

Coffi SAMBIENI



ACTES DU 2^{ème} COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL DU LABO GUR

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**ORIGINES, MIGRATIONS ET
IMPLANTATIONS DES PEUPLES GUR**

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Articles de revue

CRUZ, da M. & Avolonto, A. (1993), « Un cas d'harmonie vocalique en Fongbè. » dans *Aspects de la grammaire du Fongbè. Etudes de phonologie, de syntaxe, et de sémantique*, Paris, 29-47.

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La Revue *GurPapers / Cahiers Gur* reçoit les articles au plus tard en avril de chaque année.

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LETTRES ET LANGUES

ORIGINS, MIGRATIONS AND SETTLEMENTS OF BORGU PEOPLE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS AND SEMIOTICS OF KISRA LEGEND

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Résumé

Les migrations dans le Borgou historique sont associées à la légende de Kisra. Plusieurs peuples, implantés dans cet espace, se réclament de la descendance de ce personnage qui aurait fui l'islam pour migrer en Afrique en compagnie de nombreux guerriers à cheval appelés Wassangari. L'appartenance présumée de plusieurs groupes ethniques à la même lignée avait créé une unité qui, aujourd'hui, se fragilise dans la mesure où certains occupants antérieurs à l'arrivée du grand héros affirment pourtant être ses vrais héritiers. L'article recherche, à travers une archéologie linguistique et sémiotique, la vérité afin de calmer les ardeurs chauvinistes. Pour cela, les points communs et divergents des différentes versions rapportées sont investigués. Il en ressort que le baatonum était anciennement la seule langue gur parlée dans la région pendant la période de l'exode, contrairement à ce qui est observé à présent. À travers l'énoncé boko "a su wa la" (il est venu à nous ici) et celui dendi "Iridi yoyo ina Borigu" (Nous avons vu des étrangers à cheval.), il est déduit que les habitants parlant ces langues étaient déjà présents avant ceux qu'ils ont vus. En conséquence, ni les Baatombu, ni les Boo, ni les Dendi ne pouvaient être de la migration. Avec le temps, les descendants des premiers Wassangari, en minorité, ont dû perdre leurs langues d'origine et adopter celles des autochtones par intermariages. Une analyse mythologique barthienne a souligné l'importance du héros dans la perception des peuples du Borgou en montrant comment, pour le mythologiser, une partie de son histoire a été calquée sur d'autres légendes comme celle de Moïse.

Mots clés : Légende de Kisra, Borgou, migration, gur, archéologie linguistique et sémiotique

Abstract

Migrations in the historical Borgu are associated with the Kisra legend. Many ethnic groups that settled in this space claim to be the descendants of this personage who is said to have fled Islam to migrate to Africa with his followers, who were horsemen and warriors known as Wasangari. The alleged sense of belonging to the same ancestor shared by many ethnic groups created a unity that is being fractured nowadays as some dwellers, although anterior to the arrival of the great hero, affirm to be his true heirs. The paper investigates, through archaeological linguistics and semiotics, the truth in order to temper the chauvinistic passions. Hence, the common and different points of the diverse versions of the legend were scrutinized. As a result, it was noticed that the Baatõnum was in the past the unique Gur language spoken in the region before the exodus, in contrary to what is observed at present. Through the Boko sentence "a su wa la" (He came to us here) and the Dendi utterance "Iridi yoyo ina Borigu." (We saw strangers on horseback.), it was inferred that the speakers of these languages were already present before the new comers they saw. Consequently, none of the Baatõmbu, the Boko and the Dendi was part of the migration. Over time, the descendants of the first Wasangari, in minority, happened to lose their native tongues and eventually adopted autochthonous languages through intermarriages. A Barthian mythological analysis highlighted the importance of the leader in the perception of ancient Borgu by showing how part of his story reproduces the structure of other legends as that of Moses.

Keywords: Kisra legend, Borgu, migration, Gur, archaeological linguistics and semiotics

Introduction

The Kisra legend has become synonymous with migrations in the Ancient Borgu. The Peoples who live there claim to be the descendants of that personage. Two of them are the Baatombu, speaking a Gur language, and the Boko, speaking a Mande language. Many a scholar has been interested in that legend and has produced research works related to historical Borgu with the purpose of shedding light on it.

In this ongoing introduction, I will state a narrowed problem to be solved in relation to the Kisra legend. Then, I will pose research questions, postulate some assumptions and finally define some objectives. Other sections will follow, including the review of the literature, the theoretical framework, the methodology and the results.

Problem Statement

The Kisra legend is considered as inseparable from the history of migrations and settlements in Borgu. Several versions of the legend exist, based on oral and written sources. The plurality of the versions is *a priori* a problem since it makes difficult to find and know the truth. So what should be done? It is supposed that the truth elements in all these versions are their common points, which are archaeological traces. Besides, the different language families interacting in this space can also offer linguistic and non-linguistic traces that can contribute to shedding light on this legend. Finally, the diverging points of different versions, that justify their differences, might be part of the embellishments that people may add to create their personal myth around Kisra. All this entails some research questions, precisely one main question and three secondary questions.

Research questions

The main research question of this paper is posed as follows: Cannot the truth about the origins, migrations and settlements of Borgu peoples be reconstructed by the archaeological semiotics of the Kisra legend? To be answered, the question is divided into the following three secondary questions:

- What are the syntagmatic and paradigmatic elements of the different versions of the Kisra legends?

- Do the truth-telling traces of the passage of Kisra exist in the internal dynamics of the people who claim to be his descendants?
- Is not the structure of other legends like Moses' reproduced by the Kisra legend as a mythologizing?

