

Archaeological/Historical Treasures and Features at Mbajeng: The Need for a Rescue Historical/Archaeology operations

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Abstract

This is the result of a reconnaissance survey of the site of Mbajeng in the Nkambe Plateau, North West Region of Cameroon, with the sole aim of identifying, with the intention of recovering and preserving, the material cultural remains and features of importance to the history of the Mbum ethnic group, which occupies the area. Oral traditions and oral interviews with some Mbum people with knowledge of the site, helped in undertaking a random ethnoarchaeological reconnaissance surface survey of the site. Oral traditions maintain that, Mbajeng was settled for over a hundred years (from mid-18th to late 19th Centuries) and abandoned by the Tang, one of the three clans or Fondoms that make up the present day Mbum ethnic group. The site is still of historical importance to this clan because its leaders occasionally visit it to perform sacrifices on the royal burial chamber, shrines and graves of some personalities. The random survey we conducted, identified two sections of the site which were settled and later abandoned. These included one of the surrounding hills and the rugged plane where a good number of archaeological/historical finds and features of especially stones, iron slag, potsherds, cowry shells, shrines and ruins of buildings, were found. Unfortunately, this site and its material cultural remains and features associated with the original occupants are under the threat of extinction by natural and human factors such as erosion, cattle grazing, farming, and construction of houses. This has therefore rendered an urgent need for a rescue archaeological/historical operation for the sake of understanding the undocumented past and posterity of the Mbum people who settled at Mbajeng, very imperative.

Key words: *Archaeological, Tikar, historical, origin, tradition, settlement*

Introduction: The Tikar

The migratory history of the Mbum ethnic group, otherwise referred in some literature as Wimbum, meaning “People of Mbum” who occupy all of Ndu and Nkambe Sub Divisions in Donga Mantung Division of Cameroon, is very much tied to that of the Tikar. This is because they are believed to be of the Tikar

conglomerate of ethnic groups who claim a common origin for themselves⁷³. Most of these Tikar ethnic groups today occupy the Bamenda grassland of former British Southern Cameroons extending to the Southern parts of Northern British Cameroon; the Mambilla Plateau in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The term Tikar as applied to the Bamenda Grassfields ethnic groups “implies rather a claim to the legitimacy of political institutions and to their ultimate derivation from a legendary centre which sanctioned their adoption”⁷⁴. Tikar, according to Nkwi, were characterised by sacred kingships, princes, fraternities, distinctions between royals and subjects in their early days⁷⁵. The Tikar people, according to MuCulloch, claim their origin to either Ndobo, Tibati or Kimi, all pre-19th century settlements in present day Adamawa Region of Cameroon⁷⁶.

It should however be noted that, it is a bit difficult and at times impossible to critically understand different forms of oral traditions and legends which deal with the origin of ethnic groups in Africa⁷⁷.

Some of the traditions are very mythical, ascribing the origin of an ethnic group to an individual who probably came from the sky and landed somewhere. Examples are the *Nri* legend of Igbo land and *Oduduwa* in Yoruba land⁷⁸. Others like the Bamali⁷⁹ and the Nsei⁸⁰ people of Ndop, claim that their founders were great warriors with supernatural powers which enabled them to capture and subdued other people. Some maintained that their founders came from a particular direction or were spirits harboured by certain non-human creatures such as animals or snakes. The Hausas, for example, claim their founder, Bayajida was the son of the King of Baghdad who was associated with killing a snake which prevented people from fetching water from a well⁸¹.

It is in the light of this that, the view held by the Tikar that they came from the Adamawa planes in North East Cameroon is considered a recent part of their tradition of origin. The Mbula and Jibu of the Adamawa State of Nigeria claim

⁷³V.J. Ngoh, 1996, *Cameroon since 1800*. Limbe, Presbook. Also see Eyongetah, T., Brain Robert and Robin. P. 1987 *A History of Cameroon*. (New Edition) London: Longman and V.G. Falso, 1989. *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges*. Vol.1 *From Prehistoric Times to the Nineteenth Century*. London: Longman.

⁷⁴ E.M. Chilver et al 1967, "The Tikar Problem: A non-Problem" In *Journal of African Languages*. Vol 3.

⁷⁵P.N. Nkwi, 1976, *Traditional Government and social change - A Study of The Political Institutions among the Kom of the Cameroon Grassfield*. Switzerland, Friebourg.

⁷⁶ M.W. MuCulloch, et al 1964 *Peoples of the Central Cameroons*. London: International African Institute. Also see Eyongetah, Brain Robert and P. Robin. P. 1987 *A History of Cameroon*. (New Edition) London: Longman and Chilver, E.M. and Kaberry 1967. "The Tikar Problem:

⁷⁷ J.F.A Ajayi, and Michael Crowder (ed.) 1979 *History of West Africa*. Vol. I, London. Longman: 20-23.

⁷⁸ See K. Shellington. 1995 *History of Africa* (Revised Edition) New York: St Martin's Press: 188

⁷⁹ N.M. Chombong 2006 "The Bicycle in the Socio-economic Development of Ndop: The case of Bamali" Unpublished Long Essay, Department of History, University of Buea.

⁸⁰ See Boniface Malenfe 1996 *The Tradition, Customs and Culture of the Nsei People* Bamenda: Unique Printers and A.Y. Nebang. 2002 "The Nsei Fondom: A Historical Reconstruction, 1940-1994". Unpublished Long Essay, Department of History, University of Buea.

⁸¹ Ibid: 21.

that they left together with the Tikar from a place east of Lake Chad and travelled southwards. The Mbula in another version, claim they brought the Tikar and their mystical canoe from Boundang (Moundang) in the north east of Cameroon. According to Abubakar Sa'ad, these two versions do not provide any good and clear hypothesis or grounds for further and serious investigations⁸².

Percival⁸³ suggests that, the Tikar claim their origin from Mboum. Meek⁸⁴ on the other hand, is of the opinion that it was the Tikar ruling class which was of Mboum origin and not the Tikar people or group, as a whole. These assertions to some extent, have brought confusion as far as the real origin of the Tikar people as a group and their chieftaincy institutions, are concerned⁸⁵. It is therefore not very clear how the Tikar found themselves in the Banyo planes of north east Cameroon.

In connection with the Banyo planes of north east Cameroon, one account is today popular amongst oral traditionalists and historians. This account maintains that, more than two to three hundred years ago, increasing pressure from the North African Arabs and later, the Fulani and Chamba raids for slaves, as well as internal squabbles within the Tikar ethnic group based in the Banyo planes, led to the splitting of the group into small groups. The small groups were led by leaders who proved their worth as warriors and who later moved with their people south and eastwards away from the slave raiders⁸⁶.

The small groups today constitute ethnic groups which occupy most of the Bamenda Grassfields (present day, North West Region), parts of French Cameroon (Foumban) and also the neighbouring Mambilla Plateau of Nigeria (Taraba State). The different traditions of origin of these ethnic groups seem to relate to, or corroborate each other. Although, they have taken different names like Kom, Nso, Bum, Nkwen and Mbum, following their specific experiences along the different paths of migration, they all claim in their traditions of belonging to the Tikar whose origin they ascribe to either Tibati, Ndobbo or Kimi in the Banyo planes⁸⁷.

The Mbum Ethnic Group

The Mbum ethnic group, as earlier noted, is one of the Tikar splinter groups who, according to tradition, migrated into their present location in the Nkambe Plateau, specifically from Kimi. Tradition holds that Kimi, their area of origin was named after their leader called Kimi by the Fulani and Arab slave raiders.

⁸² S. Abubakar, 1970 "The Lamibe of Fombina." Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria: 52.

