

**Settled, Unsettled or Resettled: Contentions and Reappraisal of the Origin,
Migration and Settlement of the Kuteb People of Taraba State**

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Abstract

The ability of a homo-sapien to ask pragmatic and logical questions of his/her origin is a function of the reasoning faculty which distinguishes man as a higher animal from a lower animal and it constitutes an index of man's historical consciousness. There has been a series of contentions as to the history of migration and settlement of the Kuteb People. This debate is based on the fact that the Kuteb People like most African People did not document their early history not until their contact with the Europeans. This study is an attempt to critique the various traditions of origin of the Kuteb People. This study adopts the historical method of research which include the use of primary and secondary sources of data. The study concludes that despite the controversies in the origin and migration of the Kuteb people, overwhelming evidence suggests that they migrated from the Congo Basin region.

Keywords: Origin, Migration, Settlement, Kuteb, Taraba State.

Introduction

Delving into the realm of studying the origin and migration of African people, especially minority groups has been a problem for the historian who has tasked himself to such a historical excursion. The Kuteb, like most groups in Nigeria, were not accustomed to preserving written records of historical antecedents that took place a very long time in history, as knowledge about their past was recorded through verbal means and passed down from generation to generation. This is basically so because the art of writing was alien to the people. As such, there are at any rate no such records dating back to antiquity regarding who the Kuteb are, where they came from and how they come to be the people they are today. What is left are recollections of important historical events of the past which have been preserved in the memory of the people, and passed from one generation to the other.¹ This is not the case with only Kuteb people but most African peoples. The focus of this study is to re-examine the traditions of origin, history of migration and the settlement of the Kuteb people. This is important because it reminds the Kuteb people that they were part of a

¹ Okonkwo, U. & Zhema, S. 2017. *Jukun-Aro Relations: A Reconsideration of the Hamitic Hypothesis*, Wukari: Federal University Publishers. 17-18.



history that defines their past, shaped who they are today and who they are likely to become.

Contentions in the Origin and Migration of the Kuteb People

There are salient questions that have been raised in the introduction of this paper which demand rapt attention here. The first is, who are the Kuteb? There have been several attempts by scholars of Kuteb history to answer this question. Saddi Mgbe opines that the Kuteb people called themselves *Ndetirikwen or Andetirikwen* which literally means mountain or hill dwellers.² This is because the Kuteb people have a great love for inhabiting mountainous regions since it provided them with safety and security from their enemies.³ Apart from protection from their enemies, the mountains inspire physical activities for the Kuteb people which helps them keep fit. Beyond that, the mountain air itself fosters health and wellness. A colonial report by K. Dewar has also corroborated that the Kuteb people are hill dwellers. Dewar has said that the Kuteb people could be divided into two according to their settlement pattern; the hill Zomper and the town Zomper. He also asserted that those on the hills are usually cut off from external influences.⁴ Saddi has further postulated that the Kuteb people are peace-loving people who are never aggressors,⁵ they are kind-hearted and social to their neighbours and all who came their way. It is expedient to note that their peaceful nature does not in any way mean that they are weaklings, when provoked or pushed to the wall, the Kuteb people showcase their skills in the art of war through counterattacks on their aggressors.

The Kuteb people are also called *Zompere* by their neighbours which means "human eaters". It is important to bring to the fore that in its real and factual sense, the Kuteb people are not carnivorous in nature, and neither are they human eaters. The name Zompere has its origin when the Kuteb people at a point in time foresaw that they would be attacked by their enemies, as a result, they poisoned some of their pools of water and plants/fruits with sasswood and then vacated that location to another temporarily. On the arrival of their enemies, they met the absence of the Kuteb people living there and they decided to take some rest. Being tired and thirsty, they drank from the water and ate the fruits which have been poisoned by the Kuteb which led to their mass death with only a few surviving. As time pass by and the Kuteb people had come back to their abode, the leader of their enemies came to the leader of the Kuteb people to inquire who they are. The leader of the Kuteb people responded by saying Zompere that, we are human eaters. His response was intending to scare the leader of their enemy camp.⁶ To further confirm that the Kuteb people are

² Mgbe, S. 1981. *The History of the Kuteb and its Neighbors of Southern Gongola State of Nigeria*. Ado-Ekiti: United Star Printers & Co. Ltd. 11.

³ Oral interview with Yakubu Marinasara at Abuja, Retired Civil Servant, 70years, 15th March, 2020.

⁴ Dewar, K. 1935. Takum District, Wukari Division, Benue province Intelligence Report. NAK/SNP17/3/24898(B). 2

⁵ Dewar, K. 1935. Takum District, Wukari Division, Benue province Intelligence Report. NAK/SNP17/3/24898(B). 12.

⁶ Filibus, Y. 2017. A History of the Kuteb People from Earliest Times to 1900. Project. History and Diplomatic Studies, Arts. Federal University Wukari. 1-2.

not human eaters, when Johanna Veenstra an American missionary left New York and was posted to the former Wukari Division for her missionary activities, she was touring, Ibi, Wukari and Donga areas for this assignment. When she suggested that she wanted to expand her activities to Takum area which is the hub of the Kuteb people, the people in Donga discouraged her that the Kuteb people are human eaters and that they would devour her. Johanna Veenstra insisted that she must visit these human eaters, which she did and discovered that all she had been told about these people were false. In fact, in most of her reports, she wrote that the Kuteb people are accommodating and very friendly people. The cordial relationship she enjoyed with the Kuteb people was what led her to finally settle in Lupwe a Kuteb community.

