

# THE VENERATION OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN PHARAONIC EGYPT AND THE KOM FONDOM (NORTH WEST CAMEROON)

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## **Abstract**

*Be it in antiquity or contemporary Africa, political institutions have always stood out exceptional. In Ancient Egypt, the Pharaoh and the Tjati rose above all else in the society and were thus, revered by all. This was a similar case in the Kom Fondom in present North West Cameroon where the Fòyn and the Kfɛ'ìfòyn emerged distinctively and commanded total reverence from the ordinary people. This article therefore, answers the question of the venerated value attached to these political institutions and how the veneration of these institutions was unique in character to Negro-culture. This warrants the audacious conclusion of the cultural unity of the peoples of black Africa. The article is the outcome of written, oral, linguistic, iconographical and onomastic sources and adopts the descriptive, analytical and comparative approaches.*

**Keywords:** *Pharaoh, Fòyn, Tjati, Kfɛ'ìfòyn.*

## **Résumé**

*Que ce soit dans l'antiquité ou dans l'Afrique contemporaine, les institutions politiques se sont toujours distinguées par leur caractère exceptionnel. Dans l'Égypte ancienne, le pharaon et le tjati se démarquaient de tous les autres membres de la société et étaient donc vénérés par tous. Il en était de même dans le Royaume Kom, dans l'actuel Nord-Ouest du Cameroun, où le Fòyn et le Kfɛ'ìfòyn se sont démarqués de manière distincte et ont suscité la vénération totale des populations ordinaires. Cet article répond donc à la question de la valeur vénérée attachée à ces institutions politiques et à la façon dont cette vénération de ces institutions était unique en nègre-culture. Cela justifie la conclusion audacieuse de l'unité culturelle des peuples d'Afrique noire. Le présent article est le résultat de sources écrites, orales, linguistiques, iconographiques et onomastiques et adopte les approches descriptive, analytique et comparative.*

**Mots-clés:** *Pharaon, Fòyn, Tjati, Kfɛ'ìfòyn*

## **Introduction**

Whether or not the ancient Egyptians were the ancestors of given peoples in contemporary black Africa as the debate continues, what is clear is that they shared a common cultural identity. Current scientific research has proven that there are areas of similarity between

the culture of the ancient Egyptians and given peoples in contemporary black Africa. One of these areas is the venerated value which Africans gave to their political institutions be it in the antiquity period (Ancient Egypt) or the contemporary period (for which we take the Kom *Fondom* in present Cameroon as our case study). This article surfaces to put to question the comparative nature of some political institutions in Pharaonic Egypt to those in contemporary black Africa taking the Kom *Fondom* in the Cameroon Grassfields as an exemplary case.

The two institutions under study here are the pharaoh in Egypt and the *Fòyn* in Kom which was royal power and the *Tjaty* in Egypt and the *Kfi Ìfòyn* in Kom which executed this royal power. In order to come out with such a comparative study, written, oral, linguistic, iconographical and onomastic sources were consulted. This resulted in the following research questions: What were the political institutions of Pharaonic Egypt and the Kom *Fondom* and how were they distinguished? What exceptional values were attached to these institutions that gave them such venerated powers? How were these institutions in Pharaonic Egypt similar to those of Kom that made them unique to Negro-culture? Consequently, a proper study of these political institutions reveals that the pharaoh in Egypt and the *Fòyn* in Kom exercised a highly venerated royal power and distinguished themselves from the ordinary by royal regalia. This royal power was executed by the *Tjati* and the *Kfi Ìfòyn* respectively. Also, and very important to note is that, these institutions were highly revered by all in the society wherever their jurisdiction extended. Lastly, a comparative look at these political institutions reveal a uniqueness in character to Negro-culture as the pharaoh in Egypt and the *Fòyn* in Kom portrayed similar characteristics as well as the *Tjaty* in Egypt and the *Kfi Ìfòyn* in Kom although separated by time and space. So to speak, a proper analysis of the subject divides the body into two parts; a part 1 which discusses the royal power commanded by the pharaoh in Egypt and the *Fòyn* in Kom and a part 2 which discusses the executive power held by the *Tjaty* in Egypt and the *Kfi Ìfòyn* in Kom.

