. The NBG houses 600 indigenous and 100 exotic plants and cultivars in 10 of a proposed 17 displays.



This year NMK formally acknowledged the Society’s support for the purchase and installation of new shelving in the Nairobi Museum’s renowned Casting Department through the unveiling of a plaque by NMK Director General Dr Idle Farah on 9 October. At the same event, KMS donated more than 150 copies of the last issue of *Kenya Past and Present* for inclusion in the collection of NMK’s Heritage House library and for an exchange programme with museums around the world.

Into the digital age

The KMS annual publication *Kenya Past & Present* will soon be joining the African Journal Archive Project, a digitization project to build a digital archive of journals published exclusively in Africa and about Africa. The project is funded by the Carnegie Corporation and managed by South Africa-based Sabinet Online. Africa lags behind in building digital archives of its own research and cultural heritage with the result that international exposure and visibility for African research is being hampered. Putting African publications online will make information about Africa accessible for researchers, scholars, teachers, students and professional bodies both in Africa and internationally.

The African Journal Archive includes publications from Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe and is expected to go online in June 2013.

This past year has also seen the Society’s newsletter, *Tracker*, go digital, with bimonthly copies sent to members by email. This has proved a popular move with many appreciating the expanded safari stories and many colour photos. For KMS this means savings in printing and distribution, funds that can be used to augment our grants programme.



One of the 19 works of contemporary Kenyan art purchased by KMS for the NMK Permanent Collection. Pictured here is *Cutting the cake (referendum)* by well-known satirical artist Bertiers.



Some of the new KMS-sponsored educational signboards at the Nairobi Botanic Garden.



Head of the Casting Department, Benson Kyongo, explains the casting process during the plaque unveiling ceremony recognising the KMS sponsorship of their modern shelving system.

KMS's signature week-long *Know Kenya More!* course did not take place this year. As Nairobi grows in size and sophistication — and in the number of vehicles on its roads — we are in the process of reformatting the programme to offer distinctive events and lectures not available elsewhere in the city.

The Kenya Museum Society is run by our office staff and a small council of volunteers to whom I extend my sincere thanks.

THANKS TO KMS MEMBERS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION OF SAFARI PHOTOS. ALL OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS BY EBRAHIM MWANGI, NMK AV DEPT.

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Museum highlights 2012



“Turkana Boy” visits the 2012 London Olympics

The Government of Kenya went on an investment and tourism charm offensive at the London Olympics 2012, using the theme “From a great past to a greater future”, to showcase the country as a major destination. The organising committee adopted the National Museums’ recommendation to showcase Kenya’s great past to provide a new impetus for diversification of our tourism products, presenting Kenya’s unique status as “Truly the cradle of mankind”. Through the heroic endeavours of its scientists, NMK has over the years made major discoveries in the field of human origins and currently holds at the Nairobi National Museum the world’s most complete set of original human fossils, spanning millions of years of our evolution. The most iconic of these fossils is Turkana Boy, the world’s most complete

human fossil, found by NMK star fossil hunter Kamoya Kimeu during an expedition led by Dr Richard Leakey in 1984. Turkana boy, 1.6 million years old, belongs to our ancestor species *Homo erectus*.

Kenya House drew over 2,000 visitors during the two week period of the Olympic Games, a number that was a pleasant surprise for organisers considering that this was a first. The Kenya House concept and selling the National Museums was a successful venture and it is hoped that NMK will participate in fully marketing Kenya as a destination for archaeological wonders and a must visit for visitors around the world “coming home” to where humanity began. NMK was represented in London by Dr Thomas Kariuki (Director of the Institute of

**Juliana Jebet and Hellen Njagi,
Public Relations Officers,
National Museums of Kenya**

Above
Prime Minister Raila Odinga is shown the skeleton of Turkana Boy during his visit to Kenya House at the London 2012 Olympics. Photo by Sharon Kyungu.



Students admire paintings at the first Nairobi International Children’s Art and Photography Exhibition, held at NMK in September 2012.

Primate Research) and Ms Sharon Kyungu (Public Relations and Marketing Manager).

The first underwater museum in Africa to be built at the Kenyan coast

The National Museums of Kenya is in the process of setting up Africa’s first underwater museum to study and display marine life and shipwrecks in the coastal region. Archaeological studies have already documented over 35 shipwrecks that could be turned into underwater attractions for visitors.

Marine archaeologists Caesar Bitu and Phillip Wanyama, who were trained in China and Egypt on underwater archaeology, say that NMK is at the initial stages of documenting the shipwrecks off Mombasa, Malindi and Lamu. The intention is to establish their status, stability in the ocean, and the materials used in their construction, before finding ways of conserving them while they work to build the capacity to implement the project.

In Lamu, NMK is working with the Chinese government on a three-year project to study the wreck of a ship believed to have sunk 600 years ago. The ship is thought to have sailed during China’s Ming Dynasty as part of the fleet led by Admiral Zheng He, who reached Malindi in 1418.

Exhibitions

During the year the Nairobi Museum was the venue for a number of exhibitions, which included the following:

‘Fame, nature, and the funny’: Cartoonist Michael Munene from the *East African Standard* newspaper held a two-week art exhibition at NMK during August 2012. Munene is a figurative painter who has been painting since childhood. The show featured his portraits, wildlife paintings and cartoons, some of which have not been published before.

Children’s art and photography exhibition: Juhudi Children’s Club, based in Nairobi, hosted the inaugural Nairobi International Children’s Art and Photography Exhibition at NMK in September 2012. The exhibition, which will be held biennially, aims to give an opportunity to children to communicate their daily lives through art, as well as promote cultural appreciation and international understanding among children.

The exhibition’s theme of “We are the world” was inspired by the realisation that the world as we see it is a result of both positive and negative actions on the part of its inhabitants. The exhibition was an invitation to children to reflect and capture through art the actions, innovations, events and processes in their own communities and countries that make our world a better, or worse, place in which to live.

An evening walk with art: On 6 December 2012 the Nairobi National Museum showcased for the first time its permanent art collection that boasts contemporary as well as traditional art spanning 100 years. KMS recently augmented this collection with the donation of 19 pieces of art by well-known contemporary Kenyan artists. A prize-giving ceremony also took place on the same day

for a national art competition that had been organised earlier in the year, dubbed “Experiencing Kenyan heritage through art.” Elsardt Amulyoto took the overall prize and received a one week, all-expenses-paid trip to London to visit various art galleries. The main sponsor of the exhibition was Absolut Vodka.

‘Layers’: Another exhibition in December was a unique science-art exhibition by award-winning Kenyan artists James Muriuki and Miriam Syowia Kyambi. This one-day event took place in the Aga Khan Hall.

Challenges of Nationhood: Stone sculptures took pride of place at another December exhibition, this time by Art Piece Africa’s Naftali Momanyi. The show, which also featured artists Samuel Njuguna, Willie Wamuti, Robert Njoroge and Daniel Kinyanjui, ran into January 2013.

During the same time frame, painter Shake Makelele and photographer David Mbiyu staged their joint exhibition entitled ‘Varied perceptions’.



Rehabilitating Nairobi’s City Park

His Highness the Aga Khan and then-Prime Minister Hon. Raila Odinga signed an agreement to rehabilitate City Park at the Nairobi National Museums Ecology Hall, now renamed Aga Khan Hall. The agreement, signed in April 2012, was reached after a two-year negotiation over the possibility of returning the park to its original use. The project will include environmental improvements, landscape architectural conservation and the creation of new facilities at the park. An amphitheatre,

Elsardt Amulyoto’s entry in the “Experiencing Kenyan heritage through art” competition that won him a trip to London.



Luis Monreal of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture explains details of the Nairobi City Park rehabilitation to Prime Minister Odinga and the Aga Khan.



The Aga Khan and the Prime Minister shake hands after signing the MoU to rehabilitate City Park.

a swimming pool and a food court will also be built at the park to generate income.

The 60-hectare City Park in the Parklands area of Nairobi dates back to 1925 and comprises public gardens, open recreational areas, remnant indigenous forest and historic sites. Recent biodiversity surveys have identified 776 species, including several Kenyan plant endemics of enormous conservation value. The park has become run-down over the years and faced encroachment and land grabbing before it was officially gazetted as a protected area under the National Museums and Heritage Act in 2009.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture invests in the rehabilitation of cultural facilities that improve the lives of the poor. The trust is currently undertaking ten similar projects worldwide, with Nairobi City Park being the second in East Africa after a similar one in Zanzibar. Present during the signing of the agreement were Local Government Permanent Secretary Karega Mutahi, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage Jacob Ole Miaron, Nairobi Town Clerk Tom Odongo, and Luis Monreal representing the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

Fourth Kwani Literary Festival comes to Nairobi National Museum

The Kwani Literary Festival 2012 took place at the Nairobi National Museum auditorium in December 2012. Under the theme “Conversations with the Horn: Writers and artistes in exchange” the fourth edition brought together writers, poets, literary academics and theorists and included notable personalities such as Somali poet Hadraawi, London-based Somali novelist Nadifa Mohamed, Sudanese-English novelist Jamal Mahjoub and Eritrean writer and historian Alemseged Tefsayi, who came together to share their work with writers from other parts of the continent.

Kenya’s Binyavanga Wainaina graced the auditorium in conversation with Ghana’s Kojo Laing. John Sibi Okumu interviewed John Githongo on his starring role in the book *It’s our turn to eat*. Popular Kenyan novelists such as Charles Mangua and David Maillu also took the stage at the auditorium to talk about the art of popular literature.

Christmas party at the Children’s Meeting Place

On 24 December 2012 the Botanic Garden came alive as 200 children living in the slums and on the Nairobi streets celebrated Christmas. The festivities centred around the Children’s Meeting Place, which is a tree in the Botanic Garden. The children enjoyed games, dancing and face painting.

The Children’s Meeting Place at the NMK was inaugurated in April 2003, with Director General Dr Farah officially handing over the tree to the children of Kenya as a place of meeting and dialogue. The Mother Tree of all Children’s Meeting Places of the World is at the United Nations complex in Gigiri, Nairobi and was inaugurated in 2001.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY EBRAHIM MWANGI, NMK AV DEPT.



Mung'aro, the Shining:

Ritual and human
sacrifice on the
Kenya coast

Martin Walsh

***Mung'aro*, “Shining”, is the name given to an extraordinary ritual that once accompanied the transition from youthful or warrior status to elderhood among the Mijikenda of the Kenyan coast. Using historical sources, comparative linguistics and ethnography, anthropologist Martin Walsh summarises what is known about this rite of passage and what can be deduced about its unexpected history.**

On 17 March 1845 the CMS missionary Johann Ludwig Krapf went on a characteristically optimistic excursion to preach to the heathen on the mainland south of Mombasa. Undeterred by the lack of an audience for his sermons in Likoni and the next hamlet along, he made enquiries about pressing on:

“I asked the chief of the place to show me the way to the scattered villages. He was quite ready to do so, but warned me not to visit the village Yumbo, because the Wanika were celebrating their Ugnaro there. This is a horrible sport, practised from time to time by the young people when they have reached a certain age. They smear the body, especially the face, with white and grey earth, so that they cannot be recognized, being almost in a complete state of nudity;

Above
Kambe Bora elder
wearing mask of thorns,
painted by Joy Adamson,
circa 1945; from her
book *Peoples of Kenya*.

upon which they remain in the woods until they have killed a man, after which they wash themselves and return home, where they then feast and carouse to their hearts' content. It is not therefore advisable to journey at such times through these places, as solitary travellers, especially slaves, are their favourite prey. A wise government in Mombaz would long ago have suppressed this abomination."¹

This was enough of a warning for Krapf, and the Reverend Doctor returned to Mombasa, leaving us with this early sketch of the *mung'aro* ("Ugnaro") among the Nyika, as the Mijikenda were then known. "Yumbo" (Jimbo? Kaya Bombo?) is unidentified, and whether or not the ritual was underway at this time in one or more of the Digo communities on the south coast remains unclear. It may be that Krapf's interlocutor was simply trying to discourage him from travelling further.

Awareness of this "horrible sport" did not deter Krapf and his fellow proselytiser, Johannes Rebmann, from establishing a mission station in August the following year at Rabai Mpya, north of Mombasa. In the

course of their missionary work among the Rabai and other northern Mijikenda they learned more about the *mung'aro* and its wider social and ritual context. The explorer Richard Burton later recorded a brief account of the *mung'aro* ("Unyaro") based on information given to him by Rebmann:

"The Wanyika split into the Nyere, or young; the Khambi, or middle-aged; and the Mfaya, or old. Each degree has its different initiation and ceremonies with an 'elaborate system of social and legal observances,' the junior order always

The Mijikenda are nine closely related peoples — the Giriama, Kauma, Chonyi, Jibana, Kambe, Ribe, Rabai, Duruma and Digo — who live in the hinterland of the Kenya coast and across the border into Tanzania. They were named in the 1940s after the "nine settlements" or *kayas* that they are said to have once occupied. Many more *kayas* are now recognised and protected as sacred sites, and in 2008 eleven "Sacred Mijikenda Kaya Forests" were designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Inside Kaya Kinondo, a sacred forest of the Digo in Kwale, south of Mombasa
Photo from www.kayakinondo.com.



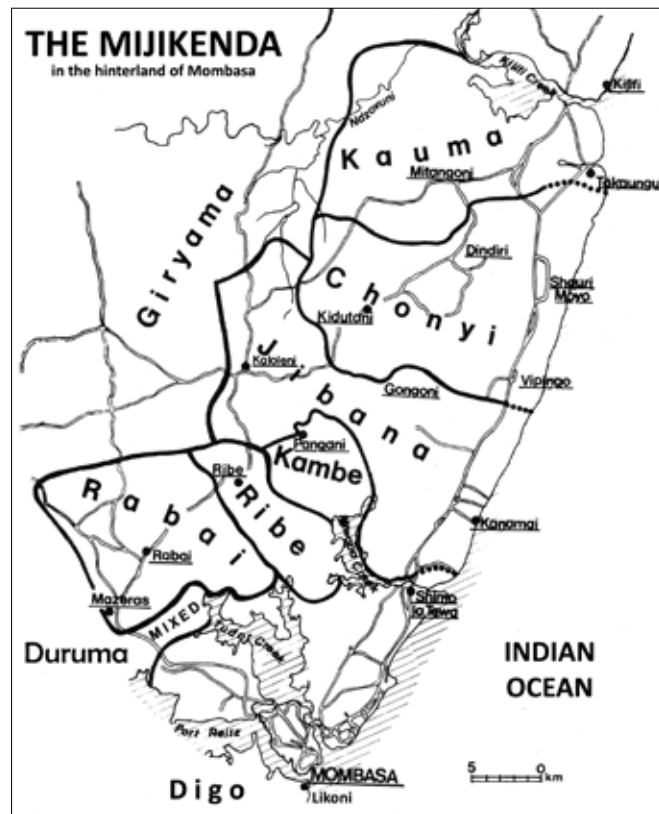
buying promotion from the senior. Once about every twenty years comes the great festival 'Unyaro,' at which the middle-aged degree is conferred. This (1857) is Unyaro-year; but the Wamasai hindered the rite. Candidates retire to the woods for a fortnight, and clay themselves for the first half with white, and during the second with red earth; a slave is sacrificed, and the slaughter is accompanied by sundry mysteries, of which my informants could learn nothing."²

The *mung'aro* that was delayed by Maasai raids in 1857 seems not to have taken place until the 1870s. Perhaps not surprisingly, Krapf, Rebmann, and their successors struggled to understand the "mysteries" of the *mung'aro* and other esoteric practices, and failed to leave us with clear descriptions of what actually took place, and why. As a result it is difficult now to reconstruct what might have occurred when the ritual was in its full (and gory) glory.

