

Kigezi History Project¹

Introduction

This is an essential reference to the background of the publication of *History of Kigezi* edited by Dr Donald Denoon, 1972; with a March 1970 letter from Dr Denoon to the District Commissioner and minutes of a historical conference held the following month in Kabale.

The importance of this *History* cannot be overestimated. It combines Western academic rigour with the knowledge and enthusiasm of local historians whose knowledge and experience bridged the colonial period from clan to national independence at an optimistic post-independence time before the destruction of Uganda, firstly under Milton Obote's autocratic tribalism (to be fair the Milton Obote Foundation sponsored the conference) and secondly, and most particularly, Idi Amin, under whose leadership the pursuit of knowledge became a motivation for murder. When the study of local history had to wait until the 1990s to slowly remerge.

The *History* was published within a few months of Amin's coup d'état and before his true colours became known; when the news of the coup was treated with guarded optimism as typically expressed in the book's introduction.

Without this book our knowledge of Kigezi would be seriously less. One wonders had Makerere's project continued what other district histories would have been written. We can only be thankful that Kigezi was the first chosen.

The letter provides part of the answer as to why it was chosen first over other better documented kingdoms and districts. But a decision had to be taken, were there other factors? Because it was a mountain frontier, its reputation of 'never having had kings', influence of academic staff and students, political prompts?

2020 will be the 50th anniversary of the conference it would be excellent if a similar be organised to provide some continuity and to leave its "participants excited with their resolution and determined to exploit their efforts and work vigorously" as according to the 1970 conference's closing words.

¹ Kigezi District Archives Administration 93/C/Adm23

Letter

Letter, 16th March, 1970 from Dr Denoon, Department of History, Makerere University to the District Commissioner, Kigezi District

Dear Sir, I beg to bring to your attention, and to recommend for your approval, various related objects involving the History of Kigezi.

The Department of History at Makerere is conscious of the urgent need for a scholarly history of Uganda. Much work is available for such a composition, but more needs to be known in various crucial areas, since History research has not been conducted evenly throughout the country so far. The History of Kigezi District is especially important in this respect, since it is an area of high population and of inter-ethnic co-operation both before and during colonial times. The following arrangements have been initiated by the History Department, with a view to repairing the existing lack of Historical work in Kigezi.

Undergraduates in the Department may now offer a research paper instead of a course-work paper, for consideration of the examiners. Last year Mr Bananuka-Rukara and Mr Mateke both chose to do the research paper, and produced impressive results which will eventually be published. This year Mr Kakima and Mr Bukandema have also chosen to do the research paper. Mr Kakima will be working, with the permission of the Hon Mr Karyegesa, on a biography of Mr Karyegesa's father; Rukandema will be working on the history of Nyakishenyi area – and emphasising economic and social developments in that part of Kigezi.

However, Kigezi is also, as you doubtless know, blessed with a number of Local Historians, not professionally trained, but often very capable indeed. The Milton Obote Foundation therefore agreed to sponsor a conference of professional and local historians, and to advance research costs against the royalties to be anticipated from a History of Kigezi, to be published as soon as possible. I enclose copies of the relevant correspondence.

At present it seems likely that the following people will be involved, each of whom are expected to contribute a chapter to the final publication:

Mr Mateka, completing his work on early Bafumbira

Mr Bananuka-Rukara, working on the social and economic history of Nyakishenyi

Mr Kakiza, working on a biography of the late Mr Karyegesa
Mr Baitwababo, who is already registered as a post-graduate on the history of Mpororo
Mr Charles Kabuga (Extra-mural tutor in Kabale) on the History of Education
Mr DZ Rwahihigi (a graduate from last year) on the Batwa around Lake Bunyonyi
(Brother Peter Rukasi) on the history of Bufumbira
Mr Paulo Ngologoza, who has already published the standard work on Kigezi
Fr Geraud, of Nyarushanje, on the early clan-history of the Bakiga
Mr Rwankwanda (who already has one manuscript complete) on the history of Kayonza
Mr Karwemera (who has a joint-manuscript accepted for publication already) on the social history of Kigezi District
Mr Bisamunyu MP who also has a manuscript nearly complete, but which I have not yet seen
Mr Tum-Rujojo an undergraduate of Makerere on the economic history of modern Kigezi
The Hon Mr Karyegesa on the life and times of his father
Mr George Kanyyeihamba of the Makerere Law Department on pre-colonial legal practices
Miss Kate Perry, of Kigezi High School, on the history of the Revival Movement. She will enrol shortly as a post-graduate student at Makerere
Mr Karaaza, Mr Kikababahenda, Mr Kakondo and Mr Zirahire whose topics are not yet known.
It is proposed that the conference be held at the Rural Training Centre from 2 to 5 April, when topics will finally be allocated among participants, and financial amount made to cover the costs involved. Mr Mukombe Mpambara (whose father was a well known historical figure) has been asked to open the conference, but has not yet replied to the invitation.

This is an interesting experiment: the first time, to my knowledge, that a people of a district have attempted to compose their own history on a professional basis. I hope you will consider it favourably

Yours sincerely

Donald Denoon (signature) Lecturer, Department of History

Kigezi History Conference

Thursday, 2nd April to Sunday 5th April 1970

At Kigezi Rural Training Centre

Present

Mr Charles Kabuga, Conference Chairman, Box 96, Kabale

Mr Charles Gashumba, Conference Secretary, Box 1031, Kisoro

Mr Hab'lyalemeye, Box 16007, Kampala

Mr P Mateke, P.O. Kisoro

Mr Rujojo, Tumisiime, P.O. Box 14, Kabale

Mr Zakayo Rwandusya, Muhanga, Bukumbiri, Box 1020, Kisoro

Mr Paulo Ngologoza, P.O. Box 131, Kabale

Mr Bananuka Rukara, P. O. Mparo

Dr. Karugire, Makerere University College, Box 7062, Kampala

Dr D J Denoon, do.

Mr Festo Karwemera, Chairman National Trading Corporation, P.O. Box 150, Kabale

Mr MMR Rwankwende, P.O. Karuhinda, Kinkiizi-Kabale

Mr Karaaza, c/o Mr Festo Karwemera

Mr Samuel Kakiza, P.O. Rukungiri, Kabale

Mr AMK Rukandema, Kajumiro Nyakisenyi, P.O. Kisiizi

Miss Foibe Biteete, Kigezi High School, P.O. Box 58, Kabale

Miss KJ Parry, do.

Fr Geraud, P.O. Kisiizi, Kigezi Nyarusanje

Mr Simeon R Baitwababo, Mutolere Sec School, P.O. Box 1012, Kisoro

Mr SB Ndebesa, Customs, P.O. Karuhinda, Kayonza-Kinkiizi

Mr Jorshon Kyikabahonda, P.O. Box 90 Kabale

Bro Anthony Munyuzangabo, Mutolere Sec School, Box 1012, Kisoro

Mr E Bisamunyu, M.P. P.O. Box 52, Kabale

These were present at the Kigezi History Conference held in the Kigezi Rural Training Centre on 2nd April, 1970 which was opened by the Secretary General Kigezi, Mr Bitnguramyé at 7.15pm (Thursday).

Mr Charles Kabuga was unanimously elected the Executive Secretary Chairman

Mr Charles Hab'lyalemye Gashumba was also unanimously elected to assist Mr Kabuga as Conference Secretary and to act as translator in course of the Conference

After an extensive discussion about the 'Kikabahenda's book plan' the meeting was adjourned.

Friday 3rd April, Discussion on the Book-Treatment proposed by Mr Kikabahenda

Father Geraud proposed that the History of Kigezi should be tackled in a chronological order and each country dealt with separately

Dr Karugire asked that although there are counties, how did they come about?

