

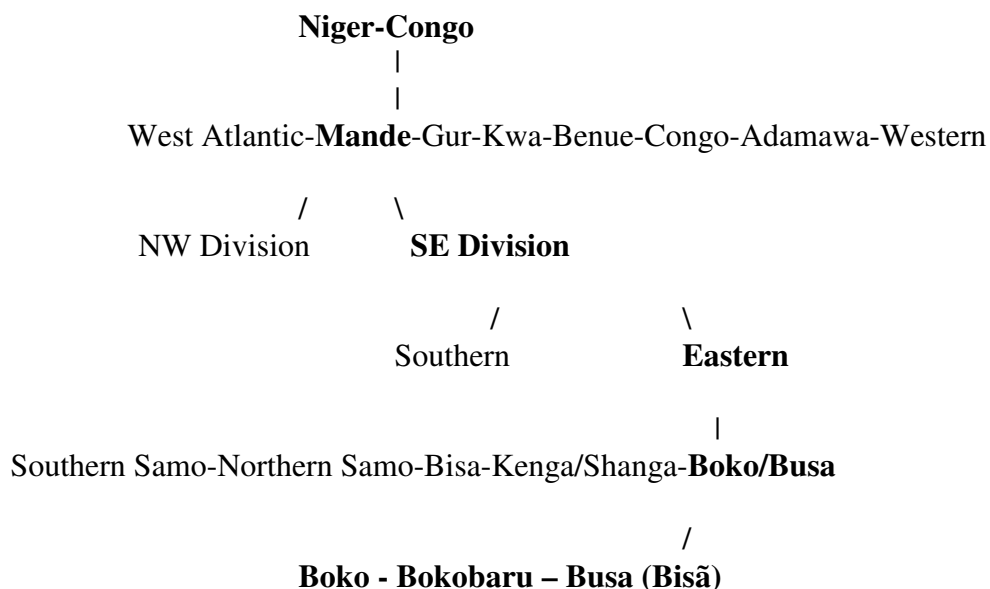
# Borgu History

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## Chapter 1. Mande Origins

**Linguistics** The Busa/Boko language cluster belongs to the Eastern Mande language group. The study of Niger-Congo and Mande languages has now come to a state where the data are sufficient and convincing enough, so that even minor classifications are widely accepted. According to Welmers, Busa/Boko has the following place within the Niger-Congo languages:



Boko/Busa is spoken by 150,000 people living in the NE of Benin Republic and the mid-west of Nigeria, between the Niger river and the Benin border.

The north-western division of Mande languages includes Bambara, Bozo, Kono, Kpelle, Kuranko, Ligbi, Loma, Loko, Mandekan, Mendi-Bandi, Samogo-Gouan, Sembla, Soninke, Susu-Yalunka and Vai. These languages are spoken in Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast.

Following is a list of the south-eastern division with an approximate number of speakers.

Mano	375,000	Guinea and Liberia
Dan/Gio	500,000	Ivory Coast and Liberia
Gouro/Kweni	300,000	Ivory Coast
Toura	40,000	Ivory Coast
Mona/Moa	12,000	Ivory Coast
Wan/Nwa	18,000	Ivory Coast
Tougan Somogo	105,000	Burkina Faso
Bisa	400,000	Burkina Faso
Kyenga/Shanga	10,000	Nigeria
Boko/Busa	190,000	Nigeria and Benin
Boko	100,000	Nigeria and Benin
Bokobaru	50,000	Nigeria (Kaiama area)
Bisã	35,000	Nigeria (New-Bussa area)
Busa	5,000	Nigeria (Illo area)

The Busa\Boko people are related to the other Mande groups who live to the west of Borgu. They have lived in Borgu for at least 1000 years. "Ahmed Rabat, an historian from Timbuktu wrote that Borgu, to the south of Kukiya, was a province of the kings of Mali during the period 1260-1564, although it was never completely subjugated. It is more correct to say that those who governed Borgu, who speak Boko, a Manding language, governed one of the outposts of the great Mali empire, when the sphere of influence of Mali extended as far to the east as Katsina, including Borgu."

*The Role of the Manding in the hinterland trade of the Western Sudan, Marjories Helen Stewart, Bulletin del'IFAN t. 41 April 1979 No 2 pp 289-290*

"The Kingdom of Mali was a Mande kingdom that began in the time of Al Bakri (1028-94) when its king was said to be a Muslim. At the time of Al Idrisi (about 1100-66) the town of Mali was not much larger than a big village. But a century later by the time of the Mandingo hero, Sundiata Keita, who conquered Ghana, it had grown considerably in size and importance. They cut through the Songhai in the north, the Dagomba in the south, but the tough resistance offered by the Borgu, Gurma and Mossi nations made their complete conjunction impossible. What Al Bakri had already set down in 1068 was substantiated: The natives of these middle regions exterminated all those who fell into their hands. (ie. all Mahommedans.)

After Sundiata's death in about 1250, his successors took the title of Mansa. Eight kings followed him before another of almost greater fame came to power in the person of Mansa Musa (1307-32). When Mansa Musa died in 1332, his empire extended from the borders of Tekrur in the far west up to Dandi, east of the Niger and on the border of the Hausa states.

In about the 11th century there were small tribal groups living in the Mossi area (Burkina Faso), most of whom spoke Gur languages though others spoke Mande. These were invaded and dominated by men of Berber origin coming from the region of Chad by way of Zamfara. Similar migrations are believed to have taken place long ago, as for instance the Zaghawa to Kukia on the Niger and the followers of Kisra to Borgu. The newcomers tended to intermarry more with the Mande speakers, at that time the more socially advanced of the two groups, and in course of years they came to speak their language and share their religion."

*Introduction to the History of the Islamic States of Northern Nigeria' by S.J.Hogben 1967 p. 32*

"The traditions of Borgu suggest that it is a creation of a group of invaders, horsemen from the north-east. In the north they had become acquainted with the idea of chieftainship as opposed to politico-ritual organisation of the indigenous population where the authority of the earth-orient depended not on physical, but on moral and religious sanctions. Because of their political and military superiority the invaders imposed their authority over the acephalous peoples, but being inferior in numbers, they adopted the language of the indigenous population."

*Muslims and chiefs in West Africa' - Levtzion 1968*

"The growth of the Mossi empire began in 1289. In this particular year there were four kingdoms in the eastern regions of the Niger-bend:

- The Songhai kingdom, bounded on the west by the Mande kingdom
- The Borgu kingdom, situated on the Niger south of the Songhai
- The Gurma kingdom, westwards from Borgu to Dagombaland
- The Gambaka kingdom in the northern portion of the Gold Coast
- According to tradition the most powerful of these four was Borgu."

*The Voice of Africa' - Leo Frobenius 1913*

## Chapter 2. The Kisira Legend

The Kakau of Songhai assert that about AD 600 there was a great migration from east to west across the Sudan called the Kisra Migration. The 'Kisra' are made out to be Persians who fought against Rum (the Byzantines) and were driven west, entering Nigeria by way of Lake Chad.

There seems to be general agreement today that some sort of migration took place during the 7th century. The account recorded by Palmer traces the Kisra migration from Darfur to Bald Mountain, north-east of Marua, thence through Adamawa, through the Bashima and other similar tribes to Muri. The group then split up, some went to Zaria, others to Wukari, others settled at Gwana and still others moved further west and founded Wawa and Baku.

The name Kisra may be derived from the popular name of an ancient Persian ruler. Two Sassanid kings of the 6th and 7th centuries were known as Khosrau, Kisra being the Arabic form. Both kings were well known throughout the Arab world. Khosrau amassed fabulous treasures and was the most illustrious figure in the history of Iran, so the name Kisra came to denote fame and royalty or a royal style of life, and it is believed by some that this name was associated with migrations from the east. The profound influences of Perso-Arabic elements on many cultures of the southern and western Sudan, even before the spread of Islam in these areas, strongly suggests the possibility that, rather than by any specific migration, the idea of 'Kisra' was borne across the Sahara to the areas where it took root in the form of the Kisra legends.

It is in Borgu that we find the most fully developed versions of the legend, and the most definite association of Kisra with the establishment of chieftaincy. The land of Borgu bordered on Songhai, but it is significant that it was always able to resist incursions from all outside forces, and it was only with Lugard's treaty of 1894 that Borgu recognized any foreign power. Songhai succeeded in conquering all of the original Hausa states. This success came under the Muslim leader Askia in the years 1512-17 after an inconclusive struggle with the redoubtable Borgu.

Matthews in speaking of accounts of a relationship between Kisra and Muhammad, suggests that these may be later accretions added by peoples who inherited the Kisra legend and wished to give it the cachet which Islam has won for itself, even among pagans in the Western Sudan. Meek says: Some of these written records may embody genuine tradition and be based on historical facts, but it is obvious that no reliance can be placed on the details given. Any imaginative Muslim who can write is capable of manufacturing history for the unlettered.

