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**NIGERIAN BORGU c.1500-1900: AN ANALYSIS
OF A SEGMENTARY SOCIETY**

by

Julius Olufemi Adekunle

Submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (History) at
Dalhousie University
September, 1993

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents,
Chief and Mrs S.Ade. Agoro

and to the loving memory of my father-in-law,
Rev. Gabriel Olaniyi Odebunmi.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the history of Nigerian Borgu between c.1500-1900, tracing the origin of the people, the emergence and development of the state system and the economic activities of the Muslim Wangara merchants. It further considers the central importance of the Kisra legend to the overall history of the Borgu kingdoms. Given the ethnic differentiation of Borgu in the early period of its existence, this study establishes that the Kisra ideology -- anti-Islamic and pro-Traditionalist -- assisted in forging unity. Despite the pressure from the Muslim communities within and Islamic states outside the kingdoms, Borgu persisted in resisting the spread of Islam until the twentieth century. Special attention has been focused on the southern satellite chiefdoms to Nikki which previous writers have ignored. In Borgu there exists a consensus that the kingdoms had never been conquered. However by utilizing sources external to the society combined with hints in the early traditions of the southern chiefdoms, this work has been able to throw some light on the "dead middle" period c.1500 to 1700 as one of foreign rule by Nupe and the Oyo Empire. Overall Nigerian Borgu emerges as a politically and linguistically segmented people who think and feel as one unified society.

ABBREVIATIONS

BHT.	Borgu Historical Texts
JAH.	Journal of African History
JHSN.	Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria
WAJA.	West African Journal of Archaeology
WAAN.	West African Archaeological Newsletter
TJH.	TransAfrican Journal of History
NAK.	National Archives, Kaduna
NAI.	National Archives, Ibadan
AHS	African Historical Studies

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I would like to emphasize the distinctive role of some individuals at the stage of writing this thesis. First is

Professor James Bertin Webster, my supervisor. Throughout the period of my study, he was very helpful and understanding. Frankly this thesis would have been a hodgepodge of confusion and unsynthesized material to every reader if not for the tireless efforts and constructive suggestions of Prof. Webster. His vast experience and wealth of knowledge on African History have been immensely valuable to my work. To John E. Flint (Professor Emeritus), I am profoundly indebted. His suggestions and literal corrections have vastly improved the quality of this thesis. I am also thankful to Prof. Jane L. Parpart for reading through the chapters and offering helpful suggestions.

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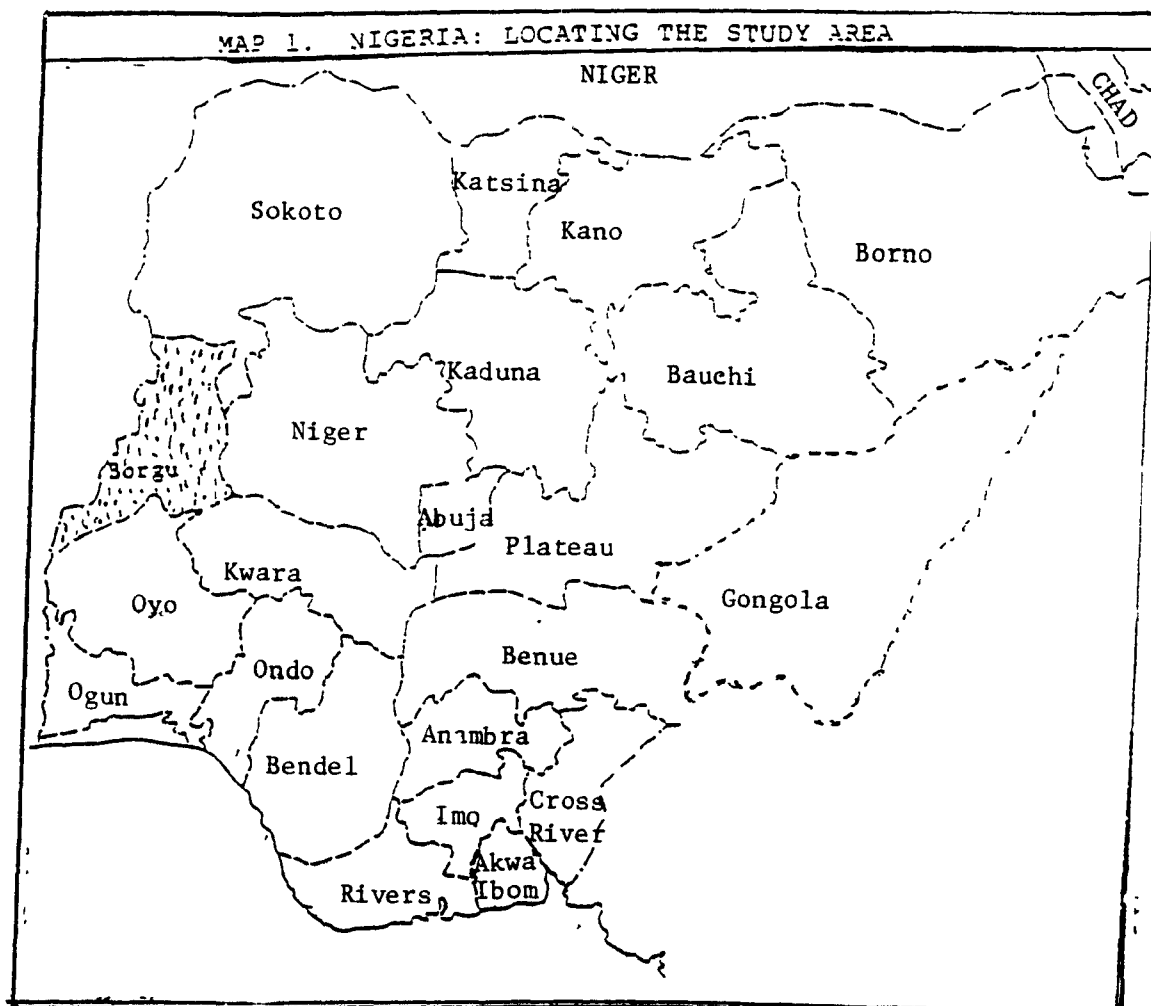
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In no situation is there perfection in human efforts, therefore I admit that some of the views expressed in this thesis are challengeable. I also take responsibility for all the interpretations and varying degrees of emphasis on the various themes in this thesis.

August 1993.

Julius O. Adekunle.



INTRODUCTION TO NIGERIAN BORGU HISTORY

The pre-colonial history of Nigerian Borgu has been understudied. This is surprising in view of certain potent reasons. First, the Kisra legend has pervaded Borgu's early history so much that an analysis is required to understand the present relationship among the ethnic groups which now constitute Borgu. Secondly, the anti-Islamic ideology became a distinguishing principle of the Borgu people until the twentieth century. Thirdly, the claim that the region had never succumbed to a foreign power provides a compelling force for thorough examination into the people's past. These factors have undoubtedly placed Borgu in a unique position, necessary for ethnological study and thorough historical analysis.

In an age such as our own, when a community is normally referred to as ethnic group defined by language or dialect, the Wasangari (descendants of Kisra) in Borgu designated their community much as the Hapsburgs had once done for parts of Europe.¹ The dynastic community, whether the Wasangari or Hapsburgs, had blithely ignored language and culture in defining its identity. But in some ways Borgu resembled the imagined communities of the Armenians more than those of the Hapsburgs which have disappeared from the imagination of any

¹ For more information on imagined communities, see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Revised edition, Verso, London, 1991.

community. The Borgu community had been built around a religious ideology, in which the people saw themselves as the defenders of a traditional religion, forming the great military obstacle to the spread of Islam stretching back in their imaginings to the time of the Prophet in seventh-century Arabia and culminating in the struggle against jihadist armies in the nineteenth century.

The region, which is the subject of this study, is termed Nigerian Borgu following the partition of 1898. Located in the western part of the middle belt, it stretches between the present-day Kwara and Niger States. It is skirted in the north by Hausaland and in the east by the River Niger. Separated by the River Moshi, a tributary of the Niger, Borgu shares a boundary with Yorubaland in the south. In the west, it is flanked by the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey). The region lies approximately between 9° and 11° 45'N and 3° and 4° 45'E. It has an area of about 12,054 square miles or 19,286 square kilometres.² In the early colonial period when statistical records became available, the population of Nigerian Borgu was estimated variously at 27,969 or 40,000, which represented 2.3 or 3.3 to the square mile.³ In the 1963 census figure, Borgu Division had a total population of

² DOB/ASR/24 "Borgu Gazetteer Historical Notes", NAK.

³ SNP/17/K 2102 "Borgu Peoples", NAK.

106,991 but by 1982, it had increased to about 147,487.⁴ Because Borgu people live in small widely distributed villages, they do not have the type of high population density that can be found among the Yoruba.

Generally speaking the vegetation of Nigerian Borgu is that of the Guinea Savanna, having similar geographical conditions with Hausaland which lies to the immediate north. This vegetation covers most of the sparsely populated middle belt of Nigeria of which Borgu is an integral part. Although the southern chiefdoms are located in wooded areas, they are not within the thick tropical forest to which many Yoruba belong. Structurally, the savanna vegetation is divided into four parts: savanna woodland, tree savanna, shrub savanna and grass savanna. All these may be found in close juxtaposition in Borgu.

Some parts of northern Borgu exhibit very low and swampy soil, with the banks of the River Niger at Bussa and Illo being flooded for many miles between July and September. In other parts of the region, the widespread features are sand and granite soil between Shagunnu in the east and Babanna in

⁴ The data was collected from the Borgu Local Government Council Office, New Bussa, 1991. The 1963 figure is taken from "Report of the Northern Nigeria Delimitation Authority 1965", Government Printer, Kaduna, 1965, p. 111. However according to Morgan and Pugh's population distribution on divisional basis, Borgu falls within the range of 0-7 people per square mile or 0-3 per square kilometre. Significantly these figures show how sparsely populated Nigerian Borgu had been. See W.B. Morgan and J.C. Pugh, West Africa, Methuen & Co., London, 1969, p. 9.

the west. The characteristic soil is the ferribols, which develops into sand stone formations. There is also an open shrub with a conspicuous display of coarse grass, gradually assuming a more wooded appearance towards the centre and the south. As a result, there emerges a high humus soil content in the south, the texture which favours the cultivation of yam and guinea corn, the primary staple food of the people.

In the extreme south, that is around Ilesha, Gwanara and Kenu, timber can be obtained.⁵ Along the Niger between Bussa to the north, Awuru and Garafini to the west and Leaba to the south, mangrove (Rhizophora racemosa) used for canoe building can be found in scattered form. Soba trees (in Batonu) used for the burial of rulers, and rafia palm (Raphia vinifera) used for house roofs and sheabutter wrap are available. The Ijo of the forest zone of the Niger Delta and the Apoi of the Central Delta were celebrated canoe builders, whose canoe were found in Idah and possibly Borgu.⁶ Other prominent trees include the sheanut (Butyrospermum parkii -- widely distributed throughout Borgu), locust bean (Parkia biglobosa), indigo (Indigofera tinctoria), baobab (Adasonia digitata), camwood (Baphia nitida), Capsicum (Capsicum annum) and acacia.

Animals common in Borgu include buffaloes, antelopes,

⁵ DOB/HIS/38, "History of Borgu", NAK.

⁶ E.J. Alagoa, "Long-distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta", JAH, Vol. 2, No.3, 1970, pp. 319-329.

elephants, leopards, lions and monkeys. Hippopotamus and crocodiles are found in the riverine areas. Important birds include eagles, ostriches, parrots and weaver birds. During their expedition to Borgu in 1830, the Lander brothers mentioned that:

[Borgu country] abounds plentifully with deer and antelopes, and other wild animals of a more ferocious nature, such as the lion, the leopard, the elephant, the wild ass, etc; but the solitary lowing of a buffalo was the only sound that we distinguished in the forest, and we had not the pleasure of meeting with this animal.⁷

In another account, they recorded that:

Alligators were plentiful in the river... Our ears were ravished by the warbling of hundreds of small birds, which with parrots and parroquets, peopled the branches of the trees in the vicinity of the stream..."⁸

The richness in the fauna of Borgu explains why hunting was an important occupation of the people. One other significant aspect of Borgu hunting culture was the use of poisoned arrows. Renowned for powerful and efficacious charms for hunting and warfare, the Borgu people and their country have been described as "nefarious and dangerous" by both African

⁷ See Robin Hallet, (ed.), The Journal of Richard and John Lander, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965, pp. 100-101.

⁸ Richard Lander, Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa, Vol. 1, Frank Cass, London, First Edition 1830, New Impression 1967, pp. 128-131.

merchants and European travellers. For instance, while accounting for the trepidation which the Yoruba felt for the Borgu people, Lugard stated that the "dread of the witch-craft and of the deadly poisoned arrows for which the Borgu are famous throughout West Africa, has prevented their [the Yoruba] ever making head against them by an invasion in force of Borgu."⁹ Some of the animals such as the antelope and leopard, some birds such as the weaver bird and certain reptiles such as the cobra and python, are revered as totems especially in the southern chiefdoms.

Borgu region is generally undulating, marked by numerous inselbergs, domed or sugar-loaf hills and occasional flat topped ridges. These hills are scattered all over the region. Their heights range between 1000 and 5000 metres.¹⁰ Notable among these rocky-hills are Jekanna, Kubli, Sarsako, Puissa, Okwarra, Kali, Aiana, Takare and Mural. Mention should also be made of Konko and Ozero at Kaiama, Kuroboko at Okuta and Kabaruu at Gurai. Small ranges of hills such as the Sauni and Ukupa are found between Rofia and Agwarra. These rocky-hills

⁹ See F.D. Lugard, "England and France on the Niger, 'The Race for Borgu'", The Nineteenth Century, No. 120, June 1895, pp. 889-903. Consult also F.D. Lugard, "An Expedition to Borgu, on the Niger", The Geographical Journal, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1895, pp. 205-227.

¹⁰ O. Akintola, Geography of Africa, Longman, London, 1982, p. 58.

have developed over the basement complex.¹¹ The Niger, which separates Borgu from Nupe, is the major river which drains the area, but its tributaries such as Moshi, Oli, Swashi, Teshi, and Wessa supply water to the population in the interior. There are various other streams and ponds which hold historical and religious significance in each locality. Some of the rivers have indeed become objects of worship. Because these tributaries are not navigable, water transportation and fishing could not be carried out on an extensive scale. The Laru in Shagunnu, Bussa and Wawa districts have emerged as distinguished fishermen. However, because none of the rivers served as an impediment to human movement, economic interactions with people outside Borgu was made possible.

Rainfall is about 70-100 inches per year. Like other parts of Nigeria, Borgu enjoys two alternating climatic seasons, the wet and the dry. During the wet season between May and October, rains are usually accompanied by tornadoes. In the dry season between October and April, the temperature rises to about 95⁰F during the day but drops to about 40⁰F in the night.¹² The dry season is characterized by a warm and dusty-air mass known as the Harmattan, which reaches its peak

¹¹ See Akin Mabogunje, "The Land and Peoples of West Africa" in J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, (eds.), History of West Africa, Vol. One, Longman, London, Second edition, 1976, pp. 11-13.

¹² See Mabogunje, "The Land and Peoples of West Africa", pp. 1-3.

in January. The Harmattan in Borgu is usually less severe than what operates in Hausaland. Obviously, certain geographical conditions have dictated the living pattern of Borgu people, their occupations and the types of crops they cultivated. Being in the Guinea Savanna zone where the land is plain and fairly fertile, farming became the mainstay of the economy, supplemented by hunting and fishing by the riverine people. The fertility of the soil was noted by a colonial officer who reported that "manure is not understood, the soil is said not to require it."¹³ To revitalize the soil, however, land was generally allowed to lie fallow for about three years after each crop. In addition, a rotational cropping system was practised as a means of restoring the fertility of the soil. Vegetables, maize, cassava and beans are some other cultivable crops. Animal husbandry was practised but not for ploughing. Despite a number of granite "pimples" found most remarkably between Taberu, Okuta and Yashikera, agriculture still thrived in the zone. To determine the level of production in the pre-colonial times might be difficult, but it seems logical to suggest that production was at the equilibrium level with the population, since almost every family produced its own food. Cattle rearing remains the prerogative of the nomadic Fulani who were located in several places. They do not migrate over long distances to obtain fresh pasture for their cattle owing

¹³ DOB/SNP/4667/1906, "Kontagora Province: Borgu Tribe, Laws and Customs, Notes On", NAK.

to the vastness of uncultivated land. As primary purveyors of beef, the Fulani depended upon the Borgu people for the supply of food crops. Thus a symbiotic economic relationship was established.

The term "Borgu" came into usage with the advent of the Europeans, applied loosely to refer to the people who inhabit the western portion of the River Niger. This fact and the problem of application has been recognized by Margery Perham and Mary Bull in the Diaries of Lord Lugard where they commented that "The very name had been given, as so often happened, by Europeans as a convenient inclusive word to cover a complex of peoples." They also admitted that the name gave the British "a misleading impression of unity."¹⁴ Regrettably this "misleading impression" has not been corrected by previous writers. This is because in contemporary historical writings, such as J.C. Anene's "The Eclipse of the Borgawa", the word "Borgawa" [Hausa word for the people of Borgu], has been used generically to refer to all the inhabitants of the Borgu kingdoms.¹⁵ Various interpretations have been suggested for the word "Borgu". As E.W. Bovill pointed out, "The river [Niger] here is generally fringed with luxuriant growth of borgu, a nutritious aquatic grass, to which the people bring

¹⁴ Margery Perham and Mary Bull (eds.), The Diaries of Lord Lugard: Nigeria 1894-95 and 1899, Vol. 4, Faber and Faber, London, 1963, p. 35.

¹⁵ See J.C. Anene, "The Eclipse of the Borgawa", JHSN, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1965, pp. 211-220.

their cattle from great distances."¹⁶ Therefore it was from the grass commonly found by the River Niger that the name had been derived. Lugard and the British colonial administrators perpetuated this explanation. For example, an ethnographic report stated that "Borgu had been derived from Burugu, the Hausa name for a succulent aquatic grass (Panicum stagninum) which is particularly associated with the banks and islands of the Niger."¹⁷

The above interpretation has been challenged by the people, although a common explanation has not been offered. An account claims that "Borgu" is a Batonu word, derived from "Baru" or "Baruwu," a collective name for all the settlements occupied by the Batombu -- the Batonu-speaking people.¹⁸ It is argued that although burugu is a river grass, it is insignificant to the people. Since Borgu does not have large rivers where burugu could be found across the whole region, nothing remarkable to the history of the people could be associated with it. It is further argued that burugu is not as plentiful as the impression given by the Europeans. Another tradition alleged that before the emergence of Kisra, two men named Mouka and Kantakpa arrived from Mecca to live with the

¹⁶ E.W. Bovill, The Golden Trade of the Moors, Oxford University Press, London, First edition 1958, reprinted 1963, p. 100.

¹⁷ SNP/17/K 2102, "Borgu Peoples", NAK.

¹⁸ BHT. Nos. 17 and 109. The Batonu language is called Borganchi in Hausa. See DOB/ASR/33, "Ilorin Gazetteer: Notes on the Languages of the Borgu Division", NAK.

Boko-speaking people. The indigenous people told them "wame wo govin" or "bo o gu" meaning "we are the owners of our land," from which Borgu was derived.¹⁹ In Bokobaru, a patois of Boko, buragu means inside the camp and barigu means horses but none could be associated with the general name of the country. The actual meaning of "Borgu" as a consequence remains wrapped in mystery.

That notwithstanding, it is only the Batonu-speaking people who should be called Borgawa because its application to the whole population of the kingdoms remains a misnomer. Interestingly, the prefix "Ba" appears in the names which their neighbours call them. For example while the Yoruba call them Bariba, the Dendi call them Barenche and the Zaberma call them Barganche. "Bariba" was said to be a corruption of Berber, suggesting that the Borgu people were of Berber descent.²⁰ Formerly, the people identified themselves through linguistic classification. For instance, the Zana, who speak the Batonu language, were said to be the aborigines of Nikki while their descendants became the ancestors of the people in the southern chiefdoms, that is Ilesha, Okuta, Kenu, Gwanara and Yashikera.²¹ They are also found in Kandi and Parakou

¹⁹ The interviews conducted in Borgu are referred to as Borgu Historical Texts and cited as BHT followed by a number indicating the informant(s). A detail information on the informant(s) is provided in the bibliography. See BHT. Nos. 184 and 194.

²⁰ BHT. No. 126.

²¹ BHT. No. 229.

districts of the Republic of Benin. Batonu, and its dialects, classified as Voltaic in the African family of languages, is widely spoken in Dahomey (the Republic of Benin) and southern chiefdoms of Nigerian Borgu. William Welmers who worked on the language mentioned that "Bariba [more appropriately Batonu] is remarkably similar in structure to languages in the Senufo group in the Ivory Coast and Sudan..."²² It is pertinent to mention that the Batombu are the most homogenous group in linguistic and cultural considerations.

In northern Borgu, the group of related languages such as Boko, Bissa, Laru, Tienga or Kienga, and Kamberi are collectively called Bussanchi and categorized as Mande.²³ According to J. Bertho, these languages have a close resemblance with Bisa spoken in the Upper Volta, Ivory Coast, and in Sudan.²⁴ They also share numerous lexical structures which distinguish them from branches of other African languages.²⁵ Rather than Borgawa, the people here are referred

²² William Welmers, "Notes on the Structure of Bariba", Language: Journal of the Linguistic Society of America, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1952, pp. 82-103. Sudan here refers to modern Mali.

²³ J.H. Greenberg, The Languages of Africa, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1963. See also George P. Murdock, Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History, McGraw-Hill Book Co., London, 1959.

²⁴ See Bertho, J., "Quatre Dialectes Mandé Nord-Dahomey et de la Nigéria Anglaise", Bull. IFAN, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1951, pp. 1265-71.

²⁵ A detail analysis of this could be found in Wm. E. Welmers, "Niger-Congo, Mande", Current Trends in Linguistics, Vol. 7, 1971, pp. 113-140.

to as Bussawa. Linguistic as well as cultural disparity make the distinction apparent. Observed by colonial officers such as A.B. Mathews, "the Bussawa cannot follow...Nikki [Batonu], though their chiefs profess that [their] origin is one and the same."²⁶ The term "Bussawa" covers all the inhabitants of Bussa, Illo, Wawa, Kaiama, Babanna, Shagunnu and Agwarra districts. It is in this section that the Kisra legend is strongest. The Wasangari first established themselves at Illo and Bussa before spreading to other parts of the region.

Borgu people have the concept of one God, called Gusonu or Peeberi ("the only father") in Batonu and Lua in Boko. But following the deep-rooted traditional belief system, numerous shrines are found all over the kingdoms. Each cultural group possessed its own special shrines but Jekanna (located between Bussa and Wawa) seems to be the most popular. To most of the shrines, the Borgu people have attached the power of fertility. Thus they were approached for rain and child birth. Oath taking was also practised. In Bussa, oathing employed a small quantity of water concocted with a handful of earth, taken from the front of the king's palace. Ladabu, an oath taking instrument is still preserved in the Kisra Museum at New Bussa. Oaths were taken at the grave of the ancestors or in other circumstances, at the local shrine. They usually involved the chief priest who held a live fowl in his left hand and with the right, he rattled a dry gourd close to his

²⁶ SNP/17/K 2102, "Borgu Peoples", NAK.

ear while offering incantations. It was believed that the spirit would send a message, the consequence of which was often disastrous to the offender.²⁷ Sundagoro, "curse stick," was usually employed by the Kibe (king) of Bussa during wars or rebellions to pronounce a curse on his adversaries. Islam did not blossom in Borgu until the twentieth century and therefore Islamic laws and principles did not apply in the pre-colonial times.

The primary sources for this study were oral data collected by the writer and supplemented by written (published and unpublished) material. Borgu traditions go beyond narrating the royal history -- they penetrate into the pre-dynastic era. Clear indications of inter-ethnic mixture, lineage social life pattern, political organisation as well as religious belief systems have been enunciated in the traditions. Dealing with such disparate traditions for historical reconstruction requires meticulous selection of facts and careful analysis. The narratives were clearest during the early colonial period when documentation on Borgu history and ethnology began, thus providing an opportunity for cross-checking the authenticity of the orally transmitted information. In this respect the historical problem of reliability of information and objectivity of interpretation seems to be solved to a large extent. Indeed oral traditions provide a key for unlocking the pre-colonial history of

²⁷ BHT. No. 138, also DOB/HIS/38 "History of Borgu", NAK.

Nigerian Borgu. The narratives collected in the field constitute what has been described as Borgu Historical Texts (B.H.T.), the methodology of collection being the subject matter of Chapter One.

Kisra remains central to the pre-colonial history of Borgu. In all its ramifications, the Kisra legend has become entirely encapsulated in Borgu history. Who was Kisra? The answer to this question and the saga which surrounded Kisra's migration from the Middle East is discussed in Chapter Two. The centrality of Kisra in the pre-colonial history of Borgu is strengthened by the fact that he emerged as an acceptable ancestor of the community and a determining factor in developing a sense of belonging to a definite political structure. In this respect, he symbolised Borgu unity. Bringing together all the different cultural and linguistic groups into a recognisable and powerful community, made Kisra the most central figure in Borgu. Although Borgu was a segmentary society in political organisation, genealogical links of its people, based on a patrilineal social system has made it possible for most groups, particularly the ruling aristocracy, to claim or imagine their descent from the ancestor hero, Kisra. Furthermore, the political and military vicissitudes which Borgu experienced between c.1500-1783 during a period of conquest and foreign domination variously by Songhay, Nupe, Yoruba and the Fulani, seemed to have mellowed the Kisra tradition. Beginning from c.1790, when

Borgu became independent of all alien powers, the Kisra factor revived, particularly in the southern region where Nikki satellite chiefdoms were established, bringing about the continuous perpetuation and consolidation of the Kisra connection. There is a necessity to re-interpret the Kisra legend. While traditional accounts present "Kisra" as a person, other interpretations have described the word as a title or a general movement in the Western Sudan. The widespread nature of the Kisra legend has therefore called for a re-interpretation, which is the aim of Chapter Two.

The complexity of the ethnic composition in the early history of Borgu becomes an issue in this study. When considering the Kisra legend, one cardinal point which should be noted was the pre-existing settlements and population. Assuming that Kisra arrived in c.1000 A.D., it is logical to accept that he met the indigenous inhabitants over whom he established his dynastic rule. A major problem which confronts the historian is the identification of these settlements and their inhabitants. However, it is well to observe that the foundation of some of the settlements was not as ancient as traditions suggest, because of the silent period in the history of Nigerian Borgu between the coming of Kisra and the revival of the Kisra royal lineages in the eighteenth century. Since Borgu passed through a turbulent political period, it is possible that its population dispersed, thereby forming new settlements which now lay claims to ancient origin. The

absence of detailed information on them prior to the revival of Kisran rule and subsequent foundation of Nikki satellite chiefdoms, tend to becloud the actual period of their foundation. Actually much of what parades as pre-Kisran, might not be pre-1000 A.D. but rather before the revival of the state system in the eighteenth century. Thus in a reconstruction of events in Chapter Three, an attempt will be made to identify some of these settlements and to put their foundation into probable periods.

Information on the southern satellite chiefdoms is more copious and more reliable than that about the indigenous settlements. The various migrations which prompted the establishment of the chiefdoms occurred at a period when reliable dates could be postulated. Availability of regnal as well as genealogical lists, allows fairly certain explanations. In addition, social observances such as totemism elucidate the clan migrations and inter-group connections. It has therefore been possible to present a chronological analysis of this period in Borgu history. Furthermore, inter-regional correlations shed useful light on the foundation and development of the southern satellite chiefdoms. It is significant to observe that these southern chiefdoms arose after Borgu's independence from foreign powers and the line of Kisra rulers revived in the three kingdoms (Illo, Bussa and Nikki). The aspect of foreign intervention in Borgu politics by the Songhay, Nupe and Oyo empires deserves especial

attention. Local traditions are reticent about the period of foreign rule, and published documents make only scattered references to it. Some of the references which explicitly clarify this epoch come from the traditions of neighbouring peoples. But because the episode permeated Borgu history for about three centuries, it should not be glossed over, hence its discussion in Chapter Four.

The activities of the Wangara merchants from Songhay, have helped to illuminate Borgu's economic history between 1700 and 1900. The Wangara were found all over the Western Sudan, but their penetration into Borgu dated to the fifteenth century. Being Muslims, one wonders how they were allowed to settle among the Borgu people who were purely traditional worshippers with pervasive anti-Muslim bias and determined to prevent the spread of the Islamic religion. A possible explanation lies in the period of alien domination. However, by the last quarter of the eighteenth century when Borgu had rid itself of the Nupe and had silenced the Yoruba, the Wangara factor became important in Borgu's economy. They transformed Borgu's economic culture by introducing long-distance trade. It is possible to argue that the establishment of the Nikki satellite chiefdoms between 1750 and 1850 was motivated by the thriving commercial economy of Borgu created by the Wangara. In social stratification, the Wangara operated between the Wasangari (ruling group) and the commoners. Ultimately, the society became polarized. Thus the inter-

relationship between politics, economy and social structure should not be neglected in the pre-colonial history of Borgu. This aspect is analyzed in Chapter Five.

The chronology of Borgu cannot be established with any certainty. Nevertheless, from the possible dates suggested from Hausa, Kwararafa and Yoruba references, it would seem the Kisra movement occurred c.1000 or in the eleventh century. It would seem that the Kisra rulers or Wasangari lost control during the Songhay invasion about 1500 and thereafter the region was subject to foreign domination largely by Nupe and Yoruba. In the eighteenth century this foreign domination was thrown off and Wasangari royal houses were again established. As far as Borgu traditions are concerned, this 300 year period of domination did not exist. The rulers came with Kisra according to tradition, even though there is no narrative which links the first king on any of the royal genealogies to him. No genealogy goes back further than the eighteenth century. The coverup is hardly convincing. When the southern satellite chiefdoms founded by Nikki princes began to be established in the eighteenth century, their narratives refer to the Nupe and Yoruba and hint at their dominance, then in decline, which permitted the success of the new rulers. The Muslim Wangara merchants were already in place and developing a flourishing commerce. Possibly it was their persecution which had caused the invasion of Songhay in 1505. The revival of the Kisran rulers in the eighteenth century clearly was

caused by the desire to seize control of Wangara commerce from the Nupe and Yoruba. This was the same period when the Kisra rulers were also re-establishing themselves in Bussa and Illo. The traditions in Bussa and Illo are threadbare because elders do not admit to any kind of re-establishment, but merely remain silent about their short regnal lists. As a consequence the study has placed little emphasis on the Bussa and Illo regions and concentrated on the south where traditions admit recent origin and acknowledge the Yoruba-Nupe presence. Kisra, who historically relates more to Nikki, Illo and Bussa cannot be ignored because he and his anti-Muslim ideology pervades the thinking of all the people.

The title of the thesis deserves some explanation. While Kisra's memory remains crucial to the Borgu people in defining his descendants and followers (the Wasangari) as legitimate rulers, there is no evidence, either written or oral, that takes us back as far as the eleventh century when the movement was supposed to have been established. The invasion of Songhay in about 1505 and the subsequent two centuries of silence by the Borgu sources become a marker ultimately chosen for the title. Oral sources, however, stretch back only to the 1700's when the Wasangari appear to have re-established their rule, almost like the second coming of Kisra. Thus in discussions of the traditions of the indigenous people or first nations, a researcher cannot be sure whether they relate to pre-1000 or pre-1700. Some traditions obviously appear to be mixtures of

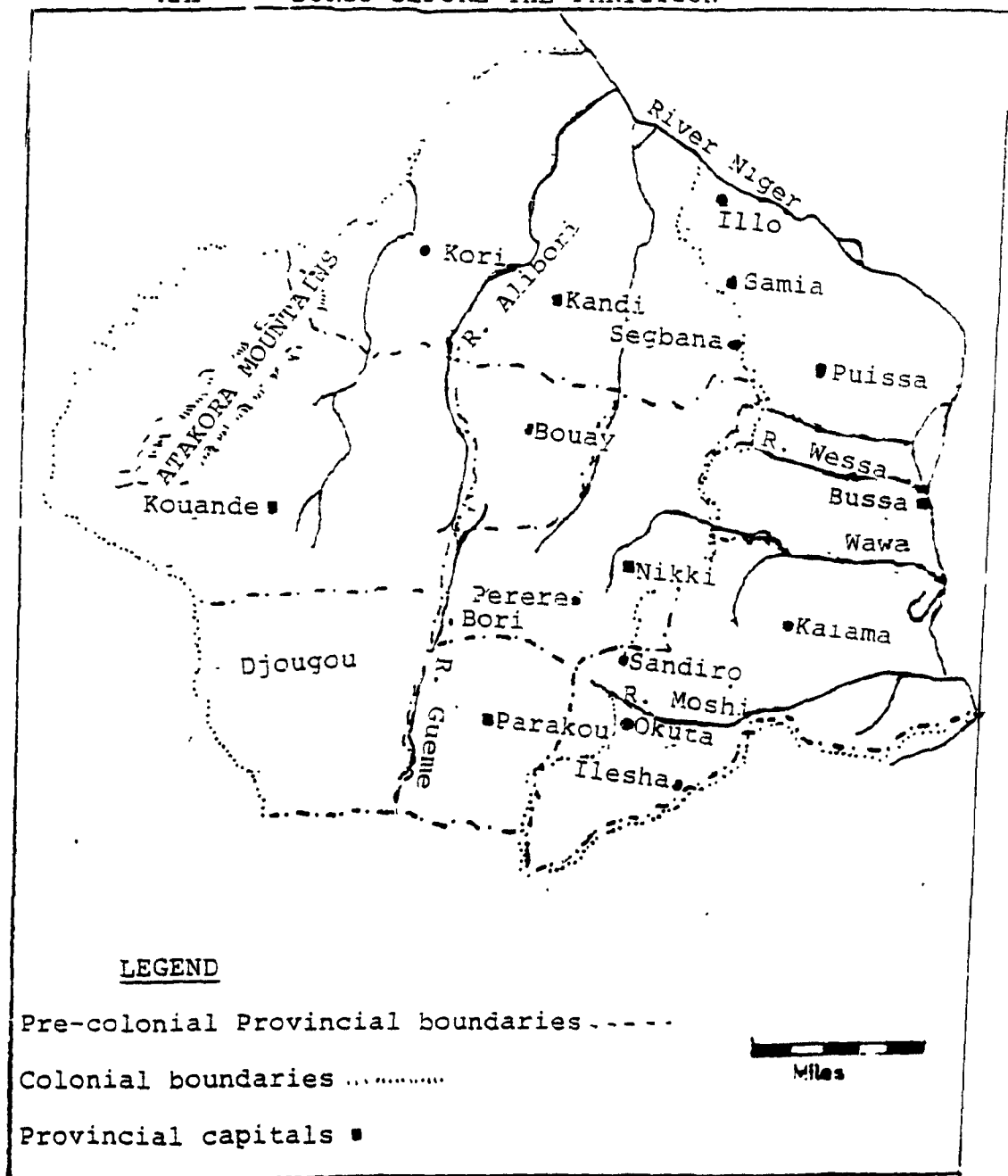
the two.

The title also refers to Borgu as a segmentary society, by which is meant a community divided yet united. Borgu is a single society because it feels so, a feeling which clearly was not merely a colonial creation because early travellers noted it and numerous independent chiefdoms fought together voluntarily against the Muslims in 1837. Borgu became a unique community with neither a single centralized and hierarchical structure, nor even the potential attributes of a nation. Two pillars underpinned the feeling of unity, first the anti-Islamic ideology so tightly bound up with Kisra and second the kinship relations of his descendants and followers or Wasangari who claim to rule in each of the constituent kingdoms and chiefdoms. Unlike the Yoruba kingdoms where the family mythology and feeling had been partially destroyed in the civil wars of the nineteenth century, in Borgu it has survived despite chiefdom rivalries. This becomes the justification for considering Borgu a single society.

Borgu, nevertheless, was also divided and segmented. First like the Yoruba, Borgu was divided politically into kingdoms and numerous chiefdoms. And again like the Yoruba, two rival power centres -- Nikki and Bussa -- had emerged which compared to the rivalry between Ife and Oyo. What set Borgu apart was the existence of two main languages. Thus a society holding an ideal of unity possessed no lingua franca, not even among the ruling Wasangari. In addition, major

cultural differences existed among the language groups. For example, while totemism was well developed in the south, partially represented in the middle it was totally absent in the north. Generally people descended from Nikki adhered to totems while those who trace their origins to Bussa did not. Normally "segmentary" refers to states such as the Yoruba or Esan who are united by language or other cultural attributes and assumed to be an ethnic group even though politically divided or segmented. In Borgu unity derived from a historical tradition of Kisra along with the right of his descendants to rule -- a tradition further strengthened by an ideology. The people of Borgu are not an ethnic group as frequently defined by language. However, they do form a nation if defined simply, as a people who feel and imagine that they are one.

MAP 2. BORGU BEFORE THE PARTITION



CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ON PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY OF NIGERIAN BORGU: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

The last quarter of the nineteenth century produced remarkable and enduring geo-political changes in the African continent. Following the scramble and partition, some ethnic groups were permanently separated into different political formations, thereby reshaping their history. Borgu constituted one such affected region. Before its dismemberment in 1898, Borgu remained an extremely large but segmented region, stretching from the Atakora chain of mountains in the west to the River Niger in the east. While Karimama served as the northern-most town bordering Hausaland, Damira in the south shared boundaries with Yorubaland. Following the effective boundary delineation between the British and the French, historical studies on Borgu have been similarly demarcated. Consequent to this development, it became convenient to concentrate study on a specific segment of the kingdom. Thus the partition also divided up Borgu's history and accelerated a trend toward very discernable tendencies of segmentation of the kingdoms which made up the original country before the Europeans arrived. The divide becomes particularly noticeable with the French writers limiting their work to Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin) and the English-speaking historians

concentrating on Nigerian Borgu.¹

Published works, reveal the massive historiography on the French side, while very little has been written on Nigerian Borgu. Comprehensive research into the history of Nigerian Borgu has not been carried out because of the problems involved in the collection of oral data. Commenting on this historical dilemma in Borgu, D.A. Breternitz, an archaeologist who excavated certain sites in Borgu, remarked that "there is a dearth of oral tradition in Borgu."² This is a major problem facing a researcher of the pre-colonial period. Surprisingly local histories -- produced by amateurs and focusing on individual towns -- are also completely lacking. This paucity of published works has highlighted the necessity for research into the pre-colonial history of Nigerian Borgu.

The main sources of information on the pre-colonial history of Nigerian Borgu include European travellers' accounts, British colonial administrators' reports, as well as

¹ Prominent amongst the French writers are Jacques Lombard, Structures de Type "Féodal" en Afrique Noire: Etude des Dynamismes internes et des Relations Sociales chez les Bariba du Dahomey, Mouton & Co., Paris, 1965; R. Cornevin, Histoire du Dahomey, Berger-Levrault, Paris, 1962; Ed. Dunglas, "Histoire du Royaume de Kouande", France-Dahomey, Octobre, 1945; R.P.J. Bertho, "Notes Concernant les Rois de Nikki", Notes Africaines, No. 35, Juillet 1947. English-speaking writers include Michael Crowder, Revolt in Bussa: A Study of British 'Native Administration' in Nigerian Borgu, 1902-1935, Faber and Faber, London, 1973 and Helen Marjorie Stewart, "Kinship and Succession to the Throne of Bussa", Ethnology: An International Journal of Cultural and Social Anthropology, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1978.

² D.A. Breternitz, "Rescue Archaeology in the Kainji Reservoir Area, 1968", WAJA, Vol. 5, 1975, p. 149.

books, and articles in journals. The region lacks Arabic chronicles and missionary records, such as are available for the Hausa states and Yorubaland. Admittedly some of the available sources provide only fragmentary and inaccurate information, but they remain useful material as a supplement to oral data for a reconstruction of Nigerian Borgu's past.

What might have been the earliest European documentation on Nigerian Borgu (especially Bussa) were the records of Mungo Park, a Scottish explorer whose mission was to discover the source, course and termination of the River Niger. During his second expedition in 1806, he died in the Bussa Rapids.³ The death of Mungo Park triggered further explorations because it drew the attention of European travellers, historians and anthropologists to that region. Since Mungo Park's mission to discover the mouth of the River Niger remained unaccomplished, other travellers continued from where he left off. Between 1822 and 1825, Hugh Clapperton led an expedition to the Niger and visited Borgu during his second journey (1825-1826). He could not retrieve Mungo Park's books and papers because they supposedly had been destroyed during one of the military encounters between Bussa and the Fulani.⁴ Rather than

³ Entering the interior of West Africa through the River Gambia, Mungo Park travelled on the River Niger until he reached the Bussa Rapids where he died in October 1806. See K. Lupton, "The Death of Mungo Park at Bussa", Nigeria Magazine, No. 72, 1962, pp. 58-70.

⁴ Lander, Records of Clapperton's Last Expedition, pp. 144-145 and BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/24, "Borgu Gazetteer, Historical Notes", NAK.

travelling on the River Niger, Clapperton and Richard Lander traversed the interior of Nigerian Borgu to get to Kano. They visited several Borgu towns such as Kaiama, Wawa and Bussa, met local chiefs and recorded their experiences as well as their impressions of the region and its inhabitants.⁵

After the death of Clapperton in 1830, the Lander brothers visited Borgu. Their document is closely related to that of Clapperton.⁶ Clapperton's journal and that of the Lander brothers provide information which serves as a background for researchers. Their information can be correlated with such oral data as exists in the field. The lucid narrative of several aspects of Borgu life gives the journals more credibility than subsequent works which merely concentrate on the Kisra legend. Additionally, because the authors visited several places such as Yorubaland, Borgu, Hausaland and the Nupe kingdom, they provided data necessary for inter-ethnic historical studies. While remaining indispensable to the history of Nigerian Borgu, the journals were considerably Eurocentric in their focus. The description of certain events pays scant attention to the people's cultural background. In travellers' accounts, as one might expect of tourists, there is often more reporting on what is

⁵ Hugh Clapperton, Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccattoo, Frank Cass, London, 1966.

⁶ Richard Lander, Journal of an Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger, Volumes I and II, Frank Cass, London, 1931.

seen (the peoples' lives and occupations -- their ethnography --) than on the history of the target region.

Only fragmentary evidence on Nigerian Borgu could be garnered from the travelling accounts of Leo Frobenius, as published in the second volume of his The Voice of Africa. He elaborated on the identification of Kisra and his migration.⁷ Acknowledging a pre-existing civilization and development of iron technology, Frobenius mentioned that smithing and smelting of iron had developed before Kisra's group entered Borgu country,⁸ a fact not reported by others, and surprisingly so, since normally Kisra has been credited with all innovations. His graphic description and explanation of the Gani festival indicated that he probably derived his information from observation if not participation.⁹ There are various other secondary studies which focus elsewhere but make occasional references to Borgu.¹⁰

The Nigerian National Archives in Kaduna hold several

⁷ Kisra is the putative ancestor of Borgu people, as will be discussed in a later chapter.

⁸ Leo Frobenius, The Voice of Africa 2: Being an account of the travels of the German Inner African Exploration Expedition in the Years 1910-1912, Benjamin Blom, New York and London, First Published 1913, Reissued 1968, pp. 634-644.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 636-638.

¹⁰ For example, Michael Crowder, The Story of Nigeria, Faber and Faber, London, 1966; Bovill, The Golden Trade; C.K. Meek, The Northern Tribes of Nigeria, Vol. 1, Negro University Press, New York, 1969; Robin Law, The Oyo Empire c.1600-c.1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade, Clarendon Press, Oxford, London, 1977.

British colonial records relating to Borgu.¹¹ These are ethnographic and anthropological records which have been compiled by administrators, following the collection of oral evidence. Although they provide skimpy information on certain aspects of the pre-colonial history, taken together they now constitute an invaluable body of source material on Nigerian Borgu. Naturally the records do not follow modern professional, systematic and analytic methods of historians. Nevertheless they remain essential because they provide particular information which could not have been recovered otherwise in modern times. Their informants were either eye-witnesses or close to the events described. Although some of the documents have been mutilated while others are fading, they raise significant issues for historical analysis as well as forming a suitable basis and background for the pursuit of field research.

The documents touch on various aspects of the pre-colonial history of Borgu, ranging from the Kisra legend to socio-cultural and economic activities of the people. Among the files consulted were the DOB (Divisional Office Borgu), SNP (Secretary Northern Province), ASR (Administrative Secretary's Report) and HIS (History) series. Since the bulk of the colonial files have been deposited at the National Archives in Kaduna, only a few of them are available in

¹¹ There are three National Archives in Nigeria, situated at Enugu, Ibadan and Kaduna.

Ibadan. These have been classified CSO (Colonial Secretary's Office). Essentially they furnish information on the economic activities of Borgu in the colonial period with some flashbacks to pre-colonial times.

These documents have some inherent weaknesses. First, they are based on personal, not group or clan interviews and were not properly cross-checked with other sources. This raises the problem of reliability. Second, they are not chronologically presented, and thus require scrupulous attention and re-arrangement, so as to become more illuminating and helpful for fieldwork. Emerging from these administrative documents are some gazetteers,¹² especially The Gazetteer of Ilorin Province which sketchily discusses the various districts. The book is indispensable because it presents an overview of the pre-colonial history of Nigerian Borgu. As well, it creditably attempts a chronological history, but provides fragmentary information on the relations between Borgu and its immediate neighbours. However, it seems to be primarily an anthology of events during the reign of certain rulers. Clearly, the Gazetteer functions as a royal chronicle.

¹² For example, J.A. Burdon, Northern Nigeria: Historical Notes on Certain Emirates and Tribes, London, 1907, Reprinted by Gregg International Publishers, 1972; C.L. Temple, (ed.), Notes on the Provinces, Emirates and States of Northern Provinces of Nigeria, Frank Cass, London, 1965. A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, (ed.), Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria, Three Volumes, Frank Cass, London, 1972 and H.B. Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer of Ilorin Province, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1929.

Whatever the weaknesses of the nineteenth century travellers' accounts and the collections of colonial officials in the twentieth century, they possess one important advantage. When collecting traditions today, it can be discovered which interpretations have remained stable over the past 150 years and which have been altered, which traditions were reported to Clapperton in 1826, to colonial officials in 1929 and the writer in 1990/91 in much the same form. Others seem to have been dropped, yet others amended. These changes have become essential in assessing their veracity for one period and not for another, and permits the researcher to begin to understand the process of distillation. One becomes grateful for the travellers of the nineteenth century -- whatever their faults -- when working in a society which does not benefit from them.¹³

The most professional and informative work available on the pre-colonial history of Nigerian Borgu is the uncompleted thesis written by Musa Baba Idris between 1972 and 1973.¹⁴

¹³ O.W. Ogbomo, "Men and Women: Gender Relations in Owan Communities, Nigeria c.1320-1900", Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1993.

¹⁴ Musa Idris was a Borgu man from Kaiama and was writing the thesis for the University of Birmingham before his death in 1973. The thesis is entitled "Political and Economic Relations in the Bariba States". The present writer disagrees with the usage of the word "Bariba" for the Borgu states. Current research indicates that the Batonu speaking group in Nikki, Kaunde, Kandi and southern section of Nigerian Borgu are referred to as Bariba by the Yoruba and Borgawa by the Hausa. From Bussa to Illo in the north and Babanna in the west, the people refer to themselves as Boko or Bisagwe while the Hausa call them Bussawa. Therefore it is erroneous to

Similarly the first chapter of Michael Crowder's Revolt in Bussa contains some useful material on the pre-colonial period.¹⁵ Clearly Crowder's work on this aspect is very succinct but concentrates more on the early history of Bussa than other parts of the Borgu Division. Most of the information was drawn from secondary sources, a weakness which reveals the deficiency of fieldwork, apparently a consequence of the difficulty in collecting oral data in Borgu. Michael Crowder and Musa Idris worked almost simultaneously. Although Idris's thesis covers the entire Borgu region, he paid considerable attention to the political and economic relations among the groups within Nigerian boundaries. Based primarily on oral data, but supplemented by archival references, the thesis remains a monument in Borgu history. The names of the informants are not available, which leaves a new field researcher to grapple with the problem of discovering people who are knowledgeable, identifying their factional or clan connections, and judging the reliability of the information which they provide.

This study has also benefitted from the state of

refer to the entire Borgu entity as the Bariba states.

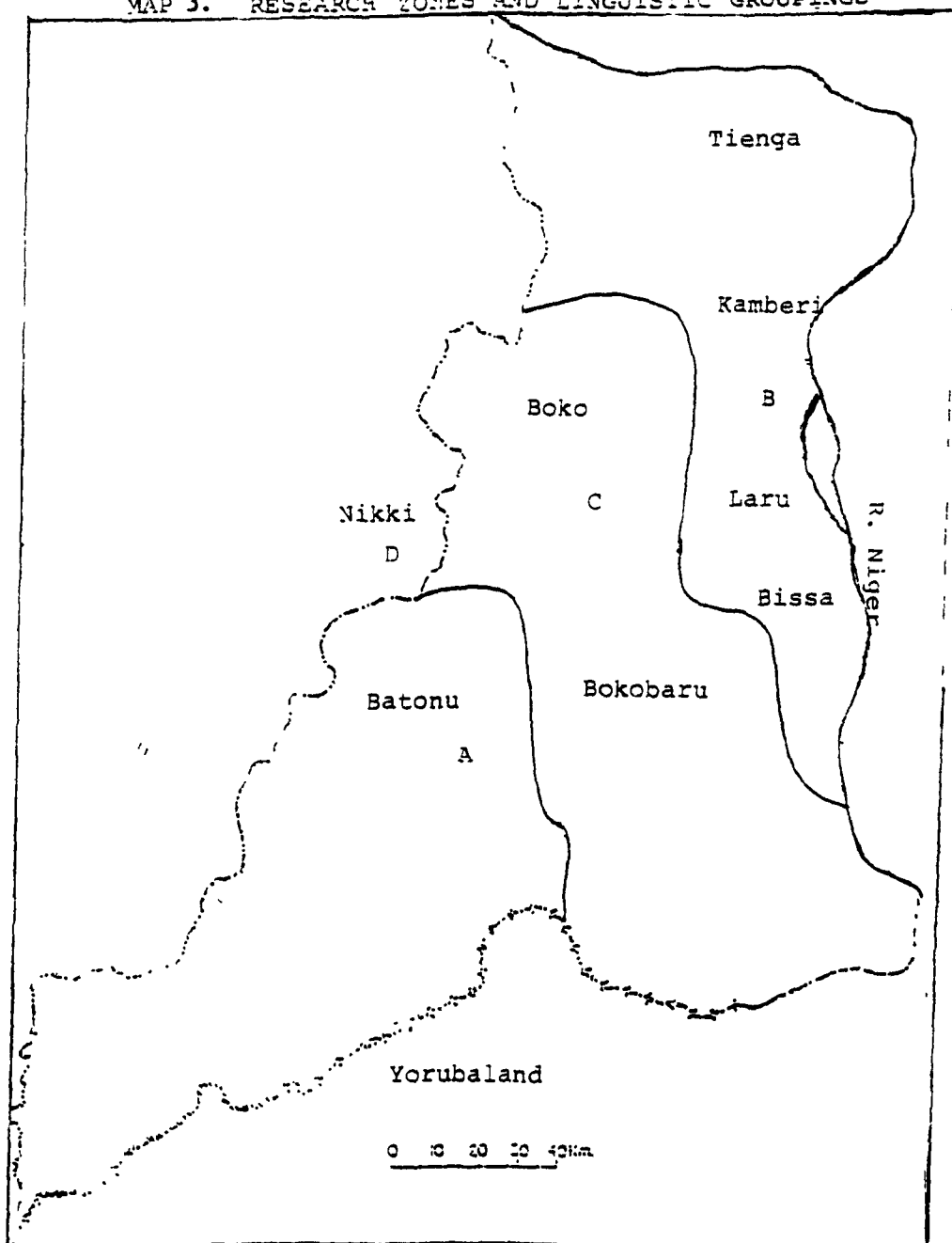
¹⁵ See Crowder, Revolt in Bussa, Chapter One. When Musa Idris died before completing the thesis, Michael Crowder had been expected to do it for him, but he also passed away before he had done so. The typescript lay for sometime in limbo, the writer initially being denied access to it in 1989 by the University of Birmingham. During field work in 1990-1991 I was finally able to read a copy held by Ahamdu Bello University in Zaria.

historiographical research in the neighbouring societies. Nigerian Borgu becomes something of an underdeveloped island surrounded by peoples whose history has drawn the attention of numerous scholars. No peoples have had greater scholarly attention than the Hausa to the north and Yoruba to the south, especially the Old Oyo Empire which bordered on Borgu. The concentration on French Borgu to the west has been noted earlier and even the Nupe to the east have been well served. Many hints in the history of neighbouring peoples provided leads to events and interpretations to be pursued within Borgu. Having considered the available printed and manuscript sources on Nigerian Borgu, it is appropriate to turn to the use made of oral tradition and its methodology of collection.

Because Nigerian Borgu covers such a vast expanse of land with scattered populations, fieldwork becomes extremely laborious, requiring several months of systematic group, clan and personal interviews. For convenience the fieldwork was conducted in four phases, following administrative division and linguistic classification. [See Map 3]. In the first, which lasted three months (October-December, 1990), fieldwork was conducted among the Batonu-speaking group,¹⁶ (Zone A). The chiefdoms included Ilesha, Okuta, Boriya, Yashikera, Kenu and Gawanara. Eighteen villages under these chiefdoms were also visited. Amongst these were Shinau, Bukaru, Tabetebere,

¹⁶ They are called Batombu people while their region is called Baruten (Batonuland). Their language is Batonu which is categorized as Voltaic.

MAP 3. RESEARCH ZONES AND LINGUISTIC GROUPINGS



Tabira, Teu, Shiya, Kpera, Ayo, Ngurume, Wonkoru, Suuru, Beteru, Kontobaru, Gurai, Gwassero, Gberia, Gbodebere and Nasarawa. During the colonial administration, the region was divided into four districts (Ilesha, Okuta, Gwanara and Yashikera. See Map 4). Today, these districts come under the Kaiama Local Government Council with the administrative headquarters at Kaiama. In this zone, clan divisions are very distinct which makes possible the collection of oral data on a clan basis. Based on available statistical data, the Batonu-speaking people are undoubtedly the most culturally homogenous and most numerous linguistic group in Borgu as indicated in the Table below.

TABLE I: Language Groups

Batonu (Voltaic Family)

Yashikera	13,920
Okuta/Kenu	19,711
Ilesha	5,837
Gwanara	9,160

	48,628

Boko/Bokobaru (Bussanchi Dialects)

Babanna/Shagunnu	21,444
Kaiama	14,008

	35,452

Bussanchi (Mande Family)

Agwarra	15,270
Bussa	10,093

Wawa	8,046

	33,409

Grand Total = 117,489.

Source: Borgu Local Government Secretariat, New Bussa, 1975?

Before the commencement of the interview series, the researcher usually made a courtesy call on the chiefs, introduced himself and tendered a letter of introduction from Dalhousie University. The letter explicitly stated the academic purposes of the research and solicited informants' support. This readily allayed the political and legal fears of the chiefs. It is pertinent to emphasize that a researcher should establish a suitable rapport with the chief and local people for the success of the exercise. When informed that the history of the Yoruba, Nupe and Hausa peoples, who constitute their immediate neighbours, could easily be read in Nigerian and overseas libraries but that little was known of Borgu, the inclination to supply information increased.

The research usually commenced with a group interview, involving the chief and his officers. Village heads were often summoned by the chief to such group interviews. For instance, in the first interview at Ilesha there were nine people, comprising the chief's officers, village heads and some elders in the town. This method offered three advantages. First of all, it introduced the research project to the main leaders in

the chiefdom. Secondly, feed back from the leaders provided a general survey of the local history which could be checked against existing records (their commentary frequently reflected information contained in available documents). Thirdly, it identified the different clans, their leaders and knowledgeable elders and thus prepared the way for interviewing clan groups and thereafter individuals with special knowledge.

The researcher should be aware that this grouping would be, in composition and interests, very much like the one early colonial interviewers would have consulted. There were five chiefdoms in Baruten (Batonuland) and therefore five such type of interviews would ultimately be necessary. They might be called chiefdom interviews. Thereafter in each chiefdom, interviews would begin with the clans, groups of elders from a single clan being brought together. Finally the process finished up with individual interviews. Eventually between October and December 1990, 112 interviews were conducted.

Clan interviews usually consisted of elders (the Gari) and other adults.¹⁷ Since the people are predominantly farmers, interviews were held in the evening when most of them had returned from the farm. Particularly, considering female labour activities, separate sessions were held for the women folk in the clan. During general interviews women were

¹⁷ The researcher encouraged school children who were present to listen because they would benefit greatly from the discussions.

sometimes called upon to clarify certain issues which appeared controversial among the men. Some of the clans with whom interviews were conducted included the Mora (Ilesha chiefly clan), Bare, Wanro, Sesi, Yari, Kabo/Mori, Mena, Nari, Muko, Tese and Mako (Drummer clan). Others were Tosu (Okuta chiefly clan), Kenu (Kenu chiefly clan), Kenu (Gwanara chiefly clan), Yari-Sunon (Yashikera chiefly clan), Seko (Blacksmith clan), Sawe and Kane. The Muslim clans found all over the area were the Ture, Taruwere and Mane. Clan group interviews often generated controversy and arguments. Conflicting and confusing facts were sometimes given. Such controversial issues were usually later raised by the researcher during personal interviews or inter-personal discussions. The most plausible explanation was often derived after discussions with several people on the same issue, and comparison with other non-narrative sources. Almost half the interviews were conducted in this region among the Batonu-speaking people. Over the whole of Borgu a total of 238 interviews were conducted. In this Batonu area of the south -- Baruten -- there were 112 interviews, thirty-four of which were with groups of elders, fourteen of these being with informants of the single clan. In addition there were seventy-eight individual interviews. Given the concentration of interviews in this area, the success of the methodology being used and the small amount of attention previously given to Batonu, this region later became the primary focus of this study.

