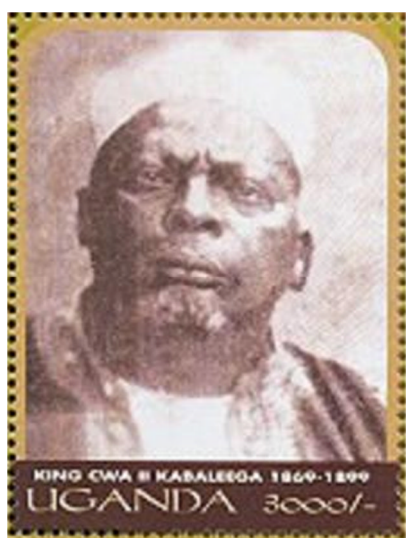


CROWN, SPEARS AND DRUM



A PROFILE OF THE BABIITO DYNASTY OF BUNYORO-KITARA KINGDOM (1500 - 2000)

by

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PART I:

A Glorious Heritage

*Oh God of Gods, King of Kings, the king of the sky and the earth! I have brought this king
to ascend the throne succeeding his father!*

- Coronation of a New King,

J. W. Nyakatura, *Anatomy of an African Kingdom*

The tale of the rise to prominence, greatness and modern survival of the Babito rulers of today's Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom has its roots in the very earliest East African mythology. According to the celebrated British ethnographer John Beattie, "For Nyoro, human history begins with a first family, whose head is sometimes called Kintu, 'the created thing.' There [we]re three children in this family, all boys." In the ancient days of what is known as the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, the region was ruled by members of a tribal group considered to have been the descendants of the original ancestor Kintu, an early royal dynasty known to history as the Batembuzi. Ugandan historian J. W. Nyakatura writes insightfully of this preliminary phase of the effluorescence of Nyoro royal culture and governance: "Since the coming of Kintu and his people [the Batembuzi] and before the arrival of the Bachwezi," who succeeded the descendants of Kintu, the three kingdoms of Bunyoro, Buganda and Nkore "formed part of the Kitara Empire." This semi-mythical Empire of Kitara, which established itself as a major force in the African subcontinent during the 14th and 15th centuries, was successively shattered by the secession of Nkore, under the leadership of a Muhuma clansman named Ruhinda, and the subsequent defection of what is known today as the Kingdom of Buganda.

According to Nyakatura, Ruhinda "refused to be ruled by any other clan, and so made himself master of Nkore by force." Indeed, "Ruhinda grew to be feared and respected by the Bachwezi, who honored him with the title of 'Ruhinda, son of Muchwa.'" Ruhinda was eventually to declare himself the first *mugabe*, or king of Nkore. This left both Bunyoro and Buganda as

remnants of the great Kitara Empire. However, with the weakening of the Bachwezi dynasty of Bunyoro under the hapless leadership of Wamara, the last of the Bachwezi kings, the rise of the greater Babito dynasty became an inevitability in the region. The Babito, or "children of the *bito* tree," are the descendants of Omuchwezi Kyoma, and the very first of the Babito rulers of Bunyoro-Kitara, Mpuga Rukidi, inherited a troubled kingdom, as well as the remnants of an empire that had been abandoned hastily by the previous sovereign and his retinue. Originally known to history as Labongo, a chief of the Bito clan of the Luo people, Rukidi moved decisively to secure his claim to the orphaned state, and to assert his rights to what remained of the once-great Empire of Kitara in the late 15th/early 16th century. After journeying into the realm of Bunyoro-Kitara at the request of Mugungu, a former retainer of the last Bachwezi king, this forward-thinking Bito chief and his followers were quickly acknowledged as the new masters of the former domain of Omukama Wamara.

Upon his arrival at the palace of Wamara, Rukidi proceeded to question Kasoira, a former minister of the departed sovereign, as to the nature and circumstances of the departure of his unlamented sovereign. "Where did the rulers of this kingdom go to?" asked Rukidi with astonishment. "[W]hy did they leave it?" Kasoira proceeded to explain that "the Bachwezi had lost prestige and respect among their subjects," and that "finding their position intolerable, [they] had decided to destroy themselves by throwing themselves into the lake," according to J. W. Nyakatura. Thus it was that the throne of Bunyoro-Kitara came to be vacant, and that Rukidi was offered the kingship of the fractured and troubled realm.



The historical kingdoms of the present Republic of Uganda

Upon inquiring about the whereabouts of the royal regalia and drums of the kingdom, Rukidi was informed that they had all been left behind after the precipitate departure of Wamara and his followers. Insingoma Mpuga I Rukidi was thus duly enthroned as the Omukama (King) of Bunyoro-Kitara, circa 1500, and quickly re-established the regal prestige of the Nyoro monarchs, which has served as a focal point of the history and culture of the nation ever since that time. The Babito dynasty has ruled over the Nyoro people in a line of direct succession, through war and peace, surviving the tumultuous era of the British imperialist incursions of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and broken only by the temporary abolition of the kingdom from the time of Ugandan President Milton Obote to 1994.