## 1. Royal Power: The Pharaoh in Egypt and the *Fòyn* in Kom

Royal power in ancient Egypt was commanded by the pharaoh and in Kom by the *Fòyn*. They were the supreme authorities in the society and their veneration of royal power was unquestionable because it descended from divine beings.

### 1.1. Authority and responsibility

The Egyptian principle of theogamy shows that the pharaohs were descendants of the gods on earth. The first Egyptian pharaoh was the god Osiris who was sent on earth by the Sun god Ra. Many Egyptian king lists like the Turin Canon and Manetho's *Aegyptiaca* all attest that the pioneer pharaohs of the pre-Dynastic period (ca. 5300-3000 BC) were gods who had received rulership from Osiris's son and Falcon-god, Horus (VALBELLE, 2004 : 84); reason why they went by the name of Horus. Royalty was handed to the pharaohs right from conception as Egyptian records have it that the god Amon often took the form of the reigning pharaoh and give to the queen, through semen, sons that would continue the heritage of the divine throne (TRASSARD, 2002 : 92). Thus came the pharaoh into the world of the living as a divine descendant with the powers and authority to rule over children of the gods. This explains why the pharaoh was also known by the Egyptians as *hm-ntr* (*hem-netjer*) meaning the "servant of god", *ntr-nfr* (*netjer-nefer*) meaning the "perfect god" and *S3 R* (*Sa Ra*) meaning the "son of the sun god, Ra" because he was the link between the gods and mankind.

The pharaoh was the Supreme Being in the entire Egypt. He was the *nsw-bity* (*Nesu-bity*) meaning the "King of Upper and Lower Egypt"; that is, the Nile valley region and the delta region. He was also the *nb-t3ny* (*neb-tany*) meaning the "Lord of the two lands (i. e. Upper and Lower Egypt)". He was the highest authority and the most revered in all of Egypt. His rule was manifested through royal decrees which were to be meticulously respected (VALBELLE, 2004 : 87).

As for the *fòyn* in the Kom *Fondom*, according to an interview with Kom palace notables, he was a descendant of the python-king Tàṅnakoli, the Kom ruler who transformed into a python and led the Kom people to their present location in the Bamenda Grassfields.

Tàṅnakoli was still considered to be the one ruling Kom through the person of the *fôyn*. Upon succession, the *fôyn* was initiated through rituals into all the secret and sacred societies of the *fondom*; he was the only one in the entire *fondom* in such a position and no one else had access to all the palace lodges and *fondom* societies. This is what gave him the unique symbol of the unity of the *fondom* (NKWI and WARNIER, 1982 : 61). That is why in Kom, it is never said that the *fôyn* has died; instead it is said that he is “missing”. He was never talked about openly as an individual and any talk about him was indirectly or metaphorically. For example, if he was sick, it was never said that “the *fôyn* is sick” but that “there is sickness in the palace” or “that the palace is feverish”. His wives and children were not referred to as the *fon*’s wives and children (*Gbi kè-i fôyn* and *woyn fôyn*) but as the wives and children of the palace (*Gbi kè-i nto*’ and *woyn nto*) (NGAM, 2012 : 104). He was, thus, an earthly incarnation of the gods; the intermediary between the gods, the living and the unborn.

