

The Pökoot of Kenya



The Pökoot were once considered part of the Kalenjin people who were highland Nilotic people who originated in southern Ethiopia and migrated southward into Kenya as early as 2,000 years ago. Though the Pökoot consider themselves to be one people, they are basically divided into two sub-groups based on livelihood. About 50% of the Pökoot are semi-nomadic, semi-pastoralists who live in the lowlands west and north of Kapenguria and throughout Kacheliba Division and Nginyang Division, Baringo District. These people herd cattle, sheep, and goats and live off the products of their stock. The other 50% of the Pökoot are agriculturalists who live anywhere conditions allow farming.

The homestead is the social center for the Pökoot. Here a man lives with his wives, each having their own hut. All members of the family live here and the stock is corralled here at night. The man of the family rules the homestead, telling the others what duties they are to perform.

The position of women in Pökoot society is weak. A woman has no voice in any public forums and no authority within her own homestead. She is considered "foolish", like the cows for which she is traded.

Illness and death are greatly feared among the Pökoot. Death is the end of life and there is no after life. Therefore, life is most important and is precious to the Pökoot. Much of their religious ritual is involved in warding off illness or in effecting cures.

The majority of the Pökoot still follow their traditional religion. Approximately 15% of Pökoot are Christians and the remaining 85% are traditionalists. Even among the Christians, the traditional religion worldview is still dominant.

Primary Religion:

Tribal Religion

Disciples (Matt 28.19):

15%

Churches:

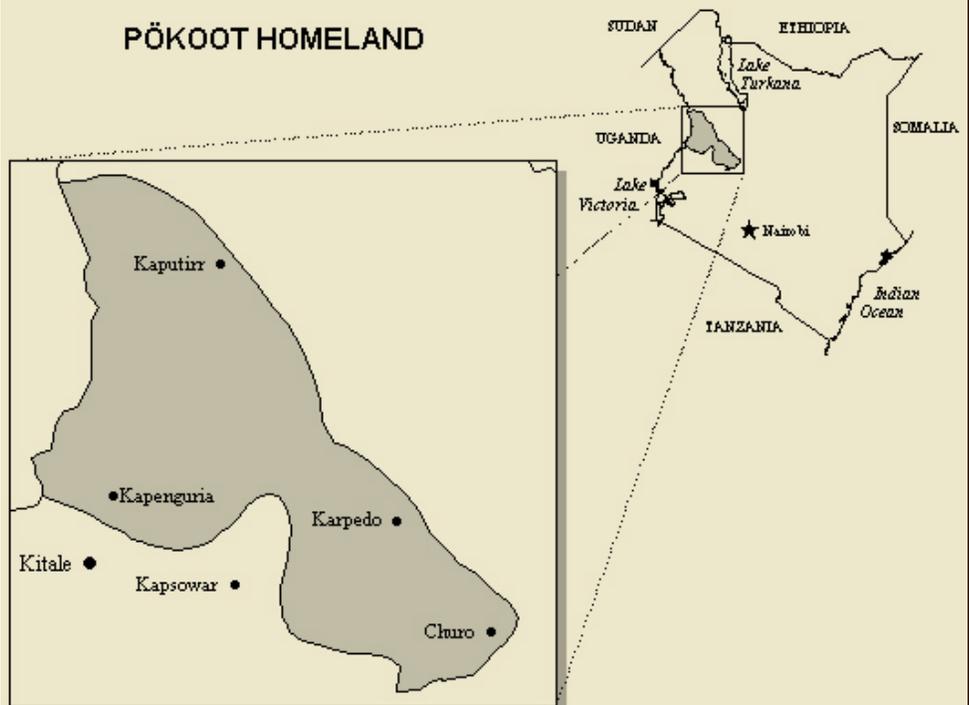
Scripture Status (Matt 28.20):

Population (date):

170,000 (1980)