The following notes outline what is known about the *mung'aro* from various sources, and attempt to place it in its historical as well as cultural context. Although there is much that we do not know and will probably never know about this extraordinary ritual and its interpretation, some surprising facts are beginning to emerge.

The Shining and its significance

As the early missionaries surmised, *mung'aro* was a rite of passage that marked the transition from the status of youth or warrior (*nyere*) to that of elder (*k'ambi* in most dialects, *ngambi* in Digo). The precolonial Mijikenda are renowned for their acephalous political ideal: the Giriama system in the first half of the 19th century has been described by Cynthia Brantley as "gerontocratic government based on age-sets and elder councils".³ Young men were initiated into age-sets (*rika*, plural *marika*)



every three years or so: when thirteen of these minimal age-sets of *nyere* had been formed they were ready to become *k'ambi* and so members of the ruling maximal age-set or generation (also called a *rika*). On all accounts *mung'aro* was an essential part of the process of installing the new generation and retiring the old, equivalent to the *ituika* or 'handing-over' ceremony of the Gikuyu and related peoples of Mount Kenya.

Map showing the location of Mijikenda in the hinterland of Mombasa (based on a map by W J G Möhlig).

One of the most detailed accounts of the ritual was recorded by George David, a catechist with the Church Missionary Society, in April 1879. This was given to him by a senior Rabai elder, Abe Mjeni Mwasunga, who had converted to Christianity and so refused to participate in the *mung'aro* that began in March of that year.

"On the day on which the Ugnaro begins, the elders allow their young men to spend the night dancing; and in the morning they are ordered to [strip] themselves of all their ornaments of beauty which they [wear] excepting the pieces of cloth around their

loins. And as soon as they finish stripping themselves of the ornaments, both they and the elders go out on the open field, away from their kayas (forests[]) to fetch clay for their bodies. And as soon as they come within the reach of a certain place which they generally take their clay for smearing their bodies, they are made to stand. Then 16 particular elders, go first to their sacred place to remove the charms. And after them follow the other elders, who stand between the 16 elders and the young men side by side in a straight line leaving a wide space on the middle for the young men to pass. And the young men who are behind, have been told by the 16 elders who are before that if they should see a smoke of fire on the spot where they are, they should at once leave the place in [speed] and with [force] like [run along] to go to [them], keeping only on the space made for them by the elders who are standing between the line ready to prevent their passing by diverse slaps. Accordingly, as soon as they see the smoke, the young men rush on between the elders who slap them from right to left. And when few of the young men reach where the 16 elders are, some [go] to the fire and throw all sorts of rubbish on it to extinguish it that the smoke should not be seen. And as soon as the fire is put out, one of the elders among the 16 brings a song of peace, and the beating is then over. Then all come [first] peaceably together where the 16 elders are. Then the young men each take[s] a lump of clay for himself. The smoke signifies [signifies] that the elders still [belong,] that they are still reigning. And the putting out of the fire signifies [signifies] that their reign is finished. The place at which they take the clay is held as sacred among them, and it is supposed not to be known by the other tribes of people owing to their charms being much superior than those of the other tribes. And after taking the clay, then all return home, each with a lump of clay put on a pakacha, ie on leaves of the

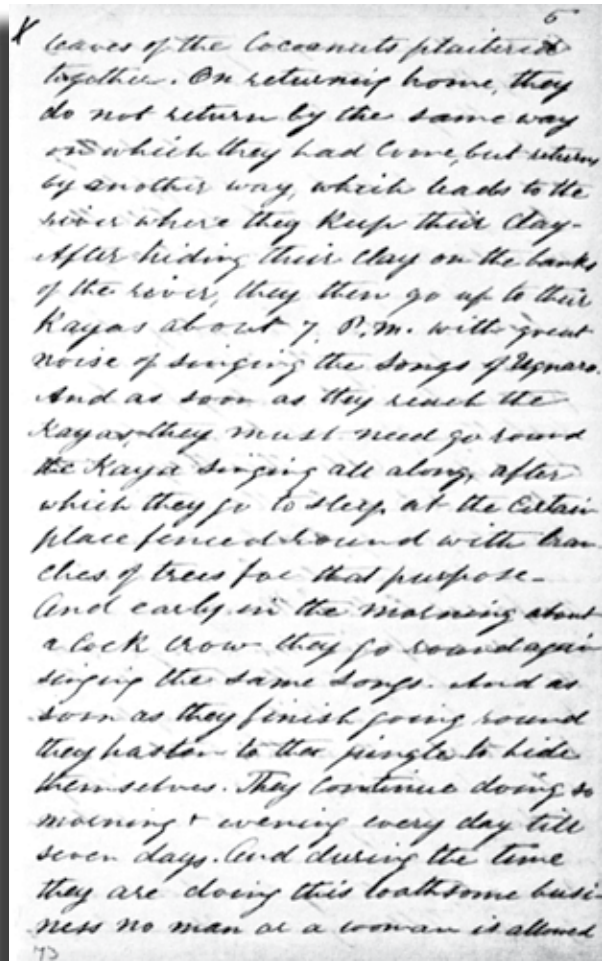
cocoanuts plaited together. On returning home, they do not return by the same way on which they had come, but return by another way, which leads to the river where they keep their clay. After hiding their clay on the banks of the river, they then go out to their Kayas about 7 p.m. with great noise of singing the songs of Ugnaro. And as soon as they reach the Kayas, they must need go round the Kaya singing all along, after which they go to sleep at the certain place fenced around with branches of trees for that purpose. And early in the morning about a cock crow they go round again singing the same songs. And as soon as they finish going round they hasten to their jungle to hide themselves. They continue doing so morning & evening every day till seven days. And during the time they are doing this loathsome business no man or a woman is allowed to see them excepting the elders only. When the seven days are over they are then allowed to return to their homes, but they are not to first wash off the clay from their body till they murder a man, ie a stranger or slave seen passing alone any where on their country. For cause, during the Ugnaro, no one passes their country for fear lest they should be made a sacrifice. After this they are then allowed to enter the office of the Kambi, ie of snake medicine, and the private council in the forest called "Mvaya". And so one friend Mwasunga is in the number of the 16 elders, the others having died, the tribe of people needed him to show them this custom, of which he himself was unwilling to do so having once found Christ as his Saviour."⁴

There are a number of published and unpublished descriptions of the Giriama *mung'aro*, though these are at best rough outlines. When he wrote the following lines, circa 1914, the Assistant District Commissioner Arthur Champion was already frustrated by the paucity of available facts:

“With regard to the details of initiation it is difficult to obtain reliable information, as in the first place the last ceremony took place over forty years ago; the old men’s memories are somewhat impaired whilst the young men find it difficult to describe what they have never seen. Both however seem to think that the ‘old days’ are over and that when the time comes for the ceremony to be again performed great modifications will be necessary owing to the altered condition and expansion of the tribe.

I have been given the following brief account of what took place in the *kaya* on the occasion of the initiation of *Kambi Kavuta*.

The whole male population from above about 13 years of age who did not belong to the *Kambi Makwavi* arrayed themselves in the *kaya*. Each of the clans provided two bulls and six poles (*mahalu*) of fowls (sixty fowls to the pole). Nothing was said about beer, but I cannot believe that it was omitted from the feast. The *nyeri*, their bodies smeared in red mud and castor oil (*mbono*) and wearing a garment known as *marinda wa makindu* (a kilt made of leaves), were grouped into *marika* and each *rika* was given its name. The feasting continued for some days in the *kaya* and then the young men went forth into the bush, still in the same guise, and so they had to remain till a foreigner could be found and killed. They then scraped off the mud and oil and threw their kilts on to the body of the dead man. The seven senior *marika* then went back to the *morho* [senior elders’ meeting house] and receiving the coloured cloth (the symbol of the *kambi*), took their place under the great trees; all night long they sat there being taught the mysteries and shown the wisdom of the elders whom they were to supersede. A ceremony known as *kirao* [to initiate senior elders] was also performed with much feasting and dancing. The five junior *marika* were also given the coloured cloth but were not permitted to attend these ceremonies.”⁵



X leaves of the coconuts plaited together. On returning home, they do not return by the same way in which they had come, but return by another way, which leads to the river where they keep their *clay*. After hiding their *clay* on the banks of the river, they then go up to their *kayas* about 7 P.M. with great noise of singing the songs of *Ugnaro*. And as soon as they reach the *kaya* they must need go round the *kaya* singing all along, after which they go to sleep at the certain place fenced round with branches of trees for that purpose. And early in the morning about a cock crow they go round again singing the same songs. And as soon as they finish going round they hasten to the jungle to hide themselves. They continue doing so morning & evening every day till seven days. And during the time they are doing this loathsome business no man or a woman is allowed

The initiation of senior elders continued for some years after 1914, and the British noted a number of proposals to revive *mung'aro* and install a new generation of *k'ambi* among the Giriama. But the attenuated ceremony held in the 1870s proved to be the last. Holding another one was impractical under the changed political and demographic circumstances of the 20th century and, as one administrator wrote in 1940, “Certain practices connected with the change of ‘kambi’ were considered undesirable, such as the practice of dancing naked and in particular the killing of a stranger.”⁶

We know much more about the Giriama *mung'aro* than its practice among other northern Mijikenda. One of the most detailed descriptions of the ritual, however, comes from the pen of the Methodist missionary J B Griffiths, who lived and

A page from George David's 1879 paper on "Ugnaro" (courtesy of CMS).

worked for some 35 years among the Duruma, west of Mombasa:

“The initiation rite, of which only the main features are given here, lasted about three weeks.

Before they could begin it, the *Nyere* had to catch a bird and a wild animal without using any weapon, and take them alive to the elders.

The day after the hunt, the *Nyere* divested themselves of their clothes, and went to the initiation pit, where they had their bodies washed with a mixture of clay and water, and had their heads covered with a thick cap of clay. Then they went to the initiation ground.

That and the following nights, they were formed into ranks of eighty or more abreast, their bodies bent and their arms stretched out straight before them, the posture of one who is about to die. For a week, from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m., they moved forward and backward from one end of the ground to the other, stamping and singing initiation songs in a cloud of dust. Whether a man was well or ill he could not leave the ranks until the end of the week. If a man left the ranks for any other than a sanitary purpose, he was beaten back with sticks by the elders on duty. When a man fell either by accident or through exhaustion, he was trampled to death and buried on the spot, the news of his death being kept from his female relatives until the end of the week. Of those who entered the ground, a few never left it. Their food during the week was boiled meal, beans and water.

Quest for a Victim

The first day of the second week, they washed off the clay and donned the initiation dress. One part of the dress consisted of armlets, a loin cover and leggings, all made of the fronds of the *Mkindu* palm [Wild date palm, *Phoenix reclinata*]; the other part, of a belt of *Flui* seeds [probably from the liana *mufwihi*, *Entada rheedii*], a mask and a club.

When every man had had a charm tied round his left arm, they formed themselves into parties and went in quest of the initiation victim, who had to be a man of an enemy tribe, and whose right hand and sexual organs they had to take to the elders. They will tell one that they have now substituted a python or a leopard for a human being; it is untrue: they are too much afraid of the shades of their forefathers to make a change. While they roamed over their own country and over the countries of friendly tribes, singing and dancing and begging, their object was to watch the main paths which led to an enemy country. They could not return before they had succeeded in their quest. When a party had secured a victim, the other parties were made aware of the fact by a tightening grip of the charm on their arms.

Admission to the Ranks of Elders

When the parties returned they put on the coloured dress of elders, and were admitted to the rank of elders on the following day.

The twenty male clans are descended from three sources, and so form three groups of clans. The oldest clan of each group is its representative clan. From each of the three representative clans a person was chosen to represent his group at its admission to the rank of elders, and of those three persons the one that was chosen from the oldest clan was the chief representative. While his two companions stood at the ceremony, this person was seated.

While holding a ladle of water in one hand and a vessel containing a little of everything that the country produced in the other, the chief elder addresses the assembly: “Do you hear?” he asks. They reply, “We hear.” “To whom is prayer offered?” he asks. They reply, “To God.”

Then he gives the Initiation Charge to the seated representative of the new generation, saying: “The shades are under us. So-and-so, receive the rank of elder.

Take care of this country of yours; hand it over to those that come after you as we are handing it over to you. Look after your wives and children; bear children that you may be many and strong. Do not oppress your people; but do what is right between man and man. Again, we give you this place (Kaya) to look after. If you want to live and prosper in this land, then follow its customs as we and our fathers have done. And may God and the shades of our fathers be with you." He then blew a mouthful of water over him, and threw the contents of the vessel to the ground. The former was their customary way of expressing their best wishes for the new generation of elders; the latter was an offering to the shades of bygone elders."⁷

There were evidently differences in the way that *mung'aro* was performed by different Mijikenda groups and by different generations within them over time. There is, however, widespread agreement in the available sources on the ritual's basic components and structure. Different aspects of the above descriptions are corroborated by other sources, including Griffith's observation that participants in the lengthy performance phase of the ritual risked being trampled and killed. The ritual itself is said to have been named after the glistening appearance of the initiates: *mung'aro*, "shining", is a nominal derived from the verb *kung'ala*, "to shine, be bright".⁸ The violent culmination of the ritual, the search for a sacrificial victim and his emasculation, evidently created widespread fear among the neighbours of the Mijikenda and was considered particularly barbarous and shocking by the missionaries and others who first described it. Mijikenda accounts, meanwhile, suggest that the human trophies that the initiates brought back with them were preserved and put to good use. Among at least some Mijikenda groups, the dried right hand of the victim was used to beat *tutu*, the war drum, which was kept in the *kaya*.⁹ The male genitals were kept as sacred

relics, and used in the war charm that was called *kirumbi* or *chirumbi*. Again, Griffith's account of the Duruma version of this is particularly informative:

"Before they went to war it was their custom to consult *Chirumbi*, the War Charm, which was a small black bag containing magic powder and pieces of the relics of the initiation victim. The charm was tied to a rod that was stuck in the ground by the door of the *Kaya* that faced the country with which they were at war.

If they meditated an attack, they sacrificed a red bullock and poured its blood where the charm stood; or if they had been suddenly attacked, a red goat.

The chief elder then appealed to the charm: "*Chirumbi*, I have inherited you from my fathers, and they from theirs. As you helped our fathers I, who have been chosen by my fellow elders to be their head, want you to help us, their sons. When our enemies see these sons of mine, let them be seized with trembling, become weak as grass and melt like salt. If they try to shoot, let their arrows be broken. And if they have charms, let their medicine go up into the air like smoke. Let these sons of mine be as brave as a lion, and spring upon their prey like a leopard. If we shall succeed, fall to the right; if we shall fail, fall to the left." Next morning they went to see what the omen was.

When they went to battle the charm was carried by an unarmed man in front of the warriors. While war lasted the warriors were forbidden sexual intercourse."¹⁰

In some cases the *kirumbi* is credited with further powers, and believed to be able to detect changes in the seasons. The same name is also used to refer to the ceremonial headgear worn by senior *kaya* elders.¹¹

At this distance, and with such fragmentary accounts of the ritual, it is not possible to unravel its symbolism and understand the full significance of its different components.

Like many rites of passage, an underlying theme of (social) death and rebirth seems to run through the *mung'aro*, which both enacts and effects the handover of power and change of social status that is its primary purpose.

