

Endangered Indigenous Archives in Mbum Land of Cameroon: Which Way Forward?

Richard Tanto Talla

Department of History
University of Buea
Cameroon
trtalla@ymail.com

Ignatius Womai Song

PhD Candidate - African History
Graduate/Teaching Assistant, Department of
History, Howard University, USA
ignawom@yahoo.com

Abstract: *In traditional African societies where there was no formal way of documentation, history was stored in human brains and transmitted by word of mouths or learned from their material cultural remains and features. The material cultural remains were preserved in indigenous archives, such as, shrines, palace museums, cultural sites or reserves which today exist in a very poor state. This study, therefore, sets out to examine the reasons behind the deplorable condition of these local archives in most local communities in Cameroon with a focus on the Mbum ethnic group of Donga Mantung Division of the North West Region. The study revealed that, over the years, a good number of factors such as rural-urban migration, absentee community leaders, Christianity, population increase etc, have negatively affected the maintenance of these shrines by the local community thereby, causing a lot of damages to its material culture content. This situation has also left the young ones of the society with no option, but to grow up with no good knowledge of their material culture history, which mirrors the achievements of their ancestors and by extension, the culture history of the community. This study therefore makes a point for the restoration of these local archives and suggest various ways through which it could done. It concludes by observing that this would go a long way to ameliorate the poor state of these indigenous archives as well as revive the dying Mbum culture, which identifies them as a specific entity in Cameroon, a country with more than 120 ethnic groups.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mbum, Yamba and Mfumnte are the three main ethnic groups that make up Donga Mantung Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. The Mbum people specifically, occupy the Nkambe Plateau and are believed to have migrated into the area from north east Cameroon (Adamawa Plains) more than four hundred years ago, in three successive groups or waves of Warr, Yah and Tang. These three groups are today referred to as clans and together, constitute 32 Mbum villages, each headed by a chief locally called, *Nkfu*. Ascension to the throne was and is still exclusively for male members of the royal family¹.

The *Nkfu* upon enthronement was bestowed with all the spiritual powers, which the throne deserved, through initiation into all the secret societies of the village. This gave him the status of a divine figure with divine powers to communicate with the gods and ancestors of the land who were believed to guide him on how best to administer his people. This therefore meant that they also believed in the concept of life after death and in the fact that, elders who died, continued to inhabit the earth as spirits for the good of the people².

He was assisted in the administration of his community by a traditional council of elders or wise men and various secret societies such as *Nwarong*³, which was charged amongst others, with making and enforcing the laws of the land. In addition to these, were also the *Ngiri*, an assembly

¹ For more details, see R.T.Talla (2003) "Ethnoarchaeology and Historical Archaeology of Mbajeng in Wimbun Land of Donga Mantung Division, Northwest Province of Cameroon" Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria , 61-70

² Ibid

³ F.W Carpenter. (1934). "Intelligence Reports on the Nsungli Area". File No. Ac19, National Archives, Buea :45 Also E.G.Hawskeworth. ,(1924) "Assessment Report on Nsungli Clan," Bamenda Division. National Archives, Buea.:34

of princes of the palace, and *Nwarong* war lodges like the *Nfu* and *Samba* (Manjong) secret societies, whose membership were healthy men responsible for the security of the society especially, in times of war. Their origins date to the times of migration and early settlement when they fought several wars to defend their territory from invaders⁴.

They also believed in the existence of the Almighty God and also several smaller gods whom He created to cater for the various needs of the society. They included the god of water, *Nyu Mroh*, compound or village god, *Nyu lah*, fertility god, *Nyu Ngong* and god of war, *Nyu Kong*. Shrines existed within the confines of most palaces to cater for these secret societies and the gods of the land⁵. Some of these shrines also served as museums as they contained works of art depicting the people's cultural values/identity and the historical evolution of the indigenous society. Any form of activity was forbidden on sites of cultural significance to the village thereby, safeguarding its cultural materials. Such sites were termed cultural reserves and included abandoned settlement sites, which could be termed archeological/historical sites, cultural monuments, ancestral forests and royal graves like the ones found at the archaeological/ historical sites of Mbajeng and Konchep⁶. Unfortunately, these local archives are today in a very awful state. This study, therefore, sets out to examine the reasons behind the deplorable condition of these local archives in most indigenous communities in Cameroon today with a focus on the Mbum ethnic group of Donga Mantung Division of the North West Region. It also makes some proposals on how such a deplorable state of affairs could be reversed.

2. DEFINITION OF SOME CONCEPTS

Archives are conventionally regarded as institutions that contain both published and unpublished materials, which could be in any format. They include manuscripts, letters, and photographs, moving images and sound materials, artworks, artifacts and the digital equivalent of all the above items. Generally, the materials are rare, specialised and unique to a particular people. Unlike the library⁷, most of its materials if destroyed are irreplaceable⁸. An archaeological/historical site is any space on the earth's surface which shows spatial clustering of evidence of human activities in the past⁹. Such sites include where people lived, worked, produced tools, ate, died and were even buried¹⁰. The evidences exist in the form of material physical remains such as human tools, works of art, pot sherds, iron slag and features like ruins of buildings, shrines, monuments and graves¹¹. In some societies, archaeological/historical sites with features such as shrines and ancestral graves, which are still very relevant to the contemporary societies, were designated as cultural reserves. The leadership of the community believed that their ancestors who were buried in those graves and the gods who inhabit the shrines, still intervened spiritually, in the daily life of the community for the good of the people.

