

The Samburu Clan Census: genealogy and age among the Pardopa

Paul Spencer

ABSTRACT. This genealogy provides the original demographic data on which previously published tables for the Samburu are based. These applications extend beyond the Samburu to simulations of the age systems of other East African pastoralists where matters of generation as well as age are relevant.

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Assessing age among preliterate societies always poses a serious problem. Even with peoples that have age systems, especially in Africa, their system is normally complicated by considerations of generation also. Among the Samburu of Kenya, however, generational constraints are hardly significant and hence their age system provides a useful estimate for true age and a comparatively rare opportunity to draw up a demographic profile of ageing. This may even be extrapolated for statistical purposes by applying the Samburu age profile to theoretical problems posed by similar societies such as the Jie (*Pastoral Continuum*, p. 105) or the Maasai (*Matapato*, p. 178), or indeed by the Samburu themselves (*Samburu*, p. 170).

The Samburu 'Clan Census' was based on the genealogy that I recorded of 566 living adult males of Pardopa clan in 1958, including details of their age and number of wives. Given the extent to which this clan were dispersed in clusters over a large part of Samburu district, I had to rely on shared knowledge among clan elders.

Details were also collected of the broad ages of Pardopa wives and surviving widows, based on the age-set of their moran lovers before marriage, when they would have been pubescent girls. These were collated with the estimated ages of their husbands as tables in *The Samburu* (pp. 321-2). Frustratingly, the exercise book in which I had systematically recorded the number and ages of these wives for each elder appears now to have been lost in the course of seven home moves., and after repeated searches more recently. This leaves only these published tables on this topic supplemented by sporadic data on this subject scattered in my field notebooks. I cannot now include this additional material in the genealogy listed here, which was my original intention before discovering the loss.

In 1973, I had the chance opportunity to visit an outlying cluster of Pardopa settlements near Marsabit. The network of information within the clan was vividly demonstrated by the elders' knowledge of individual occurrences – marriages, migrations, deaths and gossip – throughout the clan, even as far away as Maralal, some 200 kms distant. Because of my previous close association with Pardopa, these elders assumed that these were details that would interest me. But significantly, they could (or would) not discuss comparable information about their neighbours of another Samburu clan (of Masula) living in several large settlements nearby. This was of no interest or relevance to them, and my visit to these other settlements turned out to be wholly unproductive.

This visit provided an opportunity to update the Pardopa genealogy, noting systematically the deaths that had occurred over the past fifteen years, and making it possible to draw a profile of life-expectancy. In the genealogy below, those males who survived to 1973 are denoted as Δ , Those who died between 1958 and 1973 are denoted as \triangleleft . And those who had already died before 1958 are denoted as \blacktriangle

During my 1973 visit, I was also given information on 34 gaps in my record of Pardopa males, including a remote family of 14 elders and moran whom I had omitted from the 1958 genealogy because information on these had been vague and inconsistent. **These additions are marked in red** in the genealogy below, bringing the total number of males to exactly 600.

The patrilineal system

The various levels of patrilineal segmentation among the Samburu have been outlined elsewhere, identifying the clan as the most significant of these. (*Samburu*, pp. 71-5). At a higher level, certain clans combine to form more inclusive units that are officially referred to as *sections* by the administration. This term was borrowed from the Maasai area administration, leading to some confusion. The use of *section* among the Maasai identified cohesive and territorially bounded units, regardless of clanship. Thus in both societies, all levels of patrilineal segmentation are scattered throughout their region, but among the Samburu it is each clan that forms the principal unit of political and social cohesion, even though it is dispersed, whereas among the Maasai it is the territorial 'section' that is a bounded entity politically, socially, and geographically, even though it cuts across notions of clanship..

Thus a close comparison between the two societies is to regard the whole of Samburu District as an independent and detached Maasai 'section', and this may make sense historically. Consistent with this, where certain Samburu clans are also to be found in neighbouring Districts, such as the Ariaal Rendille to the east or the Chamus to the south-west, these Districts may also be regarded as separate 'sections' in the same sense. (*Nomads in Alliance* pp. 130-7; *Pastoral Continuum* pp. 158-62).

In 1958, knowledge of the ancestry of the extended lineages that composed various sub-clans could not be traced further back than is shown in the genealogy below. Where shared ancestry extends to link successive portions of this chart,, this linkage is indicated by **duplicating the common ancestry in green**.

In the chart, two recent ancestors are shown as female, indicating a quite anomalous irregularity in their marriages: perhaps a premarital pregnancy where the child was allowed to live, or a divorce by a husband who chose to disown his son. It seems quite possible that some earlier 'male' ancestors in the genealogy could actually have been girls of the clan whose gender had merged over time into the patrilineal system.