The Segeju influence

Although we can only speculate on all of its meanings for the precolonial Mijikenda, historical sources provide a much deeper genealogy for the *mung'aro*. The Portuguese who occupied the coastal city states in the 16th and 17th centuries wrote very little about the Mijikenda and other peoples of the hinterland. But they did take notice of a group of interlopers called the Segeju. Following his journey up the East African coast in 1571, the Jesuit Father Monclaro described them as follows:

“These Moors [the inhabitants of Malindi] have as neighbours in the interior a race of Kaffirs different from all the others of the coast. They are called Moceguejos, and the name also declares their barbarity. They have neither holy days, cultivated lands, nor houses; they live in the fields or woods, and cover their heads with stinking clay, the smell being caused by its being mixed with different oils, and to them it is very delicious. They have large numbers of cattle, and subsist upon their blood and milk mixed together, which they eat raw, and they have no other ordinary food, according to report; they bleed the oxen on alternate days. They are very warlike, and it is said that their habit in warfare is to cut off foreskins and swallow them, afterwards casting them up out of their mouths when they appear before the king, that he may make them knights. Their dress consists of the skins of animals, and they have many other very barbarous customs.”¹²

In 1609 another Portuguese priest, Father dos Santos, provided a more sober (and coy)

account of one of the Segeju customs that had scandalised his predecessor:

“Males who have reached the age of seven or eight years are compelled to carry a clay head covering which is fastened by the hair and the skin of the head, covering in the same manner as people do with a hat or helmet. It is very smooth on top. The Cafre wears this headdress, which weighs five or six pounds, both when he sleeps and when he walks about, as if it were a burden of no weight. He cannot remove the clay from his headdress, until he has joined the company of the old men, or has entered into the council, or he has killed a man in war or a just quarrel. Hence it follows that all the youths pretend to wage war so that they may show themselves to be warriors and men of rank, and able to kill an enemy in those fights. In order to make known that he is a slayer, he is compelled, after the quarrel is finished, to take to his headman some prominent mark of the man whom he has killed. When he produces this mark, he is held to be a warrior and a brave man in war, and for this reason is much honoured and held in high esteem. Hence it follows that the Captain gives arms to the warrior and removes the clay from the headdress, and thenceforward they enjoy all the privileges of a warrior.

The principal reason why these barbarians do this is so that they may be feared by their enemies, when they see with what delight they enter upon war, resolved to take away their lives, by reason of the honour which will come to them. For this reason they are so ambitious that they will even fight with and kill each other in pursuit of this object.”¹³

There are obvious parallels between these descriptions and key features of the *mung'aro* as described in the 19th and 20th centuries, and there are good reasons for supposing that Segeju practice was their source. Linguistic evidence makes it clear that the Segeju originally came from upcountry, and it is no

accident that their ethnonym is cognate with Thagicũ, the name given by linguists to the Central Kenya Bantu languages.¹⁴ Versions of the same name are still used to describe sections of the Tharaka and Kamba living on either side of the upper Tana River and it is likely that the Segeju travelled down this river and settled in the coastal hinterland some time before they came to the attention of the Portuguese, who noticed them when they became embroiled in local patterns of conflict and alliance on the coast.

According to their own traditions, the Segeju were pushed southwards by the Oromo-speaking Galla and by the mid-17th century had settled on the edge of the Usambara Mountains in what is now north-east Tanzania, where their descendants, the Daiso (another version of the ethnonym), still speak a Central Kenya Bantu language. Around the same time some of them moved down to the coast, where they now live in a number of villages on both sides of the Kenya-Tanzania border, and have become Digo and Swahili speakers and are still called Segeju.

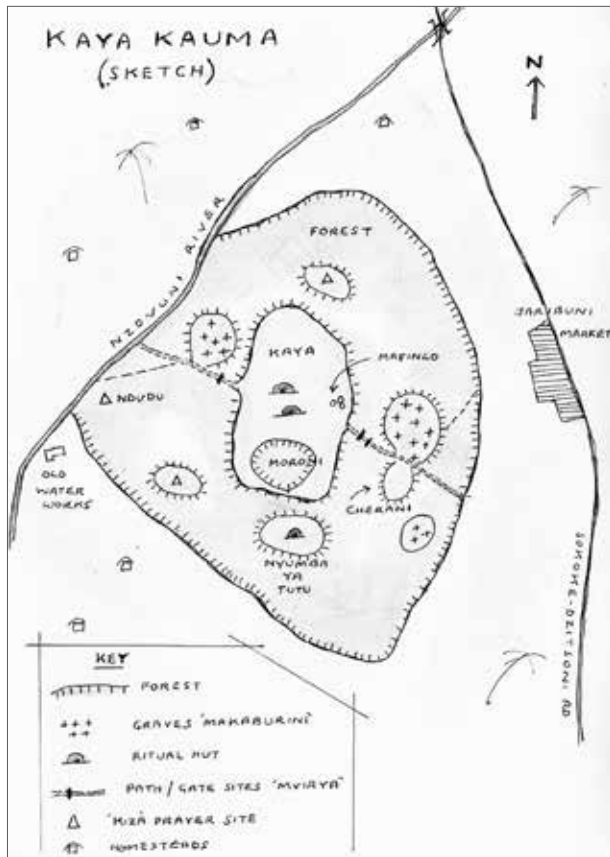
While most Mijikenda now have only hazy historical memories of the Segeju, it is apparent that they once had a very significant impact on their society and culture. The Mijikenda languages share a sizeable set of loanwords of Central Kenya Bantu origin whose source can be identified as the language spoken by the Segeju before they moved down the coast.¹⁵ These linguistic borrowings suggest that the Segeju influenced many different aspects of Mijikenda life, introducing new economic practices (including more intensive livestock production and long-distance trading), and revolutionising their military and political organisation (including the organisation and rituals of the so-called “Kaya complex”¹⁶). A lot of Mijikenda vocabulary relating to their age-set and generational system seems to have been adopted from the Segeju, including the word for “age-set” itself

(*rika*). Comparative ethnographic evidence supports the thesis that many features of this system originate from central Kenya, though they have also been modified and supplemented over time. The *mung'aro* is an example of this, and it is possible to detect Oromo influence in the historical Segeju and Mijikenda practice of emasculation, perhaps from early interactions between the Segeju and Galla.

The Galla connection

Most Mijikenda historical traditions relate that they were driven out of a northern homeland, Singwaya, by the Oromo-speaking Galla.¹⁷ Some of these traditions include the Segeju, whose own histories also describe being ousted by the Galla from the legendary place that they and other Swahili speakers call Shungwaya. Different reasons are given in these traditions for the start of the conflict with the Galla. The most common Mijikenda account involves *mung'aro*. Here is a particularly rich Jibana version, given by Ronald Mwavita to Tom Spear in 1971:

“The Mijikenda had a custom known as *mung'aro*. Mung'aro was magic and children were not allowed to watch when the old men performed it. At the end of the ceremony they sacrificed a man of a different tribe, cut off his arm and genital organs, and took them to their ceremonial hut where they used the arm to beat a drum. There is such a hut in the kaya, called *Nyumba ya tutu* [the house of the *tutu* drum], and in it they keep their *virangaono* [medicines – TS]. One time they sacrificed a Galla boy, took his arm and genital organs, and buried him in a cattle kraal, marking the spot with a stick. But the [Galla] boy had had a Mijikenda friend and the boy's father, when he missed his son, went to the home of this friend. The Mijikenda elders had instructed everyone to be quiet about the affair, so that when the Galla came he



A sketch map of Kaya Kauma including the *nyumba ya tutu*. (source: UNESCO)

was told that his son had not come to the village for two days. The [Mijikenda] boy also denied seeing him. The Galla looked for his son elsewhere, but could not find him. He suspected that his son had been killed by the Mijikenda. He knew about *mung'aro*, that it ended in the sacrifice of a man of a different tribe and that the end of the ceremony had coincided with the boy's loss. To confirm his suspicions, he arranged the marriage of a Galla girl to a Mijikenda boy. The Mijikenda did not suspect the Galla trick and they were married. After some time the woman asked her husband about the death of the boy and he told her about the sacrifice... [Here repeats details of sacrifice – TS] After she found this out, she went for a visit to her family and told them of the sacrifice. After they had heard, the Galla men kept quiet for a week so that the woman would not be suspected and then they went to the Mijikenda and asked again about the boy. The Mijikenda again denied any knowledge of what had

happened to the boy. The Galla then offered the coincidence of *mung'aro* with the boy's loss as proof of his murder, but the Mijikenda still denied fault, saying they had sacrificed another. The Galla went home and returned in a week to ask again about the boy. This time they asked the Mijikenda to accompany them to the burial spot and had the Mijikenda remove the burial marker and dig. The Mijikenda, pretending not to know anything, dug up the body. When the Galla asked about the bones, the Mijikenda said that they belonged to a diseased cow which they had buried because it was inedible. The Galla were sure that they were the boy's bones and demanded compensation, but the Mijikenda still denied their guilt. The Galla returned home planning revenge. When the Mijikenda went to their banana shambas [farms] to collect the bananas, the Galla hid among the trees and speared them. The rest of the Mijikenda needed the food and so had to go to the shambas and fight the Galla. That was the beginning of the Galla wars."¹⁸

This account of the start of conflict with the Galla is probably more myth than history. It does not seem to be the kind of myth that sanctions ritual action, given that the consequences of the *mung'aro* in the story are negative for the Mijikenda, and do not obviously explain or justify key features of the ritual. A more likely interpretation is that it represents a mythicisation of history, the explanation of historical events — conflict with the Galla — in terms of a widely known ritual practice that always had the potential to spark or intensify conflict between the Mijikenda and neighbouring ethnic groups. Oromo speakers began to expand out of the Ethiopian highlands in about 1540, and all the evidence suggests that when they moved south the Galla did indeed come into conflict with the Mijikenda and their neighbours, including the Segeju.

Given what we know about their historical location and sources of livelihood, conflict with the Segeju over pastoral resources may well have preceded any friction with the Mijikenda. However, there must also have been periods of peaceful interaction between the two groups, as suggested by the presence of a number of words of Oromo origin in modern Daiso and the vocabulary that the historical Segeju passed on to the Mijikenda. Given what we know about their influence on the Mijikenda, we can hypothesise that Segeju narratives about Shungwaya were the primary source of Mijikenda references to Singwaya.

Another common account of the Galla conflict in Mijikenda traditions ascribes its beginnings to the tyrannical behaviour of their Galla masters in Singwaya, and the killing of a Galla who tried to exercise his right to deflower a Mijikenda bride on her wedding night. Similar themes are found in modern Segeju traditions of Shungwaya, and can perhaps be traced back in turn to northern Swahili legends, a connection first made by the late Jim Allen.¹⁹ But that is a story for another time.

Apparent stylistic inconsistencies in quoted passages are as they appear in the original texts (Ed.)



Today's generation, Bomani 1985. Photo by Martin Walsh.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin Walsh is an anthropologist who has been researching and writing about East Africa for more than 30 years. He first travelled to the Kenya coast in 1984, carrying a newly-acquired copy of Tom Spear's *The Kaya Complex*, and thus began a fascination with the peoples and languages of the region that has continued through to the present. He currently works for Oxfam GB as their Global Research Adviser, supporting research for advocacy, development, and humanitarian programmes worldwide.

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The architectural heritage



of the Lamu Bohra mosque

Lamu Town is on the UNESCO World Heritage List as the oldest and best preserved Swahili settlement in East Africa. Its architecture and urban structure demonstrate the cultural influences of Europe, Arabia and India. Mombasa architect Taibali Hamzali showcases the Indian architectural heritage as seen in Lamu's historic Bohra mosque.

Taibali Hamzali

Above
Lamu mosque grand opening ceremony on 31 December 1920, attended by leaders of the Muslim fraternity of Lamu. Photo courtesy of Kurban Abbasbhai, Zanzibar, from the Adamjee Walijee family archives.

The Bohras, a mercantile trading community, belong to the Fatimid Shia section of Islam. They came to East Africa from Gujerat, together with other Gujerati Indians such as the Bhatias (a Hindu merchant caste) and the Ismailis (another Shia sect).

Although Indians had been trading with the East African coast for thousands of years, it was not until the early 19th century that they began to reside in significant numbers. The Indian migration was encouraged by Seyyid Said, the Sultan of Oman, especially after he moved his capital from Oman to Zanzibar. In his quest to develop the economy within his realm, he coaxed Indian merchants to settle and engage in commerce. As part of this Indian influx Bohras came with their families and took up residence in various

ports along the coast, from Mogadishu and Kismayu in the north to Mtwara in the south and others in between, notably Zanzibar, Pemba, Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Moa, Vanga, Mombasa, Takaungu, Malindi, Mambrui and Lamu. Wherever they settled they built their own exclusive and architecturally distinctive mosques within enclosed compounds. Tanga and Zanzibar had two mosques each and Mombasa had four.

Lamu was a particular favourite of the Bohras and their population outnumbered all the other Indian communities. Historical records state that in Lamu, of all the Indian migrant communities, the Bohras are the ones with the longest permanent residency.

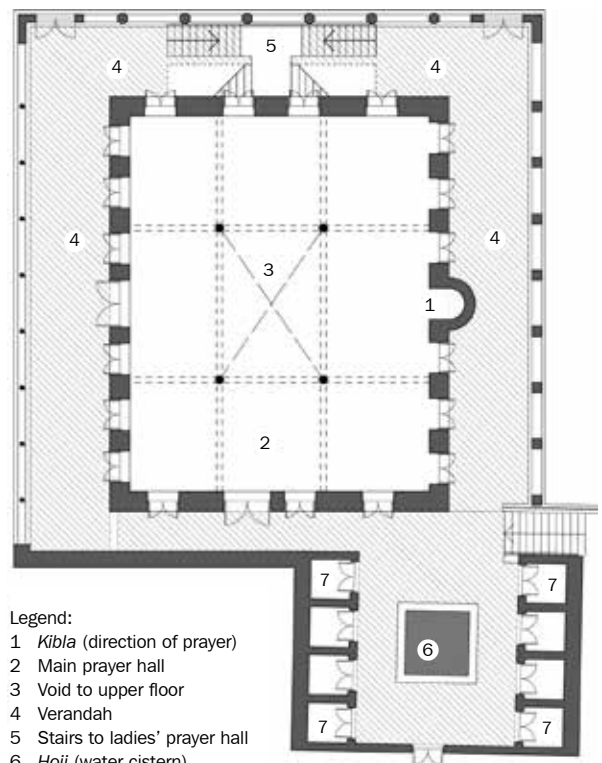
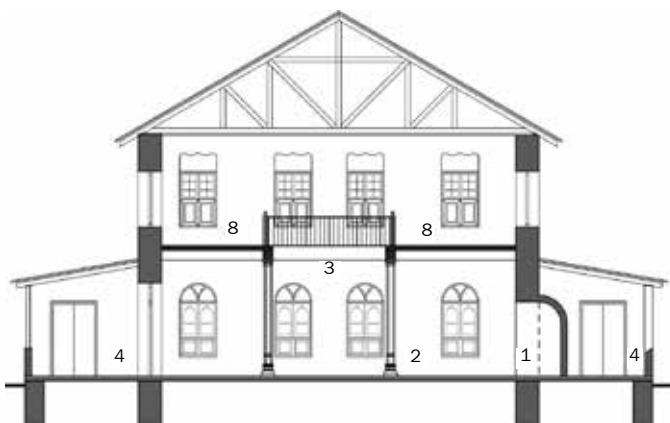
The Lamu Archipelago was a major trading region. By the mid-1800s not only had Bohra merchants established themselves in Lamu town, they had also set up trading stations in the nearby island towns of Siyu and Pate and thus came to dominate the inter-island trade. They were importers and exporters and traded in local merchandise. By Lamu standards, Bohras were wealthy and, along with the Bhatias, constructed most of the stone buildings along the waterfront and the main street.

The history and construction

The first Bohra mosque in East Africa was probably built in Lamu sometime in the 1750s at the site occupied by the present mosque¹. It was a simple mud and thatch building which was later replaced by a much larger and grander mosque financed by Jivanjee and Hassanali, sons of Adamjee Walijee, a prominent Bohra merchant who lived in Zanzibar. The family business, Adamjee Walijee and Sons, traded in textiles imported mainly from Japan and ghee from Kismayu in Somalia. They had strong trade and family connections with Lamu.