As a consequence, people were forbidden as earlier noted, from undertaking any activity, which might destroy the cultural materials and features found in these reserves. In some instances, thatched huts were constructed to cover those culture sensitive spots within the reserves so as to protect the material cultural remains and features there in. The reserves were occasionally visited by the elders of the community to perform rituals as well as pour libations on the ancestral graves and shrines on behalf of the community.

⁴ R.T.Talla et, al. (2010) 'The Nfu Society of the Wimbun in the Donga Mantung Division of the North West Region of Cameroon: Continuity and Change' in *Tropical Focus* Volume 11, No.1 :112-124.

⁵ R.T Talla (2012) "Christianity and Indigenous Religion in the Mbum land of Cameroon: Who owns the Corpse and First Fruits?" in *African Journal of Humanities and Society: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Society* Vol. 13 No.1.161-170.

⁶ R.T.Talla (2003)

⁷ Joan M. Reitz, ODLIS (2010) Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science :Libraries Unlimited,

⁸ www2archivists.org/using_archives/whatarearchives

⁹ B.W.Andah and A.I. Okpoko (1994) *Practicing Archaeology in Africa* Ibadan: Wisdom Publishers. Limited: 46.

¹⁰ Peter N,P et al (eds).. (2002) *Archaeology: Original Readings in Method and Practice*. New Jersey:, Prentice Hall, 1

