



NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA

WHERE HERITAGE LIVES ON

REF: NMK/UN/2/1

16 January 2020

Director,  
World Heritage Centre UNESCO  
7, Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris CEDEX 07  
France

Dear Dr. Rössler,

**RE: STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT FOR THIMLICH OHINGA  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (1450REV)**

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I herein submit the state of Conservation Report for Thimlich Ohinga Archaeological Site which was inscribed as World Heritage Site in 2018. Thank you for the continued support to World Heritage in Kenya.

Yours sincerely,

Mzalendo N. Kibunjia *PhD, EBS*  
**Director General**

**THIMLICH OHINGA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE, KENYA**  
**(1450REV)**  
**STATE PARTY REPORT ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF**  
**THIMLICH OHINGA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE**  
**January 2020**

**Executive summary**

Thimlich Ohinga Archaeological Site, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2018 on the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee under criteria (iii), (iv) and (v). The WHC adopted the following statement of outstanding universal value:

(a). Thimlich Ohinga archaeological site is a dry-stone walled settlement, based on a complex organization system of communal occupation, craft industries and livestock that reflects a cultural tradition developed by pastoral communities in the Nyanza region of the Lake Victoria basin that persisted from 16th to mid-20th centuries.

(b). Thimlich Ohinga is the largest and best preserved of these massive dry-stone walled enclosures. The Ohinga appear to have served primarily as security for communities and livestock, but they also defined social units and relationships linked to lineage based systems.

(c). Thimlich Ohinga is an exceptional testimony of settlement patterns and spatial community relations in the Lake Victoria Basin, which documents the successive occupation by different people from various linguistic origins during an important episode in the migration and settlement of the Lake Victoria Basin between the 16th and 17th centuries. It also gives reference to habitation patterns, livestock cultivation and craft practices prevalent in communal settlements at this time.

Issues which require attention and the response from the State Party;

1. **Acquisition of extra land for more effective conservation.** The process of acquiring the land in question is ongoing and it is hoped that formal procedures required for actualization of this process will be completed in the first quarter of this year (2020). The process of acquiring land for public use is lengthy and involves many stakeholders. There already exists a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Museums of Kenya and the local landowners as guided by legal experts. Negotiations have been ongoing with both government officials mandated with the issue of land ownership and the local owner of the land to be acquired. Some of the activities which have already been undertaken include survey and mapping of the land to be acquired, ascertaining the original land registration details including the

bona fide land owners and contacts with the National Land Commission to guide on the process. In addition, the initial demarcation was made in 2017 as a proposed extension of the buffer zone but the final and formal demarcation will be made and approved upon the completion of this process.

2. **To establish a single database to compile documentation regarding archaeological excavation results, conservation activities and associated oral traditions.** A database has been established at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) Archaeology Laboratory in Nairobi. All excavated material have already been accessioned and catalogued under the SASES (Standardized Africa Sites Enumeration System) **Ref: GtJb 10, Accession Number 3827**. All the materials ever recovered from Thimlich Ohinga site are documented in this database under the aforementioned accession number. The file have all site information including links to all publications for all the research that has been undertaken within this site.
  
3. **A monitoring system based on precise indicators, assessment methods and responsibilities.** This has been established and the action plan as per the management plan is already under implementation. The National Museums of Kenya is also actively collaborating with the Migori County Government and the local community in the maintenance, monitoring and development of the site. A Memorandum of Understanding with the County Government of Migori is underway and quarterly reports for the site through the Site Manager are published and presented to the Management at the National Museums of Kenya Headquarters in Nairobi on a timely basis.

**WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE DECISION 42 COM 8B.14 FORTY-  
SECOND SESSION (MANAMA, BAHRAIN, 2018)**

**Thimlich Ohinga Archaeological Site (Kenya) (1450rev)**

**Decision: 42 COM 8B.14**

1. Having examined Documents WHC/18/42.COM/8B.Add and WHC/18/42.COM/INF.8B1.Add,
2. Inscribes **Thimlich Ohinga Archaeological Site, Kenya**, on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iii), (iv) and (v)**;
3. Adopts the following Statement of Outstanding Universal Value:

**Brief synthesis**

Located 46 km northwest of Migori Town in the Lake Victoria region, Thimlich Ohinga archaeological site is a dry-stone walled settlement, based on a complex organization system of communal occupation, craft industries and livestock that reflects a cultural tradition developed by pastoral communities in the Nyanza region of the Lake Victoria basin that persisted from 16th to mid-20th centuries.

