A PRELIMINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF NGAMO PEOPLE OF NDOKTO FARÀ, FIKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF YOBE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the early history of the Ngamo people in Ndokto Farà, Fika Local Government Area of Yobe State, Nigeria. The objective of this paper centres on their history and some traditional ways of life before the coming of Islam. Archaeological methods adopted in the research include; collection of oral information from the people of the area and archaeological survey. There are two versions of migration among the Ngamowa’s which both link to Kanem Bornu as their ancestral homeland. Over the years, there were massive movement of hunters/gatherers and pastoralists from the Chad Basin down to Kanem and to other far and nearby locations in search for fertile land, firewood and security. This paper therefore, documents versions of these traditions and some traditional ways of life for better understanding and reconstruction of aspects of their past life ways.
Introduction

The Ngamo language group belongs to the Chadic language family and are predominantly found in Fika, Potiskum, Nangere and Fune Local Government Areas of Yobe, parts of Bauchi and Gombe States. Ndokto Fara is one of the Ngamowa’s communities found in Fika L.G.A that is largely inhabited by the Ngamo people. The words Ndokto Fara in Ngamo simply means ‘clay’ (Ndokto) and ‘white’ (Fara) from Hausa.

Ndokto Fara is situated between latitude 11°23’N and longitude 11°9’E, it is located about 27km northwest from Fika, headquarters of Fika L.G.A and 18km northwest from Gadaka the major town of the Ngamo speaking people. Ndokto Fara is surrounded by some historic archaeological sites and extant communities largely occupied by Ngamo, Bole and Kare-kare people such as Daniski and Kalefo to the southeast. Gudi to the northeast, Ndokto Ja and Boza to the north while Wala, Kadi and Shiyou are located to the southwest among others, as well as river Ngeji and farmlands. Find below (figure. I) show Ndokto Fara in Fika L.G.A with inset maps of Nigeria and Yobe State.
The area is generally characterised by the Sudan Savannah Vegetation which is predominantly made up of short grasses and shrubs ranging from 1.5m to 2m in height, while the tallest trees grow to about 9m to 15m high (Nigeria; physical settings, 2013). The most common grasses in this area include the African peach, Sarcacephadus latifolius; Guiera senegalensis and Zizaphus mauritiae. Trees include silk cotton, Gossipium Sp; Dum Palm, Borassus aethiopum; Baobab tree, Adansonia digitata; Neem tree, Azadirachta Indica;
Locust Bean, *Parkia Biglobosa*; Mango, *Mangifera Indica*; Aerial shoots, *Ficus Sp* and *Acacia Sieberiana* among others. This type of vegetation is majorly considered suitable for the habitation of domestic animals that are adversely adapted to harsh and open dry land environment. The soil nature is sandy and silty clay which is suitable for the growth of crops such as grains, groundnut Bambara nut and vegetable plants among others. The vegetation however, has a considerable impact on the people of the area who excels as farmers and herbalists.

**Tradition of Origin**

The history of Ndokto Fara people cannot be complete without mentioning the general background information of the Ngamo people and their migration to the southern part of Yobe State and beyond. The history of these group was largely traced through oral accounts which include informations from emirate council and other narratives from inhabitant of the area. According to an oral informant (Kiri Pers. Comm., 2014) the inhabitants of Ndokto Fara are speakers of Ngamo language, who shares a similarity to other Chadic language groups who migrated from Kanem to the southern part of Yobe State. There are two traditions of origin of the Ngamo people which both traced their origin to the Sayfawa legend. The tradition claims that the people migrated into the Kanem Bornu after the death of their leader Sayf Ibn Dhi Yazan Yemen, who was buried at the valley of Sanaca in Yemen (Alkali, 2013).
The first version of this tradition was mentioned in some written documents (Seidensticker, 1987 and Disa, 2008) that some sections of this group of languages migrated from Ngazargamu to Daniski hilltop site. It was revealed from the work of Ali, (2010) that some group of people were forced out of Ngazargamu as a result of the quest for fertile land and struggle for political power. He further revealed that by the 16th century AD, Birnin Ngazargamu was a centre of the political authority and seat of the Sayfawa government which forcefully drove some people away from the state to establish their kingdom and centres elsewhere. Other sources claim that this language groups settled at the Gudi hilltop settlement site on their arrival from Ngazargamu before moving to the Daniski hilltop site as a result of overpopulation (Nikau Pers. Comm., 2016). The gradual and steady movement of people out of Ngazargamu led to the spread of craftsmanship such as pottery making, weaving, dyeing and leather work among others to other towns and centres within the region and beyond (Disa, 2016).

The second version of the tradition of this language group claim that some section of Ngamo people migrated from Kanem to settle at the Mandara or Wandalamountains areatogther with their Kanuri brothers before their arrival to the present locations. Other sources further claimed that after leaving Wandala mountains area the Ngamo settled at Daura in present-day Fune L.G.A. where they established a cordial relationship with the indigenous population. After a couple of years, the Kanuris dominated their Chadic brothers and had
total control over them for several decades. After the struggle for many years to reclaim their political power had failed, the Ngamo group migrated to Ndokto Fara and called themselves Ngamo Ndokto (one of the three clans of Ngamo tribe which means Ngamo Clay). According to oral informant (Sama’ila Pers. Comm., 2015) these people (Ngamo Ndokto) descended from seven families namely Shiwo, Kushi, Ndari, Kadiri, Zobol, Janja and Tura who migrated to the area under the leadership of Moi Yaya Kanji. He was said to be the first person to explore and acclimatised himself with the environment and recommended it good for human habitation. It was further revealed that the leader was a hunter and very knowledgeable about environment. Hence, his decision to choose the hilltop settlement was for security and economic reasons. Other groups of this Ngamo section that did not live on any hilltop site in the area settled on the plains and called themselves Ngamo Yaya; which literarily means Ngamo sand.

**Traditional Religion**

Before the coming of Islam and Christianity into the land of West African region people were traditionalists in the sense that they worshipped their ancestors or spirits. It was very common in the past for people to engage in this activity to meet-up with their daily needs and seek for blessings as well as protections against evil people. They worshipped their gods through trees, idols, stones and statues among many others with a belief in the extra-terrestrial being (god). Such practice was very much common among Ngamawa’s
of Ndokto Fara, Aerial shoots trees locally called *Goro or Gorom* (see fig. iii) and Baobab trees called *Kushi* were worshiped as gods in the past. Each household in the past own Gorom trees located around its house as evidently seen on the abandoned hilltop site of Ndokto Fara. Kushi tree was said to be worshiped specifically by the family that bears its name known as Kushi people *Bye Kushi* and some other few interested non family members. They had a festival where red chicken and black goats were slaughtered as sacrifice to the spiritual trees by applying blood of these animals and application of a solution of millet powder (*ruwan sirki or amma surki*) as libation to these spiritual trees. This is done with the intention of seeking blessings and cures of some ailments. Another important aspect of their religion was a belief in *bush baby* (*Gwai-gwai*) as another god responsible for informing them about the appropriate time to till land and plant farm products (fig. ii shows remains of the Gwai-gwai room foundation). Five stones were identified that made up the foundation and arranged in a circular form. The distance between the stones used in making the foundation differs from one place to another and from the western part it was observed that a remnant of collapsed ruin of building is still visible. A big pot was found buried in situ and the unburied section was found broken, the diameter of the pot and the thickness of the broken parts were measured about 47.0cm and 1.6cm respectively. The entire section of the room measured 1.50m in circumference and the soil texture of the room is grey and compacted in
nature. At the beginning of every rainy season the village head Lawani would keep a hoe in the shrine where the *bush baby* is believed to reside-in and would slaughter red chickens and black goats as sacrifice close to the room. After that, every morning the village head had to go and check whether two thirds of the hoe kept in the room is out and wet, once it’s out and wet he will assemble his people and inform them about the beginning of the farming season and ask them to set out to their farms as rain is expected at any moment. Contrary to this, even if there was rain throughout a day and night or week but the hoe kept in the shrine is not out, then nobody would be allowed to plant anything on his farm. With the coming of Islam, the present-day people of the area discarded their traditional beliefs and accepted Islam with the belief in oneness of God *Allah*.

![Fig. II: Remnant of Shrine Foundation](image-url)
Socio-cultural organisation and economy

There are different aspects of social activities among this group of people such as wedding ceremony, harvest festival and other religious festivals among others. Like any other ethnic group, this group of people also enjoyed a unique form of traditional way of marriage. Families of the couple would come together under the family of the bride to introduce themselves and discuss relevant issues in connection to the wedding of their children, which is seen as the introduction. Local tobacco and bear called Oshore and Moshim respectively is sheared among the family members and relatives to celebrate the engagement. After some few days the groom would slaughter a black goat and take the meat to his mother in-law’s house over the night and put it on her bed. The father in-law would invite his associates and other family members in the morning to come and eat the meat to mark the second segment of their daughter’s wedding (cin naman amarya) and offer a prayer for them. The third aspect is the most tedious and demanding in their wedding which is voluntary service on the bride’s father’s farm. The groom had to invite his friends and family members to the father in-law’s farm during rainy season to work voluntarily for glory. This voluntary service includes all the stages of farming processes from clearing farm land to the harvest. Thereafter, the groom had to continue sponsoring the needs of the wife until she conceived and delivered in her family house. The naming ceremony is also organised by the groom to provide all that is required for the naming ceremony. Six chickens and a half of ram
or goat are given out to the girl’s family by the groom and the naming ceremony take place at night. After naming ceremony the girl (wife) would spend some days together with her family before her husband finally take her along with her child away to his house.

Fig. III: Aerial shoot tree (Gorom)

The community or village head (*Moi*) of Ndokto Fara is nominated or emerged based on consultations among the elders of the community and this has been in practice up to the present. According to oral information (Abdulmumini, Pers. Comm., 2015) a leader emerged from the royal family after a series of meetings and consultations among the elders. When a consensus is reached among the princes, the name of the qualified candidate would be sent to the district head in Fika for final approval and confirmation. According to this tradition, four pre-Islamic rulers ruled for several years including the first leader *Moi* Yaya Kanji, *Moi* Ma’aji, *Moi* Anga and *Moi* Langawa. The number of years they spent on the throne was not disclosed.
The Islamic leaders include Moi Bazam who ruled for 80 years, Moi Doya, Moi Kakau seven years, Moi Boyaya 23 years, Moi Shua’ibu Haruna 14 years and Moi Alhaji Abdulmumini 1993 to date.

The people of Ndokto were farmers, hunters and craftsmen. Trading was also part of their livelihood. Geographic nature of the area influence their rainy and dry season farming activities. Ngeji stream is their major source of dry season farming (fadama). The soil is very fertile for the production of crops like maize, guinea corn, millet, rice and vegetable crops. They reared animals for both domestic and commercial purposes such as cows, goats, sheep, horses and dogs among others. They were craftsmen who specialised in mat and cloth weaving, iron working, wood carving, dyeing and pottery making among others. According to Barkindo (1980) the Chadic speaking group and their Kanuri neighbours introduced cloth dyeing and other craftsmanship to Mandara from Kanem in the 17th century A.D. The knowledge of these craftsmanship were later spread to Ndokto Fara through migration. According to oral information (Kiri Pers. Comm., A. 2014) former inhabitants of Ndokto Farawere hunters and skilful craftsmen who were attracted to the hilltop site for the dense nature of the forest for security and natural resources for craftsmanship. These people were also traditional herbalist, who specialised in the knowledge of their environment. Up to the present time people troop into the town to collect traditional medicine that can cure illnesses such as fever, asthma and ulcer as well as charms for
protection against evil spirit (*sinkau*), iron, bullet and fire accident among many others.

Traditional way of disposing death was a very common phenomenon among African societies, some contain grave good with believe of another life after death. Such practice was also common in the Lake Chad region. Grave goods found in relation to grave furniture were identified in Daima of Lake Chad region in north-eastern Nigeria that includes ornaments, terracotta clay headrest and clay figurines of animals (Gundu, 1988). According to oral informant (Bala Pers. Comm., 2016) burial system in Ndokto Fara is of two types and deceased’s are housed or buried in their compounds, kings (*Moi’s*) graves are circular in shape with stone mounds (see fig. iv) with a circular chamber where their bodies are buried seated with grave goods such as cowries and other valuable goods among others. The other grave architecture is in linear form lying east to west where the ordinary citizens are buried with their heads lying on their right hand and their face facing north. The external architecture of this system of burial is circular form and it is covered by a heap of stones. Ethnographic information disclosed to this research that the deceased are now buried according to Islamic obligation and graves are located far away from their compounds unlike in the past where dead bodies are buried within their compounds (Jibir Pers. Comm., 2015).
Figure IV: Typical nature of circular grave with stone mound

**Discussion and conclusion**

This paper revealed the aspect of Ngamawa’s history of migration and some indigenous traditions of origin which manifested mostly in their archaeological features. Their migration was believed to have started from the upper Lake Chad area to Potiskum area and subsequently to Ndokto Fara and beyond. As claimed by their traditions, the migration process adopted by these people was gradual and steady through Mandara and Ngazargamu at a different time. On their arrival they settled at different locations some on hilltops while others on a plain land.

Before the coming of Islam and the spread of its knowledge to the ancient Kanem Bornu and subsequently to the other parts of Nigeria and West Africa in general as well as the settlers of Ndokto Fara where traditionally religious. They believe in
extra-terrestrial beings and some specific trees claim to be a hideout of spirits as their gods and saviours. The paper further revealed how those gods were worshiped in the past and what it takes to make sacrifice for personal or public needs. This form of religion is reflected in most of their social activities including traditional wedding, farming system and festivals among others. To establish a strong and blessed union between couples is done through seeking of blessing from the extra-terrestrial beings and elders. In the traditional marriage husband has to go through a scrutinized test and sacrifice. Naming ceremony among this set of traditional people took place in the bride’s family house over the night.

Aspect of traditional religion and burial has been clearly identified through the material evidence and oral information. There was a belief of life after death as suggested by oral information, the Moi’s where accompanied to their graves with surplus of expected materials to be used after this life. As noted by Connah (1981) such practices of burial were very common among the tradition of Soapeople of Lake Chard region. Further intensive archaeological research through excavation and probably dating is suggested to reveal their relationship in terms of social practices. Conclusively, this paper reveals a pre-colonial complex society with a centralise system of government under the leadership of a trusted leader known as Moi and a strong socio-economic practice in the past. Some scholars argue that the occupants of Ndokto Fara area were agrarian and immigrants who came from Mandara mountains area to Daura before they finally settled on Ndokto Fara hilltop site.
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