

"A HISTORY OF
THE LUO-ABASUBA OF WESTERN
KENYA FROM C.A.D. 1760-1940"

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SUMMARY

This thesis is a detailed study of a group of Luo who today occupy the Lake region of South Nyanza and the two Islands of Rusinga and Mfangano. The region under study is politically known as Mbita Constituency with a total population of about 46,118 according to the 1969 population census, covering an area of about 760 square kilometres. This Luo group was not originally Luo; they were Bantu speaking people who came from all over East Africa.

Most of them came from Uganda after the death of Kabaka Junju around 1760. Some of them were professional fishermen on the Islands of Lake Victoria who extended their fishing industry into Tanzania and proceeded on to South Nyanza in Kenya.

The Luo-Abasuba land stretch along Nyanza Gulf from Ruri Bay to the Southern end of Matara Bay including the Islands of Rusinga and Mfangano. The region is quite hilly with its population being confined to the relatively flat areas. Rusinga Island is composed of a huge central hill with numerous satellites with the inhabitants living on all sides from the shore up to the lower slopes of the hills. Mfangano Island is much more rugged with lesser population than Rusinga though larger than Rusinga in size. On the mainland Lake region South Nyanza, Gembe is much more open and rolling. Whereas Kaksingri and Gwasi are rather similar in topography, however, Gwasi is rather hemmed in by mountains and rather more open.

The non-Luo groups who came and settled in these areas of the modern Rusinga, Mfangano, Gembe and Gwasi locations, became known as the Luo-Abasuba after acquiring some of the Luo practices.

After the introduction, the thesis is divided into three major parts. The three parts are arranged in chronological order. Part one, the Genesis of the Abasuba covers the period between 1700 to 1780. Part two, the Peopling of the Abasuba Land also covers the period between 1780 to 1900; and finally, the Assimilation of the Abasuba between 1850 and 1940.

The Introduction gives the summary of the procedure and methods followed during my field research. How the materials collected were put together, the places which were visited and the period taken. The major problems which faced me during my research period and how these problems were overcome.

Part one deals with the Genesis of the Abasuba. It consists of three main chapters. Chapter one deals with the Flight of the Abakunta from Uganda around 1760 after the murder of Kabaka Junju by the supporters of his brother Semakookiro. Semakookiro had not intended to have the Kabaka killed and ordered that Junju's assassins be killed. However, before the order could be carried out, the plan leaked out and some of the group which was involved in Junju's death fled to Busoga and on to the Islands of Mfangano and Rusinga. Some of them went to the mainland South Nyanza where they founded the Wagasi Community. The group of the Abasuba is commonly known as the Abakunta.

Chapter two of part one is concerned with the Northern trek of the Tanzania group, the modern Kaksingri and the Kasungu. These two groups also originated from Southern Uganda. They were professional fishermen on the Islands of Victoria. On their fishing trade they crossed the Lake to Tanzania and settled around Rieny in Tanzania. From Rieny they proceeded on to their modern home in South Nyanza next to the Abakunta from Buganda and Busoga. Since the Luganda dialect was the media of communication among the majority of fishermen

in these Islands, the Uganda groups continued to speak the language. The common language, therefore, tightened the relations between the Abakunta, Kaksingri and the Kasungu.

Chapter three, which is the last of the genesis of the Abasuba, concentrates on the Central Nyanza Splinter Groups. These non-Luo, the Waondo-Kayanja and the Kamreri came and joined the Uganda groups from Central Nyanza. The Waondo-Kayanja and the Kamreri were originally Bantu Splinter groups who had been driven from Central Nyanza by the invading Luo. They first moved to Uyoma Naya and then to South Nyanza where they settled among the Bantu groups of Uganda and Tanzania and accepted the name Abasuba.

Part two, the Central part of the ~~the~~ thesis deals with the peopling of the Abasuba Land. This part is divided into four chapters dealing with the origin and expansion of the major clans and sub-clans of the Luo-Abasuba. Chapter four concerns the peopling of Rusinga Island. It is followed by chapter five which also deals with the peopling of the Mfangano Island. Chapter six takes a different line in that it covers the conflicts on the Island which collectively become known as the Wasaki Wars. The last chapter in part three also deals with the peopling of the mainland region of South Nyanza. The four chapters in part two cover the period between 1780 and 1900.

Finally, Part three deals with the assimilation of the Abasuba by the Luo through language, marriage, trade and associations. This part which covers a period between 1850 and 1940 contains four chapters. Chapter eight concerns itself with the important associations in trade, commerce and industry which brought in some Luo influence. Chapter nine stresses the positive Luo influence on the Abasuba. Among other things, it includes the acquisition of the Luo names,

customs and other practices with specific examples. Chapter ten deals with the adoption of the Luo philosophy of life and the acceptance of Luo values. Finally, Chapter eleven completes the last phase of assimilation. It deals with the colonial factors which affected the Luo-Abasuba such as administration, religion and education. These factors eventually led to the disappearance of the Luganda dialect.