

Nyeberekera -- Bwinamoki

This is not on tape and the only record is there notes.

The name of the whole area is Nyaberekera, the rolling hills and plains around there. The tall rocks themselves are called Bwinamoki.

G.P.S. reading 702721 9795258. alt. 1659 meters. rock at 36 degrees, 300 meters.

The landscape is distinctive here, very open but not exactly plains because it is rolling hills, there are very few features on the landscape except for these occasional rocky outcroppings that stick up so clearly. They are like kopjes I guess. Bwinamoki itself can be seen from a very long distance off and is a bit pile of balances rocks, huge rocks. It is like a needle sticking out above everything else and can be seen from a far distance.

They said that the Isenye used to climb up on top of Bwinamoki to scour the horizon for signs of raiding parties coming. And when you get up on the rocks you can see for a long distance because the land is so open. You look down toward the Grumeti river valleys and all its tributaries. It seemed that one was quite close. They said there were lots of spring up in the rocks and that water was not usually a problem.

Near to Bwinamoki at its base was a large tree which they said that when they were there in 1985 was a huge spreading tree but had had all the large branches loped off for firewood by the nearby Kuria. This is an omorogoro tree and was where the elders of old Nyeberekera used to sit and play bao and have meetings. They did not know where the site of the grave of Shanyangi is because he was killed on the tree so when they come to give offerings to him they find one of those trees like the one he was killed on mlangari and do the offererings there, just somewhere at the base of Bwinamoki but not up in the rocks or at any particular place.

[NYEBEREKERA; TREES; PROPHETS]

Kuherana -- this is what kusengera is in Kiishenyi. They go to Bwinamoki to herana for the prophet Shanyangi. They bring a white, male goat to kill and eat. Both men and women come and they pray and eat and then leave. When the propitiate the Risambwa they say that we are another generation of your people, not those who killed you so have mercy on us and help us.

[EMISAMBWA/RITUAL]

In 1985 there was a huge drought in Issenye, all of the spring dried up there and they are usually really good springs. So they went "kupiga ramli" or to a diviner in Ngoreme to find out what they should do. He said that their mkubwa, Shanyangi wanted them to come and do offerings at his grave, that they hadn't done it for a long time and had forgotten him. They think that at least 20 years had gone by since anyone had been back, some agreed that it must have been in the 1940s when they last went. It was the Abasanduka or Abamaina who last went in the colonial period. Shanyangi was not a rainmaker so it is interesting that they should have gone there to pray for rain.

The day we went they did not take anything to greet him with, no water, no tobacco. Neither did they say a prayer to him or in anyway indicate that they were in the presence of a Risambwa.

The attitude in general at these Risambwa sites is fairly casual but this seemed even more so, they did not take us to any particular site nor feel a need to make any communication. They is probably related to his death and to the fact that they have only in hindsight started going back there. There was a different feeling here than when we went to Gitaraga or Nyaheri or when I went with the Ikizu to Nyakinywa's grave. When we went home there was no rain that day either.

How can they propitiate an ancestor that they killed? Well, the diviner told them that he wanted them to do the offerings so apparently he was extending a hand to them and wanted communication again.

Shanyangi was of the clan Abarogoro and so they must go first or lead when they go to do the offerings but all of Issenye go. The Bene Okinyonyi are always closely associated with the Rogoro and so go right behind them. They think it was sometime in the 19th century when Shanyangi lived.

The Ishenyi originated in Guka or Gukana which is the line of mountains or hills there by Klein's camp on the gate which takes you out to Sonjo and Loliondo. On the map it is called Kuka which must be the same thing. This is directly in a line to the east from Nyeberekera which is in turn practically in the Loliondo district or would have been if not for the park. His may be in fact the Sonjo link. These may be the Abamasaba people who lived north of what is Sonjo today and were driven out by the Maasai. Nyawagamba said that even when he was little the Issenye were known as Abaregata and not as Ishenyi. These men also affirmed that from Nyeberekera when the Maasai drove them out some of them went to Regata and that the originating place of Mogunyi and Inyancha was at Guka and not at Sonjo itself -- that the Regata Sonjo came from Nyeberekera.

The Ishenyi also have an Ntemi scar and are proud of it.

Nyeberekera was once a huge settlement, they lived on all of the rises around this large area.

Nyeberekera Mogenda -- if you go down to the Grumeti river from Bwinamoki you come to a pool on the river which is called Nyaberekera Mogenda. The game guard thought it was 16 kms from here down to the Grumeti but I wonder if it isn't on one of the tributaries which are quite near. We did not go looking for it because it was muddy and if 16 kms we did not have time since everyone wanted to get out of Kuria country before nightfall, we had left the kids alone too.