⁸³ D.A Percival, 1938 *The Mambilla Tribe*. Nigeria National Archives Yola. Profile 2698.

⁸⁴ C. K Meek, 1938 *Tribal studies in Northern Nigeria*. Vol. 11 London

⁸⁵ S. Abubakar, S. 1970 "The Lamibe of Fombina: 67

⁸⁶ C. Noutchachom, 1984 *Répertoire Economique et Industriel de la République du Cameroun*. Yaounde. Sopecam :268-270

⁸⁷ See P.N. Nkwi, 1976. *Traditional Government and social change - A Study of The Political Institutions among the Kom*.

Common to Tikar tradition, is the claim that the Arab and later Fulani and Chamba raids for slaves as earlier noted, forced them to leave Kimi, or the

Adamawa planes⁸⁸. Kimi, under whose leadership the Mbum left the Adamawa planes, was a huge man, and tradition maintains that, the Fulani slave raiders fondly referred to him as *Kimi Manga*, in *Fulfulde*, the Fulani dialect, which means, “Big or Huge Kimi”⁸⁹.

They did not also leave Kimi as a unified group because internal dissension within its ruling ranks, an issue, which was common with the Tikar, also forced their division into three principal groups, referred to as Warr, Wiya and Tang.⁹⁰ The groups which were led by people who today are referred to as Fons, reached the present Wimbun land in three different waves or phases.

Those who arrived earlier are said to have welcomed their brothers who came later and allowed them to settle where there were available spaces. Dissensions were still common amongst the groups as dissidents broke away from the main group and formed new villages. The villages were headed by chiefs who were traditionally enthroned by the Fon, leader of the clan to which they belonged. The chiefs in turn, paid tributes to the Fon who was/is still the paramount or supreme leader of the clan. The traditions concerning the migratory history⁹¹ of the three clans differ from one group to another, since as earlier indicated, they left Kimi at different times and followed different paths to their present settlements. However, our focus will be on the Tang Clan under which, Mbajeng the site of study falls.

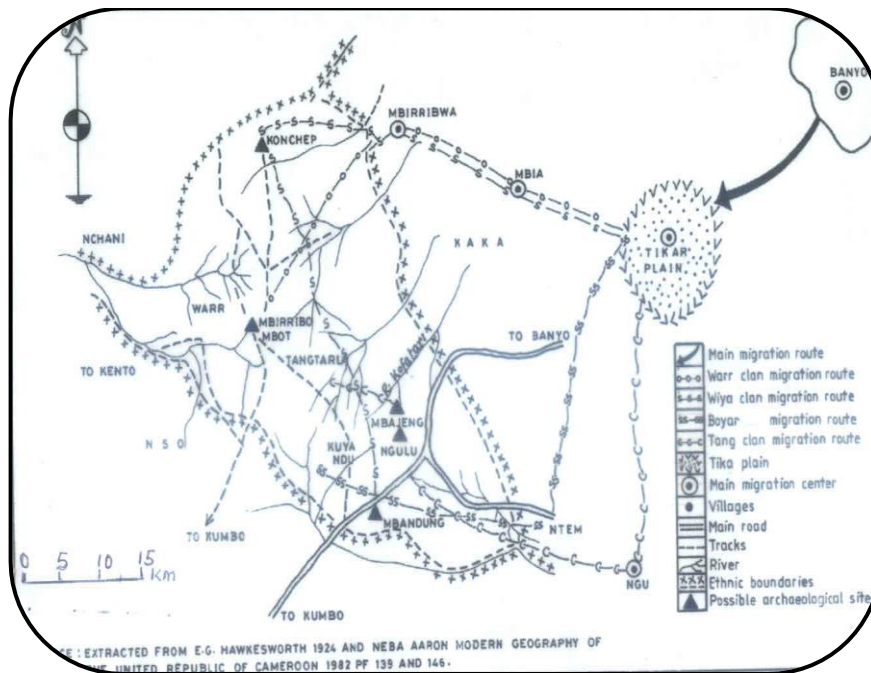
⁸⁸ Eyongetah, R. Brain and P. Robin., 1987, *A History of Cameroon* and C. Noutchachom. 1984 *Répertoire Economique et Industriel de la République du Cameroun* : 268.

⁸⁹ R.T. Talla, 2003, *Ethnoarchaeological and Historical Archaeology of Mbajeng in the Wimbun land of Donga Mantung Division, North West Province of Cameroon*” Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria: 54-55.

⁹⁰ See B.J Nfor; P 1994 “Traditional Political Practices and Local Government in Cameroon. A Case study of the Wimbun chiefdoms.” Maitrise Thesis, Department of Law, University of Yaounde.

⁹¹ W. Carpenter, 1934, “Intelligence Report on Nsungli Area. Bamenda Division” File No. Ac 15/ 1956. National Archives Buea and Hawskesworth, E.G. 1924 “Assessment Report on Nsungli; Bamenda Division” File No. 1189/1924, National Archives Buea:24. Also See Malenfe Boniface 1996 *The Tradition, Customs and Culture of the Nsei People* Bamenda: Unique Printers.

Fig 1: Map of the Wimbun showing migratory routes and possible archaeological sites



Source: Extracted from E. G. Hawkesworth, 1924 and Neba Aaron, *Modern Geography of the United Republic of Cameroon*, 1982, pp. 139 and 146.

The Tang Clan

The Tang clan is said to be the last of the three Mbum clans to arrive the present day Mbum land after Warr and Wiya in that order. However, it is not clear whether this is because they were the last of the groups to leave Kimi or they delayed somewhere. Oral traditions maintain that their leader was one of Kimi Manga's senior brothers, who was a purveyor of fish to the royal house⁹². Hawkesworth⁹³ on the other hand, maintains that, the Tang left Kimi together with the Wiya but delayed for a long time at Ngu, a site located to the south east of Mbajeng. The Fulani slave raiders are said to have forced them out of Ngu, westward into the neighbouring site of Ngulu where they rested a while. It should be noted here that, Ngu and Ngulu are not very far from Mbandung and Ntem, where the Wiya had earlier settled. Ngulu an open site, was not secure for them so they later left for Mbajeng, an enclave site, where it is believed they settled for a longer period when compared to Ngu and Ngulu⁹⁴.

⁹² W. Carpenter, W. 1934 "Intelligence Report on Nsungli Area. Bamenda Division" :

⁹³ E.G. Hawkesworth. 1924 "Assessment Report on Nsungli; Bamenda Division" 37.

⁹⁴ S. Gamje, Age 70, Interviewed 23 March 2018. He is one of the few elders still settled at Mbajeng.

Mbajeng was virtually unoccupied when the Tang reached there, but oral tradition continues that since the Wiya group was already settled at Ndu, to the south, they claim this area was under their jurisdiction. The Tang people were informed by a *Nchinda*, a royal messenger of the Wiya Fon that, they were on Wiya land and ought to respect the authority of the Fon of Wiya by paying tributes to him less they leave. They are said to have initially accepted to pay the required tributes, but at the end, they never did⁹⁵.

Traditions continue that, Tang leadership later refused to pay tributes to the Fon of Wiya, and after many years of settling at Mbajeng, they sensed that an attack on them by Wiya was eminent. This was because the Fulani slave raiders, supported by their allies, Ntem, had defeated Wiya and took the Fon to Banyo where he was converted to a Moslem. In anticipation of the attack, Tang dug trenches and made defensive walls on the main entrance into the main settlement at Mbajeng and guards were put on hilltops facing Ndu to detect any approaching enemy force. Their suspicion was proven right when Wiya supported by the Fulani raiders and their allies, the Ntem, later attack the Tang at Mbajeng⁹⁶.