The name Kuteb has often been used to refer to a Jukunoid-speaking people. It has been suggested that the name has its root from the first leader of this people whose name is Kuteb. What is not yet clear is the etymological definition of the word Kuteb. Speaking with Elder Ali Musa, he stated that the original name of the progenitor of the Kuteb people is called *Kuteb-Rimam*.⁷ To get the meaning of the word *Kuteb-Rimam*, it is needful to break the word into syllables to have much clarity on the concept. *Ku* means to bow, portray, genuflect or kneel, and *Teb* means to praise, worship, adore, extol, honour, reverence or venerate. It should be noted that *Rimam* means God in the Kuteb language and to get a clearer view on the concept, there is a need to break it into syllables too. *Ri* means to speak or say something and then *Mam* connotes final. Joined together we have *Kuteb-Rimam* which could be translated to mean “to bow and praise he whose words are final and cannot be contested with”.⁸ They derive the origin of their name from their act of kneeling or bowing and praising God, as they are a God-revering ethnic group. A Kuteb man’s life is largely focused on praise and worship of his God, aside from his daily chores. That was the most important thing in his life. In reality, Kuteb’s act of worship is the very essence of his experience and the strength of his *Rimam* followership. This tells why most of the people’s names wishfully or by supplication, start or end with *Rimam* (God). Need be it to reiterate that, the original name of the people’s progenitor is Kuteb-Rimam before it was shortened to Kuteb which now became the name of the ethnic group.

As has been noted earlier the Kuteb people are a part of the Jukun amalgam. The Jukun amalgam consists of groups such as the Kuteb, Wapan, Kpansun, Ichen, Kona, Wanu, among many others. These groups were all involved in the founding of the defunct Kororofa Empire. There is an existing argument and postulation that the Kuteb people were the ones at the forefront of fighting wars of expansion and conquest for the establishment of the Kororofa Kingdom. Having answered the question of who are the Kuteb, this paper proceeds to look at where the Kuteb came from. There has been surrounding controversy and intellectual rivalry amongst scholars and historians as regards the exact place of origin and migration route of the Kuteb people. Thus, there exist different or various traditions of origin and migration of the Kuteb people. One of these versions was first recorded by Saddi Mgbe. He traced the origin of the Kuteb people to Egypt and that their migration to the interior of Africa took place

⁷ Oral interview with Ali Musa, at Jalingo, Civil Servant, 58years, 12th November 2020.

⁸ Ali, M. Kuteb Journey. Unpublished manuscript.

around 1000 B.C.⁹ Innocent Irambiya further expatiated on this version to give reasons why the Kuteb people had to migrate out of Egypt. While the Kuteb people were still in Egypt, it was the feudal system that was practised and being agriculturalists, they needed land to farm their products to make a living. Worthy of note is the fact that it was only the banks of the River Nile that were suitable for the cultivation of crops because of its fertility. The Egyptian Pharaoh hood system was a monarchy, and only the pharaohs and their descendants owned agricultural land along the river's edge. Since the Kuteb had no land of their own, they rented land as sharecroppers. As a result, the Kuteb had to work extra hard to make ends meet in terms of paying rent and feeding themselves. Sometimes landowners were known to play practical tricks on the innocent Kuteb farmers. One such scenario involved an Egyptian landowner leasing land to a Kuteb farmer that did not belong to him. Unknowingly, the Kuteb farmer cultivates the land in the hopes that the farm products will be shared between him and the landlord. However, to his surprise, the true landowner appeared and confiscated all of the farm products at harvest time, sharing them with the other fake landlord, leaving the Kuteb farmer with nothing. Despite complaining to Egypt's legitimate authorities, no results were obtained, and he was forced to starve for a year. The Kuteb man will only come to discover that act was an arrangement between the real landlord and the fake landlord.¹⁰

The Kuteb people faced many difficulties in Egypt; they were not enslaved, but the harsh conditions they were subjected to was barely better than slavery. The Kuteb people have heard tales of large swaths of uncultivated land waiting to be harvested by capable hands in other parts of Africa. Irambiya goes further to posit that the Kuteb people should have left Egypt a long time ago for vast virgin lands in the interior of Africa, but that they were usually prevented by Egyptian landowners who saw them as a cheap source of labour. Egyptian landowners would dissuade them by claiming that Africans in other parts of the continent were cannibals and that slavery in other parts of Africa was at its worst. This deception was used to keep the Kuteb people in Egypt since the Egyptians realized that if the Kuteb people left, their agricultural economy would suffer.¹¹ This tradition further expounded that a day came when Kuteb, the Kuteb people's leader, was displeased with a decision made by the reigning pharaoh at the time. He gathered all of the Kuteb and told them to prepare for the long journey ahead. That was the start of the Kuteb people's mass emigration from Egypt, their native land. They travelled through Sudan and eventually to Central Africa, where they stayed for a while. There were enormous fertile lands in Central Africa. For around fifteen years, Kuteb and his followers lived in Central Africa. Food was plentiful, and the soil was fertile. However, security in Central Africa was insufficient because Arabs were encroaching on the area in search of slaves. In fact, Arab slave raiders killed a Kuteb man's wife. The incident irritated Kuteb so much that he decided they needed to find a safe place to settle.¹² The Kuteb people embarked on another migration to find a permanent

⁹ Mgbe, S. 1981. *The History of the Kuteb*. 66.

¹⁰ Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace: Life and Times of Ukwe Ali Ibrahim KuffangZorto II, 15th Ukwe Takum (1963-1996)*. Jos: Midland Press Ltd. 36-37.

¹¹ Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace*. 37.

