

3. Ajumbu, Mashi, Mufu, and Mundabli all possess one association whose name, *ntshu*, corresponds to analogous institutions found in Isu and Zhoa (not in the table, see Smith (1929: par.201)).
4. *kwifantɔ*, found in Biya, could recall Kom's *kwifoyn ntu'u*. In alternative, it is to be recalled that in Kom language *nto* means 'royal palace': this gives room to hypothesize that, again under Kom influence, the Biya form could be analyzed as *kwifon nto* "kwifon of the palace".

Now we can sum up the forms that seem to be peculiar to Lower Fungom. It will be noticed that either these are isolated or their diffusion is limited to Mungbam-speaking villages.

1. The names of the associations having "mainly political functions" found in Abar, Biya, and Ngun, can be all reduced to a shared root *-kp(w)VnV-*.
2. The names of the associations having "mainly ritual functions" found in Abar, Biya, Missong, Munken, and Ngun, can be all reduced to a shared root *Vk(w)V*.
3. *kə* and *ntənəyən* are known only from Buu.
4. *fəbafə* is known only from Kung.
5. *olam / nlyam* is known only from Missong.
6. *ji* is known only from Mufu (unsure as to the actual reference of the term).
7. *kwal* is known only from Mundabli (unsure as to the actual reference of the term).

5.3. "Lower Fungom Canon" societies

The data introduced so far constitute only a part, however important, of the terms of cultural comparison that we will use later on. It must be clear at the outset that the names of higher associations should not be confused with the features we present here. In this section we outline twenty individual features—concerning topography and the overall system of sociopolitical institutions—whose distribution, summarized in table 4, has led us to postulate the existence of a cultural type we have for the time being defined "Lower Fungom Canon", a label whose limits have been amply discussed in section 2. The names of the higher secret associations are not directly diagnostic as to the degree of adherence of a given society to our Canon. Rather, the two subsets of sociocultural characteristics contribute independently of one another to reconstruct the history of the Lower Fungom communities, hence providing telling data as to the magnitude of cultural boundaries in the area. In section 6 we will use these data to evaluate the extent to which linguistic boundaries can be accounted for in cultural and historical terms.

5.3.1. List of the "Lower Fungom Canon" features

1. Settlement pattern is not dispersed

Permanent settlements are all characterized by a certain degree of spatial concentration of houses (see also feature 3 below). Individual huts or small

compounds scattered over cultivable land, if any, are occupied only temporarily according with agricultural activities.

2. Central location of the sacred forest

Located at roughly the physical center of the capital village of each polity, in the proximity of the chief's quarter, is a patch of dense forest. This area has a pronounced ritual significance for the village community and for this reason access to it is strictly forbidden to women and foreigners (see also feature 17 below).

3. The capital village of a polity is subdivided into quarters and residence is virilocal

We follow here local usage in calling 'quarter' a residential area internal to the village made of one or a number of compounds. In Lower Fungom Canon societies each quarter is the exclusive residential area of the male members of a distinct patrilineal kin group (in natives' representation). Patrilineal agnatic kinsmen live there together with their wives, children, and divorced (or unmarried) patrilineal agnatic kinswomen with their own offspring. Most commonly each quarter is named after its supposed founder, though it is not rare to find quarters whose names are semantically opaque.

4. Quarters are physically well distinct residential areas

Quarters can be characterized by a more or less compact settlement pattern but a strip of empty land always keeps them separate one another. Such empty strip can be at times so wide to make quarters somewhat closer to appear as discrete hamlets (i.e. Abar, Munken, Ngun).

5. Quarters coincide with exogamous units

This feature is directly related with feature 2 above. Partners must be sought outside of one's quarter as marriage between patrilineal agnatic kin is forbidden.¹²

6. Exogamous units act corporately most clearly in economic and political dimensions

Land is typically owned by such descent groups in the form of an uninterrupted plot only loosely, if at all subdivided among patrikin, who often cooperate in the pursuit of their economic activities, especially during large-scale agricultural practices like the clearing of fields by the use of fire. Resolution of lineage-internal conflicts is a matter dealt with at the level of lineage. In political terms patrilineages constitute the polity's principal interest groups, each of which is represented by a leader, the quarter head.¹³

¹² It is clear that exogamy constraints may well include also the ban on marriage between matrilineal agnatic kin up to a certain genealogical depth. The latter aspect is however still unclear in its details and, in any case, would seem to fall outside of our present goals.