Various patrilineal segments have traditions of migration from neighbouring peoples (eg. Rendille) or from defunct groups (eg. Laikipiak). It did not occur to me to collect systematic data on these traditions, and these are therefore not indicated in the genealogy. The point to emphasise is that the clan is perceived as a time-honoured commitment to a bond that has acquired mystical overtones. This binds patrilineal segments together, regardless of distant traditions of their separate origins.

The levels of segmentation of Pardopa clan are shown below, followed by details of the full genealogy. The significance of the 'hair-sharing group' is the belief that the death of a man within this group contaminates the hair of his age mates. These age mates should therefore shave their scalps and discard the hair to bring them back to a propitious state.

Clan Sub-clans Hair-sharing groups Lineage groups

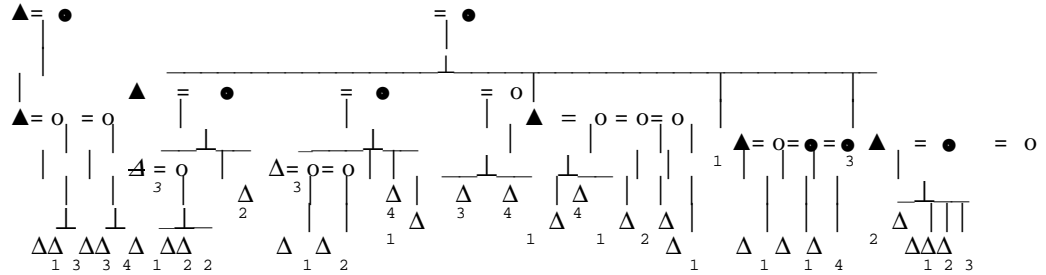


The genealogy of Pardopa clan, 1958

Kojaka: Parele

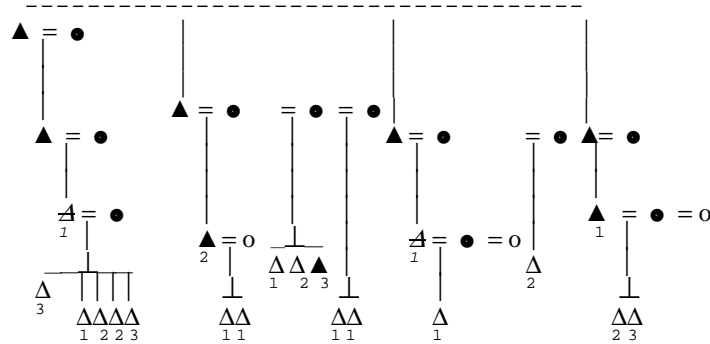
Age-set :

- Lpeeta
- Kipayang
- Kipeko
- Kiteku
- Tarigirik
- Marikon
- Terito
- Merisho
- Kiliako
- Mekuri
- Kimaniki



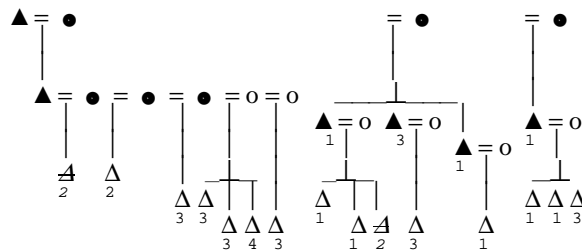
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- Lpeeta
- Kipayang
- Kipeko
- Kiteku
- Tarigirik
- Marikon
- Terito
- Merisho
- Kiliako
- Mekuri
- Kimaniki



LENAKIN | LEMARTILE

- Lpeeta
- Kipayang
- Kipeko
- Kiteku
- Tarigirik
- Marikon
- Terito
- Merisho
- Kiliako
- Mekuri
- Kimaniki

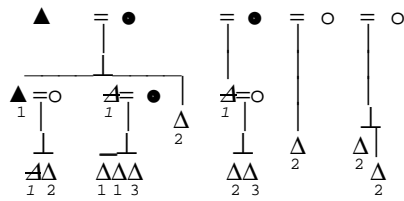


LESEPE

Kojoka: Ang'alapoi (Lkung'uan see Pastoral Continuum: 160)

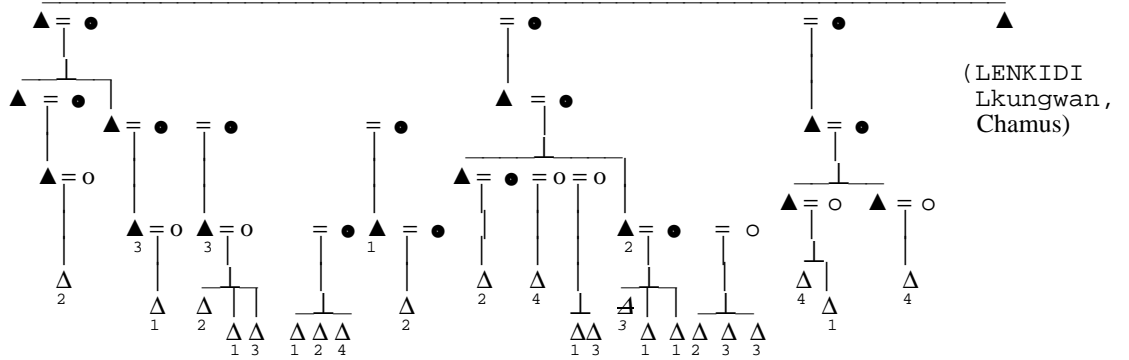
Age-set:

- Tarigirik
- Marikon
- Terito
- Merisho
- Kiliako
- Mekuri
- Kimaniki



LEPARLERO

- Lpeeta
- Kipayang
- Kipeko
- Kiteku
- Tarigirik
- Marikon
- Terito
- Merisho
- Kiliako
- Mekuri
- Kimaniki



LESALONGA

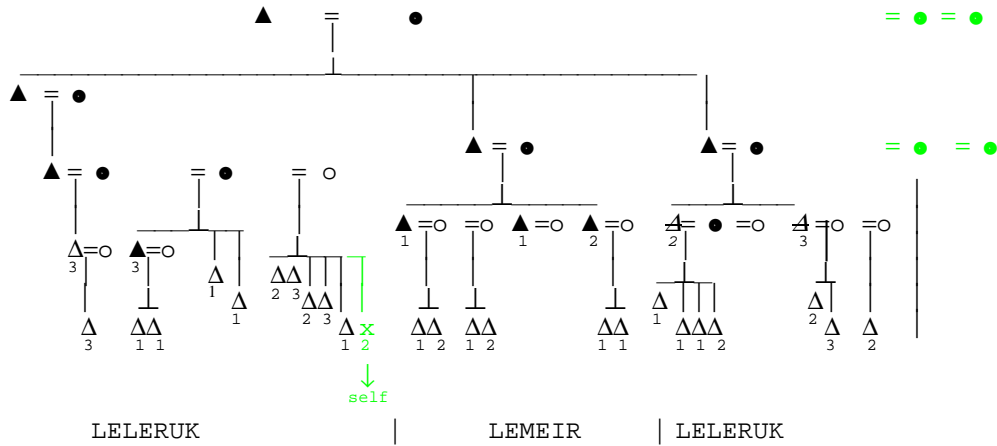
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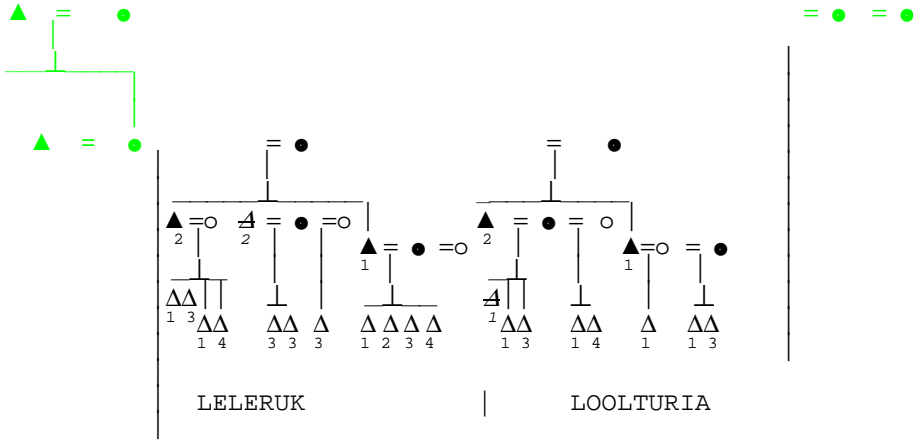
Kojaka: Kurima

Age-set :

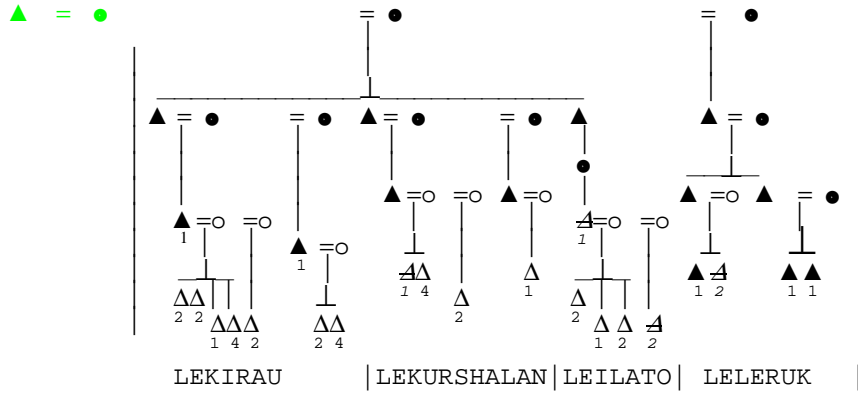
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- Merisho
- Kiliako
- Mekuri
- Kimaniki