Kisra was the head of a small lineage or clan in Mecca, or somewhere in Arabia. He refused to accept Muhammad's plans for reform, and stoutly resisted conversion to Islam. In the face of defeat by the forces of the Prophet, he fled with his people to Africa and across the Sahara, coming eventually to the Niger. The river was then miraculously widened to its present size, apparently to foil the pursuing Muslims. Some accounts suggest that they may have been Berbers from North Africa.

In some places where the legend has existed, Kisra is regarded as having been merely a visitor; in others he, or his descendants, are positively regarded as founders of the state. Kisra relics have been recorded in certain villages where they are acknowledged as the original, hence sacred articles of kingship. In all areas where the legend of Kisra exists, it and the associated relics are held as evidence of the people's claimed Eastern ancestry, or at least, Eastern connections.

Some believe the Kisira group sojourned at Bornu for several centuries and then again fled from islamisation of the Bornu area and migrated to Borgu.

All reports agree that Kisra's followers at last crossed the Niger at Illo, and that the river was immediately afterwards widened to its present size by a miracle, thus bringing pursuit by Muslims to an end. They mixed with local Mande tribe to form a well organised kingdom, superior to surrounding tribes. The newcomers became the rulers, god-kings rather than priest kings, because of their different ancestry. This explains the extreme reverence given to Emirs to this day. They were responsible for politics and warfare and because of their background, responsible for the monotheistic tradition and circumcision. As Kisra and his followers were not Muslims, this belief in one God can only be explained by the fact that they were Christians. The original Mande people on the other hand were owners of the land, responsible for the worship of local bush or nature spirits. The owners of the land still play an important part in the installation and burial of the Kisra kings and in the government of the state. The principal 'chief of the land' is called the 'Ba Karabonde'.

Kisra's death or disappearance remains a mystery; some say it was at Koko. In any case, his directives were laid down to his followers, who dispersed, and his three sons founded Bussa, Nikki and Illo. Subsequent rulers of these places claim direct descent from Kisra.

There is a story of an attempt to convert Kisra to Islam, which proved only half successful. It is interesting in so far as it explains a custom maintained to this day. The mallams, sent by the Prophet, had succeeded in persuading Kisra to prostrate himself twice, when the latter put an end to the proceedings by entering his house, then mounting a horse and galloping out. He ordered his war-drums to be beaten and holding his spear in his hand said that twice a year would he consent to prostrate himself, but no more. The mallams returned whence they came, and the Prophet had to be satisfied with this partial conversion. Every year this scene is enacted. When the Sallah moon appears the Emir of Bussa, supported by his relations and following, ceremoniously and reluctantly prostrates himself twice, then mounts his horse, and with his spear in his hand shouts to the beat of war-drums his challenge to the Prophet.

The royalty, descendants of Kisira, spread throughout Borgu and reigned over the Bariba as well as the Busa. The kings live at Busa, Nikki, Illo, Wawa and Kaiama. Other chiefs reigned in Dahomey at Kandi, Bembereke, Parakou and Djougou. They were famous for their horses and their ability in warfare and hunting. They have never been conquered.

### **Busa version by Mallam Yakubu Daudu Babana**

"The founder of the Busa people was Kisra or Kisira, a prince who came from the east. Many think that he came from Saudi Arabia. He migrated with his family and friends, his whole clan, because he refused to accept certain reforms made by the prophet Mohammed.

After a stay in Bornu, he and his followers continued their journey and arrived at the Niger, called Kora or Kwara. At that time the Niger was a narrow river. Kisra enlarged it to its present size to hinder his pursuers from following him. Because of the Niger's protecting role in keeping them safe, they established themselves on its banks.

When Kisira died, he left three sons, Woru, Sabi and Bio. Woru naturally became their father's successor as chief of the immigrants. His first act was to found Illo where he left his young brother Bio as sovereign. After doing that, he continued his exploration, then he separated from his other brother. The latter went towards the south-west, while he himself went to the south-east. After roaming for a long time, Woru finally settled at Busa. The word 'Busa' comes from 'ma busa' which means 'I am tired and have need to rest.' There where he stopped, he built the town of Busa.

In his flight and during his migration, Kisira was accompanied by a number of educated Muslims or 'mallams'. Their head was named 'Bamarubere'. One of his descendants, Mallam Toga, was the founder of Wawa. The three traditional chiefdoms were born.

There are some accounts at Busa which say that Kisira himself founded Busa. Some say that Kisira was a white man, which would agree with him being either Arab or Berber."

**The Kaiama version by Mallam Mohammed Waziri**

"Kisira and his people left their country to escape the anger of the prophet Mohammed whose instructions they had disobeyed. They fled directly south. They arrived at Bornu and stayed there for some time.

Later they were obliged to continue their migration. They continued their journey travelling west looking for a land in which they could settle. They finally came to the Niger, a large uncrossable river without a canoe. They were saved by a miracle by Kisira who commanded the waters to part and leave a passage for them to cross. Their pursuers wanted to take the same way, but the waters closed up and swallowed them all. (Note the similarity between this story and the parting by Moses of the Red Sea!)

Kisira and his people settled at Busa. At his death none of his children were present. They had all gone hunting to the west, towards the region of Nikki. Because of his ability and courage the local people made the eldest son king of Nikki. When Kisira died, his servants went to look for them. They found them, but they weren't ready to return. They told the servants to go before them and to deal with the present business. So Busa was administered for some time by the slaves and commanded from Nikki.

The king of Nikki also died while his eldest sons were far away hunting. Messengers were sent to look for them, but they did not find them quickly. The kingdom could not remain without a king, so a younger brother was named and installed as King of Nikki. One day the two brothers who were far away learnt that their father was dead and that one of their younger brothers had been made king. One of the brothers wanted to go and fight for the throne, but the other one said that there were many other places where they could reign and that it would be better to go and establish a new kingdom. One of them went and established the kingdom of Buai, the other went and established Kaiama."

**'Up the Niger' by Captain A. F. Mockler-Ferryman, London, 1892**

"The inhabitants of Borgu are certainly the most interesting of the Middle Niger, for it is the only pagan tribe which has been able to resist the Muslim invasion. Over the years the Fulani of Sokoto and Gwandu have tried to conquer this country, only to finally abandon it with the firm belief that the blessing of their prophet was not with them in their struggle against this strange people. The inhabitants of Borgu explain their invincibility not so much by their warrior prowess as by their religion, which they claim to be that of one named 'Kisira, a Jew who gave his life for the sins of the world.'

They rebel strongly, and perhaps with reason, if one calls them pagans, considering themselves to be in many ways superior to the Muslims. They say that their ancestors were originally from North Africa, from where they were chased about the 8th or 9th century by the conquering Muslims. They claim to have ties with Bornu and it is noticeable that the local people of Bornu are the Beriberi, while the local people of Borgu are the Bariba. From that we can consider that the two tribes, before being chased south, were part of the Berber states. However it may be, there is no doubt that Borgu and Bornu established an order and orderly form of government in their present territory long before any other tribe in the these regions could even dream of such a thing. Beside this, until this day both of them are free from the Fulani yoke."

**Bariba tradition - Edward Dunglas**

"The most ancient king of the Bariba which tradition gives the name is the king Kisira. He came from the north-east and it was he who led the Bariba to the present Borgu. From the beginning of their stay in Borgu, the Bariba were already divided into several tribes. There was first of all the Boko, the nobles, who belonged to the family of Kisira, then there were three common tribes, the Koraru (Nigerians), the Dafiaru or Lafiaru (Muslims), the most eastern tribe in contact with the Fulani kingdom of Sokoto and the Makararu in the west.

Only the Boko had the right to wear pants, reserved for the nobles. The other tribes had to be content to wear a simple triangular garment. They arrived on the right bank of the river Niger and founded the Busa kingdom, in the era that can be placed approximately at the end of the 12th century."

The Busa claim their origin to have been in Badar, in the vicinity of Mecca. They vainly opposed the advance of the prophet Mohammed, and on the king, Kisira, falling in battle against him, migrated westwards across Africa led by his son. On reaching the river Niger they decided to settle down and the town of Busa on its right bank became their headquarters. Many of them wandered further, and the kingdom of Nikki was founded by the Busa chief's brother-in-law, Sheru, Illo by his brother Wuru(or Agwasa), both states regularly sending tribute to Busa.

In the 11th century an important factor occurred in the Sudan, notably in the states of the loop of the Niger. Up until then, the Berbers coming from the north were Christians, but suddenly, following the pilgrimage to Mecca by Tarsina, chief of the Zenaga, the holy war began.

