

**IMPACT OF CHANGE AND DIVERSE PERCEPTIONS:
"CONFLICTS OF MEANING AND INTERPRETATIONS – NTUSI AND BIGO
BYA MUGYENYI ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN UGANDA"
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ABSTRACT

Ntusi and Bigo bya Mugyenyi are two archaeological sites 16 kilometres apart from each other. The archaeological record dates them two centuries apart, as well with Ntusi dating, between the 11th and 15th century and Bigo bya Mugyenyi dating between the 14th and 16th century. Both of them share a common tradition associating them as capitals of the legendary Bacwezi. Bacwezi are the rulers of the ancient Empire of Kitara from which, after the 16th century, the later inter-lacustrine Kingdoms of Bunyoro - Kitara, Buganda, Nkore, Rwanda and Karagwe emerged.

Ntusi and Bigo bya Mugyenyi have been variously interpreted. Due to the rich archaeological deposit in an area of 2 square kilometres the Ntusi site has been interpreted as an urban centre which represented a highly organized society. Bigo bya Mugyenyi likewise represented a site whose construction required an equally highly organised political system where the rulers would be able to marshal a sizeable labour force to construct the ditch systems covering an area of 10 square kilometres. However, there were other trench systems which were constructed in the region almost at the same time and which also required sizeable labour.

Clear about the two sites is that a lot of labour force was marshalled in the construction of the Bwogero at Ntusi and the ditch systems that formed the Bigo (forts). Equally, the massive mounds at Ntusi meant that a sizeable number of people, both pastoral and agricultural, gathered together at regulated periods to perform rituals. While Bigo bya Mugyenyi could pass as a capital site, at date it is also a ritual centre whose various places in the ditch system represent some of the Cwezi deities. My paper will discuss the misinterpretation of the functions of the two sites by the colonial and foreign scholars who did not understand the traditional belief systems. I shall show that ethnic divide among the pastoralists and agriculturalists is a recent colonial construal while during the pre-colonial times this division did not exist especially during ritual ceremonies.

My conclusion is that a new thinking among scholars is necessary in order to understand the true meaning of some of the African cultural heritage. Colonial interpretations have to be re-examined to unravel some of the riddles that surround the functions of the cultural sites like Ntusi and Bigo bya Mugyenyi in Uganda.