

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Nyamwezi; alt: Wanyamwezi, Kinyamwesi, Namwezi

Dialect: Nyanyembe, Takama

Language Family: Nyamwezi-Sukuma (3)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): nym (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): (-4.983, 33.166) (1)

1.4 Brief history: According to stories, Nyamwezi are believed to have settled in Tanzania during the 17th century. They have become nomadic herders and traders due to the poor soil of the area. Originally, there were five tribes, which referred to themselves as Wanyamwezi, but never united. The Nyamwezi keep close cultural connections with the Sukuma people. (7)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: In the 19th century, German colonists arrived in Tanzania, eventually gaining control. Surprisingly, despite outside control, the nyamwezi tribes were resistant to unfamiliar cultures. Because of their deep involvement with trade, they welcomed merchants. Eventually, a form of rule was made a central government was formed. (4)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Because of the highland and plateau environment, the Nyamwezi are predominantly cattle herders or farmers. The terrain sees minimal amounts of rain per year and the environment sees mostly warm temperatures ranging from 70-90 degrees. (2)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: Population: 1 million. The average population is about 75-100 people per village. The nyamwezi people live predominantly in dispersed populations. (1)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): A favorite food is *ugali*, a stiff porridge made from corn, millet, or sorghum meal. It is served with beef, chicken, and vegetables. Cassava, rice, bread, peanuts, spinach, cassava leaves and other vegetables are also eaten. Rice, Corn, and Millet are significant crops. (10)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: When obtainable, the meat from wild game is a special treat. Chicken. Beef are meal staples. (1)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Members are adorned with bows and arrows, or spears and guns, and whistles are used to sound the alarm. (5)

2.4 Food storage: Nyamwezi advocate immense amount of food storage for nourishment and future farming. As a result, food is stored in vases made of clay, while the scarce amount of meat is salted, wrapped in leaves and preserved. (4)

2.5 Sexual division of production: Men gather foods and herd, women prepare what is brought back to the huts. (6)

2.6 Land tenure: Most villages are established throughout the region (1)

2.7 Ceramics: Usually made of wood and feature styles that pay attention to details (yet simple). Most pieces feature small, piercing eyes, bold foreheads, and others. (1)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: All villages cooperate although ruling families are held in higher lights. However, each family is self-reliant in food production. (9)

2.9 Food taboos: No information found

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? None (live on plains)

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): 5 feet 9 inches (9)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): 5 feet 6 inches (9)

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): "Although girls do not marry until puberty, menarche (age 16) is not the main indicator for nuptial status: the appearance of breasts and the competence in household duties are. Giving in marriage of an immature girl is considered a sign of extreme poverty and does not add to one's status in the community." (12)

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): 19 (4)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): Most families are made up of a mother, a father, and children. Men have traditionally controlled most of the power within a household. Normally 4-7. (6)

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): marry at the age of about 18 to 20 years (3)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Divorce is frequent. Women's first marriages in which bride-wealth is established are the most steady. (1)

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygyny is a common male occurrence, but these marriages are comparatively unstable. Older men are less polygynous than those in their 40s. (7)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: "Giving in marriage of an immature girl is considered a sign of extreme poverty and does not add to one's status in the community. The marriage of an immature boy (barely ten) to a grown woman was considered as a sign of prosperity, and occurred not seldom- especially in former days- and was said to "make the boy grow up quickly" "(12)

4.9 Inheritance patterns: "Questions of inheritance are usually resolved within the families concerned. Customarily only sons of bride-wealth marriages, or redeemed sons, inherit the main forms of wealth. Such heirs should look after the needs of daughters. Sometimes one son looks after an inheritance for all his siblings. Unredeemed children are in a weak position; they may fail to inherit either from their father or from their mother's kin, whose own children may take precedence." (10)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: They do not condone homosexuality in any form. (4)

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): No information found

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No information found

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape. No information found

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Known family does not marry (6)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? "The inhabitants of a *maji* are free to leave it at night, and not only the young men of the village, but married men also call at the house and frequently invite the young girls to dances (*mbina*). It is not good form for a man to enter the *maji* at night,

but the evenings are spent in conversation and flirting [...] The *maji* time, especially during the first few years, is a very happy phase, but sexual intercourse is in no way its sole purpose. In many cases the state of semi-virginity is retained for a long time. The behavior of the girls is not criticized by the community as long as they observe the conventions of their position which demand not chastity but discretion [...] The ideal behavior for a girl while living in the *maji* is to have a few lovers, so as to gain sufficient experience for a good wife, and to marry at the age of about 18 to 20 years” (12)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: “Many men prefer to have children with several women, whether their wives are of bridewealth or non-bridewealth marriages or occasional acquaintances, and there is generally no lasting shame in having children born outside of official marriages (other than very devoted Christians maybe) for either men or women. Also many woman want children from the different unions they have during the course of their life.” (3)