PÖKOOT HOMELAND



The Pokoot of Kenya

Item Name	Item Note	
Have They Heard The Gospel?		Profile Summary
Believe In Jesus As God & Only Savior (%)	15%	
Believe In The Local Traditional Religion (%)	100%	
Population All Countries		Group Description
World Population For This People	170,000	
World Population (Date)	1980	
Countries Where People Group Lives		Group Description
Country Name	Kenya	
Geography & Environment		Group Description
Location	The Pokoot live in West Pokoot District and Nginyang Division in northern Baringo District of the Rift Valley Province. The Pokoot area is easily divided into three geographical areas as: Karapokot, West Pokot, and East Pokot.	
Country	Kenya	
Comments (Geography & Environment)	The Karapokoot region consists of large flat plains at an elevation of 3000-5000 feet with some large mountain ranges in the north which reach as high as 7000 feet. The plains are semi-arid with large expanses of desert scrub and thorn bush. Average rainfall is 15-30 inches per year, but rainfall is highly unreliable. The mountains receive more rainfall and it is here that dry season pastures are found and some of the farming is done.	
Language & Linguistics		Group Description
Comment (Language)	The Pokoot language is one of the Para-Nilotic languages. The Para-Nilotic speaking peoples of Kenya include the Turkana, the Kalenjin and the Maasai groups. The Pokoot language is included within the Kalenjin group though Pokoot is the most different of all Kalenjin languages. The Pokoot can communicate with other Kalenjin speakers, but only with great difficulty as many of their words are different.	
Alternate Language Names	Pokot, Suk, Pakot	
Attitude Towards Mother Tongue	Very receptive	
Neighboring Languages	SAMBURU	
Neighboring Languages	ENDO	
Economics		Group Description
Subsistence Type	Pastoralists	
Occupation	Cattle husbandry has traditionally been the center of the Pokoot economy. Even the agricultural Pokoot try to have a few cows to raise. Cattle have filled both an economic and social role among the Pokoot and the more cattle one has the better.	
Products / Crafts	Some bees are kept by the Pokoot for production of honey and honey wine which is important in certain ceremonies. The Pokoot also do some hunting, but not really as a means of subsistence. More and more Pokoot are turning to panning gold part-time.	
Community Development		Group Description
Health Care (Quality)	Fair	
Comment (Health Care)	There are two hospitals, three health centers, and fifteen dispensaries serving the needs of the people in West Pokoot District.	
Diet (Quality)	Fair	
Comment (Diet)	The diet of the Pokoot consists of what they grow and sometimes meat from livestock.	
Water (Quality)	Poor	
Comment (Water)	Irrigation systems have been developed to water the crops during the long dry season. These systems are communally maintained and water supply is regulated by the village elders.	

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Item Name

Item Note

Shelter Description

The agricultural Pokoot live in sprawling "villages" made up of 50 or more homesteads which may be as much as 2 miles apart. Two or three "villages" make up a "federation." Villages and federations have a council of elders who settle disputes and allocate irrigation waters. The semi-pastoral Pokoot live in settlements scattered across the plains. Each settlement consists of an extended family group with the eldest man serving as the leader.

Comment (Energy)

Firewood and kerosene

Clothing

A new era began in 1979 when President Moi announced that all guns had to be handed in and that clothes were to be worn in place of skins by all people in the Pokoot area.

Transportation

The roads are in poor condition. Walking is the most common form of travel for the Pokoot.

Society & Culture

Group Description

Family Structures

The homestead is the social center for the Pokoot. Here a man lives with his wives, each having their own hut. All members of the family live here and the stock is corralled here at night. The man of the family rules the homestead, telling the others what duties they are to perform. The extended family (kapor) is the most important social grouping among the Pokoot. Especially important are the relatives of the mother who are the most active in assisting with the bride price or feast contributions.

Neighbor Relations

The Pokoot were originally a part of the Kalenjin grouping of people who live south of the Pokoot. The agricultural Pokoot are particularly similar to the Kalenjin in matters of culture. However, now neither the Pokoot nor the other Kalenjin groups regard the Pokoot as part of the Kalenjin group.

Authority / Rule

The clan is the primary political grouping among the Pokoot. All livestock and shambas ultimately belong to the clan rather than to individuals and decisions regarding these and many other matters are made at the clan level. There are about 25 clans and 150 sub-clans among the Pokoot. Clans meet and interact in the extended families.

Social Habits/Groupings

A third major grouping among the Pokoot is the age-set. There are 8 age-sets in a cyclic age-set system much like that of the Nandi. One is initiated into the age-set through the circumcision ceremony which occurs at 10 to 15 year intervals. Each age-set has its own responsibilities with more authority wielded by the older age-sets. Elders (of the eldest age-set) sit in the center of the traditional half circle (kirket) during ceremonies.

Cultural Change Pace

Medium

Identification With National Culture

Integrated

Self Image

Prestigious

Judicial / Punishment System

Political control among the Pokoot is invested in the council of elders (kokwo). The council is responsible for maintenance of law and order, security affairs, settlement of disputes between clans and age-sets (including marriage disputes), decisions on ceremonial matters such as the date of circumcision, and approval of new development projects (schools, etc.). All decisions of the council of elders must be unanimous and enforcement is assured by means of ceremonies which demonstrate the authority of the elders. Wealthy men and elderly men have greater influence in the council, but any man has the right to speak.