The second phase also lasted three months (January-March, 1991). During this period, the concentration was on the Bissa, Laru, Kamberi and Tienga-speaking groups, under the Borgu Local Government Council. [See zone B, Map 3] These languages are collectively referred to as Bussanchi and belong to the Mande family. Since Bussa is the core of the area, fieldwork began from there. Villages such as Karabonde, Kagogi, Mini, Tsoho and Garafini were visited. Wawa, Agwarra and Shagunnu, which form separate districts, were included in this phase. Table I indicates the population of these districts. Since the incumbent Emir of Borgu, Alhaji Musa Kigera III (at New Bussa) had supplied historical information to previous Nigerian and European researchers, he became an understanding and willing informant. My previous interview with him in 1985 served as an added advantage. I was allowed access to the Kisra Museum File in which a brief history of Borgu, based on oral tradition, had been compiled.¹⁸ Several papers and maps in the Borgu Traditional Council Office and the Borgu Local Government Secretariat were made available. Statistical data were supplied by the Technical Officer of the Local Government. After I perused the papers, a group interview was conducted with the Emir and his officers. From this interview I discovered that although most of Borgu people claim ancestry from Kisra, certain aspects of their culture differ. For

¹⁸ EOB/COU/2/1 "Kisra Museum File", Borgu Traditional Council Office, New Bussa.

example, there is no concept of clans amongst the people in this zone and they are not totemic.

Consequently, the organisational and methodological procedures employed in Baruten could not be repeated. The differences show up in the interview statistics. Of the fifty-eight total interviews, fourteen were with groups -- of which only four involved single kinship groups -- and forty-four were conducted with individuals. While much new information was uncovered, the researcher felt a great unease about the completeness of his efforts among the Bussanchi-speaking peoples. This is the region which has drawn the major attention of earlier researchers, the one most affected by re-settlement and the one where the confusion surrounding Kisra becomes most obvious in previous attempts of historical reconstruction. The response was not as encouraging as in the first phase in Baruten, which might explain why previous researchers have not succeeded in writing a comprehensive pre-colonial history of Nigerian Borgu. They concentrated on Bussa where the documentation was greater but where the collection of oral evidence appears difficult. Additionally they focused on the royal group at the expense of the aboriginal inhabitants. To overcome this problem, I appointed research assistants from both groups. With an indigenous person as research assistant, the informants were usually more relaxed and more willing to supply information without qualms. The propensity to conceal vital information when the research

assistant belongs to an opposing group is extremely high. When necessary, interviews were conducted very late in the night or during the early hours of the day. Some informants preferred being interviewed on their farms to eliminate all interruptions and avoid hostility from any group of people in the town.

In the third phase oral traditions were collected among the Boko and Bokobaru-speaking groups. [See zone C Map 3]. Boko, with Bokobaru as a dialect, also belongs to the Mande group of African languages. The areas covered were Babanna and Kaiama districts, the first in Borgu Local Government area and the second in Kaiama. Kabe, Puissa, Kubli, Gaunji, Marami, Konkwesio, Gberia and Kemanji are some of the villages in this zone. During the two months of research, efforts were made to trace the actual origin of the ruling dynasties and examine their relationship vis a vis the other chiefdoms. This is striking in view of the linguistic difference from Nikki, from where they claim origin. While Batonu is spoken at Nikki, Boko is the language of Babanna and Bokobaru is spoken at Kaiama. Socio-cultural similarities and differences were also considered. Although not completely absent, clan divisions were less important than among the Batonu-speakers. Interviewing here became more successful than to the north among the Bussanchi, but somewhat less so than in Baruten to the south. Forty-five interviews were conducted, thirteen in groups, of which four with single clans and thirty-two

individuals. The field interviews, by region and type over the whole of Borgu has been shown in Table II.

Table II Interviews Conducted in Borgu 1990-1991.

ZONE	INDIVIDUAL	GROUP	CLAN	TOTAL
BARUTEN	78	20	14	112
BUSSANCHI	44	10	04	58
BOKO/BOKOBARU	32	09	04	45
NIKKI	07	02	01	10
YORUBALAND	05	03	--	08
ACADEMICS	05	--	--	05
TOTAL	166	44	23	238

The last circuit of the research was conducted in Nikki (better known as Danri-Nikki). The purpose of the ten interviews was to cross-check the authenticity of some of the oral data already collected in Nigerian Borgu. The centrality of Nikki to this region became apparent in the field when many informants mentioned that their facts could be corroborated in Nikki. Only one month of research was carried out at Nikki during which period group and personal interviews were conducted. The Barasunon -- chief drummer -- was particularly helpful. Apart from efforts to test the claims of various Nigerian Borgu chiefs to descent from Nikki's royal family, questions were also asked about clan migrations.

In all, it has been observed that there is no type of

interview which is immune from interruption. For instance, while interviewing the Magajiya (Bunyokaho) at Ilesha, she was summoned to settle a dispute between some members of the Bare clan. Humorously the Magajiya said to the researcher, "You are already part of us, come with me."¹⁹ The researcher obeyed. The interview resumed two days later in a session uninterrupted because it was held late in the evening. A similar interruption occurred at Shagunnu while holding a session with the District Head. A policeman brought two culprits, handcuffed together, for theft. At Yashikera, an officer from the Local Government Council in Kaiama interrupted the group interview for about one hour. An interview at Bussa was almost completed when a top military officer arrived from Lagos, requiring the urgent attention of the Emir. The interview was ultimately rescheduled. The interruption at Kenu with Shiroku Abudu (the chief priest of Bio okosi shrine) was propitious, for it turned the researcher into an observer. An old woman had carried her grandchild, who had high fever, to the shrine to request for improved health. After the woman had presented a kola nut, the chief priest made some incantations over water in a special calabash and gave this to the child to drink. Thereafter the kola nut was shared by those present, including the researcher. This

¹⁹ The interviews conducted in Borgu are referred to as Borgu Historical Texts and cited as BHT. See BHT. No. 23, Fatimah Yenka, Magajiya of Ilesha, [70+], Ilesha. A detail information on the informant(s) is provided in the bibliography.

observation, and the questions which followed, enabled the researcher to confirm the information already supplied by the informant and to understand better the world view of the people.

There seemed to be no alternative but to use various interpreters owing to the many languages spoken in the region. Where possible (as with the chief of Ilesha, Bussa and Kaiama) English became the language of communication. Elsewhere it might be Yoruba, the vernacular of the writer. But these were exceptions. The interpreter had to be neutral in terms of socio-political status, acceptable in religion and knowledgeable in social norms, prevailing inter-clan, inter- and intra-chiefdom rivalries. Pre-interview sessions with the interpreters sought to determine these factors. Above all, the interpreter had to be honest about his status, as the following incidents demonstrate.

At Ilesha, the interpreter disclosed his unwillingness to be involved in the interview with the aboriginal clan because he belonged to the royal family. In another instance, the interpreter revealed his political misunderstanding with a member of a certain clan and as a consequence, refused to participate in the interview. A similar situation arose at Bussa, where the interpreter, affiliated with the Gbemusu royal house, declined to proceed to the aboriginal settlements (which will be discussed in another chapter) for interviews. Fortunately, a number of the early settlements had been

relocated in the outskirts of Bussa, which made it possible to conduct the interviews without the knowledge of the royal family. For instance Kagogi, Mini, Tsoho and Gani Kasai had been resettled within the same locality with Karabonde. Following a taboo against divulging some secrets of the Yakparu pilgrimage at Kenu, the interpreter felt reluctant to discuss the issue.²⁰ But by contacting somebody who was not involved in the traditional practices and who had once participated in the event, the researcher had a glimpse of the secret rites. At the shrine, only the Tasosunon (chief hunter), Nikkikperogi (military leader) and the Maresunon (Fulani chief) were allowed entry. The rituals were performed in secret with the blood of animals.²¹ In all circumstances, the sincerity and commitment of the interpreter are unquestionably crucial to the accomplishment of the researcher in the field.

The discussion now focuses on Borgu oral tradition as a means of providing a background to its history. Numerous African societies possess palace historians whose primary function is to recount the genealogy of rulers and past events as they occurred. To preserve the integrity of these local

²⁰ Once in his reign, the chief of Kenu has to conduct a pilgrimage to Yakparu, a village west of Kenu, for certain rituals. This is where the ancestors of Kenu and Gwanara chiefly clans were buried. BHT. Nos. 76 and 77.

²¹ There is the impression that human blood was used in the past and this is the aspect the participants would not like to continue to perpetuate since the practice has ceased.

traditions, sacred sanctions were instituted. Premeditated misrepresentation was punishable by death. Observably, detectable distortions are more apparent in oral narratives than in fixed traditions. Court historians (often drummers and praise singers) are common in Africa and include the Arokin among the Oyo-Yoruba, the Ibiota in Benin, the Griots in Senegal, the Ahanjito in Dahomey and the Maoridi in the Congo.²²

They also exist in Borgu, and are called the Ba-Gesere, the Bataki and the Barasunon.²³ These were the chief drummers who remain profoundly knowledgeable in the history of Borgu owing to their familiarity with the genealogy of the rulers and internal politics of the palace. They often had direct access to the ruler. It became obligatory for the drummers to play in the palace for the chief every Thursday evening and Friday morning. During special meetings or specific events, the drummers were also expected to play. They were supposed to make announcements with their drums. For instance, the drums, Batanengo and the Baragurundu were beaten for announcements at

²² In most cases, these were drummers and praise singers. Different categories of griots have been identified among the Wolof of Senegal. These include the gewel (praise singers); raab (another kind of griot) and jaam-u gewel (griots' slaves). See Judith T. Irvine, "When is Genealogy History? Wolof Genealogies in Comparative Perspective", American Ethnologist: A Journal of the American Anthropological Association, Vol. 5, No., 4, 1978, pp. 651-674.

²³ The Ba-Gasere are in Nikki, the Bataki in Bussa, Babanna and Kaiama and the Barasunon among the Batonu-speaking group.

Kaiama and Kenu respectively. The drummers have played for rulers on several occasions at the war front. In this way they have preserved distinctive information about the military history of the kingdom. For instance in the Ilorin War of 1830-1837, Sule Barasunon from the Doro-Mako clan in Yashikera played at the war front for Sero Kpera, the king of Nikki who allied with the Alaafin of Oyo to fight against the Fulani jihadists.²⁴ Most often the praise singers were silent on defeats, while they amplified conquests. During certain religious festivals, particularly the Gani, and installation ceremonies, the chief drummers often mentioned, in chronological succession, the genealogy of the rulers and related the leading events of the period.²⁵ The posts of the Ba-Gesere, Bataki or Barasunon are hereditary within the professional family since the information had to be passed from father to son. These transmitted traditions have become so fixed that the information they provide is less subject to the fluctuations of day-to-day politics than free texts. Clan heads also serve as repositories of local traditions, especially those concerning migration and ancestor reverence. Despite the wealth of information furnished by the court historians, one does not expect to find evidence from royal chronicles which remains unbiased. Obviously as praise singers, they emphasize the positive about their leaders.

²⁴ BHT. No. 64.

²⁵ Ibid.

Historians approach the royal tradition of praise singers, whether oral in Africa, or written by court chroniclers in Europe, with the same degree of skepticism.

In Borgu society, oral tradition is abundant, especially on events of the nineteenth century. Before this period, events which have left an enduring impact on the society continue to be well remembered and narrated in local traditions. Before the establishment of chiefdoms, the indigenous people formed what could be described as acephalous/chiefless societies.²⁶ From this stage they developed a state system after the migration of Kisra, whose progeny established three principal kingdoms:²⁷ Illo, Bussa and Nikki. The kingdoms further comprised multiple chiefdoms, each with distinct political and socio-cultural structures, but their rulers claim cognate origin in Kisra.

The people of Borgu were one of the most militarily powerful entities in the pre-colonial history of Nigeria. They fought with the Songhay Empire in the sixteenth century, and

²⁶ Some historians and socio-anthropologists refer to these societies as 'stateless' while others describe them as 'non-centralized'. This writer prefers the use of 'acephalous'. See Robin Horton, "Stateless Societies in the History of West Africa" in Ajayi and Crowder, The History of West Africa, pp. 72-113. For further explanation, consult M. Izard and J. Ki-Zerbo, "From the Niger to the Volta" in B.A. Ogot, (ed.), General History of Africa. V Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century, Heinemann, California (UNESCO Series), 1992, p. 353.

²⁷ Although kinship relationship remained strong and well respected, each kingdom was politically autonomous of the other. But they used to face a common aggressor in concert.

thwarted several attempts at conquest by the Hausa states from the north and engaged in a series of skirmishes with the Oyo Empire from the south. Like Kwararafa to the east which halted the northern thrust of Islam into Igboland, Borgu stood as a military obstacle which blocked the expansion of Islam to the coast at least in the Dahomean region. Until c.1837 it also protected the Yoruba from the military penetration of the Islamic north. Again like Kwararafa, Borgu remained a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic political group which developed a loyalty to the territorial entity among its citizens.

Despite ethnic, linguistic and religious complexity, the people came to conceive of themselves as permanent occupants of Borgu. Several stages of migration occurred in Borgu history as apparently indicated in the early period of human existence in the region. This phenomenon brought about ethnic differentiation and a complex society. Therefore the whole of Borgu should not be perceived as a monolithic entity. It is not surprising that variant traditions are narrated with each immigrant group asserting a distinct socio-cultural heritage. The Boko-speakers of Bussa formed part of the early agriculturally-oriented immigrants.²⁸ While the Nupe occupied the littoral of the River Niger and established kingdoms in Borgu, Laru-speaking people migrated from northern Bussa (around modern Shagunnu).²⁹ The Boko or the Mande speakers

²⁸ BHT. No. 132.

²⁹ BHT. Nos. 162 and 163.

were immigrants from Songhay.³⁰ The Batonu royal families and much of the population claim origins from Nikki. Of all the immigrant groups, that of Kisra has become the most prominently recorded and recalled, owing to its enduring impact on the society. A single community identified as Borgu emerged. In his analysis of traditions of genesis, Randall Packard argues that several African states in the pre-colonial period could be associated with migration and socio-cultural diversity.³¹ The Borgu people fall within this typology, alongside the Tallensi, Ganda, Alur and Zande. Members of the ethnic groups who could not be associated with Kisra usually identify themselves with their sub-groups first before declaring "but we are all Borgu."³²

Presumably because little attention has been given to other groups, many informants often began their migration tradition with that of Kisra from Arabia. The following is an example of a migration tradition in Nigerian Borgu:

The people of Borgu are from Mecca. They were the followers of Kisra. Kisra and

³⁰ BHT. No. 141.

³¹ Randall M. Packard, "Debating in a Common Idiom: Variant Traditions of Genesis among the BaShu of Eastern Zaire", in Igor Kopytoff, (ed.), The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Studies, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987, pp. 149-161.

³² BHT. No. 123. The informant is a Kamberi man. In his research among the Nupe, S.F. Nadel commented that "All informants spoke to me of the various sub-tribes as having 'become one through Tsoede'". See S.F. Nadel, A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London, First edition, 1942, Reprinted 1961, p. 21.

Prophet Mohammad quarrelled over religion. That was responsible for the migration. Kisra eventually overpowered Prophet Mohammad and drove him to a Kuka tree. In support of Prophet Mohammad, God provided two eggs in a basket which was covered by spider-webs. It was Kisra's soothsayer who recognized the eggs as Prophet Mohammad's eyes. There-after the soothsayer was killed. Two hours after his death, the Prophet escaped with his horse and he was pursued by Kisra's followers. To provide himself adequate security, Prophet Mohammad made a demarcation between him and Kisra. It became impossible for Kisra to meet the Prophet. Consequently Kisra died at the place of separation (Bahamalia). After his death his children occupied Borgu. That was how we came here.³³

When the migration actually occurred is still a conjectural issue. It could hardly be dated through the regnal list of the three principal kingdoms, because records concerning several of them could not be recovered. But this variant of migration tradition has been presented in a manner indicating that the land remained virgin when Kisra's descendants arrived. In addition, it directly links up with political authority. This is probably why traditions regarding migration have been described as "mythical charters which serve to define and legitimize political relationships within the state and give expression to the political and cultural values upon which these relationships rest."³⁴ Surely in Borgu, identification with Kisra is synonymous with both political power and anti-

³³ BHT. No. 184.

³⁴ Packard, "Debating", p. 149.

Islamic ideology.

The next chapter is devoted to the enigma of Kisra, but something should be said about this tradition of Kisra and the Prophet. No modern scholar would defend it. However, Kisra probably did emerge as a leader against the military forces of Islam somewhere in Africa, either the Nile valley, the Sahara-Sahel or even the Central Sudan. As traditionalists, Kisra and his followers knew they were opposing Islam or those fighting for the Prophet. Once they settled in Borgu, the struggle continued, and the Kisra legend became an emblem which justified the continuous wars which dominated their struggles for survival. It gave the people of Borgu their mission in history.

While the version quoted above represents an early migration tradition which encapsulates the larger society, the centrifugal expansion from Nikki into the south-western section of Nigerian Borgu (from Yashikera to Ilesha) between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could be regarded as the continuing expansion and migration of the Kisra people. Oral tradition reveals two categories of the migrations: one led by Nikki princes and the other by commoner clans. The series of migrations at this period began another phase in the pre-colonial history of Nigerian Borgu. Dynasties were established. For example the Wanro in Ilesha migrated from Kika, near Parakou while the Mori and Kabo moved from Kaboguru. The Sawe came from Saso and the Kane in Kenu

migrated from Bouka. The princely movement from Nikki was quite analogous to the Yoruba dispersal from Ile-Ife.

Older members of the various clans have retained historical information on migration traditions. They recount the nineteenth century events which had been narrated to them by their parents.³⁵ That the migrations occurred at different times has been indicated in many clan traditions. At Kenu two versions are available, but both centre on Kabawuko as the leader which is suggestive of a split in the clan during the migration. Mora clan traditions mention migration from Nikki to Sandiro, to Moshi before finally settling at Ilesha. Similarly in Kabe traditions, one version refers to Bio Seme (founder of Kabe dynasty) as a Nikki prince, while the other identifies him as a Fulani. This probably indicates the usurpation of political authority from an earlier immigrant group. The traditions at Shagunnu identify two persons as founders: Sonbode and Kawalashi. Both migrated from Samanagi (in what is now Sokoto State). While one was a hunter and farmer, the other was a blacksmith.³⁶

Ethnic differentiation and linguistic diversity have

³⁵ For example Pa Kperogi at Okuta, (c.98 years), claimed that a great deal of historical information had been passed to him by his father. When correlated with other sources, his information on traditions of origin appears reliable. Similarly, Musa Woru Yo at Gwanara (c.95 years) mentioned how his father narrated to him the activities of the Wangara merchants. He was able to trace several trade routes to Gonja, Hausaland and to Lagos, being a trader himself during his youthful days.

³⁶ BHT. No. 162.

remained discernible features of the conglomerate nature of the Borgu population for many centuries. Despite the congenial relationship, the assimilation process and the Kisra legend epitomizing unity, an entirely homogeneous society has not evolved. As in Kwararafa, distinct cultures became united in an ideal symbolized in Borgu by Kisra.

Borgu oral traditions are also embodied in ancestor reverence. There is a strong religious belief in life after death and that the living could communicate with the dead. As the ancestors act as the link between the living and God, so do the elders serve as intermediaries between the ancestors and clan members. The people believe in the efficacious and mystical authority of the ancestors who now belong to the supernatural world, and therefore are capable of performing phenomenal feats. Although some of these ancestors remain unnamed, they have not been completely forgotten. The Lesaworu, Yari, Wanro and Bare clans developed mnemonic devices by marking on a wall the number of their ancestors. However, since names are not supplied, it becomes difficult to construct personal or clan genealogies. This position differs slightly from what operated among the Tallensi of Ghana, whose "ancestors are worshipped by name and the names are perpetuated in the lineage genealogies and personal pedigrees in an accepted generation sequence."³⁷ The Tallensi procedure

³⁷ Meyer Fortes, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa" in M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen, (eds.), African Systems of Thought, Oxford University Press, London, 1965, Reprinted

clearly is much more helpful to the historian. Among the Jukun, each deceased family-head was represented by a single pillar, with no names provided. Other members were represented by other single pillars.³⁸

To demonstrate the continuous cordiality between the dead and the living, the ancestors were buried either in their own rooms or very close to the house, a practice also found among the Jukun. They were looked to for peace, prosperity and protection. Special functions were allocated to the ancestors. For example, during the outbreak of an epidemic, they could be invoked for good health. Before embarking on any military campaign, they were called upon to assure victory. When serious disputes arose between clan members, they were invited as arbiters. For inexplicable circumstances such as sterility, the ancestors were expected to provide children. If there occurred an affliction (usually associated with malign forces), the ancestors were called upon to eliminate it. Furthermore during hunting expeditions, the hunters (Taso) formally consulted their clan ancestors for protection against wild animals. However, these benevolent functions would continue to be performed as long as the ancestors were properly and regularly propitiated. If neglected, the consequences could be disastrous. Either the oldest member of

1966, p. 124.

³⁸ C.K. Meek, The Northern Tribes of Nigeria, Vol. 2, Frank Cass, London, New Impression, 1971, pp. 13-14.

the clan or his designate performed the sacrifice with items which varied from one place to the other. For example, at Illo ancestors were offered fruits, while guinea corn was commonly presented among the Batonu-speaking group.³⁹ In Bussa a red fowl was usually sacrificed at the grave of the ancestor after the harvest season.⁴⁰ Occasionally it was alleged, that an ancestor could dictate what he wanted. In all the places, the sacrificial materials were shared after the ceremony by the participants.

In his analysis on ancestors as elders, Igor Kopytoff pointed out that among the Suku of the Congo, "interaction with them [the ancestors] is necessarily less frequent and when it occurs, it is formal..."⁴¹ The infrequency and formality of interaction between the ancestors and the living has been substantially illustrated in the performance of special pilgrimages by some Borgu chiefs. By tradition, it was requisite for the chiefs of Kaiama and Kenu to visit respectively Bweru and Yakparu (where their ancestors were buried) once during their reign. If a Kenu chief was unable to perform the three-day pilgrimage during his tenure, it became mandatory for his successor to offer double items of

³⁹ BHT. Nos. 34, 85 and 170. Consult also ILOPROF/5/2907, "Bussa Notes", NAK.

⁴⁰ BHT. No. 139.

⁴¹ Igor Kopytoff, "Ancestors as Elders in Africa", Africa: Journal of the International Institute, Vol. 40, No. 2, 1971, pp. 127-141.

sacrifice.⁴² It might be noted that visiting the royal graves at Uka had been a ritual in Kwararafa, whose regalia contained items such as a spear and a sword accredited to Kisra.⁴³ This practice continued until the legitimate dynasty was replaced by Jukun kings in the nineteenth century. Thereafter such visits became offensive to the ancestors.⁴⁴

The dependence of clan members on their ancestors for almost all necessities of life describes the complexity of the peoples' mythology. Particularly during annual sacrifices (usually held between October and December), there was an elaborate communication procedure, with specific words of invocation by the oldest member of the clan.⁴⁵ On their own part, periodic visits could be made by the ancestors. These fixed traditions have been upheld in the strictest form for centuries. But in modern times, while the widespread adoption of the Islamic religion has reduced the elaboration, it has not obliterated entirely the practice of ancestor reverence.

⁴² BHT. Nos. 94, 95, 205 and 213.

⁴³ A.B. Mathews, "The Kisra Legend", African Studies, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1950, p. 147.

⁴⁴ J.B. Webster, "Kwararafa: The Traditional Face of the Coin", in J.B. Webster, A.O. Nwauwa and O.W. Ogbomo, (eds.), Fundamentals of African History, Forthcoming.

⁴⁵ The ancestors were expected to grant specific requests, therefore the elder had to choose specific words. For example they say: "Binasi (name of the ancestor), this kolanut is for child request. Your child, Beru (name of the woman) has no child. You have provided for many. Provide her own. After providing one, let us come here to thank you." If the name of the ancestor has been forgotten he would be referred to as, "our father". BHT. No. 85.

A special way by which Borgu people remember by name the ancestors who performed extraordinary feats involved praise songs. For instance the Yari clan at Ilesha has the praise song:

Ataruwa Yari, Bonisikita n debu Boroni.⁴⁶

Every member of the Yari clan is the
child of Bonisikita who died at Boroni.

Bonisikita supposedly led the migration of the Yari clan from Dahomey. Tradition recalls his military prowess particularly when resistances were offered by people who did not want him to cross their territories. He died at Boroni in one of such wars. Because a section of the Yari are bards, they have memorialized Bonisikita's name in praise songs. Similarly the Mora chiefly clan of Ilesha has the praise song:

Bakaginara bugawa buini, ye Sabi Dagbara
rakongon kpenoko.⁴⁷

What the chief, Dagbara, has done, no one
can do.

Dagbara ruled at Sandiro and has been remembered especially for his defeat of Nikki, probably in the first quarter of the eighteenth century before the clan commenced on a migration to Ilesha. On ascension to the throne, a new ruler at Ilesha was expected to visit certain shrines, in specific order, to perform rituals. These shrines were originally established by

⁴⁶ BHT. No. 25.

⁴⁷ BHT. No. 18.

the ancestors of the chiefly clan and possibly were located along the migration route. Although they have been relocated very close to the town, they are still mentioned in songs.

For instance:

Tutuku Sabi Dokonadu Sabi,
Yanbukurowo Sabi Koronibarowo Sabi.⁴⁸

The chief must visit Tutuku
The chief must visit Dokonadu
The chief must visit Yanbukurowo
The chief must visit Koronibarowo.

At the installation of a new chief, the Barasunon among the Batonu-speaking group would recount the names of the past rulers who had visited these places. A similar visit was made to the Sinasika (royal mausoleum), where names of the rulers would be called sequentially as they have been buried.⁴⁹ This pattern however was congruent with the other parts of Borgu. An example of a praise song by the Barasunon for the chief of Kenu from the Kenu clan reads:

Bioyakara genne biyo kpai, Sokoto bila n
buro debu. Gbengberederu Sabi, Bioyakara
genne debu, Sokoto bila buro n debu,
Kasagbeku Sabi, Wonkaderu Sabi, Yiru deru
Sabi, Neru Sabi,
Dogoderenu Sabi, Sokoto bila buro n
debu.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid...

⁴⁹ BHT. Nos. 16 and 25. Among the Jukun, it was obligatory for a new chief to visit the graves of his royal ancestors to perform certain rites. See C.K. Meek, A Sudanese Kingdom: An Ethnographical Study of the Jukun-speaking peoples of Nigeria, Negro University Press, New York, Reprinted 1969, pp. 123-135.

⁵⁰ The names of other rulers have been mentioned as having defeated the Sokoto forces. This helps to preserve the various military engagements of Borgu with the jihadists from Sokoto

Bioyakara, your grandfather and your
father
have performed military wonders. They
have fought with and conquered Sokoto.

This praise song reveals the stiff resistance of Borgu to the Fulani jihadists with particular reference to the indomitability of the Kenu clan. Thus Borgu praise songs remember ancestors' accomplishments and preserve specific historical facts.

Most Batonu clans are totemic. This aspect has not been considered in available written sources. The only written information on totems referred to Kaiama's royal antelope.⁵¹ While the most prominent animal totems are leopard and antelope, others include the weaver bird, monitor lizard, rabbit and crab. Among the Mako clan of Kenu, the leopard embodies the soul of the ancestors hence if found dead, it was buried with two cowries and mourned seven days. A live leopard

in the process of resisting the penetration of Islam in the nineteenth century. Wawa traditions remember the crushing defeat the Fulani received in the town during the long reign of Ki-Mohammad (Mamman Ki Garba). The Fulani forces were led by Magaji Mallam from the Nupe kingdom. Furthermore, despite Illo's vulnerability to Fulani attack because of proximity, it is recorded that Ki-Taku (probably the army general of Illo), halted the penetration of the jihadists into the interior of Borgu. The relations between Illo and Gwandu had always been that of hostility especially between 1820 and 1825. During the reign of Dagangan, chief of Illo, a Gwandu emissary led by Baraya to collect tributes was thrashed. Illo remained an autonomous political entity until it was merged with Sokoto Province in 1905 by the British.] See BHT. Nos. 11 and 92; BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/37 "Borgu History", NAK; DOB/HIS/41 "Borgu Historical Notes" NAK; P.G. Harris, Sokoto Provincial Gazetteer, Unpublished Manuscript.

⁵¹ SNP/17/K 2101, "Anthropological Notes", NAK.

is accorded respect in human fashion. A similar attitude was shown to other totems of the clan -- the rabbit and weaver bird.⁵² The reverence for python and cobra probably developed from snake worship which was popular in most parts of West Africa.⁵³ Tree totems are few. For example, while the Lesaworu clan at Ilesha revered the Besigondo tree, the Yari at Okuta adopted the Baatoko tree as one of its totems. Upon migration into their present site, some clans increased the number of their totems, adopting those of other groups with which they mixed.

In contradistinction to the Batonu-speaking group, the Boko people do not revere many totems. There exist only three broad-based clans -- Kpai, Kpasi and Wure. While among the Batonu, clans retain their identities and tend to a slow process of fragmentation, the Boko lean towards fusion of smaller clans into these three larger groupings. The royal clan in both Babanna and Kaiama, revere the antelope as totem animal. They seem to represent an alien group from a totemic culture superimposed upon a non-totemic society. Totemism prevails among the Batombu except among the Muslim clans which descended from the Wangara merchants who entered Borgu from Songhay.

Borgu people developed a characteristic method of giving

⁵² BHT. No. 98.

⁵³ Johannes Weissenborn, "Animal-Worship in Africa", African Affairs: Journal of the Royal African Society, Vol. 5, 1905-1906, pp. 167-181.

personal names to children at birth. In some chiefdoms, the pattern follows strictly the order of birth and clearly reflects the patrilineal social system. Most of the names serve as repositories of clan history. The Batonu have particularly influenced the Sabe (Yoruba-speaking group) of Dahomey in this naming system.⁵⁴ Among the Laru-speaking group in Shagunnu, the order follows days of the week rather than order of birth. This is a clear reflection of the early and pervading influence of the Hausa people in that region. The naming system is as follows in Table III:

Table III Three Types of Naming Systems

	<u>Batonu</u>		<u>Sabe</u>		<u>Shagunnu</u>		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	
1	Woru	Yon	Woru	Yon	Mon	Danten	Teni
2	Sabi	Bona	Sabi	Bone	Tue	Dantalo	Talata
3	Bio	Bake	Biau	Saku	Wed	Woru	Yonku
4	Bonni	Bunyon	Boni	Ojo	Thu	Danlami	Lami
5	Sani	Dado	Dimon	Belu	Fri	Danjuma	Jumai
6	Worumere	Yonmere			Sat	Danasabe	Asabe
7	Sabimere	Bonamere			Sun	Danladi	Ladi

⁵⁴ Sabe section derives from A.I. Asiwaju, "A Note on the History of Sabe", Lagos Notes and Records, Bulletin of African Studies, Vol. 4, 1973, pp. 17-29. See also Biodun Adediran, The Frontier States of Western Yorubaland, c.1600-c.1889: State Formation and Political Growth in an Ethnic Frontier Zone, John West, (Forthcoming) Chapter One.

In addition to the established names, that of the clan may be included, such as Woru Mora (a first-born male, Mora clan), Yon Yari (a first-born female, Yari clan), and Mayanmu Mori (a commoner, Mori clan). Members of the Yari clan bear names such as Age, Binasi and Apoo which represent some of their ancestors possibly those who have performed spectacular deeds for the clan.⁵⁵ In the Tosu clan at Okuta, Sakabusiduu, Yarugunnumunugi, Sakagoga replicate their ancestors.⁵⁶ In Shagunnu, where clan divisions were non-existent, days of the week were strictly followed. Actually, within the nuclear family circle, it was possible for a man to have more than one Woru or Yon or Danteni, depending on the number of wives he married. Most often circumstances of birth were also recorded in personal names. For example, a first male child born during the Gani festival is called Worugani while his female counterpart is Yongani. A child who had been requested from a certain deity bears the name, such as Daraku (after Daraku stream), Woru Kpera or Yon Kuroboko (after Kuroboko hill). Yoruba influence reverberates in the name Ogungbe. While Ogun is the Yoruba god of iron, he is known as Wuru in Borgu. In Borgu interpretation, Ogungbe means "daughter of Ogun," but one would have expected the name to be "Wurugbe" (daughter of Wuru). Similarly, a male child requested from Jekanna hill in Bussa territory is named either Bio Kana or Manga while the

⁵⁵ BHT. No. 40.

⁵⁶ BHT. No. 50.

female is called Kana. Unquestionably, all these names preserve the historical, social and religious belief systems of the Borgu people.

Rulers bear personal names and the titles of their predecessors, hence the propensity to have anachronistic presentation of occurrences is quite high. They also bear names which echo the circumstances surrounding their assumption of authority. Information on military accomplishments is symbolized in names such as Nono Yeku -- "pepper in the eyes" and Bakombia -- "an invincible person." While a peaceful and prosperous reign mirrors in Yasho -- "a dancing chief" -- a turbulent tenure is reflected in Ikoko -- "a man like the hyena." Religious representation flows in the name Shinagura (god of thunder). Dying outside the chiefdom capital was remembered by names such as Kperogi Gbodokpuno (died at Gbodo), Agbiyaru Moshikpuno (died at Moshi), and at Kaiama, Yaru Iloride indicates that the ruler died at Ilorin.⁵⁷ Through all these personal names specific historical information could be garnered, thus assisting in recovering significant aspects of Borgu's past.

Etymological meanings of some Borgu place-names often reflected long-distance migration and the necessity to rest. For example, Ma busa in the Bissa language has been contracted

⁵⁷ Information on all these names are contained in BHT. Nos. 17, 31, 40, 51 and 206.

to Bussa which means "I am tired and now need a rest"⁵⁸ while Ki a ma (Kaiama) in Bokobaru translates "let us rest."⁵⁹ The relative ease of the subjugation of the early inhabitants by the dynastic group is reflected in A Baba nna (Babanna) which means "it is easy to break" in the Boko language.⁶⁰ Other place-names describe the geographical feature of the region, such as Sheronkpeiru -- "a hill which resembles an egg."⁶¹ Wawa has been so named after a fruit-bearing tree called Wawali, which was common in the area.⁶² Yet other names suggest the occupation of the people such as Yashikera -- "the grave of meat for hunters."⁶³ Many African groups memorialize past leaders in place names. That is not common in Borgu. The lack of genealogies and an acephalous, gerontocratic organisation might therefore be linked to this type of historical preservation. The Iteso (among the most consensual, gerontocratic and acephalous of all peoples) never named places or settlements after individuals. Since the place names were likely given by the aboriginals, in Borgu, the reticence to use personal names suggests their pre-dynastic

⁵⁸ EOB/COU/2/1 "Kisra Museum File", Borgu Traditional Council Office, New Bussa.

⁵⁹ BHT. No. 202.

⁶⁰ BHT. No. 177.

⁶¹ BHT. No. 49.

⁶² BHT. No. 146.

⁶³ BHT. No. 63.

organisation.⁶⁴

Borgu people store historical information in proverbs. The interpretation of the proverb would indicate its genesis and when to use it. To stimulate a military-chief and his soldiers while engaged in a campaign, Borgu people say Gbegarinsun yagbera kubodo -- "when in the war-front, you have to summon courage and bear all odds, believing that your name would be immortalized after victory is achieved."⁶⁵ When a young man speaks about the significant past at Bussa, people say Sandi gbezime -- "an ear is an old person."⁶⁶ Amongst the Boko, patience is taught in the proverb Gben kpon suruke a kokobi wa -- "whoever is patient would see the bone of an ant."⁶⁷ A further penetration into Borgu proverbs reveals their philosophy of life. For example Angisoyen ansiayen means "we know today, but tomorrow is hidden from us." Similarly, the Boko-speaking group say Gbenken yan marake nia mara e -- "he who does good receives good."⁶⁸ Clearly, from these given proverbs, it is possible to visualize the depth of the Borgu people's orientation to historical, religious and moral preservation.

⁶⁴ J.B. Webster, et al, The Iteso During the Asonya, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1973.

⁶⁵ BHT. No. 98.

⁶⁶ Ibid..

⁶⁷ BHT. No. 187.

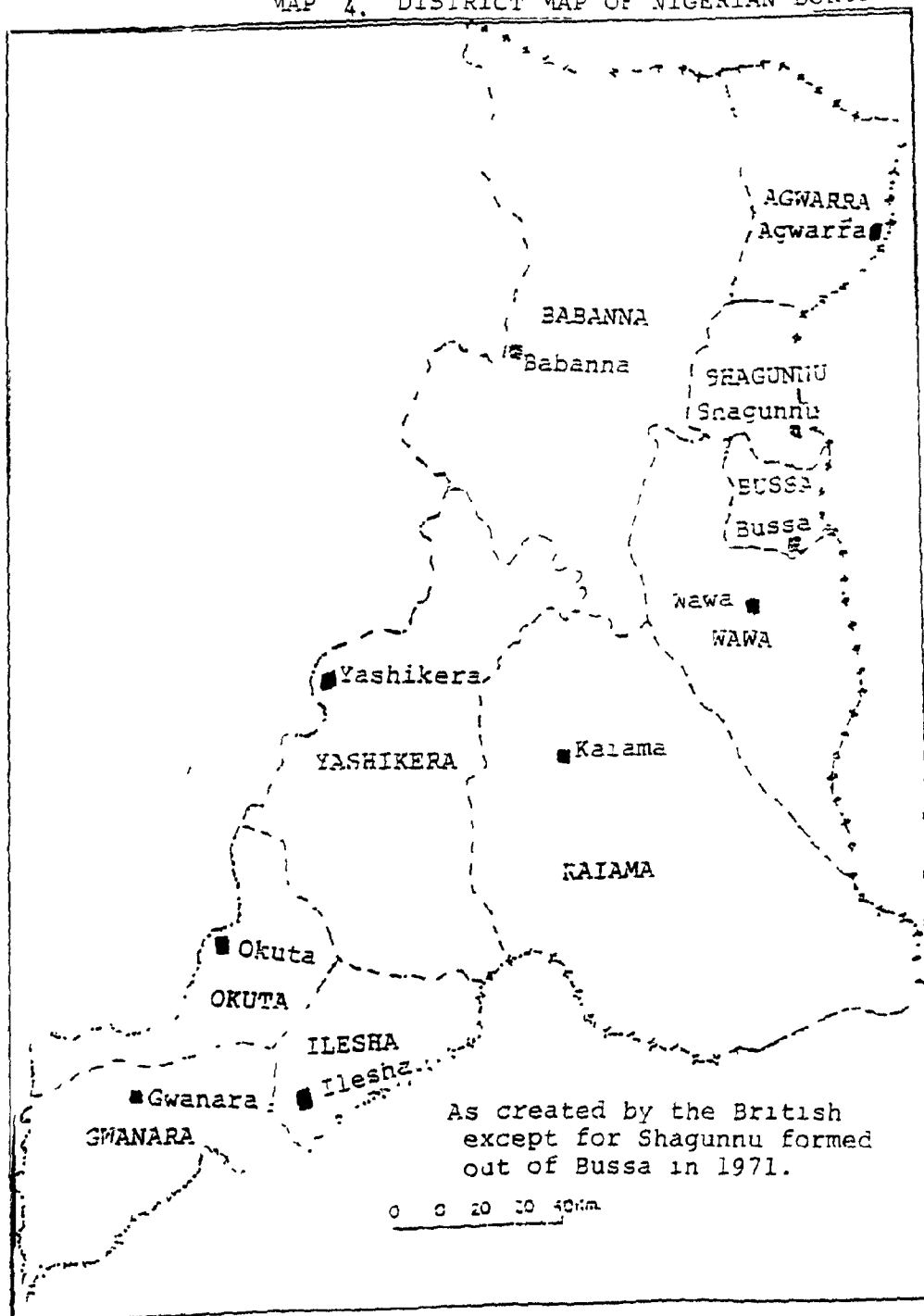
⁶⁸ Ibid..

Having completed interviewing over the whole of Nigerian Borgu, I took the decision to focus the study upon the Batonu-speaking people in the south, primarily because the methodology which I had followed seemed more appropriate and rewarding in results there. In the north the Kisra legend possibly relating to events around 1000 A.D. is strong, but royal genealogies stretch back only to the late eighteenth century. Thereafter the chroniclers claim ridiculous numbers of kings -- to over 200 -- back to Kisra. Furthermore Islam had begun to spread through the region, and as a consequence the indigenous royal traditions such as those found in the Hausa states were wiped out. Modern resettlement in northern Borgu has also taken its toll on narrative traditions and the original shrine sites. Totems do not exist and therefore provide no evidence to support a reconstruction to supplement or challenge the narratives. For these reasons, the northern area resembles a historical wasteland. Gradually this researcher came to understand why so many researchers have surveyed the area yet produced so little, other than relying upon colonial reports. Even the early travellers found little history upon which to report. Besides Kisra and nineteenth-century wars against the northern Muslims, little else seems to have survived.

Furthermore the Idris thesis noted earlier had commented upon Nikki, Bussa and Illo. With the exception of Kaiama, it barely noted the other southern satellite chiefdoms.

Paradoxically, there are very useful hints from these southern chiefdoms for the overall history of Borgu. They overtly narrate the presence of the Nupe and Yoruba in their traditions which helps to explain some critical issues of early history of Nigerian Borgu. As a Consequence, it seemed logical to concentrate upon the most neglected region and the one which responded most readily to the methodology which was being employed.

MAP 4. DISTRICT MAP OF NIGERIAN BORGU



CHAPTER TWO

THE BLACK KING: THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF KISRA TO BORGU HISTORY

The emergence of Kisra in Borgu c.1000 A.D. produced some historically significant events. This is why he has become a central figure in the pre-colonial history of Borgu. In this respect, the centrality of Kisra has to be discussed in relation to the major political developments. However, the pre-Kisra period demonstrated that before c.1000 A.D. significant socio-cultural, economic and political developments had begun to occur in Borgu. The development became more rapid from the twelfth century when further political transformations occurred. Gradually the region emerged from obscurity to historical prominence. But despite these major developments, the population neither possessed a common identity nor constituted a distinct political entity. It has been pointed out that "by A.D. 1000 peoples of black Africa were living in settled agricultural societies, and some quite powerful political states were beginning to emerge."¹ The rise of powerful empires in the Western Sudan lends credence to this viewpoint. In this regard, the Borgu region could be considered as forming a continuum with similar communities between the Niger and the Volta, that is, the pre-

¹ "African Peoples and Cultures to A.D. 1000" in Geoffery Barraclough, The Times Atlas of World History, Hammond, Maplewood, 1978, p. 44.

Yoruba, Edo, Nupe, Fon, Adja and Ewe peoples. Oral chronicles on migration as well as the development of the iron industry support this inter-group and inter-regional connection. Another plausible explanation is that among each of these peoples, there exists the tradition of a powerful figure who re-ordered the society, thereby bringing the community into a more historical perspective. In several African societies, the ruling aristocracy was usually of a different ethnic composition from the subjects. Be that as it may, in Borgu the emergence of Kisra brought about dramatic changes and certain distinct historical developments.

The pertinent questions are: Who brought about these penetrating changes? What were the significant revolutions? How did the transformation become an enduring heritage of Borgu society? In seeking answers to these questions, the discussion can range from the Middle East to the Western Sudan. Beginning from c.1000 A.D., Kisra, who came from the Middle East, became the central figure in Borgu history, indeed in the whole of the Western Sudan. He influenced Borgu and altered the course of history in various ways. Kisra provided a religious ideology -- an anti-Islamic archetype -- within and outside the Borgu kingdom. With the traditional belief system serving as a background, the anti-Islamic pattern became a prominent feature in all the societies where the Kisra legend has been perpetuated. Apart from the anti-Islamic legacy, Kisra also bequeathed to Borgu a sense of

identity as well as a complete restructuring of its political system through the formation of states. Particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, affiliation with Kisra produced a proliferation of chiefdoms and as well brought about a common identity which strengthened the entire Borgu region in its military campaigns against external aggressors. Kinship relations fostered unity and reinforced Borgu's claim to invincibility in warfare. It could be argued that, Kisra, the black king, provided religious, socio-cultural and political ideologies, the legacies of which enabled Borgu to consolidate its unity, form a strong defensive mechanism and defend its territorial integrity.

Traditions about Kisra had been widespread in the Middle East. He had been referred to as a king and an anti-Islamic leader. From the onset, it is necessary to examine who Kisra was before connecting him with the establishment of hereditary dynasties in numerous communities of the Western Sudan. Etymologically the word "Kisra" is an Arabicised form of the Persian "Khusraw." In the Middle East, Kisra was adopted as a proper name but it seemed to be more recognised as the title of the Persian Sasanid rulers.² Two of the rulers, Khusraw I (531-579 A.D.) and Khusraw II (591-628 A.D.) belonged to the

² M. Morony, "Kisra" in C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis and CH. Pellat, (eds.), The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, Vol. V, Fascicules 81-82, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1980, pp. 184-185. Kisra has been referred to variously as Chosroes, Kushru or Kishera.

era of "Oriental despotism."³ Islam, a monotheistic religion, was founded in the late sixth century as a unifying force in Arabian society. It became a proselytising religion in about 622 A.D. During this period, Khusraw II implemented some religious policies which were regarded as an anathema to the new faith and for which he had been considered "the main enemy of Islam (the head of the hostile bird)."⁴ To demonstrate his abhorrence for the emerging religion, Khusraw II publicly tore up the letter of invitation to Islam, written to him by Prophet Mohammad. This apparently indicated that Islam had begun to face stiff opposition from the traditional worshippers in the Middle East since its incipience. An Arabic document mentioned the military operations of Khusraw II in the Middle East and the en masse movement of his followers into several parts of Africa.⁵ Khusraw II was said to be an enemy of the Abyssinians. He allied with one Saif dhu al Yazan, the ruler of Yemen until 597 A.D. Having pillaged Balis

³ A.J. Arberry, "Persian Literature" in A.J. Arberry, (ed.), The Legacy of Persia, Oxford University Press, London, 1953, p. 200. Consult also Meek, The Northern Tribes, p. 71.

⁴ Morony, "Kisra", p. 185. For example in 614 A.D. he destroyed the Kufic inscription which had been the oldest surviving Islamic writings. He also destroyed St. Mary's Church of Justinian. See Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, Macmillan, London, Reprinted 1964, pp. 264-265.

⁵ SNP/17/5/633, Vol. II, "Kisra Legends", NAK. Translated by G.W. Webster, the Arabic pamphlet described the traditions of one Kisra Anu Shirwana of Farisa [Persia] and his descendants who reigned after him. It traces the migration route from the Middle East to Africa, and mentions that certain Borgu towns such as Wawa, Bussa, Shagunnu and Kabe were founded by the descendants of Kisra.

in 620 A.D., and advancing into Egypt, Khusraw caused an uproar which culminated in the mass migration of people.⁶ In the legends of the Kanuri people (in north-eastern Nigeria), Sayf d. Dhi Yazan was an Arab hero whose descendants established ascendancy over the Magumi between the ninth and tenth century A.D.⁷ However his link with Kisra is obscure in the tradition. It would be tempting to link Khusraw II to Kisra in the Borgu tradition. The clinching argument has been that Khusraw II did not lead any migration out of Persia or Egypt.⁸ Johnson, a Yoruba historian, referred to Kisra as "Asara," a corruption of "Anasara," an Arabic form of Nazarene,⁹ suggesting a Christian background for Kisra. This connection does not seem plausible. Nevertheless, the name "Kisra" has been found in parts of the Middle East and in several patterns.

There is a similar pervasiveness of the Kisra legend in the Western Sudan. In both oral and written historiography, Kisra was at the centre of religious as well as political

⁶ Consult John Bagot Glubb, The Life and Times of Mohammad, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1970, pp. 50-58.

⁷ Abdullahi Smith, "The Early States of the Central Sudan" in Ajayi and Crowder, (eds.), The History of West Africa, Vol. I, pp. 158-159.

⁸ Frobenius, The Voice, p. 125; Mathews, "The Kisra Legend", p. 146. For a detailed analysis, consult Daniel F. McCall, "Kisra, Chosroes, Christ Etc", A review Article, African Historical Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1968, pp. 255-277.

⁹ Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas, C.S.S. Lagos, 1921, pp. 5-6.

authority in Arabia. Owing to his ardent opposition to the Islamic religion founded and propagated by Prophet Mohammad (570-632 A.D.), Kisra supposedly migrated to Africa with a considerable following.¹⁰ While he was merely a visitor in some places such as Bornu, in others, he established states. Consequently he has been associated with the foundation of numerous dynasties, such as those found among the Hausa states, Kwararafa, Nupe, Yoruba and Borgu.¹¹ Using the work of Al Bekri, a Muslim scholar and a traveller, Palmer argued that the early rulers of Songhay were descendants of Kisra. Accordingly, he succinctly described the widespread nature of the Kisra legend:

Their [the Zaghawa] coming to Dendi (whence Songhay grew) must have been the so-called migration of Kisara [Kisra], which in Hausaland is held to be responsible for the kingdoms of Illo (in Dendi) and Busa [Bussa], as well as the Kwararafa Kingdoms, which were so powerful in the middle ages and still claim kinship with the Saifawa of Bornu.¹²

Kisra traditions in Hausaland state that Bayajjida possessed a horse and a large military force. After killing the menacing snake at Daura, Bayajjida married the queen,

¹⁰ A detailed migration route could be found in Palmer, Sudanese Memoirs, Vol. 2, Frank Cass, London, 1967, pp. 61-63.

¹¹ Palmer, Sudanese Memoirs, Vol. 3, pp. 87-88.

¹² Ibid., pp. 87-88. The second dynasty of Kwararafa c.1580-1790 was related to the Saifawa but the third, (Jukun in origin) which took over c.1790 was not although it sought to claim continuity. See Webster, "Kwararafa".

thereby becoming the putative ancestor of the seven original Hausa states.¹³ A variant of the tradition mentions the movement of the Zanata Berbers (probably under the leadership of Abu Yazid also known as Bayajjida) into Bornu which had been firmly established by the tenth century. While a considerable number of the emigrants became entirely assimilated into Bornu society, a small group maintained cultural independence. On further migration to Biram, they intermarried and "their cavalry, hitherto unknown in this territory, was then used to found states, but this time eventual political control did not elude them, neither was their culture allowed to be suppressed in the resulting aristocratic strain."¹⁴ Thus the Hausa states had been fathered by the descendants of Bayajjida through military conquest of the indigenous populations. The conquest theory has been similarly demonstrated in the occupation of Borgu by Kisra's followers.

The link between Kisra and Kwararafa had been through the Abakwariga who were "of the same stock as the founders of the

¹³ Bayajjida has been referred to variously as Abu Yazid or Aba Kyari. He had the sobriquet of "The Man of the Ass", indicating possession of horses. For more details consult Alhaji Hassan and Mallam Shuaibu Na'ibi, (Translators), A Chronicle of Abuja, African University Press, Lagos, 1962, pp. 1-5 and W.K.R. Hallam, "The Bayajida Legend in Hausa Folklore", JAH, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1966, pp. 47-60.

¹⁴ Hallam, "The Bayajida", p. 49.

Hausa states,"¹⁵ and therefore descendants of Bayajjida. The Yoruba-Borgu long-standing relations have been narrated in the migration tradition. It states that Kisra and Nimrod (the reputed ancestor of the Yoruba) were co-migrants from Arabia. But the affiliation of the Nupe to the Kisra legend remains tenuous. The most prominent of the Nupe traditions of origin surrounds Tsoede or Edegi, the culture-hero who had no connection with Kisra. What Tsoede was to the Nupe, Kisra was to the Borgu people. He symbolized Nupe unity. He re-ordered the society by uniting together all the pre-existing Nupe communities under a single political authority. Thus Tsoede brought about an ethnic identity among the Nupe. For this purpose S.F. Nadel argued that the Tsoede saga could be regarded as "a 'mythical charter' which anchors the existing political structure of the Nupe state in the awe-inspiring sphere of mythical, or semi-mythical, happenings."¹⁶ However, Tsoede's emergence in Nupe can be dated,¹⁷ therefore the tradition should not be regarded as mythical. The prevalence

¹⁵ Meek, A Sudanese Kingdom, p. 22. Consult also Webster, "Kwararafa".

¹⁶ S.F. Nadel, "Nupe State and Community", Africa: Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1935, pp. 257-303.

¹⁷ Sargent claims Tsoede was the son of Aji Attah (c.1507-1537) the first Bini ruler of Idah and a Nupe woman. See Igala Historical Text No. 86 collected by Sargent and S.F. Nadel, A Black Byzantium, Oxford University Press, London, 1942, Reprinted 1969, p. 73 as cited in R.A. Sargent, "Politics and Economics in the Benue Basin, c.1300-1700" Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1984, Chapter 2.

of the traditional belief system and anti-Islamic practices in all the communities associated with the Kisra legend have to a great extent strengthened the claim to cognate origin.

Orthodox explanation presented the revolution against Islam as a single-handed event by Kisra. Rethinking the circumstances surrounding Kisra's migration, it is surely necessary to offer an alternative explanation. Between the tenth and eleventh centuries there occurred a great population movement, consequent upon the pastoralist irruptions in the Middle East, spreading to North Africa and the Sudan. Two of the nomadic and militant hordes -- the Bedouin Arabs and the Sanhaja Berbers -- burst into North Africa from the Sahara-Sahel, bringing about a great deal of devastation and insecurity among numerous communities. For instance a segment of the Seljuk Turks displaced the Fatimids in Syria while another group penetrated into Africa.¹⁸ On their part, the Sanhaja moved north into Morocco and south into the empire of Ghana, dislodging the indigenous rulers. Following a period of drought, the Bedouin Arabs led by the Beni Hilal invaded the Nubian kingdom of Nobatia (Nubia), which had been populated by Christians, Muslims and traditional worshippers. Consequent to this century-long upheaval, migrations occurred in different directions out of north and northeastern Africa. For this reason Webster argues that:

¹⁸ Philip K. Hitti, "Seljuks" in The Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition, Danbury, 1980, p. 534.

While most of the Christians sought refuge in the second and middle Nubian state of Makuria, the Pagans moved toward the Central Sudan where they became known as the Kisra migration usually pictured in oral tradition as fleeing from Islamic compulsion and fathering numerous West African royal houses.¹⁹

This suggests that rather than being an individual, the term "Kisra" represents the movement of significant numbers of people into various regions of the Western Sudan and the phenomenon placed at the beginning of the thorough Islami- zation of Egypt, North Africa and Northern Nubia. Prior to the century-long devastations of the Beni Hilal, Islam had been the faith of the towns only. By a process which has not become clear, the name "Kisra" became associated with those who moved away, those opposed to Islam and those merely fleeing from the devastations which accompanied the upheavals connected with the depredations of the nomads. Because they were movements, the participants successfully founded dynasties among the various indigenous acephalous or polycephalic societies, their leaders employing the name "Kisra" as a title or honorific to embody their anti-Islamic ideology. Thus while Kisra was not the Persian king Khusraw II, he and those who followed his anti-Islamic ideology and perpetuated his name, played the same historic role of Islamic opposition as Khusraw had done. This argument appears to be a more plausible interpretation for the establishment of numerous political entities

¹⁹ J.B. Webster, "Shaking the Foundations of the Muslim World", in Webster, Fundamentals, Forthcoming.

associated with Kisra in the Western Sudan. Considering the widespread nature of the legend it seems hardly possibly for a single individual to have established the dynasties at an almost simultaneous period. The migration of Bayajjida among the Hausa, the Abakwariga of Kwararafa, and that of Nimrod among the Yoruba presumably formed part of these movements.

The Kano Chronicle has thrown some light upon the general movement of people from North Africa c.1000 A.D., resulting from the revolt caused by Abu Yazid, a prince of Baghdad. Abu Yazid represented the Barbar sectary and his insurgence was crushed in 947 A.D.²⁰ To this end, his numerous hordes relocated in different parts of the Western Sudan, establishing kingship institutions. Their spread to Bornu, Daura and subsequently to other regions produced pervading consequences. In accordance with the date provided by the Kano Chronicle, Palmer concluded that:

Taking all...factors into consideration, it is clear that the Hausas are people of the Zaghawa (Izghan) stocks who, in 900-1000 A.D., were servile to the Bornu (Tuareg) in the region that they, with their language, spread south and west.²¹

Certain striking similarities between Kisra in the Borgu tradition and Abu Yazid in the Bayajjida legend suggest that the two belonged to a single movement. For example, both have

²⁰ See Richmond Palmer, The Bornu Sahara and Sudan, Negro Universities Press, New York, Reprinted 1970, p. 273.

²¹ Ibid., p. 274.

been associated with royalty from Baghdad (then part of Persia), both possessed horses and weapons, and the followers of both scattered into several parts of the Western Sudan, instituting dynasties in a period roughly between 950-1100. Both men arose as leaders during the massive upheaval which spread throughout the Islamic world of Egypt and North Africa. It becomes hardly surprising that the peoples south of the Sahara mixed them up but grasped the essential, that numerous refugees of that age were led by men who saw themselves as spiritual heirs of heroes to the north and northeast, and who resisted the imposition of Islam. Kisra became the greatest of these.