¹¹ B.W.Andah and A.I. Okpoko (1994) :45

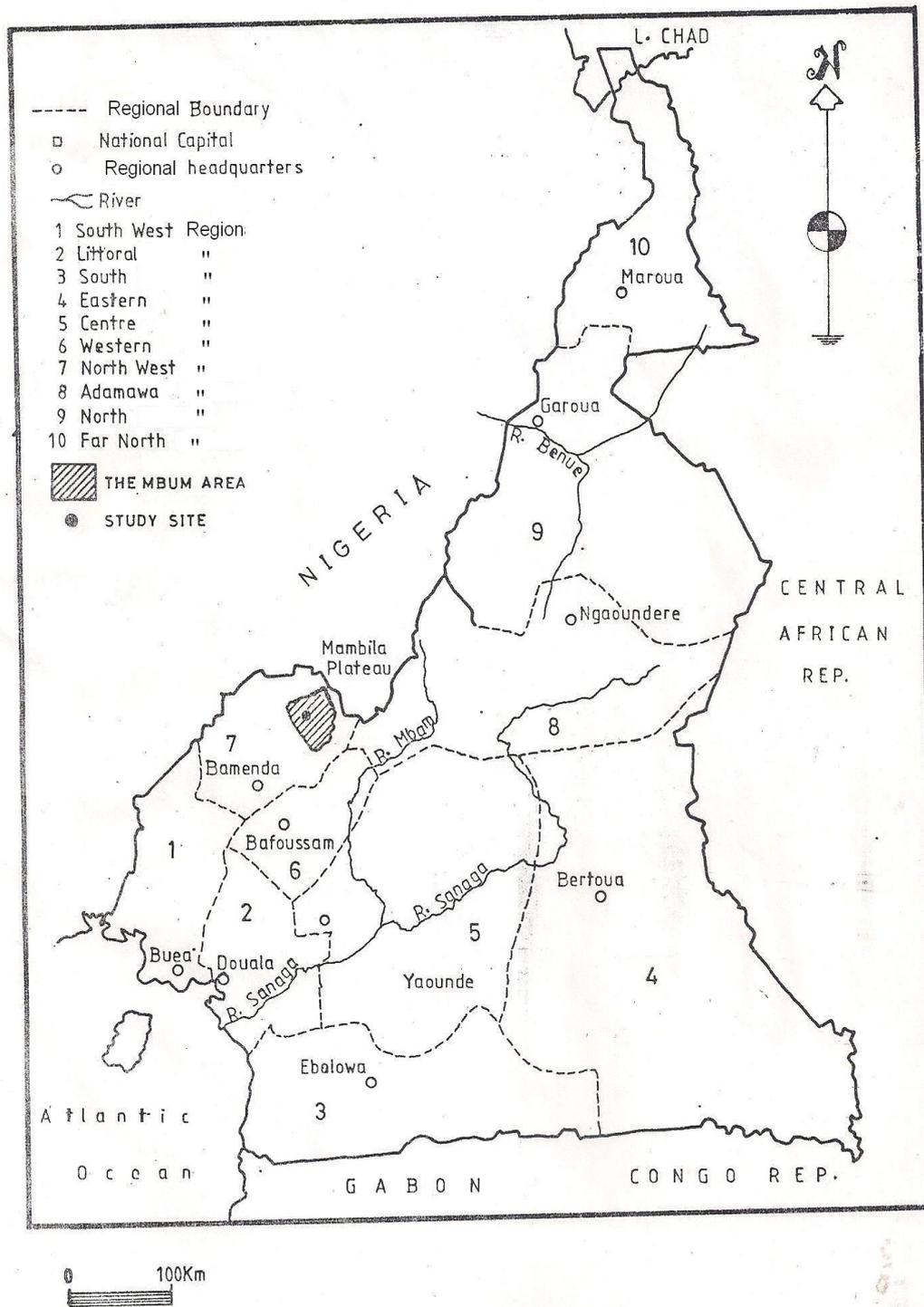


FIG-1:Cameroon and its ten regions

If there was any evidence that the cultural materials found within the reserve could be destroyed by the natural forces of decay, erosion and weathering or human activities such as theft, illegal farming, hunting and fetching of firewood, the local leadership ensured that they were rescued and preserved in the palace museum or shrines within the palace environs. The palace museums in particular, was opened to the local public with the hope that in viewing the cultural materials in

them, they would appreciate their culture and better educate themselves on their identity and the creative abilities and achievements of their ancestors¹²

From the above, one would be wondering whether the archaeological/historical sites, shrines and palace museums could be equated to conventional archives. Except for the fact that they do not contain documents because we are dealing with non literate societies and unlike conventional archives, access to some shrines was limited to only members, I emphatically say, yes. This is because they all contained cultural material remains such as works of arts and artifacts, which also constituted part of the content of a conventional archive as indicated above. These cultural remains, like those in modern archives are also unique and specific to a particular society. When studied, they also reveal past human activities. Archaeological/historical sites, local palace museums and shrines are therefore, traditional archives like the western oriented conventional archives we have today in urban centres. Unfortunately, their continuous survival in most local societies in the whole of Cameroon, and especially in Mbum land, is seriously in jeopardy because of certain factors.

3. FACTORS AFFECTING THE SURVIVAL OF LOCAL ARCHIVES IN MBUM LAND

A good number of factors have over the years been responsible for the gradual disappearance of local archives in Mbum land. They included the drastic increase in the rate of rural–urban migration of the active local population caused mostly by the attractive facilities offered by urban centers, the fear of witchcraft¹³ and lack of job opportunities in the local areas. This has left most of the rural areas empty of its energetic and youthful population, who as tradition required, should have acquired from their parents, knowledge of their cultural identity and cultural materials, preserved in the palace museums, shrines and cultural sites. As the old people pass on, there is nobody around to care for the local archives¹⁴.

A good number of palaces in Mbum land are controlled by absentee chiefs who live and work in the cities because they do not like the rural areas or are government workers¹⁵. We should understand that palaces in Mbum land like elsewhere in the Bamenda grassfield, are considered as the embodiment of the culture and the heart of every village. These chiefs only come home occasionally, to take care of village issues unlike their forefathers who lived in the palaces 24 hours every day. Some of them have even gone to the extent of constructing new palaces in the city or transferring the palace from its original site to new sites, on the pretext that, the original site was inaccessible by motorable roads. This left the original palaces and their cultural sites, features and artifacts, unattended to and exposed to the destructive natural forces of decay and the looting activities of local thieves. This was the case in Bongala, a quarter in the Mbum village of Tala¹⁶. (See Plates 1 and 2)

Chieftaincy crisis caused by rivalry amongst the princes and at times, encouraged by the supervisory state administrators, have also left some Mbum villages and their palaces without a chief for years. A case in point is the village of Tala where the throne was vacant since 2005 as a result of internal rivalry amongst the princes. This rivalry led to the death of two contenders for the throne and the abdication by two others, who complained of physical and especially, spiritual insecurity to their lives. One of them escaped to neighbouring Nigeria and has since not returned to the village. It was only in early January 2013, that an extended member of the royal family, was crowned as the new chief thereby, starting a new royal lineage in the village. Within this

¹² See C. L, Ardoun (ed) (1997) *Museums and Archaeology in West Africa*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.xi-xiv.

¹³ R, T. Talla (2009) “Witchcraft Practices and Environmental Connivance amongst the Wimbum of the Bamenda Grass field of Cameroon”. in *Epsa Moto , A Bilingual Journal of Arts and the Humanities*. Volume 4 No. 1:, 123-191

¹⁴ F. Ngwa Interviewed 10 May 2013. He is 55 years old and spent most of his youthful years in the town before returning home some years back .

¹⁵ J. Tangiri. Interviewed 21 March 2013.He is the sub chief of a quarter in Mbum land and a civil servant who has been running the affairs of his people from Bamenda, the regional capital of the North West Region of Cameroon..