This joint Fulani, Wiya and Ntem attacks on Mbajeng, according to oral traditions, exposed the once concealed site. As a result of these attacks and other factors such as increase population, disagreements within the ranks, the Tang leader decided to leave Mbajeng immediately with his people for a safer place.⁹⁷ It is not very clear from oral traditions how long the Tang settled at Mbajeng before leaving, but extrapolations made from oral traditions and ethnographic research point to at least, more than a hundred 100 years⁹⁸.

Another version has it that, the Tang people arrived when there were series of conflicts between their brothers of the Wiya and Warr clans which had reached the area earlier. Since they were latecomers into the area, they could not visualise how their warring brothers, (Wiya and Warr), were going to receive them. To better understand the situation, Tang needed a concealed environment to rest and carefully study the situation before venturing into their midst⁹⁹. Mbajeng located in a valley and surrounded by hills, provided such an environment. This version is not clear on why they later left the site.

Reconnaissance Survey of Mbajeng

It should be noted here that, apart from Mbajeng, there are other abandoned and partially occupied sites of historical and archaeological importance to the Mbum people in this region. Some of them still have relics of past occupations

⁹⁵ D. Nfor, Age 78. Interviewed 20 July 2018 An elder in the Fon's palace at Tarla.

⁹⁶ R. T. Talla (2010) "Mbajeng Ownership Dispute: An Ethnoarchaeological and Historical Appraisal" In

International Journal of Humanities. Vol. 1 No. 6:81-87. Also see W. Carpenter. 1934

⁹⁷ R. T. Talla, 2010, "Mbajeng Ownership Dispute..." 84-85.

⁹⁸ R.T. Talla 2003 "Ethnoarchaeological and Historical Archaeology of Mbajeng" :195-197.

⁹⁹ A. Ngwang, Age 81, Interviewed 21 July 2018. An elder versed in the oral history of his people.

while others do not have any serious archaeological/historical finds and features. Grass has grown so tall on most of the sites and intensive cattle grazing activities have caused damages to the archaeological and historical finds and features.

Such sites include Ngulu and Ngu, of importance to the Tang group; Konchep and Mbandung which were occupied by the Wiya group, and finally, Mbirimbo believed to be the ancestral home of the Warr Clan. The difference amongst these sites lies in the actual dearth or presence of archaeological/historical material remains to give us an idea of early human life or activities in the area. However, the rich oral history¹⁰⁰ of the Mbum people would certainly augment what the limited archaeological/historical data on these sites provides.

Generally, archaeological survey helps archaeologists to better know their sites. A successful survey depends on the nature of the site, the personnel, time, material and financial resources at the disposal of the archaeologist. The aim of this survey was to acquaint ourselves with the site; identify and where possible protect, record and/or photograph material remains and features of historical importance visible on the surface of the site for digital preservation. In doing all these, we were able to delimit and assess the general nature or status of the site.

We were assisted in the survey by two colleagues, all archaeology lecturers at the University of Buea -Messrs Isaac Akenji (Late) and Oscar Embola. Three local guides who were well versed with the site as far as its archaeological and historical artefacts were concerned, also assisted us. We had a sketch map of the site designed for us by a member of the Department of Lands and Survey, Ndu Sub-Division, who also accompanied us. In addition, there was a prismatic compass, a camera, tapes and range poles. No probing, auguring or electromagnetizing devices were used to test the soils so as to determine what was underneath the surface. The reconnaissance survey of Mbajeng, in this case therefore, entailed an examination of the site by randomly moving on the surface with the intention of visually identifying any material cultural remains and features of archaeological and historical importance, on the surface.

Mbajeng

The site of Mbajeng is located 10 kilometres north east of the Fon of Wiya clan's palace at Ndu. To the West of the site is Mbipgo, a Wiya clan village, while Sinna a Tang clan village, lies to the east. Njimnkang, also a Wiya clan village, occupies the south east of this site. Mbajeng, our site of interest, has more archaeological finds and features which are seriously under the threat of extinction, than any of the other sites mentioned above. In addition to that, Tang people continue to pay respect to this site through constant visits and pouring

¹⁰⁰ B.W.Andah and A.I.Okpoko, 1979, "Oral traditions and West Africa culture History" In *Perspective on West Africa's past West African Journal of Archaeology* WAJA Vol 9. 199-223.

of libations on what is left of the royal burial chamber and graves of some of their past traditional personalities.

Though the site is still partially inhabited today by a few people whose activities together with the natural forces have caused great damages to the cultural remains and features on the site, there are still some archaeological/historical finds and features that are very much intact and could be protected for posterity. Some of these features, however, risk being progressively eradicated by either natural or cultural forces such as weathering, erosion and most importantly, cattle rearing which has also created series of tracks on the hills which facilitates intense erosion during the rainy season. In all, the survey was in two phases.

The first phase was limited to the surrounding adjoining hills which gave Mbajeng its enclave nature. With the help of the local guides, we were able to locate archaeological/historical finds and features of mostly stones on the top of one of the hills, which was inhabited in the past. This hill top was relatively flattish to have accommodated human settlements. The second phase was down the rugged plane where most of the activities in those early days were and are still concentrated.

Some of the archaeological and historical finds and features were still intact while others were either partially or completely destroyed. We realised that, the constant visits to the site by inquisitive visitors, local tourists as well as the occasional annual visits by the *Fon* of Tang Clan to pay tribute to Tang ancestors in some of the shrines, have sort of rejuvenated interest amongst his people in their own past as far as this site is concerned. It has also instilled a spirit of historical awareness in the minds of the few people still settled at Mbajeng. This is the reason why some of the features, especially shrines, are still preserved, though, a lot of damages have been done to some of the archaeological and historical finds and features on the site.

We should also note here that, the Fulani pastoralists, who were attracted by the grass vegetation to settle in the area, do most of their grazing activities on the hills. Down the restricted rugged plane where some few indigenous people are still settled, farming is very intense. This is evident by the presence of farms planted with corn, plantains, pears, oranges and mangoes. Only a few inaccessible areas are unaffected by these activities.

Phase One: Archaeological/Historical Finds and Features on Mbipgo Hill

It is referred to as “Mbipgo” hill because those claimed by oral traditions to have settled there, are now based in one Wiya village called Mbipgo. They are said to have been the military wing of the Tang group and were also iron smelters; a profession they continued with at their present site. This could be attested to by the presence of heaps of iron slag in present day Mbipgo village. As iron smelters, they were locally believed to possess certain spiritual powers that the ordinary people did not, and were therefore chosen by the *Fon* to protect

the site. This is the only hilltop as earlier noted, which is flattish and has evidence of material cultural remains and features. They include:

Circular Stone Features

These were three heaps of stones arranged in circles and linked up to each other. They occupy the southern end of the hilltop towards a fenced, Fulani settlement. Unfortunately, grass and sunflower have covered most of them. From the look of things, the stones of different sizes, were intentionally arranged in a circular manner and adjoined to each other. Some of the stones have been completely scattered by cattle grazing activities. Others have been removed by the present day population at Mbajeng and used for house construction down the enclave plane. Generally, the highest point on the circles measured about 50 cm and the lowest 20cm. The three stone circles were named A, B and C.

Stone circle 'A' measured two metres in diameter and the highest point on the stone wall stood at 47cm. The lowest was 21 cm. Stone circles 'B', the biggest of the circles, measured 2.7m in diameter with the highest and lowest point at 50cm and 25cm, respectively. Stone circle 'C' had a diameter of 1.9m. The highest point stood at 25cm and the lowest at 20cm. Grazing activities on the hills by the pastoralists have damaged this particular circle more than the others.

