

Narrations of Precolonial Society among Terik of Western Kenya

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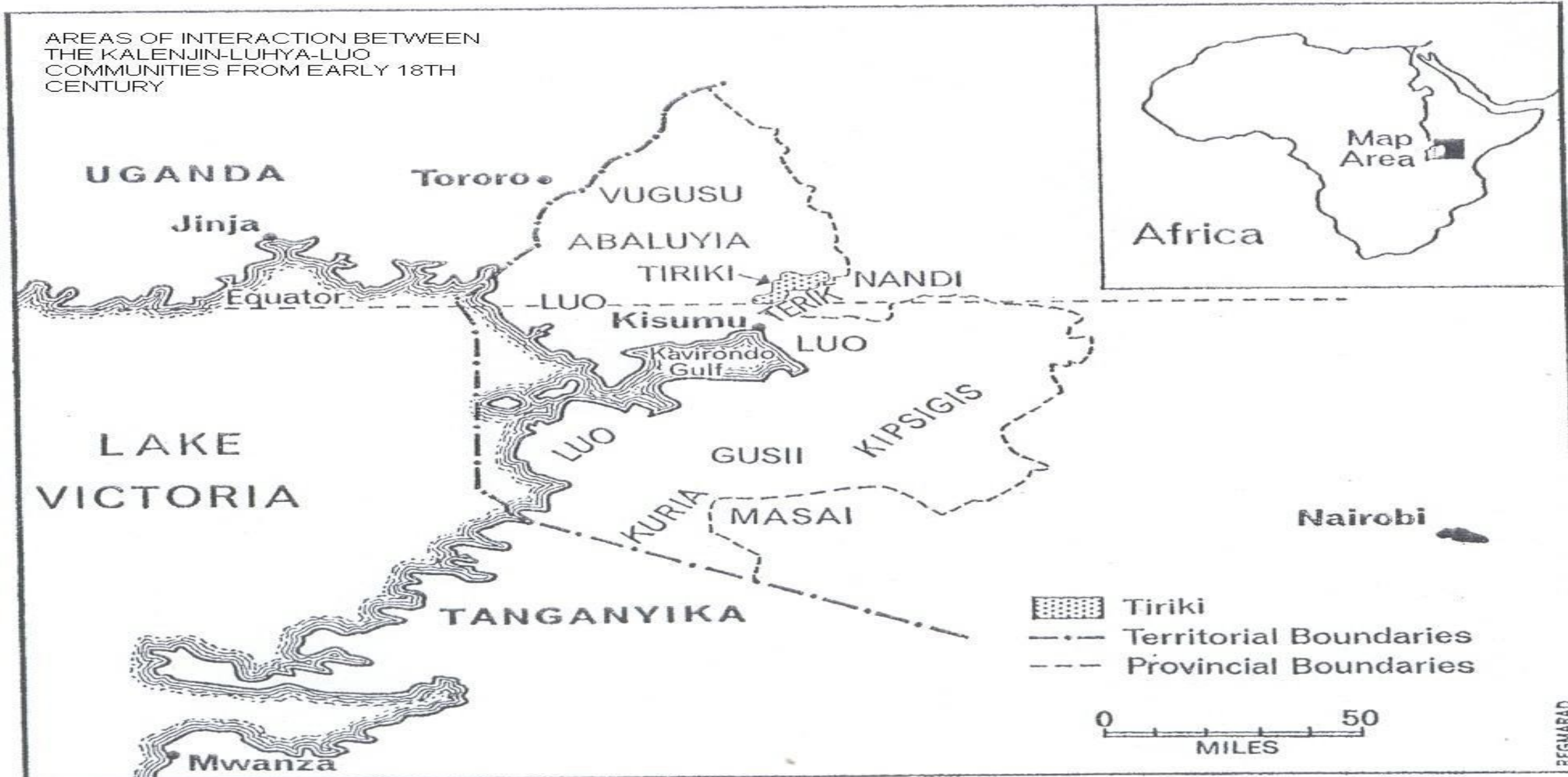
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Abstract