Philanthropy is ennobled by Islam and the prosperous brothers, Jivanjee and Hassanali, had an *umeed* (a wish) to build a mosque and *madrassa* (religious school) in Lamu. The old mosque was demolished for the construction of a fine new stone

Schematic section of main prayer hall (left) and layout of main prayer hall and ablution area (right).



- Legend:
- 1 Kibla (direction of prayer)
 - 2 Main prayer hall
 - 3 Void to upper floor
 - 4 Verandah
 - 5 Stairs to ladies' prayer hall
 - 6 Hojj (water cistern)
 - 7 Toilets and bathrooms
 - 8 Ladies' prayer hall

building, started in 1918 and completed in 1920. The builder appointed by the family was Mistry Ismailbhai Babuji who travelled to Lamu to oversee the construction. However, soon after the foundations were laid work ceased for more than a year and Mistry left the site. Later, Jivanjee's uncle, Hassanali Walijee, relocated from Zanzibar to Lamu and personally supervised the building works to completion. The final cost was a staggering Rs. 80,000, much higher than anticipated, and this left the family almost broke. Despite the difficult times, they managed to fund all the construction.

Jivanjee, who was the driving force, saw the mosque completed but sadly died before its consecration and was buried in Lamu. His son, Abbasbhai, then 21 years old, took over the family business² and presided over the grand opening on 31 December 1920. In his speech, Abbasbhai stressed the importance of education and made a passionate plea to the Lamu Bohras to use the *madrassa* to educate their children.³ The main prayer halls and *madrassa* were bequeathed on behalf of the family to the Lamu Bohra community in memory of the two patriarchs Adamjee Walijee and his brother Musajjee.

The architecture of Bohra mosques

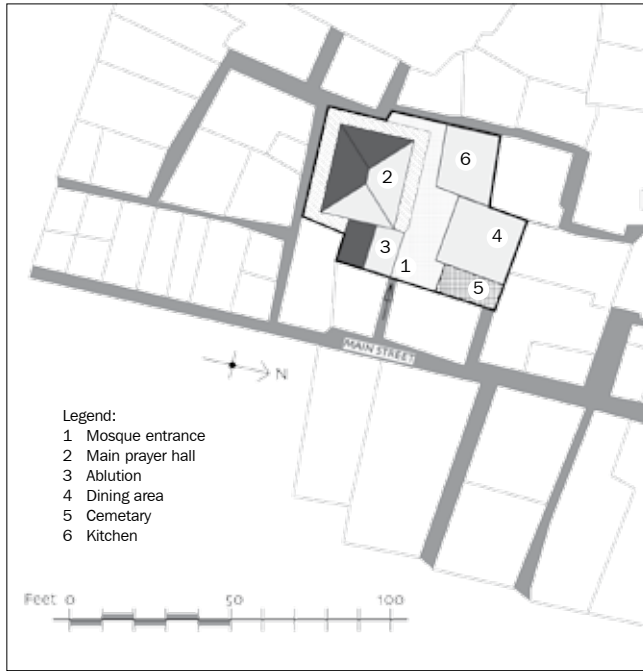
The Lamu mosque and others that the Bohras built during the early 1900s were 'pattern buildings' based on a prototype design, akin to the mosques in their homeland of Gujerat. The main prayer hall followed a simple geometric pattern, a nine-square *mandala*, a distinct plan common to all the mosques. The ground floor is used by men while women congregate on the first floor. At variance with the Sunni Muslim tradition, women are encouraged to join in the congregational prayers. The central square of the *mandala* is left as a void making it possible for the women to hear and follow the religious liturgy without being seen by the men below.

The Bohra community has always been closely knit and highly structured. Mosques also served as community centres and they had within the complex, as the Lamu mosque had, dining halls, kitchens, *madrassa*,⁴ cemeteries, *gusl khanna* (rooms for washing and preparing the dead before burial), ablution facilities and often a residence for the priest. Of special interest is the *hojj*, a sunken water cistern at least 2.4 m square

Left: The interconnecting void between the ladies' and men's prayer areas.

Right: The men's prayer hall downstairs showing the slender timber columns that support the timber ceiling.





Above

The mosque complex within the context of the Lamu townscape.

where men squat for ritual ablutions, an essential prerequisite to performing prayers.

Below

Left: Entrance to the mosque is via a narrow lane off Harambee Street.

Centre: The *Kibla* which marks the direction of prayer, facing Mecca.

Right: Details of the well-maintained timber staircase.

Curiously, the Lamu mosque has no street presence and goes unnoticed by the casual visitor because it is embedded within the dense labyrinth of massive old stone houses. The entrance is via a narrow lane off the main road (Harambee Street), rather unassuming for such a large mosque.

Whilst the external form of the mosque blends with the traditional townscape, the interior departs radically from the Swahili style. Unlike the Swahili mosques which are generally single storied with a forest of hefty stone columns⁵, intimate spaces and dramatic play of light, the Bohra mosque is a double-storied building with a central void supported on slender timber columns making the interior a unified and wonderfully voluminous space.

This spatial play was possible because the Indians in East Africa introduced a new structural system of timber columns and beams. Large-spanning teakwood beams, imported from India, made these innovations possible. The Indians came with an impressive architectural heritage from their homelands. They also brought other elements such as windows with double shutters in glass and timber, carved balconies and balustrades, coloured glass, fretted fascia boards and timber staircases. What resulted was a new architectural style — a fusion of Swahili and Indian traditions. This is particularly visible in the magnificent buildings of Zanzibar Stone Town and Mombasa Old Town, many of which were constructed by immigrant Indians.



The timber, all teakwood, came from India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). All the work, in particular the joinery, was meticulously crafted using the best available materials and skills.

Up to the 1950s Lamu remained a Bohra stronghold. The mosque was built to cater for a community that was some 300 strong. With the ensuing years Lamu's economic position declined considerably and so did the Bohra population. The young generation continues to migrate to larger towns for better education and business opportunities. Nonetheless the few families that remain are fastidious in their faith. Prayers are held every day and all religious occasions such as *Ramdhan* (the month of fasting) and *Moharram* (the Islamic New Year) are observed fully.

Remarkably, the mosque has hardly changed and is in immaculate condition, thanks to good housekeeping and regular maintenance. Today very few of the traditional Bohra mosques survive as most have been demolished to make way for larger modern structures. But the mosque in Lamu remains a paragon of the Bohra community's indelible heritage in Kenya.

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the Adamjee Walijee family, in particular Kurban Abbasbhai, Shamoon Adamali and Hussein Sadiqali Yusufali, for their generous help in providing information from the family archives, and Mrs Bilkisbai Hamzali for her help with the translation of Abbasbhai's speech from Gujerati.



Inscribed verse from the Quran over the entrance door to *Mehfil e Panjataan*, the ladies prayer hall upstairs.

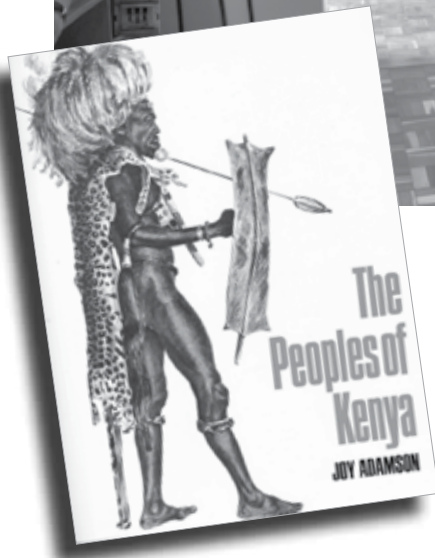
Endnotes

- 1 Patricia W Romero. 1997. *Lamu: History, society and family in an East African port city*, p. 103.
- 2 Abbasbhai was an astute businessman and a member of the Zanzibar Chamber of Commerce. The family firm Adamjee Walijee and Sons later opened branches in Mombasa and Kampala.
- 3 From the transcript of a speech made by Abbasbhai at the opening ceremony.
- 4 The *madrassa* was subsequently sold off by the Lamu *Jamaat* and is now in private ownership and was for some time used as a bakery.
- 5 Swahili construction methods relied on mangrove poles to support a coral rag roof. Mangrove poles can only span about three metres and hence the need for closely-spaced columns to shore up the heavy roof loads.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Taibali Hamzali is a Chartered Architect based in Mombasa and a nephew of Abbasbhai Jivanjee A Walijee who presided at the opening of Lamu's Bohra mosque. Taibali has a special interest in heritage buildings and their conservation. He is also the Vice Chairman of the Friends of Fort Jesus in Mombasa, an organisation that supports the work of the National Museums of Kenya.

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Is it
or isn't it?

The intriguing story of amber

Human beings have been wearing beads “since time began”, using organic materials for ornamentation, healing or talismanic properties, to mark rites of passage, or as status symbols. Of all materials ever used to make beads, amber has a very special mystique.

Writers of yore have told us about this exotic substance over a period of centuries. Herodotus, the Greek writer and historian (b. 484 BC), knew that amber “comes to us from the ends of the earth”. Diodorus of Sicily (c. 100 BC) tells of *electron*, the name by which the Greeks referred to amber, because when rubbed with a silk cloth it produces an electric charge. Pliny (23-79 AD) refuted previous misconceptions regarding

the origins of amber, which variously suggested it as coming from India, being an excretion of the sea, a liquid produced by the sun striking the earth, or the urine of a lynx. In time, it became known as “the gold of the north”.

True amber (properly called succinite) comes from the Baltic. It is the fossilized resin of a tree (*Pinus succinifera*) that existed in the Eocene period 50 to 60 million years ago. At that time, the trees grew in great profusion. They exuded large amounts of sap, in which insects and vegetable matter were often trapped. Such inclusions greatly increase the value of a piece of amber today.

Rhodia Mann

Above
A Rhodia Mann-designed necklace of amber traded to North Africa from the Baltic, with Indian silver beads. Photo by Peta Meyer.



The overland amber route from the Baltic Sea in the north down to the Mediterranean, where the amber was traded across the Ocean to Africa.

Major storms and other natural cataclysms led to vast changes in topography. Over time, the amber forests were submerged beneath the waves.

By far the largest quantities of amber found came from the Baltic Sea. From there, as demand increased, trade routes developed from northern Europe to the east, the west and south.

Old engravings depict amber gatherers on the Baltic shore of Poland, wearing protective clothing and with very large collecting bags hung round their necks. In their hands they hold large nets, like large butterfly nets. They are dredging in shallow waters for nuggets of raw amber. (This method of collecting is still in use

Amber gatherers on the shores of the Baltic. Illustration from *Succini Prussici physica et civilis historia* by P J Hartmann, Frankfurt, 1677.



today, thankfully with improvements to the protective clothing worn by the collectors.)

True amber came to Africa via complex trade routes — from the Baltic to one of the European ports on the Mediterranean, and then across the sea to one of the main African ports. The Mediterranean was conquered by Muslim Arabs in the 7th century. They began to trade West African ivory, gold and slaves in exchange for European cloth, brass, glass and beads, including beads made from Baltic amber.

Initially, merchandise did not travel far inland. There were limits to what human or donkey portage could carry. The Nile was, of course, of huge importance to north-south trade, but the hostile Sahara Desert, covering as it did such a vast section of the northern continent, presented traders with a seemingly insurmountable barrier. Crossing the desert presented daunting and even life-threatening challenges. These challenges were overcome by the existence of one creature, the camel.

The earliest evidence of domesticated camels in this part of Africa dates to the 3rd century. They were tamed by Berber people, who occupied large areas of North Africa. In time, camel caravan routes were established, usually short and following the Nile. The best known of these was the *Dar-el-Arbain* — “The Forty Days Road” — which extended from Asyut in the north, south-west to the Kharga oasis. From there it followed a southerly route to the Selima oasis. An eastward curve took it to Dongola on the Nile. From there, it followed a south-westerly direction to El-Fasher in Nubia (now Sudan).

When the Arabs conquered North Africa in the 7th and 8th centuries, intent on expanding trade and spreading their religion, other routes were established. By the 19th century (long after the Arabs had left), the northern half of Africa was crisscrossed by an amazing network of camel caravan routes.

Amber became particularly popular amongst the Berbers of Morocco, and with various West African peoples. In time, this network was largely responsible for bringing true Baltic amber further and further south.

Younger fossilised resins dating to “only” 25 million years ago exist in smaller quantities. These more recent ambers are known by various names, such as simetite (from Sicily), burmite (from Burma, now Myanmar) and rumenite (from Romania). Others are found in Canada, the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

Within Africa, there are assorted semi-fossilised resins emanating from various trees. These are approximately one million years old. Because they are *unfossilised*, they are properly called “copal”, as are other unfossilised resins.

Copal was found in Senegal in the west and on the island of Zanzibar in the east, from where it spread to Somalia and became popular with women of the Harer people. The best quality copal came from Zanzibar, from a tree of the genus *Trachylobium verrucosum*. Beads made from copal are as expensive as Baltic amber, although it is extremely unlikely that anyone will find true copal today except perhaps as part of original tribal costume in countries such as Mali and Niger.



To complicate terminology even further, other variations on the amber theme exist. “Pressed amber” refers to items made from several pieces of true amber fused together by heat, and is classed as true amber, even though it has none of amber’s translucency. Beads made of pieces of amber or copal held together by pitch or wax are known as “ambroid”.

Beads made from true amber can be in the form of raw chunks, or smooth and highly polished. A necklace made of Polish amber dating to 1610 shows crude attempts at faceting beads. By the 1920s faceting amber beads became highly fashionable in Europe as this added lustre to amber’s natural golden glow. Faceted amber beads were never part of the African bead trade,

Map showing 19th century camel caravan routes across North Africa.



Left
Raw nuggets of true Baltic amber, with holes for stringing.

Right
Amber’s imitators from around the world.
Top: “Cherry amber” made from bakelite (plastic) c. 1915.
Centre: Venetian glass bead circa 1900, sold as “Guinea amber”.
Right: Plastic beads sold as “Somali amber” c. 1960.
Bottom: Plastic “cherry amber” imitation of bakelite, c. 1980.
Left: Real burmite (younger than Baltic amber) from Burma (now Myanmar); pieces stuck together with beeswax.



Rare, high quality Baltic amber beads traded to Nigeria, and then brought to Khartoum by Hausa traders. Photo courtesy of Vicky Chignall.

in Venice, and formed into beads, for use mainly in rosaries. Later, both Venice and Bohemia produced glass imitations of amber beads in a wide range of shapes and colours. Many of these were traded to Africa. Today, they are often given exotic names by local dealers, who sell them as “Guinea” amber or “Somali” amber.

In 1913 a synthetic plastic product called bakelite was developed in America. Within a few years it was being formed into beads. Colours varied, with a vibrant deep red-brown being most popular. Known as “cherry amber”, these beads became particularly popular in Ethiopia.

however. The preference was for large, smooth, opaque beads.

Eventually, competition came from the glass bead-makers of Europe, always intent on finding new markets for their products. By the 14th century stocks of amber were held

Kenya has not been left out of the amber story. In order to keep up with the proverbial Joneses, local enterprise has produced remarkable results. In the Kisii area, women are collecting resin from an indigenous tree (*Strychnos decussata?*) and forming this into small brownish-orange opaque beads. More

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The Kenyan connection:
Left: Small contemporary beads made by Kisii women from the resin of an indigenous tree (*Strychnos decussata?*), sold as “Kenya amber”.
Right: A selection of contemporary plastic “amber” beads made in Kenya.

flamboyant are an astonishing assortment of beads in a wide range of shapes and colours, all purporting to be amber. These are all made locally from plastic.

