

Who Are The Illo-Busa?



Researched by Dr Ross McCallum Jones

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1.0 Illo-Busa, the name and language

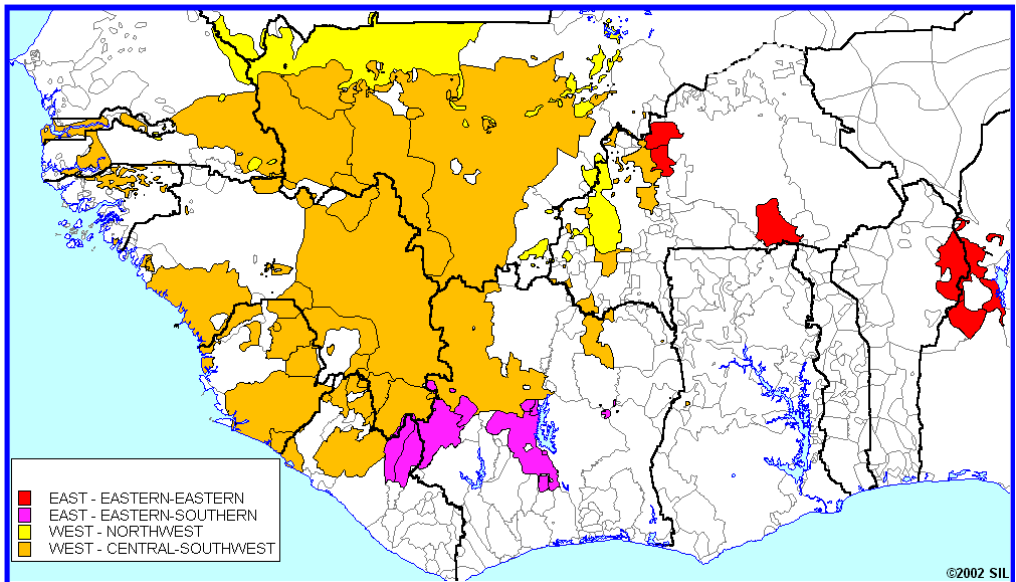
The Illo-Busa live in and around Illo, a town In Bagudo Local Government Area, Kebbi State, Nigeria. They originated from the Busa (Bisã) people who live 200 km to the south in New Bussa and its surrounding villages and are called Bussawa by the Hausa, but who call themselves Bisã. Tradition would have it that one of Kisra's sons founded Illo many centuries ago. It is not clear when a migration of Busa people to Illo occurred, but the two languages now vary considerably and it must have been at least 300 years ago as one informant suggested.

Illo-Busa is now closer to the neighbouring language Boko than it is to Bisã, being 95% cognate and 57% identical with Busa, and 94% cognate and 64% identical with Boko. Its language identification code is BQP.

The official classification is: Niger-Congo, Mande, Eastern, Busa cluster. So Illo-Busa belongs to the Niger-Congo branch of languages which includes most of the indigenous languages of Sub-saharan Africa and is classified with the Mande family of languages. Most of these languages are in the centre or west of West Africa, but Illo-Busa is towards the east, so belongs to the Eastern sub-group. Within that sub-grouping there are four

clusters of languages each cluster having some intelligibility between speakers. The Boko/Busa cluster includes Boko, Bokobaru, Busa and Illo-Busa, and the Kyanga cluster includes Kyanga and Shanga.

Illo-Busa is mutually intelligible with the Boko and Busa language speakers and there is partial intelligibility with Bokobaru. It is not intelligible with Kyanga and Shanga. Lexical similarity is 67% with Kyanga/Shanga, 94% with the Boko/Busa cluster.



