

Gratitude in Remembrance

Bethwell Ogot began lecturing in the Department of History of the University College, Nairobi in September 1964. At the time I was the Principal of Strathmore College, an A-level college in Nairobi. I had received my Master's degree from Harvard University and completed the required course work for my PhD but had not yet written my doctoral dissertation. Though not a member of the Department of History of the University College, I began to attend the weekly Wednesday seminars of the department at the invitation of my friend John Kieran, a history lecturer who knew of my interest in African history.

The weekly history seminars were active, engaging forums at which one of us would present a 'paper' for discussion. It was at one of the weekly seminars in late 1964 where I first met Bethwell Ogot and where we continued to meet and see each other.

In early 1966, Bethwell told me of his vision and wish to promote the foundation of a Kenya Historical Association. He had received a grant from the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs to cover the expenses of a national conference on African history, which he hoped might lead to the establishment of such an association. He asked me whether he could hold the conference at Strathmore College, to which I agreed. We began working closely together to prepare the agenda and logistics of the conference, which took place during the days of 17–20 April 1966. The conference attracted some seventy history teachers from secondary schools in Kenya. Professor Ogot gave the opening address, which was followed by numerous break-out sessions dealing with specific historical themes. The conference made numerous recommendations about revising the school history syllabus to

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include a much higher proportion of precolonial African history. On the closing day, the meeting resolved to form the Historical Association of Kenya and Professor Bethwell was unanimously elected chair.

Many people know Professor Bethwell Ogot as the Chairman of the International Scientific Committee for the drafting of the eight-volume UNESCO *General History of Africa*, elected to that position by his fellow professors of history from the other countries of Africa. As can be seen from the above, Bethwell also had a deep concern for the study of history in his homeland and took specific actions to enhance the quality and extent of the teaching of the history of Kenya.

I was subsequently elected to be the Treasurer of the Historical Association of Kenya, which gave me the opportunity to meet Bethwell regularly. He encouraged me to complete my doctoral studies, which I did at his old school, the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, before joining the staff of the Department of History of the University of Nairobi in 1988.

I had a memorable last meeting with Bethwell at his home in Gem.

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