¹³ Patrilineal affiliation mobilizes most of the solidarity phenomena within each polity although it is clear that here like in other nearby areas—like the Menchum valley (cp. Masquelier (1993))—the network of relationships permeating social life is far more complex. First, it must be kept in mind that patrilineages are composed of several segments of shallower genealogical depth, materialized in the residential 'compound' units, which can potentially claim autonomy on all matters (only regarding exogamy their autonomy is

7. Quarter head is a hereditary office and follows paternal or fraternal line

In the case of fraternal inheritance the relationship must be one of either full or half (same father) brothers. Genealogies of quarter heads are in general shallower than those of chiefs (see commentary to features 12 and 13 for more details on the latter).

8. Exogamous units do not seem to act corporately in ritual dimension

This feature has been isolated only *e negativo* on the basis of indirect evidence, that is, scrupulous visits to the villages and interviews. It is remarkable that in Lower Fungom Canon societies ritual institutions (i.e. secret associations as a whole) do not appear to be distributed by quarter. Houses of lower as well as higher secret associations (the latter are locally known as “law houses”) can be found in a number of quarters in each village but are not kin group-based institutions. The former are more pertinent to the struggle among individuals to formalize their prestige. The latter, as pointed out below (see commentary to feature 15), are distributed according to decisions taken at the level of the village: though surely relevant to the prestige of the quarter head, presence of a “law house” in a given quarter does not mean that its particular ritual practices are specifically related with the kin group settled there, but only that the latter is particularly important within the village. In other words, what appears to be missing in Lower Fungom Canon is an institution (i.e. a secret association) whose distribution coincides with kin groups, whose membership is limited to members of the kin group, and whose practices are both conducted by and aimed at the well-being of the kin group and not of the village as a whole.¹⁴

9. The chief has no control over coercive power (see also 12 below)

The chief alone is not able to activate any solidarity phenomena, nor to mobilize the whole village community as a corporate group unless his will is backed by an explicit consensus reached among the quarters’ heads.¹⁵ The major features

conditional on their formalization as fresh lineage/quarter). These smaller segments are relevant especially in diachronic perspective since it is from such generation-segments that new patrilineages may arise through fission (see e.g. Middleton & Tait (1970 [1958]: 4)). In synchronic view and relying on the data presently at hand it is impossible to define the extent to which these minimal lineages are significant in any social activity. For these reasons in this study we will deal only with the (maximal) patrilineages, i.e. those coinciding, at least in the “Lower Fungom Canon”, with quarters. Second, individuals refer to their own matrikin or in-law relations in specific occasions thus making it evident that patrilineal kinship hardly accounts for the whole network of relationships existing within these societies.

¹⁴ Cases like that exemplified in Baeke (2004: 253), in which the researcher has discovered that in Wuli society some associations were quarter- and not village-based only after several months of work in a single village, call for caution in any conclusions we might draw concerning secret associations due to the short duration of our field research.

¹⁵ In this article we make no mention of the fact that villages always accommodate a chief and a “sub-chief”. The former is usually defined by the community as the “Europeans’ chief” or “administrative chief” while the latter is the “traditional chief”. In most cases the present-day “sub-chief” used to be the sole legitimate chief until requirements and opportunities arisen during colonial times imposed him to name another man, usually the

setting the chief apart from the quarters' heads (special share on big game and on any good reaching the village; right to free public work in his farms and possessions in general; prohibition to be touched; conciliatory attitude) are not in any way linked to the control of coercive power. On the contrary, they seem to be motivated exclusively by the fact that the chief is accorded supernatural power by his community in the form of secret ritual knowledge. Yet, chiefs in Lower Fungom Canon societies cannot be defined 'sacred' like they are, for instance, in Bafut, Bum, or Kom (on the last see Chilver & Kaberry (1967: 127) and Nkwi (1976: 48–52)).