¹² Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace*. 38.

home with stability. They migrated westward from Central Africa. They travelled through Cameroon, where they encountered ethnic groups that are warring. They made their home in the Cameroons' north-eastern province.¹³

During their stay in Cameroon's North-eastern Province, the Kuteb were subjected to a series of wars, dynastic disputes, raids, starvation, and population explosions. To survive, the Kuteb, a peace-loving people, decided that the time had come to travel to other regions in search of an environment that is tranquil.¹⁴ The drive to break new ground and re-ordain their destiny by seeking a freer and more stable land led the Kuteb to re-migrate from North-eastern Cameroon to the present-day Takum Chiefdom in A.D 1510. Following Kuteb's orders, the Kuteb people surveyed all of the hills surrounding the settlement when they arrived in Takum. A hill was assigned to each of the twelve (12) clans that made up the Kuteb population. The 12 clans are; Likam, Akente, Jenuwa, Lissam, Kpambo, Lumbu, Rufu, Bika, Ayukuben, Atswen (comprises Fikyu and Kwambai), Acwumam, and Acha.¹⁵

The name *Takum* was not identified until Kuteb was approaching old age when the legend called all the twelve Clans for a meeting and told them in a solemn tone that his life was slowly coming to an end and urged them to be their brother's keepers. He explained the benefits of working together as a group. To begin, he summoned a broom and handed it to Likam, the eldest son, instructing him to shatter the broom into pieces. It was difficult for Likam to break the broom. Kuteb then gathered the broom and took out a single stick from it, Kuteb then handed the broom to Likam to smash. The broomstick from the broom was broken in the blink of an eye. Kuteb then spoke to them about unity and gave them some guidance. He told them that Likam couldn't crack the broom when he was given it in bulk. However, by removing a stick and giving it to Likam, he was able to smash the broom. If they were to unite in championing their cause, the same story will apply to them. They would quickly be divided if they were not together, much like the stick that was separated from the bunch.¹⁶

Another example was when he asked the second son, Akente, to bring a stone. The stone was brought by Akente, he told Akente to put the stone down and get him a pot to cook in. He asked Akente to bring another stone, bringing the total number of stones to two. When Akente returned with the second stone, he requested that he place it near the first stone, which he dutifully did. Kuteb then instructed him to balance the pot on the two stones.¹⁷ He complied and placed the pot, but the pot fell off and water poured out before he could let go of his hands. Kuteb then requested that he carry the third stone, which Akente did. He told Akente to place the three stones in a circle, which he did quickly. Following that, he asked Akente to balance the pot on the three stones in a circle. The pot stayed balanced and unshakeable when Akente put it on the three stones. He requested that Akente push the pot. Akente pushed, but the pot was too heavy to fall. He went on to say that this was how they were to unite in support of a

¹³ Mgbe, S. 1981. *The History of the Kuteb*. 66.

¹⁴ Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace*. 38.

¹⁵ Mgbe, S. 1981. *The History of the Kuteb*. 66-70.

¹⁶ Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace*. 40.

¹⁷ Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace*. 40-41.

leader. That if they did not unite behind their leader, they would crumble like a pot with just one or two supporters. He urged the entire Kuteb race to rally behind their leader; otherwise, they would perish like the pot with only one or two supporters. He urged the entire Kuteb race to rally behind a single leader. In Takum, this became the beginning of the system of supreme Chieftaincy. Following the moral and soul-searching drama, Kuteb passed the leadership baton to Likam, the oldest son. He requested that Akente assist Likam in the administration of the newly established kingdom. Apart from Likam being the oldest son, these two sons had become his closest friends. On the long journey, either Likam or Akente will join him. When visitors arrived, he would have one of the two look after them.¹⁸

After entrusting the mantle of leadership to Likam, Kuteb instructed the other twelve clans to regard Likam as their chief, whom they must rally behind, as depicted. Every year, they were supposed to gather at Mbarikam to conduct religious and other social activities to demonstrate their unity. The twelve clans, on the other hand, were to be led by a Kukwen, a priest with both religious and political authority. The priest was held in the highest regard and was often regarded as a representative of God. Likam Kukwen received reports from the other priests. Since the Kukwen of the other Kuteb Clans reports to the Likam Kukwen and the settlement of Likam was to be a meeting point where religious and social festivities were to be held, the Kuteb began to refer to Likam settlement as Teekum, which means (clans come together) in English, or Ikam, which is a direct simple pronunciation of Likam.¹⁹

Another version of Kuteb origin has it that the people descended from one man called Kuteb and his wife Kubab, who were said to have lived on *Rikwen Ussa* (Ussa hill).²⁰ This perhaps explains why *Rikwen Ussa* is so significant to the people just like Ile-Ife is to the Yoruba and Daura to the Hausa people. In other words, the Kuteb people see *Rikwen Ussa* as the cradle of life for them as a people. The tradition goes on to say that Kuteb and his wife gave birth to five (5) children named Likam, Akente, Aribur, Lumbu, and Ayigiben at Rikwen Ussa. Kubab, Kuteb's wife, became pregnant once more, and while Kuteb and Likam, his first son, were away from the home, Akente and Lumbu fought over the unborn child in their mother's womb. The quarrel stemmed from the fact that they wanted to know the sex or gender of the unborn child, and the two (Akente and Lumbu) had differing views about whether the child was male or female. To prove their point, Akente and Lumbu tore open their mother's womb, causing her to die instantly. When their father (Kuteb) and older brother (Likam) arrived, they were given severe punishment for the evil act they had committed, which resulted in the death of their mother.²¹

¹⁸ Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace*. 41.