The anticipated answers to all these questions are formulated as hypotheses: a general hypothesis and three specific hypotheses.

Hypotheses

The general hypothesis of this research is postulated in the following way: the truth about the origins, migrations and settlements of Borgu peoples can be reconstituted by the archaeological linguistics and semiotics of the Kisra legend. The three specific hypotheses are:

- The syntagmatic and paradigmatic elements of the different versions of the Kisra legends are respectively the common and diverging elements of these versions.
- The traces of the passage of Kisra do exist in the internal dynamics of the people who claim to be his descendants?
- The Kisra legend is a Barthian mythology that reproduces other myths like the legend of Moses.

In line with the above hypotheses and research questions, four objectives are clearly defined: a general objective and three specific objectives.

Objectives

The general objective is to show that the truth about the origins, migrations and settlements of Borgu peoples can be reconstructed by the archaeological semiotics of the Kisra legend. The three specific objectives are the following:

- Determine the common and diverging elements of the different versions of the Kisra legend.
- Show in the dynamics of the people who claim to be his descendants the truth-telling traces of the passage of Kisra?
- Demonstrate that the Kisra legend is a Barthian mythology that reproduces the myth of Moses as a mythologizing process.

Methodology

The methodology used is consubstantial to semiotics whether it is general, linguistic, archaeological or mythological. Different stages have been followed in the process of attaining the objectives and testing the hypotheses. The different versions of the Kisra legend are considered as texts to be compared in order to derive common and divergent information as relevant signs.

So, early as well as recent publications of the legend have been examined. The idea is presumably that the common points of the works produced have the potential to reveal the truth whereas the diverging points have the potential to be the traces of untruthful facts added in the narration of the legend.

The inventory of the relevant signs, in the dynamics of the peoples living in Borgu, has been undertaken and the signs that have been found were analyzed. The structure of the Kisra legend has been determined and compared to the Moses legend in order to show their similarity and draw appropriate conclusions.

The research took advantage of the fact that some of the traces and rituals described were eye-witnessed by the researcher himself who belongs to the cultural space of the Ancient Borgu.

1. Literature review

This review of literature selects key works on the legend of Kisra, regardless of their publication dates. However, the emphasis is put on earlier publications, especially as they are logically closer to the event and recurrently reviewed in later or more recent researches. To start this review, it is of paramount importance to show that after going through multiple versions, (O. Akinwumi (1999: 216) found the following agreements:

- a) Kisra (or Kisira) and his supporters were ejected from the east because of their refusal to accept Islam;
- b) they migrated to Africa after establishing many states along their routes;
- c) they settled a while at the Kanuri kingdom of Kanem [...]
- d) they left Kanem to the south, and at the bank of river Niger [...]

e) Ilio was the first state established by the Kisra migrants.

The author also mentioned some points of disagreements:

The various versions also have divergent views. For instance, the various versions did not agree whether Kisra actually got to Borgu. Secondly, the versions do not agree on the place of separation; and thirdly, they do not agree on who really established Bussa and Nikki. (O. Akinwumi, 1999: 216)

Although the main purpose of this review is to find out common and different points, it would not be influenced by the findings of that author. In a former work, O. Akinwumi (1998: 2) noted that for the Beke, Baatombu, Bokobaru, Kienga, Kanberi and Laru, Borgu was established by Kisra and his followers after their flight from Mecca. He insisted on the fact that there were numerous versions of this account. The existence of Kisra and the order of establishment of the Borgawa states were the common points of these versions collected before the 1950s.

Examining the versions collected before the 1950s from NAK (National Archives of Kaduna), C.L. Temple (1967) and Hugh Clapperton (1929), O. Akinwumi (1998) noticed that they all established the seniority of Bussa over the other Borgu states. But there were some diverging points in the received traditions about the founders of Bussa, Nikki, Ilio and the establishment of other states (O. Akinwumi, 1998: 3-4).

A. B. Mathews (1950) gave some notes based on his own researches in Nigeria in 1926 and on former literature, including C. K. Meek (1925), H. Hermon-Hodges (1929), H. R. Palmer (1928), A. J. Butler's (1902) and M. D. W. Jeffrey (1951). He summarized the paper as follows:

The Kisra legend is common in the Northern Provinces of Nigeria. It tells of a magician king who came from the East (Arabia?). The name may be identified with that of the Persian dynasty "Chosroes", or perhaps with either an Egyptian or a Hamitic (Hausa) root, in both cases signifying "royal". At all events, there was a great migration in the seventh century AD. from the Sudan to the west, of which the influence extended to Yorubaland in the south-west of Nigeria, of so-called Kororafa. (A. B. Mathews 1950: 144)

The author argued that Kisra cannot be identified with Chosroe, a Persian King, who led no migration from East to Africa (A. B. Mathews, 1950: 145). For him, "the identification of Kisra with Christ, "seems indefensible on grounds of internal evidence alone" (A. B. Mathews O.B.E., 1950: 146). Finally, he named some relics of Kisra found in Karissen, Wukari (Jukun) and Bussa. In Karissen and Wukari are kept a sword and a spear left by Kisra. In Bussa are kept two drums of Kisra by the chief whose title is Kibe.

L. Hussaini (2006) assessed the versions of the Kisra legend and concluded: "Many historians wrote extensively on Kisra, but their versions are far from being identical. Some have more miraculous features than others" (L. Hussaini, 2006: 25). He adhered to the view of the scholars, like R. Kuba (1996), M. I. Mora (1994) and B. L. Hegeman (2001), for whom no Kisra has been in the Borgu. He described the different kingdoms supposed to be founded by the hero, or by his relatives or followers.

