

The Kilba Kingdom: Reconstructing the Historical Chronology of a Pre-Colonial Nigerian Monarchy (C. 1250 Ad – 2025 Ad)

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Published: March 2026</p> <p>Keywords: Kilba Kingdom Həba Traditional Governance Pre-colonial Nigeria Historical Chronology Dynastic Succession</p>	<p>This paper aims to reconstruct the complete historical chronology of the Kilba (Həba) Kingdom of Adamawa State, Nigeria, from its origins circa 1250 AD to its contemporary restoration in 2025 AD, addressing the significant gap in documented political history of smaller Nigerian ethnic groups. The study employed a qualitative historical research design combining archival analysis of colonial documents (Danish Archives, British Colonial Office records), semi-structured interviews with 15 key informants including traditional leaders and historians, examination of genealogical records, and synthesis of oral traditions with written documentation. The research establishes a continuous 775-year chronology divided into five distinct eras: Pre-Dynastic Era (c.1250-1359) with 16 autonomous city-states; Foundation Era (1359) marked by Furkudol's unification; Dynastic Establishment (15th-19th centuries) establishing Dawi and Gaya ruling houses; Colonial Resistance Era (1897-1958) documenting systematic dismantling under British Indirect Rule; and Restoration Era (2025) culminating in the legal recognition of HRH Təl Alheri Bulus Nyako. The study identifies 31 documented Təls across both dynasties, with the 1906 British promise of Second-Class status deliberately unfulfilled for 119 years. This reconstructed chronology provides an authoritative historical framework for cultural education, informs policy on traditional institution recognition, serves as a model for other marginalized communities seeking historical documentation, and establishes evidentiary foundation for cultural preservation initiatives.</p>

1. Introduction

The historical narratives and governance structures of Nigeria's smaller ethnic groups remain critically under-documented and vulnerable to erasure, despite constituting the majority of the nation's diverse cultural landscape (Wycliff, 2024). While substantial scholarship exists on major ethnic polities such as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo kingdoms, the political histories of state-level indigenous communities have received disproportionately limited academic attention. This documentary deficiency is particularly pronounced in Adamawa State, where over 80 ethnic groups possess rich pre-colonial governance traditions that remain largely unrecorded in accessible academic formats (Gudumbul, 2024).

Among these marginalized histories, the Kilba (Həba) Kingdom represents a particularly significant case of sophisticated pre-colonial statehood, systematic colonial disruption, and contemporary restoration. Situated in what is now Hong Local Government Area of Adamawa State, the Kilba Kingdom developed a complex governance system centered on the Təl—a ruler who integrated political authority with spiritual and cultural custodianship—supported by the Gundiri council of kingmakers (Gudumbul, 2023). Historical evidence suggests the Kilba maintained uninterrupted political sovereignty from approximately the 13th century until the British colonial incursion in 1904, successfully resisting incorporation into both the Fulani Adamawa Emirate and later colonial administrative structures (Wycliff, 2020).

However, despite this rich political heritage, the Kilba Kingdom's complete historical chronology has never been systematically reconstructed and documented in academic literature. Existing scholarship has focused on specific aspects: Wycliff (2023) examined slavery and slave trade in the Kilba economy; Yusuf (2010) documented post-colonial marginalization; Gudumbul (2024) provided foundational historical analysis of the kingdom's emergence. Yet these works, while valuable, do not present a comprehensive, verified chronological framework spanning the kingdom's entire existence from origins to contemporary restoration. Furthermore, no study has systematically integrated oral genealogical traditions with colonial archival documentation to establish an authoritative succession timeline.

This documentary gap has significant implications. First, it renders Kilba political history inaccessible to younger generations and diaspora communities disconnected from oral traditions. Second, it limits the evidentiary foundation necessary for cultural preservation initiatives and policy advocacy regarding traditional institution recognition. Third, it perpetuates the marginalization

of smaller ethnic narratives within Nigerian historiography, which remains dominated by studies of larger ethnic polities (Ofosu-Asare, 2025).

The 2025 coronation of HRH Tāl Alheri Bulus Nyako—restoring the Kilba monarchy after a 119-year struggle for recognition—creates an urgent imperative for comprehensive historical documentation. This watershed moment represents not merely a political achievement but the culmination of centuries of institutional continuity, adaptive resistance, and community resilience. Understanding this achievement requires situating it within the complete historical trajectory from which it emerged.

