

Bobo people

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The **Bobo** are an ethnic group living in Burkina Faso although the area occupied by the Bobo extends north into Mali. In much of the literature on African art the group that lives in the area of Bobo-Dioulasso is called Bobo-Fing. These people call themselves Bobo. They speak a Mandé language. The Bobo number about 110,000 people, with the great majority in Burkina Faso. The major Bobo community in the south is Bobo-Dioulasso, the second city of Burkina Faso and the old French colonial capital. Farther north are large towns, including Fo and Kouka, with Boura in the extreme north in Mali. The Bobo are far from homogeneous. They are an ancient aggregation of several peoples who have assembled around a number of core clans that do not preserve any oral traditions of immigration into the area. Their language and culture are more closely related to those of their Mandé neighbors to the north, the Bamana and Minianka, than to their Voltaic neighbors the Gurunsi and Mossi, but they should be thought of as a southern extension of the Mandé people, that live in what is now Burkina Faso, rather than an intrusive Mandé group that has recently penetrated the region. Although over 41% of Bobo lineages claim a foreign origin, they also say that they are autochthonous.

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History

The Bobo have lived in the region for centuries, with some estimates dating back to 800 A.D. It is generally believed that they moved into this area from the north. One of the primary reasons for this thinking is that they speak a language considered to be part of the Mandé family, which originates to the north in Mali. Throughout the history of the region, other peoples, like the Zara, have also moved into the area, influencing the Bobo and sometimes being either partially or wholly absorbed into Bobo agricultural society.

Economy

Farming among the Bobo is of primary importance. Agricultural activity is not merely a way of providing for subsistence among the Bobo, it is the essential component of their day-to-day existence. The major food crops are red sorghum, pearl millet, yams, and maize. They also cultivate cotton, which is sold to textile mills in Koudougou. The imposition of colonial rule and the construction of these mills led to the disintegration of the local cooperative labor systems, which had served to bond the members of Bobo society together.

Political System

The Bobo lineage is the fundamental social building-block. The Bobo are an inherently decentralized

group of people. The concept of placing political power in the hands of an individual is foreign to the Bobo. Each village is organized according to the relationship among individual patriline. The lineage unites all descendants of a common ancestor, called the *wakoma*, a word whose stem, wa-, is a contraction of the Bobo word for house *was*a. The Bobo lineage comprises the people who live in a common house. The head of a lineage is called the wakoma or father of the lineage. He may also be called the sapro, which is the term for ancestors. As among other peoples in Burkina, each clan has a totem, so that when a Bobo introduces himself he gives his given name, then his clan name, followed by the totem he respects.

Religion

The creator god is called Wuro. He cannot be described and is not represented by sculptures. Bobo cosmogonist myth describe the creation of the world by Wuro and the ordering of his creations. He is responsible for the ordering of all things in the world into opposing pairs: man/spirits, male/female, village/bush, culture/nature and so on. The balances between forces as they were created by Wuro are precarious, and it is easy for men to throw the forces out of balance. Farming, for instance, can unbalance the precarious equilibrium between culture/nature and village/bush when the crops are gathered in the bush and brought into the village. For the Bobo people there are two important epochs. The time of Wuro, when the universe was created and the historical time, when Wuro gave man his son Dwo.

External links

[1]The Art of Burkina Faso by Christopher D. Roy

Sources

- Christopher Roy: Art of the Upper Volta Rivers. Traduction et adaptation en francais F.Chaffin. Alain et Françoise Chaffin, Meudon, 1987
- Guy Le Moal : Les Bobo. Nature et fonction des masques. Musée royale de l'Afrique centrale, Tervuren, 1999.

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