



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Phoenix from the Ashes: Rediscovery of the Lost Lukiiko  
Archives

Michael W. Tuck, John A. Rowe

History in Africa, Volume 32, 2005, pp. 403-414 (Article)

Published by Cambridge University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2005.0025>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/187896>

# PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES: REDISCOVERY OF THE LOST LUKIIKO ARCHIVES

---

MICHAEL W. TUCK  
NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

JOHN A. ROWE  
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

## I

On 24 May 1966 the 500-year-old kingdom of Buganda came to an end. That was the day that Prime Minister Obote sent Colonel Idi Amin to attack the Mengo palace of Kabaka Frederick Mutesa, who was also the President of Uganda. A 120-man bodyguard defended the *Kabaka*; Amin had automatic and heavy weapons. Nevertheless, Obote was much annoyed that the palace held out against Amin's troops. An audience watched the battle from nearby hilltops, where expatriates and others brought out folding chairs, until a mid-afternoon thunderstorm sent everyone scurrying for cover. The *Kabaka* used this interruption to scale the rear wall of Mengo palace, where he hailed a passing taxicab and set off for Burundi and ultimately exile in London.<sup>1</sup> Obote divided Buganda into two separate districts (East Mengo and West Mengo), promoted Amin, and gave him the palace as a barracks for his "paratroop" battalion, and more importantly also gave him Buganda's legislative hall—the *Bulange*—to become Amin's national military headquarters.

The casualties in the "battle of Mengo" were certainly few in number compared to the destruction Amin would wreak after his coup in 1971. But one invisible casualty of the Bulange occupation was especially significant for historians. The Bulange was not only the seat of the Lukiiko, the Ganda legislature, it was also the storage building for the Buganda government archives, which went back to the 1890s, and were still well

<sup>1</sup>M. Crawford Young, "The Obote Revolution," *Africa Report* (June 1966). The Kabaka of Buganda, *Desecration of My Kingdom* (London, 1967), 9-16.

organized and maintained in 1956-58 when Peter Gutkind made use of them for his doctoral research.<sup>2</sup> By 1963 storage space was becoming scarce when Rowe made several visits to Shaykh Ali Kulumba, the Speaker of the Lukiiko.<sup>3</sup> Shaykh Kulumba opened up cupboards and closets packed with archival folders from floor to ceiling. Clearly the archives were still being preserved, but organization and access had suffered. Three years later, when Amin occupied the Bulange, he simply destroyed the entire archive—the historical record of sixty years of Buganda government ceased to exist.<sup>4</sup>

While Amin's destructive career in the 1960s and 1970s is in a class by itself, it was not he who initiated the removal and elimination of Uganda historical documents. That honor belongs to the departing British colonial administration. In February 1962, eight months before independence, three Land Rovers full of confidential records dating back to 1900 were removed from the Entebbe Secretariat Archives and "sent for cleaning:" i.e., they were dumped into Lake Victoria.<sup>5</sup> At about the same time, the Provincial Archives at Mbale in the Eastern Province were nearly all burned over a three-day period when the PC ordered the files destroyed in advance of "internal self-government." Documents in the Jinja Archives prior to 1930 were removed; some were burned, others transferred to Entebbe. The Mbale District Archives were not attacked until September, when the DC, reportedly under direct orders of the Deputy Governor, burned as much as three-quarters of the records, dating as far back as 1910. The exception to this wholesale destruction in the Eastern Province was a lone district archive, where the DC's wife had spent months reorganizing the records and would not hear of anyone's touching them.<sup>6</sup> Thus, when Amin destroyed the Buganda government archives in 1966, he could be said to be emulating recent British practice.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Gutkind, *The Royal Capital of Buganda* (Hague, 1963). See, for example, reference notes on pages 20, 26, and 28, and for the Lukiiko of the 1920s, 57, 71, and 72, among others.

<sup>3</sup>18 September 1963; 7 November 1963; 30 May 1964; 5 June 1964.

<sup>4</sup>When the Tanzanian Defence Force liberated Kampala in 1979 they found a sign at the Bulange entrance on which Amin signaled his attitude: "NO ADMITTANCE TO POLITICIANS AND OTHER DISREPUTABLES" (Rowe, personal observation).