Stone Seat

There was also what we believed was a stone seat. This was made up of two flattish stones; one of the stone was long (about 70 cm), and well planted into the ground, while the shorter one was placed in front of the planted stone on some smaller stones which supported its stability,. The planted stone probably served as back-rest, while the flattish one was where the buttocks sat. It was also covered with grass and the belief is that it was used by the Fon as a royal seat when he visited his iron smelters/warriors up the Mbipgo hill.

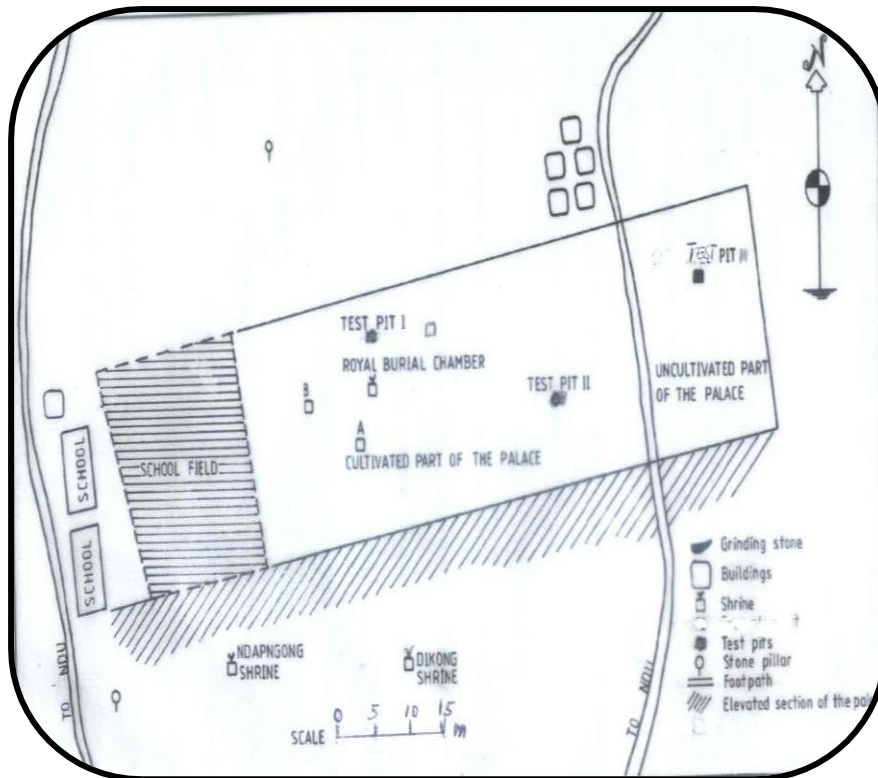
Stone Pillar

A stone pillar was also found well planted inside the sunflowers on the southern slope of the hill towards the fence of a certain cattle owner by name, Alhaji Usman. There was an inscription with a blue paint on the stone by earlier visitors to the site.

Iron slag, Cowry shells and Potsherds

There were also pieces of iron slag, although, there were no signs of furnaces. Three pieces of weathered cowry shells were also recovered up the hill. In addition to this, a stone still showing black spots probably caused by fire during cooking was identified. This possibly, could have been part of a hearth. The most numerous finds were potsherds of different sizes and some were very frail. Others were greatly damaged by the trampling of the cattle, while others still looked strong with the decorations and surface finish on them still discernible.

Fig 2: The mapped palace ground and its archaeological finds and features



Source: Author

Phase Two: Archaeological/ Historical Finds and Features in the Rugged Plane

This is where present day settlements are found and it is believed to have been the centre of activities at early Mbajeng. Features and finds include:

A trench and a defensive wall or embankment

These cut across the main southern entrance into Mbajeng from Ndu town. The highest point on the defensive embankment measured 1.2 m. There are signs that the height was more than this but the series of trampling over the years, by the cattle of Alhaji Usman, who is just a few metres to the north of this embankment, must have greatly reduced the height. The new main road linking Ndu town with Mbajeng, which is functional only during the dry season, also cuts across this embankment, levelling part of it. The trench which is now represented by a small long depression, was created in the course of building the embankment was obviously deep enough to prevent enemies from crossing, but erosional deposits from the hills have also contributed in filling it.

There is also the palace ground which is the most attractive part of the site because it has a concentration of archaeological features. It is located almost at the centre of this rugged plane, which from the look of things, was intentionally

levelled to accommodate certain activities such as the construction of palace houses and shrines. The yard is almost rectangular in shape and located 200 metres north of the trench and defensive embankment. It measures 45 metres in width at the centre and a maximum of 174 metres in length. It covers a general surface area of about 7875 sq. metres. This is the only visible levelled section of the site and from the look of things, an organised population with a focused leadership, had to intentionally level this part of the site so as to construct homes.

Ruins of Buildings

On this palace ground, four traces of what could be considered ruins of indigenous grass thatched houses, whose walls were constructed with sticks and daubed with red soils, were identified. They were represented by red soil elevations. It is very clear that continuous farming activities on the site have caused a lot of damages to the ruins. The supposed foundations are rectangular in shape as opposed to the circular stone structures up the Mbipgo hilltop. They were concentrated to the eastern part of the palace ground.

Foundation “A” measured 3m x 2m. This was located 12m to the South of the Royal Burial Chamber in the inner courtyard. An oral informant maintains this could have been the chief’s bedroom¹⁰¹.

Foundation “B” had a dimension of 1.5m x 1.5m. It was also located just 17meters to the west of the burial chamber. It looks as if this was meant to house certain royal materials or a shrine because its size is so small to have comfortably accommodated people. Foundation “C” located 15 metres to the north east of the Royal burial chamber, measured 3m by 3m. It looked bigger than Foundation “A”. This is located between the inner and outer courtyard. It looks as if it was a hall where the chief used to meet with his council to discuss matters of interest to his community. However, oral traditions and ethnographic research seem to suggest that, larger meetings with all members of the community were held in the open courtyard and not in a house.

Foundation “D” is 7.5 metres away from foundation “C” to the east. It measured approximately 4m x 3m. This looked like one of the houses, which accommodated some of the people living with the Fon. It could possibly have been the chief’s wives and children who occupied the outer part of the courtyard. It could take 3 beds and by the standards then, comfortably accommodate close to 5 or more people.¹⁰²

Shrines

The royal burial chamber locally called *Mfum* is one of the attractive features located almost at the centre of the palace ground. This is a shrine represented by an isolated patch of elephant grass in the midst of a farm, which now

¹⁰¹ F. Kamanda. Age 54. Interviewed 20 March 2018. He is the present head of Tang Clan.

¹⁰² A. Nganyu Age 69. Interviewed 30 March 2018. He is an elder in Tarla Village.

occupies most of the palace ground. In the middle of this elephant grass, is one stone planted into the ground. This is where late chiefs were buried.

Another shrine found on this rugged plane is the “People’s House” locally called *Ndapngong* located 65m south of the Royal burial chamber, on the upper grounds of the palace. An isolated patch of elephant grass also surrounds it. The inner part of this shrine unlike the *Mfum*, was recently cleared and flattish stones that served as seats could be seen arranged in a circular form. A rectangular shaped stone with a hoe on it was found at the centre of the shrine. The recent clearing was an indication that the people are still using it, although, it had no hut over it.

There was also the hunting shrine called *Ndaplikong* or *Dikong* represented by an isolated patch of grass to the east of the *Ndapngong* shrine on the southern elevations of the palace ground. Flattish stone seats were also found in this shrine. There is also no hut over it and farmers are gradually encroaching into it invitees just like they are doing with the burial chamber.