Celebrations

Pokoot life is full of ritual and ceremonies which serve both social and religious functions. They observe some five different rites of passage which are accompanied by appropriate ceremonies. Birth is an occasion for celebration and the new child is received with songs and ceremony. Hair shaving is done when the child begins to crawl and blessings are given that the child may live long. Circumcision is the next stage for both boys and girls and signifies their entrance into adulthood. Girls must be circumcised before marriage or giving birth. Marriage occurs between young "warriors" of 20 to 25 years of age and the newly circumcised girls of 14 or 15 years of age. This age difference and the population structure usually assures polygamy for the rich. Death is the ultimate end of life. There is no expectation of life after death among the traditional Pokoot. Burial is attended by only one or two family members as death and burial are feared greatly.

Media

Limited

Attitude To Outsiders

Indifferent

Attitude To Change

Indifferent

Comment (Culture)

The position of women in Pokoot society is weak. A woman has no voice in any public forums and no authority within her own homestead. She is considered "foolish", like the cows for which she is traded.

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Item Name	Item Note	
Youth		Group Description
Youth Problems (Teens)	The biggest problem facing schools in the district is how to train sufficient numbers of teachers to meet the continuing growth in education throughout the district.	
Education		Group Description
Primary Schools	198	
Primary School Enrollment	33,000	
Language Of Instruction Early Years	Swahili (specific)	
Language Of Textbooks Early Years	Swahili (specific)	
Language Of Instruction Later Years	English	
Language Of Textbooks Later Years	English	
Comment (Education)	All primary schools are run by the government with varying degrees of assistance from the sponsoring organizations which are often the churches.	
Religion & Response		Status of Christianity
Religious Practices & Ceremonies	In the Pokoot traditional religion, they have a remote idea of a supreme being known as Tororot who is approached through animal sacrifices, but not to be known as a personal God to an individual. Though Tororot is the creator of all things and is ultimately the source of all life, Yim or the Above (sky) is often equated with God and is the cause of natural diseases. Asis (sun) also has great power and accidents can occur when Asis is ill. Rain is brought by the Ilat who have human bodies and very large wings on which they carry water from the big lake.	
Comment (Religion)	The Pokoot believe that natural diseases come from the Above and are cured by the herbalist. Many illnesses, however, are caused by overstepping the bounds of Pokoot society, by sorcery, or by ancestral spirits. Special rituals and ceremonies must be performed to counteract these illnesses. Life is ultimately related to Tororot who can give life or take it away.	
History Of Christianity In Group		Status of Christianity
By Whom	Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (ANG)	
Significant Events	Some significant response to Christianity began in the early 1960s through the effect of the East African Revival movement, but the Church among the Pokoot has only really begun to establish itself since 1970.	
Scripture		Status of Christianity
Translation Status	Probable	
Comment (Scripture)	The constant moving around of some semi-nomadic Pokoot makes it difficult to establish a church and evangelize among them.	
Missions and Churches		Status of Christianity
Organization Name	Salvation Army	
Number Of Adherents	83	
Organization Name	Assemblies of God	
Number Of Adherents	175	
Number Of National Workers	1	
Organization Name	African Inland Mission	
Number Of Adherents	16,000	
Number Of Expatriate Workers	7	
Number Of National Workers	12	
Organization Name	Seventh Day Adventists	
Number Of Adherents	71	
Number Of National Workers	6	
Number Of Local Workers	1	

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Item Name	Item Note
Organization Name	Roman Catholic Church
Number Of Adherents	12,000
Number Of Local Workers	80
Organization Name	Reformed Church of East Africa
Number Of Adherents	368
Number Of Expatriate Workers	4
Number Of National Workers	9
Number Of Local Workers	6
Organization Name	Pentecostal Assembly of God
Number Of Adherents	260
Number Of Expatriate Workers	2
Number Of National Workers	3
Organization Name	Baptist
Number Of Adherents	320
Number Of Expatriate Workers	1
Number Of National Workers	5
Organization Name	Apostolic
Number Of Adherents	90
Number Of National Workers	2
Organization Name	Evangelical Lutheran Church
Number Of Adherents	1,260
Number Of Expatriate Workers	6
Number Of National Workers	6
Number Of Local Workers	7

Christian Literature And Media Status

Literature Available	No
Audio Recordings Available	No
Films Available	No
Radio Programs Available	No
Videos Available	No
Audio Visual Available	No

Status of Christianity