"The Bussawa wear a sleeveless gown which hangs to the knee. It is split up the front and back of the neck in recollection of a tradition that when their forefathers first crossed the Niger they left their gowns behind them in a heap upon the bank, and that when they returned each one had been split with a spear." *'Notes on the tribes, provinces, emirates and states of the northern provinces of Nigeria.'* O.Temple, London 1919 p 74

"According to notes collected from the King of Illo and his council, the Bussawa formed part of a big migration from the kingdom of Badar, near Mecca, their King Kisira having opposed Muhammad the Prophet. It appears that they journeyed across the Sudan to Asben, where they broke off into many sections - the Bedde (Badr) settling down in Bornu, while others under the leadership of Kisira's descendants came further west and a large body settled under the chieftainship of three brothers at Bussa, Illo and Nikki. Another section, the Yoruba, continued southwards. Bussa was the oldest of the brothers and received presents from the other two (Nikki was a brother-in-law to the others) and on the accession of each new chief they performed the offices of coronation one for the other. *The Voice of Africa' - Leo Frobenius 1913*

At the time before Mahommed had conquered Mecca, Kisra, the king of the Persians, waged a war against Anabinuhu or the King of the Ruma (the Hellenic Romans) who had occupied Egypt. At first Kisra was the conqueror. But then Anabinuhu, who was an ally of the king of the Ruma, was the victor. Then Kisra fled up the Nile and came into the land of the King of Nupeta (Nubia). Kisra said to the King: I cannot return into my own country, because there the king of the Ruma would put me to death. Grant me permission to stay in your country. I have people with wadded armour and mail tunics to fight for you, if you let me remain. Nupata the King said: I will first hold talk with my Jin(spirit), my Jin is the Jin Issa (Jesus). King Nupata spoke with the Jin who told him: Let Kisra depart westwards and subdue all the land and follow him. Your father will keep guard over this country. But you yourself will be a great king in the west.

King Nupata called Kisra and said: Go in front and conquer all the nations in the west. My Jin said that I was to follow you. Kisra said: Thus will I do. Kisra set out with an array of his own warriors

and a host of Nupata's men. he came to Borgu after a long journeying (Borgu on the Niger is meant). Nupata followed him at first as far as Gober. There he took unto himself a wife. She bore him a son, from whom all the Goberawa are descended.

Kisra sent many warriors to the west. He subjected the whole of Borgu. He put kings over them everywhere and according to the Albrecht Martius' researches in 1912, these were:

Boa (3 days journey west of Nikki) King Birjerima,  
Kika (4 days west of Nikki) King Bruka,  
Lessa (2 days from Kissiden) King Wagana,  
Wu-enu (3 days west of Nikki) King Kora  
Dari King Djaru  
Borish (5 days from Nikki) King Sakka  
Teme (4 days west of Nikki) King Scheme  
Madeguru (4 days from Teme) King Kora.

Kisra made Jiro the first King of Nikki and at the same time his brother and afterwards his successor, Sheru Shikia, ruled in Wu-ene, three hours distant from Nikki.

This legend designates three regions as the sphere of Kisra's power: Umaisha or Amar on the Benue (which means the country round about the townships and not only the townships themselves), then Borgu with the Kontangora provinces and Gurma, and thirdly and lastly Ambara, which means the country of the Yorubans.

The reports here are certainly very divergent. Some members of the final Kisra commission I called together from many different parts of Lokoja maintained that Mesi, Kisra's overlord, who was identical with Nupata, had conquered the Yorubans. It is however at all events certain that Yorubland was ruled at that period by a new dynasty, which came into the country by way of Borgu.

Kisra only lived in the district of Paiko in Gwariland for 10 years and a half. He then founded the city of Karishi, 3 days north of Kontangora in Dakarekareland. After residing there for 4 and a half years he went over to Bussa. He resided alternately in Karishi and Bussa. His brother represented him wherever he himself could not be. After ruling for a further 16 and a half years he died and was buried in Bussa 28 years after the Hedjira or 650 AD Another legend states that Mahommed, after following the two great kings, Kisra and Nupata, had waged a war shortly before or after Kisra's death against Kisra's nation. Mahommed's warriors were again beaten and then for a long time ventured no attacks upon Kisra, Nupata and their successors. After Maijaki (general) had conquered all the land as far as the Benue, he retired to Gbarra and there in 641 AD founded the Nupe kingdom, which he went on to rule for 21 more years.

Kisra's descendants sent yearly tribute to the east to the river Feriuna (ie Pharaoh's river, the Nile). They founded several large cities and kingdoms and spread the name Nupata in the land. They brought many craftsmen from the east who built great houses and decked them out bravely. Everything they did they caused to be written down on hides of animals, but not on paper. The leathern manuscripts were preserved for a long time and then buried with Adsu Zado to prevent their falling into the hands of the Fulbe. As long as the descendants of Nupata lived according to the laws made by their fathers before them, the Islamites could not prevail before them. They only lost their power when they ceased to pay tribute to the east.

Comparing dates which are historically ascertained we establish the fact that the Kisra legend can be completely and without the least violence brought into accord with the events chronicled in history. The Persians, who at that time were ruled by Kosrav 11 (ie. Kisra), the Sassanid, occupied and garrisoned Egypt in the year 619 AD. Their reception in the land of the Pharaohs was not hostile. But the energetic Graeco-Roman Emperor Heraklius, seated on the Byzantine throne, regained the

upper hand and in 1629 AD the Persians had again to evacuate Egypt. There is a certain tribe in Kordofan, a country adjacent to Nubia and to the south of Egypt, which calls itself Bagada and affirms its descent from Bagadi, who as they say came with his wife bearing a child upon her shoulder out of Persia into Egypt. In this way we can trace the remains of Persian races in the immediate vicinity of Nubia, and thus there is an increasing probability that not all Persians migrated back to Asia, but rather that many of them settled in Africa and went southwards towards the sources of the Nile.

Frobenius suggests that Kisra was a Byzantine Christian and that he introduced Christianity to West Africa. 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 1076-77 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. (Frobenius, Voice of Africa pp 627-628)

The Arabian reports and the Kisra legends tell us how effectively Christianity operated on the southern fringe of the Sahara in central Sudan and towards the north-east. The Borgu and Yoruba-Benin accounts bring to our knowledge the influence exerted in still more recent times by this Borgu Christianity on the west coast countries.

The bronze cross still hangs on the neck of the representative of the Kisra dynasty in 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 spake these words: Lie not, steal not, be ye not stirrers up of strife and keep ye peace among one another. Whenever the people came to Kisra in Karishi, a herald stepped forth and showed them the cross which Kisra wore round his neck and which the chieftains of Karishi wear on their breasts today as a token of their authority.

In ancient times a distinctly recognizable cross was a part of the decoration of the saddle pommel of the princes of Gober, Asben, Bussa etc. The present day Bussa people call this cross 'somo' and in Nupeland 'sara' with perhaps a connection with the Greek word for cross 'stauros'. There can be no possible doubt that the cross played a predominant part in these regions as a symbol of holiness. The handles of Nupe daggers, popularly called 'ede-sara' is in the form of a cross.

Martius was given a description by the Bussa folk about the Gani holy day at Nikki. During the Gani (which corresponds to Easter) child princes galloped up on their horses, dismounted and knelt several times before the King. The chief of the women pours water on the head of the child from an antique silver ewer and tells the court barber to shave his head. Then she gives the hitherto unnamed prince an ancient name of the race of Kisra, which is forthwith proclaimed with a loud voice by a herald standing at the king's side. The next day a pilgrimage is made to Ina to sacrifice a white bull at the shrine of Tobe.

The possibility is that the Boko/Busa people had a Christian tradition, brought to them by their ancestor Kisira. This Christian faith may not have been deep, and without access to the written Scriptures it lost its vitality. But it gave them superiority over their enemies and a glorious past for a long time. Over the centuries the animistic beliefs of earth worship and spirit possession have again become dominant and during this century those beliefs have been covered by a veneer of Islam.

## Chapter 3. Islam

"The empire of Mali was followed by the Songhai empire of which Sonni Ali was a famous king (1468-1493). From Timbuktu Sonni Ali conquered Jenne and commanded the whole of the great waterway of the Sudan, the middle Niger. He repulsed the strong forces of the Mossi to the south, of Hombori in the bend of the river, and of Kebbi to the east, and then established a strong fleet on the river near Timbuktu.

*'Combats for African history' Ibrahima Baba Kake, Presence Africaine 1982 p. 70*

In 1493 with the west and south to heel, he turned his attention to the east, and conducted a campaign against Borgu, but with only partial success. The Borgu native still possesses a great reputation for fighting and it is still his boast that he has never been conquered. On his return from Borgu to Gao, Sonni Ali was accidentally drowned while crossing a small tributary of the Niger."

*'The Muhammadan Emirates of Nigeria' - Hogben 1930 Temple*

"Mossi and Borgu were regarded as being among the bitter enemies of the Songhai empire. These two peoples checked the advance of Askia Muhammad to the south. At the beginning of 1505 AD the Songhai army was defeated by the chief of Bussa. He did however carry off numerous slaves, one of whom became the mother of the succeeding Askia Musa.