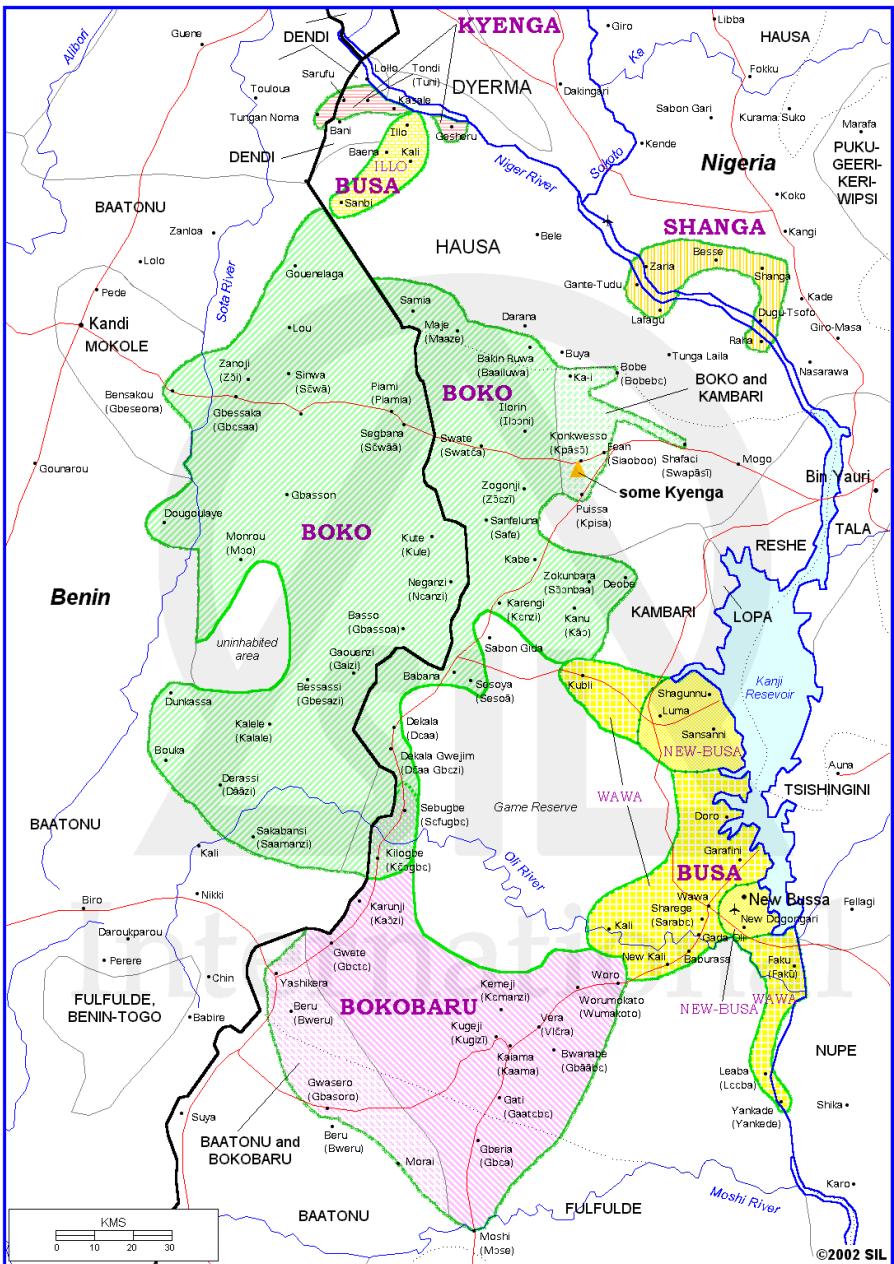
The distribution of Mande family languages with Boko/Busa/Kyanga area on the right

Eastern Mande languages

Bissa	Samo	Busa	Kyanga
Barka	Toma	Busa (Bisã)	Kyanga
Lebir	Tougan	Illo-Busa	Shanga
		Boko	
		Bokobaru	

Some of the western Mande languages include Bambara, Bandi, Boso, Jula, Kono, Kpelle, Kuranko, Ligbi, Loma, Loko, Marka, Manding, Maninka, Mende, Seeku, Sembla, Soninke, Susu, Vai, Yalunka. Eastern division Mande languages with an approximate number of speakers (2016) and the countries where they live are as follows:

Samo	460,000	Burkina Faso
Bisa	750,000	Burkina Faso
Boko	175,000	Nigeria/Benin
Bokobaru	65,000	Nigeria
Busa	60,000	Nigeria
Illo-Busa	20,000	Nigeria
Kyanga	15,000	Nigeria/Benin
Shanga	6,000	Nigeria