<sup>5</sup>Personal information from Martin Sebugwawo, acting archivist, ESA, 1963.

<sup>6</sup>The surviving archive was reportedly at Soroti; personal communication to Rowe from Michael Twaddle, although any errors are the responsibility of Rowe.

## II

What we have discovered (and in one case saved from destruction) are several years of records from the meetings of the Lukiiko.<sup>7</sup> Most sources describe the Lukiiko as an African parliament, but the first thing these records show is how incomplete that description is. The Lukiiko had been an informal body in the precolonial era, advising the Kabaka, the Ganda monarch.<sup>8</sup> However, a 1900 treaty between the Baganda and the British established (among other things) the Lukiiko as a legislature to pass laws that applied only to the Baganda. The Lukiiko also served as the supreme court in the native court system. It continued under the British to have the informal role of advising the ruler, and in the early twentieth century the British resident.<sup>9</sup>

Since it was the group of senior chiefs and landowners, British officials came to the Lukiiko to communicate their plans and policies, and to seek help in implementing these, even when that was outside the normal legislative or judicial functions of the body. The Lukiiko was particularly important because of the relative autonomy enjoyed by the Baganda. The Kabaka continued to rule over his subjects, and the Lukiiko passed laws to which the Baganda were subject, a system that was eventually challenged by the British administration in Uganda but ultimately upheld by a regional court of appeal.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond the formal roles of the Lukiiko, these records present in stunning detail the actual operation of this African government body. We know of no other source like this from this time period for any area of Africa. To add to the importance of the Lukiiko, not only did it have the roles of legislature, court of appeal, and advisory body, but during the period of these records the Kabaka was a minor under a regency of officials who were *ex officio* senior members of the Lukiiko, so the Lukiiko had a great deal of influence in how the kingdom was administered, and how colonial directives were to be carried out. Having these records helps us to establish exactly how power and administration were exercised in Buganda under the regents. They and the Lukiiko had a major hand in all of the important work of the early twentieth century, which was a time of fundamental restructuring in Buganda of the economy and systems of law and politics.

<sup>7</sup>In the modern orthography the spelling is Lukiiko. Some sources use the older spelling of Lukiko, which we retain in quoted material.

<sup>8</sup>Edwin Scott Haydon, *Law and Justice in Buganda* (London, 1960), 9-10.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 21-22.

The records we found and copied begin in 1894-96, jump to 1901 and continue to 1909, and then restart in 1914 and extend to November 1917, although with some breaks in the sequence that will be described below. Different parts of the records are located in several different places, as detailed in the table. Currently the authors are the only ones who have copies of all parts.

DATES OF RECORDS	LOCATION
June 3, 1901 to Dec. 8, 1902 (Mill Hill Records)	Nsambya Diaries, Mill Hill Archives, London
Oct. 25, 1901 to June 18 1903 (Book 11) July 6, 1903 to April 29, 1904 (Book 16) June 17, 1904 to 13 October 1905 also an insertion of May 30, 1904 (Book 14) (Mill Hill Records)	Lukiiko Record books, Box "UGA 9", Mill Hill Archives, London
June 22, 1903 to July 2 1903 (Mill Hill Records)	Book C, Box "UGA 9", Mill Hill Archives, London
1906: March 2 to June 27; 10 & 13 August; 28 & 30 November; Dec. 3-Dec. 14. (Mill Hill Records)	Archives at the Bishop's Office, Jinja
July 9 1895; May 15 1905 to Sept. 27 1909; April 1914 to Nov. 1917 (MISR Records)	Personal possession of authors, Ganda Lukiiko in Kampala, Makerere University Library, and other scholars

The first portion of the Lukiiko records to come to our notice is the latest in the series, stretching from 1905 to 1917. We will refer to them as the MISR records, because they were acquired at the Makerere Institute for Social Research, or MISR, at Makerere University, Kampala, which was formerly the East African Institute for Social Research (EAISR). We know only the end of the story of how they came to MISR, and a few pieces of their early history. How the records were recorded in the Lukiiko is unclear. In the late 1890s two people, a Muganda and a European,

reportedly took minutes at the Lukiiko.<sup>11</sup> We know that minutes of Lukiiko meetings and copies of correspondence were kept in Luganda and stored in the Bulange. At MISR a project in the mid-1950s helped to save them. Led by Lloyd Fallers, the director of the Institute and a driving force behind much scholarship on Uganda, student assistants from MISR working from the records at the Bulange, translated them from Luganda into English, and wrote the translations in 13 notebooks and 7 carbon copies which were then stored at MISR.<sup>12</sup>

