

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Bambara (Bamana), Bamanankan, Niger-Congo (1)

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

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Mali, Burkina Faso (1)

1.4 Brief history: The Bambara moved into Mali and Burkina Faso in about the 13th Century, and founded the Kingdom of Mali. When the Kingdom fell, they moved Southwest and began their practice of clan farming until the French took over in the late 19th century. (5, p 44-9)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Muslim North African raiders overthrew the Kingdom of Mali in the mid-1500's, and they ruled until the French took over in the late 19th century. The Bambara are now about 70% Muslim. (5, p 48-9)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Mostly desert, but some live in wooded areas near the south of Mali and north of Burkina Faso (3)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 2,772,340, no info (1)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): millet (2)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Cattle, chicken, goat, sheep (2)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Spears (5, p 32)

2.4 Food storage: no info

2.5 Sexual division of production: "Among the Bamana, women, in addition to taking care of many household chores, work most of their lives in the collective fields of their husband's extended family. Once women reach menopause they retire from work in the collective fields and often redirect their efforts in the cultivation of their own fields. Women are also very active in trade activities. Post-menopausal women, as in many other parts in Africa, are freer to engage more extensively in trade activities than are women of child-bearing [sic] age. However, women sell mainly food items, both raw and processed, and a few manufactured goods (e.g. cloth), while men engage more often in the sale of manufactured goods. In other words, women's access to market participation tends to be limited to a series of economic activities which are scarcely lucrative, or at least less so if compared to the business in which men engage." (3)

2.6 Land tenure: "Prior to colonization, land was not a commodity. Among the Bamana agriculturists, access to the land (that is, the right to cultivate a piece of land, not individual ownership) was often mediated by the so-called "land chief" who [sic] was often a respected elder from the first family to settle in the area. The land chief was in charge of distributing the land among the various lineages of the village. He was also responsible for the celebration of various sacrifices, in particular to the shrine of the spirits in charge of protecting the village, the so-called *dasiri* (a cluster of trees and shrubs). Lineage members would collectively cultivate the land and the lineage chief would be in charge of the redistribution of resources among individual households according to their perceived needs. However, conflicts among households of the same lineage would periodically erupt and often lead to further fissions within the lineage. Besides collective farming, individuals of both genders could cultivate smaller fields on the side and independently manage their revenues. The colonial conquest has greatly complicated the issue of property. At the present, local systems for the allocation of property, Islamic law, and colonially derived property rules (mostly affecting parcels in urban areas) coexist, but not without conflict, side by side." (3)

2.7 Ceramics: Basic pottery, it is only done by women. (5, p. 105)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: no info

2.9 Food taboos: Muslim ban on pork; traditionally, none. (5, p 33)

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? None. (Landlocked, desert climate) (3)

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): no info

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): no info

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): no info

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): no info

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): no info

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): no info

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: no info

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: no info

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Bride price, usually by giving the family of the bride ten cola nuts, then a chicken, then ten more cola nuts, then thirty cola nuts and three chickens until the bride first reaches menarche, at which time the groom will pay a cow, a heifer, a bull, and then a calf. (5, p 92)

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Bilateral Descent (5, p. 52)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Conflict arises between generations, because all members are fighting for spouses. This is especially true for fathers and sons, because they can get multiple wives. Also, conflict exists between grandparents and grandchildren, because when the grandparents die, their status passes to their grandchildren. (5, p. 52)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: no info

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Men usually marry women from different villages and families, but they must marry a cross cousin as a first wife. (5, p. 52,88)

- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized? One father, one child. (5, p 89)
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”) A Receptacle in which the fetus grows. (5, p 89)
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No, the child is a blank canvas that is given features by ancestral spirits, and by all paternal family members the mother meets during the pregnancy. (5, p 89)
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape- no info
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) cross cousins (5, p. 52)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No, they are married by their families and live with the husband that they don’t choose (5, p. 88)
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? The *Fa*, the arbiter of the family, who is appointed by the council of village elders, decides it. (5, p. 53)
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females-no info
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades- none (5, p. 89-90)
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) no info
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Respect is given to the Paternal Aunt, because she can curse her nieces and nephews, and to the Maternal Uncle, who is given a niece to marry in exchange for favors from the family (5, p. 52)
- 4.24 Joking relationships? The father’s sister’s children often make fun of and ridicule their cousins, because of the paternal aunt’s power in casting curses. (5, p. 51)
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations-Patrilineal for name and rights. (3)
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules-no info.
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes, on the wedding, the bride comes to the house her husband built with her twin or a servant representing her twin, while two different couples, which represent the union of two different sets of twins, accompany the groom. They are accompanied by a procession of seven women who represent the seven seeds planted in March. If the bride or groom are actually twins, the ceremony is different. If the bride has a male twin, then the brother must take her virginity before she is married. If the groom has a male twin, then the married husband has to marry the bride’s twin. (5, p. 94)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? no info
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Outside of community for men, but not always. The women are usually brought between families within different villages. (5, p. 94)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Yes and no, it is decided by the two to be married, with permission from parents sometimes, but with most it is done by exchange of girls between families. (5, p 92)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: Multiple generations fight each other for the chance to win wives, and this leads to arguments and distrust between generations. (5, p. 52)