Home of the Boko, Bokobaru, Busa (Bisā),
Kyenga, Shanga and Illo-Busa speakers

2.0 Population and distribution

Illo-Busa speakers number about 20,000 and live in a dozen localities south west of Illo. The majority of them live in four towns called Baani, Gidanzana, Kali and Sambe. Of these 20,000 people nearly half are ethnic Kyanga, who have assimilated to Illo-Busa. Kyanga is a closely related Mande language. They are all bilingual in Hausa. The Illo-Busa language does not seem to be in danger of disappearing in the near future, although there are several thousand ethnic Illo-Busa at Illo, Kurukuru and Gesheru who have assimilated to Hausa. Illo-Busa is mutually intelligible with Boko, but not with Kyanga. Lexical similarity is 65% with Kyanga, 94% with the Boko.

The Illo-Busa live in Kebbi State in north-western Nigeria, in the west of Bagudo Local Government Area south of Illo. Illo town is located at 11°33' north of the equator and 3°42' east. In 2007 it had a population of 7000 of whom about 2000 are ethnic Busa including the village head Alhaji Muhammed Wanka (Sarkin Illo).

Here are the official 2007 population figures of Illo-Busa towns and villages (Illo-Busa pronunciation in brackets) with *estimated* numbers of Busa speakers and ethnic Busa.

Centre	Pop.	Busa speakers	Ethnic Busa
1. Illo	7046	100	2000
2. Kali (Bãibe)	6935	3500	1500
3. Bani (Baani)	5810	4200	2200
4. Gidanzana (Gilanzaana)	5456	2500	800
5. Sambe (Sambe)	1660	1260	660
6. Sabo Birni (Waganaga)		500	400
7. Anaswa (Kãmaswai)		400	300
8. Samba		250	20
9. Sainji (Sëi)	5479	0	200
10. Ilela		160	80
11. Kangiwa	4216	100	300
12. Gbirizĩ (Gbilizĩ)		60	60
13. Gwege (Gbegε)		50	50
14. Kabaka		40	40
15. Kurukuru (Kulukulu)	1700	0	1000
16. Geshuru (Gesɔɔ)	2527	0	400
Total		13,120	10,010

2017 estimate @ 5% annual growth (not compounded):

20,000 16,500

The majority of the Illo-Busa speaking population live in 4 towns south to south east of Illo between the Illo-Samia road and the Benin Republic border. The Illo-Busa speaking population is nearly 50% ethnic Kyanga who have assimilated to the Illo-Busa

language. Many of these Kyanga retain their distinctive facial markings.

In the main Illo-Busa speaking villages all ages still speak Illo-Busa. They intermarry with Kyanga and Boko. In Kali, Sambe and Gilanzana everyone speaks Illo-Busa, but ethnic Kyanga outnumber ethnic Busa.



Map showing main Illo-Busa speaking villages,
Bani, Kali, Gilanzana and Sambe

Details of the Illo-Busa speaking villages (2011)

1. Illo has about 2000 ethnic Busa who have assimilated to Hausa, only a few old people still speaking Illo-Busa.
2. Bani has over 4000 Illo-Busa speakers. At least half of them are ethnic Busa with many ethnic Kyanga.
3. Gidan Zana has a majority of ethnic Kyanga, with one family still speaking Kyanga. All speak Illo-Busa.
4. Sambe has about 1200 Illo-Busa speakers including some ethnic Kyanga.
5. Sabo Birni (Hausa for Newtown) was originally called Waganagaa, a Kyanga word meaning camp of bubal antelopes. It now consists mainly of Busa people and everyone speaks Illo-Busa.
6. Samba is east of Sambe with a population of about 300 people 250 of whom speak both Illo-Busa and Kyanga. There are 13 Kyanga households and one Busa household.
7. Anaswa, 9 km SE of Gilan Zana has about 400 people, who are mostly Busa with some Kyanga. All speak Illo-Busa. The original name was Kāmaswai “rest river”.
8. Tungun Goge The original village is one km on the Benin side of the border and consists mainly of Hausa and Zerma with Hausa the main language. There are 3 Kyanga households and the older ones still greet in Kyanga. There are no Illo-Busa speakers there, but at a

newer village on the Nigerian side of the border called Ilela, Hausa for “extension”, they all speak Illo-Busa. There are 3 households of ethnic Kyanga who migrated there from Kamba and 3 households of Illo-Busa speakers who came from Bani.