¹⁹ Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace*. 42

²⁰ Dewar, K. 1935. Takum District, Wukari Division, Benue Province Intelligence Report. NAK/SNP17/3/24898(B). 7-8:

Hassan, E. L. 1995. The Kuteb, Kpanzun and Chamba peoples of Takum. 32.

²¹ Hassan, E. L. 1995. The Kuteb, Kpanzun and Chamba peoples of Takum. 32

According to this legend, when Kuteb was very old and about to die, he decided to hand over the household leadership to his eldest son Likam.²² And as time passed, the number of Kuteb's descendants increased dramatically. The land shortage resulted from the population explosion. Likam convened a conference of all the clans to address the current situation of population growth and land scarcity. All of the Kuteb clans decided that they should move northwards from their settlement on Rikwen Ussa to find more land for farming/hunting and settlement. This legend stated, it was this dispersal that led them to their current home, which was previously uninhabited by humans.²³ The eldest, Likam, divided the surrounding hills among Kuteb's descendants, claiming the Mbarikam hill for himself. Soon after the descendants of Kuteb had settled down in their new home, some groups led by Kpambo and Bika, who were said to be Likam's descendants split off to form their settlement within the region. Lissam was said to be Akente's descendant, and Arufu and Fikyu were said to be Bika's children, both of whom established their settlements. It becomes expedient to state that a similar oral tradition was recorded by K. Dewar also claims that Likam was the founding ancestor of the Kuteb people. He indicated in his record that there is an alternate tradition which claims that Kuteb, not Likam was the earliest known ancestor of the *Zomper* (Kuteb people), which accounts for the name of the people.²⁴ K. Dewar further expounded that his informants however state that:

*the tribe adopted this name because it was Kuteb, Likam's son who apportioned out the hills; and because they have reserved the name Likam for the hill of their origin and for the clan formed by those descendants of Likam who remained at Likam.*²⁵

Kuteb was said to have married three wives, according to another oral tradition reported by Hassan Emmanuel Lawson: Kubab, Fxentirimam, and Yuware. These women had twelve children, one of whom was Ichen (Kentu). Ichen is said to have left Ussa Hill before his other brothers dispersed to the nearby hills.²⁶ Mr Cole's recording of the Ichen (Kentu) tradition appears to shed more light on the Kuteb tradition. Mr Cole claims that the Kentu of the Donga area once lived near the present-day site of Wukari and later relocated to Markam (Likam) hill near Takum, where they entered and lived on good terms with the Zomper (Kuteb). They moved across the Donga River and settled at Nyivu, about thirty miles east of Takum, after a while due to population growth.²⁷

Kuteb Christian apologists have also traced the origin of the Kuteb people to the Tower of Babel. The Tower of Babel is an edifice whose building is portrayed in

²² Dewar, K. 1935. Takum District, Wukari Division, Benue province Intelligence Report. NAK/SNP17/3/24898(B). 7.

²³ Matudi, G. 1983. Kuteb-Jukun Relations. 18.

²⁴ Dewar, K. 1935. Takum District, Wukari Division, Benue province Intelligence Report. NAK/SNP17/3/24898(B). 8.

²⁵ Dewar, K. 1935. Takum District, Wukari Division, Benue province Intelligence Report. NAK/SNP17/3/24898(B). 9.

²⁶ Hassan, E. L. 1995. The Kuteb, Kpanzun and Chamba peoples of Takum. 35

²⁷ Dewar, K. 1935-37. Donga District, Wukari Division, Benue province Intelligence Report. NAK/SNP17/3/24678.

Genesis 11:1–9 as the direct cause of the diversity of languages in the world and the dispersion of mankind over all the earth. According to the preceding narrative, mankind after the flood was descended from one common ancestor, Noah. The story of Babel thus explains how the descendants of this one man came to be so widely scattered and divided into separate nations speaking so many different languages. The story relates how, at the time when all men still spoke one language, there was a migration from the East to the plain of “Shinar” (Babylonia). At this site, it was decided to build a “city and a tower with its top in the sky,” so that the builders would be able to make a name for themselves and avoid being scattered over the entire world. However, their building project was frustrated by God who confounded their language. As a result, mankind was distributed over the face of the earth. The unfinished tower was called Babel, a name which was explained by its resemblance to the Hebrew verb *bll* (“to confuse”), since here the Lord “confounded the speech of the whole earth.”²⁸ Thus, these Kuteb Christian apologists opine that the Kuteb people have the origin of the language from the aforementioned event and that it was from this point that the Kuteb people migrated to their present location.

Scholars agree that the edifice referred to in Genesis 11 is clearly a *ziqqurat*, or Mesopotamian temple tower. The *ziqqurat* (from Akk. *zaqāru*, “to raise up,” “elevate”) was the central feature of the great temples which were built in all-important Mesopotamian cities. Rising in progressively smaller, step-like levels from a massive base, these towers ranged from three or four stories to as many as seven and were ordinarily constructed of crude sun-dried bricks covered with kiln-fired bricks.²⁹

During the reign of Aku Angyu, a Wapan chief named Tsoho led the Kuteb migration from Kororofa to Takum, according to a Wapan oral tradition. According to the evidence, Aku Angyu Tsokwa reigned from 1815 to 1848 and is credited with moving the capital from Puje to Wukari.³⁰ According to this oral tradition, four leaders named Tsoho, Tsokwa, Khimbi, and Kuhwa petitioned the Aku Angyu for permission to lead their people from Kororofa in search of more territory. The Aku is said to have accepted this appeal, and the groups marched in this order; Tsoho led the Kuteb (also referred to as Kuveri and Tikube). Tsokwa led the Kentu (Ichen) to Bissaula, while others accompanied Khimbi to Nwuhwa. Kuhwa was in control of the Tigun, Nama, Ndoro, Jibu, and Gbaya groups.³¹

They arrived at River Gamina during their journey from Kororofa. They renamed the place Kyakyo after a massive log of wood fell across the river and formed a bridge. It was previously known as Ndama and the point where they crossed the river. Kuteb and Nyido are said to have been the first to cross the river, settling in Kunatata in the Danda (a Jukun dialect), which is Kwen Ussa in Kuteb. Kuteb was the father of twelve children, according to legend: Lissam,

²⁸Gn 11:1-9 (NKJV).