This paper addresses the identified gap by reconstructing the complete historical chronology of the Kilba Kingdom from its origins circa 1250 AD to its contemporary restoration in 2025 AD. The research systematically verifies succession lists, integrates oral traditions with archival evidence, and establishes a periodized framework for understanding Kilba political development across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. By doing so, it provides both an authoritative historical record for the Kilba community and a methodological model for documenting similarly marginalized political histories across Africa.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pre-Colonial Governance Systems in Northern Nigeria

The political landscape of pre-colonial Northern Nigeria was characterized by considerable diversity in governance structures, ranging from centralized emirates to decentralized chieftaincies and segmentary lineage systems (Falola & Heaton, 2022). The Sokoto Caliphate, established through Usman dan Fodio's early 19th-century jihad, imposed varying degrees of hegemony over numerous communities but never achieved complete administrative control over all constituent groups (Last, 2020). Communities that successfully resisted incorporation, including the Kilba, maintained autonomous governance systems that evolved independently of Caliphate influence.

Historical scholarship on these non-hegemonic polities remains comparatively underdeveloped. As Esterhuysen (2015) notes, archaeological and historical attention has disproportionately focused on large-scale states and emirates, leaving smaller polities underrepresented in academic literature. This scholarly bias reflects both the practical challenges of documenting communities with primarily oral historical traditions and the enduring influence of colonial administrative categories that privileged certain political formations over others (Stahl, 2020).

2.2 The Kilba in Historical Scholarship

The Kilba have received limited but significant attention from historians and anthropologists. Early colonial ethnographers, including Meek (1931), provided descriptive accounts of Kilba social organization, though these works must be read critically given their embeddedness within colonial administrative frameworks. Meek's characterization of Kilba as "robbers, murderers, liars, drunkards" exemplifies the derogatory framing that accompanied colonial documentation and contributed to subsequent narrative marginalization.

Contemporary scholarship has begun redressing these distortions. Gudumbul (2023, 2024) provides the most comprehensive historical analysis of Kilba political development, tracing the kingdom's emergence from the 13th century through the colonial period. His work establishes the foundational narrative of Furkudol's unification of 16 city-states and documents the sophisticated governance structures that characterized the pre-colonial Kilba polity. Wycliff (2020, 2022, 2023) has contributed specialized studies on Kilba economic history, including slavery, groundnut production, and resistance to external domination. Yusuf (2010) documents post-colonial marginalization and community advocacy.

However, these works, while invaluable, do not present systematically verified chronological frameworks. Succession lists remain incomplete, dates are often approximate, and the integration of oral traditions with archival evidence has been limited. The present study addresses these gaps through methodical cross-referencing of multiple source categories.

2.3 Colonial Archives and Indigenous Histories

Colonial archives constitute problematic but essential sources for reconstructing African histories. As Stoler (2009) argues, archives are not neutral repositories but sites of knowledge production shaped by colonial epistemologies and administrative priorities. Nevertheless, when read "against the grain," they provide crucial documentation of indigenous political formations that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

The Danish National Archives contain particularly valuable materials on the Kilba region, reflecting the activities of Danish missionaries and colonial administrators in Northern Nigeria. Documents from 1925-1940 include administrative reports, correspondence regarding chieftaincy affairs, and photographs documenting colonial encounters (Danish Archives, 1925, 1930, 1935, 1940). These materials provide external corroboration for oral historical accounts while also revealing the mechanisms through which colonial authorities systematically undermined indigenous governance.

British Colonial Office records offer additional documentation, including the crucial 1906 dispatch regarding Second-Class Staff of Office for the Kilba Kingdom (British Colonial Office, 1906). The contrast between this written promise and its deliberate non-implementation exemplifies the gap between colonial rhetoric and practice that characterizes much administrative history.

2.4 Oral Tradition as Historical Source

Oral traditions constitute primary sources for African historical reconstruction, particularly for communities with limited written documentation. Vansina (2019) established methodological principles for evaluating oral traditions as historical evidence, emphasizing the importance of corroboration, attention to genre conventions, and understanding of transmission contexts. For the

Kilba, genealogical recitations, origin narratives, and accounts of significant events preserved by designated historians provide essential data for chronological reconstruction.

Challenges in using oral traditions include chronological imprecision, potential for narrative elaboration, and vulnerability to disruption in transmission. The colonial disruption of Kilba governance institutions necessarily affected oral historical preservation, as the formal contexts for recitation and transmission were attenuated. Nevertheless, as Gudumbul (2024) demonstrates, careful cross-referencing with archival and archaeological evidence enables the construction of reliable historical frameworks from oral sources.

2.5 Literature Gap

The review of existing literature reveals a significant gap: the absence of a comprehensive, systematically verified chronological reconstruction of the Kilba Kingdom spanning its entire existence. Available studies either focus on specific aspects of Kilba history or provide partial chronological frameworks without rigorous integration of multiple source categories. This gap has both scholarly and community implications. Academically, it limits comparative analysis of pre-colonial governance structures and their transformations under colonialism. For the Kilba community, it impedes cultural education, historical preservation, and evidence-based advocacy regarding traditional institution recognition.

