

“Preserving the Traditional Kom House”



Gilbert Mbeng

HISP 700 – Final Project

University of Maryland

School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

Masters Final Project submitted to the Faculty of the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at the University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Historic Preservation

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Advisory Committee:

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Abstract

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The Kom, one of the migrating Bantu groups that followed raiding by Muslim jihadists on sub Saharan Africa in the late seventeenth century, moved southwards and established sporadic settlements, a pattern that has been traced by lexicographic evidence and oral accounts. The last recorded evidence of settlement by the Kom was in Babessi in Ndop plain.

From Babassi, they moved up through Nkar and passing through Idien, finally settled on the peaks of the Laikom in present day Cameroon which remained the seat of the palace from which the Kom Kingdom was founded. Final settlement meant the establishment of a stable culture and way of life which included the construction of the traditional Kom house.

The traditional Kom house has a thatched roof, a four-sided bamboo frame, and walls plastered with mud and sits on a stone foundation. The form and style is represented in a wider area known as the

grass field region of Cameroon¹ with similar construction materials and unique techniques depending on the mastery of artistic designs. Both the materials and techniques of the Kom house have witnessed a steady transformation in the 20th century as modern tools and materials became available.

The absence of scholarship and literature on the evolution of the traditional Kom house within its historical context is a major problem. The traditional Kom house is disappearing in the ever changing landscape which has seen the steady replacement of construction materials reflecting the influence of European and American construction techniques. The landscape in 2010 shows a marked absence of the traditional Kom house, in fact, only one example has been documented. The demolition of traditional housing is related to colonial influence and economic growth in Cameroon in general, and has resulted in the loss of heritage on a wide scale.

This project will detail or document the traditional Kom house, including its history, construction techniques, materials and social use. It will then design a program, either at the national or local level, to preserve traditional housing in Cameroon.

¹ The Republic of Cameroon is a country of central and Western Africa.

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I want to thank Pamela McClusky for setting the precedence that let to my interest in preserving the built environment from appreciating preserved objects at the Seattle Art Museum. This could not have been possible without that the role Evan Schneider played in promoting interest in a lost heritage.

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I would like to express my appreciation to the following individuals for their time, insight, and generosity: Sammy Ambe, Bobe Elias Kumato, Bobe Nges Isaiah Tufoin, Bobe Diangha Simon, Jam Glory, and Tony Ayeah

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Chapter One: Introduction

The traditional Kom house is a great example of a preservation endeavor to salvage and/or restore a valuable part of the Kom heritage. It is a structure with a thatched pyramidal roof, a four-sided, bamboo frame and walls daubed with mud on a stone foundation. This became the permanent form and style of Kom architecture following the settlement in Laikom at the close of the eighteenth century. Natural factors, colonial influences and the passing of time resulted in saw the steady and gradual replacement of the landscape to mimic Western forms and styles of architecture. Trade and contact with Europe introduced new construction materials that were longer lasting and provided a solution to the limitation of the Kom's traditional building materials. The construction process of a traditional Kom house begins with an initiation ceremony which is followed by the collection of traditional building materials. Once the construction materials are in place, the parties and individuals to be responsible for the construction proper are selected. The three stages of construction include the foundation, erecting the walls, and finally putting up the roof. A typical life span of a traditional Kom house is anywhere between one hundred to one hundred and fifty years because of the fragility of the building materials. But the cycle continues with the demolition of a dilapidated structure which is often replaced with a new structure.

My interest in this subject came from working as advisor for the Seattle Art Museum on objects in their collection from the Kom Kingdom. While researching and gathering literature in the field, it became apparent that objects in Kom carved at the same time as those in the museum, were deteriorating and risk disappearing which brought up the issue of preservation. I eventually settled on looking at the development and evolution of the traditional Kom house because this is such a critical preservation issue.

It is hoped that researching and documenting the traditional Kom house will ignite a broader preservation movement /interest in the kingdom. The focus of this work will be to trigger further research and examine how preservation efforts are and should be looked at in a developing country using existing concepts and methodology.

While underscoring the documentation of the traditional Kom house as a preservation measure, the following **research questions**, should help shape a rationale for engaging this topic² ;

- Basic questions of how built and how used will be answered via documentation of the house.

While there is no previous literature on this topic, the “walking tour through Laikom,” an unpublished work by Gilbert Schneider, and other publications on the tradition and history of the Kom, helps illuminate some of the changes which this project seeks to define. The primary source for this project will be oral interviews and accounts by elders in the kingdom who were there and could narrate and explain the construction process and how things have changed over the years. These interviews began in 1999 while this student carried out research for another project “Art from Kom” at the Seattle Art Museum. In the summers of 2007 and 2009, I returned to Cameroon and did field work on this topic which including recorded interviews, floor plans and photographic documentation of surviving structures. This became the framework from which existing literature and images from early writers were decoded to explain the changes in the materials and form of the traditional Kom house.

This project is an attempt to salvage and preserve the traditional Kom house by documenting the construction process. Like the Ijim mountain forest project, a birdlife International initiative in the same area to preserve the extinction of rare species –barnamas turaco, this project hopes to galvanize preservation initiatives in the area, and if possible, attempt a restoration program to

² Don Linebaugh, personal communication, fall 2010.

this effect. A conclusion will draw insight from preservation concepts and make recommendations for an effective preservation endeavor in the Kom Kingdom and the developing world as a whole.

Chapter Two: History of Kom –A brief context for understanding the house.

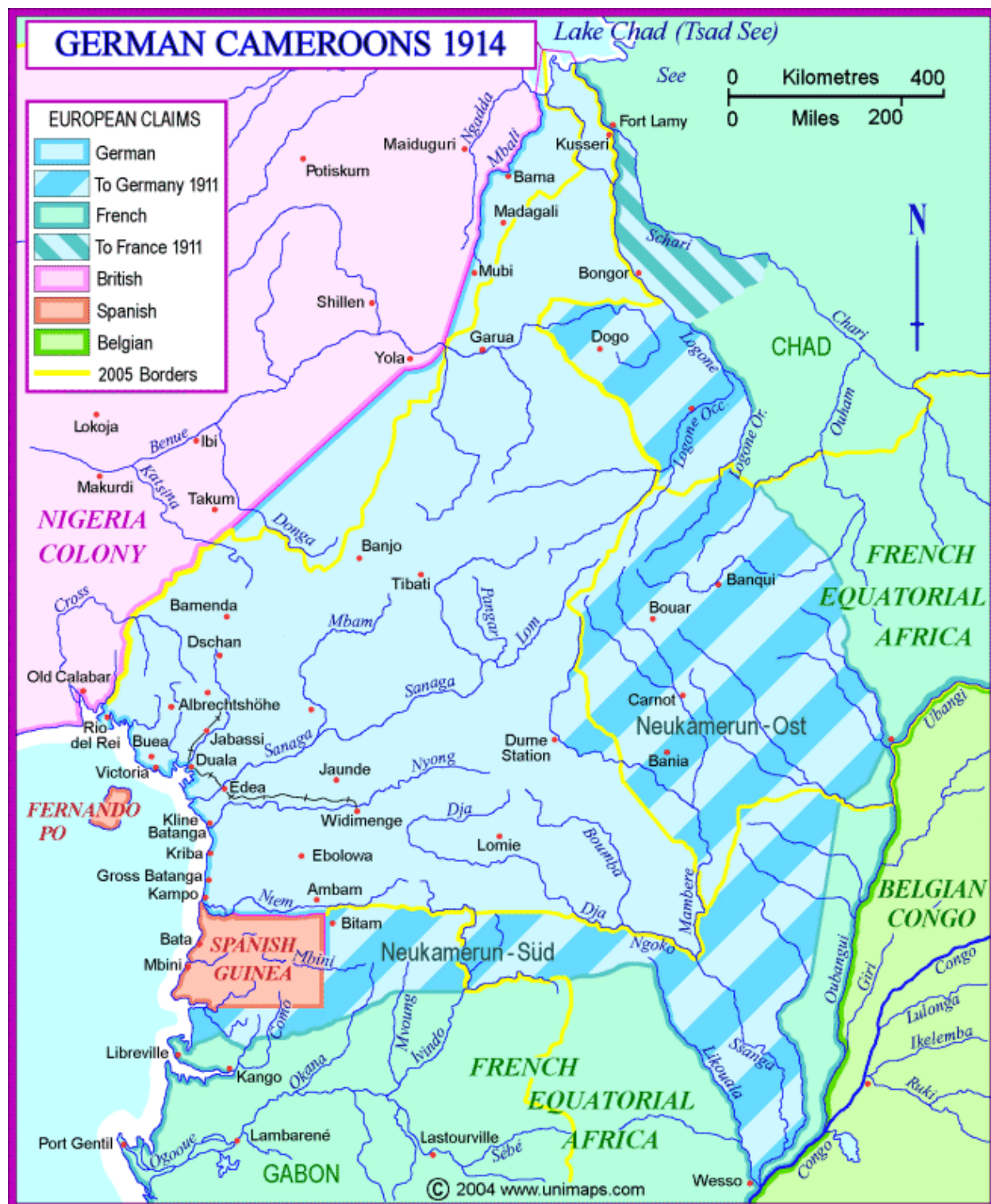
Kom is one of the over 250 ethnic groups that make up the territory known as Cameroon. Prior to the late nineteenth century, there was no Cameroon as it is known today. Knowledge of the country by European traders was generally limited to the coastal region.³ After the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, Germany became actively involved in the scramble and partition of Africa and Cameroon was among the territories that were annexed by Germany. Others included Tanganyica, Togoland and German South West Africa (Namibia).⁴ German boundaries in Cameroon were defined following agreements with the British to the West and the French to the South, East and North.



