

Kasubi (Uganda)

No 1022

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Tombs of the Buganda Kings at Kasubi
<i>Location</i>	Kampala District
<i>State Party</i>	Uganda
<i>Date</i>	20 June 2000

Justification by State Party

The royal tombs of Buganda Kabakas are sheltered in a gigantic circular thatched building which is a unique surviving example of an architectural style developed by the powerful Buganda kingdom since the 13th century. This structure represents one of the most remarkable buildings using purely organic material in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. Its unusual scale and its outstanding details of assembly bear witness to the creative genius of the Baganda and are a masterpiece of form and craftsmanship.

Criterion i

The Kasubi Tombs site is a unique testimony to the living cultural traditions of the Baganda. The built and natural elements are charged with historical, traditional, and spiritual values. The site continues to be managed in a traditional manner through a complex system of responsibilities. The site is a major spiritual centre for the Baganda and is the most active religious place in the kingdom. Its place as the burial ground of the previous four Kabakas makes it a religious centre for the royal family, a place where the Kabaka and his representatives carry out important rituals related to Buganda culture.

Criterion iii

The Kasubi Tombs site is an outstanding example of traditional Ganda architecture and palace design. Its spatial organization represents the best existing example of a Baganda palace/architectural ensemble. The complex reflects the technical achievements developed over centuries of the Baganda clans and the ingenuity and creativity of the craftsmen who designed it and continue to maintain it. The Tombs testify to the power of Muteesa I and his importance in the history of the Baganda, and mark a starting point for new customs related to the burial of the Kabakas.

Criterion iv

The Kasubi Tombs site has a direct and tangible association with the living traditions of the Baganda people. Its rich architectural and decorative features and the variety of custodians, each with his or her traditional role to play, reflects the fusion between nature and culture, between the spirits and the living population. The site is strongly linked to the beliefs associated with the spirits of the Kabakas buried there. Other traditional events occur throughout the year, such as the new moon ceremony, but the main spiritual life is not visible to the

ordinary visitor as many ceremonies are performed secretly inside the buildings. This aspect of the Ganda tradition represents a continuing link with the long-standing Baganda belief system.

Criterion vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage convention, this is a *site*.

History and Description

History

The Baganda belong to the Bantu-speaking people and date their political civilization from about the 13th century AD. Today, the Baganda are the major ethnic group in Uganda, their 6 million people constituting about 28% of the population. The Buganda region covers about 66,350km². From Kintu, the first legendary Kabaka, to Muteesa I there were 35 Kabakas. Precise dates, however, are known only from *Suuna* II (1836–56), who established his palace at Kasubi. He was succeeded by his son Muteesa I who did likewise, constructing the present tomb structure as his palace in 1882. He became a very powerful Kabaka, the first to be influenced by foreign cultures. He adopted some Islamic religious practices learnt from ivory and slave traders from Zanzibar. He also showed interest in Europe after acting as host in 1862 to John Hanning Speke, the first European visitor. In 1875 he asked Henry Morton Stanley, the explorer, for teachers of European learning and religion. Some remaining artefacts reflect this pivotal period in local history when the Baganda were first exposed to Arab traders and European explorers.

When Muteesa I died in 1884, he broke two traditions: his body was buried whole and it was buried in his palace, Kasubi, not somewhere else. This practice was followed when, in 1910, the remains of his successor, Mwanga II (*ob.* 1903), were brought back from the Seychelles and also buried there, establishing Kasubi as an important burial place of the Kabakas of Buganda. This status was reinforced when his son and successor, Daudi Chwa II, died in 1939 and was also buried at Kasubi.

His son and successor, Edward Muteesa II, was first in conflict with Britain and then, after independence in 1962 when he became President, with his own Prime Minister. Kasubi was stormed in 1966 and the President went into exile, but when he died in 1969 his remains were returned and buried at Kasubi in 1971. Four successive Kabakas of Buganda were therefore buried in the same tomb house at Kasubi, the building which is at the core of this nomination. Each prince and princess who is a descendant of the four Kabakas is also buried there behind the main shrine.