The present study addresses this gap through methodical reconstruction of Kilba political chronology from c.1250 AD to 2025 AD, integrating oral genealogical traditions, archival documentation, and contemporary accounts to establish an authoritative historical framework.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative historical research design focused on chronological reconstruction. The design integrated three complementary approaches: archival research for documentary evidence, oral historical interviews for indigenous perspectives, and genealogical analysis for succession verification. This multi-method approach enabled triangulation across source categories, enhancing the reliability of the reconstructed chronology.

3.2 Study Area

The research focused on the historical Kilba Kingdom, corresponding approximately to the contemporary Hong Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria (coordinates: 10°23'N 12°92'E). This area constitutes the traditional homeland of the Kilba people and the geographical context for the kingdom's political development. Primary data collection occurred within Hong LGA, with archival research extending to the National Archives Kaduna and the Danish National Archives (digital access).

3.3 Population and Sampling

The study population comprised three categories:

- Primary oral sources: Traditional leaders, council elders, and recognized historians with direct knowledge of Kilba genealogical and political history (n=9)
- Secondary sources: Government officials and community leaders involved in historical preservation (n=4)
- Archival materials: Colonial records, administrative documents, photographs, and maps from 1900-2025

Purposive sampling was employed to select information-rich cases. Selection criteria included: recognized authority on Kilba history, direct knowledge of genealogical traditions, involvement in historical preservation, and willingness to share detailed accounts. Participants ranged in age from 45-86 years, ensuring representation of both senior custodians of tradition and mid-generation informants.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Archival Research: The researcher accessed colonial archives at the National Archives Kaduna, including Yola Province files, administrative reports, and correspondence regarding chieftaincy affairs. Digital access to Danish National Archives materials was obtained through the archives' online portal. Documents were photographed using a Canon EOS R camera for subsequent analysis.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Fifteen interviews were conducted with key informants between February and April 2025. Interviews ranged from 45-90 minutes and were guided by protocols addressing: origin narratives, genealogical succession, significant historical events, and verification of archival findings. Interviews were recorded using BOYA BY-WM4 Pro wireless microphones and transcribed verbatim.

Genealogical Documentation: The researcher examined written genealogical records maintained by Kilba historian Chaskda Geoffrey, including succession lists, family trees, and historical notes compiled over decades. These documents were cross-referenced with interview data and archival materials.

Participant Observation: The researcher observed the coronation ceremony of HRH Təl Alheri Bulus Nyako on February 14, 2025, documenting the event through video recording and field notes. This observation provided contemporaneous documentation of restoration rituals and public reception.

3.5 Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded through four stages:

- Source criticism: Archival documents were evaluated for provenance, purpose, and potential biases. Oral accounts were assessed for internal consistency and corroboration across informants.
- Chronological ordering: Events and reigns were arranged sequentially, with dates established through cross-referencing archival dates (for colonial period) and generational calculations (for pre-colonial period).
- Periodization: The reconstructed chronology was divided into eras based on significant political transformations (pre-dynastic, foundation, dynastic establishment, colonial, restoration).
- Verification: Findings were presented to key informants for member checking, and discrepancies were investigated through additional inquiry.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from Modibbo Adama University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with explanation of research purposes and usage of recorded materials. Confidentiality was maintained for sensitive information, and participants were offered the opportunity to review their interview transcripts. Cultural protocols were observed during interactions with traditional leaders and participation in community events.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Comprehensive Historical Chronology of the Kilba Monarchy

Table 1 presents the complete reconstructed chronology of the Kilba Kingdom from its origins to contemporary restoration. The chronology is organized into five eras, with 31 documented Təls across both Dawi and Gaya dynasties.

Table 1. Comprehensive Historical Chronology of Kilba Monarchy (c. 1250 AD – 2025 AD)

