

1. Description

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

Name: Basoga

Language: Soga or Lusoga

Language Family: Niger-Congo

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

Code: xog

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

0° 33' 0" N; 30° 45' 0" E

1.4 Brief history:

The Basoga are said to originate from the eastern slopes of Mt. Elgon.(1) During the 18th century, the Baganda began to expand their territory. Eventually, they took control of the Basoga.(3) In 1906, the British Empire took control of the region and implemented a European economic and political system.(5) The group was also introduced to Christianity with the arrival of the Anglican Missionary Society and the Catholic Mill Hill Fathers.(5) Finally, with the arrival of the British, the Basoga began producing cotton as a cash crop. (3)

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

As stated in 1.4, the Basoga were subject to Baganda rule before the arrival of the Europeans. While the Basoga were able to generally govern themselves, they had to pay taxes to the King of Buganda.(6)

The infrastructure and government of Busoga was completely altered with the arrival of the British, who placed missionaries, European adventurers, and African converts in governmental posts.(3) These new leaders created a “centralized, monolithic governmental structure” in which larger chiefdoms became counties and smaller chiefdoms became sub-counties or parishes.(5) This new government created a Busoga Railway in 1912, established schools and churches around the region, and made Luganda, the language of the Baganda, the regions official language.

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

Busoga is located on the right bank of the Nile river where it issues from Lake Victoria.(1) The soil is considerably more fertile than neighboring Buganda, allowing for extensive banana plantations.(1,2,3,6) However, the northern region of Busoga is characterized by sandier soil less suited for agriculture.(2)

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

Population: 426,608 (1948 census) (3)

Mean village size: Between 30 and 100 adult males and their households (3)

Home Range Size: 3771 square miles (5)

Density: As of 1948, Busoga had a population of 514,316, over one-tenth of Uganda’s African population. Busoga also contained a non-African population of 8,318, more than one-fifth of the Protectorate’s non-African population.(5)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

The main carbohydrate in the central and southwest regions was plantains supplemented with millet, cassava, and sweet potatoes.(2,3,4,6,7) The extreme north and southeast regions depended mainly on millet and sweet potatoes due to their sandier soil and less favorable rainfall distribution.(2)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Meat was not eaten with regularity among peasants.(7) However, some “diligent” women grew Semsem, a small, oil-yielding plant that was made into cakes to take the place of meat.(4,7) The Basoga occasionally hunted elephants and hippopotamuses, but this was infrequent. Goats, sheep, and fish were more commonly traded than eaten.(6)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

A spear with a leaf-shaped blade was used for hunting elephants. In warfare, warriors carried a shield, three spears, and a sling.(6,7)

2.4 Food storage:

No information found

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Women were forbidden from herding cattle. They were primarily responsible for sowing and maintaining the plantain groves and millet fields.(6,7) It was also the duty of the wife to cook for her husband and children. Men took care of the livestock as well as matters dealing with trade.(6)

2.6 Land tenure:

Each clan had possession of its own land. This land was divided among clan members by the clan head, or *Mutaka*. The *Mwami*, or paramount head of all clans in his district, was the absolute owner of all the land in that district and could give any piece of ground to a resident of the district. (3,6,7)

2.7 Ceramics:

Women made pots by implementing a spiral method. Clay was made into long rolls that were coiled to form the sides of the pot.(6)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

No sharing pattern was specified in any of my sources aside from the provisioning of food to men that were building a new home and the gifting of food and cattle to chiefs.

2.9 Food taboos:

Women were forbidden from eating chicken, eggs, lamb, and fish. However, they could eat goat.(6,7) In some clans, if a calf was born, a boy was assigned to drink the milk of the cow for three days.(6)

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Canoes were used for fishing and hunting hippopotamuses.(1,7)

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

The mean height for men and women is 5'8". (7)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Not Specified

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

Not Specified

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Spouses were encouraged to have a child as soon as they are married (17 for males and females) (2,6,7)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

There were no restrictions on family size. A man could take as many wives as he pleased and was only limited by his wealth.(7)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Not Specified

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

17 for both males and females (7)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Not Specified

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

37-59% of all marriages were polygynous (2)

14-30% of males were polygynous (2)

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

Bride prices varied with the financial status of the male. Chiefs generally paid two to five cows while peasants only paid around ten to twelve goats. (4,6,7)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

After a man died, a formal council of the lineage mates of the deceased decided his heir.(2,7) However, this heir only received a portion of the property, the rest was distributed among the siblings to the heir, the widows, and the head of the clan. (6)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

A father represented an authority figure in his home but was also an important figure in his system of lineage. Therefore his relationship with his sons was close, in that his sons were important to him, but also distant, as he demanded respect.(2)

Conversely, a boy's relationship with his mother was full of love and affection.(2) As he grew up, the boy built a house near his parents' where he lived until marriage.(6,7)