Of whatever age, and in whatever form, amber has always been highly prized — and highly priced. Very little of what could be found on the African continent in recent years is either true Baltic amber, pressed amber, ambroid, or real African copal. Colour is not a key to authenticity, since both amber and copal can vary from deep red-brown to yellow-gold. Identification requires a combination of experience and science. There are now standardised methods for testing.

Some fakes, such as the bakelite beads mentioned earlier, have become rare collectors’ items in their own right. Eventually, these new beads will also assume a value, based on their relative age and rarity. Today’s innovation becomes tomorrow’s antique. Time moves on, and so does history!

This article is based on material contained in Rhodia’s latest book, *Ushanga: The story of beads in Africa*, available in the KMS Book Shop and other outlets.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rhodia Mann, born in Kenya, collected her first beads on the beaches of Zanzibar at the age of 12. Since then the jewellery designer has travelled all over the ancient bead worlds of Africa and Asia in search of the unusual and exotic. She curated an exhibition on beads at the Nairobi National Museum in 2003; the material formed the basis for her book *Ushanga: The story of beads in Africa* published in 2012.

Rhodia’s other books are *Talk to the stars: The Samburu of Northern Kenya*, published in 2000; *Hawecha: A woman for all time*, a historical novel based on Borana culture published in 2008; and her 2010 memoir *Ice Cream in Sololo*. In 2013 her film about the Samburu, *Butterfly people*, will be shown on MNet throughout Africa.

Declaring herself tired of academic research, Rhodia is currently writing a novel.

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Neither here nor there:



Stories from the Asian-Africans in Kenya

Narinder Heyer

“Oh, I like Indian food. My wife usually cooks that,” said Francis. We were in the home of Francis Karanja and Surinder Kaur Raghbir. Francis is a Kikuyu from Kiambu. He met Surinder when working in Nanyuki; she is the daughter of an Indian Sikh father and a Sikh-Meru mother. When their relationship grew serious, Francis’ mother asked him: “Who is that white woman?” Eventually they were able to secure the approval of Francis’ parents and enjoy a close relationship with the family in Kiambu, who they visit regularly. Surinder had many Kikuyu friends at school in Nanyuki and was familiar with Kikuyu culture, and so fitted in well with her new family. The couple own a garage where Francis repairs cars, a

small spare parts shop which Surinder runs and a comfortable house behind the garage. They have three well-educated children and some grandchildren. For official Sikh celebrations they are invited to the Sikh *gurdwara* (temple) and Francis accompanies his wife. Surinder wears her *salwar kameez* outfits on such occasions, but otherwise prefers Western-style clothing.

This family is part of the little known Asian-African community in Kenya. In the early years of the last century following the building of the Uganda Railway, immigrants from the Indian subcontinent came to East Africa seeking their fortune, married local women, and their offspring today form a close-knit community of several thousand.

Above
The young Surinder Kaur with her three step-sisters and two brothers; behind them their Sikh father and Sikh-Meru mother.

I first became interested in the mixed community when I met Muzaffar Khan; we were both members of the Asian African Heritage Trust. Muzaffar's father was a Panjabi Muslim and his mother Maasai. When I met her she wore Indian clothes, covered her head in the Muslim fashion and spoke flawless Panjabi. She had two sons and expressed disappointment that first-born Muzaffar's complexion was "ripe" like hers. Her other son, a pilot with the Kenya Air Force, had died young in a car crash. He was very handsome and "fair". The daughters were not mentioned.

The Asian African Heritage Trust was formed in 1999. The Director General of the National Museums of Kenya at the time, Dr Mohamed Isahakia, had invited the Asian community to put up an exhibition at the Nairobi Museum on the Asian presence in Kenya over the preceding 100 years. The exhibition opened in 2000 and was on display until 2005, taken down only when the Nairobi Museum closed for renovation. Although the exhibition was a success and proved an eye-opener for many, it was felt by some that it did not give enough coverage to the part of the community that had intermarried with indigenous Africans. So in 2012 the Trust undertook a series of semi-structured interviews with members of the mixed community in order to collect information for a new and updated exhibition that will open at the Nairobi Museum in the near future. Guidelines were given for conducting the interviews and each was recorded and videotaped. The interviewees told their story as they saw it, prompted for details by specific questions regarding race, identity, religion and culture. Interviews were carried out by Muzaffar Khan, Parveen Moloo and myself, all recorded and photographed by James McCreadie. In this first stage we interviewed 17 families, travelling to four major areas where we knew from personal contacts



Francis Karanja and Surinder Kaur at home in Nanyuki.

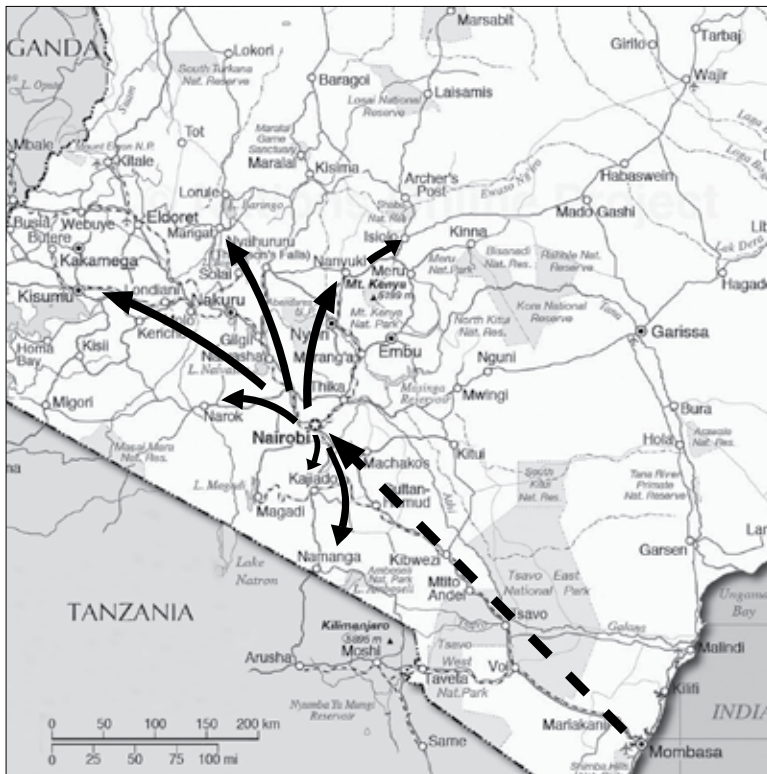
that several major clusters of mixed families lived. The interviews centred on Nanyuki/Isiolo, Namanga/Kajiado, Meru/Kiyanjai/Mikinduri and Kapsabet/Kisumu. What follows are some of the stories recorded from the families we met.

Where did they come from?

The families we met nearly all had roots in the Panjab¹ region of northwest India (now Pakistan). This was no coincidence. Most of the men who came to work on the Uganda Railway from 1896 to 1901 hailed from the Panjab because the railway labour recruiting office was in the Panjabi capital of Lahore. So Panjabis were familiar with British East Africa from stories brought back by contract labourers and soon young men from the same villages in the Panjab began to trickle into Kenya during the years 1905-1929. Completion of the railway opened up commerce. Immigrants sailed from British India to Mombasa and took the train to Nairobi. From Nairobi they fanned out south-westwards to Narok-Namanga-Kajiado, northwards to Nanyuki-Isiolo-Garba Tula and Meru, northwest into the Rift Valley and some still further west to Lake Victoria.

The original immigrants were mostly men who came without wives and, as a result, some of those who stayed took local wives. Panjabis, especially Muslims, tend to be

1. The word *Panjab* comes from the Persian language and literally means five (*panj*) waters (*āb*), i.e. the land of five rivers. Also *Punjab*, a spelling popularised from the days of the British Raj.



From Nairobi the immigrants fanned out along urban routes: to the north around Mt Kenya, west as far as Lake Victoria, and south towards the Tanzanian border. Based on a map from www.nationsonline.org

less conservative than their caste-bound Hindu brothers when it comes to choosing a marriage partner.

Between 1910 and 1920 about eight immigrants from the Panjab settled in the Masai areas around Kajiado, Bissel, Narok, Namanga and Longido. They were Muslim Panjabi Pathans and they took Maasai wives. They did transport, first with donkeys, and later with acquired trucks. They bought goats in Masai areas and sold them in Nairobi.

One of the Pathan patriarchs was Sabzali Khan. He came to Kenya after serving with the British Army in South Africa during World War I. In Kenya he settled in Bissel, Kajiado District, and married a Maasai wife. He wore a shuka, just like the Maasai and Kikuyu. Later he moved to Karatina and then Meru. Some of his children still live in Meru.

Northern Kenya attracted quite a few Indian patriarchs. Five Sikhs and some Panjabi Muslims moved to Meru, Kiyanjai

and Mikinduri. They married local Meru women, acquired land and started farming. Many of these families have intermarried. Some traded between Meru and Isiolo and gradually further north to Garba Tula, Moyale and Marsabit.

However not all immigrants came from the Panjab. Two prominent patriarchs in the north were Julio Constancio da Costa from Goa and Richard Harrington Pereira, a Sinhalese from Khandi in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Both were clerks in the colonial service in Northern Kenya. Da Costa converted to Islam and married a Gabra wife. Pereira moved to Meru, where he married and also converted to Islam. His grandsons are now well established in Northern Kenya. They are big traders and transporters and have intermarried with the Borana and Somali.

Starting out

The British administration governed Kenya based on the South African model of racial separation. Indians were not allowed to buy farmland, even though many immigrants came from an agricultural background in the Panjab. Only whites were allowed to own land in prime agricultural areas, consequently forcing many of the new immigrants into trade. Some became transporters, starting first with donkeys then slowly acquiring wagons and later trucks. They did repairs as mechanics and operated fuel pumps. In Masai areas they traded in livestock. For some reason the Meru area had not been opened up for white settlement and the 15 to 20 men who settled in this area married Meru women, acquired land from the community and went into farming. In the Rift Valley areas of Kapsabet and Kabernet where white settlers were setting up extensive farms, the newcomers were more often traders dealing in maize and livestock. In the Rift Valley several Indians married into influential Kalenjin families. This brought them land and protection.

These mixed families today have close relationships with their Kalenjin relatives.

There were several Indian traders in Northern Kenya based in the district capital of Isiolo. In contrast to the faded market town of today, Isiolo then was a lively place. The Game Department had its headquarters there. Game officers like George Adamson moved in the area and so did hunters. They all needed provisions, which were supplied by the Indian *dukas* (shops). At one time there were 23 Indian dukas in Isiolo alone. The Pereira family often supplied provisions and transport to Joy and George Adamson and to expeditions of white hunters up north. While in Garba Tula, Joy Adamson often stayed at Willy Pereira's house. Pereira was also an honorary game warden in the area.

Neither here nor there

Residential areas in the fledgling Kenya Colony³ were racially segregated, as were education and health care facilities. Local education officers were faced with a dilemma with mixed children. Were they Africans or were they Indians? Should they go to the government Indian school or the government African school? Even missionary schools did not accept mixed children. Some Goan patriarchs solved the problem by sending their sons to school in India. Independent Kenya's first Vice President, Joseph Murumbi, whose father was Goan and mother Maasai, went to school in Goa.

There was discrimination on both sides. Mohammad Sadiq Khan's family lives in the Rift Valley. His grandfather was Gujerati and his grandmother Kipsigis. The grandfather, a trader dealing mainly in maize, settled in Lumbwa and later extended his activities to Maraboi, Liten and Kipsoit. The prosperous family is now settled in Nakuru. Sadiq recalls that in 1968 he managed to acquire



Mohammad Sadiq Khan, who boasts Gujerati-Kipsigis ancestry, lives in the Rift Valley town of Nakuru.

a house in Nakuru's Mohan Lal Avenue, a Gujerati area. He heard one Gujerati woman remark to another, "Nowadays even Africans are coming to live in our area."

Bhagat Singh Rehal was born in Kiyanjai in 1937. His ancestry is Sikh Panjabi and Meru. Some of his siblings converted to Christianity as they faced discrimination from the Sikhs. Bhagat remained a Sikh; his is one of the only two Sikh families left in Meru. He is a pillar of the Meru *Gurdwara*. Yet he feels his Sikh identity is accidental; he is a Kenyan and his ancestral village is Kiyanjai. His mother tongue is Kimeru and he speaks Kikuyu and Kiswahili with the greater community, using Panjabi only with his wife. Nevertheless, as he walks down the road, he sometimes hears the comment "Muhindi".

Angelo da Costa's Goan father was a clerk in the British Colonial Service, first in Kismayu



Bhagat Singh Rehal, whose father was a Panjabi Sikh and mother Meru, pictured with interviewer Muzaffar Khan at his home in Meru.

3. The East Africa Protectorate became known as Kenya Colony in 1920.



Angelo da Costa's Goan father, Julio Constancio da Costa, and Gabbra mother, Medina Omaro.

and then in Isiolo. He married a Gabbra wife. Son Angelo was born in Moyale and sent to Goa for schooling. Angelo served in minor local government positions in the Moyale area, but failed to attain political office. The Asians looked upon him as "mixed caste" and Africans as "Muhindi". He tried to identify himself with the predominant Borana group, but found them "too clannish". He was brought up a Roman Catholic in the Goan tradition, but in 1965 converted to Islam. Today he lives in Isiolo, trades in livestock and his children speak Swahili, English and all the local dialects.

Barrack Ismail's family is well integrated in Kapsabet. Both his parents were half Nandi, half Panjabi Muslim. He himself was circumcised "in the Nandi way". When he is invited to Nandi festivals, animals are slaughtered in the Muslim way out of respect to him. In post-independent Kenya, he joined a political party and was a regular contributor to party funds. But if he, like other mixed members, thought to seek political office there were murmurs of "No, this man is Muhindi" or "No, this man is Muslim."

The first generation born to the patriarchs had few choices of career. If the fathers were traders, farmers in Meru or transporters, their sons followed them. Otherwise it was not easy finding a paid job, particularly if the family was poor, in which case the children would be illiterate. The Muslims tended to have several wives, so there were plenty of sons who needed employment. Many young men joined the colonial armed forces, especially during the Mau Mau Emergency. The army was considered a "safe" job, where they were shielded from the discriminatory attitudes of society. Even in the Railways —

Angelo da Costa's birth certificate, issued in Moyale in 1937.

COLONY AND PROTECTORATE OF KENYA													
REGISTER OF BIRTHS													
Births in the District of Moyale						in the Province of Northern Frontier							
No.	When born	Name	Sex	Name and Residence of Father	Father's occupation and rank	Father's nationality	Name and Residence of Mother	Mother's nationality	Signature, description and residence of informant	Date of birth	Signature of Registering Officer		
311	Moyale	Angelo da Costa	Male	Julio Constancio Pledade da Costa	Clerk - Administration	Goan	Medina Omaro	Nil	British Subject	J.P.D'Costa - father Moyale	28th February, 1937	J.P. Costa District Commissioner	24th December, 1939
<p>General</p> <p>I, William Barclay Ouming, General Registrar of Births and Deaths for the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya do hereby certify that this is a true copy of the entry in the Register of Births for the District of Moyale relating to the birth of Angelo da Costa.</p> <p>WITNESS my hand this 22nd day of January 1940.</p> <p>General Registrar of Births and Deaths</p>													

dominated by Indians in pre-independence Kenya — mixed-race people were given lowly jobs.

In post-independence Kenya there was less discrimination. Many found employment in the civil service at local government level. Hakim Pereira held several district council jobs, rising eventually to District Director of Social Services in Isiolo. Muzaffar Khan was chairman of the Kenya Farmers Association in 2003. Dr Kipkorir Ali Azad Rana, whose mother, Aziza Tapangoi, was a Kipsigis from Buret, had a successful academic and diplomatic career, in 2001 being appointed Kenya’s ambassador to Switzerland.