This dynasty, the longest-lived by far of the Bunyoro-Kitara sovereign families, has produced some of the greatest heroes and visionaries of the region, such as Chwa II Kabalega (r. 1869-1898), who valiantly fought the mechanized assaults of the British invaders of his kingdom, and his son,

Tito IV Winyi (r. 1924-1967), who used his considerable powers of statecraft and diplomacy to restore a measure of native governance to the shattered kingdom after the unwarranted usurpation of his kingly prerogatives by successive generations of colonial bureaucrats and Whitehall functionaries.

This brief profile of the monarchy of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom will focus on the more recent elements of its history, and in particular on the age of its greatest trials, that of the British invasions of the late 19th century, as well as the subsequent and protracted occupation of the kingdom by these foreign invaders from afar. This troubled era is, however, also the age of the very greatest of its hero-kings, a period dominated by the epochal figure of Omukama Chwa II Kabalega, a ruler whose words and deeds in defense of his country are on a par with those of the mythological heroes of Greek and Roman antiquity, and whose memory is cherished today by the modern descendants of his former subjects.

After the accession of Mpuga I Rukidi to the throne of Bunyoro-Kitara, the Nyoro monarchy, although periodically assailed by threats from without, and by the secession of certain key elements of its territories, such as Nkore, Buganda, and eventually Toro, managed to establish and maintain a stable and prosperous society for the inhabitants of its domains. The form of government practiced during this period, as with almost all other African states, was that of absolute monarchy, with the Omukama at the very apex and pinnacle of regal power. "Traditionally," writes John Beattie, "all political authority in the Nyoro state was seen as deriving from the kingship, or *bukama*..." Indeed, "[t]he Mukama's authority was seen as unique. The Nyoro king is not, like (for example) the Anuak king, *primus inter pares*, and he is not, like the Swazi or Ashanti kings, the 'father of his people,'" Beattie wrote in 1955, during the reign of Tito IV Winyi. Today, of course, with the establishment of the Republic of Uganda in 1962, and the subsequent adoption of the Constitution of 1995, the role of the Omukama is viewed in a somewhat different light, but the age-old notion persists that the sovereign is, quite literally, "born to rule."

Beattie frames the role of the king in the context of early Nyoro society thus: "The Mukama of Bunyoro, then, not only reigned, he also governed:

the idea of government, *bulemi*, with its associations of power... is essential to the Nyoro kingship." Furthermore, avers Beattie, "[t]he king [wa]s the source of all political power in the state, he [wa]s above and different from everyone else, and his relations with his people are thought of in political rather than in kinship terms." It was therefore this very uniqueness, this divinely-ordained destiny to rule, which separated the Omukama from the other ranks of the population of Bunyoro-Kitara, and which served to make him the sole and absolute focus of power, both temporal and spiritual,

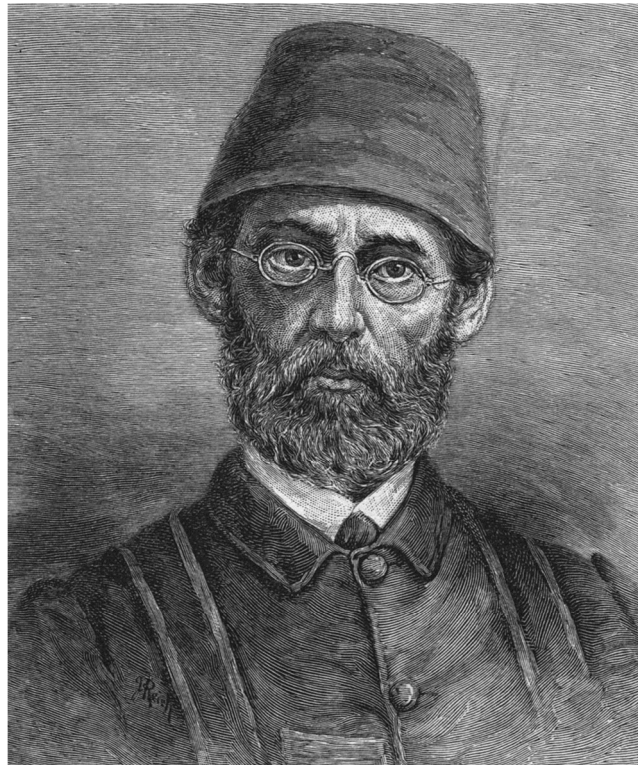


within the confines of the tightly-knit kingdom.

H. M. Rukirabasaija Agutamba Kamurasi (r. 1852-1869)

Into this age-old state, supported by its framework of divine monarchy, came the first European visitors to the region in the 1860s. The British explorers James Augustus Grant (1827-1892) and John Hanning Speke (1827-1864) were eventually followed by others, but it was Sir Samuel Baker (1821-1893) who made the most deadly and lasting of the initial marks of foreign aggression on the soon-to-be victimized Nyoro state. After a first expedition to the region in 1864, in 1872 Baker returned as an official representative of the British government, proclaiming the annexation of Bunyoro to the British/Ottoman colonial suzerainty of Egypt. This naturally aroused the deepest indignation and revulsion among the Omukama and his followers, and according to Beattie, "[i]n the fracas which followed... Baker mowed down large numbers of Nyoro with a Maxim gun, set fire to the king's enclosure and all the neighboring villages, and departed." The young king, Kabalega, who had succeeded his father Kamurasi (r. 1852-1869) as

paramount ruler of the threatened state, was soon to find himself at the very heart of a lengthy and brutal struggle for the very survival of his kingdom, and for the Nyoro way of life.