- Lpeeta
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- Kimaniki



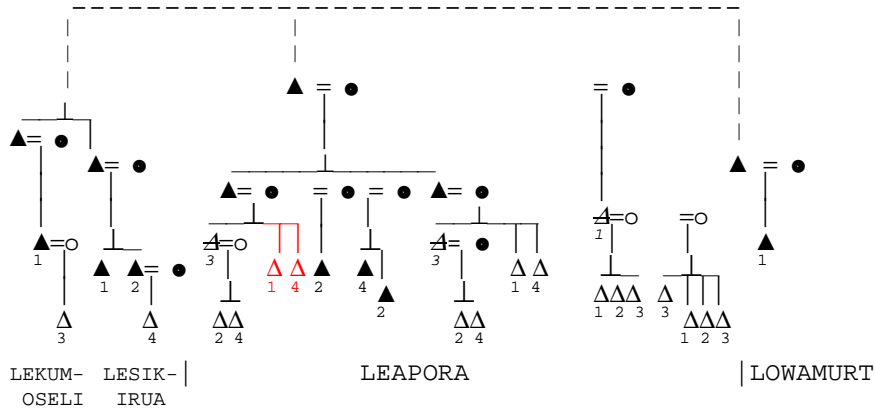
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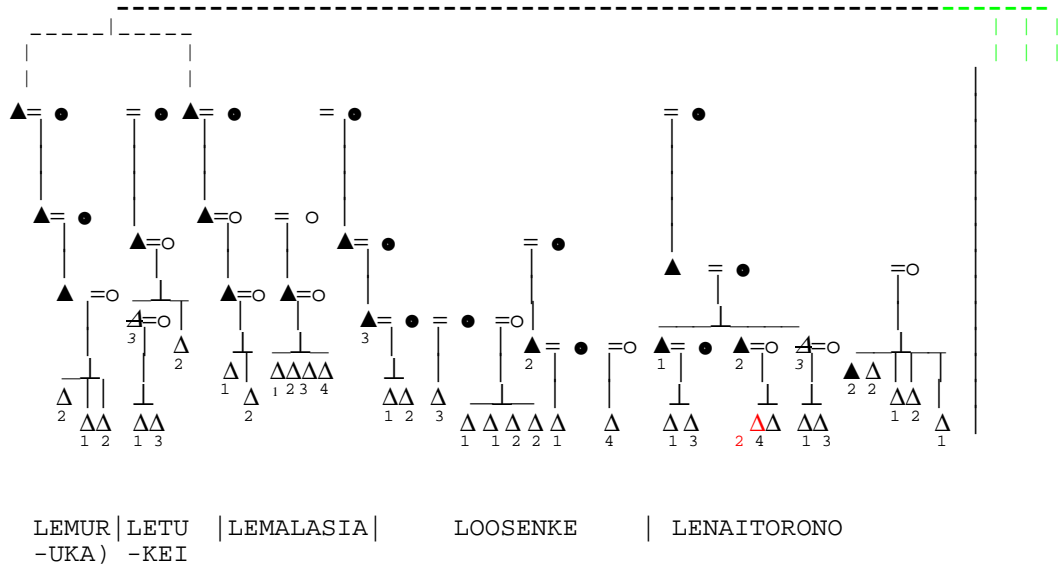
Parsile: Kunte

Age-set :

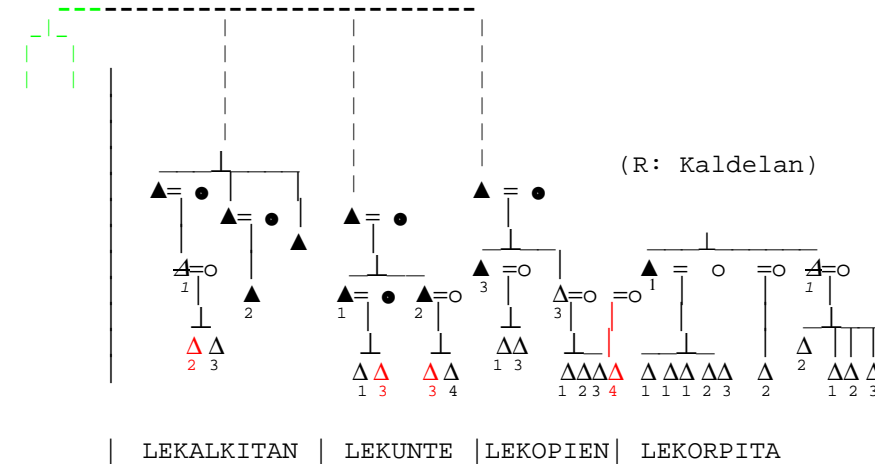
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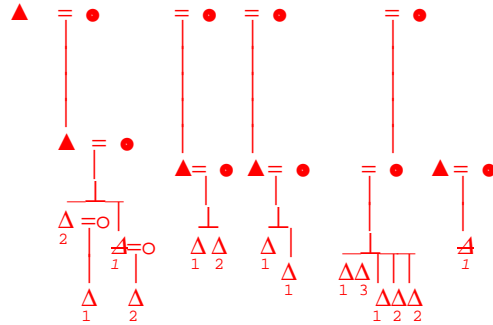
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Parsile: Seiya