A daughter had similar relationships with her mother and father as her brothers did. However, she began to learn how to cook and tend the fields at a young age and furthermore was taught that she was subordinate to any male.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Not Specified

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

A man was forbidden from marrying first or second cousins (see **4.17**) as well as anyone from his father's clan.(6,7) If a marriage was found to have been made between two related individuals, they "[parted] at once and [made] an offering to the gods to atone for the offense.(7)

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

Not Specified

Note: Partible paternity was probably not accepted as polyandry was forbidden. (6)

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

Not Specified

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

Not Specified

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

Not Specified

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

While a man could not marry his first cousin, a second cousin could be married under the correct circumstances. If the bride and bridegroom were "grandchildren of the brother and sister respectively, and if the father of one was the son of that brother, and if the mother of one of them was the daughter of that sister," the two could be married. (7)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

“An unmarried woman is not condemned for unchastity, unless she becomes with child.” (7)

However, there were strict laws about adultery. Punishment was usually given to the man, not the woman, as “a husband will pardon his wife for two or three offenses...[if she continues,] the husband divorces her and demands the marriage-fee from her clan.” (7)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

No evidence.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

When a wife dies, her relatives supplied another wife “to become heir to the dead woman.” (7)

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

Not Specified

4.22 Evidence for couvades

No evidence.

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

No evidence.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

A man avoided his mother-in-law and could only communicate with her while she was in another room. (7)

4.24 Joking relationships?

At time, men would congregate to drink beer, feast, and have sham fights. (6)

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

The Basoga were patrilineal and named their children after a dead relative in the father’s lineage who was known to be fond of children. (7)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

See **4.17**.

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

While there was no formal marriage ceremony, the families practiced several celebrative customs. After a bride fee had been paid, the bride’s family escorted her to her new home where they spent the night. The next day, the family of the bridegroom provided a feast. After the relatives of the wife left, a sister remained to care for the bride during a one-month period of seclusion, during which the bride may not touch food with her hands. (7)

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

See **4.25**.

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

Males were forced to marry outside of their fathers’ clans. Women may marry into the same clan as a sister, but, as with males, couldn’t marry into their fathers’ clans. (2,6,7)

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

Boys could choose whom they wanted to marry. However, a friend or a family member, not the boy himself, arranged the marriage and bride price with the bride’s family. (2,6,7)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

“It is a serious offence for a youth to try to get a woman who is already betrothed to another to change her mind and accept him.” (7)

The first suitor could bring the case to court; if the found guilty, the second suitor was fined. (7)

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

No specific number of deaths was found in my sources. However, warfare was rare and only amassed a handful of deaths.(6,7)

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Warfare was uncommon, but still occurred between the clans.(6,7) Fights usually occurred because of land encroachments.(6)

Furthermore, it was considered unsafe to travel outside of a man’s home-district as he could be caught a killed by members of another clan “to end some sacred ceremony with the life-blood of another person.”(7) This could start a blood feud between the two clans, each attempting to capture and kill members of the other. (7)

Murder occurred with rarity. But if it did occur, it was the duty of the friends and family of the deceased to find and kill the murderer. (6)

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

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

Within the Basoga there were 88 individual clans. (7) Additionally, there were several other tribes neighboring the Basoga, including the Baganda, Iteso, and Banyuli.(3)

4.18 Cannibalism?

No evidence.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Villages contained 30 to 100 adult males and their households. (3)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

The fertility of Busoga allowed for sedentary agriculture.(2)

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

Busoga was divided into districts ruled by the *Mwami*, or superior chiefs. These chiefs controlled all the land in the district and tried court cases brought to him by lesser chiefs. Under the *Mwami* were the *Bakungu* and *Bamitale*, second- and third-grade chiefs respectively. These were nominated by the *Mwami* and assisted in the governance of the clans. (6)

5.4 Post marital residence:

Women lived in a home built by their husbands after marriage. (6,7)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Clans didn't appear to actively defend their boundaries. However, warfare can result if a man from one clan settles on the land of another clan. (7)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Women are taught to be subservient to men at a very young age. Generally, children have relatively distant relationships with their fathers but close relationships with their mothers. (2)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

Not Specified

5.8 Village and house organization:

"Where a homestead contains a number of dwelling huts or out-buildings, these are arranged in a roughly circular pattern around a courtyard of bare earth, which is swept daily and kept free of plant growth." (2)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Huts were beehive shape, formed by making a frame with sticks and thatching them with reeds or elephant grass. Inside, the area was partitioned with bark-cloth and the floors were smoothed with clay and "cow-dung." (6,7)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Not specified

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

"All Soga are divided among a number of exogamous, totemic patrilineal clans whose members recognise a common descent in the patrilineal line but are unable to trace the exact genealogical relations among them." (2)

5.12 Trade:

The British East Africa Company established trade routes in 1889, allowing communication between traders and the various chiefs to foster.(5) Cotton and coffee were brought to Busoga and grown as a cash crop to be sold around the country.(3) Furthermore, trade routes allowed for the trade of ivory and slaves.(1,6,7) Lastly, fish caught in Lake Victoria or the various rivers around Busoga were dried and sold at the local market.(6,7)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Chiefs as well as governmental officials representing the British Empire possessed large amounts of power and wealth. (2,3,6)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Not Specified

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Every god in the Basoga pantheon had a priest, or *Bachwezi*, dedicated to it. (4,6)

Basawa: Medicine-men chiefs who specialized in rainmaking (6)

Basizi: Men who made magic for evil purposes and were said to make medicine out of exhumed bodies.(6)

6.2 Stimulants:

Beer was drunk with regularity. This was made with millet and *Gonja* or *Mbidde* plantains.

