

King Mwezi IV Gisabo Bikata-Bijoga (c. 1840 – 1908) was a pivotal figure in Burundian history, often remembered as the last independent monarch of Burundi before its full colonization by the German Empire. His reign, lasting from approximately 1860 until his death in 1908, was marked by intense internal power struggles and a fierce, yet ultimately unsuccessful, resistance against European encroachment.

Here's a crash course on King Mwezi Gisabo:

1. Early Reign and Internal Challenges:

Accession to Power: Mwezi Gisabo ascended to the throne around 1860, succeeding his father, Ntare IV Rutaganzwa Rugamba. His early reign was characterized by internal power struggles with his half-brothers and various princely factions and chiefs who challenged his authority. **Consolidation of Power:** Despite the internal turmoil, Mwezi Gisabo worked to solidify the kingdom's administrative structure. He was seen as a central, almost mystical, figure and the "Father of the Nation," embodying the law and custom. The traditional Burundian political system, with its hierarchy of chiefs and local councils (Bashingantahe), was well-established and functioned during his half-century reign. **Defense Against Regional Threats:** Before the Europeans, he actively defended Burundi against external African threats, notably defeating slave traders like Rumaliza who attempted to infiltrate Burundian territory from the east.

2. The Arrival of Europeans and Resistance:

The Scramble for Africa: Mwezi Gisabo's reign coincided with the "Scramble for Africa," as European powers carved up the continent. Burundi, along with Rwanda and Tanganyika, fell within the sphere of German influence, becoming part of German East Africa. **Initial German Incursion:** The first German missionaries and soldiers arrived in Burundi in the late 1800s. Mwezi Gisabo initially hoped to use the Germans to his advantage in his ongoing internal struggles. **Refusal to Cede Sovereignty:** However, he soon realized the true colonial intent and staunchly refused to cede his kingdom's independence. **The Abadasigana (The Unstoppable):** Mwezi Gisabo led a determined resistance movement against the Germans. His warriors, known as the Abadasigana, were renowned for their bravery and resilience. The conflict, despite the Germans' overwhelming technological superiority (firearms against bows and arrows), raged for nearly seven years (roughly 1896-1903). **Notable Battles:** The Battle of Rugombo in 1896 symbolized his determination to preserve Burundian sovereignty. **Betrayal and Forced Submission:** Sadly, Mwezi Gisabo's prolonged resistance was undermined by internal betrayal. Some Burundian princes and chiefs, motivated by personal grudges or promises of administrative positions from the Germans, sided with the colonizers. This internal division significantly weakened his position. **Treaty of Kiganda (1903):** After years of fierce fighting and facing overwhelming odds, Mwezi Gisabo was eventually forced to submit. In 1903, he signed the "Treaty of Kiganda," which formally recognized German authority over Burundi. In exchange, the Germans allowed him to remain on

the throne as a nominal ruler, effectively a puppet.

3. Legacy and Death:

Continued Rule under German Authority: Mwezi Gisabo continued to reign until his death in 1908, but his power was significantly diminished under German colonial administration. Death: He died in 1908, reportedly of malaria on his way home from a meeting with the German Resident in Bujumbura. National Hero: Despite the ultimate defeat, King Mwezi Gisabo is remembered as a national hero in Burundi, a symbol of resistance against colonial subjugation. His long and arduous struggle against a technologically superior force highlights the determination of the Burundian people to maintain their independence. Succession: He was succeeded by his son, Mutaga IV Mbikije, who had a relatively ephemeral reign.

In essence, King Mwezi Gisabo's reign represents the twilight of independent Burundi, a period of profound transformation where the traditional African kingdom confronted the relentless expansion of European colonialism. His story is one of a valiant, though ultimately tragic, struggle to preserve his nation's sovereignty.