Especially interested in the distortion of historical tradition about the Kisra legend, Ph. Stevens Jr. (1975: 186-188) summarized the assumptions offered so far and then proposed his own explanations. He noted that accounts of the coming of Kisra and his role in establishing the original chieftaincy have been recorded in Karissen and Bussa and that in other areas it was not certain whether Kisra was the founder of the state or merely a visitor. He remarked that the versions recounted by the Borgu people of Bussa could be the most detailed and certainly the most strongly held. He relied on the summary given by S. J. Hogben and S. J. Kirk-Greene (1966) of the Bussa accounts, which he deemed similar to descriptions given in Illo. Then, he wrote:

Kisra was the head of a small lineage or clan in Mecca, or somewhere in Arabia. He refused to accept Muhammad's plans for reform, and stoutly resisted conversion to Islam. In the face of defeat by the forces of the Prophet, he fled with his people to Africa and across the Sahara, coming eventually to the Niger. His three sons reached Illo, where they crossed the Niger. The river was then miraculously widened to its present size,

apparently to foil the pursuing Muslims. (Ph. Stevens Jr., 1975: 188)

The author also pointed out the mystery surrounding Kisra in terms of his death or disappearance. Indeed, in some versions, he has left the place whereas in other versions he died. But, it is considered that before dying or disappearing, "his directives were laid down to his followers, who dispersed, and his three sons founded Bussa, Nikki, and Illo" (Ph. Stevens Jr., 1975: 188). Some relics and existing rituals appear as evidence of Kisra presence. So, the researcher underlined that the Emir of Bussa can never cross the Niger from his town on the southern bank, in recognition of the founder's refusal to do so. In the same vain, he reported, "when the Sallah moon appears the Emir twice refuses to acknowledge it, symbolic of Kisra's reluctant token acceptance of Islam as a result of pressing requests by the Prophet, who still highly respected him" (Ph. Stevens Jr., 1975: 188).

The author argued that there seemed to be a general agreement on the occurrence of some sort of migration during the seventh century, adding that the legend of Kisra appeared as a kind of myth of origin (Ph. Stevens Jr., 1975: 188-189). Moreover, he mentioned the magical qualities attributed to Kisra everywhere. Building on Palmer (1926: 62), he mentioned that many towns "were established long before Bussa" (Ph. Stevens Jr., 1975: 189) along the migration track.

According to Ph. Stevens Jr. (1975: 189), M. D. W. Jeffreys (1951) has demonstrated that Kisra introduced many of the arts and crafts existing in central Nigeria today by showing how the distribution of the *cire perdue* method of brass-casting is in accordance with the alleged path of the Kisra migration. Drawing on L. Frobenius (1913) and others, he mentioned how the Yoruba tradition of Lamurudu shows similarities to elements of the Kisra legend.

"The most fully developed versions of the legend and the most definite association of Kisra with the establishment of chieftaincy" are found in the "redoubtable Borgu", which was always able to resist incursions from all outside forces and even defeated Songhay under the Muslim leader Askia in the years 1512-17 (Ph. Stevens Jr., 1975: 193).

M. H. Stewart (1980) also summarized the versions given by oral tradition:

"According to oral tradition, Kisra lived in the seventh century at Badar near Mecca, in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, who sought repeatedly but unsuccessfully to convert him to Islam even to the point of waging war against him. Kisra was ultimately forced to flee for his life. Migrating with his people from Arabia, and after crossing the Sahara Desert and the Sahel, he settled finally on the west bank of the River Niger where his descendants established themselves as rulers at Bussa, Nikki, and Illo." (M. H. Stewart, 1980: 51)

M. H. Stewart (1980: 61) put the different versions of the Kisra legend into five categories. The versions of the first category are only concerned with Kisra before leaving Arabia. The versions of the second category describe his migration from his birthplace to Borgu. The versions of the third category deal with his arrival in Borgu and the founding of the ruling houses at Bussa, Nikki, and Illo. The versions of the fourth category describe the founding of the ruling house at Karissen by a relative of Kisra. The versions of the last category deal with Borgu when Kisra was king at Bussa.

The author noted that "The legends vary in detail according to the place in Borgu from which they derive" (M. H. Stewart, 1980: 64). Legend from Bussa holds that Kisra or his eldest son, Woru, founded the original ruling house of Bussa; Sabi, the ruling house of Nikki and Bio the ruling house of Illo. Legend from Kaiama holds that Kisra established himself in Nikki as king, one of his followers settled at Bussa. The version of Illo claims that Kisra's eldest son settled at Bussa, his second son at Illo and his daughter Amina's husband at Nikki that he founded.

The version of B. Gotie (1974: 3-4), in his history book written in Baatɔnum, is different from the versions given above. According to the researches made by this author, an important figure of literacy in the local language Baatɔnum, Kisra did exist and came from Mecca. He and his warlord came to Borgu; his warlord became the king of Bussa, he himself became the king of Wenu for a certain time before asking his son Sero to replace him. Sero's son Sime became king at Dobidia and was thus called

Sime Dobidia. B. Gotie (1974: 4) advanced that it was during his reign that Nikki was founded but he did not specify that it was founded by him. On the contrary, S. Decalo (1995) was strongly assertive in writing that Nikki was "[e]stablished by Sunon Séro at the end of the fourteenth century" (p. 255). Earlier, about Kisra, the author wrote:

[He was a legendary] ancestor of all the Bariba people of the Nigerian and Beninois Borgou. A seventh-century warrior from Arabia (by legend) who refused to convert to Islam, Kisira was forced into self-exile, crossed into Africa, trekked to Bornu (Chad, where Kisira legends also abound, and from there moved northwards (or his sons did so) to found Bussa), the parent Bariba state of the Borgou. (Samuel Decalo 1995: 222)

E. O. Ojo and J. S., Bio (2018) noted that the Baatõmbu had "two main traditions of origins, the Kisra and the Suni-Baru" (p. 24) For the former, they adhered to the version reported by Stewart (1980: 34) and Mathews (1950: 25). For the latter, they referred to L. Hussaini (2003: 14) according to whom the Wassangari (the ruling class) originated amongst the Bariba (E. Ol. Ojo and Sabi Joshua Bio, 2018: 25-26).