9. Kali is 12 km south from Illo, followed by the villages of Tungan Mala, Kabaka (2 households Busa), Kangiwa (Ipu in Illo-Busa), Gbirizi (3 households Busa) and Tungan Goni.
10. Tsamia is 45 km south of Illo and 54 km from Kaoje. 5 km after Tsamia is Tungan Batule, another 15 km to Maaze and another 12 km to Bailua which is 22 km from Kaoje. Gendene (Gēnēna) is on the south bank of the Niger 19 km from Kaoje.
11. Gbege, a small settlement near Anaswa has about 60 Illo-Busa speakers.
12. Tafuna, a small settlement between Tungan Goge and Gidan Zana has some Busa people who are assimilating to Hausa.

In the main Illo-Busa speaking villages all ages still speak Illo-Busa. They intermarry with Kyanga and Boko.

3.0 Language in Society

The Busa live in 10 villages and are not decreasing in numbers like the Kyanga. Up to 50% Illo-Busa speakers are ethnic Kyanga who have assimilated to Busa, over 50% at Gidanzana where the chief is also Kyanga. Hausa and Fulani are found in or near Illo-Busa villages and Zerma from Niger are on the increase. Illo-Busa children still learn their parents language. Some call themselves Busa, others call themselves Boko, and their language is basically Boko without the elision that has occurred in Boko. All Illo-Busa are bilingual in Hausa, the prestige language of the area and of their religion Islam. There is a definite danger that the Illo-Busa people will assimilate to Hausa and that their language will be lost.

4.0 History

The Illo-Busa share in the Kisira legend that is so strong among the Boko/Busa people of Borgu and other groups in Nigeria. According to this legend some ancestors fled from Mohammed and Islam in the Middle East and eventually settled in Borgu, intermarrying with the local inhabitants (Boko). It may be true that some people came from the Middle East and intermarried with Mande people, but it is not feasible to think of a West African Mande tribe like the Illo-Busa as having originated from there. Linguistically all languages related to the Boko/Busa group are to the West of them. It is generally believed that the Kyanga preceded the Busa and the Boko in northern Borgu.

4.1 First settlements

A documentary record about Illo by a Colonial Officer states: “This part of the country is believed to have consisted of unhabited bush before it was occupied by a part of the wave of Immigrant Kishira (Kisra) people who came from the east at a very early date. Exactly when this occupation took place it is difficult to say, for the chief of Illo puts it at some fourteen centuries ago.”

28234, “Illo Independant District, Sokoto Province” Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna.

Surviving tradition suggests that the Kyanga and the Gurma were the autochthonous people. Later the Wasangari people arrived and instituted their own political authority. The Gurma moved away to the north west while the Kyanga remained on their original site. The early political system of Illo and information about its establishment are unclear. Fragments of information indicate that the Ba-Kperude, Ba-Ferinde and Ba-Kwakwa were the earth-priests, but as religious leaders they were not empowered to exercise political power and authority, a vacuum the Wasangari ruling class later filled. Thus, most of what is known about the early history and political structure of Illo relates to the Wasangari. Aguza, who was identified as the brother of Kisra, has been credited with the founding of the Illo dynasty.

Julius Adekunle, page 85.