Fifty years later, in 1555-6, Askia Daud attacked and sacked Bussa, but many of his followers suffered the fate which befell Mungo Park in later times, for they were drowned in the rapids of the Niger. As in the case of Mossi, a single victory was not enough to bring the country under the domination of Songhai. Thus early in their history the people of Borgu faced and resisted the aggression of an islamized empire.

At the rise of the Songhai power the three kingdoms Bussa, Illo and Nikki were attacked by Mamara at the head of the Zabirma, but on his death the King of Nikki conquered Songhai. He now reigned over the greater part of Borgu, his kingdom extending northwards to Illo, south to Ilesha and east to Kaiama."

*'A History of Nigeria' Ischei 1983*

At the nadir of their country's fortunes, the Songhai produced a leader of great brilliance, Askia Nuh, who succeeded in rallying the demoralized forces of the kingdom and opposing the Moor leader Mahmud Pasha with a resolute army.

Mahmud wasted no time in striking at the new leader. Nuh was waiting for him in Dendi, orchard bush country south of Gurma. In the ensuing battle Nuh scored a moral victory. He held the enemy for a whole day and then made an orderly withdrawal, withdrawing far south into the forests of Borgu. Mahmud pursued resolutely and came up with Nuh on the Mekon river. To the advantages which these conditions gave to Nuh was added the invaluable support he received from the local people. The Borgawa were warlike pagans with long experience of the great defensive possibilities of their country. They had never lost their independence, in spite of having to withstand assaults on it by such formidable warrior kings as Sonni Ali and Askia the Great. They hated the Songhai as they did the rest of their northern slave-raiding neighbours, but in the face of the common enemy from across the desert they now readily joined forces with them.

Mahmud was regretting having allowed himself to be lured into Borgu. The Moors, having no experience of bush fighting, fell an easy prey to the guerrilla tactics of their opponents. Yet two years elapsed before the utter exhaustion of his army and lack of adequate reinforcements from Morocco compelled Mahmud to admit the futility of continuing the struggle. When fresh troops

arrived, Mahmud had already made up his mind not to waste any more time campaigning in Borgu. At the end of 1593 he withdrew up the right bank of the Niger to Timbuktu, leaving behind him a garrison in Gao.

Is there any association between the threat from Askia Muhammad, the Muslim ruler, and the tradition that one of the early rulers of Borgu succeeded in evading an attempt to convert him. This is one of the traditions about Kisra who is said to have come from the north-east, retreating from the threat of a rising Muslim force. Later, not long after Kisra's descendants established the chiefdom of Bussa, Muslim envoys came to the chief of Bussa to persuade him to accept Islam.

The chief refused, but conceded that he would pray twice a year, at the two principal Muslim festivals. He soon, however, regretted even this concession, mounted his horse, and ordered the drums to be beaten in defiance of Islam. This act is repeated every year when the chief is called out to see the first moon of the Ramadan.

This tradition reflects ambivalent attitudes towards Islam in Borgu. On the one hand there is a strong tradition about resistance to an Islamic pressure, for which there is historical evidence in at least two cases, namely, the Songhai invasion in the 16th century and involvement in wars with forces of the Fulani jihad in the first half of the 19th century. On the other hand the Borgu chiefs came under a certain Islamic influence of resident Muslims. The aggression from the outside conditioned the inside impact, they have been reluctant to accept Islamic religious influence.

Even when Askia Daud of Songhai destroyed Bussa in 1556 the ruler and inhabitants refused to become Muslims. However the rulers of Borgu allowed Muslim traders into their kingdom and eventually consented to participate in a very limited way in Islamic worship. They agreed, for instance, to say the Muslim prayers twice a year at the two principal Muslim festivals of Id al-fitr and Id al-Adha. These rulers, however, and the population in general, continued to be regarded as non-Muslims, the name Bariba being synonymous with that of "unbeliever". In the main it was the Dendi settlers from Illo and Gaya areas on the Niger river who along with traders and scholars from Hausaland formed the majority of the Muslim population of Borgu. The Dendi in particular, who spoke a dialect of Songhai, were responsible for building up the Muslim community in Borgu. They settled in centres on the caravan routes leading from Hausaland to Gonja, such as Djougou, Parakou, Nikki, Kandi etc. These centres as the history of Djougou suggests, were first settled by Hausa and Bornu Muslims who carried on the trade. The Dendi constituted the majority of the population in Parakou, where the Muslim leader had considerable power and influence. In Nikki on the other hand, the Muslims were in the minority and lived outside of town.

**Fulani jihad** While the Sokoto Caliphate at the height of its expansion in the 19th century extended far south into Yorubaland, making Nupe an emirate and Yauri a vassal, it was only able to make temporary inroads into Illo and Kaoje, north of Bussa. Soon after 1820 the Fulani attacked Borgu. Twice they were defeated by the allied chiefs, but finally they captured Illo. They never attacked Bussa, though they once occupied Luma. The verdict of the jihad leader Uthman dan Fodio on the Islamic character of Bussa and Borgu was uncompromising. For him Borgu with Mossi, Gurma, Kotokoli and Gonja are countries where "infidelity is overwhelming and Islam rare." All these countries are, doubtless, lands of infidelity because authority is with the majority and the rulers of these countries are also unbelievers, the law of the country is the law of its ruler." All Muslims, he concludes, must emigrate from these lands of the unbelievers.

*Muslims and chiefs in West Africa' - Levtzion 1968*

It wasn't until 1920 that Kijibrim and Kitoro Gani, both Kings of Bussa, officially became Muslims. The British colonial system encouraged this as they allowed Muslim chiefs to keep 70% revenue, while pagan chiefs could only keep 30%. Over the next 50 years the majority of Bussa/Boko people who had resisted Islam for so long, followed suit.

## Chapter 4. Trade

Mande association with long distance trade between the Sahel and the edge of the west of the delta, a centre which flourished between the 14th and 15th centuries, has been established. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century on Bussa was situated on important caravan routes from Badagry to Sokoto and from Ashanti and Gonja to Hausaland and Bornu. The inhabitants of Borgu were notorious as robbers and murderers, their country being regarded as unsafe for passing caravans. Yet the Hausa traders, engaged in the remunerative kola trade, ventured to pass through this territory. Raids on caravans did not stop entirely, but tolls paid to Borgu helped in achieving some security. It is likely that chiefs became better disposed to extend their protection to the caravans as their relations with the resident Muslims became closer.

*'Muslims and chiefs in West Africa' - Levtzion 1968*

"This trade is known from Hausa sources to have been pioneered during the 15th century. It linked the eastern commercial network, dominated by Hausa merchants, with the western network where Mande merchants, who had originally dispersed from the old kingdom of Mali, predominated. Morton-Williams suggests that traders approaching Hausaland from the west would chose to avoid the turbulent conditions in the Borgu states of Nikki and Kaiama and to pass instead through Oyo before crossing the Niger at Jebba or Bussa. But there is a dearth of convincing evidence that trade between Gonja and Hausaland ever passed regularly through Oyo in preference to Borgu. Our earliest evidence on this, from the 1780s is of a route passing through Djougou and Nikki and crossing the Niger at Yauri. Another route avoided Nikki and Oyo, passing through Parakou, Tumbuya, Godeberi, Kaima and Wawa to cross the Niger at Bussa.

Clapperton met one of the caravans that plied the route at Kaiama in 1826. It comprised 1000 men and women and a thousand donkeys, asses and bullocks. They brought cola nuts from Ashanti in return for natron, slaves and assorted products of the Hausa manufacturing network. The round trip took from 6 months to a year and the merchants were either Hausa or Hausanized groups such as the Kambarin Beriberi. Many such merchants settled along the trade route, part of the great Hausa diaspora.

At Rabba, in Nupe in 1857, Crowther met a party of Borgu traders who told him about their own role in the trade: The Borgu trade with the Ashanti. They have to travel 39 day's journey, according to their short stages, to Araha market, in the country of Gonja, whence cola nuts are brought to Nupe and Hausa. Araha market is 9 day's journey from Kumasi. Some of the Borgu traders speak Ashanti. They were all good Yoruba speakers.

The same observer met Borgu traders at Ketu. "They trade with the Ashanti through a country between them called Gbanja. This trade route brought considerable prosperity to the Borgu kingdoms, destined to become an impoverished backwater under colonial rule. Clapperton saw more articles of European manufacture in Kaiama in two days than in all his time in Yoruba country - earthenware jugs, brass and pewter dishes, pieces of woollen and cotton cloth etc. These European goods, he learned, were imported into Borgu from Dahomey in exchange for slaves. The old caravan routes were eventually replaced by the railway which passed east of Borgu."

*'The Oyo Empire' - Law (1977)*

"There existed a system of cowry enumeration related to one which operated in Mande west. The King of Katunga levies a tax on everyone that enters the gates of Katunga with a load. A handsome horse imported from Borgu or any other country, is liable in the market to a tax of 2000 cowries.