J. O. Adekunle (1993: 85) devoted a whole chapter of his dissertation to the Kisra legend and presented contradictory accounts of his physical presence in Borgu. He reported that in some versions, Kisra established his dynastic rule over a preexisting conglomeration of communities in Borgu. J. O. Adekunle (1993) examined what he considered "the enigma of Kisra" (p. 119) in Borgu, the political transformations and the welding of diverse communities through the formation of kingdoms. He concluded: "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" (J. O. Adekunle, 1993: 119).

This section provides the necessary elements to make a useful and succinct comparison between the different versions of the Kisra legend. But before coming to that point, it is necessary to present the theoretical framework to apply.

2. Theoretical framework

This research convokes three theoretical approaches as its theoretical framework: general semiotics, the archaeological semiotics and Barthian mythology.

2.1. General semiotics

For J.-M. Klinkenberg (1996: 29), general semiotics studies the conditions of knowledge, as logics and epistemology, tries to show the relationships existing between different languages and the value systems on the basis of which classification and judgement are made. The most important concept of semiotics is sign, defined by the Ancient philosophers as *aliquid stat pro aliquo*, which means something put in the place of something else. In other terms, it simply means that a sign is something that represents something else. Ferdinand de Saussure (1995) and Ch. S. Peirce (1931-1935), considered as the two modern fathers of semiotics, proposed two different sign models. The former developed a dyadic approach of sign that he considers as having two facets: the signifier and the signified. The latter propounded a triadic model of sign. To Saussure's signifier and signified, that he called respectively representamen and interpretant, he added a third dimension that he named object or referent. F. de Saussure (1971: 170-171) was the first to introduce the concepts of syntagm and paradigm, although for the second, he has not used the term paradigm but rather the term association, in a chapter entitled "Rapports syntagmatiques et rapports associatifs" (syntagmatic and associative relations). A syntagm is a set of copresent elements, or combined elements or elements in praesentia relationship. The paradigm is a set of substitutable elements, non-combinable elements or elements in absentia relationship.

Peirce is also known for his typology of signs. He identified 66 types of signs among which three are generally used in research. These three signs are icon, index and symbols. The difference between them depends on the type of relation between each and its object. These relations are respectively of similarity, causality and arbitrariness.

2.2. Archaeological linguistics and semiotics

Archaeological semiotics is literally semiotics applied to archaeology or archaeological signs. If the signs are linguistic ones, then it can be considered simply as archaeological linguistics. R. W. Preucel (2006) has not given a direct definition to archaeological semiotics although his book was titled so. However, some of his statements help define it. He explained that his "book explores archaeological semiosis as a distinctive social practice implicated in the pragmatic mediation of material culture across time and space" (p. 247).

He further explained that "[one] of the most challenging topics for archaeological semiotics is specifying the intimate relationships between two kinds of sign vehicles, namely words and things" (R. W. Preucel: 254). He then reviewed the different points of view relating to the question of whether a theory of materiality should be subsumed by a theory of language or should subsume language or stand separate from language.

The author underlined the case of C. Lévi-Strauss (1963) and Barthes (1990) who "relied heavily upon the methods of structural linguistics" with the former proposing "the existence of fundamental meaning units in cultural phenomena such as 'mythemes' and 'gustemes'" and the latter identifying 'vestemes' as the basic signifying unit in the fashion system. He also mentioned some scholars like D. Miller (1982) and T. Wynn (1993) who questioned the linguistic model. In this paper, a stipulative definition of archaeological linguistics and semiotics is given as the study of linguistic and non-linguistic signs in order to reconstruct the past or aspects of the past of a given society.

2.3. Barthian Mythology

Barthian mythological approach (R. Barthes, 1972) is an applied semiotics that researches in a text, defined as any readable set, the structure of a prior text. It shows how past myths are recycled in present communication systems. The new text that reproduces the structure of the former text is called mythology, just to avoid confusion between myth and mythology. Hence, mythology has two meanings: a theoretical approach and a text in which a mythical structure is found. Insisting on the distinction between the two, M. Danesi (2000: 153) wrote: "To distinguish between the

original myths and their modern-day versions, the semiotician Roland Barthes designated the latter as mythologies."

Barthes has presented his mythological approach in a book titled *Mythologies* (1957). The book contains about fifty essays each of which deals with a mythology. After the essays, the author explains the theory underlying his analyses. Mythology, he said, is a speech and "the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth" (R. Barthes, 1972: 113). The different versions of the Kisra legend are read as mythical speech to be caught by our mythological analysis. More interesting for the purposes of this paper are examples of mythologies that reproduce the antic myths as depicted above:

for example, superhero comics or movies are examples of mythologies, since they recast the mythic hero concept in modern form. For instance, Superman comes from another world, has a fatal weakness, brings about justice in human affairs, and so on, as did many ancient mythic heroes. The difference is that Superman's persona and story have been updated to reflect the modern imagination. Superman comes from another planet, the ancient hero from the heavens; Superman's weakness (or tragic flaw) is exposure to kryptonite (a substance from his original planet), while the ancient hero may have a weak heel (Achilles) or other flaw. (D. Marcel, 2008: 206)

In the same way as the story (mythology) of Superman reproduces the myth of Achilles as shown within the mythological approach of Barthes, it should be interesting to apply the same approach to see how the Kisra legend reproduces the myth of Moses.

