

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

- Bambara, Bamanankan, Bamanakan
- Bambara
- Niger-Congo [1]

1.2 ISO code: bam [1]

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

- Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal [1]

1.4 Brief history:

- “They call themselves ‘Bamanan’ which translates as ‘rejection of a master’. The Bambara use this designation to reinforce shared traditions which recount how their ancestors escaped enslavement by Malinke conquerors in the 13th century by leaving their original homeland Toron (in the present Côte d'Ivoire) for settlement along the middle valley of Niger in Mali.”
- “From Toron, the Bambara moved in a northeasterly direction and then spread out towards the middle valley of the Niger where they developed a powerful empire based in Ségou during the 1700s (Monteil, 1924: 15-16). This empire started to expand under the leadership of Kaladian Coulibaly who successfully subdued several rival chiefs until his death in 1680. The empire expanded under Kaladian Coulibaly's grandson Mamary Coulibaly who established a strong personal army largely recruited from a traditional youth organization called tón. Mamary Coulibaly died in 1755 after leading successful assaults against neighboring Fulani, Soninke and Mossi peoples. He was survived by two sons Dinkoro Coulibaly and Ali Coulibaly but they were unable to hold the empire together. In 1766, a former slave called Ngolo Diarra came to power through a coup and established control over the empire. His descendants successively ruled and expanded the empire until it was finally conquered by the Tukolor-based Jihadist army of El Hadji Umar Tall on March 10, 1861 (Paques, 1954). The Tukolor rule in its turn came to an end in 1890 when the French occupied Mali. Following Mali's independence in 1960, the Bambara have been administered mostly through their own village chiefs who function as local agents of the state.” [6, 1]

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- “The Bambara live in nucleated villages which are often located near a watercourse where wells could be dug.” [6, 2]

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- “The Bambara are agriculturalists who cultivate a variety of crops including millet, sorghum, peanuts, cassava, tobacco, and Bambara groundnuts (an indigenous variety named after them).” [6, 3]

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

2.3 Weapons:

- Made metal spears and wooden swords. [5, 33]

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

- An important structure within each residential cluster is the *gwabugu*, the cooking hut. The women working inside the hut are rarely ever interrupted or overheard by men in this space. [4, 39]
- Men work out in the fields growing and harvesting grain. [4, 71]
- “Both men and women take part in farming, but very clear division of labor by gender persists (Wooten, 2003:5). Men work collectively to produce food crops such as millet, sorghum and cowpeas. Married women work individually in small fields to produce sauce crops (mainly okra and peanuts) that complete the daily meals they cook. Unmarried girls devote most of their time to household chorus such as fetching water, child care, and house cleaning, while young boys look after livestock.” [6,4]

2.6 Land tenure:

- “The village chief owns all the land on behalf of individuals belonging to the same patrilineal lineage (fa). The chief allocates the land in two ways which recognize the need to balance between group and individual rights. Each household head (dutigi) receives "big field" to be operated as a common property (foroba) by all household members. Junior men, who live under the authority of a particular household head as his younger brothers, sons, nephews, grandsons, grandnephews, etc, receive "personal fields" (jonfow). Likewise, women who are wives in

the household receive "women's fields" (musoforow). Women and junior men cultivate their personal plots, usually for growing commercial vegetables and fruits or just as pulse fields, on their own time after work on the household farm. Through time, however, married women retire from the household farm and fully concentrate on cultivating their personal fields (Becker, 1996:6-7). Land is generally abundant and both men and women receive as much fields as they can work (Toulmin, 1992)." [6, 4]

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

- "One or several eating taboos, *tne* or *tana*, are attached to the family name and are observed by all who bear the name... For the common man, the origin of the taboo is always the subject of a tale or legend and justifies the bonds between an ancestor of the family and the animal or plant designated." [7, 115]

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

- Around 14 years of age. [10, 371]

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

- For females, around 17 years of age. For males, around 30 years of age. [11, 223]

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

- No evidence of polygyny. Men are monogamous to wife but may have lover on the side. [8, 173]

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

- Household heads pay bride-price. [6, 5]

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

- "Household authority generally passes to the eldest living male who then becomes responsible for the collective household belongings including land, tools and grain stores. Mothers' fields are inherited either by sons or by the sons of co-wives if the former already had enough land to cultivate." [6, 6]

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

- They enjoy sexual freedom but in secret just like the men do because adultery is considered a crime and has punishments. [9, 178]

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

- "A very important institution is also linked to the family name. It concerns the ties called 'joking relationship,' *dyo benatye* (literally, agreement between us), which is integrated with the general kinship relationships designated in the Mandingo country by the terms *senānkuya*. But family relationships in the strict sense, called *sindyi benatye*

(literally, breast milk between us), are to be distinguished from *dyo benatyē* which, on the contrary, involves the members of two families, or even of two different peoples.” [7, 119]

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

- “When headship is transferred, it passes first to the next eldest member of the head’s generation, not directly to his sons.” [4, 22]
- “...Segmentation along the mother’s lines is very important. In the Bamana context, where a man may have multiple wives, he may also have sons who are very close in age, perhaps even born at the same time. The Bamana are therefore typically very careful to clarify exact birth order.” [4, 22]