European traders in the 1780s were aware that the slaves sold at Porto Novo were supplied not only by Oyo, but also by the Nupe and Borgu. It appears that most of the slaves coming from the north

were bypassing Oyo altogether, being taken through Borgu and Dahomey for sale at Whydah."

*'Colonial West Africa', Michael Crowder*

## Chapter 5 Wars with Neighbours

During the 16th century Oyo suffered invasions by both the Nupe and Borgu. Borgu, whose territory marched with Oyo at the river Moshi, formed a loose confederacy. They were divided into number of kingdoms, the most important being Bussa, Nikki, Wawa and Illo, the king of Bussa exercising a vague suzerainty over the others. The Oyo had the most direct dealings with Nikki. The small kingdom of Kaiama, the most southerly of the Borgu states and the immediate neighbour of Oyo across the Moshi, was originally a dependency of Nikki. Borgu tradition records that the king of Bussa used to exchange presents with the Alafin of Oyo.

The first clear signs of a decline in the power of Oyo appeared in the 1780's, in the relations of the kingdom with its northern neighbours, Borgu and Nupe. After the defeat of the Nupe and Borgu invasions of the 16th century, Oyo had apparently enjoyed two centuries of security on its northern frontiers. It is indeed possible, though not certain, that during its period of imperial greatness in the 17th and 18th centuries Oyo was able to exact tribute from some of the southernmost Borgu and Nupe communities. But in the last two decades of the 18th century, the Oyo were once more in serious difficulties in the north.

An English trader at the coast heard in September 1783 that 'Oyo had received 2 months ago a total overthrow from a country by name Bariba, having lost in the battle 11 umbrellas and the generals under them.' This disastrous defeat is (perhaps not surprisingly) not recorded in Oyo tradition, though there is some recollection of fighting against the Bariba around this time in the traditions of the provincial town of Ogbomosho. The war is however recalled in Borgu tradition, which identifies the adversaries of the Oyo specifically as the people of Kaiama.

A large army of Yoruba is said to have invaded the kingdom of Kaiama from Gwanaguru on the upper Moshi, but to have been repulsed in a battle just south of the town of Kaiama. One account attributes this victory to a king of Kaiama called Sabi Agba. (Sabi Agba was a descendant of Boroboko, a relation of the King of Nikki who left the capital to found a new town at Bueru. His successors moved town on numerous occasions until Sabi Agba finally settled his people at Kaiama.) Since Sabi Agba's grand-nephew and third successor on the throne of Kaiama, Yaru, was reigning in 1826-30, there is no difficulty in identifying his defeat of the Yoruba invaders with the war of 1783. The Borgu traditions do not explain the circumstances leading to this war. One account connects it with the transfer of the Kaiama capital from Vobera to its present site, but it is not made clear why the Oyo should have intervened. Akinjogbin has suggested that the war of 1783 was a revolt of Borgu against Oyo rule. The evidence that Kaiama or any other part of Borgu was subject to Oyo before the 1780s is slight, but the suggestion seems nevertheless plausible.

Thirty years later, in 1826, Clapperton found that raiders from Kaiama were infesting the roads in the north-east of the Oyo kingdom, and that Kaiama had lately taken from Oyo the town of Algi on the south bank of the river Moshi.

The war between Oyo and Ilorin led to the final destruction of the Oyo kingdom and the abandonment of the capital at Oyo Ile. Oyo decided to seek outside assistance and Oluewu appealed for aid to his north-western neighbours, the Bariba of Borgu. A large Bariba army arrived in Oyo to support Oluewu. Oyo sources name the commander in chief of this army as King Eleduwe, which is apparently a stock name used for any Bariba king. Bariba tradition identifies him as Siru Kpera, the king of Nikki. Under Siru Kpera, there were also contingents from Kaiama and Wawa, commanded by the kings of those towns, while Kitoro, the king of Bussa, sent a force under his nephew Gajere. This alliance between the Bariba and the Oyo represented a remarkable reversal of attitudes since

the 1820's when Borgu had sought rather to exploit Oyo's difficulties by raiding into the north-west of the Oyo kingdom, and the Borgu kings apparently looked forward to the impending fall of Oyo with equanimity. In recent years however, Borgu had suffered invasions by forces from Gwandu, and Siru Kpera had apparently had to suppress a rebellion by the Muslim elements in Nikki. A rival claimant to the Nikki throne, who had perhaps been implicated in this abortive Muslim rebellion, is said to have taken refuge at Ilorin. In these circumstances it was easier for Siru Kpera and the other Borgu rulers to recognize that they had a common interest with Oyo in resisting the jihad. The Borgu forces which they brought to Oyo are said to have been distinguished principally by their skill in archery, but they probably also included a substantial contingent of cavalry. Bariba tradition recalls that Siru Kpera accumulated over 400 horses in preparation for the Ilorin war.

Ilorin laid siege to Igbodo. However the Oyo and Borgu forces marched to the relief of Igbodo and drove off the Ilorin in about 1834. After the victory at Igbodo, Oluewu and Siru Kpera resolved to attempt an attack on Ilorin itself. Reinforced by Manzuma's army, Ilorin attacked the Oyo-Borgu army at Otefan, but were again beaten off.

During the following rainy season, the Oyo and Borgu forces advanced from Otefan to Ogbomosho where they received more reinforcements. However, the imposing army now assembled at Ogbomosho was riven by dissensions. There was tension between Oyo and Borgu, due largely to the past reputation of the latter as robbers and kidnappers along the frontier with Oyo. There were also the by now customary disagreements and jealousies among the Oyo. Several of the Oyo chiefs turned traitor and withdrew without offering to fight. Although Ilorin was at first hard pressed, the attackers were eventually decisively defeated. Siru Kpera and the rulers of Wawa and Kaiama were all killed, though the Bussa commander Gajere survived. The war was a great disaster for Nikki and Kaiama, from which they did not recover for many years. Hardly a man returned alive. Oluewu himself is said to have been taken prisoner and later put to death at Ilorin. The citizens of Oyo then abandoned their city.

*'Colonial West Africa', Michael Crowder*

The first king who can be connected with the present ruling family was Kiseru Brodi, whose son Yerima Bussa defeated the Habe in the Zabaya war about the middle of the 18th century. The name of the war comes from the war-camp near Bussa where the Hausa camped.

*'The Muhammadan Emirates of Nigeria' - Hogben 1930 Temple*

## **Kings of Bussa**

Names of initial chiefs and their dates are unknown.

Yerima Busa (1730-1750)

Kigera (1750-1766)

Jibrim (1766-1791)

Yerima Ibrahim Kitoro  
(1791-92) (1793-1835)

Kisan Dogo  
(1835-43)

Beraki  
(1843-44)

Gajere (1844-1862)

Dan Tauro (1862-95)

Kisan Dogo (1895-1903)

Kitoro Gani  
(1903-15,1924-35)

Jibrim  
(1916-1924)

Babaki(Mohamman Sani)  
(1935-1968)

Musa Mohammed Kigera 111 (1968-2001)

## **Kings of Kaima**

Sero Bagidi (5th king of Nikki)      Kpee Gunu (6th king of Nikki)

Sero Toru Tokobu (12th king of Nikki) c 1600

Mora Bakaou (king of Beru 1600-1645)

Kakama (Nikki ki)      Yaru Dazide      Boroboko

Bani Yaru Tane---Mora Dazide Dazin ki)---Sabi Agba (1st) 1775-1785

Mora Banikanide-----Mora Baragigi-----Mora Kato (2nd) 1785-1810

Yaru Iloride (4th) 1827-1830-Yerima Gane-Mora Amali (3rd 1810-1827)

Kimora (7th) 1851-84)      Kiyaru 1 (6th 1830-1851)      Sendo (5th) 1830

Mora Amali Dogo (8th) 1884-5      Mora Banede (9th) 1885....Mora Tasude 1(10th) 1885-1912

Barayaru (11th) 1912-15 died 1938

Mashi (12<sup>th</sup>) (a Zabarma)1915-16 (deposed)

Yerima Kura (13th) 1917-1921

Haliry Kiyaaaru (14<sup>th</sup>) 1921-1954) died 1985

Kiyaru 111 (15th 1955-1973)

Tasude 11 (16<sup>th</sup>) 1973- -

## **Chapter 6. The Coming of the White man**

In 1804 a jihad or holy war had begun 300 miles north of Bussa, when Shaikh Othman dan Fodio had aroused his fellow Muslims, predominantly Fulani, to purge the Hausa states of practices contrary to Islamic Law, and the Caliphate was founded then.