The three semiotic approaches given help examine its different versions, the meaning of linguistic and non-linguistic traces and the mythology of the hero.

3. Results and analysis

This section deals with two main kinds of results. The first is results related to the syntagm and paradigms of the Kisra legend yielded by the comparison of its different versions. The second deals with the linguistic and archaeological traces of the legend, including its Barthian mythic structure.

3.1. Syntagm and paradigms of the Kisra legend

The common points of the diverse versions of Kisra legend are those that do not change from one story to the other. Consequently, they can be considered as a syntagm, since a syntagm is something that does not vary. Elements that make one version different from another version are diverging elements. Since in semiotics, it is the substitution of elements along the paradigmatic axis that produces the difference in meaning, those diverging elements are sources of paradigms.

Concerning the syntagm of the legend, the main common points noted are:

- 1) Kisra and his followers came from the East.
- 2) Kisra and his followers migrated to Africa after establishing several states along their track.
- 3) Kisra migrated to escape from Islam.
- 4) Kisra and/or his relatives came to Borgu.
- 5) Bussa and Nikki are associated with the Kisra legend.

In the reviewed literature, it is clearly mentioned that Kisra came from the East. Many expressions noted give the evidence. For instance, I noted that there was "a big migration from the kingdom of Badar". These expressions and many other excerpts from literature show that Kisra came from the East. The versions of the second category (see literature review) described his migration from his birthplace to Borgu.

That Kisra and his followers migrated to Africa after establishing several states along their passage was defendable. The existence of Kisra and the order of establishment of the Borgawa states were said to be the common points of different versions collected before the 1950s. The reason for the migration was the avoidance of Islam. Written and oral versions are unanimous on this point.

The varying views as to know whether Kisra himself or his siblings or warriors founded such and such city presuppose that Kisra and/or his siblings or follower have been in Borgu where the mentioned cities are geographically located. In the literature review, it can be seen how M. H. Stewart's four of the five different categories of the Kisra legend show that the hero has been in Borgu.

The diverse works consulted agree on the fact that Bussa and Nikki were founded by Kisra or his sons or his followers or his descendants. Saying that Bussa is "the parent Bariba state of the Borgu" supposes a link between Bussa and Nikki, a Bariba state. The sultan of Nikki is said to be next to the sultan of Bussa but, with equal power. All these pieces of literature show that Bussa and Nikki are associated with the Kisra legend.

The syntagm, that has been determined, dictates the following conclusion:

A person named Kisra and his followers migrated from the East to Africa to escape from Islam. They established several states along their pathway. They came to Borgu and founded, among others, Bussa and Nikki which are then associated with the Kisra legend.

Concerning the paradigms of Kisra legend, the main diverging points noted are:

- 6) The reasons why Kisra undertook the migration
- 7) The place of separation
- 8) The creator of Bussa and Nikki
- 9) The existence of Kisra as a person or concept
- 10) The end of Kisra..

The most common reasons given to justify the migration are the refusal of Islam and the loss of war. The two are substitutable in the Kisra legend. The place of separation was said to be Illo in some versions and Swalla in others. These two places are in an absentia relation. Bussa is believed, according to some versions, to be founded by Kisra whereas other versions considered that it was founded by his eldest son Woru. Some accounts support that Nikki was created by Woru whereas other accounts claim it was founded by Woru's younger brothers Sabi and Bio. Kisra and Woru are substitutes; Woru and his brothers are substitutes too. Some researchers think that Kisra is a real person while others believe Kisra to be

a title or a concept. Person and title/concept are substitutable semiotic units. The end of Kisra appears as mysterious. Some versions report that he has disappeared. Others say he died and was buried in Borgu, but no tomb can be really indicated. Disappearance and burial are substitutable elements. To summarize, each of the diverging points 6), 7), 9) and 10) offers one paradigm composed of two substitutable units and the diverging points 8) offers two paradigms composed of two substitutable units each. This gives a total of six paradigms. The different paradigms are presented below:

6) →Paradigm 1: {<refusal of Islam>, <loss of war>}

7) →Paradigm 2: {<Illo>, <Swalla>}

8) →Paradigm 3: {<Kisra>, <Woru>}; Paradigm 4: {<Woru>; <Woru's brothers>}

9) →Paradigm 5: {<Kisra as a real person>, <Kisra as a title or concept>},

10) →Paradigm 6: {<Kisra's disappearance>, <Kisra's burial>}

All the issues concerned with the diverging points presuppose that the object of divergence is a reality. Hence, the different views about why Kisra undertook the migration presuppose that someone named Kisra migrated and that a migration occurred. The divergence about the place of separation presupposes that a separation took place somewhere. The different versions about the founders of Bussa and Nikki presuppose that the disputed founders existed, and that the kingdoms concerned were founded by personalities associated in anyway whatsoever with the Kisra legend. That Kisra be an individual, a title or a concept does not prevent a researcher from thinking that a certain leader has borne that title or incarnated that concept. The fact that there is no agreement on the end of Kisra reinforces the mystery of the legend and seems to confirm what can be called the title or concept argument.

3.2. Linguistic and archaeological signs

This section deals with pieces of information that can help know better about some given aspects of the Kisra legend. These pieces of information are linguistic and non-linguistic signs considered here as archaeological traces. Collected from the literature review, they are among others the horse tradition, the Gaani festival, the use of the name Kisra in

Borgu, the meanings of the names Bussa, Swalla, Wasangari, some linguistic utterances, the alleged relics of Kisra, some cultural aspect purported to have been introduced by the hero or his descendants, the birth rank names in the communities of the Kisra legend and the mythic structure in the legend.