10. The chief has no control over reproductive power

Another fact indicating that the chief here is not as sacred as in more centralized polities. He is not entitled to special rights on women—or, conversely, there are no men who are customarily limited in their access to women (see Warnier (1996)).¹⁶

11. Political authority is conditional on membership into higher secret associations

Anyone's authority, even the chief's, is strictly conditional on the successful payment of the extremely costly fees for admission into the higher secret associations (see section 5.1 and commentaries to features 15–18). Should a chief fail to fulfill such requirement he is not dethroned but his authority and the respect he is accorded by his fellow villagers will tangibly decrease. The greatest part of such sums are paid in the form of domestic animals and alcoholic drinks which are meant to be consumed by the members but, by the very nature of the membership representing the whole village, are in fact likely to be redistributed within the community at large. Membership into the higher associations can therefore be viewed as a formalized proof, a 'warranty' of the ability a man of influence has to contribute to the well-being *of the community as a whole*.¹⁷

12. Chief is given supernatural power by higher secret associations

As elsewhere in the region (see e.g. Chilver & Kaberry (1968: 90) for Fungom and Masquelier (1978: 238–241) for Modele), also in Lower Fungom Canon societies the chief is expected to provide "abundance of harvest, of game, and of children" (Pidgin *chop, bush, pikin*) to his fellow villagers and this he can do only as main priest of the higher lodges, i.e. through ritual-magical performances conducted in collaboration with the other members of the higher

head of the most important quarter beside his own, since he himself was expected not to leave his village in accordance with his ritual status (see also Rutherford (1920) on other instances in the area and Ruel (1969: 60–62) for analogous phenomena in the Cross River region). Throughout the article when we speak of chief we refer to the "administrative chief" unless otherwise stated.

¹⁶ The few cases in which the chief does have many wives (apparently always less than ten) are to be explained in economic and political, not in sacred terms.

¹⁷ This seems to be at odds with other similar supra-lineage formalized institutions in weakly centralized societies, like the Ngbe of the Banyang, where the institution is given prestige by the authority that its members obtain according to their personal skills and wealth (see Ruel (1969: 241–42)).

lodges.¹⁸ After being nominated and publicly announced, a new chief must spend a period of varying duration (up to two months) in the house of the "council" (see commentary to feature 16) where he is given "medicines" and revealed secrets by members of both men and women's higher secret associations (see commentaries to features 15–18, and 20).

13. Chief is a hereditary office following paternal or fraternal line

Though the village community can exert considerable influence on the choice of the new chief, mainly thanks to kin groups' political representatives (quarter heads), the office of chief is seldom moved from one patrilineage to another unless as a consequence of major (and on the whole rare) sociopolitical re-adjustments. Inheritance through paternal line seems to be the most common, although in some cases chiefs alternate between two branches of one single (maximal) patrilineage.

14. Chief-list accommodates between six and eight names including the living chief

Too many "socially motivated distortions" (Irvine (1978: 685)) may condition the composition and length of a genealogy, and hence length of a genealogy cannot be taken as an absolute historical clue reflecting, e.g., the antiquity of settlement of a given village or of the establishment of a given chiefly lineage (see e.g. Vansina (1985: 182–185)). However, among such social distortions of genealogical knowledge we must reckon also the so-called "structural time depth" (Vansina (1985: 118)), that is, the possibility that in a given tradition genealogical steps are fixed in number. At the very least, then, genealogies of appreciably different lengths from that stated here can be taken as indexes of a given village's distance from our Canon.

15. Kwifon is not a prerogative of the chief

In all Lower Fungom Canon societies (and in general in Lower Fungom as a whole) we find associations going by the name of *kwifon*. This is an institution original to centralized chiefdoms, like Bum and Kom, where it is a closed regulatory society (Kaberry (1962)) whose membership is in large part determined on the basis of the chiefly lineage's relations and whose main functions include enforcement of as well as monitoring over the chief's power (see e.g. Nkwi (1976: 64–96) and Chilver & Kaberry (1967: 143–144) for Kom and Chilver (1993: 9–15.Jun.1960) for Bum). *Kwifon* of Lower Fungom Canon societies evidently contrasts with this prototype. In particular, (i) its membership is practically mandatory for all the male individuals of a given village / polity provided they pay a small fee, (ii) there can be more than one "house of *kwifon*" in each village, (iii) the distribution of such "houses" is virtually independent of the distribution of traditional authority in much the same way as it is for "lower"