These notebooks were the standard anthropological field notebooks used by all Institute researchers for recording interviews. Under Institute leaders like Audrey Richards and Lloyd Fallers, it was customary for visiting researchers to remove the top copy of their notes, leaving the carbon behind at the Institute as a permanent record. Martin Southwold's fieldwork of 1953-55 was an example of this kind of preservation, as were Peter Gutkind's fieldnotes and Audrey Richard's "Kisozi Village Papers." When Rowe surveyed the Institute basement archives early in 1963, he found them to consist of collected field notes; translations such as Apolo Kagwa's "Basekabaka be Buganda/The Former Kings of Buganda," translated by Simon Musoke; and, in a separate file designated "Buganda," the 13 notebooks and 7 carbons labeled "Lukiiko translations, 1904-1918." All these documents were stored in several large metal file cabinets.

Returning to Makerere in 1968-69, Rowe remembered the Lukiiko translations, and in view of Amin's complete destruction of the Bulange archives two years earlier, he realized that the MISR documents might be the only remaining remnant of the original archives. Rowe decided to make a typed "insurance copy" of the MISR Lukiiko translations, which was completed by the 1 July 1969, shortly before his return to Northwestern University. This proved fortuitous, for when he next returned to MISR in July 1979, two months after Amin had been driven out of Kampala by the Tanzanian army, he discovered that the MISR archives had vanished, metal file cabinets and all. Field notes, translations, dissertation research and Lukiiko records were no more. This was an event unfortu-

<sup>11</sup>D.A. Low, "The Making and Implementation of the Uganda Agreement of 1900: in D. Anthony Low and R. Cranford Pratt, *Buganda and British Overrule, 1900-1955: Two Studies* (London, 1960), 128.

<sup>12</sup>The translators themselves were Makerere students: one person translated Notebook 1, a second translated Notebooks 2-5, and a third, Mr. J.M. Musoke, the son of Simon Musoke, who was a senior translator and Research Assistant at EAIRS, translated the eight remaining notebooks and 1 carbon copy, up to 21 February 1918. The additional carbon copy, which extended the record three months beyond November 1917, was missed in Rowe's typescript copy and no longer exists.

nately not unusual in the chaos of the Amin years, when papers, books, and furnishings were regularly taken from libraries, archives, and government buildings. But Rowe still had his typescript copy.

He shared that copy with scholars working on Ganda history and belatedly in April 2003—at the urging of graduate students Rhiannon Stephens and Neil Kodesh—he deposited one copy at Northwestern University Library, another at the Center for Research Libraries, Chicago, and through Africana Curator David Easterbrook at Northwestern, wrote to Makerere University Library offering additional copies. Meanwhile, Holly Hanson, who had been a recipient of a Rowe Lukiiko copy to aid her work on Ganda land tenure issues, returned to Makerere in July 2003. Discovering the loss of the MISR archives, she called to the attention of the Ganda Katikkiro Joseph Ssemwogerere the existence of her copy of the Lukiiko translations, which she photocopied and presented to him at a public ceremony in the restored Bulange building. Hanson gave full credit to Rowe for saving the records. She went on to say: “I am sure Buganda’s kingdom’s assets, property and data were ransacked during the past wars and such records could be a treasure to the monarchy.”<sup>13</sup> The Katikkiro promised that copies of the Lukiiko records would be bound and given to the Kabaka, the Lukiiko and Makerere University. Hanson’s personal intervention thus publicized the value of the MISR Lukiiko records and saved time-consuming correspondence and negotiation with Makerere authorities.