Grinding Stones

In addition to the above, there were two lower grinding stones made of granite on the southern outskirts of the palace ground. One of the stones which we named grinding stone “A”, was located 15 metres to the east of the royal burial chamber on the palace ground. It is rectangular in shape; measuring 56cm in length and 38cm in width. The shape is concave with a height of 25 cm.

The second grinding stone, “B” is elongated and also concave in shape because of intense grinding activities over the years. One of the ends is bigger than the other. The length is 51cm while the width of the bigger end measures 30cm and the smaller end, 20cm. It had an upper grinding stone, which looked like a stone ball with a small depression on one of the sides.

Hollow stones

Apart from grinding stones, there were also stones, which we termed hollow stones. From their appearances, they were originally normal grinding stones and, it was continuous grinding activities over the years which gave them that shape. The hollows that were circular in shape were at the centre of the stone which traditions maintain were used in pounding specific items like dry herbs. This is because they could not be used to grind normal things like corn into flour. Three of them were identified.

Hollow stone “A” was located on the coffee farm to the immediate south east of the palace ground, 35 metres away from the Royal Burial chamber. This measured 1 metre by 70 cm with the diameter of the circular hollow measuring 20cm. This was covered by a greenish plant (epiphyte), which looked like algae because of the dampness of the area where it was found.

Hollow stone “B” located 50metres south of the palace, just in front of one of the houses at present day Mbajeng, measured 40cm in length and 15cm in width.

The depth of the hollow was 2.5cm with a diameter of 7cm. It contained some maize chaffs put there for goats to eat by the present occupants.

Hollow stone "C" was located inside the *Ndapngong* shrine. It measured 20cm in diameter with a depth of 13cm and length, 50cm. On top of a stone in the *Ndapngong* shrine was a rusted iron hoe.

Stone Balls

They were called stone balls because of their circular shape. We collected them from different parts on the plane and brought them to the residence of Pa Nformi, one of the resident Mbajeng elder. These were generally used as upper grinding stones by especially herbalists or chief priests in their shrines. However, they were different from the normal and commonly used upper grinding stones which are slightly flattish in nature and could be easily handled with both hands. The stone balls were arranged in order of sizes and their diameters taken as follows

Stone Ball	a = 10cm
	b = 8cm
	c = 8cm
	d = 7.5cm
	e = 7cm
	f = 6cm

Stone Pillar

An isolated stone pillar was well planted into the ground, 50 metres to the North West of the *Mfum* shrine. This is along the footpath linking the primary school to a compound north of the school. It measured 76cm in length from the ground and 45cm in width at the base.

Another pair of stone pillars, one 40cm above the ground had a width of 13cm. and the other with a width of 14cm and 37cm above the ground, were found under a pear tree to the south of the palace ground. Traditions have it that most of these stone pillars represented graves of important personalities like the chief priest of shrines or were boundary demarcations.

Assorted Finds

Other cultural finds included potsherds that were scattered all over the rugged plane. There were also 4 pieces of cowry shells, pieces of what we believe were clay pipes and iron slag. Plastics, china wares and assorted bones were believed to be recent occurrences.

Discussion

As earlier indicated, the survey revealed that the Mbajeng site could be divided into two sections: the hills with circularly adjoined stone features and the rugged plane with its ruins of rectangular buildings, and shrines. Associated

cultural finds on both sections included potsherds, cowry shells and iron slag. Generally, it was discovered that most of the archaeological/historical finds, which survived, were of stones. The damage done to most, resulted from displacement from their original position or context by erosional forces and especially, farming and grazing activities. Potsherds, for example, which exist in minute pieces or sizes, were washed away by rain erosion while culturally reserved areas (shrines) are gradually being encroached into every year by human activities such as farming. When we first visited the site in 1996, there were four stones planted inside the royal burial chamber, but in 2018, the size of the chamber had drastically reduced by encroaching farms, with only one stone left.

The leader of Tang, one of Kimi Manga's six sons, according to oral traditions, generally chose the site of Mbajeng, for security reasons¹⁰³. This explains why the enclave nature of the site was a factor in choosing it for settlement and why it was settled in two sections. The narrow Mbipgo hill was occupied by the warriors who protected the main settlement in the valley. It is believed the use of stones to construct circularly adjoined stone structures, had to do with the presence of enough stones on the hill. The linkage was probably meant to maximise the use of space which was scarce and also ease communication amongst the iron smelters/warriors who occupied the hill, if there was an impending attack. This sounds plausible since according to oral traditions, the hill was occupied by local warriors¹⁰⁴.

In the rugged plane, houses were well constructed with sticks which were daubed with mud and thatched grass roofs, mostly in squares or rectangular forms similar to Sudanic architecture found in some indigenous African societies¹⁰⁵. They had single and relatively spacious rooms to accommodate a family. They were clustered with doors facing one direction, mostly, the house of the leader or Fon as could be seen in the orientation of the ruins on the site. This clustered settlement pattern is said to have given the people the psychological assurance of security, which they seriously needed. It is also worth noting that stones were scarce in the plane, the reason why they were probably not used for construction.

It was certainly, from the look of things, a centralised society headed by a leader who was believed to be a superhuman and had divine powers, which enabled him to communicate with the ancestors and various gods of the land for the good of his people. When the Fon died, his grave became a shrine, *Mfum*, where sons and daughters of the land occasionally met and were blessed by the incumbent to progress in life. The various shrines such as *Mfum*, *Ndapngong*, and *Ndaplikong*, believed to be graves of important personalities were weekly

¹⁰³ W. Carpenter, 1934, "Intelligence Report on Nsungli Area.

¹⁰⁴ S .Ntala Age 78. Interviewed 20 March 2018. He is the wife of late Pa Nformi, one of the prominent elders of Mbajeng who died some 10 years ago.

¹⁰⁵ D. Omokhodion, 1988, "Benin in West African Architecture" In Andah,B.W (ed), *Africa and the Lakato Hypothesis* 73-80 .

meeting points where the Fon and his people met to commune with their gods and ancestors who they believed still kept watch over the community.

He was assisted by a royal council of elders made up of mostly men and the important revered traditional Tikar police institution called *Nwarong* or *Kwifon*¹⁰⁶. This institution enforced the laws of the land and all decisions taken by the Fon and his council. However, women also served as queen mother's *Wintoh* and *Mayah*, but they never played any prominent role in the administration of this male dominated community, as it is still the case today.¹⁰⁷

It could also be deduced from the study of the site and oral traditions that, a people who had a common ancestor were settled at Mbajeng. Ascension to the position of a Fon, as is still the case today, was hereditary and opened to all male children of the leader. These were especially, the male children he had when he was made Fon and not before then. It was and is still believed by the Mbum people that only such children had royal blood flowing in their veins.¹⁰⁸ This caused rivalry amongst the princes for the position and was responsible for the dissensions that caused the breakup of the clan into different villages with leaders who were related to the Fon by consanguinity, after they left Mbajeng.

The spirit of belonging was very high as most of the things were communally done. It needed the community to level the undulated plane so as to construct the leader's palace. According to oral traditions, every able man and woman of the community is said to have taken part in the levelling the site for the construction of the palace. Even the construction of a family house as is still the case today in most Mbum societies, was the concern of all members of the community as they all gathered to give the necessary assistance. The community spirit was so high and the concept of individualism was not there.¹⁰⁹

A vivid glance of the site leaves no one in doubt that, some of its past important vestiges have been completely eroded. However, the stone features, ruins of shrines, the transformed landscape and the natural scenery of adjoining hills, common with the Bamenda highlands, and which were also a determining factor in the choice of this site for settlement by its first settlers, still makes the site attractive to visitors.