Age-set :

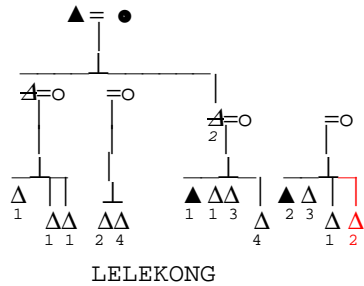
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- Kipeko
- Kiteku
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LEADO (details uncertain in 1958-60, but clarified in 1973)

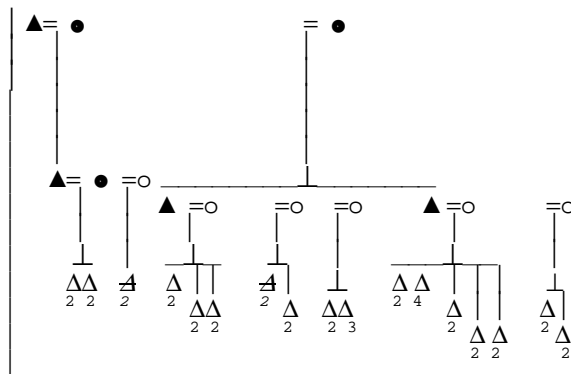
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- Tarigirik
- Marikon
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- Mekuri
- Kimaniki

(Rendille: Nahagan)



LELEKONG

- Lpeeta
- Kipayang
- Kipeko
- Kiteku
- Tarigirik
- Marikon
- Terito
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- Mekuri
- Kimaniki

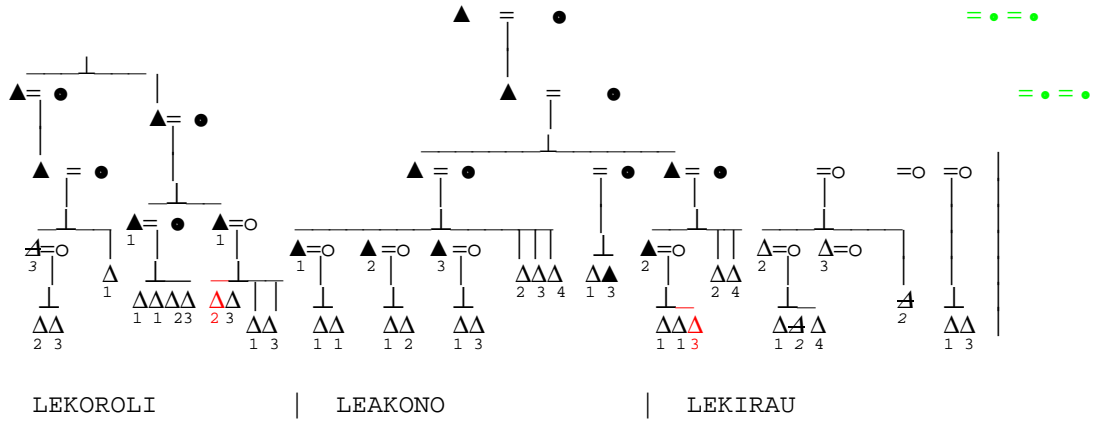


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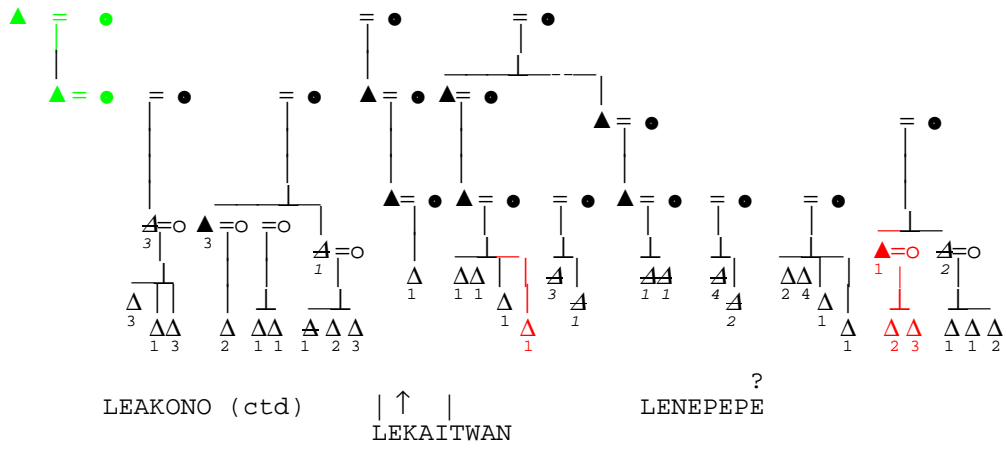
Parsile: Ikal

