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THE PLACE OF A COW AMONG THE PRE-COLONIAL KIPSIGIS OF RIFT VALLEY REGION IN KENYA: APPRECIATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS IN A PASTORAL ECONOMY.

The pre-colonial pastoral economy is mainly subsumed to comprise of a community of people wandering with their drought-stricken cattle in search of pastures and water over long distances. The Kipsigis, who were initially a purely pastoral community and finally settled in a well-watered area around Kericho, gradually adopted crop production and supplemented their diet with agricultural produce, thus becoming mixed farmers. They nevertheless retained their indigenous knowledge in cattle herding and before the advent of colonialism, they were well known for their great attachment to and love for their cattle. The 'cow' was a central defining feature in their socio-cultural, economic and political organization and relations. This paper seeks to provide historical insights on the knowledge and practice of animal husbandry among the pre-colonial Kipsigis community in the Rift Valley to underscore the importance and resilience of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in a pastoral setting. It examines the variety of pastoral systems, the diversity on animal production and the dynamic animal-based food processing and storage techniques in forestalling food scarcity. It also examines the broad social mechanisms concerning animals in alleviating food shortages and famines. It is demonstrated that the Kipsigis pre-colonial pastoral systems were dynamic, innovative, diverse, efficient, self-reliant and suited to the needs of the peoples involved. It is argued further that the Kipsigis pastoral organization was sound, resourceful, and rational and based on the people's knowledge of their environment.

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