Figure 2. Map of Cameroon, illustrates the geographic boundaries and relationship with neighboring countries. This map was accessed via <http://www.nationmaster.com/country/cm-cameroon>.

³ Victor Julius Limbe ,1996.pg 1.Ngoh, History of Cameroon since 1800, Press book, Limbe,1996, pg 1

⁴ Ibid,pg 58.



The era before German annexation marked the peopling of the area known today as Cameroon, as different ethnic groups moved to their present locations. One of the major groups that moved was the Bantu who are said to have originated from the area between Nigeria and Cameroon but who wandered across the breath and length of Africa south of the Sahara.⁵

The Kom, who are part of this Bantu group, trace their descendants to the Tikar in the northern part of Cameroon in an area called Ndobó. “Ndo” in Kom is house and Jina’bo’ (Ndobó) was the founding King of the Kom people.⁶ This is an example of lexicographic evidence to support the origin of the Kom people in the area of North Cameroon.

From Ndobó, the Kom moved down southward with temporary settlements in the Bamum area in the Western Province of present day Cameroon. From Bamum, they crossed over to Babessi in the Ndop plain where they set up a more permanent settlement. However, the Babessi Fon, who feared the rising number of the Kom people, tricked the Fon of Kom to eliminate the active male population who could challenge his authority.⁷ Realizing that he had been tricked, the Kom Fon committed suicide and advised the remainder of his population to follow the path of a python that was to appear from the droppings of his body. This is the myth of the Kom people, who followed the python up through Nkar in Nso where they were joined by the Ndonalu lineage. Passing through Indien, they finally settled on the peaks of Laikom which remained the seat where the Kom Kingdom was formed.

With a more permanent settlement in Laikom, the Kom people established their traditions and way of life, amongst which was polygamy, matrilineal succession, the form and style of the **traditional Kom house**. The political organization of the Kingdom was influenced by population growth which caused a need for more farmland.

⁵ Ibid.pg1

⁶ Field notes as Research assistant to Prof. E. Shanklin, College of New Jersey, 1999.

⁷ "A Joyous Death in Kom," Avi-a-Ngvim (The Python Trail, publication of the Kom-Bum Students Union) No. 002: 16-20. 1985.

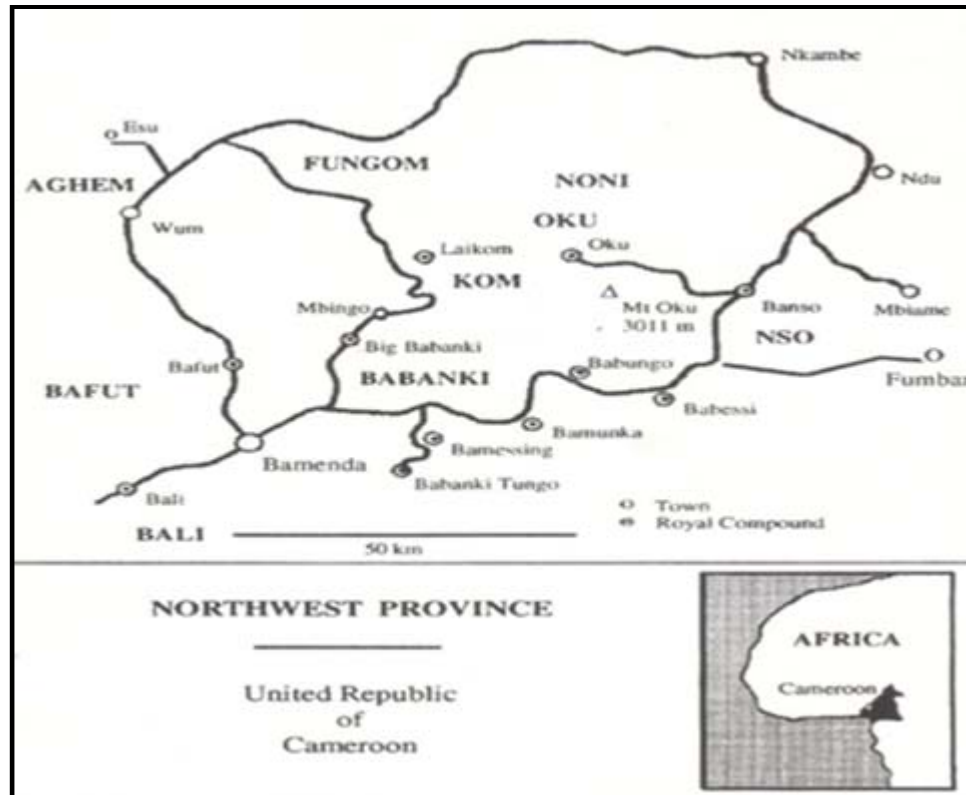


Figure 4. Map of Cameroon Grasslands. This map represents the Cameron area where Evan and Gilbert Schneider photographed, sketched and researched the royal palace at Laikom in the Kom area.

The royal family extended into nearby areas which became organized polities and eventually grew into villages with allegiance to Laikom.⁸ These initial villages were Alim, Mbam, Fuli and Aboh; today, there are over 50 such villages with allegiance to Laikom.

The traditional Kom house was built in each of these villages, and represents the way of life of the Kom people. This project examines the Kom dwelling and explores how it has changed over time to include modern materials on a new landscape.

⁸ Victor Julius Ngoh; History of Cameroon since 1800, Pressbook, Limbe, 1996. pg 10.

Chapter Three: Description of the traditional Kom House

The traditional Kom house is a square, one-room plan structure with an uncoursed stone foundation. The typical dimensions are 12ft x 12ft and the house were one story tall. The stones are filled into a dug out foundation hole and stacked to a desired level which is either raised above the ground or level with the ground surface. The foundation excavation is then back filled with earth and hardened by stamping

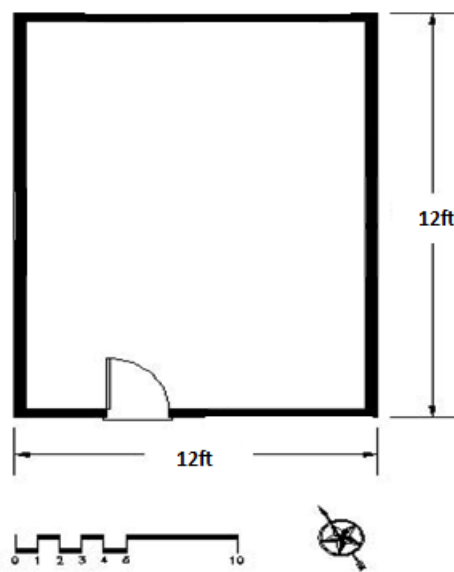


Figure 4. Floor Plan of a traditional Kom house ,sketch by Gilbert Mbeng ,December 2010.

The walls are made up of panels using Indian and raffia bamboo which are crisscrossed and tied together as if it was a wattle. The interstices are daubed with mud, a mixture of earth and water, providing a wattle and daub like structure. The bamboo elements of the structure are tied together with ropes made from raffia bamboos. There is a stepped entry doorway into the structure with a door frame of cut/squared timbers. The “door” is a lashed shutter made out of raffia bamboo.

The interior of the building has a central heath with three stones that represent the three hands of Kom: wain, nyam, and afo zghena. The walls are lined with raffia bamboo, and a wall unit made out of

bamboo faces the entry doorway and is used for storage. Decorative detailing and designs were reserved exclusively for houses in the palace and important compounds. An example of this was the Fon or compound head's house which had two doors; one entry doorway and an exit door in the back. A woman's house will only have an entry doorway which was a protective measure and the man will monitor who enters into the homes of his wives.

The floors are typically hardened earth, although the floors of title holders or male houses are sometimes tiled of stone. There are four or more bamboo beds on the four corners, of the house and separated by bamboo protectors or screens.

An overhanging roof which rests on posts surrounding the building; these posts extend to the foundation. The building is capped by a pyramidal roof made out of panels of bamboo and thatched with dry grass.

Evan Schneider who grew up in Kom describes the Kom house as pre-fabricated which he thinks is fascinating and somewhat unique. The structures four wall sections, ceiling panel, and four roof sections were all assembled on the ground out of raffia bamboo, then erected and lashed in place. Mud, wattle and thatch were applied to the appropriate areas. Carved door and house posts personalized each house.⁹

Construction materials and Tools

Construction materials were usually harvested from far afield on mountain tops with untouched natural vegetation. These construction materials which are still available today include:

- **'itumtum'**- Indian bamboo used for the main frame of the house.
- **'ileng'**-raffia bamboo-used to crisscross the main frame of the building and also used as raw material for carving roll back doors and most of

⁹ Evan Schneider, Portland ,Oregon, via email, July 3rd 2010.

the interior finishing of the house. Ropes peeled from raffia bamboo are also used to tie areas of less stress in the main frame.