Thimlich Ohinga is the largest and best preserved of these massive dry-stone walled enclosures. The Ohinga appear to have served primarily as security for communities and livestock, but they also defined social units and relationships linked to lineage based systems.

The property comprises four larger Ohingni, all of which have extensions. The main Ohinga is referred to as Kochieng, while the others are Kakuku, Koketch and Koluoch. The dry stone wall enclosures are constructed in a three-phase design with separately built up outer and inner phases, held together by the middle phase. Stones were placed in an interlocking system that enhanced overall stability without use of any mortar or cement. The walls are built of neatly arranged stones of various sizes and without mortar, ranging from 1.5 m to 4.5 m in height, with an average thickness of 1 m.

Thimlich Ohinga is an exceptional testimony of settlement patterns and spatial community relations in the Lake Victoria Basin, which documents the successive occupation by different people from various linguistic origins during an important episode in the migration and settlement of the Lake Victoria Basin between the 16th and 17th centuries. It also gives reference to habitation patterns, livestock cultivation and craft practices prevalent in communal settlements at this time.

**Criterion (iii):** Thimlich Ohinga provides an exceptional testimony to settlement traditions in the Lake Victoria Basin. It illustrates shared communal settlement, livestock cultivation and craft industry patterns,

utilized and practiced by several successive inhabitant groups of different linguistic origin. The archaeological evidence testified not only to the communities' spatial organization but also to an elaborate system of interrelations between the different Ohingni within proximity to each other.

**Criterion (iv):** The settlements of Thimlich Ohinga provide an impressive reference to spatial planning and settlement types in the wider Lake Victoria Basin, at a period in history characterized by increased human mobility as a result of social, economic and environmental pressures that affected human populations in the region. The massive stone walled enclosures at Thimlich Ohinga mark an important episode in the migration and settlement of the Lake Victoria Basin and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. Thimlich Ohinga also illustrates an outstanding example of undressed dry-stone construction typology characterized by a three-phase building technology using stones of irregular shapes in two phases joined together by a third middle phase.

**Criterion (v):** Thimlich Ohinga, as the best preserved example of Ohingni constitutes a representative and outstanding example of Ohingni, a distinctive form of pastoral settlement that persisted in the Lake Victoria Basin from the 16th to the mid-20th centuries.

### **Integrity**

The property includes the Ohingni with their stone walls and low entrances, the structural support features known as buttresses, low water/sludge drainage vents from the inner livestock enclosures (kraals), the three-phase wall design, the inner and outer enclosures, industrial site and house pits.

To ensure the full protection of the archaeological remains, the entire property area, including the suggested extension toward a yet private land in the south, will need to be considered in an integrated management approach. This also applies to the property's immediate setting, where visual integrity depends on the conservation of the surrounding vegetation to retain the traditional atmosphere of the jungle-protected settlement.

### **Authenticity**

Maintenance work of the structures was carried out over the centuries using traditional materials and techniques. Several subsequent periods of occupation and repair did not interfere with the design or workmanship of the structures. After their abandonment, the Ohingni became ruins. In the past decades, these ruins have now been largely restored, and selected walls have been added to demarcate the boundary between the archaeological site and the forest. This new work is not always easily distinguishable from the historic stone structures. Future conservation measures should be undertaken based on minimum intervention approaches and should continue to train younger apprentices in traditional maintenance techniques.

### **Protection and management requirements**

The property is protected by the National Museums and Heritage Act, Cap 216 of 2006 and is managed by the National Museums of Kenya. The legal protection is further strengthened by traditional rules and taboos maintained by community elders, which assist in the protection of the property and its surrounding flora and fauna. The archaeological potential of features located on the south side of the property requires the extension of the property boundary towards this direction, in line with the recommendation by the World Heritage Committee in its Decision 39 COM 8B.8. Likewise, the buffer zone, though adequately extended in southern direction needs to be further adjusted in all other directions.

### **Current issue**

The process of acquiring the land in question is ongoing and it is hoped that formal procedures required for actualization of this process will be completed in the first quarter of this year (2020). The process of acquiring land for public use is lengthy and involves many stakeholders. There already exists a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Museums of Kenya and the local landowners as guided by legal experts. Negotiations have been ongoing with both government officials mandated with the issue of land ownership and the local owner of the land to be acquired. Some of the activities which have already been undertaken include survey and mapping of the land to be acquired, ascertaining the original land registration details including the bona fide land owners and contacts with the National Land Commission to guide on the process. In addition, the initial demarcation was made in 2017 as a proposed extension of the buffer zone but the final and formal demarcation will be made and approved upon the completion of this process.