Between 1967 and 1993 the site was controlled by central government, but the traditional institutions of kingship were restored in 1993. Kabaka Ronald Mutebi II was crowned as the Kabaka of Buganda, and in 1997 the Kasubi tombs were returned to the Buganda kingdom. Buganda is today one of four kingdoms in

Uganda. The site is now not only the most important cultural shrine for the Baganda but also the most attractive tourist site in the country.

Description

The Kasubi Tombs site is situated on a hill within Kampala. It covers an area of 30ha, on the hilltop and down its eastern slopes. About 35 people live within it. The whole is encircled by a fence of bark-cloth trees, now somewhat depleted. It consists of three main zones:

- i. the main tomb area located at the western end of the site on top of the hill;
- ii. an area located behind the main tombs containing a number of buildings and graveyards;
- iii. a large area on the eastern side of the site used primarily for agricultural purposes.

On the western border of the site is the gatehouse (Bujabukula), traditionally housing guards 24 hours a day. It was constructed of wooden columns and invisible walls of fired brick supporting a thatched roof, with walls of woven reeds. Beyond is a small courtyard containing the Ndogo-Obukaba, a circular building containing the royal drums. Also of wooden columns and thatch, it has walls visibly constructed of fired brick. A recent cement floor is intended to protect the drums from termites. Alongside is the ticket office, one of the few modern buildings added to the site.

The D-shaped main courtyard (Olugya) lies through a gap in a reed fence. This fence encloses the courtyard and links nine buildings, five of them houses for the widows of the Kabakas, the other four respectively a twins' house, two tombs, and a mortuary. Various constructed of wattle-and-daub and fired brick, three have round plans, the others are square. All were originally thatched, but several now have new roofs of galvanized metal

The courtyard itself is empty, enhancing the visual dominance on its eastern side of the large timber, reed and thatched building (Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga) housing the tombs of the four Kabakas. The building is circular in plan and has a dome-like shape. Its external diameter is 31m and internal height 7.5m. It has both changed its profile and been significantly repaired since its construction in 1882. The roof catches the eye: it slopes right down to the ground and is reinforced underneath by 52 woven rings of palm fronds and spear grass, representing the 52 Ganda clans. The whole structure is carried by gigantic straight wooden columns wrapped in bark cloth.

The building is entered through a low, wide arch flanked on both sides by richly woven reeds. Its inside is partitioned with a huge bark cloth which hides the "sacred forest" where four royal graves lie. Entrance to the "forest" is limited to widows of Kabakas, the royal family, the Nalinya, and Katikkiro. The inside of the building is adorned with power insignia such as drums, spears, shields, medals, and pictures of the buried Kabakas. On the floor is a thick layer of lemon grass and palm-leaf mats.

Beyond the Olugya is scattered a large number of buildings – houses, royal tombs and ones for agricultural purposes – and a royal cemetery. The whole

area is sacred and is not open to visitors. It was formerly completely screened off but now moves uninterrupted into the agricultural land behind and east of it. This land was originally occupied by homesteads but was later subdivided among the widows of the Kabakas. It is now rented to and farmed by members of the community; the income is used on the site. The area contains graves, two man-made mounds, medicinal plants, and the trees used in making bark-cloth.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The King of Buganda is the private legal owner as trustee for the kingdom.

The site is listed as a National Monument under the Historical Monuments Act 1967, and therefore "shall not be used for any use inconsistent with its character."

The site is located within a zoned residential area, limiting the types of incompatible uses that could be initiated nearby. The proposed buffer zone, if approved by the Town Council, will limit construction to two storeys and functions to those appropriate to the environs of the Kasubi Tombs site.

Management

The site is protected under the Historical Monuments Act from residential and other encroachment. Recent attempts to breach this provision had been rebuffed at the time of the nomination but, although the boundary of the site as defined in this nomination is newly mapped and marked on the ground, it is being less and less respected.