The *fôyn* in Kom was the supreme ruler of the land and an incarnation of the customs and traditions of the people. He was the symbol of truth and an embodiment of unity. He was a mythical figure revered and venerated by all. He was an extraordinary, immortal and sacred personality epitomized by the royal regalia. He was infallible in all his decisions for he was guided by the gods. All political powers were vested on him and he was the head of all institutions in Kom. He had a special relationship with the leopard for the leopard all over the Cameroon Grassfields was believed to be so elevated above other animals as to have the status of a human being. Thus, it was believed that he could transform into a leopard and so had an exclusive right on slain leopards and on leopard pelts (NKWI and WARNIER, 1982 : 61). That is why hunters who killed a leopard were decorated as courageous warriors in recognition of their bravery. He was also associated with a host of other animals such as the buffalo, the python and the elephant. That is why he went by praise names reserved only for him such as *Châ-miŋfô* meaning “king of all things”, *Nyam-abo* meaning “leopard” which was a symbol of supremacy and *Nyam ngvîm* meaning “python”. He was always addressed as *Mbè* meaning “father” and anyone addressing him did so with a bowed head (NSOM, 2015 : 17).

He was an embodiment of the society; he was hyper-social and hyper-cultural. While the cultural universe was seen as polluting, the hyper-cultural *fôyn* was seen as a blessing and a constantly regenerating factor in the Kom. He was the link between the ancestors, the world of spirits and the world of the living which guaranteed social order and the prosperity of the society. That is why he was never involved with the world of pollution and danger; he belonged to the opposite pole of human society which is free from pollution and danger. For example, he never ate in public, he never shook hands with anybody, he never saw a corpse and never saw anyone who came to the palace to announce someone's death and he did not take part in wedding ceremonies, not even his own, for these were part of the polluting world (NKWI and WARNIER, 1982 : 61).

Among the pharaoh's responsibilities, he was to ensure the triumph of justice and good governance in Egypt as well as the smooth functioning of the cosmic order to the best interest of the gods as illustrated by this excerpt from the coronation ceremony of Tuthmosis I around 1504 BC:



Source: (SOMET, 2007 : 117).

#### TRANSLATION

The King's decree on the royal son and governor of the Touri southern countries: 'See, you are brought this decree of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt to let you know that my majesty, may he live, prosper, be in health, appears in glory (was crowned) as King of Upper and Lower Egypt on the

throne of Horus of the living. There will never be his like again until eternity! My titulary is as follows:

Horus: Victorious bull, beloved of Maat.

The Two Ladies: The one who appears in glory as the royal serpent, great in power.

The Golden Horus: Fortunate in years, the one who makes hearts live.

The King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Aakheperkare.

The son of Ra: Djehuty-mes (that is, Tuthmosis I), may he live forever and ever.

Therefore, you shall permit the giving of worthy offerings to the gods who are in the South by doing what is worth praising in the best interest of the life, the prosperity and the health of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Aakheperkare, may he be granted life. You shall also permit the taking of firm oaths through the name of my majesty, may he live, prosper, be in health who brought to life (the Lady) Seniseneb, may she be in good health. This is a message to let you know that the royal palace is safe and sound'. This was copied in year one, third month of *peret* (the germination season), the twenty-first day, the day of the coronation ceremony (the *Kbau*).

In this excerpt, the pharaoh is commanded to serve Egypt towards prosperity because asking the pharaoh to do “what is worth praising in the best interest of the life, the prosperity and the health of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt” is actually asking him to serve Egypt’s interest for the pharaoh meant Egypt.

The pharaoh also controlled the army and all internal and external affairs of Egypt. Particularly, he reserved the right of the conduct of foreign politics (GRANDET, 2004: 94). He was also at the command of the legislature for his decisions were divine as handed down to him by Djehuty, the Egyptian god of wisdom (BONHEME and FORGEAU, 1988: 116).