The present work considers the present-day oral recollections of Terik informants on aspects of their precolonial society, and relating them to the scant available written evidence. Four important themes emerged from the interviews conducted among Terik people between 2013 to 2016. Firstly, concerning land ownership and usage, present day Terik narrations emphasize their pastoralist past and the oral evidence shows an egalitarian and communal form of land ownership at least until the early colonial period. Even then, most Terik seem to have practised some crop farming which they seek to understate in the present. Secondly, hierarchy seems to have been dispersed at various levels, but two broad categories are discernible, which can be described as juridical-political versus ritual. Thirdly, relationships between Terik and neighbouring communities (particularly Luhya sub-groups) seem to have been fluid and to some extent complementary in the precolonial period, alternating between mutually beneficial exchange of land, warriors and wives. Finally, informants frequently said that aside from natural calamities or wars, the one social event that brought all the Terik together in one activity was the circumcision ceremonies (*tumndo*). The importance of *tumndo* is found in two of its basic functions; first, as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood and, secondly, the very conferment of personhood and obligations.

Figure 1: Terik Area and Neighbouring Communities



SOURCE: Sangree, W. H., (1966: XXVI)

Map 1: Map Showing the Population Distribution of the 'Nandi Groups' in Early 1930s



Content

1. Land and Pre-colonial Terik
2. Social and Political Organization of Pre-colonial Terik
3. Inter-Community Relations
4. Tumndo

(Briefly on method. Period-mainly late pre-colonial period)

Land Pre-colonial Terik

Terik topography: ***Soi (Geo)**-lowlands, cattle grazing salt licks; **Masaan**-houses, kapkoros and Kabonyony, **Sino**-cold uplands, forested, unsettled.*

Tuga-cattle (belonging to men. Except the milch cow)

Goat-Artheth (belonging to the household, women)

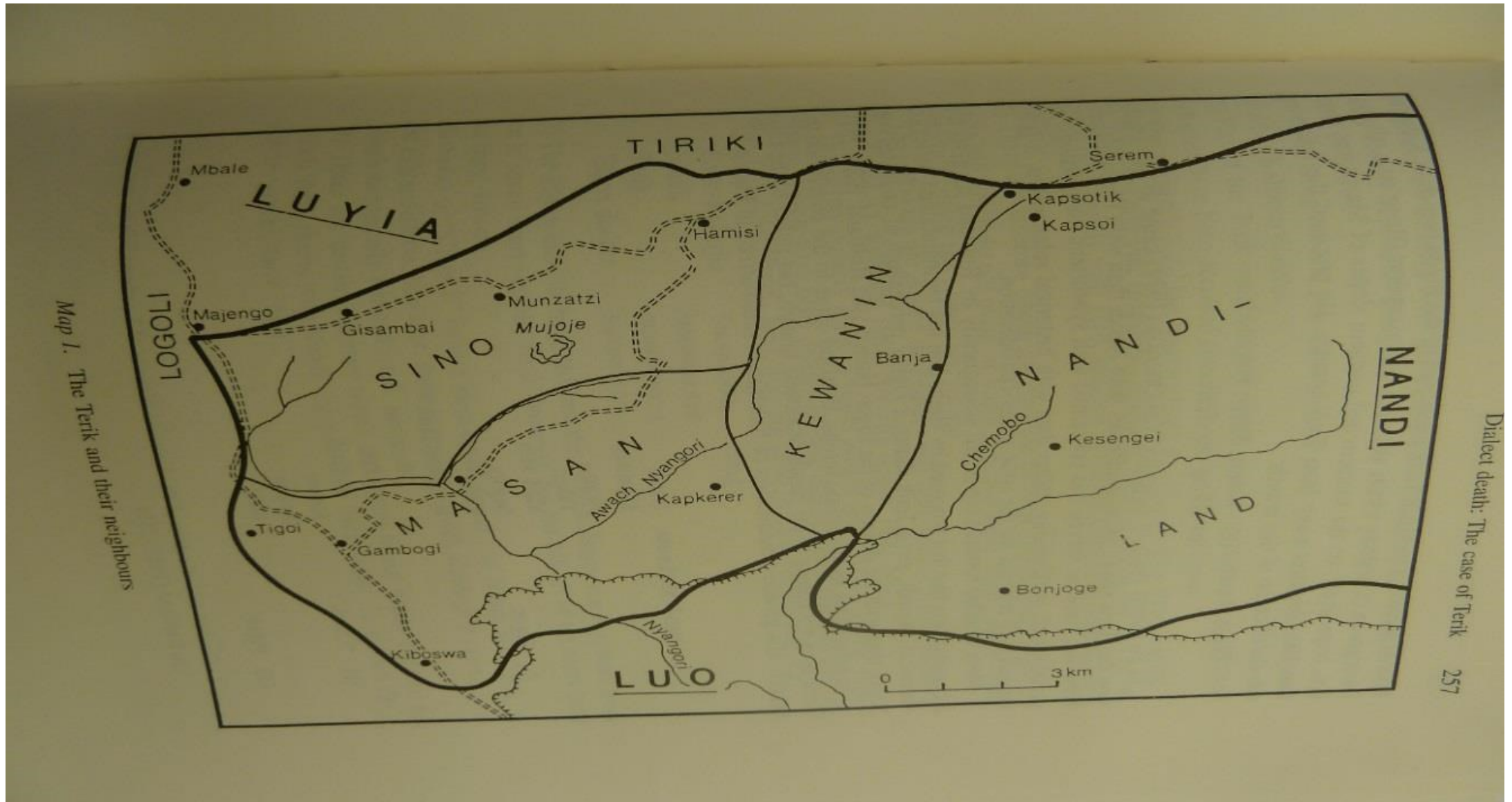
Sheep-Ngechiryeth (belonging to the household, women)