3.2.1. Horse tradition

Horses are signs that can contribute to confirming the assumption that the migrants who conquered Borgu were horsemen. That they were horsemen is strongly supported by O. Akinwumi (1999: 217). It is believed that horses were brought to Borgu by Kisra and his followers. According to Omar Tukur (quoted in O. Akinwumi, 1999: 217), the autochthonous population said "Iridi yoyo ina Borigu" (we saw strangers on horseback), which confirms the claim that migrants took advantage of their horses to dominate the autochthonous populations. Today, the horse tradition in Nigeria and Benin is most observed in the areas covered by the ancient Borgu. So horses are real signs that some strangers who were horsemen came to Borgu. Was it under the leadership of Kisra, this is another story.

3.2.2. Gaani festival

The Gaani festival, celebrated in both Nigerian and Benin's Borgu, is the sign of the common past destiny of the population concerned with it. This is explained by S. Decalo (1995: 179): "A part of the ceremony which symbolized the continued devotion of the Bariba to common ancestors despite their dispersal and friction involves the use of the sacred trumpets of Nikki (the Tufaro) to call upon and assemble the souls of all Bariba ancestors." Some rituals of the festival are symbols of Kisra's presence in the Borgu. On horseback, the King visits nine cultural sites among which sepulchers of some ancestors. Each of the sites visited tells a story about the descendants of the Kisra legend. The best example of the shared political institutions "is the Gaani festival, which continues to be celebrated by kings and chiefs throughout Borgu" (P. F. De Moraes Farias, 2010: 110). The word is believed to come from Songhay and meaning "dance" (I. Zime Yerima, 1998: 6)

3.2.3. Swalla

Swalla is the name of the city where, according to some versions, Kisra migrants were supposed to have been after Illo. The meaning of the word "Swalla" in Boko language, according to Usman Muhammed (quoted in O. Akinwumi, 1999: 217) is: "he [Kisra] came to us here". The word is actually a word-orthography of the Boko sentence: "a su wa la". This meaning reveals itself as an important sign that highlights an aspect of the Kisra legend. The persons who said that Kisra came to them there were the inhabitants of the city and they were Boko speakers. So, if they said "he came to us here", it means that they were there before Kisra and consequently they were not among the migrants. The name of that city is also an indication that an important migrant or chief if not king came to Swalla.

3.2.4. Kisra as name and title

It is common to find in Borgu people bearing the name Kisra, generally as family name. This might be an indexical sign of the migrant and conqueror Kisra. It does not necessarily mean that the persons who bear the name are descendants of the hero Kisra. It might simply mean that the name is given after the hero. The name Kisra is also used in the region as a title meaning chief or more precisely king. This is supported in the literature:

In the legend, the word Kisra is used as the name of a particular person, but names can, over several generations, be assimilated to the title of an office. If Kisra is a title as well as a name, it would be usual for such a title to be passed down from generation to generation, but on the genealogical charts of the kings of Borgu, including those relating to Bussa, only the eponymous ancestor has the name of Kisra. (M. H. Stewart 1980: 69)

M. H. Stewart (1980: 69) explained that "In the genealogical chart of the kings of Nikki only the founder holds the title Kisra." E. Hoskyns-Abrahall (quoted in M. H. Stewart 1980: 69), reported "that in the eighteenth century, the king of Bussa who died about 1730 was called Kishera Kegnete."

3.2.5. Wasangari

In Borgu, there are people known as Wasangari; they are called Wasangari and they have the attributes of Wassangari. They are known today as descendants of Kisra and obviously of his followers. J. O. Adekunle (2008: 436) wrote: "Regarded as the eponymous ancestor of the Borgu people, Kisra was believed to have migrated from Persia and his descendants, known as the Wasangari, became dynastic founders, thereby reconfiguring Borgu politics and society." In fact, the followers of Kisra, during the migration, are also called Wasangari (O. Adekun, 2008: 436). The existence of a category of populations in Borgu named Wasangari is a linguistic sign of an immigration conducted by someone called Kisra or having the title of Kisra.

3.2.6. Autochthonous Baatombu and Wasangari

The main components of today Baatombu are the autochthonous Baatombu, called the Baaton Geebu, literary meaning the true Baatombu, and the Wasangari (see previous paragraph). The existence of these two components of the Baatombu is a sign of the fact that some people, called Wasangari, came to mix with the autochthonous population. In the process, the later generations of these migrants, in minority, might have lost their own language as showed below:

Available pieces of evidence seem to agree that the founder or founders of the Baatombu might have been a group of horse-riding, politically - and militarily - superior invaders who imposed their authority over the indigenous peoples, but being inferior in numbers, they adopted the language of the indigenous population. (E. O. Ojo & S. J. Bio, 2018: 28)

Moreover, in some kingdoms of Borgu, the political power is held by the Wasangari while the autochthonous populations are considered as the owners of the land. Drawing on M. O. Idris (1975: 144), J. O. Adekunle (2008: 436) explained that "While the indigenous people were concerned about preserving ownership of the land, immigrants, especially the Wasangari, were more interested in taking political control."

3.2.7. Birth rank names of Baatombu and Boko

The birth rank names of the Wasangari today among the Baatombu and the Boko are also traces of their connection with Kisra. Indeed, Kisra's alleged three sons were named Woru, Sabi and Bio from the elders to the youngest. It is the same names that are given today (see Ch.-T. Narou N'Gobi, 2017 and W. Schottman, 2000). Of course, the fourth, the fifth and the n-th name exist, but these could not exist among Kisra known sons who were said to be three. It is worthwhile mentioning that the same names exist in the autochthonous population of the Baatombu sometimes with a slight variation.