Era	Period	Təl (King)	Dynasty	Significance & Historical Findings	Source Evidence
Pre-Dynastic Era	c.1250-1359	Various City-State Təls	N/A	Existence of 16 independent city-states (Hong, Pella, Kulinyi, Uding, Garaha, Kwakwa'ah, Dlang, Gaya, Mijili, Dugwaba, Bangshika, Kwambla, Kala'a, Gashala, Zhedinyi, Dakzao) each with autonomous governance	Gudumbul (2023); Oral Histories; Barr. Japheth (Personal Interview, 2025); Chaskda Geoffrey (Personal Interview, 2025)
Foundation Era	c.1359	Hamman Furde (Furkudol)	Founder	Unified 16 city-states into single kingdom; established centralized monarchy; name means "buffalo in river" symbolizing strength	Barr. Japheth (Personal Interview, 2025); Chaskda Geoffrey (Personal Interview, 2025)
Pre-Dynastic Rule	Post-1359	Gongpyadadakadidakur	Pre-Dynastic	Immediate successor to Furkudol; consolidated unified kingdom	Jival P. Hananiya (Archival); Barr. Japheth (2025); Chaskda Geoffrey (2025)
		Marzagwali	Pre-Dynastic	Expanded kingdom territories; strengthened administrative systems	Jival P. Hananiya (Archival); Barr. Japheth (2025); Chaskda Geoffrey (2025)
		Duguzum Dawi	Pre-Dynastic	Established early legal frameworks; organized military defense systems	Jival P. Hananiya (Archival)
		Dambal	Pre-Dynastic	Final pre-dynastic ruler; prepared kingdom for dynastic transition	Jival P. Hananiya (Archival)
Dynastic Establishment	c.15th Century	Təl Dawi	Dawi	First Dawi dynasty ruler; symbolized tact, unity, and strategic leadership	Jival P. Hananiya (Archival)
		Təl Gaya	Gaya	First Gaya dynasty ruler; embodied bravery, freedom, and military prowess	Jival P. Hananiya (Archival)
[Subsequent dynastic rulers documented in full table - selected representative rulers presented]					
Colonial Resistance	1897-1902	Təl Kuracha	Gaya	Resisted early colonial encroachment; maintained kingdom autonomy	Archival Documents; Barr. Japheth (2025); Chaskda Geoffrey (2025)

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	1902-1904	Təl Pabi	Gaya	Died during colonial consolidation period; kingdom under pressure	Archival Documents (Gudumbul)
	1904-1907	Təl Umar	Gaya	Short reign during intense colonial pressure; maintained traditional systems	Archival Documents (Gudumbul)
	1907-1928	Təl Gurai	Dawi	Fought for Treaty of Zumo protections; relocated capital to Hong; resisted indirect rule	Archival Documents; Barr. Japheth (2025)
	1928-1934	Təl Ninyanta	Dawi	Dethroned by colonial authorities for resisting indirect rule policies	Archival Documents; Barr. Japheth (2025)
Colonial Administration	1935-1958	Təl Santuraki Muhammadu Maunde	Dawi	Election overseen by British A.D.O. W.R. Shirley; marked loss of traditional autonomy	Archival Election Report
	1958-1962	Təl Muhammadu Muhammadu Maunde	Dawi	Removed as district head in 1962; continued erosion of traditional authority	Archival Documents
Post-Colonial Struggle	1964-1973	Təl Bulus Nyako	Gaya	Intensified demands for Second-Class status; retired due to political pressure	Archival Documents; Təl Alheri Interview (2025)
	1973-1994	Təl Adamu Yerima Balla	Gaya	Peak of constitutional struggle for 1906 promise; died before fulfillment	Archival Documents; Barr. Japheth (2025)
Fragmentation Era	1995-2024	District Heads (no Təl)	N/A	Kingdom divided into 5 districts (Hong, Pella, Dugwaba, Kulinyi, Gaya); deliberate political fragmentation	Barr. Japheth (2025)
Restoration Era	2025-Present	HRH Təl Barr. Alheri Bulus Nyako	Gaya	Coronated February 14, 2025 by Gov. Fintiri; gazetted restoration ending 119-year struggle	Government Gazette; Coronation Documentation

4.2 Pre-Dynastic Era (c.1250-1359): The Sixteen City-States

The earliest documented political organization of the Kilba people consisted of sixteen independent city-states, each governed by its own Təl. Historical accounts preserved by Chaskda Geoffrey identify these polities as: Hong, Pella, Kulinyi, Uding, Garaha, Kwakwa'ah, Dlang, Gaya, Mijili, Dugwaba, Bangshika, Kwambla, Kala'a, Gashala, Zhedinyi, and Dakzao. Each operated autonomously, with its own governance structures, territorial boundaries, and leadership succession systems.

This decentralized political landscape challenges colonial narratives that depicted pre-colonial Kilba society as lacking organized governance. As Chaskda Geoffrey explained in interview:

"Before Furkudol, each clan had its own Təl. They were not subjects of any external power. They collected tribute, settled disputes, and performed the Mba festival independently. The land was not empty of kings—it was full of them."

The existence of multiple autonomous polities is consistent with broader patterns in pre-colonial Northern Nigeria, where political centralization varied considerably across communities and regions (Falola & Heaton, 2022). The Kilba case demonstrates that decentralized political organization does not imply absence of governance; rather, it represents an alternative political form adapted to local conditions and social structures.

Archaeological evidence for this period remains limited, though oral traditions consistently reference specific locations associated with pre-dynastic Təls. The mountain at Hong, for instance, is identified as the site of early ritual and political gatherings, a significance that continued through subsequent periods. Gudumbul (2024) suggests that these city-states may have emerged through processes of population aggregation and political consolidation from the 13th century onward, possibly linked to broader regional dynamics following the decline of the Kanem-Borno Empire's western influence.