Illo became prosperous and accommodated merchants of different backgrounds. Its influence attracted many immigrant

groups, thus bringing about a multicultural and multilinguistic society. The Wasangari altered the previous political arrangement by taking over leadership from the earth-priests. While the Wasangari (under Bio Sheru or Agwaza) were rulers, the Kyanga (under Kirikasa) were the commercial and industrial group, the Zaberma and Fulani controlled the cattle trade. The “kawo” tree, located at the outskirts of the town, is used to remember when Illo was established. It also marked the point where Agwaza (Bio) separated from the sons of Kisra, an event that was witnessed by the Bedde of Kasati, a powerful and influential ruler in the region. The relations between Kasati and Illo were strong as indicated by an arrangement that the Bedde could serve as the regent of Illo whenever the throne was vacant, while the Kirikasa (chief priest) of Illo acted as the regent of Kasati. This political arrangement worked out well for the two towns because of a kinship factor. The Bedde was politically equal in importance to the Kokani of Kebbi since both formed part of the Wasangari migration. Another important town in the region was Kurukuru whose head also served as the Ubandawaki (custodian of the crown of the king of Illo). When a new king was chosen, the Ubandawaki handed over the crown to the Bedde of Kasati who performed the installation ceremony.

BORGU DISTRICT/28234 “Illo Independent District”, Nigerian
National Archives, Kaduna.

Migrations by the Kyanga and Dendi led to the establishment of towns such as Kali, Lollo and Yantala. A son of Sarkin Bani has been credited with the founding of Kali in 1630. Although

these towns were located near Illo, they owed allegiance to Yelwa. Other towns under Illo were Samia and Kaoje. While Samia derived its wealth from trade with Segbana, Kaoje was a market centre for cattle trade and Hausa, Fulani and Wangara quarters were established there following the flourishing trade.

4.2 Early conflicts

In 1493 with the west and south to heel, Sonni Ali, king of Songhai, turned his attention to the east and conducted a campaign against Borgu, but with only partial success. On his return from Borgu to Gao, Soni Ali was accidentally drowned while crossing a small tributary of the Niger. (Hogben in *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, 1966)

At the beginning of 1505 the Songhai army was defeated by the chief of Bussa. Askia Mohammed did however carry off numerous slaves, one of whom became the mother of the succeeding Askia Musa.

At the rise of the Songhai power the three kingdoms Bussa, Illo and Nikki were attacked by Mamara at the head of the Zaberma, but on his death the king of Nikki conquered Songhai. He now ruled over the greater part of Borgu, his kingdom extending northwards to Illo, south to Ilesha and east to Kaima. (Elizabeth Ischei, *A History of Nigeria* 1893)

In 1593 the Moor leader Mahmud Pasha attacked the Songai leader Askia Nuh in Dendi country south of Gurma. Nuh received support from the Borgawa, warlike pagans with long experience of the great defensive possibilities of their country.

Later on Dendi settlers from Illo and Gaya areas on the Niger river along with traders and scholars from Hausaland formed the majority of the Muslim population in Borgu.

In the 17th and 18th centuries Borgu extended to the Niger and included Illo. It is generally believed that the Kyanga preceded the Boko in northern Borgu. Mallam Idris claims that the Kyanga came from Mali and have a royal ancestor in the person of Askia Mohammed of the Songhai empire (1493 — 1528).

In 1810 Shehu Usman dan Fodio crossed the river and subdued Gurma.

In 1811 Bello led a 3rd expedition to this part of the country and conquered the little principality of Illo.

In 1814 Illo was made a tributary of Gwandu for a short while (this is denied by Illo).

In 1835 Borgu attacked Kaoje and killed the Emir of Gwandu's brother.

In 1900 British troops occupied Illo.

In 1907 the Illo area was given by the colonialists to Sokoto province in compensation for lands lost as a result of northern boundary adjustments.

Illo was politically independent of other Borgu kingdoms. One of the most critical battles that Illo fought was the Samba war. A frontier dispute may have caused the war. Owing to kinship relations, the Kibe of Busa sent a contingent of soldiers under the leadership of Sabi Shika to assist Illo. Of the three

kingdoms Illo was the smallest and most vulnerable to attack. It was also the wealthiest, especially because it controlled Kaoje and Segbana, which were Borgu economic centres. Proximity to Hausaland, the source of North African goods, contributed to the thriving economy of Illo.