¹⁶ Alfred Nganyu .Interviewed 10 May 2013. He still lives in the vicinity of the old sub chief’s palace, which was transferred by the sub chief o a new site near a motorable road.. The shrines, palace, cultural materials and features on the original site were destroyed and others stolen..

period, the palace museums and the shrines were vandalized by thieves who illegally made away with precious works of art. One of them was the venerated and age-old masks and feathery garments, won by the *mabu* masquerades during cultural ceremonies like the installation of a new chief¹⁷(Plate 3). This left the Tala palace museum and its shrines empty of most of their cultural materials, a situation the new chief is currently grappling with.

Villagers in Mbum land, because of degrading soil infertility, have taken advantage of the fact that some of the chiefs are absentee landlords and extended their farms into culturally reserved sites and the surroundings of palaces, which usually accommodated most of the shrines, royal and ancestral graves. The farming activities just like in most parts of the developing world,¹⁸ have destroyed cultural materials and also desecrated the land as royal graves in particular, were damaged. This is exactly what happened to the palace of Kungi village whose immediate environment with cultural materials was destroyed by farming. (Plate 5 and10)

Christianity which was introduced into Mbum land in the early 1920s¹⁹, has over the years, gradually, caused a lot of harm to the culture of the area as elsewhere in the African continent²⁰. Some of the local converts, who were village priests and guardians of shrines, ceased to perform the responsibilities the indigenous society bestowed on them because of their new status as Christians. They began to despise not only those local people who still valued their culture²¹ but also, the venerated cultural materials which were preserved in the shrines, palace museums and cultural reserves (or archaeological/historical sites). They considered such sites and their contents as anti-Christian or against their newly acquired beliefs. This therefore meant that the material cultural remains were no longer taken care but were left at the mercy of destructive natural and human forces. Such examples abound in most villages in Mbum land.

A good example is Pa Gwei Ngeh who was the chief priest of the *Dikong* or hunting shrine and also a notable of the *Nwarong* secret society of Bongala quarter in Tala village²². He became a Christian by receiving baptism at the age of 70 years. He then, stopped taking care of especially the *Dikong* shrine under his control. No replacement was found, and some of its material cultural content was stolen. Today, this *Dikong* shrine of over which he once presided as chief priest, is without a hut. Most of its cultural materials, except for the stone seats, were destroyed by natural forces and especially, farming activities, which have encroached into a greater part of what used to be the shrine (see plate 4). Such attitudes have helped to erase a people's stock of historical knowledge contained in the material culture preserved in those local archives.

Western education also gradually erased the informal local educational system, which enabled parents to orally transmit the history and values of their society to their children at night after dinner. This was done through storytelling, riddles and jokes, narration of family history (genealogy) and the migratory history of the group, the reasons behind their names and the importance of some of the cultural sites and cultural materials found in the society. Western education introduced the notion that history could only be studied through the use of documents

¹⁷ Pius Tamfu. Interviewed 12 May 2013. A 75 year old veteran royal adviser. Mabu displaying at a funeral celebration of a chief in Njap village

¹⁸ Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn (1996) *Archeology: Theories, Methods and Practice*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 527

¹⁹ E.L. Kwast, 1971 *The Disciplining of West Cameroon: A study of Baptist Growth* Michigan: William B.Esdmans Publishing Company.63-90

²⁰ Ogbogbo C.B.N (1999) *Of History, Culture and the African Crisis* Lagos: Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd:2.

²¹ See Preface in Andah B.W. (1982). *African Development in Cultural Perspective*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press,

²²Richard Tanto Talla (2012) "Christianity and Indigenous Religion in the Mbum land of Cameroon: Who owns the Corpse and First Fruits?" in *African Journal of Humanities and Society: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Society* Vol. 13 No.1.161-170.

and thus discouraged the use of oral traditions in understanding local history²³. Children therefore grew up without a good knowledge of their culture. In addition, early local missionaries in Mbum land like Joseph Mamodu, Samuel Aseh, Johannes Tanto, Peter Ndikwi and Thomas Toh²⁴, discouraged orally transmitted histories, which was one of the central focus of informal education. This was because they believed it helped in transmitting myths, or the belief in human legends and other gods associated with the cultural materials in the local archives, instead of the Almighty God who created Heaven and earth and for which Christianity stood. Children therefore, grew up with the knowledge of an imposed alien culture and with no comprehension of their original personality and indigenous history; all of which determined who they were in the world.