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

- Marriage is preferred to be within a community but outside of their own lineage. [6, 5]

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

- “Household heads are responsible for arranging marriage for all male members of their household, according to seniority, by finding the right girl, paying required bride-price and by organizing weddings.” [6, 5]

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- “Each village is divided into several wards consisting of several households.” [6, 1]

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

- “Each village has a chief, usually the senior noble man from the founding lineage, who exercises extensive moral and legal authority relating to land redistribution, inter-household relations, religion and ceremonials.” [6, 6]

5.4 Post marital residence:

- Women move into house of husband after marriage. Man will have already built his house during his transition into being a “young man,” and the wife will move there. [8, 173]

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

- “Typically, the head of the Bamana domestic group is the eldest male member of the oldest generation represented.” [4, 22]

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

- “Each village has a sacred woodlot or a dwelling place for protective spirits where religious ceremonies and initiation rites take place. The center of the village is marked by a cleared space where elders hold their councils.” [6, 2]

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

- “The men of the blacksmith caste (numu), for example, produce a wide variety of farm tools and cultural objects by fashioning metal. Women of this caste specialize in pottery. Likewise, the caste of shoemakers (garanke) works with leather.” [6, 3]

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- “The Bambara use a variety of chants, invocations, dances and musical instruments in healing the sick and in divining the causes of diseases. They also learn about the knowledge of making protective charms by joining religious societies. Through membership in secret cults, some men hope to learn how to make poisons, antidotes, and magical formulas.” [6, 8]

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

- After excision, the girls and women are confined to an enclosure with the *zeman*, an older woman who serves as their guardian. [3, 24]
- “Elaborate funeral ceremonies were held... Informants stated that ritual irons were used during both types of ceremonies. During these rites some of the irons were placed standing in the ground beneath the village’s *bana* tree, while others were actually attached to the lower branches of the tree. It should be recalled that the traditional Bambara believed that the souls of the deceased ascend the branches of the *bana* in order to gain access to the seven heavens and the afterlife.” [5, 40]
- “Prior to their conquest by Tukolor Jihadists, Bambara burial practices involved hanging the body on a tree until it rotted and keeping the bones after that. Following the conquest, however, most of them converted to Islam and started burying the body. Instead of the body, they put a band of cotton on a tree to symbolize the immortality of the deceased person's tongue (words). Funeral rituals for chiefs and spiritual leaders are highly elaborated, often involving rifle shots, lamentations, offerings by relatives and friends, ritual cleaning and inhumation of the body, and final burial feasts.” [6, 8]

6.4 Other rituals:

- “Mali remains a country with high rates of excision [female circumcision], despite the efforts of several international organizations to eradicate this practice whose social and medical dangers have made it a major human rights issue... Excision remains prevalent in Mali as part of the rites by which young girls are transformed into socially ‘complete’ women.” [3, 24]

6.5 Myths (Creation):

- “The Bambara believe in a supreme being known by a number of names such as *N’gala* and *Bemba*. Closely associated with him and with the act of creation are several supernatural beings. Prominent among them are *Mouso Koroni Koundye* or *Nyale*, *Faro* and *Ndomadyiri*. From a certain perspective these beings are also manifestations of God. During the first act of creation, known as *dali folo*, the earth was naked and God manifested himself as a grain (*kise*) known as *Pemba*. A *balanza* tree (*acacia albida*) grew from this seed. But when it became fully grown, it withered and fell to the ground. Eventually, all that remained was a long beam of wood, known as *Pembele*. This wood beam secreted mildew that accumulated beneath it. *Pembele* mixed this mildew with his own saliva to create a new being, a female known as *Mouso Koroni Koundye* (little old woman with white head)... [She] then engaged in the creative process, engendering vegetables, animals and human beings. The latter were then mortal.” [5, 29]

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- “The Bambara use a wide variety of artistic objects (such as masks, sculptures, ceramics and paintings), music and literature. Each of these arts has clearly defined cultural, symbolic, and social functions relating to rituals, ceremonials and other life situations.” [6, 8]

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

- “In the 1700s two Bambara kingdoms arose in the region, but they fell to Muslim forces during the 1800s. When the French moved into the area, they destroyed the remaining Bambara armies. By the early 1900s some Bambara had converted to Islam, the religion of their longtime Muslim enemies, as a way of resisting French rule. The process of conversion increased rapidly after World War II, and since the 1980s more than 70 percent of the Bambara have been Muslims.” [2, 73]

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- “The souls of dead ancestors are believed to come alive in the body of masked dancers and this event is celebrated annually.” [6, 8]

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

- “Most Bambara claim to be Muslims. But many people still follow their traditional beliefs in spiritual forces relating to ancestors. In addition to prayers and offerings at the individual and household levels, spirits of dead ancestors are honored with elaborated community-wide ceremonies (Toulmin, 1992).” [6, 7]

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

- The bogolanfini is a cloth made and worn by the Bamana people, and serves as a tool for the representation of preexisting traditions as well as for the creation of new traditions. [3, 3]
- “According to one source, the portion of the pattern at the top, which wraps around the wearer’s waist, also refers to the beads a woman may wear around her waist that are considered a very sensuous form of adornment.” [3, 23]

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

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