- **‘iliegh’**- ropes from Cane are used to fasten the more rigid ends of the main frame.
- **‘Ikiegh’**-for ropes
- **Avzes**-another kind of rope
- **‘Tegweh’**-a kind of hardwood used for the king post of the building
- **Aghang**-softwood for doors
- **‘ikfwam’**-another kind of hardwood-these two kinds of wood are used as the main post that hold the four corners of the main frame of the house
- **‘Ngohsi’**-stones –used for the main foundation
- **‘Achaa’**-earth mixed with water to produce mud which is used for wattle and daub

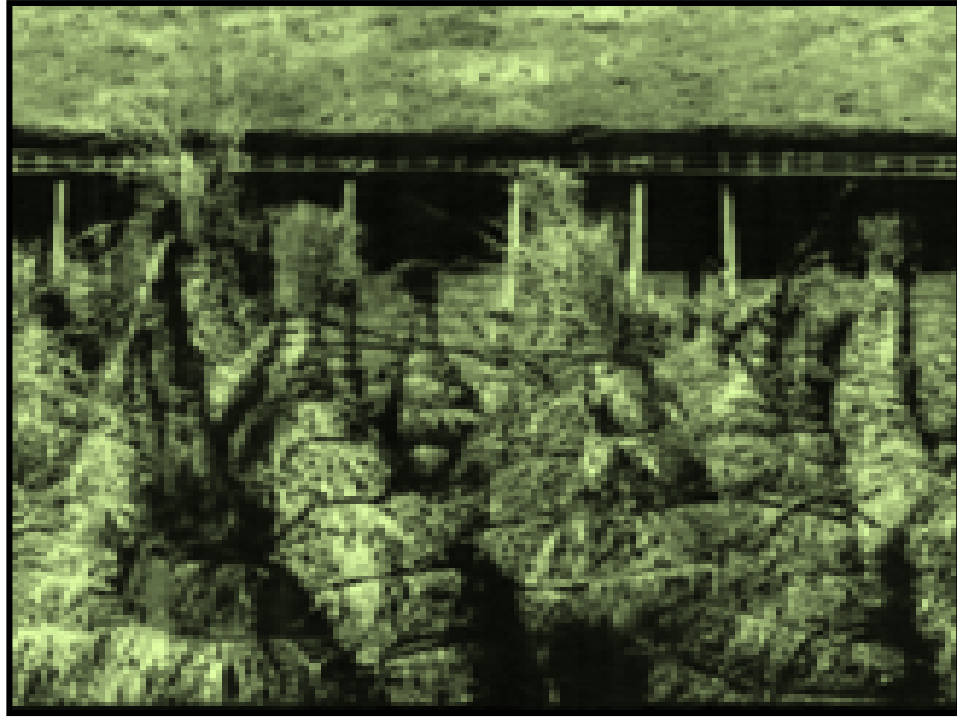


Figure 5. Bundles of thatching grass in Laikom, (Gilbert Schneider photos, 1954).

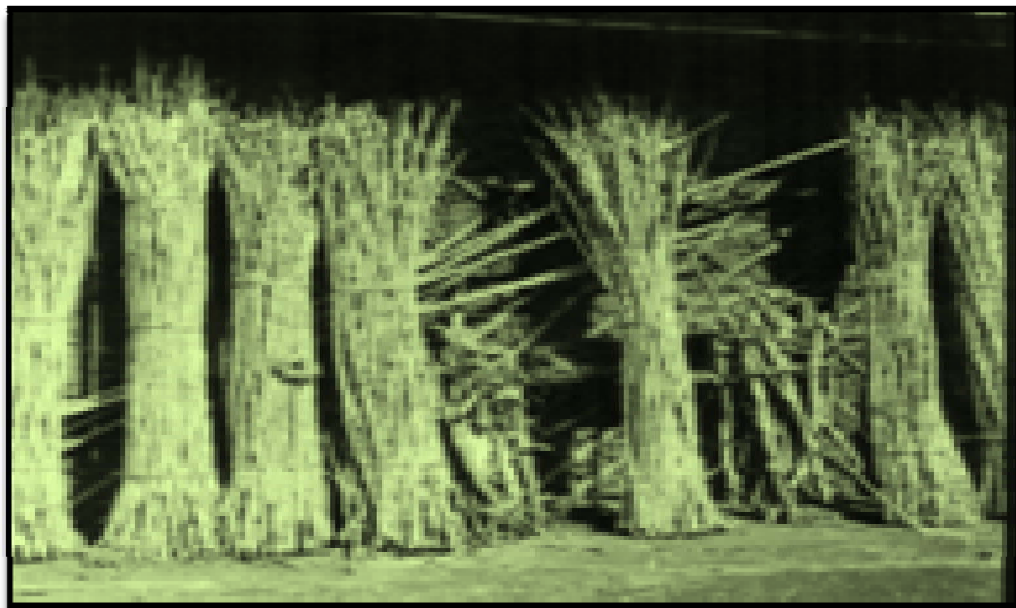


Figure 6. Elephant grass sticks, Laikom, (Gilbert Schneider photos, 1954).

- **‘iweeh fiyouh-** dry grass harvested for thatching.
- **‘isung’**-elephant grass stick, used to fill the interstices of the bamboo frame
- **‘Nkunsi’**-dead palm¹⁰

Tools

Construction tools were usually made by local blacksmiths. These construction tools which are still available today include:

- **Ifih kom-** hoe –made in Kom by local blacksmith in abuh
- **Mbe’h**-local chisel
- **nja’m**-local axe
- **finyu’**-knife
- **ifurh**-cutlass¹¹

¹⁰ List of building materials was the outcome of interview with Bobe Elias Kumato main informant who remembered the construction technique assisted by Sammy Ambe, Diagha Simon Ntenmisihi, Nges Isiahi Tufoin- was bricklayer when modern materials started to be used, Prince Johnson Mbeng, in Belo, on July 22nd 2009.

¹¹ Ibid, Belo, July 22nd 2009



Figure 7. Traditional Kom house taken ca. 1954 by Gilbert D. Schneider (obtained from Evan Schneider, October 6th 2010).

(Types) Classification of the Kom traditional house

The dimension and size of a traditional kom house is classified according to the social stratification of the Kom society which is divided into a compound head (Bobe), village head (Bo nteh) and finally the Fon. The basic status below this level is usually a young male who attains manhood by

getting out from his father's compound to start his own family in a single house. When he gets married, he builds a second house and more houses are added in that order depending on the number of wives he chooses to have. So you can tell the number of wives a compound head has by the number of houses.

The palace and all royal compounds in Kom reserve the exclusive right to construct larger structures because of their ability to galvanize the entire Fondom or village to collect the huge amounts of building materials needed for the construction of such houses. Houses in the palace also showcase the best artistic designs of the Kom house; these designs serve as a sign of royalty. For instance, posts of important compounds were carved with marks of animals on them; ordinary men could not use animal marks on their houses.¹²



Figure 8. Detail of traditional Kom house at Laikom with artistic design – (courtesy, Gilbert D. Schneider photos).

¹² Interview Vincent Yuh-Fon of Kom, Laikom, July, 2010.



Figure 9. The upper compound in the royal palace in laikom. Living quarters for the wives of the royal lineage (courtesy, Gilbert D.Schneider photos).

A cluster of one or more houses with the same family head makes up what is known as a compound. The quarter head will run a village compound, while a Bobe will be the head of an ordinary compound.¹³ So big a big compound will be one with many houses

¹³ Interview Prince Johnson Mbeng, Belo, July 2009.



Figure 10. Laikom, 1947, showing cluster of many homes (Gilbert Schneider photos).



Figure 11. Laikom, 1958 showing cluster of many homes (Gilbert Schneider photos).

The Fon is the head of the palace. The palace includes several types of houses in different clusters and separate court yards. These consist of:

- 1) Iifuum - This house is the burial site of all Fons. It is worth noting here that the tradition of the Kom people holds that Fons are immortal and don't die, they only disappear to meet their

ancestors. Thus the iifuum has only two grave sites, one on the right wing and the second one on the left wing of this house.¹⁴

- 2) Ndo Ntvil - This is the medicine house at the grave site of Fons and is where the Fon in waiting would sit for seven days upon the disappearance of his uncle. It is believed that during this time he goes into a trance for seven days and receives special powers from his ancestors to be able to lead as Fon.¹⁵ This is the only house in the palace that has remained in its original form from the founding of the kingdom, and therefore the only house that is adequately preserved.
- 3) Ngeh - This was the tallest and largest building in all of Kom facing the big courtyard in Laikom. It usually served as a meeting house when outlying villages would come to Laikom for ceremonies or served as a guest house for visitors. For example, Rebecca Reyher, who visited and wrote about the Fon and his hundred wives, stayed in this structure.¹⁶

¹⁴ Interview Prince Johnson Mbeng, July 2009.

