

## Buganda

Buganda, the largest of the medieval kingdoms in present-day Uganda, became an important and powerful state during the 19th century. Established in the late 14th century along the shore of Lake Victoria, it evolved around its founding kabaka (king) Kintu, who came to the region from northeast Africa. Kintu, who arrived as the leader of multiple clans, conquered the area, defeating the last indigenous ruler, Bemba Musota, to establish his new state. Kintu, however, ordered the new clans to intermarry with the indigenous people creating the Buganda ethnic group.

Thirty-six kabakas or kings followed Kintu, who mysteriously disappeared after laying Buganda's foundation. While in the early centuries the kings ruled at the mercy of the clan heads, by 1700 they gained more centralized authority over the kingdom.

During the 16th century, Buganda began 300 years of territorial expansion, annexing or conquering a number of chiefdoms and expanding from three provinces to twelve by 1890. Buganda's expansion came as a result of its military superiority over its neighbors.

Buganda is one of the numerous kingdoms that sprung up after the collapse of the vast chwezi empire, hence it is believed that it also originated from the large chwezi empire.

The kingdom got established in the north west part of lake Victoria and east of Bunyoro, make it in between lake Kyoga and lake Albert. The earliest inhabitant of this place are believed to have been the Bantu that migrated from the Congo basin, who live in the present day Busiro, Kyadondo and Mawokota. The origin of this great kingdom are not clear to historians however a number of theories have been put up.

According to the oral tradition in Buganda the first Uganda ruler was Kaita-Kintu who is widely believed to have come from side of mountain Elgon, He passed through Bugishu, Budama and Busoga finally to Buganda where he seized power from the clan headland crowned himself the head of all clans Ssaabataka.

He is said to have come with thirteen or fourteen of the present-day clans of Buganda.

According to the tradition in Bunyoro, the founder of Buganda was Kato-Kimera who came from Bunyoro. He was believed to have been a twin brother to rukidi mpuga the founder of the boot dynasty in Bunyoro. It is believed that Kato Kimera carved buganda from Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom which was on the collapse from bunyoro. he is believed to have come with five to six present day clans of Buganda.

Other traditions believed that Buganda originated from the Bantu clans that lived in the areas way back and others came from eastern Uganda . Other clans of Buganda are said to have come from ssese islands.

Buganda started as a small nucleus state comprising of only Busiro, Mawokota, and Kyadondo around the 15th century. The Uganda who inhabit this area belong to wider group of interlacustrine Bantu and form the largest Bantu grouping in Uganda. By the 17th century Buganda had expanded to cover Singo, Gomba, Butambala and it was Kabaka Katerega who captured these counties from Bunyoro.

Under kabaka Jjunju, Buganda expanded to include Buddu and Kooki which were annexed from Bunyoro.

By the half of 19th century Kabaka Mawanda captured the counties of Bulemeezi, Kyaggwe and Bugerere. Making Buganda the largest kingdom in the interlacustrine region by then.

With the help of the British Kabaka Muteesa brought in the lost counties of Buyaga and Bugangaizi and Buluri which were annexed from Bunyoro.

The kingdom of Buganda is located on the shores of Lake Victoria with in the interlacustrine region. The Baganda are believed to belong to a group of western Bantu.

The origin of the Baganda is unclear but they are mainly two theories that explain its origin i.e. the Kiganda and Bunyoro tradition theory.

According to the Kiganda theory, the founder of Buganda was Kintu who was believed to have come from the direction of mountain Elgon 1314 AD via Bugisu, Budama, Busoga and finally to the shores of Lake Victoria to present day Buganda. Around thirteen to fourteen of the present day clans are said to have come with Kintu.

Another theory says that Buganda was founded by Kato Kimera, a twin brother of Isingoma Rukidi Mpuuga who founded the Bito dynasty. About five to six clans are said to have come from Bunyoro.

Yet Buganda is one of the states that broke away after the collapse of Bunyoro Kitara Empire under the Bachwezi. Buganda started as a small state made up of Busiro, Mawokota and Kyadondo counties and later expanded to include former parts of Bunyoro and Ssesse Islands.

The expansion began around 17th century during the reign of Kateregga who expanded the boundary of Buganda to Ssinga, Kyagwe, Gomba and Butambala.

Around the 18th century Buganda waged wars of expansion against the Banyoro in which she captured Buddu which had iron. Between 1814-1831, Sekamanya annexed Bwera, Buwekula, and Koki to Buganda.