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Husband (1)

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: 1.9 (6)

4.22 Evidence for couvades. No information found

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) No information found

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? ? “This runs partly along generation lines and is at its strongest between affines. Sexual difference is also a factor. Thus, brothers-in-law joke with each other, and there is avoidance between a man and his daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. Known kin should not marry.” (10)

4.24 Joking relationships? ? “Greetings are very important in Nyamwezi society. One greets important people by bowing, clapping one's hands, and averting one's gaze before a handshake. A greeting among close friends are less formal and often incorporate some teasing and joking.” (10)

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Known kin do not marry (6)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? “Marriage is a very important Nyamwezi institution. Courtship typically begins with a young man's search for a suitable young woman to marry. With one or two male friends, he visits her home and discusses the possibility of marriage. If, after consulting with her female elders, the young woman agrees, bride wealth negotiations begin. When the bride wealth is agreed upon, the groom's father holds a large feast. After the bride wealth has been paid, a wedding ceremony is held with much feasting, dancing, and singing” (10)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) “If, after consulting with her female elders, the young woman agrees, bride wealth negotiations begin. When the bride wealth is agreed upon, the groom's father holds a large feast.” (10)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Marriage is a very important aspect of Nyamwezi life. Courtship normally begins with a young man's search for an appropriate young woman. With one or two friends, he visits her residence to discuss the prospect of marriage. (1)

Warfare/homicide

“Today, the Nyamwezi have a rich cultural heritage. Perhaps the most important part of their heritage is the emphasis on harmonious and balanced social relations. Nyamwezi society has historically placed a high value on tolerance. This has allowed many people from outside Unyamwezi to live peacefully in the area and has allowed the Nyamwezi to live throughout Tanzania.” (13)

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction: “In the 1990s, Tanzania changed from a one-party socialist state to a country with multi-party competitive elections and a free-market economy. A number of Nyamwezi emerged as leaders of the opposition parties and played important roles in the ruling party.” (13)

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: 75-100 people (1)

5.4 Post marital residence: “Most people in Unyamwezi live in houses made of mud bricks with either thatched grass or corrugated iron roofs and dirt floors. Most houses do not have electricity or indoor plumbing, and most people have few material possessions. Malaria and sleeping sickness are widespread.” (13)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): “Questions of inheritance are usually resolved within the families concerned. Customarily only sons of bride-wealth marriages, or redeemed sons, inherit the main forms of wealth. Such heirs should look after the needs of daughters. Sometimes one son looks after an inheritance for all his siblings. Unredeemed children are in a weak position; they may fail to inherit either from their father or from their mother's kin, whose own children may take precedence.” (10)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: A greeting among close friends are less formal and often incorporate some teasing and joking. (7)

5.8 Village and house organization: “They commonly consisted of a man and his wife or wives, their resident children, and perhaps the spouse and the children of one or more of the resident children. Other close relatives of the head of the homestead might also be present. Homesteads were the largest units in which members of one sex regularly ate together. They contained one or more households that were distinct food-producing and child-rearing units. The household was the basic economic unit and the husband-wife relation was its key element. This has been reinforced in new compact village where each 0.4-hectare plot is assigned to a family based on a couple and their children. Neighboring households collaborate in a wide range of activities.” (10)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): Men normally control most of the power in a household. However, this pattern is changes, as the government stresses equal rights for women. (5)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Beds in Huts

5.12 Trade: elephant hunting--Ivory

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR): “The Nyamwezi embrace African Traditional beliefs, Islam and Christianity. They have much respect for their ancestors (the living dead), to whom they offer sacrifices and rely on for their benevolence. Most claim to be Muslims and follow the five pillars of Islam, but in reality they live by their animistic worldview, believing in a creator God, the spirit world, and the importance of using witchdoctors and other diviners to communicate with the spirits.” (10)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): “Diviners and other local experts provide herbal and other forms of treatment for illness. Shops sell some Western medicines, including aspirin and liniments. Village dispensaries and state and mission hospitals also provide Western medicine. People commonly use both Western and indigenous treatments rather than trusting wholly in either.” (10)