As Islam gradually triumphed in Bornu, the Hausa states and elsewhere, the anti-Islamic bias of the Kisra tradition became embarrassing. Furthermore in such states normally the keeping of historical tradition fell into the hands of Muslims who felt compelled to link Kisra more closely to Mohammad, the Prophet even if they could not hide Kisra's role of opposition to Islam. They promoted the tradition to undermine the traditional religion and underscore the triumph of Islam over its adversaries. The extensive spread of the Kisra legend in the Western Sudan had been well represented in a local tradition collected at Bussa by Hoskyns Abrahall, a colonial officer in Borgu. This tradition clearly comes from Muslims and one can see how it has been adjusted to make it slightly more acceptable. Not only was Kisra related to the Prophet but

he was also associated with respectable Muslim states such as Bornu, Katsina and Gobir. It states that:

The importance of Kisra lies in the fact that, according to Bussa, Kisra was the maternal uncle of the Prophet [Mohammad], a man of great power in Arabia, and the outstanding personality of exodus from Arabia. This emigration was not confined to the ancestors of the Bussawa, but was comprised of the ancestors of the Bornu chiefs, the ruling Yoruba class, the Yaurawa, the Gobirawa, and the Katsinawa. It is claimed by the Bussawa that these tribes all acknowledge a common ancestry, and a Ba-Gobiri, at any rate, who finds his way to Bussa, is greeted as a relative or 'abokin wasa', rather than as a stranger. The ties between Yaurawa and Bussa were once close, but jealousies of modern origin have done a lot to strain their amicable relations. Between the Oyo Yorubas and Borgu there existed a defensive alliance, founded, it is said, in their common ancestry, while gifts within historical times were exchanged between Bussa and Oyo.²²

While to the growing Islamic population of the Sudan, Kisra might have been an embarrassment to be manipulated to give him more respectable antecedents, to the traditionalists his memory possessed many positive attributes. He linked them as major actors to the great events in the centre of the world, his name created an understanding of alliances far beyond the confines of ethnic or linguistic boundaries and his memory offered them a unified ideology. It might even be useful in diplomatic relations with Muslim states as the peace treaties and gift exchanges with Borno demonstrated.

²² SNP/17/K 2101, "Anthropological and Historical Report", NAK.

An intricate relationship had been established between Borgu and Bornu through the Kisra legend. This was mentioned to Clapperton when he visited Borgu in the third decade of the nineteenth century. The Kibe of Bussa claimed that "his ancestors were from Bornou."²³ This writer was able to ascertain that a "close relationship existed between Borgu and Borno."²⁴ The common tradition of Kisra permitted a long period of peace, friendship and exchange of gifts between Borgu and Borno for several centuries. Among the items sent to Borno were the following: 100 sickles, 100 choppers, 100 bundles of "gwandan daji" for horse medicine, 100 bundles of kuka, 100 bundles of firewood. In return for these, the king of Borno sent 100 camels, 100 horses and 100 suits of clothes.²⁵ Following this relationship, it is not surprising that despite Borno's hegemony over parts of Hausaland until the seventeenth century, no evidence survives that Borgu had been attacked.²⁶ Borno also arranged an annual exchange of

²³ Clapperton, Journal, pp. 102-103.

²⁴ Both commoner and royal informants mentioned this. It is also contained in File EOB/COU/2/1 "Kisra Museum", New Bussa.

²⁵ Kirk-Greene, Gazetteers, Vol. 3, p. 578.

²⁶ H.J. Fisher, "The Central Sahara and Sudan" in Richard Gray (ed.), The Cambridge History of Africa, from c.1600 to c.1790, Vol. 4, Cambridge University Press, London, 1795, pp. 114-118. Kano was said to be the first to pay tribute to Borno. Katsina was also dependent on Borno, each of the subordinate states paid an annual tribute of 100 slaves. However the gift exchanges between Borgu and Kwararafa and Borno were not significant of submission and therefore "tribute" was not appropriate for them.

gifts with Kwararafa, an event which guaranteed almost 250 years of peace between the two states,²⁷ one Islamic and the other the bastion of opposition to the faith. The gift exchange with Borgu appeared to follow an identified pattern and led to a similar result.

Frobenius, as well as Mathews, a colonial officer in Borgu, interpreted "Kisra" as an hereditary title and not the personal name of a particular king. While Frobenius described Kisra as "Lord of the Persians," Mathews suggested that:

It does not vastly matter whether the Kishira [Kisra] who founded Bussa was or was not the one who fought with the Prophet. In point of fact, he may not have been. And one Kishira [Kisra] par excellence may so have aggrandised the title that it became peculiarly associated with him, the individual, to the exclusion of the others.²⁸

Mathews argued further by drawing a parallel with "Kanta" (of Kebbi) which was a title and not the name of a particular king. To corroborate this argument, it has been observed that within Borgu, people do not bear Kisra as a personal name. It has also not been the title of the kings of Bussa, Illo, Nikki and Kaiama. But since the Kisra phenomenon has been dated c.950-1100 and the royal genealogies of these Borgu kings only stretch back to c.1675, this does not prove very much. Rather than Akite as asserted by Palmer, the title of the king of

²⁷ Webster, "Kwararafa"

²⁸ Frobenius, The Voice, p. 125; SNP/17/ K 2101, "Anthropological and Historical Report on the Bussawa" by A.B. Mathews, NAK.

Bussa was Kibe. Some political offices in Bussa have the prefix Ki, for example, Ki-Wataide, Ki-Swai, Ki-Santi, Ki-Kparu and Ki-Gbasai. Thus Ki-Sra appears to represent a title adopted by leaders of the great migrations into the Western Sudan. In the Bissa (Bisagwe) language spoken at Bussa in Borgu, "Kisra" has been explained as a compound derivation of Ki (king) and shira (black), hence "the black king."

Of Kisra's physical presence in Borgu, contradictory accounts have been given. In some versions, Kisra subdued the indigenous people, with weapons such as lifidi "wadded armour" and sulke "mail tunics."²⁹ Resulting from this subjugation, Kisra established his dynastic rule over a pre-existing conglomeration of communities in Borgu. While examining migration and urban settlement trends in pre-colonial Africa, J.D. Fage emphatically asserted that:

Kisra eventually got as far as Borgu... conquered the three areas around Bussa, Borgu, and Yorubaland... [He] died at Bussa (soon after the beginning of the Muslim era), but his work was continued by one of his generals who was the first founder of Nupe.³⁰

Fage has erroneously presented Bussa and Borgu as two separate

²⁹ Frobenius, The Voice, pp. 617-618.

³⁰ John D. Fage, "Some Thoughts on the Migration and Urban Settlement", in Hilda Kuper, (ed.), Urbanization and Migration in West Africa, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965, p. 48; J.D. Fage, A History of West Africa, Cambridge, 1969, p. 42. The Nupe might be connected to Kisra or his followers became their great hero, Tsoede who ruled about 1507-1537. Kisra's general would have lived about 500 years earlier.

and distinct political entities. Bussa was one of the three kingdoms established by Kisra's progeny. Derived from Ma busa, Bussa means 'I am tired and now need a rest' in the Bissa language, reflecting the long migration of the people.

That Kisra subdued part of Yorubaland cannot be substantiated by any evidence. As mentioned earlier, traditions of origin indicated that the Yoruba and Borgu peoples migrated from the Middle East at the same time. Warfare between them obviously belonged to the post-Kisra period. Oyo traditions, as recorded by Johnson, even affirm that during its period of greatest prosperity, the Oyo Empire extended its hegemony to Dahomey, parts of Ashanti and "portions of the Tapa [Nupe] and Baribas [Borgu]."³¹ This assertion has been denied in Borgu, where the people claim a heritage of invincibility in military engagements. Oyo conquered the kingdom of Dahomey in 1730, but when it subjugated part of Borgu remains uncertain. What is more certain in Yoruba-Borgu relations was the period of exile by the Alaafin in the sixteenth century, when the Oyo capital was sacked by the Nupe. Oyo's political authority might have been recognised at Gberegburu (Borgu town), where the Alaafin settled. After evacuating the country, Oyo continued to engage in a series of wars with Borgu. The most well-remembered one occurred during the reign of Alaafin Orompoto (at Igboho) who

³¹ Johnson, The History, p. 41. For further information on the Borgu-Nupe-Yoruba political connection through inter-marriage, consult Law, The Oyo Empire, pp. 29-33

revamped Oyo's army which consisted of about 1000 infantry and 1000 cavalry, and recorded a significant victory over Borgu at the battle of Ilayi during the second half of the sixteenth century.³² During the same period, Oyo grew in military strength, becoming more powerful than Nupe. If Oyo controlled portions of Borgu land, it might have been the unidentified land near Aburisebbi at Nwatta. However, traditions at Oyo remember that the Alaafin's sway over part of Borgu continued until the eighteenth century when the empire enjoyed a period of economic prosperity, political hegemony as well as military supremacy.³³ Borgu reportedly declared its independence after a remarkable war against Oyo in 1783 during the reign of Alaafin Abiodun.³⁴ Oyo-Nupe cultural and economic relations were more discernable than the political connection. Despite the marriage alliance which produced Sango, the fourth Alaafin in Johnson's list, warfare could not be prevented. That Oyo controlled part of Nupeland as it exists today, has been debated. While Akinjogbin supports Johnson's claim and adds

³² See Johnson, The History, pp. 161-162; Robert Smith, Kingdoms of the Yoruba, Methuen, London, 1969, p. 37 and J.F. Ade Ajayi and Robert S. Smith, Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century, Cambridge University Press, London, 1964, pp. 3-4.

³³ The Oyo Empire maintained the dominant position between 1754 and 1789 during the reigns of Alaafin Agboluaje and Alaafin Abiodun. Ibid., p. 179.

³⁴ I.A. Akinjogbin, Dahomey and Its Neighbours 1708-1818, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 164-167; Johnson, The History, p. 187.

that Nupe asserted its independence in 1790,³⁵ Robin Law argues to the contrary.³⁶ Michael Mason likewise maintained that the commercial relations between the Nupe and Yoruba people along the Niger were more profound than the political ones.³⁷ No reference has been made in modern Nupe to Oyo's political hegemony.

Supporting Fage's assertion, a documentary source as recorded by Temple claims that Kisra "founded and lived ten years at Bussa."³⁸ Similarly, it has been gathered from a colonial officer's report that Kisra settled at Bussa with his followers, wives and slaves, adding that he governed the country for an unspecified number of years.³⁹ Moreover Kisra has been credited with the construction of a defensive wall round Bussa.⁴⁰ This was confirmed in the field but it might have been constructed by his descendants. Based upon Kisra's presence, some versions emphasize that Bussa and the other

³⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

³⁶ See R.C.C. Law, "The Oyo Kingdom and Its Northern Neighbours", Kano Chronicles, New Series, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1973, pp. 25-34.

³⁷ Michael Mason, "The Jihad in the South: An Outline of the Nineteenth Century Nupe Hegemony in North-Eastern Yorubaland and Afenmai", JHSN, Vol. No. 1971, p. 194.

³⁸ Temple, Notes on the Tribes, p. 496.

³⁹ Kirk-Greene, Gazetteers, p. 24.

⁴⁰ Temple, Notes on the Tribes, p. 495.

kingdoms operated on a father-son succession pattern.⁴¹ Other accounts controvert this view. For instance in the version recorded by Hogben and Kirk-Greene, it has been asserted that "Kisra himself never reached Bussa."⁴² A colonial officer who collected oral data on Kisra from the king of Bussa in 1926, recorded that "Kishera [Kisra] himself never reached the Niger but as the succeeding chief took the title of Kishera it is commonly said that the original Kishera founded Busa [sic] though this is not correct." The same source mentioned that the three kingdoms were founded by Kisra's sons and they formed a loose confederacy under the leadership of the Kibe (king) of Bussa.⁴³ Phillips Stevens, in his analysis of the Kisra legend, pointed out that "all other accounts, including those collected in Bussa, assert that Kisra himself never reached that city."⁴⁴ Although Stevens collected his information from Bussa where the heritage of Kisra has been well preserved, tradition in other sections of Borgu narrate

⁴¹ BHT. Nos. 17, 129 and 131. Such a succession pattern was not of indigenous origin.

⁴² S.J. Hogben and A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, The Emirates of Northern Nigeria: A Preliminary Survey of their Historical Traditions, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, p. 577. A documentary source, based on oral tradition mentions that Kisra was the name of a town close to Mecca and not the name of a man but it has been adopted as a title. See SNP/17/K 2101, "Anthropological Notes", NAK.

⁴³ SNP/17/K 2101, "Anthropological", NAK.

⁴⁴ Phillips Stevens, Jr., "The Kisra Legend and the Distortion of Historical Tradition", JAH, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1975, p. 188.

similar accounts. It is well to note that the term "sons" might rather be interpreted as descendants or even followers. All of the evidence supports the concept that "Kisra" became associated with a substantial and possibly prolonged movement of refugees from Islam who looked back upon a distant hero, some of whose leaders might very well have adopted the name as a title.

On this note, it is worth examining the current traditions surrounding Kisra in Borgu, beginning with Bussa. The narrative mentions that Kisra, being a traditional worshipper, became a threat to Prophet Mohammad and the Islamic religion. As a result, a conflict ensued which culminated in the memorable migration into Africa. After sojourning first in Borno and later in Karishen (in Zuru Division), Kisra finally settled at Koko (in Gwandu) where he "mysteriously vanished."⁴⁵ Following this episode, the migration continued under the leadership of Kisra's three sons: Woru (Bate), Sabi (Woru Mansa) and Bio (Agwaṛṛ). At Nikki, Woru Mansa has been known by various other names such as Sunon Sero, Sero Temtore, Sero Duabaga, Sero Gidigi and Sabi Wure.⁴⁶ After crossing the River Niger and reaching Swalla (located near Kabe in Babanna district), the three sons

⁴⁵ BHT. Nos. 125, 128 and 132; File EOB/COU/2/1, "Kisra Museum", New Bussa. See also Wara, "Some Aspects", p. 15.

⁴⁶ BHT. Nos. 229, 232 and 238. See also Obarè Bagodo, "Le Royaume Borgou Wasangari de Nikki dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle", Mémoire Maîtrise D'Histoire, Faculté des Lettres, Université Nationale du Bénin, 1978.

dispersed to establish the dynasties of Bussa, Nikki and Illo.

The oral narrative states that:

The ancestors of Bussa people migrated from the east, that is Iraq. The migration was led by Kisra, following his reluctance to accept Islam. Leaving Iraq with a large following, the migrating group settled first at Kukawa⁴⁷ in Bornu. Today, there is a close relationship between Borgu and Bornu. The movement continued to Zamfara in Sokoto district where they settled at Karachi [Karishen]. Here, no one knows what happened to Kisra. He simply disappeared. From Karishen, the people crossed the Niger and moved inland until they reached Swalla under the leadership of Kisra's three sons. At Swalla, Woru instructed his brothers, Sabi and Bio to go and establish at Nikki and Illo respectively, while he stayed at Bussa. Sabi and Bio visited Bussa annually for tribute payment. The chief of Bussa had to approve of the candidature to the throne in both places. During installation ceremonies, he also sent representatives.⁴⁸

The version recorded at Babanna (in Borgu Local Government), simply mentions that Kisra died, affording the sons the opportunity to assume leadership roles. Whatever interpretation one might accept, it had been established that Kisra's "sons" succeeded him in political leadership. This episode marked the genesis of the state system and the period

⁴⁷ This must be interpreted as "the capital of Bornu" because the modern Kukawa was not established until the nineteenth century and after the Fulani jihad.

⁴⁸ BHT. No. 132. This tradition was narrated by Bio Yahaya, (72), at Bussa. He avowed that his ancestors were commoner followers of Kisra.

most writers consider as the beginning of Borgu history. Considering the unsolved controversy over Kisra's presence in Borgu, it would be more appropriate to attribute the formation and consolidation of the kingdoms to his descendants. The killing of the snake mentioned under the Bayajjida version symbolically represented the conquest of the indigenous rulers of Daura. In the same vein, Kisra's mysterious disappearance probably represented his loss of ascendancy over the migrating group. It might as well be that the tradition has merely glossed over Kisra's military defeat at Gwandu. Another likely explanation might be an assassination and ultimate usurpation of leadership and power by his sons. The tradition of miraculous disappearance re-echoed in Borgu in the eighteenth century at Bweru, will be discussed later.

Dates for the Kisra-led migration are confusing. Presumably for that reason, Stevens argued that the Kisra legend has been "placed in the realm of the mythological, in the times of the 'beginning'."⁴⁹ This interpretation is unacceptable because the migration occurred at a datable period. The outburst of the nomadic Berbers and Bedouins, as discussed earlier, provides evidence for dating the Kisra legend. Historical occurrences which had become products of continuous tradition in neighbouring regions, and which were congruent with the Kisra migration could similarly assist in fixing a reliable date. Frobenius, Palmer and Mathews dated

⁴⁹ Stevens, "The Kisra Legend", p. 189.

the migration to the seventh century apparently underpinned by the general upheaval triggered by Khusraw II's political and religious policies. On the other hand, Meek postulated the fifteenth century.⁵⁰ Meek could only discover the regnal list of Kwararafa to the rise of the second dynasty c.1600 but knew of Borno's connection with the state c.1500 but mentioned nothing in relation to the Borgu king list. Therefore, for Meek, Kisra came before that period (c.1500). In different works, A. Asiwaju and Marjorie Stewart agree with the fifteenth century, based on Meek's erroneous association of the Kisra legend with the Wangara migration from Songhay.⁵¹ But scholars such as Daniel McCall have expressed the unacceptability of these given dates.⁵² The present writer similarly argues that the dates seem improbable in cognizance of corresponding developments in neighbouring regions. While the seventh century appears too early, the fifteenth century seems too late. Indeed little argument surrounds the Wangara migration into Borgu in the fifteenth century. They do not claim to have been led by Kisra. Good Muslims that they were,

⁵⁰ Frobenius, The Voice, pp. 618-619; Palmer, Sudanese Memoirs, p. 88; Mathews, "The Kisra Legend", p. 145; Meek, The Northern Tribes, p. 72.

⁵¹ See A.I. Asiwaju, "Dahomey, Yorubaland, Borgu and Benin in the Nineteenth Century", in J.F.Ade Ajayi, (ed.), General History of Africa. VI Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s, Hienemann, California, (UNESCO Series), 1989 and Marjorie Helen Stewart, "The Kisra Legend as Oral Tradition", The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1980, pp. 51-71.

⁵² McCall, "Kisra", pp. 258-261.

it appears highly unlikely.

Evidence from Yorubaland indicated that the Kibe of Busa played an important role during the establishment of the Oyo Empire in the fifteenth century. It could be argued further that the Borgu kingdoms had been firmly established by the early sixteenth century when the Songhay Empire under Askia Mohammad attacked Borgu. Through cross-reference analysis, a relatively acceptable date could be derived for the Kisra migration into Borgu. Following the genealogies and reign length of the Hausa states which correspond with those of Kwararafa, the Kisra migration could be dated to c.1000 A.D.⁵³ The foundation of the Hausa states, which presumably occurred simultaneously with those of Borgu, has been dated to c.1000 A.D. in the Kano Chronicle. Based upon the information from the Kano Chronicle, Palmer concluded that:

The evidence which is available from a variety of Sudanese sources concerning the origin of the Hausa language and of the Hausa kings who ruled the seven Hausa states from about 1000 A.D. down to 1807 A.D. is fairly complete and convincing.⁵⁴

In his examination of the Bayajida legend, Hallam supports firmly 1000 A.D., and argues further that:

The Kano Chronicle covers the Hausa and Fulani dynasties in Kano down to 1892, and as lengths of reigns are recorded, it has been possible to estimate dates right back to Bagoda [grandson of Bayajida],

⁵³ Webster, "Kwararafa".

⁵⁴ Palmer, The Bornu, p. 273.

recorded as the founder of the Hausa dynasty of Kano, who, about A.D. 1000, occupied Adirani for two years...it is reasonable to assume that Bayajida alias Abu Yazid, or the people of whom he was the personification, came to Daura during the tenth century.⁵⁵

Since the Kisra legend has been narrated in Hausaland, Kwararafa and in Borgu, the dating should be similarly related. Regrettably evidence regarding this aspect is completely lacking in Borgu owing to the absence of a comprehensive regnal or genealogical list. The royal genealogies stretch back only to the eighteenth century. Consequently, 1000 A.D. might better be regarded as the date for Kisra's migration into Borgu.

Borgu traditions exhibit a phenomenon which might be referred to as the "dead middle" whereby rather elaborate details have been preserved about the origins of the monarchy and the charter of the state followed by a long period of silence and then the detailed record of the kings beginning in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. In this and other ways as well, Borgu resembled Kwararafa. In the latter confederacy, an accurate and detailed king list extends back to c.1790 and more questionably to c.1610. Before that nothing of any consequence has been recalled until the foundation in the tenth century or around 1000. Historians know that Kwararafa existed and experienced some of its greatest success and

⁵⁵ Hallam, "The Bayajida Legend", p. 49.

failure in that "dead middle" c.1000 to 1610 because of documentary records in the Hausa states and Borno.⁵⁶ It is these records which lead historians to search out obscure traditions, totemic and shrine evidence which seem to point to those events lost to Kwararafan narrative traditions. This is where Borgu differs. Like Kwararafa it stood as the block to the advance of Islam southward and it established a permanent peace with Borno, but unlike Kwararafa it did not carry its aggression northward into the Hausa heartland where records of it might have been preserved by Islamic scholars. In that "dead middle" of Borgu's history stands the invasion from Songhay in the early sixteenth century. The destruction of Katunga (capital of the Oyo Empire) by the Nupe and the short period of sojourn by the Alaafin also occurred within this phase. This was also the period of Tsoede the hero-ancestor and great conqueror of the Nupe. Either his forces or refugees from his conquests appear to have swept into Borgu and Oyo. Because of this vacuum in evidence it becomes tempting to believe that the Nupe in the north and Oyo in the south did indeed exert their hegemony over the area which obliterated the Borgu kings or reduced them to sub-chiefs. The silence of local tradition and the complete obliteration of the Borgu king list clearly suggests a period of foreign domination. However as these imperial structures declined, the Wasangari (descendants of Kisra) re-established the Borgu monarchs in

⁵⁶ Webster, "Kwararafa"

the eighteenth century. To these new founders, the regnal lists attest. They represent the "second coming" of Kisra.

In Kwararafa it has been suggested that new dynasties took over in c.1790 and before that less surely to c.1610. While the new rulers assumed power and sought to link themselves to the prestigious origins of the state, they lost the narrative traditions of those dynasties before them. For example the ruler who took power in c.1610 was called both the first king of Kwararafa as well as the last. Yet again he was called the fortieth king of Kwararafa.⁵⁷ Employing the average reign length for the Hausa (thirteen years), forty kings back places the foundation around 1000.⁵⁸ There is a similar tradition in Borgu where it is claimed that the first king in the available royal genealogy of Illo had been preceded by 294 un-named rulers.⁵⁹ Even at a ridiculous low average of five years per reign, the kingdom would have been founded before 300 A.D. One can only imagine that this figure of 294 had been invented by Muslims who realized the problem of a monarchy whose regnal list stretched back only to the eighteenth century while its origins purported to involve the Prophet in the seventh century.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. The thirteen year average reign length for the Hausa states has been calculated by D.H. Jones, "Problems of African Chronology", JAH, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1970, pp, 161-176.

⁵⁹ Hogben and Kirk- Greene, The Emirates of Northern Nigeria, p. 577-579.

Confusion becomes compounded because another source for Illo claims 372 rulers from Kisra to the first name on the regnal list which dates to c.1805.⁶⁰ The Bussa tradition, according to Temple, counts 597 kings from Kisra to their third king, Kiseru Brodi (c.1719-1730).⁶¹ Even more suspiciously the first king of Bussa is recorded as Kitoro Fulani (c.1675-1707). The Fulani have never been associated with Kisra, and therefore one could suggest an imperial rule. The confusion suggests that the Kisra royal house had been overthrown possibly for an extended period of time or at least long enough to wipe out the oral record and c.1675 there were efforts to re-establish kingship. The first effort was led by Kitoro, a Fulani (c.1675-1707) followed by his son Kizaga (c.1707-1719). (See Bussa Regnal Chart). Thereafter Kiseru Brodi of the Wasangari (Kisra's descendants) seized the throne as the new Kisra line, reviving the Kisra legend of origin but unable to revive the chronicle of the kings from c.1000 to 1675. A similar development does not occur in Illo until c.1805. Based on the example of Kwararafa, where new royal houses took power c.1610 and 1790, one might assume that new dynasties arose between c.1675 and 1805 in Borgu. In both, the traditions had been totally lost about the kings who ruled between c.1000 and the late seventeenth century. In Borgu the lost middle of its history is not enlightened by Muslim

⁶⁰ SNP/17/28/234, "Illo Independent District", NAK.

⁶¹ Temple, Notes on the Tribes, pp. 495-496.

chronicles but by traditions from Songhay, Nupe and Oyo and occasionally confirmed by fragments of internal evidence.

Northern Borgu does not possess the normal clan organisation but rather huge groupings - often only three - one of which claims to be Wasangari or descendants of the Kisra immigrants. The Ba-Karabonde (head of the pre-existing community) nevertheless qualified for certain courtesies because he once had been regarded as "royal." Thus changes of dynasty meant merely that different families from within that large grouping took over authority. But all were Wasangari. The conflicting traditions as to which of the states possessed seniority might derive from the confusion created when one family took over in Bussa, yet others in Nikki or Kaiama. We now turn to these conflicting traditions.

The Bussa version of the Kisra legend suggests that the city was the oldest establishment of the three kingdoms from where the institution of kingship emerged. Therefore it exercised political dominance over the others. Two arguments have been advanced for the claim. First, that the city was founded by the eldest son of Kisra, who thereafter distributed land to his brothers. It should be understood that as soon as the Kisra group arrived in Borgu, it assumed political leadership over the autochthonous populations. As well it took over the power to allocate land from the lineage heads such as the Ba-Karabonde. Woru, the oldest son, supposedly procured a charm attached to a boa constrictor [python] which led the

brothers to their different places of settlement.⁶² For this reason, it became customary for the king of Illo (the youngest son) to send annual presents to the Kibe of Bussa, not as a mark of vassalage but as an acknowledgment of seniority in kinship affiliation. In addition, the king of Illo received his investiture from the Kibe of Bussa.⁶³ Secondly, Bussa has been the home of Kisra's relics which became objects of veneration. Some of these objects included Kisra drums (formerly three, now two), a brass quiver, a brass spear, metallic gongs, javelins and swords.⁶⁴ Bussa's seniority has been validated by the number of trumpets it preserves. It held fourteen, Nikki possessed twelve while Illo had eight.

The presence of Kisra's relics in other places has provided manifest linkages and helps to authenticate the veracity of the legend in the Western Sudan. Kisra's regalia became sacred and properly treasured objects in the same way Tsoede's sword and stirrups were held with respect by the people of Gbagede.⁶⁵ The relics have amply demonstrated that

⁶² It should be noted that hero-ancestor in Daura, Songhay and Borgu had to deal with snakes seemingly symbols of authority in the pre-existing societies. In Daura and Songhay the snakes were killed suggesting violence as the new order took power. In Borgu, the snake appears to co-operate with the Kisrans.

⁶³ BHT. No. 133; DOB/BOU/17, "Bussa Territory", NAK.

⁶⁴ Other materials are contained in File EOB/COU/2/1 "Kisra Museum", Bussa.

⁶⁵ Hogben and Kirk-Greene, The Emirates of Northern Nigeria, p. 263.

Kisra and his followers were conquering invaders. For example the Womo -- chief of Karissen (in Zuru division) -- kept a sword and spears while the Aku Uka emperor of the Kwararafa held the custody of a sword and a spear and the Kibe (King) of Bussa retained two Gangan drums.⁶⁶ Besides, some spears, the Ladabu (oath taking instrument) and the Sundagoro (curse stick) are still in the custody of the present Emir of Borgu at Bussa.⁶⁷ Of all the vestiges, the Kakaki -- trumpet -- represented the most important paraphernalia of office in the Borgu kingdoms. Without it, the ruler was not recognised as legitimate in the Kisra line. The trumpets must have been duplicated because as each kingdom expanded and chiefdoms multiplied, the number of trumpets increased. Undeniably the relics symbolized a strong affiliation with Kisra. All of the southern satellite chiefdoms founded in the eighteenth century by princes from Nikki and therefore Kisran descendants or Wasangari possess trumpets, except the chiefdom of Kenu founded by a Nikki slave or commoner.

Certain traditions have emerged countering the authenticity of the king of Bussa's claim to seniority and

⁶⁶ Mathews, "The Kisra Legend", pp. 146-147. For a full description of these materials and accompanying veneration, consult SNP/K/6 "History of Bussa", NAK; D.F. Heath, "Bussa Regalia", Man, Vol. 111, 1937, pp. 77-80.

⁶⁷ BHT. No. 123. Although in complete disuse, some of these materials are still kept in the Kisra Museum at New Bussa. Through the assistance of Woru Garba - Secretary to the Borgu Traditional Council - the present writer was able to take a photograph of the materials.

even to direct ancestry from Kisra. This is termed the Kaiama version. It states that after crossing the Niger at Illo, Kisra returned to Arabia (probably referring to Kisra's disappearance), leaving his three sons with an elderly follower. The eldest son supposedly "inherited a horse and twelve trumpets and founded Nikki." While the second son established Kouande (in Dahomey), the youngest founded Illo and "the elderly man who tended Kisra's horses became the king of Bussa."⁶⁸ It therefore became obligatory for the king of Nikki (and probably that of Kouande too) to send annually, "certain materials for their father's horses at Bussa."⁶⁹ Carry, a colonial administrative officer in Borgu, recorded a similar tradition, but claimed that the elderly man was either Kisra's prime minister or one of his trusted slaves.⁷⁰ Carry probably obtained his information from Kaiama (a satellite chiefdom founded by a prince or other representative from Nikki).

The Nikki version states that Kisra's prime minister (who had settled at Bussa), sent a message to the lineage heads of the autochthonous settlements of Nikki and Bweru. The lineage heads were hospitable to the messengers, demonstrating their respect to the Wasangari (descendants of Kisra), acknowledging

⁶⁸ BHT. Nos. 205 and 207.

⁶⁹ BHT. Nos. 206 and 211.

⁷⁰ A.J.L. Carry, "Bussa History", in Kirk-Greene, Gazetteers, Vol. III, pp. 23-24; BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/24, "Borgu Gazetteers, Historical Notes" by Diggle and Izard, NAK.

their royalty and military strength. Ultimately the lineage heads willingly surrendered their political rights to the Wasangari ruling group. There is a close similarity between this version and that of Bussa of the charm and the python. The charm led the Wasangari to the new settlements and insured that the pre-existing people put no resistance. By some method the oldest son or horse attendant of Kisra at Bussa persuaded the indigenous religious authority -- represented by the snake -- to use its influence to guarantee a welcome for Kisra's men at Nikki and Bweru. This suggests that while the indigenous people might have been acephalous communities, there were linkages among them based on religious institutions. One might be tempted to surmise that the Kisran rulers introduced a political unity to a people who already possessed strong religious linkages.

Henceforth Nikki "paid tribute" to Bussa.⁷¹ Tribute payment, as implied in this tradition, should be interpreted as giving of presents and paying of kinship visits. This describes the relationship more appropriately because Nikki had never been a vassal of Bussa. This tradition suggests that Nikki and Bweru had been in existence prior to the emergence of Kisra. Another variant of the Nikki version acknowledged Sabi, the dynastic founder, as a prince and hunter from Bussa. While away hunting, the father died and the senior slave

⁷¹ BHT. No. 233; Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", p. 137.

became a regent. Sabi was preparing to ascend the throne when his paternal sister, Bion Due, suddenly died at Wenou (south of Nikki). For this reason, Sabi established himself at Nikki and Wenou became a sacred town which a newly installed ruler of Nikki must visit for two days to perform rituals, including shaving of the head, to ensure a peaceful, prosperous and successful reign.⁷² This version recognises Bussa's seniority but denies the sending of gifts. From the above, it has become evident that Bussa occupied a crucial historical and political position in the process of forming the Borgu kingdoms. Based on kinship relationship, it would appear that Nikki probably sent gifts to Bussa, whether directly or indirectly. Nevertheless, the political sovereignty of each remained irrefutable.

It is difficult however to evaluate the level of Bussa's political pre-eminence over the other kingdoms, especially Nikki. During his exploration in Borgu, Clapperton mentioned that the king of Bussa controlled nominally a vast area and the king of Nikki ranked after him.⁷³ The Lander brothers in 1830 also observed that Bussa's leadership was nominal. They

⁷² BHT. No. 233, Bonni Mohammad, (72). Surely this tradition hides more than it reveals. Under patriarchal values, a man does not give his kingdom because his sister dies, nor does he and all his descendants for centuries perform rituals at her grave. The incident either suggests some form of matrilinealism or that Bion Due had been a prominent leader in the pre-existing population whose death opened up political opportunities. Or was she an opponent who had resisted the charm of the python?

⁷³ Clapperton, Journal, p. 88.

stated that:

Niki [Nikki] pays a small tribute to the king of Bousa [Bussa] as an acknowledgment of his superiority; Wowow [Wawa] does the same...[the tribute payment] was originally conferred voluntarily, and it has been continued by courtesy to the present time, though Niki [Nikki] and Wowow [Wawa] begin to be different about the matter.⁷⁴

Clearly the king of Bussa's paramountcy was not real despite the attribute "The Lord of Borgu" which had been accorded him by European travellers and some colonial officers.⁷⁵ If any paramountcy was accorded the king of Bussa, it was probably during the colonial period, purposely to meet the exigences of the indirect rule system in Borgu. It could be argued that in the pre-colonial times, Bussa enjoyed a short period of imperial pre-eminence over a restricted territory, while Nikki became militarily the most powerful of the kingdoms. Bussa has been regarded as the religious centre for the three kingdoms since Kisra supposedly settled there before his descendants extended their domination over all other pre-existing communities. Emphasizing this view, Idris argued that "every successive king of Bussa seems to have inherited this somewhat sacerdotal prestige of 'Kisra,' which was the basis for the influence and the nominal respect accorded to Bussa rulers."⁷⁶ Accordingly, the Kibe of Bussa has been referred to as the

⁷⁴ Lander, Journal of an Expedition, Vol. 1, pp. 134-135.

⁷⁵ See Crowder, Revolt in Bussa, pp. 29-31.

⁷⁶ Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", p. 133.

spiritual king for all Borgu while the Sinaboko of Nikki has been designated the political and military leader.⁷⁷

An explanation for this development has been offered in local tradition. It states that Kisra distributed functions and powers to his children as part of their heritage before his demise at Koko. To Woru (Bussa) he bequeathed magical powers, to Sabi (Nikki) his weapons and to Bio (Illo) his money.⁷⁸ This interpretation has a parallel in the Bayajjida legend where functions were supposedly distributed to the children.⁷⁹ It also draws close to the Biblical story of the blessing of Jacob and Esau by Isaac.⁸⁰ Clearly the tradition is merely an interpolation to account for the diversity of power among the Borgu kingdoms. The explanation might have emanated from the fact that Bussa housed Jekanna, the most popular shrine in Borgu, the one with the charm of the python. The British colonial officers acknowledged the variance in power by remarking that "from the most ancient times a primacy, mainly religious in its nature, has been accorded him [king of Bussa]." They further added that "it would be no exaggeration to say that at least half of the total population of the [Borgu] Division looks rather to Nikki and the West

⁷⁷ BHT. Nos. 17 and 130. Compare the sacerdotal prestige of Ife with the military superiority of Oyo.

⁷⁸ BHT. No. 132, Woru Alhasan, (58), New Bussa.

⁷⁹ Hassan and Na'ibi, A Chronicle, p. 3.

⁸⁰ See Holy Bible, Genesis 27:1-40.

than to Kaiama or Bussa and the East."⁸¹ The establishment of the numerous chiefdoms with loose association to the major kingdoms forms the subject matter of a later chapter.

The coalescence of the pre-existing traditional belief system and the ones introduced by Kisra significantly inhibited Islamic progress in terms of conversion in Borgu. In the pre-Kisra era, ancestor reverence, totemic observances and several shrines formed the basis of the traditional religion of the autochthonous population. In the conglomeration of communities along the Niger, in Bussa territory, there were about 360 shrines.⁸² These included Jekanna, Kilashi, Dayi, and Gbesa to mention a few. This could have been based upon what operated in Mecca where 360 shrines were said to have surrounded the Ka'aba (Black Stone). On arrival, Kisra supposedly introduced two major and six minor shrines. The major ones were Aganakunbegun (chief deity) and Zaka (god of storms and winds), while the minor ones included Miyidi, Gombara, Gbandi, Gbendidora, Gberadi and Gbera.⁸³ An oral source claims that only five shrines were introduced by Kisra.

⁸¹ ILORINPROF/3185, "Bussa Emirate Notebook", NAK. Consult CSO/26/03542 "Annual Report 1921 Kontagora Province", NAI.

⁸² BHT. No. 132. It is also recorded in Wara, "Some Aspects". p. 7.

⁸³ SNP/K/6/1935, "History of Bussa"; BORGDIST/DOS/HIS/37, "Borgu History, Ethnology, Anthropology, Extracts from various sources", NAK.

These were -- Lata, Manata, Uzzah, Safa and Maruwa.⁸⁴ It has also been mentioned that Kisra and his followers worshipped Baala which in the Batonu language, means "the lord" or "the head of all gods."⁸⁵ Nowadays the shrine is known as

⁸⁴ BHT. No. 142. The five deities noted by the informant in Bussa, a Qur'anic scholar, refer to the only pre-Islamic gods and goddesses in Mecca and noted in the Qur'an. The significance of this was unknown to the writer when in the field. In Mecca, al-Lat, al-'Uzza, and Manat, "the daughters of Allah" were a triad of deities to the Sun, Time and Venus which the Prophet initially had been inclined to accept as intermediaries through which the faithful might approach Allah, something like the saints in Christianity. Later the Prophet's inspiration for this was called the "Satanic verses" because they were given to him by Satan disguised as the angel Gabriel. Thus the Satanic verses were removed from the Qur'an by the Prophet and replaced with Sura 53, 19-23. The Pagan armies carried the images of Uzza and Lata into battle against the Muslims. Safa and Marwa (Maruwa) were small hills within the holy area of Mecca upon which pagan shrines stood. Thus an Islamic scholar of Bussa has presumably equated the shrines brought by Kisra to those noted in the Qur'an. The six shrines noted earlier which have no Qur'anic equivalent, are most likely to have been more authentic. See P.M. Holt, "Pre-Islamic Arabia" in P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis (eds.), The Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 3-29; "Mohammad" in Holt et al, The Cambridge, pp. 37-38; TH. Noldeke, "Arabs (Ancient)" in James Hastings, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 1, T&T Clark, London, First Impression 1908, Second Impression 1925, pp. 660-661 and Montgomery Watt, Mohammad at Mecca, Clarendon Press, London, First Published 1953, Reprinted 1965, pp. 101-109.

⁸⁵ The informant of BHT. No. 141 added that Kisra was a worshipper of fire. It seems unlikely that this information came from the Qur'an. It would support the idea of Kisra as having been influenced by Zoroastrianism in whose temples burned eternal flames symbol of all things good and the righteous god Mazda. This fits into the idea that "Kisra" became a general name for the followers -soldiers of the Persian king Chosroes II (the Greek form) or Khusru II (the Persian) A.D. 590-628 who conquered Egypt but was driven out by the Byzantines. Refugees fled into Nubia. The practice of sacrificing black bulls, common to the Persians, as well as in Borgu and Kwararafa (both with Kisran traditions) supports the connection with Khusru.

Shinagura -- god of lightening.⁸⁶ The Bamaso (Badarburde) served as the chief priest for Jekanna and functioned as the coordinator of the other shrines. It could be surmised that this co-ordination spread as far as Wenou (south of Nikki) in the pre-Kisran era.

With this religious background, Islam certainly could not make any appreciable progress in Borgu. For several centuries, Borgu remained uninfluenced by Islam. Until the religious irruptions which culminated in the Sokoto jihad of the early nineteenth century, the Habe rulers of Hausaland and their indigenous subjects remained substantially traditional

In the devastations of the eleventh century, Napata or Nupeta (Note Nupe also with a Kisra tradition), was overthrown by Muslim Egyptians. The dating of Kisra in West Africa around 1000 A.D. would suggest that this was the Pagan-Muslim conflict out of which the Kisra migration occurred. It has been easy enough for the chroniclers of Borgu, ably assisted by Islamic scholars in their midst to enhance their status by pushing this conflict with Islam back to the initial struggles of the Prophet with the Pagans of Mecca. The Nubian connection can also be supported by their custom of sacrificing black bulls and the remnants and hints of Christianity and Judaism in the Kisra tradition. The two best sources on this which come to divergent conclusions and differ again from the one proposed here are Theodore Papadopoulos, Africanobyzantina: Byzantine Influence on Negro Sudanese Cultures, Memoirs of the Academy of Athens, 1966 and a review of this book by Daniel F. McCall, "Kisra, Chosroes and Christ", A book Review, AHS, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 255-277.

⁸⁶ BHT. No. 90. Here the informant is combining his Qur'anic knowledge of Baal with the Batonu Shinagura. In Arabic, not the Batonu language "baal" means "lord". It is interesting that Muslim scholars in Borgu seem anxious to link the great hero-ancestor Kisra with the enemies of the Prophet, to support rather than challenge or minimize the Pagan tradition. Baala in Borgu was similar to Aku Maga in Kwararafa, which was revered as the lord of all gods or royal ancestor.

worshippers. The traditional belief system served as a manifest linkage between Borgu and Hausaland. Islam penetrated Borno in the eleventh century and Kano in the fourteenth century through the Wangara Muslim group. But in Borgu, Islam was irrelevant because significant conversion of the aboriginal people (who constituted the majority of the population) did not occur. In Kano, Katsina and Borgu, Islam remained essentially the religion of the Wangara merchants. As a stronghold of traditional religion, Borgu remained unaffected even by the nineteenth century Fulani jihads.

It is often argued that people associate with great movements as well as identify with charismatic and historical figures to share in their reputation. Mathews followed this line of argumentation while analyzing the Kisra legend. He argued that:

There are stories of relationship between Kisra and Mahomet [Mohammad], but 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.⁸⁷

Similarly, Jeffreys contends that the Kisra legend has been employed as a means of "appropriation by peoples who wish to shine by reflected glory..."⁸⁸ This argument would not be valid in Borgu because the majority of the people did not

⁸⁷ Mathews, "The Kisra Legend", p. 145.

⁸⁸ M.D.W. Jeffreys, "The Origins of the Benin Bronzes" African Affairs, 1951, pp. 87-91.

narrate the Kisra legend in order to associate with Islam's accomplishment in the Western Sudan. Indeed they remained anti-Islamic to the core and the Kisra legend reinforced this attitude.

The ineffectiveness of Islamic propagation in the early period of Borgu history has been explained in a tradition collected at Bussa. It emphasizes the arrival of Islam with or shortly after Kisra through the Bamarubere. It also maintains that the Bamarubere were emissaries of Prophet Mohammad who were sent to convert Kisra and his followers. When they could not accomplish their mission, a substantial number of the Bamarubere returned to the Middle East.⁸⁹ Those who initially accepted Islam were forced to relapse to traditional worship in face of severe opposition, particularly marriage prohibitions. Certainly, the Bamarubere Muslims did not make any noticeable impact on the indigenous traditional worshippers. Mention should also be made of the Dandawa Muslim group found in widely distributed parts of Borgu, especially in Nikki, Kaiama, Illo and Gbodebere in Ilesha district. They migrated from either Timbuktu or the Middle East but "did not belong to the Kisra group."⁹⁰ Their religious impact in terms of converts was not felt because they did not inter-marry with

⁸⁹ BHT. No. 141.

⁹⁰ BHT. No. 90. The informant is a Muslim leader and teacher at Kenu.

the indigenous people.⁹¹ Although Islam allowed male believers to marry Pagan women and produce children who would be Muslims, this did not yield any remarkable result because these non-Muslims prohibited marriage with Muslims. The descendants of the Dandawa are now known as Taruwere headed by the Ba-kpakpe.⁹² In the sixteenth century, a group of Islamic missionaries and teachers (not the Wangara) were reportedly sent by Askia Mohammad of the Songhay Empire to make converts in Borgu.⁹³ They failed. Askia, a fervent Islamizer, has smashed the Borgu armies c.1505, probably overthrew the Kisran rulers and therefore sent in missionaries to convert the people. The episode gives a slender hint of Songhay hegemony over Borgu. Shortly both Nupe possibly under Tsoede (c.1537) and the Oyo occupied the country. It should be noted that between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nothing significant was recorded about the Islamization of the Borgu people. Possibly it was Nupe and Oyo which kept the Muslims and Songhay influence under strict control. Soon the Songhay

⁹¹ BHT. Nos. 142 and 145. The true Dandawa could be found in the region west of Sokoto but the Borgu Dandawa were part of the Kisra migration. See DOB/ASR/33, "Notes on the Dandawa", NAK.

⁹² Various forms of this word "Akpa" or "Katakpa" refer in Kwararafa to Pagan Hausa or Abakwariga. Strangely enough, it is linked up with the Muslims in Borgu. For the Akpa in the foundation of the Aro chiefdom see Apollos Nwauwa, "Integrating Arochukwu into the Regional Chronological Structure", History in Africa, Vo. 18, 1991, pp. 297-310. The title of the Dandawa in Borgu thus suggests that initially they had not been Muslim.

⁹³ Ibid... SNP/17/K 2101, "Anthropological", NAK.

Empire began its destruction by the Moroccans. Hence its traders and missionaries could not expect imperial military support. Attempts to Islamize Borgu by the Muslim Fulani from Hausaland in the nineteenth century had been similarly frustrated.⁹⁴ Borgu remained essentially anti-Islamic. The Wangara, Hausa and Nupe Muslims (after the success of the jihadists in Bida) and merchants who had travelled or settled along the well patronized trade routes which passed from Hausaland through Bussa, Wawa and Kaiama to Gonja did not succeed in Islamizing the indigenous people of Borgu. Definitely, Islam remained a religion of the foreigners and itinerant merchants. Presumably because of the hostility of Borgu people to Islam, Sultan Bello described them as "devils and of stubborn nature."⁹⁵ Thus the "stubbornness" of Borgu people was reflected in their religious as well as military encounters. In both aspects, Borgu people did not compromise.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, significant traces of Islamization could be found among the ruling houses and commoners of Borgu, especially in Illo and part of Bussa territory. While much of the Islamic influence in Borgu had emanated from the Hausa states, especially Sokoto, ironically the Imams (Muslim leaders who led Friday prayers) at Bussa had

⁹⁴ See The Encyclopaedia Britannica, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Vol. IV, 1910, pp. 250-251.

⁹⁵ J.C. Anene, "The Eclipse of the Borgawa", p. 214, quoted from Bello, Infanku'l Maisuri.

been chosen from among the Nupe.⁹⁰ This is a reflection that immigrant groups converted earlier than the indigenous population. It was possible that some of the people had been Islamized before migrating to Borgu. However, some clan traditions among the Batonu-speaking group clearly indicate that there was no contact with Islam before they migrated into Nigerian Borgu. Beginning from 1837, after the Ilorin War which the Yoruba-Borgu allied forces lost to the Fulani jihadists, glimpses of Islam from Yorubaland could be found in the southern towns of Borgu. Whether from the Songhay Empire or the Hausaland or even from the Nupe kingdom, all the alien Muslims have been totally acculturated and assimilated into the Borgu society and many reverted back to traditional beliefs. They had been Borgu-ized. Undoubtedly the Borgu people remained anti-Islamic in beliefs and practices for many centuries, the religion failing to spread until the twentieth century.

The Kisra legend has been significant in Borgu history because of the emergence of an ethnic consciousness. Kisra became an acceptable culture hero and political leader of Borgu. His influence brought about dramatic and rapid changes in terms of recognition as a political entity. There was the unification of the various pre-existing segmentary communities thereby forming what was almost synonymous to an ethnic identity centred on the three kingdoms: Illo, Bussa and Nikki.

⁹⁰ BHT. No. 135.

Although Borgu did not possess a single tradition of origin and did not form a single polity, it maintained a single identification in Kisra. The Kisra group consolidated itself by establishing political hegemony through the formation of three major dynasties. Apparently the pre-existing segmentation pattern assumed a new configuration in the sense that the kingdoms were politically autonomous. The segmentation of the Borgu society became more pronounced as from the eighteenth century when chiefdoms were established, each independent of the mother-kingdom. Despite this segmentation pattern, a defensive mechanism was formed which did not allow external invaders to subjugate Borgu. In view of the seriousness of threats and military challenges, the kingdoms became aware of the necessity to co-operate and to form a strong alliance of defense. Indeed Borgu required this defensive network, considering the militarily powerful entities which encircled it. The alliance was more effective against the Hausa to the north and Songhay to the west than against the Oyo-Yoruba to the south and Nupe to the east, the main reason being that both Oyo and Nupe also adopted the traditional belief system and displayed anti-Islamic attitudes as Borgu did, until the jihad in the nineteenth century. Furthermore and powerfully important, the people of Borgu looked upon the Nupe and Yoruba of the Oyo Empire as Kisrans like themselves as opposed to the feared, hated and despised Muslims. In the jihad of the nineteenth century when through

force and persuasion the Nupe and Oyo Yoruba had been converted to Islam, Borgu remained isolated and an outlier of Paganism as Muslims flooded around them on three sides.

It would appear that the original Kisra dynasties had survived until the rise of Nupe and Oyo possibly shortly after 1500. Until that time the Kisra tradition and the charter it laid down, had given the kingdoms a coherent model of who was superior and who performed what services. It further provided an ideological basis for opposition to Islamic regimes. However it did not create the same unity in facing religiously traditional states such as Nupe and Oyo. There is strong evidence that both of these powers had established a territorial base on Borgu soil and they might have cowed the major centres especially Illo and Bussa into some kind of tributary subservience. Whatever the reasons, the dynasties of the original Kisra royal houses seem to have disappeared, therefore creating a vacuum in Borgu history. The missing gap, the "dead middle," between Kisra and the known rulers provides a suitable basis for this argument. As noted earlier, one tradition suggests Nikki had pre-existed the Kisra leaders. This tradition could relate to what might be termed the new Kisra ruling houses which became established in the eighteenth century, following the decline of Nupe and Oyo. Within these new dynasties, confusion beset the Kisra charter tradition possibly because the order of their re-emergence did not necessarily follow that which characterized the first

founding, centuries before. Thus certain Kisra traditions might relate to the first dynasties about 1000 and others to the second founding in the 1700's. In this respect, Bussa tradition seems to represent the earlier period while the Kaiama version refers to the latter era. This suggestion appears plausible in consideration of the confusion regarding the three sons or the slave prime minister or the hunter prince of Bussa. All of these traditions might be accurate but possibly represent events 700 years apart.⁹⁷

To a certain extent, the Borgu situation compared with Yorubaland where there were branches of a dynasty from Ile-Ife but all the daughter kingdoms continually competed for supremacy. The Ebi (kinship) commonwealth which appears to have produced inter-Yoruba peace for more than 300 years ultimately broke down when Oyo rose to become a military power much greater than Ife or any of the other kingdoms. Although warfare against Ile-Ife was conventionally prohibited, this was not respected after the Ebi system collapsed. Within the Borgu system, Bussa seems to have played the role of Ile-Ife and Nikki that of Oyo. It became difficult for large powerful kingdoms such as Oyo and Nikki to recognise even the sacerdotal supremacy of Ile-Ife and Bussa, all the more so in the latter case if Bussa became subject in any manner to Nupe while Nikki did not. The Nupe kingdom did not become a danger

⁹⁷ Note the similarity with Kwararafa where the capital moved six times over 800 years each associated with the fall of the kingdom.

to Oyo until late in the sixteenth century when it sacked Katunga.

Given this triumph of Nupe arms so far from home, it seems unbelievable that Bussa and Illo, so close at hand, did not feel the effects of that imperial power. Or could there have been a deliberate suppression of this fact in Bussa tradition? The religious role of the Nupe at Bussa in modern times, perhaps suggests a reminiscence of its erstwhile political pre-eminence. The Ebi or kinship commonwealth also pervaded the Hausa states but there too, while the sacerdotal mother state of Daura declined in power, the military and economic domination passed to Kano and Katsina. Thus among the Hausa, Yoruba and Borgu, the mother states which possibly began as the most powerful, ultimately declined in relation to one of the daughter states. This separation of sacerdotal authority from that of military and economic power caused inter-family-kingdom frictions. Initially at least one would assume that political and religious authority were united in the mother state. When authority and power became separated, friction ensued. Among the Hausa, consensus remained regarding the founding charter possibly because of the tradition of literacy. Among both the Yoruba and Borgu the most powerful state appears to have sought adjustments to the Oduduwa and Kisra charters respectively to make them more compatible to the power status of a later age.

This chapter has critically examined the enigma of Kisra

in Borgu as from c.1000 A.D. It has also considered the possible subsequent political transformations which occurred. The welding together of the heterogeneous cultural and linguistic communities through the formation of kingdoms became an enduring legacy. A defined identity emerged. The indigenous populations also claimed a sense of belonging to the new political formation centred on Kisra and his progeny. Historical awareness became strong within the multi-ethnic society. Kisra became an integrative force and an acceptable symbolic leader among the aboriginal as well as immigrant groups. Particularly in southern Nigerian Borgu, the Nikki princes became the strongest flag bearers of the Kisra legend. Whatever interpretation one might give to the legend, it seems logical to argue that Kisra represented a new political and socio-cultural order in Borgu. The Kisra legend has for centuries served as a powerful historical link to other states in the Western Sudan, such as the Hausa and Songhay, Borno, Nupe, Kwararafa and the Yoruba. However, as many of those states turned to greater devotion to Islam and sought to lower the profile of Kisra in their traditions because of his outstanding opposition to the faith, these links declined. They did permit peaceful relations with Borno and the Yoruba and more distantly to Kwararafa. Borgu maintained until colonialism, the strong anti-Muslim legacy of Kisra, the black king. Within Borgu, however, although frayed and distorted, the legend did promote a degree of unity, preventing the

inter-state wars which plagued the Hausa and Yoruba.

Having surveyed all of the evidence, it seems logical to assume that the Songhay Empire overthrew the Kisra dynasties or Wasangari rulers c.1500-1505. The traditions of these dynasties have been lost and the defeat denied, partly at least, because it severely challenges the invincibility of Borgu warriors so dear to the heart of popular tradition. Possibly the defeat accelerated the influx of Wangara merchants which had begun in the previous century. For reasons unclear Songhay did not follow up its victory by instituting an administration. Rather a substantial group of the Songhay armies withdrew, leaving behind a power vacuum which the Wasangari (descendants of Kisra) were unable to fill. Instead both Oyo and Nupe took over. This was the period of the great hero-ancestor, warrior and expansionist leader Tsoede of the Nupe (c.1537-1567). It was probably Tsoede who took over northern Borgu and destroyed Katunga, the capital of the Oyo Empire, while the Yoruba extended their hegemony over southern Borgu and ultimately over some Nupe possessions in that country until c.1790 when the Nupe threw off the ascendancy of Oyo. One must therefore challenge Grimwood, a British colonial officer who wrote, "No account need be taken of the Yoruba and Nupe settlements which are said to have existed in ancient times."⁹⁸ Therefore in reconstructing Borgu history, one must indeed take such traditions into account. Numerous accounts of

⁹⁸ DOB/HIS/70 "District Notebooks", NAK.

Nupe and Yoruba settlements will appear in the following chapter. They cannot be ignored.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PEOPLE: COMPLEXITY OF ORIGINS

The history of Borgu presents obvious complications, especially in the identification of the early inhabitants. Historians have avoided discussing early settlements because of the difficulties involved. In the available literature on Borgu, there is the impression that human life of any significance commenced in the region only with the advent of Kisra. Since the Kisra migration from the east has been dated as early as fourteen centuries ago by the chief of Illo,¹ (making Kisra a contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad) to as late as c.1480 by C.K. Meek,² the migration is hardly a reliable chronological marker. However, since Kisra has been associated with the establishment of the dynastic tradition among the Hausa, Yoruba and Kwararafa, all three of those would place the migration slightly before or after 1000 A.D. as discussed in the previous chapter. For now that will be accepted as the most logical date. Kisra is not the subject of this chapter, but he becomes important because all peoples who claim to be indigenous also argue that they lived in the land before he arrived, that he brought the state system or

¹ 28234, "Illo Independent District, Sokoto Province", NAK.

² Meek, The Northern Tribes, pp. 71-72.

dynastic tradition to Borgu and, as Talbot argues, to the Nupe as well.³ Hence, as far as possible, this chapter will confine itself to discussions of peoples who supposedly occupied Nigerian Borgu between c.1000 A.D. and c.1790 when the Kisan line of rulers revived.

Studies in the prehistory of West Africa have confirmed human existence in the Pleistocene period.⁴ In Nigeria, archaeological excavations have been carried out in several places such as the Nok region, Igbo Ukwu, Iwo Eleru and Ile-Ife, where discoveries of human skeletons, pottery, stone and pebble materials provide overwhelming evidence of early human habitation.⁵ More specifically, in the sub-region which now constitutes Nigerian Borgu, archaeological evidence corroborates the antiquity of human habitation, particularly centring along the littoral of the River Niger. The radio carbon dates obtained for the artifacts indicated that they

³ P. Amaury Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of their History, Ethnology and Languages with an abstract of the 1921 Census, Vol. 1, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., London, First Edition 1926, New Impression, 1969, p. 278.

⁴ Thurstan Shaw, "The Prehistory of West Africa", in Ajayi and Crowder, (eds.), History of West Africa, Vol. 1, p. 37.

⁵ Thurstan Shaw, Nigeria: Its Archaeology and Early History, Thames and Hudson, London, 1978, p. 91; Various articles mention this aspect in Thurstan Shaw, (ed.), Lectures on Nigerian Prehistory and Archaeology, University of Ibadan Press, Ibadan, 1969. See also R.C. Soper, "The Stone Age in Northern Nigeria", JHSN, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1965, pp. 175-194.

were used between about 100-700 A.D.⁶ This evidence indicates that certain areas of Borgu had accommodated early settlers with a developed material culture and a noticeable level of iron technology prior to the arrival of Kisra. Migrations and relationships amongst the linguistic groups in Borgu and its immediate neighbours similarly suggest that Borgu people have inhabited their present location for many centuries.⁷ Oral traditions cross-checked with other ancillary sources clearly indicate the existence of specific early settlements and inhabitants. These settlements were characterized by ethnic,

⁶ The places excavated included Kabigera, Kagogi and Old Bussa. While Kabigera is no longer existing, Kagogi has been resettled near New Bussa following the construction of the Niger Hydro-electric Dam in 1968. Following changes in site, probably because of inundation by water, three "Bussas" can now be referred to: the Old Bussa, Bussa and New Bussa in that order of establishment. All sites display elements of urbanization. Among the other recovered objects were an iron staff in a shrine (at Kabigera), beads, rings, arrow and spear heads, axes and knives. See Breternitz, "Rescue Archaeology", pp. 91-151; A.J. Priddy, "RS63/32, An Iron Age Site near Yelwa, Sokoto Province: Preliminary Report", WAAN, No. 12, 1990, pp. 20-32; A.J. Priddy, "Kagoge, A Settlement near Bussa, Ilorin Province: Preliminary Report", WAAN, No. 12, 1970, pp. 33-42; William D. Wade, "The Skeletal Biology of Human Remains from Sites in the Lake Kainji Area of Nigeria", WAJA, No. 1, 1977, pp. 61-85.