Around 19th century, the areas of Bugerere, Bulemezi were annexed to Buganda from Bunyoro when the British gave guns to Buganda who defeated all neighbors.

In the 1900 Buganda agreement, the British gave Buyaga and Bugangaizi to Buganda as a reward for their collaboration with the British in crushing Bunyoro.

## **Women of the kingdom**

Namasole

The Queen Mother of Buganda

Because of the extraordinary feat and unusual good luck of giving birth to a king, the Namasole (the formal title for the king's mother) was afforded very high respect and honor throughout the kingdom. The Namasole was given a palace of her own to live in and various chiefs to serve her. In fact the head of her chiefs was also called a katikkiro. This should not be confused with the king's katikkiro who headed the kingdom's government. Despite her numerous privileges however, the Namasole had no formal role in the governance of the kingdom. In fact since Kimera's time to that of Ssuuna II, the Namasole was not allowed to even set eyes on her son who had acceded to the throne. One of the Namasole's brothers, given the title Masimbi would go to visit the king on Namasole's behalf and return with news of the king's health etc..

An interesting point here is that whenever Masimbi went to visit the king, he would carry a shield and two spears. This was supposed to symbolize Masimbi's readiness (and hence the readiness of all the king's maternal relatives) to fight in defense of their "son" if need be to ensure that he retains the throne. Another of the Namasole's brothers, given the title Ssaabaganzi had the responsibility of consulting traditional doctors and oracles in all matters concerning the king's health to help ensure his continued well-being. The need for this is not evident since the Kabaka had his own doctors but he did it nonetheless.

The Namasole together with 9 of her sisters and 9 of her brothers formed a team that was called "Bannakazadde ba Kabaka". They used to be scattered in various parts of the kingdom and served as listening posts to try and forestall any plots on parts of civil chiefs to rebel against the king, or worse still any attempts by a prince to dethrone the king. (The backbone of an Internal Security Organization :-)).

Finally, the Namasole was not allowed to remarry. The theory was that they did not want the king to have to call another man (especially not a commoner!) his Daddy since one can ascend to the throne only when one's Daddy is dead. Also they did not want the king to have brothers who were not of the royal lineage which would tend to confuse future successions. Hence the saying "Kabaka taddwaako mukopi" - meaning that the king cannot have a commoner for a sibling. Mutesa II was the first king to dispense with this custom when he gave permission for his mother to remarry. Even then, this led to considerable uproar in the kingdom. To quell this, the official duties of the Namasole were transferred from Lady Namaganda to her older sister, Perepetwa Nnaabaweesi.

### **Dress Cord**

For the women, the Gomesi has two buttons on the left side of the neckline

Did you know?

In every Ugandan society, the Gomesi is worn at most functions. It is the trademark of many ethnic groups in Uganda.

The history of 'Gomesi' dress in Uganda is obscure. The exact date when the first Gomesi was sewn, the tailor who made it and the first person to wear it has remained a mystery. Nonetheless, there are two versions about the advent of a Gomesi to Uganda. The first version claims that the Gomesi was first sewn by an Asian (Indian/Goan) tailor called Milagres Gomez who was residing around Mengo Hill, near Kampala Township in 1905 or on Bombo Road near Gayaza village. This version adds that Gomesi was the first school uniform for the Gayaza Junior School and was made by Gomez who was asked by Miss Freda Allen, the first headmistress of the school, to sew them school uniform. Gayaza Junior School opened on January 18, 1905 with four girls who had previously been pupils at Namirembe Girls' Junior School, the first girl's school in Uganda. Namirembe Girls' Junior School had opened in 1898 but closed in late 1904 to pave way for the expansion work at Namirembe Hill.

The four pioneers were daughters of some Buganda chiefs. The remainders of the pupils were absorbed in the first mixed school in the country which was built at Kampala Hill in 1902 below the Namirembe Hill, historical records indicate.

The second version claims that the Gomesi was first made by an 'India/Goan' tailor called Fernando Gomez in the 1920's or thereafter who resided along Bombo Road near Gayaza village. This version also asserts that Miss Allen, the headmistress of Gayaza Junior School, asked Gomez to make uniforms for the school. And later, the dress became a popular wear for women in Buganda and beyond.

For the men, The traditional kanzu has maroon embroidery around the collar, abdomen, and sleeves. It also draws from the Arab roots.

#### References

- <https://buganda.or.ug/namasole>
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