Emin Pasha (1840-1892)

Sir Samuel Baker was eventually succeeded as the governor of what the British called "Equatoria" by Colonel Charles Gordon (1833-1885), who built a number of garrison forts in northern Bunyoro, further escalating the hostilities between the invaders and their would-be subjects. In 1878, however, Gordon himself was succeeded by the German-born scientist and scholar Eduard Schnitzer, known to history under the sobriquet of Emin Pasha (1840-1892). Emin Pasha, although charged by the British colonialists with subjugating and pacifying Bunyoro, has left a surprisingly sympathetic portrait of Omukama Chwa II Kabalega, the very man whose kingly rights and prerogatives he had been sent to usurp:

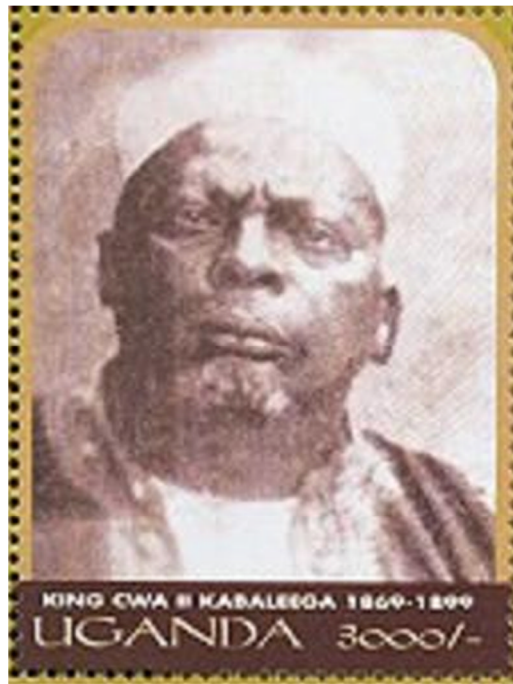
When I went to visit Omukama Chwa Kabalega, I found him dressed in beautiful bark-cloth which covered all his body up to the chest. Another piece of bark-cloth was used as a sash. He had a beautiful head, shaven with two marks, as the custom of the Banyoro demanded. Four of his lower jaw-bone teeth had been removed as the custom also was. His upper teeth were slightly

longer than the rest and very white. He had a beautiful necklace made of one big bead. He had very strong arms with two bangles around them. He had small clean hands [and] I was satisfied with his ways and with all things around him. But one thing must be admitted: his face was frightening (by no means because of ugliness). He was well-versed in the Arabic language.

Indeed, Emin Pasha's admiration for the man he had been sent to undo was not simply limited to his royal person, but extended also to his conduct and general demeanor:

All the time I stayed with him I never heard him say one bad word or exhibit any crude mannerisms, except that of spitting on the floor now and then. But all the same, the floor was cleaned as soon as he spat on it. Omukama Chwa was very glad to see visitors and talked and laughed freely with them. Unlike other kings, he was not capricious... [H]e was very generous and used to send me food every day. Every time I visited him, I found him to be a kind and understanding man.... I cannot cease to talk about my friendship with Kabalega- a friendship which was not destroyed even by one bad word. I will always cherish the days I spent with him.

Thus was the description given by his opponent of the man whose rights he was sent to oppose and curtail, a description which speaks volumes of the excellence of character and regal bearing of the great Omukama. Sadly, though, neither the sterling qualities of the Omukama, nor the resolve and valiance of his people, were to protect them from the inexorable march of British colonial ambition and greed.



A giant of the Babito dynasty: H. M. Chwa II Kabalega (r. 1869-1923)

With the coming of the British East Africa Company's Captain Frederick Lugard (1858-1945) in 1890, the stalemate between the Nyoro and the imperialist authorities was to escalate into all-out war. Lugard seemed to have one objective in mind, which was the establishment of British interests in Bunyoro, no matter what the cost to the Omukama or his people. Indeed, according to John Beattie, "[I]t is plain from his own writings that [Lugard] never even considered the possibility of negotiating with the Nyoro king." Kabalega and his forces resisted most strenuously the mechanized incursions of the British, but he was undone by Lugard's absolute determination to subjugate the area by extreme force. "[I]n 1893," writes Beattie, "after an ultimatum had been issued to Kabalega calling for guarantees of his future good conduct and a substantial indemnity for his past misdeeds, to which apparently no reply was received, a force of nearly 15,000 men, over 14,000 of whom were Ganda, invaded Bunyoro under European leadership." This tragic tale of aggression and betrayal is illuminated only by the courage of the Omukama himself, and by the image of the staunch resistance put up by the Nyoro defenders.

The courage and determination of the Nyoro notwithstanding, they were swiftly overwhelmed by the superior numbers and advanced military technology of the enemy. The Euro-Ganda forces "quickly overran the

country, but Kabalega, though constantly harried by the invaders, carried on in retreat a protracted guerilla warfare, sometimes north and sometimes south of the Nile," writes John Beattie. This noble king, despite the absolutely titanic odds stacked against him, and faced with the gathering might of the forces arrayed to strike him down, continued with Nyoro loyalists to wage a struggle worthy of the great Spartan warriors at Thermopylae, who over two millennia before had braved the unrelenting Persian onslaught with equal measures of bravery and defiance.