⁷ For instance the Bariba language (spoken in Nikki, Kandi, Parakou up to Ilesha, Okuta and Yashikera) is closely similar in structure to Gurma and the Senufo group of languages in the Ivory Coast and Sudan. The speakers of these languages probably have close historical connection before their separation which occurred prior to Kisra's emergence in Borgu. When the separation happened has not been dated. Welmers, "Notes on the Structure of Bariba", pp. 82-103. See also Robert G. Armstrong, "The Use of Linguistic and Ethnographic Data in the Study of Idoma and Yoruba History", in J. Vansina et al, (eds.), The Historian in Tropical Africa, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, pp. 339-354.

cultural and linguistic differentiation. In addition, the traditions suggest the political, religious and occupational patterns of the settlements. All other sources fall short in supplying this significant information. Thus, following the dearth of written documents for this period of Borgu history, the reconstruction relies heavily on orally-transmitted evidence, linguistic studies, archaeology and written published material which has its focus elsewhere but occasionally speculates on Borgu.

Three theories will be discussed which can neither be corroborated nor entirely dismissed by any evidence derived from within Borgu. The first is by Lady Lugard in Tropical Dependency, involving the dwarf theory which had been first postulated by Abdurraham Es-Sadi, a Sudanic Islamic scholar. The theory alludes to the presence of certain black dwarfs who inhabited scattered spots along the River Niger, especially in Songhay. Accordingly Lady Lugard argued that the dwarfs who "inhabited the vicinity of Gao, may have lived for a time in Borgu."⁸ This event has been located in undated antiquity. In another account, it has been suggested that the dwarf families who populated Teshira in Dahomey probably constituted "the last remnants of a dying race."⁹ H.J. Fisher mentioned that

⁸ Lady Lugard, Tropical Dependency, p. 157ff. The argument is found in Es-Sadi, Tarikh es-Sudan, written in the seventeenth century and mentioned in H.B. Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer, p. 141.

⁹ Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer, p. 141.

five dwarfs were among the precious gifts which also included 100 slaves, sent to Tripoli by Borno as late as the eighteenth century.¹⁰

Dwarfing may and did occur in all populations and racial groups and their rarity might explain why during the slave trade they became precious additions in households of the wealthy. The reference to a "dying race" suggests pygmy peoples, the closest being reported in the equatorial forests of the Cameroon. They might have been the source of those secured by Borno from the southern slave routes. Pygmy groups -- called the Twa or Batwa -- in east and central Africa have never survived once their forested habitat has been invaded and destroyed by agriculturalists.¹¹ It might be assumed that oral chronicles in Borgu would have recalled the unusual phenomenon of men of small stature. They do not. However, since the indigenous people recall little about their own early history, it becomes hardly surprising they do not recall others, especially when small stature was believed to be less than desirable. In Malawi, where traditions of Batwa in the

¹⁰ See H.J. Fisher, "The Central Sahara and Sudan", p. 87.

¹¹ The Twa belong to the pygmy group who inhabited scattered parts of equatorial Africa. Although of mixed ancestry, they probably originally descended from the people who inhabited the tropical rain forest, living in the region around Lake Kivu, in Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi. With specialization in pottery, the Twa had economic symbiotic relations with the pastoral Tutsi and agricultural Hutu. See The Encyclopaedia Americana, Vol. 12, The International Edition, Americana Corporation, Danbury, 1980, p. 75 and Jean Hiernaux, The People of Africa, Wiednefeld and Nicolson, London, 1974, pp. 113-125.

early nineteenth century exist, few traditions survive, and informants rarely know and even more rarely acknowledge a Batwa ancestor. That information about the pygmies in Malawi which becomes recorded by the present generation will probably be the last. The coming generation will probably lose all memory of their Batwa ancestors.¹²

Another theory relative to Borgu has been associated with the establishment of the Za dynasty in Songhay. Two Zaghawa brothers supposedly migrated from the north to Songhay where they struggled with and killed an unnamed river-god (probably a snake). This event has been dated to about the tenth century.¹³ After their triumph, they established a dynasty which spread its political suzerainty from the Dendi region to Borgu and Hausaland. An inference from this indicates an early migration of people from Songhay to populate Borgu. In pre-colonial West Africa the traditions of human beings fighting with certain animals, usually a snake, became widespread. One of the purposes of the tradition was to demonstrate the superiority of the immigrant group, possibly in iron

¹² Personal communication from Professor J.B. Webster (February 4, 1993) who supervised honours essay in Malawi 1976-1979 conducted by Tonga students. Only among the Tonga did the Batwa traditions survive.

¹³ There is a striking similarity between this event and that of Abu Yazid (Bayajjida) the serpent-slayer and the putative ancestor of the Hausa people. Both cases provide a clear indication of iron technology and political superiority. See Bovill, The Golden Trade, pp. 220-221. See also M.G. Smith, "The Beginnings of Hausa Society, A.D. 1000-1500" in Vansina, et al, (eds.), The Historian, p. 340.

technology and horses, social organisation and religious beliefs. It accounts as well for the institution of political authority over the autochthonous acephalous populations. In another sense, the tradition might have symbolised not just military conquest, but the destruction of a more ancient set of religious beliefs.

The Zaghawa immigrants were probably ancestor worshippers. Along with Kisra as well as Bayajjida -- the serpent-slayer and putative ancestor of the Hausa -- the Zaghawa brothers might represent a new age, characterized by ritual kings and ancestor reverence, which replaced the snake cults which prior to them had become "almost universal in Africa."¹⁴ For example, the idea that the boa constrictor (python) was found in Borgu and probably venerated has been mentioned in relation to the establishment of the Oyo Empire. An unidentified Borgu king supposedly instructed Oranmiyan, the founder of the Oyo Empire, to follow a boa constrictor and to establish his capital wherever the snake stopped for seven days and then disappeared.¹⁵ Based on this incident, Beier argued that "Old Oyo seems to have been founded on land belonging to the King of Ibariba or Borgu."¹⁶ It further

¹⁴ Weissenborn, "Animal-Worship in Africa", pp. 167-181.

¹⁵ Note the similarity to the charm on the python which led Kisra's sons to their locations as discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁶ See H.U. Beier, "Before Oduduwa", ODU, No. 3, (n.d.), p. 28; R.C.C. Law, "Traditional History", in S.O. Biobaku, (ed.), Sources of Yoruba History, Oxford University Press,

suggests that the snake was associated with Borgu in the tenth century. Many people mistake the python for the boa constrictor. It should be understood that the boa constrictor does not exist in sub-Sahara Africa, except in Madagascar. Both the python and the boa constrictor, however, belong to the same class of non-venomous snakes.¹⁷ The tradition that pythons inhabit certain rocky-hills is narrated at Okuta, Gurai and Kaiama. In many parts of Borgu the python, cobra and certain other animals are still revered as totems, indicating the continuity of religious and social observances from earliest times.¹⁸ Most cults possessed sacred animals, taboo plants or other ritual objects to distinguish and bond their members. When the age of the snake cults passed or the new kings persecuted them into extinction, the taboos continued to persist. Python, cobra and other reptile totems appear to have emerged in this fashion.

Broadly speaking pre-1000 societies in the Central Sudan appear to have been given to snake cults. New intruders such as the Za brothers, Bayajjida or Kisra, who favoured ancestor

London, 1973, p. 28.

¹⁷ There is a wide variety of boas. They are non-venomous, constricting snakes. Found mostly in the tropical regions of America, stretching from Mexico to Argentina, the boa constrictor easily domesticates itself. Sand boas are found in the semi-deserts of Africa. See The Encyclopaedia Americana, International Edition, Vol. 4, Americana Corporation, Danbury, 1980, p. 116.

¹⁸ BHT. Nos. 16, 49, 54 and 212. In the Batonu (Voltaic) language, waa is snake, hence Wabaka for python while cobra is Deba.

reverence out of which divine kingship arose, either challenged and overthrew the snake cults or compromised with them, absorbing them into the new ideology. The Za founders of Songhay and Bayajjida of the Hausa challenged the snakes as the traditions suggest, while Kisra in Borgu compromised with them. Thus the former recounts how the python led the sons of Kisra to the centre of their new states and Oranmiyan to the capital of Oyo, while the Python Cult in the latter remained active into the colonial period. Therefore the snake as evil or as benign became determined by the political manouvering when the new immigrants took over as rulers around 1000 A.D.

In his work on the acephalous Owan people in the derived Savanna but quite to the south-east of Borgu, Wilson Ogbomo argued for a kind of matriarchy associated with plant totems and snake cults prior to 1500.¹⁹ Today the snake cults have disappeared but a remainder of them survives in the large number of python totems common among the people. The change over to patriachalism occurred with the substantial migration of animal totems into the society from Benin, led by the royal leopard. The Benin monarchy -- if not its leopard totem -- derived in turn from Ife, the cradleland of the Yoruba ruling houses. Hence the linkage to Ife and via Kisra to Borgu provide tenuous and much disputed even mythical, connections

¹⁹ The information in this paragraph is obtained from Wilson Ogbomo, "Men and Women: Gender Relations and the History of the Owan Communities, Nigeria c.1320-1900", Ph. D. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1993, Chapter Four.

to the Kisrans of Borgu. Borgu totems are predominantly animal only a very few being plant but the charm and the python leading to a temple authority figure in Wenou strongly suggest a very different kind of society before 1000 than emerged after Kisra.

Early Arab geographers attributed the institution of divine kingship in the Western Sudan to the Zaghawa. Divine kingship seems to have emerged after the age of snake cults which was replaced between 800-1000 A.D. when the very first Muslims appeared. However, it would be centuries before Islamization could be said to have begun. Judging by the commencement of Islamization with Za Kossoi, the thirteenth Zaghawa king, and applying the Hausa average of thirteen years per reign as computed by D.H. Jones,²⁰ the Zaghawa would seem to have arrived in c.840 A.D. They probably fled from the pressure of Islam, which by 840 A.D. had reached most regions in North Africa. In the Kanem Empire, Islamization seems to have begun during the same period. The Kanem kings ultimately converted in the 900's but continued to maintain all the trappings of traditional beliefs and divine monarchy right up to the time of the Fulani jihad and El Kanemi. This successful combination of divine monarchy and Islam probably accounted for that dynasty reigning 1,000 years, c.950-1840.

Several Songhay rulers were non-Muslim and practised divine kingship. Additionally, divine kingship survived in

²⁰ Jones, "Problems of African Chronology".

Kwararafa where even in the early colonial period the Aku of Wukari did not appear in public but spent most of his time in rituals associated with his status. Surely the concept of divine kingship did not have any significant impact in Borgu, even if its riverine sections did come within the periphery of the Songhay Empire. Nevertheless, the experience of imperial rule by the Zaghawa might have prepared some people for the acceptance of Kisra. Until 1009-1010 A.D., when Za Kossoi became converted,²¹ a traditional belief system prevailed in Borgu and may have been anti-imperial, and after Za-Kossoi, anti-Muslim as well. Kisra arrived in Borgu as a hero-figure from eastern campaigns against Islam and this might have endeared him to the people of Borgu, who had their own reasons to dislike Muslims. There is, however, no evidence of the Zaghawa's political domination of Borgu, although the Wangara (Mande-speaking group and Muslim people) from Songhay migrated and settled in selected places in Borgu at a period which has been dated to the fifteenth century.²² While the Wangara could hardly be linked with the Zaghawa, they constituted an important group of the later settlers of Illo and Bussa, along the River Niger.

The third theory becomes the most fantastic of all. There are two versions of Egypto-Borgu connection from earliest

²¹ BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/33, "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK.

²² Muhammad Al-Hajj, "A Seventeenth Century Chronicle on the Origins and Missionary Activities of the Wangara", Kano Studies, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1968, pp. 7-8.

times. One version mentions that "Borgu and its neighbourhood to the south of Gao" became remarkably famous for the pursuit of magic, witchcraft and charms, thereby earning its reputation as an anti-Islamic stronghold. It had been from these places that the Pharaohs of Egypt occasionally summoned help.²³ Similarly, there seems to be no realibility in Lady Lugard's assertion that Kisra in Borgu tradition was "a Jew who died for the sins of men."²⁴ This is merely an attempt to allude Christian background to the Borgu people. It is a fruitless exercise. The other version refers to the penetration of Egyptian Copts into Borgu through the Songhay town of Kaougha (Kau-kau). This argument has been predicated upon the similarity between "Borgu" and "Barkhou" the latter being the name which the Copts used to describe the Egyptian pharaoh who in c.1700 B.C. penetrated into Africa and traversed the Black Water (River Niger) southward to the land of the Dem-Dem cannibals. After an eleven-years' expedition, the Egyptian account pointed out that:

...he [Barkhou] left a trace of himself in every country through which he passed [so much so that] at a very much later period, a country bearing his Coptic name, and claiming for its people Coptic descent, is found to be situated between the Black Water [Niger] and the country

²³ Lady Lugard, Tropical Dependency, pp. 228-229.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 235.

of the Dem Dems.²⁵

Little need be said, since the dating is far beyond the reach of even archaeology in Borgu. The evidence appears ridiculously slender, and the present writer found no informants who claimed Coptic descent. The Egyptian pharaoh might better be left to the Nile and the Dem Dem to its upper reaches. It would be profitable to examine concrete evidence of early human habitation in the Borgu region.

Archaeological discoveries with dates provide a body of information for the early settlements of Borgu. From the Nok region in central Nigeria (between the Jos Plateau and Borgu), where an ancient civilization developed, a series of migrations occurred which were reflected in the heterogenous composition of Borgu. Archaeological analysis has proved that the Nok Culture flourished during the Iron Age.²⁶ Discoveries of material culture demonstrated explicitly that the Nok civilization was sophisticated and later diffused into neighbouring regions.²⁷ Radio carbon dates obtained for the latest phase of the Nok are 925 B.C.+/-70 and A.D. 200+/-50. Furthermore, thermoluminescent dating of a terracotta (Jemaa

²⁵ The account has been based upon Marcrizi's "Historical Description of Egypt" written in the fifteenth century. For a more detailed explanation consult Ibid., pp. 231-232.

²⁶ B.E.B.Fagg, "The Rock Gong Complex Today and in Prehistoric Times", JHSN, Vol. 1, 1956, p. 28.

²⁷ Oliver Davies, West Africa Before the Europeans: Archaeology and Prehistory, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1967.

Head) has indicated that the Nok culture is about 2570+-230 years old.²⁸ A more emphatic argument claims that "certainly there was an iron industry in the Jos Plateau area [Nok region] of Nigeria by about the mid-5th century B.C."²⁹ From all indications, the region served as the distribution centre for subsequent civilization and urbanization in other parts of Nigeria, a point of reference in terms of origin. Several movements which occurred from the region brought about cultural and technological diffusion, extending westward to the Borgu kingdom through Bussa. For example the terracotta, iron bracelets and pottery discovered at Kagogi in Borgu closely resemble those of the Nok.³⁰ Although Graham Connah suggested that "the earliest evidence for the use of iron in Nigeria is at Taruga, near Abuja" (on the eastern edge of the classical Nok region), dating to about 300+-100 B.C.,³¹ the diffusion from the Nok seemed more pervasive. Striking similarities have been established between the figurines from Nok on the one hand and Ife, Iwo Eleru and Benin on the other. Since the Nok culture influenced areas and people quite

²⁸ See B.E.B. Fagg and S.J. Fleming, "Thermoluminescent Dating of a Terracotta of the Nok Culture, Nigeria", Archaeometry, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1970, pp. 53-55; Angela Fagg, "A Preliminary Report on an Occupation Site in the Nok Valley, Nigeria: Samun Dukiya, AF/70/1", WAJA, No. 2, 1972, pp. 75-79.

²⁹ "African Peoples and Cultures to A.D. 1000" in Barraclough, (ed.), The Times Atlas, p. 44.

³⁰ Priddy, "Kagoge: A Settlement", pp. 33-42.

³¹ Graham Connah, "The Coming of Iron: Nok and Daima", in Shaw, (ed.), Lectures on Nigerian Prehistory, pp. 30-36.

remote from its central core, it would be surprising had it not affected regions closer at hand such as Borgu.

Evidence has been found for the diffusion of iron from the Nok to Borgu. Technology from the Nok has been also linked with that of Kano, where iron working has been dated to the first millennium.³² The development of blacksmithing at Bussa and deposits of iron-ore around Wawa and Kubli in Babanna district strongly suggest diffusion from the Nok Culture. Further evidence has been provided by the widespread pebble culture from Nok to Borgu in the periphery of the Niger around Shagunnu and Foge Island.³³ According to Fagg, there was "abundant evidence that iron-smelting and smithing were being practised" by the Nok.³⁴ Oral traditions indicate that the putative ancestors of the blacksmiths settled at Bussa earlier than Kisra's group,³⁵ which suggests the ancientness of diffusion of iron from the Nok civilization. Leo Frobenius also asserted that iron smelting and smithing industries had developed in Borgu prior to Kisra.³⁶

Radio carbon dates obtained for iron materials and terracotta discovered at an unnamed site near Yelwa within

³² Smith, "The Early States", p. 180.

³³ Soper, "The Stone Age", pp. 175-194.

³⁴ B.E.B. Fagg, "The Nok Culture in Prehistory", JHSN, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1959, p. 289.

³⁵ BHT. No. 137.

³⁶ Frobenius, The Voice Vol. 2, pp. 634-644.

Borgu territory, indicated that the diffusion had taken place before A.D. 100+-115 and A.D. 700+-105 when the artifacts were made.³⁷ Indisputably the inhabitants of this site were iron-using people. The cire perdue method found amongst several ethnic groups in Nigeria such as the Nupe, Yoruba, Benin and extending far west to Dahomey probably diffused from the Nok. This postulation slightly differs from the argument that the cire perdue method was introduced by the Kisra group from Egypt as asserted by M.D.W. Jeffreys.³⁸ The method had been in use before Kisra's migration into Borgu. Whether from the Nok or from the east, there is the evidence of diffusion. Traditions in Borgu allege that Kisra met indigenous blacksmiths when he arrived.³⁹ The population of the Nok and its material culture seems to be continuous with the present one in the region and its precincts. According to Fagg:

The Nok people appear likely to have been the ancestors to the present population of this part of Nigeria and appear to have enjoyed an economy and way of life nearly, if not quite, as advanced as that of the present inhabitants.⁴⁰

Around Lake Kainji (New Bussa), recovered artifacts such as

³⁷ See Connah, "The Coming", p. 33; Priddy, "RS63/32: An Iron Age Site near Yelwa", pp. 20-32.

³⁸ Jeffreys, "The Origins of the Benin Bronzes", pp. 87-91.

³⁹ Local tradition at Karabonde and Kagogi narrate that blacksmiths were already in situ at Kabigera before Kisra emerged in Borgu. The widespread distribution of the industry in Bussa territory gives the tradition credibility.

⁴⁰ Fagg, "The Nok", pp. 288-289.

pottery, iron weapons, terracotta figurines and a series of twenty-six human skeletons date back to 100-700 A.D.⁴¹ However the terracotta figurines provide significant proof of the Borgu-Nok early connection. Following the discovery of iron elsewhere (such as at Kano, with the possible spread to Borgu), terracotta, which was not commonly found in many ancient societies, presents the most clinching argument in favour of the link between the Nok and Borgu. According to Angela Fagg, "the makers of terracotta figurines were also competent iron smelters."⁴² This suggests that the iron smelting and terracotta found in Borgu had been imported from the Nok civilization. Thus the evidence of archaeology -- dating, iron implements and terracotta -- in Borgu suggest very strongly the influence of Nok.

For convenience of study and analysis, Nigerian Borgu has been divided into two broad sections -- the north and the south. Archaeological excavations have been carried out in the north but none in the south, so that more can be determined about the early history of the former than the later. Kabigera has been identified as one of the autochthonous settlements in the region.⁴³ Although its ancient site has been inundated

⁴¹ Wade, "The Skeletal Biology of Human Remains", pp. 61-85.

⁴² Fagg, "A Preliminary Report", p. 76.

⁴³ Kabigera was located north-west of Old Bussa (10°10' 40" N, 4° 32' 5" E). It ceased to exist when the Niger was dammed for hydro-electricity in 1968.

with water, its population had relocated mostly at Bussa.⁴⁴ Thus evidence from contemporaneous settlements in Bussa territory and archaeology support the early existence of Kabigera.⁴⁵ Its original inhabitants were said to be people who did not possess traditions of migration from outside their environment but whose ethnic identity could not be determined, owing to the complete early inter-ethnic mixture which occurred.⁴⁶ The development of smithing in the region suggests that they were farmers and hunters, probably of the Neolithic period or Iron Age. Indeed a group of the population in Kabigera has been mentioned as the putative ancestors of the blacksmiths in Bussa.⁴⁷ A series of iron materials has been recovered at Kabigera but the most important ones were the group of nine iron staffs in varying sizes stuck in the ground. These are called Petrukpeki and were said to have been brought by Kisra's group of immigrants.⁴⁸ The discovery

⁴⁴ BHT. No. 136. Since the people of Kabigera have mixed up with the population at Bussa, it has been possible to obtain some fragmentary information on the settlement's early history. It has been erroneously argued that Kabigera was renamed Bussa. They were separate settlements. See Breternitz, "Rescue Archaeology", p. 97, referring to Robert Soper's Field Notebook 1, 1962, p. 14.

⁴⁵ BHT. No. 137. Breternitz, "Rescue Archaeology", pp. 92-98.

⁴⁶ BHT. No. 141.

⁴⁷ BHT. No. 138.

⁴⁸ Breternitz, "Rescue Archaeology", p. 97. Petrukpeki in Bissa language spoken at Bussa means "instrument of the authority of the ruler". Some of these materials remain in the custody of the Emir of Borgu in New Bussa.

probably explains why Kabigera had been referred to as the earliest political centre of the pre-Kisra period as pointed out by Robert Soper.⁴⁹

These early populations could be described as "Proto-Borgu" communities. Traditions collected at Karabonde and Bussa corroborate the absence of a monarchical political structure until the descendants of Kisra arrived.⁵⁰ While this does not imply complete absence of political activities, the people could be described as acephalous or chiefless. It is in this respect that Kisra's institution of kingship becomes significant in Borgu history. Through this development, the conglomeration of Borgu people began to conceive of themselves as constituting a single political entity. Oral traditions at Kagogi also recall early migration of people from the east,⁵¹ probably from Borno or the Nok region. Following further pressures by invaders, the settlers migrated into the interior of Borgu where they improved upon their iron technology by producing necessary instruments for farming. Through the immigrant hunters, farmers and pastoralists who inhabited the littoral of the River Niger, a new configuration began to be formed. Since the immigrants migrated from various places of origin, the composition as a consequence exhibited ethnic complexity and cultural differentiation. The development along

⁴⁹ Robert Soper, "Field Notebook 1", May 1962, p. 14.

⁵⁰ BHT. Nos.126, 136 and 141.

⁵¹ BHT. No. 137.

the Niger later dictated significantly the changes in the interior. Presumably because of over-population and occupational accessibility, there occurred expansion into the interior where the land remained unoccupied and uncultivated.

Pockets of other settlements and their inhabitants have been identified, including Gani Kasai (later renamed Bussa), Karabonde and Monai. Mini and Tsoho were later settlements situated close to Karabonde (see Map 5). Ultimately a conglomeration of settlements and ethnic groups evolved along the western margin of the River Niger. Geographical exigencies and occupational expedience perhaps brought about the convergence. How long these settlements and their population had been in existence before the arrival of Kisra remains uncertain. The ancient existence is further expressed at Karabonde, where a tradition alleges that the ancestors emerged from the hill called Jekanna, which has become the oldest shrine in Bussa region.⁵² Hence the people do not trace their origin beyond their immediate environment. Jekanna, also called Bio Wure (save me), serves as the god of rain, suggesting that the worshippers were farmers.⁵³ One strand of the tradition which should not be entirely disregarded suggests the migration of the Karabonde people from Songhay, thus appearing congruent to Meek's postulation on a linguistic

⁵² BHT. No. 136.

⁵³ BHT. Nos. 136 and 137.

basis.⁵⁴ The Ba-Karabonde⁵⁵ (head of Karabonde settlement, the first being Ba-zinna), probably wielded political power over other surrounding settlements because tradition is silent on their leadership. A documentary source used by Robert Soper suggested that the Ba-Karabonde lived at Kabigera but current tradition mentions Old Bussa.⁵⁶ Since Old Bussa became the first administrative centre during the dynastic period, it becomes logical to assume that it was a continuum of the pre-existing arrangement. Excavations of the royal mausoleum at Old Bussa by Breternitz support this line of argumentation.

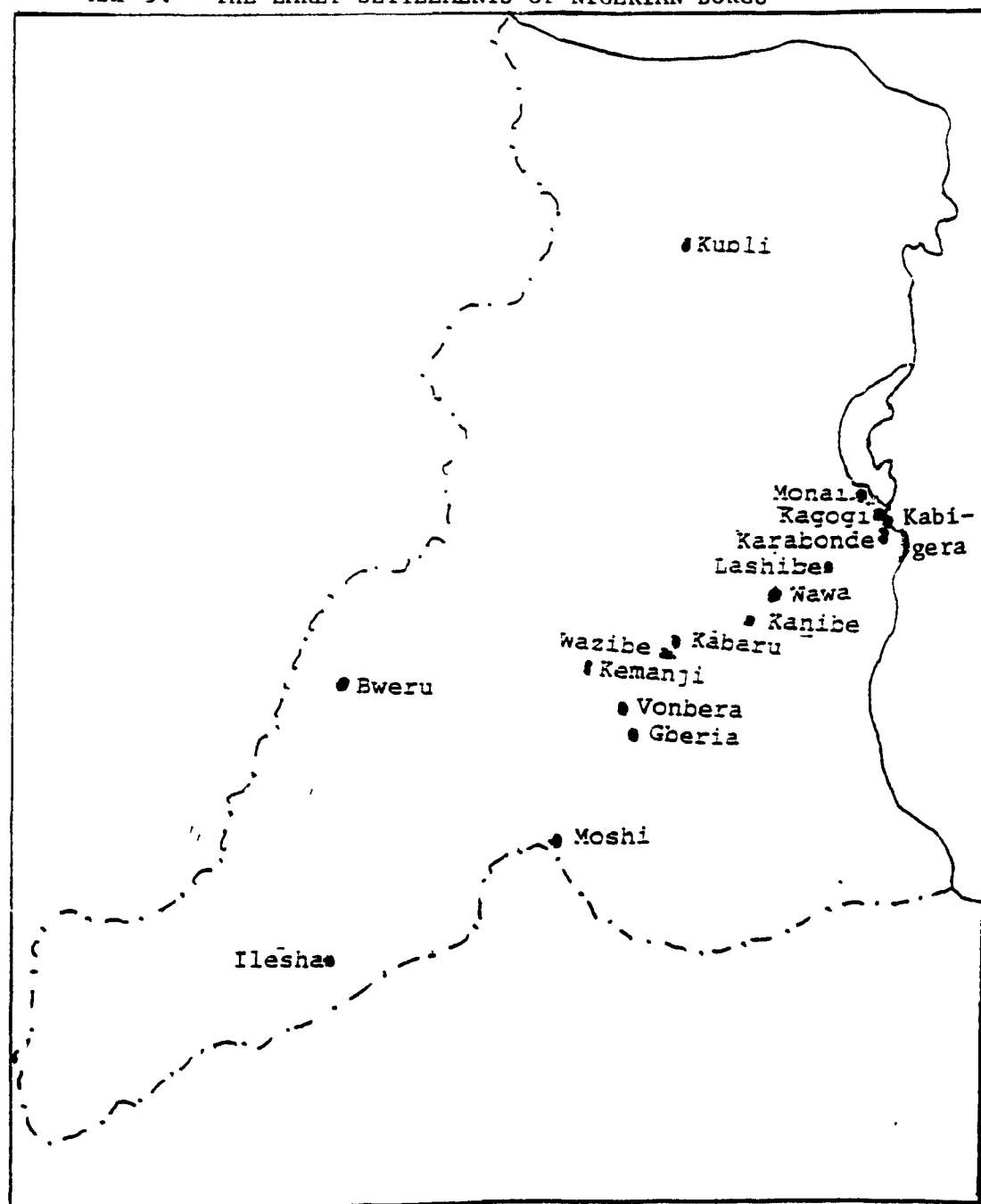
The early inhabitants formed an agricultural society. Located close to the River Niger and worshipping Jekanna, a fertility cult, the people were able to practice agriculture actively and successfully. The development of iron smelting assisted in forging of agricultural implements. As the community grew, it continually attracted immigrant groups with diversified occupations. For example, a group of hunters migrated from Kubli to the north-west of Bussa (in Babanna

⁵⁴ BHT. No. 143, Garba Usman, an educated member of the Karabonde clan. Meek suggested that the Boko speaking-group migrated from Songhay based on the similarity between Boko and Dendi. See Meek, The Northern Tribes, p. 72n.

⁵⁵ Etymologically in the Bissa language spoken in Bussa, the word can be broken down to: "Ba" = old man (father), "Kara" to increase, "abon" meaning on the spot, and "de" = owner. Therefore Ba-Karabonde literally means the owner of the people who increase on their spot. For more information, see BHT. Nos. 130 and 137. Consult also BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/37 "Borgu History", NAK.

⁵⁶ Robert Soper, "Field Notebook 1", May 1962, p. 14; BHT. No. 136. See also Crowder, Revolt in Bussa, p. 41.

MAP 5. THE EARLY SETTLEMENTS OF NIGERIAN BORGU



district) under the leadership of one Alali (Alai) to occupy Mini near Karabonde.⁵⁷ Kubli had been an ancient and large militarist city which maintained about 700 infantry soldiers until the nineteenth century when its power dissipated.⁵⁸ The ethnic identity of this group of migrants has not been clearly determined, but they might have formed a military outpost of the Songhay Empire. The Moroccan invasion of Songhay in 1591 brought about a change of military and economic power in the Western Sudan and presumably led to the establishment of a military post at Kubli in Nigerian Borgu. Linguistic evidence that they spoke Boko -- a Mande-related language -- corroborates this postulation. Along with farming and hunting, fishing also developed, especially through the Laru who migrated southward from Shagunnu. The military city of Kubli becomes a clear example of how informants mix the pre-Kisran peoples c.1000 and those before the re-establishment of the Kisran monarchies in the eighteenth century. Kubli clearly points to an occupation of part of northern Borgu by Songhay after 1505.

Monai, located north of Old Bussa and Kabigera, south of Kagogi served as the most important religious centre for all the settlements (see Map 5). Through archaeology, evidence has been provided about the significance of Monai to religion in

⁵⁷ BHT. Nos. 136, 141 and 184.

⁵⁸ BHT. Nos. 179 and 189.

the region. Two shrine sites were excavated. In the first which could be described as a male shrine, four ceramic, two stone and twelve iron objects were found. There was evidence of blood from sacrificed animals. In the female shrine, twenty-six pebbles, crystals and iron bracelets were recovered. Additionally, four iron gongs and grinding slabs formed part of the artifacts.⁵⁹ Centrally situated, Monai remained the residence of the Ba-Maso (Bamode or Badaburude -- the earth-priest, and brother to the Ba-Karabonde),⁶⁰ the chief-priest for the Jekanna shrine. All farmers in the territory of Karabonde contributed a bundle of guinea corn annually as tribute payment to the Ba-Karabonde, which he shared with the Bamaso.⁶¹ This provides a clear evidence that kinship affiliation enhanced the political and religious arrangement of the period. Nehemia Levtzion described this hierarchy as the "politico-ritual organization of the indigenous population."⁶² While the Laru-speaking people and the Kamberi have been regarded as forming a substantial number of the settlers of Kagogi and Gani Kasai, the Nupe could be

⁵⁹ See Breternitz, "Rescue Archaeology", pp. 98-100. Ogbomo also identified two shrines, male and female, in the acephalous communities in Owan, Nigeria. See Ogbomo, "Men and Women", Chapter Four.

⁶⁰ K/2849, "Old Bussa: Notes by D.F. Heath, 1933", NAK but corroborated in the field. BHT. Nos.137 and 142.

⁶¹ BHT. No. 132.

⁶² Nehemia Levtzion, Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa, Clarendon Press, London, 1968, p. xiii.

considered as either one of the first immigrant groups,⁶³ or people who came with the Nupe invaders after 1500.

Actually the original language spoken by the indigenous people remains conjectural. Basing his argument on Greenberg's analysis, Fagg pointed out that "a proto-language, whose structure can be inferred from a multiplicity of derivative languages, flourished in the central area of Nigeria about two thousand years ago."⁶⁴ The region must have included Borgu and the date falls within the period of dispersal from the Nok Culture. In other words, the evidence explains the multi-linguistic composition of the early settlements in Borgu. Within the conglomeration of ethnic groups, it seems that Boko was widely spoken. This postulation has been made possible because the language possessed some semantic acceptability among the inhabitants. Boko could be considered as the language of politics and religion because it was spoken by the Ba-Karabonde and the Ba-Maso (which suggests that the language was imposed on later migrants). The immigrants from Kubli also spoke Boko, suggesting its contemporaneity with Karabonde and possibly of cognate origin with their inhabitants. Spoken at Babanna, Marami, Dekana, Puissa and Kwonkosso in Nigerian Borgu, the linguistic bloc spread to Segbana, Gbasso, Negazi and Dunkassa in northern Dahomey. That Boko was widely spoken

⁶³ Kagogi was located north of Bussa on lat 10° 15' 50", long. 4° 32' 10". See Priddy, "Kagoge", pp. 33-42.

⁶⁴ Fagg, "The Nok", p. 289.

is affirmed by Bertho, who pointed out that it was understood in North Dahomey and Bussa in Nigeria and it is closely related to the languages of Upper Volta and Samo of the region of Tougan in Mali. It is also similar to the Mande dialects spoken in Cote d'Ivoire.⁶⁵ In all these places, Boko probably served as the indigenous language and the lingua franca. Other languages in the region are not as widely spoken as Boko. Throughout the northern section of Borgu, the various groups of languages such as Boko, Bissa, Laru, Kamberi, and Tienga (collectively referred to as Bussanchi) and spoken by both the indigenous as well as immigrant peoples have been classified as Mande.⁶⁶ Thus if the culture of Nok and its proto-language formed the indigenous strata c.700, people from the west -- proto-Mande -- came in later, even if Borgu came under the Zaghawa of Songhay in the ninth century. If the argument that a group of the Karabonde people migrated from Songhay could be sustained, they must have been represented by the Ba-Karabonde and Ba-Maso.

An important commercial group of immigrants were the Mande-speaking people from Songhay. These were the progenitors of the Wangara merchants who dominated the Borgu economy between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Initially

⁶⁵ Bertho, "Quatre Dialectes Mandé Nord-Dahomey et de la Nigéria Anglaise," pp. 1265-1271. See also Bertho, J., "Rois d'Origin Etrangere", Notes Africaine, No. 29, 1945, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁶ J.H. Greenberg, The Languages of Africa, see also Edgar A. Gregersen, Language in Africa: An Introductory Survey, Gordon and Breach, New York, 1977, pp. 121-124.

they retained their ethnic identity, but by the nineteenth century they had been completely assimilated and acculturated into the indigenous society. They dropped the Dendi language for Boko, which demonstrates a high degree of integration and probably was done because of their numerical inferiority among the indigenous people. Boko might have been easy to speak since the two languages may have been closely related and both belonged to the Mande language family. A wave of immigrants involved the Mossi people, whose traditions claim origin from Hausaland or Borno.⁶⁷ While on their migratory journey to the Volta Basin some of the Mossi people settled in Borgu.⁶⁸ They have been credited with the foundation of Kemanji.⁶⁹ In Borgu they were rapidly absorbed, especially through intermarriage.

The ancient existence of Karabonde has been supported by the claim to about fifteen lineage heads before Kisra, although the genealogy of their ancestors could not be remembered to correspond with the given number.⁷⁰ It has also been asserted that "the Bussawa [Karabonde people] have been on their present land at least four hundred and fifty years. They were already in situ on the arrival of the Kisra migrants."⁷¹ It seems possible that Meek derived his dating of

⁶⁷ Levzion, Muslims and Chiefs, pp. xxv-xxvi

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.xi-xiii.

⁶⁹ BHT. No. 209.

⁷⁰ BHT. No. 136.

⁷¹ SNP/K/6/1935, "History of Bussa", NAK.

Kisra to c.1480 from this source since 450 from 1935 (when he carried out his research) gives the date of 1485. However the Karabonde and other groups must have been in situ much longer than that if Kisra arrived c.1000 A.D.

The four hundred and fifty years must be dismissed because except for Muslims, Borgu informants do not calculate this way. They calculate by the number of rulers. If fifteen lineage heads meant fifteen generations then given thirty years per generation⁷² the Ba-Karabonde title might extend back to c.540 A.D. This seems to harmonize with the dating from archaeology, for the Nok culture, iron and terracottas. Documentary sources also point to the early populations in Borgu by stating that:

Kisra was well received by the inhabitants, [Bussawa] and the settlement of himself and his following was entirely peaceful. Only two stipulations were made, first religious freedom for all, and secondly that all dead chiefs and their sons should be buried by original inhabitants.⁷³

Since the anti-Muslim bias of Kisra and his followers has always been proclaimed, it might be assumed that Islam did not exist in the region when he arrived or freedom of religion would not have been a condition for co-habitation. Such a stipulation surely was designed to win the support of the Ba-

⁷² See the justification for this generational length in the next chapter.

⁷³ Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer, p. 119; SNP/17/K2101, "Anthropological Notes", NAK.

Maso and others like him, holding a similar position. Apparently Kisra had no intention of compelling obedience to his own faith, but merely added new shrines to the already existing ones. Possibly the failure to insist upon it, might have been partially responsible for the lack of a royal genealogy in an oral chronicle stretching from Kisra to the present. Where royal ancestor worship had been established, there should have been a sacred royal graveyard figuring prominently in "national" celebrations. Kisra and his followers may not have even believed in ancestor worship. Kisra was neither deified nor was his grave preserved for veneration. Royal graves did not become important until the re-establishment of the Kisran royal houses in the eighteenth century. That is when the informants begin to recall the names on their regnal lists. The evidence seems fairly convincing that the Kisran immigrants did not hold to ancestral worship, explaining why the names of the kings have been forgotten. Possibly they did not have praise singers either, nor it seems an institution of royal chroniclers. All of these came later as features of the re-establishment. Furthermore, since Borgu rejected Islam, there were no Muslim scribes either to preserve the royal chronicle as in Borno and among the Hausa.

Apart from proving the existence of early inhabitants in the Kisra tradition, there is a clear indication that the aboriginal people controlled all rituals associated with land, since their economy depended on agriculture and hunting.

Between the aborigines and the immigrants, farming, hunting and religious observances served as the occasions which allowed for a corporate organization. Earth-priests were relied upon to propitiate the gods for blessing the land. In this circumstance the interaction between politics, economy and religion becomes manifest. Idris argued that the immigrants were more concerned with politics, hence they did not venture to appropriate the land from the aborigines.⁷⁴ It is further asserted in a documentary source that the king of Bussa -- a descendant of Kisra -- "makes no claim to land rights which he openly says remain Karabondi's."⁷⁵

Arguing in a similar vein, Hogben and Kirk-Greene emphatically stated that the tomb of the Ba-Karabonde who received Kisra on his arrival had been marked with stones in a specific section of the palace compound of the chief of Bussa.⁷⁶ Until Old Bussa was abandoned in about 1922, because it was flooded, the Karabonde people used to offer sacrifices at the tomb of the first Ba-Karabonde. It was also incumbent upon successive Ba-Karabonde to visit the tomb as part of

⁷⁴ Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", p. 144; BHT. Nos. 130 and 132.

⁷⁵ BORGDIST/SNP/17/K2101, Anthropological", NAK. The same position of prerogative over land by the early settlers occurred at Wawa, Kaiama, Ilesha and Okuta, all located in southern Borgu.

⁷⁶ Hogben and Kirk-Greene, The Emirates of Northern Nigeria, p. 578. One would have expected Kisra's tomb to be so conspicuously marked and sacrificed to. From this development, it could be argued that Kisra and his followers did not believe in ancestor reverence.

installation rituals and as part of ancestor worship.⁷⁷ Most recently, M. Izard and J. Ki-Zerbo argued that "the Wasangari [Kisra's descendants] military aristocracy imposed its rule over long-established peoples, some of them pre-Gulmance [Gurma], who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries absorbed Mande groups...trading between what is northern Ghana and Hausaland."⁷⁸ Although how long-established the peoples were, remains obscure, the argument is specially relevant to what happened in Illo district, where it has been difficult to recover the pre-Kisra history.

Once one begins to analyze oral traditions, it becomes clear that early settlers -- supposedly pre-Kisra -- probably refer to the age after the defeat of the Borgu rulers by Songhay c.1500-1505. The references to the Nupe and even Fulani as early settlers make this very clear. The re-establishment of the Wasangari royal houses in the late eighteenth century acts like the second coming of Kisra which necessitated a new agreement with their subjects. While archaeology can date before c.1000 and the coming of Kisra, oral traditions of the indigenous people focus mostly after 1500 and before the revival of the Kisra line of rulers.

Oral traditions adequately recall some of the early waves of short-distance migrations into the interior of Nigerian

⁷⁷ BHT. No. 78.

⁷⁸ Izard and Ki-Zerbo, "From the Niger to the Volta", pp. 352-353.

Borgu. One of the early settlements was Kanibe near Wawa in Bussa territory. Traditions do not agree about the identity of the original founders because while one version mentions the emigrants from Kengakwe in Illo district, another alludes to the Nupe and yet another identifies the Fulani.⁷⁹ A clear impression is also given that Kanibe was inhabited by the Laru who poured out in large number from the Shagunnu area north of Kagogi along the River Niger.⁸⁰ Kanibe no longer exists; its inhabitants have dispersed and have been absorbed into other Borgu towns. Nevertheless, the Nupe appear to be probable founders. This is buttressed by hunting traditions and corroborated by evidence from neighbouring existing towns. The Nupe, especially the Kyedye group, have been associated with remarkable knowledge of fishing and an extensive network of trade,⁸¹ and therefore it was probable that they crossed the River Niger to pursue their occupation in the process of which they established Kanibe. This migration presumably belonged to

⁷⁹ BHT. Nos. 141 and 142; BORGDIST/DOB/SNP/17/K2101, "Anthropological Notes", NAK; DOB/ASR/26, "Earlier Settlement at Kaiama area", NAK.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ S.F. Nadel, "Nupe State and Community", pp. 257-303. There were two groups of the Kyedye. The Kede Tifin, or upper-stream group and the Kede Tako, or the down-stream group. The former (canoemen), were more politically and commercially oriented than the latter who were predominantly farmers. The Nupe tradition in Borgu possibly referred to the Kede Tifin. See S.F. Nadel, "The Kede: A Riverain State in Northern Nigeria" in M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, African Political Systems, Oxford University Press, London, Reprinted 1962, pp. 164-195.

the post-Kisra period. Furthermore, two large towns in southern Borgu (in the region of Yashikera) had been allegedly founded by the Nupe.⁸² If this is anything to go by, it could be argued that Nupe influence had spread both north and south in Nigerian Borgu from c.1500 onward.

The Fulani were far too late to have preceded, Kisra and Laru traditions of migration seem too clear to have occurred prior to 1000 A.D. Other early Borgu settlements have been associated with the Nupe, who supposedly established large kingdoms prior to Kisra's revival. As a consolidation of this evidence, S.F. Nadel pointed out that:

A great deal of migration seems to have taken place among the Nupe, small groups detaching themselves frequently from their own sub-tribe, and moving into the territory of another sub-tribe - hunters in search of game, or farmers seeking better farming-grounds.⁸³

It would appear that in the process of intra-territorial migrations, some Nupe moved beyond their environmental confines across the River Niger into Borgu to found Kanibe. Evidence of hunting and farming, as pointed out by Nadel makes it possible to regard the Nupe as founders of Kanibe. The date of the foundation cannot be determined with exactitude but Kanibe remained a small agricultural, ethnically and culturally mixed society.

Another early settlement in the northern region was

⁸² DOB/SNP/17/K2101, "Anthropological Notes", NAK.

⁸³ Nadel, "Nupe State and Community", p. 258.

Lashibe, located between Kaiama and Bussa. It would appear that a substantial population from Kanibe migrated slightly southward to inhabit Lashibe, in Bussa territory. The reason why Kanibe has been mentioned included its mixed ethnic composition of the Laru, Nupe and Kamberi, leading to cultural hybridization and the complexity of the community. The Laru claim to "have been in this area as long as the Kamberi and prior to the arrival of the followers of Kisra."⁸⁴ The Laru were possibly not controlled by the Kisran group before the silent period of Borgu history c.1500-1783. Thus the re-emergence of the Kisran line of rulers provided a convenient basis for them to claim that they were in situ before Kisra's arrival. Definitely, the Yoruba were not a factor in the inter-ethnic mixture of this region as neither orally-transmitted nor written sources mention their presence in Lashibe. The thriving economy of Lashibe in agriculture and hunting suggests that its inhabitants possessed early knowledge of iron. More than Kanibe, Lashibe combined strong economic and religious structures, which served as integrative forces. The Bagari (head of the lineage) assumed political leadership.

A variant of Lashibe tradition credits the political leadership to the Nupe. It is mentioned that after a feud over hunting territories in Nupeland, the Bagari marched [north-

⁸⁴ ILOPROF/2/88, "Wawa District", NAK. Being pre-Kisra appears doubtful. More likely the population existed prior the revival of Kisra tradition by his Wasangari descendants.

west] across the Niger to establish himself at a place where his prerogative over land would be recognized.⁸⁵ While this tradition should be treated with caution in view of the continuous domination of Kanibe and Lashibe by the Laru, it helps to suggest that when the Nupe arrived, they fused with the inhabitants of the already established agricultural settlement at Kanibe. The tradition also suggests that Lashibe could not have been a pre-Kisra settlement. Ubandawaki (the chief priest) locally known as "the representative of the gods" and from the same lineage with the Bagari, controlled local shrines such as the Kilashi (chief of the twins). The Kilashi claims ownership of the forest and served as the protector of the hunters.⁸⁶ Another shrine, the Funli (the god of fertility), was located in a Rimi tree in the eastern part of the town. It also served as the intermediary between the ancestors and the living.⁸⁷ In recognition of the farming and hunting composition of the community, the Ubandawaki sacrificed annually a black cock in the shrine.⁸⁸ Migrations by sub-groups of the Nupe from Lashibe led to the establishment of small farming settlements and towns in the southern division of Borgu as will be indicated later. This tradition

⁸⁵ BHT. No. 148.

⁸⁶ BHT. No. 159.

⁸⁷ BHT. No. 147; BORGDIST/DOB/SNP/17/K2101, "Anthropological Notes", NAK.

⁸⁸ ILORPROF/2788, "Wawa District: Bussa Emirate Re-Assessment", NAK.

of the Nupe seems to place Lashibe firmly in the period after 1500. It seems logical to locate all the references to the Nupe in the period of the dispersal associated with Tsoede c.1537-1567.

The early history of Illo remains extremely obscure. The pre-historic period seems to have been subsumed in the Kisra legend. Documentary records of the colonial officers regarding the early population mention that:

This part of the country is believed to have consisted of uninhabited bush before it was occupied by a part of the wave of immigrant Kishira [Kisra] people who came from the East at a very early date...Exactly when this occupation took place it is difficult to say, for...the chief of Illo puts it at some fourteen centuries ago...⁸⁹

There are traditions which suggest that the Tiengawa and the Gurmawa constituted the autochthonous population.⁹⁰ Owing to pressure by the Habe rulers of Hausaland some of the Gurmawa were forced to move north-westwards to the right bank of the River Niger, while the Tiengawa continued to inhabit their original site. From their new location, the Gurmawa continued to traverse Borgu to Hausaland for commercial purposes.⁹¹ The

⁸⁹ 28234, "Illo Independent District, Sokoto Province", NAK.

⁹⁰ Informants claim that the tradition of origin of the indigenous people has been forgotten since the waves of migration into the region were exceedingly powerful in terms of politics and language. No clan of the aboriginal people could be identified and the ruling house belongs to the Kisra group. BHT. Nos. 146, 149 156.

⁹¹ Izard and Ki-Zerbo, "From the Niger", pp. 352-353.

Shengawa and Kyengawa formed the earliest immigrant groups.⁹² What remains unclear is the period of migration, although local traditions place it before the advent of Kisra which seems quite unlikely. All the linguistic groups co-habited in amity under the leadership of Ba-Kperude, Ba-Ferinde and Ba-Kwakwa who served as earth-priests.⁹³ Thus it is possible to suggest that the region had been populated by indigenous people and some early immigrant groups before the revival of Kisra. If there had been a Songhay occupation, it certainly would have fallen heaviest in the Illo region.

In the south of Nigerian Borgu, one of the early settlements was Wazibe, located to the south-west of modern Kaiama. Wazibe was founded by immigrant hunters and farmers from Kanibe.⁹⁴ The population was predominantly Nupe and Kamberi people. It would be recalled that Kanibe had been abandoned. A substantial section of its population supposedly migrated southward to establish Wazibe. Another settlement which developed after Wazibe was Kemanji, (whose founders were

⁹² BHT. No. 126.

⁹³ ILOPROF/5/2907, "Bussa Notes", NAK. See also Idris, "Political", pp. 219-220.

⁹⁴ Wazibe no longer exists. It was evacuated with the rise of powerful immigrant groups. The majority of its population have been absorbed into Kaiama community where the Kiwazi exists as the chief priest and one of the kingmakers. BHT. Nos. 205, 219 and 223.

Mossi immigrants from the Hausaland or Borno).⁹⁵ Kemanji became subordinate to Wazibe, being an older establishment. Additionally political authority depended upon the possession and power to distribute land, the most valued property.

Tradition explains that a wave of Mossi immigrants from the west mixed with those already established in Kemanji, making it possible for Kemanji to emerge as a militarily powerful chiefdom because its leader (Ki-sura) possessed 200 horses with an exceedingly large following.⁹⁶ This tradition has been partly corroborated by Levtzion, who mentions that Nupe and Borgu constituted part of the "neo-Sudanese states" and that they were "the creation of groups of invaders, horsemen from the north-east."⁹⁷ It should be understood that in the western Sudan, horses were widely used and highly valued because they performed significant functions. They were used as cavalry and as transport in the savanna trade.⁹⁸ They

⁹⁵ Kemanji is located ten miles north of Kaiama and until 1900, it remained one of the large Borgu towns with about 500 houses and a considerable population. In June 1898, the British forces occupied Kemanji thereby preventing the French, who had reached Kaiama, from hoisting their flag. Today Kemanji has been reduced to a mere village with an extremely small population which speaks Bokobaru, a dialect of the Boko language. BHT. No. 206; BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/70 "District Notebooks", NAK; Perham and Bull, The Diaries of Lord Lugard, pp. 412-415.

⁹⁶ BHT. Nos. 213, 220 and 224.

⁹⁷ Levtzion, Muslims and Chiefs, p. xiii.

⁹⁸ A.G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, Longman, London, 1973, p. 74. Consult also A Burford, "Heavy Transport in Classical Antiquity", Economic History Review, No. 13, 1960, pp. 1-18.

also epitomized prestige and affluence in the society. In these terms, the possession of horses by the Ki-sura could be seen as a new and systematic development of a powerful military in Borgu. Through this enhanced position, the Ki-sura systematically imposed his political and military power over the surrounding settlements.

Bovill credited the introduction of horses into Borgu to the Zaghawa,⁹⁹ which would mean that they came from the north-west rather than north-east as claimed by Levtzion. This postulation could be substantiated by the fact that the language of Kemanji is Mande related [from the west and in the direction of Songhay]. Horses from the north-east might have arrived later in the region. Despite this, horses became significant weapons in warfare in subsequent periods of Borgu history. At Igboho in Yorubaland, it has been alleged that the Alaaafin Orompoto obtained horses from Borgu to develop cavalry soldiers.¹⁰⁰ The emergence and rapid acquisition of power by Kemanji contributed dramatically to the decimation of the Wazibe population. While in the Mossi period Wazibe had been superior to and possibly controlled Kemanji, the arrival of the Ki-sura reversed that situation.

Oral tradition offers the explanation that the Ki-sura of Kemanji possessed magical power which attracted people and as

⁹⁹ Bovill, The Golden Trade, pp. 220-221.

¹⁰⁰ BHT. Nos. 9, 11 and 12.

a consequence was responsible for the town's dense population.¹⁰¹ In addition, the possession of horses by the Ki-sura on arrival in the region already indicated military strength making possible the subjugation of villages in its precincts, increasing the population as well as enhancing the political sway of the Ki-sura. Presumably motivated by the development of the cavalry, the Ki-sura might have embarked on military conquest which resulted in the control of a large settlement. His hegemony, both religious and military, might have been responsible for the linguistic change to Bokobaru, a dialect of Boko of the Mande language family. In another explanation, the Bokobaru-speakers have been described as a product of intermarriage which involved, according to tradition, a Batonu man from Baru and a Boko woman. Over time, they developed a dialect which is closely related to both Batonu and Boko.¹⁰²

The claim to relative antiquity of Kemanji arose from its continuous occupation of the site, since the neighbouring settlements -- Kanibe and Wazibe -- had been destroyed either by raids or ecological calamities such as famine. Regrettably, a long pedigree of the aboriginal clan could not be procured to corroborate the claim. However, of all the early settlements, only Kemanji did not change sites. For example, Bussa has changed three times, Kagogi, Monai and Karabonde

¹⁰¹ BHT. No. 212.

¹⁰² BHT. No. 17.

have also been resettled. Archaeological excavations have not been carried out in Kemanji which could otherwise have assisted in establishing a date for its foundation.

Gberia, Vonbera, Kabaru and Gwanabe were other settlements over which Kisra's descendants established dynasties (see Map 5). Gwanabe was founded by a hunter from Zamfara.¹⁰³ Like the Kiwazi, the Badegwana, the head of Gwanabe, held religious powers but restricted political authority over the other hunters. It would appear that the population at Vonbera concentrated more on hunting than on farming. This is because by the eighteenth century the settlement had been evacuated probably because of famine or foreign incursions by the Nupe who had been located in various places of the region. It was also possible that the desertion occurred because of raids by more powerful settlements such as Kemanji. Consequently, a large population joined Gwanabe.¹⁰⁴ A hunter-founder tradition has been narrated at Gberia, whose establishment has been linked with an immigrant group from Kanibe.¹⁰⁵ There seems to be some substantial accuracy in the

¹⁰³ BHT. No. 217.

¹⁰⁴ BHT. No. 220.

¹⁰⁵ BHT. No. 221. The hunter-founder phenomenon was common in Africa especially in the Central lake region where oral traditions of some states penetrate back only to migration leaders and a hunter during the Nyarubanga drought. See J.B. Webster, "Drought, Migration and Chronology in the Lake Malawi Littoral", *TJH*, Vol. 9 and 2, 1980, pp. 70-90. See also A. Buluda Itandala, "A History of Usukuma, Tanzania, Up to 1890", Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1983, Chapter Two.

claim that the Nupe and Yoruba peoples inhabited certain portions of the southern Borgu territories between the defeat of Borgu c.1505 and the revival of Kisra rule in the late eighteenth century. Ethnographic studies indicate that the Nupe inhabited two enormous walled towns called Gbwire and Takpwa Suna (the town of the Nupe).¹⁰⁶ They lived in harmony with other ethnic groups before Taku (a Borgu man) drove them away across the Niger which probably occurred in the eighteenth century and as part of the re-establishment process of the Wasangari royal houses.¹⁰⁷ With regard to the Yoruba, they supposedly inhabited the land near Aburisebbi at Nwatta.¹⁰⁸

There has been no recognition given to the pre-chiefdom period of Ilesha. Documentary sources refer to Sabi Derekureku, son of the fifth ruler of Sandiro under Nikki, as the founder which merely represents the dynastic era in the nineteenth century. As the Ilesha Regnal Chart in the following chapter shows, Sabi Derekureku can be dated to c.1790-1813. Before the descendants of Kisra emerged in Ilesha, there were autochthonous inhabitants whose descendants can still be identified. The Lesaworu clan, the oldest

¹⁰⁶ The Nupe people are called Takpa by the Yoruba and Borgu peoples.

¹⁰⁷ BORGDIST/SNP/17/K/2101, "Anthropological Notes on the Bussawa", NAK. Taku should not be associated with Ki-Taku, the army general of Kaiama.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid... Both the Nupe and Yoruba towns mentioned here are no longer in existence.

inhabitants in the region, recall that their ancestors emerged from the ground and planted the Besigondo and Bondoko trees.¹⁰⁹ Therefore they have no tradition of migration. Under the Shina Lesagi (head of the autochthones and the earth-priest), the clan worshipped the Kpetaso (Stone) shrine and revered the Besigondo tree as a totem. The tree is claimed to be the oldest in the region and it is where the spirits of the ancestors now reside.¹¹⁰ The age of the town cannot be determined by either regnal or genealogical lists because none is lengthy enough to correspond with the time of establishment. In support of the claim to antiquity, Frobenius mentioned Lessa (Ilesha) as one of the Borgu towns subjected by Kisra's warriors.¹¹¹ Kisra's warriors could refer to c.1000 but more likely to those fighting for his revival at the time of Derekureku c.1790-1813. A local tradition at Ilesha corroborates the latter date (c.1790-1813). It alleges that the Yoruba and Nupe were formerly the inhabitants of Ilesha. While the Yoruba who worshipped a baobab tree, were driven to Saki and villages in its precincts, the Nufawa (Nupe) were pursued across the Niger. This evidence clearly corresponds with the revival of the Kisran rulers, the establishment of the southern satellite chiefdoms,¹¹² and the driving away of

¹⁰⁹ BHT. No. 34.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Frobenius, The Voice of Africa, p. 618.