The site is managed under the overall authority of the Kabaka. The Buganda kingdom is the single management agency, and all those involved belong to it. A management framework was defined in March 2000, identifying the roles of each person involved in site conservation and clarifying the hierarchy in the decision-making process. The main management body is the Buganda Heritage Site Commission (also responsible for other sites; with external advisors). A new Kasubi Tombs Heritage Committee includes the site's traditional managers. They are the custodians deployed on site to perform precisely defined traditional tasks at different levels: administrative, technical, and spiritual. Significant roles belong to the Nalinga (spiritual guardian and supervisor of the site) and the Lubunga (land-use co-ordinator). All these tiers of management share a commitment to the heritage of Kasubi tombs. The ICOMOS mission was convinced that the tier system of management provides adequate legal, contractual, and traditional protection and management mechanisms to ensure the conservation of the nominated property.

Thatching is clearly a major issue on the site. It is carried out by the Ngeye clan, who are sole keepers of the knowledge of how it is done and are the only people allowed to climb on the roofs. They train young members of the clan to continue the tradition and the maintenance. They do not accept advice from anyone nor do they accept technical orders.

The site is protected through Buganda custom because of its strong traditional, historical, customary, and ritual importance. Everyone fears the powerful Kabakas' spirits and respect for age-old traditions affords protection. Yet the site exists in the middle of a growing urban area, with great pressure to encroach on it, pressure which seemed to have increased quite palpably between the time of the preparation of the nomination and the ICOMOS mission. It was nevertheless a recent but not immediately past development which stood out on the western part of the core area, where a mosque and modern Islamic primary school have not only encroached but show a disregard for the norms of the site. Understandably, these buildings represent a particularly sensitive issue. Small-scale dumping on the periphery had been a problem; a small corner of the site was leased to an oil company in 1992 but local opposition has so far stopped any development. But few of the boundary bark-cloth trees remained in January 2001, when the boundary itself was seen to be less and less respected, being both encroached upon and in places crossed. In particular, dumping of waste is taking place at an accelerated rate and unauthorized farming by non-residents of Kasubi is increasing.

Rents and entry fees are the only source of funds for the site. The State does not contribute. The widows who maintain the tombs sustain themselves with small amounts of cash collected in baskets displayed in the tombs. About 4500 visitors a year come to the site; it is hoped to increase that number to 18,000 by 2005. Currently, once unavoidable expenditure like salaries has been paid, little money remains for maintenance, etc. In preparing this nomination, a Management Plan was drawn up. It estimates that US\$24,000 are needed for immediate emergency conservation and US\$13,000 per year for regular maintenance.

The Plan's twelve guiding principles include concepts such as sustainability, partnership, transparency, communication, education, and evaluation as well as specifics such as improving the lives of the permanent caretakers of the tombs, the widows. It identifies priority actions in four main areas:

1. to establish a sustainable funding system for the site;
2. to stabilize the state of conservation;
3. to improve the visitor experience;
4. to improve the conditions for the expression of living traditions.

The proposed buffer zone would be ineffectual given that its restrictions are only on the heights of buildings and uses inconsistent with the character of the site. Some much stronger provision is now needed to protect one of the main characteristics of the site, its very authenticity in being on the original site which happens now to have been caught up in rapid urban development. The Ugandan authorities realize the extent and nature of the problem, which has increased in the last two years; but clearly there is no easy solution. A fast-growing thorn hedge could provide some physical protection if it was allowed to mature over three years or so.

The site is included in the Heritage Trail Project, an initiative to promote community-based tourism at

heritage sites. The project aims to conserve and promote cultural heritage, diversify the cultural product, and encourage new income-generating activities.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

During its first fifty years (1882 to the 1930s) the palace-cum-tomb called Muzibu Azaala Mpanga experienced only minor maintenance work, although in 1905 it was reduced in size to make it more maintainable. Since 1938, however, the building has suffered several processes of restoration and modification, primarily to meet threats of structural failure. It was completely reconstructed in 1938–40; modern materials were introduced, such as some concrete columns. During the 1990s, changes incurred by most of the buildings have slightly changed the architectural value of the site. The tendency to modernize the site has now been checked, however, and efforts over the last three years have sought to change attitudes and revive traditional skills.