On the whole, it looks as if other sites settled by the Tang on their way from Kimi have been forgotten or are gradually fading from their traditions except for Mbajeng. We understand that this was the last site they settled before their present location at Tarla. A part of the present Fon's palace at Tarla has been

¹⁰⁶ R.T.Talla, 1997, "The Fondom/Chieftdom Institution of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon" In *West African Journal of Archaeology* (WAJA), Vol. 27 No. (2) 68-80.

¹⁰⁷ It was only in the Wiya clan where a woman temporarily took over leadership after the Fulani kidnapped their leader and took him to Banyo. See M.D.Jeffreys. 1963. *The Wiya Tribe* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press. And also, K.G. Nshanji, 1996, "The Origin of the Ndu Fondom" Long Essay Department of History University of Buea, Cameroon.

¹⁰⁸ A.Nganyu Interviewed 20 March 2018.

¹⁰⁹ F. Kamanda. Age 54 Interviewed 30 March 2018.

named Mbajeng, in memory of this Mbajeng. Mbajeng to most Tang people is the gateway to Tang's past, for it invokes especially, memories of both physical and psychological battles which were fought, won and lost¹¹⁰.

Conclusion

It is clear that the history of a people cannot just be reconstructed from documents. There are also other sources which can be used especially, in non-literate societies to reconstruct their history. Such include, oral traditions, ethnography, linguistics and material remains left by extinct people. Material remains discovered in archaeological and historical sites have contributed a lot in the reconstruction of the history of the people who once lived there. It is therefore imperative on us Africans, for the sake of posterity, to identify, rescue and preserve the cultural remains and features of our abandoned historic settlements like Mbajeng, which are gradually being eroded on daily bases. It is our intention in this light, not to limit such an endeavour to only Mbajeng, but to extend it to the other earlier mentioned Mbum sites of historical and archaeological importance whose histories are being eroded, such as Mbirimbo, Mbandung, Konchep, Ngu and Ngulu.

A comprehensive archaeological/historical study of these sites in Mbum land, might give us a broader understanding of the early history of the Mbum which is not known today. It will also help us determine whether the Mbum who claim to be the original occupants of the land were responsible for the circularly adjoined stone features up the hill or they met them there. This is so important because in parts of the neighbouring Mambilla Plateau of Nigeria where such features also exist on hill tops, the present occupants, the Mambilla, who like the Mbum in their present area, also claim to be the original occupants, have no knowledge of how and when the circular stone structures were made. This will also enable us know whether the two sections were settled contemporaneously or in two phases by different people. Interestingly, Wimbun traditions of origin, especially as it concerns the Tang Clan who are believed to have settled at Mbajeng, are silent on these circular stone features¹¹¹.

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Linking language, knowledge, and the environment: The case of plants in Bimbila

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Abstract

The importance of medicinal plants in traditional practices cannot be undermined giving that medicinal plants have gained much interest in current research and the conservation of our biodiversity (Terashima, 2003). However, information on the use of plants for traditional medicine in the South West Region of Cameroon is lacking. This study documents the linguistic and the biodiversity of plant resources used by the local inhabitants as treatment or cure for various ailments. From an anthropological and ecolinguistic approach, the following research techniques: participatory observations, visits to the field, and questionnaire surveys were used to elicit information on the uses of the plants. It was discovered that over 73 plant species are commonly used by the Isubu people for treating over 40 diseases and disorders. The highest number of species is used for stomach disorders, followed by cold, cough and fever and gastrointestinal disorders, such as constipation, gastritis, worms, etc. For instance, the dried leaves of tobacco (*nicotiana tabacum*) are used as a treatment for hiccup. Similarly, the use of *màsèpò* (*ocimum gratissimum* L. Forsk) together with other plants for the preparation of a traditional recipe for the treatment for malaria. The Documentation of the language and knowledge on plants used as traditional medicines is, therefore, necessary so that the knowledge can be preserved and the utilized plants conserved and used sustainably. The current investigation, therefore, attempts to fill some of the gaps in indigenous knowledge related to the use of herbal medicines in the South West Region of Cameroon, emphasizing their role in basic human health care.

Keywords: *Ethnobotany, ecolinguistics, traditional knowledge*

1.0 Introduction

The knowledge contained within indigenous languages is not easily replaced or transferred to other language communities. Every language is embedded with

the unique cultural wisdom of a people given that linguistic diversity is important to human heritage. A such, the loss of any language is a loss for all humanity (UNESCO 2003: 3). The present study seeks to contribute to the documentation of an endangered language by providing ethnolinguistic data on the medicinal use of plants by a traditional community in the South West Region of Cameroon. Linguistics, culture and biological diversity are interdependent and one aspect of culture and language which is under threat in most language communities is the traditional ecological knowledge. Isubu is an endangered language spoken by the Bimbia people (Atindogbé, 2009), the traditional ecological knowledge of this community is the concepts and terminologies that reflect the understanding of the people and their interaction with the natural world. Consequently, when the language is not used in this domain, the associated knowledge is lost to the community.

1.1 Background

In the domain of traditional medicine, plants and their body parts have long served as a source of medicinal drugs in different parts of the world and in most distinct human cultures. There is currently a dire need for the conservation and sustenance of our rich biodiversity taking into consideration the vast resources obtained from plants and the threat of the ecosystem due to the degradation and consequent unsustainable use of resources (Maffi, 1996). Furthermore, taking into account this observation coupled with a situation where the language is identified as endangered which could lead to the loss of rich and valuable local knowledge, the medicinal knowledge on plants becomes inevitable. Thus, the need for the documentation of the language including the rich medicinal knowledge on plants stands as a major endeavor for a research of this kind. Ethnolinguistics has raised concerns about the impact of endangerment on biodiversity, as some of the most valued plant species are also threatened with extinction. In this context, ethnolinguistic studies on the traditional ecological knowledge and practices of traditional communities around the world are of the most relevance, as they help to establish and enrich the global information bank of plant species most used in traditional medicine, exposing their ecological and cultural values. The documentation of this traditional ecological knowledge of medicinal plant in Isubu (an endangered language) contributes in enhancing its vitality. The use of herbs have usually served as the repository of healing materials and have been acknowledged to be originally served with little or no side effects. That is, many have been known not to pose any threat to human life. Besides healing, many plants particularly the leaves and roots of the plants are mostly consumed for their nutritional values without much consideration for their medicinal values and the species of these plants are either found in the neighbourhoods or the bushes. As a result, we need to re-orientate our knowledge on the sustainability of the use of our natural resources particularly in this era of economic recession on how to use raw materials for medicine and to harness the rich flora to improve primary health care.

1.2 Location of Bimbia

Bimbia is a village along the coast in the South West Region of Cameroon, mainly in the west coast and Limbe 2 sub-Division, Fako division. It is commonly called the slave village in Cameroon due to the major activities that took place there during the slave trade era and it presently poses as a touristic site. It is located around the Bimbia estuary area east of Limbe and west of Douala, at the foot of Mount Cameroon. The language spoken in this area is called Isubu, an appellation which can both be used to refer to the people as well as the language. According to Eberhard, David M., Gray F. Simons and Charles D. Fenning (2020) Isubu is classified as a Narrow Bantu language of the Duala group (A231) spoken in the South West Region, Fako Division, Tiko Subdivision.