¹¹² BHT. No. 32.

the Nupe and Yoruba overlords.

An examination of the socio-political setting of the pre-dynastic period of Nigerian Borgu clearly indicates a closely-knit society within individual settlements but much less so between them. It would appear that there was little interaction between one community and the other. Specific terms were used to symbolise the kinship relationship. For example, in Bussa and Illo regions, the head of the lineage was referred to as Ba (father) such as Ba-Karabond, Bamaso, Ba-zinna, Bagari, Ba-Kperude, Ba-Ferinde and Ba-Kwakwa. In the south, Ki was used as in Ki-Kabaru, Ki-zanji, Ki-sura and Kiwazi. For the women folk, Ma or Naa was used. These terms suggest that the lineage served as the earliest primary unit of political organization. Elders from the lineage of the founders exercised a limited degree of political authority. Leadership was recognized. Gerontocracy was acknowledged. Kingship was unknown. Lineage administration with a lineal patrilineal social system thus became fully integrated in the communities.¹¹³ The concept of community had been in vogue before the emergence of dynastic rule with its characteristic differentiation of functions and rigid bureaucracy. By the working of the community structure, "authority is symbolised

¹¹³ BHT. Nos. 126, 132, 136, and 139. Jack Goody has described this type of acephalous organization as "weakly centralized federations...[where] the concentration of...power is accompanied by systems of succession that are at once lineal and more determinate." Jack Goody, (ed), Succession to High Office, Cambridge University Press, London, 1966, p. 39.

and to some extent exercised by a lineage head chosen on considerations of age and genealogical proximity to the ancestors."¹¹⁴ This concept has remained constantly applied by many pre-dynastic societies as a workable structure for several centuries or remained the organising principle of the villages even after a dynasty had brought them all within one large state or even empire. Thus the village structure remained whether it was subject or not to the Kisran rulers, the Nupe or Yoruba.

In the early settlements of Borgu certain lineages along with stranger elements formed a single community. Despite their mixture of kin and strangers, the communities created charters which fictionalized their blood relationships. Although located short distances apart, each community retained its name, cultural and linguistic identity. Amongst the cluster of settlements along the Niger, the Ba-Karabonde became more prominent politically than other community leaders. Indeed the political titles of other settlements have not survived. The political powers of the community heads was restricted, but the post served as an effective community integrative factor. Members of the community owed unwavering allegiance to the founding lineage, represented by the Ba or Ki. As the head, the Ba or Ki was saddled with specific responsibilities such as acting as the intermediary between

¹¹⁴ Ade Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples and their Neighbours Before 1600", in Ajayi and Crowder, History of West Africa, p. 205.

living members of the lineage and the ancestors, settling of disputes and allocating of land. Land was jointly owned, commonly inherited and collectively guarded.

The post of the lineage head was non-elective and did not usually involve elaborate religious rituals.¹¹⁵ In some cases, the lineage heads were also recognised as the earth-priests, such as the Kiwazi of Wazibe and the Sina Lesagi of Ilesha. For example, the Kiwazi acted as the war leader and the chief priest. He was the rain maker, performed all religious rituals, and dictated when special festivals were to be held. He also directed the annual hunting festival and pronounced when the new yam was to be eaten.¹¹⁶ By tradition, he could not farm hence his food was provided by the people under his jurisdiction. However, in the face of historical transformations, his sacerdotal functions appear to be more enduring than his political duties. In other instances, the offices were separated, such as in Karabonde, Kemanji and Lashibe. Despite the separation of functions, both the lineage -- cum community head and the chief-priest worked together and enjoyed similar privileges. In many of the early communities, the lineage leaders retained their powers as heads of the autochthones as well as earth-priests in the dynastic period. This politico-ritual organization, which became prominent in all the early settlements, provided a functional background

¹¹⁵ BHT. Nos. 132, 136 and 148.

¹¹⁶ BHT. No. 209.

for the establishment of a monarchical system which occurred in later history. The lineage heads as well as the chief priests served as nascent political institutions. Compound heads were also given specific functions, such as maintaining law and order and supervision of communal works.¹¹⁷

Among the many kinds of dynasties in West Africa, two might be identified according to organising principles. In one, as among the Oyo-Yoruba to the south, and the Hausa states to the north and east of Borgu, the organisation of the local units and villages closely resembled the central authority at the capital town in structure. Over the centuries the kings had been able to impose their own system of organisation down to the smallest settlement. In other words, local governments became immature imitations of the central government. In the second type represented in Borgu by Kisra rulers, in Benin by the Eweka dynasty and in Kwararafa, the organising principles of the villages are not reflections of the centre. The central monarchy provided an over-arching umbrella to maintain law and order in relations among the villages, to permit the flow of trade over a larger region and to give the inhabitants a feeling of pride in their membership within a large political unit but did not seek to alter the principles which governed relations within the villages. This has been noted particularly in Benin, where the centre with its titles, hierarchy and principles of heredity resembled the

¹¹⁷ BHT. No.141.

Yoruba, while the acephalous villages based upon consensus and gerontocracy operate like the eastern Igbo.

Borgu under the Kisran rulers, whether before c.1500 or after 1790, appears to have operated more like Benin than like Borno or Oyo. Whether the kings ruled or not, whether their authority ran beyond the capital town or not, the villages successfully governed themselves. If the monarchy applied pressure to create villages in its own image, the policy failed. Thus the villages from one century to another may have accepted the over-arching authority of Songhay, the Nupe or Kisra but these imperial structures left little legacy even in the consciousness of the citizens of the villages. Possibly, had sustained pressure been applied by external invaders, it might have aided the Kisran rulers in re-structuring the villages. But the tendency in the villages was to accept the overlordship of a new ruler. Only Islam, with its strong re-structuring tendencies, could unite the villages for sustained opposition, becoming the main cohesion and pride of the Kisran state uniting its rulers with the people.

The geographical and ecological conditions of Borgu's environment remarkably influenced the economic activities of the early inhabitants. As there was ethnic differentiation, so there existed occupational diversity. What could be regarded as the earliest primary economic activities of the inhabitants included farming, hunting, smithing and fishing. The infra-structures had been endowed by nature: land, river and iron-

ore. These were plentifully available. To a large extent lineage affiliation demonstrated economic orientation. For instance Kagogi was a predominantly fishing settlement, while Karabonde remained essentially a farming and hunting community.¹¹⁸ Smithing became the dominant occupation in Kemanji and at Lashibe the Kamberi were farmers, the Nupe were fishermen while the indigenous group dominated farming and smithing.¹¹⁹ Although lacking extensive commercialization, the surplus of these economic activities were exchanged as need arose within and between the different communities. In this respect economic relations transcended ethnic divergence. In non-riverine areas such as Ilesha and Kabe, farming and hunting were practised. The Guinea-savanna vegetation, with fairly open land and suitable rainfall, played a vital role in the successful practice of agriculture in the zone. The persisting strength of ethnic identity grew out of the link between it and specialized occupations. Thus the people of Borgu remained a conglomeration of ethnicities rather than assimilating into one dominant nationality.

All the traditions of autochthonous origins which mention emergence of the ancestors from hills, the ground or trees directly admit that the period of existence stretches far back beyond the range of human recollections. Although such claims appear commonplace, they offer certain historical insights.

¹¹⁸ BHT. Nos. 136, 145.

¹¹⁹ BHT. No. 209, 211 and 222.

The prerogative to land ownership and power to distribute it clearly signify early existence. The date for the early period of existence remains conjectural but undeniably the settlements had formed a strong base for historical times. What seems to be more historically certain is that by the beginning of the eighteenth century, it becomes possible to identify three layers of inhabitants in Nigerian Borgu: the autochthonous people, Kisra's descendants and the other immigrant groups. The Kisran group appears more distinct than the other two. Generally the valuable contributions of the aboriginal inhabitants of Borgu have been neglected in historical discourse. Although ethnically diverse within a non-centralized polity, the indigenous people formed the essential foundation over which the state system was erected. Through the congenial cohabitation of the ethnic groups, intermarriage and cultural diffusion became possible.

The political and religious setting formed the basis for the hierarchical bureaucracy of the dynastic period. Clearly rebellions to usurp offices were infrequent, since leadership was recognized strictly within specific lineages and among the elders. When transformations occurred, the earth-priests and the heads of the autochthones continued to play significant religious and political roles in the society. This has been clearly demonstrated in Bussa with the Ba-Karaborde, who has been regarded as the final determining factor in the selection of the Kibe (King of Bussa). Thus the Borgu region had existed

as a conglomeration of ethnic groups before the emergence of Kisra brought about historically significant transformations.

While the phenomenon of Kisra and his descendants and followers probably created a kingdom or kingdoms in the north at Bussa, Illo and Nikki (in French Borgu) around 1000 A.D., they possibly did not penetrate southern Borgu for many centuries. Possibly they themselves were subject to alien rule. The obstacle to block their expansion initially involved two large Nupe states (later probably consolidated in one) and the presence of the militarily powerful Yoruba in another town. By the seventeenth century the remaining Nupe kingdom had been brought under the hegemony of the Old Oyo Empire. In Yoruba sources the empire's expansion was said to extend over many surrounding peoples and states including Nupe.¹²⁰ In the modern Nupe heartland north of the Niger river there has never been found a tradition which confirms this Yoruba claim. However significant Nupe cultural and religious influence has been found among the Oyo Yoruba.¹²¹ Presumably the Nupe

¹²⁰ Johnson, The History, p. 41.

¹²¹ Yoruba-Nupe early religio-cultural relationships could be explained with two examples. First both believe in the Ifa oracle and divination. Closely related to that is a Nupe masked deity called ebura or gunnu (Igunnuko in Yoruba), having a cylinder-like shape. It could grow tall or short at wish. It was supposedly introduced to the Yoruba at Ife by a Nupe woman. The second aspect is related to Yoruba praise poems - oriki - of towns which possess affiliation with the Nupe. For example the praise poem of Igbori town (in Yorubaland) partly reads:

Enit'o ba ki ile Igbori He who recites the praise poem of
 Igbori
 T'o ba fi Tapa sile With the exclusion of the Tapa [Nupe]

referred to in Yoruba tradition, was that Nupe kingdom whose capital was located at Takpa Suna in southern Borgu. With the collapse of the Yoruba hegemony the Nupe rulers were either driven out or subordinated. Then at the beginning of the eighteenth century princes from the royal Kisra line at Nikki began to found small sub-chiefdoms (later independent petty states) in the region which had become a kind of political vacuum between Old Oyo to the south and the Kisra kingdoms -- Bussa and Illo -- to the north. The Kisra legend is that late in finally spreading to the south. In a sense these Nikki princes became Kisra, the bearers of his legend at least. They will become the focus of chapter four.

Okò igi lo lo. Remains an ignorant person.
 See William Bascom, Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1969, pp. 352-353; S.F. Nadel, Nupe Religion, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958; S.O. Babayemi, "Oyo, Nupe and Borgu Relationship Reconsidered", Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Seminar Series, February 13, 1985, pp. 1-18.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SOUTHERN SATELLITE CHIEFDOMS (C.1700-1837)

Beginning from about the mid-seventeenth century, Nikki princes started to migrate from their political enclave to carve out chiefdoms in the south-western portion of Nigerian Borgu. This movement became significant historically for certain reasons. First, the princes established dynasties over the pre-existing populations of the region, thereby completing the process of political domination which had begun some centuries back. Up to this period, the indigenous settlements such as Wazibe, Kemanji, Kabaru and Ilesha had remained uninfluenced by the descendants of Kisra. Secondly, the princes became the principal propagators of the Kisra legend. Through them the conception of belonging to a definite political entity became well fashioned. Lastly, the formation of the chiefdoms led to the fortification of Borgu unity, through the Kisra connection. This aspect of unity was well expressed in the nineteenth century, particularly in the Ilorin War (1830-1837), when a common enemy -- the Fulani jihadists -- was involved. The establishment of Nikki satellite chiefdoms was in progress when the region was opened to European travellers but had been concluded by the period of partition and ultimate colonisation. The partition of 1898 certainly demarcated the people of Borgu administratively, but it did nothing to sever their historical connections, kinship

or socio-cultural relations. It is on this basis that the political formations and developments prior to the partition become necessary for historical analysis.

In the partition arrangement, only Nikki fell under the political sway of the French. On the British side, further segmentation occurred, as two large divisions (Bussa and Kaiama) were split into nine districts (see Map 4). While Bussa served as the headquarters for the northern division, Kaiama became the administrative seat in the south.¹ Illo was rapidly submerged in the Hausa states. To all the chiefdoms in the south, Nikki (in Dahomey) remained the nucleus of authority and reference point in origin tradition. The position in Illo and Bussa was an antithesis of Nikki because the princes in these kingdoms did not spread out on an extensive pattern, to establish independent chiefdoms. That notwithstanding, Illo and Bussa possessed dominion over specific villages. However, the concentration will be on the Nikki satellite chiefdoms, where written historiography has been grossly inadequate but oral traditions are abundant. The establishment of these chiefdoms and their subsequent developments form the essence for a chronological analysis in this chapter.

A major problem which confronts a researcher on the pre-colonial history of Borgu is the complete absence of a

¹ The northern districts were Bussa, Babanna, Illo and Agwarra. Those in the south included Kaiama, Ilesha, Okuta Gwanara and Yashikera.

chronological structure. Earlier attempts to write a pre-colonial history of Borgu have met with various obstacles because of the difficulties involved in harnessing oral tradition with the available written records to form a comprehensive and convincing work. Oral traditions are vast and diverse, requiring meticulous attention for interpretation. The barrier looms large particularly in southern Borgu where, since the evolution of Nikki satellite chiefdoms, events have not been placed in their proper chronological sequence. But the establishment of the chiefdoms and subsequent developments form the basis for a chronological study of Nigerian Borgu history. The migration from Nikki occurred at different times which provides a justification for the utilization of regnal lists, supplemented with commoner genealogies where reliable ones are available. An analysis of social relations such as totemic observances by the various clans would also assist in tracing the origin and historical development of the people. Through a combination of these methods with inter-regional cross-referencing, it is possible to arrive at fairly reliable dating structure for the satellite chiefdoms.

When employing king lists for chronological analysis, the earliest date cannot penetrate beyond the first known ruler. In the case of Nigerian Borgu there had been pockets of pre-existing acephalous/chiefless communities over which Nikki princes merely established their dynasties. The traditions of

such settlements would be considered alongside that of the ruling house for an overall explanation. David Henige rightly pointed out that:

Clan and lineage traditions and genealogies may often corroborate the existence and sequence of rulers mentioned in 'official' genealogies. Since non-royal genealogies are usually shallower than royal genealogies this kind of synchronism will most often be confined to the more recent past and add little to dates available from other sources.²

Anthropologists such as I.M. Lewis express scepticism over the historical content and utilization of genealogies for chronological reconstruction.³ Laura Bohannan even described Tiv genealogies as a "charter" which serves "at once a validation and mnemonic device for present social relationships." She further claims that "genealogies are cited in response to an occasion."⁴ Surely not all genealogies fall within a political and social scheme as implied by Bohannan. A contrary argument has been made by John Orkar -- also working on the Tiv -- that in the absence of other methods of dating such as archaeological remains, eclipses, and

² David P. Henige, The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974, p. 18.

³ I.M. Lewis, "Historical Aspects of Genealogies in Northern Somali Social Structure", JAH, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1962, pp. 35-48.

⁴ Laura Bohannan, "A Genealogical Charter", Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, No. 22, No. 4, 1952, pp. 301-315.

documentary sources, genealogies may provide helpful clues.⁵ For the Igala, Robert Sargent made use of commoner genealogies in computing a reliable chronology.⁶ Actually the genealogies of certain clans in Borgu such as the blacksmiths, chief drummers, and chief priests, serve as useful means of supplementing or authenticating the regnal list and events. Some of these clans either migrated before or with the ruling houses. This suggests that there would be a parallel in their genealogical length. It is only to be regretted that several of the commoners' genealogies are often too short -- just as Henige suggested above -- for a consistent comparative analysis with the regnal list.

The task of establishing a chronological structure for Borgu could have been made easier if there had been king-lists supplied from different sources to allow for comparison and thorough scrutiny. For example, to reconstruct the chronology of the second Bini dynasty of Lagos rulers, Robin Law compared regnal lists from six different sources, while Roland Cohen worked with three on the Bornu king lists.⁷ This advantage

⁵ John Ngusha Orkar, "A Pre-Colonial History of the Tiv of Central Nigeria c. 1500-1850", Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1979, pp. 55-95.

⁶ R.A. Sargent, "On the Methodology of Chronology: The Igala Core Dating Progression", History in Africa, Vol. 11, 1984, pp. 269-289.

⁷ R.C.C. Law, "The Dynastic Chronology of Lagos", Lagos Notes and Records, Bulletin of African Studies, Vol. 11, No. 11, 1960, pp. 46-54; Roland Cohen, "The Bornu King Lists", in Jeffrey Butler, (ed.), Boston University Papers on Africa, Vol. 11, Boston University Press, Boston, 1966, pp.41-83.

eludes Borgu because Muslim chroniclers or Christian missionaries who kept such records did not penetrate there and none of the European travellers who visited Borgu ventured to compile a king list. Lugard travelled through Borgu towards the end of the nineteenth century did not mention names of the rulers but referred to them by their towns.⁸ Aware of these problems, a deliberate effort was made in the fieldwork to recover the king list of every chiefdom from several sources and informants.

The mode of succession to the throne is indispensable to the determination of reign -- as well as dynastic -- generation lengths. Every African state or kingdom was governed by certain constitutional characteristics which regulated the succession method. Such unique conditions account for the variations in the average reign length.⁹ Although Borgu traditions allege that the primogenitural system of inheritance did not exist in the kingdom, a glimpse of this has been discovered in certain chiefdoms such as Gwanara. Under the succession rule of father to son, the ruler was usually young hence the reign length might be expected to be longer than in fraternal succession. Usurpations, wars, palace insurrections and periods of interregnum obviously

⁸ Perham and Bull, The Diaries of Lord Lugard, p. 43.

⁹ J.N Ukwedeh, "The History of Igala to c.1830 A.D. with Special Reference to the Rise of the Attah Kingship", Ph.D. Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, 1987, pp. 526-544.

affect the calculation of reign lengths.

A further problem is encountered in Nigerian Borgu with the adoption of different names and titles. Accordingly one of the colonial officers observed that "the number of different names for the same person is the chief difficulty in discovering the genealogical tree of the chiefs of [Borgu]. They often amount to three -- the man's own name, his title and his nickname."¹⁰ Confusions also arise when names collected in the field do not correspond with the recorded ones by the colonial officers. The adoption of predecessors' throne titles and personal names result in anachronisms. Finally a common average length of reigns or generations applicable to all the chiefdoms would not be workable because of the difference in periods of establishment as well as varying succession patterns from three royal houses in Kenu to one in Yashikera. To determine relatively acceptable dates, events during the reign of each ruler have been correlated with developments in the contiguous chiefdoms and regions. Borgu did not develop in isolation from its immediate neighbours, therefore through interaction with them, it has been possible to fill a significant gap in its history. The Nupe and Yoruba peoples have furnished important information on the silent period of Borgu history (c.1500 to the establishment of the satellites).

¹⁰ BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/21, "Gazetteer of Okuta District", NAK.

The southern satellites consist of six chiefdoms -- five of which will be discussed -- founded between the earliest, Kaiama c.1695 to Kenu/Gwanara c.1754 to Okuta (c.1805), Ilesha (c.1858) and Yashikera (c.1873). All dates have been calculated from the respective regnal lists which accompany this chapter. Tradition claims that the founders of all of them came from Nikki, and they were the descendants of Kisra. These claims appear substantiated because two chiefdoms revere the red antelope as royal totems and four possess leopard drummer clans, all of which appear to have been of Nikki origin as shown on the table "Totemic Distribution: Southern Satellite Chiefdoms". Special attention will be given to the earliest chiefdoms, Kaiama c.1695 and Kenu/Gwanara c.1754 because they appear to throw some light on the "dead" or "lost" middle of Borgu's history and were the first to re-establish the hegemony of Nikki in this region during the collapse of the power and authority of the Nupe and Oyo imperialisms.

Since Borgu has bragged that it never had been conquered and created pride in its warrior tradition, it appears that as early as the late eighteenth century a consensus developed to ignore and suppress the era of humiliation which began about 1500. This conspiracy of silence became so effective that it seems clear that modern informants truly have lost the memory of their history. Thus primarily, glimpses of the dead middle come from outside sources, supplemented by small hints in the

traditions of Kaiama and Kenu/Gwanara as will be shown below. A hypothetical interpretation follows.

In the Songhay invasion c.1505¹¹ -- totally denied by Borgu informants -- the Kisra ruling houses were probably defeated, overthrown or relegated into insignificance. Palmer differs in dates but provides a far more graphic description by quoting the Muslim writer Es Saidi. Between 1536 and 1566, Askia Daud of Songhay "led an expedition against Bussa. Bussa was completely ruined" writes Es Saidi, 'and a great number of persons perished in the waters nearby,' (the rapids)."¹² It seems logical to argue that the Kisra royal house perished as well in this massive destruction. Whatever happened, it disappeared from oral tradition. Three events followed. First, the Wangara merchants' penetration began, the Songhay Muslim missionaries arrived and a military outpost was established at Kubli as noted previously. Given the Kisra ideology of anti-Muslim bias, one cannot believe that this would have been permitted had the Kisra royal houses been strong and in control. Second, Nupe control appears to have begun to spread over the north and central regions as dictated by their presence in Kanibe and Lashibe (note Tsoede's dates c.1537-1567). Third, c.1520 to 1550 during the period of exile, the Alaafin of Oyo relocated his capital at Gberegburu near the

¹¹ Michael Crowder, The Story of Nigeria, Faber and Faber, London, 1966, pp. 47-48.

¹² Palmer, Sudanese Memoirs, Vol. 3, p. 81. Es Saidi's dates were 1596-1655.

modern site of Kaiama.¹³ Even though the Alaafin moved back to the Yoruba heartland at Igboho, the Yoruba control of south-central Borgu remained firm and even increased in the late 1660's when Oyo was said to have annexed portions of Nupe, presumably meaning certain Nupe-held territory in Borgu.¹⁴ The defeat of Borgu by Alaafin Orompoto at Igboho at the battle of Ilayi, suggests that Oyo controlled certain portions of Borgu territory. With the Moroccan invasion and the overthrow of Songhay in the 1590's, refugees fled east mainly into the Hausa states but clearly some of them -- more Wangara -- came into Borgu. The Wangara presumably negotiated their merchant presence with the Yoruba and Nupe rulers, both of which were trading people while the Borgu were not. This compromise enhanced their stay and economic pursuit in Borgu for several years. Given this series of calamities, it was not surprising that, Borgu desired to ignore and forget this period of its history, particularly as it raises questions on the claim to invincibility.

Thus between c.1505 to the 1780's the Kisra royal houses did not function and Borgu was subject to foreign domination. Then between 1783 and 1790 both Borgu and the Nupe secured their independence from Oyo whose political and military power had begun to wane. It is significant to note that this was the

¹³ Robert Smith, "The Alafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History", JAH, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1965, pp. 57-77.

¹⁴ Johnson, The History, p. 41.

exact period when the Kisra royal houses became re-established in Bussa and Illo and when Nikki princes founded Kaiama (c.1775-1785) and Kenu (c.1784-1791) in their present locations. While the Kaiama oral tradition begins about 1695-1772 (as shown on the Kaiama Regnal Chart) with the establishment of Boroboko or Bani at Bweru outside the region under focus, his descendants did not penetrate the area and locate at Kaiama until his grandson Sabi Agba c.1775-1785.

The Nupe hegemony in Borgu seemed to have been undermined in the late 1600's by Oyo but between c.1783-1790 Oyo's authority was completely overthrown. In the political vacuum, the Kisra royal houses re-emerged in the north and the Nikki princes brought back the Kisra tradition to the south. Thus the fluctuating fortune of the military power of the Nupe and Oyo brought about the restoration of the Kisra line of rulers. The coincidence of dating -- not oral tradition -- strongly support this argument as a possible interpretation of Borgu's history between c.1505 and the 1780's. It might also be well to note that the eighteenth century witnessed the flourishing of Wangara commerce and the revived monarchies in the north and Nikki princes in the south became eager to profit from it as well as control Muslim elements whose very presence ran contrary to the Kisra tradition. The events of the period c.1505 to the 1780's demonstrated that while the Kisra ideology might unite Borgu against Islamic northerners, it became much less effective in challenging traditional powers

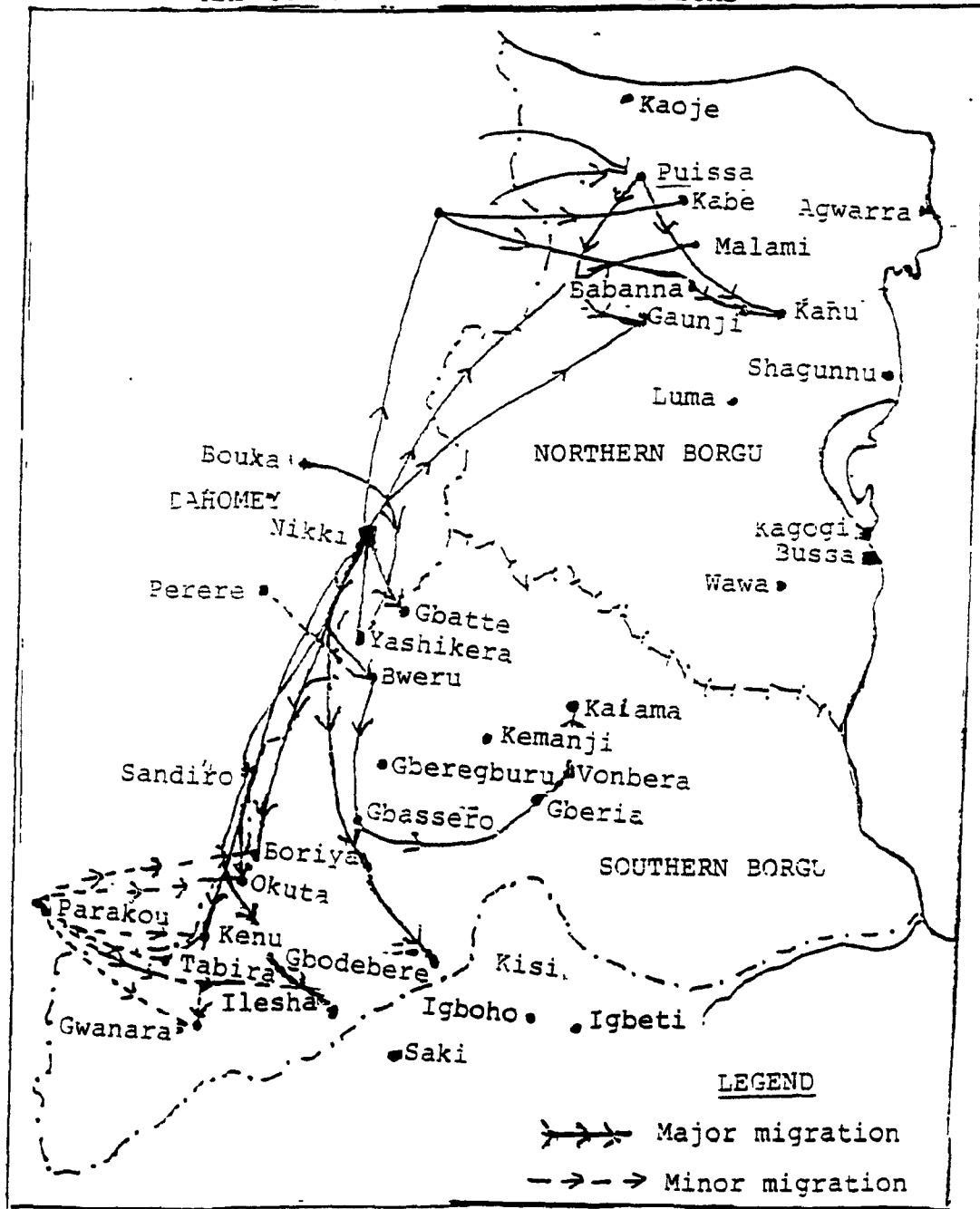
such as Nupe and Oyo both of whom tolerated merchant Muslim minorities because of their contributions to trade, the wealth generated and tax revenue for chiefs which they provided.

The early history of Kaiama indicates that Kabaru was one of the pre-existing settlements before the arrival of the present-day ruling group. It was headed by the Ki-Kabaru who was the oldest man of the lineage. He was assisted in his administration by the Gbedegbana, the chief priest of the Konko shrine.¹⁵ The shrine was represented by a ferocious looking object, located at the outskirts of the town to ward off invaders. Another important shrine in Kabaru was the Lashi, represented by one big stone in a hut. Only the chief priest could consult it directly and he should not be circumcised nor allowed to farm because the shrine represented the earth spirit.¹⁶ Mention should also be made of some shrines where women performed fertility rituals. It would appear that opposition to circumcision had once been an integral part of Kisran ideology. However with almost 300 years of domination by circumcisers -- the Nupe and Yoruba -- where the custom was not tied to Islamic belief, the general population might have begun to adopt it. The earth priest therefore possibly sought to preserve the ancient customs and incidentally the priesthood for his descendants, by insisting

¹⁵ BHT. No. 212.

¹⁶ SNP/17/K2101, "Anthropological Notes on the Bussawa", NAK.

MAP 6. NIKKI SATELLITE CHIEFDOMS



on the ban on circumcision.

Kabaru was essentially populated by the Fulani from Zamfara but it may also have been inhabited by Nupe and Yoruba peoples who had been found as settlers in scattered areas of Borgu before the expansion of the Nikki chiefdoms began (see map 6). Some of its inhabitants later moved eastward to Fakun and Awuru along the River Niger. When exactly the town was founded cannot be dated by a genealogical list because none existed, but it had been well established by the eighteenth century. This postulation is made possible by the fact that the immigrant groups met a considerable population upon their arrival. Informants give the impression that the community had been chiefless¹⁷ but if one assumes it had been controlled by Oyo, oral tradition presumably deliberately drops and ignores that fact. Once Yoruba hegemony collapsed, its agents possibly disappeared and might temporarily have left the community to fall back on its traditional organisation.

Located in the south of Nigerian Borgu and enjoying a vegetation close to the forest region with fertile agricultural land which was capable of supporting a dense population, Kabaru offered a suitable place for the immigrant groups. Short-distance migrations as well as occupational movements may have been responsible for the substantial and compact population of Kabaru at the period when the ruling

¹⁷ BHT. No. 210, Ibrahim Kabaru [68] from Kabaru compound, Kaiama.

dynasty was established. It existed within the same period as Bweru to the west, Kemanji and Gberegburu to the south-west of present-day Kaiama. Gberia and Vonbera were located south of Kaiama. The Ki-zangi of Gberia and the Ki-sura of Kemanji served as earth-priests. In both Gberia and Kemanji as in Kabarú, the priestly caste did not circumcise. Acting merely as the chief hunter and the head of the settlement, the Ki-Kabarú and other earth-priests were entitled to annual presents of food crops, especially during harvest times. They possessed the sacred prerogative to invoke the god of fertility for blessings and to offer sacrifices to the divinities. Following these sacerdotal functions, it became conventional for them to consume the first produce of the harvest before the peasants did.¹⁸ They themselves did not actually till the land. On the assumption that the Oyo-appointed heads had vanished, the earth priests temporarily functioned as leaders of their respective communities, presumably as they had prior to Oyo's overrule. Their influence remained an authority which the incoming and ambitious immigrant leaders would have to deal with, if their political authority was to be recognised.

The dynastic founders of Kaiama migrated from Nikki in c.1730. They moved through Besaji, which was located near Nikki but now extinct. Besaji was quickly abandoned probably

¹⁸ BHT. No. 218.

for fear of raids and subjugation by other Nikki princes. Possibly they were resisted by the inhabitants of Besaji. The immigrant group moved to Bweru, south-east of Nikki, where Boroboko, allegedly the son of Sero-Sunon, the seventeenth Sinaboko (King) of Nikki had established a dynasty.¹⁹ A version of local tradition in Nikki claims that Bweru had been a pre-Kisra settlement but it would appear to be the first satellite chiefdom in Nigerian Borgu, since the dynasty was founded by a Nikki prince. This involved an example of the confusion in tradition between the original Kisra, and the revival of his legend under the Nikki princes. In the early eighteenth century, Nikki had extended its political sway over places such as Kandi and Parakou. The dynastic founder of Parakou was said to be the son of Savé (Sabe in western Yorubaland) king who was kidnapped by a prince from Borgu.²⁰ An unusual long reign of about seventy years has been attributed to Boroboko in Kaiama tradition. During the period Boroboko supposedly fortified the town to forestall incursions from invading princes from either Nikki or Perere (south-west of Nikki). Slaves and war captives were employed in the construction of the safety wall.

Before the end of the eighteenth century, Perere had become militarily and economically powerful, continuously

¹⁹ BHT. No. 205, the Waziri of Kaiama, 1985.

²⁰ For the establishment of Parakou dynasty, consult Orou, G., "Origine de la dynastie de Parakou", Notes Africaines, IFAN, Vol. 66, No. 39, 1955.

challenging the authority of Nikki, its overlord. Owing to his military accomplishments, Koto, the ruler of Perere, had been referred to as "the most powerful chief of Borgu" by Wolf, a German traveller toward the end of the nineteenth century.²¹ Bweru has become important in Borgu history for the miraculous disappearance into the earth of Boroboko,²² an episode which was congruent to that of Kisra at Koko in Gwandu division. Boroboko's disappearance presumably occurred because he could not withstand the onslaught of an invading army, particularly so tradition suggests, from militaristic Perere. Since this must have occurred about 1705 (See the Kaiama Regnal Chart), one assumes that the Oyo authorities also kept an eye upon this intrusion by a Nikki prince into a frontier region. The building of the walls and even more the disappearance of the leader might have been caused by alien forces but suppressed because by tradition, the people of Borgu had never been conquered by outsiders. Killing Boroboko by Borgu states such as Nikki or Perere might be acceptable but by foreigners, not tolerated. Thus he disappeared.

For this miraculous incidence Bweru became a sacred place where the successive rulers of Kaiama were expected to visit in order to offer sacrifices at the spot Boroboko entered the ground. Similarly, at Nikki and Kenu the tradition of visiting

²¹ Crowder, Revolt in Bussa, p. 33.

²² BHT. Nos. 209 and 213.

the royal mausoleum was practised. As for Nikki, the kings were enthroned at Wenou, where the tombs of the founder and those of his sisters are situated.²³ A Kenu chief was obligated to visit Yakparu once during his reign. However, the mysterious disappearance of Boroboko in Bweru may have been a consequence of palace stratagem resulting in assassination. It also may have been usurpation or dynastic change which royal traditions attempt to conceal. The concept that "the king does not die" but merely transposes is abundantly perpetuated in local traditions. On the other hand Borgu kings who died in the Ilorin War of 1837 did not disappear. They were killed. The proliferation of disappearances in a period when Oyo was the dominant power yet unacknowledged in Borgu tradition becomes intensely suspicious. Significantly, the tradition helps to explain the complexity and instability of politics in the early period of Borgu history. As a consequence of the vacant stool, Boro Maso, said to be a brother to Mora Tasude and nephew to Boroboko ascended the throne.²⁴

There was a split in the royal family because the two brothers (Boro Maso and Mora Tasude) could not agree on where to relocate after the disappearance of Boroboko. While Boro

²³ See Lombard, J., "L'intronisation d'un roi Bariba", Notes Africaines, IFAN, 62, 1954, pp. 45-47. See also Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", pp. 170-175. While Nikki kings visited Wenou, Kenu chiefs visited Yakparu for similar observances.

²⁴ BHT. No. 208.

Maso preferred to transfer his political seat to Naberu,²⁵ Mora Tasude and his followers migrated away through Wazibe and Gberia to Vonbera where they temporarily settled but later evacuated. Henceforth, oral history becomes silent on Boro Maso's group but concentrates on that of Mora Tasude. It would appear that Mora Tasude's group was larger and more powerful militarily than Boro Maso's. Robin Law rightly suggested that Vonbera was abandoned following invasions by Nupe and Fulani raiders.²⁶ In addition, evidence from fieldwork refers to a period of famine and insecurity.²⁷ Famine provides a convenient excuse for local tradition, but the dates suggest that the Nupe-Fulani interpretation might have some merit. The brothers came to power c.1705 and the brief seizure of the Bussa throne by the Fulani did not end until 1719.²⁸ Thus Vonbera was evacuated during a period when the Fulani and possibly the Nupe in alliance, were actively seeking to re-establish ascendancy. The Oyo-Yoruba had occupied some Nupe-controlled territory but never all of it.²⁹ Johnson

²⁵ Naberu was located south of Bweru, but is no longer existing.

²⁶ R.C.C. Law, "The Oyo Kingdom and Its Northern Neighbours", Kano Studies, New Series, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1973, p. 31.

²⁷ BHT. No. 205, the Waziri of Kaiama, 1985.

²⁸ Fulani domination of Bussa is indicated in the name of the first ruler on the Bussa Regnal Chart which is in EOB/COU/2/1 "Kisra Museum File", New Bussa.

²⁹ See Johnson, The History, p. 217. Consult also Law, "The Oyo Kingdom", p. 30.

emphatically mentioned that the Nupe town which the Yoruba controlled was Ogodo (Ogudu), a market town. He also mentioned the marriage contract between Alaafin Amodo and Lanloke, the king of Ogodo. The Fulani had just seized the Bussa throne in c.1675. Prior to that, little is recovered about Bussa since its history fell into the dark, unknown middle period. It seems logical to argue that Nupe hegemony played some part in the eclipse of Bussa's political history at this time. It also seems logical to suggest that the two alien powers -- Fulani and Nupe -- became anxious to prevent any resurgence or expansion of the influence of Nikki which Vonbera represented.

Mora Tasude died at Danzin,³⁰ and his son, Sabi Agba was installed. Sabi Agba and his group finally arrived at Kabar. Subsequent to their long wandering, they supposedly sat down under a Gbirili tree to relax when they contacted the pre-existing settlement under the Ki-Kabar (community head and earth priest). Sabi Agba informed the Ki-Kabar in Bokobaru, Ka a ma, "we want to rest," from which "Kaiama" the name of the town was eventually derived. In addition to the existing deities in Kabar, Sabi Agba also introduced the Shika,³¹ (Twins shrine) which was worshipped bi-annually. Carved in human images with a special wood Werali (Twins images) and decorated with about four-hundred cowries (the symbol of

³⁰ Danzin is no longer in existence.

³¹ BHT. No. 209.

wealth), the Shika became a political institution because it was worshipped by all the inhabitants of Kaiama.³²

The Ki-Kabaru allowed congenial co-existence through inter-marriage, and willingly submitted to the royal authority of Sabi Agba, but continued to claim ownership of the land. Presumably the Ki-Kabaru preferred descendants of a Nikki prince rather than a return of Oyo suzerainty. Today, Kabaru forms a ward in Kaiama while the Ki-Kabaru remains as the head of the autochthones and one of the earth priests. The arrival of Sabi Agba (c.1775-1785) became a turning point in the history of southern Borgu because of his military victories -- presumably against Oyo agents -- which enabled him to extend his political suzerainty to all villages in the vicinity of Kabaru, such as Wazibe, Kemanji, Gberia and Vonbera, thereby emerging as the most dominant potentate, apart from the king of Nikki. According to Yoruba sources, Oyo lost its foothold in Borgu in c.1783 or before the death of Sabi Agba c.1785.

A variant of this tradition (probably a Nikki version) rationalizes the institution of chieftaincy in Bweru by referring to the son of one Quaismaila, a Nikki king, who during a hunting expedition, fell from his horse at Bweru and was treated by Bani, the Ba-Bushe (chief priest) of Nikki. For the good deed, the king installed Bani as the chief of Bweru,

³² BHT. Nos. 211 and 214.

thus establishing Nikki's ascendancy over the whole region.³³ The two traditions might both be accurate. The prince fell from his horse for which incident Boroboko had been blamed and was made "to disappear." The king of Nikki thereafter established Bani as chief of Bweru. In disgust Boroboko's nephews left as refugees, the one, Sabi Agba, choosing to take on Oyo and locate at Kabarú later to become Kaiama. The Bweru tradition has not been recorded. It might show Bani as the founder of its royal house. Totemic evidence also support this line of reasoning. Princes of Nikki were normally from the antelope totem. The earth priest of Nikki could hardly have been from the royal clan. The royal totem of Kaiama was antelope and therefore likely to have derived from a royal prince.

Because he was a chief priest, it would appear that Bani established the Shika shrine at Bweru since Kaiama tradition asserts that it was brought from there by Sabi Agba.³⁴ Nevertheless the immigrant "princes" did not expropriate the throne from Bani since they dared not flout the authority of the king of Nikki especially in a region where he hunted. Tradition becomes silent about the development at Bweru after its evacuation by members of the Kaiama ruling dynasty. History followed the rulers. Personal ambition by the princes

³³ DOB/ASR/33, "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK; Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer, p. 143.

³⁴ BHT. No. 225.

to carve out a sphere of influence which would be completely out of Nikki's control may have primarily dictated the continuation of the migration from Bweru even if this took them into the regions dominated by the Fulani, Nupe and Yoruba.

Substantial evidence exists to affirm Yoruba occupation of the region before the foundation of Kaiama. Ethnographical records corroborated by current traditions mention the prominent war which occurred between the Yoruba from Gwanaguru [Gberegburu] and Kaiama under Sabi Agba who supposedly possessed 4000 bowmen and fifty horsemen.³⁵ Despite the Yoruba superiority in men and weapons, as affirmed by tradition, they received a humiliating defeat,³⁶ leaving the survivors to relocate among "their brothers in Oyo."³⁷ Norton-Traill, a colonial officer in Borgu recorded that:

Their [the Yoruba] presence in the vicinity of Kaiama in these early years has given rise to the theory that this part of Borgu may have been inhabited by Yorubas before the coming of the Bussawa....[The Borgu people] could have driven out the ancestors of the hordes of Yorubas who are packed together in the large towns of Southern Nigeria.³⁸

³⁵. See DOB/ASR/33, "Ilorin Gazetteer" and Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer, p. 144.

³⁶ In Kaiama this tradition is jealously preserved as a mark of military invincibility. The war is also a date marker for the establishment of Kaiama dynasty by Sabi Agba. BHT. Nos. 196, 198 and 204.

³⁷. Ibid.

³⁸ BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/33 "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK.

This event has been used by previous writers to establish that the Oyo Empire extended its political sway over part of the Borgu kingdom. Johnson, a Yoruba historian, mentioned that when the Oyo Empire was at the peak of its flowering period, it embraced Dahomey, part of Ashanti, "with portions of the Tapas [Nupe] and Baribas [Borgu]."³⁹ Oyo's expansion into Dahomey might have been motivated by its slave raiding activities and into Borgu by the lure of profits from the northern trade being pioneered by the Wangara. Following the destruction of Songhay in the 1590's the Trans-Saharan trade became overshadowed by commerce towards the Atlantic littoral. Borgu became a central point for commerce. Much of Oyo's prosperity arose because it fostered and controlled this flow of commerce. Norton-Traill continues:

It is much more probable that the Yorubas left South Borgu to form a natural barrier of pathless, uninhabited wilderness between them and the slave-raiders of Sokoto, and that as they withdrew farther and farther south so a few adventurers from Nikki drifted in to the abandoned country.⁴⁰

However, the retreat of the Oyo from south-central Borgu began in the 1780's long before the Sokoto jihad broke out in 1804 and which did not overwhelm Oyo until 1837. The Nikki adventurers did not drift into an abandoned country but rather forced out Oyo and took control over north-south commerce.

³⁹ Johnson, The History, p. 41.

⁴⁰. BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/33 "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK. The same account is contained in Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer, p. 144.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century when Oyo began to disintegrate, subordinate kingdoms and neighbouring states began to overthrow its overlordship. Convincing direct evidence supports this contention. Alluding to one Oyo-Borgu battle, Lionel Abson, Governor of the British fort at Whydah in 1783 stated that:

...the Iho [Oyo]...have received two months ago a total overthrow from a country by name Barrabas [Bariba/Borgu] having lost in the battle 11 [eleven] umbrellas and the generals under them...⁴¹

The above incident referred to the Yoruba-Kaiama War. Akinjogbin pointed out in Dahomey and Its Neighbours that the episode described by Abson took place in 1783 toward the end of Alaafin Abiodun's reign.⁴² The date of 1783 seems to be absolutely correct because this was the reign of Sabi Agba (c.1775-1785) by calculated, not fixed reign dates. Given his numerous wars and subjection of surrounding towns, it seems logical to describe him as liberator from the imperialism of Oyo. Kaiama's foundation also coincided with the reign of Kigera I of Bussa (c.1755-1771),⁴³ and that of Alepata Abolu, the fifth chief of Igboho (c.1749-1784), whose ancestors were

⁴¹ L. Abson, 26 September, 1783 (T70/1545) as quoted in Akinjogbin, Dahomey and Its Neighbours, pp. 164-165. Note that only the most prominent and important generals would be permitted the use of umbrellas.

⁴² Ibid..

⁴³ In the Kisra Museum File, Kigera I's date is c.1755-1771 but a documentary source puts it at c.1750-1766. see DOB/HIS/47, "Genealogical Trees: Borgu Division", NAK.

from Borgu.⁴⁴ Despite the significant victory over the Yoruba, Kaiama's quandary continued with incessant assaults from the Nupe who menaced the budding chiefdom. In c.1790 during the reign of Mora Kato, the second ruler [c.1785-1810], the Nupe launched an offensive against Kaiama.⁴⁵ Whereas the Nupe possessed the added advantage of guns, firearms and superior numbers of cavalry soldiers, they also succumbed to a crushing defeat from Kaiama.⁴⁶ After this victory, Yaru and Beru, Sabi Agba's brother and sister left Kaiama to establish the ruling houses of Gbette and Gbassero respectively.⁴⁷ They became entirely independent of Kaiama. Obviously Kaiama lay near the boundary of the Oyo hegemony to the south and the Nupe to the north. By 1790 the Nupe too had rid themselves of Oyo authority and presumably sought unsuccessfully to crush the up-start chiefdom of Kaiama.

Considerably later in the 1820's, having consolidated their rule in Nupe, the Fulani jihadists launched the last invasion of Kaiama. To be successful jihadist-type rebellions usually required a great deal of local support. Rarely could they be imposed externally. The Muslim community of Kaiama was

⁴⁴ J.O. Adekunle, "The Foundation and Political Development of Igboho in the Pre-Colonial Times", B.A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Ife, Ile-Ife, June, 1983.

⁴⁵ DOB/HIS/70, District Notebooks", NAK.

⁴⁶ BHT. Nos. 206 and 208.

⁴⁷ BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/70, "District Notebooks", NAK.

very small in 1823 but nevertheless it rose under Magaji Mallam to support the Fulani-Nupe jihadist invaders. Ultimately, the invasion was frustrated by the Ki-Taku, Kaiama's army general.⁴⁸ This seems to be the last Nupe's aggression against Kaiama or other Borgu towns. The post of the Ki-Taku as a chief priest and an army general might have originated from Bweru where the political structure of Kaiama had begun to develop.⁴⁹ Ki-Taku also defeated Magaji Mallam and his religious insurrection in 1823. Magaji Mallam, an immigrant Muslim from the north, who sought to dramatically transform Kaiama religiously, ended dying in the attempt.⁵⁰

It may be argued that Kaiama emerged as the first important Nikki satellite chiefdom in Nigerian Borgu. Although Bweru predated Kaiama in establishment, its political influence did not appear to be as far-reaching. This argument rests on the presumption that Kaiama was founded in 1775,⁵¹ which was earlier than the establishment of other chiefdoms.

⁴⁸ DOB/HIS/41-42, "Borgu Historical Notes", NAK.

⁴⁹ The Ki-Taku came from one of the immigrant groups who followed the ruling family from Bweru. It has been affirmed that the Ki-Taku was supposed to be always a conqueror and never conquered, a tradition parallel to that of the Are-Ona Kakanfo of the Oyo Empire. BHT. Nos. 196 and 204.

⁵⁰ Clapperton 1822-1826 and the Lander Brothers 1826-1830 both found 800 Nupe cavalry soldiers at Wawa near Bussa. But Kaiama had revived the warrior tradition and the anti-Muslim ideology of Kisra to end the final Nupe threat to Borgu. See Hallet (ed.), The Niger Journal, p. 106n.

⁵¹ DOB/ASR/24, "Borgu Gazetteer and Historical Notes", NAK.

Furthermore the Kaiama tradition stretches back to Boroboko c.1695-1725 and involves the establishment of Bweru and interaction at Vonbera. But there is another version of the establishment of the royal house of Kaiama from Nikki which claims that Kaiama's ruling dynasty had been of Zaberma origin. According to the tradition, Sunon Sero, king of Nikki stationed a Zaberma at Kaiama to collect tributes and tolls since it was a period of flourishing long-distance trade in Borgu. The Zaberma did act like a chief by blowing the trumpet which he acquired from Nikki as an indication that he was a royal representative.⁵²

This tradition has been intensely discredited at Kaiama where insistence upon complete political autonomy since the town's inception has been maintained.⁵³ It seems probable that initially when Kaiama was facing the power of the Oyo Empire and the Nupe, and seeking to control the lucrative trade, the Nikki king had stationed his Zaberma agent in the town as the imperial representative. There is slight evidence that this agent or his successor ever usurped the throne. It might be a possibility that the second royal house in Kaiama had descended from the royal Zaberma agent. By Kaiama tradition the second royal house descended from the "brother" of Sabi Agba. (see the Kaiama Regnal Chart). If the "brother" Yaru

⁵² BHT. Nos. 233 and 238.

⁵³ BHT. No. It is also alleged that Kaiama did not engage in the annual exchange of gifts as occurred between Bussa and Nikki.

Tana had been the Zaberma agent, then the Nikki tradition makes some sense.

The throne of Kaiama has continued to rotate between two ruling houses, Sabi Agba and Yaru Tana (both supposedly the sons of Mora Tasude). The Sabi Agba line, however, dominated by presenting more candidates for the throne. For instance between Sabi Agba (when the royal line was supposedly founded) and 1973 (which has been taken as the base year and the beginning of a new generation of rulers), only five chiefs reigned from the Yaru Tana line while nine were from Sabi Agba.⁵⁴ The drummer clan's genealogy of four generations almost conform with the royal one. According to the accompanying regnal chart of Kaiama where the evidence has been collected, there have been five generations and fifteen rulers, including a Zaberma stranger who was imposed by the colonial officers. An average generation length cannot be determined for these fifteen chiefs in five generations because the succession pattern changed in every generation. Moving backward from the generation which ended in 1973 one finds five rulers. In the generation before four, then three, then two and in the fifth generation only one ruler (see Kaiama Regnal Chart). According to the dates assigned by colonial officers the fourth and fifth generations stretched 61 years each, the third 24 and the fourth 42. With such a

⁵⁴ The present Emir of Kaiama, Mohammad Tukur, Mora Tasude II, ascended the throne in 1973.

significant variation, an average appears ridiculous especially when one is seeking to calculate the reign of a single ruler (Sabi Agba) in a single generation.

On the assumption that the colonial dates are relatively accurate for the nineteenth century, they have been accepted back to Yaru Iloride (chief no. 4, 1827-1830). Calculating for twelve chiefs between 1827 and 1973, the reign length averages twelve years, for fourteen chiefs 1755 to 1973, the average becomes 13.4 years. D.H. Jones using another criteria calculated 13.2 years.⁵⁵ Using 13 years per reign, Sabi Agba ruled about 1772-1785. On the other hand Sabi Agba and his predecessors ruled one king per generation. In such circumstances the average in Africa falls into the 27-30 year range. Using 30 years between Boroboko and Sabi Agba, the calculations have been shown on the left hand side of the Kaiama Regnal List. Thus by reign length Sabi Agba ruled c.1772-1785 and by generation length c.1775-1785. By either calculation he fits into the period of interaction with the Oyo Empire and the Nupe as per dates from external sources.

Kenu became the second satellite chiefdom from Nikki to settle in the region. The relationship between Kenu and Gwanara chiefdoms is interwoven. According to one version of dynastic origins, their ancestors were brothers from the Kenu clan and they migrated together from Nikki. But the chiefdoms were not established at the same time as their regnal lists

⁵⁵ Jones, "Problems of African Chronology", p. 175.

clearly suggest. Kenu pre-dated Gwanara but not by enough years that the founder of Gwanara could not have been a younger brother of the six brothers who ruled Kenu in the first generation. (See the Kenu and Gwanara Regnal Charts). While the senior brother founded Kenu, the younger moved in an eastern direction to establish Gwanara. Gwanara apparently remained an offshoot of Kenu. Indeed the ruler of Gwanara according to tradition was usually the heir-presumptive to the throne of Kenu.⁵⁶ Following this intricate kinship relationship and common political experiences, both chiefdoms will be discussed together. Two versions of the tradition of origin are available.

The first version identified Boro Kabawuko, a Nikki prince, as the founder of Kenu. Of all the Nikki princes, the tradition asserts, Kabawuko was the first to migrate with a large following.⁵⁷ He first settled at Dadikiru (probably a corruption of Diguidirou on the modern Nigerian-Dahomey border, a few kilometres to Kosubosu). Dadikiru was formerly an independent town before Nikki subjugated it. Since the Dadikiru royal house possessed no kinship relations with Nikki, Kabawuko struggled to usurp the throne. But he failed. This failure provoked another migration which culminated in the establishment of Kenu. By the time of Kabawuko's arrival

⁵⁶ BHT. No. 76, an information which could also be found in BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/42, "Borgu Historical Notes", NAK.

⁵⁷ BHT. No. 76.

in the region, the tradition alleged, the vast terrain from Yashikera in the north to Ilesha in the south remained uninhabited. Thus Kenu claimed ownership of the land and the prerogative to distribute it to subsequent immigrants.⁵⁸ When Kenu chiefdom was actually founded remains obscure but traditions date it to antiquity.⁵⁹

Within this version of the origins of Kenu, a number of suspicions arise as to its authenticity. The name "Kabawuko" does not appear in the official regnal list of Kenu, until the sixteenth king in the late nineteenth century. Since "Kabawuko" appears to be one of the royal houses of Kenu the connection with Nikki seems to have been invented to boost its claim to the throne. The further claim to have sought the throne in Dadikiru seems weak. It becomes suspicious that this version stresses that there were no pre-existing inhabitants suggestive that it seeks to cover up or challenge the other version of origins which appears indigenous. Most conclusively the Kenu regnal clan totems do not include the antelope, the usual sign of relationships to the Nikki royal house. Three commoner clans in Kenu have the same totems as well as commoner clans in Ilesha, Okuta and Kaiama. In fact, the Kenu royal clan possesses a wide network of support among eight different commoner clans. The indigenous roots appear strong more closely fitting into the second version of the origin

⁵⁸ BHT. No. 77.

⁵⁹ BHT. Nos. 76, 85, and 88.

story. Finally, the Kabawuko version makes no reference to the close kinship links between Kenu and Gwanara.

The second version argues that the original homeland of the Kenu clan was Dadikiru and the ancestors specialized in hunting elephants. While leaving Dadikiru, their grandfather (probably Kabawuko) and Yon Yarugi (their sister) followed them.⁶⁰ They moved to Kenu through Yakparu where their grandfather settled. Their sister moved farther to settle at Yaaru. Periodically they used to send selected parts of the game animals they hunted to their grandfather and sister. Soon both of them died. Since then, the rulers of Kenu and Gwanara commenced the pilgrimage to Yakparu through Yaaru.⁶¹ This practice might have been borrowed from Nikki where it was incumbent upon every successive king to perform a pilgrimage to Wenou. Wenou is a village south of Nikki. It is the place where the tombs of the founder of the dynasty and those of his sisters are located. To receive ancestral blessings and enjoy a successful reign, it was mandatory for the kings of Nikki to be installed in this village after performing certain sacrificial rites. The practice at both Kenu and Nikki

⁶⁰ BHT. Nos. 102 and 107.

⁶¹ Ibid... The Yakparu pilgrimage entails sacrifices at the tombs of the grandfather and sister of the founders of Kenu. The pilgrimage was obligatory to every chief of Kenu and Gwanara. If a chief failed to perform it, his successor would be compelled to sacrifice double items.

persists in modern times.⁶² This second version presumably prompted colonial officers such as Hoskyns-Abrahall to infer that the king of Kenu had no kinship connection with the Nikki family but belonged to "one of the original stock."⁶¹ In another record by Hoskyns-Abrahall, it was clearly indicated that:

Sarkin Kenu...though not officially of such importance was in reality a more powerful man, for this position went to a favoured slave of Sarkin Nikki, who was at the same time what one might call his chief messenger, something approaching Waziri, and no one could have word with Nikki but through Sarkin Kenu. At the yearly festival when all subordinate Sarkin went to salute their overlord, it was through Kenu that they must approach the Sarkin.⁶⁴

The above assertion has been corroborated because the Kenu royal house does not possess the Tambari (big drums) and Kakaki (trumpet), which indicated authority from Nikki. The reference to "favoured slave" is an effort by a colonial official to interpret this traditional situation in Muslim terms for his superiors in Northern Nigeria. Commoners holding high positions were either regular commoners or slaves. The reference to Waziri, the chief adviser to the king was the highest position under the monarch. It carried great respect.

⁶² The last pilgrimage at Kenu was conducted in November 1990. The ceremony lasted three days.

⁶³ CSO/26/51245 "Assessment Report on Okuta District", NAI.

⁶⁴ BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/42, "Borgu Historical Notes: Kaiama Emirate", NAK.

The Kenu royal house may have acted as surrogate for Nikki specifically because it derived from commoner origins. This looks possible because unlike Kaiama the kings went to Nikki for confirmation, and as the quote above suggests, Kenu was more powerful than those states under princely houses.