4.3 Foundation Era (c.1359): The Furkudol Unification

The unification of the sixteen city-states under Furkudol (Hamman Furde) circa 1359 represents the foundational moment of the Kilba Kingdom as a centralized polity. According to oral tradition, Furkudol arrived in Kilba territory following the fall of the Mandara Kingdom, demonstrating exceptional leadership that persuaded the autonomous Təls to accept his authority. His name—meaning "buffalo in the river"—symbolizes the combination of strength (buffalo) and adaptability (river) that characterized his rule.

The unification process appears to have been negotiated rather than imposed through conquest. As Chaskda Geoffrey related:

"Furkudol did not defeat the Təls in battle. He convinced them that unity would bring strength. He showed them that together they could resist external threats that would overwhelm them separately. This is why Kilba identity combines the traditions of all sixteen houses."

This negotiated unification has important implications for understanding Kilba political culture. The resulting kingdom preserved elements of the constituent city-states' identities while subordinating them to a centralized monarchy. The persistence of district identities into the contemporary period—evident in the 1995 administrative division that recognized Hong, Pella, Dugwaba, Kulinyi, and Gaya as separate districts—reflects the enduring legacy of this foundational structure.

The dating of Furkudol's unification to circa 1359 is based on generational calculations from oral genealogies cross-referenced with documented events in neighboring polities. Gudumbul (2024) notes that this period corresponds to significant political realignments across the Central Sudan, including the expansion of the Kanuri state and the consolidation of various Mandara chiefdoms. The Kilba unification should be understood within this broader regional context of political transformation.

4.4 Succession and Dynastic Establishment

Following Furkudol's death, succession was established through a test that created the dual dynastic structure that would shape Kilba politics for centuries. As tradition recounts:

"On his deathbed, Furkudol placed a horse and spear on one side and a quiver of arrows with a woman on the other. His two sons were called. Gaya seized the horse and spear. Dawi chose the arrows and the woman."

This symbolic test established complementary rather than competing dynastic identities. Gaya, who chose the instruments of warfare, came to embody bravery, frankness, freedom, and military prowess. Dawi, who chose the arrows (symbolizing judgment) and the woman (symbolizing fertility and continuity), embodied tact, unity, and strategic leadership. From this moment, succession alternated between the Gaya and Dawi houses, with Təls drawn from each lineage according to established protocols.

The dynastic structure served multiple political functions. It provided clear succession rules that minimized contestation following a Təl's death. It distributed power across two major lineages, preventing any single family from monopolizing royal authority. And it created a symbolic framework for understanding Kilba identity as encompassing complementary qualities—strength and wisdom, action and deliberation, tradition and adaptation.

The pre-dynastic rulers who immediately succeeded Furkudol—Gongpyadadakidakur, Marzagwali, Duguzum Dawi, and Dambal—consolidated the unified kingdom and established administrative systems. Marzagwali is credited with territorial expansion, extending Kilba influence over surrounding areas. Duguzum Dawi established early legal frameworks and organized military defenses, creating institutions that would enable the kingdom to resist subsequent external threats. Dambal, the final pre-dynastic ruler, prepared for the transition to formal dynastic succession that would be implemented by his successors.

4.5 Dynastic Rule: The Dawi and Gaya Lines

The establishment of formal dynastic rule, probably in the 15th century, inaugurated centuries of stable succession under alternating Dawi and Gaya rulers. Təl Dawi, the first of his dynasty, is remembered as establishing the judicial and administrative systems that would characterize Kilba governance. Təl Gaya, first of his line, organized military institutions that enabled the kingdom to resist external threats, including later Fulani expansion.

The full succession list, preserved through oral tradition and documented in genealogical records maintained by Chaskda Geoffrey, includes 31 named Təls across both dynasties (excluding the pre-dynastic rulers). While detailed biographical information is not available for all rulers, the preservation of names across centuries demonstrates the strength of oral historical traditions and the continuity of political institutions.

Several patterns emerge from the dynastic record. First, succession appears to have followed established protocols consistently, with no documented usurpations or contested successions that disrupted dynastic continuity. This stability suggests robust institutional mechanisms for leadership transition and broad acceptance of dynastic legitimacy. Second, the alternation between Dawi and Gaya lines was maintained, preventing any single lineage from establishing permanent dominance. Third, the length of reigns varied considerably, reflecting both normal demographic variation and occasional disruptions from external conflicts or internal challenges.

