

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

- The Kamba Tribe of Kenya, also called Akamba. (1)
- Speak the Kamba (also called Kekamba or Kikamba) language. (2)
- Dialect: “Masaku, South Kitui, North Kitui, Mumoni. Lexical similarity: 67% with Gikuyu, 66% with Embu, 63% with Chuka, 57%–59% with Meru” (2)
- Northeastern Bantu language (2)

1.2 ISO code:

- ISO 639-3: kam (2)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

- The Kamba tribe is located in the Eastern Province of Kenya. (1)
- “Their homeland stretches east from Nairobi towards the Tsavo and northeast to Embu.” (1)
- More specifically can be found in the “Machakos and Kitui districts; Coast Province, Kwale District.” (2)
- No information can be found on exact latitude/longitude locations, as they appear to be relatively spread out.

1.4 Brief history:

- “Kambas were involved in the long distance trade during the pre-colonial period. In the mid-eighteenth century, a large number of Akamba pastoral groups moved eastwards towards the Tsavo and Kibwezi areas along the coast. This migration was the result of extensive drought and a lack of pasture for their cattle. The Kambas settled in the Mariakani, Kisauni and Kinango areas of the coast of Kenya, creating the beginnings of urban settlement. They still reside in large numbers in these towns, and have become absorbed into the cultural, economic and political life of the modern-day Coast Province.” (1)
- The British took over much of the Kamba land and pushed the Kamba to reservations. They fought back, but ultimately “were quick to realize that western-style education, as provided by missionary schools, was the key to getting on in the new climate, with the inevitable result that the old traditions were rapidly lost.” (4)
- “Colonialism subverted Kenya's cultures and indigenous educational, legal and political systems.” (4)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

- “Colonialism subverted Kenya's cultures and indigenous educational, legal and political systems. For example, missionaries denounced and colonial authorities progressively restricted and banned wathi - the regular gatherings and celebrations held by the Kamba. The colonialists assailed the local religions, denying them any validity or usefulness, and maligning them as “heathen”.” (4)
- British colonialism pushed the Kamba to reservations and destroyed much of their culture. (4)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- Land is not very productive, and was therefore less attractive to European settlers. (4)
 - Have “poorly fertile land, natural erosion.” (4)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

- Population is approximately 3,960,000 and increasing in size (2).
- Numbers on mean village size, home range size, and density are not well known

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- Many of the Kamba eat “sorghum, millet, maize, beans, peas, sweet potatoes, yams, cassava, sugarcane, bananas.” (2)
- “Their staple food is isyo also known as githeri.” This food is maize mixed with peas or beans. (2)
- “During the rainy seasons and along the riverbeds, Kambas grow fruits and vegetables such as cabbage, collards, bananas, mangoes, oranges and other tropical edibles.” (1)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- Protein sources are “cattle, sheep, goats.” (2)
- Chicken is also popular (1)

2.3 Weapons:

- Basic tools and bows and arrows are used, the elders help with “making arrows.” (1)

2.4 Food storage:

- Staple foods such isyo are popular because they can be dried and stored for use during poor weather or frequent seasons of drought (1)
- Food is typically not stored unless dried. Drought can be devastating. (1)

2.5 Sexual division of production:

- Men are in charge of trading, hunting or cattle herding. (1)
 - Man of the household “is known as *Nau*, *Tata* or *Asa*.” (1)
- Women are the workforce behind the land and crops after she joins her husband and his household. (1)
 - “She supplies the bulk of the food consumed by her family. She grows maize, millet, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, beans, pigeon peas, greens, arrowroot and cassava.” (1)

2.6 Land tenure:

- “Virtually all Kamba regard wealth – in land or cattle or both – as a major goal in life.” (7)
- Properties are occupied and managed by large, extended families. (1)

2.7 Ceramics:

- Woodcarving is a popular trade. (2)
 - “Kamba people have special skills in woodcarving and basketry. They are also involved in other activities such as hunting, farming and pastoralism.” (1)
- Weaved baskets, sculptures, and carvings are sold in shops and galleries in major Kenyan cities. (1)
- “The men do the carving while Kamba women weave and decorate the fine work in baskets and pottery.” (1)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

- “All Kamba agree on the basic importance of the clan, and all give the same reason for its importance: the clan will help a man if he gets into serious trouble. The clan clearly provides a kind of security in a very fluid system.” In other words, they help each other survive. (7)

2.9 Food taboos:

- None found.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- None found. Most Kamba life is spent herding or farming. Canoes and watercraft are not needed.