²⁹<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tower-of-babel>, accessed on 06/05/2021.

³⁰Keates, E. H. O. The Old Kororofa and The Jukun Tribes: Anthropological Notes. NAK: SNP17/2441/Vol.1.

³¹Hassan, E. L. 1995. The Kuteb, Kpanzun and Chamba peoples of Takum. 36.

Kunabe, Bika, Likam, Jenuwa, Akente, Kpambo, Andekusa, Acha, Kpambai, Lumbu, and Richurichu. Kuteb's sons are said to have asked Tsoho to allow them to travel further afield from Kunatata in search of more land after his death. Tsoho was said to be cooperative but insisted on seeing the most senior of them all. Tsoho pointed out Lissam and handed him some materials related to the shrines that they had brought with them from Kororofa. Tsoho was said to have given Kunabe, who was next in seniority to Lissam, a different collection of materials on the same shrines. According to him (Tsoho), the explanation for this was that they were going to disperse and ultimately settle on various hills.³² The Kuteb people are said to come from Usirsken, according to another oral tradition recounted by Emmanuel Lawson. In the Kuteb language, Usir means sun and sken means morning. When the two terms are combined, the result is simply "morning sun," implying that the people came from the direction of the rising sun, which is a reference to the east. What was not immediately apparent, however, was the absence of any relevant benchmark from which the bearing to the East could be traced in this particular Kuteb tradition (Usirsken). It was unclear if the benchmark should be taken from the location of Takum, where the interview took place, or from the position of Kwen Ussa, which served as the Kuteb people's first home before Takum was established. If one takes a bearing from Takum, the East will include all traces of settlements along the axis from Kwen Ussa to the Cameroon border. On the other hand, if we take our bearings from the old Ussa hill settlement, the East can now be traced to the ruins of every settlement from the Nigerian-Cameroonian border into Cameroon or even farther.³³

According to another Kuteb origin story, the Kuteb, Wapan of Wukari, Kpanzun, and Ichen were all part of the Kororofa conglomerate and were referred to as the Jukun in most historical documents. Kuteb, Wapan, and Kpanzun were brothers, according to legend, and Ichen was their nephew. They all left Kororofa at the same time and travelled together to Wukari, but the others had to split up with the Wapan at a place called Chinkan in the Wapan dialect of the Jukun language, where they had to part ways with the Wapan (a settlement after Puje but before present Wukari town).³⁴ The Aku-Uka was said to have granted the Kuteb, Ichen, and Kpanzun permission to leave Chinkan and establish new settlements. After seeking his permission, he said *Niken* which means "you people should move on" in the Wapan language. Since then, the term *Niken*, which is now used to refer to the Kutebs, does not seem to have fallen out of favor with the Wapan people.³⁵ *Niken* is also the name of a ward near the Aku- Uka's palace in Wukari, which is situated a few meters southwest. The majority of the residents in this ward are Kutebs, mostly from the Bika, Likam, and Akente clans. Moving together, the Kuteb, Kpanzun, and Ichen arrived in Donga's current location. Although some Ichen were said to have split off and settled in the Donga and Mararaba areas, up to the present-day Kurmi border, others were said to have branched off and settled in the Donga and

³² Hassan, E. L. 1995. The Kuteb, Kpanzun and Chamba peoples of Takum. 36.

³³ Hassan, E. L. 2016. The Kuteb Ethnic Group. *Topical Issues in the Study of Some Ethnic Groups and the Mambilla Plateau in Taraba State of Nigeria*. Ed. Talla, S. N. Jalingo: Tedia Ventures. 90.

³⁴ Hassan, E. L. 1995. The Kuteb, Kpanzun and Chamba peoples of Takum. 37

³⁵ Oral interview with BalaUseni, at Wukari, Secretary Aku-Uka's Palace, 49years, 12th April, 2021.

Mararaba areas. The other tribes, including a portion of the Ichen, proceeded to Kwen Ussa or Kunatata, across the Donga River. These groups are said to have migrated to their current habitats from here, according to legend. The Kutebs dispersed across the surrounding hills, while the Kpanzun pushed into the low-lying areas sandwiched between the Kuteb settlements.³⁶

Another version of the Kuteb migration and origins claims that the Kuteb people originated in the Lake Chad region. This oral tradition continued by revealing that the Kuteb people lived alongside their other Jukun brothers; the Wapan, Ichen, Kpanzun, Igala, Etulo, and others.³⁷ According to reports, the Lake Chad region experienced a population explosion as a result of immigration by other groups, resulting in land scarcity and conflict among the various groups inhabiting the region. The Jukunoid groups convened a meeting to resolve the issue of land scarcity that they are experiencing. They decided to emigrate from the Lake Chad area after this conference. The Kuteb and their brothers (other Jukun-speaking peoples) migrated to Fika from the Lake Chad region (A local government area in Yobe state). This tradition goes on to claim that Kuteb and her brothers unleashed their first military might on Kano while at Fika.³⁸