### III

The story of the earlier portion of the records is less dramatic, but they are no less important since they deal with the establishment and first years of functioning of the Lukiiko in its formal incarnation under British overrule. The earlier records evidently were never at the Bulange, or at least had disappeared by the 1950s.<sup>14</sup> At least one scholar knew of the existence of portions of them: Michael Twaddle cited notes of Lukiiko proceedings from the diary of the Nsambya station of the Mill Hill missionaries.<sup>15</sup> That reference led Tuck in 2001 to the archives of the Mill Hill Fathers, a Catholic missionary group formally known as the St. Joseph’s Foreign Missionary Society, at St. Joseph’s College in Mill Hill,

<sup>13</sup>*The New Vision* (Kampala), 30 June 2003.

<sup>14</sup>Low, “Uganda Agreement,” 128.

<sup>15</sup>Michael Twaddle, “The Ending of Slavery in Buganda” in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, eds. *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1988), 138-39.

north London.<sup>16</sup> What he eventually found was not just the Nsambya Diary notes, but several years of Lukiiko records kept in separate registers, stored in a box of unrelated material. During a subsequent research trip to Uganda, while seeking some other Mill Hill records he found notes on dates from 1906 in the archives of the Catholic Bishop's office, Jinja. Given their provenance, we call these the Mill Hill records. The table above can help explain where particular dates are found.

From information within the records, it emerges that they came into being because the Mill Hill fathers sent a scribe named Petero, presumably a Ganda convert of theirs, to Lukiiko meetings to record what occurred. Whether he took notes in English, or in Luganda, which was later translated, is not known. In either case members of the mission then recorded the proceedings in the mission diary at Nsambya, their headquarters in Kampala, the capital. The Lukiiko notes are interspersed among the other entries in the diaries, and are spread among the twelve books of the diary held in London.<sup>17</sup> Later the notes were written in three books dedicated solely to the Lukiiko proceedings.

At some points the same notes appear in the diary and in the Lukiiko books, in exactly the same form, so there seemed to be no editing—at that stage at any rate. The three books containing the Lukiiko proceedings are actually British diaries or appointment books from 1900, and the proceedings were entered chronologically, ignoring the dating in the books.<sup>18</sup> They were labeled Books 11, 16, and 14, presumably by a later archivist. Some dates from 1903 missing from the main three registers can be found in Book C in the same box.

The Mill Hill records from 1906 in Jinja are slightly different. Discovered in a file in the small archives held at the Bishop's office, these take the form of newsletters written at Nsambya and circulated to the different Mill Hill mission stations, mainly in eastern Uganda.<sup>19</sup> They adhere to the

<sup>16</sup>Research at the Mill Hill archives was funded by a Bernadotte E. Schmitt grant from the American Historical Association, to whom we offer thanks. Many thanks also must go to the archivist and administrators at Mill Hill for allowing access to their records. For more about the Mill Hill mission and its personnel see H.P. Gale, *Uganda and the Mill Hill Fathers* (London, 1959). Tuck would also like to thank the students in his historical methods course who helped him work through the sources.

<sup>17</sup>The diaries can be found in the box labeled: UGA-Box 5, "Vicariate of the Upper Nile, 1901-1902 Nsambya Diary, Father Thomas Matthews, 12 books," in the archives at Mill Hill.

<sup>18</sup>They are in UGA-Box 9.

<sup>19</sup>They are in the file marked "History IV 1904-1906" at the Catholic Bishop's office, Rubaga Diocese, Jinja, Uganda.



same form as the records found in London, not surprising since Fr. Thomas Matthews who wrote most of the other Mill Hill entries, wrote them as well. Tuck was able to make copies of almost all the Mill Hill records, and he and Rowe are currently arranging to have these transferred to Uganda.

#### IV

Reading through all the surviving records, one is struck by the number of potential research projects they make possible, starting with a history of the Lukiiko itself. There has not been much written about this important group. Low wrote the only article published on the Lukiiko, which was a brief analysis of the membership of the body in 1902.<sup>20</sup> In that article he noted that no one had yet written a history of the Lukiiko. With these records, along with the rich Ganda historiography described elsewhere, that is now possible.<sup>21</sup>

