

## **Qur'anic Exegesis in Old Kanembu: Lexico-grammatical Retentions and Innovations**

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The practice of oral and written interpretation of the Qur'an in archaic variety of Kanuri – Old Kanembu – goes back to at least the sixteenth century which is evidenced by Qur'an manuscripts produced in the Borno Sultanate. Old Kanembu (as used in the manuscripts and in modern-day recitations) represents a codified technical language used in studies of the Qur'an and *tafsīr*.

Old Kanembu is a complex linguistic phenomenon. On the one hand, it has retained many archaic lexemes and grammatical structures not present in modern Kanuri – to the extent that Old Kanembu is entirely unintelligible to the Kanuri speakers. On the other hand, Old Kanembu uses a high proportion of Arabic words and some syntactic devices presumably invented to convey various aspects of Arabic grammar. These elements were most likely designed to overcome differences between Arabic and Kanuri and, presumably, facilitate understanding of Qur'anic Arabic by the non-Arabic speakers (as maintained by the modern-day Kanuri-speaking scholars). However, as a result of accumulation of archaic features and invented translational techniques, the meaning of exegetic text in Old Kanembu is only accessible to the learned circles of Islamic scholars and students.

The presentation will focus on three different levels of translation of the Qur'anic Arabic, i.e. (1) morphemes, (2) word-for-word translation, and (3) phrase or sentence translation either of the Qur'anic text or an Arabic commentary (*tafsīr*). It will be shown that despite the specialised and narrow function of Old Kanembu, it has left various imprints on modern Kanuri and its dialects.