Terejeetab Maiywek-rituals of alcohol

Terejeetab Beek-Rituals of water

Gendered tensions between Pastoralism and Agriculture

Terik Concept of Territory



Source: Heine, B., 'Dialect death: the case of Terik', in Brenzinger (ed.) Language Death Factual and Theoretical Explorations with Special Reference to East Africa, Berlin/New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 1992: 255.

Social and Political Organization in Pre-colonial Terik

Bororiet (booriet means war or battle. Hence the basic territorial fighting unit), **Kookwet** (neighbourhood. Sometimes bororiet and Kokwet terms were interchangeable) and **Oret** (literally means door/lineage. This was not necessarily territorial even though most of the times members of a lineage lived in the same area/village. In some cases).

Categories of political power

Juridical/Political-*Kiruogindet*

Military/Political-*Kiptaiyat*

Ritual/Prophetic power-*Orkoiyot, Jeptumitiot*

Tumndo-Jeptumiot, Jeptuminik

Figure 1: An Artist's Impression of a Terik Circumcision Elder (Jeptumiot) Wearing his Traditional Regalia



Source: The image is published courtesy of informant Richard Kiblagat Buan Araab Jepkoi

Figure 2: An artist's Impression of Jepsirgoi Ojowi

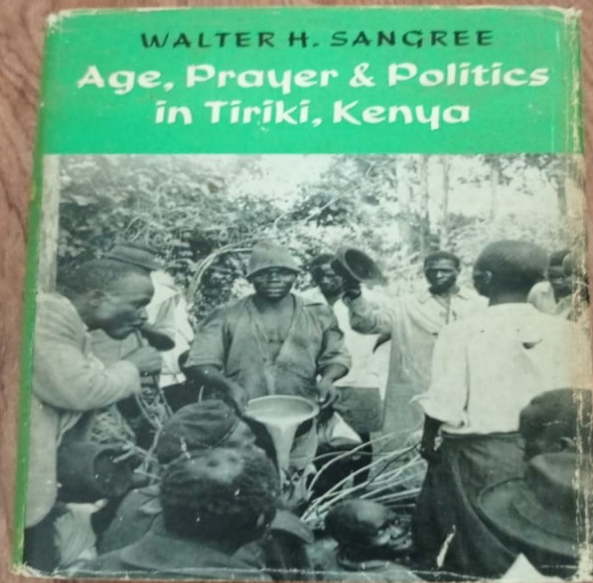


Figure drawn by of Richard Kiblagat Araab Jepkoi (Great great grandson to Jepsirgoi Ojowi). Jepsirgoi is shown wearing the ritual garment of the Giruogindet known as Sambut. This is a garment made from a leopard skin. The Giruogindet also always walks with his spear, sitting stool and a knobbery/club

Intercommunity Relations

Terik-Tiriki Relations: Evolution of Tiriki Identity

Walter Sangree experience in studying Tiriki in the late 1950s. His book published in 1958.



Walter Sangree (1966: 4)

...Tiriki lineage history recounts in detail the agnatic line from the time the wondering ancestor first arrived in the region of Tiriki and was initiated into the tribe. This line may extend back six years or seven generations, which suggests that this is when Abaluyia (sic) groups incorporated by the nilom-Hamite Terik (sic) into their age group. In many cases, the lineage depth since incorporation as Tiriki is four or five generations...'

John Osogo. *History of the Baluhya*. 1966: 56

...The Tiriki are a mere collection of clans. Some of the clans from Nandi and Nyang'ori; from Maragoli, Idakho, Bunyore and other thickly populated areas. Anyone can become Tiriki provided he is circumcised according to Tiriki circumcision, which involves a certain amount of oathing. Many people in search of land have joined the Tiriki this way...

Kiprop Arap Korir, O.I., 2014

The attacks on Terik by the Kaptumois section of Nandi led to the emergence of Tiriki people. The Kaptumois drove away our cattle and assaulted our women several times. Terik people became irritated by the Kaptumois and blew the *gondet* (horn) as a declaration of war against Kaptumois. The Terik managed to drive out the Kaptumois who grew weak and climbed the trees as sign of surrender. Terik do not kill a helpless enemy who had surrendered by climbing up the trees. Their neighbours and military friends, the Bookwek, did not understand this. With the encouragement of Terik, the Bookwek went ahead to fell the trees and kill the Kaptumois. As result of this, the Terik-Bookwek relations became stronger.

Tumndo

‘...Tumndo is the key to the secret life of the Terik...’ (Jebangwa 2014).

‘...The initiates are referred to as cow during th entire exercise...’ (Korir, 2014).

‘...initiation is considered such a crucial stage in life that before going through this rite, a young person is not considered a Kalenjin but a child of a Kalenjin...’ (Ciarunji Chesaina. *Oral Literature of the Kalenjin*. 1991: 5).

‘...male and female circumcision were highly regarded. This was most important event. It brought the whole community. All relatives came to share joy of families that initiates...’ (Kiptarus Arab Tanui, O.I., 2013).

Tumndo and Age set System

Age sets Names (Sangree, 1966: 70).

Terik

Tiriki

Gabnenach

Kablalach

Gorongoro (Gibkoymet)

Golongolo

Gimnyigei

Jiminigayi

Nyaanki

Nyonje

Mayna

Mayina

Juuma

Juma

Sawe

Sawe

Sangree, 1966: 70... Tiriki followed the lead of the Terik in the matters of circumcision and naming age groups....

Terik Age sets-Source: Table constructed from interviews with Terik informants for the present study

TERIK AGE SETS								
NAME OF CYCLE		ESTIMATED YEAR OF BIRTH			ACTUAL YEAR(S) NAMED			ESTIMATED YEAR
NYAANKI					1910s			
Kipthoihoi								2024
Thethagat								2020
Kipthoru								2016
Jongin		1880s						2012
GIMNYIGEEY								
Kipthoihoi		1890						2008
Thethagat								2004
Kipthoru		1880						2000
Jongin		1870						1996
GABNEENAACH								
Kipthoihoi					1985			1992
Thethagat								1988
Kipthoru								1984
Jongin					1970			1980
GIBKOYMET								
Kipthoihoi								1976
Thethagat					1951			1992
Kipthoru					1948			1968
Jongin								1964
SAAWE								
Kipthoihoi		1932			1952			1960
Thethagat								1956
Kipthoru								1952
Jongin								1948
JUUMO								
Kipthoihoi								1944
Thethagat								1940
Kipthoru								1936
Jongin					1936, 1938			1932
MAYNA								
Kipthoihoi					1932			1928
Thethagat								1924
Kipthoru								1920
Jongin								1916
DROPPED AGE SETS								
Antaara								
Bantaneen								
Kamunyaar								
Tamamut								

Kongoy Mising!

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