Illo fought a series of wars with Gwandu in the Sokoto Caliphate. The war of 1814 ended in a stalemate, although Walter Nash, a colonial officer, claimed that the Gwandu army captured Illo. During the reign of Mohamman (1828-1833) Gwandu attacked Illo for the second time. According to Gwandu accounts, Illo was captured and Mohamman married Tagimba, the daughter of Kwai Lafia, the chief of Illo. But the tradition at Illo stated that the soldiers of Kwai Lafia ambushed the armies of Gwandu at Bada or Tafanji. The invaders were sent back before they could attack Illo. Gwandu launched another attack during the reign of Digangan, chief of Illo. Baraya was sent by the Emir of Gwandu (1833-1858) to collect tribute, claiming that Illo was under his political jurisdiction. Considering this to be an encroachment on Illo's frontiers, the emissaries were killed. For these victories, the people of Illo assert, "we never followed Gwandu". The wars were more over boundary disputes than religion, according to Nash.

A war broke out between Busa and Kaoje in 1833. Illo joined forces with Bussa, while Halilu of Gwandu aided Kaoje. The Bussa-Illo allied army was repulsed at Kassara in 1835 and thereafter Halilu (1835-1855) sent an expedition under Mohamman Sambo on some Borgu towns. Sambo's forces lost

the first campaign, but captured Kaoje, a former ally, during the second expedition. Kaoje's economic prosperity, especially in cattle trade, may have caused the attack by Gwandu. Kaoje continued to experience military attacks from Gwandu. Between 1839 and 1850 Shirado 1 raided Kaoje and Gwomba.

In 1859 a combined force from Illo, Bussa, Kaiama, Yelwa and N'Gaski fought against Kaoje. Illo declared war in reaction to some men from Kaoje who cut off the arms of Inya, the daughter of Gajere, the kibe of Busa, in order to take away her bracelets. The allied forces captured about 1000 men and burned down Gendinni and Gaten Tudu. When help arrived from Gwandu, Kaoje was able to repulse the allied forces.

The French forces occupied Illo in 1896. As the British stationed their West African Frontier Force (WAFF) in Yashikera and other Borgu towns, the French stationed two officers and thirty soldiers at Illo between 1897 and 1902. Illo did not offer any resistance to the French because its military had been weakened having been involved in a series of wars. The control of trade on the River Niger and desire to gain access to the interior of Borgu were the motives behind the French occupation of Illo. Nonetheless, following the Anglo-French delineation agreement, Illo fell within the jurisdiction of the British. The British enjoyed the cooperation of Kimaza who died in 1902. The Commanding Officer of the WAFF detachment that had occupied Bussa installed Bio Shirado 11, who succeeded Kimaza. Bio Shirado 11 had formerly accompanied British expeditions to Raha and Sokoto.

According to a nineteenth century traveler, merchants from Songhay and Sudan met their Hausa counterparts at Illo where livestock, cotton cloth, salt, potash and kola nuts were sold.

The traditions of Illo and Busa agree that their respective foundations were closely linked, though they put forward different views as to the respective degrees of seniority of these two polities. In 1907, Illo and the area to the south and southeast of it were administratively separated from the rest of Nigerian Borgu and attached to Sokoto Province. This separation has continued ever since.

4.3 Trade routes

From Kano, there were two routes leading to Gonja. The first, the northern route, passed through Sansanne Mango, Mamprussie, and Yendi to Salaga and other Asante dominated markets (Lovejoy 1971 : 538), and the second route, which we are focusing on, went further south through most of the Borgu states. This route crossed the Niger at Illo, a commercial port of Borgu, to Bussa, Wawa, Kaiama, Nikki, Djougou, and then Gonja (Harris 1939 : 28). Apart from this route, there was also a feeder route which linked other Borgu states to the major route (Hallett 1965 : 96). The Borgu route was the shorter and therefore the more preferred of the two routes. Lander, who went through Borgu in the early nineteenth century, reported seeing "about a thousand [Hausa] individuals of both sexes" along the Borgu route (*ibid.*).