¹⁵ Johnson Mbeng, Belo, July 2009.

¹⁶ Reyher, Rebecca; *the Fon and his hundred wives*, Doubleday & company inc, New York, 1952, pg 162.



Figure 12. Tallest and Largest building in all of Kom (Rebecca Reyher 1952).

4) Antusii - This is the house that forms the gateway into the palace and leads visitors through the wives section into the inner court or wei -fijang.

5) Nsang-a-tu –wei. This is the living room where the Fon regularly retires to rest; many activities like the reception of guests, singing, dancing and drinking take place here.¹⁷

Other royal and important compounds in Kom are Abei-a -abaw, Abei-a –Muloin, Abei-a-Fuliegh, Abei-a-Ayajua, Abei-a –Nto'tuen, and Abei-Njinikijem. 'Abei' is compound and the village is where this royal compound is located see glossary. These royal compounds would have similar buildings like those in the palace but the rest of the compounds in Kom would be deemed as ordinary men's compounds or houses.

¹⁷ Details of house types in the palace gotten as responses from Johnson Mbeng via email, October 12, 2010.

Figure 13. Layout of Kom compound Sketch by Gilbert Mbeng, December 15, 2010.

Interior space of a typical Kom house

- **Ikang a' sang-** ceiling or attic space for storing corn a staple crop of the Kom.
- **ikang a'bei-**external ceiling (almost like an eave overhang) filled with earth as a protective measure for fires and heat on the thatch.
- **isieh-**for storing food and drying wood
- **Ikunikoh-storage** space –
- **lumisi-keisi-ishow** (kitchen utensils)
- **igwoh-**storage space
- **nkem-fishuow-tifu'h-ntoins**i (larger kitchen utensils)
- **fikeh fi ndoh-**walls
- **tibumni-**bed protectors/covers made of bamboos
- **ifalli ndoh**
- **mbang asang-**pole/bar for storing corn tied together in strings

- **Ayuff**-Door entrance¹⁸

The heath place-made up of three stone of the fireplace (**1-wain-2-afu'agzhina-3-nyam ngvin**) this represents the three hands of Kom cosmology, for interceding between the dead and the living. Wood ash from the fire place is held on the palm of the person interceding with the death and is blown outside as a sign for removing bad luck and evil from the living.

Stone tiling on the floor is only reserved for a house of the man here male. The women's house or section is often bare earth.

Fibeisi-Bottom door frame

Aghov - door step from inside (storage for chicken)

ngoh fisus

¹⁸ Interview with Alex kumato, Sammy Ambe, Diagha Simon Ntenmisih, Nges Isiaih Tufoin and Johnson Mbeng, Belo, July 15th 2009.

Constructing a Kom House

The initial thoughts of building a house in Kom are nurtured in a male as he attains manhood. His first achievement as a man is to leave his mother's house and begin life on his own. This means he now has a place of his own where he can get married and start his own family. The tradition of the Kom people holds that once a son has attained manhood, the landlord who is always his father, shows him a parcel of land where he should build. This land is usually on the fringes of his father's compound but when there is not enough land, a parcel is secured in his mother's farm which is often farther afield. The transfer of land title is marked by the planting of a tree at a central place on the parcel (plot); the most commonly used tree is a life plant (nkiing). This initial process is known as 'ikwati i ndoh'.¹⁹

Once land is secured, the next stage in the construction process involves the gathering and collection of the construction material needed for the building. Construction materials are harvested from the forest and hills with the help of friends and well wishers. The quantity of materials to be collected depends on the size of the house to be built. The person responsible for managing the project is often the owner who plays a lead role and supervises the project until it is finished. He is assisted by a group of technicians with special skills who build the foundation, erect the walls, and finally thatch the roof. It is important to note the role of women who supplement the labor needed to make the task easier. They are the ones who dig the trenches for the foundation and daub the main frame of the house. With material in hand, the actual construction begins with the foundation.²⁰

The foundation begins with the measurement of the four corners of the house. This stage is called ichupti; measurements are usually done using the span of the arm as a measuring apparatus. A regular size house will be two arms in both the length and width and called ndo-akoe-abo which can hold four beds. A much larger house will be five arms in length and width and called ndoh-a -koe atain, which can hold up

¹⁹ Interview with Bobe Elias Kumato ,Belo,july 22 nd 2009.

²⁰ Ibid.

to five beds or more. Once the dimensions of the house have been set, the excavation of the foundation is usually done with the help of women who use the traditional hoe.



Figure 5. Traditional Kom hoe (photo by Gilbert Mbeng July, 2009)

The workers dig a two foot trench in the ground around the limits of the house and then fill it with stones. The floor is tilled and leveled to the top of the foundation. At this point, the owner provides bush meat and pepper cooked in palm oil and everyone eats a celebration meal for the completion of the foundation. It is important that this is done on the site and on the foundation so the dancing will pack and harden the floor of the house.²¹

The next stage in the construction process is erecting the main frame of the building. This is usually done elsewhere and then the sections are carried to the construction site. Using Indian bamboo, the walls are crafted on the ground and tied with ropes from cane called iliegh. Usually, each panel wall

²¹ Interview with Elias Kumato ,Belo July 22nd 2009.

is built on the ground and stacked together in a pile at a distant location. With the help of over 20 men, each panel wall is then carried to the site and tied to the four main posts of the house, using much stronger ropes called ayvus. The main post comes from a special kind of tree called iikfam. The main frame of the structure is crisscrossed with raffia bamboo and tied to the main post using ropes called ikigh which can hold sections of high stress. Elephant grass is used to fill in the remaining holes (interstices) and then the walls at this stage will be ready for plastering.²²



Figure 15. Details of a Kom House construction –the main frame (Gilbert Schneider photos).

Once the walls have been erected, the next section of the building is the ceiling. The ceiling is built on the ground with Indian bamboo tied together with ropes called iliegh. Then the ceiling is gradually raised on top of the main bamboo frame of the building with the help of several strong men. Using poles, they steadily lift the ceiling until it lays flat on top of the roof. There are typically two kinds

²² ibid

of attic spaces in a traditional Kom house. The first one is called ikang –abeih (outside ceiling) which is the outer ceiling and is accessed from outside with an opening that serves as an escape for smoke from the fire inside the house. It is also used as storage space for drying firewood and coffee, which is a staple cash crop of the Kom area. The second kind of attic space is inkang –i-ndoh (inside ceiling) which is accessed through the inside of the building. The distance between the two ceilings, is 3feet apart. The inner ceiling is mainly used to store corn which is the staple crop of the Kom people. It is also used as extra storage space for all household utensils and implements that cannot find a home on the walls and shelving units on the inner walls of the house.

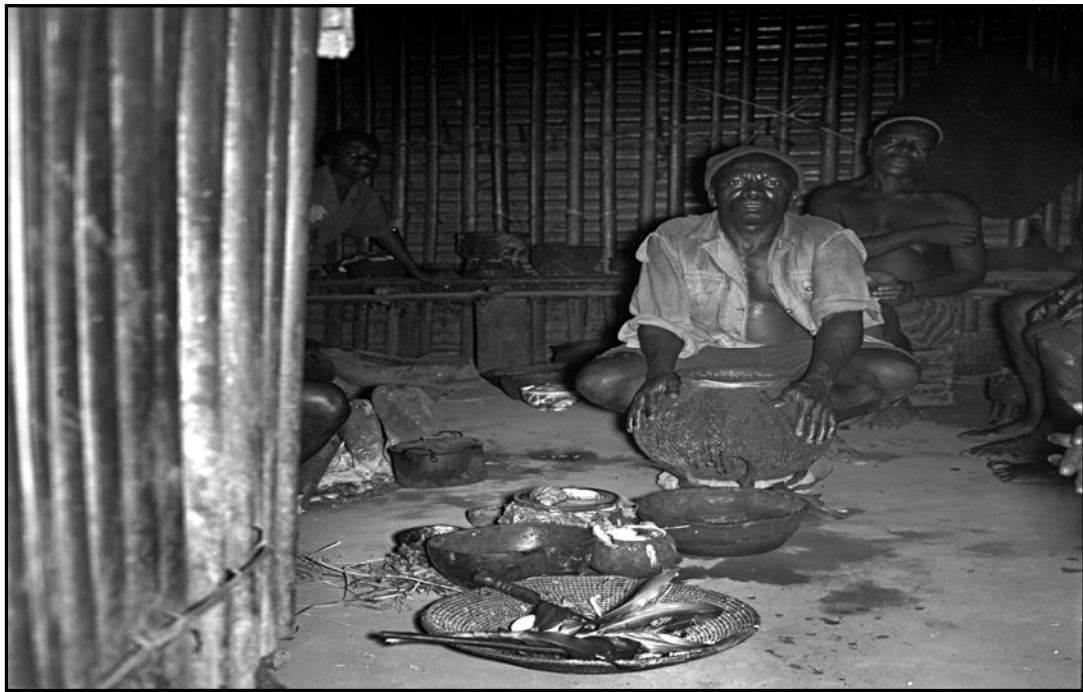


Figure 6. Interior space of Kom house (Gilbert Schneider photos)



Figure 77. Interior walls Kom House (Gilbert Schneider Photos).