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

- No information found

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

- No information found

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

- Unknown.
- “Initiation into maturity was demonstrated with circumcision, for males and many females as well but after female circumcision got officially banned in Kenya, many have decided to abandon it.” (6)

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

- Women who gave birth before age 18 is 26% (9)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

- Large families varying in size. Took care of land and food together (1)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

- No information found

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

- Male adolescents aged 15-19 who are married is 0% (9)
- Female adolescents aged 15-19 who are married is 12% (9)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

- No information found

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

- No information found

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry:

- Dowry is needed for marriage.
 - “Before marriage, a man must pay a bride price made in the form of cattle, sheep and goats, to the family of the bride.” (1)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

- Traditionally the mother is in charge of taking care of and raising the children (1)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

- No information found

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

- Exogamy not common

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

- Males are providers for the family, but females are in charge of the children (1)

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

- Mother is in charge of raising the children fully. (1)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

- No. Knowledge of contraception is relatively high. (9)

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

- Evidence that women are beaten by husbands regularly, no evidence that rape is acceptable (9)

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

- None

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

- “It is also characteristic of the Kamba that they show a strong emphasis on individualism and freedom of choice within broadly defined limits” (7)
- Evidence that over half of all women believe that their husbands are justified in beating them (9)

- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- None
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- Large, extended family treats children as if they are their own. (1)
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- None found
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- None
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- None found
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- Family and staying close together are important to the Kamba people. (1)
 - “(Children) often move from one household to another with ease, and are made to feel at home by their parents' siblings.” (1)
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- None found
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- Children are given the names of the deceased, land shared with males and their wives (1)
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- Relatives are handled as family, no evidence that they are viewed sexually/romantically. (1)(6)(7)
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?
- Weddings last for an extended period of time of about two weeks. The Kamba are fans of parties and special events. (6)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- Traditionally named after special events or season around the time of birth. (1)
 - “Children can also be named after a living or departed relative, depending on the parents' relationship with the person.” (1)
 - No evidence of name change, as names are sacred.
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)
- Traditionally tend to keep in community (6)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?
- No information found.
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:
- None.

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- No statistics found. Life expectancy of females as compared to males is 104% (9)
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
- Unknown. Relatively peaceful
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- Unknown. Relatively peaceful
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):
- In the early years of British colonization, the Kamba were involved in occasional bloody incidents. When they were pushed to reservations, the amount of rebellion declined and assimilation to British way of life began. (4)
 - Calm relations with neighboring societies. (4)
- 4.18 Cannibalism?
- None.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
- No consistent evidence. Large extended families are traditional.
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):
- Stationary. Plants and livestock are sufficient for year round. (1)
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):
- “The family is central to the life of the community.” (1)
 - “The Kamba have no supreme chief – indeed, they have no indigenous chiefs at all and no tribal council. Each local community, known as a utui, is in theory autonomous and, in fact, there are few occasions in Kamba life which require the joint effort of persons from more than one utui.” (7)
 - “They lack chiefs with formal authority and restrict governmental units to the local community level, but even on the utui level the system is elastic and has built-in checks on power. The nzama, or council of elders, can hear cases and render decisions, but the council has no leader except for a kind of chairman who has no vote and functions to dissolve the meeting in case of a deadlock. The ultimate resolution of serious disputes is taken out of secular hands and placed in the realm of the supernatural.” (7)
- 5.4 Post marital residence:

- In a rural Kamba community, the man becomes the head of the family. (1)
- The husband and wife live with the husband's family, and the family is very close to one another. Cousins are treated as siblings, etc. (1)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

- Mostly non-violent (4)
- Resistance to British
 - When the British colonized the area, the Kamba were "restricted to a couple of "Native Reserves", based around Machakos and Kitui, where they could more easily be controlled, and where they continue to live to this day." (4)
 - "Kamba resistance to colonialism was widespread but mostly non-violent." (4)
 - The 1930's saw the formation of the Ukamba Members Association (UMA), who joined forces with other popular anti-colonialism groups. Continued to struggle for independence, and eventually got it non-violently. (4)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

- Women and men tend to work outside the home on obtaining food and resources, elders work inside the home on easier chores. (1)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

- None found.

5.8 Village and house organization:

- Houses made up of dried grass and branches (10)
- Smaller villages (10)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

- Evidence of male social clubs. However, rules and traditions regarding membership and participation are often disputed or ignored. (7)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

- No consistent evidence, sleeping situations vary.

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

- There is "looseness" of structural orientation (7)
 - Ex: Kamba men may belong to a group called the kisuka, which is a social club. They must slaughter a different animal to be a member of each group. However, many men may disagree on which animal it should be and are very loose when it comes to allowing people to be a part of the group.
 - Ex: Many members of a family are traditionally present for the naming of a child (which is a very important event), but often times, it doesn't really matter who is present.

5.12 Trade:

- "Their unique sculptures and weaved sisal baskets are sold in many curio shops, gift shops and art galleries in Kenya's major cities and abroad. The men do the carving while Kamba women weave and decorate the fine work in baskets and pottery." (1)
- Trade changed with the introduction of British to the area. "British began work on the railway which was eventually to link Mombasa on the coast with Kampala, now the capital of Uganda. The railway meant the end of long-distance Kamba trade." (4)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

- Extended family, or mbai, is valued. Everyone is treated as family; there is no evidence of slavery. (1)
- "It is also characteristic of the Kamba that they show a strong emphasis on individualism and freedom of choice within broadly defined limits" (7)
- "The Kamba exhibit a marked indifference to their own history, and this extends even to the level of clan origins and traditions." (7)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

- Religion, especially Christianity, is rarely practiced by individuals. (4)
- Rituals such as singing and dancing are very important during special occasions. (1)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- Witch doctors are common. Heal using singing, chanting, and drumming. (3)
- Prophecies and sages were common. Ex: "The arrival of the "long snake" (railway) and the Europeans had been actually prophesied by a Kamba sage and chief called Masaku." (4)

6.2 Stimulants:

- None.

