

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Bangangte (Bagante, Medumba, Bamileke-Medumba), Medumba language, Niger-Congo family

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): BYV

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Southwestern Cameroon – West Province, Nde Division, Tonga Bangangte subdivisions east of Bangangte, 2N, 8E; 6N, 12E.

1.4 Brief history: The traditional agriculturally based group originated mainly from the Ndobo, Sudanic savanna-dwellers. In the 17th century, Fulani traders forced the majority of the Bamileke population to the Bamum territory in Western Cameroon. Although some have remained in the Bamum territory, the overall population has ultimately dispersed to the southern section of this area.

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: In the 1890s the German Empire penetrated the Bamileke highlands. Between 1914 and 1916 Cameroon was conquered by French and British forces and nearly all the Bangangte people were governed by the French until 1960 – European influence remains present (including French statutory law).

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Grasslands of the Bamileke Plateau

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 292,914 , about 125 persons per square kilometer – ranges from 15 to over 400 inhabitants per square kilometer

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):maize, yams, and peanuts

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Chicken and goats

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Swords and spears are traditional, guns exist in the culture post colonialism

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production: Women are responsible for the tasks of planting and harvesting the crops. Men usually help with the clearing of the land, and practice some hunting.

2.6 Land tenure: The Fon is the titular owner of all land. Quarter chiefs distribute usufruct rights to male heads or patrilineages. Lineage heads distribute plots of land to their wives, their noninheriting brothers, and their sisters.

2.7 Ceramics: Clay pots are common for trade

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Throughout history the peoples of the grasslands have been part of extensive trade routes connecting with the seaport of Douala and through trans-Saharan traders

2.9 Food taboos: Undocumented

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?: None

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): Undocumented

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): Undocumented

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): Undocumented

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Undocumented

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): The marriage is monogamous with 6 children: 8

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): Undocumented

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Lacks specifics, but marriage is encouraged early in youth rather than later

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Divorce is discouraged, previously divorce was rare now divorce is very uncommon. Divorce among the Bangangte is more of a permanent separation when it does occur as a formal legal divorce is almost unheard of unless the person wishes to remarry.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Undocumented

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: in a bride-price marriage gifts of palm oil, goats, blankets, firewood, and money are exchanged for the groom to gain reproductive, sexual, and domestic rights.

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Each lineage head chooses a single heir or heiress who becomes that person in terms of titles, rights, and duties.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Yes, Bangangte wives and children experience competing claims for allegiance and commitment from various groups of kin.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: No culturally recognized sexual deviations in sexual orientation and deviations in sexual attitude is considered an illness or possession

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Undocumented

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?: The father is believed to be half of the equation as he contributes “water” to the process so that the woman may “cook” the child in her uterus

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”): The woman is believed to be a significant part of procreation. If conception does not occur blame is placed entirely on the female. Also, the child’s personality and essence is expected to be derived from the actions and merit of the female

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?: Believe conception is the result of diverse elements that are ‘mixed’, ‘measured’, and ‘cooked’ through sex and transformed into a new being.

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: Undocumented

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Outside of lineage

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?: Yes, and Bangangte women joke of sex freely

- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: No
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?: Those with the rights to the children depending on the marital agreement – not always the father, could be the in-laws as well
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: Undocumented
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: No
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): Undocumented
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?: The children stay with the father, in the case of a divorce which ends with a remarry the first husband is given rights to the daughters.
- 4.24 Joking relationships?: Yes, of fictive, namesake kin sometimes generated from the use of praise names.
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Patrilineal descent determines inheritance of titles, land, compound and wives. Matrilineal descent determines inheritance of titles, movable property, and moral and legal obligations to lineage members.
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Yes, the Bangangte believe that incest angers ancestors
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?: Yes
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?: Undocumented
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?): Usually marriage is to come from outside of the village and patrilineage
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?: No – This practice was in existence for the economic benefit of parents, but is now outdated
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: No

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: None, currently no warfare is taking place in the region
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Undocumented
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Political steps toward independence in 1960 and the outlawing of certain political groups led to civil war from 1958 through 1972. Personal and political scars remain.
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Neighbored by the Bamum, Kom, and Babanki. Good relationships and extensive migration of people, ideas, and art work.
- 4.18 Cannibalism?: None