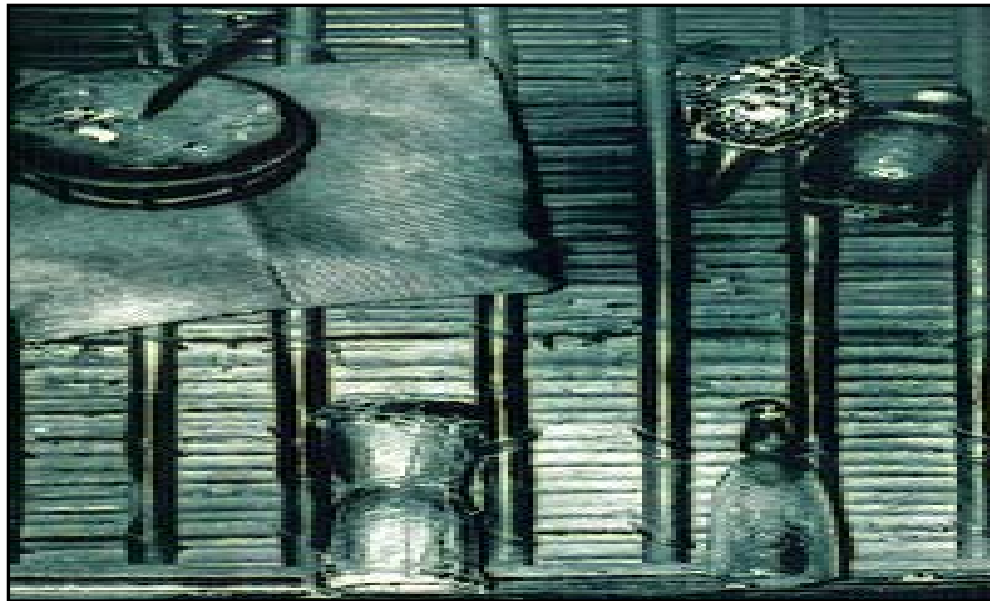


Figure 88. Interior wall of the traditional Kom house for storage (Gilbert Schneider photos).

The last part of the construction process is the putting up the roof. The rafters are arranged in an “A” frame which is tied to the ceiling. The bamboo frame of the roof is tied together on the ground and lifted to the top of the roof as in the process of the ceiling and tied together to form a pyramidal roof structure.



Figure 99. Making the pyramidal roof of a traditional Kom house (Gilbert Schneider photos from Evan Schneider).

The finishing of the traditional Kom house is subdivided into three parts. First, once the main frame has been set with a roof, the walls of the house are plastered. Mud which is a mixture of earth and water is used to plaster the interstices of the structure. This task is mainly done by women and is known as imal –i -ndoh. The second part is the thatching of the roof with dry grass harvested from the hills

during the dry season. Thatching requires special skill and is reserved for individuals with such abilities. The third and final part is the interior detailing of the house which involves carving the door lashes, beds, shelving, and panels to cover and separate the beds from each other.²³

The completion of the construction process is marked by the lighting of a fire in the heath of the new structure. The owner will collect burning charcoal from the closest neighbor and burn the remainder of the dry grass that was used to thatch the house. This is a kind of house warming which makes the house ready for use.²⁴

²³ Interview with Elias kumato ,Belo,july 22 2009

²⁴ Johnson Mbeng,Belo,July 22 nd 2009.

Chapter 4: Changes and Evolution of the Traditional Kom House

The spread of the traditional Kom house out from Laikom resulted from the need for more space due to increasing population size. The Kom kingdom grew through expansionist wars and this process also saw the building of important new compounds that remain the seat for the heads of the villages that make up Kom today. The traditional style and form of these new structures gradually and steadily changed over the years starting in the late 19th century. A combination of natural factors and the introduction of Western construction materials drove the transformation of the landscape to reflect a more European and American style architecture. As will be seen below,

Role of Fire

A fire in the hearth of a traditional Kom house was used for warm, drying and the preparation of food. Smoke from the hearth helps coat the interior space and materials like bamboo, providing the structure with some protection from rot and mold which could damage the thatch and bamboo supports. The smoke also keeps insects and vermin from damaging and consuming the foodstuffs stored in the house and attic.

Yet the same fire can be a cause for concern when the heat from this fire dries the building materials and renders them prone to burning. This was one of the major causes of the fire that burnt down the palace in 1950.²⁵

²⁵ Interview with Fon Vincent Yuh II, Laikom ,July 2009.



Figure 20. Interior space of the only surviving traditional Kom house (photo by Gilbert Mbeng, July 2009)

Weather and Climate

Cameroon has two main seasons: rainy and dry. The characteristics of these two seasons offer the warming effects of the sun during the dry season and cooling during the raining or wet season. This in turn causes the disintegration of the mud which is used to plaster the walls of the traditional Kom house. The situation is made worst, by oncoming wind.

Blowing wind causes abrasion and the erosion of the walls of the Kom house which is another reason for the fragility of the house and accounted for the change in the material structure of the traditional Kom house over the years.

Cycles of dry and wet, along with abrading wind were major factors that accounted for the slow and steady change from traditional building materials (thatch, wattle and daub, bamboo frame) to the more solid western materials like zinc, molded bricks and the use of building plans.

Time

African kingdoms and chiefdoms existed independently and had their own customs and traditions like the Kom with their traditional house. Over the years, events in Europe saw the exploration and exploitation of other parts of the world including Africa and brought a new relationship between European countries and these places overseas. African cultures were changed as Europeans sought to impose their “superior” traditions on other cultures.

These cultural influences were realized in various ways; for example in Kom through its architecture, European influence in Cameroon began when the territory was annexed in 1884 by the Germans who named the land Kamerun. With the defeat of Germany in the First World War, the territory was ceded as a trust territory of the League of Nations and given to France and Britain who were to develop this territory until it was able to stand on its own.

In Kom, German influence was minimal because the Kom successfully resisted German penetration at the battle of Elemighong.²⁶ While Germany had developed successful tactics to dominate indigenous people, such endeavors were overtaken by the outbreak of the First World War. The outcome of the war was the seizure of all German colonies which were given to administering powers to develop until they attained independence. In Cameroon, the northwest and southwest portions of the country were ceded to Britain, which adopted an indirect system of rule in West Africa. This system of indirect rule, allowed for the survival of local traditions and customs. As a result there was no categorical replacement of the traditional style of architecture in Kom, but rather a slow introduction of the more solid and western materials which replaced traditional building materials while maintaining the same form and style.

²⁶ Interview with fon Vincent Yuh , Laikom, July 10th 2009.



Figure 21. Introduction of Western building materials on the Kom Landscape with the same form and style of the traditional Kom house (Photo, Fundong, June 2007 by Gilbert Mbeng).

It was later on through the activities of the American Baptist Missionary society, that American style architecture was introduced in the area for missionary homes, schools, churches and hospitals.

Population Growth

Acting in concert with other factors, population growth was one of the factors that accounted for the change in the building materials. Increasing family size meant that more room was needed in the one room house to accommodate new family members. The typical traditional kom house was unable to accommodate and provide more space for this increasing population size and as a result, new structures were built to accommodate bigger families. Once new building materials were introduced, it became easy to modify the one room plan and add more rooms in the same building which was a plus because this maintained a strong family value.

New Construction Materials

Acting in concert with other factors, there was a shift from traditional building materials to modern materials one factor that made this possible was limitations involved in harvesting traditional building materials. Traditional building materials like Indian bamboo and grass for thatching was harvested far afield which was cumbersome, time consuming, and tedious. Thus when zinc or corrugated sheets were introduced there was a gradual shift to these newly available building materials.

Another factor for change was the contact with Europe through trade. The discovery of the new world and the need for slaves to work on the plantations, brought slavers from Europe to Africa in search of human booty. Initially led by the Portuguese and the Dutch, France, Britain and Brandenburg joined in the trade along the Cameroon coast.²⁷ They visited the coast in search of slaves who were exchanged for European goods-these goods included new construction materials which eventually made its way to the hinterland and replaced traditional construction materials. These materials include; Corrugated sheets or zinc, glass for windows, nails, door locks and hinges, Saws that were used to hewn timber. Hammers and measuring tapes heralded the art of bricklaying and blocks were molded with mud on forms made from planks.

The last major factor that accounted for the shift to the use of modern materials was the increasing family size. An average household in Kom had over five or more children. This meant there was a need for more room within the traditional Kom house and with new materials in place, it became easy to modify the one room plan to a three or more room floor plan

New Exterior façade

The new traditional Kom house saw the replacement of traditional building materials but the form and shape of this structure was initially the same but started to change when missionary groups started

²⁷ Victor Julius Limbe ,1996.pg 1.Ngoh, History of Cameroon since 1800, Press book,Limbe,1996 pg 40.

arriving the area. This change in style and form will be examined individually under the role of different European and American activity in the area.