In like manner, the *fdyn* in Kom was the father of all in the *fondom* and had the divine responsibility of upholding the principle of justice. He controlled the Kom army and was chief judge in the Supreme Court in the Kom palace. He was the hishest spiritual

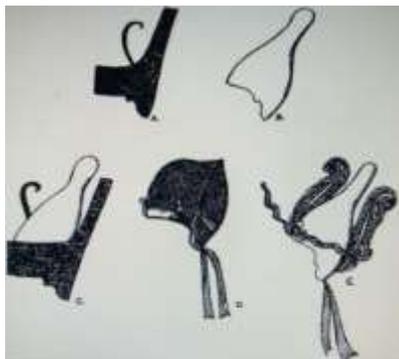
authority in the land and offered sacrifices to the gods believed to nourish the people's relations with the gods and assure continuity and prosperity. It was for this reason that the *ḥn* did not shake hands with anybody which could reduce his powers. He held the absolute power of declaring war, making peace and negotiating alliances.

It is therefore clear from the above analyses that the pharaoh in Egypt and the *Fḥn* in Kom were institutions of royal power commanding a lot of reverence from the people that they were charged by the gods to rule. They were not just administrators but earthly incarnations of divine beings from whom they had taken the power and authority to rule.

### **1.2. Distinguished Regalia**

Since the pharaoh in Egypt and the *Fḥn* in the Kom *Fondom* were extraordinary beings among their people, there were a set of symbolic royal regalia that distinguished them from the ordinary. Beginning with the pharaoh, it is probable to say he had a crown for every occasion. Firstly, there was the Double Crown worn by the pharaoh to symbolize his authority over Upper and Lower Egypt. The Double Crown was known as the *shnty* (*Sekhemty*) or the *Wrrt* (*ureret*) which was a fusion of the *Dšrt* (*Desberet*) or the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and the *Hdt* (*Hedjet*) or the White Crown of Upper Egypt. The combination of the two crowns became a telling and highly evocative symbol of the unity of Egypt. Its name *Sekhemty* signifies “the Two Powerful Ones” – the “two” being Upper and Lower Egypt. The *Sekhemty* gave the pharaoh the legitimacy and power to govern over Egypt. There were many other crowns that the pharaoh wore (see Fig. 1) depending on the occasion. There was also the *Nms* (*Nemes*) which was a royal “hair dress” of white cloth and blue lines (see Fig. 2).

*Fig. 1: A. The Desheret or the basket crown of Lower Egypt; B. the Hedjet or the white war helmet of Upper Egypt; C. the Sekhemty or Wereret, double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt; D. the Khepresh or the blue electrum war helmet; E. the Atef or Hembemet, the ram's horn crown worn during religious ceremonies.*



Source: (BUNSON, 2002 : 90)

*Fig. 2: Funerary mask of Tutankhamon showing the Nemes and the Uraeus*



Source: [www.antikforever.com/Egypte](http://www.antikforever.com/Egypte). Consulted on 12 June 2016 at 7:20pm.

At the forefront of every crown or *nemes*, there was always the *Uraeus* (see Fig. 2). It was a combination of *W3dt* (*Wadjet*), the cobra goddess of Lower Egypt and *Nḥbt* (*Nekhbet*), the vulture goddess of Upper Egypt. The *Uraeus* was a symbol of royalty and divine force.

There was equally the pair of sceptres that was attributed to the pharaoh; the *Nḥh* (*nekhbekh*) and the *Hk3t* (*heqat*). The *nekhbekh* was a whip which symbolised the authority of the pharaoh over his people while the *heqat* was a rod with a hook-like end which symbolised the pharaoh as a shepherd charged with the duty of guiding and leading his people.

In the Kom *Fondom*, the *Fôyn* wore the ancestral cap which was known as *Afol-a Fôyn*. It was a symbol of the authority of the *fôyn* over his people. He was obliged to wear it at all times in public because during coronation, his head was anointed in spiritual and mythical rituals that gave him the force and wisdom to govern. Unlike in Egypt where there were unique crowns for the pharaoh, the *fôyn* in Kom did not wear any specific ancestral cap for a unique occasion. But any cap on his head was an ancestral cap and he could never appear in public without it on his head. What made whatever ancestral cap unique was the spiritual force that it carried with it. Anyone who intentionally took it off from the *fôyn's* head manifested the denial of the authority of the *fôyn* which was the highest offense of treason in the Kom *Fondom* (TABUWE, 2001: 211).

