

Lost kingdom of Nabongo Mumia

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Nabongo Mumia is one of the most famous kingdoms in East Africa, after the Baganda of Uganda.

Although he now resides in history books, his kingdom in ruins, his influence is still strong. Mumias town is named after him while his faith Islam is still practiced in a Christian neighbourhood.

People in the area used to walk many kilometres from South Wanga village in Mumias district to sell wares at Nabongo Market. They then paid dues to attendants at the market a tribute to the lost kingdom.

The Mumias County Council had nothing to do with the weekly Nabongo Market. It did not collect dues there. This was paid out to known descendants of Nabongo Mumia, the famous king of the Luhya.

A year before the birth of Nabongo, Arab merchants settled around Mumias in 1850, turning it into a trading centre. Mumias, the capital of Hanga (Wanga) tribe, was the home of

King Mumia.

He wielded a lot of power and charted the course of the people. Arabs and missionaries consulted him before pitching tent. But Mumia was biased against Christians, hence the high number of Muslims among the Wanga.

Until his death in 1949, at 100 years, he kept largely to himself. He distrusted white missionaries, hence his people got very little education. Today, the great king of the Abaluhya lies in an unmarked grave outside the town, in a thicket his family members bar visitors from reaching.

At the time of his death, his kingdom had been humbled. He was a broken man, his glory lost. He blamed white settlers for collapse of the kingdom. So deeply did he hate them that he refused to send his children to their schools. Muslim influence within his court dispelled Christianity.

With the laying of the railway through Kisumu, Nabongo became isolated. Arabs no longer needed him to cross to Uganda as trade in slavery and ivory had ceased. The Arabs started emigrating.

The Nabongo was never flashy. He did not build a stone palace preferring a cluster of mud houses. Today, very few people in Mumias care about the town's history.

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