The records are especially useful because they cover such a critical time for Buganda, especially with a minor Kabaka, as mentioned above, and also lend much insight into the professional lives of the regents Apolo Kagwa and Stanislaus Mugwanya, as well as the relationship between the British and the Baganda. Whereas legally the British had to approve all laws or resolutions, what we see is a give-and-take. While there were certainly times when the British resident came to the Lukiiko trying to force through some issue or actions, we also see times when the Ganda stood up to him, and either deflected or derailed his plans. We also see how the Lukiiko responded to other important events of the time such as World War I, outbreaks of smallpox and plague, and the introduction of cotton as a cash crop. More seemingly mundane administrative matters like the awarding of land titles and the functioning of chiefships are clearly detailed. Outside of governance, we see the Lukiiko ruling on the issue of heirs and other matters relating to clans, and also mediating disputes between individuals over business and personal matters. Whereas the records are mainly the deliberations and correspondence of elites, they also capture concerns, actions, and sometimes the words of common people as well. Tuck has used them for essays on forest history, slavery, and

<sup>20</sup>Anthony Low "The Composition of the Buganda Lukiko in 1902," *Uganda Journal* 23(1959), 64-68.

<sup>21</sup>For more on sources for Ganda history see John A. Rowe, "Myth, Memoir and Moral Admonition: Luganda Historical Writing 1893-1969," *Uganda Journal* 33(1969), 17-40, 217-19.

social conditions in the early colonial period. Holly Hanson relied on the later series in her new book on the ties of power in Buganda.<sup>22</sup>

As with any other source, these records have their limitations. What is most clear is the detail and depth of the MISR records, while the Mill Hill records are but a brief summary. Factually the Mill Hill records contain much data, but they lack the richness of cultural flavor one gets from the MISR records. Since there is some overlap in the different records we can make comparisons between them. For example, here are the notes on one case from the two sources:

From the Mill Hill Records:  
15 May 1905

A baptized Cath. man was accused by his wife to have left him 6 years ago. Lukiko said, the man had to give his wife a present of 2 1/2 Rs, but also to pay 9 Rs tax, for in past years he escaped tax by calling himself an unmarried man, although he had a wife. The woman applied for divorce, which was refused.

From the MISR Records:  
15.5.1905

There has been a case brought up by a woman Mangadalena Yabun-jagaza against her husband Tanansi Kitagana. Mangadalena pleaded that her husband deserted her for 2 "bisiibo" [sic]. She took that matter to the Europeans who judged the case in her favour and awarded her to be given a compensation of 2 rupees and to give her brother 3 rupees. (brother-in-law). After paying the compensation the husband deserted again for 9 "bisiibo" [sic]. She therefore now wants to be separated because obviously he does no longer love her and she also does not love him. Then the Lukiiko asked Om. Kisiryé (witness and chief) he supported the woman. The husband pleaded that he deserted her because he had gone on trade to get money to pay a big debt. The Lukiiko asked him how Mugwanya had judged the case. He replied that he lost it but Mugwanya ordered them to go back and reconcile [sic] but his wife went to the Katikiro instead. He therefore caught her and beat her. The Lukiiko judged the case in favour [sic] of the woman. They told the husband to give his wife a compensation of 2 1/2 rupees and they were told to go

<sup>22</sup>Holly Elisabeth Hanson, *Landed Obligation: The Practice of Power in Buganda* (Portsmouth, NH, 2003).

back in their home and live peacefully. Kitayana [sic] was also told to tax 2 rupees because he had never paid it. (The whole case is written in Mugwanya's Case register).

An analysis of the Mill Hill sources shows limitations in other ways. There were some topics about which they had greater interest, and therefore were more likely to record in greater detail. Among these were anything having to do with religion, including questions of the denomination of chiefs, and the land grants given to individuals and to the missions. Religion came through in other ways as well, such as their apparent interest in any Catholics sentenced to death, so that the priests could administer last rites. That said, it does not seem that they have left out topics, but only that they described some of them briefly. It is good for one who uses the sources to be aware of how their provenance has affected the content, but even with those limitations they remain extremely rich sources, with virtually nothing else comparable for the time they cover.