"[I]n 1895," continues Beattie, "an even more enormous army was sent against [Kabalega]... [and] in 1896 the commander of these forces reported that Kabalega had been driven from his country and many hundreds of cattle captured." The British may have prevailed in their bid to subdue the land mass known as Bunyoro-Kitara, but still they held no sway over the stout hearts and strong arms of the mighty Omukama and his most devoted followers. "[A]lthough the traditional Nyoro state had been reduced to chaos," observes Beattie, "and the population was undergoing great hardships, the elusive Kabalega still held out with a few followers north of the Nile." The brutal end of the tale, however, seems to have been preordained, for fate had decreed that the right of the Nyoro people and their heroic sovereign should bend to the mechanized might of the British invaders.



Palace of the Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, circa 1920

J. W. Nyakatura recounts the closing moments of Kabalega's struggle thus:

On... April 9, 1899, a morning mist covered the river valley [of Mikyora] and visibility was difficult... Kabalega was captured still fighting like the brave man that he was. He was captured only after he had been wounded. He was shot in the arm and another shot broke off his thumb from another hand. As a result his gun dropped from his hands and in this way he was captured by the enemy.

The British authorities, fearful of the galvanizing effect that the continued presence of such a leader might one day come to have on resistance elements among his conquered people, exiled the fallen hero to the Seychelles Islands. Allowed to return to his former kingdom by a subsequent British administration in 1923, he was destined to die en route from the Seychelles, never again having set foot among the hills of Bunyoro. In the modern era, a monument to Kabalega has been set up in Mparo to commemorate the valiance of his struggle, as well as the bravery of his resistance fighters, and a great junction of the Nile River, the Kabalega Falls,

has been named in his honor. Human history has few examples of such staunch devotion to the causes of freedom and self-determination, and today the people of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom rightly celebrate the memory and legacy of this man as one of the very greatest of the Babito kings.

Even before the Promethean figure of Chwa II Kabalega had been exiled to distant and rocky shores, the British had already installed one of his sons, Yosia Kitahimbwa I Karukara (r. 1898-1902 CE) as a rival in royal authority, on April 3, 1898. Inconveniently for their purposes, however, the youthful monarch, born in 1887, was both a dissolute and an ill-advised sovereign, and thus he himself was quickly shuffled aside in favor of one of his father's elder sons, Duhaga II Andrea Bisereko (r. 1902-1924 CE). Duhaga II was proclaimed Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara on September 17, 1902, and is today considered to have been one of the most capable of the modern rulers of the kingdom.

During his 22-year reign, Duhaga II Andrea was faced with a number of considerable challenges, not the least of which were a revolt among the local chiefs of the country, and a terrible famine which ravaged the country throughout 1907 and 1908. In addition, and on the heels of the devastating hunger that had previously come to afflict the already-troubled land, came an outbreak of the sleeping sickness, which invaded the shores of Lake Albert in 1909.



H. M. Duhaga II Andrea Bisereko (r. 1902-1924) enthroned

On the international level, however, the most significant of the events involving the kingdom was the coming of the First World War, in which Nyoro forces fought in Africa on the side of the British and their allies, under the charge of Prince Kosima Kabeba. In fact, the Nyoro soldiers acquitted themselves so well that, as a mark of distinction and appreciation, Duhaga II Andrea was awarded the recently-created rank of M.B.E. (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) by King George V in 1918. Throughout the war years, however, the kingdom itself continued to battle serious famine and related hardships, which added greatly to the strain placed upon the already-compromised resources of the occupied nation.



H. M. Rukirabasaija Agutamba Tito IV Winyi Gafabusa (r. 1924-1967)

In 1923, the British government finally released the great Chwa II Kabalega from his long exile abroad, and he began a slow journey back to his beloved homeland. He was met along the way by various members of the royal family, including Prince Tito Gafabusa, as well as by members of the Nyoro nobility, all of whom were sent by Duhaga II Andrea to pay their respects to the returning sovereign. Sadly, however, the aged Omukama was destined to die en route to his former kingdom, and was followed to the grave shortly thereafter by his son, Duhaga II Andrea, who passed away on March 30, 1924. These two heavy losses brought to the throne one of the most universally respected of modern African monarchs, Tito IV Winyi, who duly succeeded the almost mythical figure of his father, Chwa II Kabalega, and his deeply-revered brother, Duhaga II Andrea Bisereko, on April 12, 1924.

Tito IV Winyi is remembered fondly by his former subjects for his forward-thinking attitudes, for his deep and genuine concern for the prosperity of his kingdom, and for his efforts to guarantee the general peace and stability of the region. According to J. W. Nyakatura,

He was given the title of 'Muzahunranganda ['the one who brings back home all the clans from the foreign countries]' because he was the first king to visit other kingdoms and countries purely for friendly or business reasons and not, as of old, for the sake of waging war."