¹⁸ The fact that the traditional, once unique, chief is most often recalled by our consultants as having once been the 'chief of war' indicates that war (and hunt), the two principal communal activities of the village community as a whole, were the basic prerogatives of the office of chief (see also footnote 15). Interestingly, Baeke (2004: 109) tells us that the office of the 'chief of hunt/war', as opposed to the 'chief of rain/agriculture', is connected with the earliest settlers in Lus area.

associations. All this ensures us that *kwifon* has been introduced somewhat recently in Lower Fungom Canon Societies and that here, unlike in more hierarchical ones, it is not in any way linked with the chief's political power (cp. table 3 and see Chilver & Kaberry (1968: 89–90) and Geary (1979: 60–65) for similar conclusions concerning nearby Weh).¹⁹

16. Higher associations do not include *kwifon* and are basically of two types

In Lower Fungom Canon societies we find only two higher associations (see section 5.2 for their definition) and *kwifon* is not one of them, rather, it is to be considered a "lower association" (see above). One, possessing more pronounced juridical and political functions, we call here the "council". The other, embodying the fundamental ritual-magical resource for a village community, we call here "highest lodge". Functionally analogous institutions are found throughout Lower Fungom (see table 3) but when in the following we will use the terms "council" and "highest lodge" we will refer to a whole "system", as it were, which is instead peculiar to Lower Fungom Canon societies only.

17. Higher associations are reported to be original to the village

Feature 17 is of the utmost importance to understand the role these institutions play in a given village / polity. They provide the village community with means to organize social life and with common values that transcend lineage affiliation (on the importance of analogous institutions in Weh see Geary (1979: 71) and for the fundamental role played by them in processes of village formation (see Horton (1972: 101–103)). From this perspective it is conceivable that consultants may be inclined to represent the lynchpin on which reposes the identity of the village community as a whole not as an acquisition from an outside source but as an ancestral institution.

18. In both "council" and "highest lodge" membership is equally distributed by quarter

Both are open only to the quarters' heads plus the chief and membership, though evidently hereditary as are these offices, is conditional on the payment of extremely high fees. Such constraint on membership cuts across lineage affiliation and is not based on struggle for personal prestige. Their principles lie in the allocation of legitimate authority among the men of the village. Their functions emphasize the duties of a somewhat stable hierarchy based on eldership and equally distributed among the quarters. For these reasons higher secret associations are to be seen as the clearest embodiments of the village as a sociopolitical unit (see also section 5.2).

19. "Council", not the "highest lodge" can have more than one seat

Difference in function between "council" and "highest lodge" is reflected in the distribution and form of their meeting places. The "council" may have more

¹⁹ Some institutions documented by Baeke among the Wuli of Lus, all connected with the earliest "layer" of secret associations (Baeke (2004: 333)), appear to closely recall our *kwifon*. This parallel between Wuli and Lower Fungom societies, on the whole culturally and economically similar to each other, suggests the possibility that *kwifon* was not introduced *e novo* in our area but that it replaced existing institutions of the same kind. See also our proposal in section 8.

than one “house” and more than one open-air assembly place (circle of stone-slab seats) within the village. Its distribution always reflects relations of historical primacy—the status of being the first arrived in the history of the village—or of power among quarters: in any case the establishment of a house of the council seems to be the result of a communal decision taken at the level of the village in order to materialize the importance of a given kin group. The “highest lodge” has instead only one, open-air assembly place located in the sacred forest, the holiest spot within the village / polity boundaries (see section 3 above) where we find a circle of stone slabs as seats, some vertical stones stuck into the ground, and sometimes a house made of vegetal materials only.²⁰

20. There are two women’s secret associations

Higher lodges and kwifon are of exclusively male membership, yet also women have their own secret associations. These amount to two in each village and differ one another in as much the same way as the inner circles of the highest lodge differ from the lodge itself, i.e. one is more exclusive and hence requiring a costlier admission fee than the other. There is an important ritual-magical side in these associations (see commentary to feature 12) but data at hand are too scarce in this regard.²¹

5.3.2. Using our Canon for comparative purposes

With the exception of few implication-rich features (especially features 8, 15, and 18), the sole tenable use we can make of such an oversimplified illustration lies in considering it in purely quantitative terms with no emphasis on little variations. The table above has the principal merit of exemplifying rather clearly the reasons that have led us to devise the label “Lower Fungom Canon”. There appears to be a threshold in the distribution: seven villages possess 85 percent or higher similarity with the Canon, the remaining have only 70 percent or less such similarity. The former are here labeled “Lower Fungom Canon societies”, the latter “non-Lower Fungom Canon societies”. Particularly striking degrees of divergence from the Canon (less than 50 percent) are found in Fang, Koshin, and Kung.