The totemic evidence suggests the commoner and indigenous origins of the Kenu royal house. The primary totem of the rulers was the leopard which in the other chiefdoms and Kenu belonged to the drummer clans, normally considered indigenous even if they came from Nikki. (See the Chart on "Totemic Distribution"). When one considers this totemic evidence with the unusual circumstance, that the royal clan claimed to be "owners of the soil" and thus a priestly clan as well as providing the royal drummers, the commoner origins appear confirmed. Furthermore because of its common origins, the Kenu royal house felt it necessary to be confirmed in Nikki and to be the gateway to access to the imperial capital. This was quite unlike Kaiama founded by a royal prince and eager at every turn to assert its total sovereignty from Nikki.

Dates regarding the early rulers of Kenu are not available in documentary sources and no useful hint has been supplied in oral narrative. For dating purposes, the earliest firm date for both Kenu and Gwanara involves the Ilorin War of 1837 in which Suno Ali (Kpotokpotogi) the eighth chief of Kenu and Sina Yoru the founder and first chief of Gwanara died. For Kenu the latest date was the death of the thirtieth chief in

1988 and for Gwanara the seventh chief in 1978. Calculating for Kenu: $1988 - 1837 = 151$ years, divided by the 22 chiefs gives the average reign length as seven years approximately. Projecting seven years back for the first eight kings means that Kenu was founded c.1781-1788 with Kabawuko, the grandfather and the sister falling in the generation before that or about 1754-1781. Gwanara was founded c.1810-1837 since its first chief died in the Ilorin War. The second chief (Gawe Yeruma) was engaged in a series of wars with other chiefdoms and Nikki. He died in one of the wars and a period of interregnum followed. The British met the third chief of Gwanara, as a result the colonial dates would appear to be acceptable.

The satellite chiefdom of Ilesha will be treated as the third one established by immigrants from Nikki. This actually occurred as late as c.1858-1869. However, the traditions of Ilesha penetrate far back in time. The immigrants took over a community in the mid-nineteenth century rather than establishing a new one. Ilesha had been established centuries before. It is important to note that the history of the community and the history of the immigrants are quite different and only come together in the nineteenth century when the Nikki immigrants took it over. The name "Ilesha" is clearly of Yoruba origin meaning "the land or home we have chosen." The earliest noted ruler who possibly established the community was called by the title Shina Lesagi, meaning "the

head of Lesagi." The Shina Lesagi and his clan Lesaworu, were indigenous of the tree totem (quite unusual and unlike any group from Nikki), and the Shina was the earth priest under a succession of rulers, Nupe, Yoruba and Nikki princes. He still fulfils that function in modern Ilesha.

Ilesha existed under the headmanship of Shina Lesagi, who had been variously referred to in tradition as either Yoruba or Nupe in origin. To support the latter claim, allusion has been made to the establishment of a large Nupe kingdom in the region adding that the last of the Nupe chiefs was buried at Ilesha.⁶⁵ Colonial officers and some scholars have opined that the land on which Ilesha, Kenu and Okuta were founded originally belonged to the Alaafin of Oyo.⁶⁶ Anene also described Ilesha and Okuta as "Yoruba outposts over which Nikki princes installed themselves."⁶⁷ The contiguity of Ilesha to Saki, a militarily powerful Oyo town and the dense population of Yoruba in this region formed a sturdy basis for this argument. Samuel Johnson gave credibility to this version by stating that some portions of Borguland were vassals of the

⁶⁵ BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/33 "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK and Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer , pp. 148-149.

⁶⁶ BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/70, "District Notebooks", NAK; Law, The Oyo Empire, p. 240. Consult also Law, "The Oyo Kingdom and its Northern Neighbours", 1973, p. 25.

⁶⁷ J.C. Anene, The International Boundaries of Nigeria 1885-1960, Longman, London, 1970, p. 196. DOB/ASR/33 "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK.

Alaafin of Oyo.⁶⁸ Idris added that the founder of Ilesha presented to the Alaafin of Oyo, who was then in exile at Igboho, two male and two female slaves, two cows and a horse, two hundred loads of cowries and one hundred kola nuts, in return for the land. He also suggested that the event took place during the reign of Derekureku, the chief of Ilesha who had been expelled from Nikki by the Sinaboko or king.⁶⁹ Who the Alaafin was is uncertain because Igboho tradition does not remember the episode. The piece of information clearly corroborates Oyo's preeminence over certain parts of Borgu.

Interpreting these fragments of tradition within the overall chronological framework established earlier in this chapter, it might be argued that it was not Derekureku⁷⁰ who approached the Alaafin with presents for the land but rather the Shina Lesagi. The Shina Lesagi might have made the presents to enable the Alaafin to recognise his ownership of the land. This probably did occur when the Alaafin was resident in Borgu around 1520. After all, the Shina still acts today as owner of the soil and custodian of its fertility.

⁶⁸ Johnson, The History, pp. 41 and 179. The Borgu, Nupe and Dahomey subordinate towns of Oyo were lost after the death of Alaafin Abiodun (1775-1805) when the period of tranquillity ended and revolution engulfed the empire.

⁶⁹ Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", pp. 154-155.

⁷⁰ There were two rulers referred to as Derekureku, the first c.1790-1813 and the second 1858-1869. Neither would have been seeking land from the Alaafin of Oyo because after 1790 and the defeat by Kaiama, Oyo no longer held any authority anywhere in Borgu. See Ilesha Regnal Chart.

Sometime thereafter, it seems logical to suggest that the community of Lesagi became the headquarters for Nupe kings, the last one dying there, when in the late 1600's the Oyo conquered them.⁷¹ Presumably then the name was changed from Lesagi to Ilesha.

Another Yoruba connection also relating to land has been recorded by Bada, a Yoruba local historian from Saki. He emphatically stated that the land originally belonged to Saki. Consequently he remarked that:

During Ajayi's [Chief of Saki] reign an Ibariba prince called Sendro, from Nikki District, came to Saki and asked [the] Okere [or chief of Saki] for land on which to found a settlement. Okere granted the request on condition that Sendro would acknowledge Saki as his overlord. This was agreed, and Sendro called the town Ilesha; and remained under Saki's control until the Tabida [Tabira, Borgu town] war when the Saki people conspired to desert Okere Atere in battle. The Ilesha people took the opportunity to assert their independence from Saki.⁷²

There are some inherent inaccuracies in this tradition. First "Sendro" (Sandiro) was a town and not a person. By the period of the foundation of Ilesha, Sandiro had been in existence and probably had been independent of Nikki. In the Ilesha regnal list no name survives as Sendro. Secondly, Saki did not actually fight with Tabira (west of Kenu). Following an ambush

⁷¹ SNP/17/K2101, "Anthropological Notes", NAK.

⁷² S.O. Bada, History of Saki, (n.d.), p. 32.

of the Saki army by some Borgu soldiers, Atere, the Okere (chief) of Saki, deserted his people and ultimately committed suicide for accepting self-defeat.⁷³ Thirdly there is no convincing evidence to substantiate the subordination of Ilesha by Saki. The Alaafin of Oyo had been in control of the land.

The tradition makes sense to a large degree. Chief Ajayi of Saki ruled c.1847-1863 while Ilesha was taken over by Sabi Derekureku c.1858-1869. He and his followers had come from Sandiro. Thus Sabi Derekureku of Ilesha was a contemporary of Ajayi of Saki. The historian, Bada, merely mixed his name with his natal town. But one must not mix up the Shina's request for recognition as the owner of the land from the Alaafin c.1520 with Derekureku's request c.1858. By this time Old Oyo had been destroyed and the New Oyo capital located in the south had nothing to do with Borgu. As far as the Sandiro immigrants were concerned, the Yoruba still controlled the Ilesha community. What Derekureku needed was some kind of authority in order to confront the Shina Lesagi who also claimed the land. In the end, the Shina remained in control of the land while acknowledging the political leadership of Derekureku and his descendants. More importantly, Bada's evidence gives credence to Yoruba occupation of certain portions of southern Borgu during the "dead middle" of its

⁷³ An information collected at Igboho confirmed this incident. See BHT. No. 11 and Bada, History of Saki, pp. 37-38.

history.

To claim legitimacy to the throne, a version of the local tradition traces migration of a Nikki prince to Bwe (probably Bouay an important town under Nikki in Dahomey) and to Sandiro, on the border of Dahomey (see map 6). Sandiro appeared to be a large settlement, populated by people of divergent cultural and linguistic backgrounds. When it was founded remains obscure -- possibly c.1746-1757 -- but a political relationship was ultimately established with Nikki. An account which links Shina Lesagi of the Lesaworu clan with royalty from Nikki⁷⁴ appears speculative. Shina Lesagi clan does not claim any affiliation with Nikki hence the account may have referred to one Shina Sani, a member of the Nikki royal family, who migrated to Sandiro, his maternal home, with his four children and a Kakaki (trumpet) as insignia of political authority (see the Ilesha Regnal Chart).⁷⁵ Sandiro increased in population, popularity as well as in military prowess such that it became a threat to Nikki.

To checkmate its growing strength and reputation, Nikki besieged and completely devastated Sandiro in the second half of the eighteenth century. This circumstance inspired massive migration from Sandiro. Until the present day, the Mora ruling

⁷⁴ BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/32 "Gazetteer", NAK.

⁷⁵ DOB/ASR/32, "Gazetteer of Ilesha District", NAK.

clan of Ilesha retains a blood affinity with Sandiro.⁷⁶ Two deductions emerge from the above tradition. First, that Shina Lesagi was the original founder and the earth priest of Ilesha. He claimed ownership of the land and possessed the authority to distribute it. This position was first threatened by the presence of the Alaafin but entirely changed in the nineteenth century with the arrival of the Mora ruling clan from Nikki. Henceforth Shina Lesagi's role was reduced to only the earth priest, responsible for its fertility. A remarkable political transformation began when Derekureku (1858-1869) emerged as an acceptable political leader in Ilesha.

Derekureku (c.1790-1813), the fifth ruler of Sandiro, supposedly married two women from Ilesha, each having a son.⁷⁷ Both sons, Sabi Hankuri (the elder) and Bio Tokoru (later known as Suno Mora), were brought up at Ilesha as Sandiro princes. When Derekureku died and the stool became vacant, Bio Tokoru ascended the throne to the displeasure of Sabi Hankuri. Bio Tokoru had been favoured because of his hospitality to the messengers from Nikki, informing them that the stool was vacant. Hankuri's ambition and intransigence was overtly exhibited when he was called upon to pay obeisance to Bio Tokoru, the new chief of Sandiro. Rather than obey, he declared war on Sandiro from his Ilesha base. Tokoru, who

⁷⁶ BHT. No. 17 - Hankuri Jatto, chief of Ilesha from Mora clan.

⁷⁷ BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/70, "District Notebooks", NAK.

possessed a large following, easily eliminated Hankuri. A series of palace machinations followed in which many princes were either killed or compelled to migrate out of Sandiro. In the end, Mora Jato, another Sandiro prince, conspired with Bakombia (chief of Sheronkpeiru [Okuta]) to oust Bio Tokoru. This dating cross-reference matches: Bakombia of Okuta c.1805-1814 and Mora Jato of Ilesha in the generation c.1813-1836, indicating the contemporaneity of Okuta and Ilesha.

Tradition also alludes to the continuous campaigns against Sandiro by the people of Gwandu in Hausaland who were attempting to raid the region for slaves as another factor responsible for the migration.⁷⁸ Gwandu's influence had increased dramatically following its military power and a succession of sanguine leaders who organized a series of campaigns into the Borgu region. After a momentary stay at Tera, the movement out of Sandiro continued to Kwaiwokun where the people remained for a considerable length of time. Meanwhile in 1837 the Ilorin War between the Yoruba-Borgu allied army and the Fulani jihadists broke out and Mora Lafia, who had succeeded Mora Jato as the chief of the migrants, joined forces with Sero Kpera, king of Nikki. Both died at Ilorin. After this episode, Asaburu, son of Bio Tokoru assumed the title of Agbiyaru, the ruler of the migrating group, now stationed along the River Moshi. After the death of Asaburu his brother, Irangobi, came to power under the title of

⁷⁸ BHT. No. 17.

Sinaderu. He was assailed by the king of Nikki and this triggered the desertion of the Moshi camp, with a sizeable number of the people, including Sinaderu himself, escaping to Igboho in Yorubaland where he ultimately died.⁷⁹ At Igboho, Borgu refugees from the Ilorin War occupied Bonni ward. Since the foundation of Igboho by the Alaafin Eguguoju in the mid-sixteenth century when he was accompanied by six Borgu hunters, the town had become a sanctuary for Borgu refugees.⁸⁰ Kisi, located north of Igboho, also held kinship relations with Nikki, hence it as well served as an asylum for many survivors of the Ilorin War. Following the death of Sinaderu, another prince identified as Sabi Derekureku,⁸¹ who had garnered considerable support during his four-year stay at Okuta, ascended the throne and designed certain strategies for reoccupying Ilesha, one of which involved securing permission from Oyo through the king of Saki. Given the Gwanara raiders and the hostility of Nikki, Sabi Derekureku desired to be assured that he would not also be attacked by the Yoruba of Saki.

⁷⁹ BHT. Nos. 16 and 19; BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/70, "District Notes", NAK.

⁸⁰ Bonni is a Batonu name for the fourth male child. The original founder of the ward was one of the six hunters who accompanied Alaafin Eguguoju from Borguland when Igboho was founded in the mid-sixteenth century. The six hunters also played significant roles during the process of re-occupying Katunga. See Adekunle, "The Foundation" and BHT. Nos. 6, 7, 8 and 12.

⁸¹ Not to be confused with his grandfather, also called Derekureku.

Because Derekureku successfully executed his scheme, he has been remembered in tradition as the second founder of Ilesha, the first being Shina Lesagi, the earth priest and founder of the Lesaworu clan. In actual fact, Derekureku was probably the fourth founder of Ilesha if the Shina Lesagi was the first, followed by the Nupe and later the Yoruba. Under Derekureku, the Mora dynasty was ensconced at Ilesha with the Tambari (drums) and Kakaki (trumpets) indicating royalty from Nikki. It is further suggested because the Mora clan reveres the royal antelope totem, the totem carried by most Nikki princes who founded satellite chiefdoms. The Lesaworu clan from which the earth priest is chosen reveres the Besigondo tree. Of the twenty-one totems collected in Borgu, only two were trees rather than animals. Vegetable totems tend to come from the north because many were associated with the Sahel. The major northern influence in Borgu appears to be Nupe. On that basis one might surmise that the Lesaworu clan and its leader Shina Lesagi were Nupe in origin and part of the Nupe chiefdom which existed prior to the intrusion of the Borgawa and even of the Yoruba. The complexity of inter-ethnic mixture which occurred in the region most probably brought about the confusions in tradition of origins. The Lesaworu clan revered one totem only, the Besigondo tree. The only other tree totem was one of three in one Okuta clan, the Yari -- Cobra, Deer and Baatoko tree -- which might suggest assimilated Nupe. The Nupe connection is merely a conjecture, the greater evidence

suggesting an indigenous origin. The last Nupe king was buried in Ilesha and the Shina Lesagi institution continued to function as the earth-priest.

The ancient origin and longevity of Ilesha and that it became the headquarters of the Nupe (focus of first the Yoruba and finally the Nikki princes) was probably because of the huge market town of Gbodebere which was nearby and under its control. The Muslim group of clans -- the Ture from Bonikpara (Dahomey), Mane (Borno) and Taruwere (Parakou) -- had probably moved into this town as early as the Nupe period and well before the late 1600's. The Ture recall they were led to Borgu by Alfa Umaru.⁸² Called the Dandawa, the Muslims were part of the merchant group known as the Wangara. During the same generation when the Nikki princes were preparing to take over Ilesha, one of them -- Biokura -- seized Gbodebere. He died during the Ilorin War in 1837.⁸³ Mention has also been made of a group of migrants under an adventurous war-leader known as Are Yirakene⁸⁴ who has been well remembered for the introduction of military innovations which permitted Ilesha to

⁸² BHT. No. 32.

⁸³ BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/32, "Gazetteer", NAK. Another record credits the foundation of Gbodebere to Woru Yaru a Nikki prince who supposedly became the first chief of Yashikera. This account is suspect because Gbodebere had been established and populated by the Dandawa. It also seems impossible since Woru Yaru of Yashikera ruled c.1890 to 1907. He could not have had any hand in the take over of Gbodebere which occurred before 1837, far less its foundation possibly 200 years earlier. See BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/70, "District Notebooks", NAK.

⁸⁴ BHT. No. 23.

withstand the onslaught of the Yoruba specifically from Saki.

Ilesha traditions contend that the inter-clan mixture between the indigenous and migrant groups was through peaceful negotiations by the community leaders. The longevity attached to the establishment of the town has been properly expressed in Batonu as occurring at yete genge - a very long time ago. Judging from the visit of the Alaafin in the middle of the sixteenth century, the period of the Nupe capital and ultimate Yoruba control, it had been yete genge in oral traditions even though the take over by the Nikki princes did not occur until the mid-nineteenth century.

The Ilesha regnal chart has been constructed on the data from the traditions of origin and the official British records. The British dates have been employed back to 1869 with the death of the first chief. Using 1975 (when the present ruler ascended the throne) as the forward date and death of chief number eleven, the reign length has been calculated: $1975 - 1869 = 106$ years divided by 10 kings giving a reign length of approximately eleven years and generation length of 23. The dating before 1869 has been based on these averages (see the Ilesha Regnal Chart). Although there had been four ruling houses, the chiefdom rulers have basically rotated between the descendants of the brothers Sabi Hankuri and Bio Tokoru. This gives the chiefdom collateral succession of a less extravagant type than Kenu but expectedly like Kaiama. Two competing royal houses as in Ilesha and Kaiama

suggest their princely origins while the extravagant collateralism of Kenu demonstrates a different origin as confirmed by traditions, totems and rituals. The brothers Sabi and Bio, sons of Derekureku, the fifth ruler of Sandiro, it might be recalled quarrelled over who would ultimately rule over Ilesha. Both were killed before they succeeded and their children ultimately shared the throne. Calculating by the Ilesha reign length, if Derekureku had been the fifth ruler of Sandiro then that chiefdom had been founded c.1746-1757 or in the general period of the expansion of Nikki and the Borgawa. Boroboko founded Bweru c.1695-1725 before Kabawuko left Nikki to found Kenu c.1754-1781 and just after the move to Sandiro.

In six Borgu chiefdoms information was collected from about forty-eight clans, thirty-nine of which were totemic, Babanna having the fewest clans with two and Kenu/Gwanara the most, with fourteen. Of the thirty-nine totemic clans, only ten held to one totem while twelve possessed two, fourteen possessed three and three had four (see Totemic Distribution Chart). Thus the majority had two or more totems. The two largest totems and the only ones found in all six chiefdoms were the leopard (15 clans) and antelope (14 clans). It seems that the antelope was the royal totem brought from Nikki while the leopard was the major symbol of the royal drummers. The most widespread indigenous group appear to be those who revere the Weaver bird (13 clans). Another significant group -- the Cobra (10 clans) -- seem to have been associated with Sandiro

and Parakou. The monitor lizard with five groups and the rabbit with seven are the only other totems of significance. There are four totem groups confined to one chiefdom (snail, wild cat, monkey and hippopotamus). All would appear to be indigenous well as those in two chiefdoms only (dove, lizard, mouse and crab). Clearly there is a Nupe element within the category of the indigenous. The best guess might be the two tree and two python totems.

The only way the Nupe and Yoruba elements might be sorted out in Borgu would be to collect the totems among those two peoples. Long Islamization appears to wipe out totemic observances but among the Islamized Igala, Sargent found them easily. In northern Borgu where totems do not exist, that condition appears traditional. Islamization has not yet reached the majority of the population. In the satellite chiefdoms nine clans have been classified as having no totem but six of these referred to the usual Muslims -- Wangara or Dandawa. Only three were otherwise non-totemic, the most peculiar being the royal clan of Yashikera. Later the peculiar and confusing origins of that clan will be analyzed. As this chapter has shown, totemic evidence may be employed to confirm or question certain narrative traditions such as the claim to royal Nikki ancestry for the Kenu royal house. However its most effective use is to demonstrate the multi-ethnic origins of any population which today wishes to claim a "tribal" purity. Through totemism, Sargent demonstrates the multi-

ethnic origins of the Igala and Erim of the Idoma.⁸⁵ As the Totemic Distribution Chart demonstrates most of the clans adhered to multiple totems. The royal Mora clan of Ilesha adheres to the antelope, leopard and cobra. The royal antelope, leopard drummer, and military cobra (see Totemic Chart below) probably came from Nikki. The commoner clan in Ilesha called the Bare revered the same totems and had branches in Kenu, Yashikera and Okuta. The Bare in turn enjoyed playmate relations with the Wanro clan in Ilesha and Kenu. For this reason they did not inter-marry.⁸⁶ Thus six distinct commoner clans in four chiefdoms possessed similar totems to the royal Mora in Ilesha. This group -- Mora, Bare and Wanro -- possibly represent the commoner followers and kin of the Nikki princes who founded Ilesha as well and spreading out and settling in three other chiefdoms. It might well be called the Mora clan group. Such a scattering of related peoples presumably accounted for the relative peaceful and amicable relations among the chiefdoms.

It is little wonder that the greatest concentration of antelope totem clans occurs in Ilesha (see Totemic Chart). Of all the fourteen antelope totems only three are actually royal, in Babanna, Kaiama and Ilesha. In all others the

⁸⁵ Benue Valley Project Papers Nos. 5 and 10, 1975, Dalhousie University, Halifax.

⁸⁶ BHT. Nos. 18 and 38. The two clans were probably related in the far distant period to account for prohibition, which is still in force.

presence of the antelope means the inter-mixture of royals and commoners. For example the Sesi commoner clan which appears in three chiefdoms -- Ilesha, Kenu and Okuta -- revere the antelope along with the weaver bird and monitor lizard. At Kaiama the Sesi reveres only the antelope along with the ruling house. Thus distantly related royals who have slipped into commoner status have continued to be active in absorbing commoners along their migration route and from the indigenous people.

The clans of Borgu seem to represent groups of people who have co-operated historically, their totems being one of the symbols of their unity. They were not kinship units as customarily assumed in African society since inter-marriage within the clan was permitted. The clans appear to have been mechanisms of assimilation with the royal Antelope, drummer Leopard and indigenous Weaver Bird being the most insistent assimilators. These three appear to have been the prestige groups. It becomes interesting to speculate about those clans which have remained devoted to a single totem and therefore resisted assimilation. The most important of these are the blacksmith clans all which revere the crab only. They include the Seko clan in Ilesha, another Seko in Okuta as well as the Nari and Shura. These Crab clans possessed a valuable skill and presumably were unwilling to share it with, or teach it to, strangers. The fact that all four blacksmith clans revere the crab suggests that they were distantly related but

practised an exclusivity uncommon in Borgu.

The cobra included among the totems of ten multi-totemic clans in all the chiefdoms of the south appear not to be related to kinship. The cobra was considered as a war charm in the army of Nikki.⁸⁷ It never appears as a single totem. Thus if ex-soldiers of Nikki had been assimilated into a clan, it added the cobra to its totems. Not surprisingly six antelope clans also revered the cobra. The leopard totem seems to have originated with the Mako or rabbit clan. According to the Mako of Kenu, a leopard assisted their ancestors when in battle against their enemies. From that time they added it to their Rabbit totem. The Mako claim the leopard embodies the spirit of their ancestors, understands their languages and behaves to them as if human. Consequently when a leopard dies, clan members sacrifice and bury it in human fashion, place cowries in its grave and mourn for seven days.⁸⁸ A closely similar observance honoured the weaver bird and rabbit which they also revere.

Among the fifteen clans which include the leopard, seven of them are segmentation from the Rabbit clan which includes the four drumming clans called Mako. Within this group of seven is the chiefly clan of Kenu called Kenu but obviously belonging to a larger grouping. All seven Rabbit clans revere both the leopard and weaver bird. Within the fifteen there is

⁸⁷ BHT. No. 105.

⁸⁸ BHT. No. 98.

a further sub-set of four Antelope clans led by the Bare who revere the leopard and cobra. The Mora or chiefly clan of Ilesha belong to this group and therefore presumably were called Bare originally. The Leopards within these clans presumably were assimilated peoples. Finally there were four clans of various totemic allegiances which have Leopard elements within them.

It should be carefully noted that despite the multiple totems of the clans, the satellite chiefdoms did not adopt the royal totem animal as the political totem of the community. Among many peoples in the regions to the east such as Jukun and Igala, Idoma, Owan and Esan, one totem animal became the emblem of the citizens of the community, a symbol of their unity and a sign of respect for the royal family among chiefly peoples or to the founders of the settlements where chiefs did not exist. Such never occurred in the satellite chiefdoms.⁸⁹

The next chiefdom to be founded was Okuta. Sabi Kpebekigi, a farmer from Gbere [Gberegburu], was the original founder of Okuta (meaning "rocky hill"). He was probably a Yoruba of the python totem.⁹⁰ He supposedly migrated out of Gbere because of drought, famine and widespread diseases. After wandering about, he settled under a rocky-hill called

⁸⁹ See E.O. Erim, The Idoma Nationality, 1600-1900: Problems of Studying the Origin and Development of Ethnicity, Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu, 1981; Sargent, "Politics and Economics" and Ogbomo, "Men and Women".

⁹⁰ DOB/ASR/21, "Gazetteer", NAK.

Sheronkpeiru -- in the Batonu language meaning "a hill which resembles an egg."⁹¹ This rock became remarkably useful by providing a natural barrier against invaders. Kpebekigi's settlement began to attract immigrants ostensibly because of the fertility of the soil for farmers and game for hunters. The ruling class migrated from Nikki in the early nineteenth century under Bakombia, the son of Shero Betete (King of Nikki). Bakombia hailed from the Tosu clan of the Makararu branch of the Nikki ruling house and migrated with a large following to settle first at Kpero (south of Nikki in Parakou division) before moving to Abuguru and thereafter to Sheronkpeiru.⁹² The migration might be connected with military adventure and economic factor to take advantage of the Wangara and Yoruba merchants. It would appear that some members of the Mako (drummer) clan from Nikki and some Fulani constituted part of the migration.

The python which lived in Sheronkpeiru was presumably the totem animal of the indigenous inhabitants and the Tosu clan also adopted it to win over their subjects. Strikingly it served as a war charm for the Tosu clan just as the cobra did

⁹¹ BHT. No. 40.

⁹² BHT. No. 47. See also Memorandum by the Chief, princes/princesses and the people of Okuta in connection with the case for the recognition and upgrading of the chiefdom of Okuta, (undated). One must be suspicious of these claims to kinship with the Nikki royal family since the totem of the Okuta ruling house is not the antelope. One suspects that in seeking recognition by the colonial officials, Okuta felt it necessary to create a royal pedigree.

in Nikki.⁹³ After the death of Bakombia in c.1821, his brother, Koto ascended the throne. Then the Ilorin War broke out and Koto joined the forces of Sero Kpera the king of Nikki. He died at Gbodo, therefore referred to as Koto Gbodokpuno.⁹⁴ It was under his successor Gande Shero Ikoko (1852-1868), another son of Shero Betete, that the population moved to the present site of Okuta. Therefore Gande became the founder and the first chief of modern Okuta situated on a different side of the hill, probably to benefit from the ongoing trans-Niger trade. The population of the town increased rapidly after the Ilorin War when the survivors relocated in places which offered suitable security because of the fear of the continuous raids by the Fulani jihadists. As a new and economically promising town along the trade route, numerous Yoruba merchants converged there for the promising commerce.

The Tosu was a warrior clan. Nominally under Kenu at the period of foundation, Okuta swiftly grew in political and economic influence. It overshadowed Kenu, its overlord. When extending its territory, Okuta engaged in a series of wars with other Borgu towns as well as Yoruba and Dahomey. Then the Tosu clan demonstrated its military prowess. A remarkable war occurred during the reign of Jimi, the fourth chief (c.1852-1868), whose mother was from Kenu. But this relationship did

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ If a ruler died outside the town and was not buried in the royal mausoleum, the word kpuno would be added after the name of the town where he died, hence Koto Gbodokpuno.

not prevent military encounter between the two chiefdoms. Okuta resoundingly repulsed the Nikki army possibly in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. It also escaped subjugation from Perere in about 1870.⁹⁵ Ilesha, then ruled by Mora Lafia (Sabi Dagbara), aligned with Kenu, Tabira and Gwanara and attempted to checkmate Okuta's advancement.⁹⁶ Ultimately Okuta triumphed under Kperogi Afon Totiri I (died in 1889). In 1873 Okuta assisted Ilesha against Saki whose ruler, Otegbeye, was killed.⁹⁷ Boriya, established by another Nikki prince, Morangobi (Bagadi) in c.1860 and serving as the region's principal market centre, was also brought under Okuta's suzerainty.⁹⁸ On invitation from Saki, Okuta fought with the Yoruba town of Papa (Aha/Oje) where Totiri I (chief of Okuta) had married a woman called Makanju.⁹⁹ Okuta fought several other wars with Donkassa, Kuburu and Mono, all in Dahomey.¹⁰⁰ The military power of Okuta seemed to wane during the reign of Wene Gobi (Kperogi Sukuru, who died in 1896) when

⁹⁵ BHT. No. 48. The informant claimed that his grandfather participated in the war.

⁹⁶ CSO/26/51245, "Assessment Report on Okuta District, Borgu Division, Kotangora Province", NAI.

⁹⁷ This tradition is well remembered at Ilesha and Okuta and corroborated by Rev. S.O. Bada. See Bada, History of Saki, pp. 37-38.

⁹⁸ DOB/ASR/21, "Gazetteer of Okuta District", NAK.

⁹⁹ BHT. No. 40. Abebi, a female child, was the product of the marriage.

¹⁰⁰ BHT. Nos. 41, 42, 49 and 50.

all the subordinate towns won their independence.¹⁰¹ Following these military engagements and the success which accompanied them, the Tosu leadership of Okuta seemed to have flaunted its upstart commoner origins and clearly fought almost all its neighbours including Nikki in order to survive. Consequently Okuta required a superior military organisation to any of the other chiefdoms. Added to this, by the end of the nineteenth century Okuta had emerged as a wealthy town owing to its control of Boriya (a market centre).

Yashikera was the latest founded of the Nikki satellite chiefdoms, in that its establishment almost coincided with the advent of the British. In the local traditions, the original inhabitants of Yashikera were immigrants from Bouka, north-west of Nikki. The frequent incursion into and raids against Bouka by Nikki primarily accounted for the migration. Led by Genewetede, a hunter from the Kane clan, the immigrants traversed the River Oli to inhabit the rocky-hill called

¹⁰¹ DOB/ASR/21, "Gazetteer", NAK. The military success of Okuta has been attributed to several factors which were very akin to the stringent measures of Shaka the Zulu. These included the strong discipline given to the soldiers; only men of thirty years were qualified for conscription; sexual abstinence for several months before the war; special food was eaten in accordance with the dictate of the charm applied and marriages could be delayed while in military camp. Soldiers kept their weapons in a special room where women, children or men under thirty years were not allowed to enter. All weapons were locally manufactured by the Seko clan and treated with charms by the Tabo Sunon - the war chief. BHT. Nos. 40, 47 and 50.

Yashikiru meaning "the grave of meat."¹⁰² Subsequently other immigrant groups such as the Sani and Tosu clans began to join Genewetede. Some Fulani cattle rearers from the Babanna region in the north also migrated southward because of the slave raids by the people of Segbana and Babanna, to establish their Gha (Fulani settlement), very close to Yashikera.¹⁰³ The Nupe were also said to have inhabited two ancient towns, Tamo and Bida, before they were driven out by Borgu people, to build Yashikera.¹⁰⁴ A section of the Tosu, led by Shina Chikandugi, had migrated from Nikki to dominate Chikanda, to the north of Yashikera but they later moved to join Genewetede for safety purposes. Ultimately a multi-cultural community emerged in Yashikera. For example the Kane (mouse totem) absorbed the indigenous weaver bird people and added another totem. The Kane clan in Kenu/Gwanara revered the same totems.

Commerce in Chikanda flowered because it served as a transit camp for the Fulani cattle dealers and itinerant Hausa merchants on their journey to and from Gonja. For this reason, it attracted a considerable population. Although Genewetede founded Yashikera, he did not assume kingship because he

¹⁰² Following Hausa influence, the name of the town was changed from Yashikiru to Yashikera, which was adopted by the British. Being hunters, the people killed many animals which they could not eat and therefore had to bury them in the ground, hence the settlement was called the grave of meat. BHT. No. 64.

¹⁰³ BHT. No. 66.

¹⁰⁴ DOB/ASR/22 "Gazetteer of Yashikera District, Kaiama Emirate", NAK.

resided within Nikki's territory and feared retribution. This is buttressed by the evidence that he did not come from the Bouka ruling family. An informant and descendant of Genewetede affirmed that the clan still maintains affinity with Bouka. During special festivals, members of the clan travel to Bouka to celebrate with their kindred.¹⁰⁵ At Okuta the Tosu constituted the ruling clan but strangely enough, they did not exercise their authority over the burgeoning settlement of Yashikera. The Tosu at Yashikera also revered the python like their counterparts at Okuta. For fear of raids from Nikki, Perere and Parakou, Genewetede and his followers located in several large caves on the rocky-hill. They were far too cowed to think of chieftaincy.

The recency of Yashikera's foundation is substantiated by the fact that the original inhabitants were still on the rocky-hill when the Ilorin War broke out.¹⁰⁶ It was after this event that Umaru Barakatara son of Sunon Lafia, a powerful king of Nikki (1837-1850) who supposedly held political and economic treaties with the Hausa, Nupe, Yoruba and Asante, emerged to give Yashikera historical recognition. Umaru had settled in Gbodebere, a subordinate market town to Ilesha,

¹⁰⁵ BHT. No. 58.

¹⁰⁶ BHT. No. 63.

¹⁰⁷ DOB/HIS/38 "History of Borgu", NAK.

where he became politically significant.¹⁰⁸ Being a Nikki prince from the Yari-Sunon clan and a forceful warrior, Umaru Barakatara persuaded Genewetede and his people to abandon the rocks, promising them safety if they accepted his overlordship. Genewetede acquiesced. This information supports the contention that the ruling house of Yashikera was an off-shoot of the Lafia branch of the royal clan in Nikki.¹⁰⁹ The relocation exercise must have prompted the colonial officers to regard Barakatara as the founder of Yashikera.¹¹⁰ Barakatara decided to leave Gbodebere probably to found a chiefdom which would be independent of Ilesha. Within a short time, Barakatara became so assertive that the towns in the precincts of Yashikera such as Gwette, (founded by Kiteshe Shide), Bweru, Gurai and Gbassero succumbed to his authority. To consolidate himself fully in the new settlement, Barakatara eliminated certain Nikki princes such as Saka Yeruma and Kasa Kperegi who had led the Nikki army against Gwanara. The process of chiefdom-formation continued to slowly progress when Barakatara died and was succeeded by Woru Yaru (Ojo) 1890-1903.

Judging by the Doro-Mako (drummer) clan genealogy, it is

¹⁰⁸ It has been mentioned earlier that he has been erroneously referred to as the founder and first ruler of Gbodebere.

¹⁰⁹ ILOPROF/3158A "Kaiama Emirate Notebook: Notes on Organization and procedure", NAK.

¹¹⁰ BORGDIST/DOB/WIS/70 "District Notes", NAK.

indicated that Sule Barasunon (Chief drummer) belonged to the generation of Sero Kpera, king of Nikki. He participated in the Ilorin War by beating his Kalangu drum for the Yoruba-Borgu allied forces.¹¹¹ After his death at Ilorin, Garuba his son, led members of the clan in a migration out of Kika in Parakou district to Yashikera.¹¹² Garuba became the first Barasunon or chief drummer as well as the principal custodian of local history for Barakatara.

The application of different names and titles for rulers creates a considerable confusion for chronological reconstruction using regnal lists. For instance, Umaru Barakatara was not mentioned in colonial records where Woru Yaru (Ojo) has been identified as the first ruler of Yashikera. Even in these records further confusions arise as to whom officials referred to as Woru Yaru (Ojo). In some documents, the name referred to a single person, in others they were two different individuals.¹¹³ It would appear that Woru Yaru (Ojo) and Barakatara were both sons of Sunon Lafia, King of Nikki and both settled at Gbodebere. But while Umaru Barakatara¹¹⁴ established the dynasty, Yaru succeeded him and

¹¹¹ BHT. No. 64.

¹¹² Ibid..

¹¹³ BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/22 'Gazetteer of Yashikera District: Kaiama Emirate', NAK; BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/70, "District Notebooks", NAK.

¹¹⁴ It should be noted that Umaru Barakatara (1833-1858) of Yashikera had no biological relationship with Umuoru Bakatara (1888-1897) the tenth ruler of Gwandu and the son of

remained on the throne when the partition was carried out and the colonial administration commenced.

At the commencement of colonial administration, Mora Tasude of Kaiama (the tenth chief) was imposed on the chiefdoms in south Borgu as the paramount. Objecting vehemently to this coercive placement under Kaiama, Woru Yaru of Yashikera resolved to:

relinquish his position and to return to Nikki. This he did taking with him a considerable number of families most of whom were probably his own people who had followed him from Nikki.¹¹⁵

The French initially objected to his candidature but he eventually became the king of Nikki in 1917.¹¹⁶ Mashi his successor at Yashikera, was a Zaberma stranger who unequivocally possessed no claim to the throne. He had been chosen by the British on the operation of the "picked-men" policy which commenced in 1915. This policy operatively rendered all the Borgu rulers as mere agents of the colonial officers without traditional legitimacy.

An argument has been raised that the ruling dynasty of Yashikera possessed no legitimate right to the throne on the basis that it "had no connection with the Nikki aristocracy and no permission from the Emir [of Kaiama] to blow the

Halilu.

¹¹⁵ DOB/HIS/70, "District Notes", NAK.

¹¹⁶ DOB/ASR/33, "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK.

Kakaki..."¹¹⁷ Surprisingly the British view was partly upheld in the field following oral evidence that the Kakaki and Tambari in Yashikera originated from Sokoto while the ruling house migrated from Nikki.¹¹⁸ An unnamed king of Nikki but probably Sunon Lafia, reportedly married from the Sokoto ruling house. As a confirmation of their royal relationship, the Kakaki, commonly found in Hausaland was presented to the king. This was inherited by the king's descendants who became the rulers of Yashikera. In accepting this information, caution should be exercised because there is no convincing evidence to substantiate it. First the names of the concerned rulers could not be supplied. Secondly when cross-checked in other parts of Borgu, the information was cynically received. Actually the history of the town has not indicated either migration from Sokoto or a marriage alliance between the rulers. The totem evidence, however, suggests that the royal family did not come from Nikki. Furthermore the lack of totems in the royal house he established seemed more typically Hausa, than Nikki. This was absolutely unique in the satellite chiefdoms. But since it seems highly speculative to suggest that the Nikki royal family had Hausa connections, the information remains conjectural.

In conclusion, it seems that with the wavering of the Oyo and Nupe hegemony over Borgu and their final withdrawal

¹¹⁷ BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/86 "Kakaki", NAK.

¹¹⁸ BHT. No. 56.

between 1783 and 1790, the Kisran royal houses were re-established in Bussa and Illo. This was the time when their regnal lists begin. This was also the period when Nikki princes and others began to expand and found the six satellite chiefdoms in the southern regions. Within the history of each of the early chiefdoms, it can be shown that the southward migration of the princes began as early as c.1695 to 1725 in the case of Kaiama but only after a long sojourn at Bweru did one group migrate to the modern location of Kaiama c.1772-1785. In the case of Ilesha, the southward migration began c.1746-1790 to Sandiro but not until c.1858-1869 to Ilesha itself. Thus generally it can be argued that the expansion of Nikki began in the eighteenth century but did not result in the satellite chiefdoms in their modern locations until the nineteenth after the collapse of the Oyo and Nupe hegemony c.1783-1790. Since the mainstream Borgu traditions seek to ignore and even deny the destruction of the Kisra houses by Songhay and the imperial control by the Nupe and Oyo, the traditions of the satellite chiefdoms regarding negotiations and wars with these two imperial powers are crucial evidence to the historian. The attraction for the founders from Nikki was not merely that the Nupe and Yoruba menace had been declining in the eighteenth century but also because in that same period the Wangara merchants were flourishing. They formed a source of wealth which the satellite rulers might tap as the following chapter will attempt to show.

Kaiama Regnal Chart

CHART 1

c. 1695-1725

Unknown

Boroboko (Bani)
(King and founder of Bweru dynasty)

c. 1725-1755

Boro Maso

Mora Tasude

c. 1755-1785

Yaru Tana

Beru (F)

1. Sabi Agba
1772-1785

Royal Drummers

c. 1785-1827

2. Mora Kato
1785-1810

Mora Banikaninde

Bagiji

3. Mora Amali
1810-1827

c. 1827-1851

4. Yaru Iloride
1827-1830

Yerima Gani

6. Kiyaru I
1830-51

5. Sendo
1830

Sabi Bataki

c. 1851-1912

7. Kimora
1851-1884

8. Mora Amali Dogo II
1884-1885

9. Mora Banade
1885

10. Mora Tasude I
1885-1912 [BA]

Woru Bataki

c. 1912-1973

11. Sabi Zuma
(Baroyaro)
1912-14
deposed
d. 1938

12. xx
Mashi
(Zaberma)
1914-1916

13. Yerima Kura
(Banikaninde)
1916-1919

14. Kiyaru II
1924-1954

15. Kiyaru III
1954-1973

Musa Bataki

16. Mora Tasude II
1973

Usman Bataki

For legend, see Ilesha Regnal Chart

Source: BHT. No. 198

CHART 2

Kenu and Gwanara Regnal Chart

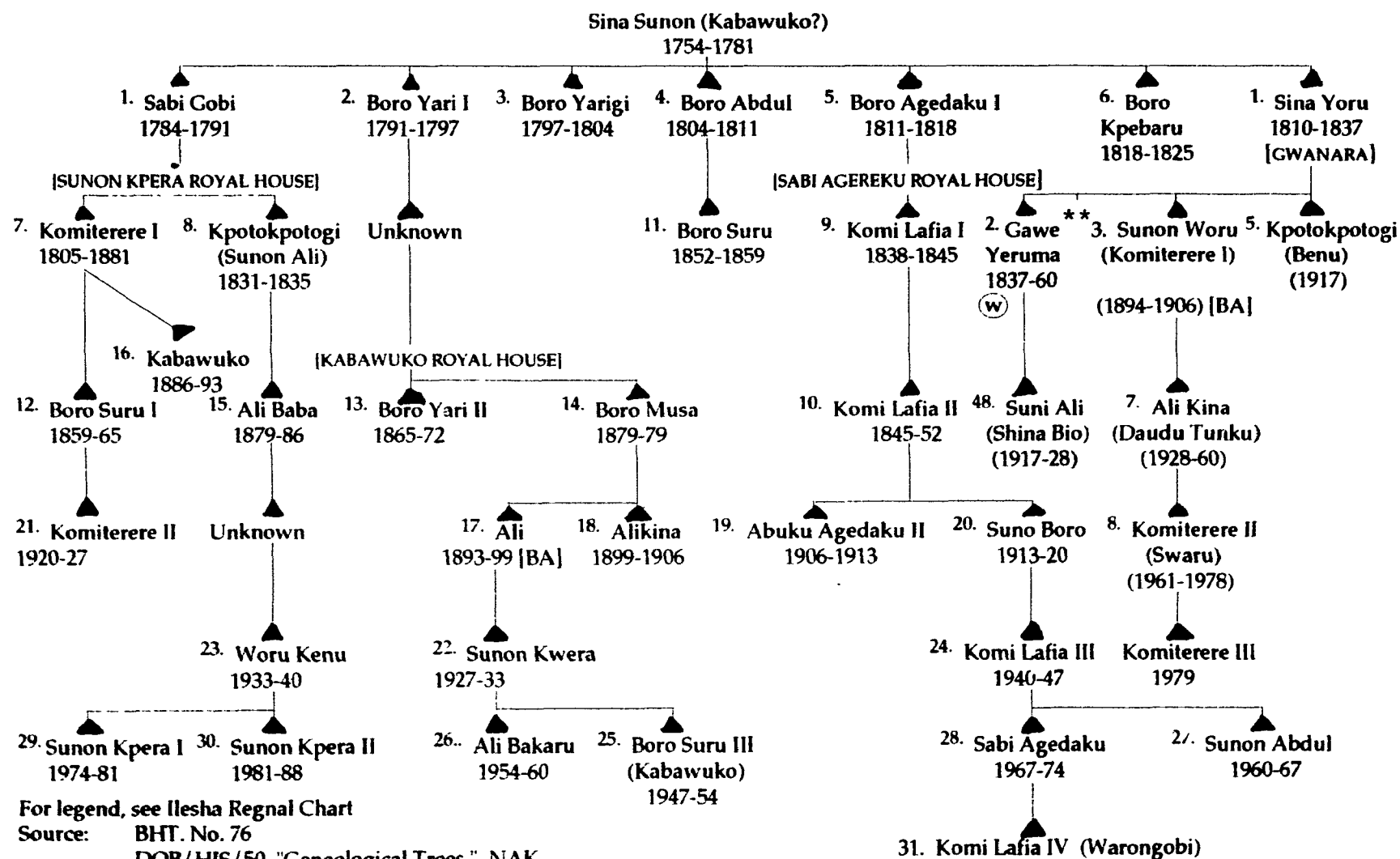


CHART 3

Ilesha Regnal Chart

c. 1746-1790

c. 1790-1813

c. 1813-1836

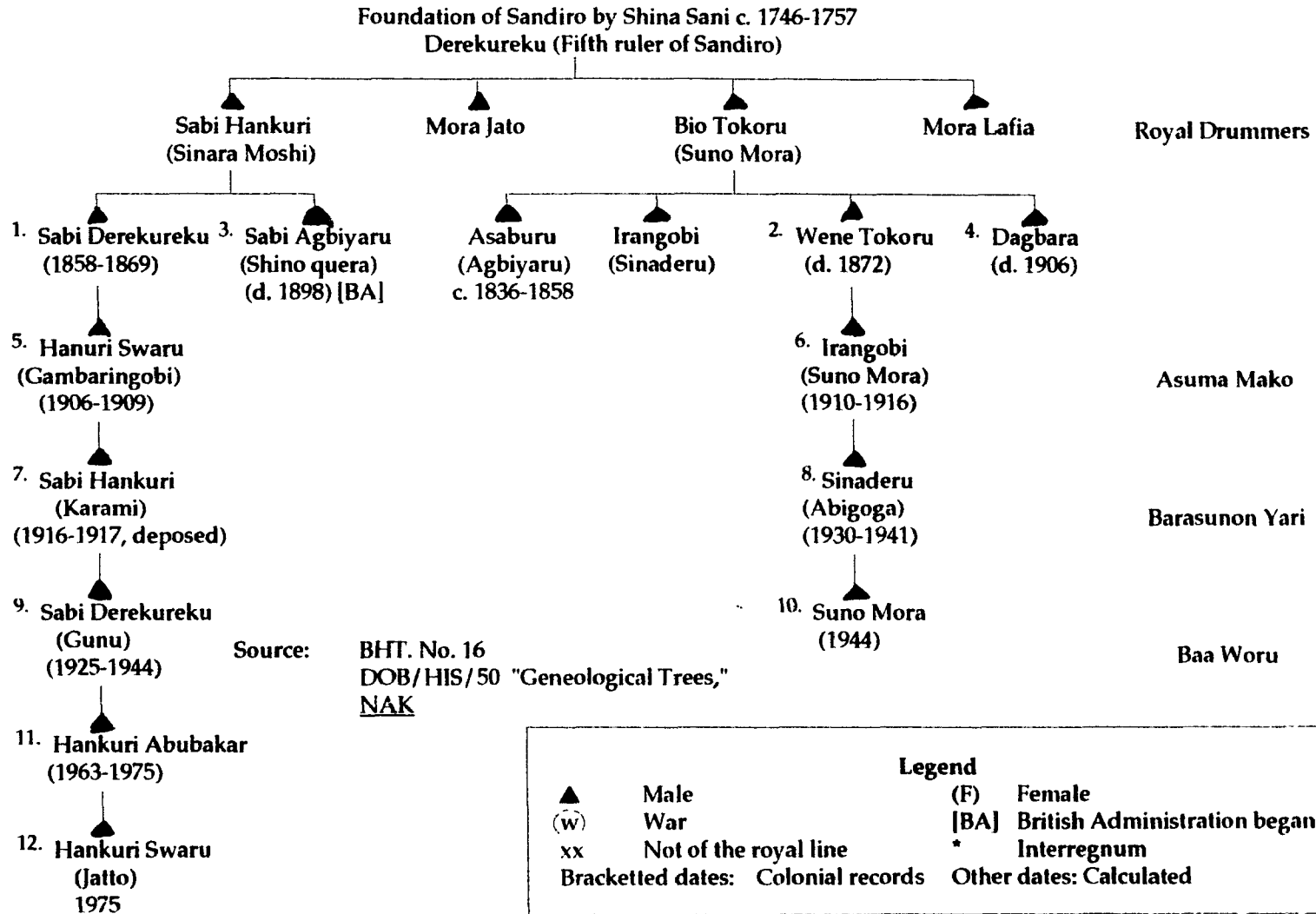
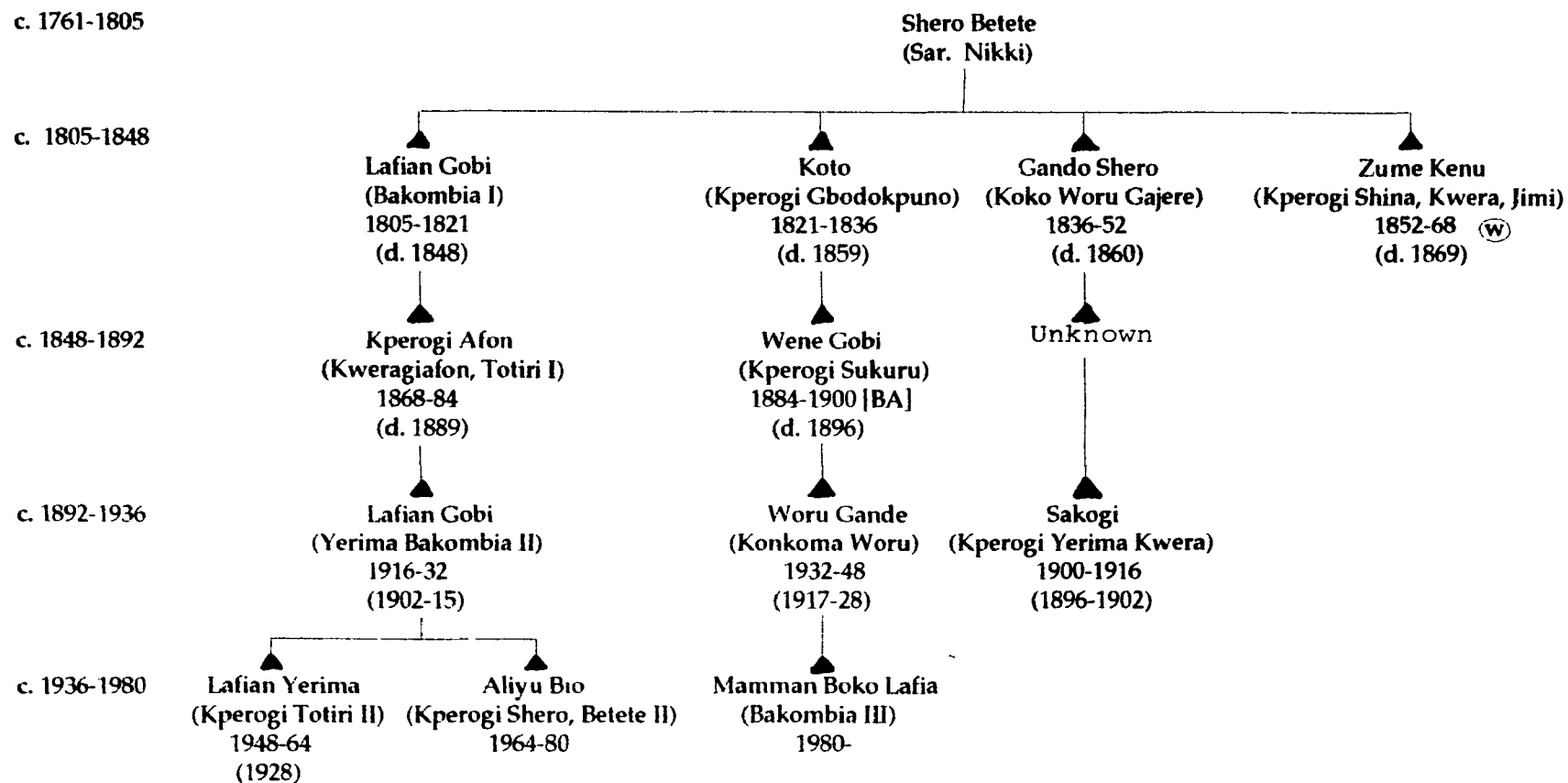


CHART 4

Okuta Regnal Chart



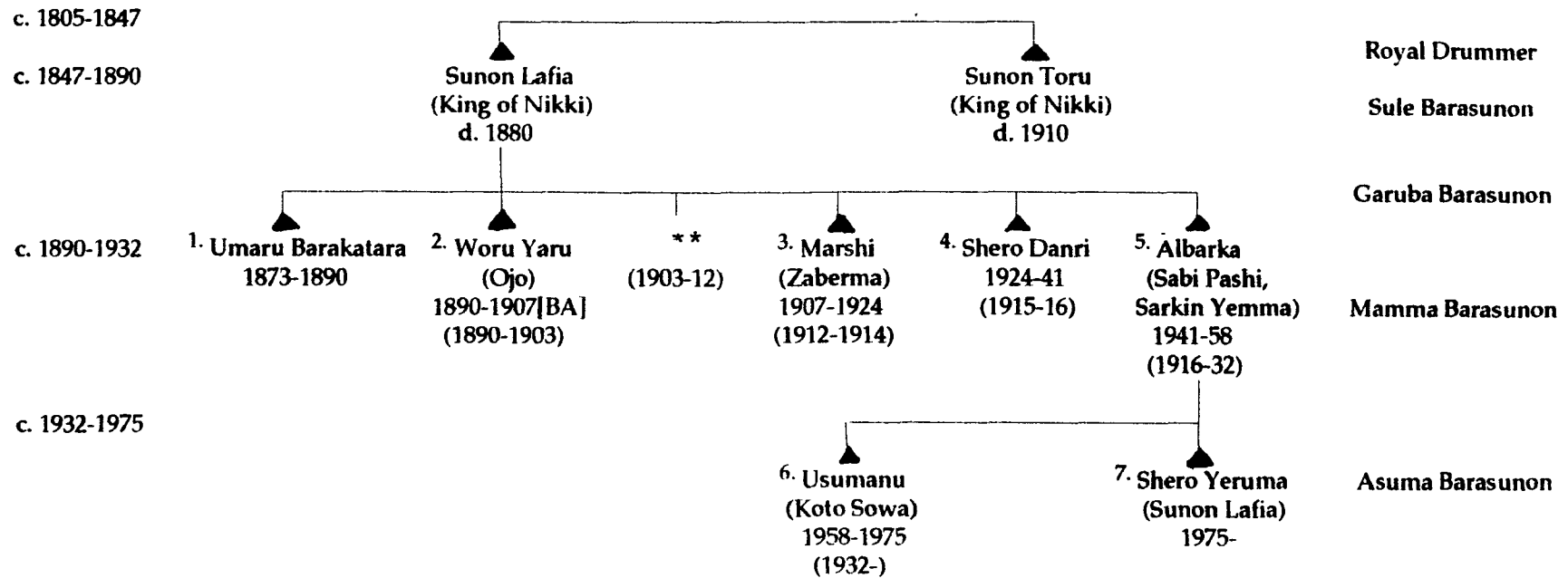
For legend, see Ilesha Regnal Chart

Source: BHT. No. 50

DOB/HIS/50 "Geneological Trees," NAK

CHART 5

Yashikera Regnal Chart



For legend, see Ilesha Regnal Chart

Source: BHT. No. 56

DOB/HIS/50 "Genealogical Trees", NAK

CHART 6

Bussa Regnal Chart

c. 1675-1717

Kitoro Fulani
1675-1690
(1675-1707)

c. 1717-1759

2. Kizagal
1690-1706
(1707-1717)

3. Kiseru Brodi
1706-1721
(1719-1730)

c. 1759-1801

4. Yerima Bussa
1721-1737
(1730-1755)

5. Kigera I
1737-1752
(1755-1771)

c. 1801-1843

6. Kitoro I
1752-68
(1771-1782)

7. Jibrin I
1768-1783
(1782-1806)

8. Kizaga II
1783-1799
(1806-1817)

c. 1843-1884

9. Yerima Ibrahim
1799-1814
(1817-1818)

10. Kitoro II
1810-1830
(1818-1828)

11. Kissan Dogo I
(Kiseru)
1830-1845
(1828-1835)

12. Gwewakaki
(Beraki)
1845-61
(1835)

13. Gasere
(Gajere)
1861-1876 (w)
(1835-1862)

c. 1884-1927

14. Kigera II
(Dan Toro)
1876-1892
(1862-1895)

15. Kissan Dogo II
(Kisarur)
1892-1907 [BA]
(1895-1902)

For legend, see Ilesha Regnal Chart
Source: EOB/COU/2/1,
"Kisra Museum File," New Bussa

c. 1927-1970

16. Kitoro Gani
1907-1923
(1903-1915)
(1904-1935)

17. XX
(Turaki)
1923-38
(1915)

18. Kwandara
(kijibrin)
1838-54
(1915-24)

19. Mohammadu Sani (Babaki)
1954-68
(1935-67)

CHART 7

Totemic Distribution: Southern Satellite Chiefdoms

CHIEFDOMS	Total No. of Clans	No. of Totems	Major Totems from Nikki						Minor Totems	Combinations			
			Antelope	Leopard	Weaver bird	Cobra	Rabbit	Monitor Lizard	Others	Single	Doubles	Triples	Four
BABANNA	2	-	2*	-	-	-	-	-	2 Dove +	-	2	-	-
KAIAMA	4	-	3*	<u>1</u>	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-
KENU	14	3	3	<u>6*</u>	<u>6+</u>	3	<u>4+</u>	1	Lizard, Deer, Snail, Mouse, Crow, Monkey	1	3	5	2
ILESHA	12	3	4*	<u>4+</u>	<u>3</u>	5+	<u>1</u>	1	Crab, Crow Lizard, Tree	2	2	4	1
OKUTA	8	1	1	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	1	<u>2</u>	2+	Python*, Deer 2 Crab, Tree	2	1	4	0
YASHIKERA	8	2*	1	2	1	1	-	1	Dove, Mouse, <u>2 Cat</u> , Pyton, Hippopotamus	1	4	1	0
TOTALS	48	9	14	15	13	10	7	5	23	10	12	14	3

* Primary Chiefly Totem = Primary Drummer Totem
 + Secondary Chiefly Totems - Secondary Drummer Totems

CHART 7 (continued)

CHIEFDOM	NAME	ROLE	ORIGINS	TOTEMS	WHERE ELSEWHERE	MISCELLANEOUS
ILESHA	Mora	Chiefly	Nikki/ Sandiro	Gbero(Red Antelope) Shurokoru(Cobra) Musuku (Leopard)	No where	Related to Kabo. Marriage is forbidden.
	Yari	Drummer	Sandiro (Dahomey)	Shurokoru(Cobra) Shekuro(Weaver Bird)	— — — Okuta	
	Mori and Kabo	Commoner	Kaboguru (in Parakou district)	Sokonrongboo(Crow) Kabayinnu(Lizard) Musuku(Leopard) Shurokoru(Cobra)	← — — Gwanara — — — Kenu	Both clans are related. Marriage <u>not</u> prohibited. Also known as <u>Gosikobu</u> because they bury the dead.
	Mako	Drummers	Nikki	Musuku(Leopard) Shekuro(Weaverbird) Gunusemu(Rabbit)	← — — Kenu — — — Okuta — — — Yashikera	Probably related to the Doro-Mako(Wild Cat) in Yashikera.
	Lesaworu	priestly- Earth Priest	Indigenous	Besigondo[Tree]	No where	
	Sesi	Commoner	Nikki	Gbero(Red Antelope) Shekuro(Weaverbird) Deba(Monitor Lizard)	← — — Okuta — — — Kenu — — — Gwanara	
	Bare	Commoner	Nikki	Gbero(Red Antelope) Musuku(Leopard) Shurokoru(Cobra)	← — — Yashikera — — — Kenu	Playmates of Wanro. Marriage forbidden.