6.2 Stimulants: No information found

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): A series of rituals welcome the birth of a new baby. Many Nyamwezi practices surrounding birth have changed as Western influences have increased. (9)

6.4 Other rituals: “Divination takes many forms, the most common being chicken divination, in which a young fowl is killed and readings are taken from its wings and other features. Sacrifices and libations, along with initiation into a spirit-possession or other society, may result from a divinatory séance. Divination and subsequent rituals may divide people, especially if witchcraft is diagnosed, but in many contexts the system allows villagers to express their solidarity with each other without loss of individual identity. In addition to ritual focused upon individuals and attended by their kin and neighbors, there is some public ceremonial at village and wider levels. Chiefly rituals are still sometimes performed, and there are ceremonies to cleanse a village of pollution when a member dies.” (10)

6.5 Myths (Creation): “The Nyamwezi people of Tanzania in East Africa worship Mulungu as the god who created all things and who watches over the earth. Although he created the world, Mulungu is a very distant god with no personal relationship with living beings. According to legend, Mulungu once lived on earth. He left and went to live in heaven because some people set fire to the landscape, causing devastation and killing many other people. Unable to climb the tree that linked heaven and earth, Mulungu asked Spider to help him travel up to the sky. Spider climbed up, spun a thread, and let one end of the thread fall to earth. Mulungu followed the thread up to heaven.” (13,11)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): “Representational art is not strongly developed; it has mainly ritual functions. Music and dancing are the main art forms, and drums are the main instruments, although the nail piano (a box with metal prongs that twang at different pitches) and other instruments are also found. Traditional songs are sung at weddings and at dances, but new songs are also composed by dance leaders. Male dance teams are the most common, but some female and mixed teams perform. Ritual and other societies have their own dance styles. Transistor radios are now widespread. Local and visiting jazz and other bands play in the towns.” (10)

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: “Funerals are important rituals for bereaved families and their kin and neighbors. Neighbors dig the grave and take news of the death to relatives of the deceased who live outside the village. The dead become ancestors who may continue to affect the lives of their descendants and demand appeasement. The idea that the dead live on in their descendants is expressed in terms of shared identity between alternate generations.” (10)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No evidence found

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No evidence found

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Nyamwezi spirituality has been shaped by traditional beliefs, Islam, and Christianity. Traditional Nyamwezi spirituality centers on the connection between the living and their ancestors. Ancestors are seen as upholding the tradition, law, and values of society. (10)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Worn only during rituals and sacrifices (9)

7.2 Piercings: No information found

7.3 Haircut: Hair is kept short to accommodate the hot environment

7.4 Scarification: None

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Many women wear *khangas*, printed cloth adorned with Swahili sayings and *vitenge*, printed cloth with brightly colored and ornate designs. “Dresses based on Arab, European, and Indian styles are also popular. Men wear trousers and shirts. On special occasions Muslim men wear flowing white robes called *kanzus*.” (13)

7.8 Missionary effect: Men wear trousers and shirts.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: No information found

8. Kinship systems: The nuclear family resides together, and villages are not essentially based on kin relationships. (4)

8.1 Sibling classification system: No information found

8.2 Sororate, levirate: None

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): No information found

Numbered references

1. Abrahams, R. G. *The Nyamwezi Today*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
2. The Nyamwezi of Tanzania, *Pray Africa: a Ministry of Inland Africa*
3. Hinkkanen: *Someone to Welcome You Home*. 2009.
4. Rockel, S. *A Nation of Porters: The Nyamwezi and the Labour Market in Nineteenth Century Tanzania*. 2000.
5. Abrahams, R. G. *The Political Organization of Unyamwezi*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1967.
6. Tanzania. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/GESUND/ARCHIV/GUS/TANZANIA.HTM>
7. Iliffe, J. *A Modern History of Tanzania*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
8. Nyemwezi. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Tajikistan-to-Zimbabwe/Nyamwezi.html>.
9. Abrahams, R. G. (1967). *The Peoples of Greater Unyamwezi, Tanzania*. International African Institute.
10. *Everyculture.com*
11. *Mythenclopedia.com*
12. Scherer, J. H. (1965) *Marriage and Bride-Wealth in the Highlands Buha (Tanganyika)*. Groningen [Holland]: R. V. B. Kleine
13. Junior Worldmark Encyclopedia of World Cultures, 1999