Preservation of Relics:
The Case of the late A. C. K. Oboth-Ofumbi in Tororo, Eastern Uganda

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This paper attempts to describe the events that sparked my interest in a specific subject of my fieldwork during this decade. I was particularly intrigued by the preservation of the relics of the late A. C. K. Oboth-Ofumbi (1932–1977), who was a Japadhola and served as a cabinet minister in Idi Amin Dada’s regime (1971–1979). Despite being the head of Amin’s inner circle, he was reportedly eventually murdered on Amin’s orders. He was acclaimed as one of the most famous Jopadhola, but he had an ambiguous reputation, including rumours that he was connected to a tipo (spirit of a murdered person), lam (curse) and jathieth (soothsayer). He left many memories and objects in his homeland of Padhola. He was the author of the first ethnography of the Jopadhola, and a defence minister who established Padhola’s first army barracks. He was a pious Christian who built a large tombstone with a huge cross, presently functioning as a monument in this area, and a memorial chapel for his late father. He was also a family man who left a large inheritance and a modern mansion, and a methodical postcolonial intellectual who left a number of diaries that faithfully depict his time. In this paper, I explain how I accidentally came to develop an interest in this figure. Visiting a large number of elders, his family and neighbours, I not only developed a better understanding of the religious beliefs and world view of the Jopadhola, but also came to appreciate the importance of the relics left by Oboth-Ofumbi, especially those in his residence, and to develop a keen interest in preserving them.

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