



Time Travel at Kraph memorial museum, Rabai, first Christian church in East Africa

Goals

1. Rabai Memorial Museum is specifically selected for the Time Travel program as it offers an opening window towards understanding the origin of Christianity in Kenya and how the abolishment of slavery affected different communities in coastal Kenya and its neighborhood and the country at large.
2. The site offers space that illuminates how historical events, such as introduction of Christianity and abolition of slavery, can bring those who actively participated in this inhuman trade network, including descendants of slave lords and those whose relatives were captured as human cargo, into a platform to dialogue for coexistence and cohesion.
3. To understand the perception of the local community on the impact of their cultural life on the arrival of missionaries.
4. To use the Rabai historical site as a venue for tourism promotion.
5. To reflect on issues of religion and human value
6. To introduce the Time Travel concept as an educational method to reflect on contemporary issues using a local heritage site and story.

Facts

Mijikenda tribes, Rabai

The Mijikenda ("the Nine Tribes") is a group of nine related Bantu ethnic groups that has inhabited the coast of Kenya for centuries. Rabai is the group in the Rabai area. During the precolonial period the Mijikenda people were pastoralists and also grew plants for food. They were knowledgeable in the use of the landscape and herbs. The Mijikenda had a trade relationship with the coastal Muslim Swahili people.

Islam and Swahili people

Islam established its presence on the East Africa coast from the 9th century and also made its way inland. The expansion was at the cost of traditional African religions. On the east Africa coast, Islam emerged as a unifying force and helped to form a unique Swahili identity, with Swahili as the mother tongue.

In 1837, Sultan Sayyid Said shifted his capital from Oman to Zanzibar. The Swahili language received royal patronage while Arabic was the state language. Trade, commerce, culture and the arts flourished. Schools and madrasas were built all along the coast. Trade fostered business relations with the interior and conversion to Islam gained momentum in the African hinterland.

Christian mission

Johann Ludwig Krapf, a German Missionary (1810-1881), working for the Church Missionary Society (CMS) came to East Africa in 1844. He had previously been a missionary in Ethiopia for six years. Most of the East African coastline was part of the Zanzibar sultanate. Sultan Sayyid Said gave Krapf a permit to start a missionary station at Mombasa, the first Christian mission in the area. Soon after arrival his wife, whom he married the year before, and their young daughter died from malaria. Krapf moved to the higher grounds of Rabai and started his mission station New Rabai. He was given a piece of land of the local Rabai people. The agreement was sealed by a token, local palmwine. Krapf learnt the local languages, Mijikenda/ Rabai and Swahili. He wrote the first dictionary and grammar of the Swahili language. Working with a Muslim judge, he translated Genesis. He went on to translate the New Testament, as well as the Book of Common Prayer. He also drafted dictionaries and translating sections of the Bible in the local languages. Krapf had trouble convincing tribal chiefs to let him speak to the people and in the beginning not many converted. Krapf also noted, what he called the "surge of Islam" that was going through Africa.

In 1846 Krapf was joined by Johannes Rebmann, another German Lutheran who was in the service of the CMS. The construction of the church building started in 1846 and the church was completed in 1848, the very first Christian church in today's Kenya. The church was built by Indian muslims and they received land for building a mosque nearby. Other buildings were soon constructed around the church compound, for example a school, a clinic and space for freed slaves. Krapf and Rebmann also set off to explore the interior of East Africa. In 1853 Krapf's deteriorating health forced him to return to Germany.

In the 1880s the Rabai church became too small and a new, large church was built, that is still in use today.

Slave trade

In the 1800s, the slave trade from Africa to the Islamic countries picked up significantly. People was captured as slaves in the interior, more women than men, and were brought to the coast. Zanzibar was East Africa's main slave-trading port, and under Omani Arabs in the 19th century as many as 50,000 slaves were passing through the city each year. David Livingstone estimated that 80,000 Africans died each year before ever reaching the slave markets of Zanzibar. From Zanzibar the slaves were sent to several of the Arabic countries.

Ludwig Krapf opposed strongly the treatment of the slaves. The mission station became a refuge for runaway slaves and slaves, who were bought free from their slave masters. They were able to live at the mission and started a small market in the compound.

The Krapf memorial museum was founded in 1994. The Church is today being managed by the Anglican Church of Kenya. The historical importance of the Church lies on its foundation as the focal point for the spread of Christianity and the birth place of formal education and introduction of western medicine through establishment of hospitals. The site also acted as the central place for the abolition of slavery and served as a refugee center for freed slaves.

National Museums of Kenya (NMK) in its mandate conserve the rich cultural heritage of the site, interpret and promote this history for appreciation by local and international visitors.

Scenario, Opening the doors of the church at New Rabai mission in 1848, the first church on the east Africa coast

The Rabai people is well established in the area. They take care of the cattle, grow their food, trade with the Swahili Muslims and have their traditions. Four years ago a Christian missionary came here and was given land to establish a mission station. Some of the Rabai have taken part in the education at the mission, but not many have converted. But now their curiosity grows. A Christian church has been completed, a big building. And today all of them has been invited to the mission station, to be the first ones to enter the church.

Ludwig Krapf is very proud. This very day, the first Christian church on the African east coast is going to be used for the first time, and on Sunday the first service will be held. He has been here for two years. It has been tough times. He has learnt the local Rabai and Swahili languages and talks to a lot of people. Quite many come to the mission station, but not many have been baptized. The Muslim tradition is strong, so are the traditional beliefs of the Rabai. But now he trusts there will be a change.

The coast area is very busy. It's a mix of people, several religions, many languages, people are coming and going. The sultanate brings slaves from the interior. They lock them up in small cells on the coast before taking them to the slave market on Zanzibar. The slaves are treated worse than animals. The Rabai are worried. Ludwig Krapf argues for the same value of all people. He has in mind to open the Mission station as a refugee center for freed slaves. Is that possible?

Today is a day of celebration but also a day for reflection on the way forward. Will all these various groups of people on the coast be able to live together in the future, independent of religion or ethnicity, even the slaves? The Rabai people arrive at the mission station, curious. This might be an important day in their lives, and for the mission station...

Roles

The students are the local Rabai people coming to the mission station

Swahili people, Slave

Ludwig Krapf, Johannes Rebmann, assistant missionaries, teacher

Key Questions

- Can I convert to Christianity or to Islam and still keep most of my religion and traditions? Or what do I have to abandon?
- How can Christians, Muslims and people of traditional religion live together? Is cohesion possible?
- Do different ethnic groups or gender have different tasks and duties in society?

Activities

- Write in Rabai, Swahili and English
- Write and decorate a Biblical text: “When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed”
- Make a traditional necklace
- Songs, dances, prayers
- Make medicine from herbs

Time Plan

- 08.00 Set up the site
- 09.00 Students arrive, welcome, background, (clothing)
Scenario, characters, rules
- 09.30 Time Travel starts
Initiation (a hymn)
- 09.40 Activities and discussions
- 10.20 (A runaway slave appears.)
Gathering, discussions, Krapf makes his announcement,
- 10.35 Hymn, prayer, ending ceremony of the Time Travel
- 10.45 Reflection
- 11.00 End

10th April 2017

Jambo Haro, National Museums of Kenya

Ebbe Westergren and Johanna Ejderstedt, Kalmar county museum/ Bridging Ages