4.4 History of Illo

According to the Sarkin Illo and his council, he is a direct descendant of Kisra, himself the 62nd king in the direct line of the Busawa race, who reigned over the Yorubawa, Gurmawa and Kyangawa in his kingdom in the vicinity of Mecca, of which Badar was the capital. Kisra opposed the advance of the prophet Muhammad and sought assistance from his kinsman, the Sarkin Bornu, but in vain. He was defeated and killed and his son led his people in flight to the town of Bussa where he settled. His brother Agwasa founded Illo with the Kyangawa as subjects, and Nikki was founded by the husband of Amina, a daughter of Kisra. The Yorubawa went south of Bussa and the Gurmawa west. At the rise of the Songhay power these three states and Borgu were attacked by the king Mamara, his principal fighting force being the Zabermawa who came to the country from the west hundreds of years after all Busawa, though now Zabermanci is a common language. After his death Sarkin Nikki took Songhay and the Kyangawa spreading their borders broke off from Illo and became independent. They were however conquered and subdued by the Kebbawa under Kanta in the 16th century. Illo retained its independence till it was made subject to Gando (Gwandu) by the second Emir.

The custom house at Illo was also important. It was at Illo that all Hausa merchants, especially from the eighteenth century when these merchants took control of the Gonja market, had to cross the Niger to Borguland. The control of

that port was however controversial. While some held the view that it was Nikki that controlled the port, others strongly believed it was Bussa. The evidence at our disposal however supported Bussa control of the port. When the horses were in short supply, more were imported to Borgu through Illo port. However, the menace of armed bandits, who were princes, led to the boycotting of Borgu markets and the diversion of the routes elsewhere. The implication was that these Borgu states lost major revenue which affected the economy of the country. Consequently, at the inception of the colonial rule in 1900, most of the capitals had deteriorated into villages.

5.0 Culture

The following professions are practised by the Busa as evidenced by these Busa nouns.

<u>English</u>	<u>Busa</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Busa</u>
barber	mibona	blacksmith	shia
farmer	sèwana	fisherman	sóokò
hunter	toekana	trader	lagatana
butcher	laga	wood gatherer	yakawena
merchant	lagatana	water fetcher	itòtòna
potter	oobona	shea gatherer	kuwena
tanner	baatotona	hair plaiter	mitãna
cloth weaver	bazatãna	mat weaver	petãna
builder	kpebona	iron furnace	mògatèkpe
drummer	batagãgã	violinist	gogelèda

Hunting has always been an important in their culture. The Busa are mostly farmers, planting millet and corn. In towns and villages near the Niger river, they fish and grow onions. Each village has its blacksmith for making knives, hoes, coup-coups etc. There are also wood carvers who carve handles, mortars and pestles etc. Others weave mats from palm fronds, although plastic mats are now more common. Male circumcision is practiced, but not female.

Beer drinking was a common pass-time in the old culture before Islam. Islam has also brought changes to marriage and childbirth ceremonies.

The livelihood of the Busa is based primarily upon agriculture, with trading being of secondary importance. Maize, millet, guinea corn and manioc are their main crops.

6.0 Religion

An early Arabic document Tarikh-es-Sudan states that “the dwellers in the Sudan, whose capital is Ghana, were Christians up to the year 469 of the hedjira, that is to say, up to 1076 by the Christian computation of time, and only then adopted Islam. He adds: “the growing power of the western stream, reinforced by the influence of Islam and Mandeland, destroyed Christendom in Songhai and forced it back to Borgu.”

The bronze cross still hangs on the neck of the representative of the Kisra dynasty at Karishi (north of Kontagora) today. The Kisra legend attributes moral injunctions in the passage

describing his residential stay in Karishi: Kisra was wont to live in a space set apart, where he was hidden from every man's sight. When the people came to worship him, they heard his voice from behind a wall. The voice spoke these words: Lie not, steal not, do not stir up strife and keep peace among one another. Whenever the people came to Kisra in Karishi, a herald stepped forth and showed them the cross which Kisra wore around his neck and which the chieftains of Karishi wear on their breasts today as a token of their authority.

Traditionally animist, the Busa have converted to Islam in the past 70 years. There is one Busa Church at Sambe. 36% of the Bible has been translated into Busa and there is an English/Busa dictionary and other literacy materials.

7.0 Bibliography

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