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

Birth: After a woman became pregnant, she was given herbs to mix with water and drink daily. These tonics were intended to help a mother by giving her an easy delivery as well as making the offspring healthy. After the birth, the umbilical cord was cut and put into a bag that the mother wore on her belt and the placenta was buried next to a plantain tree. The midwife then washed the child as she sang, a practice that was believed to make the infant stronger and lengthen his life. (7)

Death: After a man died, his wife and relatives washed his body and face and anointed him with oil. He was then placed in a grave. The grave was usually a pit dug five or six feet deep and lined with bark-cloth. If the man was important, a hut was built over his grave. After the burial, the men and women commenced a four-day mourning period when they remained strictly apart. Mourners visited the grave twice a day at sunrise and sunset to wail and lament.(6)

-Note: As the first scoop of soil was being thrown into the grave, the widow would grab a portion, roll it into a ball, and throw it over a nearby tree. This action was believed to free the ghost of deceased that might be held in bondage to the person who caused his death.(6)

6.4 Other rituals:

Rainmaking: If a clan wanted rain, it could apply to a *Basawa* to do the rainmaking rituals. A chief would provide a bull to be killed as an offering. The liver and heart would be cut into pieces for the ghosts of the clan, who would thus allow it to rain.(6)

Human sacrifice to the god *Kahango* was also implemented to bring rain. A man, usually crippled, would be brought to the *Pit of Kahango*, where a priest resides. Members of the clan laid the man at the edge of the pit. They then asked *Kahango*, if he was the cause for the draught, to take the man as a sacrifice; however, if he was not the cause, they asked him to cure the crippled man.

After some time passes, the clan returned to the pit—if the crippled man was gone, it was assumed that the sacrifice was taken and a bull was killed and eaten near the site. (7)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

Mukama is considered the creator of life in Basoga mythology. Believed to have at one point resided in near-by Mount Elgon with his sons, he worked in a forge to create the first hoes in Busoga. *Mukama* is also said to have created rivers, all of which are believed to have a source at his home.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

On occasion, men would hold sham fights and drink beer.(6) This occurred for special events, such as two clans making an oath of friendship with each other.

Dancing was also a popular pastime. Renown for their talent, Basoga musicians played for chiefs all around Busoga and Buganda. These bands consisted of primarily wind instruments—ten to twelve gourd trumpets played along two to three drums.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

Men and women were separated for certain rituals, such as dancing or mourning. Furthermore, the ghosts of women were not given shrines. (6,7)

6.8 Missionary effect:

Missionaries were often put into government positions where they instituted Christianity into many aspects of life, including education. Missions also established technical training and medical facilities. (3,5)

6.9 RCR revival:

Not Specified.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

The Basoga did not believe in an afterlife as might be understood by western religions like Christianity.(1) They believed that the ghosts of the deceased lived after death and could act helpfully or harmfully to members of the clan. (6)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

No evidence.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

No evidence.

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

The religion of the Basoga was a combination of Polytheism, Animism, and ancestral worship. Prayers and offerings were only made to gods if some assistance was required. However, offerings were made to the ghosts of family and clan members with regularity, as they were believed to work actively in daily life. Furthermore, the Basoga believed that certain trees and streams possessed spirits that could help or harm a person, much like an ancestor could.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Not Specified.

7.2 Piercings:

No evidenc.

7.3 Haircut:

Men and women shaved their heads. (1,4,6,7)

7.4 Scarification:

Women occasionally scarred their bodies (*njalo*). However, men never partook in this.

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

The Basoga wore either goat-skin or bark-cloth, a material made out of the bark of local tree, for clothing.(6,7) Women and men also wore copper, iron, or brass bracelets.(6,7) Finally, the Basoga removed their mandibular canines during childhood.(6,7)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

Not Specified

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

There were minimal differences between adornment among men and women.

7.8 Missionary effect:

Not Specified

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

Not Specified

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Sibling hostility was apparent at a young age and persisted through adulthood, manifesting itself in issues of inheritance. (2)

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

Sororate marriage occurred with frequency. A man would occasionally marry the sister who lived with his new wife during her period of seclusion. (6,7)

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

Omaha kinship structure (2,3)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them)

Numbered references

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