Also, there was the *Achi-a fôyn* which was the royal stool and reserved only for the *fôyn*. It carried with it designs of totems and important figures of ancestors who had contributed in making Kom history great. The *fôyn* sat on it both in the Kom palace and wherever he went for a visit. It accompanied the *fôyn* wherever he went and represented royal power and the *fôyn's* authority.

Fig. 3: *The Achi-a fôyn* (Royal stool)



Source: (LUKONG, 2016 : 251)

Another royal reservation for the *fôyn* was the *Gvi nyàmabo* which was a leopard skin (see Fig. 3). The leopard was an animal of power and symbolised greatness and fear. Only the Kom *fôyn* could sit on the *Gvi nyàmabo* in the entire Kom *Fondom*. Any leopard caught wherever in the Kom land was taken to the Kom palace as a sign of loyalty to the *fôyn*. The *fôyn* sat on the *Gvi nyàmabo* as the overlord of the Kom *Fondom* and the supreme authority in the land.

Also, the *fôyn* was the only one who could sit and place his feet on *Asoŋ-a àtàm* which were elephant tusks (see Fig 3). The *Asoŋ-a àtàm* symbolised the greatness of the *fôyn* and his fatherly role over the Kom people.

Lastly, there was the *Igboŋ-i nto'* which was the royal staff. It symbolised power, approval or sanctions and was venerated by all. It was the highest instrument of diplomatic power and authority in the Kom *Fondom* for it represented the *fôyn* and was an approval of his authority wherever it went. It was the entire Kom *Fondom* condensed into one. It was carried along by the *Kfi'ifôyn* to justify the *fôyn's* total approval during important announcements and declarations in any part

of the Kom *Fondom*, during official royal negotiations and during important diplomatic missions.

All these regalia go a long way to demonstrate that the pharaoh in Egypt and the *fòyn* in Kom were extraordinary among their folk in Negro-culture. The regalia distinguished them from the ordinary and gave additional value to the venerated power that they commanded.

## 2. Executive Power: The *Tjaty* in Egypt and the *Kfifòyn* in Kom

Apart from the pharaoh in Egypt and the *fòyn* in Kom who commanded royal power, there was also executive power that was commanded by the *Tjati* in Egypt and the *Kfifòyn* in Kom. Though the *Tjati* in Egypt was an individual title while the *Kfifòyn* in Kom was a group of individuals, both institutions constituted similar duties; assistance in the execution of royal command.

### 2.1. *The authority of the Tjaty in Egypt and the Kfifòyn in Kom*

The word “vizier” has been misleadingly used in Egyptology to mean the *Tjaty* as an institution. This is misleading because the word “vizier” comes from the Arabic word *wazīr* which means “bearer of burden” and it was a ministerial title applied to high government officials who were state councillors during the Abbasid caliphate from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (JAMES, 1988: 53-54). This does not really liken it to the *Tjaty* as an institution of power in Egypt. In the same line of reasoning, we cannot exactly translate the word *Kfifòyn* into English because of the varied power it possessed in the Kom *Fondom* and its role in the society.

An appointee of the pharaoh, the *Tjaty* was the closest collaborator of the pharaoh and lived in the palace with him (BIERBRIER, 2008: 251). He supervised the entire pharaoh’s works on behalf of the pharaoh as well as the activities of all the scribes and the royal archives. He executed royal directives and gave reports to the pharaoh. His authority was extended to the farthest ends of Egypt; he delegated his powers into specific duties headed by scribes.