The quest for fast cash by looters as earlier mentioned above, was and is still one of the greatest threats to the survival of traditional archives in Mbum land. Even where the palace has not been abandoned, treasure hunters or looters have successfully made their way into some palace museums and shrines in Mbum land, with the complicity of princes and palace guards (as it was with the *Afo-a-Akom* in 1966²⁵), and made away with traditional works of art so valuable to the culture and history of the people. There are even cases of princes who grew up in urban areas and understood the financial value of traditional works of art, if sold to western tourists. When some of them finally took over from their parents as chiefs, they sold these revered works of art in the palace museums or archives to professional treasure hunters who in turn, smuggled them abroad. A story is being told of one Mbum chief (name withheld) who in the year 2000, gathered time-honored masks from his palace to sell to a treasure hunter in Douala. Unfortunately, the public transport bus he was travelling in, had an accident and he died. The masks were discovered amongst his luggage and taken back to his village²⁶. These factors, as we observed above, have over the years negatively impacted on the indigenous people's attitude towards the preservation of their local archives. It has consequently, led to the fast disappearance of these local archives in Mbum Land. Unfortunately, since most of the cultural materials which have disappeared were not documented or digitalized, they cannot be recovered. Their absence has over the years seriously, threatened the indigenous people's understanding of their past and who they are. Accordingly, they have been forced to take up alien values to the detriment of their local values and cannot clearly define their personalities in the global setting. This has also forced them to use alien institutions like courts instead of palm wine to solve locally oriented land disputes²⁷. This is very pertinent if we understand that each culture as represented by its cultural materials/institutions was a direct result of the experiences the people had with their specific environments²⁸.

There is therefore, a need for the waning local archives to be revived by both the local population and the government so as to ensure continuity, peace and cohesion in the communities. For example, some of the cultural materials in these local archives revealed the cultural debts these

²³ B.W Andah and A.I. Okpoko (1979) "Oral Tradition and West African Culture History: A New Direction". In *Perspective on West Africa's Past*. Special Book Issue of the West African Journal of Archaeology. Vol. 9,201-224.

²⁴ See J. Nkeh 2011 Culture and Christianity: A n Historical Assessment of Wimbun Experience under the Baptist Mission. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of History University of Buea.,104-126

²⁵ See F .Ferretti, (1975). *Afo-a-Kom: Sacred Art of Cameroon*, New York: The Third Press and also A .Q. Ngumi, (2002) "The Place of the *Afo-a- Kom* in the Kom Fondom" Unpublished B.A. Long Essay submitted to the University of Buea, Cameroon.

²⁶ Pius Tamfu. Interviewed 27 May 2013.

²⁷ See R.T. Talla(2013) "Raffia Palm Wine and Land disputes in the Mbum Land of Cameroon: A Forgotten Legacy?" In *Cameroon Journal of Studies in the Commonwealth* (CJSC). A Multidisciplinary Peered Reviewed Journal dedicated to Scientific Research within the Commonwealth. Volume 2 Number 1:1-18.

²⁸ A.I. Okpoko." Indigenous Technology and Sustainable Development" In *Africa's Indigenous Technology with Particular Reference to Nigeria*. Ibadan: Wisdom Publishers Limited, 2-6

local communities owed each other and oneness amongst several ethnic groups²⁹ in Cameroon, which are today fighting each other. An understanding of the material culture by the local people could therefore prevent these unnecessary conflicts and wastage of resources, which have plagued Mbum land and many parts of Cameroon for long. A good example, was the inter clan war between the Warr clan village of Mbot and the Tang clan village of Tarla over a piece of land not up to 300m² in the late 1980s³⁰. This could have been avoided if Tala indigenes understood that they got their Dikong shrine from Mbot village during the migratory days. This therefore means that the *Dikong* shrines in the two villages had a common origin³¹. Unfortunately, both communities did not know because this particular shrine and its cultural material are no more in existence in the two villages. This has to do with some of the reasons earlier advanced.

4. WAY FORWARD

The advantages of preserving these local archives and their cultural material content far supersede the disadvantages of maintaining the status quo, which is, not doing anything at all. It is my opinion that, the following measures if taken by the government and the local people could go a long way to ameliorate the poor state of the few local archives still existing in Mbum land.

A good documentation, either in still or life pictures of the material culture in the few existing shrines, archaeological/historical sites in the area of study and even beyond, should be sponsored by the ministry of culture with the assistance of the local authorities. I used the word 'sponsor' here because, most shrines are sacred places reserved for people who by tradition, were initiated into it. This joint venture would enable the ministry of culture to sponsor the training of some initiated members of the local shrines or cults in the techniques of documentation so that they could personally, and better do it.

It is true that material remains and features make more sense if examined physically than when they are in a digitalized or documented format. In its physical state, it is easier for the person doing the study to better examine the object from as many angles as possible in order to satisfy his worries. This cannot be easily done when you are dealing with a documented or digitalised form of cultural material except, the artifact was documented from different angles. Despite all these, it will be a serious mistake for us not to document them because, not doing so as it is the general case today, will allow the cultural materials to completely disappear or gradually lose their value.

Culture sensitive areas like the archaeological/historical sites and sites around the palaces where royal graves and shrines are found, should be mapped out by the local authorities with the help of government and officially declared cultural reserves. This declaration should be accompanied by enforceable sanctions which would be meted on defaulters by the indigenous authorities with the support of the state³². Such action will prohibit any developmental or farming activity by the state and indigenous people on such areas. If this was done, the royal graves, *Mfum* at Mbajeng, a site of vital historical importance to the Tang clan of Mbum, which in 2003 had four stones representing four late chiefs, would have been preserved. This was not the case in 2013, when the ruins of this *Mfum* shrine were inside a maize farm³³. (Plate 5)

Where increased population within the rural community has made it imperative for people to encroach into cultural reserves so as to make ends meet, the local authorities should be assisted financially or materially by the state to rescue and preserve the cultural materials in such areas before any activity is undertaken there. Where the state has designated some of these sites for developmental projects, formal surveys and excavations should be sponsored by the state with the manual assistance of the local people, for archaeologists, historians and cultural managers to identify, rescue document and preserve the cultural material remains before the project commences³⁴. The rescued cultural materials should also be displayed for local public view so as to awaken the spirits and interest of the young ones in the area in the knowledge of their culture.