At this pool was the place where the wazee would rest and play bao. The bao was made in the rock by God and also three stones for a fire are naturally there. The Risambwa which is there is an animal which eats anyone who goes in there. "alifirisi watu" "Embiri". There are lots and lots of fish there but no one can get them out. You can't fish there.

When they lived at Nyeberekera they would run up and hide in the rocks when the Maasai came. The women and children would hide up in the rocks and they even had ladders to climb up on top. They built no forts there.

Part of the conversation on tape at Bwanda ---

Mogunya and Iyancha were first man and first woman of Ishenyi. They met.

All of these peoples here came from Ngorongoro, Olduvai area. The Ikoma call it Miwari.

[ORIGINS/ISENYES]

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More Nyeberekera continued - 2/27/96 --

Mossi came to my house today to see if Joseph had come with news about getting the Issenye book -- the was shocked that I had heard nothing yet.

Then he said that after we had gotten home from Nyeberekera that day he had talked to other elders and they said that Bwinamoki was not the place where the mitambiko is done. They said it was lucky that we had not gone to the actual place because we never would have left there, the spirits would have been mad. They do not like people from other tribes going there and if you go you have to do the offerings and all and cannot just go hivi hivi. But if they did a full offering and all and all of the clans were there then I could probably go along and they would not be mad. He said that the place where we should have gone was further up the road in the old deserted homesteads of Nyeberekera, we were in Nyeberekera but not the place where you can actually see the foundations and graves and grindstones. There is where the tree is found that is like the one that was used to kill Shanyangi. He said that no one can build there because their foundations are wrecked in the morning and the water turns bad and all sorts of things so no one goes close to there. He said it was near to where we were going to the pool which a large pool where there is lots of fish but which you cannot go into the water or you will be swallowed up.

I said that Joseph had said that he had been with them in 1985 when they did the mitambikos there so wouldn't he have told us where it was. Mossi said that either he had not been there for the actual mitambikos but just came at a different time or else he knew that it was dangerous.

Mossi said that the day after we left him off in Issenye he talked to Ali who said that Nyawagamba had told him that we would take him to go get the book in Ushashi, Mossi told him that we had sent Joseph for the book.

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Bwanda --

G.P.S. reading 703520 9796427 alt. 1745 meters.

This is the third place that someone has told me Bwanda is located. The first was near Mugumu at Matare where we went to look with the people from Burunga and did not find it at all,

they said that there is a rock painted with the name of Bwanda there, put there by Hassan Irende. Ramadhani told me that Bwanda was in Ikizu near Rakana na Moderi. But Makuru is the only man who could take me to a particular place and be sure in his own mind that this was Bwanda. Makuru is a hunter and also of the clan which had a lot of the risambwa and seems to have been involved in many of the trips. He knows this country. He took us to the top of a wide kopje that was within site of Bwinamoki. We climbed up to some rocks on the top which he said was the place, it was not an actual cave but could conceivably made into a kind of shelter.

He told the story of Nyamunywa and Nyasiongo -- this is on tape -- told mostly by Sochoro. Nyasiongo was Mgetiga and Nyamunywa was Gaikwe. They did not die here but moved on, only met here.

[ORIGINS/NATA; BWANDA; HAMATE/GETIGA/GIKWE]

The Nata claim that the reason that Bwinamoki/Nyeberekera and Bwanda are so close together is not because they lived together. The Nata came there first ever so long ago and had moved on by the time that the Ishenyi came. They say that the Nata must have been at Gitaraga when the Ishenyi were at Nyeberekera, I do not know how much this is in the tradition and how much this is current speculation. Then the Nata went to Timota.

This kopje that is Bwanda was also used for the women and children to hide when the Maasai came. There were no Orwaki built here. No enemies could climb up and get them among the rocks. The youth waited to fight them down on the plains.

They farmed with digging sticks, iroso and then the wooden hoe, koromo. They farmed millet, sorghum, chahende or kundi and sesame. The man was a hunter and a firemaker but not a blacksmith. He used wooden arrow points with arrow poison.

[FARMERS/HUNTERS]

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Settlement sites in order -- as told by Sochoro -- on tape
(this was the first time for Sochoro to come to Bwanda)

1. Bwanda
2. Gitaraga
3. Sang'ang'a
4. Gyasigeta
5. Tutuki
6. Ng'ambo ya Rubana, Kyambori
7. Torogoro
8. Mchang'oro -- Site Mosuhu na Site Mokoro
9. Magerigo
10. Kikong'oti -- Anchera ya Mogoro
11. Ng'ambo ya Tirina -- Rakana na Moderi

[SETTLEMENTS; PLACE-NAMES]

Before the Famine --

Wasaye lived at Nyanturumunti

Rumarancha lived at Gitinga

Bongirate lived at Tutuki

[FAMINE; SAIGA/TERRITORY]

The first Saiga that we remember is the Amasura of the Rumarancha, the Abangirate and the Maina of Saye.