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Undocumented
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Predominantly male migration due to the search for jobs, bride-wealth, and to gain titles
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Political system is organized around a chief (Fon), who is served by a council of elders. The chief is recognized as the de facto owner of all land and the supreme dispenser of justice. Social behavior is further controlled through a series of age-grade associations and secret societies, both of which fall under the auspices of the village chief
- 5.4 Post marital residence: Conjugal houses for monogamous marriages include a kitchen and an outhouse. Housing for polygynous marriages consists of the husbands house surrounded by either a semicircle or two rectangular quarters of his wives kitchen-houses.
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Fences were commonplace during the precolonia and early colonial periods, but now are rare.
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): No divisions in early childhood. Once a toddler children begin the tasks of adulthood such as carrying water and other objects on the head. As children become of schooling age (there are no rigid age divisions) play and gender specific work begin to distinguish genders more definitively. Formal schooling is now the norm
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: Yes, of fictive, namesake kin sometimes generated from the use of praise names.
- 5.8 Village and house organization: Villages consist of compounds and houses. Conjugal houses for monogamous marriages include a kitchen and an outhouse.
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): Housing for polygynous marriages consists of the husbands house surrounded by either a semicircle or two rectangular quarters of his wives kitchen-houses. Bangangte villages also contain royal compounds built on slopes and follow a prescribed layout.
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?: usually a single room in the home, mats are laid out on the floor when needed
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: The Bangangte have no clans
- 5.12 Trade: Throughout history the peoples of the grasslands have been part of extensive trade routes connecting with the seaport of Douala and through trans-Saharan traders
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?: yes - the practice of seclusion (six months eating fattening foods and learning about marriage and sexuality from female kin), multiple wives, land, education. Death celebrations are also public displays of wealth and value.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR: Sunday morning church for the Christian followers
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Diviners, spirit mediums, healers, and witches.
- 6.2 Stimulants: None for ceremonial purposes

- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): The skulls of the dead are removed and preserved (the eldest living male in each lineage takes care of the skulls). No formal group initiation ceremonies at puberty. Placenta and umbilical cord are buried by the mother's kitchen at birth. Circumcision for boys. Extensive royal rituals
- 6.4 Other rituals: When a mans skull is not preserved, a family member must undergo a ceremony involving pouring libations into the ground and the dirt is collected
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): Earth was created by a monolithic god named Si
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Extensive mask work, beads representing the Fon are also commonplace
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: The secret society – people of the house of god is usually male dominated, while spirit mediums are usually women. Men tend to hold the highest offices of the churches though women freely participate in large numbers
- 6.8 Missionary effect: Many Bangangte are now members of Christian churches. The Catholic church and Eglise Evangelique du Cameroun are prevalent in the region.
- 6.9 RCR revival: Undocumented
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Believe that Ancestral spirits are embodied in the skulls of the deceased ancestors
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?: No
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy?: Refer to father and his heir/mother and her heiress by the same term. Cousins are addressed by sibling terms, but both they and half-siblings are distinguished in everyday conversation.
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): Recognition of a supreme god (Si), however they also show great respect for their Ancestral Spirits

7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint: formerly in ceremonies, now largely replaced by masquerades
- 7.2 Piercings: Undocumented
- 7.3 Haircut: Men wear close cropped hairstyles, while women fashion a variety of creative hairstyles
- 7.4 Scarification: This practice was discontinued after hunting largely became uncommon and regulated by the king. Focus became more agricultural as opposed to hunter/warrior focused mentalities and appearances
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Beadwork associated with the Fon is common throughout the area. Blue and white royal display cloth is distinctive.
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Masks are made
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Western clothing or modern African dress dominate – gender differences are similar to what one would expect in western culture
- 7.8 Missionary effect: Undocumented
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Undocumented

8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system: Special sibling terms indicate birth order ex. Firstborn, relation to twins etc.
- 8.2 Sororate, levirate: None
- 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Undocumented

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Infidelity is punishable by death

Women believe that spreading hearsay will lead to witchcraft attacks

Men never cook – except in one rare instance during a ritual, in secret society meeting houses

Numbered references

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