He was also the first Omukama to ever travel in an airplane, flying from Masindi to Hoima in October of 1923, thereby earning for himself the title of

"Rubaza n'enkuba" ('He who speaks with thunder'). Among the Nyoro monarchs who lived and reigned prior to the coming of the 21st century, Tito IV Winyi distinguished himself as one of the greatest of royal diplomats among the monarchs of the region, traveling to such places as Buganda, Ankole, Kigezi, and Toro in May, 1933. Indeed, avers Nyakatura, "His intentions were to get to know his fellow kings, to cause them to come together and love one another, and to break with the tradition which prohibited kings from visiting one another. Tito IV Winyi is counted as a king of peace." This keen sense of diplomacy, as well as his genuine approachability, served to make Tito IV Winyi a very popular monarch, both with his subjects, and with the British colonial authorities, who recognized his astuteness, practicality and fundamental nobility of character.

Consequently, the Bunyoro Agreement of 1933, which guaranteed the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom the full might of British military defense in time of war, as well as the maintenance and/or restoration of a number of the Omukama's royal prerogatives, was duly signed on October 23, 1933:

"AN AGREEMENT made this twenty-third day of October, 1933, between His Excellency Sir Bernard Henry Bourdillon, Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Uganda Protectorate (hereinafter called the Governor) for and on behalf of the Government of the said Protectorate of the one part and Tito Gafabusa Winyi IV, Mukama of Bunyoro..."



The modern insignia of the Order of Omujwaara Kondo, first class

Among the most significant aspects of the Bunyoro Agreement of 1933 was the recognition of the Kingdom's ancient and celebrated order of merit, called Abajwaara Kondo ("the Coronet-Wearers"), today known as the Omujwaara Kondo ("the Coronet-Wearer"):

"10. The Abajwara Kondo is recognised as an old established Order of distinction in the Obukama bwa ['Kingdom of] Bunyoro-Kitara. It is a prerogative of the Mukama to bestow the distinction of membership of this Order upon any native of the Protectorate who has rendered service of outstanding merit to the Obukama bwa Bunyoro-Kitara."

Membership in this distinguished, highly-coveted and historical order of merit is still bestowed in the 21st century by Tito IV Winyi's son, the present Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, H. M. Rukirabasaija Agutamba Solomon I Iguru Gafabusa, not only to citizens of Bunyoro-Kitara who strive to serve their homeland, but also to non-native benefactors of the Kingdom.

In 1934, and in celebration of the tenth year of Tito IV Winyi's reign, the Nyoro monarch received the rank of Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, with the insignia of this honor presented on behalf of King George V by the British Governor of Uganda, Sir Bernard Henry Bourdillon.

Roughly two decades after the signing of the Bunyoro Agreement of 1933 came the promulgation of yet another treaty between Omukama Tito IV Winyi and the British government, this one known as the Bunyoro Agreement of 1955. This treaty also maintained and reaffirmed a number of

the Nyoro monarch's privileges and entitlements, including his fully-recognized right, as a "fount of honors," to bestow the highly-prized distinction of the Abajwaara Kondo order:

"12. The Abajwarakondo is recognized as an old-established Order of distinction in the Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara. It is a prerogative of the Omukama to bestow the distinction of membership of this Order upon any native of the Protectorate who has rendered service of outstanding merit to the Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara."

It was also at this time that His Majesty R. A. Tito IV Winyi Gafabusa was awarded a British knighthood, further underlining the value of the monarch's role in helping to usher the Kingdom into the modern world. Nevertheless, the subsequent foundation of the Republic of Uganda in 1962, a scant seven years after the signing of the Agreement of 1955, although an important milestone in the history and development of the broader Ugandan polity, was sadly to pave the way for the abolition of what was arguably the very cornerstone of the life and society of the Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara, namely the institution of the monarchy itself.



The flag of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom

In 1967, President Milton Obote, a strongman brought to power in the wake of the British departure from Uganda, ruled that the various kingdoms which had once comprised the historical pillars of the now-independent republic were now no longer useful or desirable. He therefore proceeded to oust all of the traditional rulers from their respective thrones, though not from the hearts and minds of their many subjects, and it was not until the

mid-1990s that these royal personages were able once more to assume their places as fully legitimate and honored leaders of their various homelands, under the inspired and far-sighted leadership of President Yoweri Museveni.

Tito IV Winyi was sadly destined, like his great father Chwa II Kabalega, to die destitute of his throne, having retired from public life after the usurpation of his rights and prerogatives by the various functionaries of the Obote and Amin regimes. Always a visionary and a builder of bridges between peoples, what he could perhaps not foresee was the eventual recognition and enthronement of his son, His Majesty R. A. Solomon I Iguru Gafabusa as Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom in 1994, within the context of the modern Republic of Uganda. Although the story of the monarchs of Bunyoro-Kitara has often been one of extreme struggle, selfless devotion and all-too-fleeting respite, it is also a tale of hope and persistence, one which has ultimately served in the contemporary world to gather the Nyoro people once more around the figure of a deeply beloved traditional monarch.