The dynastic period also witnessed the development of Kilba governance institutions beyond the monarchy itself. The Gundiri council—comprising seven kingmakers representing key constituencies—exercised significant authority in Təl selection and policy deliberation. As Chaskda Geoffrey explained:

"The Təl was not a dictator. He was the apex of a system. The Gundiri—the seven kingmakers—chose who would lead. The Təl presided over ceremonies, over law, over unity. Remove the pillar, and the house trembles."

This distributed governance structure, combining monarchical authority with deliberative council, represented a sophisticated political adaptation suited to Kilba social organization. It ensured that multiple interests were represented in decision-making while maintaining the symbolic unity provided by the Təl.

4.6 Colonial Encounter and Resistance (1897-1934)

The colonial encounter fundamentally transformed Kilba political institutions, though initial resistance delayed full subjugation. Təl Kuracha (1897-1902) resisted early colonial encroachment, maintaining kingdom autonomy during the initial phase of British expansion into Northern Nigeria. Təl Pabi (1902-1904) died during the period of colonial consolidation, his reign cut short by the pressures of external domination.

The British formalized control over Kilba territory in 1904, incorporating it into the newly established Northern Nigeria Protectorate. However, colonial administration did not immediately dismantle Kilba governance structures. Təl Gurai (1907-1928) fought for protections under the Treaty of Zumo, relocated the capital to Hong, and actively resisted implementation of indirect rule policies that would subordinate his authority to colonial-appointed warrant chiefs.

The pivotal moment came in 1906, when British authorities formally approved Second-Class Staff of Office status for the Kilba Kingdom. A colonial dispatch from March 15, 1906, documented this approval, seemingly promising official recognition of Kilba sovereignty within the colonial framework (British Colonial Office, 1906). However, this promise was deliberately never implemented. As Barr. Japheth Philemon explained:

"In 1906, they promised us recognition as a second-class kingdom. But it was recognition only on paper. They denied us the staff of office. They denied us our law. And when we resisted, we faced persecution."

The 1906 betrayal established a pattern that would persist for 119 years. Colonial authorities found it politically expedient to promise recognition while withholding implementation, maintaining Kilba subordination while avoiding overt conflict. This strategy enabled them to control the territory without fully acknowledging Kilba political institutions.

Təl Ninyanta (1928-1934) paid the price for continued resistance. Colonial authorities, frustrated by his refusal to accept subordinate status, formally dethroned him in 1934. This action signaled the colonial administration's determination to replace indigenous governance with imposed structures, regardless of the legitimacy claims of traditional rulers.

4.7 Colonial Administration and Erosion (1935-1962)

Following Ninyanta's dethronement, colonial authorities orchestrated the election of Təl Santuraki Muhammadu Maunde in 1935, supervised by British Assistant District Officer W.R. Shirley. This election marked a fundamental transformation in Kilba governance: for the first time, a Təl's legitimacy derived from colonial appointment rather than traditional selection processes.

The colonial record of this election reveals the mechanisms of political control. Administrative reports document British officers' active role in candidate selection, voter identification, and result certification (Shirley, 1935). While the elected Təl came from the Dawi lineage, the process by which he assumed office represented a decisive break with tradition. The Gundiri council's authority was bypassed; colonial administrative priorities determined outcomes.

Təl Santuraki Muhammadu Maunde ruled until 1958, when he was succeeded by Təl Mohammadu Muhammadu Maunde. This succession, while occurring within the same family, continued the pattern of colonial oversight and approval. The post-World War II period witnessed growing nationalist sentiment across Nigeria, but local governance structures remained under colonial control until independence in 1960.

The transition to independence did not automatically restore traditional governance. Təl Mohammadu Muhammadu Maunde was removed as district head in 1962, just two years after Nigeria's independence. This removal, occurring under the new Northern Nigerian regional government, demonstrated that post-colonial authorities were not necessarily more sympathetic to traditional institutions than their colonial predecessors. The struggle for recognition would continue under new political conditions.

4.8 Post-Colonial Struggle and Fragmentation (1964-2024)

The post-colonial period witnessed intensified Kilba advocacy for restoration of traditional recognition, met with continued resistance from state authorities. Təl Bulus Nyako (1964-1973) aggressively pursued demands for Second-Class status, leveraging the 1906 promise as the foundation for his claims. His advocacy reflected a strategic shift: rather than appealing solely to tradition, Kilba leaders increasingly framed their demands in legal terms, citing colonial documents as evidence of prior recognition.

Təl Bulus Nyako's efforts achieved partial success. He received some forms of recognition but not the full Second-Class status promised in 1906. Political pressure from competing interests within Adamawa State, particularly from groups benefiting from Kilba fragmentation, limited his achievements. He eventually retired under pressure in 1973, his goals unfulfilled but his advocacy establishing precedents for future struggles.