In 1806 the Scottish explorer Mungo Park was drowned near Bussa. He was exploring the Niger river and tracing it to the Atlantic. Following is a description by Richard Lander from the various stories he and Clapperton had heard, of what ensued when Park and his companions reached Bussa:

"Their strange looking canoe was observed by one or two inhabitants whose shouts brought numbers of their companions, armed with bows and arrows, to the spot. At that time the usurpations of the Fulani had begun to be the general talk of the black population of the country, so that the people of Bussa, who had only heard of that warlike nation, fancied Mr Park and his associates to be some of them, coming with the intention of taking their town and subjugating its inhabitants. Under this impression they saluted the unfortunate Englishmen from the beach with showers of missiles and poisoned arrows, which were returned by the latter with a discharge of musketry. A small white flag had been previously waved by our countrymen, in token of their peaceable intentions, but this symbol not being understood by the people of Bussa, they continued firing arrows, till they were joined by the whole male population of the island, when the unequal contest was renewed with greater violence than ever. In the meantime the Englishmen, with the blacks they had with them,

kept firing unceasingly amongst the multitude on shore, killing many, and wounding a still greater number, till their ammunition being expended, and seeing every hope of life cut off, they threw their goods overboard, and desiring their sable assistants to swim towards the beach, locked themselves firmly in each other's arms, and springing into the water, instantly sank and were never seen again.'

If they were not mistaken for Fulani, then could they be Arabs, possible Fulani allies? Perhaps the people of Bussa did try to warn him of the rapids downstream, with gestures which were misunderstood, as several accounts suggest, and from there it would have been a short step to weapons being brandished on both sides, then let loose. The Bussa people claimed that Park fired first, Lander suggested the reverse, but at the bottom, whoever began it, there was probably simply an outburst of mutual suspicion caused by inability to communicate.

In their haste not all the stores had been thrown overboard to lighten the boat, and Lander said that the remainder were eagerly taken to Bussa. For days there was great feasting and rejoicing, but it happened that before their revelries were well over, an infectious disease, whereof they had not previously had the most distant idea, raged in the island, and swept off the Sultan with numbers of his subjects. Those who had been most active in the destruction of the strangers were cut off to a man, expiring in great agony.

At Bussa the Emir has a ring formed from a large silver medallion bearing the head of the British King George 3rd, an inscription by now polished to illegibility, and the royal arms on the reverse. It was long associated with Park but is now known to have been struck in 1814 and to have been the gift of the Landers in 1830.

The origins of the Borgu states is not clear, but despite the declines in the political fortunes of Bussa, it is accepted as the senior of the Borgu towns, the home of the Kisra relics. In addition Bussa has 14 state trumpets, compared to Nikki's 12 and Kaiama's 5. Clapperton wrote in 1926: 'I must however go out of my way to visit the sultan of Bussa, as all this part of the country is nominally under him. The sultan of Nikki is next to him, and equal to him in power.' Clapperton however recognized the separate political identity of Kaiama and Wawa, which he described as petty states, and merely wrote that 'Bussa is considered the head.' Richard Lander, when he visited Kaiama four years later, wrote of 'the King of Bussa, who is acknowledged to be the greatest of all the sovereigns of Borgu.' The confusion as to who was sovereign in Borgu arose from a failure to distinguish between the actual political power of individual Borgu states and the reverence in which they held Bussa as the original Kisra foundation. Kaiama, Nikki and Wawa considered Bussa their suzerain because it was the home of the Kisra relics, but Bussa exercised no political control over Nikki, Wawa, Illo or Kaiama by virtue of its position of seniority among the Borgu states. In other words the Kisra legend is important in establishing primacy of Bussa among the states from a spiritual point of view, but it does not establish its political primacy.

During the 19th century Bussa seems to have had little control over Illo. In political terms at the end of the 19th century Bussa could claim hegemony of a very loose sort only over Wawa, Illo, Kaoje, Rofia, Agwarra and the eastern parts of Babana, the western parts of which looked to Nikki. Nikki definitely had hegemony in pre-colonial days over the southern states of Nigerian Borgu: Yashikera, Okuta, Banara and Ileshe. Kaiama was effectively independent of Nikki.

Tradition has it that the present dynasty of Wawa was founded by a son of the Bamarubere, a descendant of one of the mallams or learned men who accompanied the Kisra 'dissenters' to Bussa. In 1830 Wawa became more powerful than Bussa or Kaiama.

The principal roles of the king were sacerdotal and protectionist. He was considered divine, and his blessing meant a great deal to his subjects.

The weakness of the position of monarchs in Borgu arose from the method by which they acceded the throne. A by-product of the succession system was the effective parcelling up of the kingdoms of Nikki and Bussa into a series of autonomous principalities over which they exercised no centralized control. They became nominal rulers.

A war of 1835 recorded in Gwandu, when the Borgu army attacked Kaoje and killed the Emir of Gwandu's brother is not remembered in Bussa. Perhaps the Borgawa came from another town.

In Bussa all records were destroyed when the town was sacked by Gajere, its own king in 1845, after killing Sare Illo/Beraki. Many of the people fled to Wawa. In his reign (1844-62) peace was made between Wawa and Bussa, but he attacked Kaoje in revenge for a cruel attack on a Bussa girl.

On Gajere's death the rightful heir Kikwassai was killed by Kitoro's son Dan Toro, who usurped the chieftaincy and reigned for 33 years until 1895. In about 1882 during Dan Toro's reign some Nupe were allowed by Bussa to settle and found the town of Leaba.

Gebbe wars Bussa and Yauri maintained good relations. The friendship of the two states culminated in the 1880s in the joint action of their Kings. Gallo of Yauri and Dantoro of Bussa against the Kamberi of Gebbe. Many Kamberi had migrated across the Niger from Yauri to Bussa because Gallo had been unable to afford them protection from slave-raiding by Ibrahim Nagwamatse, Sarkin Sudan of Kontagora. Gallo was further hampered by civil war. The Kamberi settled on Bussa lands, in particular in the Kwanji, Agwarra and Rofia areas. The Kamberi soon asserted their independence, raiding canoes of both Bussa and Yauri. Dantoro led an expedition against them, but had to call in Yauri forces to assist him. These combined forces were at first led by Dangaladima Abershi of Yauri who had to withdraw on succeeding Gallo as King of Yauri. Dantoro, assisted by Mora Tasude of Kaiama, successfully completed the war and installed his administrator Barje Bello to govern the recently subdued districts. Abershi tried to drive out Barje Bello and re-assert Yauri control over its former Kamberi subjects, even though they were settled on Bussa land and so Yauri and Bussa became bitter enemies.

**The race to Nikki** The conquest of Dahomey allowed France to look northwards to the Niger and to the possibility of gaining a port on the stretch of Niger navigable to the sea. The key to this ambition was Borgu in whose territory lay the Bussa rapids, at the head of this navigable stretch. The British had a treaty with the king of Bussa who styled himself 'Lord of all Borgu'. But the French claimed that Nikki was in fact the overlord of Bussa, so they planned to obtain a treaty with the king on the grounds that it would invalidate the British treaty with Bussa. Captain Decoeur left Marseilles for Dahomey to obtain this treaty.

To avoid any possibility that a French treaty with Nikki might invalidate his own with Bussa, Goldie decided he must get a treaty with Nikki himself. He therefore arranged for Captain Lugard, already famous as an officer of empire for his services in Uganda, to get to Nikki before Decoeur did. Lugard left Liverpool in July 1894 for the Royal Niger Company's headquarters at Akassa. Though the distance from there to Nikki was longer, he had the advantage of being able to cover most of the journey by river steamer, while Captain Decoeur had to take his party overland.

Lugard set out from Jebba on the Niger on 28th September with two European colleagues, 40 soldiers and 280 Nupe, Hausa and Yoruba porters. Racked with fever, usually soaking wet with from the late rains and short of food, Lugard and his party of half-trained soldiers and frightened, uncooperative carriers struggled across Borgu. A treaty was made with the King of Kaiama, and then the column, held together by Lugard's will-power more than anything else, finally arrived at Nikki on 12th November. Five days later it was ambushed by local Africans, and Lugard was fortunate to survive when a poisoned arrow hit him in the head, penetrating his skull.

In the event Lugard did arrive at Nikki before Decoeur and obtained a treaty signed not by the King himself, but by the Imam Abdullah and the Head Butcher who did so in the name of the late king of Nikki. Decoeur arrived with his party of Senegalese riflemen five days after Lugard had left and persuaded the King to sign, in person, a treaty of protection with France.

The French rejected the validity of Lugard's treaty and in January 1895, Victor Ballot, the governor of Dahomey reached Nikki with the express intention of getting the King of Nikki to repudiate his treaty with Britain.

It was a major military expedition and the whole of Borgu was occupied. Numerous small garrisons were stationed throughout the territory and Ballot himself marched to the Niger, establishing outposts at Leaba and at Bajibo in the Nupe emirate. They occupied Kaiama in 1897.

The French ignored all the Company's previously established rights, even at Bussa setting up an administration and taking the positions they desired on the navigable Niger below the rapids. The French leader Lt Bretonnet had been ordered to occupy the new French administrative region of the middle Niger. Bussa was not controlled by the Company, and he had now taken possession of it in the name of the French Republic. There were no RNC forces there to stop them and the indigenous people were too weak and disorganized to mount any effective resistance at this stage.