Taking into account scrutiny of the sociolinguistic situation of the language based on the nine (9) factors of UNESCO's vitality and endangerment assessment show that Isubu is "severely endangered" (UNESCO, 2003; Atindogbé, 2009). With a population less than 1000 speakers of the language, the number keeps declining, compounded by the fact that the language is hardly spoken any longer and is being replaced by CPE.

1.3 Method

An area survey was carried out for the plants present around the surroundings of Bimbia. The types of plants used for medicinal purposes were identified and recorded. We used participant observation and semi-structured interviews were carried out with 25 consultants. We employed the SPSS analytical Package to bring out the use-value (UV) of the medicinal plants.

A list of common plants within the South West Region was made available to the language consultants and some plants samples were identified around the neighbourhoods. While others which could not be readily identified their pictures were made available. The medicinal values of the identified plants were obtained from the language consultants and some Bimbia inhabitants especially women (mothers).

1.4 Discussion

The table above presents information on the medicinal uses of some plants by the Bimbia people. It provides the local taxonomy of the plants alongside their common and scientific names. This is to enable easy identification and understanding of the data.

The findings from the study indicate a great diversity of the therapeutic usefulness of phytonyms in Bimbia and reveal the value and importance of these plants within the community, as they enhance both the nutrition and health care of the average Bimbia population even though experiencing the harsh economic situation.

1.5 Ethnolinguistics of selected plants and their cultural importance

One corollary of a language being endangered is the danger of losing the biodiversity of its ambience along with loss of knowledge, concepts and traditions encoded in them. The preservation of linguistic folk knowledge therefore, also helps in the preservation of its biodiversity and examining of the naming mechanism of plants leads to a better understanding of the relationship the people share with their natural environment. This section seeks to express the link between language, folk knowledge and the environment. It is divided into three sub-sections.

The first section presents the onomastics and the local ecological knowledge of a sample of 27 plants as used in the targeted study area. It provides the scientific names, followed by the local and the common names of the plants. Our choice of such plants was limited to the plants peculiar to the area. However, the analysis is based on the local appellations and the folk knowledge of 92 plant species in the language. The second section provides a linguistic analysis of the naming of the plants and how it reflects its cultural importance. The third section provides a quantitative analysis of the varying cultural values of the plants with the main focus on the medicinal uses of the plants.

1.5.1: Plants and their medicinal uses

Out of the ninety-three (93) plants and their major uses documented in Bimbia seventy-three were found to be used for medicinal purposes. After examining ninety-two species alongside their folk and cultural importance within the Bimbia community, I realized that 39.0% are medicinally important and have therapeutic uses. However, the leaves of the plants were found to be mostly used for medicinal purposes. Other parts of the plants such as the stem, seeds/fruits, roots and barks in some cases are also useful medicinally.

1. *Ageratum conyzoides* (èwòlá ɸàkó), common name: king grass

The leaves are harvested and smashed to extract liquid dropped into the nostrils of the patient suffering from headaches. Alternatively, the leaves of èwòlá ɸàkó are wrapped in plantain leaves, put in hot wood-ash and allowed to steam up for some few minutes. The leaves are then smashed and the liquid dropped in the nostrils. In cases of severe headache, the heated leaves are used to massage the forehead of the patient and the fresh leaves are smashed and inhaled. Furthermore, the leaves and roots of èwòlá ɸàkó are boiled for about 30 minutes and the liquid served as enema/laxative as a treatment for skin rash locally called *ndɛ́-tí* (found on the bodies of young babies). It can also be administered as enema without boiling. The liquid from the smashed leaves is administered as a treatment to ease movement in children, experiencing complications in normal growth. The smashed leaves are also used as iodine on fresh wounds to stop bleeding and another leaf placed on it to avoid infection before rushed to the hospital for proper treatment.

2. *Annanas comosus* (ḍṣaṁngá) common name: pineapple

ḍṣaṁngá is an edible fruit. the peelings of the pineapple and even the pineapple itself, with some plants such as fever grass/lemongrass, the bark of a mango tree, plum and guava leaves are boiled together and the concoction drunk as a treatment for malaria fever. It is also used in making fruit juice

3. *Aframomum melgueta* (ndóngó mǔndá) common name: alligator pepper

Few seeds of *ndóngó mǔndá* are chewed and swallowed with warm or to heat the lungs and relieve the individual from cough. It is advisable not to consume it during pregnancy because it could lead to abortion.

4. *Aloe vera* (*aloe vera*) common name: aloe vera

Few leaves of aloe vera are washed and the outer layer neatly peeled off to expose the inner layer which produces a slimy liquid. This liquid is extracted and drunk as a treatment for stomachache or stomach disorder, and also used as an antidote for food poisoning or any deadly poisons.

5. *Bidens pilosa* (ndṵ ndṵ kàḃàtíwélí “injection for the poor”) common name: blackjack, devil’s needles. The leaves of the plant are used as a blood booster. For someone suffering from blood shortage, the leaves are boiled and the liquid drunk three times daily.

6. *Bryophyllum pinnatum* (èlíwàlíwà) common name: never die

The leaves of *èḃèjálíwà* are heated over the fire, smashed with the hands and two drops of the fluid from the smashed leaves dropped into the ears morning, afternoon and evening as a treatment for pains inside the ear. In some situations, this fluid is accompanied by kernel oil commonly called *mànyàngà*. The fluid needs to be administered when the ear to be effective.

7. *Cocos nucifera* (gbé mbànga mó likàwò) “coconut tree”

gbé mbànga mó likàwò produces edible fruits called *mbànga mó likàwò* and the roots are used as medicine for toothache. The roots are boiled for an hour and the liquid administered to the patient to gaggle in the mouth for about 20 minutes. This action is done twice day: in the morning and the evening until the pain subsides. The fruit is also used to extract oil which is used in cooking and as a body oil.

8. *Carica papaya* L. (ḡḡḡḡ) common name: pawpaw

ḡḡḡḡ is used as the name of a plant and a fruit (edible). The dry leaves of ḡḡḡḡ are harvested, washed and boiled together with pineapple peelings and fever/lemongrass for over an hour, and the concoction drunk as treatment fever. Also, the seeds are chewed and swallowed with a glass of water as a treatment for intestinal worms.

9. *Citrus aurantifolia* (é ḡùma nyḡḡḡḡ) common name: lime

16. Musa sapientum (*m*□*k*□) common name: plantain

The stem of *m̀k̀* is used during local child delivery. The pregnant woman sits on small plantain leaves to lift her body from the floor, during delivery. This is to ensure that the baby together with its placenta can be carefully received on the plantain leaves.

The sucker is also used to bury the navel or dried cord of the newborn baby. Traditionally, the umbilical cord is buried together with a plantain sucker or coconut seedling. It is believed that as the plantain sucker or coconut seedling grows to maturity and bears fruits so too will the child grows to maturity. Consequently, when the child grows to adulthood he/she is shown the plant which the child now owns. It symbolises life. The liquid from the stem functions as a natural glue. It is mostly used on corpses to shut the eyes or the mouths. The young bunch seed */kpɛ̀ jàlik̀/* symbolizes a child and use when burying women who die during childbirth leaving behind the child. The young seed is harvested and placed in the arms of the deceased in a comfortable position like a mother nursing her baby. It is believed that if this is not done the dead mother can feel very lonely without the child and may come back for her baby which would lead to the death of the baby immediately after the burial of the mother. The leaves of the plantain are used as medicine to cure night fire. They are boiled and the liquid drunk and administered as an enema. Also, the plantain fruit is edible and widely consumed within the community.