Mr Ngologoza agreed with Dr Karugira that before the coming of the Europeans the boundaries of the 'Sazas' were undefined. It was the Europeans who were responsible for the drawing of the boundaries

Mr Karaaza said Ruzumbura and Kinkiizi were initially one, Rukiga separate, Bufumbira was also separate. He told the Conference that Kahaya of Ankole had influence over Ruzumbura because latter had no organised rule. He also disclosed that the Ankole incursions extended to Ruzumbura, Rukiga and Bufumbira.

Mr Ngologoza accused Pisgroves², a colonial Agricultural Officer Kigezi who wrote a pamphlet about Kigezi claiming that people in Kigezi were recent and only about 60 years old. This provoked protest from Mr Ngologoza and instigated him to write his *Kigezi n'Abantu Baamwo*.

The challenge of Mr Ngologoza which was given widespread publicity over Radio Uganda did not provoke challenge from the people of Kigezi, so most likely this officer was mistaken.

² Presumably Purseglove

Mr Ngologoza warned the meeting that members shouldn't hurry, but take their time to write a sensible book. Mr Ngologoza advised that the responsibility of writing about counties should be given to the people who come from the counties concerned.

Miss Bitete³ asked whether Counties should be treated as they now exist or as before they were split into present counties? Should we keep on referring to present names of counties or use the old names?

Mr Rwankwanda proposed that Counties should not be considered individually because in some cases their history overlap e.g. due to movements of some clans. Hence he proposed joint action in writing

Mr Hab'lyalemye argued it is hard to treat Counties individually due to economy ties and fightings they experienced

Fr Geraud thinks we can be more successful not only by interviewing old men but also inquiring into the early names of places, hills and *ebyevugo* and what they mean and therefore assess contribution

Mr Ndebesa proposed that how people came into Kigezi should be in the Book treatment plan. His proposal was taken

Dr Denoon pointed out that some of the events which happened in one part usually had an impact on other parts of Kigezi – for example *Nyabingi* and Muhumuza. So he proposed people treat and find out what happened in each county and come together before writing in a general discussion.

Mr Kikabahenda said instead of asking one person to be responsible for a country, a team of people be formed to go around Kigezi. The Conference pointed out that this would bring technical difficulties, so it was dropped.

Mr Kabuga proposed that since most members seemed to agree with the 'Kikabahenda Plan', then it be adopted and then amended. It was adopted and the Conference tried to amend it.

³ But Biteete in list of participants

Mr Nateke thinks people in Kigezi have the same origin but the difference is due to secondary migration and therefore he proposed one person to write about secondary migration.

Approved Plan: Peopling of Kigezi Small Kingdom which resulted into the formation of Sazas

Mr Rwankwanda on Kikabahenda's Treatment of the Book: To start from 1861 instead of 1912.

His amendment was taken

Mr Karugire pointed out the difference and made an addition: 1861-1912 the Europeans who came as explorers; 2nd phase of Europeans 1912-29 when they came to rule

Amendment by Mr Baitwababo: "Not the coming of the Europeans" but the "Coming of Foreigners"

Argument: Should the rule after the Baganda called indigenous? It was agreed to be "European rule using indigenous people"

Mr Baitwababo The rule after Baganda wasn't indigenous because the Bakiga were as much of European's agents as the Baganda were

Agreement: Mr Karugire was supported when he said there should be distinction between the 'Baganda Rule' and 'Bakiga Rule', he warned both were under the European rule and both agents of the Europeans

Dr Denoon warned the researchers not to indulge themselves in getting information about the administrative reforms and educational changes and progress but to find out the impact they had on the life of the indigenous people of Kigezi. He gave some examples, for example, to note the changes in social life before and after colonial rule, the cultural changes in the District and the impact of economic development on the people. This amendment was entertained by all members.