They went on from Fika, passing through Gana and crossing the Benue River to Bie-pi. According to this oral tradition, the Kuteb people and their brothers fought several wars during their migration and travel. During these battles, the Kuteb people demonstrated their military prowess, which distinguished them from their brothers. The Kuteb people were on the front lines of battle in all the wars they waged with their brothers (other Jukunoids) against their enemies. When a fight gets too intense, the Kuteb shout "Korofafae," which means "come closer in numbers." Because of the difficulty in pronouncing the real word "Korofafae," their enemies, especially the Hausa people, began to refer to them (the Jukun people) as Kororofa. Thus, they founded an empire at Bie-pi, which they called Kororofa after they arrived. The settlement of Bie-pi became the capital of the Kororofa kingdom.³⁹

The various Jukun groups started to grow in number after settling in Bie-pi (Kororofa kingdom). The land became scarce among the different Jukun groups as a result of this population boom. It's important to note that the majority of Jukun groups are farmers, and land is a critical component of their output.⁴⁰ The Kuteb people summoned their other brothers and informed them of their plans to leave Bie-pi and find a new home. Other Jukun brothers, especially the Wapan, supported Kuteb's decision. The Wapan people's leader told the Kuteb people, "Niken," which means "You can go." The Kuteb people then started to march, led by a man named Kuteb. The Kuteb people migrated in large numbers, and they eventually settled on Ussa Hill. The Kuteb people grew in number again, and to prevent land disputes, their leader Kuteb summoned the

³⁶ Hassan, E. L. 1995. The Kuteb, Kpanzun and Chamba peoples of Takum. 37.

³⁷ Oral Interview with Andetarangramae at Bika-Babba, Politician, 60years, 23rd December, 2020.

³⁸ Filibus, Y. 2017. A History of the Kuteb People from Earliest Times to 1900. Project. Humanities. Federal University Wukari. 24.

³⁹ Filibus, Y. 2017. A History of the Kuteb. 25

⁴⁰ Oral Interview with AdihikonTanko, at Wukari, Civil Servant, 52years, 17th April, 2021.

twelve (12) clans of Kuteb and assigned each of them to a hill. As a result, the twelve clans got a hill apportioned to them.⁴¹

Critique of the Origin and Migration Accounts of the Kuteb People

The issue of objectivity is one of the problems that historians face while writing history. Objectivity holds that all historical writing, regardless of ethnic group, gender, race, sex, or country/nation, should be based on solid facts, free of sentiments, biases, and prejudice. It is simply known as "respect for the truth." It also refers to the separation of investigators/historians from the topic or subject of their inquiry in order to arrive at the same conclusion on the subject matter.⁴² It is in light of the above argument that this section of this work will critically analyse and objectively critique the diverse traditions of origin and migration of the Kuteb people. The reason for this is also hinged on the fact that a historian is not expected to accept any piece of historical information at its face value, when a historian does so, he becomes a scissor-and-paste historian who is unprofessional. A professional historian is tasked with the duty of cross-fertilizing sources at his disposal to authenticate the veracity of any fact at his disposal. This indeed will also distinguish him from other storytellers who are not equipped with the tools of historical analysis. Although, it must be brought to the fore that no historian can achieve absolute objectivity but a high degree of objectivity.

The unanimity of opinion that the Kuteb people originated from one man named Kuteb is one of the most striking features of the Kuteb oral traditions of origin, as discussed above. However, there are differences in the oral traditions about the number of his wives, migration locations, and the only tradition that mentions a different migration leader. Oral traditions, on the other hand, have flaws in that they can be fabricated for social or political purposes.

The first oral tradition that the Kuteb people originated from Egypt is disputed and controversial; it is linked to the Hamitic Hypothesis/myth, a racist doctrine that tried to trace the origins of African peoples and culture to Hamitic sources. It also appears that the oral tradition was created by the educated class, who, in their quest to recreate the Kuteb people's history, considered it prestigious and glorious to claim Egyptian ancestry. The majority of the Kuteb elders, who are supposed to be the custodians of their oral heritage, are unaware of this tradition. It is critical to note that leaving this oral tradition unchecked will be disastrous; because most Kuteb people are increasingly accepting it. It's also worth noting that the Egyptian myth is relatively new, as shown by the fact that it was not registered by colonial anthropological and political officers. It may be argued that the colonial agents did not and could not document all of the Kuteb origins.⁴³ However, the oral traditions they gathered and documented bear striking resemblance to those recounted by my informants during my fieldwork.

⁴¹ Filibus, Y. 2017. *A History of the Kuteb People*. 26.

⁴² Henige, D. 1982. *Oral Historiography*. London: Longman. 3.;

⁴³ Matudi, G. 1983. *Kuteb-Jukun Relations*. 24.

Saddi Mgbe advanced the Egyptian thesis or myth in his two books, claiming that the Kuteb people migrated from Egypt because they still worship the sun god (usir) as the Ancient Egyptians did. Saddi Mgbe seems to have been inspired by C. K. Meek, who wrote that there is reasonable reason to believe that all of Africa's major languages, including Ancient Egyptians, shared a common ancestor and that ancient Egypt's society was predominantly African. Meek also claimed that the words si, usi, usir, and other similar terms, which are used all over Africa today, were also used in Ancient Egypt.⁴⁴ As a result, Mgbe's overwhelming proof to trace the Kuteb back to Egypt is the sun god (usir). Such argument is not unhistorical, since cultural resemblance alone is insufficient evidence to assume that one group descended from another. It is well recognized that if such logic is upheld, it can be extended to a wide range of Nigerian ethnic groups. Such a hypothesis requires linguistic and ethnographic data, both of which are missing in this case. It is well known that sun god worship is a universal practice that can be found among the Kuteb, Wapan, Ichen, and other peoples of Nigeria, Egypt, and even the Ancient Aztecs of Latin America.