17. *Nicotiana tabacum* (tâkò) common name: tobacco

βèjálí βétâkò "tobacco leaves" are used for medicinal purposes as a treatment for headaches, hiccough and to stop bleeding. As treatment for headaches, the dried leaves are ground to dust and sniffed through the nostrils, for hiccough the dried leaves are water for some time to extract its tobacco content and the liquid drunk and to arrest bleeding the fresh leaves are ground into a paste and applied on the fresh wound.

18. *Ocimum gratissimum* L. Forsk (m̀s̀ϕ̀ò) common name: m̀s̀pò

The ethanolic extract of the leaves of *m̀s̀ϕ̀ò* is used in traditional medicine as a treatment of several ailments such as wounds, skin and gastrointestinal infections, etc. The parts of the plant used are the leaves and the stems. the leaves together with other different types of fruits, tree leaves (such as mango, orange or pawpaw) are boiled in a big pot with water and administered differently as a treatment for malaria. Firstly, the patient undresses, sits on a small stool in front of the hot pot containing the concoction covered with a blanket to inhale the hot vapour and aroma, and sweats out the fever. After which he drinks a glass of the concoction either cold or hot three times daily.

Furthermore, as a treatment for stomach ache the leaves are boiled and drunk as tea. As treatment for nose bleeding, the leaves are warmed over the fire, squeezed and the extract dropped into the nostrils.

Also, as medicine for headache, the leaves are smashed in between the palms for some seconds and the aroma inhaled. And as a laxative, the leaves are harvested, washed, smashed and warm water poured into the content and used

for enema. The stems of *más* are used as toothbrushes and the aroma suppresses mouth odour. Traditionally this plant is said to have supernatural powers and is believed to be particularly effective in sending away evil spirits.

19. *Psidium guajava* (*ngwáβá*) common name: guava

ngwáβá produces an edible fruit and the stem is used as firewood for home cooking. The young leaves are harvested, washed and chewed as a treatment for stomach aches and dysentery. The young stems are used as chewing sticks (toothbrush) for their good taste and ability to remove mouth odours.

20. *Solanum scabrum* (*βòwá wòsángò*) common name: huckleberry, country *dámá*

βòwá wòsángò produces edible leaves and the infusions from smashed leaves and seeds are rubbed onto the gums of children who have developed crooked teeth. Also, the smashed seeds are used as a dye for the slates of school pupils.

21. *Saccharum officinarum* (*mókòkó*) common name: sugar cane

mókòkó is edible and also used as a treatment for waist pain. The leaves, known as “*tátúw*”, of the species that itches are boiled and taken as an enema to relieve waist pain.

22. *Senna alata* (*è̀nàngidz*) common name: ringworm bush “craw-craw”

The leaves of *è̀nàngidz* are used as medicine for skin rash. They are smashed and rubbed on the affected area of the body. The leaves are also used for the enema to clean the stomach and it is squeezed and the liquid drunk as a treatment for internal stomach fungi.

23. *Spilanthes filicaulis* (*lís lákómbé*) common name: cock’s eye

The stem of *lís lákómbé* is used to treat toothache. It is ground together with alligator pepper, until it forms a paste, and applied to the aching tooth. Also as treatment of palpitation in the child “*liw*” the leaf is ground together with nine grains of alligator pepper and a spoonful of the mixture administered preferably at 4 pm when it sunsets.

24. *Talinum fruticosum* (*b̀l̀bí*) common name: waterleaf

b̀l̀bí is an edible plant and the leaves are smashed along with water and administered as an enema as a treatment for measles and as a laxative.

25. *Telferia occidentale* (*ék̀̀b̀̀*) common name: fluted pumpkin

ék̀̀b̀̀ is an edible vegetable and the leaves are used as a medication for blood shortage and as antibiotics. Liquid from squeezed leaves of two or three bundles of *ék̀̀b̀̀* is mixed with two tins of peak milk and a bottle of Guinness and drunk. This concoction increases the blood level and provides strength against any form of sickness. Also, as a treatment for typhoid fever, the liquid from the squeezed leaves is served in a glass and drunk morning and evening.

26. Vernonia amygdalina (*βèjálí βé ñdòl*) common name: bitter leaf

This plant is edible and the leaves used for varied purposes. The young leaves of *βèjálí βé ñdòl* are smashed into a paste and applied on fresh wounds to arrest bleeding before the patient is rushed to the hospital. Also, the leaves are washed and smashed with some quantity of water, and the bitter liquid drunk as a treatment for diabetes and stomach pains.

27. Zingiber officinale (*ɔ́ndʒi*) common name: ginger

ɔ́ndʒi is steeped in boiling water to make ginger tea, and drunk as a tea with honey. It is also used to make candy or ginger drink. Tea brewed from ginger is a common folk remedy for colds and cough (consumed with honey).

1.5.2: Linguistic analysis of the naming of plants in Isubu

Linguistically, these plants are locally identified and given names based on their morphological structures as well as their importance to the people. The study structures the naming process of the plants species into five classes adopted from Linnaeus's 19th century classification. Taking into account their morphological structures the plants were classified into the following classes; leafy/vegetables, trees, grass, grains & tuber products

1.5.2.1: Plants identified as leafy/ vegetables**Classis 1: leafy/vegetables**

Names in Isu	Common names
<i>βé jálí</i>	tea
<i>βèjálí βé ñdòl</i>	bitterleaf
<i>βèjálí lí ɸ́n ndókó</i>	parsley
<i>βèjálí lí ɸ́n ndókó</i>	celery

In this classis, these plants are described as leafy plants or vegetables because it is the leaves that are used for a particular purpose. For instance, *βèjálí βé ñdòl* 'bitterleaf' is identified as leaves used in the preparation of *ndole* (a common Cameroonian dish) and parsley and celery as leaves used in the preparation of soup. Isubu does not have a peculiar name for some plants but describes them by referring to their specific uses.

1.5.2.2: Plants identified as trees**Classis 2: trees**

Names in Isu	Common names
<i>líjà</i>	palm tree
<i>lisá</i>	chewing stick
<i>èléjá lí ny ɸ́ng</i>	rubber tree
<i>mw ɸ́ngè</i>	movingui
<i>mwèngè</i>	hardwood, African padauk
<i>βèkónyá</i>	sapelle
<i>βèkónyá</i>	eucalyptus

Most of the plants so classified grow in the forest, bushes have great heights. These plants are of great importance to the Bimbia people because they use them to build fishing boats, paddles, furniture, medicine, etc. The plants identified as trees in this language are mostly fit in as nouns of class 5 and 7.

1.5.2.3: Names of plants identified as grass

Classis 3: Grass

Names in Isu	Common names
βòwá	green
βòwá	eru
βòwá	huckleberry 'country ndzàmandzímá'
βòwá	cabbage
βòwá	lettuce

The taxonomy of the plants identified as grass in Isubu, are not, as a rule, peculiar to the set-ups but are cultivated elsewhere and purchased from the markets or brought in from far away bushes. They are thus considered as foreign and simply called *grass* like any other plant that grows around, without any particular identification.

1.5.2.4: Plants identified as grains

Classis 4: Grains

Names in Isu	Common names
mbàsi	maize
kòndì	rice
kɔ̃ ɔ̃ í	coffee
ndóndá	garlic
ngɔ̃ ndɔ̃	groundnuts
bíndz	pea/beans

These plants are clearly identified within Bimbia and are locally named and classified as class 9 nouns. Their classification takes account of their morphological composition.

1.5.2.5: Plants identified as tuber products

Classis 5: Tuber products

Names in Isu	Common names
likàwò	cocoyams
lidzàngá	pineapple
likpàmbà	cassava
liwòkí	pumpkin
èwá já málíwá	water yam
βékpàngú	sweet potato