"Bretonnet left Carnotville on December 28th 1896. He headed north, passed by Kandi went to Illo where he installed a resident, inspector Carrérot. He descended immediately to Bussa where he found great turmoil. Its new king Kisan Dogo was preparing for war against Kibari, king of Wawa, who supported his rival to the throne and refused to recognize his sovereignty. He asked Bretonnet and obtained his help to attack and take Wawa and establish a new king Kantama, a relative of Kisan Dogo, who would not refuse to recognize his sovereignty. This interference by the French in the political affairs of the Busa region was to have unexpected consequences. It would change the course of Bretonnet's mission which could no longer be content with making the occupation effective by establishing forts, but must subdue the country by force. Kwara, a son of Kibari, the dethroned king of Wawa, extended the revolt against Kisan Dogo in the whole region of Busa and even in Bariba country at Kandi where the rebels took refuge.

Bretonnet was obliged to go everywhere where the revolt spread. First at Kandi, then at Illo where his resident was in difficulty, even at Bussa where the enemies of Kisan Dogo were using the occasion to their advantage. Mora Tasude from Kaiama also appealed to him to defeat a group coming from Wawa. He used the occasion to put everywhere a representative of France. Finally a large concentration of rebels gathered at More near Yangbasso (Babana) A real battle took place, Kisan Dogo and the French troops against an army of 1500 rebels who were well entrenched. At this time all the villages were surrounded by large hedges of cactus with only two or three entrances, easy to guard or barricade. These cactuses formed an effective protection against the Bariba or Busa nobles after plunder or against the possible Muslim raiders in search of slaves. At Babana, there is memory of a merciless battle with many deaths including a white man (the inspector Carrerot). But it is thought that the whites were English. The memory of a French presence is completely forgotten.

*"Le Royaume de Busa de ses origines mediavale a` 1935" René Faurité, 1987, Lyon*

Finishing his account of what he calls "the difficult installation in Bariba country" Robert Cornevin writes: (In "La Republique Populaire du Benin" (1981) "A final battle fought the next day at Boru (Bueru?) ended this hard campaign which secured French installation on the right bank of the Niger river (from the region of Say to Bussa) and on the whole line Bussa-Kaiama-Kishi at the 9th parallel."

It took only six months for Bretonnet's envoys to get established in Busa country. Three representatives of France were installed at Bussa, Illo and Kaiama. The internal quarrels of the Busanchi chiefdoms had been the opportunity whereby the French made their occupation. One might ask about the breadth of the resistance and its breaking up. Was it directed only against Kisan Dogo or was it aimed mainly against the French? In the affair only Kisan Dogo got a real advantage from the French presence and the other princes were not very happy about it. It would seem however that these first responses advantaged Kisan Dogo as well as the French, but their turn was to come.

When everything seemed calm, in the middle of the wet season of 1897, an unusual fact for Busa country, a revolt broke out and spread rapidly through the whole area. However the rebels only made a weak resistance to the French forces which was considerable enough it is true, about 500 well armed men. The arrows of the foot soldiers and the spears of the Busa horsemen had little chance, at the end of November it was all over. Major Ricourt was named head commander of the Upper Dahomey forces. In the months that followed, he traveled through Busa country and established a new fort "Forgetville" at Yangbasso (now Babana).

At the beginning of 1898, the country was completely subdued and Borgu was integrated into the colony of Upper Dahomey. The French possessed five forts in Busa country: Illo, Bussa, Kaiama, Forgetville and the fort of Aremberg near Leaba on the Niger.

Since Lieutenant Governor Ballot came to Bussa in January 1895, the French frequently made appearances in the country. All these coming and goings, the help given by Kisan Dogo, the forts that he started to build, all the more reason for the princes to ask questions. And all the more because they received nothing in return, or very little. The only beneficiary seemed to be the king of Bussa. The rapidity of the revolt of the second term of 1897 must have begun in this feeling of frustration of the Busa ruling class. It was not possible for a noble to look favourably at this foreign interference in internal affairs. This general feeling of dissatisfaction explains why, apart from Bussa who were indebted to France, all the chiefdoms of Busa country took part in the revolt of 1897.

Captain Totee of the French forces was defeated by his own heavy handed methods. Villages in the district were looted, women assaulted, men and women flogged in public for petty offences against the garrison and local chieftains were insulted and humiliated. The local people cut his communications with the rest of Borgu and refused to supply basic foodstuffs. Eventually Totee was forced into the humiliating position of having to appeal to the Company for a steamer to evacuate his troops downstream to safety.

A dangerous situation was now created on this section of the Niger, with France determined to secure a river port, the Company equally determined to prevent it, but without the armed forces to do so. While Lugard directed operations from Jebba, Willcocks advanced into Borgu to implement the policy of confrontation and occupied southern Borgu.

At Kaiama the British occupied a village only a short distance from the French camp. While discussions were proceeding in an atmosphere of exquisite politeness, the true owner of this particular piece of Africa, the King of Kaiama, came riding up on a magnificent charger, dressed in all his finery, and attended, as had been his ancestor in Clapperton's time, by a troop of completely naked teenage girls carrying his sword and spears. While the girls stood around chattering and gazing with curiosity at the sweating, overdressed white men, their lord and master harangued Willcocks, expressing his bewilderment at the presence of the French at Kaiama. Had he not made a treaty with Lugard in 1894 in order to be protected from just such an eventuality? Why then was Willcocks talking to the French instead of chasing them away?

With fighting still likely to break out in Borgu at any moment, and with the British troops in and around the region now totalling thousands, the French not only began negotiating seriously, but also gave way on all the major points. Finally, only Illo, a village near the Niger about 100 miles north of Bussa remained in dispute. Toutee considered that the Niger was navigable at Illo and France wanted it, but even Illo went to Britain. In the end it was agreed that Nikki and the larger part of Borgu would be incorporated in French Dahomey, but Bussa, Kaiama and the strategically important riverine districts were all retained by Britain.

The race to Nikki was repeated between France and Germany, in Fada N'Gourma, the hinterland of Dahomey and Togo. Indeed, such were the dangers of international competition for this whole area that the three powers decided to negotiate: it was as well, for the British and French forces seemed likely to clash in Borgu, France having signed treaties with, and occupied, states that Britain considered properly hers. In fact they very nearly did come to blows in Borgu in the early months of 1898, with French and British forces facing each other with uneasy fingers on the trigger while their respective foreign ministers negotiated the Anglo-French Treaty of 14th June 1898. This together with the Anglo-German Treaty of the preceding July, settled the occupation of the contested areas. The latter treaty settled the Togo-Dahomey boundary, confirming Gourma, Mossi and Gouronsi as French, but giving the important trading town of Sansanne Mango, to which the French had pretensions, to the Germans. The former Treaty gave Bussa to Britain, thus depriving France of her navigable stretch of the Niger, but giving her the contested Nikki.

As a reward for the valuable help given by Mora Tsaude, Chief of Kaiama, Lugard granted him the rank of Emir of Kaiama with power over western Borgawa and the Bussawa of Kaiama. Up to that time the five districts of Kaiama were subject to Nikki, the chief of Kaiama being the equal of the other chiefs.

The French in Borgu were amazed when the agreement was made and they heard that the border would be to the west of Tabera, Okuta, Boria, Teregbani, Yassikera and Dekala and then north to 10 miles west of Guiris, the port of Illo.

**Recruiting soldiers for the French army.** The chiefs naturally forced men from servile classes, rather than those from the free or noble families, to engage themselves. Strangers visiting a village were always in danger of seizure and presentation to the recruiters. Nigeria served as a refuge for men from Dahomey and Niger. In particular, nomads in Niger were difficult to track down for the recruiting teams since they slipped easily across the frontier. In Nigerian Borgu the district officers recorded influxes of inhabitants from Dahomeyan Borgu, not always without satisfaction, since this increased their sparse population for tax purposes. To curb this exodus of population, disastrous not only to the recruitment campaign, but also to the economy in loss of farmers and taxable adults, the French appealed to the British, Portuguese and Liberian authorities to send back refugees. The British authorities cooperated in a half-hearted manner. In March 1918 Lugard did however promise to recruit soldiers for his own army along the Nigerian-Dahomeyan border. Lugard gave emphatic orders to all officers charged with the administration of districts bordering on the French frontier to send back all fugitives and energetic action was taken with this object by the officers concerned.' But judging by the records and annual reports for Borgu, the French were right in their assessment of British action.

## **Chapter 7 - The Colonial Era**

When the British occupied Bussa in 1898, it was little more than a village surrounding a mean little palace, consisting of some 30 large huts encircled by a mud wall. The population was estimated at a mere 820. The contrast between the historical importance of Bussa, the senior of the Borgu states, and the tiny size of its capital is one of the enigmas of African history. The shock Europeans

experienced on discovering it to be little more than a village resulted from the fact that in the 19th century it was almost as well known as Benin.