Furthermore, Saddi Mgbe has said that the Kuteb people left Egypt around 1000 B.C. and led the Kuteb people into their present location and apportioned all the surrounding hills to each clan around 1510.⁴⁵ If one accepts this tradition, then it means that the legendary Kuteb must have lived over 2500years. If we are to take the dating recorded by Innocent Irambiya as 1000 A.D being the migration date the Kuteb people left Egypt,⁴⁶ then it signifies that their leader (Kuteb) lived over 500years. Either 2500years or 500years, it is historically untrue that a human lived that number of years. To further add, the Egyptians are known to be one of the early African people who developed the art of writing even centuries before Christ, but none of their recorded history made reference to the Kuteb people. All these issues raised discredits this oral tradition. What could be obvious about this oral tradition is that the Kuteb people came from somewhere to their present location.

The second tradition, according to which the Kuteb people descended from the Ussa hill (Rikwen Ussa), appears to be true. This is because Rikwen Ussa is still regarded as a holy site by the Kuteb people. It is understood that the Kuteb people have always made an annual pilgrimage to this hill in commemoration of their annual Kuciceb Thanksgiving feast. This isn't to say that the tradition has answered any important questions, such as where did Kuteb and Kubab come from before arriving in Rikwen Ussa. or does this tradition imply that Rikwen Ussa is mankind's cradle? Yet again, the tradition has failed to provide us with a date for the emergence of Kuteb and Kubab. It wouldn't be out of place to speculate that the famous Kuteb was not actually the founding father, but rather one of their leaders who had made such an impression on his people that he was revered. According to an oral tradition recorded by Hamilton, a man and his wife moved into Kuteb land at some point in the distant past. This record

⁴⁴ Meek, C. K. 1931. *A Sudanese Kingdom: An Ethnographical Study of the Jukun Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*. New York: Negro University Press. 183-184.

⁴⁵ Mgbe, S. 1981. *The History of the Kuteb*. 66.

⁴⁶ Irambiya, M. I. 2002. *The Epitome of Peace*. 36.

claims that this was all the Kuteb people could recall of their origin.⁴⁷ This may have been viewed as a migration of people into Kuteb land or even an invasion, but this is highly debatable. It's also not easy to assume that the arrival of these people signals the start of a mass movement to depose the Kuteb ruling dynasty. There isn't enough proof to support such a conclusion.

We may also draw inference to say that it is possible that the Kuteb people might have also had their origin from the Tower of Babel, this is because historical evidence abounds that lend support to the Genesis record regarding the origin of languages. There are several ancient traditions concerning this incident. Abydenus (a Greek historian of the mid-fourth century B.C.), as quoted by Rawlings, spoke of a great tower at Babylon which was destroyed. The record notes: "Until this time all men had used the same speech, but now there was sent upon them a confusion of many and divers tongues".⁴⁸ Thus, it is not out of place for the Kuteb Christian apologists to lay claim that the Kuteb people also have their origin from the Tower of Babel incident. One of the problems associated with believing this tradition is that most elders of the Kuteb people who are the custodians of the traditions of the people are unaware of this version of the migration story. It should be noted that the upholders of this tradition are some few Kuteb people who have converted to Christianity and their faith is in the Bible. More so, the precise site of the ancient tower of Babel is a matter of uncertainty, for there are possibilities among the remnants of several ruins in the region. Finally, this version of migration has failed to furnish us with dates as to when the Kuteb people left that region for their present location and the migration routes they followed.

The authenticity of the Wapan oral tradition, according to which the Kuteb people were led from Kororofa to Rikwen Ussa by a Wapan man, can be seriously questioned. This oral tradition is a carbon copy of the Tarihin Kuveri (Kuteb) document, which is displayed as the history of Kuteb as submitted by the Wapan elders in 1938 before Captain Smith, the divisional officer in charge of the Wukari division. This means that the Wapan elders are the only ones who have preserved and written this text, and it is likely that they created this tradition to elevate themselves above the Kuteb. Furthermore, the signatories to this alleged document are not Kuteb elders, but Sarkin Jukun, Yerima Tikari, Tunwari, and Sarkin Hausawa, none of whom may claim to be experts on the Kuteb people's past in any way. It's worth remembering that J. A. Atanda, an African historian, once said that the history of a people can best be told by the people themselves. As a result, the oral tradition is best defined as a collection of inconsistencies and contradictions.

The tradition fails to tell us how Tsoho, the supposed Wapan strong man fared among the Kuteb, for no mention was made of his descendants. The oral tradition was unable to determine how politically powerless or backwards the Kuteb people were at the time of their migration, necessitating the leadership of a non-Kuteb. Importantly, the Kuteb people sought permission from Aku Angyu

⁴⁷ Hamilton, K. 1913. Assessment Report on Muri Province, Southern Zumpere District. NAK: SNP10/728P/1913.