Age-set :

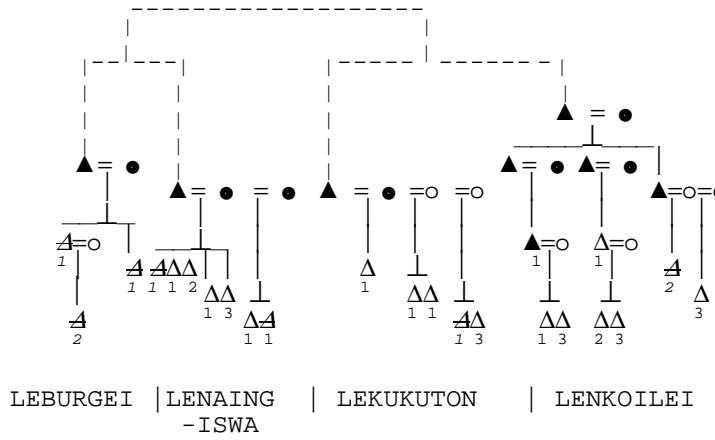
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- Mekuri
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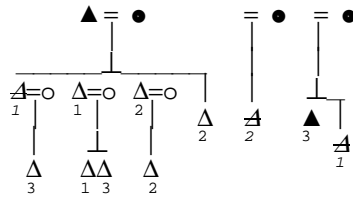
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Parsile: Ikal

Age-set :

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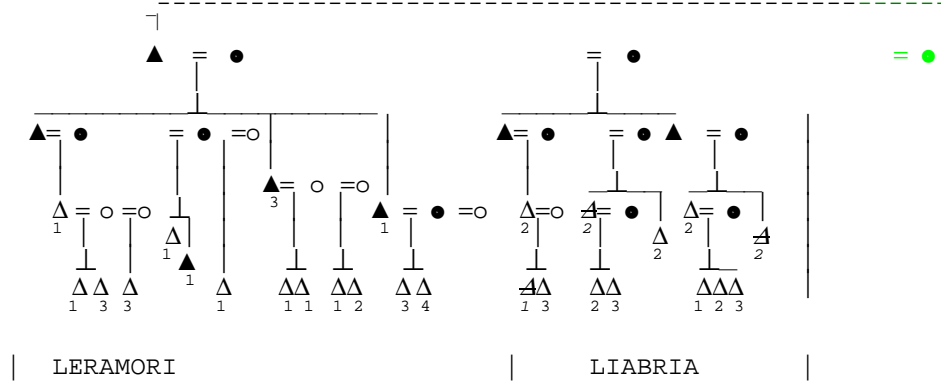


| LEKASULA |

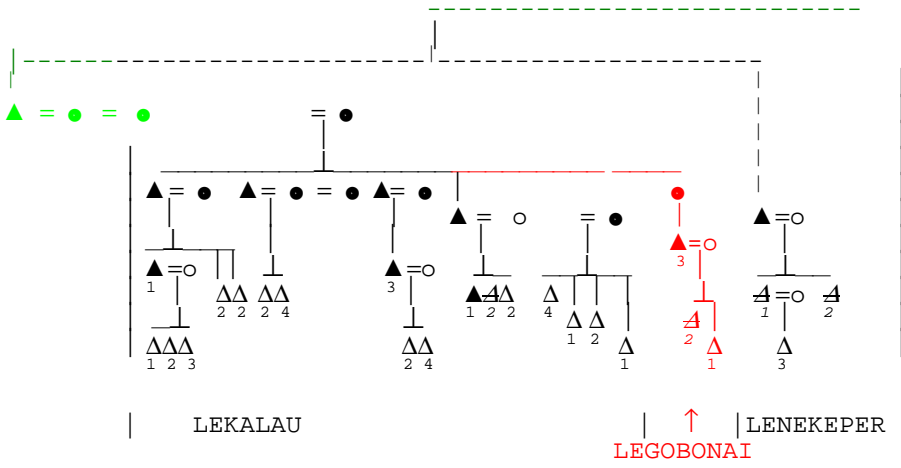
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- Kimaniki