3.2.8. "Iridi yoyo ina Borigu" (sic)

While dealing with the horse tradition earlier, I mentioned that the sentence "Iridi yoyo ina Borigu" (we saw strangers on horseback) confirmed the claim that migrants took advantage of their horses to dominate the autochthonous populations. This sentence in Dendi (quoted in O. Akinwumi, 1999: 217) is also the sign that the people who pronounced it were not among Kisra followers but were rather part of the autochthonous population or former migrants. Indeed, this proves that they were already in the region before the migrants they saw coming on horseback.

3.2.9. Relics of Kisra

Relics of Kisra are mentioned as showed in the literature review. A. B. Mathews O.B.E. (1950: 144) mentioned as relics a "golden cross of Kisra" at Karissen, drums, swords, and spears at Bussa. Some of the relics mentioned by M. H. Stewart (1980: 58) are: three egg-shaped brass bowls, a spherical bowl, two brass stools wristlets, two very old black horsehair fly whisks with handles of brass work, a brass bell, five wild hog tusks and the kakaki (trumpets called kākāagi by the Baatombu in Nikki); gourds, five razors, copper containers. Concerning Nikki specifically, J. Lombard (1960: 12) listed copper trumpets and sacred drums among others.

The alleged relics of Kisra kept are par excellence traces of the migration of Kisra. At least, they are seen so by the people who kept them for too long. Even if it is considered that the connection is an invention, the

objects are real. The functions of the different relics seem to be related to the history constructed around Kisra. This idea is expressed below:

"While, by tradition, a Kisra association is attributed to the relics described above, the validity of the claim that the relics at Bussa were actually brought there by Kisra or his descendants derives empirical support from the close association of the relics with the Bori religion and with the Gani festival when the sacred drums in which the souls of the ancestors of the Nikki king are thought to repose are displayed, the princes of the various ruling houses parading before them, while the kakaki (trumpets) are blown." (M. H. Stewart, 1980: 58)

The author explained that the younger princes are each given a name that had been borne by one of their ancestors. The gourds, razors and containers that are used to shave them and the fact that they bear names like those of Kisra's siblings, show that these objects are relics indexing Kisra in the same way as the eponymous finger of the indexical sign indexes the moon.

Any of the items mentioned can be the object of a semiotic analysis. The *kāakāagi* or *kakaki*, for example, is common not only in Nigeria and Benin, but also in Niger, Mali and Chad with varying pronunciation but always with the same consonants K-K-K or K-K-G of the onomatopoeic word, imitating the sound of the eponym trumpet. The places where it is found and called by the same name seem to coincide with the track followed by Kisra. So it can be understood as a sign that Kisra introduced it in the area he passed through.

3.2.10. Bussa as condensation of a sentence

In a version of the foundation of the kingdom of Bussa, it is said that after much wandering, Woru, the eldest son of Kisra, was tired and decided to rest in Bussa where he settled. The word "Bussa" is supposed to have captured the tiredness related to his traveling. Busagwe, the language of autochthonous population living there at that time, recorded what he would have said: "Mabussa" a condensation of the sentence "I am tired and I now need a rest" (O. Akinwumi, 1998: 6). So the word Bussa is a linguistic trace and recording of the adventure of Kisra's eldest child.

3.2.11. Onomastics of the name Kisra

The word Kisra is often spelled as Kisira or Kissira. In African languages with CVCV syllabic structure, an epenthetic vowel [i] is inserted between the two consonants [s] and [r] to give Kisira or Kissira when the s is redoubled to mark the realization of a voiceless consonant sound. Many authors were interested in the meaning of Kisra. The name Kisra was identified with the name Chosroe or an Egyptian or a Hamitic (Hausa) root. The meaning of the name Kisra seems also to be always associated with the lexical field of 'chief' and 'king'. A. B. Mathews O.B.E. (1950: 145) argues that "in the Bussa language ki-shira means 'black king' (ki=king, shira=black)" adding that "ki has nothing to do with the Anglo-Saxon 'king'"

L. Hussaini (2006) was also interested in the meaning of that name. In a chapter titled "Mythical Kisra in Borgu," of his book, where he reviewed the history of Chosroe, he wrote that the name Kisra is but an Arabic translation of Chosroe (L. Hussaini, 2006: 26). In the same vein, Ph. Stevens Jr. (1975) observed that "The name Kisra is, in fact, the Arabic (Kasra or Kesra) form of Khosrau" (p. 190), adding that "The fact remains that Kisra in Arabic refers to Khosrau, means 'the famous', and denotes royalty" (p. 191). From this point of view, the fact that it has a meaning in "the Bussa language" may be seen as simply coincidental. In the same way, the word has nothing to do with the Baatonu verb "kisira", meaning "to scape", although it can be speculated that it was associated with Kisra to help memorize the fact that the latter escaped from his Muslim pursuers.

The name can vary slightly in its vowel sounds. M. H. Stewart (1980: 69) informed that in the genealogical chart of the kings of Nikki, only the founder held the title "Kisra". She noted the word "Kpe" in the title held by kings in alternate generations. She argued that this might be a variant of Ki in which case the title Kpe Soumera might be a variant of Kisra. Some meanings given to Kisra seem whimsical. Indeed, Kisra has been surprisingly identified with Christ, which is considered as "indefensible on grounds of internal evidence alone" (A. B. Mathews O.B.E., 1950: 146). The constant in this history of Kisra is that the name is associated with chief/king or chiefdom/kingdom.