Təl Adamu Yerima Balla (1973-1994) continued the constitutional struggle, pursuing recognition through legal and political channels. This period witnessed peak mobilization of Kilba advocacy, with community organizations, legal petitions, and political lobbying deployed in pursuit of restoration. However, as with his predecessor, full recognition remained elusive. Təl Adamu Yerima Balla died in 1994, his lifelong struggle incomplete.

The year 1995 brought the most significant setback since the colonial period. In what Barr. Japheth Philemon describes as orchestrated by the "Kaduna Mafia"—a network of Northern Nigerian political and military elites—the Kilba Kingdom was formally divided into five districts: Hong, Pella, Dugwaba, Kulinyi, and Gaya. This administrative fragmentation was designed to permanently suppress Kilba political unity. As Barr. Japheth explained:

"The Kaduna Mafia divided us into five districts so our voice would be weak. Even when a governor announced restoration, the military struck our people. Every effort was blocked. They wanted us fragmented forever."

The division effectively abolished the Kilba Kingdom as an administrative entity, replacing it with multiple districts each reporting separately to state authorities. For nearly three decades, from 1995 to 2024, Kilba political identity lacked formal institutional expression. Community members identified primarily by district rather than by kingdom, and the collective advocacy that had characterized earlier periods became more difficult to sustain.

Yet the division did not extinguish Kilba identity or aspirations. Community organizations maintained cultural activities, elders preserved historical knowledge, and a new generation of educated professionals emerged who would eventually leverage their positions to achieve what previous generations could not.

4.9 Restoration Era (2025-Present)

The coronation of HRH Təl Barr. Alheri Bulus Nyako on February 14, 2025, marked the culmination of a 119-year struggle for recognition. Performed by Adamawa State Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri and gazetted as official government action, the restoration legally reversed the 1995 fragmentation and reestablished the Kilba Kingdom as a recognized traditional institution.

Several factors converged to enable this achievement. First, the evidentiary foundation built by generations of historians and legal advocates provided an unassailable case. Colonial documents, including the 1906 dispatch, demonstrated prior recognition. Genealogical records established dynastic continuity despite the interruption in formal recognition. Legal arguments framed restoration as correction of historical injustice rather than creation of new privilege.

Second, the emergence of a critical mass of Kilba professionals in influential positions created political conditions favorable to restoration. As documented in related research, over 191 prominent Kilba figures—including two Secretaries to the Government of the Federation, over 15 military generals, ministers, and numerous academics—constituted a powerful advocacy network capable of influencing state policy (Zacharia, 2025).

Third, Governor Fintiri's administration proved willing to act where predecessors had hesitated. As Mrs. Adama Maman, Permanent Secretary for Chieftaincy Affairs, explained:

"This was not just a ceremony. It was reconciliation. The law had been corrected. The pillar restored. It came through the sacrifice of Governor Fintiri."

The restoration's legal basis ensures its permanence. As Barr. Japheth Philemon noted:

"Legally, once a people are given a Chieftaincy by government law, it cannot be reversed. What Fintiri did corrected a century of failure. It was final. It was justice. By law, the Təl exists again—permanently."

The coronation ceremony itself enacted the continuity that legal recognition affirmed. Traditional rituals, including elements preserved from pre-colonial practice, were performed alongside state ceremonies. The new Təl, son of the deposed Təl Bulus Nyako, embodied the generational transmission of Kilba political identity. His Gaya lineage connected him to the dynastic structure established by Furkudol's sons centuries earlier.

4.10 Discussion

The reconstructed chronology reveals several significant patterns in Kilba political development. First, the kingdom exhibited remarkable institutional continuity from its 14th-century foundation through the colonial period. Despite external pressures, succession protocols, governance structures, and cultural practices persisted across centuries. This continuity challenges narratives that depict pre-colonial African polities as unstable or ephemeral, demonstrating instead the durability of well-adapted political institutions.

Second, the Kilba response to colonialism was characterized by strategic adaptation rather than simple resistance or acquiescence. Leaders like Təl Gurai fought for treaty protections while also relocating the capital to strengthen their position. Later advocates like Təl Bulus Nyako and Barr. Japheth Philemon deployed colonial documents as evidence for their claims, turning the colonizers' administrative apparatus against itself. This strategic flexibility enabled the community to maintain identity and pursue objectives across changing political conditions.

Third, the 1995 fragmentation represented the culmination of colonial logic applied by post-colonial actors. The division into five districts completed the process of political atomization that indirect rule had initiated. Yet this very fragmentation may have ultimately contributed to restoration by creating multiple centers of Kilba identity and advocacy that could coordinate across administrative boundaries.

Fourth, the restoration demonstrates the continuing relevance of traditional institutions in contemporary African governance. The Təl's role extends beyond symbolism to encompass cultural preservation, community development, and representation of Kilba interests within the state system. As Təl Alheri Bulus Nyako articulated in interview:

"The language is a paramount priority. My duty is not only to wear the crown, but to make sure every child speaks the words of our ancestors. Without Nya-Kilba, the crown is empty. The true challenge is keeping our people one."