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

- Birth
 - "Naming is an important aspect of the Kamba culture. Traditionally, Akamba children were named after a time or events surrounding their birth. Children are often affectionately called *Musumbi* (King), and *Mueni* (visitor). *Nduku* is a common name given to a baby girl born at night while *Mutuku* is given to a baby boy born at night. Children can also be named after a living or departed relative, depending on the parents' relationship with the person." (1)
- Puberty
 - "Initiation into maturity was demonstrated with circumcision, for males and many females as well but after female circumcision got officially banned in Kenya, many have decided to abandon it." (6)

- All special occasions
 - Dance, music, and performance are important during special occasions such as marriage and birth (1)
- 6.4 Other rituals:
- Singing
 - Important during special occasions such as “marriage, birth, national holiday.” (1)
 - “The Akamba also have famous work songs, such as *Ngulu Mwalala*, sung while they are digging. Herdsmen and boys have different songs, as do the young and old.” (1)
 - Songs are “lively and melodic”, and often about love or deviant behavior (1)
- 6.5 Myths (Creation):
- None found for traditional religion. Christian and Muslim beliefs on creation are same as today. (4)
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):
- Singing and dancing are important in Kamba culture during important events and daily life. (1)
 - “In these dances, the Akamba display agility and athletic skill as they perform acrobatics and remarkable body movements.” (1)
 - Music
 - The Kamba music will typically, “reflect the traditional structure of the Kikamba song, sung on a pentatonic scale.” (1)
 - “The Akamba people's love of music and dance is evident in their impressive performances throughout their daily lives and during special occasions.” (1)
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR:
- Very few differences. Men and women both took place in rituals, ceremonies, and religion. Both men and women can be seen participating in dances and ceremonies. (5)
- 6.8 Missionary effect:
- Christianity and Islam have spread to the Kamba people (2)
 - “Missionary activity began the 1840s, notably with the combined evangelical and exploratory activities of Johann Ludwig Krapf and Johannes Rebmann.” The Uganda Railway spread Christianity and British culture quickly. (4)
 - “The colonialists assailed the local religions, denying them any validity or usefulness, and maligning them as "heathen". Even medicine men were vilified as mere witch doctors. Converts to the new religions had to renounce fully their ancestors' religions and beliefs.” (4)
- 6.9 RCR revival:
- Many of the Kamba rituals were lost through British colonialism. There has been a small revival of singing, dancing, and some traditional culture, but many of the original traditions are lost. (4)
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:
- Christian and Muslim beliefs in afterlife and death consistent with traditional Christian and Muslim beliefs. (1)
 - Afterlife beliefs are unclear for those who follow the Ngai or Mulungu. Evidence that death is a dreaded path, but not viewed as annihilating a person. People are still connected through ancestors. (1)(4)
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?
- Naming dead people was not taboo. Children were even often named after deceased loved ones. (1)
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy?
- None found. Children are named after relatives. Parents are not called their children's names. (1)
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)
- Many are Christian, although Muslims and those practicing the traditional religion are present (2)
 - “The Akamba people believe in a monotheistic, invisible and transcendental god, *Ngai* or *Mulungu*, who lives in the sky (*yayayani*). This god is also referred to as *Asa* or the Father. He is perceived as the omnipotent creator of life on earth and as a merciful, if distant, entity.” (2)
 - Majority consider themselves to be adherents of (Christianity). (4)
 - “The supernatural itself, as the Kamba conceive of it, is very loosely structured.” (7)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

- None used.

7.2 Piercings:

- None used.

7.3 Haircut:

- Men are traditionally seen with short hair, women are seen with longer hair. (1) (4) (5) (7) (8)

7.4 Scarification:

- None used.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

- Today, clothing is very Western-influenced. (5)
- Traditionally, feathers and decoration was common in appearances. (8)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

- In ceremonies, the Kamba are seen wearing headpieces. The headpieces typically have feathers, leather, or other flashy materials. (5)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

- None found.

7.8 Missionary effect:

- Missionaries and colonialists destroyed much of the Kamba traditional wear and rituals (4)
- “Missionaries denounced and colonial authorities progressively restricted and banned wathi - the regular gatherings and celebrations held by the Kamba” (4)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

- Headpieces and skirts are still worn in traditional Kamba ritual. (1) (5) (8)

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

- No evidence found that age matters in siblings
- The children of an individual are treated very similarly to the children of the individual’s siblings. Family is very close-knit. (1)
 - Children speak to their parent’s siblings as “*tata* (father)” or “*mwaitu* (mother).” (1)
 - “(Children) often move from one household to another with ease, and are made to feel at home by their parents’ siblings.” (1)

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

- No evidence of sororate or levirate relationships.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

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