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: no info
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: no info
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: no info
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): no info
- 4.18 Cannibalism? No info

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Women who are betrothed, but pre-menarche must return to their family’s village to help in the fields every rainy season. (5, p. 88)
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): There is a chief who inherits his status, and mainly settles disputes between clans. He is also in charge of religious rites, especially ones related to fertility and the success of crops. He also distributes land between clans. Within the clans, there exists a *fa* that settles disputes internally. (5, p. 54)
- 5.4 Post marital residence: Live with the husband in the house he built. (5, p. 92)
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Different clans have defined boundaries that they can use for residence and farming. The chief defines these. (5, p 54)
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: “Traditionally certain clans entertain joking relationships with one another (e.g. the Diarra and the Traoré).” (3)
- 5.8 Village and house organization: Boys and girls, until their circumcision, live in separate houses, getting education about their society and ceremonies. This continues until they are circumcised, at which they are prepared for marriage. At this time, they return to their families. (5, p. 56-7)
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses): Boys and girls live in separate houses from each other until they are circumscised. (5, p. 56-57)
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? No info.
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: There are several fraternities of age, clan, and job. Young boys and girls take part in a society of age, usually in groups of ages 6-10 and 10-15, at which time both sexes will be circumscised. Clans are groups of

family members that arrange marriages to the clan's benefit. The fraternities of occupation are just that. They accept people in a certain occupation, although they are mainly for ceremonial purposes. (4, 5, p. 52, 54)

5.12 Trade: Not done traditionally, but is now done in modern cities and villages. (3)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Yes. Society is traditionally stratified into horonw (nobles), nyamankalaw (laborers and craftsman), and jonw (slaves and lower class people). These levels are now very permutable with much movement between classes. (3)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: no info

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): The chief and *fa* of clans have important ritual specialization, because the chief can communicate with spirits, and the *fa* interacts with ancestors of the clan. (5, p 56)

6.2 Stimulants: none

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): At birth, the baby is washed with millet beer. The patriarch of the clan (the oldest living male member) shakes the beer on the baby's head 3 or 4 times to purify the child of the spirit of death. At circumcision, the village potter, and the village blacksmith's wife, in front of her parents, circumcise girls age fifteen. In Bamana culture, the clitoris represents the male aspect of the woman, and the foreskin represents the female of the man. The blood is collected and given to her fiancé, who then offers it to his ancestors. For male circumcision, the boy is led to the center of the village where he is circumcised by the *fa* of his clan. After this, he is considered fertile, and can be married. For the funeral, the dead body has its head shaved and it has its outside whitewashed with a paste made of cowries and water. Seven days later, a feast is held in the person's honor. The clan mourns for forty days, at which time, the corpse is considered an ancestor. (5, p. 89-94)

6.4 Other rituals: Other rituals are practiced for the specific societies, which include dances and the wearing of ceremonial masks. (4)

6.5 Myths (Creation): The Bambara believe that the world was the result of a void given movement, called the *Gla*. The void emitted a voice that shattered its twin, and emitted a substance called *sumale zo*, which means cold rust. This substance transformed itself into the world, which was shiny and hard. Then, it exploded transforming itself into a series of 22 elements and the spirit, *Yo*, which together created everything in the world.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): The Bambara are famous for their masks that are worn in ceremonial dances and in rituals. They also have statues that represent ancestors placed outside of clan houses. Statue making is for men only. Music is only performed by *griots* or travelling troubadours that only come from the upper class. (5, p. 104-6)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Men lead all rituals, except for female circumcision. (5, p. 89-94)

6.8 Missionary effect: Because of the influence of North Africans, nearly 80% of the Bambara are now Muslim. (3)

6.9 RCR revival: No info

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: After forty days of death, the dead person becomes a living ancestor who watches over their clan. (5, p. 95)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No. (5, p. 95)

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No. (5)

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

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: no info

7.2 Piercings: no info

7.3 Haircut: no info

7.4 Scarification: no info

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): no info

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: no info

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: no info

7.8 Missionary effect: Because of the influence of Islam, the Bambara are adopting the traditional Muslim dress. (5, p. 103)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: no info

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: Only brothers and sisters are considered siblings. (5, p. 51-2)

8.2 Sororate, levirate: none

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Iroquois. (5, p. 52)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them): The Bambara were originally matrilineal until the introduction of cattle. (5, p. 51)

Numbered references

1. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bam

2. <http://www.africaguide.com/culture/tribes/bambara.htm>

3. <http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Mali.html>

4. <http://www.africanethnicart.com/africanethnicgroup.aspx?ethnicgroup=bambara>

5. Paques, Viviana. *Les Bambara*. Paris: Presses Universitaires De France, 1954. Print.