Mr Kabuga proposed that the conference divides itself into small groups according to the counties they come from. The aim of this was that each group finds out all the information according to the 'Kikabahenda Plan' and then at a general meeting all groups would meet, present what they found out and have all information co-ordinated

This proposal was strongly supported by Dr Denoon and Dr Karugire and the proposal was agreed on

The Conference asked Dr Denoon to enlighten them about what period he would wish the book to take

He told them another general meeting would be called in the last week of June, 1970 to check on the progress already made by researchers.

He then proposed that essays could be in by September 1970 so that book could be edited around February 1971. Dr Denoon confessed that this sounded ambitious but he stressed the need of this book so early

The Executive Secretary, Mr Kabuga, acting as Chairman, asked the members of the Conference to think about how they could divide themselves into groups, choose a leader and discuss the financial estimates that they thought would be enough for their research. This they were to report to the Conference on Saturday, 4th April 1970.

The meeting was adjourned.

Saturday 4th April

The following groups were formed

Ndorwa, Rukiga and Rubanda: Leader, Mr Karwemera; members, Mr Tumusiine Rujojo (Secretary), Mr Bananuka Rukara, Mr Bisamunyu, Mr Rukandama, Mr Ngorogoza, Mr Karaaza, Father Geraud, Miss Bitete, Miss Parry, Mr Kabuga

Kinkiizi: Leader, Mr Rwankwanda; members, Mr Kikabahanda (Secretary), Mr Ndebesa

Bufumbira: Leader, Mr Ruanduaya; members, Mr Mateko (Secretary), Mr Hab'lyalemye, Brother Anthony Munyuzangabo

Rujumbura: Leader, Mr SR Baitwababo; member, Mr S Kakiiza (Secretary)

It is hoped that more people will be recruited to swell the groups which have few people

Finance Estimates

Kinkiizi

3 local researchers @ 500/=	Sh 1,500
Trips to informants @ 100/=	Sh 500
Mr Kikabahanda, a resident in Kampala and with a personal car has been allowed 5 trips from Kabale to Kinkiizi @ 60/=	Sh 300
Total	Sh 2,100

Ndorwa, Kinkiizi and Rubanda

5 local researchers @ 500/=	Sh 2,500
2 researchers stationed in their own areas @ 300/=	Sh 600
Total	Sh 3,100

Bufumbira (They have asked high expenditure due to poor transport and long distances)

4 Researchers @ 1,000/=	Sh 4,000
Total	Sh 4,000

Rujumbura

2 researchers Leader 1,000/= for 2 months	Sh 1,000
200/= for food and transport	Sh 200
Another researcher 500/= per month for 2 months	Sh 1,000
Total	Sh 2,200

Total Estimates Sh 11,400

The reasons for demanding such expenses

- 1) Long distances, 2) poor means of transport, 3) lack of facilities, e.g. hotels, 4) necessity of giving tips to informants, 5) general hardships to be encountered in rural and remote areas

Points arising

Mr Karwemera rose question that the publication of this proposed book be in both English and Rukiga-Runyankore

Dr Denoon answered that the Publishers these days seem to be unwilling to have books published in vernaculars, but he promised that he would try to contact private firms.

More members like Mr Ndebesa, Mr Ngorogoza, Mr Rwankwenda and Mr Rwandusya insisted that the book should be in English and Rukiga-Runyankore versions.

Mr Kabuga interjected to introduce Mr Bisamunyu MP and an interested member in the History of Kigezi, and he supported Mr Rwankwenda that Mr Ngorogoza to say a few words concerning the conclusion of the meeting. He urged members not to despise their language and pointed out the need to leave our children our knowledge.

A motion was moved by Mr Kabuga that Mr Bisamunyu MP, an interested historian and who was willing to lend his material to the members of the Conference. The motion was carried.

Mr Bisamunyu ended his speech by thanking the Makerere staff and students to depart from what used to be alleged as an 'ivory tower' and join in strengthening the Common Man's Strategy.

The Conference ended with all participants excited with their resolution and determined to exploit their efforts and work vigorously

Mr Kabuga, the Chairman, adjourned the meeting