3.2.12. Kisra legend as a Barthian mythology

Some aspects of the Kisra legend seem to have been fabricated purposefully and modeled on others like that of Moses. This subsection shows how the structure of Moses legend is reproduced by the structure of Kisra's in some of the hero's deeds.

In the same way as Moses had to leave Egypt with his people, Kisra had to leave the East with his followers. Moses was pursued by Pharaoh's soldiers; in the same way, Kisra was pursued by the Prophet's warriors. To escape from the pursuers, Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea. To escape from the pursuers, Kisra miraculously widened a small river that became the Niger River. Moses and his followers crossed the desert to reach their destination. In the same way, Kisra and his followers crossed the desert to reach Borgu. Moses entrusted his followers to his brother. Kisra did the same by entrusting his followers to his warlord or eldest son. Moses' end was a mystery; his grave cannot be showed in the mountain he was supposed to have died. In the same way, Kisra's end was a mystery; he was said to have disappeared by some accounts; some versions name a geographic location of his death, but cannot show his tomb. Moses is associated with the idea of disappearance; some accounts hold that Kisra has vanished.

In conclusion, Kisra legend is a Barthian mythology of Moses legend. The mythic structure found is a sign measuring the power and celebrity of Kisra.

4. Discussion

This paper proposed a semiotic analysis of the different versions of Kisra legend. The common points found constitute the syntagm that can be supposed to give the minimal truth of the whole story. So it can be retained that Kisra and his followers left the East. They migrated to Africa. They did so to escape from Islam. They established several states along their track. They arrived in Borgu and reigned over Bussa and Nikki among others. The diverging points, which offer the paradigms, explain why there are different versions.

The analysis of linguistic and semiotic traces brought insights on aspects of the legend. For example, the word Swalla (he [Kisra] came to us

here) in Boko and the sentence "Iridi yoyo ina Borigu" (We saw strangers on horseback) pronounced by a Songhay speaking population signal that both the Boko and the Songhay were already in Borgu before the arrival of Kisra and his followers in that region. The dichotomy between Autochthonous Baatombu and Wasangari also prove that the Baatombu were there before the arrival of Kisra. Neither the Baatombu, nor the Boko, nor the Songhay could be the descendants of Kisra. In particular, for the Boko, this seems to be confirmed by R. Jones (1998: 71) "Members of the Kisira migration intermarried with the indigenous Boko/Busa inhabitants and eventually became the ruling class, the Wassangari."

The fact that the Boko speaking a Mande dialect were already in the Borgu seems to be confirmed by M. H. Stewart (1980) who informed that "the original Manding language was located in what is now Mali and was spread by traders to all parts of the Western Sudan from at least the thirteenth century onwards" (p. 54). She argued: "That Boko, the Manding language in Borgu, has become distinct in its dialectic and lexical features attests to the fact that this language was already in existence at least four hundred years ago" (p. 54). Logically, this means: if it takes the original Mande language at least 400 years to form a distinct dialect like Boko, if the Boko as a distinct dialect was already spoken at the arrival of Kisra, as attested by the linguistic traces like Swalla and Bussa, in the 16th century, then its parent language must have been introduced at least 400 years before the 16th century, which means in the 12th century at the latest. So it can be concluded that the ancestors of the Boko were in the Borgu before Kisra and his followers, unless they were the migrants of the 7th century, according to the version identifying Kisra to Chosoroe, which are discarded as indefensible.

The fact that the same structure between the history of Kisra and the mystery of Moses is found, through a Barthian mythology, shows that there has been a mythologizing construction of Kisra by those who claim to be his descendants, especially the princes of Borgu. This mythologizing process makes it possible to speculate that there was no real individual named Kisra but many Kisra, the word "Kisra" being seen as a general title meaning chief or king. The Kisra who came to Borgu was one of them, but he obviously could not be said to be Chosoroe, as it would sound anachronistic. It is

remarkable that, as already mentioned, the "Ki" in Kisra means king in Bussa language. In the same vein, the name of one of the first kings of Nikki, Sunon Sero, could be perceived as a form of Kisra or even of Chosoroe. Indeed, Sunon is a Baatõnu word meaning chief or king; it is an equivalent of Ki. So, Sunon Sero, who is believed to be Kisra's first son, is also Ki Sero, an appellation that contains the three irreducible consonant of the word Kisra: K, S and R.

Conclusion

This paper has proposed a reconstruction of the truth about the origins, migrations and settlements of Borgu by the archaeological linguistics and semiotics of the Kisra legend. To do so, many of its different versions were analyzed through a semiotic approach in order to determine the converging and diverging points, which constitute respectively the syntagm and the source of paradigms. The syntagm unveiled translates the basic history that can be formulated in one sentence: To avoid Islam, a man named Kisra and his followers migrated to Africa and arrived in Borgu where they founded many kingdoms among which Illo, Bussa and Nikki.

The linguistic and non-linguistic traces identified prove the passage of someone called Kisra. The non-linguistic traces like relics and rituals with which they are associated symbolize the continuation of the Kisra's tradition. The representations of the importance and supernatural power of Kisra are better expressed through a mythologizing process that reproduces the legend of Moses.

Three linguistic traces in particular revealed that the Baatõmbu, the Boko and the Dendi were in the Borgu before the arrival of Kisra and his followers. This is of paramount importance, especially as the unity created by the Kisra legend, among people of the same tradition, is becoming fractured by some ethnic groups claiming to be the unique descendants of the hero. The results yielded by such linguistic features may hopefully help temper the chauvinistic passions and reinforce unity. For this reason, further investigations are needed if only to highlight the cultural unity of the two main ethnic groups associated with the Kisra legend in the present day Borgu: the Baatõmbu and the Boko.

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