Lander, on his second visit to Bussa in 1829 attributed its small population to an outbreak of a pestilence shortly after Mungo Park's death. He wrote: 'The Bussa are believed to be descendants of the oldest family in Africa, which in ancient times, long before the introduction of the Mohamedan religion, was the great head of the fetish; hence the profound respect which is yet shown them by the professors of the new faith, and those who still cling to the superstitions of the old.'

During the colonial period the population of Borgu was estimated at little more than 350,000 spread over 70,000 square kilometres. Nikki was the largest state and politically the most important with about 300,000 inhabitants. Nikki had sovereignty over all the Borgu territory in Benin, though by the 19th century its provinces of Kandi, Kuande, Djougou and Parakou had become effectively independent. When the Anglo-French boundary was made between Benin and Nigeria, Nikki also lost Ilesha, Okuta, Banara and Yashikera. By contrast the other four states, Bussa, Illo, Wawa and Kaiama had only 40,000 inhabitants between them. Bussa had leadership over Wawa and Illo, but Kaiama, which was a Nikki foundation exercised an effective independence of both Nikki and Bussa.

Borgu Province was formed in 1900 by the British, comprising Bussa, Kaiama and Illo. In 1902, after a short period of West African Frontier Force administration, Borgu, which was a constituent province of Northern Nigeria, came under civilian rule. The province was divided into two: Northern Borgu (Bussa) and Southern Borgu (Kaiama). The King of Bussa was recognised as paramount over Northern Borgu and administered lands which by and large he could claim were his, were tributary to him or would accept his administration as the senior ruler of Borgu: Illo, Wawa, Babana and Agwarra. Kaiama was recognised as paramount over Southern Borgu, even though Yashikera, Okuta, Banara and Ilesha had never been subordinate to him in pre-colonial times, but had been subordinate to Nikki. Both Bussa and kaiama were recognised as First Class Chiefs.

In 1907 Borgu Province was amalgamated with the new Kontagora Province as Borgu District. At the same time Illo and other parts of north-western Borgu were excised from Bussa and handed over to Sokoto Province, bitterly resented by Bussa.

So were sown the seeds of discontent which were to be fertilised by the disastrous administration of Mr J.C.O. Clarke, who first took over Borgu Division in 1912 and introduced the Native Authority system into Bussa.

The river Niger which was so magically enlarged at the time of Kisra's emigration, was never crossed again by the chiefs of Bussa until the year 1908, when Kitoro Gani broke the spell by crossing the river in the water, supported on each side by a canoe.

The appointment of Mora Tasude as Paramount over Southern Borgu gave deep offence not only to the Nikki dependencies, but also to Bussa itself, which saw this relatively new kingdom, which traditionally had to recognise Bussa's authority, raised to parity as a first class Emirate. The resentment of Bussa at what it considered the unnatural position of the Emir of Kaiama in the Borgu Division persisted through to 1955 when the Kaiama emirate was abolished and made a District of Bussa Emirate, which was restyled the Emirate of Borgu. It should be noted here that Kaiama did not accept this view of the relevant positions of the ruler of Bussa and their own ruler.

The second major blow to the prestige of the King of Bussa was the decision of the British to hand Illo and the Fulani inhabited areas of northern Borgu to Sokoto Province. While Illo had been under Fulani occupation for a short time in the 19th century, it retained its identity as a Borgu town and its

ruler not only treated Bussa as a senior brother but was recorded as a tributary of Bussa at the beginning of the colonial period.

As far as the British were concerned the central problem of early administration in Bussa was Kitoro Gani who was addicted to drink. It was called Bussa Emirate though Kitoro Gani was not a Muslim.

In 1915 Hamilton-Browne, on the advice of Clark, proposed that Borgu and Yauri should be amalgamated. Yauri would become a monster emirate with its key rulers non-natives. The Paramount would be Aliu, from Sokoto, the District Head of Bussa would be Turaki, a slave, the District Head of West Bussa would be Aliyara, a Lopawa, the District Head of South Bussa (Leaba) would be Ajia Umoru, a Nupe, and the District Head of Kaiama, a Zaberma.

In June the fugitive Sabukki, Kitoro Gani's brother who had previously been jailed and escaped, led an army of 5-700 men armed with bows and poisoned arrows and occupied Bussa. Prior to the attack he was met by a mission from Turaki to whom he gave the following conditions for peace:

1. Turaki should give up the District Headship of Bussa.
2. Turaki, Aliyara and Ajia should leave Bussa
3. The exiled Emir should be reinstated, or another member of the royal family appointed.

These conditions were refused so the rebels took Bussa, killing members of the Native Administration. Turaki escaped, but Aliyara and Ajia were pursued and killed. Wawa which had been placed under Ajia sympathised with Sabukki. Clark and Aliu marched to Bussa via Garafini with 17 policemen and 25 WAFF. They killed 9 rebels in Garafini and 10 in Bussa and then marched south to Kaiama. After protracted negotiations with the authorities of Oyo Province six ringleaders were handed over to the patrol. Sabukki, however, eluded them.

There was considerable discussion as to the causes of the rebellion as follows:

- The administrative reorganisation of Bussa, putting rule into the hands of slaves and foreigners.
- The deposition of Kitoro Gani with its religious significance.
- Subjection to Yauri, exacerbated by Aliu when he removed the Kisra relics from Bussa to Yauri.
- Unsympathetic administration. The early docility of the Borgawa had been tried sorely by the British administration. At one level Kitoro Gani was considered by the British as having the status of a first-class Emir equal to the sultan of Sokoto and Shehu of Borno, at another he was a chief treated with contempt since he did not have the powers to carry out what the British wanted. Furthermore he resented his constantly diminishing position with land being taken away and in his eyes, a comparative upstart, Kaiama, being placed on an equal footing as himself.
- Taxation. The increase in incidence and the stricter enforcement of it did much to exacerbate unrest in Borgu - in both Bussa and Kaiama.

All these factors combined to give Sabukki, a prince who had the right to succeed to the throne, the support he needed for the rebellion. Clarke's patrol did not bring peace to Borgu. In December the area was still unsettled and Sabukki was still at large.

In November 1916 it looked as though the rebellion of 1915 would be repeated. Across the border in French Dahomey the Borgawa had risen against the authorities, but were given a crushing defeat at the hands of the French and subsequently punished. Troops went to Shagunu to encounter Sabukki. Little resistance was offered, but Shagunu remained deserted for the next decade.

Over the next decade the British settled or partially settled local grievances:

- The slave Turaki was deposed after being found guilty of murder. He was replaced by Kitoro Gani's brother Kijibrim.

- Kitoro Gani restored. Kijibrim was not popular due to his having sided with Turaki during the rebellion. District Officer Hoskyns-Abrahall recalled Kitoro Gani from Ilorin and restored him to the throne in 1924.

Kitoro Gani was exceedingly popular and his return caused universal rejoicing. However he was again deposed in 1935 for embezzling money from the Native Treasury. This time his removal from office caused no stir. He was exiled to Mokwa and replaced by his brother Babaki (Muhammadu Sani) who had been District Head of the former independent area of Agwarra. He became a devout Muslim and modelled his own conduct as chief as well as the style of his administration increasingly on that of the Fulani-Hausa Emirate. He ruled until 1968 and it is his son Musa Mohammed Kigera 111 who is the present Emir of Borgu.

- Restoration of lands. In 1917 when Bussa was made independent of Yauri, Agwarra, the Rofia hinterland and Kunji were left under Yauri largely on the grounds that the land, which Bussa claimed, was farmed by Yauris. In 1919 however Agwarra was transferred back to Bussa. In 1923 on the breakup of Kontagora province, Bussa became part of Ilorin Province. In 1927 Rofia was returned to Bussa. The loss of Kunji, Illo, Kaoje and other lands excised from Bussa over the first 25 years of colonial rule, however, still rankles in the minds of the Bussawa to this day.

- The subjection of Kaiama to Bussa. The position of Kaiama as equal to Bussa continued to be an issue in Bussa right up to 1955, when finally it was made a district of the new Emirate of Borgu. Hamilton-Browne had proposed this in 1917, but it was not followed through. It was suggested in the 1920s that on the death of the incumbent Emir of Kaiama, Haliru, the Emirate of Kaiama which had been created by Lugard, be abolished and Kaiama be united with Bussa. However Haliru was a young man and did not retire until 1954 after which this suggestion was followed through.(15)

The Busa/Boko people were separated into Benin and Nigeria by a colonial boundary and those in Nigeria have been further divided among three states, the Busa and some Boko people in Kebbi state, the Boko and Bisa people in Niger state and the Bokobaru people in Kwara state. Despite the divisions these people will continue to be bound together as long as their common language and culture exist. It is my prayer that the Bisa and Bokobaru peoples, whose dialects and history are so close, will be drawn together into a unity as never before by the acquisition of a common written language, Busa.

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