Those who aspired to high political office were not successful because people voted for their tribe. Mixed-race people did not have a tribal base, so the few who tried to achieve political office were unsuccessful. The Goan-Maasai Joseph Murumbi was an exception. A highly educated and cultured man who counted Prime Minister Nehru of India among his friends, he became Kenya’s first vice-president after independence.

Marriages and identity

Often immigrants married younger women. Muslims commonly married more than one wife, but Sikhs only remarried if their first wives died. If the patriarch lived long enough his family was integrated into the Sikh community, adopting its culture and traditions. But if he died early, his young local widow and offspring became isolated. It was not merely a question of rejection. Tradition dictated that young people not seek spouses for themselves; marriages in the community were arranged by parents and elders. If the Sikh father died before the children reached marriageable age, it was difficult for them to find a partner in the community. On top of that, in the 60s and 70s most of the community moved out of small towns and so there was no one left with whom to associate.



Muslim Panjabi families fared better in this respect because of the role that religion played in their lives. Their identity was their religion and racial tolerance has always been a basic tenet of Islam. There may have been prejudice in Indian Muslim quarters, but the mixed Muslim community had a diverse marriage pool. They intermarried with Arab, Somali, Borana, Coastal Swahili and Nubian communities.

Barrack Ismail then and now. Both his parents were half Nandi, half Panjabi Muslim. His family is based in Kapsabet.

Linguistically Asian-Africans today are a diverse group, speaking Panjabi, Urdu, Gujerati, Konkani, Kiswahili, Kimeru, Kikuyu, Borani, Somali, Daluo and Maa, among other tongues. And the question of identity is just as diverse. Mama Safia’s mother was a Kikuyu from Kiambu and her father a Panjabi Muslim. Today she is the proud grandmother of a large family, many of whom look Panjabi yet don’t speak the language. She no longer keeps up with her Kikuyu relatives, some of whom she

Jané Alam Khan with his sister Fatuma at their home in Mikinduri. Their father was the Pathan Sabzali Khan, their mother Maasai. Behind them stand the AAHT research team, from left to right Narinder Heyer, Parveen Moloo, Muzaffar Khan and James McCreadie.





Gurdial Singh's father Ram Singh came in 1914 as a sepoy (soldier) in the British colonial forces. In 1929 he moved to Nanyuki and married a Meru wife. Later, in Isiolo, he bought a Bedford lorry and started a transport business and a little garage. A supporter of Kenyan independence, he was arrested by the British in 1952 for making guns for the Mau Mau, and his land and trucks were confiscated. Ram Singh later moved in with his wife's clan in Meru, where their son Gurdial grew up.

Gurdial Singh is a practising Sikh and his wife is Christian. Neighbours and friends have tried to persuade him to convert to Christianity, but to no avail. He is pictured at home in Ngushishi, just outside Timau, with his nephew Jagat Singh, surrounded by pictures of Sikh gurus and Hindu deities.

remembers as a child saying "*Hawa ni watoto ya wahindi*" ("These are the children of Indians"). She feels her Muslim family is her identity. She says, "Now we don't want to go back to those people", meaning Kikuyus.

Jané Alam, the son of Pathan Sabzali Khan who married a Maasai, lives in Mikinduri near Meru. His family identifies with their Indian heritage, yet the language spoken at home is Kiswahili. Some wear Indian clothes, while others prefer western outfits.

The grandfather of Tommy Pereira, Willy Pereira, came from Ceylon as a colonial service clerk and converted to Islam when he married his Meru wife. Later Willy left the colonial service to become a big trader with shops as far apart as Mikinduri near Meru, Isiolo, Marsabit and Moyale. His son, born in 1919 in Mikinduri, was sent to school in Goa. Like his father, he worked as a clerk in the colonial civil service and took a Meru wife. Pereira's grandson Tommy, our interviewee, born in 1953, lives in Isiolo. He identifies with Islamic culture and his family celebrates festivals such as *Idd*.

Abdul Jalil Khan's mother was a Matabuto Maasai. Now 90 years old, he lives in Namanga with his second Somali wife. He

has no doubts about his identity either. "I am Maasai. All my relatives are Maasai. If I am not Maasai, I am nothing."

The more urbane Dr Rana expressed his identity thus, "My tribe is Kenyan and my identity is African."

The community itself is changing rapidly. Members of the younger generation are moving into professional fields and marrying outside traditional boundaries. Their languages of choice are English and Kiswahili. But there is still great pride in their grandparents' diverse origins.

PHOTOS TAKEN BY JAMES McCREADIE UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Narinder Heyer was born in Kenya and holds a BA Hons from Liverpool University. She is very interested in Kenyan history and is one of the founding members of the Asian-African Heritage Trust, helping to mount the exhibition at Nairobi Museum in 2000.

Narinder is also active in the Kenya Museum Society where she coordinates the popular weekend outings and uses her knowledge of Kenyan history to enrich many a safari.

Part male, part female: Gynandromorphism in insects



**Laban Njoroge,
Zoology Department,
National Museums of Kenya**

Nature is never short of surprises. Some are very strange and were it not for the evidence, they would seem as fanciful as the mermaids of the deep seas. One of these surprises is a phenomenon known in science as gynandromorphism.

This Greek word refers to the condition in which an organism exhibits both male and female characteristics — not to be confused with hermaphroditism, which is chiefly concerned with the reproductive organs (a hermaphrodite is an organism that possesses both male and female reproductive organs).

Moving back to the gynandromorphs, the word comes from three Greek words *gyn* meaning female, *andro* meaning male and *morph* meaning form. A gynandromorph will bear both male and female features such as colouration and size where these are different in the two sexes. The condition normally takes two forms, bilateral or

mosaic. In bilateral gynandromorphism, the organism is divided into two equal halves normally from head to the tip of the abdomen; one half being fully female and the other fully male. On the other hand, in mosaic gynandromorphism, the female and male features are scattered all over the organism forming a mosaic kind of a pattern.

Gynandromorphism is more common among insects compared to other organisms. It also occurs, albeit in a much smaller way, in crustaceans such as crabs and lobsters, and in birds. It is clearly seen in organisms that show systematic differences between sexes e.g. colour, size, different body structures etc.

Consider the example of the mosquito for the sake of understanding. In mosquitoes, the structure of the antennae is very different between males and females. While in females it is simple and devoid of many hairs, in males it is very bushy. A bilaterally gynandromorphic mosquito will therefore

A bilaterally gynandromorphic carpenter bee, *X. nigrita*, showing male and female body characteristics at the same time.

have one nearly hairless and one very bushy antenna. Mosquitoes of this kind were first reported in Kenya in July 1966 by Dr Metslaar of the Netherlands Medical Centre, Nairobi. He made the discovery while collecting mosquitoes in a bush in Port Reitz in Mombasa. All of the four specimens belonged to *Anopheles gambiae*, the well-known malaria vector in tropical Africa.

A rare phenomenon

This phenomenon is rare, evidenced by the fact that out of the three million plus invertebrate specimens at the National Museums of Kenya, only five specimens are gynandromorphic. These comprise four butterflies and one carpenter bee. Out of the four butterflies, two belong to the genus *Charaxes*, one collected from Tanganyika territory (present day Tanzania) in March 1964 and the other from Mutha Kitui in eastern Kenya, coincidentally also in March of 1969. The remaining two belong to a family called Pieridae, one which was collected from Bura in Tana River, again in March 1956, while the other was collected from Watamu on the Kenyan coast in August 1979 (one wonders whether going on a collecting expedition in March increases the chances of encountering gynandromorphs). Out of the five specimens, the most striking is that of the carpenter bee (*Xylocopa nigrita*) collected in Kericho, in the Kenyan Rift Valley in January of 1964 by R Arathoon. In this particular bee the males are all golden in colour while the females are black with a fringe of white hairs all round the abdomen and on the legs. A bilateral gynandromorph

of this species will therefore be one half golden in colour and one half black with a white outer fringe.

Gynandromorphism was discovered in 1919 when two scientists, Morgan and Bridges, found it in the fruit flies, *Drosophila melanogaster*, they were experimenting on. It occurs as a result of a genetic disorder in the early development of the organism. From simple biology, we know that all sexually-reproducing organisms begin their existence as a single cell. This cell is known as a zygote, which is formed from the union of a sperm and an egg. This zygote will undergo a countless number of cell divisions eventually resulting in all the different kinds of cells seen in the whole body. During the process of cell division, different cells take different routes. This is in a process referred to as differentiation. As a result of differentiation, a cell's development becomes determined. That is, it enters a developmental pathway that determines what it will become, e.g. a muscle cell, a liver cell, a nerve cell etc.

In mammals, these initial stages of cell division are not determined — we say they are indeterminate. In essence this means that any cell can become anything. Damage to any of these initial cells will have no effect because other cells will take over and replace it. But what happens in insects is quite different from that in mammals, because cell division in insects is totally determinate. A decision about the destiny of a cell is made in



A male of *X. nigrita* (golden in colour)

A female of *X. nigrita* (black in colour)

A bilaterally gynandromorphic *X. nigrita*

each and every cell division. The following is the sequence of cell division in insects.

1. The first division of the zygote determines left and right sides (this gives rise to two cells)
2. Second division determines front and back (at this point there are four cells)
3. Third division determines top and bottom (now there are eight cells)

If one cell were to be damaged after any of the divisions, that insect will be missing one part since all insect cells are determined from early stages. If such mishaps happen to sex-determining chromosomes early in life, the resulting organism will be part male and part female, creating what we recognise as a gynandromorph. But how exactly does this happen?

The sex chromosomes

Similar to human beings, gender in some (but not all) insects is determined by the sex chromosomes referred to as X and Y. In human beings, an individual with X and Y chromosomes (XY) will be male while one with two X chromosomes (XX) will be female. This situation may however be reversed in insects whereby an individual that is XX can be male, and one that is XY or simply one X with no Y is female. During cell division, the chromosomes in the cells divide as well, resulting in two cells with the same number of chromosomes. For example, an XY cell will duplicate its chromosomes before dividing, becoming XXYY. After cell division, each cell will be XY. Occasionally, the two copies of a particular chromosome do not separate from each other during cell division. This is referred to as non-disjunction of chromosomes. It results in one of the cells missing an entire chromosome, which is lethal to the cell. The other cell that receives the un-separated chromosome may survive, although problems can occur in it later.

If the non-disjunction occurs in an X-chromosome in an individual that is



Bilateral gynandromorphism in a butterfly *Charaxes castor* from the family Nymphalidae. The female is significantly larger than the male, hence the unbalanced appearance of this specimen.

XX (which is a male in some insects), that would mean that one cell ends up with one X chromosome while the other ends up with three X chromosomes. The cell with only one X chromosome and its descendants will be female while the other with three (XXX) and its descendants will be male.

This disjunction may also occur in an XY individual, resulting in one cell that is X and another that is XYY after cell division. Since X and XYY dictate different sexes, the organism will therefore be part male and part female. If this kind of disjunction occurs in an insect during the early stages of zygotic division, the result will be an individual appearing as exactly half male and half female. This is referred to as a bilateral gynandromorph. If it occurs later in life it results in asymmetric proportions of the male and female characteristics on the body.

A bit bizarre is a situation whereby non-disjunction happens more than once in the development of an insect such that it ends up with patches of female and male characteristics scattered in the same individual. The resulting individual is referred to as a mosaic gynandromorph. Bilateral gynandromorphs are however more frequently encountered. Non-disjunction of chromosomes is not the only cause of gynandromorphism. Other possible causes include double fertilisation by two sperms of a binucleate egg i.e. an egg that contains one egg nucleus and one (unviable) polar body.

Entomology at the National Museums of Kenya

The Nairobi National Museum's insect collection has a long history, having been started in the 19th century and initially housed by the East African Natural History Society (now Nature Kenya). The oldest specimen according to records is an 1889 long-horned beetle. There were more insect enthusiasts than qualified entomologists in the early days. Records indicate that the bulk of collectors were missionaries, settlers, soldiers and colonial administrators. In the year 1981 this rich collection was moved to the spacious Invertebrate Zoology Section in the (then) new natural history building. Incorporated in it is the famous collection by Lieutenant-Col. Hugh Stoneham from the Stoneham Museum (now known as Kitale Museum).

Scientists at the Invertebrate Zoology Section carry out research in various areas. Some of the ongoing research activities are in the areas of biosystematics, invertebrate biodiversity, pollinator diversity and taxonomy, bee biology and ecology, pollination and food security, commercial insects, agricultural entomology, medical entomology and malacology (the study of molluscs), climate change in relation to invertebrates, and ethno-entomology.

Gynandromorphs are important as they give us valuable information on the correlation of genetics and cytology (study of cells). However, they can pose a big challenge to taxonomists and insect enthusiasts who are otherwise not aware of their existence. This is especially so in Lepidopterans (butterflies and moths) where the phenomenon is more common. Opinion is divided about the fertility of gynandromorphs.

The good news is that all these gynandromorphic specimens are well preserved in the entomological collection at the Invertebrate Zoology Section, Zoology Department, National Museums of Kenya. Before you swat your next mosquito take a closer look at it; you never know what you may see.

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laban Njoroge is an entomologist working for the National Museums of Kenya. His interest in insects surfaced early when as a nine-year-old he made collections of mosquitoes, grasshoppers and dung beetles as pets. This passion led him to a bachelor's degree in zoology and botany at the University of Nairobi. Upon completion, his interest in solving many mosquito-related problems propelled him to a master's degree in medical entomology and parasitology at the Institute of Tropical Medicine and Infectious Diseases of Jomo Kenyatta University.

His current research interests have expanded to include bio-monitoring of aquatic ecosystems using aquatic invertebrates and crime solving using insects as sources of evidence.

Of land, ritual and disposal of the dead



A man rides a bull as part of the Luo burial ceremony of *tero buru*, where cattle were driven out of the deceased's homestead to banish the evil spirits that caused the death. The ceremony of *tero buru* continues to the present day, although bulls are no longer ridden. Photo from NMK exhibition *Kisumu 100 years ago*.

Angela W Kabiru, National Museums of Kenya

Burial, rituals and special treatments of the dead are a consistent feature of the symbolic life of modern human societies, and the earliest evidence for burial among *Homo sapiens* is found in the Levant at Qafzeh, dated to between 90,000 and 120,000 years ago. There is also evidence of deliberate interment by early *Homo sapiens* in Africa but it is not conclusive. Ancient intentional inhumations in the upper main Nile Valley attributed to the Qadan (c.12,000-8,000 BC) were discovered in Lower Nubia at Gebel Sabaha and Gezira (present day Sudan).

What is not known is why people began to bury the dead. In a review of west European Mesolithic and Neolithic mortuary practices, Chapman¹ put forward the hypothesis that the burial of humans in formal disposal areas will occur when there are periods of

imbalance between critical resources like food and water. "A new social order may be symbolised...by the use of formal disposal areas, through which a permanent claim to the use and control of critical resources is established by the presence of the ancestors".

The presence of the ancestors serves as a group's best evidence that the land has been theirs since time began. Thus was born the idea of lineage of descent and maintenance of land ownership by the village through generations. The burials of village members and the rituals surrounding this legitimised through time the rights of a group to inhabit a certain area to the exclusion of others. According to Charles and Buikstra,² hunter gatherer societies living in environments where resources support a sedentary lifestyle may ritualise community descent through the use of formal disposal areas for the dead, whereas societies that follow a more mobile mode of subsistence will not. This is however debatable since there are graves

1 Chapman, 1981, in Brandt 1988

2 1983, in Brandt 1988

Left:
Stone circle graves
of Lokori, near Lake
Turkana.