The site suffers badly from rain, drainage problems, and termites, with a constant threat of fire. Most of the smaller buildings show deficiencies. Of their unsightly and untraditional galvanized metal roofs, most leak. One building burnt down in 1998 has been rebuilt but is without a thatch roof for lack of funds. The Muzibu Azaala Mpanga is structurally in good order but major thatching works are necessary; too much repair work has been done as emergency (*see* below). Partial restoration of the drum-house in 1998 has left it without an adequate roof. The gatehouse was also restored in 1998, an achievement which has already underlined the need for continuous maintenance. The traditional voluntary maintenance by the clans is tending to disappear as there is no means of rewarding it: for example, the traditional royal free meal, cooked by the widows, no longer exists.

The original reed fence around the whole site has long since disappeared; the living fence of bark-cloth trees around the site has suffered quite badly as an obvious target in the endless search for firewood. The site has, nevertheless, to an extent been preserved out of fear and respect for its sacred and religious nature. This spiritual protection has freed the site from urban modernization in the 20th century, despite the booming development which has occurred all around it. Yet, as the Management Plan notes, "The vast majority of the local population ... do not consider the conservation of the site as their primary objective."

Authenticity

The existing layout of the site remains as it was at the time of construction. It is a typical example of a palace of the Baganda Kabakas. The Muzibu Azaala Mpanga itself is now more rounded in profile than originally, but this is neither deliberate nor the result of poor workmanship but an accidental product of continuous traditional maintenance. It does not affect the authenticity in any significant way.

Materials are, however, another matter. Modern materials introduced into the Muzibu Azaala Mpanga in 1938–40 included a steel structure, a few concrete

columns, a curved concrete lintel above the entrance, and some fired clay bricks. All are invisible. The thatched roof resting on structural rings of palm-tree fronds is still intact, as are internal elements and finishing materials such as the long wooden poles wrapped in bark-cloth decoration. Overall, especially with regard to the main buildings – the Muzibu Azaala Mpanga, the Bujjabukula (gate-house), and the Ndogo-Obukaba (drum-house) – the material and functional authenticity is high.

The houses surrounding the Olugya have experienced more change, although the overall layout is authentic. Two of the nine buildings are of wattle-and-daub construction. The other seven have been constructed or reconstructed using fired bricks. The roofs of all nine are now of galvanized metal, visually damaging but not structurally disastrous. A change back to thatch is envisaged in the Management Plan, once more urgent work has been executed. New thatching is, of course, being put in place continuously on the site. Woven reed partitioning is well preserved and is another feature of organic material which can be replaced using traditional methods and material.

Two of the 52 clans of the Baganda are directly involved in maintaining the physical aspects of the site. The Ngeye clan does the thatching, the Ngo clan is responsible for the decoration and bark cloth. Execution of these responsibilities continues, so the site is witness to a high degree of authenticity in terms of traditional workmanship.

Functionally – and perhaps most importantly in terms of authenticity – the site retains its main purpose, which it has enjoyed since its nature was changed from a palace to a royal burial place in 1884. It also retains its purpose as a living place for widows of the Kabakas, the custodians of the tombs. It continues to be a primary religious and ritual centre of the Buganda. In 1999 it featured significantly in the wedding of the current Kabaka.

Although the site is now surrounded by urban development, it is sufficiently large and well respected to have resisted the worst effects. Being in its original position, it therefore retains an authenticity of location and setting, its interior in particular still being one with a rural atmosphere. The most extensive, agricultural, part of the site continues to be farmed in a traditional manner.