German Influence

Germany annexed the area which became known as Kamerun in 1884,²⁸ however its influence was mainly on the coastal area with relics of German architecture. The German penetration of the hinterland was stopped by the First World War as all German protectorates were seized and became trust territories of the League of Nations. So there was no influence by German architecture in Kom because they were one of the ethnic groups that successfully resisted German penetration as seen at the battle of Elimighong.²⁹

British influence

Following the defeat of Germany in the First World, Cameroon was given to France and Britain as trust territories of the League of Nations because it was sandwiched between French and British colonies. France had the Congo and most of Equatorial Africa to the South while Britain had Nigeria to the West.³⁰ So it was just logical to trust the area to these two because the mission of the League of Nations was to develop such territories until they were able to stand on their own since colonialism was on its demise. Kom is located in the northwest Province of Cameroon which was one of the provinces administered by Britain.

British colonial policy in West Africa was the indirect system of rule, a system of governance under which 'natural rulers' were given the opportunity to rule their subjects under the guidance of the British authorities.³¹ Because of this, there was not much British influence on Kom architecture since indigenes

²⁸ Kamerun was the name used during German rule from 1884 until the outbreak end of WWI.

²⁹ Elimighong is a small village where the German Polizeitruppe was effectively pushed back by the war club of the kom.

³⁰ Victor Julius Limbe, 1996, pg 1. Ngoh, History of Cameroon since 1800, Press book, Limbe, 1996 pg 121.

³¹ Ibid, pg 168.

were allowed to maintain their cultural traditions. However, there were changes in traditional materials while the same form and style of the traditional Kom house was retained.

American Influence

The first missionary group to arrive in Cameroon was the English Baptist Missionary society led by Alfred Saker in 1846 but their activities were limited to the coastal towns. When Germany annexed Cameroon in 1884, the Basel mission took over from the English missionary society and continued the work into the hinterland. Changing events on the world scene, brought different missions to Cameroon

In kom the first missionary group was led by the Northern American Baptist convention. Their work was mainly in developing schools, hospitals, and churches, and this activity began a shift that resulted in the Kom people to embracing a new kind of architecture.(insert American architecture from power point)

Chapter 5: The landscape in 2010 and Need to Preserve

The current landscape in Kom reflects a marked absence of the traditional Kom house because of the introduction of new building materials and other factors already discussed. The trend in the entire Kingdom has been to adapt to better housing with portable water and electricity, which to the Kom men

see as the meaning of development. Thus old structures are torn down and replaced with more modern structures or new construction techniques that retain no evidence of the traditional construction methods.

This paper seeks to acknowledge these changes but document of the construction techniques of the Traditional Kom House, advocacy and possibility of a reconstruction project, will be the best way to salvage the heritage and integrity of a tradition that is endangered in the ever changing landscape-It would be a great site for World heritage tourism.

Roof

The roof which used to be a combination of thatch grass on a pyramidal bamboo roof is now constructed with zinc or corrugated sheets on purlins and plank from timber sawn to different sizes and formed into different patterns and designs of rafters to mimic the shapes of European and American structures according to the taste and desire of the owner

Walls

The walls originally a combination of mud daubed on a bamboo have since the 1950s been made with sun dried bricks of earth and built with alternating rows of headers and stretchers³²

³² Virginia & Lee McAlester; A field guide to American houses, Alfred A. Knopf Inc, New York, 1984



Figure 22. Informant Kumato in front of a house with sun dried bricks and corrugated sheets (Photo, Gilbert Mbeng ,June 2009).

Stones were also used to erect walls when the owner was able to collect enough stones for the construction process.



Figure 23. Walls constructed with Stone (Photo by Gilbert Mbeng2009).

The evolution continued and today, people use bricks made from coarse sand and cement to build the walls of houses in different styles and shapes which show a marked shift from the traditional Kom Style.



Figure 24. Construction with bricks from coarse sand and cement, (photo by Laura Mbeng, August 2010).

These changes in the building materials have resulted in a landscape in the area which show a marked absence of the traditional kom house.



Figure 25.Aerial view of Fundong the major city and capital of the Kom Division (image from Google earth, November 2010).



Figure 26. Aerial view of the Kom Palace in 2010 with modern building materials-zinc, (image accessed from Google earth, November 2010).



Figure 27. Site view of the Kom Palace showing traditional building materials (Gilbert Schneider photos).

In response to these changes, a field study of the area was done in the summer of 2009 in an attempt to document any surviving Kom house with the construction methods and techniques.

The study began with a windshield survey of the entire Kingdom and the results were disturbing because it was hard to locate any traditional Kom house; this was the case even in the palace which is suppose to be the custodian of the tradition and heritage of the people. The Fon, Vincent Yuh II, was alarmed by the changes and regretted the fact that he had nothing to show me. The traditional Kom house which he himself grew up in was largely gone but he applauded my endeavors while showing me a parcel of land that could be used to reconstruct a traditional Kom house for posterity. He promised to do all he could, to galvanize community input for such a project.³³

I was told by some informants that there are still houses in certain suburbs with sun dried bricks and thatch. I was able to locate two traditional Kom dwellings. One was in the compound of a local business man who had reconstructed the house for his mother who preferred to live in a traditional house; he and his son live in a modern compound. The other was in its original state and had not been torn down because mbainwol, the lady who lives in the house, chose not to move to a brick structure that her son had constructed for her she felt that the modern structure was colder to live in than the Kom house³⁴. I chose to call the traditional Kom house from this point henceforth as 'Ndo mbaiwol' (house of Mbainwol)³⁵ in honor of this lady who was able to have it saved.

³³ Interview with Fon Vincent Yuh II, July 2009, Laikom. During this interview, the Fon gave me his blessings on my strides to salvage and preserve the traditional kom house. He reserved a parcel of Land in the court yard leading to kwifoyn(highest governing body of the land) compound where all traditional artifacts are stored. He explained to me that the current image of the palace is because it got burnt but fires when it was thatched and rebuilding it with modern materials was to avoid any eventuality of a future fire.

³⁴ Interview with Diangha Simon Ntemishi, Belo, July 22nd 2009.

³⁵ Mbainwol in 2009 was aged 90+ years .She told me jokes about the modern house like saying that you can never replace the peace and tranquility of the traditional house because in a modern house ,when it rains and kids play and throw stones on the roof you will hear allot of noise which is not the case with Kom house.



Figure 28. Ndo Mbainwol-the only surviving kom House (photo by Gilbert Mbeng July 2009).

This is the only surviving structure in the entire Kom kingdom in its original form. An appraisal of the building showed evidence of degradation on the walls and foundation. It is constantly maintained by daubing with mud to hold the building together.

The roof is redone once in ten to fifteen years and always during the dry season. Thatching is done routinely as needed and a new layer will be added to the existing thatch once there is evidence of penetration of rain water into the main building. The maintenance of the structure is done mainly by Diangha Simon whose mother lives in the house and his plan was to tear the building down and build a modern house with sun dried bricks once his mother passes. I was able to talk him into rethinking his position because this structure remains a valuable asset to him and posterity if it were to be adequately preserved.

An interesting observation from the appraisal of this structure was the state of the interior space which remained intact and appears to be well preserved. This is an essential part of Kom house preservation which is the function of the structure as a dwelling with a fire. The fire is lit and used for cooking and warmth especially during the rainy season. The heat from the fire prevents rot and mold from destroying the thatch and bamboo supports. The smoke from the fire also keeps insects and vermin from damaging and consuming the foodstuffs stored in the house and attic and also adds a coat on the bamboos making it solid.³⁶

The preservation endeavor of Ndo Mbainwol is the ultimate goal and recommendation of this paper and this will remain essential for preserving the Kom house.

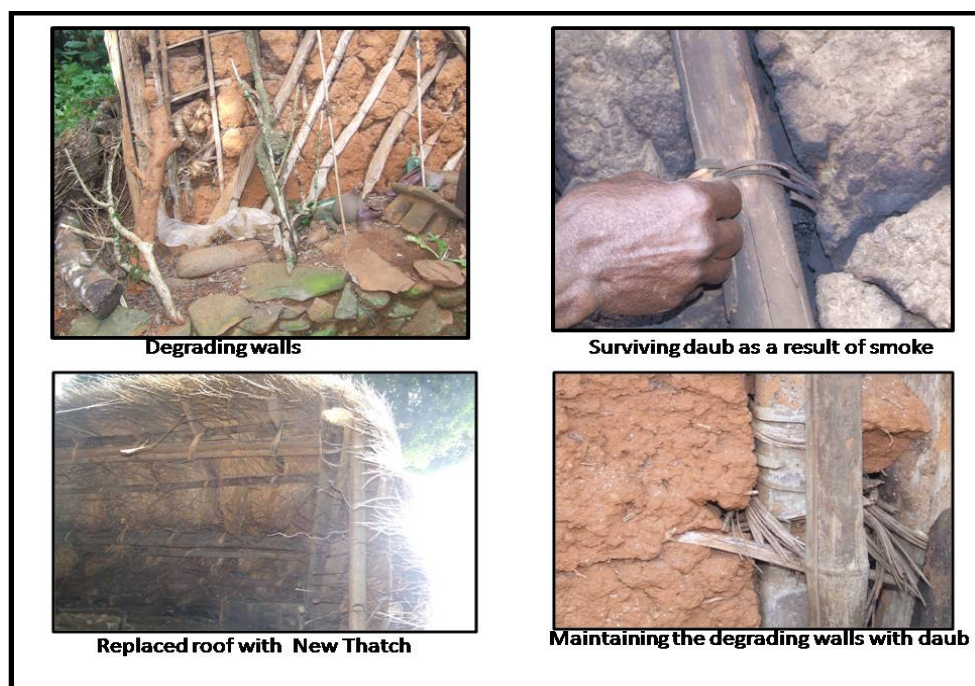


Figure 29. Degradation and maintenance of the traditional Kom House,(images by Gilbert Mbeng, July 2009).