PART II:

Babiito Royal Authority in Transition

(ca. 1850-2000 CE)

The current Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, H. M. Solomon I Iguru Gafabusa, like many other royal leaders of the traditional kingdoms of the Republic of Uganda during the last decade of the 20th century, was in 1994 reinstalled as hereditary king of the Nyoro people, his father, H. M. Sir Tito IV Winyi Gafabusa having been deposed by the government of Milton Obote in 1967. This recent return to traditional kingship, however, has brought with it nothing like the wide range of political power and direct influence that were enjoyed by the Omukama's great predecessors, but appears instead to be at least partially based on the present British model of constitutional monarchy, which accords to the sovereign the right to "preside" over a government, but not to rule directly in any meaningful

fashion. According to the present government of President Yoweri Museveni, which ushered in this return to royal traditions during the 1990s, the new role of the Omukama is primarily to serve as a living link to the historical past of the Nyoro people, a living symbol of the greatness of the ancient Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, as well as an inspiration for its people. Thus it is that today the Omukama is viewed primarily as a "cultural figure," or "traditional leader," rather than as a political participant in the decision-making processes that surround the life of the modern-day Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara.

However, this modern institutional reshaping of the role of the Omukama in contemporary Nyoro life, the product of nearly a century of the British government's hegemony in Uganda, as well as the of the recent transformation of this royal office under the Museveni government, is not merely the result of the restructuring and restriction of the secular role of the king, but also reflects the drastic changes that came about as a result of Christian missionaries' introduction of their faith into the context of Nyoro society during the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

"John Hanning Speke had been the first European visitor to Bunyoro, in 1862. He described a polity of some considerable size," writes Justin Willis, "under the rule of a Mukama, Kamurasi" (r. 1852-1869). By this time, the country had already been under the sway of the Babito dynasty of kings for several hundred years. In the late 15th century, the first Babito king, Rukidi I Mpuga had, after the breakup of the ancient Empire of Kitara, succeeded the *abakama* of the previous Bachwezi dynasty, founding a new dynasty of kings which would govern western and central Uganda as an independent political entity until the era of British hegemony in the 19th century. The socio-political landscape of East Africa has always been fraught with internecine rivalries and tensions, and repeated conflicts and border disputes with the neighboring Kingdom of Buganda colored much of the life of the Bunyoro state throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. According to Henry Ford Miriima, the Press Secretary of the present Omukama, "Buganda kings could not rest until they had expanded their kingdom. Apart from a desire for wealth originating from a large kingdom,

geography also favoured and tempted Buganda kings." Furthermore, in 1830 the region of Toro broke off from Bunyoro, forming its own independent royal splinter state, and effectively creating another of the kingdoms that are today recognized as traditional by the modern Museveni government.



A modern rendering of the arms of H. M. The Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara

In the ancient religion of the Nyoro, the god Ruhanga, who is described as "[the] Most High One, one who eats while in the skies and the bones fall, the all-seeing one, the creator who created the heavens, the earth, the hills and the valleys," was the central figure of worship. His centrality, as well as his eminence and power, were to be reflected in the office of the Omukama, or king. The government of the country, as well as worship of the various gods and divinities who were believed to control the natural and spirit worlds of the Nyoro, was placed squarely in the hands of the Omukama, who was responsible to the gods alone for the correct and proper administration of his kingdom.

The ceremonial importance of the religious role of the Omukama within Nyoro society was considerable. "Kamurasi's authority," writes Willis, "had rested at least in part on the belief that the Mukama himself possessed a fearsome power, or *mahano*, and that the well-being of the domain was bound up with regular ceremonies performed by the Mukama, or under his supervision, at the New Moon, in which the drums and spears which formed the regalia of the Mukama played a central role." It was the multi-faceted nature of his centrality that placed the Omukama in a pivotal position, both within the political and social frameworks of the state, and within the

religious hierarchy of the kingdom, thus according to him a sacrality based upon his importance in communication with and supplication of the divine spirits that governed creation.



H. M. Rukirabasaija Agutamba Chwa II Kabalega in Western dress

This is an important aspect of traditional Nyoro life, for the macrocosm of society was governed by strictly established notions of one's place in that macrocosm. "In accordance with the Nyoro philosophy of life," writes scholar A.B.T. Byaruhanga-Akiiki, "the Nyoro kings were believed to be ruling in connection with the divinely appointed line of the Babito, Bachwezi, Batembuzi and Ruhanga himself." Therefore, in the decades to come, it was this very hierarchically-oriented structure that was to be threatened and partially demolished, first by coercive and aggressive actions on the part of representatives of the British government, and shortly thereafter by the coming of Christianity to the ancient kingdom, this latter under the aegis of the Anglican CMS (Church Mission Society).



The regalia of the Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom

It was during the time of Kamurasi's son and heir, Chwa II Kabalega (r. 1870-1923), that both the political and the religious roles of the Omukama were to come under direct and relentless attack, due to the invasion of the country by agents of the British government. In 1872, with the arrival of Sir Stanley Baker in the region, Bunyoro found itself annexed to the British protectorate of Egypt: "Baker explained to Kabalega that he was the representative of the king of Egypt....[and] eventually, on May 14, 1872, Baker formally annexed [Bunyoro-] Kitara to Egypt." In the years to follow, the country would find itself increasingly dominated by British interests, despite the armed resistance of Kabalega and his followers, until in 1899 the valiant Omukama was defeated and eventually sent into exile in the Seychelles Islands.