A judgement about the degree and validity of authenticity on the site is clearly finely balanced. The nomination document itself states that "the authenticity of the site, in all of its aspects remains at a very acceptable level," while the accompanying Management Plan states that "...many changes have already occurred on site which have seriously faded the authenticity and the general value of the site." Perhaps the most important point is in the former, where it goes on to remark that "the conservation works carried out since 1998 show a willingness by all those involved, to maintain the site more faithfully..."

Such an attitude was found to be in place in January 2001, when, following the brave decision to remove the thatch roof from the Muzibu Azaala Mpanga, the ICOMOS mission witnessed its replacement. Proper documentation preceded and accompanied the exercise

at all stages, as it was executed in the traditional way using traditional materials.

Overall, and to a proven extent, Kasubi enshrines the principles enunciated at Nara and at the Great Zimbabwe meeting on authenticity and integrity.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in January 2001.

Qualities

The site's main qualities are intangible ones to do with belief, spirituality, community, and identity. It has been at the centre of the Baganda kingdom since its origins about a thousand years ago, it has witnessed interaction with the Arab world, it was in the vanguard of contact with the arrival of the European world, and its influence has stretched far over Africa and beyond. It possesses an aura which is distinctly original. Simultaneously, it possesses a considerable physical presence, being visually striking and a place of the royal dead exhibiting outstanding examples of indigenous architecture, craftsmanship, and traditional organization, methods, and skills.

Its overall plan also exhibits significant historical patterning. A Kabaka became the first President of Uganda. Almost all heads of state and dignitaries who have cause to call on the Kabaka visit Kasubi as "the spiritual heart of the Baganda." Furthermore, the site as a whole is clearly of high potential in cultural and tourism terms, and it acts as a "green lung" in an area of rapid urban expansion.

Comparative analysis

There are 33 tombs remaining in the kingdom where previous Buganda Kabakas were buried. Traditional practice was to bury each Kabaka at one site and establish a royal shrine containing the royal jaw at another. Many such shrines continue to be maintained. The state of conservation is less good or well maintained at most sites, and they are less well known and less visited by tourists.

The Kasubi Tombs site presents some unique features. It is a multiple Kabaka burial site, the only one where four are buried. It is also the cemetery of the royal family. It is bigger than most other Baganda tombs, and it is the best known. It has become a landmark, not only for the Buganda but also for Uganda. Its location and status ensure that the Kasubi Tombs site will continue to be maintained for its cultural values. Were Kasubi to be inscribed on the World Heritage List, it would bring some unique elements currently missing among the cultural properties.

The ICOMOS mission visited two Kabaka tombs near Kampala: the Wamala tomb where Suuna II is buried only a few kilometres from Kasubi, and Masanufu where Kiwewa is buried. Wamala was not mentioned in the nomination but is in fact almost a replica of Kasubi, although the relationship is rather the other way round. Wamala is the earlier, because the first Kabaka buried at Kasubi was the son of Suuna II (1837–56). The internal arrangements of the Muzibu Azaala Mpanga at Kasubi replicate those at Wamala; the traditional objects at the

latter are all in wood, replicated in metal by those at Kasubi. It would seem, therefore, that Kasubi can best be understood as a development of the formative processes represented at Wamala, and should not be divorced from them.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

- General

a. Wamala should be recognized now as an integral part of the ensemble containing Kasubi and as a future addition to this nomination should it be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Wamala will therefore in due course need to enjoy a similar restorative and maintenance regime to that at Kasubi, so meanwhile some effort should be made at least to prevent deterioration of its critical elements.

b. Aware of the considerable input in recent years from ICCROM, UNESCO, the World Heritage Centre, and CRATerre-EAG, the ICOMOS mission was highly impressed with the synergy at Kasubi between the locally derived traditions and techniques and those based on scientific principles. This experience and the results should be publicized in the interests of global conservation issues.

c. While Kasubi is a Buganda heritage site, it is also a significant component of Uganda heritage as would indeed be acknowledged in the title were Kasubi to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Central government funding of the site, in part at least, could well be reconsidered.