³⁶ Email response from Evan Schneider. Evan is a the lead photographer at the Oregon Historical society. He grew up in Kom while his parents worked as missionaries in the area. He went back as a peace corps volunteer and did considerable work in documenting through mages aspects of cultures in the grassland Fondoms

Conclusion:

Advocacy for the Preservation of the kom House

Having exposed the marked absence of Ndo Mbainwol or the traditional Kom house in Kom today and considering the condition of the surviving structure, it became apparent that there was a need to ignite a preservation endeavor in the Kingdom.

The first step will be to advocate for the inclusion of the study of the ‘ndo Mbainwol – traditional Kom house in the school curriculum of public and private education at the primary level of education in the Division. This will be through the Divisional Delegate of National Education for Boyo who oversees and directs the school programs in the area. This will educate the young population at an early stage of their learning and will help pass on a lost heritage to future generations.

This task will be made possible by a handbook on the construction technique of the traditional Kom house which will be produced with excerpts from this study.

The second step will be to form a nongovernmental organization to be called Ndo Mbainwol. The vision and goal of this organization will be to educate the population about a lost heritage. It will also manage surviving structures and attempt a reconstruction project of the Kom house on a parcel of land secured in the palace for this purpose.³⁷ This will promote and enhance the Kom culture also renowned for the sacred symbol-Afo-a-Kom that was stolen and taken to America then returned in the 1970's at the intervention of the State department.³⁸

This study is a great example of a preservation endeavor to salvage a lost heritage by documenting the process of the construction of the traditional Kom house.

³⁷ A grant application is included as an appendix of this study.

³⁸ Official Journal of the National Geographic Society, Washington DC, Vol.146,NO.1 ,pg 141.

Underscoring the changes seen in the traditional, and considering the current trend in Preservation towards sustainability and the drive towards adaptive reuse, this project opens the grounds for further research with a desire to see how the concept of an effective adaptive reuse could be employed to sustain the traditional Kom house in the 21st century. It is great to have things evolve and adapt to the realities of an ever changing cultural landscape but having some degree of integrity and heritage of a people salvaged is the ultimate goal for any Preservationists.

While the disappearance of traditional housing in Kom and Cameroon on a wider scale accounts for a loss in a people's heritage, it would be interesting in the future to see what the King has done or can do within his Kingdom or look at what the government of Cameroon is doing in this regard?

Finally, because this example illuminates preservation endeavors in a developing country, it would also be interesting to look at what is happening elsewhere in neighboring countries like Nigeria, Ghana and how similar outcomes are handled or if this is unique only to Kom?

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Bobe, Aka kombani, use to be retainer from 1932-1952, interviewed August 7th, Fundong, 2001.

Bobe Careless Anchang, Chief retainer at the palace 1999 Fundong, 2001.

Bobe Elias Kumato, interviewed July 15th, Belo-Kom, 2009

His Royal Highness, Fon Vincent Yuh, interviewed, Laikom June 28th, 2001.

Prince Francis Chia Ngam, interviewed August 6th, Fundong, 2001.

Prince Johnson Mbeng, interviewed June 6th 2001 Belo-Kom, and July 20th 2009.

Correspondence:

Evan Schneider, Portland, Oregon via email throughout graduate School 2008-2010.

Pamela McClusky, Seattle, Washington via email throughout graduate School 2008-2010.

Appendix

Grant Application for the Restoration of the Traditional Kom House

1.0 Grant request

1.1 Name of building-

'Ndo 'kom(Kom House)-Mbainwol Initiative

*See –Fig 1

1.2 Location of Building;

Laikom, PMB –Fundong ,

Boyo Division, Cameroon

1.3 Name of legal owner

The Fon of Kom,

PMB-Fundong

Boyo Division-NW-Province

Cameroon

*see fig 2

1.4 Name of Applicant(s)

Gilbert Mbeng, Pamela McClusky, Evan Schneider & Don Linebaugh

The Seattle Art Museum in collaboration with the University of Maryland School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation.

1.5 Funding request (attach item budget)

Grant Request		
Applicants funds	Trip to Cameroon x 3	\$15.000
	Transportation in Cameroon pickup truck	\$30.000
	Construction material & Labor	\$85.000
Project Estimate		\$130.000

2.1 Current Listing of the Building.

Host of the renowned statue 'Afo'a'Kom

The Fon and his hundred wives, Rebecca Reyer

2.2 Describe the Architectural Significance of the Building.

The kom house is a mid 18th century thatch structure of bamboo frame -plastered with mud from fine earth. It is a typical vernacular structure of the kom people who represent a greater picture of the grassland Fondoms of the North west Province Of Cameroon, West Africa.

2.3 Cultural and Historical significance of the Kom structure.

The traditional Kom house is almost extinct and maybe deemed an endangered architectural relic of the grassland region of the North West Province of Cameroon.

Interestingly kom, is the home of the renowned art piece "Afo 'a'Kom" that was stolen in the early 70's and brought to the United States. It's stay and final return to the Kom through the intervention of the State Department, made headline news.

Yet those who have read Rebecca Reyer's ;The Fon and his hundred wives, New York 1952, will remain curious and anxious for an opportunity to explore .It is in this Kingdom that the Fon whom

Rebecca is describing reigned- needless to mention the intangible aspects of these peoples culture which will rightly be preserved in a walk back to the 18th century in such a restoration work.

Why the Work must be undertaken at this time.

When the palace burnt down in 1952 its restoration was not a replication because the original material was replaced by more synthetic and modern material like corrugated sheets

As a grandson of the palace and student of Historic Preservation, it is quite appropriate to attempt a restoration following the guidelines and principles involved in the preservation of Historic places.

2.4 Need For Financial Assistance.

Preservation and here restoration is entirely an unknown discipline in the area. To adhere to the general principles and guidelines in any preservation endeavor, the services of an expert or trained professional is required.

The School of Architecture, Planning and Historic Preservation where this proposal is being submitted will be the best setting to organize such restoration.

Secondly and most importantly as seen by this student is the urgency of time. This restoration requires special skills and data from an aging population that will be absent to answer directed questions at a later date.

An early consideration for this project will save a lost tradition and heritage

3.0 Describing the Building

* see fig 1

-Grass is used in its dry form to thatch the roof of this kind of structure. This material is normally harvested in the dry season.

-Bamboos-two kinds of bamboo are used .Golden goddess bamboo plant and the plain un striped bamboo plant.

These bamboo is used to construct the main frame of the structure and roof.

*see fig 3

-Mud-a local form of Adobe is a mixture of fine earth and water. Sometimes a blend of banana or plantain stem holds the mud as fiber glass holds plaster today.

This mud is then daubed on the bamboo frame wall and also used to glue the foundation of stone

3.2 Provide approximate date of original construction/foundation

Circa-1790

3.2 Describe the type and style of Building

The Kom house is a late 18th century one story mud/thatch structure with a porch on its main façade .It is a typical vernacular structure of the grassland region of the North western part of Cameroon.

3.3 Describe the size and configuration

It is a rectangular structure measuring approximately 40'x 30' with a single floor. The footprints of the original foundation have remained the same.

3.4 Describe briefly the setting of the building

This is an edifying kom structure which use to be located on the peaks of Laikom, seat of the kom palace

3.5 Classify the present condition of the building

☐ Ruined ☒ Extinct ☐ Fair

3.6 Indicate the degree of urgency of restoring the building

☒ Imperitive ☒ urgent ☐ Desirable

4.0 Project Management Summary

Mbainwol Initiative

4.1 Describe the nonprofit or charitable status of the owner of the building

It is one of the many houses in the Kom Palace

4.2 Provide name and address of the organization that will monitor the restoration.

University of Maryland

School of Architecture Planning & Historic Preservation,
College Park, Maryland

4.3 Provide name and address of the organization that will be financially responsible for the continued maintenance of the building after restoration is completed

Mbainwol Initiative

4.4 List other potential funding resources and the status of any other application

Seattle Art Museum

5.0 History of the Building

5.1 Provide a historical summary of the ownership and cultural usage of the building

The kom house 'Ndo 'Kom' would be best described as the common house of the kom Palace. Kom Palace is a Royal Fondom that was founded following the final settlement of the migrating kom people on the peaks of Laikom.