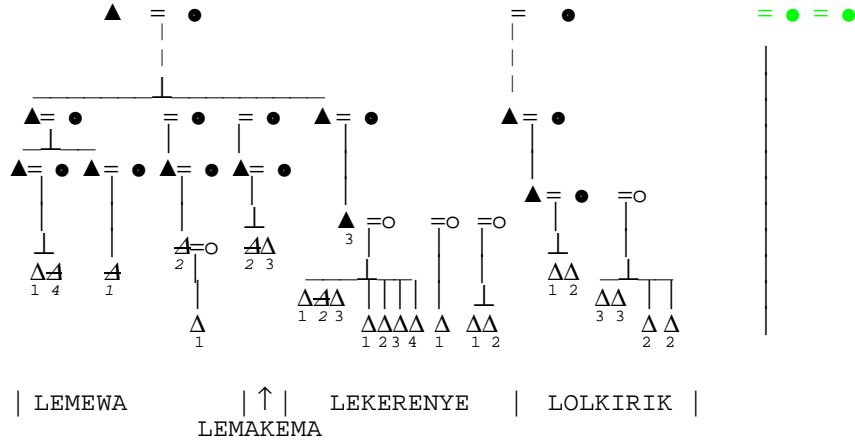
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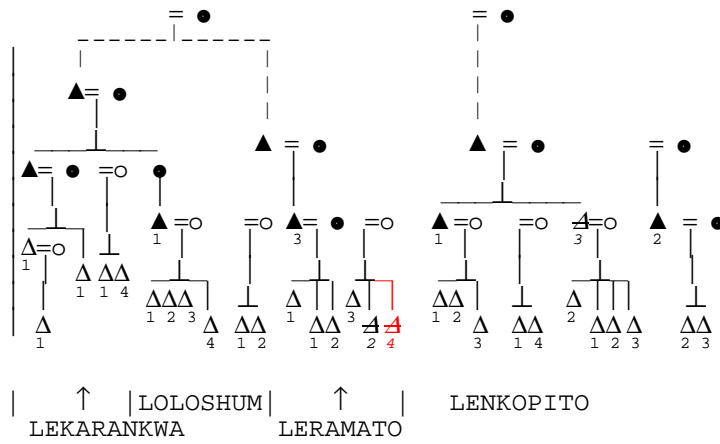
Age-set :

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- Terito
- Merisho
- Kiliako
- Mekuri
- Kimaniki



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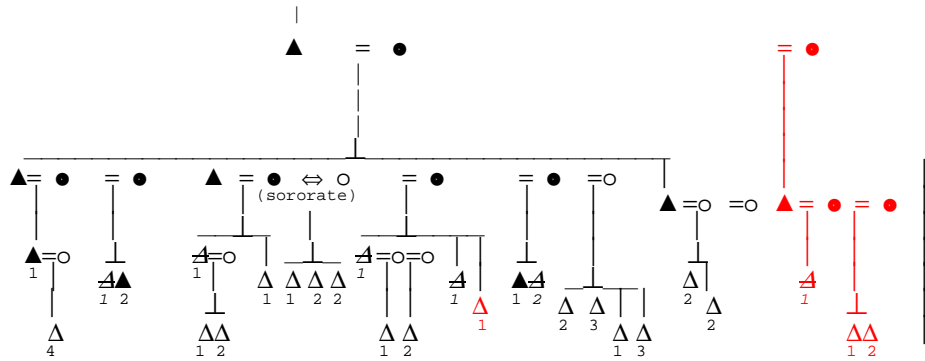
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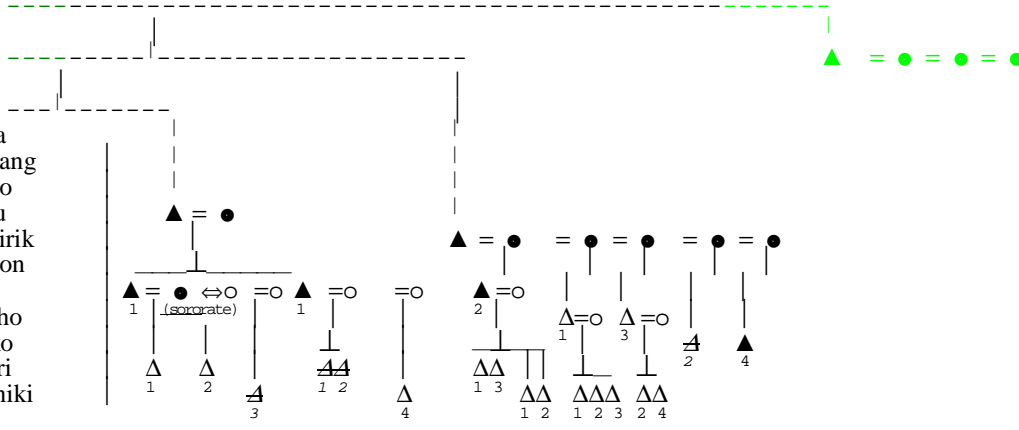
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LARAPO