A new management plan for the property has been adopted in 2017 and guides site management until 2027. The management authorities plan to develop controlled tourism while conserving cultural and environmental values. Plans are underway to develop a picnic site, a camping site and an eco-lodge as additional visitor infrastructure. The aims of these development proposals are geared towards sustainability in the management of the property. There is also an increase in visitor numbers thus the necessity to provide public amenities. Monitoring measures are in place to observe in practice how the increase in visitor numbers and the new infrastructure will affect the property. In addition, all proposed developments are being evaluated as per the institution's heritage regulations.

The property serves as a meeting venue for the community and remains a location for community rituals, in particular in times of crisis. These as well as the community-based maintenance strategies need to be encouraged in order to retain the strong involvement and attachment of the local communities.

4. Recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

1. Expanding the property boundary at the south-eastern end of the property near the entrance of Koketch in line with Decision **39 COM 8B.8**,

**Response:** The process of acquiring the land in question is ongoing and it is hoped that the formal procedures will be completed as soon as possible. The process of acquiring land for public use is lengthy and involves many stakeholders. In 2017, the State Party of Kenya had started engaging the local landowners on acquisition of extra land for the site on the South Eastern section of the property. There already exists a signed memorandum of understanding between the National Museums of Kenya and the local landowners as guided by legal experts. Negotiations have been ongoing with official engagements on the land registration issues of the land to be acquisitioned including ascertain the original land registration details, bonafide land owners, and the exact size being sought. In fulfilment of the recommendation of Decision **42 COM 8B.14**, the National Museums of Kenya as the custodian of the site wrote a letter on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019 to the Lands Office in Migori County requesting for directions in the acquisition of the land for public use. A response was received on **2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019** giving the National Museums of Kenya more directives on the additional documentation required. As per the Constitution of Kenya 2010, Article 67 (g), the National Lands Commission is mandated to assess tax on land and premium on immovable property in any area designated by law. Section 107 of the Land Act, 2012 empowers the commission to acquire land on behalf of the National Government in public interest. The National Museums of Kenya is currently putting together all the necessary documentation to file with the National Land Commission who will finalize the process.

2. Defining and legally approving the exact demarcation of the extended buffer zone,

**Response:** Initial demarcation was made in 2017 as a proposed extension but the final and formal demarcation will be made and approved upon the completion of the process in 1 above.

3. Establishing a single database to compile documentation regarding archaeological excavation results, conservation activities and associated oral traditions,

**Response:** A database has been established at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) Archaeology Laboratory in Nairobi. All excavated material have already been accessioned and catalogued under the SASSES (Standardized Africa Sites Enumeration System) **Ref: GtJb 10, Accession Number 3827**. All the materials ever recovered from Thimlich Ohinga site are documented in this database under the aforementioned accession number. The file have all site information including links to all

publications for all the research that has been undertaken within this site.

4. Establishing a monitoring system based on further detailed, precise indicators, assessment methods and responsibilities and define how the monitoring exercise results can also feed into the above database,

**Response:** This has been established and the action plan as per the management plan is already under implementation. The National Museums of Kenya is also actively collaborating with the Migori County Government and the local community in the maintenance, monitoring and development of the site. A Memorandum of Understanding with the County Government of Migori is underway and quarterly reports for the site through the Site Manager are published and presented to the Management at the National Museums of Kenya Headquarters in Nairobi on a timely basis.

5. Undertaking comprehensive Heritage Impact Assessments for any infrastructure developed in and around the property, before permissions for these are granted;

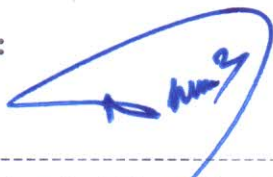
**Response:** All infrastructural development in and around the site will be subjected to Heritage Impact Assessment, but currently there are no development projects on the site.

6. Requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre by **1 December 2019** a report on the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 44th session in 2020.

**Response:** The State Party regrets that this report is made after the deadline due to delayed responses from various government departments especially on matters of land which is a long process.

**Submitted on behalf of the State Party of Kenya**

**Signed:**



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Dr. Mzalendo Kibunjia, **PhD, EBS**

**Dated:**

Jan 20, 2020