Although Christianity had been known in Bunyoro since the time of Speke and Baker, "these were not Christian missionaries as such. The first people to formally preach Christianity in Bunyoro were Baganda evangelists. They started out in 1895 under a lay reader named Tomasi Semfuma." With the baptism in 1899 of the young Omukama Kitahimbwa (r. 1898-1902), who had replaced his exiled father Kabalega as the British-backed king of Bunyoro-Kitara, and his sister, Christianity soon began to spread throughout the country. "This was the occasion for the baptism of the first Christians in Bunyoro on the CMS [Church Missionary Society] side... The

young king and his sister had learnt the truth in exile," writes scholar A.B.T. Byaruhanga-Akiiki, "[b]oth of them were reported to be attending classes [in Christianity] regularly, and the king was spending much of his revenue to buy testaments for his people." Thus it was that the rapid Christianization of the country was to be effected using the same "top-down" model that was proving to be so effective for European colonialists in such other African nations as Rwanda, Urundi and Congo during the late 19th- and early 20th century.

The part played by the Omukama in the conversion of the Nyoro people cannot be overestimated. Chiefs loyal to Duhaga II Andrea (r. 1902-1924), Kitahimbwa's brother and successor, "realized in time that they would have to embrace the 'religion of the king.'" In fact, write scholars Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed in their *History of the Church in Africa*, "[o]f fifty-eight men appointed chiefs in 1908, 'no less than fifty-two were Christian pupils of the senior [CMS] school at Hoima.'" This demonstrates the fundamental effectiveness of a method of conversion that at first centred on the elite members of Nyoro society, for these very chiefs themselves, as new Christian believers, would in turn be responsible for the conversion of those directly beneath them in the social and political hierarchy of the Bunyoro kingdom.



The reigning Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara, H. M. R. A. Solomon Gafabusa Iguru I.

The role of the kings of Bunyoro-Kitara in the unravelling of some of the most important socio-religious skeins of their authority, however, presents a striking paradox to the modern eye, for it was indeed largely as a direct

result of his centrality in worship ceremonies designed to insure the health and well-being of the kingdom that the Omukama held sway over the hearts and minds of the people. "The king's exclusive authority was sustained by ancient myth and ritual," write Sundkler and Steed, and Elizabeth Isichei observes that "Christianity undermined the sacred office of the king... [as well as] the role of traditional religious specialists." On the other hand, Isichei recognizes that "[s]ometimes, however, they, or their children were among the first converts." Thus it can be seen that in certain cases, people at the upper levels of African society were the authors of their own loss of prestige and authority within the confines of the prevailing social structures, preferring to follow the dictates of their consciences, or the persuasive power of the missionaries, rather than to persist in following the old ways.

This casting aside of traditional Nyoro religion, in favour of the incoming Christian faith, represented an important divergence from a universally-accepted element of the Nyoro way of life. The personal prestige of the Omukama, however, was a key factor in the undoing of his own religious centrality, for as scholar John Beattie wrote of H.M. Omukama Sir Tito IV Winyi Gafabusa in 1960, "According to... myth, the present Mukama is descended in an unbroken patrilineal line from the very beginning of things," thus directly tying the physical person of the king to the very origin of creation itself.

Nevertheless, the "seeking" attitude manifested by the royal leaders of Bunyoro-Kitara in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is an interesting and genuinely admirable one, for their adoption of Christianity entailed the surrender of a great deal of the prestige and centrality that had traditionally been associated with their important role within Nyoro society. "In the nineteenth century," writes Byaruhanga-Akiiki, "Nyoro society was based on the philosophy of Ruhanga, the creator, and that of His subordinates, the Batembuzi, the Bachwezi, various spirits and the Babito, who were believed to share certain responsibilities with Ruhanga." Therefore, it is most significant that the subsequent *abakama* of Bunyoro-Kitara were to eschew this direct regal and personal connection of their dynasty with the divine ruler of creation, Ruhanga, and to opt instead to follow the teachings of

Christianity, a faith which emphasizes the essential equality of all men before God.

Despite the widespread success of the Christian missions within the kingdom, the following decades saw repeated instances of strife in Bunyoro-Kitara, largely as a result of popular resistance to British rule. In 1907 a revolt, fueled by long-simmering grievances with the Kingdom of Buganda (which had for decades been Bunyoro's chief rival within the British Protectorate of Uganda), broke out against the colonial authorities and had to be put down by force. However, beginning in 1924 with the installation of H. M. Omukama Sir Tito Winyi IV Gafabusa, father of the present Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara, an era of increased royal cooperation and détente began, and "in 1933 the Bunyoro Agreement provided the kingdom with a political status analogous to that of Buganda." Nevertheless, despite the important advances made in the field of Christian missionary activity, scholar and ethnographer John Beattie wrote in 1960 that "[t]he old religious cult, centering on spirit possession, is still strong," observing as well that "there is still in Bunyoro a widespread and underlying fear and distrust of Europeans." This observation of Beattie points to a considerable degree of ambivalence on the part of the general population of the kingdom with regard to European (i.e., British) presence and influence within its borders, and this at a point just a few short years before the foundation of the modern Republic of Uganda.