CHIEFDOM	NAME	ROLE	ORIGINS	TOTEMS	WHERE ELSEWHERE	MISCELLANEOUS
	Wanro	Commoner	Kika(Parakou-Dahomey)	Gbero(Red Antelope) Shurokoru(Cobra)	Kenu Gwanara	Playmates of Bare. Marriage forbidden.
	Seko	Blacksmiths	Nikki	Gbekoko(Crab)	Okuta	
	Mane	Muslim	Borno	No totem	Yashikera Okuta	
	Taruwere	Muslim	Parakou/ Djoukou	No totem	Okuta Kenu Gwanara Yashikera	Originally from Timbuctu.
	Ture	Muslim	Birni-Kebbi/ Bonikpara (in Dahomey)	No totem	Okuta Kenu Gwanara Yashikera	

CHIEFDOM	NAME	ROLE	ORIGINS	TOTEMS	WHERE ELSEWHERE	MISCELLANEOUS
OKUTA	Tosu	Chiefly	Nikki/Bwe	Wabaka(python) Deba(Monitor)	Yashikera	The Tosu at Yashikera are not of the royal family but observe the same totems.
	Seko	Blacksmiths	Nikki	Gbekoko(Crab)	Ilesha	
	Nari and Shura	Blacksmiths	Nikki	Gbekoko(Crab)	No where	
	Mako	Drummers	Nikki	Musuku Leopard Shekuro(Weaverbird) Gunusemu(Rabbit)	Kenu Ilesha Yashikera	
	Sesi	Commoner	Nikki	Gbero(Antelope) Shekuro(Weaverbird) Deba(Monitor Lizard)	Ilesha Kenu Gwanara	
	Yari	Commoner	Parakou	Shurokoru(Cobra) Kpasa(Deer) Baatoko(Tree)	Ilesha	The Yari at Ilesha do not observe Kpasa and Baatoko. The Yari have divergent origin.
	Yo	Hunter Commoner	Sabe	Musuku(Leopard) Shekuro(Weaverbird) Gunusemu(Rabbit)	Gwanara	

CHIEFDOM	NAME	ROLE	ORIGINS	TOTEMS	WHERE ELSEWHERE	MISCELLANEOUS
	Bare	Commoner	Nikki	Gbero(Antelope) Musuku(Leopard) Shurokoru(Cobra)	Okuta Ilesha Yashikera	The Taso-sunon-chief hunter comes from the clan.
	Mori	Commoner	Nikki/ Kaboguru (Dahomey)	Musuku(Leopard) Sokoron-gboo(Crow) Kabayinnu(Lizard) Shurokoru(Cobra)	Ilesha Gwanara	Related to the Kabo. Also called Gosikobu. They bury the dead.
	Sira	Commoner	Nikki	No totem	No where	
	Sesi	Commoner	Nikki	Gbero(Antelope) Shekuro(Weaveabird) Deba(Monitor Lizard)	Okuta Ilesha	
	Mako	Drummers	Nikki	Musuku(Leopard) Shekuro(Leopard) Gunusemu(Rabbit)	Ilesha Okuta	
	Wanro	Commoner	Kika(near Parakou)	Gbero(Red Antelope) Shurokoro(Cobra)	Ilesha	
	Biso	Commoner	Nikki	No totem	No where	
	Mane Ture Taruwere	Muslim	Parakou/ Djoungou Kandi/Birni- Kebbi/Borno	No totem	Ilesha Okuta Yashikera	



CHIEFDOM	NAME	ROLE	ORIGINS	TOTEMS	WHERE ELSEWHERE	MISCELLANEOUS
YASHIKERA	Yari-Sunon	Chiefly	Nikki	No totem	No where	
	Yari	Commoner	Parakou/ Kandi	Kpera(Hippopotamus) Kparuko suanbu (Dove)	No where	
	Doro-Mako	Drummer	Kika (near Parakou)	Kokoyanru(Cat)	No where	Probably related to Mako in Ilesha.
	Yari- Ateuwa	Commoner	Nikki	Musuku(Leopard) Kokoyanru(Cat)	No where	
	Kane	Commoner	Bouka (Dahomey)	Shekuro(Weaverbird) Gunobasune(Mouse)	Kenu	Earliest settlers of Yashikera.
	Bare	Commoner	Nikki	Gbero(Antelope) Musuku(Leopard) Shurokoru(Cobra)	Ilesha Kenu	
	Mane Taruwere Ture	Muslim	Parakou/ Djoungou/ Kandi	No totem	Ilesha Okuta Kenu Gwanara	
	Tosu	Commoner	Nikki	Wabaka(Python) Deba(Monitor)	Okuta royals	Second group of settler.

CHIEFDOM	NAME	ROLE	ORIGINS	TOTEMS	WHERE ELSEWHERE	MISCELLANEOUS
BABANNA	Kpai	Chiefly	Nikki	Zotena(Antelope in Boko) — — — — Ferentena(Dove)	Kaiama	Zotena is Gbero in other places. The story for revering it is the same.
	Wure Kpasi	Commoner	Nikki	Zotena(Antelope) Ferentena(Dove)		The chiefly clan probably imposed the totems on the commoners.
KAIAMA	Kpai	Chiefly	Nikki	Gbrichao — — — — — (Antelope)	Babanna	
	Wure	Commoner	Nikki	Gbrichao (Antelope)		Gbrichao is in Bokobaru.
	Sesi	Commoner	Nikki	Gbrichao(Antelope)		
	Mako	Drummer	Nikki	Musuku(Leopard) — — —	Kenu, Gwanara	

Arrows indicate where else information on the totems was collected.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WANGARA IN BORGU 1700-1900: THE RISE AND COLLAPSE OF AN ECONOMIC ARISTOCRACY

The economic history of Borgu has not received as much attention as given to such neighbouring polities as the centralized states of Oyo, Dahomey, Nupe, Benin and the Hausa states. This neglect cannot be attributed to the political autonomy which existed among the Borgu kingdoms and chiefdoms but probably to its limited economic resources. Before the advent of the Europeans and subsequent partition, Borgu people interacted within their enclave and with their neighbours in a variety of ways: religion, war and commerce amongst others. The Borgu confederacy, centred on Bussa and Nikki, was based on a defensive mechanism to protect the east-west trans-Niger trade. The strategic location of Borgu along the trade route undoubtedly placed it in a suitable position to participate in the inter-regional commerce. But this aspect has been neglected, presumably because Borgu was not endowed with certain resources which could have facilitated external commerce or fascinated foreign mercantile groups. During the 1894 "Race for Borgu" for treaty signing, Lugard commented that "commercially, [Borgu's] value is not at present great..."¹ In addition, he mentioned that "the people [of

¹ Lugard acknowledged Borgu's valuable production of indigo, tobacco, cotton and gums. Curiously, no mention was made of shea butter which constituted one of the principal

Borgu] are essentially poor in all that constitutes wealth in Africa."² If this comment was based on the supply of raw materials which the Royal Niger Company wished to acquire for the steadily expanding European industrialization in the nineteenth century, Lugard's view had some validity. Nevertheless, the pre-colonial economy of Borgu was not as gloomy as this impression suggests. From the fifteenth century when various immigrant groups began to infiltrate Borgu, significant historical and economic events manifested themselves. The Mande-speaking people who migrated from Songhay emerged as one of the potent determining factors in reshaping the economic system of the Borgu kingdoms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These were the Wangara merchants. They were both traders and Islamic missionaries. While acknowledging the immense economic and religious role of the Wangara in the Western Sudan, the discussion here will be limited to their contribution to revolutionizing the Borgu economy.

The substantial commercial background and ever-widening experience from Songhay enabled the Wangara to evolve a new pattern in Borgu's economic culture by establishing long-

south and west-north commerce linking Salaga to Hausaland. See Lugard, "An Expedition to Borgu, p. 214; Hermon-Hodge, Gazetteer, pp. 23-24. See also Augustus Mockler-Ferryman, British-Nigeria: A Geographical and Historical Description of the British Possessions Adjacent to the Niger River, West Africa, Cassell and Co., Ltd., London, 1902, pp. 144-147.

² Lugard, "England and France on the Niger", p. 903.

distance trade and organizing complex and extensive caravan routes. They altered Borgu's economic orientation. Whether directly or indirectly, they brought about a gradual shift from a purely agrarian economy to significant commercialization. A close relationship with the Wasangari ruling elite was maintained in the process of accomplishing these economic changes. Consequently the Wangara not only altered and transformed Borgu's commercial structure, they themselves emerged as an economic privileged class, a position which was maintained for about two centuries.

In the history of West Africa, Wangara has been popularly remembered as a place with bounteous gold deposits. Gold provided the wealth of the ancient Ghana and Mali empires for several centuries of their existence. Al-Idrisi, an Arab scholar and twelfth century traveller, first mentioned Wangara as an island which was famous for its great "quantity and quality of ... gold,"³ but did not give a precise location of the region. Arab geographers also referred to it as the "land of gold", without indicating its locale, presumably because "no one knew... where Wangara was."⁴ While travelling through

³ Bovill, The Golden Trade, p. 191.

⁴ Ibid... Bovill further argued that only a few privileged merchants could penetrate into the core gold areas but their information was insufficient to have adequate knowledge of the location. Intruders were prevented from entering the mining centres. Who these "privileged" merchants were remains obscure. However, reference has been made to Barbary merchants who supposedly visited Wangara with articles such as jewellery, beads and salt and merchants from the Maghrib and Wargla (the capital of Mzab) as the principal

the Sudan in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, G.F. Lyon corroborated the locational problem of Wangara by stating that:

Wangara is a place of which we cannot obtain any decided account; it is, however, generally supposed to be a low country, and sometimes inundated. One person states it to be twenty days south of Tembuctoo [Timbuctu]; another places it south of Kashna [Katsina]; and many even assert, that it is beyond Waday; but it is quite impossible from the varied accounts given of it, to form any idea as to its actual situation, or even existence.⁵

Lyon proceeded further to describe the silent barter trade as practised in this "invisible nation." The silent trade was not peculiar to the Western Sudanese gold merchants. It remained a world-wide phenomenon. As early as the fifth century, exchange by barter became a feature of the silk trade between the Romans and the Chinese. It featured amongst the Abyssinian gold traders, the pygmies of the Congo, the peoples of the lower Niger, the Yoruba of the Oyo Empire and the Kinuku people of Zaria Emirate in Northern Nigeria.⁶

The difficulty in locating Wangara probably emanated from the inability of alien gold merchants from the Sudan or North

buyers of gold. See E.W. Bovill, Caravans of the Old Sahara, Oxford University Press, London, 1933, pp. 58-66.

⁵ G.F. Lyon, A Narrative of Travels in Northern Africa in the years 1818-1819 and 1820, Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., London, First edition 1921, New Impression 1966, pp. 148-149.

⁶ Bovill, Caravans, pp. 61-62.

Africa to penetrate into the core mining areas. In addition, Bovill suggested that the people were certainly not of the steppe.⁷ This is because the openness of the land usually influenced free commercial relations amongst local and alien merchants. The Trans-Saharan trade which persisted for centuries succeeded because of the vulnerability of the savanna and easy accessibility to durable commodities. However while a seventeenth century Arabic chronicle placed Wangara "to the east of Mafzat" with appropriate reference to its abundant gold-dust and frankincense,⁸ the region could be located between upper Senegal and the Niger, comprising Bambuk, Mandingi, Boure and Sieke, now occupied by the Soninke and Dyula peoples.

Bovill contended that the word "Wangara" has for many centuries remained "wrapped in mystery."⁹ A similar view is expressed by Paul Lovejoy who believes that the term occupies "a confusing position in the West African historiography."¹⁰ It would appear that both conclusions have stemmed from the earliest usage of the word to designate a place as well as a

⁷ E.W. Bovill, "The Silent Trade of Wangara", African Affairs, Vol. 29, 1929-30, p. 35.

⁸ Muhammad Al-Hajj, "A Seventeenth Century Chronicle on the Origins and Missionary Activities of the Wangara", Kano Studies, vol. 1, No.4, 1968, p. 7.

⁹ Bovill, Caravans, pp. 59-60.

¹⁰ Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Role of the Wangara in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", JAH, Vol. 19, No.2, 1978, p. 175.

people. As a place, Wangara, from all probabilities, and copious references to the gold trade, was an important Sudanese commercial region in medieval times. Its fame spread to North Africa from where merchants travelled through the long stretches of the Sahara Desert to purchase gold in return for salt. As a people, the Wangara seemed to have a cognate origin, speaking a Mande language but now referred to variously as the Mandingoes, Dyula (Dioula), Ungara or Dendi.¹¹ Being commercially oriented, the Wangara had for centuries dispersed all over the Western Sudan. A seventeenth century Arabic manuscript described the ubiquity of the people by stating that "there was no land in the West, that was not inhabited by the Wangara."¹² Lovejoy describes it as the "Wangara diaspora."¹³ They were mostly found in the Senegambian region but also located in spotted areas of the Western Sudan. It is salutary to mention that although a predominantly commercial people, their relationships with those with whom they interacted were sometimes political and

¹¹ Early Arab writers knew the Wangara as the Mandingoes or Malinke. Other names by which the people were called included Wangarbe by the Fulani, Wankore by the Songhay and Wangarawa by the Hausa. See Bovill, "Silent Trade", p. 135. From Delafosse's account, Bovill concluded that the Wangara were variously referred to as Gbangara, Gwangara, Gangara, or Gangaran. Bovill, Caravans, p. 60.

¹² Al-Hajj, "A Seventeenth Century Chronicle", p. 8. Also consult Soelken, Heinz, "Routes conduisant au Bénin dans L'Afrique Centrale", Anthropos, Vol. 49, Nos. 5 and 6, 1954, pp. 809-933.

¹³ Lovejoy, "The Role of the Wangara", pp. 175-179.

sometimes religious in nature. Hence it could be posited that while the Wangara in Kano were mostly missionaries, those in Borgu and Katsina were essentially merchants, although their religious influence could not be completely ignored. By the mid-nineteenth century the trade in Katsina was dominated by the Wangara who occupied a ward which bore their name.¹⁴ One of their oldest quarters was called Tundun Melle.¹⁵ Therefore, Wangara as applied in this chapter generically refers to the immigrant trading communities which existed in Borgu between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The origin of the Wangara has been traced to North Africa by H.R. Palmer who contended that the Wangara were peoples of half Berber extraction, possessing some degree of sophistication, before migrating to fuse with the autochthonous population of ancient Ghana in about 1203 A.D.¹⁶ Similarly, Bovill identified them with the descendants of a Berber group called Gara but known to the Arabs as the Su or

¹⁴ Bovill, "Silent Trade", p. 135.

¹⁵ H.R. Palmer, Sudanese Memoirs, Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., London, 1967, pp. 86-89. Apart from the Wangara, there were the Hausa, Tuareg and Arab merchants who occupied separate wards and contributed in no small measure to the economic prosperity of Katsina. Their influence remained significant in the eighteenth century when Katsina emerged as one of the most economically and militarily powerful Hausa states. See R.A. Adeleye, "Hausaland and Borno 1600-1800" in Ajayi and Crowder, (eds.), History of West Africa, pp. 591-596.

¹⁶ Palmer, Sudanese Memoirs, pp. 86-89.

So.¹⁷ Less controversy has arisen over the Wangara origin, than about the period of their migration into various parts of the Western Sudan. The Kano Chronicle indicated that the Wangara spread into Kano under the leadership of Abd al-Rahman Zaite, between 1349 and 1385.¹⁸ But based on the evidence deduced from Arabic manuscripts, Al-Hajj dismissed this date as "a very long time indeed" and placed the migration in the fifteenth century which corresponds with Ivor Wilks' date for the Wangara occupation of the Senegambian region.¹⁹ J.O. Hunwick agrees with Al-Hajj's date because according to him, "Kano Wangara traditions compress a long process into a single immigration under the charismatic leader Abd al-Rahman Zaghaite..."²⁰ The fifteenth century corresponds to the reign of Muhammad Rumfa (1463-1499), during whose era Islam effectively penetrated into Kano, probably through the Wangara. Commerce and Islamization moved simultaneously. This factor has proved the centrality of the Wangara in the religious and economic history of the Western Sudan.

Despite Al-Hajj's scepticism over Palmer's date, it

¹⁷ Bovill, "Silent Trade", p. 35.

¹⁸ Palmer, Sudanese Memoirs, pp. 86-89.

¹⁹ Al-Hajj, "A Seventeenth Century Chronicle", p. 8. Consult also Peter Morton-Williams, "The Influence of Habitat and Trade on the Politics of Oyo and Ashanti", in Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry, (eds.), Man in Africa, Lavistock Publications, London, 1969, p. 85.

²⁰ Hunwick, "Songhay, Borno and Hausaland in the Sixteenth Century", in Ajayi and Crowder, (eds.), History of West Africa, pp. 275-276.

provides a basis for dating the migration as well as giving the indication of the Wangara factor in the Islamization of Kano. It was in the same fifteenth century that popular Islam penetrated into Katsina at the time of Muhammad Korau. The attribution of the widespread Islamization to the influence of the Wangara by Hunwick²¹ suggests that the Wangara factor in Katsina was both economic and religious. It should be added that the Islamization of these places (as far as Borno in the east) witnessed a dramatic change in the early nineteenth century (1804-1812) with the outbreak of the jihad under the leadership of Uthman dan Fodio, a Fulani Islamic scholar. With this revolution, the Hausa Habe rulers were politically and religiously displaced and new dynasties, which have survived till modern times under a Fulani oligarchy, came to power. In this period, rural peasants began to convert to Islam.

Surprisingly this rapid religious change (the conversion which went along with the jihad) did not significantly affect Borgu, whose traditional belief systems persisted until the twentieth century. Undoubtedly the Wangara factor in Borgu was essentially economic. In Borgu, the Wangara inhabited Djougou, Bussa, Kandi and Illo districts. If the dating of the Wangara migration into Kano (where there are extant chronicles) becomes controversial, that of Borgu is more complex owing to lack of written records. The Wangara tradition in Borgu, however, links their diaspora to Songhay. They see them-

²¹. *Ibid*, pp. 274-278.

selves as people of Songhay.²² Possibly, therefore, the first Wangara merchants came into Borgu, as into Kano, in the fifteenth century when Songhay was expanding. If we can assume that the Kisra rulers looked upon them as a danger and the spearhead of the Islamic religion, they might have sought to drive them out or in other ways restrict their activities. It might be this persecution or restriction which prompted the Songhay invasion of Borgu after 1500 A.D. Writers report this invasion but none speculates upon its causes.²³ What seems quite remarkable is that neither c.1500 nor in the centuries after or even at the peak of their affluence in the eighteenth century, did the Wangara ever seek political authority. None of the Wangara clans in Borgu claimed the right to political authority but all affirmed economic preeminence.²⁴ Indeed as a trading community, the Wangara remained ethnically, culturally and commercially distinct from the other groups of inhabitants because of their wealth.

At the early period of their emigration into Borgu, the Wangara first accustomed themselves to the pre-existing economic framework, until they began to introduce commercial innovations which became the basis for their complex network of trade. Their commercial astuteness became apparent during

²² BHT. No. 114.

²³ For example, see Crowder, The Story of Nigeria, pp. 47-48; Lady Lugard, Tropical Dependency, p. 173 and Bovill, The Golden Trade, pp. 163-164.

²⁴ BHT. Nos. 8, 43, 74, 136.

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when they established trading links with Hausaland and the Western Sudan through the booming gold and kola nut trade. Emerging as a strong commercial power, the Wangara not only provided "brokerage services" but also became the founders of the long-distance trade of the Borgu economy. They maintained a powerful middleman position and wove an economic aura around themselves in Borgu where they existed as an outstandingly wealthy group. They also retained their traditional patronymics, such as Sesi, Ture, Taruwere and Mane and equally maintained their "ancient affinity with Songhay."²⁵ Before considering the impact of the Wangara, it becomes vitally important to discuss the pre-existing economic culture in Borgu.

An understanding of the indigenous economic structure is fundamental in assessing the Wangara factor in the commercial development of the Borgu kingdom. As in many other African societies, agriculture constituted the economic base of the Borgu people. A form of mixed economy was carried out by complementing farming with hunting and fishing along the Niger. Thus the economy was essentially land-based. The centrality of hunting in Borgu history has been emphasized in the hunter-founder tradition of most of the towns. Borgu people responded to some particular agricultural problems,

²⁵ BHT. Nos. 79, 82 and 94. Although the link now seems tenuous, Musa Yo, (98), who claims that his ancestors were the Wangara, mentions that the Dyula traders in the Senegambia region are their kindred.

especially land-ownership and distribution.²⁶ Because the people were chiefless and closely-knit, land, which was fundamental to agriculture, was communally owned. The practice of gerontocracy was applied in land distribution. Individual farmers enjoyed access to it as distributed by clan elders. The importance of land in Borgu is embodied in the Batonu saying wikatensanna, unwinsinyeru yen²⁷ -- "anybody who quarrels with land, knows where to find his final resting place." They also claim that "land is our soul, we rise with it, we die with it."²⁸

The household served as a determinant of labour organization and as a unit of production. The family head automatically served as the entrepreneur. Proceeds from the farms were stored in granaries common to all family members while consumption was collective. As the society became more complex, collective works were organized at the village level and agriculture witnessed a dramatic expansion. Iqberou and Wurou which served as forms of co-operative labour were usually organized to assist members of the community on their farms. Age-grade members became useful sources of labour assistance. While Samir Amin described the joint ownership of

²⁶ BHT. Nos. 19, 130, 142 and 204.

²⁷ BHT. No. 92, a chief drummer and a farmer.

²⁸ BHT. No. 221, a local historian and a farmer.

land as "primitive-communal,"²⁹ Webster termed it a gerontocratic mode of production.³⁰ Karl Marx on his part stated that:

The community is based on the fact that its members consist of working owners of land, small peasant cultivators; but in the same measure the independence of the latter consists in the mutual relation as members of the community, in the safeguarding of the ager publicus (common land) for common needs and common glory, etc. To be a member of the community remains the precondition for the appropriation of land, but in his capacity as member of the community the individual is a private proprietor.³¹

It is more appropriate to describe the system as a lineage mode of production, recognizing that all members of the family contributed inputs, although contributions and rewards were not on an equal basis. Contributions were complementary. In the groundnut plantations among the Beti of Southern Cameroon, both men and women made significant contributions to the overall production. Within the framework of sexual division of

²⁹ Samir Amin, "Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa - Origins and Contemporary forms", in Dennis L. Cohen and John Daniel, (eds.), Political Economy of Africa: Selected Readings, Longman, Harlow, 1981, pp. 28-44.

³⁰ Webster argues that gerontocratic mode of production usually existed among acephalous societies where meritocracy was acknowledged among the youths. In Borgu merit was usually accorded the youths who succeeded in having large farms especially in yam production. See J.B. Webster, "Evolving Social Formations and a Static Mode of Production", IRORO: Journal of Arts and Social Sciences, Vol. 3, Nos. 1 & 2, 1990, pp. 18-21.

³¹ Karl Marx, Pre-capitalist Economic Formations, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1964, pp. 72-73.

labour, and the polygynous marriage system, Jane Guyer contended that women worked longer in the fields and were more productive than men.³² However, all members of the family benefitted from the co-operative labour.

The position on communal land ownership and distribution in Borgu shifted when Kisra's descendants, the Bisagwe or the Wasangari, arrived. Assuming political control over the indigenous people, they took over the distribution of land.³³ Although the indigenous people still retained the claim to land ownership, they no longer distributed it.³⁴ Henceforth there existed a distinction between the ruling aristocracy and the peasants. In the Ilorin Gazetteers, Hermon-Hodge posited that "On the arrival of the Bisagwe, ... [the aborigines of Borgu] became their peasants."³⁵ For instance at Ilesha the Shina Lesagi lost the power of land allocation to Sabi Derekureku, the leader of the immigrant ruling group from Nikki; the Sinawosho lost to the Tosu ruling house at Okuta; the Kane clan in Yashikera lost to Barakatara; Ki-Kabaru lost

³² Jane I. Guyer, Family and Farm in Southern Cameroon, Boston University, 1984, pp. 18-20.

³³ For more details, particularly on the position of the Wasangari in relation to political power and land control, see Lombard, Le Type "Feodal", Chapter Three.

³⁴ This trend occurred amongst all the pre-existing communities. The lineage heads succumbed to the political domination of the Wasangari and lost the right to land distribution into the bargain. BHT. Nos. 2, 19, 34, 139 and 197.

³⁵ Hermon-Hodge, The Gazetteers, p. 39.

to Sabi Agba the first ruler of Kaiama; and at Bussa the Ba-Karabonde lost distribution rights to the descendants of Kisra. But the land allocated to a family could be inherited by the members. Despite the change, farmers still possessed land and agriculture continued to flourish, producing sufficient crops to feed the population. The continuous growth of agriculture was made possible by suitable ecological conditions such as the open savanna, fertility of the soil, adequate rainfall and absence of pests. All of these combined with the ingenuity of Borgu farmers. Consequently by the mid-eighteenth century, Borgu's economy was basically agrarian.

The bulk of the farming labour was provided by men, with little assistance from the women. Most of them specialized in the cultivation of yam and guinea corn. Owing to the fertility of the soil in the south, the Batombu (Borgawa), the Boko-speaking people of Babanna and the Bokobaru-speaking group (mostly at Kaiama) allocated large plots of their land to yam cultivation. They claim that yam is an indigenous crop.³⁶ Lashibe, located between Wawa and Kaiama, was a small community but well developed in agricultural and industrial productions. While yam constituted the primary crop, guinea corn and dorowa beans formed the secondary. Lashibe was not a riverine village but became the principal producer of food

³⁶ For yam cultivation and conditions required for germination and high productivity in Nigerian Borgu, consult BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/31 "Gazetteer and Economics of Wawa District of Bussa Emirate", 1931, NAK. BHT. Nos 24 and 222.

crops for the Wawa market where Nupe refugees from the jihad had settled in the nineteenth century.³⁷ Agricultural implements were supplied from Wawa where the smithing industry had developed. Wawa developed into a market centre where slaves, yam and fish formed important export commodities. In the early nineteenth century, following the political turmoil in the Nupe kingdom, slaves from that region were sold at the Wawa market.³⁸ Each Lashibe household possessed a communal farm which was worked by all the adult male members. The profits were used to purchase necessary household materials and farm implements. Rotational cropping systems and bush burning as a means of fertilizing were methods of restoring land fertility. During the colonial period, the British acknowledged the economic significance of Lashibe through its outstanding contribution to total income in Wawa district.³⁹

It has been pointed out by D.G. Coursey that yam cultivation in West Africa was a pre-European contact phenomenon. To confirm this, he traced the presence of some

³⁷ Lashibe was probably the 'self-sufficient community' which the Lander Brothers mentioned in their records. Their reference to the men of Brass as 'energetic middlemen' could also indicate the presence of the Wangara merchants. Hallet, The Niger Journal, p. 28.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For example, agricultural products from Lashibe amounted to £6,107. 0s 0d which was 67.6% of the total income of £9,129. 0s 0d of Wawa district in 1918. See ILOPROF/2788 "Wawa District: Bussa Emirate", NAK.

other crops in West Africa to the Palaeolithic period when early man gathered edible roots including varieties of yam.⁴⁰ This view compares with the Borgu tradition which holds that yam did not have an external origin in the kingdoms.⁴¹ Yam was significant because it served as the primary staple food of the people. Varieties of the crop were planted in the two seasons of the year and was processed into sokuru (pounded yam) and bataru (yam flour meal).

Next to yam in importance was guinea corn. Some species appear to be indigenous to West Africa while others were presumably introduced from Asia.⁴² Of all the varieties, the exsertum known as Hanikpare (in Batonu), was mostly cultivated in parts of Dahomey, Yorubaland and Borgu. In the northern part of Borgu, especially in Shagunnu, Luma, Swashi and

⁴⁰ D.G. Coursey, "The Cultivation and Use of Yams in West Africa", in Z.A.Konczacki and J.M. Konczacki, (eds.), An Economic History of Tropical Africa Vol.1 :the Pre-colonial Period, Frank Cass, London, 1977, pp.31- 40. The author has mentioned the varieties and origins of yams in West Africa. Accordingly, he concludes that "Yam cultivation doubtless [sic] evolved independently, probably on essentially similar lines in the other main areas of origin..." The D. rotundata and D. cayenesi have been identified as the most important species in West Africa. The varieties of yam planted during the wet season included the aoba, kokuma, ungogo, jeto, and kwari. The dry season species were kenkeiku, kokogbara, worugbi, and woru lebeta. This information was collected from various farmers in Batonuland. See BHT. No. 9; No. 10; No. 24; No. 40; No. 53; No. 63.

⁴¹ All the farmers interviewed during fieldwork affirm that yam had been an ancient and indigenous food to Borgu people. BHT. Nos. 33, 108 and 222.

⁴² F.R. Irvine, West African Crops, Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p. 136.

Babanna District, stretching up to Illo and Hausaland, the notabile (called Hanibi in Borgu) was grown because it required less rainfall rather other crops. In Agwarra district, the Gunguwa, Kamberi and Lopawa farmed on Foge island, cultivating yam and guinea corn. Intercropping of guinea corn with yam, bulrush millet or cow peas was practised. These crops were planted between July and August and harvested in November or December. Guinea corn and maize were preserved in large granaries for about six months before becoming unpalatable. Apart from serving as a staple food, the guinea corn was processed into local beer by the women. Brewing became an important industrial activity of the women in Wawa, as noted by Clapperton in the nineteenth century.⁴³

Maize was next in importance to guinea corn. Although a mainly starchy-staple crop, the grain contains significant protein, oil, and minerals. There were many types but the most widely grown was the Dent (Zea mays indentata).⁴⁴ For heavy productivity, the maize required fertile soil, an average rainfall of 30-60 inches and constant weeding. Maize was

⁴³ The development of brewing in Wawa prompted Clapperton to comment that drunkenness was general, the people were merry and "behaved well". See Clapperton, Journal, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Other types include Flint - Z. mays indenturata, Flour or Squaw - Z. mays amalacea, Sweet - Z. mays succharata, Popcorn - Z. mays everta, and Waxy - Z. mays ceretina. For a full explanation on these, consult Marvin P. Miracle, Maize in Tropical Africa, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1966, pp. 3-18.

cross-planted with guinea corn, yam or vegetables. Like yams, maize was cultivated twice a year, following the seasonal pattern. The introduction of maize to West Africa has often been credited to the Portuguese⁴⁵ but Marvin Miracle argues that it existed earlier than the Portuguese contact with the continent. He concluded that "the only archaeological evidence on the introduction of maize to western Africa is pottery with an imprint resembling an ear of maize, found at Ife, Nigeria... which is thought by some to have been manufactured in 100 A.D.,... a date estimated from the depth at which it was found."⁴⁶ This probably suggests the spread of maize from Yorubaland to the Borgu kingdoms through inter-group economic relations. Indeed the word agbado or nagan by which maize is called in Borgu are originally Yoruba. Other agricultural crops grown included millet, beans, cowpeas, sweet potatoes, vegetables, pepper, and onions. Two types of onion were cultivated between December and February and were exported to Yorubaland. Fruits were also cultivated. Owing to the widespread laterite soil in northern parts of Borgu, resulting

⁴⁵ For instance, Irvine, West African Crops, p. 125. The author claims that there are two main varieties. The yellow grain which originated from Central America and spread through Spain, Portugal, Egypt and into West Africa from the north and the soft-seeded white grain which was introduced through the West African coast in the south in the sixteenth century from South America.

⁴⁶ Miracle, Maize in Tropical Africa, p. 89. See also A.H.H. Goodwin, "The Origin of Maize", South African Archaeological Bulletin, March 1953.

from the long stretch of hills such as Kubli, Sauni and Ukupa, the major crops planted in the zone included millet, maize and guinea-corn. The differences in texture of the soil and types of crops cultivated made possible intra-kingdom exchange of agricultural products. Fortunately the river Niger which flows in south-easterly direction, provided drinking water and fertile land to the population in the hinterland through its many tributaries.⁴⁷

By the eighteenth century, agriculture witnessed enormous development and became more commercialized than in the previous centuries. During this period, there was a noticeable expansion of the cultivation of yam as well as cash-crops such as indigo, cotton and the shea nuts. What facilitated the considerable change was the economic relationship which Borgu experienced with its immediate more wealthy and more industrialized neighbours, particularly the Yoruba to the south and the Hausa to the north. Thus isolation which had hampered economic growth in earlier centuries had been removed. The interaction with a larger world and the business-like attitude of Borgu farmers brought about agricultural changes not only in the cultivation of crops but also in

⁴⁷ Some of the rivers include the Makron which flows northwards from the Atakora Mountains into the Niger, the Alibori, Queme, Okpara, Sota, Oli, Moshi and Teshi. Although of little navigational significance, these rivers provided means of livelihood through fishing. On the River Niger, fishing was practised at Shagunnu, Kagogi, Old Bussa, Fakun and Leaba. Awuru and Garafini too were important because of the utilization of canoes for fishing.

varieties and techniques. As population expanded, farms were enlarged and agricultural output correspondingly increased. Particularly in the peripheral towns such as Saki/Ilesha and Kisi/Kaiama in the south, farmers exchanged ideas. Through the interaction with other peoples, the self-sufficient economy of the pre-mercantile period gave way to a larger production for consumption within and outside continental Borgu. The exchange of goods and ideas as a consequence fostered inter-group economic relations.

Borgu's participation in external trade did not become noticeable until the eighteenth century. This was made possible by the Wangara, who constituted the principal merchants among the Borgu kingdoms. The participation in the gold trade had provided an opportunity for the Wangara to become a strong connecting link between Bonduku and Gonja on the one hand and the Sudan on the other. Indeed they were advantageously placed to control trade because of their early access to the producing areas. Two major factors facilitated the commercial activities of the period. First of all (gold which was lacking in the Sudan) was procured in Bonduku, while salt (a scarce commodity in the gold mines) was produced in the Sudan. Hence the possibility of exchange. Secondly, by the beginning of the eighteenth century there occurred an upsurge in the demand for kola nut in Hausaland, thus motivating the Wangara to obtain the commodity in large quantities. Lovejoy attributes the increase in the kola trade to the expansion of

Islam since kola was the only stimulant permitted by the religion and because it was used by Mallams as gifts and for medicinal purposes.⁴⁸ The Wangara could not have succeeded in supplying the commodity without direct access to the producing centres. Apparently, the Wangara position became strengthened, the gold and kola nut trade expanded and new caravan routes developed.

Demand might well have increased in Hausaland, as Lovejoy suggests, but greater supply also occurred in the early eighteenth century because the Akan States, which basically controlled the production of gold and kola, were united into the Asante nation which expanded rapidly into an empire. As a consequence, the linkage between expanding commerce and an evolving social formation demonstrated itself. Needing more finances, first the state and then the empire organized themselves for expanded production and therefore greater supply over the course of the eighteenth century. Borgu then became a major conduit between growing demand in Hausaland and expanding supply in the Gonja market which managed Asante's north-eastern commerce. Obviously, strategic location became advantageous. It was during this period that the Borgu economy began to witness a rapid and dramatic transformation. There

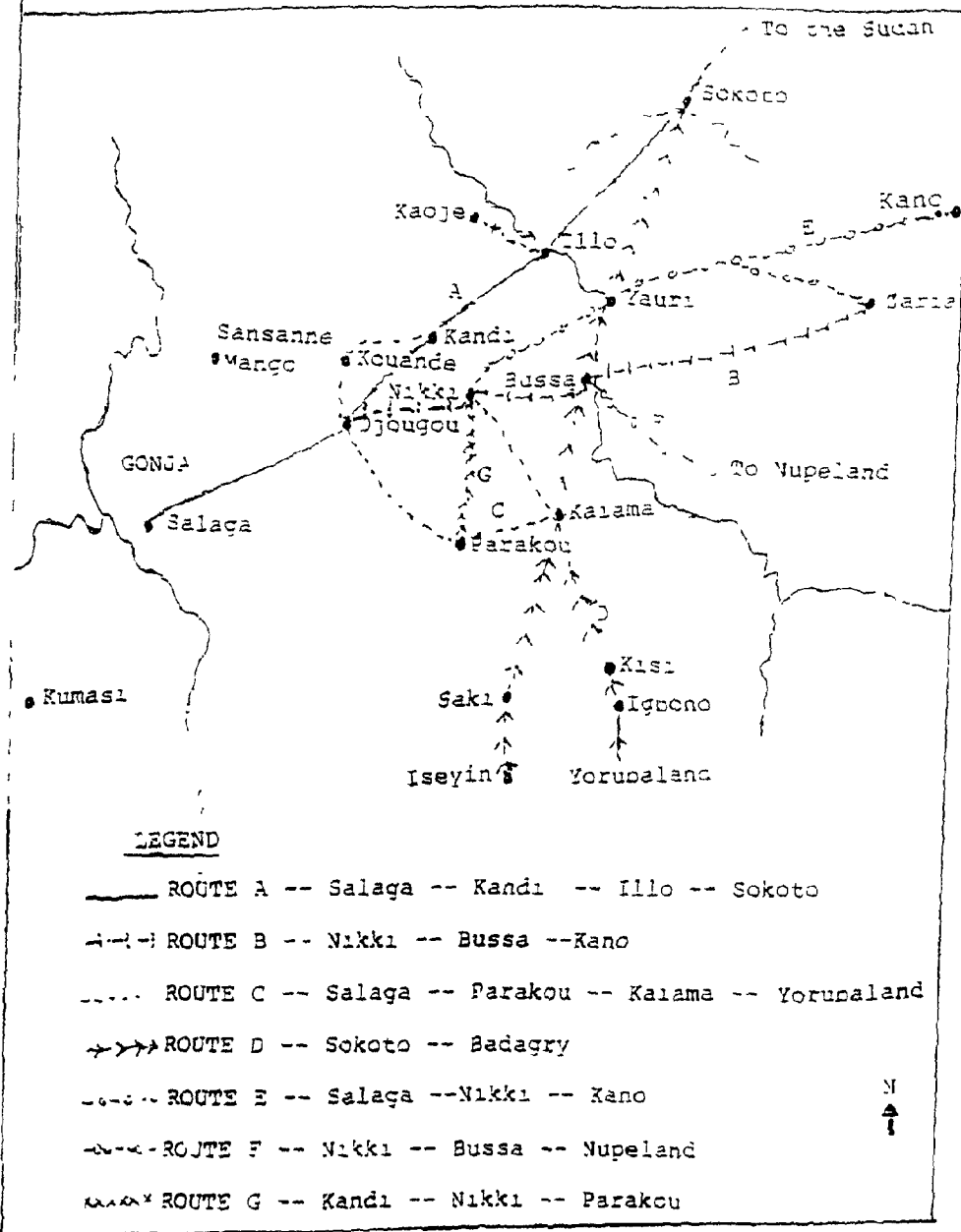
⁴⁸ The multitude uses of kola have been elaborately discussed in Paul E. Lovejoy, Caravans of Kola: The Hausa Kola Trade 1700-1900, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, Nigeria, 1980, pp. 2-5. Also consult Jack Goody and T.M. Mustapha, "The Caravan Trade from Kano to Salaga", JHSN, Vol. III, No. 4, 1967, pp. 611-616.

occurred a gradual but conscious shift from a land-based economy to a money economy. Since Borgu was strategically located between Gonja and Hausaland, it profitably shared in the expanding kola nut trade. Through the Wangara, slaves, horses, salt, natron and exotic goods such as earthenware, jugs, brass and pewter dishes, woollen and cotton cloth (which were purchased from the Europeans along the Gold Coast) were plenteously available in Borgu local markets.⁴⁹ Obviously the more commerce flourished, the more diversified the economy and the more merchants proliferated.

The existence of clearly marked and diversified trade routes which connected the primary producing regions and towns indicated the extensiveness of the Wangara economic activities in Borgu. These routes appear to be an extension of the Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic trade because of the linkage with the strategic commercial centres. Borgu became an "economic middle-man zone" between the gold mines of Bonduku and kola nut fields of Gonja on the one hand, and the salt centres of the Sudan on the other. Just as slaves served as the major commercial link between Africa and Europe in the Trans-Atlantic trade, so did gold, kola nut and salt dominate the Trans-Saharan trade. The major routes also connected Borgu to Dahomey, Oyo and Nupe kingdoms. Through the operation of a

⁴⁹ Clapperton, Journal, p. 68. Information from various sources indicate that the Borgu people were not much addicted to slave raiding or slave trading. Borgu economy was certainly not slave-based like the Oyo Empire before its dismantlement by the Fulani jihadists in 1837.

MAP 7. WANGARA CARAVAN ROUTES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY



complex network of caravan routes, both the interior of Borgu and the easterly section adjoining the middle Niger around Bussa were well served with varied commodities. In remarking that Bussa enjoyed both prestige and commercial importance by controlling the trade "between the Fulani states and Dahomey, Salaga and Yendi, which passed through Illo, Gonja and Bussa," Anene could have been referring to the Wangara factor in that section of Borgu.⁵⁰ Bussa in particular maintained economic relations with Borno from where horses were supplied. Since the eighteenth century and following the expanding northern trade, the traffic along these routes became heavy. Borgu markets such as Nikki, Kandi, Segbana, Kaoje, Bussa and Kaiama were frequently visited by Hausa and Borno merchants. Surely the favourable ecological environment, with the open Guinea-savanna vegetation and low annual rainfall, enhanced the emergence of commercial centres and regularly utilized routes. The Wangara controlled all the principal routes.

Although the Wangara had many route options to Hausaland, most of them preferred the Djougou-Nikki-Bussa-Kano route, (Route B on map 7), especially when they carried gold. From the travelling patterns, it could be suggested that the northern routes through Kandi-Illo-Sokoto (Route A) or Nikki-Bussa-Zaria-Kano (Route B) were usually favoured during the wet season. Nikki-Yauri-Sokoto (Route E) was also heavily patronized during the wet season. On the Kandi-Nikki-Parakou

⁵⁰ J.C. Anene, "The Eclipse of the Borgawa", p. 217.

route (G) agricultural products and sheabutter constituted the main articles. In the dry season, the southern routes (C & D) became more popular. The easy movement and perhaps relative security along the routes might have been responsible for the pattern. For travelling convenience, the Wangara established settlements which served as refreshment centres along the routes. The caravan journey was usually slow. For instance, while the Gonja-Hausaland caravan journey could last between 5-6 months, that of Bonduku-Hausaland could take seven months.⁵¹ The Wangara who crossed the River Niger to N'Gaski in Kontagora and into the Nupe kingdom for mats and clothes also travelled for about seven months.⁵² It should be noted, however, that the fewer the number and the lighter the weight of the load, the faster the movement of the caravan.

During the reign of Zume Dobidiya in the eighteenth century, Nikki extended its authority to Kandi in the north and Parakou in the south.⁵³ Kouande and Kaiama were founded within the same period. These developments brought about the extension of trade routes from Gonja to Parakou and Kaiama. Ultimately Kaiama emerged as an important entrepôt and market centre not only for the Wangara but also for the Hausa and Yoruba merchants who patronized the Sokoto-Badagry caravan

⁵¹ Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", p. 190. The fact was corroborated in the field. See BHT. Nos. 5 and 91.

⁵² Ibid., p. 190.

⁵³ See Orou, "Origine de la dynastie de Parakou"

route. Clearly its location enhanced rapid economic growth. Further extension of the trade route was made to Sansanne Mango in the mid-eighteenth century when it was founded by the Anufo mercenaries under the control of Gonja and Mamprussi kings. Because the Wangara formed a sizeable population, they swiftly and successfully linked the town to both Bonduku in the west and Borgu in the east. Mahdi Adamu did not reckon on the extension of routes to Parakou and Kaiama. He gave the impression that Yoruba merchants travelled from Old Oyo (Katunga) through Djougou to Salaga.⁵⁴ But evidence from Clapperton corroborated by field research has indicated that by the early decades of the nineteenth century, both Yoruba and Hausa merchants, alongside the Wangara, had established commercial connections with Kaiama. The proximity of Kaiama to Kisi in Yorubaland, where indigo, woven cloth and cotton were procured, gives credibility to the above claim. As recorded by Clapperton:

Kaima [Kaiama] is one of the towns through which the caravan from Houssa [Hausa] and Bornu [Borno] passes to and from Gonja, on the borders of Ashantee [Asante]: it also has a direct trade with Dahomey, Youri [Yauri], Nyffe [Nupe], and Yourriba [Yoruba].

Clapperton proceeded to mention that he saw a "caravan which is on its way from Gonja and Ashante [Asante]; they consist of

⁵⁴ Mahdi Adamu, The Hausa Factor in West African History, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria and Oxford University Press, Ibadan, 1978, pp. 64-65.

upwards of 1000 men and as many beasts of burthen [burden]."⁵⁵ The caravan was en route to Kano. Clapperton most probably saw either the Hausa or Wangara merchants and the evidence describes in lucid terms the central importance of Kaiama to the foreign merchants.

Nikki's position grew tremendously during this period of booming commerce. Apart from being the origin of political power for the southern satellite chiefdoms, and serving as the main axis for the confederal system, Nikki served as an emporium and became so significant that the coin called the mithqal was minted there with the gold imported from Bonduku.⁵⁶ The quantity of the imported gold into Borgu cannot be assessed and archaeological excavations have not yet unearthed examples of such coins. But it would appear that copper from the mines of Takedda which was exported to Gobir, Borno and North Africa through Borgu was minted into coins too. Lugard alleged that hoes became a form of currency in

⁵⁵ BHT. No. 10; Clapperton, Journal, pp. 68-73. Similarly, Sir John Glover saw a large caravan of traders at Wawa. They were on their way from Kano to Nikki and possibly to Salaga. They consisted 150 slaves, 32 horses, 26 donkies, traders' servants and about 301 slaves for sale. Their articles of trade included spices, bitter kola, minerals, knives, silk and sword suspenders. See A.C.G. Hastings, The Voyage of the Dayspring, being the Journal of the late Sir John Hawley Glover, R.N., G.C.M.G., together with some account of the Expedition up the Niger River in 1857, William Clowes, London, 1926, pp. 156-157.

⁵⁶ Mahdi Adamu, "Distribution of Trading Centres in the Central Sudan in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries", Sokoto Seminar Paper, Jan. 1975, (Unpublished), p. 20.

Borgu in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ The use of hoes as currencies did not seem to be a widespread practice because local traditions do not mention them as legal tenders in the pre-colonial times. Thus it could be surmised that Lugard was referring to the exchange of goods with hoes by local farmers. Cowries, however, formed the main medium of exchange.⁵⁸ These had been imported into the Western Sudan by the fourteenth century but when they were actually introduced into Borgu remains obscure. That notwithstanding, commerce was facilitated by the use of cowry shells. Until the end of the nineteenth century, cowries remained the main currency in Nigerian Borgu.

To consolidate further commercial predominance, the Sina-Boko (the king of Nikki) made commercial treaties with various Hausa and Nupe, Yoruba and Asante rulers.⁵⁹ Through this arrangement, Nikki's economic paramountcy became widely acknowledged by the neighbouring peoples. Hausa, Wangara, and Yoruba merchants established quarters in Nikki as in Salaga and Katsina. As a militarily powerful king, the Sina-Boko provided adequate security for the merchants, particularly for the revenue which he derived from them. It was during this period that Nikki extended its chiefdom system eastward to

⁵⁷ Lugard, "An Expedition to Borgu", p. 214.

⁵⁸ BORGDIST/SNP/7/4667/1906' Kontagora Province: Borgu - Laws and Customs: Notes on", NAK.

⁵⁹ BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/38 "History of Borgu", NAK.

parts of Batonuland. The Nikki princes presumably wanted to share in the booming economy by establishing chiefdoms where they would extort money from the itinerant merchants. In this respect, it seems plausible to argue that collection of tolls and presents from merchants became one of the major factors in the establishment of chiefdoms. Until the partition in 1898, Nikki unquestionably remained the largest of the Borgu kingdoms. Bussa was the second greatest nexus of trade being directly connected to all the major markets. Its location along the littoral of the River Niger also linked it to Nupe, Niger Delta and Igboland market centres. This explains why its economy ranked second among the Borgu kingdoms at the time of partition. Illo also developed as a market centre. It controlled the wealth emerging from the inter-regional trade between Borgu, Hausaland and the Sudan. According to a traveller's account:

The Dendi have a little of everything, the Zaberma [Songhay] have only livestock and potash. The Bengou people [from the Sudan] have only salt, the inhabitants of Ilo [Illo] foodstuffs which they produce and the Hausa the cotton cloth which they weave. As it is, the Zaberma go to sell their livestock in exchange for salt which they carry to Ilo [Illo]. At Ilo [Illo] they meet the Hausa who bring cotton cloth there to exchange and thereby procure merchandise, part of which they sell afterwards to the Dendi. Then the Zaberma and the Dendi go to Kani [Kandi?] where they meet people from Togoland with whom they exchange their merchandise for kola nuts, which are then

sent off to Sokoto.⁶⁰

Overwhelmed by the commercial contributions of the Wangara and acknowledging that they were the pillar of Borgu's external trade, Umaru Yerimagobi peremptorily declared "no Wangara no commerce in Borgu."⁶¹ The Lander brothers authenticated this assertion when they described the commercial disparity between the Yoruba and Borgu peoples. They wrote:

Perhaps no two people in the universe residing so near each other, differ more widely in their habits and customs, and even in their natures, than the natives of Yariiba [Yoruba] and Borgoo [Borgu]. The former are perpetually engaged in trading with each other from town to town; the latter never quit their towns except in case of war, or when engaged in predatory excursions...⁶²

The above description does not absolutely deny that no indigenous Borgu traders existed but they were few and far between. As claimed by the present Emir of Borgu, rather than actively participating in the Bonduku-Gonja-Hausaland gold and

⁶⁰ See Elliott P. Skinner, "West African Economic System", in Melville J. Herskovits and Michell Harwitz, (eds.), Economic Transition in Africa, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964, p. 92, quoted from Noll Ned, "Le Haut Dahomey, d'après le Lieut, Tilho", La Géographie, Vol. 1, 1900, pp. 402-404.

⁶¹ BHT. No. 5.

⁶² Hallet, The Niger Journal, p. 112. Musa Idris also believed that Borgu people showed no interest in commerce. See Adamu, "Distribution of Trading Centres", p. 21, derived from Musa Idris's paper delivered to the Mande Conference in London, 1972.

kola nut trade, most Borgu merchants dealt in cattle, sheabutter, indigo and dyed clothes -- products of local industries. Many of these local merchants settled at Kaoje and Segbana where the cattle and salt trades flourished in the nineteenth century. The presence of the Fulani coupled with the closeness to Hausaland made Kaoje thrive as a commercial centre to the extent that its ruler was referred to as "Sarkin Borgu" by the colonial officers.⁶³ Mention can be made of Woru Yari and Bonni Madugu (probably a caravan leader) who used to purchase horses from Jiga in the Sokoto area and slaves from either Hausa or Yorubaland.⁶⁴ Marami which was predominantly populated by the Fulani was also visited by local Borgu merchants seeking cattle. The number of Borgu merchants to the south was not numerous because the Yoruba controlled the trade in that direction. It would appear that such local merchants were generally not engaged in extensive long-distance and inter-regional trade when compared to the Wangara.

The development of an indigenous merchant class frequently

⁶³ This was an artificially created title because Borgu comprised a number of kingdoms and chiefdoms and not a unified political organisation. BORGDIST/DOB/QHR/1 "Borgu Division Reports", NAK and BORGDIST/DOB/ASR/33 "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK.

⁶⁴ Bonni was probably one of the caravan leaders who became prosperous through his organization of caravan journeys. As a caravan leader the Madugu brought together all the merchants ready for the journey. There could be between 500-1000 people and animals on the journey. The caravan leader was assisted in his duties by the Ubandawaki-leading horseman and the Jagaba-the leading guide. See Goody and Mustapha, "The Caravan Trade", p. 613.

grew slowly over much of tropical Africa. Thus among hundreds of ethno-cultural groups in eastern Africa, the Kamba and Nyamwezi formed the trading class while the Bisa and Yao held the same position in central Africa. In west Africa, the Aro, Wangara and Hausa usually formed the major components of the trading class. Customary practices and social ideology often hindered the emergence of traders. While these varied from one culture to another two appear to have been widespread. The first involved social disapproval of vast differences in wealth. Successful merchants became wealthy, vastly so compared to their agricultural counterparts. Resentment of this break in the egalitarian ethos would result in arson, social ostracization or even murder. Linked to this ethos, men particularly were expected to offer gifts to relations upon stated occasions during the year. The wealthier the man, the greater the host of relatives. Gift giving thus enforced the egalitarian ethos of the culture. Consequently men who determined to enter commerce had best do so outside their native culture. Long distance traders returned home only when they felt able to afford the gifts and not bringing with them all of their fortunes. However for the Wangara, Hausa and Yoruba another factor became important. Conversion to Islam tended to loosen the bonds to traditional culture and propel its converts into a society where wealth became admired rather than resented and despised. Like the Tiv, males in Borgu believed that farming was the most masculine of occupations

and that a proud home was one which achieved the greatest degree of self-sufficiency. Trade suggested weakness and dependence upon the markets by farmers who were less than successful as providers. The ideology of self-sufficiency created a barrier to the spread of Islam which normally first attracted converts through the spread of trading activities. This was true of both Tiv and Borgu.

Engaging in trade and mixing in the trader class normally involved some commitment to Islam. For the people of Borgu, such a commitment implied a rejection of their long held ideology of hostility to that religion: a compromise which Borgu people were not prepared to make. Even permitting Muslims to enter Borgu had long been opposed by its Kisran rulers. Presumably the Wangara would not have been permitted to enter the country, if the Wasangari had maintained control. After the defeat by Songhay and the rise to pre-eminence of the Nupe and Yoruba -- both highly addicted to trade -- the Wangara found a welcome. The indigenous people largely remained apart, and continued to be tied to farming, hunting and their local industries which catered strictly to local needs. Their anti-Islamic ideology worked to prevent involvement in trade. The separate identity of the Muslim Wangara clans attests to this strict degree of separateness. Furthermore the men of Borgu were the farmers. Among many of the groups which elsewhere in Africa became famous long distance traders, women were more important than men in

farming. But in Borgu, women only dominated some industrial activities such as sheabutter production. Thus basic needs of the society could be met by the females leaving male free to engage in trade and remain away from home for extended periods. In Borgu males were tied to the land.

Kola nuts were produced in various locations of Gonja, but commercialization occurred at Salaga where both Wangara and Hausa merchants formed significant trading communities. They occupied different quarters. The collection of merchants in different quarters of Salaga produced remarkable effect in that it brought about urbanization and accelerated industrial activity. In several Borgu towns, such as Kaoje, Illo, Bussa and Wawa in the north, and Kaiama in the south, the presence of artisans increased population as well as intensified and broadened the commerce and industry of the towns. The development in Bussa and Kaiama exemplifies Benton's mercantile theory that "towns grew when merchants, involved in long-distance commerce, began to settle at attractive locations."⁶⁵ In other words, as commerce created towns, so towns created commerce and industry. Ultimately Bussa and Kaiama became nodal towns with a significant economic position for the Wangara merchants. The emergence of Salaga as a principal kola nut market, especially after 1810, was the sequel to a new pattern of trade which had begun to affect the

⁶⁵ See John F. Benton, (ed.), Town Origins: The Evidence from Medieval England, D.C. Heath and Company, Boston, 1968, p. ix.

Wangara and Hausa merchants. The Asante restricted commercial exchange only to Salaga, thereby denying the Wangara direct access to the core producing centres. Lovejoy points out that:

By 1817 when Salaga was 'the grand emporium of Inta [Gonja]', Asante traders were responsible for transporting large amounts of kola to Salaga for sale....Salaga remained the only outlet for Asante kola until the British-Asante war of 1873-74....Asante was able to restrict traders to Salaga because of the state's strong commercial and political position.⁶⁶

Without doubt, this restriction policy adversely affected the economy of the Wangara merchants and regrettably, no other commodity could suitably substitute for kola nut.