The reconstructed chronology also provides evidentiary foundation for addressing ongoing challenges. Documentation of the 1906 promise supports continued advocacy for redress of colonial injustices. Verification of dynastic succession strengthens claims to legitimate authority. Periodization of Kilba history enables more sophisticated understanding of how different eras contributed to contemporary conditions.

5. Implications of Findings

The reconstructed Kilba chronology carries implications across multiple domains. For historical scholarship, it provides a methodologically rigorous example of integrating oral traditions with archival evidence to reconstruct African political histories. The study demonstrates that careful cross-referencing can yield reliable chronological frameworks even for communities with limited written documentation, challenging assumptions that oral societies cannot produce verifiable historical records.

For Kilba cultural preservation, the chronology establishes an authoritative framework for education and identity formation. Schools can incorporate this documented history into curricula, youth can understand their place within a centuries-long political tradition, and diaspora communities can maintain connection to ancestral institutions. The succession list of 31 documented Təls across six centuries provides tangible evidence of Kilba political heritage accessible to all community members.

For policy on traditional institutions, the Kilba case demonstrates both the importance of accurate historical documentation and the consequences of its absence. The 119-year struggle for recognition was prolonged partly because colonial and post-colonial

authorities could dispute Kilba claims in the absence of systematic documentation. Communities seeking recognition of traditional institutions would benefit from investing in historical research that establishes evidentiary foundations for their claims.

For comparative African studies, the Kilba chronology contributes to understanding of political diversity across the continent. The kingdom's combination of centralized monarchy with deliberative council (Gundiri) represents one model among many for organizing political authority. Its successful resistance to incorporation into the Sokoto Caliphate demonstrates that pre-colonial African polities were not passive recipients of external political formations but active agents in shaping their own trajectories.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study, while comprehensive in scope, faces several limitations. First, chronological precision decreases for earlier periods. Dates prior to the colonial era are based on generational calculations and cross-referencing with regional events rather than absolute chronological markers. While careful methodology enhances reliability, some uncertainty inevitably remains.

Second, archival documentation from the colonial period reflects the perspectives and priorities of colonial administrators rather than Kilba actors. Reading these documents "against the grain" can recover some indigenous perspectives, but the archival record remains partial and filtered through colonial frameworks.

Third, the study focuses primarily on political chronology rather than social, economic, or cultural history. While these dimensions are referenced where relevant to political development, comprehensive treatment of non-political aspects requires separate investigation.

Fourth, the study is limited to the Kilba Kingdom and does not include systematic comparison with neighboring polities. Such comparison could illuminate patterns of political development across the region and identify factors unique to the Kilba case.

7. Conclusion and Future Studies

This paper has reconstructed the complete historical chronology of the Kilba Kingdom from its origins circa 1250 AD to its contemporary restoration in 2025 AD. The research establishes a 775-year political trajectory divided into five eras: Pre-Dynastic Era (sixteen autonomous city-states), Foundation Era (Furkudol's unification), Dynastic Establishment (alternating Dawi and Gaya rule), Colonial Resistance and Administration (systematic dismantling under British indirect rule), and Restoration Era (legal recognition in 2025).

The study documents 31 named Tøls across both dynasties, demonstrating institutional continuity despite colonial disruption. It identifies the 1906 British promise of Second-Class status as a pivotal moment whose non-implementation established a 119-year struggle for recognition. It traces the mechanisms of political erosion—dethronement of resisting Tøls, imposition of warrant chiefs, administrative fragmentation—that gradually dismantled Kilba governance. And it documents the convergence of factors—evidentiary foundation, professional advocacy network, political will—that enabled restoration.

Several directions for future research emerge from this study. First, detailed biographical investigation of individual Tøls would enrich understanding of how specific leaders shaped Kilba political development. Second, comparative study of neighboring polities (e.g., Bwatiye, Bura, Margi) would illuminate regional patterns and Kilba distinctiveness. Third, investigation of Kilba social and economic history would complement the political focus of the present study. Fourth, examination of how the restored monarchy navigates contemporary challenges—language preservation, youth engagement, development advocacy—would extend the chronology into the present and inform understanding of traditional institutions' modern roles.

The Kilba Kingdom's reconstructed chronology demonstrates that meticulous historical work can recover narratives long marginalized in African historiography. It provides the Kilba community with an authoritative record of their political heritage. And it offers scholars a methodologically rigorous example of integrating multiple source categories to reconstruct African political history. The 2025 restoration is not an end but a beginning—the commencement of a new era whose significance can only be understood in relation to the centuries that preceded it.

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