²⁹ B.W. Andah (1982) *African Development in Cultural Perspective*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press,

³⁰ Pius Tamfu. Interviewed 27 May 2013. Lives and property were lost during the conflict.

³¹ See F.W Carpenter (1934), for more details on this.

³² Pius Tamfu. Interviewed 27 May 2013.

³³ R.T Talla 2003:60-70. Also see plate.

³⁴ Collin Renfrew and Paul Bahn 1996:524-525.

After this, the findings should be published and the cultural materials preserved in the local palace museum, where available, or taken to any state museum or cultural center for posterity³⁵.

The government/academic institutions should design programmes in their curricula which would focused on restoring local understanding of the various cultures of Cameroon in particular, and Africa at large. This could be started at the early stages of secondary education right up to the university. In this light, children will grow up even in the cities, with knowledge and a dedicated interest in the preservation of their cultural heritage³⁶. This will also ease the training processes of culture experts like historians, archivists, curators, anthropologists, and archaeologists by higher institutions and thereby, make available a good number of professionals to revive and manage the few archives, cultural centers and museums in the country. Such a scenario will avoid what happened at the National Archives Buea (NAB), some years back, when the archivist died and his daughter (who was not a trained archivist) had to manage the institution before the state could appoint a replacement. Most importantly, if more professional cultural managers were to graduate from higher academic institutions, their expert services could also be made available to the local leadership and their people at an affordable fee. The government should also assist the local population to make the local areas habitable by providing pipe borne water, electricity and transforming the footpaths into motorable roads. Such a scenario will not only reduce rural urban migration, but, will also attract urban dwellers and absentee chiefs to frequently visit their villages or take up permanent residence in the local area. Their presence in the village would certainly, reduce the destruction and disappearance of the cultural materials.

Village cultural associations which are common in all townships should enshrine in their constitutions, policies that encourage parents who are resident in urban areas to bring up their children in the knowledge of their culture. This could be done by reinstating the practice of informal education during the weekly or monthly meetings, through which children are taught different aspects of their culture including, language³⁷.

In addition, the state should ensure that, members of the police and custom departments who are charged with the control of our local and international borders are well paid and also trained in the knowledge of the value of cultural resources. This will enable them to have a passion for cultural resources so as to prevent looters from illegally making away with works of art from especially, local areas to urban centers and even beyond the territory, before they are, at least, documented³⁸.

5. CONCLUSION

Man's culture is his identity. He loses his personality whenever he cannot be identified with any cultural group. Culture itself is represented by material and non-material traits such as the nature of works of arts, food, houses, language and belief systems, which are specific to a particular human group and environment. In indigenous African communities like Mbum, shrines, palace museums and cultural reserves were created to preserve some of these traits for posterity and to create a sense of belonging and oneness in the people from generation to generation. The disappearance of these cultural values in any setting is therefore, a threat to human existence and survival. Unfortunately, over the years, certain factors such as rural-urban migration, absentee chiefs, lust for fast money, population increase and continuous developmental activities, have helped in destroying the local archives, which housed most of the cultural materials that were an embodiment of these values in Mbum land. In addition, some of the factors above have also assisted in erasing some of the vestiges of our cultural past and even prevented them from entering the local archives or records. Although, it is clear that some of the ideas, cultural

³⁵ A.I Okpoko 1986 "Archaeology Education in Nigeria" In *West African Journal of Archaeology* Vol.16:147-153

³⁶ A.E. Afigbo 1986 "Archaeology and the Schools". In *West African Journal of Archaeology* Vol.16:155-164.

³⁷ D. Nsagha. Interviewed 24 May 2013. He is a University Lecturer from Mbum Land is resident in Buea with his family

³⁸R. T ,Talla, W. N, Gam and I.S. Womai (2014) "Neglected Cameroonian Works of Art: The Need for Appropriate attention" Upcoming in the *Photon Journal of Arts and Culture*

institutions and material inventions of indigenous African societies cannot sustain them in the present dispensation in which the world has become a global village³⁹, this should not stop Africans from preserving vestiges of their culture which distinguished them as unique in the past. There is therefore a need for the State, each indigenous leadership and its people to ensure the preservation of relevant indigenous material culture in the local archives, and only borrow from outside, what is compatible with their identity and existence as a people. This is the more reason why there must be a constant documentation in any form possible, of the various cultural materials of indigenous societies which reflect their past struggles so as to adapt to the daily challenges of this changing environment. The question is, how can this be successfully done when most local archives are disappearing? The answer is the reason for this write up, which is, the dire need to revive the disappearing local archives to the standards that they used to be, and constantly update the stock of materials in those archives with recent local technological inventions. This would enable local African societies to keep at pace with the current developmental trends and the demands of the future.