The myth following the migration of these people hold that, they moved down from Ndobbo in Adamawa province-settled in Babessi, left at the intrigues of the Babesi Fon on the Kom Fon who later committed suicide –transformed into a python and led his people up through Nkar-and Idien and finally settled on the peaks of laikom.(This myth and legend has been extensively researched and written upon by Prof Eugenia Shanklin-College of New Jersey who recently passed away as this student was heeding to her pursuant of preservation endeavors in the kom kingdom.)

At the peaks of laikom, population growth caused an expanse to a wider area with different villages, clans and tribes .Yet the Fon would bring everyone in his Kingdom once every year in routine annual dances .

It is in this Kom house that representatives of the entire Kom country would congregate.-Today it can be measured to a house of assembly.

5.2 Describe any additions or modifications to the building.

In 1952 this structure and others in the palace got burnt. An attempt to rebuild the structures saw the replacement of the original building material which has rendered this structure obsolete

5.3 Describe any conservation work that has already been completed on the building.

Several restoration attempts are done today by different development organizations yet they fall short of realizing the essence and guidelines of preservation endeavors. Recent knowledge is pushing this student into a proper restoration project of a traditional kom house.

5.0 Project work Plan

6.1 Describe the conservation principles underlying this project; refer to any established guidelines on preservation.

The principles that will be applied to this project are enshrined in the secretary of interior standards for the preservation of Historic places. Here we are restoring!

Any restoration project is undertaken to depict a property's at a particular period of time in history, while removing evidence of other periods.

The local laws are quite tolerable and such a project would be deemed an honor yet need would be to partner with the ministry of culture in Cameroon for documentation as the field of Preservation in Cameroon develops-

The local administration here Divisional Officer would also be notified as a courtesy of an activity within his jurisdiction.

But the blessing and authority of the palace and current Fon protects any project in his palace.

The Cultural attaché at the US embassy will be notified if funding is coming from the States

6.2 Provide the name and address of the project supervisor (architect, conservator, or consultant who may be appointed to oversee the project for which grant funding is currently being requested.)

David.C Overholt

Conservator,
University of Maryland
School of Architecture &
Historic preservation

Gilbert Mbeng
Student , ,
University of Maryland
Historic Preservation.

KEMCO-management & Consulting
PMB-Belo,
Belo sub Division.
Cameroon

6.3 Justify the suitability of the proposed conservation techniques by describing each technique to be used and its probable impact on the building. Provide a detailed description of the proposed changes or modifications to the building

This restoration requires material which is quite accessible and affordable.

Bamboos-Dried Grass-timber-stones.

But this restoration requires extensive research on the construction techniques which are almost obsolete.

Field work is needed to document the art of;

-thatching

-carving of door post and pillars

-Replicating the bamboo frame

-And use of local adobe to plaster the walls.

This will be made possible by the professional expertise of decoding existing photos

Project Timetable

Step and event	Approximate Dates
Ground work and trip to Cameroon	Pending approval and if 2011 then progressive dates will apply
Assessment of plot for restoration	January 10 th 2012
Questioner and research	January-15 th -30 th 2012
Gathering of materials	February-march 2012
Assembly of stage for work	April 2012
Evaluation	December 2012
General assessment & reporting/inclusion	January 2013

'The main façade of the Building to be restored'

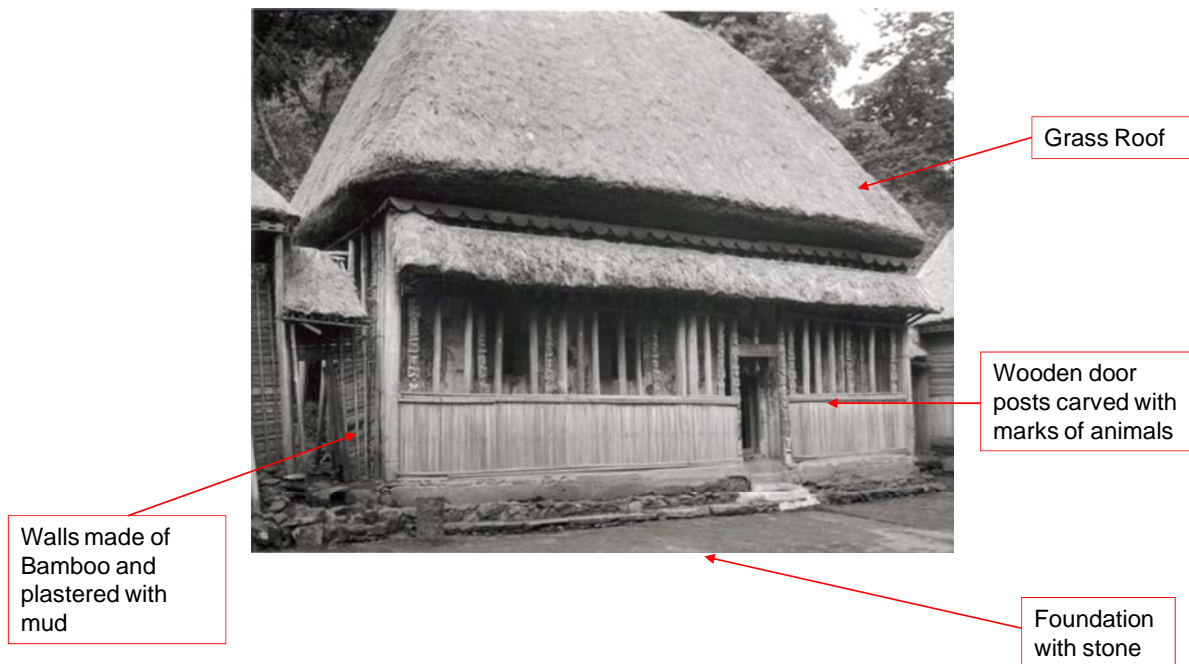


Fig1



Fig 2



Fig 3

Asi a njwà'li Itanjikom (The Kom alphabet)

Letter		Awo Itanjikom	Meaning in English
capital	small		
A	a	Abas, achi, afo, atam, atef, ayes	Lizard, stool, thing, trap, will, broom
Æ	æ	kàè, bàè, fikæ,	Four, dad, wall framework,
B	b	Ba, bò, bes, bisi, biyn, byem	Friend, bag, cat, reserve, dance, hunt
Ch	ch	Chu', cham, chuf, chwokù', chye'si, chya	Pound, chew, curve, rat, erase, kick
D	d	dæsi, dùyn, dyal, dàla,	Dash, buttocks, pride, traditional gown
E	e	Tem, nchen, nge', ntè', ngè'si	Clear bush, bottle, trouble, village, egussi
F	f	fikâ', fiki, fingvan, fu, fyef, fyen	Tree, mortar, salt, give, blow, divination
G	g	Gèli, gàmti, gwò, gvà, gyasi	Carry on head, help, share, grind, voices
Gh	gh	Gheli, ghayni, ghal	People, stroll, grip
I	i	Ibi, ibayn, ibemsi, iboyisi, ichili	Kola nut, light, praises, blessing, bravery
†	i	†kæ, ikwo, ik*, ilû, ilvi,	Arm, money, ladder, honey, time
J	j	Jva, jèn, jèla, jini,	River, hunger, walk, confused
K	k	Kâf, kfan, kumti, kin̄ti, kam	Armpit, modern, knock, shift a bit, squeeze
L	l	labsi, layn, lema, le ŋ, libis	Decorate, today, grow, beat, tomorrow
M	m	Mbam, mbanj, mbas, mbàs, mbayn, mbè'	Snake, line, charm, soup, nail, shoulder
N	n	Nìni, ndàbà', ndon, ndòn, ndzisi, ngvim	Old woman, tobacco, flute, potato, dress, python
Ny	ny	Nyam, nyimli, nyon, nyin, nyan, nyàmàbo	Animal, smile, suck, run, snub, leopard
l	ŋ	lànli, ña'si, ño'ti, ñgu'ti, ñòŋsi	Crawl, open, economise, squat, scare
O	o	Ndo, nò', ntòyn, itof, isom, ison	House, one, put, intellect, palm tree, tooth
Œ	œ	ikæ, asæ, sæ, awæ,	Arm, inner bamboo, deep, ice
S	s	Asan, sami, samo', sæ, suyn, syin	Corn, disappear, truth, gain, friend, rush
T	t	Tas, tebti, tifwo, ton, tum, tuynsi	Sew, advise, beads, blow, put, deny
U	u	Ntum, ntufa, lum, wul, kul, ñintu'	Message, six, bite, person, tie, night
Ue	ue	Akue, azue, azûe, ñin̄chûe	Belt, nose, breath, day
V	v	ivis, visi, viyti, gvi,	Fire, allow, wait a moment, come
W	w	Wayn, wam, weyn, wusa, wuti	Child, lie, ignore, pause, deficient
Y	y	Yangîs, ye'i, yel, yèli, yèma, yu'si	Head tie, learn, plant, wake up, sweat
Z	z	Zi gvi, zi ndu, zueli	Come in, get in, break into pieces

Source: Nchiynti ibà'li Itanjikom