Musa Woru, an erstwhile Borgu trader, made a distinction between the "itinerant Wangara" and "Borgu Wangara." While the former emerged as the principal purveyors of gold, kola nut, salt and foreign commodities, the latter were the retailers in Borgu local markets.⁶⁷ The Borgu Wangara also supplied the itinerant group with locally produced goods such as sheabutter, ivory, slaves and glass beads.⁶⁸ The Lander

⁶⁶ Lovejoy, Caravans, pp. 18-19. Hopkins expressed a similar view when he stated that "Hausa merchants...were prevented by the Ashanti from entering the areas of production". See Hopkins, An Economic History, p. 64.

⁶⁷ BHT. No. 108. The informant also claims that the itinerant group served as a link between the permanent one and their homeland in Songhay.

⁶⁸ Some writers claim that Clapperton witnessed an exchange of these goods at Kaiama during his early nineteenth century journey. Strikingly, this was not mentioned by

brothers mentioned that iron-ore, found in abundance particularly in Wawa district of Borgu, formed part of the articles exported to other places.⁶⁹ Between Bussa and Nikki, Lugard came across "masses of ironstone and honeycombed lava impregnated with iron, alternating with surfaces of grey granite."⁷⁰ Iron-ore and sheabutter constituted the primary articles which the Wangara carried to the Nupe kingdom in exchange for mats, glass-beads and clothes. Through this connecting process, both Wangara groups contributed immensely to the transformation of Borgu's economic system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For both groups common ancestry, commerce and the Islamic religion provided unifying ideologies.

An efficient transportation system stimulated commerce within and outside the Borgu kingdoms. Three forms of transportation existed: human portage, pack animals and water transport.⁷¹ The openness of the savanna allowed the utilization of both human portage and pack animals. Slaves

Clapperton himself or Richard Lander who accompanied him. However, the Wangara had been responsible for the European goods which Clapperton found at Kaiama in 1826. These included earthenware jugs, brass and pewter dishes and woollen clothes. The same set of articles were found at Wawa. See Clapperton, Journal, pp. 68 and 93.

⁶⁹ Hallet, The Niger Journal, p. 68.

⁷⁰ Lugard, "England and France", p. 902.

⁷¹ These modes of transport are fully discussed in Gabriel O. Ogunremi, Counting the Camels: The Economics of Transportation in Pre-Colonial Nigeria, Nok, New York, 1982.

were mostly employed as porters by the Wangara.⁷² Captives of wars or victims of kidnapping also provided portage services to merchants. In addition, women and children were hired during the wet season to transport wares for long distances because men were usually more gainfully engaged on the farm. Caravan traffic seemed to be more frequent during the dry season than the wet. By then, there were more porters to sell their service.

In his examination of the Yoruba caravan system, Toyin Falola contended that members of the trader's households constituted one of the sources of human portage. He underscored the significance of porters by asserting that "porters were the life-blood of caravans. They worked hard, in a society with a low level of technology in transportation."⁷³ The Yoruba system described by Falola was not radically different from what operated in Borgu except that household members were sparingly employed for long distances in view of the hazards along the caravan routes. Banditry was rampant. The involvement of women in long-distance trade could be regarded as another revolution in the Borgu economy. They were introduced into commerce. In the process of serving as porters, some of them emerged as powerful and successful merchants too. Among others, Widow Zuma at Wawa who was said

⁷² BORGDIST/DOB/HIS/38 "History of Borgu", NAK.

⁷³ Toyin Falola, "The Yoruba Caravan System of the Nineteenth Century", The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1991, pp. 111-132.

to have possessed about 1000 slaves, Ramotubiyon at Ilesha and Bake Memunat at Yashekira dealt in kola, cloths woven by Gandu women and even slaves. Widow Zuma usually hired out her female slaves to serve as porters for merchants.⁷⁴ The drawing of women into commerce tends to support the theory elaborated above, that men were tied to the land by economics and ideology (anti-Islamic).

Camels and donkeys were the most widely used pack animals because of their high carrying capacity and ability to travel for long distances with minimum stop-overs. None of these animals was bred in Borgu, hence the Wangara had to purchase them from Hausaland. Both Clapperton and the Lander brothers attested to the importation of large horses (not useful for commerce but for warfare) from Borno. They indicated that the horses bred in Borgu (probably at Sassani in Shagunnu district) were "excessively small" and "hardly active."⁷⁵ Only the Wangara merchants who crossed the River Niger into Nupeland from either Awuru, Fakun or Leaba in the south and Yauri in the north made use of water transport. Leaba became

⁷⁴ BHT. No. 23, Fatima Yenka, [70], the Magajiya of Ilesha and No. 62, Manu Banikasi, [92], the Yonkogi of Yashikera. See also Clapperton, Journal, pp. 67-69.

⁷⁵ Clapperton, Journal, p. 93; Lander, Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition, p. 140. Tradition indicates that horses were bred at Sassani in Shagunnu district. During field work, the researcher met five horses in stable at Sassani. BHT. No 165. During his second journey, Glover reportedly bought a horse probably from Nikki at 150,000 cowries an equivalent of £16.17s.6d. See Hastings, The Voyage, p.188.

both agriculturally and commercially important in the nineteenth century. Its excessively rich soil made the cultivation of yam, maize, vegetables and tonkwa beans possible on a relatively large scale. By 1845, there had been the emergence of professional canoe builders and paddlers in the riverine areas such that water transport accelerated the economic boom of the region. Movement from Leaba southwards to Bajibo, Jebba and farther to Onitsha became relatively easy. Thus water transport assisted in linking Borgu to the Delta region. The Kyedye [Nupe group], who were canoe builders and fishermen probably influenced the Borgu people with whom they interacted on the Niger. It could therefore be surmised that while human portage was efficient between Borgu and Yorubaland, animal transport was better between Borgu and Hausaland and water transport between Borgu and Igboland.

The males might cling to the land, avoiding the merchants and the Islamizing influence, but over the eighteenth century as commercialization flourished, the young men particularly began to develop a taste for exotic goods beyond what their farming activities could satisfy. Still much averse to Islam, they turned to migrant labour. By the turn of the nineteenth century, there emerged a class of professional migrant labourers whose preoccupation was to sell their labour.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Houghton identified three categories of labour migration: emigrant breadwinners, the emigrant families and absconders. Of the three, only the first one applied to Borgu people. Like in other African societies, kinship or family obligations remained strongly entrenched in Borgu custom,

These were farmers who did not possess permanent farmlands of their own or who had less work to do during the dry season. It is clear that Borgu people developed a flexible occupational pattern which blended with their agricultural cycle. The large wave of migrant labour in Borgu could be accounted for by the restricted co-operative arrangement such as existed in Yorubaland. Thus Borgu migrant labourers moved southwards into Yorubaland where they were appointed either on permanent or contractual basis. The demographic changes within Borgu became clearly noticeable during the dry season. The workers migrated in various directions. They migrated to the north, where labour demand was high in the salt mines, to the west where they participated in weeding kola nut plantations and to the east in favour of Nupeland where they took part in mat-making and glass-making. The Kamberi particularly migrated cross the River Niger into Kontagora and Nupeland. In agreement with the views of Elliot Berg,⁷⁷ most of the Borgu migrant workers were young people who were flexible to change from permanent farming to paid labour. They moved in groups under a chosen

hence labourers could not afford to be away completely without playing their expected roles. See Hobart D. Houghton, "Migrant Labour" in Smith Prudence (ed.), Africa in Transition, Max Reinherdt, London, 1958, pp. 39-46.

⁷⁷ See Elliot J. Berg, "The Economics of the Migrant Labor System", in Hilda Kuper, (ed.), Urbanization and Migration in West Africa, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965, pp. 160-181. Borgu migrant workers were different from the "stranger farmers" of the Senegambian region who could "rent land for a season...before returning home with their savings". See Philip Curtin, Economic Change in Pre-Colonial Africa, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1975, p. 171.

leader who usually determined the work to be done and controlled the team's finances. The married ones amongst them often sent money back to their wives or brought substantial amounts at the end of the season for the building of houses.

Pastoralism was the exclusive work of the ubiquitous Fulani, who were found in all the big towns of Borgu.⁷⁸ It has been ascertained through serological studies that the Fulani are Caucasoid,⁷⁹ hence genetically different from the other Borgu inhabitants. Hiernaux described them as one of the "Elongated Africans" and employed a detailed anthropometric survey to establish their expansion into West Africa. He also asserted that they "differ systematically from the neighbouring populations."⁸⁰ However, they speak a language of the Niger-Congo family just as the Wangara and some Borgu people did. The period of Fulani expansion into Borgu is rather obscure but it could be deduced from A.G. Adebayo's assertion that their "migration eastward along the Sudan had started by the twelfth century and gained momentum in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the sahel experienced

⁷⁸ Two categories of the Fulani have been identified. These are the Fulbe na'i or Bororo'en and the Fulbe siire. Only the first group were found in Borgu. They possessed two species of cattle - the humpless short-horned and the zebu. Both are susceptible to trypanosomiasis.

⁷⁹ For details on the recent discussion on the origin of the Fulani, see A.G. Adebayo, "Of Man and Cattle: A Reconsideration of the Traditions of Origin of Pastoral Fulani of Nigeria", History in Africa, Vol. 18, 1991, pp. 1-21.

⁸⁰ Jean Hiernaux, The People of Africa, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1974, pp. 134-135.

another bout of desiccation."⁸¹ Traditions of some Borgu towns point to the Fulani as one of the ancient groups of inhabitants, which helps to explain their early existence in Borgu.⁸²

It would appear that the dry savanna-sahel vegetation of northern Nigeria prompted the southward migration of the Fulani mainly from Gwandu or Sokoto into Borgu where they pursued their pastoral occupation. Like the Yoruba and Hausa merchants, the Fulani occupied separate sections of Borgu towns usually under the leadership of a Gah-sunon. Environmental factors were responsible for the eco-symbiotic relationship and mutual benefit derived by the Fulani and Borgu peoples. Both co-operated to exploit the environment to their advantage. Both required different soils for their complementary occupational pursuits; one for pasture, the other for farming. Both attended the same daily and periodic markets.

Although biologically and culturally dissimilar to one another, inter-marriage among the Fulani and the Borgu people was not prohibited.⁸³ Through this process, acculturation, assimilation and economic co-operation were fostered. Their

⁸¹ Adebayo, "Of Man and Cattle", p. 14.

⁸² Kabe and some villages in its vicinity have tradition of the earliest occupation by the Fulani.

⁸³ Notably in Hausaland the Fulani were cautious about inter-marriage. Through this they were able to protect their colour and their identity.

presence has not only solidified inter-ethnic relationship, it has also undermined the theory of economic self-sufficiency in a multi-ethnic society. While the Fulani supplied cattle and milk to the society, the Borgu people in return produced farm crops. This arrangement was quite analogous to the Fulani-Hausa relationship in the earliest times of their co-existence in northern Nigeria.⁸⁴ One striking thing about the Fulani is that they never compromised on cattle. To the Fulani, their cattle seem to be more significant than other possessions. Their long existence in a particular settlement depended upon the largeness of their herd and the absence of animal diseases to decimate their cattle. Following their nucleated pattern of life and weak political inclination, the Borgu Fulani, especially in the southern chiefdoms who were mostly nomadic, did not threaten the hegemony of the Wasangari. Clearly, the economic interaction was stronger than political attachment probably because most of the Fulani owed allegiance to the king of Nikki. In the northern section, following the revival of the Kisran rulers, the Fulani had become submissive to the Kibe of Bussa.⁸⁵ Since Borgu kings and chiefs received money

⁸⁴ Earl Scott, "Life Before the Drought: a Human Ecological Perspective", in Earl Scott, (ed.), Life Before the Drought, Allen and Unwin, London, 1984, pp. 49-75.

⁸⁵ The writer interacted with some Borgu Fulani in various places. Although not the focus of the research, none of them possessed reliable information about their origin. At Yashikera Ardo Bio made reference to the king of Nikki as their ruler. At Babanna, Woru Sime simply mentioned that they were from the north. At Ilesha, the information was "we have

and cattle from them, the Fulani sought to escape the numerous tributes often expected of them from the three kingdoms through which they might pass during their annual transhumance.

The concept of aristocracy as applied in this chapter signifies the evolution of a group of people, unique for their material and monetary wealth, influential in politics and educated in the Islamic religion. The combination of these factors distinguished the Wangara from the Wasangari ruling elite or the Batombu commoners or even the Gandu or Fulani cattle rearers. Musa Idris grouped them as occupying the upper middle estate in Borgu social classification.⁸⁶ But considering the wealth, opulence and the symbiotic eco-political relationship which they maintained with the Wasangari, it would be more appropriate to describe the Wangara as a powerful economic class. It was clear that the idea of accumulation of wealth and property emerged with the Wangara which to a large extent enhanced their position in

been here for a long time." BHT. Nos 125-127.

⁸⁶ Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", p. 90. Toennies points out that "estate" and "class" are synonyms which are often used interchangeably. He however distinguishes the terms: estates are conceived as communal while classes as societal. While estates are rigid, classes are fluid. See Ferdinand Toennies, "Estates and Classes", in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, (eds.), Class, Status, and Power: Social Stratification in Competitive Perspective, Second Edition, The Free Press, New York, 1966, pp. 12-13. This aspect of fluidity and uncertainty of class is also mentioned in Bill Freund, The African Worker, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 25.

Borgu.

In the history of West Africa, there have been instances where individual wealthy merchants dramatically rose to acquire political authority. John Kabes, in the Gold coast between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, wielded political power. Jaja of Opobo in the Niger-Delta emerged from servile origin to rise to economic and political prominence in the nineteenth century. However, the Wangara did not preoccupy themselves with political authority. They remained successful merchants. They contributed wealth to the Wasangari by paying caravan taxes and distributing gifts to the ruling elite. The motives behind the payment of tolls and presents were three-fold. It was to recognize the political authority of the rulers, to boost profits, and to seek permission to trade within their territories. Presents served as rent. The revenue generated through this source seemed to be substantial for it was claimed that "the rich man and his wealth belonged to the king."⁸⁷ The Wasangari reciprocated with political and military protection along the complex network of caravan routes. Possibly the Wasangari had few options. If they were to re-establish their rule in the eighteenth century, the revenue from the Wangara helped them to do so. With the establishment of the southern satellite chiefdoms, the anti-

⁸⁷ BHT. No. 139 (1985). This aspect is given wider consideration in Julius O. Adekunle, "Yoruba-Borgu Relations in the Nineteenth Century", M.A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 1987, Chapter Three, pp. 58-87.

Islamic ideology became revived but it did not extend to expelling the Wangara merchants because the ruling families became financially dependent upon them.

As the principal purveyors of the much needed commodities in Borgu, it was necessary for the Wangara to require political and military assistance in their inter-regional business. In c.1750 the Hausa sent an expedition against Borgu. It was called the Zabayi War, named after the place where the Hausa pitched their camp. The heavy duties extracted from Hausa merchants by Borgu chiefs might have been one of the causes of the war. In addition, the Borgu people were accused of enslaving Hausa merchants and porters who traversed the region from or to Gonja. The Hausa forces were repelled.⁸⁸ It may also be remarked that each of the main kingdoms attempted to tap as much revenue as possible from the commerce within their jurisdiction. This brought some internal rancour but unity was ensured by the threat of a common enemy. Internal aggressions were checked. External attacks were repelled. Trade continued to flourish. Thus regardless of the seemingly hostile relationship between Borgu and Hausaland, the above war did not seem to have significantly strained the economic relations between the two regions for any considerable length of time. Particularly in the mid-nineteenth century the operation of the Wangara-Wasangari relationship sometimes met with obstacles. This arose from the

⁸⁸ Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", p. 210.

inability of the rulers to guarantee security because the caravan routes were usually infested by marauders. The frequency of raids against Wangara merchants and caravans by the rapacious Borgu princes⁸⁹ often drastically reduced the amount of tolls and presents due to a ruler. Clearly, such situations usually led to antipathy between the two groups. There is no doubt that Wangara wealth provoked ill-feelings, jealousy and wrangling among the Wasangari ruling class. The growing financial demands from the kings combined with their indifference to security and the banditry of their princely sons drove the Wangara into a desperate but futile military effort.

With the satellite chiefdoms growing in number, the amount of tolls increased accordingly. Furthermore princes of Nikki and princes from the satellite chiefdoms who failed to create their own fiefdoms, cut into the merchants profits by raiding the caravans. Thus while tolls increased, security declined. Idris opined that as merchants became richer than chiefs, wealth engendered ill feelings which ultimately provoked the resentful Wangara to organize measures to avoid the payment of tolls in the mid-nineteenth century. Inevitably a conflict occurred which was ultimately suppressed by Sero Kpera the

⁸⁹ Before leaving Kisi, Lugard was continually warned of attack by Borgu raiders. Although he reached Kaiama unattacked, he was informed of an ambush on porters by a prince of Kaiama. This incidence became "his first experience of the lawlessness of the Borgu princes." Details are contained in Perham and Bull, Diaries of Lord Lugard, pp. 134-135.

Sina-Boko of Nikki.⁹⁰ Rather than a religious war, the conflict probably had been economically motivated, to resist the exploitative measures of Sero Kpera and to oppose the rapacity of his numerous princes.

At Bussa it was believed that the Wangara-Wasangari relationship was relatively peaceful to the extent that rulers partially participated in commerce. The rulers secured a fair percentage of the profits which remained very significant in running their administration. In the Nikki system the tolls remained fixed regardless of profit levels. Furthermore whatever the reasons, it was the princes of Nikki, not Bussa who were scrambling to secure a share of merchant profits by establishing small kingdoms, and when that was no longer possible, they turned to banditry.

The commercial involvement of the Wangara no doubt raised their social status above that of the commoners. Through this advantage, they were able to reshape Borgu society. Max Weber argues that accessibility to scarce commodities and services often leads to gaining of power.⁹¹ Indisputably, the Wangara never were able to convert their wealth into political power, nor did they ever seriously attempt it. They did form an economic aristocracy and social differentiation within the

⁹⁰ Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", p. 191. Sero Kpera was the Nikki chief who allied with the Yoruba against the Fulani jihadists in Ilorin war of the 1830's.

⁹¹ Max Weber, "Class, Status and Party", in Bendix and Lipset, (eds.), Class, Status and Power, pp. 21-28.

society occurred according to the pattern suggested by Peter Wickins:

One does not need to be a Marxist to appreciate that, with an increase in wealth and the development of states, following from improved agriculture and the growth of trade, especially when accompanied by the spread of a money economy, social and economic differentiation becomes more marked, dividing society into rulers and ruled, into better-off and worse-off.⁹²

Apparently, the Wangara were responsible for the introduction of a money economy into Borgu and for organizing inter-regional trade and diversified routes. All these profoundly transformed the Borgu economy and enhanced accumulation of wealth and property. They also helped to explain the emergence of the Wangara as an economic aristocratic group.

The Islamic religion was employed as a powerful weapon by the Wangara to forge a connection with the outside world but within Borgu, the traditional belief systems prevailed. As Muslims, the Wangara found it both economically and religiously convenient to relate closely with the merchants from Hausaland and the Sudan. The Wangara operated in a closely similar way to the Yao and Nyamwezi in East Africa and the Aro in eastern Nigeria. Rather than oracles, the Wangara (like the Yao) employed the Islamic religion to extend their commercial influence. They had access to Islamic education and

⁹² Peter Wickins, An Economic History of Africa from Earliest Times to Partition, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1981, p. 236.

adopted Muslim dress which distinguished them from the local Borgu peoples. Nevertheless, these did nothing to tempt the Borgu people to adopt the Islamic religion. For a long time Borgu people resisted the propagation of Islam in the kingdoms. A similar situation occurred in Kebbi (north of Borgu). Consequently Stevens has argued that both Borgu and Kebbi adopted the Kisra legend as an ideological base for maintaining their autonomy from outside threats and for opposing Islam.⁹³ Whether they adopted it as fiction or consciously stressed that episode of their history because of its relevance is not the immediate concern here.

Along the caravan routes, settlements were established to serve primarily as resting areas for merchants but secondarily as centres for religious education. In these settlements the Wangara Mallams assisted in protecting the merchants in their commercial activities by offering prayers and providing charms -- Tirah in Batonu and Boko or Kitab in Arabic -- to protect them against marauders on the trade routes.⁹⁴ Thus Islam fostered commerce. The coalescence of commerce and religion as a result promoted the cohesion of the Wangara. Nevertheless, it failed to influence or penetrate the general population.

⁹³ Stevens, "The Kisra Legend", pp. 185-200.

⁹⁴ The concept of using the Qur'an for magical powers does not seem to be universal. The Tirah was said to be a development under the Qur'anic efficacy. Originally, it was not in Islam but because the people of West Africa believed in employing the Qur'an to suit their purpose, they developed the idea of the Tirah. Personal communication with Alhaji Bisi Ahmed, 40+, a learned scholar on Islamic laws.

Rather some Wangara were converted to traditional beliefs. Consequently when the great days of Wangara commerce had passed, they settled into Borgu society as farmers, some of their clans today being unconscious of their Wangara and commercial past. When Islam failed to take root outside the Wangara aristocracy, the attitudes in favour of the market economy were also poorly developed in the general population. Generally attitudes remained welded to the ideal of a self-sufficient agrarian economy like the Tiv in the contrast to the Yoruba and Hausa.

The climax period of Wangara aristocracy lasted for less than two centuries.⁹⁵ By the mid-nineteenth century there were signs of imminent collapse of their economic pre-eminence. The collapse was brought about by a combination of several historical factors. First, there was the increasing domination of the kola nut trade by the Hausa merchants. A European traveller to the central Sudan in the last quarter of the nineteenth century commented that:

The Hausas are a quiet commercial people, who carry their manufactures far beyond the limits of their own country, but with little or no ambition to interfere with the political constitution of the

⁹⁵ If the Wangara first entered in the fifteenth century, their activities did not become prominent in history until the eighteenth century. The earlier period c.1500 to 1700 forms part of the silent or dead middle of Borgu's tradition. Given the manner in which the Wangara had become settled, one can argue that they had been in Borgu much longer than 200 years. Had they been less attached to the society, one might assume that when commerce declined they would have shifted their activities elsewhere as the Hausa merchants did.

countries in which they trade.⁹⁶

The more Hausaland became closely linked with the salt trade of the Western Sudan and the kola nut trade of Gonja, the more the merchants intensified their domination of commerce along the middleman trading routes. Ultimately, Hausaland became thoroughly integrated into the commercial structure of the Western Sudan and employed Islamic ideology to consolidate the relationship. The accessibility of Hausa merchants to oriental goods and pack animals provided additional advantages over the Wangara. The Hausa merchants dealt in more diversified commodities such as onions, natron, potash, woven clothes, leather products, hides and skins, some of which originated within Hausaland. For example, Kano had developed as a market and industrialized town, producing varieties of goods. From there, cloth dyed blue with indigo and salt were imported to Borgu markets through the Hausa merchants.⁹⁷ These internally generated commodities produced a vibrant economic base for the Hausa merchants. From the eighteenth century, when commercial centres such as Kano, Katsina and Birnin Kebbi began to attract large numbers of foreign merchants, they not only developed the marketing and commercial system of Hausaland, they also jealously preserved their economic position. In addition to all of this, it was apparent that the Hausa

⁹⁶ Robinson C. Henry, Hausaland or Fifteen Hundred Miles Through the Central Soudan, Samson Low, London, 1897, p. 80.

⁹⁷ See Seymour Vandeleur, "Nupe and Ilorin", The Geographical Journal, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1897, pp. 349-374.

trading communities were more widely dispersed than the Wangara. There was east-west and north-south movement with extensive exchange of goods with Nupe, Borno, the Sudan and North Africa. Considering the numerous advantages of the Hausa, the Wangara could not compete with them.

The second factor was the limited articles of trade and area of operation of the Wangara. This problem of restricted commodities rapidly altered the Wangara economic position of the Wangara, particularly when the Hausa merchants became more dominant in the kola nut trade. The Wangara dealt mostly in perishable goods and possessed limited opportunities to invest in other productive resources. Agricultural products did not produce as much wealth as that derived from long-distance trade. Furthermore, fluctuating marketing conditions coupled with losses from plunder along the caravan routes usually reduced the economic resources of the merchants. Wickins rightly argues that wealth which is generated solely through trade could not sustain a society for a long period. Only the ruling class which frequently appropriated the surplus agricultural products and profited from commerce could maintain its position. He further states that:

Wealth in the form of trade goods, cattle and crops, despite the prestige it conferred and the popularity it could earn through the display of generosity, generally had limited value in the purchase of support and was unlikely to give rise to deep class divisions, because there were so many social obligations to fulfil and because it

could so easily be lost.⁹⁸

The longer they settled in Borgu, the more their network of kin expanded. Thus the social obligations noted by Wickins and described earlier as elaborate gift-giving began to weigh upon and destroy their profits. The Wangara were no longer itinerant traders as the Hausa were, but "indigenous" merchants close to their home base. Thus they inherited the disadvantage of being indigenous as well as those of being strangers of an alien religion, one repulsive to the general population. As indigenous merchants, their wealth was more resented than if they had been strangers like the Hausa.

One other major factor which weakened the position of the Wangara was the decline of the Trans-Saharan trade. This development crippled the activities of the Wangara as well as the entire west-east trade of the Sudan. Movement to the west became restricted and routes to north became insecure. Gold and salt did not interchange smoothly as in the previous centuries. Thus the Wangara were confined to Borgu and its immediate vicinity. Within this region, commerce was restricted to the locally produced goods which did not yield the large profits to which the Wangara had been accustomed. Inevitably they lost their wealth, they lost economic domination and they lost their social status.

While the Hausa factor in the north hindered Wangara

⁹⁸ Wickins, An Economic History, pp. 235-239.

operations, the increasing infiltration of Yoruba merchants into Borgu towns from the south constituted another major cause for the disintegration of Wangara commercial power. After the Ilorin War of the 1830's, which had been disastrous for the Yoruba-Borgu allied army, there occurred a relocation of the survivors, especially Borgu soldiers in many Yoruba towns. Apparently, population increased, food production expanded and commerce improved. The Oyo-Yoruba merchants from Upper Ogun diverted their commerce from the capital to Borgu. The nineteenth century crisis in Yorubaland became a factor which prompted the diversion of trade from Oyo in favour of Borgu. The traffic along the routes to various Borgu markets increased with astonishing rapidity. The Oyo-Iseyin-Saki-Ilesha-Okuta-Nikki trade route (see map 7) was dominated by Yoruba merchants. In the same manner, the Igboho-Kisi-Kaiama-Parakou-Nikki route was frequently patronized by Yoruba merchants. The prosperity of Gwanara during the first half of the nineteenth century has been attributed to the presence of the Yoruba merchants and Fulani cattle raisers.⁹⁹ After meeting a number of Yoruba traders in Borgu in 1894, Lugard described them as "a most industrious race passionately devoted to trading."¹⁰⁰ The population of the Yoruba merchants in Okuta and Ilesha became so significant that the two towns were referred to as Yoruba outposts. Indigo, dyed and woven

⁹⁹ DOB/HIS/42, "Borgu Historical", NAK.

¹⁰⁰ Lugard, "England and France", p. 890.

cloths, and imported commodities acquired from the Europeans in Lagos and Badagry enabled the Yoruba merchants to infiltrate into the various Borgu towns, including Kaiama.

Yorubaland like Hausaland possessed a thriving industrial economy and had access to exotic goods. Armed with these wares, Yoruba merchants travelled through Kaiama and Bussa to either Kano or Sokoto. At Kaoje, they participated in the lucrative cattle trade. Thus it became very clear that both Hausa and Yoruba merchants provided a challenge for the Wangara and indeed contributed to the eclipse of their economic aristocratic position in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Wangara had been the middleman merchants between the two industrial powers, Hausa and Yoruba. Ultimately they were squeezed out by the Hausa penetrating from the north and Yoruba from the south.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Bonduku-gold trade had dwindled and the Asante-imposed restrictive policy on the kola nut producing areas remained in operation. This served as the commencement of the fluctuating economic fortune of the Wangara merchants. Perhaps the greatest blow was the economic disintegration of Salaga market. By 1892 the Dagomba forces invaded Salaga, and "the kola trade never regained its earlier vitality."¹⁰¹ Thus to the Wangara, gold was no more, kola nut was no more and European goods through the Gold coast were no more. Their inability to exploit the agrarian economy

¹⁰¹ Goody and Mustapha, "The Caravan Trade", p. 613.

adversely affected their commercial activities, since they concentrated only on long-distance trade which was susceptible to the vagaries of the market and competition by other merchants. Presumably the combination of agrarian products with kola nut and exotic goods could have sustained them. Finally the Wangara could not intensify their control of internal trade because it was so efficiently pursued by the women of Borgu.

The collapse of the Wangara in commerce served as a tocsin to the process of Islamizing Borgu. As soon as the Wangara lost the monopoly of trade to the Hausa and Yoruba merchants, the slow growth of Islam gradually came to a halt. Three major reasons could be advanced for this development. First the Wangara in Borgu were more committed to commerce than to religion. Most of them seemed to have adopted Islam only as a convenient means of facilitating their commercial objectives. This meant that when their commerce fluctuated, the urge to continue the propagation of Islam dwindled. Secondly, the Wangara operated among a population which was essentially traditional in religion. The rulers as well as the subjects could not be easily persuaded to adopt Islam. Conversion became an onerous task. Thus the traditional belief system stood against the ponderous forces of Islam. The outbreak of the jihad in the early nineteenth century did nothing to ameliorate the religious situation in Borgu. When the knot became difficult to loose, some of the Wangara

ironically reverted to traditional religion. Hence traditionalism continued to flourish. The third factor was that the Hausa and Yoruba who traversed Borgu and supplanted the Wangara were also unable to make any religious impact on the society in which they operated. The solid grip of traditional religion was preserved until about the middle of the twentieth century.

The Hausa and Yoruba became the new merchant estate and aristocracy became as separate, distinct and aloof as the Wangara had been in earlier centuries. The Hausa, often noted for inter-marriage with local people, adopting indigenous partners in trade and thereby spreading Islam, failed in Borgu. This suggests that the Wangara had not existed as an aristocracy by choice but had been isolated by the attitude of the general populous and their rulers. The ideology of Kisra's opposition to Islam, the ideology of agrarian self-sufficiency, looking down upon trade and a market economy and the ideology of the warrior tradition according to which Borgu had never been defeated, combined to keep the society isolated from the merchant stranger groups -- Nupe and Yoruba, Hausa and Wangara -- which over the centuries had plied the trade routes running through the country. One might surmise that for the first 500 years (c.1000 to 1500) the Kisran rulers had excluded foreign traders entirely, as did the Tiv until 1900 and the forcible opening of markets by the British. After 1500 the Songhay armies forcibly opened trade in Borgu, which

presumably was sustained by the over-arching power of Nupe and the Oyo Empire. When the Kisran rulers re-emerged in the eighteenth century, they tolerated foreign commerce primarily because the tolls on it permitted them to re-assert themselves. But they isolated the trading community as if it were a cancer bent upon destroying the society.

Obviously the collapse became inevitable. What further compounded the issue was the effective penetration of the Europeans who assiduously pursued their economic interests. They needed Borgu to control the Niger. The invaluable position of Borgu to the Europeans was adequately expressed by Lugard when he declared that:

The possession, therefore, of Borgu became a matter of some importance to France, but of vital importance to the Royal Niger Company if they desired to maintain the sole control of the lower waterway by Great Britain.¹⁰²

Apart from the control of the Niger, the Europeans required both gold and kola nuts. In addition, they encouraged the production of raw materials which were exported to Europe to feed the developing industries. Regrettably, Borgu possessed no natural resources (except sheabutter) which could have assisted in revamping the Wangara economic position. Sheabutter from Borgu became an export commodity in the 1860's and continued to increase in production in the early period of colonial administration. Wangara economic dominance and

¹⁰² Lugard, "England and France", p. 893.

aristocracy thus collapsed when Hausa, Yoruba and European merchants supplanted them. Today the term Wangara is no longer used to describe the merchant community in Borgu. Since their eclipse, they have been fully assimilated into Borgu's society and now become identified by their clan names only. They have also reverted to farming but those who professed Islam continued to provide the mallams to the society. Many informal Qur'anic schools, headed by the Ba-kpakpe,¹⁰³ have been established by the mallam group all over Nigerian Borgu.

The Wangara pioneered the commerce of Borgu which initially flourished between Asante and Hausaland, based upon salt, gold and kola nuts. The highly profitable commerce was primarily long distance, the Wangara acting as middlemen between production bases to the north and south. Clearly the eighteenth century formed the height of Wangara prosperity. The long distance markets encouraged the development of local or domestic commerce. Political developments in the early nineteenth century -- the fall of Old Oyo, rise of the Sokoto Caliphate -- caused an influx of Yoruba and Hausa traders as competitors just as Asante restricted Wangara access to the

¹⁰³ The increase in mallams and revival of Qur'anic schools might have taken place after the arrival of the Hausa traders and especially following the early nineteenth century jihad in the north. This word combines "Ba" the Batonu word for "head man" with Kpakpe a word surprisingly akin to Akpa, Bakpa and other variants dismissed by Webster in "The Traditional Face", of the expression common in the Benue to refer to Hausa and other northerners. It specifically means "people of the robe". Webster argues that in the 1670's it referred to "Habe-speaking non-Muslims". for indirect corroboration see BHT. No. 100.

kola producing region. While alien traders were seizing the long distance trade from the Wangara, Borgu women were coming to dominate the local trade. As the Wangara were squeezed out, many turned to reliance upon farming and assimilation -- partially at least -- into Borgu society, some even abandoning Islam for traditional beliefs. After all Islam was a religion of trade rather than agriculture.

While the Kisra rulers revived their state system by utilizing the profits of the Wangara merchants, as the petty satellite chiefdoms proliferated in the south between 1750-1850, their tolls and other exactions struck a deadly blow to Wangara commerce. It seems probable that the rapacious Wasangari princes were more oppressive to the Wangara than the alien merchants possibly because Hausa and Yoruba enjoyed an unspoken connection with powerful entities on the borders. The Hausa actually sent an army to defend their traders and it has been shown in an earlier chapter, how careful the princes of the satellites were, not to offend powerful Yoruba chiefdoms such as Saki. The Wangara had no strong supporters externally and because of their isolation from society within, the Nikki princes were not inclined to support them either. This failure rested primarily on their lack of success in converting influential members of the Borgu society to Islam which would have given them a solid base of support within.

Possibly the most surprising theme of the Wangara story involved the tenacity of Borgu society in clinging to its

ideology of exclusiveness, in opposition to Islam and to the market economy. Among the Yoruba, Nupe, Igala and many other peoples the attractiveness of trade led to the tolerance and ultimate adoption of Islam as a faith. Even in Kwararafa, which held a similar anti-Islamic attitude to Borgu, the religion spread more widely, because jihadist forces destroyed the capital and forced tribute payments. This did not happen in Borgu, partly because of the military reputation of its forces and the ability to unite against foreign invasion despite internal disputes and disunity. This ability stretched back to the ideology of Kisra.

CONCLUSION

Although the original intention of this study was to present a general history of Nigerian Borgu, it became necessary to shift its focus rather drastically because of the nature of the oral traditions. In the northern region of Bussa and Illo traditions have totally faded, beginning as they do with the coming of Kisra and then jumping about 800 years to the chief who ruled in the eighteenth century. The invasion of Songhay and the imperial rule of the Nupe has been totally forgotten. Trusting that totemism and shrine traditions might lead to hints as to historical developments, the fieldwork eventually revealed that totems did not exist and shrine history proved rather threadbare except to delineate pre-Kisra peoples. Even then the problem remained about what pre-Kisra meant. Were these references to before 1000 A.D. or before the revival of the Kisran ruling houses in the eighteenth century? Given the narrative silence in the north, the traditions among the southern satellite chiefdoms appeared full and revealing not only about their own histories, but also about the final days of Nupe and Yoruba rule. Thus the peculiar organisation of this study, which focuses upon Kisra and the southern chiefdoms and the Wangara traders whose activities the new chiefs sought to control and exploit. Fortunately, the southern chiefdoms were largely ignored by previous writers and thus this study moves into a pioneer region historically.

While dealing with the complex issue of "Kisra," this

study has argued in favour of the term being applied as a title for leaders of the great movements from the Middle East into Africa. Although the name was widespread in the Middle East and could possibly refer to certain Persian rulers, it would not appear to have been a personal name in the Western Sudan. If consideration is given to the general religious irruptions which occurred between the tenth and eleventh centuries in the Middle East spreading to North Africa and southward to the Western Sudan, and if cognizance is taken of the time frame, it seems impossible for a single person to have brought about the remarkable political transformations experienced by numerous societies. The mere fact that the Kisra legend became handy for legitimising political organizations indicated that the name could hardly refer to a single person. In addition, given the fact that Khusraw II the Persian king (to whom Kisra is associated) died in 628 A.D., it becomes absolutely impossible for him to be the Kisra in Borgu tradition who emerged c.1000 A.D.

This analysis has not focused on the larger question of Kisra in Egypt, Nubia or in the Western Sudan. There is an extensive literature related to these debates. To become involved in them requires literacy in many languages and expertise in the history of the Middle East. Rather the focus has been upon the traditions of Kisra in Borgu. In the extensive Kisran literature, more attention has been paid to the Middle East and north-eastern Africa than to the

collections of traditions in the Western Sudan. Kisra appears too much like supporting the Hamitic hypothesis (whereby state building and other attributes of "civilization" derive from invaders from Egypt or outside the continent) for it to interest the modern generation of African historians. Hamites have become taboo. However it might be pointed out that Kisra traditions unite numerous peoples in West Africa: Borno, Hausa, Kebbi, Kwararafa, Nupe, Yoruba and Borgu. But Islamic studies dominate the Western and Central Sudan such that the outstanding opponent of that religion is not likely to arouse enthusiasm. Thus Kisra is fading in the traditions of many Muslim peoples and in the societies fighting a losing battle against that religion. Only in Borgu has it survived in some detail, and even there Muslims have begun to embellish the traditions with Qur'anic additions.

Probably the unresolved and seemingly unresolvable problem which has perplexed researchers and kept them away from the history of Borgu, centres around the issue of chronology. Pre-colonial historians prefer societies like Borno, the Hausa, Edo and Yoruba, where traditions are accompanied by respectable regnal lists with an accompanying narrative tradition stretching back for centuries. In Borgu the regnal lists all date to the eighteenth century, yet the Kisra tradition and narrative accounts from neighbouring peoples clearly demonstrated that Borgu had been in existence for centuries prior to that. Thus the "dead middle" seems to

extend from Kisra c.1000 to the eighteenth century. Borgu people perpetuate a warrior tradition, emphasising that they had "never been conquered" by any external power. Early writers on Borgu have never challenged this assertion. For instance, Bovill contended that the people of Borgu "had never lost their independence, in spite of having had to withstand assaults on it by such formidable warrior kings as Sonni Ali and Askia the Great."¹ Similarly, Anene posited that "the Borgawa proudly claim, and rightly too, that until the partition of their country by the Europeans, they had never yielded to alien domination."² Rather than follow this mainstream acceptance, this study argues that the contention is suspect. There is little doubt over the Songhay invasion of Borgu in c.1505. Borgu was defeated, but Songhay did not follow up with political hegemony. Presumably, this circumstance allowed the Borgu people to deny their defeat at the hands of Songhay. The period following the defeat coincided with the establishment of two large Nupe kingdoms in Borgu and a Yoruba intrusion into the south. Documentary evidence asserts that "originally the Borgawa and Nufawa [Nupe people] lived in perfect amity till Taku (a Borgu man) drove them across the Niger..."³ Although the exact date remains

¹ Bovill, The Golden Trade, pp. 163-164.

² Anene, "Eclipse of the Borgawa", p. 214.

³ SNP/17/K 2101, "Anthropological Notes on the Bussawa", NAK.

obscure, there is evidence that the last of the Nupe rulers was buried at Ilesha.⁴ One might surmise that the Nupe were driven over the Niger in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The period after the defeat by Songhay was congruent with the period when Orompoto the Alaafin of Oyo, while in exile at Igboho, first used horses and defeated Borgu, controlling some southern towns of the kingdom. From the traditions of the southern satellite chiefdoms it is clear that Yoruba hegemony was declining in the eighteenth century. The documentary evidence referred to above puts it tersely that "first the Nupawa [Nupe], next the Yorubas and then the Borgawa arrived." This refers not to people since it is clear the Borgu were in place long before the Nupe, but rather to the succession of rulers.

Thus when Songhay overthrew the Kisran or Wasangari ruling houses c.1500, Nupe rulers moved in to the north and centre, followed by the Yoruba in the south c.1560. The Nupe expansion was associated with their hero-ancestor Tsoede (c.1537-1567) who united numerous groups, including a Yoruba sub-group, the Gbedegi and the Kyedye into one Nupe nation.⁵ While the official history of the Nupe does not mention it, clearly the evidence demonstrates that either sub-chiefdoms under Tsoede or refugee chiefdoms from his wars, were created

⁴ DOB/ASR/33, "Ilorin Gazetteer", NAK.

⁵ See S.F. Nadel, A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London, First edition 1942, Reprinted 1961, pp. 19 and 21.

across the Niger river in Borgu. These foreign rulers were not removed until c.1780-1790. This whole sequence of events -- called the "dead middle" -- Borgu tradition ignores, while boasting about never being successfully invaded in the course of their history. The Kisran tradition and its ideology could arouse the people of Borgu against Muslim aggression, but not against the Nupe and Yoruba, who, they believed, shared the history and ideology of Kisra. Since Kisra is not an indigenous tradition among the Yoruba or Nupe, one wonders if it were not attached to both people by the inhabitants of Borgu as a justification for alien rule. Presumably neither the Yoruba nor Nupe overlords would have objected to a Kisran ancestry if it had encouraged the people of Borgu to accept their hegemony.

It becomes clear that the Wangara Muslim merchants reached their peak of prosperity and influence in the eighteenth century and that the re-emergence of the Kisran ruling houses -- the second coming of Kisra -- was closely related to the desire of royal princes to control and profit from their commerce. The problem is, when did the Wangara first arrive? Was it prior to 1500? Was the Songhay invasion designed to punish the Wasangari royal houses for persecuting, even prohibiting the Muslim merchants? Because Songhay rule resulted in only one military outpost (Kubli) in Borgu, a strong argument could be made that the invasion was underlined by economic motives. Whatever the case the Wangara certainly

flourished during the "dead middle" when the Nupe and Yoruba determined policy. After all Alaafin Orompoto c.1560 was the first ruler of Old Oyo to employ horses and one might surmise that Wangara merchants played some role in supplying them.

The people of Borgu became famous for their anti-Islamic attitudes. The anti-Islamic ideology which began with Kisra, distinguished the Borgu people until the second half of the twentieth century. More importantly, the anti-Islamic ideology served as a significant factor for achieving Borgu's unity especially when confronted by a common external aggressor and drawing together peoples of different languages and cultures. The opposition to Islam dominated Borgu's history for centuries, finally ending in the Ilorin War of 1830-1837. To this end, it is pertinent to describe the relevance of the Ilorin War to Borgu history. The Muslim community at Ilorin, a powerful military camp for the Oyo Empire, had grown numerically and its influence had increased so much that it became a threat to the Yoruba. It should be recalled that Borgu, Oyo and Kwararafa were bulwarks of traditional religion and therefore averse to Islam. Aided by internal rancour and rivalry among Oyo chiefs, the continuous weakness of Oyo's political and military power, and collaboration with Oyo's army general, the Muslim community under Abdul-Salami waged a jihad on the Yoruba.⁶ Since it was the burning ambition of the Muslims to dip the Qur'an into the sea, they were determined

⁶ Johnson, The History, pp. 258-268.

to bring Yorubaland to its knees. Thus faced with the threat of political and religious domination by the Fulani, Oyo sought external assistance. Borgu became a ready and willing ally. Traditional explanations for Borgu's involvement had centred on the issue of common origin with the Yoruba. But the anti-Islamic analysis in this study has demonstrated that the Yoruba-Borgu alliance was stimulated by common opposition to the spread of Islam. To Oyo, and even more so to Borgu, Islam remained an anathema. It had to be forestalled. The alliance was defeated, and the aftermath was catastrophic for both Oyo and Borgu.⁷

The Ilorin War has served several purposes in this study. First, it became a common denominator for creating a chronology for Borgu. Because almost every Borgu chief and his soldiers participated in the war, it has become possible to compute dates for Borgu rulers and events, using the war as a base line.⁸ In this respect, the Ilorin War has become a reliable date marker in Borgu oral traditions. Secondly, it served as a factor to argue in favour of Borgu's unity during periods of threat. Fearing that Islam might spread to Borgu if Oyo was conquered, Borgu rulers rallied around to thwart the

⁷ The causes and consequences of the war has been discussed in Adekunle, "Yoruba-Borgu Relations", Chapter Two, pp. 30-57.

⁸ The Ilorin War involved Borgu rulers outside Nigerian borders. The rulers of Nikki, Parakou and Kouande also participated in it. A comprehensive list of the Borgu rulers who participated in the war could be found in Idris, "Political and Economic Relations", pp. 280-285.

attempt of the jihadists. Thus the Kisra factor, in kinship affiliation and anti-Islamic ideology, became effective weapons of unity. Thirdly, the war provided a means of questioning the Borgu people's claim to invincibility. The war indeed marked the eclipse of Borgu military power. Nevertheless, the triumph of the jihadists did not mean automatic penetration of Islam into Borgu. Undoubtedly, the anti-Islamic ideology remained powerfully in force.

Observers constantly referred to the commerce of Borgu as poor without natural resources or possibilities for expansion. What Borgu possessed was an ideal location for long distance trade between the Hausa and their flourishing industry in the savanna to the north and the Yoruba also industrial in the tropical forests to the south. This should not be ignored. The state and condition of the economy depended upon the flow of goods through the country. From the general economic history of West Africa, one might assume that c.1500 the dynamic flow of trade was northward but that by the eighteenth century, it had swung southward toward the Yoruba markets and the Atlantic. It is important to mention that commerce made a significant contribution to the expansion of the southern chiefdoms because they were located along the frequently patronized trade routes. In the north Kaoje remained a flourishing cattle market and Illo served as a nodal town for Hausa, Zaberma and Dendi merchants. In the south, Kaiama remained central to Borgu's commerce as well as to the Yoruba

merchants. It served as a gateway to Hausaland for the Yoruba merchants. Trade routes from Katunga in the east and from Upper Ogun in the south crossed at Kaiama to either Hausaland or Gonja. The importance of these routes to the economies of Borgu dating back to the mid-eighteenth century should not be underestimated. In this respect, it could be argued that the collapse of the Wangara affected Nikki more adversely than the other kingdoms of Borgu. Its satellite chiefdoms in Nigerian territory had the benefit of interacting with the Hausa and Yoruba merchants thereby sustaining their economies. Crossing the Niger into Kontagora and Nupe, Borgu merchants (including women) traded in mats, glass beads and other commodities. Even during the early colonial period, Borgu became important for the production of sheabutter which was exported to Britain where it was manufactured into soap, margarine, candles and lubricant.⁹ Kaiama became the depot for sheabutter. Apparently industrial production, dominated by women, did not collapse with the Wangara.

Three factors need special stress regarding the commerce of Borgu. First, it was dominated by Muslims and if the men of Borgu were to become serious traders, they would have had to convert. The Kisran ideology generally prevented this. Furthermore Borgu men were the farmers of the society. By and large they kept to their traditional role. Thus when the

⁹ CSO/26/03542, "Annual Report 1921, Kontagora Province", NAK.

Wangara were being replaced as the major merchant class, it was not by the men of Borgu but rather by Hausa and Yoruba. Second, the major traders of Borgu were women. Long distance commerce with its influx of aliens, caravans and porters stimulated a domestic trade in food, cattle and other locally produced artisanal items. Free of agricultural production, women came to dominate the domestic trading system. Third, the slave trade so crucial to West African commerce in the eighteenth century never took hold in Borgu. Presumably this was because the unity of Borgu was preserved against the segmentary tendencies arising within the multiple state system, a unity which did not break down as it had among the Yoruba kingdoms. Slaving was therefore an alien philosophy, possibly even a Muslim concept. Consequently the development of a strong male merchant class in Borgu was prevented by the strength of the traditional division of labour, the Kisra ideology against Muslims (and the slave trade associated with them) as well as the female monopoly of domestic commerce.

This study has demonstrated that state formation and forging of unity in a segmentary society is a long process which requires many centuries to occur. The configuration of numerous linguistic groups ultimately brought about a broad "national" consciousness. Some of the ethnic groups, particularly the immigrants, lost their original identity and adopted that of the aboriginals. The most apparent immigrant group was comprised of the descendants of Kisra who inter-

married with the indigenous people and adopted the local language.¹⁰ Thus ethnic assimilation and acculturation had taken place over several centuries. All the "Borgu-ized" immigrant groups now claim equal rights and identity with the indigenous people. Following the segmentary nature of the society, the evolution in Borgu of a single political consciousness therefore took several centuries to materialise. It is difficult to date with exactitude when human existence began in the Borgu region but what seems certain is that the earliest inhabitants were organized on lineage basis. They were chiefless. When Kisra emerged in c.1000 A.D., dynasties were established, political offices were created and a complex bureaucratic system began. Through the Wasangari, the process of unifying the conglomeration of ethnic groups along the littoral of the River Niger into a single political consciousness became accelerated. The relationship between the royal Wasangari and the autochthonous population involved some compromises. While the lineage heads continued to claim ownership of land, the earth-priests retained their sacerdotal powers and the Wasangari assumed kingship with the authority to distribute land. This arrangement remains in force in modern times. It should be understood that the problem of ethnicity was not peculiar to Borgu. It is universal. However Borgu was unique in the sense that the Kisra legend provided a symbol of unity, which Bayajjida and Oduduwa did not as

¹⁰ SNP/17/K 2102, "Borgu Peoples: Notes On", NAK.

readily provide among the Hausa and Yoruba respectively. Despite the linguistic differences and numerous chiefdoms, Borgu people have conceived of themselves as belonging to a single political entity.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Borgu began to witness a series of transformations caused by the presence of the Europeans. Since the penetration into the interior by the Europeans and the subsequent domination of the Niger trade by the Royal Niger Company, British influence had continued to increase in Borgu especially at Bussa which Goldie considered to be the political centre of Borgu.¹¹ Although the Royal Niger Company signed treaties with the ruler of Bussa in the 1880's, Lord Lugard also concluded some similar treaties with the rulers of Bussa, Nikki and Kaiama in 1894.¹² In the 1890's, the scramble for Borgu by the British and French became intense even though warfare was avoided. Rather, a compromise was reached. Following the Anglo-French Boundary Commission of 1898, Nikki became a French controlled area, while Bussa, Illo, Kaiama and the other five satellite territories fell under the sway of the British. This followed tradition lines of discussion except among the chiefdoms in the south which had been subject to Nikki and resented one of

¹¹ John E. Flint, Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London, 1960, pp. 160-161. It should be added that European travellers before Goldie held a similar opinion.

¹² Perham and Bull, The Dairies of Lord Lugard, pp. 134-208.

their own -- Kaiama -- being elevated to "paramount" status. The British insistence on dominating the Niger was clearly an outgrowth of their economic policies and pursuits, the river being an invaluable asset to the British-owned Royal Niger Company. As a consequence of this partition, the ancient confederal arrangement of Borgu's political organisation collapsed as it was "disrupted by the International Boundary and successive adjustments,"¹³ particularly within the British section.

Based on the principle of indirect rule, the British had to decide how to interpret the situation of the satellite chiefdoms whose headquarters had been Nikki which fell to the French. The British created two artificial emirates, one centred in Bussa, the other in Kaiama. There was no challenge or opposition to Bussa, but the elevation of Kaiama has been resented until the present day. Accordingly:

The prestige of Bussa has lasted to this day, but the Batonu districts of the South West of the Division have never accepted the suzerainty of Kaiama...¹⁴

In considering pre-colonial relations among the satellites and between them and Nikki, two chiefdoms held claims to pre-eminence. Kenu and Kaiama were the oldest chiefdoms. The chief of Kenu had traditionally been the "gate" to Nikki. Anyone wishing to see the "paramount" had to approach the chief of

¹³ SNP/17/K/2102, "Borgu Peoples, Notes On", NAK.

¹⁴ SNP/17/K 2102, "Borgu Peoples", NAK.

Kenu, who, acting as the "Waziri," would arrange the meeting. Kenu, indeed, was small and located far off in a corner of southern Borgu. The British chose Kaiama for a number of reasons, both political and economic. The king of Nikki had established a Zaberma representative at Kaiama to collect tribute on the major trade routes and receive it from surrounding chiefs before being passed on to Nikki. Since the British had now replaced Nikki, they expected to be the recipients of the tribute. Furthermore Kaiama was more centrally located, much more populous than Kenu and hosting the largest market in the south. Clearly it was the commercial heart of the satellites having become the major centre for the marketing of sheabutter, virtually Borgu's only export to Europe. Finally the "unmerited favour" accorded Kaiama was said to have resulted from the favourable and even hospitable treatment its chief bestowed upon British travellers and especially Lugard in 1894. The critics of the decision at the time and today argue that the founder of Kaiama was not a legitimate prince because he did not possess the royal trumpets and drums which represented the symbols of authority from Nikki. This probably was correct but the chiefs of Nikki, like the British after them, had recognised that Kaiama's economic pre-eminence was far more important than its lack of legitimacy. The very lack of royal legitimacy might have made the chiefs of Kaiama more tolerant of the overriding authority of the overlord, first Nikki and later the British.

The British decision was possibly as right as could be expected, since the satellites would not accept paramountcy by any one of their members. They all recognised Nikki. With that option closed, Kaiama became the best and only alternative. The satellites opposed Kaiama but clearly could not unite behind any other candidate, for the legitimacy of Kenu was also suspect its chiefs were believed to be descendants of slaves. The debate however continues to demonstrate the continuing power and authority associated with Kisra and the Wasangari ruling class in maintaining the unity of a segmentary society.

In a very real sense Kisra is Borgu. All other significant events might fade from history for nearly 800 years but the Kisra tradition remains strong and vital. It forms the national charter of the people holding together a number of kingdoms and peoples of distinct languages and culture. It has created a "national" consciousness without a nation or centralized political structure. The ideology of Kisra determined relations with neighbouring peoples, creating hostility to those who were Muslim and friendship with those who were not, even to the point of tolerating the overrule of the latter. Furthermore it determined the development of trade (males from the society avoiding it because of its domination by Muslims), but even today it dominates politics since Kisra's descendants are the chiefly rulers, so debates tend to centre around who is and who is not

a legitimate biological descendants of the great hero-ancestor. The consciousness of belonging to a single political entity (created by the Kisra legend) creates unity between the rulers and subjects. Despite internal rancour and skirmishes, the Kisra legend continued to bring the Borgu people together until the colonial period. It almost seems that if Kisra could somehow be removed, Borgu would cease to exist as a united entity, becoming a conglomeration of petty states and peoples like other areas of the Middle Belt of Nigeria.

APPENDIX

TOTEMIC CLARIFICATION

TOTEMS	CLANS
Gbero/Zotena/Gbrichao (Antelope)	Mora, Sesi, Bare, Wanro, Kpai, Wure, Kpasi.
Shurokoru (Cobra)	Mora, Yari, Mori, Kabo, Bare, Wanro.
Musuku (Leopard)	Mora, Mori, Kabo, Mako, Bare, Yo, Kenu, Sawe, Yari-Ateuwa.
Shekuro (Weaver bird)	Yari, Mako, Sesi, Yo, Kenu, Sawe, Kane.
Sokonrongboo (Crow)	Mori, Kabo.
Kabayinnu (Lizard)	Mori, Kabo.
Gunusemu (Rabbit)	Mako, Yo, Kenu, Sawe.
Besigondo (Tree)	Lesaworu.
Deba (Monitor)	Sesi, Tosu.
Gbekoko (Crab)	Seko, Nari and Shura.
Wabaka (Python)	Tosu.
Kpasa (Deer)	Yari, Yari-Kpero.
Baatoko (Tree)	Yari.
Kotokenuku (Snail)	Yo.
Wonmu (Monkey)	Yari.
Gunobasume (Mouse)	Kane.
Kpera (Hippopotamus)	Yari.
Kparukosuanbu/Ferentena (Dove)	Yari, Kpai, Wure, Kpasi.
Kokoyanru (Cat)	Yari-Ateuwa.

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1. ORAL TRADITION

The main theme of this thesis is the pre-colonial history of Nigerian Borgu. This aspect of Borgu history has only been mentioned but rarely analyzed in few written documents. During the colonial period, British officers compiled some traditions but these are incoherent and insufficient for thorough historical analysis. Essentially, this is the first comprehensive work undertaken on Nigerian Borgu. Thus in attempting to fill the missing gap and reconstruct the history of the area, there is the necessity to make extensive use of oral traditions, the collection of which had not been a priority of earlier researchers.

Much of the oral information used in this thesis was derived from a series of group and individual interviews in Borgu and adjacent areas. While some of these were conducted between 1985 and 1986, the others were done between 1990 and 1991. During the two periods, a total of two hundred and thirty-eight interviews were conducted. The first five on the list are professors in various Nigerian universities who have carried out related studies and whose inter-personal discussions have been of invaluable assistance. All together, the interviews are hereby referred to as Borgu Historical Texts (B.H.T.).

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- B.H.T. 174 Woru Sassani, [52], Sassani, Shagunnu, February 13, 1991.
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44	Ethnographic Sketch - Kinship
46	Fragments on Ilesha Customs
47	Genealogies of Principal Dynasties
48	Report on Agwara District
50	Genealogical Trees of Borgu Division
51	Pot Burials
55	History of Bussa
56	Ethnology - Marriage Customs
57	Ethnology - Mohammedanism
59	Pagan Administration
67	Language Classification
70	District Notebooks
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- 2 Borgu Patrol 1915
- 3 Reports on Chiefs 1911
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