In the Kom *Fondom*, *Kfi'ifōyn* was made up of high moral ranking officials initiated and trained in the philosophy of traditional statecraft and administration known as *Nchisi-ndo*. Because they distinguished themselves by demonstrating a mastery of tradition, high moral integrity and strict respect for the laws and institutions of the land, they were therefore the representatives of the *fōyn* in their various villages of origin (NGAM, 2012: 113).

*Kfi'ifōyn* was headed by a *Bòbé Kfi'ifōyn* appointed randomly by the *fōyn* from among the members of *Kfi'ifōyn* depending on the person's patriotism and respect for the laws and traditions of Kom. The *Kfi'ifōyn* in the Kom *Fondom* exercised executive and judicial powers and was the supreme law making body in the *fondom* (NGAM, 2012: 112). It was an instrument of the *fōyn's* secular authority. Its authority was anonymous and its members could not be judged.

## 2.2. ***The responsibility of the Tjati in Egypt and the Kfi'ifōyn in Kom***

The role of the *Tjati* was the most delicate in the day-to-day life of Egypt. The *Tjati* was in charge of administering absolute justice all over Egypt in conformity with the Egyptian principle of *Maat* which was justice, goodness, righteousness and balance (GRANDET, 2004 : 95). This is illustrated in excerpts from the various tombs of New Kingdom *Tjati* like Rekhmire, Useramon, Hepu, Amenemope and Paser which defined the functions of the *Tjati* as he assumed power (JAMES, 1988 : 61). His responsibilities included the maintenance of public order, tax collection, organization of archives, supervision of all state employees, supervision of land distribution, protection of state property and ensuring the triumph of justice. The office of the *Tjati* was of vital importance in the day-to-day life of Egypt. His administration was extended to all the corners of Egypt as “reporters” were stationed at least one in every province to report their activities to him.

In like manner, the *Kfi'ifōyn* in the Kom *Fondom* was responsible for implementing executive, legislative and judicial decisions all over the *Fondom*. It was represented in every village in Kom by its members known as the *Nchisi-ndo*. It was the regent administrative body at the loss of a *fōyn* until the new *fōyn* was installed.

It communicated with the gods to detect an impending danger in the land. It was equally the diplomatic organ of the Kom *Fondom* and its importance in the conduct of diplomacy was recognized by the neighbouring *fondoms*. In this capacity, it represented the *fôyn* during the mortuary celebrations of the death of Kom diplomatic-partner *fons* and renewed diplomatic links. It negotiated treaties, alliances and diplomatic (inter-royal) marriages with other *fondoms*.

This analysis of the authority and responsibilities of the *Tjati* in Egypt and the *Kfî'îjôyn* in Kom justify that these two institutions were revered by all in the society. Also, it illustrates that the two institutions were similar in character answering the question of the similarity between the political institutions of Ancient Egypt and the Kom *Fondom*.

## **Conclusion**

On a conclusive note, the political systems of Pharaonic Egypt and of the Kom *Fondom* were similar in character despite being separated by time and space. At the head of the society in Egypt was the pharaoh, just like the *fôyn* in Kom, who was a divine representation on earth charged with governing the children of the gods, maintaining justice and cosmic order and ensuring prosperity on behalf of the gods. They commanded royal power venerated by the ordinary people to the fullest and distinguished themselves through a set of symbolic royal regalia. Their royal directives were executed by the *Tjati* and the *Kfî'îjôyn* respectively. The *Tjati* in Egypt and the *Kfî'îjôyn* in Kom extended their executive role to the entirety of their jurisdiction under the respective guidance of the pharaoh and the *fôyn*. At the end of it all, we can understand that the prosperity of the famous Egyptian civilisation and the emergence of Kom as a giant kingdom in the Cameroon Grassfields can be attributed to the veneration of their political institutions. The political systems of modern African republics, handicapped by numerous socio-political and economic crises, can therefore look up to the original Negro-African institutions as a model to rebalance their governance policies and enjoy prosperity.

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