

## LANGUAGE AND MIGRATION THE IMPACT OF THE JUKUN ON CHADIC SPEAKING GROUPS IN THE BENUE-GONGOLA BASIN

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### Introduction

Our paper deals with the problems of migration, culture and language in the wider Benue-Gongola basin. Here are mainly concerned the West-Chadic speaking groups Kwami, Kupto, Kushi and Piya as well as the Jukun who speak a language belonging to the Benue-Congo family. We try to point out the possible reasons for their historical migrations and in particular the consequences of ethnic expansion of the Jukun in the middle Benue region. History shows that contacts of ethnic groups - being peaceful or by force - had always led to mutual influences and changes in culture and language, which finally resulted in cultural fusion of various aspects. Our study, based mainly on oral traditions as well as on linguistic comparisons, focusses especially on the history of the above mentioned Chadic groups, who are considered - according to our hypothesis - to have come in close contact with the Jukun. Subsequently the warlike expansion of the Jukun caused a strong turmoil which led to the scattering of the various ethnic units.

The Jukun language belongs to the Benue-Congo language family. The majority of the Jukun speaking people lives south of the middle and upper Benue River around Wukari, but pockets of scattered groups are also found in the Benue and Gongola Basin as well as on the Bauchi Plateau. Their history and development has been marked by extended migrations from their homeland especially north- and westwards.

On the other hand, we have the Kwami, Kupto, Kushi and Piya, small Chadic speaking groups belonging to the Bole-Tangale language family (LEGER 1994b:7f.). The members of their speakers range between 3.000 and 10.000 people; for Piya they do not exceed 20.000 in number (ADELBERGER/KLEINWILLINGHÖFER:1992:35f.). The Kwami reside on a plateau northwest of Gombe, the Kupto settle on the middle Gongola river and the Kushi and Piya live on the slopes of the eastern Muri mountains. Compared to the Jukun they have migrated in recent history on a smaller scale and only as a reaction to the expansion of other tribes in this area.

An exact scientific reconstruction of the movements of these ethnic groups becomes difficult or rather impossible to establish in light of the fact that there

is a dearth of accurate sources and written documents on their origins and development. This leaves oral tradition to rely upon.

## Origin, migration and expansion

### The Jukun

Among the various theories concerning the origin of the Jukun, the most common one states that they originally came from the Yemen. From there they crossed Kordofan, the Fitri region, the Mandara and Gongola region and finally reached the Benue Basin. According to Meek and Palmer the Jukun came from Ancient Egypt. This theory is based on similarities existing between certain practices connected with the cults of the Jukun and the ancient Egyptians (MEEK 1931:23f.; PALMER 1931:XV, XXV). But it must be mentioned that many African peoples claim their genesis in the Yemen, Egypt or Arabia, although there are no reliable sources for such assumptions. The driving force here is the influence of the Islamic tradition with its origins in Arabia.

A different theory according to WEBSTER (1993:1f.) - not as widespread but in our opinion just as plausible - states that the Jukun originally came from the south. They began to migrate from Cameroon into Kwararafa only about 1600 and did not dominate its political structure until just before 1800. In the 19th century the Jukun were the rulers of the most prominent successor state - the Kingdom of Wukari - which claimed continuity with the town Kororofa (remark the difference between the town *Kororofa* and the kingdom or empire *Kwararafa*). But this does not mean that they were the founder-rulers of the empire Kwararafa. It seems probable that the founder groups of Kwararafa were the Abakwariga, - a name usually associated with the non-Muslim Hausa who might have come from the north east and Wadai.

Another assumption of tracing the origin of the Jukun in the south is based upon linguistic affiliation. The Jukun-language - as mentioned before - belongs to the Benue-Congo language family. There is in fact a high degree of frequency of lexical correspondence which exists between Jukun and some Bantu languages, seemingly attesting to the fact that the origins of the Jukun are to be sought in a Bantu speaking area - which leads again to the south (MEEK 1931:7f.).

### The Kwami, Kupto, Kushi and Piya

Just as the Jukun, the Kwami and Kupto also claim the Yemen as their place of origin, from where they once came via the Red Sea to the Lake Chad area together with the Fika (=Bole), Kalam and Bauchi (LEGER 1991:80f; 1994a:148f.). There they separated from their brothers after a dispute over a gazelle and proceeded southwest to their present day home. Even after their

separation the Kwami and Kupto still consider the Bole in particular as their full brothers because of their descent from the same mother referred to as Degeri (LEGER 1994a:146f.).

According to yet another theory, the Kwami and Kupto came from the region of the Gongola and Hawwal Rivers, which is situated southwest of their present-day settlements (CARLYLE 1919:235). This theory also applies for the Kushi and Piya. They migrated - according to their oral traditions - from the east towards the west and repetitively mention Shani or the riverine areas around as their former home. It's a point of interest that the Piya, though calling themselves *'àm pándì*, which literally means "*people of the mountains*" or "*hills*", have still preserved in their vocabulary a great number of words for various types of fish, which are hardly believed to be existent in their present mountainous surroundings.

### Sources and conjecture concerning the history of Kwararafa

The first larger permanent settlement of the Jukun in the area of our study is assumed to have been situated in the Benue Basin on the south bank of the River Benue. This was - according to MEEK (1931:24f.) - also the starting point of the legendary kingdom of Kwararafa, which played an important role in the demographic history of northern Nigeria. This makes the Jukun one of the first peoples in the Western Sudan who have established a kingdom at such an early date. There are no precise dates at hand, but according to MEEK and PALMER the kingdom of Kwararafa was supposedly founded in the 14th century. This kingdom of the Jukun reached its apex between the 16th and 17th century. The name Kwararafa is mentioned in the Kano Chronicle (translated by H.R. PALMER) for the first time for the years 1582 and 1618 (MEEK 1931:24f.). Meek is of the opinion that the Jukun were the sole founders of the kingdom of Kwararafa, whilst ABUBAKAR (1989:170,171) speaks of "the Kororofa" and by this term means a loosely united confederation encompassing a number of culturally and linguistically rather diverse populations on the Benue and the Gongola. There were several distinct waves of migration of different ethnic groups into the Benue Basin where they were integrated into and acculturated by the native populations. Three main areas of immigration or rather settlement can be distinguished: 1. The Gongola River Basin; 2. The middle Benue; 3. The confluence of the Niger and the Benue. The area of settlement south of the Benue was referred to as the so-called "Kororofa of the Jukun" - a multiethnic confederation which was dominated by the Jukun as of approximately the 16th century (ABRAHAM 1940:7-12; ABUBAKAR 1989:170-171; ERIM 1987:35f.; ISICHEI 1983:148f.; LOW 1972:81-86; MEEK 1931:XIII f., 1-60; RUBIN 1969:198f.). In contrary to that, WEBSTER (1993:1f.) assumes the first presence of Jukun in Kwararafa in the 16th century. Equally to Abubakar he states that Kwararafa was a loose conglomeration of several ethnic groups with many centres of power. According to Webster the Jukun were not the founders, but represented the

last dynastic group in this expansive kingdom. The Jukun who migrated into the area around 1600 only adopted the institution of "divine kingship" from the already established kingdom (WEBSTER 1993:2f.). A.A. FARE (1984) even doubts as to whether there ever really existed a kingdom of Kwararafa.

It would lead too far, where we do here expound, upon numerous contradictions and questions surrounding the theories of the various authors. The study and comparison of reports, dissertations and publications on the origin, migration, expansion and surmised development of the Jukun (of PALMER, MEEK, FREMANTLE, TEMPLE, RUXTON, RUBIN and WEBSTER as well as the statements of the Jukun informants) do not provide conclusive evidence about the actual course of the history of the empire of the Jukun.

There are, however, grounds for the assumption that with the founding of the kingdom of Kwararafa the phase of vast waves of migration had ceased and the driving force in the expansion of the kingdom of Jukun was now warfare. That is to say, military campaigns were undertaken from Kwararafa in order to subject neighbouring peoples. Conquered land was no longer used for settlement but was pillaged and its inhabitants were forced into a state of permanent dependency by an obligation to pay tribute. Thus the Jukun became increasingly war-like. From Kwararafa they frequently started raids against the surrounding peoples situated between the Benue Basin and the eastern slope of the Jos Plateau. They conquered areas along the important trade routes and brought the trade in the entire Benue-Basin under their control. This militarily and economically motivated expansion resulted in warfare, subjugation and even the displacement of ethnic populations residing in this region.

### The influence of the Jukun on Chadic-speaking peoples

If we look at the distribution of the Chadic speaking groups (and especially on those of the Bole-Tangale family) in the wider Gongola Benue region we find them scattered ranging from the Muri Mountains up to the plain-lands of the extended Lake Chad Basin. This, however, does not mean that they have not once been united in a common "Sprachbund". In contradiction to existing theories (cf. JUNGRAITHMAYR 1990:61f.) which state that especially the northern and northwestern representatives of the Bole-Tangale languages (like Bole, Ngamo, Karekare, Kirfi, Galembi, etc.) migrated - driven by the invading Kanuri - straight from Lake Chad south- and southwestwards to their present homes, we strongly presume, supported by linguistic evidence, that there was a southern "homeland" once shared by all these ethnic groups (JUNGRAITHMAYR/LEGER 1993:171). From there the various migration waves took off northwards. As one of the common linguistic features - being one of the arguments - for their former living together might be the so called 'Intransitive Copy Pronoun', whose distribution in the various verbal paradigms decreases from the southern to the northern languages most probably in accordance to the time deferred migrations of the respective groups.

We therefore assume a common "Sprachbund" for all Chadic-speaking groups - in spite of the geographical distance from one another - in the Gongola-Benue confluence region up to the River Hawwal, to which in particular also belonged the Kwami, Kupto, Kushi and Piya. A question, however, remains: What caused them to abandon a region of favorable living conditions and retreat into less easily accessible and also less hospitable regions as, for example, the Kushi and Piya, who withdrew to the Muri Mountains and the Kwami, whose wanderings finally brought them to the waterless Keri-Keri Plateau? This shifting of settlement is only to be accounted for by external pressure. In our opinion, this is where the connection between the Jukun expansion and the dispersion of other ethnic groups becomes apparent. A fact which has heretofore never been viewed in this context and affected not only the Chadic-speaking "Sprachbund" but also Adamawa-speaking peoples. Our hypothesis might be supported by a quote from Carlyle about the Kwami out of a report written in 1911. He writes:

"An interesting speculation is raised by the fact that a dialect of the Tangale tongue is still spoken by the people of Kafaretti (or Kwom) and Dulli. It seems probable, that the Jukun occupation cut off these towns from the towns of the Tangale tribe".

This reveals the settlements of Pindiga, Gwana and Kona having been outposts of the great kingdom of Jukun and are therefore to be considered to have been Jukun enclaves in a Chadic-speaking continuum. The Jukun also wedged between the Kwami and Tangale, who once shared a common language. Even today their common linguistic heritage is still very apparent. The validity of this statement is reinforced by the fact, that Kwami is lexically much more closer to the Tangale than to its immediate northern neighbouring language Bole; with Tangale Kwami shares about 75-80% of common vocabulary, with Bole not more than 50% (LEGER 1994b:11).

### Wukari's relationship to its northern enclaves

The Jukun chieftaincies Pindiga, Gwana and Kona, as outposts of the great Kingdom of the Jukun, were to a great degree independent, but bound to Kororofa (Wukari) in that they were subject to their administration. The right to appoint and depose chiefs was a right reserved exclusively for the King (*Aku*) of Wukari. Every newly appointed chief was under obligation to travel to Wukari where he was officially installed in his office by the king. No new appointments were made without the authorisation of the *Aku*. In Wukari every new chief was instructed by the *Aku* in the practice of certain rites and ceremonies which had to be performed for the duration of his stay in office. Certain magical practices are supposed to have insured the security and well-being of the chieftaincies. The *Aku* was informed immediately about the death of any chief. It was also within his power to depose or even execute a chief who only disobeyed him. The death penalty was for being guilty of some unforgivable breach of religious practice. Within the chieftaincies there were

also the so-called "king-makers" responsible for the first culling of possible candidates. They had the right to depose the chief but not without the knowledge of the Aku in Wukari. Special officials from the enclaves resided in Wukari where they attended to the administration, and were responsible for continuous relations and the flow of information between the Aku and the Jukun diaspora. They also oversaw the regular payment of tribute by the settlements to the king of Wukari (ABUBAKAR 1986:13f.). The chieftaincies of the Jukun diaspora were used as bases to launch further military campaigns and along with other strategic points in the Gongola Basin they formed a network of enclaves within a wide radius of Wukari. Pindiga and Gwana were the northernmost outposts of the Jukun settlements. It is most likely that from here contacts were made with other Chadic-speaking peoples in the Bauchi region and the Muri Mountains: with the Widala (Kode), Nyam, Pero and Tangale. In the name of the king of Wukari the Jukun of Pindiga had also influence on parts of the Bolewa, Waja, Tera and the Tangale (of Biliri). CARLYLE (1919:365) writes: "They [i.e. the Wurkum], like the Tangale were subject to the Jukun of Pindiga."

The Jukun of Gwana dominated over much of the territory of the Wurkum. The dominated groups mined the salt deposits in the Muri Mountains, whereby the Jukun pocketed all the profit. Thus these groups formed the backbone of a flourishing Jukun salt trade (ABUBAKAR 1986:13,14). Not just economically but also spiritually and politically the Jukun became the most influential ethnic group in the Benue Basin.

Since the 14th century there had been a constant influx of significantly large ethnic groups into the Benue Basin. These vast extensive migrations resulted in multilevel interethnic contact which manifested itself linguistically, spiritually and politically. Institutions and ideas were passed on from one group to another and culminated in cultural fusion.

It is indispensable and of great value for the reconstruction of African history that social anthropologists and linguists work together. Especially in our research area which is characterized by multilevel interethnic contacts, high cultural fusion and historical migrations the coherence of both disciplines is a basic need. Long-term multidisciplinary cooperation can give an answer to complex historical questions and bring evidence and proofs where authentic sources and written historical documents are missing.

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