The status and prestige of the religious function of the Omukama, already reduced, or at least considerably curtailed by the ascendancy of British power in the region, as well as by the introduction of Christianity and its widespread adoption by Nyoro people of every class, were openly rejected as fundamental principles by the central Ugandan government of Milton Obote. J.W. Nyakatura writes that "[t]o further make for unity it was found necessary to abolish the kings and the traditional chiefs and to create a unitary form of government." This action on the part of the new republic sounded what many believed at that time to have been the death knell of the old system, with its traditional vision of the nature and orientation of Nyoro society. The subsequent administration of the dictator Idi Amin Dada, who

ousted Obote in 1971, did nothing to enhance the profile of the traditional kings of any of the constituent regions of Uganda, and indeed, many members of the royal families of these various kingdoms, such as those of Toro and Buganda, as well as Tito Winyi's heir, Solomon I Iguru, preferred to live abroad during the turbulent years of the Amin era.



The Omukama of Bunyoro-Kitara (right) with President Museveni of Uganda

After the ouster of Amin in 1979, the subsequent restoration of an Obote-led government and the coming of the government of President Yoweri Museveni to power in 1986, a new age of reconciliation and renewal had begun for proponents of the restoration of traditional kingship in Uganda. Traditional kings found themselves once again at the centre of Ugandan national affairs, but this time in purely ceremonial roles, rather than in the positions of political and religious authority to which their august forefathers had been accustomed. A new national constitution, ratified in 1995, recognized the importance and centrality of these kings to the life of the Ugandan nation as a whole. Section 246 of this new constitution outlined the role of the traditional kings as follows:

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the institution of traditional leader or cultural leader may exist in any area of Uganda in accordance with the culture, customs and traditions or wishes and aspirations of the people to whom it applies.

Furthermore, the newly-recognized "traditional leaders" could thenceforth openly be accorded the same "allegiance and privileges" historically considered the birth right of their royal forebears. However, conspicuous by

its absence was any mention of religious or political power within the structures of the newly-reconstituted kingdoms, for the Museveni government, while eager to enunciate its support for the soft power associated with the reintegration of the institution of traditional or cultural leaders in Uganda, was also wary of establishing any potential rivals in the realm of *realpolitik*.

PART III:

The Role of the Omukama Today

The present monarch of Bunyoro-Kitara is a reigning king, devoid of political power, but the titular head of a regional government nonetheless, as outlined in the constitution of Uganda . Among the documents that support this status are Section 8(a) of the Fifth Schedule of the Article 178 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (2005 Amendment), as well as Section 6 of Chapter 16 Article 246 of the current constitution. In addition, he was also recognized as eligible to rightfully be enthroned as king (in this ruling, Omukama was translated specifically as King) in *Civil Appeal 18/94: Prince J.D.C. Mpuga Rukidi vs. Prince Solomon Iguru and Hon. Henry Kajura and All Members of the Committee of Coronation of Prince Solomon Iguru of April 25, 1994*. Thus it is that certain of the royal rights and prerogatives of the traditional kings of Bunyoro-Kitara have been reinstated and fully recognized by the present government of the Republic of Uganda.

As has been seen in the case of the ancient Kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara, the erosion of certain aspects and appurtenances of the once multi-faceted role of the Omukama in Nyoro society has been the result of two main factors, 19th-century British political and military might in the region, and the subsequent arrival and early 20th-century spread of Christianity, initially via the Anglican Church Mission Society, throughout Uganda. These two factors effectively paved the way for the wholesale abolition of the offices of the kings by the Obote government in 1967, and it was over twenty-five

years later that the reintegration of these kings into the fabric of Ugandan society, this time as "traditional" rather than political rulers, became part of central government policy. Thus, the present king of Bunyoro-Kitara, H.M. Omukama Solomon I Iguru Gafabusa, operates in a distinctly different socio-political atmosphere than that which prevailed during the reign of his late father, H. M. Omukama Sir Tito IV Winyi Gafabusa, who enjoyed a certain limited measure of personal power and political autonomy under the British protectorate system then in force in Uganda.

Today, the Omukama's role in Ugandan society is primarily to serve as a symbol of the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, although his personal opinions about various aspects of national politics and socio-religious matters are often voiced straightforwardly and forcefully, and are frequently very influential. Thus, although his role is largely a ceremonial and symbolic one, the current Omukama does use this position of prominence to air his personal views on matters he believes to be of importance to the well-being of both his kingdom and to Uganda as a whole.



H. M. Rukirabasajja Solomon I Iguru enthroned

Therefore, where once his royal ancestors had exercised direct power of life and death over their subjects, and had held unquestioned control over key aspects of the political and religious life of the nation, today's Omukama finds that his ability to directly influence events and situations depends primarily on the prestige of his very personal connection to the collective historical heritage of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom. Although no longer "above all men" (the meaning of the honorific *'Rukirabasaija Agutamba'*) in any effective legal, cultural or constitutional sense, the present Omukama represents a vital link to the shared past of this great and historical African kingdom.

Thus, despite the substantial reductions in his direct royal power and prerogatives, diminutions which have many of their roots in the adoption of the Christian faith by his royal predecessor Omukama Kitahimbwa (and which is the very faith professed by the king himself, as well as by the majority of his subjects), H. M. Solomon Gafabusa Iguru I. continues nonetheless to play a pivotal and abiding role in the life of the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom as it moves forward into the future.

The ancient rite of enthronement, as observed for centuries by the Kingdom's rulers, includes a prayer for the health, fruitfulness, and longevity of the Omukama, which we can do no better than to reproduce here:

May God preserve our king, and may he live for long!

May he have children [and] riches

and may he die a very old man with white hair!

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