⁴⁸ Rawlinson, G. 1873. *Historical Illustrations of the Old Testament*. Boston: Henry A. Young & Co. 28.

to move from Kororofa to the Ussa Hill during his rule, according to this tradition. However, there is only one Aku with such a name on the Wapan king list. What is clear is that Angyu did not rule in the former Jukun capital of Kororofa, but rather in Wukari in the early nineteenth century (1815-1845), as suggested by the king list and other documents.⁴⁹ If there is one truth that supports this tradition, it is linguistic evidence showing that the Wapan, Ichen, Ndoro, Nama, and a slew of other languages are classified as one language (the Benue-Congo language family).

If we consider the tradition that the Kuteb people came from Usirskén, there are a few questions that beg to be answered to support this claim. If the Kuteb claim to have come from Usirskén (morning sun), where exactly is Usirskén (morning sun) where the people came from to get to where they are now? The tradition has left us with an ambiguous and contentious location. The benchmark for determining the East (morning sun) is not yet clear, as mentioned above while narrating the UsirSkén migration. As a result, it seems that the historian and his evidence are primarily responsible for identifying this mark as he tries to understand the past. The East would include all traces of settlements along the axis from Kwen Ussa to the Cameroon border if one takes a bearing from Takum. The East, on the other hand, can now be traced to the ruins of any settlement from the Nigerian-Cameroonian border into Cameroon or even further if we take our bearings from the old Ussa hill settlement.⁵⁰

Regardless of how we approach this aspect of Kuteb origin, establishing certain ruins of Kuteb settlement or emigrational route would necessitate an archaeological investigation of the region from after Rikwen Ussa into the current Republic of Cameroon. Although we wait for this, linguistic research led primarily by Greenberg and Shimizu appears to have paved the way. On this basis, we can safely infer that the East referred to by the Usir Skén tradition of Kuteb is a reference to the Nigerian-Cameroonian border and beyond. Though archaeology is one of the most important sources of African history, it can provide some useful information about the Kuteb's origins and history, as it has for many African groups. However, since this source has yet to be thoroughly explored in terms of Kuteb's history, only fragmentary data derived from Lawson's reconnaissance survey of some ancient Kuteb settlements, including Rikwen Ussa, has become available.⁵¹ However, it is hoped that future archaeological investigations of some of these settlements will shed further light on the Kuteb's origins and early history.

The last tradition which traced the origin of the Kuteb people to Lake Chad appears to contain some historical information and evidence regarding Kuteb's origin. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Lake Chad area was not always a desert and that it was once home to a diverse population. It could therefore be argued that as groups continued to occupy the region and engaged in agricultural practices, the area became desertified, resulting in a lack of fertile land and conflict between groups. This is why the Jukun people (including the Kuteb) were forced to leave the region. On a second note, the

⁴⁹ Keates, E. H. O. The Old Kingdom of Kororofa. NAK: SNP17/2441, Vol. 1.

⁵⁰ Hassan, E. L. 2016. The Kuteb Ethnic Group. 91.

⁵¹ Hassan, E. L. 2016. The Kuteb Ethnic Group. 91.

Kanuri people in their history acknowledged contact with the Jukun group which still presents evidence of the people (Jukun) from the Lake Chad area. Furthermore, if the Jukun people are known for their military prowess and invasions of other groups, it means that the Kuteb people led the Jukun family's military expedition. Remember that the Kuteb people led, and are still at the battlefield, during the Jukun people's wars, with their constant shout of "Korofafae" (come closer) to their brothers to get more reinforcements. As a result of the difficulty in pronouncing the original word, Korofafae, it was distorted to Kororofa. A survey of the various Jukun groups reveals that none have any words that are similar to the Kororofa definition, except for the Kuteb language, which has the Korofafae word, which supports this claim.

There is also proof that the Kuteb people were once a part of the defunct Kororofa kingdom. This is focused on the fact that a ward exists in today's Wukari city, just a few kilometres from the defunct Kororofa capital "Bie-pi." This ward is known as "Niken Ward," and the Kuteb people who did not move to the Takum region make up the majority of the population. Research reveals that the Niken people are among Wukari's King Makers. It should be noted that the Niken ward is still in existence today, with the Kuteb people residing there. Although more than 95% of the Kuteb people in the Niken ward have lost the ability to speak the Kuteb language.⁵²

What seems confusing about this tradition is the fact that it failed to provide a date when the Kuteb people left the Lake Chad region. On a second note, the tradition claims that the Kanuri in their recorded history acknowledged having contact with the Jukun. The fact that the Kanuri acknowledged that they had contacts with the Jukun does not in any way signify that the Kuteb people originated from the Lake Chad region, their contacts with the Jukun which the Kuteb are part of could have been an economic relation and nothing more. It must also be emphasized that this version of origin is not well accepted by most Kuteb elders.

Concluding

This paper represents a major historical analysis of the traditions of Kuteb Origin. The use of evidence derived from oral traditions, archival records, works of various researchers and other sources provides a rare insight into the roots of the Kuteb people. Based on evidence gathered during this study, it is concluded that if the Kuteb people's original homeland was outside of present-day Nigeria, it would have to be found in Central Africa, specifically in the Congo Basin region, which is the direction where linguistic evidence on the group's origin and migration route is most abundant. It is possible to argue that most narrative sources mistook this area for the Lake Chad region while tracing the origin and migration route of the Jukun. The people may have migrated from this area to their current home along Nigeria's Lower Benue Valley, through northern Cameroon, and the Cross River area to Takum. A second theory links the Kuteb and the Jukun to the rugged range of hills along the Nigerian-Cameroonian border, from where the Jukunoids migrated through the Cross

⁵² Filibus, Y. 2017. A History of the Kuteb People. 27-29.

River region to the Benue Valley, where the Kuteb groups founded their first settlements on Rikwen Ussa and later Mbarikam hill in Takum.

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