REFERENCES

Interviews

- [1] Nsagha D. Interviewed 24 May 2013. He is 47 years old and a University Lecturer from Mbum Land, resident with his family in Buea.
- [2] Nganyu Alfred. Interviewed 10 May 2013. He still lives in the vicinity of the old sub chief's palace, which was transferred by the sub chief who was a teacher by profession to a new site near a motorable road..Cultural materials and features on the original site are now destroyed.
- [3] Tamfu. Pius Interviewed 12 May 2013.A 75 year old veteran royal adviser.
- [4] Ngwa, F. Interviewed 10 May 2013. He is 55 years old and spent most of his youthful years in the town before returning home some years back.
- [5] Tangiri. J. Interviewed 21 March 2013. A quarter head in Mbum land and a civil servant who has been running the affairs of his people from Bamenda, the Regional Capital of North West Region of Cameroon.

Secondary

- [1] Andah B.W. (1982). African Development in Cultural Perspective. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press,
- [2] Andah, B.W.and Okpoko A.I. (1994) Practicing Archaeology in Africa Ibadan: Wisdom Publishers. Limited.
- [3] Andah B.W and Okpoko A,I. (1979) "Oral Tradition and West African Culture History: A New Direction". In Perspective on West Africa's Past. Special Book Issue of the West African Journal of Archaeology. Vol. 9,201-224.
- [4] Afigbo A.E. 1986 "Archaeology and the Schools". In West African Journal of Archaeology Vol.16:155-164.
- [5] Ardoun, C.D. (ed) (1997) Museums and Archaeology in West Africa, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- [6] Carpenter F.W. (1934). "Intelligence Reports on the Nsungli Area". File No. Ac19, National Archives, Buea.
- [7] Ferretti, F (1975). Afo-a-Kom: Sacred Art of Cameroon, New York: The Third Press.
- [8] Hawskeworth, E.G.(1924) "Assessment Report on Nsungli Clan," Bamenda Division. National Archives, Buea.
- [9] Kwast, E.L (1971) The Disciplining of West Cameroon: A study of Baptist Growth Michigan: William B.Esdmans Publishing Company.
- [10] Ngumi, A .Q (2002) "The Place of the Afo-a- Kom in the Kom Fondom" Unpublished B.A. Long Essay submitted to the University of Buea, Cameroon.

³⁹ C.B.N Ogbogbo 1999 *Of History, Culture and the African Crisis* Lagos:Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd,1

- [11] Nkeh, J. (2011) "Culture and Christianity: An Historical Assessment of Wimbun Experience under the Baptist Mission". Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of History University of Buea.
- [12] Ogbogbo C.B.N (1999) Of History, Culture and the African Crisis Lagos: Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.
- [13] Okpoko, A.I (1986) "Archaeology Education in Nigeria" In West African Journal of Archaeology Vol.16:147-153.
- [14] Okpoko, A.I. (1996 "Indigenous Technology and Sustainable Development" In Africa's Indigenous Technology with Particular Reference to Nigeria. Ibadan: Wisdom Publishers Limited.
- [15] Peregrine, N. P, Ember R. C. and Ember M. (2002). Archaeology: Original Readings in Method and Practice, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- [16] Renfrew C. and Bahn P. (1996) Archeology: Theories, Methods and Practice. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- [17] Talla R.T (2003) "Ethnoarchaeology and Historical Archaeology of Mbajeng in Wimbun Land of Donga Mantung Division, Northwest Province of Cameroon" Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
- [18] Talla R, T. (2009) "Witchcraft Practices and Environmental Connivance amongst the Wimbun of the Bamenda Grass field of Cameroon". In Epsa Moto: A Bilingual Journal of Arts and the Humanities. Volume 4 No. 1, 123-191.
- [19] Talla R.T.and Nforba, S. Y.(2010) 'The Nfu Society of the Wimbun in the Donga Mantung Division of the North West Region of Cameroon: Continuity and Change" In Tropical Focus Volume 11, No.1 :112-124.
- [20] Talla R.T (2012) "Christianity and Indigenous Religion in the Mbum land of Cameroon: Who owns the Corpse and First Fruits?" In African Journal of Humanities and Society: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Society Vol. 13 No.1.161-170.
- [21] Talla.R.T. (2013) "Raffia Palm Wine and Land disputes in the Mbum Land of Cameroon: A Forgotten Legacy?" In Cameroon Journal of Studies in the Commonwealth (CJSC). A Multidisciplinary Peered Reviewed Journal dedicated to Scientific Research within the Commonwealth. Volume 2 Number 1: 1-18.