If we project these data upon the distribution of languages we obtain a remarkable degree of coincidence between our Lower Fungom Canon and the two language clusters of the area. In fact, with the only exceptions of Missong and

²⁰ As we have seen in table 3, within the highest lodge there can be one or more inner circles, i.e. progressively more secret and hence powerful magical-ritual lodges whose membership seems to be determined by either historical primacy or, more rarely, by political prominence among the quarters. Some of them have special meeting places, always in the open, but the scarcity of data at hand does not allow us to take them in consideration here.

²¹ It is interesting to note that the women’s associations more commonly accorded the highest status in Lower Fungom all go by names recalling Kom *fymbwen* (cp. Nkwi (1976: 129–130)), also recorded in Aghem, Fungom, Mmen, Isu, and Zhoa under slightly different names (see Kaberry (2003 [1952]: 99)). On the contrary, the names of most of the remaining associations, all sharing a *-shaam-* root, seem to be peculiar to this area (see Kaberry (2003 [1952]: 99)).

Mundabli (the latter being more incompletely documented, though), villages where either Mungbam or Ji varieties are spoken are also the sole “Lower Fungom Canon societies”. Conversely, the four one-village languages (Ajumbu, Fang, Koshin, Kung) and the only Beboid language found in the area (Naki) show to be spoken in villages whose cultural patterns seem particularly distant from the Lower Fungom Canon. In the following section we analyze more in detail the distribution of all the features introduced so far and propose some interpretations.

Village	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Tot.		
Abar (M)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	20	
Ajumbu	x	-	x	-	x	x	?	?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	n.a.	n.a.	-	11	(2)	
Biya (M)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	18	
Buu (J)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	n.a.	x	x	18	
Fang	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	?	x	x	?	x	x	-	x	-	?	x	x	9	(3)	
Koshin	x	-	x	-	x	x	?	?	-	-	?	-	x	-	-	-	x	n.a.	n.a.	-	6	(3)	
Kung	x	x	-	-	-	x	?	x	?	?	?	?	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	8	(5)	
Mashi	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	-	n.a.	-	14		
Missong (M)	x	-	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	12		
Mufu (J)	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	?	18	(1)
Mundabli (J)	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	?	x	?	?	?	14	(4)	
Munken (M)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	?	x	x	-	x	17	(2)	
Ngun (M)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	20	

Table 4: Lower Fungom Canon features in all the villages observed. x = feature is present, - = feature is absent, ? = unknown, n.a. = not applicable. In the ‘Village’ column (M) and (J) stand for Mungbam and Ji respectively and identify the affiliation of the language spoken in the village according to Good et al. (2011). In the ‘Total’ column the numbers of ‘unknown’ are enclosed in parentheses. It is to be noted that in the case of Buu the essentially historical purposes of our research have obliged us to include what we had witnessed in old Buu (abandoned in 1972, see section 7.1.) so to get a historically sounder picture for features 2-5.

6. Deviations from Lower Fungom Canon and their historical interpretation

In this section we shall be concerned with all the villages instantiating more or less pronounced deviations from our proposed Canon. Sociocultural features (section 5.3) are considered along with the names of higher associations (section 5.2) and with oral history, colonial documents, and linguistic observations. Our goal is to analyze the historical significance of these deviations, to assess the extent to which they can constitute cultural boundaries, and to begin shedding some light on their likely consequences / co-occurrences in linguistic terms. We shall analyze first (section 6.1) the most distant societies from our Canon—those possessing 14 features or less out of the 20 proposed above—beginning from the less surprising ones (i.e. those whose languages are affiliated with groups located