- Site-specific

d. The Management Plan states that the car park is in front of the site and that the ticket office is in a poor state of conservation, but no mention of improvements here is made other than noting that the latter requires some conservation works. Rather than repairing the ticket office *in situ*, it should be demolished, and the whole issue of car-parking and ticketing should be reconsidered in the context of a review of visitor reception aimed at improving the visitor welcome while restoring respect to the traditional entrance by removing facilities for that purpose away from the entrance.

e. In this context, ICOMOS notes the proposal for a cultural village as an added tourist attraction, but could discover in the dossier nothing about where this development is to be sited or about its nature. It strongly recommends that very careful consideration be given to the character and theme(s) of this village and to its location. The latter could perhaps be away from the core area of the site, and the possibility of carrying out ticketing functions within it might then be particularly appropriate.

f. The Masiro road serves as the western boundary of the nominated site. Beside it on its west (ie immediately outside the site) is the mausoleum of a Katiro, a tomb belonging to Jungu, son of Muteesa I, and the site of a 1971 ceremony involving the return of the body of Muteesa II. These landmarks are there because they are an integral part of Kasubi. They should therefore be considered as part of the core area of the nomination.

g. The ICOMOS mission commends highly the work under way on the Muzibu Azaala Mpanga and

ICOMOS recommends that all other structures be tackled following the same principles and appropriate methodologies, that is using traditional materials and techniques and recording both the state of conservation and the course of the work on each structure.

h. Particular attention should be given to reinforcing the traditional roles played by such officials as the Nalinga and the Lubunga.

i. ICOMOS recognizes the crucial nature and roles of the agricultural and horticultural area of the site downhill from the royal structures, particularly on its east, and in order to reinforce the concept of this area as an integral part of the site would therefore recommend that the whole be inscribed as a cultural landscape. ICOMOS also has in mind the analogies with the Colline Royale d'Ambohimanga (Madagascar) which was nominated in 2001 and is recommended for inscription as a cultural landscape.

j. There may be some merit in reconsidering the outer boundary of the buffer zone so that it accords with some reality on the ground such as vegetation, topography, or street/property lines, rather than simply being a regular geometric shape.

k. Noting the considerable assistance already given to this carefully selected site by the World Heritage Centre, and noting its extremely fragile nature in terms of its situation, nature, and proposed management, it is suggested that, should the site be inscribed on the World Heritage List, a mission to review the situation may well be helpful to all concerned two to three years after inscription.

Brief description

The Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi is a site embracing almost 30ha of hillside now within Kampala. Most of the site is agricultural, farmed by traditional methods. At its core on the hilltop, retaining its original plan, is the former palace of the Kabakas of Baganda, built in 1882 and converted into the royal burial ground in 1884. Four royal tombs now lie within the Muzibu Azaala Mpanga, the main building, which is circular in plan and dome-like in shape. It is a major example of architectural achievement in organic materials, here principally wood, thatch, reed, and wattle-and-daub. Maintenance is continuous and traditional. The site's main significance lies, however, in its intangible values of belief, spirituality, continuity and identity.

Statement of Significance

The most important value associated with the Kasubi Tombs site are the strong elements of intangible heritage. The built and natural elements of the site, which is an outstanding example of traditional Ganda architecture and palace design, are charged with historical, traditional, and spiritual values. The site is regarded as the major spiritual centre for the Baganda. It also serves as an important historical and cultural symbol for Uganda and East Africa as a whole.

ICOMOS Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, iii, iv, and vi*:

Criterion i The Kasubi Tombs site is a masterpiece of human creativity both in its conception and its execution.

Criterion iii The Kasubi Tombs site bears eloquent witness to the living cultural traditions of the Baganda.

Criterion iv The spatial organization of the Kasubi Tombs site represents the best extant example of a Baganda palace/architectural ensemble. Built in the finest traditions of Ganda architecture and palace design, it reflects technical achievements developed over many centuries.

Criterion vi The built and natural elements of the Kasubi Tombs site are charged with historical, traditional, and spiritual values. It is a major spiritual centre for the Baganda and is the most active religious place in the kingdom.

Bureau Recommendation

That the tombs of the Buganda Kings at Kasubi be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, iii, iv, and vi*.

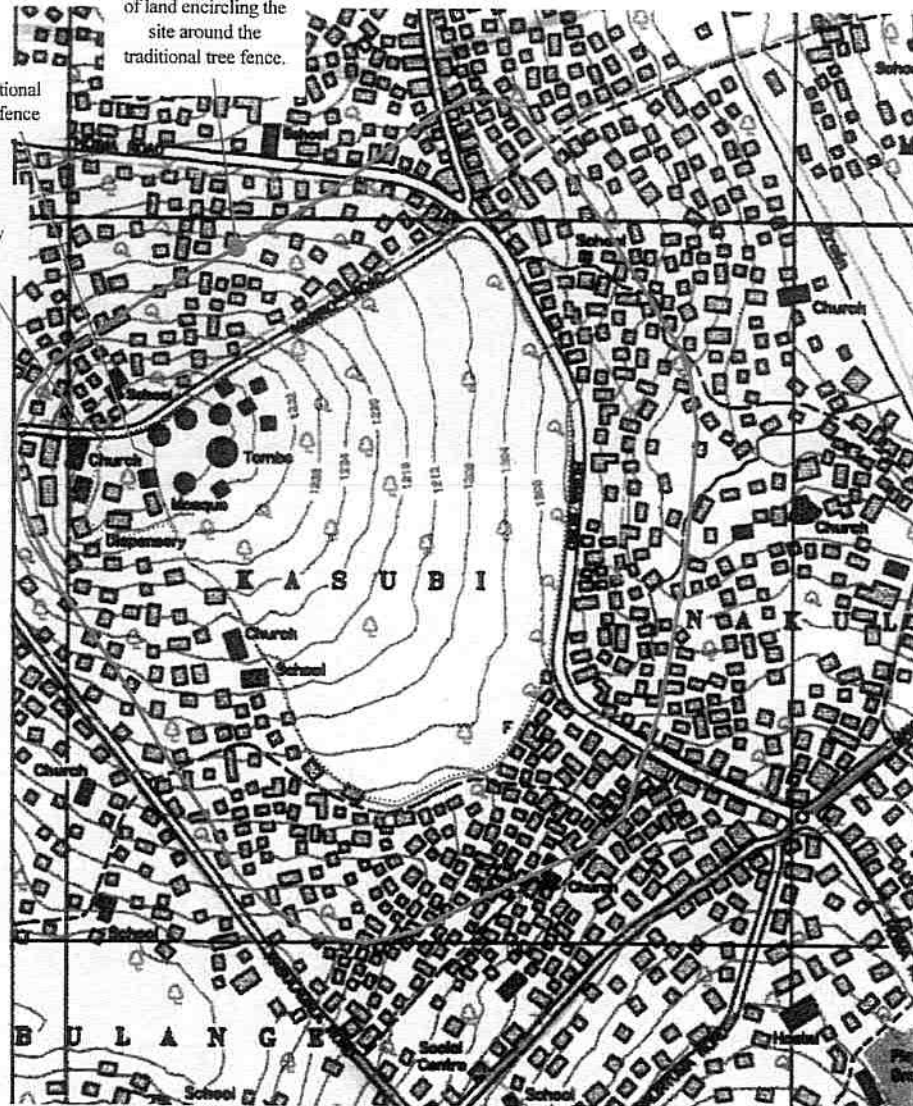
ICOMOS, September 2001

Plan scale 1/10 000

Plan scale 1/10 000

traditional
tree fence

boundary of
nominated property



Proposed site boundaries



Buffer Zone

Plan de délimitation de la zone proposée pour inscription et de la zone tampon /
Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property and the buffer zone