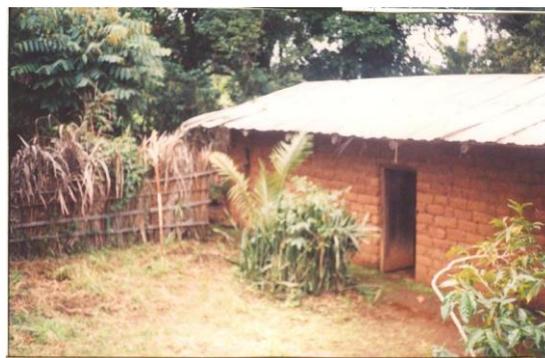


Plate1. *Abandoned palace with the door opened by thieves who made away with works of arts*



Plate2. *Abandoned Palace of Bongala Note the dilapidated roof and the maize plants*



Plate3. *Mabu displaying at a funeral. Take note of the mask and feathery attire*

Plate4. *Abandoned Dikong or hunting shrine of Bongala left with only the stone seats*



Plate5: *Ruins of the foundation of an abandoned Mfum shrine or royal grave in the midst of a farm at the abandoned village of Mbajeng*



Plate6: *An abandoned Shrine of the "god of rain" on the archaeological site of Bangsi represented by stone hearths*



Plate7. *Abandoned Fertility Shrine today represented by a grinding stone.*



Plate8. *Uncompleted and abandoned Fertility Shrine of Bongala*



Plate9. *Renovated Fertility shrine of Tala Palace*



Plate10. *Road to a former shrine on a palace vicinity now covered by maize plants*

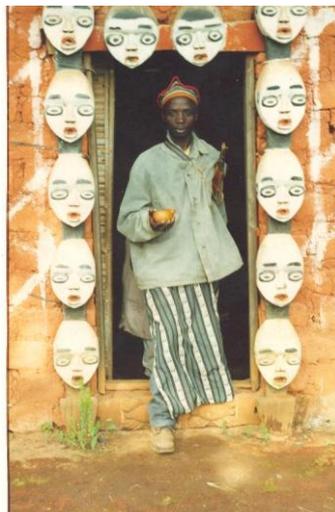


Fig11. *A well protected shrine and its chief priest in the village of Taku*



Fig12. Reception Room of the Fon of Tang now serving as a lodge for some of the works of arts which were rescued from thieves.

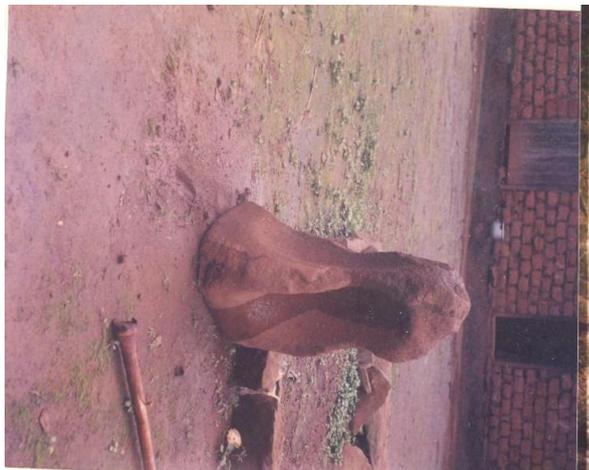


Fig13. Abandoned three face mystical Grinding stone in palace ground. It was formerly in the local palace museums which does not exist anymore

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Dr Richard Tanto Talla holds a B.A in History /Archaeology from Ahmadu Bello University, an MSc in Archaeology and, a PhD in Archaeology and Anthropology from the University of Ibadan, all in Nigeria. He lectures History and Archaeology at the University of Buea since 1995, and was once Head of Service in-charge of Research in the Central administration of this University. Dr Talla has published in several peer reviewed journals and also contributed book chapters. One of his publications is entitled “Palm Wine and Land Disputes in the Mbum land of Cameroon: A Forgotten Legacy?” In Cameroon Journal of Studies in the Commonwealth: A Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed Journal Dedicated to Scientific Research within the Commonwealth Vol. 2 No.1, 2013. He has also attended and presented papers at several international conferences and seminars around the world. His research focus is on using ethnographic, historical and archaeological sources in understanding and reviving aspects of indigenous African cultures (especially in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon), which are today threatened with extinction in this world that has become so globalised. He is currently the Chair, Department of History in the same institution.



Ignatius Song Womai obtained Bachelors and Masters Degrees in History at the University of Buea, Cameroon. After that, he taught with the Catholic mission and also took part-time with the Department of History of the University of Buea. During this interlude, he conducted research on a cross-section of historical and cultural issues in the Grasslands region of Cameroon. After migrating to the United States, he enrolled for doctoral studies at Howard University in the Fall of 2010 with a major in African History and a minor in African Diaspora. He specializes in West, Central, Southern, and Black Atlantic history. His research focuses on: African

Nationalism and Independence; Nation Building in post-colonial Africa; Pan-Africanism; African Political Thought; Anti-neocolonial Activism; African renaissance; African continuities in the Diaspora; Black Power; Afro- centrism; and the history, challenges and experiences of lopsided union minorities in Sub-Saharan Africa. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation.