

UNEARTHING THE STORY BEHIND “LAROPI”



Sunrise over River Nile at Laropi – Photo Credit: Chole Richard, January 2020

Laropi is a small settlement astride a ferry crossing point on River Nile on the border between East and West Madi counties along the Adjumani – Moyo highway in Northern Uganda.

“Laropi” is a Madi modification of Acoli phrase, “Laro pii”, which roughly means, “Let us cross the river”. The story abounding among the Madi is that the crossing point was named when most probably in the pre-colonial times, Acoli warriors who had invaded Madi territory, were beaten in a battle and hastened to retreat across the river with the cry, “Laro pii! Laro pii! Laro pii!”. Over time, apparently, the Madi people modified the pronunciation to “Laropi”, which has stood test of time to this day. Behind this feud and the naming of Laropi, there probably is immense volume of fascinating events which may or may not have been documented anywhere. Much of whatever records that exist are most probably in the memories of the indigenous Madi and Acoli people. If there is evidence in form of artifacts and other archeological sources to support the story, probably, it is yet to be discovered.



FIGURE 2: A screen shot of map of Northern Uganda showing the location of Laropi ferry crossing on River Nile. – Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/@3.1714459,32.9609155,8z>

However, time, human development and the other elements wait for no one. All valuable leads to know more about the story behind the Laropi incident run risk of fading away if not salvaged now. Most, if not all the people who hold memory of the stories are now probably very old or dead. Given social dynamics of the present times, it is less likely that the younger generation of Madi and Acoli today have fully inherited and memorized the stories from their ancestors and elders. The once cherished tradition of orally passing stories from one generation to the next has largely disintegrated. Any archeological evidence might have also

greatly faded with time. Any attempt to source and document events, anecdotes and artifacts concerning events leading to the name, Laropi is therefore a matter of urgency.

Why Unearth the Story Behind “Laropi”?

1. To establish and document the details of the events leading to the naming of Laropi – when it happened, its causes, how it unfolded and affected the peoples of Madi and Acoli.
2. To establish and document significant social and cultural events and practices that might have existed during the events of the feud.
3. To establish any significant orature, events, anecdotes and outstanding personalities (legends, heroes, antagonists) that can form basis for producing literature in any appropriate and workable form today.

Purpose

At the heart of this venture, is to seek for raw information that can form the basis of literature grounded in the tradition, culture, and history of the people of Madi and Acholi around the story of Laropi. It is informed and propelled by need and desire to get back to African roots to enrich identity of and experience with Ugandan literature. Unearthing the story of “Laropi” is therefore first part of a two-phase project:

1. To unearth and document the details of the story around Laropi
2. To produce works of literature out of the above work.

Significance

1. It will contribute to enriching the history of the Madi and Acholi and by extension of Uganda and Africa.
2. It will provide much needed information to localize and authenticate the literary experience of Uganda.
3. It will act as a catalyst for further exploration of many other untouched or largely unknown history of Madi, Acoli and Uganda at large.

The Undertaking

This project will be undertaken in no more than two years in two major phases:

1. Unearthing, collecting and documenting details of the story of Laropi. Estimated to last six months to one year.
2. Producing work(s) of literature derived from the documented material above. At least one work of literary art in a space of one year.

Work Breakdown

Phase One: Data Collection and Documenting

To begin in December 2022

The sources of information will be categorized as primary and secondary sources.

Pertinent questions to answer:

- When did the event(s) take place? Was it a onetime occurrence or part of series of feuds between the Madi and the Acoli?
- Where did the battle take place? Or which areas did the confrontations cover?
- What were the possible causes of the conflict(s)?

- How did the Madi and Acoli fight? What weapons were used? What battle fatigues did they wear, if any? Were there options to sue for peace? How was it carried out?, etcetera.
- Are there known legendary heroes and antagonists in these conflicts? What made them stand out?
- How did the conflicts affect the people?
- How did it shape the Madi and Acoli community of today?
- What orature have emerged from the conflicts?

Possible sources:

- Persons with knowledge of the story, any existing tales among the Acoli and Madi people.
- Archeological evidence and artifacts
- Recorded historical, anthropological or any other account that may shed light on the events in question.

The information collected will be compiled into appropriate format(s) yet to be decided.



FIGURE 3 AND 4: A Madi man (Left) and an Acoli warrior (Right). Two pictures (Public Domain) believed to have been taken by Richard Buchta between 1845 and 1894. Do they conjure possible look of the warriors that fought in the battle leading to Laropi baptism?



Phase Two: Developing of a thesis of historical account, compiling realized orature and producing at least one literary work.

The primary and secondary sources will be cross-examined for authenticity and relevance.

Once the thesis is completed, the available information will be used to create at least one literary piece derived from the story.

This will involve study of the compiled information to determine what form of literature to develop out of it.

Possible literary outcomes:

- Poems
- Formulaic statements.
- Children's story books
- Pictorial representation of the stories.
- A fantasy story

Any realized works of art from the indigenous people at the time of or associated with the events of Laropi will be compiled. This may include:

- Sayings
- Proverbs
- Stories
- Myths
- Legends
- Songs

The outcome of phase two is dependent on the success of phase one.

Tools

- Audio recorder
- Video and still camera
- Notebook
- Pens
- Pencils
- Maps
- Art book

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