Right:
Rock art found at the
Lokori burial site.



in Northern Kenya attributed to Pastoral Neolithic communities. It has also been suggested that in addition to demonstrating a group's ownership of or access to vital resources through formal burial areas, territorial rights could be further reinforced by constructing conspicuous grave markers such as monuments or cairns³ (stone piles).

Conspicuous grave markers have been found in many places in Kenya, notably in the Turkana basin and the Laikipia highlands. The markers take the form of vertical stone pillars or cairns. Perhaps the most famous are the grave circles of Namoratung'a (or Ng'amoritung'a) near Lokori, south of Lake Turkana, dated to about 24,000 years ago.⁴ This is a concentration of 110 circles composed of basalt blocks, some covered with engravings, located on the slope of a hill. The circles consist of roughly circular rings of vertical slabs of irregular shape that stick out above the surrounding ground; the area within the circles is covered with horizontal slabs. Circle diameters are 1.4 to 4 metres. Grave pits are set within the circles and some of those that have been excavated contain human remains. Pottery fragments, beads and rock art engravings have also been found scattered at the site.

Another site with stone markers is located at Kalokol on the western side of Lake Turkana. The site has 19 basalt pillars that are believed to be aligned with the seven star system.⁵ Excavations reveal there are human burials here, but whether they had something to do with the stars remains to be explored.

Grave markers may also be in the form of stone cairns, simple piles of stones heaped on top of a burial. They are more common than upright pillars, and have been found in the Turkana region, Laikipia highlands, Central Rift Valley, Narok, Lukenya and as far as Garissa.

How did the beliefs and rituals surrounding death develop? The reasons for the origins of a belief system associated with death cannot be easily explained.

According to Bard,⁶ "Members of all societies perceive the real world through a system of beliefs in order to provide explanations for phenomena. Material symbols are the visible, tangible expressions of concepts and relationships which are complex and have more abstract mental meanings. As complex society evolved, mortuary patterns became symbolic of the socio-cultural transformations, and ideologies evolved in parallel to justify and sanctify the new socio-economic relations."

Wenke⁷ while referring to Egyptian burial ritual argues that "the world teemed with unseen but animate conscious forces; malignant spirits were everywhere as were forces for good; and, with sufficient effort, some of the inconveniences of being dead could be mitigated".

3 Renfrew, 1976, Chapman, 1981

4 Soper and Lynch, 1977

5 Lynch and Robbins, 1977

6 Bard, 1987

7 Wenke, 1991



All over the world, early funerary customs developed as cultural components of communities that adopted agriculture and its sedentary lifestyle. Such developments took place in different places at different times, leading to diversified customs that reflect the localised manner and perception of death. Thousands of skeletons have been excavated from diverse burial contexts that emphasize the varied course of the custom's development.

In Kenya, prehistoric human burials within the recent Holocene period have been found in many different environments and contexts that indicate differences as well as similarities in the cultural practices of the people who occupied these areas. In the Laikipia highlands, seven burials were excavated in the early 1970s in a cave named Porcupine Cave (KFR-A5). Burial 1 was laid in a contracted position, lying on the left side with the head to the south-west. Under the body was a thin layer of ochre and two stone slabs covered the whole body. The graves in Ng'amoratung'a excavated by Soper and Lynch also contained bodies laid in contracted positions and so did one of the graves the archaeology team from NMK excavated in Garissa in 2010.

These three burials describe a common funerary practice that was widespread at one point in prehistory. It is not yet clear why the bodies were placed in a contracted position, but that it was a widely accepted practice is not in doubt as such burials have



Left:
Burial mound in
Garissa.

Right:
Burial 1 from
Porcupine Cave in the
Laikipia highlands.
(Siirainen, 1977.
"Later stone age in the
Laikipia highlands."
Azania, Vol. XII)

been found as far apart as Garissa, Narok, Nakuru and Lothagam, as well as other parts of Kenya. The peoples responsible for these burials are still unidentified, as groups that currently live in these areas did not bury their dead until the early 20th century. A few grave goods have been found, the most common being ostrich eggshell beads and stone bowls. The function of red ochre is unclear but is thought to give the impression of life to human remains during funerary ritual, as there is a strong connection between ochre and blood.⁸ Rose⁹ views directional orientation as being related to a belief in a continued life of the dead person, the orientation pointing to the direction the deceased must travel in the journey to the land of the dead, the original home of the forefathers.

Land, transition and the afterlife

The belief in the afterlife is a common theme in traditional African religion. The act of dying is not considered final but a transition into the world of the living-dead.¹⁰ Death is only considered a departure from the world of the living into the spirit world, a departure from the physical body into the 'other'. It is therefore not a complete

8 Sasson, 1968, in Binford, 1972

9 Rose, 1922: *ibid*

10 Mbiti, 1969: 156-7

annihilation of the person, as there are continuing ties between the living and the dead, shown by the elaborate rites associated with death. Contact with this person must be maintained until he/she passes into the *zamani* period of the forefathers.¹¹

Maintaining contact between the living and the dead was of paramount importance. The ground was the point of contact between the dead and the living. According to Mbiti, the ground is the medium through which offerings, libation and divination enable humans to contact the living-dead. That is one of the reasons land (soil) was considered 'holy'. Every adult male was supposed to own land; first, on which to build a hut, and second, on which to grow crops or graze livestock with which to feed his family, for it was an obligation of every male to marry and have children. A man's wealth was measured in terms of the number of animals he owned, the size of his fields and the resulting harvests, as well as the number of wives and children he had.

In his book *Facing Mount Kenya*¹² in which he discusses the traditional life of the Gikuyu, Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta emphasizes that land tenure must be taken into consideration when studying Gikuyu tribal organisation. It is the most important factor in the social, political, religious and economic life of the group.

"As agriculturalists, the Gikuyu people depend entirely on the land. It supplies them with the material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental contentment is achieved. Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried."

The earth is considered the mother of the tribe because it is the soil that feeds the living, and it nurses the spirits of the dead. It is for this reason that the soil is honoured, and swearing by it makes an everlasting oath.

Mix of religion and tradition

Even in a country described as 80% Christian, rituals and ceremonies performed for the dead continue to be carried out by many communities in Kenya. Here are highlighted two: one among the Giriama at the coast and the other among the Bukusu in western Kenya.

Traditional rituals have sometimes caused conflict between the church and traditional elders, but occasionally there is compromise. When Kenya's Minister for Tourism Karisa Maitha died in 2004, the burial was planned as a mix of Christian, Islamic and traditional Giriama rites because while Maitha himself was Christian, most of his constituents were Muslim and he was also a member of the Giriama Council of Elders. Mandatory rites for initiates into the *Kaya* council of elders include slaughtering a black hen at the deceased's house, the blood then mixed with a secret concoction and sprinkled on the body, close family members and other community members. This is done to appease the spirit so it does not return to haunt and bring calamity to the family. Carefully selected leaves are mixed with water and sprinkled on the mourners and special prayers said before lowering the body into the grave. A bull is killed at the graveside, the body wrapped in its skin, and other rituals carried out before the body is buried.¹³ Perhaps not surprisingly three mainstream churches threatened to boycott Maitha's burial unless Giriama elders called off the traditional rites, saying such a ceremony was in conflict with the Christian faith.

Among the Babukusu of western Kenya, the dead must be buried at least one day after death. The exact spot where the grave will be dug is identified by the deceased's father or paternal uncle. The grave is dug at dawn,

11 Ibid: 159

12 Kenyatta, 1938

13 Kenya Churches threaten to boycott Maitha's burial. Daily Nation, 7 September 2007

supervised by an elder. A man must never be buried with his head facing his house, but rather pointing in the direction of entry. Anything that interferes with the comfort of the dead man — watch, tie, rings and shoes — is removed.

Kenya's Vice President Michael Wamalwa Kijana was buried in his formal clothes, but without his watch, necktie or cash. He was allowed to retain his shoes but with the laces loosened. A newspaper report¹⁴ stated that 'He will lie in the traditional Bukusu hut overnight from which he will be brought out legs first. He is then buried lying on his side with the back facing the homestead ... (he) will be buried shortly after 2pm because only the very old are buried after 4pm'.

After three days the post-burial ceremony is performed. Here the family members have their hair shaved off or trimmed. It is then decided how the person's wealth will be distributed, and who will care for the members of the family left behind. The next ceremony takes place 40 days later, and is usually an effort to break away from the spirit of the dead person. There is singing and laying of flowers on the grave. This, it is believed, enables the spirit hovering over the home to take refuge in nearby bushes. The final ceremony, about a year after this one, marks the final break with the dead.¹⁵

The clash of customary and modern law

Until about 20 years ago, many people who worked in the city would still spend a good amount of time 'back home' and it was expected of them to build houses in which they would live when they travelled upcountry. However that ceased to make economic sense when, owing to commitments in the city, visits upcountry became less and less frequent. Therefore people began buying land to build their permanent homes close to the cities where they work. Initially, this did not auger well with their relatives in the village, who

considered those living in town 'homeless'; as they said '*mwacha mila ni mtumwa*' (he who abandons his culture is a slave).

But this living 'in town' in any case only lasts as long as the person is alive, as it is considered normal to have the body transported upcountry for burial. This is not a matter of debate. Members of many communities believe that the spirit cannot rest in peace unless the person is buried with the ancestors and that calamity will befall the survivors if this does not happen. When a man has settled away from his ancestral land, and does not leave instructions regarding his final resting place, the relatives take it upon themselves to bury him 'at home', regardless of his wife's wishes. In most cases this results in a fight between customary and common law.

Perhaps the most famous case in Kenya's history is that of S M Otieno, a prominent criminal lawyer.¹⁶ Otieno was Luo from Nyanza and his wife, Wambui, was Kikuyu from Central Province. They built their home at Matasia, not far from Nairobi, and Otieno ran a successful law practice. When Otieno died in December 1986, his wife wanted him buried at his farm in Matasia while his family/ clan claimed the body on the basis of longstanding tribal customs. The body lay in the mortuary while the case moved to court. The clan won the case when the court of appeal ruled that he be buried in Nyanza; this finally happened in May 1987.

Changing use of urban space

The diminishing pieces of land, rising costs of funerals and changing settlement patterns are factors contributing to the changing use of space in relation to burials. Although communities have held on for generations to customs associated with the dead, rituals

14 *Death and burial, the Luhya way*. Daily Nation, 6 September 2003

15 *Ibid.*

16 Ojwang and Mugambi, 1989

associated with death are being done away with as they are becoming uneconomical to sustain. Families are now looking for cheaper and more convenient alternative ways of disposing of the dead. One of these is of course burial in cemeteries and, to a lesser extent, cremation.

Cemeteries and cremation

Nairobi was once described as the city without cemeteries, as it has only two public graveyards, one for Muslims and another one for everyone else (though it has three war cemeteries). For a long time after independence very little use was made of public cemeteries, and it is perhaps for this reason that the City Council did not set aside additional land for this purpose. Langata Cemetery has been in use since the 1950s. With the sharp increase in the number of city burials, it has now reached a critical point, filling up faster than anticipated and running out of space. Cemeteries in Nairobi are reported to be handling 20 to 30 burials every day, far more than projected. In the past several years, due to a shortage of space at Langata Cemetery, residents have had to dig new graves over old ones. The contents of temporary graves at least 45 years old are first emptied before burying their loved ones in them, or the new grave is dug a foot shallower than the older one. Almost too late the City Council is considering buying additional land for a new cemetery. But officials at City Hall cannot seem to agree

Nairobi's Langata Cemetery: overcrowded and neglected.



even over the location of a suggested new site at Kitengela, 40 km outside Nairobi.¹⁷

An even more controversial option is cremation. The Langata Crematorium, opened in 1958, historically had never recorded more than 20 cremations yearly. Apparently things are changing, for over 40 were done in 2008 alone.¹⁸ News of a cremation is always met with shock and anger. When Joshua Okuthe, the chairman of the Kenyan National Sports Council, was cremated in 2009, his clansmen still demanded to have the body to give it a decent burial. Cremation, the clansmen said, was “uncultural, inhuman and disastrous”, adding that their brother was not lying as an unclaimed dead body. “He has a home and could not have established it under the Luo cultural traditions if he did not wish it to be his final resting place”.¹⁹

The clan insisted on having an alternative burial rite because, according to Luo tradition, the body had to be interred at the ancestral home. Where there is no body, the symbolic burial of a banana stem or animal is conducted and a cleansing ceremony carried out to appease the spirits.²⁰ In the end, they buried an empty white coffin in a symbolic burial. Clerics from the Anglican Church of Kenya conducted the one hour ceremony, and a bull, two sheep and five chickens were slaughtered to feed the mourners.²¹

Such cases notwithstanding, Kenyans are increasingly beginning to consider cremation as a cheaper alternative disposal of the dead. Ironically though, most of

17 *Grave problem at City Hall*. Daily Nation, 21 February 2009

18 *Ashes to ashes: Cremation slowly gains approval as way of laying loved ones to rest*. Daily Nation, 18 July 2009

19 *Clan demands Okuthe's body*. Daily Nation, 10 July 2009

20 *Stunned villagers say, we will 'bury' Okuthe even if he was cremated*. East African Standard, 15 July 2009

21 *Kin conduct mock burial for Okuthe*. East African Standard, 18 July 2009

those choosing to be cremated are the rich who can afford to buy their own land, and are most likely better educated than their counterparts opting for burial. A report in the *Daily Nation* states that none of the 40-plus cremated in 2008 came from a poor family. Is there a relationship between method of disposal and level of education or social class?

For those who choose to be buried, just like in ancient Egypt, social stratification does not end with death. As Gakiha Weru, a columnist with the *Daily Nation*, wrote about Langata Cemetery²²

“To the left of the cemetery is the executive corner. Here, the graves are set on neatly trimmed lawns. Most of them have red tiled gable roofs mounted on steel structures. They are also fairly large — some of them are family graveyards. “Phase one” of the executive corner is already full. So, a new site for the moneyed has been carved out of what was once the cemetery’s parking bay. The stratification in death continues with the unkempt, concrete and cheaper local marble attesting that those buried across from the “executive site” were financially less endowed.

Families with kin buried here have made several attempts to leave lasting memories by putting up marble crosses and slabs. However, since no maintenance fee is charged, this section of the cemetery is regularly left unattended as attested by the overgrown grass and shrubs covering some of the gravestones. Here, just like in Eastlands and other middle class residential estates, the graveyards are crowded. To secure a grave in this section, one is required to pay the required fee at least three days before the actual date of burial.

Here, there are a few memorial crosses lying askew, faded, weathered and bleached almost white, making it difficult to identify who is buried there. The graves are not too deep either ... two or three feet at most. There is little attempt at sophistication here — no marble slabs, no gabled roofs, no statues of angels. It is like navigating the narrow alleys with open sewers that identify any of the city’s slums. Here, unidentified bodies from the City Mortuary and hospitals are buried in communal graves. This is the final resting place for those too poor to afford anything better.”

**PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR
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22 In death, as in life, the rich and the poor keep their safe distance. *Daily Nation*, 26 November 2006

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The case of Kisumu:



Stephen Agong',
Fredrick Odede
and George
Anang'a

Urban history and cultural heritage in the face of modernisation

Rapid urbanisation poses a threat to the archaeological and cultural heritage of Kisumu city in western Kenya. Apart from the general lack of knowledge of cultural sites, there is public and political apathy due to the perception that preserving history brings no tangible benefits. In their 2012 study the authors propose models to document, protect and promote Kisumu's vanishing treasures.

Above
Kisumu's famous town clock, unveiled in 1938, was a gift to the town from the family of Asian pioneer Kasim Lakha.
Photo: Kisumu City Council.

Over a third of Africa's one billion people live in urban areas. By 2030 this figure is likely to rise to more than half of the population. *Vision 2030*, the Kenyan government's blueprint for development, concedes that the country lacks adequate capacity for urban planning, evidenced by the growth of unplanned settlements, a highly centralised framework for urban planning that does not give sufficient authority to county and municipal governments, and general lack of capacity to plan and manage urban development. These shortcomings lay bare the challenges which face urban Kenya. What is more, they suggest that cultural heritage is likely to slide

even lower in priority due to the pressure of providing the basics such as housing, food, water and sanitation for growing urban populations.

The case of Kisumu

Kisumu is the third largest city in Kenya with a population of about 400,000. It is growing and modernising at a faster rate than other Kenyan cities. Modernisation means that the city stands to gain from infrastructure development, but runs a huge risk of losing its history.

The oldest town and port of Lake Victoria, Kisumu's population is predominantly Luo, with substantial representation of Luhya and Kisii from adjacent areas, a significant community of Asians (Indians) whose ancestors arrived with the building of the railway, and other Kenyan groups. The city's economic and infrastructure growth has been rapid, with many new buildings and complexes being constructed, especially in the five years since the last elections. The promotion of "western corridor" tourism in Kenya has seen the rise in tourist numbers in and around Kisumu with corresponding growth in hotels and real estate.

The influx of NGOs, often working on issues related to HIV/AIDS, has created some new employment in the tertiary sector. Since this appears to benefit the few who are more educated, disparities in wealth continue to grow. Reliable statistics are hard to obtain, however visual evidence shows that the majority of young people migrating from rural areas are either unemployed or under-employed.

Kisumu remains shaped by its colonial origins with a wealthy residential zone on the lake side of the city centre. The less well-off areas of Manyatta and Nyalenda slums are intertwined with middle class areas. The commercial centre of the city is composed of shops, supermarkets, judicial offices, and the city administration. Kisumu also has areas of well-planned, if somewhat run down, housing estates built between the 1950s and 1980s, and areas of less planned urban growth, which spread into the flood-prone lowlands of the Kano plains. These areas, although not 'slums', have very high levels of unemployment, often lack essential facilities and as a result suffer from various poverty-related health problems.

The study in Kisumu

The study focused on cultural heritage most likely to be impacted by the city's rapid modernisation, with the ultimate aim of identifying models that could be adopted for successful promotion and protection of Kisumu's heritage. It involved a desk review, the mapping of sites of cultural and historical importance, interviews and workshops with stakeholders, and focus group discussions.

The study confirmed that there is little documentation on cultural heritage, sites have not been properly mapped out and very little activity exists in terms of dissemination and promotion; where they do, it is incoherent and uncoordinated.

Contributing factors include a lack of funds, minimal requisite skills, low priority and therefore lack of commitment by key stakeholders, and a pervasive public apathy and disconnect. It is evident from the study that practical efforts must be made to protect the cultural heritage of Kisumu in order to forestall its imminent loss. The dangers should not be underestimated.

The study and its methodology

The study used the DIVE approach of describe, interpret, value, enable. DIVE applies methods familiar to planners and cultural historians, and its structure follows process logic as developed in modern communications research.

The National Museums of Kenya is represented by Kisumu Museum which opened to the public in 1980. The museum stores and disseminates information on cultural and scientific issues with emphasis on western Kenya and provides educational services to schools. Under the jurisdiction of the Kisumu Museum are a number of sites and monuments of historical significance including the colonial-era Fort Tenan, Songhor, Kanam and Rusinga Island prehistoric sites, the Thimlich Ohinga UNESCO World Heritage site, various Luo sacred sites including Simbi Nyaima, Kit Mikayi and Ramogi Hills, and the Tom Mboya Mausoleum.

What is cultural heritage?

Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation. This includes its customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values.

Cultural heritage can be recognised in:

- built environments, which includes buildings, townscapes, archaeological remains

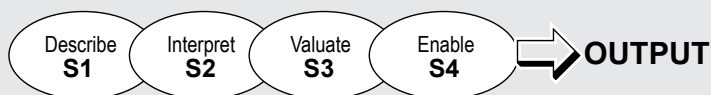


- natural environments, which includes rural landscapes, coasts and shorelines, agricultural heritage
- artefacts which include made objects, books and documents, pictures

Thimlich Ohinga stone settlement, now a UNESCO World Heritage site.
Photo: National Museums of Kenya.

Such forms of tangible heritage are also interwoven with the intangible heritage of a community, reflected through its oral history, foods, traditional skills, music and dance, religious ceremonies, etc. These trends reflect new thinking about world heritage, which is moving from defining

The DIVE approach



a) Stage one (S1): Collect information about the site's origin and development; describe and convey the knowledge. Basic sources of information are field investigations, documentation and registration; old maps, drawings and photos; descriptions, local names, records of local life and history, orally-transmitted stories and conversations, traditions, information collected through participation processes and interviews.

b) Stage two (S2): Interpret the historical context and its significance, analysing the knowledge base from stage 1 and

the description of the historical character.

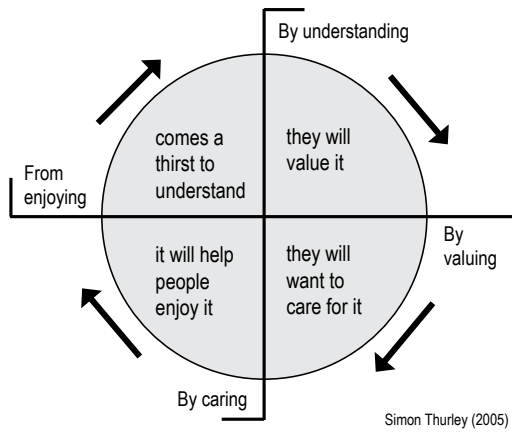
c) Stage three (S3): Assess the qualities and

values of the cultural heritage, investigate its development potential and vulnerability. This is the consolidation of the knowledge base from stage 1 and the interpretations from stage 2.

d) Stage four (S4): Define the arena of intervention; suggest implementation strategies.

e) Output: Summarize the contents, results and recommendations; in the case of this study to provide a way forward and suggest a prototype of how archaeological history and cultural heritage can be protected and promoted in Kisumu.

The Heritage Cycle



specific categories towards integrated conservation of cultural landscapes.

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage are fragile and endangered by factors such as globalisation, urbanisation, migration and cultural homogenisation, as well as a lack of understanding and appreciation by those who have responsibility for safeguarding it.¹

Simon Thurley proposes what he calls the “Heritage Cycle diagram”,² to give individuals an idea how they can make the past part of their future:

- By understanding cultural heritage, *people value it*
- By valuing it, *people want to care for it*
- By caring for it, *it will help people enjoy it*
- From enjoying it, *comes a thirst to understand*

Heritage protection enables the promotion, protection and curation of architectural and archaeological history. This process also increases the visibility of features which define a community’s character and creates an insightful narrative which will educate and inculcate a sense of purpose to lure visitors, scholars and investors in equal measure.

1. Rukingama, L (2011)
 2. Thurley, S (2005)

Study findings: The implications for Kisumu

Stakeholders interviewed during the study observed that cultural and archaeological history could be tapped as an avenue for earning revenue through tourism, which has the potential to create employment opportunities for the youth of Kisumu and improve livelihoods.

Community members interviewed strongly felt that a people’s cultural heritage and archaeological history are tangible representations of its beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. They (90%) also deemed it particularly important to cultural identity, which they saw as central to self-esteem and self-worth in individuals. The need for protection and promotion of cultural heritage was deemed important to ensure that a people’s culture and way of life is not lost, in effect ensuring continuity.

With the awareness of the rapid expansion and growth currently experienced in Kisumu, it was noted that the priority to protect cultural heritage is increasingly a victim of competing interests such as unplanned construction of housing. These issues were raised mostly by people who live in the slums, unemployed young people, and those without income. Some policy makers also raised concerns especially on issues of limited capacity, knowledge and skills among existing personnel to undertake



planning that integrates cultural heritage within their larger plans for a futuristic city.

The school syllabus is largely silent on the issue of cultural heritage. Existing content is general, focusing on broad themes rather than the context that enables a young person to appreciate their surrounding cultural heritage as a focus of study. There is a danger that the younger generation are growing up not knowing the heritage bequeathed to them.

The majority of respondents (85%) and interviewees saw cultural heritage as an important element of social cohesion and integration. Regarding the 2007/2008 general elections in Kenya, which split the country along tribal lines, it was felt this would not have occurred if cultural diversity was appreciated in the context of sustainable socio-economic development. They argued that lack of understanding and misrepresentation of different cultural practices heightened the tension during election campaigns, and could have contributed to the explosion of violence and rage after the disputed elections. Most of the respondents (79%) agreed that preservation and promotion of cultural heritage play a role in cementing social cohesion, citing cases where diverse cultural identities are celebrated, thus enabling ethnic groups to appreciate how cultures enrich and complement each other.

Moving forward: Models for protection and promotion

During the exploratory phase of this study, several sites of cultural and archaeological importance were identified and mapped out. These places were categorised under built environment, natural environment and artefacts. The range includes educational and health institutions, public buildings, markets, housing estates, parks and recreation centres, hotels, famous people, traditional foods and indigenous trees, plants, flowers and vegetables.

Key examples are institutions which marked the transition from traditional legacy to colonial legacy and are still objects of modern growth. These institutions trace the history of colonisation and the migration of various ethnic communities into Kisumu. Examples of such institutions are the Kisumu Day School, which was the first black African high school in Kisumu, and the RIAT institute, which was the first technical college created for the people of Nyanza. Maseno School in the peri-urban outskirts represents the influx of missionaries and the advent of missionary-led education.

Housing estates were also mapped as urgently needing preservation due to the rate at which they are being pulled down and redefined. Different estates and building styles are attributed to the different communities that settled in Kisumu. The Nubian estate has

Colonial-era buildings. Left to right from opposite page: The first Anglican church in Kisumu; the pre-war Jubilee Market; old Nyanza Hospital.



connections with the Nubian community, Milimani has connections to the Indian community and upcoming affluent Africans of the post-colonial period, and Kaloleni estate stands as a relic of typical African neighbourhoods during the colonial period. The arrival of the Indian community brought a change in architectural styles with houses and shrines being constructed in and around the town. Documenting these developments is important in teaching future generations of the transformations that have occurred in Kisumu over time.

It is also important to trace the development from traditional healing systems to modern western medicine. This can be done with the mapping and documenting of the first hospitals of Kisumu, such as the Kisumu District Hospital, Lumumba Hospital and the Nyanza Provincial Hospital. At the moment, these facilities are not well documented and information about their history is not readily available.

The rail and shipping history of Kisumu is another element that needs to be documented. Originally named Port Florence by the British, Kisumu marked the end of the railway line from Mombasa. Until several years ago there were still

ships that connected Kisumu to other East African countries. The transport network contributed to the economic development of Kisumu and its environs. Few know that Kisumu had the first international airport in Kenya where aircraft landed at the lake on their way to the southern parts of Africa. Also mentioned in interviews was the existence of material artefacts mostly found in homes. These include household items and photos that participants felt could be placed in a museum of urbanisation.

In view of these gaps, the study team proposes the adoption of the following prototypes for promotion and protection of cultural heritage and archaeological history:

1. Create a museum of urbanisation depicting the past, present and possible future state of Kisumu and its peri-urban surroundings.

Due to the costs of undertaking new construction, the report recommends approaching Kisumu Museum to apportion part of their facility to curating the city's urban cultural heritage. Such an undertaking will raise the profile of the theme and give opportunity to engage stakeholders to eventually put up a museum of urbanisation and cultural heritage.

2. Set up an interactive website and a virtual platform to showcase Kisumu's cultural heritage sites.

This web portal will serve several purposes, among them being a conduit for a virtual tour of Kisumu; a discussion platform where people can debate and share views on urbanisation, growth and cultural heritage; a tourist attraction site to present the flavour, culture and sounds of Kisumu and a permanent virtual preservation and restoration site. An example is the portal for Manchester City which can be found at www.360spin.co.uk/virtual-manchester/

3. Map out, protect and label all important archaeological and

Chief Ogada of Kisumu, one of the most important and well-known Luo leaders, photographed in 1902. Photo from Pitt Rivers Museum Luo visual history, <http://photos.prm.ox.ac.uk>



Examples of the undocumented cultural and archaeological heritage sites in Kisumu city, Kisumu peri-urban, and the larger Nyanza Province.

Type of cultural heritage	Kisumu city	Kisumu peri-urban	Larger Nyanza Province
Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kisumu Hotel • Kaloleni Estate • Nubian Estate • Kisumu Day School • RIAT • Kisumu Railway Station • Kisumu Port • Sunset Hotel • Market (<i>Chiro Mbero</i>) • Factories (KICOMI, sisal factories, sugar industry, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kit Mikaye • Fort Tenan • Maseno School • Churches (ACK, SDA, Catholic, Pentecostal, etc) • Mosques • Indigenous churches (Legio Maria, Got Kwer, Nomiya Luo Church etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thimlich Ohinga • Homes of chiefs, religious leaders, teachers, seers, Luo heroes (<i>Thuond Luo</i>), traditional, mud-walled and grass-thatched round houses, etc.
Natural Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Victoria(<i>Nam Lolwe</i>) • Kajulu (RIAT) Hills • Dunga Hippo Point • Sunset viewing point along the shores of Lake Victoria • Swamps • Trees, shrubs, flowers • Seeds (indigenous vegetables, flowers, trees, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River Nyando • Natural springs and waterfalls • Trees (<i>ng'ow, onera, nyabend winy</i> etc), flowers • Medicinal trees and plants • Birds and various animals • Domestic animals • Swamps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramogi Hills • Luo migration trail and dispersion points • Obama /Kogelo Village • Kanam prehistoric site • Thimlich Ohinga • Rusinga /Tom Mboya Mausoleum • Simbi Nyaima • Abundu Hotsprings • Homa Hills • Nyakach Hills • Nandi Hills
Artefacts	Old planning documents, photos, drawings, stools, chairs, flywhisks, hats, mats, baskets, pots, skins, shoes (<i>akala</i>), spears, shields, arrows, grinding stones, toothbrushes (<i>maswak</i>), coins, gold, cowrie shells	Old planning documents, old title deeds, land tenureship documents, old identity cards, old currency, old bus/rail tickets etc.	Books (e.g. <i>Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi</i>), signed treaties, old school reports, old title deeds

cultural heritage sites. This should be done by a team of key stakeholders, experts and political leadership and include places such as where freedom fighters were born and lived, key personalities, historic buildings, factories, indigenous trees and plants, etc. An example is the blue plaque seen in places of cultural, archaeological and historical significance in Great Britain, an undertaking run by English Heritage.

A cultural heritage educational curriculum and modules that are contextualised to the larger Kisumu and Nyanza environment should be introduced in local institutions, including schools, colleges, universities, community centres, churches, and mosques. Leaflets which summarise the cultural heritage sites, their stories and photos should be produced for tourists, local and international.

Conclusion

The study sought to understand the state of cultural heritage in Kisumu and examined efforts made towards the protection and promotion of heritage sites. In the process of the study, and going by its findings, recommendations have been made that are the likely beginnings of a process to bridge the gaps between academic discourse on cultural heritage, practical application through the establishment of working prototypes and an advocacy platform that will engage the public. Further research needs to be undertaken to explore ways to protect cultural heritage that are contextually relevant. Some scepticism was encountered in the course of the research which raises the questions of how to address the apparent apathy and low priority that is given to cultural heritage protection as seen by the government's low budgetary allocation to the cultural sector. The links between the thematic areas of eco-tourism and cultural heritage need to be cemented so that culture is seen as capital, with the associated potential to generate income, enhance livelihoods, and raise standards of living.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE AUTHORS UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

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