In the MISR records some years are better than others. 1905 is very good, with complete notes and letters. For 1906 there are only very brief notes, with some entries just a sentence or two, and various dates are skipped. They also record "no events" for several dates. We know from the Mill Hill records that the Lukiiko did meet on some of the missing dates and conduct business, so there is a discrepancy. 1907 is better, but 1908 contains mostly letters, and few minutes, and 1909 has records for only one meeting a month, which is an unlikely meeting schedule based on the other years. As the records move to 1914 they get better, with very detailed notes from September to December in particular. For 1915 there are good notes of Lukiiko discussions for most of the year, but few court cases and nothing from November and December. The good notes from 1916 seem to cover only the first half of the year. The records finish with strong minutes in 1917, omitting only December.

Sometimes the Lukiiko records downplay or minimize a serious issue, and so they cannot be used in isolation. For example, on 28 April 1908 the following letter was sent from Kisingiri, one of the three regents, to Mugwanya, another regent who headed the Catholic party: "Greetings. You were called to appear before the Lukiiko of the kingdom of Buganda at 9 o'clock on charges of fighting in the Lukiiko. You did not come at the appointed time. You must now come quickly." From this spare document one might not guess that the rivalry between Apolo Kagwa, the Protestant leader, and Stanislaus Mugwanya had finally erupted on the floor of the assembly into what came to be called "a wrestling match" between the two big men, and was celebrated in local bars and drinking

parties by a popular song: “Kanjogere byendaba, Katikiro yamega Mugwanya ekyabalwanyisa z’empapula” (“Let me speak of what I see, Katikiro threw Mugwanya down and what made them fight were the papers.”).<sup>23</sup>

In fact, Sir Apolo did not throw Mugwanya, rather the reverse happened. Infuriated by Kagwa’s removing Mugwanya’s speaking notes from the table, and calling a recess, Mugwanya seized Kagwa by his lapels and shook him while several of Mugwanya’s Catholic followers slapped the Lukiiko clerk, who was a Kagwa man, and tore his clothes. The British Governor was called upon as a peacemaker; Mugwanya was fined for assault and Kagwa was advised to curb his highhanded management of Lukiiko business.<sup>24</sup> It might seem like a storm in a teacup, but in a chiefly group that valued dignity and prestige (*ekitiibwa*), departures from accepted behavior were regarded as shocking, and probably indicators of serious underlying problems.

It was disappointing to discover the five-year gap between April 1909 and October 1914 in the MISR records, which the translators noted “had not been traced” in the 1950s. With this example in mind, we turned to a close examination of Apolo Kagwa’s personal papers for the 1909-1914 gap in the Lukiiko records to see if they could provide a meaningful substitute for the missing years. But regrettably, the Kagwa correspondence, while relating general concerns, particularly the drive to raise money for the new Namirembe Cathedral, proved to be too personal and narrowly focused to serve that purpose.

## V

What we have described in the Ganda Lukiiko records is obviously an essential source for the early history of Uganda. In fact, it is accurate to say that no one doing research on early twentieth-century Uganda can ignore this source. We have detailed the content of the sources and suggested some research topics to which they can contribute, but they would also be of interest to scholars exploring issues of governance and administration in the early colonial period. Furthermore, with the re-establishment of the kingdoms in Uganda, there is renewed interest within the country into the history and culture of Ganda institutions like the Luki-

<sup>23</sup>The song was sung for Rowe by Semu Kakoma on 30 March 1964 at Kakiri in Busiro country, Uganda.

<sup>24</sup>Kagwa Papers, correspondence, Box A, CA70-74. Makerere University Library archives room.

iko, and the Baganda themselves prize these sources as a link to their past. Beyond describing the records, the story we have told also provides an illustration of the fragility of sources in Africa, and the role that scholars can play uncovering and preserving them.

We hope that, for everyone who is concerned about the survival of sources in Africa, the story of the Lukiiko records provides some inspiration about how sources can still be discovered in European archives, and sometimes among our own fieldnotes. The Lukiiko records also contain hints about other sources. In the quote above there is reference to “Mugwanya’s Case register.” Stanislaus Mugwanya was the *omulamuzi* or Chief Justice, and he kept notes on the cases he judged. No other historian seems to have used these, and it is likely they do not survive, but it would be worthwhile to try to track them down in case they do. A final point we wish to make is about the vital need to restore copies of archival records to parts of the continent ravaged by war and unrest. This is a call to other researchers, especially people who did work in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, to see if they have things that can usefully be returned to libraries and archives in Africa.