

KITARA TRADITION

The Empire of Kitara (also known as Bachwezi, Bacwezi, or Chwezi Empire) is a strong part of oral tradition in the area of the Great Lakes of Africa, including the modern countries of Uganda, northern Tanzania, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

In the oral tradition, Kitara was a kingdom which, at the height of its power in the fourteenth and fifteenth ...centuries, included much of Uganda, northern Tanzania and eastern Congo (DRC), ruled by a dynasty known as the Bachwezi (or Chwezi) who were the successors of the Batembuzi Dynasty.

According to the story, the Kitara Empire lasted until the 16th century, when it was invaded by Luo people, who came from the South of the present-day Sudan and established the kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara. Evidence suggests that the clans of Buganda, for instance, have their own history (based on oral tradition) that is exclusive of the history of the Kingdom of Buganda.

1. BATEMBUZI AND BACHWEZI DYNASTIES

The Empire of Kitara was founded by the Batembuzi Dynasty, who was succeeded by Bachwezi Dynasty. Little is known about the Batembuzi and Bachwezi, or when they established Kitara. Much of what is known is based on mythology and oral tradition. A number of current Great Lakes kingdoms claim inheritance from the ancient Kitara Empire, ruled by a dynasty known as the Bachwezi. The reign of the Bachwezi is shrouded in mystery and legend, so much so that many traditional gods in Toro, Bunyoro and Buganda have names associated with the Bachwezi kings. The Bachwezi are often associated with great earthwork sites found in western Uganda. Archaeological discoveries made at Bigo bya Mugenyi, the capital of the empire, and Ntusi located in present day Mubende District of Uganda, reveal rich deposits of an urban centre which represented a highly organized society.

2. BABIITO DYNASTY

The Kitara Empire finally broke up during the 16th century with the advent of the invading Luo people from the north. A Luo clan known as the Biito, led by a Chief called Labongo, invaded Bunyoro, the northernmost province of Kitara, from where the empire was ruled. The Luo had migrated from present-day Sudan, and would later settle large areas of northern Uganda, and around the north-eastern shores of Lake Victoria. Labongo established his rule in what was now Bunyoro-Kitara, becoming Isingoma Mpuga Rukidi, the first in line of the Babiito kings which provided the dynasties that also ruled in the kingdoms of Toro, Kooki, and some chiefdoms of Busoga. To the south of Bunyoro, the rest of the Kitara was superseded by the development of several kingdoms located within, or across, the span of several present-day national boundaries, including Ankole mainly in Uganda, Karagwe and Kyamutwara in Tanzania, and the kingdoms of Burundi and Rwanda.

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