

Building Community Heritage Collaborations in Kagera, Tanzania

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Since 2009, research in Kagera Region of NW Tanzania has responded to successive requests by local communities to engage heritage preservation and development. These collaborative ventures began with research into the oral traditions of villages, a research initiative that arose out of local needs and was conducted by local investigators. As Katuruka village developed a clear agenda for preservation of its heritage, so too did a plan emerge for the development of a heritage tourism destination to generate income for the exhibit multiple heritage sites. Over the years the developmental program expanded to include archaeological excavations in Katuruka to expose ancient iron smelting furnaces, thus enhancing the impact of exhibits during heritage tours.

Shortly after the Katuruka initiative, community heritage projects took root in other parts of the region, the most notable of which was the restoration of Kanazi Palace—a grand edifice built by the German colonial government for its primary client among the local *Bakama* or kings. An initiative taken by the royal Hinda clan and the former sitting king, the Kanazi Palace now features a small museum that presents exhibits about the past kings and about the archaeological investigations that occurred at Kanazi Palace in 2011 and 2012. Gradually our attention turned to other important heritage sites in the region. One important site, burial estate of King Kahigi II who was the original occupant of Kanazi Palace, hosts the last remaining Buchwankwanzi house in the region. Once a common feature in highly venerated royal burial locales in former palace compounds, these specialized houses had significant ritual importance. King Kahigi's burial occurred in a traditional palace compound in Ibwera, 12 km West of Kanazi, not the European-styled palace at Kanazi. Used by Kahigi as a retreat and common residence

free from the direct gaze of German administrators, it was his natural resting place following his suicide, widely attributed to his public humiliation at the hands of the first British administrator in 1916.

The Buchwankwanzi house at Ibwera was the last intact structure of its genre in the entire region. When our team visited the site in 2011, we found the royal drums being eaten by termites and other regalia in various states of degradation. A report submitted to government and to the royal clan asked if a collaborative effort might help to preserve and curate these irreplaceable relics. The royal clan responded that it did not want the artifacts removed for safe keeping and treatment and that they would repair or replace the house to preserve them. Two years later, upon another visit to the site with a senior Haya scholar and cultural expert, we found the house unrepaired and overgrown with vines, the mud walls collapsing, and corrugated iron sheets missing from the roof. Relics formerly present were missing and the drums had been reduced to three by termite action. Upon moving the drums, out dropped the skull of Kahigi II. Knowledge of his presence within the Buchwankwanzi had been kept a well concealed secret, as otherwise knowledgeable Hinda elders remain unaware of its presence, though his father Rugomora Ibale was similarly treated—having his head removed and the skull preserved in a Buchwankwanzi. His skull is now on display at a small museum in Kamachumu to the south.

Our heritage preservation efforts thrust us into the midst of an ethical conundrum: given that we employ a collaborative approach that valorizes initiatives taken by local communities and key community members, how could we advocate the removal and preservation of these precious objects without the concurrence and cooperation of the royal clan?

This heritage dilemma arises out of the replacement of traditional values by



Christian beliefs. Before Christianity, the relics preserved in the Buchwankwanzi were held in the highest regard and we used in monthly New Moon ceremonies of renewal involving Bacwezi spirit mediums and other religious functionaries. As Christians today, the clan elders privilege their beliefs about the dangers of engaging objects within a “Bacwezi domain” over the huge historical importance of these objects. This conundrum was at last resolved when in a last minute effort we contacted the land owner and royal princess, sharing our concern and asking for her cooperation to remove the objects. Her response was immediate and unequivocal, authorizing us to remove them with her son's assistance, thanking us profusely for our assistance to resolve a long simmering frustration with her uncles and siblings over their preservation. And, so it came to pass that with the collaboration of a royal family member and the Tanzania government, the objects were removed for curation and safe-keeping until a better venue can be found for their long-term preservation and use for educational purposes.

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