

**SONGS AND DANCES AMONG THE ABAGUSII
OF KENYA: A HISTORICAL STUDY**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study based on the History of songs and dances among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial, colonial and to some extent, the immediate Post-Colonial period. It traces the origin, establishment and development of songs and dances among the Abagusii. The study analyses the role played by songs and dances in the reconstruction of the cultural history of the Abagusii. The focus is on the role and dynamism of songs and dances in the community's history. A major factor of the dynamism came as result of the interaction between the Abagusii and the neighbouring communities such as the Maasai, Kipsigis the Luo and the Kuria. These changes also resulted from the Abagusii interaction with the British colonisation and its cultural policies. The imposition of hut tax and abolition of cattle villages (Ebisarate) by the colonial administration compelled the Abagusii men to seek wage labour outside their homes so as to raise money for tax payment. By 1940s a large number of Abagusii men were out on migrant labour, leaving their wives with increased agricultural activities and household tasks. When they were performing all these tasks, they composed and performed some work songs and dances to either keep their low spirits high when working or express resentment against colonial administration for interfering with the community's independence. The colonialists introduced new musical instruments, songs and dance styles that the Abagusii incorporated into their singing and dancing styles. They also introduced settler economy, cash crop production and formal education as well as western religion all of which had a lot of impact in the dynamism of songs and dances among the Abagusii.

This study will contribute to the preservation of cultural values incorporated here into the Gusii historiography. Further, the research findings are intended to aid researchers who may want to understand similar or different aspects of the Gusii songs and dances. The Ministry of Culture and Social Services may use findings from this study to plan for the dissemination of cultural activities in Kisii districts.

The study methodology employed field interviews supplemented by secondary and archival materials. All these provided valuable data which was collected, sorted, verified, classified and organised to produce this thesis.

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