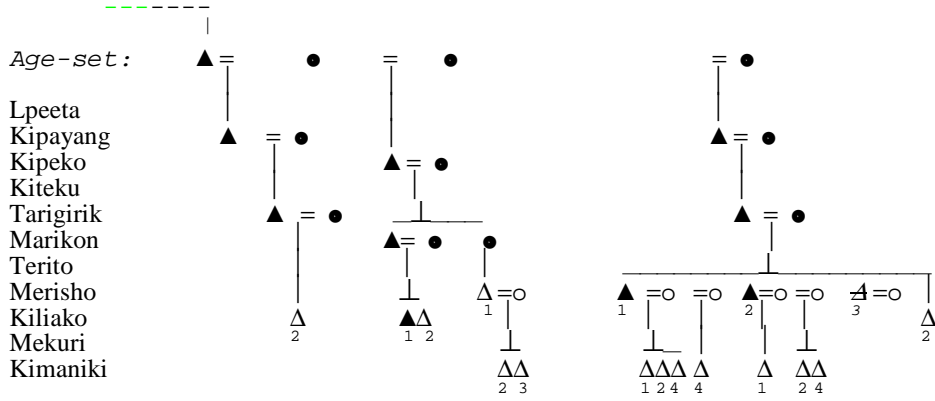
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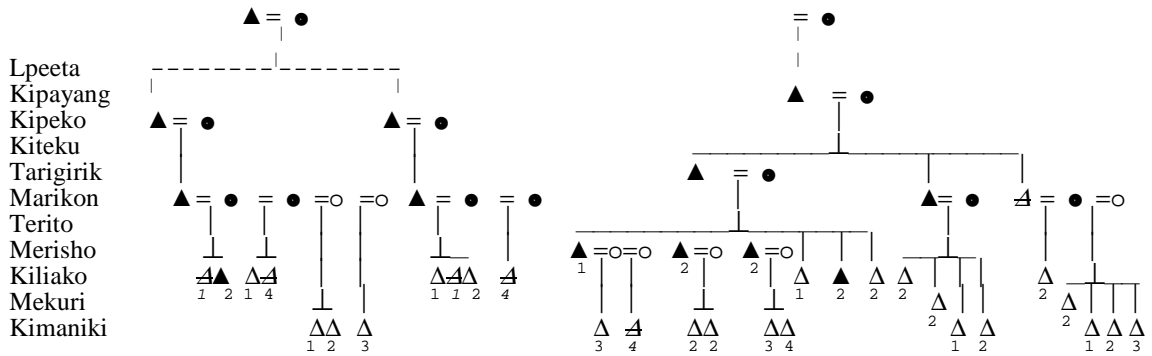
LARAPO

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LETAPASI | LEARUS | LENKAWO | LEMELEN



LESORI | LEKORTAL | LEARAT

The age-set system

The genealogy is arranged vertically according to the age-set of each male. Below each elder or moran, the number (1-4) refers to successive sub-age-sets in order of seniority within his age-set.

Initiation into a sub-age-set defines youths of broadly the same age. However, there is a certain age range because of personal factors within each family, such as the precociousness of some sons (who are initiated early) or a shortage of boys retained for herding despite their maturity (who are initiated late). This results in an uncertain overlapping of true age between successive sub-age-sets, and hence also between age-sets.

With this in mind, the most reliable indication of age difference occurs between the first two sub-age-sets of an age-set (ie. between '1' and '2'). These were initiated together at the inauguration of the age-set, and those labeled '1' (*Chong'onopir*) were held to be fully grown at this time and the trail-blazers of their age-set, whereas the remainder (labeled '2') were less mature and lagged behind. Thus the broader grouping of males into six age categories for statistical purposes (*Pastoral Continuum*, p. 215) was not strictly according to their age-sets, but it grouped the most senior of each age-set with their predecessors of the next age-set. Thus sub-age-set Mekuri 1 was combined with Kiliako 2, 3, and 4 in order to provide a reasonably well-defined age category, and Kiliako 1 was combined with Merisho 2 and 3, so on.

Summary: Age-set profile of Pardopa elders and moran, 1958-73

Age-set, & sub-age-set (1-4)	Estimated. average age in 1958	1958 sample distribution	1973 retrospective additions	1958 amended total	Deaths 1958-73	Survivors to 1973
Marikon	88+	2	-	2	2	0
Terito 1	84	5	-	5	5	0
Terito 2	79	3	-	3	3	0
Terito 3	72	5	-	5	5	0
Merisho 1	66	15	-	15	8	7
Merisho 2	61	11	1	12	5	7
Merisho 3	58	15	-	15	6	9
Kiliako 1	55	37	6	43	12+3	28
Kiliako 2	50	50	1	51	10	41
Kiliako 3	46	5	-	5	1	4
Kiliako 4	42	22	1	23	4	19
Mekuri 1	41	37	3	40	5	35
Mekuri 2	36	38	3	41	4+1	36
Mekuri 3	32	27	1	28	1	27
Kimaniki 1	29	114	5	119	5	114
Kimaniki 2	24	82	7	89	5	84
Kimaniki 3	20	65	4	69	1	68
Kimaniki 4	17	33	2	35	1+1	33
Total		566	34	600	83+5	512

[cf. *The Samburu* 1965: 321]

[cf. *The Pastoral Continuum* 1998: 215]